

# Beyond Populism

Tribalism in Poland and Hungary

A STUDY BY POLITICAL CAPITAL INSTITUTE



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## INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

„Vox populi, vox Dei” – this is how Jaroslaw Kaczyński summarized his populist political credo a few years ago, referring to the Latin phrase meaning „Voice of the people, the voice of God”. Viktor Orbán made the message that his government is the sole representative of the will of the people even more concrete after a manipulative, government-organized referendum: “It will be small consolation that the peoples of Europe will not forgive the leaders who completely changed Europe without first asking its people. Let us be proud of the fact that we are the only country in the European Union which has asked people whether or not they want mass immigration.”

We can observe a developing populist zeitgeist<sup>1</sup> all over the Western World, with elections and referenda resulting in outcomes that were previously regarded to be impossible. A few examples: the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the formation of the Austrian government in 2017 and the Italian one in 2018 with the inclusion of forces from the radical right. Still, countries, where authoritarian populists are in government, are still rather the exception than the rule. Hungary and Poland are the early birds of this era. Populists in these Central Eastern European countries were elected before it was cool: eight years ago, in Hungary<sup>2</sup> and three years ago in Poland. Based on the experiences of past years, the assumption that populism can only be successful in opposition – and not in government – certainly has to be overcome. “Populist establishments” can be highly successful in delivering results at the policy level, and in transforming and even building institutions<sup>3</sup>.

But some issues need further explanation: how can these populist politicians do the magic trick: mobilizing their electorate with anti-elite messages while being the

political elite themselves? How can they keep their voter bases happy, and who is resonating with their populist way of governance? And what can be the broader, long-term impact of their policies?

With the generous support of the National Endowment for Democracy, Political Capital<sup>4</sup> (PC) and the Institute of Public Affairs<sup>5</sup> (IPA) implemented a 12-month-long project to try and respond to these questions. Our aim was to better understand, raise awareness of, and respond to populism and socio-political polarization in Central Europe with a specific focus on Hungary and Poland.

The project consisted of two parts: extensive analysis and targeted outreach. The comprehensive study incorporated desktop research, a representative survey and qualitative interviews with the aim of identifying socio-demographic factors and other possible contexts and correlations concerning the support of populism. Simultaneously, the activity-focused component involved the work of grassroots community partners. This was done in order to gain a better understanding of underlying issues that in certain areas make local populations more susceptible to anti-systemic messaging and to formulate a constructive approach to facilitate building dialogue.

Some claim<sup>6</sup> that Poland and – especially – Hungary are more autocracies than democracies, given the systemic elimination of checks and balances in an undemocratic manner. It would mean that using the term populism is rather an understatement. At the same time, we think that the rhetoric and electoral strategies of the ruling parties in the two countries can be described as populist because they define themselves as the (sole) representative of the will of the people and promote

1 Mudde, Cas. “The populist zeitgeist.” *Government and opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541-563.

Krastev, Ivan. “The strange death of the liberal consensus.” *Journal of democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007): 56-63.

2 Disregarding the first term of Viktor Orbán.

Zsolt, Enyedi: understanding the rise of populist establishments.

3 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/07/04/understanding-the-rise-of-the-populist-establishment/>

4 <http://www.politicalcapital.hu/>

5 <http://www.isp.org.pl/>

6 See for example:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/30/danger-hungary-verge-full-blown-autocracy-viktor-orban-vengeance>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/05/hungary-and-poland-arent-democratic-theyre-authoritarian/>

their eternal fight against the evil (international, globalist) elites. Still, while we started to research populism in these societies, in the end, we found something more malevolent and dangerous: *tribalism* - an authoritarian, anti-pluralistic approach to politics that is strongly encouraged by right-wing populist actors.

In fact, it might be better to talk about a tribalist zeitgeist than a populist one, as it better describes the social reality of authoritarian populism. Tribalism strongly undermines democratic processes, as it makes following the leader of the tribe and defeating the other tribe almost the only goal of politics. It also undermines political debates and puts reality in parenthesis. While it seems to be more of a zeitgeist than only a regional phenomenon, tribalism can be especially destructive for democratic institutions in Central and Eastern European countries where democratic institutions are young, fragile and democratic norms are weaker.

We are really grateful for our partners in the Institute for Public Affairs for joining us in this challenging exercise, and for Rodger Potocki, Joanna Rohozinska, and Agnieszka Gmys-Wiktor for helping us introduce the results in Budapest and for supporting us throughout this project. We are grateful for Levente Littvay from Central European University, who helped with the empirical research, and also for Sanjay Kumar, who gave very insightful recommendations on how to improve the comprehensibility of this study. Any and all errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM IN POWER: THE CASE OF POLAND AND HUNGARY

- Hungarian and Polish populist narratives – disseminated by the two governments – have a lot in common: the sense of victimhood, a feeling of limited sovereignty, a peripheral position within the European Union and a negative perception of superpowers in the West and in the East – the latter especially in Poland. These sentiments are widely exploited by populists in both countries. It manifests in apocalyptic visions: a narrative claiming that liberals, Brussels and Muslim immigrants are threatening the survival of these nations. Both Kaczyński and Orbán can build on the negative assessments of their predecessors.
  - » In Poland, populist political actors, especially the Law and Justice (PiS) and to some extent the Kukiz'15 Movement, have effectively exploited the weaknesses and mistakes of the previously ruling government. Their success lies in that people from various socio-economic groups were given the opportunity to build a sense of self-esteem resulting from belonging to the Polish nation and correct the mistakes of the Polish democratic transition.
  - » In Hungary – a country that mostly counts freedom fighters among its national heroes – Orbán can successfully play this role, promising to save Hungary from external threats such as Brussels, which is sending Muslim immigrants to Hungary under the guidance of George Soros.
- Politicians are exploiting “platonic xenophobia” – anti-immigration sentiments without immigrants – in both mostly ethnically homogenous countries.
- High polarisation and low trust clearly helped authoritarian populists in both countries.

### FROM POPULISM TO TRIBALISM: SURVEY RESULTS

- In our research, we focused on “populist attitudes,” and not voting on populist parties – although we also measured party preferences.**
- Our survey results in Poland and Hungary indicate that socio-demographic indicators predict receptivity to populism very poorly. Party preference trumps all other factors. In our opinion, it reveals a more general tendency. Contrary to common wisdom, right-wing populism is much more about the circus than about the bread, although populism can gain ground after financial crises. Inequality and socio-economic deprivation, while definitely creating fertile grounds for the rise of authoritarian populism, fail to explain its political success: today’s main right-wing populist trend is not economic populism, it rather targets identity-based fears and nationalist sentiments. Right-wing populism mobilizes, unites and divides using the concept of the nation and not that of the class.
  - There is an obvious difference between populism in government and populism in opposition: they see the elite elsewhere. While populists in opposition are concerned with the national elite (and mainly the government), populists in government are rather channeling social discontent towards international elites (and their domestic allies).<sup>7</sup> If the anti-elitist opposition party becomes the elite itself, the voter base seems to easily adapt to this new situation. Pro-government voters in Poland and Hungary see the national parliament as trustworthy, but do not regard the European Parliament the same way<sup>8</sup>. For opposition voters, it is the other way around. According to our research, negative sentiments towards the domestic elite are stronger among supporters of opposition parties than among supporters of governing parties.

<sup>7</sup> In Hungary, supporters of the governing Fidesz-KDNP are more likely to trust the national parliament than the European Parliament. While supporters of opposition parties have much less confidence in their national parliament than in the EP. In Poland this difference is even more visible.

<sup>8</sup> According to European Social Survey data.

- Populism in these countries is all over the spectrum: not only the supporters of populist parties are open to populist narratives. We have found left-wing and liberal parties with similarly strong black and white views on politics to the electorate of the two governing parties.
- Interestingly, people-centrism (a reference to the will of the people as the final source of legitimacy) is weak among the supporters of parties claiming to be the sole representative of “the people”—among voters of PiS and Fidesz.
- A significant portion of these societies supports a strong leader instead of elected politicians. This ratio is higher in Poland (35%) than in Hungary (26%), though.
- While we started to study populist attitudes, we found something more dangerous and malevolent: the combination of Manichean, black and white narratives that divide the world between good and evil and authoritarianism that puts trust in a strong leader makes a dangerous combination. We labeled it *tribalism*: rallying around the leader of the tribe and rejecting the other tribe. We found that tribalists, who are overrepresented in the governing party’s voter base, are more likely to support political violence as a tool and are also more likely to reject political pluralism. Tribalism is beyond populism: tribalists do not share democratic attitudes, they are authoritarian, politically intolerant and, to a certain extent, elitist.
- Authoritarian populism leads to increasing tribalism in these societies. And it can be especially dangerous in Central and Eastern Europe, where democratic institutions are young, fragile and democratic norms are weaker – therefore, “populist establishments” can transform and re-write the whole socio-political setting. Poland and Hungary are the best illustrations. In these countries, leaders of the tribes want to benefit from fuelling tribal views instead of reducing them, as they have a lot to gain from increasing polarisation.

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO COUNTER AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM AND TRIBALISM?

Throughout our project, we organised several local debates outside the capitals. **Based on our experiences, the methods which can potentially mitigate authoritarian populism and tribalism are the following:**

- **More debates.** Debate culture is traditionally weak in both Hungary and Poland, and it has been weakened further in recent years. This provides a fertile ground for tribalism and polarisation.
- **Stepping out of bubbles.** Good debates can be organized only if the participants are willing to step out of their comfort zone and get out of their bubbles. Debates outside the capital are especially important. The events we organized in cooperation with 17 local grassroots organizations were very important for these groups as well to get recognized by their local authorities and gain more visibility among the inhabitants.
- **Bridging the ‘populist gap’.** The most successful events are the ones where the speaker-audience divide can be diminished, creating an environment where status differences do not determine the discussion.
- **Going offline.** As Timothy Snyder puts it<sup>9</sup>: “Within the two-dimensional internet world, new collectivities have arisen, invisible by the light of day—tribes with distinct worldviews, beholden to manipulations.”. To counter this tendency, there is a need for more debates in the offline space. More discussions outside the online platforms are necessary for reducing the echo chamber effect: the driver of tribalism.

9 Snyder, Timothy. On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century. Tim Duggan Books, 2017.



## WHAT ARE POPULISM AND TRIBALISM? A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In our study, we tried to grasp the complexity of populism by including **multiple facets of the phenomenon**<sup>10</sup>. We identified and measured populism as a combination of the following ideological-attitudinal dimensions:

- *People-centrism*: a reference to the “will of the people” as the final source of sovereignty and painting the ‘common people’ as a homogeneous group. Is it also about the idea of a general will driving political processes. A typical statement<sup>11</sup>: “politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people”.
- *Political anti-elitism*: the idea that a small, powerful group who has illegitimately taken over the state and subverted it for its own benefit, and that private interests are capturing the institutional system. A typical statement<sup>12</sup>: “independent of which parties are in power, the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves”.
- *Manichean worldview*: an understanding of politics as the ultimate struggle between good and evil, which also means that compromise with the other side is unacceptable. We measured this facet with statements such as<sup>13</sup>: “you can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics”.

We also measured two other dimensions that are not essentially part of the populist worldview but related to it in some forms:

- *(Anti)pluralism*: populists tend to think about people as a homogeneous group and claim that political divisions are unnecessary and dangerous because they undermine (national) unity. Pluralism is a motivation for compromise between values, a tendency to accept different viewpoints

and political positions as legitimate, and a need to listen to dissenting voices. We measured it with statements like: “it is important to listen to the opinion of other groups.”<sup>14</sup>

- *Elitism*: A belief that members of the elite, such as businessmen and experts, would be better at leading the country than elected politicians. While in theory elitism is the anti-thesis of populism, it is not necessarily true, as both share a Manichean worldview and some form of anti-political attitude; „at least in practice, populist and elitist ideas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather might overlap to some extent”. (Akkerman et al., 2014, 1328). We measured this facet with statements such as: „our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independent experts”.

We also measured authoritarianism and support for political violence, as these are possible consequences of populism.

While doing the research, we found a specific pattern: a combination of Manichean worldviews and authoritarianism that we labeled *tribalism*<sup>15</sup>. This attitude is the combination of Manichean, black and white narratives that divide the world between good and evil and authoritarianism that puts trust in a strong leader. Tribalism is about rallying around the leader of the tribe and rejecting the other tribe. Tribalism goes beyond populism: it is not people-centric, it is not anti-elitist in the classical sense, but essentially anti-pluralist. Tribalism has ethnocentric features as well. It is more tribalism, and not so much populism, that poses an essential threat to representative democracies.

10 Following mainly the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the following two articles: Akkerman, Agnes, Cas Mudde, and Andrej Zaslove. “How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters.” *Comparative political studies* 47, no. 9 (2014): 1324-1353.

11 from Akkerman et al’s scale: 2014

12 A bit modified version of the item from Silva et al., 2018

13 From Silva et al., 2018

14 From Akkerman et al., 2018

15 The concept is not new, see for example: neo-tribalism: Dencik, Lars, and Marc-André Anzueto. “NEO-TRIBALISM: Exploring the Populist Backlash to Europeanism.” 2006, ; See also: Ian Bremmer: *Us Vs. Them*, Penguin books, 2018.

## DWA BRATANKI: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN POLAND AND HUNGARY

Hungary and Poland, two countries where right-wing populists are in government, share several similarities in historical narratives that can be the breeding grounds for populism<sup>16</sup>:

- The feeling of being the victims of history and being ill-treated by superpowers, and the prevalence of a rich conspiracy culture as a consequence.
- The experience of the loss of sovereignty and even the disappearance of Polish/Hungarian statehood.
- The feeling of being treated as second-class citizens in the European Union (while having a rather positive opinion on the community), which generates mistrust against the EU on the right side of the political spectrum.

There are also several similarities when it comes to the current manifestations of right-wing populism. The discursive strategies of populist political actors on migration are built on securitisation and the fear of cultural loss. Human rights and procedural norms, arguably the foundations of liberal democracies, can be relegated to secondary importance in the name of the government's responsibility to act, referring to some sort of "special state". Therefore, certain political forces use the issue of migration consciously to transform the political system, even replacing liberal democracy with an autocracy. At the same time, they keep referring to democracy – but they only define it as the will of the people, and not as the separation of powers.

Two important social factors that help authoritarian populism in both countries: high political polarisation<sup>17</sup> and low interpersonal and institutional trust<sup>18</sup>. Similarly to Hungary in terms

of overall trust in the society, Poland occupies one of the last places among European countries.

Politicians are exploiting "platonic xenophobia" – anti-immigration sentiment without immigrants – in both mostly ethnically homogenous countries. 45% of the Poles and 56% of the Hungarians regard immigration as the most important problem the EU is facing at the moment – while only 29% of Brits do.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the populist politicians in government in the two countries keep their anti-elite stance – but they channel it towards international elites instead of national ones. As Figure 1 indicates, in both countries, supporters of governmental parties trust the national parliament much more than the European parliament – while, in the case of opposition voters, the situation is the exact opposite.

However, we can observe important differences as well, especially when it comes to the manifestations of populism. While for Polish populists (especially for PiS), for example, Russia is painted as the most essential threat to national sovereignty (which is understandable in light of the country's historical experiences), Hungarian populists view threats differently. In Hungary, nationalist-populist discourses increasingly paint Russia as a saviour of Hungarian sovereignty from the federalist visions of Brussels.

Political anti-elitist, elitist and people-centrist attitudes are at similar levels among Hungarians and Poles. In both countries, people-centrism and political anti-elitism are strong. Support for political pluralism, at least on the surface, seems to be strong in both countries as well, but Hungarians tend to be more pluralist than the Poles. The largest difference between the two societies concerns the black and

16 See for example: Adam Balcer: Beneath the surface of illiberalism: The recurring temptation of 'national democracy' in Poland and Hungary – with lessons for Europe <https://pl.boell.org/en/2017/02/07/beneath-surface-illiberalism-recurring-temptation-national-democracy-poland-and-hungary>; Political Capital: Illiberalism in the V4: Pressure points and bright spots [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2258](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2258)

17 See for example: Veronika Patkós: Causes and effects of partisan polarisation in European democracies (2016) <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/a56c10a4-d857-40bd-8a9b-a6b143078b55.pdf>

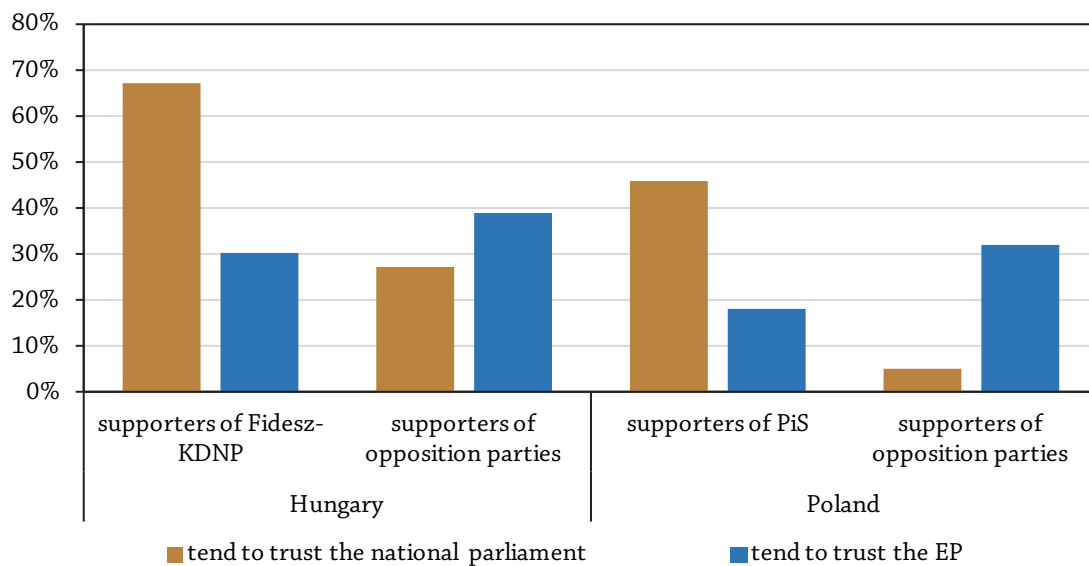
18 Krekó, P. et al: Trust Within Europe <https://www.viennapolicyconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/trust-within-europe-vienna-policy-con-20151030.pdf>

19 2018 Spring Eurobarometer

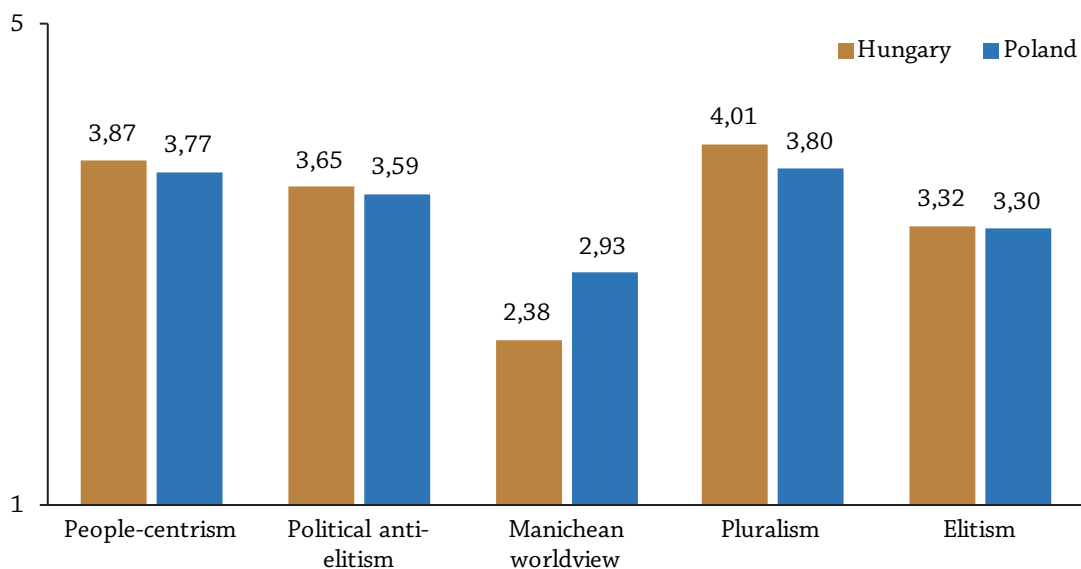
white way of thinking; the Manichaeian attitude is much more prevalent among Poles than Hungarians – which reveals even deeper divisions within Polish society. Nevertheless, we found that in both countries aspects of populist thinking, such as a black and white worldview, are rather widespread on all sides of the political spectrum, with the supporters

of populist governing parties having above-average scores. Additionally, supporters of the governing parties are less people-centric and less anti-elitist (!) than the average<sup>21</sup> or, to be exact, their anti-elitism rather targets international political elites instead of national ones (as the latter is the government itself).

**Figure 1.** Level of trust towards the national governments and the EP, among supporters of governmental parties and the opposition parties<sup>20</sup>



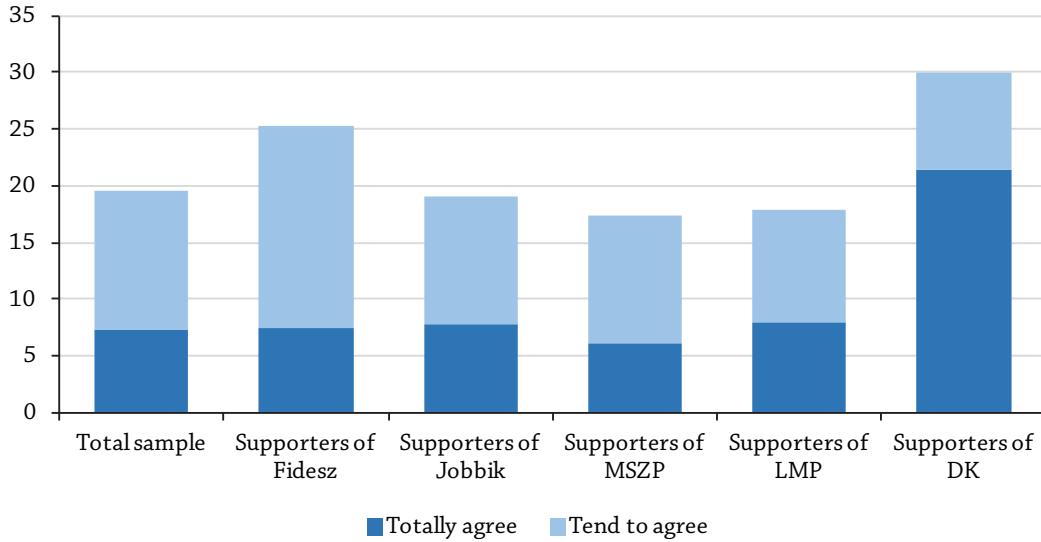
**Figure 2.** Scores of the five populism scales among Hungarians and Poles (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with the statements)



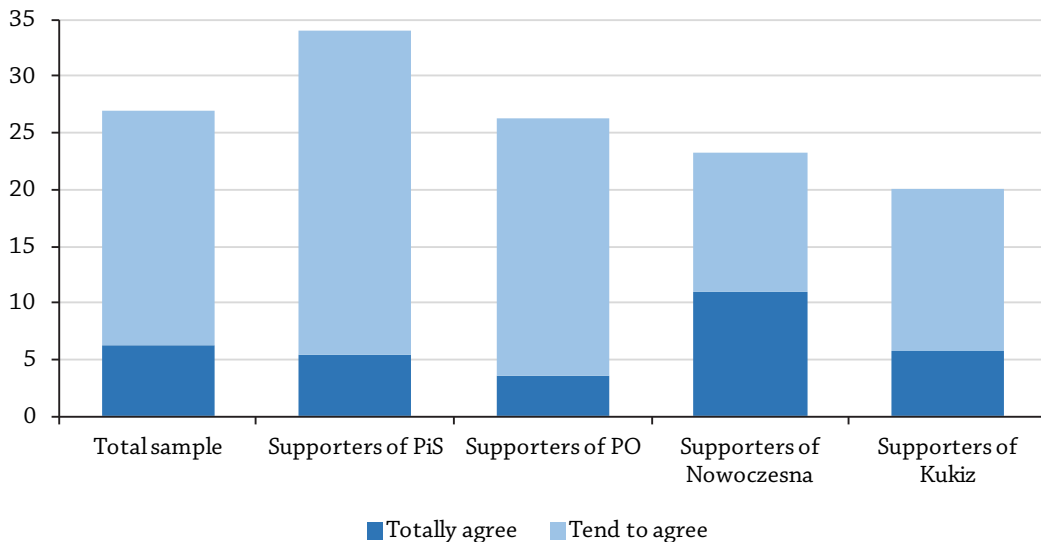
20 Calculations are based on European Social Survey Round8 data (edition 2). Fieldwork period: Hungary (May-September, 2017), Poland (November 2016 – February 2017).

21. We found similar results in the CSES database, akin to Bojan Todosevic: voters of the governmental party in Hungary for example showed less anti-elitist and populist attitudes.

**Figure 3.** Manichean way of thinking among the supporters of Hungarian political parties (% level of agreement with the statement: You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.)



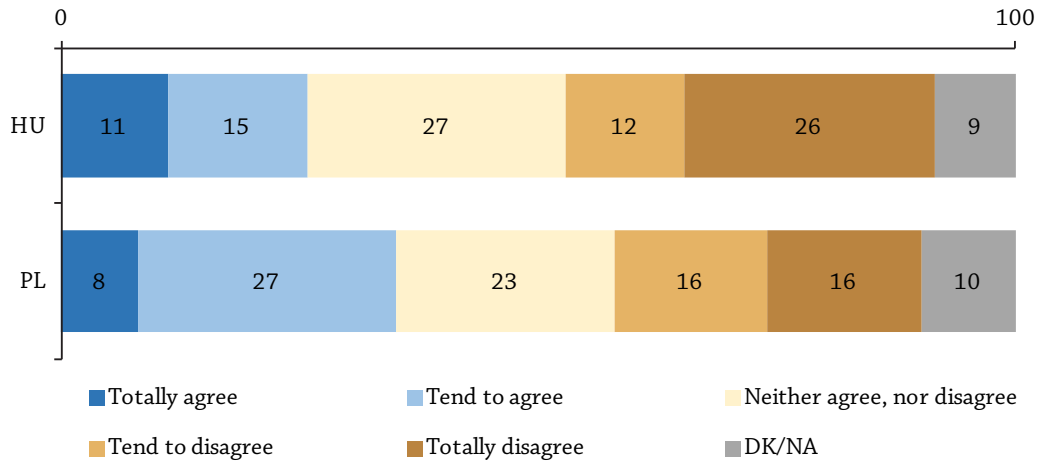
**Figure 4.** Manichean way of thinking among the supporters of Polish political parties (% level of agreement with the statement: You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.)



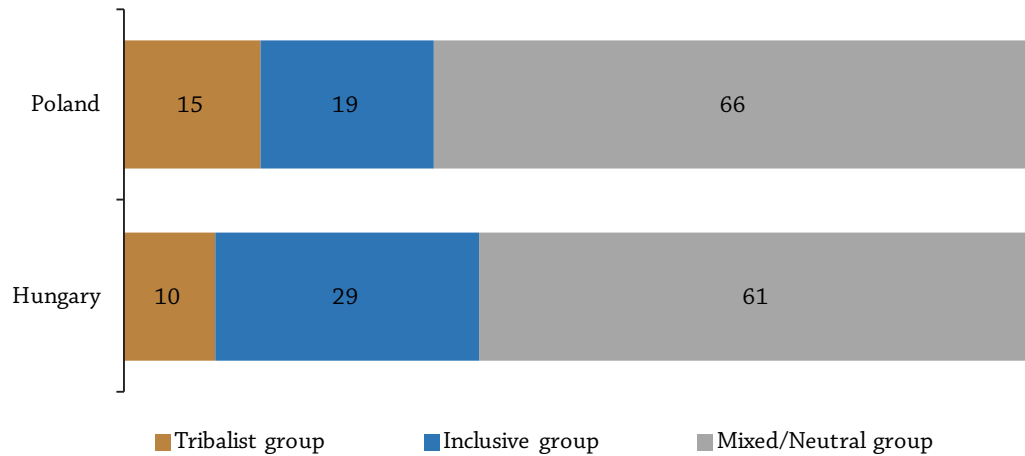
When it comes to authoritarianism, a significant portion of the two societies supports having a strong leader instead of elected politicians. This ratio is higher in Poland (35%) than in Hungary (26%).

A stronger Manichean worldview, greater elitism, and weaker pluralism are explanatory variables of the desire for a strong leader in both countries.

**Figure 5.** Authoritarian attitudes of Hungarians and Poles (% level of agreement with the statement: Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians.)



**Figure 6.** Share of the tribalist, the inclusive and the mixed/neutral groups in Hungary and Poland (%)



Importantly, the proportion of tribalists in Poland is higher (15%) than it is in Hungary (10%). In both of these countries, the supporters of the governing parties are more likely to be tribalist than the electorate of opposition parties.

To sum up, while we found very similar patterns in both countries, political cleavages, authoritarianism, and tribalism seem to be an even bigger danger in Poland than in Hungary.

## POPULISM AND TRIBALISM IN POLAND AND HUNGARY: A CLOSER LOOK

In this section we present the results of the comprehensive research, starting with Hungary and then moving onto Poland. Both national reports begin with a background, a contextual part based on our desktop research. This is followed by the analysis of the representative surveys conducted in both countries. The third and last section introduces the most important outcomes of the expert interviews.

In order to measure populist attitudes in a comparable way, we decided to conduct representative public opinion polls in both countries using almost identical methodologies. Comparability was ensured by employing the same polling technique (computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) on representative samples of the adult population) and using a unified questionnaire. The poll was conducted by Kantar Hoffmann in Hungary and by Kantar TNS in Poland in December 2017<sup>22</sup>. During the questionnaire's development, we decided to use scales which measure different facets of populism that have already been tested and widely accepted. We chose to ask all nine statements used by Silva et al. (2017)<sup>23</sup> and nine questions developed by Akkerman et al. (2014)<sup>24</sup>. During the analysis, we organized the questions into the scales suggested originally by the abovementioned authors, but we applied two slight modifications, which were justified by a theoretical concept and reliability testing. Throughout the chapter on the survey, we present the results on the following scales:

- (1) *people-centrism* – painting the common people as a homogeneous group and emphasizing the idea of a general will driving political processes, sovereignty in politics;
- (2) *political anti-elitism* – the idea that a small, powerful group has illegitimately taken over the state and subverted it for its own benefit;
- (3) *Manichean worldview* – a view of politics as an ultimate struggle between good and evil, which

means that compromise with the other side is unacceptable;

- (4) *pluralism* – willingness to compromise between conflicting values, a tendency to listen to different viewpoints and the need to listen to dissenting voices; and
- (5) *elitism* – a view that instead of politicians, businessmen and experts should lead the country. Obviously, elitism and pluralism are expected to be negatively associated with populism. However, as we will see, it is not always the case.

We also measured authoritarianism: a need for following the decisions of a strong leader instead of having long debates between different viewpoints. Last but not least, we measured the tendency to support political violence. In the following, we will introduce how these concepts were measured.

If we take a look at the speeches of political leaders in both countries, it is easy to see that their speeches are full of rhetorical elements that can be connected to these populist characteristics:

22 Size of the sample was 1,108 in Hungary and 1,022 in Poland.

23 See more details here: Castanho Silva, Bruno, Ioannis Andreadis, Eva Anduiza, Nebojša Blanuša, Yazmin Morlet Corti, Gisela Delfino, Guillem Rico, Saskia Ruth, Bram Spruyt, Marco Steenbergen, and Levente Littvay. forthcoming. "Public Opinion Surveys: a New Scale". In: *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis*, edited by Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. Routledge

24 See more details here: [https://works.bepress.com/cas\\_mudde/95/](https://works.bepress.com/cas_mudde/95/)



**Table 1.**  
*Dimensions of populism in the speeches of Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński*

People-centrism	You can see how in many European countries the distance between the people and their democratically elected governments increases day by day. Minister Antal Rogán will be responsible for ensuring that this does not happen to us in Hungary. I ask him to persevere in finding points of consensus between the people and the Government. – Viktor Orbán, upon the formation of the new government, May 18, 2018, source: <a href="http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-upon-the-formation-of-the-new-government/">http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-upon-the-formation-of-the-new-government/</a>
Anti-elitism	“The question is, if the Union in its current shape, with its horrible bureaucracy and institutionalized undermining of the nation state, is able to survive,” he told a Polish interviewer. “According to me, no.” - Jarosław Kaczyński, <a href="https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2017-ranking/jaroslaw-kaczynski/">https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2017-ranking/jaroslaw-kaczynski/</a>
Manichean Worldview	“Therefore they [our opponents] will stop at nothing: they will not argue, but censor; they will not fight, but pinch, kick, bite and sow hatred wherever they go. We are calm and good-humoured people, but we are neither blind nor gullible. After the election we will of course seek amends – moral, political and legal amends”. Viktor Orbán, March 15, 2018, source: <a href="http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848/">http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848/</a>
Anti-pluralism	“In Poland, there is a horrible tradition of national treason, a habit of informing on Poland to foreign bodies,” Kaczyński said after some opposition politicians complained to European authorities about Law and Justice’s actions in office. “And that’s what it is. As if it is in their genes, in the genes of Poles of the worst sort.”

## HUNGARY: SAVING EUROPE FROM THE MUSLIM HORDES

### BACKGROUND

Populism is generally built on the strong political polarisation of society. As a result of the traumatising effects of 20th century Hungarian history (defeat in the Great War and Trianon, defeat in the Second World War, Holocaust, fascist and communist dictatorships, and 1956), sharp political divisions between the left- and right-wing of the political spectrum emerged in society and commonly accepted political values are lacking.<sup>25</sup>

Nationalist ideologies centred on freeing the nation from dependence on foreign actors is the most crucial element of nationalist discourses<sup>26</sup>. Considering the fact that throughout its history Hungary often fell under foreign rule and occupation, ideologies referring to national sovereignty are able to evoke strong emotional responses, even today. The attitudes of Hungarian society were formed by strongly centralised political systems, decade-long autocracies and dictatorships. Left- and right-wing autocracies emerged one after the other, the 20th century history of the country is the story of a constantly transforming political systems. In this political environment public authority and civil society did

<sup>25</sup> Sławomir Sierakowski, “How Eastern European Populism Is Different | by Sławomir Sierakowski,” Project Syndicate, January 31, 2018 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/populism-stronger-in-eastern-europe-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2018-01>

<sup>26</sup> Buzalka, J. (2008). Europeanisation and post-peasant populism in Eastern Europe. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60(5), Populism in Eastern Europe.

not get separated from each other, those in power regularly extended their oversight to self-organising communities and tried to dissolve independent civil society. The people and the nation have only been in the focus of politics rhetorically. In reality, the majority of society has never felt that it can have its say in politics, society and the elite were separated from each other, and this feeling remained persistent even in a democratic environment, thus becoming a fertile ground for populism.<sup>27</sup>

On the European scale, political polarisation, similarly to Poland, remains high in Hungary even today. Interpersonal and institutional trust are both low<sup>28</sup>. Táarki Hungary's regular polls, paying special attention to examining the structures of social trust and values, suggest more than half of Hungarians are mistrustful towards their fellow citizens, meaning that more than 50% of society thinks it is either generally or completely impossible to trust other people. This might be related to the public belief that two-thirds of Hungarians think they are trustworthy, but others are not.

In terms of institutional trust, Hungary is ranked at the bottom in Europe as well as among the countries of the former eastern bloc – again a fertile ground for populism. It is characteristic of the state of public trust that the average citizen's trust in important occupations is dramatically low (35%): for instance, in MPs, bankers, and journalists. The head of Táarki, István György Tóth once sarcastically said that Hungarians tend to mistrust the institutions that they have the most direct contact with: the politicians they vote for, the media they consume, and the banks they keep their money in.<sup>29</sup>

- Trust in politics mainly depends on who is in government and who is in opposition – a sign of polarisation not unique to Hungary. In 2009, the right-wing did not trust the institutional system

and certain actors, it only trusted the opposition at best (its own political representatives); in 2013 it was the left-wing that trusted no one but the opposition at best (e.g., its own political representatives);

Hungarians consider civil and political rights to be less important than the average Western European country's citizens, their day-to-day participation in politics is less active, they are less tolerant of opinions diverging from the majority thinking, and they consider self-realisation to be less important as well. In Hungary, the level of social participation is also low. People rarely meet their friends, they are less willing to help each other, they do not visit clubs or civil society organisations as much as their Western counterparts. The atomized state of society and the low level of social capital, again, provides a good foundation for authoritarian populists to build on.<sup>30</sup>

According to Pew Research's 2017 poll<sup>31</sup>, the Hungarian population is the least committed to representative democracy among Europeans; Poland is next to last. Support for democracy is generally higher in higher income countries, but both aforementioned countries are among the leaders in the level of approval for non-democratic alternatives. As a result, only 18% of Hungarian respondents considered themselves committed to representative democracy, and 60% considered less democratic forms of governance acceptable<sup>32</sup>. It is characteristic that the richest are the most content with how democracy operates as well as the fact that the difference is the highest between pro-government and opposition voters. Although support for direct democracy is lower than the European average, that of a technocratic government is the highest in Hungary – support for it is outstanding, even. Autocracy is rejected, although by a below-average share of respondents – similar to a military government.

27 Lane, D. 2005. 'Social Class as a Factor in the Transformation of State Socialism'. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 21(4): 417–435.

28 <https://www.viennapolicyconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/trust-within-europe-vienna-policy-con-20151030.pdf>

29 Táarki, „Értékek 2013”, 2013. október

[http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/2013/2013\\_zarotanutmany\\_gazd\\_kultura.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/2013/2013_zarotanutmany_gazd_kultura.pdf)

30 Táarki, „Értékek 2013”, 2013. október

[http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/2013/2013\\_zarotanutmany\\_gazd\\_kultura.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/2013/2013_zarotanutmany_gazd_kultura.pdf)

31 Richard Wike et al., “Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy,” *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), October 16, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy/>

32 Wike et al.



The sub-index measuring anti-establishment attitudes in Political Capital's DEREK Index<sup>33</sup> indicates that in Hungary, trust is extremely volatile. Fidesz, when in power, could benefit from this: the very high mistrust in institutions in 2009-2010 helped the party implement its transformative agenda without any backlash from the society.

However, there are other reasons for the advance of populism as well. Pew Research<sup>34</sup> explained the strengthening of anti-establishment attitudes in society with the following three factors (besides trust in political institutions) in a study published in December 2016:

- Existential anxiety, economic uncertainty,
- fears about security, terrorism,
- cultural, identity-based fears (migration).

In line with a significant part of the literature on the topic<sup>35</sup>, societal attitudes connected to terrorism, culture and identity-based fears were found to be the most important driving forces of (right-wing) populism. For example, in 9 out of 10 countries examined in the study, the majority named the Islamic State to be the primary threat to their country. On average, 59% of Europeans believed the influx of immigrants increased the chance of terrorist acts taking place in their country. This share was considerably higher in Hungary and Poland, 76 and 71%, which can partly be explained by the lo-

cal anti-refugee campaigns and politics<sup>36</sup>. Cultural fears about migration are connected to all of this: four out of ten Hungarian respondents believed that multiculturalism is bad and immigration undermines national culture. Moreover, xenophobia was high in Hungary even before the escalation of the migration crisis in 2015 regardless of the fact that it is not a target country for immigrants. In fact, figures had already been higher than in Western European countries with large immigrant communities.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of government campaigns, extreme xenophobia is reaching newer and newer peaks in Hungary. According to Tárki's polls conducted regularly since the democratic transition, extreme xenophobia hit a new record in April 2015, when 46% of respondents said they would not allow a single asylum-seeker to enter the country<sup>38</sup>. A poll in early 2016 found that 53% of respondents would not allow any refugees to enter Hungary. In January 2017, 60% of the whole population completely opposed asylum-seekers, and only slightly more than one-third of them would have considered whether they would allow someone to enter the country.<sup>39</sup>

33 The Index is a value given in percentages: it shows the share of voters who, in a given society might be psychologically (in terms of their attitudes and the patterns of their values) receptive to authoritarian, ultranationalist, anti-systemic ideologies and political acts connecting to these. With the help of DEREK Index, given European countries can be compared in terms of the proportion of such groups. Political Capital developed this hierarchically-built Index following its own theoretical model and based on calculations with the database of the European Social Survey (ESS), a comprehensive, representative study of attitudes and values conducted every two years – 6 waves of the ESS have been completed so far, examining over 30 countries in the process. DEREK generally separates four main categories: (1) prejudices and welfare chauvinism; (2) right-wing value orientation; (3) anti-establishment attitudes; (4) fear, mistrust, pessimism. In this study, the values of the anti-establishment attitudes sub-index are the relevant ones. This category is made up of respondents who are extremely distrustful of either the political elite (politicians and the National Assembly), the legal system and authorities (police and legal system), international institutions (European Union or UN) or the political system (government and democracy).

34 Richard Wike, "4 Factors Driving Anti-Establishment Sentiment in Europe," *Pew Research Center* (blog), December 6, 2016 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/06/4-factors-driving-anti-establishment-sentiment-in-europe/>

35 See for example: Oesch, D. (2008). Explaining workers' support for right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: Evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway, and Switzerland. *International Political Science Review*, 29(3), 349-373. Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Vol. 22, No. 8). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

36 Wike, "4 Factors Driving Anti-Establishment Sentiment in Europe."

37 Péter Krekó and Attila Juhász, "Scaling the Wall," *Foreign Affairs*, July 30, 2015 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/hungary/2015-07-30/scaling-wall>

38 Based on Tárki's regular surveys. The researchers ask the following question: "Should Hungary welcome all asylum-seekers, or nobody, or should it be considerate about who it welcomes?" Respondents who would not allow any refugee to enter Hungary are xenophobic, xenophiles are those who would allow all refugees to enter. The considerate are those who select the "it depends" option, indicating that they would need further information to make a decision. They tend to be willing to consider arguments for or against.

39 Endre Sík, "Rekordot Döntött Az Idegenellenesség Magyarországon," 2017 <http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1119911-rekordot-dontott-az-idegenellenesseg-magyarorszagon>

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY IN HUNGARY

Despite all the research so far, there has been no systemic investigation into populist attitudes in Hungary using a representative sample. In the section below, we aim to introduce the results concerning Hungary to give a more detailed picture.

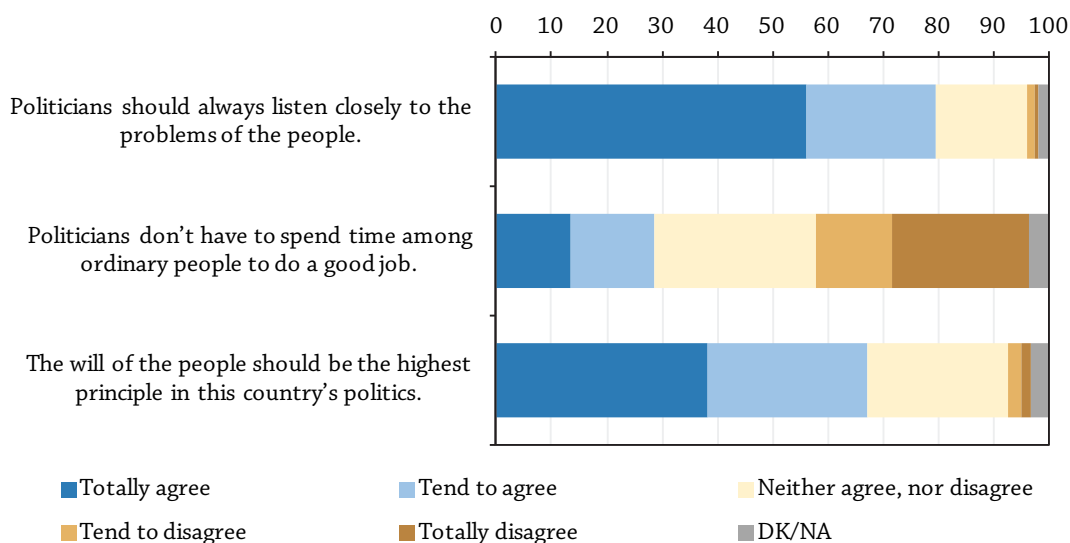
PEOPLE-CENTRISM

**First, we examined the most “innocent” form of populism: references to the people’s will. There is a really strong consensus in Hungary that people should be the politicians’ highest priority.** The vast majority of respondents agree that politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people. Almost the same proportion of people (67%) think that the will of the people should be the highest principle in Hungarian politics. 39% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that “politicians do not have to spend time among

ordinary people to do a good job,” while 29% agreed with it<sup>40 41</sup>. As a result, the answers do not correlate with the other two questions. (For the detailed distribution of answers, see the Appendix at the end of the document.)

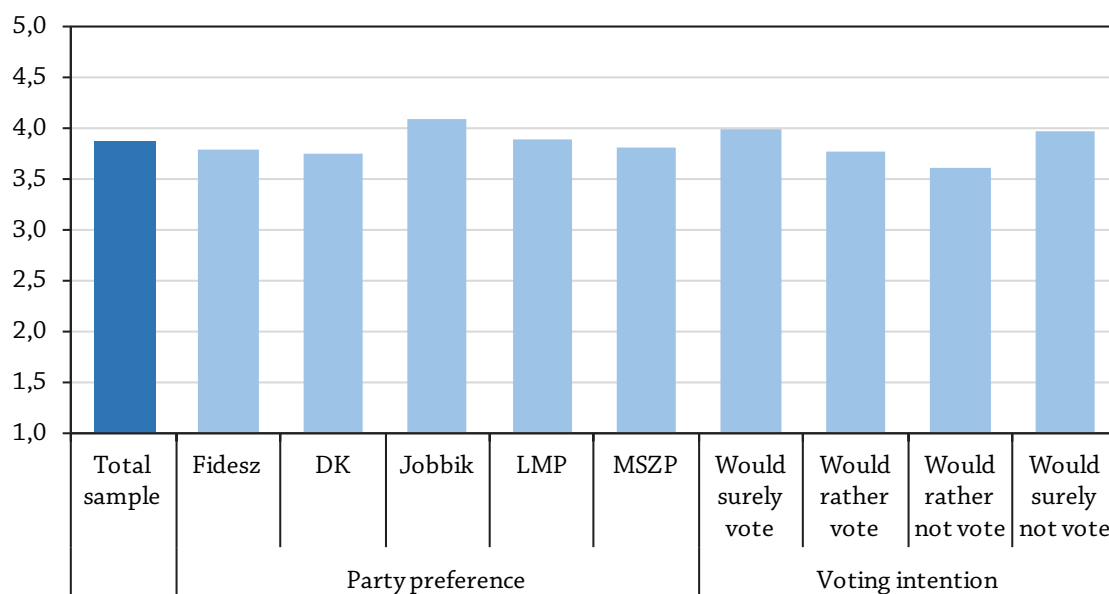
The results of a regression analysis<sup>42</sup> indicate that higher education leads to a lower level of people-centrism<sup>43</sup>. The region of residence is also a significant explanatory variable of people-centrism: those living in Western Hungary<sup>44</sup> are more people-centric than those living in Budapest and in Eastern Hungary. Willingness to vote and party preference were better predictors of people-centrism: **Fidesz voters were significantly less people-centric than voters of other parties**. This is an interesting result in light of the fact that politicians of Fidesz use the reference to people’s will extensively as an axiom for political legitimacy and also, they equate themselves with the will of the people the most often. As Viktor Orbán said in the last party congress of Fidesz: “*The*

**Figure 7.** People-centrist attitudes in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)



40 Furthermore, another 29% chose the option ‘neither agree, nor disagree’. This highlights that opinions are rather divided on this statement and uncertainty is quite high.  
 41 This was a negative-worded question suggested by Silva et al., with the aim of differentiating between actual support for populism and acquiescence, affirmation, and agreement bias.  
 42 We conducted a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis in order to reveal the factors explaining people-centrism. Socio-demographic variables (gender, age, highest level of education, type of settlement, and region) were entered in the first block, and party preference and willingness to vote were entered afterwards in a second block. We entered our variables in this way in all subsequent regression analyses.  
 43 We aggregated the answers to these three questions into one scale (people-centrism scale), by calculating the unweighted mean of the answers. Before calculating the mean, we reversed the negative-worded question. As a consequence, the scale’s range is identical with the original questions’ range (i.e. 1 to 5), where higher number represents stronger agreement with the people-centrist view.  
 44 Includes counties situated west from the Danube: Baranya, Fejér, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Komárom-Esztergom, Somogy, Tolna, Vas, Veszprém, Zala.

**Figure 8.** People-centrism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale, where higher number represents higher agreement with people-centrist statements)



people know what the situation is, even though they might not say it in so many words. It's also true that the Hungarian people's voices are apt to fail them when it comes to talking about an improving situation. But that's the sort of people we are. The Hungarian people know exactly what the situation is, and therefore in Hungary today there is no general mood in favour of a change of government (...)" Moreover, citizens with greater willingness to vote were found to be more people-centrist. However, those at the other end of the spectrum, the most passive, tend to score as high on the people-centrism scale as the most active voters.

In short, the less educated, those living in Western Hungary, opposition voters, and those very willing to vote are more prone to people-centrism.

### POLITICAL ANTI-ELITISM

Negative sentiments towards the elite are also a sine qua non of populism. Unsurprisingly, the majority of Hungarians cast doubt on the intentions of elected officials. 54% of participants agreed

that the governments, in general, are run by a few big interests looking out only for themselves. Furthermore, only 31% thought that officials use their power to try to improve people's lives. 58% of respondents believed that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked. 62% said that "elected officials talk too much but take too little action."<sup>45</sup>

The results of a regression analysis<sup>46</sup> indicate that the region of residence and party preferences play the biggest roles in explaining political anti-elitism<sup>47</sup>. Those living in Western Hungary are more politically anti-elitist than residents of Budapest or Eastern Hungary. Unsurprisingly, voters of the far-right Jobbik party were significantly more politically anti-elitist than other parties, and voters of Fidesz were found to be the least anti-elitist. **This is another characteristic where Fidesz voters do not behave like textbook populists should: they are not just less people-centric, but less anti-elitist as well.** When it comes to international

45 However, the high rate of "neither agree, nor disagree" opinions (between 30-39%) shows that there is great uncertainty among people regarding political anti-elitism.

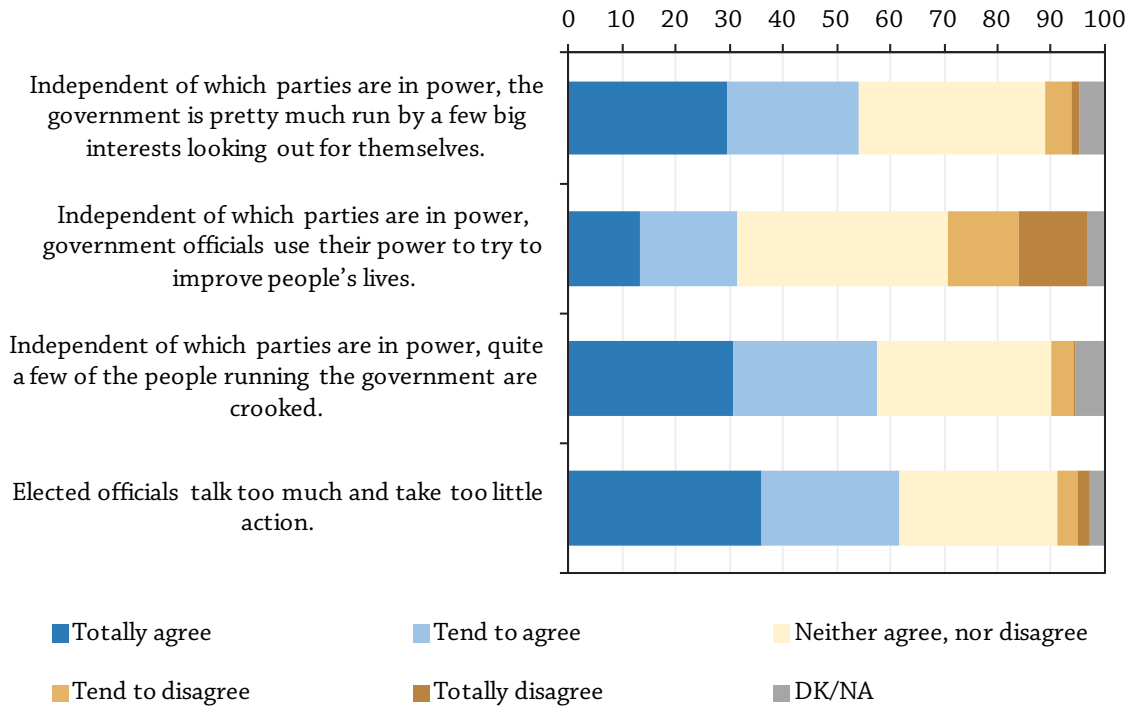
46 We employed a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis again to find out what explains political anti-elitism.

47 We created a political anti-elitism scale from these four questions by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. We reversed the negative-worded question before calculating the mean. The final scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5), and a higher number represents stronger political anti-elitism.

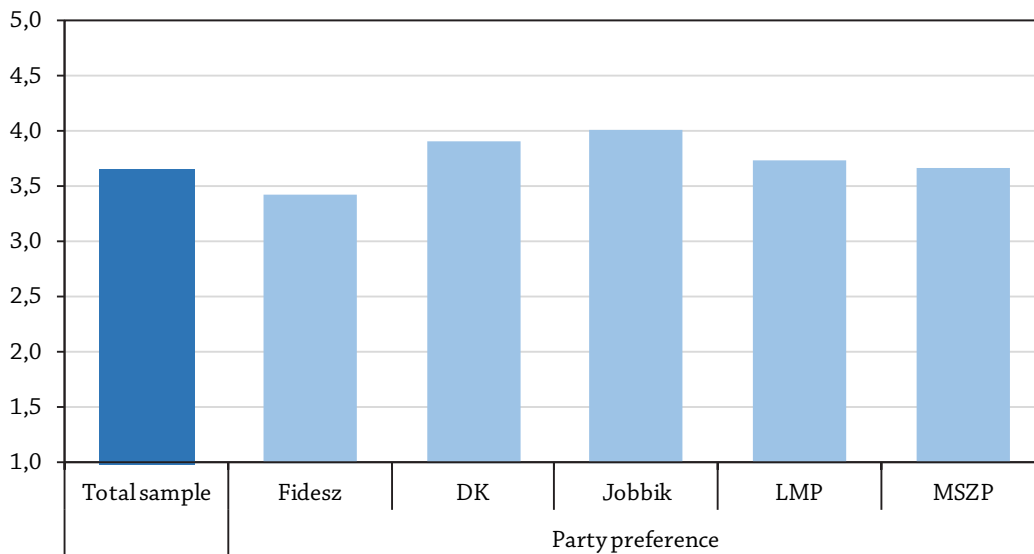
organisations, though, Fidesz voters seem to be more anti-elitist: only 30% of the Fidesz voters tend to trust the European Parliament for example, which is way below the national average, and lower than the trust level of opposition voters (39%).

To sum up our results: residents of Western Hungary and voters of Jobbik had the strongest negative sentiments towards the national elite, while those living in Budapest and Eastern Hungary and Fidesz voters had the most positive attitudes towards governing politicians.

**Figure 9.** Political anti-elitist attitudes in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)



**Figure 10.** Political anti-elitism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with political anti-elitist statements)



MANICHEAN WORLDVIEW

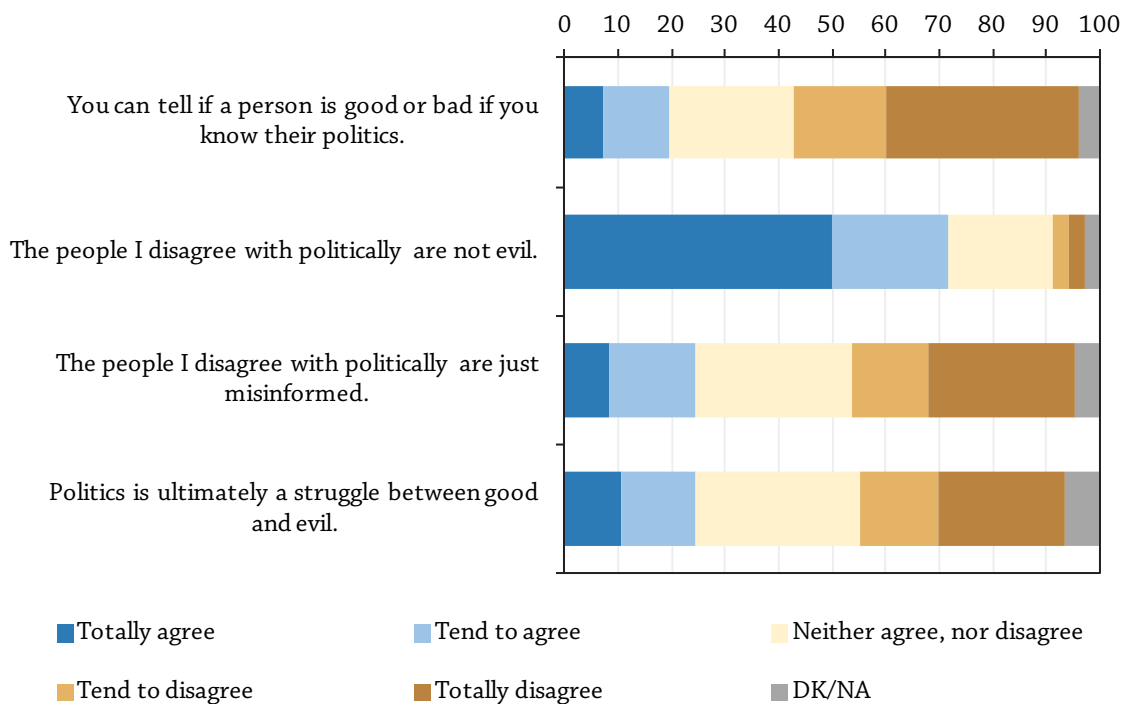
**The dangerous aspect of populism is that it creates a very sharp dichotomy between good (the people) and evil (the elites and their representatives). The good news is that the Manichean worldview, a harsh, black and white way of thinking concerning politics is not very common among respondents.** Only 19% agreed that one can tell if a person is good or bad if they knew their political affiliations, and 53% of the respondents believed that the people they disagree with politically are not evil. 24% accepted the statement that the people they disagree with politically are just misinformed. The assumption that politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil was only supported by one-fourth of the population (25%).<sup>48</sup>

The bad news is that Fidesz voters are characterised by a stronger Manichean worldview<sup>49</sup> than voters supporting other parties. The second highest level of Manichean thinking was among voters of the Democratic Coalition, a left-wing party led by former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány. So, black and white thinking is not only a trait of the governing side.

The regression analysis also revealed possible explanations for the Manichean worldview. Age correlated with Manichean thinking: the younger the people are, the more they see politics in black and white. Residents of Budapest and Eastern Hungary were more Manichean than people in the west of the country. A higher Manichean score resulted in the lack of willingness to vote as well.

To conclude, younger people, residents of Budapest and Eastern Hungary, Fidesz and DK voters and those who do not wish to vote are more prone to see politics in black and white.

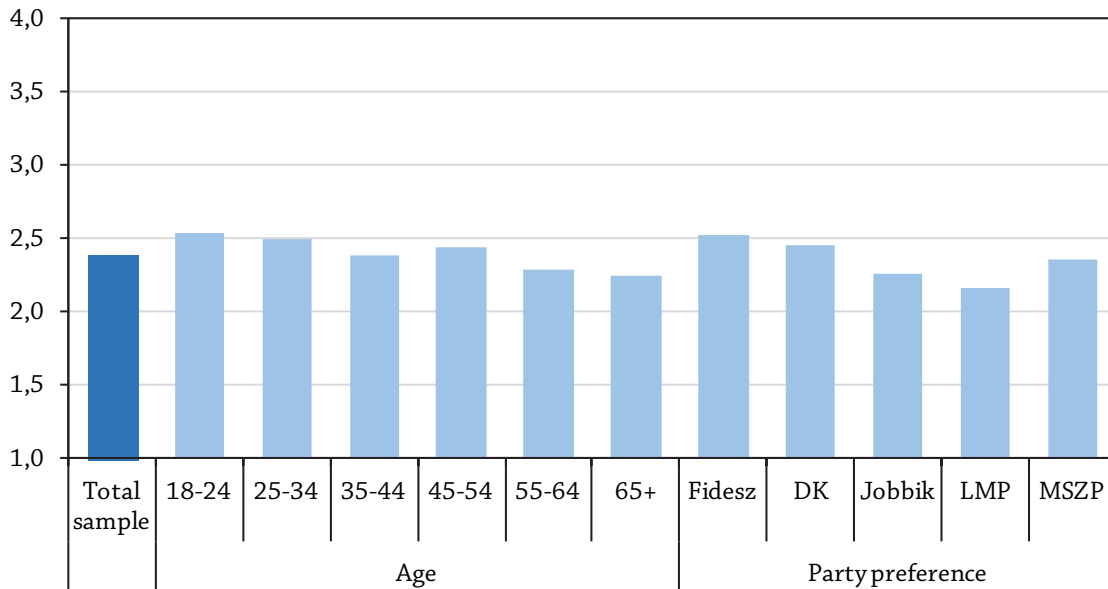
**Figure 11.** Manichean way of thinking in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)



48 The rate of uncertain opinions (neither agree, nor disagree) was between 20-31%, indicating that opinions are rather diverse regarding this topic.

49 We calculated the unweighted mean of answers and created the Manichean scale from these four items. The negative-worded question was reversed before creating the mean. This scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5): a higher number represents a stronger Manichean worldview.

**Figure 12.** Manichean worldview scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with Manichean statements)

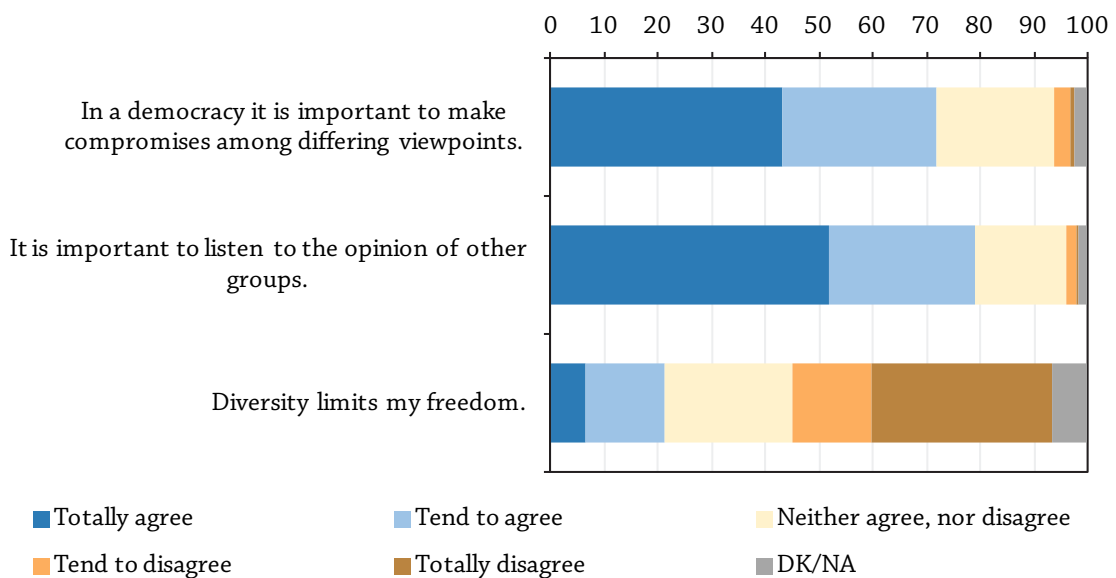


**PLURALISM**

**Another important and dangerous feature of populism is its anti-pluralistic nature: populists tend to think about people as a homogeneous group and claim that political divisions are unnecessary and dangerous because they**

**undermine (national) unity. The good news is that support for pluralism is prevalent among Hungarians, even if this should be taken with a pinch of salt<sup>50</sup>. 72% of respondents agreed that in a democracy it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints, and 54% thought that it is important to listen to the opinion of other groups.**

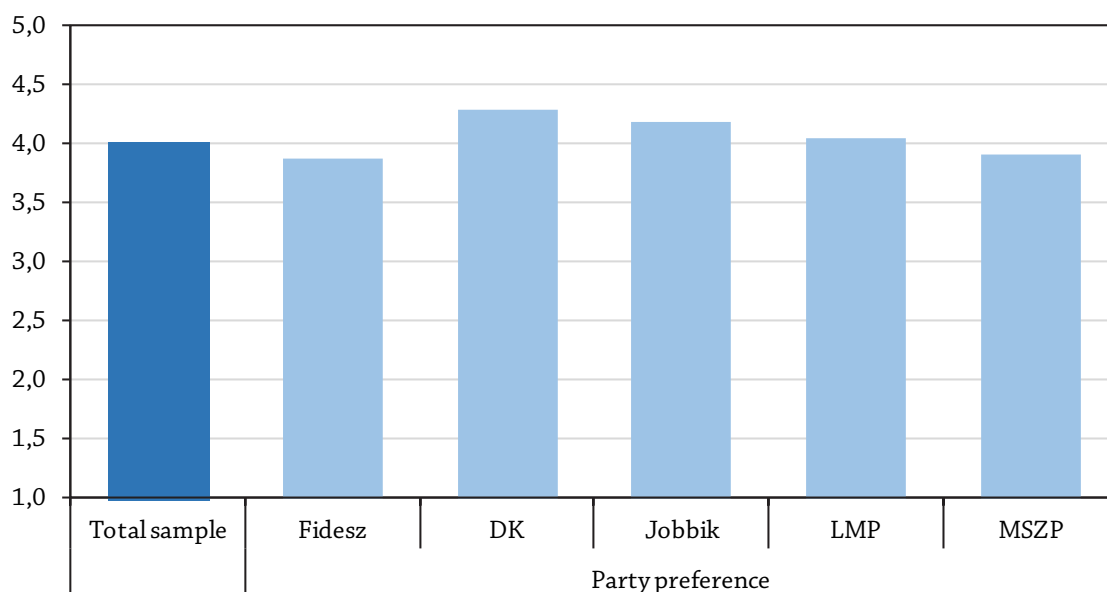
**Figure 13.** Pluralist attitudes in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)



50 However, pluralist attitudes might have been connected with a social desirability bias (i.e., some respondents tend to answer with what they believe to be socially acceptable rather than express what they really think of a given issue), thus the high level of agreement with statements supporting diversity.



**Figure 14.** Pluralism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with pluralist statements)



49% disagreed with the claim that diversity limits their freedom, and only 21% agreed.<sup>51</sup>

The results of a regression analysis indicate that people in Western Hungary are more pluralistic<sup>52</sup> than residents of Budapest and the east of the country. Individuals with a greater willingness to vote were found to be more pluralistic.

All in all, we can conclude that living in Western Hungary and willingness to vote are positive explanatory variables of pluralism but voting for Fidesz is negatively correlated with the need for a diversity of opinions.

## ELITISM

One surprising result of the study is that certain forms of elitism and anti-elitism are not necessarily in contradiction with each other. One can be mistrustful towards the political elites, for example, while thinking that not elected politicians, but

businessmen and experts should lead the country. **Despite being anti-elitist regarding politicians, Hungarians tended to agree with other elitist statements.** 48% believed for example that politicians should lead rather than follow people. 31% of respondents agreed that the country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful business people, and 47% favoured independent experts. However, 30-36% chose the option 'neither agree nor disagree', which means that uncertainty is high among respondents regarding these statements.

The results of a regression analysis<sup>53</sup> show that, interestingly, elitism<sup>54</sup> is higher in smaller towns and settlements: the bigger the city, the less elitist the residents are. Similarly, less educated people were found to be more elitist as well. It is again an indication of that the hatred directed at elites is not necessarily stronger among less privileged social groups: the myth that experts and businessmen are

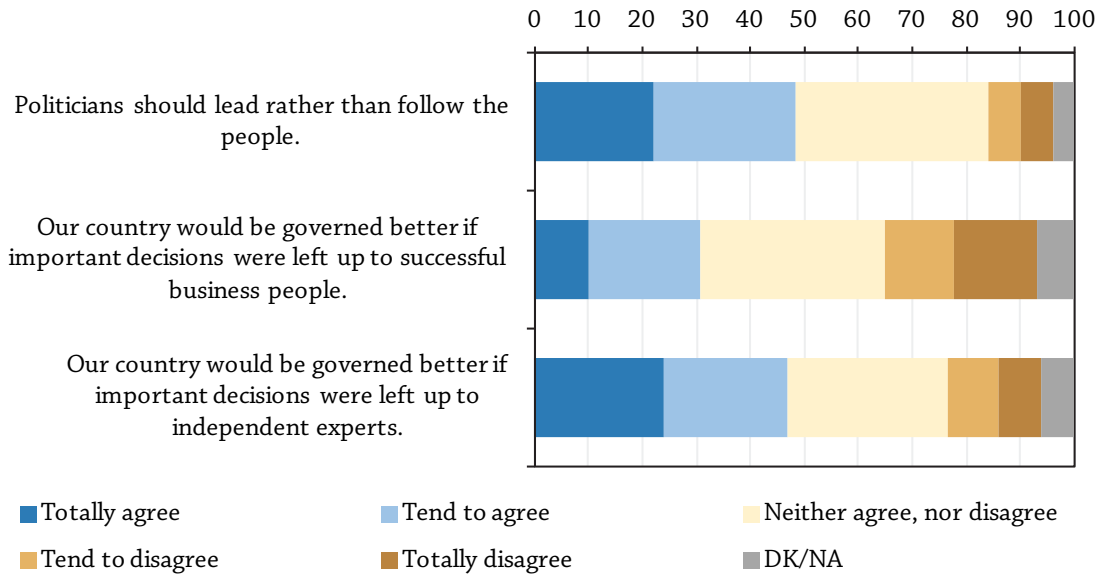
51 Uncertain answers are among 17-24%, which is less than on statements regarding political anti-elitism and Manichean worldview, so there is less diversity and uncertainty among the respondents.

52 We computed a pluralism scale from these three questions by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. The negative-worded question was reversed before creating the mean. This scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5), which means that a higher number represents higher pluralism and need for opinion diversity

53 A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to reveal the possible explanations for elitism.

54 We aggregated the answers to these three questions into one elitism-scale by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. As a result, the scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5): a higher number represents stronger agreement with elitism.

**Figure 15.** Elitist attitudes in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)

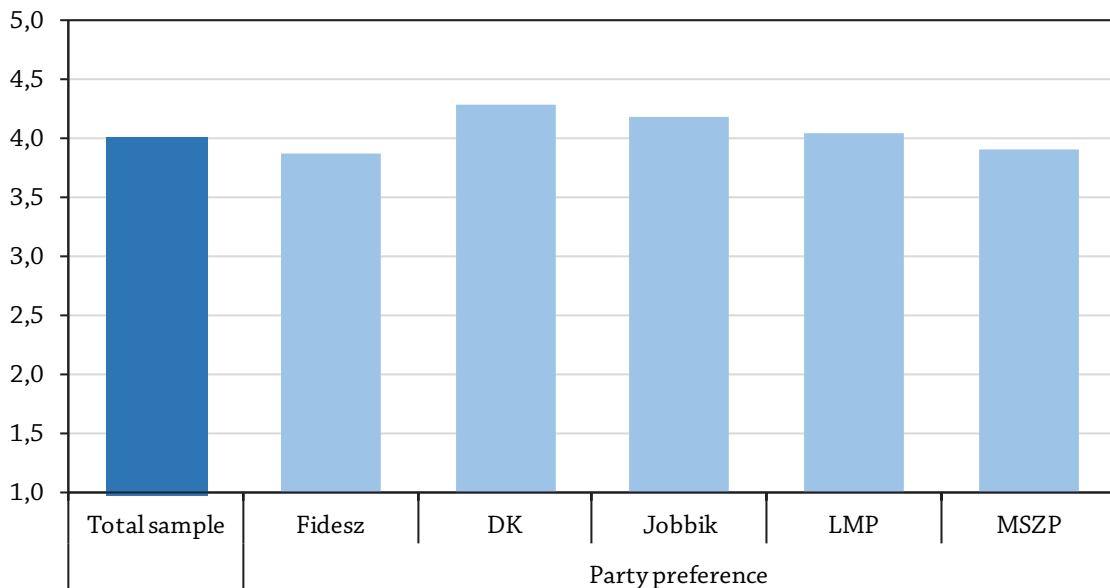


good at leading the country is supported more among undereducated people living in the villages. Voters of the left-wing opposition party DK were found to be significantly more elitist as opposed to other parties. Fidesz voters were found to be the least elitist.

To sum up, supporters of DK, residents of small cities and villages, and the less educated mostly favour the elites.

To summarise the findings of our calculations above, we can conclude that different facets of populism are largely dependent on the region where people live, the party preference of respondents and their willingness to vote. However, age, gender, settlement type and high level of education were almost unrelated to the acceptance of populist rhetoric in the Hungarian population. Generally, party preference was found to be the most important explanatory variable by far, it trumps any other socio-demographic variable.

**Figure 16.** Elitism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with pluralist statements)





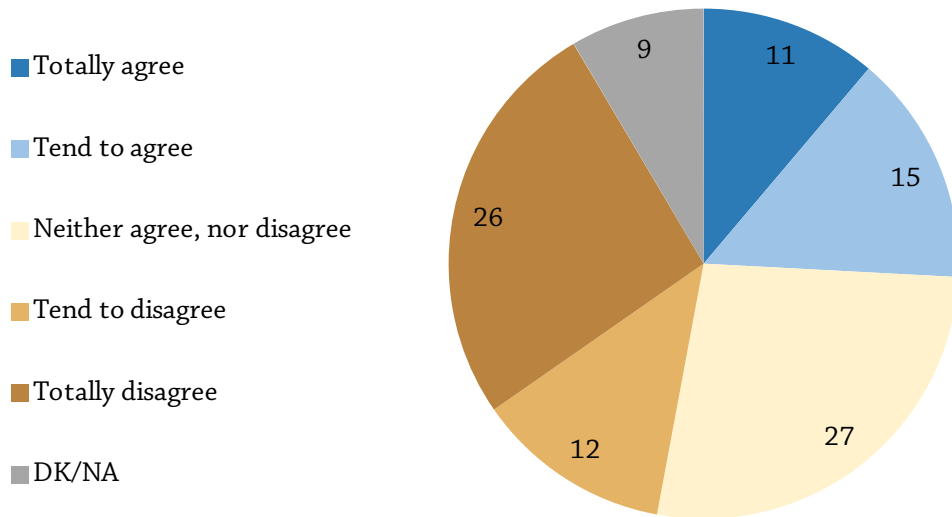
**THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN POPULISM, AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE**

In our study we were also curious about the ways and means populism can turn really malevolent, therefore we also measured authoritarianism and acceptance of violence, and its relationship with certain features of populism. Authoritarianism does not seem to be a dominant feature of Hungarian respondents: 26% of respondents agreed with the

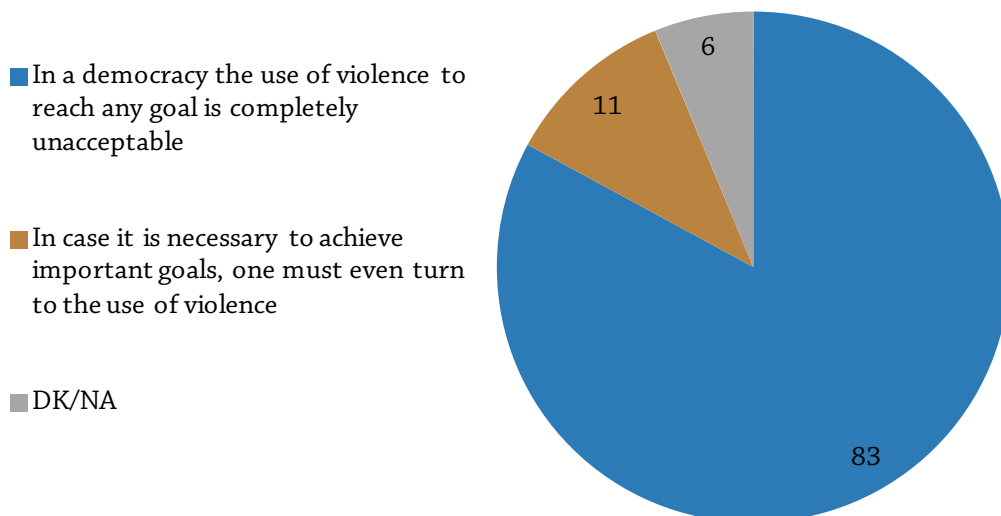
statement that our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians while 36% did not. 27% percent was uncertain.

Concerning violence, the good news is that 83% of respondents agreed that violence is completely unacceptable in a democracy and only 11% justified violence when it is necessary to achieve important goals. People answered this question with a high level of confidence.<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 17.** Authoritarian attitudes in Hungary (agreement with the statement: Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians, %)



**Figure 18.** Opinions on the use of violence in Hungary (proportion of answers in %)



55 Only 6% chose the 'neither agree, nor disagree' option.

Within the largest party preference groups, interestingly, the supporters of the largest left-wing party MSZP tend to be open to violence the most (21%). The share of governing party and Jobbik supporters who approve the use of violence is close to the average in the total sample (11%). Supporters of other opposition parties, the left-wing DK and the green LMP, are the least likely to accept violence (8% and 4%, respectively).

Manichean Worldview, pluralism, and elitism proved to be significant explanatory variables of authoritarianism: higher support for a Manichean worldview and elitism, and the lack of pluralism predicted the desire for a strong leader. **So those who see politics in black and white, do not need the diversity of opinions and think that the elite should govern are more likely to follow a strong leader.**

However, only the lack of pluralism and the lack of elitism proved to be significant in explaining the acceptance of violence. **To sum up, those who do not accept the diversity of opinions and do not wish the elite to govern are more prone to justify violence in order to reach any goal.**

## EXPERT INTERVIEWS

We have done five interviews with experts, spin-doctors, and ex-politicians to have a deeper insight into the nature of populists<sup>56</sup>. The latter was mainly focused on personal experiences.

- There was mostly a consensus on that populism is not so much economic populism, but that it rather focuses on identity-based fears and nationalist sentiments. However, there were interviewees who thought the essence of populism is promises made without the necessary financial coverage to back them up. Moreover, in Hungary, experiences show that votes can mainly be won through people's pockets, with material promises.
- Most of the stakeholders we asked did not believe that populism and liberal democracy are in contrast with each other. For example, former Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy said illiberalism is a bigger problem than populism: while illiberal state-building threatens democracy, populism (which often uses unrealisable promises) is less of a threat. One can build a political system on the former, but not on the latter.
- The majority of respondents said there is no such a thing as inherently good or bad populism. All political actors can use populism, even for the right purposes.
- Our experts did not think we are witnessing a paradigm change. There is a large-scale disappointment, the end of history cannot be envisioned, and when looking for new solutions it is easier to convince the masses that the market economy does not have functioning correction mechanisms. This uncertainty can be exploited by populists, and this is why they can become models for others. Donald Trump was mentioned by our interviewees among the most important figures of contemporary populism. Some think that Emmanuel Macron is also populist. Viktor Orbán was mentioned among the most important populist politicians both domestically and internationally. A number of respondents mentioned Gábor Vona and Ferenc Gyurcsány from Hungary as well.
- Interviewees mainly named domestic campaigns among the most populist ones. For example, the campaign against visiting fees and university fees was found to be the most populist campaign in Hungary after the democratic transition. Additionally, MSZP's "more money for the people" campaign, the 2004 campaign of the referendum on the citizenship of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, and the Orbán government's post-2015 campaign against refugees were also mentioned.
- There is a general notion that the existentially most vulnerable layers, mainly the sliding lower middle class is the easiest to manipulate. András Keszthelyi, an advisor to former left-wing Prime

56 Five background interviews were conducted in the frames of this project in February and March 2018 with former politicians, political advisors, opinion-formers both from the left and right wing of the political spectrum. Former Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy and political advisor András Keszthelyi agreed to be named.

Ministers Péter Medgyessy and Ferenc Gyurcsány also emphasised that populist campaigns can lead to permanent changes in attitudes, this is their most threatening aspect.

- In terms of personal experiences, András Keszthelyi witnessed the 2004 campaign about not giving voting rights to Hungarians living in neighbouring countries from within. However, today he considers it a mistake due to the fact that it led to a still relevant division between Hungarians living in Hungary and those living in neighbouring countries. Péter Medgyessy discussed the 100-day programme implemented after 2002. In connection with this, the former prime minister admitted: “I dare not to claim that it was not populist.” He thinks the general trait of populism is that if it helps actors win an election, then they generally forget their promises. Admittedly, his approach is not objective, but he believes that the 100-day programme was built on the idea that a “left-wing turn is needed.” It aimed at helping the disadvantaged layers of society, improve the tough situation of pensioners (whose situation is still very hard despite Orbán’s efforts). It wanted to improve the disgraceful wages of teachers, doctors, and stop the unacceptable taxation of the minimal wage. At first glance, it included a lot of populist elements, but he told it was a legitimate legislative package aiming to restore social justice.
- All interviewees thought solutions to populism can be only long-term ones. Everyone emphasised the importance of education, training, and improving the population’s literacy. One of our interviewees suggested that the best remedy is keeping direct and continuous contact with voters, building organisational structure because the main reason for populism is that politicians became distant from the people or – at least – it feels like it. The responsibility of the intelligentsia also came up because they are unable to give

simple, easily comprehensible answers to people’s problems, but they strongly influence mainstream politics, and in contrast to them, populists give easy answers, which is why they are gaining strengths.

## **POLAND: MODERN AUTHORITARIANISM BASED ON ULTRACONSERVATISM**

### BACKGROUND

The political developments in Poland since 2015 can serve as an argument that the theory about the rise of populism being a response to growing social “inequality” has very limited explanatory value<sup>57</sup>. Law and Justice’s (PiS) victory in Poland came at a time of stable economic development, falling unemployment, and decreasing poverty rates. The level of inequality, as measured by the standard GINI coefficient, puts Poland close to the EU average, worse than the egalitarian Nordics but better than the UK and crisis-stricken southern members such as Greece<sup>58</sup>. The Polish experience demonstrates that while inequality and socio-economic deprivation may create a fertile ground for authoritarian populism, they fail to explain the populist rise in countries such as Poland. The analysis of the Polish case prompts us to agree with Pippa Norris, who argues that “authoritarianism can best be explained as a cultural backlash in Western societies against long-term, ongoing social change.”<sup>59</sup>

Poland has undergone very intensive social and cultural changes since the breakup of the communist regime in 1989, and especially since it joined the European Union in 2004. Integration with the Western political and economic structures and opening up the borders have resulted in not only a quarter century of sustained economic development and vast investment in infrastructure but also in the diffusion of liberal social norms and modes. After 2007, under the central-right government, many ideas and policies once promoted by relatively marginal groups of feminist and LGBT activists became

57 See: Kucharczyk, Jacek (2018), *It’s not the economy, stupid! Explaining the success of authoritarian populism in Poland* <http://situationroom.dpart.org/index.php/blog/15-articles/poland/31-not-the-economy-stupid>

58 Eurostat, *Gini Coefficient of Equalised Disposable Income, 2005-2015*, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di12)

59 Norris, Pippa, *It’s not just Trump: authoritarian populism is rising across the West, here’s why*, “Washington Post”, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/11/its-not-just-trump-authoritarian-populism-is-rising-across-thewest-heres-why/?utm\\_term=.45d42181ac24](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/11/its-not-just-trump-authoritarian-populism-is-rising-across-thewest-heres-why/?utm_term=.45d42181ac24), accessed on 20th of December 2017.

mainstream, even if they were not always able to influence legislation. However, the refugee crisis, and especially the controversial policy of the European Commission for mandatory quotas of Syrian refugees for each member state, had – in a matter of months – brought about an upsurge of xenophobia. Which, in turn, made Polish populism rather similar to its West European counterparts.

Populist actors, especially the Law and Justice (PiS) and to some extent the Kukiz'15 Movement, took this change of events as an opportunity to utilize the weaknesses and mistakes of the previous Civic Platform and Polish Peasant Party governments. The resentment and dissatisfaction with the so-called 'transformation elites' amongst the voters were thus exploited to strengthen conservative beliefs and magnify migration-related fears in Polish society, leading the way to a populist win in the parliamentary election of 2015. Subsequently, the favourable economic situation along with a centrally-controlled public media and the adoption of some social solutions helped them maintain support for two years after the elections.

PiS introduced conditions that allowed them to gain popularity among groups from various social strata in Poland. On the one hand, they restored the self-esteem and sense of belonging to socio-economic groups that felt disenfranchised by the elites who allegedly benefitted from the opportunities created in the first decade of transformation. On the other hand, PiS also successfully gained supporters amongst privileged groups. The explanation for that is obviously complex and differs between particular social groups. However, some interesting observations came from a qualitative research that was conducted during the summer of 2017 in a rather small district in a city located in the Polish Mazovia region<sup>60</sup>. The research reveals some interesting methods used by Jarosław Kaczyński and his party to attract people from various social groups and different biographical experiences.

It appeared that to the peasant/working class, "for which there is no place in the middle-class society [Kaczyński – F.P.]," PiS offers participation in the national community. Kaczyński skilfully stokes the sense of victimhood and wins people over with the promise to settle the scores with perpetrators of their alleged "injustices". To the group of people aspiring to reach the middle class, he gives a sense of moral superiority. Conflicts with the elites and building a sense of dignity by setting weak groups against ones that he makes feel strong constitute a strategy targeting the whole population<sup>61</sup>. These groups include refugees or people from the working class that are in a worse economic situation than others. Moreover, there is a relatively wealthy middle class who has benefitted from decades of economic growth and material goods. Nevertheless, they are dissatisfied with the political system and also have aspirations beyond material issues. All these sentiments were cultivated and amplified by PiS for the benefit of their party. As researchers observed, "the specificity of PiS policy is that these aspirations carry a sense of superiority over degenerate elites and weak minority groups."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the middle class is contemptuous of the elite — former politicians included— due to their own failure to meet their higher expectations, not the elite's failure to meet the expectations of the people in general. According to researchers "their [the former elite] weakness contrasts with the voter's sense of morality. One gets the impression that the critics of the elites served to improve the self-esteem of the critic and confirm his right to define good and evil."<sup>63</sup>

**Based on the aforementioned traits, PiS created something that the authors of this research call "modern authoritarianism," a phenomenon that follows certain patterns similar to its historical counterpart but originates from a contemporary niche society.** Additionally, today's authoritarianism differs from the old one and its attitude towards democracy, as the current one "uses a democratic vocabulary and

60 Gdula, Maciej (2017), *Dobra zmiana w Miastku. Neoautorytaryzm w polskiej polityce z perspektywy małego miasta*, Stowarzyszenie in. Stanisława Brzozowskiego, Krytyka Polityczna, Warsaw, <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/file/sites/4/2017/10/Dobra-zmiana-w-Miastku.pdf>

61 Ibidem, p. 38.

62 Ibidem, p. 36.

63 Ibidem, p. 37.



is seeking legitimacy through extensive mobilization and voting.”<sup>64</sup>

This all took place in a society where, after undergoing a socio-political transformation, democratic values are still very important. Poles value democracy more than other forms of government<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, their support for democracy increased after the 2015 elections when the new PiS government started attacking the rule of law and the institutions of liberal democracy. Similar shifts in recognising the role of democracy were also shown by the significant increase in the level of disagreement with the statement that “for people like you it does not matter whether governments are democratic or undemocratic?”<sup>66</sup> That said, there is still sizeable support for the ruling parties despite the fact that they have introduced policies that are deemed by the majority of experts as contrary to the basic rules of liberal democracy (as it is in case of the PiS).

This phenomenon could be explained by the different ways in which democracy is understood in Polish society and can be interpreted differently according to different political tastes. The rule of law and the protection of minority rights are deemed of the utmost importance by some, especially in the ranks of the opposition, while Poles influenced by authoritarian values and attitudes persistent in society see democracy as a system where the will of the majority prevails over everything else<sup>67</sup>. The latter understanding is related to the political discourse presented by PiS leaders and supported by government-controlled public media. According to them, the ruling party works to strengthen democracy in the country by representing the voice of the majority and listening to ordinary people; whereas the parties ruling before they were working only for their own interest and for the benefit of the

elites — rooted, to a great extent, in the communist era. This pattern thus aligns with common patterns of anti-establishment attitudes common in populist environments.

This divisive discourse renders society vulnerable to populist attitudes. This is more problematic where there are low levels of public trust and a large number of “critical citizens”<sup>68</sup> or “dissatisfied democrats”<sup>69</sup> who, despite valuing democracy, are not satisfied with its current condition in their country<sup>70</sup>. In terms of overall trust in the society, Poland occupies one of the last places among the countries covered by the European Social Survey (ESS). According to this research, individuals with the opinion that „most people can be trusted” were 18% in 2012 and 2014<sup>71</sup> (over four times less than in Denmark, Norway, and Finland). According to the Social Diagnosis study, the same opinion was expressed by 10.5% of respondents in 2003 and 2005, 11.5% in 2007, 13.4% in 2009 and 2011, 12.2% in 2013 and 15.2% in 2015<sup>72</sup>.

Using the prevailing societal trends and presented narratives enabled the PiS to change the constitutional order on the country into a majoritarian democracy. It was, therefore, able to dismantle the most important checks and balances and independent institutions, including the Constitutional Tribunal, common courts, and the public media. They were also able to limit some civil liberties and to amend the electoral system and the authorities watching over it. All these changes were possible due to the strong pro-government propaganda in media outlets pursuing nationalist and populist narratives. Despite large protests, dominant socially conservative ideologies and strong dissatisfaction with domestic politics created a fertile ground for populists, allowing them to maintain their influence in the society.

64 Ibidem, p. 38.

65 Feliksiak Michał, (09.2017), “Opinie o demokracji”, Research communicate, Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) No. 118/2017, p. 2.

66 Ibidem, p. 7.

67 See: „Jedno państwo, dwa plemiona. An interview with Janusz Reykowski”, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 19.03.2016, Warsaw, available at <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,19789701,janusz-reykowski-jedno-panstwo-dwa-plemiona.html>

68 Norris, Pippa (1999), Introduction: *The Growth of Critical Citizens*, in: *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, (ed.) Pippa Norris, p. 1-27, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

69 Klingemann, H.-D. (1999), *Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis*, in: *Critical Citizens*, (ed.) Pippa Norris, p. 31-56.

70 Markowski, Radosław, Kotnarowski, Michał (2016), *Normatywne i ewaluacyjne aspekty stosunku Polaków do demokracji w latach 2012–2015*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 2016, 4 (223), PAN, Warszawa, p. 132.

71 *European Social Survey* 2014, <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/country.html?c=poland>

72 Czapiński, Janusz (2015), *Stan społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Diagnoza Społeczna 2015, Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków – Raport*, Contemporary Economics, 9/4, 332-372. DOI:10.5709/ce.1897-9254.191, p. 351.

**Consequently, PiS was able to not only maintain its middle-class voter base for two years<sup>73</sup>, but it was also able to gain support within other social groups along the years, namely the unemployed, the self-employed and farmers. This was made possible by the favourable economic conditions and the implementation of new social policies.**

One important example is the “500+” programme of child benefits paid after each of two or more children born to the same (married) couple. It seems that without a clear change in Polish opposition parties’ methods, and as long as the positive economic developments persist, the governing party will not be forced to make significant changes in their political orientation domestically.

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

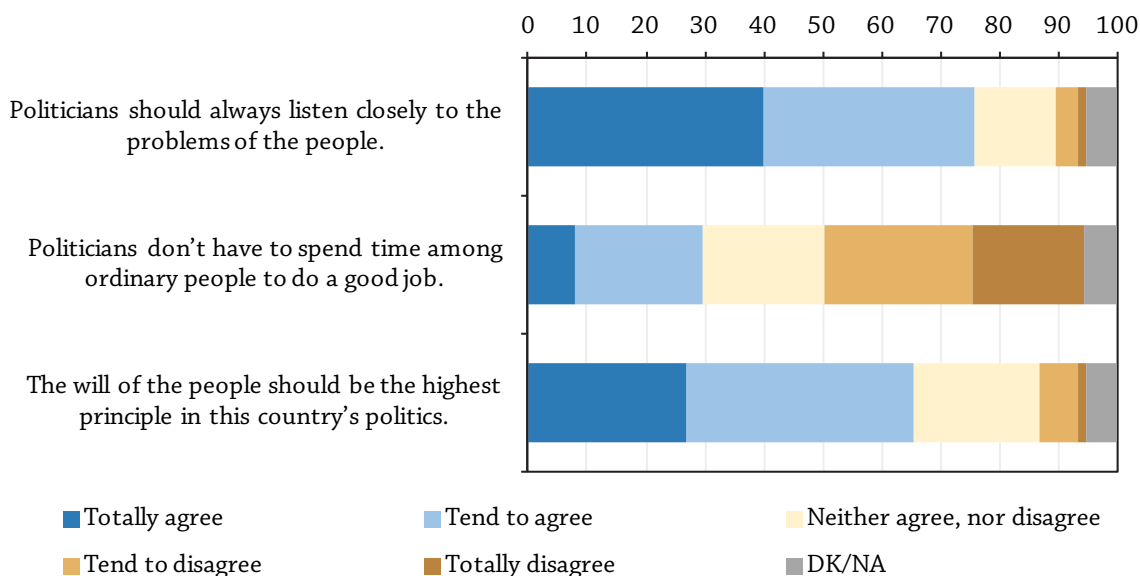
### PEOPLE-CENTRISM

**Similarly to Hungarian society, it is important for Poles that politics is oriented towards**

**the people’s needs.** The majority of respondents tend to agree with the statement that politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people (76% of respondents agree to some extent). In contrast, 44% of those surveyed think it is unnecessary that politicians spend time among ordinary people to do a good job, whereas 29% are of the opposite opinion. Moreover, the majority of Poles (66%) believe that the will of the people should be the highest principle in their country’s politics.

We conducted a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis in order to reveal the factors explaining people-centrism (calculated by using the unweighted average of the items above).<sup>74</sup> Our results show that **gender, region of residence, voting intention and party preference are associated with people-centrism.** Men tend to be more people-centric than women. Those from the eastern<sup>75</sup> regions have the highest people-centrism score, while the scale value is the lowest in the central<sup>76</sup> voivodships. Those with higher intention

**Figure 19.** People-centrist attitudes in Poland (proportion of answers in %)



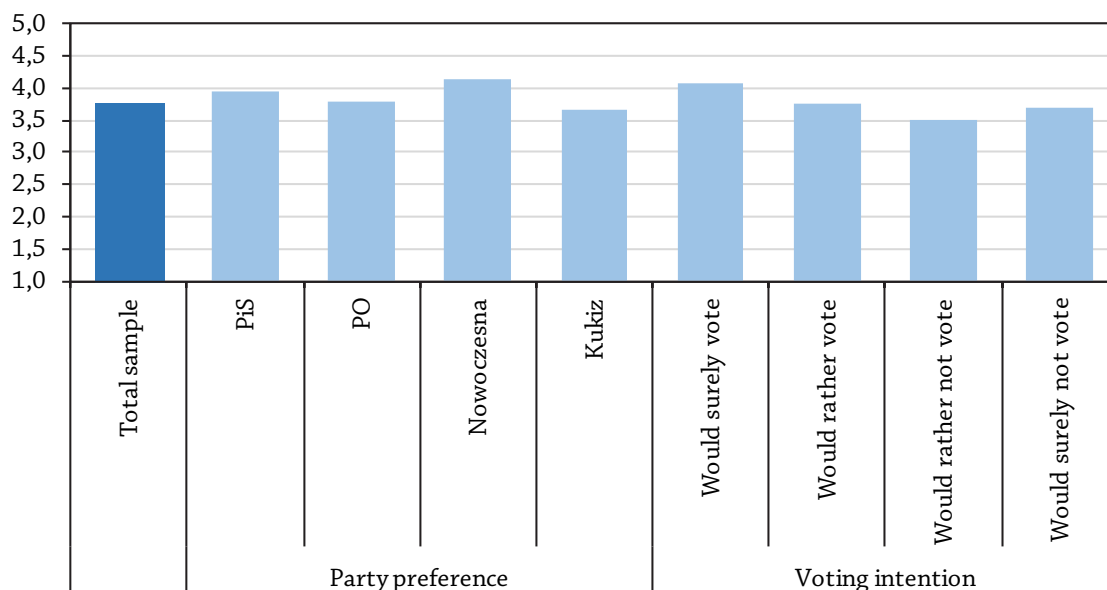
73 For more on the reasons of middle class support to PiS see: Pazderski, Filip (2018), The Middle Class in Poland, in: Arjen Siegmans & Matthias Schäfer (eds.), No Robots: *The Position of Middle Class Households in Nine European Countries*, CDA-WI / Wilfried Martens Centre, accessible at <http://www.no-robots.eu/>

74 Socio-demographic variables (gender, age, highest level of education, type of settlement and region), party preference and willingness to vote were entered in the model. We entered our variables in this way in all subsequent regression analyses.

75 It covers voivodships Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie.

76 That includes Łódzkie and Mazowieckie voivodships.

**Figure 20.** People-centrism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale, where higher number represents higher agreement with people-centrist statements)



to vote had higher people-centrism scores. When it comes to party affiliation<sup>77</sup>, voters of the liberal opposition Nowoczesna party were found to be the most people-centric, while the voters of the opposition agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL) are the least people-centric<sup>78</sup>. PiS voters were found to be less people-centric than Nowoczesna supporters. The latter is interesting in light of the fact that PiS politicians present themselves as those who listen to people and answer their needs, and PiS leaders define their government as one embodying the will of the people.

### POLITICAL ANTI-ELITISM

The majority of the Poles manifested strong anti-elitist attitudes. 59% of them to some extent agree with the statement that "independent of which parties are in power, the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves" and only 8% disagree with that. In contrast, 41% of

Poles believe that government officials (regardless of which party they are affiliated with) use their power to try to improve people's lives and 22% are of the opposite opinion. However, a large part of the population (63%) also believes that people in the government are corrupted, and only 9% disagree with that. Moreover, a negative opinion about the governments is even more pronounced in the case of the effectiveness of elected officials. 74% of Poles believe that politicians talk too much and take too little action, whereas only 6% disagree with that.

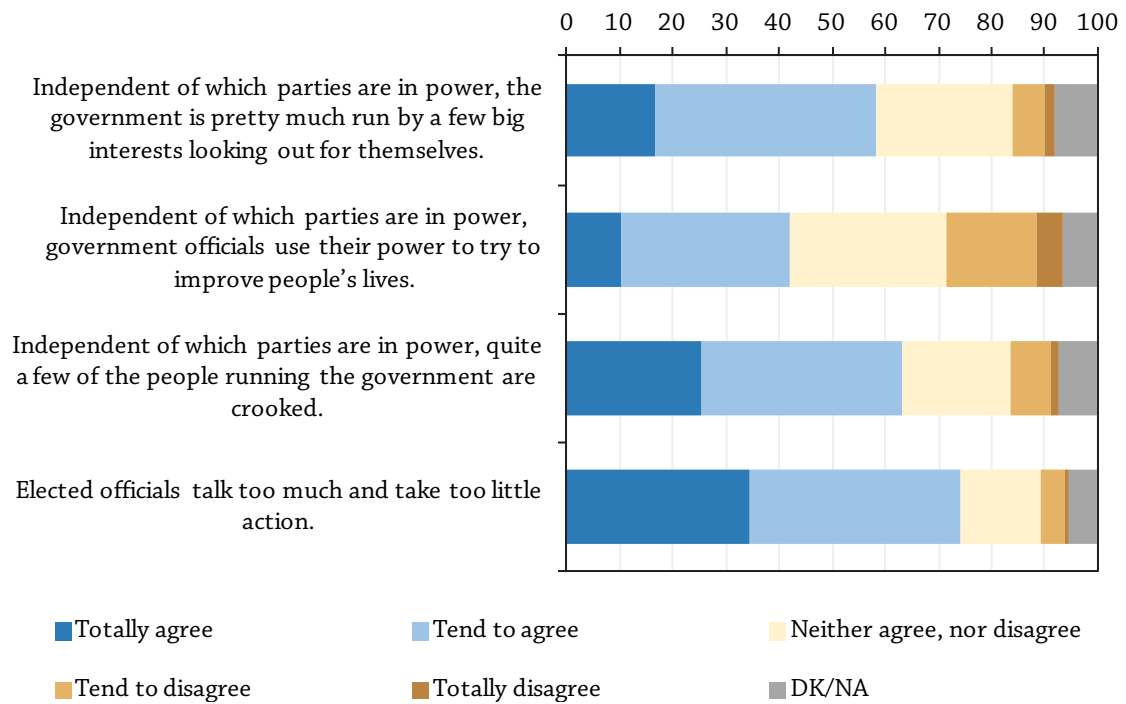
We employed a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis to find out what explains political anti-elitism from the above-mentioned background variables<sup>79</sup>. Our results indicate that only voting intention and party preference play a role in explaining political anti-elitism. **We found a similar pattern to Fidesz voters in Hungary: supporters of the governing PiS party are less likely to score high on the political anti-elitism**

<sup>77</sup> The party preference question was asked only from respondents who would definitely or rather vote in an election. The other respondents (those who knew that they would not vote or who did not know it) did not get this question. As a result, the party preference variable provides information only on the active voters of a party, while we do not have information on those who feel closer to a political party but are rather passive in terms of electoral participation.

<sup>78</sup> As the number of active supporters for these parties was rather small in the sample, one must be cautious when making generalisations for the whole society.

<sup>79</sup> We created a political anti-elitism scale from these four questions by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. The final scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5), and a higher number represents stronger political anti-elitism. We reversed the negative-worded question before calculating the mean.

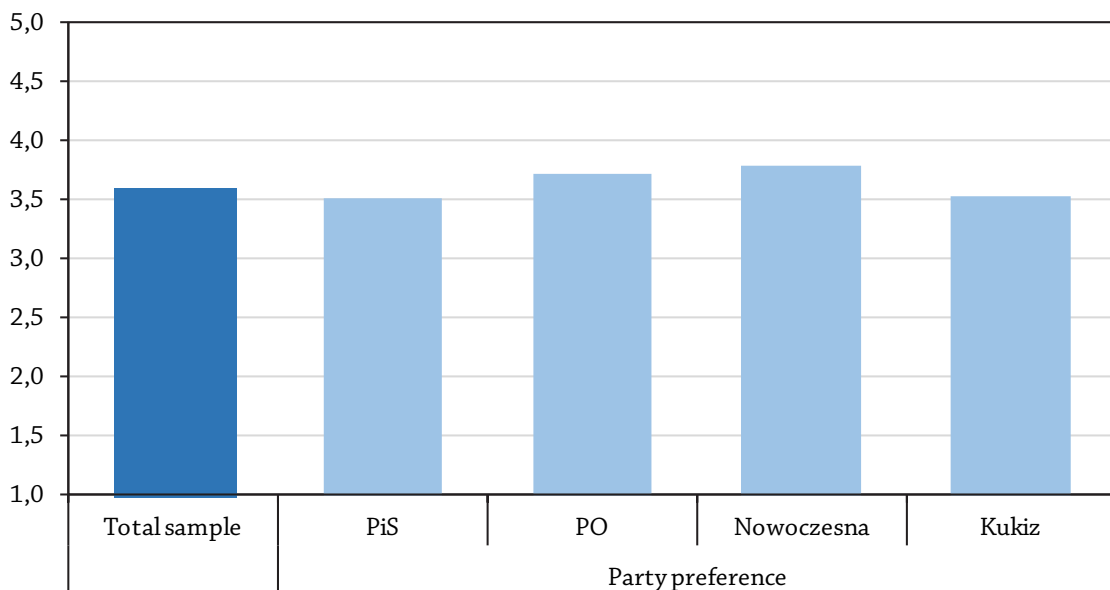
**Figure 21.** Political anti-elitist attitudes in Poland (proportion of answers in %)



**scale.** It is rather surprising considering the fact this party has built its political message on anti-elitist slogans targeted against the elites of the Polish transformation. However, it should also be noted that this survey was conducted after PiS had already been in power for 2 years and had gotten sufficient time to establish its own elite. Additionally, its political

message conveyed the image that there are new, “good” elites related to PiS and old ones linked to the opposition parties and rooted in the communist era. PiS supporters’ low anti-elitism score, therefore, is a reflection of these factors. As also mentioned above, the anti-elitism of PiS voters, similarly to Fidesz voters, mainly targets international organizations,

**Figure 22.** Political anti-elitism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with political anti-elitist statements)





especially the European Union. Politically inactive Poles also had a lower score on this scale, since those who would rather not participate in a general election tend to be less politically anti-elitist.

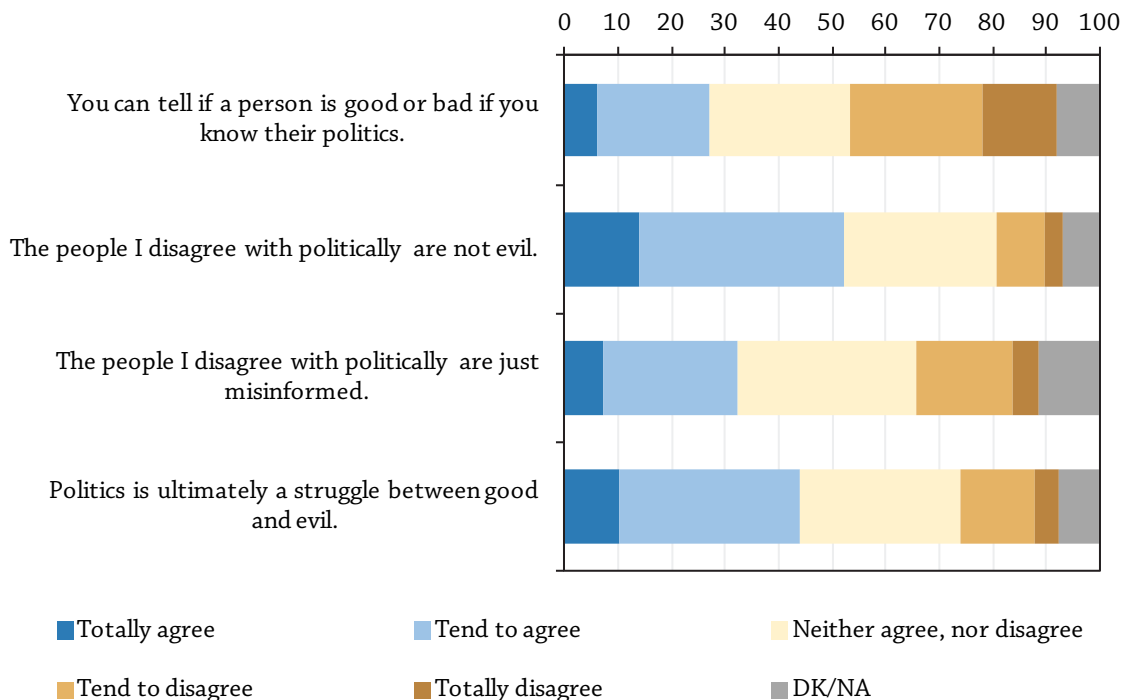
MANICHEAN WORLDVIEW

**Most Poles are not inclined to judge other people based on their political views.** 39% disagree that it is possible to tell if a person is good or bad by knowing their political disposition (27% agree with that). Moreover, more than half of them (52%) are of the opinion that the people they disagree with politically are not evil and 13% are of the opposite opinion. Poles are almost equally divided when it comes to whether the main reason why some people have opposite political opinion is just that they are misinformed – 23% disagree, 32% agree, 33% chose the neutral answer and 11% did not have an opinion on the issue. Nevertheless, a substantive part of Polish society perceives politics in moral or even metaphysical terms. 44% agree with the statement that “politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil” (including 10% who strongly

agree), whereas 18% do not agree with it and 30% chose the neutral option.

A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted<sup>80</sup> to reveal the possible explanations for Manichean worldview. Voting intention, region of residence and party preference turned out to be significant factors. Those who would probably not participate in elections tend to agree more with the black and white understanding of politics. The same is true for those who live in the central region of Poland. Similarly to Hungary, one ruling and one opposition party proved to be the champions of the Manichean worldview: the governing party PiS and the opposition party Nowoczesna<sup>81</sup>. That said, when interpreting the position of the Nowoczesna supporters it is important to note that in our sample they represented only 4.4% of the total number of respondents. However, the result of PiS voters is less surprising since the party’s political message is prone to use the language of moral superiority and inferiority aimed at creating strong divisions in society: those who support the party form a national community and all the others are excluded

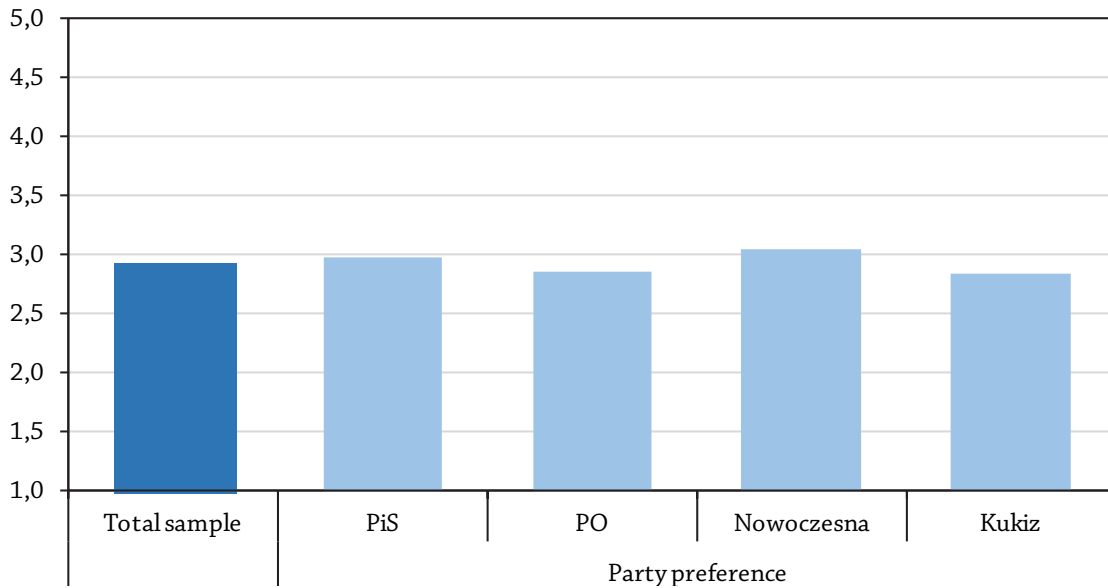
**Figure 23.** Manichean way of thinking in Poland (proportion of answers in %)



80 We calculated the unweighted mean of answers and created the Manichean worldview scale from these four items. This scale’s range is identical with the original questions’ range (from 1 to 5). A higher number represents a stronger Manichean worldview. The negative-worded question was reversed before creating the mean.

81 The standardized beta coefficients are +0.156, +0.129, +0.116 and +0.077, respectively.

**Figure 24.** Manichean worldview scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with Manichean statements)

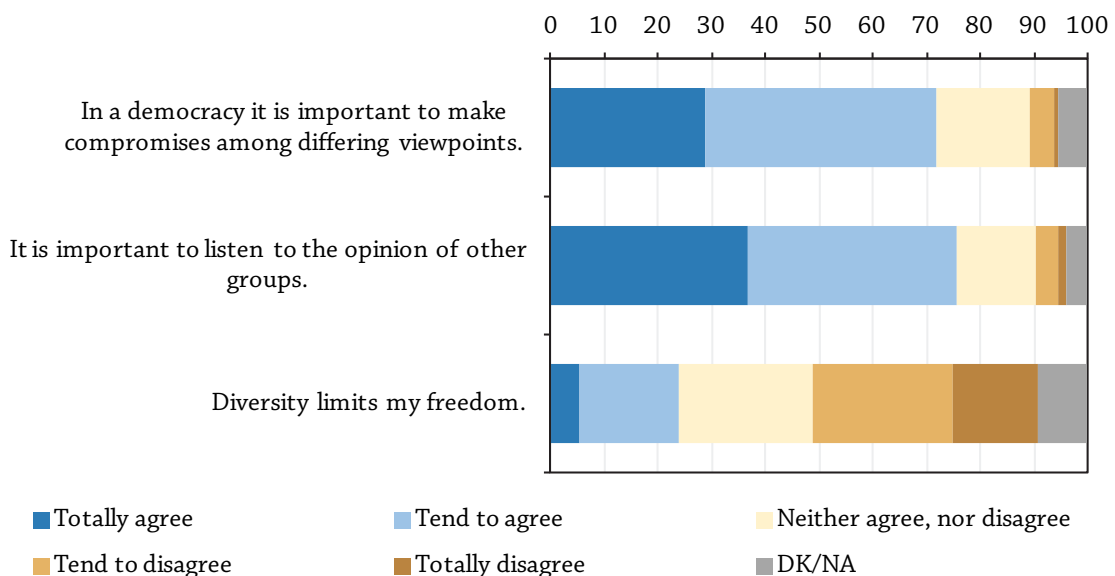


from it. This finding seems to justify the term “modern authoritarianism”<sup>82</sup> as a description of Law and Justice voters. Nevertheless, our research indicates that at the time of this writing, more than two years after PiS came into power, Manichean views on politics can be found among the supporters of all major political forces.

**PLURALISM**

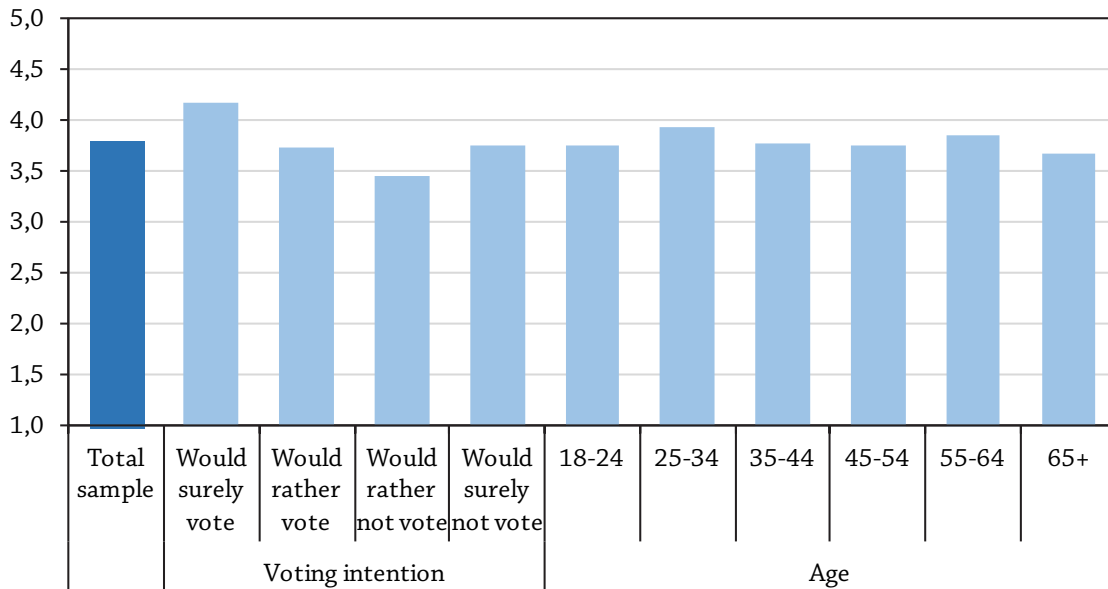
**Polish society seems to be supportive of pluralism.** The majority of respondents (72%) are of the opinion that “in a democracy, it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints” and for 76% of them say it is “important to listen to the opinion of other groups.” Poles are more divided on the question of how diversity limits their freedom.

**Figure 25.** Pluralist attitudes in Poland (proportion of answers in %)



82 See: Gdula, Maciej (2017), „Dobra zmiana w Miastku. Neoautorytaryzm w polskiej polityce z perspektywy małego miasta”, Stowarzyszenie in. Stanisława Brzozowskiego, Krytyka Polityczna, Warsaw, p. 38.

**Figure 26.** Pluralism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with pluralist statements)



While 24% agree with this statement, the relative majority, 42% are of the opposite opinion and 25% settled on the neutral answer.

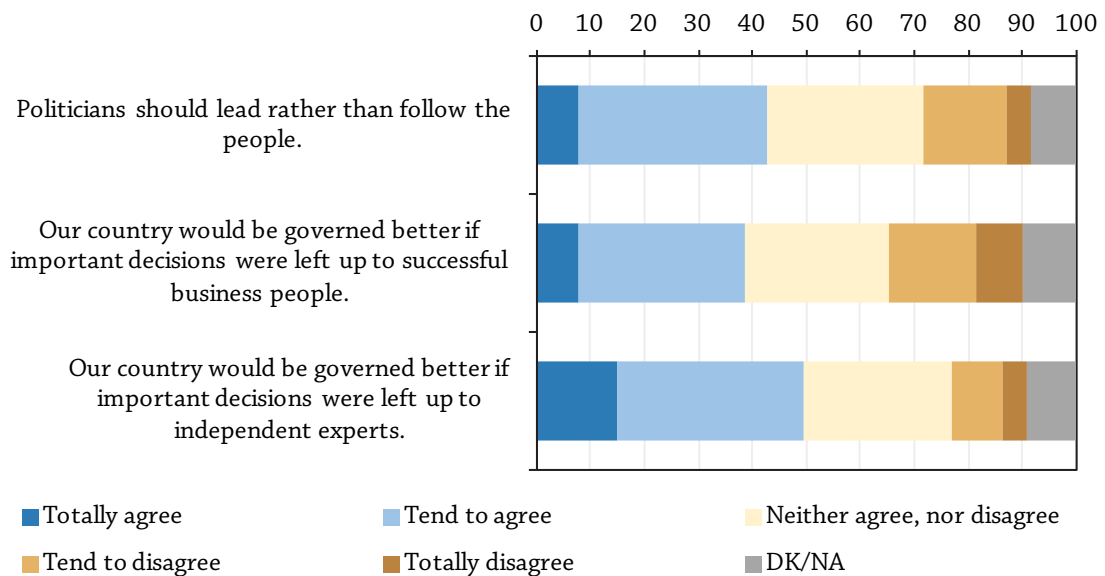
The results of our hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis<sup>83</sup> indicate that only voting intention and age have an effect on this scale<sup>84</sup>.

The politically inactive tend to be less pluralistic politically. Pluralism decreases with age.

**ELITISM**

**A significant part of Polish society is prone to elitism.** Twice as many Poles believe that politicians

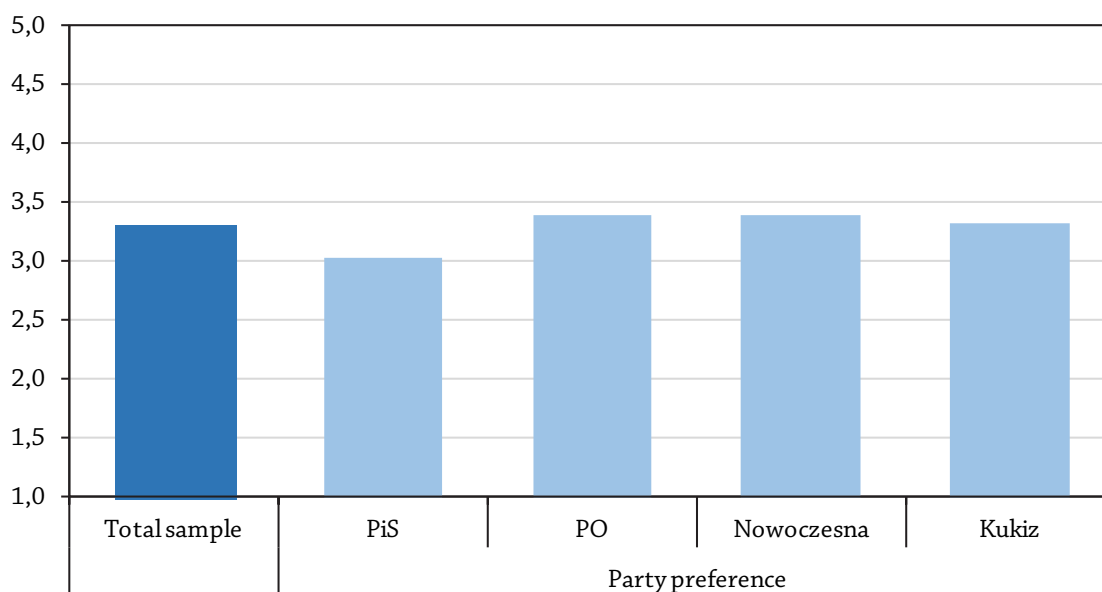
**Figure 27.** Elitist attitudes in Poland (proportion of answers in %)



83 We computed a pluralism scale from these three questions by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. This scale's range is identical with the original questions' range (from 1 to 5), which means that a higher number represents a higher level of pluralism and need for opinion diversity. The negative-worded question was reversed before creating the mean.

84 The standardized beta coefficients are -0.266 and -0.073, respectively.

**Figure 28.** Elitism scores within different groups (mean of answers on a 1-5 scale where higher number represents higher agreement with pluralist statements)



should lead instead of following the people (43%) than those who are of the opposite opinion (20%), while almost one-third of respondents (29%) did not express any opinion on this matter. Additionally, 39% of Poles believe that “Poland would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful business people,” while only 25% think the opposite. That said, more than a quarter of the population does not have an opinion on the issue (27% chose “Neither agree nor disagree”). Exactly half the Polish society believes that important decisions should be left to independent experts<sup>85</sup>, while less than 15% are against such an idea.

The hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis<sup>86</sup> revealed the impact the size of settlement and party preference have on elitism<sup>87</sup>. Larger size of settlement was associated with stronger support for elitism. Voters of PiS were found to be less elitist than those of other parties, which is understandable in light of the party’s ambiguous approach to the idea of political elites (i.e. there are good or bad ones).

#### POPULISM, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE

Poles, while being confronted with two alternatives, believe that in a democracy the use of violence to reach any goal is completely unacceptable. Two-thirds of Poles are in favour of the former option, only 14% chose the option that “in case it is necessary to achieve important goals, one must even turn to the use of violence” (19% do not have an idea or have not provided any answer).

Concerning the active supporters of the four largest parties, **voters of the governing PiS and Kukiz are more likely to accept violence; 17% and 20%, respectively.** Voters of the opposition parties **PO (center-right) and Nowoczesna (liberal) find violence less acceptable** (7% and 0% would accept it, respectively).

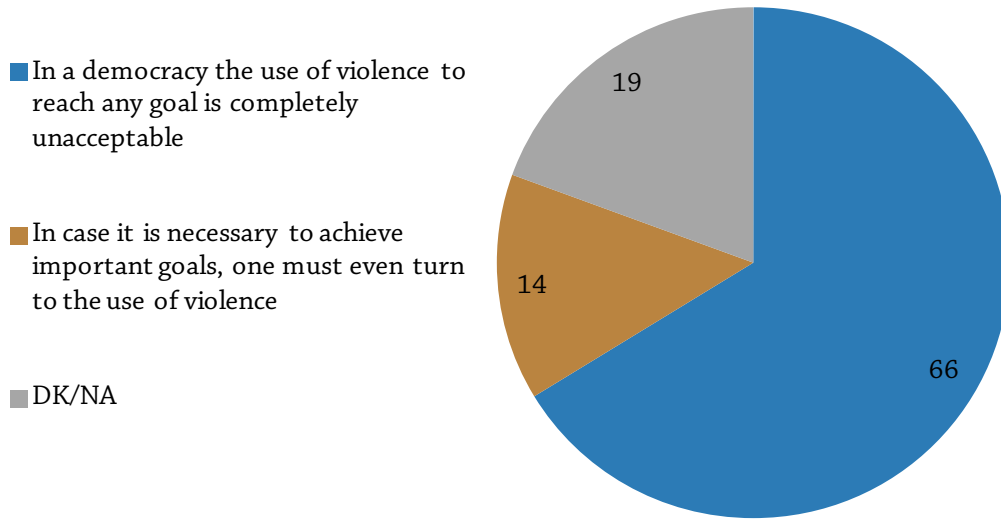
**However, Poles show relatively strong authoritarian attitudes.** 35% of them agree that

85 Interestingly, it is the same share of Polish population that support being ruled by experts as a potential model of government according to Pew Research survey – see: Wike, Richard, et al (2017), Pew Research Center, October, 2017, “Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy”, p. 8.

86 We aggregated the answers to these three questions into one elitism-scale by calculating the unweighted mean of answers. As a result, the scale’s range is identical with the original questions’ range (from 1 to 5): a higher number represents stronger agreement with elitism. There was no negative-worded question in the elitism scale.

87 The standardized beta coefficients are +0.173 and -0.118, respectively.

**Figure 29.** Opinions on the use of violence in Poland (proportion of answers in %)

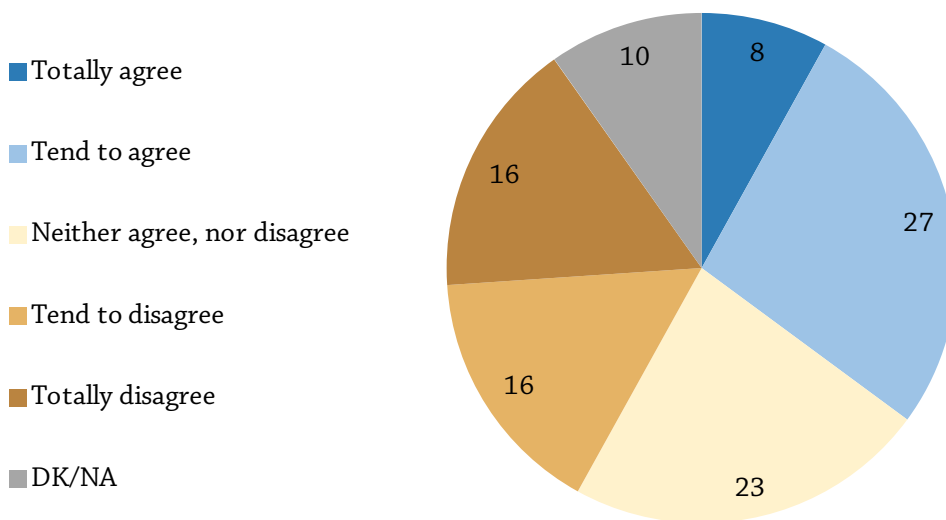


the country would be governed better if important decisions were left to a strong leader instead of the elected politicians<sup>88</sup>, while 32% disagree with that (23% were of a neutral opinion on this matter).

Our multiple linear regressions<sup>89</sup> model indicated that authoritarianism has a connection to five populism-

dimensions. Stronger Manichean worldview, higher level of elitism, and lack of pluralism and people-centrism predicted a greater desire for a strong leader<sup>90</sup>. In other words: those who favour following a strong leader see politics in black and white think that the elite should govern, do not feel the need for

**Figure 30.** Authoritarian attitudes in Poland (agreement with the statement: Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians, %)



88 It is twice as many in comparison to the Pew Research survey, where 15% of Poles agreed that rule by a strong leader would be a good way to govern the country – see: Wike, Richard, et al (2017), op. cit., p. 8.

89 The five populism-dimensions were entered into the model as predictors, and authoritarianism and acceptance of violence were the outcome variables.

90 The standardized beta coefficients of elitism, Manichean worldview, pluralism, and people centrism are +0.277, +0.241, -0.129 and -0.083 respectively.

diversity of opinions and do not find it necessary that politicians take the will of people into consideration.

When it comes to the acceptance of violence, we found that those who do not accept the diversity of opinions and do not find it necessary that politicians take the will of people into consideration are more likely to accept violence in certain cases.<sup>91</sup>

## EXPERT INTERVIEWS

*Interviewees answered various questions on populism. The questionnaire included a theoretical, a historical and practical part. The latter mainly concerned personal experiences.*

- When asked to define populism, almost all interviewees distinguished between two types of populist strategies: hard and soft.
- In defining hard populism, Jan-Werner Müller's interpretation of populism was often quoted. It was thus defined as a concept that promotes strong and exclusionary divisions within society. This was regarded as a new phenomenon in a society that had never previously witnessed delegitimizing narratives between different political parties.
- An interviewee also mentioned the "shock doctrine" in connection with hard populism. This strategy involves using one political event to shock and distract the people, while laws are introduced and passed without anyone noticing parallelly to that. An example of this was the introduction of the Surveillance Act while people were distracted by the refugee crisis and what the politicians were saying or doing about it.
- Soft populism was defined as a concept that has always existed in politics. This strategy involves claiming to be speaking on behalf of a whole chosen group while expressing anti-establishment sentiments. Older interviewees claimed this was a natural phenomenon within a democracy, but younger ones believed that soft populism is not always negative. According to one person, addressing the needs of a chosen group of people is acceptable if it solves some existing problems.
- According to all experts such "soft populism" might be related to demagoguery, but populists do not have a monopoly on the use of demagoguery in public discourse. This tool, they said, is also being utilized by political actors that are not recognized as a populist.
- When speaking about the factors that contributed to the rise of populism, most experts were of the same opinion. It is through vulnerable socio-economic circumstances that populism rises. In other words, populist politicians use the "fertile social ground consisting of people[s] disappointments" to create their narratives. According to one expert: "the path to current populism was possible due to the fact that Poles do not identify with state institutions. Since 1989, they have heard that everything that is state-owned is bad, it must be privatized or close[d] immediately... Additionally, all research shows that respect for the officials in Poland is embarrassingly low".
- It was noted that the opposition's failure to present reasonable answers to people's fears created an even better environment for populist narratives in Poland to utilize people's concerns in political campaigns. **Two experts, a young leader of a conservative think tank and a former minister in the Civic Platform government, pointed out that the growth of populism is related to the poor quality of current politics that are not based on merits, studies and analysis, and the lack of political courage to undertake difficult topics that may trigger social discontent.**
- The modern tools of communication were also mentioned as a contributing factor to the rise of populist attitudes. This includes the influence of echo-chambers, clickbait and fake news on people.

91 The standardized beta coefficients of pluralism and people centrism are -0.163 and -0.115 respectively.

- Experts noted **how unique the character of Polish society is in its attachment to matters of identity and dignity**. Aversion to foreigners and national pride are the most notable features that provide grounds for politicians to create their populist campaigns and slogans. For instance, PiS's campaign focused on restoring dignity to people through the improvement of the 500+ program and through fighting for Poland to be respected abroad with identity-related narratives.
- **The majority of the experts, regardless of their political orientation, observed that the growth of populism in Poland was also due to the weakness of public institutions (the so-called "cardboard state")**, which made them exposed to easy attacks by populists.
- A former employee of a ministry in the Civic Platform government also added that unsatisfied aspirations in Poland create strong grounds for the rise of populism. "Many people graduated from university, but it turned out that there was no possibility for them to achieve social advancement" – added the interviewee.
- **According to practically all the experts, the most populist political party or campaign in post-1989 Poland are PiS activities since 2015. Moreover, only these activities can be described as hard populism as it was defined earlier**. Most of the experts also observed that the new wave of populism in Poland and the **current rise of hard populism in the country started with the competition between PO and PiS that has dominated political life in Poland since 2004-5, starting with the division between "Solidary Poland"<sup>92</sup> and the vision of a liberal Poland**.
- One of the experts pointed to previous cases of populist activities in Polish politics, namely the presidential campaign of Stanisław Tymiński in 1990 and the activities of the Samoobrona party and its leader, Andrzej Lepper in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
- There were different ideas concerning an effective way to fight populism.
  - » **One of the experts (serving as a minister in the last government) suggested that there is a need for organising frequent meetings with people on the local level, building social bonds with them and working on their group's identity-building**. The same person also suggested that the liberal bloc should try to mirror activities of conservative groups by creating their own values on the positivity of open society and establishing their own heroes who would reflect these values with their activities.
- **Another expert (a member of a new left-wing party's governing board) suggested** taking the initiative from the populists in particular issues and reframing the language they use on these topics in the public discourse. According to a young representative from a conservative think tank, this strategy should also take the form of courageous activities in politics aimed at working on topics that cause negative emotions in society (like the refugee issues).

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92 Solidary Poland was a right-wing, Catholic-nationalist political party in Poland.



## BEYOND POPULISM: TRIBALISM IN HUNGARY AND IN POLAND

In our study, we wanted to integrate all the variables and findings into one model. As discussed above, there is a moderate positive correlation between the black and white, Manichean worldview and authoritarian attitudes. Those who would prefer a strong leader instead of elected politicians are more likely to see the world of politics in black and white. We labelled respondents who share both of these attitudes *tribalists*. In other words, they are individuals who rally around the leader of their tribe, divide the world into the good “own tribe” and the evil “other tribe,” and therefore reject the other tribe. In order to see who are the tribalists in the two countries and what is their share within these societies, we decided to categorize respondents based on their answers to two selected questions. One is the statement on authoritarianism and the other is the strongest statement from the Manichean worldview scale<sup>93</sup>. Those who agreed (‘tend to’ or ‘totally’) with both statements are classified as a *tribalist*, while those who have the opposite view (i.e. tend to or totally disagree) are called inclusive. The third group incorporates all other respondents. They either agreed with one and disagreed with the other statement or chose the neutral option (i.e. neither agree nor disagree). These respondents have mixed/neutral views.

**The proportion of tribalists in Hungary is 10%, while the share of inclusives is 29%. The rest have a rather mixed or neutral opinion on these issues.**

Tribalism does not seem to be associated with the minimal criteria for populism. On the one hand, tribalists are the least people-centric compared to the other two groups. Their score on the political anti-elitism scale is close to the average of the total sample. On the other hand, they are the least pluralist and the most elitist. Tribalists are the most likely to accept the use of violence to achieve important goals, 16 % of them share this view. This rate is much higher

than that of the inclusives (5%) and it is also more than the result of the mixed/neutral group (13%).

**Tribalists are overrepresented on the governing side: 59 % of tribalists would vote for Fidesz.** Within the inclusive and the mixed/neutral groups we observed similar proportions, 33 and 34%, respectively. Voters of the Democratic Coalition (DK) are also overrepresented among tribalists, while none of them would vote for Politics Can be Different (LMP). Tribalists’ are more likely to vote than the average; however, they are not as active as the inclusives.

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of tribalists, they are interestingly more likely to be female<sup>94</sup>, have primary education only, and live in smaller towns in the eastern countryside. Within this group of respondents, males, those having secondary education with a high school diploma and living in large cities or villages in the western countryside are underrepresented.

Inclusives have different socio-demographic attributes. The gender ratio among them is close to the average, with a slight bias towards women. They tend to be older, have finished secondary education with a high school diploma and live in villages. They are underrepresented in Budapest. Inclusives seem to be the most likely to participate in elections.

**The proportion of tribalists in Poland is 15%** (higher than in Hungary) while the share of inclusives is 19% (lower than in Hungary). The absolute majority (66%) are in between. Similarly to Hungary, tribalists were found to be the least people-centric. They are the least pluralist and the most elitist.

One-fifth of tribalists accept the use of violence to achieve important goals. This rate is substantially higher than that of the inclusive group (7%) and it is also above the results of the mixed/neutral group (15%).

Tribalists are much less active compared to inclusives when it comes to voting intention. 57%

93 Solidary Poland was a right-wing, Catholic-nationalist political party in Poland.

94 The reason behind this outcome is that female respondents agree more with the Manichean statement. Regarding the statement on authoritarianism, there is no statistically significant difference between the answers of men and women. Furthermore, correlation between the Manichean and the authoritarian statements is stronger among women respondents than among men. As a result, they tend to agree more with both statements, compared to men.



	Tribalist	Inclusives	mixed/neutral
PiS	23%	23%	18%
PO	7%	9%	7%
Nowoczesna	4%	7%	4%
Kukiz	1%	6%	5%
All other parties	6%	6%	5%
Do not have a preferred party (but would vote)	12%	25%	14%
Not applicable (would not vote)	47%	25%	47%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

of them would vote if an election was held, while this ratio is 75% among inclusives. In this regard, tribalists are similar to those with mixed/neutral views, as their activity rate is almost the same.

**Support for PiS is equal within tribalists and inclusives** (23%), slightly higher than among the mixed/neutral group (18%). However, taking into account that the activity rate is much lower among tribalists than among inclusives, active voters of the governing party are overrepresented within active tribalists.

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of tribalists, there are no statistically significant differences regarding age and gender compared to the other groups. Tribalists are overrepresented in medium-sized cities (residents between 20 000-100 000) and in the largest urban areas (at least 500 000) in the central and western regions of Poland. Their share is the lowest in the southern region. Regarding the level of education, those with only elementary or basic vocational education tend to express mixed/neutral views on these issues. As a consequence, the proportions of both tribalists and inclusives are below-average in these educational groups, whereas one can find more tribalists and inclusives among those who have at least a BA degree. Similarly to the Hungarian results, inclusives are more likely to live in villages and they are underrepresented in the capital city.

## LOCAL EVENTS

The project's outreach activities consisted of 14 events in Poland<sup>95</sup> and Hungary<sup>96</sup>. They were held at colleges, schools and community centres for local audiences that are usually not targeted by awareness-raising projects. Political Capital and the Institute of Public Affairs teamed up with grassroots organisations. In Poland, the events were realized with the involvement of Autonomia Foundation, Soclab Foundation, and WatchDog Poland. These NGOs involved six additional grassroots communities. In Hungary, the main grassroots partner, Civil College Foundation, ensured through its local networks that all seven events were hosted and organised by seven different small, local grassroots movements. Altogether, we involved 17 formal or informal grassroots organisations in our project.

These events, each bringing together some 20-80 participants, reached around 400 people overall, explored important topics such as conspiracy theories, fake news, citizenship, gun control, women's rights, core values, the structures of democratic states and civic participation, and addressed the specific local contexts and issues. This initiative was a pilot project to identify and test which methods work most effectively in facilitating dialogues so that they could be expanded and employed in other communities and countries.

The most important conclusions from the events:

- Poland, as it is a larger country, is more decentralized compared to Hungary when it comes to identity, autonomy, and views on polarizing issues.
- Although fear and insecurity dominate the public discourse in both countries and hinders civic dialogue on the local level, there are still very strong local communities demonstrating resilience against illiberal, authoritarian trends and fearmongering.
- The lessons inferred from these events indicate that there is an extremely strong need to build and improve the debate culture and the foundations of constructive dialogue in these countries because they are increasingly missing from Hungarian and Polish society and this provides a fertile ground for populism and polarisation.
- The local organisations we worked with are usually resilient to polarisation and populist tendencies but also fragile due to their inability to strengthen social embeddedness and visibility. The events we organized in cooperation with the local grassroots organizations were very important for them because they helped these groups get recognized by their local authorities and gain more visibility among the inhabitants. Additionally, local activists could finally get places/environment independent from any of the actors active on the local political scene in order to engage in work with their local communities. This also meant that they received short-term financial support from an independent source.
- Our experience shows there is a need for more long-lasting local activities that would enable working on more difficult issues, ironing out deeply rooted conflicts within particular communities (i.e. related to difficult local memories). In one of the small towns in Eastern Poland, our local partner has decided to stay away from a topic related to collective memory (of cursed soldiers), claiming that it would require much longer and deeper intervention in the local community in order to come up with real solutions and loosen local tensions.
- The most successful events were those where we managed to erase the "populist divide" of expert vs. audience and create an environment where the experts and audience could exchange ideas from an equal position. By encouraging everyone to take part in the discussion, share their experiences and views on the topics at stake, we could stimulate discussions where everyone felt safe and brave enough to express agreement or disagreement.

95 Locations included: Białystok, Bielsko-Biała, Częstochowa, Hajnówka, Lubartów, Radom, Świebodzin

96 Locations included: Debrecen, Eger, Gyál, Mátészalka, Pécs, Szeged, Tiszavasvári

## APPENDIX

Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	0	2	16	23	56	2	100
Poland	1	4	14	36	40	5	100

Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	13	15	29	14	25	4	100
Poland	8	21	21	25	19	6	100

The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	2	3	25	29	38	3	100
Poland	1	7	21	39	27	5	100

Independent of which parties are in power, the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	2	5	35	25	29	5	100
Poland	2	6	26	42	17	8	100

Independent of which parties are in power, government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.*							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	13	18	39	13	13	3	100
Poland	10	31	30	17	5	7	100

Independent of which parties are in power, quite a few of the people running the government are crooked.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	1	4	33	27	31	5	100
Poland	1	8	20	38	25	7	100

You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	36	17	23	12	7	4	100
Poland	14	25	26	21	6	8	100

The people I disagree with politically are not evil.*							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	50	22	20	3	3	3	100
Poland	14	38	28	9	4	7	100

The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	28	22	29	16	8	5	100
Poland	5	18	33	25	7	11	100

The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	5	10	41	21	20	4	100
Poland	3	16	31	29	14	8	100

Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	2	4	30	26	36	3	100
Poland	1	5	15	40	34	5	100

Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	24	15	31	14	11	6	100
Poland	4	14	30	34	10	8	100

In a democracy it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	1	3	22	29	43	3	100
Poland	1	4	17	43	29	6	100

It is important to listen to the opinion of other groups.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	0	2	17	27	52	2	100
Poland	1	4	15	39	37	4	100

Diversity limits my freedom.*							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	7	14	24	15	34	7	100
Poland	5	19	25	26	16	9	100

Politicians should lead rather than follow the people.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	6	6	36	26	22	4	100
Poland	5	15	29	35	8	9	100



Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful business people.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	15	13	34	21	10	7	100
Poland	9	16	27	31	8	10	100

Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independent experts.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	8	9	30	23	24	6	100
Poland	5	10	27	35	15	9	100

Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians.							
	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	26	12	27	15	11	9	100
Poland	16	16	23	27	8	10	100

In the following you will hear two statements. There are people who agree with the first one, and others agree with the second one. Please tell me which one of the two you agree more.				
	In a democracy the use of violence to reach any goal is completely unacceptable.	In case it is necessary to achieve important goals, one must even turn to the use of violence.	DK/NA	Total
Hungary	83	11	6	100
Poland	66	14	19	100