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

András Körösényi, Gábor Illés and Rudolf Metz

1 Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: korosenyi.andras@tk.mta.hu; Tel: +36 1 224 6700 / 460
2 Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: illes.gabor@tk.mta.hu; +36 1 224 6700 / 354
3 Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: metz.rudolf@tk.mta.hu; +36 1 224 6700 / 321

* Corresponding author

Abstract

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

Keywords

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

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1. Introduction

Great leaders need crisis situations to gain power to (re)act (Rossiter, 1948; Genovese, 1979), but crisis situations need great leaders in order to be solved as well (Tucker, 1968, p. 745; Tucker, 1995). Generally, a crisis is seen as a pressure and an urgent threat, which leaders must survive as they adapt to the new situation. Leadership always seems to be reactive: leaders must make sense of the crisis, give it meaning, harness and shape it through their responses, give an account after a crisis and even learn lessons from it (Ansell et al., 2014; Boin et al., 2005; Boin et al., 2008; Buller & James, 2015; Genovese, 1986; Heifetz, 1998). However, from a different ontological basis constructionist/constructivist authors give more space to form the conceptions of a situation endogenously (Grint, 2005; Widmaier et al., 2007). But what if these are just different types of relations between leaders and crisis situations? In this sense, there are two extreme ways to perceive and conceptualize extraordinary situations and to deal with them. On the one hand, a crisis could be seen as an exogenously given situation for leaders to manage in a technocratic or conventional way; on the other, it can be seen as a situation generated endogenously by leaders acting in an innovative way. While researchers usually explore leaders’ responses to exogenous crises, such as industrial accidents, natural catastrophes, terrorist attacks or responses to economic or international financial crises (e.g. Boin et al., 2005; Boin et al., 2008), our focus is on endogenously generated and / or shaped crises. The goal of this paper is to emphasize the role of political agency in crisis generation and to attempt a re-definition of it, something that is very much neglected by approaches focusing on structural determinants.
The problem arises from the structure–agency debate. A fundamental problem for political leadership studies is how the relationship between the political actors and the environment in which they find themselves is managed. Calls for research into the dilemma of the structure–agency problem in leadership studies are not new (Hargrove, 2004; Jones, 1989; Masciulli et al., 2009; ’t Hart & Rhodes, 2014). Three different approaches can be distinguished in this debate: a structure-oriented (structuralist or determinist) approach, an agency-oriented (intentionalist or voluntarist) one, and a literature that aims to transcend this dualism. ‘Agency’ is understood as a capacity to act upon situations, as a property of actors to be able to formulate and implement decisions. On the other hand, “structure” means the situation, context and political environment. It refers to the conditions within which actors operate and seize the opportunities, and which constrain their actions. Essentially, structure and agency are two sides of the same coin, as they coexist in a political process.

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

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

2. Crisis and contingency

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

“But in stipulating general conditions for choosing less incidental than the choices themselves, in establishing relationships more durable than those which emerge and melt away in transactions to satisfy a succession of contingent wants, and in articulating rules and duties which are indifferent to the outcome of the actions they govern, it may be said to endow human conduct with a formality in which its contingency is somewhat abated.” (Oakeshott, 1990, p. 74)
In a crisis situation it is precisely these “rules and duties” (and conventions, authorities) that become dubious, thereby making the political situation uncertain.¹

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

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

Table 1. Conceptual differentiations related to contingency

| contingency | normal state of affairs | indeterminacy | risk |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------------|------|
| crisis situation | uncertainty | uncertainty |

3. Palonen’s antithesis: background vs. operative contingency²

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

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

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

² Our reading here relies heavily on Kari Palonen’s distinction between Machiavelli and Weber, a distinction to be made clear at the end of this section. His reading, in our view, has great analytical merits, but The Prince can also be interpreted in a different way, i.e. as a work that supposes a more complex relationship between fortuna and virtú (see e.g. Pocock, 1975, pp. 156-182), or one that lays a greater emphasis on agency and character, and therefore rather stresses the similarities between the views of Machiavelli and Weber (see e.g. Philp, 2007, pp. 37-96). However, here our point of interest lies not in conceptual historical accuracy, but in analytical usefulness.
(2) For Machiavelli, the main threat that political action must face is the desolation of *fortuna*, which is compared by him to “raging rivers” in Chapter 25 of *The Prince*. For Weber, the main problem consists not in taming the forces of *fortuna*, but in avoiding the “petrification” of bureaucratic structures. Put differently: his main concern is with the possibility of politics, not with that of order (Palonen, 2001). The difference between the two authors is aptly expressed by their uses of metaphors: while Machiavelli’s prince has to erect “defences and barriers, in such a manner that, rising again, the waters may pass away by canal, and their force be neither so unrestrained nor so dangerous” (Machiavelli, 2008, Chapter 25), Weber describes politics as a “strong and slow boring of hard boards” (Weber, 2001, p. 128). The latter in Palonen’s interpretation means the opening up of new horizons for political action.

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

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

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

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

Table 2. Comparison of the Machiavellian and the Weberian Moment

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

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

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

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

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

Table 3. Typology of the relationship between political agency and crisis

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

4 Our approach can be considered as a constructivist viewpoint, which while not ruling out differences between types of crises concerning their interpretability, assumes that all of them can be shaped by interpretation to a certain degree.
Unlike quadrants A and B, an elevated level of operative contingency is present in quadrants C and D. We speak of operative contingency when the political actor deliberately acts or speaks in such a way as to heighten the level of uncertainty, e.g. by questioning conventions or conventional authorities, the existing legal order, etc. The latter often entails a paradigm change (Hall, 1993; cf. Blyth, 2013), i.e. a dramatic change in policy-making, comparing to policy adjustment (change of settings) or policy reforms (change of instruments, institutions).

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

4.1. Quadrant A: normal state of affairs

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

Drawing on Hall, by paradigm we mean an interpretative framework of policymaking. “Policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing”, states Hall (1993, p. 279.). Policy-paradigm is a lense for perceiving problems, a way of cognition of the world and an attitude to the potential modes of dealing with it. Hence, by paradigm change we mean the change of the hierarchy of overarching goals guiding policy.
succession of rulers usually increases the level of contingency, because early, and even regular elections cause indeterminacy in domestic politics. However, it is within the “normal” level of contingency which prevails in the parliamentary form of government. In other words, “rules and duties”, norms and convention are not usually under threat in these cases. Uncertainty is limited to the composition of the next parliament or government. Although there may be changes in public policies, so contingency may rise to a higher level compared to the periods between two elections, this is expected and accepted as “normal” and falls within the boundaries of the predictable way of policy change in parliamentary regimes. One example of the remarkable presence of contingency in the normal state of affairs is the French Fourth Republic up to the 1958 crisis. In one of the most penetrating recent French histories Marcel Merle (1999, pp. 975–976.) argues that under this regime “governmental instability did not always result in political instability […] Governmental instabilities were mainly part of a relative continuity, almost making governmental crises into a means of governing”.

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

4.2. Quadrant B: crisis as exogenous shock

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

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

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

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

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

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6 The First Republic in Italy (1948–1992) can be a similar example for contingency as normal state of affairs.
election and right before the flash flood in eastern Germany the polls gave the center-right opposition (CDU) a lead and a marginal majority for the red-green coalition. The Elbe flash flood changed the picture and resulted in the re-election of Schröder. At very early stage of the disaster the federal government reacted effectively and provided financial aid for the lands hit by the catastrophe. Moreover it eased the pressure on incumbents to manage the existing high budget deficit. (Bytzek, 2008) Due to positional asymmetry Edmund Stoiber supported by CSU/CDU was unable to keep up with Schröder or to bid high enough, and Schröder was re-elected.

4.3. Quadrant C: crisis re-defined

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

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

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

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

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7 Churchill’s Speeches: The Munich Agreement. October 5, 1938. House of Commons. [http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1930-1938-the-wilderness/the-munich-agreement](http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1930-1938-the-wilderness/the-munich-agreement) (10.06.2015)
Presidential War Power, based on Constitutional tradition but also legitimized by Congressional authorization acts. The 9/11 attack was conventionally interpreted as an exogenous challenge which caused a so-called “incomprehensible crisis” (Boin et al., 2008, p. 19.), and which provided the incumbent with a relatively wide space for political interpretation and framing. The “War on Terror”, and the “Axis of evil” were original frames for the Bush Doctrine, which turned out to be a new policy-paradigm – it introduced a new era in the American foreign- and security policy and in international relations. The new policy included the concept of pre-emptive strikes, unilateralism and democratic regime change, which has some antecedents in American exceptionalism (Nagan & Hammer 2004). Bush transformed and extended his role as war president and turned it into an extensive executive unilateralism, using for example presidential signing statements extensively to suspend the application of Congressional laws in public administration (Galvin, 2009). The global “War on Terror” aimed to reduce background contingency. But the preventive military actions against terrorist suspects, the surveillance and detainment, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the replacement of a multilateral policy in international relations with unilateral US dominance (which caused a dissensus even within NATO) meant the increase of operative contingency in world politics. Bush continuously raised the stakes, but by 2005–06 he lost support within Congress, was challenged by the Supreme Court, and for the last years of his presidency he became a lame duck.

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

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

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

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8 Speech for Urgent and Topical Issues Debate, 24 October 2011. [http://parlament.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat?p_ckl=39&p_uln=122&p_felsz=10&p_szoveg=v%E1ls%E1g&p_felszig=10](http://parlament.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat?p_ckl=39&p_uln=122&p_felsz=10&p_szoveg=v%E1ls%E1g&p_felszig=10) (10.06.2015)

9 His revolutionary measures included crisis taxes on sectors like banking, telecommunication, or commercial industry, or reducing utility prices, but also a massive state intervention even in market and property relations, changing the relation between state and society and drafting and voting on a constitution.
multinational firms, international financial institutions and banks as well as institutions such as the IMF and the EU. Conflicts with such actors increased uncertainty further, and this was exacerbated by the opening to the East and to Russia, which was detrimental to relations with the USA, though it ensured political support from Hungarians with strong national feelings. However, deepening conflicts and increasing contingency by political agency was a strategy to create advantages in domestic politics. Therefore instead of bringing back the normalcy of the pre-crisis era, Orbán applied extraordinary measures on a permanent base. Instead of applying pure policy-adjustment to restore the situation ex ante, he developed new policies but also a wider political paradigm and successfully mobilized people to support it among the electorate. By and large, Orbán can be regarded an example of a politician who played not only against (background) contingency, but through (operative) contingency at the same time. In his 2014 Tusványos speech Orbán revealed his attitude towards contingency (as evidence for his view, he both mentions external shocks and policy measures of his government):

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

4.4. Quadrant D: endogenously generated crisis

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

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

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

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

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

12 In his typology, two main dimensions of variables are set up. Firstly, the previous regime’s established commitments could be vulnerable or resilient. Secondly, president’s political identity could be either opposed or affiliated to the pre-established regime. “The leadership project of the opposition leader is to challenge the received agenda, perhaps to displace it completely with another; the leadership project of the affiliated leader is to continue, perhaps to complete, the work on that agenda.” (1997, 76)
provocative anti-European speech on 15 May. His motives were clear: de Gaulle had a different vision of the republic to both his allies and his opposition. As Gaffney puts it: “1962 was a dramatic showdown between de Gaulle wanting to reinforce personality politics and almost everyone else trying to dedramatize the republic” (Gaffney, 2010, pp. 42). His strategy was to “move away from some forms of support, to move towards new policy positions” (Gaffney, 2010, p. 41). The second step in this process was the announcement of a referendum on the direct election of the president. After every party apart from his own united and overturned de Gaulle’s prime minister, he dissolved the National Assembly, and scheduled the new elections after the referendum. He approached the people in an unconstitutional manner: “There was no basis in his own constitution for what he was doing; what he was doing was asserting the centrality of his own action” (Gaffney, 2010, p. 42). At the end, he clearly won his self-arranged showdown, triumphing both at the referendum and at the following elections. He successfully used operative contingency to ram through and solidify his political vision.

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

4. Conclusions

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

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

14 A consensual constitution-making can be a long-lasting process, where there is time for deliberation and/or bargaining of the parties, in order to reduce contingency and threat.
de-legitimize or blame conventional authorities; to offer / apply a new kind of crisis-management; to restructure power relations.

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

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

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

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