The institutional design of Kuwait's political system is in need of reform to streamline and rationalize its oversight procedures. This needs to be accomplished similar to many Continental European parliaments, which were reformed precisely because of endemic legislative–executive deadlock in the interwar period. Yet, as long as Kuwait's constitution continues to be viewed as a rigid document and serious reforms of parliamentary rules of procedure are generally unsuccessful and blocked by the executive branch, reform will remain elusive. Given these shortcomings and the way that the political system is set up, it was perhaps inevitable that the KNA was unconstitutionally dissolved by the emir on May 10, 2024, for the first time in 38 years.

NORWAY: STRONG PARLIAMENT FACING NEW CHALLENGES

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As Ishiyama (2020, 203) argued, analyses of the dynamics of legislative–executive relations should include both decline and revival of parliaments, and explanatory factors should comprise exogenous and endogenous as well as "distal" (long-term) and "proximate" (immediate) aspects. This article examines the Norwegian Parliament (i.e., the Storting)—one of "the strong parliaments of Scandinavia" (Damgaard 1994) and ranked 23rd among 158 legislatures on the Fish and Kroenig (2009, 756) power index.

As long as Kuwait's constitution continues to be viewed as a rigid document and serious reforms of parliamentary rules of procedure are generally unsuccessful and blocked by the executive branch, reform will remain elusive.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

NOTES

1. Other than a fraudulent election in 1967, the KNA generally has continued to be freely and fairly elected (see Al-Shayeji 1988 and Al-Saeedi 2003).
2. State of Kuwait Constitution, Articles 65, 71, 79, 80, 100, 102, and 107. See www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.
3. Government formation is governed by the two constitutional Articles 56 and 57; is dominated by the emir and his appointed prime minister; and only vaguely mentions "traditional consultations." Disputes about portfolio allocation evolve into interpellations and motions of confidence.
4. This is the post-Iraq invasion of Kuwait period.

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In the 1960s, Rokkan (1966) found that the central arena in Norwegian politics was the corporatist bargaining table, where government representatives met with trade unionists, farmers, fishermen, and representatives of employers' associations. Important decisions in economic policy rarely were made in the Storting. Elections and votes counted in the choice of governing personnel, but other resources decided when public policies were negotiated in the corporatist arena. For decades, most observers of Norwegian politics supported the "decline of legislature thesis." However, from the late 1970s onward, the Storting became more active and influential vis-à-vis the executive (Rommetvedt 2003, 2023a). The corporatist apparatus, composed of numerous public boards, councils, and committees with interest-group representation, was gradually downscaled, and interest groups increasingly lobbied Parliament (Rommetvedt et al. 2013). In 2014, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution and the Storting, historians and political scientists concluded that since the 150th anniversary, the Parliament had strengthened its position (Narud, Heidar, and Grønlie 2014).

The Norwegian political system is based on negative parliamentarism. There is no investiture vote in Parliament, but the government must resign in case of a vote of no confidence. Election periods are fixed for four years. From 1945 to 1961, five or six parties were represented in the Storting, but the Labor Party controlled the majority of seats. Consequently, Labor could form single-party majority governments. Since then, the number of parliamentary parties has increased, and the latest general election in 2021 ended with 10 parties in the Storting. Since the mid-1960s, most governments have been coalition and/or minority governments.

Minority coalition governments depend on complex negotiations, among the parties in government and with one or more opposition parties, to obtain the necessary support from a majority in Parliament. This could strengthen Parliament, but resources are

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needed to realize the potential. In the case of Norway, the political–administrative resources and working capacity of the Storting and the parliamentary party groups were modest, but they have increased markedly. The number of people employed by the parliamentary party secretariats increased from 23 in 1971 to 202 in 2020. In the same period, the Storting's administration increased from 151 to 492 employees (Rommetvedt 2023b, 529). This has paved the way for a much more active and influential Parliament.

After the general election in 2013, the Conservatives and Progress Party formed a minority coalition government headed by Conservative Erna Solberg and supported by the Christian Democrats and Liberals. The Solberg government continued in office after the general election in 2017. The Christian Democrats and Liberals had a standing invitation from the Prime Minister (PM) to join the government and, in January 2018, the Liberals accepted. The Christian Democrats were deeply divided; however, after a dramatic vote on "choice of direction" at the national convention, the party leader —who preferred collaboration with center-left parties—resigned. The new leadership decided to accept the PM's invitation, and the Christian Democrats entered the center-right coalition in January 2019. Consequently, the coalition government parties gained control of the majority of seats in the Storting. However, the majority status was lost a year later when the Progress Party decided to leave due to disagreements with the coalition partners, particularly regarding immigration policy.

A few weeks later was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and, on March 12, 2020, the government launched strict regulations. The Storting "took on a more active role than usual by adopting extensive compensatory financial measures without discussion within the Ministries" (Norwegian Official Report 2023, 2). At first, the pandemic led Norwegians to "rally around the flag" and, for a while, the popularity of the PM's Conservative Party increased. Nevertheless, in September 2021, the coalition parties lost the election. The Labor Party lost votes as well, but other center-left parties won. Labor leader Jonas Gahr Støre wanted to form a majority coalition together with the Centre and Socialist Left parties, but the Centre Party strongly opposed the inclusion of the Socialist Left. After tough negotiations, the Socialist Left withdrew. A new minority coalition government was formed by Labor and the Centre Party based, however, on parliamentary support of the Socialist Left.

The new government struggled with several problems, including a new wave of the coronavirus; Russia's war against Ukraine; and increased prices for electricity, food, and petrol. This time, the various "crises" did not lead to rallying around the flag. The two government parties suffered great losses in the opinion polls (Rommetvedt 2023c) and in the local election in September 2023. For the first time in 99 years, Labor lost its position as the largest political party in any election (local, regional, or national) in Norway.

In recent years, many Norwegian MPs and government ministers have been involved in various types of scandals related to #MeToo, unjustified coverage of travel and housing expenses, and disqualification due to the appointment of friends or acquisition of stocks by ministers or their spouse. The latter scandal included Erna Solberg and her husband during her tenure as PM, and she was strongly criticized by the Storting's Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs. A Christian Democrat leader, two deputy leaders of the Labor Party, and eight members of the Labor-Centre Party government have resigned or been dismissed. This included two ministers who had their master's degree canceled due to plagiarism.

Recent surveys among Norwegian citizens show that based on a scale from 0 to 10, the average level of trust in Parliament has decreased from 6.4 in 2021 to 5.4 in 2023 and trust in government has decreased from 6.2 to 5.0 (Norwegian Agency for Public and Financial Management 2024). It remains to be seen whether the decline in political trust is the beginning of a long-term trend or a temporary setback. However, Norwegian political institutions are robust—ranked fifth in the world on V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (Nord et al. 2024, 59)—and earlier research indicated that the impact of scandals is short-lived. Voters primarily blame individual politicians and, to a lesser degree, their parties (Hammerstad 2024); however, this may have changed after a period with several scandals.

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THE LEGISLATIVE–EXECUTIVE RELATIONS IN POLAND IN 2019–2024: A MULTILEVEL PERSPECTIVE

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Legislative–executive relations increasingly are investigated at all territorial levels in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the state of democracy (Fidalgo 2022). This article analyzes the case of Poland in 2019–2024 to identify and explain the position of local and regional legislative vis-à-vis executive branches and to compare it with relations between the national parliament—that is, the *Sejm* and the *Senat* and the Council of Ministers. At subnational levels (i.e., three territorial tiers), the focus is on city council versus president or mayor, depending on the size of a city and the provincial council—the so-called *sejmik* versus the leader of the executive branch (*marszałek* in Polish) and its board. I argue that the "executive aggrandizement" (Bermeo 2016) was observable at all territorial levels in Poland in 2019–2024; at the national level, precisely until the establishment of the new government on December 13, 2023, that consisted of previous opposition forces. However, the excessive strengthening of the executive branches at the expense of legislative branches in this period was a process that developed at the national and subnational levels long before 2019.

Past research on legislative–executive relations in Poland indicates that strengthening the national executive branch at the expense of the legislative branch resulted from a chain of events concerning the political and party system, which began in the mid-1990s, as well as the growth of majoritarianism. This created a fertile environment for the rising power of the Council of Ministers and incumbents at the expense of the parliament and opposition after the Law and Justice (PiS) party won the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015 (Szymański 2019).

At the subnational level, the strengthening of the executive branch at the expense of the legislative branch began after the major administrative reform of 1999 (Regulski 2003). The introduction of direct elections for local executive-branch heads in 2002 enabled them to gradually build a dominating position vis-à-vis councils and to have financial and human resources (including council administrative staff) at their disposal. Moreover, councilors sometimes were treated instrumentally by mayors or presidents, receiving material benefits for their full subordination. This clearly reflects one of the problems of nondemocratic governance marked by corruption. Although citizens did not elect executive-branch leaders at the provincial level, they also often gained a strong position in decision-making processes (Mieńkowska-Norkiene, Szymański, and Zamęcki 2024).

The strengthening of the Council of Ministers at the expense of the parliament accelerated in 2015–2019—that is, within the first period of the ruling of the United Right coalition led by the PiS. It took the form of executive aggrandizement—a key component of the de-democratization process in Poland. It weakened the position of the legislative body, which often became a voting machine, and the courts (Szymański 2019). In the next legislative period (i.e., from the second parliamentary win of the United Right on October 13, 2019, to the elections on October 15, 2023), a further shift of the core of decision making from the legislative to the executive branch was observed.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly contributed to this process of executive aggrandizement. The introduction of the "state of the epidemic" (March 20, 2020) was used instrumentally by the government to consolidate its power. In the emergency period, the prime minister and ministers issued many regulations, often unrelated to COVID-19. This also included certain acts adopted by the incumbent majority in the *Sejm*, limiting functions of the *Senat* (the majority after 2019 was held in the second chamber by the opposition). Another example of the further marginalization of the parliamentary opposition was when the "parliamentary voting was organized typically according to a two-step procedure-collecting proposals from the majority and amendments from the opposition in separate groups so that the latter could be easily rejected *en bloc*" (Cassani et al. 2023, 69–70). Moreover, the government's draft laws were submitted as parliamentary laws, thereby bypassing stakeholder consultations and regulatory impact analysis.

Most of these issues continued after the COVID-19 crisis, resulting in further marginalization of the role of the parliament and opposition (at least until 2023). This was a continuation of processes begun in 2015 that were aggravated during the pandemic. The government used special procedures for the Council of Ministers at the governmental and parliamentary levels in "urgent matters," which allowed the bypassing of consultations and the examination of draft laws by government committees, thereby compressing the work deadlines of the parliament and the president. From November 2019 to November 2020, the procedure impacted 36.2% of all laws; in the next two annual periods, it impacted 27.6% and 38% of all laws, respectively. Further marginalization of the work of the parliamentary opposition and procedures also was noticeable in the canceling or resumption of voting unfavorable to incumbents, as well as in the limiting of opposition activities (e.g., time for speeches given by Members of Parliament) and consultations. This included "hiding" draft laws in ministries until their submission to the parliament (Mieńkowska-Norkiene, Szymański, and Zamęcki 2024).

The executive aggrandizement at subnational levels continued after 2015–2019, which was a consolidation of the previously strong position of executive branches vis-à-vis councils; however, this was dependent on local political situations. An important role in this context was played by the 2018 subnational

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