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The Ideological Enemy Within: How Viktor Orbán’s Hungary Fell Out of Democracy as a Member State of the European Union

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The Ideological Enemy Within: How Viktor Orbán’s Hungary Fell Out of Democracy as a Member State of the European Union

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Masters thesis written under the supervision of Prof. dr. hab. Zdzisław Mach

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Chapter One: Introduction

Although Hungary joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 as a promising liberal democratic state, it transformed into what Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán himself proclaimed to be an “illiberal democracy” within a decade. This reversal defeats the assumption of EU accession theorists such as Milada Anna Vachudova that once a state joins the EU, it has firmly chosen to commit itself to democratic values (2005). Furthermore, not only has Hungary rejected the rationale of EU membership incentives and democratic commitment, but it has also done so to a serious degree: today’s Hungary is marked by the anti-European trends of far-right political movements, exclusionary nationalism, Euroskepticism, anti-pluralism, and democratic backsliding.

In light of this contradiction between the EU’s democratic expectations and Hungary’s authoritarian reality, this research project proposes to investigate how Hungary has fallen out of democracy despite being a member of the EU. The project, then, bases itself upon the following research question: through what tactics and narratives has Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government managed to erode Hungary’s democratic institutions? How have these tactics earned enough popular support to elect the same authoritarian leader for a fourth time and resulted in the successful rise of authoritarian illiberalism in a nation-state supposedly committed to EU values, namely democracy, rule of law, equality, and pluralism? Does this represent an ideological turn for the nation, and if so, to what ends? In the simplest of terms, this thesis searches to answer the question, “How does the Orbán regime attract the support of Hungarian voters, and is their legitimization of the Orbán regime associated with an ideology?”

Previous scholarship on the topic typically argues that a combination of the EU’s lack of intervention mechanisms and the jading effects of the national population’s perceptions regarding both domestic economic hardship and EU interference with national sovereignty (on issues such as migration quotas) have culminated in Hungary’s authoritarian turn (Buzogány, 2017). This reasoning encompasses only part of the predicament, however, for it still fails to explain why Hungary has regressed to the severe degree that it has: plenty of other EU member states have shared similar experiences yet have not exhibited Hungary’s fate. In fact, as of 2018 Hungary now ranks as the least democratic of all 28 EU member states, and as the only EU

To provide a fuller explanation for Hungary’s democratic backsliding, this research project will turn its attention to four of the most prevalent tools and narratives employed against democratic tenets by the Hungarian government since Orbán’s his first re-election as prime minister in 2010: the distortion of the rule of law, the strangling of free speech, the nationalist revision of history, and the exploitation of biopolitics. This paper acknowledges that the latter two tactics mentioned could be classified as mere rhetorical devices, but it will strive to demonstrate that each is performed for an end more deeply disturbing than merely winning support for Fidesz’s regime: they are separate propagandistic tools bringing their own conceptual contributions into an authoritarian ideological pattern across the Hungarian populace. With each of these four tools, the Orbán regime fabricates, perpetuates, and popularizes a specific Hungarian social identity—based on the imagined ideal of an ethnically homogeneous, Christian nation-state—and lays the groundwork for the potential realization of deeper, mass-approved authoritarianism in the future. Such notions are antithetical to the liberal values spelled out in EU documents, treaties, speeches, and so on (to be explicitly defined in the literature review and methodology chapters).

An analysis of how the Hungarian government has been utilizing the four aforementioned tools in increasingly oppressive ways, in both the public and private spheres, will demonstrate that the current Hungarian leadership is deliberately eroding democratic institutions and EU values and instead formulating an anti-liberal popular ideology that captures large segments of the Hungarian population which, in turn, fulfills a mandate for further democratic degradation. Thus this thesis will also attest that there is an intense social construction at play in Hungary, one that extends beyond the personal greed of Orbán and his ruling party Fidesz to the general public. This is crucial to comprehend because the activity of the public (e.g. their generally held beliefs about Hungary and its relationship to the rest of the world, their voting preferences, their decisions about whether to protest against the national government or not, etc.) therefore must factor into the Orbán regime’s decision-making. It is not as though Orbán and Fidesz have seized unlimited power for themselves: despite the unprecedented and illiberal ways in which they have internally and (technically speaking) legally enhanced their ability to control the Hungarian nation-state, the fact remains that they still answer to Hungarian voters because they must be
popularly elected to power. While Orbán and Fidesz have excavated for themselves plenty of room for creative maneuvering, it must be recognized that they can only act with the compliance of the Hungarian population’s will.

This study will more than simply echo the works of some scholars, notably Jan-Werner Müller (2018a & 2018b) and Bálint Magyar (2016), who assert that Hungary has fallen out of democracy altogether; it will attest to the existence of a fundamentally anti-liberal ideology that has been often overlooked as a cause of Hungary’s backsliding and as a flaw in EU accession theory. Authoritarian movements will not be stopped unless they are first properly understood and recognized for their true nature. At a time when an influx of far-right (and far-left) populist movements are challenging the EU’s integrity as a bastion of liberalism, it is important to analyze a case like Hungary’s in order to better combat and prevent the spread of illiberal, authoritarian ideologies to other member states.
EU accession theory must begin with an understanding of the EU’s strategies and legal expectations regarding candidacy for EU membership. All candidates are required to participate in frequent monitoring and to fulfill the rigorous Copenhagen Criteria, which consists of geographic, political, and economic requirements that embody common European values, especially democracy, rule of law, human rights, equal treatment for minorities, capitalism, etc. (European Commission, 1993). However, the EU is not as clear on the frequency of its monitoring of states once they have been admitted, nor does it specify what types of punishments should be applied for noncompliance or enumerate guidelines on what constitutes an offense of the EU membership criteria. Its Treaty of Accession of 2003, which granted Hungary admission, merely explains that new members will be expected to “observe the principles and guidelines deriving from those declarations, resolutions or other positions” adopted by the EU. The Treaty does specify that if a member state violates an EU obligation, it “shall take all appropriate steps to eliminate the incompatibilities,” but this particular document is limited in that it does not describe specific parameters regarding how far a state must go to be found in violation of various EU obligations (European Commission, 2003, pp. 7 and 11).

Specialist in post-Communist democratization and EU enlargement Milada Anna Vachudova claims in her pivotal book on EU accession theory, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, & Integration After Communism*, that EU member states do, in fact, continue to uphold the collective values and goals to which they had earlier committed themselves in order to gain membership status in the supranational body (2005, p. 7). Vachudova identifies capitalism, democracy, and the rule of law as the most defining of all EU values, particularly because they are the most prevalent subjects in the Copenhagen Criteria. Contrary to the EU’s lack of legal enforcement mechanisms for its obligations, the book argues that once they have officially joined the EU, all member states continue to work toward these same values because of the incentivizing benefits of cooperation in matters of European integration (e.g. favorable economic trade and the potential for each state to retain power in EU decision-making processes). She also mentions negative reinforcement, arguing that member states will want to
continue to abide by EU values so as to avoid potential fines or other kinds of punishment (2005, p. 8).

Liesbet Hooghe, a political scientist who focuses on integration and party politics in Europe, teamed up with Vachudova to expand upon this theory of EU accession on an article entitled “Postcommunist politics in a magnetic field: how transition and EU accession structure party competition on European integration.” Their text reiterates Vachudova’s basic ideas on EU accession theory but adds the crucial concept of ideology to its inner workings. Together, they assert that EU accession criteria and negotiations encourage mainstream political parties in Central and Eastern European candidate countries to adopt similar ideological positions (i.e. favoring liberal EU values of democracy, rule of law, equality, etc.) and to promote them in public opinion. In this way, the two scholars claim the EU successfully socializes new member states in ways that, for the most part, culminate in the continuity of liberal EU values; they use Hungary as a prime example of success on this account (2009, p. 207). While Vachudova and Hooghe’s introduction of the concept of ideology into this discussion of commitment to EU values is an important consideration, unfortunately they neglect the potential forces of opposing ideologies that might result in, say, a situation like that of Hungary circa 2019.

Other scholars, such as Vladimir Tismaneanu, note the ability of ideology to work against European integration. Tismaneanu contends that the EU failed to “to deprive the illiberal forces of their political and symbolic ammunition” in post-Communist member states (2002, p. 93). His ideas effectively criticize Vachudova and Hooghe for not taking into account the importance of national politics, history, and culture in ideological formations and for presenting the liberalization of a nation-state as a linear path terminating at an “endgame” defined by equality, liberal democracy, rule of law, etc. Thus, Tismaneanu places a heavy emphasis on the ability of domestic politics and anti-liberal ideology to counter the EU’s leverage and policies among member states.

So far, a variety of domestic incidents of the twenty-first century—such as Hungary’s refusal to abide by EU migration quotas in 2016—seem to support Tismaneanu’s statement that the domestic politics of EU member states are not necessarily governed by the pursuit of EU values. Relatedly, political scientists James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, both specializing in democratization and European integration, conclude that once a state achieves EU membership, a “tacit policy consensus on inaction” on certain EU values might emerge precisely because that
state has already earned its position and therefore no longer suffers the burden to prove itself a good fit for EU membership (2003, p. 28). Like Tismaneanu, yet unlike Vachudova and Hooghe, Hughes and Sasse suggest that not all members are ideologically swayed by liberal EU values. In fact, they find that states would have little to fear in the way of potential EU punishment if they were to lag on, or even to reverse, the implementation of EU values.

EU security and enlargement scholar Nikolaos Papakostas published an article which in effect agrees with Hughes and Sasse’s conclusion, complementing it with two explanations as to why some (read post-Communist Central and Eastern European) states appear to have stagnated on their commitments to democracy, rule of law, equality, etc.: (1) embedded corruption that still lingers as specters of Communist pasts, and (2) the lack of EU mechanisms by which to enforce commitment (2012, p. 227). While Papakostas points out two major obstacles to democratization and Europeanization in many once-Communist countries including Hungary that help to explain the phenomenon described by Hughes and Sasse, his work leaves other possible reasons as to why EU accession theory might fail open for exploration—particularly the possibility of anti-liberal ideologies and mobilized public opinion in favor of authoritarian governance.

Political scientist and former opposition politician Bálint Magyar’s Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary helps to explore such a gap and examines deeper ways by which a post-Communist state supposedly committed to democracy might descend into an anti-EU authoritarian spiral. In this book, Magyar explores the deceitful mechanisms by which the hybrid regime installed by Orbán and his fellow Fidesz officials has systematically stripped Hungarians of civil liberties with impunity, ironically owing to the governing party’s control over the rule of law (2016, p. 225). Magyar’s work enhances current scholarship regarding kleptocracy and mafia states by expanding the traditional scope of the terms via the particulars of the Hungarian state, which corrupts all aspects of society, from the public to the private.

Magyar had formulated his own conception of the “post-communist mafia state” in the early 2000s. He reveals that a mafia state can be more than just a country run by corrupt, kleptocratic leaders who take advantage of their privileged positions to seize the nation’s wealth for themselves: rather, as is the case in Hungary, it could be a country whose corrupt, kleptocratic leaders also go out of their way to actively control illicit societal activities and organized crime. These leaders do more than just steal from the state: they rot it, coercing various segments of society—churches, elementary schools, universities, media providers, small
businesses, multinational companies, NGOs, bureaucrats at all levels of governance, the parliament, the courts, and other state institutions—to abide by the mafia state’s vision (2016, pp. 81-82). Magyar, though, avoids the concept of ideology in his work; the proposed thesis will focus on ideology in order to reclaim Magyar’s missed opportunity in comprehending how Hungarian leaders are fundamentally perverting the once-democratic country, and to what ends.¹

The most recent book published in this field, Hungarian émigré Paul Lendvai’s *Orbán: Hungary’s Strongman*, is very similar to Magyar’s. Lendvai spends most of the book detailing how Orbán and Fidesz have captured power in the Hungarian nation-state, although he does so in a more chronological and biographical manner, rather than a sociological one. The author largely fixates on the leader Orbán’s personality, mentioning that Hungary’s fate goes hand-in-hand with Orbán’s, whom he believes to be “driven by an unbridled lust for power and blessed with exceptional personal talent and tactical skills” (2018a, pp. 9-11). While Orbán’s behaviors and desires are crucial to the state of today’s Hungary, it would be irresponsible to assume they are the only factors. After all, the electorate must still choose to vote for Fidesz’s political platform. Thus it is not just that Orbán and his party have assumed dictatorial tendencies, but also that the people of Hungary have permitted them to do so.

Lendvai does not necessarily dismiss such a scenario, but he hardly mentions it, either. As Jan-Werner Müller criticized, it is as though *Orbán: Hungary’s Strongman* is uncertain of how to categorize the Orbán regime (2018b). Lendvai only occasionally mentions the idea of ideology and popular will, as if he were trying to signal other researchers to pick up where he leaves off and use his more historical book as a foundational basis for further study. Taken with Magyar’s book, these two texts provide a compelling rationale for exploring the more narrative elements of Hungary’s democratic backsliding and the potential existence of a state-created ideology, as well as how these forces affect the Hungarian population.

¹ For a more in-depth analysis of Magyar’s book, a few sentences of which have been adapted into this literature review, see Langdon, K. Book Review, Magyar, Bálint: POST-COMMUNIST MAFIA STATE. THE CASE OF HUNGARY. *The Czech Journal of Political Science*, 3, pp. 275-278 (2018).
Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

This research project, grounded in the styles of narrative and critical discourse analyses, serves as a study on the rise of authoritarian ideology in Hungary, a country supposedly committed to the EU’s liberal democratic values. The thesis treats Hungary as a critical case because, in spite of the fact that it joined the EU in 2004 as the most democratically consolidated out of all the member states recently added through its enlargement policy, Hungary now ranks in 2019 as the least democratic of all 28 states. As some researchers, political scientists, and journalists have already suggested, this thesis contends that democracy is no longer a suitable framework by which to analyze Hungary.

As for its theoretical basis, this research grounds itself on the point of EU accession theory, as laid out by scholars like Milada Anna Vachudova and Liesbet Hooghe and by official EU documents and agreements such as the Copenhagen Criteria, because it provides the baseline universal expectation for member states’ behaviors. EU accession theory holds that once a state accedes to EU membership, it will continue to pursue EU values as defined by the accession criteria and hallmark EU treaties (either out of ideological commitment or incentive to perform well in the eyes of the supranational body and avoid potential punishment). For instance, according to such criteria and documents, member states are expected to uphold the following spirit as outlined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU):

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. (European Commission, 2012, Article 2)

However, the Hungarian case blatantly attacks that spirit and disproves this assumption of enduring cooperation after accession. It is this gap between expectations and reality that functions as the point of departure for the rest of the project.

This research, then, will scrutinize what the national government of Hungary has done, contrary to EU accession theory, to erode its democratic institutions since Orbán’s re-election as prime minister in 2010 and to perpetuate an authoritarian ideology with an illiberal vision for the nation. For readers not familiar with Hungarian history and its transformation into an EU member state, as well as the rise of Fidesz and Orbán to political power, I have composed a brief
overview to aid them in understanding the historical, political, and social, contexts of this research. The overview is included as an appendix at the back of this thesis. Readers can choose whether or not to read it; if they do, I recommend that they read it following the methodology (Chapter Three) and before moving on to the analysis (Chapter Four).

The analytical chapter will elaborate upon the main four tools of democratic erosion employed by the Orbán regime. These tools have been selected because they are the most prevalent strategies by which the Hungarian government abuses the pervasive tenets of democracy, namely the rule of law, freedom of speech, plurality and diversity, and the protection of universal human rights (United States Department of State, 2017). All of these tools either directly or indirectly violate each of these four democratic values. And they function as more than just rhetorical devices used to garner support for Fidesz and Orbán during election seasons: they are employed in ways that assault pluralistic society and engrain specific values within the Hungarians exposed to them. They each make up a crucial pillar of an increasingly authoritarian ideology that, if left unchecked in an era of global populism, could evolve into a more serious one that mobilizes populations—Hungarian and beyond—against the EU and liberal democracy.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the specific manifestations of each of the four tools are not necessarily exclusive: an act that violates the rule of law might also directly or indirectly suppress of free speech, just as an act that re-imagines Hungarian history might also directly or indirectly further the cause of biopolitical exploitation. Thus, it is prudent to examine all of these four tools in the same thesis and then use them all to draw conclusions about Hungarian society as a whole.

The first tool, the distortion of the rule of law, will feature an analysis of Fidesz’s infamous rewriting of the Hungarian national constitution in 2011, the erasure of certain checks and balances, the institutionalization of corruption in government and business (this latter instance will especially draw upon the previous scholarship of Bálint Magyar and his version of the “mafia state” concept), and Orbán’s declaration of Hungary as an “illiberal state.” This tool is the first to be explored because, out of the four, it is the most heavily influential on the functioning of the Hungarian state. It also sets the stage for the three other tactics to function effectively, introducing and then reinforcing more abstract notions such as propaganda,

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2 Obviously the definition of democracy and its tenets is not objective; the four tenets explicitly mentioned here are not meant to be all-encompassing, but to express the general, most agreed-upon elements that make up democracy according to various political theorists, politicians, and states that identify themselves as democratic.
Hungarian exceptionalism, and the sanctity of the Hungarian identity—all of which have come to pervade the four tools and contribute to the success of Fidesz’s ever-popularizing narrative.

The second tool, the restriction of speech and press freedoms, will reveal that the Hungarian government is engaging in the anti-democratic behaviors of censorship and marginalization of the political opposition. Government centralization of media providers, threats against many news sources and NGOs that have criticized the Orbán regime and ruling Fidesz party, and accusations of “traitorous” oppositionist talk have been plentiful in Hungary over the last eight years. Censorship and marginalization does not stop at the media or NGOs, though: the particularly egregious government attack on the Central European University shows that the public educational apparatus and intellectualism—and, with them, political plurality—are under fire, as well. Of course, both the media and education are crucial communication vehicles through which to affect the opinions of society. Altogether, the multitude of ways by which Fidesz has pursued the restriction of press and speech freedoms in Hungary not only violates EU values and individual rights, but also cuts off access to credible alternative modes of thought or perspectives. The intensifying crackdown on narratives not controlled or sanctioned by Fidesz serves to convince more Hungarian citizens of the need to support the Orbán regime as the “one” keeper of “truth,” further interpellating them into the ideology Fidesz promotes.

The third tool, the nationalist revision of history, will explicate upon the Hungarian government’s attempts to fabricate a myth of a unique, ethnically-based, Christian Hungarian nation-state that has been undeservedly marginalized by the West and therefore must reassert its national sovereignty (even if the means of doing so are authoritarian or illiberal). Specific examples of this tool include Hungary’s reinvigorated fascination with the original tenth-century Magyars and Huns, its recent denials of its culpability in the Holocaust (as manifested in a very controversial physical monument), its remembrance of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, and its public encouragement of the idea of “Greater Hungary” and the current state’s connections to Transylvanian lands in Romania. These examples demonstrate a trend of historical revisionism that is especially alarming because it affects both the public and the private spheres and denies the democratic concepts of plurality and diversity.

Finally, the fourth tool is the exploitation of biopolitics. This is a term with a long history dating as far back as ancient Greek philosophy. Perhaps most famously, French philosopher Michel Foucault defines biopolitics as the strategy by which states calculate natural life into
modern politics, thereby subjecting human processes to government authority (Foucault, 2008, p. 317). Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben expands upon Foucault’s formulation by advancing the idea that a state employs biopolitics to arbitrarily suggest that it is only obligated to care for people who match a certain biological profile and that only this profile belongs within the state’s borders. Such a contested view of citizenship and human rights functions to essentially bestow upon some “the right” to state-guaranteed rights and protection under the law while simultaneously excluding others that do not fit into the state’s prerogative. Usually this artificial rule is justified by deeming the “others” as dangers to the state for various reasons (Agamben, 1995, pp. 12-13).³ It is this conception of biopolitics that prevails throughout this thesis. Having established this operational definition, this research will demonstrate how biopolitics serves to help the Orbán regime to unify the Hungarian nation-state’s population with a common identity—an identity that the regime has the power to mythologize as an ethnically homogenous, Christian nation. In defining the “who,” however, the Hungarian government inherently claims that certain groups of people do not belong to the nation, such as Syrian refugees, other non-white or non-Christian migrants, or gays. The 2015 migrant and refugee crisis, and Orbán’s racist rhetoric (such as his insistence that “all terrorists are basically migrants” (Hungarian Ministry of Human Capacities, 2016)), is a prime example of how Hungary has perpetuated an unwelcoming, discriminatory attitude that violates EU values of equality, solidarity, and protection of universal human rights. This tool is considered at greater length than the other three because of the myriad of ways in which it powerfully shapes the attitudes and opinions of the entire Hungarian nation-state.

These four tools are the main mechanisms that have made the Orbán regime’s erosion of democratic practices in Hungary possible through the buildup of popular support. By exploring these four tools, this research will support the claim that Hungary can no longer be treated as a democratic nation-state; beyond this, and most crucially, it will emphasize the presence of a fundamental ideological currently at play within Hungary, one that favors authoritarianism and anti-liberalism over EU values. As the conceptual definition of ideology is simultaneously

³ I formulated this definition of biopolitics best already in two unpublished academic papers, each submitted for a grade: Riding the Xenophobic Nationalist Wave: Viktor Orbán and Fidesz’s Successful Tactics in Hungary, Professor Lenka Rovna, European Comparative Politics and Society, Charles University (December 2017); and Biopolitics as a Substitute for an Ethnically Homogeneous Nation in the Practice of Russian Nationalism, Professor Zdzisław Mach and Professor Joanna Orzechowska-Waclawska, Challenges to the European Identity. The rebirth of nationalisms in Europe, Jagiellonian University (February 2019).
ubiquitous and ambiguous, this thesis will adopt Hannah Arendt’s explanation of ideologies as “isms which... can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing [them] from a single premise” (Arendt, 1958, p. 468), as well as Václav Havel’s description as stated in his essay “The Power of the Powerless”:

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier to part with them. As the repository of something “suprapersonal” and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their glorious modus vivendi, both from the world and from themselves. It is a very pragmatic, but at the same time an apparently dignified, way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side... It is an excuse that everyone can use... (1985, pp. 28-29)

Together these complementary definitions highlight the processes by which an ideology functions. In the case of this thesis, we are dealing with an ideology originally propagated by the Orbán regime (with the help of the four identified tools) for the Hungarian population, the believing segments of which then reproduce said ideology and in turn come to shape it themselves. If that ideology turns out to be sufficiently compelling and supported throughout Hungarian society, it is very well possible that the national government will continue to steer an already-authoritarian Hungary down anti-liberal paths in ways that further convince the Hungarian population—and perhaps also populations outside of Hungary—that their country is special, on a righteous mission, and justified in destroying liberal democracy.

With that in mind, this project can better analyze how the Orbán government promotes a self-legitimizing ideology, builds a sense of community around an “ideal” demographic, and creates a sense of fear that further generates support for an increasingly authoritarian state. Altogether, these factors produce an ideology fundamentally opposed to EU values. If taken for granted, such an ideology could wreak havoc and enable Orbán’s regime to amass power to the point where Hungary operates as a dictatorship, rather than a democracy—and within the EU, a collection of supposedly like-minded nation-states, at that. Ideally, this will help to highlight and advocate for an area of research that deserves more attention in order to understand the entire puzzle of Hungary’s authoritarian turn away from the EU values to which it was supposedly committed.

For a more in-depth discussion of the topic of ideology, see Chapter Four: The Intellectual Origins of Putinism in my forthcoming publication, Putin’s Totalitarian Democracy: Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First Century, co-authored with Vladimir Tismaneanu (expected 2019).
In general, qualitative methods—including the examination of Hungarian legislation and EU legislation; judicial rulings at the national level; publications, reactions, and meeting transcripts from both the official websites of the Hungarian government; speeches given by Orbán, Hungarian political elites, and Hungarian oppositionists; news articles published by Hungarian outlets; and reports by NGOs—characterize this project. It will additionally discuss some numerical measures, such as election results, polling data, and other descriptive statistics calculated by various NGOs and research groups (Freedom House, Eurostat, etc.). The combination of these particular data sources will allow for this project to consider how the Orbán regime has generated an ideology in Hungary that differs from the one for which the EU stands. All research is conducted in the English language, mostly using the official translated versions of documents, interviews, and articles originally published in Hungarian.

Before moving into the analytical chapter, a few more terminological notes regarding this project remain to be discussed. First is my decision to use the simpler phrase “Orbán” or “Orbánism” as a synecdoche for the actions and policies of both Fidesz and the Hungarian government since April 2010, when Fidesz won its supermajority in the parliamentary elections that month. Indeed, this thesis treats Orbán, Orbánism, Fidesz, and the Hungarian government since 2010 almost synonymously with one another, and there are many reasons for doing so. Most importantly, as the historical overview in the appendix explains in more detail, Orbán has been a key leader of Fidesz since he and some friends first created the group as a liberal youth party in 1988. Since 1993, Orbán has been the leader of Fidesz, more importantly, this single person also has been the leader of Hungary since Fidesz began its supermajority rule in 2010. Not only does he exercise considerable control over Fidesz, but together the man and his party have exercised considerable control over the whole country, as well. They have managed to dismantle checks and balances and erode democratic institutions in Hungary while continuing to garner electoral support. For all of these reasons, this project takes the same approach as several other scholarly works on modern-day Hungarian politics and recognizes the interoperability of the following subjects: Viktor Orbán, Orbánism, Fidesz, and the Hungarian government since April 2010.

Also like many other scholarly works, this project uses the term “Orbánism” to refer to the policies, goals, and ideas of both Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán. In its most literal and non-controversial understanding, Orbánism (much like Putinism) refers to the political system of
Hungary formed during the leadership of Viktor Orbán. It is characterized by Hungarian nationalism, conservative Christian values, anti-migrant, anti-Roma, and anti-EU attitudes, and a disregard for liberal democratic institutions and procedures such as the rule of law, checks and balances, and the separation of powers (Soós, 2015, pp. 92-103).

This thesis goes further than merely legitimizing the idea that Orbánism should be treated as its own concept. Rather, it makes the case, as a few other scholarly works have mentioned but not dedicated themselves to examining, that Orbánism is either in the process of transforming or has already transformed into an interpellative ideology for Hungarian society that will gain strength in time.5 This ideology convinces believing Hungarians that Hungary is a homogenous state constantly under threat from foreign enemies—be it Western liberal democracy, the EU, George Soros, NGOs, Muslims, migrants, etc.—and is a special, superior civilization with a unique past and messianic-like future. It does so by controlling historical and current narratives in public speeches, events, and media, and educational curricula in schools and universities, and by employing four main tactics: the distortion of the rule of law; the restriction of speech and press freedoms; the revision of national history; and the exploitation of biopolitics, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

5 I make this allowance because the nature of ideology is controversial, fluid, and abstract. It is difficult enough to prove that a state-imposed, authoritarian, anti-liberal ideology exists in Hungary, in the first place; that is the primary goal of this thesis. Further research, a higher word count, and a mastery of the Hungarian language are necessary for any further statements regarding the phase in which the ideology is currently.
Chapter Four: Analysis

Distorting the Rule of Law

The first tactic to be discussed in this thesis is one of the most straightforward ones: the distortion of the rule of law. The rule of law refers to a concept of “universal validity” that must be exercised in any country wishing to accede to the EU, as the Copenhagen Criteria stipulates. Particularly in the context of the EU, the rule of law requires: (1) an impartial and independent judiciary that guarantees fair trials, (2) an accountable government made up of officials who also “take a clear stance against corruption,” and (3) a transparent and fair law-making process that above all protects fundamental rights. It is considered to be one of the pillars upon which genuine democracy is based (European Commission, 1993; European Commission, 2016). But as described in the historical overview presented as an appendix to this thesis, Fidesz immediately pursued the destruction of the rule of law in Hungary upon taking office in 2010.

The most blatant way in which Fidesz eroded the rule of law was by taking advantage of its two-thirds parliamentary majority to draft and pass a new constitution, known as the Fundamental Law of Hungary, and then to exploit its legislative loopholes in the form of “cardinal acts.” The party did so in a matter of months with hardly any public debate or feedback from the opposition. Although it is true that 80 percent of the previous 1989 constitution still survives in this most recent 2011 version, the newer document does not acknowledge the separation of powers, nor does it affirm Hungary’s commitment to respecting the fundamental rights of all human beings, businesses, or organizations—unlike most other constitutions of democratic nation-states (Breitenbach & Levitz, 2011; Halmai, 2018, p. 10; Sadecki, 2014, p. 11). It also provides that Hungary recognizes “the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood” and that “Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and a woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the survival of the nation”; these statements have worried many political scientists and human rights activists for their discriminatory nature against the LGBTQ community and religions other than Christianity (The Fundamental Law, 2018, National Avowal & Article L(1)).

Perhaps the most powerful items in the 2011 Fundamental Law are the provisions that “The National Assembly shall establish the rules of its operation and the order of its debates in
the provisions of the Rules of Procedure adopted with the votes of two-thirds of the Members of the National Assembly present” and “Cardinal Acts shall be Acts, for the adoption or amendment of which the votes of two-thirds of the Members of the National Assembly present shall be required” (The Fundamental Law, 2018, Article 5(1), & Article T(4)). These statements work two-fold: they grant the governing party, if it maintains a two-thirds majority, the ability to create whatever laws it wants without interference from the opposition, which also means that the opposition or future governing parties cannot change those laws or amendments unless they too secure two-thirds of the entire vote. For a party that won a four-year-long mandate with a supermajority and the possibility of limitless re-election, such a scenario affords Fidesz quite a great deal of power—and legally, at that (Mazzo, 2013, p. 142).

The “cardinal acts” mentioned in the constitution refer to laws that can be passed with a supermajority and are hence not subject to constitutional review. In fact, the Fundamental Law calls for cardinal laws to specify and enumerate policies for the Hungarian nation-state. Thus in 2010 Fidesz gained the power to establish cardinal acts in fields ranging from electoral laws and legislative procedures to the rights of national minorities, speech freedoms, and beyond. Fidesz was sure to leverage its supermajority position to reduce the size of the National Assembly from 386 to 199 seats while preserving the nation’s majority-proportional voting system and gerrymandering districts so as to favor Fidesz election victories; to pass laws and policies at spectacular rates with little input from the opposition, passing a 840 acts in the first three years of its term (far more than the 583 that the previous government managed to pass over the entire length of its term); to create entirely new government institutions, such as the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (which wields “unprecedented oversight” over all media outlets in Hungary and can either issue fines or altogether force “offending” outlets to terminate transmission/publication or pump “compliant” media providers with government funds); to change laws and policies regarding labor, pensions, local governance, education, and healthcare (the latter two of which have been significantly centralized under national government authority); to temporarily alter the retirement age of certain bureaucratic, juridical, and judicial offices, facilitating a purge of workers and allowing Fidesz to then appoint loyal people to influential positions in government and courts; to overhaul national fiscal and tax policies so as to permit state taxation authorities to rather arbitrarily impose “special taxes” on both domestic and foreign firms and investors in order to encourage more state control of different sectors,
discourage capital flight out of Hungary, and supplement the state’s coffers after it lowered personal income tax rates in a move to strengthen the party’s electoral support; and far more (Száky, 2019, p. 153; Halmai, 2018, pp. 11-13 and 19-25; The Fundamental Law, Article 3(5) & Article 5(2)).

Because Fidesz has used its supermajority status to legally intervene in countless aspects of daily life in Hungary without input from the opposition, at this point it is important to closely analyze Fidesz’s erosion of the core features of the rule of law in order to better understand how it affects the population. In particular Fidesz’s legislative changes have violated judicial independence, the first crucial element of the rule of law delineated at the beginning of this section. Through legal adjustments to the appointment of judges on the Constitutional Court, Fidesz has managed to alter the existing practice that mandated judges be picked jointly by both the ruling party and the opposition, instead permitting the majority to appoint new judges on their own accord. Fidesz also expanded the size of the Constitutional Court from 11 to 15 judges, increased their terms from 9 to 12 years, and abolished the imposition of a retirement age on them. As of 1 June 2019, 11 of the judges who sit on Hungary’s Constitutional Court have been appointed according to Fidesz’s wishes; most of them do, in fact, vote along the lines of Fidesz’s agenda (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2015; The Official Internet Resources of the Constitutional Court of Hungary, 2019). This demonstrates that the highest court in Hungary is no longer independent of politics. And besides just influencing the Constitutional Court, Fidesz used its power to arbitrarily lower the retirement age of certain judges from 70 to 62, forcing the dismissal of lower-level sitting judges and staffers—only to stock those emptied seats with judges loyal to Fidesz (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 103), further destroying the principle of judicial independence in Hungary.

Moreover, Fidesz created a government institution, the National Office for the Judiciary, and endowed it with far-reaching powers over the country’s judicial system. Not only can this institution (generally staffed by middling bureaucrats as well as strategically placed persons in the most influential positions) appoint judges at various levels throughout the country, but it also “decide[s] which cases should be heard by which courts.” Both the appointment of judges and the fate of cases are core elements of judicial independence, yet the Orbán regime has intervened in ways that prompt many impartial observers to argue that the judicial branch is biased in favor of Fidesz in manners unprecedented for a supposedly democratic state (Kornai, 2015, p. 282).
Of course, the National Office for the Judiciary does not act alone: the Prosecution Service, originally designed as the head of the juridical branch of the Hungarian nation-state meant to remain independent of the executive and political branches, is yet another institution that has been manipulated under Fidesz to impede the functioning of the judicial system and rule of law in Hungary. According to Hungarian law, the Prosecutor General, who is appointed by the prime minister and rubber-stamped by the Fidesz-dominated parliament, enforces the state’s monopoly on justice and ability to legally punish offenses. Thus the Service is especially important when it comes to anti-corruption projects within the state itself. But according to the most recent data available to the public, gathered between 2010 and 2014, the Prosecution Service has pursued significantly fewer political corruption cases than it did in past years—despite the fact that the amount of potential cases referred to the office had nearly tripled in number. Most cases related to people and businesses with ties to Fidesz were dropped before they even made it out of the investigative period; on the other hand, potential opposition rivals have often been humiliated just before elections with excellently timed accusations (Kornai, 2015, pp. 281-282 & 306).

All of this manipulation of the judicial system points to the conclusion that Fidesz controls the Hungarian judiciary, denying its claim to independence and hence violating the rule of law in this crucial area. This directly infringes upon the democratic principle that no one, “not even those who hold the most power, should be above the law” because anyone in the appropriate position of power—meaning placed in an influential seat by Fidesz—can institutionalize a law with little obstacle or be safeguarded from the justice system due to their political affiliation. It also means that government officials are not, in fact, accountable to the public, which is yet another important pillar of the rule of law listed at the beginning of this section (Heller, 2018b; Kornai, 2015, p. 281).

Simply through an examination of the judicial realm, it is clear that Fidesz has violated many aspects of the rule of law. And this analysis does not even begin to scrape the surface, for Fidesz attacks the rule of law through many other avenues, as well. Some of those methods have already been mentioned, but they also delve into state-sponsored assaults on private ownership, discrimination against national minorities such as the Roma, preferential government treatment of businesses involved in advertising, media, banking, energy, transportation, public works, etc. that promote Fidesz’s agenda, financial and legal restraints on free speech, and more (Kornai,
All of this should serve as proof of what prominent authoritarianism scholar and Hungary expert Kim Lane Scheppele stated: that Fidesz has successfully enacted a “one-party constitution,” which essentially gives it absolute power and destroys any semblance of checks and balances that go hand-in-hand with democratic governance (Scheppele, 2013). Separation of power between the executive, the legislative, and judicial branches has ceased to exist since Fidesz basically erased the concept from modern Hungary’s procedural functioning. This refutes the third tenet of rule of law mentioned at the start of this section, the manifestation of transparent and fair law-making practices. And the implications of many of the aforementioned policies, ironically now enshrined in Hungary’s founding and legitimizing legal document and other cardinal acts, further violate the rule of law. According to the opinion of András Bozóki, a Hungarian political scientist and short-lived Minister of Culture (2005-2006), the rule of law has outright been abolished since Fidesz claimed its supermajority in 2010 and installed the new Fundamental Law (2013, pp. 850-851).

Fidesz is not the only element of Hungarian society that is affected by the rule of law’s existence or nonexistence or that, in turn, has the power to affect the rule of law’s existence or nonexistence. The entire country is touched in theory and in practice. Thus conclusions about the erosion of the rule of law and checks and balances cannot just be left at the idea that Hungarian government officials are unaccountable, or that the judicial system is not independent, or that law-making is not transparent and fair because these statements stop short of recognizing how daily societal life might be altered. Citizens can choose to abide by the state’s abuse of the rule of law or not; they can choose to protest or not; they can choose to believe the state’s narrative or not. In Hungary, the lack of protest and effective opposition to the erosion of the rule of law is demonstrative of a general apathy and/or complicity with Fidesz’s behavior. This points to the even more significant idea that there is a larger social construction at play in Hungary, one that allows Fidesz to claim inordinate amounts of power and to destroy democracy from within the nation-state.

In large part, this scenario stems from the fact that Fidesz has transformed Hungary into a mafia state. As Hungarian political scientist and opposition politician Bálint Magyar expresses in his book *Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary* (2016), Hungary under Fidesz and Orbán has become a “post-communist mafia state,” where a group of corrupt, kleptocratic leaders steal from the state while also actively growing illicit criminal networks throughout all
sectors of society, be it the executive branch, the judicial system, business, industry, and more, at
the national, regional, and local levels, in both the private and public spheres. They are able to do
so with relative impunity because of their positions of power, because of their successful
distortion of the rule of law, and because of their ability to convince the population that these
shady actions are either not important or not criminal.

In this way, Hungary’s Fidesz-led mafia does not just steal from the nation-state: it
institutionalizes corruption by coercing an expanding array of societal elements (such as small
businesses, multinational businesses, churches, schools, media outlets, NGOs, bureaucrats, and
state institutions) to comply with their direction (Langdon, 2018, p. 269). For instance, there
have been plenty of cases reported by international media and NGOs in which individual
Hungarian citizens have signed their businesses over to the government or Fidesz-linked
oligarchs in the face of arbitrary tax fraud investigation threats, or media providers have aired
only pro-Fidesz advertisements because it heightens their competitiveness for government-
administered funding (Beauchamp, 2018; Rady, 2017). It is crucial to highlight that Fidesz’s
manipulation of the rule of law has infiltrated both the private and the public spheres, in terms of
both businesses and the everyday life of individuals. The governing party’s ability (and choice)
to manipulate the rule of law means that it can advance its perspective of what is legal and what
is not, as well as normalize criminality in Hungary in terms of judicial codes and in the opinions
of its citizens.

Therefore such institutionalization of corruption is the second most significant manner,
besides the infamous rewriting of the national constitution in 2011 and subsequent cardinal act
adoptions, in which Fidesz has distorted the rule of law in Hungary. Concretely, this means that a
policeman might seek bribes from a local small business in exchange for not launching an
investigation into tax fraud; the Prosecution Service might drop a corruption case related to a
Fidesz parliament member but accuse an oppositionist of illicit business dealings; a university
professor might seek to retain his position by lauding Fidesz and Orbán’s leadership, etc.
(Magyar, 2016, pp. 81-82; Langdon, 2018, p. 269). It also means that the majority of the
population does not protest with claims that Orbán has become “Hungary’s wealthiest individual,
with a fortune distributed to relatives and put in dummy companies that may reach €650 million”
(Rady, 2017), as this activity—no doubt tied up in activities beyond the rule of law—has become
When individual citizens and groups in society accept the explicitly criminal and implicitly corrupt behaviors of the ruling leadership, or when they begin to comply with and even replicate those behaviors themselves, it is a sign that the governing party has succeeded in destroying the rule of law in practice and in theory, and in a way that the voting public largely acquiesces to.

Here Orbán’s turn to “illiberal democracy” becomes especially significant because it marks his regime’s utter destruction of rule of law in Hungary and a deeper move toward authoritarianism, one that further encompasses the Hungarian public. Announced in his now-infamous July 2014 speech (delivered in front of an ethnic Hungarian audience in Romania’s Transylvanian region, at that), Orbán defined his new direction for Hungary as one that should not be organized around the principle

... that everything is allowed that does not infringe on the other party’s freedom, but instead should be that one should not do unto others what one does not want others to do unto you.... the Hungarian nation is not simply a group of individuals but a community that must be organised, reinforced and in fact constructed. And so in this sense the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organisation, but instead includes a different, special, national approach. (2014)

In this same speech he also lauded Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey, countries known for their authoritarianism and human rights violations, while disparaging “blasphemy by the liberal world” and insisting that “liberal democracy will probably be incapable of maintaining their global competitiveness in the upcoming decades and will instead probably be scaled down unless they are capable of changing themselves significantly.” Through such fear-mongering and nationalist praise, Orbán promoted the idea a kind of Hungarian exceptionalism, one claiming Hungary is a special nation that must not be bound by liberalism and its constraints. He and Fidesz then exploit this idea to further intimate that the rule of law is useless in Hungary because it assumes that individuals (and states) are equal and deserve to be treated equally—but if

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6 Due to the shady nature of wealth accumulation of high-profile politicians on such a grand scale, I do not wish to make the certain assertion that Orbán is, in fact, the richest man in Hungary. Other sources rank him as the fifth-richest person in the nation or predict his family’s holdings at around €23 million (Müller, 2018b), which is a far cry from the €650 million mentioned by Rady. But the exact value and ranking is not relevant here: the point is that Orbán has become immensely rich, and most sources agree this has undoubtedly transpired through massive levels of corruption and abuse of power. And yet this is not an area of contention among political debates or discussions in Hungary, attesting to the idea that corruption is normalizing across the state and in the population’s mind, regardless of the fact that the Communist period has been long over and the nation had committed itself to anti-corruption programs as obliged by EU membership.
Hungary is so different and unique from all other democracies, then the rule of law bears no relevance to them, apparently.

By 2018, Orbán had expedited the ideologization of Hungary’s “illiberal state,” equating the term with “Christian democracy” when he again stated in Transylvania,

Let us confidently declare that Christian democracy is not liberal. Liberal democracy is liberal, while Christian democracy is, by definition, not liberal: it is, if you like, illiberal. And we can specifically say this in connection with a few important issues – say, three great issues. Liberal democracy is in favour of multiculturalism, while Christian democracy gives priority to Christian culture; this is an illiberal concept. Liberal democracy is pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration; this is again a genuinely illiberal concept. And liberal democracy sides with adaptable family models, while Christian democracy rests on the foundations of the Christian family model; once more, this is an illiberal concept.

The thrust of Orbán’s speeches and his championing of illiberalism over the last five years is in defiance of liberalism, democracy, and their core beliefs in the rule of law, individual freedoms, diversity, and pluralism, each of which are explicitly prioritized values in EU documents and membership criteria. By trying to narrow the nation-state’s purpose to one that limits people’s freedoms based on what Hungarians want and accept, and at the same time attempting to define the nation-state as a specific group of “unique” Christian Hungarians who are entitled to pursue a “different” approach to politics, the Orbán regime reveals its anti-pluralist themes. These themes not only favor Hungarian nationalism and identity but also actively demean the legitimacy of other, non-Hungarian identities.

This demonstrates Fidesz’s anti-democratic nature because “illiberal democracy” is not democratic, at all. It is used to justify the state’s trampling of the very tenets at the core of democracy, such as respect for all human rights and freedoms. The name is merely a half-hearted façade constructed for reasons of political correctness and plausibility deniability. Its definition might as well coincide with that of authoritarianism or even dictatorship, considering Fidesz’s systematic dismantling of Hungary’s liberal democratic institutions and the rule of law (Isaac, 2017). It is true that the population votes in ways that keep the authoritarian leadership in power, but this does not mean that today’s Hungary is democratic. Much like the term “tyranny of the majority,” only procedurally can Orbánist Hungary even pretend to be democratic, seeing as how the ruling power achieves re-election only through the incitement of large portions of the electorate to vote for it through the manipulation of legality and the widespread vocalization of
narratives that promote Hungarian nationalism, fear-mongering, xenophobia, and other anti-pluralist themes.

Add to this illiberalism ideas of cultural superiority, Fidesz’s institutionalization of corruption and the mafia state, its rewriting of the national constitution, its stacking of courts and bureaucracies with political allies, its ability to rush bills into law with minimal, if any, debate—and it is evident that over the past decade, the Orbán regime has taken its distortion of the rule of law to unprecedented levels that now spill over into the realm of public ideology. At first, Fidesz began by making legal changes and centralizing its politically biased control across the government. In the words of Hungarian economist and political commentator János Kornai, the Hungarian leadership has made it so that “the very organizations which should be fighting, with the authority of the state behind them, against the entanglement of business, politics, and government and against corruption are not independent: they themselves are cogs in the same machinery” (2015, p. 283). But then these changes increasingly affected the general public, as well, either directly or through ripple-effect changes ordered by the Fidesz government (as well as through Fidesz’s control over the media and educational system, which will be discussed in the next section). And then Orbán began to make speeches like the infamous “illiberal state” speech of July 2014, which called on Hungarians as citizens to take pride in their national community and to defend its survival through illiberal means.

Through a rather quick process, Fidesz and Orbán seem to have captured the Hungarian state—both government and population—and instituted their own social environment nationwide. The type of ideological rhetoric and policies that Fidesz has been advancing serves to conjure fear among Hungarian citizens and to convince them that otherwise well-respected democratic and EU values, such as the rule of law, should be overthrown because their community is supposedly different and knows how to thrive better than any liberal democratic principles can suggest. It is not just that the rule of law does not apply to Fidesz “patriots” working hard to support their great nation, but that the entire great nation itself need not adhere to the rule of law or other liberal democratic conditions that it once committed itself to before joining the EU.

The following sections will more deeply explore some of the themes introduced by this discussion of Fidesz’s distortion of the rule of law. The next section, dedicated to examining Fidesz’s pressure on speech freedoms in Hungary, will better prove the propagandistic nature of
the regime; the section on historical revisionism will elaborate upon the idea of Hungarian
exceptionalism; and the last section on biopolitics will delve into the significance of the idea of a
pure Hungarian community. Together, these analyses will demonstrate that from Fidesz’s most
straightforward tool of democratic erosion—the distortion of the rule of law—has emerged a far
more nuanced, multi-pronged ideology with sway over the entire state.

Restricting Speech and Press Freedoms

Another direct tactic of democratic erosion that Fidesz has relied upon over the last
decade is the restriction of press and other speech freedoms. As was mentioned in the previous
section on the distortion of the rule of law, Fidesz first began to attack the press in Hungary
through legally based methods. These will be explored in closer detail in this section. But so will
other forms of speech restrictions, from the Fidesz-influenced financial and leadership takeover
of almost all of Hungary’s media outlets, to the suppression of the opposition and their
campaigns, to the alteration of educational curricula at both the public school and university
levels, to the recent assault on the Central European University in Budapest, and to the
stigmatization of foreign-funded NGOs. A comprehensive analysis of the ways in which Fidesz
has eroded Hungarian democracy through the strangulation of press and other speech freedoms is
key to explaining the ideological nature of the predicament in which the Hungarian population
now finds itself.

Fidesz’s first move against the press came through a set of media laws, the most notable
priority of which was the establishment of the National Media and Infocommunications
Authority. Passed by a two-thirds majority cardinal act in July 2010, Act CIV on the Freedom of
the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content abolished a few existing media oversight
authorities to create one that would be supposedly autonomous but, in reality, turned out to be
closely regulated by the governing party. This law endows the Hungarian president with the
ability to select the head of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority, and it
consults a council whose composition is based off of the National Assembly’s—meaning that so
long as Fidesz holds a supermajority in the parliament, so does it control the five-member media
council.

Furthermore this Media Authority is primarily tasked with supervising any media
provider (radio, television, internet, etc.) that operates using frequencies owned by the Hungarian
state, makes its editorial decisions within the nation’s borders, employs a “significant” part of its
staff inside of Hungary, or “maintains actual and continuous contact with the players of the Hungarian economy,” among other conditions (Act CIV on the Freedom of the Press, 2010, Article 2). The varied, ambiguous, and lengthy nature of the criteria listed as part of this law essentially means that the Media Authority can exercise its power over any media outlet in the country, be it run by the state or privately.

Content-wise, the Authority operates to “foster and preserve national, family, ethnic and religious communities” and can request that media providers “correct” what the Authority deems to be false; it can also impose penalties and potentially force the provider to shutdown if it does not comply (2010, Article 12). Various analysts confirm that stipulations like this are not unusual for countries in the EU—but Hungary’s Media Authority nevertheless stands out because it abuses this privilege. According to Hungarian political scientist Paul Lendvai, its Fidesz-packed council can, and does, “review the compliance of all public and private media with a vague standard of political ‘balance’ and ‘proper’ news coverage” in ways that are “unprecedented,” frequent, and skewed in favor of Fidesz and its policies (2012, p. 218). This ability alone jeopardizes press freedoms in Hungary.

But Hungary’s Media Authority is unique in other ways, as well. Besides content control, it is also endowed with manipulative financial and technical power, tools which it has arguably used to a greater extent than the more straightforward approach of content control. The Media Authority is in charge of deciding which media providers receive government funds and how much they receive; it reserves the right to fine supposedly noncompliant providers; it has power over how much advertising revenue those providers can generate; it has the authority to grant or revoke broadcasting licenses; it can influence the number of subscriptions to those outlets; and it can pressure companies and state institutions to choose to advertise through media providers that cooperate with the government, to name a few of its abilities. These technical powers, then, encourage providers to be friendly to Fidesz. The more loyal they are, and the more they act like a state mouthpiece, then the more competitive and lucrative their operations become. If they are not cooperative with Fidesz, then they are neglected when it comes time to award government funds and advertising campaigns (Lendvai, 2018, p. 118), which no doubt affect the providers’ budgets and general survival.

This is an especially hard to swallow fate in Hungary because as of June 2017, the state mandates that any organization operating in Hungary must report itself to be a foreign agent if it
receives a certain threshold of funding from foreign sources; this law with be more closely considered later in this section, but it is necessary to mention here because it stigmatizes foreign connections, limiting media providers’ options for funding sources and hence augmenting their dependency on the state (Case, 2017, pp. 114-115). While the Media Authority has not taken the blatant route of shutting down media providers purely on the basis of improper content, nor has it explicitly jailed journalists, its technical and economic leverage is an alternative form of censorship at the hands of the Fidesz-led government. It works just as well as, if not better than, content control methods, since it is seemingly less political and less likely to draw domestic or international scrutiny (Waller, 2016).

Perhaps the most well-known Hungarian media provider that has been shut down following government intervention was Népszabadság. Until it was closed over the course of one weekend on 8 October 2016, it had been the largest independent daily news outlet in Hungary. According to Lendvai, the quick dissolution of the left-leaning outlet came “just days after the paper had published allegations of corruption against Antal Rogán,” the head of Orbán’s cabinet office. The Media Authority did not reference this occurrence but instead cited reasons of financial deficit. Despite the economic excuse, many analysts still assume that the shutdown was antidemocratic and politically motivated, especially considering how the Authority offered no chance of economic restructuring for Népszabadság. The less-than-transparent, hasty closure of the outlet represents Fidesz’s achievement of “near total hegemony in the Hungarian media world” and is emblematic of its goal to limit media pluralism (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 161-162).

Like its treatment of the judicial system, Fidesz has also engaged in purges and select installments of people loyal to the governing political party in high places in the Media Authority, government-owned media providers, and private media outlets. Hungarian economist János Kornai calls the Media Authority and Fidesz’s expanding control over press freedoms the Orbán regime’s “fourth branch of power” (the other three being the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the traditional three branches of power in a democratic nation-state); though independent providers still exist in Hungary, in light of Fidesz’s influence and the potential economic ramifications of disloyalty, Kornai reports that Hungary has seen a rise in self-censorship across media providers (Kornai, 2015, p. 288). Likewise, Freedom House has reported a regular decline in media freedoms in Hungary (Freedom House, 2018; Freedom
House, 2019), and other analysts estimate that over 90 percent of all media providers in Hungary are now either owned by the state or an ally of the Fidesz party (Beauchamp, 2018).

Some media providers in Hungary have acquiesced to Fidesz’s influence to the point that ten of them “donated” over 88 million euros’ worth of their holdings to the creation of one huge right-wing media conglomerate that almost exclusively promotes pro-government content and advertising. Though the merger surely would have violated antitrust regulations, the Media Authority and Fidesz leadership agreed that it would not be reviewed (Freedom House, 2019). Various NGOs and analysts say the government was incentivized to turn a blind eye because the conglomerate is so large that it will cheapen the government’s advertising costs while helping to drive out smaller competitors and independent media providers (Gorondi, 2018). In the words of Hungarian journalist Daniel Pal Renyi,

The fact that such valuable firms were practically gifted to the foundation at the same time and in such an obviously coordinated way shows very well how the Orban system works... This demonstrates that the owners did not have real ownership rights, but were carrying out political tasks... and ultimately it’s the political will that gets its way. (Gorondi, 2018)

Cases like this, of independent businesses seeking the government’s favor at the expense of independence and press freedoms, reveal that the Orbán regime is succeeding in actively persuading segments of Hungarian society—even those privately owned—to promote its line. Not only does this mean that the individual members of the Hungarian population are increasingly exposed to Fidesz-sponsored content, but it also means that their access to opposition or alternative sources is greatly hampered, and that they are less likely to hear about the corruption, scandals, or failures of the Fidesz government or its politicians. Such a scenario is government-engineered and, for the most part, accepted by the public, which has engaged in only a few, relatively small or at least short-lived protests against Fidesz’s media takeover (Muller, 2018b).

The entire system works to silence not just independent media providers, but also independent thinkers and opposition campaigns. By making it so unsavory for media providers to air opposition ads, the Hungarian government and Media Authority blocks major sources of access to their voices, be they transmitted online, in print, over the radio, or on television. While international election monitors observe that elections in Hungary are free overall, several have expressed concerns that they are not fair, citing heavy media biases in favor of Fidesz, the lack of opposition advertisements, and toxic rhetoric aimed against oppositionists (Beauchamp, 2018;
In some cases, Fidesz has been accused of manipulating its power over the media for the purposes of setting up fake opposition parties, whose advertisements suspiciously get aired, in order to weaken the unity of any potential anti-Fidesz coalition (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2018, p. 20).

In other cases regarding political opposition, Fidesz simply goes on the offensive, slandering their opponents as “traitors” who represent “foreign interests” (Soós, 2015, p. 106). In his most recent 2019 State of the Nation address, Orbán besmirched the entire opposition, saying:

On this occasion we don’t usually speak about the Hungarian opposition. This is because we could hardly say anything new or more damning than the widely known fact that the Hungarian opposition is an assemblage of pro-immigration politicians which George Soros and the European bureaucrats are keeping on life support. Nonetheless, painful conclusions drawn from Hungarian history compel us to say a few words about them... “Friends or foes?” “They look like friends, because they’re coming together.” Well they are indeed coming together, and they may well be one another's friends, but they’ve always seen our kind of decent patriots as being their enemies. This is a betrothal. A betrothal between the communist tradition and the Nazi tradition: one which caused suffering for hundreds of thousands of Hungarian families, and the other which liquidated hundreds of thousands of our Jewish compatriots. (2019a)

This amounts to a rather vicious, discrediting attack on any oppositionists in Hungary. It offers only a Manichean worldview, one in which the Hungarian nation must decide either between the great, loyal, Hungarian Fidesz party or the pathetic, evil, non-Hungarians opposed to Fidesz.

Quite literally, Orbán engages in what American historian Timothy Snyder refers to as one of the foundational pillars of fascist ideology. In Snyder’s words, that “politics begins from ‘friend or foe’ is the basic fascist idea, formulated by the Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt” (2018, p. 61) because the distinction is an invocation of hatred that is simultaneously arbitrary and potentially lethal for those who are deemed “foe.” Though it is not this research’s place to state whether or not the Orbán regime is fascist (a statement with which I personally agree, in full disclosure), as an academic work on this point would require a deeper knowledge of the Hungarian language and PhD-level access, Snyder’s point is nevertheless important because it supports the identification of Orbánism as an ideology that affects the nation in profound ways that limit, and even destroy, democratic principles.

Citizens are told that to be anti-Fidesz is to be against the nation. Thus the silencing of independent press, the restriction of the opposition’s access to platforms through which they can express their voices, and the poisonous rhetoric used by Fidesz works to suppress the opposition and its movement while also associating Fidesz in the minds of Hungarian voters with the
security, glory, and honor of the nation-state and as “the” holder of “truth.” When given so narrow a choice as this one, especially when the narrative is so widely repeated across Hungarian society through the media, it becomes easier for Fidesz to capture the public’s attention and to continue winning elections (with supermajorities, at that).

The media is not the only target of, and vehicle for, Orbánism’s restrictions of freedoms or imposition of its ideological narratives in Hungary. The national educational system has suffered a similar fate, as well. Fidesz has pursued a strong program of centralization from the elementary through university levels. One of its first moves to limit academic freedoms was Act CXC on National Public Education. Passed under Fidesz in 2011, this act stripped control of public elementary and secondary schools from local and county governments and instead established a new national body, the Klebelsberg Intézményfenntartó Központ (Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Center, or KLIK) that would handle nearly all schooling decisions. Now financial decisions, including budgets, expenses, and teacher salaries, and the choice of hiring or firing a teacher is up to KLIK (Act CXC on National Public Education, 2011).

Besides its administrative and financial powers, KLIK has also made various curricular adjustments and severely limited the number of approved textbooks that schools can use to teach their students. To compound this matter of educational content, the national government now administers some publishing houses, namely the Education Research and Development Center (OFI); at the same time, the national government has also stepped up its efforts to cancel independent book publishers’ licenses to operate, limiting the array of books and perspectives available even outside of schools (Semjén, Le, & Hermann, 2018, pp. 14-15; Kornai, 2015, p. 296). All of this means that the governing majority—Fidesz—has an even greater say in what can be published and taught in schools across the state and what cannot be.

One of the most popular Fidesz-approved textbooks in Hungary today promotes Orbán’s quote, “We consider it a value that Hungary is a homogenous country” under a lesson on multiculturalism and shares non-sourced statistics like “67% of young people can only imagine their future in this country,” and “every 4th young person lives in a marriage or a permanent relationship and 68% of those who don't, would like to” (McKenzie, 2019). Such insertions are heavily biased and function to not-so-subtly teach young people in Hungary that they should take pride in their national culture to the detriment of EU values like multiculturalism, that they
should not dream of life without Hungary, and that they should uphold the Christian values that the 2011 Fundamental Law claims to form the bedrock of the nation.

Furthermore, such state-approved textbooks feature cartoon caricatures that negatively portray the EU. In one, the EU member states are represented as young piglets that greedily suck from a mother pig, labeled as Germany, while the Hungary piglet happily munches on its own grass off to the side, by itself. The power of cartoons, especially when impressed upon young minds in a classroom setting, should be taken seriously: analysts and some educators in Hungary have admitted that commentaries like this one foster nationalism and intolerance (McKenzie, 2019). In a country like Hungary, where the ruling party is increasingly monopolizing the media and public opinion while silencing the ideas of the opposition, it is important to recognize that the education system, too, is coming to reinforce what students hear on the news and (probably) from their parents. This limits individuals’ access to alternative narratives and perceptions that differ from the one Fidesz pushes, setting the stage for their intensified ideological development.

Fidesz has enacted similar changes at the university level, too, centralizing public institutions and appointing chancellors tasked with defining budgets and approving or rejecting certain curricula. In October 2018, the Hungarian government declared that gender studies programs were not legitimate and would no longer receive accreditation. It made sure that the two universities in the country that offered such programs no longer received funding for them (Kent & Tapfumaneyi, 2018). The growing degree of centralized control at even the university level to the point where the government sees fit to eliminate entire fields of study is another demonstration that academic freedoms in Hungary are diminishing under Fidesz.

The most scandalous government-sponsored violation of academic freedom in Hungary has been the forced upheaval of the Central European University (CEU), one of the top universities in Budapest that also happens to be known for its criticism of Fidesz and its interest in liberal democracy, from the country (Foer, 2019). For years, the Orbán regime had been slowly eroding CEU’s autonomy and existence, making several attempts to penalize the university, shut down certain programs, and adjust its curricula. The final government-imposed blows came in 2018, when Fidesz amended Hungary’s higher education laws in ways that most legal analysts agree were intended to specifically target CEU, considering its unique status as a “foreign” university functioning both as a Hungarian and an American institution operating in the state of New York (McLaughlin & Britton, 2018).
Among the new stipulations was the requirement that CEU attain a bilateral international agreement for its operations in the US. Of course, this is a confounding condition because private universities in the US are regulated at the state, rather than the federal, level, meaning that Fidesz’s legal obstacles (and the short deadlines they set) were intended to be unfeasible from the start. When CEU creatively found a way to attain an agreement with Bard University in the state of New York and thus allow it to continue its operations in Hungary, the Hungarian government simply refused to sign off on it, thereby denying the agreement bilateral status (Fee, 2018). As a result, since 1 January 2019 the university has not been legally permitted to accept any more students. While the Hungarian government never explicitly expelled CEU from the country, the legal changes de facto ensured this outcome: without new students, the university would not be able to function, and hence it was left with no choice but to move from Budapest to Vienna (McLaughlin & Britton, 2018; Freedom House, 2019).

The essentially forced expulsion of CEU is more than simply another casualty of the increasingly centralizing national government. It is representative of the Orbán regime’s assault on diversity and thought in the country, particularly in the realm of academic freedoms, which “form the backbone of strong, democratic societies” (Fee, 2018). This conclusion is especially potent considering the quick, oddly specific, and shady legislative adjustments made possible by Fidesz’s parliamentary supermajority, the government’s later refusal to recognize CEU’s attempts to meet the new arbitrary criteria, and the fact that CEU has long been an economic boon to the Hungarian state, bringing the country over €67 million through domestic expenditures and research funding in 2017 alone (Fee, 2018). Thus CEU’s departure marks a significant loss for Hungary in terms of economics, knowledge, academic freedom, tourism, and international opinion—yet Fidesz pursued it, anyway, demonstrating the ruling party’s darker objectives: to politically control the pursuit of knowledge and the exercise of speech freedoms in Hungary.

The attack on CEU was compounded by the government’s long-standing attack on Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros. An analysis of Fidesz’s anti-Soros smear campaign would require an entire thesis in itself, but to put it briefly: Soros, a prominent funder and advocate of CEU, has been assaulted in Hungarian press, official government speeches, and even national law and portrayed quite crudely as a rich, greedy, capitalist Jew who is a traitor to
Hungary and actively promotes cosmopolitanism\(^7\) and “illegal” immigration (Heller, 2018a). He, and the allegedly dangerous things for which he stands, has become a crucial target of Orbánism. Over the last five or so years, supposed enemies to the Hungarian state have been increasingly referred to in domestic news as “Soros agents” and even militarized in the minds of listening audiences as “Soros mercenaries” (Freedom House, 2019). Hungarian media and Fidesz politicians applied such labels to CEU (of which Soros has been a major advocate), heightening the stakes behind the state’s suppression of academic, speech, and press freedoms.

It must be addressed that not all Hungarians fell for this narrative. Thousands did, in fact, spill onto the streets of Budapest to protest against the forced removal of CEU on multiple weekends. Nevertheless the fact remains that they stopped gathering in large numbers or effectively protesting in a short amount of time without having gained any concessions from the government. And it is also important to understand that most of those who protested came from educated, urban backgrounds, which does not characterize the rest of the Hungarian population: especially in the more rural segments of the population that have been most devoted to Fidesz (according to surveys and voting habits), the anti-Soros, anti-CEU campaign is effective. Thanks to biased media coverage and the growth of anti-liberal ideology, those who already believe in the Orbánist line are more likely to assume that the people who protested in favor of CEU and against Fidesz are nothing but ill-advised and illegitimate agitators, or even cosmopolitans enemies of the state (Heller, 2018a; McLaughlin & Britton, 2018). It is not as though the short-term protestors have won over the hearts and minds of fellow Hungarians, partly because their efforts are rather small, and partly because the Hungarian media demonizes them as untrustworthy elements against which “true,” Fidesz-supporting Hungarians must unite.

In this lies the most significant effect of Fidesz’s restriction of speech freedoms and takeover of the media and educational systems. To use the concepts of French philosopher Louis Althusser, both the media and education are key ideological state apparatuses that the national government can influence in order to produce (and then reproduce) its ideas across the domestic population, establishing and promoting nationalist tropes which serve the interests of Fidesz’s state. Fidesz has captured so much of the media and educational system in Hungary, making it

\(^7\) In the Hungarian government’s narrative, “cosmopolitanism” is a strictly negative concept steeped in global conspiracy, antisemitism, fears of unrestricted immigration, and imagined threats to the homogeneity of the Hungarian nation-state.
easier for the state to expose its ideas to every individual in the population and thus socialize them according to the biased narratives it disseminates.

This is propaganda, defined here as the “intended attempt to alter the minds of intended audiences” (Bajomi-Lázár & Horváth, p. 221). But such propaganda is capable of more than just changing individuals’ opinions: it can “establish ideological hegemony” that “not only promotes certain ideas, but it also rejects other ones; it seeks to monopolize the truth and—when coupled with various kinds of overt censorship or informal pressures—it also attempts to marginalize alternative explanations of reality” (Bajomi-Lázár & Horváth, pp. 221-222). When one political voice like Fidesz commands such power over ideological state apparatuses and uses it to promote its own propaganda, it becomes easier to limit access to other sources or alternative perspectives. Such control, if abused, as this research determines to be the case in Orbánist Hungary, can indoctrinate the population into believing that Fidesz and Orbán speak the one, moral “truth” and are thereby entitled to pursue illiberalism, even at the expense of democracy and the EU values it once committed itself to, if it means that the nation and its culture must do so in order to survive.

Those who become interpellated into the Orbánist ideology might then take it upon themselves to act for the government. For instance, when the Fidesz regime accused various Hungarian public intellectuals (notably Ágnes Heller, Sándor Radnóti, Gábor György, György Geréby and Mihály Vajda) of corruption and insinuated that they were threats to the state, it was average Hungarian individuals who adopted this disdain for liberal intellectuals by coming up with negative, generalizing labels such as “mafia of philosophers” and so-called swears such as “ágnesheller,” repeating them on the internet, in everyday conversations, and in print news commentaries and further disseminating toxic ideas to more of the population (Bajomi-Lázár & Horváth, p. 230). Not only does this foster a distrust of the targeted group—liberal intellectuals—but it also emphasizes the idea that enemies exist within the Hungarian population and strengthens some individuals’ convictions that they should continue to support Fidesz because they are against the liberal intellectuals and hence committed to defending the nation.

Of course, Soros, CEU, and liberal intellectuals are not the only ones being attacked by the state-influenced media, educational system, or legal system. All of these organs also prioritize the slandering of immigrants, the LGBTQ community (both of which will be later discussed in conjunction with biopolitics), and foreign-funded NGOs, more groups that the Orbán regime categorizes and stigmatizes as being “non-Hungarian” and potential threats to the
nation’s identity. Following the lead of Vladimir Putin’s Russia and a few other authoritarian countries, Fidesz passed its own “foreign agents” law on 13 June 2017. Act LXXVI on the Transparency of Organisations Supported from Abroad now requires any “organisation receiving support from abroad” in the form of at least €22,000 per year to register with the Hungarian government as an “organisation receiving foreign funding” and to display this classification on all of their publications and websites (Act LXXVI on the Transparency of Organisations, 2017, Article 1 & Article 2).

The government justified this legal imposition by arguing that the aid of “unknown foreign sources” could be “used by foreign interest groups to promote—through the social influence of these organizations—their own interests instead of community objectives in Hungary’s political and social life” and thus “pose a threat to Hungary’s political and economic interests and the uninfluenced operation of institutions established by law” (Act LXXVI on the Transparency of Organisations, 2017, Preamble). Failure to comply with the law can result in fines, police raids, and even dissolution of operations within the Hungarian state. The law and its punishments are meant to intimidate NGOs, degrade their reputations, and violate their right to freedom of association and right to privacy and data protection (thus offending many EU agreements like the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017)) while silencing and discrediting institutions that attempt to publicize information about the extent of the Orbán regime’s illiberal authoritarianism. Some NGOs, such as Open Society Foundations, have already left Hungary because of the “increasingly repressive political and legal environment” (Open Society Foundations, 2018).

This signifies the “alarmingly shrinking civic space for civil society and the growing obstacles faced by human rights defenders in Hungary” and the start of a longer campaign to completely discredit NGOs and oppositionists in Hungary, without which critical thinking will wither and democracy and individual freedoms cannot exist (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2017, pp. 1-3). The new NGO law, then, is yet another manifestation of the Fidesz regime’s attack on freedoms. But in the even bigger picture, it is another method by which Orbánism seeks to impose its ideology on the population and to limit access to narratives other than the one Fidesz espouses. In effect this contributes to the destruction of free speech and ultimately of independent thought or action in Hungary.
Fidesz’s attacks on various freedoms—speech, press, association, academic, and more—represent the “methodological harassment of civil society” that either scares people and organizations into remaining silent about the Fidesz regime’s transgressions and refraining from discussion of divergent opinions on topics such as homosexuality and immigration (lest they lose their jobs or be labeled as another “Soros agent”), or outright convinces them that the government’s narrative is “correct” and thus should be supported (Kornai, 2015, pp. 283-284). It also demonstrates Orbánism’s fundamental opposition to pluralism and diversity, for instead of fostering debate it encourages individuals, students, teachers, professors, journalists, news anchors, companies, and other elements of society to act according to “those theories, beliefs, and norms of behavior that are part and parcel of its acceptable dogma” (Kornai, 2015, p. 296). By repeatedly forcing upon society certain narratives through government speeches, laws, approved educational curricula, and propagandistic media, the Orbánist regime better “ensures that the world view of the system gets to every inhabitant of the country” (Tölgyessy, 2013), sowing seeds of ultranationalism and anti-liberalism that could be later used to mobilize the population in favor of Fidesz and against anything the ruling power deems to be “non-Hungarian” and/or a “threat” to the state. For this reason, Orbánist Hungary’s turn to authoritarianism and illiberalism should not be taken for granted as merely the responsibility of the governing Fidesz party or Prime Minister Orbán because it also exacts profound ideological effects on the population and its behavior, as well—trends that could be hard to reverse even if Orbán and Fidesz lose power in the future.

Revising History and National Myths

Aided by its control over the media and educational curricula, the Orbán regime has also engaged in serious efforts of historical revisionism, many of which find their bases in past trends of Hungarian history and popular perceptions of it. Through various speeches, national museum exhibitions, school curricula, textbooks, and media, Fidesz has engaged in historical revisionism to cultivate and perpetuate the idea amongst its citizenry that Hungary is a great cultural power that has been often unfairly victimized by outside forces but regardless bears a unique, perhaps even messianic, mission to defend its Christian character. In glorifying and mythologizing the

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8 Especially for the purposes of this section, those not well versed in Hungarian history and who have not read the historical overview located in the appendix might better understand this section once they have read the overview and can properly situate the topics discussed in conjunction with historical revisionism in a deeper cultural context.
past, Fidesz can present the notion that modern Hungary is also great and destined for even more greatness in its future.

Though it is arguable that modern Hungarians are about as close culturally and genetically to the earlier tenth-century Magyars as modern Chinese populations are to the Mongols or the modern Italians are to the Etruscans, Hungary under Fidesz has especially come to praise this group as the ancestral roots of today’s Hungarians. Memory of the Árpáds, the founding rulers of the original Kingdom of Hungary back in the year 1000, today is rife with pride in the bravery and power of these warrior kings and in their conquest of the Carpathian Basin, the land in which modern Hungary is located and has long thought of as the “heart of Europe” (Fodor, 2013, p. 400). In light of later historical events—namely the post-First World War 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which ceded much of the territory of the Carpathian Basin away from the newly formed Hungarian Republic—national consciousness around the Árpáds grew in a way that fondly recalled them as the ethnic conquerors of Hungary’s “great” past whose work had been undone by external powers. The Árpáds thus have become a symbol of an ethnically based, powerful Hungarian nation. Plenty of young people (many of whom coincidentally support Fidesz and refer to themselves as “true Hungarians”) sport t-shirts of the Kingdom of Hungary’s flag and images of the turul, the mythical predatorial bird that was once the symbol of the Árpád clan and has again been revived as a symbol of modern Hungary (Hungarian Spectrum 2013; Pieller, 2016).

Hungarian politicians and elites even in the twenty-first century have said that they think of themselves as descendants of the Árpádian warriors and that to question the importance of Hungary’s older Magyar ethnogenesis might as well be “treasonous.” Such statements are absurd in part because various scientists have found that Hungarians today are not direct descendants of the Árpáds because the territories and peoples they conquered assimilated the Árpáds into their genetic makeups, rather than the other way around (Dreisziger, 2011, pp. 9-10). Moreover, they are absurd because such an obsession with genetic lineage serves no ends except to promote arbitrary nationalist dreams of legitimacy in a completely different era and civilization. Nevertheless current Hungarian officials continue to fondly recall this mythical connection. Of course, this trend cannot be attributed solely to Fidesz or Orbán because it has expressed itself at different times in Hungarian history, noticeably in older poetry and art after the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century; in the poetry, art, and nationalist rhetoric of the post-First World War
Horthy era; following the collapse of the rather anti-nationalist Communist Hungarian state; and again since Fidesz returned to power in 2010. Nevertheless Orbánism invokes this Árpádian myth and continues to adjust school textbooks to emphasize links to them, ever-popularizing an over-exaggerated nationalist legacy for the purpose of more closely unifying the current Hungarian nation, presenting it as a powerful force in history, and suggesting that it is destined to find even more greatness in the future (Orbán, 2019b; Pieller, 2016).

Somehow the Huns, particularly the infamous leader Attila the Hun who ravaged and nearly seized the capitals of multiple empires, have also taken up center-stage in popular Hungarian consciousness. In part this connection stems from documents written by Hungarians in the thirteenth century, which made unfounded claims that the founding Árpád dynasty of the Magyars descended from Attila the Hun himself. For centuries, Hungarian poetry and art has treated the figures of both the first Árpád king of the Hungarians and Attila as epic national heroes. However, most historians and archaeologists deny any blood connection between the Huns and the ancient Magyars, the former of which disappeared about 400 years before the latter came into existence (Lendvai, 2003, p. 7). Many modern Hungarians, notably from members of the fascist Arrow Cross Party of the mid-twentieth century to current Fidesz and Jobbik members and Hungarian historians, are nevertheless keen to say that their nation-state can claim the ancestral legacy of the Huns. Jobbik politicians often open their speeches with the phrase, “Dear descendants of Attila.” And today Attila remains as one of the most common male names in Hungary (Pieller, 2016; Raátz, 2008, p. 11).

By invoking a supposedly shared lineage to a warrior people who made the Roman and Byzantine Empires quake, current Hungary can stake its relevancy to world history and the current Carpathian Basin region, the lands of which the imperialist Hungarian kingdom had spent centuries conquering and governing (until the 1920 Treaty of Trianon), just like the Huns had done centuries before them. This also creates a mythic figure around which Hungarians can unite and strengthen their collective identity as a tiny nation-state seeking a higher cause for being (Hoppál, 2012). Belief in the Árpádian and Hunnic origins of the current Hungarian people is just another attempt at exploiting history to encourage “allegiance on the basis of social identification,” in the words of Hungarian academic, Fidesz politician, and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) György Schöpflin (1997, p. 21).
Besides claims of the glorifying, mythical, ancient ethnic foundations of the Hungarian population itself, modern Hungary also manipulates the geopolitical circumstances of its society. When the Kingdom of Hungary first made a deal with the Holy Roman Empire in the eleventh century, it began to think of itself as Christian Europe’s “last bastion on the frontiers of Orthodox and pagan worlds” and of its king as the “champion of Christ” (Molnár, 2001, p. 25; Fodor, 2013, p. 401). This understanding has survived for over 1,000 years, but it was not until Fidesz rewrote the national constitution in 2011 that Christianity was featured so prominently in the legal foundations of the Hungarian nation-state. This new constitution added the phrases, “We are proud that our king Saint Stephen built the Hungarian State on solid ground and made our country a part of Christian Europe one thousand years ago” and “We recognise the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood” at the beginning of the document (The Fundamental Law, 2018, National Avowal). While many national constitutions across the globe reference God and specific religious, Fidesz went further when it added the Christian definition of marriage as a union between a man and woman and later the even more alarming point that “The protection of the constitutional identity and Christian culture of Hungary shall be an obligation of every organ of the State” (The Fundamental Law, 2018, Article L(1) & Article R(4)).

In this way, the Hungarian state tacitly disavowed the significance of other religions and lifestyles in both its present and its past, reformulating itself using an ethnic conception of the nation (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 102). This very idea is absurd when one considers that Hungarian history has been full of imperialism and the conquering and assimilation of other tribes and groups that were not all Christian. It also ignores the fact that for almost 150 years large segments of the Kingdom of Hungary were under the influence of the Ottomans. This oversight contributes to the artificial erasure of the Ottoman Turkic period, as do adjustments in state-sponsored school textbooks that either also neglect this era or revile it as a time of unfair alien domination and stagnation, despite what many historians outside of Hungary find to be “the formative role of the Ottomans on the birth of modern Europe” (Fodor, 2013, pp. 403-403). For instance, the Battle of Mohács in 1526, in which the Ottomans handily annihilated the Hungarian military, is now given almost sacred standing in school curricula and art as a time of deep sorrow for the Hungarian nation. It colors the entire ensuing period of Ottoman rule and is blamed as the beginning of Hungary’s loss of its dear independence for several centuries. Furthermore, this Christian element is especially ironic given modern Hungary’s nationalist fascination with its
fabricated Hunnic origins, as the Huns were notorious pillagers of Christendom and the Roman Empire (Pieller, 2016).

In general, however, the various religious practices of assimilated peoples, the Ottoman period, and the defeat associated with it are largely overlooked in the national Hungarian consciousness when thinking about their history. Instead Hungary is considered to have been—and often is still considered to be—a frontier nation on the fringes of Europe tasked with the valiant prerogative of defending a Christian Europe from outside, non-Christian forces. Clashes with the Mongols are remembered as evidence of Hungary’s strength, Christian mission, and dedication to Europe. Orbánism has been particularly sure to emphasize such a “Christian-national idea” in schools, speeches, and the media to promote national unity and pride among the population (Orbán, 2019a).9

The non-Christian Ottoman period is not the only history that the modern Hungarian state under Fidesz largely denies. The 2011 Fundamental Law of Hungary explicitly states that it recognizes the “continuity” of the Hungarian state’s “self-determination” from its origins until 19 March 1944, the day that Hitler’s Nazis seized Budapest, and then once again from 2 May 1990, the day “the first freely elected organ of popular representation” replaced Communist rule. In this way, Fidesz has attempted to rewrite Hungary’s national history to reject its complicity in the Second World War and the Communist era, refusing even to acknowledge the war crimes committed by the government and right-wing Hungarian fascists who were voted into power by the Hungarian population (The Fundamental Law, 2018, National Avowal; Halmai, 2018, pp. 44-45).

Since Orbán came to power in 2010, the national memory of Admiral-turned-Regent of Hungary Miklós Horthy and his government (20 March 1920-15 October 1944) has undergone an intensified propaganda campaign that highlights “positive” aspects of a reign that many international historians consider to have been monarchist and Nazi. Historians like William M. Johnston point out that through the White Terror of 1920 and beyond, Horthy oversaw a regime in which “torture was used indiscriminately, public whipping was reinstated, political murders were concealed, and Jews who had arrived as refugees since 1914 were expelled. Jews who had no passports were put in internment camps, devoid of adequate food and sanitation” (Johnston,

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9 The influence of Hungary’s Christian revisionism will be further explored in conjunction with the discussion of biopolitics.
1972, p. 342). But Orbán’s favorable mentions of Horthy in speeches, and both government and civil celebrations held in Budapest in front of a bust of Horthy, reveal that historical revisionism has been largely successful in the domestic public (Toomey, 2018, p. 2). The majority of Hungarian nationalists and pro-Horthy sympathizers often cite Horthy’s later secret negotiations to reach a peace agreement with the United States and thus pull out of the war without Hitler’s knowledge in 1944 as proof that this era of Hungary’s past was not so bad. Other historians, however, imbue this fact with a different understanding: Horthy was just trying to come out of the catastrophic war as unscathed as possible after having already engaged in over a decade of antisemitic laws, nationalist propaganda, and irredentist policies when he realized it was very possible that Hitler would lose the war. But the Fidesz government does not acknowledge this contradicting perspective.

When Hitler invaded Hungary in March 1944 in retaliation for Horthy’s attempts at diplomatic trickery, Horthy chose to remain in power over Hungary, thereby further legitimizing the German takeover, ghettoization, and massacre of Hungarian Jews. While it is also true that Horthy tried to stop the ensuing mass German-launched deportation of Jews from Hungary beginning in March 1944, he only did so in July and then allowed them to resume a few weeks later. Not only do many historians cite this as evidence of the Hungarian regime’s (albeit hesitating) fascism, but also as evidence that Hitler could not have succeeded in Hungary if it were not for Horthy’s approval. Yet as of 2012, the Hungarian government has hailed Horthy as a hero and “exceptional statesman” of the Hungarian nation (Vági, Csösz, & Kádár, 2013, pp. 142-143; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.a; Lázár, 2017). From the general Hungarian perspective, Horthy did his best to save the country by centralizing power but could not stop the rabid Hitlerite forces from once again overpowering Hungary’s sovereignty and committing unspeakable acts against popular will. A government-pushed narrative like this one functions to convince people that Hungary was an innocent nation and that Hungary stands to benefit from more authoritarian, centralized rule like Horthy’s (Müller, 2015).

In another instance of Fidesz-sponsored politicization of wartime Hungary’s memory, the state made a rather blatant attempt at committing a physical forgery of history in the summer of 2014. The Fidesz-dominated National Assembly ordered a controversial monument to be created on Szabadság Tér, or Liberty Square, one of the most central squares in Budapest that also boasts several major buildings, including that of the United States Embassy, the National Bank, and
until recently the Hungarian Public Television (MTV) headquarters. Following a few weeks of discrete work, around 100 police officers shut down the square on the night of 20 July 2014 to erect the monument. Orbán described it as “a tribute to all the victims of the German occupation” of Hungary during WWII (Nolan, 2014; Feher, 2014)—a cunning method by which to portray Hungary as a victim of Nazism, as the monument implies, rather than as a perpetrator allied with the Nazi regime.

The memorial, inscribed with the words “To the victims of the German fascist invaders” and featuring a demonic German eagle atop crumbling Roman ruins as it prepares to trounce the Archangel Gabriel, a cultural symbol for Hungary, is problematic not only because it tries to whitewash the Hungarian state’s responsibility for cooperating with the Nazis and effectively gassing hundreds of thousands of innocent Hungarian Jews, Roma, and disabled. It also represents empty promises: before being elected Prime Minister for the third time in April 2014, Orbán promised to postpone any decisions on the proposed Holocaust memorial until discussing the project after Easter with the Mazsihisz, Hungary’s most popular Jewish organization (Simon, 2014). Coincidentally, however, workmen broke ground for the monument a mere two days after Orbán won nearly 20 percent more of the national vote than his next-closest competitor. The Hungarian government had neither spoken with the Mazsihisz, nor waited until Easter to launch the memorial’s construction. Lying to this very relevant society sent a clear signal: Orbán’s regime would not care to abide by the facts of history or recognize its long trend of antisemitism but nevertheless would disguise itself as a benevolent state just trying to “do the right thing.”

Worse still, then-State Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Office János Lázár quickly announced a change of plans once some of the public reacted to the completed monument with criticism, scrapping its state-sponsored unveiling ceremony. He cited that the government did not wish to “triumphantly” commemorate the monument officially (Nolan, 2014)—yet another way of telling citizens that this memorial was not benevolently created for them, despite the fact that the sculptor had advertised the project as a form of “reconciliation between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians.” Orbán’s regime did not care to hear the opposition’s voices—it only cared to reconstruct the public’s memory to wash away the sins of Hungarian leadership in 1944, and to shift all of the blame and accountability for the Second World War-era Hungarian leadership’s antisemitic laws and mass deportations of Jews to Nazi death camps.
This monument represents far more than the Orbán regime’s desire to portray Hungary both as an innocent historical force and as an unfair victim of external powers: it also serves as a method by which Fidesz can alter public opinion and fool the Hungarian population into trusting their “illiberal democracy.” After all, government-sponsored monuments especially are “applied by power to occupy public space in order to inscribe its specific narrative about the past, in many cases justifying its authority in the present” and assuaging that same authority of guilt in other crimes or exclusionary practices, in the words of Ágnes Erőss, a Hungarian specialist in ethnic and political geography (2016, p. 239). There is a reason why this vessel of “national memory poisoning” appeared with such swift discreteness (Loth, 2015). To construct the monument, the Fidesz-led Hungarian government chose to use the darkness of night and many law enforcement officers to hide the project from the public—a tangible example of how Hungary’s elected leaders are duping their nation’s population and manipulating historical understandings to do it.

The wartime era is not the only piece of recent Hungarian history that the Fidesz-backed 2011 constitution tries to hide from public memory. It also disavows Communist rule and specifically rejects the validity of the 1949 constitution drafted under Communist pretenses. Ironically, though, the Fundamental Law makes sure to champion “our 1956 Revolution” against the Communists rulers of Hungary (The Fundamental Law, National Avowal). In various speeches delivered by Orbán and government media campaigns, the national authority has also sanctified the 1956 Revolution as a thoroughly Hungarian legacy. Thus the government under Fidesz claims credit for the acts of anti-Communist resisters but refuses the idea that Hungary itself had any part in the overwhelmingly negative aspects (violence, repressions, executions, tortures, etc.) of the Communist era, despite the fact that Hungarians themselves cooperated with and actively facilitated the Communist regime—just consider the long-lasting and largely popular rule of János Kádár, General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (October 1956-May 1988).

To make matters regarding Hungary’s Communist past more confusing, in recent years Fidesz has turned against national hero Imre Nagy, the very man whose public reburial in 1989 marked the rebirth of an independent Hungarian democratic republic and gave Orbán the opportunity to deliver a speech that skyrocketed him to national fame.10 Media outlets known for

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10 For more on the significance of Nagy’s reburial and the speech Orbán gave at the event, see the historical overview of Orbán and Fidesz in the attached appendix.
their pro-Fidesz stances and various public speeches by national authorities have tried to smear Nagy as an ardent Communist and an NKVD agent. The public slander campaign culminated in December 2018, when Orbán ordered the nighttime removal of the Nagy statue from Martyr’s Square, where it had stood in front of the Hungarian parliament building since 1996 as both a tourist attraction and a constant reminder of Hungary’s revolutionary and anti-fascist moments. Various historians and political commentators, such as Hungarian János Széky, argue that Fidesz’s pursuit to tarnish Nagy “clearly shows that the aim of today’s government is to nationalise a left-wing and liberal narrative which was central to the rendszerváltás [the regime change of 1989].” Following the statue’s removal, the national government announced it would launch a long program to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of Hungarian Communism between March 2019 and June 2021 (Széky, 2019, pp. 154-155). In other words, Fidesz is again rewriting history to retroactively convince the public that Fidesz alone stands for the “true” people of Hungary and is responsible for the liberation of Hungary from its Communist past.

The Fidesz regime’s tangled understanding of Hungarian nationhood, victimhood, and unaccountability furthers the idea that Hungary has been a victim of external forces—some of which manifested themselves in the form of Hungarian political insiders (e.g. Nagy), like Trojan horses—at various points throughout its innocent existence, and that citizens should be proud of their country for surviving such a fraught history with its morals supposedly unblemished. When this becomes the loudest, most accessible narrative heard by the majority of the Hungarian population through school, university, the media, politicians’ rhetoric, and even other fellow citizens, the likelihood that it will be perpetuated and become the dominant story increases all the more, drowning out other historically accurate comprehensions (Toomey, 2018, p. 14).

Yet another important instance of historical revisionism in Hungary that has been co-opted by the Fidesz regime deals with the infamous 1920 Treaty of Trianon (the contents of, and the initial Hungarian reaction to, which are described in the historical overview located in the appendix). One of the first government actions after Fidesz gained a supermajority in 2010 was to announce a new annual holiday, the “Day of National Solidarity,” on 4 June, the day the Trianon Treaty was signed almost a century earlier (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 89). Fidesz MEP Schöpflin has echoed the importance of Trianon for modern Hungarians, writing that “Trianon is
a memory, a symbol, indeed a brand that suffuses Hungarian consciousness, one that acts as an insurmountable obstacle, as an evil spirit that haunts us” (2010).

Thanks in part to Fidesz’s perpetuation of Trianon as a national trauma, today visitors in Budapest will often see people wearing Trianon t-shirts, taxis displaying large maps of “Greater Hungary” that include territories seized from the state (especially Transylvania), and average Hungarian’s cars proudly sporting bumper stickers of similar unofficial geographic outlines. It is evident that Trianon has “filled generations with bitterness” and induced a sort of “victim myth” among the national population, one in which Hungary is perceived as the unfortunate victim of external powers that led it down a long, supposedly independence-less path toward fighting on the losing side of the First World War and then ripped the country apart with unfair geopolitical, military, economic, and social conditions (Lendvai, 2018b).

In more recent years, Orbán has intensified all of the aforementioned strains of historical revisionism that his regime has been building itself upon for nearly three decades in increasingly disturbing and ideological ways. In a speech given to mark the occasion of the 171st anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Orbán stated,

The word “Hungarian” will once more be exalted, and worthy of its great fame of old. This is how it shall be, again and again, until the end of time. This is the greatest triumph that a European nation like ours can achieve over empires... We are a full-grown nation, and we know what we must know. We know that instead of submitting to any empire, our ancestors in the first millennium chose a homeland in the freedom of the West. We know that, through their own free will, the chieftains chose the House of Árpád to rule over them. And we know that they freely chose to adopt Christianity. They fought tooth and nail for their right to freely choose—against the will of the Ottomans, the Habsburgs and the Soviets. We know that the lodestar of the history of the Hungarians is freedom, and the guiding thread is a succession of freedom fights... We also know that the notion of freedom is rooted in Christianity... that without Christian culture there will be no free life in Europe, and that if we fail to defend our Christian culture we will lose Europe, and Europe will no longer belong to Europeans. We want the peoples of Europe to be cured of their partial blindness, and for them to realise that in a liberal European empire we will all lose our freedom. (2019b)

In this way, Orbánism brings together various national myths—of the glory of Hungarian culture, the victimhood and martyrdom of a wiser, superior Hungarian nation-state, and its saving Christian mission, among other things—that it has been spinning in the minds of the public for years to now project a narrow worldview that calls upon all Hungarians no matter where they are in the world. This approach interpellates them into a narrative that elevates
Hungarian society and reshapes it in the minds of those who believe as the saving grace of Europe and Christendom as a whole.

Having considered the myriad of ways in which Fidesz pursues historical revisionism in Hungary (e.g. invoking the legendary and legitimizing connections to the Árpád dynasty and to the Huns, reformulating Hungary as an ethnic Christian nation, ignoring entire centuries of Ottoman rule, whitewashing Hungary’s responsibility in the Holocaust and Communist eras, painting Hungary as an innocent victim of the Trianon Treaty, announcing Hungary as the savior of Europe and Christianity, etc.), it is at this point that American historian Timothy Snyder’s concept of the “politics of eternity” should be advanced. As Snyder explains in his book The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America, the politics of eternity “places one nation at the center of a cyclical story of victimhood.” In this story, “time is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past” as “politicians manufacture crisis and manipulate the resultant emotion” (2018, p. 8).

The politics of eternity are active in a state like Hungary under Fidesz, where the political leadership insists that their country’s current direction and way of life is the direction, the way of life. They can reshape history and its meanings, downplaying events that do not fit into their overarching narrative while exaggerating those that do and telling their audiences that no alternatives exist: that their country is a Christian nation descended from brave warriors that has always been left to fend for itself on the frontier of Europe but has nevertheless survived. While Hungary is not on the same level of ideological authoritarianism as a country like Vladimir Putin’s Russia or Xi Jinping’s China yet, it is crucial to notice that historical revisionism holds sway over a vast portion of the population. It is increasingly exploited by Fidesz in order to unify the population, solidify their support, and to perpetuate the mythical national narrative of a glorious, innocent Hungary that need not abide by the same rules as the rest of the international community or Europe because it is, in fact, “better,” “wiser,” “stronger,” and “more Christian” and hence destined to save the continent.
Exploiting Biopolitics

Perhaps Orbánism’s most pivotal tactic is the exploitation of biopolitics (previously defined in Chapter Two). Fidesz’s biopolitical narratives are deeply rooted in the country’s history, as has been mentioned in the discussion of historical revisionism, what with the obsession of linking modern Hungary to its earlier origins with the Árpáds and its even earlier alleged origins with the Huns, and of denying relations with the Ottomans. But in the last decade Fidesz has ramped up rhetoric about Hungarian unity, culture, and ethnicity. It institutionalized in the 2011 constitution the idea that the nation-state is primarily an ethnic and cultural community composed of the “members of the Hungarian Nation” who share a common “intellectual and spiritual” background, rather than political one, and are dedicated to defending the “Christian culture of Hungary” (The Fundamental Law, National Avowal & Article R(4)). Of course, the constitution does make mention of respecting various religions, genders, nationalities, etc.; but various other legal stipulations and societal behaviors demonstrate that tolerance of plurality and diversity has become “largely illusory” and tacitly chipped away at (Halmai, 2018, pp. 41-43). This leaves little doubt that the nation-state, at least under the leadership of Fidesz, has a good idea of who it will accept into its community and who it will reject, even if it does so quietly, without blatant violations of international human rights laws or EU principles.

Of course, centuries of nomadic conquests and imperial rule by the Ottomans and Austrians mean that “truly” ethnic Hungarians with genetic connections to the Árpáds hardly exist today. And though imperial rule is hardly ever a positive experience, since the eleventh century, and especially under the Habsburgs, Hungary practiced the acceptance of Austrians, Croats, Germans, Jews, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, and others who, true, had to commit to a process of Magyarization to “fit” into society but then had access to “the same career chances in society” and were considered to be Hungarian by the government (Lendvai, 2012, p. 56). This makes the notion of revitalizing the idea of a “true Hungarian” today all the more arbitrary.

Yet there is precedent for doing so, and Fidesz has tapped into it: there has always been a tradition of celebrating Hungary’s cultural uniqueness—perhaps even superiority—throughout

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11 Some research presented in this section has been previously conducted and expressed in different form by myself in the following unpublished academic papers: Riding the Xenophobic Nationalist Wave: Viktor Orbán and Fidesz’s Successful Tactics in Hungary, Professor Lenka Rovna, European Comparative Politics and Society, Charles University (December 2017); and Biopolitics as a Substitute for an Ethnically Homogeneous Nation in the Practice of Russian Nationalism, Professor Zdzislaw Mach and Professor Joanna Orzechowska-Waclawska, Challenges to the European Identity. The rebirth of nationalisms in Europe, Jagiellonian University (February 2019).
history, literature, and society over the last several centuries. Here an excerpt from Hungarian intellectual Paul Lendvai’s book *Hungary: Between Democracy and Authoritarianism* proves pivotal:

With a unique language and history the Hungarians are, with the exception of the Albanians, perhaps the loneliest people in Europe. The author Arthur Koestler, who dreamed in Hungarian but wrote his books first in German and later in English, once said, “Perhaps their exceptional loneliness can explain the strange intensity of their existence. To be a Hungarian is a collective neurosis.” Since the conquest of the territory in 896 CE loneliness has been the determining factor in Hungarian history. To this we may add the fear of a slow death of the nation: one ethnic Hungarian in three lives outside the country. (2012, p.55)

This sets the stage for the nation-state’s desire to produce and reproduce myths of Hungary’s cultural and ethnic greatness as well as to create national enemies against which a “true” Hungarian identity can be reaffirmed. Myths, enemies, and biopolitics can be leveraged by authorities—in this case the Hungarian governments—to “generate powerful concepts of an ethnic past that can fire the imaginations of the members of a community” and to inspire a “messianic energy” that can imbibe target audiences (the Hungarian citizenry) with “passionate belief in the ‘people,’ its expectation both of imminent destruction and of a subsequent perfect society” (Smith, 1997, p. 48; Hosking, 1997, p. 209).

Although Fidesz’s Hungary might not seem to fit into this category of a mobilized, ideological state at first glance, the following research on this topic suggests that it might in fact already be one, or at least be in the process of becoming one, based on the government’s intense imposition of narratives, control of media sources and education, manipulation of legality, and pursuit of biopolitical tactics that demonize “Others” while praising “Us,” the “true” Hungarians. Such exploitation takes many forms: the positive treatment of ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary, the negative discrimination against migrants and refugees (particularly those of Muslim and/or Middle Eastern or North African background), the constitutional and public disavowal of gay lifestyles, the popular trends of antisemitic and anti-Roma attitudes, and more.

The most prominent biopolitical strategy employed by Fidesz is its ongoing campaign against migrants. This ramped up in the spring of 2015, when immigration rates to the European continent swelled to the point which it was deemed a crisis. As a country marking the edge of the Schengen Area and dividing the EU from non-EU states, Hungary became a site of high traffic for entry into the EU. At first Orbán approached the influx of migrants and refugees—most of whom come from places like the Middle East and Northern Africa and thus practice the Islamic
faith—primarily through the lens of preserving the Christian identity of Hungary as written in the 2011 Fundamental Law. He made statements like “Christian culture is the unifying force of the nation… Hungary will either be Christian or not at all” in May 2015 and argued that “people arriving from the Islamic world… bring with them the laws, customs and conflicts that have existed in their culture for centuries,” as if they would taint Hungarian society with their presence (Hungarian Spectrum, 2015; Orbán, 2019c). He has also referred to himself as “the defender of European Christianity, the very roots of today’s European culture,” further limiting the identity of the ethnic Hungarian population and distinguishing it from that of the migrant “Others” (Noack, 2015). The Fidesz regime’s interest in stressing the Christian-national unity of an ethnic Magyar state is crucial to upholding myths about the sanctity of the Hungarian culture and idea of Hungary as a great, though small, power that is destined to protect higher values of the Christian nation itself and perhaps of Christian Europe as a whole (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 90).

Aside from emphasizing the Christian angle, Fidesz took physical and legal action against the European migrant and refugee crisis, as well. According to Hungarian government statistics, over 440,000 migrants illegally entered the country within the first few months of the European migration crisis (International Organization for Migration, 2018). Orbán thus denounced what he referred to as the EU’s “failed” immigration quotas and policies and instead declared that the state would construct a 13-foot-tall border fence, reinforced with razor wire, on the 109-mile-long stretch of border that Hungary shares with Serbia in an effort to stem the flow of illegal migrants into the country. Hungary’s Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN) patrols the fence and has established four “transit zones” along it. These four areas are the only places where migrants and refugees are able to apply for asylum and potentially gain permission to step across the fence into Hungary. Though these zones are on Hungarian territory, the government nevertheless claims them to be “legally neutral”: if a migrant entered one, they would not be considered as actually having set foot on Hungarian territory. Such a confounded legal myth allows the state to keep asylum-seekers out of Hungary’s domestic orbit without processing their requests in due time (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 16; Amnesty International, 2016).

The system is further confounded by the fact that the OIN only processes 15 asylum-seekers each day on average. If the Hungarian government truly wanted to address the migrant crisis at its borders and treat these people with human dignity and according to their human
rights, it has the capability to do so. But instead it chooses not to. As a result large, unsanitary migrant camps of over 300 people have burgeoned at the transit zones of Röszke and Tompa since September 2015, in which the asylum-seekers withstand hot summers and frigid winters with only the less-than-adequate food supply and medical aid that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) can offer (Amnesty International, 2015).

With a(n) (il)logic similar to the legal fiction of the transit zone, the Hungarian government declared on 5 July 2016 that any asylum-seeker caught by authorities within five miles of the Serbian or Croatian borders with Hungary would be immediately “escorted” out of the country. Such policing violates international law, which obliges Hungary to abide by non-refoulement procedures and to assess the protection needs of those who have entered the country; however, Hungarian authorities claim that the first five miles from the border are “no man’s land” and technically not Hungarian territory, anyway (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2016). Thus, the “neutral” spaces of transit zones and the new five-mile standard are just another creative way by which Hungary claims it has no responsibility towards these asylum-seekers.

Thus the fence and Hungarian OIN presence along the border are quite literal pieces of evidence attesting to the idea that the Fidesz regime uses biopolitics in a way that, using the terms of Karl Popper, encourages a closed society rather than an open one. In effect this means that Hungarian society is turning inwards on itself, denying the ideals of pluralism, diversity, multiculturalism, equality, and other values associated with both liberal democracy and EU membership and instead exhibiting preferences for what the state (often arbitrarily) deems to be elements of Hungarian culture, traditions, and ethnicity (Popper, 1994, p. 30).

As French philosopher Étienne Balibar’s book *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* explores, some nations exploit exclusionary biopolitical practices in ways that advance xenophobic, anti-pluralist, nationalist governments like Hungary’s. States like this justify their illiberal means (and their natural ends of a homogenous society) by equating an individual’s “right” to human rights with the term “citizenship,” which is then further distorted by associating it with the concept of nationality (Balibar, 2004, p. 37). In this manner, a state like Hungary can pretend that it has no obligation to the hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees who have come to its borders and/or illegally entered Hungary. Instead it can demonize them and encourage nationalism, intolerance, and xenophobia among its citizenry, many of
whom hear abrasive rhetoric about migrants every day in school, television, print news, online media, on the radio, and from other ordinary Hungarian people.

Orbán is a major source of these negative viewpoints in Hungarian society, spouting rhetoric like “All the terrorists are basically migrants,” that “every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk,” and referring to those of non-European origin and/or Islamic faith as “a poison” against the Christian, Hungarian citizenry (Kaminski, 2015; Kroet, 2016). He also scares the domestic population by asserting on public radio anxiety-inducing, fear-mongering claims like “if we do not protect our borders, tens of millions of migrants will keep coming,” as if the Hungarian state could collapse as a result of migrant entries (Kossuth Radio, 2015). The sheer magnitude of people that Orbán referenced was irresponsible, too. An outrageous number like that would strike worry even into the most tolerant of societies not already concerned with their demographic makeups. Nevertheless it serves Fidesz’s purpose of turning public opinion against sympathy or liberal attitudes towards “Others” and actively demonizing them.

Of course it is also crucial to point out that he and the rest of the Fidesz government, Hungarian media, and school textbooks almost exclusively use the term “migrant,” rather than “refugee.” In this manner Hungary can not only escape the moral dimension that accompanies the term “refugee” as well as the costs—be they economic, social, or political—which the nation-state would then be bound by international principles to assume: they can also distract those listening from thinking about the reasons why many are seeking entry to the EU (e.g. civil war in a failed state like Syria). Thus the government’s word choice can belittle the entire endeavor of migration in the minds of Hungarians who believe Fidesz’s narrative and instead create a social atmosphere in which the word “migrant” evokes thoughts of a bunch of uncivilized, dirty, Muslims who will only commit crimes, like rape, murder, and terrorism, against the innocent Hungarian population (Hungarian Ministry of Human Capacities, 2016).

Government-sponsored demonization is fairly easy if the authorities have influence over all kinds of media and can make legal changes to migration policies, if a nationalist trend exists among society, and if there exist plainly visible differences between groups of people—as is the case in Hungary, which claims to be a white and Christian nation (and whose demographics since the Treaty of Trianon and deportation of Jews reflect this claim). Those who exist outside of this category, like migrants and refugees with different skin coloring, clothing, religious habits, dietary preferences, etc. are easy to identify as “Other” for their biopolitical variances and
to thus alienate them as people and traditions that do not “belong” in Hungarian society. The majority of Hungarian society fell for Fidesz’s narrative, with polls conducted in September 2015 showing that 79 percent of Hungarians agreeing that asylum-seekers should be treated even more harshly by the Hungarian government and 41 percent approving of the use of weapons “to defend the border against illegal migrants” (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 192-193).

From the interviews, polls, and policies that Fidesz has been involved in, it seems very well possible that most of its members are actually convinced that migrants and refugees should be demonized and very well could destroy the state. Even if their political speeches and voting behaviors do not align with their actual beliefs, the Hungarian population probably does not know this, instead taking them at their word in light of such an alleged crisis. This is one of the most identifiable ideological convictions that Fidesz spreads, as this narrative of a specific, enemy group of “Others” has the power both in theory and arguably in reality to alter the opinions and values of a vast majority of the domestic Hungarian population.

While the construction of the border fence served a direct physical end—to prevent migrants and refugees from entering Hungary—it also functions on an abstract level, representing Hungary’s own nationalism and xenophobia. In her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010), American political theorist Wendy Brown examines how border walls allege to delineate the “danger, disorder, and violence” of a state’s exterior from the “homogeneous, orderly, and safe national interior.” In this way the wall constantly reminds those average Hungarians who see it or think of it that they belong to a collective “We,” the Hungarian people, and require their state’s defenses to protect them from “Them,” those who pose a danger to the state and do not belong in it simply because some of their biopolitical factors are different (e.g. national origin, religion, skin color, etc.) (Brown, 2010, pp. 80-85 & 103).

A Pew Research Center poll from 2016 suggested that the invocation of difference and danger in relation to migrants affected much of the Hungarian population in the same way, with 82 percent of participants agreeing that migrants are a “burden on our country” because they take employment opportunities, suck up economic benefits, and bring crime (Bayer, 2016). Additionally, as an intern for the United States Department of State at Embassy Budapest in the summer of 2016 I worked on a project that required me to analyze interviews with dozens of Hungarian university students, in part to evaluate their reactions to the border fence and Hungary’s treatment of migrants. The majority of their with responses amounted to “I don’t like
the idea of a wall, but... we haven’t had a repeat of the Brussels or Paris attacks here, so I’m for it.” Although many of these students admitted to feeling that the wall was wrong on the level of human rights, they complacently accept it because their government perpetuates a culture of insecurity based on biopolitics. Though polls like these can be flawed, in this context they demonstrate that Fidesz’s fear-mongering rhetoric and exploitation of biopolitics finds success in the Hungarian population and fosters quite closed-minded attitudes among them.

This strategy that Fidesz employs epitomizes what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben refers to as the “state of exception” because the Hungarian authorities insist that the country can and should enact whatever measures necessary to defend its borders and domestic population from the possible national security threats posed by each non-European migrant (Agamben, 2005, p. 5). It is in conjunction with this idea of the power and unity of the state that the securitization of its borders and the policing against certain immigrants has become one of the most visible exercises of biopolitics in Hungary. The Fidesz regime’s exploitation of biopolitics then serves as a tool for the deeper unification of Hungarian identity through the projection of threats onto alienated groups that do not “fit” into that identity.

As if the visible policing practices against certain immigrants were not enough, Orbán’s government sought other strategies by which to use biopolitics and associate migrant-status with criminality and danger. Fidesz launched a billboard campaign across the country in the summer of 2016 featuring biased statements including “Did you know that the Paris attack [of November 2015] was carried out by immigrants?” and “Did you know that since the beginning of the immigration crisis the harassment of women has risen sharply in Europe?” (Budapest Business Journal, 2016). The billboards insinuated that migrants in Hungary would be nothing but criminals who would surely attack the Hungarian population, inspiring more fear in the domestic population and, in turn, more support for the supposedly always-victimized Hungarian government and acceptance of policies that discriminated against outsiders. Going further than merely telling the domestic population that migrants are dangerous Muslim criminals, Orbán also has written articles for Hungarian and international press making the claim that “those who are overwhelmed cannot offer shelter to anyone” (Orbán, 2015). Statements like this compound the fabricated security crisis by recalling the theme of a small, innocent Hungary that can only rely on itself for the protection of its community; it is a call to action for individuals to agree with the state and perhaps even to actively support it.
This billboard campaign led up to a government-sponsored referendum on 2 October 2016. It asked the following single question: “Do you want to allow the European Union to mandate the resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary without the approval of the National Assembly?” Such phrasing was loaded with politically charged themes, such as Hungarian sovereignty and xenophobia. A shocking 98.36 percent of the Hungarians who voted answered in the negative, meaning that they rejected the imposition of EU immigration quotas. Since only 44.04 percent of the Hungarian voting population participated in the referendum, falling short of the simple majority threshold required, it could not be treated as a legally valid occurrence; still, the outpouring of popular opinion on the matter in favor of the Hungarian government and at the insult of the EU is a crucial indicator of intense public support for the Orbán regime and the themes it stresses (Herszenhorn, 2016; Gall, 2016).

In this public support for the Hungarian government’s campaign against a fabricated external enemy to the nation-state lies evidence of the ideological influence that Fidesz’s exploitation of biopolitics exerts on the domestic population. It is this kind of xenophobic discrimination that encourages the growth and intensification of nationalist sentiment in Hungary to the point where the citizenry acts in opposition to EU values such as equality and inclusivity. Individual Hungarian citizens have begun to take up Fidesz’s militaristic attitude against migrants and refugees. László Toroczkai, the mayor of the Hungarian village Ásotthalom, and other members of the community took it upon themselves to shoot and edit a threatening short film specifically addressed to “illegal immigrants in Hungary.” The video shows tough-looking Hungarian policemen and civilians hunting down illegal immigrants on foot and horseback as well as by motorcycles, car, and even helicopter. It ends as Toroczkai declares, “Hungary is a bad choice [of a route for entering the EU]; Ásotthalom is the worst” (HVIM1920).

The vigilante border guards presented in Toroczkai’s video act as though they believe themselves to be an additional force meant to strengthen the federal government’s current policing mechanisms and protect the national population from the supposedly dangerous outside. The existence of groups like these often indicates that citizens are unsatisfied with their state authority, or that the state’s power is not as extensive as it would like to be, leading some citizens to take it upon themselves to strengthen national defenses; in the case of Ásotthalom’s small-time border guard unit, however, the situation most emphatically signifies how Orbán’s propaganda has deeply infiltrated his population. The film, then, serves as a blatant
representation of racism and Hungarian nationalism based on Fidesz’s biopolitical war against non-white, non-Christian migrants. It signifies one instance in which national government’s message was reproduced at the local level by individuals who came up with the idea to involve themselves in the anti-migrant fight without any prompting. Thus Orbánism has succeeded in interpellating at least some Hungarian citizens into a larger mindset, moving them to the point where they accept the call in their ordinary lives to actively participate in Fidesz’s narrative.

Toroczkai’s militia represents a state-subject relationship that is “no doubt an element of all forms of militarized nationalism” (Brown, 2010, p. 108): it is interpreted in Hungary as a sign of solidarity and national unity, as an enthusiastic embrace of Orbán’s call to defend a Christian Hungary from non-European terrorists. In this sense, actively disliking, hunting down, and devaluing the human rights of (potential) illegal immigrants has become a mode of positively expressing one’s loyalty to the Hungarian state. Ásotthalom’s immigrant policing group is a marker of Orbán’s success: the government has been “prioritizing nation-state considerations over individual human rights,” and the general Hungarian population is both accepting and acting in accordance with this motto (Luibhéid, 2002, p. 115).

In this regard, it should be emphasized that Fidesz’s narrative has been successful enough to the degree that individual Hungarian citizens have taken it upon themselves to promote the same hateful ideology. It is another form of propaganda, except this time, it is not sanctioned by the Hungarian state: it is reproduced by individuals who have made the decision to do so. Though Hungary today is not characterized by mass mobilization—meaning that groups of people do not frequently form, organize, and demonstrate in the public sphere, either in favor of the government or in protest against it—the actions of individuals like Toroczkai and the militia members who participated in his video matter. It shows that Fidesz’s narratives can and do inspire some people to act, and in large part the rest of the population remains either silent or agrees with such behaviors and sentiments. In other words, there is a nontrivial ideological influence afoot, one that exploits the self-other relationship to identity, foments a “besieged fortress” mentality, and fosters artificial national unity through the fabrication of enemies against which the “proper” citizenry must bond.

And even though the number of asylum-seekers arriving at Hungary’s borders has drastically fallen over the years since the migration crisis began in 2015 to about 29,000 in 2016 and fewer than 4,000 in 2017 (the most recent year for which there exists reliable official data),
Fidesz and the Hungarian population have not adjusted the levels of their xenophobic rhetoric. In fact, migration issues remained the central campaign theme for Fidesz in 2018, as government-controlled media “relentlessly cover[ed] reports of migrant crime and violence in Hungary and other European countries” (International Organization for Migration, 2018; Beauchamp, 2018). Also in 2018 the Fidesz regime drafted and adopted a new law that criminalizes individuals, businesses, and organizations which try to aid—through the provision of monetary funds or material goods like food, water, and clothing—undocumented migrants in their pursuit of “illegal migration” in Hungary (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2018).

Though it is impossible to know if Fidesz politicians and Orbán truly consider refugees and migrants to be dangerous, lesser beings, or if they are merely attempting to capitalize off of the fear and panic their electorate feels, it is nevertheless clear that this mentality is appreciated by a large and growing segment of voters, even if it comes at the expense of liberal democratic values. The criminalization of attempts to aid migrants and refugees, protests against which have been relatively small and diminished as time passes, is likely to alienate Hungarian citizens from the migrant “Others” even more and consolidate nationalist collectivist opinion. As further evidence of the increasingly xenophobic trend, it must be mentioned that Fidesz is not the only political party in Hungary that espouses such rhetoric and showcases anti-migration policies as the main thrust of their political campaigns. Jobbik does so, too. Jobbik is an extreme right-wing political party in Hungary that engages in ultranationalist, antisemitic, and neo-Nazi ideas. While Jobbik has yet to gain more than 21 percent in the national parliamentary elections, since 2010 they have made up at least the third-largest share of any party in the National Assembly. After the 2018 elections, Jobbik became the second-largest party represented in the parliament. Its success, based largely on its anti-migration focus, is another indicator that hatred and fear of the “Other” is gaining strength across the Hungarian electorate (Szabó, 2011, pp. 46-47).

Some might argue that the spread of xenophobic sentiment is not unique to Hungary, especially as of 2019 when nationalist populism seems to be sweeping across continental Europe in countries like Poland, Austria, and the United Kingdom, and beyond. However this research argues that Hungary under Fidesz cannot simply be lumped together with other countries exhibiting a similar trend; after all, Hungary engages in far more than the mere demonization of migrants and refugees, as this thesis has already shown. There are other factors at play in Hungary that make it even more successful in slandering migrants and destroying diversity and
multiculturalism within its borders, and polls and analyses of different European countries support this idea. Out of ten European countries surveyed, a Pew Research Center poll recently revealed that the population of Hungary is the most fearful of a terrorist attack committed by refugees (76 percent agreed with this sentiment) and maintains the highest levels of anti-Muslim sentiment (76 percent) as well as high levels of antisemitic (32 percent) and anti-Roma (64 percent) attitudes (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons, 2016, pp. 3, 9, & 23). In the words of Paul Lendvai, these numbers “confirm the deeply rooted anti-foreign attitudes present in Hungarian society” and the unique success that Orbánism has had in drawing out these already ingrained discriminatory beliefs (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 193).

Hungary does not only exclude certain external populations, such as migrants and refugees, from its national identity. It also excludes certain internal populations, particularly the LGBT community, the Roma, and Jews. As discrimination against these groups has already been systematically detailed in several books, NGO reports, scholarly articles, and news reports, they will not be deeply explored here.12 Still it is important to the topic of biopolitics in Hungary to at least stress that these groups of people, even though they already reside in Hungary, are frequently discriminated in public rhetoric, media, educational curricula, and government policies.

The rights and dignity of the LGBT community are restricted because the 2011 constitution explicitly recognizes marriage as the union between a man and woman only (changes to which are not likely any time soon because the constitution can only be altered with a two-thirds parliamentary majority); the annual Budapest Pride Parade is largely for show, as plenty of thugs and riot police line the route and the city police cordon off streets, preventing the public from joining in but often allowing the anti-LGBT thugs to attack participants; and government officials often deride homophobia as a distinctly “Western” phenomenon that would taint and rot the traditional family values of Christian Hungary. Thus gays are singled out as being anti-Hungarian on the basis of their sexual preferences, a form of discrimination that the

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EU has already decried as a violation of its principles of equality and inclusion (Tait, 2017; Herszenhorn & Bayer, 2018).

The Roma, numbering at about 600,000 people and thus constituting the largest ethnic minority residing in Hungary, have long been ostracized as well. On many occasions the nation-state has refused to comply with EU legislation and court rulings in regards to the Roma’s minority rights. According to the most recent data available from the 2009 European Agency for Fundamental Rights’ European Union Minorities and Discrimination (EU-MIDIS) Survey, about 62 percent of the Roma report that they suffer from discrimination, particularly when it comes to their access to equal education and employment opportunities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009, p. 4). A state-approved university-level textbook argues that “many Roma are mentally ill”; influential Hungarian journalist Zsolt Bayer wrote in a published and widely circulated article that “a significant part of the Gypsies is unfit for coexistence… These Gypsies are animals, and they behave like animals… These animals shouldn't be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved—immediately and regardless of the method”; Orbán equated the Roma with the much maligned migrants, stating that “Hungary’s historical given is that we live together with a few hundred thousands of Roma. This was decided by someone, somewhere. This is what we inherited,” emphasizing the idea that the Roma have never been, and never will be, considered part of the Hungarian citizenry, who instead have to put up with this uncivilized “Other” (Rorke, n.d.).

Though Orbán has claimed multiple times that Hungary follows a “zero tolerance” policy regarding antisemitism, Jews, too, have been an enduring target of Hungarian policies and public opinion. Media outlets close to Fidesz often portray Jews as greedy, capitalist anti-nationalists who harm Hungary’s economic and cultural wellbeing, with business magazine Figyelő blatantly picturing an image of a money-covered András Heisler, the director of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, on one of its covers in December 2018 (Forman, 2018). Apart from the migration theme, Fidesz’s second-most hyped campaign platform was that the Hungarian-born Jewish multimillionaire and philanthropist George Soros was to blame for all of the nation’s problems, with Orbán rallying crowds during a campaign event in March 2018 with the words, “We are fighting an enemy that is different from us… Not open but hiding; not straightforward but crafty; not honest but base; does not believe in working but speculates with money; does not have its own homeland but feels it owns the whole world” (McAuley, 2018)—
all of which are antisemitic stereotypes insinuating that Jews are enemies who try to hide amongst the “true” and loyal Hungarian citizenry but are nevertheless a separate, non-Hungarian people against whom the nation must be defended.

Thus Orbánism is not afraid to go after even those already living within the Hungarian nation, many of whom are legal, voting citizens. Be they members of the LGBT community, Roma, Jews, or other minorities, the Hungarian state has largely succeeded in framing the narrative that certain groups, based on their biopolitical attributes, should be considered “un-Hungarian” or “not Hungarian enough” and thus not a part of the “true” Hungarian community. While the state’s discrimination of such groups certainly cannot be equated with the teleologies of openly fascist dictatorships like those of Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin, Hungary’s behaviors nevertheless should not be taken lightly. They are in direct violation of EU principles like non-discrimination, plurality, and diversity, to name a few. Indeed, the EU has sought on several occasions to “recommend” improvements (European Parliament, 2018); the fact that the Fidesz regime largely ignores or refutes these reprimands by emphasizing its commitment to Hungarian sovereignty, and that the Hungarian population for the most part accepts this reasoning, is all the more disturbing. This reaction offers further proof that biopolitical narratives shape the popular mindset to the point where the majority do not question or protest when some of their fellow citizens and neighbors are discriminated against, so long as it is in the “best interests” of the narrowly-defined nation.

Worse still, Hungary’s biopolitical project is not solely based on exclusionary practices. It also engages in inclusionary exploitation. Just as Orbánism’s exclusionary tactics operate externally and internally, so do these inclusionary ones. Hungarian nationalism calls not just on domestic ethnic Hungarians: it also interpellates Hungarian communities outside of Hungary’s borders. Almost immediately after winning a supermajority in the 2010 parliamentary elections Fidesz passed a law granting the right of all ethnic Hungarians living outside the borders of the Hungarian nation-state the right to apply for a Hungarian passport and to vote in national elections. In a sense, it is a kind of borderline violation of democratic tenets to arbitrarily expand the electorate to a group of people who permanently reside abroad (some of whom have never lived in Hungary and have not expressed intentions to move back at all) and thus will not be subject to day-to-day life or most general policies that will be enacted by the parties they may have voted for. In fact, in the first national elections incorporating registered ethnic Hungarians
abroad (a move that expanded the Hungarian electorate by about one million), 95.5 of them opted for Fidesz—since only 43.5 percent of domestic Hungarians voted for Fidesz in that election, it is evident that the votes from abroad were crucial in securing another supermajority for Fidesz, giving the party another mandate to deeply alter the entire Hungarian state. In the next national elections of 2018, 96.2 percent of ethnic Hungarians abroad voted for Fidesz, again helping them to achieve another supermajority. Most researchers attribute Fidesz’s success among this group to its prioritization of glorifying the Hungarian nation-state, its culture, and its preference for a homogenous society, rather than substantive policy issues (Halmai, 2018, p. 44).

The decision to offer passports and extend voting rights to ethnic Hungarians abroad carries direct political motivations. These people are, after all, a previously untapped source of votes for Fidesz. But the decision is also about more than just elections. It reveals a tendency for the Hungarian government under Orbán to reinforce the idea of what it means to be Hungarian, more narrowly defining the country as a homogenous nation-state based upon ethnic Hungarian-ness. In the words of journalist Evelyne Pieller, “Fidesz goes beyond irredentism and promotes the ethnicisation of the population” for the purpose of encouraging virulent nationalism and discouraging plurality and multiculturalism in Hungary (2016).

It also helps to justify Hungary’s claim to the territories it lost after the First World War as per the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. This revanchist spirit has been around since 1920, as is described in the appendix’s historical overview, but Fidesz has proven itself adept at harnessing this particular strain of nationalism in Hungary, specifically in regards to Transylvania (which has rightfully belonged to Romania since 1920) and a smaller community within it known as Székely Land. According to the most recent available census data, just under 6.8 million people live in Transylvania, a region covering just under 40,000 square miles. Almost 71 percent of them identify as Romanian, and 18 percent as Hungarian. Despite the facts that Transylvania has belonged to Romania officially for almost one entire consecutive century now, and that Romanians far outnumber Hungarians living there, the region continues to be exploited by Fidesz and Hungarian cultural legends.

In part this is due to the trauma of the Treaty of Trianon and the idea that the Hungarian nation was shattered and its people scattered across various geopolitical boundaries, but the long-held belief that this area was the birthplace of Hungarian culture over one millennium ago is also a key reason why Transylvania remains important to Hungarian nationalists. More specifically,
Székely Land, an area comprising about 6,500 square miles within Transylvania, is thought to be the place where the people who have become modern Hungarians today overlapped with Attila the Hun, inspiring claims of hereditary ancestry (which have been much derided as false by historians and archaeologists). Moreover about 60 percent of the inhabitants in Székely Land identify as ethnic Hungarians, and they have made repeated pushes for autonomy from the Romanian national government on the basis of their Hungarian identity (Szilágyi, 2014, pp. 202-204; Politics.Hu, 2013b).

Thus Székely Land makes a good target for Hungarian nationalism because it draws upon the ideas of an ethnic Hungarian group, the myth of a victimized Hungary, and the goal of creating a strong, reunified Hungarian community comprised of “true” Hungarians who understand the greatness of their culture. It, along with the rest of Transylvania, is often the focus of national memory regarding the Treaty of Trianon and features prominently in the narrative of “Greater Hungary,” the imagined possibility of a Hungary still connected to its pre-First World War territories. The dream is not just irredentist or revisionist: it is also biopolitical, as the narrative, long present in Hungarian society but re-energized by Fidesz, is based on the idea that Transylvania and Székely Land are the most important lost lands because a large number of ethnic Hungarians still live there.

The fact that many average Hungarian citizens support the idea of a spiritual link to Transylvania, Székely Land, and “Greater Hungary,” is telling. It is likely that not even their grandparents were alive to witness a pre-Trianon Hungary; moreover, the global consensus on the First World War is that Hungary fought on the losing side, and that the lands lost to Hungary had largely been conceived through imperialist measures, anyway. But these otherwise logical factors are often drowned out in the din of government-sponsored rhetoric and propaganda that perpetuates the memory of “Greater Hungary” to the point where a large number of individual citizens think about it in their daily lives and walk or drive around with visual symbols of it.

Such revanchist themes are chilling because it can be heard and seen all over Budapest and the rest of Hungary, as various researchers, polls, and journalists have attested to. It represents a blatant rejection of historical truth and responsibility in favor of an ultra-nationalist vision that would fancy the moral seizure of another sovereign state’s land on the bases of (1) reclaiming the former glory of Hungary, and (2) “protecting” the rights of the 1.3 million ethnic Hungarians who still live in Székely Land and their supposed status as “victims of Romanian
nationalism” (an illiberal logic that echoes President Vladimir Putin’s justification for invading eastern Ukraine and illegally annexing Crimea in 2015) (Marinas, Than, & Szakacs, 2015). Of course, it is not as though masses of Hungarians actually suggest that the state should invade and reclaim any lost territory—but the fact that even the young generation feels so passionate about a seemingly long-dead event (and the idea that only the Hungarian government can protect ethnic Hungarians elsewhere) signals a dangerous current of nationalism sweeping Hungarian society. It is a current that is fomented by the narratives that Fidesz spins in education, the media, and public speeches, and eventually by believing segments of Hungarian society.

Yet another public display of biopolitics drives this nationalist idea home, and it hangs on the front of the Hungarian parliament building in the middle of Budapest. There, the EU flag is nowhere to be found (at least on the majority of days); instead, the Hungarian national flag flies beside that of Székely Land. This is a bold act that highlights Hungary’s inflated sense of nationalism and ethnicity at the expense of respect for the international community and history. Speaker of the National Assembly (and a founding Fidesz member) László Kövér praised the hoisting of Székely Land’s flag in February 2013, calling it a “symbol of national solidarity” (Politics.Hu, 2013a). Much like the “German occupation” memorial mentioned earlier in this chapter, the flag’s presence is another attempt by Orbán’s right-wing administration to manipulate history so as to absolve the state of past wrongdoing and justify its present mission of achieving a glorified Hungary through illiberal means and the unification of ethnic Hungarians living outside of the nation-state.

Again, all of the aforementioned strains of biopolitical exploitation employed by Fidesz and spread throughout the Hungarian public over the years serve to reinforce one another, weaving into an ever-strengthening, narrow, state-imposed worldview that reiterates the sanctity of Hungarian culture, the need to protect the survival of the great Hungarian ethnicity, and the righteousness of a homogenous, non-diverse, non-multicultural Hungarian nation-state. Orbánism preaches these ideas constantly. In his most recent 2019 State of the Nation address, Orbán told the Hungarian public,

We are the community that has always wanted the life of every Hungarian to count, and for everyone to have their place in the Hungarian future... We do not need numbers, but Hungarian children. In our minds, immigration means surrender. If we resign ourselves to the fact that we are unable to sustain ourselves even biologically, by doing so we admit that we are not important even for ourselves. So why would we be important for the world? The fate of such peoples is slow but certain obliteration, until they become a mere
It must be explained that when Orbán expressed the idea that Hungary does “not need numbers,” he used the term “numbers” in the sense that Hungary does not need just any population increase: it needs an increase in the *ethnically Hungarian* population. The rest of his speech makes this idea all the more clear, for he announced a seven-point “family protection” plan that encourages young Hungarian couples to have children (singling out women under the age of 40 who, in “true” Christian fashion, have never before been married), gives loans to families for each child they bear (with the guarantee that any debt accrued from the loans will be forgiven if they have more than three children), relieves any woman who raises four or more children from ever having to pay any personal income tax again for the rest of their lives, and institutes a car purchase program for families with three or more kids.

All of this culminates in the idea, expressed by famous American diplomat Madeleine Albright, that “the togetherness he [Orbán] envisions is defined by bloodlines, not borderlines” (2018, p. 172). It is yet another indication that the Hungarian government holds a clear vision of who it prioritizes and envisions as members of its citizenry: ethnic Hungarians. This is a fundamentally anti-pluralist and anti-liberal ideology, one based on exclusionary, fabricated myths about the uniqueness of and an ethnically based Christian nation-state that come together over radio, television, print communication and the national educational system to gradually convince the Hungarian population of their validity and truthfulness. It also interpellates them as crucial figures in the Hungarian nation-state’s survival and mission. As Orbán expressed in his 2019 national address,

> And thanks are due many times over to those who have recognised that each of us can only realise our individual plans if we face the world together as a single country and face the trials of Hungarian life as a single nation. To put it more briefly: thanks are due to you! Please do not forget that in unity there is strength, but in division there is weakness. (2019a)

Thus the individuals whom Orbán is addressing (ethnic Hungarians) are called into being as active participants in the Hungarian government’s mission. They are interpellated into a certain Hungarian social identity meant to promote unity and nationalist fervor while excluding those who the controllers of the narrative—Fidesz, Orbán, and their supporters—deem to be “Other” and hence unbelonging to the Hungarian community. Worse still, the ideology expressed by the
government is Manichean: if someone does not support their state and its ideas, then according to Orbánist rhetoric about collectivist unity they are automatically transferred into the camp of those who foster “division” and “weakness” against the nation.

A plethora of scholars, including Milada Vachudova, have written about the dangers that accompany attempts to redraw “the lines of the ‘legitimate’ national community,” as Fidesz’s Hungary is doing, even in states that have already pledged their allegiance to EU values of democracy and pluralism and acceded to the Union. Such biopolitical tactics, if employed effectively, have the power to “undermine basic social norms” (2017, p. 2); and considering the majority of the Hungarian population’s support for the Orbán regime’s harsh campaign against migrants, refugees, Muslims, gays, the Roma, and so forth, it would appear that the state is succeeding in this endeavor. It is imposing a biased biopolitical order upon human nature and the thoughts of average citizens. This biopolitical angle, and the flooding of public communications with propaganda, exacerbates growing nationalist sentiments. Though in clear violation of EU principles, it justifies the Orbán regime’s discrimination and demonization of specific groups of people by conflating the ethnic purity of the nation with the survival of an entire culture and state, further destroying any semblance of a multicultural, tolerant, pluralist, or diverse society in Hungary.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Orbán and his ruling party Fidesz have governed Hungary since 2010, rewriting legal procedures in an alarmingly successful attempt to amass near-total executive, legislative, and judicial power for themselves. They have leveraged their positions of power to destroy the core characteristics of democracy like checks and balances, rule of law, and separation of powers, in terms of both the legal functioning of the state and the domestic attitudes of the population. According to Freedom House’s analyses, Hungary’s democratic status has been stagnant since Fidesz came to power in 2010, and in outright decline for the last five straight years (Freedom House, 2019, p. 2).

Even if Fidesz were to be somehow voted out of power by the Hungarian electorate in future elections, they have made it incredibly difficult for any other incoming leader or party to reverse the course in which they have set for Hungary. Since Fidesz and Orbán enshrined so many of their legal changes into the 2011 constitution that they themselves pushed through the National Assembly by exploiting their two-thirds parliamentary majority, any non-Fidesz parliament of the future must also hold a two-thirds majority in order to affect the necessary structural changes to the constitution.

Although attaining a two-thirds majority might not seem so difficult, one must also consider that over the past decade Fidesz and Orbán have nearly destroyed the ability of any opposition to gain much strength in Hungary (Kornai, 2015, p. 281). They have eaten up almost all of the public media and widely engaged in the slander of oppositionists as traitors to the nation. Fidesz and Orbán also have committed purges of various degrees across the Hungarian bureaucracy, judiciary, and all major media outlets, installing people loyal to Fidesz and its goals in the highest and/or most influential positions; many of these positions, particularly those in the judiciary, carry re-electable terms of nine years. All of this further ensures the survival of Fidesz policies and ideas in Hungarian society even if Fidesz and Orbán were to lose an upcoming election.

While many of the negative actions mentioned in this previous paragraph might not be legally found in opposition to binding EU treaties and protocols for member states, that is only because the EU judicial system is not structured in a way that conveniently allows for the examination of such state-sponsored actions (Krekó & Envedi, 2018, p. 45; Hughes & Sasse,
2003). Additionally, EU member states are not enticed to act because their only recourse (through Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty) would require them to act in unison to sanction Hungary and strip it of its voting rights in the EU Council, and in the current moment of global populism, nationalism, and Euroskepticism, it is unlikely that all member states will commit to such a serious action that could highlight their own hypocrisies and open up sensitive debates about national sovereignty and EU authority (Lendvai, 2018b). It is also difficult for a court to say in the legal context when a tangible or intangible policy or behavior violates an intangible ideal, such as democracy or diversity. As the previous chapters sought to prove, however, the Orbán regime has done just this, and on many occasions—so many that its behaviors should be understood as a comprehensive direction that have eroded democracy in the nation-state that had relatively recently committed itself to the EU and its liberal democratic values.

Moreover, the previous chapters demonstrated that Orbánism is about more than just legally eroding the democratic procedural foundations of an entire nation-state, or capitalizing off of a weak and incompetent opposition, or riding a wave of economic prosperity (which ironically emanates from EU funds, access to the EU common market, and social policies that pander to Hungarian families), or creating panic about “dangerous” migrants. It is about generating a nationalist ideology and an anti-pluralist environment that punishes people and organizations in Hungary that might go against the ruling Fidesz government’s line. It is about discouraging the success, and eventually the support for and existence of, opposition parties, the diminishing of which contributes to the further interpellation of individual Hungarians into Fidesz’s narrative and cuts off other modes of thought beyond Fidesz’s line.

This is not to say that all opposition groups in Hungary have or even will dissolve entirely. Orbánist Hungary, after all, is not that kind of aggressive, stereotypical authoritarian government. But it is to say that these measures are effective on society as a whole. While at the

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13 In fact, there have been several motions mentioned in the European Parliament to sanction Hungary for its breach of EU values over the last decade. Most recently, in September 2018 448 members voted against 197 others to proceed in the process of launching sanctions on the Hungarian state under Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty. But several months have already passed since then, with the European Council delaying further investigations into the matter. Most analysts predict that the Council simply will not vote to strip Hungary of its voting rights or to withhold EU funding from the state for the reasons mentioned in the body of this research, and if it does, Hungary has allies—like Poland—that it can count on to prevent the fruition of the required unanimous decision. All the while, Orbánist Hungary continues to embed its illiberal, authoritarian policies and mindset into the Hungarian state institutionally and popularly—while remaining the fourth-largest net recipient of EU funds (according to the most recent data from 2017, it received a net influx of €3.1 billion), at that. Thus, the EU’s ability to sanction Hungary and affect change through punishment amounts to essentially nothing other than an empty threat (Bershidsky, 2019).
moment Hungary can still technically claim to tick off some of the boxes of a democratic state’s checklist—like maintaining multiple parties and an independent press—and it is true that Fidesz has actually lost some votes from election to election, and there have been no en masse arrests or executions, this does not mean that Hungary under Fidesz functions as a democracy (Kornai, 2015, p. 292).

In fact this research has proven that over the last decade Hungary has slid deeper into authoritarianism, so deep that it can no longer be considered a democracy at all. Fidesz has delegitimized the rule of law, putting the judiciary under its authority, eliminating checks and balances, denying the separation of powers, and outright declaring illiberalism over liberal democracy; it has seized control of nearly all media providers and educational curricula and severely restricted the operations of NGOs and the access of political oppositionists to platforms by which to disseminate their voices across Hungary; it has quite literally rewritten history, in textbooks, the physical public space, and the abstract public opinion; and it has sanctified a homogenous, Christian Hungarian community while demonizing “non-Hungarians,” at the expense of universal principles such as human rights and geopolitical boundaries.

Through the four tactics highlighted in this thesis—the distortion of the rule of law, the restriction of press and speech freedoms, the nationalist revision of history, and the exploitation of biopolitics—Fidesz and Orbán have seized control over the majority of information flows inside the country and continue to successfully propagandize their own narratives. They have projected an imagined version of Hungary in which the country is an innocent, brave defender of Christianity with a legendary past and surely an equally messianic future, and that in order to protect this great civilization, the state must maintain its ethnic homogeneity and conservative values. At the same time, Orbánism has also either cut off or verbally discredited alternative avenues of encounter and thought across the entire Hungarian-speaking population. Without access to unprejudiced sources, the state’s version of events becomes all the more believable and “true.” Society-wise, Orbánism’s efforts are succeeding: the national government has duped huge portions of the domestic population into falling for anti-migrant billboards, for the state-sponsored rewriting of memory, for the alleged sanctity of conservative family values, and more. The vast majority of the Hungarian people have gone along with the narrative espoused by Fidesz that their national leadership is ensuring their freedom from the inferior “Other,” be they
migrants, Muslims, the Roma, gays, or some other group that can be discriminated against as enemies based on their biopolitical backgrounds.

Fidesz and Orbán have claimed power and found ways to near-ensure that they will continue to exercise it. Even if the voting population overturns their mandate on power, their countless appointments in other sectors of society and the government, combined with the effects of crony capitalism, the mafia state, and oligarchs, and rules stating that most of the constitution and laws cannot be changed except with a two-thirds majority, will effectively carry out Fidesz’s rule at least until the next election cycle, and potentially for years after. It is hard to imagine that a rather apathetic Hungarian voting population will suddenly mobilize themselves in favor of EU values and amass enough strength and conviction to oust Fidesz from power (permanently or temporarily). In fact, considering the great pull that Fidesz has cemented for itself in schools, religion, and the media—three of the most important ideological state apparatuses—it is likely that their narratives will continue to shape the mindsets of the Hungarian population. If what we are seeing today, as of 2019, is not already an ideology, we are at the very least witnessing the process of the establishment of one through a kind of information warfare first administered by the state and later reproduced by elements in the public and private spheres (Müller, 2015).

Due to the ideological dimension of Fidesz’s control, the Orbán regime’s behaviors and goals must be taken seriously, lest Hungary continue to evolve (or is it devolve?) into a near-totalitarian (some would say totalitarian) state like Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Though there is no cult of personality around Prime Minister Orbán, and though Hungary does not engage in other actions typical of past or current dictatorships across the world (e.g. the detention of journalists), it would be a fallacy to judge one dictatorship against another. Orbán and Fidesz are nevertheless pivotal figures in Hungarian society and have used their positions of authority to poison the mass mind for years now. They have undermined the domestic population’s faith and trust in democratic and EU values, such as pluralism, diversity, and rule of law, while also “opening up new ideological possibilities” (Traub, 2015). So, the Orbán regime must be considered at the lowest common denominator with authoritarian dictatorships: because the thrust of Fidesz’s actions over the last decade demonstrate a desire to restrict, if not destroy, such values in Hungarian society, the regime should not be analyzed as a democracy, but as an authoritarian
dictatorship.\textsuperscript{14}

Authoritarian, anti-democratic movements will not be stopped unless they are first properly understood and recognized for their true nature. If Hungary is utilizing similar tactics and (il)logics as, say, Putin’s Russia, which has been widely recognized as one of the most pressing dangers to a democratic Europe, then the EU needs to be just as wary and proactive when it comes to one as it is the other. The EU cannot just occupy itself with the threat of the external erosion of democracy posed by Putin’s anti-Western Russia. It must also recognize that its own member states, too, could erode its larger mission of democracy from the inside out, or else its vision and principles will ultimately fail both in theory and in practice. What is more, what happens in Hungary does not necessarily stay in Hungary: Fidesz remains, after all, a member of the European People’s Party, the largest supranational political party in various EU bodies; Orbán has teamed up with Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini to launch a European-wide movement against immigration to the EU (Tondo, 2018); and if the EU fails to reprimand Hungary or re-instill its democratic values within the member state, then it could lose legitimacy as a supranational authority at a time when Euroskeptics and events like Brexit are already inspiring enough tough questions.

Perhaps in recognizing the scope and methods by which Hungary has abandoned democracy, as well as the fact that Hungary has chosen to reject EU values, EU activists might learn how to prevent—or at least identify at an earlier stage—other authoritarian movements and understand the need to promote liberal ideology even in seemingly healthy democracies. In the process, maybe the democratic spirit across the EU and the West, in general, could be rejuvenated, for we are living in dark times, indeed. Thus just as this research project was warranted, so are more in-depth explorations of the narratives and tactics which Fidesz and Orbán use to capture public support while also eroding democratic institutions, and of the ways in which they contribute to the formulation of an interpellative, illiberal ideology amongst the Hungarian population both inside and outside of the nation-state’s borders. Not only is Hungary’s fate at stake, but so is that of the EU’s project, not to mention the fates of the individuals whom Orbánism targets.

\textsuperscript{14} It is not within the scope of this thesis to define, analyze, and prove the concept of dictatorship in modern Hungary. However, it has hopefully laid the groundwork for future studies on the subject.


--- (2003). *Treaty concerning the accession of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Malta, the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovak Republic to the European Union*. Athens: European Commission.


Gorondi, P. (28 November 2018). Huge pro-government media conglomerate formed in Hungary. Associated Press. Accessed 28 November 2018 at https://apnews.com/39028d9c44b64e08a6609b60a8bf7a13?fbclid=IwAR2PkQq5de8pIm_2NdGs-SRO4CMzynISy5Lgg8Xp0LekEalzb838hVKkKTI.


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--- (9 April 2019c). Speech by Viktor Orbán at the inauguration of the main building of the Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies. Speech, Piliscsaba. Official Website of the


Appendix: Brief Historical Overview

In order to understand the narrative and tactics by which Viktor Orbán and his ruling political party Fidesz have chosen to employ in the last decade, and why they are met with so much success across the Hungarian population, this research finds it necessary to offer a brief historical background of Hungary, as well as of Orbán and Fidesz’s rise to power, for those interested in more deeply comprehending the situation modern-day Hungary faces. It is crucial to situate Orbán within the greater context of Hungarian history; without this, it would be difficult to understand the social and ideological dimensions of his campaign and policies.

The first section of this appendix offers a short overview of general Hungarian history. It highlights the most important events and themes, particularly the fear of foreign influence, a lack of internal stability, and the constant mixing of different tribes, cultures, ethnicities, and languages throughout Hungary’s nomadic conquests, expansion periods, and subjugation by external powers such as the Ottomans and the Austrian Habsburgs. Many of these events and themes not only survive in today’s public memory, but are also featured front-and-center in Orbán and Fidesz’s policies and speeches, as will be explored more deeply in Chapter Four.

The second section provides a basic overview of Orbán and Fidesz, from their births through their landmark 2010 parliamentary victory and up to the current day. Again, the political trajectories and events highlighted in this section are further elaborated upon in Chapter Four for their effects on the Hungarian population and ideology and their interplay with crucial events and common themes of Hungarian history.

Hungarian History Background

The early Hungarians (also known as Magyars) were a nomadic people living in the Eastern European steppes. Under the leadership of the ruling Árpád dynasty, they conquered the Carpathian Basin between 895 and 900, after which they sought to expand into present-day Austrian, Balkan, French, German, Italian, and Spanish lands (Lázár, 2001, pp. 44-46). Under threat the Holy Roman Empire negotiated with the Hungarians, permitting them control of certain lands and accepting them into Christian Europe on the condition that it Christianized. Thus in 1001 AD the Christian Kingdom of Hungary was founded under Saint Stephen (István
I), a member of the ruling Árpád family. After the Great Schism in 1054 the Kingdom of Hungary vowed to act as a defender of Western civilization and Christian Europe from Eastern Orthodoxy and other “uncivilized” invaders from the East (Molnár, 2001, pp. 25-26).

Of course, the Hungarian monarchy was by no means stable during this time: it always feared external invasions, vassalization at the hands of the Holy Roman Empire, and princely infighting. By 1241, one of their greatest fears came true when the Mongol-Tatars invaded, devastating the landscape, pillaging villages, raping inhabitants, and forcing Hungarian leaders to flee. Historians estimate that between 50 and 80 percent of the farmlands were destroyed and that between 20 and 50 percent of the population had been killed, starved, or died of disease (Engel, 2005, pp. 100-103). Luckily the Mongol-Tatars retreated in 1242 following the death of their own leader, Khan Ogedei. This allowed the ruling Árpáds to reclaim Hungary, only to struggle with the feudal system they had put into place earlier as nobles and different regional barons contested the king’s authority. Outside of this internal power struggle, the next major threat to the stability of the Hungarian kingdom arose in the fifteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire began to seriously expand. Hungary engaged in a series of military campaigns for nearly a century until the Battle of Mohács on 29 August 1526. The Ottomans decimated the Hungarian army and paved the way for the partition of Hungary into three parts occupied by the Ottomans, the Turks, and the Habsburgs. This marked the beginning of virtually 450 years of Hungarian subjugation to foreign powers and is still considered to be one of the nation’s most pertinent traumas (Molnár, 2001, pp. 84-86).

Although the declining Ottoman Empire signed a peace treaty to end its occupation of Hungary in 1699, the Hapsburg Monarchy retained control of Hungary. Over the next 150 years, Hungarians tried to revolt against their Austrian rulers. Most famously Lajos Kossuth, the son of a poor landless family who became a lawyer seeking national reforms and the end of Habsburg domination, launched a liberal democratic opposition in 1832 that culminated in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The Hungarian National Assembly proudly proclaimed their independence only to be ruthlessly crushed by the Russian Empire under Tsar Nicholas I in June 1849 (Lázár, 2017, pp. 157-162; Molnár, 2001, pp. 167-200).

The weakened yet surviving Austrian Monarchy then reasserted its absolute rule of Hungary and came to an agreement in 1867 to create the dual Austro-Hungarian Empire. Through this “Dual Compromise,” the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph essentially retained
control of Hungary but allowed it to have its own king who could deal with internal matters and at least nominally maintain the face of an independent Magyar nation-state. The Hungarians largely accepted this agreement and leveraged its power to pursue the annexation of lands like Bosnia-Herzegovina. In many ways the Hungarians facilitated the growth of Austria’s imperialist great power politics (Hoensch, 1996, pp. 18-19).

This meant that Hungary came out on the losing side of the First World War in 1918. As if its history had not been unstable enough, the interwar period proved to be a violent period of wildly different types of governments, leaders, and power changes. Despite the fact that Hungary could finally claim its own independence as a democratic republic under the leadership of aristocratic yet liberal Mihály Károlyi, the war-torn nation did not cope with the democratic transformation under the stresses of its imperialist and authoritarian past, the rise of Communism, and the economic, diplomatic, and social strains resulting from the unprecedented war. Károlyi’s government, which many Hungarians had hoped would be the saving grace of their nation, failed and turned public opinion against democratic values and instead back to traditional ones, “increasingly defined as Christian-nationalist in character, along with a desire for order and authority” (Romsics, 1999, p. 111).

In the chaos, Communist zealot and friend of Vladimir I. Lenin Béla Kun seized power for the Communist Party he led and to establish the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919. To make matters more complicated, the Romanian Army continued to push across Hungarian borders in an effort to reclaim territory it had lost to Hungary earlier (and to save face after originally entering the First World War on the losing side as well); the Romanians, fearful of being geographically caught between two Soviet Republics (Russia and Hungary), aided the rise of Hungarian anti-Communist Admiral Miklós Horthy and caused Kun to escape to the Soviet Union (Molnár, 2001, pp. 254-256).

Horthy proved to be no better of an answer to Hungary’s political crisis than Kun. He adopted the title of Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary on 1 March 1920. Almost immediately upon taking power he launched his White Terror, brutally persecuting Jews, peasants, workers, and Communist sympathizers (genuine or assumed). He especially did not react well to the Treaty of Trianon, the peace agreement concluded between the Allied Powers and Hungary at Versailles on 4 June 1920; this treaty stripped Hungary of two-thirds of its territory (ceding the lands mostly back to Austria, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Romania; the
worst-received blow to Hungarians was the transfer of Székely Land and the rest of Transylvania, which had been ascribed a mythical quality as the supposed origins of the Hungarian people, to Romania) and three-fifths of its population (from 20.9 million to 7.62 million), limited its military capacity, mandated that the country to pay back an unspecified amount in financial war reparations, and required it to accept guilt for causing the war (Romsics, 1999, pp. 123-125).

Though the treaty was admittedly harsh, few historians or politicians have ever conceded the idea that is was undeserved. Yet it has continued to mark yet another traumatic rupture in the collective memory of Hungarians (and has in fact become even more exploited in recent years, as Chapter Four emphasizes). In defiance of the Treaty of Trianon, Horthy and the majority of the remaining Hungarian population and the ethnic Hungarian population abroad continued to imagine their state under pre-war conditions. In the words of historian Jörg K. Hoensch, in an eruption of patriotism they

carefully nurtured the Magyars’ sense of an historically based national identity, looking back to the founding of the state, the Hungarian Kingdom’s thousand years of history and their belief in the Magyar cultural mission of spreading their superior civilization. They kept alive the sense of humiliation at Hungary’s defeat, the experience of economic privation and despair at the injustices of the peace settlement. (1996, pp. 103-104)

During this time, Christian religion and nationalism “became virtually compulsory” if one was to claim themselves as a true, patriotic Hungarian who cared about their mother country. The Hungarian population largely supported Horthy’s attempts to limit rights for national minorities, to restrict academic freedoms, and to bar many Jews from access to higher education (Romsics, 1999, pp. 111-116).

The revanchist and right-wing radical Horthy government began cooperating with Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime as early as 1932. The fascist Arrow Cross political party and social organization formed in 1935, advocating policies and desires very similar to the Nazi Party and later also coming to political power in the national government. By 1938 Hungary had voluntarily—without pressure from Nazi Germany—passed the first of what would become many anti-Jewish laws. On 26 June 1941 Hungary entered into the Second World War on the side of the Axis powers. By the end of the war, only 255,000 out of 825,000 of Hungarian Jews had survived; official statistics note that 560,000 had died (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d. b; Shapiro, 2013).
On 13 February 1945 the Soviet Red Army marched on Budapest to “liberate” the country, only to facilitate the establishment of the Marxist-Leninist Hungarian People’s Republic on 20 August 1949. By 1950, the Hungarian state had become a full-blown Communist dictatorship engaging in mass repression, countrywide terror, show trials, torture, and executions. In a continuation of historical Hungarian independence movements, a group of peaceful student protestors reacted to such Communist oppression by staging the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 on 23 October in Budapest in the name of securing Hungarian independence and restoring political democracy by withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact and overthrowing Soviet dominance (Tökés, 1996, pp. 32-33). Despite street fighting between civilian protestors and Soviet police and militias, the freedom fighters managed to reinstall the reformist socialist leader Imre Nagy to the prime ministerial position by 27 October 1956. By November 4 the Soviet Union sent a massive military force to quash the revolution, kidnapping, torturing, and replacing Nagy as leader of the Hungarian People’s Republic with the Soviet-approved János Kádár. After a few years of holding Nagy in custody, the Soviets secretly put him on trial, found him guilty of treason against a “people’s democratic state,” and executed him on 16 June 1958 (Molnár, 2001, pp. 311-321).\(^\text{15}\)

The Kádár regime was repressive and violent but somehow managed to put on a friendly façade for the most part, offering brief periods of relaxation on academic and press freedoms throughout his three-decade-long rule that earned Hungary the nickname, “the happiest barracks in the Eastern bloc” (Hoensch, 1996, p. 281). By the later 1970s Kádár had managed to “achieve a benevolent toleration of the regime by a broad mass of the population” who saw him as the “jovial father of the nation” and “hallmark of a golden era,” according to various opinion polls during the time—even though he was deeply involved in the same Soviet machine that so brutally put down the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and murdered the beloved martyr Nagy (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 4-5).

But as the entire Soviet Union and its economy began to crumble in the late 1980s, so too did support for Kádár. He was eventually voted out as General Secretary, and the leading Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party made massive concessions on free speech, the formation of other political parties, capitalist practices, and more. On 16 June 1989 the state celebrated its turn

\(^{15}\) Although the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 ended as an unsuccessful bloodbath, it quickly became known as the “greatest popular uprising in post-War Europe” and is still remembered this way by scholars of the Communist era and Hungarian people alike (Lendvai, 2018a, p. 4).
away from Communist authoritarianism towards democracy by organizing a funeral for Imre Nagy on Heroes’ Square in Budapest in front of a live audience and television broadcasters, during which various speakers explicitly called for Hungarian independence and democracy. The state also engaged in a series of national roundtables throughout the rest of the year, culminating in an overhaul of the country’s constitution to reflect its new name of the Republic of Hungary and its new status as a constitutional democratic republic that respects human rights, the separation of powers (judicial, executive, and legislative branches), and a multi-party electoral system (Romsics, 1999, pp. 428-442; New York Times, 1989, p. 8; Tokés, 1996, pp. 303-398).

The first two democratically elected national governments (in 1990 and 1994, respectively) both prioritized Euro-Atlantic integration in their foreign policy goals, specifically stating that they sought to one day join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Hungarian Foreign Minister János Martonyi said, “The decision [to join NATO] was not only about security. NATO accession is also about returning Hungary to her natural habitat. It has been our manifest destiny to rejoin those with whom we share the same values, interests and goals,” demonstrating the country’s desire to grow closer to Europe. A referendum conducted in November 1997 showed that an overwhelming 85 percent of Hungarians (with a turnout of 49 percent) desired Hungary’s integration into NATO. On 12 March 1999, Hungary was accepted into NATO after complying with its regulations and preconditions (Romsics, 1999, p. 459; Moffett, 1999).

Reflecting a similar goal of enhancing ties to Europe, 83.8 percent of Hungarians (of the 46 percent who voted in a referendum in April 2003) expressed their desire to join the EU. The Hungarian government, since it first launched its bid for EU membership in 1994, consented to outside monitoring, fulfilling the rigorous Copenhagen Criteria (previously explained in Chapter Two), and respecting the values upon which the EU is based, namely “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities… pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men...” as per Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. Hungary was so cooperative in its actions that it became regarded as a model for and “clear driver of further EU enlargement,” proving that a country with as varied of a past as Hungary’s could, in fact, learn to change its political and economic structures and to gradually and progressively integrate all major fields (banking, currency control, local governance, etc.)—
overthrowing forty years of Communist rule and fully transforming into a liberal democratic state compliant with the EU in a mere 15 years (Dezséri, 2017; European Commission, 2003, pp. 7 & 11).

By ratifying the EU Accession Treaty of 2003, Hungary committed itself to upholding EU values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, equal treatment for minorities, capitalism, and more, or so it was thought at the time (Huszka, 2017, p. 591). But the emergence of a particular political figure, Viktor Orbán, and his political party, Fidesz, seem to have altered this trajectory towards a liberal democratic future. Knowing the various themes presented in this brief history of Hungary—such as the threat of external invasion and domination, the idea of Hungary as a Christian fortress protecting the rest of Europe from non-Christian outsiders, the notion of Hungary as an innocent nation unfairly punished by others and taken advantage of by forces like the Nazis during the Second World War, the demographic, cultural, and ethnic confusion caused by centuries of imperialism, the painful memory of repressive Communist governments, and the glorifying trend of Hungarian freedom fighters (as nomads, as defenders against the Ottomans, as anti-imperialists in the Revolution of 1848, as anti-Communists in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, as protestors during the fall of Communism in the later 1980s, etc.), to name a few—portrays the environment in which Orbán and Fidesz formed and rose in much fuller detail.

**Orbán and Fidesz History Background**

Viktor Mihály Orbán was born on 31 May 1963 in the rural city of Székesfehérvár, Hungary to working-class parents. He himself has observed that he grew up with “no culture,” as the only life he knew for the majority of his childhood required him and his siblings to toil in the fields most days and to return to a home with no hot running water. Several of his biographers, including József Debreczeni and Paul Lendvai, have noted that this upbringing left its mark of a “personal background of perceived inferiority” on Orbán, who always exhibited intelligent qualities in school but typically spent most of his time getting into fistfights (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 29-30).

Although he spent many of his younger years climbing up the ranks of the Hungarian Youth Communist League, as an older student he typically criticized Communism; upon earning the opportunity to study law at the liberal Bibó István College for Advanced Studies of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, he completed his graduate thesis on the topic of the Polish
Solidarność civil resistance movement against Communism (Traub, 2015). It was there that he and a few other students from the Bibó István College held debates and discussed potential political reforms and philosophy. Driven by their opposition to Communism, he and 36 other students eventually established the youth opposition party Fidesz (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, the "Alliance of Young Democrats") on 30 March 1988 in what has often been described by journalists and historians as a “fairytale” moment of civic triumph in the face of authoritarianism (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 21-23). Fidesz began as a group of anti-Communist students committed to democratic ideals who chose to limit membership in the party to those below the age of 35. Within months, the surreal became the reality, and Communism in Hungary began to crumble in 1989, opening up new political spaces as the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw from Hungary and the national government began to implement a series of Western-style liberal democratic reforms, such as the permission of a multiparty system, guarantees for freedoms of speech, and the creation of a new constitution—all of which the outlook of the early Fidesz supported (Beauchamp, 2018).

At the age of 26, Orbán, as the leader of the vocal, new, youthful Fidesz party, was invited to speak at the rehabilitating reburial ceremony for Imre Nagy16 held on Heroes’ Square in Budapest on 16 June 1989 as a monumental demonstration of the Hungarian national government’s dismantling of the Communist era and subsequent transition to democratic liberalism. In front of the 250,000-strong live audience and television cameras, the budding leader delivered a hitherto unprecedented speech calling for democracy, independence, national sovereignty, individual resistance, and civic action, inspirationally telling his fellow Hungarians that, “If we are sufficiently resolute, then, and only then, can we fulfill the will of the revolution. Nobody should believe that the official state party will reform itself on its own.” His words helped to mobilize the nation in its transitional period and skyrocketed Orbán and Fidesz to national acclaim (Kovács, 2014). Less than ten years later, Orbán became the youngest prime minister to ever be freely elected in either Hungary or all of Europe, for that matter, in 1998.

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16 Imre Nagy (7 June 1896-16 June 1958) was a prime minister (1953-1955 and 24 October 1956-4 November 1956) of the Communist Hungarian People’s Republic who broke with Soviet influence and became the symbolic leader of the bloody October-November 1956 Hungarian Revolution, during which as many as hundreds of thousands of Hungarian citizens demonstrated against Communism and Soviet control over their state. Soviet authorities in Moscow largely blamed Nagy for the insurrection and secretly kidnapped, deported, tortured, and executed Nagy in 1958. His public rehabilitation marked a distinct shift from Hungary’s Communist past to what was expected to be a bright, liberal, democratic future. For more, see Sebestyen, V. (2006). *Twelve Days: The Story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books.
As impressive as this fact is, it should not be forgotten that it also means that Orbán and Fidesz did not gain power overnight, and that they were not operating in a vacuum. There are a plethora of factors that played into the 1998 elections and previous ones, as well. In the first elections following the fall of Communism in Hungary in the spring of 1990, Fidesz won 21 out of 386 seats in the Hungarian parliament, the National Assembly, as it was still a relatively new party run by youthful members that could not compete as well with other leading liberal and anti-Communist parties. This first government, run by Prime Minister József Antall of the patriotic, conservative, and pro-market Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) in a center-right coalition with the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) and the Independent Smallholders’ party (FKGP), struggled to steer the country in its transition to liberal democracy and the market economy. Already saddled with massive foreign debt and artificially inflated employment and wage levels stemming from the Communist era, the Antall government saw GDP shrink by 20 percent before 1993, inflation levels rise, a large number of businesses close, and popular protests from citizens who had been anticipating nothing but economic success following the fall of Communism and resented the alarming economic recession in which Hungary now found itself (Popescu & Tóka, 2000, pp. 4-5; Molnár, 2001, pp. 338-354).

Despite the poor performance of this first democratic government of modern Hungary, Fidesz failed to rally more votes around itself during the next parliamentary elections in May 1994. Instead a more leftist, socialist-liberal coalition between the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) prevailed, in large part because of the tensions the entire country experienced during the previous center-right government’s attempt at transitioning to a market economy. Fidesz performed slightly worse in 1994 than in 1990, narrowly passing the five percent threshold for entering the National Assembly and winning only 20 seats. In part this is because they lost a fair number of supporters (and a few key leaders) to these more leftist/center-leftist parties when Orbán, who had been elected as the first president of the party in April 1993 and was frustrated at his party’s stagnation in popular polls, launched fervent debates within Fidesz about pushing further to the political right in order to carve out their own distinct space in Hungary’s multiparty system. By July 1995, Orbán’s will as the top leader of Fidesz had won the debate: the party now styled itself as a conservative party on the political right, one that emphasized nationalist tendencies by declaring its “faith in the nation, in
Magyar tradition, in the homeland, in national interests, in respectability, in middle-class values, in the family, [and] in love of the mother country” (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 24-27 & 36).17

Orbán and Fidesz reaped the benefits of reshaping themselves on the right during the government of the MSZP and SZDSZ, which suffered from corruption scandals and accusations of foreign agreements and business deals that did that favor Hungary (Bozóki & Simon, 2010, pp.214-215). In a speech on 12 June 1997, Orbán declared that “The Hungarian government is alien despite our constitutional law; it is not under national influence” (Lendvai, 2018a, pp. 41-42)—one of the earliest instances of Fidesz’ use of biopolitical tactics, a topic discussed in Chapter Four. Come the next parliamentary elections in 1998, Fidesz won 148 seats, marking a huge increase of 128 since the previous election. This enabled Fidesz to form a center-right coalition with the FKGP and the MDF, which then elected Orbán as prime minister.

It was under this government that Hungary formally launched its negotiations with the EU on accession and its program of harmonizing national laws with EU regulations. All the while, however, he and the coalition immediately began to make changes to parliamentary procedures, appointing loyal friends of Fidesz to public positions and media outlet leadership roles and diminishing the transparency of government meetings, while also engaging in frequent radio and television appearances—more so than any other leading party or prime minister of a democratic Hungary had before (Popescu & Tóka, 2000, pp. 6-7). This theme of needing to communicate with the Hungarian population on his own, rather than through official government meeting notes, does indeed ring fairly populist. At the same time, it also comes off as illiberal, decreasing transparency of government functionings and limiting the ability of average citizens to gain knowledge about them outside of the more personal speeches delivered by the prime minister himself; it is a theme that, as the analysis provided in Chapter Four displays, evolves and factors heavily into Fidesz’s manipulation of popular opinion over time.

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17 This willful shift of Fidesz from the liberal democratic left to what would become the illiberal nationalist right is indicative of more than the simple idea that Orbán and Fidesz are just populists. Short of somehow being inside of Orbán’s head throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it is impossible for anyone to know whether he ever truly believed in the values of the original Fidesz, or if he had just been a greedy opportunist yearning for power during the formative years of Fidesz, or if his world outlook did happen to radically change in the 1990s. On the other hand, it is possible to consider the policies which Fidesz and Orbán have since embarked upon and to examine the effects that Fidesz’s narratives have had on the Hungarian population. Thus, Fidesz’s shift from left to right also reveals information about the attitudes of Hungarians and their choice to opt for the political right, rather than the political left, as demonstrated by changes in voting habits in favor of Fidesz and the later trajectory of this party (and by Chapter Four of this thesis).
Unluckily for Orbán, the Hungarian economy had yet to recover from its Communist past or the transition to a market economy, which likely hampered the success of Fidesz in the 2002 parliamentary elections. Though they won the most seats of any party—179 for Fidesz plus 9 for the MDF, with which Fidesz had aligned—the MSZP and SZDSZ were able to form a larger coalition and take back both the National Assembly and the prime ministerial office. Despite Fidesz’s attempts to cozy up to the Christian vote and policies, and to advertise en masse, the 2006 parliamentary elections saw the continuation of this leftist coalition and, in fact, the loss of 40 seats for Fidesz (now aligned with the KDNP).

This time fortunately for Fidesz, the Hungarian left committed considerable gaffes. Poor economic decisions and the worldwide financial crisis of 2008 led Hungary to the brink of bankruptcy and to a countrywide recession by 2009. A recording of a private conversation amongst MSZP members and then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány surfaced in September 2006 in which Gyurcsány admitted,

... we [the MSZP and SZDSZ government] have fucked it up. Not a little but a lot. No European country has done something as boneheaded as we have.... We have obviously lied throughout the past one-and-a-half, two years.... we did not do anything for four years. Nothing. You cannot mention any significant government measures that we can be proud of, apart from the fact that in the end we managed to get governance out of the shit. Nothing. (2006)

Upon being handed such a gift, Fidesz and Orbán used the outrageous statements and admissions of the left’s failure in the campaign leading up to the parliamentary elections of 2010. During this time Fidesz and Orbán capitalized off of the left’s inability to unite and perform competently (not to mention the Hungarian population’s unrealistic expectations of economic growth following EU accession and relative apathy of democratic traditions and activism) (Sadecki, 2014, pp. 7-8). 53 percent of the Hungarian electorate voted for Fidesz in the 2010 election, awarding Fidesz a staggering 227 seats; adding the 36 seats won by the KDNP, with which Fidesz had aligned, this meant that Fidesz had attained a supermajority (two-thirds or more) in the National Assembly.

Thus, Fidesz and Orbán’s regime began just as other credible opposition parties collapsed. Among the Fidesz government’s first acts were the extension of the rights to a Hungarian passport and to vote for ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary’s territorial borders, as well as the establishment of a new national holiday—the “Day of National Solidarity”—on 4 June, the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon back in 1920.
Within months of entering the government, Fidesz exploited its two-thirds majority—which is required to make any constitutional alteration, be it an adjustment to a provision or an altogether new document—to draft and push through parliament a new constitution (known as the Fundamental Law of Hungary). They were able to do so with little debate or input from the parliamentary opposition; in fact, much of the opposition, knowing that Fidesz’s supermajority would guarantee the passage of the new constitution, boycotted discussions and the final vote once they realized that Fidesz would not consider their inputs at all.

This new constitution, among many things, does not acknowledge the separation of powers or respect for human rights characteristic of democratic states, but it does emphasize the Christian core of Hungarian society, specify marriage as a union between man and woman, and elevate various laws and amendments passed with the two-thirds majority to core national legislation status that will prove difficult to overturn, considering how Fidesz consistently retains so many seats in parliament. Instead they have used their political power to change the legislation, legislative procedures, and electoral laws in their favor, gerrymandering districts, creating new Fidesz-controlled institutions capable of exercising a deep degree of media “supervision” (censorship), purging the government and courts and installing bureaucrats and judges loyal to Fidesz, and establishing arbitrary tax policies that could be used against businesses that do not comply with Fidesz’s political line (The Fundamental Law, 2018, National Avowal, Article 5(1), Article L(1), & Article T(4); Halmai, 2018).

All of this transpired with relatively little popular protest, aside from the many complaints made by political opposition groups themselves. In 2014, Fidesz captured nearly 45 percent of the popular vote and won yet another supermajority, earning 133 out of 199 seats. On 26 July 2014, Orbán delivered his now-infamous speech in front of members of the Hungarian minority in the Transylvanian region of Romania in which he declared Hungary to be an “illiberal state” and praised nations like Russia, Turkey, and China for their “non-liberal” approaches. He also went on to accuse various NGOs and media outlets that criticized himself and Fidesz of being nothing but the stunts of “political activists who are being paid by

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18 It should be noted that this supermajority was lost once the European Commission appointed Fidesz Member of Parliament (MP) Tibor Navracsics as the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport. He accordingly left the National Assembly and was replaced by an independent politician who won the resulting special election to fill his seat.
foreigners” attempting to “enforce foreign interests here in Hungary,” and to characterize the “liberal world” as nothing but blasphemous and hypocritical (Orbán, 2014). Of course, this speech did not mark a turning point for Orbán, Fidesz, or Hungary: it was just the articulation of the policies Orbán and Fidesz had been pursuing and evolving since it first shifted from a leftist liberal to a rightist conservative force in 1994 (Müller, 2015). Nevertheless this public iteration of Orbán and Fidesz’s direction marked a pivotal moment in Hungarian society’s political situation and intents.

Once the EU migrant and refugee crisis hit in 2015, Orbán and Fidesz ramped up their xenophobic, nationalist rhetoric, launching massive anti-migration campaigns on television, the radio, billboards, and in print and online press. They built a border fence along Hungary’s southern border with Serbia in an effort to physically repel migrants. They also went so far as to issue a referendum to Hungarian voters on EU migration quotas on 2 October 2016. In further antagonism of EU values, namely freedom of speech, Fidesz also passed in June 2017 a new law that stigmatizes, and potentially penalizes or shuts down, NGOs that receive a fairly low amount of money from foreign countries, forcing them to register as an “organisation receiving support from abroad” and to display this classification on any publications or websites (Act LXXVI on the Transparency of Organisations, 2017).

Fidesz continued to campaign around the issues of immigration and foreign violations of Hungarian sovereignty and conservative traditional values over the next few years, expanding its electorate to a record-high 2.5 million Hungarians (grabbing most of the quarter of a million new Fidesz voters from rural areas) in four years. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, Fidesz won its third supermajority, taking 49 percent of the popular vote and winning 133 out of 199 seats. The party performed well even as it engaged in a blatant violation of academic freedom through its attempts to push the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, a liberal higher educational institution prone to criticizing Fidesz and Orbán, out of Hungary entirely. Though thousands of Hungarians did, in fact, protest this move and even latest supermajority victory, they were still fairly marginal and confirmed the Orbán regime’s ability to nevertheless command governmental power and, as this thesis argues, societal power. In the words of Freedom House researcher and Foreign Policy writer Zselyke Csaky, “Orbán is just getting started” (2018).