ANDRÁS SCHWEITZER*

Democracy dies in conceptual darkness. How the innocuous left-right metaphor leads to deceptive ideational hierarchies and democratic backsliding

Intersections. EEJSP
12(1): 33–51. (2026)
https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v12i1.1416
https://intersections.tk.hu

* [schweitzer.andras@tatk.elte.hu] (Associate Professor, Institute of Political and International Studies, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University)

Abstract

The democratic backsliding of the past decades has been widely described and explained by general disillusionment due to economic inequality and insecurity, by the global rise and appeal of non-democratic great-powers, and by populist politicians spreading simplistic messages and disinformation made easier by non-traditional media. The process has also been connected to the rise of illiberalism, although political ideas have often been characterised as mere tools for political rhetoric rather than genuine drivers of the transformation. This article argues that political ideas indeed had an important effect. Focusing on Hungary's post-1989 course, it shows that the combination of mainstream liberal descriptions (which practically equate democratic and liberal backsliding) with critical narratives (which emphasize the free market centric and elitist nature of the pre-2010 politics) provide a remarkably coherent description of a Polányi type countermovement from the overly liberal 1990s to an era that can be described, with the words of István Bibó, as anti-democratic nationalism. The article demonstrates how the traditional left-right spatial metaphor does more to confuse than to explain this ideological shift, and the misleading effect of its application even exacerbates democratic backsliding. It also offers an alternative three-dimensional spatial model with the potential to more accurately frame the relationship between major political ideologies (including nationalism) and to better understand how political ideas support or undermine democracy.

Keywords: *democracy, backsliding, political left and right, liberalism, nationalism.*

Motto
"Please step forward to the rear!"[1]

1 Introduction

Based on his understanding of human nature, the decay of democracy into tyranny was a completely natural process for Plato. And yet, almost two and a half millennia later, after a global surge in democracy, the subsequent backsliding came as an unexpected shock for contemporary political scientists. A long series of explanations and narratives has been constructed, and the analytical process does not seem to be concluded. There is a cacophony of contributing factors identified by the expanding

[1] This request was the motto of a sarcastic piece of the eminent Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, titled How to be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist (Kolakowski, 1978). Not only is the quoted sentence he heard on a tramcar in Warsaw quite fitting to describe the recent political course of Hungary, the topic of his essay also is: the actual compatibility of these three important political traditions and a mighty new International synthetizing them, which however "will never exist because it cannot promise people that they will be happy".

literature, some focus more on the machinations of anti-establishment populist politicians (Casal Bértoa & Rama, 2021; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Carothers & Hartnett, 2024) others the general disillusionment with rising inequalities (Rau & Stokes, 2025), or the changing modes of social communication (Diamond, 2019), or cultural shocks caused by immigration (Kapelner, 2024).

The following article intends to contribute to another subset of this discourse, one that focuses on the roles of political ideas. Narratives in this category often invoke right-wing populism, nationalism, and illiberalism as connected to de-democratisation. But they usually treat these political phenomena as elements of a rhetorical mode or discourse type that serves as a means for certain politicians to grab or keep the power, not as a substantial intellectual framework or an ideology that directly contributes to the backslide (see, Aslanidis, 2015; Dai & Kustov, 2022). By contrast, I will start from the assumption that political ideas matter – they are driving forces during democratisation and autocratization alike.

I will focus on Hungary as a single but emblematic case, a country that, in recent decades, presented itself as a regional pioneer in democratisation and then in autocratisation. In 1989–1990, Hungary quickly became a democracy. In the 2010s, as shown by a long list of analyses by political scientists (e.g. Ágh, 2015), think tanks (V-Dem Institute, 2020), and the European Parliament (Committee on Civil Liberties and Justice and Home Affairs, 2022), Hungary became a hybrid regime of electoral autocracy. I do not aim to write an event history of the post-1989 transformation, nor to analyse Viktor Orbán's political system. My aim is rather to analyse academic and political narratives of the Hungarian post-1989 transformation process from the perspective of how they describe the relationship between political ideologies and democracy. I will divide the narratives into two categories: the mainstream liberal ones (scholarly or political), which generally tend to identify a serious democratic backslide beginning with the second Fidesz government after 2010, and the critical ones (anti-capitalist or sovereigntist), which emphasise serious aspects of democratic deficit in the previous two decades due to the reckless policy application of the liberal ideology.

I want to point out that while liberal accounts of the transformation practically equate liberalism with democracy (talking of erosion of democracy as a liberalism-illiberalism shift), a combination of the two narrative types provides a more accurate account of the developments, which takes into account not just the nature of the illiberal pull, but also causes for the push away from more liberal politics. These include an overreliance on the economic benefits and effectiveness of liberal market mechanisms and an underappreciation of social traditions and values, which resulted in a substantial and long-lasting shift in popularity.

I also want to highlight that both narrative types struggle to adequately conceptualise the political-ideological nature of the transformation, largely because they base it on the left-right spatial model. Liberal accounts, for instance, struggle to make sense of the etatism (centralisation efforts) of a nominally right-wing government and sometimes frame it as a turn back toward Communism, while sovereigntist narratives describe market-oriented policies as based on post-Communist left-wing ideas. In a critical leftist description, both political forces that dominated the scene since the 1990 parliamentary elections (and both political periods) are labelled as right-wing neoliberalism.

In the following, I first summarise the liberal mainstream framing of the Hungarian transformation process, then the critical accounts of it. By liberal framing, I mean those

narratives that describe the reform process in and around 1989 as primarily a transformation from dictatorship towards a constitutional democratic system of checks and balances, respect for individual rights and civil liberties, free speech and free multiparty elections. Critical accounts view the essence of the Hungarian Annus Mirabilis as a transformation either from a state-socialist planned economy to capitalism or from Soviet imperial dominance to national sovereignty. Both streams tend to be much more critical of the 1990s and the 2000s than the liberal accounts. In the third part, I will describe what a more inclusive (combined) narrative would look like and explain why it is so deeply misleading if its core elements (the rise of illiberalism, growing nationalism, and democratic backsliding) are explained on a single axis (as a simple left-right ideological shift). Finally, I will propose a more elucidatory model of the relationship between democracy and the main political ideologies, one that does not prioritise liberalism as the democratic core and does not downgrade nationalism as a 'thin-centred' ideology. The proposed model provides a better conceptual framework to understand the past decades of Hungary, but more generally also to protect democracy and reverse the democratic backslide.

2 The liberal framing of the post-1989 Hungarian trajectory

In this first part, I will analyse the main ideas in what I will call 'liberal narratives', ones which generally positively valorise the two post-1989 decades as the 20 years of liberal democracy in Hungary and view the subsequent 15 years as a deviation from the main liberal democratic norms (a democratic backsliding). Many of these pieces were written as a critique of Orbán's autocratic turn. Some of the authors were politically involved as liberal politicians during the 1990s, like János Kis, Bálint Magyar, Lajos Bokros, András Bozóki, Péter Tölgyessy; the latter two were even affiliated with Fidesz for certain periods. Quite a few work(ed) in academia (e.g., philosopher János Kis, economist János Kornai, historian Balázs Trencsényi, political scientists András Bozóki and Zsolt Enyedi). The aim is not to provide a comprehensive or comparative summary, but rather to look for the generally held views about the role of ideology in the backsliding, shed light on the conceptualisation of the main political ideologies (liberalism, socialism, nationalism and conservatism), and their relation to each other and to democracy itself.

The Hungarian liberal narratives about the post-1989 overall democratic trajectory of the country hold that democracy came to Hungary in (and around) 1989–1990, while its serious deterioration can be connected to the establishment of the second Fidesz government in 2010. As a prime example, eminent economist János Kornai, the late professor emeritus of Harvard University and Corvinus University in Budapest, described the Hungarian course this way: 'For two decades, Hungary, like the other Eastern European countries, followed a general policy of establishing and strengthening the institutions of democracy, rule of law, and a market economy based on private property. However, since the elections of 2010, when Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party came to power, Hungary has made a dramatic U-turn' (Kornai, 2015). The author had already announced that Hungary is no longer a democracy but an autocracy four years earlier in an opinion piece (Kornai, 2011). Many others use the term 'hybrid regime' to describe Orbánism, and believe that it became consolidated only later, with one of the crucial steps being the coming into effect of the Fidesz-drafted new constitution on the first day of 2012 (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 40).

Pre-2010 democracy and liberalism go hand in hand in these accounts – quite a few authors indeed refer to the system as liberal democracy (e.g. Bozóki, 2012, Magyar, 2016[2], Halmai 2024) with rule of law mechanisms, constitutional limits on power, system of checks and balances, freedom of speech, etc. Accordingly, the essence of the transformation around 2010 is not just de-democratisation but also one from a liberal to an illiberal (or anti-liberal) regime. András Bozóki, for example, talks of an 'anti-liberal, anti-democratic turn' to describe policies of the new government at the time when 'democracy fell into a crisis in Hungary' (Bozóki, 2012).

Kornai details the following main elements for the downturn: 'the executive and legislative branches are no longer separate' (both effectively controlled by Viktor Orbán); the basic institutions of the rule of law have been abolished or significantly weakened ('the holders of power are able to elevate any decision to the status of law quickly and without hindrance'); the ruling political group makes attempts to take control over the courts while the prosecution works suspiciously more effectively against people in the opposition;" 'private property has become the target of frequent legal economic and ideological attacks';tendencies of centralization effects almost all spheres of society; civil society is harassed and concerns of the people expressed through declarations or demonstrations are disregarded (Kornai, 2015, pp. 4–6). These elements recur in all accounts, with varying emphasis on the loss of specific liberal aspects: constitutional checks and balances (e.g., Halmai, 2024; Kis, 2013), the primacy of the free market (Lajos Bokros in Trencsényi 2017, p. 21), and political pluralism, among others (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018).

While there are no substantial differences in the general description of the 1990–2010 regime (liberal and democratic), the ideological nature of the new 'illiberal' and 'antidemocratic'regime, or the ideational roots of its triumph, is surprisingly disputed. There are those who connect the new Hungarian right wing with the pre-1945 one (seeing either substantial similarity or just a longue durée socio-cultural basis for the popular acceptance of Orbán's 'System of National Cooperation'). According to János Kis, 'The right-wing's Horthy-ist nostalgia made it easier for the left to find the anti-democratic communist regime justified; and the left's nostalgia for Kádár's 'consolidation' made it easier for the right to rehabilitate the 'Christian course' as a crusade against the communist dictatorship (Kis, 2013). Implicit in this description is the assumption that a small liberal-democratic political force was squeezed between two large blocks with anachronistic socialist and conservative-nationalist ideologies, respectively.

János Kornai did not want to systematically analyze the causes which brought about the U-turn, but he also mentioned a few historical factors that shape contemporary anti-liberal political-ideological thinking: 'goulash-communism, when the population became accustomed to the paternalism of a heavy-handed regime' and 'nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic ideology of the autocracy of the Horthy period of 1919 to 1945, with its foreign policy that prioritized the revision of the unjust dismemberment of the country after the First World War, turning Hungary into a loyal ally – to the bitter end – of Hitler' (Kornai, 2015). As for the characteristics of the regime, he noted that 'the Orbán government is not Socialist', but its efforts at centralization, its anti-capitalist rhetorics and policy steps still represent a shift back towards the

[2] Later, refining his ideas in joint works with Bálint Madlovics, the same author, Bálint Magyar claims that Hungary had been a liberal democracy only until 2002, and the following eight years it was closer to what they call a patronal democracy. (Magyar & Madlovics, 2020)

Socialist system and are detrimental to the economy, just like attempts at national isolationism and autarchy or the 'nationalization of private pension funds' which 'dealt a heavy blow to the principle of respect for private property' (Kornai, 2015).

Five years into the U-turn, historian Balázs Trencsényi identified three types of well-developed interpretative frameworks for the Hungarian backsliding (Trencsényi 2015). One was former dissident Rudolf Ungváry's model of a 'fascistoid mutation', which has its charismatic-authoritarian vision and nationalist rhetoric and satisfies with it the habits and needs of a society formerly characterized by rural, patriarchal, right-wing masses and the Christian middle class, which had made their own compromise with existing socialism, and is frightened by civil-liberal-capitalist modernity after 1989. Liberal politician turned political analyst Péter Tölgyessy's interpretation is of a 'directed national capitalism' that fits well a frustrated society's aversion to capitalism and desire for respect and greatness. And former liberal finance minister Lajos Bokros's narrative of a post-2010 'restoration of the communist command economy system', based on Orbán's presumed hostility toward capitalism and markets (Trencsényi, 2015).

Bálint Magyar classified the historical analogies to describe and explain Orbánism as: neo-communism (those that focus on centralisation and nationalisation), fascistoid system (those that find similarities with the Horthy regime or corporatist pre-war regimes), and neopatrimonial or reincarnated feudal system (that describes a certain kind of vassalage structure) (Magyar, 2016, p. 61). Yet, in his argument, all of these frameworks are misleading, among other reasons, because Orbán's system – which is essentially a more modern and unique phenomenon (a post-Communist mafia state) – is non-ideological but also because true power and legitimacy do not overlap (Magyar, 2016, pp. 61–62). In Magyar's interpretation, presented in a series of books (beginning with Magyar, 2015), assumes that the post-2010 Hungarian political system should not be described as a flawed democracy or a system anywhere between dictatorship and democracy (hybrid regime or other) but a completely different category: a patronal autocracy (or post-communist mafia state) (for a detailed description of the system and Hungary's trajectory see Magyar & Madlovics, 2020).

In sum, while not idealising the 1990–2010 period, liberal narratives of the post-1989 era of Hungary agree that it was characterised by a functioning liberal-democratic system, but that this was followed by a democratic decline firmly connected to anti-liberal tendencies. They are less in unison in describing the ideational characteristics of the new regime. There is much confusion about what the post-2010 regime is like, aside from what it is not: it is illiberal (or anti-liberal) and autocratic (anti-democratic). Liberal authors characterise the democratic backslide as caused at least partly by Communist and nationalist delusions stemming from past social experiences and traumas, and similarly describe post-2010 developments as political (and, to an extent, economic) re-centralisation, in some accounts even as neo-fascism or neo-communism. While the Fidesz regime is often regarded as pragmatic and lacking a clear ideology, its rhetoric and policy steps are usually presented as serious right-wing (and at times left-wing) deviations from the 'liberal centre' that threaten(ed) Hungarian democracy.

3 Progressive-egalitarian and sovereigntist approaches

Contrary to liberal framing of the post-1989 Hungarian political trajectory, progressive-egalitarian and sovereigntist narratives are much more critical of the first two 'liberal'

decades, and do not connect liberal ideas with democracy. They also see 1989 through a different lens: for the progressives (sometimes labelled critical left), the transformation from socialism to capitalism is at least as important as the one from dictatorship to democracy, for the sovereigntists (or: identitarians, nationalists), the main theme is national liberation from imperial oppression, the regaining of national sovereignty and independence.

Members of the first group usually acknowledge democratic backsliding but point to serious social problems stemming from (neo)liberal economic policies that overshadow – and, to an extent, explain – Orbán's rise to power. In his essay on historiographies of 1989, historian János Rainer identifies a group of authors who partly based their criticism on Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory, partly on the moral judgement that the systemic transformation benefited mostly a narrow upper echelon of society, but mainly 'international capital'. Rainer quotes two media articles written by political philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, a conservative liberal-turned radical critic of the Hungarian transformation. In one, from 2014, Tamás claims that instead of establishing a flourishing market economy, privatisation resulted in deindustrialisation, which destroyed a world that offered to the workers a modest wage and accommodation, but also a home, an aim, a meaning (Rainer 2019, pp. 27–28). In an article published five years later, Tamás goes even further, claiming that the pre-1989 system was economically and socially more just than the contemporary one (Rainer, 2020, p. 32).

A crucial motive of leftist criticism is the insensitive behaviour of the political elite toward those who were losers of the transition. Erzsébet Szalai writes the following about intellectuals 'calling themselves liberals' (for Szalai they are rather neo-liberals): 'They were the ones to provide ideology for the full, uncritical, reckless opening up of the economy in front of the mammoth-ownership to whom the price of labor has always been too high (...) and who urge the total marketization of the remaining public sphere' (Szalai, 2009, p. 213). As Péter Rauschenberger argues, the downfall of the republic occurred because, according to the assessment of too many citizens, it failed to deliver the public policy outcomes that could have been expected of it (Rauschenberger, 2013). To Gábor Scheiring, this is just one factor. He claims that the rise of illiberalism is tightly connected to the 'exhaustion of the political economy of patience' and to the polarisation of the economic elite and the 'needs and interests of the native capitalist class' (Scheiring, 2015).

The post-2010 regime, in these accounts, is not better at creating more equitable, welfare-focused policies. It rather created an autocratic political system based on national capitalism (an 'alliance of state autocracy and neoliberal capitalism' in the words of Attila Antal, 2019). In these descriptions, where the interest of capitalists and the re-arrangement of capital are central themes), the new regime's economic policies are characterised as essentially neomercantilist and aimed at strengthening the national bourgeoisie (see, Gerőcs, 2021).

Sovereigntist narratives are similarly critical of the pre-2010 period, but view Orbán's 'revolution of the ballot boxes' and the subsequent creation of the 'System of National Cooperation' as a correction and remedy for most of the ills of the previous regimes[3]. As Márton Békés, director of the pro-government XXI Századi Intézet (XXI

[3] It must be noted that there had already been an Orbán and Fidesz led government in 1998–2002, but this is usually not emphasized in these accounts, or if yes, the implicit partial responsibility is explained away by pointing out that without a two-third majority, that government's transformative power was limited and its

Century Institute, a history research think tank), explains, the 2010s were the period of the 'global breakdown of the post-bipolar era' with the promise of a post-liberal period and an 'accompanying phenomenon of a sovereigntist wave' (e.g. Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency) – and the Hungarian system was a pioneer and still is a model for the new era (Békés, 2021).

Such contemporary sovereigntist thinking has a long history: they were gradually developed throughout the 2000s by intellectual networks around Fidesz and the Századvég Foundation, as shown by a rare academic piece that takes the ideational aspects of the Hungarian backsliding seriously (Buzogány & Varga, 2018). A core idea is the essential similarity of Communism and Liberalism, or its Hungarian adherents. A telltale essay published before the crucial 2010 transformation unites the left and the liberal camp as the 'progressives', the opposite of the 'internalists' with whom the authors clearly identify (Fodor & Kern, 2009). Questioning what they call a progressive assumption that those two decades of post-Communism show a clear break away from Communism, they largely agree with those who talk about the 'abortive and incomplete nature of the regime change' (Fodor & Kern, 2009, p. 119). This is because – as the article claims – liberals show weird similarities to communists in that they both believe in linear progressivism, both apply a crisis narrative, both argue for the need for a complete regime change, and both want to copy an existing foreign system. 'On the other hand, the authors acknowledge the fact that there still was a great shift in Hungarian political history in 1989 and declare that 'we have no intention of starting a new revolution' (Fodor & Kern, 2009, p. 119)[4].

While, according to G Fodor, the 'progressive approach' sees 'joining the West' and 'copying Western institutions and procedures' as the purpose of the transition; the internalist approach wants the "'foundation of the state', identity politics, including the issue of national independence; a clear definition of national interest; willingness to get into a conflict in order to protect national interests" (Fodor & Kern, 2009, p. 127). It is quite remarkable to note again that just one year later, Fidesz really started to implement clearly related policies. 'Liberal democracy was not capable of openly declaring, or even obliging, governments with constitutional power to declare that they should serve national interests. Moreover, it even questioned the existence of national interests', stated Orbán in 2014. (Berend, 2020, p. 281). Democracy per se is seldom put in a negative light in political discourses of Fidesz, but liberalism is, to the point that Viktor Orbán famously put 'illiberalism' on the banner a decade ago, and ever since. What is usually viewed in Hungary as the anti-democratic phenomenon of corruption is famously re-framed by András Lánczi as a deliberate policy of Fidesz aimed at social-economic restructuring of the country, similar to what happened after 1945 and after 1989, diverting of capital to a 'domestic entrepreneurial stratum' (Lánczi, 2015).

All in all, these alternative accounts question the basics of the liberal narrative. Sovereigntist (internalist) accounts, whose promoters are, in general, supporters, political allies, or members of the contemporary Fidesz regime, naturally do not talk of a democratic decline after 2010, but, in turn, find faults with the previous 20 years. Instead of an inverted U curve, they describe a generally rising period in which both 1989 and 2010 represent positive (upward) steps toward nation-centred governance

achievements could not be enough far-reaching.

[4] This claim is notable, because it happens to be in stark contrast with Orbán's declaration just a year later, that the overwhelming Fidesz victory means a revolution at the ballot boxes which was then referred to as the basis for establishing the new "System of National Cooperation". (Országgyűlés, 2010)

and sovereignty. Critical left authors, on the other hand, problematize the whole period of post-1989 as a period of social injustices, poverty, and rising inequality – characteristics of capitalism. In both types, the issue of democracy is either sidelined or understood less in terms of the procedures of free and fair elections, a constitutional system of checks and balances, or civic rights, and more as a system characterised by positive outcomes that benefit the people or the nation. Liberalism ceases to have positive value, and its relation to democracy (broadly understood as governance for the people, by the people) is neutral or even inverse.

4 The post-1989 Hungarian political trajectory and ideational hierarchies created by the left-right spatial metaphor

In the first two parts, I briefly characterised the liberal and critical narrative streams of the Hungarian post-1989 political course. In this part, I will argue that they all grasp some elements of truth, and that, taken as complementary observations, they can be meaningfully combined into a fitting unified description of the actual political trajectory. I will also show how this trajectory cannot be adequately fitted within the mainstream cognitive model of the political-ideational space, namely the left-right spectrum. I will also argue that the trajectory was indeed influenced by the inappropriateness of existing models, which, somewhat paradoxically, supported both liberal and nationalist exceptionalism.

In line with the liberal interpretation, democratic backsliding was clearly underway between 2010 and 2026, as reflected in the extraordinary centralisation of political and economic power in the country. A long list of independent analysts and think tanks shows this[5]. On the other hand, the critics of liberals also seem to be right in pointing out that the illiberal (sovereigntist) turn can be described as an attempted (or promised or implemented) shift from a position of over-liberalism (nationality-blind, open, (neo)liberal capitalism) to which the disappointment and the backslide can – at least partially – be attributed.

In line with the Washington Consensus atmosphere, the political elite in the Visegrad countries were generally convinced that the effective functioning of the economy requires deregulation, trade liberalisation, and privatisation. It was also widely believed that governments should act quickly before domestic resistance escalates, but to the surprise of international observers, the liberal fervour lasted long and went way deeper than in the West with 'radical neoliberal reforms' like flat tax, pension privatisation, the slashing of corporate tax rates, extreme monetarism, and strong central bank independence (Appel & Orenstein, 2018). Hungary was a leading country in East Central Europe in transforming its economic system by introducing elements of market coordination and small-scale private ownership prior to 1989. The country opened up, and by the end of 1995, it attracted as much foreign investment as all the other countries of the former Communist Bloc together (Pogátsa, 2009). In the years preceding 2010, based on property rights, government integrity, business freedom, trade freedom, investment freedom, and financial freedom, Hungary was more liberal than the other Visegrad countries, and much more than the EU average (Bohle & Greskovits, 2018, p. 1073).

The transformation came with a tremendous price: a steep rise in the number of

[5] For the backslide of Hungary from consolidated democracy to electoral autocracy and hybrid regime by V-Dem and Freedom House, see: Halmai (2024, p. 439)

unemployed and inactive, and inequality also grew. This, in part, was a natural consequence of the transformation, but the negative effects were more pronounced in Hungary than in most other transforming countries. Employment rates fell in most countries in the region between 1990 and 1999, but the Hungarian figure fell slightly below 60 per cent, well below those of the other Visegrad countries, the Baltic states, Slovenia, Romania, or Bulgaria (Nesporova, 2002). Special difficulties for Hungary included the debt burden accumulated by the Kádár regime and problems with the methods of privatisation, which were very rapid and relied heavily on attracting foreign capital.

In this situation, it would have been logical to see a turn to economic left-wing ideas, away from the market and toward more redistributive and welfarist policies. This was indeed attempted in 2002 with the 'welfare system change' (jóléti rendszerváltás) promise of the Socialist-led government of Péter Medgyessy, but the actual implementation resulted in an unsustainable economic course. The left had to introduce austerity measures again (like in 1995), and became seen as the real representatives of economic liberalism, which is devastating for the ordinary people. According to Bozóki, the turn toward the nationalist camp (that came with a 'Hungary belongs to the Hungarian message' versus those who seemed to have favored foreign capital) can be explained by a lack of alternatives, because 'nearly by definition, if social solidarity from the politics of the Left is lacking, the values remaining on the side of the road are lifted up by the extreme Right based on ethnic rhetoric' (Bozóki, 2012, p. 34). The ideological nature of the new Fidesz regime is generally identified to be nation-centered (nationalist) by both their critiques and their proponents, though the former like to evaluate it as empty rhetoric for legitimation purposes (Csepeli, 2017), while the latter attributing to it substantial meaning as a more sovereigntist foreign policy, a more home-oriented culture and education policy, and a more protectionist economic policy favoring the national bourgeoisie.

Comparing and contrasting the ideological narratives with the actual policy steps and outcomes reveals that the post-1989 Hungarian transformation process failed on two fronts. First, overreliance on free-market capitalism created unequal conditions and imposed significant difficulties on a large part of the population[6]. Then, partly due to the resulting widespread disappointment, a nationalist-populist government could more easily centralise political decision-making by creating a hybrid regime. Democracy suffered a blow with both steps: first as a 'rule for the people", then also as a 'rule by the people'; that is, first with the creation of serious economic inequalities and hierarchies, then with the centralisation of political decision-making and the

[6] It could also be argued that the turning away from liberalism was not because of faulty policies based on over-marketization, but rather that liberal political and economic principles were not widely popular within the Hungarian electorate. This has also been my interpretation in an earlier essay (Schweitzer, 2014a and 2014b). Similar is the assessment of Bálint Magyar, who quoted survey statistics on values to back it up. „According to a survey in 1991, only 5 per cent of the 30 thousand membership of even the most western oriented, liberal party to have emerged from the anti-communist dissident movement, the Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – SZDSZ) revealed a value system that could be considered consistently liberal in matters concerning human rights and economics – though the party leadership proclaimed such a stance with full determination. A value analysis of liberalism in 2013 on the other hand showed that though the proportion of those considering themselves liberal in Hungary was 14 per cent, and 18 per cent categorized themselves as liberals in matters of human rights, the percentage of those committed to capitalism was a mere 5 per cent. Among the three dimensions of the liberal value system examined by the survey, the number of those who believed in at least two of the three did not even reach 5 per cent. Yet the condition of the stability of western liberal democracy is a broad and cohesive sense of commitment to the values of human rights, the free market and respect for private property, and awareness of this commitment." (Magyar 2016. p. 17.)

creation of political class hierarchies. The overall political-ideological course seems to align with what Karl Polányi described as a double movement: overreliance on market mechanisms results in an anti-democratic backlash (Polanyi et al., 2010).

Without judging whether market-oriented liberal policies were too excessive or beneficial to the Hungarian economy in the first two decades after 1989[7] or if the nationalist/sovereigntist/internalist shift of the Fidesz government was genuine and served national interests in any way, describing the theoretical meaning of such a shift – in relation to the most basic political categories such as left, right, democracy – is not easy. Our usual frames of reference can be confusing. This is why, for some analysts, a liberal-nationalist swing corresponds to a left-to-right movement, while for some others, that linear axis is useless as an interpretative device. Similarly, the shift can mean a pro- or an anti-democratic change for different political commentators.

The left-right divide is a concept that lies at the core of political-ideological thought. It is imagined as an axis that runs from the far left (e.g. Communism) through Socialism, Liberalism, and Conservatism to the far right (Fascism) (Heywood A., 2012, p. 17). The metaphor has serious implications for how political adherents of different ideologies view their respective positions relative to other groups.

The simple left-right cognitive spatial model gives liberals a central position on the spectrum, the furthest away from the two totalitarian extremes. This could provide cognitive backing for the oft-cited 1989 theory that, after the defeat of Fascism and Communism, liberalism is the ultimate winner, since no serious challengers remained. In Hungarian post-1989 politics, this cognitive mapping manifested itself physically as well, as the Liberals – originally the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz) – got their seats in Parliament between the Socialists and the right-wing parties. But it was also manifested in mental self-positioning: for example, a grouping of Fidesz members in 1992–1993 fought very hard for the 'strategy of the liberal centre' (Szelényi, 2023, p. 45), which effectively meant preventing Fidesz from drifting away 'to the right' from its natural partner, SZDSZ.

An important view suggested by the left-right model is that liberalism (broadly understood to encompass individualism, human rights, constitutional constraints on power, and economic laissez-faire) is the democratic centre per se; it cannot go so far to the extreme as to become anti-democratic. The other side of the coin is to see 'left' or 'right' ideologies as being closer to extreme, totalitarian ideologies. The fact that the Hungarian Socialist Party was a legal successor of the former Communist incumbent (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Pary), and that leading members of the post-1990 right wing coalition party appeared rather forgiving towards 1920–1944 Conservative autocratic leader Miklós Horthy[8] fueled liberal suspicion (apparent in some liberal arguments presented in the first part) that welfare protection or references to national unity are anachronistic (statist or nationalist) deviations from the democratic path.

The left-right cognitive model is partially responsible for creating a false ideational hierarchy: putting liberalism on an undeserved pedestal. It is an example of the misleading qualities of metaphors and the implicit presumption that metaphors depend on preexisting similarities grounded in inherent properties (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981,

[7] For example, in an interview about economic aspects of the transformation Károly Attila Soós, a leading economist of the main liberal party SZDSZ claimed that the early and current accusations about „wild capitalism" are very strong exaggerations, given the low VAT, relatively high level of redistribution (around 50 per cent of GDP), social transfers, and a number of other factors. (Schweitzer, 2020)

[8] Eight government ministers and a series of other dignitaries attended „privately" Miklós Horthy's reburial in Kenderes in 1993. (TSZA, 2008)

p. 215). Equally misleading is the claim that nationalism is not a core ideology because it does not have a fixed place in the left-right model (or in two-dimensional versions that differentiate between economic and political left and right).

Nationalism has a bad reputation that stems from many sources. In the post-1945 Western world, it was reminiscent of the extreme form of fascism. It was also believed to be an ideology of the past, that should be forgotten once its essential program – creating a nation-state – is achieved. Until it became too popular recently, political scientists preferred to use other terms for nation-centred ideas in contemporary politics, such as 'conservatism' or 'populism'. Based on the argument of Michael Freeden, a contemporary doyen of political ideas, nationalism can appear at most as a 'thin-centred ideology' or sometimes no more than 'embellishments of, and sustainers of the features of their host ideologies' (Freeden, 1998). However, the shortcomings he and others have detailed to back up this claim are not very convincing, and should not lead to the disqualification of nationalism. It has been argued that a) nationalism does not have its theorists, b) it does not offer policies to major areas of modern state governance, c) it cannot be associated with any social class, d) it can co-exist with a full range of other ideologies from Socialism and Liberalism to Fascism, and e) it creates an us-versus-them dichotomy. While the first two statements lack validity[9], the last three are true but also hold for other major ideologies.

But, while Hungarian liberals did not bother much in making references to the 'nation', and – influenced by history and political science – looked down on nationalism as either tribal non-ideology or right-wing anachronism, nationalists had a reverse hierarchical ordering. Nationalist groups frequently positioned themselves above the realm of ideological politics, as characterised by the 1990s slogan of MIÉP (Hungarian Justice and Life Party): 'Neither right, nor left, Christian and Hungarian!' (Perdiák J, nd). Other politicians and intellectuals, as was shown in the second part of this paper, usually portrayed liberalism as being next to (almost identical to) socialism and communism, and also as being alien to Hungarian politics.

While pluralism is a constituting element of democracy, polarisation is clearly detrimental to it. Once people denounce 'the other side' more than they value democracy, once they find the victory of 'their camp' more important than the upholding of the freedom and fairness of the election and of other political procedures, nothing can stop the erosion of democracy. This process was led by elite groups who viewed themselves as on a higher pedestal than their ideological rivals. Liberals considered themselves the true champions of democracy and looked down on fellow politicians or intellectuals advocating nation- or social justice-focused policies. Nation- and people-oriented political groups looked at liberals as individualists and elitists who are detached from everyday reality because they are obsessed with ideologies. These made-up ideational hierarchies seem to be partly the creation of the deeply entrenched left-right model, and, in turn, bear some responsibility for polarisation and democratic backslide.

[9] As for general theorists of nationalism, Rousseau is commonly seen as the father of political nationalism, Johann Herder as that of cultural nationalism. As for theorists for particular contexts, German Johann Fichte or Friedrich Jahn, Italian Giuseppe Mazzini, French Charles Maurras, Czech Frantisek Palacky, Hungarian Lajos Kossuth can be mentioned. As for promoted policies, the general aim of benefiting the nation affect all areas of life: foreign policy steps focusing on raw national interests, enhancing national self-determination, sovereignty, security countering multinational or global forces; domestic policies that protect against any kind of separatism but enhance the national unity of the nation; economic policies that protect and boost national industries by subsidies, tariffs, or even by corporatist methods; cultural and identity politics related to cultivating national traditions and the national language, increasing national pride, guarding against foreign influences; etc.

5 Democracy: flattening political hierarchies and balancing among ideologies

In the previous part, I showed how the left-right axis as a spatial metaphor can (and does) lead to conclusions about political ideas – mainly about the characteristics of liberalism and nationalism – that contradict theoretical considerations and empirical observations. A gestalt switch is needed: a more appropriate representation of the relationship among the major ideologies. Such a model should avoid conveying the false message of the centrality of liberalism (both political and economic) and grant a justified place for nationalism (the ideology advocating policies that focus on political, economic, and cultural aspects related to the national community)[10] and for socialism (focusing on welfare, equality, and solidarity).

Democracies in the West are based on all these principles. It was a serious mistake to assume in 1989 that, with the defeat of fascism and communism, liberalism won. The victorious model is based on individual freedom and liberal constitutionalism, but also on welfare, solidarity, and redistribution; and it operates in nation-states with a significant degree of social and cultural cohesion[11].

Liberalism, socialism, and nationalism can be described as equally important ideologies centred on three basic concepts of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity. These concept-cores define political principles that together constitute prerequisites of democracy (tolerance, (self-)respect; solidarity, justice; social trust and cooperation, respectively). None of the three ideologies should be imagined as having a central position; it is better to imagine them in a triangular arrangement.

This model is an extension of Friedrich Hayek's idea, which focused on the relation of liberalism (or the ideology of freedom) to conservatism (which he understood in a narrow sense, as opposed to drastic change). He emphasised how the picture of a 'line, with the socialists on the left, the conservatives on the right, and the liberals somewhere in the middle' does 'more to obscure than to elucidate' the true relations of the three. 'Nothing could be more misleading. If we want a diagram, it would be more appropriate to arrange them in a triangle with the conservatives occupying one corner, with the socialists pulling toward the second and the liberals toward the third.' (Hayek, 1960, p. 2.). His model was meant to elucidate why liberalism, as the ideology of freedom, is not well placed between socialism and conservatism: while conservatism aims to slow change and socialism pulls toward equality, liberalism pulls in another direction.

Nationalism is no less a distinct and important political ideology than the other three, and it is not any more an in-between ideology than Liberalism. This can serve as the basis for establishing its relative position among the others. If Socialism pulls

[10] he fact that nationalism should not be viewed as antithetical to democracy, but maybe even as constitutive in it, has been emphasized by Hungarian political thinker, István Bibó at a time when it was highly unpopular among similar anti-fascist thinkers: "Democracy and nationalism are movements with the same root, profoundly related" and talked of antidemocratic nationalism as "the greatest monstrosity of modern European political development" (Bibó, 1946, p. 151). Benedict Anderson described nation as an "imagined community" or "fraternity" because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each", it is "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship". (Anderson, 1991, p. 7.) More recently, Ivan Krastev have also argued that "nationalism – in one form or another – is an organic part of any democratic political scene", and liberals make a serious mistake if they don't acknowledge it for fear (that it leads to nazism or war) or for the hope that it can be defeated like Communism was. (Krastev, 2018)

[11] It must be emphasized that for nationalism to be conducive to democracy it must be working for the whole political community. Ethno-nationalism can be divisive and thus be even detrimental to democracy.

toward equality and Liberalism pulls toward liberty (as Hayek explained), then Nationalism pulls toward fraternity (or national cohesion, the security and well-being of the nation), a third direction.

The four principal ideologies, thus, form a tetrahedron, a three-dimensional object with four independent vertices. This idea is at the heart of my suggested model. (See: Figure 1.)

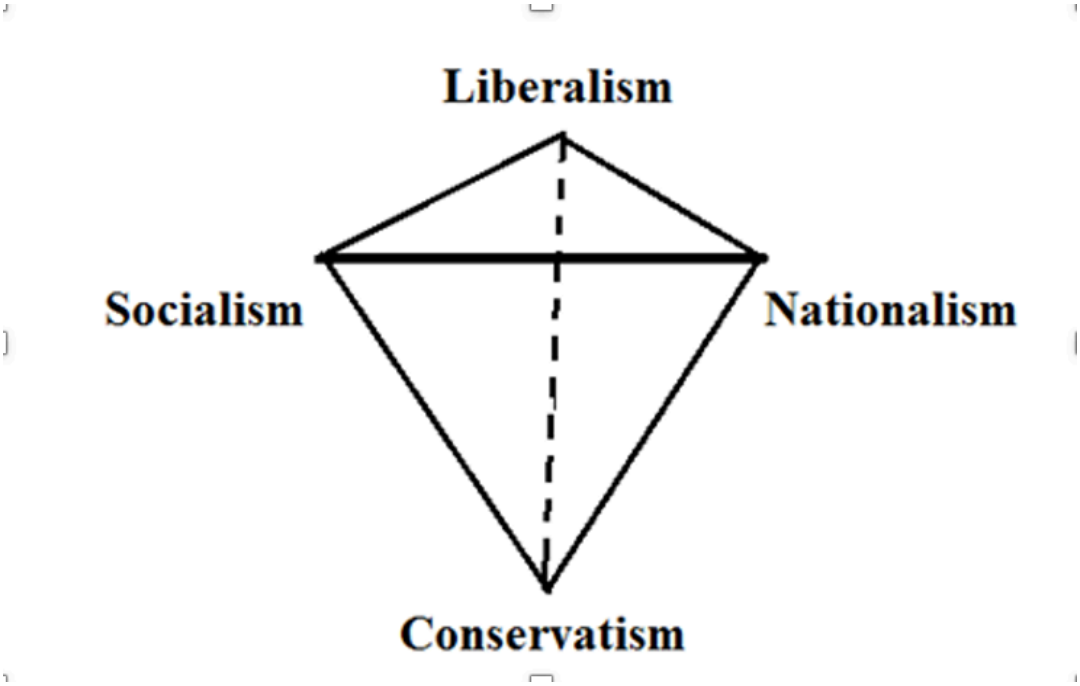

Figure 1 A model of democracy

Source: own illustration.

In the model, the centre of the tetrahedron corresponds to a doctrine that can be reconciled with the idea of democracy. That means a combination of a certain degree of each of the four principal ideologies is needed to support democracy. Without a minimum of social justice and equality (the demand of socialism), democracy lacks the necessary inclusiveness, and people cannot participate in political action. Without basic civil liberties (the goal of liberalism), there can be no open competition, elections cannot be free and fair, and there is no government accountability. Without some identification with the nation (a mark of nationalism), people don't feel they have a common cause for which they should participate in public life. Without a certain level of stability and continuity (the objective of conservatism), democratic rules and norms evaporate. The ideal democratic system, therefore, is supported by a balanced compromise of these ideologies.

The advantages of this three-dimensional model are numerous[12]. With this spatial arrangement of the four ideologies, the imagined value hierarchies between them are flattened. All four ideologies occupy an independent position; no ideology is central.

[12] I have already used the tetrahedron model a few times since I came up with it in the mid-1990s, for example to analyze Czech political transformations in the 20th century (Schweitzer, 2023). Using holistic grading, I measured with it how the ideology of Fidesz shifted in a three-dimensional political space from liberal to nationalist direction (Schweitzer, 2014c).

Nationalism is no longer an outsider of the political-ideological sphere, but an equally important ideology in its own right. Not just nationalism and socialism, but all four have extreme versions (which can be visualised as further from the centre): for conservatism, it is fundamentalism; for liberalism, it is individual anarchism and economic laissez-faire.

The model also eliminates another wrong implication of the one-dimensional left-right political field: that right-wing nationalism and socialism meet halfway at liberalism. What is in between those two ideologies is not liberalism but rather populism. That is the ideology that employs leftist, socialist-like concern for prioritising the people over the ruling elite, and often, at the same time, rightist nationalist discourse against outsiders (equivalent to Rogers Brubaker's horizontal and vertical dimensions of populist discourse; see Brubaker, 2017).

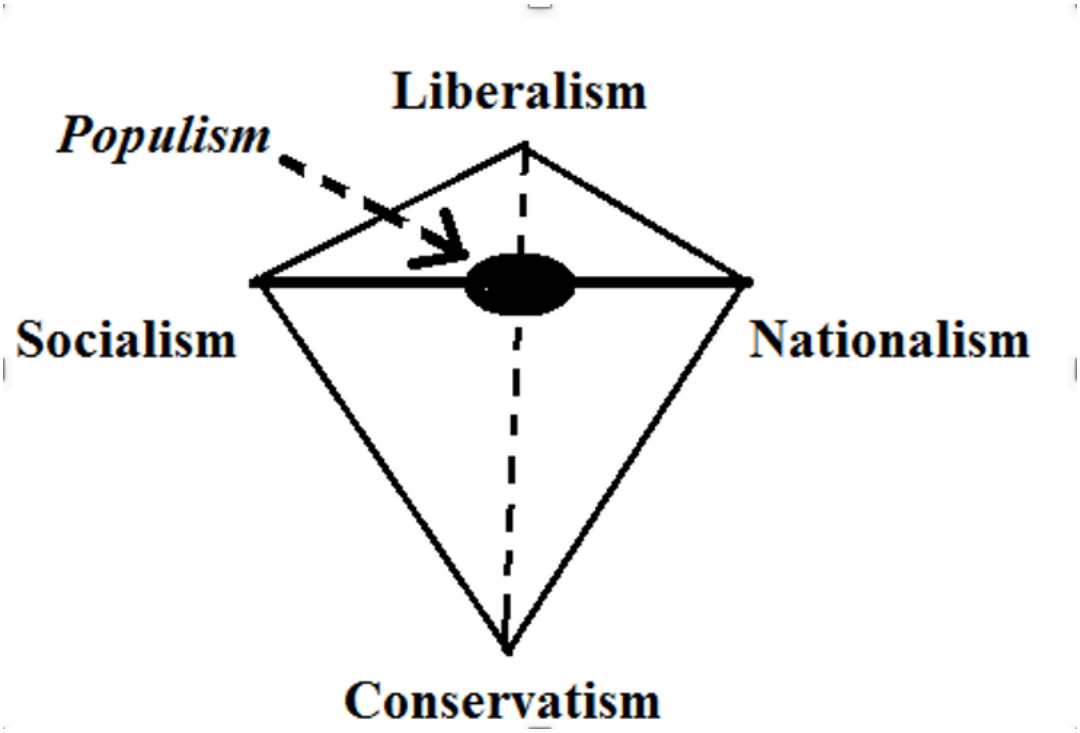

Figure 2 The location of populism

Source: own illustration.

Another serious shortcoming of the mono-axial left-right model is that it covers up three profoundly different practical meanings of the left-right dichotomy, which can be visualised only in three dimensions. One is the original French Revolution meaning: social progress versus conservatism. The second left-right is welfare and redistribution versus (economic) liberalism. The third is universalism and multiculturalism versus nationalism. These three meanings define three distinct right-wing schools: conservatism, liberalism, and nationalism. In real political contexts, within traditional moderate right-wing parties, they are often combined. But they can also appear separately, causing headaches for political analysts who, for example, want to position a party that has conservative and nationalist views but also socialist ones (typical of contemporary illiberal groups).

The model is capable of illustrating political-ideological shifts, including the Hungarian trajectory. 1990–2010 was an era when the ideological positions of successive governments were within the space conducive to democracy, though at times too close to liberalism and further away from the promotion of social solidarity, national cohesion, and social traditions. The swing back, primarily toward nationalism (sovereigntism, economic protectionism, foreign policy realism) but to a lesser extent conservatism and even socialism[13], went too far away from liberalism (e.g. from pluralism or from the principle of constitutional checks and balances) to the point where it ended up being outside the democratic space. The liberal backing is missing for a meaningful democratic system. That is, then, the ideology-based description of what led to a hybrid regime (an extensive concentration of power coupled with centralisation across all walks of life) that called itself the System of National Cooperation. And this is the basis of a possible roadmap to restore democracy in Hungary, and the blueprint to preserve it where it is still alive: ensuring the right balance among moderate political ideologies.

6 Conclusion

The post-1989 political and economic transformation of Hungary has generally coincided with similar global developments. After an initial period that fit within Huntington's third wave of democratisation, a serious backslide followed. Hungary is often depicted in the international media as a notable example of democratic backsliding and hybridisation, which was unexpected, as the country had been a regional forerunner in the liberal-democratic transformation around 1989.

Based on the assumption that focusing on political ideas can help better describe and explain what happened in Hungary (and so many other parts of the world), I have presented three main arguments. First, analysing the Hungarian case, I summarised the mainstream liberal narrative (pointing to democratic backsliding fueled by a nationalist, populist, illiberal turn) and critical narratives (which emphasise the anti-democratic and elitist nature of the previous over-liberal regime), and claimed that both streams should be taken seriously.

Second, I explained why the difficulty in conceptually capturing the transformation (at least partly) stems from the left-right spatial metaphor as the ever-present mental-political framework. It is because it puts liberalism at a high pedestal, as the democratic centre between 'left' (socialism, communism) and 'right' (conservatism, fascism), and therefore it cannot be imagined as too extreme. Nationalism, on the other hand, is imagined outside the political spectrum, either as too primitive, incomplete, shallow as an ideology, or – for its pragmatic adherents – as the down-to-earth, rational way of thinking versus the dogmatic ideologies.

I also presented a more appropriate spatial metaphor, a three-dimensional model that treats all core moderate ideologies, including nationalism, as independent equals. This model has the potential to better describe and explain the political developments of the past decades as a liberal-antiliberal swinging motion. It also points to a political mindset that is needed to restore democracy by establishing its ideational foundation

[13] Almost 20 years ago, Jaques Rupnik detected quite a few policy elements (or political demands) of the anti-liberal, anti-democratic swing-back in East Central Europe: some can be classified as conservative (e. g. anti-abortion, anti-"gender" vs tolerance), some nationalist (e. g. unilateralist foreign policy, national identity vs human rights), others socialist (e. g. demands for reducing inequalities vs „neoliberalism"). (Rupnik, 2007)

as neither liberalism nor nationalism, but the balance of the four main moderate ideologies.

References

Ágh, A. (2015). *The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System. From Democratic Chaos to Electoral Autocracy. Südosteuropa 63(2), pp.* 201-222.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.

Antal, A. (2019). Democracy in Hungary The Alliance of State Autocracy and Neoliberal Capitalism. *Public Seminar. www.publicseminar.org/2019/04/democracy-in-hungary-2/ Accessed: 01-05-2025.*

Appel, H., & Orenstein, M. (2018). *From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge University Press.

Aslanidis, P. (2015). Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective. *Political Studies*, *64*(1_suppl):88–104. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12224

Békés, M. (2021). Geopolitikai feszültséget importál az ellenzék [The opposition imports geopolitical tensions]. *XXI. Század Intézet. Accessed: 01-05-2025.*

Berend, T. I. (2020). *A Century of Populist Demagogues: Eighteen European Portraits, 1918–2018*. CEU Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633863343

Bibó, I. (1946). The Miseries of East European Small States. In Dénes, I. Z., editor, *The art of peacemaking: political essays by István Bibó*, pages 130–180. Yale University Press.

Bobbio, N. (1996). *Left and Right. The Significance of a Political Distinction*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bohle, D., & Greskovits, B. (2018). Politicising embedded neoliberalism: continuity and change in Hungary's development model. *West European Politics*, *42*(5):1069–1093. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1511958

Bozóki, A. (2012). The Transition from Liberal Democracy: The Political Crisis in Hungary. Mediations 26(1-2) (Summer 2012), 29-52. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-transition-from-liberal-democracy.

Brubaker, R. (2017). Why populism? *Theory and Society, 46, 357—385.*https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7 Accessed: 02-05-2025.

Buzogány, A., & Varga, M. (2018). The ideational foundations of the illiberal backlash in Central and Eastern Europe: the case of Hungary. *Review of International Political Economy*, *25*(6):811–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2018.1543718

Carothers, T., & Hartnett, B. (2024). Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *35*(3):24–37. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2024.a930425

Casal Bértoa, F., & Rama, J. (2021). The Antiestablishment Challenge. *Journal of Democracy32*, (1):37–51. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0014

Committee on Civil Liberties and Justice and Home Affairs (2022). Interim Report on the proposal for a Council decision determining, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded. *European Parliament*.

Csepeli, G. (2017). *The Ideological Patchwork of the Mafia State. In B. Magyar & J. Vásárhelyi (Eds.), Twenty-Five Sides of a Post-Communist Mafia State. CEU Press. pp.* 27-40.

Dai, Y., & Kustov, A. (2022). When Do Politicians Use Populist Rhetoric? Populism as a

Campaign Gamble. *Political Communication*, *39*(3):383–404. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2025505

Diamond, L. (2019). The Road to Digital Unfreedom: The Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism. *Journal of Democracy30*, (1):20–24. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0001

Fodor, G. G., & Kern, T. (2009). *The crisis of the regime change. Századvég Kiadó. pp*. 119-140.

Freeden, M. (1998). *Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?* Political Studies XLVI.

Freire, A. (2006). Bringing Social Identities Back In: The Social Anchors of Left-Right Orientation in Western Europe. *International Political Science Review*, *27*(4):359–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512106067358

Gerőcs, T. (2021). *Magyarország függő fejlődése: Függőség és felzárkózás globális történeti perspektívában*. Napvilág Kiadó, Helyzet Műhely Könyvek.

Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021). The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *32*(4):27–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0050

Halmai, G. (2024). From Liberal Democracy to Illiberal Populist Autocracy: Possible Reasons for Hungary's Autocratization. *Hague J Rule Law*, *16*:439–463. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-024-00231-6

Hayek, F. (1960). Why I Am Not a Conservative In F. Hayek. *The Constitution of Liberty.* The University of Chicago Press.

Heywood A., . (2012). Political Ideologies: An Introduction. Palgrave.

Human Rights House Foundation (n.d.). (2017. November). *Resisting ill democracies in Europe. Understanding the playbook of illiberal governments to better resist them: A case-study of Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Serbia*. Human Rights House Foundation Oslo and Geneva, Human Rights House Zagreb.

Kapelner, Z. Anti-immigrant backlash: the Democratic Dilemma for immigration policy.CMS12, . (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00370-7

Kis, J. (2013). Az összetorlódott idő – Második nekirugaszkodás [Congested time – Second attempt]. *Beszélő. Accessed: 11-10-2024*.

Kolakowski, L. (1978). How to Be a Conservative Liberal Socialist. *Encounter, Accessed: 2-05-2025*.

Kornai, J. (2011). Számvetés [The Account]. *Népszabadság*.

Kornai, J. (2015). Hungary's U-Turn. *Capitalism and Society*, *10*(1).

Krastev, I. (2018). Central Europe is a lesson to liberals: don't be anti-nationalist. *The Guardian. Accessed: 09-10-2024*.

Krekó, P., & Enyedi, Z. (2018). Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism. *Journal of Democracy*, *29*(3):39–51. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0043

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1981). *Metaphors we live by: With a new afterword. Univ.* of Chicago Press.

Lánczi, A. (2015). Viccpártok színvonalán áll az ellenzék [The opposition is at the level of satirical parties]. *Magyar idők Accessed: 12-10-2024*.

Magyar, B. (2016). *Post-Communist Mafia State. The Case of Hungary*. CEU Press in association with Noran Libro.

Magyar, B., & Madlovics, B. (2020). *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes: A Conceptual Framework*. CEU Press.

Nesporova, A. (2002). Why unemployment remains so high in Central and Eastern Europe. Employment paper 43. International Labour Office, Geneva https://www.ilo.org/media/305646/download Accessed: 12-10-2024.

Országgyűlés (n.d.). (2010, May 22) A Nemzeti Együttműködés Programja [Program of the National Cooperation]. http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/00047/00047.pdf Accessed: 01-05-2025.

Perdiák J (n.d.). Köszöntő. Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja [Hungarian Justice and Life Party] miép.hu.

Polanyi, K., Stiglitz, J. E., & Block, F. L. (2010). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (2. *Beacon paperback ed.*, [*reprinted*]). Beacon Press.

Rainer, M. J. (2020). *1989: a rendszerváltás régi fogalma és újabb jelentései* [*1989: the old concept of regime change and its new meanings*], *In: Rainer, M. János (szerk.) Ezerkilencszáznyolcvankilenc, Kronosz Kiadó; 1956-os Intézet Alapítvány (2020) pp.* 17-50.

Rau, E. G., & Stokes, S. (2025). Income inequality and the erosion of democracy in the twenty-first century, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 122 (1) e2422543121, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422543121

Rauschenberger, P (n.d.). Arccal a sárban – Hozzászólás Kis János cikkéhez a köztársaság bukásáról [Face in the mud – Comment to the article of János Kis on the defeat of the republic]. *Beszélő*http://beszelo.c3.hu/onlinecikk/arccal-a-sarban-—-hozzaszolas-kis-janos-cikkehez-a-koztarsasag-bukasarol Accessed: 11-10-2024.

Rupnik, J. (2007). Populism in Eastern Central Europe. *Eurozine, Accessed: 02-05-2025.*

Scheiring, G (n.d.). (2015. August 25-28) The Political Economy of De-Democratization in Hungary. [Paper presentation] 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Prague, Czechia.

Schweitzer, A. (2014a). The Revolving Door. Seven Reasons for Hungary's Autocratic Turn. https://www.academia.edu/6210244/The_Revolving_Door_Seven_Reasons_for_Hungarys_Autocratic_Turn Accessed: 09-10-2024.

Schweitzer, A. (2014b). Factors that made Hungary a borderline democracy (and are likely to stay). *Hungarian Spectrum.* https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/andras-schweitzer-factors-that-made-hungary-a-borderline-democracy-and-are-likely-to-stay/ Accessed: 09-10-2024.

Schweitzer, A. (2014c). *Tengelytörés. A jobb- és a baloldal fogalmi problémáihoz.* [*Broken Axes. On the Conceptual Problems of Left and Right*]. *In Rainer M., J. (szerk./ed.) Búvópatakok – Mélyfúrások.* [*Underground Streams – Deep-drillings*] *1956-os Intézet, XX. évkönyv. Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár – 1956-os Intézet Alapítvány. pp.* 13-54.

Schweitzer, A. (2020). Eurologus. *A gazdasági átmenet kérdőjelei a rendszerváltás idején* [*Questions of the economic transtition at the time of regime chage*], *Drótvágó series, part 3.*

Schweitzer, A. (2023). Round-trip on the Czech lands. The Origins of a Liberal Right Revolution. In Rainer, J., editor, *Underground Streams – National-Conservatives After the WW II in Communist Hungary and Eastern Europe*. CEU Press.

Snyder, T. (2017). *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. The Bodley Head.

Szalai, E. (2009). Eltorzult magyar alkat, zsákutcás magyar liberalizmus. [*Distorted Hungarian make-up, dead-end Hungarian liberalism*]. *In Szalai, E. (2012). Globális válság—Magyar válság—Alternatívák.* [*Global crisis – Hungarian crisis – Alternatives*] *L' Harmattan.*

Szelényi, Z. (2023). *Szétzilált ország: Hogyan bontotta le Orbán Viktor a demokráciát?* Szelényi, Zsuzsanna (2022). Tainted democracy: Viktor Orbán and the subversion of Hungary. Hurst & Company.], HVG Könyvek. [English version.

Trencsényi and Balázs (2017). *What Should I Call You? The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy in a Regional Interpretative Framework. In B. Magyar & J. Vásárhelyi (Eds.), Twenty-Five Sides of a Post-Communist Mafia State. CEU Press. pp.* 3-26.

TSZA (2008, September 3.) (n.d.). 1993: magánember-miniszterekkel temetik újra Horthy Miklóst. Index.https://index.hu/belfold/tegnapiujsag/2008/09/03/1993_maganember_miniszterekkel_temetik_ujra_horthy_miklost/?token=e0870261ba9433751ddcb2603081e8bd Accessed: 02-05-2025.

V-Dem Institute (2020). Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows. *Democracy Report*, *2020*.