

Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Katherine Langdon
Title of the thesis:	The Ideological Enemy Within: How Viktor Orbán's Hungary Fell Out of Democracy as a Member State of the European Union
Reviewer:	Dr M David

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The research question covers topical and significant subject matters. Hungarian domestic politics are increasingly a source of anxiety for the EU, moving as they are so far from EU values. The student shows excellent knowledge and understanding in respect of this. The student relies on a good body of literature and, again, demonstrates a good grasp of it. The research question the thesis seeks to answer is: "How does the Orbán regime attract the support of Hungarian voters, and is their legitimization of the Orbán regime associated with an ideology?". Unfortunately, as the thesis goes on to demonstrate, the first part of the question has already been answered, this is shown through a heavy reliance on secondary source literature. The second part of the question is more problematic. It required far more engagement with the Ideology literature. In the absence of this, it is not surprising that, ultimately, this part of the question is not answered, except to talk of an illiberal ideology in broad, sweeping terms. Equally, insufficient space was given to thinking about how that question might be answered, i.e. what research methods could be applied in order to answer it.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The methods chapter suffers from a failure to articulate clearly the method to be employed in order to deliver the analysis. Despite the heavy emphasis on research methods in this programme of study – two research methods courses, the Barcelona seminar and the Oxford Spring School, little or nothing of that body of knowledge is applied here. I would have expected to see a clear analytical framework laid out, the method of analysis explained, the source materials detailed and some discussion of what was excluded as well as included delivered. The section at the top of p. 13, for instance, required far more detail to explain and justify the data. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the later analysis goes on to suffer from the lack of a rigorous and disciplined application of method and that the student has to rely on secondary sources to assist her analysis of the primary source material.

One purpose of the research methods courses is to alert students to the necessity of designing research that asks an original research question (or pursues a hypothesis) that can feasibly be researched. The methods literature explicitly cautions against speculation, talks about ethical issues, causation vs correlation, sampling issues and so on. In all these areas, the thesis is rather problematic. On speculation, for instance, on p. 51 and the discussion of the polls where we are told "it seems very well possible". From p. 51-52, the student also refers to interviews sampled as part of an internship. This suggests a useful data source but we are not given any information about the sampling strategy and how representative the data might be. The student talks about how such data might be "flawed" but then goes on to draw a larger conclusion, in which the reader can have little faith as a result of that failure to talk through the sampling issues. In terms of ethics in research, we are not told whether the student had permission to refer to this or rely on it in her thesis. Further suggestions that the student has not thought through what makes for a persuasive argument comes on p. 54 (as just one example), where in the last full paragraph on that page, the student talks, effectively, about causation when the evidence suggests correlation.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The conclusions are not always as persuasive as they might have been because of a failure to realise the need to establish a warrant for certain claims, e.g. p. 13 and the discussion of how Orban and Fidesz have eroded the checks and balances. At certain points, references are missing, e.g. p. 24. More problematically, the thesis suffers from a descriptive character in that much of the analysis delivered seems to be a recounting of the

existing literature. See, for examples, pp. 14-18, where Kornai is heavily relied on but this is a characteristic of the entire thesis. It is not that primary research is not conducted, just that the necessity for doing so is not clear given the number of secondary source citations in relation to much, if not all of the analysis. The student would have been better served by determining where there is a gap in the literature and by delivering on research and analysis that filled it. This might have entailed doing more comparative work or by focusing on one or two of the issues raised as case studies and delivering deep and critical argumentation in respect of them. The biopolitics issue, for instance, seems to have offered the student more opportunity for original research and so warranted the attention that other issues covered had already received in the literature. In short, the failure to consider research design identified above brought insurmountable problems here. In the conclusion the student does not come back explicitly to her own research question and the question is only partially answered.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is very well-written, with meaning always clear. There are some minor errors but these do not detract from an overall impression of excellence in writing. A little more attention to academic tone was warranted, avoiding phrasing/wording such as, “lumped together” or “go after”. The referencing is generally good, although the in-text referencing would be improved if the student did not insist on putting the book titles in, this is what the bibliography is for, as is, their inclusion in the text interrupts the flow of reading and suggests the student has not thought sufficiently about what is most important – the arguments or the name of the scholar and their publication. There are a few problems on the bibliography e.g. a European Council reference in the wrong place, some inconsistency in placing of the date of publication but overall, the student demonstrates good facility in this regard. The thesis is well presented with chapters and sections clearly laid out. There are, however, problems with structure as a result of that single, very long chapter, which is extremely hard to navigate given its scope. The logic of the chapter is not clear, more thought needed to be given – and articulated – re the issues covered, the order in which they came and why they needed to be expounded upon. In short, it lacks rigour and discipline, the 50 pages it takes up should have been a sign that this was the case. I would have advocated this being broken down into multiple chapters.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis is well-written, relies on good source material and demonstrates good understanding of much of the material under discussion. The weak points relate to: 1) the fact that it is not clear this thesis is necessary. Even in the empirical chapter, the student relies on the secondary source literature to cement her understanding of the primary source literature. Thus, the thesis suffers from a lack of originality; 2) The “analytical chapter” is far too long, insufficient thought has been given to scope, as such we are told an awful lot but not in a terribly critically analytical or original fashion; 3) Lack of rigorous research design.

The inclusion of an entire chapter as an appendix is highly questionable. In the main text, the student argues for its inclusion on the grounds that readers may not be familiar with the background context. Such decisions are always judgment calls and unfortunately the decision to append the chapter shows poor judgment. That conclusion is bolstered by the start of the appended chapter in which the student says “it is necessary to offer a brief history”. If it is necessary, it should have been in the main body of the thesis. The appendix is inconsistent with academic convention and looks like an attempt to evade the constraints of the word count.

Grade (A-F):	6.5 / D
Date:	Signature:
12 June 2019	Maxine David