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To cite this article: Zsolt Enyedi (2016) Paternalist populism and illiberal elitism in Central Europe, Journal of Political Ideologies, 21:1, 9-25, DOI: 10.1080/13569317.2016.1105402

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2016.1105402

Published online: 21 Dec 2015.

Article views: 1550

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 22
View citing articles
Paternalist populism and illiberal elitism in Central Europe

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ABSTRACT
Through the analysis of the ideology of two Hungarian parties typically considered as populist, this paper investigates how elitism can be integrated into an overall populist appeal. The two parties, Fidesz and Jobbik, exhibit features of paternalist populism and illiberal elitism while offering different responses to the challenges typically confronted by authoritarian populist movements. With regard to Jobbik, the paper uncovers the existence of three distinct ideologies: right-wing populist; ultra-nationalist; and traditionalist and ‘meta-nationalist.’ The paper directs attention to the layered nature of partisan ideological discourses and assesses the relevance of the analysed model for Eastern and Central Europe.

Introduction

Just before the financial crisis, Ivan Krastev concluded that forces of populism and illiberalism were tearing Central Europe apart. Nationalist populist actors were mobilizing against the ‘excesses of postmodern culture,’ the ‘collapse of traditional values,’ the ‘liberal rationalism embodied by EU institutions,’ ‘the unaccountability of the elites’ and the ‘corrupted elites and morally corrupting “others” such as ethnic or sexual minorities.’ Krastev did not find this phenomenon to be directly dangerous to democracy, for two main reasons. First, because populism—although viciously antiliberal—is not antidemocratic. And, second, because ‘there is very little in the way of populist policies.’ His relatively optimistic assessment was in line with those evaluations that acknowledged the potential positive contribution of populist parties and movements. In these studies, populism is considered to be a temporary force, one that undermines sclerotic and collusive party systems, brings new issues to the agenda, removes taboos and after its collapse leaves behind a rejuvenated party system.

The majority of the populist movements that existed prior to the financial crisis in Central Europe have, indeed, either now disappeared or transformed into more mainstream parties. But two particularly prominent representatives of the antiliberal populist wave, Jobbik and Fidesz, survived and increased their influence. These two parties have commanded close to two-thirds of the support of Hungarian voters for more than a decade. First, from the opposition; then, in the case of Fidesz, from government, they were able to adjust the
constitution and a considerable part of the national political institutional framework to suit their ideologies.\(^5\)

As shown later, the stereotypical image of populism does not fit perfectly the two respective parties. Their preference for elitism in a number of issue areas and their inclination to assign an elevated role to the state in structuring social relations, together with a number of other more specific ideological tenets discussed in detail later, constitute a borderline subtype of populism, best labelled paternalistic populism.

Following a broad literature, the term populism refers in this paper to an ideology that possesses three principal characteristics.\(^6\) First, it is structured around opposition between ‘ordinary people’ and corrupt elites (anti-elitism). Second, it demands some form of direct popular participation in government, at the expense of the institutions of representative democracy and to the detriment of professional politicians (bottom-up input). Third, it treats the mechanisms of organized pluralism with suspicion and objects to the preferential treatment of minority interests (majoritarianism).\(^7\)

Of these criteria, the second may be the most controversial. The fact that many of the existing populist movements endorse the rule of a single leader and only few of them support deliberative versions of direct democracy seems to contradict the proposed definition. But without including the demand for redistribution of power in favour of the masses, the concept would lack the programmatic aspect that distinguishes ideologies from attitudes and rhetoric. Furthermore, anti-elitism is understood to imply identification with non-elites.\(^8\) This suggestion may seem uncontroversial but, in fact, it is in tension with the often-heard assertion that the term ‘people’, on behalf of whom the populists claim to speak, is an ‘empty vessel’, a term without content.\(^9\) The latter understanding, while being correct in emphasizing the flexibility of the language of populists, goes too far. Or, to put it differently, it fits populist discourse better than populist ideology. Those political actors who use the term ‘people’ in such a way to include some actual elites and exclude some non-elites, particularly those with least power and wealth, may be said to employ a populist discourse, but their ideology is not a classical populist one. A close analysis of the rhetoric of Fidesz, and especially Jobbik, indicates exactly such a conception.

Since both parties produce a large number of statements, programmes and legislative initiatives in line with the three definitional criteria of populism,\(^10\) the term seems applicable to them. This does not mean, however, that the populist label is necessarily optimal. As shown later, the ideology of these parties assigns great weight to elements that contradict ideal-typical populism.

The following analysis mainly relies on the party programmes, on legislative initiatives (in the case of Fidesz, also on laws and regulations), on the speeches of the party leaders and on the articles of their advisers. In the case of Fidesz, the charismatic party president and Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, and his chief ideologue, Gyula Tellér, are considered as the most authentic sources. As far as Jobbik is concerned, the essays published by party leader Gábor Vona, the party’s programmes and the articles of Magyar Hüperión, an intellectual magazine supported by Jobbik, provide the principal references.

**Majoritarianism**

When applying the criteria listed earlier to the two respective parties, majoritarianism appears to be the least problematic attribute, whether one understands majoritarianism
as the assertion of the dominance of the values and norms of the majority or as a type of decision-making procedure. Fidesz and Jobbik agree that once the most fundamental human rights are taken care of, the collective interests of the national community trump the interests of individuals and of minorities. They both reject multiculturalism, expect the government to represent the values of the majority and seek to restrict the presence of non-conventional subcultures (e.g. sexual minorities) in the public space. Differences between the two parties are politically significant, but are related more to the degree of radicalism than to substantive positions. For example, while Jobbik promises to ban the annual Gay Pride in the capital city, and the leaders of the party often participate in anti-Pride demonstrations, Fidesz treats the representation of minority norms as objectionable but legitimate.

In the discourse of the two parties, the category of ‘nation,’ or ‘people,’ rarely appears as composed of diverging interests. Fidesz claims to represent the national interest ‘not in constant debates but in its natural way.’ Orbán’s opposition to debates has a pragmatic foundation: he considers (‘regretfully’) autocracies to be often more efficient than democracies. The systematic exclusion of the opposition from decision-making (e.g. from the nomination of Constitutional Court justices, from the writing of the new constitution and its amendments, or from the regulation of constituency boundaries) can also be considered as the implicit rejection of pluralism. The idea of state neutrality, a logical concomitant of social pluralism, is officially not opposed by the party. At the same time, one of the principal justifications given for replacing the previous constitution was that it came down on the side of individual rights as opposed to the interests of the national community, and was, therefore, unable to express forcefully enough ‘Hungarian values.’

Viktor Orbán’s adviser, Gyula Tellér, prepared the grounds for the post-2010 ‘illiberal state’ (baptized so by the Prime Minister himself) not only by pointing out the dangers of a rights-based constitution, free markets and the dominance of liberal norms, but also by emphasizing that frequent alternations in power and the direct dependence on the short-sighted and materialistic masses are an obstacle to solving long-term societal problems. In his assessment, the cyclical nature of electoral pressures cuts short all major attempts at moving the country away from its financial dependency on the West. The old constitution made government-change too easy and the society was too weak to defend itself against the forces that captured government. Because of the large stakes involved in the polarized competition, the political parties overpromised and the governments had no choice but to take foreign loans. The result was citizen alienation and an increasing dependency on lenders. The solution is a new constitution that narrows the field of the political game, prescribes a certain set of values and creates institutions that are to advance the interests of the national community.

Accordingly, many institutional arrangements and policies in post-2010 Hungary contradict the idea of state neutrality. Take the example of denominational neutrality. The new constitution defines Christianity as a force that preserved ‘nationhood.’ The 2012 Church Act authorizes the parliamentary majority to pick and choose among churches when it comes to joint church-state projects. By 2015, the transfer of the ownership of state schools and social welfare institutions to a few chosen churches reached a stage when even some of the leaders of the benefitted churches protested, claiming that under such conditions, the denominational neutrality of the state was in danger.

Globalization, neoliberalism, consumerism, privatization to foreign investors and cosmopolitanism are seen by the Fidesz ideologues as interrelated and carefully managed processes aimed at establishing the world dominance of certain economic and political powers. The
availability of abortion, the spread of new religious cults, of drug use and of value-neutral schools has the common effect of weakening the Hungarian nation.\textsuperscript{17} It is the duty of the state to protect citizens against the greed of the multinationals, the dominance of internationally owned media outlets and the interference of international NGOs.\textsuperscript{18}

Jobbik denounces state neutrality and the constraints on the ethnocultural majority even more explicitly than Fidesz. Like Fidesz, Jobbik demands an active, powerful, ideologically committed state. The task of the state is to show direction to the national community, and, therefore, by definition, it cannot be ideologically neutral.\textsuperscript{19} The party plans to replace liberal democracy, ‘a refuse imported from abroad’,\textsuperscript{20} with ‘value-based democracy,’ effectively ending the current situation in which Hungarians are second-class citizens in their own country.

While the differences between the two parties continue to be relevant, Jobbik’s ideas have had a surprisingly large influence on Fidesz-government policies. The ideological gap between the two parties has gradually narrowed. Jobbik’s 2010 manifesto urged the Parliament to write a new constitution, to include references to God and to the Holy Crown into the constitution, to remove the statutes of leftist historical figures from public spaces, to introduce a Memorial day of the Versailles Treaty (1920), to give citizenship with voting rights to Hungarians living in neighbouring countries and to include the work of some extreme-right writers into national textbooks. All of these ideas have been implemented by Fidesz, although in some cases (e.g. the reference to the Holy Crown and Christianity in the Constitution) in a less radical fashion than demanded by Jobbik. While the term ‘influence’ may be too strong, as one does not know what the Fidesz policies would have been without the presence of Jobbik, it is important to recognize that these demands appeared first in Jobbik and not in Fidesz documents.

For both parties, majoritarianism stems from the converging ideas of statism (état-ism) and nationalism. A strong state is understood as a sovereign, unitary, nation state. Nationalism has a long tradition in Hungary, rooted in the trauma of losing large parts of the country’s territories after First World War. But current conditions, the combination of a decade-long economic decline, membership in the European Union and the extremely high openness of the economy, imply that the achievement of state sovereignty is simultaneously a popular objective and a technical impossibility. The tension between the two provides solid ground for nationalist mobilisation.

**Bottom-up input**

As far as the demand for bottom-up input is concerned, the ideologies of the two parties oscillate between populism and elitism. Prior to 2010, in opposition, Fidesz conducted an orthodox populist strategy: it initiated referenda and campaigned with the promise of halving the political class. And indeed, after coming to power, it reduced radically the number of MPs and of local councillors. But the size of the national executive has not declined, and the elitist, non-majoritarian components of the political system were actually strengthened. The Budget Council (composed of the president of the National Bank, the president of the State Audit Office and the deputy of the President of Hungary) was given the right to veto budgets. The President of the Republic acquired the right to call for new elections if the budget was not accepted in a timely fashion. The *actio popularis*, the right of citizens to turn to the Constitutional Court for the examination of the constitutionality of laws, was abolished. The length of terms of office holders of independent regulatory agencies (media
board, national judicial office, public prosecutor, state audit office, etc.) was increased. The requirement of a supermajority was extended to new policy areas, including taxes, family subsidies and the establishment of the boundaries of electoral districts.

Through the use of extraordinarily expedited legislative procedures, the government restricted the scope of public debates. The decline in the role of the Parliament in supervising the government and the spectacular growth of secrecy concerning governmental decisions decreased further the scope for bottom-up input. By abolishing the institution of popular initiatives, by increasing the thresholds for the validation of referendums and by packing the body that decides about the legality of the proposed referendum-questions with government loyalists, the weight of direct democratic elements of the political systems diminished. Given that none of these changes has been indicated by Fidesz prior to 2010, the rupture between the oppositional and governmental phase of the party can be considered radical.

Fidesz, however, did not establish a pure aristocratic-representative system and has not turned against plebiscitary procedures tout court. Populist techniques became in fact an integral part of the regime, albeit in a rather specific form. Their primary example is the institution of National Consultation. In the framework of National Consultation, all citizens of Hungary receive letters from the Prime Minister, accompanied by questionnaires targeting a few selected issues. Take the example of the 2015 National Consultation on immigration. The letter, containing the photo and signature of Viktor Orbán, stated that ‘Economic immigrants cross our borders illegally, pretend to be refugees, but in fact come for social benefits and jobs … Because Brussels has failed in tackling immigration, Hungary must go on its own way … We will not allow the economic immigrants to pose a threat to the livelihood and jobs of Hungarian people … I count on your opinion.’ Then the questionnaire attached to the letter asked a long list of questions, including whether the respondents are worried about terrorism, whether they see a connection between terrorism and the inability of Brussels to tackle immigration, etc. The final question was: ‘Do you agree with the government that instead of allocating funds to immigration we should support Hungarian families and those children yet to be born?’ The replies to such questionnaires have then been regularly used by the government as evidence for the popular legitimacy of its course of action–in spite of the fact that the actual answers have never been made public.

Given the nature of these letters and questionnaires, it is safe to conclude that they serve as instruments of top-down rule. This logic also applies to links between the government and some civic organizations: the government supports them financially while these associations organize public marches in support of the Prime Minister and play a central role in negative campaigns against Fidesz’s opponents. The demonstration of popular support is apparently an important component of the regime, even if the channels of direct democracy have been narrowed rather than broadened. In spite of the formal constraints on the executive, the regime is centralized to a level that is unknown in Europe, concentrating all power in the hands of the Prime Minister, in line with the spirit of ‘leader democracy.’

The institutionalist agenda of Jobbik is even more unequivocally on the populist side than that of Fidesz. The party promised to abolish the immunity of the MPs, to make ministers legally responsible for their decisions and to give the citizens the right to elect the president directly and to recall their MPs. Of course, Jobbik’s ideas were not put to the same kind of test as the promises of Fidesz, and, therefore, it is more difficult to judge their robustness. Additionally, Jobbik’s admiration of authoritarian political structures (discussed later)
indicates that bottom-up surveillance of the political class is only a second-best option for the party and the ultimate goal is to build a leader-centred, hierarchical political system.

**Elitism and anti-elitism in the ideology of Fidesz**

At the level of campaign discourse, Fidesz fits squarely into the anti-elitist box. Particularly in the 2006–2010 period, the party’s rhetoric was directed against ‘new aristocrats,’ ‘opulent millionaires,’ ‘loafers’ and ‘swindlers,’ who exploit ordinary Hungarians. But these attacks were not firmly grounded in an establishment vs. people dichotomy. Ordinary Hungarians were typically not contrasted with the Hungarian elite, but rather with the international economic and cultural establishment and their local representatives: the ‘foreign-minded,’ cosmopolitan leftists and liberals. By focusing its criticism on Brussels, on Washington or on the various international agencies, compared to which the government of Hungary was presented as an underdog, the party could continue to voice anti-establishment feelings even after it became the de facto political elite and even after it enlisted among its supporters the largest oligarchs.

In contrast with the David-and-Goliath image used when speaking about foreign policy relations, within the Hungarian context Fidesz relates to ‘its own people’ in a highly paternalistic way. The party interpreted its mandate as one that allows the government to educate and discipline citizens. After 2010, the curricular autonomy of schools was abolished, the autonomy of local governments and universities was restricted and surveillance of state employees was tightened. Further governmental decisions, like the Sunday-closing of supermarkets, were also based on the idea that the victorious party, or at least the government based on it, has the moral authority to structure citizens’ lives. Those who don’t work, don’t form traditional families, don’t keep their gardens tidy or fail to send their kids to kindergarten are not considered to perform their duties and, therefore, can be penalized. Both parties are ready to deny social benefits, or even full membership in the political community, from these ‘undeserving’ citizens.

While Jobbik prefers to speak of merits counting for more than rights, Fidesz tends to emphasize that rights cannot exist without social obligations. But both of them see the rights-based liberal approach as the cause of social disintegration. They consider fulfilled duties as precondition for full membership in the national community. This implies that membership rights are not conditional on something given, like citizenship or ethnicity, but on performance.

Accordingly, under the Fidesz government, those unemployed who rejected the offered communal work and those parents who failed to send their children to kindergarten or to school were deprived of a large part of their welfare benefits. Local authorities were given the power to deny subsidies from citizens deemed to be undeserving, including those who failed to keep order around their house or who exhibited anti-communitarian behaviour.

In direct contrast with the emancipatory character of populism, both parties attempted to reduce the voice of the uneducated and the political underclass by changing the political opportunity structure. Fidesz introduced the voluntary registration of voters, while Jobbik proposed educational criteria as precondition for voting rights.

Although typical Fidesz rhetoric does not contain elitist phrases, as they would contradict the general populist strategy, the statements of the party’s ideologues betray a sceptical image of the people. Citizens are seen as gullible and consumption oriented, rather than
spiritual. But the emphasis is not on the faults of the people, but on the sinister character of their manipulators. Consumerism and, more generally, the prominence of instinctual motivations over spiritual motivations appear as phenomena purposefully encouraged by the enemies of the nation (including socialists and liberals). The main beneficiary of the shallowness of the citizenry is the mythical ‘Investor’, a force that has exploited nations for centuries, ‘maybe millennia.’

Conspiracy theories and moralism are of course well-known attributes of populist discourse. The relevant question is against whom are they used? Conspiracy theories are inevitably used against elites, in the case of Fidesz primarily global elites. Moralistic discourse, on the other hand, can target both the luxurious lifestyle of elites and the lack of self-discipline in lower classes. Paternalistic populism prefers the latter use.

Under the Fidesz government, such moralistic arguments accompanied the systematic redistribution of resources from the lower classes to the upper classes. The relevant policies, for example, the flat personal income tax, the increase of VAT, the conversion of financial transfers into tax relief, the conditioning of social benefits on various behavioural criteria, etc., contributed to an increase in social inequalities. While after 2008, all OECD countries, with the exception of Greece, increased social expenditure to mitigate the consequences of the financial crisis, in Hungary social benefits were lowered and unemployment benefits reduced from ten months to three months. In 2013, the government spent less on welfare than in 2008, even though the number of poor rose significantly: in 2008, 17.9% of the society was labelled ‘severely materially deprived’; by 2013, the figure had risen to 26.8%. The slogan of a ‘workfare’ society, a society that replaces social benefits with the possibility to work, was supported by the majority, partly because it was regarded more just than the unconditional support of the least well-off and partly because it seemed to offer a solution to the very low employment rate.

Economic reasons may have played a larger role than ideological reasons in producing such outcomes, but the outcome was definitely in line with the writings of the ideologues of Fidesz, including Gyula Tellér. According to him, the most fundamental problem facing the country in 2010 was the large number of those who depended on government subsidies. This was both a problem for the economy and for Fidesz, as these welfare recipients tended to form the clientele of the socialists. The response of the Fidesz government to this challenge was the radical reduction of social benefits for those who do not work and do not raise children. For the unemployed, the government offered limited work opportunities, through non-contractual public works in the form of community service, the availability of which is typically at the discretion of local political elites. The rise in inequalities was also related to the fact that the social engineering aimed at creating a new, loyal business elite led, inevitably, to oligarchic structures—an outcome that is directly opposed to what populism is supposed to be about.

In line with these developments, one analyst, András Bozóki, concluded that ‘… middle class populism went effectively hand in hand with the exclusion of lower classes and the unemployed from the nation.’ Accordingly, he used the label of neoliberal populism to describe the essence of the Fidesz programme. While the adjective ‘neoliberal’ is debatable, as it is difficult to reconcile it with the growing role of the state in a number of sectors, the upper middle-class bias of the post-2010 policies is unmistakable.

It is important to note, however, that the market economy is criticized by Fidesz for its insensitivity to spiritual values, its cruelty against the weak and its supranational character.
The state has the duty to protect the interests of domestic producers and consumers. Therefore, it is permissible to discriminate against foreigners, regulate prices, support specific enterprises, nationalize certain properties and industries, and to intervene if private financial institutions treat consumers unfairly.

While the agricultural and manufacturing sectors are praised for their contribution, financial markets are seen as inherently dangerous. Accordingly, after 2010, the Fidesz government channelled resources from the ‘speculative’ to the ‘productive’ sectors of the economy with the help of state subsidies, extraordinary taxes and hefty penalties. It prioritized vocational training at the expense of higher education, and introduced a massive expansion of state regulation of almost all economic sectors.

This state interference in the economy, which not only seeks to mitigate misery, but also to generate new inequalities, is embedded in an ideology that evaluates individuals against vaguely defined communitarian moral standards. According to Tellér, the community needs to reward individuals proportionately to their performance. While Tellér makes some references to what such a performance could consist of—primarily working (as opposed to being a burden for the others), raising a family, participating in politics and in the intellectual work that recreates national identity—ultimately he allows the nation and its leaders to decide who contributed, and then to reward them accordingly with prizes, promotion or economic opportunities. By such extra rewards, the state can demonstrate that contributions to the community are worthwhile, and it can hope to trigger a virtuous circle, which will ultimately allow to state to scale down its active interference. But social engineering, with the creation of a domestic and patriotic middle-class as its primary objective, is considered a legitimate task of the government. The prioritization of Hungarian entrepreneurs, the support for large (but decent) families and patriotic education are all part of this ultimate goal. Tellér acknowledges that the distribution of extra rewards creates a clientele around the government, but he believes this is simply a collateral phenomenon as this clientele is nothing else but the womb in which a new, performance-focused regime is born.

The fervour for centralization and regulation was of course deeply embedded in the peculiar post-crisis context in which the lack of regulation was widely seen as the principal cause of economic meltdown. But it also satisfied the logic of paternalistic populism. Part of the resources channelled from lower classes to the wealthy with the tax and welfare policies were given back to the less well-off through highly visible, even theatrical, gestures of the government. Public opinion particularly welcomed government actions to suspend foreclosures; introduce extra taxes on banks and on multinational companies in the retail, energy and telecommunication sectors; make utility companies reduce prices (for electricity, water use, gas, waste collection, etc.); and force banks to forego part of their loans. The regime of paternalistic populism satisfied the public’s sense for justice, not through automatic, impersonal social benefits, but via highly publicized state interventions that inflicted visible harm on the most hated elite institutions.

**Elitism and anti-elitism in the ideology of Jobbik**

Much of Fidesz’s social policies and its approach to the role of state are in line with Jobbik’s philosophy. Moreover, the bulk of Fidesz policies discussed earlier originated in Jobbik manifestos. On the other hand, Jobbik continues to be, in almost all respects, more extreme than Fidesz, particularly with regard to law and order issues. Jobbik advocates the introduction
and use of the death penalty and argues for forced labour of criminals. Jobbik-dominated city councils excluded citizens with criminal records from social housing and workers doing community service have been monitored by cameras. Jobbik’s programmes and electoral campaign slogans project the image of a party that is vehemently anti-establishment, very tough on law and order matters, and strongly Eurosceptic—but also democratic and non-racist, in the sense that it does not seek legal differentiation among citizens on the basis of ethnicity or race.

The relevant literature reminds us, however, that the extreme right parties often possess two distinct ideologies, one presented for the masses and one provided for insiders. In the case of Jobbik, the existence of the second layer is particularly visible: various speeches, public gestures and leaked internal communications of the party leave no doubt that a considerable part of the leadership—and probably of the membership—is racist (particularly anti-Roma and anti-Semitic) and ultra-nationalist. Speeches by parliamentary representatives attest that many party leaders believe in blood libels (that Jews used to kill Christian children); do not accept the current borders of Hungary; and consider the Gypsies to be tools in the hands of Zionist conspirators against the Hungarian nation.

Both of these two ideological layers—law and order populist and ultra-nationalist—are dominated by anti-elitist elements, although to the extent that they define a considerable part of the lower strata as individuals who need to be educated and disciplined, such elements also share the paternalistic-elitist approach that characterizes Fidesz policies.

A close scrutiny of Jobbik-related documents, however, reveals the existence of a third layer, distinct from the other two, which is much more radically elitist. The primary source for the latter ideological construct can be found in the essays of the party leader and in the articles written by his intellectual circle, published in the magazine *Magyar Hüperión*.

In describing the peculiarities of this ideological construct, one may take as starting point the relatively well-known fact that the leader of Jobbik is pro-Islam, and the party considers Iran, Russia and Turkey as its principal international allies. The justification provided for this attitude by the second, ultra-nationalist layer is that Hungarians are of Asian and Turkic origin and, therefore, the Muslim Turkic nations need to be treated as relatives. But the third layer provides a less particularistic, more abstract and more global explanation, according to which Islam needs to be respected as the last bastion of traditionalism.

In this context, ‘traditionalism’ is not simply a positive attitude towards traditions. The term refers to a specific ideological school, the Traditionalist School, whose representatives include figures such as René Guénon and Julius Evola. The metaphysical and esoteric ideology of the traditionalists is centred on the belief in the existence of a universal transcendental order, which has originally been expressed by what they call ‘perennial philosophy,’ and then, in a partial manner, by world religions.

Most of the original members of the traditionalist school were European Christians, but many of them turned to Buddhism and Hinduism, and particularly many became Muslim. The founder, Guénon, died as a Sufi Muslim. The unique political profile of this school is well illustrated by the fact that Guénon was also the founder of a—still functioning—Freemason Lodge. Freemasonry appealed to traditionalists because of its promise to give access to an ancient, sacred knowledge via a set of initiations, just as Sufi Islam does. At the same time, the traditionalists regard both mainstream Freemasonry and Christianity diluted, corrupted and unable to preserve their original sacred mission.
While the Fidesz critique of European mainstream politics goes back to 1968 and, sometimes, even to 1789, Vona, in line with the traditionalist school, dates the tendency towards social and political decay to the end of the Middle Ages: ‘When humanism replaced the immortal with the mortal it created an unforgivable, diabolic confusion in the hierarchy of the existential order.’43 The Eastern foreign policy orientation is based on the framework of Eurasianism. Globalization is seen as the effort of the Euroatlantic space to colonize the rest of the world. Since the Euroatlantic region became anti-traditionalist, the alternative must come from the East.44

There are two elements of the reviewed ideological scheme that are potentially problematic from the point of view of the first two layers of Jobbik’s ideology. The first concerns the criticism of nationalism and of nation states. Vona calls himself ‘metanationalist.’ He critically points out the leftist and liberal roots of nationalism and the fact that they share a belief in equality. Agreeing with his advisor, Tibor Baranyi, he considers the claim that one nation would be better than another ‘irrational.’ Nationalism is still considered superior to internationalism, largely because ‘nation is the only community that can provide the platform to fight globalized modernization’.45 But it needs to be transformed and purified: its emotional aspect needs to be toned down, and, more importantly, it needs to be based on a universalistic and spiritual foundation.

While this claim, especially if formulated in a very abstract form, may not necessarily irritate nationalists, other implications of the discussed ideological constructions pose a more direct challenge. One such idea is the positive evaluation of supranational monarchies46 and the appreciation of empires. The latter idea is central to Euroasianism, a theory propagated by such contemporary thinkers as Alexander Dugin,47 but also supported by Vona.48 In the Hungarian context, the empire vs. nation conflict appears primarily concerning the question of the Habsburg rule. Nationalist ideology is dominated by the ‘freedom-fight’ against the Habsburgs. The traditionalists, on the other hand, blame the freedom fighters for undermining the legitimate rulers49 and praise the pro-Habsburg opponents of the 1848 Hungarian uprising. The praise is even extended to General von Haynau,50 the military leader who executed hundreds of Hungarians in 1849, and whose brutality was found to be so excessive and unlawful that his superiors eventually removed him from office.

Vona, the party’s president, has repeatedly been asked to distance himself from the anti-nationalist tendencies of the traditionalists. He condemned the most radical re-evaluations of Hungarian history (like the rehabilitation of Haynau), but he continues to provide a platform—via Hüperión and via the King Attila Academy—to a group of intellectuals who show a surprising insensitivity to traditional nationalist taboos. For example, in one of the articles published by Hüperión, Franco, the Spanish leader, is commemorated as someone who has a place in the Valhalla of great fighters, alongside, among others, Otto Skorzeny.51 While the average Jobbik supporter may not be aware of this, insiders probably know that Skorzeny was the famous Waffen-SS officer who rescued Mussolini. This may not be in itself a problem for those who belong to the ultra-nationalist wing of the party. But the fact that Skorzeny also led the German unit that kidnapped the son of Admiral Horthy should give them pause for thought, given that Horthy is one of the principal heroes of the authoritarian right, whose memory is celebrated with yearly marches by Jobbik.

Next to deviations from nationalism in general, and Hungarian nationalism in particular, the strong belief in hierarchy distinguishes the analysed ideological construct from the other two layers, particularly from the populist one. Traditionalists mourn the fact that
the ‘qualitative freedom’ that existed prior to the French Revolution was replaced by ‘quan-
titative freedom,’ which is in fact ‘worse than slavery.’ ‘Democratic transformation, which
produced the dictatorship of capitalism, originated in the fact that the people lost their
sense for quality.’ True legitimacy cannot come from below, i.e. from the people, but only
from above. A considerable part of the population ‘differs from unicellular beings only
in terms of quantity.’ Equality is nothing else but the negation of freedom. The values of
the right are: ‘the priority of spiritual order over material order, aristocracy and monarchy,
congest, personal, freedoms that are estate-based and corporate instead of abstract, locality,
subsidiarity, privileges, opposition to masses, verticalism, elitism, hierarchy, traditionalism
and federalism.’ The superiority of the right over the left lies in the fact that it relies less
on the people.

According to Baranyi, Vona’s adviser, the idea that the elite should be determined by
the people is both nonsensical and morally repulsive. Ideally, leadership is not based on
popularity. Leaders do not rise from below; they are men who have links to the transcend-
ent. Unfortunately, under the conditions of modernity, such individuals are not allowed to
access power. The world is anyway not ruled by those who are elected, but by hidden anti-
traditionalist manipulators. The opponents of the current world order may want to employ
a populist strategy to advance their cause, but such a strategy, warns Baranyi, comes with a
high price: one is likely to be dragged down to the level of the masses, and then ultimately
crashed by the–hidden–rulers of the world.

The size of the influence of traditionalists and Euroasianists within the party is unclear.
Vona does not seem to expect many followers as far as his views on these matters are con-
cerned. As he puts it: ‘The realization, understanding and acceptance of the above is either
impossible for the majority or is shocking.’ He explicitly addresses his message to a selected
group of insiders. He writes: ‘We expect readers already to possess the spiritual and cognitive
background needed’ and directs readers to the writings of Baranyi and Guénon. But not
even the reading of the relevant literature is enough to make one become a proper tradi-
tionalist as this is not a matter of individual decision but of Providence, which determines
one’s intellectual-spiritual level.

The majority of the leadership probably does not entirely subscribe to these views. On
the other hand, the fact that many of the prominent party activists attend the so-called King
Attila Academy, an institution dominated by the traditionalists, and the fact that the party
leader himself is a prominent representative of this wing, signals considerable influence.

Given the problematic nature of these views from the point of view of the nationalists and
populists, one would expect more internal conflict within Jobbik. In fact, with the excep-
tion of some minor skirmishes, there is little apparent tension. One key reason for the lack
of conflict is that these ideas are presented in selected fora, for a selected readership. The
other is that they are formulated in abstract language, never translated into concrete policy
proposals. The practical implications of these ideas are left unspecified. Finally, the lack of
conflict may be explained by the fact that the traditionalist argument has a very different
time horizon than party politics. For example, the superiority of monarchical forms is said
to imply no political actions as the nation is not ready for a king. Hungarians first need to
create their internal, spiritual monarchy, and they can start to think about changing the
political-legal structures only afterwards.

It is also important to note that while this third layer can be considered as the most
extremist among the three, it is actually combinable with a pragmatic attitude to politics. As
one party leader put it, gradualist strategy is required because this is the only way to make
the ‘spiritually and intellectually undernourished nation realize the fundamental truths.’

**Wider regional implications**

Populism, both as a political discourse and as a party strategy, is prominent in Central
Europe. According to the last parliamentary elections, the public support of parties labeled
by scholars as populist or authoritarian in Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech
Republic reached 40%. Liberal democracy is particularly at risk in the post-Communist
countries, where the support for minority and individual rights has always been shaky.

Having said that, it is questionable whether the ideological configurations mapped in the
Hungarian case can be generalized for the entire region. Some observers treat Hungary
as an oddity in the region, while others argue that it stands in the forefront of a general
populist-authoritarian turn of the Eastern peripheries. The latter approach groups Orbán
together with Putin, Erdogan, Ponta, Fico, Zeman, Borisov or Kaczynski, statesmen who
all experimented, to varying degree, with anti-liberal rhetoric or policies.

In fact, the first approach has somewhat more plausibility than the second, due to the fact
that most of the populist actors of the region avoid the profound critique of liberal democ-

dracy detected in Hungary. Most of the populist parties and movements focus primarily on
the corruption of the establishment and some of them actually advocate centrist-liberal
solutions.

The Hungarian specificity may have much to do with the country’s historical trajectory.
Given the territorial gains during the Second World War and the economic development
under Communism, Hungarian society has more reasons to feel nostalgic about the author-

tarian past than the other countries of the region. Additionally, the prevailing interpretation
of history among Hungarians carries a mixture of resentment against neighbours and inter-
national powers and the memory of a glorious past. The latter component of this mixture
provides credibility for the ambition to have an impact on the European discourse. Most
Central European countries lack this mixture. They accept more readily their subordinated
role to the West and/or have internalized Western values more profoundly than Hungary.

The country that comes closest to the Hungarian patterns, both in terms of histori-
cal trajectory and in the current influence of paternalist populism, is Poland. The Polish
right (ZChN, PiS, etc.) is similar to the Hungarian one, in the sense that it combines anti-
establishment appeal with the ambition to re-educate society. But in Poland, the traditional
pro-American orientation has so far tempered the authoritarian tendencies of the political
actors and the central role of religiosity has hindered the development of a secular paternalist
populism with a modernized outlook.

The Croatian right (HDZ), especially under Tudjman, also resembled Fidesz, and one
can find individuals or minor parties in the Latvian, Slovenian and Lithuanian parliaments
who appear to be ready to support anti-liberal policies. The clergies in many of the countries
of the region and the politicians representing church interests are often outspoken critics
of Western liberalism, particularly when issues such as gay marriage appear on the agenda.
But in no other country do committed anti-liberals command the support of the large
majority of the voters and no other leading politicians lecture the West about the dangers
posed by multiculturalism, the erosion of Christian roots and the decline of nation states
as systematically as Orbán and Vona do.
The deepening of the multiculturalism- and globalization-related conflicts in Europe and the inability of the EU to maintain the image of a competitive economic and political enterprise may, however, ultimately change the current patterns, and may allow for a larger paternalist populist coalition to emerge in the region. The 2015 migration crisis has revealed that the values prevailing in the Eastern Central European political class concerning national and racial homogeneity are indeed different from the ones characterizing Western discourse. Hungary was the first to reject the idea of distributing the asylum seekers through a quota system, but was soon followed by many of the neighbouring countries. Some spillover could be detected also concerning the anti-liberal approach in the economy: in Poland, the president elected in 2015 declared that he supported the Hungarian statist-patriotic economic policies, including the taxing of foreign banks and retail chains.

Speaking up against consumerism, individualism and Europeanization continues to be a niche-party strategy in the region. But the weakening appeal of the Western European socio-economic model increases the likelihood for the development of a compelling ideological narrative that could match the existing authoritarian potential.

Conclusions

This analysis has shown that while many aspects of populism apply to the examined parties, the demand for popular participation in decision-making is only half-hearted and that anti-elitism is also only partially present, particularly if one considers this requirement to mean more than occasional attacks on the establishment. Both parties support the institutionalization of hierarchical, state-dependent structures and the reduction of the participation of lower strata. These features contradict the ideal-typical formula of populism, and are better conceived as constituting a borderline subtype, that of paternalist populism. Paternalist populism rejects the political correctness of the ‘inorganic’ establishment, but considers the people insufficiently mature to participate autonomously in decision-making, and allows the government, elected by the people, to educate and discipline the citizenry.

The emphasis on collective interests and social obligations in the ideology of the two parties resembles communitarianism and the republican model of citizenship. As opposed to these normative models, however, the basis of the political community is provided by ethnocultural similarity and conscience, and not by citizenship. The ideological orientation of the two parties also differs from the republican-communitarian models in its advocacy of robust leadership instead of horizontal relations.

As with most right-wing populist (and conservative) movements, the analysed parties oppose the liberal agenda of personal freedoms, especially concerning issues such as euthanasia, same-sex marriage or access to abortion. The progressive (liberal and social-democratic) conception of entitlements is also rejected. Similar to a number of right-wing populist movements such as the American Tea Party, the analysed parties strongly believe that entitlement programmes create a culture of dependency. But, contrary to Anglo-Saxon conservative populism, Fidesz and Jobbik do not wish to delegate full responsibility to individual citizens, but rather to the all-powerful government. Order, tradition, lean welfare spending and low personal income tax are components of the conservative agenda that are endorsed, but local autonomies, free markets and the idea of a minimal state are rejected.

The Krastev article quoted in the introduction describes a clash between ‘elites that are becoming ever more suspicious of democracy and angry publics that are becoming ever
more hostile to liberalism.’ Contrary to this description, this article has found that elitist
and populist orientations appear alongside each other in the ideology of the two parties.
The degree of integration of these various elements is not very high, but nationalism pro-
vides a platform that can, to some extent, bring them together. Nationalism is capable of
this integrating function because, on the one hand, it is a majoritarian ideology, while, on
the other hand, it expects from citizens some sort of contribution to the common cause
in return for rights within the community. In this sense, it allows for defining the circle of
legitimate decision-makers rather narrowly.

Finally, and perhaps most unexpectedly, in case of Jobbik, the paper uncovered an ide-
ological construct that is not nationalist in the conventional sense. In fact, contrary to the
usual stereotypes, Fidesz can be considered as being more purely nationalist than Jobbik.
In fact, Fidesz, in spite of claiming to be a Christian Democratic party, has never accepted
the reservations of classical Christian Democracy against nation states and nationalism.

Within Jobbik, elitist and hierarchical ideas are kept in the background, and are mainly
used to motivate top-level activists. Ordinary voters are provided with a nationalistic and law
and order populist agenda. Undoubtedly, some of the voters of Jobbik, if informed, would
be disturbed by the tenets of the ‘traditionalist’ orientation. But in the short run, belief in
the ultimate rule of ‘proper elites’ and the endorsement of meta-national, universalistic
principles do not conflict with the collective selfishness of nationalism and the mundane
righteousness of law and order programmes. By maintaining these ideological discourses
alongside each other, albeit in a somewhat compartmentalized form, political actors can
attract supporters and recruit activists with diverging motivations.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Daniel Hamilton for his suggestions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Austrian Marshall Fund and by OTKA [grant number K-105445].

Notes and References

   pp. 56–63.
2. Ibid., p. 62.
   and Its Diverse Forms* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013); A.
   Bozóki, ‘Consolidation or second revolution? The emergence of the new right in Hungary’, *Journal
   of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 24(2) (2008), pp. 191–231; A. Bozóki,
   ‘Illusion of inclusion: configurations of populism in Hungary’, *EUI Working Papers, SPS,*
6. One frequently cited feature, the assertion that the people are homogeneous, is left out of the definition. The frequency of statements implying homogeneity indicates well the presence of populist sentiments and discourse, but political actors cannot avoid differentiating along specific values and interests. Therefore, expecting a genuinely homogeneous, undifferentiated idea of the people is not realistic.
8. Most typically, the term ‘people’ either refers to the entire community or to the underdog, cf. Laclau, op. cit., Ref. 3.
10. Z. Enyedi, ‘Plebeians, citoyens and aristocrats or where is the bottom of bottom-up? The case of Hungary’, in H. Kriesi and T. Pappas, op. cit., Ref. 7, pp. 229–244.
17. Ibid., p. 94.


28. The Constitutional Court rejected the latter provision.

29. Eventually both initiatives failed.

30. Not considering such slips of the tongue as minister János Lázár’s infamous ‘those people who have nothing are worth just that.’

31. Of course, the emphasis on spiritualism has strong roots in the tradition of Christian Democrats, which rejected both communism and liberalism as forms of materialism.


35. A. Bozóki, ‘Illusion of inclusion’, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, p. 16.


37. *Ibid*.


40. Interestingly, Jobbik appeared on the Hungarian scene originally as an explicitly Christian party. Its very first campaign was about erecting large-scale crosses across Budapest in various public spaces. While this image has never been repudiated, as time went by the party became more explicit in its criticism of the Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church, demanding more conservative and nationalist policies.


46. Vona’s advisor, Baranyi, reminds the reader that the ancient kings lived in symbiosis with nations, but they did not belong to any particular nation. Accordingly, not even the Árpád-house, the first kings of Hungary, can be considered Hungarians, cf. T. Baranyi, ‘Monarchy and royalty’ [Királyság és királyiság], *Magyar Húperión*, 1(3) (2013), pp. 280–297.


48. G. Vona, ‘Introductory thoughts’, *op. cit.*, Ref. 44.

49. The would-be editor of *Magyar Húperión* put it in no uncertain terms: ‘From a right wing perspective being an active component of an Empire is incomparably superior to democratic independence.’ R. Horváth, ‘Lectures to nationalists’ [Tanítás nacionalistáknak], *Pannon Front*, 5(2) (1999), pp. 34–40.
57. T. Baranyi, ‘Populism’, *op. cit.*, Ref. 53.
60. Available at http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150426_hegedus_lorant_a_jobbik_neppartosodasarol.
61. Slovakia 2012: 59.2% (SMER-SD, OďaNO, SNS, 99%), Austria 2013: 29.77% (FPO, BZÖ, Stronach List), Czech Republic 2013: 25.53% (ANO 2011, Dawn of Direct Democracy), Poland 2011: 29.89% (PiS) and Hungary 2014: 65% (Fidesz, Jobbik).
63. In Eastern Europe, Russia has a similar historical and intellectual background.
64. Some of the politicians of the past, like Meciar and Slota in Slovakia, Milosevic and Seselj in Serbia, Iliescu and Vadim Tudor in Romania, may have been more authoritarian in their fundamental values. But they have not attempted to influence Western political discourse through speeches and articles (cf. Orbán’s article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 3 September 2015).