

ABSTRACT

I briefly summarize current theoretical findings in political science that deal with the issue of transition to democracy. I outline the circumstances in the Soviet Union, which with the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a policy of non-interference in the development of satellite countries. I describe conditions in both the PLR and the MLR, with particular emphasis on key events such as the suppressed Hungarian uprising in 1956 or the declaration of a state of emergency in Poland in 1981. I trace the development of opposition movements in both countries and the reactions of government officials. I focus on the phases of transition processes up to the point where democracy is "the only game in town." I answer questions such as the nature of the regimes being dismantled, their modes of power, or the circumstances of economic development. I assess the transformation process in Poland according to Karl Schmitter's typology as a reform, because the main initiator of events was the social mass, and its strategy was not the use of force but the search for compromise. In contrast, the situation in Hungary is less clear. While the main initiator was certainly the ruling elite, it is not clear which strategy prevailed. In my opinion, it was about force, which is why I describe the transition in Hungary as an imposition. I also focus on the post-election comparison. In Poland, with an initially unified opposition force, the Solidarity trade union movement, the post-election party scene fragmented into four similarly strong groups that blocked each other. In Hungary, there was a split opposition before the collapse of the regime, but no complications arose after the elections.

KEYWORDS

Transformation; People's Republic of Poland; People's Republic of Hungary; Solidarity; Hungarian Democratic Forum; Democracy

