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„Out-group and In-group Framing in Populist Discourse:
the Case of Hungary's Fidesz Party“

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Abstract

This study examines how populist communication shapes public opinion and consolidates political authority in Hungary, focusing on the evolution of the Fidesz party's in-group and out-group narratives between 2010 and 2024. In the context of Hungary's democratic involution since the Fidesz party's victory at the 2010 parliamentary elections, populist communication has become a cornerstone for constructing Viktor Orbán's "illiberal democracy". Through a qualitative analysis of seven State of Nation addresses (2011, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2022 and 2024) held by the Hungarian Prime Minister and a complementary review of several political posters from the same periods, this research traces back the evolution of in-group and out-group framing in Hungary, highlighting a form of complete populism driven by anti-elite sentiments, out-group exclusion and the construction of nationalist in-group identity. Moreover, it reveals a dual use of populist in- and out-group framing, both as an ideological tool and as a means for Viktor Orbán to maintain power, thus revealing the relevance of understanding populist discourse in today's political landscape.

Abstrakt

In dieser Studie wird untersucht, wie populistische Kommunikation die öffentliche Meinung formt und die politische Autorität in Ungarn festigt. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf der Entwicklung der *In-Group*- und *Out-Group*-Narrative, der Fidesz-Partei zwischen 2010 und 2024. Im Kontext der demokratischen Rückschritte Ungarns seit dem Sieg der Fidesz-Partei bei den Parlamentswahlen 2010 ist populistische Kommunikation zu einem wesentlichen Grundstein des Aufbaus von Viktor Orbáns "illiberaler Demokratie" geworden. Anhand einer qualitativen Analyse von sieben Reden zur Lage der Nation (2011, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2022 und 2024) und einer ergänzenden Untersuchung mehrerer politischer Plakate aus demselben Zeitraum, enthüllt diese Arbeit die Entwicklung der antagonistischen Identitätsbildung in Ungarn und hebt eine Form des vollständigen Populismus hervor, die von Anti-Elite-Gefühlen, *Out-Group*-Ausschluss und dem Aufbau einer nationalistischen *In-Group*-Identität angetrieben wird. Darüber hinaus offenbart diese Analyse eine doppelte Nutzung des populistischen *In-Group*- und *Out-Group-Framings*, sowohl als ideologisches Instrument als auch als Mittel zum Machterhalt von Viktor Orbán, was die Bedeutung des Verständnisses des populistischen Diskurses in der heutigen politischen Landschaft verdeutlicht.

Pledge of honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Camille Fourmy

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Abstrakt	ii
Pledge of honesty	iii
Acknowledgements	1
Introduction	2
I. Literature Review and Research Gap	4
II. Theoretical Framework	6
II.a. Definition and Theory of Populism	6
II.b. Theories of Populist Communication	7
III. Methodology	13
IV. Background	16
IV.a. Political, Economic and Social Background of Right-Wing Populism in Hungary	16
IV.b. Kulturkampf and the capture of communication: a building block of the Fidesz party's populist strategy.....	20
V. Analysis of the Evolution of the Fidesz Party's In-Group and Out-Group Framing between 2010 and 2024	26
V.a. 2011 – 2014: The Early Stages of the Fidesz Government.....	26
V.b. 2017 – 2018: The Crystallization of In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics	31
V. c. 2021 – 2024: The Evolution of the Out-Group through Crisis and a New Focus on the <i>Volonté Générale</i>	36
VI. Results and Discussion	42
VI.a.1. Summary of the Out-Group Framing Evolution	42
VI.a.2. Interpretation of the Out-Group Framing Evolution	45
VI.b.1. Summary of the In-Group Framing Evolution.....	48
VI.b.2. Interpretation of the In-Group Framing Evolution	50
Conclusion	55
Sources	I
Bibliography	II
Annex 1: Political Posters of the Fidesz Party 2021 – 2024	VIII

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Introduction

“[...] Whoever controls the media of a country, controls the mindset of that country and, through that, the country itself”¹ stated Balázs Orbán – the Political Director of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán – at the opening of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium international media conference in early January 2023. As reflected in this intervention, knowledge dissemination and more precisely political communication has been and is until today understood by the Fidesz party as an essential tool for shaping public opinion and exercising control over the populace.²

This understanding becomes more important with regard to the use of populist communication strategies by the Fidesz party and the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, since their re-election in 2010. In fact, Viktor Orbán marked a tilting point in the history of Hungarian politics leaving behind the communist regime and its relics by introducing a new political system today commonly understood both by academia and the Prime Minister himself as an “illiberal democracy”.³ The political change the party went through in order to be re-elected into government with an important majority, is especially reflected in the transition of the party’s and more specifically the Prime Minister’s discourse. In fact, we can observe a strong shift from a liberal democratic narrative to a populist and nationalist discourse between 1989, year of Viktor Orbán’s first speech, and the present day.⁴

As such it appears that populist discourse was used on the one hand as a way to (re-)gain and maintain popular support, and on the other, in its continuity, as a tool to divulge effectively nationalist and illiberal ideas, serving the political goals of the Fidesz party.⁵ An important element of populist discourse is its capacity to mobilize masses. In observing the significance of populist communication for the fulfilment of populist goals, the core dialectic of in-group and exclusion of an out-group is central. In fact, applied to the context of Hungary, the in- and out-group discourse, led through different media, reflects the dynamics and strategies through which Viktor Orbán is able to mobilize the masses to adhere to the new political system of his illiberal democracy and through that maintain control and power in the country, a success showcased especially by his current fifth term in office.

¹ Barnóczy/ Horváth Kárai 2023: n.i.

² Szilágyi/ Bozóki 2015: 153 – 156 ; Juhász/ László/ Zgut 2015: 3.

³ Juhász/ László/ Zgut 2015: 3.

⁴ Sata 2023: 1.

⁵ Szilágyi/ Bozóki 2015: 153 – 156 ; Juhász/ László/ Zgut 2015: 3.

Given the centrality of populist discourse for the current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, it is probably not surprising that there is by now an extensive body of research that studies various aspects of populist communication in Hungary. Yet, what has received little attention thus far, is the way populist communication in Hungary contributes to the construction of in- and out-group narratives. Whilst previous research has focused on the elite-people divide in populist discourse, in- and out-group dynamics provide a particularly nuanced perspective for the study of populist communication in Hungary and in general. This leads us to the following research question: *How did the Fidesz party construct, frame and utilize in and out-group narratives between 2010 and 2024?*

Our analysis will focus on the speeches held by the Prime Minister himself, as he is the undisputed leader of the party and the engine behind the construction of Hungary's illiberal democracy. As complement, this analysis will also draw from the visual communication of the Fidesz party, and more precisely on political posters of the Fidesz party issued between 2010 and 2024. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the sources, this paper will, after a brief literature review, introduce the theoretical frameworks which will serve as a basis for the analysis of populist communication and more specifically the determination of in- and out-group discourses and their function. In a second part, this research paper will offer a background analysis of the Hungarian illiberal state, drawing from its historical evolution and further delve deeper in the context of communication means used by the Fidesz party to reach out to the population. Subsequently a third and fourth part will describe the methodology used and further show the results of the qualitative analysis of the evolution of the in- and out group narrative in Viktor Orbán's State of Nation Address and on the posters shown in the same time frame. Lastly, this essay will discuss the meaning of the changes in out- and in-group narratives and their importance for the construction of an illiberal democracy.

I. Literature Review and Research Gap

The rise of illiberal democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, and especially the case of Hungary has since 2014 attracted the attention of many scholars nationally and internationally, such as for example András Bozóki and Anna Szilágyi⁶, Attila Antal,⁷ Don Kalb,⁸ or Zoltán Ádám,⁹ who have focused on the post-communist evolution of the region and more concretely on the origins and roots of these types of regimes.

Concerning more specifically the topics focused on in this paper, i.e. communication strategies and populism in Hungary, the amount of literature available varies greatly depending on the subject. While the role and the control over media has been intensely focused on by scholars,¹⁰ other topics such as the rhetoric of the Fidesz party and the role of in and out-group dynamics for Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy have only received attention in more recent years. Furthermore, there seems to be a focalization on the study of specific subtopics such as immigration,¹¹ crisis,¹² Christianity,¹³ or victimhood¹⁴ for example, rather than comprehensive dialectic strategies.

The question at the centre of this paper, the strategic discursive use of in- and out group narratives in the Fidesz' communication contains two specific focus points. Firstly, the methods and aims behind the construction of in- and out-group narratives in Hungary and secondly the evolution of this construct over time, i.e., between the second and the fifth mandate of the Prime Minister.

Concerning the first focus point, three major articles can be outlined. The most comprehensive approach to the rhetoric and discourse analysis of Viktor Orbán's statements and speeches is provide by Tamás Tóth,¹⁵ who in his article "Target the enemy: explicit and implicit populism in the rhetoric of the Hungarian right" provides a quantitative review on the basis of key words for the year 2018 and successfully points out the main argumentative elements of Orbán's public interventions and specifically the dichotomies expressed through them. Following a similar method, another interesting approach to Orbán's discourses is given by Jessie Barton Hronešová

⁶ Szilágyi/ Bozóki 2015.

⁷ Antal 2019.

⁸ Kalb 2018.

⁹ Ádám 2019.

¹⁰ E.g. Benett / Kneuer 2023; Surowiec/ Stetka 2019.

¹¹ Boda/ Rakovics 2022.

¹² Sata 2023.

¹³ Lamour 2022.

¹⁴ Barton Hronešová/ Kreiss 2024.

¹⁵ Tóth 2020.

and Daniel Kreiss,¹⁶ who proceeding in a similar way analyse the speeches of the Prime Minister held in the year 2022, identifying in and out group discourses, but with a strong focal point on victimhood and in comparison with the speeches of fellow US populist leader, Donald Trump.¹⁷ Finally, Danaj *et al.*¹⁸ analyse the populist rhetoric of Viktor Orbán here adopting an evolutionary approach on a small scale, considering 30 interviews led between 2012 and 2016. While this work also further contributes to the understanding of Viktor Orbán's narrative tool, it is, however, mainly aimed towards analysing the discursive dynamics in relation to the EU and further, is only able to cover a limited time span. This shows that while parts of in an out-group building have been explored, there remains a gap in the time span covered by these analysis as well as a direct strategic link to the specific form of regime which the illiberal democracy is.

Concerning the second focal element of this paper, the evolution of the Fidesz party communication between 2010 and 2022, it has been covered through a quantitative analysis led by Robert Sata in 2023. In this article the author reviews all statements and speeches made by the Prime Minister, over the span of 12 years, analysing in how far Orbán Viktor has discursively utilized crisis in order to radicalize his Eurosceptic discourse, and hence strengthened Hungary's democratic backsliding. While Sata comes closest to the subject of this paper, by both studying the evolution of the discourse and its link to the Hungarian illiberal democracy, the focus on crisis nonetheless hinders a comprehensive overview and thus, the understanding of the full range of in and out-group construction beyond the utilization of crisis.

Based on these approaches and especially on the frameworks given by Sata¹⁹ the following research paper will lead a complementary analysis, focusing on a qualitative examination of Viktor Orbán's yearly "State of Nation Addresses," putting an emphasis on one type – and hence on one comparable form – of public speech and its evolution over time. A restricted number of sources, will, in opposition to prior research, allow to cover a broader palette of topics raised by the Prime Minister in the construction of the in and out-group. Further the qualitative approach, which was used only by few authors on restricted topics and limited in time, such as Christian Lamour,²⁰ can allow for a new and more nuanced understanding of an evolution which has until now only subject to quantitative analysis. Hence, this method offers a new perspective on the in-group and out-group evolution and can subsequently provide a more

¹⁶ Barton Hronešová/ Kreiss 2024.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Danaj *et al.* 2018.

¹⁹ Sata 2023.

²⁰ Lamour 2022.

detailed insight on certain rhetorical elements, picking up on smaller variations, which a quantitative analysis would not have the luxury of doing. Lastly, this paper will further add a dimension of visual reinforcement of the in and out-group creation. This will be achieved through an additional review of the evolution of political posters publicized by the Fidesz party, which has until now, contrary to mainstream- or social media for example,²¹ not been subject of academic research, thus adding significant value to the analysis.

II. Theoretical Framework

In order to proceed to a comprehensive overview on the evolution of the in- and out group in Viktor Orbán's populist discourse, it is important to first establish the definition of populism and secondly to detail the constructive elements of populist discourse and more specifically of the in- and out-group paradigm.

II.a. Definition and Theory of Populism

Considering the frequent misuse of the term "populist" in diverse contexts, it is crucial to establish a clear understanding of its definition before proceeding. Mudde and Kaltwasser²² offer a comprehensive framework to that end.

The authors begin to identify and circle the concept of "populism" through a comprehensive triptych approach framing it "as a movement, as a political style, and as a discourse".²³ The authors first highlight key aspects of populism as a movement, by emphasizing the capacity of populists to serve as "catch-all parties"²⁴ by appealing to voters with diverse socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.²⁵ Secondly, Mudde and Kaltwasser delineate populism as a political style referencing Peter Mair's definition as "a means of linking an increasingly undifferentiated and depoliticized electorate with a largely neutral and non-partisan system of governance".²⁶ This suggests that populism does not need a specific form of leader, nor a specific form of movement or party, but rather it is compatible with all of them.²⁷ Lastly, populism as a discourse is defined by the authors as an opposition between an existing hegemony, which constitutes a "power bloc"²⁸ on the one side and the so-called *people* on the other. This opposition is grounded in a three-step process, which is constituted by the

²¹ Eg. Farkas *et al.* 2022 ; Szebeni/ Salojärvi 2022 :

²² Mudde/ Kaltwasser 2012.

²³ *Ibid.*: 3.

²⁴ Kirchheimer 1965.

²⁵ Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 5.

²⁶ Mair 2002: 84.

²⁷ Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

formulation of specific demands, the definition of a common enemy, and an affective attachment to a specific element (e.g. the leader).²⁹

While the authors introduce these various perspectives to delineate populism as a concept, they contend that these approaches alone do not give a satisfactory analytical framework. Hence, Mudde and Kaltwasser use these theories to formulate a minimal definition of the concept as follows: “a thin-centred ideology that considers to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the “pure people” and “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.³⁰ Based on this minimal definition we can conclude on the following essential components of populism. Fundamentally, it underscores the centrality of a Manichean moral differentiation between two groups — the pure and the impure, i.e. the “in-“ and “out group” at the heart of this work. Further, it is also important to note that the political style is defined as “thin-centred”.³¹ Put simply, this implies that the ideology can easily be attached to other ideologies, making it compatible with both left and right politics. Subsequently, this also means that the dichotomies, elaborated as elites versus the so-called *people* based on moral, cultural, economic or further characteristic are to a certain extent “empty signifiers”.³² In other words, like the ideology itself, the populist categories can be modelled to fit the ideologies and are thus, endowed with a great flexibility.³³ Finally this minimal definition brings to light that the development, spread, and evolution of populist ideology, along with the formation of these groups, will be most affected by the politics’ capacity to reflect the *volonté générale* to their target audience.³⁴

Based on this framework, we can understand populism, as an ideology endowed with an important flexibility. While the populist categories of “corrupt elite” vs “the people” remain at the heart of the concept, its essence and impact are contingent upon the ideologies it is linked to, as well as on the use the politicians make of it and their ability to construct these groups.

II.b. Theories of Populist Communication

The minimal definition of populism underscores the importance of delineating a Manichean division between the people and the out-group. In constructing this dichotomy, effective communication plays a cardinal role.

²⁹Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 6.

³⁰ Mudde 2007: 23/ Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 6.

³¹ Mudde 2007: 23,

³² Laclau 1977.

³³ Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 8f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 9.

As Hameleers *et al.* suggest in their examination of the strategies and dynamics of populism, effective populist communication plays a vital role in conveying ideas across all societal levels, exerting influence on citizens' emotions, behaviours, and political perspectives.³⁵ In order to better understand the strategic value and elements of populist discourse, Hameleers *et al.* establish a “model of individual effect processes in populist political communication”³⁶ building onto five connected pillars: citizen predisposition, communicators, citizen psychological effect mechanism, citizen responses, and citizen outcomes.³⁷

For the first stage, which is the citizen's predisposition, the authors cite two levels of analysis, namely the individual level, comprising access to information, age psychological factors, and the national level, which encompasses current crisis and developments which affect people's daily lives, such as the state of the economy for example. Using this predisposition, the so-called *communicators* then in a second stage create a Manichean dichotomy adhering on the one hand to an in-group dynamic, relying on threat and injustice messages and developing an out-group dynamic, by which responsibility for the problems of the in-group is attributed to the out-group. In a third step, the theory foresees the formation of an in-group identity, paired with out-group blame attribution as well as the emergence of negative and positive stereotypes. Following this psychological evolution, the populist communication should be linked in a fourth step to cognitive responses by the public, on the one hand emotions, such as anxiety, attachment, anger and on the other hand, positive and negative images corresponding to the in and out-group. Lastly, as an outcome, populist political communication would, according to Hameleers *et al.* lead to an increase in political engagement, collective action, and favourable voting behaviour.³⁸

While the theory presented by Hameleers *et al.* gives a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of populist communication, Reinemann *et al.* offer a complementary theoretical approach by detailing how the concept of “the people”, i.e. the “in-group”, is constructed and further, how this central element of populist discourse affects the quality of democracy.³⁹ The article explores the concept of “the people” as – as mentioned above – a deliberately vague and ambiguous concept, which allows to address and unite various audiences under a common label.⁴⁰ In this approach, the authors argue that references to “the people” “implicitly or

³⁵ Hameleers *et al.* 2019: 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.* : 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 18.

explicitly refer to an idealized vision of the community at some point in the past”.⁴¹ The orator is creating and not translating a social identity, which is based on common history, but can also include elements of class or ethnicity.⁴² If we suppose the form of populism in Hungary to be *complete populism* as first defined by Jagers and Walgrave,⁴³ i.e. populism which combines anti-elite, exclusionary rhetoric and an identification of the people, we should find all three elements of the social identity building mentioned before.⁴⁴ At last, the article puts forward that the creation of this social identity, aims to establish a permanent and fixed point of reference, hereby offering an alternative to the uncertainties and fluctuations in the democratic decision making.⁴⁵

Further, addressing the framework of right-wing specific strategies in populist communication, two approaches appear central to this thesis. A first method is presented by Hameleers *et al.* in their article “Framing Blame”.⁴⁶ Based on statistical evidence Hameleers *et al.* argue that blame is at the heart of the construction of the “moral and causal opposition between the good people and the corrupt elites”.⁴⁷ As such, assigning blame fosters voter sympathy for one’s party, accentuating the divide—be it moral, social, or economic — between the insider and outsider groups. Further, the theory also pinpoints the effect of recurrently exposing the public to blame, which leads to altered perceptions towards a certain elite. These altered perceptions, in turn, serve as cognitive cues shaping political preferences and influencing the receptors’ propensity to vote. Hence, the quality and quantity of blame exposure of the targeted public, according to Hameleers *et al.*, affects populist party preferences, and in the case of their research, leads to less support for the largest governmental party, in favour of the smaller right-wing populist party.⁴⁸ Lastly, the authors confirmed the positive correlation of a heightened national sentiment or exclusive perception of identity with exposure to right wing populist blame on the propensity to vote, meaning that right-wing populist communication achieves better results on subjects with this identitarian predisposition.⁴⁹

A complementary approach is offered by Shayegh *et al.*, who underline the strategic use by right wing populists of the performative construction of a social identity which is shared by the

⁴¹ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 18; Vreese *et al.* 2018 : 426f.

⁴² Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 18.

⁴³ Jagers/ Walgrave 2007.

⁴⁴ Vreese *et al.* 2018: 426 ; Reinemann *et al.* 2017 : 18.

⁴⁵ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 19.

⁴⁶ Hameleers *et al.* 2018.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 381.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*:385 – 389.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 393.

people and their leader. Therefore, in this scenario, group leaders function as "entrepreneurs of identity,"⁵⁰ whereby the shared identity characteristically mirrors the leader's ideological beliefs. The authors outline that by raising suspicions on the information provided by a designated out-group presenting it as "colluding elites,"⁵¹ the speaker can present itself as the necessary source of facts, which it uses to validate popular beliefs. In other words, according to the authors, the elite collusion narrative allows for the populists to raise suspicions on the circulating information which do not stem from the party. As such, the role of the populist leader becomes crucial for the legitimacy of information and as a consequence enables the leader to seize and maintain control over the information received by the so-called *people*. Hence, the leaders use the narrative of ill-intentioned manipulative misinformation by an elite to position oneself as the bearer of right and true information. Here the theory of colluding elites joins Hameleers *et al.*⁵² in the idea of positioning the leader as the trustworthy source of information for the in-group.⁵³

Shayegh *et al.*'s colluding elite narrative is further divided into three effects. First the "under attack" aspect of the populist discourse, which highlights the severity of the hidden agenda of the elite out-group and as a consequence allows for the critiques toward the out-group to appear rational in comparison.⁵⁴ More specifically, this allows to legitimize the radical narrative of the in-group, making it appear as a rational response to an irrational attack by the elite.

A second aspect underlined by the authors, highlights that beyond the shared fate of elite attacks, the orator showcases himself or herself as equally vulnerable to these attacks.⁵⁵ Shayegh *et al.* especially argue the importance for the leader to apply prototypicality, or in other words, to embody the essence of the in-group. This then strongly contrasts with the built image of an illegitimate elite which causes for insecurity. Through this approach the leader is also able to put in the background his own privileges and emphasize his own shared fate with the in group instead.⁵⁶

The third building element of populist narrative is the use of a suppressed consensus paradigm. The authors suggest that by doing this, leaders imply that more people subscribe to the ideas of the in-group than what the out-group would have them believe. Hence, resistance is legitimized

⁵⁰ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 8.

⁵² Hameleers *et al.* 2018.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 12f.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 10.

against hegemonic claims, and in the same way the actions of the leader as the voice of the in-group and as the true representative of *volonté générale*.⁵⁷

At last, the theories presented by Shayegh *et al.* specifically join the theory and critique voiced by the Reinemann *et al.* on the correlation between populism and illiberal democracies.⁵⁸ Reinemann *et al.* assert that the articulation of the *volonté générale*, becomes especially apparent in the use of “we”, which solidifies the idea of consensus. Populist leaders, within this framework, assert their role in articulating the *volonté générale* while actually constructing it under their own terms, fostering homogeneity in the perception of the in-group through their discourse. The authors also demonstrate that populists consistently create a uniform and disparaged depiction of the in-group in their rhetoric, regardless of whether they are targeting specific groups such as ethnicity, class, or religion. These two strategies demonstrate that the populist social identity construct of in-group versus out-group takes precedence over other factors.⁵⁹ Finally, the critique here addresses the dangers of having a naturally right but suppressed majority in-group, which presents a critical danger to pluralism in information sources and thus, in politics.⁶⁰

Based on these arguments, we can summarize the populist in- and out-group framing as follows. On the one hand, populist discourse constructs social identities by shaping the social realities of the audience. In the most complete form of populist discourse, anti-elite sentiments, exclusionary rhetoric, and the clear identification of *the people* should appear. This process creates a specific form of social identity, assembling *the people* on one side and *the others* on the other. The in-group is framed through assimilation rhetoric, emphasizing unity and shared identity. In contrast, the out-group is negatively assessed, constructed through a anti-elite, exclusionary and homogenized lens based on vertical (elite) and horizontal (non-elite out-group) comparisons.⁶¹ The category of *the people* is further often used as a deliberately vague vessel and can evolve over time, influenced by the general circumstances of the speech and the speaker's position within the in-group. The expression of emotions within these frameworks, can generate a sense of belonging, or of aversion, and thus, constitutes an essential part of the social identity framing.

⁵⁷ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 11f.

⁵⁸ Reinemann *et al.* 2017.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 18f.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 19.

On the other hand, as suggested by the interplay of emotions and co-dependent group definitions, understanding in- and out-group framing requires identifying the dynamic construction of these groups. This requires examining the frameworks used by the speaker to illustrate the relationship between the in-group and the out-group. One such framework is the "blaming frame," which posits that the quality and quantity of blame exposure of the in-group can strongly affect in- and out-group construction and consolidation. Another is the "colluding elites" framework, which aims to raise suspicion about the trustworthiness and intentions of non-in-group members. Within the "colluding elites" framework, three sub-narratives can be identified: "under attack," "shared fate," and "suppressed consensus." Each sub-narrative defines a similar but slightly different positioning of the speaker within the group, leading to diverging group dynamics. The "under attack" narrative positions the in-group as being under threat from the out-group, the "shared fate" narrative emphasizes a common destiny for the in-group, including its speaker often in opposition or cause by the out-group, and the "suppressed consensus" narrative, which suggests that there is a consensus within the in-group that is being suppressed by the out-group.

In conclusion, populist discourse is centred around a Manichean dichotomy between the morally superior in-group, i.e. *the people*, and a homogenized out-group. The “naturally apparent”⁶² but suppressed⁶³ aspect of the will of *the people*, is represented by the leader in a narrative of shared fate. Through blame, the discursive use of out-group attacks, and the prototypicality of the leader, the populist party becomes the sole source of legitimate information, which as a consequence also implies that intermediaries or other institutions are obsolete.⁶⁴ By creating this Manichean dichotomy and leaving no space for dialogue, the populists endanger the essence of liberal democracies i.e., pluralism. Combining both the essential and lexical definition of the in- and out-group with the frameworks through which their interactions are presented, is thus, necessary to gain a full understanding of the construction and purpose of in- and out-group framing in populist discourse. Therefore, this research will centre on the Fidesz party's construction of a Hungarian social identity using an in-group versus out-group narrative, as a strategy for fostering illiberal democracy.

⁶² Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 17.

⁶³ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 11.

⁶⁴ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 19.

III. Methodology

This paper will use a qualitative approach to examine the evolution of in-group and out-group framing within the populist discourse of the Fidesz party. While as we will show, the Fidesz party uses a large variety of media and supports to communicate with *the people*, this thesis will focus primarily on the direct addresses of the Prime Minister. This approach helps to isolate the findings from any external influences, such as interviewers or different media platforms. Additionally, the choice of speeches also offers the best support to analyse the role and evolution of the leader and his positioning within the in-group., especially considering the importance and power of Viktor Orbán within the party, the government and the country. Given the limited frame of this work, to ensure consistency across the 14-year period spanning Viktor Orbán's tenure from 2010 to the present day, the analysis will concentrate solely one speech type: Viktor Orbán's annual "State of the Nation address," affording one comparable form of oral communication.

The “State of Nation Address” is a practical source for the analysis of populist discourse strategies as it offers both a comprehensive and a relatively neutral approach. Indeed, on one hand, this type of speech, which aims to summarize the events of the previous year, affords the populist speaker the opportunity to address a wide range of topics that it considers important for *the people* to be informed about, hence, which (right) information the populist speaker desires to be the source of. On the other hand, contrary to other yearly recurring speeches of national importance, such as the 15th of March or the 20th of August, where the vocabulary might be centred around the topic of the festivity, the “State of Nation Address” offers a relatively neutral ground for the analysis and comparison of the lexical field used. Lastly, Viktor Orbán’s State of Nation Addresses have not yet been reviewed qualitatively, in opposition to the Kossuth Rádío interviews for example.⁶⁵

Given the length constraints of this research, it will review only the year preceding the election and the election year itself i.e., 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2022. The upvalue of these years stems from a higher probability to use populist discourse to gain party sympathy and confirmation, and hence to encounter more recognizable patterns. There are further three exceptions to this set. Firstly, as Viktor Orbán, could not give a “State of Nation Address” in 2009 nor in 2010, the year 2011 will serve as the reference for the Fidesz’ populist narrative at the beginning of the Prime Minister’s first term. Secondly, in order to allow for a most updated as well as

⁶⁵ Barton Hronešová/ Kreiss: 2024

comprehensive overview, the analysis will further also include the year 2024 in the analysis of the in- and out-group framing in Viktor Orbán's addresses. Finally, since the Prime Minister couldn't deliver his usual speech in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, an interview conducted on Kossuth Rádío around the same time and which seemed to serve a similar purpose, will be used as a substitute. However, the interview will be regarded rather as a frame of reference, as it only covers specific topics, primarily related to the pandemic.⁶⁶

The qualitative analysis will delve into the lexical and essential definition of the in-group and out-group on the one hand. For that we have used the following key topics: Christianity, Hungary, Economy, Family, Political rivals, Elite/Western Powers, Globalism, Immigration, Islam, LGBTQIA+ Community. We will examine how these topics evolve over time, encompassing their surface-level presentation, recurrence, and underlying essence through frequency and form of apparition. These key words have been identified primarily on the basis of analytical works done by Barton Hronešová and Kreiss, in which the authors identify the prior cited registers as characteristic of the Fidesz' in and out-group narrative in 2022,⁶⁷ and is further confirmed by the temporal quantitative analysis presented by Sata.⁶⁸ Leaning onto the framework presented by Hameleers *et al.*,⁶⁹ the analysis also focuses on the range of emotions evoked by framing the following selection: renewal, danger, fear, combativeness and anger, distrust, optimism and pessimism, to complete the identification of the in- and out-group definition in relation to each other. The aim will be here to observe which topics and emotions ranges overweigh others in each period while also focusing on their positive or negative connotation. This will subsequently allow to frame how the in-group is defined in relation to the out-group and which groups are put in opposition to each other. Put another way, this allows to identify the traits and fundamental components of each group and on that basis evaluate how identity building has evolved over time (e.g. elite or non-elite out group ; national or religious in-group, etc.).

In parallel, based on the results of this first approach, the analysis will aim to establish the dynamic construction of these groups based on the two frames ("blaming frame," "colluding elites") and the three sub-narratives ("under attack," "shared fate," "suppressed consensus") that have already been established in the theoretical framework. This assessment will additionally include an evaluation of the party's and in particular of the speaker's self-positioning within the

⁶⁶ PMVO IKR 2021.

⁶⁷ Barton Hronešová/ Kreiss 2024 : 7.

⁶⁸ Sata 2023 : 6.

⁶⁹ Hameleers *et al.* 2019 : 143.

in-group, in this case Viktor Orbán. By establishing the positioning of the leader as well as using the definition of both groups on a lexical and essential basis, this qualitative analysis will allow to reveal which framework dominates in each period. Subsequently, this thesis will be able to determine the evolution of the dynamic relationship between both groups and furthermore, highlight inherent intentions of the speaker behind the in and out-group framing.

This analysis will secondarily also review the visual in and out-group communication to supplement the speech analysis through one form of graphic support, namely: political posters issued by the Fidesz party. The political posters of the Fidesz party have gained in momentum and intensity since 2019,⁷⁰ especially through their direct and provocative messages. However, despite the significance of visual appeal for populist parties,⁷¹ as argued by Benjamin Moffit, the academic interest for this medium seems to fall behind compared to research on speeches or written communication.⁷² However, in the context of the in- and out-group framing in particular, the visual reinforcement is an essential and non-negligeable component of populist communication. While neither the theoretical framework nor the scope of this thesis allow for a thorough analysis of visual populist messages, the limited wording and information that can be contained on such a source could highlight the party's accents and, in turn, support the conclusions drawn from the speech analysis, based on the previously established frameworks. Further, the "leader" does not need to be present, it will be significant to observe, where the party places itself on the posters. For a better understanding, besides an analysis in accordance with the methodological framework laid out on the basis of the works of Reinemann *et al.*⁷³, Hameleers *et al.*⁷⁴ and Shayegh *et al.*,⁷⁵ this study will further take into account Moffitt's approach by looking at the following characteristics: the demographic elements, the *genre*, the theme, and who the intended audience is.⁷⁶

⁷⁰Eg. Deutsche Welle 2019 ; Dessewffy 2023.

⁷¹ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 13.

⁷² Moffit 2022 : 558.

⁷³ Reinemann *et al.* 2017.

⁷⁴ Hameleers *et al.* 2019.

⁷⁵ Shayegh *et al.* 2021.

⁷⁶ Moffit 2022: 562.

IV. Background

Before entering the analytical part of this thesis, we must first establish the context in which it is grounded. We, hence, must first identify the Hungarian political context with a specific focus on the democratic involution that followed the re-election of the Fidesz party in 2010. Therefore, it is essential to explore the historical and political evolution of Hungary in relation to the Fidesz party, as well as to analyse the social and economic factors that have contributed to the establishment of today's illiberal democracy. In a second step, we need to examine the extent and elements of populist communication in Hungary and the relevance of these communication systems for the Fidesz party. In other words, this second part will explore in what ways communication and information is an integral but also indispensable instrument of Viktor Orbán's political agenda.

IV.a. Political, Economic and Social Background of Right-Wing Populism in Hungary

When the Eastern Block collapsed in 1989, Hungary was seen as one of the most promising countries in the region, both politically and economically. Confirming this forecast, for the first two decades following the end of the Cold War, Hungary laid the foundations for a democratic future by establishing and strengthening economic and democratic institutions, and in particular rule of law.⁷⁷ Since 2010, however, as Bozóki and Hegedűs argue, Hungary is considered an “ever-widening grey zone between democracy and dictatorship.”⁷⁸

At the heart of this development, which has now been observed for over 13 years, is Viktor Orbán, the president of the Fidesz Party (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége: Federation of Young Democrats) presently serving his fifth term in office as the Prime Minister of Hungary. The party which was once characterized as “radical liberal”⁷⁹ at the first free elections held in 1990, underwent a strategic shift in its approach ever since. Following a meagre 9% vote share, which subsequently declined to 7% in 1994, the party embraced a more deliberate coalition politics and underwent significant restructuring. Forming an alliance with the MDF (Magyar Demokrata Forum: Hungarian Democratic Forum – Popular) and the FKGP (Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt: The Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party – popular right wing) the Fidesz party was able to win the national elections for the first time in 1998, 10 years after its foundation.⁸⁰ This victory was however, not only significant for the party itself, but also for the country, as the Hungarian population both in urban and rural

⁷⁷ Kornai 2015: 280.

⁷⁸ Bozóki/ Hegedűs 2018: 1173.

⁷⁹ Körösnéyi 1999: 32.

⁸⁰ Schmidt-Schweizer 2007: 342f.

areas in majority voted against socialism represented by the MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt: Hungarian Socialist Party) and in support of a young right-wing nationalist conservatism, represented by the Fidesz Party.⁸¹

While the first term in office (1998 – 2002) of Viktor Orbán did not lead to any long-lasting political changes, the era following the Fidesz' re-election in 2010, signed the beginning of a rapid decline in the quality of democracy in Hungary. Under the political leadership of Viktor Orbán, Hungary abandoned its internationally recognized and unique progress towards a “Western-type liberal democracy”,⁸² for a regime which conflicts with liberal values, as best exemplified by its recurring and criticized opposition to the values of the EU reflected in Art. 2 TEU.⁸³ In fact, with the promise of combating the economic crisis and of encouraging national unity since 2010, the Prime Minister progressively started to oppose (neo)liberal ideas before finally officially announcing his project of building an “illiberal democracy” in July 2014., as a key to the success of the country.⁸⁴

Under this term of “illiberal democracy” – as presented by Gábor Polyák – we understand a system “supported by indisputable political proclamations and a unified public opinion that, of course, limits the citizen’s political choices,”⁸⁵ and where “the main function of the public sphere is the legitimisation of the predominant party’s power.”⁸⁶ And indeed, in the past 13 years the Fidesz party, has significantly limited the power and independence of the judiciary, as well as political opposition, making for strong example of the framework. In the same way serving the idea of unity, “populist ultra nationalism”⁸⁷ became the dominant form of discourse combining nationalism, neoconservative traditionalist values and Euroscepticism in Hungary.⁸⁸ We can, thus, see a strong political will to work towards an illiberal democracy and an effective plan of action in this regard so far. Through these various mechanisms and discourse, the Fidesz party under Viktor Orbán has achieved the elimination of any form of legitimate opposition and consequently the suppression of pluralism, embracing the idea, that there is no alternative to the Fidesz regime.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Schmidt-Schweizer 2007: 343 ; Polyák 2019: 279.

⁸² Bozóki/ Hegedűs 2018: 1175.

⁸³ Marzocchi 2023.

⁸⁴ Kim 2023: 443; Polyák 2019: 279.

⁸⁵ Polyák 2019: 281.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Sata 2023: 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Kim 2023: 444.

This political progression is also well illustrated by the Economist's Democracy Index. Between 2010 and 2023, Hungary's score declined from 7.21,⁹⁰ – 10 being the purest form of democracy – to 6.72,⁹¹ indicating a clear drop in democratic standards. While staying in the category of “flawed democracy,”⁹² during this period, Hungary's rank fell from 43rd to 50th, placing it today just 0.04 points above Brazil,⁹³ and below Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, which were its immediate competitors in 2010.⁹⁴

While the efforts and the complexity of the Fidesz' authoritarian institutionalism by itself explains much of its effective success in maintaining power, the positive national reception and stability of Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy is however, further anchored into two systemic dimensions.

First, the social and demographic characteristics of Hungary. On the one hand, the social factors influence the relation of the public to politics. Hungarian history is marked by periods of foreign domination, from the Ottoman Empire to the Soviet Union, and significant territorial losses, particularly after World War I. Authors, such as Sata for example, hence argue that the nationalist feelings and identity politics that can be observed among the Hungarian population are a direct consequence of these experiences.⁹⁵ Also grounded in the country's historical past we can further observe a trend that can be regarded as a specific legacy of communism. This trend is characterised by a low politicization of the population, leading to low commitment to democracy, distrust in political institutions and – as counter-intuitive as it may seem – a strong demand for state intervention.⁹⁶ This cultural and historical predisposition has contributed to the establishment of paternalist populism in Hungary, i.e. strong state intervention and a constant expansion of the government's legal scope and resources.⁹⁷ These social characteristics heavily contribute to the success of nationalist rhetoric and the erosion of pluralism in the Hungarian political landscape. This, in turn, reinforces the Fidesz party's hold on power, effectively marginalizing any real opposition.

On the other hand, the demographic characteristics of Hungary also play an important role in the popular success of the Fidesz party. While we can observe an overall conservative leaning

⁹⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit 2010: 5.

⁹¹ Economist Intelligence Unit 2024: 9.

⁹² Economist Intelligence Unit 2010: 5 ; Economist Intelligence Unit 2024: 9.

⁹³ Economist Intelligence Unit 2024: 9.

⁹⁴ Economist Intelligence Unit 2010: 5 ; Economist Intelligence Unit 2024: 9.

⁹⁵ Sata 2023: 2.

⁹⁶ Bíró-Nagy 2017: 36f.

⁹⁷ Enyedi 2023: 12f.

of the Hungarian population,⁹⁸ firstly, there is an important gap between Budapest and the rest of the country, in which Budapest reflects a stronger liberal mindset and the countryside a higher level of conservatism.⁹⁹ This urban-rural divide, however, is not unique to Hungary. Compounding these dynamics is Hungary's demographic decline, with the population growth rate dropping from -0.2% to -0.7%,¹⁰⁰ and a rapidly aging population, increasing from 17% to 20% over the age of 65 between 2010 and 2023.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, this demographic trend and the positive correlation between age (above 68) and more conservative tendencies, demonstrated by Tom O'Grady,¹⁰² combined with a strong brain drain which has increased since Viktor Orbán's entry into power, strongly reinforces the removal of government critiques. Hence, also these demographic factors substantially contribute to the strong grounding and progressive reinforcement of Viktor Orbán's right wing populism.¹⁰³

The second factor to be emphasized when speaking about the fertile grounds of populism and right-wing nationalism in Hungary is the economy. In fact, the high national debt, amounting to 75% of the national GDP, scandals surrounding Ferenc Gyurcsány's (former Prime Minister) economic reforms, and the 2008 economic crisis plunged the Hungarian economy into a profound recession in the late 2000's. When the Fidesz party assumed office, their right-wing economic policy aimed to reduce unemployment and stimulate economic growth by boosting private consumption and investment, imposing economic caps on utilities, and privatizing necessary institutions in the spirit of a paternalist state. This plan garnered significant public support.¹⁰⁴ The results of this agenda have also been evident in reality: since the entry into power of the Fidesz government, the unemployment rate has declined steadily and the GDP per capita constantly risen.¹⁰⁵ Echoing the Fidesz' political stance of Hungarian nationalism and sovereignty, economic self-determination has also been central in the Fidesz' agenda.¹⁰⁶ Making use of its supermajority in parliament, the Fidesz party pursued economic self-rule,¹⁰⁷ which included the vilification of international and foreign owned economic institutions including the IMF for example, but also the prior Hungarian leadership of the National Bank of Hungary.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ Bíró-Nagy 2017: 36f.

⁹⁹ Michalska/ Zwęglińska 2018: 253.

¹⁰⁰ World Bank 1 2022.

¹⁰¹ World Bank 2 2022.

¹⁰² O'Grady 2018: 1394.

¹⁰³ Liu 2022: 266.

¹⁰⁴ Scoggins 2022: 9 ; Stegmaier/ Lewis-Beck 2011: 466 ; Enyedi 2023: 12f.

¹⁰⁵ Scoggins 2022: 11.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson/ Barnes 2015: 536.

¹⁰⁷ Corruption and nepotism are significant aspects of Hungary's economic landscape. While the importance of these issues is acknowledged, this analysis cannot address them comprehensively within its limited scope.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson/ Barnes 2015: 545f.

Parallely, the Prime Minister supported the creation of a network of Fidesz affiliated economic players promoted to high ranking positions and who benefit from government and international subsidies.¹⁰⁹ Johnson and Barnes summarize the results of Viktor Orbán's financial nationalism in the following way: "the country taxed foreign businesses, undermined central bank independence, and generally rejected international economic advice."¹¹⁰ In sum, the relative success of this right-wing economic policy and the improvement of the economy in specific areas thus, on the one hand served Viktor Orbán's own nationalist agenda by legitimizing the expansion of the government's control over economic institutions and resources. At the same time the capture of wide parts of the judicial power further guaranteed the party profits and stability, through the establishment of profitable policies. At last, specific small but visible achievements – especially in contrast to the prior government -, granted him a certain voters' support as well.¹¹¹

In conclusion, we can see that Viktor Orbán utilized the economic crisis and the social predisposition of the Hungarian people, to establish an interventionist and powerful government without much resistance. Hence, over the past 14 years, the Fidesz party has successfully built up a right-wing populist regime, limiting the independence of the judiciary and using a nationalist discourse with the goal of creating unity against foreign powers.

IV.b. Kulturkampf and the capture of communication: a building block of the Fidesz party's populist strategy.

Now that the background and the essence of the Fidesz party's and more specifically of Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy have been highlighted together with its economic and social enabling factors, it is in a next step necessary to contextualise the importance of communication and knowledge dissemination for the Fidesz party. Eventhough the following analysis will focus only on two means of communication of the Fidesz party, it is important to first give a general overview, to subsequently better understand the specific dynamics portrayed in the actual analysis.

As presented by Ágh, after the legal capture of power and the oligarchization of so-called *politico business networks* beginning in his first two terms in office, i.e. until 2018,¹¹² Viktor Orbán's plan of autocratization was completed by a cultural war, which crystallized in his third

¹⁰⁹ Polyák 2019: 283.

¹¹⁰ Johnson Barres 2015: 559.

¹¹¹ Koopmans/Ruud 2004: 204.

¹¹² Ágh 2022: 5.

term.¹¹³ This *Kulturkampf* is characterized by a takeover of control over knowledge production and dissemination so as to exercise power over the minds and thinking patterns of the citizens. Hence, this third phase, characterized by direct addresses to the public, media manipulation, control over universities and other academic institutions, in other words, new communication and socialisation systems, has laid a solid ground for the construction of the in and out group by the Fidesz party, which is at the heart of this analysis. The means and patterns of communication of the Fidesz party and especially of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán shall thus be reviewed in this last part before entering the analysis of the narrative in and out-group construction.¹¹⁴

While there is no literature on this specific area so far, the in-person reach out by the Hungarian Prime Minister to the population is one first characteristic element of this cultural war. An analysis of the speeches and interactions of Viktor Orbán with the people between 2010 and 2024, quickly reveals interesting patterns on in and out-group building. Looking first at geographical patterns, we can see a relative even distribution between the interactions of the Prime Minister with the population in Budapest and in rural areas. From official electoral campaigns, opening ceremonies (eg. universities, kindergartens, football clubs etc.) within the current national but also historical borders,¹¹⁵ to diplomatic visits in crisis affected areas (eg. visit to the border with Ukraine 2022), we can see a will to present and a will for presence.¹¹⁶ This constant engagement can be viewed as a strategy to strengthen the relationship between the represented and the representative while also granting him visibility, thus reaching out in person to a portion of the potential in-group and showing presence to the more remote members of it.¹¹⁷

Further, the choice of locations and event also appear to reflect the political and ideological agenda of Viktor Orbán. The border visits convey the idea of national sovereignty, visits in schools and in Transylvania for example show a focus on certain demographic groups, to which the Prime minister would seek a closer connection to. We can also see that from 2018 onward, not only the pace and extent of these interactions increases but also the Christian relation of these interactions. Hence, both in showing presence in all regions of the country and beyond

¹¹³ Ágh 2022: 12.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 5.

¹¹⁵ While the Prime Minister tends to refer to these borders as “greater Hungary”, in order to avoid any politically charged statement, this term will be avoided in this thesis.

¹¹⁶ All information on the Prime Minister’s speeches were taken from the official government website. Further details on the study can be provided upon request.

¹¹⁷ Koopmans/Ruud 2004: 204 ; Fumagalli 2020: 74.

the Prime Minister is able to create relationships and build links with certain demographic groups, which echo the Fidesz's conservative and illiberal values. From an in- and out-group perspective, it appears that Viktor Orbán leads this *Kulturkampf*¹¹⁸ very personally, by showing his presence in crisis regions and in more happy occasions of communities, creating almost a familiar, unmediated and trustworthy image of a charismatic but ordinary leader for the in-group, which can be broadcasted and showcased to the other members of the in-group.¹¹⁹ In other words, Viktor Orbán appears to carefully select groups and venues through which he can create both a relationship with the present in-group members, but also show a positive image for the other members of the in-group.¹²⁰

The personal interaction and moulding of the in-group by the Prime Minister is further strongly anchored in a network of supporting policies controlling information dissemination. In fact, the rearranging of Hungary's media structure plays a key role in the communication strategies of the Fidesz party and has also made for the greatest international backlash. With his entry into government in 2010, Viktor Orbán, rather than using censorship in order to avoid critical voices, engaged into a progressive capture of the media landscape. Besides forcing out foreign media companies (eg. Deutsche Telekom),¹²¹ the Fidesz party created the Media Council linked to the National Media and Infocommunications authority (NMHH), which, governed by a Fidesz elected body, has the authority over the media market.¹²² Indeed, the establishment of the Media Council has significantly impacted the media market, hence the private media. Empowered by the media laws of 2010, the Media Council, however, also holds the authority to appoint the CEO responsible for managing the Fund that oversees the Public Service Media, thus exercising control over both.¹²³ Moreover, the establishment of the Central European Press and Media Foundation/Council¹²⁴ (KESMA) in 2018, marks the epitome of Viktor Orbán's media capture and the establishment of a "government affiliated, right-wing empire."¹²⁵ In fact, this foundation attracted ten government-friendly private companies, which together cover almost the entire media landscape, thus giving an undisputable monopoly to government affiliated media.¹²⁶ This forced oppositional media outlets out of the competition, thus eliminating critical voices through the laws of the market. We can thus observe a large and intricate network,

¹¹⁸ Ágh 2022: 12.

¹¹⁹ McDonnell 2017: 27.

¹²⁰ Fumagalli 2020: 76.

¹²¹ Griffen 2020: 58f.

¹²² Polyák 2019: 284.

¹²³ Polyák 2019: 287.

¹²⁴ Both versions were found in literature. See: European Parliament 2018; Bíró-Nagy 2017: 38.

¹²⁵ European Parliament 2018.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

through which Viktor Orbán and more generally the Fidesz party can exercise control over the media and thus over the visibility and resonance of their discourse. This approach allows the party to reinforce their messages to the in-group, by eliminating the out-group's voice.¹²⁷ While the in-group is self-determined, the out-group can only be represented by in-group speakers, thus, possessing no agency over their own portrayal. This again facilitates on the one hand the Manichean portrayal of both, by offering no room for nuances or contradicting arguments, and allowing a constant and repeated exposure to the message of one voice, that of the in-group.¹²⁸ All of which contributes to an enhanced legitimacy of the in-group narrative.¹²⁹

Parallel to the media capture, we can observe an increase in the presence of the Prime Minister himself in traditional media as a means of direct communication. Especially in the form of radio appearance on the frequency "Kossuth Rádió", the Prime Minister appears to use his influence on the media to increase his visibility and resonance, both becoming part of the citizen's daily lives and increasing the accessibility to his discourse.¹³⁰ This means of communication again creates a personal link and relationship, which caters to in-group formation through familiarity due to repeated exposure and reinforces it through limited criticism. In the same way, the out-group can be freely portrayed in specific ways that would enhance their status as out-group through blame exposure. Hence, the combination of both allows the Hungarian Prime Minister to function – in Shayegh *et al.*'s formulation – as an "entrepreneur of identity."¹³¹ In contrast, the (involuntary) absence of the opposition, ostracized from most media, gives the idea of not caring, thus again reinforcing the trust in the in-group leader and an apprehension of the out-group.¹³²

While the effect resembles that of the media overhaul in general, the personal touch added here can also be seen as information coming directly from the source, and thus, unbiased by any corrupt mediator. As a complement, the Viktor Orbán also actively uses social media to exacerbate this effect, meanwhile also reaching out to a younger generation, which may have distanced itself from traditional media. Besides showcasing himself close to people of all age classes in different urban and rural locations, this shows a will to show proximity to the people, but also the will and capacity to adapt to different audiences in order to achieve the most

¹²⁷ Fumagalli 2020: 74.

¹²⁸ Engesser *et al.* 2020: 74.

¹²⁹ Koopmans/Ruud 2004: 204.

¹³⁰ All information on the Prime Minister's speeches were taken from the official government website. Further details on the study can be provided upon request.

¹³¹ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 2.

¹³² McDonnell 2017: 30.

efficient reach-out. All these elements perfectly reflect the following idea formulated by Fumagalli: “Media can function as a key connector between political actors and the public; it can orient political agendas and transform mass communication into a kind of interpersonal exchange.”¹³³

Furthermore, Viktor Orbán’s regime has not only targeted the broad mass, but also the intellectual spheres through an “aggressive” privatisation of the academic sector. Not only has the Fidesz party dismembered the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), but it has taken over weaker universities through “private foundations with public functions”¹³⁴ which colonized the universities and at the head of which exclusively Fidesz political leaders can be found, hence making them dependent on the government’s political and financial support. The privatization, making the academic body vulnerable to the laws of the market and the decisions of a government deployed rector i.e., the political leadership of these universities, thus guarantees loyalty towards the ideas and the regime of Viktor Orbán.¹³⁵ Progressively, also the greater universities become subject to this institutional restructuring and privatization. This subsequently also induces a devaluation of academic credentials, which are more often than not considered as suspicious regarding loyalty to the Fidesz government.¹³⁶ Hence, finally through the control over academia and thus, knowledge dissemination among an intellectual elite, instead of encouraging critical thinking forges “ideological foot soldiers.”¹³⁷

At last, two interconnected communication elements must be underlined. First, national consultations, argued for by Viktor Orbán since 2005 “as a means to establish a direct link between the “politics and the people”.”¹³⁸ Formally introduced as a political instrument by the Fidesz party after its victory in the parliamentary elections in 2010, National Consultations have been issued yearly and sent to the citizens per mail to their homes ever since. With the claim of giving the people a voice in political debates, the suggestive questions which usually offer only one rational answer, rather serve the confirmation and legitimization of the in-group ideas through consensus.¹³⁹ On the other hand, posters addressing various political subjects, and densely and visibly distributed all over the country (eg. every few meters along the Andrassy street) also play an important role in the in- and out-group framing of the Fidesz party. The depictions and

¹³³ Fumagalli 2020: 87.

¹³⁴ Ágh 2022: 13.

¹³⁵ Ágh 2022: 13.

¹³⁶ Pető 2022: 36.

¹³⁷ Ágh 2022: 13.

¹³⁸ Bocskor 2018: n.i.

¹³⁹ Bocskor 2018: n.i. ; Bajomi -Lázár 2019: 221.

open critique of an – often foreign – out-group is put forward in regularly changing posters, the messages however, are written in Hungarian. Hence, the posters clearly do not have the out-group to whom the violent messages are addressed as target group, but rather the Hungarian in-group, able to see and comprehend these messages.¹⁴⁰ The common denominator and thus, the relevance of these last two methods in in- and out group framing is not only in the use of the posters to advertise the national consultations but can further be found in the passive confirmation of the in-group ideas. While the messages can easily be discarded or disregarded by any person not interested in them, they on the contrary have a profound impact on the people tending towards these ideas or already convinced by them. Their omnipresence, both in the public sphere and in the privacy of people's homes, allows in-group members to perceive a larger consensus within their group. This widespread exposure to clear and simplified populist messages, directly aimed at *the people*, reinforces the distinction between the in-group and the out-group.¹⁴¹ As argued by Ernst *et al.* this one-sided confirmation, also reinforces the group dynamics by cultivating an environment, in which the in-group feels it can share with other members, thus further reinforcing the propagation of the in-group dialogue and ideas.¹⁴²

Concludingly, we can see that Viktor Orbán has been able to establish a strong presence in-person and in the media, through which he is able to create a direct connection to the people he claims to represent, i.e. the in-group. Not only do his communication strategies showcase him as a charismatic but relatable leader, the extensive personal reach-out by the Prime Minister in the daily lives of the people also allows him to appear as a trustworthy source of information, as he shows presence thus, strongly contrasting with an (involuntary) absent out-group leadership. Furthermore, the growing control over private and national media outlets and universities, increases the visibility both of ideas confirming the in-group and subsequently the visibility and legitimacy of Viktor Orbán as its leader. Lastly, National Consultations and posters passively confirm the in-group members in their ideas and thus, further reinforces the in-group dynamics and creates an environment in which the members feel at ease sharing and spreading their ideas. Already in their complexity the means of communication show how communication can be an effective tool to frame in- and out-groups. The following analysis shall next reveal how the framing of these groups has evolved between 2010 and 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Bajomi -Lázár 2019: 221.

¹⁴¹ Farkas *et al.* 2022: 556.

¹⁴² Ernst *et al.* 2018: 171.

V. Analysis of the Evolution of the Fidesz Party's In-Group and Out-Group Framing between 2010 and 2024

Focusing now on the “State of Nation” addresses of Viktor Orbán from 2011, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022 and 2024 and the poster put up within these same years, the following analysis will aim to establish the evolution of the in- and out-group framing through on the basis of the narratives employed by the Fidesz Party.

V.a. 2011 – 2014: The Early Stages of the Fidesz Government

The analysis of Viktor Orbán's first term, i.e. the years 2011, 2013 and 2014 is particularly interesting as it not only marks a reiterated - now long-term – shift from a socialist government to the right-wing conservatism of the Fidesz party, but also the steps leading up to the birth of the illiberal democracy, for which's implementation and consolidation Viktor Orbán has gained strong mediatic and political attention until today.¹⁴³

The 2011 State of Nation address revolves around two important topics: the political transition from MSZP to Fidesz, and secondly the economic situation of the country following the 2008 financial crisis, which allows for two different emotions. It appears quite clearly that the economic situation of the country is put in the foreground, linked to alerting idioms and formulations such as “bankruptcy,”¹⁴⁴ “the danger that Hungary has to avert”,¹⁴⁵ combined with allusions to the negative consequences of globalism.¹⁴⁶ Hence, the Prime Minister successfully frames explicitly and implicitly in his message, a negative cue that has affected a broad part of the population, allowing his address to speak to an indiscriminate large group.¹⁴⁷ Following the idea of right-wing populist rhetoric proposed by Shayegh *et al.* we could identify the bad economic situation in Hungary as the main “attack,”¹⁴⁸ by the out-group against which the in-group has to protected, both of which remain to be defined.

The framing of the out-group can be derived from the origins of the so called *attack*. In the case of the State of Nation address from 2011, we can only see mild outlines of an out-group. In fact, the origin of the crisis repercussions on Hungary are mainly attributed to specific actions and reforms rather than specific people or groups. While the Prime Minister references his political rival's government and financial management in a slightly provocative way, he appears to keep a relatively mild tone illustrated by the following sentences: “not the five year plan of

¹⁴³ Kim 2023: 441f.

¹⁴⁴ PMVO SNA 2011.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Hameleers *et al.* 2019: 144

¹⁴⁸ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 10.

socialism”¹⁴⁹ and “different from the ugly reform plan failure of the past eight years.”¹⁵⁰ Whereas we can observe some light blame attribution, and thus, some cognitive cue for out-group framing in the direction of the socialist government,¹⁵¹ the focal point of the leader’s speech appears to be that the danger stems from concrete mistakes from the recent past.

In contrast, the in-group framing is more apparent. In his address, Viktor Orbán emphasises with great optimism the new role of the Fidesz party in tackling the economic challenges of the country. This is especially visible in the optimistic tone adopted by the Prime Minister which combines both combative emotions (eg. “face the danger”),¹⁵² as well as optimism, arguing that danger brings opportunities and repeating the idiom throughout the address while underlining the strength of the Hungarian population.¹⁵³ There is a clear focus on the renewal which this political change can bring to Hungary by implementing reforms and boosting the economy.¹⁵⁴ Further focus elements of the in-group underlined by Barton Hronešová and Kreiss¹⁵⁵ are also introduced by this first State of Nation address. First the Hungarian national pride, evoked with the repetition of the adjective “Hungarian” associated with diverse positive nouns. Secondly, short allusions to families and pensions reveal a specific interest to address these demographic groups, however, neither appears in a strongly pronounced way. Thirdly, Christianity, although referenced through the phrase “the thousand-year Christian state organization,”¹⁵⁶ does not seem to be a prominent discursive element employed by Viktor Orbán to delineate the in-group. Lastly, the relatively extensive use of the words “our” and “us”,¹⁵⁷ combined with the idiom “dear friends,”¹⁵⁸ leaves the impression of proximity between the speaker and the people, i.e. between Viktor Orbán and the voting public. While other patterns cannot yet be discerned, as for example the positioning of the leader as the sole source of legitimate information, we can already observe an intention to create as an almost familiar bond between the speaker and *the people*.

This position is further reflected by the posters issued around the 2010 election campaigns,¹⁵⁹ and which put the focus on Viktor Orbán and other party members, as the central element of

¹⁴⁹ PMVO SNA 2011.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Hamелеers *et al.* 2018: 385 – 389.

¹⁵² PMVO SNA 2011.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Barton Hronešová/ Kreiss 2024: 7.

¹⁵⁶ PMVO SNA 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Sata 2023: 6.

¹⁵⁸ PMVO SNA 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Despite thorough research in the accessible archives, no poster was found for the year 2011. The campaign posters from 2010 were used instead.

their campaign.¹⁶⁰ For the early years of the Fidesz government, i.e. the years 2010/2011, it appears that the focus was primarily set on the new opportunities given by the political switch from MSZP to FIDESZ KDNP, and thus on presenting the party rather than taking the focus away from it. In echo to Viktor Orbán's 2011 State of Nation address, the main visual elements of the political posters show Hungarian flags, Fidesz party members, and the clearly visible emblems of the Fidesz-KDNP. The text used, name "Fidesz again" and "The time has come Hungary"¹⁶¹ only further underline these ideas. Therefore, as in the State of Nation address, we can observe a significant emphasis on cultivating a positive image of the Fidesz party for the in-group, without overly accentuating the role of political opponents or fostering a cult of leadership around the Prime Minister at this stage.

In 2013 and 2014, we can observe the apparition of more concrete fault lines typical of populist discourse according to our theoretical framework.

While the bad economic situation of the country keeps an important role in the discourse a further central argument of both the 2013 and 2014 State of Nation Address revolves around the idea of Hungary's sovereignty. The latter leads to the apparition of a new populist discursive element, that of victimhood. The Prime Minister uses allusions to the historical oppression of Hungary through the Ottomans, Austrians and the communists,¹⁶² as a temporal cognitive link, which plays into the auditors' own biases and knowledge.¹⁶³ As argued by Barton Hronešová the use and the understanding of this narrative "needs to be understood at the backdrop of ontological insecurity of states whose self-understanding and autobiographies [...] have been repeatedly challenged and undermined by traumatic experiences and losses of territories."¹⁶⁴ This cognitive cue plays directly into a narrative propagated both by the school curriculum as well as through generations. Hence, the emotionalization of this Hungarian historical canon of foreign dominance allows to reach a vulnerable and commonly understandable subject of Hungarian auditors.¹⁶⁵ We can here frame the danger to sovereignty through foreign dominance as the main "attack" in the Prime Minister's addresses. Lexically, this danger is reflected in the lexical opposition to sovereign Hungary's greatness through a frequent use of the word Hungary and its declination as well as of the idea of sovereignty in contrast with the negative idea of subjugation, particularly illustrated by the following quotes from 2013 and 2014: "at the

¹⁶⁰ Szentgáli 2023: §2010.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* [translated by the author].

¹⁶² PMVO SNA 2013 ; PMVO SNA 2014.

¹⁶³ Corbu/Negrea-Busuioc 2020: 185.

¹⁶⁴ Barton Hronešová 2024: 452.

¹⁶⁵ Pető 2016: 48.

mercy of Great Powers[...] we learnt to be small”¹⁶⁶ and “Sovereignty and the protection of national interests had to be set right to counter external and international power groups”.¹⁶⁷ The central argument in the two speeches appears to be a moral one, that of defending the greatness of the Hungarian nation and tradition.

Using both the economic crisis and the danger to sovereignty as a premise we can here see an evolution in the framing of the in-group. In fact, the Prime Minister appears to use temporality to define and link past and new enemies. On the one side, the financial crisis and the bad economic situation in Hungary is attributed to the past, and on the other side the dangers to sovereignty and the subsequent danger to economic autonomy to the future. Viktor Orbán hence, uses an intertemporal link to blame the past for the current situation using communism and the socialist government as direct references, more so than in 2010. This allows him to frame the fault on the opposition party. Hence, we can observe a concretisation of the target, from concrete mishandled measures in 2011 to clearly pinpointed wrongdoers in 2013 and 2014. The Prime Minister further uses the discourse of past domination and the analogy of past foreign domination to introduce the new potential dangerous or harmful group, namely foreign international institutions and most specifically the IMF and the EU as dangers to the Hungarian autonomy and economy. Using the “under attack” framework provided by Shayegh *et al.*¹⁶⁸ we can observe that the formulation “not once correctly forecasted our budget deficit”,¹⁶⁹ – while not being a concrete attack by the elite yet – is used by the Prime Minister in his speech as a warning about possible harmful influence of the EU, while more importantly raising doubts about the information circulated by the “Brussels Bureaucrats.”¹⁷⁰ This blame of the socialists and the warning against foreign influences, allows for the Prime Minister to discredit both groups according to past experiences and anticipated future mistakes through the creation of a simplified intertemporal link easily understandable to the populace. It must however be noted that the word elite is not explicitly used yet.

In contrast, these issues allow the Prime Minister to associate the Fidesz party with the fulfilment of the greatness of the Hungarian nation. The victory of the Fidesz party at the parliamentary elections 2010 is hailed as a triumph for democracy, marking a transition away from the remnants of the past, and communism in particular. The Prime Minister further emphasizes this transition by emphasizing tangible achievements, notably higher economic

¹⁶⁶ PMVO SNA 2013.

¹⁶⁷ PMVO SNA 2014.

¹⁶⁸ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 10.

¹⁶⁹ PMVO SNA 2013.

¹⁷⁰ PMVO SNA 2014.

success facilitated by the financial reforms implemented by the party. We can also observe a reiterated interest to address families and pensioners through the emphasis on specific economic reforms, which are mentioned more often in 2013 and 2014. While Christianity would fit into the framework of sovereign Hungarian traditional value, it must be noted, that in 2013/2014 the idea of Christian faith is not apparently utilized. While it is mentioned both at the beginning of the State of Nation address in 2013 and as a Latin allusion in 2014, it appears to be a quite natural use, which does not deny the Christian belief and convictions of Viktor Orbán and the Christian traditions of Hungary, while not emphasizing it meaningfully either. With some small variations, the main defining element of the in-group clearly appears to be the shared Hungarian national sentiment, connotated with positive emotions linked to the renewal and fight for sovereignty brought by the election of the Fidesz party.

Lastly, we can observe a crystallization of the Fidesz party as the embodiment of the in-group and, as its representative, of a great transition. Within this context, the role of Viktor Orbán as both the party leader and head of the government also seems to have evolved compared to 2011. In fact, while the use of “us” and “dear friends” did translate an idea of closeness already in 2011, the discourse used in 2013 and 2014 elevates the identification with the Hungarian people. On the one hand, the speaker makes no differentiation between the “we” of the party such as in “we took office,”¹⁷¹ from the “we” used to speak about the Hungarian nation, such as in “we Hungarians”.¹⁷² This aspect culminates with the following sentence: “Brussels bureaucrats attacked Hungary roughly and threateningly, just because we had the audacity to tax the banks”.¹⁷³ With this sentence, we can identify quite clearly, how a criticism to the leader was utilized and reformulated as a criticism of the nation, thus on the one hand showcasing an attack on the leader as an attack on all (the people) but simultaneously also deviating the attention from the critique to the leader towards the idea of an irrational or unjustified attack.¹⁷⁴ Here, one could interpret a voluntary play into the Prime Minister's past, reinforcing his image as a young democrat who stood against the communists and socialists in 1989, as he continues this fight for democracy, now against new adversaries—the socialists and the international out-group.¹⁷⁵

This transition to a more targeted Manichean discourse is further also translated in the posters of the Fidesz party. While the EU does not yet appear on the billboards, probably as the

¹⁷¹ PMVO SNA 2014.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Shayegh *et al.* 2022: 10 – 13.

¹⁷⁵ Körösenyi 1999: 32.

institution was both too new and too distant for the Hungarian people, the MSZP leaders, namely Kunhalmi Agnes, Gyurcsány Ferenc, Gordon Bajnai and further politicians from the opposition take up the billboards. We can see that the Fidesz party instead of promoting itself and appearing in branding or in person on the posters, rather depicts its political rivals in a bad light using clowns and other pejorative texts to underline their untrustworthiness.¹⁷⁶ At last, while this aspect is not mentioned in the State of Nation Addresses, the billboards, through accusations of Fraud and the depiction on one of the posters as puppeteers, also play into blame exposure and the idea of colluding elites described by Shayegh *et al.*,¹⁷⁷ with the nuance however, that we also here cannot yet fully speak of elites.

In conclusion while the year 2011 was mostly axed around the economic crisis and the renewal brought by the election of the Fidesz party, with the years 2013 and 2014, we can see the emergence of what appears to be a concretized out-group on the basis of which the in-group is forged in opposition with. The shift also becomes more evident in how blame is assigned, moving from attributing it solely to a concrete situational crisis to highlighting and pointing out a dangerous out-group or specific individuals. The efforts put into discrediting the out-group members further underlines a will to establish this image in the long run. The blame is thus not attributed anymore to a concept but to people, and the distinction between the source of danger and the victims receives a moral dimension. This also matches the introduction 2014 by the Prime Minister of his concept of illiberal democracy. In this, Fidesz and more precisely Viktor Orbán appear as the keepers of the Hungarian morals and values and on the other, the socialist and the EU and IMF are depicted as economic but also moral threats to Hungary, and thus to the in-group, as it marks an attempt to work towards a unified public opinion and discrediting political rivals.¹⁷⁸

V.b. 2017 – 2018: The Crystallization of In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics

The discourse analysis of the years 2017 and 2018 showcases a strong evolution in the narrative of Viktor Orbán. In fact, where the analysis of the first term discourse could pinpoint to crystallizing tendencies, we can find these same ideas fully rooted in 2017 and 2018, with an expanded understanding of the in- and out-group.

In 2017, the Prime Minister explicitly lists “five major attacks”¹⁷⁹ against Hungary: issues related to the EU, namely sovereignty and two economic issues, the Empire of George Soros

¹⁷⁶ Szentgáli 2023: §2010.

¹⁷⁷ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 10.

¹⁷⁸ Polyák 2019: 281.

¹⁷⁹ PMVO SNA 2017.

and at last immigration.¹⁸⁰ This introduces the idea of the out-group for the years 2017 and 2018. While the first term of the Prime Minister did already show signs of blame as well as of an “under attack” narrative, 2017 marks the explicit concretisation of this sentiment. Hence, we can on the basis of the two addresses distinguish two separate groups. First a secondary out-group, “the migrants”, which discursively are associated with emotions of danger and combativeness through wordings connotated with fear as the words “flooded”¹⁸¹ or “transformed into railway stations”¹⁸² or even more explicitly “these dangerous, migrant-battered times”¹⁸³ and “[migrants] replace the subsoil of European life.”¹⁸⁴ However, we can assume that this narrative only aims at highlighting a tangible symptom of the out-group which would symbolize a concrete threat to the livelihoods of the in-group, and thus create a sense of alert and anger. The Western media, presented as enemies of free speech and propagators of false information can also be counted towards the secondary out-group, which again is a tangible symptom of the dangers of the primary our group. Both the media and the migrants can be seen as proofs of the foreign power’s ill will, and as a consequence, discredit their voice compared to the speaker.

In contrast, the framing of what we could call the “primary out-group” takes up a more layered form. In fact, we can observe that the primary out-group builds onto a foundation laid back in 2014. The Prime Minister leaves the past behind by refraining from mentioning political rivals and instead focuses on future threats, which he portrays as having caught up with Hungary. The European Union, the IMF and the newly added George Soros are from 2017 onwards clearly labelled as elites, entering a clearly defined populist narrative. The explicit vocabulary used by Viktor Orbán underlines the power of these elites on decisions and the undemocratic nature of their actions, thus framing a concrete blame. Thus, the direct attack on the elite on the one hand showcases Viktor Orbán’s self-depiction of an ambitious fight for state sovereignty and on the other, uses arguments to discredit the liberal ideas of the elite. The EU Bureaucrats are portrayed as distant from reality (eg. “ivory towers”¹⁸⁵) and colluding against Hungary (eg. “through dismantling the rules of economic self-defence, the foxes are let into the henhouse.”)¹⁸⁶ From a lexical point of view it is also important to underline the beginning of a more imaged use of language referring to very simple scenes, understandable for all. Lastly, concerning the out-

¹⁸⁰ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁸⁴ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

group, while we can perceive the targeting of specific actors such as the EU or George Soros for example, as the out-group is exported outside the Hungarian borders (making it less tangible for the common population), the frame seems to become more extensible. Formulated more simply, the EU, the IMF and George Soros are in the focus of Viktor Orbán's "under attack narrative", however, the upper threshold appears blurrier as the Prime Minister criticizes globalism and even the UN.¹⁸⁷ Lastly, it must be noted, that while the primary out-group is clearly framed through concrete mentions and critique, apart from George Soros, no names are clearly mentioned. The terms used are rather broad, as the example of Brussels, used to attack the so-called *EU bureaucrat elite*, used instead of Ursula van der Leyen shows.

Concerning the in-group framing, the features underlined 2011 -2014 appear clearly strengthened and broadened in comparison. National identity continuously defines the in-group while some additional characteristics make their apparition. As in prior discourse we can observe a reiterated direct address to family concerns, but also the direct address to pensioners. Related to age groups, 2018, we can also observe a play on nostalgia and a repeated mention of the formulation "people my age":¹⁸⁸ This also hint towards an in-group focus point on the baby boom generation and the generation X, rather than on younger people, with the exception of family building. Hence, beyond listing economic success and changes concerning the population and specific groups, Orbán Viktor additionally directly addresses target demographic entities. Further, a major addition to this narrative is brought in by the increase in direct allusions to Christian faith. In fact, Christian religion is added as an explicit element of the Hungarian identity and also European culture through wording such as "genuine refugees: [...] Christians",¹⁸⁹ "defend our Christian Hungarian culture"¹⁹⁰ and "those Western Europeans and leaders who want to save their homeland and Christian culture".¹⁹¹ Hence parallel to the exportation of the out-group making it appear more distant from reality and less available to prove their intention, the in-group is also broadened to like-minded states and individuals, which fit into the right-wing illiberal ideology. In this use, one could see a pattern of oppressed consensus forming, which is also echoed into the criticism of Western media.

The role of the Fidesz party adds two dimensions to the in-group and out-group framing, especially with regard to the consolidation of Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy.¹⁹² First, we

¹⁸⁷ PMVO SNA 2017 ; PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁸⁸ PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁸⁹ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁹⁰ PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² PMVO SNA 2017.

can observe a strong political and moral narrative, showcased by opening his address in 2017 with attacks on liberal ideas, and further exposing these as threats to democracy. This idea is especially exemplified by the sentence “the liberal ideology turned against the ideology of democracy.”¹⁹³ The party thus, beyond blaming the out-group for the economic and social crisis encountered by the population (migration, bad state of the economy), here, more clearly than in the years prior, reinforces the moral divide between both groups. Western (liberal) ideas, broadcasted by a corrupt media under the control of a colluding elite, are depicted as perverting true democracy and thus, restricting Hungarians in their freedoms for their own profits, as illustrated by the following affirmations: “democracy based on argument was replaced by democracy based on correctness,”¹⁹⁴ “we sent the muzzle back to Brussels and the lead back to the IMF”.¹⁹⁵ The Fidesz party, thus, presents itself as the morally superior political actor, as it speaks up and according to the Prime Minister successfully fights for Hungary’s sovereignty, thus defending a population victim of the attempts of a corrupt ideology.

While this discourse is rather combative also using the lexical field of war (eg. “battlelines”¹⁹⁶; “we shall fight”¹⁹⁷), Viktor Orbán further uses elements of historical oppression – as in 2013 and 2014 – to illustrate the common suffering of the Hungarian population, which the following sentence perfectly summarizes: “there has been an uprising by those who are not usually asked, whose voices are not usually heard: [...] the weak and vulnerable [...] forced into economic and social straightjackets; whose mouths have been gagged in the name of political correctness.”¹⁹⁸ Although there are clear analogies with the efforts of the EU to contain Viktor Orbán’s illiberalism, the attack is represented as being formulated against the whole group. As in the years prior, victimization as a historical narrative is used to create a group consensus, as well as the feeling of it being suppressed.

Lastly, we can see an enhanced will by the Prime Minister to appear approachable to the public through the use of jokes and anecdotes on his childhood. Sharing personal information, the people can easily identify with clearly shows an effort to appear as part of the in-group. This is further also confirmed by the use of “we simple citizens”¹⁹⁹ or “all 10 millions of us.”²⁰⁰ Instead of placing himself above *the people* and thus the in-group, he presents himself here more than

¹⁹³ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁹⁶ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁹⁷ PMVO SNA 2018.

¹⁹⁸ PMVO SNA 2017.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ PMVO SNA 2018.

before as part of it. Through this, Viktor Orbán can both distance himself from his elite status, by contrasting his in-group position with the colluding elites of the out-group. Further, as part of the in-group, he can appear as the person who dares to speak up in the crowd, again joining Shayegh *et al.*'s theory of sharing the fate of *the people* and thus, as a victim of irrational biases.²⁰¹

This evolution is also mirrored in the political posters of the Fidesz party. One type of poster is composed of a red, white, green background and a picture of Viktor Orbán himself, barely smiling. This composition accompanied by the text "For us, it's Hungary first"²⁰² but without the logo of the party appears to reinforce two dimensions. First it positions Orbán Viktor at the heart of a movement – not only the Fidesz party- for Hungary and centered around Hungary, underlined by the background and the wording, the "us" can thus speak to anyone passing the poster. Secondly, the formulation also echoes the infamous "America first" policy of former US -President Donald Trump.²⁰³ Combined with the earnest facial expression, it conveys an easily recognizable idea of a Head of Government ready to fight for his country.²⁰⁴

The second type of poster is solely focused on the "out-group". The billboard depicts George Soros embracing MSZP and other opposition candidates in front of a fence cut open by the Hungarian politicians, with the words "They would tear down the border fence together."²⁰⁵ The depiction of George Soros and the border fence matches the idea of the two (primary and secondary) out-groups and the attacks by foreign colluding elites on Hungary. On the contrary, the opposition candidates who are depicted as following the instructions of George Soros, put very simply, as doing the dirty work, do not reflect the out-group image made by Viktor Orbán in his State of Nation Addresses 2017 and 2018, where none of the politicians are mentioned, nor the MSZP in an out-group framing. Although it might seem like an extension of the out-group, I would rather argue, that – as these posters stem from an election year – the depiction of a link between opposition candidates and the out-group elite described in the speeches, could have a purely functional reason of diverting electors from these candidates.²⁰⁶

In conclusion, for the years 2017 and 2018, Viktor Orbán appears to use all four frames of in- and out-group framing in populist communication, i.e. blaming, colluding elites, shared fate and oppressed consensus. While doing so, he creates two layers of the out-group, one tangible

²⁰¹ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 8f.

²⁰² Szentgáli 2023: §2018 [translated by the author]

²⁰³ Geil *et al.* 2017.

²⁰⁴ Szentgáli 2023: §2018.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* [translated by the author]

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

secondary out-group, and a more distant extraterritorial elite, as a primary colluding out-group which attacks Hungary. He therefore also shifts away from the political Hungarian rivals towards the EU and other foreign elites. In parallel, the Prime Minister keeps the essence of the in-group while placing slightly enhanced focus on families, pensioners as well as the baby boom and X generations. Further, the idea of Christianity also appears for the first time as a central narrative of Viktor Orbán. At last, we can also see an increased focus on the Prime Minister as a person playing into the idea of the *primus inter pares*, underlining both his belonging to *the people* of the in-group, while also underlining his merit as the voice of a victimized nation.

V. c. 2021 – 2024: The Evolution of the Out-Group through Crisis and a New Focus on the *Volonté Générale*

The years 2021, 2022 are marked by an intricate suite of crisis, namely: the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian War of aggression in Ukraine and the linked refugee wave entering in Hungary. As in the prior years, the Prime Minister utilized the current crisis events to frame his in- and out-group.

The year 2022 brings an important switch in the out-group narrative used by Viktor Orbán. In fact, while the secondary out-group does not seem to change much using the (muslim) migrants and the media as form of “attacks” of the elite, the definition of the primary out-group, the deciding and colluding elite seems to take different dimensions. Primarily, the discourse on immigration and its negative consequences remains one of the central points of argumentation. Here, while there is brief mention of the US and the UK in 2021, Brussel and George Soros remain the most important foreign out-group component.²⁰⁷

We can however observe a concretisation of the foreign out-group under two aspects. First, Orbán Viktor nuances his narrative around the European Union/ Brussels by bringing in positive remarks as well (eg. “we want to keep the European Union”²⁰⁸ ; “the EU must go forward, not back”).²⁰⁹ This allows the Head of Government to distinguish between the EU as an institution, for which he preaches solid engagement,²¹⁰ and the EU bureaucratic elites he criticizes, also exacerbated by the following statement: “Brussels has abandoned the people of Europe (...), let there be Europeans among the Brusselers.”²¹¹ This nuanced and more concrete approach rationalizes the Prime Minister’s critiques of the EU, directing these only to an allegedly corrupt

²⁰⁷ PMVO SNA 2022.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ PMVO SNA 2024.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

elite, while discrediting the EU's concerns and voiced opinions on Orbán's anti-EU stance and hence, against Hungary. The second concretisation touches upon the attacks of the "Brussels elite" and its target groups. In fact, next to the aforementioned foreign elite led secondary out-group hostilities, i.e. the threat of demographic replacement by migrants and misinformation by Western media, now a direct relation between demographic groups and colluding elite is pointed out, which is best illustrated by the following sentence: "insulting people to their very core, mocking the disabled, abusing "provincials", threatening pensioners and disparaging women."²¹² As we can observe, these groups correspond to the specific demographic focus points underlined by Viktor Orbán when framing the in-group since 2011. Hence, he can present a direct blaming frame of a threatening and disrespectful foreign elite towards the in-group he is protecting, using both registers of anger and danger. This also goes along with the idea, that this framing of the attacks allows Viktor Orbán - stronger than before – to highlight the shared fate of the leader and the population, by discrediting but not mentioning attacks against him, while expressly and concretely underlining attacks against the people. This is also reflected in the maintained strong use of "us"²¹³ concerning the dangers of the out-group.

Moreover, a discernible evolution in the out-group framing within the national context also becomes evident. As we concluded earlier, during the years 2017 and 2018, predominant attention was directed towards the perceived hazards posed by the secondary out-group within Hungary. Here, a significant shift occurs in the 2021 and 2022 discourses, with the reemergence of the Left as a focal point of threat, as articulated by the Prime Minister. In this narrative, the Left reassumes a primary out-group status as in 2011, 2013 and 2014, running parallel to existing secondary out-group elements. This reintroduction of the discursive element is further characterized by a more direct criticism and more severe accusations. However, in the same way as for the EU, it seems that the Prime Minister puts efforts into limiting the size of the out-group, by framing it mostly around political personalities, namely: "Gyurcsány [former Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány]" and Bajnai [former prime minister Gordon Bajnai] (...)."²¹⁴ For these two politicians, Viktor Orbán uses here again an intertemporal link between the past and the present the Left as the out-group based on the failures of the Left government in the past. Ferenc Gyurcsány and Gordon Bajnai are designated as scapegoats for the troubles which followed the end of the Cold War, and as the source of the challenges – mainly economic but not only – the Fidesz party had and still is fighting today. As a consequence, voting them

²¹² PMVO SNA 2022.

²¹³ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 18.

²¹⁴ PMVO SNA 2022.

into parliament is represented as an economic set back to the status quo prior to 2010, against which the Fidesz has been working through active reforms in their 12 years in power. This approach vows for the use of a blaming frame.²¹⁵

A further link used by the Prime Minister is that of a collusion between the European bureaucratic elite and Ferenc Gyurcsány. The possibility of the Left, and specifically the designated politician being elected into government is framed as opening the door to liberal ideas, thus endangering the in-group.²¹⁶ Following the frame of colluding elites, the EU is linked to the sponsoring of the Left to have better access to Hungary, as exemplified by the following sentence: “if we allow pro-migrant Brussels bureaucrats to assist into government the ridiculous and dangerous players in the Gyurcsány Show, they will open the borders (...) We will have such an “open society” that even our grandchildren will groan under it – if they are still here at all.”²¹⁷ Further, as we can see over the years, the out-group, while becoming more specific by framing the elite more restrictively, also becomes more complex and interwoven. The blame for the current situation thus, becomes less and less directly attributable/transparent. One could almost argue, that the emotions raised by the words are more important than their meaning (not to speak about arguments) as exemplified by this expression “a rule-of-law jihad.”²¹⁸ This argument can further be supported by a more elevated sense of danger than before, translated by wordings around alert and attack. Subsequently we observe a more emotional discourse centred around fear and danger, using again very imaged vocabulary such as: “shadow of war”,²¹⁹ “wolves”,²²⁰ “poisoned kiss”,²²¹ “swarmed by wasps”,²²² and more precise and aggressive verbs, such as : “insulting”, “mocking”, “abusing”, “threatening”, “disparaging”,²²³ “dumping”, “drama unfolding”,²²⁴ among many.

Concerning the in-group framing between 2021 and 2024, we can observe that the core factors remain unchanged with a strong focus on the value of a sovereign and independent Hungary and Hungarians on the one hand (eg. “If Hungarian experts say something it is sufficient”)²²⁵ and Christianity on the other (eg. “The time will come for two verdicts: one on 3 April; the

²¹⁵ Hameleers *et al.* 2018: 381.

²¹⁶ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 8.

²¹⁷ PMVO SNA 2022.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ PMVO SNA 2024.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ PMVO SNA 2022. [All terms listed stem from the same speech].

²²⁴ PMVO SNA 2024.

²²⁵ PMVO IKR 2021.

other as decreed by the Lord above”;²²⁶ “when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”²²⁷), a duality especially highlighted by the following sentence from 2024: “Hungary before all else, God above us all.”²²⁸ Where we can observe an evolution and an opposition/reaction to the out-group framing, is the increased expansion of these two concepts. In fact, Viktor Orbán mentions “Hungarians beyond the borders”²²⁹ for the first time in 2022 and again explicitly in 2024.²³⁰ By directly addressing the Hungarian communities and minorities living on these territories, the Prime Minister subtly links the in-group framed around sovereign Hungary’s greatness with its past territorial claims.

Another expansion can be observed in the interpretation of the idea of Christianity. When speaking of the state of the geopolitical landscape and the question of immigration, Viktor Orbán does not only draw a moral divide between “Christian Europe”²³¹ or “Western Christianity”²³² and the territories from which immigrants might come, namely Afghanistan and Africa,²³³ but states the necessity of cooperation with the Eastern Orthodox Christians in order to preserve Christian culture.²³⁴ The idea of Western Christianity is also continued in 2024 by the Prime Minister, listing it among the great success of Europe in opposition to the “bad things”²³⁵ which came from the continent such as “The Jacobins, the Nazis – and in fact the communists.”²³⁶ In order to combat the attacks of the primary (EU, the Left) and the secondary (immigrants, the media), the Prime Minister reaffirms the moral unity of the in-group in Christianity, by broadening its understanding, thus, creating a larger opposition, and leading up to the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees.

Regarding specific demographic groups, Viktor Orbán consistently highlights pensioners and families as key points in his messaging. Notably, while he frequently mentions the elderly and families in the context of government subsidies and funding, he does not introduce any new aspects to these discussions. Additionally, a short comment against the LGBTQIA+ community, namely “a father is a man, a mother is a woman,”²³⁷ allows to concretise the idea of family endorsed by the Prime Minister in alignment with the Christian moral values underlined earlier.

²²⁶ PMVO SNA 2022.

²²⁷ PMVO SNA 2024.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ PMVO SNA 2022.

²³⁰ PMVO SNA 2024.

²³¹ PMVO SNA 2022.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ PMVO SNA 2024.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ PMVO SNA 2022.

An interesting addition can also be seen in Viktor Orbán's mention of the scandal involving the president of Hungary, Katalin Novák,²³⁸ in which he addresses the importance of the female approach. While one cannot conclude a wish for equality from this discourse, the focal element here is more the clear distinction of male and female ("two halves")²³⁹, as a two-gender approach with distinct gender qualities, again leaning on a Christian narrative.²⁴⁰ Russia, Ukraine, the Jewish community and the LGBTQIA+ community are mentioned in 2022 and 2024, but mostly in a neutral relation, without direct targeting, but a clear stance not to endorse either in particular.

Coming to the position of the party, wordings such as "Fidesz-KDNP is an alliance of brothers-in-arms rather than a coalition"²⁴¹ among others, show a continued framing of the Fidesz and Viktor Orbán in an idea of shared fate, also underlined by the repeated use of the term "friends",²⁴² and the pronouns "us" and "we."²⁴³ What is interesting to note on the one hand, is the relative halt back of Orbán Viktor in those three years to address critiques against him, as unjust. Instead, we can see for examples signs of diversion, by qualifying the scandal involving Katalin Novák as an opportunity "by learning from it together."²⁴⁴ While he opens his discourse in 2022 by underlining his 16 years of experience and familiarity to the population, in the rest of the text he rather depicts a glorified image of the work of the party exemplified by "So there is money, and there will continue to be money if we are able to continue in government,"²⁴⁵ opposing an improved economic situation linked to their government to the rule and ambition of the out-group. So, beyond the shared fate, there seems to be an enhanced emotional targeting playing on a Manichean threat-saviour duality.²⁴⁶

Lastly, in 2024, we observe an increased use of the term "the Hungarians,"²⁴⁷ thus giving more subjectivity to the population he addresses. This shift could be interpreted as the Prime Minister partially transferring some of his agency to the people, embodying the concept of the *volonté générale*. This change in approach suggests that the Prime Minister no longer needs to explicitly outline his position but rather emphasizes the dangers posed by the out-group and the benefits and combativeness of the in-group, also underlining unity and in-group consensus and cohesion.

²³⁸ Thorpe 2024.

²³⁹ PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁴² PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁴³ PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024 ; PMVO KRI 2021.

²⁴⁴ PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁴⁵ PMVO SNA 2022.

²⁴⁶ PMVO SNA 2022; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁴⁷ PMVO SNA 2024.

Hence, contrary to earlier discourses the years 2021 to 2024 showcase an implicit but strong convergence towards a unity discourse, and an explicit emphasis on the *volonté générale* through the “suppressed consensus” framework.

This evolution is at last also depicted in the political posters published between 2021 and 2024. The ones between 2021 and 2022 have a strong focus on emotions and emotionalization of different topics. The 2021 campaign which used emoticons accompanied by out-group framing catchphrases, clearly shows a link between the emotionalization of topics, but also the implicit leadership Orbán takes in dictating those emotions. The out-group framing outlined earlier is thus confirmed here. Similarly, 2022, the depiction of a missile associated with the word “sanctions”, can be interpreted as a clear allusion to direct threat. In both cases, while not presenting itself as Fidesz through a logo, the party is the key response to protect the population, to which they give the agency to decide by filling out the national consultation. Hence, the Fidesz party is implicitly understood as the response to the crisis without putting itself in the focus. 2024, we can see as described above, an enhanced focus on the national sentiments and *volonté générale*, by using the argument of “99% of people vote against (...)”²⁴⁸ and inserting parts of the out-group, thus according to our interpretation reinforcing his personal arguments through explicit in-group consensus, showcasing the “suppressed consensus” narrative.²⁴⁹

Finally, the idealized and homogenized antagonistic perception of both (primary) groups is also explicitly translated by the most recent campaign posters (May 2024), depicting on the one side the elite out group members with the word “War” and Viktor Orbán within the word “Peace”.²⁵⁰ Hence, although the latest visual campaign reinstates the depiction of the Prime Minister, the predominant motif on the poster is the pursuit of peace. Orbán's image is more subtly incorporated within this thematic context, thereby putting the emphasis rather on a generic moral difference between both groups rather than on himself, and his concrete political agenda.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Annex 1.

²⁴⁹ Annex 1 ; Shayegh *et al.* 2021.

²⁵⁰ Annex 1.

²⁵¹ Annex 1.

VI. Results and Discussion

The results of our analysis of the past 13 years can be summarized into two main categories: the evolution of the out-group and the evolution of the in-group. We will now thoroughly examine and discuss the results for each category.

VI.a.1. Summary of the Out-Group Framing Evolution

We begin the discussion of the results with the out-group, as it constitutes the exclusionary and emotional basis, through which the in-group is defined.

As we could observe, the out-group in its composition evolves immensely between 2010 and 2024. While the Left appears as the only out-group in the beginning of Viktor Orbán's first term, 2014, he soon introduces additional out-group members, namely the European Union in particular and foreign *elites* such as the UN and IMF in a more general framework. In 2017 and 2018 the Left disappears entirely from Viktor Orbán's discourse, while the international dimension of the out-group elite becomes more prominent, with the addition of George Soros.

However, the biggest evolution between 2014 and 2017 is not the relative expansion of the out-group elite, but much more the introduction of what has been denoted as a "secondary out-group." In fact, contrary to the assumption of Mudde and Kaltwasser, we observe populist out-group framing not only in the form of an elite out-group²⁵² but also through additional ethnic, religious and sexual dimensions i.e., through the inclusion of a horizontal in-group out-group comparison alongside the pre-existing vertical one.²⁵³ For the years 2017 and 2018, this secondary out-group has been identified as mostly including (illegal) migrants and the (Western controlled) media.

In 2021, 2022 and 2024 while remaining broadly similar, aspects of Islam, the LGBTQIA+ community are also subtly introduced in the Prime Minister's speeches and more explicitly on posters. The primary out-group on the contrary evolves more explicitly in both media between these years. Indeed, the framing of the elite out-group includes the re-introduction of the Left. One could argue that the Left, as a broad term, is considered a secondary out-group and merely a symptom of elite manipulation. However, certain Left leaders, namely Ferenc Gyurcsány and Gordon Bajnai are specifically framed by the Prime Minister as elites, and as consequence, as belonging to the primary out-group. This distinction also introduces the second evolution, namely, the specification of the out-group elite. Contrary to the secondary out-group, which is

²⁵² Mudde 2007: 23/ Mudde/Kaltwasser 2012: 6.

²⁵³ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 19.

kept is relatively vague (eg. migrants, media, the Left) and not depicted on billboards, the elite is mentioned by name as George Soros, Ferenc Gyurcsány, Gordon Bajnai, and also strongly put in the foreground on political posters under a negative light. While the generic term "Brussels" is commonly used to refer to the primary out-group member(s), the European Union bureaucrats, the depiction of Ursula von der Leyen on political posters as part of the out-group could suggest that "Brussels" is used as a convenient shorthand by Hungarians, rather than using the President of the European Commission's full name.

In parallel, the framing method of the out-group in its interaction with the in-group appears to change as well. Initially, during the Prime Minister's first term, the "blaming frame" as described by Hameleers *et al.* predominates. Viktor Orbán primarily focuses on the failures of the previous government, presenting what appears to be fact-based arguments.²⁵⁴ The focus lies mostly on the discrepancy between the Fidesz party and the previous government, rather than an elite versus *the people narrative*. This discourse hence seems merely political, with the aim of proving that the Fidesz party is to be re-elected for a second term. With 2018, however, we can observe the introduction of the framing of the elite out-group as "colluding elites".²⁵⁵ This is especially exemplified through an increased interwovenness of the designated elites, more and more emphasizing and pointing out the connection between physically distant elite out-group entities, i.e. the IMF, the EU (bureaucrats) and George Soros, and later in 2022 and 2024 also with Ferenc Gyurcsány and Gordon Bajnai.

While the meaning of this choice of elite shall yet be discussed, this complexification of the elite out-group conveniently also appears to correlate with the official beginning of Viktor Orbán's *Kulturkampf*.²⁵⁶ This could be interpreted as the exploitation of the new range of possibilities offered by the Fidesz party's control over communication systems, to construct the image of a more homogenic (at least ideologically) out-group.²⁵⁷ In this sense, the Fidesz' strong control over information creation and dissemination in Hungary, could thus allow to interlink and interweave the components of the delineated out-group to reinforce the idea of "colluding elites" more easily. The Prime Minister also appears to dig into the social pre-disposition of the population to rebel against foreign influences²⁵⁸ through this framing, which he can exacerbate using his power over the media and other information systems. Similar to the adage "all roads

²⁵⁴ PMVO SNA 2011 ; PMVO SNA 2013 ; PMVO SNA 2014.

²⁵⁵ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 8.

²⁵⁶ Ágh 2022: 5.

²⁵⁷ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 18.

²⁵⁸ Pető 2016: 48.

lead to Rome," it seems that all narratives constructed by Viktor Orbán converge toward the portrayal of one colluding and interconnected foreign elite, which's framing has progressively narrowed since 2014.

With the introduction of the framing of the out-group as "colluding elites" also follows the "under attack narrative" as one of its components.²⁵⁹ Initially hinted at in 2014,²⁶⁰ the framing of the out-group through an aggression perspective was explicitly articulated by the Prime Minister in 2017 and 2018,²⁶¹ and this perspective has persisted through 2022 and 2024,²⁶² growing in intensity over time. While the discourse of the Prime Minister during his first term, as previously mentioned, predominantly revolves around attributing blame for factual mistakes of the past, thus relying on a fact-based argumentation, the subsequent terms' discourses exhibit a shift. They increasingly emphasize the portrayal of an irrational and dangerous elite, leading to irrational and unpredictable attacks overtaking rational arguments.²⁶³ This is echoed also in the emotions used in relation to the framing of the out-group, which begins with dissatisfaction, anger and combativeness in the first terms, and gives way for danger, fear and combativeness. Endorsing this heightened emotionalization of the discourse, we can also observe an increase in the use of simple idioms such as "the foxes are let into the hen house"²⁶⁴ since 2017, and the use of clearly recognizable emoticons on political posters for example in 2021. The shift in the range of emotions and the simplified vocabulary emphasize the Prime Minister's effort to appeal to the emotions of the in-group rather than to its rational thinking. Consequently, the aim is not merely to evoke dissatisfaction against the out-group but to instil fear of it and its policies.²⁶⁵ Both the increase of the "colluding-elites" framing and the "under attack narrative" contribute to a blurring of lines in blame attribution, "blaming frame" to which the in-group remains heavily exposed. While the designated out-group members and associated emotions are clearly depicted and disclosed, over time, the attribution of blame becomes less focused on a single person, event, or action, and hence, less attributable.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁹ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 9.

²⁶⁰ PMVO SNA 2014.

²⁶¹ PMVO SNA 2017 ; PMVO SNA 2018.

²⁶² PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁶³ PMVO SNA 2017 , PMVO SNA 2018 ; PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁶⁴ PMVO SNA 2017.

²⁶⁵ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 9.

²⁶⁶ Bajomi-Lázár 2019: 621.

VI.a.2. Interpretation of the Out-Group Framing Evolution

Coming to the interpretation of the out-group evolution, we can find two approaches. On the one side, it could be interpreted in alignment with Laclau's theory, i.e. as an evolution reflecting the attachment of the illiberal democracy ideology to the thin-centred ideology of populism, or rather reflecting the ideological evolution of the Fidesz party.²⁶⁷ In fact, one can see a more distinctive out-group framing since 2014, year of the official declaration of the sovereign Hungarian "illiberal democracy" ideology by Viktor Orbán,²⁶⁸ and the narrative warfare against both primary and secondary out-groups appears to align with the ideology of the Prime Minister. In fact, the European Union, is the first distinct out-group element introduced in 2014 and stays at the heart of Viktor Orbán's out-group framing until today. Its prominence in Viktor Orbán's discourse could be attributed to its ideological position as opposite to Hungary's illiberal democracy as an undemocratic liberal institution. George Soros, Ferenc Gyurcsány and Gordon Bajnai, through their (colluding) affiliation to the EU and through their own liberal ideas,²⁶⁹ would thus, also count towards the main moral foe of the Fidesz' ideology. The introduction of the secondary out-group could thus, also have followed an ideological pattern. While this out-group may lack the elite power to push its own agenda, it symbolizes the emerging groups that pose an ideological threat to Hungary's illiberal democracy. The evolution of both vertical and horizontal out-group framing would, thus, only reflect the simple timeline of the beginning of their influence in Hungary and subsequently, their relevance for Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy.

One could, however, argue further – as some variations and inconsistencies let believe – that there is not only an ideological element to the evolution of the framing of the out-group but further (and maybe more prominently) an instrumental one. In fact, on the level of the elite out-group, the focus on a foreign elite from 2014 onwards, and its limited expansion could be interpreted not as the reaction to an ideological warfare, countering their liberal influence on the country, but rather as the instrumental use of names and institutions, which gained in prominence among the Hungarian population. Leaning onto Sata's article on performed crisis, where the author argues that Viktor Orbán strategically uses crisis in order to gain legitimation and distract from his own politics,²⁷⁰ the results of this analysis could extend the argument to the framing of the out-group. One could argue that not only the way of framing, but the subjects

²⁶⁷ Laclau 1977.

²⁶⁸ Mounk 2018: 99.

²⁶⁹ PMVO SNA 2022.

²⁷⁰ Sata 2023: 10.

of the framing were political instruments. One compelling argument in favour of an instrumental out-group framing is the choice of a prominent foreign out-group, which allows Viktor Orbán to export the problem outside the Hungarian borders, thus enhancing the perception of a distant and alienated elite. Additionally, it diminishes the likelihood of actually holding such an elite accountable for its actions. Following this argument, by exporting the elite out-group beyond the Hungarian borders, the average citizen may find it more difficult to hear contradicting arguments and thus, would forcibly rely on the Hungarian sources to learn more, hence successfully using the “framing blame” framework. In parallel, this would also allow to draw the attention away from the Hungarian elite, constituted by the Fidesz party and pro-government personalities.

A second argument speaking in favour of this interpretation, is also the counter-intuitive restriction on the out-group elite, from general groups, “the Left”, the “EU”²⁷¹ to specific political personalities. Arguing in an ideological perspective, this restrictive framing would not make any reasonable sense, as neither the Left’s political agenda nor the EU’s values written down in Art. 2 TEU have changed between 2010 and 2024.²⁷² The re-introduction of the Left as matter of fact, would also not make much sense, from a purely ideological rationale. Looking at it from an instrumental perspective, however, focusing on specific people allows to give widely recognizable faces for the blame attribution, a framing only used on the elite (primary) out-group. This is further demonstrated by the findings from the poster depictions between 2014 and 2024, which prominently highlight these specific individuals. Returning to the re-introduction of the Left, this switch could be explained through the lens of a reaction to an increased popularity of the opposition beginning in the early 2020’s before the election, and against which the Fidesz party would have needed to take action. By pointing out specific people, vilification is made more easily understandable for the broader mass and more intuitive.²⁷³ The introduction and intensification of the colluding elites frame – depicting interconnected and conspiring elites as a single homogenous group²⁷⁴ – serve two key functions. Firstly, it blurs the lines of actual accountability, hence generalizing blame attribution to the entire group without differentiation in political rank and power. Secondly, it sustains the perception of an out-group dynamic, despite the physical distance between its members.

²⁷¹ PMVO SNA 2014 ; PMVO SNA 2011.

²⁷² Marzocchi 2023.

²⁷³ Farkas *et al.* 2022: 556 , Sata 2023: 11:

²⁷⁴ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 8f.

This point leads us to our last argument, which is the reason for the introduction of the secondary out-group. While the foreign elites vilified by Viktor Orbán may be easily recognizable to the in-group, they present a strategic dilemma. On one hand, these elites are quite powerful, on the other hand, their alienation and distant framing may result in a general disinterest or a lack of connection between the in-group and the out-group, thereby failing to achieve the desired effect. This – beyond the ideological perspective – could explain the apparition of the framing of a secondary out-group within the “under attack narrative.”²⁷⁵ While the phenomena did appear in Hungary within the timeframe in which they were introduced in the Prime Minister’s discourse, their influence on the country were by far not as disruptive as depicted.²⁷⁶ Nonetheless, we could observe a will by the Prime Minister beginning 2017²⁷⁷ onwards, to put forward the emotions of fear and dangers. Within the “under attack narrative” framework this would allow to showcase the irrationality of the elite out-group, fostering beyond the pure political dissuasion, an increasing aversion and apprehension of the elite out-group.²⁷⁸ To this would also contribute the aggregate frequency, with which the audience (i.e., the in-group) is confronted with these ideas.²⁷⁹ For instance, the constant repetition of the dangers of “migration” fosters a belief in its threat, despite its actual impact on Hungary having strongly diminished since 2016.²⁸⁰

Hence, one could see the introduction of the discourse around the secondary out-groups, as a means to make the danger of the elite tangible, not playing into Viktor Orbán’s personal affect and ideology, but rather into the citizen’s positive predisposition to nationalist and traditionalist discourses.²⁸¹ As to sustain a sense of fear, it is necessary to continually adapt, contrary to *the elite*, the secondary out-group would be framed very loosely, as a secondary “empty signifier”,²⁸² which can be redefined to fit new crises as they arise. Considering the power of the Fidesz party over the media and information dissemination as well as the relative weakness of the outcast secondary outgroups (LGBTQIA+ community, the Left, migrants) within Hungary, the Prime Minister can easily construct antagonistic social identities, making the emotion of fear easy of access, especially if supported through the communication systems he

²⁷⁵ Shayegh *et al.* 2021: 9.

²⁷⁶ Sata 2023: 7.

²⁷⁷ 2017 marks the earliest date in our analysis. With regard to the so-called “migration crisis” of 2015, it is however highly probable that the discourse on “migrants” started earlier than 2017. This, however, does not affect the outcome of the argumentation.

²⁷⁸ Shayegh *et al.* 2021 : 20.

²⁷⁹ Engesser *et al.* 2020: 74.

²⁸⁰ Sata 2023: 7.

²⁸¹ Bíró-Nagy 2017: 36f.

²⁸² Laclau 1977.

controls.²⁸³ Hence framing the attacks around this subgroup, on the one hand, offers more control and secondly, allows for less backlash, whilst heavily shaping the attitude of the population towards them.²⁸⁴ Although this argument might appear to join that of Sata's quantitative analysis, stating that with every new crisis, a new foe emerge,²⁸⁵ we could argue that this qualitative analysis rather shows that the out-group elite framing stays relatively stable, while the secondary out-group is used to foster fear and kept as loosely formulated as possible, and narrowly formulated as needed, endowing it with high adaptability, thus also creating new foes with every crisis. Also, the poster would confirm these approaches, as the secondary out-group is never depicted, but mentioned, either linked to the primary out-group or an emotion set specifically by the Fidesz party.

Thus, the example of Hungary and in specific the Fidesz' discourse shows that contrary to a large portion of literature on out-group framing, on the one hand, one cannot only argue the construction of the populist out-group around ideological arguments, but further must consider political and instrumental ones as well. Secondly, this analysis of the out-group also shows the complexity of out-group framing and the importance of non-elite out-group framing to fully understand populist out-group framing. Especially in the case of Hungary, the complexity of the results highlights the intricate construction of an antagonistic social identity by the Fidesz party. This identity is carefully crafted to be tangible and universally intelligible in situations that evoke fear, such as those depicted in the blaming frame and under attack narrative, while remaining elusive and immune to scrutiny in circumstances that might invite questioning, emphasized by the colluding elites framework.

VI.b.1. Summary of the In-Group Framing Evolution

Summarizing the evolution of the in-group i.e., *the people*, we can observe that it stays relatively constant over the entire timespan studied. In 2011, although there seems to be no clear intention to distinguish a specific in-group, we can identify the foundational elements that will define *the people* by 2024. In fact, while there is no accent on any divide, nationalistic discourse already dominates the in-group address. Major attention is here put on the traditional values of Hungary, with a mention of sovereignty and Christianity. These accents are, however, not yet formulated in an exclusionary manner. This suggests that the Fidesz government, while developing a right-wing Christian nationalist political agenda, did not put an accent on clearly defining an in-group before 2014. In fact, the distinction of an in-group appears to arise around

²⁸³ Griffen 2020: 58f.,

²⁸⁴ Dijk 2015: 69/75.

²⁸⁵ Sata 2023: 10.

2013 -2014, as the focus on national sovereignty crystallizes using the “under attack” framework. This marks the first clear distinction between an out-group, seen as attacking Hungary's sovereignty, and *the Hungarian people*, who are perceived as being affected by it. Hence, while various aspects were hinted at, Hungarian nationality and culture emerged as the most prominent determinants of the in-group by 2014.

The vagueness of this nationalistic in-group begins to diminish from 2017 onwards with the incorporation of a Christian discourse focus, thereby aligning more closely with the nationalist conservative values of the Fidesz party.²⁸⁶ A parallel trend beginning in 2017, is the expansion of the in-group on an international scale. This becomes particularly visible through the appeal of the Prime Minister to other like-minded “Western Europeans and leaders,”²⁸⁷ putting an accent both on nationalist and Christian values, while not limiting this in-group identity to the Hungarian nationality. This double trend of parallel geographic expansion and ontological specification is continued also between 2021 and 2024, as on the one hand distinct gender roles and gender identities²⁸⁸ are incorporated into the in-group identity, and on the other, the Prime Minister further reaches out to both “beyond the border” Hungarians²⁸⁹ since 2022 and “Eastern Christians” since 2024. As an aside, one should also underline two demographic groups, which receive constant and increasing special attention from the Fidesz party: pensioners and the baby boom and X generations, as well as (traditional) families.

An important part of the in-group construction further revolves around the relationship between the speaker and *the people*. Since the beginning, the use of “us” and “we” is very prominent in the Prime Minister’s speeches, as already pointed out by the most recent quantitative analysis of his discourse presented by Sata.²⁹⁰ Nonetheless, also the framing of this relationship subtly evolves over time, thus, making for variations mostly perceptible through a qualitative analysis. The evolution of the in-group-leader relation crystallizes first in the establishment of the “under attack” framework in 2014, i.e. simultaneously to the official declaration of the “illiberal democracy” as a state ideology.²⁹¹ Over time, while this framework persists, the “shared fate” and “suppressed consensus” frameworks are added to Viktor Orbán’s discourse and become increasingly dominant. With this shift, we see a rebalancing between the aspiration to be

²⁸⁶ PMVO SNA 2017.

²⁸⁷ PMVO SNA 2018.

²⁸⁸ PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁸⁹ PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁹⁰ Sata 2023: 6.

²⁹¹ Juhász/ László/ Zgut 2015: 3.

recognized as a fighter for justice and also to be perceived as a prototypical in-group member.²⁹² Going even further, by 2021 it almost seems as the self-presentation as a leader becomes progressively more discreet. While the discourse implies that the success of Hungary is attributable to the policies of the Fidesz party, the focus is more and more laid on the common suffering and the consensus within the in-group, and specifically the Hungarians.²⁹³ Hence the moral consensus appears to take a more prominent role than the leader and the party in the discourses of the fourth term.

At last, the in-group, while consistently referenced through textual cues evoking the significance of the in-group voice, is notably devoid of direct visual representation, save for Viktor Orbán, hence allowing for the in-group framing to remain vague and facilitate identification. However, also here, we can interpret a similar evolution as for the discursive in-group framing. In fact, during his early terms, Viktor Orbán prominently occupied campaign billboards. However, as time progressed, the campaign narrative appears to have expanded to focus on representations of both the (primary) out-group as well as the voice of- and consensus within the Hungarian population (national consultations).²⁹⁴

VI.b.2. Interpretation of the In-Group Framing Evolution

Drawing from these findings, one can once more posit two different interpretations. First, one can again argue within the framework of Laclau, for an ideologically influenced evolution.²⁹⁵ In favour of this argument speaks the precision and expansion of the in-group consistently under the term of conservative nationalism. Initially presented in vague terms, it would seem reasonable to suggest that as the ideological project of Viktor Orbán's "illiberal democracy" takes roots from 2014 onwards, the framing of *the people* also radicalizes. Hence, the evolution of the in-group, from a broad national sovereignty discourse to progressively including elements of religion and territoriality between 2017 and 2024, may reveal an intention to (re)define a national identity after several periods of foreign domination and influence, echoing the idea of nationalist identity building presented by Reinemann *et al.*²⁹⁶ The emphasis on specific demographic groups, could also be interpreted from this perspective. Indeed, the discourse appears to focus on the one hand on a demographic group which likely aligns with conservative viewpoints of the Fidesz party and on the other, promotes traditional families, who

²⁹² Shayegh *et al.* 2021:10.

²⁹³ PMVO KRI 2021 ; PMVO SNA 2022 ; PMVO SNA 2024.

²⁹⁴ Annex 1.

²⁹⁵ Laclau 1997.

²⁹⁶ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 15.

represent Christian values at the heart of the Hungarian culture constructed by Viktor Orbán.²⁹⁷ In a similar way, the inclusion of the “beyond the borders” Hungarians²⁹⁸ also vows for a desire to reinforce the Hungarian (ethnic) identity, in this case by appealing to a historical trauma of Hungary, namely Trianon.²⁹⁹ Taking these approaches into account, the various focal points and shifts indicate an ideologically influenced evolution in Viktor Orbán’s in-group framing, driven by the radicalization of both the government and, subsequently, the country

Conversely, an additional instrumental dimension to the framing of the in-group could also be argued. Looking first at the evolution of the in-group in general, we can see that the in-group is always specified as a counter-reaction to the secondary out-group (eg. Christianity, Gender roles, etc.). The Prime Minister uses very explicit social contrasts between *the people* by (re)defining the Hungarian identity and the secondary out-group from 2014 onwards. While the terms employed for the in-group and for the secondary out-group remain quite vague, one could see an effort of Viktor Orbán to underline a moral divide between groups of people which live in the vicinity of each other, thus creating a palpable division, and perpetuate existent clichés through a lack of interaction between both.³⁰⁰ For example, while both global South and Ukrainian refugees might have arrived in Hungary under similar circumstance, the divide built by the Fidesz party discourse between Christian and Muslims, would alter the perception of Hungarians. As *the people* would tend to accept Christian Ukrainian refugees but exclude refugees from the global South, the in-group misses the opportunity to interact and integrate with people of Muslim origin. As a result, this exclusion creates the impression that Christians have a greater capacity to integrate than Muslims, validating the discourse held by the Prime Minister.

While with this the Prime Minister can achieve a self-confirming ideological and physical division between both groups through exclusion, the construction of an effective in-group also requires unity among the different in-group members. The intentionally kept ignorance of the in-group regarding the out-groups, beyond the narratives presented by populist communication, the introduction of the “under attack” framework since 2014, the subsequent nurturing of anti-elite sentiments that consolidate by 2017, and the progressive emphasis on emotions of fear and danger can all be interpreted as strategies aimed at fostering unification. Against this backdrop, one could see an effort by the Fidesz party to form an in-group isolated from the influences of

²⁹⁷ O’Grady 2018: 1394.

²⁹⁸ PMVO SNA 2022:

²⁹⁹ Reinemann *et al.* 2017: 15.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

liberal ideas, not only from an ideological point of view, but also coming from a thirst of power. By isolating any new form of influence that may counter its position, through the rejection and aversion of elite influence and the increasingly frightening framing of tangible threats, the Fidesz party is able to redefine the in-group to maintain and confirm its power. This also showcases the flexibility and influence of the empty signifiers used to define the in-group.³⁰¹ In this context, the expansion of the in-group beyond Hungarian ethnicity could be perceived as a means to conveniently emphasize international support for Fidesz's "illiberal democracy," with critics being silenced through the "under-attack" frame, but further also as broadening the in-group in response to every specification to its definition to allow for maintained flexibility, ensuring some room for manoeuvring. This argument matches the idea of Sata, who underlines the capacity of Viktor Orbán to reinvent and reinforce dichotomies between the in- and the out-group for his own benefit.³⁰²

Now turning to the appeal to specific demographics, the emphasis on pensioners and Generation X through nostalgia, fear, and combativeness may be seen as an effort to shape the in-group's foundation around individuals who viewed Viktor Orbán as a freedom fighter in 1989. In fact, this early connection likely enhances their inclination to believe his explicit claims of pursuing justice today. Further, pensioners, while harbouring similar nationalist sentiments, also belong to the percentage of the population, which is least likely to speak a foreign language, especially English.³⁰³ Addressing this demographic group in particular, could help create an environment of positive reinforcement for the Fidesz party's discourse,³⁰⁴ as they are less inclined to challenge or verify the Prime Minister's arguments, both due to their existing ideological convictions and a potential language barrier. Instead, they are socially predisposed to engage in intra-group dialogue, hereby perpetuating and consolidating the Fidesz' political agenda. This focus of Viktor Orbán's populist communication could, thus, further suggest an instrumental use of the in-group framing, with the sole aim of keeping a strong base of voters and thereby, power.

Additionally, supporting this argument, the direct outreach to Hungarians living beyond the borders, may besides an ideological consideration also be perceived as a strategic one. While lacking definitive evidence, one might argue for a correlation with the fulgurant rise in popularity of the opposition in the early 2020's, and which contested the until then undisputed

³⁰¹ Sata 2023: 2.

³⁰² *Ibid.* :1.

³⁰³ Languageknowledge 2023.

³⁰⁴ Hameleers *et al.* 2019: 143

majority of the Fidesz party.³⁰⁵ From this perspective, the renewed focus on a community so central to his agenda in his first term and also strongly anchored in their historical attachment to Hungary while not experiencing the outcomes of the Fidesz' policies, might have aimed to revive the potential of transborder Hungarians as “voting machines.”³⁰⁶

Finally, the choice of framing of the in-group in relation to its leader, also appears to show signs of instrumentalization. In fact, the interesting evolution in this regard is the balancing between the “under attack”, the “shared fate” and “suppressed consensus” narratives. The under-attack framework is introduced first and at the same time as the official announcement of Hungary’s “illiberal democracy” in 2014.³⁰⁷ The initial focus on this narrative, may be anchored in the recent memory of Viktor Orbán as a democrat fighting for Hungary’s sovereignty. Putting an accent on the foreign “attacks” to which he was subjected in his first two terms, may have been an intentional choice to revive these memories, thus granting him both sympathy and support.

However, the introduction of the “shared fate” and of the “suppressed consensus” frameworks from 2017 onwards may indicate a change -while not entirely linear - in the self-presentation of the Prime Minister in order to appear more ordinary and paly into the frame of prototypicality. This could be seen as being linked, on the one hand, to the lack of policy performance by the Fidesz party and, on the other, to the consolidation of the Fidesz members as Hungary’s elite.³⁰⁸ By avoiding to mention directly the attacks on him and rather underlining the consensus behind the moral politics led, Viktor Orbán can actively shift the focus and reiterate his ordinariness, hence driving attention away from his own status, and emphasizing his role as the speaker of *the people*. Conveniently, this shift occurs at a time when the Prime Minister has gained control over most information channels,³⁰⁹ enabling him to disseminate his ideas indirectly and focus on subconscious in-group confirmation. Furthermore, it transpires after two terms in office, by which point the majority of the population knows him as a “familiar face.”

This rebalance is also visible through the posters, where the Fidesz logo and the Prime Minister become progressively less visible, while the consensus on the emotions and anger of the people is clearly put forward. An exception could be seen in the latest billboards published by the Fidesz party, where Viktor Orbán is clearly visible. However, the emphasis is put on the contrast between “War” and “Peace”, and the depicted protagonists suggest a play on association rather

³⁰⁵ Politico 2024.

³⁰⁶ Pogonyi 2013: 550 -552.

³⁰⁷ Juhász/ László/ Zgut 2015: 3.

³⁰⁸ McDonnell 2017: 30

³⁰⁹ Griffen 2020: 58f.

than a direct of the politician. Thus, one could see this last element of the evolution of the Fidesz's populist discourse as a strategic and instrumental "shape shifting".³¹⁰ In fact, while the communication constantly moves within the frame of illiberal ideas, Viktor Orbán's status appears to shift from extraordinary to more ordinary, and from leader of a community to speaker of the voice of the Hungarians i.e., of the *volonté générale*.

Concluding the assessment and discussion of both in- and out-group framing, we can observe a form of complete populism, based on anti-elite sentiments and out-group exclusion, and a unification of *the people* drawing from these narratives. This analysis has further demonstrated that the evolution of the in- group and of the out-groups have always been contained within a right-wing nationalist narrative, thus showcasing, how populism as a thin-ideology works in combination with other ideologies. However, the conclusions drawn from this research, have also pointed out that the evolution of the in- and out-group framing may not solely be attributed to the evolution of the Fidesz party's ideology. In fact, particular focal points and shifts in framings for both groups, have also pointed towards a high flexibility and shape shifting capacity by the Prime Minister to adapt to the context in which he moves. Thus, beyond an ideological evolution of the in and out-group framing, we can further argue for an instrumental use of the populist ideology with the goal of maintaining stable power. In other words, while group framings in each period conform to the elements of right-wing nationalism, the dynamics of their construction combined with the democratic involution observed in Hungary since 2010, highly suggest that the Prime Minister's motivations may not be exclusively ideological, but rather indicate the strategic utilization of populist communication as a mechanism for maintaining political authority, thus, a thin-ideology also associated with power-thirst.

In order to confirm this finding, however, it would be necessary in a subsequent work to also take into account the remaining seven speeches, which were omitted in this work i.e., the years in which no election was prepared or held. In a similar way, a deeper visual analysis of the posters issued over the span of the past 14 years in Hungary could also heavily contribute to confirm the findings of this research. Additionally, a crucial indicator that could clarify whether ideology or power is the main driver of the populist discourse evolution is the actual implementation of policies. Examining how policies either counteract the actions of the out-group, specifically of the secondary out-group or alleviate the alleged suffering of the in-group,

³¹⁰ Saward 2014 : 723.

could help determine the dominant intentions behind the discourse of the Fidesz party, and more specifically, those of Viktor Orbán.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this work has analysed the evolution of in-group and out-group framing in the populist discourse of the Fidesz party, providing a dual understanding of the highlighted trends. In order to come to these findings, we first established two theoretical frameworks for analysing populist communication, specifically in-group and out-group framing. These frameworks were based on Reinemann *et al.*'s model of in-group and out-group identity definition and on the frameworks presented by Shayegh *et al.* and Hameleers *et al.* for studying the dynamic construction of these groups. This provided a solid foundation for a qualitative analysis of the evolution of populist communication in Hungary between 2010 and 2024.

Secondly, we reviewed the political changes which occurred within the party and in Hungary since 1989, and specifically focused on the democratic backsliding that followed the Fidesz party's victory in the 2010 parliamentary elections. In this context, we highlighted both economic and social factors, such as the economic crisis of 2008 and Hungary's history of foreign domination, which have enabled right-wing nationalism and, in particular, the Fidesz party to gain public support and grow strong roots. Subsequently we also emphasized Viktor Orbán's party's strong dominance over the information and knowledge systems, reinforcing its position within the government and society, and pin-pointing the importance of communication for the Fidesz' rule.

At last, we have analysed and discussed seven State of Nation addresses held by the Prime Minister. Supported by the review of political posters issued by the Fidesz party over the same timespan, we have first established the evolution of the out-group between 2010 and 2024. This evolution demonstrated the utilization of "framing blame" and "under attack" frameworks, the designation of specific elite members, and heightened emotionalization to discredit foreign liberal elites and foster in-group aversion against them. We have further also observed the introduction of a secondary out-group in 2017, which serves to emphasize the distance and negligence of the foreign elite during crises and make the discursively constructed danger more tangible. Conversely, the framing of the in-group has demonstrated a strong echo to the definition of the out-group. The Prime Minister appears to construct the in-group identity by creating a moral divide between both groups and progressively specifying the initial Hungarian in-group identity in terms of ethnicity and Christian religion in response to new developments and crisis in Europe, while uniting *the people* through common fear of the colluding elites and

their control over the secondary out-group. Within the in-group framing, we have further also observed a shift in the relationship between *the people* and the leader. In fact, this relationship seems to have moved from a strong, explicit focus on demonstrative leadership to a more implicit one, as put forward by the introduction of narratives emphasizing "shared fate" and "suppressed consensus" around 2017. These qualitative findings somewhat challenge Sata's assumption that each crisis brings "new friends" and "new foes,"³¹¹ by introducing new layers to the out-group definition. While they demonstrate a high discursive flexibility of the secondary out-group and of the in-group, thus seconding Sata's assumption, they also suggest that the primary in-group does not change substantively, as familiar vilifiable personas remain central to the populist discourse strategy of Viktor Orbán.

Concluding our research of both in-group and out-group construction, framing and utilization in the Fidesz party's communication between 2010 and 2024, we observe the consolidation of a complete form of populism by 2024, as the Prime Minister's discourse now combines anti-elite sentiments, out-group exclusion, and the active identitarian construction of *the people*. The results showcased in this paper highlight that the evolution of both in-group and out-group dynamics has consistently stayed within the frame of right-wing nationalism, underscoring how populism as a thin-centred ideology could be comfortably used by the Fidesz party to communicate its own ideology, and thus, how the populist discourse radicalized together with the party itself. Nevertheless, our findings further also pinpointed that certain evolutions and framings could not solely be attributed to shifts in the Fidesz party's ideology. Rather, specific focal points and dynamic shifts suggest a remarkable adaptability and strategic use of populist discursive tools on the part of the Prime Minister. Therefore, beyond an ideological evolution of the Fidesz party's in- and out-group framing, we conclude an additional instrumental use of populist discourse, as a means to consolidate the Prime Minister's own power position. This indicates that the evolution of the populist discursive framing of the in-group and out-group, may not only have radicalized with the ideology of the party, but further also with the growth in power thirst of the party leader himself, Viktor Orbán, as a means to maintain undisputed political authority in Hungary by utilizing *the people's* predispositions to adhere to his nationalist discourse. Thus, in a Europe affected by democratic backsliding and the uprise of right-wing nationalism, in which trend Hungary has often been a frontrunner, understanding the power of populist discourse and specifically of how nuanced antagonistic groups are discursively framed, may be one of the keys to countering such developments.

³¹¹ Sata 2023: 10.

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Annex 1: Political Posters of the Fidesz Party 2021 – 2024

2021: “Fill out the National Consultation”



1. “Do you want to protect your child from sexual propaganda?”
2. “Are you outraged by illegal immigration?”
3. “Does Brussels enrage you?”
4. “George Soros attacks again”

Pictures taken by the author, Budapest 2021.

2022: “The Brussels sanctions are destroying us. National Consultation”



Vadhajtások, *Kiakadt az EU az új plakátok miatt: “nem helyénvaló” bombákat mutogatni, mert azokat az oroszok dobálják az ukránokra*, Budapest 2022. Online: <https://www.vadhajtasok.hu/2022/10/19/kiakadt-az-eu-az-uj-plakatok-miatt-nem-helyenvalo-bombakat-mutogatni-mert-azokat-az-oroszok-dobaljak-az-ukranokra> (accessed 07.01.2024).

2024: “We do not Jump, when Brussels whistles. National Consultation”



1. “99% no to genetically modified Ukrainian grain”
2. “99% no to the gender propaganda”
3. “99% no to the migrant ghettos”
4. “99% to sending weapons”

Picture taken by the author, Budapest 2024.

2024: “June 9th only the Fidesz”



“Peace. We need it/him more than ever. June 9th only the Fidesz”



“Stop War. June 9th only the Fidesz”

Pictures taken by the author, Budapest 2024.