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WHEN POPULISM TRIUMPHS

From Democracy to Autocracy

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Introduction

In the last few decades, populism has been on the march in many countries, including developed Western democracies (Trump's election in the USA, the Brexit vote) as well as countries with few democratic traditions such as Putin's Russia, Erdogan's Turkey, Kaczyński's Poland, and Orbán's Hungary. Populism, although difficult to define, is marked by several recognizable features. Populist ideology contrasts the people with an alien, unrepresentative 'elite', idealizes the people as an unquestionable reference group, leans towards charismatic leadership, considers its own ideology to be morally unquestionable, and prefers a hierarchical, autocratic system to individual freedoms. Populism is thus fundamentally a collectivist ideology that emphasizes the primacy of the group over the individual.

Populist politics often succeeds because it mobilizes the deeply felt human need for identification with a group (Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup, this volume). Group identification is the product of evolutionary pressures, as group cooperation represents a highly effective adaptive survival strategy (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; von Hippel, 2018). It was the revolutionary ideology of the Enlightenment that explicitly challenged the primacy of group identification and replaced it with the ideology of the free and independent individual, producing an unprecedented improvement in the human condition (Pinker, 2018). The recent rise of populism represents the latest challenge to the values of the Enlightenment, the atavistic and romantic rise of collectivism and group identification as an alternative to individualism and freedom.

In this chapter, we pay special attention to Hungary, a country that has progressed perhaps furthest in using populist methods to replace democracy with an authoritarian system over the past ten years. Hungary is the only country

within the EU that Freedom House (2020) now classifies as no longer a democracy. Remarkably, the transition to autocracy was accomplished without a political coup or military takeover, relying solely on populist policies and propaganda to retain the electoral support of a portion of the population. The aim of our chapter is to employ the tools of social psychology to explore the psychological mechanisms involved in this process. First, we discuss the role that a damaged sense of national identity played in the rise of populist autocracy, as evidenced by representative national surveys and linguistic narrative analyses. We will also consider the propaganda strategies that exploited the vulnerable sense of national identity and feelings of collective narcissism and self-uncertainty (Kruglanski et al., this volume). In the second half of the chapter, we present three empirical studies exploring the psychological characteristics of populism. Finally, we will discuss the implications of our analysis for understanding the international rise of populism.

International Ramifications

Although Hungary is not an important country, providing barely .08% of the EU's economy, what occurred in Hungary has international ramifications, because it could easily happen elsewhere. Hungary has become a successful populist laboratory of what can happen when illiberal governance comes to power. Hungary's autocratic ruler, Viktor Orbán, has many followers, in not only Central and Eastern Europe but also the Balkans, where he is an active promoter of illiberalism. Orbán has also made a great impression on Trump, who showered praise on him for a 'tremendous job' (Borger & Walker, 2019). The US ambassador to Hungary, David Cornstein, a close friend of Donald Trump, confirmed that Trump would 'love to have the situation' Orbán achieved (Riotta, 2019).

Orbán's government completely reshaped the country's political culture and institutions, demonstrating how populist propaganda, conspiracy theories, and identity politics can be harnessed to destroy democracy. It seems that Hungary's case is part of a larger trend, drawing partial legitimization from the Western world's shift towards identity politics and the growing backlash against political correctness and 'gender ideology'. The success of Orbán's autocracy is based on the same populist strategies and ideologies that have been routinely employed by autocratic regimes since the 1930s (Albright, 2018). International populist political movements and their leaders, such as the AfD, the National Front, Salvini, Kaczyński, Erdogan, Netanyahu, Putin, and many others, regularly consult with Orbán, and there are many similarities between these populist movements and their strategies.

From Democracy to Autocracy

After his election in 2010, Orbán built a de facto one-party system that, using Orwellian Newspeak, he calls the 'System of National Cooperation'. He

introduced a new constitution supported only by his own party, dismantled democratic institutions, and abolished the system of checks and balances. A new electoral law entrenched the power of the ruling party: 'although in both the 2014 and the 2018 elections Fidesz failed to win more than 50% of all votes cast, it both times secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority' (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 42). In an extraordinary speech in 2014, Orbán confirmed that Hungary is turning its back on liberal democracy and sees autocratic Eastern states such as Russia and Turkey as its role models. He stated that 'we must abandon liberal methods and principles of organizing society and the liberal worldview . . . because liberal values today mean corruption, sex, and violence' (Orbán, 2014). In the same speech, Orbán extolled the virtues of the labor-based economy of 'healthy' Eastern peoples with the tired, immoral, Western world subordinated to financial capitalism (Orbán, 2014).

Orbán's loyal party apparatchiks were appointed to run the judicial system, the Constitutional Court, and most other state institutions. Much of the media, including the public broadcaster, are under direct party control and now function as propaganda outlets. Hungary fell from 23rd to 87th in the international list of press freedom, under Sierra Leone. All the country's important public officials belong to the prime minister's loyal personal network. The prime minister, the leader of Parliament, and the president were roommates and close friends in the same college. According to Freedom House (2020), Hungary registered the largest cumulative democratic decline in Nations in Transit history after its score fell for ten consecutive years.

Political scientists debate how best to characterize Hungary's populist autocracy. Some call it a quasi-fascist state, as Orbán's propaganda methods fomenting division, hatred, and nationalism employ the methods used by Mussolini, Goebbels, and Hitler (Crano & Gaffney, this volume). Others define it as a post-communist mafia state (Magyar, 2016), focusing on the all-encompassing corruption and *Godfather*-like hierarchical power structures. Orbán's childhood friend, until 2010 a humble gasfitter, has now become the richest man in Hungary, with a personal fortune twice that of Queen Elizabeth II. Orbán's son-in-law has also become a multi-billionaire, despite being accused of racketeering and corruption by the EU. Transparency International shows that corruption has become endemic in Hungary since 2010, yet the number of significant corruption prosecutions has dropped to almost zero (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 44).

Orbán and his party monopolize all legislative and executive power, and also seek to dominate most spheres of social life, including commerce, education, theatre, the arts, churches, and even sports and women's reproductive choices. Yet this de facto one-party state is not without some semblance of political legitimation. Orbán has now been re-elected three times in elections commonly described as not fair, and only partly free. This leads us to perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Orbán's populist autocracy. How can state-controlled propaganda be used so effectively to generate sufficient electoral support for what is, in essence,

an autocratic one-party state? This is a question that our empirical analyses in the second half of the chapter will also explore.

The Role of Damaged National Identity

Manipulative government propaganda exploiting Hungarians' damaged sense of national identity played a critical role in the promotion of autocracy. Advocating conspiracy theories, creating enemies (foreigners, Jews, the EU), and emphasizing the moral superiority of the 'people' are key strategies (Mols & Jetten, 2016; Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup; Krekó, this volume). The need for a positive group identity is a universal human characteristic shaped by evolutionary processes, and has been an adaptive feature of human groups in our ancestral environment (Harari, 2014; von Hippel, 2018). In his classical 'minimal group' experiments, Tajfel showed that even the most superficial and meaningless group membership can easily trigger a strong sense of group identity and discrimination against out-groups (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In these experiments, participants are assigned to meaningless 'groups' and then are asked to distribute rewards to anonymous strangers identified only as in-group or out-group members. Even transparently random group memberships decided by the flip of a coin can produce strong in-group identification and spontaneous discrimination against out-group members. This work shows that as a means of achieving positive self-esteem, humans possess a powerful motivation to see their own group as better than other groups (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000).

This mechanism also plays a critical role in political thinking and collectivist populist ideology, especially when the reference group cannot provide a real basis for a positive group identity. Traumatic group experiences require narrative explanation, often built around themes of injustice, betrayal, powerlessness, and victim mentality (Bibó, 1946). Populism becomes a truly dynamic political force when autocratic leaders can exploit the collective narcissistic emotions produced by compromised group identity (Albright, 2018; Ditto & Rodriguez, this volume). Similar mechanisms also played a role in motivating Trump voters, Brexit supporters, and the advent of populist leaders such as Kaczyński and Orbán (Lantos & Forgas, 2020). In the case of Hungary, damaged national identity can be traced to repeated historical traumas that characterize the last five hundred years of Hungarian history (Bibó, 1946, 1991; Lendvai, 2012). For example, the loss of territory after World War I still remains a painful trauma in Hungary, while Austria has long forgotten its loss of a major empire. As we will see in the next section, Hungarian national identity today is characterized by a deep sense of insecurity, inferiority, and lack of self-confidence, compensated by an overly unrealistic, grandiose, narcissistic evaluation of the in-group's virtues and entitlements, predisposing many Hungarian voters to a kind of 'political hysteria'(Bibó, 1946; see also Krekó, this volume).

The Language of Political Identity

The quantitative analysis of linguistic narratives in school texts, historical novels, and everyday conversations offers an excellent way to document the damaged sense of national identity in Hungary (László, 2005, 2014; László & Ehman, 2013). Such narrative analyses focused on three topical domains: (1) the *causes* of historical events, (2) *emotional reactions*, and (3) and national *self-evaluation*. László and his colleagues showed that Hungarians predominantly describe themselves as victims who have little causal influence on events and mostly blame outsiders for their failures. Their emotional reactions are dominated by sadness, fear, frustration, helplessness, and self-pity (László, 2005, 2014).

Despite such a deeply pessimistic view of history, narrative language analyses also document a surprisingly grandiose and narcissistic *self-evaluation* of Hungarians, emphasizing their superiority and moral greatness and the de-valuation of external groups, especially neighbors (László, 2014, p. 96). The significant tension between perceived helplessness and negative emotions, on the one hand, and national self-aggrandizement, on the other, is effectively resolved by holding foreigners solely responsible for failures (lost world wars, Holocaust, etc.). It is this tendency that is actively exploited by Orbán's propaganda machinery through emphasizing foreign enemies (the EU, Jewish financiers, liberals) and reinterpreting history by financing various 'historical' institutes that extoll the superiority, moral virtues, and innocence of the nation (Figure 12.1).

This damaged sense of national consciousness is also confirmed by Csepeli (2018), who ingenuously compared the vocabulary of the Hungarian national anthem with those of surrounding countries. While neighboring nations' anthems feature words such as 'beauty, splendor, life, dawn, freedom, glory, love, fortune, joy, wealth, pride, victory, happiness, strength', the Hungarian anthem is replete with words such as 'misfortune, sin, punishment, sad, moan, slavery, beaten, war, thundering sky, mounds of bones, ashes of your fetus, sea of flames, death growl, mourning, blood of the dead, torment'. This pattern of victim mentality and self-pity promotes a psychological state of learned hopelessness and openness to populist manipulation and propaganda.

The Hungarian language itself also plays an important role in defining national identity. According to Eurostat (2016), very few Hungarians speak foreign languages, and this is a major cause of cultural and intellectual isolation. On the other hand, language also functions as a key symbol of national uniqueness, often invoked to support a grandiose and narcissistic sense of national identity. Many Hungarians who speak no foreign languages routinely claim that Hungarian is the most beautiful and expressive language in the world. Naïve and unsubstantiated claims that runic writing is actually a brilliant and ancient Hungarian invention (!) resulted in many localities now proudly displaying their names in runic writing—even though almost no one can actually read it (Figure 12.1).

FIGURE 12.1 Examples of Hungarian government propaganda. Top left: 'Our message to Brussels: we demand respect for Hungarians! Top right: 'Let's not allow Soros to have the last laugh!' Middle left: 'Let's not give in to blackmail: Defend Hungary'. Middle right: 'You have a right to know what Brussels is planning for you'. Bottom left: Runic writing of locality names. Bottom right: 'Hungary will not give in!'

Populist Attitudes in Survey Data

This kind of damaged national identity is also documented by representative national surveys (Keller, 2010). For example, Kelemen (2010; Kelemen et al., 2014) and Szilágyi and Kelemen (2019) found that in 2019, the majority of

respondents supported statements expressing deep pessimism and helplessness, such as 'a strong political leader is needed to solve the country's problems' (80%), 'democracy in Hungary will not function as it should for many decades' (72%), 'political parties do not really represent the interests of the people' (69%), 'people lived better before the change of regime' (55%), 'the average person has no influence on public life' (55%), 'the Hungarian economic and social structure should be radically transformed' (70%), 'the state of our society is getting worse every year' (63%), 'not everyone in Hungary has the opportunity to get rich and prosper' (54%), and 'most domestic political decision does not serve the public good' (55%) (Szilágyi & Kelemen, 2019, pp. 192–193). These attitudes are particularly strong among rural, poorer, and less educated respondents.

Similar results were reported in the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's national survey in March 2020. The majority of respondents believe that corruption (60%), public education (58%), health (63%), democracy and freedom of the press (50%), poverty (54%), and the international perception of the country (52%) have all declined in the last ten years (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2020, p. 86). Perceptions of the rule of law are similarly negative. The majority of respondents believe that 'the law is applied differently to influential people than to the average person' (82%), 'not all people are equal before Hungarian courts' (65%), 'law and justice in court judgments often separated' (76%), 'the outcome of cases largely depends on the person of the judge' (75%), 'it is not worth litigating because it only favors lawyers' (58%), and 'the Hungarian judiciary is not independent of politics' (71%) (Szilágyi & Kelemen, 2019).

Remarkably, such strongly negative opinions coexist with an unrealistically romanticized and grandiose national evaluation, as the majority of voters felt that 'for me, Hungary is the most beautiful place in the world' (80%; Szilágyi & Kelemen, 2019). This pattern of schizoid national identity also produces a feeling of collective narcissism, when the moral superiority and entitlements of one's own group is unquestionable, and other groups are denigrated and receive no empathy (Bar-Tal, 2000; Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar, & Lantos, 2019). Such a damaged sense of national identity may predispose voters to willingly embrace political propaganda that satisfies their need for positive group identification. Feelings of vulnerability and narcissism also played a role among Trump voters and British Brexit voters (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018; Lantos & Forgas, 2020).

Collective Narcissism and the Role of Populist Propaganda

The need for positive group identity also promotes experiences of collective narcissism, a term first used by theorists of the Frankfurt School. Collective narcissism is motivated by a fragile, unstable self-esteem, which can be remedied by identifying with a privileged group imagined to be grandiose (Forgas & Lantos, 2020; Lantos & Forgas, 2020). Similar psychological dynamics are revealed by the

minimal group experiments, according to which people gain an important part of their positive self-esteem by extolling the virtues of highly valued in-groups (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Collective narcissism may be measured with items like 'I insist that my group gets the respect it deserves' (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009). In the second part of our chapter, we present research exploring the links between populism, collective narcissism, and related psychological constructs.

Populist propaganda plays a key role in the political exploitation of collective narcissism and threatened group identity. Simple, endlessly repeated political messages glorifying the group and creating external enemies and conspiracies is a well-established strategy also used by Mussolini, Hitler, and aspiring dictators ever since (Albright, 2018; Crano & Gaffney, this volume). Populist propaganda works because 'our political values are determined by our identity and emotions based on the perception of the world, and these are largely shaped by the political actors themselves' (Kovach, 2020, cited in Illés, 2020). Collective narcissism is characterized by hypersensitivity to perceived attacks on our group, triggering fear and anger towards out-groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Marcus; Petersen et al., this volume). Autocratic leaders routinely emphasize the relentless struggle against their enemies (Albright, 2018). In Hungary, Orbán's propaganda during the past ten years variously portrayed the EU, refugees, the opposition, or George Soros as mortal threats to national survival (Figure 12.1).

Media influence is thus crucial for populist success. Orbán's media empire by 2017 included Hungary's national broadcaster; all regional newspapers; its second-largest commercial television company; most popular websites; the sole national commercial radio network; the only sports daily; the only news agency; and a large number of papers that purvey what can only be described as centrally controlled propaganda journalism (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 46). In 2017 alone, about US$250 million was spent on billboards, leaflets, television ads, and 'national consultations', mass mailings to every voter, a strategy first used by Goebbels. These messages attacked Hungary's 'enemies' such as refugees, Brussels, and George Soros (Figure 12.1). Hungary's propaganda expenditure before the last election was several times the official amount spent by both sides on the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom. And this propaganda seems working: Hungarians today are among the most xenophobic people in Europe and the least worried about corruption, and they fear Russia less than they fear Brussels and George Soros. In one recent survey, 51% of Fidesz voters said that they would prefer Russia to the United States when choosing a strategic partner, and Vladimir Putin is more popular than Angela Merkel or Donald Trump (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, p. 47).

After 2015, refugees were identified as a mortal threat to national survival—even though almost no refugee wanted to stay in Hungary. The EU's inability to manage the refugee crisis allowed Orbán to exploit this issue for years. Another target of xenophobic propaganda was George Soros, a successful financial

entrepreneur and philanthropist of Jewish-Hungarian descent. This campaign was also characterized by barely disguised anti-Semitism. The more recent anti-EU campaign offers a clear example of the narcissistic nature of populist propaganda (Figure 12.1). Several empirical studies now confirm that populism is related to a variety of psychological variables such as collective narcissism, an issue we shall turn to next.

The Psychological Components of Populism

Based on the theoretical and conceptual considerations outlined earlier, we next report three studies conducted in 2017, 2018, and 2020, exploring the psychological underpinnings of populist attitudes and voting behavior, including negative attitudes towards the EU, narcissistic attitudes towards Hungary, and preference for Orbán's regime.

Study 1: Collective Narcissism and Conservatism Predict Support for Populist Politics

In a 2017 study (Lantos & Forgas, 2020), a convenience sample of 284 volunteer participants aged between 18 and 72 were recruited on popular internet sites and completed an online survey in Hungary. Participants responded to the 5-item collective narcissism scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, e.g., 'I will not be satisfied until the Hungarian nation obtains the respect it deserves'). Attitudes towards the national in-group, a national out-group (the UK), and the EU were also measured. Support for Fidesz, the populist ruling party, was assessed by asking participants whether they voted for Viktor Orbán in the 2014 elections, and whether they intended to vote for him in the next (2018) election. Political conservatism was also measured on a five-point *liberal–conservative* scale.

Results showed a significant link between collective narcissism and populist voting in the 2014 election, $r_{pb} = .21$, $p = .004$, and voting intentions in the next (2018) election, $r_{pb} = .32$, $p < .001$. Next, in four multiple linear regressions, we explored the relationship between collective narcissism, political conservatism, attitudes towards Hungary and the EU, and towards a neutral country, the UK, while controlling for demographic variables. The results confirmed that collective narcissism was a significant and reliable predictor of all of these measures. Collective narcissism was also the most reliable predictor of support for the populist Fidesz party.

In subsequent mediational analyses, we used collective narcissism as the predictor, populist voting as the outcome variable, and conservatism as the mediator. Collective narcissism significantly predicted populist voting in both the previous and the forthcoming election. However, this effect was significantly mediated by conservatism (Figure 12.2). These results confirm our theoretical prediction that a vulnerable national identity and feelings of collective narcissism are implicated

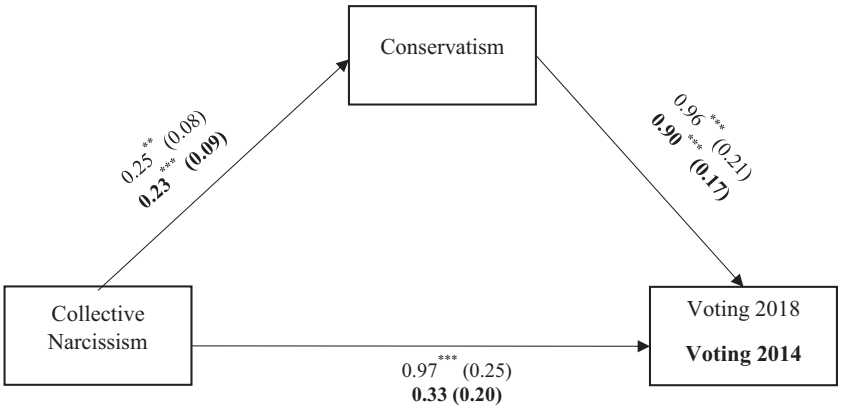

FIGURE 12.2 The psychological antecedents of populist voting preferences: the direct and indirect effect of collective narcissism on Fidesz support in 2014 ($N = 194$) and Fidesz support in 2018 ($N = 240$). Political conservatism functions as a significant mediator of the effects of collective narcissism on populism.

in populist political preferences. However, conservatism was a significant mediator between collective narcissism and voting behavior.

Study 2: Feelings of Deprivation and Collective Narcissism in Populist preferences

In the next study (Lantos & Forgas, 2020), we studied the relationship between perceived grievance and a sense of relative deprivation, and collective narcissism and conservatism (Ditto & Rodriguez, this volume). The study was carried out in 2018, with a convenience sample of 271 online participants aged between 18 and 92, and recruited on popular internet sites. Questions again assessed collective narcissism (as earlier), as well as perceptions of grievance and relative deprivation ('Over the past five years economic situation of those similar to me in Hungary has been better/worse than that of immigrants living in Hungary'). Populist political preference was again assessed by asking about past and intended future voting for the ruling populist party, Fidesz, and conservatism was measured as previously.

Results showed a significant link between collective narcissism and voting for Fidesz. Multiple linear regressions found that collective narcissism was a significant predictor of political conservatism, as well as self-reported relative deprivation. A damaged sense of national identity and a sense of collective narcissism and relative deprivation are likely to make voters especially vulnerable to populist propaganda addressing their need for positive group identification.

In further mediational analyses, we again used collective narcissism as a predictor and conservatism as a mediator predicting three different dependent variables: (1) perceived grievance and relative deprivation, (2) populist voting in the 2014 and (3) 2018 Hungarian elections. Collective narcissism significantly predicted perceived grievance and relative deprivation, but this effect was again significantly mediated by conservatism. When conservatism was also included in the model as a mediator, the effects of collective narcissism became nonsignificant (Figure 12.3). Voting support for Orbán's populist Fidesz party was again significantly predicted by collective narcissism, but this effect was again mediated by conservatism (Figure 12.3).

These studies show that even though collective narcissism plays an important psychological role in genesis of populist political preferences, its effect is mediated by other factors such as political conservatism. In other words, unless a person is already committed to a conservative ideology, feelings of collective narcissism may not necessarily produce a preference for populist political alternatives. In the next study, we explored a variety of additional psychological variables in the genesis of populist political attitudes.

Study 3: The Psychological Components of Populism

In our most recent study (February–March 2020), 440 volunteer Hungarians recruited on popular internet sites completed an online questionnaire measuring a

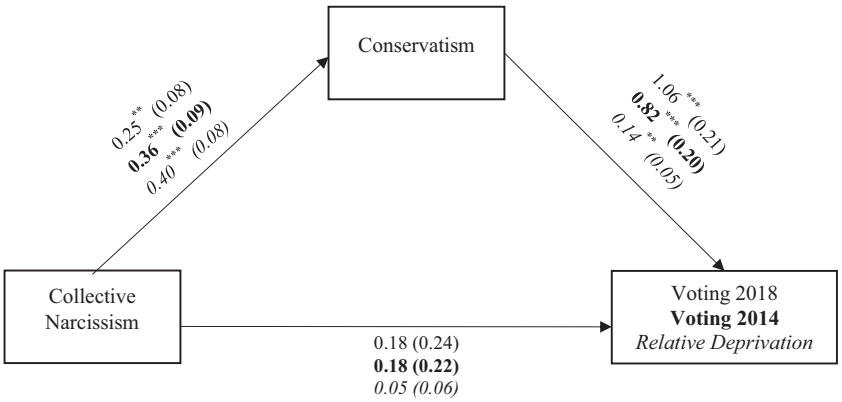

FIGURE 12.3 Result of the mediation analysis of collective narcissism as the predictor and conservatism as the mediator on three dependent variables: (1) perceived grievance and relative deprivation, (2) Fidesz support in 2014 (N = 265), and (3) Fidesz support in 2018 (N = 155). Political conservatism significantly mediates the effects of collective narcissism on these variables.

range of variables shown as follows (373 females, 67 males, ages 18–77, $M = 28.71$, $SD = 10.56$. Participants were offered a chance of winning books as a reward. Responses to each question were on a 1–5 agree–disagree scale.

The study assessed populism (15 questions), collective narcissism, individual narcissism, self-esteem, just world beliefs, system skepticism, authoritarianism, nationalism, need for cognition, uncertainty avoidance, depression, conspiracy beliefs, conservatism, and personality (for summary of variables and items, see Table 12.1).

TABLE 12.1 Summary of the variables studied and the questions used in Study 3. For the 15 populism items, the three factors obtained and factor loadings for each item are also shown. Items marked by ⋆ are sourced from Szilágyi and Kelemen (2019).

Variable	*Questions/Items*
POPULISM Factor 1 Collectivism	it is a moral duty to fight for the groups we belong to, .70; it is our duty to subordinate ourselves to the national interest, .70; individuals are often wrong, but the nation is always right, .68; a strong leader is often best able to express the will of the people, .53; every method is justified to achieve the interests of the people/group, .52; people have the right to decide who they want to admit to their group, .52; the people are always right, and those who disagree are traitors, .50; and democratic processes often prevent the expression of the popular will, .44
POPULISM Factor 2 Anti-elitism	political elites care only about themselves and ignore the interests of the common people, .78; our society was always divided into the 'elite' and the 'people', .71; the political leaders are often more decent and sensible than the common people (reverse-scored), .58; the more power a leader has, the more mistakes he/she will make, .46
POPULISM Factor 3 Tolerance/ Rigidity	no group is worth sacrificing your individual rights for, .70; minorities have the right to fight against the will of the majority (reverse-scored), .58; and individuals who criticize our group should also be listened to, .51
COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM (based on Golec de Zavala et al., 2009)	my nation deserves special treatment; many people don't understand the importance of my nation; I will never be satisfied until my nation gets the recognition they deserve
INDIVIDUAL NARCISSISM	I am a narcissist; I insist upon getting the respect and recognition due to me; I am an extraordinary person
SELF-ESTEEM⋆	I have high self-esteem; I am mostly satisfied with myself; I seldom feel envy towards others; I can be proud of many things in my life

Variable	*Questions/Items*
JUST WORLD BELIEFS*	the world is generally not fair; most of the time, we can only rely on ourselves; the end mostly justifies the mean
SYSTEM SCEPTICSM*	democracy does not work in Hungary; our society is fundamentally corrupt; the leaders only worry about their own interests
AUTHORITARIANISM*	only a strong leader can protect the country from outside attacks; it's great when leaders tell us exactly what to do; it's important for people to be able to act both in an obedient and commanding way; everyone should know where their place in the world
NATIONALISM*	I am proud to be born a Hungarian; Hungarians are among the most talented people in the world; my nation is surrounded by enemies
NEED FOR COGNITION*	I enjoy working on complicated problems; I am curious about everything; I try to avoid situations that require too much thinking
UNCEERTAINTY AVOIDANCE*	I dislike uncertain situations; I prefer to live life according to the rules
DEPRESSION*	I mostly feel alone in the world; I am often unhappy; life does not have much meaning; our fates are governed by invisible forces
CONSPIRACY BELIEFS (after Bruder, Haffke, Neave, Nouripanah, & Imhoff, 2013)	I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about; I think that politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions; I think that government agencies closely monitor all citizens; I think that events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities; I think that there are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions
CONSERVATISM	indicate your political views on a liberal–conservative scale
PERSONALITY	the ten-item personality inventory (TIPI) scale assessing extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness

Principal Components Analysis of the Populism Scale

To discover the psychological features of populist thinking, responses to the 15 populism questions were first subjected to a principal components analysis resulting in three interpretable factors, *collectivism*, *anti-elitism*, and *intolerance* (overall Cronbach's alpha = .58; factor 1 = .73; factor 2 = .55; factor 3 = .27; KMO = .78). The first factor contained eight questions measuring *collectivism*, the second factor contained four items measuring *anti-elitism*, and the third factor featured three items assessing *rigidity* vs. *tolerance* (for items and loadings, see Table 12.1). Overall, these dimensions reveal the underlying content of populist

thinking, with considerable face validity (Pauwels, 2017). The collectivism and rigidity subscales were positively correlated, $r(438) = .23$, $p < .001$. Interestingly, collectivism and anti-elitism subscales were negatively related, $r(438) = -.17$, $p < .001$, and there was no correlation between the anti-elitism and rigidity subscales, $r(438) = .02$, $p = .66$. There is growing evidence from 32 Western European parties between 1989 and 2008 that anti-elitism differs across left- and right-wing populism (Roodujin & Akkerman, 2017). Also, once a populist party like Orbán's Fidesz acquires autocratic power, the populist concept of anti-elitism becomes confounded, as our results also suggest. Populists in power often change their tune, and their followers rapidly embrace their own populist elites, while distrusting foreign or opposing elites with unchanging ferocity. As Krekó (this volume) argues, when populism triumphs, it often reveals its true face, which is tribalism.

The Psychological Predictors of Populism: Regression Analyses

Next, we used multiple regression to explore the relationship between psychological variables and populism.

Overall populist belief was significantly predicted (beta values in brackets, $R^2 = .53$) by (1) *collective narcissism* (.32, $p < .001$), (2) *just world beliefs* (.19, $p < .001$), (3) *conspiracy beliefs* (.18, $p < .001$); (4) *authoritarianism* (.17, $p < .001$), and (5) *conservatism* (.16, $p < .001$), as well as (6) *low need for cognition* (.08, $p = .046$).

Separate Populism Dimensions

The predictors of the three populism subscales (*collectivism*, *anti-elitism*, *and rigidity/tolerance*) were also explored. Collectivism was predicted ($R^2 = .64$) by (1) *collective narcissism* (.37, $p < .001$), (2) *authoritarianism* (.26, $p < .001$), (3) *conservatism* (.17, $p < .001$), (4) *low system skepticism* (.11, $p = .002$), (5) *conspiracy beliefs* (.11, $p = .003$), (6) *just world beliefs* (.08, $p = .02$), (7) *low need for cognition* (−.08, $p = .02$), and (8) *nationalism* (.08, $p = .03$). Anti-elitism was predicted ($R^2 = .39$) by (1) *system skepticism* (.43, $p < .001$), (2) *conspiracy beliefs* (.18, $p < .001$), (3) *just world beliefs* (.17, $p < .001$), and (4) *low authoritarianism* (.10, $p = .03$). The third, rigidity/tolerance aspect of populism ($R^2 = .13$), was predicted by (1) *collective narcissism* (.16, $p = .01$), (2) *just world beliefs* (.15, $p = .01$), (3) *low need for cognition* (.11, $p = .04$), (4) *low nationalism* (.10, $p = .06$), and (5) *low system skepticism* (.10, $p = .06$). Overall, these results suggest that populist ideology is significantly predicted by a relatively small number of tightly organized psychological variables, such as collective narcissism, authoritarianism, nationalism, conservatism, conspiracy ideation, system skepticism, unjust world beliefs, and low need for cognition.

Populist Voting

Next, we explored the variables that best predict actual voter support for Hungary's populist ruling party, Fidesz. Fidesz support was significantly predicted ($R^2 = .34$) by *collective narcissism* (.23, $p = .04$), *low depression* (.23, $p = .03$), and *introversion* (.21, $p = .04$). This pattern appears consistent with previous results indicating that collective narcissism plays an important role in the genesis of political populism, a question that we further explored in the subsequent mediational analyses.

Mediational analyses linking psychological variables to populism

Based on the multiple regression analyses, mediational analyses tested the role of various predictor and mediator variables in producing populist thinking and voting. In interpreting the results of regression as well as mediational analyses, we need to be careful to recognize that such analyses cannot support causal conclusions, and are suggestive rather than definitive about the pattern of relationships revealed (Fiedler, Schott, & Meiser, 2011).

Predicting Populist Voting

The first mediational analysis indicated that collective narcissism predicts *populist voting intentions* as also found in other countries (Forgas & Lantos, 2020). A mediation model with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4, Hayes, 2018) revealed a significant overall model: likelihood ratio $\chi^2(2) = 65.92$, $R^2 = .14$ (Cox & Snell); .29 (Nagelkerke), $p < .001$, and with 10,000 bootstrapped samples found that collective narcissism significantly predicted conservatism, and conservatism as a mediator further predicted Fidesz support. The indirect effect of collective narcissism on Fidesz support was significant, $b = .31$, $SE = .25$, 95%CI [0.04,0.76] (Figure 12.4).

Predicting Overall Populism Scores

Collective narcissism also predicted overall populism with conservatism as a mediator (significant overall model: $R^2 = .38$, $F(2, 437) = 132.45$, $p < .001$). Collective narcissism also significantly predicted conservatism, and conservatism predicted populism. Again, the indirect effect of collective narcissism on populism was significant, $b = .03$, $SE = .01$, 95%CI [0.01,0.05] (Figure 12.3).

Predicting Populism Subscales

We also analyzed the effects of collective narcissism and conservatism on the three separate populism subscales. Collective narcissism predicted *collectivism* (overall

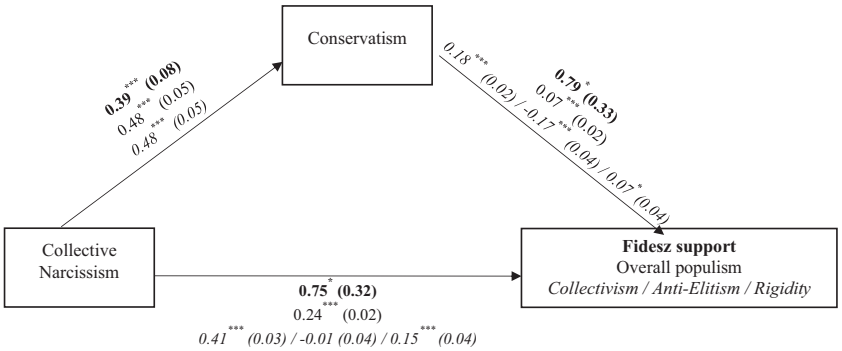

FIGURE 12 4 The direct and indirect effects of collective narcissism on Fidesz support (N = 137) and populism scores (N = 440), mediated by conservatism.

model R^2 = .53, F(2, 437) = 246.74, p < .001) and *tolerance/rigidity* (overall model: R^2 = .07, F(2, 437) = 16.88, p < .001), and it predicted *anti-elitism* negatively (overall model: R^2 = .05, F(2, 437) = 12.70, p < .001). Collective narcissism also predicted the mediator, conservatism, positively in all three cases. Conservatism in turn predicted *collectivism* and *tolerance/rigidity* positively, and *anti-elitism* negatively. The indirect effect of collective narcissism on *collectivism* (b = 0.09, SE = .02, 95%CI [0.06,0.12]) and on *tolerance/rigidity* (b = 0.04, SE = .02, 95%CI [0.001,0.07]) was significant and positive, while it was significant and negative on *anti-elitism* (b = −0.08, SE = .02, 95%CI [−0.12,−0.04]).

Populism and Voting Intentions

In a further mediation analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4, Hayes, 2018), we looked at the relationship between populism as predictors, populist voting (Fidesz support) as the criterion, and collective narcissism, nationalism, and conservatism as potential mediators. The overall model predicting Fidesz support was significant, likelihood ratio $\chi^2(2)$ = 62.17, R^2 = .16 (Cox & Snell); .34 (Nagelkerke), p < .001. Populism predicted both collective narcissism and conservatism, but not nationalism. Conservatism in turn predicted Fidesz support, while in this model collective narcissism and nationalism did not. The indirect effect of the populism on Fidesz support via conservatism was positive and significant, b = 0.56, SE = 6.72, 95%CI [0.04,1.66], while the indirect effects via collective narcissism, b = 0.41, SE = 10.81, 95%CI [−0.67,1.82], and nationalism, b = 0.02, SE = 2.17, 95%CI [−0.29,0.48], were nonsignificant (Figure 12.4).

We also checked these effects entering each of the three subscales of the populism measure separately as predictors. Only the collectivism (β = .41, p < .001), but not the anti-elitism (β = −.15, p = .08) or rigidity (β = .14, p = .10) independently predicted Fidesz support. A mediation model for the latter two variables

thus cannot be tested; however, observing an indirect effect is nevertheless possible (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The direct effects of *collectivism*, $b = 1.97$, $SE = .82$, 95%CI [0.37,3.58], and *tolerance/rigidity*, $b = 0.92$, $SE = .45$, 95%CI [0.03,1.80] on Fidesz support were significant, but *anti-elitism* was not, $b = -0.56$, $SE = .43$, 95%CI [−1.40,0.28]. In all three models, each of the indirect effects were nonsignificant. The fact that anti-elitism was an inconsistent predictor of populist voting here makes sense, since in Hungary's case populists themselves have become the new elite.

It appears that a relatively small number of tightly clustered and interdependent psychological variables play a key role in populist ideation and populist voting intentions. Support for populist parties tends to be contingent on the presence of psychological factors, such as collective narcissism, conservatism, relative deprivation, and the general identification with populist ideology. This pattern makes sense if we consider that the highly effective propaganda strategies employed by the populist Hungarian government emphasize precisely such narcissistic themes, including fighting against enemies and detractors (such as refugees, Soros, the EU), seeking respect and recognition due to Hungarians, and emphasizing national greatness, moral superiority, and innocence of the nation (Figure 12.1). Further, our results also suggest that the influence of such populist propaganda is significantly mediated by a variety of other factors, such as receptive voters having a conservative worldview to begin with, experiencing a sense of grievance and relative deprivation, and already sympathizing with populist ideology.

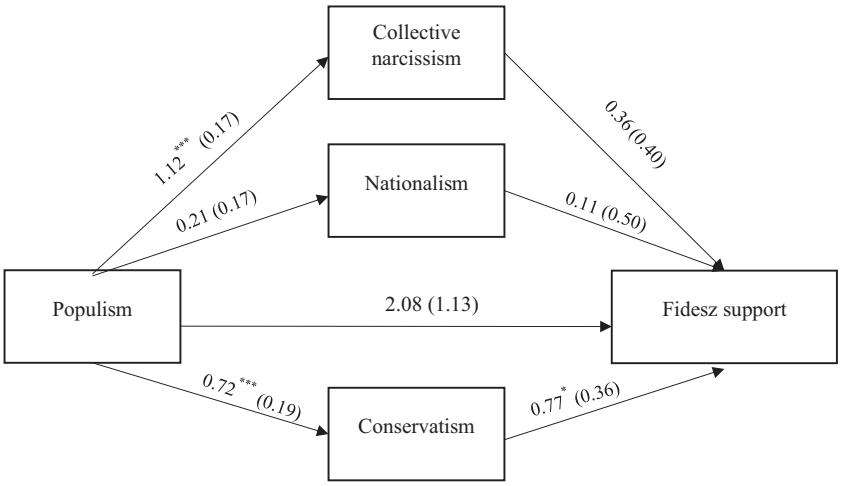

FIGURE 12.5 The direct and indirect effects of populism on Fidesz support, mediated by collective narcissism, nationalism, and conservatism ($N = 137$). Populism significantly predicts collective narcissism and conservatism, mediating populist voting intentions.

Discussion and Conclusions

We started this chapter by arguing that populist political systems and leaders, once they acquire power, are notorious for dismantling and undermining democratic institutions and establishing dictatorial patterns of governance. We also suggested that within the EU, the recent history of Hungary offers an exemplary case worthy of focused study of how such a shift to dictatorship occurs. Although Hungary is not by itself an important country, its recent history offers a cautionary tale of what might happen once populism becomes government policy. Since the election of Orbán's Fidesz government in 2010, the country has turned from a democracy to a quasi-dictatorial system.

In the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2019, Hungary is now ranked dead last in the EU, EFTA, and North America regions. In the 2019 edition of the Sustainable Governance Indicators, Hungary and Turkey occupy the two bottom places out of 40 countries when it comes to the rule of law. In the 2019 edition of the Global State of Democracy (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019), Hungary was listed as a country that has seen the most widespread democratic erosion in the past five years.

It is remarkable that this dramatic turn to illiberalism occurred with the support of a reasonable minority of the Hungarian population, who re-elected Orbán's government three times (even though these elections suffered from numerous serious shortcomings). To understand how this occurred, we argued that we need a multi-faceted psychological analysis of the mental representations and political ideas of voters, taking into account the historical circumstances that shape political ideas (Bibó, 1946/1986, 1991). The recent literature in political psychology offers a range of interesting hypotheses about how voters' thinking may undergo such a dramatic transformation in a relatively short time (see also Marcus; Bar-Tal & Magal; and Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup, this volume). In our introductory review, we argued that a damaged sense of national identity, the emotional need for positive group identification, and feelings of collective narcissism might play an important role in promoting populist ideologies and populist voting intentions.

In the case of Hungary, we argued that historical grievances and a culture of victim mentality resulted in feelings of collective narcissism that made some voters especially receptive to propaganda messages exploiting their sense of vulnerable group identity. The ruling populist party was able to successfully exploit this mentality and claim political legitimation by emphasizing external threats, create conspiracy theories, and at the same time affirm the moral greatness and grandiose achievements of the group. There is even a strange state-sponsored cult of 'hungaricums', officially listing foods, practices, and inventions that are sometimes spuriously claimed to be uniquely Hungarian and thus confirm the genius of Hungarian people. Obviously, a country with realistic sense of self-confidence would not need official committees to determine which sausages, soups, spices, or drinks people should be collectively proud of from now on.

Such a simplified and endlessly repeated propaganda strategy is not a new invention. Populist leaders regularly use this method to strengthen their political legitimacy (Albright, 2018; also see Crano & Gaffney, this volume). Demagogic propaganda claims that Hungary is in a life-and-death struggle for recognition, protects Christianity, exposes the crimes of Soros agents and conspirators, and resists the colonizing efforts of the EU and international financiers seem naïve and absurd in light of reality, but Orbán has proved uniquely successful in disseminating such dishonest messages (Kelemen, 2010; Krekó, 2018; László, 2014). Exploiting narcissistic feelings is also effectively served by the deliberate falsification of history. In Hungary today a number of lavishly state-supported institutions propagate narcissistic historical themes, such as ancient triumphs, heroic national virtues, and the responsibility of others for failures.

The results of our empirical studies broadly suggest that the feelings of inadequacy and a threatened group identity result in collective narcissism that in turn is significantly related to the acceptance of populist ideology and support for the dominant autocratic one-party state. We have also found, however, that the links between perceived relative deprivation and collective narcissism, on the one hand, and populist voting, on the other, is neither simple nor direct. Rather, important mediators such as political conservatism play a critical role in turning feelings of collective narcissism into effective populist voting intention. It is also interesting that in our work, it was the collectivism component of collective narcissism that turned out to be the most robust predictor as well as mediator of populist voting support. We argued in our introduction that one of the defining features of populism is that it represents a return to the pre-enlightenment value system based on collectivism and group identification rather than individual autonomy and liberty. It is telling that items emphasizing the primacy of the group rather than the individual in our collectivism subscale also emerged as a powerful factor in populist voting.

These results should be seen in the broader context of the international rise of populist ideation. The link between threatened group identity and populist voting has now been convincingly demonstrated in a number of countries, including the USA, Britain, Poland, and others (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018; Lantos & Forgas, 2020; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018). The current research in Hungary adds an important dimension to this work. It turns out that populism can remain an effective political strategy even after populist leaders and parties acquire political power, and in a sense, they themselves become the 'elites' that populists typically denounce. The political legitimacy of such newly installed autocrats can be effectively maintained by the continuing exploitation of feelings of inferiority and victimhood. Populist ideology and practices represent a serious and lasting threat to liberal democracies. In combating this danger, we need a more thorough understanding of the psychological processes that underlie populist support.

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