The Political Means and Social Service Ends of Decentralization in Poland

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the politics and social service outcomes of the second round of decentralization in Poland. Poland’s 1999 public administration reform reduced the number of provinces from 49 to 16, restored 373 counties, and decentralized public programs and services to these two levels. In the process it dramatically altered many programs in social services previously administered on higher levels including residential nursing homes, orphanages, adoption services, rehabilitation centers, and services for the disabled. It also provided the potential for increased citizen participation in social service programming. While the reform intended to improve services and participation, outcomes in these areas for social service delivery often failed to meet these goals. Many of these unsatisfactory outcomes can be traced back to the politics of reform development. Conflicting ideologies and pressures on policy actors stemming from a variety of historical, institutional, political and international sources resulted in compromises that caused unfavorable public service outcomes. Most significant for immediate outcomes was the tension between neoliberal and neotraditional ideologies espoused by reformers. This paper addresses a gap in decentralization studies by connecting the politics of decentralization with specific outcomes for public services on subnational levels of government.
This paper analyzes the politics and social service outcomes of the second round of decentralization in Poland. Poland’s 1999 public administration reform\(^1\) was an immense undertaking that included administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization as well as territorial re-division of the state. It reduced the number of provinces from 49 to 16, restored the county level in the form of 373 counties\(^2\) (including 65 cities with county status), and decentralized central tasks and authority to these two levels. Broad goals focused formally on increased citizen involvement and improved public services though still informally on the further de-communization of the public bureaucracy. Initial outcomes, however, show the reform resulted in many unmet goals and unintended consequences. Democratization was only minimally increased as the central government retained both revenue generating and revenue assignment authority over most decentralized functions severely limiting county and provincial self-government autonomy. Moreover, a number of functions intended for decentralization remained centralized limiting the scope of new sub-national governments. Though decentralization improved some services by bringing them closer to recipients, poor funding did little to improve services in other ways and in some cases made them worse. Unintended consequences of the reform also included policy that worked at cross purposes resulting in such outcomes as increased disparity in services across urban and rural areas. In addition, the reform had mixed results particular to specific policy sectors, as a detailed examination of the reform in the area of social services reveals.

In this study I show that the politics of reform development involved tensions between competing interests within and without the ruling coalition government resulting in compromise and manipulation that led to less than satisfactory outcomes. I draw and build upon Schickler’s concept of “disjointed pluralism” to explain this political process and resultant outcomes.\(^3\) Disjointed pluralism is the idea that 1) many different formal and informal coalitions promoting a range of collective interests drive choices made in legislatures and 2) the dynamics of reform development “derive from the interactions and tensions among competing formal and informal coalitions promoting several different interests” (Schickler, 2001:4). Here the interactions and tensions that characterize the relationship between multiple interests drive processes of change that are ultimately reflected in legislative outcomes. As Schickler states, “...conflicts among competing interests generate institutions that are rarely optimally tailored to meet any specific goal. As they adopt changes based on untidy compromises among multiple interests, members build institutions that are full of tensions and contradictions” (Schickler, 2001:3). Though Schickler develops the concept of disjointed pluralism based on an analysis of the development of legislative institutions in the United States, its basic premises can be applied to the development of other public institutions in different democratic contexts, as this study on the politics of public administration reform in Poland demonstrates.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) The term “public administration reform” has a broader meaning in Eastern Europe than it does in the United States. In Eastern Europe it is often used additionally in reference to decentralization of the state apparatus and territorial re-division of the state.

\(^2\) Seven new counties were added to this number on January 1, 2002 (Miklaszewska, 2001).

\(^3\) See Schickler, 2001 for a discussion on the utility of disjointed pluralism versus collective interest.

\(^4\) Haggard and Webb demonstrate that processes and behaviors similar to those Schickler bases his ideas on are at work in post-communist democratic settings. Their definition of policy in this context “as the outcome of interactions among politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups operating within a set of institutional constraints” illustrates this point (1994:3).
I test the result of unintended consequences of the politics of reform through a study of reform outcomes for social service delivery in new provinces and counties. Among other data, I use results from a nation-wide, representative survey of Polish public social service offices on three levels of government I conducted in summer 2000. The survey provided information on how well overall goals for the reform were met in the area of social services. It assessed degree of reform implementation, funding levels, civil society activity (including involvement of non-governmental organizations), professionalization of the social service sector, and intergovernmental cooperation and coordination.

The overriding objective of this study is therefore to show how the politics of decentralization in Poland a) shaped the reform package and b) affected social service outcomes on county and provincial levels. It examines what happened to policy goals as they moved through the political process and were written as policy. It then takes the analysis a step further by examining what happened as policy moved through the implementation phase and emerged in the form of outcomes. Analysis of these two phases is key because the ironies of decentralization reform in Poland occurred not only where inconsistencies between goals and written policy resulted in unmet goals but also where consistent goals and policies resulted in unintended outcomes because they worked at cross-purposes with other reform policy. By connecting the politics of decentralization with decentralization outcomes, this research spans a gap in the decentralization literature between politics and outcomes. In particular, this study not only outlines how politics contributed to decentralization policy that failed to meet its ends, but shows more generally that attention to politics is needed when approaching policy reform.

Literature on Politics and Outcomes of Decentralization

This study bridges a divide in the decentralization literature between politics and outcomes by showing how the politics of decentralization affect social service outcomes. In particular, it addresses a narrow focus in the decentralization outcomes literature on expected consequences of decentralization (whether positive or negative) that overlooks the unintended consequences that stem from the politics of decentralization. Polish reformers attempted to develop and implement policies in line with decentralization literature claiming positive results.

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5 A question may arise as to the need to conduct research on social service decentralization reform when it is widely held that decentralization of social services leads to regional disparities and decreasing funding of services for the poor (see Peterson, 1995). The purpose of this project, however, is not to test or repeat studies evaluating the economic outcome of fiscal decentralization. Indeed, an exact test of the redistributive policy thesis was not possible because true decentralization of fiscal responsibility to subnational levels, though expected, did not happen in Poland. The aim of the study is, however, to analyze social service outcomes against a broad range of goals held by Polish reformers. In any case, the Polish point of view on the tendency of fiscal decentralization to introduce disparity differs from that of western decentralization scholars due to long experience with a centralized system that did not adequately or fairly distribute resources (Regulski, 1999). Indeed, Polish reformers believe that a decentralized system directly overseen by citizens would lead to better services and that equalization measures between wealthy and poor subnational units could address disparities.

6 Though providing a less than favorable critique of the democratic politics of reform in terms of meeting reform goals, this study is not intended as a negative critique of democracy as a form of government. A critique of democracy necessarily involves the weighing in of other values that are generally considered more important than immediate attainment of any one party’s reform goals. Indeed, democracy is most valued because of its ability to peacefully mediate between and reflect different interests and opinions, which is precisely what this study shows as happening in Poland.
of reform. In practice, however, they found that both development and implementation of such decentralization policy was compromised by the politics of reform.\footnote{This study is an analysis of policy and what happens when mainly poor policy is implemented. It is not an implementation study where the implementation context is examined to better understand its effect on policy outcomes. However, poor policy is sometimes identified during the implementation phase, for example, two policies may be found in conflict with one another as outcomes are observed or flaws in the written legislation uncovered. In general, this study looks at poor policy that precluded desired outcomes even before the implementation stage.}

As stated, the literature on decentralization consists of two separate forums. The first focuses on the politics of decentralization in terms of why decentralization or a certain degree of decentralization takes place in a given country or countries (Willis, Garman & Haggard, 1999; Eaton, 1999; Luong, 2000; Brusis, 1999; Illner, 1997). The second looks at the outcomes of decentralization policy concentrating on fiscal arrangements (Levitas, 1999; Ter-Minassian, 1997) and good governance in terms of gains or losses to democracy and efficiency as a result of decentralization (Kirchner & Christiansen, 1999; Rousseau & Zariski, 1987; Huther & Shah, 1998). Much of the democratic outcomes literature focuses on the responsiveness and participation of those on the local level after decentralization (Faguet, 2000; Blair, 2000; Osmani, 2000). The study of the outcomes of decentralization also includes a number of publications on lessons learned from decentralization or conditions for its success also largely measured in terms of improvement to democracy and efficiency (Prud'homme, 1995; Shah, 1998; Regulsk & Regulski, 2000; Manor, 1999; United Nations, 1999; Giguale et al., 2000). In addition there are many mostly descriptive accounts of decentralization undertaken in various countries (Bird, Ebel & Wallich, 1995; Kirchner, 1999; Horvath, 2000). Largely missing from the decentralization literature is work connecting the politics of decentralization with specific outcomes for public services on subnational levels.

**Methods**

The study’s focus on both the politics of decentralization reform and its service outcomes necessitated the use of two different types of original data collection: focused interviews were used to understand the politics of reform and survey questionnaires were used to assess outcomes. Focused interviews were conducted to collect data on the politics of the reform for several reasons. First, detailed information was needed on a subject for which there was little available information. Second, the insights of particular reformers on specific aspects of the reform were sought after. Third, access to other potential interviewees was provided through contact with each successive interviewee (Yin, 1994). In 2000 –2001, a total of 23 interviews were conducted with important reform actors. Twelve interviews were conducted with eleven members of the Polish parliament representing the four main political parties. Eleven interviews were conducted with eight government officials and one university professor who were directly involved in the reform. Most of the government officials interviewed held high positions in central ministries at the time of reform development including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Also, two interviews were with the head of the reform – former secretary of state and government plenipotentiary for state systemic reform.

Data collection on reform outcomes in the area of social services necessitated a different approach. The goal was to obtain a nation-wide picture of social service delivery after the reform to test hypotheses generated from a preliminary survey questionnaire. To achieve this
goal, a nation-wide representative survey was conducted during summer 2000 of directors of 200 public social service offices on three levels of government. Institutions in the study included 66 municipal social assistance centers, 70 county family assistance centers, 32 city family assistance centers, all 16 provincial departments of social affairs and all 16 provincial regional social policy centers. On county and provincial levels self-administered questionnaires consisting of close ended questions were delivered by an interviewer who remained present during survey completion. Surveys conducted in municipalities were done by computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) using fixed-response questions (Fowler, 1993). A Polish research institute, Pracownia Badań Społecznych, provided trained interviewers and initial data analysis.\(^8\) Research was conducted 1½ years after reform implementation first began in January 1999, thus, expectations for outcomes were moderated against the early timing of the study. Document collection was also undertaken to supplement the original research on politics and outcomes of the reform.

### Background

At the beginning of Poland’s transition to democracy, decentralization reforms in 1990 transferred decision-making authority to elected municipal governments (\textit{gminy}) and passed down central government tasks and some revenue raising authority. Despite some problems with the underfunding of decentralized tasks (Regulski, 2000) the municipal reforms were largely deemed a success (Bird, Ebel & Wallich, 1995; Regulska, 1998a; Zaucha, 1999; Koral, 2000). Even as municipal reforms were taking place reformers were thinking of the next stage of public administration reform – the return of the county (\textit{powiat}) level of government and the establishment of large provinces (\textit{województwa}).\(^9\) Counties and large provinces had been abolished by the communist party in 1975 and replaced by 49 small provinces in an effort to enhance state centralization (Regulski, 2000). The provincial administration, an arm of the central government, was considered saturated with communist-era bureaucrats. In addition, there was increasing pressure, much of which was self-imposed, to harmonize Poland’s administrative structure with that of Western Europe by creating fewer and larger provinces. The return of counties, on the other hand, was an act to restore the Polish state administrative structure to its rightful design and give shape once again to the cultural identity formed in these smaller regions over hundreds of years. As shown, however, this second round of reforms fell short of the basic goals Poles had for decentralization particularly in the areas of democratization and improved public services.

The 1999 public administration reform differed significantly from the 1990 reform in its breadth and depth. The 1990 reform involved decentralization of central government tasks and authority to established municipalities and the organization of 268 administrative regions (\textit{rejony})\(^10\) drawn roughly along the lines of counties in existence before 1975 (Kowalczyk,

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\(^8\) Funding for the surveys and interviews conducted in 2000 was provided by a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship 1999-2000. Interviews conducted in 2001 were funded by an American Council of Learned Societies East European Dissertation Fellowship.

\(^9\) The English words ‘county’ and ‘province’ are used here as only approximate translations of the Polish words ‘\textit{powiat}’ and ‘\textit{województwa}’ and are not meant to connote county or province in the American/Canadian sense.

\(^10\) Territorial offices in these regions were strictly organs of the state administration. They oversaw services that had been left under central government auspices with the municipal reforms because they were deemed too large for municipalities to administer (Regulski, 2000). Such services included secondary schools, health care, law enforcement, fire protection, sanitation, veterinary control and building inspection (Kowalczyk, 2000).
2000). The second round was considerably more complicated as it sought to dramatically redesign the territorial division of the state and correct a fragmented system of central government administration at the same time as it decentralized tasks and authority. Before the 1999 reform there existed 49 centrally-governed provinces and 2,489 self-governed municipalities with 268 administrative regions. Also in existence were over 40 so-called special administrations (administracje specjalne)\(^\text{11}\) – field offices of central ministries and institutions (such as labor offices) that often operated in their own territorial divisions (Płoskonka, 2001). The reform proposed to liquidate the 49 provinces, administrative regions (rejony), and special administrations and establish in their stead 16 large provinces, with both self-government and central government administrations, and 373 self-governed counties (including 65 cities with county status).

Most significantly this study of the second round of public administration reforms also finds Poland and its politics under much different circumstances than the first round. The 1990 Law on Local Government was passed by a “contract” parliament established in negotiations between the communist party and the Solidarity Trade Union. In this semi-democratic forum one-third of the seats in the lower house of parliament (Sejm) and all of the Senate seats were opened to free democratic elections and were subsequently won by Solidarity (Zaucha, 1999). Solidarity showed a unified front and won against the communist party who opposed the reform on ideological and practical grounds. For communists the reforms undermined the principle of unified state authority and cut off their control of the local level. In addition, rigid communist bureaucrats resisted any change in their sphere of control and authority. Indeed, one of the main goals of reformers at this time was to establish a democratic strong-hold on the local level to counterbalance waning though still pervasive communist control in the center (Regulski, 2000).

At the time of the second round of public administration reform, the fully democratic parliamentary elections of 1998 had just removed the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the left-leaning former communist party in control of the government for four years, and placed in power a tenuous coalition government made up of the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) and the Freedom Union (UW). These two center-right parties had large differences both between themselves and within their own parties as to means and ends of many aspects of state policy, including the public administration reform. In addition, central bureaucracies were again on the defensive not wanting to give up more control and authority after losing a fair share in the municipal reforms. Old provincial capital cities, often politically powerful, also resisted the loss in status that would inevitably come with the abolishment of many of the old 49 provinces. Reformers were also more awake to the Western international community to which they wanted to belong and which itself had much more interest in Poland’s designs for public administration than previously. Western ideologies on decentralization and fiscal matters had also had more time to settle into the experience and thinking of policy actors involved in reform development. Goals for this round of the reform reflected these new circumstances and were more elaborate and detailed than previously. Goals included:

1) the continuation of public management decentralization;

\(^{11}\) Special field administrations, while instituted under the Communist regime, increased in number after the municipal reforms in an effort to improve the effectiveness of central ministries. Reformers viewed this system as a “federation of ministries” as each area of state activity in a given region was managed separately leading to conflicting and overlapping powers and policies. A number of special administrations had already been placed under provincial authority in 1996 (Płoskonka, 2001; Nunberg, 1999).
2) expansion of civil society mechanisms, democracy, and societal control (oversight) of administrative activities;
3) the greater effectiveness of institutions providing public services on a nation-wide as well as local scale;
4) improvement in the rationality of public expenditures;
5) reconstruction of the public finance system and improvement of its cohesiveness;
6) to bring order to the public administration competency system and a correction in the flow of information;
7) creation of instruments to conduct regional politics;
8) bring efficiency to central government functioning, modernize central government administration in the center and in the field;
9) development of a professional civil service;
10) make possible the natural advance of the political elite (from municipal government through county and provincial government to the national level);
11) adaptation of the country’s territorial organization to European Union standards (Chancellory of the President of the Council of Ministers, 1998:25, author’s translation).

However, the specific ideologies, interest groups, and international pressures on policy actors of the second round of public administration reform were also key in moving the reform away from these initial goals. The following is a description of each of these main influences on the reform.

Ideologies
Neotraditionalism

Neotraditionalism in the Polish post-communist context refers to a general attitude that changes attributed to the Communist Party that significantly altered the “Polish” state of affairs were things that needed to be undone, “fixed,” and restored to their original “natural” state. In this case it was a return to the decentralized system and territorial division of the state in place before communism. Restoration of self-governing counties that had been abolished by the communist party in 1975 was especially viewed as an important step in returning Poland to its rightful democratic structure (Regulski, 1999). Counties themselves were viewed as “small fatherlands” (małe ojczyzny) with their own cultural identities that deserved the right to self-government almost as much as Poland as a country deserved this right (Regulski, 1999; Puzyna, 2000). It was in counties that reformers of the second round of decentralization had hope for a further renewal of civil society (Fenrych & Puzyna, 2001; Puzyna, 2000; Gilowska, 2000). This return to a historical public administration design, though most heavily influencing the number of counties and county government, was influential in other aspects of the reform as well.

Administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization broadly construed were supported by another neotraditional tendency which was a return to allowing principles espoused by the Catholic Church into state matters. The Catholic Church in Poland provided support for the idea of “pomocniczość” or, roughly translated, subsidiarity, the idea that the smallest unit possible provide assistance on behalf of the citizen. The Church’s position on “pomocniczość” is found in the Centesimus Annus encyclical (1991) and defines it as follows:

The society of the highest level of government should not interfere in the internal matters of the society of the lowest level,
depriving it of its jurisdiction, but rather it should support it in cases of necessity and help in the coordination of activities with activities of other social groups, for the common good (cited in Leś, 1998:2; author’s translation).

A Polish reformer states, “The principle of ‘pomocniczość,’ traced back to the Old Testament and developed by the social teachings of the [Catholic] Church, is presently accepted as one of the foundations of democratic state structure.” (Regulski, 2000:367, author’s translation). Indeed, “pomocniczość” is explicitly stated in the preamble of the new Polish constitution as one of the principles of the Polish system (Regulski, 2000).

Neotraditionalism was an ideology espoused by policy actors who were the initiators of the reform. They included parliamentary representatives who had worked in local government and had the continuation of decentralization as their specific goal when they entered parliament in 1998. They came to be known as “self-governmenters” (samorządowcy) and were found mostly in the governing right coalition but also among representatives of the Democratic Left Alliance (Sekuła, 2000). Initiators were also found among government officials and academics who had long worked on the problem of decentralization and public administration reform in Poland.

Neoliberalism

Another ideology found in policy actors in the right coalition was neoliberalism. During the early years of transition, neoliberalism was a predominant ideology guiding the transition to democracy and a free market in Eastern Europe. The economic prescription called for stabilization that reduced government subsidies and limited budget deficit, price and trade liberalization, privatization and, institutionally, an overall withdrawal of the state from the economy. In a democracy it was believed that such a course would inevitably be resisted by those who stood to lose at the outset. Thus, while supporting democracy as a principle, neoliberals worked to restrict the development of reforms to economists who were politically insulated from the democratic process (Orenstein, 2001). Indeed, reforms were to be a painful but quick process after which the economy would stabilize and everyone would be much better off for having gone through it. This was seen as a more desirable alternative to extended reforms that would result in longer but more moderate suffering but not deliver quick positive returns. In the post-communist world, neoliberals believed there was a window of opportunity immediately after the fall of the communist regime when support for democracy and new reforms was high and citizens would tolerate the unemployment and steep drop in the standard of living brought on by extensive and quick economic reform (Orenstein, 2001).

Poland in particular embraced neoliberalism not only in content but in policy approach. Leszek Balcerowicz, the Polish minister of finance (1989-91), and a small team of technocrats including foreign advisors drew up plans for quick restructuring of the Polish economy – an idea known as “shock therapy.” Society’s awareness of the need for reform due to the economic crisis in Poland, a supportive parliament, and the blessing of the Solidarity movement provided the political insulation Balcerowicz’s team needed to prepare an economic package with little outside interference and have it passed quickly into law (Orenstein, 2001; Johnson & Kowalska, 1994). This was the experience neoliberals had with policy making and set a precedence for when Leszek Balcerowicz along with other neoliberals returned to the Ministry of Finance in fall 1998 and began work on four large reforms, the public administration reform

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12 In the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) party alone there were over 70 members of parliament who were previously or currently mayors or councilmen on the municipal level (Emilewicz & Wolek, 2000).
among them. Neoliberals closely involved with the public administration reform from a fiscal standpoint were successful in their closed door policy and also in their efforts to keep public funds on the central level while divesting the central government of public responsibilities. Such conduct resulted in serious negative consequences for the entire public administration reform. Neoliberal inclinations were partly to blame for why fiscal decentralization did not take place as planned and mainly responsible for a temporary fiscal plan that failed to adequately fund newly decentralized tasks and services.

The necessity for haste in the reform process was one element of neoliberalism that center-right reformers, both members of parliament and government officials, espoused across the board when they returned to power in 1997. Indeed, only a little over a year was planned to finish work on the administrative reform and push it through the legislative process\(^\text{13}\) (Kulesza, 1999). Reformers generally accepted an approach to the policymaking process that worked to achieve consensus as quickly as possible by proposing general, imprecise reform solutions with modifications made during implementation under the guidance of real experience (Kolarska-Bobinska, 2000). But the haste of reformers was heavily if not mainly influenced by their perception of the political context. Much emphasis was placed on the fact that political will to proceed with the reform was present when the right came into power in the fall of 1997 but might diminish over time (Emilewicz & Wołek, 2000). That is, they again viewed the wave of popularity that brought them into power as a window of opportunity during which it was possible to pass difficult reform measures. Moreover, it was thought political will would diminish specifically among supporters in parliament because it was believed the more time representatives spent in Warsaw the more they would come under the influence of central ministers resistant to reform (Sekuła, 2000). Reformers also wanted to make use of the element of surprise thinking that if reforms were done fast enough those against them would not have time to organize resistance (Kulesza, 1999; Puzyna, 2000). This was a typical neoliberal-style attempt to shield reform from interest group reaction. In this case it was of particular importance with regard to central ministries who would resist decentralization. It was also thought reforms needed to be passed as quickly as possible so that positive outcomes could be experienced before the next parliamentary elections (Levitas, 1999; Miller, 2001). The right’s ideology of policymaking, that of hasty preparation, was later blamed in part for unclear and inconsistent legislation and poor initial outcomes – an effect of neoliberal thinking that was not limited to fiscal aspects of reform development.

**Interest Groups**

Interest groups sprang up almost immediately to block aspects of the reform or to promote a version of the reform more beneficial to their interests. These groups consisted of central bureaucrats, trade unions, and defenders of old provincial capitals, county advocates, and local government associations. Reform and removal of the old communist bureaucratic apparatus was a priority for reformers for political reasons – to de-communize the administrative bureaucracy and put government responsibilities more directly under control of the people (though also motivated by neotraditionalism). Administrative decentralization was intended to not only decentralize many ministerial tasks but also dismantle deconcentrated special administrations which existed on the level of newly proposed counties and were directly

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\(^{13}\) In terms of work on administrative decentralization alone this meant the amendment of almost 200 existing laws (Kulesza, 1999). Though there remained much work to be done, significant groundwork had been laid for the reform in the 1992-1993 period.
subordinate to the ministries. Many ministerial duties and special administrations were to be
transferred to elected county and provincial governments, that is, taken out of the hands of old
party bureaucrats and put under control of the people.

Given this pointed attack on the existent public administration system it was no wonder
central bureaucracies put up considerable resistance during reform development. Well-
entrenched ministries were reluctant to have their responsibilities and funds decentralized to
lower levels of government and fought any kind of restructuring of the central administration at
the center. Loss of control over ministerial tasks and deconcentrated special administrations
and funds for them meant a significant loss of jobs and power for ministries. Among central
ministries there was also the mentality that if an administrative task was important it should stay
in the hands of the state administration and not be passed to “incompetent” locally elected
officials (Emilewicz & Wolek, 2000). Interestingly, ministers were in favor of decentralization
in general but not when it came to their own ministry – each felt his or her ministry should be
the exception. Thus, outcomes in this area differed largely according to the political influence
of a given ministry and the willingness of reformers to compromise in their demands in
exchange for a minister’s support of the reform as a whole (Puzyna, 2000).

Several trade unions were also staunchly opposed to administrative decentralization in
their respective areas. Administrative and political decentralization for them meant loss of
influence over issues currently controlled in the center and thus also loss of bargaining power
with the central government. Two unions in particular, the Solidarity Labor Union and the
Polish Teachers Union, 14 were able to significantly influence the reform process in the area of
decentralization though with differing degrees of impact on outcomes.

A strong lobby was also created by inhabitants of old provincial capitals that stood to
lose their status with the reform. Reformers initially established the optimal number of
provinces at 12 which meant the abolishment of 37 provincial capitals. Residents of these
capitals feared the loss of jobs and resources that would follow and protested by organizing
rallies in front of parliament and in extreme cases by blocking roads and railway lines
(Kowalczyk, 2000; Koral, 2000). Such pressure was largely responsible for the establishment
of 16 rather than 12 provinces and resulted in compensation to abolished provincial capitals
giving them status as both municipalities and counties among other things.

There were also numerous county groups that sprang up to promote the return or
creation of a county in their area. These groups traveled to Warsaw and petitioned
parliamentary committees directly for their counties. Lawmakers, in their quest for political
support, all too often acquiesced to their requests even though it pushed the number of counties
far beyond the recommended number.

Other interest groups included local government organizations on the national level who
were eager advocates of the public administration reform supporting the decentralization of
functions and authority to lower levels of government. Such organizations included the Union
of Metropolitan Cities, the Association of Rural Municipalities, the Union of Polish Towns, and
the Association of Polish Cities among others. However, most notable about their role in the
reform process was their inability to effect real change in the most important areas. Local
government organizations were too weak to monitor the reform of local government finances,
indeed, local government representatives were consistently left out of policymaking for fiscal

14 In Polish, Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego.
reforms that had a large impact on local government. Nonetheless, such supportive organizations played an important behind-the-scenes role during the years leading up to and after the 1999 reform through their work organizing trainings, conferences, consultation services, research on local government, and lobby efforts (Grochowski & Regulska, 2000).

International Influence

International influence on the public administration reform came in various forms. First, there was the soft influence of western ideologies and ideas that were adopted by reformers. This includes neoliberalism espoused by foreign advisors to Poland from the early transition period but also supported by more long-term players such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ideas on decentralization, especially in terms of subsidiarity, were put forward by the European Union and indirectly encouraged in country assessments. A host of other international organizations were influential in their dissemination of ideas about and support for decentralization. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded full-time American advisors and other consultants to work with reformers, most significantly the Ministry of Finance on developing legislation for fiscal decentralization (though advice in this area went largely unused). Other technical assistance for the reform, including expert conferences and study trips to West European countries, was provided by International Policy Services (contracted by the Commission of European Communities), the International Investment Fund, the World Bank, DATAR (department of the French government), the French-Polish Foundation, the Swedish Agency of International Development, and the British Know How Fund. The EU’s PHARE program eventually funded training for local governments and monitoring and analysis of the reform (Kulesza, 1999).

Second, there existed a kind of international influence of the carrot variety. That is, European Union aid in the form of structural assistance and the ability to compete economically on the same level with other large regions in Western Europe were great incentives for Poland to create a complementary regional system. Third, international influence on the reforms came in the more direct form of the Council of Europe’s charters on local and regional government, signed by Poland, which directly call for elected self-governments on subnational levels.

Reform Politics and Large-Scale Outcomes

From the fall of 1997 to winter 1999 the right coalition government was engaged in numerous political battles that would ultimately compromise reform goals. During this period of intense legislative work many conflicting interests emerged resulting in compromises that pushed reform in unintended directions. Ideologies and pressures on policy actors stemming from historical, institutional, political, and international sources were the basis for interest coalitions formed by politicians that cut across party affiliation. Friction between these coalitions forced politicians to compromise the original goals of reform authors. In particular, tension between ideologies of neoliberalism and neotraditionalism found in the coalition government in the area of fiscal decentralization proved to be the largest stumbling block for the reform. As a result of these processes many of the original goals of the reform went unrealized


16 See Regulska, 1998b for a discussion on the role of western assistance on local democracy reforms in Poland through 1997.
as decentralized programs were not fully implemented for lack of funding, autonomy for self-governed county and provincial governments was limited, and there was an increase in disparity between urban and more rural areas, among others.

Political debates during reform development in the 1997-1999 period centered around the four different aspects of the public administration reform in Poland: administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization and territorial division of the state. While there is some overlap in definitions of the types of decentralization, these categories highlight separate processes that are significant when discussing development of the reform. Administrative decentralization is the redistribution of public responsibilities to lower levels of government. Political decentralization is the extension of citizen power in public decision making. Fiscal decentralization is the transfer of funds or legal instruments for raising funds to lower levels of governments along with the authority to make decisions regarding how those funds are used (World Bank, 2001). The territorial division of the state is the establishment of the number, size, and placement of subnational government and administrative units (see Appendix A, Table 1 for an overview of the legislation in these four areas). Analysis of the politics of the 1999 reform addresses each of these four parts of the reform separately and shows that large-scale outcomes for each area were often influenced by the politics of more than one of these areas.

Pressures on the four aspects of the reform that resulted in compromised outcomes can be traced back to historical and contemporary sources. Historical influences that shaped the reform were found in neotraditional ideologies with roots in the pre-communist system as well as in communist legacies of institutions resistant to change. For example, with the territorial division of the state reform initiators in parliament and government espoused neotraditional ideologies calling for the return of the county system along pre-communist lines within certain limits. Constituents however took neotraditionalism to its extreme by advocating for the return of many historical counties that went against advised guidelines for efficient administrative divisions. Thus, such action resulted in policy that undermined other goals of the reform. Similarly, in the case of administrative decentralization, those opposed to reform due to ties with the communist public administration system – namely central bureaucracies and old provincial capitals – pressured politicians to limit proposed reforms which also resulted in policy that did not fully achieve reform goals. Haggard and Webb describe such power politics and its consequences on policy: “Politicians respond to constituent pressures because they seek to remain in office, and they exchange policy distortions for political support. The fate of any reform effort thus hinges on the political balance of power between the winners and losers of the reform effort” (1994:8, emphasis added).

There were also influences on the reform that were contemporary in nature and independent of constituent pressure. These mainly involved international sources of influence which supported neotraditional ideas of decentralization and which, in particular, had a large impact on political decentralization especially the type of subnational government established in provinces. Western sources were also behind neoliberal tendencies that ultimately compromised reform in the area of fiscal decentralization. Specifically, neoliberal ideas were behind exclusionary manipulations on the part of the Ministry of Finance that left out other reform actors. Indeed, Greskovits, in his study of reform in Eastern Europe, finds that a “characteristic of the neoliberal reform process is its secrecy and failure to consult with other bureaucratic and political actors” (1998:42). This state of affairs contributed to continued centralized financing and underfunding of the new system which ultimately compromised goals in the areas of democracy and improved public services.
Political actors being pushed and pulled in these various directions worked for or against the reform in a democratic context of party fragmentation and a coalitional government. This political framework set the stage for compromise politics both within and without the coalitional government and allowed for the shifting of the reform away from its intended goals. Indeed, as Haggard and Webb note, “Fragmentation [tendency toward the proliferation of political parties] makes coalition rule more likely, increases the difficulty of reaching compromises, and contributes to the instability of governments – all factors that can effect government policy” (1994:9; see also Roubini & Sachs, 1989; emphasis added).

Schickler’s theory of disjointed pluralism provides a framework which helps explain how the politics of the 1999 reform led to unintended consequences. In turn, such analysis of the 1999 reform provides added support for the theory of disjointed pluralism and demonstrates the theory is applicable to institutions beyond legislative ones. It also shows the theory can be applied in different democratic contexts. Rather than evaluate institutional change across four different time periods as Schickler does, this analysis looks at the four differing but related types of institutional change (outlined above) found within the same reform package. These four cases demonstrate the following three claims made by the theory of disjointed pluralism.

The first claim is that “multiple collective interests typically shape each important change in congressional institutions” (Schickler, 2001:12). This claim posits that with a few exceptions the political process by which institutional change occurs is not characterized by just one collective interest but by multiple interests promoted by different coalitions. The interaction between these coalitions determines the outcomes of institutional change. As Schickler states, “The ‘unintended effects’ of an institutional innovation often derive not from the failure of members seeking a single goal to anticipate the consequences of their actions, but rather from the tensions among the multiple interests that produced the change in question” (2001:13).

Schickler identifies two ways in which this phenomenon can take place. The “common carrier” model posits that different interests may support a particular change but for different reasons – each looks to different consequences of reform that are not completely compatible. The case of political decentralization on the provincial level provides an example of this where potentially resistant central bureaucrats supported provincial self-government because it would facilitate EU structural funds while the main reasons for support espoused by decentralization reformers included gains to democracy and efficiency as well as EU structural funds. Second, and more common to this study, is a situation where change intended to fulfill a specific goal of a single interest may be compromised by concessions to other interests. Schickler best expresses what happened most often in the Polish reforms with the following statement:

Although those initiating a change may have a single, clear goal in mind, they often are forced to make concessions to opponents of this goal, or to members who are not hostile to the basic purpose of the reform but nonetheless believe it might adversely affect some other interest. One cannot equate the initiators’ goals with the final outcome of these compromises (2001:13; emphasis added).

17 Only three of Schickler’s four claims about disjointed pluralism are examined here. The one missing claim is based on examination of chronological factors in Schickler’s four cases, factors which are missing in the four cases presented here because they are not chronological.
Equally important is Schickler’s observation that a change in one aspect of a reform proposal may affect other aspects of the proposal in significant ways. The Polish reform demonstrates that this not only happened within one of the four parts but between the four parts of the broader reform proposal as well. That is, a change in one element of the plan for territorial division of the state not only affected other elements within that plan but also aspects of administrative and political decentralization. For example, reformers, who despite a clear goal for the number of counties, made concessions that drove the number much higher in order to gain support for the reform. The result was that administrative decentralization was interfered with because the many small counties lacked the infrastructure to adequately implement tasks decentralized to them (which is indicative of a larger problem with an inefficient economy of scale). Political decentralization may also be affected because once fiscal decentralization takes place the smallest counties will not have the resources to generate sufficient revenue leading to dependency on central government transfers which ultimately limit political autonomy.

Schickler’s second claim is that “entrepreneurial members build support for reform by framing proposals that appeal to groups motivated by different interests” (2001:14). This claim further elaborates the common carrier model by positing that reform initiators establish a basis for cooperation among opposing legislators by defining proposals in a way that appeals to their interests. This was the case in the common carrier situation cited above with respect to political decentralization in the provinces. Reform initiators positively framed the proposal for provincial self-government as beneficial to initially resistant politicians by showing it would facilitate EU structural funds.

The third claim is that “congressional institutions typically develop through an accumulation of innovations that are inspired by competing motives, which engenders a tense layering of new arrangements on top of preexisting structures” (Schickler, 2001:15). This claim has its roots in the path dependency model where choices open to policy makers today are dependent on previously made choices. In this case, institutions created by past decisions develop constituencies interested in preservation of power afforded that institution (see Pierson, 1998; North, 1990; Remington & Smith, 1999). Schickler posits that this constrains reformers to add on new institutions rather than abolish old ones. The case of administrative decentralization in the area of provincial reforms provides an example of this where central bureaucrats were resistant to dismantling provincial offices under central government auspices. In response in part to this, a new provincial self-government was added along side rather than in place of these provincial offices though as yet few provincial functions and funds were actually transferred to this new entity.

Overview of Social Service Outcomes

The above discussion on the politics of the public administration reform and its broad impact on outcomes uncovered ways in which large scale pressures and processes impacted on the reform as a whole. However, as can be expected, each individual public service area was affected not only by these more macro-scale events but also by processes specific to each service area. The analysis takes as its next step an evaluation of policy and outcomes in the area of social service delivery to illustrate how both overarching reform policy and service specific policy either did not meet reform goals, worked at cross-purposes with other goals, or showed initial promise of meeting reform goals.
The area of social services encompasses a broad array of service types and funding arrangements making it more representative of public services on the whole than other areas. Social services under consideration here mainly included those benefits and programs that were decentralized to or newly established on county and provincial levels. On the county level this included all types of social assistance homes and the new County Family Assistance Center responsible for crisis intervention, specialized counseling, services for the disabled, foster care, and community integration services for youth, among others. Provinces, rather than administer programs, were entrusted with regional development and education programs for social services with the addition of a provincial social service administrative office under the auspices of new provincial self-government. Old centrally run provincial offices retained their monitoring and supervisory role (see Appendix B, figures 1-2, for diagrams of the social service system before and after the reform).

The public administration reform in Poland was undertaken largely on the basis of expected improvements in democracy and public services and therefore had important implications for the entire social service delivery system. Zaucha, a Polish author, stated, “The main purpose in introducing counties is to make the rest of the social service system…which is now under central control, more efficient and economically sound by putting it under the scrutiny of its own customers and clients” (1999:75). The goals of the reform are therefore easily applied to the social service context.

The following are reform goals re-written in the context of social service delivery and categorized by their relation to democracy and improved public services:

**Democracy**
A) Increased decentralization of social service tasks (goal 1);
B) Appropriate and rational funding for social service tasks (goals 4, 5);
C) Increased influence of civil society and societal control over social services (goal 2);
D) Increased influence of democracy (county elections) on county social service tasks (goal 2).

**Improved Public Services**
A) Improvement in social services in terms of distance and accessibility (goal 3);
B) Improvement in the clarity of the competency system and flow of information (goal 6);
C) Addition of regional politics and planning in the area of social services (goal 7);
D) Improvement in the level of professionalism in local social services (goal 9).

Analysis of the policies that created the new social service delivery system shows they were not always written in a manner supportive of achieving stated goals of the reform. Policies fell into three categories: deviant policy (policy that did not achieve its intended goal); counterproductive policy (policy that addressed the intended goal but worked at cross purposes with other goals); and expected policy. These types of policies were found on the level of overarching structural changes to the administrative system that impacted social service delivery and on the level of specific social policy legislation. The following is a summary of the analysis of social service outcomes based on a nationwide survey of public social service offices and other sources. It provides an overview of main failures and successes of the reform in the area of social services.

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18 Some reference is made to secondary effects of the reform to the municipal level in the area of social service delivery though the reform did not legally alter municipal legislation.
Deviant Policy

Large-scale reform processes in the area of fiscal policy resulted in unmet reform goals with respect to social services. Fiscal policy was intended to cover the needs of decentralized services and provide for the autonomous (potentially democratic) functioning of subnational units – that is, that citizens, through their local governments, would be more involved in decisions regarding decentralized services. Due to the politics of the reform, administrative tasks were decentralized but fiscal responsibility was not which effectively retained decision-making power regarding services on the central level. Most dramatic for social services was the situation in counties. Though counties had been given complete fiscal responsibility for a number of social services, on average less than 5% of a county’s budget consisted of its own county funds (ZPP, 1999). The result was a drastic underfunding of social services where regular counties were only able to cover 21% of need for such services and urban counties 47% according to the survey. The problem stemmed from the fact that subnational governments were not provided with sufficient revenue generating capacity nor adequate shares in centrally-controlled personal income tax (PIT) and corporate income tax (CIT) to finance tasks they had been given fiscal responsibility for (Levitas & Herczyński, 2001).19 Thus, the temporary fiscal policy put in place with the reform was not in harmony with its goals of adequate funding of subnational services and improved democracy as limited fiscal autonomy translated into limited political autonomy.

Counterproductive Policy

Counterproductive policy is policy that, while achieving its immediate goal, worked at cross purposes with other goals of the reform. Many ironies of the reform were found in these counterproductive policies. In this case policy that was often in line with the goal of decentralization for the purpose of bringing government closer to the people came in conflict with goals of an efficient public administration system. This conflict in policy was often the result of the overall administrative structure and circumstances found specific to the area of social services. Counterproductive policies found here included: the creation of cities with county status that led to increased disparity between urban and rural services, policy regarding provinces that led to centralization of provincial offices and inefficient intergovernmental functioning, decentralization of some specialized services to small county units that resulted in an inefficient economy of scale for those services, policy that allowed for county presidents to hire county center directors opening the door for politicization, and decentralization of social assistance homes that resulted in an inefficient system of funding for those homes.

Expected Policy

Expected policy is understood here as policy that shows progress in reaching goals and that doesn’t conflict with other goals of the reform. Given the early nature of the study, indeed, any movement towards achievement was deemed as an indication that expected policy had been implemented. The analysis of survey results found indicators that goals of the reform to stimulate civil society, establish increased societal control (oversight) over public services, and

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19 Fiscal decentralization in Poland and Europe generally includes both the transfer of revenue generating authority to lower levels and any funds subnational governments are given which they are free to spend as they choose. This includes subnational government shares in PIT and CIT (collected and disbursed on the central level) not earmarked for specific purposes by the central government (see footnote 29 in Levitas & Herczyński, 2001).
bring services closer to citizens were starting to be realized through specific social service policy and activities. This was based on survey evidence that new county family assistance centers were cooperating with municipal social assistance centers and non-governmental social service organizations, that half of all county centers were making use of a needs assessment and goal planning instrument and involving the community in its preparation, and that specific decentralized social services had indeed been brought closer to citizens.

A Model for Politics and Outcomes

The particular political environment in which decentralization policy was generated in Poland resulted in several different types of politics that each produced a specific policy outcome. Exclusionary politics of neoliberals resulted in deviant policy. Contested politics, best explained by disjointed pluralism, resulted in counterproductive policy. Largely uncontested but uninformed politics also had the outcome of counterproductive policy. Finally, uncontested politics resulted in more or less expected policy (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Politics</th>
<th>Exclusionary</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Uncontested – Uninformed</th>
<th>Uncontested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Outcome</td>
<td>Deviant</td>
<td>Counterproductive</td>
<td>Counterproductive</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This typology was created on the basis of inductive observation of the study’s empirical data informed by political theory. Its purpose is to show general trends in politics and outcomes for this particular decentralization reform in its specific political context. Though the typology is therefore not intended as a theory, it can be viewed as a theoretical proposition to be investigated by future comparative studies of post-communist countries. Factors that may, however, limit the generalizability of the Polish case to other post-communist states include Poland’s status as a first wave country for accession to the European Union, its relatively homogenous make-up (it lacks a sizable ethnic minority), and the fact its public administration reform was more far reaching in breadth and depth than in other post-communist countries. The following is a description of each of the typology’s categories for type of politics and corresponding policy outcome.

*Exclusionary politics* is where policymakers limit the participation of other groups in the policymaking process in order to achieve policy outcomes they have prescribed. According to Haggard and Kaufman (2001) this narrow approach to policymaking may interfere with the actual undertaking of a reform initiative. The practice of this type of politics in Poland was part...
of the reason why fiscal decentralization stalled necessitating a substitute reform which deviated from the original reform goal. In addition, self-isolating policymakers were in a position to manipulate this substitute reform to their own ends, resulting in another deviant policy. Deviant policy, as introduced above, is policy that did not achieve original reform goals.

Contested politics are those where coalitions promoting different interests force compromise that moves policy in unintended directions. This type of politics is informed by Schickler’s theory of disjointed pluralism which shows how tensions and interactions of different interest coalitions in legislative politics can result in unstable and contradictory institutions. Here, such policy outcomes were labeled counterproductive in the sense that though they may have addressed a goal of the reform they worked at cross purposes with other goals.

Uncontested-uninformed politics are politics that, though minor conflict is present, majority opinion moves reform in the direction originally intended by reformers with little or no compromise to the basic premise of the reform. However, policymakers themselves are uninformed about possible negative consequences of larger reform on specific policy or about how to create the best policy for a particular policy area. This type of politics is informed by the literatures on the cognitive limitations of policymakers and the specific policymaking environment found in transitioning countries. It also results in counterproductive policy as defined above.

Uncontested politics are those where conflict between competing interests is minimal precluding the need for compromise and where policymakers are relatively informed OR are not informed entirely but their gamble with the policy they initiate pays off. With the Polish reform, the result of such politics was expected policy understood as policy that shows progress in reaching goals and does not conflict with other goals of the reform. The following section reviews the specific politics that led to particular policy outcomes in the area of social services with the decentralization reform in Poland.

Exclusionary Politics and Deviant Policy

Exclusionary politics were found in the neoliberal isolationist approach to policymaking that characterized reform development for fiscal decentralization. The neoliberal Undersecretary of State for Fiscal Decentralization, Jerzy Miller, successfully blocked the involvement of representatives of local government and other government officials in the development of fiscal policy for the reform. Failure to involve others resulted in a fiscal decentralization project that found little support outside Miller’s small circle. As a result of this and other factors, fiscal decentralization was initially put on hold for the first two years of the reform necessitating the need for a temporary centralized plan for funding subnational governments. Miller, using the same isolationist approach in developing the temporary plan, was able to use manipulation and misinformation to transfer fewer funds to programs that had been decentralized with the reform. Thus, exclusionary tactics contributed to policy that directly deviated from original reform goals: fiscal policy remained centralized and adequate funds were not provided for administratively decentralized services. Moreover, this situation

21 See Lindblom (1959) who in particular addresses this “flying by the seat of one’s pants” method of policymaking.

22 Admittedly, there are other possible categories to this model such as contested-uninformed, etc. The categories found here were developed according to that political factor that had an overriding effect on policy outcomes. Therefore, some categories were not included because, for example, with the category ‘contested politics’ the effect of contested politics outweighed that of uninformed politics.
seriously limited the autonomous functioning of new county and provincial elected
governments, another goal of the reform.

In the area of social services, lack of fiscal decentralization and underfunding most
profoundly affected county services administered by new county family assistance centers.
Social services that were given to counties as their administrative and financial responsibility
were drastically underfunded because lack of fiscal decentralization meant that counties did not
have enough of their own revenue to fund such services. This situation also meant that elected
officials, and thus citizens through them, did not have a say in how funding was spent on county
social services.

Contested Politics and Counterproductive Policy

Contested politics were found especially in reform development regarding the territorial
division of the state and administrative decentralization. Specifically, the number of counties
was determined in a compromise between reformers and county interest groups where reformers
received support for the overall reform in exchange for increasing the number of counties well
passed a number that would provide an administratively efficient system. Likewise, the number
of cities with county status was a negotiated compromise between reformers and interest groups
defending old provincial capitals. Reformers received support for a reduced number of
provinces (and a reduced number of provincial capitals) in exchange for extending “city with
county status” to many of the old provincial capitals. Also, in terms of administrative
decentralization, reformers had to compromise with central ministries on the amount of
functions passed down to subnational units or be faced with lack of ministerial support for the
overall reform. Policy outcomes of such contested politics proved to be counterproductive.
That is, decentralization that improved democracy did take place but most often at the cost of
administrative efficiency, another goal of the reform.

Contested politics affected social service outcomes in a number of ways. The most
immediate effect was disparity in county social services between urban and more rural areas.
The large number of cities with county status meant that most of the major urban areas were
able to draw on county and rich municipal funds to cover the costs of county social services,
while regular counties in less urban areas had only county reserves to draw on. Also, the large
number of small counties posed an economy of scale problem for some social services for
which the county level is now too small to operate services for the few beneficiaries found
there. Such programs include disability eligibility offices, crisis intervention centers,
specialized counseling, and juvenile rehabilitation centers. Efforts at cross-county cooperation
to correct the situation have been minimal. In terms of administrative decentralization of social
services, unlike other policy areas, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy gave less resistance
than other central ministries to the decentralization of social welfare functions and saw many
social services transferred to lower levels with the reform.  

Uncontested-Uninformed Politics and Counterproductive Policy

Uncontested-uninformed politics were also found in reforms to the territorial division of
the state and administrative decentralization. One of the main goals of the reform was to
drastically reduce the number of provinces to bring Poland's regions in line with those in
Western European countries. While politics concerning the specific number of fewer provinces

\[23\] The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy was however successful in stalling the decentralization of labor offices
and other labor policy.
(ranging from 12-16) to be implemented were of the contested type, the basic goal of the overall reduction in provinces was achieved without compromise (initially there had been proposals for 25 provinces and for maintaining the existing 49 provinces). Reformers, however, were unaware that the introduction of a much smaller number of provinces had unintended consequences for intergovernmental relationships between central government offices – that continued to be maintained on the provincial level – and municipalities. In terms of administrative decentralization, some service areas were decentralized with little resistance and thus need for compromise. Here, however, uninformed policymakers struggled with how best to create policy. In both cases, counterproductive policy resulted where goals of efficiency were undermined.

This type of politics was reflected in social service outcomes in several ways. With the reduction of provinces to 16, provincial departments of social affairs (under the jurisdiction of the central government) were in effect centralized in relation to municipal social assistance centers. As a result, social service workers on the municipal level had a much more difficult time communicating with these provincial offices when difficulties or questions arose. Some policy specific to social services, though meeting goals of bringing government and services closer to the people, failed in other ways with respect to efficiency. For example, policy allowing for directors of county family assistance centers to be hired by the county head stood at cross-purposes with the goal of developing a professional civil service. Also, the decentralization of social assistance homes to the county level created a series of problems in funding and access as homes were not spread evenly across counties.

Uncontested Politics and Expected Policy

Some of the politics involving political and administrative decentralization were identified as uncontested politics. For example, the establishment of county self-government and the decentralization of some functions fall into this category. Expected policy was found here with some services that were decentralized and did bring services closer to recipients without interfering with other goals of the reform. Some of the goals reformers set, though, had no specific politics of their own as they were expected consequences of implementing other aspects of the reform. Here victories, where they were found, in political and administrative decentralization laid the groundwork for the success of these intended side effects. Two such expected consequences found as good policy were the stimulation of civil society on the local level and increased societal control (oversight) over services.

In the area of social services expected policy was found that met reform goals but did not conflict with other goals. The decentralization of some services did indeed bring services closer to citizens without any apparent negative consequences. These include referral services to social assistance homes, foster care services, and services for the disabled (excluding disability eligibility offices). Also, civil society appeared to be supported by the introduction of county family assistance centers. Important here was their non-mandated cooperation with municipal social assistance centers and non-governmental organizations. Increased societal control or monitoring over services also appeared to be taking place in social services on the county level, though not through the path of local elections. Here, the development and use of a county strategy to address social problems showed promising signs of community feedback that is integrated into planning sessions for county services.
Conclusion

A Post-Communist Setting and Mechanisms of New Democracy

Some few scholars have begun to analyze policies in post-communist East-Central Europe from both historical and ideological perspectives as well as the democratic context in which they are made. For example, Cain and Surdej (1999) evaluate stalled pension reforms in Poland using both transitional politics (along the lines of historical institutionalism) and public choice. They state, “Our analysis of pension policy not only illustrates the importance of history and ideas on policy developments in Poland but more precisely shows how the mechanisms of democratic functioning manipulate this history and ideas” (Cain & Surdej, 1999:146). As they point out, most scholars studying democratic transitions focus on either the path dependency created by historical legacies and structures and ideologies in place before policy formation (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996; White et al., 1993) or rational or public choice approaches examining voting rules and changes in voting cycles to explain policy outcomes (Alesina, 1994; Kaminski, 1998; Olson, 1995; Przeworski, 1991).

Schickler’s theory of disjointed pluralism borrows from both rational choice and historical institutionalist theories showing, as do Cain and Surdej, that a combination of the two provides a more complete understanding of processes that influence policy formation. Schickler notes that rational choice contributes the idea that the goal-driven behavior of legislative members shapes institutional outcomes whereas historical institutionalism shows that institutions are “historical composites” (2001:267). He tempers the linearity of path dependency often found in historical institutionalism with the goal-driven behavior of individual members. He states, “whereas path dependence suggests that legislative institutions likely will, in the long run, move toward a single organizational model, members’ multiple goals have precluded such an outcome” (2001:268). The result of combining these two processes suggests the creation of institutions that are unstable and even contradictory, rather than stable institutions as much of the rational choice literature suggests. Schickler states that, “Congressional development does not produce some stable, effective compromise that is reasonably satisfactory for all (or even most) members. Instead, it produces a set of institutions that often work at cross-purposes” (2001:267).

In Poland, a specific democratic framework had a role in structuring the goal driven behavior of reform actors. Democracy in Poland is characterized by multiple veto gates – a situation that can have mixed consequences for policy outcomes. Veto gates are “institutions with the power to influence or block policy initiatives” (Haggard & Kaufman, 2001:16). Multiple veto gates allow in a wide array of interests necessitating negotiation and compromise. If successful such accommodation may broaden political support for reform through the expense of reform objectives which may be diluted in the process (Haggard & Kaufman, 2001). Veto gates that were influential in Poland’s recent public administration reforms included the president, the legislature, and parties (especially the government’s coalition partner). Negotiation and compromise resulted in the eventual passage of reforms through these veto gates in the areas of administrative and political decentralization and the territorial division of the state. However, compromises that facilitated the passage of reforms resulted in unintended consequences and undermined some original goals of the reform.

Reforms involving fiscal decentralization, on the other hand, were de facto centralized to one neoliberal decision maker who in various ways strove to bypass or disengage potential veto
gates (namely interest groups and parties) through isolation and misinformation. This situation was in part responsible for two failed attempts at the passage of fiscal decentralization legislation (in 1998 and 2000) and the underfunding of services after decentralization. Indeed, as Haggard and Kaufman state, “Centralized decision making reduces the scope of policy advice the government receives and reduces the incentives for consensus building, consultation, and feedback, which may be essential to the sustainability (if not the initiation) of the reform effort” (2001:17 italics added). The situation was compounded by the distributive nature of fiscal decentralization reforms. As Haggard and Kaufman also note, “The advantages of centralized decision making decrease and the importance of representation increases in reforms characterized by strong distributive conflicts” (Haggard & Kaufman, 2001:19-20).

The reforms were also characterized by the limitations of Polish policymakers themselves. Cognitive limitations and inexperience of policymakers as well as the short time they gave themselves to push reforms through were also factors shaping the reform development environment. Schickler (2001:268) states, “the limited cognitive capacities of decision makers, who must evaluate the complex implications of proposed institutions” contributes to solutions that are not always optimal. Add to this the particular transition environment found in post-communist politics and the chances for good policymaking are limited even further. On politics in East-Central Europe scholars note, “…overloaded policymakers attempt[ed] to develop responses to the fast-paced and complex problems of transition in a world of uncertainty” (Orenstein & Haas, 2000).

Refining Schickler’s Theory of Disjointed Pluralism

This study has shown that Schickler’s theory of disjointed pluralism, while useful in explaining many aspects of the reform, was unable to account for the exclusionary politics that brought deviant outcomes or the uncontested politics that resulted in expected outcomes. In terms of the exclusionary politics of neoliberals, such politics are a hallmark of the transition environment of the reform. Greskovits, citing reform in Eastern Europe and South America, refers to this as the “neoliberal transformation strategy” characterized by the “exclusionary features” of new democracies, “not only with respect to economic policy making, but for many important political issues” (1998:181). Thus, Schickler’s theory was limited for the purposes of this analysis because it was formulated on the basis of a fully consolidated democracy. Application to a transitioning democracy revealed that it cannot account for the exclusionary politics often found in the transition setting.

The finding of uncontested politics that resulted in expected policy can most likely be attributed to the different types of reform policies examined in this study in contrast to Schickler’s narrow focus on reform of legislative institutions. As Kingdon (1995) shows different policy types can attract varying levels of involvement by a host of different policy actors at a given point in time and thus by extension generate more or less conflict during policy formation. Reform of legislative institutions, as Schickler clearly demonstrates, has been fraught with conflict throughout the history of the U.S. Congress due to its direct attack on disparate vested interests of congressmen. This study provides evidence, however, that when different policies are examined the existence of conflict that necessitates compromise depends on the policy in question. This, as yet, theoretical proposition awaits future applications of disjointed pluralism to the study of other policy.

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Democracy and Decentralization in the Polish Context

Major decentralization reforms in a post-communist, democratic context, when studied from goal through policy design and implementation, were found in this study to be far more determined by the politics of national-level democracy than by prescriptions of policy experts. While goals may reflect desired outcomes anticipated by experts, realization of them is subject to the realities of conflicting interests and limited resources, intellectual and financial. Indeed, though goals of decentralization in Poland called for the improvement of both democracy and efficiency it is interesting to find that outcomes indicate reformers were more likely to advance the goal of democratization over the goal of efficiency when the two came in conflict. Admittedly, efficiency was also at times undermined due to uninformed policymaking.

Analysis of the public administration reform has also provided an interesting commentary on the functioning of democratic governance in Poland. On the one end are neoliberals who seek to limit involvement in policymaking with the justification that they know what is best for all. On the other end are politicians who allow the preferences of citizens to determine policy far beyond rational ideas of what is in the best interest for all. Thus, the question of how much democracy to allow into the policymaking process is an issue Polish lawmakers still appear to be grappling with. Meanwhile, the results of these extreme approaches are being reflected in policy outcomes.

Overall, this analysis has shown that improving democracy on subnational levels through national-level democracy can be elusive. Scholars of decentralization agree that it takes a host of factors working together for positive outcomes of reform to be achieved. Speaking broadly, two East European scholars note, “The development of local and regional democracy…needs to be seen as a process, with its gradual achievement depending on the interaction of a number of factors” (Kirchner & Christiansen, 1999:16). What is often overlooked are the politics of reform which can prevent these factors from coming together simultaneously or even materializing at all.
## Appendix A

### Table 1 Laws of Poland’s 1999 Public Administration Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Decentralization</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Competence Law</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day July 24, 1998 on the change of some laws defining the competencies of public administration organs – in association with the state systemic reform. (Dz.U. Nr 106, poz. 668)*</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation Law for Administrative Reforms</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day October 13, 1998 – Regulations implementing laws reforming the public administration. (Dz.U. Nr 133, poz. 872)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Political Decentralization</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law on County Self-Government</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day June 5, 1998 on county self-government. (Dz.U. Nr 91, poz. 578)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law on Provincial Self-Government</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day June 5, 1998 on the self-government of the province. (Dz.U. Nr 91, poz. 576)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law on Central Government Administration in the Province</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day June 5, 1998 on governmental administration in the province. (Dz.U. Nr 91, poz. 577)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Electoral Law for Subnational Governments</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day June 16, 1998 – Electoral law for municipal councils, county councils and provincial parliaments. (Dz.U. Nr 95, poz. 602)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation Law for New Subnational Governments</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day July 24, 1998 on the starting dates of the law on county self-government, law on self-government of the province and the law on governmental administration in the province. (Dz.U. Nr 99, poz. 631)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law on Territorial Division of the State</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day July 24, 1998 on the introduction of the basic three-tier territorial division of the state. (Dz.U. Nr 96, poz. 603 sprost. Nr 104, poz. 656)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Decree on the Formation of Counties</strong></td>
<td>Decree of the Council of Ministers from the day August 7, 1998 on the matter of the formation of counties. (Dz.U. Nr 103, poz. 652)</td>
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<th>Fiscal Decentralization</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Law on Public Finance</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day November 26, 1998 on public finance. (Dz.U. Nr 155, poz. 1014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenue Law for Subnational Governments</strong></td>
<td>Law from the day November 26, 1998 on revenues of territorial self-government entities in the years 1999 and 2000. (Dz.U. Nr 150, poz. 983)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Chancellory of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, 1998; Czubaszek, 1999; Kutyla, 1999. *Each entry on the right-hand side includes the formal name of the law translated into English by the author and its reference number (in parentheses) for the Polish Journal of Laws.*

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Appendix B

Figure 1
Old Social Service Delivery Structure 1990-98

Central Ministry of Labor and Social Policy

Provincial Social Assistance Offices (49)

Municipal Social Assistance Centers (2,489)

Source: Author.

Figure 2
Social Service Delivery Structure After the 1999 Public Administration Reform

Central Ministry of Labor and Social Policy

Provincial Departments of Social Affairs (16)

Regional Social Policy Centers (16)

Provincial Self-Government

County Family Assistance Centers (373)

County Self-Government

Municipal Social Assistance Centers (2,489)

Municipal Self-Government

Municipal Social Assistance Centers (2,489)

Municipal Self-Government

Source: Author


Sekuła, Mirosław (2000). Author interview. (Chair, Polish Parliamentary Committee on Public Finance; member, Solidarity Electoral Action party) July 12.


