

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

**UNDERSTANDING HYBRID REGIMES: HOW ARE  
THEY MAINTAINED AND OPERATED?**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Supervisor: Bartha Attila, PhD

Hajnal Áron

Budapest, 2025

Understanding hybrid regimes: How are they maintained and operated?

Hajnal Áron

Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science

Supervisor: Bartha Attila, PhD

Hajnal Áron ©

Corvinus University of Budapest  
Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science  
Political Science Track

Understanding hybrid regimes: How are they maintained and operated?

Article-based doctoral dissertation

Hajnal Áron

Budapest, 2025

## CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                           |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figures.....                                                                                                              | 8  |
| Tables.....                                                                                                               | 10 |
| Abstracts of the articles in the dissertation .....                                                                       | 12 |
| 1 Introduction.....                                                                                                       | 15 |
| 1.1 An introduction to the chapter.....                                                                                   | 15 |
| 1.2 General conceptual framework .....                                                                                    | 18 |
| 1.2.1 Democracy and autocracy .....                                                                                       | 18 |
| 1.2.2 Hybrid regimes.....                                                                                                 | 20 |
| 1.2.3 Autocratization.....                                                                                                | 21 |
| 1.2.4 Corruption .....                                                                                                    | 22 |
| 1.3 The global crisis of democracy .....                                                                                  | 23 |
| 1.4 Corruption, autocratization, and hybrid regimes.....                                                                  | 28 |
| 1.5 An overview of the constituent articles.....                                                                          | 31 |
| 2 Article I: Popular autocrats: why do voters support Viktor Orbán’s government in Hungary? A quantitative analysis ..... | 33 |
| 2.1 Introduction.....                                                                                                     | 34 |
| 2.2 Defining authoritarian populism .....                                                                                 | 36 |
| 2.3 Factors influencing support for authoritarian populist regimes: Theory, evidence, and hypotheses .....                | 38 |
| 2.3.1 Economic and performance voting .....                                                                               | 38 |
| 2.3.2 Political beliefs: policy congruence, ideology, and attitudes.....                                                  | 39 |
| 2.3.3 Basic human values.....                                                                                             | 40 |
| 2.4 The Hungarian case.....                                                                                               | 41 |
| 2.5 Data, hypotheses, and methods .....                                                                                   | 43 |
| 2.5.1 Hypotheses and operationalization .....                                                                             | 44 |

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                     |    |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 2.6    | Methods.....                                                                                                                                                                        | 48 |
| 2.7    | Empirical analysis .....                                                                                                                                                            | 49 |
| 2.7.1  | Egotropic voting.....                                                                                                                                                               | 49 |
| 2.7.2  | Sociotropic and performance voting, political beliefs, and values .....                                                                                                             | 52 |
| 2.8    | Discussion .....                                                                                                                                                                    | 55 |
| 2.9    | Summary and limitations .....                                                                                                                                                       | 57 |
| 2.10   | Appendix (Article I).....                                                                                                                                                           | 58 |
| 2.10.1 | Calculation of change in PIT rates .....                                                                                                                                            | 58 |
| 2.10.2 | The Hungarian tax reform.....                                                                                                                                                       | 60 |
| 2.10.3 | Descriptive statistics of change in PIT rates .....                                                                                                                                 | 61 |
| 3      | Article II: Rational autocrats? Drivers of corruption patterns in competitive authoritarian regimes: towards an explanatory framework with empirical applications from Hungary..... | 62 |
| 3.1    | Introduction.....                                                                                                                                                                   | 63 |
| 3.2    | Conceptual and theoretical review .....                                                                                                                                             | 65 |
| 3.2.1  | Corruption: quantitative or qualitative differences? .....                                                                                                                          | 65 |
| 3.2.2  | Regime types.....                                                                                                                                                                   | 65 |
| 3.2.3  | Corruption in competitive authoritarian settings.....                                                                                                                               | 66 |
| 3.3    | Conceptualising corruption types and patterns .....                                                                                                                                 | 67 |
| 3.4    | Net gains from corruption .....                                                                                                                                                     | 69 |
| 3.4.1  | Accountability costs.....                                                                                                                                                           | 69 |
| 3.4.2  | Transaction costs.....                                                                                                                                                              | 72 |
| 3.4.3  | Political benefits.....                                                                                                                                                             | 73 |
| 3.5    | The framework in practice: two cases from Hungary .....                                                                                                                             | 75 |
| 3.6    | Discussion .....                                                                                                                                                                    | 81 |
| 3.7    | Summary and conclusions .....                                                                                                                                                       | 83 |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 4     | Article III: The anatomy of authoritarianism: A conceptual framework and taxonomy of authoritarian government practices (AGPs) with empirical applications from Central and Eastern Europe..... | 84  |
| 4.1   | Introduction.....                                                                                                                                                                               | 85  |
| 4.2   | Studying contemporary authoritarianism.....                                                                                                                                                     | 86  |
| 4.3   | The need for a new conceptual apparatus .....                                                                                                                                                   | 88  |
| 4.4   | Authoritarian governance practices: A conceptual framework.....                                                                                                                                 | 90  |
| 4.4.1 | The actors .....                                                                                                                                                                                | 91  |
| 4.4.2 | Accountability sabotage.....                                                                                                                                                                    | 91  |
| 4.4.3 | Practices .....                                                                                                                                                                                 | 92  |
| 4.4.4 | Related phenomena not qualifying as AGP .....                                                                                                                                                   | 94  |
| 4.5   | Constructing a taxonomy of AGPs .....                                                                                                                                                           | 95  |
| 4.5.1 | Case selection.....                                                                                                                                                                             | 96  |
| 4.5.2 | Data .....                                                                                                                                                                                      | 97  |
| 4.5.3 | Coding.....                                                                                                                                                                                     | 98  |
| 4.5.4 | Illustrative Analysis of AGPs .....                                                                                                                                                             | 98  |
| 4.6   | A taxonomy of AGPs and illustrative analysis of their prevalence in V4 countries (2017-2022).....                                                                                               | 99  |
| 4.7   | Concluding remarks .....                                                                                                                                                                        | 105 |
| 5     | Article IV: Varieties of corruption? A typology of country-level corruption patterns using fuzzy set ideal type analysis (FSITA) .....                                                          | 108 |
| 5.1   | Introduction.....                                                                                                                                                                               | 109 |
| 5.2   | FSITA in a nutshell .....                                                                                                                                                                       | 111 |
| 5.3   | Dimensions of the typology .....                                                                                                                                                                | 111 |
| 5.4   | Ideal types .....                                                                                                                                                                               | 113 |
| 5.5   | Operationalization and calibration of dimensions.....                                                                                                                                           | 115 |
| 5.5.1 | Power of the state (POS).....                                                                                                                                                                   | 116 |
| 5.5.2 | Societal control over corruption (SOC) .....                                                                                                                                                    | 118 |

|       |                                                                                                                                                        |     |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5.5.3 | Democratic Institutions (DEM) .....                                                                                                                    | 120 |
| 5.6   | Findings.....                                                                                                                                          | 121 |
| 5.6.1 | IT1—Limited misconduct in developed countries.....                                                                                                     | 123 |
| 5.6.2 | IT2—Partial State capture.....                                                                                                                         | 124 |
| 5.6.3 | IT3—Autocratic patrimonialism.....                                                                                                                     | 125 |
| 5.6.4 | IT4—Dispersed and unconstrained corruption. ....                                                                                                       | 126 |
| 5.7   | Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                       | 127 |
| 5.8   | Appendix .....                                                                                                                                         | 129 |
| 6     | Article V: Trials and Errors: Limitations of Anti-Corruption and Rule-of-Law Policies in the Context of Systemic Corruption. The Case of Hungary ..... | 131 |
| 6.1   | Introduction.....                                                                                                                                      | 132 |
| 6.2   | Literature review .....                                                                                                                                | 133 |
| 6.2.1 | Systemic corruption and state capture .....                                                                                                            | 133 |
| 6.2.2 | Approaches to anti-corruption .....                                                                                                                    | 134 |
| 6.2.3 | EU policies vis-à-vis autocratization and systemic corruption.....                                                                                     | 136 |
| 6.3   | Case selection.....                                                                                                                                    | 136 |
| 6.4   | Data and methods.....                                                                                                                                  | 139 |
| 6.5   | Empirical analysis .....                                                                                                                               | 140 |
| 6.5.1 | Judicial independence .....                                                                                                                            | 140 |
| 6.5.2 | Public procurement system .....                                                                                                                        | 142 |
| 6.5.3 | Transparency and corruption prevention .....                                                                                                           | 143 |
| 6.5.4 | New anti-corruption institutions .....                                                                                                                 | 145 |
| 6.5.5 | Anti-corruption strategies.....                                                                                                                        | 146 |
| 6.5.6 | Reducing EU funds fraud.....                                                                                                                           | 147 |
| 6.6   | Discussion .....                                                                                                                                       | 148 |
| 6.7   | Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                       | 150 |
| 7     | Concluding remarks to the dissertation.....                                                                                                            | 151 |



|     |                                                                      |     |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 7.1 | Synthesis of the constituent articles .....                          | 151 |
| 7.2 | Are hybrid regimes stable?.....                                      | 155 |
| 7.3 | How to study hybrid regimes? .....                                   | 156 |
| 8   | References .....                                                     | 158 |
| 9   | Full references of the constituent articles of the dissertation..... | 179 |

## FIGURES

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Figure 1-1.</b> The number of liberal democracies and other regime types globally and net regime transitions (1992-2023) Source: authors' work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). .....                                     | 16 |
| <b>Figure 1-2.</b> Number of articles about autocratization and hybrid regimes (1996-2024). Source: author's work, based on Web of Science. ....                                                                                                                              | 17 |
| <b>Figure 1-3.</b> Types of autocratization. Source: (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100). .                                                                                                                                                                                    | 22 |
| <b>Figure 1-4.</b> Evolution of regime types globally (1919-2023). Source: authors' work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). .....                                                                                              | 25 |
| <b>Figure 1-5.</b> Evolution of regime types in Europe (1919-2023). Source: authors' work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). .....                                                                                             | 25 |
| <b>Figure 1-6.</b> Association between political corruption and liberal democracy globally (1992). Source, author's work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019). .....                                                                                                   | 29 |
| <b>Figure 1-7.</b> Association between political corruption and liberal democracy globally (1991). Source: author's work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019). .....                                                                                                   | 30 |
| <b>Figure 1-8.</b> Average political corruption across regime types (1992 and 2023). Source, author's work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019) and RoW data (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). .....                                                          | 31 |
| <b>Figure 1-9.</b> The five constituent articles of the dissertation organized based on Easton's (1965) framework. Source: author's work. ....                                                                                                                                | 32 |
| <b>Figure 2-1.</b> Liberal democracy scores of selected countries and regions (1985–2022). Source: Varieties of Democracy Institute .....                                                                                                                                     | 43 |
| <b>Figure 2-2.</b> Coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals for Model 8 (scales of the variables on the left side). Source: author's calculations .....                                                                                                            | 55 |
| <b>Figure 3-1.</b> Illustrative examples of corruption patterns. Octagons represent types of corruption (e.g., bribery in police, clientelism in public procurement), and darker shades indicate that the given type of corruption is more common. Source: created by author. | 68 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Figure 3-2.</b> Examples of corruption types with high or low vertical transaction costs.<br>Source: created by author.....                                                                                                  | 73  |
| <b>Figure 3-3.</b> Summary of the explanatory framework. Source: created by author.....                                                                                                                                         | 75  |
| <b>Figure 4-1.</b> Liberal democracy scores in the V4 countries between 1990 and 2023.<br>Source: Authors’ work, based on data from the V-dem institute.....                                                                    | 97  |
| <b>Figure 4-2.</b> Number of AGP instances in V4 countries between 2017 and 2022. Source:<br>Authors’ work. ....                                                                                                                | 104 |
| <b>Table 4-3.</b> Number of AGP instances per mode of accountability sabotage in Hungary<br>from 2017 to 2022. Note: see Table X for a description of the four modes of accountability<br>sabotage. Source: Authors’ work. .... | 105 |
| <b>Figure 5-1.</b> Property cube. Notes: “~”: negation; “*”: logical “and”. Source: Authors’<br>construction. ....                                                                                                              | 115 |
| <b>Figure 5-2.</b> Enhanced XY plot of STAB and STATCAP (the constituent sets of POS).<br>Note: values on the axes represent MSs. Source: Authors’ construction. ....                                                           | 118 |
| <b>Figure 5-3.</b> Enhanced XY plot of PART and PERM (the constituent sets of SOC). Note:<br>values on the axes represent MSs. Source: Authors’ construction. ....                                                              | 120 |
| <b>Figure 5-4 .</b> Results of the classification. Source: Authors’ construction, created with<br>mapchart.net. ....                                                                                                            | 122 |
| <b>Figure 6-1.</b> Political corruption (from least corrupt-0 to most corrupt-1) in Central and<br>Eastern European MSs in 2010 and 2023. Source: authors’ work, based on V-dem data.<br>.....                                  | 138 |

## TABLES

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Table 2-1.</b> Description of the variables. Source:author’s work, based on ESS database.<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 48  |
| <b>Table 2-2.</b> Parameter estimates for egotropic voting. Source: author’s calculations. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 51  |
| <b>Table 2-3.</b> Parameter estimates for sociotropic and performance voting, political beliefs,<br>and values voting). Source: author’s calculations.....                                                                                                                                                         | 54  |
| <b>Table 2-4.</b> The most important aspects of the Hungarian PIT system in selected year.<br>Source: author’s compilation based on national legislation.....                                                                                                                                                      | 61  |
| <b>Table 2-5.</b> Descriptive statistics of the variable $\Delta\text{PIT}(t-1)$ . Source: author’s calculations,<br>based on ESS data .....                                                                                                                                                                       | 61  |
| <b>Table 2-6.</b> Descriptive statistics of the variable $\Delta\text{PIT}(t-2)$ . Source: author’s calculations,<br>based on ESS data .....                                                                                                                                                                       | 61  |
| <b>Table 3-1.</b> The four factors influencing accountability costs of corruption types. Source:<br>created by author. ....                                                                                                                                                                                        | 71  |
| <b>Table 3-2.</b> Analysis of the two cases on the basis of the presented framework. Source:<br>created by author. ....                                                                                                                                                                                            | 80  |
| <b>Table 3-3.</b> Summary of costs and benefits associated with the two cases (Legend: +:<br>limited/no benefits; ++: moderate benefits; +++: substantive benefits; \$: limited/no costs;<br>\$\$: moderate costs; \$\$\$: substantive costs). Source: created by author. ....                                     | 81  |
| <b>Table 4-1.</b> Modes of accountability sabotage. Source: Authors’ work. <i>Notes: Two-two<br/>cells were merged, as * limiting information undermines all three types of accountability,<br/>discerning them is irrelevant/impossible; ** actors of diagonal accountability cannot<br/>pass judgment.</i> ..... | 92  |
| <b>Table 4-2.</b> Typology of AGPs and the number of AGP instances identified in the V4<br>countries between 2017 and 2022. <i>Notes: * the four modes of accountability sabotage are<br/>described in Section 4.2 and presented in Table 1. Source: authors’ work.</i> .....                                      | 102 |
| <b>Table 5-1.</b> Property space. Notes: “~”: negation; “+”: logical “or”. Source: Authors’<br>construction. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 115 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Table 5-2.</b> Descriptive statistics and anchors for calibration of raw variables used to operationalize STATCAP and STAB (the constituent sets of POS). Source: Authors' construction. ....                                                                                                                                          | 117 |
| <b>Table 5-3.</b> Descriptive statistics and anchors for calibration of raw variables used to operationalize PERM and PART (the constituent sets of SOC). Source: Authors' construction. ....                                                                                                                                             | 120 |
| <b>Table 5-4.</b> Operationalization of DEM based on Regimes of the World data. Source: Authors' construction based on Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018, 63). ....                                                                                                                                                                 | 121 |
| <b>Table 5-5.</b> Results of the classification. Source: Authors' construction. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 123 |
| <b>Table 5-6.</b> Fuzzy MSs of countries in the dimensions (sets) of the typology and ITs. Notes: the highest MSs (pertaining to the IT a country belongs to) are marked in bold. The MSs in IT4 are the maximum across the MSs pertaining to the four different configurations of IT4 (see Table 1). Source: Authors' construction. .... | 130 |
| <b>Table 6-1.</b> Assessment criteria. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 139 |
| <b>Table 6-2.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at strengthening judicial independence. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 141 |
| <b>Table 6-3.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at reducing corruption in public procurement. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 142 |
| <b>Table 6-4.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at enhancing transparency and corruption prevention. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 144 |
| <b>Table 6-5.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at establishing new anti-corruption institutions. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 145 |
| <b>Table 6-6.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at reinforcing anti-corruption strategies and legal provisions. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                            | 146 |
| <b>Table 6-7.</b> Assessment of the measures aimed at reducing corruption in the distribution of EU funds. Source: Authors' work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 147 |
| <b>Table 7-1.</b> Overview of the constituent articles. Source: author's work. ....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 154 |

## ABSTRACTS OF THE ARTICLES IN THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation consists of five articles that examine different aspects of hybrid regimes. Their titles, abstracts, and full references are provided below.

**Article I.** Hajnal, Á. (2025) ‘Popular Autocrats: Why Do Voters Support Viktor Orbán’s Government in Hungary? A Quantitative Analysis’, *Public Choice*, 202(1), pp. 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-024-01175-z>.

Authoritarian populism has become an increasingly prevalent subtype of hybrid regime and is characterized by weakened democratic institutions and a leader who relies on populist appeals. Authoritarian populist regimes limit citizens’ freedom, undermine accountability and the rule of law, and are likely to be more corrupt than democratic regimes. Nevertheless, certain authoritarian populist regimes appear to enjoy broad popular support. Based on the European Social Survey database and my calculations of respondents’ personal income tax rates, I investigate the factors that influenced voters’ support for Viktor Orbán’s government in Hungary from 2010 to 2020, which may be considered an exemplary case of an autocratic populist regime. The analysis shows that voters’ support for the government was influenced by their perceptions of the economy and government performance, political beliefs (i.e., policy congruence and ideology), and basic human values (i.e., self-transcendence and conservation). By contrast, changes in voters’ individual economic conditions were not found to be associated with their support for the government. The findings indicate that, in addition to explanations of government support that specifically focus on hybrid regimes, economic voting theory, which originated from and has typically been applied in democratic contexts, also provides viable explanations for understanding support for authoritarian populist regimes. More broadly, the findings also lend support to the altruistic and expressive voter hypotheses.

**Article II.** Hajnal, Á. (2025) ‘Rational Autocrats? Drivers of Corruption Patterns in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: Towards an Explanatory Framework with Empirical Applications from Hungary’, *European Political Science*, January. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y>

Competitive authoritarianism, a specific type of hybrid regime, is gaining ground globally. Corruption is particularly prevalent in these contexts as regimes utilize it to consolidate their power. However, some competitive authoritarian regimes also take

significant measures to curb certain types of corruption. The present article posits that competitive authoritarian regimes, acting as rational utility-maximizing actors, curb or enhance corruption types based on the net costs and benefits—that is, net gains—they yield for the regime. To elucidate the factors influencing net gains an explanatory framework is presented. Its three constituent elements are accountability costs, transaction costs and political benefits. The empirical applicability of the framework is demonstrated with case studies of two corruption types (informal payments in healthcare and clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions) in Hungary.

**Article III.** Hajnal, Á. and Hajnal, G. (2025) ‘The Anatomy of Authoritarianism: A Conceptual Framework and Taxonomy of Authoritarian Government Practices (AGPs) with Empirical Applications from Central and Eastern Europe’. Working Paper. Corvinus University of Budapest.

Authoritarianism is on the rise globally, often advancing gradually and subtly under democratically elected leaders who seek to maintain a democratic façade. This challenges dominant structuralist theories of (de-)democratization, which tend to focus on legal-institutional changes at the country level. Additionally, existing theoretical frameworks and empirical strategies struggle to capture anti-democratic dynamics within democracies. To address these limitations, we propose shifting the unit of analysis to the meso, “practice” level and introduce the concept of authoritarian governance practices (AGPs), defined as *purposive practices aimed at extending and entrenching the power holders’ authority by sabotaging their accountability*. Based on an effort to conceptualize and operationalize AGPs and relying on explorative empirical work focusing on the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia from 2017 to 2022, we constructed mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive taxonomy of AGPs with 12 AGP types and conducted an illustrative empirical analysis of AGPs in the four countries. The conceptual apparatus and taxonomy enable the identification of empirical instances of AGPs unambiguously, which, along with the taxonomy, allows for systematic comparative work about the phenomenon.

**Article IV.** Hajnal, Á., Bartha, A. and Martin, J.P. (2025) ‘Varieties of corruption? A typology of country-level corruption patterns using fuzzy-set ideal type analysis’, *Political Studies Review*. Epub ahead of print 20 May. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299251335227>.

Broadly applied unidimensional corruption indices fail to grasp important qualitative differences between various manifestations of corruption, creating substantive obstacles in corruption research. Against this background, the present article develops a typology of country-level corruption patterns comprising four Weberian ideal types (ITs) and assigns countries to ITs based on the fuzzy set ideal type analysis (FSITA) method. The typology focuses on formal and informal institutions that influence emerging corruption patterns rather than tangible properties of corruption. The four ITs are Limited misconduct in developed countries, Partial state capture, Autocratic patrimonialism, and Dispersed and unconstrained corruption. The analysis, comprising a total of 83 countries globally, offers novel insights into corruption patterns and their underlying mechanisms, demonstrates the applicability of the FSITA method in the context of corruption research, and offers policy pointers in the field of anti-corruption.

**Article V.** Martin, J.P. and Hajnal, Á. (2025) *Trials and errors: Limitations of anti-corruption and rule-of-law policies in the context of systemic corruption. The case of Hungary*. Working paper (in review at *Public Integrity*).

Systemic corruption yields severe adverse political and socioeconomic consequences. Although anti-corruption has been a top priority on the agenda of international organizations and donors, evidence is inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption approaches. In particular, it is unclear whether a series of incremental reforms can be effective, or only large-scale, sudden, and in-depth (i.e., “big bang”) reforms can tackle systemic corruption. Contributing to this debate, this research assessed 27 anti-corruption and rule-of-law measures prescribed by the European Union (EU) for Hungary in the frame of “conditionality regimes”, aimed at curbing systemic corruption and rule-of-law abuses. The reform package—introduced in 2022 after a decade of inaction of the EU vis-a-vis democratic backsliding and systemic corruption—was enforced by withholding substantial EU funds from Hungary and constitutes an extreme case of incremental anti-corruption reforms. Based on the measures implemented between 2022 and 2024, the analysis found that while the reforms had some positive impact and may lead to the erosion of the autocratic Orbán regime, they failed to impede systemic corruption. In a broader sense, the findings indicate that incremental anti-corruption reforms, while not futile, are insufficient to address the roots of systemic corruption effectively.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 An introduction to the chapter

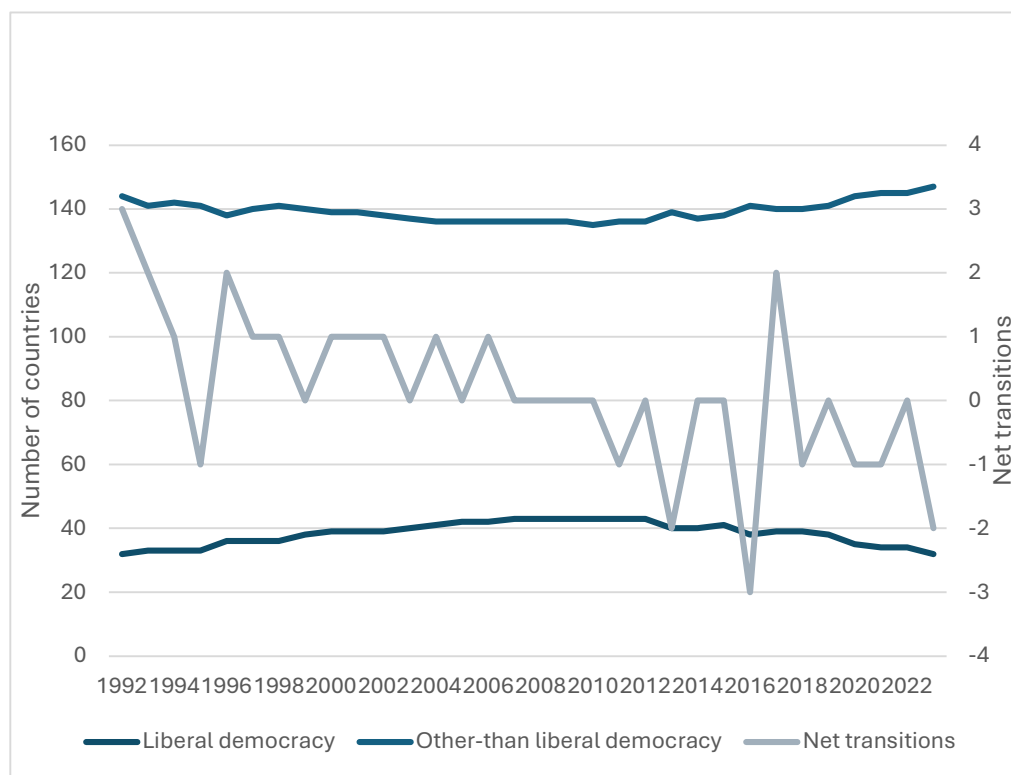
As of drafting these lines in early 2025, Donald Trump was commencing his second term as president of the United States (US). Although he had been quite clear about his intentions during the run-off for the presidency, his actions and statements have set off global shockwaves nonetheless. Among the various domains in which his policies have represented major shifts relative to what had been considered “normal” for decades, or even centuries—including foreign policy, administrative reforms, and trade policy—his statements and actions undermining the very foundations of democracy stand out still.

In his first days of office, Trump pardoned the rioters who stormed the Capitol on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 in a failed attempt to overturn the election results Trump had claimed were rigged (*The Economist* 2025). While his true intentions about ending the war in Ukraine are still unknown, in contrast with the consistent condemnation by the previous administration and allies, he praised the overly authoritarian Russian president Vladimir Putin as “very smart” and “cunning” while calling Ukraine’s democratically elected president Vladimir Zelensky a “dictator” (*The New York Times* 2025). Finally, defying both Constitutional amendments and centuries of norms, he has begun an unprecedented wave of executive aggrandizement as he issued a total of 72 presidential executive orders during his first 100 days in office (nearly double of any recent president’s record), purged the bureaucracy and appointed loyalists to key positions, halted various programs authorized by the Congress, and claimed he would take on critical media by a “nice new law” (*The Economist* 2025; *The Guardian* 2025).

President Trump’s latest assault on democratic order is largely consequential in the US and elsewhere, yet it is merely the tip of the iceberg. The extensive debates about the conceptualization and operationalization of democracy notwithstanding, it is clear that democracy is on the retreat worldwide (Diamond 2021; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). While the trend has primarily affected countries outside the “democratic core” of Western polities, there are important cases of similar processes in the latter group of countries, including the US, thought to be the beacon of democracy.

The figure below provides a preliminary insight into these trends. For roughly a decade following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the number of liberal democracies grew,

whereas the number of other regimes—including autocracies and hybrid regimes (i.e., an encompassing term used to describe various regimes mixing autocratic and democratic traits) decreased. However, since the mid-2000s, the trend has reversed as the number of liberal democracies declined steadily and autocratic transitions outnumbered democratic transitions almost every year.

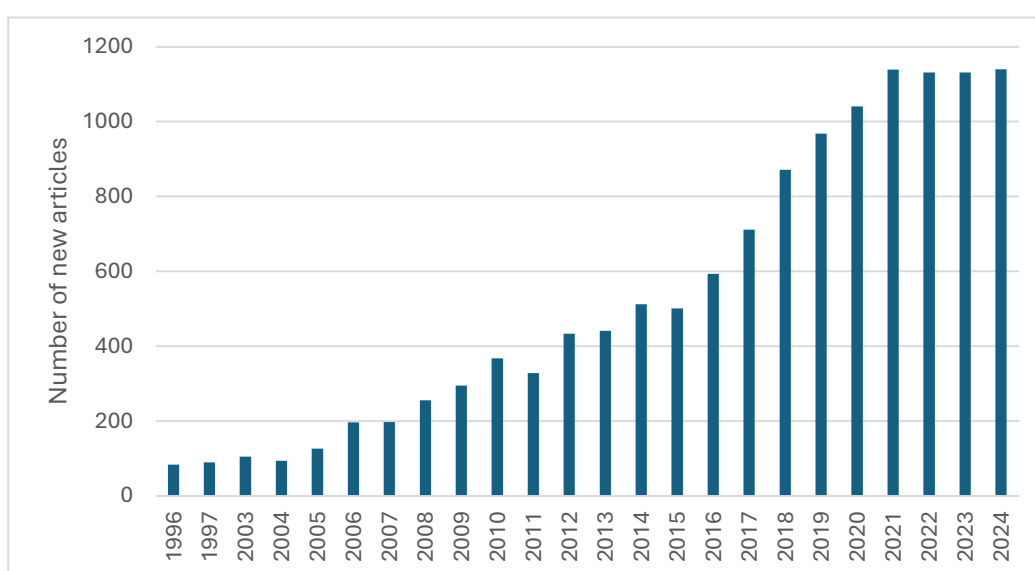


**Figure 1-1.** The number of liberal democracies and other regime types globally and net regime transitions (1992-2023) Source: authors’ work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018).

While there have been periods of autocratization before, the current crisis of democracy—or, as it is often called, the “third wave of autocratization (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019)—has some important characteristics setting it apart from previous ones. Likewise, while autocracies have always been around throughout human history, hybrid regimes that are gaining ground today systematically differ from “classical” autocracies. First, current episodes of autocratization tend to be subtle and gradual. Coups and overt election frauds are much less frequent than they used to be in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bermeo 2016). Rather, in the majority of cases, democratically elected politicians purposefully dismantle democratic institutions, sometimes with relatively broad popular support (Diamond 2021). Second, the emerging hybrid regimes tend to maintain a democratic façade, as they claim to be the true champions of the people (Guriev and Treisman 2022). While these

regimes limit citizens' freedoms and political rights, they typically refrain from overt repression and violence. These aspects have important implications and pose significant challenges to research (I will come back to this point later).

The global crisis of democracy has also become a pivotal issue in public and political discourse in many countries over the past years. In a similar vein, it has become one of the most researched topics in the social sciences and, in particular, in political science. As Figure 2 shows, the volume of research articles about autocratization and emerging autocratic/hybrid regimes has increased since the mid-2000s (mirroring the process of autocratization itself) at a stunning pace: in 20 years from 2003 to 2023, the number of new articles grew tenfold.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1-2.** Number of articles about autocratization and hybrid regimes (1996-2024). Source: author's work, based on Web of Science.

In spite of the large volume of research conducted in this area, much remains to be explored. *The overarching ambition of the present dissertation is to contribute to this body of knowledge by investigating how different subtypes of hybrid regimes garner popular support, operate, produce policy outputs, and respond to pro-democratic pressures.* As will be argued, corruption is closely related to autocratization as it is both a factor and an outcome of the latter and plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of emerging hybrid regimes. Therefore, the dissertation dedicates special attention to corruption in hybrid regimes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a Web of Science search on 5 March 2025, using a search expression with various terms with similar meanings and scanning the title, abstract, and keywords.

Before proceeding, it is important to discuss the purposes of the present introductory chapter. Unlike typical introductions to academic contributions, the present introduction does not aim to identify specific research gaps and discuss how the research addresses them, as these aspects are explained in detail in the introductions of the constituent articles. For similar reasons, the present chapter does not present the detailed conceptual frameworks of each article either. Instead, its purpose is to (i) provide a general introduction to the topic and (ii) organize the constituent articles to an encompassing framework elucidating the ways through which they contribute to the overarching research ambition.

In line with these caveats, the introductory chapter is organized as follows. In the next section, a general conceptual framework is presented, in which the most general concepts of the dissertation are discussed. This subchapter also aims to locate the various concepts describing different subtypes of hybrid regimes (also used in the constituent articles). This is followed by a general description of the global crisis of democracy. Then the role of corruption is autocratization and hybrid regimes is discussed. Finally, a general framework is presented to elucidate how the articles contribute to the overarching ambition of the dissertation.

## **1.2 General conceptual framework**

### **1.2.1 Democracy and autocracy**

To define hybrid regimes—that is, regimes that mix democratic and autocratic features—first, democracy and autocracy need to be defined. Originating from ancient Athens, the term democracy consists of *demos* and *kratos* (*people* and *rule* in Greek) and can be translated to “rule of the people”. Earlier, one-dimensional definitions in political science adopted a similar perspective and conceptualized democracy, focusing on the presence of institutionalized elections and representatives through which the citizenry can choose their leaders (e.g., Schmitter and Karl, 1991).

Conversely, mostly based on the work of Robert Dahl (1972), the multi-dimensional approach to democracy posits that in addition to elections, democracies are characterized by additional features, such as media freedom, equal political rights, and a right to form political and other organizations. While different authors define slightly different elements as requisites for democracy (e.g., Diamond 1999; Merkel 2004) multi-

dimensional conceptualizations all adopt a broad understanding of democracy encompassing various features.

These different approaches to democracy can be linked to underlying core principles based on which political regimes are organized, and which may prevent a misuse of the immense powers possessed by modern states (with the Hobbesian term, Leviathans): these are democracy, liberalism, and republicanism (O'Donnell, 1998). Originating from ancient Athens, the democratic principle focuses on the citizenry's ability to choose their leaders and express their opinions. The liberal principle—originating from France and England during the Enlightenment and largely influenced by the works of Montesquieu and Locke—emphasizes individual liberties which cannot be encroached by any power. Finally, conceived in Ancient Rome, the republican principle posits that the discharge of public duties should be subjected to law and devoted to the service of the public interest (O'Donnell, 1998). The one-dimensional understanding of democracies focuses on the democratic principles. Conversely, multi-dimensional approaches to democracy recognize the need for further constraints on the state's power, and—in line with the liberal and republican principles—prescribe additional components that democracies must entail. (Closely related to these principles, Article III discusses the concept of accountability in detail.)

While it can be argued that the multi-dimensional approach to democracy risks concept stretching and the unidimensional has the merit of parsimony (for arguments supporting the unidimensional approach, see Schmitter and Karl, 1991), the articles in this dissertation—similarly to the vast majority of recent scholarship and the influential approach and database of the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-dem) (Lindberg et al. 2014)—adopt the multi-dimensional approach. Arguably, in the present historical period in which many regimes with clear authoritarian ambitions adhere to the democratic principle by allowing for competitive (although often not free and fair) elections while severely undermining other components emphasized by the multi-dimensional approach to democracy, thereby hallowing out democratic institutions and subverting constraints on their political power, the unidimensional approach would hinder the analysis of such regimes. Democracy, hence, is defined “as system of government in which power is exercised through regular, free, and fair elections; where all adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office; where freedoms of speech, press, and association are protected;

and where the rule of law ensures accountability and limits on power” (Diamond 1999, 10).

At the other end of the spectrum, the conceptualization of autocracy is less contested. Autocracy is most often defined negatively, that is, as a lack of democracy. However, not all elements of democracy (as defined by Diamond) must be (jointly) absent for a political regime to qualify as an autocrat, only the most pivotal one, namely, elections. Consequently, autocracy can be defined parsimoniously as “regimes in which leaders are not chosen through competitive elections” (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018, 2).

### **1.2.2 Hybrid regimes**

In between the two extremes, autocracies, and full-fledged democracies, are hybrid regimes. In light of the conceptualization of autocracies and democracies used in this dissertation (presented above), any regime that has competitive elections but misses any of the additional definitional elements of democracy (e.g., free media, freedom of association, rule of law, or equal political rights) qualifies as hybrid. Thus, hybrid regimes are defined as regimes that “combine democratic and autocratic elements in ways that systematically undermine political competition, participation, and accountability” (Wigell 2008, 230). Consequently, hybrid regimes are largely heterogeneous: as the wisdom of the opening line of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, enthusiastically cited by recent studies on autocratization, holds, “All happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”.

Consequently, terms used to describe various subtypes of hybrid regimes have been proliferating in social and political science research in recent years. It is beyond the scope of this brief discussion to review all or even the majority of these concepts. Rather, I focus on those types of hybrid regimes that appear in one or more of the constituent articles and clarify their similarities and differences.

The Regimes of the World (RoW) classification—applied in Article IV—is a useful starting point for mapping the subtypes of hybrid regimes. Developed by Lührmann et al. (2018) and based on V-dem data, the RoW classification discerns four types of regimes. Liberal democracies (corresponding with the multi-dimensional approach presented above) uphold free and fair elections, strong rule of law, judicial independence, and civil liberties such as freedom of speech and association. Electoral democracies also feature competitive elections but have weaker protections for civil liberties and checks on

executive power. Electoral autocracies, the most common regime type today, hold elections, but they are often manipulated through fraud, repression, or media control, limiting real competition. Finally, closed autocracies (in line with the above definition of autocracy) lack meaningful multiparty elections, concentrating power in an unelected leader or ruling elite.

Competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002; 2020)—discussed in Article II—fail to meet minimum standards of democracy and lack free and fair elections, but elections are nonetheless competitive. This concept is relatively close to electoral authoritarianism. Notably, the term “authoritarianism” is often used in a similar sense, denoting regimes which are not democratic but not fully autocratic either.

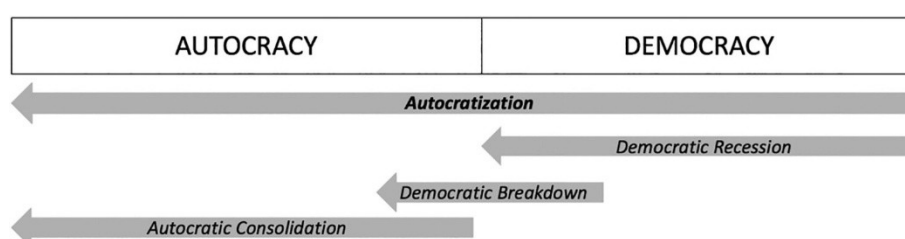
Authoritarian populism—presented in Article I in more detail—denotes another type of hybrid regimes that rely on populist ideology and methods to secure popular support (which is often relatively broad) and is characterized by a democratic façade but dysfunctional and hallowed out democratic institutions (Ádám 2019; Hall 1979). Notably, Guriev and Treisman (2022) develop the concept of “Spin Dictators” (in analogy with spin doctors) with a largely similar meaning, referring to leaders and regimes that undermine democratic constraints, but refrain from overt repression (unlike 20<sup>th</sup> century “classical” dictators), and seek to remain popular and appear democratic. Authoritarian populism may be considered a subtype of electoral autocracies.

Three caveats must be made concerning the presented conceptual framework. First, the presented definitions are neither uncontested nor claimed to be superior to alternative conceptualizations. Second, various additional subtypes of hybrid regimes were not presented. Third, the conceptual delineation of the discussed regime types is at times not unequivocal, let alone assigning “difficult” empirical instances to one or more subtypes. With these considerations in mind, I reiterate that the purpose of this framework is merely to organize the various concepts used in the articles in a manner that enables the assessment of the transferability and external validity of the constituent articles’ main findings.

### **1.2.3 Autocratization**

Similarly, numerous concepts have been proposed to describe transitions from more democratic to less democratic states. These include but are not limited to, democratic decline, regression, breakdown, erosion, and backsliding, and autocratization. The

conceptual framework proposed by Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) is useful for locating these concepts (Figure below). The authors argue that autocratization is the broadest term, denoting any kind of transition towards a less democratic state, irrespective of the end-point and the starting point. Autocratization is the opposite of democratization. The other concepts denote subtypes of autocratization: democratic recession, decline, regression (and others) refer to autocratization processes where the starting point is some democratic state. Democratic breakdown describes abrupt transitions from democracy to autocracy. Finally, autocratic consolidation refers to transitions from mild forms of autocracy towards even more restrictive and oppressive states. The term de-democratization (e.g. Bogaards, 2018) is often used with a similar meaning to autocratization.



**Figure 1-3.** Types of autocratization. Source: (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100).

#### 1.2.4 Corruption

Given the moral dimension of corruption and the heterogeneity of actions labeled as corrupt, the conceptualization of the term is equally challenging and contested (for a review of definitions, see Rose, 2018). Most commonly, it is defined as a use of public office for private gain (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016; Transparency International 2025). This general definition—also applied in Articles III, IV, and V may refer to a broad array of practices ranging from bribing of police officers to a mode of redistribution of wealth within societies, with largely different factors and consequences. Several subtypes of corruption and typologies of corruption have been proposed in the literature (Ang 2020; Graycar 2015; Johnston 2006). Potentially the most salient one among these, also used in the constituent studies mentioned above, is the distinction between petty (or low-level) and political (or grand) corruption. Political corruption is defined as a systematic and large-scale appropriation of public goods by state elites (ibid). Conversely, petty corruption entails situations where public officials discharge duties or provide services illegally for a bribe (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016).



### **1.3 The global crisis of democracy**

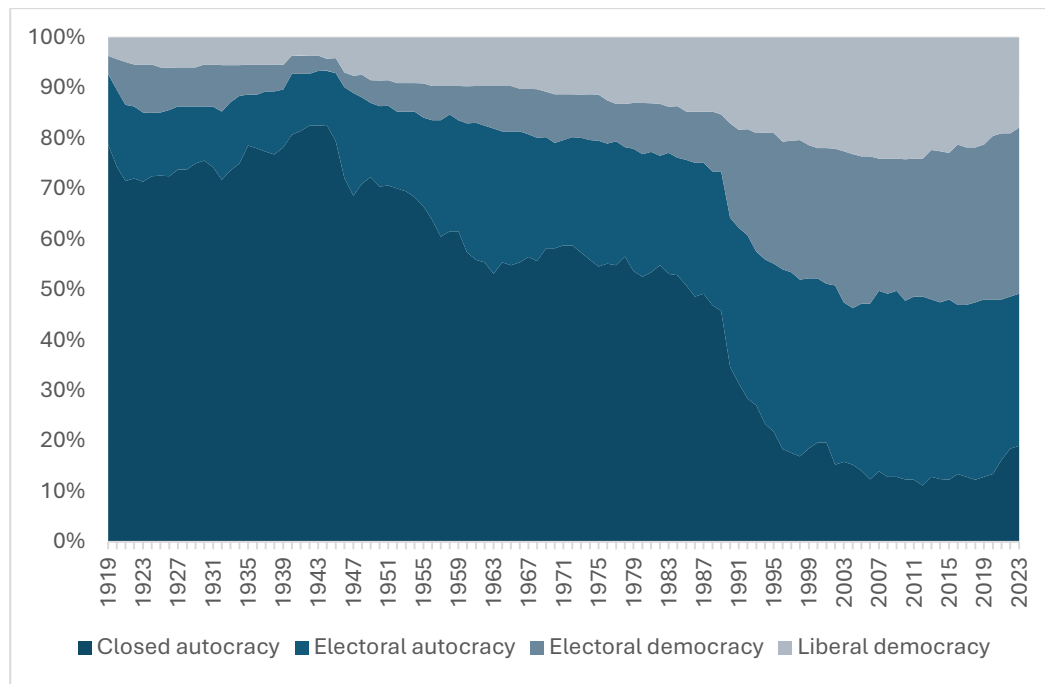
Over the past years, a broad and nearly uncontested consensus has emerged among observers and researchers that democracy faces a crisis globally. This is often referred to as the “third wave of autocratization” (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019), although there has also been criticism vis-à-vis the wave approach (Skaaning 2020; Tomini 2021). To lend a historical perspective to the examination of the present crisis of democracy, it is worth outlining the previous waves of democratization and autocratization.

In his seminal work, Huntington (1993) discerned the following broad waves. The first wave of democratization (from the 1820s to the 1920s) was driven by the gradual expansion of suffrage and democratic institutions, particularly in the United States, Western Europe, and parts of Latin America. It gave way to the first wave of autocratization and the late 1920s and 1930s as fascist, authoritarian, and/or totalitarian regimes emerged in countries such as Germany, Italy, and Spain. The second wave of democratization began after the end of World War II, as defeated Axis powers, including Germany and Japan, and former colonies of Western powers in Asia and Africa transitioned to democracy. Nonetheless, many of these democracies proved fragile, and a second wave of autocratization occurred in the 1950s to 1970s, characterized by military coups and the rise of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The third wave of democratization (from the late 1970s to the 1990s) began with the fall of authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe, such as in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. It later expanded to Latin America and parts of Asia, culminating in the post-Cold War democratization of former Soviet states.

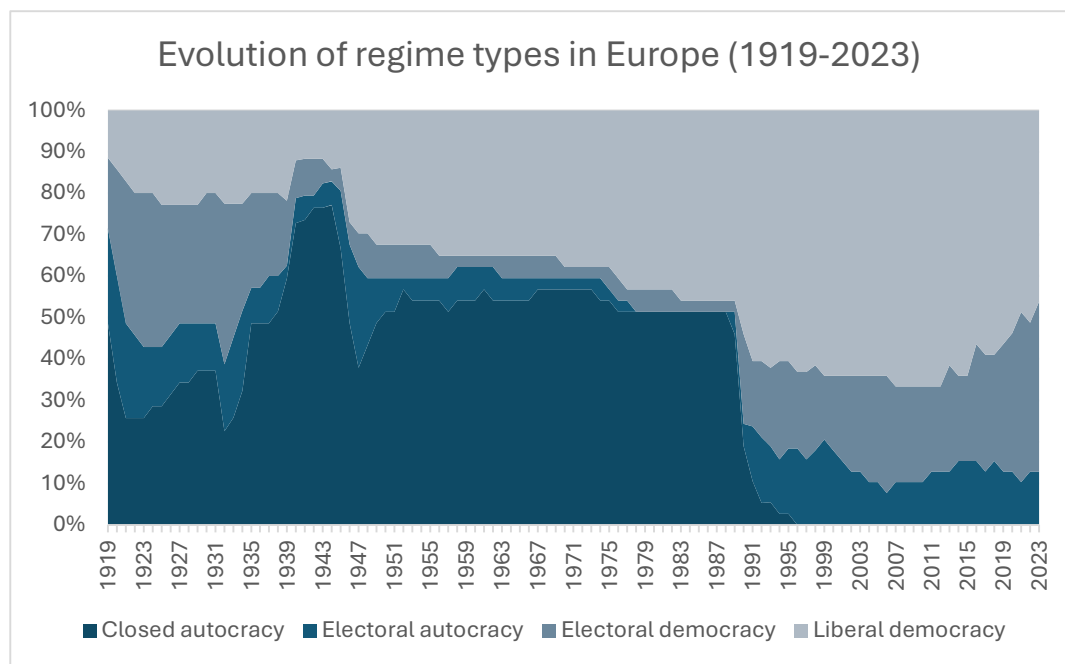
The ongoing, third wave of autocratization began roughly in the 2000s (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). While the process has been the most pronounced in the former Eastern Bloc (e.g., Hungary, Poland, and Russia), many countries across various regions have been severely affected (Diamond 2021). Notably, since the late 2010s several of the most established democratic policies—including the US (mentioned in the Introduction to the present chapter)—have experienced similar trends. While the characteristics of ongoing episodes of autocratization and emerging hybrid regimes were briefly discussed in above and will be presented in more detail in the constituent articles, I reiterate some of its key aspects most relevant to the present discussion. First, unlike previous waves of autocratization, the present one is typically gradually orchestrated by democratically elected politicians (Bermeo 2016; Guriev and Treisman 2022). Second, unlike typical

20th-century dictators, authoritarian leaders today tend to refrain from overt repression and seek to hide autocratic transformations by maintaining a democratic façade (Diamond 2021; Guriev and Treisman 2022). Third, in hybrid regimes emerging as a result of the current wave of autocratization, elections are—while not free and fair—typically contested and consequential (Levitsky and Way 2020). These characteristics, as the preceding articles will show, are key to understanding how hybrid regimes function today.

The waves are also clearly visible on the graphs created based on data from the RoW. Based on 4-item classification presented in Section 1.2.2, the RoW database contains the classification of nearly all countries worldwide since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After an increase in the ratio of closed autocracies and a decrease in the proportion of liberal democracies around the Second World War (both globally and in Europe), there is a clear reversal of these trends as the second wave of democratization unfolded. In line with the above description, the subsequent wave of autocratization is visible globally but not in Europe. The third wave of democratization is clear in both figures and involves a large drop in the proportion of autocracies, followed by the collapse of the USSR. While the ongoing wave seems less dramatic in the graphs, it is clearly visible, especially from the 2010s. Notably, while Europe has been devoid of closed autocracies since the 1990s, there is a clear increase in the proportion of electoral autocracies. This observation is in line with the characteristics of this wave of autocratization discussed above, that is, emerging hybrid regimes tend to organize competitive elections and maintain a democratic façade.



**Figure 1-4.** Evolution of regime types globally (1919-2023). Source: authors' work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018).



**Figure 1-5.** Evolution of regime types in Europe (1919-2023). Source: authors' work based on Regimes of the World database (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018).

While an extensive (let alone exhaustive) discussion of the reasons behind the current global crisis of democracy is well beyond the scope of the present brief Introduction, in the following, I outline some of the most influential explanations in the literature and related considerations and questions. It is relatively clear that there is no single universal

factor explaining the trend. Rather, a large number of interrelated processes seem to be in play. Moreover, while the recent and ongoing autocratization processes share important similarities, the (mix of) factors driving them seem to vary largely across regions and countries within them.

In a recent review article, Larry Diamond (2021) discussed some of the most salient explanations. The weakening of political norms, institutions, and civil society is often considered as immediate factors of autocratization. Democracy depends on mutual tolerance, institutional forbearance, trust, and a commitment to democratic principles (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), but in many countries, these have gradually eroded over the past decades. Leaders and political movements increasingly reject compromise, turning politics into a zero-sum game where opponents are treated as enemies rather than legitimate adversaries (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). Polarization weakens democratic accountability (Hajnal 2025c), as courts, legislatures, and electoral systems become tools for partisan control rather than impartial arbiters of democracy. Additionally, civil society—a critical force in holding governments accountable (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020)—faces growing restrictions through legal and financial pressures, limiting its ability to counter authoritarian trends. The decline of these democratic foundations makes it easier for leaders to gradually dismantle democratic norms without immediate resistance. Moreover, Diamond (2021) argues that the political craft of actual and would-be autocrats also constitutes an immediate driver of autocratization. While some leaders rely on personal charisma and political cunning, the weaker the democratic safeguards, the less skill is needed to achieve authoritarian control.

Other analyses focus on the role of the broader international environment as a driver of modern autocratization. Democracy promotion, once a key foreign policy priority for the U.S. and EU, lost credibility after the Iraq War and other failed interventions. Without strong international pressure, authoritarian leaders have faced fewer consequences for their actions, making democratic backsliding more viable.

Global socio-economic trends have also contributed to autocratization, mainly by creating fertile ground for populist insurgencies. Economic instability, rising income inequality, and the effects of neoliberal globalization have fueled resentment among large segments of the population, undermining trust in democratic institutions (Stiglitz 2013; 2017). The 2008 financial crisis reinforced perceptions that democracy serves elites rather than

ordinary citizens, while the digital revolution has simultaneously enabled political mobilization and widespread disinformation, deepening polarization (Stiglitz 2013). Meanwhile, external forces like Russia and China have actively worked to undermine democracy—Russia through disinformation campaigns and political interference, and China through economic influence and authoritarian diplomacy (Diamond 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic provided additional justification for curbing civil liberties, further accelerating authoritarian tendencies worldwide.

Another important, related question regarding the ongoing wave of autocratization concerns its nature: Why do modern autocrats refrain from overt violence and repression, in contrast to typical 20th-century dictators? In their book *Spin Dictators*—in analogy with spin doctors—Guriev and Treisman, (2022) argue that it is a so-called modernization cocktail that explains the former observation. It has three main elements. First, the postmodern transition empowered educated elites, whose access to information and global networks made them more difficult to repress. These elites have made fear-based autocratic methods more challenging to pursue, compelling modern spin dictators to adopt more subtle forms of control, such as co-optation and manipulation. Second, economic and informational globalization have also hindered modern autocrats from maintaining isolated and repressive regimes. As these regimes integrated into the global economy, they benefited from economic growth, which required them to allow certain levels of modernization. Moreover, the spread of information through the internet and social media exposed citizens to global ideas of democracy and freedom, forcing dictators to employ sophisticated media control strategies. Third, the rise of the liberal world order emphasized human rights and international norms, increasing scrutiny of authoritarian practices. Autocracies have faced diplomatic and economic pressures, as overt violence and repression led to global condemnation, and modern autocrats to build legitimacy abroad through selective cooperation and token democratic reforms.

Needless to say, the above short review is merely a glimpse of the vast literature on the causes of autocratization and related outcomes. A few recent surveys of this stream of research include (Bandau, 2023; Blühdorn and Butzlaff, 2020; Cassani and Tomini, 2019; Corbett, 2020).

#### 1.4 Corruption, autocratization, and hybrid regimes

Corruption and democracy/autocracy are closely related. The present dissertation, therefore, dedicates special attention to corruption (Articles II, IV, and V), and in particular, its role in hybrid regimes and autocratization processes. While specific aspects of the former mechanisms will be discussed in detail in the articles, the following brief introduction to the topic provides a general theoretical framework and simple descriptive statistics of the joint distribution of corruption and regime types/democratic quality.

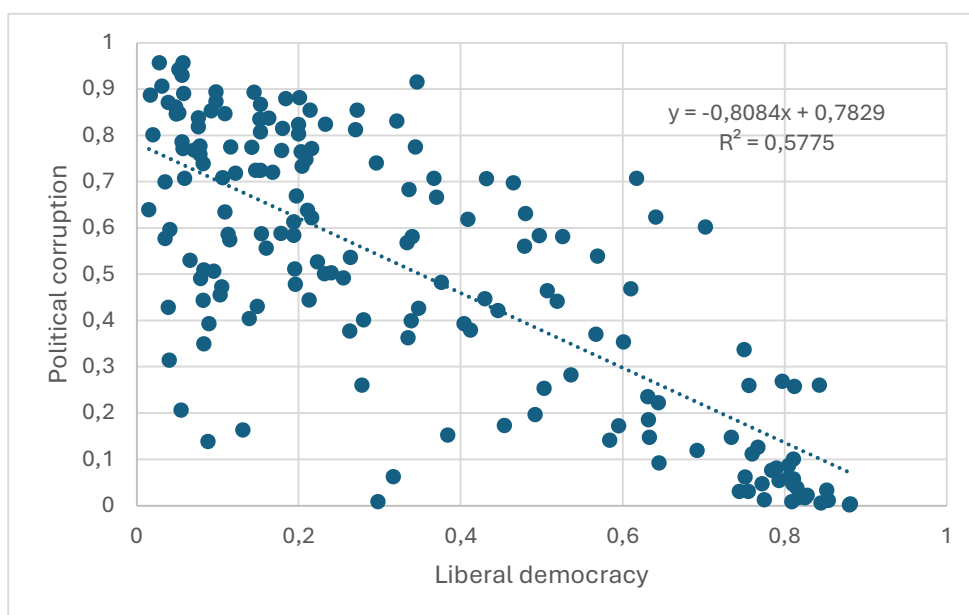
In their influential books *Why Nations Fail?* and *The Narrow Corridor*, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2013; 2019) outline a robust general theory that constitutes a useful basis for examining the link between corruption and democracy. They argue that economic and political institutions jointly determine the allocation of political power, economic opportunities, and wealth in nations, and ultimately their prosperity. Both political and economic institutions can be extractive or inclusive. Extractive political institutions provide elites with nearly unconstrained political power, which they use to implement extractive economic institutions, enabling them to seize much of the wealth and economic opportunities. This, in turn allows them to reinforce extractive political institutions even more, thereby creating a vicious cycle. Conversely, inclusive political institutions distribute political powers relatively evenly and enable the implementation of inclusive economic institutions, which provide large segments of society with economic opportunities. This in turn reinforces inclusive political institutions, leading to a virtuous circle.

This framework is applicable to cast light on the link between democracy/autocracy and corruption in a straightforward manner. Democracies have by definition inclusive political institutions. Consequently, they (tend to) implement inclusive economic institutions—such as free market institutions and sophisticated redistribution regimes enabling a broad array of public services—in a corruption-free—that is, universalistic, rather than particularistic (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006)—manner.

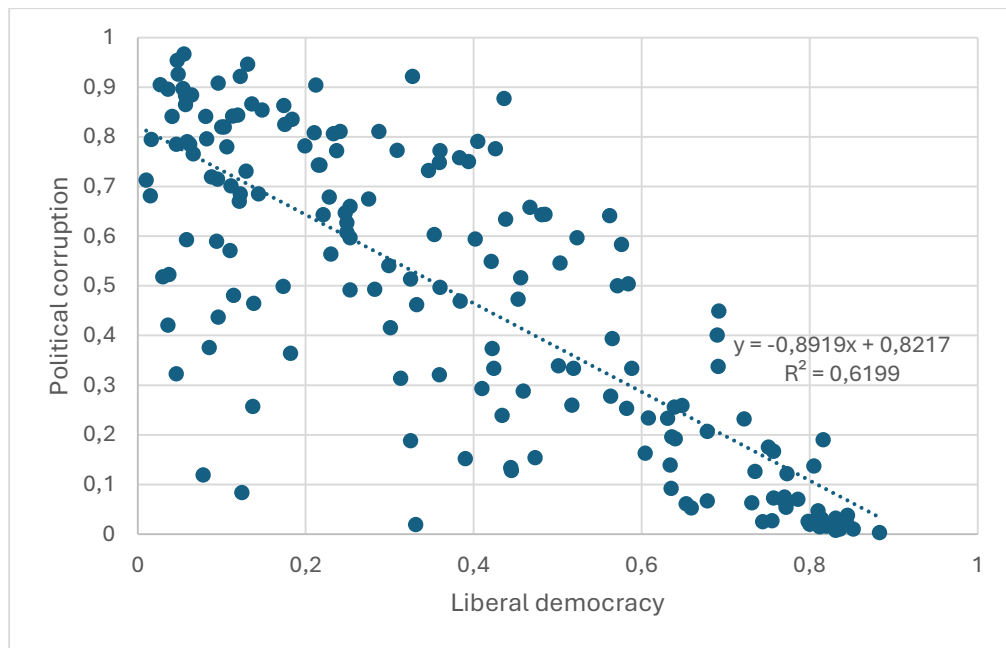
Conversely, hybrid and autocratic regimes have extractive political institutions, which enable their elites to implement extractive economic institutions. Corruption—in particular, political (or grand) corruption—is synonymous with the former concept, as it may be conceptualized as a mode of societal redistribution of wealth and opportunities in a particularistic manner (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). Enriched by corrupt gains, elites in non-

democratic regimes are poised to gain even more political power as they further undermine democratic institutions.

In line with the above general arguments, empirical studies have found that democracy (and various specific elements of broadly understood democratic institutions) reduces corruption and vice versa, less corruption leads to more democracy and more corruption undermines democracy and fosters autocratization (Dimant and Tosato 2018; Kolstad and Wiig 2016; McMann et al. 2020; Rock 2009; Saha et al. 2014; Sung 2004). The two figures below show the link between political corruption and liberal democracy (both measured by the respective indices of the Varieties of Democracy Institute; (Coppedge et al. 2019) in 1992 and 2023 globally. The strong negative relationship is clearly visible in both years.



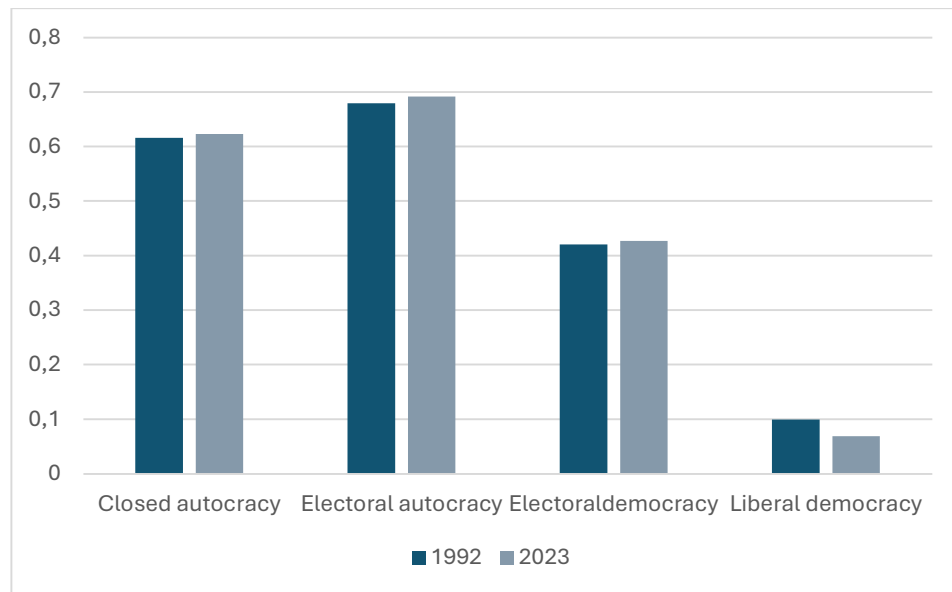
**Figure 1-6.** Association between political corruption and liberal democracy globally (1992). Source, author's work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019).



**Figure 1-7.** Association between political corruption and liberal democracy globally (1991).  
Source: author's work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019).

However, while the relationship between democracy and corruption is clear, several studies have shown that the link is not linear, but U-shaped (McMann et al. 2020; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Rock 2009). In essence, the argument runs as follows. In fully authoritarian regimes, power is nearly uncontested, allowing elites to monopolize corruption for their benefit. That is, certain types of corruption that do not benefit them are effectively curbed. Democracies, with strong accountability institutions, maintain the lowest corruption levels. In hybrid regimes, where power is contested but oversight is weak, corruption tends to be the highest. This pattern is also visible in the Figure below: while political corruption is relatively high in closed autocracies, it is the highest in electoral autocracies on average. Electoral democracies have significantly lower levels of political corruption, while liberal democracies are by far the least corrupt. These and related arguments regarding corruption and democracy/autocracy will be discussed in detail in Articles II and IV.





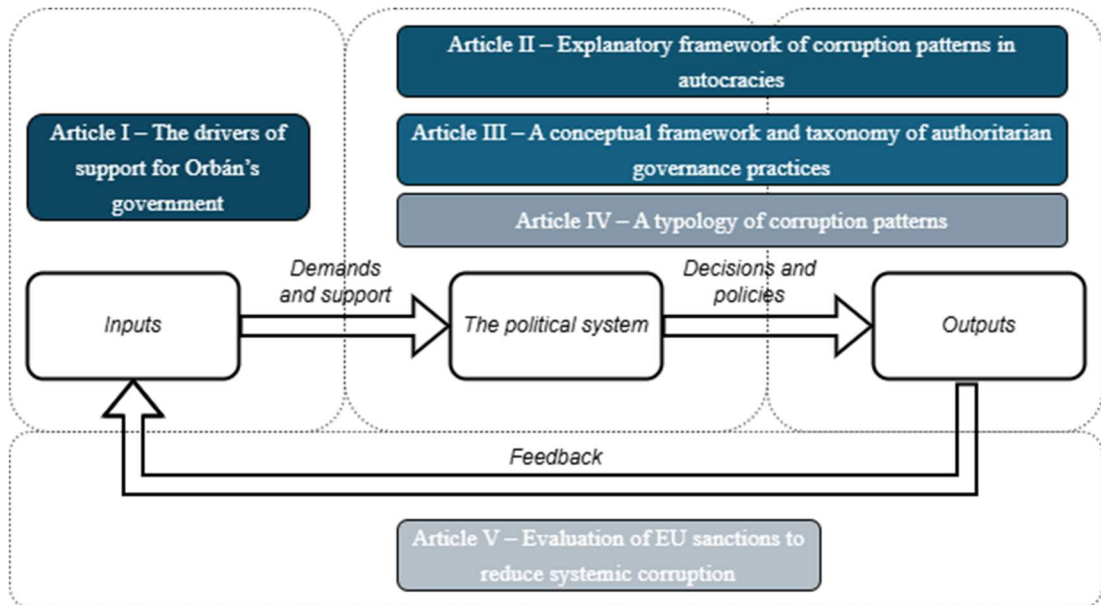
**Figure 1-8.** Average political corruption across regime types (1992 and 2023). Source, author’s work, based on V-dem data (Coppedge et al. 2019) and RoW data (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018).

## 1.5 An overview of the constituent articles

David Easton’s (1965) Systems framework is used to organize the five constituent articles of the dissertation. The framework views political systems—in the present case, hybrid regimes—as dynamic entities that process inputs (demands and supports) from society and produce outputs (policies and decisions). The system operates within an environment that influences and is influenced by it. Feedback loops ensure adaptation and stability, helping the system respond to societal needs while maintaining legitimacy.

Article I focuses on the inputs by examining individual-level drivers of support for hybrid regimes. Articles II, III, and IV examine various aspects of the political system of hybrid regimes. Article II considers the drivers of corruption in electoral autocracies and discusses how they are utilized by elites to consolidate their power. Article III presents a novel analytical approach to studying contemporary authoritarianism. Article IV presents a typology of corruption patterns and describes the distinct mechanisms through which formal and institutional factors lead to different corruption outcomes. Finally, Article V focuses on the feedback loop, by assessing the extent to which external pressures (in the form of sanctions by the EU) can be effective in curbing (systemic) corruption, and in a broader sense, autocratization, in the context of hybrid regimes. The Figure below situates the five articles in the Systems framework.

The diversity of the articles in terms of theoretical and analytical approaches (to be discussed later, in the articles), applied methods (e.g., large-n models, medium-n set-theoretic methods, qualitative case studies, and theory-building) and empirical scope enables the dissertation (as a whole) to study contemporary hybrid regimes from distinct angles. While the dissertation can only have a modest contribution to this vast area of research, the multi-disciplinary and multi-method approach arguably enhances the authenticity and validity of emerging general conclusions.



**Figure 1-9.** The five constituent articles of the dissertation organized based on Easton's (1965) framework. Source: author's work.

## 2 ARTICLE I: POPULAR AUTOCRATS: WHY DO VOTERS SUPPORT VIKTOR ORBÁN'S GOVERNMENT IN HUNGARY? A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

*Áron Hajnal*

*Published in Public Choice, 2025*

Authoritarian populism has become an increasingly prevalent subtype of hybrid regime and is characterized by weakened democratic institutions and a leader who relies on populist appeals. Authoritarian populist regimes limit citizens' freedom, undermine accountability and the rule of law, and are likely to be more corrupt than democratic regimes. Nevertheless, certain authoritarian populist regimes appear to enjoy broad popular support. Based on the European Social Survey database and my calculations of respondents' personal income tax rates, I investigate the factors that influenced voters' support for Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary from 2010 to 2020, which may be considered an exemplary case of an autocratic populist regime. The analysis shows that voters' support for the government was influenced by their perceptions of the economy and government performance, political beliefs (i.e., policy congruence and ideology), and basic human values (i.e., self-transcendence and conservation). By contrast, changes in voters' individual economic conditions were not found to be associated with their support for the government. The findings indicate that, in addition to explanations of government support that specifically focus on hybrid regimes, economic voting theory, which originated from and has typically been applied in democratic contexts, also provides viable explanations for understanding support for authoritarian populist regimes. More broadly, the findings also lend support to the altruistic and expressive voter hypotheses.

Keywords: Authoritarian populism, Hungary, Economic voting, Performance voting, Ideological voting, Basic human values

Full reference: Hajnal, Á. (2025) 'Popular Autocrats: Why Do Voters Support Viktor Orbán's Government in Hungary? A Quantitative Analysis', *Public Choice*, 202(1), pp. 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-024-01175-z>.

## 2.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the third wave of democratization has given way to the third wave of autocratization (Diamond, 2021; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). Autocrats have been present throughout human history, but contemporary autocrats seem to systematically differ from their predecessors. Typical 20th-century tyrants such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong relied on overt repression, extensive censoring, and intimidation to enforce compliance of the populace and organized elections for symbolic purposes only. By contrast, their present-day counterparts, which Guriev and Treisman (2022) dubbed “spin dictators” in analogy with spin doctors, cultivate a legal and democratic facade, resort to hidden repression and partial control of the media, and seek to remain popular, typically by utilizing populist strategies. Although they manipulate election rules and harass the opposition, election outcomes are not predefined (ibid). This regime type, which features a mix of authoritarian and populist traits, is often referred to as authoritarian populism (Ádám, 2019; Diamond, 2021; Hall, 1979; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Rogers, 2020).

Indeed, although popularity poll results should not be taken at face value in such contexts, certain authoritarian populist regimes appear to enjoy broad popular support (Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Svoboda, 2019). This is a puzzling pattern, as such regimes curtail citizens’ freedom in various ways, undermine accountability and the rule of law (Diamond, 2021; Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Norris and Inglehart, 2019), and suffer from higher levels of corruption than democratic regimes (Dimant and Tosato, 2018). Against this background, the present article asks why voters support autocratic populist regimes.

This ambition is relevant for the following reasons. Firstly, economic and performance voting theories, which broadly refer to two partially overlapping sets of theories about how economic factors and government performance affect political preferences (Stiers, 2022), originate from and have been mainly applied in liberal democratic contexts or transitioning democracies (for reviews, see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2008; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2019). However, research on the applicability of these theories in other, less democratic (particularly authoritarian populist) contexts is scarce (a notable example being Lewis-Beck et al., 2014, who focused on China). Given that political context substantially influences how economic conditions affect political preferences (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2019), this is a significant gap.

Secondly, a large body of research focuses on explaining how different types of hybrid regimes have emerged and prevailed (Cianetti et al., 2018; Diamond, 2021; Evans, 2024, Guriev and Treisman, 2019, 2019; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; McCoy et al., 2018). The majority of contributions in this vein “focus on regime strategies and tend to neglect the attitudes of citizens” (Lavrič and Bieber, 2021, p. 18). Given the importance of popular support in maintaining autocratic populist regimes, drivers of voter preference deserve more scholarly attention. The few analyses that consider factors that influence voters’ attitudes towards autocratic and/or populist regimes and actors (e.g., Lavrič and Bieber 2021; Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017; Baro 2022; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2023; Marcos-Marne 2021; Scoggins, 2022) typically focus on one or two potential factors, such as issue positions, populist and autocratic attitudes, ideologies, and human values. By building on and contributing to these findings, the present analysis simultaneously examines several factors, which enables a comparison of their effect sizes.

The empirical analysis focuses on Hungary, where a self-proclaimed “illiberal” model was implemented following the election victory of a coalition consisting of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz and the Christian Democratic Party (KNDP) in 2010. Since then, democratic institutions have significantly deteriorated as the government dismantled the system of checks and balances and the rule of law, took control of most independent media outlets, and implemented changes in the electoral system that largely favored the government (Bogaards, 2018). In spite—or perhaps as a consequence—of these tendencies, the coalition has won three elections since then (in 2014, 2018, and 2022) and enjoys relatively broad popular support.

Hungary may be labelled a “laboratory of illiberalism” (Krekó and Enyedi 2018) and is regarded as a potential model for authoritarian populist leaders around the world. Therefore, it stands out as an exemplary case of a de-democratizing country (Bogaards, 2018) and arguably of an authoritarian populist regime; that is, it “is not only of importance in itself but is also instructive for comparativists with no special commitment to this particular instance” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 213). The case selection is also justified by a large-scale tax reform that was implemented between 2011 and 2013. The reform, which affected various subgroups in distinct ways (Krekó et al., 2023), provides a unique opportunity for a natural experiment to test the effects of voters’ economic conditions on their political preferences. Finally, although numerous articles have sought to elucidate the factors underlying Hungary's shift towards authoritarian populism and the

mechanisms that sustain the regime (Ádám, 2019; Buzogány, 2017; Krekó and Enyedi, 2018; Scheiring, 2020), to the best of my knowledge, only Scoggins (2022) addressed this issue by considering the drivers of voters' individual preferences. However, his analysis only considered two potential factors (economy and culture). By contrast, the present study aims to assess a range of potential drivers.

From a more practical and normative perspective, understanding the means through which authoritarian populist leaders appeal to voters and maintain their regimes (often relatively smoothly and without facing significant popular backlash) is imperative to designing and implementing effective responses from opposition parties, civil society actors, and international and intergovernmental organizations.

The article is organized as follows. Firstly, I discuss the concept of authoritarian populism. Then, I examine various theories and mechanisms that can explain the support for authoritarian populism. This is followed by a presentation of the Hungarian case. Subsequently, I formulate the hypotheses and present the data and methods employed. The empirical analysis is then presented, followed by a discussion of the results. Finally, I conclude the study by summarizing its findings and addressing its limitations.

## **2.2 Defining authoritarian populism**

Compelling evidence supports the contention that democracy is declining and that this trend has accelerated over the past decade or so (Diamond, 2021; Hellmeier et al., 2021; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019). This trend affects both new and established democracies in all regions (Diamond, 2021). While coups and open election-day frauds still occur, they are much less frequent than before (Bermeo, 2016; Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Most recent and ongoing episodes of democratic decline are incremental and, crucially, orchestrated by democratically elected politicians (Diamond, 2021; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Populism, which is defined as a “thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the ‘pure and wise people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004, p. 543), has often been at the core of strategies applied by recent would-be and actual authoritarians (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Despite the diversity of countries that have experienced democratic decline, many of the processes and tactics applied show remarkable similarities (Diamond, 2019; Guriev and Treisman, 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Upstart populist politicians exploit and fuel existing frustrations and factions within societies and promote an “us vs. them” narrative to gain a political advantage (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). When they are elected, they first loosen institutional checks and balances and further fuel divisions to ensure that violations of various democratic norms seem increasingly justifiable to supporters of the regime. They claim to directly represent “the people,” which justifies bypassing democratic procedures and institutions (Diamond, 2021). Taking advantage of the loosened democratic controls, they take over the free media and assert control over various economic sectors. Civil society organizations, universities, and other independent and critical organizations are also labelled as enemies and harassed through various means as checks on the regime’s power loosen. Moreover, would-be autocrats systematically manipulate election rules to tilt the playing field in their favor (Diamond, 2019). Alberto Fujimori (Peru), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), Orbán (Hungary), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), and many others have used this playbook. While this process has been less severe (at least to date) in the United States, it also showed striking similarities with the above countries under the leadership of Donald Trump (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).

Importantly, to mitigate external and internal backlash, authoritarian populists refrain from overt repression and violence and cultivate a democratic facade by (nominally) maintaining basic democratic and rule-of-law institutions. While some commentators have argued that regimes tend to transition towards either democracy or autocracy (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013), hybrid regimes appear to be relatively stable, at least in the short and medium terms (Guriev and Treisman, 2022).

According to Guriev and Treisman (2022), the emergence and durability of authoritarian populist regimes may be explained by a so-called “modernization cocktail”: the postmodern transition after World War II empowered informed elites who are more difficult to repress, while economic and informational globalization and the rise of the liberal world order have made it challenging to maintain isolated fear dictatorships due to increased international focus on human rights.

Consequently, authoritarian populism—a sub-type of hybrid regime—may be defined as “an exceptional form of the capitalist state, which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institutions in place, and which at the

same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent” (Hall, 1979, p. 15). In other words, authoritarian populism is a type of regime that largely relies on populism to enable and justify authoritarian measures and to gain, consolidate, and increase its power while typically maintaining a democratic facade. Terms with relatively similar meanings include illiberal (as opposed to liberal) democracy (Wagrandl, 2021), populist democracy (Pappas, 2014), competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2002), and informational autocracy (Guriev and Treisman, 2019).

### **2.3 Factors influencing support for authoritarian populist regimes: Theory, evidence, and hypotheses**

As the preceding discussion shows, although various democratic institutions are dismantled or hollowed out in authoritarian populist contexts and elections are not free and fair, the latter are of crucial importance because they constitute the main tools for justifying the regime. Unlike “old-style” autocracies in which dictators “win” nearly 100% of votes, autocratic populist regimes must compete in competitive elections and enjoy significant popular support. Consequently, they must appeal to voters like their democratic counterparts. This section reviews the most important mechanisms through which they may do so.

#### **2.3.1 Economic and performance voting**

Within the realm of political economy, there are two large and somewhat overlapping sets of theories that explain voters’ political preferences: economic voting and performance voting (Stiers, 2022). Economic voting theory focuses on how broadly understood economic factors affect voters’ political preferences. Classical economic voting theory postulates that voters consider the economy as a valence issue, punish incumbents for bad times, and reward them for good times. Economic voting can be broken down into two broad elements. Firstly, voters’ individual economic situations may influence their political preferences (i.e., egotropic or pocketbook voting). Secondly, voters may also consider the economy as a whole (i.e., sociotropic voting) and focus on unemployment, growth, inflation, and other characteristics of the national economy. Both the egotropic (Healy et al., 2017; Lewis-Beck, 1985) and sociotropic (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2011; Stiers, 2022) economic voting theories have received significant empirical support (for a review, see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2019).



Originating from egotropic economic voting theory, the taxpayer retribution hypothesis posits that taxpayers punish incumbents for raising taxes (Kone and Winters, 1993). While the authors found some support for the hypothesis in the United States, they also showed that voters do not reward incumbents for tax cuts. Similarly, the grievance asymmetry hypothesis posits that individuals negatively impacted by tax reforms care more about these reforms than those who benefit from them (Geys and Vermeir, 2008).

Later, the classical economic voting model has been broadened to incorporate new elements. Positional voting considers voters' policy preferences with regard to economic issues (e.g., preferred level of redistribution), whereas patrimonial voting posits that voters' political preferences are shaped by their acquired status in terms of class membership and wealth (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2011).

The vast majority of research on economic voting focuses on democracies, but some evidence suggests that economic voting mechanisms are also applicable in fragile and transitioning democracies (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2008, 2019; Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck, 2009). Although a recent cross-national analysis showed that authoritarian leaders' popularity also depends on individuals' perceptions of the economy (Guriev and Treisman, 2020), research on the applicability of economic voting theories in hybrid regimes is limited at best.

Partially overlapping with economic voting theory, performance voting theory (Healy and Malhotra, 2013; Stiers, 2022) hypothesizes that voters cast their votes based on how they evaluate the government's performance (either in general or in various areas, such as education, crime, health services, and the economy—the last element is the one where the two streams overlap). Similarly to economic voting theory, performance voting theory has received considerable empirical support, mainly in democratic contexts (Kotzian, 2011; Stiers, 2022). Both economic and performance voting may be retrospective and prospective; that is, voters may consider both the past and the expected performance of the government and economic conditions (Stiers, 2022).

### **2.3.2 Political beliefs: policy congruence, ideology, and attitudes**

Another largely heterogeneous set of theories focuses on how voters' political beliefs affect their political preferences. One such stream of research focuses on how voters' issue positions and policy preferences in various areas shape their political preferences. Indeed, evidence has shown that policy congruence (i.e., congruence between voters'

preferred policies and policies proposed by candidates) largely matters in various contexts (Graham and Svobik, 2020; Jastramskis, 2022). However, the majority of voters do not possess detailed knowledge about parties' issue positions. Therefore, more general political ideologies, particularly left- versus right-wing positions, may serve as cues for vote choice (i.e., ideological voting; Sartori, 2005; Van Der Brug, 2010). Lachat (2008) found that political polarization—a phenomenon that often accompanies authoritarian and populist tendencies—increases the effect of left-right ideology on vote choice.

Some recent survey experiments have shown that voters are willing to make trade-offs between democracy and policy congruence in that they may choose politicians with anti-democratic traits who promote preferred policies over democratic politicians who promote different policies (Graham and Svobik, 2020; Lewandowsky and Jankowski, 2023). However, supporters of populist parties not only trade off democratic principles in favor of their policy preferences, but they also care less about democracy and sympathize more with populist ideologies. So-called populist values or attitudes—a set of correlated values that capture the extent to which people identify with different elements of the minimalist definition of populism (in particular with claims about the exclusive power of the “people” vs. others)—are observed to a greater extent among supporters of populist parties than supporters of other parties (Akkerman et al., 2014, 2017; Marcos-Marne, 2021; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). More recently, a survey experiment conducted in Germany found that voters trade off policy congruence for liberal democracy and that voters who are less opposed to authoritarian and populist attitudes are more willing to make this trade-off (Lewandowsky and Jankowski, 2023). Authoritarian populists may also appeal to voters' (ethno-)nationalist sentiments (Bonikowski, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

### **2.3.3 Basic human values**

Political preferences—particularly support for authoritarian populist regimes—are not only influenced by issue positions and political attitudes and ideologies but also more generic human values. Basic human values are defined as “desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity” (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21) and have been shown to influence decision making in politics (Baro, 2022; Piurko et al., 2011). In his seminal work, Schwartz discerned 10 basic human values that can be organized into four higher-level values

(Schwartz, 1992): self-enhancement, self-transcendence, openness to change, and conservation. The former and latter pairs represent two bipolar dimensions.

Human values have been shown to influence left-right political preferences and voting behavior in Europe (Purkayastha et al., 2011). Furthermore, Baro (2022) analyzed whether higher-level values affect support for populism and whether this effect holds, irrespective of left-right ideology. Based on European Social Survey (ESS) data, she found that voting for populist parties was associated with lower self-transcendent values and higher conservation values across left-right ideologies.

Most contributions on how political beliefs and values affect support for authoritarian populist (and similar) regimes tend to focus on one or a few potential factors, which complicates the comparison of their effects. Indeed, research on the relative importance of economics-based explanations and mechanisms related to political beliefs and values is virtually absent.

Placing the discussed theories and mechanisms in the broader debate about the core drivers behind voters' political behavior, egotropic voting stems from the rational voter hypothesis, which postulates that voters, who act as rational utility maximizers, cast their ballots based on their well-understood self-interests (Downs, 1957). By contrast, the (sociotropic) economic voting and performance voting theories assume that voters are motivated by altruistic reasons, as suggested by the altruistic or ethical voter hypothesis (Goodin and Roberts, 1975; Margolis, 1984). Finally, factors related to ideology and basic values correspond with the expressive voter hypothesis (Fiorina, 1976), which stipulates that voters do not vote to achieve a particular outcome but rather to express their opinions.

## **2.4 The Hungarian case**

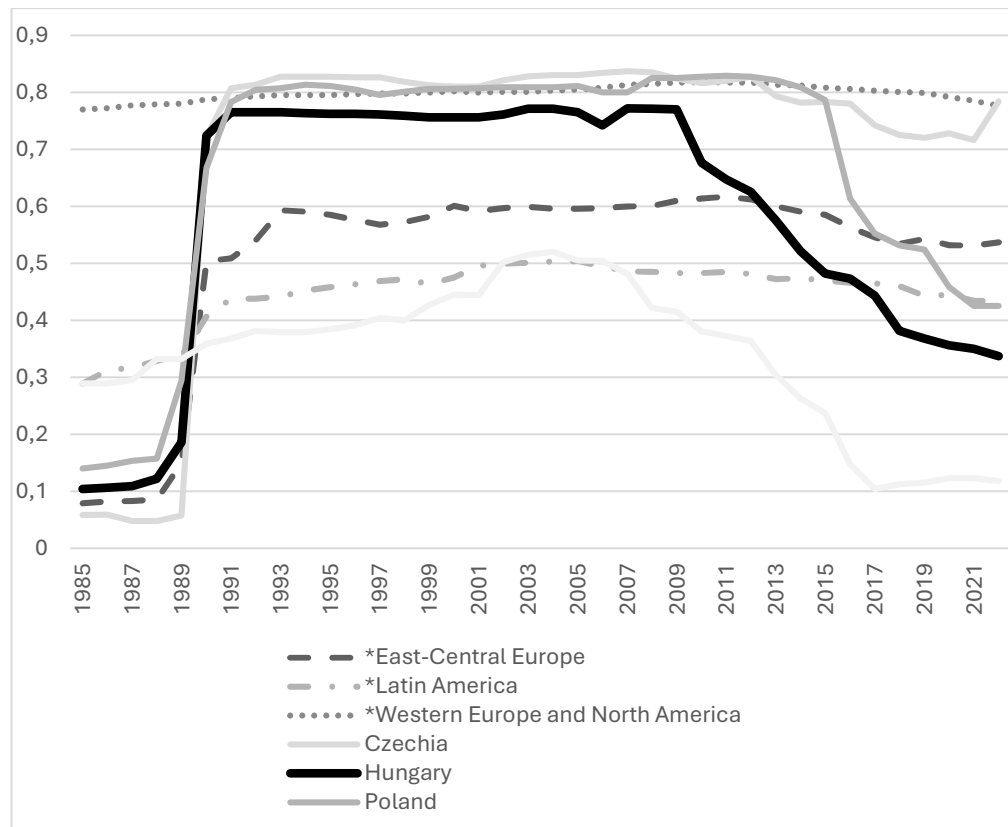
The present empirical analysis focuses on Hungary, which may be considered an exemplary case of an authoritarian populist regime. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Warsaw Pact countries in the early 1990s, Hungary quickly adopted a parliamentary democratic system and free market institutions. Over the following two decades or so, Hungary seemed to converge towards a Western-style liberal democratic model at a pace that defied even relatively optimistic expectations (Merkel, 2010). Although it would be an overstatement to claim that the country's illiberal turn in 2010, in which both structural factors (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019) and critical events such

as the 2008 financial crisis and a leaked recording of the former socialist prime minister (in which he admitted lying to the public) are likely to have played a significant role, was completely unexpected, its pace was nonetheless striking.

The systematic dismantling of democratic institutions from 2010 is well-documented (Bogaards, 2018; Kornai, 2015; Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele 2012; Krekó and Enyedi 2018; Scheiring, 2020) and largely conforms to typical steps in recent episodes of democratic decline, as described in Section 2. After taking power and securing a constitutional majority in 2010, Orbán's government quickly began to implement a self-proclaimed "illiberal" model. The system of checks and balances and the rule of law were gradually dismantled, and electoral rules were altered in several steps to favor the incumbent coalition. Most critical media outlets were taken over or silenced, and the civil sector was also targeted.

The regime is characterized by high political corruption (Fazekas and King, 2019) and significant centralization in various domains of the administrative structure (Hajnal and Boda, 2021; Hajnal and Hajnal, 2023). In line with populist ideology, the government's rhetoric systematically distinguishes between the "good" people of Hungary and its enemies (e.g., the opposition, liberals, homeless people, LGBTQ people, and refugees) to fuel severe partisan polarization (Vegetti, 2019). So far, despite external pressures and crises, the regime has shown no signs of crumbling, as the coalition led by Orbán secured its fourth consecutive victory in 2022.

Figure 1 shows trendlines for the Liberal Democracy Index (Varieties of Democracy Institute) in Hungary, along with those of selected countries and regions. Hungary's liberal democracy score and those of other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries skyrocketed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and remained at a high level over the next two decades, when it started to rapidly decline. While a slower downward trend can also be observed in other CEE countries and, to a lesser extent, in Western Europe and North America and Latin America, the pace and extent of the decline experienced in Hungary are unparalleled (the only country that suffered a similar decline was Turkey).



**Figure 2-1.** Liberal democracy scores of selected countries and regions (1985–2022). Source: Varieties of Democracy Institute

A few studies have analyzed the factors that affect vote choice in Hungary. Prior to the “illiberal turn” in 2010, two studies found support for classical economic voting (i.e., voters punish the government for bad times and reward it for good times; Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck, 2009, 2011). A more recent analysis that focuses on the post-2010 era also identified economic satisfaction as the most important driver of political preferences (Scoggins, 2022). With regard to egotropic voting, performance voting, or the effects of basic human values on political preferences, evidence from Hungary is virtually absent.

## 2.5 Data, hypotheses, and methods

The current empirical analysis relies on the ESS database. The survey is conducted every second year in all European Union member states and collects data on various topics from a representative sample of approximately 2,000 respondents per round and country. Based on my database of personal income tax (PIT) rules in Hungary, respondents’ individual PIT rates were calculated and added to the database (details can be found in Appendix I). Six ESS rounds (Rounds 5 to 10) between 2010 (the beginning of the democratic decline

in Hungary) and 2020 (the last available wave at the time of manuscript completion) were used for the study.

### **2.5.1 Hypotheses and operationalization**

The reviewed theories and mechanisms led to the following testable hypotheses in the context of Hungary between 2010 and 2020. Firstly, as previously noted, a large-scale PIT reform introduced in Hungary between 2010 and 2013 created an opportunity for a natural experiment to test the egotropic economic voting theory. The reform significantly affected the majority of taxpayers to extensively varying degrees. The new system replaced a complex multi-rate system (with tax credits) with a single-rate (“flat”) system that featured a relatively generous family tax allowance scheme. Generally, high-income taxpayers with many children were the main winners in the new system, whereas low-income earners with one or no children had to pay more than before (see details in Appendix II and Krekó et al., 2023). In line with the egotropic economic voting theory and the taxpayer retribution theory, this led to the following hypotheses:

*H1a: Changes in individual PIT rates influenced support for the government.*

*H1b: Increases in individual PIT rates negatively influenced support for the government.*

The tax reform’s effects on individual taxpayers and families (i.e., the change in the overall PIT rate relative to previous years) depended on income, the number of children in the household, and the number of earners in the household. To test these hypotheses, I calculated the change in the PIT rate relative to the previous year and to two years before. To assess the taxpayer retribution hypothesis, PIT increase and PIT decrease variables (see Table 1) were also computed. The details of the calculations are described in Appendix I, whereas descriptive statistics for the calculated variables are provided in Appendix III.

Still within the realm of economic voting, the sociotropic economic voting theory was operationalized through a survey question that captured the perceived state of the economy, leading to the following hypothesis:

*H2: Perceptions of the general state of the economy positively influence support for the government.*

Furthermore, the positional voting theory was operationalized through a question about the preferred level of redistribution. In addition to the implementation of a single-rate tax

system, prominent Fidesz politicians, including Orbán, actively embraced a "work-based society" and strongly criticized the Western welfare state model and guaranteed allowances. As a result, the effect was expected to be negative:

*H3: Preference for redistribution negatively influences support for the government.*

Next, performance voting theory was operationalized through two questions on the perceived state of healthcare and education:

*H4a: The perceived state of the healthcare system positively influences support for the government.*

*H4b: The perceived state of the education system positively influences support for the government.*

Moreover, the effects of policy congruence (i.e., congruence between voters' preferred policies and policies proposed by candidates) were assessed through two questions related to redistribution (which were also used to assess positional voting) and LGBTQ freedom. Firstly, as noted above, the government took a clear stance in favor of low redistribution. Secondly, Fidesz embraced conservative family values and used an increasingly hostile rhetoric against the LGBTQ community; this culminated in Act LXXIX of 2021, which relates pedophilia and homosexuality and bans "pro-LGBTQ propaganda." While these specific issues covered only a fraction of voters' overall issue positions, their significance in the government's communication made them suitable for assessing the influence of policy congruence on political preferences. This led to the following two hypotheses:

*H5a: Preference for redistribution negatively influences support for the government.<sup>2</sup>*

*H5b: Preference for LGBTQ freedom negatively influences support for the government.*

In addition, the effects of ideology on support for the government were tested based on a question about left-right self-placement. Given the government's clear self-positioning on the political right, the effect was expected to be positive:

*H6: Preference for the political right positively influences support for the government.*

Finally, the effects of human values on political preferences were assessed based on Schwartz's (1992) four higher-level values, which were calculated as the (rescaled) mean

---

<sup>2</sup> Identical to H3.

of the constituent lower-level values. To ascertain the internal consistency of the calculated indices, Cronbach's alpha statistics were calculated. The relatively high Cronbach's alpha values<sup>3</sup> indicated that the constituent questions measured one underlying concept.

The government's rhetoric and actions provided clear indications regarding potential associations between human values and support for the government. On the one hand, its rejection of the liberal welfare state model, targeting of vulnerable groups (e.g., the homeless, refugees, and the LGBTQ community) through legal measures and rhetoric, and promotion of a "work-based society" and a single-rate tax system suggest that individuals with higher self-enhancement values and lower self-transcendence values are more likely to hold a favorable opinion of the government. On the other hand, the government's conservative stance, which embraces traditional Christian and family-centered values while vividly opposing liberalism, suggests that higher conservation values and lower openness values are associated with greater support for the government. Similarly, previous research has shown that lower self-transcendence and higher conservation values are linked to increased support for populism in Europe (Baro, 2022). This led to the following hypotheses:

*H7a: Self-enhancement values positively influence support for the government.*

*H7b: Self-transcendence values negatively influence support for the government.*

*H7c: Conservation values positively influence support for the government.*

*H7d: Openness values negatively influence support for the government.*

The outcome—support for the government—was operationalized through a question about how satisfied the respondent was with the national government (on a scale of 0 to 10). Additionally, in the case of H1a and H1, satisfaction with the state of the economy and partisan preferences were also used as outcome variables. Table 1 presents the ESS questions used to operationalize the variables and indicates the hypotheses and theories that they were related to.

---

<sup>3</sup> Self-enhancement: 0,734; Self-transcendence: 0,756; Conservation: 0,691; Openness: 0,714



| Variable                                                  | Description/question in ESS                                                                                                                                                                                            | Related hyp. |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Economic voting</b>                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |              |
| $\Delta PIT(t-1)$<br>$\Delta PIT(t-2)$                    | Tax change relative to 1 and 2 years before the reference year (negatives indicate tax cut) (Own calculations, see Appendix 1)                                                                                         | H1a/b        |
| $PITincr(t-1)$<br>$PITincr(t-2)$                          | Tax increase relative to 1 and 2 years before the reference year (0 if no change occurred, or the tax rate decreased) (Own calculations, see Annex)                                                                    | H1a/b        |
| $PITdecr(t-1)$<br>$PITdecr(t-2)$                          | Tax cut relative to 1 and 2 years before the reference year (0 if no change occurred, or the tax rate increased) (Own calculations, see Annex)                                                                         | H1a/b        |
| <i>Satisf. with the economy</i>                           | "On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?" (0 to 10 scale)                                                                                                               | H2           |
| <i>Preference of redistribution</i> <sup>4</sup>          | "Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels" (1-agree strongly / 5 disagree strongly) (rescaled) | H3           |
| <b>Performance voting</b>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |              |
| <i>Satisf. with educ.</i>                                 | "What do you think overall about the state of education in [country] nowadays?" (0 to 10 scale)                                                                                                                        | H4a          |
| <i>Satisf. with health serv.</i>                          | "What you think overall about the state of health services in [country] nowadays?" (0 to 10 scale)                                                                                                                     | H4b          |
| <b>Political beliefs (policy congruence and ideology)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |              |
| <i>Support for LGBTQ freedom</i>                          | "Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish" (1-agree strongly / 5 disagree strongly) (rescaled)   | H5a          |
| <i>Preference of redistribution</i>                       | "Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels" (1-agree strongly / 5 disagree strongly) (rescaled) | H5b          |

<sup>4</sup> May be viewed both as a measure of positional voting or an issue position.

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              |     |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Left-right placement</i>                 | "In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" (0-left / 10-right) | H6  |
| <b>Human values</b>                         |                                                                                                                                                                                              |     |
| <i>Self-enhancement</i>                     | Averages of the respective Schwartz-value questions.                                                                                                                                         | H7a |
| <i>Self-transcendence</i>                   |                                                                                                                                                                                              | H7b |
| <i>Conversation</i>                         |                                                                                                                                                                                              | H7c |
| <i>Openness</i>                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              | H7d |
| <b>Outcome variables</b>                    |                                                                                                                                                                                              |     |
| <i>Satisf. with the economy</i>             | "On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?" (0 to 10 scale)                                                                                     |     |
| <i>Satisf. with the national government</i> | "Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?" (0 to 10 scale)                                                                       |     |
| <i>Partisanship</i>                         | A categorical variable that discerns non-partisans, supporters of Fidesz/KDNP, and of any other parties.                                                                                     |     |

**Table 2-1.** Description of the variables. Source:author's work, based on ESS database.

## 2.6 Methods

To test the hypotheses, two sets of models were constructed. Firstly, the egotropic voting hypothesis and the taxpayer retribution hypothesis (H1a and H1b) were assessed using a separate set of models (Model 1a to 3d) with different outcome variables and estimation methods (simple regression and binary logistic), identical controls (year dummies and a three-item income scale), and explanatory variables that captured changes in respondents' PIT rates. In these models, all of the other explanatory variables were excluded due to the substantial challenge posed by endogeneity (reverse causation). By contrast, it could be assumed that tax rates and their changes were not influenced by any of the explanatory or outcome variables. Therefore, while the inclusion of further explanatory variables may have increased significance levels and model fit statistics, they may also lead to biased estimates, which constitutes a more serious threat to internal validity. In these models, I only included the ESS waves of 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016, as subsequent changes in

the tax system affected only a fraction of taxpayers (and to a lesser extent), which would have led to too many “zeros” in the sample.

A second set of models (Models 4 to 9) were used to address the remaining hypotheses (H2 to H7). In the case of these mechanisms, endogeneity posed a substantive threat, as not only do voters’ perceptions of the economy and government’s performance, political beliefs, and human values affect political preferences, but the reverse is also true, particularly with regard to perceptions (Evans and Pickup, 2010; Burlacu and Tóka, 2014), as partisanship creates a cognitive bias (Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018). Put simply, support for the government affects partisanship, which largely influences media preferences and choices regarding friends and social interactions, which decisions, in turn, affect the hypothesized drivers of support for the government (i.e., perceptions, political beliefs, and human values).

In light of these challenges, I applied two different solutions. Firstly, I controlled for partisan preferences (Model 8; Baro, 2022; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Evans and Pickup, 2010; Stiers, 2022). Partisanship has a bidirectional causal relationship with both the explanatory and the outcome variables (i.e., it is both a mechanism variable and a reverse causation variable), therefore the regression coefficients estimated using partisanship as a control variable are lower estimates of the actual effect. Secondly, in Model 9, I estimated the coefficients of the hypothesized factors on the subsample of non-partisans (Burlacu and Tóka, 2014). In the case of non-partisans, the explanatory variables were not endogenous (or only endogenous to a very limited extent), as these respondents were less likely to be affected by the aforementioned reverse causation mechanism.

In the case of both model groups (Models 1 to 3 and Models 4 to 9), the sample sizes were harmonized by omitting all observations in which any of the variables used in the respective model groups had missing values to ensure comparability (this did not apply to Model 9, in which only non-partisans were included).

## **2.7 Empirical analysis**

### **2.7.1 Egotropic voting**

The coefficient estimates of the models that focused on H1a and H1b are shown in Table 2. Changes in individual tax rates relative to the previous two years were not found to significantly affect either satisfaction with the economy (Models 1a–1d), the national

government (Models 2a–2d), or partisanship (Models 3a–3d). The low adjusted  $R^2$  values also indicated that the explanatory variables in Models 1 and 2 accounted for a very limited amount of the variation in the outcome variable. Consequently, the results supported neither the egotropic voting hypothesis (H1a) nor the taxpayer retribution hypothesis (H1b).

|                                                                         | <i>Satisfaction with the economy</i> |                  |                  |                  | <i>Satisfaction with the national government</i> |                  |                  |                  | <i>Sympathy with Fidesz (binary logistic)</i> |                  |                 |                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
|                                                                         | (1a)                                 | (1b)             | (1c)             | (1d)             | (2a)                                             | (2b)             | (2c)             | (2d)             | (3a)                                          | (3b)             | (3c)            | (3d)             |
| <i>ΔPIT(t-1)</i>                                                        | 0.448<br>(1.28)                      |                  |                  |                  | 0.488<br>(1.49)                                  |                  |                  |                  | 0.751<br>(1.36)                               |                  |                 |                  |
| <i>PITincr(t-1)</i>                                                     |                                      | -0.405<br>(2.87) |                  |                  |                                                  | -0.849<br>(3.34) |                  |                  |                                               | -1.483<br>(3.54) |                 |                  |
| <i>PITdecr(t-1)</i>                                                     |                                      | 0.732<br>(1.54)  |                  |                  |                                                  | 0.934<br>(1.79)  |                  |                  |                                               | 1.338<br>(1.62)  |                 |                  |
| <i>ΔPIT(t-2)</i>                                                        |                                      |                  | -0.729<br>(1.13) |                  |                                                  |                  | -0.794<br>(1.32) |                  |                                               |                  | 0.327<br>(1.22) |                  |
| <i>PITincr(t-2)</i>                                                     |                                      |                  |                  | -0.231<br>(3.15) |                                                  |                  |                  | 1.63<br>(3.66)   |                                               |                  |                 | 4.724<br>(3.45)  |
| <i>PITdecr(t-2)</i>                                                     |                                      |                  |                  | -0.863<br>(1.38) |                                                  |                  |                  | -1.443<br>(1.61) |                                               |                  |                 | -0.766<br>(1.45) |
| <b>Controls</b>                                                         | <i>Year, income (3-item scale)</i>   |                  |                  |                  |                                                  |                  |                  |                  |                                               |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>Years</b>                                                            | 2010-2016                            |                  |                  |                  |                                                  |                  |                  |                  |                                               |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>Observations</b>                                                     | 2714                                 |                  |                  |                  |                                                  |                  |                  |                  |                                               |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></b>                                               | 0.078                                | 0.078            | 0.078            | 0.078            | 0.040                                            | 0.039            | 0.040            | 0.040            |                                               |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>AIC</b>                                                              |                                      |                  |                  |                  |                                                  |                  |                  |                  | 2879.20                                       | 2880.80          | 2879.50         | 2879.70          |
| *** $p < 0.001$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , * $p < 0.05$ ; std. error in brackets |                                      |                  |                  |                  |                                                  |                  |                  |                  |                                               |                  |                 |                  |

**Table 2-2.** Parameter estimates for egotropic voting. Source: author's calculations.

### 2.7.2 Sociotropic and performance voting, political beliefs, and values

A total of six models were estimated to test H2 to H7 (see Table 3). In all six models, year dummies, income and education (using a three-item scale for both), age (using a 10-year interval categorical variable), and gender were included as controls. In the first three models, different sets of variables were included: economic and performance voting variables in Model 4, political beliefs (policy congruence and ideology) in Model 5, and human values in Model 6. In these models, all but two coefficient estimates (i.e., *openness* and *support for LGBTQ freedom*) were found to be significant, and their signs were in line with the hypotheses. The estimates for Model 6 indicated that higher levels of self-enhancement and conservation values were associated with higher support for the government. By contrast, higher self-transcendence values were associated with lower support for the government. In Model 7, all of the aforementioned sets of variables were included, which, as expected, resulted in a loss of significance in the case of a few variables (i.e., *preference for redistribution* and *self-enhancement*) and lower coefficient estimates in the case of all variables.

As explained above, however, the associations estimated in Models 4 to 7 cannot be interpreted as causal, as the explanatory variables are likely to be endogenous. Thus, Model 8 employed partisanship as a control, while Model 9 was estimated based on a subsample of non-partisans. Interestingly, endogeneity controls only had a limited effect on the results. *Satisfaction with the economy* and *preference for redistribution* (the latter with a negative sign) remained significant, which provided support for the sociotropic economic voting (H2) and positional voting (H3) hypotheses. Similarly, the significant and positive coefficient estimates for perceptions of the education and healthcare systems affirmed H4a and H4b. While controlling for endogeneity slightly decreased coefficient estimates of these three variables, they still remained significant.

The policy congruence hypotheses (H5a and H5b) were partially confirmed by the results: as mentioned above, *preference for redistribution* had a small but significant negative coefficient in Models 8 and 9, which indicates that voters with a lower preference for redistribution (and thus a greater alignment with the government's position) tend to have a more favorable opinion of the government (H5a). By contrast, *support for LGBTQ freedom* had a negative but statistically insignificant effect on the outcome; therefore, H5b was not supported. Moreover, the coefficient estimate for *left-right placement* decreased after controlling for endogeneity but remained significant, which provided

support for the ideological voting hypothesis (H6). As for higher-level human values, *self-enhancement* and *openness* only exhibited significant coefficients in Models 8 and 9, respectively, but *self-transcendence* (with a negative sign) and *conservation* (with a positive sign) remained significant in both Models 8 and 9, which lent support for H7b and H7c. Notably, the coefficient estimates' magnitudes and significance levels for Models 8 and 9 are fairly similar, which underscores the robustness of the findings.

|                                      | <i>Approval of national government</i>                                                                     |                         |                         |                    |                         |                         |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                      | (4)                                                                                                        | (5)                     | (6)                     | (7)                | (8)                     | (9)                     |
| <i>Satisf. with economy</i>          | 0.725**<br>(0.013)                                                                                         |                         |                         | 0.635**<br>(0.013) | 0.578**<br>(0.012)      | 0.630**<br>(0.017)      |
| <i>Satisf. with education</i>        | 0.166**<br>(0.014)                                                                                         |                         |                         | 0.154**<br>(0.013) | 0.138**<br>(0.012)      | 0.125**<br>(0.016)      |
| <i>Satisf. with healthcare</i>       | 0.103**<br>(0.013)                                                                                         |                         |                         | 0.085**<br>(0.013) | 0.077**<br>(0.012)      | 0.084**<br>(0.016)      |
| <i>Preference for redistribution</i> |                                                                                                            | -<br>0.459**<br>(0.039) |                         | -0.050<br>(0.029)  | -0.070*<br>(0.027)      | -0.088*<br>(0.036)      |
| <i>Support for LGBTQ freedom</i>     |                                                                                                            | -0.018<br>(0.027)       |                         | -0.006<br>(0.019)  | -0.005<br>(0.018)       | -0.022<br>(0.025)       |
| <i>Left-right placement</i>          |                                                                                                            | 0.513**<br>(0.014)      |                         | 0.254**<br>(0.010) | 0.147**<br>(0.011)      | 0.176**<br>(0.018)      |
| <i>Self-enhancement</i>              |                                                                                                            |                         | 0.222**<br>(0.050)      | 0.051<br>(0.031)   | 0.060*<br>(0.029)       | 0.018<br>(0.042)        |
| <i>Self-transcendence</i>            |                                                                                                            |                         | -<br>0.622**<br>(0.071) | -0.110*<br>(0.045) | -<br>0.148**<br>(0.042) | -<br>0.243**<br>(0.058) |
| <i>Conservation</i>                  |                                                                                                            |                         | 0.555**<br>(0.070)      | 0.154**<br>(0.044) | 0.125*<br>(0.041)       | 0.133*<br>(0.057)       |
| <i>Openness</i>                      |                                                                                                            |                         | 0.010<br>(0.064)        | -0.018<br>(0.040)  | -0.009<br>(0.037)       | 0.105*<br>(0.051)       |
| <i>Partisanship</i>                  |                                                                                                            |                         |                         |                    |                         |                         |
| <i>Nonpartisan (ref)</i>             |                                                                                                            |                         |                         |                    | —                       |                         |
| <i>Other</i>                         |                                                                                                            |                         |                         |                    | -<br>0.438**<br>(0.057) |                         |
| <i>Fidesz</i>                        |                                                                                                            |                         |                         |                    | 1.298**<br>(0.059)      |                         |
| <b>Endogeneity addressed</b>         | No                                                                                                         | No                      | No                      | No                 | Yes                     | Yes                     |
| <b>Controls</b>                      | <i>Year, income (3-item scale), education (3-item scale), age (categorical var. for 10-year intervals)</i> |                         |                         |                    |                         |                         |
| <b>Years covered</b>                 | 2010-2020                                                                                                  |                         |                         |                    |                         |                         |
| <b>Observations</b>                  | 4918                                                                                                       | 4918                    | 4918                    | 4918               | 4918                    | 2596                    |
| <b>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></b>            | 0,601                                                                                                      | 0,289                   | 0,071                   | 0,647              | 0,688                   | 0,619                   |

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ; std. error in brackets

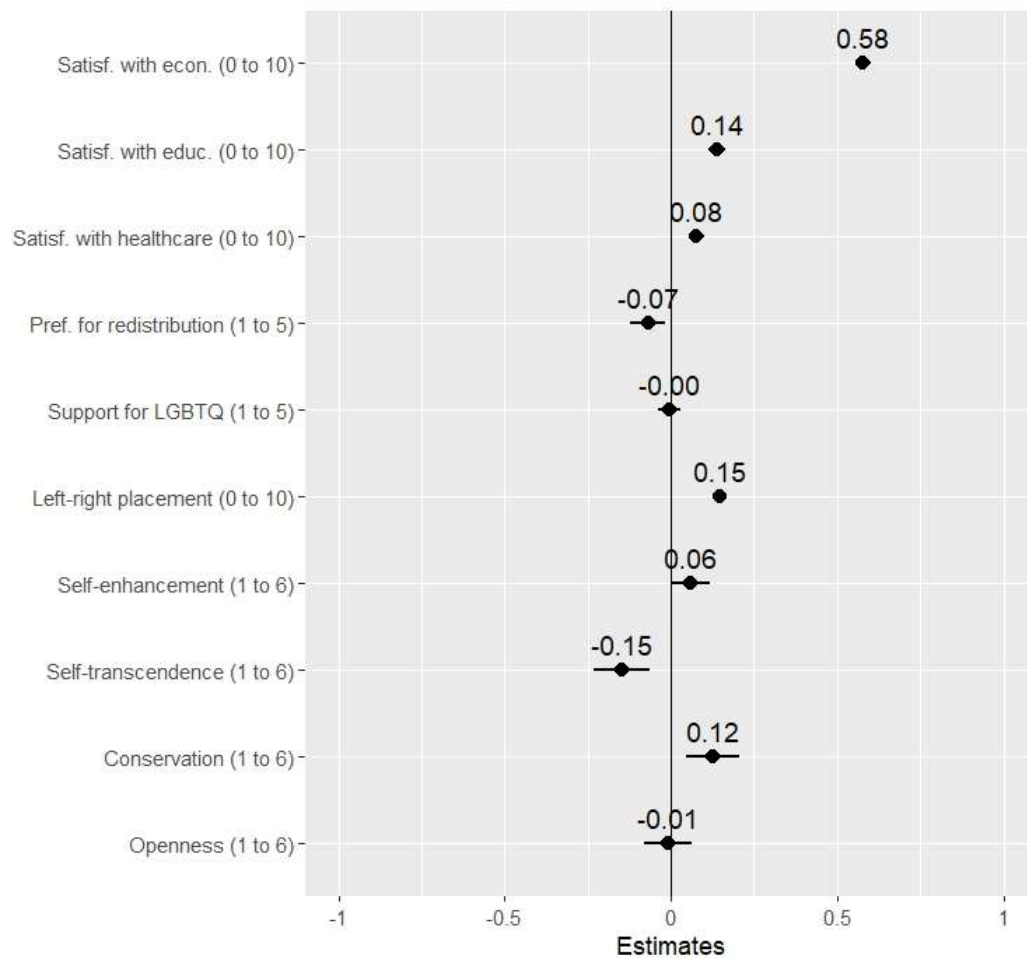
**Table 2-3.** Parameter estimates for sociotropic and performance voting, political beliefs, and values voting). Source: author's calculations

The adjusted  $R^2$  values suggested that the first group of variables (Model 4: *satisfaction with the economy, education and healthcare*) explained the largest fraction of the variance in the outcome by far; adding all of the other explanatory variables in Model 8 only increased the adjusted  $R^2$  by 0.087 relative to Model 4. To grasp the relative magnitude of the effect sizes, Figure 2 shows the coefficient estimates for Model 8, along with the scales of the variables.<sup>5</sup> *Satisfaction with the economy* (coefficient: 0.58; measured on a scale of 0 to 10) had the strongest effect on the outcome. The effects of *self-transcendence* and *conservation* (coefficients: -0.15 and 12, respectively) were weaker, but they were still much stronger than that of the remaining variables since they were measured on a narrower scale of 1 to 6.

---

<sup>5</sup> As the variables are measured at different scales, the scales must be taken into account when comparing the coefficients.





**Figure 2-2.** Coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals for Model 8 (scales of the variables on the left side). Source: author's calculations

## 2.8 Discussion

The results provided partial support for the economic voting theory. In line with previous findings from democratic (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2011; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2019) and autocratic countries (Guriev and Treisman, 2020), the results supported the sociotropic economic voting hypothesis. The strong effect of perceived economic performance on political preferences can also explain why authoritarian populists' rhetoric typically emphasizes economic performance (Evans, 2024; Guriev and Treisman, 2019). The results also corroborated positional voting theory, as a higher preference for redistribution was found to decrease support for the government. By contrast, the significant changes in individual tax rates that result from a large-scale tax reform did not seem to affect political preferences, as predicted by the egotropic voting hypothesis and the taxpayer retribution hypothesis.

The results supported the performance voting theory—that is, support for the government is affected by its perceived performance in different policy areas. Interestingly, however, perceptions do not seem to be largely endogenous, as the coefficient estimates decreased only marginally when partisanship was included as a control variable. This implies that a large share of the variation in voters' evaluations of the government's performance is independent of their partisan identity. In a broader sense, these results indicate that the economic and performance voting theories, which originate from and are mainly applied in (liberal) democratic contexts, offer viable explanations for understanding the support garnered by authoritarian populist regimes.

Political beliefs (policy congruence and ideologies) were also found to affect political preferences. Specifically, a preference for redistribution and self-identification with left-leaning ideologies was found to decrease support for the government. The results confirm previous findings (e.g., Baro, 2022; Stubager, 2013) and indicate that political outcomes are also influenced by values: conservation and self-transcendence increase and decrease support for the government, respectively.

Placing the study within the broader debate on the core motives that drive voters, the results confirm that political preferences are not primarily influenced by economic self-interest, as the (classical) rational voter hypothesis suggests (Downs, 1957). Rather, the analysis lends support for the altruistic voter hypothesis (Goodin and Roberts, 1975; Margolis, 1984), as general perceptions of the state of the economy and the government's performance were found to have the most explanatory power. The results also support the expressive voter hypothesis (Fiorina, 1976): general ideologies and basic human values influence voters' political preferences. The latter two considerations offer a solution for the paradox of voting (Downs, 1957). A seeming contradiction lies at the heart of this paradox: due to the low probability that an individual vote will alter the outcome of an election, the associated costs of voting often surpass its anticipated benefits. Thus, altruistic and expressive motives explain why voters may still decide to cast their ballots.

A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that, in authoritarian populist (or similar hybrid) regimes, incumbents remain popular by controlling the media (Guriev and Treisman, 2019) and polarizing citizens (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018). Since partisanship serves as a cue that drives both media consumption and polarization, it may influence not only ideologies but also perceptions of the government's performance and the state of the economy, as well as basic human values (Baro, 2022; Evans and Pickup,

2010; Iyengar et al., 2019). While partisanship undoubtedly affects the above factors, the present analysis also shows that the latter influence political outcomes, independent of partisanship.

These findings also have important implications for the fate of democracy in Hungary and other authoritarian populist countries. Political commentators and citizens who lean towards the opposition tend to be rather skeptical about potential opposition strategies for appealing to voters and claim that the overwhelming dominance of pro-government media outlets and deepening partisan divisions make many (typically pro-government) voters unreachable. While there is considerable truth in this assertion, the findings show that partisan identities are far from being the only cues that influence voters' political preferences. Therefore, appealing to voters by proposing substantive arguments (rather than simply emphasizing partisan identities) may still be an effective strategy. In particular, voters seem to be most likely to consider arguments about the economy and more generic moral aspects of policies.

## **2.9 Summary and limitations**

Authoritarian populism is spreading around the globe. In authoritarian populist regimes, elections are still meaningful despite not being free or fair; therefore, incumbents must and do seek to remain popular. The aim of this article is to examine how they do so by identifying the drivers of support for Orbán's government in Hungary. Hungary stands out as one of the most rapidly de-democratizing countries worldwide (Hellmeier et al., 2021), and a context in which the government continues to enjoy relatively broad popular support. The present empirical analysis was based on six ESS waves that took place between 2010 and 2020 and my calculations of respondents' PIT rates.

This approach enabled the examination of factors that influence support for authoritarian populism at the individual level, thereby complementing extant literature that predominantly focuses on the country level (Lavrič and Bieber, 2021). Additionally, most previous analyses that focused on the individual support for authoritarian populist (and similar) regimes considered only one or a few factors. By contrast, the present analysis includes a relatively large number of explanatory variables, which enabled an assessment of their relative explanatory power.

The empirical analysis showed that voters' preferences are primarily shaped by their perceptions of the economy. Their perceived performance of the government, issue positions, ideology and two basic human values—self-transcendence and conservation—are also relevant. By contrast, voters' economic situation, as captured by changes in individual PIT rates, did not appear to be associated with the outcome. The applied research design addressed potential endogeneity concerns and enabled a causal interpretation of the results. Similar results were obtained with different model specifications, which underpins the robustness of the findings.

The study has some important limitations. Firstly, due to data limitations, several potential drivers of political preferences could not be tested, such as populist attitudes and ethno-nationalist sentiments. Furthermore, the deterioration of media freedom in Hungary has likely had a substantial effect on voters' political preferences. Future contributions may assess these factors, should suitable data be available. Secondly, focusing on a single case somewhat limits the external validity of the findings. Nonetheless, the validity of the findings extends beyond the borders of Hungary. On the one hand, the results show that many of the individual-level drivers of political preferences that have gained significant empirical support in democratic contexts (particularly those rooted in economic voting theory) are also applicable in less democratic settings. On the other hand, since Hungary is an exemplary case of authoritarian populism and a role model for populists, the results are not only likely to hold among actual authoritarian populist regimes but can also contribute to the understanding of why voters support parties with similar values in more democratic contexts.

## **2.10 Appendix (Article I)**

### **2.10.1 Calculation of change in PIT rates**

The PIT variables used to assess the egotropic voting hypothesis (Models 1 to 3) were calculated as follows.

- (i) As the ESS dataset only contained data on families' net income, PIT rates could not be calculated by simply applying the PIT rules to gross incomes. Instead, they had to be indirectly calculated. Firstly, a database was constructed in which, for each combination of (net income intervals of HUF 1,000, or around EUR

3)\*(year)\*(number of children), a PIT rate was calculated based on PIT regulations (see Appendix 2 for a summary).

(ii) Secondly, the same characteristics were calculated for ESS respondents:

- a. Net income: Based on family net income deciles, net incomes were estimated as the average of the two nearest deciles (in the case of the first and the 10<sup>th</sup> deciles, the  $\pm 33\%$  of the lowest and highest decile was used). It should be noted that the potential discrepancies between estimated and (unobserved) actual incomes have a very limited effect on estimated tax rates, as the tax rates of very low and high incomes are not sensitive to minor changes. Additionally, until 2012, the number of earners in a household also affected the overall tax rate of households through the tax credit system (as not households but individuals were the main subjects of the PIT rules). Therefore, this was also taken into consideration for those years: estimated net family income was divided by two if the number of earners in a household was two (assuming that the two earners did not have drastically different income levels).
- b. Number of children under age 18 (entitled to family allowance): This was calculated based on household composition variables (the number of people living in the respondent's household, their relationship to the respondent, and their age).
- c. Year (as indicated in the database)

(iii) Using the database described in (i) as a lookup table, respondents' PIT rates were assigned to observations in the ESS database, based on the individual characteristics described in (ii).

(iv) To calculate tax changes, respondents' PIT rates from Years ( $t-1$ ) and ( $t-2$ ) were also calculated based on respondents' data (income, number of children, and number of earners) in the reference year ( $t$ ) and the tax rules in force in Years ( $t-1$ ) and ( $t-2$ ). This approach was justified based on the following two considerations. Firstly, if a respondent's effective tax rate changed because their situation changed (e.g., a significant change in income, children born, etc.) while the tax rules remained the same, they were unlikely to attribute this change to government policies. Secondly, the individual-level variables that determined the effective tax rate were not likely to drastically change within two years in the majority of cases. The change in the PIT

rate between the reference year ( $t$ ) and Years ( $t-1$ ) and ( $t-2$ ) was calculated based on the following formulas:

$$\Delta PIT(t-1) = PIT_t - PIT_{t-1} \text{ (Eq1)}$$

$$\Delta PIT(t-2) = PIT_t - PIT_{t-2} \text{ (Eq2)}$$

(v) PIT rates were not calculated for observations in which the income decile was missing or if the main source of income was not work-related and neither the respondent nor their partner performed a paid job over the last seven days.

(vi) Furthermore, PIT increase and PIT decrease variables were computed relative to Year ( $t-1$ ) (Equations 3 and 4) and Year ( $t-2$ ) (Equations 5 and 6) as follows:

$$PITincr(t-1) = \begin{cases} \Delta PIT(t-1), & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-1) > 0 \\ 0, & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-1) \leq 0 \end{cases} \text{ (Eq3)}$$

$$PITdecr(t-1) = \begin{cases} \Delta PIT(t-1), & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-1) < 0 \\ 0, & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-1) \geq 0 \end{cases} \text{ (Eq4)}$$

$$PITincr(t-2) = \begin{cases} \Delta PIT(t-2), & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-2) > 0 \\ 0, & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-2) \leq 0 \end{cases} \text{ (Eq5)}$$

$$PITdecr(t-2) = \begin{cases} \Delta PIT(t-2), & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-2) < 0 \\ 0, & \text{if } \Delta PIT(t-2) \geq 0 \end{cases} \text{ (Eq6)}$$

## 2.10.2 The Hungarian tax reform

| Tax                                                  | 2007          | 2011   | 2013 | 2017 | 2021 |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------|------|------|------|
| <b>PIT</b>                                           |               |        |      |      |      |
| Band limit (EUR, annual)                             | 6,8           | -      | -    | -    | -    |
| Lower tax rate, %                                    | 18.0          | 20.3   | 16.0 | 15.0 | 15.0 |
| Top tax rate(s), %                                   | 36.0;<br>40.0 | -      | -    | -    | -    |
| <b>Minimum wage tax credits</b>                      |               |        |      |      |      |
| Lower threshold (EUR, annual)                        | 8,4           | 9,857  | -    | -    | -    |
| Max value (EUR, monthly)                             | 45            | 43     | -    | -    | -    |
| Phase-out threshold (EUR) (reduced)                  | 11,04         | 14,194 | -    | -    | -    |
| <b>Family tax allowance (EUR, monthly)</b>           |               |        |      |      |      |
| One dependent - tax base                             | -             | 224    | 208  | 202  | 180  |
| One dependent - net                                  |               | 36     | 33   | 32   | 27   |
| Two dependents - tax base                            | -             | 224    | 208  | 323  | 360  |
| Two dependents - net/dependent                       |               | 36     | 33   | 48   | 54   |
| Three dependents - tax base                          | -             | 738    | 687  | 665  | 595  |
| Three dependents, net/dependent                      | 14            | 118    | 110  | 106  | 89   |
| Can also be deducted from employee ssc contributions | X             | X      | X    | ✓    | ✓    |

|                                                    |      |      |      |      |       |
|----------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| PIT exemption for mothers of four or more children | X    | X    | X    | X    | ✓     |
| <b>Employees' contributions</b>                    |      |      |      |      |       |
| Social security contributions, %                   | -    | -    | -    | -    | 45430 |
| Pension contributions, %                           | 8.5  | 10   | 10   | 10   | -     |
| Health insurance contribution, %                   | 7    | 6    | 7    | 7    | -     |
| Labour market contribution, %                      | 1.5  | 1.5  | 1.5  | 1.5  | -     |
| Total %                                            | 17.0 | 17.5 | 18.5 | 18.5 | 18.5  |

**Table 2-4.** The most important aspects of the Hungarian PIT system in selected year. Source: author's compilation based on national legislation

### 2.10.3 Descriptive statistics of change in PIT rates

| Children                            | Lower income (1st to 3rd deciles) |     |       |       | Middle income (4th to 7th deciles) |     |       |      | Higher income (8th to 10th deciles) |     |       |       |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|------------------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|
|                                     | Mean                              | N   | Min   | Max   | Mean                               | N   | Min   | Max  | Mean                                | N   | Min   | Max   |
| <b>None</b>                         | 0.01                              | 376 | -0.04 | 0.07  | -0.01                              | 852 | -0.11 | 0.08 | -0.01                               | 611 | -0.09 | 0.05  |
| <b>1</b>                            | 0.02                              | 71  | -0.04 | 0.07  | 0.00                               | 214 | -0.11 | 0.08 | -0.02                               | 215 | -0.09 | 0.05  |
| <b>2</b>                            | -0.02                             | 44  | -0.06 | 0.06  | -0.02                              | 131 | -0.11 | 0.04 | -0.02                               | 100 | -0.09 | 0.05  |
| <b>3+</b>                           | -0.06                             | 17  | -0.19 | -0.02 | -0.19                              | 54  | -0.24 | 0.00 | -0.16                               | 29  | -0.25 | -0.05 |
| <i>Notes: 2010 to 2016, N= 2714</i> |                                   |     |       |       |                                    |     |       |      |                                     |     |       |       |

**Table 2-5.** Descriptive statistics of the variable  $\Delta\text{PIT}(t-1)$ . Source: author's calculations, based on ESS data

| Children                            | Lower income (1st to 3rd deciles) |     |       |      | Middle income (4th to 7th deciles) |     |       |      | Higher income (8th to 10th deciles) |     |       |      |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|-------|------|------------------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|------|
|                                     | Mean                              | N   | Min   | Max  | Mean                               | N   | Min   | Max  | Mean                                | N   | Min   | Max  |
| <b>None</b>                         | 0.00                              | 376 | -0.04 | 0.17 | -0.02                              | 852 | -0.11 | 0.07 | -0.03                               | 611 | -0.11 | 0.03 |
| <b>1</b>                            | 0.00                              | 71  | -0.04 | 0.17 | -0.01                              | 214 | -0.11 | 0.07 | -0.02                               | 215 | -0.11 | 0.03 |
| <b>2</b>                            | -0.04                             | 44  | -0.10 | 0.06 | -0.03                              | 131 | -0.11 | 0.09 | -0.05                               | 100 | -0.13 | 0.08 |
| <b>3+</b>                           | -0.02                             | 17  | -0.18 | 0.01 | -0.10                              | 54  | -0.24 | 0.17 | -0.08                               | 29  | -0.25 | 0.01 |
| <i>Notes: 2010 to 2016, N= 2714</i> |                                   |     |       |      |                                    |     |       |      |                                     |     |       |      |

**Table 2-6.** Descriptive statistics of the variable  $\Delta\text{PIT}(t-2)$ . Source: author's calculations, based on ESS data

### **3 ARTICLE II: RATIONAL AUTOCRATS? DRIVERS OF CORRUPTION PATTERNS IN COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES: TOWARDS AN EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK WITH EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS FROM HUNGARY**

*Aron Hajnal*

*Published in European Political Science, 2025*

Competitive authoritarianism, a specific type of hybrid regime, is gaining ground globally. Corruption is particularly prevalent in these contexts as regimes utilize it to consolidate their power. However, some competitive authoritarian regimes also take significant measures to curb certain types of corruption. The present article posits that competitive authoritarian regimes, acting as rational utility-maximizing actors, curb or enhance corruption types based on the net costs and benefits—that is, net gains—they yield for the regime. To elucidate the factors influencing net gains an explanatory framework is presented. Its three constituent elements are accountability costs, transaction costs and political benefits. The empirical applicability of the framework is demonstrated with case studies of two corruption types (informal payments in healthcare and clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions) in Hungary.

Keywords: corruption, causes of corruption, patterns of corruption, competitive authoritarianism, hybrid regimes

Full reference: Hajnal, Á. (2025) ‘Rational Autocrats? Drivers of Corruption Patterns in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: Towards an Explanatory Framework with Empirical Applications from Hungary’, *European Political Science*, January, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y>.



### 3.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the third wave of democratisation has given way to the third wave of autocratisation (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; Diamond, 2021). While 20<sup>th</sup>-century dictatorships typically relied on deterrence to maintain compliance of the general population, most autocracies today apply significantly different strategies to remain in power. Empowered elites, the rise of the liberal world order, and economic and informational globalisation made it harder to maintain isolated repressive dictatorships (Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Therefore, typical modern-day autocracies refrain from overt repression, seek to keep a democratic facade and organise elections. Although elections are not free and fair, they are nevertheless meaningful and competitive (Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Such regimes are referred to as competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2020; Diamond, 2021).

Corruption—broadly defined as the use of public office for private gain (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016)—plays an important role in such regimes as incumbents rely on it to consolidate and maintain power by (re)distributing wealth and economic opportunities through corrupt networks (Johnston, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). Evidence shows that competitive authoritarian regimes (and in a broader sense, hybrid regimes) are the most prone to corruption (McMann et al., 2020). However, a closer examination of corruption in competitive authoritarian settings unfolds an intriguing picture: such regimes often take significant measures to curb certain types of corruption (Quah, 1999; Ang, 2020b).

For instance, in Malaysia, a large-scale corruption scandal (“1MDB”) led to the introduction of a series significant of anti-corruption measures (Dettman and Gomez, 2020). Evidence also shows that certain forms of corruption were effectively curbed in Russia (Rochlitz et al., 2020) and Hungary (Ligeti et al., 2020). Perhaps the most famous example—the outlier of many corruption studies—is Singapore, where a highly successful anti-corruption framework has been implemented (Quah, 1999; Abdulai, 2009). For many years, the country has been ranked among the least corrupt countries globally by Transparency International.

This study aims to explain these puzzling outcomes. To that end, by contrast to the prevalent, but recently, increasingly criticised (Heywood, 2017) country-level approach to corruption, I delineated different types of corruption within countries and argue that these incur various costs and benefits for the regime. The regime, presumed to be a

rational utility-maximiser, assesses the net costs and benefits (i.e., the net gains) associated with corruption types, and decides to enhance or curb them based on these assessments. The principal ambition of this article is to present an explanatory framework that elucidates the various factors that influence the net gains of corruption types in the context of competitive authoritarianism. While the present paper does not aim to provide solid empirical proof for the presented explanatory framework, its empirical applicability is demonstrated by case studies of two corruption types in Hungary. This ambition is relevant for the following reasons.

Firstly, the article contributes to the streams literature focusing on the relationship between regime types and corruption (Rock, 2009; Saha et al., 2014; McMann et al., 2020), and corruption in competitive authoritarian and similar regimes (Quah, 1999, 2013; Fritzen, 2005; Chang and Golden, 2010; Hollyer and Wantchekon, 2015). The within-country approach applied in this study allows for considering various novel drivers of corruption that country-level studies are not able to capture, thereby adding new insights to these streams of research.

Secondly, the present article also contributes to the rapidly growing body of literature concerned with various aspects of the recent wave of democratic decline and emerging hybrid regimes (Cianetti et al., 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; Levitsky and Way, 2020; Diamond, 2021; Guriev and Treisman, 2022) by considering the crucial, but so far relatively neglected role of corruption in the emergence and maintenance of competitive authoritarian (and other, similar) regimes. Similarly, Cianetti et al. (2018) argued that there is a need to move away from narrowly institutionalist approaches in research on de-democratisation and “to better integrate the role of illiberal socio-economic structures such as oligarchical structures or corrupt networks” (Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley, 2018: 243).

The article is organised as follows. In Section 2, the relevant streams of research are briefly reviewed. In Section 3, the outcomes of interest (types and patterns of corruption) are conceptualised. In Section 4, the explanatory framework of net gains from corruption is described. In Section 5, two case studies are presented to demonstrate the pertinence of the framework. In Section 6, some key questions regarding the framework are discussed. Finally, Section 7 offers a summary and concluding remarks.

## **3.2 Conceptual and theoretical review**

### **3.2.1 Corruption: quantitative or qualitative differences?**

The appearance of corruption indices with broad temporal and geographical coverage (e.g. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, the World Bank's Control of Corruption indicator, and various corruption indices of the Varieties of Democracy project) has resulted in a surge in cross-national large-n studies of corruption (for reviews, see Lambsdorff, 2007; Dimant and Tosato, 2018). These studies have significantly enhanced comprehension of the country-level patterns, drivers, and effects of corruption. However, the majority of these studies—often implicitly—apply a unidimensional approach to corruption assuming that corrupt acts are relatively homogenous (Graycar, 2015; Andersson, 2017; Ang, 2020b) and that corruption varies among countries in terms of quantity, rather than quality (Johnston, 2006).

This problem has caught the attention of many students of corruption. Some scholars have taken on to delineate different corruption patterns at the country level (e.g., Johnston, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006; Grzymala-Busse, 2008). Others have sought to discern different forms of corruption. The most salient distinction lies between petty and grand corruption. Petty corruption refers to smaller bribes typically paid by citizens to low-level bureaucrats, whereas grand corruption involves a systematic and large-scale appropriation of public goods by high-level state officials (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016). Graycar's (2015) more nuanced classification framework identified types of actions (e.g. bribery, extortion), activities (e.g. procurement, appointing personnel), sectors (e.g. construction, energy), and places (e.g. countries, regions).

### **3.2.2 Regime types**

Corruption manifests in diverse forms and is driven by distinct factors across different political regimes (Johnston, 2006). To analyse such regime-dependent factors, it is necessary to establish a broad typology of political regimes. In line with the influential multi-dimensional approach to democracy, the latter is defined as a political regime which consists of five interrelated constituent elements: democratic election, political participation rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern (Merkel, 2004). At the other end of the spectrum, (closed) autocracy is defined as a regime in which 'the chief executive is not subjected to de jure multiparty elections' (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019: 1109). Finally, the encompassing term hybrid regime denotes the

grey zone between autocracy and democracy (Wigell, 2008). Hybrid regimes are diminished forms of authoritarianism or democracy and share certain features of both ideal types (Bogaards, 2009).

This article focuses on corruption in competitive authoritarian regimes. Competitive authoritarianism is a particular type of hybrid regime ‘in which the coexistence of meaningful democratic institutions and serious incumbent abuse yields electoral competition that is real but unfair’ (Levitsky and Way, 2020: 51). Competitive authoritarianism has been increasingly prevalent worldwide (Levitsky and Way, 2020; Diamond, 2021; Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Although some analysts have argued that such regimes have an inherent transitional character, and converge either towards democracy or autocracy (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013), it appears that they have certain socio-political anchors that may stabilise them, at least over the medium run (Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Unlike some other types of hybrid regimes, in competitive authoritarianism political power is centralised, and the government is relatively free to implement policies and use the state apparatus for their own goals. However, unlike in fully authoritarian contexts, governments in competitive authoritarian settings face significant constraints both in domestic and international arenas (Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2020; Guriev and Treisman, 2022).

### **3.2.3 Corruption in competitive authoritarian settings**

Both empirical (Rock, 2009; McMann et al., 2020) and theoretical (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006) accounts underpin that democracy and corruption exhibit an inverted curvilinear relationship. In fully authoritarian settings, the regime enjoys a nearly uncontested power monopoly. It can seize public assets at will and has little incentive to share the gains by allowing other groups to benefit from corruption. Therefore, while corruption is pervasive, it typically remains limited to areas that directly benefit the ruling elite. In democracies, the presence of formal and informal institutions that uphold public integrity and accountability contributes to the attainment of the lowest levels of corruption. In hybrid regimes (including competitive authoritarian ones), the ruling elite’s power monopoly is challenged but accountability institutions are not fully in place, which makes way for higher levels of corruption.

However, while by and large, competitive authoritarian (and in a broader sense, hybrid) regimes are the most prone to corruption, a closer examination sheds light on interesting

patterns: the prevalence of different corruption types varies largely in such contexts. Evidence shows that some forms of petty corruption are effectively curbed by such regimes (Hollyer and Wantchekon, 2015; Ang, 2020a; Ligeti et al., 2020; Rochlitz, Kazun and Yakovlev, 2020).

By contrast, grand corruption typically flourishes in competitive authoritarian settings (McMann et al., 2020), often to an extent characterised by state capture, whereby (a large share of) state institutions are captured by the ruling elites and laws and policies are formulated to their benefit (Hellman, Jones and Kaufmann, 2003), rather than to pursue the public interest. State capture may occur through influencing law and policy making, influencing policy implementation and/or disabling accountability institutions (Dávid-Barrett, 2023). As such, state capture may play a crucial role in maintaining political power. Yet, competitive authoritarian rulers are not always keen to (fully) capture the state: Singapore, for instance, has been effective in curbing not only petty but also grand corruption (Quah, 1999; Abdulai, 2009).

What factors may explain these counterintuitive outcomes? Although country-level studies are of limited use when it comes to describing and explaining within-country corruption patterns, some insights may still be applicable to the latter ambition. Firstly, many studies have analysed how institutions and actors may constrain corruption (for a review see Dimant and Tosato 2018). Secondly, some contributions have focused on corruption in hybrid and authoritarian settings specifically, analysing the role of ideological commitment (Hollyer and Wantchekon, 2015), the time horizon and the type (i.e., personalistic or single-party) of the regime (Chang and Golden, 2010), and political will for anti-corruption measures (Quah, 1999; Fritzen, 2005; Abdulai, 2009) as drivers of corruption. A few other contributions have sought to describe and/or explain different patterns of corruption (e.g., Johnston, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006) and state capture (Grzymala-Busse, 2008; Innes, 2014) in various contexts, including competitive authoritarianism.

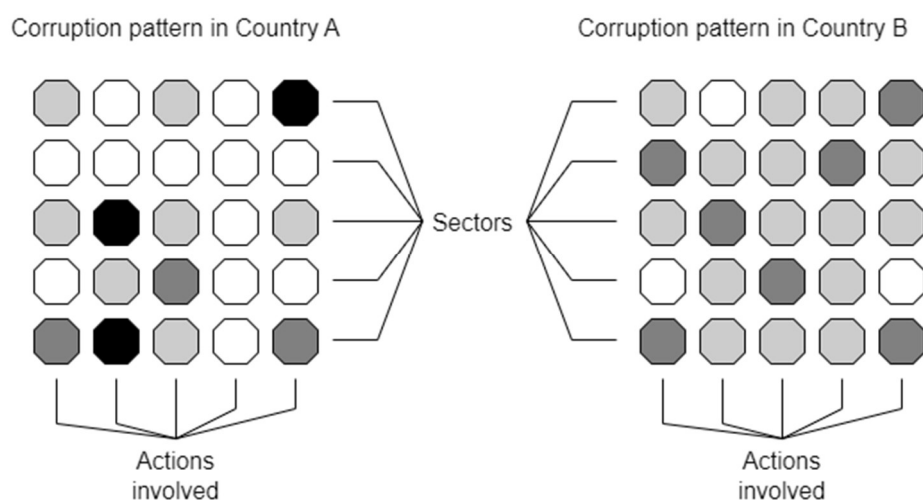
### **3.3 Conceptualising corruption types and patterns**

Although the literature briefly reviewed in Section 2.3 puts forward valuable insights that may contribute to describing and explaining within-country corruption outcomes in competitive authoritarianism, the country-level approach applied by the majority of these contributions is not well suited for the present purposes. A few studies considered

different forms of corruption within countries (e.g., Ang, 2020a, 2020b; Johnston, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006), but they did not seek to decompose country-level patterns into constituent elements systematically and applied a primarily country-level perspective.

Shifting the level of analysis downwards, I propose a novel approach to studying countries' corruption patterns by conceptualising it as the ensemble of different corruption types. Corruption types are defined based on two dimensions of Graycar's (2015) classification framework, denoting sets of corrupt transactions that are relatively similar in terms of the specific actions involved (e.g., bribery, clientelism, nepotism, extortion), and the sector in which they occur (e.g., construction, retail, healthcare, customs and immigration, public administration). For instance, bribery in customs and immigration, and clientelism in public procurements constitute types of corruption. Arguably, in a given country and time, corrupt transactions within corruption types are relatively similar in terms of characteristics relevant to the present discussion (in particular, the costs and benefits they incur to the regime; see Section 4).

The schematic figure below illustrates the corruption patterns of two countries. In Country A, several corruption types are rampant, while a few others are very limited. In Country B, the majority of corruption types are present but moderate.



**Figure 3-1.** Illustrative examples of corruption patterns. Octagons represent types of corruption (e.g., bribery in police, clientelism in public procurement), and darker shades indicate that the given type of corruption is more common. Source: created by author.

### **3.4 Net gains from corruption**

What explains patterns of corruption in competitive authoritarian regimes? Broad evidence supports that political will for anti-corruption efforts (Brinkerhoff, 2000) is a vital—potentially necessary and sufficient—condition of successful anti-corruption interventions in non-democratic settings (Fritzen, 2005; Abdulai, 2009, 2009; Ristei, 2010; Quah, 2013). As I argued in Section 2, competitive authoritarian regimes may effectively curb certain types of corruption while enabling others. This implies that such regimes' will to curb corruption varies significantly across corruption types. What may explain this variance?

Put simply, the influential institutional economist approach to corruption (Becker and Stigler, 1974; Rose-Ackerman, 1975; Klitgaard, 1988; Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016) assumes that corrupt actors are rational utility-maximisers who engage in corruption if it is profitable to them. The profitability is determined by the incentives created by the institutions in which the actors operate. Building on this approach, I posit that competitive authoritarian regimes assess and weigh the costs and benefits—that is, the net gains—associated with different corruption types and curb or enable them based on this calculation. The costs and benefits are influenced by various intervening factors, falling under the following broad categories: accountability costs, transaction costs, and political benefits (McMann et al., 2020). In the following three subsections, I discuss these in detail.

The model applied in the present article differs from the classical institutional economics approach in two main aspects. Firstly, in contrast to the traditional model which considers individuals, here the focal actor is the regime itself, presumed to be a rational and unitary agent. Secondly, the net gains of corruption arising on the regime's part are considered at the level of distinct corruption types, rather than for corruption in general.

#### **3.4.1 Accountability costs**

Accountability costs refer to punishments inflicted by democratic institutions and pro-democratic actors vis-à-vis the government and are influenced by various factors. To enumerate these factors, I use the metaphor of North (1990), who argued that institutions (including laws, regulations, and norms) can be thought of as the rules of the game, whereas organisations are players in the game. Both institutions and organisations (and in a broader sense, actors) may inflict accountability costs that regimes must bear for

corruption. Notably, while the distinction between institutions and actors is sometimes blurred, it is useful to discern them theoretically. Accountability costs inflicted by institutions are incurred in a mechanistic manner, often in the form of binding rules or shared norms; by contrast, in the case of accountability costs inflicted by actors, the agency of particular persons and organisations plays an important role. It is also useful to discern the domestic and the international arenas. These dimensions delineate four potential sources of accountability costs (Table 1).

Firstly, formal political institutions, such as elections, political and civil rights, and independent legislatures and courts strongly influence accountability costs associated with corruption types.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, these institutions may incur varying costs for different types of corruption. For instance, independent legislatures may only constitute constraints for those types of corruption for which they possess a legal mandate to intervene. Whilst competitive authoritarianism is characterised by diminished democratic institutions, these institutions are nonetheless present to some extent and may act as constraints on the regime's power (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Informal institutions, or norms, also matter. Societies are characterised by a level of permissiveness towards corruption in general (Lavena, 2013) and also hold beliefs about the moral acceptability of distinct types of corruption. For instance, people may be indulgent concerning bribing bureaucrats but largely condemn extortion in education.

Secondly, still within the domestic arena, organisations and actors also influence accountability costs. Shifting from the neo-institutionalist perspective, some recent contributions have emphasized the role of actors who inhabit institutions (e.g., Voronov and Weber, 2020). In the context of competitive authoritarianism, Guriev and Treisman (2022) argue that well-informed, educated elites may effectively oppose the government. Furthermore, other pro-democratic actors and organisations, such as independent media outlets (Bhattacharyya and Hodler, 2015) and civil organisations (Treisman, 2000) may also exert significant pressure on the government and thereby influence the accountability costs of corruption.

---

<sup>6</sup> The association between these factors and country-level corruption has received substantive empirical support (Lederman, Loayza and Soares, 2005; Dimant and Tosato, 2018; McMann et al., 2020).



Thirdly, accountability costs are also shaped by binding rules imposed by international and intergovernmental organizations. For instance, the EU has specific rules about how member states can access and spend EU funds (White, 2010). The European Anti-Fraud Office also has a mandate to investigate cases that involve suspicions of fraud. For example, in response to allegations of extensive clientelism in the allocation of EU funds, in 2022 the European Commission initiated a rule of law procedure against Hungary, which lead to the withholding of a substantial portion of the EU funds that the country was entitled to receive (Stavis-Gridneff et al., 2022).

Fourthly, international actors may also influence accountability costs by incentivising the implementation of provisions enhancing accountability through various formal and informal means, such as conditional aid. In the frame of the European Neighbourhood Policy, for instance, the EU pressured neighbouring countries to implement various pro-democratic measures, including some that promote accountability and transparency (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011). The EU also pressed prospective members to implement anti-corruption measures (Kartal, 2014; Ristei, 2010).

Competitive authoritarian regimes may seek to lower accountability costs in various ways. For instance, such regimes often fuel political polarisation and partisan sentiment to reduce electoral retribution for corruption (Hajnal, 2024). They may take measures to discredit independent civil organisations, critical media outlets, and international organisations involved in anti-corruption. Finally, they can dismantle and undermine formal accountability institutions, such as the judiciary.

|                            | <b>Institutions</b>                           | <b>Organisations</b>                          |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Domestic arena</b>      | Formal political institutions, norms          | Media outlets, watchdog NGOs, educated elites |
| <b>International arena</b> | Rules enforced by international organisations | International actors                          |

**Table 3-1.** The four factors influencing accountability costs of corruption types. Source: created by author.

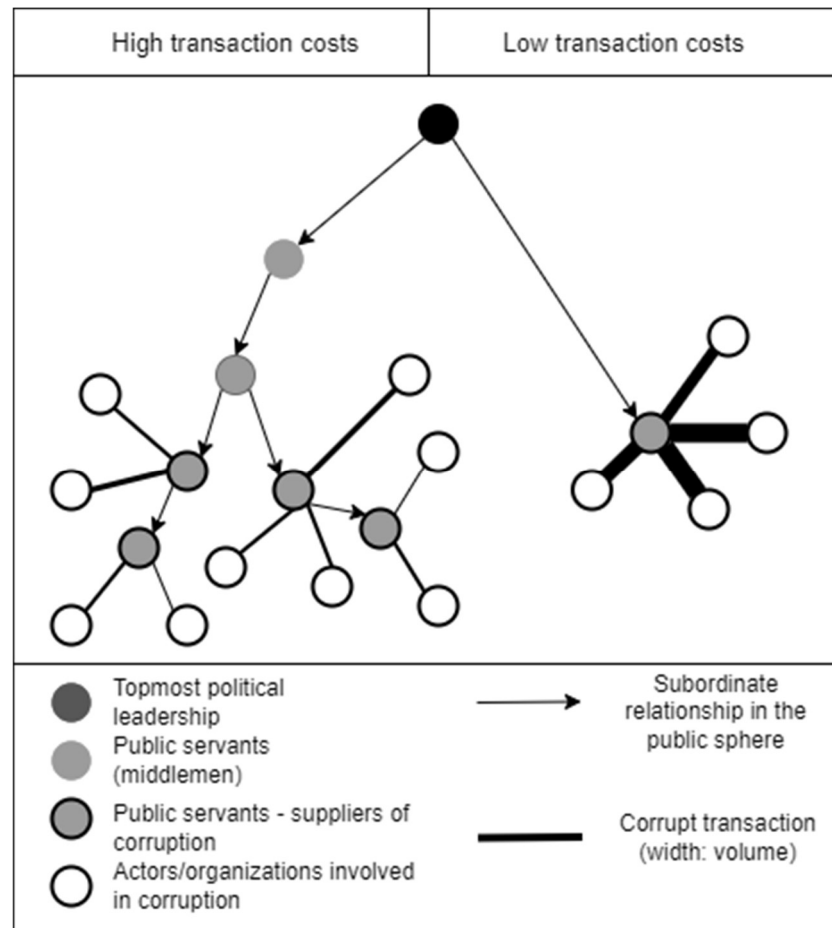
In some instances, the discussed factors may influence overall accountability costs independently from one another. In other cases, they interact. For instance, competitive authoritarian regimes may have relatively well-elaborated legal anti-corruption frameworks and powerful anti-corruption bodies. However, in the absence of more general accountability institutions, these tools are either futile or applied by the regime to

harass the opposition and other critics. The case of Ukraine also illustrates the above point. Under the leadership of Petro Poroshenko, the country implemented comprehensive anti-corruption legislation. However, weak accountability institutions, including the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, hindered the proper functioning of these laws. The judiciary, plagued by corruption and inefficiency, further compromised anti-corruption efforts. In sum, despite the presence of anti-corruption measures, accountability costs generally remained low (Freedom House, 2018; Kramer, 2020).

### **3.4.2 Transaction costs**

Transaction costs of corruption in general terms are defined as ‘the costs of searching for partners, determining contract conditions, and enforcing contract terms’ (Lambsdorff, 2002: 221). Adopting the concept to the present framework, I use the term to refer to costs that the government must bear to oversee (sets of) corrupt transactions to manipulate resource allocation through corruption.

I propose that transaction costs of corruption depend on two characteristics of corrupt transactions. Firstly, they are influenced by the distance between the supplier of corruption (i.e., the public official who abuses their position) and the topmost political leadership in the hierarchical structure. Arguably, involving more middlemen increases transaction costs. Secondly, transaction costs depend on the average volume of corrupt transactions: it is less costly to oversee (sets of) transactions if the average volume of single transactions is high. Notably, transactions are not necessarily monetary but may involve the exchange of other assets (e.g., jobs, concessions, permits, etc.). The figure below illustrates two corruption types, one with high, and another with low transaction costs.



**Figure 3-2.** Examples of corruption types with high or low vertical transaction costs. Source: created by author.

For instance, in the case of clientelism in infrastructure procurement, transaction costs are typically low: suppliers of corruption, that is, public procurement agencies, are close to the chief executive in the hierarchy, whereas the average volume of transactions is high, as infrastructure procurement contracts typically involve relatively large amounts of money. By contrast, low-level bribery in police constitutes an example of high transaction costs corruption types: (potentially) corrupt police officers are relatively far from the topmost political leadership, whereas bribes are low.

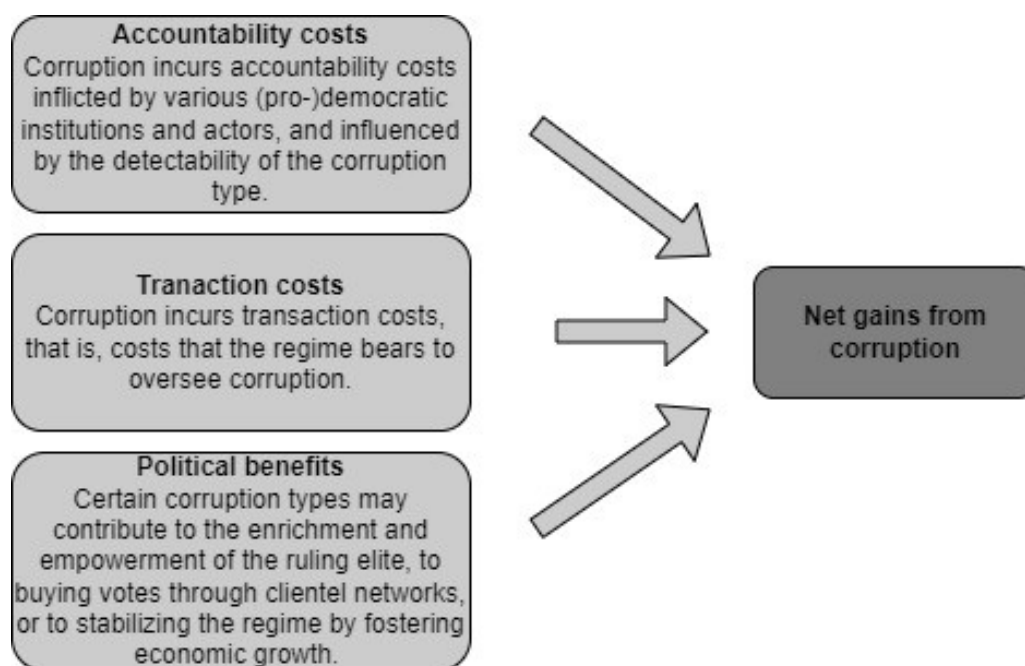
### 3.4.3 Political benefits

The previous two subsections focused on the costs that regimes must bear for enabling or practising different types of corruption. On the other side of the balance, corruption types may also yield political benefits for the regime through one or more of the following three ways.

Firstly, corruption may directly contribute to the enrichment and empowerment of the ruling elites. Nepotism and favouritism in public procurement, for instance, allow for the establishment of large business empires overseen by the topmost leadership and their inner circles. Such conglomerates grant elites economic leverage, which in turn yields more political power (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). One widespread mechanism through which this may happen involves funnelling corrupt gains seized through public contracting into party and campaign finance. Notably, a similar mechanism is also prevalent in democracies, whereby business organizations buy political influence in exchange for party donations (Johnston, 2006, chap. 4; the main difference being the distinction between business and political elites). In a similar vein, certain types of corruption may lead to the empowerment of the ruling elite by enabling them to take control over legislation and/or policymaking and implementation in certain areas and utilise it to pursue their own purposes, that is, capture the state (Dávid-Barrett, 2023). For instance, extortion in commerce regulation agencies may allow ruling elites to create an uneven playing field favouring politically aligned enterprises.

Secondly, certain corruption types may contribute to clientelist vote-buying through machine politics (Hicken, 2011; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter, 2014; Nichter, 2014). Ruling elites may apply corruption to trade particularistic benefits in exchange for political support. While vote-buying may occur through simple exchanges of votes and money/goods, it often involves establishing and maintaining clientelistic networks for longer periods. These networks financially depend on the regime and are therefore poised to support it. For instance, public sector jobs may awarded in a particularistic manner, in exchange for maintained political support, rather than merit, as was the case in Argentina (Auyero, 2012). Clientelistic networks may also be sustained by granting concessions in lucrative state-controlled sectors (see Section 5, Case B) to politically aligned businesses and individuals. Such corrupt transactions involving ‘unjustified restriction of access to public contracts to favour a certain bidder’ (Fazekas, 2017, p. 405) are referred to as political favouritism. Regional favouritism constitutes a specific type of the latter, whereby the regime favours politically aligned sub-governmental entities (i.e., regions and municipalities; for a review, see (Reszkető, Váradi and Hajnal, 2022). Similarly, corruption may also be used to co-opt potentially critical interest groups (Guriev and Treisman, 2022).

Thirdly, certain corruption types may also yield political benefits by boosting economic growth and thereby stabilising the regime. Most corruption types yield adverse economic effects, but some types favour growth: so-called ‘access money’ involves bribes paid by large corporations to politicians, allowing them to deregulate markets, win contracts, and access other privileges. In analogy with drugs, access money is similar to steroids, in that it produces long-term adverse effects (e.g., distorted competition, higher inequality), but boosts the performance of involved corporations and hence contributes to economic growth (Ang, 2020b). Economic growth yields political benefits for competitive authoritarian regimes as it can enhance stability. Ang (2020a) argues that the combination of the predominance of performance-boosting types of corruption and—mitigating its adverse effects—large-scale redistributive policies enabled China a high growth rate and relative stability over the past decades. Notably, the three presented sources of political benefits are not mutually exclusive; certain types of corruption may yield more than one type of political benefit. The presented explanatory framework is summarised in Figure 3.



**Figure 3-3.** Summary of the explanatory framework. Source: created by author

### 3.5 The framework in practice: two cases from Hungary

To demonstrate the applicability of the explanatory framework, I applied it to assess the net gains associated with two corruption cases (belonging to two distinct corruption types) in Hungary: informal payments in healthcare (case A) is a particular manifestation of

bribery in public services, whereas clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions (case B) is a case of clientelism in regulation. Having experienced severe and rapid de-democratisation since the election victory of Viktor Orbán's coalition in 2010 (Bogaards, 2018), Hungary can be considered an exemplary case of competitive authoritarianism. While Orbán's regime is characterised by highly centralised and thriving grand corruption (which has played a key role in consolidating and maintaining the regime; Fazekas and Tóth, 2016; Magyar, 2016), certain forms of petty corruption were effectively curbed. Using the framework, I compared the net gains associated with the two corruption cases in terms of the presented categories of costs and benefits. This exercise is solely intended for illustrative purposes (i.e., to demonstrate the empirical applicability of the framework) rather than as solid empirical proof. Table 2 presents the comparison of the two cases.

|                                       | Case (A) - IPs in healthcare                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Case (B) - Clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Brief presentation of the case</b> | During the socialist era and the subsequent roughly three decades, IPs in healthcare were largely prevalent in Hungary. IPs, constituting a significant portion of physicians' income, served as both gratuities and bribes for better services (Gaal et al., 2021).                                                                                                                                                                                         | In 2012, the Hungarian parliament passed laws allegedly aimed at reducing smoking among young people by nationalising tobacco sales and limiting the number of tobacco retailers. The new legislation established 'national tobacco shops' as the only authorised sellers, with concessions granted by a regulatory authority (overseen by the government). Evidence emerged showing that concessions were awarded to politically aligned individuals and organisations (Laki, 2015; Civitas Institute, 2018). |
| <b>Outcome</b>                        | Implementing a set of provisions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government criminalised all forms of IPs. Accepting IPs became punishable with prison, whereas physicians' wages were more than doubled. Thereby, the provisions both increased deterrents and decreased incentives for accepting IPs (Gaal et al., 2021). According to various accounts in the news media, the provisions have been largely effective and IPs have become the exception. | The system was still in place as of 2024, with no signs indicating that the government is considering any changes in it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Accountability costs</b>           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Domestic institutions                 | Formal accountability institutions are hallowed out and/or controlled by the government in Hungary (Bogaards, 2018), therefore, the costs inflicted by them were not significant in either case.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           | As for informal norms, IPs in healthcare were broadly used for decades and accepted as legitimate by many as a form of showing gratitude and/or complementing low wages in healthcare.                                                                               | By contrast, (B) is a relatively clear case of “corruption” as understood in the public discourse and, therefore may incur slightly higher accountability costs than (A). (A poll that found, the majority of opposition voters, and a quarter of government voters believed there was corruption in the process; Laki, 2015). |
| Domestic actors                           | Domestic actors capable of inflicting accountability costs (such as independent media, and watchdog civil organisations) were generally weak in Hungary (Bogaards, 2018), they nevertheless had substantial public outreach and could therefore exert some pressure. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                           | In the case of (A) media attention was rather limited. Articles concerned with IPs did not typically blame the government. However, influential healthcare labour unions had long been pressuring the government to address the issue of IPs.                        | In the case of (B), this pressure might have been slightly stronger (media outlets and watchdogs kept the scandal on the agenda for a long period). <sup>7</sup>                                                                                                                                                               |
| International institutions (biding rules) | There were no binding rules which could have pressured the government in either case.                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| International actors                      | The EU exerted some, although limited pressure with regard to both cases: they were both explicitly mentioned in country-specific recommendations (prepared by the European Commission and endorsed by the council), in 2018 (A) and 2014 (B).                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Transaction costs                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

<sup>7</sup> According to the searchable database of news articles concerned with corruption in Hungary (k-monitor.hu), almost 400 articles have appeared about clientelism in tobacco retail. Less than half of that discussed IPs in healthcare (up until the point it was curbed), with the majority of these articles not explicitly blaming the government.



|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                             | IP transactions' average volume was relatively low, at the magnitude equivalent to EUR 10-100. IPs were typically allocated within hospital departments, far from the political leadership. Consequently, transaction costs associated with IPs were (would have been) <sup>8</sup> high.                                                         | By contrast, the average volume of transactions involving largely lucrative tobacco retail concessions was several orders of magnitude higher. Decisions about the concessions were made by central authorities <sup>9</sup> , resulting in low transaction costs.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Political benefits</b>                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Enrichment and empowerment of inner circles | IPs in healthcare may not contribute directly to the enrichment and empowerment of the inner circles of the ruling elite.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Although there is no evidence that the most inner circles (i.e., families and close friends of the topmost leadership) directly benefited from the concessions, evidence emerged of 'Tobacco barons' (HVG, 2020), that is, politically aligned oligarchs who were awarded dozens of concessions. Nonetheless, the enrichment and empowerment of inner circles is not likely to be the primary benefit stemming from tobacco concessions. |
| Potential to build a clientele network      | One could imagine ways to use IPs to favour politically aligned healthcare workers. For instance, in theory, politically controlled state authorities could crack down on non-aligned physicians when they accept IPs and turn a blind eye when aligned ones do so. However, such practices would be very hard to implement in practice and would | Clientelism is awarding concessions is an excellent tool both to award politically aligned firms and individuals and to make them financially dependent on the regime. Over 5,000 tobacco shops operate across the country. The livelihoods of their owners and employees largely depend on the shops, and thus are incentivised to support the government and avoid openly criticising it.                                              |

---

<sup>8</sup> There is no evidence that the allocation of IPs was centrally controlled.

<sup>9</sup> Until 2022, the National Tobacco Retail Non-Profit Ltd., after 2022, the Prime Minister's Office was in charge.

|                    |                                                                                  |                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | likely provoke outrage among both physicians and the general public.             | Evidence emerged that the concessions were broadly used for such purposes. <sup>10</sup> |
| Stabilising effect | Neither (A) nor (B) is likely to boost economic growth and stabilise the regime. |                                                                                          |

**Table 3-2.** Analysis of the two cases on the basis of the presented framework. Source: created by author.

---

<sup>10</sup> An opposition member of parliament noticed that the properties of the word processor file for the draft of the act (which was also shared with the Commission) indicated that the document was edited by János Sánta, the owner and manager of Continental Tobacco Corporation and a close friend of János Lázár, the head of the Prime Minister's Office at the time. Later, more than 500 concessions were granted to people with close ties to Continental Tobacco Corporation. Moreover, in a leaked voice recording, a mayor from the governing block contended that 'the important thing is that [the bid winners] should be devoted rightists' (Laki, 2015; Civitas Institute, 2018).

Table 3 summarises the broad results of the assessment. Case (B) outperforms type (A) in terms of net gains: although (B) incurred slightly higher accountability costs, the transaction costs were higher in the case of (A), and, most importantly, (B) yielded substantial political benefits, in contrast to (A). In line with these findings and the expectations derived from the presented model, the regime abolished IPs in healthcare, whereas clientelism in tobacco retail remains largely prevalent.

|                             | <b>Case (A) – IPs in healthcare</b> | <b>Case (B) – Clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Accountability costs</b> | \$                                  | \$\$                                                                 |
| <b>Transaction costs</b>    | \$\$\$                              | \$                                                                   |
| <b>Political benefits</b>   | +                                   | +++                                                                  |
| <b>Outcome</b>              | Curbed by the regime                | Enabled by the regime                                                |

**Table 3-3.** Summary of costs and benefits associated with the two cases (Legend: +: limited/no benefits; ++: moderate benefits; +++: substantive benefits; \$: limited/no costs; \$\$: moderate costs; \$\$\$: substantive costs). Source: created by author.

### 3.6 Discussion

The two case studies demonstrated the empirical applicability of the presented framework. Firstly, although the assessment of the costs and benefits is not based on soundly operationalised variables, it is still feasible by conducting a thorough qualitative analysis. Secondly, the findings are also consistent with the focal assertion of the explanatory framework, that is, competitive authoritarians curb corruption types which yield low net gains for them, and enable those which yield high net gains.

How do net gains vary across corruption types identified by other, extant corruption typologies? One may argue that petty corruption is associated with low net gains, whereas grand corruption is associated with high net gains. On the one hand, the presented framework underpins this general pattern: by and large, petty types of corruption tend to have lower overall net gains as their transaction costs are typically high, whereas their potential political benefits are low. On the other hand, the framework also shows that this is not necessarily the case. For instance, in some petty corruption types may be associated with high political benefits.

The latter point is illustrated by the following example. Eduard Shevardnadze, the president of Georgia from the collapse of the USSR until the Rose Revolution, implemented several measures that encouraged certain types of petty corruption. Provisions stipulated that cab drivers had to show up for a medical check-up every day. Impossible to comply with, this provision incentivised both cab drivers and public bureaucrats to engage in corruption. Arguably, this measure was primarily motivated by the high political benefits of this corruption type: involved actors were made vulnerable by potential corruption charges and were thereby less likely to oppose the regime (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019, chp. 4).

Another important question regarding the framework concerns its applicability in other-than-competitive authoritarian contexts. Although some of the presented factors also influence corruption in other institutional settings, the framework as a whole is only applicable in the context of competitive authoritarianism. For instance, in fully autocratic settings accountability costs are typically negligible; in weak and failing states, the presumption that corruption is determined by policies implemented by the government does not hold; whereas in democratic settings, corruption is a deviation, not an instrument to maintain and consolidate power (Johnston, 2006), therefore it would be largely exaggerated to claim that the incumbent simply weighs the costs and benefits of corruption types and curb or enable them accordingly. In other types of hybrid regimes, the framework may be applicable, in case the given regime type resembles competitive authoritarianism in key aspects.

Finally, it is important to discuss the implications of the well-documented reverse causal relationship between democracy and corruption (Drapalova et al., 2019) concerning the presented framework. Put simply, democratic institutions are supposed to hold the government accountable. If these institutions deteriorate, potentially corrupt actors face fewer constraints, which leads to increased levels of corruption. In turn, as outlined in Section 4.3., corruption may be used as a tool to undermine democratic political competition (e.g., by buying political support). Although this pattern does not undermine or contradict the explanatory framework, the association between accountability costs of corruption types (in particular, accountability costs inflicted by domestic actors and institutions) and the prevalence of corruption types may involve reverse causality.

### **3.7 Summary and conclusions**

Although competitive authoritarian countries are particularly prone to corruption, regimes in such contexts often take measures against certain types of corruption. To account for these variations, first, a novel level of analysis is proposed, namely, corruption types. The article posits that competitive authoritarian regimes decide to curb or enable corruption types based on a rational calculation considering the costs and benefits—that is, the net gains—associated with different types of corruption. The article presents an explanatory framework which sheds light on various factors that influence these costs and benefits. The applicability of the framework is demonstrated with case studies about two corruption cases in Hungary: IPs in healthcare and clientelism in awarding tobacco retail concessions.

The following main conclusions emerge. Firstly, shifting the level of analysis from the country-level to the within-country level opens up new avenues to study corruption and explain corruption outcomes. Secondly, the framework showcases the multiplicity and complexity of the factors influencing corruption in competitive authoritarian settings. Academics, policymakers, and other actors seeking to take on corruption in such contexts should consider the multifaceted nature of corruption and the broad range of factors potentially influencing it. Thirdly, the analysis also underpins the importance of the institutional setting in the context of studying corruption: the large share of the costs and benefits discussed are not relevant in democratic or fully authoritarian contexts.

Future contributions could test the presented explanatory framework and put it to empirical use. Qualitative case studies may analyse the mechanisms through which the presented drivers interact and result (or not) in different corruption patterns. In light of the complex causal interrelations of the constituent elements, set-theoretic methods may be particularly suitable for this purpose. Should sufficient data be available for this, large-n quantitative studies could operationalise and measure some of the drivers discussed in the framework, and assess whether they are associated with specific corruption outcomes. Furthermore, although the framework is extensive, it is far from exhaustive. Future studies may also complement it by adding novel drivers. Finally, one could enlarge the scope of the framework by considering other-than-competitive authoritarian regimes.

#### **4 ARTICLE III: THE ANATOMY OF AUTHORITARIANISM: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND TAXONOMY OF AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENT PRACTICES (AGPS) WITH EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

*Aron Hajnal*

*György Hajnal*

*Not yet published*

Authoritarianism is on the rise globally, often advancing gradually and subtly under democratically elected leaders who seek to maintain a democratic façade. This challenges dominant structuralist theories of (de-)democratization, which tend to focus on legal-institutional changes at the country level. Additionally, existing theoretical frameworks and empirical strategies struggle to capture anti-democratic dynamics within democracies. To address these limitations, we propose shifting the unit of analysis to the meso, “practice” level and introduce the concept of authoritarian governance practices (AGPs), defined as *purposive practices aimed at extending and entrenching the power holders’ authority by sabotaging their accountability*. Based on an effort to conceptualize and operationalize AGPs and relying on explorative empirical work focusing on the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia from 2017 to 2022, we constructed mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive taxonomy of AGPs with 12 AGP types and conducted an illustrative empirical analysis of AGPs in the four countries. The conceptual apparatus and taxonomy enable the identification of empirical instances of AGPs unambiguously, which, along with the taxonomy, allows for systematic comparative work about the phenomenon.

Keywords: authoritarian governance practices, authoritarianism, hybrid regimes, practice-based approach, Central and Eastern Europe

Hajnal, Á., and Hajnal, Gy. (2025) ‘The Anatomy of Authoritarianism: A Conceptual Framework and Taxonomy of Authoritarian Government Practices (AGPs) with Empirical Applications from Central and Eastern Europe’, *Working Paper. Corvinus University of Budapest*.

## 4.1 Introduction

During his first presidency between 2017 and 2021, Donald Trump repeatedly called into question the integrity of the election system, claiming that he won the popular vote in 2016 and that the 2020 elections would be (had been) fraudulent. These efforts culminated on 6 January 2021, when rioters emboldened by a Trump speech stormed the Capitol in an attempt to overturn the election results. While the rioters were only a few thousand strong, almost two-thirds of Republican voters believed that the election was rigged<sup>11</sup>.

In recent history, including the period of the first Trump presidency, the United States consistently qualified as a strong liberal democracy by any available democracy indices and classification systems. We do not claim that the fact that such game-changing democratic crises are not captured by democracy scores suggests that they are flawed. On the contrary, they enable the description and analysis of broad trends and patterns of democratic transformations and have largely advanced research in this area. Nonetheless, the above illustrative case does demonstrate that democracy ratings have serious limitations and cannot fully capture the state and trends of democracy.

In a broader sense, extant research about autocratization (we use the term to refer to all transitions from a more democratic to a less democratic state; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019) is dominated by structuralist, country-level, and legal-institutional analytical and theoretical approaches (Pepinsky 2020; Schedler 2024). Such approaches were, to a large extent, suitable to study previous waves of autocratization and democratization, typically characterized by sudden and overt changes, such as the emergence of openly totalitarian regimes in the 20s and 30s, military coups in the 70s, and sudden democratic transformations in the early 90s. However, current episodes of autocratization are pointedly more subtle and incremental, not the least because their orchestrators seek to maintain a democratic façade (Diamond 2021; Guriev and Treisman 2022; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). As a consequence, traditional approaches are less well-suited to study autocratization in today's world.

In response to the above issues, a few recent contributions have advocated a novel, practice-based approach to studying autocratization (Curato and Fossati 2020; Glasius 2018; 2023; Pepinsky 2020). Focusing on practices (i.e., systematic patterns of actions)

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://electioninnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/CEIR-Survey-of-Voter-Beliefs-about-Election-Integrity\\_GOPTrump\\_Nov2021.pdf](https://electioninnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/CEIR-Survey-of-Voter-Beliefs-about-Election-Integrity_GOPTrump_Nov2021.pdf)

rather than formal-institutional features, and shifting the unit of analysis from the macro (polity) to the meso (practice) level enables overcoming much of the problems outlined above and thus describing and explaining modern-day autocratization processes. While these contributions have made important conceptual and theoretical groundwork for a practice-based approach, a fine-grained conceptual and analytical framework that allows for systematic empirical analysis is lacking.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background, we propose the novel concept of authoritarian governance practices (AGPs). We present a conceptual framework allowing for the unambiguous identification of AGPs across different contexts. Furthermore, based on an explorative analysis of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia between 2017 and 2022, we propose a taxonomy of AGPs, making a further step toward an easy-to-use analytical framework which paves the way for future empirical work. We also present illustrative applications of the conceptual apparatus in the aforementioned countries.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we delve into some key features of contemporary autocratization processes and the resulting limitations of index-based approaches of empirically identifying and measuring them. Next, we synthesize the state of the art of practice-based autocratization research as a promising solution to some of these limitations and identify areas for further improvement. We then present our refined concept of AGPs. This is followed by the presentation of the data and methods used to construct the taxonomy. Next, we present the taxonomy and the illustrative applications of the framework. Finally, we conclude the study.

## **4.2 Studying contemporary authoritarianism**

It is frequently argued that since the late 1990s, the third wave of democratization has given way to the third wave of autocratization (Diamond, 2021; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; although for contrasting views see Skaaning 2020; Tomini 2021). While the trend has been the most pronounced in new democracies, established democracies have also been severely affected. Consequently, the deterioration of democratic quality—which we

---

<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Glasius (2023, p. 29) emphasizes that the conceptual and analytical framework leaves open questions and needs further refinement based on empirical research.



refer to as autocratization<sup>13</sup> (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019)—has become a highly salient topic.

Whereas autocratization is not a novel phenomenon, recent and ongoing autocratization episodes have some important characteristics that set them apart from previous ones. The literature highlights that although coups and open election-day frauds still occur nowadays, they are much less frequent than before (Bermeo, 2016). Instead, the majority of recent and ongoing episodes of autocratization are incremental, subtle, and orchestrated by democratically elected politicians (Guriev and Treisman 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Guriev and Treisman (2022) proposed the term *spin dictator* (in analogy with *spin doctor*) to refer to such modern-day autocrats, who, by contrast to many 20<sup>th</sup>-century dictators, seek to maintain a democratic façade. Importantly, anti-democratic phenomena—whether official measures or patterns of action—are not limited to autocracies and hybrid regimes (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Attempts—both successful and unsuccessful—to curtail certain elements of democratic accountability and political and civil rights have become recurrent in many democracies, even the most established ones.

These specific characteristics of the current wave of autocratization yield important limitations for predominant analytical and theoretical approaches. Firstly, the prevalent structuralist “big theories” of (de-)democratization—which typically adopt a country-level perspective and mostly focus on formal institutions—are not well suited to describe and explain the current wave of autocratization due to its inherently subtle and incremental nature (Curato and Fossati 2020; Schedler 2024). Cianetti (2021) points out that the backsliding paradigm focusing on broad institutional shifts hides complex patterns and dynamics. In a similar vein, Bermeo (2016, 5) argues that autocratization today is “like an old steamer trunk, it is opaque and unwieldy but yields much that proves useful when it is unpacked”. To the moment, the lack of an appropriate analytical tool to do the “unpacking” has hindered related streams of research (Morgenbesser 2020).

Secondly, the predominant country-level approach to autocratization impedes the analysis of anti-democratic phenomena in otherwise democratic contexts (Pepinsky 2020). Schedler (2024) points out that early signs of authoritarian processes in otherwise

---

<sup>13</sup> Note that several terms with overlapping meanings have been used to describe autocratic transformations, including democratic decline, de-democratization, and hybridization.

democratic countries—such as the “January 6” example in the Introduction—may remain below the radar of country-level analytical perspectives and related measures of democracy. In light of the proliferation of anti-democratic measures in established democracies (Diamond 2021; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), this leads to a significant blind spot.

Thirdly, rather than outright demolishing democratic institutions authoritarian tendencies often involve their hollowing out by sidelining, politicizing, constraining, or intimidating them to appear more democratic (Bauer 2021). The predominant legal-institutional focus in the literature hinders the analysis of efforts aimed at undermining democracy and accountability that are devoid of such formal-legal aspects.

Fourthly, anti-democratic actors invest great efforts to conceal their authoritarian ambitions and often seek to appear as committed reformist democrats vis-à-vis the “corrupt elite” (Guriev and Treisman 2022). Their efforts are both facilitated by and contributing to the extensive conceptual confusion surrounding terms like “authoritarian”, “illiberal”, “populist”, and “extremist”. Academic discourse on these phenomena has also been beset by this conceptual ambiguity (Glasius 2018).

#### **4.3 The need for a new conceptual apparatus**

In this section we first briefly review current scholarship elaborating and applying a practice perspective in the examination of authoritarian phenomena, then we proceed to discuss some of their gaps, which enables us to proceed to propose some conceptual improvements in the next section.

Recently, the conceptual and methodological issues outlined above triggered several academic efforts. Glasius’ (2018; 2023) work made two, from our current perspective noteworthy, steps in a new direction. First, her analytical focus shifted from macro-level political institutions to so-called practices. The concept of practice is used in a variety of contexts; it is generally understood as “patterns of actions that are embedded in particular organizational contexts” or “a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules” (Schatzki, 2000, p. 61, cited in Glasius 2018, p. 524).

Proceeding from the conceptualization of practices in general to the conceptualization of authoritarian practices in particular, Glasius (2018; 2023), secondly, makes a bold attempt at conceptualizing authoritarianism. Based on Bovens (2007), she conceptualizes it as a

“sabotage (of) accountability to people (‘the forum’) over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by disabling their access to information and/or disabling their voice” (Glasius 2018, 517). Importantly, this conceptualization is significantly narrower than other understandings of democratic quality, as it excludes numerous elements related to infringing individual rights in general (such as the protection of minorities or the freedom of artistic expression).

Building on the above (and other related) work that laid important conceptual foundations for the study of contemporary authoritarianism, another related stream of scholarship introduced the concept of authoritarian innovations—that is, in general terms, an authoritarian practice that is novel in some sense (Curato and Fossati 2020)—and conducted empirical analyses of the phenomenon. The 2021 volume of *Democratization* devoted an entire special issue to authoritarian innovations. The contributors to the Special Issue introduced and discussed the concept of authoritarian innovations (Curato and Fossati 2020; Pepinsky 2020), carried out explorative empirical analyses to identify authoritarian innovations in South East Asia (Dettman 2020; Mietzner 2020; Tan 2020), and compiled a “menu” of authoritarian innovations (Morgenbesser 2020).

We believe that the aforementioned framework provides a promising foundation for studying contemporary authoritarianism. However, the current state of the art is characterized by several areas for improvement. A crucial one of these are related to the difficulties of operationalizing authoritarian practices.

This entails two elements. First, the concept of practice offers, in its current form, a limited extent of what Gerring (1999) calls differentiation, i.e., that feature of the given concept that allows one to clearly demarcate phenomena that are practice from that are not. In particular, the demarcation between practices and other, related and similar phenomena, such as institutions, legal norms, policies, or programs has received very limited attention in the above contributions.

Secondly, there are similar problems with the operational criteria used to qualify a practice as authoritarian. Precisely what phenomena constitute a sabotage of accountability?

As to the latter problem, Glasius outlines a robust framework differentiating two ways through which accountability sabotage can occur, namely, disabling the voice of the people (by preventing them from passing judgment and posing questions) and limiting

their access to information. While this approach has the merit of parsimony, it is too restrictive in that it excludes important mechanisms through which powerholders may undermine accountability as it focuses primarily on vertical accountability (i.e., voice of the people), and dismisses the sabotage of other, for example horizontal, forms of accountability (we will come back to these additional types of accountability later). For instance, although practices aimed at undermining the independence of the judiciary clearly lead to lower accountability of the power holders and, thereby, to autocratization, they do not, strictly speaking, meet the criterion of “disabling the voice of the people”.

Yet another set of problems relates to the analytical purpose, for which the authoritarianism concept is used, and the resulting scope of the concept. Glasius (2018, 2023) focuses on the deterioration of democracy resulting from whatever sources. Correspondingly, she includes in her concept of authoritarianism those instances where the actors exercising authoritarian practices are foreign states or multinational companies (Glasius 2023). Notwithstanding the potential benefits of such a broad conceptualization, it prevents one from focusing on autocratization triggered and driven by the power holders themselves. However, the main actors (subjects) of most episodes of contemporary autocratization, and certainly most instances of high visibility or importance seem to be the incumbents: (aspiring) strongmen already in governing positions and/or political formations standing behind them (Guriev and Treisman 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Schedler 2024).

#### **4.4 Authoritarian governance practices: A conceptual framework**

We define AGPs as *purposive practices aimed at extending and entrenching the power holders’ authority by sabotaging their accountability*. This definition implies that AGPs can take place in polities exhibiting at least some extent of democratic quality, since in closed autocracies power holders are, by definition, not accountable to the citizenry (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). In the following, we revisit each one of the above definitional elements which, following the concept building tradition frequently termed “classical” (Gerring 1999, Sartori 1970), constitute the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of a phenomenon to qualify as AGP.

#### **4.4.1 The actors**

AGPs are pursued by the power holders or their agents they (at least to a reasonable extent) control. These actors may include, in addition of course to the executive branch of government, the legislature, or nominally autonomous state institutions (such as the judiciary, regulatory agencies, or courts of audit). However, government-controlled but essentially non-state agents such as QUANGOs, government-owned or government-friendly business enterprises, and news media outlets may be actors engaging in AGPs, too.

#### **4.4.2 Accountability sabotage**

Below we follow Lührmann et al.'s (2020, p. 812) concept of governmental accountability: “de facto constraints on the government’s [and its agents, see above] use of political power through requirements for justification of its actions and potential sanctions by both citizens and oversight institutions”.

Accountability, thus, involves two main elements. On the one hand, powerholders—the bearers of accountability—must provide information about, and justification for, their actions. On the other hand, the citizenry and oversight institutions—the enforcers of accountability—must be able to impose sanctions if they deem necessary (Schedler 2022). Potential sanctions by citizens are imposed through mechanisms of so-called vertical accountability, such as elections and elected representative bodies (legislatures). However, sanctions by oversight institutions are incurred through so-called horizontal accountability, which builds on non-executive state institutions such as legislative and judicial branches, and other oversight agencies (O’Donnell 1998; Schedler 2022). Finally, the third type of accountability, diagonal, (Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020) refers to mechanisms whereby non-state actors enable and facilitate vertical and horizontal accountability, as they provide and amplify information about the government. In addition to civil society organizations and independent news media (ibid.), we propose that academic institutions can also foster diagonal accountability since they can provide citizens and oversight institutions with important information about the operations of the government and the policies it implements.

From the above conceptualization, it follows that the sabotage of accountability may occur in two ways (following the footsteps of Glasius, 2018). First, powerholders may undermine citizens' and their representatives' (vertical accountability) or oversight

institutions’ (horizontal accountability) capability to impose sanctions when they deem necessary. Second, powerholders may deny providing information about and/or justification for their actions. This involves systematic withholding of information related to government operations (except in cases where classification follows transparent and well-regulated procedures), denial to justify these actions by preventing or ignoring inquiries, or dissemination of knowingly biased, or misleading information about its operations. Powerholders may also pursue the former ambitions by weakening civil society, and media, and undermining academic freedom (diagonal accountability). The table below briefly summarizes—in the form of a (somewhat partial) conceptual typology—ways through which accountability sabotage can occur (or modes of accountability sabotage).

| <i>How is it sabotaged? →</i>                    | <b>Undermining accountability actors’ capability to sanction the government</b> | <b>Limiting information</b>              |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>What type of accountability is sabotaged?</i> |                                                                                 |                                          |
| <b>Vertical</b>                                  | T1 (e.g., election interference, intimidation, etc.)                            | T4 (disinformation, secrecy, deception)* |
| <b>Horizontal</b>                                | T2 (e.g. undermining judicial independence, politicizing prosecution, etc.)     |                                          |
| <b>Diagonal</b>                                  | T3 (e.g. intimidating independent media and CSOs, limiting academic freedom)**  |                                          |

**Table 4-1.** Modes of accountability sabotage. Source: Authors’ work. Notes: Two-two cells were merged, as \* limiting information undermines all three types of accountability, discerning them is irrelevant/impossible; \*\* actors of diagonal accountability cannot pass judgment..

### 4.4.3 Practices

Whether or not a phenomenon qualifies as a practice depends exclusively on what power holders (or their agents) actually do, whether or not that is prescribed in law or runs counter to the applicable law. As we noted above, practices are “patterns of actions that are embedded in particular organizational contexts”; “a practice is a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules” (Schatzki, 2000, p. 61, cited in Glasius 2018). Still, it matters whether there are organizational and/or legal changes accompanying the practice.

A simple conceptual typology may help to convey key features of the practice concept as we suggest refining it. A practice is “informal” if there is no clear, legally defined

blueprint establishing it. (Such practices may or may not be “illegal”; e.g. physical harassment of critical journalists is typically forbidden by law, thus illegal, whereas politically motivated influence over the prosecution may fit within the legal framework.). By contrast, a practice is “formal-legal” if there is a legal regulation defining the given practice.

Additionally, we suggest practices should have a reasonably systemic character in other words, they should have—spatially, functionally and temporally—a sufficiently significant effect on accountability. Note that in certain cases, even singular acts may significantly alter the behavior of some key actor(s) resulting in systemic deterioration of accountability. One might think about such examples as the imprisonment and death of Russian opposition leader Alexander Navalny, which, even though was a (series of) singular acts, set a highly important precedence and signaled clearly the regime’s intolerance political contestation. These AGPs work through forcefully shaping the expectations some key (group of) actors attach to certain behaviors, which in turn shape their behavior.

That some formal policy or legislative change is not done (despite possible demands) is not an AGP. In other words, a mere gap or weakness in some institution or mechanism of accountability does not constitute an AGP. However, if a law or policy is systematically and purposively unimplemented (or implemented selectively—for example, to intimidate government-critical actors) may constitute an AGP.

Moreover, there should be a reasonable extent of instrumental rationality in AGPs. That is, AGPs are purposive in that powerholders (and their agents) carry them out with the goal of sabotaging accountability. Practices that undermine accountability as a “by-product” (e.g., power struggles and a resulting gridlock in parliament) do not constitute an AGP (Glasius 2018).

Some AGPs must be perpetuated continuously to inflict the desired effect. For instance, if autocratic regimes support aligned media outlets with overpriced government advertisements to squeeze independent outlets, they need to do it more or less continuously. Other AGPs need to be perpetrated only once, and they have a lasting effect. Changes in the constitution to undermine the powers of the constitutional court would be an example of the former. Consequently, when examining AGPs in a specific period, it

may be important to look at AGPs—in particular, of the latter type—in the preceding years as well.

#### **4.4.4 Related phenomena not qualifying as AGP**

Now we turn to the discussion of grey zone cases, that is, phenomena similar and/or closely related to AGPs that nonetheless do not qualify as such. First, practices that undermine accountability to some extent, but may be considered as justified in the given context do not constitute AGPs. For instance, the trimming of the powers of an overpowered constitutional court's powers in an attempt to enable a more effective legislative process does not constitute an AGP. Underlying such decisions there is some degree of subjectivity and a normative assessment. We argue, however, that this is not a weakness of the concept but an unavoidable step in democracy research. As Bovens (2007) argues, “behind each assessment ultimately lies a theory, often implicit, about what constitutes sufficient democratic control, or adequate checks and balances, or satisfactory reflexivity.” Similarly, Schedler (2024) contends that scholars have sought to study democratic subversion through “mere observation”, in a “neutral and objective manner”, thereby creating an “illusion of epistemic certainty” and overlooking the contested nature of autocratization (Schedler 2024, 13)

Second, corruption and AGPs—and in a broader sense, autocratization—are closely related. Authoritarian regimes often loosen accountability through AGPs (e.g., by politicizing the prosecution) in order to enable themselves and their allies to seize public assets. In turn, enriched and loyal allies can facilitate and perpetrate AGPs (e.g., they may overtake independent media outlets). However, while the former two examples qualify as AGPs, corruption in itself does not since it does not directly undermine accountability.

Third, Political polarization has been shown to undermine vertical accountability and is widely considered one of the root causes of autocratization. Indeed, most aspiring and actual autocrats purposefully fuel polarization. Nonetheless, practices aimed at fueling polarization (e.g., spreading an us-versus-them narrative) with the purpose of undermining vertical accountability do not constitute AGPs either. This is because such practices are not authoritarian in themselves—in fact, many non-authoritarian actors also apply polarizing strategies—since they neither limit access to information, nor do they undermine citizens' ability to pass judgement over them. Rather, polarization may be an antecedent and enabling factor of AGPs, as polarized citizens are likely to tolerate AGPs



to a larger extent. Notably, if practices whereby the incumbents not only promote a polarizing narrative but also spread false information about opponents in an attempt to demonize them do qualify as AGPs.

Forth, illiberal practices—that is, practices that violate individual autonomy and dignity, such as harassment of minorities (Glasius 2018)—do not necessarily constitute AGPs either. Similarly to AGPs, illiberal practices erode the foundations of liberal democracy, but in a distinctly different manner, that is, by undermining the liberal idea of inalienable human rights. Importantly, there are practices that are both illiberal and authoritarian. Practices that result in the intimidation of certain groups of citizens to an extent that it undermines their ability to enforce accountability are both AGPs and illiberal practices (e.g., systematic physical violence against independent journalists).

#### **4.5 Constructing a taxonomy of AGPs**

Having laid the conceptual foundations of AGPs, now we turn to the questions about the empirical use of the concept. AGPs, by their very nature, are a set of very diverse phenomena, and many of them are difficult to observe. This poses significant challenges to their reliable and transparent identification and categorization. Against this background, we introduce two hierarchical units (i.e., levels) of analysis to study AGPs.

First, individual empirical instances of AGPs (we use the term “AGPs” in this sense) are geographically and temporally delimited, specific patterns of actions that meet the definitional criteria outlined above. For instance, a novel media regulation seeking to establish political control over the distribution of radio frequencies in a specific country is one (instance of) AGP. Second, AGP types are broader categories of AGPs that share similar traits. For example, “Undermining independent media” could be one such type, to which the aforementioned instance of AGP belongs.

Moving beyond purely idiosyncratic descriptions of AGP-related phenomena, and in particular comparing, let alone measuring, such phenomena across space, time and functional domains requires the creation and application of such broader categories or types (Collier et al 2012). Generally, typologies are built on one or more dimensions. However, some (indeed influential) typologies—such as Hirschmann’s (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty—lack such explicit underlying dimensions (“free-floating typologies”; Collier et al., 2012, p. 225)). It seems nevertheless more customary to term systems of

inductively generated types lacking explicit underlying dimensions “taxonomies” (Bailey 2014), therefore in this study we follow this terminological convention.

In the empirical component of the present research we set out to create a taxonomy of AGPs. The taxonomy’s main use is to facilitate the identification and classification of AGPs in given countries and time periods, and thus, to enable systematic temporal and cross-sectional analyses of AGPs.

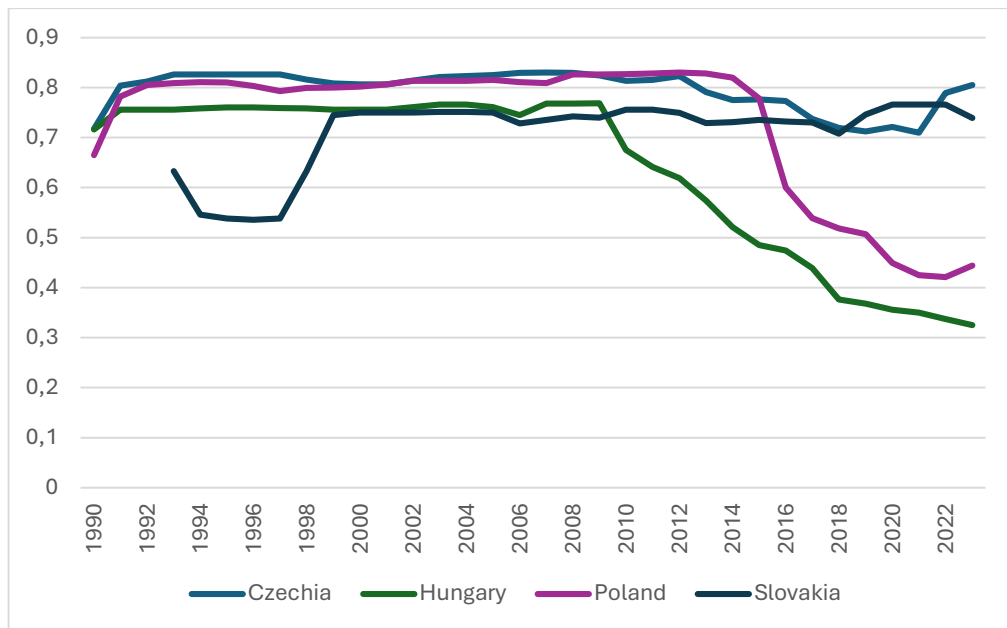
We aim to create, in an inductive manner, a system consisting of jointly exhaustive and mutually exhaustive categories, so that any AGP can be assigned to one and only one AGP type.

#### **4.5.1 Case selection**

The empirical analysis focuses on the “Visegrád Four” (V4) countries, namely, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia between 2019 and 2023. On the one hand, the V4 countries are often cited in the literature as prime cases of autocratization, and illiberal governments were in power in all four countries during (at least some of) these years. On the other hand, the four countries are fairly diverse in terms of the resilience of their democratic institutions, the strength of pro-democratic actors, and consequently, the ways through which and the degree to which their illiberal governments have managed to sabotage accountability. Hungary may be particularly suitable for an explorative analysis of AGPs as it is often labeled as a laboratory of illiberalism (Krekó and Enyedi 2018) and a beacon for aspiring autocrats around the world. Therefore, the selected countries are expected to have a significant number of diverse AGPs, which makes them suitable for exploration. The graph below shows how these countries’ liberal democracy scores changed since the regime change.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> While we have argued that such country-level scores hide important underlying processes, they nevertheless capture broad trends.



**Figure 4-1.** Liberal democracy scores in the V4 countries between 1990 and 2023. Source: Authors' work, based on data from the V-dem institute.

#### 4.5.2 Data

Two series of detailed country-year reports by Freedom House, a global think tank, were used as primary data sources to identify AGPs and compile a database of them. The Nations in Transit (NT)<sup>15</sup> country reports evaluate, on a yearly basis, the state of democracy in transition countries. Freedom of the World (FW) annual country reports cover all countries and focus on political rights and civil liberties<sup>16</sup>. Both reports are roughly 4-8 pages long, elaborated based on a detailed procedure by country analysts, and reviewed and validated by various expert panels. The reports rely on a broad range of data sources, including newspaper articles, reports, and legal and academic sources. Although there is a significant overlap between NT and FW reports, both contain unique information. Generally, NT is slightly more detailed and more focused on events, whereas FW is rather static. Relying on both reports minimize the chance of overlooking AGPs and enhances measurement validity. Arguably, the minor changes in the reports' methodologies throughout the years do not hinder temporal comparability.

<sup>15</sup> NT reports have the following categories (sections): national democratic governance, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework, and corruption. Methodology in detail: <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/nations-transit/nations-transit-methodology>.

<sup>16</sup> In recent years, these two broad categories were broken down into sub-categories). Methodology in detail: <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>.

We briefly address two points of possible criticisms regarding our empirical basis. First, one may argue that the purpose and the conceptual groundwork underlying the FH reports were different from those of the current research. This is indeed the case. However, we do not rely on the analytical and evaluative concepts underlying the reports. Rather, we treat them as “raw materials” describing broad phenomena related to different aspects of democratic quality, and we apply our own conceptual apparatus as described in the next sub-section.

Second, it may be claimed that the FH data sources contain significant gaps that do not allow for the exhaustive identification of AGPs. Such gaps may be conceptual (when the report does not cover certain AGP related phenomena) or empirical (when there is no way to empirically identify, let alone ascertain, instances of AGPs). Whereas such gaps may well exist their possible existence does not constitute significant problems for the present research, as the purpose of the empirical research is not the full description of the AGP landscape.

#### **4.5.3 Coding**

To identify AGP types, we carried out a thematic analysis. First, two research assistants coded both the NT and FW reports for a few country-years independently. They identified text segments describing instances of AGPs based on detailed instructions compiled on the basis of the conceptual framework. Next, based on the resulting, initial list of AGPs, we created a preliminary taxonomy of AGPs. In the next step, using these AGP types as codes, the research assistants coded the remaining country years.

In the process of coding special attention was paid to, first, ascertaining whether AGPs belong to one (as opposed to more) types, and, second, whether they neatly fit into at least one of the (as opposed to requiring the creation of new types). AGPs not fitting into the pre-existing category system were grouped into new types, thus leading to a modified, final typology.

#### **4.5.4 Illustrative Analysis of AGPs**

Additionally (as a by-product of the taxonomy construction) we compiled a database of AGP instances across the four countries between 2017 and 2022. The AGPs were sorted into the AGP types of the taxonomy and the modes of accountability sabotage outlined in Section 4.2 (Table 1).

#### **4.6 A taxonomy of AGPs and illustrative analysis of their prevalence in V4 countries (2017-2022)**

Table 2 below presents our taxonomy of AGPs. We identified a total of 12 AGP types. All AGP instances across the V4 countries (2017-2022) could be assigned to one (and only one) of the AGP types, which suggests that the types are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive.

|          | Type name                                                                                                                                                           | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Mode of accountability sabotage* | CHE | HUN | POL | SVK | Sum |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>A</b> | Election day fraud                                                                                                                                                  | Cheating on the day of the election or turning a blind eye to misconduct by other agents favoring the incumbent (e.g. miscounting votes, preventing voting, vote-buying, intimidation of voters, and reluctance to prevent the former)             | Vertical accountability          | 0   | 2   | 0   | 1   | 3   |
| <b>B</b> | Meddling with the election system                                                                                                                                   | Changing the electoral law that clearly favors the incumbent.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Vertical accountability          | 1   | 6   | 11  | 1   | 19  |
| <b>C</b> | Undue and politically selective influence over state institutions: independent state institutions (changing the incentive structure of institutions/actors therein) | Formal and informal ways to influence (theoretically) independent state institutions, such as anti-corruption bodies, electoral oversight bodies, etc.                                                                                             | Horizontal accountability        | 0   | 7   | 4   | 2   | 13  |
| <b>D</b> | Undue and politically selective influence over state institutions: judiciary                                                                                        | Formal and informal ways of undue influence over judges and courts, including intimidation of judges, firing non-aligned judges, etc.                                                                                                              | Horizontal accountability        | 1   | 8   | 6   | 0   | 15  |
| <b>E</b> | Undue and politically selective influence over state institutions: the criminal justice system (incl. prosecution, police, but excl. judiciary)                     | Formal and informal ways influence the prosecution and the criminal justice system (excl. Judiciary), such as systematic reluctance to investigate high-level corruption by prosecution, politically motivated appointments to key positions, etc. | Horizontal accountability        | 5   | 7   | 4   | 3   | 19  |

|          |                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                           |    |    |    |   |    |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----|----|----|---|----|
| <b>F</b> | Undue politically selective influence over media (incl. social media)                                  | Undue influence over media, such as intimidation of journalists, withholding frequency rights, buying independent outlets through government proxies, favoring aligned outlets by government ads, or turning state media into government/party mouthpiece                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Diagonal accountability   | 14 | 11 | 12 | 5 | 42 |
| <b>G</b> | Undue and politically selective influence over civil society organizations                             | Measures/practices to suppress/control civil society organizations, including legal harassment, cutting funding of non-aligned organizations, reluctance to enforce protection of NGOs (if they are harassed by their parties, etc), GONGOs (Gov. Owned NGOs)                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Diagonal accountability   | 2  | 8  | 11 | 0 | 21 |
| <b>H</b> | Limiting the power of independent state institutions and opposition (including legislative procedures) | Rules and practices to reduce the powers/capacities of or shut down independent state institutions (incl. Oversight bodies, judiciary, constitutional court, anti-corruption bodies, ombudsman, etc.). Also: disregarding court/constitutional court rulings. (We focus on new measures. That said, if the status quo clearly violates the most basic democratic principles (e.g., there are no independent state institutions at all) that also should be coded here) | Horizontal accountability | 3  | 10 | 10 | 4 | 27 |
| <b>I</b> | Intimidation of critical citizens and their representatives                                            | Actively harassing, blackmailing, or failing to protect citizens and their representatives (i.e., politicians and political parties) critical of the government. Also includes violations (or systematic reluctance to protect) of political rights, and violations (or systematic reluctance to protect) of civil liberties (such as freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly) to the extent that certain groups are discouraged from political participation       | Vertical accountability   | 3  | 15 | 7  | 2 | 27 |

|            |                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                         |    |     |    |    |     |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----|-----|----|----|-----|
| <b>J</b>   | Rules and practices limiting government transparency and freedom of information | Formal-legal actions and legally non-prescribed practices to withhold public information from citizens and organizations in unjustified ways, such as non-disclosure of public procurement contract terms, systematic refusal to answer journalists' questions, etc. | Limiting information    | 6  | 13  | 7  | 1  | 27  |
| <b>K</b>   | Active disinformation/deception                                                 | Willfully and systematically spread false information to deceive citizens.                                                                                                                                                                                           | Limiting information    | 6  | 1   | 2  | 0  | 9   |
| <b>L</b>   | Limiting academic freedom                                                       | Undermining academic and research institutions' capability to produce reliable information about, or related to, government operations                                                                                                                               | Diagonal accountability | 0  | 13  | 4  | 0  | 17  |
| <b>SUM</b> |                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                         | 41 | 101 | 79 | 19 | 240 |

**Table 4-2.** Typology of AGPs and the number of AGP instances identified in the V4 countries between 2017 and 2022. *Notes: \* the four modes of accountability sabotage are described in Section 4.2 and presented in Table 1. Source: authors' work.*



It is important to emphasize that the number of AGP instances (in a year, country, or AGP type) is not a measure of their importance or effect. It is possible that a regime pursues only a few, but largely consequential AGPs that profoundly undermine accountability. Conversely, a regime may engage in a large number of less significant AGPs because it cannot enact a few simple and drastic practices due to external or internal pressures. The quantity of AGPs is still an important metric, however. It captures the diversity of AGPs in a given country, year, and/or AGP type. It is also a proxy of the efforts governments dedicate to undermining accountability. While these aspects—measurable by the quantity of AGPs—can constitute important areas to study, we note that the primary advantage of studying autocratization through the analytical lens of AGPs is that it enables thorough qualitative analysis of the distinct practices and related intricate mechanisms. With these caveats in mind, we now present some preliminary observations based on the compiled AGP database.

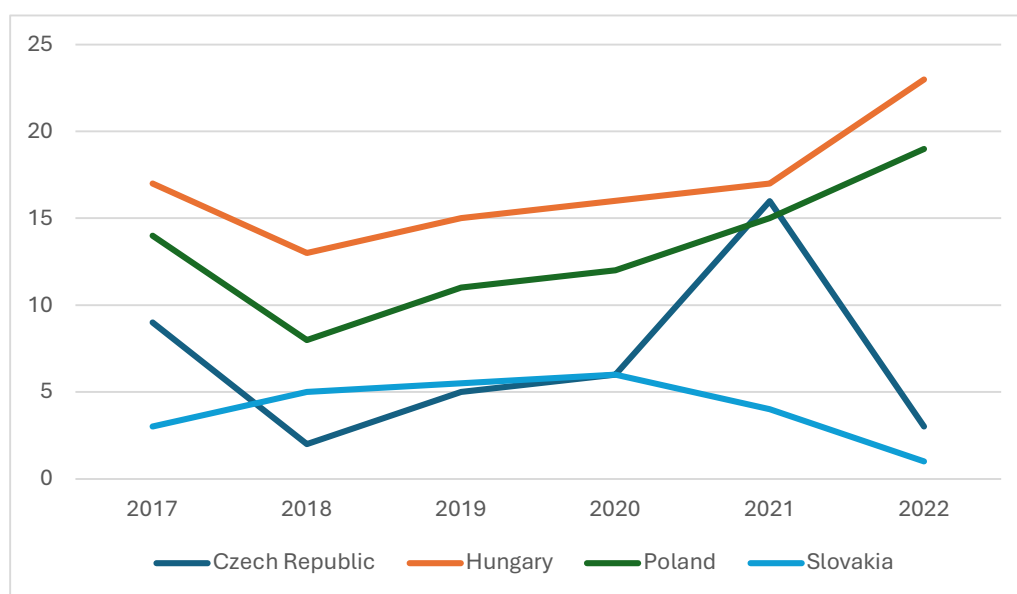
We identified a total of 240 AGP instances in V4 countries from 2017 to 2022<sup>17</sup>. The diverse nature of AGP types and the large number of AGP instances assigned to most of the types suggest, in line with the general observations about the current wave of autocratization (see Section 2), that aspiring and actual autocrats apply a broad range of sophisticated tools to dismantle democratic institutions as they seek to maintain a democratic façade. The very low prevalence of Type A (Election day fraud) is also noteworthy: while autocratization has been present in all V4 countries, and severe in two of them, AGPs involving election day fraud occurred only three times in total. This low figure is in line with another general pattern of the ongoing wave of autocratization, that is, today's autocrats tend to refrain from such relatively open and obvious practices and apply more concealed and sophisticated tools to weaken accountability and entrench their power (Bermeo 2016).

The prevalence of AGPs across the four countries (Figure below) also shows interesting patterns. In Hungary and Poland, the number of AGPs was steadily rising from 2018 to 2022, suggesting that the Orbán and Kaczynski governments, respectively, diversified the ways through which they undermine accountability. In Hungary, as many as 101 distinct AGPs were identified over six years, which demonstrates why the country is often labeled as a lab of illiberalism. As from other sources (see Figure 1) it is clear that democracy

---

<sup>17</sup> FH reports were missing for Slovakia in 2019.

deteriorated significantly during this period (to an extent that it was visible even at the country level), one can conclude that the AGPs were not only diverse but also consequential. In the Czech Republic, the large decrease in the AGPs from 2021 can be attributed to the ousting of the government of Andrej Babits following the election victory of the Civic Democratic Party led by Petr Fiala in December of that year.



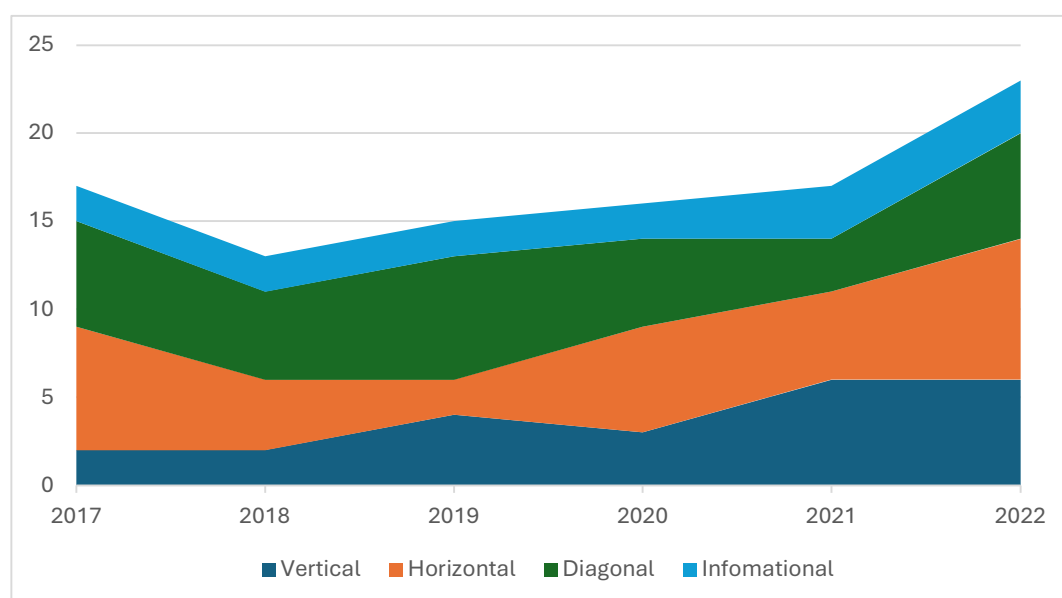
**Figure 4-2.** Number of AGP instances in V4 countries between 2017 and 2022. Source: Authors' work.

We also examined the prevalence of AGPs according to modes of accountability sabotage. As we argued in Section 4.2., accountability sabotage can occur through four main mechanisms (modes): by undermining the sanctioning powers of vertical accountability actors (Mode 1: Vertical) or horizontal accountability actors (Mode 2: Horizontal), undermining diagonal accountability actors' capability to facilitate the former two (Mode 3: Diagonal), and withholding information/lying (Mode 4: Informational). The AGP types in each group are presented in Table 2 above. The prevalence of AGP types by modes of accountability sabotage in Hungary is shown in the Figure below. Two interesting observations emerge.

First, there were general elections in 2018 and 2022 in Hungary. While from 2021 to 2022 there was a sharp increase in both the number of AGPs overall as well as in each of the four categories, the occurrence of AGPs decreased from 2017 to 2018. A potential explanation for this is the stark difference between the two elections in terms of contentedness and opposition unity. In 2018, the government was in a relatively comfortable position as it enjoyed a clear lead in polls during the run-up to the election,

and—not least because of its efforts—the opposition was divided. Conversely, in 2022 the opposition parties managed to select one candidate at the national level and agreed to endorse one candidate in each constituency. In the months before the election, the united opposition leveled and even surpassed Orbán’s party in polls. This arguably prompted the government to boast their chances through a variety of novel AGPs (for a detailed account of the 2022 elections see Scheppele, 2022).

Second, there is a clear increase in the number of AGPs aimed at undermining vertical accountability (almost) throughout the observed period. This trend may signal an increasing effort by the Orbán regime to undermine vertical accountability (which primarily involves elections), potentially driven by an observation that despite the unlevel playing field and, in particular, the overwhelming media dominance of the government, polls are relatively leveled and elections are contested.



**Table 4-3.** Number of AGP instances per mode of accountability sabotage in Hungary from 2017 to 2022. Note: see Table X for a description of the four modes of accountability sabotage. Source: Authors’ work.

## 4.7 Concluding remarks

Ongoing autocratization episodes tend to be gradual and concealed. Their orchestrators are typically democratically elected politicians who apply a variety of frequently sophisticated methods to increase their power and undermine accountability as they seek to maintain a democratic façade (Diamond 2021; Guriev and Treisman 2022). These characteristics hinder the analysis of the ongoing wave of autocratization by the predominantly structuralist conceptual and theoretical apparatus focusing on the country

level (Glasius 2018; Schedler 2024). Against that background, based on recent work (Glasius 2018; 2023), we propose a novel conceptual and analytical framework to study authoritarianism by shifting the level of analysis from the country (macro) to the practice (meso) level. This enables the thorough analysis of the diverse and intricate ways through which autocrats consolidate and increase their power.

We defined AGPs—the main unit of analysis of this novel approach—as *purposive practices aimed at extending and entrenching the power holders' authority by sabotaging their accountability*. We offered a detailed discussion of each of the elements of the above definition. Based on explorative work focusing on the V4 countries from 2017 to 2022, we constructed a mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive taxonomy of AGPs containing 12 types. Finally, we presented an illustrative analysis of AGPs identified in the analyzed countries.

These results constitute important advancements in the practice-based approach to autocratization. First, the fine-grained conceptual framework allows for ascertaining in a relatively unambiguous and straightforward manner whether a given empirical phenomenon qualifies as an AGP or not. Second, the taxonomy enables the classification of specific empirical instances of AGPs and facilitates systematic temporal and cross-sectional comparative work about the phenomenon. Thirdly, the illustrative empirical analysis demonstrates the empirical applicability of the concept and the taxonomy.

In a broader sense, our findings demonstrate that shifting the unit of analysis to AGPs can significantly contribute to autocratization research. Building on our and others' (Curato and Fossati 2020; Glasius 2018; 2018; Pepinsky 2020) work, future contributions may apply the conceptual framework of AGPs in different empirical contexts and investigate trends and patterns, as well as drivers and outcomes of the phenomenon.

The AGP based conceptual and empirical approach may, in our view, contribute to such research in at least three ways. First, it can help explain the proliferation or (relative) absence of authoritarian practices, thereby contributing to theory building, as well as informing practice seeking to safeguard and promote democratic quality. Second, it may serve the purpose of idiosyncratic descriptions of authoritarian innovations by allowing researchers to examine and compare diverse and possibly numerous instances of authoritarian practices of a similar kind. For example, new instruments of avoiding judicial accountability or hacking election campaigns may be identified, thereby

enriching the understanding of the ongoing process of autocratization. Thirdly, a systematic and broad scope empirical examination of authoritarian innovations and the patterns and factors of their “success” (proliferation) or failure becomes feasible.

## 5 ARTICLE IV: VARIETIES OF CORRUPTION? A TYPOLOGY OF COUNTRY-LEVEL CORRUPTION PATTERNS USING FUZZY SET IDEAL TYPE ANALYSIS (FSITA)

*Áron Hajnal,*

*Attila Bartha*

*József Péter Martin*

*Published in Political Studies Review, 2025*

Broadly applied unidimensional corruption indices fail to grasp important qualitative differences between various manifestations of corruption, creating substantive obstacles in corruption research. Against this background, the present article develops a typology of country-level corruption patterns comprising four Weberian ideal types (ITs) and assigns countries to ITs based on the fuzzy set ideal type analysis (FSITA) method. The typology focuses on formal and informal institutions that influence emerging corruption patterns rather than tangible properties of corruption. The four ITs are Limited misconduct in developed countries, Partial state capture, Autocratic patrimonialism, and Dispersed and unconstrained corruption. The analysis, comprising a total of 83 countries globally, offers novel insights into corruption patterns and their underlying mechanisms, demonstrates the applicability of the FSITA method in the context of corruption research, and offers policy pointers in the field of anti-corruption.

Keywords: corruption, corruption patterns, corruption types, typology, set-theoretic methods, QCA, FSITA

Hajnal, Á., Bartha, A., and Martin, J. P. (2025) ‘Varieties of Corruption? A Typology of Country-Level Corruption Patterns Using Fuzzy Set Ideal Type Analysis (FSITA)’. *Political Studies Review*, ahead-of-print, <https://doi.org/10.1177/147892992513352>

## 5.1 Introduction

Corruption—broadly defined as the use of public office for private gain (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016)—has become a major field of research over the past decades. Most empirical studies have operationalized corruption using unidimensional country-level measurements, such as Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and the World Bank’s Control of Corruption Index (Andersson, 2017). These indices have excellent geographical and temporal coverage, which allows for identifying general trends, patterns, and mechanisms.

The unidimensional approach to corruption assumes—often implicitly—that acts referred to as “corrupt” are relatively homogenous and that corruption in different countries varies in quantity rather than quality. This assumption is being questioned by a growing number of scholars (Ang, 2020; Graycar, 2015; Grzymala-Busse, 2008; Hajnal, 2025; Jancsics, 2024; Johnston, 2006). As early as 2006, Johnston called for “rethink[ing] the current emphasis on corruption-index scores; the notion implicit in that approach that the problem is essentially the same everywhere” (Johnston, 2006, p. 186). Indeed, corruption is multifaceted: it may refer to various phenomena ranging from bribing a police officer to the systematic seizure of public assets by the ruling elites. Unidimensional measures fail to grasp this diversity and hinder the identification of intricate corruption patterns, their drivers, and their consequences.

Several typologies have been proposed to account for qualitative rather than quantitative differences in corruption. Other typologies delineate corrupt actions (Graycar, 2015, Jancsics, 2024), while others focus on broad patterns of corruption (Ang, 2020; Johnston, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006) and state capture (Grzymala-Busse, 2008; Innes, 2014) at the country level. These contributions are either primarily theoretical in nature, focusing on the description of the inherent logic of types of corruption (or state capture), with the actual classification of countries receiving less attention, or are limited in their empirical scope due to the lack of available data.

This article aims to contribute to this stream of research by constructing a novel typology of corruption patterns and classifying a large number of countries using fuzzy set ideal type analysis (FSITA; Kvist, 2007), which belongs to the realm of set-theoretic methods and is closely related to Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The FSITA method, which has not been applied to develop corruption typologies, allows for the construction

of Weberian ideal types (ITs) based on dimensions (in set-theoretic terms, sets; we use the two terms interchangeably) and the classification of cases using so-called fuzzy membership scores (MSs). This approach enables the determination of the extent to which cases match ITs rather than merely assigning them into clusters.

What, precisely, constitutes a corruption pattern? While a large number of distinct corrupt mechanisms and practices may be observed in any country (Graycar, 2015), the relative importance (in terms of prevalence, as well as political and socio-economic consequences) of these mechanisms and practices varies significantly across countries and periods. Following Hajnal (2025), we use the term “corruption pattern” to refer to specific configurations of distinct mechanisms and practices that involve corruption. As such, a corruption pattern in a given country is characterized not only by the presence or absence of distinct corrupt practices (e.g., bribery of police or political corruption) but also by the mechanisms and networks through which corrupt practices are organized (e.g., centralized “legal” corruption networks overseen by corrupt elites, or criminal organizations). While every country is distinctive, we contend that there are subsets of countries that exhibit comparable patterns of corruption. In contrast to the conventional focus on the tangible aspects of corruption, such as its extent, prevalence across sectors, and the key actors involved, our typology adopts a neo-institutionalist perspective. It focuses on formal and informal institutions that shape the incentive structure, which in turn influences corruption outcomes.

This exercise is relevant for the following reasons. Typologies are “well-established and analytical tools in the social sciences” as “they can be ‘put to work’ in forming concepts, refining measurement, exploring dimensionality, and organizing explanatory claims” (Collier et al., 2012, p. 217). Given the heterogeneity of phenomena labeled corrupt, the creation of typologies is a particularly useful analytical ambition in the context of corruption research. It allows for the delineation of corruption patterns and the identification of the underlying mechanisms that drive these patterns. As the efficacy of anti-corruption measures is contingent upon the specific forms of corruption prevalent in a given context (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016), our research also offers valuable insights into this domain.

The article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we describe the dimensions of the typology. In Section 3, we designate the ITs of corruption patterns and explain how different combinations of set memberships enable them. In Section 4, we operationalize



the constituent dimensions and calibrate the membership scores (MSs) of the countries. In Section 5, we present the findings. Finally, Section 6 offers concluding remarks.

## 5.2 FSITA in a nutshell

We follow the sequences suggested by Kvist (2007) in applying FSITA, a set-theoretic method suitable for descriptive and exploratory purposes. First, we describe the three dimensions of the typology. In the set-theoretical framework, dimensions are conceived as sets in which cases (i.e., countries) have fuzzy-set MSs ranging from 0 (fully out) to 1 (fully in), indicating the extent to which the cases belong to the different sets. To better capture the relatively complex and encompassing concepts underlying the dimensions of the typology, we break them down into constituent elements (sets). Second, based on these dimensions, we describe Weberian ITs of corruption patterns. For instance, in Figure 2, IT2 denotes an ideal-typical case, which has full membership of the sets “Power of the state” (*POS*) and “Democracy” (*DEM*) and full non-membership of the set “Societal control over corruption” (*SOC*). That is, this ideal-typical country is characterized by a powerful state and strong democracy but lacks societal control over corruption. With  $n$  dimensions,  $2^n$  ITs are possible from a purely logical perspective—that is,  $2^3=8$  in the present case, corresponding to the eight corners of the cube (Figure 2). However, not all of them are necessarily theoretically and empirically relevant—we will come back to this point later. Third, based on raw data, we calibrate the fuzzy MSs of our cases in the sets. Finally, we calculate the fuzzy MSs of the cases in the ITs, showing the degree to which cases match different ITs. The fuzzy MS of a country in IT2, for instance, equals the membership in the conjunction<sup>18</sup>  $POS*DEM*(\sim SOC)$ , that is, the maximum across the country’s MSs in *POS*, *DEM*, and  $\sim SOC$ .

## 5.3 Dimensions of the typology

We rely on three dimensions to capture the incentive structures that influence corruption patterns. In their book *The Narrow Corridor*, Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) argue that the power of society and the state jointly determine what type of state emerges. Similarly, we posit that the power of the state (*POS*)—that is, the extent to which the government is

---

<sup>18</sup> We use the following set-theoretic operations: + for disjunction (logical “or”); \* for conjunction (logical “and”);  $\sim$  for negation

able to exert central control and deliver state capacities—and societal control over corruption (*SOC*)—that is, the extent to which society is able and willing to participate in public life to exert pressure on the government to control corruption—substantially influence emerging corruption patterns. While *SOC* captures informal institutions primarily, formal political institutions also affect corruption patterns. Formal democratic and inclusive institutions (*DEM*), therefore, constitute the third condition of the typology. In the following, we discuss these dimensions in more detail.

First, to prevent the Hobbesian “war of all against all,” a powerful central state—a Leviathan—is needed, capable of preventing chaos, resolving conflicts, and implementing policies (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019). Similarly, a powerful state is also a prerequisite for effective corruption control. Mann's work on the concept of state power (Mann 1984, 2008) is an important anchor in this respect. In his seminal work, Mann distinguished between the despotic and infrastructural dimensions of state power, defining the infrastructural power of the state as “the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm” (Mann, 1984, p. 189). We use the term “power of the state” in this sense.

At the same time, only strong states can become “predatory” (Diamond, 2008) and implement centrally controlled networks of grand corruption. Other factors—captured by the other two conditions of our typology—influence which of these outcomes is more likely. To grasp the encompassing concept of state power, we apply two further concepts and posit that if a state can achieve substantive stability (i.e., prevent political instability and violence) or possesses significant capacity (i.e., can achieve the goals it has set for itself; O'Reilly and Murphy, 2022), it qualifies as powerful. By contrast, states that possess neither of these attributes are considered weak.

Second, a vigilant and powerful society is needed to counterbalance the state and prevent it from becoming repressive and exploitative (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019). With regard to corruption control specifically, this implies that to prevent the state from becoming predatory and incentivize it to tackle corruption effectively, society must be able and willing to participate in politics and public life and have a low permissiveness towards corruption. Participation is defined as “the values of direct rule and active participation by citizens in all political processes; it emphasizes nonelectoral forms of political participation such as through civil society organizations and mechanisms of direct democracy” (Lindberg et al., 2014, p. 160). Corruption permissiveness refers to the

status of corruption in terms of societal norms—that is, the extent to which societies are willing to justify corruption (Lavena, 2013). In societies characterized by low permissiveness of corruption, public integrity and the separation of the public and private spheres constitute a norm, and corruption is a deviation (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). Both participation and corruption permissiveness have been shown to influence corruption and corruption patterns (Johnston, 2006; Lavena, 2013).

Third, the presence of formal democratic institutions is among the most important factors influencing corruption (Dimant and Tosato, 2018). Free and fair institutionalized political competition makes politicians accountable and thus creates incentives to tackle both grand and petty forms of corruption. In addition to electoral institutions, checks and balances and the rule of law also constitute significant constraints on corruption as they limit the power of the government to implement provisions that enable them to enrich themselves and their allies or cement their power (Kolstad and Wiig, 2016).

#### **5.4 Ideal types**

**IT1—Limited misconduct in developed countries.** This IT is characterized by a potent state, counterbalanced by a vigilant society, and constrained by democratic institutions. Corruption is rather the exception, not the norm. Abuses of power are either transactional (Refakar and Cárdenas, 2023) in the form of fraud and embezzlement or limited to the undue (mostly legal) influence of powerful business interests on policymaking, often in the form of donations. While the harms of such influence-seeking may be significant, they are typically limited to certain domains or regulations. Bribery of public officials is rare, and although scandals occur, state institutions and the judiciary typically take action and intervene. IT1 is similar to what Mungiu-Pippidi (2006) referred to as a state of universalism and Johnston (2006) coined “Influence markets.”

**IT2—Partial state capture.** With this IT, democratic institutions are present, and the state possesses substantial power, but societal control over corruption is weak. Consequently, powerful, sometimes overlapping business and political elites seize significant public assets and economic opportunities for their and their clientele networks’ benefit (Innes, 2014). Public power is mainly, albeit not entirely, exercised for private gain. This IT comprises milder cases of different types of state capture (e.g., oligarchical or party) (ibid.) and overlaps with what Johnston (2006) refers to as elite cartel corruption.

**IT3—Autocratic patrimonialism.** With the IT of autocratic patrimonialism, the state possesses significant power but is constrained neither by democratic institutions nor a vigilant and powerful society. Consequently, the ruling elites—which consist of overlapping and informal business circles, political parties, and sometimes criminal groups—are able to capture the state fully and implement highly centralized corruption networks to enrich themselves and consolidate their power. Creating a vicious circle over the long term, this cemented power also allows ruling elites to loosen the remaining constraints on their power further and to create even more room for seizing state assets (Hajnal, 2025). Corruption thus becomes a process of resource transfer towards crony and loyal groups (Jancsics, 2019). While overt grand corruption thrives, petty corruption—which does not serve the interest of the ruling elites—may, at times, be curbed effectively. The term “predatory state” (Diamond, 2008; Vahabi, 2020) is often used with a similar meaning in the literature.

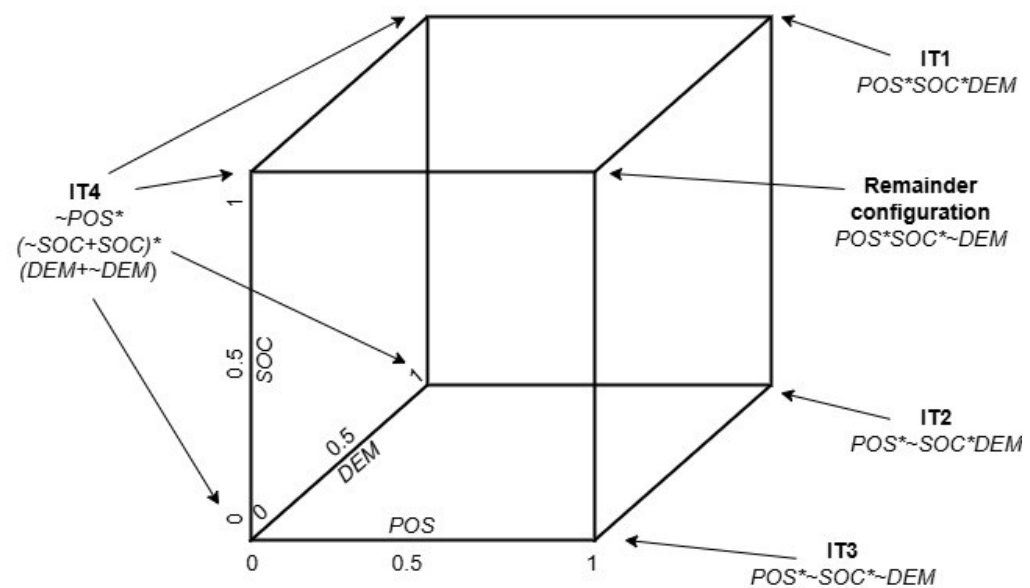
**IT4—Dispersed and unconstrained corruption.** With this IT, the government has little to no capacity to implement policies and maintain order, a dire situation often found in states described as weak or failing. Irrespective of the level of democracy and societal control over corruption—although both are typically low—these institutional constraints (or, more precisely, their lack) will result in the expropriation of public assets at will by various, sometimes competing interest groups (e.g., oligarchs, and clans; Johnston, 2006). In contrast to IT3, IT4 does not result in a centrally controlled corruption network, as the government lacks the capacity to implement such a network. It is also unable to curb petty corruption; hence, both petty and grand corruption flourish.

In line with the description above, Table 1 presents the property space—that is, the combinations (conjunctions) of dimensions that lead to the emergence of distinct ITs of corruption patterns. Note that not all possible combinations are present in the property space. Although it is possible from a purely logical perspective, we argue that the remainder configuration ( $POS * SOC * \sim DEM$ ) is unlikely to occur, as a powerful state counterbalanced by a powerful and vigilant society typically leads to the emergence of democratic institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019). Figure 1 presents the same information graphically with a so-called property cube (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012).

|  | Powerful state<br>(POS) | Societal control<br>over corruption<br>(SOC) | Democratic<br>institutions<br>(DEM) |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

|                                                        |            |                   |                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>IT1 - Limited misconduct in developed countries</i> | <i>POS</i> | <i>SOC</i>        | <i>DEM</i>        |
| <i>IT2 - Partial state capture</i>                     | <i>POS</i> | $\sim SOC$        | <i>DEM</i>        |
| <i>IT3- Autocratic patrimonialism</i>                  | <i>POS</i> | $\sim SOC$        | $\sim DEM$        |
| <i>IT4 - Dispersed and unconstrained corruption</i>    | $\sim POS$ | $\sim SOC (+SOC)$ | $\sim DEM (+DEM)$ |

**Table 5-1.** Property space. Notes: “ $\sim$ ”: negation; “+”: logical “or”. Source: Authors’ construction.



**Figure 5-1.** Property cube. Notes: “ $\sim$ ”: negation; “\*”: logical “and”. Source: Authors’ construction.

## 5.5 Operationalization and calibration of dimensions

This section presents the operationalization (including the raw data and the calibration procedure) of the three main sets (or dimensions), namely, *POS*, *SOC*, and *DEM*. Two-two further sets were applied to operationalize the first two. The year 2020 was selected as the subject year for all applied data sources,<sup>19</sup> as this was the most recent year in which all the indicators were available.

We employed the direct method of calibration (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012, pp. 35–38), which uses a logistic function to transform the raw data into fuzzy MSs based on three anchors at 1 (full membership), 0.5 (point of indifference), and 0 (full non-membership). The anchors are selected by the researcher based on case-specific

<sup>19</sup> Slight adjustments were necessary in the case of two data sources (see later).

knowledge and the distribution of the raw data in order to locate them (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). The point of indifference denotes the demarcation point below (above) which a case is “rather out” of (“rather in”) a set. Importantly, “rather out” and “rather in” cases differ qualitatively from one another. Therefore, the “point of indifference” denotes a qualitative demarcation point and hence affects which ITs specific cases are assigned to. By contrast, the “fully in” and “fully out” anchors only affect the degree to which cases are members of sets and, hence, the extent to which they conform to ITs. For practical/computational reasons, we applied country-case raw data scores as “rather in” thresholds. We set the actual “points of indifference” in the codes marginally below these country scores. This was done to avoid countries having MSs of exactly 0.5, making it impossible to assign them to ITs.

### 5.5.1 Power of the state (POS)

To operationalize the constituent sets of *POS*, namely, stability (*STAB*) and state capacity (*STATCAP*), we applied the *Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism* index of the World Governance Indicators (WGI; Kaufmann and Aart, 2023) and the *State Capacity index* compiled by O’Reilly and Murphy (2022).

**Calibration anchors of *STAB*.** Cases that have an equal or lower stability score than Nigeria—a country suffering from excessive rates of violent crime, including numerous kidnappings by the terrorist group Boko Haram—were considered to be “fully out.” The point of indifference was set right below China’s score. China exhibits relatively low scores on WGI’s *Stability Index*, falling below the average and the median. Additionally, the country faces significant ethnic and religious tensions, as evidenced by the Uighurs in Xinjiang, and political upheaval, as exemplified by the protests in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, it can be considered a stable country overall. Cases whose score reached or exceeded Switzerland’s score were considered “fully in.”

**Calibration anchors of *STATCAP*.** Libya is a justifiable choice for the “fully out” threshold for state capacity, as the government fails to deliver even the most basic public services. Countries reaching the level of state capacity in the Philippines were considered “rather in.” Despite the government’s inability to attain its objectives in specific domains (e.g., healthcare and education and managing separatist unrest in the Mindanao region), its state capacity remains considerable as it maintains a robust bureaucracy and enables

substantive economic growth. Sweden, renowned for its high-quality public services and generous welfare provisions, was set as the threshold for full membership.

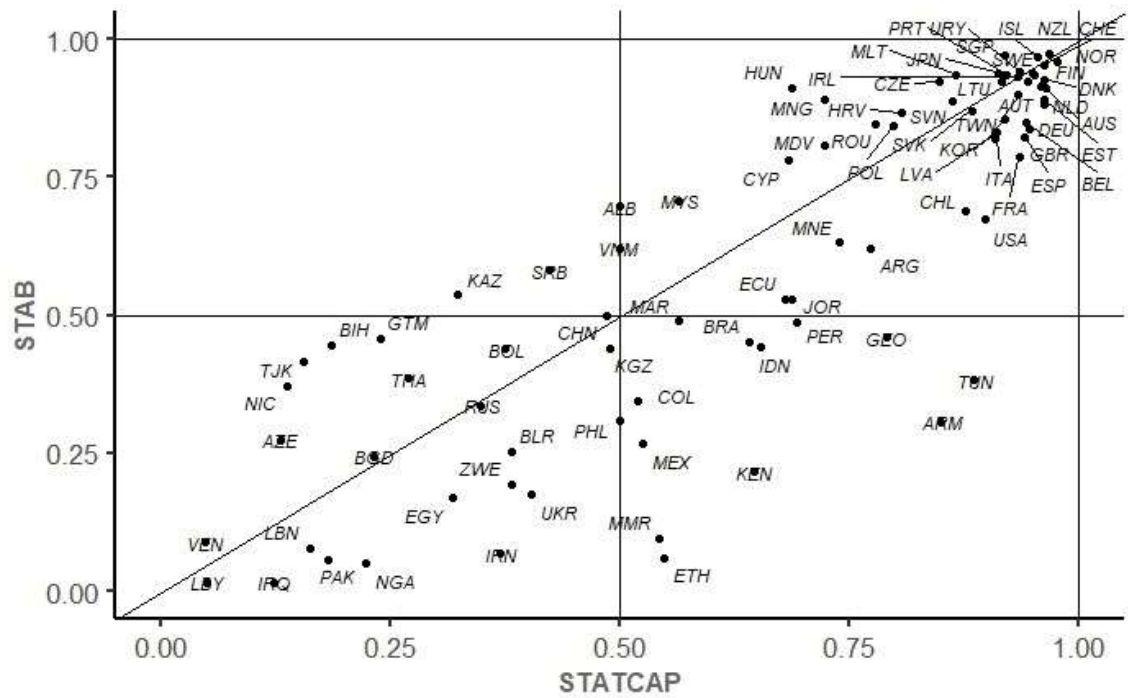
|                                        | <b>STATCAP</b>                                   | <b>STAB</b>                     |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b><i>Raw data</i></b>                 | State capacity index (O'Reilly and Murphy, 2022) | Political stability index (WGI) |
| <b><i>Descriptives of raw data</i></b> |                                                  |                                 |
| <b><i>Min</i></b>                      | -2.78                                            | -2.46                           |
| <b><i>Q1</i></b>                       | -0.2                                             | -0.6                            |
| <b><i>Q2 (Median)</i></b>              | 0.98                                             | 0.07                            |
| <b><i>Q3</i></b>                       | 2.26                                             | 0.72                            |
| <b><i>Max</i></b>                      | 3.42                                             | 1.49                            |
| <b><i>Mean</i></b>                     | 0.92                                             | -0.05                           |
| <b><i>Calibration anchors</i></b>      |                                                  |                                 |
| <b><i>Fully out (0)</i></b>            | Libya (-2.75)                                    | Nigeria (-1.87)                 |
| <b><i>Rather in (0.5+)</i></b>         | Philippines (0.15)                               | China (-0.33)                   |
| <b><i>Fully in (1)</i></b>             | Sweden (2.72)                                    | Switzerland (1.15)              |

**Table 5-2.** Descriptive statistics and anchors for calibration of raw variables used to operationalize STATCAP and STAB (the constituent sets of POS). Source: Authors' construction.

Using logical operators, the power of the state is the disjunction of stability and state capacity:

$$POS = STAB + STATCAP \quad (1)$$

In other words, either *STAB* or *STATCAP* are sufficient for *POS*, whereas if both are absent, *POS* is considered absent. In the case of fuzzy sets, the MS in a disjuncture equals the maximum of MSs in the constituent sets. Using an enhanced XY plot (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012), this means that cases located in the lower left quadrant are not members (i.e., “rather out”) of *POS*, whereas all the others are within (i.e., “rather in”) *POS*. As can be seen in Figure 2, the two components are strongly correlated. This is neither unexpected nor does it render the application of both components superfluous: in many cases, MSs in *POS* are substantively—often qualitatively—different from MSs in *STATCAP* and *STAB*.



**Figure 5-2.** Enhanced XY plot of STAB and STATCAP (the constituent sets of POS). Note: values on the axes represent MSs. Source: Authors' construction.

### 5.5.2 Societal control over corruption (SOC)

As explained in Section 3, we employed two constituent sets, namely, participation (*PART*) and corruption permissiveness (*PERM*), to operationalize *SOC*. We used the *Participatory Component Index* of the Varieties of Democracy (V-dem; Coppedge et al., 2024) to measure *PART*. To operationalize *PERM*, we applied two data sources. In the case of European Union (EU) Member States, we used the proportion of Special Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2022) respondents who deem corruption unacceptable. In the case of non-EU countries, *PERM* was measured using the principal component derived from four related questions in the World Values Survey (WVS; Haerpfer et al., 2020), following the method applied by Lavena (2013). We calibrated the two raw data sources separately; that is, we defined distinct qualitative anchors for EU countries and non-EU countries and independently applied the direct method of calibration based on these anchors.

**Calibration anchors for *PART*.** Countries scoring equal or lower than Iran were considered “fully out” of *PART*. In Iran, long-standing norms, such as men’s guardianship over women, and formal institutions, including the religious police, pre-empt social participation and mobilization. Cases scoring equal or higher than the Netherlands are



“rather in.” Although citizen participation in the Netherlands is primarily seen solely as an instrument of representative democracy rather than an essential feature of democracy (Michels, 2006) and, consequently, the country scores relatively low in the *Participatory Component Index* (slightly below the median and above the average), it is nevertheless characterized by a longstanding tradition of civic engagement (Meijeren et al., 2023). Denmark, boosted by strong norms of electoral and nonelectoral forms of participation, was set as the “fully in” threshold.

**Calibration anchors of *PERM* (within the EU).** We set the “fully-out” threshold below the lowest observed score (Hungary) as low-performers in the EU still have a relatively high intolerance of corruption on a global scale. Austria was set as the “rather in” threshold. While it scores relatively low among EU countries, it is still characterized by the norms of accountability and transparency to a significant extent. The large gap between Austria's score and that of its lower neighbor, Romania, also reinforces this decision. Finally, cases reaching or exceeding Denmark’s score, an exemplary case of corruption control (Quah, 2013), were considered “fully in.”

**Calibration anchors of *PERM* (outside the EU).** As for corruption permissiveness in non-EU countries (based on WVS data), Ukraine, characterized by a “culture of corruption” (Waal, 2016), was set as the “fully out” threshold. Although Switzerland scores relatively low, between the second and third quartiles, it has strong informal norms supporting public integrity. Therefore, cases reaching or overcoming its score were considered “rather in.” Finally, Norway and Singapore (having identical scores) were set as the “fully-in” threshold.

|                                        | <b>PERM (EU)</b>                                                             | <b>PERM (non-EU)</b>                                     | <b>PART</b>                           |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Raw data</i></b>                 | Proportion of people deeming corruption unacceptable (Special Eurobarometer) | Principal component of four related questions in the WVS | Participatory component index (V-dem) |
| <b><i>Descriptives of raw data</i></b> |                                                                              |                                                          |                                       |
| <b><i>Min</i></b>                      | 56                                                                           | 6.4                                                      | 0.12                                  |
| <b><i>Q1</i></b>                       | 77                                                                           | 8                                                        | 0.5                                   |
| <b><i>Q2 (Median)</i></b>              | 83                                                                           | 8.55                                                     | 0.61                                  |
| <b><i>Q3</i></b>                       | 88                                                                           | 9.11                                                     | 0.66                                  |
| <b><i>Max</i></b>                      | 98                                                                           | 9.58                                                     | 0.87                                  |
| <b><i>Mean</i></b>                     | 81.04                                                                        | 8.5                                                      | 0.55                                  |
| <b><i>Calibration anchors</i></b>      |                                                                              |                                                          |                                       |



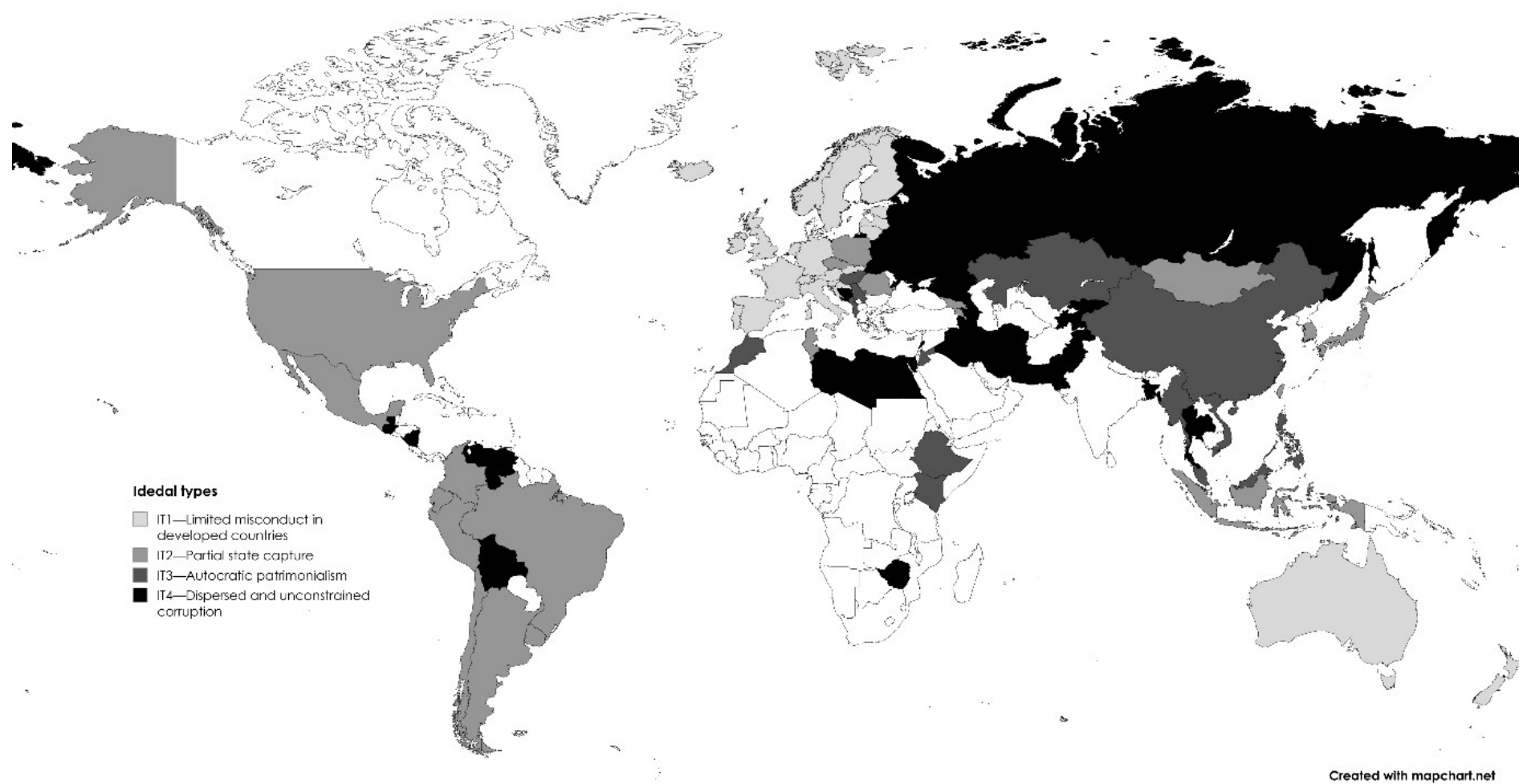
four types of regimes, namely, closed autocracy, electoral autocracy, electoral democracy, and liberal democracy, and delineates them in a set-theoretic logic by applying logical operators to describe the sufficient conditions for each type. Table 4 shows the description of the four regime types and the fuzzy MSs we assign to them. While categorical democracy variables (such as RoW) are more suitable for descriptive purposes than interval democracy variables (Lindberg, 2016), they are sensitive to the selection of the subject year. Therefore, we computed the average *DEM* MSs across 2019, 2020, and 2021 and used these in the analysis.

| <i>Regime type</i>                | <b>Properties</b>                                                                                                 |                                                                      | <b>Fuzzy MS in DEM</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i><b>Closed autocracy</b></i>    | No de-facto multiparty, or free and fair elections, or Dahl's institutional prerequisites not minimally fulfilled | No multiparty elections for the chief executive or legislature       | 0                      |
| <i><b>Electoral autocracy</b></i> |                                                                                                                   | De-jure multiparty elections for the chief executive and legislature | 0.33                   |
| <i><b>Electoral democracy</b></i> | De-facto multiparty, free and fair elections, and Dahl's institutional prerequisites minimally fulfilled          | Rule of law or liberal principles not satisfied                      | 0.67                   |
| <i><b>Liberal democracy</b></i>   |                                                                                                                   | Rule of law and liberal principles satisfied                         | 1                      |

**Table 5-4.** Operationalization of DEM based on Regimes of the World data. Source: Authors' construction based on Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018, 63).

## 5.6 Findings

Table 5 and Figure 4 below present the results of the classification of a total of 83 countries for which all the applied data sources were available. The exact MSs of countries in sets (dimensions) and ITs are shown in Appendix 1.



**Figure 5-4 .** Results of the classification. Source: Authors' construction, created with mapchart.net.

| <i>PO</i><br><i>S</i>                                  | <i>SO</i><br><i>C</i> | <i>DE</i><br><i>M</i> | Countries assigned                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | N  |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>IT1 - Limited misconduct in developed countries</b> |                       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |    |
| 1                                                      | 1                     | 1                     | Australia, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden | 25 |
| <b>IT2 - Partial state capture</b>                     |                       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |    |
| 1                                                      | 0                     | 1                     | Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Georgia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Peru, Poland, Romania, Tunisia, Taiwan, China, Uruguay, United States                                      | 23 |
| <b>IT3 - Autocratic patrimonialism</b>                 |                       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |    |
| 1                                                      | 0                     | 0                     | Albania, China, Ethiopia, Hungary, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Morocco, Myanmar, Montenegro, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Serbia, Vietnam                                                                                                          | 15 |
| <b>IT4 - Dispersed and unconstrained corruption</b>    |                       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |    |
| 0                                                      | 0                     | 0                     | Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Thailand, Tajikistan, Venezuela, Zimbabwe                                                                       | 17 |
| 0                                                      | 0                     | 1                     | Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Ukraine                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 3  |
| 0                                                      | 1                     | 1                     | Nigeria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1  |

**Table 5-5.** Results of the classification. Source: Authors' construction.

### 5.6.1 IT1—Limited misconduct in developed countries

Twenty-eight countries were assigned to IT1. Most of these countries, especially those with higher MSs, are mature Western democracies. These states possess significant autonomy and are counterbalanced by democratic institutional constraints and vigilant society, conditions that are favorable for effective control of corruption. While the most famous examples of successful corruption control, such as in New Zealand and Scandinavian countries, are close to IT, there are some other, perhaps somewhat more surprising members of this group. The fact that the conditions are observed to a relatively large degree does not necessarily mean that corruption in these countries is insignificant but that it is qualitatively different from countries in other ITs. By imposing imperfect and incomplete yet substantial disincentives and impediments vis-à-vis potentially corrupt actors, the constraints prevent the emergence of a kleptocratic or criminal state,

the capturing of the state by powerful interest groups, and the proliferation of petty corruption.

In Italy, for instance, powerful criminal organizations developed far-reaching and deeply embedded political connections, leading to the burgeoning of various forms of both petty and grand corruption. However, the extensive anti-mafia crackdowns and subsequent trials against the Cosa Nostra in the 1980s and the ‘Ndrangheta in the 2020s (known as "maxi-trials"), which led to the prosecution and sentencing of numerous individuals, including politicians and bureaucrats, highlighted that these criminal organizations, and the businesses and political entities involved with them, should fear retaliation.

### **5.6.2 IT2—Partial State capture**

Twenty-two countries were classified into the IT2 case. These democracies have potent governments but lack societal control over corruption, allowing business and/or political elites to capture some (but not all) domains of the state and implement policies that serve their own purposes. Substantively more heterogeneous than the set of countries assigned to IT1, this group includes countries of the former Eastern Bloc (Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic) and the USSR (Georgia, Armenia), Latin American countries democracies (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay), and three of the four “Asian Tigers” (South Korea, Indonesia, and Taiwan). The countries in question are all relatively young, having only become democracies within the past few decades. Their formal democratic institutions are more-or-less in place, but their societies have not developed the capability and/or willingness to prevent state capture effectively. As Williamson (2000) argues, informal institutions that are associated with societal norms related to corruption tend to change much slower than formal ones.

Puzzlingly, this group also includes some mature democracies, such as the United States and Japan. Concerning the United States, the fact that the court ruling against Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump regarding charges of large-scale tax evasion (Bromwich et al., 2023) resulted in no significant decline in popularity among his supporters demonstrates that in the presence of severe polarization, voters fail to enforce the norms of democracy and public integrity (McCoy et al., 2018). At least partially driven by this broadening space of partisan impunity, the influence of “big business” on politics via lobbying and campaign financing—a longstanding concern regarding the functioning of American democracy (Johnston, 2006; Mills 1999, originally published in

1956)—has increased to the degree that some recent contributions refer to it as state capture and argue that it substantially undermines democracy (Hertel-Fernandez, 2019). Recent large-scale corruption scandals involving former prime minister Abe Sinzo have also shed light on the presence of large-scale political corruption in Japan (Quah, 2020), although it is worth noting that the country has an MS of 0.55 only.

### **5.6.3 IT3—Autocratic patrimonialism**

Fifteen countries are attributed to IT3. Several autocratic Middle and East Asian autocracies (e.g., Kazakhstan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and China), de-democratizing East European countries with “strongmen” leaders (Hungary, Serbia), and a few African autocracies (e.g., Myanmar, Jordan, and Morocco), among others, belong to this group. These states, characterized by a powerful state that faces neither strong formal institutional nor societal constraints, are inclined to implement relatively centralized corruption networks to seize state assets and consolidate their power. Occasionally, they seek to curb certain forms of (typically petty) corruption (Hajnal, 2025).

Mirroring this line of argumentation, Ang (2020) showed that in China, grand corruption involving exchanges between businesses and high-level politicians and bureaucrats (that is, “access money”) thrives, while other petty types of corruption are effectively curbed. She argues that this pattern of corruption is favorable for economic growth, as such “access money” allows large corporations to win public contracts, circumvent regulations, and facilitate access to business opportunities. Singapore has also experienced remarkable economic expansion, becoming one of the most prosperous nations in the world. However, unlike China, Singapore, an outlier in many corruption studies, has been largely successful in combatting both petty and grand corruption (Abdulai, 2009). As such, Singapore may be considered an outlier in this IT.

Autocratic patrimonialism does not typically favor inclusive economic development, however. In Hungary, the rapid de-democratization in 2010 was accompanied by the implementation of extensive centralized clientele networks (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016). Economic development was ambivalent until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. While most economic indicators were favorable (Martin, 2020), long-term structural indicators such as competitiveness, productivity, and the quality of human infrastructure eroded sharply or proved to be shallow compared to regional peer countries (Éltető and Martin, 2024). Since the pandemic, economic conditions have worsened due to structural

vulnerabilities. The main beneficiaries of the regime have been friends and family members of the political elite and loyal corporations.

#### **5.6.4 IT4—Dispersed and unconstrained corruption.**

Twenty-two countries were assigned to IT4. Struggling to establish central state control, these states are inclined to constrain neither petty nor grand corruption. While in three of them, basic formal democratic institutions are present, in the absence of an autonomous state and a powerful society, this does not fundamentally alter the nature of corruption. Members of this group include, but are not limited to, countries in the Middle East (e.g., Lebanon, Libya, and Iraq), some post-soviet states (e.g., Tajikistan, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Kyrgyz Republic), less developed countries in Central America (e.g., Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Bolivia), and two African states (Egypt and Zimbabwe).

Some members of this group have recently faced wars or civil wars (such as Lebanon, Libya, and Iraq), whereas others have long struggled to collect taxes and provide even the most basic public services (such as Bolivia and Bangladesh). In such instances, it appears evident that the state is unable to fulfill its responsibility of combating corruption or developing and maintaining effective and resilient corruption networks. In contrast, the inclusion of some members of the group that are well-known for their autocratic strongmen (such as Vladimir Putin in Russia, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey) may appear counterintuitive. The fact that they have powerful leaders who face few constraints from democratic institutions and society does not mean that they possess sufficient autonomy to implement centralized clientele networks while effectively curbing petty forms of corruption. Such networks may exist but arguably tend to be more limited in scope relative to those in some IT3 countries, such as Hungary and China.

For instance, while in Russia, President Putin has substantive leverage over the country's business elites, the power of the federal government is clearly constrained by Russia's enormous size and ethnic and religious diversity, as showcased by disputes and conflicts over state autonomy in Chechnya and Tatarstan, and the Wagner mercenary group's uprising. Rochlitz (2014) argues that the federal authorities may tolerate predatory activities by local elites in return for electoral support. Nonetheless, Russia under Putin may be converging towards IT3. In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and subsequent privatization in the Yeltsin era, Russia was characterized by an extremely



weak state and rival clans competing for state resources (Johnston, 2006, Chapter 6). However, the intense centralization of power over the past decade has resulted in the centralization of corruption (Rochlitz et al., 2020).

Notably, four countries attributed to IT4 lack a powerful central state but—in contrast to other countries in this group—have either democratic institutions (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala, Ukraine) or both democratic institutions and a potent society (Nigeria). At first glance, these configurations seem somewhat surprising. Arguably, these countries may be transitioning towards other, more stable configurations. Ukraine, for instance, may be heading towards another IT, possibly towards IT2. Conversely, Nigeria is likely to transition either towards IT1 or a more stable configuration of IT4 (e.g.,  $\sim POS^* \sim SOC^* \sim DEM$ ).

## 5.7 Conclusion

Corruption is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a vast array of practices and mechanisms. While unidimensional corruption indices are useful for grasping the broad patterns of corruption and testing general causal claims, they obscure significant qualitative differences in corruption between countries (Graycar, 2015; Hajnal, 2025; Johnston, 2006). Against this background, we constructed a four-element typology of corruption patterns (IT1—Limited misconduct in developed countries; IT2—Partial state capture; IT3—Autocratic patrimonialism; IT4—Dispersed and unconstrained corruption). As corruption patterns cannot be observed directly, we focused on (observable) incentive structures and described the mechanisms through which distinct configurations of incentives lead to the emergence of different patterns of corruption. We applied the FSITA method, which enables the capturing of these incentive structures more accurately than standard quantitative methods using logical operators and allows for assessing the degree to which countries conform to ITs. The resulting country groups exhibit significant intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity.

The analysis showcases that the FSITA method can be fruitfully employed to study intricate patterns of corruption. More generally, the findings strengthen the relevance of considering qualitative (and not only quantitative) differences in corruption (Andersson, 2017; Johnston, 2006) and highlight that similar corruption levels may mask distinct patterns of corruption. Moreover, the analysis underpins that corruption entails distinct phenomena across regime types.

While the analysis did not directly address the question of anti-corruption, the findings nevertheless have significant implications in this area. The anti-corruption literature discerns two broad types of anti-corruption approaches. On the one hand, proponents of the “big bang” approach contend that only large-scale, rapidly implemented, and encompassing measures can effectively tackle systemic corruption (that is, the institutionalized and normalized form of corruption) (Persson et al., 2013). On the other hand, advocates of the incremental approach argue that smaller-scale measures can also yield a positive impact (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022). Arguably, the potential effectiveness of these approaches varies across corruption types. In IT1 countries, where corruption is an anomaly rather than a norm, and governments are potent but face significant constraints, smaller, technical reforms may work. In IT2 and IT3 countries, the ruling elite benefits from corruption directly and thus has little incentive to curb it. Thus, incremental reforms are likely to be futile. Rather, “big bang” type reforms that fundamentally alter the institutional context may be an effective alternative. Finally, in IT4 countries, where the state lacks both the resources and the motivation to address corruption, neither approach is likely to yield positive outcomes.

An important limitation of our analysis stems from the fact that we cannot directly observe corruption patterns, but—based on findings about the partial effects of distinct elements of the incentive structure that affect corruption in general—we describe how different configurations of incentives may result in different corruption patterns. Future contributions—potentially qualitative country case studies—could provide more insight into how such configurations affect emerging corruption patterns. Moreover, data quality constitutes another potential source of weakness. That said, the calibration of raw data into MSs implies that minor inaccuracies may only translate into flawed classification decisions when countries are located near the point of indifference. This degree of uncertainty is explicitly quantifiable based on the fuzzy MSs (Appendix), as higher MSs signal greater confidence. We have referred to this in the discussion in Section 6.

The main limitations of the study revolve around the operationalization of the complex concepts underlying the dimensions of the typology. Should more suitable and valid indices become available, future analyses could deploy more elaborate typologies. That said, the application of constituent sets has allowed for grasping the underlying concepts fairly accurately, and the fuzzy MSs enabled an assessment of the certainty of classification decisions.

## 5.8 Appendix

| <i>Country</i>                | <b>IT1</b>  | <b>IT2</b>  | <b>IT3</b>  | <b>IT4</b>  |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Albania</i>                | 0,33        | 0,33        | <b>0,59</b> | 0,30        |
| <i>Argentina</i>              | 0,08        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,23        |
| <i>Armenia</i>                | 0,29        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,15        |
| <i>Australia</i>              | <b>0,83</b> | 0,17        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>Austria</i>                | <b>0,69</b> | 0,31        | 0,11        | 0,05        |
| <i>Azerbaijan</i>             | 0,07        | 0,29        | 0,29        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Bangladesh</i>             | 0,15        | 0,26        | 0,26        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Belarus</i>                | 0,04        | 0,33        | 0,37        | <b>0,63</b> |
| <i>Belgium</i>                | <b>0,79</b> | 0,21        | 0           | 0,06        |
| <i>Bolivia</i>                | 0,03        | 0,44        | 0,44        | <b>0,56</b> |
| <i>Bosnia and Herzegovina</i> | 0,39        | 0,45        | 0,33        | <b>0,55</b> |
| <i>Brazil</i>                 | 0,15        | <b>0,64</b> | 0,33        | 0,36        |
| <i>Chile</i>                  | 0,05        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,12        |
| <i>China</i>                  | 0           | 0           | <b>0,50</b> | 0,50        |
| <i>Colombia</i>               | 0,10        | <b>0,52</b> | 0,33        | 0,48        |
| <i>Croatia</i>                | <b>0,67</b> | 0,21        | 0,21        | 0,13        |
| <i>Cyprus</i>                 | 0,45        | <b>0,55</b> | 0           | 0,22        |
| <i>Czech Republic</i>         | 0,48        | <b>0,52</b> | 0,22        | 0,08        |
| <i>Denmark</i>                | <b>0,95</b> | 0,05        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>Ecuador</i>                | 0,03        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,32        |
| <i>Egypt, Arab Rep.</i>       | 0,09        | 0,30        | 0,30        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Estonia</i>                | <b>0,68</b> | 0,32        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>Ethiopia</i>               | 0,19        | 0,33        | <b>0,55</b> | 0,45        |
| <i>Finland</i>                | <b>0,79</b> | 0,21        | 0           | 0,05        |
| <i>France</i>                 | <b>0,74</b> | 0,26        | 0           | 0,06        |
| <i>Georgia</i>                | 0,45        | <b>0,55</b> | 0,33        | 0,21        |
| <i>Germany</i>                | <b>0,83</b> | 0,17        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>Guatemala</i>              | 0,05        | 0,46        | 0,44        | <b>0,54</b> |
| <i>Hungary</i>                | 0,15        | 0,33        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,09        |
| <i>Iceland</i>                | <b>0,64</b> | 0,36        | 0           | 0,03        |
| <i>Indonesia</i>              | 0,16        | <b>0,65</b> | 0,33        | 0,35        |
| <i>Iran, Islamic Rep.</i>     | 0,06        | 0,22        | 0,36        | <b>0,64</b> |
| <i>Iraq</i>                   | 0,07        | 0,10        | 0,10        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Ireland</i>                | <b>0,87</b> | 0,13        | 0           | 0,07        |
| <i>Italy</i>                  | <b>0,91</b> | 0,02        | 0           | 0,09        |
| <i>Japan</i>                  | 0,45        | <b>0,55</b> | 0           | 0,06        |
| <i>Jordan</i>                 | 0           | 0           | <b>0,69</b> | 0,31        |
| <i>Kazakhstan</i>             | 0,04        | 0,33        | <b>0,54</b> | 0,46        |
| <i>Kenya</i>                  | 0,02        | 0,33        | <b>0,65</b> | 0,35        |
| <i>Korea, Rep.</i>            | 0,15        | <b>0,85</b> | 0           | 0,08        |
| <i>Kyrgyz Republic</i>        | 0,23        | 0,33        | 0,49        | <b>0,51</b> |
| <i>Latvia</i>                 | <b>0,78</b> | 0,22        | 0           | 0,09        |

|                           |             |             |             |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Lebanon</i>            | 0,09        | 0,14        | 0,14        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Libya</i>              | 0           | 0           | 0,04        | <b>0,72</b> |
| <i>Lithuania</i>          | <b>0,67</b> | 0,15        | 0,15        | 0,08        |
| <i>Malaysia</i>           | 0,01        | 0,33        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,29        |
| <i>Maldives</i>           | 0,32        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,19        |
| <i>Malta</i>              | <b>0,67</b> | 0,10        | 0,10        | 0,06        |
| <i>Mexico</i>             | 0,01        | <b>0,53</b> | 0,33        | 0,47        |
| <i>Mongolia</i>           | 0,01        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,11        |
| <i>Montenegro</i>         | 0,44        | 0,44        | <b>0,55</b> | 0,26        |
| <i>Morocco</i>            | 0           | 0           | <b>0,56</b> | 0,44        |
| <i>Myanmar</i>            | 0,19        | 0,22        | <b>0,54</b> | 0,46        |
| <i>Netherlands</i>        | <b>0,54</b> | 0,46        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>New Zealand</i>        | <b>0,96</b> | 0,04        | 0           | 0,03        |
| <i>Nicaragua</i>          | 0,06        | 0,33        | 0,38        | <b>0,62</b> |
| <i>Nigeria</i>            | 0,20        | 0,20        | 0,20        | <b>0,56</b> |
| <i>Norway</i>             | <b>0,79</b> | 0,21        | 0           | 0,02        |
| <i>Pakistan</i>           | 0,16        | 0,16        | 0,16        | <b>0,57</b> |
| <i>Peru</i>               | 0,23        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,31        |
| <i>Philippines</i>        | 0,00        | 0,33        | <b>0,50</b> | 0,50        |
| <i>Poland</i>             | 0,48        | <b>0,52</b> | 0,33        | 0,16        |
| <i>Portugal</i>           | <b>0,61</b> | 0,39        | 0,11        | 0,06        |
| <i>Romania</i>            | 0,31        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,33        | 0,15        |
| <i>Russian Federation</i> | 0,01        | 0,33        | 0,35        | <b>0,65</b> |
| <i>Serbia</i>             | 0,11        | 0,33        | <b>0,58</b> | 0,42        |
| <i>Singapore</i>          | 0,06        | 0,33        | <b>0,67</b> | 0,03        |
| <i>Slovak Republic</i>    | <b>0,87</b> | 0,13        | 0           | 0,12        |
| <i>Slovenia</i>           | <b>0,78</b> | 0,13        | 0,13        | 0,11        |
| <i>Spain</i>              | <b>0,83</b> | 0,17        | 0           | 0,06        |
| <i>Sweden</i>             | <b>0,79</b> | 0,21        | 0           | 0,05        |
| <i>Switzerland</i>        | <b>0,50</b> | 0,50        | 0           | 0,04        |
| <i>Taiwan, China</i>      | 0,41        | <b>0,59</b> | 0           | 0,07        |
| <i>Tajikistan</i>         | 0,07        | 0,33        | 0,42        | <b>0,58</b> |
| <i>Thailand</i>           | 0           | 0           | 0,39        | <b>0,61</b> |
| <i>Tunisia</i>            | 0,41        | <b>0,59</b> | 0,33        | 0,11        |
| <i>Ukraine</i>            | 0,06        | 0,40        | 0,40        | <b>0,56</b> |
| <i>United Kingdom</i>     | <b>0,75</b> | 0,25        | 0           | 0,05        |
| <i>United States</i>      | 0,29        | <b>0,71</b> | 0           | 0,10        |
| <i>Uruguay</i>            | 0,36        | <b>0,64</b> | 0           | 0,06        |
| <i>Venezuela, RB</i>      | 0,08        | 0,10        | 0,10        | <b>0,67</b> |
| <i>Vietnam</i>            | 0           | 0           | <b>0,62</b> | 0,38        |
| <i>Zimbabwe</i>           | 0,33        | 0,33        | 0,37        | <b>0,54</b> |

**Table 5-6.** Fuzzy MSs of countries in the dimensions (sets) of the typology and ITs. Notes: the highest MSs (pertaining to the IT a country belongs to) are marked in bold. The MSs in IT4 are the maximum across the MSs pertaining to the four different configurations of IT4 (see Table 1). Source: Authors' construction.

## 6 ARTICLE V: TRIALS AND ERRORS: LIMITATIONS OF ANTI-CORRUPTION AND RULE-OF-LAW POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION. THE CASE OF HUNGARY

*József Péter Martin*

*Áron Hajnal*

*In second-round review in Public Integrity*

Systemic corruption yields severe adverse political and socioeconomic consequences. Although anti-corruption has been a top priority on the agenda of international organizations and donors, evidence is inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption approaches. In particular, it is unclear whether a series of incremental reforms can be effective, or only large-scale, sudden, and in-depth (i.e., “big bang”) reforms can tackle systemic corruption. Contributing to this debate, this research assessed 27 anti-corruption and rule-of-law measures prescribed by the European Union (EU) for Hungary in the frame of “conditionality regimes”, aimed at curbing systemic corruption and rule-of-law abuses. The reform package—introduced in 2022 after a decade of inaction of the EU vis-a-vis democratic backsliding and systemic corruption—was enforced by withholding substantial EU funds from Hungary and constitutes an extreme case of incremental anti-corruption reforms. Based on the measures implemented between 2022 and 2024, the analysis found that while the reforms had some positive impact and may lead to the erosion of the autocratic Orbán regime, they failed to impede systemic corruption. In a broader sense, the findings indicate that incremental anti-corruption reforms, while not futile, are insufficient to address the roots of systemic corruption effectively.

Keywords: corruption, anti-corruption, big-bang approach, incremental approach, systemic corruption, Hungary

Full reference: Martin J. P, Hajnal, Á. (2025) ‘Trials and Errors: Limitations of Anti-Corruption and Rule-of-, Policies in the Context of Systemic Corruption. The Case of Hungary’, In review in *Public Integrity*.

## 6.1 Introduction

Corruption remains one of the most important challenges facing countries worldwide, with significant adverse political and socioeconomic implications (Dimant and Tosato, 2018). Although member states (MSs) of the European Union (EU) outperform other regions in corruption control, corruption constitutes a pivotal problem within the block (EPRS, 2024). Systemic corruption—broadly defined as an institutionalized and normalized form of corruption (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022)—plays an important role in building and solidifying hybrid regimes (i.e., regimes mixing democratic and authoritarian features) and has been a pivotal instrument in autocratization processes within the EU. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán has widely applied it to strengthen his power since 2010 (Hajnal 2025b). In Poland, between 2015 and 2023, under the *de facto* leadership of Jaroslaw Kaczynski authoritarian trends showed similar schemes, but corruption was less rampant. While the Polish autocratic government was recently ousted, Orbán is in his 16<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in power as of 2025. His political maneuvering—including his pro-Kremlin and pro-China stances and vetoes of EU decisions—and the precedence of authoritarian measures he set seriously endangers the European project.

Although anti-corruption has become a major industry in recent decades and academic research on (anti-)corruption has been proliferating, it is still largely debated what can be done to tackle systemic corruption. Two broad approaches exist. Advocates of the incremental approach contend that gradual reforms aimed at lowering various incentives vis-à-vis potentially corrupt actors (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022; World Bank, 2000) may be effective in tackling systemic corruption. Conversely, others argue that incremental reforms fail to address the root causes of systemic corruption, and it can only be curbed by the “big bang” approach, which involves sudden, large-scale, and in-depth reforms that profoundly change the political system (Rothstein, 2011).

Another, related stream of research focuses on how the EU can (or not) tackle autocratic trends (Blauberger and Sedelmeier, 2024) and foster effective anti-corruption reforms (Schmidt-Pfister and Moroff, 2013) within the bloc. While research shows that accession conditionality constituted a strong incentive for prospective Eastern European MSs to implement meaningful anti-corruption and rule-of-law reforms (Bátory, 2010; Ristei, 2010), evidence remains mixed regarding the potential of the EU in limiting corruption and opposing autocratization in actual MSs (Bátory, 2010; Gadowska, 2010; Lacatus and

Sedelmeier, 2020; Sedelmeier, 2014) These gaps underscore the necessity of conducting further research on EU-initiated reforms aimed at curbing systemic corruption.

Against this background, the present article offers an interim assessment of the anti-corruption and rule-of-law reform package prescribed by the EU for Hungary. To counter systemic corruption and rule-of-law abuses, the reform package was prompted by the introduction of the unprecedented conditionality regimes between 2020 and 2022. These regimes stipulated that the disbursement of the majority of EU funds for Hungary—a total of ca. EUR 32 billion excluding agricultural subsidies—is contingent upon the implementation of anti-corruption and rule-of-law reforms.

The analyzed reform package constitutes a case of incremental anti-corruption reforms and provides an excellent opportunity—a “living lab”—to assess the extent to which such reforms—whether incremental or “big bang”—may be effective in tackling systemic corruption. The analysis has practical relevance too, as it may provide useful feedback for policymakers by pointing out potential weaknesses and areas for improvement in the EU’s efforts to curb systemic corruption in Hungary, and potentially other MSs in the future.

## **6.2 Literature review**

### **6.2.1 Systemic corruption and state capture**

The term systemic corruption describes contexts where corrupt practices have become pervasive, institutionalized, normalized, socially accepted (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022), and constitutes an inherent element of the political system (Vergara, 2020). In such contexts, corruption may be an everyday experience of ordinary people (Rothstein, 2021), but this is not necessarily the case. Politics characterized by systemic corruption may have low levels of petty corruption, while organized grand corruption is rampant (Hajnal, 2025).

Systemic corruption and state capture are closely related and evolve iteratively. State capture—defined as the seizure of control over public institutions by narrow interest groups for the benefit of their own interests rather than the public good (Dávid-Barrett, 2023)—is perpetuated through staffing state institutions with loyalists and exerting improper influence over the formation of laws and policies (Hellman et al., 2003). While initially, powerful businessmen (oligarchs) were seen as hijackers of public good, later

several other forms of state capture were identified, whereby political parties, or informal networks of politicians and oligarchs act as captors of the state (Innes, 2014). State capture constitutes a crucial precondition for systemic corruption as it provides impunity for high-level perpetrators, and enables building and operating entire state systems to funnel public money to favored groups.

### **6.2.2 Approaches to anti-corruption**

By the 2000s, the promotion of anti-corruption and good governance by donors and international organizations led to the implementation of anti-corruption reform packages in many countries worldwide. The reforms, prescribed by international organizations such as the World Bank (2000) and the United Nations (2004), followed the “holistic corruption strategy”, which entailed various “one-size-fits-all” measures aimed at reducing incentives for corruption vis-à-vis potentially corrupt agents. These measures included reducing officials' discretion and monopoly and enhancing accountability and transparency through privatization, competition, democratization, better salaries, decentralization, public oversight, and independent media. However, the results were underwhelming: the reforms were widely futile, if not counterproductive (Persson et al., 2013).

The frustration over lacking results led many experts to question the theoretical foundations of the applied approach. Critics argued that the implemented reforms were based on the influential principal-agent model (Rose-Ackerman, 1975), which did not reflect the reality in many countries (Persson et al., 2013; Rothstein, 2011). The core idea of the model is as follows: principals (acting in the public interest) delegate tasks to the agents (acting in their self-interest). Exploiting the information asymmetry between them, agents will betray the principal's interest (i.e., the public good) and engage in corruption whenever its expected benefits outweigh the expected costs. It follows that policies aimed at manipulating the incentive structure of potentially corrupt agents should be effective against corruption. Different variations of the model assign roles differently: typically, the government embodies the principal and bureaucracy is the agent, whereas other models put “the people” in the role of the principal and the ruling elites, supposedly acting in their interest, as the agents. In any case, however, the mechanism works only if principals adhere to the public interest and are committed to combating corruption. This is where, critics argue, the model is flawed (Persson et al., 2013). In the context of



systemic corruption, there are no “principled principals”, thus technical reforms remain futile (Carothers et al., 2007; Rothstein, 2011).

The criticism of the principal-agent approach led to the reconceptualization of the problem of systemic corruption as a game-theoretic collective action problem (Persson et al., 2013; Rothstein, 2011). According to the general model, in societies where systemic corruption prevails and corruption is the norm and the expected behavior, self-interest-oriented actors will engage in corruption even if there is perfect information and even if they know that society as a whole would be better off without corruption. This leads to an equilibrium of systemic corruption, which thus operates as a self-reinforcing trap (vicious circle). To be tilted to the low-corruption equilibrium (virtuous circle), the system needs a “big bang” (Rothstein, 2011) or a “big push” (Collier, 2006), that is, a radical, sudden, and in-depth change in various domains of the politico-administrative system, such as courts, media, civil society, and the civil service (Rothstein, 2011).

In recent years, there has been a revived interest in the incremental approach (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022; Stephenson, 2020; Taylor, 2018). Stephenson (2020) contends that the presumed universal superiority of the big-bang approach vis-à-vis the incremental approach is based on unfounded assumptions. Based on a theoretical model, he argues that the self-reinforcing character of corruption does not necessarily imply that there are multiple equilibria, or that corruption is irresponsive to policy changes. While he does not state that “big bang” interventions do not work, he argues that their success depends on various factors and that incremental interventions may work, even in the context of systemic corruption.

Due to various empirical challenges, rock-solid empirical proof for the superiority of either approach is hardly achievable. The significance of contextual factors regarding the feasibility and potential effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions also hinders the formulation of general conclusions. Proponents of the “big bang” approach often cite the cases of Sweden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rothstein and Teorell, 2015), Singapore in the 1960s, Hong Kong in the 1970s (Persson et al., 2013), Estonia in the 1990s, and Georgia in the 2000s (Kupatadze, 2017) as successful “big bang” reforms. Advocates of the incremental approach point to the endured and successful process of anti-corruption efforts in Denmark (Jensen, 2014) and the United States (Cuèllar and Stephenson, 2022).

### **6.2.3 EU policies vis-à-vis autocratization and systemic corruption**

A large body of research has assessed the potential role and effectiveness of international organizations, donors, and foreign countries in promoting good governance and anti-corruption reforms domestically (Rose-Ackerman, 2013; Villeneuve et al., 2020). A related—and in the context of the present research, highly relevant—stream of research has focused on policies of the EU vis-à-vis autocratization and (systemic) corruption. Extant evidence suggests that through accession conditionality the EU could create strong incentives vis-à-vis prospective MSs to implement effective anti-corruption reforms (e.g., Bátori, 2010; Gadowska, 2010; Ristei, 2010).

However, the EU has proved less successful in countering autocratization and pushing anti-corruption reform after accession. While some anti-corruption policies were implemented in new MSs between 2010 and 2020, these were largely devoid of enforcement and sanctioning elements, and lacked systemic nature (Closa, 2021). The EU was stuck in an “autocratic equilibrium” fuelled not only by the inaction of the EU institutions but also by generous subsidies towards the autocratic governments (Kelemen, 2020). In Hungary, EU funds have been systematically diverted toward pro-government stakeholders (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016) and contributed to the enrichment of a new clientelist and politically aligned elite (Author, 2020). The EU remained reluctant to address democratic backsliding and systemic corruption.

This period of inaction ended at the end of 2020 when the European Council accepted the Conditionality Regulation (Detre et al., 2023) to allocate the EU funds dependent on the compliance with the rule-of-law. Blauburger and Sedelmeier (2024) explains this policy shift by two factors: first, by public discontent in the Western MSs vis-à-vis EU funds fraud in poorer members states which have been “net beneficiaries” of the EU’s common budget, second, by the fact that autocracies undermine the EU’s common policies in areas such as the common budget, global minimum tax, and the war in Ukraine. Academic research on the impact of the conditionality regimes—effective since December 2022—is absent to the moment.

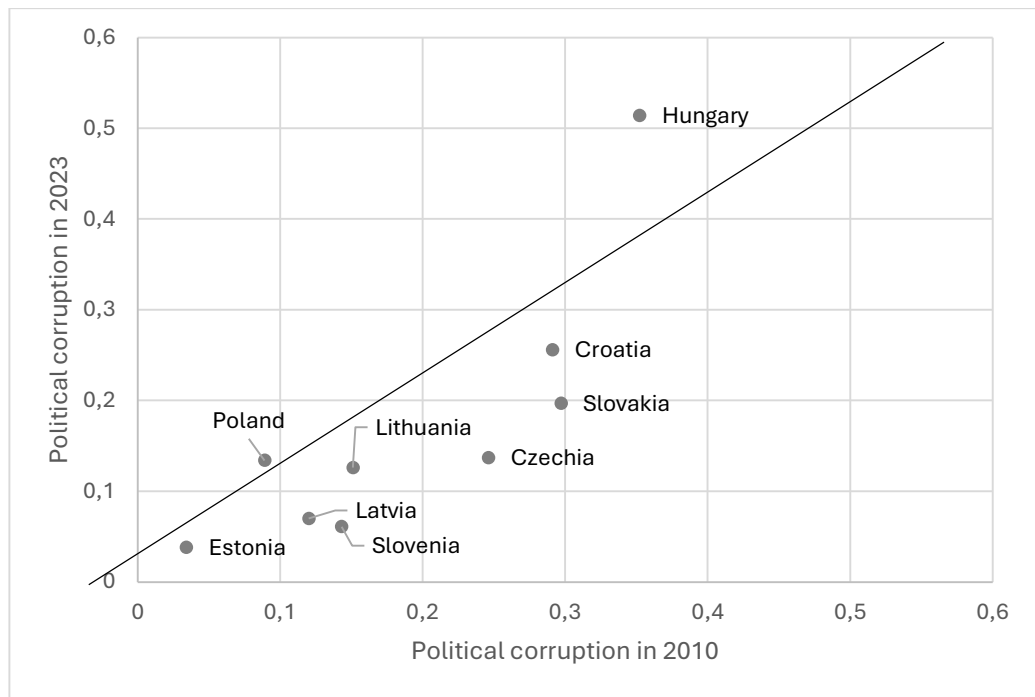
## **6.3 Case selection**

To address the aforementioned gaps in the literature, the present article assessed the potential effectiveness of the anti-corruption and rule-of-law reform package prescribed

by the EU for Hungary in 2022. Following the election victory of Viktor Orbán in 2010, Hungary witnessed the implementation of a self-proclaimed illiberal model, characterized by a U-turn from democracy, extreme centralization and erosion of rule-of-law and market mechanisms (Bogaards, 2018). Although corruption as a dysfunction of the regime was substantial prior to 2010, its nature changed significantly as it has become systemic under the Orbán regime (Martin 2020).

Systemic corruption plays a pivotal role in the maintenance and consolidation of the regime as corruption is applied as a mode of societal (re)allocation of wealth and opportunities (Authors, 2025), whereby large fractions of public and EU funds are funneled to clientele networks overseen and controlled by the inner circles of Orbán (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016). Systemic corruption evolved iteratively with state capture and resulted in the emergence of patronal (or “mafia”) state (Magyar and Madlovics, 2020). Conversely, the government effectively curbed some forms of petty corruption (Hajnal, 2025).

The rampant levels of corruption are also reflected in various corruption indicators. Hungary is the most corrupt country among East and Central European (as well as among all EU) MSs, as measured by the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) Political corruption index (Coppedge et al., 2024). Hungary has also ranked consistently among the most corrupt countries in the EU over the past few years across various other corruption indices, such as Transparency International’s (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), and the World Bank’s Control of Corruption Index (Kaufmann and Aart, 2023; TI, 2024).



**Figure 6-1.** Political corruption (from least corrupt-0 to most corrupt-1) in Central and Eastern European MSs in 2010 and 2023. Source: authors' work, based on V-dem data.

Following a period of over a decade during which the EU had effectively been inactive to counter democratic decline, in December 2022 it took significant actions against the Hungarian government. These involved triggering three conditionality regimes: the Conditionality Regulation, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) Regulation (also known as Covid-19's Reconstruction Fund), and the Common Provision Regulation (Detre et al., 2023). The EU linked Hungary's access to EU funds to the fulfilment of specific conditions. These were imposed in response to the country's extensive corruption and severe breaches of the rule of law and human rights. The requisite remedial measures comprise 27 anti-corruption and rule-of-law provisions (Council, 2022: 86-104; AI Hungary et al., 2023). Until these measures are fully implemented, the EU has blocked the disbursement of EUR 6.3 billion from the Cohesion Funds under the Conditionality Regulation, and EUR 6.5 billion support plus 3.9 billion preferential loans from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) Regulation. This study does not assess the remedial measures of the third conditionality regime, the Common Provisions Regulation addressing human rights issues and the judicial provisions, however, the latter is also part of the RRF Regulation.

The reform package of 27 measures can be seen as a "living lab" of the EU to test its options to address systemic problems of corruption and ruleof-law in MSs. While the

reform package constitutes an unprecedented and large-scale intervention by the EU, it falls short of a big-bang type reform, as the prescribed measures did not, and had not been intended to, profoundly alter the political regime itself. Instead, the package stands out as an extreme case (Seawright and Gerring, 2008) of incremental anti-corruption reforms both in terms of the scope of the reform and the exerted pressure to implement the reform. As such, the impact—to be assessed by the ensuing analysis—of the reform package represents an upper estimate of the potential influence of incremental anti-corruption reforms in countries where systemic corruption prevails.

#### 6.4 Data and methods

The interim assessment of the reform package aims to establish its potential effect of on systemic corruption in Hungary. To that end, Rossi et al.'s (2019) systemic policy evaluation framework was applied which allows for a rigorous and transparent analysis even when hard data is not available. The measures were assessed based on the following aspects:

- i. Impact theory: the theoretical soundness of and empirical support for the impact mechanism(s) through which the measures may contribute to lowering systemic corruption.
- ii. Implementation: the extent to which measures were implemented by the Hungarian government.
- iii. Impact: the extent to which the measure can be expected to affect systemic corruption.

The table below presents the criteria against which the measures were assessed.

| Evaluation level          | Score | Meaning                                                                               |
|---------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>(1) Impact theory</b>  | 0     | There is no plausible impact theory                                                   |
|                           | 1     | The impact theory has limitations                                                     |
|                           | 2     | The impact theory is sound                                                            |
| <b>(2) Implementation</b> | 0     | The measure was not implemented                                                       |
|                           | 1     | The measure was partially implemented                                                 |
|                           | 2     | The measure was fully implemented                                                     |
| <b>(3) Impact</b>         | 0     | The measure has no impact (if theory and/or implementation scores are 0)              |
|                           | 1     | The measure has a limited impact (if theory and impact scores are 1-1, 1-2, or 2-1)   |
|                           | 2     | The measure has a substantive impact (if both theory and implementation scores are 2) |

**Table 6-1.** Assessment criteria. Source: Authors' work.

Measures' impact theory and implementation were assessed directly, relying on a broad array of data sources, including policy documents; reports by EU bodies, international organizations, and watchdogs; academic sources; and indicators. The impact of a measure was assessed based on the former two aspects, in the following manner. Arguably, a more-or-less sound impact theory and at least partial implementation are both necessary conditions for any measure to yield an impact. Hence, if a measure failed at either (score 0), it was deemed to have no effect. If both conditions were partially fulfilled (scored 1), or one was partially fulfilled and the other was fully fulfilled (scored 2), a measure was deemed to have limited impact, as either the theoretical soundness or the full implementation is in jeopardy. If both the theory and implementation were scored 2, a measure was considered to be impactful.

## 6.5 Empirical analysis

The following analysis assessed 27 anti-corruption and rule-of-law measures prescribed by the Council of the European Union (Council, 2022) in the frame of two conditionality regimes (based on Conditionality and RRF Regulations). Technically, the measures (numbered R1 to R27 in the original legal document, and M1.1 to M6.5 in the present analysis) entail one or more “milestones”, “super milestones” and/or “targets”. We sorted the 27 measures into six broad policy domains, each discussed in separate subsections. The overall impact of policy domains was assessed by qualitatively (i.e., without explicit criteria) aggregating the impact of constituent measures.

### 6.5.1 Judicial independence

| Measure no. | Description                                                                                                                                                     | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| <i>M1.1</i> | Reform regarding the review of final judgments by the Constitutional Court (R18)                                                                                | 2             | 2              | 2      |
| <i>M1.2</i> | Strengthening the role and powers of the National Judicial Council to counterbalance the powers of the President of the National Office for the Judiciary (R15) | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M1.3</i> | Strengthening the judicial independence of the Supreme Court (R16)                                                                                              | 1             | 1              | 1      |

|                       |                                                                                                  |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>M1.4</b>           | Removing obstacles to references for preliminary rulings to the Court of Justice of the EU (R17) | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| <b>M1.5</b>           | Introduction of a specific procedure (“private prosecution”) in the case of special crimes (R3)  | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| <b>M1.6</b>           | Upgrading the cooperation systems of the prosecution service to tackle corruption practices (R8) | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                  |   |   | 1 |

**Table 6-2.** Assessment of the measures aimed at strengthening judicial independence. Source: Authors’ work.

**Theory assessment.** Law courts have been under serious government pressure under the Orbán regime (Bogaards, 2018), moreover, the Constitutional Court and the Prosecution Service have been captured by the ruling party’s interests undermining judicial independence (Ligeti, 2023). As a deficiency, the functioning of the two latter institutions is not part of the reform package. In theory, all reform measures (M1.1- M1.6) targeting ordinary law courts and the Supreme Court (“Kúria”) strengthen judicial independence. However, warranting full judicial independence seems to be impossible until the rule-of-law is re-established (Baka, 2023). The widespread practice of politically motivated appointments and promotion of judges undermines the potential positive effect of the empowerment of the National Judicial Council, a judges’ self-governing body to counterbalance the power of the President of the National Office for the Judiciary, an administrative body loyal to the government (M1.2). Moreover, in the absence of guarantees for fully automatic (i.e., without any human intervention) case allocation, the effects of M1.3 (strengthening independence of the Supreme Court) shall remain limited. Circumventing decisions by the captured Prosecution Service by “private prosecution” (M1.5) could strengthen judicial independence and thus contribute to deterring corruption. M1.6 (the establishment of new IT systems) has only limited importance.

**Implementation assessment.** The Hungarian Parliament approved and implemented a comprehensive judicial reform package in 2023 to comply with measures M1.1 to M1.4. The EC approved the same remedial measures under the third conditionality regime, namely the Common Provisions Regulation (which is not the subject of the current study), and unblocked EUR 10 billion in December 2023 (EC, 2023/a). M1.1 was implemented in its entirety; however, measures M1.2—M1.6 were only partially addressed (AI Hungary et al., 2023/b, 2024/b). The most important shortcomings are as follows. Firstly,

despite the empowerment of the National Judicial Council (NJC) (M1.2), the President of the National Office for Judiciary still can nominate a NJC leader circumventing the normal application procedure. Secondly, despite the ban on the re-election of the president of the Supreme Court (M1.3), the incumbent remains in office as long as its successor is elected by a two-thirds majority. Thirdly, the judges can turn to the European Court of Justice only in those cases which involve the EU norms (M1.4). Fourthly, the potential positive effect of “private prosecution” (M1.5) was undermined by implementation deficiencies such as too short deadlines and by the fact that the potential private prosecutors lack the necessary resources.

**Impact assessment.** Although the measures were not futile, following the positive assessment by the Commission in 2023, subsequent legislative steps and techniques (e.g., circumventing automatic case allocation) set off most of the progress (AI et al., 2024b). Systemic deficiencies continued to undermine the judicial independence, which thus had limited potential to tackle systemic corruption.

### 6.5.2 Public procurement system

| Measure no.           | Description                                                                                            | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| <i>M2.1</i>           | Reducing the share of single bid public procurement procedures (R10)                                   | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M2.2</i>           | Development of the Electronic Public Procurement System (EPS) to increase transparency (R11)           | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M2.3</i>           | Performance measurement framework for public procurement (R12)                                         | 2             | 2              | 2      |
| <i>M2.4</i>           | Action plan for increasing the level of competition in public procurement (R13)                        | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M2.5</i>           | Training and support for SMEs to facilitate their participation in public procurement procedures (M14) | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M2.6</i>           | Full and effective use of the Arachne (“red flag”) system for all Union support (R21)                  | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                        |               |                | 1      |

**Table 6-3.** Assessment of the measures aimed at reducing corruption in public procurement.  
Source: Authors’ work.

**Theory assessment.** The Hungarian public procurement system has long been considered a hotbed of systemic corruption due to a playing field tilted in favor of pro-government players resulting in conspicuous market concentration (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016; EC,



2024). M2.1 addresses the high proportion of tenders without competition (“single bidding”). Reducing single bidding is a necessary but insufficient precondition for enhancing competition. It does not exclude collusion among bidders. Other measures fostering transparency, performance measurement and data availability (M2.2 – M2.6) are insufficient by themselves to free the public procurement system from systemic corruption and can only have a limited impact. The applied measures do not address the high concentration of the public procurement market (Integrity Authority, 2024: 100-102). Empirical evidence shows that this market is highly concentrated as two oligarchs (Lőrinc Mészáros and László Szíjj) secured 16% of the total amount of public contracts, and centralized purchases (“framework agreements”) help crony companies cement their market positions (Zeisler, 2023). For these reasons, measures M2.1 – M2.6 (except M2.3) have limited theoretical potential to counter systemic corruption as, while they improve transparency and incentivize competition to some extent, they do not have the potential to limit the concentration of the public procurement system substantially.

**Implementation assessment.** The condition to reduce the share of single bidding (M2.1) refers to all public procurements financed both from domestic and EU sources. While the 15% target for EU funded procurements was already reached by the end of 2022, this share for domestically funded tenders (29%) remained above the target for 2024 (24%) (EKR, 2024). The measures to increase transparency and competition were addressed by a government decree (1118/2023) which contains two elements: anonymous access to documents for potential bidders and a reduction in appeal fees. However, the implementation of these measures (M2.2 – M2.4 and M2.6) was undermined by shortcomings such as lacking or incorrect data publication, concerns about the absence of performance indicators and not addressing conflicts of interest (AI et al., 2024; EC, 2023b: 4-7). Although the legislation is supposed to support the small and medium-sized companies’ participation (M2.5), a large share of flat-rate subsidies was funneled to fraudsters (AI Hungary et al., 2024b).

**Impact assessment.** While the measures have decreased the share of single bidding procedures and to some extent improved transparency, they were insufficient to significantly enhance competition and hinder systemic corruption in public contracting.

### 6.5.3 Transparency and corruption prevention

| Measure no.           | Description                                                                                                                      | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| <i>M3.1</i>           | Strengthening rules related to asset declarations (R4)                                                                           | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <i>M3.2</i>           | Ensuring the transparency of the use of public resources by public interest asset management foundations (higher education) (R5) | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M3.3</i>           | Enhancing the transparency of public spending (R6)                                                                               | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <i>M3.4</i>           | Improving transparency and access to public information (R26)                                                                    | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <i>M3.5</i>           | Awareness-raising for the eradication of gratuity payments in the healthcare sector (R9)                                         | 0             | 2              | 0      |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                                                  |               |                | 1      |

**Table 6-4.** Assessment of the measures aimed at enhancing transparency and corruption prevention. Source: Authors' work.

**Theory assessment.** Transparency is presumed to lower corruption. However, research shows that transparency promotion is ineffective in the absence of free media and free and fair elections, but both are missing in the Hungarian case (Lindstedt and Naurin, 2010; Magyar and Madlovics, 2020). Therefore, enhancing transparency in the fields of public spending, asset declaration and public information, and awareness raising after the legal eradication of bribery in the healthcare sector (M3.1 – M3.5) can only have limited impact to counter systemic corruption.

**Implementation assessment.** The implementation track record of the Hungarian government to promote transparency in measures M3.1 – M3.4 has been conspicuously shallow (Ligeti, 2023). The asset declaration system is not capable of tracing the enrichment of publicly exposed persons, and legislative changes to ease the access to public information have serious shortcomings (AI et al., 2024b) Despite the conditionality mechanism, even some setbacks were registered, such as the removal of the requirement to report residential properties. Concerning public spending, only the metadata of the contracts is required to be uploaded to the Public Data Information Registry instead of the whole contract (M3.3). Although, according to measure M3.4, the public interest asset management foundations (entities where universities' assets were outsourced) must comply with public procurement rules, the public oversight remained weak as they are not included in the public contract data repository and the foundations' leadership remained politically partial (AI et al., 2024b). Gratitude payments in the healthcare sector

have been successfully countered by its criminalization since 2021, and the awareness raising campaigns (M3.5) were fully implemented.

**Impact assessment.** These measures were ultimately ineffective in curbing systemic corruption due to their lack of robust theoretical underpinnings and minimal implementation.

#### 6.5.4 New anti-corruption institutions

| Measure no.           | Description                                                                                                                                                    | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| <b>M4.1</b>           | Establishment of the Integrity Authority (IA) to counter corruption and other irregularities concerning the EU funds (R1)                                      | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <b>M4.2</b>           | Establishment of the Anti-Corruption Task Force to monitor and review the measures taken in Hungary to prevent, detect, prosecute and sanction corruption (R2) | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                                                                                |               |                | 0      |

**Table 6-5.** Assessment of the measures aimed at establishing new anti-corruption institutions.  
Source: Authors' work.

**Theory assessment.** In a captured state, (new) anti-corruption institutions can only be effective if they have external legitimacy, that is, their existence and operation is justified and supported by external actors (Dávid-Barett, 2023). In theory, the establishment of the Integrity Authority (IA) (M4.1) could have some effect to counter systemic frauds of EU funds as it has reporting duties not only to the Hungarian Parliament but also to the European Commission. In the case of the Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF), a monitoring body next to the IA (M3.2), its theoretical soundness is limited as 10 of its 21 total members have been delegated from state institutions whose commitment to curb systemic corruption is undermined politically (TI Hungary and K-Monitor, 2024).

**Implementation assessment.** The measure to establish the IA (M4.1) was only partially implemented as the IA was devoid of necessary legal mandate in several areas, such as verifying asset declarations and acting as prosecutor. Therefore, it was unable to fight against corruption effectively (AI Hungary et al., 2024b). The level of cooperation between the IA and other state institutions remained low, and the powers of the IA were not mirrored in sectoral laws (EC, 2024: 17). The impact of IA was further undermined

by the government’ attempts to criminalize the President of the IA after it had started to investigate a high-level corruption case (Thorpe, 2025).

The implementation of ACTF (M4.2) was undermined by the unwillingness of state actors to cooperate with the civil society members, and by the intimidation of the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO). This latter organ was established at the beginning of 2024 and is entitled—nominally—to protect Hungary’s sovereignty but serves as an intimidation tool against independent media and NGOs (Bayer, 2024). In June 2024, SPO started investigations against two civil members of the ACTF, Transparency International Hungary and Atlatszo.hu, an investigative portal.

**Impact assessment.** Due to some theoretical shortcomings and mostly unsatisfactory implementation, these measures did not yield any impact on curbing systemic corruption.

#### 6.5.5 Anti-corruption strategies

| Measure no.           | Description                                                                                                                                          | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| M5.1                  | Development and implementation of a National Anti-corruption strategy and action plan (R7)                                                           | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| M5.2                  | Reinforced legal provisions setting out implementation, monitoring, audit and control arrangements to guarantee the sound use of Union support (R19) | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| M5.3                  | An effective anti-fraud and anti-corruption strategy for the implementation, audit and control of Union support (R20)                                | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                                                                      |               |                | 1      |

**Table 6-6.** Assessment of the measures aimed at reinforcing anti-corruption strategies and legal provisions. Source: Authors’ work.

**Theory assessment.** In the context of state capture, anti-corruption strategies can only have limited impact as both the legal provisions and the enforcement are influenced by particularistic interests (Dávid-Barett, 2023). Therefore, potential relevance of strategies (M5.1-M5.3) is very limited.

**Implementation assessment.** Some of the provisions were implemented, albeit mostly with important shortcomings. The government’s new anti-corruption strategy (M5.1) was carried out with serious delay and without public consultation (Zeisler and Ligeti, 2024). The strategy had a major shortcoming as it neglects the systemic nature of

corruption and perceives corruption as a set of isolated phenomena. Although it contained some relevant elements such as improving the freedom of information landscape, and the adoption of a new lobbying regulation by November 2025, the practical implementation was missed. Other strategic documents (M5.2, M5.3) were elaborated but did not result in any de facto policy changes (AI et al., 2024b).

**Impact assessment.** Given the theoretical shortcomings and insufficient implementation, the measures had a limited impact on systemic corruption.

#### 6.5.6 Reducing EU funds fraud

| Measure no.           | Description                                                                                                                                            | Impact theory | Implementation | Impact |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|
| <b>M6.1</b>           | Establishment of a Directorate of Internal Audit and Integrity to reinforce the control of conflicts of interest when implementing Union support (R22) | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <b>M6.2</b>           | Ensuring the capacity for the EUTAF to effectively carry out its tasks (R23)                                                                           | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <b>M6.3</b>           | Strengthening cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) (R24)                                                                             | 1             | 1              | 1      |
| <b>M6.4</b>           | Effective implementation, control and audit of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the protection of the financial interests of the Union (R25)       | 1             | 1              | 0      |
| <b>M6.5</b>           | Effective involvement of stakeholders and social partners in decision-making (R27)                                                                     | 1             | 0              | 0      |
| <b>Overall impact</b> |                                                                                                                                                        |               |                | 0      |

**Table 6-7.** Assessment of the measures aimed at reducing corruption in the distribution of EU funds. Source: Authors' work.

**Theory assessment.** EU funds fraud has been one of the distinguishing features of Hungary's systemic corruption under the Orbán regime (Fazekas and Tóth, 2016). Changes in the legal status and operation of otherwise captured institutions to oversee EU funds spending (M6.1 – M6.5) can only be limited. While strengthening the cooperation with the Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) of the EU, an external body (M6.3) could contribute to curbing systemic corruption, OLAF's anti-corruption mandate is constrained as it can carry out administrative investigations only, and it cannot indict. In theory, effective involvement of stakeholders and social partners (M6.5) should be important for increasing the quality of decision-making, but again, its relevance is undermined by the

prevalence of particularistic interests (Council, 2022).

**Implementation assessment.** Although the government implemented most of these measures (M6.1 – M6.4) nominally, the case of the newly established directorate of internal audit (M6.1) is illustrative: the new body has not published any reports, nor has it announced any wrongdoing (AI et al., 2024/a, 2024/b). M6.5 is undermined by the measures of the Sovereignty Protection Office (Bayer, 2024).

**Impact assessment.** The measures had no significant impact on anti-corruption due to theoretical shortcomings and partial implementation.

## 6.6 Discussion

Using the systematic policy evaluation framework, the analysis shows that both the impact theory and the level of implementation of the prescribed measures have significant limitations.

The analysis found that the impact of the introduced measures was limited in the domains of judicial independence, public procurement system, and anti-corruption strategies. Conversely, the reform measures have failed to yield any impact in three domains, namely, control of EU funds, transparency and corruption prevention, and anti-corruption institutions. In the latter two, the measures were futile mainly due to the government's reluctance to implement them sufficiently. As for the domain of control of EU funds, although the measures were implemented nominally, they remained ineffective.

While generalization based on a single case warrants precaution, being an extreme case of incremental anti-corruption reforms, the effect of the reform package represents an upper estimate of the impact of incremental interventions in countries where systemic corruption prevails. Our findings on the case of Hungary are in line with the “big bang” literature as the reform package did not hamper systemic corruption. As the latter constitutes an inherent feature of the political system and instrument of societal organization and redistribution of resources through which ruling elites in electoral autocracies (such as Hungary) consolidate and maintain their power, a set of individual measures cannot eliminate it, even in the face of external pressure. The main cause of it is that the Hungarian government had an interest in implementing the prescribed measures only to a limited extent that could be enough to unblock further EU funds but would not threaten its power. As the state is captured by a narrow informal group of oligarchs and

politicians and corruption is systemic, if anti-corruption measures had penetrated deeply into some policy areas, they could have touched the backbone of the political regime. This would constitute an existential threat to the regime. These conclusions are in line with those of previous studies arguing that political will to curb corruption is a crucial factor in the success of anti-corruption interventions in hybrid regimes (Abdulai, 2009; Hajnal, 2025; Quah, 2020)

On the other hand, the reform package was not entirely futile. As the analysis shows, the measures prescribed may have prevented further malpractices in certain policy domains. In this sense, the findings support the claim that incremental anti-corruption reforms can, to a very limited extent, yield a positive impact. In a broader sense, thus, these findings point toward a consolidation of the two, thus far starkly opposed approaches to anti-corruption in the context of systemic corruption: while incremental reforms cannot tackle root causes of systematic corruption, they can nonetheless have some, very limited impact on corruption in certain domains.

Being the EU's *bête noire* and its most corrupt and least democratic MS, Hungary may be the most challenging target of EU policies. Therefore, one may expect that similar reforms prescribed for MSs where systemic corruption is less resilient will yield a larger impact than the reform package implemented in Hungary. While the reforms are not likely to have changed Hungary's downward democratic trajectory and were unable to curb systemic corruption, similar interventions prescribed in countries at earlier phases of democratic decline may be decisive. Furthermore, it is assumable that the conditionality regimes contribute to the erosion of the Orbán regime as withholding a substantial share of EU funds undermines economic performance (Gyórfy and Martin 2023).

It could be argued that the findings are not indicative of the effectiveness of incremental anti-corruption reforms given that, as the analysis shows, the reform package has not been fully implemented. However, the Hungarian government's reluctance to implement anti-corruption reforms is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is an inherent challenge associated with incremental reforms in contexts where systemic corruption has become a pillar of an autocratic political regime. In this way, the findings regarding implementation also contribute to the literature on anti-corruption interventions.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Although anti-corruption has become a large industry over the past decades, the literature on anti-corruption policies is largely inconclusive. According to one school of thought, systemic corruption can only be changed by a “big bang”, that is, sudden, in-depth, and large-scale reforms that eventually fundamentally change the nature of the political system and/ or go together with it. By contrast, others argue that incremental reforms can also yield a positive impact. The present study contributes to this debate by an interim evaluation of the reform package prescribed by the EU institutions for Hungary in 2022.

Based on the qualitative assessment of the program theories and the implementation of the reforms’ components, the analysis found that the reform package overall had very limited impact to curb systematic corruption. The measures in the domains of judicial independence, prevention of public procurement fraud, and general anti-corruption provisions had limited impact. By contrast, measures aimed at promoting transparency and corruption prevention, the establishment of new anti-corruption institutions and lowering corruption in the distribution of EU funds were found to be futile. Arguably, the main reason for the reforms’ limited effectiveness is a lack of political will to curb systemic corruption: as the former constitutes a crucial tool in the maintenance of the regime, the government refuses to take substantive action against it even in the face of substantive financial pressures.

Bridging the gap between the “big bang” and the incremental approaches to corruption, the results suggest that while incremental reforms cannot root out systemic corruption, they may still contribute to preventing further wrongdoings in some specific domains.

In the case of Hungary, the reforms were relatively broad and significant external pressure (on behalf of the EU) was exerted to implement them. As the Hungarian case is an extreme variant of incremental reforms, typical incremental reforms are presumed to have even lower effects. In line with previous findings about the EU’s modest capacity to limit corruption and rule-of-law abuses in MSs, the analysis suggests that although the EU’s efforts to limit corruption by enforcing policy reforms are not futile, they are insufficient to curb systemic corruption and reverse the democratic decline in a captured state such as Hungary. In MSs where democratic decline is at earlier stages and systemic corruption is less resilient than in Hungary, similar reforms would likely yield a greater effect.



## 7 CONCLUDING REMARKS TO THE DISSERTATION

This chapter offers concluding remarks to the dissertation. To that end, first, the main findings of the constituent articles are synthesized, and their (overall) external validity is discussed. Then, two overarching questions about hybrid regimes and their scholarly analysis are discussed based on the findings of the articles. One considers whether hybrid regimes are stable or transitioning towards democratic or (fully) autocratic states. The other asks how hybrid regimes should be analyzed and offers pointers for future research in this domain.

### 7.1 Synthesis of the constituent articles

The overarching ambition of the present dissertation was to *investigate how different subtypes of hybrid regimes garner popular support, operate, produce policy outputs, and respond to pro-democratic pressures*, with special attention dedicated to the role of corruption in hybrid regimes. To that end, the dissertation applied a multi-disciplinary and multi-method approach. More specifically, the articles employed a variety of theoretical approaches, including rational choice theory (and several more specific theories and mechanisms based on it), neo-institutionalism and its certain sub-branches, and the principal-agent model. The articles applied a large variety of methods, such as large-n regression models, the set-theoretic FSITA method, qualitative case studies, and qualitative program evaluation techniques. The constituent articles also varied in terms of empirical scope. While some of the articles focused on Hungary specifically, others considered a broader range of countries. Finally, the analysis employed different analytical perspectives/units of analysis, such as individuals, practices, countries, and policies.

The five constituent articles examined specific questions related to the main ambition stated above. Article I investigated why voters supported Viktor Orbán's authoritarian populist government despite its erosion of democratic institutions. It found that support was driven by perceptions of economic performance, political ideology, and core values such as self-transcendence and conservation, while individual economic conditions had little influence. Article II examined corruption in competitive authoritarian regimes and argued that rulers strategically allowed or curbed different forms of corruption based on accountability costs, transaction costs, and political benefits. This framework was applied

to Hungary through case studies on informal payments in healthcare and clientelism in tobacco retail concessions.

Article III proposed to shift the unit analysis in autocratization research downwards. It developed the concept AGPs, that is, practices that power holders do to entrench their power, and identified 12 distinct AGP types. Applying this taxonomy to Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (2017–2022), the study highlighted how anti-democratic tactics undermined accountability even within electoral democracies. Article IV critiqued traditional corruption indices for failing to capture qualitative differences and constructed a new typology of corruption patterns using the set-theoretic FSITA method. It identified four corruption types and assigned 83 countries to one of these ideal types. Article V evaluated the effectiveness of EU-imposed incremental anti-corruption reforms in Hungary (2022–2024). It found that while these measures may have weakened Orbán’s regime, they failed to curb systemic corruption. The findings suggest that only large-scale, radical reforms could effectively dismantle entrenched corrupt networks.

While the external validity of the constituent articles is discussed separately in the Discussion / Conclusion sections of each, here I discuss briefly some overarching considerations with regard to the generalizability of the main findings of the dissertation as a whole. The articles have varying temporal and geographical scopes. They also analyze distinct (sub)types of hybrid regimes. While some (primarily) earlier contributions on (de-)democratization considered such grey-zone regimes relatively similar to one another and sought to offer “universal” analyses and explanations (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013; Dahl, 1989), recent scholarship—including the articles of the present dissertation—tends to emphasize important differences between different countries’ experiences with autocratization. It follows that any generalization of the five articles’ findings should be cautious.

That said, some overarching externally valid findings do emerge. First, three articles focus on post-2010 Hungary. While the articles use slightly different concepts to designate the regime (e.g., authoritarian populism and competitive authoritarianism), given Hungary’s widely accepted stance as a “role model” for actual and aspiring authoritarians around the world and a “laboratory of illiberalism” (Krekó and Enyedi, 2018), the findings of Articles I, II, and V are likely to be indicative of similar regimes led by populist “strongmen”. Article IV is primarily descriptive and has a global scope; thus, the issue of external validity is less relevant. Likewise, Article III is primarily a concept-

building exercise; its conceptual and analytical framework is meant to be applicable “universally”, that is, irrespective of the country context.

The table below presents the most important characteristics and publication status of the articles and indicates the specific areas in which they contribute to understanding hybrid regimes.

| <i>Article# and brief title</i>                                                    | <b>Article I – The drivers of support for Orbán’s government</b>                                           | <b>Article II – Explanatory framework of corruption patterns in autocracies</b>                                          | <b>Article III – A conceptual framework and taxonomy of authoritarian governance practices</b>                                                                | <b>Article IV – A typology of corruption patterns</b>                                                          | <b>Article V – Evaluation of EU sanctions to reduce systemic corruption</b>                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Co-authors</i>                                                                  | Single-authored                                                                                            | Single-authored                                                                                                          | with György Hajnal                                                                                                                                            | with Attila Bartha and József Péter Martin                                                                     | with József Péter Martin                                                                                    |
| <i>Journal</i>                                                                     | Public Choice (Q1)                                                                                         | European Political Science (Q1)                                                                                          | not yet submitted                                                                                                                                             | Political Studies Review (D1)                                                                                  | Public Integrity (Q1)                                                                                       |
| <i>Publication year</i>                                                            | 2024                                                                                                       | 2025                                                                                                                     | -                                                                                                                                                             | 2025                                                                                                           | in review (second round)                                                                                    |
| <i>Essence</i>                                                                     | Investigates various individual-level factors that influence the support for Orbán’s government in Hungary | Proposes a novel explanatory framework to elucidate the factors driving corruption in competitive authoritarian contexts | Proposes a novel conceptual and analytical apparatus of authoritarian governance practices to study autocratization and develops a taxonomy of such practices | Develops a typology of country-level corruption patterns and assigns countries to types using the FSITA method | Evaluates the (potential) effectiveness of the EU’s interventions to counter systemic corruption in Hungary |
| <i>Method</i>                                                                      | Quantitative                                                                                               | Theoretical/qualitative                                                                                                  | Theoretical/qualitative                                                                                                                                       | Set-theoretic/FSITA                                                                                            | Qualitative                                                                                                 |
| <i>Main unit of analysis</i>                                                       | Individual                                                                                                 | Corruption types                                                                                                         | Governance practices                                                                                                                                          | Countries                                                                                                      | Anti-corruption interventions                                                                               |
| <i>Empirical scope</i>                                                             | Hungary, 2010-2020                                                                                         | Hungary (illustrative examples)                                                                                          | V4 countries, 2019-2023                                                                                                                                       | 83 countries, 2020                                                                                             | Hungary, 2020-2024                                                                                          |
| <i>Contribution to the understanding of hybrid regimes - The analysis shows...</i> | ...how hybrid regimes secure popular support.                                                              | ...how hybrid regimes utilize corruption to consolidate their power.                                                     | ...through what practices hybrid regimes undermine accountability.                                                                                            | ...what corruption patterns result from different regime characteristics (e.g., hybridity).                    | ...to what extent external actors can take action to limit corruption in hybrid regimes.                    |

**Table 7-1.** Overview of the constituent articles. Source: author’s work.

## 7.2 Are hybrid regimes stable?

Earlier influential work suggested that hybrid regimes are not stable. That is, they are transitioning towards either fully democratic or fully authoritarian states. Similarly, the terms “transitional democracy” and “fragile democracy”—applied to non-established democracies falling into the broader category of hybrid regimes—suggest an inherent temporary character. In *Why Nations Fail?* Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argue that political and economic institutions reinforce one another. Depending on whether they are extractive or inclusive, their reinforcing character leads to a vicious or virtuous circle, respectively. This suggests that countries located in the grey zone between the two endpoints characterized by fully extractive and fully inclusive institutions are transitioning toward one of the two endpoints. The authors support their argument with case studies of countries in the “grey zone” that have proved to be unstable and descended into autocracies or turned into democracies. Conversely, other researchers argued that hybrid regimes may exhibit significant stability as they are anchored by various socio-economic and political forces (Guriev and Treisman 2022; Levitsky and Way 2020; Morlino 2009).

While it is beyond the scope of the dissertation to assert whether hybrid regimes are stable or transitioning, some of the emerging findings of the constituent articles suggest that such regimes can prove largely resilient. More specifically, Articles II and IV underpin that the ruling elites have developed efficient methods to seize large amounts of public assets. Article I shows that they can do this overtly without significant popular backlash as they can appeal to voters through various issues. It follows that ruling elites in hybrid contexts have little motivation to toughen their regime and transition toward repressive authoritarianism. Neither do they have the means: the arguments presented in Articles III and V underpin that modern-day hybrid regimes face significant constraints both domestically and internationally in their efforts to build fully authoritarian systems. Finally, Article V shows that while international organizations can exert pressure on hybrid regimes, they are unable to change the foundations of hybrid regimes.

That said, recent developments—including the incarceration of the leader of the Turkish opposition and the restrictions of assembly rights in Hungary—suggest that the forces keeping hybrid regimes from further autocratization may be weakening. Guriev and Treisman (2022) argue that hybrid regimes have remained stable and avoided transition into full autocracies due to the liberal world order (among other factors). The liberal world

order, however, seems to be crumbling: at the beginning of his second presidential term, Donald Trump's policies and statements have made it clear that the US ceases its role as the global promoter and defender of democracy and free trade. Time will tell whether this will ultimately prove Acemoglu and Robinson right, and hybrid regimes—now not constrained by the United States—will indeed descend into more authoritarian states.

### **7.3 How to study hybrid regimes?**

The analyses and findings presented in the five constituent articles of the dissertation demonstrate that diverse analytical, theoretical, disciplinary, and methodological approaches can be fruitfully applied to study contemporary hybrid regimes. Moreover, the dissertation also underpins that combining approaches that are not typically combined can contribute to extant research in important ways.

More specifically, Article I employed classical voting theory—typically applied in established democracies—to explain satisfaction with the government in a hybrid regime. Article II introduced novel units of analysis, namely, corruption type and corruption pattern, to better describe and explain corruption in hybrid regimes. Similarly, Article III argued that the predominant country-level approach is not well suited to study autocratization and developed the concept of authoritarian governance practices. Article IV applied the FISTA method for the first time to develop a typology of corruption patterns. Finally, Article V employed Rossi et al's (2019) systematic program evaluation approach to assess the extent to which anticorruption reforms may be effective in hybrid contexts.

The fact that these novel combinations of thus far scarcely linked and/or novel analytical approaches, theories, and methods yielded important contributions to the study of hybrid regimes demonstrates the need for transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Beyond the above general conclusions, the dissertation also offers more specific pointers for future research. Given their novel theoretical and/or empirical approaches, Articles II, III, and IV offer the most in terms of future research directions. Article II offers a novel analytical lens (i.e., corruption types and patterns) and a related explanatory framework that enables the description of within-country variations of corruption outcomes in hybrid regimes. Article III also develops an analytical tool (of AGPs) that enables future contributions to describe and explain authoritarianism from a novel perspective. Finally,

Article IV lays the groundwork for future scholarship focusing on explaining qualitative, rather than quantitative differences across countries' corruption outcomes and demonstrates the applicability of set-theoretic methods to pursue this research ambition.

## 8 REFERENCES

- Abdulai, A.-G. (2009) 'Political will in combating corruption in developing and transition economies: A comparative study of Singapore, Hong Kong and Ghana', *Journal of Financial Crime*, 16(4), pp. 387–417. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/13590790910993753>
- Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J.A. (2013) *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. New York: Currency.
- Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J.A. (2019) *The narrow corridor: States, societies, and the fate of liberty*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Ádám, Z. (2019) 'Explaining Orbán: A political transaction cost theory of authoritarian populism', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66(6), pp. 385–401. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1643249>
- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C. and Zaslove, A. (2014) 'How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters', *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(9), pp. 1324–1353.
- Akkerman, A., Zaslove, A. and Spruyt, B. (2017) "'We the People" or "We the Peoples"? A comparison of support for the populist radical right and populist radical left in the Netherlands', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), pp. 377–403.
- Amnesty International (AI) Hungary et al. (2023a) *Assessment of compliance by Hungary with conditions to access the European Union funds*. April. Available at: [https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/HU\\_EU\\_funds\\_assessment\\_Q1\\_2023.pdf](https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/HU_EU_funds_assessment_Q1_2023.pdf) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- Amnesty International (AI) Hungary et al. (2023b) *Assessment of Hungary's compliance with conditions to access European Union funds*. November. Available at: [https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/11/HU\\_EU\\_funds\\_assessment\\_Q3\\_2023\\_table.pdf](https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/11/HU_EU_funds_assessment_Q3_2023_table.pdf) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- Amnesty International (AI) Hungary et al. (2024a) *Contributions of the Hungarian CSO to the European Commission's Rule of Law Reports*. January. Available at: <https://transparency.hu/wp->



[content/uploads/2024/01/HUN\\_CS0\\_contribution\\_EC\\_RoL\\_Report\\_2024-1.pdf](#)

(Accessed: 4 April 2025).

Amnesty International (AI) Hungary et al. (2024b) *Assessment of Hungary's compliance with conditions to access European Union funds*. November.

Available at: [https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-](https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/12/HU_EU_funds_assessment_Q3_2024.pdf)

[content/uploads/sites/2/2024/12/HU\\_EU\\_funds\\_assessment\\_Q3\\_2024.pdf](#)

(Accessed: 4 April 2025).

Andersson, S. (2017) 'Beyond unidimensional measurement of corruption', *Public Integrity*, 19(1), pp. 58–76. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2016.1149980>

Ang, Y.Y. (2020a) *China's gilded age: The paradox of economic boom and vast corruption*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108778350>

Ang, Y.Y. (2020b) 'Unbundling corruption: Revisiting six questions on corruption', *Global Perspectives*, 1(1), p. 12036. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2020.12036>

Auyero, J. (2012) *Patients of the state: The politics of waiting in Argentina*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bailey, J. (2014) *Social Europe*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Baka, A. (2023) 'From targeted restrictions to the future restoration of an independent justice system', in Martin, J.P. (ed.) *White Book: Is there a way out from systemic corruption?* Budapest: Transparency International Hungary, pp. 11–23.

Bandau, F. (2023) 'What explains the electoral crisis of social democracy? A systematic review of the literature', *Government and Opposition*, 58(1), pp. 183–205.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.39>

Bánkuti, M., Halmai, G. and Scheppele, K.L. (2012) 'Hungary's illiberal turn: Disabling the constitution', *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), pp. 138–146.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2012.0054>

Baro, E. (2022) 'Personal values priorities and support for populism in Europe—an analysis of personal motivations underpinning support for populist parties in Europe', *Political Psychology*, 43(6), pp. 1191–1215. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12814>

- Bátory, Á. (2010) 'Post-accession malaise? EU conditionality, domestic politics and anti-corruption policy in Hungary', *Global Crime*, 11(2), pp. 164–177.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440571003669183>
- Bauer, M.W. (ed.) (2021) *Democratic backsliding and public administration: How populists in government transform state bureaucracies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108860369>
- Bayer, L. (2024) 'Transparency watchdog investigated as Hungary tries to curb "foreign influence"', *The Guardian*, 26 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/26/hungary-transparency-watchdog-investigated-curb-foreign-influence> (Accessed: 4 April 2025)
- Becker, G.S. and Stigler, G.J. (1974) 'Law enforcement, malfeasance, and compensation of enforcers', *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 3(1), pp. 1–18.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/467507>
- Békés, G. and Kézdi, G. (2021) *Data analysis for business, economics, and policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bermeo, N. (2016) 'On democratic backsliding', *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), pp. 5–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>
- Bhattacharyya, S. and Hodler, R. (2015) 'Media freedom and democracy in the fight against corruption', *European Journal of Political Economy*, 39, pp. 13–24.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2015.03.004>
- Blauberger, M. and Sedelmeier, U. (2024) 'Sanctioning democratic backsliding in the European Union: Transnational salience, negative intergovernmental spillover, and policy change', *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp. 1–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2313523>
- Blühdorn, I. and Butzlaff, F. (2020) 'Democratization beyond the post-democratic turn: Towards a research agenda on new conceptions of citizen participation', *Democratization*, 27(3), pp. 369–388. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1708456>
- Bogaards, M. (2009) 'How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism', *Democratization*, 16(2), pp. 399–423. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340902777800>

- Bogaards, M. (2018) 'De-democratization in Hungary: Diffusely defective democracy', *Democratization*, 25(8), pp. 1481–1499. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1485015>
- Bonikowski, B. (2017) 'Ethno-nationalist populism and the mobilization of collective resentment', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68(S1), pp. 181–213. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12325>
- Bovens, M. (2007) 'Analysing and assessing accountability: A conceptual framework', *European Law Journal*, 13(4), pp. 447–468. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2007.00378.x>
- Brinkerhoff, D.W. (2000) 'Assessing political will for anti-corruption efforts: An analytic framework', *Public Administration and Development*, 20(3), pp. 239–252. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-162X\(200008\)20:3<239::AID-PAD138>3.0.CO;2-8](https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-162X(200008)20:3<239::AID-PAD138>3.0.CO;2-8)
- Bromwich, J.E., Protess, B. and Rashbaum, W.K. (2023) 'Trump's company gets maximum punishment for evading taxes', *The New York Times*, 13 January. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/13/nyregion/trump-organization-tax-fraud.html> (Accessed: 4 April 2025)
- Burlacu, D. and Tóka, G. (2014) 'Policy-based voting and the type of democracy', in Thomassen, J. (ed.) *Elections and democracy: Representation and accountability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 60–78.
- Buzogány, A. (2017) 'Illiberal democracy in Hungary: Authoritarian diffusion or domestic causation?', *Democratization*, 24(7), pp. 1307–1325. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1328676>
- Carothers, T., Elstain, J.B., Diamond, L.J., Ibrahim, A. and Bangura, Z.H. (2007) 'A quarter-century of promoting democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), pp. 112–126. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0076>
- Cassani, A. and Tomini, L. (2019) 'Introduction: From democratization to autocratization', in Cassani, A. and Tomini, L. (eds.) *Autocratization in post-Cold War political regimes*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1–13. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03125-1\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03125-1_1)
- Chang, E. and Golden, M.A. (2010) 'Sources of corruption in authoritarian regimes', *Social Science Quarterly*, 91(1), pp. 1–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2010.00682.x>

- Cianetti, L., Dawson, J. and Hanley, S. (2018) ‘Rethinking “democratic backsliding” in Central and Eastern Europe – Looking beyond Hungary and Poland’, *East European Politics*, 34(3), pp. 243–256. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2018.1491401>
- Civitas Institute (2018) *Black Book: Corruption in Hungary between 2010 and 2018*. Budapest: Civitas Institute.
- Closa, C. (2021) ‘Institutional logics and the EU’s limited sanctioning capacity under Article 7 TEU’, *International Political Science Review*, 42(4), pp. 501–515. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120935523>
- Collier, D., LaPorte, J. and Seawright, J. (2012) ‘Putting typologies to work: Concept formation, measurement, and analytic rigor’, *Political Research Quarterly*, 65(1), pp. 217–232. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912912437162>
- Collier, P. (2006) ‘African growth: Why a “big push”?’’, *Journal of African Economies*, 15(suppl\_2), pp. 188–211. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejl031>
- Coppedge, M. et al. (2019) ‘The methodology of “Varieties of Democracy” (V-Dem)’, *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 143(1), pp. 107–133. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106319854989>
- Coppedge, M. et al. (2024) *V-Dem Dataset v14 (Version 14) [Dataset]*. University of Gothenburg. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.23696/MCWT-FR58>
- Corbett, J. (2020) ‘The deconsolidation of democracy: Is it new and what can be done about it?’’, *Political Studies Review*, 18(2), pp. 178–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929919884856>
- Council of the European Union (2022) *ANNEX to the proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Hungary*. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/COM\\_2022\\_686\\_1\\_annexe\\_EN.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/COM_2022_686_1_annexe_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 4 April 2025)
- Cuéllar, M.-F. and Stephenson, M.C. (2022) ‘Taming systemic corruption: The American experience and its implications for contemporary debates’, *World Development*, 155, 105755. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105755>

- Curato, N. and Fossati, D. (2020) 'Authoritarian innovations: Crafting support for a less democratic Southeast Asia', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1006–1020. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1777985>
- Dahl, R.A. (1972) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dahl, R.A. (1989) *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dávid-Barrett, E. (2023) 'State capture and development: A conceptual framework', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26(2), pp. 224–244. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00290-6>
- Detre, L., Jakab, A. and Lukácsi, T. (2023) 'Comparing three financial conditionality regimes and their application to Hungary: The conditionality regulation, the recovery and resilience facility regulation, and the common provisions regulation', *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law & International Law (MPIL)*.
- Dettman, S. (2020) 'Authoritarian innovations and democratic reform in the “New Malaysia”', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1037–1052. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1705791>
- Dettman, S. and Gomez, E.T. (2020) 'Political financing reform: Politics, policies and patronage in Malaysia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 50(1), pp. 36–55. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1658786>
- Diamond, L. (1999) *Developing Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.56021/9780801860140>
- Diamond, L. (2008) 'The democratic rollback—The resurgence of the predatory state essay', *Foreign Affairs*, 87(2), pp. 36–48.
- Diamond, L. (2019) *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Diamond, L. (2021) 'Democratic regression in comparative perspective: Scope, methods, and causes', *Democratization*, 28(1), pp. 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1807517>.
- Dimant, E. and Tosato, G. (2018) 'Causes and effects of corruption: What has past decade's empirical research taught us? A survey', *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 32(2), pp. 335–356. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12198>.

- Downs, A. (1957) 'An economic theory of political action in a democracy', *Journal of Political Economy*, 65(2), pp. 135–150.
- Drapalova, E. et al. (2019) 'Corruption and the crisis of democracy: The link between corruption and the weakening of democratic institutions', Transparency International. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20482> (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- Duch, R.M. and Stevenson, R.T. (2008) *The economic vote: How political and economic institutions condition election results*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunai, M. (2024) 'Hungary loses EU funds as economic slump deepens'.
- Easton, D. (1965) *A framework for political analysis*. 1st U.S. edn. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- EKR (2024) 'Analysis of single-bid public procurements', Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Territorial Development. Available at: <https://ekr.gov.hu/portal/hirek/8798812861784> (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- Éltető, A. and Martin, J.P. (2024) 'Captured institutions and permeated business—the longevity of Hungarian autocracy', *Post-Communist Economies*, 36(4), pp. 482–505.
- ESS Round 10 (2020) *European Social Survey Round 10 Data (2020)*. Data file edition 3.0. Norway: Sikt—Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.
- European Commission (EC) (2023a) 'Commission considers that Hungary's judicial reform addressed deficiencies in judicial independence, but maintains measures on budget conditionality (Press release)', 13 December. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_6465](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6465) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- European Commission (EC) (2023b) 'Commission Resolution (C(2023) 8999 final)'. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/C\\_2023\\_8999\\_1\\_HU\\_ACT.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3emj74JrzHkM8jPzEr59l\\_sRH DGdKx\\_7Pd41\\_VQHdnkifbJznWzKejI2A](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/C_2023_8999_1_HU_ACT.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3emj74JrzHkM8jPzEr59l_sRH DGdKx_7Pd41_VQHdnkifbJznWzKejI2A) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- European Commission (EC) (2024) *2024 Rule of Law Report. Hungary*. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2024-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2024-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).

- European Commission Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs and Kantar (2022) *Corruption: Report*. Special Eurobarometer 523. Brussels: Publications Office. <https://doi.org/10.2837/110098>.
- European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) (2024) ‘Combating corruption in the European Union’, *European Parliament Briefing*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/739241/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)739241\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/739241/EPRS_BRI(2022)739241_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- European Social Survey (2020) *Cumulative File, ESS I-9*. Data file edition 1.0. Norway: Sikt—Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.
- Evans, A.J. (2024) ‘Competitive authoritarianism, informational authoritarianism, and the development of dictatorship: A case study of Belarus’, *Public Choice*, 198(3), pp. 343–360.
- Evans, G. and Pickup, M. (2010) ‘Reversing the causal arrow: The political conditioning of economic perceptions in the 2000–2004 U.S. presidential election cycle’, *The Journal of Politics*, 72(4), pp. 1236–1251.
- Fazekas, M. and King, L.P. (2019) ‘Perils of development funding? The tale of EU funds and grand corruption in Central and Eastern Europe’, *Regulation & Governance*, 13(3), pp. 405–430.
- Fazekas, M. and Tóth, I.J. (2016) ‘From corruption to state capture: A new analytical framework with empirical applications from Hungary’, *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(2), pp. 320–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916639137>.
- Fazekas, M. (2017) ‘Red tape, bribery and government favouritism: Evidence from Europe’, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 68(4), pp. 403–429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9694-2>.
- Financial Times (2024) ‘Hungary loses EU funds as economic slump deepens’, *Financial Times*, 31 December. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/fe893219-7ac3-4ff4-a01f-5cfc3e99be7c> (Accessed: 4 April 2025).
- Fiorina, M.P. (1976) ‘The voting decision: Instrumental and expressive aspects’, *The Journal of Politics*, 38(2), pp. 390–413.



- Freedom House (2018) *Ukraine: Freedom in the World 2018 Country Report*. Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-world/2018> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).
- Fritzen, S. (2005) 'Beyond "political will": How institutional context shapes the implementation of anti-corruption policies', *Policy and Society*, 24(3), pp. 79–96.
- Gaal, P. et al. (2021) 'The 2020 reform of the employment status of Hungarian health workers: Will it eliminate informal payments and separate the public and private sectors from each other?', *Health Policy*, 125(7), pp. 833–840.
- Gadowska, K. (2010) 'National and international anti-corruption efforts: The case of Poland', *Global Crime*, 11(2), pp. 178–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440571003669191>.
- Gans-Morse, J., Mazzuca, S. and Nichter, S. (2014) 'Varieties of clientelism: Machine politics during elections', *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(2), pp. 415–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12058>.
- Geddes, B., Wright, J. and Frantz, E. (2018) *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316336182>.
- Geys, B. and Vermeir, J. (2008) 'Taxation and presidential approval: Separate effects from tax burden and tax structure turbulence?', *Public Choice*, 135(3), pp. 301–317. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-007-9264-8>.
- Glasius, M. (2018) 'What authoritarianism is ... and is not: A practice perspective', *International Affairs*, 94(3), pp. 515–533. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy060>.
- Glasius, M. (2023) *Authoritarian Practices in a Global Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goodin, R.E. and Roberts, K.W.S. (1975) 'The ethical voter', *American Political Science Review*, 69(3), pp. 926–938.
- Graham, M.H. and Svolik, M.W. (2020) 'Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States', *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), pp. 392–409.
- Graycar, A. (2015) 'Corruption: Classification and analysis', *Policy and Society*, 34(2), pp. 87–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2015.04.001>.



- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2008) 'Beyond clientelism: Incumbent state capture and state formation', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(4–5), pp. 638–673.
- Guriev, S. and Treisman, D. (2019) 'Informational autocrats', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), pp. 100–127.
- Guriev, S. and Treisman, D. (2020) 'The popularity of authoritarian leaders: A cross-national investigation', *World Politics*, 72(4), pp. 601–638.
- Guriev, S. and Treisman, D. (2022) *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Györfy, D. and Martin, J.P. (2023) 'Legitimacy and authoritarian decline: The internal dynamics of hybrid regimes', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 70(6), pp. 593–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.2023579>.
- Haerpfer, C. et al. (2020) 'World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020) Cross-National Data-Set (Version 1.5)' [Dataset]. World Values Survey Association. <https://doi.org/10.14281/18241.1>.
- Hajnal, Á. (2025) 'Rational autocrats? Drivers of corruption patterns in competitive authoritarian regimes: Towards an explanatory framework with empirical applications from Hungary', *European Political Science*, pp. 1–20. Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y>.
- Hajnal, Á. (2025a) 'Popular autocrats: Why do voters support Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary? A quantitative analysis', *Public Choice*, 202(1), pp. 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-024-01175-z>.
- Hajnal, Á. (2025b) 'Rational autocrats? Drivers of corruption patterns in competitive authoritarian regimes: Towards an explanatory framework with empirical applications from Hungary', *European Political Science*, January. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y>.
- Hajnal, Á. (2025c) 'Two tales of polarization? How affective and ideological polarization influence political corruption—A panel analysis of 153 countries between 2000 and 2021', *Political Studies*, March, p. 00323217251324306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217251324306>.
- Hajnal, Á., Bartha, A. and Martin, J.P. (2025) 'Varieties of corruption? A typology of country-level corruption patterns using fuzzy set ideal type analysis (FSITA)', *Political Studies Review*, accepted for publication.

- Hajnal, G. and Boda, Z. (2021) 'Illiberal transformation of government bureaucracy in a fragile democracy: The case of Hungary', in Peters, B.G., Pierre, J., Yesilkagit, K., Bauer, M.W. and Becker, S. (eds.) *Democratic Backsliding and Public Administration: How Populists in Government Transform State Bureaucracies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 76–99.
- Hajnal, G. and Hajnal, Á. (2024) 'Economics, ideas or institutions? Agencification through government-owned enterprises in illiberal contexts: The case of Hungary', *Public Policy and Administration*, 39(2), pp. 171–192.
- Hall, S. (1979) 'The great moving right show', *Marxism Today*, January, pp. 14–20.
- Healy, A. and Malhotra, N. (2013) 'Retrospective voting reconsidered', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16(1), pp. 285–306.
- Healy, A.J., Persson, M. and Snowberg, E. (2017) 'Digging into the pocketbook: Evidence on economic voting from income registry data matched to a voter survey', *American Political Science Review*, 111(4), pp. 771–785.
- Hellman, J.S., Jones, G. and Kaufmann, D. (2003) 'Seize the state, seize the day: State capture and influence in transition economies', *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 31(4), pp. 751–773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2003.09.006>.
- Hellmeier, S. et al. (2021) 'State of the world 2020: Autocratization turns viral', *Democratization*, 28(6), pp. 1053–1074.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A. (2019) *State Capture: How Conservative Activists, Big Businesses, and Wealthy Donors Reshaped the American States--and the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heywood, P.M. (2017) 'Rethinking corruption: Hocus-pocus, locus and focus', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 95(1), pp. 21–48. <https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.95.1.0021>.
- Hicken, A. (2011) 'Clientelism', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 14(1), pp. 289–310.
- Hirschman, A.O. (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. 18th edn. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Hollyer, J.R. and Wantchekon, L. (2015) 'Corruption and ideology in autocracies', *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 31(3), pp. 499–533.

- Huntington, S.P. (1993) *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- HVG (2020) ‘Az apróért is lehajol a milliárdos: újabb trafikot szerzett [The billionaire bends over backwards for change: he has acquired another tobaccoist]’, *HVG.hu*, 28 November.
- Innes, A. (2013) ‘The political economy of state capture in central Europe’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(1), pp. 88–104.
- Integrity Authority (2024) *Annual Report*. Available at: <https://integritashatosag.hu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/integrity-authority-annual-report-2023.pdf> (Accessed: [insert access date]).
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N. and Westwood, S.J. (2019) ‘The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), pp. 129–146.
- Jancsics, D. (2019) ‘Corruption as resource transfer: An interdisciplinary synthesis’, *Public Administration Review*, 79(4), pp. 523–537.
- Jancsics, D. (2024) *Sociology of Corruption: Patterns of Illegal Association in Hungary*. Ithaca [New York]: Cornell University Press.
- Jastramskis, M. (2022) ‘Foreign policy preferences and vote choice under semi-presidentialism’, *Political Research Quarterly*, 10659129221119200.
- Jensen, M.F. (2014) ‘The question of how Denmark got to be Denmark – establishing rule of law and fighting corruption in the state of Denmark 1660 – 1900’, Working Paper Series 2014:06, The Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg.
- Johnston, M. (2006) *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power, and Democracy*. Illustrated edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kartal, M. (2014) ‘Accounting for the bad apples: The EU’s impact on national corruption before and after accession’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21(6), pp. 941–959.
- Kaufmann, D. and Aart, K. (2023) *Worldwide Governance Indicators* [Dataset]. Available at: [www.govindicators.org](http://www.govindicators.org) (Accessed: [insert access date]).
- Kelemen, R.D. (2020) ‘The European Union’s authoritarian equilibrium’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(3), pp. 481–499.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1712455>.

- Klitgaard, R. (1988) *Controlling Corruption*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kolstad, I. and Wiig, A. (2016) 'Does democracy reduce corruption?', *Democratization*, 23(7), pp. 1198–1215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2015.1071797>.
- Kone, S.L. and Winters, R.F. (1993) 'Taxes and voting: Electoral retribution in the American states', *The Journal of Politics*, 55(1), pp. 22–40.
- Kornai, J. (2015) 'Hungary's U-Turn: Retreating from democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 26, pp. 34–48.
- Kotzian, P. (2011) 'Public support for liberal democracy', *International Political Science Review*, 32(1), pp. 23–41.
- Kramer, A.E. (2020) 'Ukraine passes a critical anticorruption bill', *The New York Times*, 13 May.
- Krekó, J., Erős, H., Greskovics, B., Hajnal, Á. and Scharle, Á. (2023) 'The redistributive effect of the Hungarian flat tax and family allowance system', *Acta Oeconomica*, 73(4), pp. 481–503.
- Krekó, P. and Enyedi, Z. (2018) 'Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's laboratory of illiberalism', *Journal of Democracy*, 29(3), pp. 39–51.
- Kupatadze, A. (2017) 'Accounting for diverging paths in most similar cases: Corruption in Baltics and Caucasus', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 67(2), pp. 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9658-y>.
- Kvist, J. (2007) 'Fuzzy Set Ideal Type Analysis', *Journal of Business Research*, 60(5), pp. 474–481.
- Lacatus, C. and Sedelmeier, U. (2020) 'Does monitoring without enforcement make a difference? The European Union and anti-corruption policies in Bulgaria and Romania after accession', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(8), pp. 1236–1255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1770842>.
- Lachat, R. (2008) 'The impact of party polarization on ideological voting', *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), pp. 687–698. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.06.002>.
- Laki, M. (2015) 'Restructuring and re-regulation of the Hungarian tobacco market', *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 6(2), pp. 39–71.
- Lambsdorff, J. (2007) 'Consequences and causes of corruption—What do we know from a cross-section of countries?', in Rose-Ackerman, S. (ed.) *International Handbook on the Economics of Corruption*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 3–52.

- Lambsdorff, J.G. (2002) 'Making corrupt deals: Contracting in the shadow of the law', *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 48(3), pp. 221–241.
- Lavena, C.F. (2013) 'What determines permissiveness toward corruption?', *Public Integrity*, 15(4), pp. 345–366.
- Lavenex, S. and Schimmelfennig, F. (2011) 'EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: From leverage to governance?', *Democratization*, 18(4), pp. 885–909.
- Lavrič, M. and Bieber, F. (2021) 'Shifts in support for authoritarianism and democracy in the Western Balkans', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 68(1), pp. 17–26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1757468>.
- Lederman, D., Loayza, N.V. and Soares, R.R. (2005) 'Accountability and corruption: Political institutions matter', *Economics & Politics*, 17(1), pp. 1–35.
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L. (2020) 'The new competitive authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), pp. 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>.
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A. (2002) 'Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), pp. 51–65.
- Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2018) *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.
- Lewandowsky, M. and Jankowski, M. (2023) 'Sympathy for the devil? Voter support for illiberal politicians', *European Political Science Review*, 15(1), pp. 39–56.
- Lewis-Beck, M.S. and Nadeau, R. (2011) 'Economic voting theory: Testing new dimensions', *Electoral Studies*, 30(2), pp. 288–294.
- Lewis-Beck, M.S. and Stegmaier, M. (2008) 'The economic vote in transitional democracies', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 18(3), pp. 303–323.
- Lewis-Beck, M.S. and Stegmaier, M. (2019) 'Economic voting', in Congleton, R.D., Grofman, B. and Voigt, S. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Choice, Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 247–265.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190469733.013.12>.
- Lewis-Beck, M.S. (1985) 'Pocketbook voting in U.S. national election studies: Fact or artifact?', *American Journal of Political Science*, 29(2), p. 348.
- Lewis-Beck, M.S., Tang, W. and Martini, N.F. (2014) 'A Chinese popularity function: Sources of government support', *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(1), pp. 16–25.

- Ligeti, M. et al. (2020) *Corruption, economic performance and the rule of law in Hungary: Results of the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2019*. Transparency International Hungary Foundation.
- Ligeti, M. (2023) 'Public policy must be reshaped', in Martin, J.P. (ed.) *White Book. Is There a Way Out from Systemic Corruption?*, pp. 36–58. Transparency International.
- Lindberg, S.I. (2016) 'Ordinal versions of V-Dem's indices: When interval measures are not useful for classification, description, and sequencing analysis purposes', *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 8(2), pp. 76–111.
- Lindstedt, C. and Naurin, D. (2010) 'Transparency is not enough: Making transparency effective in reducing corruption', *International Political Science Review*, 31(3), pp. 301–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110377602>.
- Lührmann, A. and Lindberg, S.I. (2019) 'A third wave of autocratization is here: What is new about it?', *Democratization*, 26(7), pp. 1095–1113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029>.
- Lührmann, A., Marquardt, K.L. and Mechkova, V. (2020) 'Constraining governments: New indices of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal accountability', *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), pp. 811–820. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000222>.
- Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M. and Lindberg, S.I. (2018) 'Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening new avenues for the comparative study of political regimes', *Politics and Governance*, 6(1), pp. 60–77. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1214>.
- Magyar, B. and Madlovics, B. (2020) *The anatomy of post-communist regimes: A conceptual framework*. Budapest: CEU Press.
- Magyar, B. (2016) *Post-communist mafia state: The case of Hungary*. Budapest: CEU Press, in association with Noran Libro.
- Mann, M. (1984) 'The autonomous power of the state: Its origins, mechanisms, and results', *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 25(2), pp. 185–213.
- Mann, M. (2008) 'Infrastructural power revisited', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 43, pp. 355–365.

- Marcos-Marne, H. (2021) 'A tale of populism? The determinants of voting for left-wing populist parties in Spain', *Political Studies*, 69(4), pp. 1053–1071.
- Margolis, H. (1984) *Selfishness, altruism, and rationality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, J.P. (2020) 'Resource reallocation and ambiguous economic performance in a captured state: The case of Hungary', in Rosta, M. and Piroška, D. (eds.) *Systems, institutions, and values in East and West: Engaging with János Kornai's scholarship*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 173–202.
- Martin, József Péter (2020) 'Resource reallocation and ambiguous economic performance in a captured state: The case of Hungary', in Rosta, M. and Piroška, D. (eds.) *Systems, institutions, and values in East and West: Engaging with János Kornai's scholarship*. Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 173–202. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633863725-009>.
- McCoy, J., Rahman, T. and Somer, M. (2018) 'Polarization and the global crisis of democracy: Common patterns, dynamics, and pernicious consequences for democratic polities', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1), pp. 16–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759576>.
- McMann, K.M., Seim, B., Teorell, J. and Lindberg, S. (2020) 'Why low levels of democracy promote corruption and high levels diminish it', *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(4), pp. 893–907. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919862054>.
- Meijeren, M., Lubbers, M. and Scheepers, P. (2023) 'Trends in forms of civic involvement in the Netherlands between 2008 and 2020', *Journal of Civil Society*, 19(4), pp. 464–484.
- Merkel, W. (2004) 'Embedded and defective democracies', *Democratization*, 11(5), pp. 33–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598>.
- Merkel, W. (2010) 'Plausible theory, unexpected results: The rapid democratic consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe', in Best, H. and Wenninger, A. (eds.) *Landmark 1989: Central and Eastern European societies twenty years after the system change*. LIT Verlag, pp. 11–29.
- Michels, M.B.A. (2006) 'Citizen participation and democracy in the Netherlands', *Democratization*, 13(2), pp. 323–339.



- Mietzner, M. (2020) 'Authoritarian innovations in Indonesia: Electoral narrowing, identity politics and executive illiberalism', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1021–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1704266>.
- Mills, C.W. (1999) *The power elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morgenbesser, L. (2020) 'The menu of autocratic innovation', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1053–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1746275>.
- Morlino, L. (2009) 'Are there hybrid regimes? Or are they just an optical illusion?', *European Political Science Review*, 1(2), pp. 273–296. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773909000198>.
- Mudde, C. (2004) 'The populist zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), pp. 541–563.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2006) 'Corruption: Diagnosis and treatment', *Journal of Democracy*, 17(3), pp. 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2006.0050>.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2013) 'Becoming Denmark: Historical designs of corruption control', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 80(4), pp. 1259–1286.
- Nichter, S. (2014) 'Conceptualizing vote buying', *Electoral Studies*, 35, pp. 315–327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.008>.
- Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2019) *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- North, D.C. (1990) *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, G.A. (1998) 'Horizontal accountability in new democracies', *Journal of Democracy*, 9(3), pp. 112–126.
- O'Reilly, C. and Murphy, R.C. (2022) 'An index measuring state capacity, 1789–2018', *Economica*, 89(355), pp. 713–745.
- Pappas, T.S. (2014) 'Populist democracies: Post-authoritarian Greece and post-communist Hungary', *Government and Opposition*, 49(1), pp. 1–23.
- Pepinsky, T. (2020) 'Authoritarian innovations: Theoretical foundations and practical implications', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1092–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1775589>.
- Persson, A., Rothstein, B. and Teorell, J. (2013) 'Why anticorruption reforms fail—systemic corruption as a collective action problem', *Governance*, 26(3), pp. 449–471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2012.01604.x>.



- Piurko, Y., Schwartz, S.H. and Davidov, E. (2011) 'Basic personal values and the meaning of left-right political orientations in 20 countries', *Political Psychology*, 32(4), pp. 537–561.
- Quah, J.S.T. (1999) 'Corruption in Asian countries: Can it be minimized?', *Public Administration Review*, 59(6), pp. 483–494.
- Quah, J.S.T. (2013) 'Curbing corruption in Singapore: The importance of political will, expertise, enforcement, and context', in Quah, J.S.T. (ed.) *Different paths to curbing corruption* (Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management, Vol. 23). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 137–166.
- Quah, J.S.T. (2013) *Different paths to curbing corruption: Lessons from Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Singapore*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Quah, J.S.T. (2020) 'Corruption scandals in six Asian countries: A comparative analysis', *Public Administration and Policy*, 23(1), pp. 7–21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/PAP-01-2020-0002>.
- Refakar, M. and Cárdenas, G.C. (2023) 'Corruption and transactional crime: Building up effective, accountable, inclusive, and transparent institutions as ground for sustainable finance', in Dion, D. (ed.) *Sustainable finance and financial crime*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 165–188.
- Reszkető, P., Váradi, B. and Hajnal, Á. (2022) *Local governments and types of political favouritism - Theoretical approaches, empirical evidence, and plan for an empirical analysis in Hungary*. Budapest Institute.
- Ristei, M. (2010) 'The politics of corruption: Political will and the rule of law in Post-Communist Romania', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 26(3), pp. 341–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279.2010.496324>.
- Rochlitz, M. (2014) 'Corporate raiding and the role of the state in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30(2–3), pp. 89–114.
- Rochlitz, M., Kazun, A. and Yakovlev, A. (2020) 'Property rights in Russia after 2009: From business capture to centralized corruption?', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(5–6), pp. 434–450.
- Rock, M.T. (2009) 'Corruption and democracy', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 45(1), pp. 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380802468579>.

- Rogers, S. (2020) 'Hungarian authoritarian populism: A neo-Gramscian perspective', *East European Politics*, 36(1), pp. 107–123.
- Rose, J. (2018) 'The meaning of corruption: Testing the coherence and adequacy of corruption definitions', *Public Integrity*, 20(3), pp. 220–233.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2017.1397999>.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. and Palifka, B.J. (2016) *Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (1975) 'The economics of corruption', *Journal of Public Economics*, 4(2), pp. 187–203. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727\(75\)90017-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727(75)90017-1).
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (2013) 'International actors and the promises and pitfalls of anti-corruption reform', *Faculty Scholarship Series*. Available at:  
<https://openyls.law.yale.edu/handle/20.500.13051/4476> (Accessed: [date]).
- Rothstein, B. and Teorell, J. (2015) 'Getting to Sweden, Part II: Breaking with corruption in the nineteenth century', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 38(3), pp. 238–254. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12048>.
- Rothstein, B. (2011) 'Anti-corruption: The indirect 'big bang' approach', *Review of International Political Economy*, 18(2), pp. 228–250.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692291003607834>.
- Rothstein, B. (2021) *Controlling corruption: The social contract approach*. 1st edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192894908.001.0001>.
- Saha, S., Gounder, R., Campbell, N. and Su, J.J. (2014) 'Democracy and corruption: A complex relationship', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 61(3), pp. 287–308.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-013-9506-2>.
- Sartori, G. (2005) *Parties and party systems: A framework for analysis*. ECPR Press.
- Schatzki, T.R. (2000) 'Practice mind-ed orders', in Knorr Cetina, K., Schatzki, T.R. and von Savigny, E. (eds.) *The practice turn in contemporary theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203977453>.
- Schedler, A. (2022) 'Conceptualizing accountability', in Schedler, A., Diamond, L. and Plattner, M.F. (eds.) *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 11–28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685854133-003>.

- Schedler, A. (2024) 'Rethinking democratic subversion', in *The Routledge Handbook of Autocratization*. Routledge.
- Scheiring, G. (2020) *The retreat of liberal democracy: Authoritarian capitalism and the accumulative state in Hungary*. 1st edn. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scheppele, K.L. (2022) 'How Viktor Orbán wins', *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3), pp. 45–61.
- Schmidt-Pfister, D. and Moroff, H. (eds.) (2013) *Fighting corruption in Eastern Europe*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203718346>.
- Schmitter, P.C. and Karl, T.L. (1991) 'What democracy is... and is not', *Journal of Democracy*, 2(3), pp. 75–88.
- Schneider, Q.C. and Wagemann, C. (2012) *Set-theoretic methods for the social sciences: A guide to qualitative comparative analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz, S.H. (1992) 'Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries', in Zanna, M.P. (ed.) *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 1–65. Academic Press.
- Schwartz, S.H. (1994) 'Are there universal aspects in the structure and contents of human values?', *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(4), pp. 19–45.
- Scoggins, B. (2022) 'Identity politics or economics? Explaining voter support for Hungary's illiberal FIDESZ', *East European Politics and Societies*, 36(1), pp. 3–28.
- Sedelmeier, U. (2014) 'Anchoring democracy from above? The European Union and democratic backsliding in Hungary and Romania after accession', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(1), pp. 105–121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12082>.
- Skaaning, S.E. (2020) 'Waves of autocratization and democratization: A critical note on conceptualization and measurement', *Democratization*, 27(8), pp. 1533–1542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1799194>.
- Stegmaier, M. and Lewis-Beck, M.S. (2009) 'Learning the economic vote: Hungarian forecasts, 1998–2010', *Politics & Policy*, 37(4), pp. 769–780.
- Stegmaier, M. and Lewis-Beck, M.S. (2011) 'Shocks and oscillations: The political economy of Hungary', *Electoral Studies*, 30(3), pp. 462–467.

- Stephenson, M.C. (2020) 'Corruption as a self-reinforcing trap: Implications for reform strategy', *The World Bank Research Observer*, 35(2), pp. 192–226.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkaa003>.
- Stavis-Gridneff, M., Pronczuk, M. and Novak, B. (2022) 'Top European court rules E.U. can freeze aid to Poland and Hungary', *The New York Times*, 16 February.
- Stiers, D. (2022) 'Performance voting, retrospective voting, and economic voting: Conceptual clarity and empirical testing', *Social Science Quarterly*, 103(2), pp. 399–408.
- Stiglitz, J. (2017) *Globalization and its discontents revisited: Anti-globalization in the era of Trump*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Stiglitz, J.E. (2013) *The price of inequality: How today's divided society endangers our future*. Reprint edn. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Stubager, R. (2013) 'The changing basis of party competition: Education, authoritarian–libertarian values and voting', *Government and Opposition*, 48(3), pp. 372–397.
- Sung, H.-E. (2004) 'Democracy and political corruption: A cross-national comparison', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 41(2), pp. 179–193.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/B:CRIS.0000016225.75792.02>.
- Svolik, M.W. (2019) 'Polarization versus democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3), pp. 20–32.
- Tan, N. (2020) 'Digital learning and extending electoral authoritarianism in Singapore', *Democratization*, 27(6), pp. 1073–1091.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1770731>.
- Taylor, M.M. (2018) 'Getting to accountability: A framework for planning & implementing anticorruption strategies', *Daedalus*, 147(3), pp. 63–82.  
[https://doi.org/10.1162/daed\\_a\\_00503](https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_00503).
- The Economist (2025) 'Donald Trump is a reckless president, but not yet a lawless one', *The Economist*, 20 February. Available at:  
<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2025/02/20/donald-trump-is-a-reckless-president-but-not-yet-a-lawless-one>.

## 9 FULL REFERENCES OF THE CONSTITUENT ARTICLES OF THE DISSERTATION

- Hajnal, Á. (2025a) ‘Popular autocrats: why do voters support Viktor Orbán’s government in Hungary? A quantitative analysis’, *Public Choice*, 202(1), pp. 51–75.
- Hajnal, Á. (2025b) ‘Rational autocrats? Drivers of corruption patterns in competitive authoritarian regimes: towards an explanatory framework with empirical applications from Hungary’, *European Political Science*. Epub ahead of print 23 January. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00514-y>.
- Hajnal, Á. and Hajnal, G. (2025) *The anatomy of authoritarianism: A conceptual framework and taxonomy of authoritarian government practices (AGPs) with empirical applications from Central and Eastern Europe*. Working paper. Corvinus University of Budapest.
- Hajnal, Á., Bartha, A. and Martin, J.P. (2025) ‘Varieties of corruption? A typology of country-level corruption patterns using fuzzy-set ideal type analysis’, *Political Studies Review*. Epub ahead of print 20 May. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299251335227>.
- Martin, J.P. and Hajnal, Á. (2025) ‘Trials and errors: Limitations of anti-corruption and rule-of-law policies in the context of systemic corruption. The case of Hungary’, Working paper (in review at *Public Integrity*).