

THE ANATOMY OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM

Dealing with transformational
fatigue in Central and
Eastern Europe



Edited by
Jan Kubik and
Richard C. M. Mole

UCLPRESS



The Anatomy of Right-Wing Populism

FRINGE

Series Editors

Uta Staiger, UCL European Institute, and
Peter Zusi, UCL School of Slavonic and
East European Studies

The FRINGE series explores the roles that complexity, ambivalence and immeasurability play in social and cultural phenomena. A cross-disciplinary initiative bringing together researchers from the humanities, social sciences and area studies, the series examines how seemingly opposed notions such as centrality and marginality, clarity and ambiguity, can shift and converge when embedded in everyday practices.

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FRINGE

The Anatomy of Right-Wing Populism

*Dealing with transformational fatigue
in Central and Eastern Europe*

Edited by
Jan Kubik and Richard C. M. Mole

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Series editors' preface

The UCL Press FRINGE series presents work related to the themes of the UCL FRINGE Centre for the Study of Social and Cultural Complexity.

The FRINGE series is a platform for cross-disciplinary analysis and the development of 'area studies without borders'. 'FRINGE' is an acronym standing for Fluidity, Resistance, Invisibility, Neutrality, Grey zones, and Elusiveness – categories fundamental to the themes that the Centre supports. The oxymoron in the notion of a 'FRINGE Centre' expresses our interest in (1) the tensions between 'area studies' and more traditional academic disciplines; and (2) social, political and cultural trajectories from 'centres to fringes' and inversely from 'fringes to centres'.

This book examines one of the most significant and far-reaching social developments in the world today: the movement of right-wing populism from peripheral phenomenon to central political force. Populism claims simultaneously to defend the interests of those who have been left behind on the fringes of society and to represent the 'authentic' beliefs and values of the predominant community. Populist discourse operates on economic, social, linguistic and (perhaps most strikingly) cultural registers; for that reason, the present volume examines the topic through a multidisciplinary lens that marshals theories and methods from a wide range of humanities and social science fields. The book focuses on the rise and development of populism in Central and East-Central Europe, a region that not so long ago was widely regarded as the periphery of 'the West', due to learn from and catch up to the democratic and capitalist practices of the West after the collapse of the European communist regimes in 1989–93. Recent years have shown, however, that rather than lagging behind the ostensibly established democracies of the West, this region may in fact be best regarded as the vanguard in terms of a neo-traditionalist 'illiberal turn' now felt across the globe.

Uta Staiger and Peter Zusi

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Dealing with transformational fatigue in Central and Eastern Europe

Jan Kubik and Richard C. M. Mole

On 15 October 2023, Poland held its parliamentary elections, in which a large grouping of anti-populist parties, led by the Civic Coalition, won a 54 per cent majority in Parliament, dethroning the right-wing populist PiS (Law and Justice) that had ruled the country for eight years. Two months after the election, Civic Coalition leader Donald Tusk became Poland's Prime Minister and set out to undo the effects of those eight years that he and his coalition saw as the period during which Polish democracy was seriously damaged. It soon turned out that the task was extremely difficult, not only because PiS retained control over the presidency, the Constitutional Tribunal and some chambers of the Supreme Court but also because during their eight years in power, right-wing populists solidified their grip on a large segment of the Polish economy and culture and thus gained access to resources that allowed them to maintain support of about one third of the population.¹ In short, the new government has been facing the dilemma of how to re-democratise a polity in which the former de-democratiser, a coalition of right-wing populist parties, continues to have consequential political power and enjoys considerable public support.

Right-wing populism

Why is overcoming the legacies of right-wing populist rule so difficult? The answer must include a thorough analysis of the phenomenon itself, so first we need its definition.

There are several ways of defining populism. The definition that is shared, at least partially, by most authors of this volume approaches populism as a type of ideology. It has two variants: thin and thick. The former has four features, the latter five. Following Cas Mudde (2004), we assume that all four features need to be present, at least in trace amounts, to classify a given ideological statement/political programme/discourse as populist. These features include:

1. Vertical polarisation that sets ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’, which are seen as separate, relatively homogeneous and mutually exclusive groups or categories of people.
2. A claim that the dominant if not exclusive relationship between these two monolithic groups is one of antagonism.
3. A Manichean valorisation of this antagonism (that is, fundamentalist moralising or mythologisation), which assumes that the essential feature of social/human reality is the struggle of the forces of good and evil and that any conflict/tension between these two groups is an instance of that fundamental struggle. These first three features generate a vision of *vertical polarisation*.
4. The idea that politics should be the expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

The key implication of Manicheism is that political opponents of populists, construed as champions of the forces of evil, are, by definition, illegitimate or at least defective political actors, whose elimination from the public sphere needs to be rhetorically promoted and, if possible, realised in practice. The key implication of combining the idea of popular sovereignty – founded on the concept of general will – with the definition of ‘the people’ as ‘uninstitutionalized, nonproceduralized corpus mysticum’ (Müller, 2016: 62) is the underestimation or even outright rejection of pluralism of interests and identities that in reality characterises any sufficiently large group of people. The idea of the *volonté générale* helps to justify the premise that it is knowable what ‘the people’ – as an undifferentiated monolith – want, that this knowledge is unproblematically available to a populist leader and that it is relatively easy to realise a programme that will satisfy this collective wish, if the leader has freedom to act. And to be free, the leader should not be constrained by the rules of the (democratic) political game. In short, the substance of (majoritarian) democracy is elevated above the need to follow the system of democratic checks and balances that constitutes the essence of liberal democracy. The latter is seen as a nuisance if not an obstacle to the exercise of the

people's genuine will. This disregard for the idea that the power should be always constrained opens a way towards the justification of authoritarianism as a form of rule. If democracy, in a nutshell, is understood as the rule of electoral majority constrained by the rule of law, 'full' democracy is always liberal democracy (Müller, 2016; Rummens, 2017). Ergo, authoritarianism can be defined primarily as a strategy of power exercise that removes or minimises the rule of law and the system of institutional checks and balances.

Populism 'thickens' when its designers begin to define 'the people' by juxtaposing 'us' and 'them' and thus generating *horizontal polarisation*, the fifth feature of thick populism. Among the most common cultural resources employed in constructing such a definition is a conception of national identity, usually derived from the concept of nativism. But there are other cultural resources that may be employed in the thickening of populism: for example, a religious discourse/idiom that contrasts the faithful with the infidels or an often racialised discourse of 'pure' versus 'impure' people.

While the volume does draw primarily on the ideational understanding of populism presented above, in our work we also consider aspects of other approaches, including Weyland's (2021) understanding of populism as a specific political (personalistic) strategy (see Ivanov's and Mátyás's chapters), Laclau's idea of populism as a political logic or a set of approaches that treat it as a type of discourse (Melito's chapter).

The approach which focuses on populism as a political logic is associated most closely with the post-Marxist political theorist Ernesto Laclau. In his book *On Populist Reason* (2005a), Laclau criticises the view that populism is a deviation from standard political practice and thus inherently negative. Indeed, he argues that all politics is populist. To follow this argument, we need to understand his view of democracy as one that is a product of conflict rather than consensus. Along with his long-time collaborator Chantal Mouffe, he argues in favour of an *antagonistic* understanding of democratic politics. As Mouffe explains:

A well-functioning democracy calls for a clash of democratic political positions. This is what the confrontation between left and right needs to be about. Such a confrontation should provide collective forms of identification strong enough to mobilise political passions. ... When political frontiers become blurred, disaffection with political parties sets in and one witnesses the growth of other types of collective identities, around nationalist, religious or ethnic forms of identification. (Mouffe, 2005: 30)

To Laclau, it is by defining such ‘collective forms of identification strong enough to mobilise political passions’, that is, the political community, that populism provides a strategy for ‘radical democracy’. Or to put it in his own words, ‘populism is quite simply a way of constructing the political’ (2005a: xi). Laclau’s approach is thus useful in explaining how political identities come into being. As he explains, ‘political practices do not *express* the nature of social agents but, instead, *constitute* the latter’ (2005b: 33, emphasis in original). In other words, ‘populists do not speak to or for some pre-existing “people” but arguably bring the subject known as “the people” into being through the process of naming, performance or articulation’ (Moffitt, 2016: 24). What is more, as Graff and Korolczuk explain, ‘the people’ ‘achieve unity not through adhering to a coherent ideology but rather through opposing a common enemy’ (2022: 21). As we will see in the chapters that follow, migrants, Muslims and the LGBTQ community are such common enemies.

The discursive understanding of populism sees it as ‘a particular mode of political expression’ or a political style (Moffitt, 2016: 21) rather than a particular ideological position or policy orientation. While other approaches understand populism in either/or terms (you are a populist or not), the discursive approach shows how individuals or groups can instrumentalise populist rhetoric at particular points in time. In our research, we recognise the importance of discourse and seek to show that populist actors discursively construct migrants, Muslims, sexual and gender minorities and so on as out-groups and attach specific meaning to them such that they constitute a threat to society, thereby consolidating the meaning of the pure ‘people’ in whose name the populists claim to speak.

Explanation of the rise of (right-wing) populism

Having defined populism and its right-wing version, we can turn to explanations of *populist ideology’s* popularity and the identification and analysis of *populist rule’s mechanisms* and its short- and long-term *consequences*. After the electoral defeats of PiS in Poland and Bolsonaro in Brazil, the study of right-wing populism has entered a new stage, as now we have access to empirical evidence on three situations or periods: the period of populist ascendancy, the period of populist rule and the period of post-populist rebuilding of liberal democracy. The first two periods add up to the process of de-democratisation or democratic backsliding (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021), while the task in the last one

is re-democratisation. In this volume we focus on the former, particularly on the period of populist rule, but our analysis is designed to help with the latter as well (see Conclusions of the book). We assume that societal and political processes taking place in both periods – of populist ascendancy and populist rule – are multifaceted yet are driven by a specific socio-political logic. To reconstruct this logic, we rely on two central distinctions:

- Supply versus demand side in the explanations of the rise and resilience of right-wing populism.
- Culture versus economy as the dominant dimension of the society ‘responsible’ for the rise of right-wing populism.

In projects focused on demand, researchers want to know what people want and why. To answer the latter question, many studies turn to socio-economic or demographic categories such as age, gender, race, educational level, profession, place of residence and so on. Studies of the supply side provide different answers to the ‘why’ question. As they look for explanations as to why certain discourses are more effective in convincing and mobilising people, they study how political messages are constructed and delivered to influence people’s understandings of reality and the values and norms guiding their behaviour. Although not too many studies analyse simultaneously the demand and supply sides of populism, or for that matter any other political phenomenon, studying them together to understand their interactions yields high scientific and practical paybacks, but it is not done too often for practical, for example financial, reasons. The contributors to this volume contribute to both sides.

The culture versus economy debate belongs to one of the most developed areas of the study of populism. In an influential paper and book based on the data collected in the World Values Survey, Inglehart and Norris argue that ‘the surge in votes for populist parties can be explained not as a purely economic phenomenon but in large part as a reaction against progressive cultural change’ (2016: 2–3) that is seen by a substantial portion of the populace as ‘eroding the basic values and customs of Western societies’ (2016: 30). In another formulation, the backlash becomes a more specific, silent counter-revolution that has been gathering strength for a while in reaction to the liberal-cosmopolitan cultural trend, often referred to as the ‘revolution of 1968’ (Ignazi, 1992; Rensmann, 2017; Bornschier, 2010: 422). Again, we offer in this volume several novel ideas that contribute to this debate.

Neo-traditionalism as a legitimising discourse of right-wing populism

What is absent or rare in most works on the rise of right-wing populism is the lack of any systematic attempt to analyse simultaneously the economic and cultural dimension of the phenomenon. We propose such a synthetic approach by combining in this volume studies on the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the rise of right-wing populism. Our custom-made concept of neo-traditionalism organises our thinking about the role various cultural phenomena play in the growth, durability and demise of right-wing populist formations and their ideologies.

We see traditionalism and neo-traditionalism as programmes, more or less ideologised, of continuously creating 'tradition', that is, reproducing in a purposive manner a selective version/vision of the past (or a fragment thereof) in order to create a contrast with and contest modern, globalised, cosmopolitan and liberal culture and society.² In the most basic sense, traditionalism is a movement of appreciation of 'tradition' in contrast to modernity, and its main goal is the protection of the authenticity of culture that, it is assumed, provides stable, permanent and non-relative values to guide society. Neo-traditionalism, by contrast, is usually seen as an individual or collective strategy whose goal is to return to what is claimed to be 'tradition' after a period of disruption, to find the temporarily lost, albeit authentic, roots of culture and eliminate unwanted elements of the way of life which were borrowed from or imposed by some 'aliens', for example colonisers. Both traditionalism and neo-traditionalism may be seen as ideologies employed in situations of choice or competition between what are seen as established, rooted in the past, values and ways of life of a community, and an alternative that is defined as 'modern' and presented as progressive, founded on cultural values and symbols that signify and valorise change.

As a conceptual novelty, we make one more distinction between these two concepts. While traditionalism is predominantly a programme of societal reproduction, devised and implemented by such actors as communities, civil society organisations or specialised public-professional bodies, neo-traditionalism is mainly a strategy of political reproduction practised by governments or political parties.

The originality of the FATIGUE ('Delayed transformational fatigue in Central and Eastern Europe: Responding to the rise of populism') project, on which the book is based, comes from the assumption that to understand the rise and political staying power of right-wing populism, we cannot limit ourselves to the study of shifts in the composition of

popular attitudes or realignments within party systems. People's experience of transformational fatigue has been well documented, but to explain why this fatigue is framed and expressed in specific cultural idioms requires additional studies on a broad range of institutions of cultural production. We want to understand why and how these attitudes are shifting and thus need to reconstruct the institutional and discursive mechanisms responsible for the observed attitudinal change. It is important to know how these alterations are related to the changing landscape of political parties, but it is equally important to understand the change in such institutions of cultural production as schools and colleges, art and historical museums and religious organisations. There are thorough studies of the populist takeover of the economy (Magyar, 2016; Benczes et al., 2022) and the damage (right-wing) populists inflict on the *institutions* of liberal democracy, while sowing doubt about the appropriateness of liberal *culture* in which the legitimacy of this political system is anchored. Scheppele (2018) and Sadurski (2019) document the destruction or severe deformation of independent judiciaries, Gadowska (2018) analyses the dismantling of the impartial civil service in Poland and several scholars take stock of the defanging of the independent media (Ribeiro et al., 2019). Quite a few researchers focus on other populist innovations in such areas as evolving interactions between liberal and anti-liberal mobilisations, the emergence and demise of populist and anti-populist social movements, increasingly heated politics around the issues of collective identity (gender, race and ethnicity) as well as several dimensions of cultural production, particularly related to the questions of national identity and historical memory. While this volume's essays contribute to these areas of study, in this introduction we will try to sketch a multidimensional model of the phenomenon and determine if it constitutes a system.

Populists in power

The relatively long tenures of right-wing populists in power, in Hungary (2010–present) and Poland (2015–23), have provided a wealth of empirical material on their methods of economic governance. Magyar (2016) and Magyar and Vásárhelyi (2017) called it simply *the mafia state*, while in FATIGUE's sister project, POPREBEL,³ we have developed the concept of *neo-feudalism*. As we see it, the latter system is based on two relationships, with the business elite and the public. The former is legitimated by providing access to governmental resources and offering

state protection, in most cases based on *personal* connections. To legitimise themselves in the eyes of the public, right-wing populists provide or promise to provide *security*, while promoting anti-market sentiments. Since the credibility of the *security promise* depends, at least partially, on the definition of security, the proposed construal of this concept is critical. In essence, it is based both on the popularity of right-wing populist redistributive policies and on the concerted promotion of neo-traditionalism, whose tenets resonate with the more conservative and traditionally minded segments of the population.

The emergence of populism as a worldwide phenomenon, associated with the democratic backsliding that commenced in the early twenty-first century, has dramatically redefined politics. Right-wing populists became governing parties in several countries, including India, Turkey and Brazil, but also in Hungary and Poland, which were counted among the most successful democratisers in the group of 27 states that emerged from Soviet-type communism in 1989 and 1991. The new system of political power, which has been variably called populist authoritarianism (Sadurski, 2022), a form of competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2010) or personalist authoritarianism (Styczyńska in this volume), has a hybrid nature as it is situated somewhere between liberal democracy and full authoritarianism. One thing we know for sure is that during the fourth wave of autocratisation, the destruction of liberal democracy, sometimes dubbed the ‘illiberal turn’, has been gradual and piecemeal (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). The causes of the rise of populism are complex, and the combination of political, social, economic and cultural factors always seems to be somewhat different, depending on the place and time. Sadurski compares this process to playing with Lego toys: the number of pieces is not infinite but ‘their different shapes, sizes, and colours matter for whatever comes at the end. And variants of contemporary populisms are just as diverse (and just as alike) as are Lego toys’ (2022: 47). Almost always, some pieces are ‘cultural’ and some are ‘economic’.

Melito’s chapter that opens the volume takes us straight to the key conceptual issue on the ‘cultural’ side of the equation: what is the relationship between (right-wing) populism and neo-traditionalism? Relying mostly on Laclau’s understanding of populism, he analyses this link with reference to Poland, showing how populist politicians have succeeded in bringing about a neo-traditionalist revolution that rejects the main principles of liberalism (free political and judicial institutions, a strong civil society and established human rights) and aims at redefining the value system of Polish society in line with traditional Catholic morality.

Melito demonstrates how the relentless promotion of neo-traditionalism, with its emphasis on restoring a sense of ontological security through the revival of specifically interpreted tradition, contributed to the delegitimisation of liberalism in the eyes of a large segment of the population and thus created a discursive opportunity structure for building legitimacy for right-wing populists.

As has been already observed, ‘thick’ populism is formed when the horizontal axis of discursive polarisation is expressed in concrete cultural terms. The meaning of the element that constitutes the ‘other’ of the populist discourse emerges only in the context of a specific time and place. Cole’s chapter illustrates this process with great precision and depth, as he shows that ‘Russia’ takes diametrically different meanings in the discourses of far-right populist parties in Ukraine and Georgia. This exemplifies the significance of the cultural supply side, or the domain of cultural production, in the analysis of populism. The significance of this domain increases when right-wing populists win power and gain control over the levers of government.

Political and economic populisms

Economists have much to say about economic drivers of the rise of populism, among which they emphasise the causal relevance of economic shocks. Moreover, some of them, including Benczes et al. (2022), point out also the tight relationship between a sense of endangerment generated by economic shocks and the more comprehensive loss of security that is always culturally framed. But, as Benczes et al. observe, they have much less to say about the impact of populist governance on the performance of the economy, beyond pointing out the dangers, particularly in the long run, of economic populism. But as we are trying to make clear in our project, the relationship between populism in power and the economy is more complex than is usually diagnosed by those who focus on the excessive distributionism, economic isolationism and macroeconomic policies ballooning state budget deficits, the key features of economic populism.

To grasp what Benczes calls ‘the consequences of populism in the economy’ (in this volume), we need to go beyond studying economic populism and gain a better understanding of how ideological-political populists in power organise their government’s relationship with the business world and what economic philosophies they subscribe to. As Ivanov shows, political populists sometimes stay away from economic

populism, but more often their economic programmes are markedly different from the programmes of their non-populist competitors from the centre of the political field. For example, they differ from centrist parties in their often-extreme conservative positions on such issues as abortion or immigration. Ivanov calls parties such as Fidesz and PiS, both with long stints in government, as *left-authoritarian*. It is an unconventional label for what are usually seen as right-wing populists, but it usefully highlights the leftness of their economic programmes.

Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland have been electorally the most successful right-wing parties in Europe. Both are in what is known as Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the question arises if there are some features of these countries, in this part of Europe, that make their populations more likely to vote for such parties than their equivalents in the West. Based on her own large-N quantitative analysis, Lenik shows that there exists a statistically significant difference between the people in the West and CEE 'regarding government policies on income inequality'. She then begins to probe the extent to which these differences can be explained with reference to the legacies of feudalism and communism. And while hers is only a preliminary study, it points to intriguing possible avenues of future research.

Cossu's ingenious counterfactual research design allows her to compare the performance of the Hungarian economy under Fidesz with the performance of an 'imagined' ('synthetic') Hungary free of populist rule. It is an exercise designed to assess the cost of populism in power. The analysis shows that Fidesz's rule has had a negative effect on the trajectory of GDP per capita growth. Cossu locates the reasons for this effect not in what would be traditionally seen as economic populism with its *excessive* public spending but in exclusionary policies and *non-efficient* public spending. The gains made by a small part of society, the oligarchs loyal to Orbán, rather than the country's overall economic prosperity, seem to be the principal purpose of state economic policies.

Populism in action: personalistic networks

Having established that the economic impact of populism in power goes well beyond the usually highlighted negative consequences of economic populism, we turn towards the analysis of populist architecture of power. There is a divide between those who see populism as a feature of *discourse* (what people say) and those who treat it as an attribute of *institutions* (what people do). Sadurski offers a useful summary of this

debate (2022: 10–15) and concludes that the most effective approach combines both dimensions, in the spirit of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008). Two chapters in Part III that focus on the institutional dimension follow Weyland's (2021) idea that the hallmark of populist organisation of power is *personalism* and employ network analysis to tease out the central features of populist networks. By reconstructing the changing nature of networks connecting several top media executives in Hungary between 1990 and 2020, Mátyás examines the role of the media in both consolidating and challenging populist hegemony in Hungary. His analysis reveals the mechanisms of the destruction of the liberal media elite by the right-wing populist political formation. It also shows that the refuge provided to the journalists not aligned with the ruling party by civil society is weak and over time has failed to sustain independent journalism. Many liberal editors moved from commercial to civil society media, dramatically reducing their impact on the public, as the governmental control over civil society intensified.

Heilig employs network analysis to compare the relationship between political parties and civil society organisations within two pillars of the Polish public sphere, right-wing-conservative (illiberal) and centrist-left-leaning (liberal). She concentrates on the struggle for reproductive and LGBTQ rights and, based on her own extensive fieldwork in Kraków, shows how activists in Poland push back against neo-traditionalist gender policies by forging links between civic groups and political parties and navigating the restrictions placed on civic and political freedoms by the populist government. The study helps to understand the role pro-women's rights organisations played in the electoral defeat of PiS in October 2023. Unable to conduct direct research among the right-leaning organisations, she reviews the available literature and concludes that the more professionalised and centralised illiberal pillar of Polish civil society is very effective in promoting its agenda.

In Chapter 8, Baginova expands Heilig's analysis of the movement that was arguably the most successful challenger to the power of right-wing populists in Poland: the mobilisation of women and their allies against the draconian anti-abortion regulations. The mobilisation was very broad, with thousands participating in protest actions organised not only in major cities but also smaller towns and villages. While the initial protests were focused on anti-gender policies, the mobilisations quickly evolved into a broader movement for a systematic change, linking feminist activism in CEE with social movements across the globe opposing austerity, climate change or nationalism. In general, all chapters in Part III deal with various types of *counter-mobilisation* to the ruling right-wing

populists who have increasingly defied the liberal principles assumed to constitute the normative bedrock of the European Union (EU). Anti-populist reaction comes from two sides, 'the street' and 'abroad', that is, from popular mobilisations under the banners of liberal democracy, tolerance and the protection of women's and sexual minorities' rights, and from the increasingly alarmed institutions of the EU. Since the latter's reaction is seen as unsatisfactory by several observers, popular, bottom-up, pro-liberal mobilisations have gained in significance.

Neo-traditionalist legitimisation of the populist rule

The authors of the chapters in Part IV engage with the main topic of this book, the neo-traditional legitimisation of right-wing populist rule. Neo-traditionalism, as a multifaceted cultural formation, provides ready-made material for the ideology of populism. It is intensely Manichean in its insistence on moral polarisation between everything associated with domestic 'tradition' and rotten cosmopolitan 'modernity'. Its proponents generate a steady stream of narratives and images that serve to elevate the 'pure', tradition-minded people and cast in a negative light both the liberal elites and all kinds of 'others', such as Muslim refugees, LGBT+ people or women fighting for their reproductive rights (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). This enhances simultaneously vertical and horizontal polarisation, the hallmark of thick populism, 'by offering backwardly oriented utopias and historical narratives that glorify traditional communities with ethnic, national and cultural homogeneity' (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017: 577). The construction of threatening out-groups is thus central to the definition of the 'pure people' in whose name right-wing populists claim to speak.

Ellingsen Thue analyses the rise of antisemitism in Serbia and Croatia, showing how right-wing populists often appropriate the history, suffering and imagery of the Holocaust to accentuate and memorialise their own suffering and victimisation in a bid to cast themselves as the 'pure people'. This in turn remains a potential vessel for increased anti-semitic prejudice and for the Jewish population to be used as a tool in contentious political and historical debates. The relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia is also analysed.

Gómez del Tronco demonstrates the constructed nature of the horizontal axis of populist polarisation, relying on his own extensive field-work on the othering of Muslims in Czech populist political discourse. Despite Czechia having a tiny Muslim population, EU surveys show that

Czechs exhibit the most negative attitudes towards Muslims in the EU. In seeking to explain this puzzle, he examines the dynamics of Czech political discourse, which ethnicises the Czech nation and constructs Czechia as being under threat in the face of Muslim migration.

Yermakova shifts the focus from the right-wing populist politicians to the objects of their othering, analysing how Ukrainian migrants in Poland position themselves in a socio-political reality shaped by right-wing anti-migrant discourse and how their self-identifications are impacted and, more broadly, providing insights into how right-wing populist discourse affects minorities. Based on 40 in-depth interviews, she found, for example, that the majority of her respondents were aware of the exclusionary tone of the right-wing populist discourse espoused by PiS and other parties of the far right and expressed concern about it. But she also discovers that Ukrainians often hide their true feelings and try to do their best to fit in, being acutely aware that many Poles harbour the sense of superiority that is exacerbated by the anti-Ukrainian narratives espoused by some far-right parties.

Dekić examines the strategies employed by social movements in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia in pushing for same-sex family rights. In particular, she analyses the alternative narratives on family and family politics created by LGBT activists in order to challenge hegemonic, traditional conceptualisations of the family in the Western Balkans.

Right-wing populists and the politics of history

Tradition, the populist argument holds, was destroyed in CEE first by communism and then by Western liberals. Both of those enemies of tradition, paradoxically, offered similar modern alternatives to it: secularism, a liberal concept of family and the repudiation of the traditional concept of the ethnic, culture-based nation to be transformed into a modern type of society (a Soviet-style, supra-national society in the communist model and a liberal-cosmopolitan society in the contemporary Western world). Right-wing populists often make this comparison, presenting liberal Western Europe in its current form of the EU as dominated by leftist cosmopolitan liberals, thus continuing after communism a similar socialist domination of post-communist societies. CEE, when in the EU, was to be deprived of its hard-won national identity and sovereignty and gradually dissolved in the multicultural, cosmopolitan European super-state. Populists offer neo-traditionalism as a remedy. The danger of Western 'leftist' liberal ideas and values are to be overcome by the traditional, sacred values on which the 'true' national cultures of the CEE societies are built: traditional

religiosity, the patriarchal model of the family and exclusive nationalism. These are promoted as effective and attractive alternatives to secularism, sexual liberation and the promotion of equality of sexual minorities and the idea of multicultural, multiethnic civic nations. In this way, right-wing populists propose to build a new type of *alternative modernity*, founded on traditional values, which are often also presented as the core of a truly European civilisation, to which Europe should and one day will return.

To create a solid cultural base from which to launch the project of an alternative modernity within which their power will appear 'natural', right-wing populists engage also in the thorough rewriting of history in the countries they rule. Populist authorities treat funding for culture as a means of promoting their vision of history and national heritage and therefore pour considerable resources into gaining control of school curricula and museum exhibitions, particularly in historical museums. The ministries of culture and education tightly controlled by the ruling populists do not eliminate state funding for institutions that do not fulfil their cultural mission, but they make it harder for them to function. A culture war that results from this type of cultural policy exacerbates social and cultural polarisation, but it is clearly seen by the ruling right-wing populists as an effective method of creating and retaining legitimacy among enough people.

For the adherents of neo-traditionalism, liberal policies are a threat to 'our traditions', which must be restored and protected to provide legitimacy for populist power. Since the construction of 'our traditions' is consistent with the precepts of populist ideology, emphasising in particular the Manichean nature of the horizontal polarisation, a cultural war with liberals ensues. The conflict around LGBTQ or reproductive rights is a part of that war, and so is the area of *memory politics*. Through proposing specific narratives of the past, mnemonic authorities introduce, change and reshape historical narratives as a tool to overcome various kinds of crises, a strategy to distract and a technique to solidify its electorship.

Volk investigates the politics of memory in the post-socialist city of Dresden in the context of the anniversaries of the 1989 revolution and German reunification. Recognising that memory is a key cultural tool for social movements, specifically in the context of scarce resources, Volk shows that PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) uses the memory of 1989 to construct a master frame of 'righteous resistance to illegitimate authority', based on the populist antagonism between 'the resistant people' as an in-group and 'the leftist-totalitarian elites' as an out-group.

Shifting from bottom-up to top-down memory politics, Sadecki shows how the Hungarian government does not simply adopt nationalist

narratives of the past but reuses and repackages them in line with various present interests. The case of the memory of the Treaty of Trianon is particularly instructive to examine how the difficult past is employed in the discourse of the populist incumbent party. It shows how Fidesz adopted and mainstreamed historical discourses that had previously been confined to radical politics and marginalised in the public domain.

In the closing chapter of the volume, Chiruta demonstrates the impact of Hungary's memory politics on the state's relations with Romania, whereby the Orbán regime has sought to incorporate the ethnic Hungarians who ended up as citizens of Romania following the dismemberment of Hungary following the Treaty of Trianon into the Hungarian body politic. The chapter examines the economic and cultural initiatives of Fidesz used to reinvigorate the Hungarian cultural heritage dating back to the pre-Trianon period in trans-border settings, specifically in Transylvania.

Conclusions

In this volume we offer a way of looking at right-wing populism that attempts to be more comprehensive than is usually done. The full nature of this system is grasped, we argue, when populist discourses, economic policies and institutional practices are observed together. Such an opportunity has been offered by Hungary and Poland, where populists' tenures have been of considerable length. We invited to the project a group of young economists, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists and students of culture, who mostly write about these two countries but also about the Czech Republic, Romania, Germany, Lithuania, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. The picture that emerges from their work can be summarised in the following manner: populism, particularly its right-wing variety, appears as a result of a complex combination of economic, political, social and cultural factors, and once its champions win political power, the system that emerges and solidifies is antithetical to liberal democracy. Its economic dimension is based on the personalistic dependence of the business world on their political overlords, in contrast to liberal democracy, where the ideal is to keep these domains separate and organise their interactions in as a-personalistic and formally regulated a manner as possible. Its political subsystem is based on incessant efforts to centralise power and to tightly intertwine the political parties and civil society in a web of clientelist dependencies, while liberal democracies are founded on the ideal of the maximal dispersion of power and of the separation of

the state, political society and civil society. Finally, its domain of cultural production is institutionally centralised as much as possible and set up to deliver a message unified around the precepts of neo-traditionalism, while liberal democracies tend to promote cultural pluralism.

In essence, neo-traditionalism founded on the rejection of modernity and liberal values in the context of CEE is composed of three key elements:

1. The rejection of communism – stemming from the anti-communist opposition but reinforced and reshaped to fit contemporary political needs. The current right-wing populists in Central Europe emphasise the fact that they are the first ones to be truly anti-communist and to be a real alternative to communism (and post-communism). Positioning themselves in such a way allows them to gain political traction, and – if in power – to rewrite the past and reinvent the present.
2. The rejection of post-communist politics – denial of the legitimacy of previous post-1989 governments, especially those including former communist-era elites (for example, the Hungarian ex-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány), but also those who were previously in the opposition (for example, the Polish then ex-Prime Minister Donald Tusk). In the Polish case, the nature of the political transition, based on negotiated consensus (round table) and not violent confrontation, also comes into question, and the new, post-communist elites are accused of failing to introduce a clear break from their communist predecessors. Such a rejection appeals particularly to those who feel distrust towards politics and suffer from economic deprivation.
3. The rejection of liberal and progressive twenty-first-century modernity – while the desire to join Western European partners dominated much of the political agendas of the first two decades of the post-communist transformation, right-wing populists in CEE questioned this process. On the one hand, they argue that to achieve full sovereignty and a clear break from the communist past, the CEE societies must ‘rise from their knees’ and become independent from the West, drawing on their own traditions. On the other hand, by constantly presenting Western Europeans as too liberal and too leftist, they paint the picture of two opposed ideological camps that can never find common ground.

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This volume collects the studies of 15 young researchers who participated in the EU-funded project designed and coordinated by Professors Jan

Kubik and Richard Mole from the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies. Working at six partner universities, UCL, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, University of Tartu, University of Belgrade, Charles University in Prague and Corvinus University in Budapest, they were grouped into thematic clusters that provide also the organising principle for this volume. The project's coherence emerges from a common theoretical frame, best encapsulated in the concept of neo-traditionalism, followed sufficiently closely by all participants to produce a comprehensive picture of right-wing populism in CEE.

Notes

1. For example, according to Politico's Poll of Polls, in the poll conducted on 28 July 2024, 32 per cent of Poles declared their readiness to vote for PiS, despite many revelations of the party's corrupt practices during their years in power. See www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/.
2. For the full discussion of the concept, see Benczes et al. (2022).
3. <https://populism-europe.com/poprebel/>.

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Part I

Illiberal democracy and right-wing politics

Foreword by Natasza Styczyńska

The rise of right-wing populist political actors and the ‘illiberal turn’ in CEE has been discussed by both mainstream media and the academic community for more than a decade, but defining and analysing these phenomena still seem to be a challenge. Although already in 2017 populism was named ‘word of the year’ by the Cambridge Dictionary, one may observe that the term is now overused and politicised more than ever. The most common definition, which is also the point of inspiration for this volume, is the one by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 5–6), introduced and discussed in the Introduction. In post-communist CEE, contemporary populism is a domain of the radical right and is accompanied by so-called illiberal democracy. In this sense, right-wing populism is no longer a phenomenon of the political fringe – in the CEE region, parties of this type are in government as the main power or as coalition partners. This is or until recently was the case in Poland (Law and Justice-led coalition), Hungary (Fidesz), Slovenia (Slovenian Democratic Party), Bulgaria (GERB) and Czechia (ANO). The radicalisation of the mainstream has an impact on the quality of democracy. In 2015, Freedom House labelled Hungary a semi-consolidated democracy and in 2020 downgraded Hungary to a transitional/hybrid regime, while in the same year Poland’s status changed from democracy to a semi-consolidated democracy (Freedom House, 2020).

The ‘illiberal turn’ in CEE is characterised by democratic backsliding and the rise of personalist authoritarianism, the malfunctioning of rule of law, the suppression of the independent media and/or the dismantling of the system of checks and balances. These activities are characteristic of those who propagate majoritarian rather than liberal democracy

and those who favour nation-oriented policy-making over deep political integration within the EU. According to some scholars, democratic illiberalism is consistent with electoral democracy but disrespects liberal values, institutions and constitutionalism (Smilov and Krastev, 2008; Mudde, 2013). In other words, populism can be seen as an ideology that ‘seeks to establish an order that is democratic but not liberal’ (Pappas, 2019: 71). Others argue (Müller, 2016; Rummens, 2017) that illiberal democracy is an oxymoron as without proper institutional guarantees of basic rights, the expression of people’s political choices is impossible.

The rise of populist parties in Europe is often explained by the economic crisis and its aftermath, although the relationship between these two phenomena is complex, as is argued also by Benczes (Part II Foreword). For example, data analysed by Ehin and Talving suggests that ‘the severity of economic downturn during the economic and financial crisis does not explain patterns of populist party vote gain in CEE’ (2021: 14). The success of populist actors in CEE can be linked to the migration crisis of 2015 as well as to delayed transformational fatigue (Kubik, 2020) and not fully realised Europeanisation that goes in line with lack of trust towards institutions and weak democratic traditions. In the case of the EU candidate countries in the western Balkans or Ukraine and Georgia (the model members of the Eastern Partnership), the long-lasting and complicated process of acquiring EU membership can lead to pre-enlargement fatigue when unpopular decisions and reforms are explained as required by Brussels and the prospect of membership remains unspecified.

Grzymala-Busse (2019) claims that populist parties maintain their popularity largely thanks to generous, if selective, social policies. Although economic aspects seem to be important, researchers point out several other factors that can play a significant role in fuelling populism in CEE – one of them being neo-traditionalism. We can thus understand the conflict around LGBT or reproductive rights as part of a culture war. In Poland, as demonstrated by Francesco Melito in the first chapter of this part, one may observe a non-liberal counter-revolution that refuses the main principles of liberalism and looks to traditions to redefine the value system of the society and increase people’s sense of ontological security.

Similarly to Western Europe, right-wing politics in CEE is predominantly anti-EU, with the stances shuffling from Eurosceptic to EU-rejectionist. Interestingly, right-wing populism – although critical of the EU – is not openly anti-European, arguing that healthy, Christian Europe is preserved in countries like Poland or Hungary. This pro-European but anti-EU stance can be understood as an anti-liberal and/or anti-Western

approach that is accompanied by a critique of European values such as multiculturalism, the protection of minority rights and a freely operating civil society.

While Poland serves as an example of this tendency, Ukraine and Georgia are somewhat exceptional cases mainly due to the different ways in which Russia is used in creating and pursuing the populist narrative. While in Ukraine the radical-right populists will utilise anti-Russian sentiments, the Georgian example shows that combining religious conservatism with increasingly pro-Russian rhetoric can generate positive electoral outcomes (see [Chapter 3](#) by Michael Cole in this volume). The role of Russia in strengthening the right-wing (and often anti-EU) rhetoric is not only characteristic of the Georgian case; the involvement of the Kremlin is also detected in other cases of the populist radical-right parties both in the EU member states (for example, France) and EU candidates (Serbia).

Across Europe, the populist radical right may have many issues in common. Nevertheless, the CEE variation is characterised by the region's historical legacies and the post-communist context, in which challenging liberal democracy became a characteristic feature of the populist radical right in power.

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2

The illiberal and neo-traditionalist discursive shift in Poland

Francesco Melito

Introduction

When Francis Fukuyama described 1989 as the end of history, ‘the victory of liberalism ... *in the realm of ideas or consciousness*’ seemed inevitable (1989: 4, emphasis added). The Western model of liberal democracy had emerged as the undisputed prism through which to look at the world and ‘the final form of human government’. In this context, although the political environment was often turbulent and fragmented, most CEE countries embraced the ideas of liberalism after the fall of socialism. As argued by Aurelian Crăiuțu (1998, in Trencsényi, 2014: 136), ‘liberalism in this part of the world became an obligatory syntax of political thought’. The ‘liberal consensus’ had become hegemonic in the region and defined the discursive space in economic, civic and cultural terms (Bill and Stanley, 2020). Western liberalism functioned as an attractive emancipatory fantasy that promised to give back freedom and independence to CEE after decades of foreign domination.

Two decades after the ‘liberal revolutions’, we are now observing ‘illiberal counter-revolutions’ that aim to reverse the post-1989 order (Zielonka, 2018). The hegemonic position of liberalism is being contested and alternative voices based on non-liberal principles are on the rise. Illiberal actors challenge the liberal organisation of the national community, rejecting the values of liberalism as the cornerstone upon which society is built. As argued by Viktor Orbán (2014), democracy does not need to be liberal; it can be based on non-liberal assumptions that privilege the interests of the nation (as a community) over those of individuals. The so-called illiberal turn signals, first of all, a discursive shift: liberalism is

no longer the predominant paradigm that defines society. Illiberal world views compete against liberalism to redefine cultural values and ‘common sense’. From this perspective, liberalism should not be seen simply as an axiologically neutral institutional framework. Rather, it is understood as a regime of truth that defines true and false and determines behaviours (Foucault, 2008). Although liberalism had become hegemonic in CEE after 1989, illiberal actors today propose counter-hegemonic discourses to recapture ‘*the realm of ideas or consciousness*’ and offer a different truth. The discursive shift is particularly evident in Poland, where the challenge to liberalism on the cultural terrain has been vigorous. While, on the surface, political confrontation is dominated by cultural and ethical issues (for example, multiculturalism, LGBT rights, abortion), this clash hides a deeper cleavage between a liberal and a neo-traditionalist world view. The Polish illiberal counter-revolution questions the cultural pillar of liberalism to establish a different system of values. The resulting *Kulturkampf* is fought in the field of ‘common sense’ between two ‘competing truths’; they compete to define reality and the founding principles of Polish society.

The picture that emerges from this Introduction reflects a discursive change: the illiberal counter-revolution is an attempt to oust the liberal paradigm and reorganise the discursive space along different lines. In Poland, the rejection of liberalism (*pars destruens*) is accompanied by the construction of a neo-traditionalist discourse (*pars contruens*). Several theoretical conceptualisations have dealt with the establishment of dominant world descriptions: different traditions of political and sociological analysis have discussed, at some point, concepts such as *episteme* (Foucault, 2002), *Weltanschauung*,¹ paradigm (Kuhn, 1962), common sense and hegemony (Gramsci, 1975), habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and so forth.² All these schools faced a similar problem: how do we come to understand the world as we understand it? How are the practices and values of a community produced, sedimented or modified? Based on the insights of post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT; Glynos and Howarth, 2007), this chapter will try to answer these questions to explain the so-called illiberal turn as a counter-hegemonic discursive shift.

Building upon the discussion of neo-traditionalism in the Introduction, I will look at the formation of a neo-traditionalist ‘discourse coalition’ (Hajer, 2005) as a means to examine how the neo-traditionalist world view in Poland has been constructed, what its main features are and how it was able to crystallise despite the infinite possibilities history can offer. In other words, rather than seeking causal explanations

or discovering its genealogy, this chapter explains the illiberal backlash in Poland by referring to the idea of a hegemonic struggle between illiberalism and neo-traditionalism as a reaction to a crisis of hegemony and as a counter-hegemonic project based on traditionalist values against the dominant liberal world view. The aim of this chapter is thus to explain how an illiberal, neo-traditionalist discourse in Poland seeks to replace the 'liberal truth'.

Methodological remarks: the logics approach

As the aim of this chapter is to explain the emergence of an illiberal and neo-traditionalist discourse in Poland, it is necessary to clarify what exactly the object of analysis is and how to study it. Rather than a specific political party or social group, it is the counter-hegemonic neo-traditionalist discourse. Contrary to an intuitive understanding of the term, a post-structuralist notion of discourse does not define discourse as necessarily a verbal or written expression but, rather, as a 'system of representation' of reality (Hall, 1997: 44). From this perspective, 'every object is constituted as an object of discourse' as long as it is meaningful (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 107). This approach pays special attention to the role of meaning. The discursive shift indicates the resignification of discursive elements through articulatory practices, which are defined by Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) as 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice'. Talking of a neo-traditionalist discourse means that the very meanings of certain values (for example, freedom, democracy) depend on their articulation in this discourse. Take, as an example, the signifier Polishness (*Polskość*): its meaning depends on its articulation with other elements. When Polishness is articulated with 'tradition', 'nation' and 'Christianity', it assumes a very specific meaning (Kotwas and Kubik, 2019). However, we cannot claim that Polishness (and Polish society) can be defined as *necessarily* linked to traditionalist sentiments. Other discursive elements circulate within the social: the articulation of terms such as 'emancipation', 'openness' and 'secularism' with Polishness defines the latter differently. However, the very existence of liberal Polishness is necessary to define traditionalism and can be considered as its constitutive outside (Melito, 2021a).

Two corollaries follow from this position. First, discourse is '[t]he structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105). The latter modifies the meaning of discursive

elements that compose the discourse itself through relations of equivalence and difference. An important role is played by nodal points, which partially fix meanings and stabilise the otherwise floating nature of discursive elements. Second, the contingency of meanings also determines the openness of the social. Different discourses compete to define the social space. In this light, a hegemonic discourse is a discourse that has (temporarily) fixed meanings within a specific environment.³ However, even a hegemonic discourse remains open to change, and under pressure its elements can be resignified. Hence, Laclau (1990) talks about the impossibility of society as a unitary and intelligible object. The paradoxical essence of a hegemonic project lies in its goal of representing the whole society in a totality and the impossibility of doing so. Even if liberalism was unquestionable after 1989, eventually its principles became contested. In this light, the neo-traditionalist discourse is one of the attempts to resignify common sense and seize the intellectual power that determines the cultural direction of society (Gramsci, 1975). It indicates a discursive construction that links in a chain of equivalence traditionalist discursive elements (called demands by Laclau, 2005) and the antagonistic division of the social into a neo-traditionalist and a liberal camp.

To study the emergence of practices and discourses, Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007) propose the 'logics approach' as a middle-range theorisation that links PDT ontology and abstract categories with observable data. The goal of the logics approach is to offer a methodological framework 'to account for the institution, contestation and sedimentation of social practices and regimes' (Glynos and Howarth, 2008: 9). To explain analytically the content, conditions of possibility and ideological grip of practices (or discourses, as in this chapter), Glynos and Howarth distinguish, respectively, between social, political and fantasmatic logics. The articulation of the three logics allows researchers 'to elucidate processes of social change and stabilisation within a general theory of hegemony' (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 152). Therefore, the logics approach is a suitable methodology to achieve the goals of this chapter as it tries to explain how discourses emerge, change and resist. On the one hand, it seeks to answer how a particular hegemonic project discursively implements a hegemonic strategy; on the other hand, it explains why that project is able to achieve a degree of success within society among the number of possibilities given by the contingency of the social.

Taken together, the three logics try to answer all the questions that a problematised phenomenon raises: *what*, *how* and *why*. Social logics

reveal the rules or grammar of a discourse.⁴ Identifying the social logics of a discourse falls into the hermeneutic tradition of research that focuses on meanings and self-interpretation of actors. Although Glynos and Howarth failed to operationalise the category of nodal points (Marttila, 2015), the latter are arguably the most relevant indicators of the ‘rules’ of a discourse. Whether a discourse can be defined, for example, as nationalist or populist depends on its main nodal point, that is, respectively, the people-as-nation or the people-as-underdog (De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017). While the social logic deals with the synchronic aspect of a regime of practices (what the content of a discourse is in a given moment), the political logic relates to the diachronic aspect in that it focuses on how a discourse emerges. Based on Laclau and Mouffe’s logics of equivalence and difference, political logics account for the emergence or maintenance of a certain discourse by creating or disrupting political frontiers.⁵ The previous example about Polishness clearly shows how the articulation of different discursive elements generates meanings and defines the social.

Finally, fantasmatic logics explore why that specific discourse ideologically attaches subjects to a certain narrative. Since meanings are always ‘open’ and discourses can never fully represent totality, fantasies have a function of closure. They conceal the radical contingency of social relations and strengthen the ideological attachment to a certain identity. For example, we need fantasies to sustain our national identity since nationality is just a discursive contingent construction. In this regard, a fantasmatic narrative has an ideological connotation since it tries to cover the non-necessary character of discourses. To achieve this goal, fantasies involve an imaginary situation that promises to overcome (beatific fantasy) or surrender to (horrific fantasy) the antagonism always present in the social. They point to a primary fundamental fantasy, that is, the fantasy that narrates the origin of the subject or the community – a fundamental fantasy of a once-unified society, without antagonism and divisions (Sharpe and Turner, 2020). The following empirical analysis will identify and articulate the three logics to provide a comprehensive explanation for the rise of neo-traditionalism in Poland.⁶

The anticolonial narrative of neo-traditionalism

This post-structuralist ontological position, which assumes the contingency of identities and discourses, suggests that neo-traditionalism is

just one of the discursive possibilities to counter liberalism. The latter, indeed, can be denied from different angles and give rise to different alternatives. For example, non-liberal discourses may criticise the liberal model of economy based on the primacy of the economic exchange in social relations, or its institutional architecture that emphasises the rule of law over majority rule. Neo-traditionalism instead criticises the founding principles of liberalism and seeks to redefine what it means to be a society. The crucial point in understanding this divide revolves around the signifier of ‘freedom’. As mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, liberalism is not a neutral world view. Although it cannot be summarised as a single theory or ideology, at its core we find the idea of emancipation and negative freedom. The liberal individual is ‘the locus of moral judgement and choice’ and ‘the final adjudicator of morality’ (Carse, 1994: 186). The history of progressive liberalism is marked by a constant fight against authority, heteronomy and traditions. The liberal hero is Prometheus, who fought to free humankind from the chains of the Gods. In this light, liberalism is bound to modernity as it seeks to remove the limits given by traditions in the name of progress. However, the emancipatory dream of liberalism presents a dilemma. Can the free liberal individual survive in a world devoid of external norms?

The expansion of the individual sphere of freedom hides a subtle outcome. While liberalism offers freedom of choice to individuals, freedom is not always desirable. This ‘coercion to freedom’, as defined by a member of the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS), Ryszard Legutko (2016: 67), left some sectors of society disoriented and harmed their ontological security (Benczes et al., 2020). The post-1989 order brought with it new models and values that provoked a ‘cultural displacement’ that disrupted old traditions and triggered a counter-reaction (Melito, 2021a). What Piero Ignazi (1992: 6) had described as a ‘silent counter-revolution’ against the post-materialist revolution of the 1960s became a ‘noisy counter-revolution ... against post-industrial liberal democracy and its universalistic, inclusive, and non-authoritarian cultural underpinnings’ (Rensmann, 2017: 128). This argument accounts for the negative side of the illiberal reaction. The cultural counter-revolution in Poland is illiberal since it rejects the individualistic and emancipatory drive of liberalism. However, the counter-revolution does not simply reject that system. It also aims to positively resignify the cultural terrain and recreate a common morality based on traditionalist principles. Whereas liberal modernity liberates

people from the chains of prejudice, traditionalism provides stable and permanent values. In this sense, tradition serves as a tool to counteract relativism and provide a mental map to face a changing world (Burke, 2003). Against the individual axiology of liberalism, traditionalism presents traditional values as the guiding principles of a new (old) morality.

However, the emergence of a traditionalist discourse as a reaction against liberalism does not tell the whole story. The prefix *neo-* denotes the political and counter-hegemonic dimension of Polish traditionalism. In the context of anthropology and postcolonial studies, the concept of neo-traditionalism indicates the refusal of Western cultural interference and the appeal to a precolonial, authentic way of life (Friedman, 1994; Rata, 2007). Opposing modern values brought by European colonists, the tribal elites in the former colonies utilise a neo-traditionalist strategy to build a more genuine and culturally defined identity. In this context, 'neo-traditionalism is a view that rejects modernism and seeks an organic form of existence. ... It aspires to return to the importance of values and community that presumably existed before modernist rationality drove out customary verities' (Fisher, 2005: 242). Neo-traditionalism not only poses 'tradition' as a crucial nodal point in its discourse; it also signals a political strategy to operate a discursive shift 'deployed in different ways by both elites and ordinary people' (Galvan, 2007: 599): from foreign values to 'our way of life', from modernity to authenticity. In this case, modernity does not necessarily refer to industrialisation or the use of technology. While tradition refers to a world with stable, culturally defined values, modernity 'is defined from this [traditionalist] perspective as a universe emptied of meaning, peopled by alienated individuals' (Friedman, 1988: 449).

The same strategy and anticolonial narrative have been observed in CEE (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; Melito, 2022). In this case, the liberal West is considered a colonial foreign power. While the native elites of former colonies refer to a precolonial golden age, neo-traditionalists in the Northern Hemisphere evoke a genuine Europe based on Christian traditions. They denounce the corruption of 'our authentic way of life' by cosmopolitanism and individualism and led by the liberal establishment. The neo-traditionalist counter-reaction, therefore, indicates the attempt to fight the absence of order brought by relativism and offers a secure environment where individuals are lifted from the burden of free choice. In this respect, it should also be noted that neo-traditionalism is not co-terminous with conservatism. The latter is a full-fledged ideology that

seeks to cover all aspects of society (Dąbrowska, 2019), while the former is concerned with rejecting modern and postmodern values and reproducing a world view that is an alternative to liberalism.

Discourse coalitions and organic intellectuals

Although the object of the empirical analysis is the neo-traditionalist discourse itself, it is necessary to identify where the discourse is produced so that we can gather observable data. Discourse, in fact, is not an autonomous entity that lives outside of the collective action of ‘discourse makers’. Rather, it is produced and disseminated by its ‘organic intellectuals’. Gramsci (1953) coined this term to describe those actors with an intellectual function who fight the ‘war of position’ for hegemony in civil society. To Gramsci, the intellectual is not simply a person of culture. Having an intellectual function means critically elaborating new forms of knowledge that actively shape different conceptions of the world. In other words, intellectuals do not have ‘the truth’; they actively create ‘the truth’. Therefore, the study of a certain discourse should begin with those who have the function of ‘creating’ it; in other words, those who have a *signifying capacity*. For example, the organisers of a nationalist march (for example, *Marsz Niepodległości*)⁷ can be considered to carry out an intellectual function since their demonstrations signify the signifier ‘nation’ with ethno-nationalist connotations. In this light, intellectuals are those actors able to intervene in civil society and steer ‘common sense’: from politicians to philosophers, or, moving to our times, from YouTubers to influencers. However, Gramsci talked of organic intellectuals of an economic class. Overcoming Gramsci’s essentialist remnants, I talk of ‘organic intellectuals of a discourse’ as they propagate a discourse regardless of their class affiliation (which is as contingent as any identity).

From this perspective, what ‘organic intellectuals’ share is not their affiliation with a certain political party; rather, they are members of the same discourse coalition. Hajer (2005) used this expression to indicate a group of actors who propagate the same discourse. A discourse coalition ‘is not so much connected to a particular person (as if such a person would have a coherent set of ideas and beliefs that were not context specific), but is related to practices in the context in which actors employ storylines and (re)produce and transform particular discourses’ (Hajer, 2005: 303).

Therefore, a discourse coalition does not indicate a coalition of political actors that belong to the same organisation. Nor does it mean that a member of the discourse coalition cannot reproduce different discourses or participate in different discourse coalitions at the same time. A discourse coalition signals an informal and unaware alliance of different discourse makers who try to establish their world view as the dominant one. It may even be the case that the members of a discourse coalition do not share anything else. It is also likely that discourse makers contradict themselves. However, they can be considered part of the coalition as long as they produce that specific discourse at a certain moment. By linking Gramsci's 'organic intellectuals' and Hajer's 'discourse coalition', it is possible to draw the lines of an informal discursive alliance that produces and changes 'common sense'. In our case, I will analyse the discursive productions of the organic intellectuals of the neo-traditionalist discourse coalition in Poland.

The Polish neo-traditionalist discourse coalition: a sample

Since the beginning of the 1990s, right-wing ideologues and intellectuals in Poland have propagated a non-liberal discourse and formed a discourse coalition (Dąbrowska, 2019). The dissatisfaction of conservative milieus with the post-communist transition had resulted in a wider intellectual project that aimed to create an alternative to the dominant liberal world view. Interestingly (and ironically), communist Gramsci was an explicit point of reference (and arguably still is) for the Polish counter-revolutionaries in the preparation of a hegemonic plan: in a speech delivered in 1996, Andrzej Nowak, one of the most influential Polish conservative intellectuals, called for a battle in the field of media, schools and cultural institutions to establish cultural hegemony, referring explicitly to the Italian philosopher (Nowak, in Behr, 2021). A similar explicit appeal to use Gramscian concepts in the 'crusade' against the abnormality of political correctness has been made by another neo-traditionalist intellectual, Aleksander Nalaskowski (2019a). The neo-traditionalist discourse coalition, therefore, is not only an abstract concept used for analytical purposes. The lesson of the *Gramscisme de Droit* was learned by Polish neo-traditionalist intellectuals, who, after the fatigue of the democratic transition, have waged a long war of position in civil society.

The empirical analysis for the study of the emergence of neo-traditionalism in Poland is based on the discursive productions (for example, speeches, columns) of a sample of neo-traditionalist organic intellectuals, in the period between 2015 and 2020. After an initial preliminary analysis of several sources and a pilot study, these actors have been considered a valid sample of the Polish neo-traditionalist discourse. Using theory-based sampling, that is, the collection of data and actors based on the potential manifestation of important theoretical constructs (Patton, 1990), the sample of neo-traditionalist organic intellectuals and the text corpus has been selected on the basis of the nodal points and demands expressed by these actors. The selected discourse makers all have an intellectual function, since they contribute to propagating a particular world view. In addition, the sample of the 'Polish neo-traditionalist discourse coalition' can be divided into several levels that capture different layers of Polish non-liberal civil society. At the highest level, we can find political leaders. As Gramsci (1953) argued, politicians occupy the highest rank of the 'neo-traditionalist army' due to their political influence. At a lower level, we encounter academics and journalists. The former perform a proper intellectual function as they seek to elaborate and disseminate a coherent world view. The latter also play a significant role due to the capacity of newspapers and magazines to reach a wide audience. Finally, going down the power ladder, grassroots movements have a considerable mobilising function. Although they are at the margins of the mainstream political debate, their actions and activities on digital media can affect people's views in narrower environments. This categorisation has a schematising function with the goal of providing an organised sample of discourse makers. In fact, the different levels do not aim to show their different weight. Of course, the voice of a high-level politician has a higher impact on the political debate than the words of a young member of a grassroots movement who writes on an online portal. However, in terms of analysis, that is irrelevant. All discursive productions have been analysed as neo-traditionalist discursive productions, and, therefore, what matters is just their meaning. Table 2.1 provides a sample of neo-traditionalist organic intellectuals whose discursive productions have been analysed for this chapter.⁸ As is clear from the table, these actors do not belong to the same political organisation and, in some cases, are not even within the same political area. The only aspect they have in common is their 'organic affiliation' with the neo-traditionalist discourse.

Table 2.1 Sample of neo-traditionalist organic intellectuals

Discourse makers	Position	Analysed texts
Jarosław Kaczyński	Leader of PiS	Speeches held during the 2019 electoral campaign for parliamentary elections
Ryszard Legutko	Philosopher, member of PiS	Book: <i>The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies</i>
Andrzej and Katarzyna Zybertowicz	Sociologists	Columns in the right-wing weekly <i>W Sieci</i> , period 2017–20
Aleksander Nalaskowski	Professor of pedagogy	Columns in the right-wing weekly <i>W Sieci</i> , period 2017–20
Paweł Lisicki	Journalist, editor of the weekly <i>Do Rzeczy</i>	Columns in the right-wing weekly <i>Do Rzeczy</i> , period 2015–20
Rafał Ziemkiewicz	Publicist	Columns in the right-wing weekly <i>Do Rzeczy</i> , period 2015–20
Tomasz Sakiewicz	Journalist, editor of the weekly <i>Gazeta Polska</i>	Columns in the right-wing weekly <i>Gazeta Polska</i> , period 2015–20
Nowy ład (nlad.pl); narodowcy.net	Right-wing information portals linked to nationalist grassroots movements	Online articles related to identity and culture, period 2017–20

The emergence of neo-traditionalism in Poland

Social logics: nation, people, tradition

Often, the illiberal counter-revolution is analysed through the concept of ‘populism’, a term that fails to capture the non-liberal attempt to reverse the post-1989 order in its entirety (Zielonka, 2018). The frequent appeal to the people and the criticism against the elite suggest that a populist

dimension is certainly present in the current illiberal turn. However, the conflation of populism with other concepts may lose sight of the complexity of illiberal discourses. Using the terminology of this chapter, the social logics of illiberal discourses are usually oversimplified into a single populist logic, sacrificing any other possible interpretation. Nativist or nationalist aspects, for example, are often overlooked and reduced to facets of populism (De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017).

The empirical analysis of neo-traditionalism in Poland shows a clear populist dimension, creating an antagonistic division between ordinary people and the 'enlightened elite' in Brussels or the liberal circles of Warsaw (Ziemkiewicz, 2016; Lisicki, 2017; Kaczyński, 2019a). However, this is not the only 'rule' of neo-traditionalism, nor the most significant. Indeed, I have identified three main social logics governing the neo-traditionalist discourse in Poland: a populist logic, a nationalist logic and a traditionalist logic. They are based, respectively, on three main nodal points: people (Poles), nation (Poland) and tradition (based on Christianity and Polishness). The three logics define what Polish neo-traditionalism is about and what its hegemonic goal is, namely, the aspiration to define the whole society according to these nodal points. The post-1989 order is accused of promoting a multicultural society and a supra-national political organisation (against the national community), governed by liberal technocrats (against the people) and based on relativism and individualism (against Christian values and Polish communitarian traditions). Rejecting the liberal system, Polish neo-traditionalism performs a discursive shift towards illiberalism to redefine the core aspects of the political community.

The community we especially value is the nation. A nation is a community of language, culture, history, common destiny, common civilizational achievements. The nation is the basis of human existence and activity in our civilisation. ... We need the nation, Europe needs it, the world needs it. Here I am not talking about our nation, but about nations. But for us the nation is Poland. We value Polishness very highly. It builds the foundations of our programs, our hopes, and we place everything that is to be related to our future in it. We want Poland to last and we know that it is worth being Poles, it is worth being a Pole. Christianity is part of our national identity. The Church was and is the proclaimer and holder of the only system of values commonly known in Poland. (Kaczyński, 2019b)

In this fragment, Kaczyński places at the centre of his political plan all three neo-traditionalist nodal points. He emphasises the nation

as the ‘basis of human existence’ in contrast to cosmopolitan or individualist alternatives; the nation must be sovereign and democracy can be achieved only in the context of the nation-state (Kaczyński, 2019c). The reference to the people is strictly related to a culture-based understanding of national identity. As discussed later, Poles who diverge from traditional Polish values are excluded from being considered part of the national community. To be a Pole means adhering to Polish values and Polishness, where the latter is explicitly defined according to the values of Christianity, ‘the only system of values commonly known in Poland’. From this citation, it is also clear that the nodal points signify each other. The Polish nation and the Polish people are defined by their adherence to Christian Polishness. Moreover, they also have a structuring function as they provide meanings to other signifiers and define their antagonistic relationships. ‘Every good Pole’ respects traditional and Christian Polishness as ‘our way of life’: ‘without it, we have only nihilism’ (Kaczyński, 2019b). A similar articulation of the main nodal points of neo-traditionalism is performed by Tomasz Sakiewicz, including the construction of an antagonistic frontier between us and them: people against Eurocrats, nations against Pan-European ideology, traditional family and normality against depravation.

Even more nations are opposed to the group of Eurocrats who wanted to replace democracy with a Pan-European ideology. The cheering crowds of Poles and Hungarians on the streets of Budapest at the sight of the prime ministers of both countries declaring their fight for a Europe of Homelands – this is a visible sign of a new spring of peoples. This bloodless revolution involves more and more countries. The protection of the family, and especially children, against depravation is its important element. ... This rebellion cannot be stopped. People want normality. (Sakiewicz, 2019a)

Political logic: the illiberal discursive shift at work

Whereas the social logic and the three main nodal points define the characteristics of neo-traditionalism, other demands are articulated together to challenge liberal hegemony. This discursive operation signals the political moment of neo-traditionalism and should be read against the background of what is considered the broken promise of 1989. Indeed, a common theme in neo-traditionalist discursive productions is the disappointment with the post-1989 system that dashed the hopes

of freedom (Legutko, 2016; Kaczyński, 2019d; Nalaskowski, 2019b). While the fall of the socialist system had been greeted with enthusiasm and expectations of independence, the post-communist elite revealed its foreign and alien origins, neo-traditionalists accuse. The political aspect of neo-traditionalism marks its dynamic movement: it cannot merely be considered an interpretation and critique of the post-1989 situation in Poland given by certain segments of Polish society. It is also possible to observe a political discursive strategy, often explicit, to overthrow what is considered a colonial regime and establish an alternative system. Simply put, the political logic of neo-traditionalism reflects the illiberal discursive shift at work.

This operation involves two moments. Challenging the liberal hegemony implies the articulation of traditionalist demands through equivalence as well as the construction of an antagonistic frontier that defines negatively the aspirations of the counter-hegemonic project. Regarding the latter, although the post-communist elite or the technocrats in Brussels embody the tangible enemy of the neo-traditionalist triad (Poland, Poles, Polishness), their actual constitutive outside is modernity and liberal progressivism. Modernity has in common with liberalism and communism its destructive anti-traditional force.

[E]verything – in both communism and liberal democracy – should be modern: thinking, family, school, literature, and philosophy. If a thing, a quality, an attitude, an idea is not modern, it should be modernized or will end up in the dustbin of history. ... By becoming a member of a communist and liberal-democratic society, man rejects a vast share of loyalties and commitments that until not long ago shackled him, in particular those that were imposed on him through the tutelage of religion, social morality, and tradition. (Legutko, 2016: 8)

Removing the bonds and constraints of tradition, modern values and liberal democracy gave people freedom of choice, harming instead the guiding function of heteronomous morality provided by 'the tutelage of religion, social morality, and tradition' (Legutko, 2016: 8). Against modernity, it is necessary to find a new ordering principle. In this respect, neo-traditionalism confirms its prescriptive character. It is an answer to chaos and the relativisation of values. According to neo-traditionalist discourse makers, the antagonistic division of the discursive space is not just

between two different political views. It is between the disorder caused by individual freedom and relativism and the stability given by traditions.

Between what is predictable (knowledge/order) and what is unpredictable (lack of knowledge/chaos). Between truth, and falsehood and information storm: post-truth, fake news. Between the rich and the powerful, and the people. ... Between closure and openness: e.g., borders vs migrations. ... Finally, between these areas of what is safe and what is dangerous. (Zybertowicz and Zybertowicz, 2019)

The division is far more complex than a mere political divergence. Rather, it shows the clash between world views that has characterised European history at least since the French Revolution (and in terms of theoretical reflections, at least since the myth of Prometheus). It is the same clash between individual emancipation and heteronomy, freedom and authority, modernity and tradition. The current Vendée counter-revolution calls for the restoration of moral limits and stability. Since progressivism has torn down any immutable principle in the name of emancipation, the distinction between good and bad has been reduced to a personal choice. Neo-traditionalism, instead, offers the anchor of traditional elements (for example, nation, family, religion) to cope with the chaos of the modern world (Zybertowicz and Zybertowicz, 2017).

The political aspect of neo-traditionalism does not, however, consist simply of dividing the discursive space into two camps. The neo-traditionalist discourse coalition contributes to defining and creating a different discursive reality. The meanings of the founding principles of society are determined through the construction of a chain of equivalence and relations of contrariety between demands. As modernity advances, these demands are frustrated and unfulfilled. Figure 2.1⁹ shows how neo-traditionalist demands are denied by their opposites: for example, the demand for 'nation' is blocked by 'cosmopolitanism', 'hierarchy of values' by 'relativism'; 'authority' by 'individual liberty'. However, taken separately, these demands do not present any counter-hegemonic potential. To constitute a hegemonic discourse, neo-traditionalist demands need to be articulated through equivalent links given by their common contrariety against the liberal chain of equivalence. The articulation of equivalent demands and their common contrariety to the modern world is attempted in some cases, as is clear from this fragment.

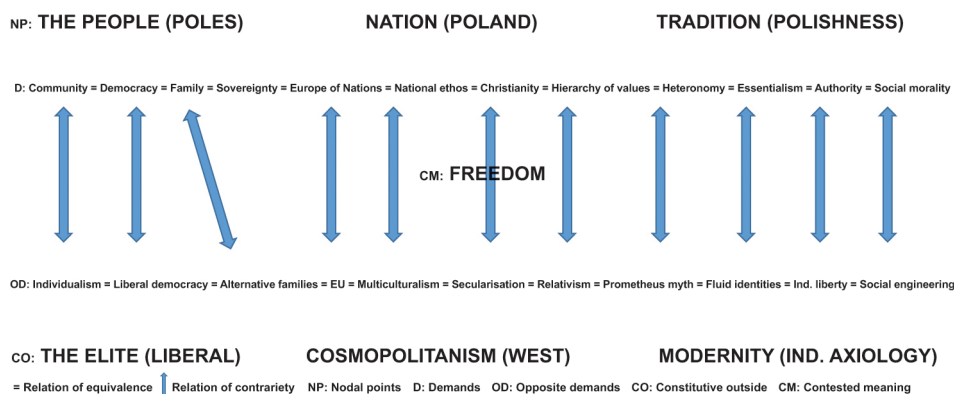


Figure 2.1 Discursive map of the Polish neo-traditionalist discourse

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We are facing confusion and a deep crisis of traditional values. Faith, patriotism, family, marriage or the protection of life are not as respected today as a generation or two ago. Authorities are challenged and extremely different views divide society. While more attention is paid to the individual, we are all treated as a mass. Under the apparent slogans of freedom, equality and encouragement to make our own decisions, we are deprived of control, autonomy and we are forced to think in a certain way. (Okulska-Bożek, 2020)

Faith, patriotism, traditional roles and authority are all denied by a liberal understanding of freedom (one which emphasises individual axiology). In this regard, the political aspect of neo-traditionalism is clear: it seeks to reverse the modernising and individualistic tendencies of liberal democracy as it reaffirms traditional values at its centre. What is at stake is the crafting of ‘common sense’ and the choice of the basic values of the community. As discussed above, the resignification of the signifier ‘freedom’ represents a crucial operation of the neo-traditionalist counter-hegemonic project. The creation of the neo-traditionalist chain of equivalence provides freedom with a different meaning. When the signifier ‘freedom’ is articulated with neo-traditionalist demands, its meaning is no longer related to individual freedom. It is no longer the liberal freedom waved by pro-choice or LGBT movements. The freedom of neo-traditionalists consists instead of affirming national and traditional values and living according to them.

If we want to live much better in 5–10 years, but live in freedom and not to be subject to all that is happening to the west of our borders, where freedom is liquidated, where people are punished ... for

saying what they think; to stop this to coming to our country, Poland must be an island of freedom, of our freedom, of Polish freedom! And Polish freedom is the right to have our sacred values respected so that we can live as we want; so that our lives can go with a rhythm that has been preordained centuries ago, millenniums ago by those who created our faith. (Kaczyński, 2019c)

The discursive shift cannot be clearer: articulating different but equivalent demands, neo-traditionalism resignifies what freedom means. Neo-traditionalist freedom is thus 'the right of a community to have its own rules, even though they contrast with individual liberty and may have an authoritarian character' (Melito, 2021b: 36). In addition, the reference to the West as the thief of Polish freedom strengthens the anticolonial narrative of neo-traditionalism. The political and counter-hegemonic dimension of illiberalism in Poland is directed against the cultural influence of 'cultural colonisers' to defend the authentic way of life based on 'our sacred values'.

Fantasmatic logic: defending 'our way of life'

The last aspect of the explanation for the emergence of neo-traditionalism concerns the role of fantasies. The different possibilities to signify 'freedom', or other signifiers like 'normality' or 'Polishness', show the inherent instability of any discursive formation. To defend their discourse from the openness of the social, neo-traditionalist discourse makers narrate fantasies that offer an ideological shield against the contingency of identities.¹⁰ In this case, the contingency of the meanings of the nodal points Poland, Poles and Polishness is concealed by sublimating them so they embody the fundamental fantasy of the neo-traditionalist discourse. As the 'Polish way of life' has been repeatedly stolen by foreign agents, affirming the three nodal points (in their traditionalist signification) as the cornerstone of Polish society is a crucial step to achieving the ultimate goal of a hegemonic project: unity.

It is not only about our faith. It is about whether Poles can behave in this kind of situation when the holy symbols are being offended. Nations that could not do this, died. They died because they lost the glue of their community. This struggle is therefore more than just a demand for the rights of Christians. This is about keeping our nation alive. (Sakiewicz, 2019b)

In this case, the fact that traditional Polish symbols are contested functions as the motivating force for deploying a reactionary counter-hegemonic discourse. If these sublimated nodal points are denied, the whole nation would perish and the community disappear. Thus, against the threat brought by liberal modernity, neo-traditionalism poses a fundamental fantasy of a Christian Poland without antagonism, where Polish people live in line with their traditional values. Today, instead, there is a part of Polish society that ‘steals’ Polish symbols and threatens Poland. Neo-traditionalist fantasies portray with horror this part of Polish society as foreign, as it does not belong to the same national community. The lack of unity is a lack of true Poland and true Polishness. Those people who do not share the traditionalist world view are excluded: they are not considered true Poles. The opposite description of the world is just disqualified as not Polish, as foreign. The fundamental fantasy of unity is threatened by alien and dangerous elements within Polish society. In this context, the so-called LGBT ideology is one of the main threats to the traditional authentic way of life: it attacks Polishness and seeks to redefine what is considered normal (Nalaskowski, 2019c).

Is it possible to be a Pole and mock what has always been the most important for Poles, regardless of their privately professed faith: the white and red flag, the cross, etc.? The symbols of Polishness are not junk without meaning. In order to save them, to keep them around, generations of Poles shed blood, died, fought and made sacrifices. So, in a cultural sense, is it possible to be a Pole, and to reject these signs and despise them? I do not think so. ... Today, in Poland, we are not dealing with a war of two tribes, but with the defence of Polish national heritage against the mob, and of Polish culture against the rabble. (Lisicki, 2020)

This horrific fantasy portrays a dangerous scenario in which the enemies of Poland conspire to dismantle the country and its symbols. Its function is to mobilise people ideologically: horrific fantasies conceal the contingency of identities by claiming that ‘their Polishness’ does not even have the right to exist and should not be acceptable, otherwise Poland will not survive.

At the same time, horrific fantasies are accompanied by beatific fantasies that envision idyllic scenarios of ‘our way of life’, where the enemies cannot corrupt Polish values. They show a unified Poland, if only the obstacles to unity were defeated. Talking about the LGBT march that took place in July 2019 in Białystok, Nalaskowski compared the ‘horrific

LGBT Poland' and the 'normal traditional Poland' in the rural region of Podlasie:

Riots occurred in Białystok because someone did not think (or they politically chose to ignore) and staged in the heart of the conservative, i.e. normal, Poland a pro-pederasts march. Brigades of homosexuals invaded the capital of Podlasie. ... In Tykocin, 20 km away, it was still normal, as usual in Podlasie. ... On Monday people went to work as always. The majority to the fields. Because it was almost harvest time. They will be working hard from dawn till dusk, repairing machines broken in the fields, eating fatty food and sleeping little. And so, in this way, until Sunday, when they will put white shirts on their sunburnt necks, not minding the heat, put on their ties, wear their jackets, their Sunday shoes and go to Church, and later with their children for an ice-cream. (Nalaskowski, 2019d)

This quote offers a clear example of the fantasmatic logic: the infinite possibilities of interpreting the 'Polish way of life' are reduced here to two options. The first is represented by the 'abnormal' LGBT march, associated with negative images of violence and perversions. Normality, instead, resides in the ordinary lives of working people. Refusing the possibility of the existence of an alternative way of being Polish, their idealised way of life becomes an antidote against the moral corruption caused by the LGBT march. It offers a utopian scenario where everything is bright and Polish society goes on without conflict and antagonism. The fantasy of neo-traditionalism.

Conclusion

Rather than a mere political shift or an electoral turbulence, the rise of neo-traditionalism in Poland signals that we are witnessing a discursive shift or, at least, a crucial struggle for the signification of the core values of society. The unquestionability of the superiority of liberal values is no longer taken for granted, and the meanings of the founding principles of Polish society are yet to be settled. Hence, the chapter seeks to contribute to the literature on illiberalism, stressing the importance of discursive shifts to explain the illiberal turn. The analysis of neo-traditionalist discourse through the logics approach has highlighted different aspects of its emergence. First, populism as a concept is insufficient to explain illiberalism in all its nuances. Although populism can be combined with

other concepts, more often it has engulfed them and overshadowed alternative explanations based on other concepts. The social logics of neo-traditionalism demonstrate the equal importance of the nation, the people and traditions in constructing a discursive alternative to liberal democracy. Second, illiberal discourses should not be reduced to a simple political strategy to win votes. More than that, neo-traditionalism in Poland follows a hegemonic strategy. On the one hand, it explicitly aims to seize civil society and cultural hegemony. On the other hand, its political logic reveals a process of resignification of the core pillars of the post-1989 order; freedom, people, cultural values and other discursive elements assume, in this light, a different meaning. The clash, in this case, is between different world views, not different political families. Finally, the fantasmatic logic makes visible the ideological character of neo-traditionalism. Narrating beatific and horrific fantasies, neo-traditionalism has offered an ideological anchor to defend itself from the novelties brought by liberal values. Fantasies explain why a traditionalist world view in Poland still resists and how it sustains the non-liberal counter-revolution. However, studying the fantasmatic logic of neo-traditionalism not only has an explanatory value; it also shows how the ideological construction of fantasies has radicalised identities and exacerbated the conflict. Laying bare the logic governing this process is an important step to reduce polarisation and the tension of the political debate.

Notes

1. *Weltanschauung* was not invented by a single author but has its roots in German philosophy and culture. It translates into English as 'world view' and is related to how humans experience and understand the surrounding world.
2. As discussed in the previous note, all these concepts focus on the cultural codes that determine our world view. Although each of them has distinct characteristics and applications, they all pertain to how humans understand, interpret and interact with their environment, as they are influenced by social and cultural norms and beliefs.
3. To give an example, liberalism has 'fixed' the meaning of 'freedom' as negative and individual freedom. Yet, the meaning of 'freedom' remains contingent as it could be signified in different ways, as discussed below, even within the liberal context.
4. As discussed by Glynos and Howarth (2007: 153), the identity of social logics 'is virtually coterminous with the social practices and contexts they inform and make possible'. This indicates that the empirical phenomenon 'out there' is interpreted by subjects (both the articulating subject and the researcher) losing the status of 'practice' or 'Discourse' (Glynos et al., 2021). The concept of logic helps the researcher in grasping the dynamics of a discourse (De Cleen et al., 2021).
5. The political logic of neo-traditionalism will be discussed in a separate section. In brief, the logics of equivalence and difference account for the construction (or disruption) of a discursive antagonistic frontier by unifying (or dividing) different but equivalent demands.
6. The fantasmatic and political logic (in the singular) refer to their ontological dimension. Their empirical manifestation, instead, can be observed in several ways. Therefore, in this work I will talk about fantasmatic or political *logics* (in the plural) to refer to the different ways of fantasising or articulating a discourse.

7. *Marsz Niepodległości* (March of Independence) is an annual event that takes place in Warsaw every year on 11 November to celebrate the independence of Poland (see Kotwas and Kubik, 2019).
8. This chapter is part of wider research that includes a larger corpus. Thus, the sample of the neo-traditionalist discourse coalition presented in this chapter is not exhaustive of the several manifestations of neo-traditionalism in Poland. Yet, the following analysis provides an accurate picture of the logics of the neo-traditionalist discourse.
9. Only some neo-traditionalist demands are shown in this figure.
10. Fantasies are necessary to conceal contingency in any discourse. Thus, we can also observe liberal fantasies to cope with the illiberal turn.

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Representations of Russia in Georgian and Ukrainian far-right populist discourses

Michael Cole

Introduction

In the [previous chapter](#), we saw how protecting traditional values from liberal Western influences has been a key aim of right-wing populists in CEE. In this context, Russia presents itself as the saviour of traditional values vis-à-vis the West. While the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has strengthened opposition to Russia's influence, in the period prior to 24 February 2022, populist politicians in CEE had a more complicated relationship with Moscow. The aim of this chapter is to examine the influence of Russia on populist actors in Georgia and Ukraine in the time before this, highlighting key differences in supply- and demand-side factors contributing to the appeal of populist rhetoric.

What follows is an examination of the unique elements of the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, highlighting how the local manifestations of far-right populism differ from those more commonly assessed in the literature. While Russia's role may have been expected to provide points of commonality in Ukrainian and Georgian far-right populist discourses, it instead revealed key differences in local supply- and demand-side factors contributing to their appeal. In Ukraine, 'ugly ethno-nationalists' (Wilson, [2014](#): 41) Svoboda gained electoral success fusing nationalist ideology with a strong anti-Russian flavour, whereas the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) won seats in the Georgian parliament combining religious conservatism with increasingly pro-Russian rhetoric (Delcour and Wolczuk, [2015](#): 465; Wales, [2017](#)).

Populism in Georgia and Ukraine

I understand populism as a ‘loose’ (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 17) discursive ‘frame’ (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011) to which other ‘political twists’ (Žižek, 2006: 557) are added. Populism frames societal problems as a struggle between ‘the sacred people’ (DeHanas and Shterin, 2018: 179) and ‘the elite’ or ‘enemies’ (Laclau, 2005) and is one of a wider repertoire of styles available to actors (Brubaker, 2017) across the political spectrum (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The nodal points of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ or ‘enemies’ act as empty signifiers (Laclau, 2005), whereby meanings are adapted to fit the national and temporal contexts in which they appear (Brubaker, 2017).

Understanding populism this way avoids potential ambiguity caused by definitions based on the notion of a ‘thin-centred ideology’ (Freeden, 1998) and better enables analyses of country-specific supply- and demand-side factors, which have greater influence on discursive content. Building on the understanding of populism as ‘a particular mode of political expression’ (Moffit, 2016: 21), populism is understood here as a gradable phenomenon, with discourse-based approaches the most suitable methods of analysis (Aslanidis, 2016: 93). Additionally, cultural expressions found across national contexts are not classified as populist or non-populist due to the presence or absence of specific ‘populist’ ideological or discursive features but instead can be grouped on the basis of having a ‘family resemblance’ to one another (Wittgenstein, 1958; Brubaker, 2017: 8). This allows for more nuanced and insightful comparisons between examples of populism in countries with fundamentally different governmental systems and societal norms, rather than frameworks created to examine cases in better-established democracies, which lack suitable nuance (Cianetti et al., 2018).

This is particularly important when examining transitioning democracies on Europe’s borders (Glahn, 2018), including Georgia and Ukraine, neither of which has had entirely liberal-democratic political systems at any point since gaining independence. Although, like elsewhere, the term ‘populist’ possesses largely negative connotations when used by Ukrainian and Georgian politicians to discredit opponents (Jones, 2015; Kuzio, 2018), it is important to recognise populism’s potential not only to inhibit democratisation but also to assist it, as both countries transition from forms of authoritarianism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 20). Therefore, definitions of populism emphasising its innately negative qualities (Aslanidis, 2016: 94) and often used as a negative label ascribed to political actors, rather than being self-proclaimed

(Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 2) or willingly accepted (Panizza, 2005), also appear unsuitable for the Ukrainian and Georgian contexts.

The far right

'Far-right' actors share an ideological stance based on the general belief that inequality and not egalitarianism is the natural state of affairs (Mudde, 2014: 98). From this perspective, the state's role is primarily to protect this so-called natural order, favouring local culture and society, rather than seeking to rectify the imbalance by supporting minority rights (Taguieff, 1990: 101). The further a political party's ideology is to the right, the narrower and more homogeneous its understanding of local society and culture tends to be (Rydgren, 2018: 25). This fosters more exclusive definitions of those belonging to societal 'in-groups' as well as of internal 'others' who exist in the society but who are considered external (Saull, 2013). Precise definitions of internal 'others' in far-right ideologies are highly context-dependent, although ethnic or sexual minorities often fulfil the role (Sakki and Pettersson, 2016: 156).

Mudde (2014: 98) uses the umbrella term 'far right' to encapsulate both the 'extreme' and 'radical' right. The former entirely oppose democracy, instead seeking power through non-democratic means, while the latter utilise democratic processes to gain power, only opposing certain features of liberal democracy such as minority rights and pluralism (Mudde, 2014: 98). While it is theoretically possible to parse the radical from extreme right based on this taxonomy, in practice differentiation is more complicated (Hainsworth, 2008: 8). Rydgren (2018: 25) notes that both extreme and radical-right actors participate in democratic processes, while simultaneously undermining them. Bušítková (2018: 565) additionally highlights growing tendencies for coexistence and cooperation between radical-right and 'radicalised' mainstream right parties. While Bar-On (2018: 64) claims differences between the Western and Eastern European far right should not be overstated, there are several unique features fundamental to Ukrainian and Georgian far-right discourses.

The Ukrainian far right

Euromaidan in 2013/14 and the subsequent war with Russia played crucial roles in changing perceptions of far-right groups in Ukrainian society (Umland, 2020: 249). Right Sektor, for instance, gained credibility due

to their willingness to take action during Euromaidan and their subsequent involvement in defending Ukraine from Russia's invasion of the Donbas (Likhachev, 2016). Uncompromising devotion to the national cause in response to existential threats legitimised such groups as Right Sektor and Azov as Ukrainian 'patriots' (Colborne, 2022: 109). While not leading to electoral success for Azov's subsequently created 'political wing', National Corpus, even in an ultra-nationalist coalition with Svoboda (Umland and Tarasiuk, 2021: 13), ideologies forged in the war did become increasingly prominent in the Ukrainian political and cultural mainstream (Likhachev, 2016: 6).

One side effect was mainstream political actors' shift towards more nationalistic discourse. Then-incumbent president Petro Poroshenko's ultimately unsuccessful 2019 re-election campaign, for example, was on a platform of 'Army! Language! Faith!' (Colborne, 2019). During Poroshenko's presidency, far-right organisations expanded considerably, establishing cultural centres, youth clubs and staging numerous events to promote their views, particularly to young people (Boichenko, 2017; Umland and Tarasiuk, 2021: 13). This included 'patriotic' youth organisations such as 'Young Corpus', 'Prava Molod' and 'National Alliance' developing summer camps, which provided military training for children and promoted nationalist ideas (Kuzmenko and Colborne, 2019).

The Georgian far right

Parsing radical from extreme-right groups is also challenging in Georgia, as exemplified by 2017's 'March of Georgians', where a mix of right-wing and nationalist groups and individuals gathered for a Tbilisi street protest against increased immigration (Jgharkava, 2017: 4). Heading the protests was Sandro Bregadze, leader of Georgian March (GM), alongside members of APG and well-known public figures, purportedly defending 'traditional values' (Lomsadze, 2017; Pertaia, 2017). That participants ranged from football hooligans to members of fully fledged political parties with seats in parliament (Baranec, 2018) highlights the sense of ideological synergy of a broad set of far-right Georgian actors (Cole, 2020: 8).

In recent years, APG have been the most electorally successful Georgian far-right party, winning six seats in the 2016 parliamentary elections on a platform highlighting the synonymy of Georgian national identity with Orthodox Christianity (Stephan, 2018: 3). GM registered as a political party to contest the 2020 elections, although it failed

to achieve the 1 per cent threshold required to gain a seat (Gelashvili, 2021). APG's vote share also decreased in 2020, leaving the Georgian far right's primary focus as organising and participating in aggressive and violent street protests against minorities (Gelashvili, 2021).

While many of the ideological traits of the Georgian far right resemble those elsewhere and some claim inspiration from prominent European groups (Gordon, 2020: 5), one unique element is the influence of, and attitudes towards, Russia (Cole, 2020: 21). Russian connections to the Georgian far right are not limited to ideological synergy surrounding religious and illiberal values but also allegations of direct financial support from the Kremlin (Transparency International Georgia, 2018). Officially, APG favour a reconciliatory approach towards Russia based on arguments of economic pragmatism (Baranec, 2018: 6). However, several meetings with Russian government officials in Moscow in recent years have fuelled suggestions of them being 'Russian lobbyists'.

Despite this, the precise nature of Russia's influence on APG and other Georgian far-right groups has not been fully established (Stephan, 2018: 4). 'Pro-Russian' labels are commonly used to attack political opponents in Georgia (Wales, 2017) and fail to address ways far-right groups' actions may benefit Russian interests in the country or their motivations for fostering closer relations with Moscow. While its promotion of religious conservative values may benefit Russia, APG more often purports to defend Georgian identity from external influence (Stephan, 2018: 3). Thus, tendencies for APG voters to hold anti-Western and anti-US views (Stephan, 2018: 4) must be distinguished from automatic assumptions of being 'pro-Russian'.

Discourse

This study combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) and post-foundationalist approaches. Both aim to uncover existing hegemonic power systems, the maintenance and dissemination of which engages societies in continuous struggles for dominance (Makarychev and Sazonov, 2019: 23). However, where CDA understands discourse as emanating specifically from language, which subsequently influences material processes and social phenomena (Fairclough and Wodak, 1995: 28), for post-foundationalists, discourse is not seen as separate from reality (Carpentier, 2019: 57). Hence, where for Fairclough and Wodak (1995) language use and social actions are inherently intertwined, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 107–10) see discourses as fluid and evolving sets of interconnected

phenomena encompassing all features of the social world, which create meaning through their various combinations and interconnections (Carpentier, 2019: 157). These meanings never remain fixed for long periods but are continually negotiated and reimagined through discursive interactions in different situations (Laclau, 1988: 25; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 113). However, discourses must be temporarily stable for networks of meaning to develop around them (Carpentier, 2019: 157). This requires ‘nodal points’ within discourses to have an anchoring effect, allowing related concepts to be tied to them so that larger webs of association are created. As a result, a retroactive change in the perception of affect concepts’ meaning becomes possible (Cederström and Spicer, 2014: 190). Thus, nodal points come to symbolise something considered inherent in a desirable or natural social order (Marttila, 2018: 571), with their apparent lack of independent meaning creating the impression they have always been present (Žižek, 1992: 95). For Laclau (1996: 53), certain nodal points, known as ‘empty signifiers’, are entirely void of fixed meaning, creating fertile ground for exploitation by political actors for their own gain (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 9). However, it may be more accurate to describe them as possessing at least partial meaning (Brown, 2016: 119–120). Thus, ‘the people’, rather than other less situationally relevant potential nodal points, frequently acts as a hub around which wider discourses collect in populist rhetoric.

Post-foundationalist views that language and social action are not implicitly connected (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 107–10) do not negate the belief that language provides the most visible manifestation and therefore useful entry point for analyses (Macaulay, 2018: 168). Equally, CDA agrees that discourses affect more than simply language use, highlighting the interplay between language and social practice as a key research aim (Fairclough et al., 2011). CDA’s exploration of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, for instance, assesses ways in which power relationships are created, negotiated and maintained or challenged (Fairclough, 2003), suggesting parallels with post-foundationalist notions of discourses assembling around empty signifiers and determining wider patterns of meaning (Laclau, 1996: 53). Thus, understanding discursive features as comprising both language and practice (Müller, 2008: 324) satisfies both approaches, enabling application of CDA’s analytical toolkit from a post-foundationalist theoretical base.

Methodology

This chapter seeks to answer two main research questions. First, what are the main discursive commonalities and differences between Georgian

far-right populists APG and their Ukrainian counterparts Svoboda? Second, how do APG and Svoboda present Russia and how does one account for the identified differences? To address these questions, two separate datasets were collected and analysed, the first being online written discourses presented by Svoboda and APG, beginning with the parties' manifestoes, which are both freely accessible on their respective websites (Svoboda.org.ua and patriots.ge). Manifestoes provide overviews of political parties' standpoints (Budge et al., 1987), display the discursive strategies they employ (Breeze, 2018: 30) and facilitate cross-party and cross-national comparisons (Odmalm and Hepburn, 2017: 10).

However, in isolation, manifestoes are too broad to produce detailed and nuanced analyses of party discourses (Odmalm and Hepburn, 2017: 10). Therefore, additional data was collected from Svoboda's and APG's social media accounts, with a focus on visual materials. Social media enables direct and unmediated communication between political parties and 'the people' (Santamaría, 2020: 134) and facilitates the construction of desirable self-images through humour, 'flaunting the low' (Rodina and Dligach, 2019; Mendonça, and Caetano, 2020), and other features of the populist discursive frame. Crucially for this study, social media enables political actors to promote ideological views via non-traditional and indirect means (Santamaría, 2020: 140).

To examine linguistic data on Svoboda's and APG's websites, this study used CDA. CDA aims to uncover problematic social inequalities and power relations inherent in discursive practices (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000: 449) via a three-dimensional analytical framework (Fairclough, 2003). The first stage examines linguistic features of texts, including representations of social actors, agency and evaluative terms used to assess actions or events (Fairclough, 2003). The second analyses discourses as products distributed for societal consumption, and the third considers discourses as social practice, reflecting existing power structures in societies (Fairclough, 2003). Unlike simple discourse analysis, CDA also considers linguistic choices speakers make from the range of available options, including language deliberately omitted or avoided (Baker et al., 2008).

While CDA is particularly useful for analysing linguistic data, alternative approaches are often used when working with images. Visual materials from Svoboda's and APG's social media accounts were examined using Rose's (2016: 24) tailor-made analytical framework, whereby overall meaning derives from the combination of four sites. First, the site of *production* assesses who produced the image. Second, the site of *the image itself* examines the specific content. Third, the site of *circulation* evaluates where and when images are distributed. Finally, the site of

audiencing analyses for whom they are produced. As a fully comprehensive analysis of all facets of the images published by Svoboda and APG is beyond the scope of this chapter, instead a more focused assessment of those images containing representations of Russia is presented.

Analysis

The data analysed from Svoboda's and APG's official websites and social media accounts suggests two main commonalities in their discursive approaches. First, the co-option and re-articulation of national symbols familiar to their respective audiences, and second, the discursive construction of contextually relevant versions of 'the people', seen most clearly in both parties' logos. APG's logo (Figure 3.1) includes the Georgian flag and a map of the country, as well as a bell, which may be understood here as a symbol of Orthodox Christianity, metaphorically tying Georgia together. Svoboda's yellow and blue logo features a version of the Ukrainian 'Trizub' from the national coat of arms (Figure 3.2). Yet, in the Ukrainian context, where constructions of 'the people' rely on navigating nuanced interpretations of national identity, certain symbols remain largely divisive in the society as a result of ethnic, regional and linguistic differences (Barrington, 2018). Thus, it is noticeable that Svoboda's visual discourse consistently features images of controversial OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) leader Stepan Bandera, who is generally revered in western Ukraine, yet mostly reviled in eastern regions (Kulyk, 2014: 100).



Figure 3.1 Alliance of Patriots of Georgia's logo

Source: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_of_Patriots_of_Georgia)



Figure 3.2 Svoboda's logo

Source: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svoboda)

While Svoboda's persistent use of Bandera's image is highly provocative to certain sections of Ukrainian society (Carnaghan, 2016: 1600), it also denotes the construction of a version of 'the people' long accepted in western Ukraine, along with its associated historical narratives, which are inherently antagonistic towards Russia. Thus, Svoboda presents a clear and definitive version of the Ukrainian 'people', based not only on views of the country's present and its future trajectory but also interpretations of its history (Khromeychuk, 2020: 149). This connects to the second observable commonality between APG and Svoboda: the articulation of locally customised versions of 'the people'. APG presents their constructed version of the Georgian 'people' in the 'Who are the Supporters of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia?' section of their website, via 13 descriptions of 'typical' supporters (Table 3.1) (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020a). APG chose this range of examples to present their seemingly diverse appeal throughout Georgian society, from taxi drivers to doctors, summarised as 'We are present in every stratum and category of society!' (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020a). The combination of 'characters' in the 'Our Supporters' section of APG's manifesto demonstrates a locally considered use of the populist discursive frame. Each 'APG Supporter' is presented positively, emphasising their desires to improve the country and society.

Despite these similarities, Svoboda's and APG's discursive approaches also differ in three key ways. First, the type of enemies they discursively position as opposed to 'the people'; second, the main themes of their discursive content; and third, the overall emphasis, suggesting differences in the parties' target audiences.

Table 3.1 ‘A supporter of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia is ...’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020a)

Archetypal APG supporter	Positive characteristic
A scientist	sees that science is promptly dying out in Georgia
An architect	in the eyes of whom Tbilisi has entirely lost its historical appearance, spirit and character, while the heart of this architect is aching for his native city ... He perfectly knows how to help his city
An educator	whose profession is extremely undervalued in Georgia
A doctor	who knows better than anyone, how hard all those who come to him live, while the doctors themselves suffer need not less than their patients
A refugee from Sukhumi and Tskhinvali	who is confident that we will never cede our Georgian lands, and that we will never say that Abkhazia is not the part of Georgia. He is sure that we will never become any other country's slaves.
A taxi driver	who drives his old, decrepit car through the day and night to feed his family ... However, he will never say, ‘I’m tired’, but he will always be the first to come to a protest action, because he is a true patriot, and his heart is full of love for his Homeland.
A family with dependent children	which is hungry and thirsty. This family strongly believes that we won’t be able to sleep at night if we warm our own children, while leaving other people’s children to be cold. This is why these families are with us ...
A citizen	who wants to live in a fair state, which is not just a territory for him ... His Homeland, his native language and his faith are vitally important for him
A journalist	for whom journalism doesn’t mean working in the propaganda services and collecting compromising materials
A Georgian immigrant	who carries out backbreaking labour abroad to help his own family and country... This immigrant perfectly knows the value of labour and Homeland
A citizen	who wants his children to live in the state, where no one will steal their votes, and where the human and constitutional rights of the citizens will never be violated.
Every mother	who wants her children to be grown up freely in their own Homeland, and with their native traditions

Source: Cole, 2020: 13–14

Enemies

For APG, the main enemies are internal to Georgia. Common targets include the government of the moment and former president Mikheil Saakashvili, who is identified as an enemy of the nation (Cole, 2020: 14). APG’s website describes Saakashvili as ‘tyrannical’ four times and twice refers to ‘crimes’ his government committed against the Georgian people (Cole, 2020: 15). The populist discursive frame is also visible in the repetition of the word ‘homeland’, which appears in five of the 13 character descriptions in the ‘Our Supporters’ section of their website. The sense that ‘the people’ belong to an idealised Georgian national ‘heartland’ (Breeze, 2018: 28) is coupled with five descriptions demonstrating antagonisms against representatives of ‘the elite’ who prevent ‘the people’ from achieving noble aims (Table 3.2).

Svoboda’s discourse tends to focus on presenting internal elites, particularly oligarchs and incumbent President Volodymyr Zelensky, as a threat to the people. However, while APG focuses almost exclusively on internal enemies, Svoboda also identifies Russia and those perceived to support Russia’s interests as prominent external enemies to the Ukrainian ‘people’. One example of an image shared on Svoboda’s official Instagram account demonstrates the party’s opposition to EU leaders who are prepared to strike deals with Vladimir Putin, in this case over

Table 3.2 Antagonism with ‘the elite’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020a)

Archetypal APG supporter	Antagonism with ‘the elite’
A scientist	The state has no will to declare the support and stimulation of the Georgian science as a priority. The state not only has no will, but also doesn’t even know how to do its job
An architect	After all, he has neither an influential relative nor a friend who could give him work and involve him in such a good deed as the preservation of the historical face and colours of Georgia
An educator	The education system is undeveloped and ineffective, distant, and detached from any national values
A taxi driver	He perfectly distinguishes white, black, and gray, and he is a more competent expert than most of the experts
A journalist	For him, journalism means being unbiased and speaking the truth

Source: Cole, 2020: 13–14

the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.¹ In the image, French President Emmanuel Macron agrees to allow Vladimir Putin to ‘eat another little piece of Ukraine’, while the caption accompanying the image states that ‘We [Ukraine] cannot achieve peace through negotiations with the Kremlin’s business partners’ (Svoboda, 2021). While a more detailed account of Svoboda’s discursive representations of Russia is presented below, this image is one example demonstrating Svoboda’s employment of the populist discursive frame to dichotomously divide the world between those who support Ukraine and those who oppose them. In this case, any political leaders prepared to negotiate with Russia are considered to be inherently acting against the interests of the Ukrainian ‘people’.

Themes

Thematically, Svoboda’s discourse tends to be overtly militaristic. Visual manifestations of militarism can occur in many ways, from positive representations of the military in public discourse to ‘telling war stories to motivate new generations of fighters’ (Shepherd, 2018: 210). During an ongoing conflict, it is perhaps unsurprising that positive images of military personnel have become more common in Ukrainian discourse, yet it is notable how this has also become a central feature of Svoboda’s visual discourse more generally. An image, from a post on Svoboda’s official Telegram channel to commemorate Orthodox Easter, provides one example, adapting the response in Ukraine to the traditional greeting ‘Christ has risen’, which is usually ‘Truly he has risen’ to ‘Ukraine has risen’. The image of a soldier alongside traditional Easter symbols and images highlights the intertwining of military themes with all aspects of Ukrainian life in Svoboda’s visual discourse. Further examples include young people in army fatigues participating in military training activities and Svoboda’s leaders posing alongside military personnel, which were also posted frequently on the party’s Telegram channel.

For APG, religious rather than military themes dominate. Invoking the words of Georgian nineteenth-century poet and patriot Ilia Chavchavadze, APG’s manifesto claims their supporters value ‘homeland, faith in God, love for everything Georgian, and respect for the native language’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020d). In reordering Chavchavadze’s famous slogan to place ‘faith in God’ ahead of ‘love for everything Georgian’ and ‘language’, APG’s version aligns them with the interpretation preferred by the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), whose Patriarch Ilia II believes Orthodoxy should be the primary defining characteristic of Georgian national identity (Minesashvili, 2017: 7). APG articulates the social and

political issues facing Georgia through repeated use of religious keywords and symbols, including one notable passage ‘conflating Georgia’s national development with the battle between God and Satan’ (Cole, 2020: 11). Orthodox Christianity is also a prominent theme of APG’s social media content, with party leaders often pictured in churches or with religious icons.

Emphasis

In highlighting the importance of religion and elements of traditional Georgian culture, APG’s discourse is predominantly nostalgic, aligning with the views of the GOC, both the most trusted institution in Georgia (Minesashvili, 2017: 2) and also highly resistant to liberal values. Thus, following the GOC, APG emphasises potential threats external forces pose to Georgian traditions and identity, notably the EU (Minesashvili, 2017: 8), justifying a Eurosceptic stance, owing to a need to prioritise the preservation of Georgian culture. The GOC’s general conceptualisation of ‘Europe’ as synonymous with forced legal changes to increase LGBT rights and promote homosexuality in schools (Lebanidze, 2016: 1; Kakabadze and Makarychev, 2018: 5), for instance, capitalises on widespread intolerance of sexual minorities throughout Georgia (Minesashvili, 2017: 6). While APG avoids directly commenting on LGBT rights-related issues, individual members have actively participated in street protests alongside GOC leaders and extreme-right groups, including GM (Gotsiridze, 2018).

Svoboda’s approach tends to resemble that of other far-right Ukrainian organisations, with a strong focus on youth recruitment, emphasising the importance of young people in Ukraine’s future development (Umland and Tarasiuk, 2021), which also contrasts with APG’s emphasis on nostalgia. Party leader Oleh Tiahnybok, who on his official Instagram page regularly poses with young people, often while wearing traditional Ukrainian costume as a further national identity marker, exemplifies this focus.² This is also an example of community building through ostensibly apolitical activities, which was a key feature of Svoboda’s campaign to increase support ahead of their most successful election result in 2012 (Polyakova, 2014: 223).

Representations of Russia

Svoboda presents Russia as the main enemy of the Ukrainian ‘people’ but rarely uses the word ‘Russia’, instead preferring analogous and loaded terms such as ‘the occupier’ or ‘Muscovites’. One such example

is an October 2021 article on Svoboda's website titled: 'We don't have "Ukrainian Russian"; we have the language of the occupier' (Svoboda.org.ua, 2021). This also highlights Svoboda's presentation of Ukraine as an exclusively Ukrainian-speaking country, with no space for Russian speakers in their conceptualisation of 'the people'. To add legitimacy, Svoboda posts lectures by academics from western Ukrainian universities, whose views on the language issue have strong nationalist leanings. In one (pre-February 2022) instance, war with Russia is needed to 'completely cleanse ... the country from the language of the occupier and stupid anti-language "patriots" [which] is still unresolved' (Farion, 2021). It is also noticeable that in this speech Russia is referred to as 'the occupier' and Russian as the 'Muscovite' language (Farion, 2021). Furthermore, Vladimir Putin was the subject of 1,368 articles on Svoboda's official website in the dataset examined, demonstrating his importance, while Russia is more generally presented as an enemy in juxtaposition to which the concept of the Ukrainian people is constructed. Svoboda also regularly shared images mocking Putin on their official social media accounts.³

Contrastingly, direct mentions of Russia are rare in APG's discourse, indicative of their aim to remain 'pragmatic', due to the purported economic benefits of improved relations (Baranec, 2018: 6). Despite highlighting the importance of the Georgian language as a national identity marker, APG's manifesto emphasises that Georgians 'never hate other nations surrounding us' (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020c). Thus, while those not born in Georgia are praised for learning the national language, there is no mention of efforts to prevent other languages, such as Russian, being used. APG's manifesto does refer to Russia's occupation of Georgia, although only briefly in a section emphasising the potential threat of Turkey and historical incursions by Azerbaijan and Armenia (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020d). This is followed by a vague statement that 'Georgia should immediately develop and implement a comprehensive plan in this direction' (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020c), which, although calling for a hasty response to these external threats, fails to propose concrete solutions and suggests potential for a conciliatory approach towards Russia.

There are also examples in APG's online materials where naming Russia directly is deliberately avoided. One 'character' in the 'Our Supporters' section of APG's manifesto is 'A Refugee from Sukhumi and Tskhinvali', both of which are cities in the Abkhaz and South Ossetian territories recognised by the Tbilisi government as parts of the Georgian state and occupied by Russia since 2008. Though APG asserts that their

supporters ‘will never become any other country’s slaves’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020a), failure to explicitly mention Russian responsibility for creating this situation adds weight to suggestions of APG’s pro-Russian agenda. It is also notable that this example includes only refugees from Sukhumi and Tskhinvali now living in Georgia, while omitting those still residing in those regions. Although not necessarily indicative of APG promoting Russian narratives surrounding the geopolitical situation in the region, it does suggest attempts to avoid directly blaming Russia for instigating and prolonging the conflicts (Cole, 2020: 13). Thus, while both APG and Svoboda often avoid mentioning Russia by name, the former does so to prevent openly criticising Kremlin policy towards Georgia, whereas the latter substitutes ‘Russia’ for other terms to emphasise the antagonistic relationship with Ukraine.

Regarding foreign policy, APG stresses its pro-EU stance, yet argues that while NATO and EU membership are not forthcoming, prioritising Georgian interests is necessary (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020b). Russia is mentioned specifically, as are the US and the EU, each of which APG advocates dialogue with but with emphasis placed firmly on doing so to further Georgia’s interests. The statement ‘We are obligated to protect Georgian interests in Moscow, and not the interests of Moscow in Tbilisi’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020c) appears alongside similar ones, where ‘Moscow’ is substituted for ‘Brussels’ and ‘Washington’ on the ‘Let’s Defend Georgian Interests Throughout the World’ page. Discursively positioning Russia as simply one of Georgia’s potential international partners selectively disregards the lack of official diplomatic relations between the two countries since the 2008 war, instead effectively equating Russian efforts to destabilise Georgia with EU and NATO demands, thus framing both as examples of external powers attempting to assert influence.

Another area exemplifying differences in Svoboda’s and APG’s attitudes towards Russia is national culture. Consistent with Svoboda’s approach to firmly distinguishing Ukraine from Russia in language terms, they also advocate for the removal of Russian language cultural items including films, music and television. One image from Svoboda’s Telegram channel, depicting a reel of film and a movie clipboard on a Russian flag, clearly visualises this, while news on Svoboda’s official website follows suit, such as the February 2020 article ‘Picketing the Ministry of Defence against discrimination towards Ukrainian culture’ (Svoboda Press Service, 2020).

For APG, culture is seen as a fundamental characteristic of Georgian identity, with a section of their manifesto dedicated to Georgian Singing,

Georgian Folk Dance and Georgian Feasts (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020c). Each is described in highly positive terms, with connections made to their historical and religious import. APG also mentions that ‘in Soviet times this tradition was almost destroyed’ (Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 2020c). While this may suggest nuance in their attitudes towards external influence on uniquely Georgian cultural elements, in terms of general cultural values, much of their approach shares commonalities with Putinist Russian views.

One highly publicised example was APG members’ participation in violent protests against the screening of the film *And Then We Danced* due to its central love story between two young male dancers in the National Georgian Ensemble (Dry, 2019; Tartaglione, 2019). While APG did not officially take part in the protests, leading members’ involvement suggests both ideological synergy with extreme-right-wing actors like GM, while also closely resembling Russian government moves to disrupt cultural events, ostensibly to restrict the so-called promotion of Western cultural sympathies (Carroll, 2018). Thus, whereas both APG and Svoboda present their respective national cultures as facing an external threat, the fact that the former identifies the West and the latter points to Russia as the source of that threat further underlines fundamental differences between the two parties’ discursive content.

Conclusions

Both APG and Svoboda use populist discursive frames to present contextually specific versions of ‘the people’ which appeal to local audiences. A key component of both parties’ approaches involves co-option and re-articulation of familiar symbols, fostering impressions of connections to locally valued institutions.

Where Georgian and Ukrainian far-right populism appears to differ from examples more commonly examined in the literature is the immediacy and relevance of Russia to domestic politics. Svoboda clearly defines Russia as the main enemy of the ‘Ukrainian people’, both in the party’s official manifesto (svoboda.org.ua/party/program) and visual discourses on social media. In contrast, APG officially advocates a ‘pragmatic’ approach towards Moscow (Baranec, 2018: 6), focusing more on internal enemies, including ex-President Mikhail Saakashvili (Cole, 2020: 14).

A second key difference relates to the locally resonant versions of ‘the people’ that both organisations presented. Svoboda’s visual discourse

was heavily militaristic, reflecting the state of war between Ukraine and Russia since 2014. APG instead emphasised Orthodox Christianity through a combination of symbols and visual images highlighting its fundamentality to Georgian identity. Thus, the former foregrounds an aspect of antagonism against Russia, whereas the latter focuses on a potential point of coalescence. Differences between the two parties' approaches are also observed in what Rose (2016: 24) calls the site of audiencing. Svoboda's online discourse foregrounds the role of youth and young people in constructing a version of the 'Ukrainian people' free from foreign influence. APG instead highlights aspects of Georgian tradition, connecting values of the present to the past, appealing to nostalgic sentiment towards a bygone age when the nation was great.

A fully comprehensive analysis of all features of Ukrainian and Georgian far-right populist discourses was beyond the scope of this chapter. However, future research into the societal impact of these contrasting attitudes towards Russia could be fruitful. In both cases examined in this chapter, while far-right populist parties have failed to achieve electoral success, their visible presence in the political sphere has notably shifted societal discourses in their direction. Therefore, ethnographic research into the socio-cultural conditions facilitating support for political actors promoting anti-Russian discourses in Ukraine and acting in Russia's interests in Georgia would also be beneficial.

Notes

1. VO Svoboda (@vo_svboda) 'Зеленський збирається на переговори з Макроном і Меркель в Парижі. Очевидно, що там його спонукатимуть до капітуляції'. *Instagram*, 15 April 2021. www.instagram.com/p/CNs0vK_h3vX/.
2. For example, see Oleh Tiayhnybok (@tiayhnybok) 'З музиками зі Збаража на фестивалі'. *Instagram*, 6 August 2018. www.instagram.com/p/BmJBPFhEan/; Oleh Tiayhnybok (@tiayhnybok) '#фестивальнескореноїнації #холоднийяр – 2018'. *Instagram*, 11 July 2018. www.instagram.com/p/BlFvwtuhkDh/?img_index=1.
3. For example, see VO Svoboda (@ vo_svboda) 'Заява Всеукраїнського об'єднання «Свобода» про відсіч вторгненню московського агресора'. *Instagram*, 21 April 2021. www.instagram.com/p/CN7PBm-BWx8/.

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Part II

The economics of populism

Foreword by István Benczes

Understanding the economic drivers and mechanisms of the most recent rise of populism is necessary to establish a full picture of the phenomenon. In addressing the ‘why now?’ and ‘why so general?’ questions, economists typically focus on the demand side of populism with the aim of identifying the (ultimate) economic causes of an otherwise political phenomenon and tracking down the exact mechanisms through which an external trigger translates into votes on populist parties and candidates. In response to the seminal paper of Inglehart and Norris (2016), which heavily downplayed the role of economic factors, economists provided ample ground for elevating economic triggers to the forefront of analysis, as documented in two recent surveys by Rodrik (2021) and Guriev and Papaioannou (2022).

There is now compelling evidence that economic shocks – often working through culture and identity – can, in fact, explain the increasing vote share of populism. The quest has been, therefore, to identify all those economic shocks that can hit a particular segment of the society and can significantly alter economic opportunities, thereby exacerbating the antagonism between the ‘pure’ people and the corrupt elites. By deepening the divide between the winners and the losers of globalisation, economic shocks can create divisions among citizens by privileging one segment of the society, typically the highly educated urban citizens, over another segment, often the less-educated and rural working class. Economic shocks have generated widespread dislocation and have eroded voters’ trust in the traditional political system. As a result, the marginalised segment of the society opts for populist parties that represent a break from the mainstream agenda and (seemingly) offer solutions to voters’ economic malaise (Guiso et al., 2017).

The economic literature typically explains the increasing demand for populism through four main channels related to increased import competition, technological change, financial crisis and the inflow of immigration. First, some claim that populist parties seize on the rise in import competition that has hurt domestic workers in manufacturing industries. People in manufacturing industries suffered from high rates of job loss, decreases in labour market participation and an increase in unemployment, and, as a result, became responsive to populist appeals. Second, others argue that improvement in technology has produced a shift from manufacturing to service sector jobs and has deepened the gap between low- and high-skilled occupations. At the same time, automation replaced many low-skilled occupations that, in turn, increased unemployment and, in some cases, even led to the depopulation of rural areas. Others find that financial crises and mainstream parties' responses to these crises made the tensions between debtors and creditors salient, and, in turn, gave rise to populism. Finally, inflows of immigration are also often cited as one of the prominent factors driving up support for populism where the main argument is that immigrants either intensifies competition in certain labour market segments or that the costs of taking care of immigrants have further depleted already limited resources for public services. These economic shocks indeed proved fertile ground for populism.

Certainly, while emphasising economic anxiety and distributional struggles, economists do not deny the relevance of culture and identity as these forces together generate a solid base for populism. Voters' grievances and anxieties triggered by the economic changes are driven in part by cultural and social implications of those changes. Economic shocks have exacerbated the sense of a cultural threat and thus made a well-defined segment of the society increasingly receptive to populist charges.

The economist profession, however, seems to be less effective (or maybe just less interested) in understanding and coherently explaining the consequences of populism in the economy. Those few who were not reluctant to take on such a quest underlined the inevitable economic costs of populist incumbency. Economists have always been pessimistic about the ultimate effects of policies implemented by populists in power over the economy (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). The notion of populism as 'bad economics' can be traced back to at least the seminal papers of Sachs (1989) and Dornbusch and Edwards (1990), who found that even if populist leaders in power engineered their economies full of good

intentions, they ultimately failed and left behind a bankrupt and dysfunctional economy.

In consequence, economic analyses of the supply side seem to suffer from a certain bias by placing too much emphasis on unsustainable policies and/or trade protectionism – due to the lessons drawn from prime examples of populist policies, both old and new, found in Latin America on the one hand and in the Trump administration and Brexit on the other.

Governments worldwide started to provide shelter for their domestic employees in the form of increased tariffs and/or by urging domestic employers to abstain from outsourcing their activities to foreign locations eventually. Donald Trump was certainly not the only example of someone taking deliberate actions to protect the ‘pure’ people against the (alleged) abrupt consequences of free trade. Besides the relatively long list of Latin American protectionists, right-wing populists such as Thaksin Shinawatra (Thailand), Narendra Modi (India), Rodrigo Duterte (The Philippines) or Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey) can also serve as prime examples of trade protectionism champions. What is new, however, is that such protective measures have been provided not by the left-wing parties but by politicians belonging to the right. Generally speaking, losers of globalisation typically demand more social protection, which, in turn, is nurtured by more generous welfare state provisions.

More recently, however, it has been the right-wing populists who have managed to capitalise on anti-globalisation sentiments. These populist incumbents offered no income compensation but job security in the form of limited import competition. More so because the earlier experience of promised ex-post compensations of free trade agreements did not materialise in their home countries. In turn, populists not only endorsed outright protectionism but also embarked on vehement attacks on multilateralism, international financial organisations and even regional integration.

Yet, in some other cases, neither unsustainable macroeconomic policies nor trade protectionism characterised populists’ economic policies in power. The new member states of the EU such as Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria managed to govern their economies by internalising the strict macroeconomic rules of the EU, and they are all members of the tariff-free market of the union. Nevertheless, the division of their societies into two antagonistic groups, that is, the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ people, has been clearly mirrored in both their redistributive policies and the way their domestic economies have been restructured, including even property rights (Benczes, 2024).

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Does twenty-first-century *economic* populism exist?

Denis Ivanov

Introduction

While earlier approaches to populism in economics and political economy emphasised the role of the economic factors and the redistribution of wealth (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990), contemporary cross-disciplinary understandings focus more on the *us* versus *them* divide, while emphasising the *thinness* of the ideology (Mudde, 2017). However, when it comes to the classification of populist political parties via their manifestoes, ideological stances or discourse, these two conceptualisations often overlap both within and across party families (Stavrakakis et al., 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Rooduijn et al., 2019). Although referenced less often today, are earlier definitions still relevant to the discussion of contemporary forms of populism?

This chapter critically revisits the ideas of the past and discusses whether the term *economic* populism is useful in the analysis of modern populism. It looks back at the definitions of political and economic populism, analyses previous conceptualisations of macroeconomic mismanagement in Latin American and historical examples of economic manifestations of populism and reviews modern approaches to the role of the economy in the supply side of populism. While macroeconomic factors played a key role in twentieth-century Latin American populism, they are less central in contemporary left- and right-wing populism, although economic demand and supply factors do fuel support for populist parties to some degree. This chapter discusses the three waves of economic populism and introduces a new typology of parties by dividing them into three distinct groups by economic policy position, namely,

left-authoritarian (a combination of right-wing cultural and left-wing economic stances), ideologically ambiguous and the redistributive radical left. The chapter uses expert survey data from Chapel Hill and presents the above-mentioned groupings using descriptive statistics.

Political populism

How can we firmly tell whether a politician or party is populist or not? Most scholars studying modern populism classify parties and leaders, with certain variations, by focusing on political aspects: (i) populist in terms of stated ideology (Mudde, 2017), (ii) the level of *antielitism* and *anti-pluralism* (Müller, 2016), (iii) populist in terms of style (Moffit, 2016), (iv) discourse sceptical of the system of checks and balances (Taggart, 2000) or (v) the rhetorical style of communication (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). While mostly overlapping, the five main definitions are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Contemporary classifications of populist parties

Authors	Definitions
Mudde (2004, 2017); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017); Stanley (2008); rooted in Canovan (1999, 2004)	Parties that employ the minimal definition of populism as a <i>thin-centred</i> ideology; an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society.
Müller (2016)	Parties that contain a level of <i>antielitism</i> (a necessary but not sufficient condition) and <i>anti-pluralism</i> (providing moral justification for the antagonism), combined with identity politics.
Moffit (2016); Stavrakakis (2017)	Parties that use populism as discourse or style. Focused on appeals to (i) the people versus the elite; (ii) bad manners; and (iii) crisis, breakdown or threat.
Taggart (2000)	Parties that use populism as a discourse critical of democratic institutions, pitting the elite against the members of <i>the heartland</i> (a virtually homogeneous construct).
Norris and Inglehart (2019)	Parties that use populism as the antithesis to pluralism, as evidenced in the rhetorical style of communication.

In their minimal definition, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017; see also Mudde, 2004, 2017) and Stanley (2008) define populism as a thin-centred ideology. It is thin because ‘it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions’ (Stanley, 2008: 95). Unlike grand theories, it is unable to propose solutions to crucial political questions. Other ideologies with strong economic or social political solutions, such as Marxism or neo-liberalism, could, in theory, *thicken* populism into a full-fledged ideology (Kotwas and Kubik, 2019). Importantly for our purposes, it implies that economic populism is not necessarily associated with political populism. In fact, the economic dimension of populism only applies in a subset of politically populist scenarios, where economic issues are emphasised to intensify the populist appeal.

Adopting an ideational approach does not mean overlooking the importance of the role political *and* economic institutions play in both the demand and supply sides of populism. When economic and political institutions are weak and trust in institutions is low, it creates demand for institutional change, which can result in the appearance of charismatic populist leaders or populists in government. This demand would aim to elevate *the people* (a large voter base) over *the elite* (a narrow stratum of political elites) in the effort to fix deteriorating economic and political institutions (democracy) through the exercise of *general will*. Blaming Brussels for such frustrations or previous regimes of economic mismanagement is part of the story as well. This important element is related to the deliberate weakening of political institutions, for example, in the cases of judicial reforms in Poland and Hungary, the creation of new institutions or the institutionalisation of the political and economic systems under forms of *clientelism* or the return to *statism* in post-socialist CEE. The main advantage of this minimal definition of populism is its inclusivity: it is applicable to a large variety of *populisms* (differing in discourse and ideology and the extent of antielitism and antiliberalism) as well as suitable for cross-nation comparison and empirical work.

Another aspect of populism is the parties themselves and the far-right and extreme (radical) variations of them. Mudde (2004) highlights three core features of radical-right populist parties in Europe, namely, *nativism*, *authoritarianism* and populism itself. By separating two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the *pure people* versus the *corrupt elite*, radical-right populist parties argue that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people, which is a core concept for them. Party classification in Mudde’s account is based not only

on the ideology of the parties but of the leaders as well, the latter playing the role of the spokespeople in the public domain.

Müller (2016) generally agrees with Mudde's definition of a populist party overall but views the sub-classification of parties differently. He highlights that populist actors must contain some form of *antielitism* (a necessary but not sufficient condition) and *anti-pluralism* (providing moral justification for the antagonism), combined with a form of identity politics. Compared with the minimalist framework produced by Mudde that allows for the assignment of labels and classifications across countries, Müller emphasises that a particular threshold of *anti-pluralism* and *antielitism* needs to be reached if a political actor is to be classified as populist in regards to democratic institutions. However, the criterion of *anti-pluralism* has received criticism. Specifically, by suggesting a strict opposition between populism and democracy, Müller seems to juxtapose populism with liberalism, instead of focusing on the dangers that populism poses to democratic governance (Stavrakakis and Jäger, 2018).

Moderate populist parties, especially in CEE, are characterised by new ideologically *centrist* populism (Učeň, 2007). An example of a centrist populist could be one that does not necessarily engage in identity politics, such as the Labour Party in Lithuania.

However, since the onset of the economic and refugee crises, centrist populist parties seem to have disappeared. Instead, most of them now embrace left authoritarianism; that is, they combine leftist distributive stances on economic issues (primarily on job insecurity, family policies and so on) with conservative preferences on the cultural dimension (Ivanov, 2024). The most vivid examples include Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland, which successfully combine leftist economic and right-wing cultural positions, somewhat reminiscent of the 'reddish' and 'brownish' coalitions (communist successor parties and nationalists) in the early years of the transition (Ishiyama, 1998; Melito, 2021). The mostly cultural issues that well-established radical-right populist parties in Western Europe try to emphasise fit well in the Manichean duality and the anti-pluralism dimension emphasised by Müller (2016) as well as Mudde.

In addition, left-authoritarian parties in CEE perform a balancing act between the exclusionary and inclusionary variations of populism. This requires a new classification, especially on the economic dimension. This is particularly acute in the context of post-crisis Europe, where economic triggers have exacerbated the sense of insecurity and acute dissatisfaction. These factors have arguably propelled the electorate towards the anti-establishment rhetoric of some, and opposition to the economic

retrenchment of others (Ivanov, 2023). The success of left-authoritarian parties might also be explained by supply-side factors – the weakening of their competitors, the post-communist successor parties (reformed communists). These successor parties have been outflanked on certain policy issues by their right-wing competitors, especially on the economic dimension (Kim and Borbáth, 2022).

Populism as political style

Another important aspect that defines populists and populist parties is their leaders, whose political *style* contains three main features: (i) appeal to the people versus the elite; (ii) bad manners; and (iii) crisis, breakdown or threat (Moffit, 2016). For Moffit, both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects are important, and the form of the discourse, the so-called *performance*, and balancing between *extraordinariness* and *ordinariness* is the key. The role of political parties in the foreground is overshadowed by the charismatic leader and his political style. As Mátyás discusses in Chapter 7, mediatisation plays a crucial role, as it serves as an intermediary or as a catalyser in the representation of the people influencing the outcome of a dynamic process between leaders, constituencies, audiences and the media (De La Torre, 2010; Moffit, 2016: 111).

With regard to the performance, where the role of the leader is central, there is a clear distinction between the populist style and ideology. Hugo Chavez, for example, has a populist style of leadership but is ideologically socialist. So, to what extent can a leader be considered populist, just by their style? Moffit's definition of *style* relates to the way in which we order or bring together disparate objects or phenomena with similar characteristics to schematise them in a comprehensive fashion (2016: 33).

Another element of style that is emphasised in Moffit's work is policy implementation. As seen in numerous examples (Trump and the Paris Agreements, immigration policy in the US and Italy, judiciary reform in Poland), populists deliver on their promises.

However, standardising the various country-specific and time-specific styles in a cross-national analysis remains a challenge – particularly when the focus is on parties. Unlike certain leaders, parties are bound by political documents – manifestoes that appear to be much more homogeneous, unlike the individual styles of each member of parliament from a particular party.

Populists and institutions

Paul Taggart, in his seminal book *Populism*, defined populism as ‘an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis’ (2000: 5). *The heartland* is presented as the place where, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides (2000: 95). References to *the heartland* as a virtually homogeneous construct are key in forming a discourse around it, pitting *the people* (numerous and indigenous to *the heartland*) against the elites or minorities, who possess qualities *extraneous* to it. Taggart also points to the logistical fallacy of populist discourse in that the numbers – the majority or *silent* majority – matter more than the variety of opinions of the minority. In the understanding of populists, ‘the people are monolithic, seen as a single entity, devoid of fundamental divisions, unified and solidaristic’ (2000: 92). While there is some depth as to what is meant by *the people*, similarly to *the heartland*, there is too much variation and room for interpretation for such a thin concept to serve as a guiding principle of populism.

Taggart points to the deep ambivalence in the attitudes of populists towards institutions – those of the state, universities, bureaucracy and financial institutions, similar to McCarthyism in the US. Populists present the system of checks and balances as malignant in times of crises. Conspiracy theories, populist reactions to representative politics or parliamentary elections, and charismatic and authoritarian leadership are all examples of this (Taggart, 2000: 78–9). Unlike purely opportunistic or loud party leaders, such an attack on political (and potentially economic) institutions represents if not a real danger to democracy then some form of *hollowing* and *backsliding* in the democratic representation and performance of the countries where populists are in power (Greskovits, 2015).

Anything in between?

An alternative definition of populist parties is given by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019), who divide populist parties into *authoritarian-populist* versus *libertarian-populist*. Their definition of populism is focused on the form of discourse (rhetorical style of communication) on the first-order principles of governance, delegitimising established power structures and the role of elected representatives in liberal democracy, while claiming that *the people* should rule. Instead of the division into

right wing and left wing, far right/left and extremes, they claim that *all populists are illiberal*. In addition, they seem to be working to hide their authoritarianism under the veil of loud rhetoric, communicated through a particular style of political communication, reaching out to the masses who previously did not participate in electoral exercises or were uninterested in politics (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). They see populism as the antithesis to pluralism. As such, they define populist parties on the basis of their opposition to pluralism. Based on their operationalisation on the value dimension, their innovation is the analysis of the emergence of new cleavages: the left–right division on economic values, legitimate–illegitimate sources of governance and authoritarian–libertarian on cultural values (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

All five approaches to the classification of populist parties revolve around the mostly political aspects of populism, with variations across certain aspects that generally overlap when it comes to the actual classifications of the parties. The classifications of Roodujin et al. (2019) as well as Norris and Inglehart (2019) differ, but the consensus on the core of the populist parties generally remains the same. In order to include the variation and distinct features, it is necessary to go back into the older definitions of populism rooted in economic grievances.

Latin American macroeconomic populism

The first attempt at defining the economic aspect of populism as a separate phenomenon was made by Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) in their analysis of twentieth-century populism in Latin America. However, some authors refuse to apply the populist label to many of the new movements, especially those that implement neoliberal policies (Weyland, 2001). Other authors argue that the term populism has been overused when it comes to ‘Pink Tide neo-populism’, and even neoliberal governments enact some features of economic populism (Grigera, 2017). Although contested, Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) provide a systematic and cross-country approach in the path dependency perspective. They define macroeconomic populism as: ‘An approach to economics that emphasises growth and income distribution and deemphasises the risks of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints, and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive non-market policies’ (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991: 9). They point to the fact that in most cases, populism in Latin America manifested itself as irresponsible macroeconomic policy, which led to the overall collapse of the economic system. Heavy

restrictions on foreign exchange, extreme inflation as well as massive political instability, coups and violence resulting from growing inequalities were among the worst consequences of such short-sighted economic policies (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991). Moreover, while populist leaders might have had (dynamic) strategic considerations to use macroeconomic tools when in power, their emphasis on macroeconomic management as a tool of solving the consequences that created the societal inequalities was particularly weak.

In terms of policy-making mechanisms, they present the populism paradigm in Latin America as having three key features: (i) *initial conditions*, (ii) the absence of constraints (*no constraints*) and (iii) *policy prescriptions*. *Initial conditions* represent the circumstances that prompt support for the populists, the overall dissatisfaction with the slowing down of the region's economic performance. The stabilisation policies and the unpopular implementation of liberalisation programmes in the Latin American region as well as the consequent stagnation explain the dissatisfaction with the status quo of the general population of these countries. The second feature of economic populism is that there are virtually *no constraints* on the populists' economic policies. The policy-makers were prone to overuse the economic instruments at hand without the risk of running into external constraints under the logic that expansion is not inflationary. While rejecting mainstream conservative economic thinking by ignoring the constraints on macroeconomic policy, populist policy-makers ran into dire consequences that included hyperinflation and the rise of economic inequalities. The third feature is the *policy prescriptions* of the populist programmes, which emphasise the three elements closely associated with the left-wing policies: *reactivation*, *redistribution of income* and *restructuring of the economy*. However, in most cases, such strategies resulted in an active use of macroeconomic policy to redistribute income, which, in the long run, created massive structural problems, since overcompensation for economic losses of the most vulnerable ended up in the patrimonial networks of the ruling elites.

The return of economic populism

Contemporary studies (Guiso et al., 2017; Rodrik, 2018a; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020) point to the fact that the recent success of populism around the world is at least partially a supply-side phenomenon related to the economy. Guiso et al. (2017)

refer to supply as a mix of policies in political documents that populist parties offer to their potential voters. Guriev and Papaioannou (2020) and Norris and Inglehart (2019) conceptualise the supply of populism in terms of the political strategies of political parties. Funke et al. (2023) focus on the economic policies of populists in power, while Guiso et al. (2017) provide a second definition of populist supply in terms of economic policies that aim at short-term protection but disregard future consequences, referring both to right- and left-wing populism.

For Rodrik (2018a), short-sighted economic policies are not the basis for *economic* populism; instead, he focuses on (mostly) economic determinants of the rise of populism and the economic cleavages that are used by left-wing populists to gain further support. Although generally agreeing with Dornbusch and Edwards's account in the case of the Latin American experience, Rodrik (2018b) considers modern European populism to be different for two reasons. First, regional specificities as well as the ideological position of populists in power are a key difference in the economic variety of populisms around the world (see also Binev, 2022). Second, in Rodrik's view, Latin American populism of the 1980s was mainly left wing, mainly due to pre-existing economic cleavages. The presence of a narrow stratum of visible, wealthy groups with strong bargaining power within the economy created a minority that dictated the rules of the game, pitting themselves against the lower-income groups without access to power (Rodrik, 2018b).

Instead of inequality being the most salient feature, as was the case in Latin America, European populism, which is mostly right wing, is based on cultural, national, ethnic cleavages and the *us* against *them* (outsiders) divide (Zaslave, 2009). Although inequality is also a salient issue, it is of a different kind. It was namely welfare chauvinism and increased competition with immigrants for in-kind benefits and public housing that propelled populists forward on the economic dimension in Western Europe (Rodrik, 2018b). Interestingly, both kinds of cleavages can be identified in the US case, with the emergence of left-wing and right-wing populism in parallel, exemplified by Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Rodrik goes on to argue that:

Imports (especially from China) and trade agreements (with Mexico, Asian countries) were politically significant issues around which a large number of voters could be mobilised. The financial crisis and the different fates of large banks versus low-income homeowners engendered anger at the financial elites. At the same time, immigration from Mexico, the threat of radical Muslim

terrorism, and the lingering racial divides were ready for political manipulation. (2018b: 27)

He emphasises the two salient economic issues that have grabbed the attention of populists in power: trade agreements in the US and competition over welfare payments in Western Europe. In Rodrik's assessment, globalisation and its consequences, which are important in both cases, are the main determinant of the emergence of the *breeding ground* for populism. While in Europe benefits from globalisation have been more equally distributed by inclusive institutions through an expansion of the overall economic welfare for many citizens, in Latin America globalisation has generally produced distortions, regional inequalities, wide discrepancies in economic outcomes and a significant number of people who failed to benefit from global trade. However, while globalisation can certainly have a big upside in promoting the mobility of capital and those actors who are capital-abundant, the impact of automation and labour substitution might feel different for blue-collar workers, who are the most susceptible to such risks. This produces general concerns over job security across the region, which takes the form of the perception of unfairness of the system and unequal opportunities for fair and stable work conditions (Rawls, 1971; Dworkin, 1981; Roemer, 1998; Benczes et al., 2020).

If the definition of economic populism by Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) and Rodrik (2018a) is still valid, we would expect three aspects to hold. First, populist parties should emphasise redistribution over other issues in their policy positions. Second, the level of salience of economic issues in their ideological positions should be high. Third, we would expect such positions to be distinct from those of non-populist parties.

Waves of economic manifestations of populism

Although the definitions of political populism do not seem to include a direct reference to the economic side and given the earlier experiences with Latin American macroeconomic populism not being directly applicable to the current times, I propose to conceptualise the phenomenon through the prism of three distinct waves associated with the manifestations of the economic aspect of populism presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Three waves of economic populism

First wave: historical examples of economic populism	Second wave: Latin American incumbency	Third wave: the European experience		
		Left-authoritarian	Ideologically ambiguous	Redistributive radical left
New Deal – US; eight-hour workday – Britain, Soviet Union	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua of the 1970s and 1980s	Fidesz (Hungary), PiS (Law and Order) (Poland), Smer (Slovakia), Ataka (Bulgaria)	DP – Labour Party (Lithuania), M5S – Five Star Movement (Italy), Sinn Féin (Ireland and the UK), SP (Netherlands)	Syriza and MR25 (Greece); Symmaxia (Citizen Alliance) (Cyprus); [La France] Insoumise (France Unbowed); Die Linke (The Left) (Germany); Levica (The Left) (Slovenia); Podemos (Spain)

The first wave constitutes historical examples of policies that included elements of economic populism. As highlighted by Rodrik (2018a), one such example is the set of policies included in the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States between 1933 and 1939. The stabilisation policies for the banking sector during the Great Depression, minimum wages and maximum working hours, the introduction of the wealth tax for the rich as well as the Social Security Act and new programmes to aid tenant farmers and migrant workers between 1933 and 1939 all became part of the New Deal. Although the implementation of reforms had the political goal of enlarging the voter base, its aim was primarily redistribution in the aftermath of the crisis and the minimisation of the burden on the most economically insecure strata of the population.

Another example of economically populist policies is the regulation of the eight-hour workday in the early industrialisation period in Britain as well as on the fourth day after the October Revolution in the Soviet Union. These drastic reforms, which capped the working week at 40 hours and led to the prevention of excess and abuse as well as a ban on child labour, were considered populist at the time. Coming out of a social movement

(also known as the short-time movement), which sought to regulate the length of a working day, it aimed primarily at reducing inequality within and between groups in the general population. In Europe, the policy was taken on board by socio-democratic parties, which vouched for the rights of workers, while in the Soviet Union it fit perfectly within the Marxist struggle for the rights of the ‘true people’, the proletariat.

The aim of both policies seemed to be to fight inequality and can be interpreted as a policy with a rather short-term prospect at the time, fitting the definition of Dornbusch and Edwards (1991), which implied significant public spending in the case of the New Deal or a loss in tax revenues and flexible labour arrangements in the case of the eight-hour workday programme. However, as Rodrik (2018b) posited, these policies had, contrary to expectations, a consistent positive effect within a long-term time frame and cannot be deemed ‘bad’ economic decisions.

The second wave relates to the Latin American experience of the 1980s, and particularly the incumbent governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua during the 1970s and 1980s. The economic stabilisation policies implemented during this period, as documented by Dornbusch and Edwards (1991), could be characterised as macroeconomically populist due to the ‘bad’ economics that led to economic mismanagement. However, at its core, the intention to redistribute from the wealthy to the poor and to overcompensate for the perceived unsuccessful privatisation and liberalisation under the recipe of the Washington consensus represented the delivery of the promises to protect the common interest of ‘the people’ from ‘the corrupt elite’.

The third wave of economic populism comprises the European populists who appeared on the political horizon in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008. In the current populist wave, macroeconomic prudence seems to be followed much more closely than it was in the 1980s and 1990s because of the lessons learned from the past and the existence of stringent borrowing mechanisms. Seemingly irresponsible forms of economic policy whereby governments engage in massive public spending financed by foreign loans, periods of hyperinflation and harsh economic adjustments are less common. In some cases, an overall trend of better governance, the ability to sustain the current account deficit as well as the use of exchange rate flexibility can increase the capacity of a country to accommodate external shocks (Edwards, 2004; Özmen, 2005). In others, both the net-borrower and net-creditor governments, the increasing intergovernmentalism of crediting bodies and stringent balanced budget rules dampen the political business cycle – the

fluctuation of economic activity that is due to the intervention of political actors (Rose, 2006). This, in combination with the effect of globalisation, makes it harder for hyperinflation and macroeconomic mismanagement to pass unnoticed by other players in the world economy and is thus less plausible.

I propose to divide the third wave into three separate categories of populist parties on the basis of their economic stances: (i) left-authoritarian, (ii) ideologically ambiguous and (iii) redistributive radical left. The category of right-wing populist parties is intentionally omitted; in terms of their economic stances, some are subsumed under left-authoritarian groups. It is noteworthy that there are very few strictly right-wing economic policies among populist parties, with the exception of the Libertarian Party of Javier Milei in Argentina. The current political horizon is dominated by many successful populist parties in CEE that can be characterised by so-called left authoritarianism, that is, a combination of highly distributive stances on economic issues with conservative preferences on the cultural dimension. The politically conservative component is important for the left authoritarians for two reasons. First, using the thin ideology of populism, it delineates which groups belong to 'true people', using appeals to nativism, xenophobia and nationalism. Second, embracing populist discourse prepares the ground for redistribution and compensation of 'the true people' through family policies, public work programmes, price caps and so on. The most vivid examples include Fidesz in Hungary, PiS in Poland, Ataka in Bulgaria and Smer in Slovakia, all of which successfully combine such positions in a way that is reminiscent of the 'reddish' and 'brownish' coalitions (communist successor parties and nationalists) in the early years of transition (Ishiyama, 1998). For the most part, CEE populist parties acquired the left-authoritarian profile if they had the combination of left-wing economic policies and authoritarian/nativist stances, further exacerbated by the global economic and refugee crises. These parties fit the ideological definition of populism in its definition as a thin ideology and have been the most successful with multiple stints in power. In addition, this group's political manifestoes included at least some redistributive economic policies or else they managed to implement short-sighted economic policies when in government: overdrawing the budget, inflated government spending without the regard to its sustainability and so on (for an example from the Baltic States, see Kutasi and Ivanov, 2023).

The second category includes the ideologically ambiguous populist DP (Labour Party, Lithuania), M5S (Five Star Movement, Italy), Sinn

Féin (Ireland and the UK) and SP (Socialist Party, Netherlands). All four parties started out as left wing but have used nativism as an electoral tool or have shifted their positions between elections to make them closer to the centre or less ideologically well defined. Some, like the Lithuanian Labour Party or the Italian Five Star Movement, do not have a clearly defined ideological stance but have served in coalition governments. Others, like Sinn Féin or the Dutch SP, are left wing, deeply rooted in republicanism and subject to historical specificities of the respective party systems in these countries and thus have moderated their positions over time, while in opposition.

The final sub-category of the third wave is the redistributive radical left, which emerged out of the anti-austerity movements, which are reminiscent of the Latin American experience in the second wave of economic populism and the turn to progressive economic and social policies of the 'pink tide' – the rejection of neoliberal policies and a turn towards socially progressive policies in the region. Some, such as the Greek Syriza and the Cypriot Symmaxia, are the most vivid examples of parties that came to the forefront on the wave of opposition to the austerity and the politics of retrenchment as mitigating the measures of the global economic crisis. Others appeared on the political horizon in the aftermath of the economic crisis, organising protests against inequality and corruption and in favour of direct democracy, inspired by the move of the experience with economic populism. The latter includes other parties on the far left: the Spanish Podemos, the German Die Linke, the Slovenian Levica, the French La France Insoumise and the Greek MR25, all of which are placed to the left of social democracy (March, 2012).

Policy stances and issue salience

As [Figure 4.1](#) shows, the parties appear to be grouped according to their distinct positions on the cultural (policy stances on immigration) and economic (left–right) dimensions.

Compared with the other parties with electoral representation in the EU (normally distributed, in the background), all three groups of economically populist parties are situated on the economic left of the political spectrum (as compared to the average policy positions from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), 2006–19). The left-authoritarian group includes populist parties such as the Bulgarian Ataka, the Hungarian Fidesz, the Polish PiS and the Slovak Smer, which adopt a strict stance on anti-immigration. They openly embrace anti-Brussels

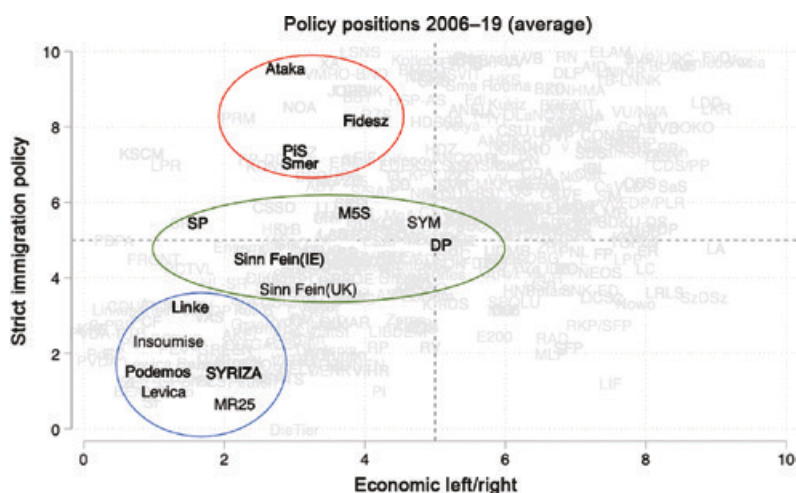


Figure 4.1 Policy positions on immigration and the economy

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rhetoric in the case of refugee relocation schemes and engage with hate speech in their discourse. All parties in the group have had experience in government and have propagated policies that could be characterised as economically populist: nativist family policies (Fidesz, PiS, Smer), public work scheme (Fidesz), unconventional use of monetary policy (Fidesz), extra tax on foreign companies (Fidesz) and the politicisation of economic institutions (the central bank in the Hungarian case in particular).

The second group includes the Italian Five Star Movement, the Dutch SP, Sinn Féin (IE and the UK), the short-lived Cypriot Symmaxia and the Lithuanian Labour Party (marked DP on the graph), which are closer to the centre in the value dimension. This group includes primarily left-leaning populist parties, which, although they initially had a highly distributive stance when it came to overpromising on increases to the minimum wage, social payments and pensions, softened their economic position (DP, Symmaxia) due to their experience in government, competition in the party system or historical legacies (Sinn Féin and Symmaxia). The cultural dimension seems also to be quite vague (SP and Sinn Féin). Some changed their stance on migration due to their experience of being in a coalition government (M5S) or took up a very conservative stance on immigration in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. In some cases, such as with the Labour Party (DP) in Lithuania, this anti-migrant stance did not pay off electorally and, eventually, had to be scaled back to a position that was in line with their competitors in the party system.

The third group includes far-left parties with a highly leftist economic stance with a strong, consistent focus on the issues of redistribution combined with a relaxed stance on immigration. Parties such as these belong to the political systems of established democracies and are primarily outside the post-socialist context (except for ex-Yugoslav Slovenia). This group includes Spain's Podemos, Greece's Syriza and MR25, Germany's Linke, France's Insoumise and Slovenia's Levica. Except for Syriza and Podemos, no parties have government experience in the period of the analysis and thus did not have the opportunity to implement their economically leftist policies in practice.

Figure 4.2 shows the salience (importance) of the two policy stances, displaying to what extent the two issues represent how important cultural (policy stances on immigration) and economic (left-right) issues are in their political programmes.

When analysing the importance of immigration and the economic dimension in the stances of economically populist parties, with some degree of data limitations, left authoritarians are in the top, upper-right quadrant on both dimensions. The ideologically ambiguous parties place these issues at the bottom of the scale of importance (Five Star Movement, Sinn Féin, SP), while the redistributive radical left is in between the two.

There are two main reasons for this effect. As stated by Haughton and Deegan-Krause (2015), in the previous two decades, party competition throughout CEE revolved around two main themes: the role of

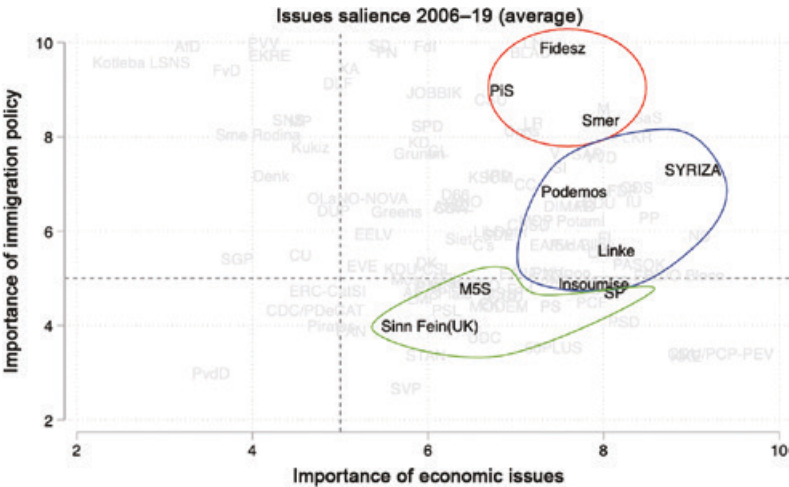


Figure 4.2 Policy salience on immigration and the economy

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the market and issues related to national identity. Parties from the post-socialist region seem to emphasise immigration and the economic issues to a similar extent to their far-left counterparts from West European countries. The second reason is the competition in the party system and party strategies of retaking issue ownership from other niche party competitors during the time of the crises. As seen from the distribution of the parties with electoral representation (background, in grey), many smaller niche parties try to outdo the more established mainstream ones, which explains why the emphasis on immigration and economic issues during the time of the crises is used as a party strategy to prevent vote losses. Spoon and Klüver (2020) also conclude that, although many established parties have adopted an ‘accommodative strategy’ by taking a more immigration-sceptical policy, acting tough on immigration does not help mainstream parties prevent vote losses to their far-right competitors.

Figure 4.3 shows the policy positions on the Green-Alternative-Libertarian and Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist dimension (GALTAN), as well as the stances on redistribution.

The groupings persist with similar trends in the GALTAN (Green-Alternative-Libertarian versus Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist, coined by Hooghe et al., 2002) dimension as well as the positions favouring redistribution. Figure 4.3 presents the position of parties in 2019 in terms of their views on social and cultural values (GALTAN) and an average of policy positions on economic redistribution (the average

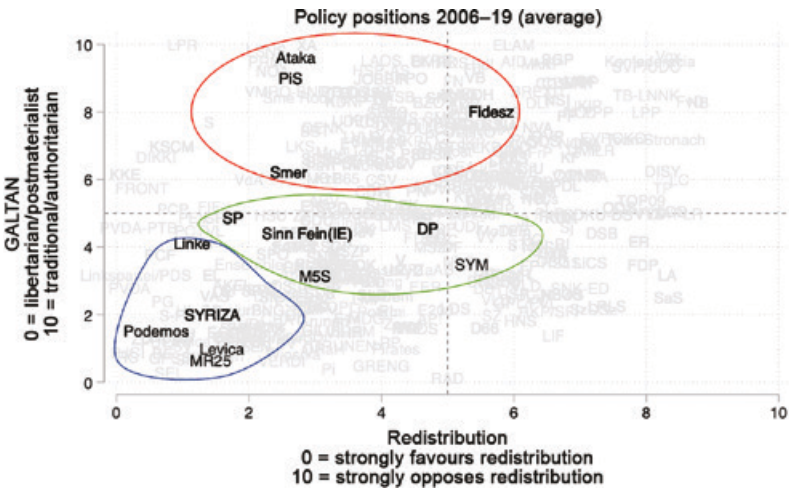


Figure 4.3 Policy stances on GALTAN dimension and redistribution

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of values of policy positions from the CHES, 2006–19). While the distribution of all the parties with electoral representation seems to be skewed towards the centre in terms of redistribution and towards more libertarian/post-materialist values on the value dimension, the three groups seem to occupy separate spaces. Generally, they score high on redistribution without considering whether they believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues or not. In addition, there seems to be a consistent division between parties in Western Europe and those in the post-socialist space, with the left authoritarians of the region more prone to opposing expanded personal freedoms: abortion rights, divorce and same-sex marriage. ‘Traditional’ or ‘authoritarian’ parties such as Smer, PiS and Ataka are also in favour of the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, except for Fidesz, which is an exception and is closer to the centre in this regard. The ideologically ambiguous Labour Party (DP), Symmaxia (SYM), Sinn Féin and the Five Stars Movement are closer to the centre on those issues than the rest of the grouping. The redistributive radical left strongly favours redistribution and holds libertarian positions on the GALTAN dimension.

Figure 4.4 shows the salience (importance) of the two policy stances, showing to what extent cultural (GALTAN) and economic (re-distribution) issues are important in their political programmes.

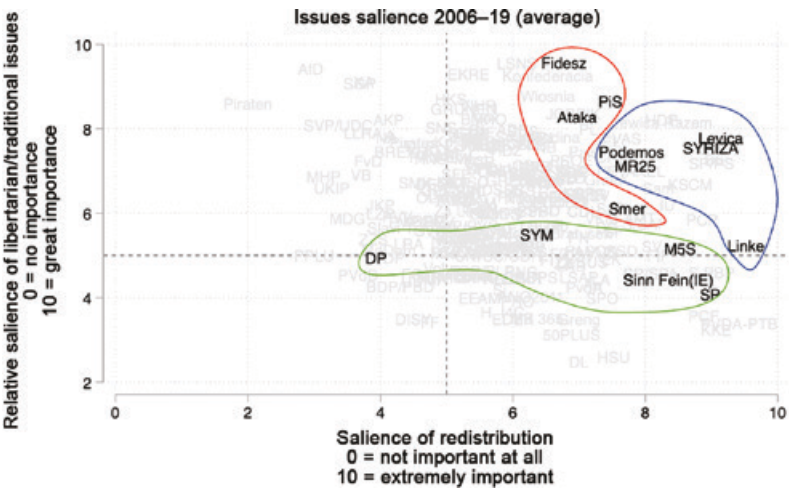


Figure 4.4 Issue salience of libertarian/traditional and redistribution dimensions

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Similar trends can also be seen in the salience of the value and redistribution dimensions for the three groupings of parties. As seen from the overall distribution of all parties with parliamentary presence in the background, both issues seem to be of more than average importance for the parties in the EU. [Figure 4.4](#) shows that the cultural dimension is important to all parties, except for the ideologically ambiguous, which are located around the midpoint (5 out of 10). Moreover, for all except for the Lithuanian Labour Party, the importance of economic redistribution is much higher for this group of parties as compared to those situated closer to the centre. This points to the ideological ambiguity of the Labour Party as well as the disappointment of the electorate as a result of the party not delivering on promises when in government and the resulting change of strategy. During the early stages, the Labour Party structured its political discourse and all of its electoral manifestoes around the issues of social security: raising pensions, introducing minimum wages and boosting unemployment benefits. The emphasis on economic issues as well as the charismatic Russian-born leader of the party hinted at a symbolic flirting with the times of full employment in the Soviet past. The emphasis on social security, calling for higher public investment, securing social rights and job creation as well as the willingness to participate in various types of coalitions after the elections, signalled centre-left allegiances ([Jurkynas, 2004](#)). However, the fact that redistribution became a less salient issue following the successful comeback from the economic crisis left the party with a loss of identity, prompting it to soften its leftist economic stance. Nor should we overlook the potential effect of the traditional party systems in the Baltic States, which are ideologically tilted against redistribution and consistent with neoliberal economic thinking. The rest of the groupings remain in line with the proposed classification, with the division between a strong emphasis on the value dimension in post-socialist countries and the even greater importance of economic matters for the radical left.

Conclusions

The theoretical framework of Dornbusch and Edwards ([1990](#)) clearly fits the region-specific context of the second and third waves of populism in Latin America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as it relies heavily on left-wing populism, where the issues of inequality and redistribution are the most acute and are at the root of the populist discourse. The real question is to what extent their understanding of economic

populism translates to modern-day Europe, which is dominated by right-wing cultural positions.

Instead of trying to apply economic populism to modern-day Europe, the current economic manifestations are seen through the prism of political populism qua ideology (Mudde, 2004) and discourse (Moffit, 2016) and a division of *us* versus *them* in the economic sense – of the winners and losers of globalisation (Müller, 2016).

The emergence of three separate groups of parties – left-authoritarian (Fidesz, PiS, Smer and Ataka), ideologically ambiguous (Labour Party, Five Star Movement, Sinn Féin and the Dutch SP) as well as redistributive radical left (Syriza and MeRa25, Symmaxia, La France Insoumise, Die Linke, Levica, Podemos) – reflects the degrees to which parties compensate for economically insecure groups through left-wing economic policy positions on economic redistribution.

Unlike the Latin American experience of the last century, the economic dimension of populism in parties in countries in Eastern Europe is focused predominantly on redistribution policies, carefully packaged with other issues in their policy positions. Left-authoritarian parties do so while suggesting a ‘traditional’ or ‘authoritarian’ conservative position on abortion rights, divorce and same-sex marriage in combination with highly redistributive policies, thus *thickening* their *thin* populist ideology (Kubik, 2020). The ideologically ambiguous populist parties change their positions between the elections or try to move closer to the centre on issues of immigration and redistribution, while the redistributive radical left is on the extreme end of the values for redistribution (March, 2012).

For the most part, in contrast to the definition of Dornbusch and Edwards (1990), the economic positions of left-authoritarian and ideologically ambiguous (except for the radical left) populist parties in CEE are left-leaning, but not extreme, and thus not distinct from those of the non-populist parties. This could be partially explained by the different ways the consequences of economic shocks were experienced in Latin America and CEE, given that, in the aftermath of the crisis in the European context, inflation is now under control, foreign debt is sustainable and budget deficits are manageable, which go against the definition of ‘economic mismanagement’ of Guiso et al. (2017). Instead, inequality between countries is trending downwards around the world, accompanied by rising economic inequalities and the emergence of new cleavages within countries, which is an issue of concern for the redistributive radical left (Milanovic, 2016). It is not only the majority of West European states but also CEE states that are struggling with regional disparities, adverse effects of outmigration and job insecurities (Béland,

2020). These issues become more salient and might lead to more friction as well as demand for anti-establishment and unconventional solutions as mitigation for such dire socio-economic conditions.

The level of macroeconomic mismanagement or the introduction of short-sighted policies are time- and case-specific. Variations in the post-economic crisis responses in Greece and Spain and the build-up of the verticality of economic power combined with the return of conservative family policies in Poland and Hungary are all good candidates for case studies of short-sighted economic policies that need to be further explored in our quest to understand populism. It should, however, not be labelled *economic populism*.

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Trapped in the past? Examining the difference in individual preferences for governments' policies to address income inequality between Central and Eastern Europe and the West

Paulina Lenik

Introduction

While there exists evidence for a cross-national variation in preference for income redistribution, with individual economic self-interest being a key explanatory factor (Dion and Birchfield, 2010), the debate is still inconclusive, and few studies look at the idiosyncratic context that may shape these preferences. To examine this puzzle, this chapter provides a conceptual framework using CEE and the West as two case studies. The mature democracies of the EU are referred to as the West, while CEE constitutes the group of post-communist member states of the EU. The source of the data is an individual-level, European Social Survey, cumulative file from 2002 to 2018 (ESS Round 1–9, 2002–18).

The conceptual framework used to interpret the findings is based on two central concepts: feudalism and communism, albeit acknowledging that these are not the only models that can be used to explain the identified differences. Post-feudal traits include most prominently personalistic loyalties (Benczes et al., 2020), while communist legacies tend to influence public expectations for welfare policy (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). Through an analysis of central tendency, this study identifies a

statistically significant difference between the West and CEE regarding government policies on income inequality.

Where does the variation in preferences for income redistribution come from?

At the individual level, we may have the following expectations about attitudes to income redistribution. Firstly, we may expect that individuals formulate their preferences for redistribution in a rational, utility-maximising way (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Secondly, we also theorise that some people would express *altruistic concerns* for others, going against their own interests in support of *fairer* income redistribution (Ghiglino et al., 2021). Thirdly, we may reflect on certain behavioural traits. Studies identify a robust link between risk aversion and the positive demand for redistribution, particularly among women and the elderly (Gärtner et al., 2017).

At the regional level, it is often assumed that societies with greater income discrepancies have a higher degree of expectation of income redistribution (Engelhardt and Wagener, 2014). Some studies identify income levels to be inversely related to preference for redistributive welfare policy (Iversen, 2005; Meier, 2005; Finseraas, 2006). However, we still lack a theory as to why income distribution is a better predictor of public attitudes in certain regions than others, with the majority of studies identifying considerable cross-national differences in preferences for government policy on income inequality (Kenworthy and Pontusson, 2005). Only a limited number of studies focus on the historical context and its influence on preferences regarding redistribution (Alesina and Giuliano, 2009; Chen et al., 2016). Yet, we cannot refute the fact that historical experiences contribute to cross-national variation in perceptions of inequality, as noted by Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2008): '[A] History of misfortune may make people more risk-averse, less optimistic about their future ... and more inclined to equalise everybody's income' (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011: 2). Therefore, it is difficult to argue that attitudes towards redistribution or its associations with income inequality are solely driven by income level or, conversely, that income inequality or public attitudes towards a government policy on income are strongly or solely influenced by the memory of some past experiences. Nevertheless, a combination of these aspects may give us the best understanding of the source of regional differences.

With that in mind, focusing on the regional perspective is a conscious research decision. Despite the expectation of variability in attitudes

at the individual level, on average all these countries face a series of similar policy dilemmas and a limited number of policy tools (Dion and Bichfield, 2010: 316). CEE is also a region that shares a common past, with the communist and the transition experience having left a predominant imprint (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014). It allows us to offer a different perspective on the issue by engaging with historical aspects that are usually peripheral to the debate (Dion and Bichfield, 2010).

Conceptual framework

Before introducing the definitions of the concepts relevant to this study, I must limit the field of inquiry. Firstly, inspired by the *systems thinking* approach (Arnold and Wade, 2015), in my study of current public attitudes to income inequality, I will consider their interconnection with the historical legacies of feudalism and the experience of communism. Secondly, I must also stress that there will undoubtedly exist unobserved distortions which influence perceptions of inequality. Therefore, the chapter does not engage in a causal analysis or direct comparison of the CEE countries with the West. Such a comparative analysis of regional determinants explaining differences in income preferences has already been done by a number of empirical studies (Mason et al., 2000; Heyns, 2005; Leitner and Holzner, 2008; Douarin and Mickiewicz, 2017; Andrei and Georgescu, 2018; Brzezinski, 2018; Alfani, 2021; Cole and Svidroňová, 2021).

Lastly, given the nature of this research, I will not be directly measuring economic inequality, the intensity of post-feudal and post-communist legacies or their linkages with current attitudes. The core objective here is to deliberate why the identified difference exists and to explain it in the light of historical experiences. I will now present the definitions of the concepts relevant to the later discussion.

(Neo- or post-)feudalism

In this project I focus on the legacies of feudalism, or post-feudalism, not neo-feudalism as it is defined in Fatigue's sister project, POPREBEL (Benczes et al., 2020). The word feudal comes from the Latin *feudum*, meaning a '*fief*'. In turn, a '*fief* was a piece of property (land) which was held in return for service [feodalita]' (Brown, 2022). Most basically, feudalism was based on unpaid or forced serf labour on the lord's demesne and was almost universally present across Europe (Okey, 1991). Typically,

the peasantry had little to no judiciary representation and an inexistent legal personality (Anderson, 1978; Astarita, 2005). In the sixteenth century, the peasantry in the West started to benefit from cash rents, which gave them a greater degree of independence (Okey, 1991). In the East, however, grain exports and raw materials were the predominant source of income, which gave little rationale for freeing up the peasantry. Also, as argued by Okey (1991: 18), ‘The East European nobility decisively asserted its dominance over the towns and pressed ahead to consolidate the weakened demesne economy so as to maximise the profits from grain exports.’ While the West’s merchant bourgeoisie began to flourish, the East’s socio-economic divisions and isolation became yet more evident, with the peasantry remaining relatively poor, leaderless, often excluded from trading and burdened by both feudal and religious duties and loyalties. Such a system generates a sense of suspicion towards powerful, privileged and often close-knit groups taking advantage of the wider population (Benczes et al., 2020). Such suspicion frequently exacerbates the sense of social injustice, economic deprivation and income inequality (Wollenberg, 2018) and thus can generate a strong desire to ‘equalise’ the society, for example via redistribution.

Communism

Communism as a socio-economic system was meant to create a classless society, with no private property, currency or overarching authority (Kořakowski, 1978b: 4–6). Marx and Engels presented communism as a paradise-like end point of human history (Kořakowski, 1978a, 140–1), but this goal was never realised. Although CEE during the communist period (1945–89), at least on paper, was one of the most economically equal regions of the world (Szelenyi and Wilk, 2013: 229), in reality the distribution of income and social privileges was determined by party linkages (Szelenyi, 1978; Matejova, 2011; Ekiert et al., 2017). There was also a relatively high level of hidden unemployment as the centrally planned economy was inefficient in labour allocation (Sojka, 2003). Those who lived through communism experienced a regime which was meant to provide a safety net without targeting any specific social ills (Douarin and Mickiewicz, 2017: 255); thus we may expect the elevated demand for redistributive policies in CEE to be an expression of communist nostalgia, and not just a result of differences in absolute income levels (Todorova and Gille, 2010).

Post-communist nostalgia is a symbolic, socio-cultural phenomenon that links present expectations with the memories of the past (Matejova,

2011). While post-communism became a signifier of overwhelming uncertainty, the memory of communism became a utopian image of a certain, assuring past (Bunce and Csanadi, 1993). Post-communist nostalgia took hold when the impossibly high hopes for free-market economies did not materialise (Jay, 2003). As documented in interviews by Mandel (2002: 124), 'Reacting against the increased class divisions and insecurities of neo-capitalism, many workers long for a return to the security and predictability of socialism.' This sense of uncertainty may feasibly inflate individual expectations for income redistribution. In general, the experience of communism provides a feasible explanation for welfare expectations in CEE, as shown by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017).

Feudalism or communism?

We can therefore identify some commonalities between the post-feudal and communist traits. While in the feudal system the landowners (lords) were sitting at the top of the power structure, under communism the socio-economic system was fully controlled by the state (Matejova, 2011). Individuals were *holders* of the land, not *owners* of the land. For example, in the Soviet Union, 'Private property was placed at the service of the state and was no longer a dangerous rival. That represented a possibly decisive contribution to ... the main problem of the relationship between the state and the society' (Vasil'ev, 1994: 48). In both cases, power was derived from the control of property. This generated suspicion towards privileged – potentially secretive – groups having access to benefits otherwise unattainable by the wider population (Kim, 2021).

Income inequality

Despite the fact that this study does not associate the individual preference of income redistribution solely with income inequality, it is important to show the regional inequality gap. Moreover, as I refer to income inequality in other sections of this chapter, it is important to have a clear understanding of the concept and to see why it is only partially relevant to the considerations of this study. I discuss this aspect in more detail below.

The early understanding of income inequality was based on finding out what individuals earn, with an assumption that respondents strictly refer to the *objective* discrepancies in their income levels (Gimpelson

and Treisman, 2018). However, scholars started to realise that *subjective* perceptions of inequality had a considerable influence on policy decisions (Sewell, 1971; Checchi and Peragine, 2010; Marrero and Rodríguez, 2013). At the centre of the debate has always been the need to model the linkage between economic inequality, welfare policy and the democratisation process (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). The most recent empirical studies focus on a recalibration of the aggregated measurement of inequality by accounting for individual bias in estimating income levels (Gimpelson and Treisman, 2018), adjusting the income decomposition (Ranaldi, 2022) and controlling for relational perspectives (Schmalor and Heine, 2022).

The most frequently used measure of inequality is the Gini coefficient. The index represents the deviation of individual and household income from a perfectly equal distribution scored from 0 to 100 for perfect inequality (World Bank, 2022). Figure 5.1 shows the average scores per region over the period 2012–19.¹ CEE has a decreasing trend, closing the regional gap around 2017, with a more equal distribution than the West from that point onwards.

A slightly different measure of income distribution is the income quintile share ratio (QSR), also referred to as the S80/S20 ratio. It is a primary measure of income inequality in the EU and presents a ratio of the total receivable income of the top 20 per cent of earners in the population

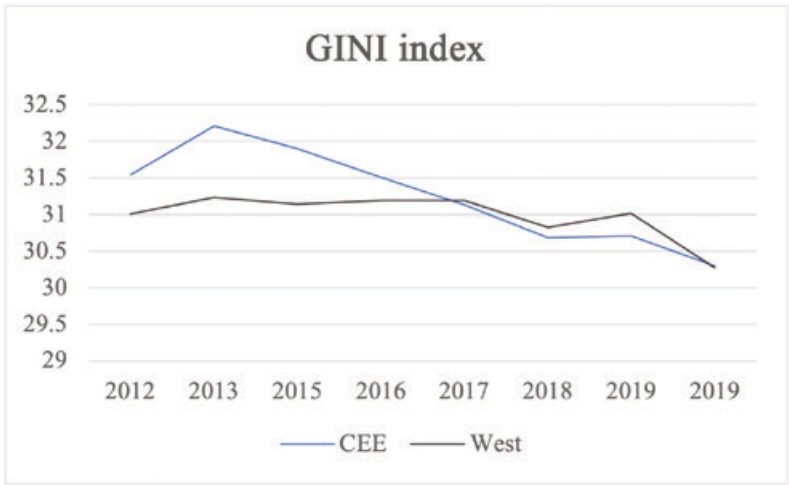


Figure 5.1 Gini coefficient per year – author’s own calculated aggregate averages per region. Source: World Bank, 2022

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to the total receivable income of the 20 per cent of the population with the lowest income (European Commission, 2019).² In contrast to the Gini coefficient, the QSR looks at the extreme ends of the distribution and is insensitive to the middle values. The lower the ratio, the more equal the distribution of income is within a given population. The 2012–19 European aggregate average was 4.9, with the smallest ratio being scored by Nordic countries – Iceland (3.34), Norway (3.55) and Finland (3.62). The highest was in Italy (6.35), Greece (6.04) and Spain (5.88).³ The aggregated regional average income quintile ratio is depicted in Figure 5.2 below.

The Gini index implied that the income gap between the regions was closing. However, the QSR ratio depicts a visible discrepancy in the way income is distributed across the regions. On average, the highest earners in CEE had five times more income⁴ than the bottom of the income distribution. In the West, that ratio was slightly smaller, with 4.5 times more income at the top compared to the bottom. The S20/S80 ratio also informs our anticipation of the nature of subjective income inequality. An individual’s perception of their own wealth is shaped by their observation of their peers. If we follow Hirschman’s argument, that is, the *tunnel effect*, individuals derive positive utility from observing their peers’ economic progression and anticipate their own welfare following a similar trend (Hirschman and Rothschild, 1973; Caplin and Leahy, 2001). However, we may argue that individuals perceive income inequalities in a rather arbitrary way. This body of literature would discuss the negative impact of ‘comparison effects’ – a sense of economic injustice and limited access to socio-economic opportunities, which hamper an individual’s ability to improve their welfare (Manski, 2000; Senik, 2008).

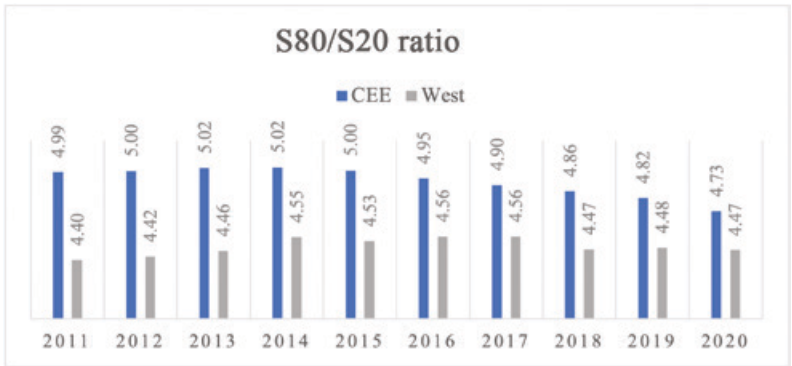


Figure 5.2 Income quintile share ratio S80/S20 – authors’ own calculated aggregated average by region. Source: European Commission, 2019

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We may therefore assume that a positive expectation for redistributive policies is more likely to be found among those who see themselves as victims of injustice (Grosfeld and Senik, 2010).

The juxtaposition of these two measurements of income inequality shows that we cannot uniformly agree on the existence of a regional gap in income inequality. Thus, it is also difficult to assume that income inequality is directly relevant to the considerations raised in the later parts of this study, where individual preference for income redistribution is concerned. Moreover, the aim of this chapter is to redirect our attention towards the historical context of the CEE region rather than the socio-economic determinants that are habitually associated with individual preferences for welfare. Therefore, the study will prioritise the focus on these traits as its chosen explanatory frame.

To summarise, first, in feudalism, we had a political and economic separation between the landowners and the peasantry. It was evidenced not merely in accumulated wealth but also in disproportionate judicial representation, which equated power with the right to property, effectively distancing the peasantry from the landowners. We may also argue that a sense of social injustice was universally present during the feudal period, which, to a varying degree, was spread across the European continent. The concept of neo-feudalism is based on an assumption that such disproportionate distribution of wealth and political power centres still exists (Benczes et al., 2020: 9). The CEE countries additionally experienced the period of communism, where the ideas of a *classless* society, equality and an all-encompassing role of the state were strongly promoted. After the transition, the disillusionment with the free-market conditions and a new degree of uncertainty resulted in a sense of post-communist nostalgia, at least among some people. Studies show that this nostalgia is related to a perception of inequality and a preference for income redistribution.

Data

Given the nature of the research, the selected data source is an individual-level, pooled cross-section – the ESS – which allows us to aggregate data from the 2002–18 waves of the survey (ESS, 2018). As the study is specifically concerned with the difference between CEE and the West in respondents' mean attitudes to government policies addressing income inequality, the dependent variable is the survey item as described in Table 5.1.

It may also be interesting to verify if there is any dynamic trend in individual preferences for the government to tackle income inequality. For that, I compiled an aggregate mean score per region per year, illustrated in Figure 5.3. The calculation also includes two country cases to contrast with the regional trends. The West averages are slightly lower than for CEE over the entire data collection period, while Hungary has the highest average – considerably above the CEE’s aggregate mean.

Table 5.1 Dependent variable: descriptive statistics

The government should reduce differences in income levels	West		CEE		Total
Response	N	%	N	%	N
1 Disagree strongly	6,283	2.47	2,567	2.40	8,850
2 Disagree	29,703	11.66	8,308	7.76	38,011
3 Neither agree nor disagree	36,932	14.50	13,595	12.69	50,527
4 Agree	113,415	44.51	44,008	41.08	157,423
5 Agree strongly	68,454	26.87	38,646	36.08	107,100
Total	254,787	100	107,124	100	361,911

Source: ESS, 2002–18

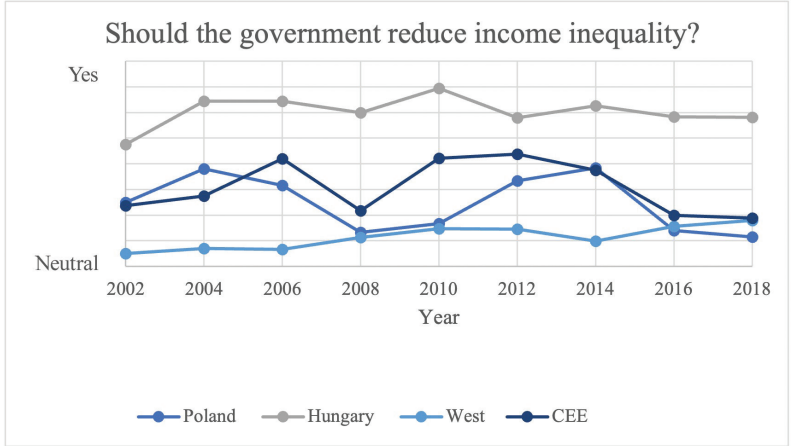


Figure 5.3 Aggregate mean per region per survey year – preferences for the government to tackle income inequality. Source: ESS, 2002–18

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Analysis

The analysis is enriched by the following two complementary examinations. Firstly, I calculate d-family estimators and, secondly, the independent two-sample mean comparison test (t-test). The d-family and the t-test are measures of the difference between two means in two independent groups (Goulet-Pelletier and Cousineau, 2018). These allow us to cross-validate the existence of a regional difference in means of the dependent variable. Given a very detailed description of the analysis, the study is easily replicable, and the validation of my findings should be straightforward.

The d-family

D-type effect size estimates are measures of the difference between means in two independent groups. These aim to capture the effect size and are thus frequently referred to as effect size measures. The effect size entails ‘the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population’, or ‘the degree to which the null hypothesis is false’ (Cohen, 1988: 9). The standardised population effect size, also referred to as the population parameter (δ), is given by (Cohen, 1988: 20) as

$$\delta = \frac{\mu_1 - \mu_2}{\sigma} \quad (1)$$

where μ_1 and μ_2 are population means and σ is the population standard deviation. Hence, the result is principally drawn by how σ is calculated. For that, we may have the following alternatives. Firstly, *Cohen’s d*, which is estimated using the difference in the sample means ($\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$) in the population, standardised by the weighted average of the standard deviation (s^*). That is given by Cohen (1988: 66) as

$$d = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{s^*} \quad (2)$$

An alternative is *Glass’s difference* (Δ), first proposed in observational studies, based on the difference between the control group and the treatment group. In principle, *Glass’s* Δ is the difference between population means divided by the standard deviation of the control group, as proposed by Smith and Glass (1977). The effect is estimated as follows (3):

$$\Delta = \frac{\bar{X}_{treated} - \bar{X}_{control}}{s_{control}} \quad (3)$$

where $\bar{X}_{treated}$ and $\bar{X}_{control}$ are the respective means divided by the sample estimate of the population ($s_{control}$).

Lastly, *Hedges's g* (Hedges, 1981). Hedges showed that both *Glass's Δ* and *Cohen's d* have a positive estimation bias, particularly when the sample size is small. He proposed the following adjustment:⁵

$$g = \text{Cohen's } d * c(m) \quad (4)$$

where $m = n_1 + n_2 - 2$ (equals the sum of the two respective sample sizes subtracting two degrees of freedom of each unmatched group) and $c(m)$ is approximated by

$$c(m) \approx 1 - \frac{3}{4m - 1} \quad (5)$$

If the research requires, two estimates of *Glass's Δ* are reported: *Glass's Δ₁* uses the s_1 of the control group, while *Glass's Δ₂* would estimate using the treated group s_2 . In contrast to the t-test assuming the normality of distribution, *Cohen's d*, *Hedges's g* and *Glass's Δ* have a non-central *t* distribution,⁶ and while *Cohen's d* and *Glass's Δ* are referred to as biased effect size estimators, *Hedges's g* is reservedly referred to as an unbiased effect size estimator. In this study, given the considerable sample size, we may expect very similar results across all these estimators.

Independent two-sample mean comparison test

An equivalent to *Cohen's d* formula is the t-statistic of the independent groups (t-test), which is given by Enzmann (2015) as

$$d = t \sqrt{\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}} \quad (6)$$

where n_1 and n_2 are the two sample sizes. The two-sample mean-comparison test (t-test) is based on the following assumptions (Senn and Richardson, 1994). Firstly, the data is drawn from two independent (unpaired) groups. Respondents in the control group must not be found among members of the treated group. Secondly, the test assumes a normal distribution of the dependent variable within each group, which

technically also requires a normal distribution of the residuals. This can be tested using the Shapiro–Wilk and Shapiro–Francia tests for normality and a histogram (Shapiro and Wilk, 1965). In case the normality assumption is violated, a non-parametric Mann–Whitney test⁷ is a supplementary validation of the result. Thirdly, the homogeneity of variance: the t-test also assumes that the variances of the two groups are equal in the population. Should these be unequal, this will strongly affect the Type I error (Adusah and Brooks, 2011). We can test this assumption using Levene’s test (Caci, 2004).

Lastly, the t-test is employed for a continuous dependent variable and a binary independent variable disaggregating the independent groups. Given that, in this study, the dependent variable is discrete, a secondary robustness check is needed. Empiricists suggest that in large samples the results of the test are asymptotically equivalent (Parra-Frutos, 2009). However, to make sure that this is the case, I also provide a Poisson-distributed mean comparison test, which does not deviate from the main results.⁸ The t-test poses the following null hypothesis (Hoel, 1971):

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

which states that population means from the two independent groups are equal. That naturally creates the following alternative:

$$H_A : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

stating that the population means from the two independent groups are not equal. The test provides a t-statistic with a 95 per cent confidence level to reject or accept the null.

Verifying the data assumptions

Before presenting the results of the tests, I discuss how the data meets the study objectives. Firstly, the composition of the CEE country dummy. The variable takes the value of 1 for data drawn from each survey conducted in a post-communist country that is currently a member of the EU, thus including Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The CEE dummy takes a value of 0 for the following countries in the sample: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Iceland,

Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The ESS assures the independence of observations and the non-repetitiveness of entries, which gives a reasonable degree of separation of respondents based on the regional placement (ESS, 2019). Secondly, the assumption is that the dependent variable is normally distributed. Given that the dependent variable is discrete, it approximates a Poisson distribution. It is confirmed with a histogram as well as the Shapiro–Wilk and Shapiro–Francia tests of normality, as reported in Figure 5.4.

Looking at the histogram, strongly significant p-values of the normality tests and the additional check of kurtosis and skewness, we reject the null hypothesis that the dependent variable is normally distributed. To address this violation, the following two options are performable. First, to transform the DV so that it approximates a normal distribution. However, given the scale of the DV as well as its implications on interpretability, it is not considered a viable research choice. A second option is warranted by the large sample size. Empirical research suggests that in large sample sizes the t-test should not deviate in results from a Poisson-distribution mean comparison (Cameron and Trivedi, 1990; Brown and Zhao, 2002), which I equally report in the t-test results table. The third

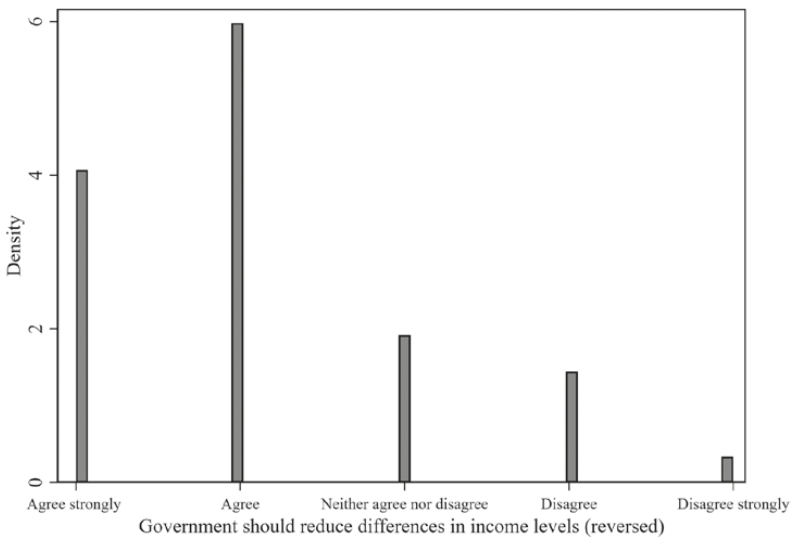


Figure 5.4 Normality tests – histogram for the government should reduce the inequalities in income (DV, reversed). Source: ESS, 2002–18

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Table 5.2 Levene’s t-test for equal variances

Source	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square
Between groups	514.805	1	514.805
Within groups	163002.04	361909	0.450
Total	163516.84	361910	
T-statistic	1143.01		
p-value > T	0.000		

Table 5.3 Data assumptions for the independent two group mean-comparison test

Assumptions	Verified	Met	Addressed
Continuous dependent variable	Discrete, Likert scale	x	Poisson mean comparison test reported
Normal distribution of the dependent variable	Histogram Shapiro–Wilk test, Shapiro–Francia test	x	Large-N, histogram, Poisson mean comparison as a robustness check reported
Homogeneity of variance	Levene’s test	x	t-test with unequal variances (with Satterthwaite’s degrees of freedom)

step before running the t-test is to verify the homogeneity of variance assumption using Levene’s test, reported in [Table 5.2](#).

Given a strongly significant t-statistic, the test rejects the null. The data does not meet the homogeneity of variances assumption. To address that, I adjust the estimation assuming unequal variances with Satterthwaite’s degrees of freedom (Satterthwaite, 1946). [Table 5.3](#) summarises all these steps before reporting the results.

Findings: presenting the identified regional difference

Firstly, as reported in [Table 5.4](#), *Cohen’s d* and *Hedges’s g* statistics indicate that the average difference in expectation for the government

Table 5.4 Effect size based on mean comparison, standardised

Estimated effect size, absolute values	Estimate	95% conf.	Interval
Cohen's d	-0.185	-0.192	-0.178
Hedges's g	-0.185	-0.192	-0.178
Glass's Delta 1 (West)	-0.184	-0.191	-0.177
Glass's Delta 2 (CEE)	-0.188	-0.196	-0.181

Observations by group: West =254,787, CEE =107,12

Source: ESS, 2002–18

to reduce discrepancies in income levels in the West is approximately -0.19 standard deviations lower than in the treated group (CEE) with 95 per cent confidence intervals. For all the estimations, the confidence intervals do not include the null value of 0, which entails a statistically significant influence of regional position on the expectation of the governmental reduction of income inequality. Across all the estimators, we have a sound indication of the existence of a difference between these two independent groups, which, given the sample size, is an expected consistency in the results.

The results for the independent two-sample mean comparison test are reported in [Table 5.6a](#) and further validate the initial mean comparison ([Table 5.5a](#)). The null hypothesis of the test is that the average expectation for the government to reduce income levels is the same across both regions (H_0) against the alternative (H_A). The test identified a statistically significant difference in means ($|0.190|$). The t-statistic of the test equals $t=-51.49$ and the two-sided p-value is statistically significant (0.000).⁹ The secondary check on the reversed scale of the dependent variable approximating the Poisson distribution is reported in [Table 5.5b](#).

We therefore have a sound degree of evidence that there is a regional difference in individuals' expectation of a governmental intervention to address income inequality. However, we also notice ([Table 5.5a](#)) that both regions are strongly in favour of the government tackling income inequality, with means approximating *Strongly agree* (coded 4). Given this, we may also be interested in the likely outcome when drawing these samples from a population with an equal median

Table 5.5a Test of equality of means, by CEE (unequal variances, unweighted), own calculations using ESS, 2002–18¹⁰

Group	N	Mean	Std. err.	Std. dev.	95% conf.	Interval
West	254,787	3.82	0.002	1.03	3.81	3.82
CEE	107,124	4.01	0.003	1.01	4.00	4.01
Difference		0.190	0.004		0.15	0.16
t-stat (p-value)		-51.49 (0.000)				

Table 5.5b Poisson regression, DV reversed, survey weights applied¹¹

	Coefficient	SE	T	P> t	95% conf.	Interval
CEE	-0.07	0.003	-25.61	0.000	-0.076	-0.065
Cons	0.78	0.001	554.01	0.000	0.775	0.780

Source: ESS, 2002–18

(Conroy, 2012), which is a null hypothesis of the test reported in Table 5.6a.

The test calculates the grand median for all the observations and compares it with the scores of each of the groups. I also report an alternative specification (Table 5.6b) when the sample scores equal to the grand median are evenly split between the groups (Gelman and Park, 2009). The results reject the null hypothesis of the test with a strongly significant p-value. We must therefore embrace the alternative that at least one of the samples was drawn from a population with a different median. These results, however, give us little insight into why such a difference exists. The following section provides a historical discussion of potential regional legacies that may influence the expectation of governmental intervention.

Discussion of the study findings

The results of the analysis identified a positive, statistically significant difference between the regions when it comes to individual expectations of governmental intervention to tackle income inequality. That is, an aggregate difference in means for data gathered over the 2002–18 period

Table 5.6a Two-sample equality of median test

Greater than the grand median	West	CEE
No, N=	186,333	68,478
Yes, N=	68,454	38,646
Pearson chi2(1)	3100	
p-value	0.000	

Source: ESS, 2002–18

Table 5.6b Two-sample median test with values equal to the median equally split between the two groups

No, N=	125,096	60,715
Yes, N=	129,690	46,409
Pearson chi2(1)	1700	
p-value	0.000	

shows that demand for governments to tackle income inequality is higher on average among respondents in CEE. That aligns with the empirical study by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017), which used the World Values Survey as a source of data, identifying CEE populations as having a more positive attitude towards welfare policies than the rest of the sample. Importantly, we cannot link these results directly with legacies of the past, but we may theorise which *elements* present in the society may influence this expectation.

As discussed in the introductory section, feudal traits are expected to incite feelings of social injustice (Dean, 2020). That may have an indirect impact on an individual’s sense of discrimination and demand for welfare provision. From the post-communist literature, we would argue that a sense of post-communist nostalgia for the former social net influences the individual demand for a government to address income inequalities (Todorova and Gille, 2010). Given that the feudal mode of production was more universally present across the European continent, it is more plausible to argue for communist traits to constitute a distinctive feature of the CEE populations. However, that is not to say that certain reappearing elements of the feudal past do not seep into the social consciousness of the region today. Below, I discuss the following three explanatory traits.

First, as Mickiewicz and Gerry (2007) show, inequality on average tends to diminish when the state capacity, particularly its ability to raise revenue, increases. In other words, with an increased state capacity – especially in the area of tax collection – economic inequality tends to decrease (Mickiewicz and Gerry, 2007: 107). If we align that argument with post-communist or post-feudal nostalgia for welfare provision combined with the culture of statist interventionism, we have a strong indication that CEE would be a region of higher redistributive demands than the rest of the sample.

Second, disenchantment with the transition may be associated with the idea of being victimised by a detached (feudal) elite. This pillar of post-communist or post-feudal nostalgia is concerned with unfulfilled hopes of democratisation, which was somewhat assumed to solve all the ills of the communist regime (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014). Despite the macroeconomic success in several countries of the region, individuals became increasingly disenchanted with the promises of the transition that resulted in post-transitional fatigue (Totev and Kubik, 2017). Post-transitional fatigue, as a concept, captures the idea of a certain delay in the collective realisation that socio-economic reforms came at a cost and that certain groups benefited from the process more than others (EBRD, 2016). This contributed to a sense of social injustice associated with observed income discrepancies (Guriev, 2021), which have considerable potential to inflate individual demands for governments to tackle income inequality.

Third, arguably the most consequential feudal legacy is a heightened sense of suspicion towards privileged groups and their particularistic interests, which may influence the perception of income inequality and the need for governments to address the issue.

As this review of data on income inequalities shows, the QSR reveals the existence of a considerable difference between the two parts of Europe, not mirrored by the Gini coefficient. This study argues there is a need to examine this regional disparity in the context of historical traits that influence individual welfare. Given the sense of social injustice, personal loyalties warranting socio-economic opportunities and a sense of post-communist nostalgia for the welfare state, we may assume continuity in a higher public demand for redistributive policies in CEE.

Conclusion

The study sought to explore regional differences between CEE and the West in individual attitudes towards the role governments should play

in tackling income inequality. It also aimed to inspire a discussion on historical traits that may shed light on the identified differences in the data. The study proceeded as follows.

First, I presented the research scope and limitations. The study presents an analysis of the two regions, loosely inspired by systems thinking (Meadows, 2009). Second, I provided definitions of the relevant concepts, which was followed by the analysis. The findings of the study are as follows. In a comparative study of inequality, both the d-family estimators and the t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference in means between the two broadly defined parts of Europe, 'the West' and CEE. Typically, we would anticipate a positive attitude to income redistribution among societies with a highly unequal distribution of income (Dollar et al., 2015; Wildowicz-Szumarska, 2022). Yet, my analysis of the Gini coefficient, showed that there was no alarming discrepancy in income levels between the two regions. However, an analysis of the QSR ratios revealed a more pronounced difference. In my search for explanations of this difference, I decided to look into history and consider the legacy of feudalism and post-communist nostalgia.

The study contributes to the current research in the following ways. First, there are few studies that discuss the legacies of feudalism and communism together (Okey, 1991; Dean, 2020). Second, a number of scholars underline the importance of idiosyncratic elements acknowledging that the shared past bears an influence on individual attitudes (Dion and Bichfield, 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Albuquerque et al., 2020). This chapter aimed to discuss such traits, which remain peripheral to the mainstream debate on welfare preferences and economic inequality. Third, the study reinforced previous findings on CEE's welfare expectations (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). An analysis of the central tendency, using the ESS data, identified a higher aggregated mean in CEE relative to the West. Fourth, the chapter presents a theoretical sketch suggesting why such a difference might exist. I show historical traits can explain individual preferences for income redistribution. No doubt there are likely to be other interpretations of the results; their identification and analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

The research has limitations. First, the study does not engage in a further analysis of potential determinants of the identified difference. That has been done by a plethora of studies and goes beyond the core research question presented here. This chapter was concerned with historical, idiosyncratic elements that remain peripheral to more traditional explanations of people's attitudes towards income redistribution. It aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the socio-economic complexities that we observe today. Second, I did not 'measure' legacies'

impact directly. Rather, I offered a conceptual framework that should help to expand our current deliberations on the sources of the regional variation beyond a habitual reference to present-day income levels or individual economic self-interest.

As for the directions of future research, the contextual analysis presented here would strongly benefit from an empirical assessment of the influence that the discussed historical legacies may have on individual preferences. A quasi-similar study on this theme was conducted by Djankov (2021), who divided the sample into individuals born after and before the end of communism in Europe. A call for more research integrating information about historical context was also issued by Roland (2021). However, at the time of this writing there are no studies of preferences for income redistribution that try to deal with the impact of legacies of feudalism on such preferences. Naturally, there is the question of data sources, which are rather fragmentary. Yet, an exploration of historical data that stretches back to before communism may still prove extremely insightful for our understanding of the existing regional differences.

In summary, the chapter provides an analysis of individual preferences concerning governmental policies towards income redistribution. It presents solid evidence for the existence of a regional gap, with a higher average level of support for governmental policies designed to tackle income inequality in the CEE region. The conceptual framework sketched in the chapter offers a new lens through which to contextualise this difference. The nostalgia for a communist safety net and legacies of feudalism seem to influence *mentalité populaire* and thus shape individual preferences concerning contemporary government policies.

Notes

1. The degree of missing data between the countries in the earlier period (2002–10) was substantial. Therefore, I only report the aggregated mean for the complete dataset of the single data provider (2012–19).
2. For a formal definition and application, see Drezner et al. (2014).
3. Own calculations based on (Eurostat, 2022).
4. Measured as equivalised disposable income, that is, a total income of a household after tax and other deductions that are available for personal spending (Eurostat, 2022).
5. A step-by-step explanation of the adjustment is provided by Hedges (1981).
6. A more detailed discussion of these, including the non-centrality parameter, can be found here: Venables (1975) and Steiger and Fouladi (1997).
7. The Mann–Whitney is a non-parametric test of equality of medians for the k-number of samples. The null hypothesis of the test is that two unmatched samples are from a population with the same distribution (Wilcoxon, 1945; Mann and Whitney, 1947). The test is only performed on

- unmatched data. When adjusted, it also allows us to verify the effect size between the groups and the difference in medians. Conroy (2012) offers a complete discussion on its applicability.
8. The dependent variable was reversed to approximate the Poisson distribution. Therefore, the sign of the result must be contrary to the one reported by the t-test, which used the original scale.
 9. The table reports results on unweighted data. A test of difference in means using survey weights showed a positive, statistically significant difference ($\delta=0.148$, p-value= 0.000) for the treatment group, replicating results of the ones reported in Table 5.6a and Table 5.6b.
 10. For the comparison within CEE, the t-test indicated the highest average positive (above the region's aggregate mean) preference for governments to tackle income inequalities in Bulgaria (0.38), Hungary (0.37), Lithuania (0.36) and a negative difference (below CEE's regional mean) in Czechia (-0.56).
 11. Poisson regression, N= 361,911, number of primary sampling units (PSU) = 361,911, number of strata = 28 (countries), $F(1, 361883) = 656.03$, p-value= 0.000. To check for overdispersion – goodness-of-fit test results confirm Poisson is a correct model specification: Deviance goodness-of-fit = 170157.9, Prob > $\chi^2(361909) = 1.0000$; Pearson goodness-of-fit = 179126.7, Prob > $\chi^2(361909) = 1.0000$; To approximate the Poisson distribution, the variable scale was reversed to: 1 strongly agree; 2 Agree; 3 Neither agree/disagree; 4 Disagree; 5 Disagree strongly, as presented on the histogram. Due to the DV being reversed, the coefficient has a negative sign consistent with the categorisation of the pro-welfarist stance.

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The effect of policies of populist parties in power on economic performance: the case of Hungary

Elena Cossu

Introduction

There is no doubt that in recent years, populist leaders in CEE have been extremely successful politically. However, the literature concerning the *economic* mechanisms and consequences of this success is limited. For this reason, this work aims to fill this gap in the literature by analysing the policies implemented by the populist Hungarian government and their effect on gross domestic product (GDP). This chapter positions itself alongside a small but growing number of works concluding that populism in Europe has negative economic consequences only in the long run (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Funke et al., 2023). I contribute to this literature by utilising a specific version of the synthetic control method (SCM) that uses countries with no spillover effect on the unit of interest to build the counterfactual unit (Abadie, 2021).

This work examines the Hungarian macroeconomic case in detail, while placing the analysis in a broader European context. To achieve the aims of the chapter, the first section outlines the literature on the intersection between populism and economic performance. It briefly discusses the concepts of populism and economic performance and how the two can be linked methodologically. In the second section, the chapter reviews the existing research on the topic and provides the research rationale. I then take a deeper look at the way the policies of populist parties are defined and argue that the Hungarian case is a representative example of populist policy positioning and rhetoric, allowing us

to examine the underlying mechanisms in more detail. The chapter also establishes the representativeness of the Hungarian case, allowing me to impute the effects of the SCM performed in the section that follows. It elaborates on and implements the SCM and discusses how it can give us an overall quantitative estimate of the effect on GDP of policies chosen by a populist government. The study concludes by presenting the negative effects of populist parties in power, using the case of Hungary, and hypothesising as to which of the policies explain this result.

Overview of the relevant concepts

There is broad agreement in the academic literature on the intersection between populism and economic performance that populist leaders are usually bad for the economy. The consensus comes from the study of Latin American countries between the 1940s and the 1980s, where seven countries elected populist leaders who promised legislation to cushion the shocks of growth and to build social solidarity to tackle inequality (Drake, 1982). The policies implemented to tackle such problems had disastrous economic consequences. They ‘emphasize[d] growth and income redistribution and deemphasize[d] the risks of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints, and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive non-market policies’ (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1989: 6). In addition, they repeatedly implemented expansive monetary policies while maintaining fixed exchange rates, which triggered economic crises and resulted in the devaluation of the local currency (Sachs, 1990). In other words, there was a systematic mismatch between the aim of the policies and the way the populist leaders implemented them.

Latin America became associated with recurrent economic crises of this kind, triggered by the choice of poorly conceived or unorthodox economic policies (Kingstone, 2019). Nevertheless, it is difficult to say whether these unorthodox policies were implemented because of the Latin American context or because the leaders in charge were populists. Both voters and populist leaders in Latin America tend to reject anything that the perceived international elite says, especially if it concerns politics or economics. Some scholars argue that the voters’ rejection of the policies proposed by the elite and their preference for populist leaders is due to the population’s frustration with their existing economic situation (Mouffe, 2019). On the other hand, other scholars suggest that the rejection of the political and economic orthodoxy and preference for populist leaders takes place in countries that are already prone to corruption and

economic crises (Funke et al., 2023). The literature on the topic would suggest that the latter explanation may be more applicable to Latin America.

The Latin American example teaches us that the economic policies of populist leaders cannot be judged outside their regional context. This brings us to the concept of populism and policy-making in Europe. Europe is an area of the world particularly interesting for the study of the intersection between populism and policy-making because it has seen a rise of populist leaders but has not witnessed any major economic crises. Populist parties have risen across the political divide, for example, left-wing and right-wing populists (Table 6.1), and as well in Central and Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe (Table 6.2). CEE, here defined in line with the CHES as the countries that were part of the former Soviet bloc, saw the most significant rise in the populist vote and is usually considered the most emblematic case of populism politics in Europe (Toplišek, 2019).

To study the intersection between populism, policy-making and their effects on GDP, we need to conceptualise populism, economic performance and the SCM. In this chapter, I use the ideological understanding of populism set out in the Introduction to the volume, with a party defined as populist when its leader or most of its members consistently adopt a rhetoric style that juxtaposes the ‘pure’ people and the corrupt elite. Given this definition, Hungary has been led by a populist party since 2010 and Poland from 2015 to 2023 (Funke et al., 2023).

Economic performance is a relevant outcome variable for measuring the effect of populist parties in power as it offers a standardised measurement to understand a country in relation to others and despite its context. GDP at purchase power parity (PPP) and constant US dollars (USD) is an especially good, standardised measurement despite certain shortcomings (Coyle, 2016; Stiglitz et al., 2018). I use World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files to construct

Table 6.1 Division between centre, right, left and populist parties in 2014 and 2019

	2014				2019			
	Left	Centre	Right	Populist	Left	Centre	Right	Populist
Left	80	0	0	8	85	0	0	9
Centre	0	54	0	8	0	60	0	11
Right	0	0	87	31	0	0	75	37

Table 6.2 Number of parties by political family in Europe in 2014 and 2019

			2014			2019		
	Western Europe	Central and Eastern Europe	Northern Europe	Southern Europe	Western Europe	Central and Eastern Europe	Northern Europe	Southern Europe
Left	31	21	12	14	30	21	14	15
Centre	16	18	7	13	17	29	5	8
Right	22	36	12	15	17	28	11	14
Populist	16	19	4	8	15	25	5	10

the measure, using 2010 USD because of data availability. As there is a 0.98 correlation between welfare and GDP (under specific conditions), as shown in a study of 13 countries (Jones and Klenow, 2016), I hypothesise that a change in GDP has a significant positive effect on the living standards of the population in question. It is also hypothesised that GDP is the best predictor of future economic growth as it is strongly and positively connected to nation-building (Prados de la Escosura, 2017).

Nonetheless, according to the literature, improving or influencing a country's economic performance is not a straightforward task. Since the 1990s, the prevalent opinion among policy experts is that a combination of macroeconomic stabilisation, trade liberalisation, financial sector reform, privatisation, deregulation, public sector reform and democratisation is the best means of doing so. Of course, this opinion is based on classical neoliberal theories and relies on the failure of policies like those implemented in Latin America by populist leaders. In practical terms, these policies aim at minimising fiscal deficits, inflation and tariffs, while maximising privatisation and the liberalisation of finance. Both the EU and the International Monetary Fund also believe in these kinds of policies as a pillar of their intervention (Lütz and Kranke, 2014). However, these policies have brought about very mixed results over the decades and have not closed the economic gap between rich and less rich economies. The reason they did not work is that they were primarily focused on efficiency, while what we know so far from growth theories is that the best way to implement prosperity is by implementing macroeconomic stability and the accountability of institutions, which should in turn lead to policies focused on the efficient use of resources, education, healthcare and social capital (World Bank, 1991). Even today, experts disagree on the exact chain of causation that produces this virtuous circle (Gylfason and Hochreiter, 2009). Besides institutions, geography, culture and luck are considered potential triggers (Acemoglu et al., 2004).

So far, economists do not have a standardised approach to foster economic performance despite considerable empirical literature pointing in the same direction (Basturk et al., 2008). In institutional economics, what creates or leads to accountable institutions and good institutional practices is also a matter of debate. At the same time, we do not have a general theory on what triggers or fosters populism in specific contexts (Zagha et al., 2006). Nonetheless, populism can still have an effect on institutions and in turn on economic performance. Even if the chain of causation between populism and economic performance is not clear, we know that cultural factors related to the rise of populism may be activated by economic shocks and vice versa (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020).

Building on existing studies, further research seeking to establish a relationship between populism and economic performance, especially when populist leaders come to power, is needed. New methodologies, such as those used in this chapter, have prompted a renewal of research on this aspect of populism (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Rodrik, 2021; Funke et al., 2023). This research has shown that the current wave of populist leaders does not implement policies like those seen in Latin America, but they still enact policies that can be dangerous in the long run. In other words, this chapter takes inspiration from both the political literature on populism and the literature on economic growth to find the potential economic consequences of populism. It also considers the cultural theories of populism, applying insights from the recent literature to better understand the specificities of the populist policy cycle in Hungary. In general, it aims to expand the political-economic theories of populism and to contribute to the study of the economic consequences of populism, examining mostly the case of Hungary.

Research rationale

While there is a vast and growing literature on populism, research on the relationship between populism and economic performance is limited, although interest in this topic has increased recently (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Rodrik, 2021; Funke et al., 2023).

My study aims to contribute to the literature on policy positions in contemporary Europe. The main hypothesis I am testing is whether populism results in economic problems as hypothesised in the literature or whether it can be economically sustainable in specific contexts. When selecting the case study, I started by looking at political parties in the different European regions (Table 6.2). To determine the parties' policy positions, I draw on Dornbusch and Edwards (1989) and Sachs (1990) as well as on the CHES (Bakker et al., 2019). The latter database covers experts' opinions on each European party on variables such as identity position, fiscal position and redistribution position, among others, and enables us to conceptualise the positioning of the parties under review as left wing or right wing. To identify whether parties are centrist, the CHES ideological positioning variables are used to create a new group with values of parties that tend towards the centre of the variable. I classify parties as populist using the PopuList database, which uses Mudde's (2004) definition to categorise them (The PopuList, 2020).

I then narrow down the sample to select the most relevant case of a populist party in power, to be able to apply my coherent methodological approach to see the effect of policies on economic prosperity. The relationship between economic performance, or GDP, and policies can be assessed in many ways (UCL for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2020). However, the methodologies that seem to work best for assessing the causality between these two kinds of macro variables are those related to quasi-experiments (World Bank, 2019), in particular the SCM, first used by Abadie and Gardeazabal (2001).

The use of the CHES and PopuList data to determine the political and economic preferences of parties in Europe allows me to see that the theories of Dornbusch and Edwards (1989) do not seem to apply. I would expect both the identity and the economic preferences of populist parties to be positioned on the left side of the ideological spectrum, yet they are not (Figure 6.1). Nonetheless, there is still cause for concern when it comes to the long-lasting impact of populist parties' economic policies on economic prosperity. Such policies could send certain countries, especially in CEE, further down the path of further continental divergence (Györffy, 2021). These preferences could also be clustered differently across different countries. To study this possibility, this work moves to the use of SCM to assess the causality between these policies and economic convergence. Hungary is chosen as the only available case where a populist party stayed in power for a sufficient number of years to use this method.

Synthetic control is a quasi-experimental research method in which an artificial placebo group is created to facilitate measuring the outcome of an event, which in this case means measuring the effect of populism on growth in the short run. It has been used for similar purposes and is an upcoming methodology in the field. The methodology is ideally suited to my research question, although it cannot consider the business cycle in understanding economic growth. It looks at what would happen to growth 'if one single thing did not happen' and therefore it cannot help us forecast growth in the long run, where the interaction of other dynamics happens. For this reason, I can evaluate correlation research and single variable research as possible solutions to measure the effect of populism on long-term growth. The use of SCM has been widely applied in the literature as a way to use a quasi-experiment to assess causality in the use of macro aggregates (Cerulli, 2019; Abadie, 2021; Cunningham, 2021). Even if there is no perfect quantitative method to assess the causality of a certain style of governance on economic performance, similar works on the topic (Funke et al., 2023) have shown that SCM can estimate the

difference in the overall GDP trajectory of a populist country and a non-populist country.

Relevant policy dimensions and case study selection

An examination of the CHES data reveals that populist parties exhibit a greater centrism than centrist parties concerning redistribution policies, with an average score of 4.37 compared to 4.71 for centrist parties. In contrast, regarding identity politics, populist parties demonstrate a more right-wing stance than right-wing parties, as evidenced by an average score of 7.30 for populist parties versus 6.33 for right-wing parties. This disparity is also visually represented in [Figure 6.1](#). Surprisingly, such differences do not exist when we divide parties between Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern Europe ([Figure 6.2](#)). This work therefore suggests that while populist parties may not lead a country to economic disaster, they may still be able to cause long-term damage to a country's economic prosperity in a specific context.

I identify Hungary as a main example of this kind of policy-making in line with the literature (Sata and Karolewski, 2019). In the following section I specify how Hungary aligns with [Figure 6.1](#). I do so

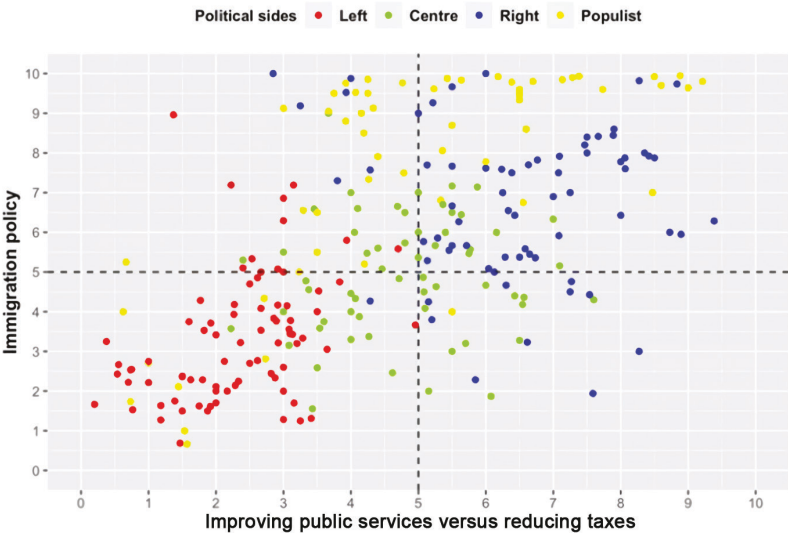


Figure 6.1 Economic versus identity positioning of political parties in Europe. Source: 2019 CHES

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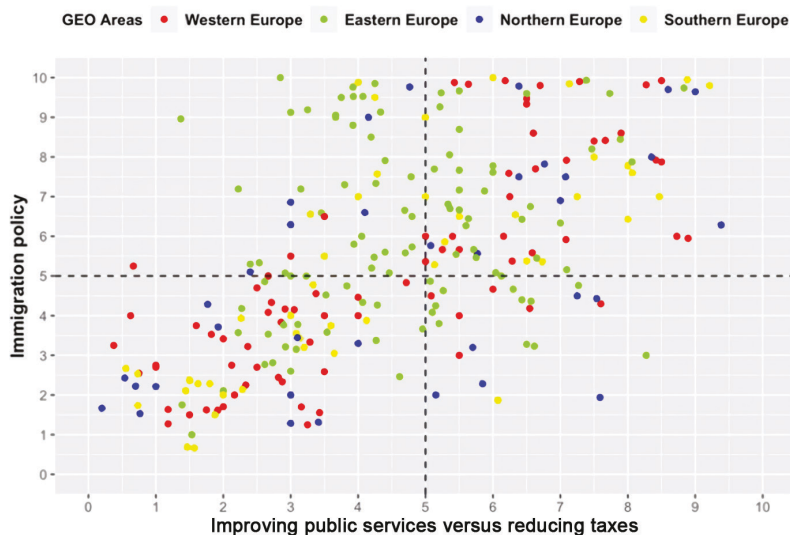


Figure 6.2 Economic versus identity positioning of political parties across geographical areas in Europe. Source: 2019 CHES

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by considering the context that paved the way to the Fidesz party's electoral victory and what came subsequently. I then analyse the 2010–15 and 2015–20 periods and the recurrent elements throughout this time. The division between these periods is highlighted to account for different external and internal factors that might influence the creation of the synthetic unit. It also helps us understand how different kinds of populist rhetoric might have an overall negative effect on economic performance. I use the SCM (or the 'synthetic control method for causal inference in comparative case studies') to measure the effect of the kind of policy-making practised in Hungary and its effects. The SCM was created by Abadie and Gardeazabal to overcome the methodological difficulties relating to country heterogeneity and intervening variables (Abadie and Gardeazabal, 2001; Abadie et al., 2015).

The rise of populism in Hungary

The complex relationship between economic and cultural stances of political parties in Europe that is represented in Figure 6.1 can also be seen in the history of Hungarian policy-making. Historically, during the 1990–2009 period, the following parties took turns to govern Hungary in

different forms and coalitions: the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the ‘first liberal version’ of the Fidesz party (Gomez and Leunig, 2021). Especially during the penultimate MSZP governments (2002–06), we can already see elements typical of economic populism in the policy-making. Examples include the ‘100 days programme’ of Péter Medgyessy¹ and the actions of the government led by Ferenc Gyurcsány from MSZP (2004–09).² They were characterised by more ‘classical’ economic populist elements such as redistributive and expansive policies (Benczes, 2014).

The policies implemented by these governments created the perception of widespread corruption and inefficiency; moreover, the socialist governments of this period were also perceived as having long-lasting connections with the communist regime. The country’s economic situation was also critical during this time. It is not by chance that Fidesz rose to power in conjunction with the rise of household debt. This sudden rise of debt in turn happened because of the depreciation of the local currency in 2008 (Gyongyosi and Verner, 2021). Most household loans were held in Swiss francs, prompted by a mix of low interest rates and a lack of information about the potential risks of these loans. When the forint depreciated, the average household debt skyrocketed.

On a more general level, the lack of economic convergence also played a role in terms of creating grievances exploited by the Fidesz government (Figures 6.2 and 6.3). In the early 2000s, Europe was buzzing

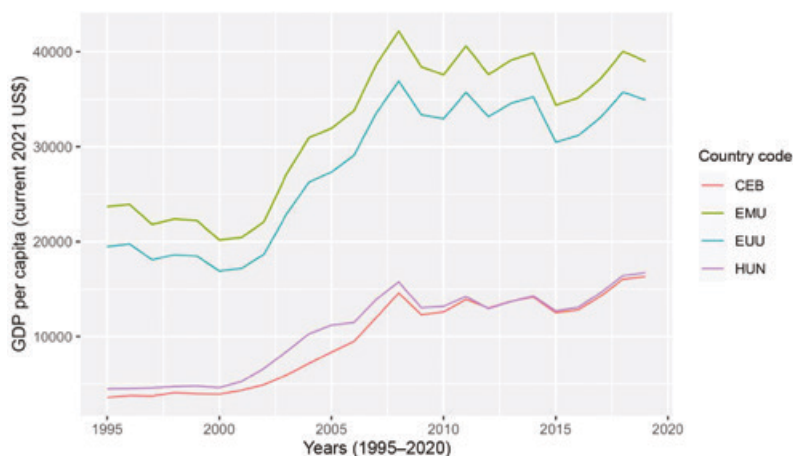


Figure 6.3 GDP per capita in Hungary, Central and Eastern Europe, European Monetary Union and the European Union, 1995–2020

Source: World Bank

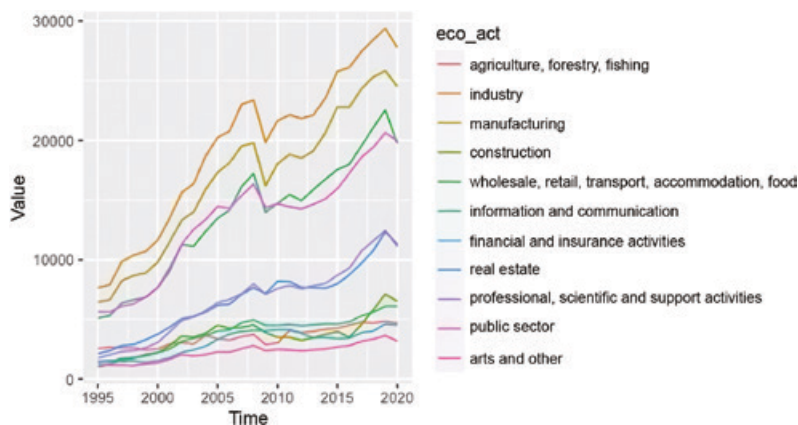


Figure 6.4 Contribution per sector to GDP in Hungary 1995–2020

Source: EUROSTAT

with the idea of the post-communist countries potentially ‘catching up’ with the West. The main idea was that the economically poorer countries in Europe could prosper by absorbing the richer countries’ technology, investing in manufacturing and opening their economies to trade, as some of the East Asian tiger economies had done ten years earlier. The enthusiasm was especially pronounced in CEE around the 2004 enlargement. However, the catch-up never happened. Even if the CEE economies (CEE in [Figure 6.1](#)) almost tripled in all sectors ([Figure 6.4](#)), GDP per capita never converged to that of richer European countries ([Figure 6.3](#)). Furthermore, this happened despite the increasing role of manufacturing and other sectors opening to trade ([Figure 6.4](#)).

The 2010–15 period

It was commonly understood that a backlash against the technocratic elites of transition was inevitable once the public began to experience the hardships of the transition (Stanley, 2017). Advocating for ‘illiberal democracy’ became especially appealing as it allowed the rejection of both previous socialist governments and neoliberalism as a whole. However, the policy changes associated with this shift were questionable from the very beginning. For example, we would expect public sector spending to be uninterrupted and stable to counterbalance volatility around the years of the financial crisis, to prevent emigration and to increase human capital. This would be in line with the rejection of

neoliberalism and would help solve the especially relevant problem of emigration (Botev, 2012). However, public spending in Hungary during these years was far from continuous. We can see that it was volatile and followed the trends of the other sectors. Furthermore, over this period, Hungary was 35th out of 44 European countries in terms of public spending as a proportion of GDP (World Bank Open Data, 2021). The low level of public spending has been combined with the lack of efficient political institutions and high-skilled labour emigration, as highlighted in the previous section. As mentioned in the literature, institutions traditionally lack efficiency in CEE due to historical and political factors; it does not seem that the Fidesz government was able to change this trend (Magyar, 2016).

Another example of deteriorating institutions is ‘The Hungarian Fundamental Law’ passed in 2012, which sets the policy preferences of the government in the constitution (Müller, 2016). This law is infamous for having ‘curbed the independence of the judiciary and the administration of justice’, for having ‘forced nearly 300 judges into early retirement’ and for having ‘imposed limitations on the Constitutional Court’s ability to review laws and complaints’ (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 1). Furthermore, independent media outlets started to practise self-censorship to avoid clashing with unclear regulations and to minimise the pressure of declining public and private advertising revenue (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Other examples include the vague requirements to be classified as religious groups included in the 2011 Transnational Act or the ‘inadequate consultation with civil society or time for proper parliamentary debate and scrutiny [which] limited the independence of the judiciary and interfered with the administration of the courts’ (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 13).

The 2015–20 period

During the second phase of Fidesz’s rule (2015–20), after re-election, its discourse became more extreme. The party intensified the use of rhetorical elements typical of populism, like the ‘us versus them’ rhetoric and the identification of ‘the real people’ with traditional Christian values. The rhetoric against immigrants also picked up during these years. Such intensification is probably due to the success of this kind of rhetoric seen in the previous period. On a practical level, this rhetoric translates into the implementation of policies based on militancy (the implementation

of legal measures to limit the civil and political rights of democratic actors), incorporation of political outsiders (the idea of converting semi-loyal into loyal political actors) and education (the strengthening of populist beliefs by developing forms of civic education and designing programmes aimed at limiting potential threats to the government).

Notable examples include the lack of political independence of the Media Council, the unjustifiably high fines for journalists, unclear requirements for content regulation, the inadequate protection of journalists' sources, the forced early retirement of judges, the vague requirements to be classified as a religious group and the limitations of the authority of some universities (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Kornai, 2015; Freedom House, 2018).

Present situation

What we have today is an economy where public spending does not seem to be aimed at improving efficiency, but where many policies seem to be designed to intensify internal and external divisions, and where public institutions are deteriorating. Furthermore, the inflation in Hungary is steadily increasing. In the last several years, this country has had one of the highest inflation rates in the EU, making it impossible for Hungarian policy-making orthodoxy to continue as it has done to date. To add another problematic layer, inflation is not expected to go down any time soon, as expectations on prices in CEE tend to increase rapidly because of local historical memory of hyperinflation (Ashley et al., 2020). Finally, inflation is mainly targeting consumer prices, while wages are not adapting accordingly. Hungary still has some of the lowest wages in Europe when adapting to PPP (OECD, n.d.). Overall, inflation is eating into living standards, creating a ticking time bomb for the future of Hungary.

In this situation, the optimal solution would be to tighten fiscal policy or reorganise public spending. However, the Hungarian government did the opposite by increasing the public deficit and by continuing with the same set of policies. Moreover, Hungary's limited, hyper-targeted approach to specific groups did not help much in reorganising public spending in an efficient way. In the years ahead, the country is thus likely to experience a prolonged period of much higher inflation and, subsequently, potentially more aggressive monetary tightening. In this context, looking at the overall effect of these policies as a specific example of dangerous populist policies in the long run is especially useful.

Methods

The SCM is a methodology born out of ‘the necessity of establishing bridges between quantitative and qualitative approaches to empirical research in political science’ (Abadie et al., 2015). It is also defined as ‘a popular approach for estimating the impact of a single unit in panel data settings’ (Ben-Michael et al., 2021), and the idea behind it is quite straightforward. The objective of synthetic control is to estimate the dynamic effect of an intervention or event that happened at a specific moment in time. In other words, the objective is to show the trajectory a given process would have taken if something would not have happened.

The SCM does so by taking inspiration from the experimental method, which assesses the effects of a treatment by measuring the difference between a treatment and a control group. More precisely, the treatment is measured as the effect of a certain intervention (e) for a certain country i at the time t (or e_{it}). It equals the difference between the treatment group (Y_{it}^I) and the control group (Y_{it}^C). The effect must be calculated for any moment after the intervention or event ($t \geq T_0$), as shown in Equation 1:

$$e_{it} = Y_{it}^I - Y_{it}^C \text{ for all } t \geq T_0$$

The synthetic control works in a similar way. However, we have the real case trajectory (or a country) instead of the treatment group (Y_{it}^I) and a counterfactual case (of a country) instead of the control group (Y_{it}^C). This makes it possible to overcome the problem of not being able to prescribe a ‘treatment’ and not being able to find a control group.

The estimation of Y_{it}^C , also known as the creation of the synthetic or counterfactual case (or country), is the core element of this methodology. To build the counterfactual, we can start from Equation 1 to estimate $\widehat{Y_{it}^C}$, as shown in the work ‘Institutional integration and economic growth in Europe’ by Campos et al. (2019) (Equation 2):

$$\widehat{Y_{it}^C} = \sum_{i=2}^{N+1} w_i^* Y_{it}$$

Here, $\widehat{Y_{it}^C}$ is the outcome where the intervention/event did not take place or the pool of similar countries where the intervention or event did not take place. In Equation 2, $N + 1$ represents the number of countries where the populist government was not elected, or the ‘donor pool’

(Abadie, 2021). w_i^* is the combination of optimal weights for a certain country i , and Y_{it} is the outcome for a certain country i at time t .

Therefore, choosing the right w_i^* , or the optimal combination of weights, becomes fundamental. To do so, we need to consider that we are measuring the effects of populism on economic growth in Hungary. We will need to build a database that includes Hungary and the biggest possible number of countries where populists did not acquire power to dictate economic policy. To calculate the weights, it is not important to have countries with similar starting conditions (Campos et al., 2019). What matters is to have a set of weights and countries that closely replicate the Hungarian GDP trajectory, and, consequently, the more countries the better.

Once we have the database, RStudio calculates the weights through an iteration. The weights and the synthetic country are calculated between 1995 and 2010: the former year is chosen as it is the first year for data available for Hungary, while the latter is chosen as it is the year when the first populist government came to power. The data is extrapolated from the World Bank's indicator 'GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international \$)' database. The synthetic prediction, or the line, tries to replicate the line between 1995 and 2010 as closely as possible. By then looking at the difference between the two lines after 2010, we can compare the real trajectory and the one calculated by the software on the basis of the previous data points. In this way, we will be able to see the overall effect and difference between the real Hungary and the synthetic one where populists did not take power.

Synthetic control data and setup

Once Hungary is selected as a relevant case study of a state with a populist government, it is hard, if not impossible, to find any comparable unit of analysis. Therefore, it is also impossible to use other quantitative comparative methods of analysis such as difference-in-differences (Kreif et al., 2016). Nor are panel approaches the best way to measure the effect of a variable on a country unit as they can only estimate 'the overall average effect' of populism (Campos et al., 2019). In estimating the effects of the Fidesz government as an example of a populist government in Europe, I address the following main questions. What would be the level of per capita income GDP at constant USD in Hungary if the Fidesz government had not been elected? Are the effects of this government temporary or permanent?

In the application of the SCM in this chapter, the outcome variable is GDP at current 2020 USD, using the data from the World Bank Open Data (2021). The choice of predictors is in line with the SCM and growth literature (Barro, 1997; Cerulli, 2019; Abadie, 2021). To choose the variables from all those in the literature and available in the World Bank Open Data, I perform a fixed-effect regression analysis for each variable on the same 164 countries that are used to estimate synthetic Hungary. I then select the variables significant for Hungary after performing the cluster analysis reported in Table 6.3 to reduce the total number of variables. The results of the selected variables and the relative OLS (ordinary least squares) regression are shown in Table 6.1.

The previously mentioned 164 countries, or the donor pool, are chosen by following the reasoning of Campos et al. (2019). In an SCM study focusing on an EU country, it is appropriate to have a donor pool that excludes EU27 but includes OECD countries, EU-neighbouring countries, Mediterranean countries and newly industrialised countries. The exclusion of the EU27 is to counterbalance the potential spillover effects. A full list of the countries used can also be found in Table 6.6 in the Appendix to this chapter. The weights forming the synthetic Hungary

Table 6.3 OLS regression for GDP in Hungary and selected indicators for the SCM

	Estimate	Std.	Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-1.551e+11	9.297e+09	-16.685	2,00E-16	***
Service imports (BoP, current US\$)	1.467e+01	2.931e-01	50.046	2,00E-16	***
Container port traffic	4.438e+03	9.764e+02	4.545	5.64e-06	***
Arable land	6.806e+03	4.866e+02	13.988	2,00E-16	***
Population in largest city	1.263e+04	2.111e+03	5.983	2.35e-09	***
External debt stocks, total (DOD, current US\$)	2.723e+00	9.181e-02	29.656	2,00E-16	***

Signif. codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘.’ 1

Residual standard error: 5.458e+11 on 4804 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.8263, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8262

F-statistic: 4572 on 5 and 4804 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

Table 6.4 Composition of the weights for the synthetic Hungary

Country	Weight (%)
Hong Kong	15%
Niger	33%
Singapore	4%
Solomon Islands	7%
United Arab Emirates	43%
Total	100%

are determined based on the match produced by the determinants of GDP before 2010 (Table 6.4). The synthetic control counterfactual is estimated for Hungary at the country level before 2010, the first year of the government, to deal with country and populism heterogeneity. Consequently, it does not matter if the countries are fundamentally and structurally different from Hungary. For reference, the countries representing Hungary are set out in Table 6.6. Regarding the overall time frame, I use data from 1995 because of the generally accepted lack of reliability of data for CEE countries before this year.

The effects on economic performance

Figure 6.5 shows the actual and counterfactual series for GDP at current 2020 USD. The continuous line represents the actual GDP trajectory, while the dashed line illustrates its estimated synthetic equivalent. The vertical line is set at 2010, the year the Fidesz government was formed. Before 2010, the synthetic Hungary was replicating the real one quite closely. After 2010, it floats freely based on the trajectory calculated before 2010. Figure 6.5 shows that Hungary would have grown even more without the Fidesz government. The reliability of synthetic Hungary is confirmed by two observations: first, the fact that it replicates quite closely the pre-2010 period; second, it accurately predicts the 2008 period, usually considered problematic in SCM because of the confounding power of the 2008 financial crisis.

The reliability of Figure 6.5 is further confirmed by two other observations. First, by the close gap between real and counterfactual values, as shown in Figure 6.6. Second, by the calculation of the distribution of the ratio of the post- to pre-treatment root mean squared prediction error (RMSPE), as shown in Figure 6.7.

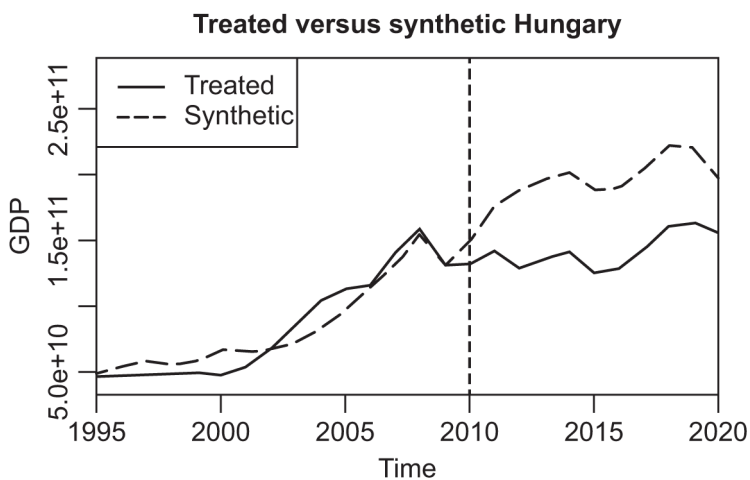


Figure 6.5 Treated versus synthetic Hungary – GDP at constant 2020 US\$

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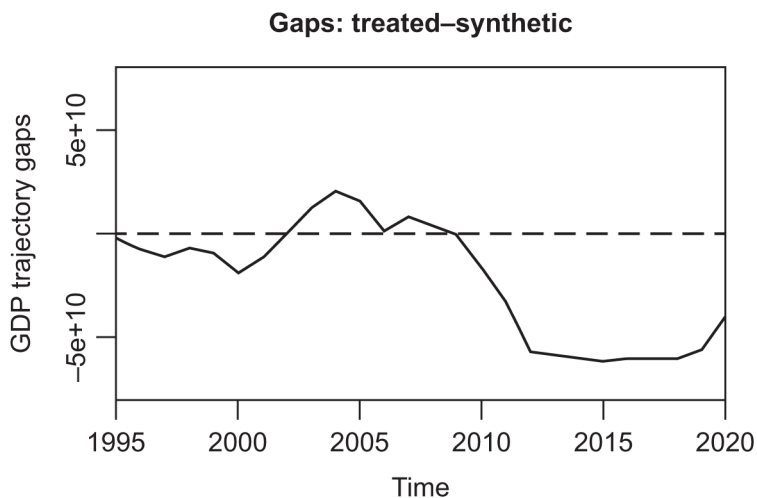


Figure 6.6 Gaps in GDP estimation

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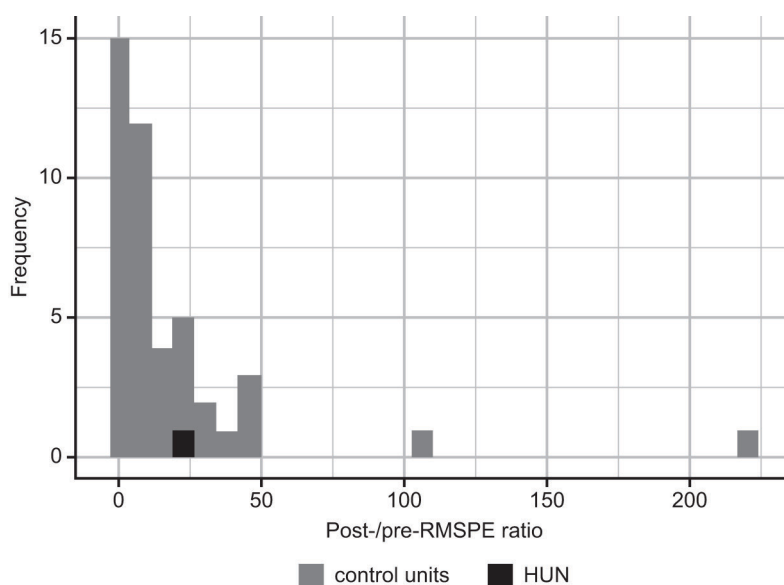


Figure 6.7 Histogram of post-/pre-RMSPE of all units

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Conclusions

According to Viktor Orbán, ‘a crisis is not an objective state of affairs but a matter of interpretation’ (Müller, 2016: 40). According to the literature on populism, every problem can be reinterpreted as involving the ‘us versus them’ juxtaposition, although we need to take specific contexts into account (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013). In this chapter, I showed that this framing can also be detrimental to the Hungarian economy and the economic prosperity of people living in Hungary in the long run. In the present day, the economic ‘catch-up’ is still slow or close to non-existent, and nobody can see any further signs of economic convergence. Furthermore, thanks to SCM and the analysis of the Hungarian context, we can say that the situation is increasingly deteriorating over time.

I conclude that the Fidesz government, as a representative case for recent European governments led by a populist party, had a negative effect on the trajectory of GDP per capita growth in Hungary between the years 2010 and 2020. I estimate that without this government, per capita income would have been, on average, approximately 10 per cent higher in the first ten years after the election. This shows that, in the Hungarian case, the persistent use of populist rhetoric and a related set of policies are

detrimental to economic performance, although in a different way than was hypothesised by Dornbusch and Edwards (1989) and Sachs (1990). My analysis suggests that the reasons why the economy is performing below its potential are to be found in exclusionary policies and non-efficient public spending. On the other hand, I believe that the EU framework and the interdependence of its constituent countries, despite also being a source of problems, is the main reason why countries with populist governments such as Hungary do not quickly self-destruct like other cases presented in the literature. This is in line with other works on this topic and the generic context of countries in CEE (Györfy, 2021).

Appendix

Table 6.5 Factor analysis to reduce the significant variables to predict GDP in Hungary

Loadings	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	
GDP (current US\$)	0.757	0.372	0.308	0.161	0.158	0.243	
Arable land (hectares)	0.182	0.899	0.189	0.135	0.222		
Imports of goods and services (current US\$)	0.804	0.267	0.394	0.285	0.153	0.124	
Exports of goods and services (current US\$)	0.756	0.209	0.501	0.292	0.178		
Taxes less subsidies on products (current US\$)	0.731	0.330	0.365	0.140	0.330		
Goods exports (BoP, current US\$)	0.687	0.189	0.592	0.282	0.194		

Loadings	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	
Exports of goods and services (BoP, current US\$)	0.763	0.206	0.495	0.288	0.176		
Service imports (BoP, current US\$)	0.849	0.175	0.343	0.239	0.161		
Goods imports (BoP, current US\$)	0.787	0.281	0.398	0.289	0.149	0.144	
Imports of goods and services (BoP, current US\$)	0.808	0.262	0.391	0.282	0.153	0.126	
Imports of goods, services and primary income (BoP, current US\$)	0.832	0.258	0.350	0.275	0.127	0.125	
External debt stocks, total (DOD, current US\$)	0.565	0.301	0.346	0.304	0.146	0.565	
Container port traffic (TEU: 20-foot equivalent units)	0.309	0.146	0.889	0.123	0.142		
Rail lines (total route – km)	0.439	0.821	0.144	0.220			
Trademark applications, non-resident, by count	0.479	0.311	0.587	0.207	0.262	0.150	

(continued)

Table 6.5 (Cont.)

Loadings	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	
Merchandise imports (current US\$)	0.779	0.270	0.420	0.295	0.152	0.118	
Merchandise exports (current US\$)	0.669	0.184	0.609	0.285	0.193		
Merchandise exports by the reporting economy (current US\$)	0.640	0.231	0.562	0.352	0.179		
Merchandise imports by the reporting economy (current US\$)	0.738	0.316	0.390	0.362	0.137		
International tourism, number of arrivals	0.379	0.196	0.237	0.803	0.108		
Commercial service imports (current US\$)	0.842	0.162	0.354	0.243	0.161		
International tourism, number of departures	0.472	0.219	0.244	0.693	0.171		
High-technology exports (current US\$)	0.411	0.111	0.833	0.187	0.103		
Population in largest city	0.265	0.268	0.219	0.136	0.882		

Loadings	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	
SS	loadings	4.965	10.259	2.856	2.636	1.374	0.673
Proportion	Var	0.207	0.427	0.119	0.110	0.057	0.028
Cumulative	Var	0.634	0.427	0.753	0.863	0.920	0.948

Table 6.6 Donor pool countries for the SCM

Name	Code	Name	Code	Name	Code
Afghanistan	AFG	Grenada	GRD	Panama	PAN
Albania	ALB	Guatemala	GTM	Papua New Guinea	PNG
Algeria	DZA	Guinea	GIN	Paraguay	PRY
Angola	AGO	Guinea-Bissau	GNB	Peru	PER
Antigua and Barbuda	ATG	Guyana	GUY	Philippines	PHL
Argentina	ARG	Haiti	HTI	Puerto Rico	PRI
Armenia	ARM	Honduras	HND	Qatar	QAT
Australia	AUS	Hong Kong	HKG	Russia	RUS
Azerbaijan	AZE	Iceland	ISL	Rwanda	RWA
Bahamas	BHS	India	IND	Samoa	WSM
Bahrain	BHR	Indonesia	IDN	Sao Tome and Principe	STP
Bangladesh	BGD	Iran	IRN	Saudi Arabia	SAU
Barbados	BRB	Iraq	IRQ	Senegal	SEN
Belarus	BLR	Israel	ISR	Serbia	SRB
Belize	BLZ	Jamaica	JAM	Seychelles	SYC
Benin	BEN	Japan	JPN	Sierra Leone	SLE
Bermuda	BMU	Jordan	JOR	Singapore	SGP
Bhutan	BTN	Kazakhstan	KAZ	Solomon Islands	SLB
Bolivia	BOL	Kenya	KEN	Somalia	SOM
Bosnia and Herzegovina	BIH	Kiribati	KIR	South Africa	ZAF
Botswana	BWA	Korea, Republic of	KOR	Sri Lanka	LKA
Brazil	BRA	Kuwait	KWT	St. Kitts & Nevis	KNA
Brunei	BRN	Kyrgyzstan	KGZ	St. Lucia	LCA

(continued)

Table 6.6 (Cont.)

Name	Code	Name	Code	Name	Code
Burkina Faso	BFA	Laos	LAO	St Vincent & Grenadines	VCT
Burundi	BDI	Lebanon	LBN	Sudan	SDN
Cambodia	KHM	Lesotho	LSO	Suriname	SUR
Cameroon	CMR	Liberia	LBR	Swaziland	SWZ
Canada	CAN	Libya	LBY	Switzerland	CHE
Cape Verde	CPV	Macao	MAC	Syria	SYR
Central African Republic	CAF	Macedonia	MKD	Taiwan	TWN
Chad	TCD	Madagascar	MDG	Tajikistan	TJK
Chile	CHL	Malawi	MWI	Tanzania	TZA
China Version 1	CHN	Malaysia	MYS	Thailand	THA
China Version 2	CH2	Maldives	MDV	Timor-Leste	TLS
Colombia	COL	Mali	MLI	Togo	TGO
Comoros	COM	Marshall Islands	MHL	Tonga	TON
Congo, Dem. Rep.	ZAR	Mauritania	MRT	Trinidad & Tobago	TTO
Congo, Republic of	COG	Mauritius	MUS	Tunisia	TUN
Costa Rica	CRI	Mexico	MEX	Turkey	TUR
Cote d'Ivoire	CIV	Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	FSM	Turkmenistan	TKM
Cuba	CUB	Moldova	MDA	Uganda	UGA
Djibouti	DJI	Mongolia	MNG	Ukraine	UKR
Dominica	DMA	Montenegro	MNE	United Arab Emirates	ARE
Dominican Republic	DOM	Morocco	MAR	United Kingdom	GBR
Ecuador	ECU	Mozambique	MOZ	United States	USA
Egypt	EGY	Namibia	NAM	Uruguay	URY
El Salvador	SLV	Nepal	NPL	Uzbekistan	UZB

Name	Code	Name	Code	Name	Code
Equatorial Guinea	GNQ	New Zealand	NZL	Vanuatu	VUT
Eritrea	ERI	Nicaragua	NIC	Venezuela	VEN
Ethiopia	ETH	Niger	NER	Vietnam	VNM
Fiji	FJI	Nigeria	NGA	Yemen	YEM
Gabon	GAB	Norway	NOR	Zambia	ZMB
Gambia, The	GMB	Oman	OMN	Zimbabwe	ZWE
Georgia	GEO	Pakistan	PAK		
Ghana	GHA	Palau	PLW		

Notes

1. The '100 days programme' was a series of actions promised for the first 100 days of the MSZP–SZDSZ government as part of their 2002 electoral campaign. Once the coalitions won the elections, the actions included, among other things, the increase in administration salaries by 50 per cent and a one-time bonus for pensioners. Péter Medgyessy was the candidate prime minister for MSZP during the '100 days programme' campaign. The programme is alleged to have cost around 150 billion forints.
2. Ferencs Gyurcsány was the MSZP prime minister from 2004 to 2009. He was implicated in a scandal where, during the annual 2006 MSZP party congress, he allegedly admitted to the misuse of government funds and to having falsified Hungary's budget in the country's yearly financial report to the EU.

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Part III

Networks of power and resistance

Foreword by Jan Kubik

As Polanyi famously observed, history moves through the never-ending sequence of movements and countermovements. On a smaller scale, in the field of social movements, we observe a similar dynamic of mobilisations and counter-mobilisations. The three chapters in this section are devoted to the analysis of different aspects of this dynamic. Employing the tools of network analysis, Mátyás shows how over time Orbán's operatives in Hungary dismantled the powerful elite of anti-populist editors-in-chief, while Heilig and Baginova examine the mechanisms of counter-mobilisation to the wave of right-wing populist mobilisation in Poland.

As is amply documented in this volume and numerous other studies, right-wing populists organise simultaneously on several levels, and, once they achieve state power, they make a concerted effort to solidify their grip on the country's economic and cultural resources. Then they utilise the newly acquired access to state resources not only to promote their anti-pluralist ideology, but also to further enhance their networks, both in the system of political parties (political society) and in the sector of civil society they create and cultivate. But if people's freedom of assembly is sufficiently robust, populist mobilisations generate anti-populist counter-mobilisations. The conflict between these two mobilisations is not only political; given the Manichean tenor of the populist world view and the right wing's dominant strategy of 'othering' various categories and groups of people, a culture war commences. It can be usefully conceptualised as a battle between liberalism and il- or anti-liberalism (Kubik, 2024).

To understand this battle, we need to observe how the participating 'armies' are organised, and we thus need to approach populism not just as a type of discourse or ideology (see the Introduction) but also as a political strategy or method of organising public and political

practice. Right-wing populists are very good at organising their troops (Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Ślarzyński, 2017, 2018) but they also invest considerable resources in demobilising their political adversaries. Since the capacity to mobilise and organise one's ideological kin is essential to achieve long-term political viability, it becomes the target of one's political competitors. This is documented by Mátyás in his innovative analysis of the dismantling of the networks of liberal journalists by the Orbán regime. The Hungarian Prime Minister employed the tried-and-tested political strategy of *divide et impera* composed of three specific tactics: the co-optation of established journalists, the promotion of less talented but more loyal replacements and the preparation of ideologically 'correct' young adepts of the journalistic profession.

The Polish case (2015–23) illustrates well that in response to right-wing cultural and political mobilisation, the broadly understood 'liberal' side responds with its own mobilisation. Since the right-wing populist government, in cooperation with the increasingly conservative Catholic Church, dramatically curtailed women's reproductive rights and initiated anti-LGBT+ campaigns, many liberal and left-leaning groups responded with their own mobilisation around the same issues.

Heilig's study of this mobilisation, based on a different version of network analysis than the one used by Mátyás, supports the idea that the study of civil society must consider its ideologisation, no less intense than in the system of political parties, and the main structural consequence of this fact: pillarisation (Ekiert and Kubik, 2014; Ekiert, 2021). Civil societies are ridden with ideological and political conflicts, and treating them as monolithic foundations of democracy is thus a mistake.

By reconstructing networks of cooperation and value-sharing between the political parties and civic groups *within* each pillar, Heilig also contributes to an important subfield of comparative political analysis that deals with the relationship between civil and political societies (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Ekiert and Kubik, 1999; Bermeo and Nord, 2000). She also provides nuanced empirical evidence supporting the idea that within the broadly understood liberal pillar, there exist two sub-pillars – liberal and left-leaning (more 'progressive') – that sometimes have divergent ideas and interests.

Baginova's chapter is also focused on mobilisation around the defence of women's rights. Relying on her own ethnographic interviews, she notes in particular three important phenomena: (1) the emergence of a robust subculture protective of women's interests, (2) the development of horizontal networks among many activists fighting for women's

rights and (3) the expansion of transnational networks of cooperation between feminist movements.

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A diachronic social network analysis of the impact of the populist party system on civil society and the media in Hungary, 1990–2020

Máté Mátyás

Introduction

In 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party achieved a landslide two thirds supermajority in the national legislative elections. They repeated this astonishing success in 2014, 2018 and 2022 alongside similarly lopsided electoral victories in European Parliamentary and local elections. Today, Orbán is the longest-serving head of state or government in the EU and the longest-serving Prime Minister in Hungarian history. Fidesz has secured constitutional changes and legislative supermajorities more successfully than any other contemporary European party or movement, while maintaining a stable, growing economy. Among scholars, Orbán and his Fidesz party are universally understood to be populist. As Orbán embraced populism, Hungary's political regime quickly evolved into *competitive authoritarianism*, a term coined to describe hybrid regimes which combine democratic and autocratic elements (Levitsky and Way, 2020). This dramatic turn – often evaluated as a form of regime change and democratic backsliding (Greskovits, 2015) – contradicts some expectations of International Relations theory, democratic theory and 'transitology'. The remarkable stability of populist governance in Hungary holds important lessons for theories of international political economy, democratic and democratisation theory and populism studies.

This chapter argues that the relationship between civil society and the media requires closer investigation if we are to fully understand the

success of populist politics in Hungary. Pro-democratic civil society has been viewed as a pivotal player in democratisation and a bulwark against undemocratic forces. Indeed, it played a significant role in the democratic transitions in CEE, including that of Hungary (Ekiert and Kubik, 1998). Therefore, its failure to counter or even seriously challenge populism in Hungary under Orbán in the 2010s presents a noteworthy theoretical puzzle.

The media perform a special function as the primary conduit of political information, shaping the perceptions of millions of voters and elite decision-makers alike. As such, the interplay between the media and populism has attracted considerable academic attention (see, for example, Aalberg et al., 2017). Without the media – especially the mass media – populism could not have ascended to global prominence. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that in Hungary, civil society media had the potential to serve as a crucial force for democratic pluralism. However, in the period under investigation, it was ultimately unable to fulfil this potential. Given these preliminary observations, the chapter poses this research question: how did the populist party system affect civil society and the media in Hungary from 1990 to 2020?

Using an innovative theoretical and methodological approach, the chapter shows that a key segment of Hungarian civil society and the media failed to come together and effectively counter the massive, almost hegemonic Fidesz-led social movement and social network. This points to two important phenomena. Firstly, populism needs to be understood as a political strategy, an aspect of political organising that aims to create an efficient social movement. Secondly, countering high-functioning populism thus needs a disciplined and thoughtful counter-organisation and resource-sharing among a large network of social groups and stakeholders. This was not the case in Hungary in the 2010s, and there is little sign of this changing any time soon given the dominance of the Fidesz-led social movement.

Literature review

This chapter lies at the intersection of multiple areas of research united by a shared relationalist ontological–epistemological position and the specific case study of post-communist Hungary: namely, populism and party systems; political communication, media and media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Bajomi-Lázár, 2014, 2018; Polyák, 2015; Mátyás, 2020); as well as civil society and social movements.

Within the field of political systems and regime types, the research in this chapter focuses on the concept of ‘party system’ (Sartori and Mair, 2005), which is understood here as ‘to a certain extent stabilised relations among parties’ (Soós, 2012: 15). The present case study looks beyond party-to-party relations, aiming instead to uncover trends between parties, on the one hand, and civil society and the media, on the other. The research seeks out instances and evidence of interpersonal interactions among them within the context of existing scholarship on the Hungarian party system (Boda and Körösenyi, 2012; Körösenyi, 2015).

As this research is investigating the impact of populism on civil society and the media, it is essential to take account of the organisational aspects of populism (Mouzelis, 1985: 341) and not only its ideological character. This study thus argues that ‘populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers’ (Weyland, 2001: 14).

However, there is an important amendment to Weyland’s definition, as the chapter argues that no mass support can be ‘unmediated’, as Kriesi (2013: 9–10, emphasis added) explains:

As the public sphere extended beyond the local realm ... the communication between citizens and their representatives became essentially *media-based*. ... Moreover, they [the media] have a particular importance for those non-established political actors, like social movement organizations ... [Mediatisation] can be defined as the growing intrusion of the media logic as an institutional rule into fields – such as political communication – where other rules of defining appropriate behaviour prevailed.

Civil society, a key sphere of social life, needs to be also considered here. The study follows Waisbord’s (2011: 112, emphasis added) conclusive observation:

to view civil society as a communicative space of opposition to the state and the market is insufficient. ... Civil society encompasses heterogeneous and contradictory interests about desirable media systems, policy priorities, and paths to reform. This heterogeneity should make us more cautious about making categorical generalizations about ‘civic society’ or ‘civic engagement with the state.’ *Who* are we talking about? What are *their* priorities? How are civic actors positioned vis-à-vis competing state interests?

What alliances are formed between civic and state interests? What views of civil society inform policy debates and proposals? Asking these questions is necessary to understand ideological and political divides in civil society as well as the articulation between civic groups and political elites.

These insights serve as a major impetus for the reconceptualisations that are proposed in this work – mainly, the shift towards social movements. Diani's formulation of the concept is instructive, seeing social movements as 'networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities' (1992: 1). Diani, together with Donatella della Porta (2011: 69), argues:

Social movements are actually just one possible mode of coordination of collective action within civil society. Their peculiarity lies in the coupling of dense interorganizational networks and collective identities that transcend the boundaries of any specific organization and encompass much broader collectivities ... A good deal of collective action in civil society may also take the form of instrumental coalitions ... At other times, collective action is promoted by networks of like-minded people concerned with a specific issue or a broader cause ... rather than by organizations alone.

All these strands of literature are interrelated on relationalist grounds which hold that '[a]ny natural or social phenomenon is constituted through interactions between various human and non-human interactants' (Dépelteau, 2018: 18). This ontological and epistemological view suggests a clear preference for social network analysis methods.

Methods: hypotheses, sample selection, data collection and its analysis

In line with its relationalist theoretical foundations and the research question 'How has the populist party system affected civil society and the media in Hungary from 1990 to 2020?', the goal of this research is to identify a distinguishable impact in the *structure* of the observed interrelationships in the period of populist governance from 2010 to 2020. It assumes that

H₁: During the period of populist domination over the party system, interpersonal interaction networks among individuals in civil society and the media system in Hungary experienced sudden, momentous structural changes compared to earlier years.

The terms ‘sudden’ and ‘momentous’ are used to denote interactions that are justifiably attributable to the populist party system and to populist actors. The changes need to be atypical, differing from earlier (pre-2010) interactions and impacts on civil society and the media. The alternative hypothesis is:

H₀: There are no identifiable sudden, momentous structural changes in civil society and the media system in Hungary during the period of party system under populism compared to earlier years.

Theoretically, the confirmation of H₀ would not invalidate the usefulness of the term ‘populism’ but would definitely diminish the usefulness of the political strategic definition as applied to Hungary after 2010.

For numerous reasons – chiefly, poor availability of reliable, especially *relational* data about the research subject – this chapter must limit its focus to a narrow subset of highly influential individuals in Hungarian civil society and the media. Hence, it selects a small, elite sample whose members can be observed relatively well. It is reasonable to assume that if populism impacts interrelationships among the leading figures of the most influential civil society groups and media organisations, less significant actors and their organisations would be affected, too.

To select the most influential, politically relevant civil society organisations, this research relies on the metric of *the amount of financial support received from the population* in the period under investigation.¹ Throughout the 2010s, there are four *civil society media organisations* that consistently feature prominently on the list:

- Free Frequency! Foundation (*Szabad Sávot Alapítvány*), which supports the otherwise commercial Budapest radio station ‘Club Radio’ (*Klubrádió*);
- Radio Maria Public Benefit Association (*Mária Rádió Közhasznú Egyesület*), which operates the volunteer religious media outlet ‘Radio Maria’ (*Mária Rádió*) nationwide;
- Forbidden Cultural Foundation (*Tilos Kulturális Alapítvány*), operating the Budapest local civil society radio station Forbidden Radio (*Tilos Rádió*);

- TransparentNet Foundation (*Átlátszónet Alapítvány*), which supports Transparent (*Átlátszó*), a civil investigative journalism team and on-line news website.

This selection complements and is compatible with the other research subject, the media – providing an appropriate baseline to which commercial mass media can be compared.

Mass media outlets are selected based on the size of their respective audiences in the 2010s. It is common sense to select the four most widely consumed mass media outlets, which are virtually household names in Hungary. While their audience sizes have slightly changed over the decades, remarkably, they reach the largest audiences (each approximately one to two million people). All of them started operating at the end of the 1990s:

- *RTL Klub*, a commercial TV channel launched in 1997. The study focuses on the organisation of its main primetime news programme, *News*cast (*Híradó*);
- *TV2*, a commercial TV channel launched in 1997. The study focuses on the organisation of its main primetime news programme, *Facts* (*Tények*);
- *Origo.hu*, an online news portal since 1998;
- *Index.hu*, an online news portal since 1999.

This research pinpoints the specific role of the editors-in-chief as the most significant, directly comparable and relatively traceable ‘units’ of observation (see [Table 7.1](#)). Editors-in-chief are the most prominent journalists who bear responsibility for their outlets’ content. They shape the daily national socio-political discourses. The identities of the people in these roles are relatively straightforward to identify. In the present case, it is possible to determine with almost complete certainty (down to the months in question) who the editors-in-chief were in the 2010s and to reconstruct their career trajectories.

In the highly polarised Hungarian media system (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014, 2018), working and belonging to the same outlet ensures that co-workers share a degree of mutual understanding as well as professional, journalistic and political similarities. Therefore, it is logical to study professional interactions between colleagues.

The choice of relationships between editors-in-chief was based on their having been members of and having worked in the same professional

Table 7.1 Overview of the selected editors-in-chief, the units of observation grouped by their media outlets in alphabetical order

Name of the editor-in-chief	Time in position (between 2010 and 2020)	Selected for position at
BODOKY Tamás	since 2011	Átlátszó
DUDÁS Gergely	2013–17	Index
DULL Szabolcs	2019–20	
MÉSZÁROS Zsófia	2011–13	
SZOMBATHY Pál	2020	
TÓTH-SZENESI Attila	2017–19	
UJ Péter	2000–11	
PATAKI Gábor	since 2014	Klubrádió
VICSEK Ferenc	2010–14	
PRONTVAI Vera	since 2016	Mária Rádió
GÁBOR László	since 2017 and 2015, respectively	Origo and TV2
GYÖRGY Bence	2016–17 and 2010–15, respectively	
GAZDA Albert	2011–13	Origo
PÁLMAI L. Ákos	2014–17	
SÁLING Gergő	2013–14	
WEYER Balázs	2000–11	
KOTROCZÓ Róbert	since 2001	RTL Klub
DÁVID Ferenc	since 2002	Tilos Rádió
AZURÁK Csaba	2015–16	TV2
KÓHEGYI Anna	2016–17	
TÓTH Tamás Antal	2017–19	

organisations for at least a year. Thus, it is assumed that interpersonal interactions exist between two editors-in-chief if they spent at least one year as members or employees (regardless of their job titles, roles or positions) at the same organisation (usually a media outlet) at the same time between 1990 and 2020.

To do so, the research gathered each editor-in-chief's career history from the following sources:

- the selected media outlets' content – as outlets often report on their own personnel changes;

- other online information – always critically evaluating the validity of the information;
- online searches regarding the individual editors-in-chief;
- the identified social media profiles of editors-in-chief (on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and so on);
- individual outreach to confirm information.

The data gathered creates a matrix of the selected individuals' affiliations between 1990 and 2020. If in the same year an organisation is featured multiple times under two or more different editors-in-chief, those editors-in-chief are marked as colleagues in 'co-working' dyads. Based on the database of these shared memberships, dyads and 'chains' of dyads – ultimately, a social network – form.

The time factor turns this into a temporal social network: dynamic changes – the establishment and dissolution of dyads, cliques and 'sub-networks' – are studied using temporal social network analysis (tSNA). Software-based tSNA is utilised to analyse the compiled dataset. The analysis is carried out using three packages of the open-source statistical software R and their manuals: 'sna' (Butts, 2020), 'tsna' (Bender-deMoll et al., 2016) and 'ndtv' (Bender-deMoll and Morris, 2016). These R packages allow for two main types of social networks to be constructed: static and dynamic, temporal networks.

First, one static social network is created which encompasses the entire period under investigation (1990–2020), containing all the observed interrelationships among the selected editors-in-chief. This means that in this 'overarching' social network, ties accumulate over time. So, for example, even if an interrelationship was established only for a single year as early as 1990, it will 'remain' in the full network.

Hence, second, to better account for changes in the network, the analysis splits the period of observation into three segments. These are demarcated by the entry into force of two media laws in the post-communist period (in 1997 and 2011, respectively): 1990–97, 1998–2010 and 2011–20. This temporal 'slicing' of the overarching social network, in practical terms, results in the construction of three separate static social networks. So, ties in these three separate static social networks do not accumulate throughout the entire period of observation. Rather, only ties established in the same time segments are accounted for. For example, if two editors-in-chief only worked together in the early 1990s, their relationship will not be represented in the static social network of 2011–20.

Temporal social network analysis: dynamic changes within the network

First, the entire temporal social network is visualised (Figure 7.1).

The software automatically divides the three decades of observations into nine snapshots. Each depicts the active collaborative ties among the actors. The general trend that underlies the whole analysis already surfaces here.² There are separate ‘communities’ in the network throughout the entire period of observation, and the connections between these cliques and sub-networks become denser in the first half of the period (around 2008). Then, their cohesion declines.

As a second step, networks in the three sub-periods determined above are visualised. This way, three separate snapshots are created. Each shows the active interrelationships at the specific year end of its sub-period, in 1997, 2010 and 2020. Figure 7.2 displays the same dynamic: network cohesiveness peaks in the second period when several different groups are established.³

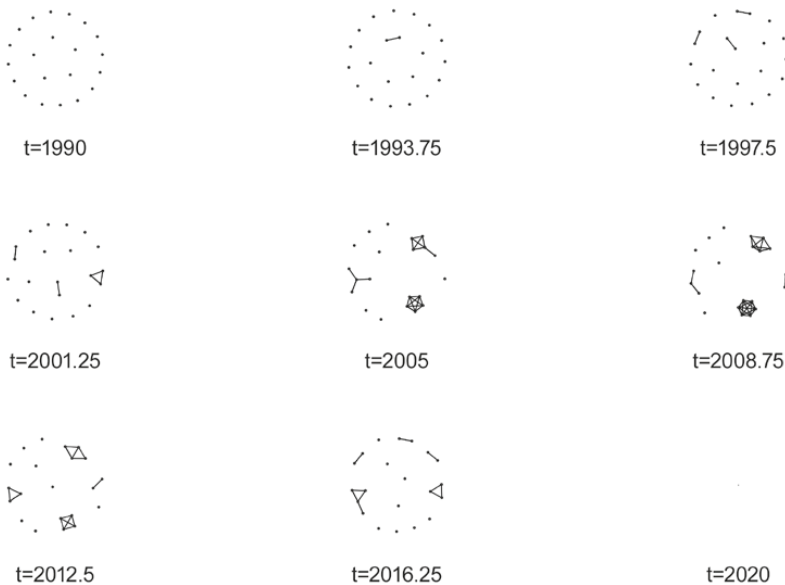


Figure 7.1 The temporal evolution of the ties within the social network

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Figure 7.2 The depictions of the interrelationships at the end-years of each separate period

© Author

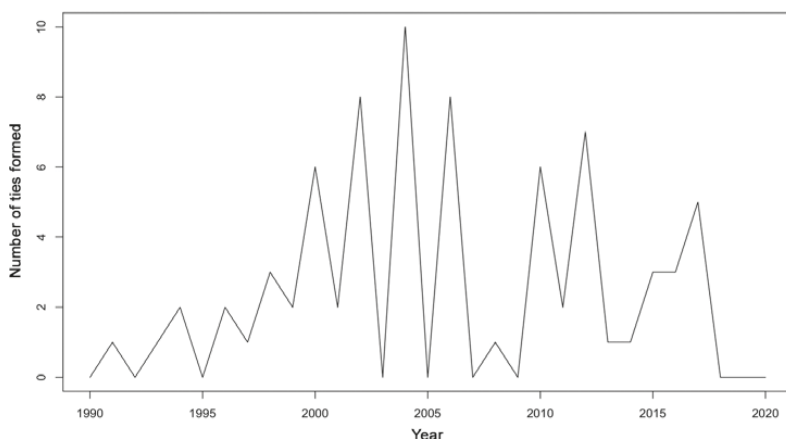


Figure 7.3 The annual tie (edge, interrelationship) formation counts of the temporal social network (1990–2020)

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In the third step, the 1990–2020 dynamic network’s cohesiveness is studied quantitatively (Figure 7.3). The software can quantify and plot both the creations and the dissolutions of interrelationships among editors-in-chief. It is worth studying the formations of interrelationships first within the predetermined time frames.

The differences between the first and the second periods are significant. In almost every year of the second period, more interrelationships were formed than in any year of the first period. Compared to the second period, the third period (the time of populist governance after the 2011 media law) shows a relative decline. There are two spikes in 2012 and following 2015 – but the curve steadily flatlines after that.

For the full picture, one also needs to consider the number of dissolved interrelationships, too. [Figure 7.4](#) also appears to confirm the observation that the whole dynamic network’s cohesiveness peaks in the second period.

Note that the figure accounts for accumulating interrelationships. This means that if there are only a few interrelationships established, only a few can be dissolved. So, for a larger number of ties to have ceased, there needs to be a preceding period of steady accumulation of ties.

Compared to the first period, the second one features significant peaks around 2001 and in 2009–10. Nevertheless, the third period still stands out in terms of the number of ties dissolved. While the peaks around 2001 and 2009–10 may be explained with global economic trends (the dot-com bubble and the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath) resulting in layoffs in the media, the ‘worst’ year of the dissolutions (2011) and the high levels of dissolution of collegial interrelationships throughout the rest of the 2010s happen at a time of economic growth – during the party system dominated by a populist party.

Additionally, the quantitative analysis of social network connectedness also confirms this trend. Connectedness is a network-level metric which measures how much a given network resembles the hierarchy archetype⁴ – with its score ranging from zero to one. R computes these annual values (see [Table 7.2](#)). With its connectedness values between zero and 0.214, the collegial social network of the selected editors-in-chief

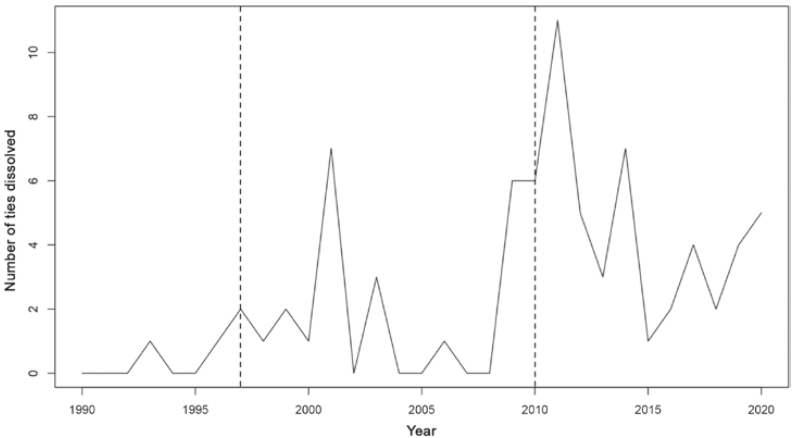


Figure 7.4 The annual tie (edge, interrelationship) dissolution counts in the temporal social network (1990–2020)

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Table 7.2 Annual connectedness values (marked with a grey colour scale: the higher the values, the darker their background colours)

1991	0.16666
1992	0.16666
1993	0.13333
1994	0.14286
1995	0.10714286
1996	0.21428571
1997	0.08333333
1998	0.09090909
1999	0.07575758
2000	0.1025641
2001	0.06410256
2002	0.18095238
2003	0.12380952
2004	0.18333333
2005	0.18333333
2006	0.18300654
2007	0.18300654
2008	0.16959064
2009	0.14035088
2010	0.14210526
2011	0.12631579
2012	0.10526316
2013	0.07368421
2014	0.04285714
2015	0.05238095
2016	0.06666667
2017	0.07619048
2018	0.07619048
2019	0.05238095
2020	0.02380952

never resembles a hierarchical organisation; its connectedness remains low throughout.

Displaying these values on a simple line plot on [Figure 7.5](#), the chart conveys a similar impression. Interestingly, the connectedness of the social network peaked in 1996. This is most likely due to a smaller number of active editors-in-chief in the 1990s. Most of the editors-in-chief selected in this sample were not yet professionally active in the mid-1990s, so a relatively smaller number of collegial interrelationships among them could result in a higher overall connectedness in the first sub-period. In the second sub-period, connectedness values plateau at the relatively high score of 0.183 in the years 2004–07, a level to which they never return. The third sub-period highlights the decline of connectedness, decreasing to almost zero in 2020.

The interpretation of the low values of the connectedness indicator could even be positive. Since connectedness relates to the notion of hierarchy, one could see these developments as moving from a more hierarchical media elite structure towards a less hierarchical one. At this point, however, two caveats need to be made. First, as mentioned, connectedness values always stay low. Second, this dataset is far from being comprehensive; it represents only 21 – albeit highly influential – editors-in-chief, therefore any conclusions drawn need to be understood with reference to their interrelationships and not assumed to be a complete characterisation of all interpersonal and inter-organisational relationships in the Hungarian media. Hence, what the rising–falling tendency of their connectedness really represents is that these individuals (mostly representing mass media editors-in-chief who displayed

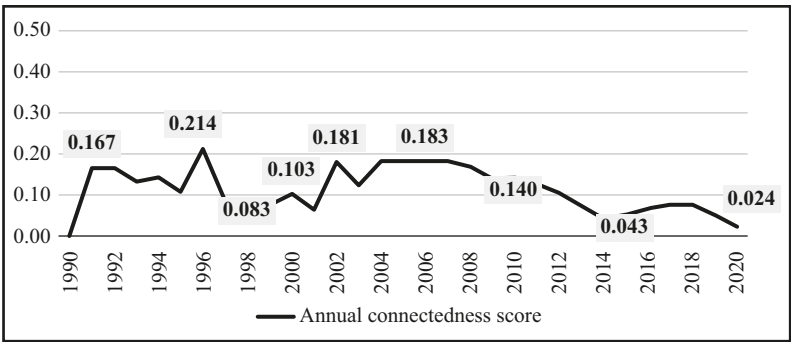


Figure 7.5 The annual connectedness scores of the temporal social network throughout the entire period of observation (1990–2020)

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left-liberal, critical attitudes⁵ towards the Fidesz-led governments and other populist actors) had been working together less and less by 2020.

Hence, the combination of the quantitative analysis of connectedness as well as the preceding visual analysis all point towards the same result. There is an increasingly cohesive social network up to 2010, which subsequently dissipates relatively quickly during the period in which the party system is dominated by populists. But to analyse the data in more detail and evaluate the fundamental hypothesis of this research, the chapter now delves more into the quantitative analysis of the same network – but this time converted into a series of static networks.

Static social network analysis: comparing the full network and the three periodical networks

The entire static network (1990–2020)

‘Converting’ a temporal social network into a static one means disregarding the sequence of events over time and treating all interrelationships contained in the dataset as simultaneous. This means that the interrelationships that lasted at least one year are considered equally, regardless of their actual lengths.

The visualisation of the full static social network (see [Figure 7.6](#)) was somewhat surprising. Although the annual connectedness values of

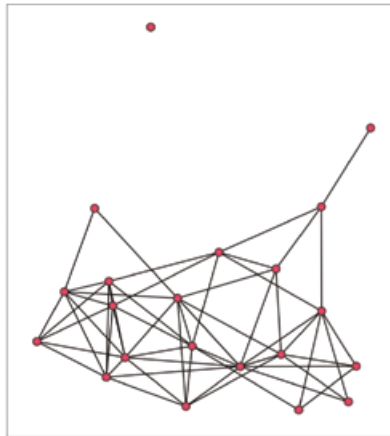


Figure 7.6 All interrelationships throughout the entire period of observation (1990–2020) among the selected editors-in-chief as a static social network

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the changing social networks throughout the entire period of observation are very low, the ‘static’ visualisation shows a rather densely connected graph. Indeed, the connectedness of the full static network of collegial interrelationships takes on a very high value: 0.905. Two reasons can explain these – at first glance – somewhat contradictory results.

The first one is related to the nature of the change of method from observing a series of changing networks to an image of the ‘synthetic’ static social network: namely, the relative overstatement of the ‘weight’ of short-term (even one-year-long) interrelationships and the ‘strength of weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973). It shows that the selected, highly influential subset of the Hungarian media elite have worked together at least temporarily. However, there is a discernible structural difference among them: except for Bodoky Tamás (the founder and editor-in-chief of *Átlátszó*), the other civil society outlets’ editors-in-chief are only sparsely connected to the rest of the network – with *Mária Rádió* editor-in-chief Prontvai Vera being the only actor in the network isolated from everyone else.

The second reason is the peripheral position of liberal civil society editors-in-chief – primarily, Pataki Gábor, *Klubrádió*’s former editor-in-chief. To recall, the quantitative measurement of connectedness also takes into account the similarity of a given network to the ideal type of a hierarchy (Krackhardt, 1994). Since Pataki is connected to the rest of the network through one tie to another actor who, in turn, is also connected to the rest of the network through a few ties, the network ‘accidentally’ appears to be similar to a relatively efficient hierarchical organisational chart. But, in reality, Pataki does not come close to being an influential or powerful figure in the Hungarian media.

To amend this somewhat misleading result, the analysis turns to the centralities⁶ of the actors that highlight their roles in the network (Tables 7.3 and 7.4). Indeed, it is the individual histories and circumstances of the editors-in-chief that imply causal linkages between the party system, on the one hand, and civil society and the media, on the other. It is worth focusing on the bottom five and top five in the rankings. Among the five lowest-ranked editors-in-chief – all with a zero betweenness score but a handful of actual collegial ties to the rest of the network – three are liberal civil society media representatives. So the fact that liberal civil society media journalists do not play a central role in the Hungarian media seems rather clear. But this should not be interpreted to mean that they are unimportant in the network. Quite the opposite: liberal civil society media editor-in-chief Bodoky testifies that civil society can be influential. For example, in a podcast (Tóth, 2018)

Table 7.3 The centrality values of the selected editors-in-chief in the full static social network (1990–2020), coloured from white (lowest) to dark grey (highest) and ranked according to their betweenness centrality scores from highest to lowest

Ranking	Name	Degrees	Stress centrality score	Betweenness centrality score
1	PÁLMAI	12	214	64.699392000
2	WEYER	9	118	44.224007000
3	SZOMBATHY	6	98	39.013484000
4	VICSEK	4	76	36.566667000
5	DULL	8	104	34.368455000
6	AZURÁK	7	76	32.960458000
7	GAZDA	9	84	18.434241000
8	KOTROCZÓ	5	56	17.969332000
9	UJ	7	56	15.133394000
10	BODOKY	7	30	15.043860000
11	DUDÁS	7	44	13.096825000
12	GYÖRGY	8	46	12.226768000
13	TÓTH-SZENESI	7	44	12.125397000
14	SÁLING	6	28	3.921053000
15	KŐHEGYI	4	10	2.700000000
16	TÓTH	3	8	1.516667000
17–21	MÉSZÁROS	5	0	0.000000000
	GÁBOR	3	0	0.000000000
	DÁVID	2	0	0.000000000
	PATAKI	1	0	0.000000000
	PRONTVAI	0	0	0.000000000

interview, he makes the claim that his outlet, *Átlátszó*, can be credited for popularising the word ‘oligarch’ in Hungarian public discourse (Tóth, 2020, from 10:00).

Indeed, the low rankings of liberal civil society editors-in-chief regarding how central a role they play in the full static network also stems from the selection of applied analytical methods. This specific type of social network analysis highlights actors with multiple changes in their work histories. So what the low rankings of most liberal civil society editors-in-chief reflect is the stable, long-term approach to their organisations – albeit

Table 7.4 The centrality values of the selected editors-in-chief in the three periods

	1990–96				1997–2010				2011–20			
	Name	Degrees	Stress centrality	Betweenness centrality	Name	Degrees	Stress centrality	Betweenness centrality	Name	Degrees	Stress centrality	Betweenness centrality
1	BODOKY	2	2	2	PÁLMAI	12	86	31.507143	GAZDA	6	100	55.53
2	WEYER	2	2	2	WEYER	9	51	21.084921	DULL	7	75	46.1
3	VICSEK	2	0	0	SZOMBATHY	6	49	19.110317	PÁLMAI	5	54	28
4	KOTROCZÓ	2	0	0	VICSEK	4	38	18.361111	DUDÁS	4	48	26
5	GAZDA	2	0	0	DULL	8	50	16.835714	KŐHEGYI	5	35	15.03
6	UJ	1	0	0	AZURÁK	7	38	16.630159	TÓTH-SZENESI	4	31	12.5
7	SZOMBATHY	1	0	0	KOTROCZÓ	5	28	10.559524	AZURÁK	4	13	9
8					GAZDA	9	39	9.890476	GYÖRGY	3	4	2.4
9					GYÖRGY	8	23	6.848413	SÁLING	4	6	2.2
10					BODOKY	7	15	6.80119	UJ	4	6	2.2
11					DUDÁS	7	22	6.652381	MÉSZÁROS	4	2	0.53
12					TÓTH-SZENESI	7	22	6.652381	SZOMBATHY	3	1	0.5
13					UJ	7	25	6.579762	GÁBOR	3	0	0
14					SÁLING	6	14	2.054762	WEYER	2	0	0
15					TÓTH	3	4	1.233333	TÓTH	2	0	0
16					KŐHEGYI	4	5	1.198413	BODOKY	2	0	0
17					PRONTVAI	0	0	0	DÁVID	2	0	0
18					PATAKI	1	0	0	VICSEK	1	0	0
19					DÁVID	2	0	0	PATAKI	1	0	0
20					GÁBOR	3	0	0	KOTROCZÓ	0	0	0
21					MÉSZÁROS	5	0	0	PRONTVAI	0	0	0

with presumably lower societal significance due also to the low audience sizes of their outlets. Moreover, when analysing the role of liberal civil society, we need to note that two other editors-in-chief of civil society media outlets, Bodoky Tamás and Vicsek Ferenc, actually achieve remarkably high centrality scores. Their career trajectories, however, give another insight into the role of liberal civil society media. Both had had a prominent career in the mass media before joining civil society outlets. Openly critical of the populist government, they shifted from mass media to liberal civil society media due to strong external, political and business pressures (Bednárík, 2014; Tóth, 2020, 38:50). By 2020, the few surviving collegial interrelationships in the temporal network are either links from fully civil society media collaborations (around *Tilos Rádió* – namely, Bodoky, Dávid and Weyer) or the result of new (for profit) media outlets that have been financed mostly from donations and crowdfunding (namely, *Uj's 444* together with Mészáros and *Telex* with Dull and Tóth-Szenesi) – forms of distinctively liberal civil society action and behaviour.

Nevertheless, going beyond the role of civil society institutions, it is even more important to analyse the most central actors. Besides the aforementioned Vicsek, the second most central journalist, Weyer, is also an active member of civil society media at *Tilos Rádió* – but has been selected as part of the sample due to his long-term work as editor-in-chief at *Origo*. His ‘dual’ role is one of the reasons why he is ranked number two. After being such a central figure in the Hungarian media elite, he has been rather withdrawn from mass media since the mid-2010s following the takeover of *Origo* by Fidesz-linked business actors,⁷ remaining active only at *Tilos Rádió* and advising the independent investigative journalism platform *Direkt36*. Interestingly and finally, the most central actor in the full static social network turns out to be Pálmai L. Ákos. Not a very well-known figure publicly, he worked at *Origo* and *TV2* as editor-in-chief after starting his career at *RTL Klub*. Pálmai has become almost infamous for his role in the takeovers and transformations of both outlets – from critical journalism to pro-government, militant journalism (Waisbord, 2013), which he justified with reference to ‘changing consumer habits’ (Mátrai, 2014).

To better understand the formation of this elite civil society media and mass commercial media network, the analysis turns to the comparison of the three distinct periods.

Comparing the three periods (1990–96, 1997–2010 and 2011–20)

The comparison of the three periods once again displays the underlying dynamic: the network starts out very sparse in the 1990s, forming fully

in the second period and starting to fragment and decline in the 2010s. Except for the 1990s, each period’s centralisation value confirms this quantitatively as well (see [Table 7.5](#)). The reason for the first period’s high centralisation value stems from the fact that the network is rather well connected but has few members; hence, this measure is bound to be high.⁸ Then, in the 2000s, the network expanded massively – nearly halving the centralisation value due to the introduction of more actors than ties. Indeed, at first glance, there seems to be no difference between this period’s social network graph and that of the full static network (see [Figure 7.7](#)).

This is not a mistake: the two graphs are the same, suggesting a major finding. Consequently, the network graph of the 2010s displays a much sparser network – showing signs of fracturing with one more isolate and a dyad disconnecting from the rest of the network.

In the first period, the small number of active editors-in-chief in the 1990s suggests that the whole sample comprises a new generation of journalists. So, while Vásárhelyi (1999) identifies the phenomenon of ‘surviving’ communist media elites in the 1990s, the media elites selected for this study definitely do not belong to this group. In fact, the most senior member of the sample, Vicsek Ferenc, was born in the 1950s. Hence,

Table 7.5 The centralisation values of the three periods’ static social networks

1990–96	1997–2010	2011–20
0.667	0.347	0.219

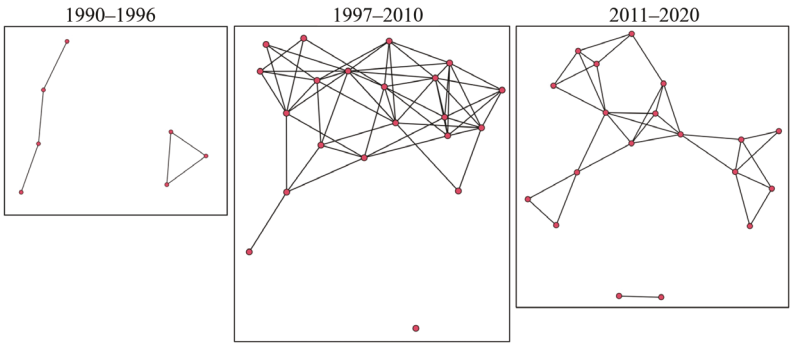


Figure 7.7 The static social network graphs of the three periods’ static social networks

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the majority of the selected editors-in-chief were socialised well after the democratic transition. Moreover, this subset of editors-in-chief who were already active in the 1990s worked at media outlets with markedly left-liberal ideologies.⁹ So altogether, it is perhaps the most important insight of the first period that, as the network starts to take shape in this time, their political attitudes are noticeably left-liberal.

That the graphs representing the second sub-period's network (1997–2010) and the full network (1990–2020) are the same is a major finding. This means there is no collegial interrelationship in the network that did not exist between 1997 and 2010 for at least one year. So, the complete selected collaborative social network was formed in this period – ties constituted in the other two periods are only recurring ones. It may also suggest that the 'small world' of Hungarian civil society and mass commercial media elites is based on a community principle rather than a meritocratic-institutional one. The centrality ranking of the selected journalists in this second period is, naturally, the same as in the case of the full network.¹⁰ In the 2000s, only three of them already held editor-in-chief roles and only Weyer ranks highly among them. So, job titles are not the reason why this analysis highlights some individuals over others. Rather, it is their connections to other well-connected individuals. With this period being the formative beginning of this elite community, it is the varied nature of ties that boosts a journalist's position: both Pálmai and Szombathy worked at three or more outlets in this period.

Lastly, the period of the populist-dominated party system in the 2010s is actually the one in which most of the members of the network assume their paramount positions as editors-in-chief. Many of them who rank highly in this period (for example, Gazda, Dudás and Azurák) have left journalism as a profession temporarily or permanently. Pálmai, while dropping, still ranks highly. In the top slots, Gazda and Dull both worked at *Origo* and *Index* – and both personally claimed that political intervention had been behind their resignation and dismissal (respectively).¹¹ Additionally, Dudás's (Borbás, 2020) and Tóth-Szenesi's (Szeretlek, Magyarország, 2020) career trajectories show the impact of the populist-dominated party system. Ultimately, the decreasing centralities of previously influential editors-in-chief like Weyer, Szombathy or Vicsek attest to the political-economic pressures of the party system, as basically all of them have ultimately discontinued their involvement in civil society media or the mass commercial media.

These developments show a sweeping change in the Hungarian civil society and media elite – in direct parallel to the remaking of the party system donated by a populist party. It is essentially a replacement of the

‘older’, mostly left-liberal pre-2010 elite: formerly high-ranking actors lost their social significance. So those who remained in the industry logically do so with a reduced number of ties to other former colleagues. Even if previously existing professional relationships hold up – and, theoretically, new journalists join the network at ‘lower’, non-editorial level – they usually do so at media outlets whose reach is far lower. Surviving (and perhaps new) relationships only subsist at civil society media outlets or newly founded mass media outlets with smaller audience sizes. These render independent and opposition journalism outlets marginal within the contemporary Hungarian media scene.

Discussion

This analysis confirms hypothesis H_1 and, necessarily, rejects the null hypothesis H_0 . The chapter argues that two major phenomena explain this outcome.

The first phenomenon is inherent to the studied elite civil society and media network: the demise of the ‘old guard’. Amid the evident political-economic pressures from the Fidesz-led government, the opposition and independent media network failed to come together in a meaningful way. Their collegial relationships have vaporised, and many have withdrawn from these spheres. While sometimes new outlets were (re) established after media organisations had been acquired or taken over by pro-government business interests, their successes have proved to be limited.

Civil society, particularly its liberal sector, could be hailed as a refuge, a survival strategy to preserve journalistic independence against political-economic pressures. The spread of crowdfunding and donation campaigns in Hungarian independent and opposition media can also be regarded as an adoption of a civil society strategy, although these are not too far from usual business practices such as paywalls and subscriptions either. It can also be assumed that civil society media and their professional interrelationships have boosted the standing or influence of several editors-in-chief. But *Klubrádió*’s fate¹² – which also threatened *Tilos Rádió* – clearly shows the limits of the civil society strategy.

It is remarkable, nevertheless, how independent and liberal (oppositional) civil society media and commercial mass media failed to muster a united front or even collaborate against populist encroachment. This shortcoming, paralleled by the successful Fidesz-led efforts to build a concentrated, centralised organisation or social movement,¹³ limits the

channels of communication of opposition political actors immensely, leaving pro-government political communication in a dominant, almost hegemonic position in Hungary.

The second phenomenon explaining the results is extrinsic to the studied network sample. With the decline of the elite network I focused on in this research but with several outlets still in operation, what has succeeded these interpersonal networks? The answer suggests an elite change, a ‘great replacement’ of the post-communist Hungarian media elite – as previously mentioned, dominated by editors espousing left-liberal world views. There are three major trends and strategies observable in the replacement of the former media elite: co-opting journalists or ‘side-switching’; promoting formerly lower-ranking, Fidesz-loyalist journalists to higher positions (even hiring them specifically for their ideological leanings); or training and onboarding early-stage journalists, already trained to be pro-government supporters.

All these organisational processes, also related to the evolving landscape of social movements, need to be analysed vis-à-vis the concept of populism. Among the major approaches to populism, it is usually the discursive-stylistic and ideational-ideological ones that inspire most research. This chapter suggests that they miss a crucial point: namely, the role of organisational strategy and behaviour. Although, the political strategic strand is critiqued (Rueda, 2020) as a theoretically and methodologically less-specified branch of populism research, this chapter reinforces the view of Mouzelis (1985) and Weyland (2021) that it is necessary to consider organisational strategy and actors’ interpersonal behaviour if we are to fully understand the phenomenon of populism – and it is best done within a relationalist theoretical framework supported by social network analysis. This contribution essentially sees populism as a distinct political strategy and behaviour that seeks to build mass political support *while simultaneously* undermining opposing political organisations or movements. As a political strategy aimed against political organisations constituting a pluralistic political system, populism contributes to autocratisation (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019).

The journey of Fidesz from a liberal, anti-communist student organisation – through a budding party solidifying its position as a ‘central forcefield’¹⁴ on the Hungarian right wing, splitting, merging and integrating other conservative party formations (Oltay, 2012) amid changing electoral fortunes in the 1990s and 2000s – to becoming the dominant party in the 2010s clearly indicates the conscious and sustained application of an authoritarian-populist strategy.

This research contributes to the understanding of how Fidesz's populist social movement strategy has managed to fundamentally reshape post-communist Hungary's political economy. I focus on the impact of populist political strategy on a small subset of civil society and media elites. Using a populist social movement strategy, Fidesz has established a virtual hegemony over various aspects of Hungary's society, economy and, of course, politics – which still appears to be remarkably stable. Even facing a united opposition at the polls following the global COVID-19 pandemic and health crisis and financial consequences, as well as the tragic war in neighbouring Ukraine with its massive economic fallout and inflationary pressures, Fidesz has managed to increase its vote count and seat share, winning its fourth-in-a-row, two-thirds parliamentary supermajority.

Under these conditions, opposition actors cannot feasibly overcome the structural disadvantages posed by the dominance of the Fidesz-led social movement in the populist-dominated party system without resource-sharing and coordination, on the one hand, and rebuilding their interpersonal and inter-organisational ties to civil society and the media, on the other. The same applies to civil society as well as media organisations. To effectively serve their purpose, they need to engage with each other collaboratively rather than on the current, competitive basis. Hungary's case serves as a cautionary tale globally. Policy proposals (for example, Mátyás, 2022b) must revolve around resolving the conflicts of interest among civil society and media organisations, on the one hand, and politics and business, on the other; strive to increase transparency and thereby trust in these organisations; and create more inclusive and efficient public spheres in Europe and around the world.

Notes

1. Since 1996, taxpayers can donate 1 per cent of their personal income taxes to a civil society organisation and 1 per cent to an established church or religious organisation (Nemzeti Adó- és Vámhivatal – National Tax and Duties Office, 2003).
In the 2010s, well-known charities ranked the highest. After ranking NGOs based on their annual amounts of tax donations received, those engaged in national or local political activity or the dissemination of political information ranked the highest. Only a selected few organisations stand out. The Society for Liberties (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért, TASZ), the Faith and Morals Foundation (Hit és Erkölc Alapítvány) and Christian UCB Media (Keresztény UCB Média) were also ranked highly but were not selected because of low comparability.
2. One may disregard the first and the last snapshots. In the first year of the observation (1990), there is indeed no record of the selected editors-in-chief working at the same outlet. As for the last slice, the software simply does not register the actors and their relationships anymore.
3. Over time, there are more actors displayed in the three snapshots because they only appear if their records show professional activity.

4. See Krackhardt (1994: 93–6) and Everett and Krackhardt (2012). This metric has become a standard in social network analysis.
5. See Beck et al. (2011) on the behaviour of the media in 2006–10.
6. All centrality values used in this analysis capture the same phenomenon, using slightly different methods. Degrees are the number of ties (collegial interrelationships) an editor-in-chief has. Stress centrality takes the number of the shortest paths between two nodes of the network (Koschützki et al., 2005; Butts, 2020). Betweenness centrality scores are also related to the notion of shortest paths and capture how much a node is in between other nodes of the network. The number of shortest paths on which the actor is present is moderated by the number of all existing shortest paths in the network (Perez and Germon, 2016). Hence, ‘conceptually, high-betweenness vertices lie on a large number of non-redundant shortest paths between other vertices; they can thus be thought of as “bridges” or “boundary spanners”’ (Butts, 2020: 15).
7. See, for example, Rényi (2016) or Origo (2017).
8. Simply put, the graph centralisation value compares a given network to a maximally centralised graph (for example, a ‘star’ or ‘wheel’ formation) (Freeman, 1978: 237). While this measure differs considerably from connectedness, it partially explains why the connectedness value also peaks at 0.214 in 1996 in the dynamic temporal network analysis of the entire network (see Figure 7.5).
9. Their outlets, Magyar Narancs (Hungarian Orange), Népszabadság (People’s Freedom) and also Index-precursor Internetto, were far on the spectrum from right-wing positions. Also, the then-public broadcaster-affiliated journalists Kotroczó (Szalay, 2017) and Vicsek (Vicsek, 2020) or Szombathy (Nagy, 2020) still profess views critical towards the government.
10. The only difference is in the values of the stress centrality and betweenness centrality. That is because the shorter period of observation decreases these values. Shorter ties over a three-decade period become ‘more valuable’.
11. Regarding Gazda, see Tóth (2019); about Dull, see Babos (2020) or Mátyás (2022a).
12. The radio station had to cease its terrestrial broadcasting service in February 2021 following a controversial decision by Hungary’s media authority (Szalay, 2021). It continues to operate as an online radio station.
13. This Fidesz-centric social movement not only entails a monolithic media conglomerate, with the Central European Press and Media Foundation (Közép-Európai Sajtó- és Médiaalapítvány) controlling more than 100 media outlets (Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, 2019), but also strong, at times centralised linkages also to private and state enterprises, religious organisations, foundations, local organisations, sports associations, cultural institutions and many more.
14. *Centrális erőter.*

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Conflict zone gender: pillarised society in Poland and the rise of illiberalism

Carolin Heilig

Introduction

The electoral success of Andrzej Duda in the 2015 presidential elections heralded Poland's right-wing populist government and marked the beginning of the country's shift towards illiberalism (Bušítková and Guasti, 2017). This state of affairs is all the more shocking given that Poland is one of the most pro-European member states of the EU and was a front-runner in the democratic transition. This illiberal turn under Law and Justice (PiS) – at its core undermining the rule of law and the protection of minority rights – has brought particularly serious challenges for many women and the LGBTQ community, most visibly in the near-total ban on pregnancy terminations through a ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal in October 2020 and the establishment of so-called LGBTQ-free zones in numerous municipalities and even voivodeships (Kapelańska-Pręgowska, 2021; Żuk et al., 2021).

These developments have been actively pushed and influenced by ultra-conservative civil society actors, such as the legal think-tank *Ordo Iuris* (Suchanow, 2020), highlighting that illiberal policies are being implemented in a concerted effort between the illiberal incumbent governing coalition and parts of civil society.

The backlash against women's rights and the LGBTQ community is not new and has often predated claims by and actual policy gains of feminist and LGBTQ activists (Graff, 2003; O'Dwyer, 2018). In recent years we have witnessed the increased and evolving mobilisation of civil society in Poland in response to PiS's populist politics (Karolewski, 2016;

Korolczuk et al., 2019). Gender and hence gendered issues constitute a core battlefield in the fight for liberal democracy, and feminist mobilisation such as the Black Protest represent ‘a struggle for a democratic Poland’ (Graff, 2019: 481).

Against this backdrop, this chapter uses mobilisation around gender issues as an entry point to an investigation of the relations between civil society and political parties across the political spectrum to contribute to our understanding of fostering and opposing the illiberal developments in Poland from 2015 to 2023 under the PiS-led national government. This contribution applies Grzegorz Ekiert’s concept of pillarisation of civil society to trace the patterns of interaction between civil society organisations and political parties (2019) in the case of Kraków, relying on survey data collected there in the second half of 2020.

I begin by presenting the concept of pillarisation, a phenomenon associated with illiberal politics that intensifies once an illiberal coalition (or single party) is in power. What follows is a description of a relational approach to understanding pillarisation. As will be demonstrated, a focus on relations adds to the growing literature challenging the notion of ‘weak civil societies’ in post-socialist CEE (Ekiert et al., 2017; Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2017).

My analysis confirms the pillarisation of society between what Ekiert calls the ‘illiberal’ and the ‘liberal’ pillars, before proceeding to a more in-depth study of the ‘liberal pillar’. In this endeavour, two different modes of coordination between civil society and political parties are presented and discussed from two sides: from the perspective of civil society actors and from the perspective of political parties. It turns out that what matters most for civil society actors in their cooperation with political parties is, first, whether the civil society actors in question understand themselves as ‘apolitical’ or as ‘political’, and second, the type of activism they subscribe to. Additionally, groups that engage in issues that are more visibly politicised, such as reproductive rights, tend to relate differently to political parties. When it comes to political parties, the more typical cleavage between left and liberal organisations (Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill, 2021) comes to the fore: while the cooperation with oppositional liberal parties remains on a superficial basis of shared values and visions, cooperation with opposition parties from the left is deeper, more multifaceted and coincides with a shared vision for society. These findings will then be briefly discussed in the light of a highly professionalised civil society within the illiberal pillar.

The chapter ends with a discussion of several findings’ relevance for our understanding of illiberal politics in Poland and beyond. Most notably,

pillarisation under an illiberal incumbent creates a difficult operational environment for liberal-democratic civil society actors, particularly in the highly polarised field of engagement around gender issues. This should not, however, be equated with the ‘weak civil society’ thesis, as the backlash to the conservative policies introduced by the first PiS-led government in 2005–07 contributed to the development of a more vibrant LGBTQ movement with strong ties to the feminist movement (O’Dwyer, 2018), while the number of civil society associations and foundations working on equality issues grew faster than civil society as a whole (Arczewska et al., 2019). Similarly, the attacks on reproductive rights have led to an increased frequency of public rallies across the country, and over the last years many Polish cities and towns have started to host their own equality marches (that is, Pride parades) in defiance to the rise of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric (Chowaniec et al., 2021, Muszel and Piotrowski, 2022).

Pillarisation of society in times of an illiberal incumbent

In a neo-Huntingtonian tradition, a numerically strong or ‘dense’ civil society is not per se conducive to liberal democracy (Berman, 1997; Bermeo, 2003; Riley, 2005); what matters more is its configuration, its ideological composition and its ties to state institutions and political actors. The density and nature of such ties determines whether civil society is conducive or dangerous for liberal democracy (Bermeo, 2003). For Ekiert, ‘Pillarization is the vertical segregation of civil society into distinct compartments with limited interaction across a dividing boundary (religious, ethnic, political). This creates the potential for social conflicts, contentious mobilization and political instability’ (2021: 85). The advantage of considering civil society to be pillarised rather than polarised is that it allows for noting nuances within broader organisational blocks and prevents simplistic binary thinking.

Applying his concept to Poland, Ekiert shows how the ‘illiberal pillar’ in civil society and illiberal actors in political society reinforce each other, fuelling the illiberal turn and allowing both to benefit from it simultaneously. This argument considers liberalism in its political and cultural dimensions (Kubik, 2020). The former understands liberal as a property of a political system and is marked by the rule of law and the protection of minority rights (Kubik, 2012). The opposite of liberal democracy is thus authoritarianism (Kubik, 2020), and, institutionally, the dismantling of liberal democracy is most often marked by attacks on judicial independence (Sadurski, 2019). Cultural liberalism, on the other hand, finds its

opposite in cultural conservatism and does not have to be at odds with liberal democracy. The illiberal pillar that threatens liberal democracy in Ekiert's model consists mainly of politically illiberal actors in civil and political society, and these actors become particularly dangerous when their illiberal political stance is married with cultural conservatism. Such marriage, typical of right-wing populism (Kubik, 2020), is central to neo-traditionalist reaction, as discussed in Melito's contribution to this volume.

Pillarisation in Poland is enabled by various processes, namely the re-etatisation of civil society work, particularly favouring the illiberal pillar, de-corporatisation and the professionalisation of civil society (Ekiert, 2021). An example of such developments directly affecting civil society actors mobilised around gender can be found in the government's redirection of funding to newly established Church-based organisations at the expense of the well-established and trusted organisation 'Centre for Women's Rights' dedicated to help victims of domestic violence, as reported in an interview with one representative of the centre's Łódź branch in January 2018.

The analysis presented in this chapter uses Ekiert's idea of a pillarised civil society as an entry point to investigate the relations within a pillarised rather than simply polarised society: at a high level of abstraction, a neat division between the illiberal and liberal pillars within society is helpful to capture the illiberal developments in Poland, stressing the momentum for these gained through an illiberal incumbent. Nevertheless, this binary picture conceals divisions within both camps that have been reported by other scholars, such as the division between radical and liberal feminists (Graff, 2019).

Overall, Ekiert's description of how pillarisation plays out in Poland echoes concerns of both feminist scholars and activists (Graff, 2020; The Great Coalition for Equality and Choice, 2020), and while Ekiert portrays Poland as a crucial testing ground for the power and consequences of what he calls the 'dark side of civil society' in the face of rising illiberalism, an effective test of his ideas is provided by studies that try to gauge the extent to which right-wing populists, ultra-conservatives and illiberal actors push their agenda on reproductive and LGBTQ rights.

A relational approach to pillarisation: mapping a network

In a relational perspective, civil society can be identified as 'represent[ing] a distinct social system, whose profile is created primarily by the patterns

of relations between its constituent components, and by the interplay between categories and relational patterns' (Diani, 2015: 187). In this chapter, civil society is considered in conjunction with political society. Political parties are treated as units of analysis representing the political society, and civil society associations and groups as representing civil society. The study's focus on relations and the make-up of civil society interactions goes beyond the mere counting of registered civil society organisations, the method that is most commonly used to justify the argument that civil society in post-socialist CEE is weak (Howard, 2003). This relational approach, which considers civil society's connections to the political sphere, adds to the work of other scholars who have convincingly questioned the 'weak civil society' thesis (Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019).

Civil society actors included in the survey and invited to participate in the study on which this chapter is based had to meet two conditions: they had to be mobilised around gender issues, and they had to be part of Kraków's civil society. Mobilisation around gender is conceived broadly to include gender equality,¹ women's rights, reproductive rights and health as well as sexual minorities' rights, sex education, family aid, sexualised or gender-based violence and sex-based health issues. Questions of reproductive and sexual minorities' rights have arguably been the most visible issues in this field in recent years, but less politicised issues were also included in this research to include both groups involved in protest movements as well as civil society organisations that continuously offer support to their communities. These issues mobilise civil society actors across the ideological spectrum. A similarly broad approach was taken when considering the groups and associations invited to participate in the survey, including both registered foundations (*fundacje*) or associations (*stowarzyszenia*) that have been active in the city for a long time as well as smaller (protest) initiatives. (Western) scholarship on civil society in CEE is criticised for relying on a limited number of indicators, among them the comparatively lower number of civil society organisations (Bitusíková, 2015), and scholars convincingly point out that this conceptualisation fails to capture the real extent of civil society in CEE. At the same time, standard studies on social movements, understood as groups of people engaged in a collective action with the objective of accomplishing their goals (Jacobsson and Saxonberg, 2013), do not consider associations within civil society that engage in similar issues but are focused on serving their communities rather than protesting.² To bridge this somewhat artificial divide, in this project I include a variety of groups and associations in a bid to capture

both long-term community-serving forms of engagement as well as social movement organisations (SMOs). In view of the massive protests against restrictions on abortion rights but also homophobic rhetoric coming from public figures (Motak et al., 2021), the less visible activities of registered associations and foundations should not be neglected. As for political parties, the survey included all those that represent citizens from Kraków in the current and previous terms (as of 2020) locally, regionally, nationally and in the European Parliament.³

Civil society groups and organisations as well as political parties were selected as the object of this project rather than individual members of the respective entities. This choice does not dismiss the role of individuals as vital elements in political processes. The overlapping membership in parties and civic organisations by specific individuals was monitored in the survey. Additionally, the survey was interpreted in the light of local political developments which acknowledge the role of individual activists or politicians. However, the network data itself emphasises the role of collectives and this choice was made to achieve a meaningful return rate among actors surveyed, particularly as the data collection process was impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Arguably, a response rate above 30 per cent, achieved in the case of this study, is sufficient for a meaningful analysis (Saunders, 2007). In total, 49 associations and groups mobilised around gender were identified in the preparation for the survey rollout, 19 of which completed surveys, a return rate of 39 per cent.

In his research, Mario Diani explores different modes of coordination within the civil society networks in Glasgow and Bristol based on the patterns of different relations between civic society organisations (2015). His approach, which does not neglect the attributes and properties of individual actors but rather complements them with their structural positions (2015: 190), informed the survey data collected among civil society respondents in Kraków. The two categories of ties are those that represent ‘resource allocation’ and those that represent ‘boundary definition’ (which denotes processes of identity-building) (2015). Ties representing resource allocation allow us to trace actual cooperation on the ground, whereas ‘boundary definition’ enables us to juxtapose this cooperation on the ground with the proximity of values and ideas.⁴ Civil society respondents were asked to report their own political self-description, their fields of engagement and their action repertoire, to assess the impact of these factors on their relations to political parties. For the entire list of questions related to shared ties, please refer to Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Ties respondents were asked to report towards political parties

Cooperation ties between political and civil society	CSO attends events organised by political party Collaborate organisation of events Political party attends events organised by CSO CSO joins political consultations with political party CSO supports political party in their election campaign Joint membership of individuals between CSO and party Political party provides office space, materials or locations for CSO's activities CSO provides information to political party
Value-sharing ties between political and civil society	Similar values and goals Vision of society in accordance with CSO's activities and values Based on party's ideas and values, CSO values or would like to work with the party CSO agrees with activities and campaigns of political party

Mobilisation around gender issues in Kraków

The 19 civil society organisations that agreed to cooperate with me varied considerably in their legal form, size, fields of engagement, repertoire of action and age. The fields of engagement of civil society respondents can be mapped on their relations to each other (Figure 8.1). The social network presented below depicts this, using their fields of engagement as nodes in the network; ties connect them if one respondent claimed to operate in both fields; the thicker the tie the more respondents engaged in both connected fields of engagement, while the size of the nodes corresponds to their centrality, highlighting those that are most connected to other fields of engagement. The most popular fields of engagement were thus gender equality, human rights and LGBTQ rights, followed by sexual education and culture. Women's rights and reproductive rights came up next.

With respect to the political self-description of civil society respondents, the picture that emerged was one of an almost even split between those respondents that described themselves as decisively 'apolitical' and those that used a specific political self-description. The chart below (Figure 8.2) shows not only the overall shares of political self-description but also an overview of whether these groups either engaged in

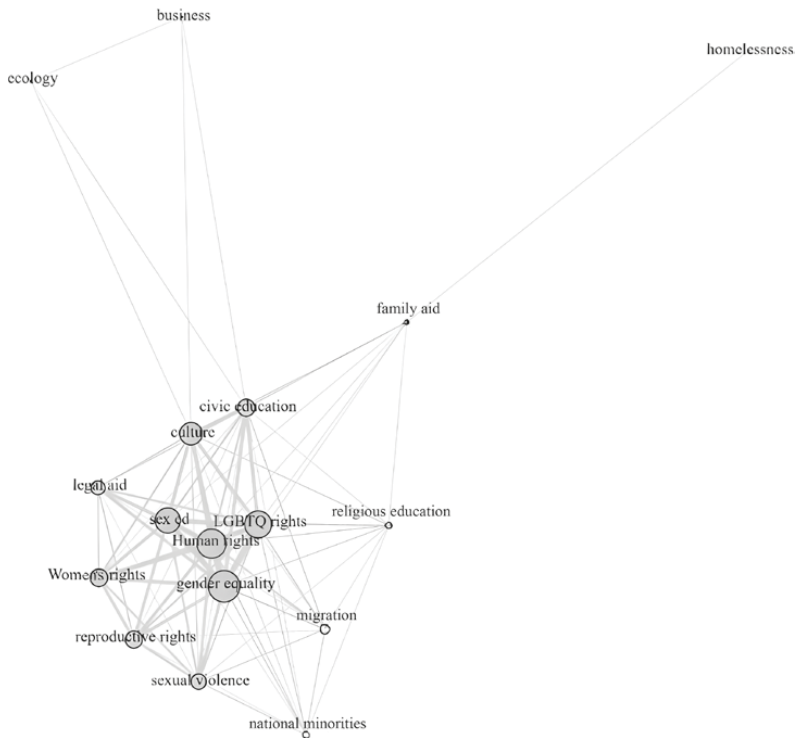


Figure 8.1 Network: fields of engagement

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cooperation or had value-sharing ties to political parties, indicating that different modes of interaction with political parties depend on political self-description.

***Divide et impera?* The liberal pillar facing an illiberal incumbent**

PiS and Solidarna Polska ('United Poland'), two right-wing parties governing at the national and the voivodeship levels, are markedly absent in the survey. Much like the far-right-wing oppositional Konfederacja ('Confederation') and Kukiz'15, they were not named by civil society respondents. This might not come as a surprise for anyone following Polish party politics, but it is nevertheless remarkable that this exclusion not only applies to those associations and groups that mobilise around the more contentious issues such as abortion rights but also those that

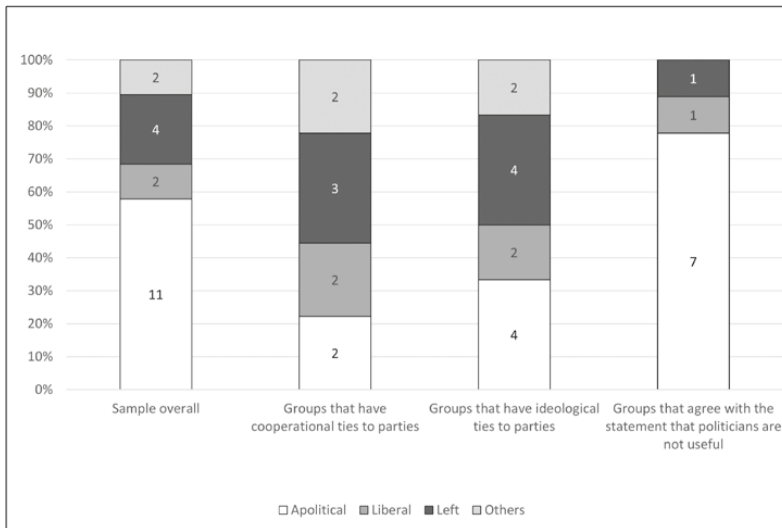


Figure 8.2 Overview over ties to political parties by political self-description

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focus their work on religious education, homelessness or culture. Nor did such groups name any right-wing parties as cooperation partners or indicate that they shared values with them.

The catalogue of organisations named in the survey alone provides insights into the make-up of the liberal pillar. The two graphs presented below summarise the networks of cooperation (Figure 8.3) and value-sharing (Figure 8.4). They include all parties that were named by any of the respondents, although the more detailed discussion later will focus on those five parties that were named most frequently. Both civil society groups and political parties to which there were no ties reported by the respondents are excluded in the networks presented below for the sake of simplicity. Political parties are depicted in black,⁵ civil society groups' political self-identification in grey.

The purpose of asking civil society organisations to identify their political orientations was to understand the fault lines between various groups and associations as well as their position in relation to political parties that find themselves in competing camps. However, what emerged to be the most significant difference was not between groups that understood themselves as liberal or left but between groups that identified themselves clearly as 'apolitical' and those that described themselves as 'political' in some sense.

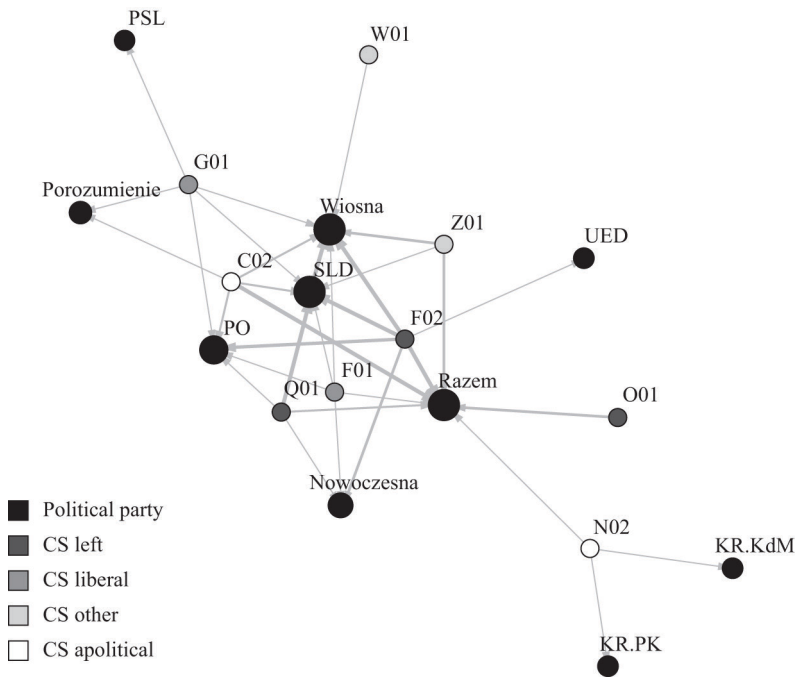


Figure 8.3 Cooperation network, no isolates

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Self-proclaimed ‘apolitical’ civil society actors make up a considerable portion of the overall sample. However, their relationship to politics is often complex, as the following response from one group illustrates: ‘We try not to get involved in politics. At this point, our [demands] fully reflect left-wing party programmes.’ This indicates that drawing a clear line between civil and political society does not mean that individual civil society actors do not pursue political goals or that their own goals are not addressed by political parties. What has been observed as political disavowal (Bennett et al., 2013) in other cases can in this case be a strategy to engage on behalf of society, while staying away from ‘dirty politics’. This idea of ‘becoming corrupted’ by engaging in politics has also been voiced in the Polish context, for instance by Women’s Strike leader Marta Lempart.⁶

Based on their political self-description and on their cooperation and value-sharing ties to political parties, three categories of civil society associations and groups can be identified: (1) groups that share neither

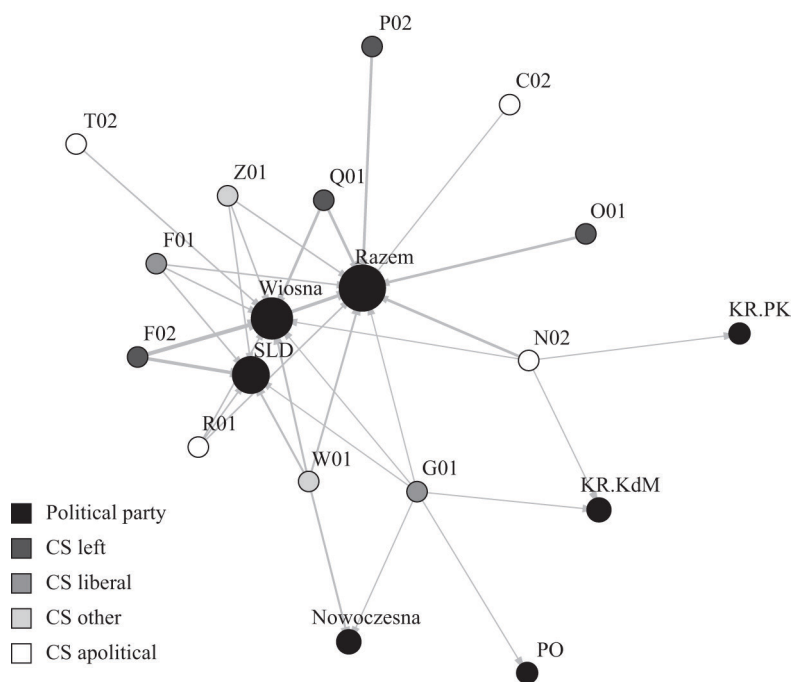


Figure 8.4 Value-sharing network, no isolates

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cooperation nor value-sharing ties; (2) groups that share no cooperation ties but do have value-sharing ties; and (3) groups that share both.

‘Truly apolitical’

The civil society groups and associations in the first category did not name any cooperation or value-sharing ties to political parties. They define themselves as apolitical and consider their activities to be unrelated to the work of political parties. These groups and associations fulfil various functions – some of them act as service providers to the public and specific groups of society or as organisers of public debates and discussions; they also vary considerably in terms of their age and legal format.

The majority of groups and associations are active in fields that lie outside the most politically salient issues around gender in contemporary Poland. According to their own account, these groups focus more on culture, assistance for families and support of those who are in need. This seems to indicate that culture is perceived by these actors as something

potentially apolitical. In total, ‘truly apolitical’ associations and groups account for a higher share in these fields of engagement among the overall sample, whereas other fields of engagement are under-represented; particularly the otherwise popular fields of gender equality, LGBTQ rights and sex education are not prominent in this category.

‘The conflicted ones’

The common characteristic of the groups and associations in the second category is that while they claim to be apolitical, they all reported value-sharing ties to political parties, with two even sharing cooperation ties. Overall, this is the smallest category with only four groups.

What is interesting about the groups belonging to the ‘conflicted’ category, in contrast to the previous one, is that its members construe their public identity as apolitical, yet they can position their activities in the political sphere. For these groups it is logical and possible to consider themselves apolitical, while working on politically loaded issues.

As the ‘apolitical’ civil society groups and associations, the members of this category vary in age and organisational format. The main difference, however, lies in the fields of engagement. All groups in the category reported their work on gender equality and other highly visible gender-related issues, indicating that in the politicised climate surrounding these issues, activists find it hard to truly ‘stay out of politics’ and they can identify the political formations representing their demands. This highlights the political salience of gendered policy issues in a polity governed by illiberals, a phenomenon observed also outside of Poland.

Another tendency among these groups is the focus on psychological counselling and legal aid that indicates a strong emphasis on support for their respective communities and groups whose rights they defend. This suggests a potentially more inward focus that tends to be associated with support work rather than advocacy.

‘The political’

Containing eight groups and associations, the ‘political’ subset is the biggest of the three categories. All respondents declared themselves to be in one way or another ‘political’, and they all identified various value-sharing ties to political parties. With one exception, they all also share cooperation ties with political parties. Like in the other categories, the members of this category vary in terms of age, activity format and size. The issue of gender equality is the most common field of engagement,

but usually in various configurations with women's, reproductive and LGBTQ rights. As is common among the groups belonging to the 'conflicted' category, counselling and cultural (community-oriented) events are the main forms of activity, but the respondents in this category also engage in protest activities, research and dissemination of expert knowledge. The last two activities are reflected in cooperation ties to political parties. Importantly, only self-identified 'political' civil society respondents declared that they engaged in political consultations with political parties. The difference between self-declared 'left' and 'liberal' associations and groups is rather subtle and not as straightforward as in the case of the apolitical/political division. Given the broader variety of cooperation ties of civil society respondents that described themselves as 'left', one can cautiously conclude that the groups considering their engagement as 'leftist' are generally more prone to engaging with political parties.

Fields of engagement

The politicisation of issues influences the patterns of ties to political parties. Groups and associations working on issues that are among the most visibly politicised (Król and Pustułka, 2018; Wołowicz et al., 2022) are most able to identify shared goals or values with political parties. Most notably, this is the case for the respondents working on reproductive rights, sex education and sexualised violence. Overall, the groups and associations working on sex education, civic education, gender equality, reproductive rights and legal aid are particularly able to identify value partners in the political sphere, and these are left-wing parties. By contrast, a considerable number of groups active in the area of LGBTQ rights declare themselves to be apolitical and distance themselves from political parties both in terms of cooperation and sharing values. The issue of 'gender equality' acts as an intermediate position that is popular among the 'conflicted' category.

Modes of coordination between civil society and political parties

The cleavage between left and liberal orientations comes to the fore when we consider political parties. For civil society actors, what matters in their relational patterns to political parties is whether they identify as 'apolitical' or whether they can position themselves on the political spectrum. However, while there is no tangible difference within the 'political'

civil society groups, the cleavage between the three left parties on the one hand, Razem (‘Together’), Wiosna (‘Spring’), Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), and the two centre-liberal parties, Civic Platform (PO) and Nowoczesna (‘Modernity’), on the other is pronounced.⁷ The networks presented above illustrate this. This difference also impacts modes of coordination between political parties and civil society (Table 8.2). The first one is a superficial, pragmatic form of cooperation that lacks a value base, whereas the second one is marked by more varied cooperation between civil society and political parties that is underpinned by civil society being able to identify shared values and visions for society.

Superficial, pragmatic cooperation with liberal parties

Both PO and Nowoczesna are liberal-centre-right parties. While Nowoczesna emerged as a challenger to PO in the 2015 parliamentary election, they ran on the same list of the Koalicja Obywatelska (‘Civic Coalition’) in the 2019 parliamentary elections, and in Kraków they joined forces in a parliamentary group in the city council. Arguably, Nowoczesna should not be seen as a splinter formation of PO as they included a considerable share of members who had previously not participated directly in party politics, despite their appeal to voters dissatisfied with the drift of the formerly liberal PO towards the centre (Stanley et al., 2021).

The types of cooperation ties that were reported by civil society respondents indicate a relatively loose form of cooperation. They are generally event-based and in most cases involve party representatives attending events organised by the civil society respondents. This indicates a specific directionality of cooperation: parties are more likely to seek civil society actors out than vice versa. Nevertheless, the low level

Table 8.2 Modes of coordination

	Value-sharing ties – low	Value-sharing ties – intermediate	Value-sharing ties – high
Cooperation ties – low			
Cooperation ties – intermediate	Superficial, pragmatic cooperation: PO, Nowoczesna		Value-based, varied cooperation: Wiosna, Razem, SLD
Cooperation ties – high			

of value and goal sharing might indicate that these parties want to use the activities organised by civil society to strengthen their own profile and expand their base of support rather than to necessarily foster deeper, value-based cooperation. At least in the case of PO, civil society actors whose events this party reportedly attended do not identify shared values. Considering the moderate political stance of PO and Nowoczesna on the most visible gender-related issues in Polish politics and much more radical positions of the civil society survey respondents, the most prominent common issue between them might be the opposition to the PiS government, while an agreement on questions of LGBTQ rights or women's rights is hard if not impossible.

Value-based, varied cooperation with left parties

All three parties selected by the civil society respondents as value-based partners with whom they engage in multifaceted cooperation, namely Razem, Wiosna and the SLD, form the left-wing oppositional parliamentary club in the Sejm after the 2019 elections.⁸ The SLD, by far the oldest party in this category, is the successor of the former communist party in Poland. While it played an important role in Poland's transition in the 1990s, its influence decreased considerably after the cleavage between post-communists and those parties that developed from the Solidarity movement collapsed in the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, ushering in a new dividing line between the two heirs to Solidarity, PiS and PO (Szczerbiak, 2017). The marginalisation of the left peaked in the 2015 parliamentary elections when both SLD and its new competitor Razem failed to pass the 5 per cent threshold. Razem was founded as a social-democratic party with an affinity to the Scandinavian model of social democracy (Mazur, 2017). The third party in this category is Wiosna, which was founded by Robert Biedroń only in February 2019 in the run-up to the European Parliamentary elections. Biedroń has had a long-standing career as an LGBTQ activist active in the Campaign against Homophobia and was the first openly gay mayor in Poland (O'Dwyer, 2018).

The three parties did not win enough votes to enter the regional parliament, the Sejmik of Lesser Poland, in 2018 and they also did not form a leftist political club in the City Council of Kraków. This means that in the case of mobilisation around gender, the parties that are ideologically the closest political partners of civil society groups championing gender-related issues are largely marginalised in the regional political landscape.

The left parties' positions on gender-related issues are close to the programmes of many associations and groups, as shown by the fields of engagement survey respondents marked as prominent. While the SLD initially took a cautious position on women's and LGBTQ rights – voting in favour of the legalisation of same-sex partnerships in 2013, but refraining from touching the so-called 1993 abortion 'compromise' (Korycki, 2017) – the three parties ran together in the 2019 parliamentary elections on the platform promising abortion on demand until week 12 of pregnancy (and after that in cases of danger to the pregnant person's life or health and in cases of foetal impairment), equality between marriage and civic partnerships for all, state refunds for contraception, mandatory sexual education in schools and restrictions of the Catholic Church's influence in classrooms.

Cooperation between civil society actors and the parties belonging to this category is event-driven, and its most common form is the participation of party representatives in events organised by civil society actors. But civil society respondents also reported instances of co-organising events together with political parties. What distinguishes the cooperation ties of the left in comparison to the centre-liberal parties is not only the intensity but also the diversity of ties. In the view of civil society actors, the parties in this category are far ahead of other political actors in joining political consultations with them. Every civil society actor involved in political consultations listed at least one leftist party as a partner. While civil society also shares information with other political parties and this form of cooperation is generally weakly partisan, it is remarkable that sharing expertise turns into participation in political consultation almost exclusively with left parties. The party that most actively engaged with the civil society respondents was Razem.

The differences between the left-wing parties in the sample and the others are particularly pronounced regarding value-sharing, which is – according to civil society respondents – the most intense and extends to a shared vision of society more generally. Only in the case of left-wing parties, civil society respondents declared that they would wish to co-operate with them based on the parties' values and goals; particularly self-described left civil society respondents identified this type of tie to political parties. More broadly, however, the support for left-wing parties' activities and campaigns comes from civil society groups that identify themselves as left, liberal or apolitical, creating a broad platform of support for left-wing parties' work on behalf of gendered issues.

In this category of parties, both value-sharing and cooperation ties are denser and more manifold than in the previous category. The

relatively strong cooperation that is based on shared values suggests what Diani would call a ‘social movement mode of coordination’ (2015: 19), marked by a deeper understanding of shared goals, visions and ideas of society. Diani notes that it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between a social movement and its environment, but in the case of the parties in this category, they become drawn into the social movement particularly for their engagement in reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights. Yet, the close cooperation and proximity of values between some of the associations and groups in the survey should not lead to the assumption that leftist parties are accepted as leaders of the extra-parliamentary opposition by women’s rights activists.⁹ It should rather be a reminder of the undefined boundaries of social movements and highlight the role of different formats of civil society organisations that are parts of a social movement and yet pursue autonomous goals as well.

The illiberal side of civil society mobilised around gender issues

Over the last years, scholars have paid more and more attention to ultra-conservative civil society actors that are united in their anti-gender mobilisation (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Žuk and Žuk, 2020; Graff and Korolczuk, 2021; Henninger et al., 2021), addressing – from the opposite ideological position – the same issues that lie at the core of activism of the groups and associations analysed in this chapter. These groups are concerned with limiting access to safe abortions, rolling back LGBTQ rights and opposing the Istanbul Convention, as according to them this all threatens traditional families. Importantly, Poland is by no means the only country in which activists of this internationally well-connected network operate (Zarembek et al., 2021).¹⁰ Their activism mirrors the civil society activism described above: some focus on inward-facing activities that tend to their respective communities’ well-being; others take to the street to promote their interests (Tilles, 2022), not shying away from direct confrontation in the public sphere, as I witnessed in Kraków when anti-choice activists disturbed and noisily interfered with the city’s 2020 left-leaning ManiFa protest. The Catholic Church plays a considerable role in this, too. In the framework of a campaign against ‘gender-ideology’ in 2012–14, the Catholic Church started to provide financial support to various Catholic NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and strengthened Polish ‘pro-life’ organisations (Chołuj, 2021).

Importantly, they also include highly professionalised and well-funded organisations such as the Ordo Iuris Institute, whose founding can be traced back to Father Piotr Skarga’s Association for Christian

Culture in Kraków (Suchanow, 2020). Ordo Iuris actively contributed to the restriction of access to abortion and provided the text of declaration used by local and regional 'Family Charters' that created 'LGBT-free zones' (Datta, 2021).

Since I was unable to collect data on civil society networks within the right pillar, modes of coordination like those I reconstructed for the liberal pillar cannot simply be identified. What can be observed from the outside are influential connections of individual members of these groups and associations, as exemplified in the persona of Aleksandr Stępkowski, a co-founder of Ordo Iuris, who was appointed to the Highest Court in 2019. It should be remarked that civil society figures in the illiberal pillar do not restrict their cooperation to the illiberal incumbent PiS; the leader of the anti-abortion organisation 'Foundation for Life and Family' ran in the 2019 European elections for the right-wing *Konfederacja* list. Assessing how much this cooperation is based on shared values or whether there is a certain 'opportunistic synergy' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2021: 165) lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

Discussion

The data collected in Kraków and presented above confirms the basic tenet of the pillarisation thesis that in the Polish civil society there exist two main pillars: liberal and illiberal. As with any binary conceptualisation, this one also potentially glosses over some significant distinctions that need to be made within the observed phenomenon. My close investigation of the liberal pillar shows, for example, that it is internally diversified, certainly when it comes to gender issues. Patterns of interaction between civil society and political parties vary within the liberal pillar, displaying a vibrant, diverse civil society that was engaged in an uphill battle against a hostile system created by the illiberal incumbent during the 2015–23 period in Poland. This illiberal incumbent itself relied on support and initiatives of an increasingly professionalised sector of civil society aligned with it ideologically. In the literature on post-socialist CEE, the professionalisation of civil society is often discussed critically, as this process is blamed for detaching civil society from the broader population and steering activities towards a few causes that receive considerable support from international funding bodies but do not always respond to the concerns of the domestic population (Jacobsson and Saxonberg, 2013). However, gender issues, such as reproductive rights

and LGBTQ rights, are increasingly fought in the legal arena and thus call for the professionalisation of some actors. Globally, actors like the legal think-tank *Ordo Iuris* are part of a wider development, using human rights discourse to mainstream and push their own agendas (Gilby, 2021). This offers a new perspective on the debate on the professionalisation of civil society. It is not only the so-called neoliberal civil society actors who may be impeding the growth of a truly democratic, domestically grown civil society through professionalisation. It is now clear that professional associations play a huge role in the development and strengthening of the illiberal pillar of civil society. Moreover, domestically grounded liberal civil society organisations have also been professionalising. For example, among the civil society respondents in Kraków, a considerable share engaged in legal aid and directly influenced the legislative process through consultations with political parties as well as through collecting signatures for citizens' initiatives. Furthermore, strategic litigations to secure wider access to safe abortion as pursued by the Foundation for Women and Family Planning rely on a professionalised civil society to actively push back against the illiberal civil society actors. These groups were an important cornerstone in civil society's resistance to restrict reproductive and LGBTQ rights. All of this indicates that professionalisation per se is not endangering the 'healthy' growth of civil society. On the other hand, the civil society sphere in Kraków is active in various ways, particularly in the realm of LGBTQ issues, where community-oriented and supportive work (such as counselling) offers a refuge from the politicised battlefield over rights.

As the results of my survey show, mobilisation around gender issues is politicised. The groups and associations working predominantly on reproductive rights were particularly drawn towards politics. This suggests that these issues do not only feature heavily in political debates but that they also generate a field in which civil society and oppositional political parties seem to have more incentives to work together than in others. During the 2015–23 period in Poland, liberal and left-leaning political parties benefited from popular opposition to the illiberal incumbent, while many civil society actors could promote their demands in the political sphere. Overall, LGBTQ rights as well as reproductive rights were and no doubt will continue to occupy a special place in Polish politics: they are highly visible in political discourse, hotly contested and in the studied period created mass mobilisation in the streets that was unprecedented since 1989. At the same time, moral issues are not decisive for the majority of Poles at the polls; ahead of the 2019 parliamentary elections,

issues such as abortion, LGBT rights or in vitro fertilisation were listed as the least important topics in the elections (Kolanko, 2019). Illiberal attacks on the rights of women and sexual minorities were an expression of underlying patriarchal ideology promoted by the incumbent. The case in point is the 2020 ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal that drastically restricted access to abortion. Such a decision, radically changing the landscape of the struggle for reproductive rights, was only possible after the court was restructured to become a mere executor of the ruling party's and its president's will.

The observations made in the Polish context are relevant beyond Poland, with similar dynamics playing out in Hungary (Grzebalska and Pető, 2018; Szikra et al., 2020) and other countries ruled by right-wing populists. All such cases also show that illiberal civil society is setting up an international network that supports anti-liberal politics and policies.

Notes

1. Note that in the survey, the Polish term '*równość płci*' was used that does not distinguish between sex and gender and therefore avoids the heavily charged term 'gender'.
2. An example for this in the case of mobilisation around gender are groups in Kraków that provide safe gathering spaces and counselling for members of the LGBTQ community.
3. Furthermore, Polska 2050 was included, as this new party has since its foundation after the 2020 presidential elections polled nationally well above the threshold required to enter parliament. Additionally, the two clubs of city councillors in Kraków's City Council were included.
4. The survey aims to capture several factors that have been identified as relevant in previous research on civil society cooperation (Diani and Mische, 2015), namely proximity in agenda, organisational model and ideological affinity.
5. KR.PK ('Pleasant Kraków') and KR.KdM ('Kraków for Citizens') are the two clubs in the Kraków City Council that are not built on political party membership. The members of KR.PK are related to independent mayor Jacek Majchrowski. For clarity, civil society organisations and groups are abbreviated with the first letter of their name and a number.
6. At the webinar 'Women in Revolt: from 1989 to 2021', 9 March 2021, Lempart reflects that in regard to feminist mobilisation, it is civil society that wants to stay at arm's length from political parties, not the other way around, as political parties are perceived as part of a corrupting system.
7. The following focuses on these five parties. There was a very limited number of ties reported to other opposition parties such as the Polish People's Party (PSL). No ties were reported to exist between the civil society respondents and the governing parties PiS and its junior partner Solidarna Polska, as well as to the oppositional populist Kukiz'15 and the radical-right Konfederacja.
8. In 2020 Wiosna and SLD initiated their merger that was finalised in 2021. Wiosna formally dissolved and joined the renamed SLD under the name of 'Nowa Lewica'. Since 2019 all three, now as two parties, form one parliamentary club 'Lewica Razem'.
9. In response to the left's decision to back the Polish Recovery Proposal for the EU Recovery Plan, the All-Polish Women's Strike were very critical of this 'betrayal' of their fights in parliament (Karwowska, 2021).
10. According to one expert at the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development who is observing such developments, Poland acts as a testing ground in the region.

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Contemporary feminist movements in Central and Eastern Europe: transnational mobilising against anti-gender alliances

Mina Baginova

Introduction: abortion ban in Poland (Warsaw, November 2020)

They thought we would give up without a fight. Today, and every other day, until we are falling with fatigue, we will organise – despite all the prohibitions – in the streets, at home, at the workplace, with our bodies, which have turned into a political battlefield. Today, our bodies represent a revolution!

Listening to the voice of Marta Lempart from the All-Poland Women's Strike roaring on a megaphone to the seemingly endless mass of people gathered outside the Palace of Culture and Science gave me goosebumps. Looking up at the iconic building, an enormous red bolt, the symbol of the Polish feminist movement, is projected across its 237 metres. We are there to protest the Polish law banning abortion in almost all cases, which, after multiple attempts and counter-struggles over the years, was finally enacted on 22 October 2020. I have been following women's protests in Poland since 2016 but today the atmosphere feels tangibly different. The endless crowds consist of all genders and ages, and one can almost feel the anger and outrage in the air. I stumble over somebody's foot as the crowd around me moves abruptly – we see the large unit of anti-riot police running in our direction. Several strangers next to me, an elderly couple and a group of young people with trumpets, prevent me from falling, making sure I am fine. The striking sense of solidarity among the

protesters is almost moving. We know we cannot back off, despite the riot police urging us to do so. Nor will we leave the streets the next day either, regardless of the cold weather, the pandemic ban on public gatherings or police aggression. Instead, our numbers multiply as the protests move daily from one city to another, from towns to villages, crossing borders to neighbouring countries in which solidarity protest actions are organised on central squares and outside the Polish embassies. That winter, media across the world will write about the largest protest mobilisation in CEE since the democratic transitions of 1989 and one of the greatest feminist mobilisations in the world.

Anti-gender alliances and the emergence of a new wave of feminist organising in CEE

Commentators from Western media and academia expressed surprise at the emergence of a large-scale social movement in a region where, in the context of post-socialist transitions, social movements have predominantly been characterised as ‘NGO-ised’ (Einhorn, 1993; Verdery, 1996; Ghodsee, 2004, 2021) or weak (Tarrow and Petrova, 1997; Howard, 2003; Kopecký, 2003; Fraser, 2009). This perception persists despite an abundant body of scholarship from the region that challenges such viewpoints, with an emphasis on grassroots mobilisations (Piotrowski, 2011, 2015; Gagyí, 2014; Bitušíková, 2015; Pixová and Novák, 2016; Pixová and Sládek, 2016; Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2017; Novák and Kuřík, 2019) and women’s movements both before and following the 1989 transitions (Fidelis, 2010; Grabowska, 2012; Hryciuk and Korolczuk, 2013; Jacobsson and Saxonberg, 2013; Regulska and Grabowska, 2013; Jacobsson, 2015; Polanska, 2015; Hall, 2019; Majewska, 2021; Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). Furthermore, the visibility in the international media of the recent wave of feminist activism in Poland further counters this notion, due to its large-scale organisation both domestically and transnationally since 2016.

While there has been a global surge in women’s and LGBT+ movements and mobilisations (Biglieri, 2020; Flesher, 2020; Gago, 2020; Gagatay et al., 2021), the most recent dynamics in CEE can be understood as a manifestation of resistance against the pervasive global anti-gender movements (Kuhar and Patternote, 2017; Correa and Parker, 2020; Roth, 2020). This movement, which opposes so-called gender ideology (Pető, 2015; Kováts, 2017) and has organised an increasing number of anti-gender campaigns (Maďarová, 2015; Svatoňová, 2022), has significantly influenced the region’s political spectrum. As numerous scholarly works

have demonstrated, this ‘war on gender’ is intrinsically connected to illiberal (Kováts, 2017) and populist politics (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022), with tangible ramifications for reproductive rights and legal abortion access (Maďarová, 2023), LGBT+ rights (Valkovičová, 2023) and policies aimed at eliminating violence against women (Fellegi, 2020).

In Poland ruled by the right-wing populist party PiS (2015–23), widespread attacks on reproductive rights catalysed the mobilisation of diverse actors, leading to large-scale protests nationwide. This spurred the formation of significant activist platforms, such as the Black Protests and the All-Poland Women’s Strike. These platforms challenged anti-gender policy-making decisions and inspired other activist platforms. Concurrently, in neighbouring Slovakia and the Czech Republic, a new wave of feminist activism emerged in response to attempts by ultra-conservative political alliances to restrict legal access to abortion. Alongside this, there was a significant transnational surge of practical solidarity with the protesters from neighbouring countries, notably in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. Despite the vehement opposition to reproductive rights by Law and Justice, these demands persisted with an unwavering strength and determination and contributed to this party’s electoral defeat in October 2023. This resilience underpinned the initial protests which, while primarily directed against anti-gender policies, rapidly evolved into a broader movement advocating for systemic change in the country (Gwiazda, 2021).

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2018 and 2021, this chapter explores the organising dynamics that have not only given rise to new feminist mobilisation in Poland but also fostered the development of new feminist transnational networks across CEE. The focus is primarily on the case of the Polish feminist movement, the originality of its mobilisation efforts and transnational networking practices with other mobilisations in the region. I contend that the emergence of new feminist mobilising in CEE extends beyond the issues of an abortion ban and women’s rights. It is fundamentally anchored in a vigorous, collective resistance, with feminist movements serving as key agents against the global anti-gender movements and ultra-conservative populist politics, both regionally and globally.

A note on methodology

Drawing on the tradition of ‘engaged anthropology’ (Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Juris and Khasnabish, 2013), this chapter

presents findings from a multi-sited ethnographic study conducted between 2018 and 2021. This approach builds on the use of ethnographic methodology as a collection of (on-site or online) protest observations often utilised in interdisciplinary research (Kubik, 2022) and underscores the importance of the ‘ethnographic position’. It advocates for research conducted, in part, from an ‘inside’ perspective (Maeckelbergh, 2009). Such a position facilitates access to spaces within social movements typically inaccessible to non-members. It also enables a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973; Marcus, 1998) and analysis of the everyday practices, actions and behaviours of participants. These elements form part of a dynamic process in which individuals strive to articulate and navigate their political demands (Maeckelbergh, 2017).

This research was conducted amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, with almost half of it taking place during this period. This resulted in modifications to both the data collection methods and the modes of feminist movements’ organisation, which partially transitioned to online spaces. The digital ethnographic approach boasts a long and rich tradition in social movements research, with notable applications in the first media revolutions in Latin America (Khasnabish, 2008), the ‘Twitter revolutions’ of the Arab Spring (Herrera, 2014) and various online-supported mobilisations (Milan, 2013; Barassi, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2016; Postill, 2018; Treré, 2019). Hence, this research extends this substantial yet continually evolving scholarship by offering digital ethnographic accounts from CEE, a region that, with a few exceptions (Korolczuk, 2016; Heřmanová, 2022), remains under-explored in this context. Lastly, the multi-sited ethnographic field in this study encompasses both offline and online spaces of investigation, contributing to the thriving research in digital ethnography and digital activism.

Black Protests: first mobilisations against the ultra-conservative agenda in Poland

The journey of the All-Poland Women’s Strike began when non-governmental groups, spearheaded by the ultra-conservative Ordo Iuris Institute, initiated a campaign for a revision of the existing abortion laws through a civic initiative. The legislative initiative, known as ‘Stop Abortion’, was registered with the Polish Parliament on 14 March 2016 and fervently championed by the Ordo Iuris Institute (Ciobanu, 2021). The proposed law aimed to prohibit all instances of abortion, including those involving serious foetal damage, and proposed penalising women

undergoing abortions with up to five years in prison. Given that existing legislation permits abortion under three specific circumstances, one of which is severe foetal damage – the basis for most legal abortions in Poland – the proposed legislation was perceived as a stepping stone towards a full abortion ban in the country. Furthermore, it raised concerns that doctors may cease to offer prenatal testing for fear of prosecution, as such testing could be interpreted as aiding abortions. Another grave concern was that criminal investigations could follow involuntary miscarriages.

The potential for the ‘Stop Abortion’ initiative to become law was a palpable threat. This engendered significant concern among feminist and women’s rights groups, leading to the initiation of counter-mobilisations. The first of these began on 1 April 2016 with the emergence of the group Gals4Gals (Dziewuchy Dziewuchom) on Facebook. This profile swiftly amassed thousands of members and spurred the creation of numerous local groups. On 3 April, the left-wing Together (Razem) party organised the first demonstration under the banner ‘No to the torture of women’. Participants brandished wire hangers, an internationally recognised symbol of pro-choice groups. A myriad of groups initiated small-scale creative actions to further the cause. On 13 April, a group of activists, led by left-wing politician Barbara Nowacka, registered the legislative initiative ‘Save the Women’, which aimed to legalise abortion and ensure access to both sex education and contraception. The ‘Save the Women’ initiative garnered 215,000 signatures, while the ‘Stop Abortion’ initiative, with signatures predominantly collected in churches, accumulated 400,000. This stark contrast underscored the active political influence of the Church in Poland (Błuś, 2016). On 23 September 2016, the ‘Save the Women’ initiative was dismissed without debate, whereas the ‘Stop Abortion’ initiative was referred for further parliamentary scrutiny.

As a reaction to these developments, Polish actress Krystyna Janda wrote a Facebook post reminding her followers of the Icelandic Women’s Strike of 1975, calling for mobilisation. The hashtags #czarnyprotest and #BlackProtest came to stand for the entire mobilisation. During the protest in Wrocław, Marta Lempart called for a nationwide women’s strike on 3 October 2016. Together with Natalia Pancewicz, Marta Lempart set up the Facebook profile All-Polish Women’s Strike (Strajk Kobiet), which would remain the core of the movement’s national and international connective leadership. Moreover, this site became known as the movement’s ‘helpdesk’, being the contact point for the media as well as an organisational model and support for regional groups (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 152).

The Women's Strike on 3 October 2016 stands as a pivotal achievement of the Black Protests mobilisations. The demonstration in Warsaw attracted over 30,000 individuals, yet it was far from an isolated event – protests also occurred in about 150 other cities and towns across Poland. In some locations, participant numbers reached over 10,000, and it was this widespread mobilisation, even in smaller towns, that served as the cornerstone of the movement's success. Globally, solidarity events were held in 49 cities across 29 countries (Gober and Struzik, 2018: 137). Across Poland, women went on strike, choosing to join the numerous demonstrations rather than attend work. Even those who did go to work wore black in a show of support for the Women's Strike. Polls conducted a month after the strike indicated the significant impact and popularity of the protests: 90 per cent of the population were aware of the Strike; 64 per cent of women and 52 per cent of men expressed their interest and support; 1 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men reported wearing black on 3 October in solidarity; and 4 per cent of women stated they had taken part in the demonstrations in person (IPSOS, 2019). Moreover, the Strike achieved temporary political success: the 'Stop Abortion' law was withdrawn from parliamentary proceedings, marking the first instance of the governing PiS party succumbing to public pressure (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022) and the first collective action directed explicitly against the anti-gender alliances and ultra-conservative agenda in Poland. As Agnieszka, a 42-year-old professional and one of the frequent Black Protests participants, shared during an interview: 'After these mobilisations, nothing was really the same. Protests became increasingly common, advocating for women's rights, LGBT+ rights and against policies limiting free media or courts. This surge in activism, I believe, has shed light on the ultra-conservative alliances, potentially making them more vulnerable.'

100 days of protests: mobilisations against PiS

Despite the massive scope of the Black Protests, an ultra-conservative coalition led by Ordo Iuris and the PiS persistently sought to curb reproductive rights in Poland. In 2019, a group of 119 MPs, predominantly from PiS but also including representatives from the far-right Confederation (Konfederacja) and the centre-right PSL-Kukiz'15 coalition, approached the Polish Constitutional Tribunal. They requested an evaluation of whether induced termination of pregnancy in cases of severe and irreversible foetal defects violates four constitutional principles: human

dignity, the right to life, prohibition of discrimination and democratic rule of law. On 22 October 2020, the court declared that human life holds intrinsic value at every stage of development and should consequently be safeguarded, effectively outlawing abortion in almost all circumstances.

This decision was immediately condemned as a form of torture against women by women's rights groups as well as the centrist and left-wing parliamentary opposition, triggering the most extensive protests in Poland's recent history (NFP, 2022). On the day of the court's decree, people of all ages convened in protest at the Constitutional Court's gates in Warsaw, breaching anti-epidemic measures that limited public gatherings. In response to this announcement, the All-Poland Women's Strike expeditiously galvanised tens of thousands of demonstrators, initiating a series of protests that unfolded over several months and subsequently earned the well-known tag '100 days of protests'.

The 2020 protest mobilisations differed markedly from those in 2016, not merely due to the pandemic restrictions necessitating additional inventiveness from the protesters. The scale of the 2020 protests, when compared to those of 2016, was huge. On 28 October 2020, the police recorded 410 events across the nation, with an estimated turnout of approximately 430,000 individuals (Jurzso, 2020). However, media reports from that day suggest both numbers could have been significantly higher. On 30 October, a major demonstration, encompassing over 100,000 individuals, was organised in Warsaw (Oko Press, 2020). A notable feature of the 2020 protests was the age of the protesters, with the majority being in their early twenties or younger. This demographic was reflected in the radicalism of their slogans and demands. As one of the protest organisers in Warsaw put it: 'These protests belong to the youth. We may have called and organised them but all this energy you see here tonight is thanks to them.' In a conversation, 21-year-old Anna articulated the frustration she and thousands of others like her felt: 'This is not the Poland I want to live in. We are young, we want to be free; access to abortion is just one step from criminalising all our freedoms. We will not accept this.' 'The next step is a dictatorship,' added Adam, a 24-year-old student. 'This is about our rights, freedom, life that we desire, which is so different from what this government has orchestrated over the years being in power.'

Amid the height of the pandemic, protesters across Poland exhibited remarkable creativity. Particularly innovative were online protests that lasted for hours or the remote blockades like spamming, texting, calling mobile phone numbers and reporting sites on social media, targeted not only at MPs and government officials but also at anti-choice and

far-right activists. One of them, Kaja Godek, a leader of ultra-conservative organisations *Życie i Rodzina* ('Life and Family'), received approximately 1,500 text messages and 1,200 calls (Polonia Christiana, 2020). Owing to the ban on mass gatherings, thousands of people organised protests across various cities from their cars, honking their horns and displaying posters, one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding an umbrella, the symbol of the previous Black Protests. People also organised protests outside shops, while adhering to social distancing guidelines, and displayed posters and slogans supporting the feminist movement and free elections on the windows of their residences. On other occasions, groups mobilised in bicycle protests, a Halloween protest under the motto 'trick or free choice' and young protesters organised techno parties outside the homes of politicians (Baginova and Vusilović, 2020). Young people expressed their desire to participate in the public discourse, often employing unconventional tools such as happenings, solo strikes, performances and the entire spectrum of tactics offered by the internet and social media (Muszel and Piotrowski, 2022).

Polish feminist protests and transnational networks

Another substantial outcome of the Black Protest mobilisations, particularly those in 2020, is the genesis of transnational networks intrinsically connected to the endeavours of the Polish feminist movement. Leveraging the cohesive potential of social media (Korolczuk, 2016), the activist collectives emerging in cities and towns across Poland established interconnections among themselves, while simultaneously cultivating robust transnational solidarity ties with activist groups in other countries. Consequently, this led to the All-Poland Women's Strike serving as the catalyst for the first International Women's Strike in 2017. In late 2016, activists from the All-Poland Women's Strike engaged with the *Ni Una Menos* feminist movement in Argentina and extended a global call for mobilisation for women's reproductive rights and autonomy. The following extract from an interview with a prominent figure from the All-Poland Women's Strike provides an insight into the transnational practices of the movement:

When my acquaintances informed me about Argentina's inaugural feminist strike in October 2016, I noted it was planned two weeks after the Polish one. At that juncture, there was a dearth of information in Poland about the feminist movement *Ni Una Menos*

(‘Not One Less’), initiated in response to femicide incidents in the country, prompting me to write about it. I aimed to enlighten the Polish public so that Polish women could recognise they weren’t isolated in their struggle. I initiated a dialogue with some activists on Facebook who facilitated connections with others in Argentina. This led to establishing links with activists in other countries, including Russia and the US, and subsequently, I was approached by activists from South Korea. It became evident that the issues surrounding women’s rights had a global dimension. In Italy, a feminist movement *Non Una Di Meno* was born. These interactions eventually paved the way for the International Women’s Strike. Merely five days after the Polish Women’s Strike, the concept of strikes was embraced by the women of Saint Petersburg, who organised a protest advocating for abortion rights. The women of South Korea were the next to follow suit. Numerous other countries followed in our footsteps.

Prior to 2016, the Polish women’s movement received scant attention and its struggle was largely regarded as an isolated anomaly within Europe – a seemingly insurmountable and ‘unique’ circumstance, primarily due to the considerable influence of the Catholic Church within the country. However, this perception underwent a fundamental transformation following the mass protests of 2016 and the global feminist strikes of 2017. The leaders of the Polish Women’s Strike assumed the coordination of the International Women’s Strike in 2017, taking pride in having sparked this wider movement. The online presence of the All-Poland Women’s Strike underscored the grassroots nature of the movement, while also spotlighting the crucial role Polish activists played in coordinating international efforts. These activists meticulously tracked and supported the emerging feminist struggles in other countries, from Ireland to El Salvador, often pioneering the establishment of transnational solidarity structures transcending borders.

The initial phase of the Black Protest mobilisations in 2016 was marked by symbolic acts of solidarity. Women’s strikes across the globe adopted similar visual motifs during their local and national protests, utilised social media platforms to exchange messages of solidarity and kept each other informed about their respective struggles. This phase was characterised by a pronounced focus on declared solidarity. For instance, the protest organised by *Dziewuchy Berlin* held significant symbolic value, particularly targeting Julia Przyłębska, chairwoman of the controversial Constitutional Tribunal, residing in Berlin with her husband,

the Polish ambassador to Germany. Moreover, the involvement of young Polish LGBT+ activists, many of whom had relocated to Berlin due to escalating hostility towards the LGBT+ community in Poland, added depth to these protests.

Following this phase of symbolic solidarity, a more tangible and pragmatic form of activism emerged – abortion-care activism (Braine, 2023; Hume, 2023; Žuborová, 2023). This shift saw the development of transnational infrastructures for abortion care that operate beyond the confines of state mechanisms. Feminist groups and collectives outside Poland, such as Aborcja Bez Granic (Abortion without Borders), spearheaded international fundraising campaigns to assist those in need of abortion services. These networking endeavours have been instrumental in fostering practical transnational solidarity.

Ciocia Basia, a grassroots abortion-care transnational network, exemplifies this shift. In response to Poland's near-total abortion ban, it expanded rapidly, establishing a new branch in Czechia named Ciocia Czesia. This expansion drew significant financial support from individuals and activist groups across Europe, including Slovakia, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. A Polish activist living in Prague described the mobilisation, saying:

Initially, a small group of us in Prague were distressed by the developments in Poland. We quickly organised online groups on platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. In just a day, we connected with feminist groups across Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. Our Facebook group swelled to over a hundred members in a few hours and we raised substantial funds to support those urgently needing abortions, covering medical, travel and living expenses. This represented a new approach to grassroot activism, driven by donations from people sharing our indignation. As protests in Poland grew, we spontaneously called for demonstrations across Czechia and Slovakia, drawing thousands (Interview with Polish activist, Prague, 7 March 2021)

This evolution in the feminist movement is also reflected in the deeper understanding of what activists stand against. The movement has progressed from a singular focus on the abortion ban to advocating broader social justice issues. Activists in Poland and beyond have become more cognisant of the influence of international anti-gender alliances, often informed by academic research on these movements. An activist in Warsaw highlighted this awareness, stating: 'We need to build a network

as robust as the politically influential network the anti-gender alliances have established, impacting our lives' (Excerpt from the interview, Warsaw, November 2020). In a similar vein, a strong grassroots initiative 'We Won't Be Silent' emerged in Slovakia in response to conservative attempts in parliament to limit or ban abortion. These groups have been successful in blocking such legislation by organising protests, educating communities, publicly exposing the agendas behind these proposals and working closely across transnational feminist spaces. Hence, transnational networking practices are sustained by groups compelled to mobilise against the influence of anti-gender groups in national politics and beyond.

Connective power behind the feminist movement

The rapid and intensive mobilisation in response to Poland's near-total abortion ban raises numerous questions regarding the success of the movement. Firstly, I contend that the abortion ban acted as a catalyst, symbolising a wider array of issues and grievances. The scale and intensity of the feminist protests had immediate and long-term impacts. Initially, it led to the withdrawal of the contested legislation and, ultimately, rejuvenated the feminist movement in Poland. This resurgence marked the beginning of a grassroots feminist movement characterised by its intersectionality, inclusivity and diversity (Murawska and Włodarczyk, 2017; Majewska, 2018; Korolczuk et al., 2019). The movement took notice of the broader political context, particularly the connection between the transnational anti-gender alliances and right-wing populism in Poland, and evolved into a mass movement with a distinct political culture and agenda.

Secondly, the movement leveraged networking principles (Juris, 2004) and emergent communication technologies to engage groups previously unaffiliated with activism or feminism, facilitating transnational networking. The engagement of internet users and online communication became integral to the organisational structure of the movement (Korolczuk, 2016). This approach signifies a departure from the hierarchical logic of traditional parties and unions, emphasising the creation of expansive spaces where diverse collectives maintain their autonomy while aligning around shared principles. This network politics aims to enhance connectivity and horizontal expansion, integrating diverse groups within decentralised, flexible information structures for local and transnational coordination (Juris, 2004). The protests and mobilisations

against the abortion ban in Poland exemplify this shift towards connective action, a key factor in facilitating mass engagement today.

Conclusion

This chapter, based on ethnographic observations, describes the emergence of the feminist movement in Poland and its networks from 2016 until the abortion ban in 2020. The chapter further identifies and analyses the two main strategic practices that made the movement powerful in Poland and beyond. First, I argue that feminist mobilisations in Poland signalled the emergence and highlighted the importance of transnational networking practices in organising feminist movements. Going beyond initial protests against the abortion ban fuelled by anti-gender populist alliances, the mobilisations have evolved into a broader movement for a systematic change, positioning the recent struggles over ‘gender’ as part of a broader conflict, where what is genuinely at stake is the future of democracy. The conflict between ultra-conservative and progressive forces over reproductive rights and gender equality exemplifies a key aspect of the political dynamic which several scholars have dubbed ‘the populist moment’ – and social movements play an indispensable part in mobilising against these dynamics, with the All-Polish Women’s Strike being one of the most visible feminist movements today challenging these dynamics.

Second, the movement’s mobilising success lies in applying horizontality, decentralisation and connective action. More specifically, the movement’s strategy included: (1) the building of horizontal ties and connections among diverse autonomous elements, (2) open circulation of information, (3) collaboration through decentralised coordination and (4) self-autonomous networking.

Despite the failure to halt the abortion ban, the radical mobilisation practices of the Polish feminist movement, along with its transnational solidarity networks, served as a source of inspiration for movements outside Poland, enabling them to mobilise and protest amid pandemic-related restrictions (Baginova and Vusilović, 2020). The mobilisation efforts of the All-Poland Women’s Strike also prompted a critical examination of how new forms of women’s protest inform and shape feminist discourse. These mobilisations indicated a discernible shift within CEE towards an intersectional feminism that coalesced around issues of gender, class, citizenship and status. Moreover, through various communication platforms and diverse action spaces, the activists of the

All-Poland Women's Strike amplified their voices. This diversity in communication and creativity of protest repertoire encouraged a multiplicity of voices, narratives and demands within the movement (Vusilović and Baginova, 2020). Ultimately, the movement played a significant role in disseminating knowledge about anti-gender alliances and their global practices. It is also seen as one of the main factors that contributed to the PiS's electoral defeat in 2023.

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Part IV

Populist discourse and the politics of othering

Foreword by Richard C. M. Mole

While much of the recent research on the appeal of populism to the ‘left behind’ has focused on the latter’s failure to benefit from the economic policies championed by neoliberal politicians, it is no less important to consider the disorientating impact of the rapid social and cultural change brought about by globalisation (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Such change – combined with the ‘shock therapy’ economic policies introduced in the 1990s – often resulted in a loss of status for members of previously advantaged groups and, at the same time, greater empowerment for women and sexual and ethnic minorities. Taken together, these processes undermined the sense of entitlement of formerly privileged individuals, which populists promise to restore ‘by offering backwardly oriented utopias and historical narratives that glorify traditional communities with ethnic, national and cultural homogeneity’ (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017: 577). To achieve this goal, populism in the CEE context is thus invariably thickened with nativist nationalism, which ‘alludes to the notion that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native (“alien”) elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state’ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 34).

Such constructions of sympathetic in-groups and threatening out-groups are central – albeit not exclusive – to nativist populism. Shared ethno-national identity was historically and still is used as a marker for ‘monopolistic closure’, where ‘one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors – race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc. – as a pretext for attempting their exclusion’ (Weber,

1968: 341). Monopolistic closure ensures that access to limited resources (historically, agricultural produce; today, social welfare) is restricted to those who are 'like us'. Where no shared identity exists, people question why those who 'define themselves differently but live side by side with them and whose solidarities they cannot rely on should be politically or economically or culturally favoured' (Schöpflin, 2000: 39). This logic underpins nativist populist attitudes towards the Other.

National identity also gives individuals – and especially those whose social status has been undermined – a sense of belonging and positive feelings of psychological well-being in that pride in the achievements of one's nation can boost one's self-esteem (Mole, 2007). However, this is often the result of a process of 'positive distinctiveness', that is, assessing your nation more favourably than others. Taken together, the processes of monopolistic closure and positive distinctiveness frequently result in prejudice and discrimination. Patterns of social exclusion are more often based on ethnic or national prejudices than on social class, for instance, as the former identifications tend to carry a stronger emotional weight for people.

The populist construction of borders between in-groups and out-groups does not always fall along national lines, however. As Osuna argues, 'borders are used in a multiplicity of populist discursive articulatory practices and play an important role in underpinning several of the dimensions of the populist construct' (2022: 6). At the most fundamental level, populists establish a moral hierarchy between the 'corrupt elite' and the 'pure people'. Populists also go to great lengths to limit the definition of the 'pure people' in whose name they claim to speak, as this allows them to delegitimise any (liberal, queer, atheist) voices that oppose and challenge their rhetoric and behaviour. In general, defining the in-group and out-group along multiple axes allows populists to construct 'an idealized society based on emotional and ahistorical interpretations of the past that the populist projects aspire to revive' (Osuna, 2022: 6).

In the following four chapters, Tiril Ellingsen Thue, Carlos Gómez del Tronco, Olena Yermakova and Slobodanka Dekić discuss how populists instrumentalise antisemitism in Serbia and Croatia, Islamophobia in the Czech Republic, anti-migrant sentiment in Poland and homophobia in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, respectively, to construct Jews, Muslims, immigrants and sexual minorities as threatening out-groups whose threat to the national in-group only right-wing populists can protect voters from.

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Antisemitism in Serbia and Croatia: a study of antisemitic hate speech on 4chan's 'politically incorrect' board

Tiril Ellingsen Thue

Introduction

Numerous reports and surveys continue to document the spread of and increase in antisemitism worldwide. In 2019, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, reported on the increase in hostility, discrimination and violence motivated by antisemitism, documented by Jewish communities around the world. Shaheed noted with serious concern and alarm the increasing frequency and magnitude of antisemitic incidents and the growing use of antisemitic tropes in slogans, images, stereotypes and conspiracy theories used to incite and justify hostility, discrimination and violence towards Jews (Shaheed, 2019). This, in turn, has created an atmosphere of anxiety and fear among Jewish communities throughout the world. A survey designed to capture Jewish people's experiences and perceptions of hate crimes, discrimination and antisemitism found that 85 per cent of respondents rate antisemitism as the biggest social and political problem where they live, clearly documenting the extent to which contemporary antisemitism pervades their everyday lives (FRA, 2018). Conducted in 12 EU member states, states that are home to over 96 per cent of the Jewish population in the EU, the survey found that 9 out of 10 respondents felt that antisemitism had increased in the five years prior to the study, 1 in 3 avoided visiting Jewish events and sites because they did not feel safe as Jews and almost 4 out of 10 respondents considered emigrating, as they did not feel safe as Jews in their country of residence. In Croatia and Serbia,

the Jewish communities are small but vibrant. As of 2018, the Jewish population numbers 1,700 in Croatia, or 0.41 per 1,000 inhabitants, and 1,400 in Serbia, or 0.2 per 1,000 inhabitants (DellaPergola, 2019: 68). Despite the marginal size of the Jewish communities in each country, a survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL, n.d.a) in 2014 found that 42 per cent of adult Serbs and 33 per cent of adult Croats harbour antisemitic attitudes.

Antisemitic prejudice and hostility continue to function even where Jews are barely present, in part because 'antisemitism has increasingly come to be perceived as an insidious transnational phenomenon, not necessarily related to direct contact with Jews as real-life individuals' (DellaPergola, 2020: 3). In an increasingly globalised world, antisemitic ideas are circulated and moulded into social and political movements that go beyond local collectivities. This is due to a significant degree to the impact of the internet. Antisemitic hate speech, which has seen an incredible proliferation and acceleration online, has also steadily moved from the fringes of society to mainstream media. Perpetrators of major antisemitic attacks have been 'active in disseminating antisemitic propaganda online, through international networks of like-minded activists' (Kantor Center, 2020: 6). This chapter seeks to investigate antisemitic hate speech and conspiracy theories on 4chan, an online forum known for disseminating and propagating extremist, racist and antisemitic content. Levels of physically violent antisemitism remain low in Serbia and Croatia, but Jewish communities in both countries have reported an increase in online antisemitism. Thus, this chapter seeks to examine the relationship between populism, far-right ideologies and antisemitism and show how this fuels antisemitic attitudes online.

Populism and antisemitism

The global rise in antisemitism has, according to Subotić (2022), coincided with the surge and success of far-right populist movements. That is not to imply that all populist movements are antisemitic or that those that utilise antisemitism do so in the same way or to the same degree, but rather that, as an 'interpretative framework' and as a 'system of meaning', antisemitism is useful for populists. This is because it is both plastic and adaptable, and the inherently contradictory nature of antisemitism means it can be 'everything and nothing and it is about constructing the perfect enemy, the perfect elite, and the perfect antidote to the people, to the *volk*' (2021: 6, emphasis in original).

In this study I am interested in two particular features of populism, as it is defined in the Introduction: its sharp division of the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ and its Manicheism. To recall Mudde’s point, populism, particularly its right-wing variety, is permeated by a ‘Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not just people with different priorities and values, they are *evil!*’ (2004: 544, emphasis in original).

Populism may be found on both the left and right ends of the political spectrum, but the proliferation of right-wing and far-right populist parties in the mainstream is what has most significantly altered contemporary political landscapes and is the focus of this research. Within these parties and movements, nativism and authoritarianism are key components. ‘The people’ is thus defined in exclusive ethno-national or nativist terms. Non-native elements, whether people or ideas, are framed as a fundamental threat to the nation-state and thus to ‘the people’. In extreme cases, this nativism evolves into racism (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Mudde, 2017). The far right embraces a number of ideological precepts. These range from the radical (seeking change but doing so within a democratic framework) to the extreme (rejecting democracy and considering violence both necessary and legitimate in achieving their goals) (Bjørge and Ravndal, 2019). Enemy categories will naturally vary depending on the ideological basis on which the movements are based and what their ultimate goal is. However, whether threats or enemies are depicted as immigrants, sexual or ethnic minorities, political systems or political opponents, ‘anti-Semitism performs the special function of integrating these elements and seemingly mediating the contradictions that exist’ (Botsch and Kopke, 2014: 208). Botsch and Kopke argue that Jews remain the ‘common denominator’ that links this broad span of ideological precepts.

Interestingly, despite antisemitism being a constitutive ideology of the far right, some parties and movements have over the past years sought to align themselves with Jews. They present themselves as pro-Jewish, positing a liberal defence of gender equality, gay rights and freedom of speech (Brubaker, 2017). This is a strategic tool and tactic in reframing and renewing their image. It deflects from accusations of racism and Islamophobia as well as their own history of antisemitism, where Jewish support is claimed as evidence for their supposed liberalism (Rose, 2020; Obermaier, 2021). Neither genuine nor sincere, this ‘philosemitic turn’ or ‘wave of philosemitism’ is more a consequence of populists’ and the far right’s preoccupation with Islam. Jews are reframed as fellow Europeans, equally under civilisational threat from Islam.

Philosemitism, or deliberately positing positive statements about Jews, is rooted in the typical stereotypes about Jews, thus drawing on the same mechanisms of antisemitism (Brubaker, 2017; Rose, 2020). Despite this trend by some to present themselves as ostensibly liberal by advocating for the Jewish cause as well as for gender equality and gay rights, racism, Islamophobia, misogyny and homophobia are foundational elements of far-right ideologies. As Rose (2020) states, this philosemitic wave is built on the same stereotypical assumptions about Jews; the phenomena are two sides of the same coin. It does testify to the plastic and adaptable nature of antisemitism and how it can be utilised by various actors for different purposes. This is why Subotić (2022: 6–7) argues that contemporary far-right populists incorporate antisemitism: it is the ability to construct ‘the Jews’ to represent whatever it is that populists reject, whether multiculturalism, communism, pluralism or capitalism. This is useful for populists and for others on the far-right spectrum, as so much is built around a sense of collective insecurity. The cause of this insecurity can thus be projected on to Jews, as elites pulling the strings in malevolent ways. This provides not only a model of explanation but also a way to soothe anxiety and fear and create a sense of cohesion among the inner group. Antisemitism thus helps provide simple explanations for complex issues and problems.

Antisemitism is, simply stated, hatred, prejudice and hostility towards Jews because they are Jews. A more precise definition, as given by Helen Fein, presents antisemitism as a

persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against Jews, and in collective or state violence – which results in and/or designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews (in Marcus, 2013: 100).

Hostility and prejudice towards Jews dates back centuries, and scholars of the topic have shown how antisemitic ideas and hostility have changed over the centuries and how new ones have emerged but also the extent to which antisemitism adapts to political, social or other changes. Today, antisemitism may be understood as ‘syncretic’; the ideological roots of antisemitism, whether religious, nationalist or racist, are merged together. This allows all forms of antisemitic stereotypes to be employed for whatever political need or function may arise, regardless of whether they are in contradiction (Wodak, 2015, 2018).

Antisemitic conspiracy theories: constructing world views through enemy images

The core of antisemitism is believing that Jews really are 'Jews'; it is the process of turning Jews into 'Jews' (Klug, 2003: 123–4). As Fein's definition explains, antisemitism is a persisting structure of hostile beliefs that are ascribed to Jews as a *collectivity*. These hostile beliefs may be rooted *religiously*, such as accusing Jews of killing Christ and being companions of the Devil, or *racially*, claiming a specific Jewish character that is inferior, typically greedy and cunning (Zick et al., 2005: 40). Furthermore, antisemitism may be defined and explained as political, cultural, Christian or Muslim, left or right wing, 'old' or 'new' (Wodak, 2018). Since the nineteenth century, antisemitic depictions have generally focused on Jews as being foreign to and outside of the national collective. With the newly emerging European nation-states, Jews' lack of homeland made them suspect to accusations of lacking loyalty (Bergmann, 2008). From this emerged the view of Jews as 'cosmopolitan anti-nationalists', a figure also used 'as a projection surface for the unacknowledged uncertainties, antagonisms of the modern nation state' (Wodak, 2018: 65–6). This fear and anxiety manifested itself and was embodied in accusations against the Jews as undermining a desired sense of moral order, of loyalty to state, nation and ruler and to ethnic cohesiveness of the modern nation-state (Subotić, 2022: 4). In 1903, the antisemitic falsification *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published, translated into several languages and distributed across the world. This forgery synthesised the many existing conspiracy theories on Jewish world dominance. It provided a simple and total model of orientation for modern antisemitism, that is, that Jews are working in secret and systematically to achieve world power (DellaPergola, 2020; Simonsen, 2020). *The Protocols* were said to be secret notes from meetings of Jewish leaders in which they were plotting to conquer the world and subvert Christian civilisation. Economic crises, revolutions, wars, capitalism, communism, democratic and anti-religious ideas were all instigated by Jews with the ultimate aim of subverting Christian civilisation and constructing a Zionist-led world government.

Conspiracy theories as models of explanations and their usage

Conspiracies are, simply put, explanations of events and of observable facts. Conspiracy theories 'reduce the complexity of social and political phenomena to monistic and intrinsically deterministic explanations'

(Castanho Silva et al., 2017: 426). Typically, complex social and political events are explained or attributed to the intent of a certain group of people, or elites, who hold infinite power. With this power and 'because of the secrecy and almightiness of the elites perpetrating conspiracies, such theories are not falsifiable' (2017: 426). Consequently, any attempt to disprove a conspiracy theory only demonstrates the extent and depth to which the elites' power reaches as well as to the extent of the conspiracy. The propensity to hold conspiracy beliefs is higher among those who feel the system is stacked against them, who hold little trust or harbour resentment towards authorities, or feel stigmatised (Bergmann, 2008). Similarly, Milošević Đorđević et al. (2021) state that low levels of institutional trust, higher perceptions of corruption, political cynicism and inclination towards authoritarianism are all predictors for individuals to endorse conspiracy theories or to hold a tendency for conspiratorial thinking. Furthermore, violent tensions and ethnic conflict increase the probability of endorsing conspiracy theories. When traumatic, violent events or ethnic conflicts that have occurred are not accompanied by clear and official causal explanations, individuals are left without the resources to cope with what may be real or perceived threats. As Blanuša (2020) points out, traumatic experiences generate conflictual narratives about the violent past and reproduce themselves for the coming generations. Today, incomplete, conflictual and conspiratorial accounts still remain around contested historical events about World War II, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars of the 1990s.

For movements and groups on the radical and extreme far right, conspiracies are an integral ideological element that provide explanatory models of the causes of problems and the enemies to be held accountable, which in turn justify exclusionary tactics and even violence. That such groups promote hatred and prejudice is not surprising, but hate speech that was previously confined to fringe communities has recently been disseminated and accepted in mainstream media. Populists are often known to transgress the boundaries of what may be deemed acceptable, employing a style and language that is transgressive, direct and emotional (Moffit and Tormey, 2014; Ostiguy, 2017). In their moralistic imagining of a good versus evil, people versus elite, it is not difficult to see how conspiracy theories and populism can converge.

Both are deeply linked to institutional distrust, the dualism between good and evil is readily employed and the attractiveness of both resides in their ability to provide seemingly simple solutions to complex problems, attracting supporters from a similar voter base. As Castanho Silva et al. (2017: 434) find, 'conspiracy beliefs are not only associated

with despise for political elites, but with romanticization of common people as victims – the central aspect of populist preferences’.

Antisemitism, in itself a conspiracy theory, resonates not only with the populist imaginary of a battle between good and evil, moral and corrupt – it provides a framework of enemies and conspirators. Furthermore, it can help to explain the negative effects of economic or cultural globalisation by attributing the blame to the conspiracy between the global elite and the minorities they promote to subvert host or ethnic nations. Allusions to corrupt global elites easily draw on antisemitic tropes and, as noted in the Introduction, move what was previously un-accepted from the fringes into mainstream discourse and society.

Predictors of antisemitic prejudice in Serbia and Croatia

According to Bergmann (2008), antisemitic prejudice in East European countries is mainly tied to a perceived threat to the national image. The persecution of Jews during the Holocaust negatively affects national self-esteem and self-confidence, and here ‘antisemitism is tightly interwoven with right-wing nationalist attitudes’ (2008: 358). As discussed, Jews have for centuries been and continue to be targeted because of their supposed outsized power and wish to cause harm. Antoniou et al. (2020: 8–9) argue that

antisemitic attitudes may also stem from a sense of collective victimhood, or a perception that one’s nation has been a victim of history. Societies that favour a victimized perception of their past tend to glorify their own suffering while diminishing the severity of others’ suffering. They argue that if those who perceive themselves as victimized do not feel that their suffering is sufficiently acknowledged, in contrast to the Holocaust or to the Jews as the penultimate group of victims, antisemitic feelings may arise.

In CEE, the supposed singularity of the Holocaust as the unique and most consequential event of the twentieth century, and the dominance of this West European interpretation, has not only been contested but has also led to resentment and victimhood rivalry (Van der Poel, 2019). In many post-communist countries, this interpretation did not align and was at odds with the memory traditions that evolved following the collapse of communism. Key to constructing new national identities was the memory of Stalinism and Soviet occupation. The dominant organising frame of

nationalist narratives is one of anti-communism and ethnic nationalism. As such, accepting this paradigm of the Holocaust was both threatening and destabilising ‘as it drowned out nationalist appeals to their own victimization and diluted it with appeals to memorialize Jewish suffering’ (Subotić, 2022: 2). Furthermore, it was perceived as elevating the suffering of Jewish victimhood above the victimhood of one’s own majority ethnic group. As a means of resolving this, many post-communist states engaged in what Subotić terms *memory appropriation*. This was aimed at criminalising communism, a process in which the memories, symbols and imagery of the Holocaust were appropriated to memorialise another kind of suffering. Either that of suffering under communism or of ethnic violence perpetrated by other ethnic groups.

This chapter does not aim to discuss these processes, which have been extensively researched in Serbia and Croatia, but only to highlight three points relevant to this analysis. First, the Holocaust and the appropriation of Holocaust themes, such as genocide and persecution, were instrumental in the ethno-exclusivist nationalisms that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Holocaust was invoked both in Serbia and Croatia as a means to demonise and attribute ‘genocidal intent’ to the aggressor both in the present and near past. Memories of Jewish victims were appropriated by Serbs and Croats to accentuate their own suffering and to promote nationalist narratives of victimhood (Byford, 2013; Biondich, 2007). Second, these narratives have in turn ushered in a series of revisionist strategies in the past three decades. Revisionist strategies have recast previous fascist movements and known collaborators, responsible not only for the extermination of the Jewish population but for countless civilians as well, as patriotic, even as anti-fascists, but also more widely as victims of communism (Pavasović Trošt, 2018; Djokić, 2002). Third, this continued ambivalence towards the group’s culpability in the Holocaust and the wars of the 1990s leads to various forms of negation, relativisation and even denial. This is typically associated with engaging in justificatory strategies, such as guilt comparison, victim reversal, Holocaust revisionism, erasure and denial (Wodak, 2018). These strategies in themselves constitute antisemitism.

Methodology

This chapter is based on research conducted on 4chan and its subboard /pol/ or ‘politically incorrect’. 4chan is an online image-based bulletin board where users post anonymously on a variety of boards dedicated

to different topics. The /pol/ subboard is said to be a political discussion forum which has increasingly come to be known as a platform for far-right extremists. Since its creation in 2003, 4chan has ‘emerged as one of the most impactful generators of online culture’ (Hine et al., 2017: 1). 4chan has more than 22 million monthly users, almost half of which are from the United States. Although the user base is predominantly American, users from non-native English-speaking countries are also well represented. 4chan has a user base of predominantly young men aged between 18 and 34 (Hine et al., 2017; DMR, 2024). Many of /pol/’s users support the alt right and the QAnon movements. A wide range of conspiracy theories originate here, and, in general, the board is known for allowing or even to an extent encouraging and taking pride in the dissemination of incredibly aggressive and distasteful content (Hine et al., 2017; FOI, 2021; Milanović, 2021). /pol/ is one of the most active subforums on 4chan, producing, spreading and disseminating hateful, conspiratorial and anti-semitic content from a fringe community to more mainstream platforms. In their large-scale analysis of fringe web communities, Zannettou et al. (2020: 795) find an increase in popularity of the use of racial and ethnic slurs, particularly antisemitic language. Furthermore, they find that /pol/ is the ‘single most influential community for the spread of memes to all other Web communities’, suggesting that ‘/pol/ acts as a primary reservoir to incubate and transmit antisemitism to downstream Web communities’. Similarly, Hine et al. find that a great deal of content on /pol/ is unique, stating that ‘in fact, /pol/’s ability to find or produce original content is likely one of the reasons it is thought to be at the center of hate on the web’ (2017: 11).

Posts on 4chan average around one million daily. Independent software archives threads, allowing one to search through the boards as well as by country code. Posts are anonymous; only the IP address of the poster is visible. I have not created a user profile but have simply accessed the threads and archives as a visitor. I searched for posts made from Croatian and Serbian IP addresses. I originally began using the search word *Jew* with no time frame; due to the enormous number of posts, I limited my search to the time period 1 April 2021–1 April 2022. In addition, as the analysis progressed, I added more search words without the time frame. These included search words I suspected would either directly or indirectly be related to Jews and/or antisemitic prejudice, such as *Soros*, *WWII*, *Great Reset*, *Great Replacement* and *Holocaust*. I did not use any form of large-scale processing or data tools. I read every post, being sure to read all thread commentaries and discussions from the original post. Typically, on 4chan, users will repost other users’ posts and

commentaries, so I followed up on these threads and commentaries as well when posts I was using for analysis were reposted. I wanted to be as certain as possible that my interpretation of these posts was as close to the intent of the poster to the degree that is possible given my own perceptions. Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 33) present a rigorous and systematic process of analysis, drawn from their socio-diagnostic critique. They propose to use five questions to uncover the latent or manifest character of discursive practices and strategies in antisemitic speech utterances. Their five questions are used as a framing guideline for this analysis:

- How are Jews referred to linguistically?
- What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?
- By means of what arguments do people/groups aim to justify exclusion, discrimination or suppression of Jews?
- From what perspective or point of view are these namings, attributes and arguments expressed?
- Are the respective discriminatory utterances articulated in an overt or mitigated manner?

Language on 4chan, and especially on /pol/, is both aggressive and hostile. Posters use crude language and express all forms of racist, xenophobic and misogynistic sentiment. There is also a great deal of mockery and irony, use of specific internet/slang/meme language and, to an extent, humour. I have relayed the posts as they are originally written. Most posts are written in English, so there has been no need for translation. I have not corrected spelling or grammar mistakes, unless the meaning was not possible to convey otherwise, and have kept all posts in their entirety, including the use of all racial and ethnic slurs. The language is both disturbing and offensive, but it conveys the extent to which hate pervades these forums.

Analysis of 4chan's /pol/ subboard

Activity on the /pol/ subboard is intense. Users engage in an enormous array of discussions on contemporary and historical issues. Many, as they state themselves, are only there to make fun of others, whereas a large portion engage in a seemingly serious, well-researched form of analysis. The use of memes, as Zannettou et al. (2020) found, is rampant. The

'happy merchant' meme accompanies almost any discussion in which the Jews are mentioned. Classified as a hate symbol by the ADL, the 'happy merchant' is a drawing of a Jewish man with heavily stereotyped facial features, wearing a yarmulke and hunched over, while greedily rubbing his hands together (ADL, [n.d.c](#)). On /pol/, there is an endless variety of these images. Typically, the happy merchant is depicted as huddled over and trying to interfere with whatever is being discussed, be it financial or political institutions, countries, corporations or, a particular favourite on /pol/, Hollywood and the mass media. Collages are often posted, with the same aim of showing the extent and reach of Jews' power. Jewish individuals, or individuals thought to be Jewish, are depicted side by side, often with the Star of David on them.

Classic antisemitic tropes

A vast number of discussion threads on /pol/ revolve around racialised and classic forms of antisemitism, but there are no clear-cut lines. This Serbian user, for instance, asks: 'How do you kill two Jews without direct contact? Throw them a penny and watch them fight to the death' (4chan, [2018b](#)). This user plays on the classic stereotype of Jews as being greedy and money-grubbing and may, in the context of /pol/, be meant as a joke or form of humour. Nonetheless, it is proposed as a solution for killing Jews. Posts on killing Jews are not uncommon and are justified in a number of ways. For instance, portraying Jews as soulless manipulators, like this Croatian user who states: 'Jews perform circumcision on small children to break their spirit (think blood, fear and pain), thus making them indifferent to the suffering of others and susceptible to manipulation. When they grow up, they become manipulators themselves' (4chan, [2022c](#)). Or others who simply state, 'Fuck the Jews! The Jews are a criminal people. They mutilate their children. They're murderous, thieving, lying bastards' (4chan, [2018a](#)). That Jews manipulate in all spheres of life seems to be a given, which in turn is a way to execute their alleged plan of world dominance. When one poster wonders whether psychiatry is a scam, this Serbian user explains, 'It was founded by a jew, what the fuck do you think? ... The jews saw easy manipulation potential by selling you mind altering "medicine" and putting everyone into archetypes, so they twisted what is a legitimate futurist branch of science into a kiked up philosophy of mind control' (4chan, [2022a](#)).

There are at times those who question or even attempt to counter some of these positions. One poster comments on the ludicrous assertion that Jews not only created communism but capitalism as well. In response

to this, this user explains that 'jews create shit conditions for the worker thru soulless capitalism and then mobilize the frustrations of the worker to make structural changes to the government with communism, end result is jewish oligarchy controls everything and permanent underclass of slaves' (4chan, 2022d). This is followed up by a suggested reading of *Mein Kampf*. Although some contend that not all Jews are evil, inevitably 'even a "good" jew will most likely side with his tribe no matter how corrupt it may be ... even the so called good jew can give birth to bad jews, so why take the risk? just send them to israel or at least remove them from positions of power' (4chan, 2022b). Many discussions revolve around proposed solutions to make the world a better place. This is generally contingent on removing Jews from their positions of power and control. However, for many, a simpler solution would be their end, such as this poster who laments, 'Why can't the Jews just die? I pray for the death of these demons every day' (4chan, 2021c).

Jewish world control: Globohomo and Death to Jewmerica

Conspiracy theories on /pol/ are rampant. Some are explicitly stated; others are alluded to through more 'coded' or latent expressions. This is typical of the use of the word 'globalist', which in itself is not antisemitic but has largely come to represent Jews. The use of triple brackets, ((())), known as echo, has become an antisemitic symbol intended to indicate that someone or something is Jewish or controlled by someone Jewish. References to ZOG, short for Zionist occupational government or Zionist-occupied government, are widely used, referring to alleged Jewish control over Western governments, banks and institutions in a bid for global power and control. The Holocaust as a complete fabrication is widely termed the Holohoax, and discussions on these range from complete denial to lengthy discussions on lack of evidence of the so-called 6 gorillion deaths. The '6 gorillion' term is particularly popular among users when discussing the Holocaust. It is an antisemitic reference to the number of Jews killed during the Holocaust, where million is replaced with the 'nonsensical' gorillion to imply that the number of deaths is wildly exaggerated by the Jews (ADL n.d.b). Discussions on the Holocaust engage in every form of denial, victim reversal, relativisation, equating the Holocaust with other crimes and accusing the Jews of being complicit and orchestrating or fabricating the Holocaust. As one poster states: 'every single death of WW2 and tens of millions after it all go back to a single source – communism. and communism was invented by jews for the specific purpose of destroying the white race culturally, psychologically,

politically and eventually physically' (4chan, 2020a). Accompanying a picture of Hitler and with the title 'ww2 was just another elite's trick', a lengthy explanation of why World War II was orchestrated follows: for the profit and enrichment of elites, to kill as many white Christians as possible, so that 'jews have an eternal victim card so they can finally conquer all top positions in globo society' and so that the USA/jewish/masonic/elite becomes a superpower 'to dictate the rules and spread degeneracy for decades to come'. Ultimately, World War II was orchestrated to ban nationalism and patriotism forever, to destroy nations and cultural identities to 'prepare the world for globohomo' (4chan, 2021d).

Globohomo is a particular favourite on /pol/. Short for *global homogenisation*, it is an alleged elite conspiracy aimed at destroying traditional cultures and values to be replaced with some kind of global corporate uni-culture. Also commonly used as *globalist homosexual(ity)*, it then refers to a global homosexual/Jewish conspiracy that erodes national and traditional culture (Futrelle, 2019). On /pol/, users claim that Jewish and other elites are spreading degeneracy. Particular targets are transsexuals and the more general liberal sexual order. There is a long history of far-right antisemitism that claims Jews make use of sexual politics to erode the patriarchal and racialised sexual order. In the 'porn conspiracy' that began in the 1970s, Jews allegedly promoted pornographic films, as they controlled Hollywood and the distribution of media content. Alleged addiction to pornography was a tool the Jews used to pacify white males and to solidify their global domination (Kerl, 2020). This is a theme that is evident in many of the posts in this discussion of the liberal sexual order promoted by Jews through social media, capitalist and consumer culture. It is often accompanied by mockery of vegan lifestyles, ecologism and the decadent West, in which posters claim we will all soon be 'living in a pod'. Again, there is no clear demarcation between the use of these theories but rather an intricate merging. The bottom line for /pol/ users seems to be the destruction of national cultures and/or the white race. These ideas draw on the Great Replacement Theory, a theory largely promoted by white supremacists that has been widely spread and adopted across the world. The Great Replacement Theory is the idea that white Americans and Europeans are being replaced by non-white immigrants. Those who promote this theory claim that liberal immigration policies, of Muslims and non-whites, will ultimately lead to the destruction of the white race as these groups have higher birth rates than whites. Though not initially antisemitic, it has increasingly merged with other conspiracy theories that Jews are orchestrating mass immigration through their control of

powerful institutions and is increasingly associated with and exemplifying antisemitism (ADL, 2021).

What is particularly noticeable among Serbian and Croatian users is the merging of anti-Americanism with antisemitism. As a Croatian user explains, 'USA aka Jewmerica ... is the vessel of global jewry. Their (((culture))) of soulless materialism aka (((capitalism))) suits them perfectly. The jews have wrought incalculable evil using jewmerican military to strike at Israel's larger enemies. Death to America' (4chan, 2019b). Similarly, this Serbian user states: 'Americans are essentially Jews. They cut baby dicks. They worship shekels more than anything ... If we're being honest, if you hate Jews, you have to hate America as well. Death to America' (4chan, 2020b). Jewmerica is in these discourses at the centre and the major cause and root of the decline of what they perceive in society. The level of hateful rhetoric is incredibly high, calling for the killing and death of those who are either part of or who support this alleged Jewish American construction. For some of these posters, there is no other way: 'Death to Jewmerica, especially to all those fucks who allowed for ZOG to take over – in exchange for cheap credit, fast food, degenerate pop culture and all other trinkets and commodities of boomer mindset that every Jewmerican has' (4chan, 2019a). It seems clear that these discussions generate strong feelings among many /pol/ users. The acceptance of the level of hate speech leads to a common conclusion of stating that if you in any way support the USA and as such the Jews, you are supporting 'jew wars, pedophilia, child slaughtering and molech offerings' (4chan, 2019b). Consequently, 'If you're not openly displaying hatred for any, and I repeat ANY Jewmerican, you're a satanic jew and the discussion ends right then and there' (4chan, 2019b).

Soros and Jewish involvement in the domestic narrative

Another conspiracy theory that has gained considerable traction is the one surrounding George Soros. Soros is a Hungarian-born Jew and Holocaust survivor who became financially successful in the US and has spent the last 40 years investing in various liberal and progressive causes internationally. In anti-Soros conspiracies it is claimed that he is 'interfering to cause national disturbance and disorder' (Subotić, 2022: 9). By some, he is accused of facilitating refugee and migrant streams in Europe, and in the American context he is accused of funding Antifa and Black Lives Matter. These topics are widely discussed on /pol/, among Serbian and Croatian users as well. Soros plays a prominent role in the

globohomo narrative and in the alleged degradation and destruction of national societies.

Referring to the election of Tomislav Tomašević, mayor of Zagreb, in 2021, a user asks, 'How did we get to the point of getting a degenerate, lgbtqp promoting, immigrant loving retard who literally gets funded by (((George Soros))) elected as our capital city's mayor?' (4chan, 2021h). Furthermore, 'our recently elected mayor is liberal-green and he has "Gender correct traffic lights" on one of his action priority lists, we are truly going down' (4chan, 2021f). This 'God-forsaken prime minister is one of the worst examples of traitorous (((EU))) (((globohomo))) (((soros))) shit you will find in europe' (4chan, 2021f). This is interpreted not only as the 'international jewry solidifying its presence' (4chan, 2021f) but also as the epitome of what the globohomo / Jewish / American agenda is aimed at achieving. Similarly, in Serbia, the current political leadership is equally under foreign influence. Current President Aleksandar Vučić is 'a total globohomo, who only presents himself as a nationalist ... we have a soros ngo dyke for a PM for God's sake' (4chan, 2021i), referring to the publicly out Prime Minister Ana Brnabić. And as another poster adds, 'true Serbian nationalists hate this piece of shit Vucic, he's a globohomo puppet and sucks Killton and Soros tiny dicks', adding that it is not obvious to people or 'sheeple' that they are under occupation, despite the supposedly all-gay ruling party, president and PM that they have (4chan, 2021j). In addition to pulling the strings of the current political elites in individual countries, Soros is also accused of facilitating the 'invasion' of Europe by immigrants: 'Jews are your only mortal enemy ... The brown shitskins invading Europe are here only because Jews like George Soros orchestrate it' (4chan, 2021g). Soros is also linked to the so-called emancipation of women with comments such as 'Do you think women would be in position they are right now if it weren't for Jews like George Soros funding these organisations?' (4chan, 2021e). Furthermore, because of pornography and social media, men have lost confidence and become incels, whereas 'armies' of men have become feminine due to junk food and consumerism. Conclusively, this user states: 'I'm not saying jews are single-handedly responsible for every single thing, but they are definitely using all of these things to make us weaker. By exterminating jews, the world would surely become a much, much better place' as 'You can't even think of changing the world without removing its "greatest" virus- the jew' (4chan, 2021e).

The examples presented above are only a small selection of what antisemitic hate speech on /pol/ looks like among Serbian and Croatian

users. As the initial discussion of this chapter aimed at showing, anti-semitic prejudice, hostility and conspiracy theories are used to provide meaningful frames of understanding. As the examples above show, one form of hateful utterance is usually complemented with another form of hateful utterance, whether antisemitic, racist or misogynist. To return to Reisigl and Wodak's questions, discriminatory statements are largely made in an overt manner. Even the use of coded or latent language is so thinly veiled that it leaves little doubt that one is referring to Jews. Jews are referred to as Jews, viruses, the devil, satanists, mutilators and manipulators. They are characterised as conniving, greedy, evil and most of all as attempting to destroy and undermine both national and international order. It is not surprising, then, that these arguments justify their suppression, exclusion and even annihilation. Antisemitic themes on /pol/ to a large extent do not differ from other countries. They are, however, adapted and reinterpreted to fit the domestic setting in Serbia and Croatia.

Conclusion

4chan and /pol/ are naturally in no way representative of the general population of Serbia and Croatia. However, the proliferation of anti-semitic hate speech online has gone to a large extent unchecked. The evolution of the internet and its global capabilities has, as discussed in the Introduction, led to a transnational dissemination of antisemitic ideas and prejudice. Communities such as those on /pol/ are worrying, as they enable previously isolated, even ostracised members of fringe communities to gather, share and organise their political ideological agendas (Hine et al., 2017). As confirmed by an FOI report (2021), right-wing extremist content, initially developed on national online stages, travels across borders in transnational forums, where memes, ideas and conspiracy theories are shared and eventually adapted and incorporated back into respective national settings. Furthermore, these are to an increasing degree being spread through mainstream media outlets and reach the general public.

As the outright expression of antisemitism has been generally acknowledged to be taboo following World War II, antisemitic speech today is often 'coded' or latent. Instead of explicitly referring to Jews, one may instead speak of 'globalists', 'international money/finance/power' or 'cosmopolitanism'. These are still easily recognisable antisemitic tropes, yet it enables one to avoid accusations of antisemitism, while reproducing

antisemitic ideas, as Jews are never in fact mentioned. Jewish communities in Serbia and Croatia have also reported an increase in growth of antisemitism online. The COVID-19 pandemic fuelled antisemitic narratives, with the lockdowns and increased use of the internet surely being contributing factors. However, right-wing populist and nationalist rhetoric in the region that continues to emphasise victimhood narratives and continues to promote revisionist interpretations of the past also opens up opportunity structures for antisemitic sentiment. The global diffusion of antisemitic hate speech is of great concern, as 'dehumanising language erodes the moral inhibition to cause harm to a limited group of people' (FOI, 2021: 8). This kind of speech not only dehumanises but promotes conceptions of minority groups as enemies who may cause harm to the majority. Combating these kinds of perceptions is vital as they may ultimately serve to justify hate, discrimination and violence.

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A qualitative approach to Islamophobia in Czech public opinion: historical changes, the limits of 'Muslims' as a topic, racialisation and understandings of 'Islam'

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In January 2018, Miloš Zeman was re-elected Czech president after years of increasingly blatant Islamophobic discourse (Naxera and Krčál, 2018). A few months earlier, most political groups standing in the Czech general election had made opposition to welcoming refugees (generally perceived as Muslim) central to their programmes (Krčál and Naxera, 2018). In the latter election, with 10.6 per cent of the vote, the populist radical-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party entered the lower house under a hyperbolically Islamophobic programme that promised 'to ban Islam in Czechia' (SPD, 2017). Indeed, the Czech far right had become revitalised in 2015 by shifting their scapegoating of Czech Roma on to Muslims. Still, at the time, mainstream parties across the ideological spectrum engaged with Islamophobia too (Zahradník and Rosůlek, 2017). In particular the Czech centre right and far right had been attempting to emulate the West European right's use of Islamophobia for some years (Mareš, 2015). Even in the early days of January 2015, many political scientists still believed that this strategy lacked the relevance to mobilise the Czech electorate (Trachtová, 2015). However, the context had changed by mid-2014, mostly as a result of the mediatised topics of the rise of the so-called Islamic State (and other militarised jihadist groups), the 2014+ European refugee 'crisis' and a string of jihadist terrorist attacks in Western Europe, starting in December 2014. Notably, the reaction to the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings led to the first large anti-Islam demonstrations in Czechia (Muhič Dizdarevič, 2016).

and worsened attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the country (Savelkoul et al., 2022).

Rather than the increased appeal of Islamophobia to Czech politicians (that is, the supply side), what was most striking was that, from early 2014, several cross-national surveys had shown Czech respondents (that is, the demand side) to hold the most negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the EU (Linek, 2014; Heath and Richards, 2019; Kantar, 2019; Marfouk, 2019). As Muslims made up just around 0.2 per cent of the Czech population by 2013 (Topinka, 2015), most Czechs had limited interpersonal contact opportunities with Muslims, which according to the contact hypothesis could explain their high levels of prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998). Indeed, when Czechs self-reported contact with Muslims (MEDIAN, 2018) or 'people of different race and ethnicity' (Bell and Strabac, 2020), this correlated positively with greater tolerance towards 'Muslims'. My hypothesis is that, in the absence of contact opportunities, public discourse has fundamentally shaped many Czechs' social cognitions of 'Muslims' on which much anti-Muslim prejudice is based. Even before 2015, 'Muslims' regularly featured in the Czech news mostly in the context of conflicts and foreign politics, with an emphasis on terrorism or fundamentalism (Vesecký, 2006) and their perceived difference (Křížková, 2006). The securitisation of (Muslim) migration in news media only increased by 2015 (Tkaczyk, 2017) and so did the volume of information on 'Muslims' within the frames of terrorism and migration.

Despite the existence of extensive survey data capturing negative attitudes, particularly since 2014, to the best of my knowledge, no qualitative analyses of Czech public opinion on 'Muslims' have been published (see also Gómez del Tronco, 2023). Relying on an analysis of semi-structured interviews with Czech non-Muslim and Muslim citizens, this chapter aims to explain (a) when attitudes were perceived to have changed; (b) what the national particularities of 'Muslims' as a topic of public debate are; (c) and (d) what roles race and 'Islam', respectively, play in Islamophobia within the Czech context. A sub-section corresponding to each question presents findings and raises implications for future research on Islamophobia in Czechia.

Theoretical framework

My epistemological position in the study of public opinion is socio-cognitive constructionism, and I adopt a critical realist ontology. Thus, my main

interest is in the social cognitions associated with the context-dependent vernacular understandings and uses of the social category 'Muslims' (see Brubaker et al., 2004). Consequently, my analysis is also informed by such socio-psychological theories as intergroup threat (Stephan et al., 2016) or social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) theories, and by such concepts as stereotypes (the cognitive schemata (Fiske and Linville, 1980) that contain our 'knowledge, beliefs, and expectations ... about social groups' (Sherman et al., 2013: 549)) and prejudice (the mostly affective evaluations of groups based on our stereotypes (Fiske and Taylor, 2021, Chapter 12)). My conceptualisation of Islamophobia also goes back to cognition. Using a definition informed by race studies, Islamophobia is here 'a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness' (APPG on British Muslims, 2018: 11). To paraphrase Miles and Brown's (2003) assertion about racism, Islamophobia is first and foremost an ideology (see Allen, 2010) which is articulated in multiple ways and reflected in attitudes or policies. Ideologies, in turn, are socially shared axiomatic belief systems defining groups' social identities, which organise and inform holders' social representations (for example, knowledge and attitudes) and situation-specific personal mental models (van Dijk, 2006).

Importantly, Islamophobia is understood here as a form of cultural racism which takes Muslimness (or its perception) as the basis for racialising a group of people because of their perceived shared culture and/or biology (Meer and Modood, 2019). Hence, markers of Muslimness (for example, dress, Muslim names and beards) contribute to racialising 'Muslims' as a perceived ethno-religious group (Meer and Modood, 2019), problematise the whiteness of converts (Moosavi, 2015) or raise the likelihood of becoming the target of hate crimes (Allen, 2020). Despite the growing consensus about the 'disingenuity' of separating 'Islam' from 'Muslims' as the target of Islamophobic prejudice (Alexander, 2017), some have attempted to analyse both phenomena separately (Čada and Frantová, 2017). Acknowledging this tension and working with the concept of cultural racism, in this analysis, I attend to how Czech anti-Muslim prejudice is informed by the particular ways in which Muslims are racialised and how the religion of Islam is understood by many in the country.

Data and methodology

I conducted semi-structured interviews with non-Muslim ethnic Czechs (N= 23) and Muslims living in Czechia (N= 8) to understand the nature,

history and causes of anti-Muslim attitudes in the country. In these interviews, participants not only express and report their own attitudes and experiences, but are also encouraged to report, interpret and attribute relevant attitudes held by other Czechs. Although the study was largely exploratory, I entered the field with theoretical insights and concepts from social psychology's study of intergroup bias and Islamophobia studies as well as a thorough knowledge of the context and literature on Islamophobia in Czechia, which informed both scripted and improvised questions. Between July and August 2020 and between September and October 2021, 31 interviews were conducted mostly face to face, with six of them carried out via videoconference due to logistical complications. Five interviews with Muslim participants were conducted in English – the remaining ones in Czech. The basic inclusion criteria for non-Muslim Czech participants were not to be an elected official, nor a journalist nor a university researcher. One non-Muslim participant self-identified as an ethnic Slovak who had mostly lived in Czechia – the rest were ethnically Czech (that is, including Moravian and Silesian). For Muslims, a self-identification as Muslim was enough. Except for one Muslim participant who had moved into the country in 2016, the rest had been living in Czechia since before 2015.

The sample design for non-Muslim participants (see [Table 11.1](#) below) pre-defined five cohorts and, in four of these, socio-demographic variation was sought according to pre-defined criteria. Three cohorts were drawn from selected localities that varied in size, presence of Muslim migrants and recent share of vote for parties whose support correlated to anti-Muslim attitudes (see [MEDIAN, 2018](#)). The pre-selected localities were Prague, Ostrava and a small town in Moravia. In addition, two other cohorts were pre-defined based on participants' likelihood of interaction with Muslims. These were participants from Teplice (a small spa city with a relatively high Muslim presence and tourism from Arab countries) and people who had been to Egypt since 2015 – as these travels could explain why Czechs' attitudes towards 'Egyptians' are, according to surveys, twice as warm as towards people falling under the category 'Arabs' ([STEM, 2016](#)). Four to five participants from each of these five cohorts were interviewed. Sampling took place through my personal networks in the country, with individual contacts never referring me to more than two people from each cohort.

Finding a diverse sample of Muslim participants through my networks to speak to on this subject proved harder, although some kindly agreed to meet informally off the record. After having interviewed five Muslim participants through referrals, I spoke to three additional

Table 11.1 Interviews sample design

Name	Age	Occupation	City	Gender	Muslim	Was in Egypt	University degree
Adam	44	Unemployed	Prague	M			Y
Adéla	34	Hospital staff	Ostrava	F		Y	Y
Agáta	45	Trader and therapist	Somewhere in Egypt	F		Y	Y
Aneta	56	Entrepreneur	Teplice	F			Y
Barbora	55	Healthcare	Prague	F		Y	N
Beáta	34	Healthcare	Teplice	F			N
Bernard	32	Architect	Small Moravian town	M			Y
Františka	54	Unemployed (caregiver)	Prague	F			N
Hana	24	Student	Small Moravian town	F			N
Jozef	40	Entrepreneur	Ostrava	M			N
Kamil	49	Photographer	Small Moravian town	M			N
Klára	52	School teacher	Small Moravian town	F			Y
Lucie	68	Retired	Ostrava	F			Y
Maleek	51	Unemployed	Prague	M	Y	N/A	Y
Malika	32	Self-employed	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y

(continued)

Table 11.1 (Cont.)

Name	Age	Occupation	City	Gender	Muslim	Was in Egypt	University degree
Maryam	26	Student	Prague	F	Y	N/A	N
Milada	43	Entrepreneur	Ostrava	F			Y
Ondřej	20	Student	Teplice	M			N
Radek	31	Theatre	Ostrava	M			N
Robert	19	Student	Prague	M			N
Roman	39	Policeman	Small Moravian city	M		Y	N
Šimon	32	Unemployed	Prague	M			Y
Štěpán	20	Student	Small Moravian town	M			N
Tereza	35	Public sector	Brno	F	Y	N/A	Y
Věra	25	Market research	Teplice	F			Y
Vítek	31	School teacher	Small Moravian city	M		Y	Y
Youssef	47	IT	Town in Central Bohemia Region	M	Y	N/A	Y
Yvona	33	Non-profit sector	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y
Zain	55	Healthcare	Teplice	M	Y	N/A	Y
Zehra	30	Administrative role	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y
Žofie	48	Part-time caregiver	Prague	F			N

people who replied to my messages on Facebook groups. Difficulties in recruiting participants and residence patterns meant that Muslim interviewees from Prague (five out of eight) predominate in the final sample. A pseudonymised list of participants can be found in [Table 11.1](#).

Interviews in Czech were transcribed by a professional with whom a data-processing agreement was signed to protect participants' data, whereas interviews conducted in English were transcribed by myself. Transcriptions were coded and analysed in NVivo 2020 following a critical-realist thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017). Finding 'themes' in the data equals finding significantly recurrent 'patterns of meaning' that are 'important in relation to the particular topic and research question being explored' (Braun and Clarke, 2012: 57). Coding was largely deductive, with 19 non-exclusive codes mapping areas of my interest (for example, 'changes in attitudes' and 'race versus religion'). Afterwards, I organised the information within each code along recurrent (sub-) themes (for example, 'attitudes changed by 2015' and 'hijab perceived as generating ethnocultural distance'). The content of these themes is often put back in conversation with theoretical concepts (for example, race and stereotypes).

There are disagreements on the chronology of changes in attitudes

It was noticeable that there was a difference of opinion between participants (mostly between Muslims and non-Muslims) about when attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the country had changed for the worse. First, there were differing evaluations of the significance of 9/11. Second, for most non-Muslim participants, the events of 2015, particularly the refugee 'crisis', remained the most salient and meaningful turning point. However, most Muslim participants reported feeling an increasingly hostile environment already by the early 2010s. Although research on Islamophobia in Czechia surged mostly after 2015, understanding the changes in public opinion around that year requires a re-examination of relevant trends in the preceding decades (for example, Mendel et al., 2007).

With the youngest interviewee being born in 2001, most non-Muslim participants did not recall thinking or talking about 'Muslims' much or at all until encountering basic information in high school, which was largely regarded as neutral. Overall, participants do not think that before 9/11 'Muslims' were discussed in Czech public discourse (even if

events in Muslim-majority countries were), nor that Czechs held particularly negative attitudes towards them. Víték (31), 12 at the time, goes so far as to believe that, before 9/11, he did not even know that there was a group of people who identified as Muslims living somewhere in the world. Over half of the sample identified 9/11 as an inflection point at which 'Muslims' as a (negatively framed) social actor significantly entered the Czech public debate and could have led to a collective negative change in attitudes. However, unlike the jihadist attacks of 2014+ in Western Europe, most considered 9/11 as a distant event without much direct relevance to Czechs. Indeed, surveys point to a slight increase in antipathy towards 'Arabs' after 9/11 (STEM, 2016), despite rather low threat perceptions of terrorist attacks to Czechia (Červenka, 2004). Muslim participants who lived in Czechia by the early 2000s and non-Muslim participants who knew Muslims did, however, report increased suspicion towards Muslims ever since. After 9/11, Maryam (26) started facing prejudice and impertinent questions about her Muslim identity from other children at primary school, with the terrorist attacks constantly brought up in conversations. This alienating experience pushed her to identify more as a Muslim and to promote the good deeds of other Muslims. At the same time, post-9/11 anti-Muslim attitudes aroused the curiosity of Yvona (33), who eventually converted to Islam in the late 2000s and faced hostilities right away.

For most Muslim participants, changes in attitudes could already be felt by 2011–13. For Arab Muslims like Youssef (47) or Maleek (51), disappointment with the Arab Springs, driven by dominant media narratives, led Czechs to believe that the rise of Islamists was the inevitable outcome of popular will and, thus, that people in the Middle East needed to be ruled by autocrats. Malika (32) registered how a rather latent prejudice that Othered 'Muslims' and associated them with terrorism throughout the 2000s turned into aggressive anti-Muslim behaviour by 2010–11. She recalled that, at first, there was an increase in online abuse, but by 2012–13 there were greater activist/political mobilisation and changes in public opinion (which she directly experienced when being shouted at on public transport by fellow passengers for wearing a hijab). Malika (32) believes that anti-Islam activists and politicians mimicked a growing trend from Western Europe. Some non-Muslim participants also made implicit and explicit references to changes by the early 2010s. Among them, five referred to an information revolution (presumably greater internet access and the rising popularity of social media) that introduced many Czechs to vast volumes of disorientating information about 'Muslims'. Likewise, Adam (44) believed that the high-profile activist Martin Konvička, leader

of the 'We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic' group, was the first to introduce average Czechs to the frames of a 'civilisational war' with 'Muslims' when he started attracting media attention around 2013.

Participants almost unanimously regarded the events of 2015 and their treatment by politicians and news media as crucial in shaping attitudes towards 'Muslims' in Czechia. Nonetheless, these a posteriori recollections should not be treated as invitations to restrict future research on Islamophobia in Czechia to the post-2015 context. Evidence points to anti-Muslim hostility and negative attitudes already rising in prior decades. From Zain's (55) personal experience, 'the misunderstanding of the question of Muslim minorities or communities started right after the Velvet Revolution'. By 2015, Muslim participants had already experienced instances of aggression and prejudice, witnessed small anti-Muslim protests or felt humiliated by the 2014 police raids during Friday prayer in Prague. Thus, on the day of the Charlie Hebdo shootings (7 January 2015), after which Islamophobic rhetoric in mainstream public discourse and anti-Islam protests became regular, some already felt intimidated: 'That day, I decided to stay home. ... I did not know whether someone would start shouting or swearing at me as if I bore responsibility for what had happened' (Yvona, 33).

As a context-dependent topic, 'Muslims' is influenced by its history in public discourse

In the field, I purposefully formulated broad questions about 'Muslims' without explicit context cues to any specific events or (sub)group of Muslims. Only after our conversations had moved to specific actors (for example, migrants in Western Europe) or topics (for example, 'refugee quotas') did I inquire further in that direction. Unsurprisingly, the frames of (negatively) mediated topics such as irregular migration/refugees, the integration of 'Muslims' in Western Europe, Islamic fundamentalism, intolerance within Muslim-majority communities or jihadism not only limited the types of issues we could discuss, but also the kinds of 'Muslims' we could conceive of. For instance, the categories 'Arab', 'refugee' or 'migrant' were often used interchangeably with 'Muslim' by non-Muslim participants and, reportedly, by other Czechs. The implication for researchers is that, whereas 'Muslims' as an analytical category can refer to the exceedingly diverse hundreds of millions who, in different ways, self-identify as Muslim, in practice, talk and thought about 'Muslims' cover a restricted and context-specific territory. Furthermore, to most

non-Muslim Czechs, ‘Muslims’ are not just people who follow Islam but are frequently expected to come from the ‘Middle East’ (*Blízký východ*), be racially different or hold specific cultural values. After asking this participant what came to her mind upon hearing the words ‘Muslim’ or ‘Muslims’, she, as did many other non-Muslim participants, demarcated the group by stressing their perceived difference: ‘I imagine a different culture, a different faith, a different lifestyle, a different type of dress and maybe behaviour’ (Adéla, 34).

Furthermore, ‘Muslims’ as a topic of public debate in the Czech context is different in other ways. The topic was perceived as largely negative, sensitive and politicised. Most participants believe that most Czechs hold negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’. They support this belief with regards to journalists’ reporting of public opinion, negative posts from other social media users – mostly on Facebook – or from face-to-face conversations with other non-Muslim Czechs.

‘Fear’ was the most mentioned emotional component of Czechs’ attitudes, with the expression ‘fear of the unknown’ appearing frequently to highlight the perceived baselessness of a prejudice resulting from a lack of actual intergroup contact and accurate knowledge about the out-group (for a critique of the ‘fear of the unknown’ narrative, see Gómez del Tronco, 2023). Many participants recalled unpleasant experiences when listening to others (for example, friends, relatives and neighbours) expressing prejudice, as well as conveying that ‘Muslims’ (that is, ‘Muslim migration’ and ‘refugee quotas’) was a sensitive topic.

While we tend to think that others hold more negative intergroup biases (Judd et al., 2005), according to Prokop (2019), Czechs’ high perception of others’ negativity towards migrants can lead to a spiral of silence in which less-prejudiced citizens might self-censor their views to tune to socially desirable behaviour. Even if some middle-aged participants openly confronted prejudices expressed by others, more frequently, participants reported actively avoiding ‘the topic’, for example, to eschew seeing a loved one expressing bigotry or to avoid damaging friendships. In extreme cases, participants lost friends because of others’ perceptions of their favourable views towards ‘Muslims’. Perceptions of others’ negativity towards ‘Muslims’ were stronger in smaller towns, where the potential for solidary conformity was higher: [*for context – CGdT: the participant looks around the crowded biergarten where we are sitting*] ‘if you asked all the people sitting around us, the majority would tell you that they do not want refugees here. And the state respected this’ (Stěpan, 20).

Despite frequent assertions that society had been polarised around ‘the topic’ (that is, on whether the state should welcome refugees), most participants believed that extreme positions were only espoused

by politically active minorities. On the one hand, those consistently labelled as ‘extremists’ – a ‘loud’ minority who were gendered as male – were accused of actively promoting anti-Muslim hostility. On the other was a naïve, mostly urban and cosmopolitan group who advocated for a careless open-borders policy and were reportedly labelled by ‘extremists’ as *sluníčkáři* (‘sunny people’), *havloidi* (‘followers of Václav Havel’s ideas’) or *pravdoláskaři* (‘Truth and Love people’, after a famous moral imperative promoted by Havel). Curiously, notwithstanding the ‘polarisation’ narrative, when participants were asked which politicians they remembered talking about ‘Muslims’, almost all mentioned a handful of actors infamous for their anti-Muslim messages, with Tomio Okamura and his SPD party recalled by far most often. This goes to show that, far from polarised, memorable political talk on ‘Muslims’ in Czechia is overwhelmingly associated with the negativity and agendas of both the far right (for example, Tomio Okamura and Martin Konvička) and ‘populists’ (for example, Miloš Zeman and Andrej Babiš). Even foreign-born Muslim participants who did not follow Czech politics were aware of these actors’ most outrageous interventions.

In short, studies of public opinion towards ‘Muslims’ should acknowledge the emic understanding (that is, from the perspective of participants and in terms ‘natural’ for them) of a group that is shaped by history and has only relatively recently become a topic of public debate. Thus, when speaking of ‘Muslims’ as a topic, different national publics share understandings about the restricted number of issues, social (sub-)groups, and political or public opinion dynamics involved in that conversation. Even micro-level context cues in a research interview can delimit the scope of ‘the topic’. For instance, when I asked participants in Teplice about ‘Muslims’ and other Czechs’ attitudes towards them, they often restricted our conversation to the context of the city – both because of their expectations of why a foreign researcher interested in ‘attitudes towards Muslims’ had chosen them as interviewees but also because they were relying on their cognitive context models (van Dijk, 2006) to interpret the communicative situation and retrieve vivid personal experiences relevant to our subject.

Anti-Muslim prejudice is built on contingent processes of racialisation

The social representations of ‘Muslims’ employed and reported by non-Muslim participants were largely racialised. This was because stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ were based on the ethno-cultural or racial characteristics believed to be typical of some groups assumed to be representative of

this social category (such as Arabs). For many non-Muslim participants, Arabness, Middle Eastern-ness and non-whiteness (as opposed to the relational racialisation of 'Czechs' and 'Europeans' as white) informed Czechs' stereotypes of 'Muslims':

In my opinion, Czechs do not differentiate whether someone is Muslim or comes from Arabia. A Muslim does not have to be Arab. A normal European who would also be Muslim would not be scary. However, if he looked like an Arab, he would immediately be seen by people, myself included, as 'a Muslim' and then, people would start behaving more cautiously. (Vítek, 31)

Racialising labels like the adjectival noun *černý* (black), the slur *čmoud* (smoky) or the biological metaphor *špína* (dirt) had been reportedly used by other Czechs to refer to hypothetical and actual Muslims. These labels and racial differentiations are, in practice, applied to racialised groups other than 'Muslims'. Taking 'dirt' as a case in point, while a friend of Tereza's (35) was called a 'dirty Arab' (*špinavý Arab*) in an unmotivated attack that did not explicitly call out his Muslimness, or when Maryam (26) was 11, a group of men verbally attacked her on public transport by calling her 'dirty' [*špinavá*], unpalatable [*nechutná*], hairy' without explicitly calling out her Arabness, she believed they had assumed her to be Romani. As Modood (2018) stresses, groups who may be targeted by a form of cultural racism like Islamophobia (in these examples, Arab Muslims) can likewise be targets of biological racism.

Moreover, stereotypes of 'Muslims' were frequently racialised by non-Muslim participants as 'Arabs', 'refugees' or 'migrants'. These groups were made to stand at different times for all 'Muslims' and vice versa. The mental geography that informed general talk about 'Muslims' was mostly restricted to the imagined 'Middle East' (particularly Arab countries) as well as migrants from this region and their descendants living in Western Europe. In the Czech context, due to the low public visibility of Muslim communities, it seems unlikely that average citizens encountering actual individuals from that imagined 'Middle East' in Czech streets would automatically categorise the latter as 'Muslims'. For instance, Arab male participants living for a long time in Czechia like Maleek (51), Zain (55) or Youssef (47), while having been discriminated against for looking like 'foreigners', do not believe that those actions targeted them for appearing 'Muslim'. The rarity of being categorised as 'Muslim' based on phenotype is due to the perceived lack of context-relevant Muslim-majority ethnic groups. In contexts outside Czechia, the superficially perceived

ethnic identity of others could indeed serve as a cue of Muslim identity. Some non-Muslim participants reported encountering 'Muslims' in the streets of French or German cities whose religious identity was guessed via phenotype or non-religious behaviour. For instance, in the streets of Paris, Hana (24) and her friend became unsettled by a group of 'young boys with darker skin' who behaved 'strangely' towards them on New Year's Eve. She admitted that, while at the time they believed them to be 'Muslims', they had no evidence to confirm this was the case.

The superficial marker which inescapably revealed the perceived Muslim identity of an individual remained the headscarf worn by Muslim women, mostly the hijab. According to non-Muslim female participants' accounts, the most common theme concerning Muslim women was that they were often diminished and treated unjustly by Muslim men. In contrast, Muslim participants, the biggest theme concerning Muslim women was that of women in hijabs experiencing discrimination and abuse by non-Muslim Czechs. Every Muslim participant reported instances of their relatives, friends or themselves being subjected to such experiences. Reported harassment and assault included being spat at or verbally abused in the street or receiving online threats, but also 'softer' forms of discrimination like difficulty finding a flat or job that allows the wearing of the hijab. The fact that no non-Muslim Czech participant discussed such challenges revealed their societal disconnect from the experiences of actual Czech Muslims.

The hijab does not only demarcate perceived religious difference but also (ethno-)cultural distance embedded into stereotypes of 'Muslims':

People shouted at my mother in the streets when she started wearing the hijab [in Prague]. When she removed it, people stopped screaming at her because of the way she looked. She had beautiful short curly hair and always dressed impeccably. That is why there was no reason to scream at her. She looked like a Spaniard or Italian. ... The hijab became the problem. She believed that people categorised her, that they said, 'there goes an Arab and we don't know people from there'. (Maryam, 26)

Similarly, female Muslim participants reported experiences of foreignisation when ethnically Czech Muslims wore the hijab. Yvona (33), a Czech convert, has become accustomed to Czech strangers thinking of her or other hijabi Czechs as foreigners – by 2015, even as 'refugees'. Precisely because of her reticence to partly renounce her Czechness in the eyes of society, Tereza (33), who recently converted to

Islam, is delaying her decision to wear the hijab. Malika (32), who self-identifies as an ethnic Tatar, stopped wearing the hijab after receiving abuse and unwanted public attention. In her words, 'I look like a Slavic person, thus, I look like a typical Czech. My appearance did not trigger fears in Czechs unless I wore the hijab.' Female Muslim participants who did not wear the hijab still reported being scrutinised by non-Muslim Czechs about their values, their observance of certain practices or lack thereof. However, by not being perceived as inconspicuously and uninterruptedly 'Muslim', they were better able to manage these expectations. As the section on emic understandings of religion below will explain, many Czechs hold expectations about the cultural differences of those who are 'truly' Muslim, and wearing the hijab seems consistent with those expectations. As Allen (2020) shows, for abusers in the British context, headscarves stand for a series of beliefs ('normative truths') about Islam that trigger and self-justify their attacks on Muslim women. The latter do not perceive abusers as motivated by fear ('phobia'), but these attacks serve to instil fear over victims. Fear is what kept some female Muslim participants from wearing the hijab or motivated them to stop wearing it.

The data show that 'Muslims', as imagined by many Czechs, are not only racialised in discrete, context-relevant ways but that anti-Muslim prejudice is driven by perceived racial and ethno-cultural distance. Several non-Muslim participants were asked whether Czechs would prefer some types of 'Muslims' over others to live in their communities. Generally, those perceived to be whiter (including more 'European' or 'Christian') and less 'Arab' or 'Middle Eastern' were seen as more likely to be accepted. For instance, Bernard (32) believed that an 'Arab Christian' neighbour would be preferred to a 'European Muslim' one, as Czechs would 'wrongly' assume the former to be culturally closer. In his opinion, a 'blonde Austrian' or fair-haired white Muslim would be more likely to be accepted. Jozef (40) believed that Moroccans or Turks, reportedly culturally and 'genetically' closer to Czechs, would not look as different to Czechs as Pakistanis. Robert (19) said that a 'UK-born Muslim' would be preferred as a neighbour over a (stereotypically 'Arab') 'Saudi Muslim'. Šimon (32) believed that the less 'Middle Eastern' the neighbour would look, the more likely they were to be accepted. Thus, although Czech Muslims can become the target of different types of discrimination, perceived Muslimness, which is linked to racialised stereotypes and essentialisation, adds an additional layer of Otherness to social representations of 'Muslims'.

An overt racialised essentialisation of migrants also appears regularly in political discourse. For example, the main Czech far-right and

centre-right parties have sometimes warned against an expansion of an 'Islamic'/'Arab' as well as an 'African' (that is, shorthand for Black African) culture in Western Europe as separate but related phenomena (ODS, 2010; Okamura, 2021). However, other times, the two phenomena become discursively entangled when, for example, pictures of mostly Black African refugees are used by politicians to warn against the Islamisation of Europe (Fiala, 2019). These forms of cultural essentialism assume a perceived common descent of racialised groups by defining them primarily as inescapable bearers of a shared 'culture' which differs from the racialised national one (Taguieff, 1990).

Finally, at those times when participants framed the subjects of our conversation as 'migrants' or 'refugees' rather than 'Muslims', they were more likely to bring up resource competition and socio-economic issues instead of culture clashes. Jozef (40) went as far as to stress that Czechs' economic concerns related to migration had nothing to do with migrants being Muslim. Fears of low-skilled migrants as resource competitors were attributed to Czechs with lower socio-economic status. On the other hand, some participants did express a preoccupation with Muslim migrants not being able or willing to find a job, turning to idleness or anti-social behaviour as a result. This scenario was perceived as a threat to a debilitated welfare system as well as – congruent with widespread stereotypes about Muslim communities in Western Europe – a trigger for social exclusion, segregation and deviancy. Therefore, the data suggested that the social cognition about 'refugees', while overlapping with that of 'Muslims', often tapped into knowledge, stereotypes or beliefs more closely related with migration, resource competition and welfare.

Emic understandings of 'Islam' and religiosity also sustain Islamophobic prejudice

Maleek (51) was hurt when he heard Czech public figures advocating in favour of just welcoming Christian refugees from Syria. Growing up, Maryam (26) realised that Czech parents did not perceive Christian Palestinian children to be as threatening to their children as Muslim Palestinian children. Such instances invite us to believe that there is something about Islam that drives anti-Muslim prejudice when, in fact, this prejudice has more to do with understandings of this (perceived-as-foreign and raced) religion and, more broadly, religiosity. Halliday (1999) stressed that by studying Western Islamophobia as a prejudice against Islam (qua analytical category), scientists ran the risk of reducing

this vastly diverse, complex and ever-changing religious phenomenon to a monolithic abstraction. While Halliday's article failed to capture the power of emic understandings of Islam in driving Islamophobia, later conceptualisations of the latter as cultural racism do provide frameworks through which to analyse tensions between European understandings of secularism and Islam (Kalin, 2011). As argued by Hesová (2018), since the 1970s, European Islamophobic discourse has relied on a succession of frames, construing Islam as a civilization, then as a culture and finally as a political ideology. Indeed, when participants self-reported or attributed the view that the religion drove prejudice, 'Islam' was frequently imbued with cultural elements (for example, forms of family organisation and gender relations) or political goals (for example, Islamism and aggressive proselytism). Malika (32) lamented that the Saudi or Iranian governments are sometimes thought of as equivalent to 'Islam', or as this ethnic Czech Muslim participant contended:

[Czech] people perceive that Islam contains many negative things. They perceive polygamy, having four wives or child marriage to be elements of Islam, when none of them should appear within Islam. They are wrong. They see many Eastern rather traditional things [as part of Islam] and they get the feeling that we, as Muslims in Czechia, will do all those things ... that, automatically, because we are also Muslims, we will do all those things. (Yvona, 33)

As Bravo López (2017) points out, different societies may incorporate elements of their own understandings of religion or secularity into their prejudice against 'Muslims'. Given that most Czechs are detached from or uninterested in traditional forms of organised religion (Václavík et al., 2018), it is likely that many have relatively rigid normative ideas about what it means to be a believer, particularly outside Christianity. This might explain why self-declared practising Christian participants often stressed that Islam was something which individual believers can interpret in diverse and multiple ways, in the same way that Christians differ on their interpretations of faith and practices. Considering the highly secular national context, a few female Christian participants even expressed admiration for Muslim women who dare to publicly manifest their faith by wearing the hijab. Tereza (33) believed that Christians understood her conversion to Islam better than non-believers. The literature is inconclusive on the relationship between religiosity and anti-Muslim prejudice. Dobeler (2014) finds that non-fundamentalist European believers hold more positive attitudes towards 'Muslims' than non-believers. In Czech surveys, Bell

and Strabac (2020) find a positive correlation between respondents' degree of religiosity and positive attitudes towards 'Muslims', while Topinka (2016: 242) finds no such correlation. Topinka (2016: 239–41) also finds greater reservations towards more public and organised forms of Islam (for example, exercise of Islamic law or establishing Islamic political parties) than private practice (for example, wedding ceremonies or burials in common cemeteries). Likewise, most interviewees defended the right of Muslims to (privately) follow their faith and believed most Czechs would happily endorse practices unlikely to interfere with their lives and public spaces, such as praying at home or observing dietary prescriptions.

While discussing experiences of intergroup contact, participants reported expectations (regardless of their accuracy or representativeness) about what being 'Muslim' entailed. Expectations frequently related to the observance of dietary laws, fasting during Ramadan or abstaining from alcohol or premarital sex. Zehra (30) was surprised to discover that whenever she drank alcohol in front of Czech fellow students, the latter told her, 'Okay, so you're not Muslim ... you're not a believer' – which was disconcerting to her as, in her native Turkey, the ways of relating to one's faith are tremendously diverse. Likewise, Maryam (26) avoided drinking alcohol during her teens partly because of the peer pressure from her Czech classmates who expected abstinence from an Arab Muslim. For some non-Muslim participants, expectations around observance served as a measure of who was a true 'Muslim'. Consequently, 'non-observant' Muslims were often perceived as exceptions to the rule and thus unlikely to subvert the 'Muslim' stereotype (Richards and Hewstone, 2001). Kamil (49) had a Sudanese flatmate who 'did not behave like a Muslim', partly because of his libertine behaviour and adoption of 'European ways'. Also, Klára (52) stated that her Turkish neighbour had 'adapted' to life in Czechia as he admitted enjoying drinking beer. Štěpán (20) interacted pleasantly with a Muslim Arab student towards whom he felt no inter-religious distance: 'It was because he was a Muslim in Czechia. When Muslims come to Czechia, Allah is not seeing what they do. They can drink alcohol, eat pork and do forbidden activities from which they would have to abstain back home' (Štěpán, 20).

Anxieties were often expressed and reported about the entanglement of fundamentalist radicalisation and 'Muslims' 'pushing' perceived Islamic norms on to the ethnic majority. Radicalisation was frequently acknowledged to involve a minority of 'Muslims'. Nevertheless, given the many negative connotations of 'Islam', in a hypothetical scale of 'Muslimness', being very Muslim had the potential to be associated with the perceived problematic aspects of Islam (rather than, for instance,

generosity)), whereas being barely Muslim approximated warmer Czech ideals of secularity. Hence, participants commonly expressed beliefs like Czechs being more wary of 'orthodox' Muslims or more concealing headscarves. As Yvona (33) stated, while she is very well integrated into Czech society, people are still bothered by her headscarf or her children being raised religiously. Additionally, problematic forms of observance were often raced, with some ethnic groups' religiosity expected to be more troublesome (for example, Arabs, Pakistanis and Saudis) than that of others (for example, Bosniaks and Muslim 'Europeans'):

I think that Czechs would be indeed [willing to accept a Muslim as their neighbour]. If someone said 'Look, you are going to have a new neighbour. They are regular Czechs, but they are Muslims. Yet, you will not notice because they are white, have fair hair, do not wear headscarves, they just pray five times a day, do not eat pork or drink alcohol.' Then, they would say, 'Okay. That's fine.' (Bernard, 32).

Likewise, non-Muslim participants frequently expressed concerns about 'Muslims' trying to impose religion-based norms of behaviour on others. Actual anxieties ranged from being ruled according to 'Sharia'; the disappearance of Czech traditional dishes and alcohol-drinking patterns; feeling intimidated to wear a necklace with a cross or walking one's dog; and, for several female participants, being forced to wear a headscarf. Fears of the assertiveness of 'Muslims' to 'push' for their own religious-based norms partly result from anxieties about perceived demographic decline of 'European' ethnic majorities:

Muslims want the majority society to adapt to them, which the latter will not do until Muslims become the majority. Then, they will have no choice. ... therefore, [the majority] do not want [Muslims] here when they hear that in Germany, by 2050, there will be more Muslims than non-Muslims. (Kamil, 49)

Finally, while a few non-Muslim participants expected that Czech converts' cultural proximity would make them seem less distant, I commonly heard beliefs that converts would elicit distrust as other Czechs would see them as 'traitors', 'mentally uprooted', 'suspicious', 'willing to join the Islamic State' or likely to be 'dogmatic'. Respondents to a 2018 survey reported feeling significantly more fearful of Czech converts than of second-generation Muslims, which sociologist Daniel Prokop

attributed to worries about potential radicalisation (Heller, 2018). Although stereotypes of 'European converts' as prone to jihadist radicalisation appear in other countries too (Bartoszewicz, 2013), not only does available evidence remain patchy (Schuurman et al., 2016) but no data suggests this to be the case in Czechia. Nevertheless, it is possible that the extensive stigmatisation of 'Islam' increases suspicions about the motives and fates of converts.

Conclusion

Anti-Muslim attitudes among Czech citizens largely result from widespread social representations of 'Muslims' as threatening. This chapter has explored four aspects of the Czech public's construal of this social category through a thematic analysis of interviews with citizens. Each sub-section provides evidence to support a broad finding and discusses its implication for future research on Islamophobia in Czechia. First, Muslim and non-Muslim participants differed in their narratives about when attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the country had changed. Despite non-Muslims vividly remembering the refugee 'crisis' as the key turning point, Muslim participants often reported hostility increasing by the early 2010s. Thus, future research should advance our limited understanding of preceding decades' trends in anti-Muslim attitudes. Second, dominant understandings of 'Muslims' in the Czech public discourse constrain the choice of actors and events that are cognitively invoked when speaking about this social category. Additionally, current perceptions of this topic as permeated by negative emotions and frequently politicised carry implications for how people think and talk about it. Third, in the Czech context, 'Muslims' are largely racialised as non-white, Arab, non-European and Middle Eastern. These understandings of the topic and category 'Muslims' in contemporary Czechia should be considered when researchers design or interpret relevant surveys. Furthermore, qualitative analyses of attitudes can shed light on the contents driving anti-Muslim prejudice and how to tackle them (see Gómez del Tronco, 2023). Finally, emic understandings of 'Islam' often contained beliefs about negative cultural or political norms believed to be sanctioned by the religion (for example, patriarchal family control or forcing Europeans to adopt Muslims' norms); expectations about the observance required to become a true follower; or evaluations of how different ethnic or racialised groups make Islam more threatening or true to its supposedly threatening essence. By integrating local understandings of 'Islam' and

religiosity, future investigations can trace back such processes of signification and offer recommendations on how to resignify 'Islam' to tackle Islamophobia.

Although Czech populist and far-right actors largely promoted anti-Muslim politics and hence influenced political attitudes in the country in the mid-2010s, the inaction and even complicity of much of the Czech political mainstream ultimately legitimised and augmented Islamophobia in Czechia. The mainstream embraced Islamophobic narratives (for example, about 'Muslims' having 'to respect our norms' or 'causing problems in Western Europe') and failed to offer a convincing political alternative to Islamophobia. Notwithstanding the mainstream's own racism, they pragmatically reacted to a perceived domestic and European populist threat. At home, from 2010, following corruption scandals and government instability, the Czech mainstream parties had lost a considerable share of votes to anti-corruption and technocratic populist challengers. For their part, Zeman, Okamura and Babiš had not only successfully introduced relatively disruptive political styles but were highly trusted even before the refugee 'crisis' (Kunštát, 2014). Additionally, the Czech centre right had been timidly experimenting with Islamophobic rhetoric since 2010 (Mocht'ak, 2015), but by the mid-2010s, they warily observed the surge of a mobilised anti-Islam civic movement and reputable right-wing intellectuals vocally turning against Islam.

Meanwhile, after the 2009+ Eurozone crisis, Czech public and elite trust in the EU and Western institutions decreased considerably. From the perspective of Czech Eurosceptics, the subsequent rise of West European far-right leaders was a logical consequence of the region's multifaceted decline, partly due to multiculturalist policies. Such declinist narratives became popular by 2015 (Slačálek, 2021). Therefore, during the refugee 'crisis', Czech mainstream politicians repeatedly co-constructed Czechs' 'fears' about 'Muslims' and 'refugees' as valid and real, representing themselves as responsible for addressing such 'fears' before hypothetical 'extremists', 'radicals' or 'populists' did so – as it had supposedly occurred in Western Europe. Consequently, in national party politics, the frequently mentioned polarisation around 'Muslims' and 'refugees' ranged from the pragmatic anti-refugee Islamophobia of the mainstream to its unabashedly xenophobic and racist version by the far right and 'populists'. Of course, politicians were not the only actors promoting Islamophobic rhetoric in 2015 and were also tapping into historical racist and anti-religious stereotypes. Yet, my analysis of 2014–15 political discourse as part of my PhD dissertation revealed that many of the topics, arguments and strategies employed by the mainstream to represent

'Muslims' (and 'Czechs'/'Europeans') appeared recurrently among non-Muslim participants in 2020–21.

By 2020/21, most participants believed anti-Muslim attitudes in the country to have lost public relevance while remaining latent. Challenging the unfairly negative stereotypes of 'Muslims' that support prejudice requires a concerted effort among stakeholders (for example, Islamic institutions, state bodies and non-governmental and civil society organisations), with news media platforms and online content creators occupying a privileged position to reshape Czechs' social representations of 'Muslims'. Options for the strategic promotion of more balanced and positive representations include reframing communication strategies, editorial interventions or training by relevant NGOs. Audiences can be exposed to stereotype-inconsistent subgroups (Richards and Hewstone, 2001), Muslims perceived as typical group members who present stereotype-disconfirming information (Wolsko et al., 2003) or stories about others' positive intergroup contacts which vicariously reduce prejudice (Zhou et al., 2019). Regarding the former, my research shows that contact with relatable subgroups (for example, 'Arabs from Teplice', 'kebab-shop sellers', 'Egyptians' and 'Muslim doctors') can improve people's image of 'Muslims'. Worryingly, contemporary European Islamophobic public discourse pervasively spreads across countries. To build a healthier national public debate, 'Muslims' should be decoupled from specific newsworthy Muslims and the hypocrisy behind collectively blaming Muslims exposed (Bruneau et al., 2018). Second, discursive representations should better reflect the group's vast heterogeneity, and a diversity of Muslim voices should be included and celebrated in content production. Third, people's Muslimness should not be foregrounded by default and their other relevant social identities should be brought to the fore, thus diminishing the danger of essentialising Muslimness as a trait that is the sole determinant of a person's identity.

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Between right-wing populist discourse and liberal policy: the curious case of Ukrainian migration to Poland

Olena Yermakova

Introduction

Poland is one of the most intriguing cases of contemporary migration politics. Having ridden into power on a wave of xenophobic anti-migrant rhetoric amid the so-called European migration crisis, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party subsequently let in millions of migrants from Ukraine. Traditionally a net emigration country, Poland has since become the top migrant-receiving country in Europe, which has modified its social and cultural homogeneity and the structure of its economy. While these processes have only been exacerbated by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, this chapter will not examine the impact of the full-scale war but will instead focus on the period leading up to the summer of 2021. It will analyse the discrepancy between PiS's anti-migrant discourse and its liberal migration policies, and the extent to which migration has been instrumentalised for political purposes. Particularly, I seek to understand the impact this situation has had on Ukrainian migrants: how do they navigate the grey zone they exist in, and how are they affected by the dominant right-wing populist discourse? Where do migrants position themselves in a socio-political reality shaped by right-wing populist discourse? What impact does this discourse have on their self-identification? To answer these questions, 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and September 2021 in five locations in Poland.

Context: the previous wave of Ukrainian migration

There are several legal means allowing Ukrainians to migrate to and stay in Poland, such as national visas, short- and long-term residence cards and so on. This variety and the seasonal and circular nature of labour migration make it difficult to have an accurate statistical record. Nonetheless, one thing is clear: Ukrainians have moved to and remained in Poland in large numbers. According to estimates, in 2018 there were some two million of them in Poland (Interfax-Ukraine, 2018), while Eurostat (2022) data showed that Ukrainians in Poland were the biggest new migrant population in the EU as a whole.

This new phase in Ukrainian migration started in 2014, around the same time that the Russo–Ukrainian war began. The greatest influx of Ukrainians in Poland was recorded in 2014–16, according to employers' declarations for short-term work and the number of work permits issued. The number of permits issued to Ukrainians almost doubled year on year until slowing down in 2017 (Jaroszewicz, 2018). However, the same year, a visa-free regime between Ukraine and the EU came into force. Poland, under the PiS government, was the only EU member state that reacted by liberalising its employment rules and allowing Ukrainians to work during the period of visa-free travel. The liberal legislation pulled in new groups of migrants (Sydorenko, 2019) and, while the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the process, new arrivals kept coming (Stoikov, 2021). In 2017 Poland became a global leader in terms of the inflow of foreign, seasonal, short-term workers for the first time (OECD, 2018), indicating a *de facto* open-door policy. The openness to workers from Ukraine is usually explained by economic necessity and labour shortages, citing Poland's 'golden age of growth' (Fredriksson, 2019).

Meanwhile, PiS avoided making direct comments on the issue, thereby strategically silencing the migrants, or framing Ukrainians as refugees in order to legitimise its firm rejection of so-called EU refugee quotas (Reuters, 2016). Public attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants remained mixed: 35 per cent held positive attitudes and 33 per cent negative attitudes, according to a recent survey (CBOS, 2020: 2).

Regarding the geography of immigration, Ukrainians are spatially dispersed over the entire territory of Poland, with a particularly high concentration in the Masovian Voivodeship surrounding Warsaw (Lesińska, 2017: 156). Other regions with a high concentration include the eastern border regions of Subcarpathian and Lublin Voivodeships, Kraków, Katowice and Gdańsk. The concentration in the big cities is explained by higher economic development and job opportunities, while strong

migrant networks explain the significant presence in the eastern regions (Fihel, 2007; Duszczek and Góra, 2013; Lesińska, 2017).

Most Ukrainians migrated for work; many also came to study and the share of refugees was negligible. As for fields of employment, those employed on a short-term basis are primarily concentrated in agriculture, construction and services. Regarding long-term migrants, the variety of sectors is wider, including education and health services (Fihel, 2007). More recent data showed significant employment across the economy, from science to catering to industrial processing. However, ILO data stressed that less than 7 per cent of Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland in 2010–12 occupied jobs appropriate for their level of education, which suggested a process of deskilling (Brunarska et al., 2016).

As for the structure of Ukrainian migration to Poland, it is ‘strongly feminine, young and relatively well-educated’ (Lesińska, 2017: 156). However, male migration has been on the rise since 2014.

The major migration push factors prior to the Russian invasion included political instability in Ukraine, economic hardships, conflict-provoked displacement and related changes to preferred migration routes (unwillingness to go to Russia, which used to be the number one destination for labour migration). Major pull factors included economic opportunities, EU-wide benefits, liberal employment regulations, geographical proximity (allowing maintenance of family ties), cultural and linguistic proximity and strong migration networks. Some significant challenges included the lack of a coherent integration policy in Poland, the lack of diaspora/emigration policy in Ukraine, mutual perceptions and stereotypes and a traumatic shared history.

Theoretical underpinnings

At the core of the ideational approach to populism lies political polarisation and the redrawing of boundaries between groups, dividing society into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2014). As Melito discusses in Chapter 2, this is the discursive construction of Polish society that PiS has been deploying in its rhetoric. The (radical) right-wing version of populism adds the notion of ‘the enemy’ (usually ‘aliens’) to the contestation between ‘the people’ and ‘the elites’, relations among which are constructed through discursive manoeuvres, setting up symbolic boundaries between the imagined groups and defining their cultural substances (Kubik, 2020). Hence, a critical study of discourse is essential to studying populism under the ideational approach.

The research in this project was based on some ideas of CDA, which aims to critically examine the use of language to uncover power relations and implicit ideological meanings (Regmi, 2017). I relied in particular on the works of Wodak and Reisigl (2015) since their framework centres around identifying discursive practices which position people in the societal structure, which in turn (re)produce unequal power relations in a society. Discourse is understood in line with the definition of the discourse-historical approach, which emphasises language use in speech and writing as a 'social practice' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and considers the 'context of language use' to be crucial. The key background assumption of this research is that discourse is 'socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

The process of 'Othering', seen as drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders, is usually articulated linguistically and constructed interactively at different levels. In sociology, 'Othering' usually refers to differentiating discourses that imply moral and political judgements of superiority and inferiority between the so-called 'Us' and 'Them'. However, 'Othering' can also occur within the 'othered' group through 'self-othering' (Dervin, 2015). 'Othering' can be based on different identity markers, such as nationality, race, gender, language or religion. The research is based on the underlying hypothesis that 'Othering' occurs on the grounds of differentiating cultural traditions in societies that perceive themselves as communities with a common national culture. This form of collective identity is common throughout the entire CEE region, particularly in Poland, due to extreme homogeneity since World War II. For historical reasons, the collective identity of its people has been shaped by ethnic or national self-image and cultural traditions and values, most significantly influenced by Catholicism; historically, the latter has played a more central role in Polish identity than common political denominators (Porter, 2001; Mach, 2007). Since 'Othering' is tied to identity-building, if collective identity is defined by culture, the 'Others' are also culturally constructed. 'Othered' are those whose culture and identity differ from the common homogeneous Polish one – seen as inherited and imposed and not allowing for any deviation from the cultural 'norm' or any plurality of collective identities. The construction of homogeneous and virtuous 'pure people' and a cultural conflict generated by such a construction are central to populism as an ideology.

Note on methodology

The contribution is conceived as an interpretive case study that employs qualitative methods. The results of previous research that examined the discourse of PiS (Yermakova, 2019, 2021) laid the foundation for the fieldwork which was conducted between July and September 2021 in five locations in Poland: Warsaw, Kraków, Pruszków, Katowice and Lublin – cities of different sizes in different regions but all with a high density of Ukrainian migrants as well as PiS voters. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with migrants from Ukraine and a significant variation in the sample was achieved. The participants comprised 25 women and 15 men, who ranged in age from 19 to 51 years. They came from villages, towns and cities in all regions of Ukraine, including the non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, and some had been internal refugees in Ukraine. The recruited participants were ethnic Ukrainians and included people of mixed background, particularly with self-declared Polish, Russian, Jewish, Peruvian, Moldovan, Greek and Czech roots. While some ethnicities may appear unusual, having mixed roots is common in Ukraine. Participants declared themselves to be Orthodox Christians, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics and Jews, as well as agnostics and atheists. Most participants self-identified as heterosexual, two as homosexual and one as pansexual. Levels of education varied from secondary education to PhD degrees. As for occupations, participants currently or formerly worked in the service industry (for example, a manicurist), as manual workers (for example, warehouse workers), skilled manual workers (for example, a construction site electrician), highly skilled workers (for example, a finance consultant), representatives of creative professions (for example, a writer) and education professionals (for example, a language teacher). Participants included students, a business owner, an unemployed person and women on maternity leave. Some interviewees were currently or previously active in a Ukrainian church in Warsaw, a Ukrainian-language newspaper, a social media group for Ukrainians in Poland, a Ukrainian festival in Kraków and a Ukrainian theatre, and recruitment agencies targeting Ukrainian workers. Among the participants were those married to Polish citizens, having one Polish parent and those who became Polish citizens. The length of stay in Poland ranged from two months to 17 years, including those staying temporarily, permanently and seasonally. Participants identified Ukrainian, Russian and Polish as their native languages and

assessed their level of Polish from none to fluent. Each interview was scheduled individually at a place of the respondents' preference.

The interview transcripts and fieldwork notes were coded using a mix of deductive and inductive coding (Elliott, 2018) and analysed using thematic analysis (TA), 'a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2012: 57). TA was chosen for its flexibility, immediate compatibility with qualitative coding software and applicability to working with a wide range of research questions and deconstructing complex phenomena.

Analysis and interpretations

Below, some of the insights from the empirical data are presented. The names of the respondents are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Awareness of exclusionary discourse and anti-migrant sentiment

Most migrants are aware of the exclusionary right-wing populist discourse and the associated anti-migrant attitudes in the country they moved to. Such discourse constructs migrants as an existential security and cultural threat.¹ The higher the awareness, the greater the concern. But there are certain exceptions. One is those people who have recently moved and thus have yet to become aware of the Polish socio-political context in its entirety. Even though Poland has recently appeared more frequently in Ukrainian media due to increased migration, many newcomers lack a complete picture of political issues and public attitudes. Another exception is people who take no interest in politics. These are usually individuals who do not speak Polish well or work overtime, thereby not having the time for and access to the Polish public sphere. The last exception is Ukrainian citizens with Polish roots who are practising Roman Catholics and identify as Poles. While the first two groups are simply not aware of the right-wing construction of Polishness, this last group often comprises supporters of right-wing politics who more readily accept the Polish nationalist construction of 'the pure people'.

Discourse contributes to anxiety, even if there are no negative personal experiences

When asked about experiences of negative attitudes as migrants, a typical response was: 'I have not experienced any negative attitudes

personally, but I know they exist.’ It was very common that, despite not experiencing hate speech or hate crimes themselves, migrants regularly feel uncomfortable in Poland as a receiving society because they often hear nationalist or xenophobic remarks in the media, from politicians or, less commonly but more worryingly, reports of ethnically motivated hate crimes by far-right groups or individuals. Migrants often remain in tight communities and quickly pass the disturbing information far and wide. It is also important to remember that the fieldwork was carried out during the migrant crisis on the border with Belarus, where the authorities clamped down on attempts by migrants to enter Poland, with tragic consequences for the migrants. This context, as well as other so-called migration crises, pushback scandals and anti-migrant rhetoric, serves as a cautionary tale for all migrants.

Snizhana (HR specialist, 21, Odesa) describes an instance where her Ukrainian ex-boyfriend was punched in the stomach on a tram in Kraków:

I was touched by it too ... Maybe not much has happened to me. I don't suppose that I suffered much from some sort of discrimination. Even the fact that once a landlord did not want to rent a room to me [once he found out she was Ukrainian], I cannot say that it offended me much. ... But when it comes to those dear to me, it touches me. Even if it didn't happen to me, it worries me. On the other hand, I understand that this is a phase. As in, maybe it is a drawback of migrating.

‘Maybe I was lucky?’ Snizhana laughed, and she said that she has not personally experienced serious discrimination. The implication here, an exemplar of a migrant’s mindset, is that discrimination is the norm, a natural ‘drawback of migrating’, while equal treatment is a lucky exception. Again, taking discrimination or negative attitudes towards oneself for granted is a cause of anxiety.

Most long-term migrants note that the attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants have worsened in recent years. The first reason for this was the scale and the speed of the influx, which did not give the receiving society time to adjust. In addition, the nationalistic discourse and memory politics of the PiS government had normalised the anti-migrant ideas and behaviour of the parties even further to the right.

Personal experience of nationalistic hatred is very rare; even long-term migrants could not remember more than a couple of verbal attacks during their many years in the country. However, given the context,

when a vulnerable population like migrants hear stories of friends' negative experiences, it creates mindsets of anxiety and insecurity. Against the background of constant anxiety over paperwork for not yet naturalised migrants, the future in the country becomes ever-more uncertain and the present ever-more nerve-racking. Very few could answer with certainty when asked where they see themselves in the future.

The issues linked with obtaining residency permits constitute a major concern. The problem is worse for the low-skilled, who cannot count on social benefits (employers' tax and contribution to the social welfare fund), as the employers tend to avoid official contracts. Some mentioned that legalising their stay took them a long time after arrival due to the initial lack of official employment. This creates cases where long-term migrants do not have permanent residency, let alone citizenship. One such example is Hanna (cleaner and seamstress, 51, Ivano-Frankivsk oblast), who, after 17 years, is still regularly worried about renewing her temporary residence permit and, therefore, views her stay in Poland as temporary.

The above-mentioned anxiety creates a fear of the receiving society, thereby inhibiting dialogue and integration. Even more so, it inhibits the recognition of a multicultural society emerging in Poland and adjusting its political and social rules and norms accordingly. The inhibitions are due to the fact that the migrants' anxiety moves them to keep their heads down (Russian: *'не высовываться'* (ne vysovyvat'sya)): to hide who they are in public spaces, to try to blend in with the crowd and not cause any problems or not draw attention to their own problems (for example, Snizhana ignoring xenophobic landlords). For instance, multiple respondents mentioned that they do not pick up the phone on a tram or bus, as they want to avoid drawing attention to themselves by speaking Ukrainian.

As mentioned earlier, the government is strategically silencing Ukrainian migrants, but the migrants are also silencing themselves.

Not identifying as migrants

Despite unambiguously being (im)migrants in the legal sense, many respondents do not identify as such. This creates an interesting paradox that adds another layer to the ambiguous migration situation in Poland. The reasons given are various and sometimes contradictory. Long-term migrants explain that they do not see themselves as migrants because they are not wage earners (Ukrainian: *'заробітчани'* (zarobitchany) – a colloquial way to refer to labour migrants that aim to earn money and return

home); they did not come ‘for strawberries’ (Polish: *‘na truskawki’* – a colloquial expression for seasonal agricultural work). Instead, they simply say ‘we live here’. The researcher succeeded in recruiting a person who engages in seasonal agricultural work, including picking strawberries. Olha (production worker, 40, Rivne) claimed she did not identify as a migrant either. According to her, migrants were those who chose to settle in another country. She, on the other hand, has not yet decided if she wants to settle in Poland; thus, she has not fully immigrated, she argued.

Eschewing the label ‘migrant’ suggests a perceived stigma against migrants, which Ukrainians in Poland are attempting to avoid by positioning themselves differently. This signifies a rather instrumental identity construction as a coping strategy for navigating a precarious life in a socio-political reality shaped by right-wing populist rhetoric.

Ukrainians in Poland: implied inferiority

It was noteworthy how frequently, when asked whether they were comfortable being Ukrainian in Poland, respondents confirmed that they were because they were able to ignore the discomforts or to stand up for themselves, thereby acknowledging the presence of such discomforts.

No, no, no. With my temperament, as soon as someone starts saying that ‘I am a Pole and you are Ukrainian’. As in, as soon as they start some kind of nationalism or racism, I don’t know how to put it. Let’s say we will start shouting and fighting. If he provokes a conflict, maybe there will be a conflict. But not because he called me Ukrainian, but because he said with the implication that he is superior to me. Which is probably untrue. ... Just saying that ‘I am a Pole and you are Ukrainian’, so you should do something I wouldn’t, no I would not put up with that. (Valeriy, warehouse worker, 28, Khmelnytskyi)

Curiously, in this example and others, although confirming that they are comfortable, respondents bring up nationalism, implied feelings of superiority of Poles and inferiority of Ukrainians, discrimination and conflicts. In the example above, Valeriy says he ‘would not put up’ with such attitudes, claiming he can defend himself, which implies there is something to defend oneself against.

There is an idea, often heard in Poland, especially in the liberal segments of society, that Ukrainians are perfect migrants for Poland. The reasons given usually include similar cultural, linguistic and religious

backgrounds. While those are true, they alone are not enough. After all, plenty of Ukrainians are atheists in a highly religious country and it can require many years to master the Polish language. They are perfect migrants because, first, they are willing to make an effort to fit in. Moreover, because the national complexes fit well (Ukrainians suffer from an inferiority complex and Poles suffer from a superiority complex towards Ukrainians), plenty of Ukrainian migrants perceive this power relationship as reality and willingly accept it. Inessa (lawyer, 29, Ternopil) summarised, 'We are almost like them, yet it's so nice [for them] to have someone to look down on.'

It is important to mention that public attitudes to the arrival of labour migrants were tolerant and rather positive. Having been a net emigration country for decades, with a large diaspora and established stereotypes about Polish workers abroad, witnessing the shift gave many Poles a sense of pride. It is perceived as a marker that the country has made it to a higher stage of economic development. This perception is shared in Ukraine, as there are jokes in pop culture that Ukraine will have succeeded when Poles and other Europeans come to Ukraine to work in the service industry. More seriously, a goal widely repeated by Ukrainian politicians is to create conditions for migrants to return. That is, for talents to be able to self-actualise and for Ukrainians to have decent earnings at home. People leaving is perceived as an indicator of a poor economy and underperforming state; losing human capital, particularly a brain drain, causes pessimism about the future, a sense of failure and hopelessness.

While many questions were difficult for respondents to answer, the question 'Do you feel that Poles perceive themselves superior to you?' received an overwhelming majority of quick and unambiguous affirmative answers. The perceived social hierarchies are a result of 'Othering' and indicate that Ukrainians are constructed as an out-group and excluded from the notion of 'the pure people'.

There is a historical background for this. In the former Polish eastern borderlands, particularly during the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the socio-economic reality was that the Polish elites, the *szlachta*, mostly owned land, while Ukrainians were the stateless population of the countryside, mostly peasants working the land. '*Polak to Pan*' (Polish: a Pole is a lord) is a popular narrative in Ukraine that multiple respondents have repeated.

One respondent working in a warehouse mentioned that Ukrainians are often mistreated because they do not challenge the dominant narrative. He described an instance where a Polish co-worker told

a Ukrainian woman to clean up, and she hastily started doing so. The respondent asked the woman: 'What are you doing? He is not your boss to give you orders, and your shift is over.' The woman was confused: 'but a Pole told me to' she responded, revealing the sense of inferiority. Moreover, the policies and discourse on migration, the construction of 'the pure people' and 'enemies' binary, arguably exacerbates this perception, reproducing unequal power relations.

A paradox observed during fieldwork was that migrants with the worst social positions and living conditions were comfortable and satisfied. In contrast, migrants with the best social positions and living conditions were often dissatisfied and spoke of unequal treatment. As a prominent example, a cleaner (Nina, 49, Cherkasy oblast), after describing her working conditions, which included a minimum wage and occasionally missing payments, dangerous working conditions, 12–16-hour-long days, and only one day off a week during which she worked privately, summarised her experience as 'I like everything here'. She mentioned never having had problems with Poles, which constituted people for whom she works. Due to her very poor knowledge of Polish and lack of free time, in her private life, she mainly communicates with her family, who moved with her. On the other hand, multiple highly skilled office employees, who scheduled interviews in trendy coffee shops next to the Warsaw skyscrapers they work in, voiced multiple complaints and grievances.

The explanation may be that people like Nina fit perfectly into the prescribed social hierarchies. One long-term migrant (Artem, bank worker, 28, Kyiv region), when asked about Polish attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants, mentioned the joke '*Szlachta nie pracuje*' (Polish: 'The nobility do not work'), the narrative that workers from Ukraine enable. Liberal Poles commonly voice pro-immigration stances and express gratitude to Ukrainian migrants, without whom, they say, there would be nobody to do the low-paid, difficult but essential jobs, and the economy might collapse. Hence, the narrative is that migrants do not steal jobs but take jobs that locals do not want. Apart from the marginal far right, most Poles are not bothered when a Ukrainian is cleaning their office. However, respondents report that social tensions arise when a Ukrainian is running against a Pole to be the office's boss. The unspoken problem is that the social roles and the power dynamics are challenged in this case.

Migrants who are highly educated, speak fluent Polish and have good jobs and high salaries may encounter glass ceilings in career development. When asked about negative attitudes, participants most often mentioned 'envy'. Envy, or perhaps resentment, emerged when Valeriy,

for example, received a higher salary than his Polish co-workers or when Snizhana was dating a rich Pole – the conflicts started when the implicit social rules were broken. There seem to be perceived social injustices on both sides.

Keep your head down

Avoiding conflicts was perhaps the most prominent theme across the sample, along with the already-mentioned perceived need to keep your head down and ‘blend in with the crowd’. Arguably, it is a reactionary strategy to the fear of being attacked or perceived as a threat – in practical terms, ultimately deported – but also simply for one’s mental well-being.

Many elaborated that the topics they try to avoid mostly touch upon the difficult, at times bloody, shared history. Migrants consider Poles to have a stereotypical and one-sided view of this history. However, ‘being a guest’ – as many respondents put it – they choose to ‘keep their opinions to themselves’. Many explained that, from their experience, constructive dialogue is impossible, only contestation.

When asked if they feel any social pressure to behave a certain way, or have any cultural codes to follow, respondents often, again paradoxically, responded with a ‘no’, further explaining that they do not feel any pressure because they try to behave and blend in. In other words, there is no pressure as long as they act like a Pole or at least do not parade their different identity.

No, no, no [cultural pressure felt]. I don’t act out, so that I would always avoid problems. I am an average person – I work ... It’s not that I walk around with the flag showing that I am Ukrainian, and if you don’t like it – let’s take this outside. Nothing like that. I don’t stand out from the crowd. (Valeriy, warehouse worker, 28, Khmelnytskyi)

Answering the same question, Snizhana (HR specialist, 21, Odesa) commented: ‘Yes, I think the most important thing is showing very strong respect to Poles, and to their culture and religion. For instance, I try not to bring up certain topics in order to avoid conflicts. I try not to discuss history, I try not to discuss matters of religion, cultural matters.’ One respondent pointed out the cultural nature of the perceived threat of migrants in Poland very straightforwardly. There is an implied fear that migrants will bring a new identity and new distinct cultural elements: ‘I am not a threat because I try to assimilate. Ukrainians here don’t unite;

we are not as united as Georgians or Syrians. We cannot pose a threat to Poland because we stay apart' (Vasyl, architect, 26, Rivne).

As the evidence suggests, a type of self-silencing, self-censorship of sorts, occurs. The implied fear behind this is that standing out, displaying an identity different from the cultural communitarian norm, would lead to trouble, to being perceived as a threat, and threats are to be eliminated – in other words, a fear of being identified as 'threatening aliens' in the right-wing populist world view.

When directly asked if he believes Poles around him feel threatened by him, Valeriy repeated, 'No, as I said, I don't stand out. I act like a normal person.' Since on the horizontal axis of the right-wing populist world view there are only 'pure people' ('normal Poles' often in the Polish context) counterposed to threatening 'aliens/enemies', and there is no or little room for pluralism, migrants from Ukraine often try to seem 'normal' or 'pure' to escape being labelled with the other category. Their privilege is that they can. As one respondent put it: 'Yes, Ukrainians are second-class citizens in Poland. But other migrants, Indians and Vietnamese, are jealous of us that at least we can blend in with the crowd' (Yelizaveta, lecturer, 35, Kyiv).

It must be noted that, overall, many migrants did not feel comfortable speaking about negative experiences, and some showed apprehension. One respondent asked, 'Are you sure I won't get deported for saying this?' When asked about negative attitudes, one respondent, interviewed in her empty office, first whispered, then stopped talking altogether, because the instance she was describing involved her boss. As mentioned, migrants are a vulnerable population whose future is uncertain, which causes them fear and anxiety. Many seemed to try to convince the interviewer, and perhaps themselves, that they were doing 'really well overall'.

Differences within the migrant population

As mentioned above, different types of migrants experience the social world around them differently. The same is true for the political sphere and their reactions to it. Additionally, the highly skilled are more often dissatisfied than the low-skilled, questioning whether it was the right choice to move to Poland.

The low-skilled migrants are neutral or even very satisfied with the government. Due to working overtime, these migrants do not have enough time to take Polish classes. They cannot read Polish news; instead, they follow Ukrainian social media. Therefore, they are poorly informed

about what is happening in Polish politics. Being almost entirely excluded from the Polish media sphere, they barely ever come into contact with the government's discourse. However, they encounter the government in much more practical and tangible terms – when they receive social benefits, such as the famous '500+', which foreigners can also receive. For people that left their country to escape poverty, who now do hard and sometimes hazardous physical labour for 12 zloty/hour, receiving multiple social benefits ('500+',² '300+',³ benefits for holders of *'Karta Polaka'*⁴) from a foreign government translates into the often-repeated narrative 'Here, the government cares about the people' and creates sympathetic attitudes. As a result, these respondents wish to stay in Poland long term. On the other hand, the highly skilled migrants appreciate these social programmes less. They finance such programmes with their taxes while rarely benefiting from them. A typical young corporation employee in Warsaw tends to be dissatisfied with the perceived injustice of 'all of the taxes, none of the benefits'. That is because the firm offers private health insurance as a benefit; they do not know if they will still live in Poland half a century from now to claim their pension fund, and more often than not, they do not have children, leaving them unable to claim childcare benefits. Furthermore, as discussed in an earlier section, they often face glass ceilings. They tend to be not only more aware of the political situation but also more concerned about it due to their chiefly liberal and progressive outlooks. It was remarkable how quickly LGBT and women's rights violations and related anti-governmental protests came up in the conversation, although I never asked about them specifically. (The backlash against women's rights and the LGBT community by the PiS government as well as civil society's counter-mobilisation are elaborated on in [Chapters 7 and 8](#).) Due to all these factors, they are more dissatisfied, concerned and unsure about tying their future to Poland. Many consider either moving back to Ukraine or going further West. It is particularly true for young families, who worry about their children being taught Catholic catechism at schools, supplemented by the Polish 'patriotic' interpretation of history, neither of which they relate to or agree with. Moreover, they are afraid of potential further restrictions on individual liberties.

Fitting in in Poland: hopelessness and an uncertain future

It was striking how often the question 'Do you feel comfortable living in Poland as a migrant?' prompted remarks about PiS politics and various right-wing discourses. 'PiS politics depresses me,' responded

Inessa (lawyer, 29, Ternopil). Hanna (cleaner and seamstress, 51, Ivano-Frankivsk oblast) spoke emotionally: 'Why does Kaczyński hate Ukrainians so much? He just hates Ukrainians! He keeps saying on TV or on the radio that we are bad, right?'

Even though many do not fully identify as migrants and distinguish between themselves and (Muslim) refugees (the most threatening migrant construction in right-wing populist discourse), more often than not, they feel like 'Others', like they do not belong. Not feeling accepted as one of us, as 'one's own' (Ukrainian: *'почуватися своєю' (pochuvatysya svoeyu)*), neither feeling at home, was something that emerged in the first interviews, and thus a relevant question was added to the interview guide to capture the feeling of belonging and perception of 'Othering' in a more elaborate language: 'I like it here overall, and I feel fully comfortable by now. But I don't feel like one of them. Somehow, I keep feeling alarmed. And even though I feel comfortable, I don't feel at home [after seven years]' (Inessa, lawyer, 29, Ternopil).

Given the ethnic conceptualisation of the nation that PiS promotes and the overall right-wing populist discourse, politically aware migrants feel they do not belong because they do not perceive themselves as fitting into the conceptualisation of the 'pure people'. Furthermore, they think they will never belong, simply by virtue of having a different background. Therefore, they do not invest much effort into trying to integrate and often consider moving: 'When I hear the discourse of "*Polska dla Polaków*" [Poland for Poles] I think to myself, what am I doing here?' (Kateryna, journalist, 35, Ivano-Frankivsk oblast).

However, many respondents noted that they felt at home in the city they lived in but not in Poland overall. Local identity manifested as they associated themselves with their host cities. The cities are familiar to them, whereas they do not necessarily have connections to other regions. Their social lives are often concentrated in particular neighbourhoods; hence, they feel accepted and have a sense of belonging in that particular local context. When it comes to the national context, the so-called all-Polish values and other imaginations of what holds the nation together come to the fore. Migrants do not associate with them and are, therefore, apprehensive that they do not belong. When asked, 'Do you think you could ever become a true Pole?', the vast majority answered with a determined 'no'. It is primarily explained by the perceptions of Polish identity as ethnic, ascribed and inherited.

A Pole is a Pole. There will always be an accent; I think it's impossible to take it away. Plus you need to know the history. Always if they

just hear my name, they understand right away that I am not a Pole. They have a bad word for it. When they don't like that a person has Polish citizenship but he is Ukrainian, they call him 'przepisaniec' [from the Polish '*przepisać*' – to reassign]. ... He doesn't know that this person has received Polish citizenship because they have been living on Polish territory for eight or nine years. Or that they have, for instance, Polish roots ... They don't care which way you get it. It's just that you were not born a Pole but got the documents some other way. So, he is not a Pole, but he is 'reassigned' to Poland. (Valeriy, warehouse worker, 28, Khmelnytskyi)

The exception is made for those with Polish roots *and* a strong sense of Polish identity, who identified as Polish even back in Ukraine. They, however, are faced with the fact that even if they might perceive themselves as Poles, other Poles around them do not. One respondent, holder of Karta Polaka, a Catholic and a family person, has summarised it: 'It turns out that both here and there you are a foreigner' (Marta, hairdresser, 32, Khmelnytskyi).

Furthermore, migrants who are politically aware and have more liberal views than the PiS government have even less hope of being seen as 'normal' or 'the pure people' in the language of populism. That is because, as they believe: "The pure people" for the government are those who agree with them' (Maksym, trader, 28, Ivano-Frankivsk oblast). Indeed, the migrants whose world view aligns with the ruling party's platform are most likely to feel like they belong.

At the same time, Ukrainian identity remains strong for many. Perhaps this is because Ukrainian identity, while largely also ethnic, is still more inclusive. Many respondents said one could become Ukrainian, while very few said one could become Polish. However, from an essentialist perspective, there is a fundamental conflict in trying to combine two ethnic-national identities. The inner conflict stems from the feeling that a person cannot simultaneously be themselves and a Pole. It may therefore be a struggle to integrate the Ukrainian migrant population into Polish society, with resistance from either or both sides.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed the impact of the anti-migrant discourse of the right-wing populist PiS government on Ukrainian migrants in Poland. Overall, the data shows that being exposed to anti-migrant discourse

prompted Ukrainians to modify their self-identifications to avoid being seen as 'aliens' or 'enemies'.

Due to the binary populist world view not allowing for pluralism and different identities, migrants do not feel like they can claim their place in the social sphere of contemporary Poland. Due to nationalist discourse, anti-migrant sentiments and constructions of migrants as a threat, many try to escape the label of a migrant altogether and deny identifying as such. Being in the position of a migrant is associated with stigma and causes a multitude of anxieties. Therefore, migrants try to seem like 'normal Poles' or 'the pure people' in the language of populism.

The problem is that in the case of the right-wing populist world view, in general, and the case of Poland, in particular, the notion of 'nation' is strongly ethnic and, therefore, exclusive. Many migrants are aware, after trying and failing, that they will never be able to become 'a true Pole'. Even after many years of settled life in Poland, they sometimes experience the natives highlighting their differences and claiming their lack of belonging. Respondents' examples included pointing out the accent, occasional grammar mistakes or calling migrants by a particular pejorative term, *'przepisaniec'*, reserved for foreigners acquiring Polish citizenship. In many cases, such experiences could be considered microaggressions. Notably, those who disagree with the government's politics do not consider it realistic to ever be 'normal' under the current regime because they see 'normality' conflated with support for the government – as discursively constructed by the government. It further illustrates the sharp political polarisation in Poland, as an example of a country governed by right-wing populist actors, which affects migrants as well as locals.

Therefore, migrants from Ukraine are often afraid to display their different identities publicly, worried about the fragility of their legal status. The coping strategies they frequently choose include 'laying low', self-silencing and trying to 'blend in with the crowd'.

As a result, Ukrainian migrants in Poland, even though enormous in number, remain a disorganised and fractured collection of individuals rather than a community, not to mention a politicised minority deserving of protection and representation.

Since the governmental policies seem to follow economic necessity, while ignoring or even suppressing cultural deviations, a parallel society of low-skilled workers, completely disengaged with the Polish social and political spheres, is emerging. Besides, due to the lack of inclusivity in the government-sponsored conception of the Polish identity and the populist world view promoted by the PiS government, there was not much space for migrants in Polish society, even those as similar as Ukrainians and Poles.

The right-wing populist actors deny the changing fabric of the ever-more heterogeneous society, constructing scapegoats and intergroup competition. Due to the resulting disillusionment regarding the prospects of acceptance, it remains uncertain if highly skilled migrants will decide to settle in Poland, even under the new, more liberal government that came to power after the 2023 elections.

The analysis above refers to the situation before 24 February 2022. It should serve as a point of departure and comparison with the fast-changing reality on the ground today.

Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of PiS migration discourse, please refer to Yermakova (2019).
2. 'Rodzina 500+', commonly referred to as '500+', is a governmental programme of financial support which pays families 500 Polish zloty monthly for each child under 18.
3. 'Dobry Start', commonly referred to as '300+', is a governmental programme supporting the education of schoolchildren with a 300 Polish zloty payment at the start of the school year until they reach 20 years of age (for disabled children, until 24 years). As with 500+, the programme was launched by the PiS government.
4. *Karta Polaka* (Pole's Card) is a document confirming belonging to the Polish nation for citizens of other countries with Polish roots. It grants the right to reside in Poland, the right to free higher education and free healthcare, and social benefits for the entire family. It was approved under the first PiS government in 2007.

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Same-sex versus ‘natural’ families in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia

Slobodanka Dekić

Introduction

If you were gay or lesbian living in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), your family life with a same-sex partner would have had to have been kept secret: having a registered partnership that included raising children was unimaginable (see Spahić and Gavrić, 2012; Blagojević and Dimitrijević, 2014). Some 30 years later, the SFRY was replaced by seven independent states (Kostanić, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Vesić et al., 2015). As a lesbian or a gay man, you are now referred to as an LGBTIQ person,¹ enjoying (nominal) protection from discrimination and your rights are promoted and protected by a significant number of NGOs (see Spahić and Gavrić, 2012; Gočanin, 2014). In three successor states of the SFRY, same-sex families are now legally recognised.² Nevertheless, the invisibility and marginalisation of same-sex families in all successor states remain strong (Švab and Kuhar, 2005; Radoman, 2015, 2018; Maričić et al., 2016) and the nuclear family model is still seen as the exclusive framework for biological, cultural and economic reproduction of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Gal and Kligman, 2000; Milić et al., 2010).

The issue of same-sex families and their (alleged) conflict with the nuclear family model became a major political issue with the rise of conservative and illiberal populist politics. According to some authors, modern populism can be understood as a political strategy that insists on antagonism between impoverished, neglected ‘people’, who are seen

as losers of the neoliberal transition, and transnational elites, who hold absolute economic, political and social power in neoliberal order (Kriesi, 2014; Muller, 2017; Fassin, 2018; Mouffe, 2018). In this strategy, attacks on 'gender' became part of a revolt 'against so-called "post-material values" (multiculturalism, solidarity, protection of the environment, gender issues, etc.) which are increasingly pervasive due to advancing living standards' (Dočekalová, 2006, in Stojarova, 2013: 8; see also Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). It provides an additional dimension to the antagonism between the 'people' and the 'elite': ordinary, hardworking, 'normal' men and women becoming victims of 'gender ideology' which destroys the 'natural' understanding of sex and family with the support of international corporate businesses (Jongen, 2017; see also Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017).

This chapter contributes to the critical discussion on same-sex families in the post-Yugoslav region, by analysing their relationship with the 'natural' family model. It focuses on two research questions: how these two deferent family models are defined and presented by their advocates, that is, LGBTIQ organisations and their conservative, 'anti-gender' counterparts; and what the points of conflict and/or overlap in these two family models are. I am setting this analysis in the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH).³ Given that academic literature on same-sex families and their advocacy in studied societies is severely lacking, the data for the analysis has been gathered through 16 semi-structured interviews with representatives of local LGBTIQ organisations and independent activists.⁴ Conservative 'anti-gender' politics in the region has already gained significant academic attention, especially in Serbia and Croatia (see Šljivić and Mlinarić, 2016; Hodžić and Štulhofer, 2017; Petričušić et al., 2017). Data on advocates of the conservative, 'natural' family model has been gathered through publications, reports and relevant media content involving the Coalition for the Natural Family (Serbia); Vigilare, GROZD, the Centre for Cultural Renewal and the Coalition 'In the Name of the Family' (Croatia); Young Muslims and *SAFF* Magazine (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina); as well as international documents presenting new conservative family politics. The interpretation of the gathered data was based on discourse analysis, as it allows insight into the different meanings and interpretations of social phenomena (Jorgensen and Philips, 2002: 25), but it also opens the possibilities for analysing the processes of negotiating between two different family narratives, seen as a conflict over dominance between these two opposing discourses. In this conflict, according to Jansen (2005: 49), both sides tend to impose their narratives 'as knowledge that

acts as general, common sense'. Thus, discourse analysis allows us to gain an in-depth understanding of the negotiation between the two opposed family models but also between two different positions on the family policies in the selected countries.

A comparative approach was taken due to the important similarities between the selected countries, that is, their shared history and the circumstances in which contemporary Serbian, Croatian and BH societies created their modern statehood and national identities (Karačić et al., 2012). All three countries transformed from autarchic socialism to neoliberalism in the European periphery (Horvat and Štiks, 2015). Most importantly, these states share the experience of transforming their family policies from family planning to pronatalism (Drezgić, 2010). The former focused on measures that enabled individuals to choose the number of children they wanted to have to ensure their economic and social security. By contrast, pronatalism insists on increased birth rates, which is recognised as important for the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation but also for the survival of the state within a global neoliberal system that is in a constant need for (cheap) labour (Drezgić, 2010: 15; see also Fodor, 2022). These pronatalist family measures include conditional, irregular, short-term financial assistance to mothers (Ćaćić and Levačić, 2018; Reljanović, 2018; Hasanbegović and Dizdar, 2020). At the same time, in the context of the collapse of economic security and the social protection system, the family becomes the backbone of the survival economy (Milić and Tomanović, 2009). Related processes include the transformation of civil society from semi-formal feminist, peace, cultural, anti-war initiatives into professional human rights organisations (see Stubbs, 1996; Lazić, 2005; Bilić and Janković, 2015). Both 'anti-gender' and LGBTIQ organisations in these countries could be seen as part of such civil society: professionalised, focused on advocacy, based in human rights, utilising public campaigns, cooperating with institutions and financed through the international donor system (see Vučković Juroš et al., 2020).

An important difference, however, lies in the legal status of same-sex families. Croatia, which has been a member of the EU since 2013, adopted the Same-Sex Life Partnership Act in 2014.⁵ Serbia and BH, both EU candidate countries, still do not legally recognise same-sex families. EU membership or the status of the EU integration processes certainly has an important impact on the legal recognition of same-sex families (Stychin, 2010; Colpani and Habed, 2014; Kollman, 2014). However, in this chapter I do not focus on the countries' relationships with the EU. My interest is in the relationship between same-sex and so-called natural

families, that is, the relationship between the ‘progressive’ politics of LGBTIQ organisations and the conservative ‘anti-gender’ actors. By providing a new interpretation of the relationship between local ‘anti-gender’ and LGBTIQ actors, I hope to encourage local LGBTIQ organisations to abandon a self-victimising position (see Kovatzs, 2018), critically review their past activities and policies, and devise a more effective opposition to the increasingly conservative politics in the region.

Family is a fortress: advocating in favour of the ‘natural’ family

Conservative, ‘anti-gender’ politics is focused on the dangers that threaten the preservation of the ‘natural’ family, understood exclusively within the framework of familistic discourse, which sees the heteronormative family as the only framework for biological reproduction: it is based on heterosexual, monogamous marriage, with a strict division of gender roles and a clear separation from the state (Donzelot, 1977, in Milić, 2007: 224). Thus, conservative actors point to the ‘dangers of homosexuality’, Marxism, feminism, abortion, strengthening sexual and reproductive rights, sex education and biomedically assisted fertilisation.⁶ Also, the demographic decline in birth rates is one of the most important arguments pointing to the danger of the disappearance of the white and Christian ‘true Europe’, as they call it, threatened by migrants from the East who have not experienced a similar reduction in birth rates (Đurković, 2017).⁷ Additionally, one of the key points for modern conservative discourses on family is the notion of ‘gender ideology’, which they see as imposed through various human rights organisations and academic programmes (gender studies). The notion of ‘gender’ is *snuck in*, defined as a subjective construct, thus denying the ‘natural’, biological differences between the two sexes. ‘Gender ideology’ calls into question the very basis of civilisation as we know it, that is, the clear division between men and women, thus destroying the foundation of the family itself, as a union between a man and a woman (Antonić, 2014; Đurković, 2017). Promoting ‘gender equality’ politics, rooted in feminism and Marxism, undermines the privacy of the family by insisting on its reliance on the welfare state, which replaces maternal care for home and children.

In practice, however, conservative ‘anti-gender’ politics do not advocate for the complete withdrawal of the state in relation to the family but for the conservative welfare state, which ‘promotes pro-natal policies

and offers high quality social services for in-groups, while respecting the autonomy of parents when it comes to children's upbringing and education' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 128; see also Somerville, 2006). Fodor (2022) provides an excellent insight into the functioning of 'anti-gender' politics using as an example of Hungary, where they represent one of the most important aspects of the Orbán regime, aligned with the consolidation of neoliberalism in Hungary. These policies provided a replacement for the collapsed social system, shifting the care of others to women already burdened with precarious and low-paid jobs, justifying it as corresponding to 'feminine nature and feminine innate qualities' (Fodor, 2022: 32). At the same time, women's (and men's) labour rights are unprotected and adjusted to the interests of foreign investors (see also Toplišek, 2019).

Conservative actors in Serbia, Croatia and BH promote a family model that is grounded in heterosexual marriage seen as the exclusive framework for biological and cultural reproduction. This model is believed to be economically sustainable, best represented in urban and middle-class milieus, and independent of state control (see Đurković, 2017; Hodžić and Štulhofer, 2017). Conservatives insist on its endangerment on various levels: from the introduction of sexual education to the organisation of Pride Parades. Thus, attempts to introduce sex education in schools failed in all three countries due to strong conservative opposition (see Dekić et al., 2012; Čaušević and Biličević, 2017; Dekić, 2020). Pride Parades, although held in capital cities, face a backlash, either in violence or in organisation of 'family parades' as a conservative counter-protest, emphasising the 'devastating effects' of homosexuality on the traditional family and reproduction.⁸ Finally, the 'natural' family has to be protected from legalisation of same-sex families, especially granting them equal status with heterosexual couples, through marriage and reproductive rights. However, some of the specifics of local conservative narratives on family arise from the post-socialist and post-conflict contexts of these societies.

Advocating for the protection of the 'natural' family is important also because it is assumed to be related to the trauma caused by the 1990s conflicts as well as the social and economic transition, all of which had devastating effects on these societies. Dominant national narratives in these societies are based on the idea of continuous suffering and the need to preserve the national community. Formulating national historiographies that deny crimes against 'others' and insist on crimes against 'us' was the prerequisite for strengthening the ideology of victimisation, based on the dichotomy of 'us' – the exclusive victims – and

'them' – the exclusive executioners. At the same time, positioning themselves as the biggest victim of the war, each of the nations gave itself the right to act 'preventively' and protect itself (Vlaisavljević, 2007, 2012). Conservative politics embodies these narratives, thus insisting on the 'natural' family as a sort of warranty guaranteeing the traumatic past will never be allowed to repeat itself. Family is the key channel for sustaining the memory of what happened to *us*, and every attack on the 'natural' family is inevitably an attempt to erase these memories. Therefore, according to these narratives, there is an unquestionable link between heterosexual marriage and the 'national identity' of Croatian people;⁹ between the legalisation of same-sex partnerships and 'brutal, illegal aggression in which, as in 1999 ... will not differentiate between fighters and civilians in Serbia';¹⁰ Pride Parade in Sarajevo and the continuous anti-Bosniak and anti-Muslim politics in BH.¹¹

Moreover, the protection of the 'natural' family is assumed to be essential for economic survival: it is already a proven 'safety net' with the potential to be the basis for economic progress through family businesses and the protection of private property (Šljivić and Mlinarić, 2016). Only such an economy can defend nations from the harmful effects of multinational capital, which affects not just the market but also tears apart other segments of society, such as the 'healthy' family. By proclaiming this, conservative actors position themselves as the protectors of those who are lost in the social and economic transition (see Kriesi, 2014), for whom the 'natural' family is a fortress grounded in traditional values, economic (domiciliary) self-reliance, a belief of its significance for national and religious identity, and its capacity for natural (biological) and economic reproduction. Because it is 'natural' and fertile, it deserves exclusive protection from the state.

Like their global partners, local 'anti-gender' actors also insist on using human rights and scientific discourse in building their arguments. They oppose hate speech provisions, deeming them a limitation on the freedom of speech and a continuation of totalitarian communist practices.¹² By doing so, they place themselves in the context of EU integration, rejecting the image of backward savages from the Balkans (see Vučković Juroš et al., 2020). Moreover, presenting 'gender ideology' as totalitarian and as an obvious continuation of the communist persecution of the freedom of speech brings the conservative politics of the region closer to the problematic interpretation of the socialist heritage in the former Yugoslavia by the EU and liberal political forces alike.¹³

We are not from here? Advocating 'rainbow families' in Serbia, Croatia and BH

In the countries of Western Europe and the United States, the struggle for the recognition and acceptance of same-sex families gained full momentum during the 1980s and 1990s. The family had not been the focus of the 1960s lesbian and gay activism; the nuclear family was seen as completely opposite to the idea of gay and lesbian liberation (see D'Emilio, 1983). Nevertheless, the influence of neoliberal hegemony changed this course, and advocacy for the legalisation of same-sex partnerships intensified in the 1980s and 1990s (Duggan, 2003; Duggan and Hunter, 2006; Cooper, 2017). Key advocacy arguments were (and still are): gaining the economic and social benefits for the same-sex partners; accepting homosexuality as 'natural', thus normalising same-sex kinship and especially the parental rights of LGBT persons; and, finally, reducing or eliminating discrimination against LGBTIQ persons and democratisation of a society as a whole (Butler, 2002; Polikoff, 2008; Mršević, 2009; Klapper, 2017).

In Serbia, Croatia and BH, this issue is being advocated for exclusively by local LGBTIQ organisations, whose work has come a long way from semi-legal initiatives in the 1990s to more institutionalised, professional human rights organisations, focused on advocating changes in the legal framework in favour of LGBTIQ rights (see Bilić, 2016; Bilić and Kajinić, 2016). Nevertheless, legal recognition of same-sex families is not prioritised: it is one among many initiatives they are sporadically or continuously engaged in. Everyday violence, discrimination and exclusion that LGBTIQ persons are faced with are still more important problems for the vast majority of local activists I have spoken with. Legalisation of same-sex families is a matter of privilege for those LGBTIQ partners who have reached economic and social stability and have something to share: personal and/or joint property, health and social insurances and benefits and so on, or parenthood responsibilities. In Croatia, they 'were the most active around this Law, because it was, for them, a step toward normalisation of their lives'.¹⁴ The same pattern is visible in Serbia and BH, where primary beneficiaries of legal recognition are those same-sex partners who have higher economic and social standards. Also, most of them have low or no interest in being engaged in activities that are not directly related to their particularistic interests. 'I sometimes felt as if I was at their service, and they were my (un)satisfied clients. At the same time, we had to work with the LGBTIQ persons who had been beaten up,

fired from their jobs or kicked out of their houses because of who they were.¹⁵

The issue of privilege seems related also to gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Some of my collocutors emphasised that the issue of same-sex families was pushed on the organisations' agenda when it became important for the 'rich' gay men 'who were now into having kids'.¹⁶ Trans people remain largely excluded from the portrait of an ideal same-sex family, and the idea of a trans person considering parenthood borders on fiction: 'Every time I'm doing a workshop with the institutions, I say I don't want to have the bottom surgery because I would like to give birth one day. They often have very aggressive reactions.'¹⁷ This rather narrow image of a 'rainbow' family is also visible in the rare attempts at its public representation, insisting on a well-off, modern, pleasant-looking, young lesbian or gay couple, with a child.

Despite expressing their critical awareness of the issue of privilege that seems inseparable from the discussion of same-sex families (see Goldberg and Allen, 2013), all activists were supportive of the idea of having this matter legally arranged, particularly because of the equal access to social and economic benefits. This is seen as a protection of the social and economic rights of LGBTIQ persons, especially in 'our deteriorated economies in the region'.¹⁸ Legalised same-sex families would allow LGBTIQ couples to share property or regulate health and insurance benefits provided through employment contracts. Still, there is little discussion about those LGBTIQ persons who are not in stable partnerships or whose employment contracts and precarious jobs (and these make up the majority) simply do not come with any kind of benefits that might be transferable to their partners (see Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Nevertheless, this argument on 'social and economic' rights is also the most acceptable one for the mainstream public, which seems to be somewhat inclined to allow visits in hospitals and jails by the LGBTIQ partners or to support joint access to health insurance. What the wider public is not so keen on is giving them parenthood rights.¹⁹

As in other countries in Europe, LGBTIQ parental rights are a matter of fierce public debate and remain limited or completely left out from the same-sex partnership laws or drafts of the laws (Waaldijk, 2020). In Croatia, the Same-Sex Life Partnership Act was adopted in 2014, recognising the status of 'partner guardian' and allowing adoption but without the guardian recognised as a legal parent or listed as such on the birth certificate. Similarly, same-sex partners cannot apply for a joint adoption or bio-medical assisted reproduction. In Serbia, the proposed draft of the law on same-sex partnerships excluded parenthood rights

altogether, prompting the relevant institutional representatives to state that this ‘law doesn’t allow adoption’ for gay couples.²⁰ At the same time, some LGBTIQ activists who spoke publicly about this issue focused on the ‘biological’ parenthood of the LGBTIQ persons who have ‘enough money to pay’ assisted reproductive techniques (ART) abroad.²¹ Serbia has quite liberal policies related to ART,²² but LGBTIQ people remain excluded from this option (see Dekić, 2019; Mršević, 2020).

In BH, the issue of parenthood is completely left out of the advocacy for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships for strategic reasons – it would never win in institutional, public and political debates.²³ Some of my collocutors, especially those coming from organisations that are not directly involved in advocating legalisation, support this approach. Although they are aware that LGBTIQ parents do exist, they think that fighting this battle is beyond their organisations’ capacities.²⁴ A rather different approach is taken by those who are active in the negotiation processes and who are parents themselves. For them, having a law which completely ignores the question of parenthood is not enough, stating that ‘the situation on the ground has changed – there are people with kids, and want their families to be protected’.²⁵

This reluctance and lack of consensus over what is actually being negotiated with the state when it comes to family rights indicate that there is no clear stance on the question of family among the local LGBTIQ organisations. It is a process filled with compromises with the state, which is seen as the sole partner. There are no alliances with other civil society organisations, parents’ associations or other possible relevant partners. Thus, in all three countries, the final outcome depends (or depended, in the case of Croatia) on the will of the current governing party and its power to deal with this issue. This also puts a lot of pressure on local activists, reducing their position to an almost completely defensive one, so they cannot provoke additional antagonisms towards the LGBTIQ population but only pursue a compliant approach towards the institutions and decision-makers. ‘We don’t want to be the ones who keep complaining, who are constantly the victims, but rather we want to have a more positive approach.’²⁶ Certainly, there are activists who find this approach unacceptable, defining it as a result of reducing the movement’s policies to ‘dealing with LGBT rights in an administrative way, focused on legal changes and without the support for the real people’.²⁷ Another question that arises is whether the local LGBTIQ organisations should make compromises with the same political forces which played crucial roles in the social and economic devastation of these three states during the 1990s (and 2000s to a degree), providing them a sort of legitimacy

by respecting the rule of law and European values. More importantly, by avoiding criticism and confrontation with the politically compromised institutions, this advocacy approach by local LGBTIQ organisations brings them close to the global trend of 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2017) supported by 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2003), that is, the normalisation and integration of a specific, 'proper' kind of homosexuality into the national body, where same-sex families support the homonormative, familistic ideals of a bourgeois household (see also Maljković, 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter analysed two family models and the relationship between them: the 'natural', heterosexual nuclear family, advocated by the conservative actors, and the same-sex family, advocated by the LGBTIQ organisations in Serbia, Croatia and BH.

At first glance, the relationship between these two family models and the way they are presented to the public are mutually exclusive. Conservative actors are fiercely protective of the 'natural' nuclear family rooted in heterosexual marriage, as an exclusive framework for the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation. It emphasises the right of parents to take full control over the upbringing of their children. It nurtures the traditional gender roles among its members and is the main channel for transmitting national narratives and ideologies, a pledge that the traumatic past of the 1990s should never be repeated. LGBTIQ organisations advocate in favour of a nuclear, same-sex family based on a stable and functional same-sex partnership, which should grant social and economic security to those lesbians and gays (primarily) who have the privilege of living in a stable relationship and who have already gained capital that can be inherited. Although same-sex families with children exist, there is still silence around the issue of reproduction, caused partially by the harsh opposition from the state and public opinion and partially due to the non-confrontational advocacy strategy that the LGBTIQ organisations are taking. Thus, same-sex families are not presented as sites of biological or cultural reproduction. The model of family as a bastion of national pride and the memory of victimhood are antithetical to the advocacy for same-sex families. Finally, while the conservative family model is grounded in 'nature' and 'normality', the idea of same-sex families is grounded in the ideal of equality and the human rights of LGBTIQ people.

Nevertheless, there are similarities between the two. Both same-sex and ‘natural’ family advocates tend to ignore the problematic effects of the states’ transition from family planning to pronatal policies and measures (Drezgić, 2010). Neither of these two advocating strategies deals with the lack of structural support for families with children and sustainable, long-term financial and social security of non-traditional families. They embody neoliberal family values, insisting on the idea of self-sustaining families that are independent of the state (see Berger and Neuhaus, 1996; Cooper, 2017). And, both strategies are grounded in the human rights narrative. The ‘natural’ family advocates insist on ‘parental rights’ as well as on freedom of speech and opinion, which allows them to point out all types of ‘deviance’ that are promoted in the society and have a ‘devastating’ impact on their families. For the same-sex family advocates, equality, derived from the universality of human rights (which often diminishes the importance of social and economic inequalities; see Harvey, 2005) is the ultimate argument used in advocating this issue. Finally, both conservative and LGBTIQ organisations ignore the existence of a variety of family models: transgender persons and their family rights, single-parent families, families with parents and/or children with disabilities and even extramarital unions, to mention just a few. What they are promoting is, actually, a very exclusionary image of a nuclear, middle-class, urban, professional family with healthy children, rooted in a legally recognised partnership between two persons. Thus, there is no alternative to the existing pronatal policies and the status quo approach to the family in these states. A lack of critical thinking and re-questioning of what the family is in these societies leaves more space for narrow, conservative and populist manipulation of this term in the public sphere.

Notes

1. In the chapter, I am using the acronym LGBTIQ, since the majority of organisations I have included in the research use this acronym, too. But most of them reach out and include mostly lesbians and gay men, especially regarding family rights.
2. The Republic of Slovenia (2006 and marriage equality in 2022); the Republic of Croatia (2014) and Montenegro also legally recognised same-sex partnerships in 2020.
3. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a federal state consisting of two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (where the majority of the population is Bosniak and Croatian) and the Republic of Srpska (in which the majority is Serbian), and the Brčko District (with an ethnically heterogeneous population, composed by all three nations). My focus is on the entity of Federation BH, more specifically on conservative actors coming from the Bosniak/Muslim community, since the conservative politics in the other two communities – Serbian and Croatian – are in line with the ones in Serbia and Croatia. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that conservative values among Bosniaks are not articulated through the notion of ‘gender ideology’, as in Serbia or Croatia. A possible reason for that, I believe, lies in the domination

of Islam; thus the argument about its threat to white, Christian Europe simply has a different weight and meaning here. Though research on ethno-national extremism in BH (Halilović and Veljan, 2021) pointed to a clear correlation between the principles of preserving the 'traditional' family and maintaining clear ethnic boundaries, according to which the 'traditional' family is one of the most important pillars for the survival of the (endangered) 'us' ethnic group (2021: 22). The traumatic war experience during the 1990s, which is still very much present in everyday life and politics in BH in various forms, gives a different tone to conservative politics: here they exist in plural, and are based on mutually opposed national narratives of three ethnic groups (see Vlasisavljević, 2007, 2012).

4. Interviews included activists from the following organisations: Labris, Glic, ERA, EGAL, Da se zna, Belgrade Pride (Serbia); Trans Aid, Dugine obitelji/Rainbow Families, LORI, Zagreb Pride (Croatia); Sarajevo Open Center, Tuzla Open Center, KVART (BH). Also, three individual activists from Croatia and BH were included. The interviews were conducted during 2019/20, combining online and face-to-face interviews.
5. The text of the Law is available at the following link: www.zakon.hr/z/732/Zakon-o-%C5%BEivotnom-partnerstvu-osoba-istog-spola.
6. See 'Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe'. Published in May 2019. Available at: <https://agenda.europe.wordpress.com/restoring-the-natural-order/>.
7. See also 'The Paris Statement: A Europe We Can Believe In'. Published in October 2017. Available at: <https://thetrueeurope.eu/>.
8. See the example from Sarajevo: 'Organizatori 'Dana tradicionalne porodice' objavili zvanični proglas manifestacije'. Published on Klix.ba, October 2019. Available at: www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/organizatori-dana-tradicionalne-porodice-objavili-zvanicni-proglas-manifestacije/190907082. 'Setnja 'Dan tradicionalne porodice' u Sarajevu, u znak protesta zbog Povorka ponosa'. Published on Radio Free Europe, October 2019. Available at: www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30151668.html.
9. 'Crkva i vjerske zajednice: brak jednako žena i muškarac'. Published on Vecernji.hr, April 2013. Available at: www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/crkva-i-vjerske-zajednice-brak-zena-muskarac-544368.
10. 'Odgovor Koalicije za prirodnu porodicu Gordani Čomić: 'Ne može biti dijaloga o protivustavnim predlozima zakona''. Published by Novosti.rs., March 2021. Available at: www.novosti.rs/drustvo/vesti/977496/odgovor-koalicije-prirodnu-porodicu-gordani-comic-moze-biti-dijaloga-protivustavnim-predlozima-zakona.
11. See the text produced by organisation Young Muslims (Mladi Muslimani) in BH, making a link between Pride Parade in Sarajevo and genocide in Srebrenica: 'Proglas povodom parade srama'. Available at: www.mm.co.ba/index.php/bs/udruzenje-danas/zvanicni-stavovi/1297-proglas-povodom-parade-srama-tzv-parade-ponosa.
12. See, for example, 'Dugin verbalni delikt u Hrvatskoj'. Published on Vigilare. Available at: <https://vigilare.org/vijest/dugin-verbalni-delikt-u-hrvatskoj/>, or the press conference of the Coalition for Protection of Natural Family. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDD1KuX-bbw.
13. Socialist heritage is seen as a problematic burden both by conservative political forces and (neo)liberal ones. This one-dimensional interpretation of the recent past constitutes a key overlapping point between these two political options and provides a strong threshold for conservatives in post-socialist states, especially among those social groups that can be marked as 'losers' of transition (Keys, 2014; Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Mark et al., 2019).
14. Interview with activist from Zagreb Pride, Croatia, June 2020.
15. Interview with activist from Zagreb Pride, Croatia, June 2020.
16. Interviews with activist from Zagreb Pride, Croatia, May 2020.
17. Interview with transgender activist from BH, January 2019.
18. Interview with activist from Sarajevo Open Centre, BH, November 2019.
19. Results of the public poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2015 indicate that 73 per cent of participants from six Balkan countries are absolutely against legalisation of 'same sex marriages'. Nevertheless, when this issue is expounded to the specific rights, 39 per cent of them are in favour of giving the right to LGBTIQ persons to visit their partner in hospital or in jail; 32 per cent with the right to access joint health insurance. Only 10 per cent of participants agree with the idea that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children. Available at: www.ndi.org/LGBTI_Balkans_poll i <https://www.slideshare.net/NDI-democracy/ndi-public-opinion-poll-in-the-balkans-on-lgbti-communities>.

20. 'Glasovi iz crkve, ali i vlasti protiv Zakona o istopolnom partnerstvu u Srbiji'. Published at Radio Free Europe, Iva Martinović, January 2021. Available at: www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/godina-za-zakon-o-istopolnom-partnerstvu-u-srbiji/31025074.html.
21. 'Lažna polemika o gej brakovima'. Published at Politika, January 2021. Available at: www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/471159/Lazna-polemika-o-gej-brakovima.
22. All costs of these procedures are covered by the state health insurance, with no limitations in the number of ART attempts. Since December 2022 it is also possible to import reproductive materials from abroad. There are also announcements of the possible decriminalisation of surrogacy. Nevertheless, all these opportunities are restricted for heterosexual couples living in marital or extramarital unions. Nevertheless, single women do have the right to apply for ART by using imported reproductive material. See Mršević (2020).
23. Interview with activist from SOC, October 2021.
24. Interview with activist from EGAL, Serbia, May 2019.
25. Interview with activist from Labris, Serbia, May 2019.
26. Interview with activist from Dugine obitelji, Croatia, May 2019.
27. Interview with activist from KVART, BH, February 2020.

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Part V

Neo-traditionalism and the politics of memory

Foreword by Kateřina Králová

Coming to terms with the past, especially its dark periods, represents a formal and informal 'European entry ticket', as Tony Judt indicated in his seminal book (2006: 803). What Judt meant by that was that addressing dark chapters of national histories, especially related to the Holocaust, has become a prime focus of European cultural politics and a condition for membership in the EU. In EU declarations directed at aspiring members, this condition has been phrased in terms of 'reconciliation', 'good neighbourly relations' or 'cooperation with the international criminal tribunal in the prosecution of war crimes' (most notably for the Western Balkan countries where a separate accession chapter (23) was added focusing on dealing with war crimes – Milošević and Trost, 2020). However, the often-divergent interpretations of history and the contemporary one in particular – from World War I, through World War II, to the rule and fall of communist regimes in East Europe – continue to provoke uneasy confrontations between neighbouring countries. Tensions in this regard grow not only within nation-states and their communities, but also cleave the symbolic East Europe exactly there and then, as unity is sought. In addition, such varied interpretations contribute to the solidification of the Cold War narratives of East and West divisions, which is anything but productive for the unification of Europe.

While the EU tries to create an overarching European identity based on the narrative of a common past (thus far without tangible consequences), nation-states in Eastern and Western Europe seem to be more eager to put forth their own memory narratives, appealing to various parts of the electorate and legitimising their rule (Barton

Hronešová, 2024). Through narratives of the past presented in print and on social media, which trigger and nourish their visibility, in schoolbooks, monuments and memorials with a long-term conservation effect, and at commemorations as periodically recurring interpretations of history, various mnemonic authorities introduce, change and recompose/reshape historical narratives as a tool to overcome various kinds of crises, a strategy to distract and a technique to solidify its electorship, often rallying behind the flag. In newly established or redesigned 'national museums', they can manipulate memory politics both at the national and transnational level (Schissler and Soysal, 2005; Subotić, 2019; David, 2020; Radonic, 2021; Asavei and Králová, 2023). In such 'memory wars', prompted by conflicts over the interpretation of the past, memory actors often become entrepreneurs or even defiant warriors as some put it (Jelin, 2003; Dragovic-Soso, 2012; Mink and Neumayer, 2013; Bernhard and Kubik, 2016) who weaponise the past using, among others, 'anti-fascism', 'anti-communism' and Holocaust remembrance to produce a catch-all effect with ambiguous results (Stone, 2013; Sniegon, 2014; and so on).

Under such circumstances, the effect of the Europeanisation of memory in national communities and its ability to challenge national narratives is limited. Yet not only memory wars but also uneasy fraternal alliances are occurring between like-minded mnemonic warriors, both at the level of states and between equally arguing kin-state activists (Waterbury, 2017; Mudde, 2019). Memory politics of luring wide audiences is selective and tactical. Domestic factors hindering effective dialogue, capacity transfer and, consequently, the ability to (re)negotiate memories of a troubled past differ in Europe not only regionally (Western Europe, CEE, the Balkans, post-Soviet countries) or around the West–East dichotomy (Krastev and Holmes, 2019; Laczó and Lisjak Gabrijelcic, 2020), but also in relation to the ruling parties, their power structures and their recognition. Once populist memory warriors come to political power, a fusion of previously marginalised narratives gradually becomes mainstream. While there is a booming scholarship on historical narratives and memory (Wingfield, 2007; Troebst, 2013; Přibáň and Hvízdala, 2019; Gyáni, 2020), a comprehensive and comparative elaboration of the shifts towards repackaging them discursively and making them popular is so far missing.

In the following part, the authors examine the cultural re/production of national heritage and narratives of the past, which, according to the rhetoric of the memory entrepreneurs, must be taken away from the intellectual elites and returned to the masses. Based on data

gathered from protest events, commemorations, political speeches and proclamations, each of the following chapters documents these attempts at different community levels: in a city (Dresden), in a country (Hungary) and in a cross-border setting (Transylvania). Relying not only on datasets but also on fieldwork and original ethnographic research, they present unique case studies on the memory practices used during the far-right populist PEGIDA protests in Germany (Volk), on Fidesz's memory work especially during the Trianon Treaty centenary in 2020 (Sadecki) and on Fidesz's kin-state activism towards the Hungarian minority in Romania (Chiruta). Each in their own way, but far from an overarching European identity, populist actors, as the authors argue, seek to create, through discursive and economic means, an essentially neo-traditionalist ethnic culture in which they would become mnemonic and cultural hegemons.

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Resisting ‘leftist dictatorship’? Populism and memory in far-right street politics in Dresden

Sabine Volk

Introduction

In recent years, the global rise of the far right (Mudde, 2019) has been accompanied by the (re-)nationalisation of memory politics and the writing of ‘patriotic histories’ (Kończal and Moses, 2022). While this trend can be observed across Europe (Couperus et al., 2023), the upsurge of far-right memory politics is particularly strongly pronounced in post-communist CEE, where actors on the far right of the political spectrum mobilise history, memory and myths to gain and assert political power.

Empirical research on ‘the symbols and figural language that refer to cultural memory as it is seen by the radical right’ promises to ‘understand better the hidden logic behind its ideology, as well as the emotional and aesthetic appeal that it obviously has for many people’ (Korhonen, 2020: 309). Aiming to contribute to such cultural approaches to populism and the far right (Rensmann, 2017; Aslanidis, 2020), this chapter analyses an instance of far-right memory politics in post-communist Europe.¹ It focuses on the eastern German ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident’ (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, PEGIDA). Mobilising for regular street demonstrations in the eastern German city of Dresden and beyond since 2014 (Berntzen and Weisskircher, 2016; Vorländer et al., 2018), PEGIDA constitutes one of the most sustained far-right SMOs in Europe in the 2020s (Volk, 2022b). While PEGIDA may not be a neo-Nazi revisionist memory agent pushing for ending the ‘German cult of guilt’ (Wüstenberg,

2019; Eckersley, 2020), previous studies found memory to be a major tenet of its activism (Richardson-Little and Merrill, 2020; Volk, 2020).

Drawing from original empirical data generated during several months of ethnographic fieldwork in Dresden in 2019/20, this chapter examines some of the many ways in which memory politics shapes far-right street protest in post-communist Dresden, 30 years after the 're-unification' of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, 'West Germany') and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, 'East Germany'). Specifically, my frame-analytical approach to populism (Aslanidis, 2017) sheds light on how activists strategically mobilise the past to spell out the populist master frame of 'democratic resistance against leftist dictatorship', while the perspective of critical discourse analysis (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009) helps to uncover how historical references inspire the discursive construction of far-right activism as 'democratic' and the political establishment, counter-demonstrators and Islam as 'leftist-totalitarian'.

The chapter proceeds as follows: to begin with, I propose to study memory politics in grassroots contexts and thus beyond state institutions and political parties. Secondly, I present my methodological framework as well as my original ethnographic dataset. In the analysis, I then examine memory politics in PEGIDA's populist collective action framing and exclusionary construction of a 'democratic' in-group and 'leftist-totalitarian' out-groups. Finally, I discuss the relevance of my findings for scholarship at the intersection of memory politics, populism and far-right mobilisation.

Conceptualising memory politics in far-right street protest

The study relies on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework at the intersection of (interpretive) political science and social movement studies, tailored to analyse memory politics in grassroots activism. Conceptualising politics of memory as uses of the past, it emphasises semiotic strategies and collective action framing. Political approaches to memory posit that memory politics serve as an instrument for political actors to achieve present needs (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014; Kaasik-Krogerus et al., 2020). Such a perspective focuses on the semiotic 'strategies that political actors employ to make others remember in certain, specific ways and the effects of such mnemonic manipulations' (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014: 7). Semiotic strategies include the adoption

of specific political-cultural identities or the discursive use of particular ideological themes which resonate with the available cultural repertoire in a given political context and are devised against the backdrop of cultural constraints to political action. While recognising that culture may also constrain actors' free choices, this approach emphasises agency.

So far, scholars have predominantly focused on the memory politics of governments and political parties. To conceptualise grassroots memory politics, I turn to the emerging body of work on the movement–memory nexus (Wüstenberg and Gutman, 2023). Distinguishing between movements 'about' memory (memory agents) and memory 'in' movements (Daphi and Zamponi, 2019), this literature theorises how the past may serve as 'a cultural resource out of which activists draw symbols and ideas' (Kubal and Becerra, 2014: 872) in the processes of collective action framing. It builds on an interpretive understanding of (political) culture as a set of meanings that serves as a 'toolkit' providing scripts, symbols and rituals from which political actors choose elements to engage in meaning-making practices (Swidler, 1986). For instance, empirical research examines how activists construct discursive frames by deploying instances of historical symbolism and semiotics such as meaningful slogans and flags and by figuratively re-performing past events in public (della Porta et al., 2018).

Finally, I use the concept of the 'far right' as an umbrella term for actors 'located on the rightmost end of the *ideological* left–right spectrum' (Pirro, 2023: 103, emphasis in original), and whose ideologies typically oscillate between populist, radical and extreme positions (Carter, 2018; Volk and Weisskircher, 2023). Apart from nativism and authoritarianism, populism is a core feature of the contemporary European far right (Mudde, 2007), including in eastern Germany (Rensmann, 2018; Weisskircher, 2020). In line with the Introduction to this edited volume, my interdisciplinary understanding of populism integrates ideational and discursive-performative approaches to grasp the contents, logic and dynamics of populist mobilisations. I refer to populism as a thin ideology which believes in the fundamental division of society into 'good people' and a 'corrupted elite' (Mudde, 2007). The discursive-performative perspective then sheds light on how political actors articulate populism's antagonistic logic in speech and action, typically focusing on the unequal power relations between the 'oppressive' elites and the people as 'suppressed underdog' (Moffitt, 2016; De Cleen, 2017). Such a perspective is particularly suited to the analysis of grassroots mobilisation

as it allows shifting the focus from outsider politicians hunting for votes to protest groups claiming to emancipate ‘the people’ on the streets (Aslanidis, 2017; Volk, 2020).

Methods and material

Typical for qualitative-interpretive research, this chapter’s research strategy is the single case study (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Aronoff and Kubik, 2013). To this aim, it conceptualises PEGIDA as a case of far-right street protest in post-communist CEE. Since 2014, this small-scale protest group around leader Lutz Bachmann organises about fortnightly demonstrations in Dresden’s historical centre where it mobilised a record number of 25,000 protesters in 2015 (Vorländer et al., 2018: 5) and up to 3,000 participants during my fieldwork period in 2019/20. Its average supporters are male, middle-aged and non-religious members of the working population of Dresden and surroundings (Vorländer et al., 2018: 73–98). While PEGIDA claims to be ‘patriotic’, scholars define its ideology as a combination of populist, radical and extremist elements and thus exemplary for far-right actors in contemporary Europe (Druxes and Simpson, 2016; Virchow, 2016; Vorländer et al., 2018; Kocyba, 2020; Volk and Weisskircher, 2023). By the end of the 2010s, PEGIDA had firmly embedded itself in the European far-right social movement (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2019). The demonstrations, especially the ritualistic anniversary events, provided networking opportunities for the broader far-right scene, including representatives from the party Alternative for Germany (AfD), the youth organisation Generation Identity, the so-called Institute for State Policy think-tank or ‘alternative’ news outlets like *Compact* magazine and Politically Incorrect News (PI News).

As a major reference point within the network, PEGIDA represents a pertinent example for understanding the politics of memory by most far-right actors from eastern Germany and beyond. In fact, PEGIDA constitutes a ‘critical’ case (Snow, 2013) of populist memory politics: while culture is a crucial element in both street and online activism (Coury, 2016; Druxes, 2016; Richardson-Little and Merrill, 2020; Volk, 2020), the group is set within the ‘unified’ memory regime of reunited Germany, which provides little room for mnemonic manoeuvre by oppositional actors (Art, 2014). Yet, PEGIDA drives and benefits from a dynamic discursive context in eastern Germany: in conjunction with AfD, it has contributed to the normalisation of far-right meaning-making and thus co-constituted new

discursive opportunity structures for anti-establishment actors on the right of the political spectrum (Rensmann, 2019; Yoder, 2020).

Out of the toolkit of qualitative-interpretive methodologies (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012), I adopt an ethnographic approach to data generation. As the 'prime method' to gain insight into political culture (Aronoff and Kubik, 2013), such an approach promises new insights into the production of meaning in action and the symbolic dimensions of protest (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014; Brodtkin, 2017). Aiming to analyse memory politics from the 'native's point of view' (Geertz, 1973), I draw from ethnographic fieldwork in protest events and web-based research of online activism. Specifically, I conducted participant observation of more than ten demonstrations, using both immediate and mediated techniques of recording such as filming, photographing, jotting and preparing detailed fieldnotes. My physical fieldwork took place in Dresden in autumn and winter 2019/20 and thus comprised a few outstanding internal events, such as PEGIDA's five-year anniversary on 20 October 2019 and the 200th demonstration on 17 February 2020 as well as relevant external events such as the Saxon state elections on 1 September 2019, the adoption of a motion on a so-called Nazi emergency by the city council on 30 October 2019, the Thuringian government crisis in February 2020 and the declaration of an AfD party faction as 'right-wing extremist' by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in March 2020. During and beyond this time frame, I systematically archived contents on PEGIDA's website, YouTube and Telegram channel(s) that provided information about protest activities. Drawing from YouTube, I moreover archived videos of entire demonstrations that PEGIDA livestreamed.

In the following, I treat semiotic strategies as specifically discursive ones (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014). Firstly, I explore the collective action frames that PEGIDA constructs via the strategic display of historical symbolism in public, namely so-called master, diagnostic and prognostic frames (Snow, 2004). Secondly, drawing from the discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009), I examine how PEGIDA references certain instances and understandings of the past to depict far-right activism as a 'democratic' in-group and the political establishment, counter-demonstrators and Islam and Muslims as 'totalitarian' out-groups. Highlighting the agency of movements rather than structural conditions, my cultural approach promises to shed light on mobilisation beyond political opportunity structures and resources (Goodwin et al., 1999). The focus on collective action framing is particularly suited to studying grassroots mobilisation (Lindekilde, 2014;

Aslanidis, 2020), while the emphasis on group construction in critical discourse analyses acknowledges populism's antagonistic logic.

PEGIDA's memory politics in post-communist Dresden

At a rally taking place on Dresden's *Neumarkt* between the historically reconstructed *Frauenkirche* and the feet of the larger-than-life statue of church reformer Martin Luther on 20 January 2020, a demonstrator carried a makeshift placard displaying a quote ascribed to the resistance fighter, novelist and French statesman André Malraux: 'Those who want to read in the future must browse the past.'

Indeed, 'browsing the past' is at the core of PEGIDA's cultural strategies, as activists cite various instances and periods of local, national and European history. Unexpectedly, however, my ethnographic observations of demonstrations and rallies reveal that activists did not deploy historical symbolism typical for far-right movements such as torches, the swastika or Germanic symbols (Schuppener, 2016; Eckersley, 2020; Korhonen, 2020). Rather, historical references to democratic and resistance forces, also against Nazism, dominated the protests. Within my corpus generated in the field and online in 2019/20, the most frequent citations include the following historical periods and actors: firstly, the so-called Peaceful Revolution in East Germany in 1989/90, which contributed to the demise of the GDR's communist regime; secondly, the conservative resistance circles around Hitler attacker Claus von Stauffenberg; thirdly, the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in connection with the Catholic monk and church reformer Martin Luther; and fourthly, references to German and European intellectual history writ large.

PEGIDA's selection of historical references is congruent, at least partially, with the 'official', state-sponsored politics of memory and discursively embedded in the regional context. Indeed, the citations do not only evoke some of the more enthusiastically remembered actors and periods in German twentieth-century history such as the antifascist resistance and the Peaceful Revolution. Also, they resonate with local political culture due to their connection with the regional context of the state of Saxony of which Dresden is the capital (Rensmann, 2017; Göppfarth, 2021). For instance, the 1989 Peaceful Revolution took off in the Saxon city of Leipzig with the weekly 'Monday Demonstrations' and reached Dresden in October 1989. Church reformer Martin Luther lived in what is today eastern Germany, and Saxony was the first kingdom to

officially adopt Protestantism. Both realms of memory are represented in the public space of Dresden, including a statue of Martin Luther on *Neumarkt*, the heart of the reconstructed city centre, and a 'revolutionary path' on *Pragerstraße* which connects the Central Station, where protests erupted in 1989, with the historical nucleus.

The master frame of 'democratic resistance against leftist dictatorship'

'We welcome all patriots here in Dresden, the capital of resistance!' proclaimed protest leader Wolfgang Taufkirch at the beginning of each demonstration in 2019/20. During the events, the crowd repeatedly chanted 'Resistance, resistance (*Widerstand*)', for instance in response to Lutz Bachmann's rejection of censuring his speech at the 2019 Christmas rally, taking place on *Theaterplatz* close to the reconstructed *Semperoper*. In line with these observations, PEGIDA's core semiotic strategy consists of deploying a populist collective action frame based on the notion of 'democratic resistance against dictatorship'. This 'master frame', that is, a generic, inclusive collective action frame which resonates with social movement activists and organisations more broadly (Jasper, 1997: 75), construes meaningful interpretations of German politicians and representative institutions and activism itself. Notably, demonstrators understand the protest events as instances of democratic resistance against the political regime that they see as dictatorial, rooted in the 'right to resist' as included in the Basic Law, Germany's constitution.

Historical references, displayed in language and image at demonstrations as well as online, are the main discursive tool to articulate this master frame. A post published on the website www.pegida.de on the anniversary of the so-called Fall of the Berlin Wall in 2017 poignantly illustrates how activists mobilise East Germany's recent revolutionary history to give meaning to contemporary politics and actors:

In 2014, a resistance movement grew again in eastern Germany – in Dresden. For three years already, it has been critical of the government and Islam, and it opposes a government that, as in times of the GDR, constantly makes decisions against the majority of the people. The Merkel-regime has appropriated the socialist structures of that period, the German people have to be submissive toward the authorities, including in the voting booth. This form of politics has worked for twelve years, the people have diligently financed two expensive and unnecessary financial crises as well as the exit

from nuclear energy. Yet, we opt out of the ‘refugee crisis’, which threatens our economy, our culture, and our future! PEGIDA goes ahead in these times and, just like 28 years ago, it looks like a regime will be toppled for the second time within one generation. We are the people!

As exemplified in this excerpt, activists evoke the past to articulate a historically rooted narrative constructed according to the antagonistic logic of populist discourse, featuring the resistance of a structurally disempowered but righteous social group against overpowering and totalitarian authorities. Apart from the many references to peaceful revolutionaries toppling the GDR regime, PEGIDA’s discourse also alludes to antifascist martyrs versus the Nazi regime of the Third Reich, a monk true to his own conscience and to God versus an absolutist Roman Catholic Church, and a national hero versus imperialist Frenchmen.

Specifically, the diagnostic frame purports that contemporary Germany has ceased to be a liberal democracy and resembles an authoritarian, even dictatorial regime lacking fundamental democratic rights, such as freedom of conscience. Activists base this conclusion on historical comparisons of the current political system with regimes such as the Nazi Third Reich or the GDR. At the demonstration celebrating the 200th protest event, taking place on Dresden’s picturesque *Neumarkt* on 17 February 2020 and thus in the context of the Thuringian government crisis, during which the newly elected regional governor was pressured to step down after it became clear that AfD votes had lifted him into office, leading activist Lutz Bachmann proclaimed that ‘The GDR has come back indeed!’ As I noted down in my fieldwork diary, Bachmann argued that the domestic security service was a contemporary equivalent to the infamous secret police organisations of both GDR (*‘Stasi’*) and Nazi Germany: ‘The best example [for the return of the GDR] is the contemporary observation of several democratically elected parliamentarians by this *Stasi* 2.0, called *Verfassungsschutz*. Again, so-called personal records are compiled. All of this happened already twice in German history, but obviously nobody has learned anything.’ The comparison of the political systems of reunited Germany with GDR and Third Reich generates an alarming diagnostic frame of crisis, a discursive move typical of populist politics (Moffitt, 2015). In speeches and online, PEGIDA suggests that ‘Germany is in decline’ due to political mismanagement, immigration and social change. Activists refer to German intellectual history to flesh out the claims of their diagnosis, most importantly by mobilising the notion of the declining ‘Christian West’ or ‘Occident’ (*Abendland*),

for instance in the organisation's name. Originating in Catholic, conservative circles, the *Abendland* as a cultural-political concept for Europe constitutes an important tenet of contemporary German-language far-right crisis narratives (Volk, 2022a). It is regarded to be in decline at least since Oswald Spengler's (1922) publication *The Decline of the Occident*.

Beyond the rhetoric of crisis, activists construct a hopeful prognostic frame based on historical citations. For instance, in the demonstrations in 2019/20, a large placard carried by regulars featured an anti-Napoleonic poem ascribed to Theodor Körner, a nineteenth-century poet and German national resistance hero born in Dresden: 'Still you are sitting on top, you coward creatures, // paid by the enemy and mocked by the people. // One day justice will reign, // then the people will judge and may God be merciful on you.' In line with the idea of final justice in this poem, leading activists declare that 'PEGIDA came to stay. We stay in order to win. And we will win!' towards the closing of each demonstration. As exemplified in the website entry displayed at the beginning of this section, references to the Peaceful Revolution inform the prognosis of 'victory' (Göpffarth, 2021), suggesting a reading of the 1989 demonstrations as the causal factor for the demise of the GDR. Due to their regular presence on the squares and streets of Dresden on Monday evenings, demonstrators believe to be initiating a system change 'just like in 1989'.

A democratic in-group versus totalitarian out-groups?

Critical discourse analysis provides further insights into how the articulation of antagonistic societal groups sustains PEGIDA's collective action framing (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009; Lindekilde, 2014). Cultural strategies relate to the discursive division of society into an in-group, that is, the allegedly 'democratic' far-right scene, in opposition to several 'non-democratic' out-group(s), including the 'leftist-totalitarian' establishment, the 'green-fascist' counter-demonstrators and 'extremist' Muslims. At each event, demonstrators performed PEGIDA's self-identification as heirs of historical freedom fighters by displaying historical symbolism evoking past resistance actors on placards, banners and flags. At the same time, they fashioned themselves as a precursor of a European or even global movement rebelling against the political establishment. At anniversary events like the one in February 2020, guest speakers such as the Thuringian AfD leader Björn Höcke congratulated PEGIDA for its role within the far-right movement and German revolutionary history: 'You continue to write the German history of freedom, the good part of the German past!'

Again, allusions to 1989 serve to discursively construct the in-group as an heir to German and international democracy and peace movements as well as ‘nonviolent resistance’ forces (Volk and Weisskircher, 2023). Activists ostentatiously cite 1989: not only do demonstrators chant the famous revolutionary slogan ‘*Wir sind das Volk*’ (‘We are the people’) and display it on placards and German national flags which they wave in the air in response to the speeches on stage. Also, since 2014 most demonstrations take place on Monday evenings, borrowing from the so-called Monday Demonstrations which were one of the carriers of the East German transformation. The leading activists’ depiction of PEGIDA and other far-right players as a ‘civil’ or ‘civilian’ movement (*Bürgerbewegung*) is strongly rooted in the discourse on civilian protest in Central Europe of the late 1980s.

PEGIDA generates political meaning mostly by staging protest performances on the streets and squares of Dresden. During my fieldwork, events most often took place at symbolic places in the city centre such as the site of the *Frauenkirche* and Dresden’s Central Station, which symbolise the East German peace movement of the 1980s and the idea of ‘peaceful revolution’, respectively (Widera, 2020). In line with the customary meaning of these strategic locations, demonstrators brought placards and flags which displayed peace symbolism such as white doves and the slogan ‘Swords into ploughshares’. Leading activists repeatedly emphasised the ‘peaceful’ character of the demonstrations in their speeches; in fact, initially they had named the group ‘Peaceful Europeans’ rather than ‘Patriotic Europeans’ (Vorländer et al., 2018: 4). By raising lighters and mobile phone torches into the evening sky towards the end of demonstrations, the crowd copied the use of candles in peace movements and particularly ritual commemorations of the victims of the 1945 bombings of Dresden that have taken place at the site of the *Frauenkirche* since the early 1980s (Klose, 2020).

Beyond the symbol of 1989, PEGIDA references the German resistance during the Third Reich and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church to procure the image of a structurally inferior, yet valiant and impactful, ‘underdog’ (De Cleen, 2017). One of the key symbols that dominated demonstrations from the very start symbolised resistance as it invoked Claus von Stauffenberg, the leader of the coup against Hitler. It was the so-called Wirmer Flag, a cross in ‘German’ colours, designed as a counter-symbol to the swastika by resistance fighter Josef Wirmer, which has been appropriated by far-right actors (Schlürmann, 2015). In addition, activists appeal to regional myths of resistance against authority by citing the Protestant

Reformation, particularly in connection with church reformer Martin Luther. In 2019/20, demonstrations frequently took place ‘at the Luther-statue’ on Dresden’s *Neumarkt*, suggesting that the larger-than-life Luther watched over the demonstrating crowd like a patron. The 2015 manifesto, the so-called Theses of Dresden (*Dresdner Thesen*), which were still regularly read out at demonstrations in 2019–20, moreover allude to Luther’s reformatory ‘95 theses’. Leader Bachmann’s 2015 Facebook video entitled ‘Like Luther’, showing him as he pins a printout of the ‘Theses of Dresden’ to a church door, references the myth of Luther nailing his 95 theses to a church door in the town of Wittenberg. Luther denounced the practices of the Roman Catholic Church as non-Christian.

The depiction of the political establishment as an out-group, namely as ‘leftist totalitarianism’, is the second dimension of PEGIDA’s collective action frame of ‘democratic resistance against leftist dictatorship’. My ethnographic observations indicate that historical citations are again the key discursive tool to construct the political establishment as a totalitarian, ‘neo-communist’ or ‘neo-socialist’ system. This discursive construction is based on the comparison of the state of democracy in reunited Germany, specifically its government, chancellor, party system and institutions, to the past dictatorships in Germany. Expectedly, activists use symbolism associated with the Peaceful Revolution to strike a direct parallel between the Federal Republic and the GDR. At the 200th event in the context of the Thuringian government crisis, demonstrators visualised this comparison particularly clearly: supported by hand-written placards, they proclaimed ‘Never again German Democratic Republic!’ and ‘No third dictatorship in Germany!’ and critically conflated the respective state acronyms ‘GDR-FRG (DDR-BRD)’. They specifically blamed Germany’s ‘democratic demise’ on its long-term chancellor Angela Merkel. At PEGIDA’s five-year anniversary event on 20 October 2019, a printed placard challenged the Chancellor’s legitimacy by portraying her as the ‘biggest disrupter in history’ and asking ‘when will we finally dispose of her?’ Similarly, in February 2020, a placard showed the politician with a fierce facial expression accompanied by texts such as ‘I decide who will be elected’ and ‘A turning point in 1989? Error!’

Additionally, references to European intellectual and revolutionary history are tenets of PEGIDA’s discourse on what they construe as ‘totalitarian’ elites. In 2019/20, activists quoted a number of German and European intellectuals. Apart from the anti-establishment poem ascribed to Theodor Körner, which was discussed in the previous section, such quotes included George Orwell’s adage that ‘The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it’, suggesting that

the German political establishment had cut back the right to freedom of expression to silence the far-right ‘civil movements’.

The notion of the establishment being specifically *leftist*-totalitarian was built through two discursive strategies. Firstly, activists conflated the contemporary mainstream political parties with the GDR’s ‘Socialist Unity Party of Germany’ (SED). In the aftermath of the regional elections in three eastern German federal states in 2019, when Saxony’s party actors were discussing broad coalitions to form majority governments excluding AfD, PEGIDA speakers denounced them as the ‘New Unity Party of Germany’ or ‘NED’. On placards, images of ‘red socks’, labelled with the acronyms of mainstream parties, visualised their supposed ideological interchangeability. The political context is crucial to understand these references, as the broad coalitions discussed by the party establishment might have involved the cooperation of Christian Democrats and ‘The Left’, the successor party of the GDR socialist party. My fieldnotes attest that, on 17 February 2020, leader Bachmann denounced the party establishment as a leftist ‘New Unity Party’:

Friends, I cannot believe that the self-declared liberators of the GDR, all the bigwigs of the West German parties, who promised us democracy and blooming landscapes ... now want to rebuild a dictatorship, and that they cooperate with those responsible for the wall, injustice, crimes against humanity, and hundredfold murder at the intra-German border and in GDR educational institutions and prisons ... Here we are, nearly 30 years after the German reunification, and we have exactly the same national front, a sect of fat cats, who squeeze money out of the people and are living in the lab of luxury, completely detached from reality.

Secondly, and somewhat unexpectedly for a movement whose ideology is usually classified as far right, PEGIDA evokes the German Nazi past to denounce the Merkel government as *leftist*-totalitarian. Such meaning is based on a controversial reinterpretation of the Third Reich as a left-wing rather than right-wing dictatorship. Leading activist Lutz Bachmann repeatedly justified this reinterpretation online by pointing to the notions of ‘socialism’ and ‘worker’ in the name of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP). For instance, he contended that “‘socialists’ have pushed Germany into an abyss already twice’ (Telegram tweet from 27 February 2020) and compared Antifa to NSDAP: ‘after all they are socialists!’ Placards carried by

demonstrators display similar meanings; for instance, at a demonstration on 20 January 2020, I spotted a placard that rhymed ‘Hitler was a leftist stinker (*linker Stinker*)’.

The reinterpretation of National Socialism also informs PEGIDA’s construction of a second out-group, namely the counter-demonstrators. Speakers repeatedly vilified the mainly Antifa-related and pro-migrant activists as ‘leftist-green fascists’. On 4 November 2019, a few days after Dresden’s city council adopted the controversial ‘Nazi emergency’ motion, Bachmann referred to them as the ‘storm detachment of the socialists’, thus evoking the Nazi paramilitary organisation *Sturmabteilung* (SA). A powerful visual tool was the re-erection of a symbolic so-called anti-fascist barrier, the GDR’s official designation of the intra-German border, and the ironic reinterpretation of its meaning: at special events such as anniversaries, when both PEGIDA and the counter-demonstrators mobilised larger crowds, leading activists ‘shielded’ their supporters with a vast piece of cloth in the colours of the German flag. Appropriating GDR propaganda, organisers jokingly referred to the fabric as an ‘anti-fascist barrier’ and proclaimed that the ‘fascists’ are outside of it, namely on the side of the counter-demonstrators.

Finally, PEGIDA’s collective action framing excludes another group from the ‘democratic people’, namely Muslims. Also in this context, activists drew on the past, especially European intellectual history, to portray Muslims as extremist and non-democratic. For instance, at the five-year anniversary event on 20 October 2019, guest speaker Michael Stürzenberger, the editor of the online platform PI News, quoted Martin Luther’s 1529 book *On War against the Turk* to depict Muslims as violent. My photographs of the scene record the key slogan: ‘Islam did not get so far with sermons and marvels, but with the sword and murders.’ With Luther being commemorated as an intellectual authority in the region and beyond, a reference to his writings served to increase the weight and credibility of the proposition. Even more unexpectedly, Stürzenberger went on quoting Karl Marx to denounce Muslims as inherently dissentious and quarrelsome: ‘Islam creates a state of permanent enmity between Muslims and non-believers.’ This quote points to the trend among the German-speaking far right to consume left-wing literature for strategic reasons (for example, Kaiser, 2019). Also, based on my observations, Stürzenberger directed this specific quote to the counter-demonstrators, mocking them as uneducated: ‘He knew more than you 160 years ago! Wake up, use your brain – if you have one – and fight the political state!’

Populism and memory in far-right street activism

Designed as a contribution to cultural approaches to populism and the far right in CEE, my analysis of a ‘critical’ case of memory politics in eastern German far-right street activism sheds new light on the complex entanglements of memory, populism and far-right mobilisation. To begin with, my case study of PEGIDA adds nuanced insights into the relationship between different ideational and discursive elements in the populist discourse of the far right: while the antagonistic logic of populism accounts for how PEGIDA arranges seemingly random historical references into the consistent master frame of ‘resistance against dictatorship’, the inequality doctrine of far-right ideology explains the construction of an in-group and out-groups. Crucially, far-right ideology informs PEGIDA’s memory politics with regard to the symbolism deployed to suggest a questionable historical continuity of ‘leftist fascism’ from the supposedly left-wing dictator Adolf Hitler, through the GDR-style communism to the contemporary government, but also leftist counter-demonstrators. This mnemonic strategy can be classified as promoting ‘fake history’ typical in the context of grassroots actors (Couperus and Tortola, 2019). In this perspective, the reinterpretation of National Socialism as a leftist dictatorship is an instance of fake history which seeks to integrate Germany’s dark past into a coherent memory narrative of a constant societal struggle against ‘the Left’.

My ethnographic dataset also provides insights into how the populist collective action frame dovetails with far-right ideology in PEGIDA’s protest performances. For instance, the populist slogan of ‘We are the people’ takes a nationalist turn because PEGIDA demonstrators often displayed it on German national flags. This strategy ‘thickened’ (Kotwas and Kubik, 2019) the populist claim by defining the empty signifier of ‘the people’ as ‘German nation’ that, in PEGIDA’s nativist and anti-leftist reading, did not include Muslims and counter-demonstrators. Also, most of the time, in 2019/20 PEGIDA did not draw from the memory of just *any* past resistance movement but carefully avoided referring to left-wing resistance actors, for instance the German workers’ movement, the student revolts of 1968 or the various waves of ecological mobilisation. In turn, references to left-wing ideology, including GDR propaganda and Marxist writings, remained scarce and mostly ironic. For instance, PEGIDA reinterpreted the GDR propagandistic speech of the ‘antifascist protection barrier’ to mock the establishment and counter-demonstrators.

Secondly, my interpretive approach to politics, and especially my frame-analytical approach to populism, allow me to illuminate the constitutive role of memory politics for the far right. My analysis suggests that uses of the past are constitutive of protest collective actors, helping to account for the emergence and persistence of protest as such. According to my ethnographic dataset, PEGIDA's memory politics clearly exceed practical matters of protest organisation and the demonstration aesthetics: rather, activists deploy memory narratives in strategic ways, namely as a powerful semiotic tool to give meaning to protest which is thus placed in an imagined tradition of anti-establishment and pro-democratic revolts in regional, national and transnational history. Hence, while my results partially confirm previous scholarship, which posits that 1989 plays a role in both individual and collective identity constructions (Geiges et al., 2015), I challenge the idea that PEGIDA's mnemonic references are only habitual political 'folklore' (Weiß, 2017: 153; see also Geiges et al., 2015: 117) or merely a deliberate legitimisation strategy (Richardson-Little and Merrill, 2020).

In line with Thompson's assertion that 'When arranged in deliberate sequences and incorporated into broader mobilisation frameworks, historical citations ... can prompt constituencies to assume responsibility for history itself' (2020: 545), my findings indicate that strategic historical references serve to constitute a political community. Political actors may mobilise memory as a semiotic tool to define socio-political reality in such a way that public protest appears to be necessary. The case study of PEGIDA offers a pertinent example as it shows that strategic uses of the past generate the powerful conviction that citizen-induced regime change is possible and convince supporters to protest 'like Luther' or 'like people did in 1989'. This study thus also offers a new explanation for PEGIDA's emergence in Dresden. Indeed, conventional behavioural approaches to political culture (Almond and Verba, 1989) have only limited explanatory power in the context of far-right mobilisation in Dresden: surveys of political attitudes held by the local population and PEGIDA protesters cannot explain the emergence and persistence of protest (Reuband, 2015, 2020).

Finally, PEGIDA proves to be a critical case to demonstrate the link between cultural resources and movement persistence. As PEGIDA has been mobilising for years despite highly unfavourable context conditions, the constitutive value of culture for far-right protest can barely be overstated. In other words, the strategic adoption of available cultural resources, such as memory narratives, is key to explaining

PEGIDA's 'strange survival' since 2014. The group suffered from the lack of sufficient human, organisational and political resources. After the peak in 2014/15, only a handful of activists engaged in organisational tasks and only around 1,500 participants took to the streets on a regular basis. By the early 2020s, PEGIDA also lacked powerful allies, as the local newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung* reported on it only occasionally and mostly negatively, and the established political parties and even the national elites of AfD sought to keep a cordon sanitaire around PEGIDA (Weisskircher and Berntzen, 2019). From March 2020 onwards, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic created another major challenge, forcing PEGIDA to adapt its protest ritual (Volk, 2022b). During these months and years, culture and memory remained PEGIDA's principal resource.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter demonstrates the value of cultural approaches to generate novel and nuanced interpretations of the far right in and beyond post-communist CEE. My study of PEGIDA as a 'critical' case of far-right memory politics sheds light on some of the many ways in which the far right manipulates memory to sustain illiberal and nationalistic political projects, decades after the democratic revolutions in the region.

Crucially, my analysis opens up avenues for further research, calling for a comparative analysis of how and why political actors in post-communist Europe construct politically relevant memories of the transformation period. In line with the notion of a delayed illiberal backlash against the so-called politics of imitation of the 1990s (Krastev and Holmes, 2020), the populist master frame of 'resistance' might resonate with further far-right actors in the region.

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Politics of memory in Orbán's Hungary: the case of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon in 2020

Andrzej Sadecki

Introduction

The popularity of the right-wing Fidesz party in Hungary since the early 2010s has been one of the most discussed political phenomena in CEE. In spite of many controversial moves by the party that generated wide criticism both domestically and internationally, Viktor Orbán's party won a two-third majority in parliament in four consecutive elections in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022. Even though the political playing field since the first victory has been distorted by Fidesz through, among others, the sweeping state capture and ever-increasing control of the media, the hold on power can be partly explained by the fact that the party has retained genuine popularity among Hungarian voters. The voters' support for Fidesz and its illiberal turn has been explained by many factors – domestic and international, cultural and economic. Various authors have sought to explain Fidesz's success with reference to paternalist populism (Enyedi, 2016) or ethnopopulism (Vachudova, 2020), the plebiscitary political leadership (Körösenyi, 2019), the transformation of civil society (Greskovits, 2020), the constraining but also enabling and legitimising role of the EU (Bozóki and Hegedüs, 2018) and, finally, a range of socio-economic factors (Schering, 2020; Scoggins, 2020).

This chapter argues that cultural factors, even if not sufficient to fully explain Fidesz's popularity, are necessary to understand it. Engaging with similar debates about the instrumentalisation of history

in Chapter 4, I examine how collective memory – with a focus on commemorations of the Treaty of Trianon – is employed as a resource to legitimise the power of Hungary’s ruling party. The Treaty confirmed the loss of two thirds of Hungary’s territory in 1920 and is commonly seen as the biggest tragedy in the nation’s history. The public approach to it has evolved throughout the past century: from the irredentism in the interwar period, through tabooisation under communist dictatorship to semi-private/semi-public commemorations in post-1989 democratic Hungary. Since the 2010 landslide win of Fidesz, presented by the party to the public as legitimation for the deep changes it planned to make, including the adoption of a new constitution, the approach to Trianon has also changed. The Treaty has been granted a much more prominent place in the official memory policy and the ruling party has tried to tap into the well of emotions that this event still evokes in the collective memory of Hungarians. This, however, did not mean that the Orbán government has resurrected in its entirety the interwar discourse on Trianon. The post-2010 official memory policies have been characterised by an eclectic, ambivalent, at times contradictory discourse on Trianon, combining historical grievance with a sense of pride and mixing irredentist allusions with rhetoric of respect of interstate borders and good neighbourly relations.

The chapter explores, therefore, the ways in which the memory of Trianon has been shaped in Orbán’s Hungary and how it was employed to legitimise Fidesz’s rule. It focuses on the centenary of the Treaty in 2020, as this is the moment when attention on the historical event was intensified and the engagement of state institutions in commemorative practices was particularly strong. The chapter begins by sketching the theoretical assumptions about the politics of memory, placing the Hungarian case in a wider (Central and East) European context, and delimiting what empirical material is used for the analysis. Secondly, it overviews the importance of this topic for Hungarian society through a brief historical survey of the event itself and how the memory of it has evolved over the past 100 years. Thirdly, it offers a brief account of the approach of Fidesz to the Treaty. Fourthly, the chapter presents the analysis of the various official memory policies during the Trianon commemorations and identifies the main narratives around them. Finally, it ends with conclusions on the uses of the past by the Orbán government and the role of cultural factors in understanding its popularity. It also sets out the possible consequences of the current memory policies in Hungary.

The politics of collective memory

Collective memory is a valuable source for legitimising political power. Political actors manipulate or instrumentalise the collective representations of the past in order to legitimise their power and attract voters. This chapter focuses on the agency of the state in shaping the discourse about the past, while acknowledging that political actors are not the only mnemonic actors (other actors in the public sphere such as the opposition parties or the NGOs which also advocate specific interpretations of the past) and that they are not completely free in this enterprise (Olick and Levy, 1997). They have to take into account that ‘each audience cultivates a certain vision of the past that it considers valid’ (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014: 9). The politicians – in this case acting as mnemonic actors or entrepreneurs – calibrate their discourses about the past so they are both credible to the public and serve their political interests. Mnemonic actors themselves have their own views on the past, and collective memory both constrains and enables policies (Müller, 2002). Nevertheless, this chapter does not look at how the historical developments impact the present – for instance, how the past creates cognitive frames for political elites or how societies are prone to accept certain policies or narratives due to specific experiences in the past. It follows a moderately instrumentalist approach, focusing on the ways in which political actors make use of the past for their own political ends, while taking into account the context and limits set by the audience they address.

In the countries of CEE, debates about the past could not develop freely under the communist dictatorships and so became particularly intense after the democratic transition (Pakier and Wawrzyniak, 2013). Moreover, the sudden regime change brought with it the reformulation of collective identities and a change in the ways in which power is legitimised. The ‘new’ democracies have therefore been particularly exposed to ‘turbulent mnemonic politics’ (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014). The ‘frozen’ perceptions of grievances or injustice resurfaced and have been employed and often reinforced for political aims mainly by right-wing parties, while the left and liberals often neglected the fields of memory and national identity. While Hungary shares many characteristics with other countries of the region, its memory culture has some distinctive features: apart from dealing with the memory of the Holocaust and communism – the defining issues in all (Central and East) European countries – Hungary has additionally struggled with

the difficult memory of losing the larger part of the country's territory. Moreover, the memory of Trianon sets Hungary apart from most CEE countries; while in 2018 most countries of the region celebrated the centenary of their independence (Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) or unification (Romania), Hungary was preparing for the centenary of what has been often seen as the biggest tragedy in the nation's past.

The chapter is based on the analysis of various manifestations of official memory policies. It explores the official communication by the government and parliament, including declarations, press releases and announcements by major officials. As the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, holds a central position in Hungarian politics, particular attention is paid to his discourse. Various other undertakings, sponsored or co-sponsored by the government, such as the exhibitions and media campaigns, are also explored. Significant attention is paid to the National Unity Memorial, a key mnemonic undertaking of the centenary year, sponsored by the government and unveiled together by the president, prime minister and the speaker of the parliament. The empirical material was collected through the observation of the commemorative events and visits to the commemoration sites and exhibitions as well as from online sources, such as official websites and social media profiles.

Treaty of Trianon and its afterlife

The treaty signed in Trianon on 4 June 1920 was one of the series of peace treaties concluded by victorious allied countries with the vanquished central powers, including the successor states of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The Treaty confirmed the loss of lands incurred by Hungary in the turbulent period after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, during which the country went through subsequent political upheavals: the republican revolution, the communist revolution and the conservative counter-revolution, resulting in the restoration of the monarchy (albeit without the king). The loss of two thirds of the territory was particularly painful for Hungary, as it followed the period of an accelerated nation-building and economic modernisation, after the creation of Austria-Hungary in 1867. Although much of the lost lands was predominantly inhabited by other nationalities (only 54 per cent of the pre-war population declared Hungarian as its first language), about three million ethnic Hungarians found themselves outside the state borders (Romsics, 2002). Hungary lost some of the key cultural and industrial centres and was

reduced from a status of 'co-host' of one of the major European empires to an independent but small and isolated state.

Most Hungarians regarded the Treaty as an injustice and humiliation (Zeidler, 2007). There was little space for self-reflection, as the pre-war elite, led by the regent Miklós Horthy, was not interested in critically assessing the Hungarian policies of national assimilation at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which aggravated the minorities. Instead, the regime pointed to the culprits inside the country (particularly the liberal republican and communist politicians) and outside (the great powers or even, in its more radical version, international networks of Jews and Freemasons). The state and various organisations or clubs propagated irredentist ideas through monuments, slogans or songs. Driven by the revisionist agenda, Hungary entered into an alliance with Nazi Germany, which resulted in the temporary recovery of about half of the lost lands in 1938–41. However, after World War II the 'Trianon borders' were almost entirely restored. Consequently, the pre-war territorial revisionism was largely discredited and seen as a failure, while the social trauma around Trianon was reinforced as the lands were again lost with no hope of recovery. Under the communist dictatorship, the issue of Trianon was largely a taboo. It started to change with the liberalisation of the regime from the 1960s, when Hungarian historiography began to deal quite extensively with the topic (Krizmanics, 2020: 102) and both the liberal and conservative oppositions took up the issue of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring states.

In post-1989 democratic Hungary, the state asserted its responsibility for the Hungarian communities abroad and supported their cultural activities, but it strongly rejected any revisionist claims and confirmed the inviolability of borders with the neighbouring countries (Bárdi et al., 2011). The official commemorations of Trianon were kept low profile. The issue of Trianon and revisionist postulates became restricted to the far-right parties, in particular the Hungarian Justice and Life Party and then, to a lesser extent, Jobbik (until its move towards the centre-right in the second half of the 2010s) (Romsics, 2010). The revisionist discourse developed mainly outside the mainstream media, publishing houses or academia. A peculiar historical subculture and a memory industry emerged around Trianon, including in non-academic, amateur historical journals and semi-private museums and sites of memory (Gyáni, 2012). In the 2000s the memory of Trianon became part of the wave of 'neo-nationalism', produced and spread by popular culture, which manifested itself in such cultural phenomena as national rock music (*nemzeti rock*) (Feischmidt, 2014).

The memory of Trianon persists strongly until today. In public debates, the dissolution of the pre-World War I Hungary is often referred to as a collective trauma or neurosis (Kovács, 2016). According to a poll from February 2020, 83 per cent of Hungarians considered the Treaty of Trianon to have been the greatest tragedy in their country's history. However, those surveyed were divided in terms of how to approach the issue today: 54 per cent believed that decisions taken in Trianon should never be accepted (against 41 per cent thinking otherwise) and 46 per cent believed that this issue was no longer relevant today (against 51 per cent).¹ In the survey covering the approach of a number of countries to the lost territories, even if the variations in how the questions were formulated in particular languages might have affected the result, Hungary appeared to have the biggest percentage (63 per cent) of respondents who agreed that 'there are parts of the neighbouring countries that really belong to us'.² A sizable ethnic Hungarian population still lives in the neighbouring countries, amounting to about 2.2 million people (Hungary itself has a population of 9.7 million).

Fidesz's approach to Trianon

Fidesz's approach to Trianon has evolved quite significantly since its establishment in 1988, similarly to the general change of the party's profile throughout the past three decades. Being a party of young, forward-looking liberals right after the first free election in 1990, its members boycotted the minute of silence during the commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the Treaty in parliament. Later, the party underwent a programmatic change with an increasingly conservative profile; however, during the 80th anniversary of Trianon in 2000, the first Orbán government decided to emphasise the celebration of the millennium of Hungarian statehood in the same year instead of commemorating the Treaty, probably in order to avoid antagonising the neighbouring countries. In the 2000s the party again turned in a more nationalist direction and placed greater emphasis on Trianon and its consequences. A turning point seems to be around the 2004 referendum, when Fidesz campaigned in favour of granting dual citizenship to non-resident ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring states, with the ruling left-liberal government arguing against it (Pogonyi, 2011). Since the mid-2000s there has been increased competition for the right-wing nationalist electorate between Fidesz and the far-right Jobbik, promoter of the revisionist agenda.

The transformation of Fidesz's approach to Trianon has been translated into changes in state policies and official discourses after

the assumption of power in 2010. As one of the first decisions after the sweeping election victory, Fidesz announced that 4 June (the anniversary of signing the Treaty of Trianon) would become a day of national remembrance. The narratives of grievance and injustice gained prominence in the official discourse. Nevertheless, the irredentist rhetoric was avoided and the government promoted instead the concept of 'national unity' of all Hungarians in the country and beyond its borders. The focus was, therefore, not on the lost territories but on ethnic Hungarians who remained on the lost territories. This, in turn, had practical consequences for the granting of Hungarian citizenship to the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries (this way Hungary gained about one million new citizens in 2011–20) and awarding them voting rights. They later become an important voting base for Fidesz.

It was, however, not until the centenary of the Treaty that the Orbán government assigned a major role to Trianon in its memory policies. Before, a much bigger emphasis was on other major events from Hungary's past, particularly the 1848 and 1956 revolutions, which are commemorated as national holidays of 15 March and 23 October, respectively, when Orbán regularly gives major, agenda-setting speeches. Significant importance was also assigned to the memory of World War II and the Holocaust, and in this area the government's policies were particularly controversial (Ungváry, 2017). In the years leading up to the centenary, however, the Treaty of Trianon assumed greater prominence in official memory policies: in 2018 the parliament held a special session to commemorate the Treaty, while in 2019 Orbán himself gave a speech commemorating the signing of the Treaty of Trianon on 4 June. Fidesz also wanted to maintain its 'monopoly' over the commemoration of Trianon: it voted down two initiatives by Jobbik to call 2020 the 'Year of Trianon' but ushered its own bill through parliament that pronounced 2020 as the 'Year of National Unity'.³ Although this title did not contain a direct reference to the Treaty, the justification for it emphasised that the year would commemorate the centenary of the 'Trianon peace dictate', as the peace treaty is often called in right-wing narratives. The government also decided to build the first official monument since World War II to commemorate Trianon in Budapest – a large underground ramp with inscriptions of all the pre-Trianon towns and cities of the Kingdom of Hungary, which was unveiled in August 2020. Moreover, the government assigned 10 billion forints to various events during the centenary,⁴ which had to be partly postponed or restructured due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Finally, the parliament held an extraordinary session on 4 June 2020 with speeches by the president and the speaker of the house, while the prime minister delivered two major anniversary speeches on

6 June 2020 in front of the revisionist Trianon memorial in Sátoraljaújhely and on 20 August 2020 on Kussuth Square in Budapest, the latter upon the unveiling of the Trianon memorial.

Trianon centenary: analysis

In the official commemorations of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon, the Fidesz government navigated between various expectations, opportunities and constraints. As demonstrated by the opinion polls quoted earlier, the dissolution of pre-1914 Hungary is seen by the vast majority of Hungarians as the most important and most tragic historical event in the national history, which constitutes a political opportunity. The right-wing and more nationalistically oriented part of the society expected a robust Trianon commemoration, and this is the electorate that Fidesz courts in particular. At the same time, the government was constrained by the fact that territorial revisionism was, as a matter of principle, rejected in the post-World War II order, in particular by the European Union and NATO (Kornprobst, 2008). The neighbouring countries with whom Hungary shares vast economic and political interests were particularly sensitive to any expression of irredentist rhetoric (Sadecki, 2020). Finally, the party itself and its intellectual milieu were not fully unified in their approaches to the memory of Trianon. The framing also had to consider the general memory policies of the government from 2010 onwards, which were based on the idea of defending a strong and independent country from various threats from abroad. The historical defeat of Trianon and the grief and grievance related to it do not necessarily concur with the discourse of a proud and strong country.

Therefore, Fidesz's discourse on Trianon, despite its apparent coherence, has been very eclectic and heterogeneous. The traditional narratives on Trianon have been often reinterpreted and repackaged in various ways. Orbán employs a discursive strategy, which is described sometimes as 'dog whistle' or 'calculated ambivalence' (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). He often alludes to certain topics which are considered taboo in the public sphere but in a way that the message is understandable to his supporters but less so to the broader domestic and foreign audience. For instance, in his speeches during the Trianon centenary, he referred to some slogans using interwar irredentist vocabulary or photographed himself with the map of Greater Hungary in the background but at the same time officially renounced any revisionist claims and promoted the idea of cooperation among CEE states. This way, he

could satisfy his right-wing electorate but avoid major domestic and foreign controversies.

However, narratives directed at different audiences are not always pragmatically calculated and are part of a broader discursive strategy. The lack of a coherent message also stems from the variety of approaches to Trianon within the ruling elite. For instance, there is a significant difference between the narratives propagated by the state-funded Institute of Hungarian Research, which does not shy away from revisionist ideas and a network of institutions supervised by Mária Schmidt, a close advisor of the prime minister, who has a more toned-down approach to the centenary. This is also true of various media outlets linked to Fidesz, which respond to different demands but are also linked with different circles within the party. Nevertheless, the ruling party has always sought to dominate the discourse on the memory of the Treaty and to marginalise other voices. At the special commemorative session of the parliament on 4 June 2020, only the then-head of state János Áder and the president of the parliament László Kövér delivered speeches (both are Fidesz nominees), while representatives of other parties were not given the opportunity to speak.

The official policies did not encourage debate, let alone critical reflection, on Trianon. Although the centenary generated renewed intellectual debates about the Treaty and its legacy, it mostly occurred outside the official, Fidesz-controlled realm. In the academic field, this included, for instance, the project by the Trianon100 Research Group at the Hungarian Academy of Science or the research team at the Institute for Political History, both of which explored new angles in Trianon historiography. Many debates were held in a variety of independent media outlets. However, given the domination of the Fidesz discourse in the public space, these could reach only a small part of Hungarian society.

The systematic analysis of the empirical material allows us to identify three main narratives on Trianon that coexisted within the official memory policies of the Fidesz government. The following part of the chapter examines them in detail and uncovers the eclectic character of Orbán's government framing of the memory of Trianon on its centenary.

Trianon as tragedy, victimhood and injustice

The traditional narrative about the Treaty of Trianon and the loss of territory is centred around the sense of victimhood, grievance and injustice. A term often used in the public discourse about Trianon is one of collective or historical trauma, even if, contrary to most other historical

events defined as a collective trauma, the Treaty did not result in mass violence and loss of human life. The detachment of territories has been seen by some as even a defining feature of Hungarian national identity, captured by a popular slogan: 'A Hungarian is someone who grieves Trianon.'⁵ The Treaty of Trianon is sometimes also inscribed into a larger philosophy of Hungarian history. As Egry observes, in the right-wing narrative the catastrophes of Trianon, the Holocaust and communist rule were presented as the chain of Hungarian victimhood (although the anti-semitic far-right sometimes juxtaposes Trianon and Holocaust, as 'our' versus 'their' experience). In this way, in Hungary 'suffering became the common thread of national history' (Egry, 2020: 128–9).

The framing of Trianon as a tragedy was an important element of Fidesz government's centenary discourse. The memorial unveiled in Budapest for the centenary echoes to a large extent the narrative about the national tragedy. Its very form – the underground stone ramp – suggests an analogy with a tomb or a sepulchre. Putting the memorial below the ground level may signify that we deal with something dead, bygone, below the living. Other elements of the memorial convey even more mortuary symbolism. The tables with names of towns and villages look like commemorative plates of the deceased. The eternal flame placed at the lowest point of the memorial builds on the commemorative message of the memorial. Finally, inside the granite tomb, where the eternal flame is located, is soil from the 64 countries (*vármegye*) of pre-Trianon Hungary.⁶ This, again, contributes to the analogy with the tomb, in which the soil symbolises the ashes of the 'dead body' of Greater Hungary.

The dissolution of 'historic' Hungary is also presented as a unique event of biblical proportions. Viktor Orbán often underlined during the centenary the unprecedented character of the catastrophe that Trianon was: 'the verdict was obviously a death sentence. History has not recorded a nation that could survive such a loss of blood.'⁷ His major speech during the centenary, delivered on 6 June – two days after the exact centenary of the Treaty's signature – took place on the memory site called Hungarian Calvary (*Magyar Kálvária*). It is situated on the top of the hill, overlooking the towns of Sátoraljaújhely and Slovenské Nové Mesto, which constituted a single city before 1920 but is today divided by the Hungarian–Slovak border. On the pathway towards the top of the hill, there are 14 stations indicating the towns lost after World War I.⁸ Orbán consciously chose to commemorate the centenary on the site of the Hungarian *via dolorosa*, a clear reference to popular analogies between the fate of Hungary and the Christian Passion. He actually started his speech with a reference to the Way of Cross and the Hungarian Calvary.

Nevertheless, the tropes of tragedy and victimhood did not dominate the centenary. Instead, the official discourse put even greater emphasis on the idea of the injustice and unfairness of the Treaty. This is reflected in the very term that the government officials and pro-Fidesz media use to describe the 1920 agreement. They most often called it ‘Trianon (peace) dictate’ (*Trianon békediktatum*), which conveys a much more emotionally charged message than the neutral ‘Trianon peace treaty’ (*Trianon békeszerződés*), and stresses that it was imposed on Hungary.

Along these lines, Orbán’s speeches focused more on the sense of injustice and betrayal that is connected to Trianon rather than on trauma and suffering. Already on the 99th anniversary of Trianon, he accused the Western powers of short-sightedness if not hubris: ‘the victors’ decisions were arrogant and they punished entire nations; and they did not sow the seeds of freedom or peace in Europe, but those of renewed enmity, dictatorships and further wars’.⁹ During the centenary he was much more explicit and said that the Western powers dictated the border without considering the will of the people. By doing so,

the West raped the thousand-year-old borders and history of Central Europe. They forced us to live between indefensible borders, deprived us of our natural treasures, separated us from our resources, and made a death row out of our country. Central Europe was redrawn without moral concerns, just as the borders of Africa and the Middle East were redrawn. We will never forget that they did this. And when we thought that neither the arrogant French and British nor the hypocritical American empire could sink deeper than this, they could still do so. After World War II we were thrown to the Communists without heartache. The reward of the Poles, the Czechs and the Slovaks was the same as our punishment. May this be an eternal lesson for the peoples of Central Europe!¹⁰

On the one hand, this may be connected to the long pattern in Hungarian thinking on Trianon, which focuses often not so much on the responsibility of nation-states (or their successors) that benefited territorially from the treaty but on the empires (or their successors) that had shaped the post-World War I European order. Like other countries coping with the defeat, as observed by Schivelbusch, the vanquished prefer to focus on being defeated by a large and powerful coalition of states, rather than a single belligerent country (2004). Another narrative connected to this emphasises the ingratitude of European powers to Hungary, which

defended the continent for centuries against various foreign belligerents (the so-called *antemurale* myth). On the other hand, however, Orbán's emphasis on blaming the empires at the Paris Peace Conference is strongly embedded in contemporary politics. In order to counter the criticism coming from other EU countries or the US, the Fidesz government itself embarked upon heavy critique of the West and sought to delegitimise its claims. It often did so by juxtaposing the national Hungarian interests and values against the globalised elites, symbolised by 'Brussels' (Mos, 2020; Csehi and Zgut, 2021). Therefore, the alleged Western betrayal of Hungary in Trianon has been instrumentalised by Orbán's government to justify his current political claims. The 'unfair treatment' of Hungary by the West is presented in the discourse of Fidesz as yet another example of injustice in Hungary's history starting from Trianon, or even earlier.

Trianon as source of strength and perseverance

The official narratives on Trianon during the centenary did not focus only on the traumatic experience of the loss of territories and sense of injustice related to it. Surprisingly, perhaps, emphasis was often put by the Fidesz officials on seeing Trianon and the ensuing period of 100 years as a source of national strength and pride. As Enyedi argues, 'historical grievances vis-a-vis the West have a long tradition in the political and cultural discourse of Eastern Europe' and they have some objective basis (2020). However, as he further contends, one of the key innovations of the populist right wingers in CEE was to complement these narratives with a sense of optimism and to insert 'self-confidence into the otherwise gloomy traditional mentality' (2020: 3).

In his first appearance during the Trianon centenary year, Orbán emphasised that one of the key consequences of the Treaty was that the country became isolated and a century later 'the biggest achievement is that we put an end to the 100 years of [that] solitude'.¹¹ He explained that the close cooperation with the Visegrad Group (a regional grouping composed of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia) and with other neighbouring countries, such as Croatia and Serbia, is necessary. Orbán actually cautioned against focusing too much on past antagonisms: 'We should not isolate ourselves but strive to cooperate and build up Central Europe. I hope that the commemorations will not set us back but take us forward on this path. I would like to ask everyone to show a smart restraint in this context.'¹² Somewhat in contrast to the traditional right-wing narratives on Trianon, he advocated for a more forward-looking

approach: 'Historical memory and anniversaries are important, the truth has to be told, but it is not enough to build the future on.'¹³

This idea to move beyond the expression of grief is particularly characteristic of the more moderate circles of Fidesz. In one of their leading outlets, 'the Kommentár', an author advocated that 'each representative of the Hungarian national conservative thinking should not only restore Hungarian self-esteem, but also play an initiating role in the emancipation of Central Europe as a whole'.¹⁴ This does not mean that the official memory policies encourage critical self-reflection about the reasons why Hungary lost the territory or the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the contrary, these critical reflections are suppressed and the historians that examine them are often vilified in the pro-government press.

Even the 'Trianon' memorial in Budapest, despite its grave-like form, can be seen in a more optimistic, forward-looking light. Such an interpretation is actually suggested by the authors of the memorial. As the architect in charge of the project explained, 'the main idea behind the memorial is not the death of the nation, but its resurrection'.¹⁵ It is designed this way so that the visitor first descends into the 'tomb of historical Hungary', then circles around the granite structure in the darkness with the eternal flame at its lowest point, before going back up to see the light again and finally appreciating the emerging contours of the monumental building of the parliament.

A somewhat similar reading, with future-oriented overtones, was put forward by Orbán in his speech delivered upon the unveiling of the memorial. He emphasised the uniqueness of the Hungarian nation, which, in spite of everything, managed to survive: 'There is no other nation in the world that could have endured such a period of one hundred years',¹⁶ echoing the polemics of the Herderian prophecy of the death of the Hungarian nation (*nemzethalál*). He also alluded to the idea that the centenary can be understood as a closure and new beginning, by announcing 'the end of the one hundred years of Hungarian solitude brought about by Trianon'.

Orbán put emphasis on the success of 'rebuilding' the country after Trianon and the vision of future greatness, of which his government should be taking credit. As he underlined on 6 June:

Let us look at the history of the past hundred years. Let us understand the depth of change of the last ten years. Let us not be afraid of what we see: we are the ones we have been waiting for. Yes, we

are the ones who are reversing the fate of Hungary. ... Great times are ahead of you. Get ready and prepare every day.¹⁷

This, in turn, is connected with another legacy of Trianon, namely the sense of loss of the imperial status and the fiasco of Hungarian efforts to create a modern nation-state before World War I. Along these lines, Orbán implies that the government works to restore the past greatness and heal old wounds.

The main way to 'overcome' the legacy of Trianon is in Fidesz's approach to reintegrate the nation divided by the contemporary borders. This thinking is reflected in the declaration adopted by the parliament on 4 June 2020, which focused on Hungarian minority issues and the idea of the unity of the Hungarian nation beyond its borders.¹⁸ According to official narratives, the 'virtual' reintegration of the nation became proof of the vitality of the Hungarian nation and its unique perseverance. As Orbán said on a number of occasions: 'Only the state has borders, the nation does not.' Thus, it is possible to reintegrate the nation without territorial revision. This narrative became visible in state-sponsored short videos that were launched on television and in online media on the occasion of the Trianon centenary. They concretise the abstract idea of national unity and reunification in its human dimension by showing Hungarian families from various towns in the neighbouring countries reuniting with their relatives in Hungary.¹⁹ In this sense, the emphasis is on the success of the effective reintegration of the Hungarian people, a form of 'remedy' to the legacy of the Treaty. Consequently, as the narrative suggests, the territorial loss is no longer relevant and Hungarians can cherish again the unity that was once lost.

Trianon as a call for revision or reconciliation?

Along with a somewhat innovative approach to Trianon's legacy, referred in the previous section, the centenary prompted a revival of far-right narratives on Trianon including official references to irredentist slogans and symbols, originating from the interwar period. However, the calls for reconciliation with the past tragedy and the neighbouring nations were also part of the official discourse, intertwined with the revisionist rhetoric. In the speeches of Viktor Orbán the references to revisionism were recognisable, although usually expressed not in a straightforward manner. For instance, the Hungarian prime minister ended his meditations about Trianon in his yearly 'state of the nation' speech by

saying: 'I believe in one homeland', which is a quote from an interwar irredentist prayer 'Hungarian Credo'.²⁰ On many occasions state officials, including Orbán, appeared with the map or contours of the so-called Greater Hungary, a clear reminder of the interwar revisionism. For example, referring to the final history exams in high schools in May 2020, Orbán posted a picture from his cabinet, with a globe on which Greater Hungary is in a central position.²¹

In his speeches, Orbán called for close cooperation with neighbouring nations but also talked about national greatness, tectonic shifts in the world, an emerging new order and so on, as if the chance to restore Greater Hungary was re-emerging. These suggestions are visible in an often-employed slogan in his speeches that 'the future is written in Hungarian'. Referring to future greatness on the occasion of the Trianon centenary can have, for many, a double meaning. Although it does not contain a direct revisionist programme, it leaves enough space for speculation about regaining the once lost lands in the future. Similar tropes can be identified in the speech delivered by Orbán on 6 June 2020 at the Magyar Kalvária: 'We can hope that our generation, the fourth generation after Trianon, can fulfil our mission and take Hungary all the way to the gates of victory.'

Some revisionist elements can also be identified at the new 'Trianon memorial' in Budapest. Although it is named a Memorial of National Unity, along with the official emphasis on national reintegration, its interpretation of the legacy of Trianon departs from the human dimension and focuses more on the space- or geography-oriented aspect of that unity. It refers not to the co-nationals that remained on the detached territories but to very concrete places in that it includes about 1,200 names of cities, towns or localities, currently located both in Hungary and in its neighbouring states. As some even argued, the memorial showed that 'Orbán's regime brings its thus-far backhanded flirtation with irredentist fantasies out into the open' (Berecz, 2021).

Before and during the centenary, the irredentist activists came out from the margins of the public discourse, often thanks to the support of the public institutions and pro-government media. The most instructive is the case of Ernő Raffay, a former politician and historian who is a leading revisionist intellectual, who calls for the revision of the borders and is also known for his antisemitic pronouncements. Not only was he invited to give interviews to the pro-government media but he was also employed by a state-funded institution and received a state award from the president in 2020.²² The media outlets linked to Fidesz, such

as the daily leading Magyar Nemzet, also gave space to various conspiracy theories about Trianon, such as the one about the leading role of Freemasonry in the event.

The state-sponsored cultural institutions prepared several events for the Trianon centenary that also contain revisionist tropes. The National Museum in the beginning of the centenary year hosted an exhibition that glorified the period of 1938–40, during which Hungary, which had become increasingly authoritarian and was in alliance with Nazi Germany, regained half of the lands lost in Trianon.²³ A similar narrative was presented by the Trianon Rock Opera, a musical under the patronage of the deputy prime minister, a large open-air show staged on Heroes' Square in Budapest in 2018 and screened during the centenary on public television. It presented the short-lived regaining of the lands as practically the only successful period of Hungarian history in the twentieth century.²⁴

The most outwardly revisionist events were organised, however, outside the scope of state supervision. This included, in particular, the demonstrations by irredentist and extreme-right organisations marking the exact 100-year anniversary of the signing of the treaty. On 5 June 2020 the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (the name refers to the number of counties in pre-Trianon Hungary) organised a march with torches through central Budapest. The participants were chanting several irredentist slogans, such as 'Down with Trianon' (*Vesszen Trianon*), 'Everything back' (*Minden vissza*) and 'Transylvania will be Hungary again' (*Lesz még Erdély Magyarországé*). They held plaques with names of all 64 counties and numerous banners with the map of Greater Hungary. A few revisionist organisations collected signatures in support of a motion to annul the Treaty of Trianon. The leader of a far-right party Our Homeland (*Mi Hazánk*), a splinter group of Jobbik, proposed that the Hungarian parliament should cancel the bill ratifying the treaty, adopted in 1921. Many from the revisionist circles criticised the government for abandoning the national cause.

The presence of irredentist rhetoric and symbolism was noticed by the neighbouring countries and generated criticism in Romania in particular, which has the largest Hungarian minority and whose relations with Budapest had deteriorated in recent years, but also in other countries. Hungary tried to counter these accusations by emphasising the commitment to Central European cooperation. In the weeks before the centenary, Hungary's Minister for Foreign Affairs met with his counterparts from Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine, that is, the countries with the largest Hungarian populations. By the end of the centenary year, he emphasised that 'Hungary is working on deepening the

relations with most of the countries that were formerly hostile, but now are allied.²⁵ This illustrates well the opportunistic approach by Fidesz to the memory of Trianon, consciously employing various narratives depending on the audience and interests on a given occasion.

Conclusions

As a prominent Hungarian historian and public intellectual put it, the problem with Trianon for Hungarian society is that it can 'neither accept it, nor not accept it ... neither swallow it, nor spit it out'.²⁶ A hundred years after the Treaty, although most Hungarians see it as a historical tragedy, there is no consensus on how to approach it today, with attitudes varying from revisionism through accommodation to lack of interest. The populist government of Viktor Orbán was the first since World War II to place such a significant emphasis on the issue in its public policies. By doing so, Orbán could demonstrate to the public his initiative and decisiveness and show a clear sense of direction, no matter how eclectic the message turned out to be. The use of national symbols and historical references, however reformulated and repackaged in order to become more acceptable and fit the contemporary demands, became a ubiquitous element of Orbán's governmental memory policies. It contributes to his popularity and the legitimacy of Fidesz rule.

As the chapter demonstrates, the populist government does not simply adopt the nationalist narratives of the past but employs them in the form adjusted to various present interests. The official discourse on Trianon did not follow in full any of the old patterns originating in the interwar period and propagated by the nationalist circles. Instead, the Orbán government's approach to the memory of the Treaty remained more of a patchwork, including some traditional sentiments of victimhood and injustice, revisionist rhetoric and a sense of national strength and perseverance. The discourses about Trianon were calibrated to the visions of the past cultivated by various groups in society but also adjusted to the government's present-day interests. The resentments towards the neighbouring nations were toned down in the name of Central European cooperation, promoted by the current Hungarian government as a counterweight to the West. The sense of victimhood and injustice was directed towards the Western countries or institutions of the EU, often sliding into conspiracy theories. Here, constructing analogies about the West's alleged hostility towards Hungary then and now became common practice. In terms of revisionist messages, they were usually presented in

indirect forms, and the human aspect, rather than territorial, of the idea of national unity beyond state borders dominated.

It is yet unclear what long-term consequences these eclectic and at times contradictory memory policies around Trianon will bring. On the one hand, one can argue that the narratives emphasising the strength and perseverance of Hungarians can somewhat transform the gloomy, if not depressing, idiom of Hungarian identity discourse into a more positive and forward-looking direction. On the other hand, Fidesz's decision to place far greater emphasis on the memory of Trianon than its predecessors, coupled with allowing irredentist rhetoric in the public space, might generate unfulfilled expectations in society, which could, in turn, lead to a further radicalisation of Hungarian politics.

Notes

1. Telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,009 respondents. Source: A magyarok viszonyulása a trianoni békeszerződéshez és az ezzel összefüggő kormányzati politikához, 4 March 2020, <https://publicus.hu/blog/a-magyarok-viszonyulasa-a-trianoni-bekeszerzodeshez-es-az-ezzel-osszefuggo-kormanyzati-politikahoz/>.
2. Europeans divided over whether parts of neighbouring countries belong to them, Pew Research, 6 November 2019, www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/09/nato-seen-favorably-across-member-states/pg_2020-02-09_nato_0-18/.
3. 18/2019. (VI. 18.) OGY határozat a 2020. év nemzeti összetartozás évének nyilvánításáról, 18 June 2019, <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A19H0018.OGY>.
4. A Kormány 1064/2020. (II. 28.) Korm. Határozata [in:] Magyar Közlöny 2020. évi 31. Szám, <https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/105b39a01845f852aa09c2079ca4869d636c95cd/megtekintes>.
5. The quote is often falsely attributed to the Hungarian writer Gyula Illyés (1902–83), while it was most probably first used around 2000 by a politician turned activist. More: Magyar az, akinek fáj Trianon – hirtelen felindulásból jött, 8 June 2017, <https://24.hu/tudomany/2017/06/08/magyar-az-akinek-faj-trianon-hirtelen-felindulasbol-jott/>.
6. Curiously, the fact about the soil placed in the stone is not indicated anywhere at the memorial, so the visitors are largely unaware of it. The information about it was revealed in an interview with the Speaker of the Parliament László Kövér, who is considered as one of the main initiators of the memorial. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8VXu22MdyI.
7. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's 'State of the Nation' address, 16 February 2020, www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orban-state-of-the-nation-address-4/.
8. The stations refer to the Christian 'Way of the Cross', depicting Jesus Christ's way to his crucifixion, with 14 stations on the way to Mount Calvary.
9. Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Hungarian Day of National Cohesion, 4 June 2019, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-hungarian-day-of-national-cohesion/>.
10. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's commemoration speech, 6 June 2020, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orban-commemoration-speech/>.
11. Orbán Viktor tartja az év első kormányinfóját, 9 January 2020, https://index.hu/belfold/2020/01/09/orban_viktor_sajtotajekoztato_karmelita_kolostor_orbaninfo/.
12. Orbán Viktor tartja az év első kormányinfóját, 9 January 2020, https://index.hu/belfold/2020/01/09/orban_viktor_sajtotajekoztato_karmelita_kolostor_orbaninfo/.
13. Orbán Viktor tartja az év első kormányinfóját, 9 January 2020, https://index.hu/belfold/2020/01/09/orban_viktor_sajtotajekoztato_karmelita_kolostor_orbaninfo/.

14. Máthé Áron, Tíz Tézis Trianonról, Kommentár 2/2020, <http://kommentar.info.hu/cikk/2020/2/tiz-tezis-trianonrol>.
15. Nem nemzethalál, hanem feltámadás – Wachslér Tamás az Összetartozás Emlék helyéről 10 September 2020, <https://vasarnap.hu/2020/09/10/nem-nemzethalal-feltamadas-wachsler-tamas-az-osszetartozas-emlekhelyerol/>.
16. Address by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the inauguration of the Memorial to National Cohesion 20 August 2020, www.miniszterelnok.hu/address-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-inauguration-of-the-memorial-to-national-cohesion/.
17. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's commemoration speech, 6 June 2020, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-commemoration-speech/>.
18. A Kormány 1322/2020. (VI. 16.) Korm. Határozata [in:] Magyar Közlöny 2020. évi 143. Szám, <https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/b03370b69269d5c572ad3d88e0f786f4fe365d28/megtekintes>.
19. For example, Trianon 100 – Összetartoz(t)unk, összetartozunk! 26 May 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=36E1EuYyZJI.
20. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's 'State of the Nation' address, 16 February 2020, www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-4/.
21. See www.facebook.com/orbanviktor/photos/a.10151703698051093/10158178404511093/?type=3&theater, <https://www.facebook.com/potapiarpad/videos/644629756377274/>.
22. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's commemoration speech, 6 June 2020, <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-commemoration-speech/>.
23. 'Magyar Világ 1938–1940' (Hungarian World 1938–1940). Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (6 December 2019–15 March 2020).
24. Trianon Rockopera, dir. Gábor Koltay, Estrád Színház (watched by the author on 23 June 2018).
25. Szijjártó: Magyarország a szövetségi viszony elmélyítésén dolgozik a környező országokkal, 17 December 2021, www.atv.hu/belfold/20201217-szijasrt-magyarorszag-a-szovetsegi-viszony-elmelyitesen-dolgozik-a-kornyezo-orszagokkal.
26. Ungváry Krisztián Trianonról (Ököpódium, 6 April 2015), www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvjMLDUSERk.

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Fidesz's neo-traditionalist pull factors: the Transylvanian Hungarian minority

Ionut Chiruta

Introduction

Right-wing populists consistently strive to use their version of national history and culture to reshape society in alignment with traditional values for the purpose of gaining electoral advantages. This has been the case in a number of CEE states since their accession to the EU (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014), most notably in Hungary, where the populist Fidesz party has ruled the country since 2010. Since coming to power, it has redrawn the main tenets of Hungarian memory politics (Trencsényi, 2021), instrumentalised economic policies (Varga, 2021; Scoggins, 2022) and promulgated populist narratives (Palonen, 2018; Hegedüs, 2019; Mátyás in this volume) in a bid to replace liberal with illiberal democracy.

Existing literature on Hungarian populism focuses on the ways in which Fidesz has incorporated economic, identity and mnemonic policies to redraw domestic politics and confront European institutions (Ágh, 2016; Pogonyi, 2017; Dąbrowska et al., 2018; Krekó and Enyedi, 2018; Agarín, 2020). By contrast, the aim of this chapter is to contribute towards an understanding of Fidesz's kin-politics vis-à-vis Hungarian minorities living beyond the state's borders as a result of the Treaty of Trianon. As such, it engages with several of the same themes raised in Chapter 5 but makes an original contribution by showing how Fidesz uses neo-traditionalism to attract ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania into Hungarian politics. This study draws on survey analysis to show how

Fidesz's cultural programme, built on neo-traditionalism in 2015–20, contributed to the strengthening of illiberal viewpoints.

This study is anchored in the approach to populism in CEE that has at its centre the concept of *neo-traditionalism*, as discussed in the book's Introduction. It focuses on the tools with which right-wing populist players like Fidesz combine cultural and economic initiatives to mobilise trans-border electorates. Unlike others who applied neo-traditionalist lenses inside Hungary (Asavei and Kocian, 2020; Kollai, 2020), the same criteria are rarely used to assess and enhance our comprehension of Fidesz's efforts in kin-state engagement within the Hungarian diaspora. In this context, kin-state activism is analysed from a neo-traditionalist perspective, wherein right-wing populists utilise economic and cultural strategies to evoke a revival of a perceived 'Golden Age', depicted by Fidesz as the 'Greater Hungary' era.

Through *kin-state activism*, Fidesz's 'actions engage and protect ethnic kin-communities in neighbouring or nearby states' (Waterbury, 2014: 36). Elsewhere, external support refers 'to the entire range of active and passive support an ethnic group can receive from outside the country' (Harff and Gurr, 2004: 91). Fidesz refashioned its kin-state activism in 2011 to replicate domestic policy successes in diaspora settings (Liebich, 2017). Drawing on selected visions of the past, Fidesz revitalised the image of Greater Hungary across the border (Chiruta, 2022). Likewise, it gradually revived the Trianon memory in the public consciousness by building museums and collections of relevant physical artefacts (Feischmidt, 2020). To gain insight into the motivations and accomplishments of Fidesz's neo-traditionalism among the diaspora, this chapter delves into the perspectives of Romania's Hungarian minority concerning cultural and economic neo-traditionalist influences, considering the impact of domestic push factors affecting various segments of the population within the country. Although various factors produce supply and demand dynamics in a given milieu, this study will concentrate on identifying and interpreting the supply factors exported by the kin-state, that is, Hungary, and its leading party Fidesz.

Before proceeding further, it is essential to clarify the conceptual distinctions between 'push' and 'pull' factors as well as 'supply' and 'demand', as these terms will be central to this chapter's discussion. It is crucial not to conflate these concepts.

In the context of migration and socio-political studies, 'push' factors, such as political instability, lack of job opportunities and limited representativity, propel individuals, in this chapter's case ethnic Hungarians, away from their home country, namely Romania. This

migration or, in most cases, the political repositioning of ethnics is driven by the perception that the economic and cultural incentives provided by the kin-state, Hungary, surpasses what Romania offers. In contrast, 'pull' factors, generated and felt in Romania, entice individuals to Hungary's orbit, due to elements like political stability, enhanced representativity, cultural affinity and linguistic similarity that offer stability.

The concept of 'supply' pertains to the availability or provision of opportunities and benefits, including financial support for strengthening cultural ties and political representation. Such support helps to sustain the ethnic minority within a host country, thereby increasing the kin-state's political influence. On the other hand, 'demand' refers to the needs of the ethnic Hungarian minority, encompassing economic assistance and cultural preservation, which Hungary, under Fidesz leadership, seeks to fulfil.

The Szekler Hungarians, situated in a territorial enclave in the heartland of Romania, present a complex case study, as they are caught between Hungary's proactive regional policies under Fidesz and political uncertainties within Romania. This dynamic underscores a transactional relationship in which Hungary's actions align with the specific demands of its ethnic minority, reflecting economically driven interactions aimed at preserving culture within a territorial enclave.

The data for this chapter comes from a survey conducted among 617 ethnic Hungarians. While this survey provides valuable insights, it is important to recognise its limitations in establishing a definitive causal link between the behaviour and actions of both Romanians and Hungarians. I approach this examination through the framework of supply and demand, considering how these dynamics influence the perceptions of the ethnic Hungarian population, specifically the Szekler community. In the following sections, this chapter critically examines the relationship between populism and minority identity, heavily relying on the concept of neo-traditionalism.

The intersection of neo-traditionalism and populism in Fidesz's ideology

The incorporation of the concept of neo-traditionalism into the analysis of populism helps to elucidate the mechanisms involved in the construction of 'the people'. This blend seeks to establish a symbiosis between history, memory and tradition. Paradoxically, it encourages a backward-looking gaze when envisioning a future proposed by a charismatic agent.

Against this background, literature claims populism as being inherently nostalgic: ‘disliking the present and immediate future, seek[ing] to mould the further future in accordance with its vision of the past’ (Willes, in Ionescu and Gellner, 1969: 167).

Nowadays, politics seems to merge populism and neo-traditionalism by embroidering nostalgia into their fabric (Elgenius and Rydrygen, 2022; Kotwas and Kubik, 2022). Contemporary populists adhere to neo-traditionalism because they ‘are more interested in outcomes; cherishing a protected national collective; being determined to cultivate “traditional” social roles; permanent vigilance in protecting the purity of the (national) community against perceived threats’ (Kubik, 2020: 11–12). The remobilisation of neo-traditionalism allows politicians ‘to tap into budding proto-populist sentiments’ (Kubik, 2020: 15), reinforce partisanship and remedy unresolved past–present issues.

Although neo-traditionalism focuses on reinventing tradition, its pragmatic aim is in moulding collective identities for a specific purpose: to reinforce a tight connection between the ‘people’, its past and its current rulers. This conceptualisation of neo-traditionalism, therefore, emphasises its nature as a political strategy which aims to ‘reproduce tradition in a purposive manner as a selective version/vision of the past’ (Kubik, 2020: 5). Under the guise of reinstating tradition, populists propose and collectively apply specific political world views. Since neo-traditionalism is resurging in CEE, it has attracted attention from a growing number of researchers. Some of them have investigated Romanian neo-traditionalism and its intermingling with religion (Asavei, 2020), others have investigated the roots of Polish neo-traditionalism (Melito, 2021), while others still have applied it when comparing Slovakia and Hungary (Kollai, 2020). Regardless, current CEE-based neo-traditionalist literature attests to this region’s ‘rapid changes which followed the 1989 political and economic transformation’ (Benczes et al., 2020: 7).

Building on the discussion in the Introduction, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the understudied impact of neo-traditionalism on the perceptions of diasporic minority groups towards their kin-states. It will further examine the tactics used by populist politicians employing neo-traditionalist rhetoric and actions to influence the political identity of trans-border minorities, with a particular focus on the experiences of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

In its bid to convince Hungarian citizens to support its brand of illiberal democracy and reject EU norms, Fidesz has successfully employed populist CEE-based neo-traditionalist strategies domestically, championing anti-immigration policies and emphasising religious

conservatism (Barna and Koltai, 2019), banning gender studies (Pető, 2021), promoting family and maternity payments (Tálas, 2020) and introducing unconventional economic models as alternatives to neo-liberalism (Benczes et al., 2020; Scoggins, 2022).

While research on neo-traditionalism has highlighted its use as an effective political strategy within the state, it is increasingly understood as a useful means of political mobilisation across borders (Mach et al., 2020: 8). Kin-states can incorporate neo-traditionalism in their relations with their diasporas as a long-term mobilisation strategy to strengthen their political influence. For instance, the support that Fidesz offers to its ethnic kin in Romania – such as maternity payments for young mothers and financing for Hungarian schools as well as support of research promoting Hungarian national heritage (Akos, 2020) – is aimed at promoting a collective trans-border Hungarian identity, thereby tightening links between the Hungarian minority in Romania and the populist party in Hungary. To fully understand why the minority's allegiance shifts from its home state to Fidesz, we need to analyse not just the appeal of Fidesz's neo-traditionalist strategies but also various domestic crises and the Romanian state's relative absence from minority-based affairs. Political instability, corruption and the lack of Hungarian representation in the national government constitute crises, resulting in the reorientation of national minorities to the orbit of their kin-state. To understand the relationship between domestic crises and the appeal of neo-traditionalist rhetoric from the kin-states, we need to turn our attention to ontological security.

The role of ethnic kin in the question of security

Kin-states assume responsibility for protecting and providing for their kin-minorities, especially those living across the borders in neighbouring states. Providing support for these groups helps ensure their well-being and promotes their rights and opportunities. One concept that can be useful in understanding this interrelation between the kin-state and kin-minority is ontological security (see Mitzen, 2006; Skey, 2010). This concept, when considered in the context of the literature on neo-traditionalism, can help to explain the strategic interest of kin-states in supporting kin-minorities in the populist era by instrumentalising the past, trauma and territorial redistributions. By supporting these groups, kin-states can maintain their influence and presence in the host countries and advance their national interests. As long as there exists a set

of conditions that generate a sense of insecurity among members of a weaker group, a concept of collective identity which supports the security of that group is expected to gain support (Browning and Joenniemi, 2017; Zarakol, 2017). The *ontological security* thesis posits that ‘rapid transformation or deep change in the economic, social, and cultural environment disturbs stability and deprives people of their sense of living’ (Mach et al., 2020: 6).

In the context of CEE’s political landscape, shaped by territorial re-shuffling, memory of historical conflicts and the legacy of post-communist transition, certain societal groups are grappling with disorientation and societal fatigue. Economic struggles and political instability are prominent push factors. The latter compel many to seek better conditions elsewhere. In CEE’s rich tapestry of ethnic minorities, push factors might not uniformly drive migration. Instead, these pressures can lead to varied responses based on each group’s unique socio-political ties and the support structures available from their kin-states. These offer a counterbalance through cultural, economic and political support, acting as supply factors to a demand presented from a minority in need of support. This chapter investigates the effects of supply factors, through the perspective of CEE kin-state relations, assessing how the uncertain politics of nation-states affect ethnic minorities. One such example is Romania.

Romania has been a significant labour force exporter since entering the EU (Dobrescu and Durach, 2019). Socio-economic and political factors have promoted a demographic decline and the emigration of qualified specialists (Suciu et al., 2017; Goga, 2020). As of May 2022, there were more than eight million Romanians living abroad, according to the Romanian officials (G4Media.ro, 2022). Push factors have also undermined the sense of belonging to Romania, and the insecurities generated by these factors trigger migration, contribute to demographic decline, undermine social cohesion and increase individual malaise. Populism often appeals to people by providing a sense of solace to those whose social status is declining due to economic deprivation and cultural and demographic changes (Kubik, 2020: 12), factors that apply both to national majorities and minorities. As Romanians responded to socio-economic and political challenges by opting for emigration, the Hungarian minority found itself in the unique position of being able to demand assistance from Hungary. Faced with this opportunity, Hungary’s Fidesz was able to fill the vacuum and provide economic and cultural support to their ethnic counterparts in Romania, who may have been adversely affected by suboptimal policy-making.

However, these efforts may also come with political strings attached in that the Hungarian state seeks to protect the legal status and cultural identity of the minority group in Romania and shape a sense of collective identity for political gain. It is important to study the impact of these factors on the perceptions of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the role of Fidesz's neo-traditionalist ideology in influencing their political identity. Scholars have documented Fidesz's economic and cultural policies towards the Hungarian diaspora, particularly in the Carpathian Basin (Kovács, 2020a, 2020b). Reports estimate that, via local NGOs, Fidesz's kin-state apparatus provided roughly 300,000,000 euros in 2017–20 in support of agriculture, property, education and culture (Akos, 2020). Furthermore, Fidesz fosters Hungarian cultural heritage by cultivating a specific historical memory and aesthetic culture in Romania (Chiruta, 2022). The merging of collective memory with cultural traditions has been pivotal in protecting Hungarian heritage across regions previously lost due to historical border changes, a fact that is still poignantly felt today. Populists underline tradition as 'a sacred treasury of society, ancestral heritage, legitimised by antiquity but also by religion' (Mach et al., 2020: 7). Hence, how is the link between minorities' self-understanding and neo-traditionalism constructed by right-wing populists?

To answer this question, we need to study the 'memories of past greatness' and 'historical traumas' that are used to define trans-border relations between the state and its 'kin' ethnic groups (Waterbury, 2010: 4–5). Fidesz-generated 'nostalgia' involves an anachronistic depiction of Greater Hungary, and its trauma is the Trianon Treaty of 1920 (Feischmidt, 2020; see also Sadecki in this volume). These past issues are manipulated by Fidesz's kin-state activism, which also presents the remedy: economic and cultural support. Ethnic groups are interpreted herein as having 'shared traits such as religion, common history, place of residence, and culture' (Harff and Gurr, 2004: 83). Supporting this, Mach et al. (2020: 6–7) argue that 'while tradition is often accompanied by political preference towards strong leadership, [it] may be a useful tool in building ethnic enclave boundaries, perhaps partially explaining why diasporas often tend to be more conservative in their attitudes towards culture and values'. If, for instance, Romania experiences an acute brain drain and socio-economic unpredictability, then people will naturally seek ontological security in suitably constructed narratives. The results of a survey presented in the next section provide a preliminary picture of the attitudes of ethnic Hungarians within Romania, shedding light on how these narratives influence their choices and sense of identity

amid changing socio-political landscapes. But first let us briefly introduce Romania's Hungarian minority.

Romania's Hungarian minority

After the Habsburg Empire dissolved in 1918, around 1.6 million Hungarians became a minority in Romania, a seismic shift often termed the 'great trauma' by Hungarian nationalist parties (Feischmidt, 2020). The twentieth century saw these ethnic Hungarians navigate their way through fascism, communism and eventually the transition to democracy. Under communism, particularly during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, there were concerted efforts to dilute Hungarian ethnic identity by dispersing Hungarian populations among predominantly Romanian areas (Bottoni, 2017).

Democracy's return saw improved conditions for the Hungarian minority, especially after Romania's EU accession in 2007. This accession has been supported by Hungary, which perceived this development as the construction of a safety net for its trans-border ethnics. Nonetheless, demands for autonomy for Szeklerland, a region with a strong Hungarian identity, have consistently been met with resistance, often portrayed as unconstitutional by various Romanian political factions.

Szekler autonomy has been more symbolically expressed in recent years through the reinforcement of cultural heritage sites and the enactment of regional traditions (Szedlacsek, 2015). The last decade has seen significant benefits flow to ethnic Hungarians in Romania from Fidesz's kin-state policies, including dual citizenship for over 600,000 individuals. Such support, coupled with the commemoration of Hungarian history, has garnered overwhelming backing for Fidesz among the Hungarian minority in successive elections, solidifying its electoral stronghold.

Methodology

The study utilised a structured survey to explore the Hungarian minority's views on the root causes of domestic crises and the factors contributing to the political and cultural support for Fidesz. Data collection was conducted in December 2021, utilising a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. A quota sample of 617 individuals was selected from the ethnically homogeneous counties of Harghita (Hargita), Covasna (Kovaszna) and Mureș (Máros), which comprise the Szeklerland region – an area with

a significant ethnic Hungarian population and of considerable historical and cultural relevance to Hungarian national identity. The respondents were diverse: their ages ranged from 18 to 60+. The survey was carried out by Transylvania Inquiry, an independent polling firm, following a research design created by the author of the study (see [Table 16.1](#)).

Table 16.1 Frequency of basic socio-economic and economic variables

Category	Frequency distribution	Percentage
County		
Covasna	152	25
Harghita	255	41
Mureş	210	34
Type of settlement		
Urban	287	47
Rural	330	53
Gender		
Male	270	44
Female	347	56
Age group		
18–29	86	14
30–49	215	35
50–59	121	19
60	195	32
Educational attainment		
Primary and lower secondary	68	11
Vocational training	128	21
Upper secondary	261	42
Tertiary	159	26
Economic activity		
Employed	298	49
Self-employed	61	10
Unemployed	20	3
Student	1	0
Housework	50	8
Pensionary	182	29
Other inactive	3	1
NA	2	0
Total sample size	617	100

The survey, composed of 50 questions, yielded data on 66 variables. The instrument was initially crafted in English and subsequently rendered into Hungarian by native speakers to preserve linguistic accuracy. The questionnaire was structured into three thematic sections: an assessment of Romania's role in the precipitating crises, Hungary's function as a provider of economic support and cultural and historical narratives, and the Hungarian minority's perspective on these phenomena. Demographic data was also collected to contextualise respondents' social backgrounds. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no compensation provided. On average, the survey was completed in 40 minutes.

The survey questions were designed to capture a snapshot of the factors influencing the Hungarian national minority's political alignment with their kin-state. A limitation of the study was its sample, which did not encompass Hungarian respondents from urban or ethnically diverse regions like Cluj (Kolozsvár), potentially narrowing the scope of insights into the broader minority experience outside the direct influence of Hungarian kin-state policies.

In the next section, I provide a concise characterisation of the Hungarian minority's situation and then move on to the presentation of the empirical findings. The results are organised into two principal categories, delineating the minority's perceptions of both the crises within Romania and the neo-traditionalist strategy used by the Hungarian government.

Survey results

The empirical evidence derived from survey data between 2015 and 2020 indicates that the strategic neo-traditionalist policy framework and accompanying economic interventions implemented by Fidesz have substantively contributed to the reinforcement of ethnic identity among the Szekler population in Transylvania. Likewise, the survey data confirms a prevailing consensus among respondents that the general conditions within Romania have deteriorated during the time frame. Despite episodic escalations in ethnic tensions, precipitated by the resurgence of anti-Hungarian rhetoric from Romanian political figures, most of the cohorts appear to have experienced a sense of reprieve attributed to the incentives supplied by Fidesz. This sentiment is evident across various demographic categories, including age, gender and type of settlements, which showcases a complex interplay between external policy influence and internal national dynamics.

Exploring the layers of domestic insecurity among the Hungarian minority

This section outlines the salient aspects of the ‘push factors’, predominantly the consensus among ethnic Hungarians regarding the level of satisfaction with the state of affairs in Romania. The data confirms general dissatisfaction with the state of national affairs (see [Figure 16.1](#)). A disaggregated analysis by age cohorts yields nuanced insights: notably, there is a pronounced discontent within the 30–49 and 60+ demographics. Contrary to expectations, the younger cohort, aged 18–29, exhibited a comparatively optimistic stance, evidencing a more equilibrated appraisal of the Romanian socio-political climate.

[Figure 16.1](#) shows the distribution of responses provided by the Szekler who were asked about their satisfaction with the state of affairs in Romania. Two cohorts, 30–49-year-olds and 60+ -year-olds expressed pronounced dissatisfaction. This sense of disaffection, particularly within economic and political realms, may signal a tension between the forces of modernisation and a yearning for a return to a perceived traditional socio-political structure, as advocated by Fidesz’s political platform (Ágh, 2016). Such sentiments of dissatisfaction are likely exacerbated by such factors as political instability and an intensifying economic polarisation, phenomena well documented in the contemporary literature (Suciu et al., 2017; Goga, 2020).

As other studies show, members of these two age cohorts are the most predisposed to vote for Fidesz (Bálványos Intézet, 2021). Unlike the 50–59s, the 60+ respondents were more likely to appreciate the cultural value of Fidesz’s kin-state activism, demanding autonomy and even participating in protests. On the other hand, the relatively high level of discontent in the 60+ group regarding circumstances in Romania could be explained by general dissatisfaction with the pension system.

As for the 30–49 group, one factor which may explain dissatisfaction could be the lack of jobs. People ensconced in a relatively homogeneous ethnic enclave, especially those within the 30–49 group, rarely venture outside their area when searching for employment, although some are more likely to travel to Hungary to work. Reports attest that younger generations are less likely to know the Romanian language, reducing their mobility in the labour market. Previously, journalistic investigations attested to low unemployment levels among such groups (Adevărul, 2017). People who do not speak Romanian are not expected to venture far from home. This means that such categories of people who are not integrated into the Romanian labour market are instead,

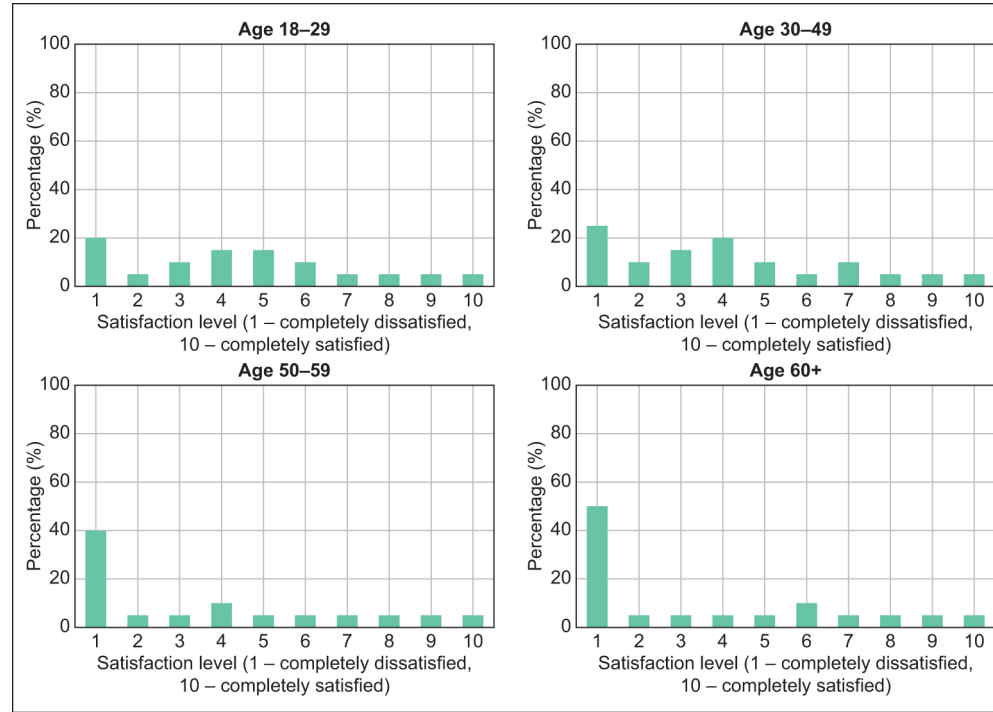


Figure 16.1 a–d Satisfaction with state of things in Romania by age range

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possibly, being pushed towards Hungary or Western Europe, reducing the size of the community. Studies show that people within the 30–40 categories usually apply most frequently for dual citizenship (Pogonyi, 2018; Kovács, 2020a).

In contrast, the younger cohort (18–29) demonstrates a more optimistic disposition, suggesting a departure from the more conservative, and potentially insular, perspectives of their elders. This divergence may reflect a generational shift towards a redefined identity that reconciles traditional values with contemporary socio-economic realities.

The lower dissatisfaction among the 50–59 cohort, compared with the attitudes predominant among the people belonging to the adjacent age brackets, is an intriguing anomaly. This demographic appears to be navigating the dualities of economic stability and political disaffection. It could be hypothesised that this group, benefiting from relative employment security, evaluates their satisfaction through a political lens, reflecting a critical stance towards the political establishment, yet without completely disavowing the neo-traditionalist rhetoric. Political factors, however, cannot be discounted; the historical context in which these individuals have lived, encompassing Romania's shift from a communist system to a liberal-democratic and market-oriented economy, might have informed a more nuanced perspective on current affairs. Additionally, given their lived experience through various political regimes, members of this age group are expected to have greater linguistic proficiency in Romanian, further enhancing their engagement with and understanding of Romanian politics.

This complex landscape of satisfaction levels across age cohorts underscores the relevance of ontological security concerns among the Szekler minority. The economic difficulties and political disengagement that characterise the dissatisfaction articulated by the survey participants may be interpreted as a manifestation of the 'push factors' discussed earlier. Herein, the ethnic community grapples with the challenges posed by a rapidly transforming socio-economic milieu.

Kubik's exploration of neo-traditionalism posits that such political landscapes often catalyse a retreat to familiar cultural paradigms, serving as a bulwark against the perceived marginalisation within the prevailing socio-political order (2020). This retreat is manifest in the expressed dissatisfaction across the surveyed age groups, suggesting a collective yearning for a reinvigorated sense of identity and solidarity, which neo-traditionalist sentiments, as amplified by kin actors like Fidesz, promise to fulfil.

My analysis of dissatisfaction with the situation in Romania by different age cohorts shows marked disaffection among the 30–49 and 60+ demographics, contrasted with the relative optimism of the younger Szeklers. The next step in the analysis takes us to gender. The interplay between age and gender is crucial, as it may further illuminate distinct experiences and attitudes within the community but, as [Figure 16.2](#) demonstrates, there is no clear relationship between gender and the level of satisfaction with the state of affairs in Romania. Both genders tend to be equally dissatisfied, although males show a slightly higher level of satisfaction.

Assessing the impact of Fidesz’s cultural and economic policies on Szekler community allegiances

Political support can be generated by providing cultural or economic incentives or a combination of both. In this study, ethnic Hungarians in Romania were asked to rate their familiarity with several cultural and economic policies implemented by Fidesz in Szeklerland ([Figure 16.3](#)).

[Figure 16.3](#) shows the Szekler awareness of various policy interventions by Fidesz. The cultural measures encompass heritage preservation, religious support and dual citizenship, while economic initiatives include scholarships, maternity payments, entrepreneurial support and assistance for Hungarian-language schools. Respondents were asked whether they recognised these measures, with the assumption

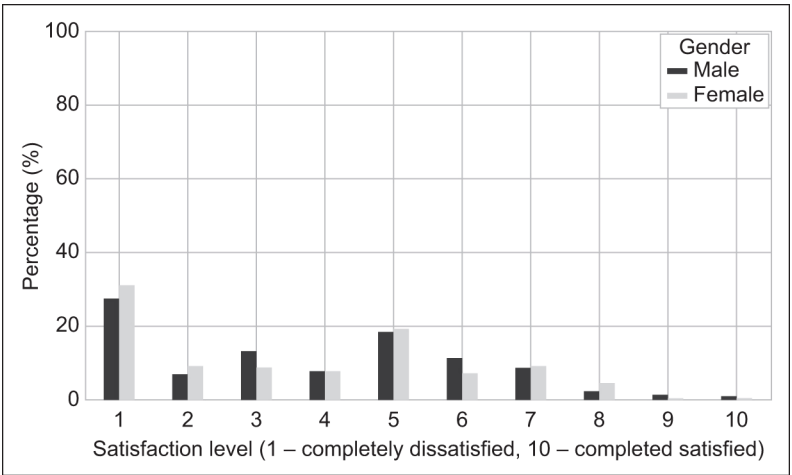


Figure 16.2 Satisfaction with state of things in Romania by gender

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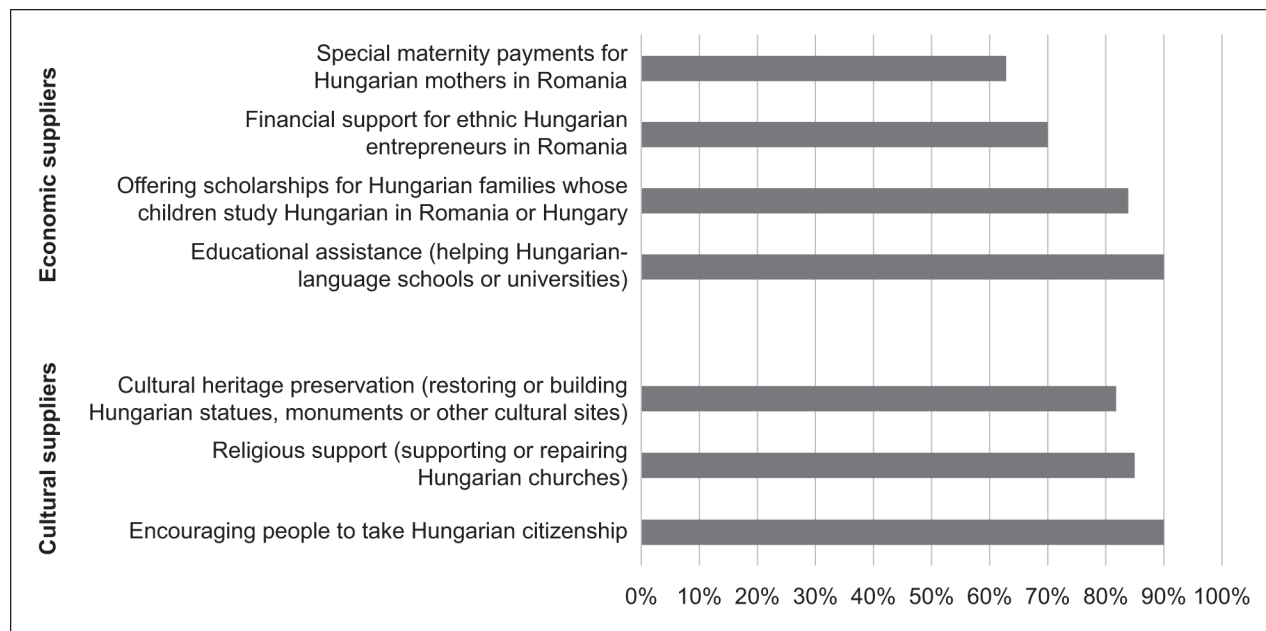


Figure 16.3 Familiarity with the Szekler community with Fidesz's cultural and economic policy interventions in Szekerland

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that familiarity comes either from directly benefiting from a given policy or from information about it obtained through community networks.

The results indicate a more substantial awareness of cultural programmes, with 91.7 per cent of respondents cognisant of Fidesz's push for dual citizenship and 90.4 per cent aware of educational support for Hungarian-language schools. Moreover, 84.8 per cent acknowledge religious support efforts, emphasising the refurbishment of churches, which serves as a cornerstone of Fidesz's right-wing populist agenda. In line with recent research, by investing in churches in Transylvania, Fidesz is upholding Hungarian cultural heritage and possibly strengthening its partnership with the region's churches (Chiruta, 2022). This level of recognition corroborates the effectiveness of the Hungarian government's investment in trans-border cultural endeavours and suggests a robust affiliation between Fidesz and Transylvanian ecclesiastical institutions, potentially enhancing the party's influence and consolidating its ideological narrative within the region. It is important to note that initiatives supporting cultural heritage preservation (museums, statues and so on) are also well known by respondents (81.7 per cent). Overall, these findings document kin-state activism in Transylvania that is focused in particular on cultural policies.

Economic initiatives appear to have a lower penetration rate. Throughout the years, Fidesz invested hundreds of millions of euros to create a strong electoral pool in trans-border settings. Much of this effort was through the Transylvanian church organisations or NGOs (Akos, 2020). Notably, financial support for ethnic Hungarian entrepreneurs was less well known, potentially indicative of the beneficiaries' demographic profile being limited to those directly engaged in commercial ventures.

Since 2018, Fidesz has adopted a policy of mitigating Hungary's low fertility rate by financially supporting young Hungarian families who have more than two children. Simultaneously, Romania also faces a demographic crisis caused by mass emigration to Western Europe (Turp-Balazs, 2018). It is therefore surprising that special maternity payments are the least-often-mentioned items. This lack of awareness may indicate that this new policy has not been communicated and endorsed properly in Szeklerland or that families have not benefited from it, despite being at the core of Fidesz's populist agenda. Built to address Hungary's falling demographics and used to consolidate Fidesz's ideological conservatism, this was adopted in 2019 to incentivise natality domestically. Across the border, curbing emigration among ethnic Hungarians is essential to mitigate potential long-run demographic assimilation but, more importantly, Fidesz primarily needs to preserve its electorate in Transylvania.

This section provided further empirical evidence of Hungary's kin-state activism and its multidimensional support in Transylvania. Fidesz's strategic allocation of resources is aimed at fostering a solid electoral base among Hungarian minorities abroad. This policy creates 'unique opportunities' (Gamlen, 2018), especially for populist parties, provided that the home state is somewhat ineffective in its dealings with ethnic minorities or is undergoing a crisis.

Measuring the perception of Fidesz's neo-traditionalism in Transylvania

The majority of Hungarian respondents involved in this study support Viktor Orbán's ideological stance on illiberal democracy. This seems to imply that they are also supportive of Fidesz's actions and policies, which are framed in terms of neo-traditionalism. According to Kubik (2020), neo-traditionalism, as a conceptual framework, emphasises strategic approaches that advocate a return to perceived 'traditional' values. In the context of Hungary's Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán, a return to perceived 'traditional' values is related to the celebration of the idea of Greater Hungary, as documented by Chiruta (2022) and reflected in many old or new architecture projects.

In this context, the present section aims to contribute a fresh dimension to the ongoing discourse surrounding contemporary neo-traditionalism and its interplay with socio-economic demands, as delineated in the works of current scholars (Kollai, 2020; Melito, 2021). Notably, the literature has documented a robust correlation between populism, particularly as espoused by political parties led by charismatic leaders, and the resurgence of neo-traditionalist sentiments, as posited by Mach et al. (2020). Within this academic context, it is argued in neo-traditionalist literature that the charismatic leadership dynamic can effectively mobilise individuals when it successfully taps into the nascent proto-populist sentiments typically associated with neo-traditionalism, as articulated by Kubik (2020: 15).

Hence, this research looks to add a new layer to the neo-traditionalist literature regarding the mobilisation of individuals through proto-populist sentiments, which share commonalities with the tenets of neo-traditionalism.

Survey participants were asked for their opinions regarding: 'As you may know, the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, has visited Tusnádfürdő/Băile Tușnad a couple of times and criticised the way democracy currently works. He has called for an "illiberal" democracy that

would protect traditional family values.’ Figures 16.4, 16.5 and 16.6 provide a visualisation of the extent to which Orbán’s illiberal ideology has penetrated the cultures of Hungarian minority communities in Romania and most likely elsewhere in CEE. These figures indicate a significant influence of illiberalism among the Hungarian minority in Szeklerland, a region that appears to have experienced a degree of political neglect by the Romanian state.

This perceived vacuum has facilitated a space in which ethnic Hungarian political entities, such as the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR), which maintains close ties with Hungary’s Fidesz party, can operate with considerable influence, without being challenged politically, or Fidesz’s investments being scrutinised under a transparent bilateral agreement. It was only in 2023 that the two countries initiated formal discussions to revise their bilateral agreements. This decision came as a response to mounting pressure from Romanian civil society and political parties. They raised concerns about the unregulated flow of financial investments from Budapest into Romania.

The findings from the survey indicate a pattern that aligns with Kollai’s notion of a ‘traditional traditionalist stream’ (2020: 36). This stream appears to have been fostered through Fidesz’s right-wing policies, which effectively mobilised the electorate and expanded its ideological influence across the Carpathian Basin. The outcome of this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on contemporary neo-traditionalism, particularly in the context of Hungarian measures and policies. These measures, rooted in neo-traditionalist principles, seem to be strategically oriented towards addressing the cultural and socio-economic needs of Romania’s Hungarian minority. In the following, let us understand the results of Fidesz’s influences in Szeklerland with an analysis of four age categories.

Figure 16.4 shows that support for Orbán’s illiberal democracy varies with age. The first cohort (18–29) exhibits the lowest level of ‘strong support’ (36.05 per cent) for illiberalism, suggesting that support for a more liberal, open society, in which neo-traditionalism is not hegemonic, is strongest in this age group. This cohort, likely more exposed to European liberal values and having more relations with other ethnicities may resist the allure of populism that seeks to revert to traditionalist, illiberal norms. The data for the second cohort (30–49) shows a greater degree of ‘strong support’ for Orbán’s policies, indicating a demand for stability and security that they seem to believe neo-traditionalism offers. The 50–59 age category represents an anomaly when compared with the 30–49 and 60+ categories in terms of a lower stance on illiberalism. This nuanced position might suggest a generational bridge between more traditionalist views and

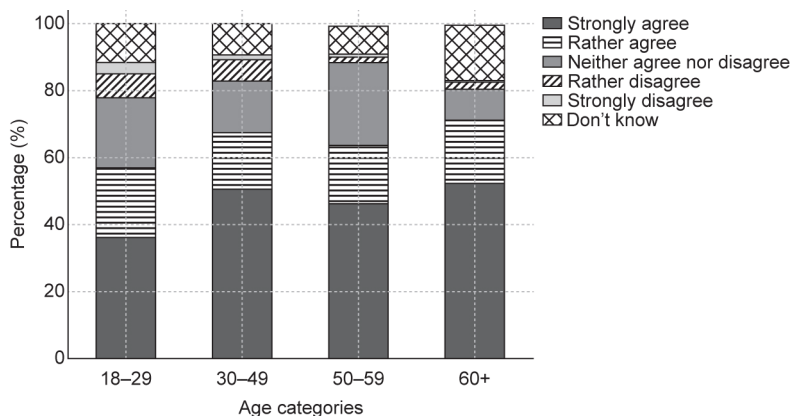


Figure 16.4 Views on Orbán's illiberalism based on age categories

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modern liberal perspectives. The relatively lower agreement, compared with the oldest demographic group (60+), could be interpreted as a sign of this group's internal conflict between embracing the security and familiarity of neo-traditional values and recognising the need for or benefits of more liberal-democratic principles. This age group has witnessed first-hand the shifts towards democracy and may appreciate its ideals, yet they also understand the complexities and challenges of transitioning societies, making them more cautious in their support of either side.

Lastly, in the older adult cohort (50+), 52.58 per cent express 'strong support' for Orbán's illiberalism. Members of this age group are likely to be driven by nostalgia and they seem to be more comfortable with illiberal democracy. They respond positively to the supply of Fidesz's policies that emphasise national pride, sovereignty and traditional values, resonating with their longing for traditional socio-cultural order over modern societal changes. It is in this group that the positive reception of Fidesz's cultural policies is the strongest as it seems to address their existential concerns and nostalgic yearnings, promising a return to a 'golden age' of cultural and national unity (Chiruta, 2022).

The distribution of support for Fidesz's neo-traditionalist and populist programme in the Hungarian minority community in Transylvania is influenced by age. Fidesz's policies resonate more with older, conservative and traditionalist elements of society, while simultaneously alienating some more progressive younger people. The age-specific trends highlight the complexity of political alignment within this community, reflecting broader patterns of populism and neo-traditionalism in CEE.

Next, the analysis turns to gender and its impact on the reception of Orbán's illiberal democracy. The data shows a pattern known from other parts of the world.

As can be seen in [Figure 16.5](#), there is a pronounced gender disparity in support for Orbán's policies. With 60.22 per cent of male respondents strongly agreeing with Orbán's illiberal democracy and only a small portion of them disagreeing with this political precept, the study shows that the supply of neo-traditionalist policies from Fidesz meets strong demand among men. Populist and neo-traditionalist ideas promoted by Fidesz resonate more with those who subscribe to traditional values and norms that include the concept of male dominance. This aligns further with the neo-traditionalist emphasis on returning to an idealised past that privileges traditional gender roles, which populists like Fidesz exploit to consolidate their power base.

Conversely, only 39.31 per cent of female respondents strongly agree with Orbán's programme, suggesting a critical or cautious perspective towards illiberal democracy. This reflects a demand for more progressive policies that challenge the restrictive norms perpetuated by neo-traditionalism. Women's weaker support could indicate concerns over policies that might limit gender equality and social freedoms, highlighting a tension between the populist supply of traditionalist policies and the diverse demands of the electorate (Mach et al., [2020](#)).

As Mach et al. ([2020](#)) argue, the neo-traditionalist agenda can sometimes entrench traditional gender roles that restrict women's

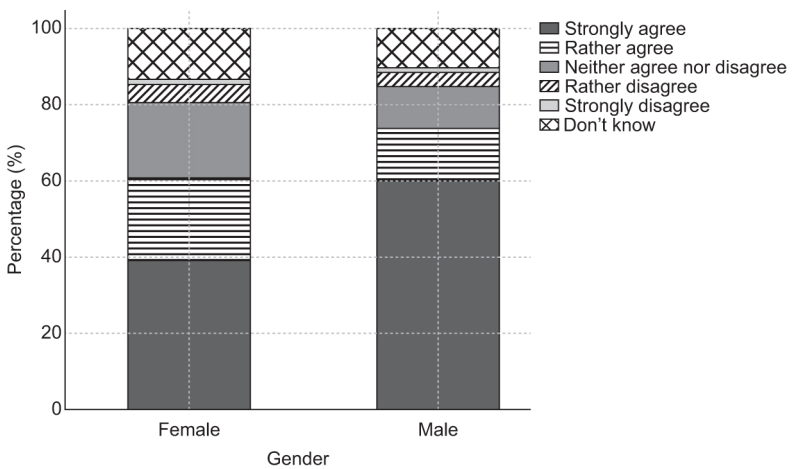


Figure 16.5 Views on Orbán's illiberalism by gender

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socio-economic and political agency, leading to heightened dissatisfaction among women, who may prioritise gender equity and diverse opportunities. Kubik’s analysis (2020) further elucidates the complex role that neo-traditionalism plays in shaping political attitudes. In societies experiencing rapid socio-economic changes, like Romania following its accession into the EU, neo-traditionalism can provide a sense of stability and continuity. Yet, for many women within the Szekler community, this stability may come at the cost of progressive values, resulting in a satisfaction profile that reflects deeper societal schisms.

Figure 16.6 confirms another pattern well established in the literature: illiberalism is more popular among rural populations. Among the Transylvanian Hungarians who took part in the survey, rural respondents show higher levels of support for Orbán’s illiberal programme – 45.10 per cent of them strongly agree with the precepts of this programme; among the rural respondents this ‘strong’ level of support goes up to 51.37 per cent. Urban centres are typically hubs of liberal and progressive values, as their populations, exposed to diverse socio-economic interactions and more integrated with the European context, may demand policies that support open societies and liberal-democratic principles. The supply of neo-traditionalist and illiberal policies by Fidesz, therefore, finds a less receptive audience in these areas.

The higher resonance of Orbán’s illiberalism among rural respondents testifies to the effectiveness of Fidesz’s neo-traditionalist policies in rural areas. Such areas, often characterised by stronger ties to

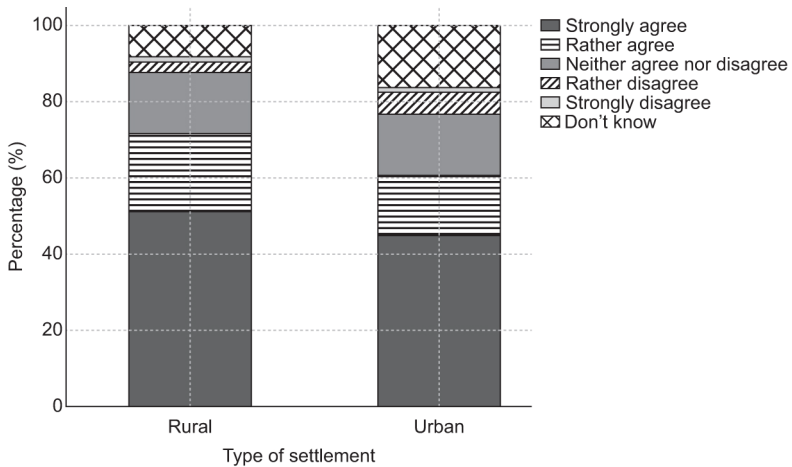


Figure 16.6 Views on Orbán’s illiberalism by type of settlement

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tradition and a slower pace of socio-economic change, present a fertile ground for the populist supply of policies that emphasise cultural continuity, national pride and economic support tailored to rural needs. This confirms Mach et al.'s (2020) theorising of neo-traditionalism as a strategic tool for populists to craft a selective version of the past that appeals particularly to rural constituencies. The demand in these areas for stability and a return to 'traditional' values is met by Fidesz's policies. As I argued earlier (Chiruta, 2022), Hungarian transnational kin-state activism, which leverages both economic and cultural measures, proves to be an effective mechanism of promoting illiberalism and thus increasing support for Orbán's government.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the literature on neo-traditionalism and ontological security of Eastern European minority groups and their susceptibility to right-wing populism. The analysis draws on the results of a survey designed to investigate the perceptions of ethnic Hungarians residing in Romania regarding the neo-traditionalist policies and actions implemented by the Fidesz political party. Anchoring this study in the literature on neo-traditionalism, developed in studies conducted within the POPREBEL project by Kubik (2020) and Mach et al. (2020) (see <https://populism-europe.com/poprebel/poprebel-working-papers/>), kin-state activism (Waterbury, 2010) and diaspora studies (Gamlen, 2018), has proved productive. I showed the impact of cultural and economic strategies employed by populist movements or governments on diaspora communities, focusing on the case of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. The research revealed that such strategies serve not only as tools for pro-Fidesz mobilisation but also as validation or enhancement mechanisms for traditionalism calling for a return to authentic cultures and thus consonant with the neo-traditionalist tenor of right-wing populism.

I showed that by utilising neo-traditionalism, right-wing populist leaders, such as Victor Orbán, mobilise trans-border minorities and diasporas (Gamlen, 2018). There exist two methods of developing and cultivating neo-traditionalism – cultural and economic – and both are used by Fidesz, although the former seems to resonate more deeply with Transylvanian Hungarians, at least those who participated in the survey.

The survey findings appear to corroborate the initial hypothesis of this study: the more dissatisfied the Hungarian minority in Romania are, the more supportive they are of Orbán's policies. The level of support

varies, however, with age, gender and location. Younger people, female participants and urban populations expressed less support for Fidesz's illiberalism and neo-traditionalism than older people, males and people in rural areas.

The study offers new insights into the ongoing discussion of the relationship between neo-traditionalism and (right-wing) populism. For example, the data supports the idea that there is a complex interplay between the socio-geographical location and political preferences within the ethnic Hungarian minority in Transylvania. While the urban population may be more resistant to the illiberal discourse due to demand for more progressive and open policies, there is stronger resonance with the traditionalist supply in rural communities, indicating a divergence in how neo-traditionalism and populism are received across different types of settlements in CEE. The intersection of neo-traditionalism and gender, another area addressed in the survey, proves to be emblematic of a broader struggle within many communities: a struggle between the comforting embrace of familiar cultural narratives and the imperative to forge a path that accommodates evolving gender roles.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on the political relationship between diasporas or ethnic minorities and their kin-states. The fact that Fidesz managed to bolster its influence among Hungarian communities and their leaders in Transylvania by promoting its vision for an illiberal CEE indicates that this vision finds resonance among a substantial portion of ethnic Hungarians.

Some researchers and politicians view the intensification of Hungarian kin-state activism in Romania as a substantial interference in Romania's internal affairs and a potential threat to its national security. Over the long term, these developments could strain relations between the two countries. Consequently, the study advocates for future EU legislation to regulate kin-state spending and establish measures for host-states to counter financial incentives from kin-states, fostering a balanced environment where minority populations can thrive and prosper in their home country.

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Remedies: going beyond the restoration of the rule of law

Jan Kubik and Richard C. M. Mole

Since the rise of right-wing populism is broadly seen as a major threat to liberal democracy, it is imperative to formulate and implement effective countermeasures. This is, however, not an easy task. Writing against the rise of fascism, Karl Lowenstein (1937a, 1937b) coined the concept of ‘militant democracy’ and argued that pro-democratic forces, faced with the anti-liberal and anti-democratic threat, need to take off the (political) gloves and punch their opponents hard. The defenders of liberal democracy may want to become ‘militant’ but, as Rovira Kaltwasser and Taggart observe: ‘Although there are strong reasons to be in favour of this solution, it is also true that it brings to the forefront a significant democratic paradox, namely the possibility of a democracy destroying itself in the process of defending itself’ (2016: 209) As a result, for many researchers and policy-makers, the task is to propose moderate and piecemeal measures.

As Rovira Kaltwasser and Taggart (2016) suggest, a study of responses to the rise of populism, like the study of consequences, can be conveniently organised along two analytical axes: the supply versus demand side of politics and the relation to political power as a study should consider the fact that (right-wing) populists participate in politics either as challengers (on the way to power) or as incumbents (in power). When we embarked on the FATIGUE project, we focused mostly on the second situation and decided not to spend much time on the areas in which the impact of right-wing populism had been already thoroughly studied, such as party politics, for example. We have, however, studied Capoccia’s

seminal work (2005), in which he reviewed four types of strategies that political actors fighting right-wing populists may employ:

- militancy (implement legal measures to limit the civil and political rights of extremist actors)
- incorporation (convert semi-loyal into loyal political actors)
- purges (prosecute the architects and administrators of anti-democratic activities)
- education (strengthen democratic beliefs by, for instance, developing forms of civic education and designing programmes aimed at integrating activists who want to abandon extremist parties)

Taggart and Rovira Kaltwasser (2016) concluded that under most circumstances, isolation and ostracism (Capoccia's militancy and purges) do not work very well and the best strategy is 'regulated inclusion'. It is nonetheless clear that the strategy needs to be tailored to the specific situation and differentiate between facing off against populists out of power and populists in power (here, the increased role of international actors is desired). The general conclusion of the literature on strategies is that the response to right-wing populism should be multifaceted, nuanced and restrained, albeit steadfast. Lowenstein's 'militant democracy' that calls for strong measures in defence of liberal democracy is only one, and not necessarily a recommended, option. Having conducted a series of studies on various, previously insufficiently examined, aspects of the rise of right-wing populism, we are in the position to build on this recommendation.

In their chapters and other texts, our authors offered a plethora of policy recommendations that we organised by relying on two central distinctions that have driven our work on the project. The first is between neo-feudalism and neo-traditionalism; the second is between the supply and demand sides of the phenomenon. While addressing the problems generated by neo-feudalism, policy-makers need to focus on the structure of the politics-business relationship, the populace's material well-being and economic policy. To address the problems generated by neo-traditionalism, they need to attend to people's visions of the desired moral order of the world around them, thus focusing on the institutions of cultural production and consumption.

Turning to the second distinction, on the demand side remedial actions should target the problems that some people believe can be solved by right-wing populists better than by the representatives of other political options, while on the supply side the goal needs to be the

minimisation of right-wing populists' influence *within the boundaries of the democratic game* and the formulation and implementation of clear policy alternatives to right-wing populist solutions.

Neo-feudalism: demand side

There is a consensus in the literature that right-wing populists' ability to become major political players and to stay in power depends to a large degree on the popularity of their economic policies, the linchpin of which is a high level of redistribution of wealth to the poorer segments of the society. To put it simply, the economic programme most often associated with neo-feudalism is economic populism. Various issues related to the redistributive largesse of both Polish and Hungarian right-wing populist governments is analysed in the chapters written by Ivanov, Cossu and Lenik, who also provide a solid review of the relevant literature. The relative novelty of the FATIGUE and POPREBEL projects is the insistence that right-wing populists create a second distributive system for their loyal cadres, who benefit from selectively disbursed privileges.

Such a system is not compatible with the principles of liberal democracy because its criteria of redistribution are non-transparent, and the rules of distribution are not subjected to public scrutiny. As a result, the inequality such a system generates is often undetected both by the people and observers, who tend to focus on the dimension of inequality the populist rulers try to combat, that is, the economic inequality reported by various statistical agencies and routinely studied by economists.

When right-wing populists lose power, their successors face a dilemma. They can curtail popular redistribution by limiting or eliminating various social programmes but such a move can trigger social anger and cost the new government a lot of support. In Poland, the anti-populist coalition that defeated right-wing populist PiS in October 2023 has decided not to alienate the electorate and has continued its adversaries' redistributive largesse.¹ On the other hand, taking benefits away from the oligarchy of the neo-feudal system and initiating court proceedings to determine the legality of their gains should improve the legitimacy of the new government, if properly organised and convincingly presented to the public. While there is a good argument to be made that such an action is necessary to reestablish the rule of law, its effectiveness as a legitimacy-generating mechanism is not so clear. In Poland, when the new government has been vigorously investigating and prosecuting the former government's oligarchic redistribution, the popular reaction to

this activity is mixed and its approval is heavily determined by ideological and political loyalties of the surveyed public.²

The modern neo-feudal systems built by right-wing populists leave behind two social constituencies brought about by their policies: a relatively large group of citizens who benefited from relatively generous social programmes and the former neo-feudal overloads (oligarchs), who now expect or even demand the same level of political-economic privileges they had enjoyed under the old system. Due to the existence of such expectations, the restoration of a more transparently equitable system of redistribution is thus not easy, although it seems to be inextricably related to the task of restoring the institutional foundations of liberal democracy. In turn, the rebuilding of the rule-based and transparent system of economic redistribution calls for dealing with the supply side of politics.

Neo-feudalism: supply side

According to the authors, there are two main strategic directions that liberal democrats should follow in their anti-neo-feudal restoration project:

- Raise the level of trust in the rule of law and the national as well as international institutions of the liberal order; and
- Decentralise power by empowering local institutions and civil society.

Raising the level of trust in the rule of law and the institutions of liberal order

One of the key features of populist neo-feudalism is the limitation or outright destruction of the rule of law. Since that system depends not only on the welfarist redistribution of resources to a large segment of the population but also on the personalistic support of the loyalists and the emerging neo-feudal oligarchy, its leaders systematically undermine the rule of law to facilitate the capture of state resources needed for such munificence.

Many observers point out that the restoration of the rule of law is the necessary step in reviving liberal democracy. But for the rule of law to be effective, this requires a culture that values legality and helps to socialise people into respecting universal civic and political rights, a system of checks and balances in the political system, transparency and accountability. The *restoration of trust in the institutions* that are needed to rebuild such a culture becomes an urgent task, but it is important to know what factors influence its successful completion. Ivanov, for

example, shows that when individuals (or regions) are highly economically insecure, their level of trust in national institutions does not alter the probability of voting for populist parties; it tends to remain high. But for individuals (or regions) that are more economically secure, this factor is important: those who show higher levels of trust in national institutions tend to vote for right-wing populists in lower numbers. This, of course, indicates that policies designed to increase trust in national and transnational institutions, such as the EU, need to be carefully tailored to regional conditions that need to be carefully diagnosed. Ivanov observes that the most effective strategies of raising the level of trust in governmental institutions are those that have been co-designed with local populations. As he puts it, governments should trust the people just as much as the people should trust governmental institutions.

In a policy paper that draws on her chapter in this volume, Lenik finds that in CEE individuals who show higher levels of trust in democratic institutions are more likely to vote for a populist party than their counterparts in Western Europe. She sees three potential explanations for this: post-communist legacies, dissatisfaction with democracy and the anger of the left-behind. Given this situation, Lenik argues for *direct participatory democracy* that increases citizens' ability to directly shape policy decisions, closes the distance between the policy-makers and the electorate and increases the degree of trust in political institutions. The success of direct participatory democracy depends to a considerable degree on the quality of the media, particularly in local markets. As Mátyás argues, the EU should use its considerable resources to enhance the strength of local and regional media that – in turn – can become a major factor in eliminating inequities in the European public sphere. Writing about Hungary, Mátyás notices the slow re-emergence of the 'liberal-democratic' mindset in society at large (a growing consciousness of social media's power), the business sphere (corporations' initiatives to reduce negative impacts of the right wing's dominance in the media) and politics (attempts to introduce higher standards in media regulations), but he argues that these disparate trends need to be better coordinated. One solution to this coordination problem could be a *pan-European multi-stakeholder social movement* that would promote organisational and personal transparency and accountability in all spheres of public life. Mátyás believes such an initiative could help to solve the problem of low institutional trust and show the effectiveness of the EU in addressing its citizens' problems, thus improving its public image.

Several authors, Heilig perhaps most prominently, argue that the right-wing populist (neo-feudal) challenge should be met by more

decisive measures implemented by the various bodies of the EU. All existing legal paths should be activated to ensure that rule of law in member states is respected. For example, more decisive use should be made of the existing infringement procedures (based on directives on public procurement and concessions or EU fundamental rights) to ensure that EU money is not funnelled to illiberal civil society actors through the right-wing governments of some member states. In general, *the EU must ensure that the rule of law and the protection of minority rights are safeguarded, using all the legal mechanisms at its disposal*, contends Heilig, who also calls for improving public education on EU laws and the member countries' obligations stemming from the EU treaties they signed.

Such an ambitious programme of raising trust in liberal-democratic institutions and countering the growing influence of right-wing ideologies and policies requires considerable resources. They can be secured if the economy performs relatively well, but this is not always the case. Cossu notes the continuing gap between the structure and performance of the economies in the 'West' and in the former Soviet-bloc countries and calls for *more imaginative economic policies that would go beyond copying and pasting 'standard' developmental blueprints*. She sees four policy solutions. First, it would be beneficial to invest more in research based on a better diagnosis of what holds these countries back. Second, the EU should invest more in inoculation against illiberal ideas and policies targeting young people. Third, the funds from the European budget should be partially disbursed directly to civil society organisations and local governments, without involving national governments, and the tool of participatory budgeting should be used more extensively. Last, the EU should implement policies targeting the brain drain and inflation that often pushes young people out of their home countries, such as Hungary.

Decentralising power by empowering local institutions and civil society

The restoration of trust in liberal-democratic institutions, bolstering the belief in the rule of law, and the implementation of direct participatory democracy are organically linked with the bolstering of civil society and empowering local and regional governments.

Lenik emphasises the significance of *decentralised participatory democracy*, particularly in budgeting. She is also partial to the controversial idea of *mandatory electoral participation*, as she sees it as an opportunity to help people develop pro-democratic civic virtue. Heilig presents a plan that calls for the creation of *the state of civil society*

monitoring mechanism, for example in the form of yearly ‘State of Civil Society Reports’. They would be like the European Commission’s rule of law reports and pay attention to both formal and informal civil society organisations in the member states, analyse their economic situation and their relationships with national governments, and monitor the rise or fall of illiberal civil society. She also points out the necessity of *simplifying access to the EU funds* designated for civil society organisations and the need to *use all available legal paths to ensure that the rule of law in member states is respected*. In this respect, infringement procedures (based on directives on public procurement and concessions or EU fundamental rights) should be strictly enforced to ensure that EU money is not funnelled to illiberal civil society actors. Finally, Heilig proposes *the Year of Volunteers*, modelled upon the Year of Youth 2022, that would honour and encourage EU citizens who volunteer at the local, regional, national and even EU levels. The celebrations and other activities should be planned and carried out together with civil society stakeholders and showcase the accomplishments of various organisations presented in the available reports. Ivanov calls for *the visibility of the EU institutions to be improved at the local and regional levels* and the strengthening of local and regional organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, by intensifying cultural, political and economic cross- and inter-regional cooperation. Finally, Cossu advocates for the greater reliance on local and regional resources, for example through direct taxation, to reduce dependence on national governments.

In essence, all authors are concerned with the pathologies resulting from the established or emergent neo-feudal system constructed by right-wing populists in power. They propose often innovative ideas on how to restore and stabilise the institutions of liberal democracy by going beyond the rebuilding of the rule of law and focusing on: (1) restoring the mechanisms generating trust in liberal-democratic institutions, (2) organising the economic base needed for this restoration and (3) facilitating the decentralisation of power by buttressing both governmental and non-governmental local and regional organisations whose ethos is broadly compatible with the spirit of liberal democracy.

Neo-traditionalism: demand side

The appeal of populism in CEE can be attributed in part to the perceived failure of the liberal project to deliver effective participatory democracy and safeguard traditional social structures and values. By promising to

wrest power from ‘the elites’ and give it back to ‘the people’, populist parties present themselves as the defenders of real democracy, which they understand in majoritarian rather than liberal terms. In addition, populists are seen by large parts of the electorate as the only political force committed to defending traditional identities and values.

Take voters’ concerns seriously

In his research on democratic backsliding in Poland, Melito argues that the people feel they are not being listened to. Rather than trying to discredit populist politicians as undemocratic, a more effective political strategy for liberal-democratic parties would be to *listen to people’s demands and to offer appropriate solutions* by rethinking the neoliberal economic philosophy and the elite-focused political model.

Melito argues that the appeal of populism can be traced back to the post-communist process of democratisation. While liberalism praised individualism in the social, political and economic spheres, many traditional institutions, such as religion and the ethnic nation, or traditional social roles lost importance. Rather than dismissing old models, liberals need to implement *discursive strategies that broaden the public arena* and take the demands of a broader section of society into account.

The tendency of the political establishment to dismiss the concerns of ‘the people’ was also examined by Volk in her analysis of the anti-Islam ‘PEGIDA’ movement in Dresden. She highlights how national and specifically western German politicians and political observers too often conflate the contemporary populist far right with the extremist neo-Nazi milieu from the post-reunification period of the early 1990s. Such simplified explanations for rising populist far-right politics undermine the complexity of the situation on the ground and overlook some of the genuinely felt concerns shared by supporters of populist actors.

Similar to the situation Melito described in Poland, populists in eastern Germany also see themselves as the ‘true’ democrats, safeguarding democracy and the civil rights of the German people in the face of what they see as the authoritarian policies introduced by the establishment parties in response to the COVID pandemic. To counter this claim, liberal-democratic policy-makers need to invest time and energy in *political and civic education*, reinforcing the core meanings of liberal-democratic values, such as the safeguarding of civil rights, in their policy initiatives.

Given that PEGIDA was established as a movement ‘against the Islamisation of the Occident’, it is understandable that liberal

commentators focus on its anti-Muslim character. However, this overlooks the complex interplay of interests of the grassroots activists, not least their anti-left position. Liberal-democratic policy-makers need to take account of the specific dimensions of the anti-leftism of the contemporary populist far right in eastern Germany. PEGIDA's understanding of 'leftist politics' does not concern economic but rather social and cultural matters: while it supports left-wing economic policies such as public welfare, it opposes liberal and left-wing socio-cultural and environmental policies such as the promotion of gender-neutral language, multiculturalism and measures against climate change. Rather than simply dismissing PEGIDA supporters as Islamophobic, *liberal commentators need to engage with populist voters' feelings of disorientation brought about by globalisation.*

Neo-traditionalism: supply side

It is a well-established tactic among right-wing populists in CEE to rhetorically, and sometimes physically, attack migrants, feminists, the LGBTQ community, Muslims, Jews, atheists and the EU as the Others against which their desired conceptualisation of the national Self is defined. Drawing on the insights from their research, the authors of this volume seek to promote a more open-minded, pluralistic and optimistic vision of Europe and its constituent nations to counter the attempts by right-wing populists to normalise a narrowly defined, inward-looking, ethnically pure and patriarchal view of their home societies.

Promote a plurality of voices

In his research on how the Hungarian government instrumentalises sentiments of injustice and grievance around the Treaty of Trianon to legitimise present-day conflicts with the European institutions, Sadecki shows how the revisionist narratives and symbols employed by the Orbán government have caused tensions with its neighbours – especially Romania – and have fuelled far-right populism at home and in the diaspora communities. A related strategy employed by the Hungarian government – namely, pursuing kin-state policies vis-à-vis Hungarians in Romania – was the subject of Chiruta's analysis. He argues that Hungary's unilateral policies, under the absence of a bilateral agreement with Romania, could potentially lead to ethnic conflict and jeopardise Romania's national security.

To push back against this official historical revisionism, we need to ensure a *plurality of voices* and thereby greater nuance in debates about Hungary's past, acknowledging 'reflexive' nostalgia for the lands lost after World War I, while at the same time refuting 'restorative' nostalgia that supports any calls for the country's borders to be redrawn.³ Hungarians should therefore *decouple their legitimate support for the diaspora, its language and culture from calls for the pre-Trianon borders to be reinstated*; this will allow them to demonstrate solidarity with ethnic kin, without undermining the principle of the inviolability of borders, a cornerstone of peaceful coexistence between states.

While supporting one's ethnic kin is a valid form of state support, Chiruta argues that *governments should refrain from taking unilateral decisions* but should work with the government of the host society, on the basis of *bilateral treaties and agreements*, to enhance the development of all groups living in the territory where the ethnic kin reside so as to foster peaceful coexistence.

Similarly, Sadecki argues that the opportunities for populists to instrumentalise concerns about the rights of Hungarians abroad for their own political purposes can be reduced if there is *recognition by the governments and societies of both sides – in Hungary and the neighbouring states – that wanting the best for one's ethnic kin is a valid concern* and should not be assumed to be a springboard to historical or territorial revisionism. Encouraging dialogue between historians, joint publications presenting both sides' points of view, efforts to present a more balanced view in school curricula (including the perspective of the 'other side') and resisting the use of ethnic stereotypes could help ease the tensions, increase mutual understanding and deny populists the opportunity to present the other side as an existential threat.

Finally, discussing the continent's shared history at *the European level* and thereby putting the Treaty of Trianon into more universal European historical frames could help Hungary and its neighbours overcome the sense of uniqueness of their national myths and raise awareness about how other nations dealt with similar phenomena.

Push back against hegemonic conceptualisations of society

Different interpretations of the past and of perceived threats to national identity are as common within nation-states as they are across national borders. Constructing those who do not share the narrow definition of national identity promoted by populists as internal enemies is a useful tool to delegitimise critique and silence opposition. Even before the

full-scale invasion by Russia in 2022, debates about what it meant to be a 'real Ukrainian' were heated – particularly regarding the role of language. Antagonism towards Russia, a key feature of Ukrainian populist discourse, ran the risk of internally Othering or alienating sections of the population whose first language is Russian.

To drain the power of populist discourse that seeks to polarise Ukrainians along linguistic lines, Cole argues that it is important *to articulate Ukrainian identity in positive terms* rather than defining it strongly in opposition to Russia and Russian culture. This would be facilitated by *nuanced discussions of the reality of cultural diversity* in Ukraine, with the aim of emphasising *common ground and accepting aspects of ambiguity and contention* based on regional and historical differences.

To limit the ability of populists to use regional and historical differences to polarise the country, it is key to continue *support for cultural initiatives which emphasise the unifying aspects* of being Ukrainian and encourage *open dialogue and interaction* between people from different regions of the country. In addition, *a clear division needs to be drawn between the past and the present*. Discourse suggesting that contemporary political events are simply the continuation of historical events – especially relating to World War II – not only causes division within the country but also provides ammunition for Russian propaganda.

Given the centrality of defending traditional values as a legitimising strategy, right-wing populists in CEE place considerable importance on identifying and seeking to neutralise the factors which, according to them, threaten the continued existence of the nation in its desired pure form. This entails demonising the LGBTQ community, feminists, Jews, Muslims and migrants, constructing each as a threat to societal norms and values and thereby justifying their marginalisation.

Several of the proposed policy responses to attempts by right-wing populists to demonise, marginalise and silence minority communities were shared by our authors.

Firstly, in pushing back against homophobia in Serbia and Islamophobia in Czechia, for example, Dekić and Gómez del Tronco both emphasised the importance of *visibility and representation* as means to bring about positive change. Dekić argues that increasing the visibility of same-sex families can help challenge heteronormativity and normalise sexual and gender difference, thereby making society more amenable to protective legislation for the LGBTQ community. Similarly, Gómez del Tronco argues for the need to promote fairer representation of Muslims, *breaking down the monolithic understanding* of 'Muslims', emphasising *the human plurality* across this group and its members' multiple social

identities, including those that overlap with the broader Czech society. Important in this endeavour is the inclusion of a diversity of Muslim voices rather than assuming that those representing a specific religious institution or interpretation of the faith speak for the whole community.

Secondly, when populists attack minority groups, they do so with the aim of marginalising and isolating them so as to make it more difficult to engage in collective action against the powers-that-be. *Establishing alliances* with other groups targeted by populists, both within the state or across borders, is thus an effective way to pool resources and coordinate a political response to populist rhetorical and physical violence – whether the ally is pursuing similar policy goals or not. As Bogdanova highlighted in her research on feminist movements in Slovakia and Poland, reaching out to as many people as possible, including those not personally affected by anti-gender attacks, allowed activists to *secure broader popular support* for their cause. Strengthening alliances with others pursuing related goals helps highlight commonalities and challenges the perceived marginal status of the group and its cause. As Dekić shows, by working together with single parents, parents wanting to adopt and those seeking the right to medically assisted reproduction, same-sex families in Serbia were able to demonstrate that their needs are, in many aspects, the same as those of other families.

And, thirdly, given the broad use of antisemitic, Islamophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric and discourse by populist actors, the need to *monitor hate speech* was identified by Thue, Gómez del Tronco and Yermakova as particularly important. As Thue proposes on the basis of her research on antisemitism in the Balkans, online monitoring should incorporate specific country-related keywords, which would help to uncover more implicit forms of antisemitism, and which could also lead to the identification of the sources that might be deliberately promoting antisemitic content. In parallel, *working groups comprising experts on hate crime and hate speech* should be established to help raise awareness and provide training to the police and other public officials to help them properly identify what constitutes hate crime and hate speech. Gómez del Tronco also advocates in favour of monitoring journalistic output and political discourse for hate speech about Muslims. However, in addition to clamping down on negative discourse about minority groups, it is key, he argues, for journalists and other opinion formers to receive support from experts in academia, religious institutions, interfaith dialogue platforms and NGOs on how to *communicate better* about Muslims and other minority groups.

Conclusions

Fifteen young researchers examined several well-understood and less-studied dimensions of right-wing populism, reflected on the reasons for its popularity, including both the supply and demand mechanisms, and offered a broad gamut of policy recommendations. The goal was to go beyond the existing literature that has almost exhaustively dealt with the necessary legal-institutional solutions and the needed revival of party competition carried out within the commonly shared boundaries of the liberal-democratic ethos. To accomplish this goal, the team came up with a novel conceptual frame, built around the concepts of *neo-feudalism*, to capture the economic-political uniqueness of the system, and *neo-traditionalism*, to catch the dominant feature of the social imaginary promoted by the right-wing populist apparatus of cultural production.

Accordingly, the policy recommendations can be grouped along these two dimensions. We observed that neo-feudalism creates two separate constituencies: a large set of people who benefited from its social programmes, and a small oligarchy of the neo-feudal system that benefited from a privileged relationship with the holders of political power. The champions of liberal democracy need to try to chip away at these constituencies' support for right-wing populists when the latter are out of power but engage in the full examination and critique of the neo-feudal arrangements when they control the levers of power.

The key task is the rebuilding of trust in the rule of law and the institutions of the liberal order, enhancing participatory democracy at the regional and local levels and beefing up support for pro-liberal-democratic civil society. It is also important to tailor economic assistance and cooperation for local authorities and civil society, so that it better reflects local conditions.

Countering right-wing populism in the cultural dimensions means proposing a social imaginary built on the principles that directly challenge neo-traditionalism but are not inimical to people's customary cultural environments. This calls for a multifaceted and nuanced strategy that would allow liberal democrats to propose their own versions of patriotism and religiosity. Such a strategy requires that liberal democrats listen to the people to understand better their ways of experiencing and framing problems, not just proposing 'dry' technocratic solutions. At the same time, they need to find a way to teach the public how to understand, live with and enjoy cultural (racial, ethnic, religious, sexual and so on) diversity and how to engage with political opponents while respecting

the rules of democratic politics, including the rejection of hate speech in any form.

Bilateral relations, often complicated by divergent historical memories, should be openly debated and framed, as much as possible, in a broader European context, so that each society learns how to move away from its own myopic vision of the past. This should be coupled with promoting a positive, yet not aggressive, national self-image. The adage *e pluribus unum* still holds.

Notes

1. Musiałek, Paweł. 2024. 'Tusk kontynuuje politykę PiS-u. To wielka klęska Kaczyńskiego', Klub Jagielloński. Available at: <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2024/06/07/tusk-kontynuuje-polityke-pis-u-to-wielka-klaska-kaczynskiego>.
2. TVP info. 2024. 'Rozliczanie rządów PiS poprawia praworządność? Polacy zabrali głos [SONDAŻ]'. Available at: www.tvp.info/82085129/pis-zjednoczona-prawica-sondaz-rozliczanie-rzadow-poprawia-praworzadnosc.
3. The distinction between reflexive and restorative nostalgia was introduced by Svetlana Boym (2001) in *The Future of Nostalgia*.

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Over the past two decades, populist politicians and parties have enjoyed remarkable success across the globe. The rise of right-wing populism is perhaps most noticeable in post-communist Europe, especially in Hungary and Poland, where politicians subscribing to this ideology have come to power and weakened media pluralism, the protection of minorities, the sovereignty of civil society and the independence of the judiciary.

To develop a multidisciplinary understanding of the rise and functioning of right-wing populism in Central and Eastern Europe, *The Anatomy of Right-Wing Populism* examines the two original concepts of neo-traditionalism (to capture the construction of the pure people in opposition to the corrupt elites and the threatening others) and neo-feudalism (to capture an economic strategy whereby a relatively small elite controls the apex of political power and a sizable portion of the country's economy). This book argues that the causes and consequences of populism cannot be fully understood without a multidisciplinary analysis, drawing on the theories and approaches of politics, history, economics, sociology and anthropology. Grounded in empirical research, this volume provides theoretical insights into how populism became such a powerful political force and formulates policy recommendations on how to resist illiberalism, thereby appealing not only to academics but also to activists and policy makers.

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