

## **CHAPTER 13.**

### **Populism in power: The tribal challenge**

**Péter Krekó<sup>1</sup>**

**Senior Lecturer, Eotvos Lorand University of Budapest, Department of Social  
Psychology**

**Associate Fellow, Johns Hopkins University, SAIS Bologna Policy Institute**

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer, Eotvos Lorand University of Sciences. Europe's Futures Fellow, IWM/ERSTE Foundation. Associate Fellow, JHU SAIS Bologna Policy Institute

## Abstract

"Populism" is a useful term in political science to label a "thin" ideology and a related rhetorical style that can be highly useful in opposition to acquire power. Populist attitudes can change though when populists gain power, for two reasons. First, when getting in government, they often lose their anti-elitist appeal, as they become the elites themselves. Second, populists in power make much greater effort to create and strengthen their own elites, rather than help the poor. In this article, we analyze the attitudes of voters of populist parties in government. Our studies in Hungary and Poland showed that voters of so-called populist parties (Fidesz and Pis) are, in fact, less anti-elitist and less people-centric than voters of opposition parties that are not labeled as populist by the social science literature. Based on the existing components of populist attitudes, we can put together a different concept. This article suggests the term "*political tribalism*", and defines it as the combination of Manichean Worldview that defines politics as the ultimate war between the "good" and the "evil", Anti-pluralism, and Authoritarianism that empowers the leader of the tribe via unconditional trust. Tribalist leaders, while talking about the "people" as a homogenous concept, are using divisive social identity categories and strategies, fueling antagonisms and hostility between political ingroups and outgroups. The nature of tribalism, its cures and possible future avenues of research are discussed.

## Introduction

Cas Mudde, probably the most famous scholar on populism, wrote an article on the “Populist Zeitgeist” already 15 years ago (Mudde, 2004), in which he claimed that “*populist discourse has become mainstream in the politics of western democracies*” (p.541.). One and a half decades later, this prophetic vision seems more timely than ever. Furthermore, we can argue these days that it is not just populist rhetoric that has become mainstream, but populist attitudes and populist governance have done so as well. While most of the early literature on populism in the Western World focused on populist parties in opposition, populists, such as Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Matteo Salvini in Italy and Lech Kaczynski in Poland are all indications of the trend that populist politicians are capable on taking and often keeping the executive power as well (see also Forgas & Lantos, this volume). But what happens to populist politicians and the attitudes of their voters when they are in government? What are the deeper social-psychological drivers of populist politics? This chapter aims to give a response to this question based on the available political science literature and our own empirical study.

### Populist attitudes: myth or reality?

While populism is a vague concept with many definitions, mainstream political science literature tends to define it as a “thin” ideology (Mudde, 2004) that emphasizes the division between the “good” people versus the ruling elites. The minimalist definition of populism relies on these two features: an appeal to the people (people-centrism) and mobilization against the elites (see for example: Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Populism has a “chameleonic” nature (Taggart, 2004) in the sense that it quickly adapts to the social-political environment in an attempt to be successful. In the last decade though, social science literature went beyond analyzing the political style and strategies of the voters, and attention was turned towards populist *attitudes* – the mindset and opinion of populist voters (for an early attempt, see Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014). A recent overview and comparison of seven populism scales (Silva et al., 2019) revealed that all scales invented to measure measures of populism contain three components: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and anti-pluralism.

While there are some methodological shortcomings of some populist measurement tools, populist attitudes seem to go hand in hand with low political trust, belief in conspiracies and predict populist party identification (Silva et al., 2019). Populist attitudes are not without

internal contradictions, though, especially when it comes to the relationship with the political elites. Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) found for example in a Dutch sample that populist attitudes correlated *positively* with elitism scales, so populist voters expressed a favourable opinion towards a possible rule of the experts and a certain kind of distance towards the ordinary people. So populism, in reality, is not always consequential in its anti-elitism - even in opposition. And the so-called “populists” once in government add even more confusion to the picture.

### When anti-establishment becomes the establishment: populists in government

While hard-core populist parties in government are still more the exception than the rule in the Western World, the examples are numerous and important from the last decade, from the US, Brazil and UK through Austria, Italy, until Hungary and Poland. Populism is being tested in executive power in many countries in the Western World. Traditionally, political science literature has been much more busy analyzing populists as outsiders, opposition parties and as protest movements (Barr, 2009) than their activities in the governmental power.

The experiences with populists in power dissolved many wishful myths about the nature of populism. One of these widespread misconceptions has been that populism is irreconcilable with power, as it loses its anti-elitist appeal and cannot keep up with the expectations it raised. But as Enyedi (2018, p1.) notes, populists in government can be surprisingly successful, as *“inhibitions that constrain other political actors from using norm-breaking methods for keeping governmental power do not apply to populists, and therefore they can be surprisingly resilient in office”*. Populists can build “populist establishments”, and are not only capable of destroying institutions, but building them as well. It also means that the description of populism as merely an “anti-establishment” and anti-elitist position is a simplification and does not apply for populists in power. Furthermore, so-called populist parties in Central Eastern Europe can exhibit features of „illiberal elitism” as well, and the Hungarian governmental party Fidesz is an excellent example of this trend (Enyedi, 2016).

Previous research in the Western Balkans indicated that voters supporting so-called populist politicians in government are not necessarily sharing the anti-establishment, anti-elitist position of their respective parties – as they have now become the establishment themselves. For example, in Montenegro, where Milo Djukanovic and his party DPS is ruling Montenegro since it gained independence in 2006 (and, de facto, even before), voters of his “state-sponsored populist” regime (Džankić & Keil, 2017) showed remarkably low levels of anti-elitism, compared to opposition parties such as the Democratic Front (Todosijevic, 2018). Voters of

Milo Djukanovic and DPS, at the same time, expressed remarkably high levels of exclusive national identity. Džankić & Keil concluded that in Montenegro we can observe *“the growth of a new kind of populism, a state-sponsored populist discourse that is very different from populism as understood in Western Europe.”* (p1.)

We see an even more clear pattern in Serbia, where voters of the nationalist populist incumbent President of Serbia, Aleksander Vucic, were the most (!) convinced that politicians are trustworthy, and they expressed by far the least anti-elitist opinions. At the same time, voters of Aleksander Vucic proved to be the most supportive of the idea of a strong leader, even if the leader bends the rules to get things done (Todosijevic, 2018).

Populism in government seems to be a strange animal that not necessarily even looks populist. The anti-elitist, anti-establishment features that are mostly considered to be the core of populism tend to disappear – or, at least, change their outlook, as was also suggested by the data in Hungary presented by Forgas and Lantos (this volume).

#### **Populist establishments within the European Union: Hungary and Poland**

Hungary and Poland can be regarded to be the early birds of the “populist zeitgeist”. In these Central Eastern European countries, populists were elected “before it was cool”: ten years ago in Hungary, and five years ago in Poland. Viktor Orbán returned to power in 2010, and his rhetoric on government became much more populist than it was during his first term of governance between 1998 and 2002 (Hawkins et al., 2020). He did not waste time and implemented deep institutional and political changes that added up to a new “transformation”- but an illiberal one (Krekó and Mayer, 2014; Krekó and Enyedi, 2014, Forgas and Lantos, 2020). When the PiS, led by Lech Kaczyński, obtained governmental power in 2015, they could already build on the experiences of Viktor Orbán on how to develop a populist establishment without facing tough consequences.

The rhetorical justification of these transformative measures were that they all express the will of the people. Both Kaczyński and Orbán are using the textbook political rhetoric of populism (see Table 1), reflecting the core of populism such as people-centrism and anti-elitism, as well as a Manichean divide of the Good vs. the Evil and uninhibited anti-pluralism. „*Vox populi, vox Dei*”, as Jaroslaw Kaczyński summarized his populist political credo a few years ago, referring to the Latin phrase meaning „Voice of the people, the voice of God”. Viktor Orbán claimed after a manipulative, government-organized (and finally, invalid) referendum in 2016: *“It will be small consolation that the peoples of Europe will not forgive the leaders who*

completely changed Europe without first asking its people. Let us be proud of the fact that we are the only country in the European Union which has asked people whether or not they want mass immigration.” (for references, see Krekó et al., 2018, and see Table 1).

Table 1: Populist statements of populist leaders Viktor Orbán and Lech Kaczyński

<b>Table 1.</b> <i>Dimensions of populism in the speeches of Viktor Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczyński</i>	
People-centrism	You can see how in many European countries the distance between the people and their democratically elected governments increases day by day. Minister Antal Rogán will be responsible for ensuring that this does not happen to us in Hungary. I ask him to persevere in finding points of consensus between the people and the Government. – Viktor Orbán, upon the formation of the new government, May 18, 2018, source: <a href="http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-upon-the-formation-of-the-new-government/">http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-upon-the-formation-of-the-new-government/</a>
Anti-elitism	“The question is, if the Union in its current shape, with its horrible bureaucracy and institutionalized undermining of the nation state, is able to survive,” he told a Polish interviewer. “According to me, no.” - Jaroslaw Kaczyński, <a href="https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2017-ranking/jaroslaw-kaczyński/">https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2017-ranking/jaroslaw-kaczyński/</a>
Manichean Worldview	“Therefore they [our opponents] will stop at nothing: they will not argue, but censor; they will not fight, but pinch, kick, bite and sow hatred wherever they go. We are calm and good-humoured people, but we are neither blind nor gullible. After the election we will of course seek amends – moral, political and legal amends”. Viktor Orbán, March 15, 2018, source: <a href="http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848/">http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktors-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848/</a>
Anti-pluralism	“In Poland, there is a horrible tradition of national treason, a habit of informing on Poland to foreign bodies,” Kaczyński said after some opposition politicians complained to European authorities about Law and Justice’s actions in office. “And that’s what it is. As if it is in their genes, in the genes of Poles of the worst sort.”

In our empirical research, conducted in 2017, I and my colleagues at the Budapest-based think-tank Political Capital Institute (Krekó et al., 2018) tried to discover how this populist rhetoric resonates and manifests in the public opinion in these two populist establishments. We were particularly curious about how much anti-elitism is visible in the voter bases of these parties. Do voters of populist parties in power show real populist attitudes?

Todosijevic (2018) already found a pattern in Hungary that was similar to Montenegro and Serbia described above: the voters of Viktor Orbán’s party Fidesz were the least (!) anti-elitist

among groups of party supporters.

To measure populist attitudes comparably, we conducted representative public opinion polls in both countries using almost identical methodologies. Comparability was ensured by employing the same polling technique (computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) on representative samples of the adult population) and using the same questionnaire. The poll was conducted by Kantar Hoffmann in Hungary and by Kantar TNS in Poland in December 2017. We aimed to measure different facets of populism with items from already existing scales that have been already tested and widely accepted: Silva et al. (2018) and Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) (for more information on the scales see below; items are shown in Table 2). Although we were not aware of their comparative research when we started the study, Silva et al. (2020, p12) found that these two scales presented good model fit and high factor loadings in this test, having therefore, high internal consistency. While we aimed to use the original sub-scales, based on our preliminary calculations we decided to combine items from the two scales in two subscales (Manichean Worldview and Anti-Elitism), which resulted in higher reliability and conceptual and internal consistency of these constructs (still, Cronbach-Alphas remained relatively low in some cases due to the low number of items and the presence of reverse items).

The scales were the following (for the items, see Table 2).

(1) people-centrism – painting the common people as a homogeneous group and emphasizing the idea of a general will driving political processes, sovereignty in politics (based on Silva et al., 2017, 3 items,  $\alpha=0.39$  in Hungary and 0.47 in Poland);

(2) political anti-elitism – the idea that a small, powerful group has illegitimately taken over the state and subverted it for its own benefit (based on Silva et al, 2017 and Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014, 4 items,  $\alpha=0.64$  in Hungary and 0.49 in Poland);

(3) Manichean worldview – an understanding of politics as an ultimate struggle between good and evil, which means that compromise with the other side is morally unacceptable (based on Silva et al, 2017 and Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014, 4 items,  $\alpha=0.63$  in Hungary and 0.43 in Poland);

(4) pluralism – a willingness to compromise between conflicting values, a tendency to listen to different viewpoints and the need to listen to dissenting voices (based on Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove 2014; 3 items;  $\alpha=0.55$  in Hungary and 0.55 in Poland);

(5) elitism – a view that instead of politicians, businesspeople and experts should lead the country. (based on Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014; 3 items,  $\alpha=0.52$  in Hungary and 0.53 in Poland). The exact items are included in the Appendix.

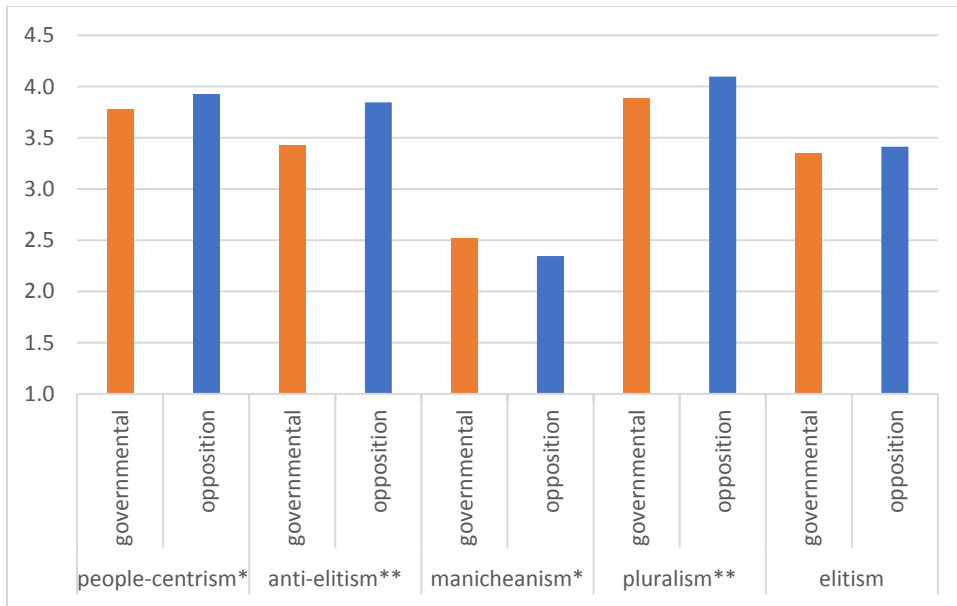
We also measured authoritarian tendencies, the need for following the decisions of a strong leader instead of having long debates between different viewpoints, with one item that is similar than is used in the World Values Surveys: “*Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to a strong leader instead of elected politicians*”. Also, we measured the tendency to support political violence with a binary item, where voters had to choose between two options: “*In a democracy the use of violence to reach any goal is completely unacceptable*”, versus „*In case it is necessary to achieve important goals, one must even turn to the use of violence*” (based on Bartlett et al., 2012).

In the following, we highlight six main findings of attitudes of supporters of populist establishments – e.g. voters of PiS and Fidesz.

- 1) *Mixed results in people-centrism.* In Hungary, we found lower levels of people-centrism among supporters of the governmental parties, while in Poland, higher levels. In Hungary, voters of the right-wing opposition Jobbik party were found to be significantly more people-centric than other parties, including Fidesz ( $df=671$ ,  $F=3,428$ ;  $p=0.05$ ). In Poland, voters of the liberal Nowoczesna party were found to be the most people-centric (but not significantly higher than the Pis voters.). When we compared governmental voters to opposition voters, we found significantly lower levels of anti-elitism among Fidesz voters in Hungary ( $t=-2.6$ ,  $df=575$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) and significantly higher levels in Poland  $t=2,1$ ,  $df= 402$ ,  $p=0.37$ , see Graph 1 and 2).

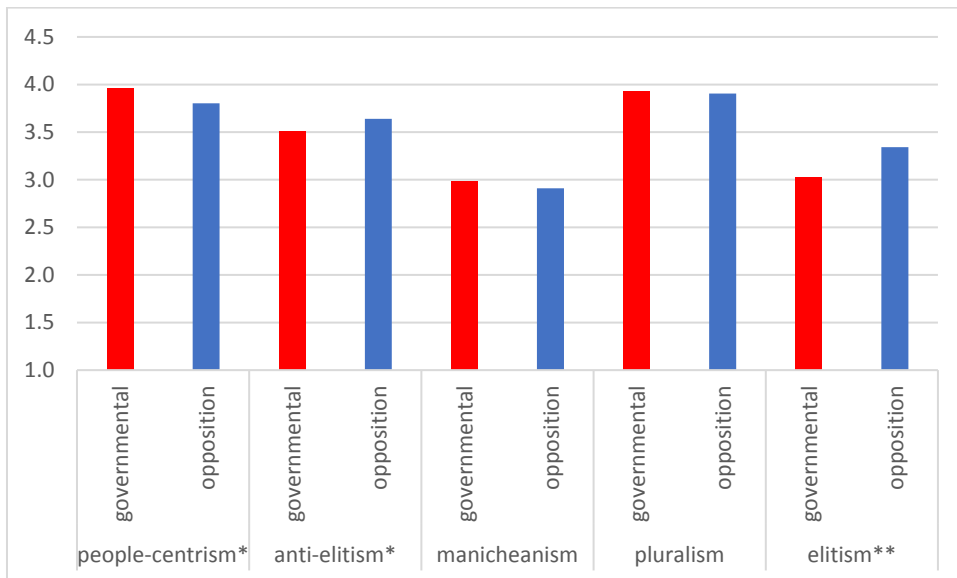
*Graph 1: Differences in populism-related attitudes among government (Fidesz) vs. opposition (combined) voters, Hungary (means on a 1-5 scale). Supporters of the populist Fidesz party were less people-centric, anti-elitist and pluralistic, but more Manichean (understanding politics as the ultimate war between Good and Evil) than opposition voters.*





mean differences: \*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.01$

*Graph 2: Differences in populism-related attitudes among government (PiS) vs. opposition (combined) voters, Poland (means on a 1-5 scale). Governmental voters were found to be slightly more people-centric, more supportive of the governing political elite, but less supportive of business elites and experts in politics.*

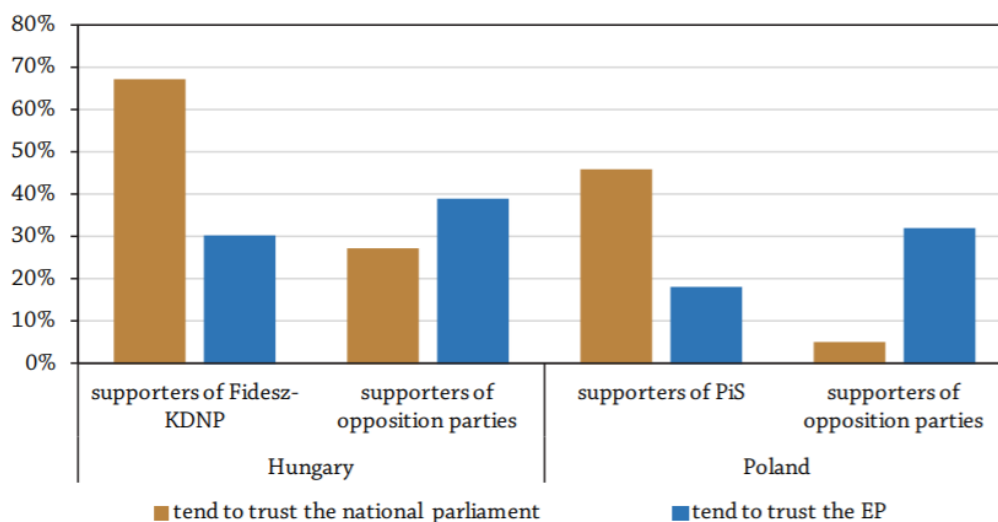


mean differences: \*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.01$

2) *Low levels of anti-elitism.* In both countries, we found lower levels of anti-elitism among voters of the populist governmental parties than among opposition supporters. In Hungary, we found a similar pattern that Todosijevic (2018) also described: voters of the governmental Fidesz were the *least* anti-elitist among voter groups. Governmental voters were significantly less anti-elitist in Hungary than opposition voters ( $t=-7.7$ ,  $df=576$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). In Poland, voters of governmental PiS party were also found to be significantly more anti-elitist than opposition voters ( $t= -2.2$ ,  $df=373$ ,  $p=0.026$ ; see Graph 1 and 2).

This does not necessarily mean, though, that voters of populist parties are more supportive towards all kinds of elites. While supporters of populist establishments are more in favor of their own domestic political elites, they reject the international elites. Both in Poland and Hungary, governmental voters trust much less the symbol of the international political elites: the European Parliament – the directly elected parliamentary assembly of the European Union – than do opposition voters. At the same time, Pis and Fidesz supporters trust more the national parliaments – dominated by their beloved parties - than supporters of the opposition (See Graph 3 below).

*Graph 3 : Level of trust towards the national parliaments and the European Parliament (EP) among supporters of governmental parties vs. opposition parties. Both in Hungary and Poland, supporters of the ruling populist parties support more their own political elites but reject international elites in the EU compared to opposition supporters who trust the EP more than their own parliament).*



*Source: Krekó et al; 2018. Calculations are based on European Social Survey Round8 data (edition 2). Fieldwork period: Hungary (May-September, 2017), Poland (November 2016 – February 2017).*

- 3) *Strong black-and-white thinking.* In both countries, voters of populist governmental parties showed higher levels of absolutist, moralizing Manichean attitudes. Interestingly, we could see that some opposition voters show high levels of such attitudes as well- which might be the result of the increasing polarization in both countries (see also Marcus, this volume). In Hungary, voters of the progressive-liberal Democratic Coalition (the party of ex-PM Ferenc Gyurcsány), and in Poland, voters of the liberal Nowoczesna (that later merged into the center-right Civic Platform) showed above-average levels of black-and white, Manichean thinking, as harsh opposition counterpoints to the governmental parties. But if we compared the absolutist Manichean attitudes of governmental voters to all opposition voters combined, we could see significantly higher levels of black-and-white thinking among Fidesz voters in Hungary ( $t= 2.6$ ,  $df=649$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). In Poland, governmental supporters showed higher levels of black-and-white, Manichean thinking, but this difference was not significant (see Graph 1 and 2).

- 4) *Low levels of pluralism in Poland.* In Hungary, supporters of Fidesz were found to be the least pluralist across the party supporter groups, and governmental voters were significantly less pluralist than opposition voters combined ( $t=-3.8$ ,  $df=653$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In Poland, pluralist attitudes were not distinctive, and there was no significant difference found between supporters of political parties, not between voters of the government and the opposition combined (see Graph 1 and 2).
- 5) *Higher support of elitism in Poland.* In Hungary, governmental voters and opposition voters were similarly elitist – which here means support towards the idea of non-elected businessmen and experts running the country rather than elected politicians. In Poland though, supporters of the populist right governing party PiS were significantly less elitist than voters of the opposition ( $t=-3.6$ ,  $df=310$ ,  $p=0.000$ , See Graph 1 and 2). It could seem surprising in the light of the fact that as we could see above, PiS voters were *more* supportive toward the political elites. At the same time, these results are not necessarily logically incoherent, as supporters of the government can see experts and businessmen as a challenge to the legitimacy of their beloved elected leaders.
- 6) *Higher support of political violence in Poland.* In Poland, voters of the governmental law and justice party were more supportive of the idea that “*In case it is necessary to achieve important goals, one must even turn to the use of violence*”. 19 percent of governmental voters were supportive of this idea, compared to 11 percent of opposition voters ( $\chi^2=4.8$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.027$ ). We found no such significant differences in Hungary.

To summarize: we found that voters of ruling populist parties in government in Poland and Hungary were not necessarily showing ‘typical’ populist attitudes as we would expect from the textbook definitions of populism. This is especially the case in the two core features of populism: anti-elitism and people-centrism. In Hungary, Fidesz-voters are *less* people-centric than opposition voters – which means they are less supportive towards the democratic idea that people should always make the final decisions in politics. In both countries, supporters of the populist governments were *less* anti-elitist than opposition voters. On the other hand, some secondary features of populism are strongly visible among voters of populist establishments. We found higher levels of black-and white, morally absolutist Manichean worldview and stronger rejection of pluralism in Hungary, and lower support for the idea that businessmen and

experts have to run politics in Poland. Furthermore, voters of PiS party in Poland were more supportive towards violence than opposition voters. In short: the pattern we see here in the attitudes do not fit into the minimalist definition of populism.

#### Conspiracy theories among governmental voters in Hungary

As considered above populism and conspiracy theories are often interconnected, both conceptually and empirically. Conceptually, populism is not separable from conspiracy theories, as conspiracy theory is a ‘populist theory of power’ (Fenster, 2008, Yablokov, 2015). Conspiracy theories are based on the assumption that some elite groups have secret, malevolent plans against the ingroup (the “people”). In terms of attitudes, strong links were found between populist attitudes and partisanship and certain forms of conspiracy theories, including anti-vaccination (Littvay et al., 2017).

In another representative survey we conducted at the Political Capital Institute in Hungary, we discovered a more nuanced picture (Krekó, Molnár, Simonovits, 2019). Voters of Fidesz, the governing party that extensively used conspiracy theories in its public communication in the last few years (e.g. Krekó and Enyedi, 2018), were more supportive towards theories of external intervention, such as the conspiracy of the Western superpowers, the Jews or the Muslims (Hungary has practically no Muslim population). At the same time, we found stronger support for different kinds of conspiracy theories among the opposition. Opposition voters had a stronger Conspiracy Mentality- an assumption that there is some conspiracy behind world events. Also, they were more supportive towards neutral conspiracy theories (e.g. chemtrails, anti-pharma, anti-bank theories), and also, obviously, for anti-governmental conspiracy theories.

We see a similar pattern here as with the anti-elite attitudes: voters of ruling domestic populist establishments are *less* afraid of domestic threats and conspiracies – but strongly suspicious about any form of foreign intervention, that they feel can threaten the stability of the system that their populist leaders established. This finding, again clearly goes against the general simplification that populist politics is inevitably anti-establishment.

## Populism or tribalism?

The empirical results listed above pose a challenge to the conventional concept and research on populism. The construct, ‘populism’ seems easy to capture as a political reality on the “supply side”, as a political strategy - but difficult to grasp it on the “demand side” – as a social psychological reality (see also Bar-Tal; this volume). Voters of populist parties in power do not necessarily exhibit the classical “populist attitudes”, such as anti-elitism and people-centrism, neither in Central and Eastern Europe and nor in the Western Balkans (Todosijevic, 2018). Voters in this region show lower levels of anti-elite, anti-establishment attitudes and at the same time, not necessarily higher levels of people-centrism.

A revision of the measurement tools might help us in the revision of our concepts as wells. Based on our research, it appears that measuring attitudes with populism scales make sense only if we re-combine and re-label them.

*Table 2: The first two factors obtained in the factor analysis of 17 populism-related items in Hungary and Poland (in two separate factor analysis), and the factor loadings of items. Political Tribalism and Plebeian Pluralism emerged in both countries, with similar content.*

	Hungary		Poland	
	Political Tribalism	Plebeian Pluralism	Political Tribalism	Plebeian Pluralism
PC1 Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people	-0,168	0,613	-0,044	0,632
PC2 Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.*	-0,511	0,031	-0,509	0,056
PC3 The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.	0,054	0,573	0,193	0,446
AE1 Independent of which parties are in power, the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves	-0,011	0,222	0,110	0,493
AE2 Independent of which parties are in power, government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.	-0,475	-0,151	-0,386	-0,158
AE3 Independent of which parties are in power, quite a few of the people running the government are crooked.	0,042	0,286	-0,033	0,639
AE4 Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.	-0,139	0,192	0,002	0,409
MA1 You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.	0,694	-0,175	0,581	-0,015
MA2 The people I disagree with politically are not evil.	0,106	-0,432	0,011	-0,269
MA3 The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed*.	0,581	-0,181	0,477	0,088
MA4 Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil.	0,513	-0,150	0,472	0,118
PL1 In a democracy it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints.	-0,269	0,596	-0,035	0,373
PL2 It is important to listen to the opinion of other groups.	-0,310	0,565	-0,044	0,228
PL3 Diversity limits my freedom*	-0,556	0,226	-0,581	0,133
EL1 Politicians should lead rather than follow the people.	0,225	0,181	0,384	-0,043
EL2 Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful business people.	0,360	-0,005	0,498	0,041
EL3 Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independent experts.	0,098	0,090	0,282	0,269

*Extraction Method: Principal Likelihood, with Varimax Rotation. Variance explained by the 2 factors: 31% in HU and 30% in PL. KMO=0,82 (HU) 0.81 (PL); Bartlett's Test of Sphericity:  $\chi^2=3451$ ,  $df=136$ ,  $p=0.000$  in HU  $\chi^2=2411$ ,  $df=136$ ,  $p=0.000$  in PL). \*: reversed items. See the source and the exact description of the items in the Appendix.*

A factor analysis that I ran on the 17 items of all the five the populism scales for the purpose of this chapter revealed a structure that is different from the conceptual approach of populism introduced above. As we can see in Table 2, the first factor in both the Polish and the Hungarian sample is an attitude dimension, the core of which is the absolutist, moralizing Manichean Worldview and understanding of politics as warfare. The item loading highest on this factor is: “you can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics”. It is combined with a strong rejection of pluralism, lower level of anti-establishment attitudes and lower people-centrism. This attitude dimension explains a significant ratio of the total variance of all the 17 populism-related items we included in the research: 19 percent in Hungary and 17 percent in Poland. Also, this absolutist, intolerant, Manichean and anti-pluralistic attitude set is positively associated to authoritarianism ( $R^2=.26$ ,  $\beta=.51$ ,  $t=17.5$ ,  $p<0.001$  in Hungary,  $R^2=.23$ ,  $\beta=.48$ ,  $t=14.3$ ,  $p<0.001$  in in Poland), and slightly increases the likelihood of supporting violent solutions ( $\text{Exp}(B)= 1.3$ ;  $p=0.012$ ; Nagekerle  $R^2=.014$  in Hungary;  $\text{Exp}(B)= 1.29$ ;  $p=0.029$ ; Nagekerle  $R^2=.013$  in Poland).

One might label this attitude dimension as *political tribalism*, as this attitude is about understanding of politics as a kind of religious warfare between the Good and Evil, that justifies suppressing dissent, rallying around the leader of the own tribe, and support for violent solutions. This attitude dimension was found to be significantly stronger among governmental voters in Hungary ( $t=4.5$ ,  $df=585$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

It is important to note that the scree plots in the factor analysis in both countries revealed a two-factor solution. The second attitude dimension we found is almost the opposite of the previous one: a combination of higher levels of people-centrism, pluralism, and some anti-elitist attitudes. The highest loading item on this factor was: “*Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people*”. We labelled this attitude dimension as *Plebeian Pluralism*, and this attitude was associated with decreased support of political violence both in Hungary ( $\text{Exp}(B)= 0.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Nagekerle  $R^2=.089$  and Poland ( $\text{Exp}(B)= 0.47$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Nagekerle  $R^2=.093$ ; See Table 2 for details). But in the following, we will elaborate on the concept of Political Tribalism.

#### **The nature of political tribalism and its specifics**

As our research shows, supporters of populist parties in power can manifest attitudes that can contradict the core concept of populism, in particular, lack people-centrism and anti-establishment position. Based on the findings above it appears that *political tribalism* as a term may be more suitable to explain the political tendencies of supporters of ruling populist parties than *populism*.

Political tribalism is an understanding of politics as all about righteous power, the ultimate, war between the Good and the Evil, when no compromise is possible other than defeating the other tribe. To be successful in this political war, the political rivals should be seen as enemies, leaders of the tribe should be unconditionally trusted, and dissent within the own political tribe must be suppressed. This combination of a morally binary, black-and white thinking, anti-pluralism and authoritarianism makes populist rulers a dangerous threat against democratic societies. This view of contemporary governmental populism is fundamentally different from traditional understanding, where populism was seen as an ultimately democratic phenomenon (see for example, Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018), maybe best illustrated by Canovan's understanding (2002) of populism as "*the Ideology of Democracy*".

Advocates of the term populism can argue though that the "chameleonic" nature of populism applies to populist attitudes as well. Anti-elitism and people-centrism may manifest in supporters of populist parties in opposition who want to obtain the power via mobilizing their voters against the incumbent elites, referring to the will of the masses. This political ideology can rapidly change however when populists acquire power, and now the electorate can pose a threat to their position on power. Interestingly, a qualified form of anti-elitism can occur in populist establishments as well, directed at foreign elites. While populists in opposition are concerned with the national elite, populists in government often channel discontent against international elites and their domestic allies. If the anti-elitist opposition party becomes the elite itself, the voter base seems to easily adapt to this new situation. We can remember that government voters in Poland and Hungary see the national parliament as trustworthy but do not regard the European Parliament the same way.

If voters of ruling "populist" parties manifest attitudes that redefine the boundaries of the original term, some re-conceptualization could be useful. The argument is not that we should abandon everything we know about populism. Conceptually, the term captures well a political mobilization and rhetorical strategy in democratic societies that aims to take over the power – and then, keeping it – justifying it with "the will of the people", and pointing to the conspiracies of the rival elites.

At the same time, populism is not a simple or singular psychological reality, but only an adaptable political strategy mimicking a democratic façade to attack liberal democracies. When populism becomes a governmental force, it reveals its real face, which is tribalism – both as a



political practice, or as we defined here in the chapter, an attitude set. In Table 3 we tried to summarize some differences between the concept of populism and tribalism.

*Table 3: Differences between Populism vs. tribalism*

	Populism	Tribalism
Relationship to democracy	Democratic	Autocratic, un-democratic
The relationship to the leader	People-Centric, Egalitarian (the members of the group defines the ingroup)	Leader-Centric, Authoritarian (the leader defines the ingroup: tribe)
Direction of conflicts	Vertical (“People vs. Elites”)	Horizontal (“Us” vs. “Them”)
Attitudes	High people-centrism, low anti-elitism	High anti-pluralism, absolutist black-and white (Manichean) thinking, authoritarianism

The term “tribalism” as an extreme form of ingroup identification and intergroup conflict is not my invention. Tribalism identified a dangerous, and ancient, form of political polarization recognized by several leading scholars (see for example: Wind, 2020 or “pernicious polarization: McCoy et al., 2018). It is more and more widely accepted that the distinction between ingroups and outgroups, rivaling social identities, and tribal mindset and behavior have evolutionary roots (Park, & van Leeuwen, 2015 Greene, 2013, Hobfoll, 2018; Clark et al. , 2019, Harari, 2014)

Populist rhetoric might be an important tool to unlock this ancient predisposition. As Forgas and Lantos (2020, p. 287) put it in the previous volume of this series: “*Evolutionary psychological research on the fundamental characteristics of human cognition now confirms that humans are indeed highly predisposed to embrace fictitious symbolic belief systems as a means of enhancing group cohesion and coordination (...) Populism is designed to exploit these tendencies*” (see also Forgas & Lantos, this volume).

**Practical implications: Consequences and cures of political tribalism**

We argued here that the real danger that liberal democracies face these days is more *political tribalism*, not just populism. This is a phenomenon that we can find both on the left and right, among conservatives and self-identified ‘liberals’ as well (Clark et al., 2019), and the

consequences reach well beyond politics, totally undermining positivist views that facts matter – or even exist. Motivated rejection of scientific findings, due to their mismatch to our core ideological beliefs, was found to be extremely widespread in the US population in a study a few years ago (Lewandowsky, Oberauer, 2016). While this tendency was more present on the right side of the political spectrum, the cognitive mechanisms underlying the rejection of scientific facts were found to be universal and present on both sides of politics.

Some argue that tribal demands and absolutist, intolerant and even violent political ideologies are at least as popular on the left side of the political spectrum as on the right (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018; Murray, 2019). But if we look around in the Western World now, we can see that the political right seems to have some advantage in tribal politics based on the absolutization of political identities, even if it was pseudo-liberal ideologies and movements that put group-based identity in the center of politics in the democratic Western World (Fukuyama, 2018). The dangers of tribalism are multifold, and not only in new and fragile democracies such as Poland and Hungary. The nature of tribal politics is that it destroys moral and democratic norms. Tribalism kills dialogue, and puts monologues first – why talk to the Dark Side? Moral universalism based on Enlightenment values and humanism disappears and gives way to moral relativism and particularism. It is not for cynical, but for absolutist moral considerations: that everything is justified to guarantee the survival and win of your tribe.

If these are the premises, the conclusions can be dire. Corruption can become acceptable, or even a moral act (Blais, Gidengil, & Kilibarda, 2015; Anduiza et al., 2013), as are the accumulation of resources in a tribal war. This is illustrated by the statement of the consultant of the Hungarian government, András Láncki, who once claimed: „*what others call populism is the rationale of politics of Fidesz*”, arguing for creating a strong national bourgeoisie (using corrupt methods) via public money to be able to defeat the post-communist, globalist elites. Also, norms towards democratic transgressions might be tolerated or even cheered if it helps our own group (Eisinger, 2000; McCoy et al., 2019). As successful tribal wars need strong tribal myths, tribalism drives both the creation and the spread of disinformation. Tribal partisanship and emotions can make people highly receptive to misleading information and fake news (Fragó, Kende, Krekó, 2019; Forgas, 2019; Forgas and Baumeister, 2019). Also, tribalism can justify violence (Hobfoll, 2019), as it was also found in our empirical research from Hungary and Poland.

This chapter argued for a reconsideration of the term populism in light of the empirically demonstrable behavior of populist regimes in power. The data show that tribalism is a more

characteristic and universal feature of populist rule, based on empirical research in a small set of countries. Obviously more studies are needed on the exact relationship between populism and tribalism on the level of psychological attitudes both when populists are in government and in opposition. Also, we need more work on the exact conceptualisation, and operationalization of tribalism. Once we recognize the highly dangerous and disruptive nature of tribal politics for Western liberal democracies, more research is needed on exactly how to counter effectively this phenomenon. Research so far suggests that changing the elite discourse (Mc Coy et al., 2018), perspective taking (Broockman & Calla, 2018), removing political labels from positions and people during discussions (Hawkins, Nosek, 2012, or making electoral systems more proportional (Mc Coy et al., 2018, Gidron et al., 2018), might be promising avenues. These are all strategies that are based on classical Enlightenment values and a humanist and universalist (rather than tribalistic) social orientation. Unfortunately, research focusing on the interventions against populism/tribalism is still rare, so social psychologists need to speed up their efforts to find the cures. The future of our democracies is at stake.

## Literature

- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative political studies*, 47(9), 1324-1353.
- Anduiza, E., Gallego, A., & Muñoz, J. (2013). Turning a blind eye: Experimental evidence of partisan bias in attitudes toward corruption. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(12), 1664-1692.
- Barr, R. R. (2009). Populists, outsiders and anti-establishment politics. *party politics*, 15(1), 29-48.
- Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J., Krekó, P., Benfield, J., & Gyori, G. (2012). Populism in Europe: Hungary. London, Demos.
- Blais, A., Gidengil, E., & Kilibarda, A. (2017). Partisanship, information, and perceptions of government corruption. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 29(1), 95-110.
- Broockman, D., & Kalla, J. (2016). Durably reducing transphobia: A field experiment on door-to-door canvassing. *Science*, 352(6282), 220-224.
- Canovan M. (2002) Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy. In: Mény Y., Surel Y. (eds) Democracies and the Populist Challenge. Palgrave Macmillan, London
- Castanho Silva, B., Andreadis, I., Eva, A., Blanuša, N., Morlet Corti, Y., Delfino, G., ... & Littvay, L. (2018). Public opinion surveys: A new scale.
- Castanho Silva, B., Jungkunz, S., Helbling, M., & Littvay, L. (2020). An empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales. *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2), 409-424.
- Castanho Silva, B., Jungkunz, S., Helbling, M., & Littvay, L. (2020). An empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales. *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2), 409-424.
- Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., & Littvay, L. (2017). The elite is up to something: Exploring the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 423-443.
- Clark, C. J., Liu, B. S., Winegard, B. M., & Ditto, P. H. (2019). Tribalism is human nature. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(6), 587-592.

- Džankić, J., & Keil, S. (2017). State-sponsored populism and the rise of populist governance: the case of Montenegro. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 19(4), 403-418.
- Eisinger, R. M. (2000). Partisan absolution? Exploring the depths of forgiving. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 12(3), 254-258.
- Enyedi, Zs. (2016). Paternalist populism and illiberal elitism in Central Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 21(1), 9-25.
- Enyedi, Zs. (2018). Understanding the rise of populist establishments. LSE blog, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/07/04/understanding-the-rise-of-the-populist-establishment/>
- Faragó, L., Kende, A., & Krekó, P. (2020). We Only Believe in News That We Doctored Ourselves: The Connection Between Partisanship and Political Fake News. *Social Psychology*, 51(2), 77-90.
- Fenster, M. (1999). *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Forgas, J. P. (2019). On The Role of Affect in Gullibility: Can Positive Mood Increase, and Negative Mood Reduce Credulity?. In *The Social Psychology of Gullibility* (pp. 179-197). Routledge.
- Forgas, J. P., & Baumeister, R. F. (2019). Homo credulus: On the social psychology of gullibility. In *The Social Psychology of Gullibility* (pp.1-18). Routledge.
- Forgas, J. P., & Lantos, D. (2020). Understanding populism: Collective narcissism and the collapse of democracy in Hungary. In *Applications of social psychology* (pp. 267-291). Routledge.
- Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90.
- Gidron, N., Adams, J., & Horne, W. (2018). How ideology, economics and institutions shape affective polarization in democratic polities. In *Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association*.
- Greene, J. D. (2013). *Moral tribes: Emotion, reason, and the gap between us and them*. Penguin.
- Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Random House.

- Hawkins, C. B., & Nosek, B. A. (2012). Motivated independence? Implicit party identity predicts political judgments among self-proclaimed independents. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(11), 1437-1452.
- Hawkins, K. A., Aguilar, R., Silva, B. C., Jenne, E. K., Kocijan, B., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2019). Measuring Populist Discourse: The Global Populism Database. In *Presentado en el 2019 en EPSA Annual Conference en Belfast, Reino Unido, June*.  
 Silva, B. C., Andreadis, I., Anduiza, E., Blanuša, N., Corti, Y. M., Delfino, G., ... & Littvay, L. (2017). Executive Memo on a new Populist Attitudes Scale.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2018). *Tribalism: The evolutionary origins of fear politics*. Springer.
- Krekó, P., & Enyedi, Z. (2018). Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(3), 39-51.
- Krekó, P., & Mayer, G. (2015). Transforming Hungary—together?: An analysis of the Fidesz–Jobbik relationship. In *Transforming the Transformation?* (pp. 183-205). Routledge.
- Krekó, P., Molnár, C., Juhász, A., Kucharczyk, J., & Pazderski, F. (2018). Beyond Populism. Tribalism in Poland and Hungary. *Political Capital*.
- Krekó, P.; Molnár, Cs.; Simonovits, A. (2019). Conspiracy Theories for Winners: the case of Hungary. *THE 42ND ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY. Lisbon, 12-15 July*. [https://www.ispp.org/uploads/attachments/FULL\\_PROGRAM\\_2019\\_FINAL\\_POS\\_T.pdf](https://www.ispp.org/uploads/attachments/FULL_PROGRAM_2019_FINAL_POS_T.pdf)
- McCoy, J., Rahman, T., & Somer, M. (2018). Polarization and the global crisis of democracy: Common patterns, dynamics, and pernicious consequences for democratic polities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1), 16-42.
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and opposition*, 39(4), 541-563.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Park, J. H., & van Leeuwen, F. (2015). Evolutionary perspectives on social identity. In *Evolutionary perspectives on social psychology* (pp. 115-125). Springer, Cham.
- Silva, B. C., & Littvay, L. (2016). Presenting a cross-nationally validated populist attitudes scale. *Provo: Brigham Young University*.

- Todosijevic, B. (2018). Anti-elite orientation and populism in comparative perspective. *Parties, Populism and Participation: Hungarian elections in a comparative perspective* CEU, Budapest June 6, 2018
- Wind, M. (2020). *The Tribalization of Europe: A Defence of Our Liberal Values*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yablokov, I. (2015). Conspiracy theories as a Russian public diplomacy tool: The case of Russia Today (RT). *Politics*, 35(3-4), 301-315.