

among the two smaller coalition partners (i.e., the Greens and the FDP). Reactions to Russia's war on Ukraine led to visible conflict, when individual MPs from within the majority publicly positioned themselves against their PPGs' positions and the chancellor. The heat thus further intensified.

We observe current "hot politics" in a system that values "cold politics."

For the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), in the opposition for the first time in 16 years, it took time until it had "dusted itself off." After narrowly losing the 2021 election, the party settled on new leadership and positioned itself in conflict mode—but nevertheless it occasionally cooperated with the majority. This was a significant difference from the ongoing collaboration of previous years, when the major parties (i.e., the CDU/Christian Social Union and the SPD) had governed jointly in grand coalitions for 12 years.

One piece of legislation had significant effects. In 2023, Parliament passed a reform of the electoral law, effectively limiting the size of Parliament to 630 members. Currently, the Bundestag has more than 730 members, making it the largest parliament in the world. Despite attempts in recent years, it had not been possible to pass this reform in the mode of "cold politics"—that is, through compromise and consensus between the majority and the opposition. Politics surrounding this change in the German polity was intense; members of the opposition decried foul play: "a manipulation of electoral law" and "an attack on democracy itself" (Siefken 2024). When the Constitutional Court decided in July 2024 that most of the rules indeed were constitutional (some adjustments were required), attention to this issue subsided. Beyond circles of those politically interested, there had not been much previous awareness in German society either. However, this certainly had an effect on the atmosphere inside Parliament as a toxic issue.

Stability in Institutions, Instability in Political Behavior

Overall, the German political system has strong institutional stability. Parliament is working and accomplishing things in its usual routines: 250 laws were passed at the halfway point of the electoral period, which is the typical number. Parliamentary questions are asked and answered at high rates, and plenary debates are held at the usual intervals. An intermediate external evaluation revealed that the coalition contract was well on its way to being largely fulfilled, as in past years (Vehrkamp and Matthieß 2023).

In the meantime, visible conflicts have arisen for three reasons: parliamentary presence and actions of the right-wing AfD, the new strategic approach of the opposition, and internal conflicts in the coalition. The breakdown of the coalition in November 2024 led to early general elections in February 2025, intensifying conflict in a contested electoral campaign. In a political culture that values compromise and is based on competition toward the center, these conflicts work against trust in political actors. They can have reverberations on the political system.

To summarize, the parliamentary situation and the political perceptions in Germany currently are driven by various changes in

German politics. We observe "hot politics" in a system that values "cold politics." This is good news because politics—that is, the style of getting things done—can be changed most easily by the political actors. The question is: Do they have the incentives, intentions, and capacities to do so?

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

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LEGISLATIVE–EXECUTIVE RELATIONS IN ISRAEL: CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS 2023–2024

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Israel has a weak parliament that is dominated by the executive branch (Cohen 2024; Tuttnauer and Hazan 2023). The judiciary is independent and strong, and it plays an important role in balancing the weak parliament and the strong executive branch (Roznai 2024; Zamir 2021). Between 2019 and 2024, Israel's legislative–executive dynamics changed dramatically (Akirav 2024; Roznai 2024). Four factors led to this change: the indictment of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, overlapping crises, political polarization, and populist rhetoric. This Spotlight article focuses on how Netanyahu's indictments changed the legislative–executive relationship, specifically after October 7, 2023.

The Indictments Against Prime Minister Netanyahu

In February 2019, for the first time in the history of Israel, the attorney general announced the filing of an indictment for crimes of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust against an incumbent prime minister. Because Netanyahu was unable to form a

government after the April 2019 election, he convinced his coalition partners to vote to dissolve the 21st Knesset and hold new elections. This also occurred after the election of September 2019. The main issue that dominated the second election was whether it was appropriate for a candidate for the prime minister position to be facing indictments. The third election in March 2020 resulted in the establishment of an emergency government due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fourth election took place in March 2021, resulting in Netanyahu spending a year as the leader of the opposition, a role he strongly disliked. After the 2022 election, Netanyahu formed the most extreme government in Israel's history, including parties from the right wing, the extreme right wing, and the ultra-Orthodox. The coalition agreement of this government included numerous policy-specific procedural rules that enabled these previously marginalized parties to fulfill their extremist goals in Israeli politics. The government's majority rule (i.e., 64 of 120 seats) transformed into the tyranny of the majority, leading to further oppression of the weaker Knesset and enabling the ultra-Orthodox party and other extreme right-wing parties to push forward their extremist agenda.

In February 2023, a group of coalition Israeli legislators proposed a private bill to amend the “Basic Law: Government Regarding the Prime Minister's Inability to Fulfill His Position.” To amend the Basic Laws, a simple majority is required for seven and an absolute majority for six of the laws. Thus, it is relatively easy for any given government to change the Basic Laws for its own reasons. The number of amendments that Israel made in the Basic Laws is higher compared to other Western democracies.¹ The content of the amendments is an additional indicator of the weakness of the Israeli parliament and the ability of the government to set its agenda regarding significant changes in checks and balances. For example, in 2014, the government amended “Basic Law: Government (Vote of No-Confidence)” from semi-constructive to become fully constructive. Scholars indicated that a full constructive vote of no-confidence is rare in democracies, and it constrains the power of the opposition to oversee the government (Tuttnauer and Hazan 2023).

To accelerate the process of amending the “Basic Law: Government Regarding the Prime Minister's Inability to Fulfill His Position,” a special committee was established—it was the second special committee since the establishment of Israel and both by the same government. This committee held only eight meetings, and the amendment passed on the third hearing—less than a month since it had been tabled. The executive branch prevented a proper legislative process for amending a Basic Law and avoided deep and professional committee discussions. The coalition's majority in the committee guaranteed its passage. The passage of the amendment dramatically changed legislative–executive relations. In its current form, it is almost impossible to declare that the prime minister is unable to fulfill his position.

In January 2024, the Supreme Court determined that the amendment to “Basic Law: Government Regarding the Prime Minister's Inability to Fulfill His Position” would be in effect only starting in the next Knesset term because it targeted a particular individual, which constituted an abuse of the Knesset's authority. The weak parliament was unable to stop the dominant executive branch from promoting a fundamental change in this Basic Law. The independent Supreme Court did.

Netanyahu's innocence is one factor that explains the observed dynamics of the parliament losing power to the executive branch. The five consecutive elections between 2019 and 2022 concerned Netanyahu's argument that he was innocent (Navot and Goldshmidt 2022; Oren and Waxman 2022). Scholars have indicated that the criminal proceedings against Netanyahu led to an overlap of his personal interest in escaping the law and the aspiration of the parties that compose the right-wing religious bloc to rein in the courts (Akirav 2024; Navot and Goldshmidt 2022).

After the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Netanyahu and his coalition partners prioritized remaining in power. In doing so, they changed the legislative–executive dynamic. The most visible evidence of this is the shift in fund allocation to prioritize the coalition's interests and the exclusion of ultra-Orthodox men from military draft. During wartime, a country has two critical requirements: funding for the military and soldiers. The following sections examine how the ultra-Orthodox party neglected the necessity for funding and soldiers and instead prioritized the interests of its ultra-Orthodox voters.

Coalition Funds

On October 15, 2023, the Ministry of Finance CEO wrote: “The allocation of budgets that have not yet been allocated and are not related to supporting the fighting, the affected civilian population, or the provision of essential services of the economy must be frozen.”²

At the beginning of November 2023, Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich (i.e., leader of the National Religious Party) refused to freeze the coalition funds. The finance committee's chair, Moshe Gafni (i.e., leader of the Haredi party United Torah Judaism) led a vote to approve the use of the coalition funds for the ultra-Orthodox. The coalition's majority in the committee guaranteed its passage. The government also needed to adjust the 2024 budget. The finance minister broke the law by presenting the bill 16 days later than the Basic Law allowed. He did so to ensure that he would be able to transfer the ultra-Orthodox parties' coalition funds to the yeshivas (i.e., traditional Jewish educational institutions).³

Opposition legislators and non-governmental organizations filed a petition with the Supreme Court regarding the 2024 budget. Following allegations of a lack of transparency in the war budget, the Supreme Court judges gave the government three weeks to explain the level of detail required in the budget proposal. To convince the ultra-Orthodox legislators to vote in favor of the 2024 budget, the government approved a proposal to exclude yeshiva budgets from the mandatory reductions in the 2024 budget that applied to all government ministries to raise funds to finance the war. The budget for the yeshiva institutions remained the same as the year before October 2023. Thus, the ultra-Orthodox legislators voted in favor of the 2024 budget, and Netanyahu managed to remove the threat to the stability of his government. These debates in the finance committee demonstrate how the executive branch did not deliberate or compromise during and after hearing the opposition legislators or professional advisors. Netanyahu and his coalition's partners put their personal needs before those of Israeli society in wartime, and the Supreme Court played a minor role in this event.

Opposition to the Drafting of Young Ultra-Orthodox Men into the Army

In 2017, the Supreme Court invalidated the two laws that exempted yeshiva students from military service. Instead of passing a law requiring equal military service, the government ordered

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Roznai, Yaniv. 2024. "From the 'Hungarian Blitz' to the 'Polish Salami': The Judicial Overhaul in Israel as a Populist Project." Social Science Research Network. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4807540.

Since his indictments in 2019, Netanyahu—with his proxies (i.e., legislators)—worked hard to change the executive–legislative relations in Israel to increase the powers of the executive branch at the expense of the legislative branch.

the Israeli Defense Forces to not draft yeshiva students until March 31, 2024, bypassing the parliament. On March 26, 2024, the Supreme Court discussed petitions claiming that the government's decision was illegal. Two days later, the Supreme Court issued an interim order prohibiting the transfer of funds to those yeshivas whose students had refused the draft. Once the parliament was excluded from the process, the independent Supreme Court balanced the dominant power of the executive branch over the weak parliament.

Conclusion

Since his indictments in 2019, Netanyahu—with his proxies (i.e., legislators)—worked hard to change the executive–legislative relations in Israel to increase the powers of the executive branch at the expense of the legislative branch. Netanyahu's most recent government did not allow the parliament to hold professional discussions regarding essential issues, including the budget during wartime and the drafting of yeshiva students. In some cases, the Supreme Court managed to balance the dominant power of the executive branch over the weak parliament and did not in other cases. The analysis of the dynamics of the legislative–executive relations in Israel shows that the power shifted toward the executive branch during the past five years. The Supreme Court appears to be the only institution that currently can limit the power of the executive branch to any significant degree.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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NOTES

1. See <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/39441>.
2. See www.sponser.co.il/Article.aspx?ArticleId=113545.
3. See www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001469475.

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RECENT INTRAPARTY DYNAMICS IN THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE JAPANESE EXECUTIVE BRANCH UNDER THE KISHIDA ADMINISTRATION

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The Japanese executive branch has the most important role in the legislation. For example, the National Diet prioritizes government bills and typically passes them without amendments. From 2013 to 2023, on average, 93.1% of government bills were passed within one session and 93.6% were passed without legislative amendments. However, this practice results primarily from the governing parties' informal preliminary examination system (i.e., *Jizenshisa*). Under this system, the Cabinet can submit bills to the National Diet only if they are approved by the governing party. In exchange for this, "backbenchers" (i.e., Members of Parliament who do not hold a ministerial position) are obligated to support government proposals. Therefore, to explain the dynamics of legislative–executive relations in Japan, the intra-governing party's policy-making process in the pre-legislative stage must be discussed.

This article focuses on the backbenchers' regaining their influence in the policy-formulation process under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration, which began in October 2021. I argue that this recent dynamic was led by Prime Minister Kishida's limited resources inside his own party; that is, the relatively weak status of his faction amid policy conflicts within the party. Consequently, Kishida was forced to compromise with backbenchers on major policy-making issues within the party. He also could not wield the Special Organs under the direct supervision of the President (SOPs)—one of the tools that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had used to lead the intraparty policy discussion, with comparable efficacy.

Under a legislative framework in which the Cabinet cannot have formal involvement in the legislative process and faces a strong Upper House—which the prime minister cannot dissolve—the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government institutionalized the governing parties' *Jizenshisa* (Kawato 2005). Under this