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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.

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. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767221144346>

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. <https://doi.org/10.1556/032.2023.00011>

Understanding hybrid regimes: How are they maintained and operated?

Booklet of article-based doctoral dissertation

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Introduction

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 & 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 20th 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 & 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. In spite of the large volume of research conducted in this area, much remains to be explored.

List of publications by the Author (including the constituent articles and other related work)

Hajnal, Á. (2024) ‘Political polarization and corruption: A theoretical and empirical review’, *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 10(2), pp. 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v10i2.1310>

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*. <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*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217251324306>

References

Bermeo, N. (2016) 'On democratic backsliding', *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), pp. 5–19.

Diamond, L. (2021) 'Democratic regression in comparative perspective: Scope, methods, and causes', *Democratization*, 28(1), pp. 22–42.

Easton, D. (1965) *A framework for political analysis*. 1st edn. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. (Prentice-Hall Contemporary Political Theory Series).

Guriev, S. and Treisman, D. (2022) *Spin dictators: The changing face of tyranny in the 21st century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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.

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.

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 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 form of sanction 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.

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.

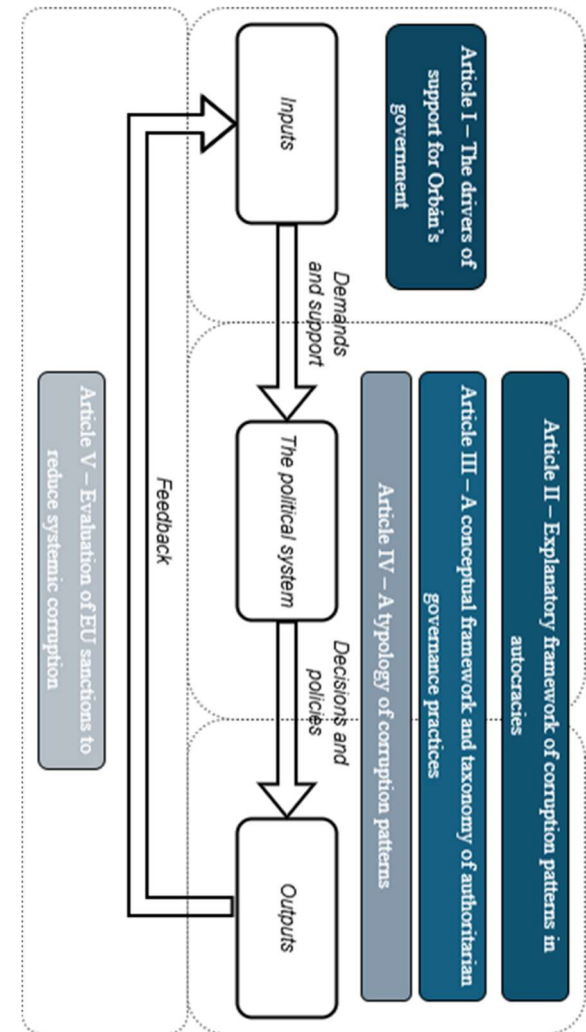


Figure 1. The five constituent articles of the dissertation organized based on Easton's (1965) framework. Source: author's work.

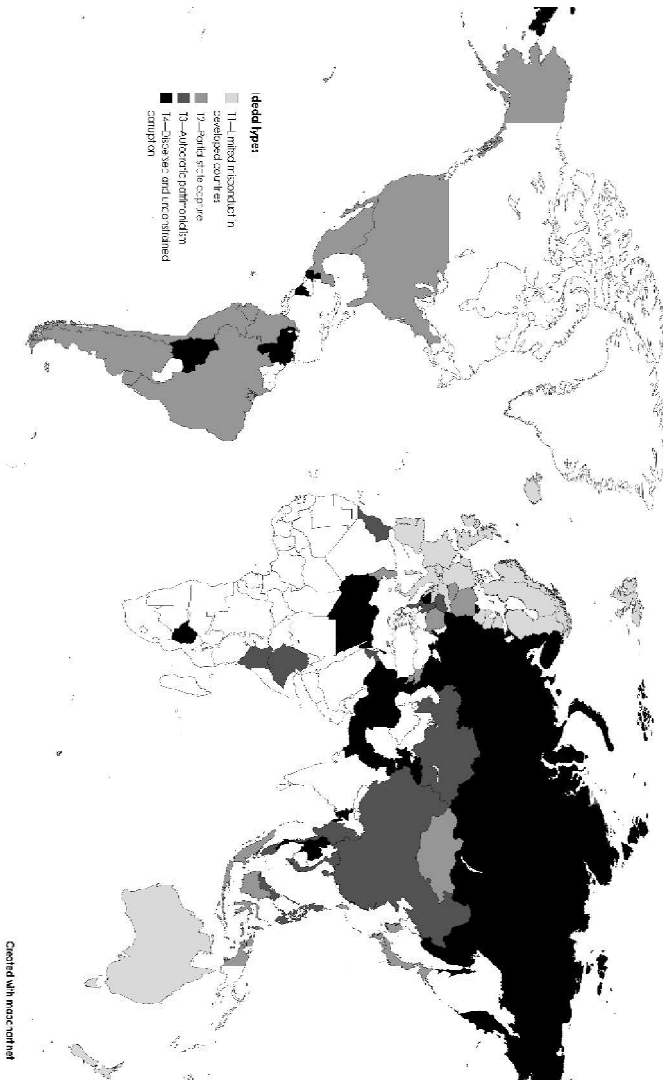


Figure 4. Results of the classification. Source: authors' work, created with mapchart.net.

Article I. 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>

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

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. The results of the classification are presented in the figure below.

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.

expressive voter hypotheses. The effect sizes of the explanatory variables are presented in the figure below.

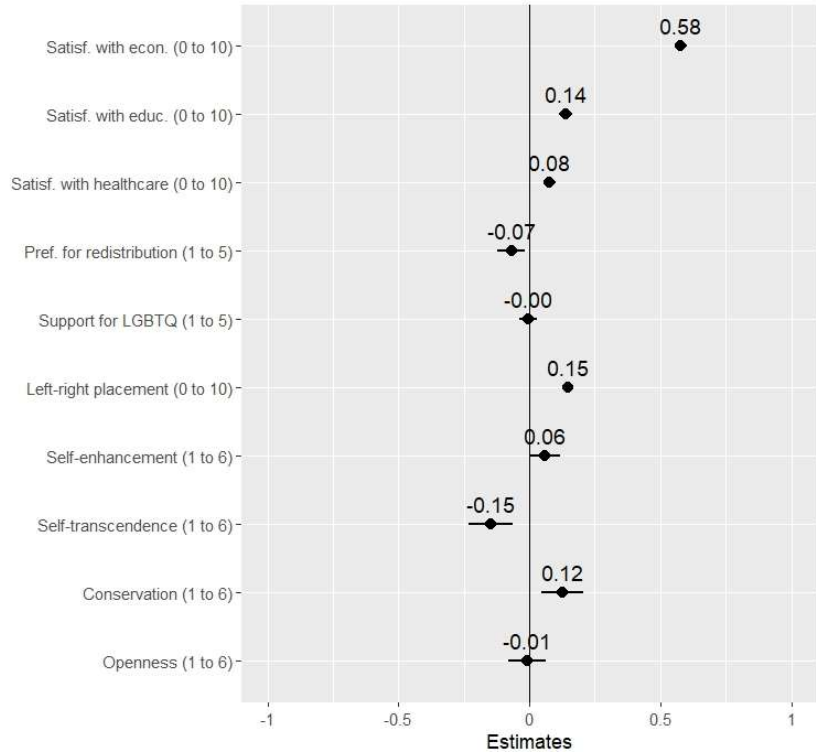


Figure 2. Coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals (scales of the variables on the left side; independent variable: support for the national government, 1 to 10 scale). Source: author’s calculations.

Article II. 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>.

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.

The explanatory framework is summarized in the figure below.

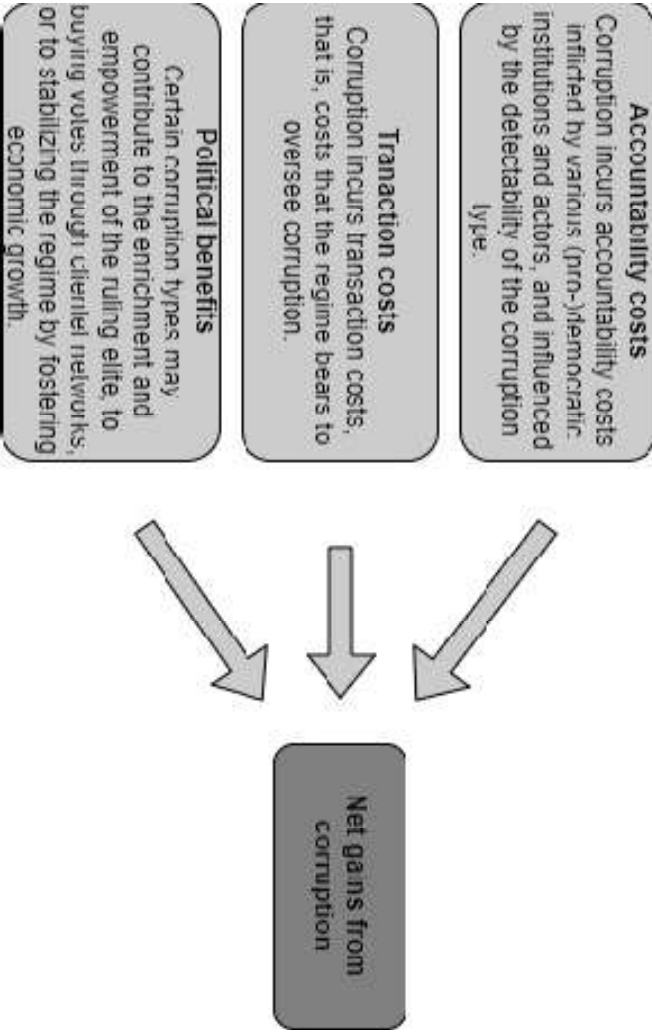


Figure 3. Summary of the explanatory framework. Source: author’s work.