

Social cognition and democracy: An eastern European case study

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Abstract

The collapse of communism over two decades ago provided one of the most dramatic opportunities for new democracies to emerge in Europe. However, the transition from dictatorship to democracy has been far from simple, and in some countries, such as in Hungary, there are worrying recent signs of popular support for a newly emerging autocratic system. This paper will discuss some of the psychological mechanisms responsible for the apparent weakness of democratic systems and institutions. It will be argued that the effective functioning of democracy requires a particular kind of individual consciousness that involves a set of psychological values and beliefs that include individualism, autonomy, independence and trust. The paper will discuss the historical and social reasons why such attitudes and beliefs have not fully developed in Eastern Europe, and empirical data from a national sample survey and from the analysis of written narratives will be presented illustrating the psychological constraints that impact on the functioning of otherwise well designed democratic institutions.

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Introduction

The last few decades saw the emergence new democratic systems in a number of areas of the world (Eastern Europe, the Arab world, South America). However, there are also worrying signs that these new democracies are extremely vulnerable, and easily succumb when facing internal and external challenges. This chapter will analyze some of the likely psychological reasons for the weakness of democratic institutions in what was once one of the most promising new democracies in Europe, Hungary, and the absence of popular support for maintaining democratic institutions. The recent dismantling of democracy in Hungary resulted in critical comments from the European Parliament, the Venice Commission, the European Commission and Mr. Barroso, and the President of the EU himself – but to no avail. There was surprisingly little popular protest by Hungarians themselves. How can we explain the apparent lack of support for democratic institutions? Do Hungarians not care about democracy? In what way does the world view of Hungarians differ from well-established democracies? Is it the case that Hungarians think differently from their Western counterparts, and hold to a different set of social and political values?

Social cognition and democracy

In a fundamental way, democracy lives in the minds of its citizens, and without the psychological prerequisites, even well designed democratic institutions remain hollow shells devoid of content. Ever since Plato's 'Republic', political philosophy and psychology were concerned with the mental prerequisites of well-functioning democratic systems. There is also a veritable tradition in social psychology of analyzing the mental representations of particular nations or cultures, reaching back to Wundt's classic work on 'Volkerpsychologie' (Forgas et al., 1977, 1980, 1985, 1995; Wundt, 1911; Borgida, Federico & Sullivan, 2009).

This investigation was motivated by a need to understand the psychological factors that are responsible for the low commitment to, and lack of popular support for democratic values and institutions in countries such as Hungary. We will present new evidence showing that in contrast with most Western democracies, people in Hungary indeed do think differently about social and political issues, their mental representations are excessively skeptical and cynical, guided by a poorly elaborated understanding of the causal forces that shaped their nation's history. Whereas most Western nations tend to support and even over-justify their political systems (Jost & Banaji, 1994), we will argue that Hungarians display an opposing pattern of 'system derogation': a motivated belief that their social and political system is inherently unfair, unjust and corrupt, and beyond redemption. In this chapter, we will discuss the phenomenon of system derogation, and the social, historical, cognitive and personality variables associated with system derogatory world views.

The retreat from democracy

In the last three years the ruling populist right-wing government of Hungary has turned away from democratic principles and that form the ideological foundations of the European Union, and moved towards an authoritarian, nationalistic and often dictatorial political ethos that was more characteristic of the Europe of the 1930s. In a series of administrative, constitutional and political moves they eliminated the various checks and balances that constrained their power. This included the imposition of a new undemocratic constitution supported only by the ruling party, the installation of party political appointees for terms of up to 9 to 12 years to run most of the state's institutions, including the central bank, the media and the judicial system, the forced retirement of large numbers of judges, and the emasculation of the constitutional court (Majtenyi & Miklosi, 2013; The Telegraph, 2012). In July 2013, the Tavares Report commissioned by the European Union

strongly condemned the unprecedented erosion of democracy in Hungary. As Scheppele (2013), a constitutional scholar at Princeton University writes, “It is hard to imagine a more sweeping indictment of the Fidesz constitutional revolution in Hungary over these last three years...”, urging “that the Hungarian government changes its ways and returns to the path of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights” (p. 2).

It is surprising that this turn to autocracy should occur in a country such as Hungary. When communism collapsed in 1989, Hungary was by far the most open, progressive and liberal country in the communist block, and was widely expected to make the most rapid transition to democracy and the free-market system. Hungarians repeatedly demonstrated a desire for freedom and democracy, as in the 1956 revolution, seeking to re-establish their historical place among the nations of Western Europe. Hungary also played a pivotal role in precipitating the collapse of the Iron curtain by allowing East Germans to flee to the West, and so causing the collapse of the Berlin wall.

Yet the recent dismantling of democracy by a nationalistic right-wing party occurred without any serious opposition, and a majority of voters continue to support this autocratic regime. The regime’s modus operandi can be described as a new-age version of *national socialism*. *Socialism*, because the regime has a strong centralizing, ‘statist’ orientation, it distrusts the market system, and prefers to regulate, run, own and nationalise as much of the economy and social institutions as possible. And the regime is explicitly *nationalist*, because its political legitimacy is provided by an explicitly populist, nationalist and ethnocentric propaganda machine where all outsiders (including the IMF, and the EU that supports Hungary to the tune of billions of euros) are depicted as enemies that conspire to oppress the Hungarian nation.

It seems that Hungarians now support a government that models itself on the quasi-fascist governments of 1930s. Why have many Hungarians lost faith in democracy, and support an

autocratic demagogue to lead their country? Similar trends have also occurred in other Eastern European countries, such as Poland during the rule of the Kaczynski brothers, and in Slovakia under the rule of Fico, but have never reached the extremes of Hungary. The disappointing weakness of democracy in the Arab world points to a similar question: what are the apparently missing psychological - mental, cognitive and personality – qualities that are the prerequisites for democratic institutions to take root and flourish? Understanding the reasons for this crisis is of critical importance not just for politics and social psychology, but also for our understanding of the psychological underpinnings of democracy. We will present new empirical evidence illustrating the reasons why democracy can be eroded so rapidly when its psychological underpinnings are weak or missing.

What went wrong since the transition to democracy in 1989?

With the wisdom of hindsight, we can see that the unprecedented transition from a monolithic, state-run dictatorship to a free-market democracy two decades ago was performed in haste, and many mistakes were made. In the absence of domestic capital, much Hungarian industrial and agricultural capacity was either destroyed, or ended up in the hands of a small elite who were often close to the former communist regime. Huge fortunes were made, and tens of thousands of people lost their livelihoods. Instead of material progress, large sections of the population experienced absolute, or relative impoverishment, especially in comparison with the ostentatious life styles of the 'new rich'. Dissatisfaction has been brewing for years; in every election but one there has been a change of government, parties pursued short-term, opportunistic agendas, crucial economic, education, health service and administrative reforms have been neglected, and no government has been able to fix the state's bankrupt finances. Corruption has become endemic, yet the newly rich 'kleptocracy' has largely escaped punishment. The new democratic system produced

unprecedented inequalities (Berkics, 2008; Kolosi,& Róbert, 2004; Kolosi,& Tóth, 2008). Many voters report nostalgia for the former dictatorial, but certainly more egalitarian regime (Fülöp, 2008; Magyar Gallup Intézet, 1998; Örkény, 1997; Örkény,& Székelyi, 2000).

It is in this context that the current regime came to power in 2010 with a two-thirds majority. Rather than using their powerful political mandate to carry out long-overdue social and economic reforms, the regime has instead embarked on a quest to entrench their power, eliminate democratic checks and balances, and use the powers of the state to enrich a coterie of closely aligned entrepreneurs. The regime established state control over media outlets, limited the number of recognized churches, establish political control over the judicial system, and adopted a nationalistic constitution without any meaningful consultation.

Perhaps most remarkable is that the nationalistic rhetoric of this government proved very effective in creating a perceived enemy in EU, presenting the government as carrying on a life-and-death 'freedom struggle' against Brussels 'foreigners', multinational corporations and (Jewish) international financiers who want to re-colonize Hungary. Why are Hungarian voters so receptive to such populist and demagogue propaganda? The surprising effectiveness of this kind of chauvinistic romantic nationalism requires a psychological explanation, and a consideration of the historical events and entrenched social cognitive world views that make Hungarians particularly vulnerable to this kind of propaganda.

Towards an explanation

It is a truism that democracy, above all, lives in people's minds and consciousness. To understand the current crisis of democracy in Hungary, we need to understand the subjective mental representations and 'life worlds' in Lewin's terms of the citizens of these newly democratic

countries. For our first cues we must look at the role of historical experiences in how people perceive and relate to different social systems. While in Western Europe the nation and the state historically grew together, countries like Hungary suffered centuries of foreign occupation, and it was the symbolic 'nation' that was traditionally mobilized *against* the oppressive state (Bibó, 1986; Szűcs, 1973). László (2013) suggests that recurring traumatic experiences in a group's history produce psychological representations and historical narratives of injustice, powerlessness and victimhood that become deeply entrenched (László & Fülöp, 2010). Such dominant historical narratives are transmitted in the educational system and shape citizen's consciousness and psychological attitudes and values. The evidence we present will suggest that in countries such as Hungary, for historical reasons, the psychological and mental habits that are essential for democracy to flourish remained poorly developed. In this discussion we will document three aspects of this world view:

(1) System derogation and belief in an unjust world: First we will present evidence from a representative national survey documenting a widespread tendency of system derogation and beliefs in an unjust world.

(2) The role of historical narratives: Next, we will present empirical data based on the analysis of written texts, school books and personal narratives demonstrating a passive, poorly articulated view of history where perceptions of victimhood and self-pity play a key role.

(3) Cognitive variables: Finally, we will explore the role of cognitive factors (such as low need for cognition and high need for closure) and authoritarianism in shaping the political representations of Hungarians.

Disenchantment, system derogation and 'unjust world' beliefs

In a representative national survey (N=1000) and parallel survey of 100 lawyers, we used eight questions to assess current attitudes towards democracy and the socio-political system (see Table 1 for questions). Results showed that most respondents perceived Hungarian society negatively, and believed that democracy will not work as it should in Hungary for some decades. There is even evidence for a nostalgic view of the previous communist system. Both samples thought that political parties do not have the interest of the country in mind, corruption needs to be controlled, and that average citizens cannot influence public life. Attitudes in the general population, and the more select lawyer samples were very similar, although lawyers expressed slightly less pessimistic views. The majority of respondents in both samples believe that it is best to ignore public life and focus on family and friends instead. Further, and most worryingly, the majority thought that 'a strong political leader should be in control to solve the problems of the country', although most respondents also believe in the value of elections (Table 2). Surprisingly, the preference for autocratic leadership was strongest among the wealthiest and most well-to-do segments of the population (Figure 2).

Table 1 about here

Figure 1 about here

System derogation. In the same representative (N=1000) we also assessed 'system derogation', a construct that we may define as the ideological opposite of system justification. System justification is the enduring motivation to defend and justify the status quo, even when it may be disadvantageous to some groups. This occurs because people have a psychological need to maintain the appearance of stability and order in their lives, and they do so by perceiving the prevailing social, economic, and political norms as good, legitimate, and desirable (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). System justification theory (Jost, & Banaji, 1994) suggests that people not only believe in a

just world in general, but they also justify the current political, economic and social system. Thus, just-world beliefs and system justification are correlated and play a complementary role in stabilizing and legitimizing the current social establishment (Jost, & Hunyady, 2005; Sidanius, & Pratto, 1999).

Unlike in Western democracies, just-world beliefs and system justification are less characteristic in Eastern Europe. Both Hungarians and Poles score lower on just world beliefs than do citizens of Western nations (Sallay, & Krotos, 2004; Dolinski, 1991, 1996; Wojciszke, & Dowhlyuk, 2006), and report lower perceived justice and trust in the establishment (Örkény, 1997; Berkics, 2008; Csepeli, Örkény, Székelyi, & Barna, 2004; van der Toom, Berkics, & Jost, 2010; Wojciszke, Baryla, & Mikiewicz, 2008). These differences are so striking that we may talk of a 'system derogation' bias rather than 'system justification' as the fundamental pattern in these cultures. System derogation may be understood as a stable psychological tendency to perceive socio-political systems as inherently bad, unfair, unjust and illegitimate. Just as system justification is motivated by a need to maintain belief in a just world, system derogation may also serve important defensive psychological objectives. If the system is fundamentally unfair and illegitimate, then individual failures, shortcomings and undesirable outcomes can be safely attributed to a bad system. In this respect, system derogation functions in a similar way to self-handicapping (Dolinsky, 1996).

In our nationwide survey (Kelemen, 2011) system justification / derogation was measured using a shortened version of Kay and Jost's (2003) scale (see Table 2, Cronbach's $\alpha = .63$). Both samples displayed a basic system derogatory world view. Rather than displaying the well-demonstrated phenomenon of 'system justification', Hungarians (and probably other Eastern European countries as well) displayed the opposite mental tendency, 'system derogation' or system scepticism. A parallel survey of a sample of 100 lawyers also confirmed that most

respondents thought that current Hungarian society is fundamentally dishonest, needs to be radically reformed, most political decisions do not serve the common good, social conditions are getting worse every year, and people do not have an equal chance to be happy and wealthy. Despite these overwhelmingly negative socio-political attitudes, the majority of respondents also felt that for them, 'Hungary is the nicest place in the world'. This kind of romantic nationalism seems entirely detached from the very negative perceptions of current reality (Table 1). The romantic endorsement of Hungary as an ideal place seems more common in the older age-groups, while younger people, who presumably are more mobile and know more about the outside world are less romantic (Figure 1).

Table 2 about here

Figure 2 about here

We also performed a regression analysis, using political party preference, left-right political orientation, age, gender, residence, educational level, income and economic situation to predict system derogation. Those with a right-wing party preference ($b=-.101$, $SE=.024$, $\beta=-.200$, $p<.001$), lower income ($b=.057$, $SE=.014$, $\beta=.186$, $p<.001$) and in a worse economic situation ($b=-.097$, $SE=.030$, $\beta=-.140$, $p=.001$) showed the strongest system derogation compared to voters of left-wing parties and those with higher income ($R^2=.105$, $F(8,579)=8,53$, $p<.001$). Such widely shared views that de-legitimize the political system can have wide-ranging political consequences. The motivated belief that the 'system' is inherently unfair and unreasonable can have a corrosive effect on people's trust in, and commitment to a democratic system and their willingness to abandon it in favour of more autocratic alternatives, as has been the case in Hungary.

Unjust world beliefs. According to the just-world hypothesis (Lerner & Miller, 1978), people want to perceive the world as a just place where people usually get what they deserve. These beliefs are prevalent in Western democracies (Lerner, 1977; Miller, 1977). In contrast, our representative national survey (Kelemen, 2011) provides clear evidence of the existence of an opposing belief system in Hungary. We used a shortened version of Dalbert's (1999) scale, including eight statements (see Table 3; Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

The majority of respondents believed that the world in general is an unjust place, where people do not get what they deserve, and where justice does not prevail over injustice. However, injustice in people's personal lives was more the exception than the rule (Table 3). Lawyers saw the world as more just than did the population at large. We found a strong relationship between system derogation and belief in an unjust world ($r = .48, p < .001$). A regression analysis identified just one significant predictor of unjust world beliefs: the respondents' perceived economic situation, $\beta = -.195, p < .001$. Those who saw themselves as disadvantaged were more likely to see the world as fundamentally unjust, consistent with the predicted motivated nature of unjust world beliefs ($R^2 = .083, F(8,579) = 6,511, p < .001$).

Table 4 about here

Overall, Hungarians are clearly pessimistic, see the world as unjust, and hold system derogatory beliefs. An analysis of specific perceptions of the justice and legal system confirms this conclusion (Table 4). The majority of respondents thought that influential people are treated differently by the law, the administration of justice is not independent of politics, judges have a disproportionate influence on the outcome of cases, and that law and justice are not the same in Hungary. Wealth and socio-economic status mediated these beliefs, as poorer respondents saw the

administration of justice as more politically biased, while the well-off show less scepticism towards the judicial system (Figures 3 and 4).

Figures 3 and 4 about here

When taken together, these results demonstrate a deep-seated and wide-spread tendency among Hungarians to take a highly sceptical and derogatory view of the socio-political and legal system as a whole, and see the world as a fundamentally unjust and unfair place. The tendency of system derogation offers a potentially corrosive psychological foundation for establishing a new, democratic system. In order to explain why Hungarians are so sceptical about social systems, we will next look at Hungarian history and the historical narratives that shaped these views.

Social cognition and history

A capsule historical overview. After settling in the Carpathian basin in 898, and forming a unified state in AD 1000, the Kingdom of Hungary by the middle ages became one of the richest and most important countries in Christian Europe, more populous and wealthier than England (Lendvai, 2011). Hungary possessed some of the richest silver and goldmines, it occupied the entire Carpathian basin and beyond, and it was a major player on the European stage. This came to a crushing halt in 1526 when the expanding Ottoman Turkish empire defeated the Hungarian army at Mohacs, leading to 150 years of Turkish occupation, followed by centuries of Habsburg dominance. A series of Hungarian revolutions were defeated, shaping a sense of national identity characterized by feelings of victimhood, suspicion and distrust towards foreigners, and an exaggerated sense of the unique role of language and culture in maintaining a threatened identity. After the defeated 1848 revolution, in 1876 a historic treaty between the Habsburg empire and the restive Hungarian nation resulted in the establishment of the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The next fifty years,

1867 to 1918, saw a phenomenal economic, political and cultural evolution that brought Hungary back within the orbit of Western European developments.

After the lost first world war, in 1918 Hungary suffered probably the greatest historical trauma. In the Trianon Peace Treaty the victorious entente powers, led by France forced Hungary to give up two-thirds of its historical territory, and millions of Hungarians became ethnic minorities in the newly created and largely hostile surrounding states such as Romania and Slovakia. To this day, arguments about Trianon remain live political issues. The loss in the first world war was followed by a bloody but short-lived communist putsch, followed by the emergence of Miklos Horthy as governor of Hungary. The 1920s and 1930 saw slow consolidation, and the establishment of an autocratic, nationalistic, right-wing regime under Horthy. In pursuing territorial objectives, Hungary inevitable fell within the orbit of nazi Germany and the lost second world war, it became a communist dictatorship under Soviet military occupation.

This brief overview is essential in order to understand that Hungary, despite it often rebellious history, had not been truly an independent state for most of the last 500 years. Yet it managed to retain a strong sense of national identity and culture. Many of the ideological and political movements that shaped the evolution of Western democracy – such as the Enlightenment, liberalism, individualism and the emergence of an assertive and independent bourgeoisie – have not taken root in Hungary (Bibo, 1986; Lendvai, 2011). In this sense, many Hungarian voters can still be characterized as living in a pre-modern age, characterized by an archaic sense of romantic, nationalistic and ethnocentric sense of identity. The idea that individuals should act as independent, autonomous citizens, and take responsibility for their own fate have simply not become established in the Hungarian national consciousness.

Historical narratives and social identity

Psychologists and historians have long recognized that in the course of history, nations form historical narratives that serve a number of psychological and identity functions (Hobsbawm, 1992; White, 1981, Stearns & Stearns, 1985). Analyzing the narrative language used when describing national history offers an empirical method for analyzing 'folk psychology' (Allport, 1924). Research by Laszlo (2003; Laszlo et al., 2013) produced illuminating empirical narrative analyses documenting how Hungarians think of themselves, documenting a recurrent pattern of victimhood, distrust of foreigners, and romanticised ideas of a unique national identity and destiny.

Agency (or the lack of it, victimhood) are important components of national identity and can explain psychological characteristics of a nation's culture such as strength or vulnerability, autonomy or dependence (László 2008). Attributing agency to in-group vs out-group sources is a sensitive indicator of national identity (Laszlo, 2012). Accepting agency for negative outcomes implies accepting responsibility for failures, whereas assigning agency to outgroups indicates defensiveness and the inadequate cognitive elaboration of historical traumas. Using a computerized content analytic method (Laszlo, 2013), a series of studies analyzed texts in history textbooks, historical novels, newspaper texts and everyday spoken narratives by respondents from a stratified sample of 500 subjects. Analyses of perceived agency (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) showed that agency of the Hungarian ingroup is much lower than the agency of the out-groups in both history school textbooks and folk-narratives, and blaming outsiders for negative events is especially noticeable in both samples.

Figures 5 and 6 about here

Emotions. Certain emotions and emotional patterns as reported in historical narratives can define a culture, a pattern confirmed by cultural anthropologists (Mead, 1937; Benedict, 1946) as well as by social psychologists (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such deep-seated patterns of emotional

reactions can also be uncovered by analyzing linguistic data featuring historical group narratives, especially narratives about historical traumas. Analyzing textbooks, literary works and personal narratives as described previously, altogether 57 emotion types with 918 occurrences were identified. According to the data, sadness and hope were the emotions that most distinguished Hungarians from other nations. Hope and enthusiasm are most common in positive, whereas sadness and disappointment in negative events. When comparing the pattern of these emotions (sadness, disappointment, fear, hope and enthusiasm) between Hungarians and outgroups, Laszlo and Ehman (2013) concludes that “the results portray a vulnerable Hungarian national identity and a long-term adoption of the collective victim role. /The/ emotional and cognitive organization of the Hungarian national identity as it is expressed in historical narratives shows a deep attachment to the glorious past and a relatively low level of cognitive and emotional elaboration of the twentieth century and earlier traumas... /suggesting/ that this historical trajectory is not the most favorable ground to build an emotionally stable identity around. As we saw, emotions that are implied in this trajectory are fear, sadness, disappointment, enthusiasm and hope” (pp. 216-217).

Self-evaluations. Despite the perceived lack of agency, self-evaluations were much higher for the ingroup versus outgroups. Hungarians were evaluated positively in positive events and outgroups were negatively evaluated in negative events in both folk stories and textbooks. Inflated self-evaluations paired with low ingroup agency are particularly striking, especially in negative events when Hungarians were clearly perpetrators (e.g. holocaust). These historical narratives assign high agency to outgroups (eg. the Germans as solely responsible for the holocaust) in negative events, thereby absolving the ingroup of all responsibility. This is reminiscent of what Bar-Tal (2000) described as the identity state of collective victimhood. Collective victimhood occurs when ethnic groups or nations experience repeated traumas, losses, repressions and failures and these experiences make it difficult to maintain beliefs in the group as competent, strong and

capable, and so threaten the integrity or survival of the collective. Collective victimhood may function as a protection of positive group-image by maintaining perceived moral superiority and refusing of responsibility, avoiding criticism and evoking sympathy from other groups (Fülöp, Csertő, Ilg, Szabó, Slugoski & László, 2013).

This empirical analysis is confirmed by Bibó (1991), a prominent Hungarian political thinker. He argued that repeated historical traumatisations and the permanent threat to national existence lead to pervasive fear which in turn produced cognitive and emotional regression. Traumatic collective experiences produce distorted perceptions of reality and political illusions resulting in a psychological state resembling characterized by collective victimhood and 'political hysteria' (Bibó, 1991).

This insecure sense of national identity helps to explain why system derogation and belief in an unjust world have become so characteristic of the mental and political landscape of Hungary. The potential of manipulating a collective sense of national grievance and victimhood has always been there for a populist leader (such as the current prime minister Orbán) to exploit in order to establish political legitimacy. Understanding national history and identity thus goes some way towards explaining the willingness of a significant part of the Hungarian electorate to believe in conspiracy theories and the populist nationalist propaganda of the current regime. Claiming that Hungary is fighting a life-and-death freedom struggle against the IMF and (mostly Jewish) international financiers, that Hungary is being colonized by the EU may seem bizarre and outlandish to objective observers, but these claims resonate with significant portions of the Hungarian electorate, because their own understanding of history has been coloured by historical narratives that emphasize victimhood, exploitation, and conspiracy against a small but valiant people. Psychological variables

such as cognitive style and authoritarianism also play an important role, as we shall see in the next section.

Cognitive style and authoritarianism

Historical and cultural processes can also shape the psychology and mental habits and cognitive styles of individuals. Many fundamental cognitive tendencies that were first thought to be universal, such as the fundamental attribution error (perceiving causation in the individual and not the situation) do differ across individualistic versus collectivist cultures (Miller, 1984). Some social cognitive representations that are fundamental to Western democracies, such as liberalism, individualism and autonomy do not manifest themselves the same way in countries such as Hungary. Cognitive style and authoritarianism can play a key role in shaping political representations. In this section we will explore how political preference and demographic variables are linked to cognitive style and authoritarianism in a nationally representative Hungarian sample.

Cognitive style, enduring and consistent patterns of acquiring and processing information may show individual and cultural variability (Messick, 1976). We looked at two psychological measures here: (1) need for closure (the extent to which people prefer certain rather than uncertain answers; Kruglanski, 1989), and (2) need for cognition (the extent to which people prefer effortful cognitive processing; Cacioppo, & Petty, 1982) were assessed in a representative national sample of 1000 respondents, whose party preference, age, gender, educational level, residence, income and economic situation were also recorded.

People who have a high **need for closure** prefer definite answers, are more confident, prefer fewer alternatives and are less cautious and considerate. Need for closure was measured using a short version of the original Need for Closure scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), translated and validated in Hungarian by Csanádi, Harsányi, and Szabó (2009),

including four statements: “I don’t like situations that are uncertain”; “I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life”; “When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different options on the issue as possible”; “I frequently make important decisions at the last minute”; these items showed adequate reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .69$). There is typically a moderate correlation between high need for closure and conservative political beliefs, as well as dogmatism and authoritarianism (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Need for cognition was measured with a short version of Cacioppo and Petty’s (1982) scale, including five statements: “I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is likely a chance I will have to think in depth about something”; “The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me”; “It’s enough for me that something gets the job done; I don’t care how or why it works”; “I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems”; “I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally” ($\alpha = .75$).

Need for cognition is typically negatively correlated with need for closure (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Combining these two measures, one can identify persons with a “rigid cognitive style”, whose dispositional need for closure is high, while their need for cognition is low. Cognitive rigidity has political implications, and can be related to either left, or right wing attitudes (Kossowska & van Hiel, 2003). System justification or derogation can also be closure-friendly cognitive strategies (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

Authoritarianism has long been a key variable in understanding political beliefs and prejudice (Adorno et al, 1950). High authoritarians tend to subordinate themselves to superiors, protect their group’s rules and are hostile to those who challenge authority (Altemeyer, 1996). Authoritarianism is also linked to cognitive rigidity and conservatism (Altemeyer, 1998), although in the Soviet Union the highest scorers on authoritarianism were

communist party members. Authoritarianism and socialist ideology were also correlated in a Hungarian sample (Pentony et al., 2000), confirming the existence of left-wing authoritarianism. We measured authoritarianism using five statements : “Everybody has to know his or her place in life in terms of both superiority and inferiority”; “I would rather be told what to do than come up with my own decision every time”; “It is both important to know how to obey and how to command”, selected from questionnaires measuring this construct ($\alpha=.63$).

Political orientation and psychological variables

A correlational analysis showed that nationally, high need for closure was negatively correlated with need for cognition ($r=-.22, p<.05$), and positively correlated with authoritarianism ($r=.31, p<.05$). **Need for closure** was significantly predicted by right-wing nationalist political orientation $b=.025, SE=.012, \beta=.100, p<.05$; right-wing party preferences, $b=.059, SE=.024, \beta=.122, p<.05$; older age, $b=.005, SE=.001, \beta=.184, p<.01$, and country rather than capital city residence $b=.145, SE=.050, \beta=.123, p<.01$ ($R^2=.065, F(8,579)=5,02, p<.001$). **Need for cognition** was significantly predicted by higher educational level, $b=.249, SE=.033, \beta=.325, p<.01$, being male rather than female, $b=-.147, SE=.048, \beta=-.117, p<.01$, and better economic situation, $b=-.081, SE=.038, \beta=-.089, p<.05, (R^2=.174, F(8,579)=15,22, p<.001)$. **Authoritarianism** was predicted by right-wing party preference, $b=.048, SE=.024, \beta=.097, p=.046$, older age, $b=.003, SE=.001, \beta=.119, p<.01$, and lower educational level, $b=-.084, SE=.026, \beta=-.148, p=.001$ ($R^2=.057, F(8,579)=4,360, p<.001$). Interestingly, authoritarianism scores were lower for liberal voters than **either** for supporters of left-wing and right-wing parties ($M=2.89$ for liberals, $M=2.99$ and 3.06 for left- and right-wing parties,

$F(3)=2.723, p<.05$), suggesting that left wing voters were *no less* authoritarian than right-wing voters.

These analyses suggest that the kind of conservative, nationalistic and populist world view promoted by the current government to justify the dismantling of democratic checks and balances is most likely to find ready acceptance among segments of the population that are characterized by a combination of high authoritarianism, high need for closure and low need for cognition. This cognitive style is likely to be linked to low level of cognitive elaboration that was also demonstrated in the way dominant historical narratives were constructed, as seen in the previous section. Overall, our analyses go some way towards explaining why democratic institutions do not enjoy the kind unquestioning support that is taken for granted in Western Europe. A history of oppression and historical failures has given rise to a dominant national identity that is characterized by ideologies of victimhood and blaming others. System derogation and belief in an unjust world are the attitudinal consequences of these historical experiences, and a close-minded and autocratic mindset are its psychological manifestations.

Conclusions

In this chapter we tried to explore some of the historical, psychological and cognitive factors that may explain why democracy seems such a fragile institution in some newly democratic countries, such as Hungary. We argued that for democracy to flourish, individual citizens have to trust the 'system', and think and act in an autonomous, confident, individualistic and assertive manner. Countries such as Hungary suffered from centuries of oppression where the ideology and mental habits of robust individualism have not had a chance to establish themselves. We have found that in a representative national sample, Hungarians demonstrate a high degree of system

scepticism and system derogation, and general beliefs in an unjust world. These attitudes appear to be rooted in historical experiences and historical narratives that emphasize lack of agency and victimhood, a lack of ability to take any responsibility for historical traumas, paired with a defensive, unreasonably positive and poorly elaborated evaluation of the in-group and nation. In the final section of the chapter, we reviewed evidence from a representative survey showing that it is the poorer, right-wing voters who represent the main electoral support for the ruling nationalist party that are most likely to be characterized by high authoritarianism, high need for closure and low need for cognition. It is the combination of these psychological characteristics that are most likely to make an individual vulnerable to simplistic government messages emphasizing external enemies and victimhood. As Plato noted more than 2000 years ago, one of the greatest dangers for democracy is that ordinary people are all too easily swayed by the emotional and deceptive rhetoric of ambitious politicians. Our results suggest that even countries with initially well-designed democratic institutions, such as was the case in Hungary, may succumb to autocracy if the historical foundations are lacking, the democratic institutions are not valued, and if the psychological characteristics and mental habits of the population are poorly adapted to the requirements of democracy.

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Table 1. Disenchantment and pessimism about the current social and political system (after Kelemen, 2010)

	Representative Sample	Lawyer Sample (N=100)
1. Democracy will not work as it should in Hungary for several decades.		
disagree	21%	29%
Agree	79%	71%
2. Ignoring public life and only caring about our family and friends is not right.		
disagree	35%	9%
Agree	65%	91%
3. People lived better before the change in the political system.		
disagree	24%	40%
Agree	76%	60%
4. Ordinary people can influence public life.		
disagree	67%	67%
Agree	33%	33%
5. Political parties do not have the interests of the country in mind.		
disagree	18%	29%
Agree	82%	71%
6. It is worth participating in elections, since political decisions can be influenced in this way.		
disagree	12%	7%
Agree	88%	93%
7. The fight against corruption is necessary in Hungary, since, in the end, its outcome will be beneficial.		
disagree	12%	4%
Agree	88%	93%
8. A strong political leader should be in control to solve the problems of the		
disagree	16%	19%
Agree	84%	81%

Figure 1. The link between preference for strong autocratic leadership, and wealth: The most well-to-do segment of respondents are most likely to prefer strong leadership (after Kelemen, 2010).

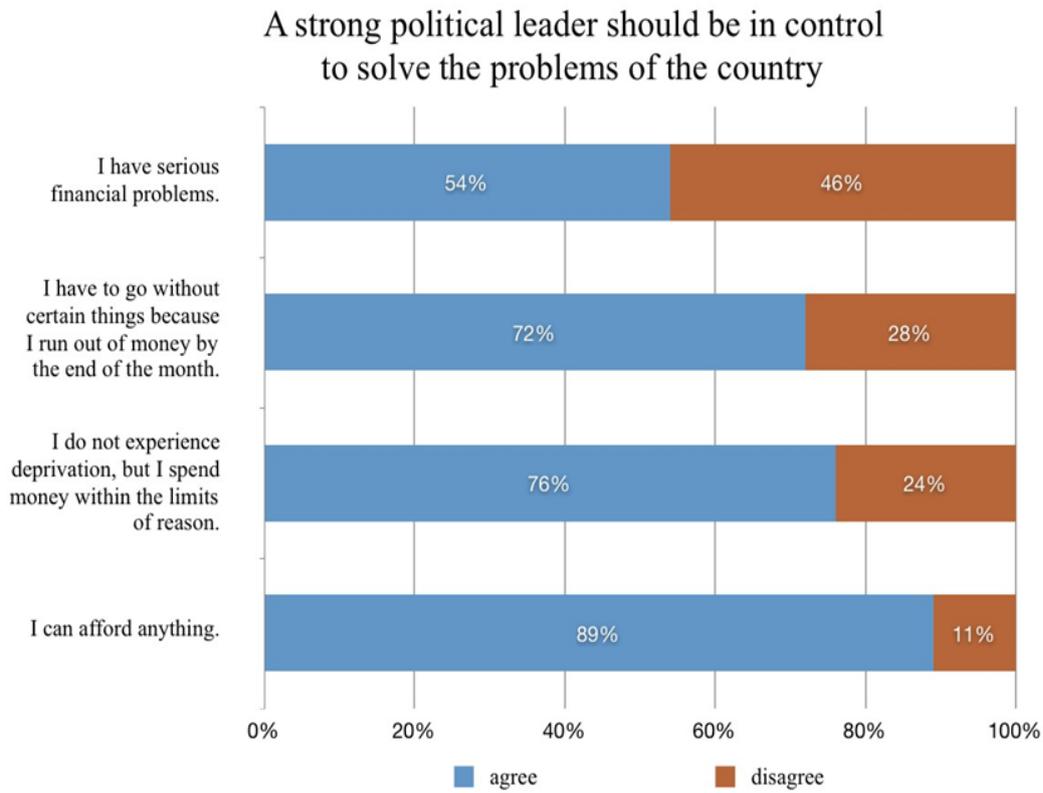


Table 2. System derogatory beliefs (After Kelemen, 2010)

	Representative Sample (N=1000)	Lawyer Sample (N=100)
I think Hungarian society is honest.		
disagree	70%	49%
agree	30%	51%
The structure of Hungarian economics and society should be radically reformed.		
disagree	8%	16%
agree	92%	84%
For me, Hungary is the nicest place in the world.		
disagree	22%	18%
agree	78%	82%
Most of the domestic political decisions serve the interest of the common good.		
disagree	81%	74%
agree	19%	26%
In Hungary, everybody has an equal chance to be wealthy and happy.		
disagree	76%	69%
agree	24%	31%
Social conditions get worse year by year.		
disagree	14%	22%
agree	86%	78%

Figure 2. The relationship between age, and belief that Hungary is the nicest place in the world: romantic nationalism is strongest in the older age groups (after Kelemen, 2010).

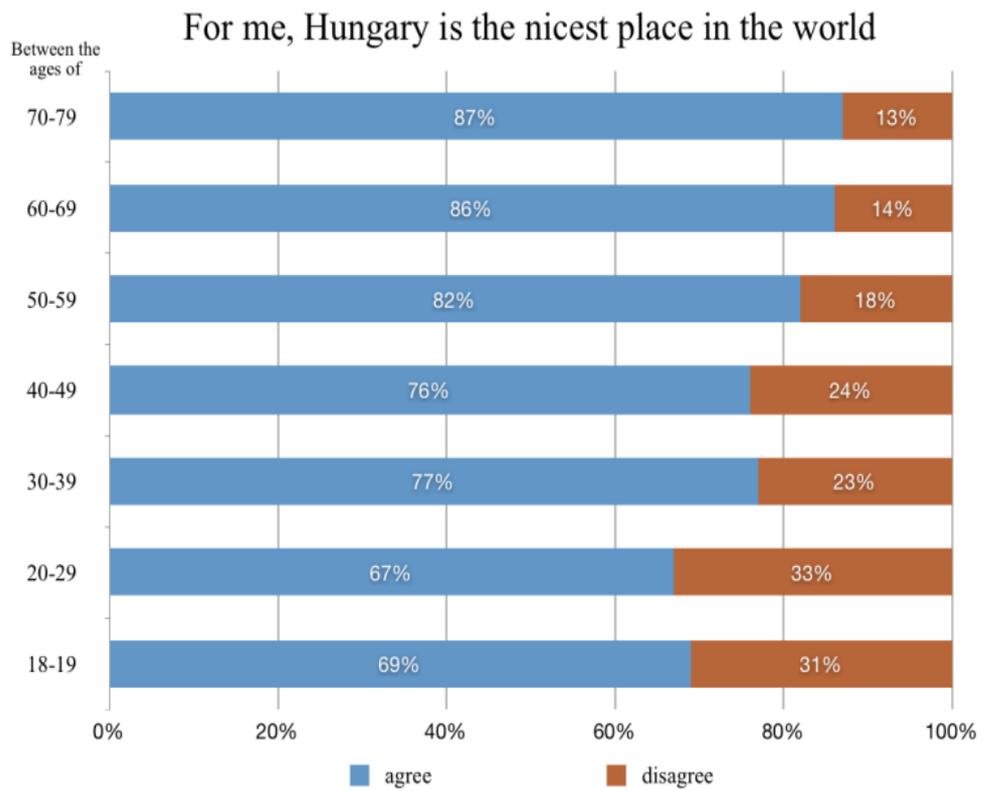


Table 3. Belief in an unjust world – General and Personal items (after Kelemen, 2010).

	Representative Sample (N=1000)	Lawyer Sample (N=100)
GENERAL		
In my view, the world is a just place.		
disagree	60%	51%
agree	40%	49%
People usually get what they deserve in life.		
disagree	57%	40%
agree	43%	60%
I firmly believe that injustice with respect to all aspects of life (professional, family, political) is more of an exception than the rule.		
disagree	47%	26%
agree	53%	74%
I am sure that justice always prevails over injustice.		
disagree	61%	32%
agree	39%	68%
PERSONAL		
Important decisions concerning my life are usually fair.		
disagree	43%	6%
agree	39%	94%
I usually get what I deserve.		
disagree	49%	10%
agree	51%	90%
Unjust events in my life are more of an exception than the rule.		
disagree	42%	13%
agree	58%	87%
Most of the things which happen in my life are right.		
disagree	45%	12%
agree	55%	88%

Table 4. Perceptions of the justice system (after Kelemen, 2010).

	Representative Sample (N=1000)	Lawyer Sample (N=100)
When compared to the average person, influential people are treated differently in the eyes of the law.		
disagree	15%	51%
Agree	85%	49%
The administration of justice in Hungary is independent of politics.		
disagree	79%	46%
agree	21%	54%
The judge assigned to a case influences the outcome of legal procedures.		
disagree	22%	21%
agree	78%	79%
Everyone is treated equally in Hungarian courts.		
disagree	72%	32%
agree	28%	68%
Law and justice are separate concepts in the case of verdicts.		
disagree	20%	45%
agree	80%	55%

Figure 3. The relationship between respondent's wealth and their perception of the independence of the judicial system (After Kelemen, 2010).

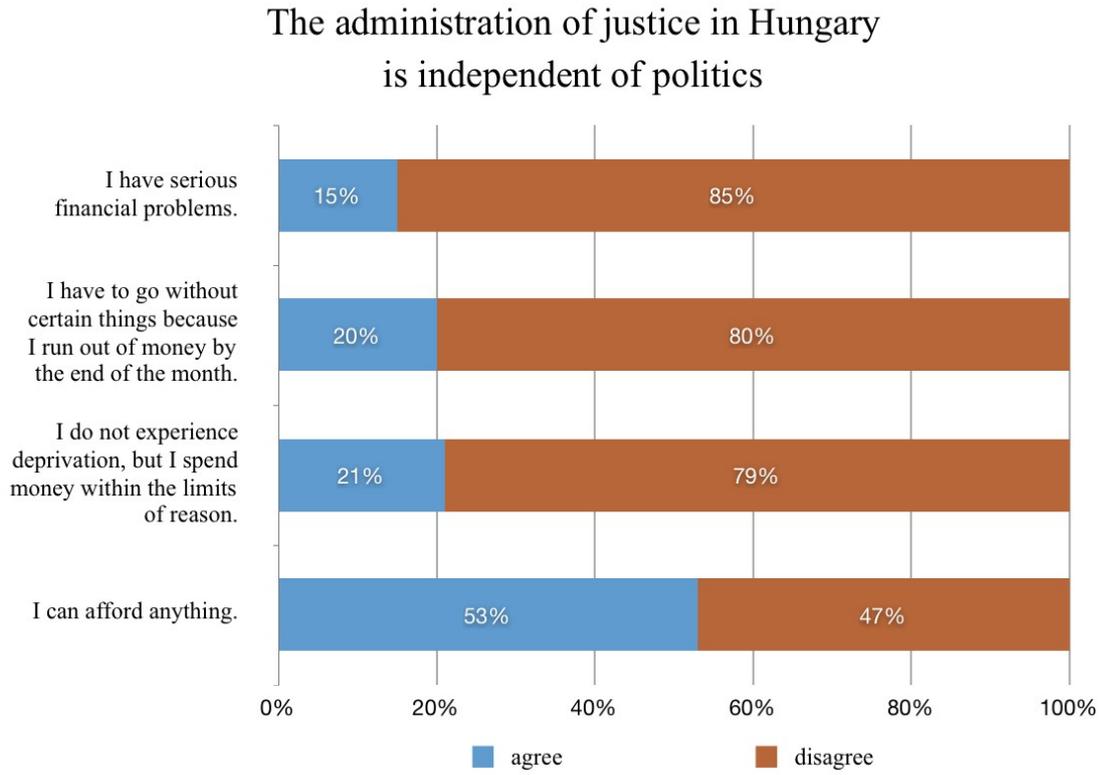


Figure 4. Relationship between wealth and perceptions of equality before the law (after Kelemen, 2010).

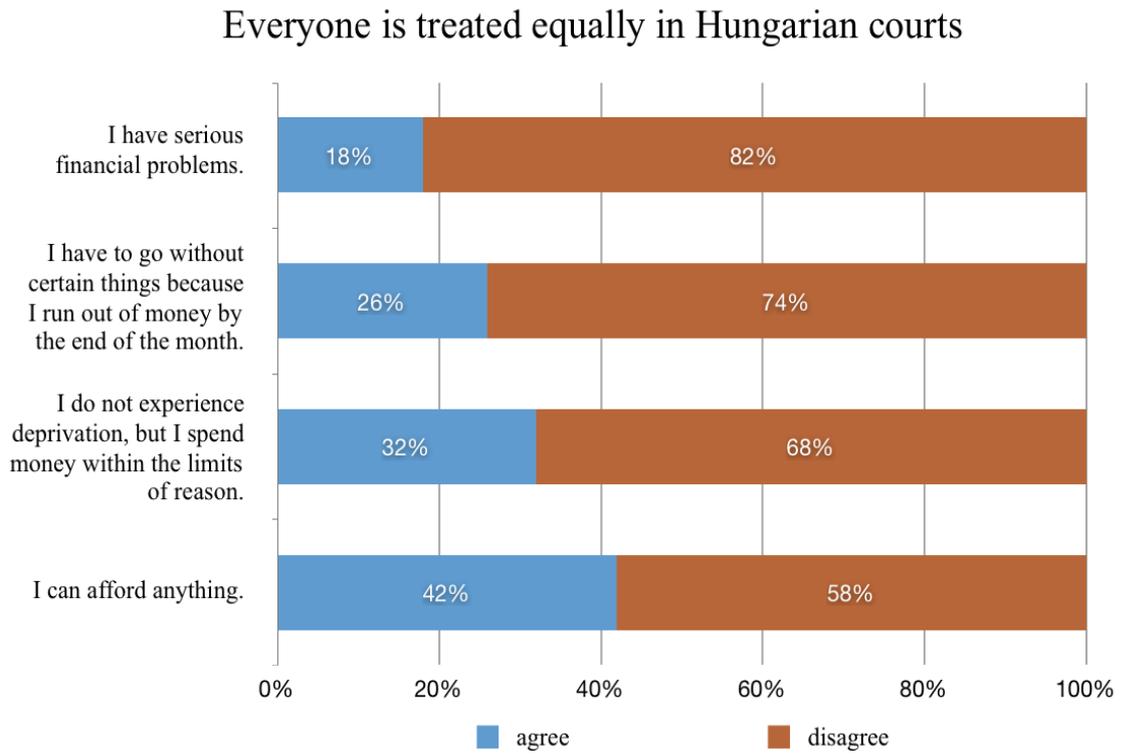


Figure 5. Blaming others: Attributions of in-group and out-group agency for positive versus negative historical events as presented by history text-books (number of mentions of agency; After László, Szala and Ferenczhalmy, 2010)

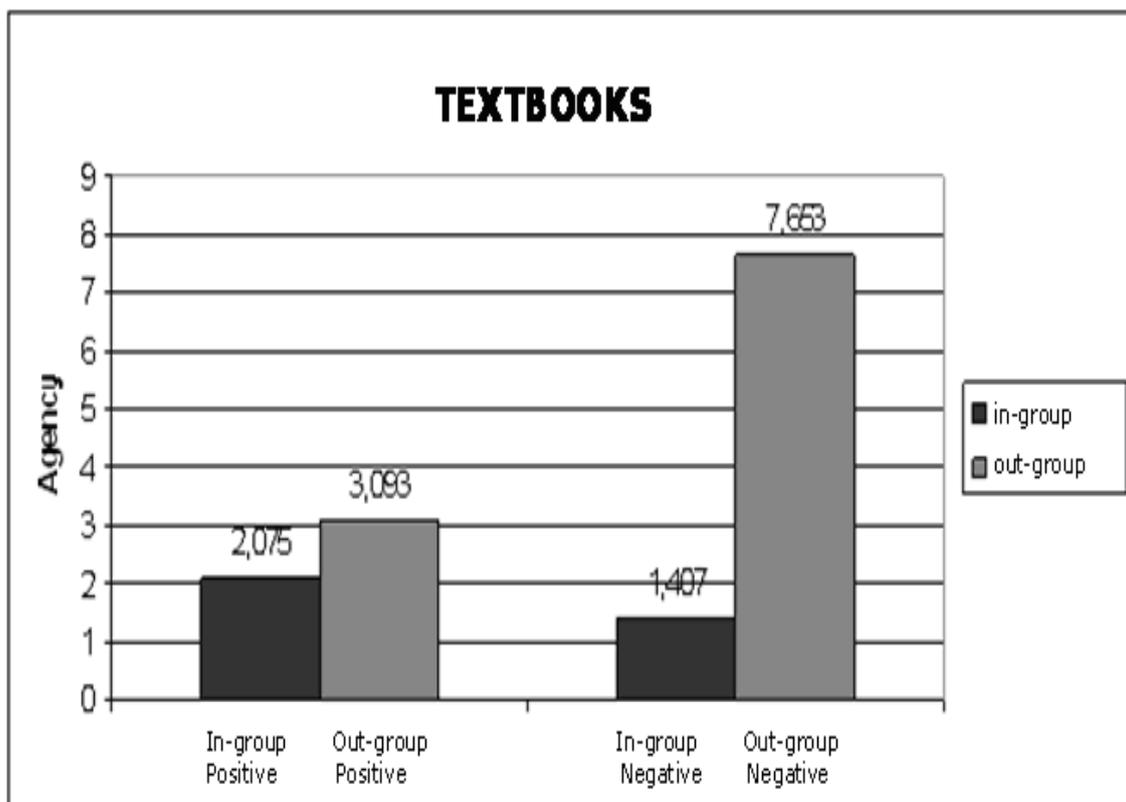


Figure 6: Attributions of in-group and out-group agency for positive versus negative historical events as presented in folk-narratives (number of mentions; After László, Szala and Ferenczhalmy, 2010)

