How To Break A State:

How Populists Challenge Liberalism In Post-Communist Central Europe

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Declaration

I declare that the material contained in this work is original and has not been used for a previous work submitted for the attainment of a degree. The dissertation is my own work and was completed individually. All references to outside sources are appropriately cited.

Abstract

English

Why are some populist challenges more successful than others? Theorizing that a successful challenge occurs from a combination of demand, opportunity, and activation, I examine these conditions in the Visegrad Countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and how the challenger party in each country utilized these conditions to stage their challenges. Using a mix of public opinion surveys, secondary literature, and qualitative textual analysis, I find that parties that use identity-based appeals (e.g. to religion or nation) are better able to establish hegemonic electoral positions and delegitimize their opponents than parties that either coincidentally or by design fail to do so. This study contributes a review of populist challenges in post-communist Central Europe and a qualitative textual analysis of party literature that is largely unavailable in other languages. In considering why some challenges result in monolithic state capture (e.g. Poland and Hungary) while others founder (e.g. Czechia and Slovakia), we gain a broader picture of how parties instrumentalize identities and values, and a clearer picture of the structural weaknesses in liberal democratic regimes that facilitate democratic erosion and breakdown.

Deutsch

Warum sind einige Anfechtungen der liberalen politischen Ordnung durch populistische Parteien erfolgreicher als andere? Diese Dissertation befasst sich mit den Bedingungen unter denen solche Anfechtungen in den Visegrád-Ländern (Tschechien, Ungarn, Polen und Slowakei) stattfinden und untersucht, wie die herausfordernde Partei jedes Landes diese Bedingungen genutzt hat, um ihre Anfechtung umzusetzen. Unter Anwendung von Meinungsumfragen, Sekundärliteratur und qualitativer Textanalyse stelle ich fest, dass Parteien, die sich auf identitätsbasierte Appelle (z. B. an die Religion oder die Nation) stützen, besser in der Lage sind, hegemoniale Wahlpositionen zu etablieren und ihre Gegner zu delegitimieren als Parteien, die diese Appelle entweder zufällig oder vorsätzlich nicht anwenden. Diese Studie liefert einen Überblick über populistische Anfechtungen des liberalen Systems im postkommunistischen Mitteleuropa und eine qualitative Textanalyse der Parteienliteratur, die in anderen Sprachen weitgehend nicht verfügbar ist. Die Frage warum einige Anfechtungen des liberalen politischen Systems zu einer monolithischen Staatseroberung führen (z. B. Polen und Ungarn), während andere scheitern (z. B. Tschechien und die Slowakei), schafft ein umfassendes Bild davon, wie Parteien Identitäten und Werte instrumentalisieren, ebenso wie ein klareres Bild von den strukturellen Schwächen liberal-demokratischer Regierungen, die die demokratische Erosion und den Zusammenbruch fördern.

Chapter 1: Discontent Amid Plenty

Introduction

1989 was a moment of euphoria for many citizens across the socialist bloc. The fall of the Moscow-backed authoritarian regimes ushered in a new era of political freedom and economic change, converting the authoritarian planned economies into liberal market democracies within a decade. In spite of these rapid transformations that appeared, on paper, to be staggering successes, Europe has witnessed a surge in contestations to the liberal-democratic order in the former socialist[1] countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Beginning with Viktor Orbán's election in Hungary in 2010, a new generation of politicians across the region proclaimed that they speak for the people against the corrupt and degraded post-communist liberal regimes, and will take back the power to serve their country's interest against the self-serving elite. One by one, the states of the Visegrad Group (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) elected parties whose appeal arises from their promise to challenge the status quo. A new political cleavage has opened pitting those in favor of the liberal regime against those seeking alternative forms of government. For the citizens of the Visegrad Four, politics as usual are over. Democratic backsliding has occurred across the region, with Hungary now considered a hybrid regime and Poland an unconsolidated democracy, as opposed to the consolidated democracies they had previously been.[2] As the liberal script – the ideas and structures that define the post-World War II liberal-democratic-capitalist order[3] - comes under increasing attack around the world, an understanding of why and how one of liberalism's greatest triumphs – the conversion and integration of the socialist bloc – becomes necessary. In an environment of similar expressions of

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[1] The phrases 'communist' and 'socialist' often appear interchangeably, both in the literature and in the regional context. For the sake of clarity, I refer to the Eastern Bloc regimes as 'socialist' in the understanding that these countries had implemented socialist means of production (i.e. state-led and organized) with the goal of constructing a communist society (i.e. self-organized) at some future point. I refer to the ruling parties as 'communist parties' to refer to their ideology. At times, I use the terms 'communist' and 'post-communist' because the subjects of this research frequently use these terms to refer to the pre-1989 order. When I use these terms, it is out of lexical consistency with the subjects.

[2] Zselyke Csaky. "Nations in Transit 2020: Dropping the Democratic Façade." *Freedom House*. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/05062020_FH_NIT2020_vfinal.pdf

[3] Michael Zürn and Johannes Gerschewski. "Sketching the Liberal Script. A Target of Contestations." *SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 10*, Berlin: Cluster of Excellence 2055 "Contestations of the Liberal Script – SCRIPTS". 2021.

discontent, what accounts for the variation in populist contestations across the four Visegrad countries? How do the challenger parties justify their challenges, and why do some succeed where others fail? These questions guide my investigation into the content and form of the divergent challenges to the post-1989 order in the Visegrad countries.

Puzzle

Since the fall of the state socialist regimes in 1989, the concurrent structures of liberal democratic government and market capitalism have taken root in the former Eastern Bloc. A comparison of key economic indicators from the outset of the transition in 1990 to the eve of the pandemic in 2019 shows enormous progress in key indicators of economic prosperity:

Table 1: 1990 Economic Indicators, Visegrad 4[4]

Indicator	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
GDP[5]	40.73 billion	34.75 billion (1991)	65.98 billion	12.75 billion
GDP per capita [6]	3,941.50	3,350.30 (1991)	1,731.20	2,405.5
GDP per capita PPP[7]	12,718	8,320	6,181	7,172 (1992)
Gini Index[8]	20.7	29.6 (1991)	29.3 (1992)	20.19 (1991)
Human Development Index[9]	0.73 (31st)	0.70 (47th)	0.71 (43rd)	0.74 (30th)
Unemployment[10]	0.7	1.7	13.6 (1992)	12.2 (1993)

[4] I have selected 1990 as the first year following the end of economic planning and single-party rule. Some data for Czech Republic and Slovakia appear as Czechoslovakia while other are separated. All amounts are given in USD.

[5] "GDP (current US$) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

[6] "GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Income Inequality – Gini Index, 1990." *Our World in Data.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/economic-inequality-gini-index?tab=map&time=1990&region=Europe

[9] "Human Development Index – HDI." *Country Economy.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://countryeconomy.com/hdi

[10] Unemployment statistics for 1990 mask the explosions of unemployment that occurred in the middle of the decade during privatization. This unemployment boom settled in the mid 2000s. "Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (national estimate) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.NE.ZS?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

Table 2: 2019 Economic Indicators, Visegrad 4[11]

Indicator	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
GDP[12]	252.5 billion	163.53 billion	598.858 billion	105.28 billion
GDP per capita [13]	23,489	33,515	15,694	31,966
GDP per capita PPP[14]	42,847	33,514	33,797	31,966
Gini Index[15]	25 (2018)	29.6	30.2 (2019)	24.9
Human Development Index[16]	0.90 (27th)	0.85 (40th)	0.88 (35th)	0.86 (39th)
Unemployment[17]	2.0	3.4	3.3	5.8

These indicators show both an increase in the general economic wealth of the nation and of individuals. Gross domestic product (GDP) has expanded, indicating a more productive national economy, and GDP per capita purchasing power parity (PPP) indicates wealthier consumers able to maintain a higher standard of living. Income inequality and unemployment remain generally low, and the human development index (HDI) score for each of the countries ranks among the highest in the world. Unemployment, though higher than during the socialist era, remains low relative to other capitalist economies. Since the outset of the transition, there has been a clear trend of improvement in the economy and the standard of living of the people of the

[11] I have selected 2019 to showcase 'normal' pre-COVID levels. All amounts given in USD. "Country Profile: Poland." *UNDP.* Accessed 15 May 2021. http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/POL.
"Poland." *World Bank.* Accessed 15 May 2021. https://data.worldbank.org/country/Poland
"Czech Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 15 May 2021. https://data.worldbank.org/country/czech-republic
"Country Profile: Czechia." *UNDP.* Accessed 15 May 2021. http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/CZE

[12] "GDP (current US$) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

[13] "GDP per capita, PPP (current international $) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] "Income Inequality – Gini Index, 2019." *Our World in Data.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/economic-inequality-gini-index?tab=map&time=latest&region=Europe

[16] "Human Development Index – HDI." *Country Economy.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://countryeconomy.com/hdi

[17] "Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (national estimate) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic." *World Bank.* Accessed 23 May 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.NE.ZS?locations=CZ-HU-PL-SK

Visegrad countries. Coupled with the absence of a repressive police apparatus and the removal of constitutionally enshrined one-party rule, it is not an unreasonable expectation to think that the people of the Visegrad countries would be growing more satisfied with their lives, not less. The reality, however, shows growing discontent. In 2019, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey across the former Eastern Bloc to determine the long-term attitudes toward the transition from authoritarian socialism to liberal-democratic capitalism. According to the survey *European Public Opinion Three Decades after the Fall of Communism*, the overall approval of the systemic changes begun in 1989 was high, but indicators of economic satisfaction with the new order, including satisfaction with the market economy and the belief that the economic situation had improved since the end of the era of state socialism, were lower than the economic indicators might lead us to expect.[18] Specifically, there were mixed views among respondents as to whether the economic situation changed for the better since the end of the socialist period, with sizable minorities perceiving their economic situations as worse off than under socialism[19] and claiming that elites enjoyed outsized benefits from the transition relative to ordinary people.[20] Among the Visegrad countries, support for the transition to the market economy had risen since 1991 in all countries except the Czech Republic.[21] In their analysis of Czech public opinion surveys on the 10th, 15th, and 20th anniversaries of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, Lyons and Bernardyová describe disappointment and disillusionment as the dominant feelings surrounding the Czech Republic's dual transition to capitalism and liberal democracy.[22] The data indicate a crisis of expectations, and even a revolution betrayed as Czechs evaluated the post-1989 regime against its predecessor. Wyss confirmed these trends in interviews with the residents of the mid-sized town of Opava on the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, citing a sense of relative deprivation over their economic situation, betrayal by the intellectual and political elite, and migration as a cultural threat.[23] This sense of relative deprivation is

[18] Pew Research Center, October, 2019, "European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism." 25.
[19] *Ibid*, 24.
[20] *Ibid*, 27.
[21] *Ibid*, 22.
[22] Pat Lyons and Alžběta Bernardyová, "Satisfied, Skeptical or Simply Indifferent? Current Public Opinion towards the Fall of Communism in the Czech Republic," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 9 (November 2011): 1719–44.
[23] Johana Wyss, "Exploring Populism Through the Politics of Commemoration," *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, no. 9 (October 21, 2021): 1683–1702.

especially enlightening. Residents of Opava complained that a person earning the minimum wage, or even above, were unable to achieve the same standard of living they could during socialism.[24] Polling conducted by Czech and Slovak research institutes,[25] found that 25 years after the Velvet Revolution, only 61 percent of Czechs and 51 percent of Slovaks viewed the Velvet Revolution positively.[26] Throughout the Visegrad bloc, a sense of frustration over the equity of the gains of the transition is evident. When asked whether ordinary people benefited from the transition, as opposed to business people and politicians, 54 percent of Czechs, 41 percent of Hungarians, 68 percent of Poles, and 42 percent of Slovaks answered in the affirmative. Politicians and business people scored significantly higher, with the vast majority of respondents answering in the affirmative.[27] Scheiring's study of post-industrial towns in Hungary is revealing of these divergent gains. The study shows that with the decline of manufacturing, the identity of the working class as a unified, culturally distinct unit disintegrated.[28]. In the words of one Hungarian worker from the deindustrialized town of Ajka, "they unleashed the dog, but the dog hasn't got any food to eat. That is freedom: no chains but no food either.[29]"

In spite of rising standards of living, dissatisfaction remains high among the population of the Visegrad countries. This dissatisfaction is often reflected in the programs and promises of parties that purport to challenge the sources of the dissatisfaction. Amid a broader trend of challenges to the currently-dominant liberal script,[30] the post-communist challenge has produced a cast of characters and an assortment of political movements ranging from the "illiberal democracy" of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance party,[31] in Hungary, the Fourth Republic of Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) in Poland, the "Slovak Social Democracy" of Robert Fico's Direction-Social Democracy (*Smer* -

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[24] *Ibid*,
[25] CVVM and IVO, respectively. "Dvacet pět let od Sametové revoluce očima občanů ČR a SR." *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.* https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c6/a3901/f77/pd141111a.pdf
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Pew Research Center*,* 27.
[28] Gábor Scheiring, "Left Behind in the Hungarian Rustbelt: The Cultural Political Economy of Working-Class Neo-Nationalism," *Sociology* 54, no. 6 (December 2020): 1159–77.
[29] *Ibid*, 1167.
[30] Tanja A. Börzel and Zürn, Michael. "Contestations of the Liberal Script. A Research Program." SCRIPTS Working Paper Series, No. 1, January 2020, Cluster of Excellence "Contestations of the Liberal Script", Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.
[31] Fidesz comes from the acronym Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Young Democrats)

sociálna demokracia -SMER-SD), and the entrepreneurial populism of Andrej Babiš's Action of Unsatisfied Citizens (*Akce nespokojených občanů* - ANO[32]). The differences between these challenges are as striking as the politicians themselves. The Polish and Hungarian movements share a strong redistributive tendency aimed at addressing the "flaws and frustrations with the transition to capitalism and neoliberalism.[33]" The Slovak challenge, initially offering the broad appeal of anti-corruption, quickly lost traction as the party itself became mired in corruption scandals. The Czech Republic's challenge to the post-1989 order has, so far, been relatively benign compared to these agents of illiberalism. Andrej Babiš, the billionaire CEO of the Agrofert Group, founded the movement as a protest against "Godfathers" who dominated the "traditional parties," promising to streamline the Czech government so that it facilitated economic growth through individual entrepreneurial spirit.[34]

The reactions of political parties to the dissatisfaction in the Visegrad 4 demonstrate a diversity of approaches, from their ideological content to their economic program to their posture toward minority groups to their attitude to democracy itself. This diversity is a diversity of justifications and frames with which populists challenge liberalism and break liberal-democratic states. The populist challenges in the Visegrad countries represent a diversity of outcomes: some challenges are highly successful while others face backlash and defeat at the hands of outraged electorates. Some neutralize civil society while others are harassed and eventually undone by public watchdog organizations. Some have created emotionally charged paradigms in which the survival of their countries is under threat while others flail about with rhetoric promoting efficiency and business acumen. It is that diversity of outcomes that this work seeks to explain. Specifically, why do populist challengers justify and frame their challenges differently?

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[32] In addition to its abbreviation of "Action of Unsatisfied Citizens," *ano* means "yes" in Czech.
[33] Jochen Roose and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski. "The National Conservative Parties in Poland and Hunagary and their Core Supporters Compared: Values and Socio-Structural Background." In Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga. *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*. London and New York: Routledge. 2019. P. 117.
[34] "Par Slov o ANO" *ANOBudeLip.* Accessed 12 April 2022. https://www.anobudelip.cz/cs/o-nas/par-slov-o-ano/

Findings and Contribution

Discussions of populism, challenges, and backsliding in the Visegrad countries has been done, some have told me "to death" in the scholarly literature, and indeed I discuss many of these works in the proceeding chapters. Nothing to my knowledge however, attempts to explain the causes, methods and diversity of rhetoric in each of these countries in a single work. A comparative analysis of the challenger parties focusing on the way in which they justify and frame their challenges, and a comprehensive review of the challenges that combine perspectives on political economy, political parties and structures, and culture and identity, remains conspicuously absent, and it is that absence I propose to rectify. In addition to covering the missing ground, the purpose of this work is to approach challenger parties from multiple angles; to understand how they construct their ideology, how they communicate with their electorates, and the factors that influence their success or failure. In short, our goal over the next five chapters is to understand the variation in challenges to the liberal order in this part of Europe. This goal helps account for the "varieties of populism" both in general, and in the post-socialist context in particular.[35] This understanding facilitates the recognition of when and under what circumstances challenger parties can succeed, and how they frame, structure, and justify their contestations. In undertaking this research, I contribute to a broader understanding of populism as a tool for enterprising politicians and movements seeking to challenge and overturn the liberal democratic order.

The findings of this work address the success or failure of movements challenging liberal democracy. Challenger parties are successful when they activate identity tensions that speak to a broad segment of the population, while exploiting political opportunity structures and latent discontent. A successful rhetorical activation requires a rhetoric of ideational threats that serves to mobilize the population far more effectively than ideologically non-committed discourses and discourses of governmental efficiency. Chief among these is nationalism, i.e. the construction of the country as a nation bound together by specific values and cultural traits, and a shared history that informs its priorities. Nationalism, when coupled to policies of redistributive economics, makes an especially potent combination as citizens see

[35] Timothy M. Devinney and Christopher A. Hartwell, "Varieties of Populism," *Global Strategy Journal* 10, no. 1 (February 2020): 32–66, https://doi.org/10.1002/gsj.1373.

direct benefits for their support of the party while gaining the impression that the party is working for the real, actual good of the voters as individuals and as a wider national community. The specter of the post-communist party makes an effective enemy against which the challenger party can mobilize the electorate, at both the opportunity stage and the activation stage. Blaming the reformed communists for the corruption and hardship of the privatization period, the challenger party can directly blame its political opponents for activities that are detrimental not only to the state, but to the people in their organic conception as a nation. These crimes can be tied to the socialist-era regimes to further delegitimize electoral alternatives to the challengers. Party systems with a mainstream post-communist party, as opposed to a marginalized and politically isolated one, present this opportunity. Taken together, these factors serve to enhance support for the challenger party while delegitimizing alternatives and raising the stakes in a given election to national and identitarian proportions. When the nation itself is at stake, a compelling discourse can develop leading to the challenger party's ability to initiate its project: the reshaping of the state machinery and the solidification of its hold on political power. These lessons and the model for populist challenges is, as we will see, applicable beyond the post-socialist world, and presents a challenge for liberal-democratic governments everywhere.

As we pass the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, we see a return to discontent characterized not only by its evaluation of how things went wrong and its varying visions of an alternative future, but also a diversity of outcomes when the challenges are launched. Understanding the reason for this diversity of challenges will help us understand one of the core challenges to political stability in the region of our time. For the Visegrad Four, 1989 represented a turning point in history when state socialism, the only evident alternative to global market capitalism, was defeated by a combination of its internal flaws and the relentless competition with the capitalist West. This victory of liberal democracy and market capitalism did not prove to be an "end of history,[36]" but rather a temporary respite between ideological conflicts. The dust remained settled long enough to foster the rise of a new challenge; a challenge born of discontent and offering new solutions in the name of the people. This work contributes both a theoretical and empirical

[36] Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

addition to the scholarship on these challenges to the post-1989 script. In terms of theory, I provide a causal model for how different challenges arise in a closely-knit economic, political, and cultural unit such as the Visegrad Group. I also demonstrate the variety of populism in a single region with a similar recent historical experience, in turn demonstrating that there is no singular populism, but rather multiple populisms whose emergence depends on an assortment of political, historical, cultural, and economic factors. Empirically, I contribute a discourse analysis of party publications largely unavailable in English that shows the way these parties construct, justify, and advance their challenges to the post-1989 discontent.

In constructing these arguments, this dissertation engages primarily with the literature on populism and post-communism. In addressing the populism literature, I explain the conditions for a populist party's success and highlight the discursive strategies that contribute to that success. Addressing post-communism and specifically Central Europe, I show that different opportunity structures and conceptualizations of identity produce very different discursive strategies in countries with broadly similar historical, economic, and political experiences. These differences ultimately affect to the durability of the country's liberal democratic system. This model is applicable to other populist movements seeking to solidify control over liberal democratic political systems, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5. Therefore, this work provides a model for predicting when a populist challenge will succeed and when it will fail. The model is limited to challenges occurring in electoral democracies, and is not applicable to regimes in which no real political competition exists (e.g. Central Asia) or in which outside forces such as the military are the drivers of the contestation (e.g. East Asian military juntas).

Research outline

Research Questions

Under the broad question of what accounts for the variety of challenges and the diversity of outcomes of populist challenges in the Visegrad 4, this research poses an investigation into two key areas. How do the nature and justification of the challenges to the liberal order vary across the V4, and how do the challenger parties justify their challenges and why do they succeed or fail? These questions guide my investigation into the content and form of the divergent challenges to the post-1989 order in the

Visegrad countries. This study is focused on discourse construction and its utility in political challenges. It is a qualitative study that seeks first to understand the diversity of contestational rhetoric, and then to identify and evaluate the factors for its success or failure. Thus, the success of the challenge (a binary of success or failure) serves as the dependent variable. I define success and lack of success as whether the party was reelected following its first term of parliamentary leadership. Differences in demand, opportunity structures, and activation serve as the independent variable. I define criteria for success below, and outline the markers for differences in the dependent variable in Chapter 2. The analysis reveals that variation of challenges depends on two broad factors: the challenger party's linkage of ideational tension to economic and political factors and outcomes and the delegitimization and hegemonization of its political competitors.

Conceptual Framework

To look at the research questions, I have developed a causal theory that explains why some populist challenges succeed while others do not. A causal relationship is a mechanism that produces an effect.[37] A causal relationship can be conceptualized further, in terms of democratic regression, as being predicated on willingness and opportunity: a political actor seeking to dislodge liberal democracy, for example, requires the will of the actor to carry out necessary actions, and the opportunity to do so, i.e. through elections.[38] Willingness and opportunity are mutually necessary for the event to occur, therefore the event, a challenge in our case, has multiple causes.[39] What are the causes of a challenge in the Visegrad countries? Based on my review of the relevant literatures, I theorize that populist challenges to the post-1989 order are the result of a combination of demand and opportunity forming a common effect causal relationship, with ideational tension providing a catalyst. Demand in the form of economic and political discontent provides an impetus for the challenger parties to contest elections with platforms explicitly aimed at challenging the liberal-democratic order. This represents willingness. Those parties succeed by exploiting structural

[37] Johannes Gerschewski, "Erosion or Decay? Conceptualizing Causes and Mechanisms of Democratic Regression," *Democratization* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 43–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1826935.
[38] My gratitude to Mikhail Zabotkin for this insight. Harvey Starr, "Opportunity and Willingness: From 'Ordering Concepts' to an Analytical Perspective for the Study of Politics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, by Harvey Starr (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.309.
[39] *Ibid*.

weaknesses within the party system that allow them to attain the political primacy that facilitates democratic breakdown. This represents opportunity. The challenge is finally activated by the challenger, using ideational rhetoric to enflame the electorate by creating a threat mentality over the electorate's "secure identities,[40]" i.e. critical areas of personal identification such as family or faith. This represents activation; a final step in the causal model, which I argue in the context of the Visegrad challengers, is necessary for the party's continued success. Put simply:

Successful Challenge = Demand + Opportunity + Activation

Demand arises through a combination of systemic discontent over individuals' perceived economic and political situation (step 1). The party exploits salient political cleavages and structural weaknesses surrounding the party system and the left-right ideological spread of parties, the role and function of the post-communist successor party, and its ability to hegemonize or delegitimize its competitors (step 2). The character of elites conducting the challenge influences this step. The challenger party is then able to capitalize on that discontent by activating anxieties over threatened secure identities to secure its position in power (during and after the election) (step 3). The activation of identity anxiety serves to maintain the party's hold on power while delegitimizing would-be opponents. In my analysis, I therefore pay particular attention to the role of ideology and ideational threat as it appears in the different discourses of the challenger parties.

Throughout this work, I utilize a set of terms to guide and construct the investigation. I define my key terms in this section and provide a discussion of populism as the overarching frame in which I situate the challenges of the Visegrad challenger parties.

Challenge/challenger party: I define a challenge as an effort by a political party to change some aspect of the post-1989 political order. I borrow this term from De Vries and Hobolt, who define a challenger party as one that challenges established parties

[40] Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (October 2004): 741–67.

and offers new political programs not present in the political mainstream.[41] Challenger parties pose their challenge by mobilizing new ideas and by creating alternatives to the traditional political parties. In addition to challenging established parties and the political mainstream, the challenger parties in the Visegrad 4 are challenging the liberal script itself, as embodied in the post-1989 order in their respective countries. The challenger parties that I address in this work are either extra-systemic parties that challenge the legitimacy of the traditional party system (ANO), or are reformed "traditional parties" that have undertaken the role of systemic challenger (Fidesz, PiS, and SMER-SD). Moreover, all are (or were) ruling parties of their respective countries for at least one electoral cycle. That at least a portion of the electorate entrusted them with political power has allowed the parties access to the legislative machinery and the opportunity to translate their challenges into policy. While other challenger parties exist in the Visegrad countries, the fact that they have not obtained parliamentary majorities or the opportunity to form governments, and therefore had no opportunity to implement their challenge at the programmatic level, excludes them from this study.

I categorize the Visegrad challenger parties as representations of populism. Populism is a contested term in the literature.[42] Puhle even argues that there is no single populism, but rather varieties of populism; i.e. differing expressions of a similar core consisting of an anti-elitist movement of the pure people fighting against the corruption or misrule of the 'establishment.[43]' The most prominent interpretations of populism in the literature construct it as a historically informed discourse[44]; a political

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[41] Catherine E. De Vries and Sara B. Hobolt. *Political Entrepreneurs: The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2020.

[42] Noam Gidron and Bart Bonikowski, "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2459387; Kubát, Michal and Mejstřík, Martin and Baloge, Martin and Bobba, Giuliano and Castillero, Daniel and Cremonesi, Cristina and Dobos, Gábor and Magre Ferran, Jaume and Hubé, Nicolas and Hüning, Hendrik and Ianosev, Bogdan and Klinge, Sune and Korkut, Umut and Krunke, Helle and Lembcke, Oliver and Lipinski, Artur and Mancosu, Moreno and Matic, Dejan and Medir, Lluis and Morkevičius, Vaidas and Pano, Esther and Roncarolo, Franca and Sahin, Osman and Seddone, Antonella and Školkay, Andrej and Sotiropoulos, Dimitri A. and Tsatsanis, Emmanouil and Wineroither, David M. and Žúborová, Viera and Žvaliauskas, Giedrius. "Populist Parties in Contemporary Europe." *Populist Parties in Contemporary Europe.* Working Paper. 2020.

[43] Hans-Jürgen Puhle. "Populism and Democracy in the 21st Century." *SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 2.* Berlin: Cluster of Excellence 2055 "Contestations of the Liberal Script - SCRIPTS" 2020.

[44] Ruth Wodak. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourse Means*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. 2015.

style challenging established communicative and behavioral norms[45], a challenge to democracy itself[46], and a reaction to neoliberalism[47], among other definitions. The effect of populism is similarly debated, with its definitions ranging from a democratic corrective,[48] to authoritarian,[49] to totalitarian.[50] These definitions, while compelling, are far too normative because they envision populism as an ideology itself, with a set of similar and reproducible beliefs and goals. Conceptualizing populism as a normative judgment limits comprehension of its related phenomena to a value-based interpretation based upon the desirability of particular models of democracy. This formula casts populism as either a positive or negative force, leading to questions 'what do they do' often being linked to 'why is it bad.' This line of investigation ultimately oversimplifies the methodology of the populists. What function do the 'pure people' and 'corrupt elite' serve in constructing a view of politics? What plans are linked to those groups and what actions do they justify? These value judgments of democracy are necessarily discursive because it is in their specific contexts that the speakers and the listeners assign them value. Democracy as a term does not refer just to liberal democracy of the continental European or Anglo-Saxon model, but how the speaker perceives it, just as a pure people or corrupt elite are similarly context-dependent. Populism as an ideology does provide an understanding based on common elements that appear across diverse national political contexts. The dichotomized view of society as a battle between the pure people and corrupt elite is almost universal in populist movements, as is the moralization of politics.[51] This moralized struggle can reach epic, indeed mythological proportions in the way in which political leaders frame the battle.[52] Populism as an ideology is generally anti-system, giving its identity as a challenger ideology more credence.[53] I accept Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's conception of populism as a thin ideology, meaning that it provides a

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[45] Benjamin Moffit. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2016.
[46] Jan Werner-Müller. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2016.
[47] John Judis. *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics.* New York: Columbia Global Reports. 2016.
[48] Chantal Mouffe. *For a Left Populism*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books. 2018.
[49] Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. *Cultural Backlash. Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2019.
[50] Werner-Müller. *What is Populism?*
[51] *Populist Rhetorics: Case Studies and a Minimalist Definition*, eds. Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022.
[52] See, for example, Ostiguy, Pierre. 2022. "The Voice and Message of Hugo Chávez: A Rhetorical Analysis." In *ibid*, 187–216.
[53] Puhle. "Populism and Democracy in the 21st Century."

frame of dichotomized politics as a struggle between two homogeneous and morally defined groups (i.e. the pure people and corrupt elite). [54] The thin ideology concept allows politicians to graft their ideology of choice onto populism as a means of communicating a vision to the electorate and delegitimizing their opponents to justify extraordinary measures in politics.

In addition to its function as a thin ideology, populism plays a rhetorical role.[55] The discourse of populism springs from the construction of popular identity that contributes to the formation of the homogeneous group related to the internal split of the crystallization of the popular identity, i.e. the particular demand and the wider universality. This discursive strategy centers upon linking identity to a concrete demand upon which the listeners can attach value. As Laclau states, "For a short time after 1989, for instance, the word 'market' signified, in Eastern Europe, much more than a purely economic arrangement: it embraced through equivalential links, contents such as the end of bureaucratic rule, civil freedoms, catching up with the West, and so forth.[56]" Marketization therefore serves the dual purpose of a particular demand, and an empty signifier in the sense of a wider universality. Marketization is the frame onto which its supporters could graft democracy, freedom, and other demands of the Velvet Revolution, thereby establishing an equivalency between the market and those additional values. Terms such as *freedom* or *catching up* appear as "undifferentiated fullness," i.e. without conceptual content. Linking conceptually abstract, empty terms such as freedom or catching up to the west with a conceptually specific term such as markets grounds the abstract terms in practical, actionable substance (thus, the equivalential link). Paraphrasing Laclau, referring to a set of social grievances, i.e. those referred to by the protesters of November 1989, and attributing the source to the communist government (containing the structures of political and economic governance), constitutes the people as those harmed by the social grievances, and the elite as those causing the social grievances. The singular element (i.e. markets) facilitates the performative constitution of the equivalential

[54] Casse Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press: 2017.
[55] I take much of the following passage on Laclau and discursive populism verbatim from Keith Prushankin, "Neoliberalism or Else: The Discursive Foundations of Neoliberal Populism in the Czech Republic," *Czech Journal of International Relations*, February 9, 2023, https://doi.org/10.32422/mv-cjir.431.
[56] Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso Books. 2005. P. 95.

chain, rather than the location of an abstract common feature.[57] The discourse can utilize individual terms as representative of greater, more complex meaning. Žižek (in Laclau) argues that the 'quilting point' represents the point at which the unity of the discursive formation is achieved. Through his example that "Coke" is America (but America is not the Coca-Cola Company), the construction of a soft drink as a crystalizing signifier for American identity is achieved. In this sense, "the name becomes the ground of the thing.[58]" Therefore, constructions such as "the elite" can stand in for a host of negative concepts such as corruption, popular suffering, or political malfunction, while "the people" can encompass justice, democracy, or positive political action. Hawkins identifies populism as a particular style for framing and delivering ideas, using moralism to delegitimize the corrupt elite whilst simultaneously elevating the pure people and compelling them into political action.[59] These definitions of populism speak to both the content and the delivery method, which lends itself to the comparative discourse analysis methodology by facilitating analysis of the content and the context of its presentation. Hawkins, following de la Torre, conceptualizes populism as a Manichaean discourse, i.e. a moralizing discourse that interprets everything "as part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil" in which "there can be no fence sitters."[60] For Hawkins, statements themselves are not populist, but become populist because of the meaning ascribed to them by their participants.

The discursive definition of populism, encompassing equivalential linkage, moralistic attachment, and popular meaning, provides a useful understanding of what makes statements sound populist, while accounting for ideological differences that allow populists to embrace programmatic visions from left-wing anti-imperialism to right-wing national revivalism. I believe that this definition is mutually complementary with that of populism as a thin ideological frame. I therefore adopt a definition of populism both as a thin ideological frame, and as a discursive strategy. I additionally recognize populism as a rhetorical tool, along the lines of Norris and Inglehart's definition of populism as a rhetorical device assigning legitimacy to the exercise of

[57] *Ibid*, 97.
[58] *Ibid*, 105.
[59] Kirk A. Hawkins, "Is Chavez Populist?: Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 42 (2009); Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 1045.
[60] *Ibid*, 1043.

power by the people and Hawkins' concept of moralism as a legitimizing and delegitimizing strategy.[61]. These definitions of populism speak to both the content and the delivery method, which lends itself to the comparative discourse analysis methodology by facilitating analysis of the content and the context of its presentation. Right populists often endow the moralized construction of the people with specific ethno-cultural attributes, enabling them to create a threat atmosphere by drawing attention to outside forces opposing those attributes.[62] It is this fusion of populist definitions that informs this dissertation. At once accepting the structural definition of the dichotomization of society into mutually opposing groups, the definition encompasses the rhetorical and ideational construction of the pure people as constituting a specific, distinct, and valued national-cultural unit in whose name the populist party acts. Populism as a concept for understanding the political processes underway in the Visegrad 4 provides a useful analytical capacity for how actors communicate their ideals and goals to the electorate. The dichotomous rhetorical framing of the pure people struggling against the corrupt elite creates a compelling story of good against evil battling for the nation that, considering vote shares of populist parties, is relatively successful.[63] Put simply, populism offers a simple and compelling narrative to address "what went wrong; who is to blame; [and] what is to be done.[64]" This adds utility to my discussion of Visegrad populism as it allows me to compare each party's construction of problem, responsibility, and solution across the four cases from a rhetorical perspective (see below).

Successful/Unsuccessful challenge: For our purposes, a challenge is successful when the challenger party obtains control the country's national government and is in a position to enact its core electoral goals with respect to challenging the political and/or economic structure of the post-1989 order. A successful party maintains a law-making majority in the national parliament with functional control over the executive machinery across multiple election cycles. A challenge is unsuccessful when the

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[61] Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash.*
Hawkins, "Is Chavez Populist."; Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo*.
[62] Abdul Noury and Gerard Roland, "Identity Politics and Populism in Europe," *Annual Review of Political Science* 23, no. 1 (2020): 421–39.
[63] "Populist vote share in the national elections of selected European Union (EU) countries as of March 2018." *Statista.* Accessed 27 May 2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/883893/populism-in-europe/
[64] Austin Botelho. "The Short End of the Stick: Income Inequality and Populist Sentiment in Europe." *Issues in Political Economy*, Vol 28(1), 2019, 39-78. 42.

challenger party fails to establish or retain a hegemonic position, and during its time in power is unable to accomplish its core political or economic goals.

Methodology

I undertake a three-step process to answer the research questions. First, I review the theoretical literature on explaining populist challenges in Central and Eastern Europe to develop my causal model (successful challenge = demand + opportunity + activation). I then use this model to create a typology of the Visegrad challenges and to identify successful and unsuccessful cases. Through this analysis, I identify the Polish and Czech cases as extreme cases due to the electoral success, longevity, and ideological coherence of the former and the electoral failure, transience, and ideological incoherence of the latter. I then undertake a deeper investigation of the discourses of these parties using the concept of linguistic packages to examine the way in which the Czech and Polish challenger parties constructed their discourses, with the goal of understanding what worked and what did not. Predicated upon the cognitive experience of individuals making sense of the same issue, linguistic packages are pre-existing sets of words, images, and concepts that provide actors with ready-made devices to advance a particular agenda.[65] Gamson and Modigliani present a series of framing devices linked by reasoning devices that assist the speaker in the production of a discourse, which may then be used to influence public opinion:

> (1) Metaphors, (2) exemplars (i.e., historical examples from which lessons are drawn), (3) catchphrases, (4) depictions, and (5) visual images (e.g., icons). The three reasoning devices [that link the framing devices] are (1) roots (i.e., a causal analysis), (2) consequences (i.e., a particular type of effect), and (3) appeals to principle (i.e., a set of moral claims). A package can be summarized in a signature matrix that states the frame, the range of positions, and the eight different types of signature elements that suggest this core in a condensed manner.[66]

Developed to encompass the way the media presents an issue to the public, the concept of linguistic packages offers utility in an analysis of political communication as political actors seek to guide their audiences to shortcuts between a condition and a judgment. I previously demonstrated the operation and utility of linguistic packages in

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[65] William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 95, No. 1. (1989).
[66] *Ibid*, 3-4.

the US national security discourse as a means of shaping public perception of Russia throughout history.[67] Examining the Visegrad 4 with this model helps us understand how a political party constructs issues to the electorate with the goal of creating a specific worldview consisting of problems that only it can solve. To this end, Chapter 4 analyzes the core linguistic packages that make up the Czech and Polish discourses, showing how the model explains the success of the Polish challenge and the failure of the Czech challenge.

Rhetoric, discourse, and persuasion fall within the broader category of political speech. Why look at these factors at all? Political rhetoric at its core is a communicative act between the political actors proposing solutions and the political actors demanding solutions to commonly experienced problems. The value of rhetoric as a tool for shaping and influencing political action was recognized as far back as the classical period by such figures as Aristotle and Cicero, and possesses a variety of functions.[68] Political rhetoric is a strategic asset aimed at gaining and retaining power.[69] Rhetoric is an act of persuasion, which is, according to Johnson and Johnson, a key factor for the health of a political system, affecting attitudes and approaches to the political system in subsequent generations.[70] A "political discourse is a method of decision making in a democracy.[71]" At its core, discourse is a question of rhetoric, that is, the construction of thoughts and ideas through words. Rhetoric serves to legitimize or delegitimize policy options, and through the communication of understanding and recognition of the audience's needs and values, can translate into the broad public support necessary for the attainment of political power.[72] Values are sociologically and politically embedded, differing across cultures, though in every case they provides guide posts to both politicians and the public as a means of

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[67] Keith Prushankin. "Who's Afraid of the Lurking Bear? Russia in the US National Security Discourse." MA Thesis. Charles University, 2017.
[68] Patricia L. Dunmire, "Political Discourse Analysis: Exploring the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language: Political Discourse Analysis," *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6, no. 11 (November 2012): 735–51, https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.365.
[69] Kenneth Hudson, 1978. The language of modern politics. London: MacMillan. In *Ibid*.
[70] David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, "Civil Political Discourse in a Democracy: The Contribution of Psychology.," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 6, no. 4 (December 2000): 291–317, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327949PAC0604_01.
[71] *Ibid*, 292.
[72] Agnieszka Sowińska, "A Critical Discourse Approach to the Analysis of Values in Political Discourse: The Example of Freedom in President Bush's State of the Union Addresses (2001–2008)," *Discourse & Society* 24, no. 6 (November 2013): 792–809, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486214.

showing priorities and evaluating different courses of action.[73] Political actors communicate value through a variety of rhetorical devices.[74] Metaphors connect political concepts with familiar concepts to promote broad understanding. Proximization constructs "the events on the discourse stage as directly affecting the addressee, usually in a negative or threatening way," affecting a breakdown of the distance between "us" and "them" that makes threats appear more threatening and danger appear more imminent in order to justify the proposed actions.[75] Legitimization occurs as the speaker attempts to convince their audience of their authority on a given subject.[76] There is an interesting debate on who uses what rhetorical forms in a given political spectrum. Hirschman created a typology of conservative rhetoric, his *Rhetoric of Reaction*, arguing that conservatives delegitimize unwanted policies as perverse, futile, or placing valued objects in unacceptable jeopardy.[77] Hochschild accepts this categorization, but argues that it is in fact leftists (American liberals) who use these rhetorical strategies to critique and condemn conservative policy alternatives.[78] This is indicative of a broader reversal of the roles of left and right that afflict the politics of the region, which I discuss elsewhere in this work. We know that populists are particularly prone to using emotional language in their rhetoric, with right-populists generally (but not exclusively) using negative emotions including fear, insecurity, anger, hate against an out group, and "indignation against neoliberalism," and left populists often, but not exclusively, using positive emotions such as joy and pride.[79] This rhetorical style influences non-populist parties, which over time adopt more emotional rhetoric in a general trend of systemic polarization.[80] Taken together, these factors inform us of both what actors say and how they say it. The examination of political discourse as a

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[73] *Ibid*.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] *Ibid*, 797.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] Albert Hirschman. *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1991.
[78] Jennifer Hochschild. "How History Has Proven Albert Hirschman's Insight to be Essential but Also Wrong. The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy, Albert Hirschman." *Social Research*. Vol. 85 : No. 3 : Fall 2018. Pp. 597-611.
[79] This, of course, depends on national context. Caiani and Di Cocco show that these emotions, in the Italian context, are not exclusive to left or right, and may be used by both groups depending on the situational need. Manuela Caiani and Jessica Di Cocco, "Populism and Emotions: A Comparative Study Using Machine Learning," *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, May 11, 2023, 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2023.8.
[80] *Ibid*, 5.

means of gaining and maintaining power offers significant insight into the processes by which the challengers contest liberal democracy in the Visegrad 4.

Justification for source selection

In addition to the extensive secondary literature on the subject, I consult the corpus of party literature from the four primary parties understood in the literature to be engaging in some form of challenge to the post-1989 order. These parties, ANO, Fidesz, PiS, and SMER-SD, have, like most political parties, produced a sizable corpus of literature expounding upon their practical and ideological positions, their plans and goals, and their conceptualization of politics and their role in their country's political struggle. Party literature provides the basic and often first contact between the voter and the party. A party program, for example, is often the first piece of literature yielded by an internet search. Party literature consists not only of party programs discussing key proposals and values, but electoral programs making specific pledges for a given election, newsletters describing the activities of the party, and books written by the party leader delineating a vision for the country. These publications play a role in crystalizing a party's communication to its voters, establishing and building its reputation, and ultimately attracting sufficient votes to enter power. With this in mind, I utilize the following resources when analyzing the discourses of the parties: party programs; leader speeches; party newsletters; campaign leaflets; billboards and other slogans; leader books; electoral programs. In addition, I utilize the sizable body of scholarly literature written on the subject of the Visegrad countries since 1989 and their challenger parties.

Structure

This chapter has provided background, introduced the research questions, theoretical concepts, and key terms, and has explained the methodological tools that this research uses. Chapter Two introduces the justification and specification of my causal model. I examine the components of the causal mechanism leading from discontent to a successful challenge by reviewing the literature on its component parts. I examine demand as the economic reasons for discontent at the micro level (individuals and communities) and at the national level (the model of capitalism). I then examine opportunity as political-structural conditions, namely party system institutionalization, cleavage salience, and elite character, and how these translate discontent into a concerted challenge to the existing political order. I then examine activation, i.e. the

ideational component of the challenge, which I explain as a function of positional anxiety over identity and status based on tensions between the established, domestic, traditionalist culture, values, identity, and religion, and those factors that arrive in the country through globalization and shifting patterns of migration.

In Chapter Three, I use my model to create a typology of the challenges of the Visegrad Four. Using the extensive secondary literature and primary sources where appropriate, I identify the demand, opportunity, and activation structures for each of the challenges. Understanding the Czech Republic and Poland as two extreme cases, with Czechia producing the weakest challenge and Poland producing the strongest, I use Chapter Four to explore the party literature of ANO and PiS. This chapter serves to analyze the linkages between politics, economics, and identity tensions and the effect of their presence and absence on the success or failure of a challenge. I conclude in Chapter Five with an accounting of the similarities and differences of the challenges and the implications for the liberal script in Central Europe and beyond. A synthesis of factors give rise to discontent and the challenges it fosters, and I delineate a playbook of these challenges to show why they form differently and how the challengers advance them.

Chapter 2: Theorizing Challenges

Introduction

What explains the success and failure of challenge movements in post-1989 Central Europe? Keeping in mind the causal model established in Chapter 1, that a successful challenge = demand + opportunity + activation, this chapter examines the scholarly literature to explore the relationship between these different factors to justify and orient my theoretical model. I begin by reviewing the literature on discontent and how it can translate into populist action before moving to an examination of systemic causes of discontent in the literature on Visegrad political economy. This orients us in terms of the demand for a challenge. The literature on political party systems in the Visegrad Four informs the opportunity side of the equation, namely factors that influence structural opportunities for parties to launch their challenges and cleavages that enable them to obtain sufficient electoral and structural power to implement their agendas. Finally, I consider identity as the activating agent of the challenge, looking at how secure identities such as religion, nationalism, and traditional conceptions of sexuality, gender, and the family can become rally points for challenger parties and means of mobilizing their populations through a fear-based threat mentality.

Demand: Discontent

The challenger parties I analyze in this work emerged in relatively prosperous countries (the World Bank classifies each of the Visegrad four as "high income"). However, I theorize that there are some economic conditions that influence a general discontent that provides a fertile environment for the challenges to develop. These conditions are both material, i.e. actually experienced by the population, and social, as individuals compare themselves and their national condition with others and other states. This section contains three parts. First, I survey the literature describing the economic model of post-socialist Central Europe to understand macro-level influences on discontent. I then describe the connections between discontent, economics, and the influence these have on political preferences with a discussion of the literature connecting these factors. These factors represent micro-level discontent, i.e. that which influences the initial conditions in which a challenger party can take root. I then conceptualize the linkage between economic discontent and support for populist political parties as a question of relative deprivation and/or nostalgic

deprivation, that is to say a negative perception of where one would like to be vis a vis other members of the community, society, or nation, and a negative perception of where one is now relative to an idealized point in history, respectively.

Macro-Level Influences

The different models of the political economy of the Visegrad Four found in the literature can lend insight into the systemic causes of individualized discontent, showing why the micro-level factors could be sufficiently widespread to give challenger parties national followings. There are a number of models seeking to capture the political economy of the Visegrad countries. While demand differs across the four cases (see Chapter 3), it is worth briefly examining these to look at the systemic factors can fuel the demand for challenger parties. These systemic factors are best contextualized in a brief history of the systemic transformation in the region.

The states of the erstwhile socialist bloc, newly independent and facing a future beyond Moscow's orbit quickly moved toward shedding their planned socialist economies for market economies, and authoritarianism for liberal democracy. These states found that despite having exited "the narrow hallway,"[81] the new openness was marked by very bright signposts indicating the proper, if not the only, path to take. The path developed along two distinct prescriptive avenues. The Western-led international community expected states to adopt the liberal-democratic political model, along with its requisite shifts in political, economic, and social relations, and it expected these countries to open for business. The collapse of the state socialist regimes suddenly opened a vast untapped market to Western multinational corporations. Amid a global hegemonic trend in which neoliberal economics were the only path to national development,[82] the new regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) readily embraced neoliberal economic reforms. This embrace was influenced as much by sticks as it was by carrots.[83] In addition to the bright promises of plentiful

[81] I find the following quote illustrative of the perception of life under the socialist and capitalist systems. During the communist period, "the future stretched out before the Soviet citizen like a narrow but relatively well-lit hallway… In the 1990s, the narrow hallway exploded into wide-open space." Masha Gessen. "The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia." New York: Riverhead Books. 2017. 307-308.
[82] E.g. Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian, and Philip Mirowski, (eds.). *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*. London: Verso, 2020.
[83] Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein. "Why Did Neoliberalism Triumph and Endure in the Post-Communist World?" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (April 2016), pp. 313-331.

consumer goods and a generally higher standard of living, countries that did not reform, or failed to reform with sufficient scope and speed, risked receiving downgrades in international credit rating systems including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ratings and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) Ease of Doing Business scale.[84] The Washington Consensus, as Heyns remarks, perceived "neither poverty nor inequality…to be problematic if economic growth could be achieved.[85]" Faced with an ideological pressure to implement economic reforms that were inherently competitive, competition was fierce. A total of 27 former socialist states opened to the global market at more or less the same moment in history, requiring those states, only an historical moment ago allies in the struggle for the communist future, to battle one another for foreign investment. Not only did the former communist states need to compete with one another, but with the developing markets in Asia and Latin America. As Appel and Oreinstein relate, the competition combined with a late start to capitalism "from less integrated positions than other middle-income countries" to produce an exacerbated sense of historical backwardness among policymakers.[86] As a means of gaining advantage in the market competition, the new markets in CEE needed to, as Appel and Orenstein put it, "assert their capitalist credentials" through a process they define as competitive signaling.[87] Competitive signaling functioned through the use of neoliberal reforms as a *lingua franca* to demonstrate compliance with the international neoliberal agenda. International organizations interpreted those reforms through favorable or unfavorable ratings in their various credit rating systems. International investors then made investment decisions based on those ratings.[88] The role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in this process is debated. Lansbury, Pain, and Smidková argue that "FDI provide[ed] a vital source of investment for modernizing the industrial structure of these countries and for improving the quality and reliability of infrastructure. In addition, new investments may also bring badly needed skills and technologies into the host economy.[89]" The process of signaling that a country could

[84] Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein. *From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 4-6.
[85] Barbara Heyns. "Emerging Inequalities in Central and Eastern Europe." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 31 (2005), pp. 163-197. 164.
[86] *Ibid*, 30.
[87] *Ibid*, 5-6.
[88] *Ibid,* 6-7.
[89] Melanie Lansbury, Nigel Pain, and Katerina Smidkova. "Foreign Direct Investment in Central Europe Since 1990: An Econometric Study." *National Institute Economic Review*. May 1996. 104.

provide a reasonably safe environment for investment, signaled through the following points, constituted economic improvements on its own in the eyes of the reformers.[90] A commitment to privatization, i.e. the willingness of the regime to privatize the state-owned economy as a non-negotiable reform was central to this agenda, as it represented a definitive break from state socialism and irreversible entry into the global capitalist system. The establishment of tax incentives and a legal framework for foreign investment would open the country to the global economy and facilitate upgrading and growth through foreign investment, while the policy goal of macroeconomic stability would help to safeguard those investments. Expanding foreign trade would similarly contribute to the opening and growth of the economy. The maintenance of low labor costs, coupled with the widespread availability of skilled and educated workers would serve as an incentive for foreign investors, along with the structural characteristics of the newly opened countries including technology and economic infrastructure. Together, these factors would help investors in pursuing strategic considerations: e.g. beating the competition through the acquisition of a dominant market share, while contributing to the overall upgrading of the country.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a sensitive role in the political economy of the region. While its contribution in developing a higher material living standard in the region is undeniable, the deleterious effects of FDI on inequality, both in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, are clear. As Liu argues, "in the process of introducing FDI, the government pays attention to quantity rather than quality, and takes a clearance sale on natural resources, environment, market and even government tax in a competitive way. The bias of this policy and behavior to attract foreign investment virtually increases the hidden trouble of immiserizing growth.[91]" Through a cross-comparison of the Gini index with levels of foreign investment, Mahutga and Bandelj show that FDI worsens inequality by holding countries in low-wage, export production economic models within the broader global capitalist system. Inside the country, FDI introduces wage inequality between the foreign and domestic sectors, with the foreign sector receiving higher wages; and between management and labor

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[90] *Ibid*, 106-108

[91] W. Liu and P Nunnenkamp." Domestic Repercussions of Different Types of FDI: Firm-Level Evidence for Taiwanese Manufacturing." *World Development,* 2011, No. 5, pp. 808–823. 122, in Ondřej Babuněk. "Foreign Direct Investment in Visegrad Four and the Main Trading Partners." *Statistica*. Vol. 49, No. 3-9. 15.

within the foreign sector.[92] FDI, for its positive effects of injecting much-needed capital into the region, caused inequalities within the societies. These inequalities are symptomatic of the conditions in which populist challenges emerge. This review of the region's economic transformation calls for an examination of the different models for the region's political economy, and a discussion of how they generate discontent.

Varieties of capitalism (VoC) literature offers an explanation for discontent in the model of capitalism practiced in the Visegrad countries, and the resulting relations of that country to other countries and transnational firms. The literature on varieties of capitalism identifies the Visegrad states as comprising a similar type of dependent market economy (DME).[93] Originating as a concept contrasting the social market economies of continental Europe with the liberal market economies of Britain and the United States,[94] scholars attempted to place the marketizing economies of CEE in these categories, with the level of state coordination being the primary metric.[95] Bluhm argues that these attempts were flawed, as the original VoC framework was predicated upon an economy being fully developed, rather than in transition.[96] King and Szelenyi understood the type of capitalism emerging in the Visegrad countries as "capitalism from without," highlighting the significant role played by FDI in driving development and the dynamics of the new market economies.[97] Arguing that integration into global value chains by providing a comparative advantage in low cost labor and raw materials rather than one based in knowledge-based, capital intensive industries, Nolke and Vliegenthart enlarged the categories of VoC to address features of the new capitalist models emerging in post-socialist CEE.[98] Nolke and Vliegenthart define the DME both by its geography and its economic typology, being present in the post-socialist countries and representing a distinct variety of capitalism centered upon

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[92] Matthew Mahutga and Nina Bandelj. "Foreign Investment and Income Inequality: The Natural Experiment of Central and Eastern Europe." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology.*" Vol. 49, No. 6. 431, 435, 438-439. It is notable that this inequality is not the result of the bounce-back from "artificially" low inequality in the Socialist period. Rising inequality in CEE is not different from that experienced in many Western countries during globalization. *Ibid* 447.
[93] Andreas Nolke and Arjan Vliegenthart. "Enlarging the Varieties of Capitalism: The Emergence of Dependent Market Economies in East Central Europe." *World Politics*. Vol 61, No. 4 (2009). 670-702.
[94] P.A. Hall and D. Soskice. (Eds.) (2001). *Varieties of capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[95] Katharina Bluhm, "Theories of Capitalism Put to the Test: Introduction to a Debate on Central and Eastern Europe." *Historical Social Research*. Vol. 35, No. 2 (2010). 197-217. 201.
[96] *Ibid*.
[97] King and Szelenyi. "The New Capitalism in Eastern Europe."
[98] Nolke and Vliegenthart. "Enlarging the Varieties of Capitalism."

comparative advantage in complex manufacturing processes (e.g. electronics, automotive and machine parts). This comparative advantage stems from these economies' skilled and educated labor forces that through market conditions work at a fractional wage of similarly skilled and educated workers in Western Europe.[99] This lower wage allows employers to generate a larger profit from the work performed. Similarly problematic are the relative weakness of the knowledge sector and the relative absence of research and development activities, with the foreign investors prioritizing lower-value added industries.[100] The Visegrad States are the foremost representatives of DMEs given their similar socio-economic positions as having fully transitioned from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism by 2009, and having embarked on similar approaches to the transition, compared to variations in the Baltic countries, the former Soviet Republics,[101] and Southeastern European states.[102]

The dependent market economy model is useful for understanding the political economy of the Visegrad states because it accounts for the historical processes of industrialization and high level of professional training, while accounting for the imbalances between it and the market economies of Western Europe and North America. In spite of this, Williams, Nadin, and Rodgers pose a critique to VoC's general applicability to the post-socialist countries. Using Ukraine as a case study, Williams et al. find that non-capitalist coping strategies[103] are still heavily utilized by Ukrainians to secure their daily material needs and therefore recommend the conceptualization of post-socialist economies as "diverse economies.[104]" This micro-level explanation, related to individual choices in relation to the economic system, does not sufficiently overturn the dependent market economy model. The DME is a macro-structural phenomenon that describes the relations of countries to one another, and to transnational firms. Individual coping strategies to make up for the shortfalls of

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[99] Lawrence P. King and Iván Szelényi. "The New Capitalism in Eastern Europe: Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Post-Communism." In *From State Socialism to Post-Communist Capitalism: Critical Perspectives*, 167–204. Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022. 672.
[100] Krysztof Jasiecki, ed. *Central and Eastern Europe 30 Years of Capitalism: 1989-2019.* Budapest: China-CEE Institute, 2020. 35.
[101] i.e. Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, the Caucuses, and Central Asia. I separate the Baltics as do many scholars due to the radically different models of marketization pursued there from the rest of the former USSR.
[102] *Ibid* 671.
[103] i.e. non-monetized exchange, not-for-profit monetized work, or non-exchanged work.
[104] Colin C. Williams, Sara Nadin, and Peter Rodgers, "Beyond a 'Varieties of Capitalism' Approach in Central and Eastern Europe: Some Lessons from Ukraine," ed. Zsolt Bedo, *Employee Relations*. Vol. 33, No. 4 (June 28, 2011): 413–27.

the market, whether they are market-based or not, do not undermine the reality of dependent capitalism's dominance at the national and international level. Additional terms to describe this model are "liberal, dependent variant of capitalism," "foreign led capitalism," and capitalism "from outside," highlighting the outsized role of foreign investors.[105]

As an alternative to the dependent market economy model, Bohle and Greskovits label the Visegrad countries as *embedded neoliberal countries*, which they define as "a permanent search for compromises between market transformation and social cohesion in more inclusive but not always efficient systems of democratic government."[106] This middle-ground orientation, eschewing the extreme neoliberalism of the Baltic states while still endeavoring toward marketization through the 1990s is the result of "politically conditioned and politically consequential" choices on the part of the reformers, based on "legacies of socialist or earlier pasts" that continued to influence political outcomes throughout the transition.[107] This model facilitates an exploration of the factors that shape the political outlook of the population, and how the population shapes the political outcomes of the democratic system, incorporating the populations' historic habituation to social support and the unwillingness of politicians to dramatically cut those services.[108] Simultaneously, the discourse informs us as to how the political parties condition the political outlook of the population and how this conditioning in turn shapes political outcomes. The concept of embedded neoliberalism is useful for explaining the policy choices of countries transitioning to capitalism during the 1990s. The concept however loses relevance as it ages. Embedded neoliberalism was, as Bohle and Greskovits argue, a strategic decision to fit the tensions of a specific historical era; when the population needed to be coaxed away from the support

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[105] King 2007 and King, Szelenyi 2005 in Jasiecki. *Central and Eastern Europe 30 Years of Capitalism*. 25, 34.
[106] Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery.* Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2012, Cornell Studies in Political Economy. 2.-3
[107] *Ibid*, 4.
[108] The situation was of course different in each of the countries, with for example high levels of Czech support for social spending preventing even the hardline neoliberal Vaclav Klaus from cutting and privatizing to the extent neoliberal logic would demand. See Ladislaw, Rabušic and Tomáš Sirovátka. "Czech Welfare State and Its Legitimacy." *Polish Sociological Review*, Vol. 2, No. 126, pp. 239-63; Jiří Večerník. "Social Policy in the Czech "Republic": The Past and the Future of Reforms." *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 496-517, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325408315830>.

structures of state socialism without causing a backlash. The need for this strategic balancing is no longer the politicized problem it was in the 1990s, as the Visegrad countries have fully and completely transitioned to capitalism and have produced two generations that never knew the state socialist system except in name and reputation. Thus, while embedded neoliberalism adeptly captures a specific historical moment, its value as a comparative relative to the "Western" capitalist economies is questionable. The concept's enduring relevance however, is in an insight from Šćepanović, that economic policies in the region were judged not on their merits, but their utility in facilitating eventual EU accession.[109] This suggests a symbolic, rather than instrumental value of economic policies in the region.

An alternative interpretation of CEE's capitalist evolution is found in Wallerstein's world-system theory, originally predicated upon the relationship between core, semi-periphery, and periphery as a single labor system.**[110]** World system theory is predicated upon the extraction of surplus value of workers in all countries across multiple cultural units by core capitalists.[111] Artner expands upon this framework in considering the question of CEE economies catching up to the West. Artner argues that integration of a (semi-) peripheral country into the hierarchical world system is inversely related to its likelihood of achieving economic convergence with the core.[112] In this argument, a technological imbalance perpetuates the stratification, with that of the periphery always some steps behind that of the core. The extraction of value through capital repatriation from the periphery to the core aids in this process with the net effect of stunting the peripheral country's growth rate, thereby stopping it from catching up.[113] Without rejecting it entirely, Bluhm indicates some of the shortcomings of world systems theory in its application to CEE for overlooking the influence of external actors on the formation of institutions and the high transnationalization of the CEE economies, particularly the banking sector, which

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[109] Vera Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment in East-Central Europe After 1989." In Stefan Berger and Thomas Fetzer (eds.). *Nationalism and the Economy: Explorations into a Neglected Relationship*. Budapest-New York: Centrual European University Press. 2019.
[110] Immanuel Wallerstein. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11smzx1.
[111] Immanuel Wallerstein. "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol. 116, No. 4, 387-415.
[112] Annamaria Artner. "Is Catching Up Possible? The Example of Central and Eastern Europe." *Science & Society*. Vol. 82, No. 4 (2018). Pp. 502–530
[113] *Ibid*.

VoC helps to explain.[114] Bluhm addresses the common ground between VoC and world systems theory through the lens of the former German Democratic Republic as a region transferred from the semi-periphery into the core through a process of mass de-industrialization, essentially becoming an extreme case of dependent market economy.[115]

Between these three models, we can piece together the reasons that might influence discontent in the population. Compared with the promises of the transition, the region spent the early years of the transition producing products for its richer neighbors. People with high levels of education and professional competency saw lower prospects for professional development since the economic model did not require more than rudimentary skills aimed at producing finished or semi-finished products and various support services for Western firms, and earned "persistently low wages.[116]" Far from the shining images of the market future common during the transition,[117] the reality has become one of staggering foreign ownership over the economies and significant capital outflows.[118] This loss essentially means that the people and productive inputs of one state are working to enrich another, while their own state is deprived of resources to enrich itself. The economic conditions can merge with socio-political factors, namely the identification of workers' organizations and trade unions with the mandatory mass organizations of the socialist period,[119] and the use of "zombie socialism" as a scare tactic to discredit reform as a step toward the return of totalitarianism.[120] These realities ultimately make genuine efforts at worker-oriented reform. In Poland and Hungary, the privatization experience became one of

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[114] Bluhm. "Theories of Capitalism Put to the Test."
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment." 230.
[117] Martin Babička, "'The Future Is in Your Hands': Temporality and the Neoliberal Self in the Czech Voucher Privatization," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 83–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2022.2044616.
[118] Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment."
[119] Martin Myant and Jan Drahokoupil. "Trade Unions in Transformation: An End to Cheap Labour-How a Public Campaign may become a Turning Point for Czech Unions' Strength." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. November, 2017.
Pieter Vanhuysse, "Workers without Power: Agency, Legacies, and Labour Decline in East European Varieties of Capitalism," *Czech Sociological Review* 43, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 495–522.
[120] Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druţă, "Zombie Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism in Post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 4–5 (September 2, 2016): 521–44. For example, union membership and collective bargaining coverage is at an all-time low in Czechia (now less than 10 percent and between 35 and 45 percent, respectively). See Myant and Drahokoupil. Trade Unions in Transformation."

deindustrialization, rising poverty, and a sensation of being stuck.[121] In the Czech Republic, the sense of deprivation stemmed from unmet promises,[122] and in Slovakia, a longing for the friendlier and safer certainties of socialism contributed to the overall discontent.[123] The result is a crisis of expectations, of disappointment and the realization that the liberal market economy, which for many citizens was an opportunity for material well-being unknown under state socialism, was not capable of producing the lives they envisioned, or worse, that this failure was inherent to capitalism and the liberal model.

Upgrading does occur in the region, and with it the standard of living continues to improve. Indeed, accession to the EU has facilitated an improved regulatory environment for SMEs to use European funds, and ultimately, to integrate into global value chains.[124] Other methods of upgrading include an "increase[ing]…the number of lead firms engaging in intangible activities" (i.e. non-production activities) through innovation, knowledge creation, research and development, and design; and the creation of specialization in niche areas leading to the development of national and global champions.[125] In spite of the long-term results of the transition, public opinion in the four countries remained fixed upon the idea that the transition was unfair, corrupt, or beneficial only to the politicians and entrepreneurs (see Chapter 3). Moreover, the reality remains that in spite of the upgrading that has occurred since 1989, the high concentration of foreign-owned firms across economic sectors, including traditionally sensitive sectors (e.g. banking, media, and energy),[126] could be

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[121] Scheiring, "Left Behind in the Hungarian Rustbelt." 11.
[122] Wyss, "Exploring Populism Through the Politics of Commemoration."; Nina Hrabovska Francelova. "Unconvinced by Democracy: Czechs Nostalgic for Communist Past, Slovaks Even More So." *Balkaninsight.com.* 16 November 2021. Accessed 27 July 2023. https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/16/unconvinced-by-democracy-czechs-nostalgic-for-communist-past-slovaks-even-more-so/;
[123] *Ibid*; "Poll: People Are Nostalgic About Communism." *The Slovak Spectator.* 26 June 2018. Accessed 27 July 2023. https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20858226/poll-people-are-nostalgic-about-communism.html
[124] Gergő Medve-Bálint and Vera Šćepanović, "EU Funds, State Capacity and the Development of Transnational Industrial Policies in Europe's Eastern Periphery," *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 5 (September 2, 2020): 1063–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1646669.
[125] Szent-Iványi does criticize the contemporary Hungarian approach as "crony capitalism" and casts doubt upon its long-term efficiency. Balázs Szent-Iványi. "Prospects for FDI-Led Development." In: Balázs Szent-Iványi (ed.) *Foreign Direct Investment in Central and Eastern Europe: Post-crisis Perspectives*. Cham: Springer International. 2017. 250-251, 254.
[126] "By the late 2000s, more than 40 percent of total economic output of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovakia was produced by foreign firms, closely followed by Poland's 32

sufficient to create sovereignty anxiety in populations that experienced loss of sovereignty multiple times throughout the 20th century.[127]

Micro-Level Influences

Let us now look at the micro-level demand for political contestations. Macro-level factors such as GDP loss through capital outflows, a low earning workforce (resulting in social pressures[128]), and a lack of economic upgrading that perpetuates the process are long-term structural problems not directly felt with the same magnitude as personal economic disasters such as bankruptcy, job loss, or foreclosure. The population of a country, regardless of its voting habits, considers its own economic fortunes, good or ill, to be among the most important, pleasurable, and traumatic events of a lifetime.[129]. This micro-level discontent is worth exploring more. Economic discontent at the individual or micro level is a combination of insecurity, inequality, and injustice: all factors we can easily imagine arising from the political-economic models described above. A broad literature describes the relationship between these emotions and the rise of challenger movements. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, a number of scholars have blamed economic insecurity for provoking populist backlashes, for example Brexit or the election of Donald Trump.[130] Guiso et al argue that populism is caused by economic insecurity, and that a cultural dimension often contributes to the expression of this insecurity.[131] Botelho indicates a correlation between rising income inequality and support for populist political movements.[132] Writing prior to the rise of the challenger parties in 2009, Kalb argued that a crisis of legitimacy would beset the liberal states as pressure built for them to compete in the global market "by offering their populations and territories up as readily exploitable

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percent and well ahead of any other OECD state." Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment." 209.

[127] Šćepanović also suggests this in *Ibid,* 212.

[128] Mark Tomlinson, Alan Walker, and Liam Foster, "Social Quality and Work: What Impact Does Low Pay Have on Social Quality?," *Journal of Social Policy* 45, no. 2 (April 2016): 345–71.

[129] Kinder and Kiewiet, "Economic Discontent and Political Behavior."

[130] Yotam Margalit, "Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 4 (November 1, 2019): 152–70.

[131] Luigi Guiso & Helios Herrera & Massimo Morelli & Tommaso Sonno, 2017. "Demand and Supply of Populism," EIEF Working Papers Series 1703, Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance (EIEF), revised Feb 2017. 38.

[132] Austin Botelho. "The Short End of the Stick: Income Inequality and Populist Sentiment in Europe." *Issues in Political Economy*, Vol 28(1), 2019, 39-78.

factors for global capital.[133]" These pressures would result in the rise of "hybrid and volatile populisms that reject…the foundations of liberal rule and…are composed of ethnonational or religious symbolic sources eclectically combined with items of the classical left.[134]" The challenge emerges at the nexus of tensions between local, national, and global power structures and a "dramatically declining power, prestige, and opportunities" available to workers that energize "popular anxiety and paranoia" and in turn energize populism.[135] A similarly broad literature links inequality to challenges. Though the Visegrad countries have similarly low Gini indices, we can conceptualize it not as intra-state inequality, but inequality between states and between the political elite and the people, or the "winners and losers of globalization.[136]" Pastor and Veronesi suggest that inequality and a backlash against globalization are responsible for rising populist movements, especially when they focus upon "the high consumption of "elites.[137]"" The economic genesis of populism, according to Botelho, is the combined perception of the truth of two conditions: that others are benefiting from globalization, and that the perceiving individual is excluded from those benefits.[138] Accepting the cultural backlash interpretation of populism, Botelho finds greater statistical support for the inequality-based theory of populism. Interestingly, we can trace the rise of populism to the rise in the standard of living experienced in countries undergoing economic development. Pastor and Veronesi show that as an economy develops, voters grow in opposition to growing inequality, which causes a populist backlash.[139] A further economic genesis of challenges is the inherent contradiction between the democratic ideal and the economic realities of the neoliberal market economy. Cayla argues that the failure (or refusal) of the neoliberal state to address social discontent results in the rise of authoritarian populism, which attempts to "[satisfy] the immediate expectations of its electorate.[140]" Both

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[133] Don Kalb, "Conversations with a Polish Populist: Tracing Hidden Histories of Globalization, Class, and Dispossession in Postsocialism (and Beyond)," *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 2 (May 2009): 207–23. 207.
[134] *Ibid*, 208.
[135] *Ibid*, 218, 209.
[136] Céline Teney, Onawa Promise Lacewell, and Pieter De Wilde. "Winners and Losers of Globalization in Europe: Attitudes and Ideologies." *European Political Science Review* 6, no. 4 (2014): 575–95. doi:10.1017/S1755773913000246.
[137] Lubos Pastor and Pietro Veronesi. "*Inequality Aversion, Populism, and the Backlash Against Globalization*." NBER Working Paper No. 24900. August 2018, Revised July 2019.
[138] Botelho. "The Short End of the Stick." 47-48.
[139] Pastor and Veronesi. "Inequality Aversion, Populism, and the Backlash Against Globalization." *National Bureau of Economic Research* (2019)
[140] David Cayla. *Populism and Neoliberalism.* New York: Routledge. 2021. 175.

neoliberalism and authoritarian populism are ultimately the result of a failure "to build coherent and ambitious collective projects" which are necessary to the long-term success of a nation-state.[141] Furthermore, Glaser considers the current political breakdown in much of the world as the result of right-wing forces repackaging legitimate grievances of working-class people and weaponizing them against the contemporary political elite and selected out-groups such as immigrants. This strategy obscures the role of the neoliberal system and enables the super-rich to present themselves as authentic allies of the people, whose wealth enables them to speak freely.[142]

While the Visegrad states score fairly low on the Gini Index, inequality can manifest itself as a real or perceived comparison of one's self with a previous position in life or with other countries. Ultimately, economic dissatisfaction comes down to individual comparisons of where one is versus where one would like to be: an internalization of external conditions. In a 2018 investigative piece on workers earning poverty wages in the Czech economy, Saša Uhlová reports "every Czech knows that a shop clerk in Germany or Austria will make three times as much as one in the Czech Republic. Housing and food, however, aren't massively cheaper compared with the west. The working poor, who too often cannot get by with their wages, and themselves consumed by a deep feeling of injustice. They believe they have been left behind.[143]" The point necessitates further investigation. Comparison of the present situation with their own country's economic situation at the outset of the transition might inform a favorable perspective, but the same comparison of the present day circumstances with those of a neighboring, or comparator, country, while overlooking divergent histories, produces a sense of unfairness; a frustration that conditions are not better compared with that other country. Considering that subjective perceptions of stratification characteristics (e.g. status, income, etc.) do not necessarily match objective

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[141] *Ibid*. The literature on neoliberalism is extensive and outside the scope of this research to make a deep dive into. For a working definition of neoliberalism, I adopt the Friedmanite definition of a political economy prescribing the primacy of economic over political considerations to encourage the efficient functioning of a market economy. See Milton Friedman. *Capitalism and Freedom*: Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

[142] Eliane Glaser. *Anti-Politics. On the Demonization of Ideology, Authority, and the State."* London: Repeater Books. 2018.

[143] Saša Uhlová. "If the Czech economy is thriving, why are we so poor?" *The Guardian*. 19.09.2018. Accessed 08.10.2020. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/19/czech-republic-transition-state-socialism-capitalism

understandings of position, mobility, or absolute deprivation,[144] This comparison with where a country 'should be' helps us situate discontent in the wider contestations that the challengers pose. Thus, it is necessary to examine how individuals perceive the pre-1989 regime, as well as their opportunities in it and in the post-1989 regime.

Relative deprivation is derived from reference group theory, identified by Merton in his study of the behavior of American soldiers in relation to their peer group and other groups, e.g. "the drafted married man…comparing himself to his unmarried associates in the Army" feels that the demands for sacrifice upon him are greater than those facing his unmarried comrades.[145] Quoting the book *The American Soldier*, Merton identifies relative deprivation as a function of differing levels of aspiration relative to others and a sense of frustration resulting in the feeling that one has more to lose than another. This differs from differential deprivation, which refers to different levels of suffering or sacrifice (i.e. a frontline soldier versus a rear soldier).[146] Critically, soldiers conceptualize the fairness of the promotion system relative to their comrades of a similar educational background. For example, a university-educated captain will compare the speed of his own promotions to that of other university-educated captains, and a high school educated corporal will compare her promotions to that of other high school educated corporals.[147] The military example found in Merton is applicable to the realm of political behavior (and indeed any structure in which individuals interact and compete for a limited good, whether rank, jobs, or economic well-being). Mummendey and Simon identify three types of such comparisons: intergroup, i.e. comparisons toward other groups or countries; temporal, i.e. comparisons to other points in a country's history, and abstract/absolute, i.e. comparisons to an ideal state.[148] In their study, Mummendey et al showed that intergroup comparisons produced the strongest negative reactions to out-groups.[149]

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[144] Blanka Řeháková and Klára Vlachová, "Subjective Mobility after 1989. Do People Feel a Social and Economic Improvement or Relative Deprivation?," *Czech Sociological Review* 31, no. 2 (September 1, 1995): 137–56.
[145] Robert K. Merton. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: The Free Press. 1968 Enlarged Edition. 282.
[146] *Ibid*, 282.
[147] *Ibid*, 283.
[148] Amélie Mummendey, and B. Simon. (1997). Nationale Identi kation und die Abwertung von Fremdgruppen (National identification and devaluation of groups of foreigners). In A. Mummendey & B. Simon (Eds.), *Identita ̈t und Verschiedenheit* (S. 175–193). Bern: Huber.

Relative deprivation is applicable not only to individuals within a particular system, but also to individuals across two different systems, and across temporal boundaries. Řeháková and Vlachová, citing a variety of empirical evidence, that a sense of relative deprivation in a democratic system accounts more for political opinion and action than the stratification characteristics themselves.[150] The sense that one's position is unequal, in decline, or unfair, weather empirically justifiable or not, is a stronger call to action than the actual circumstances. As a temporal concept (i.e. comparing two ages of a country's history), Gest et al link this concept to racial identity and support for radical right parties in the US and UK.[151] Describing dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs relative to a perceived past "golden age," Gest et al identify nostalgic deprivation as arising from "the discrepancy between individuals' self-reported social, political, or economic status and their perceptions of the past" to influence the amount of status loss or gain over a certain period of time.[152] Nostalgic deprivation among white voters in the US and UK influences support for radical right movements, such as the Trump campaign or Brexit.[153] This is especially true when the deprivation concerns a diminishing capacity to influence material or psychological resources, with economic concerns being closely correlated with support for Donald Trump.[154] Thus, a perception of decreasing status encourages support for systemic challenger movements. It is not unreasonable to extend this idea of status anxiety to populations that compare their material capabilities relative to one another during the socialist period and the post-transition period. The socialist period saw a relatively high level of material equality among the population, with the inequality between the *nomenklatura* and the population carefully hidden.[155] The 1990s saw an explosion of growing wealth inequality in the transitioning societies, leading large portions of the populations to judge their lives

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Cited in Amélie Mummendey, Andreas Klink, and Rupert Brown, "Nationalism and Patriotism: National Identification and out-Group Rejection," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 159–72, https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164740.

[149] Mummendey et al. "Nationalism and Patriotism."

[150] Řeháková and Vlachová, "Subjective Mobility after 1989." 139.

[151] Justin Gest, Tyler Reny, and Jeremy Mayer, "Roots of the Radical Right: Nostalgic Deprivation in the United States and Britain," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (November 2018): 1694–1719.

[152] *Ibid*, 1712.

[153] *Ibid*.

[154] *Ibid*.

[155] Řeháková and Vlachová, "Subjective Mobility after 1989." For a fascinating description of the ways in which the wealth of the nomenklatura was obscured from the public, see Hendrick Smith. *The Russians*. London: Sphere Books Limited, 1976.

under socialism as better than under the new capitalism.[156] As a symptom of nostalgic deprivation, it can be argued that individuals in the post-transition societies feel status anxiety because of the high visibility of their peers' wealth and consumption, and feelings of frustration that they themselves have not attained this level under the new regimes. Indeed, Řeháková and Vlachová argue that an acceptance of this new inequality as a price for political and economic change resulted in the destruction of the egalitarian model of socialist society, and constituted the first step toward feelings of relative deprivation, as individuals developed a sense of declining status and income.[157] This status anxiety, Řeháková and Vlachová argue, can become a potent political weapon in transitioning societies when anxiety over a specific inequality is elevated over others, to the exclusion of some groups.[158] Additionally, the character of the democratic culture affects the outcome of efforts to improve and address relative deprivation, with collectivist, solidaristic cultures generally preferring group solutions that spread benefits, as opposed to individualistic cultures seeking solutions that maximize individual utility in overcoming problems. The post-communist countries, Řeháková and Vlachová argue, are examples of a mixed system, at once opposing socialist patterns of collectivism whilst shying away from American-style individualism.[159] Dissatisfaction leads citizens to accept more authoritarian behaviors from a governing party, while satisfied citizens are more likely to reject such moves.[160] Micro-level dissatisfaction causes people to compare themselves with other citizens and other countries (relative deprivation) and/or to their country in the past (nostalgic deprivation). These unfavorable comparisons provide fertile ground for challenger parties to activate the economic and identity anxieties latent in the population. This theory necessitates an examination of public opinion concerning the transition to capitalism and liberal democracy following the end of state socialism. I examine this in the following chapter in the country case studies.

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[156] Heyns. "Emerging Inequalities." 165.
[157] Řeháková and Vlachová, "Subjective Mobility after 1989. Do People Feel a Social and Economic Improvement or Relative Deprivation?"
[158] *Ibid*, 140.
[159] *Ibid.*
[160] Inga A.-L. Saikkonen and Henrik Serup Christensen, "Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders? A Conjoint Experiment on Elite Transgressions of Democratic Norms," *Political Research Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (March 2023): 127–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211073592.

Economic dissatisfaction has a strong link to political alienation.[161] Specifically, dissatisfaction with a government's economic policies impacts support for democracy in general.[162] In the Visegrad context, Epstein outlines the difference between the real economic gains of the post-socialist countries versus the relative deprivation in comparison with the Western EU economies. EU enlargement led to a strong output convergence between the Eastern and Western economies: the CEE countries have gained in GDP per capita, with the Czech Republic surpassing Spain in 2019[163] and Poland set to surpass the UK by 2030.[164] Wage convergence also occurs though not at a sufficient pace to halt the brain drain facilitated by the single market's labor mobility affects the ability of CEE states to innovate and upgrade as its more skilled workers frequently move abroad where higher wages can be found.[165] In fact, the single market, according to Epstein, is a driver for relative deprivation and the resultant frustration as people compare their opportunities for mobility and economic activity in the single market with those of their neighbors. Epstein argues that ethnopopulists instrumentalize the economic conditions in Central and Eastern Europe to highlight disparities of wealth and power.[166] In spite of the superior wealth indicators relative to the outset of the transition (noted elsewhere in this work), the disparity between the post-socialist countries and their Western European neighbors is dramatic. As Epstein notes, this disparity hinders the ability of the people of CEE to spend money outside of the domestic economy in terms of business, travel, and education. Epstein argues that this contributes to higher levels of brain drain. [167] While high amounts of FDI have led to significant economic growth in the region, the Western countries retain "profit-making, managerial control, innovation, and therefore power.[168]" Vachudova delineates the competing theories to explain ethnopopulists' success in the more prosperous countries relative to the poorest in her

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[161] Brad Lockerbie, "Economic Dissatisfaction and Political Alienation in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 23, no. 3 (April 1993): 281–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1993.tb00360.x.
[162] *Ibid*.
[163] Rachel A Epstein, "The Economic Successes and Sources of Discontent in East Central Europe," *Canadian Journal of European and Russian Studies* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 1–19.
[164] Daniel Johnson. "Poland will be wealthier than Britain by 2030 – it's time we took notice." *The Telegraph*. 7 May 2023. Accessed 8 May 2023. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/05/07/poland-europe-superpower-communism-putin-military/?WT.mc_id=tmgoff_youtube_youtube-community
[165]. Epstein, "The Economic Successes and Sources of Discontent in East Central Europe."
[166] *Ibid*.
[167] *Ibid*, 5.
[168] *Ibid*, 6.

thorough literature review, ranging from strong economic performance acting as an accelerant for social change, economic performance increasing perceptions of inequality within the country, and higher social spending in wealthier states[169]

The relationship between economic dissatisfaction and populist challenges is far from settled in the literature. Indeed, many political scientists have empirically proven that voters do not vote based on self-interest, but on their perceptions of the national interest.[170] A few critiques are worth noting in particular. Margalit challenges the economic-based interpretation of populism, suggesting instead that the role of economic insecurity is overstated in its influence on the populist backlash. Economic insecurity is a contributing factor affecting the margins of populist gains, but not the explanatory factor in causing populist reactions. Social and cultural factors, for example immigration, account more for populist political support, as does the frustration of being 'left behind' in deindustrializing towns; resentment turned toward the political elite.[171] Importantly, Margalit argues that economic dissatisfaction can be expressed in cultural terms, while cultural anxiety can be expressed in economic terms. Hüther and Diermeier in particular question the causality of inequality leading to political breakdown. Using populism as their frame for political breakdown and Germany as a case study, Hüther and Diermeier argue that the economic situation of a country plays a role, but is not in itself sufficient to act as a "fundamental driver for the current level of populism," but interacts with identity-based tensions (i.e. migration) and sovereignty anxiety to influence these political challenges.[172] This assertion is supported by survey data showing that wage growth and employment share have increased in Germany relative to, for example, the United Kingdom, working people are generally happy with their income, but rate income distribution as unfair.[173] This shows that rhetoric playing on societal anxieties such as immigration and sovereignty, connected with economics can serve to elicit a linked response of fear of loss in the voting population, thereby influencing support for parties proposing

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[169] Milada Anna Vachudova, "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe," *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 318–40. 325-326.
[170] The literature is neatly summarized in Jason Brennan. *Against Democracy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. 49-50, 251.
[171] Margalit, "Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered." 153-154, 166.
[172] Michael Hüther and Matthias Diermeier, "Perception and Reality—Economic Inequality as a Driver of Populism?," *Analyse & Kritik* 41, no. 2 (November 1, 2019): 337–58. 352.
[173] *Ibid*, 340.

solutions that address economic problems, real or perceived, as well as social-identity threats. These critiques suggest that economic dissatisfaction is not the cause of populist backlash, but a driver. It is insufficient to break a state, but important in providing energy to the challenger party.

Takeaways: Discontent and Economics

Discontent can manifest as dissatisfaction with the economic order in general and a negative comparison of oneself with comparators. The political economy literature informs several assumptions about the relationship between the economic system and discontent. There is a crisis of expectations as the model of capitalism in the Visegrad countries manifested itself differently from the hopes of the people during late socialism. Economic insecurity contributes to cultural backlash, as groups are perceived to compete over limited economic goods. Economic inequality fuels resentment and is instrumental for the party to build populist dichotomization, i.e. creating the pure people and corrupt elite. Neoliberalism, in its regional iterations dependent capitalism/embedded neoliberalism, contributes to the rise of insecurity and inequality both within the country and in the country relative to other countries, leading to unfavorable comparisons founded on relative deprivation. Unfavorable comparisons with the previous historical versions of the state, either their paternalistic socialist period or some idealized past create nostalgic deprivation among the population. In general, economic dissatisfaction will not be enough to produce a successful challenge. It can, however, provide a baseline of dissatisfaction that enables the challenger party to exploit the party system and contest the opposition over salient cleavages.

Opportunity: Political Factors

How does a party emerge to capitalize on discontent and challenge the liberal-democratic political order? How does the party interact with other parties, and how does it obtain hegemony? A similarly rich literature exists discussing these questions. Before turning to this, however, it is necessary to define the process by which challenger parties contest liberal regimes. Situated in the context of contestations of the liberal script, specifically, internal challenges to liberal democracy that emerge from within a liberal-democratic society, the literature defines the challenger parties

as engaging in democratic backsliding.[174] Bermeo defines democratic backsliding as "the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy.[175]" While the traditional *coup d'etat* is a method of backsliding, contemporary backsliding usually occurs in more subtle forms. Waldner and Lust, for example, accredit backsliding to "a consequence of shifting balances of power that favor incumbents.[176]" Unlike a coup in which highly emotive images of tanks on the main square and soldiers taking over the television stations can arouse widespread anger that helps bind potential opposition together, the stakes may appear much lower. The process is not a sudden regime change, but rather, as I and Rovira Kaltwasser indicate, a "gradual erosion of key institutions and norms that are intrinsic to liberal democracy.[177]" Erosion through the undermining of accountability at its multiple levels eventually disables the ability of theoretically co-equal branches of government to intercede, restrains civil society from mobilizing, and neuters opposition political parties.[178] This slow and often subtle transformation begins in an inherently democratic setting, and each movement is the result of conditions and structures previously in place with each building upon the others.[179] Democratically elected governments or leaders, according to Bermeo, possess a broad popular mandate to enact new laws. Those laws can target hate groups or corrupt politicians, or aim at protecting the country from nefarious foreign influences. For a potential opposition to prove the anti-democratic intent behind these policies presents a challenge. The sense of legitimacy of the acting government's policy implementation can render challenges from the opposition and the international community difficult, especially as international condemnation can inflame rhetoric of threatened sovereignty.[180]

To capture the notion that policy and attitudinal changes are the result of long-running processes, and that Bustikova and Guasti instead propose the notion of illiberal

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[174] Börzel and Zürn, Michael. Contestations of the Liberal Script. A Research Program, SCRIPTS Working Paper Series, No. 1.
[175] Nancy Bermeo. "On Democratic Backsliding". *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 27, No. 1. 5-19. 5.
[176] David Waldner and Ellen Lust, "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding," *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, no. 1 (May 11, 2018): 93–113. P. 108.
[177] Keith Prushankin and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Populism and Authoritarianism." In Aurel Croissant and Luca Tomini (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization*. Forthcoming (2023).
[178] *Ibid*.
[179] Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti. "The Illiberal Turn or Swerve in Central Europe?" *Politics and Governance*. Vol. 5, No. 4. 2017. 166-176.
[180] Bermeo. *On Democratic Backsliding.* 15-16.

swerving, which is a volatile episode in which the country in question takes illiberal steps in an episodic, temporary, and reversible manner. Bustikova and Guasti suggest that illiberal swerves can become more permanent illiberal turns if over the course of at least two election cycles the following conditions are met: 1) political polarization that prevents viable consensus about the character of the democratic polity; 2) the capture of the courts that seeks to dismantle the rule of law and balance of power; 3) political control of the media that involves increased control of the state media, and elimination or subjection of private media; 4) legal persecution of the civil society to disable mobilization and protest; and to ensure a lasting hegemonic turn, 5) change in the electoral rules and of the constitution to permanently weaken the political opposition.[181] Vachudova identifies moralization and polarization as the causal mechanism that leads to democratic backsliding by challenger parties. Instead of casting parties as competitors in a democratic polity, backsliding parties present their opposition as debased, amoral traitors to the nation beholden to malign foreign interests.[182] These factors come into play in the Visegrad challenges, especially in the more successful challenges as challengers use constructions of an ethnic, national, or religious-based identity as a basis for their challenges. The presence of threatening groups constructed as out-groups, as well as residual communists in the mainstream or previously governing parties justifies extraordinary measures in defense of the nation, often resulting in forms of democratic backsliding.[183]

What is the motivation for backsliding? Bakke and Sitter suggest two justifications for challenges: ethno-nationalism and technocratic centrism.[184] These different rhetorical constructions represent two broad types within the rhetorical stage that serve to justify the challenge. Ideational-rhetorical challenges utilize aspects of identity (e.g. nation, religion, language, culture) to construct the appearance of threat in the discourse as a justification for the challenge and a call to action for the voters. A technocratic justification uses language about efficiency, performance, and effectives in providing for the citizens' needs to justify the challenge. While these two types of rhetorical

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[181] *Ibid* 174.
[182] Milada Anna Vachudova, "From Competition to Polarization in Central Europe: How Populists Change Party Systems and the European Union," *Polity* 51, no. 4 (October 2019): 689–706,
[183] Milada Anna Vachudova, "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe," *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 318–40.
[184] Elisabeth Bakke and Nick Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles* : Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe since 2010," *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 1 (March 2022): 22–37.

challenge often overlap, the overall discourse contains a higher content of one or the other. In the context of the Visegrad countries, Bakke and Sitter suggest that backsliding is a function of motive, opportunity, and opposition.[185] Starting with the assumption that backsliding is deliberate (the motive), parties must gain structural power (the opportunity), often in multiple political arenas (e.g. multicameral legislatures) while outwitting or subduing the opposition.[186] When is backsliding successful? Vachudova argues that the successful dismantling of liberal democracy depends upon "whether counter-majoritarian institutions and independent voices can consistently check [challenger parties'] power.[187]" In the absence of such institutions, backsliding succeeds in "eliminating independent institutions, capturing the economy, polarizing society, and subordinating civil society.[188]" Overall, in the Visegrad 4, and elsewhere in the world, we see different forms and processes of democratic backsliding emerging in the last decade. The definition of backsliding for our purposes will remain fairly broad. Recognizing that the processes described in this subsection are underway to varying degrees in each of the countries under analysis in this work, I confine the definition to simply capture whether and to what extent a ruling political party attempts to change the norms of a liberal-democratic system to provides itself with an advantage over its competitors, thereby improving its ability to affect its desired systemic changes.

How does a challenger party emerge and how does it behave in the party system? The literature indicates that the answer can be found in a country's party system and its institutionalization. Zürn and Schäffer argue that populist parties emerge because of the perceived inability among the voters of the mainstream parties to address the sources of their discontent. This inability leads to a demand-based emergence of populist parties seeking to fill the gap in what the political spectrum offers.[189] According to Guiso et al., the availability of political space determines left or right orientation.[190] While none of the four challenger parties discussed in this work are extreme right (i.e. fascist), the very existence of these fringe parties might play a role

[185] *Ibid*.
[186] *Ibid*, 28.
[187] Vachudova. "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding." 329.
[188] *Ibid*.
[189] Armin Schäfer and Michael Zürn. *Die demokratische Regression*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2021.
[190] Guiso et al. "Populism: Demand and Supply." 1.

in the performance of the main challenger parties.[191] The emergence of populist parties can shift a country's Overton window by providing alternatives to the policies of traditional parties. Guiso et al argue that Mainstream parties move their programs closer to the successful populist party, making the political spectrum more populist.[192] This process has occurred, for example, with PiS's 500+ program, effectively making subsidies for children a baseline policy across the Polish political spectrum (see Chapters 3 and 4). In the Western European context, Jackman and Volpert argue that increasing thresholds depress extreme right support, while multi-partism fosters increased extreme right electoral proportionality, with rising unemployment aiding these conditions. Taken together, these elements help foster efforts to create a challenge to the mainstream, established political order from the far right.[193] Jackman and Volpert recognize that country variation occurs based on the availability of "political entrepreneurs" to take advantage of these conditions. Part of the efforts of these political entrepreneurs in gaining traction is through the normalization of their parties. While this does not explicitly apply to the parties under examination in this work, with PiS, Fidesz, and SMER being long-established parties before their illiberal turns and ANO being a relatively centrist newcomer, it is worth examining the structural processes by which extreme right parties become normalized within parliamentary systems, especially considering the roles of their charismatic political entrepreneurs. This process sheds light o the overall behavior of the challenger party in relations to other parties in the system. Valentim argues that entry into parliament serves a legitimizing function for supporters of radical right-wing parties.[194] It is not unreasonable to extend this line of reasoning to parties that pose specific, possibly illiberal challenges to the economic, political, and identitarian dissatisfaction in the Visegrad Four. Recalling the axiomatic formulae for marketization of the 1990s and the assuredness that neoliberal capitalism was the only path forward (recall Heyns' remark that "neither poverty nor inequality…[were] problematic if economic growth could be achieved[195]"), it could be the case that entry into power of challenger parties

[191] Defined as "neo-fascist" or "anti-system." Robert W. Jackman and Karin Volpert, "Conditions Favouring Parties of the Extreme Right in Western Europe," *British Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 4 (October 1996): 501–21.
[192] Guiso et al. "Demand and Supply of Populism."
[193] Jackman and Volpert, "Conditions Favouring Parties of the Extreme Right in Western Europe."
[194] Vicente Valentim, "Parliamentary Representation and the Normalization of Radical Right Support," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 14 (December 2021): 2475–2511.
[195] Heyns. "Emerging Inequalities." 164.

committed to revising the status quo could act as an accelerant for greater electoral support, thereby encouraging bolder and farther reaching attempts to redress the sources of discontent. The connection between these questions of party access and voter behavior are further informed as Akdede and Kentmen pursue the thread of economic anxiety and party support through an examination of the effect of income inequality on voter fractionalization.[196] Warwick similarly urges consideration of the degree to which voters are willing to compromise on their party's core values in order to attain entry into parliament.[197] Taken together, these factors can influence the type of party that enters into government, and the types of parties that stand in opposition to or in coalition with it. So far, we can say that a challenger party will gain electoral traction when the traditional parties do not appear to offer solutions to popular discontent and a political entrepreneur comes onto the scene with bold and a-typical solutions beyond politics as usual.

Assuming that the discontent is sufficient to create a demand in the population for a challenge and give rise to a challenger party, we still need to determine the factors that influence the success of a challenger party both as an electoral contender and a governing party. In considering the character of the challenger parties, it is important to understand the left-right political dimension in the party systems of the post-socialist countries. The left-right distinction, developed in the Western European context, holds that leftist parties generally support higher social spending while rightist parties typically pursue policies of lower spending. While this holds empirically in much of Western Europe, the applicability of the left-right dichotomy to post-socialist party systems is questionable. Tavits and Letki contend that the behavior of left and right parties in the first decade of the transition does not follow the usual characteristics of similar parties outside the region.[198] Throughout the transition, leftist parties (ex-communist, socialist, social democratic, and green parties), were more likely to pursue hardline reform policies that included public

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[196] Sacit Hadi Akdede and Çigdem Kentmen, "Income Inequality and Voter Fractionalisation: An Empirical Study of 16 Multi-Party European Democracies," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 3 (September 2011): 425–36.
[197] Paul V. Warwick, "When Far Apart Becomes Too Far Apart: Evidence for a Threshold Effect in Coalition Formation," *British Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (July 2005): 383–401.
[198] Margit Tavits and Natalia Letki, "When Left Is Right: Party Ideology and Policy in Post-Communist Europe," *American Political Science Review* 103, no. 4 (November 2009): 555–69, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409990220.

spending cuts because of its guaranteed base of supporters (usually ex-communist party members and economic beneficiaries of the old regime) while simultaneously to prove their reformist credentials and their commitment to abandoning their authoritarian past. These factors gave the post-socialist left a surprisingly rightist character in economic policy, while creating a structural demand for the right in certain cases to retain higher levels of social support. In addition, the right's credentials from opposing the socialist autocracies leant them a moral force that combined their revolutionary anti-communism with their commitment to "rejoining the West.[199]" As Lindner et al contend, the delegitimzation of the left, especially in Poland and Hungary occurred because of the left's heritage as successors of the vanguard parties. This baggage helped to harden the reversal of the traditional left-right roles. Lindner et al provide an example in the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt* – MSZP), the successor of the ruling party, which upon electoral victory in 1994 formed a coalition with the "pro-market liberal [Alliance of Free Democrats] to form the government rather than pushing for more redistribution single-handedly[200]." This party behavior opened a clear political space for the right, both in Hungary and Poland, to orient themselves toward lower income voters "who had not benefitted from the fruits of transition," combining redistributory policies with "a conservative and nativist political platform.[201]" This merger would also lead to an idea that the communists retained power after the formal regime change This discourse of the communist infiltration of the political system and the continuing corruption is present throughout the challenger parties' discourses and colors a key argument about the role and function of the post-communist party for the challenger party, which I discuss below. This post-communist realignment of left and would come to open new cleavages fundamentally different from those in countries without a socialist past.

Cleavages and party systems inform the investigation of how specific challenges manifest and whether (or to what extent) they succeed in achieving their stated goals. This is important because cleavages represent the structure of a political party system,

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[199] Prushankin. "Neoliberalism or Else."
[200] Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, Tomasz Zawisza. "Political Conflict, Social Inequality and Electoral Cleavages in Central-Eastern Europe, 1990-2018. *World Inequality Lab – Working Paper No. 2020/25*. November 2020. 23.
[201] *Ibid*.

essentially setting the battlegrounds for electoral politics. The ideas and concepts that will be fought over by the country's political parties are informed by the cleavages that exist within the society from which the political parties arise and draw support. Cleavage salience, i.e. the importance of a particular cleavage in national politics, will ultimately influence the type of political contestations that occur, and the fervor with which they are debated. The cleavages thus represent a core influence on both the scope of ideas and the range of actors that vie for political power in a given polity. Cleavages themselves are contested terms in the literature, which identifies two schools for understanding these divisions that occur in political party systems. Lipset and Rokkan argue that the formation of cleavages influences the way in which a party system crystalizes, with relationships between the varying poles freezing into place around these cleavages.[202] Lipset and Rokkan identify fundamental historical moments of change, namely the national and industrial revolutions of the 19th Century, and their interactions as responsible for the formation of the Western European party systems.[203] These tensions produced schisms between the state and church, the center and periphery (i.e. town and country), landowners and capitalists (i.e. old and new rich) and labor and capital.[204] It is the way in which the formation of these cleavages occurred that influences their future character, and whether and where the freeze into place. An alternative to the freezing model is the social pluralist school, which fills some of the gaps in the original freezing conception of cleavages. Kitschelt applied Lipset and Rokkan's analysis of Western European party foundation, to CEE in his 1995 article. Kitschelt makes a causal argument: inter-war democratic traditions, industrialization, and the type of communist rule influenced the pathways of transition and post-1989 institutional structure. Personalized or depersonalized power relations in these institutions in turn influence the democratic experience and programmatic structuring.[205] Once parties formed, voters formed party preferences through a calculation of tangible and intangible advantages and personal sympathy with candidates, which eventually socialized supporters into a pattern of electoral loyalty. In this paradigm, parties are charismatic, clientalistic, or

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[202] S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan. Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments: An introduction. In: Lipset SM and Rokkan S (eds.) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*. New York: Free Press, 1967.
[203] *Ibid*, 34.
[204] *Ibid*, 35.
[205] Herbert Kitschelt. "Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies." *Party Politics*. Vol. 1, No. 4. Pp. 447-472.

programmatic in the way they gain support from the electorate.[206] Evans and Whitefield find a correlation between cleavages and the social and historical characteristics of the country in which they evolve,[207] and also relate party system stability to the type of cleavage, i.e. political, socio-economic, or ethnic.[208] Ethnic cleavages concern identity-based questions that make compromise more difficult, while political-based cleavages leave space for voter defection and thus improve the fluidity of the party system. I adopt Mair's definition of a cleavage as forming "when a particular social divide becomes associated with a particular set of values or identities [which are] made politically relevant by means of an organized party or group.[209]" This definition captures the intensification and polarization of political debate that mirrors the emergence of the challenger parties as these parties not only embrace a social divide, but also deepen and enflame the divide by making it a point for political mobilization. This process is visible among each of the Visegrad challenger parties, as we will see in the proceeding chapters. Moreover, as Casal Bértoa argues, this definition bridges top-down (supply) approaches to political sociology with bottom-up (demand) approaches.

In the Visegrad context, Hloušek and Kopeček identify the dominant cleavage to emerge out of the transition as the left-right cleavage. This cleavage centered upon the degree to which the country should marketize and to which it should maintain social safety networks.[210] This largely class-based cleavage appeared around the winners and losers of privatization and divisions on the extent of privatization. A nationalist cleavage also emerged, surrounding the reassertion of non-communist national identities encapsulating questions of ethnicity, language, and belonging.[211] These socio-economic cleavages are more stable than the nationalist cleavage in the sense that the nationalist cleavages affect a starker polarization and decrease opportunities

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[206] *Ibid*, 49.
[207] G.A. Evans and S. Whitefield. (1993) "Identifying the bases of party competition in Eastern Europe." *British Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 23 No. 4. 521–548.
[208] G.A. Evans and S. Whitefield (1998) The structuring of political cleavages in post-communist societies: The case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Political Studies 46: 115–139.
[209] Peter Mair. "Party System Change." In: Eds. Richard Katz and William Crotty. *Handbook of Political Parties.* London: Sage. 2006.
[210] Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček, "Cleavages in the Contemporary Czech and Slovak Politics Between Persistence and Change," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 22, no. 3 (August 2008): 518–52. 519.
[211] *Ibid*, 523.

for reconciliation and cooperation.[212] Religion versus secularism has played a significant role in Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland in the formation of cleavages, but has not been an issue in the majority-atheist Czech Republic.[213] Hlošek and Kopeček describe this cleavage as forming due to the presence of an ethnic minority in a specific territory of the state (e.g. Hungarians in Slovakia), the historic construction of a neighbor as a hostile threat (e.g. Germany to some Czechs), or the dispute between groups seeking a nationalist, rather than a civic construction of the state.[214] Noury and Roland argue that the traditional left-right cleavages with their largely economic bases expanded since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (GFC) to encompass a cultural cleavage.[215] Spurred by economic anxiety, voters feel a heightened sense of cultural anxiety that leads to greater receptivity to parties advancing such ideologies. Krastev argues that this trend in CEE is born out of cultural anxieties that relate to the region's suppressed national identities under Soviet-backed governments that imported copies of Soviet nationalism at the expense of local identities.[216]

Shifting cleavages can influence the development of new types of populist contestation. New cleavages form as liberal politicians transfer significant authority into non-majoritarian institutions (e.g. central banks and courts).[217] This in turn justifies a backlash based on returning power to the people from the malign elites. Zürn argues that political causes for populism underpin economic and cultural explanations. The current iterations of populism in much of the world, particularly their authoritarian variety, are not new challenges, but are the result of a new cleavage in society: traditionalist, authoritarian populists against cosmopolitan liberals. Thus the economic insecurity and cultural backlash explanations are insufficient in explaining populism, as they address symptoms without touching the underlying political causes.[218] Specifically addressing consolidated democracies (i.e. older democratic polities), Zürn argues that non-majoritarian institutions create a sense of voicelessness among the electorate, and that populist parties respond by giving the

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[212] *Ibid*, 526.
[213] *Ibid*, 527.
[214] *Ibid*, 523.
[215] Noury and Roland. "Identity Politics and Populism in Europe."
[216] Ivan Krastev. *After Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2017.
[217] Mair. "Party System Change." 15.
[218] Michael Zürn, "How Non-Majoritarian Institutions Make Silent Majorities Vocal: A Political Explanation of Authoritarian Populism," *Perspectives on Politics*, May 26, 2021, 1–20. 2.

appearance of voice to the hitherto 'silent majority.' It is hardly a stretch of the imagination to theorize that a growing sense that the traditional parties existed only to enrich themselves and to engage in business with foreign corporations that ultimately benefited only selected insiders generated a similar sense of voicelessness among the people of the post-socialist countries, causing them to turn to new and alternative parties that in some way sought to address their discontent. At the very least, these voters could believe that someone was listening to them. Considering our discussion of cleavages, we can assume that a challenger party will gain traction if there is a strong post-communist cleavage pitting the remnant of the ruling communist left against a patriotic, traditionalist right committed to protecting the "voiceless" people and traditional values becomes a major, if not the dominant, cleavage. Left wing SMER-SD and centrist ANO would need to find effective ways of attaining the same effect with other cleavages, focusing on, for example, the transition elites or the pre-1989 communists as its enemies.

How does a populist party behave in a jungle of competing parties? If cleavages explain the structural and spatial ability of a party to find a place among the electorate, party system institutionalization can help explain how parties interact with one another. This includes forming coalitions or isolating another party, and how those parties contest certain cleavages in a given political system. Institutionalization, according to Casal Bértoa (following Bakke and Sitter and Mair), fosters interaction in a cooperative, standardized manner that transcends specific issues and shocks.[219] A stable party system therefore operates across specific crises, with normalized collaboration and collegial competition. How do populist parties break a stable party system? Much of their ability to do so depends on the party's ability to bring together economic and cultural arguments in a cleavage-based challenge. We can see an example of this in Varga's outline of the non-economic goals of economic nationalism in Poland and Hungary. The argument holds that these countries embraced this sovereignty-based approach to economic management as a means of advancing a previously established challenge to liberalism itself (and by extension,

[219] Fernando Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited: A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (January 2014): 16–36.

globalization and cosmopolitanism).[220] Reclaiming economic sovereignty is a means of asserting the "organic" or "holistic" conception of the economy and society as expressions of sovereignty, thus necessitating economic measures to protect the nation. The literature shows differences in parties' ability to affect this. In the Polish and Hungarian contexts, Varga links economic nationalism to calls for extraordinary measures to defend the nation, while arguing that Czechia has yet to embrace an economic nationalist developmental challenge to dependent capitalism because of the compartmentalization of the communists.[221] Generally speaking, system institutionalization determines the spaces available to parties seeking to challenge the existing order. As we will see in the following chapter, in the Visegrad context, those positions are often the result of maneuvering, opportunism, or just luck.

The role of the former communist party is worth further consideration. The experience under the pre-1989 regime and the role of the party after the regime change create a cleavage in the political systems of the Visegrad countries and an obvious difference between them. Here, we can compare the Czech case, in which strong lustration laws prohibited former communist functionaries and secret police collaborators from holding government positions, against the Polish and Hungarian cases in which there was no such law.[222] The communist parties in Poland and Hungary on the other hand, with their seats at the negotiating table and role in the consensus-based transition, have proven, as Vachudova argues, to "carry the seeds of [liberal democracy's] degradation.[223]" The idea of communist holdovers continuing to exercise influence creates the conditions to polarize the political scene. Dispersing from the erstwhile ruling party into the new post-communist leftist and social democratic parties, the communists retain influence over the state and the anti-communists who negotiated the transition with them charged as "traitors who colluded with the communists.[224]" This serves to justify challenger parties both in

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[220] Mihai Varga, "The Return of Economic Nationalism to East Central Europe: Right‐wing Intellectual Milieus and Anti‐liberal Resentment," *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 1 (January 2021): 206–22.
[221] *Ibid*.
[222] Veronika Bílková. "Lustration: The Experience of Czechoslovakia / The Czech Republic. Report prepared for the Conference on Past and Present-Day Lustration: Similarities, Differences, and Applicable Standards. 7 September 2015. https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2015)028-e
[223] Vachudova. "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding." 334.
[224] *Ibid*, 332.

providing an opposition to these elements and in using extraordinary measures (i.e. those policy and legal changes that result in backsliding) to reclaim and protect the state. The Czech case offers a different model. The Czech ruling party did not rebrand as a social democratic party, unlike its counterparts in Poland and Hungary, but continued in political isolation as a distinct but politically neutered force. In maintaining the compartmentalization of the erstwhile ruling communists in their own unreformed party and excluding them from government by the legal means of a strict lustration law, the conditions in the Czech political system undercut potential conservative demand for extraordinary measures, such as economic nationalism, to root out the communists disguised as liberals that so alarmed Polish and Hungarian conservatives.[225] This comparison tells us that the role and form of the post-communist party influences the strength and character of the challenger party, a connection I examine more in Chapters 3 and 4. If the communist party was dissolved and its members folded into the post-1989 political system as mainstream politicians, the challenger party will be able to claim that it is acting against continuing communist rule and justify itself on the basis of opposing the communist holdovers. On the other hand, if the post-1989 communist party remained whole and politically isolated, as in the case of the Czech communist party, the challenger party will be unable to make this claim and will need to find alternative justifications for the challenge. The question, therefore, is what is the role of the left and right in the party systems of the Visegrad countries? Specifically, how does the challenger party move among left and right to position and launch its challenge? How does it instrumentalize or hegemonize, delegitimize or compartmentalize the left or right to serve its political ends? I discuss these questions in the following chapter.

Looking at the cleavages and party system institutionalization in the Visegrad countries, several discrepancies emerge. Casal Bértoa does not find a correlation between the number of electoral parties and cleavage fragmentation (i.e. the number of social issues at play).[226] Similarly, Casal Bértoa finds no correlation between cleavage fragmentation and party system stability in the Visegrad 4.[227] The absence of these indicators leads Casal Bértoa to conclude that cleavage types do not affect the

[225] *Ibid*.
[226] *Ibid*, 19.
[227] *Ibid*.

degree of party system institutionalization.[228] Institutionalization, he argues instead, is a function of the interactions between the different cleavages.[229] This theory facilitates interactions among cleavages and among parties, allowing for the formation of different party groupings according to changing circumstances. Hloušek and Kopeček identify the cleavages that resulted from the societal transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, proposing to identify through a party's rhetoric which cleavages it utilizes in the construction of its political and economic messaging, and how it dominates the discourse over those cleavages.[230] The initial cleavage to break out was over regime character, between communist parties and the anti-communist dissident movements. There quickly followed the development of a socio-economic cleavage pitting workers and new capitalist against one another and drawing battle lines between social democratic and reformed communist parties and the new liberal-conservative, right-wing parties. Nationalism re-emerged as the bonds of socialist brotherhood dissolved and frozen tensions over the composition of the nation, the role of minorities, and historical enmity with traditional enemies thawed under the banner of new nationalist parties. In some cases, agrarian and Christian parties reemerged, reopening the pre-communist cleavages of secular versus ecclesiastical authority and the urban-rural divide. As the dust of the regime change settled, a new cleavage over attitudes toward the socialist past emerged, amid deindustrialization and strengthened by the outbreak of the GFC, parties began to preach redistribution and a backlash against the transition regime for demolishing the stable edifice of late-socialist social protection systems and industrial economies. Through the 2010s, two new cleavages opened over regime character as the challenges to liberalism and rule of law emerged and questions over materialism and environmentalism entered the mainstream. What does all of this tell us? First, we can see that the development of cleavages encompasses historical, as well as emerging tensions in society. Second, we can see that shifts in the dominant cleavages occur periodically. Decommunization disappeared as a political question by the early 1990s and the importance of agrarian parties diminished as countries' populations increasingly undertook employment in the information sector. Furthermore, we can see entry points for the challenger parties in the form of economic discontent, political discontent, and a crisis of values. By

[228] *Ibid*, 21.
[229] *Ibid*, 22.
[230] Hloušek and Kopeček, "Cleavages in the Contemporary Czech and Slovak Politics." 524-525.

considering both the cleavages exploited and the rhetorical method of exploitation, we can discern the how and the why of the challenges to the post-1989 order. This will come into play in the following chapter as I develop a typology of the challenger parties.

While cleavages address the type of issues and policies that will appear in party contests, parliamentary thresholds determine the level of support a party needs to have access to political power. These institutional factors can, as Pappalardo argues, have great influence on political outcomes, as electoral rules condition voters, the parliamentary strength of parties, and types of governing majority.[231] In the context of the challenger parties, this compliments cleavages by exploring whether there is space for a party to undertake a particular type of ideological challenge (i.e. on the left-right spectrum) and if so, what practical constraints the party has to gaining power. As we would expect, a party needs a minimum of electoral power to be able to make policy changes. In addition, the party will need to interact with, either in coalition or with the support of, competing parties while delegitimizing or otherwise politically isolating its competitors. Therefore, the party must fulfill the following conditions: hegemonize one side of the political spectrum or ideological bloc; isolate or delegitimize its opponents to obtain the required position within the political system from which to effect its challenge. In short, the party must have a dominant position over its allies, its actual competitors (i.e. ideological opposition), and its potential competitors (i.e. parties from a similar ideological position such as, for example, the Hungarian Jobbik and the Slovak Kotleba party: both far-right parties that became opposition elements to the main challenger parties (see Chapter 3). There are several aspects that influence a party's relative position in the party system. When voting in a Condorcet system (i.e. rank-ordered voting) voters, argue Núñez and Xefteris, will usually make rational decisions on which party receives their vote, whilst taking the threshold of parliamentary entry into consideration. In the instance of a lower threshold, if the voter's preferred party will not meet the threshold, the voter will vote for the party they consider to be least objectionable.[232] If the threshold is higher, the voter will usually vote for their preferred party because the probability of the vote helping the

[231] Adriano Pappalardo, "Electoral Systems, Party Systems: Lijphart and Beyond," *Party Politics* 13, no. 6 (November 2007): 721–40.
[232] Matías Núñez and Dimitrios Xefteris, "Electoral Thresholds as Coordination Devices," *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 119, no. 2 (April 2017): 346–74.

party enter parliament is higher than that of the vote having a determinant effect on the winner.[233] High entry thresholds therefore encourage voters to split their votes between similar parties, while lower thresholds encourage compromise votes for parties more likely to attain representation. Núñez and Xefteris leave an important question open regarding the relationship between threshold levels and the strategy behind parties' platform selection.[234] This suggests a mutually constitutive role for parties and electorates in crystalizing demand. It would follow that when thresholds are lower, parties will be more likely to express a weaker ideological position to attract voters seeking a least objectionable option other than abstention. When a threshold is higher, parties will be able to embrace more brazen displays of ideology to drive core supporters' mobilization. While the thresholds in the Visegrad countries are fairly uniform (see chapter three), this point informs the investigation into how the parties under observation in this work conduct themselves discursively. If thresholds are similar, the behavior of parties in the system will likely influence the ability of the ruling party to retain power. As Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni demonstrate in their case study of Mexico's longtime ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the party retained power not due to voters' overwhelming preference, but due to the opposition's inability to mount a successful alternative.[235] As we will see in Chapter 3, this was the case with Fidesz and PiS, but not with SMER-SD and ANO. Indeed, the failure to coordinate can be an electoral benefit to extreme parties by causing crowding (i.e. multiple parties with similar platforms) on either the left or right, which in turn benefits the opposition, for example in the case of the Polish left's defeat despite PiS only receiving a plurality of votes.[236] We will therefore need to look at the nature of opposition parties that attempt to unseat the challenger party in the following chapter. Additionally, the ruling party in a competitive autocracy like Hungary under Fidesz or Mexico (until 2000) can restructure electoral rules and

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[233] *Ibid*.
[234] *Ibid*, 372.
[235] Alberto Diaz-Cayeros and Beatriz Magaloni, "Party Dominance and the Logic of Electoral Design in Mexico's Transition to Democracy," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 13, no. 3 (July 2001): 271–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/095169280101300303.
[236] Christian B. Jensen and Daniel J. Lee, "Potential Centrifugal Effects of Majoritarian Features in Proportional Electoral Systems," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2021.1928879.

procedures affecting as the allocation of seats to ensure that it retains a competitive advantage regardless of the behavior of its adversaries.[237]

It is worth examining the role of elites as they are visible and influential movers and shapers of opinion capable of effecting political mobilization, and who in turn require, at least to some extent, the approval of some select group of their fellow citizens to exercise power, rather than approval from Moscow.[238] They may base their authority on the *real* values and manifestations of social relations, as opposed to the "artificial" ones imposed on their societies by the post-war communist elites.[239] The distinction between elites and non-elites is "blurred and usually transitory.[240]" It is similarly worth noting that local and national elites have been, in the post-communist context, interchangeable, and not mutually exclusive. A local elite can become a national elite, and a national elite can influence local conditions.[241] Kaminski and Kurczewska make an important contention on the role of the elites in post-communist societies: "the role of the state in post-communist society will depend upon the relative strength of the state *vis-a- vis* society and upon the political orientations of the new ruling classes.[242]" This last factor, the political orientations of the new ruling classes lends significant insight into the strength of Visegrad challenges because that elite character necessarily influences the character and strategic choices of the challenges.

The character of the elites in post-communist countries varies, generally consisting in the early years of the transition of "ex-members of the communist apparatus and administration, former revisionists later turned dissidents, people with links with the Church, specialists and professionals whose attachment to the regime was instrumental, and a few survivors of the anti-communist post-war parties.[243]" It is important to understand that all of the populists discussed in this work have been

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[237] Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni. "Party Dominance."; Anna von Notz. "How to Abolish Democracy: Electoral System, Party Regulation and Opposition Rights in Hungary and Poland." *Verfassungsblog*. 10 December 2018. Accessed 30 March 2023. https://verfassungsblog.de/how-to-abolish-democracy-electoral-system-party-regulation-and-opposition-rights-in-hungary-and-poland/
[238] Antoni Z. Kaminski and Joanna Kurczewska, "Strategies of Post-Communist Transformations: Elites as Institution-Builders," in *Social Change and Modernization*, ed. Bruno Grancelli (De Gruyter, 1995), 131–52, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110884470.131.
[239] *Ibid*, 135.
[240] *Ibid*, 137.
[241] *Ibid*.
[242] *Ibid*.
[243] *Ibid*, 135.

involved in projects of system building, some with greater success than others. System building occurs in a situation of disorder; it is a reaction to a perceived disorder that opens both an opportunity and encourages a desire for action. To understand this, I turn to Kaminski and Kurczewska once again:

> States of disorder are created by interactions among the strategies pursued by different actors striving to attain their ideal and material interests in new ways when old behavioral patterns are no longer effectively enforced by the old regime. When these strategies do not lead to desired states of affairs, then actors both at the micro and macro levels attempt to devise new strategies and new structures: they destroy the old forms of social order and build new ones… such groups may have their power entrenched within the political order; or they may stand outside this order and owe their influence to a privileged economic situation; or they may consist of revolutionaries alienated from the order and contesting it. They may possess a clear-cut political program or only a vague vision of a 'morally superior society'. These elites may exist in a local community or at the national level. [244]

The reaction to a state of disorder can inspire institutional redesign, institutional building, and systemic breaks, all of which we will see in the following chapters. The identities of the elites themselves are important, both in determining the sources of discontent, and the character of the challenges. Kaminski and Kurczewska identify four types of elites in post-communist societies.[245] Traditional elites base their authority on continuity, tradition, and the sacredness of moral norms. Charismatic elites derive authority on a prophetic sense of mission, rejecting traditional hierarchies in favor of a personalized relationship between the leader and followers. Bureaucratic elites focus on management of the state and imposition of law from a "practical and technical" perspective, with competence determining hierarchy and duty informing morality.[246] Interactionalist elites originate in civil society (i.e. "the market and the public sphere") and embody an informal character, perceiving society as social interactions between entrepreneurs and citizens.[247] It is important, therefore, to place each of the challenger parties in the context of the post-1989 systems: where did they come from and what were their influences? Who are their elites and how do they

[244] *Ibid*, 138-9.
[245] *Ibid*.
[246] *Ibid*, 144.
[247] *Ibid*, 145.

behave? This is equally important to identifying who are the challengers themselves as both political actors and as people. I undertake this in the following chapter.

Anti-elitism forms the backbone of populism. While much of populism studies focus on the role of the elite as the "other" against which the challenger party is seeking to act, elites play a significant role in the building and campaigning of populist movements. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser identify the elite as part of the triad of populism, standing in opposition to the people and the general will.[248] Populists portray the elite, comprised of the political, economic, cultural, and media elite, as a corrupt and homogeneous group working against the interests of the common people.[249] This anti-elitism is not anti-capitalist, as many populists consider themselves "post-class" and seek to bridge class divides and restore capitalism to its "proper" (i.e. mutually-enriching) function.[250] Elites can also appear as agents of foreign interests, working against the country on behalf of extra-territorial financial, religious, or cultural interests.[251] Guiso et al deepens the conception of the role of elites through the concept of elite trust, showing that populists are more likely to succeed "when voters lose faith in mainstream parties and existing institution.[252]" Specifically, shocks to trust in mainstream political parties drive people not to vote at all, and when they do, to vote for populist parties. This tendency is mirrored with economic shocks.[253] While they are often framed in populist discourses as the enemy, elites can be drivers of contestations. Billionaire populists who seem to say what everyone is thinking but the mainstream politicians are unwilling to say are able to generate a maverick appearance that can be appealing to people for whom politics as usual appears to have failed.[254] Elites, when not taking up roles as populist politicians, can generate demand for populist solutions by throwing their support behind the challenger parties. The Hungarian case demonstrates the utility of elites in upholding populism after the party has been elected through the creation of clientelistic relations. The clientelistic system developed after Fidesz's rise to power, as the party used special taxes to provide benefits to national oligarchs and regime-friendly

[248] Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism A Very Short Introduction.* 9.
[249] *Ibid*, 12.
[250] *Ibid*.
[251] *Ibid*, 14.
[252] Guiso et al. "Demand and Supply of Populism." 16.
[253] *Ibid* 5.
[254] Glaser. *Anti-Politics.*

multinationals in exchange for their continued political support. Antal calls this relationship "a neo-feudal structure.[255]" Antal describes the relationship as having converted Hungary into "a 'good province' of this neoliberal empire" for its strategic partnerships between the Fidesz regime and key multinationals, notably German car companies, which sees enormous tax benefits enticing those companies to keep their production in Hungary.[256] The model leaves Hungarian small and medium enterprises on their own.[257] Schiering calls the Orbán regime's purchase of business loyalty "authoritarian capitalism" for the regime's promotion of the rent-seeking behavior of various economic actors, the maintenance of economic dominance for those actors in, for example, the automotive sector, and the heavy-handed measures the state uses to put down labor dissatisfaction.[258] This relationship indicates that both domestic and international economic elites can play a role in supporting the challenger party, if the challenger party is willing to enact beneficial economic policies for them. While this does not appear to be as essential a factor for the rise of the challenger party as public dissatisfaction, it does appear to influence the sticking power of a challenger party following its entry into power.

While we have considered party system institutionalization, cleavages, and elites, it is necessary to briefly consider the role of the European Union (EU) in shaping the behavior of challenger parties. As each of the challenger parties came to power under the auspices of the EU's mandate to uphold rule of law, liberal democracy, and the universal application of human rights within its borders, understanding the role of the EU can shed light on the evolution and longevity of the challenges, and while this work makes no attempt to predict the future of the challenger movements, the ability of the EU's supranational legal structure to set a cap on backsliding is an unavoidable influence on challenger movements. Bozóki and Hegedűs discuss the notion that a regime may experience backsliding while facing external constraints, calling Hungary an externally constrained hybrid regime.[259] In its interactions with Hungary, the EU

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[255] Attila Antal. *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime.* Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2019. 126.
[256] *Ibid*, 129.
[257] *Ibid*.
[258] Gábor Scheiring, "Dependent Development and Authoritarian State Capitalism: Democratic Backsliding and the Rise of the Accumulative State in Hungary," *Geoforum* 124 (August 2021): 267–78.
[259] András Bozóki and Dániel Hegedűs, "An Externally Constrained Hybrid Regime: Hungary in the European Union," *Democratization* 25, no. 7 (October 3, 2018): 1173–89,

plays the seemingly contradictory role of systemic constraint, supporter, and legitimizer for Fidesz. As a constraint, the EU has judicial and financial means available to it. The European Court of Human Rights passes down judgments attempting to secure personal freedoms, in spite of the Union's lack of direct enforcement mechanisms. In November 2022, the European Commission recommended withholding 13 billion Euros of COVID recovery funds in response to Hungary's failure to implement recommended judicial reforms.[260] On the other hand, the EU's Cohesion Fund provides the regime with payments equivalent to 3.89 percent of gross national income (GNI), with much of the money flowing to single-tender public procurement procedures.[261] Finally, the EU plays an indirect legitimizing function as a lack of official censure toward Hungary gives the appearance of tacit acceptance of Hungary's democratic regression, while the Union's reputation as a club for democracies appears to broadcast that Hungary is still a democracy, and still welcome among its peers.[262] The EU's lack of "any detailed benchmarks with regard to what constitutes a level political playing field, or the quality of checks and balances in its member states" suggests that while interesting, a systematized analysis of the interplay between the EU and the challenger parties is not necessary for this work.[263] Moreover, longer consideration of the EU is not necessary because I do not believe constraints on a backsliding regime actually occur at the supranational level, but that they occur at the country level. The fact that all four of the countries studied in this work are EU members and some have more successful challenges than others suggests that EU membership and supranational influence does not produce a significant effect on the character and outcome of a party's challenge. It is certainly possible that, for example the threat of EU financial sanctions or at most expulsion for countries that have gone too far could act as a deterrent to more severe backsliding, but the longevity of two successful challenges in Poland and Hungary suggests that the EU is institutionally limited in constraining challenger parties once they are in power.

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https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1455664. Bozóki and Hegedűs use the term "hybrid regime" to define a liberal-democratic government that has backslid to some form of electoral authoritarianism.

[260] Nick Thorpe and Paul Kirby. "EU Commission calls for freeze on €13bn funding for Hungary." *BBC News*. 30 November 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63806254

[261] Bozóki and Hegedűs, "An Externally Constrained Hybrid Regime."

[262] *Ibid*.

[263] *Ibid*, 1182.

Key Takeaways: Political Opportunities for a Challenge

The literature on political opportunities for challenger parties crystalizes the causal model developed in Chapter 1. Decreased trust in the mainstream parties and a perceived inability of the mainstream parties to address discontent opens new cleavages (especially liberal versus authoritarian, cosmopolitan versus nationalist, etc.). Weak party system institutionalization in which one side of the left-right divide is marginalized and/or concentrated combined with a higher party threshold encourages voters to accept stronger rhetoric and leads to the rise of a challenger capable of capturing power. The presence of a reformed post-communist party enables the challenger party to blame systemic dysfunction on the continued influence of communists in government, thereby delegitimizing and isolating the left. Frustration with the political status quo, for whatever reason, provides the structural impetus to encourage the rise of a challenger party. The existing cleavages in a particular country will determine the character and form of a challenge. High cleavage salience and low party institutionalization will produce a more successful challenge, while low[er] cleavage salience and higher party institutionalization will produce a less successful challenge. The challengers will require a structural opportunity to advance their agenda, and will take advantage of gaps in the party system to do so. Absent the structural opportunity, the possibility of launching a successful challenge will be constrained. Finally, the character of the elites can influence the character of the challenge. More traditionalist elites will challenge the system on terms of traditional values while extra-systemic elites, for example coming from the private sector, will criticize the system from outside its boundaries, e.g. on the terms of a private sector organization. But how does a challenger, bolstered by popular discontent and with a clear strategy for maneuver within a party system, convey the urgency and emotion to raise their electoral support?

Activation: Identity Tensions

When the challenger party has taken advantage of streams of popular discontent and has identified or created a favorable political-structural environment from which to launch its challenge, an accelerant is still needed to enflame popular sentiment against its competitors and in favor of the new challenge. Culture and identity, especially when linked to economic or political tensions, can prove a highly compelling avenue

upon which to frame a challenge. Kinnvall argues that insecurity causes people to look to secure identities that reduce "existential anxiety," notably nationalism and religion.[264] Schmid and Muldoon highlight the deepening entrenchment of ideological positions individuals experience when faced with threats.[265] Those threats may be economic degradation and insecurity. Paul argues that inequality, a negative economic condition, produces negative political outcomes because of actors' ability to link economic suffering to an out of touch (liberal) elite, against whom they promise to lead the people.[266] These identity tensions, Paul argues, relate to the disproportionate burden born by the lower and middle classes as liberal elites embrace flexible definitions of the nation-state and borders, among other factors. This connection between economic burdens and identity tensions is critical because it links together the initial demand of popular discontent with the supply of a challenger party's solutions. Jay et al delineate a causal mechanism linking economic inequality and identity tension as influences for political challenges in the form of far-right populism, and while none of our challenger parties are themselves far right, the reasoning works for challenger parties in general.[267] Inequality causes reduced social trust and cohesion. A threat perception amplifies these tensions. National identity consolidation is a likely response to inequality, thereby reducing tolerance for cultural diversity. Populists harness those strengthened national identities for political gain.[268] The effect of this process is that individuals focus more on emotive concepts such as patriotism, national community, and immigration (see below), relegating the systemic explanations for their discontent to lesser importance.[269] This suggests the importance of emotive, identity-based factors in counter-liberal political mobilization, drawing on threat perception and protecting their seemingly contested access to scarce resources through allegiance to ideational factors such as nation, culture, or religion: Kinnvall's secure identities protecting the people against existential anxiety. As Hanley and

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[264] Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism."
[265] Katharina Schmid and Orla T. Muldoon, "Perceived Threat, Social Identification, and Psychological Well-Being: The Effects of Political Conflict Exposure: Perceived Threat, Identity, and Well-Being," *Political Psychology* 36, no. 1 (February 2015): 75–92.
[266] Jean-Michel Paul. *The Economics of Discontent: From Failing Elites to the Rise of Populism.* 2019 Digital Version Available At: https://www.economicdiscontent.com
[267]Beyond populism, referring to political contestations in general as discussed in the proceeding section. Sarah Jay et al., "Economic Inequality and the Rise of Far-Right Populism: A Social Psychological Analysis," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 29, no. 5 (September 2019): 418–28.
[268] *Ibid*.
[269] *Ibid*, 422.

Vachudova relate in the context of the post-socialist countries, "parties embrace intense if not extreme populist appeals to safeguard the interests of "the people" and "the nation" from opposition elites, outsiders, traitors and foreigners…political competition on socioeconomic issues [are] thus…eclipsed by or subsumed into competition on identity and values.[270]" Much of the literature argues that identity outweighs economic considerations in voters' electoral choices. As we saw above, Hüther and Diermeier demonstrate the utility of economic discontent when it is linked to identity tensions.[271] Investigating further into the linkage of economics and political challenges, Kinder and Kiewiet, using voter data from congressional elections in the United States over a 20 year period, challenge the assumption that "issues that impinge immediately and tangibly upon private life" motivate political behavior by showing that personal economic suffering did not influence a tendency to punish incumbents for their perceived role in creating those conditions. Rather, voter preferences are influenced by partisan loyalties and perceptions of national-level economic trends[272] Kinder and Kiewiet further argue that voters' personal economic circumstances have little to do with "their attachments to political parties, with their feelings for the president, or with their collective economic judgments.[273]" Cramer confirmed this in a micro-level study of Wisconsin voters, showing that they repeatedly chose to support a candidate whose policies did not provide an economic benefit because he addressed their ideational grievances.[274] This argument, while perhaps limited in its focus on the United States with its binary political system influencing zero-sum choices in voters' calculation,[275] provides an interesting insight. Voters experiencing personal economic hardship are unlikely to vote against the current ruling political party, but are likely to be swayed by party loyalty and national-level perceptions. This suggests that the role of parties in both cultivating

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[270] Polk et al and Vachudova in Seán Hanley and Milada Anna Vachudova, "Understanding the Illiberal Turn: Democratic Backsliding in the Czech Republic," *East European Politics* 34, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 276–96. 279.
[271] Michael Hüther and Matthias Diermeier, "Perception and Reality—Economic Inequality as a Driver of Populism?," *Analyse & Kritik* 41, no. 2 (November 1, 2019): 337–58. 352.
[272] Donald R. Kinder and D. Roderick Kiewiet, "Economic Discontent and Political Behavior: The Role of Personal Grievances and Collective Economic Judgments in Congressional Voting," *American Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 3 (August 1979): 495-527.
[273] *Ibid*, 523.
[274] Katherine Cramer. The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
[275] See Shai Davidai and Martino Ongis, "The Politics of Zero-Sum Thinking: The Relationship between Political Ideology and the Belief That Life Is a Zero-Sum Game," *Science Advances* 5, no. 12 (December 6, 2019).

loyalties and discursively presenting national-level perceptions is critical in shaping and channeling economic resentments for political purposes. While micro-level economic discontent can be insufficient to sway voter perceptions, at the national level the challenger party can frame it as a national problem, affecting the organic conception of the nation and the identity of the people. This is especially potent if it is linked to the secure identities of the people, i.e. competition over scarce social benefits with immigrants whose higher birthrates threatens the dominant religious and cultural values.

The conception of the nation and its broad interests become rallying cries for the challengers. Within this frame, challengers elevate economic and political issues to questions of national survival to mobilize the population. Relating this argument to the Visegrad 4 in general and Hungary and Poland in particular, Varga outlines the non-economic goals of economic nationalism in Poland and Hungary, arguing that these countries embraced a sovereignty-based approach to economic management as a means of advancing a previously established challenge to liberalism itself (and by extension, globalization and cosmopolitanism).[276] Reclaiming economic sovereignty is a means of asserting the "organic" or "holistic" conception of the economy and society as expressions of sovereignty, thus necessitating the undertaking of economic measures to protect the nation. Krastev and Holmes suggest that the populist trend in CEE is a reaction of a broader societal disappointment that stems from an "imitation game" played by the former socialist countries. This discontent appears as a sense of humiliation and loss of sovereignty as the post-socialist countries attempt to emulate the West, thereby implicitly giving the West the right to judge, evaluate, and set the standards for their behavior. Populism and illiberalism are therefore emotional responses, "rooted in rebellion at the humiliations that must necessarily accompany a project requiring acknowledgment of a foreign culture as superior to one's own.[277]" In Krastev and Holmes' argument, discontent is a reaction to disappointment between the 1989 ideas of what the West was, and the experience of real existing liberalism. Nationalism, demonized in the West, is seen as healthy in the East, not least of all

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[276] Mihai Varga, "The Return of Economic Nationalism to East Central Europe: Right‐wing Intellectual Milieus and Anti‐liberal Resentment," *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 1 (January 2021): 206–22.
[277] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, "Imitation and Its Discontents," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 117–28.

because of its utility in breaking free from the hegemonic pre-1918 empires from which the Visegrad states were born.[278] Nationalism in the Visegrad countries thus becomes a positive force, compared with, for example, Germany's post-nationalism that almost "criminalize[s]…ethnonationalism.[279]" It is worth taking a closer look into nationalism and patriotism as concepts influencing these secure identities. Nationalism is a means of binding a people together to protect and advance their rights against others.[280] This utilitarian definition makes sense in the context of nationalism's strategic value in populist discourses linking economic and political factors to ideation. Patriotism is often conflated with nationalism[281] but in fact is different, focusing on "feelings of belongingness, responsibility, and pride, typically focused on one's country.[282] Both nationalism and patriotism can serve to delineate in- and out-groups, which can then become tools of populist mobilization.

The nature of the loyalties parties cultivate is similarly important to the conception of identity. If personal economic circumstances are on their own insufficient to arouse support for a particular cause, it is necessary to determine what motivates individuals to support a particular cause. Duncan and Stewart propose the notion of personal political salience to define the linkage of political events with personal identities (e.g. racial or gender identities).[283] Personal political salience provides "a personality link between group memberships, politicized collective identity, and political participation.[284]" The attachment of "personal meaning to social events is related to the tendency to politicize relevant group or collective identities.[285]" Kearns et al. confirm the effect of risk and identity on grievances, noting that actions taken to address grievances are an effect of social identity.[286] It therefore stands to reason that

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[278] *Ibid*.
[279] *Ibid*.
[280] Michael Ignatieff. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 1993.
[281] Lowell W. Barrington. ""Nation" and "Nationalism": The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science." *Political Science and Politics*. Vol. 30, No. 4. (1997). Pp, 712-716.
[282] Mummendey, Klink, and Brown, "Nationalism and Patriotism."
[283] Lauren E. Duncan and Abigail J. Stewart, "Personal Political Salience: The Role of Personality in Collective Identity and Action," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 2 (April 2007): 143–164.
[284] *Ibid*, 143.
[285] *Ibid*. 158.
[286] The article identifies grievances as chiefly political: discrimination, political repression, and physical violence. I believe these categories are applicable to grievances of a social nature as well, e.g. the threatened national identity. Erin M. Kearns et al., "Political Action as a Function of Grievances, Risk, and Social Identity: An Experimental Approach," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 11 (November 1, 2020): 941–958.

issues of identity have a compelling capacity to impel people to political action while varying in character and salience across national contexts.

Identity tension often manifests as xenophobia; a fact well documented in the literature. Jenne declares that ethnopopulism, if not authoritarian populist rhetoric, becomes more attractive to a population in the wake of a global or national crisis, due to the appeal of a group's ability to provide security in belonging.[287] The cultural backlash theories suggest that the stabilizing material security as the transition period concluded led to the people of CEE searching for belonging. Combined with the disappearance of the West as the Cold War "other," the demystification of public office following political liberalization, and the decentralization of the media proved fertile ground for movements founded on identitarian anxiety to emerge. The subsequent arrival of Arab migrants and refugees to Europe activated the latent sense of insecurity, fed by ideas of belonging, and resulted in the rising appeal of actors who frame politics as a "clash of civilizations.[288]" Vachudova argues that ethnopopulism is the key to backsliding in Czechia, Poland, and Hungary. Using the term coined by Jenne, Vachudova argues that ethnopopulism has strategic utility in both the electoral and post-electoral periods. Combining frustration over neoliberal economics and a heightened threat perception from immigrants and extra-territorial influences (i.e. the EU) in ethnically homogeneous countries,[289] the success of ethnopopulism (at least in Poland and Hungary[290]) is evident as it takes root in countries hitherto known for their rapid and successful adoption of the post-1989 liberal-democratic consensus. The flexible construction of "the people" having its roots in national, ethnic, cultural, religious, and civilizational terms is, according to Vachudova, a more flexible concept than ethnic nationalism, which depends only on

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[287] Erin K. Jenne, "Is Nationalism or Ethnopopulism on the Rise Today?," *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (October 20, 2018): 546–52.

[288] Austin Botelho. "The Short End of the Stick: Income Inequality and Populist Sentiment in Europe." *Issues in Political Economy*, Vol 28(1), 2019, 39-78. 45-46.
R. F. Inglehart and P. Norris. Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash. Faculty Research Working Paper Series. 2016.

[289] Slovakia, in comparison, has a sizable Roma and Hungarian minority.

[290] Vachudova contends that Czechia under Babiš, like Fidesz, PiS, and the UK Conservative Party "won power as [a] mainstream conservative part[y]…[and] radicalized while in government." As I discuss in Chapter 3, ANO is not a conservative movement on par with Fidesz and ANO, but a technocratic, entrepreneurial populist movement lacking the clear and consistant ideology of its regional peers. Vachudova. "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding." 318.

belonging to a particular nation.[291] That the Visegrad countries do not have a particularly high level of immigration, relative to other European countries, might seem to suggest that the cultural backlash approach is either partially or wholly inapplicable. Several studies however demonstrate that there is no causation between bearing higher costs of immigration and opposition thereto.[292] Opposition to demographic shift and the cultural hegemony of the native-born population, on the other hand, account for politicized opposition to immigration.[293] The overall result of the rise in an identity-based, anti-migrant and xenophobic narrative is as Stojarová shows, the mainstreaming of these attitudes in populist parties and the marginalization of extreme-right (i.e. anti-democratic or neo-Nazi) parties.[294] This has significant implications for the party systems as it mainstreams formerly extreme ideas and forces a polarization as parties must either accept or reject the new discourse. The identity-based rhetoric therefore has significant spillover effects on the political, and as above discussed, the economic aspects of a populist challenge. Assertions that CEE face challenges to democracy because of its undemocratic history, e.g. Trencsényi's theory that the East Central European "*Kulturkampf,*[295]" is the basis of all the region's contemporary contestations) do not capture key historical experiences of the region. The thirst for freedom that led Czechs and Slovaks, Hungarians and Poles onto the streets in 1989 and the celebrated Czechoslovak democracy of the interwar years, not to mention the rapid and sturdy creation of liberal democracies in the 1990s and the Czech and Slovak rejections of backsliders (see Chapter Three) are sufficient historical evidence to the contrary. Kleinert and Schlueter go a step further, connecting subjective economic dissatisfaction with political radicalization, which is often expressed through anti-immigrant stances.[296] This contention adds weight to the

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[291] *Ibid*, 320.
[292] Jens Hainmueller and Michael J. Hiscox. "Attitudes toward Highly Skilled and Low-skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment." *American Political Science Review.* Vol. 104, No. 1. 2010, 61-84.; Dustin Tingley, "Public Finance and Immigration Preferences: A Lost Connection?," *Polity*. Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 2013): 4–33, https://doi.org/10.1057/pol.2012.30.
[293] Eric Kaufmann and Matthew J. Goodwin. "The diversity Wave: A meta-analysis of the native-born white response to ethnic diversity." *Social Science Research*. Vol. 76, 2018, 120-131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.07.008.
[294] Věra Stojarová, "Populist, Radical and Extremist Political Parties in Visegrad Countries Vis à Vis the Migration Crisis. In the Name of the People and the Nation in Central Europe," *Open Political Science* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2018): 32–45, https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2018-0001. 42.
[295] Balázs Trencsényi, "Beyond Liminality? The Kulturkampf of the Early 2000s in East Central Europe," *Boundary 2* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 135–52.
[296] Manuel Kleinert and Elmar Schlueter, "Why and When Do Citizens Support Populist Right-Wing Social Movements? Development and Test of an Integrative Theoretical Model," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 9 (July 4, 2022): 2148–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1763788.

activation effect of identitarian tensions on existing economic discontent. Kleinert and Schlueter develop a similar model to that which I delineate, that economic dissatisfaction merges with political dissatisfaction *and* anti-immigrant attitudes to generate support for far-right movements.[297] Socio-economically disadvantaged people are more likely to blame the government for their woes, creating an expression of dissatisfaction at the political stage. The key to this model is that immigrants exacerbate the perceived socio-economic-political deprivation of native-born citizens, as they are more likely to compete for lower-wage jobs traditionally filled by economic disadvantaged strata of the native-born population. While this argument is sound, I believe it does not go far enough. Where I differ from this model is in the discussion of anti-immigration attitudes. Kleinert and Schlueter place a narrow focus on xenophobia. I believe that identity activation comes from multiple vectors of identity tensions, including religion, nationalism, and various conceptions of traditional values that include alternative definitions of gender and sexuality. On top of low-wage competition with immigrants, ideas of nationalism, the family, religion, and gender roles can take on heightened levels of importance, especially when contextualized in the history of the country. I will discuss this further in the following chapters.

What have we learned from a review of the literature on the identitarian underpinnings of a challenge? Insecurity increases the appeal of secure identities to reduce existential anxiety. Emotional issues supersede systemic complaints and voters are more likely to vote based on identity-based concerns than economic and material concerns. Challenger parties respond by mobilizing a defensive narrative against harmful outside forces. Economic and political considerations can be mobilized and/or justified as a means of promoting the ideational construction of the in-group (i.e. the nation, the faith, etc.). Economic challenges alone, while important at the micro-individual level, appear insufficient to generate significant political action in the context of the Visegrad challenges. Once linked to identity-based challenges such as immigration and sovereignty, economics serve as a relational element, connecting the economically struggling individuals with larger challenges facing the entire society and mandating broad and bold solutions. In sum, the literature recognizes

[297] *Ibid*, 2151.

economic insecurity as contributing to populism by undercutting trust in the system and raising ire toward elites and other cultural groups perceived to threaten the hegemonic construction and well being of the people. We can therefore expect to see successful challenges arising which use identities as a means of drawing battle lines and raising the political stakes to approach the level of a "cosmic struggle.[298]"

Chapter Takeaways

This chapter has assessed the components of the causal model for challenges to the post-1989 order in the Visegrad countries. Compared with the promises of the dual-transition to liberal democracy and market capitalism, the economic reality in the Visegrad countries has facilitated conditions that lead to a demand for the redress of the post-socialist order. The political economy models show the region as stuck in a subordinate orbit of the countries that did not undergo the transition. People living within these countries experiencing micro-level discontent over their economic position will compare themselves unfavorably to either each other within the country, themselves before the 1989 regime change, or to citizens of other countries. Similarly, elites attempting to develop a new domestic capitalist class come into conflict with the transnational elites to whom they are, by virtue of their inferior market power, subordinated. These factors give both the electorate and the elites incentives to oppose the status quo, creating a demand for a challenger party. Generalizing these conclusions, a population that perceives their economic situation unfavorably, whether or not this is a factually accurate perception, will be more likely to support a challenger party than a population relatively satisfied with its economic situation.

A challenger party can respond to this demand when the political conditions are right. A specific and sufficiently salient cleavage must be available for the party to exploit, which the mainstream parties appear to be incapable or unwilling to address. This cleavage will often combine different existing cleavages within the party system. Additionally, the party system must exhibit a sufficiently low level of institutionalization in order to give the challenger party the political space to maneuver against its opponents. This is not always the case, as we will see in the next chapter, Fidesz came to dominate the Hungarian party system in spite of its strong institutionalization. In the context of the party system, an opportunity exists for the

[298] Hawkins, "Is Chávez Populist?"

challenger party in the post-communist context to orient itself against the reformed communist party in particular and the political left in general. Due to its historical roots as instigators of neoliberal reforms and past associations with authoritarianism and foreign rule, this party grouping becomes an easy target for the right, which is able to merge patriotism and ethno-nationalism with a redistributive economic policy aimed at uplifting the poor, appearing to give a voice to the voiceless, and righting the wrongs of both the socialist period and the transition. This can theoretically occur outside of the post-communist context with a former ruling party in a post-authoritarian state, or a party responsible for a sufficiently high-level scandal. In general, a challenger party will be successful in attaining and retaining electoral office if it is able to both delegitimize and/or isolate its ideological opponents and establish a hegemony over its ideological allies by incorporating elements of that party grouping's discourse. The latter is to prevent more extreme parties from siphoning away voters who are more attracted to these discourses. If a party is either unable to isolate/delegitimize its ideological opponents[299] and/or is unable to establish a hegemony over its own side, its electoral performance and staying power will be greatly reduced. Similarly, if the opposition fails to coordinate, or if the challenger party can restructure voting rules or procedures sufficiently, the electoral system itself can be an enabling factor for the rise of the challenger party, inadvertently or by design thwarting the efforts of the opposition to attract sufficient parliamentary force to unseat the challenger. These factors together create the opportunity for the party to launch its challenge.

As economic and political factors alone are insufficient to spur a challenge to victory, the ideational element will influence the ultimate success of the challenge. As people experiencing discontent will look toward secure identities for a sense of stability in difficult times, a successful challenge will activate a threat mentality over those secure identities. The challenger party will present salient values such as, in the Visegrad context, religion, the nation, and traditional values, as both integral to the organic conception of the nation-state and under threat from political competitors and from outside elements, again in the Visegrad context, for example, Brussels or

[299] Either because it is the reformed communist party in the case of Slovakia or it uses the communist party as a coalition partner as in the Czech Republic, or is in a two-party system like the US GOP. See Chapter 3.

migrants, and will position themselves as a shield to protect the nation, the people, and their identity. Policies and programs will therefore appear in connection with ideational elements and challengers will frame their policies as necessary for the survival of the organic conception of the nation and people. This conceptualization, on top of latent demand from economic dissatisfaction and a political-structural opportunity, is essential for the success of a challenge.

In this chapter, I have explained and justified my causal model through a review of the relevant scholarly literature. The model I have discerned for a successful challenge shows that a material or social perception of discontent provides the impetus to a challenge. A challenger party will exploit opportunity structures (low party institutionalization and salient cleavages), often in accordance with its elite character. The party will then identify and exploit important identities in the population to activate the challenge. This is, of course, only a model and as we know anecdotally, there are different outcomes in each of the Visegrad states. Keeping in mind what we have learned in this chapter, the following chapter examines the four challenger parties to see if the model's predictors for success are able to explain the variation of outcomes in Budapest, Bratislava, Warsaw, and Prague.

Chapter 3: Varieties of Challenge: The Visegrad Challenges

Introduction

Recalling that our goal is to determine the reasons for and character of the variety of challenges in the Visegrad countries, I now turn to an analysis of those challenges. Understanding that each country began with similar conditions of dissatisfaction and ended with different results (two successful and two unsuccessful challenges, two strongly ideological challenges and two ad-hoc, low ideological challenges) I use this chapter to develop a typology of the different challenges, and the economic, political, and ideational factors that lead to different populist outcomes. I develop a typology of each challenge based on the following framework, recalling that a successful challenge is the result of demand + activation + opportunity. I divide this chapter's four case studies according to the following table:

Table 3. Case Study Organization

Section	Background	Demand	Opportunity	Activation
Main Question	What are the party's origin, ideology, and main figures?	What were the initial conditions of demand prior to the rise of the challenger party?	What were the political conditions that created the opportunity for challenger parties?	How, if at all, did the challenger parties use ideational tension to justify its program?
Secondary questions	When did it come to power and in what circumstances?	What is public and elite opinion on economic satisfaction, political satisfaction, and values since 1989?	What was the role of the (post)-communist party? Reform or compartmentalized? Did old communists become social democrats? Does this leave open allegations of corruption/collusion for the Challenger party to exploit?	How does the party link economics and politics to ideation?
	How, in general, does the literature label the party?	What is public and elite opinion on patriotism and nationalism since 1989?	What was the role and composition of the left and right prior to the challenger party's assumption of power?	How, if at all, does the party create the image of an immanent threat to secure identities?
			What is the structural situation the party exploited? With whom did it compete and with whom did it enter into a coalition? What did the party do post-election to consolidate power?	

A key metric for this chapter is whether the challenge was successful or unsuccessful. Recall the definition from Chapter 1, that a challenge is successful when the challenger party obtains a hegemonic position in the country's national government and accomplishes its core electoral goals with respect to challenging the political and/or economic structure of the post-1989 order. This lends insight into broader trends for populist challenges by addressing specific rhetorical configurations that are more likely to succeed, therefore offering utility as a predictive mechanism for populism in post-socialist countries. The overall goal of this chapter is thus to determine a most successful case and a least successful case, to further analyze in the proceeding chapter. Throughout this chapter, I rely on secondary literature, acknowledging the breadth of scholarship performed particularly on Hungary and Poland. Where appropriate, I incorporate primary sources. Following the selection criteria established in chapter one - parliamentary power lasting at least one electoral term and a clearly delineated goal of affecting systemic change either as outsiders or reformed "traditional parties" - I select Fidesz, SMER-SD, PiS, and ANO for analysis. The character of these parties is contested in the literature, and while is general consensus that these four parties are populist in their approach to politics,[300] I give a brief summary of the competing definitions and justify my own. The review of each party is in chronological order of the party's first ascension to power, and therefore begins with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz.

Hungary – Illiberal Democracy

"We will not be a colony. Hungarians won't live according to the commands of foreign powers, they won't give up their independence or their freedom…as a European nation we demand equal treatment. We will not be second-class European citizens."

- Viktor Orbán[301]

Background

The primary Hungarian challenge to the post-1989 order comes from Viktor Orbán and Fidesz. Orbán first appeared on the national political scene amid the challenges to

[300] For a strong overview, see Stojarová, "Populist, Radical and Extremist Political Parties." 34.
[301] Valentina Pop. "Hungarian PM to EU: 'We won't be a colony'." *EU Observer.* 16 March 2012. Accessed 30 March 2022. https://euobserver.com/political/115613

the Soviet-backed socialist government at the close of the 1980s, proclaiming that "the communists took away our future," and demanding a pro-Western, pro-market orientation for Hungary.[302] The Hungarian post-communist elites, initially allied in the effort to build a liberal-democratic-capitalist regime, split along the fault line of the character of the regime (i.e. the globalist-traditionalist divide) and the post-communist divide (i.e. the continuing role of ex-communists in civic and public life). Orbán ascended to the post of prime minister in 1998 on a conservative platform opposed to socialist governance, only to lose power to the same socialists in 2002 by a slight margin.[303] During the next 8 years, Orbán and Fidesz condemned the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party as "rebranded communists" who had never left power following the 1989 transition. Again losing to the Socialists in 2006, Orbán launched a "continue the revolution" campaign culminating in riots, at once to commemorate the 1956 anti-communist uprising, and to tie that historical event to contemporary opposition to the socialists.[304] Orbán similarly ratcheted up the nationalist fervor on the 90th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon, which saw Hungary stripped of two thirds of its territory following its defeat in the First World War. The dual currents of anti-communism and revanchism can be traced to the regime of Miklos Horthy (Hungary's authoritarian-conservative regent until 1944), and function as a continuation of the pre-communist evolution of Hungarian nationhood outside of the illegitimate interruption of the communist period.[305] A major faction within the elite would coalesce around the reborn and more conservative Fidesz to embrace Orbán's anti-liberal agenda, mobilizing a broad segment of the population and national capitalists with key business portfolios.[306] Shortly after these events, Fidesz won an electoral majority in the 2010 election with 53 percent of the vote: a sufficient mandate to affect sweeping constitutional changes.[307] The effect of Fidesz's election to the supermajority rule of Hungary was the collapse of the post-1989 party system and the institution of a new model of political control; the definition of which is

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[302] Luke Waller. "Viktor Orbán." *Politico.eu.* Accessed 30 March 2022. https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28/viktor-Orbán/
[303] OSCE/ODIHR. "Republic of Hungary: Parliamentary Elections 7 and 21 April 2002, Final Report. Warsaw: 6 June 2002.
[304] Jacques Rupnik. "Hungary's Illiberal Turn: How Things Went Wrong." *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 132-137.
[305] *Ibid*.
[306] Gábor Scheiring, "Dependent Development and Authoritarian State Capitalism: Democratic Backsliding and the Rise of the Accumulative State in Hungary," *Geoforum* 124 (August 2021): 267–78, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.08.011.
[307] Rupnik. "Hungary's Illiberal Turn."

subject to some debate in the literature, which describes Fidesz as a populist, illiberal, and conservative developmental statist party.[308] Metz and Várnagy call Fidesz a hybrid cartel party that combines organizational strategies of a mass movement and personalistic, leader-based party with a complex patronage system operating within the machinery of government.[309] Bozóki and Hegedűs describe Hungary under Fidesz as a hybrid regime that operates under the external constraints of the supranational structure of the EU.[310] They argue that Hungary under Fidesz is a fully entrenched and consolidated hybrid regime, thus invalidating the concept of backsliding for forward-looking Hungarian political development as the country has already transformed into a non-democracy.[311] Orbán himself does not describe the changes precipitated by his party in such academic terms. Speaking to a crowd of ethnic Hungarians in the Romanian town of Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) in the summer of 2014, Orbán referred to Fidesz's project as "an illiberal state, a non-liberal state," centered upon the recognition of the achievements of the individual while recognizing the core role of the Hungarian community in facilitating those achievements. The illiberal state, according to Orbán, maintains the fundamental rights of freedom under liberalism, but does not turn them into an ideology, instead applying "a specific, national approach in its stead.[312]" The evolution of this illiberal state, as we shall see, follows the pattern of demand + opportunity + activation = successful challenge, making Fidesz one of the most successful challenges in the Visegrad 4 and the wider world.

Demand

Among the various currents of demand in pre-2010 Hungary, a strong economic demand emerged for a challenge to the post-1989 order. The transition from the relatively relaxed market socialism of General Secretary János Kádár's government was peaceful and rapid, and Hungary quickly became a highly attractive destination for foreign investment.[313] As a result of the round table agreement with the liberals,

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[308] Bugozany and Varga. "Against Post-Communism."
[309] Rudolf Metz and Réka Várnagy, "'Mass,' 'Movement,' 'Personal,' or 'Cartel' Party? Fidesz's Hybrid Organisational Strategy," *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 4 (November 24, 2021): 317–28.
[310] Bozóki Hegedűs, "An Externally Constrained Hybrid Regime."
[311] *Ibid*.
[312] Csaba Tóth. "Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014." *The Budapest Beacon*. 29 July 2014. Accessed 13 March 2022. https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/
[313] Rupnik. "Hungary's Illiberal Turn."

the ruling communist party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* – MSZMP), retained a systemic role, albeit with new branding and an abandonment of the Marxist-Leninist line. While national capitalism was the initial hope of the Hungarian reformers, since the country's accession to the IMF and World Bank in 1982, a significant level of debt held by private commercial banks had accumulated, as opposed to debt held by foreign governments.[314] Additionally, Hungary's need for hard currency, export dependency, and the relative disinterest of Western governments in Hungary (as opposed to the strategically important Poland), led to the rapid emergence of transnational capitalists as the dominant force in the Hungarian transition. In effect, Hungary obtained the cash necessary to keep its economy alive by selling the family silver, i.e. its state assets, to foreign buyers.[315] By virtue of its status as a debtor country (and a reliable one since the 1980s), Hungary offered an attractive option for foreign direct investment, which would be protected by a relatively stable government and political system.[316] In 2009, the year before Viktor Orbán's return to power, FDI represented 76.2 percent of GDP, with a vast proportion of the financial industry under foreign ownership.[317] Employees in the foreign-owned economic sector produced 3.5 times more added value than the employees of domestically owned firms, leading to a widening gap between domestically and foreign owned firms.[318] At the micro-level, Hungarians felt the effects of the global financial crisis dramatically as the Forint depreciated by 17 percent relative to the Euro, GDP declined 6.7 percent from 2008-2009, and industrial investment and production collapsed, hitting large segments of the Hungarian population in the form of layoffs.[319] The resultant hardship on the export-oriented sectors of the economy faced impacted Hungary's post-communist economic model as a producer of intermediate goods.[320] The dramatic economic situation cast a dark influence over public perception. In 2009, in the midst of the GFC and a year before Orbán's electoral victory, the Pew Center performed a poll gauging public opinion in the former Eastern Bloc two decades after the regime changes. A staggering 91

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[314] Bohle and Greskovits. "Capitalist Diversity." 143.
[315] *Ibid*.
[316] *Ibid*, 143.
[317] Scheiring, "Dependent Development and Authoritarian State Capitalism." 5.
[318] *Ibid*.
[319] Tamás Egedy. "The Effects of Global Economic Crisis in Hungary." Hungarian Geographical Bulletin 61 (2) (2012) 155–173.
[320] *Ibid*.

percent of Hungarians stated that they were dissatisfied with "the way things [were] going in their countr[y]," and 94 percent the country's current economic situation negatively: the highest share on both counts of any country surveyed.[321] Nearly 50 percent of a sample of Hungarians surveyed reported that their lives had "slightly deteriorated" since the outbreak of the GFC, with a further 17 percent stating that their lives had "significantly worsened.[322] Only 46 percent of Hungarians approved of the change to capitalism, a decrease of 34 percent since 1991.[323] 72 percent of Hungarians reported that they felt economically "worse off than under Communism.[324]" Only 15 percent of Hungarians reported that they felt that they were living their "best possible life" in terms of overall life satisfaction, with 32 percent reporting that they were living in the opposite conditions.[325] 60 percent of Hungarians believed that their personal situations had diminished since 2005; the highest figure in the Visegrad group.[326] The vast majority (80 percent) of Hungarians, as with the rest of the Visegrad group at the time, scored economic prosperity as their highest priority, above factors of democratic governance, and when faced with the two choices, said that a strong economy is more important than a good democracy.[327] This data demonstrate that economic concerns held a higher priority for Hungarians than political and democratic governance, and in the wake of the GFC, a pessimistic mood hung over the population. It is perhaps telling of the results of the 2010 election that 49 percent of Hungarians stated a preference for a strong leader, compared to 42 percent for whom a strong democracy was the priority.[328] This data represent a people deeply dissatisfied with the state of their country, and a people who prioritized their economic wellbeing over the maintenance of a healthy democratic system. This is critical for the fertility of a political system to give rise to a challenge, because it signals an increasing instability in the economic lives of the population. Concerns over democracy and civil society necessarily take a lower priority when citizens are concerned about paying their rents, about unemployment, or about the future of their pensions and savings. Moreover, the idea that the economic gains resulting from the

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[321] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall: End of Communism Cheered But Now With More Reservations." *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*. 2 November 2009.
[322] Egedy. "The Effects of Global Economic Crisis." 170.
[323] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall." 73.
[324] *Ibid*, 5.
[325] *Ibid*, 15.
[326] *Ibid*.
[327] *Ibid*.
[328] *Ibid*.

systemic transition were unevenly distributed caused nostalgia for the pre-1989 regime: a regime that was paternalistic in its attempt to fairly distribute economic gains to the population. Economic wellbeing under socialism was generally higher for workers, with stable jobs and communities, and the opportunity to enjoy state- or enterprise- funded holidays.[329] Considering this relative deprivation, i.e. the idea that life was easier or in some ways better under a paternalistic, if authoritarian, government would prove fertile ground for Fidesz to assign blame to the post-socialist parties. This discontent would reach a tipping point as support for the multiparty system declined by 18 percent on the eve of Orbán's election.[330] 77 percent of the population reported dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Hungary, opening a space for Fidesz to make sweeping promises that addressed voters' economic needs. [331] In sum, the demand in Hungary arose from the insecurity experienced during the Global Financial Crisis and the relative deprivation that it triggered vis a vis the pre-1989 regime. This would open a political opportunity for an enterprising party willing to address that insecurity and promise a redress of the wrongs of the transition.

Opportunity

The political opportunity structure Fidesz exploited to succeed in its challenge centered upon its ability to exploit party system institutionalization, the salience of particular cleavages, and the character of elites in the post-communist system. While the party system that gave rise to Fidesz was the most institutionalized in the Visegrad countries,[332] the alignment of the parties left the post-1989 liberal regime open to serious weaknesses. Beginning in 1998, the Hungarian party system contracted to a two-party system. In spite of this concentration trust was generally low in the parties, with Fidesz and the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt* – MSzP) occupying the primary political spaces.[333] In this atmosphere, Fidesz's ability to hegemonize or radicalize different elements of the Hungarian right, while discrediting and enfeebling the left amid a backdrop of plummeting public support for the pre-2010 status quo proved essential to its success. The series of governments dominated

[329] Scheiring, "Left Behind in the Hungarian Rustbelt."
[330] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall."
[331] *Ibid*.
[332] Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited
[333] Attila Ágh, "The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System. From Democratic Chaos to Electoral Autocracy," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 63, no. 2 (February 1, 2015): 201–22.

by the MSzP suffered the critical trap of needing to prove their reformist, anti-communist credentials. The MSzP's pursuit of pro-market policies that included cuts to public spending enabled the Hungarian right to emerge under the broad banner of protecting the people's interests and well-being, factors it contrasted with the harmful influences of the left.[334] Overall, the Hungarian left suffered from the concurrent problems of being unable to instrumentalize a non-authoritarian leftist legacy, and were constrained by the lack of viable alternatives to neoliberal capitalism that was the zeitgeist of the time. [335] This legacy left the MSzP vulnerable to attacks from the right based on their alleged "communist" sympathies, as Fidesz led the weaponization of history against the left to affect MSzP's delegitimation in a country with a decidedly anti-communist current. Fidesz has exploited the left's internal problems masterfully, using its past as a weapon and exploiting the timidity of a left burdened with a history of repressive authoritarianism. We will discuss this in greater detail with regard to cleavage salience below, but from the perspective of party system institutionalization, the delegitimization of the left was a master stroke at once attacking alternative political programs and enabling Fidesz to present itself as a defender of Hungary against a corrupt authoritarian legacy.

While delegitimizing the left, Fidesz moved to gain a hegemonic position among the Hungarian right. Uniting various right-wing parties in the early 1990s, Fidesz came to occupy a hegemonic space on the right of the Hungarian party system by virtue of its being the only right-wing party to challenge the dominant left-socialist alliance that ruled throughout the 1990-2010 period (while engaging in a cooperative relationship with the radical right Jobbik party).[336] From 2005, Fidesz has engaged in a permanent coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*, - KDNP), whose Christian priorities align with Fidesz's Christian National ideology. As a means of energizing the right, Fidesz linked popular discontent to the MSzP governments, but it also had a practical reason to link the economic situation of the population to its assessment of the political situation. Compared with the mass-following and strong party organization of the MSzP, Fidesz and rest of the

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334 Margit Tavits and Natalia Letki, "When Left Is Right: Party Ideology and Policy in Post-Communist Europe," *American Political Science Review* 103, no. 4 (November 2009): 555–69, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409990220.
335 Kiss. "Of the Past Let Us Make a Clean Slate"
336 Ágh. "The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System."

Hungarian right suffered from inferior organization and a dearth of volunteers, leading to Fidesz receiving the inglorious nickname of "the answering machine party" due to its lack of staffers on hand to man the phones.[337] Fidesz thus had a clear economic incentive to offer the voters policies of economic support delivered through populist language about protecting the people. Initially cooperating with the extreme right ethno-nationalist Jobbik party, Jobbik, boasting the largest vote share other than Fidesz, would emerge to challenge it from the right. [338] Orbán would respond through his cooption of the legacy of the Horthy regime, and forcing Jobbik to either moderate or take on the mantel of succession of the Nazi-backed Arrow Cross party, condemned in the 2012 constitution as a foreign agent.[339] This move ended with Jobbik rebranding itself as a moderate party and joining the opposition.[340]

Fidesz's hegemonization of the right yielded significant electoral advantages. By cooperating with KDNP, Fidesz was able to gain a reliable partner capable of marshaling the Christian electorate, while cooperation and later cooptation of Jobbik won Fidesz voters on the far right. These moves served to hegemonize the right as Fidesz drew voters away from alternatives, incorporating the political positions of its would-be competitors on the right into its electoral program and effectively drowning out the space from which smaller parties would be capable of differentiating themselves. As Fidesz continued to gain electoral successes and alter the electoral landscape following its assumption of power, it became the only viable choice for conservative voters.

The hegemonizing of the right and delegitimation of the left affected by Fidesz has created a firm institutional position for Fidesz. The 2010 parliamentary election left MSzP and the other left parties severely weakened or out of parliament altogether, while Fidesz and Jobbik dominated the right, and the "socio-environmental protest party" Politics Can Be Different (*Lehet Más a Politika* - LMP) joined parliament.[341] In spite of a convergence toward liberal socio-cultural values, the Hungarian

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337 Tavits and Letki. "When Left is Right." 559.
338 Milada Anna Vachudova, "From Competition to Polarization in Central Europe: How Populists Change Party Systems and the European Union," *Polity* 51, no. 4 (October 2019): 689–706.
339 Toomey, Michael, "History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary,'" *New Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (February 2018): 87–108.
340 Dominik Héjj. "The Rebranding of Jobbik." *New Eastern Europe*. No 6 (XXIX) 2017.
341 Ágh, "The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System." 213.

opposition has generally struggled to cooperate against Fidesz in the 2010 and 2017 elections.[342] In 2022, the party merged with other opposition parties as diverse as Jobbik (now reformed as a center-right party) to the center-left Green Party. The coalition failed to unseat the increasingly hegemonic Fidesz, whose methods of eroding mechanisms of democratic accountability have proven highly successful.[343]

Since its ascension to power in 2010, Fidesz has engineered various electoral authoritarian measures to further dismantle the party system. From the takeover of state media and the shuttering of private media to the manipulation of the legal system to stifle civil society, these moves have demoralized and neutered the opposition while institutionalizing Fidesz's ability to influence national politics. The 2012 constitution is fundamental in its importance both as an ideological tool and a tool for effecting political and legal change to solidify Fidesz's rule. The constitution announces a fundamental break from the socialist period and the "post-communist" period, singling out the MSzMP as a criminal organization and the MSzP as the beneficiaries of their corrupt practices.[344] Against this consolidated force, the electoral coalition United for Hungary, similar to the Czech example of a broad center-right coalition that dislodged ANO (see below), failed to generate sufficient traction for its appeals uniting the opposition to generate sufficient force to dislodge Fidesz. The 54 percent electoral victory in 2022 was, according to Orbán, "a victory so big that you can see it from Brussels.[345]"

In addition to a favorable system of party institutionalization, Fidesz exploited highly salient cleavages with broad resonance in the Hungarian political imagination. The primary cleavage Fidesz exploits is anti-communism, or, beneficiaries versus victims of the socialist regime. Early in its electoral history, Fidesz began to channel the broad discontent in Hungarian society into stark anti-communism and the need to make a fundamental break from the corruption of the communist past. The MSzP proved an

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342 *Ibid*.
343 Keith Prushankin and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. "Populism and Authoritarianism." In Aurel Croissant and Luca Tomini (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization*. Forthcoming.
344 Kiss. "Of the Past Let Us Make a Clean Slate."
345 "Hungary: Orbán declares victory in parliamentary election." *Deutsche Welle.* 03.04.2022. Accessed 20.09.2022. https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-Orbán-declares-victory-in-parliamentary-election/a-61344177; Ágh, "The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System."

easy target for Fidesz's anti-communist rhetoric.[346] As the direct successor to the communist vanguard party, the MSzP ranks were filled by people who had benefited during communist rule.[347] The ranks of the senior leadership were filled with ex-communists, notably Gyula Horn, prime minister between 1994-1998 and erstwhile central committee member.[348] The dominance of the anti-communism cleavage almost an unavoidable consequence of the model of Hungary's transition to liberal democracy. The round table agreement, which saw liberal-democratic forces forge an agreement with the communist party to liberalize the political system, in exchange for the non-prosecution of leading communists and their continued ability to engage in politics would lead directly to Fidesz's diagnosis of the post-communist system as unreformed and still dominated by corrupt communist interests. This has proven essential for Fidesz to justify its measures to dominate the party system and remake the country. The same outcome occurred in Poland (see below), while in the Czech Republic and Slovakia; prohibitions against the participation of former communists in political and public life were more stringent (see below).

Fidesz compliments the anti-communist cleavage with a traditionalism versus modernism cleavage, using rhetoric on migration, religion, the family, and the nation to deepen the us-against-them populist framing. I discuss these in greater detail in the following sub-section. Around the time of Fidesz's ascension to power, the Hungarian party system oriented itself primarily on the cultural cleavage (state vs. church, post-communist vs. anti-communist, urban vs. rural) distilled into "a socially conservative, religious, somewhat nationalist, and anti-communist camp" against "a secular, morally permissive, and generally less nationalist camp.[349]" Fidesz came to dominate the former, and effectively weaponized the left's own past to delegitimize the latter. This highly ideological, as opposed to policy-oriented, atmosphere was based in cultural cleavages rather than socio-economic ones, with the pro- and anti-EU agenda featuring prominently.[350] Fidesz's willingness to embrace these highly ideological and cultural cleavages enhanced its ability to position itself as the only viable defender of

346 Csilla Kiss. "Of the Past Let Us Make a Clean Slate."
347 Tavits and Letki. "When Left is Right."
348 "Meghalt Horn Gyula." *Nol.hu*. 19 June 2013. Accessed 27 January 2023. http://nol.hu/belfold/meghalt_horn_gyula-1394823
349 Fernando, Casal Bertoa,. "A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe." *Party Politics* Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2014): 16–36. 24.
350 Ágh. "The Transformation of the Hungarian Party System."

traditional and national interests, thereby facilitating its dominance over the electoral system.

The character of Fidesz's elites lends itself to the success of the party's challenge. Linkages between elite character, party behavior, and cleavage salience are evident. Under Kaminski and Kurczewska's framework for identifying elites established in Chapter 2, Fidesz's elite character is traditionalistic and charismatic. Fidesz's presentation of itself as a defender of a traditional Hungarian order, along with traditional conceptions of Hungarian nationhood, including the country's pre-1918 borders, lends a strong air of traditionally based legitimacy to the illiberal democratic project. Meanwhile, Fidesz's charismatic appeals to the nation show Orbán as a defender of the nation and of its traditionalism, protecting the Hungarian people, at home and abroad, from Brussels, Soros, and migrants. This charismatic and traditionalistic approach enables Fidesz to at once appeal to the electorate from a position of strength and ability to act, while its traditionalism serves to deepen its link to the idea of the Hungarian nation. This link then serves to dichotomize politics and deepen the MSzP's out-group status. In sum, the political opportunity structure Fidesz enjoyed has been conducive to its bid to challenge the post-communist liberal-democratic order. The delegitimization of the left and cooptation of the right enabled Fidesz to establish a hegemonic position in the Hungarian party structure, while its use of highly salient cleavages helped fuel the dichotomization of the national political system into a corrosive us-against-them atmosphere. Fidesz's elites embodied these characteristics, giving the party an historic sense of mission and charismatically binding it to a traditional conception of the nation that found broad appeal among Hungarian voters. Its supermajority victory in 2010 then enabled it to act without constraint, as is evident by its increasingly blatant illiberal stance during subsequent elections.[351]

Activation

The causal model applied to Hungary has so far ticked all of the boxes. Fidesz recognized the growing discontent over Hungary's economic situation and took advantage of the structural opportunities in the Hungarian party system to attain hegemony. Continuing along the causal model, Fidesz's linkage of its economic and

[351] Bakke and Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles*."

political program to identity-based tensions becomes apparent. First, it is necessary to look at how Fidesz has justified itself to the voters in terms of economics. During the 2010 campaign, Fidesz relied on economic issues such as "unemployment, wages, and pensions" and took advantage of general systemic dissatisfaction exacerbated by the ongoing effects of the global financial crisis.[352] Citing "private interests and business interests" as the priority of the previous government, Fidesz's 2010 electoral program promised deliverance from the corruption that was choking the country and "get the Hungarian economy back on its feet.[353]" To do this, Fidesz promised job creation, public works programs, tax cuts for the private sector, and trade opening to Asia. Fidesz linked its economic renewal with a scathing critique of the country's corruption, which it blamed for exacerbating the economic woes of the population.[354] This included a call for a restoration of democratic norms, in which the state would be a "reliable partner for the members of society" as the party strengthened rule of law.[355] After more than a decade in power, Fidesz remains popular with the Hungarian electorate primarily due to the appearance of economic competence and lingering memories of the instability of the pre-2010 period.[356] By cloaking its pragmatic bargains with multinational firms in the language of the national interest, Fidesz succeeds in demonstrating patriotism to give the appearance of itself as a champion of the average Hungarians, while it in fact does very little to alleviate the conditions of dependent capitalism. This is obvious as, recognizing the fragility of a model in which nearly 2/3 of GDP is subject to market conditions in foreign countries, the Orbán government provided lavish handouts to multinationals in 2010 and 2020.[357]

The ideological content of Fidesz's discourse frames Hungarian politics as a crisis necessitating dramatic action.[358] Keeping this in mind, Fidesz's ideational activation

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[352] *Ibid*, 30

[353] "Átolvastuk a Fidesz 2010-es választási programját, megnéztük, mi maradt belőle."*hvg.hu*. 4 October 2021. Accessed 26 January 2023. https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20211004_fidesz_2010_kormanyprogram_ner12. As the article notes, the original 2010 electoral program is difficult to find, having been removed from the Fidesz website. I therefore rely on secondary sources and Deepl translation tools for access.

[354] *Ibid*.

[355] *Ibid*.

[356] Bermond Scoggins, "Identity Politics or Economics? Explaining Voter Support for Hungary's Illiberal FIDESZ," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 36, no. 1 (February 2022): 3–28.

[357] Yann Caspar. "Central European Dependent Capitalism." *Visegrad Post.* 29 May 2021. https://visegradpost.com/en/2021/05/29/central-european-dependent-capitalism/

[358] Scoggins, "Identity Politics or Economics?"

takes three paths: anti-communism, traditionalism, and victimization. Considering Fidesz's instrumentaliztion of the MSzP and the broader Hungarian left as convenient enemies, an anti-communist, and by extension, anti-liberal ideology has crystalized around Fidesz's political structural worldview. This ideology generally identifies an alliance between the post-1989 liberals and reformed communists as responsible for Hungary's submissive economic position vis a vis foreign countries. Much of the ideational discourse is oriented toward malign foreign influences. We can see this in the two streams of Fidesz's conservative knowledge network. Conservative academics led by former politician István Stumpf, link the problematic post-communist stage to "flaws" with European institutional thinking in particular and liberal thinking in particular.[359] Fidesz party intellectuals, led by sociologist and party ideologue Gyula Tellér, perceive the problematic post-communist situation as; the result of "direct, unfriendly actions of external powers" which part of a historical process begun in the 1970s, deepened with privatization in the 1990s to eventually "rob the Hungarian state of the means needed for pursuing autonomous action.[360]" Tellér constructs Hungarian history (and indeed world history) as a struggle between national communities and "symbolic investors," financial interests in the form of global powers (the US, Israel, EU, Russia) and international organizations (the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization, etc.).[361] Those financial forces of the symbolic investor "enslave countries…in particular [with] the tool of the debt trap.[362]" This argument, while not critical of capitalism itself, echoes the dichotomy of national capital and transnational capital present in both the language and policy of Fidesz. Through this ideological lens, dependent capitalism is an assault on Hungarian sovereignty: a process that strips Hungary of its ability to control its economic destiny, and the result of a corrupt bargain between the new liberal elite and the erstwhile oppressors. Stumpf's argument contents that these problems are institutional, stemming from a "two-headed government" of the prime minister and a

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359 Aron Bugozány and Mihai Varga. "Against Post-Communism: the Conservative Dawn in Hungary." Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (eds.). *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*. London and New York: Routledge. 2019.
In 74-75.

360 *Ibid*, 75.

361 Bugozány and Varga. "Against Post-Communism." 84.

362 *Ibid*. The debt-trap refers to countries using lending to secure leverage over other countries. Hungarian claims regarding the debt trap go back to the 1970s, when the Hungarian economy experienced a spike in the balance of payments and account deficits. See András Giday. "Double Deficit in Hungary in the 1970's and 1980's." *Civic Review*. Vol. 16 Special Issue, 2022. 314-331.

powerful finance minister controlled by the liberal and post-communist parties, the SZDSZ and MSzP, respectively. According to Stumpf, the aforementioned Round Table Agreements of 1989 that saw the end of single-party rule led to corruption because of the nature of the contributing ideologies, liberalism and socialism.[363] In the Hungarian conservative worldview, these ideologies represent amoral attempts to change the world, and because of their divorce from morality, are dangerous.[364] These ideologies are similar because of their primary goals, the attainment of a classless, self-regulating society and the perfection of a liberal democracy and a market economy, demand a pseudo-religious belief in their eventual attainment through reforms and progress.[365]

Fidesz's answer to this destructive amorality is its National Cooperation Regime, as outlined in the National Cooperation Declaration. The declaration proclaims a clean break with the communist period and the transition, declaring that "Hungary has regained the right and ability of self-determination."[366] This villainization of the communist period continues in Fidesz's attempted institutionalization of national memory. Budapest's Terror House museum serves to illustrate Fidesz's version of Hungarian history, in which Hungarians are absolved of the crimes of the Stalinist and Arrow Cross regimes; foreign creations maintained by foreign troops.[367] The discourse of the foreign regimes *imposing* suffering through alien ideas on good Hungarians reoccurs in Fidesz's rhetoric, creating an effective siege mentality and driving Hungarian voters into a with-us-or-against-us dichotomy.

A significant part of the Fidesz discourse centers upon the construction of traditionalist Hungarian identity as a counterpoint to the globalist, transnational identity of the West. Orbán frequently colors his speeches with references to Hungary's Christian faith as a lodestone of Hungarian identity, and a value under threat from malign foreign influences. Orbán has claimed that the Christian faith has a "role in preserving nationhood," and Saint Stephen's crown is an embodiment of

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363 Bugozány and Varga. "Against Post-Communism." 11.
364 *Ibid*.
365 *Ibid*, 82.
366 "Declaration of National Cooperation." *The Orange Files: Notes on Illiberal Democracy in Hungary*. 30.05.2016. 06.04.2022. https://theorangefiles.hu/declaration-of-national-cooperation/
367 Kiss. "Of the Past Let Us Make a Clean Slate." Ljiljana Radonić, "'Our' vs. 'Inherited' Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors," *Südosteuropa* 68, no. 1 (May 26, 2020): 44–78.

Hungarian statehood.[368] Christianity is instrumental, as it enables a link between Fidesz, the Christian electorate, coalition partner KDNP, and a traditionalist image Orbán seeks to create, in which the traditional nation-state is bound with religion and the values it instills. While the Polish Catholic Church (see below) served as a point of resistance to the state socialist regime, its Hungarian branch held no such role during the period of the Hungarian People's Republic. Hungarian Christianity thus merges with appeals to Hungary's pre-Christian pagan culture to bolster a "surrogate religion" of Hungarian nationalism.[369] The appearance of Christianity in the preamble of the 2011 constitution serves to legalize the construction of an ethnically defined Hungarian nation, further entrenching Fidesz's role as a defender of the nation and faith.[370] This surrogate nationalism, "the Christian national idea (*keresztény-nemzeti eszme*),[371] in linking the nation and the faith, provides a basis from which to oppose migration, and by extension, foreign entities like the EU, as Fidesz positions them as enemies seeking to undermine core identities of the Hungarian people. Society appears divided into an in- and out-group, with religious, patriotic, and hard-working Hungarians constituting the former. So-called "work-shy" individuals (in other words, those excluded from the labor market) including the Hungarian Roma population, along with migrants and at times Jews, make up the out-group.[372] This dichotomization, a core element of populist framing, provides an effective accompaniment to Fidesz's political strategies of delegitimization and cooptation. Crystallization of the out group along lines of economic performance and participation plays into Fidesz's goal of activating economic discontent among voters. The out-group can then appear as lazy compared to the hardworking, but still struggling, in-group. To valorize the in-group, work is prioritized as a national value, along with family, nation, and order in the 2012 constitution. The Hungarian Work Plan, aims to address the behavior of the out-group, capitalizing on the constitution's

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368 Gábor Halmai, "Populism, Authoritarianism and Constitutionalism," *German Law Journal* 20, no. 3 (April 2019): 296–313. 308.
369 Halmai, "Populism, Authoritarianism and Constitutionalism."
370 *Ibid*.
371 Liz Fekete. "Hungary: Power, Punishment and the 'Christian-National Idea,'" *Race & Class* 57, no. 4 (April 2016): 39–53. 40.
372 Fekete. "Hungary: Power, Punishment and the 'Christian-National Idea,'" In the early years of Orbán's tenure, 70 percent of the Roma population were excluded from the labor market, and while the number of Hungarians as a whole living in poverty has declined from approximately 30 percent in 2016 to 17 percent at the time of writing, 66 percent of the Roma population were in poverty in 2020. Orbán's Minister for Human Resources Zoltán Balog, responsible for integrating the Roma population, stated that "poverty is common, but it has a Gypsy face." *Ibid*, 47.

mention of the "'usefulness of citizens' work' as a determinant of social rights" to move away from unemployment benefits toward a workfare program, in which the unemployed would work on public works projects for 70 percent of the national minimum wage.[373] Combining economic security with a promise of defending religious values addresses the needs and worries of a broad segment of the Hungarian population. The linkages are not as explicit as they are in the Polish discourse, as we shall see, but remain effective at generating an encouragement-threat response in the electorate: Fidesz will take care of the people's material needs but the spiritual heritage of the nation is under threat and must be defended. It is a far less refined ideological posture than that of the PiS ideologues, but it appears after more than a decade in power to be effective. Lionizing traditional Christian values like hard, honest work serves to reinforce the Christian motivation for economic activity, while othering and casting out those who do not fit into this narrative.

Fidesz activates a victim mentality among its electorate through its construction of Hungarian history. The Treaty of Trianon and the interwar Horthy regency serve as focal points for Fidesz's historical narrative, representing a traumatic wrong committed against Hungary and an attempt to redress those wrongs.[374] Horthy serves as a predecessor to Orbán, as both appear in the discourse as leaders who placed Hungary above all other concerns, and against whom any opposition can be depicted as treasonous to the Hungarian nation.[375] This narrative has significant political utility, allowing Orbán to out-do the extreme right in nationalism, remove a potential obstacle to the far right's incorporation into the Fidesz electoral group (i.e. Horthy's rehabilitation) and delegitimize the opposition as insufficiently patriotic.[376] Evoking the Trianon Treaty's amputation of ¾ of the Hungarian lands from Budapest's control, Orbán claims to represent the large Hungarian diaspora in neighboring countries while resurrecting blame of "urbanists," an amalgamation of cosmopolitans, Jews, liberals, and socialists, for Hungary's woes.[377] The 2015 migration crisis prompted an increase in Orbán's rhetoric of a threatened Hungarian identity. Orbán

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373 *Ibid*. The program's results are dubious, with for example only 13 percent of its participants in 2012-13 going on to find alternative employment. In addition to and in keeping with the workfare program, a law and later constitutional changed criminalized street homelessness in 2012.
374 Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy."; Rupnik. "Hungary's Illiberal Turn."
375 Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy."
376 *Ibid*.
377 *Ibid*, 95.

used rhetoric about a "Second Trianon" and resisting outside influence to justify his government's hardline stance on migrants during the crisis.[378] Speaking against Muslim migration to Europe, Orbán again invoked religion, saying that "Hungary will either be Christian or not at all.[379]" This rhetoric manifested into concrete actions such as the erection of a fence on the border with Serbia, the deployment of military and police units to the border, and the refusal to provide assistance to migrants attempting to enter Hungary.[380] A parliamentary resolution authorizing the use of force to defend the border stated that Hungarians "have the right to defend [their] culture, language, and values.[381]" In barring migrants from entry into Hungary, and therefore the Schengen Area, Fidesz presented Hungary as defenders of Europe and European civilization.[382] Trianon references reoccur as Orbán refers to Brussels as "the new Moscow," leading a EU effort to "colonize" Hungary.[383] Fidesz repeatedly deploys the Hungarian-born billionaire investor and philanthropist George Soros as a mastermind behind efforts to destabilize Hungary, encapsulated in its "Stop Soros" advertising campaign. This personification of an enemy colors Fidesz's rhetoric on Hungarian political contests, as government press officer János Lázár, commenting on the 2018 parliamentary elections, said that "after April 8, either [Fidesz] or Soros will form a government.[384]" The victimization discourse evokes loss of sovereignty, an experience that has traumatized subsequent generations of Hungarians throughout the 20th century. The ease with which Fidesz used these events as a rhetorical device for deepening populist dichotomization is evident in its linear narrative. Trianon was a loss of the Hungarian crown's territory and the division of its population. In spite of this, Horthy led the Hungarian nation until the Nazis, and subsequently, the Soviets intervened to force Hungary's destiny to take an alternate path. After breaking away from Moscow's rule, Orbán tries to lead the nation in spite of the EU's attempts to dictate to it, and in spite of efforts by the transnational elite to force unwanted immigration on Hungary and thereby threaten its ethno-national composition. It is a compelling narrative with sinister villains, a threatened land, and a hero who is struggling to defend the nation. Victimization is part of Fidesz's storytelling device.

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[378] Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy." 97.
[379] Halmai, "Populism, Authoritarianism and Constitutionalism." 308.
[380] Fekete. "Hungary: Power, Punishment and the 'Christian-National Idea."
[381] *Ibid*, 41.
[382] Melegh, "Unequal Exchanges."
[383] Toomey, "History, Nationalism and Democracy." 98.
[384] "To Soros or not to Soros?"

Anti-communism crystalizes the enemy, traditionalism the values at stake, and victimization the threat the nation faces. In sum, Orbán's ideational rhetoric allows him to position Fidesz at a morally superior position vis a vis the left opposition and the far right, while armoring Fidesz with a historic sense of mission and a moral imperative to guard, advance, and restore Hungary. The discourse similarly identifies its enemies, from Brussels to immigrants, as seeking to degrade and ultimately destroy the nation. This combination activates latent anxieties among a people who had suffered from foreign occupations and efforts to rewire their ideals and beliefs from the Stalinists to the Nazis to Hungary's traumatic dismemberment following World War I. Together, reminding the electorate of these traumas while waving the threat of new attacks on the Hungarian nation while demonstrating to Hungarians that Fidesz can bring a higher standard of living serves to make a potent formula for long-lasting populist rule.

Conclusion

Fidesz rose to power in an environment of significant economic dissatisfaction surrounding the global financial crisis, and a political environment ridden with scandals. Fidesz exploited an institutionalized but vulnerable party structure by delegitimizing and coopting its opponents while exploiting highly salient ideological cleavages and deepening the links between its elite and the traditionalist and charismatic rhetoric of populism. To activate discontent and fully exploit its political opportunities, Fidesz relied on a combination of anti-communism, traditionalism, and victimization to mobilize the electorate. Fidesz's challenge is grounded in a threat mentality, frequently calling out cabals of transnational elites such as Soros and Brussels as threats to the Hungarian culture and way of life. The post-communists and pre-1989 communists stand out as enemies who delivered Hungary into foreign hands, and against whom Fidesz must take action. These factors change politics from a cooperative debate to an existential struggle, reducing the scope for collaboration and compromise and polarizing voters. A vote for Fidesz becomes a vote for Hungary, while a vote for another party is a betrayal of the nation. Fidesz outlined its justification for affecting a systemic challenge, clearly articulating the elements of the post-1989 political system it perceives as responsible for Hungary's woes and tying contemporary corruption to pre-1989 authoritarian socialism. Hungary under Fidesz rightly deserves notice as one of the two most successful post-1989 challenger

movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Where the country's economic situation is mentioned, it is done so either in the context of blaming the (post) communists or Brussels, but is not tied to the behavior of multinational firms, with which the Orbán government extensively cooperates. Fidesz's performance in government generates residual support from a segment of the population who are satisfied with their economic situation since 2010. Fidesz's challenge has been highly successful both in terms of longevity and the scope of which the party has been able to affect systemic change. A new constitution and significant legal-structural changes indicate that it has accomplished at least part of its mission, and appears to have sealed the party's grip on power for the foreseeable future. Whether Fidesz will actually live up to its promises to the Hungarian people remains to be seen, as 54 percent of Hungarians in 2020 reported that their lives were better under the communist regime.[385] This number includes the majority of left-party voters and surprisingly, a majority of Jobbik voters. Unsurprisingly, but perhaps ironically, a majority of Fidesz voters agree that "the hopes of the regime change have been realized.[386]"

Slovakia – From "democratic laggard" to "a ray of hope"

"Politics only makes sense when it is made with sovereignty and for the people."
- Robert Fico[387]

Much of the literature on Slovak parties since the country's split from Czechoslovakia in 1993 focuses on the populist dimension in their discourses and approaches to governing. The two parties that stand out the most in this literature are Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), governing from 1994-1998, and Robert Fico's SMER-SD, governing from 2006-2010, and again from 2012-2020. I discuss Mečiar and HZDS to provide historical background before moving to SMER-SD, to which I devote the primary focus of the Slovak subsection of this work. In an interesting departure from the three other parties under consideration in this work, SMER-SD is, at least in name and original intent, the only left-wing challenger party. Like its Visegrad counterparts, SMER-SD attempted its challenge using

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385 András Bíró-Nagy and Gergely Laki . "30 Years On – Public Opinion on the Regime Change in Hungary." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung,* May 2020. Living better includes questions on individual financial satisfaction and social harmony.
386 *Ibid,* 5.
387 Fico, Robert. 2023. "POLITIKA MÁ ZMYSEL LEN VTEDY, KEĎ SA ROBÍ SUVERÉNNE A PRE ĽUDÍ." Facebook, 20 March 2023. https://fb.watch/jBiaEvhQA0/

populist appeals, and like its Czech cousin ANO, is no longer in power at the time of writing.

Background

Since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992, Slovakia was an outsider in comparison with its Visegrad neighbors. The country under Mečiar's HZDS was a slow reformer that adopted a personalistic, cronyistic, and authoritarian governing style: the opposite of the new democratic future sought after by the Czech, Polish, and Hungarian transition governments and that prescribed by the EU's membership criteria.[388] Mečiar, an ex-communist functionary and secret police collaborator[389] turned dissident lawyer, embraced the term *populist*, highlighting its positivity and its "relationship to the people.[390]" The Mečiar government constructed a populist discourse that separated the people from "non-believers, capitalists, [and] non-Slovaks[391]" and embarked on efforts to retain domestic ownership of firms during its privatization process. The Slovak post-communist elites initially divided among the pro- and anti-Mečiar factions, i.e. those who supported the semi-authoritarian, national capitalist, and clientalistic post-communist successor and those who sought a path more closely aligned with the Western mainstream. Mečiar's ruling coalition brought together "antireform leftists" and "radical rightist nationalists[392]" and cast domestic entrepreneurs as "one of us" to ensure that "capital remained home, and so that people, owners of capital, could then by means of the market, advanced technology and investment enter into other international methods of cooperation.[393]" Mečiar envisioned privatization as a means of creating a domestic capitalist class to "conduct business in Slovakia's interest," reviving socialist-era "welfare paternalism, subsidies and protective regulation for inherited industries, and nationalism" as a

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[388] Seongcheol Kim, *Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism in the Visegrád Four*. London and New York: Routledge. 2022. 222. Kevin Deegan-Krause, "Populism, Democracy, and Nationalism in Slovakia," in *Populism in Europe and the Americas*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 182–204. Zora Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing of Slovakia's Democracy," *Social Research: An International Quarterly.* Vol. 86, No. 1. Spring 2019, pp. 83-112.
[389] "Mečiar byl agent StB a donášel na Dubčeka, napsal slovenský list." *iDnes.* 17 February 2015. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/vladimir-meciar-donasel-na-dubceka-stb.A150217_135315_zahranicni_vez
[390] Deegan-Krause, "Populism, Democracy, and Nationalism in Slovakia." 184.
[391] *Ibid*, 186.
[392] Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing." 91.
[393] Deegan-Krause, "Populism, Democracy, and Nationalism in Slovakia." 187.

means of gaining public support for the privatization project.[394] Mečiar scrapped voucher privatization in favor of a clientelistic game of rewards for politically loyal players.[395] The program fell short of expectations, and discontent rose over Mečiar's increasing authoritarianism for the failure of Slovak national capitalism in the 1990s resulting in the abandonment of the project and an embrace of the FDI-led developmental model favored by the other Visegrad countries.[396] Fallout from Slovakia's missed EU accession cost Mečiar further legitimacy, and HZDS's public support dwindled until the party lost its majority in 1998, and by 2006 it lost its junior role in the defeated coalition to be replaced by Fico's SMER-SD party.[397] Mečiar and HZDS left a legacy of authoritarianism and corruption, and a failed bid to challenge the emerging dependent capitalism by protecting and supporting domestic business elites. With these efforts undermined by the party's corruption, the Slovak transition to capitalism became submerged in the FDI-led model and Slovak politics became submerged in the dominant cleavage of pro- and anti-Mečiar: a situation inherited by HZDS's successor, SMER-SD.[398] Following the fall of the Mečiar regime and the transition to the rule of SMER-SD, the elite once again splintered between those who supported Fico's clientalism and later identity politics, and those who embraced the pro-Western, anti-corruption agenda.

Demand

The Slovak population has a complicated demand structure related to its satisfaction since the end of the communist regime. Since the transition to the FDI-led developmental model, nearly 75 percent of income generated in Slovakia by foreign investment is distributed as dividends outside of Slovakia.[399] Slovaks' consideration of the legacy of the Velvet Revolution as a systemic change leaves a mixed impression. In a 2018 poll, 32 percent of respondents indicated that they believed life has improved "for people like them" since 1989. 43 percent believe life was better before 1989, and 16 percent do not see a difference between the pre- and post-

[394] Bohle and Greskovits. "Capitalist Diversity." 145.
[395] *Ibid*; Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing."
[396] Bohle and Greskovits. "Capitalist Diversity."
[397] *Ibid*, 180.
[398] Tim Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy: Explaining the Patterns of Party Politics in Post-Communist Slovakia," *East European Politics* 30, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 210–29.
[399] Michael Landesmann and István P. Székely (eds.). *Does EU Membership Facilitate Convergence? The Experience of the EU's Eastern Enlargement*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG (2021). 51-52.

November regimes.[400] Economic factors account for a relative deprivation with the communist regime. While popular appreciation for political freedoms is widespread, Slovaks nurse lingering nostalgia for

> the era of full employment, of a more homogeneous society with smaller socioeconomic inequalities and a stronger feeling of social security. As research data show, there is also relatively widespread acceptance of myths about the advantages of the communist era concerning not only the oft-mentioned cheaper milk but also healthier food, better education, more accessible health care, even a cleaner environment and longer life expectancy—most of them sharply contrasting with objective statistical data.[401]

Relative to the socialist period, most Slovaks perceive no change in opportunities for getting ahead in life, and less than half of Slovaks agree that "opportunities for talented and hardworking people have increased after 1989.[402]" This is especially significant as the Velvet Revolution was partially driven by a desire for increased social mobility beyond the prerequisite of Party membership, and that these problems have become a "permanent, chronic source of public dissatisfaction" and an erosion of pubic trust in government.[403] In spite of material factors for discontent, Slovaks remain optimistic about the idea of democracy. In general, Slovaks believe that the twenty years of democracy from 1918-1938, and their experiences under the semi-authoritarian Mečiar government in the 1990s, account for their superior democratic performance vis a vis Poland and Hungary.[404]

In 2009, twenty years after the beginning of the dual systemic transformation, 66 percent of Slovaks, mostly in the younger age groups, approved of the economic transformation and 71 percent of the political transformation.[405] Compared with 1991, a far higher percentage of the population was highly satisfied with life (43 percent, up from 13 percent).[406] Paradoxically, 48 percent of Slovaks responded that they felt better off under communism with 18 percent reporting that they felt "about the

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[400] Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing."
[401] *Ibid*, 96.
[402] *Ibid*, 97.
[403] *Ibid*.
[404] *Ibid*, 96.
[405] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall."
[406] *Ibid*.

same.[407]" Support for the market economy remained generally stable at 66 percent, down from 69 percent in 1991.[408] Looking into the future, Slovaks in 2009 were generally optimistic (40 percent)[409] and had an even split (34 to 31 percent) on whether the previous five years had been negative or positive.[410] Political changes, a fair judiciary and economic prosperity ranked highest among Slovaks' concerns.[411] Comparing economic and political changes, a clear majority (50 to 42 percent) rated a strong economy as more important than a strong democracy.[412] Undoubtedly frightened by their experience with Mečiar, 81 percent of Slovaks prioritized a strong democracy over a strong leader.[413]Overall, we have a picture of increasing satisfaction in Slovakia. Fewer people (55 percent) felt that outside factors determined success in life than at the outset of the transition (59 percent).[414] This data paints a picture of a society generally satisfied with the changes since 1989, and more so a society increasingly on guard against the potential erosion of its democratic system. Compared with the overt discontent of the Hungarian electorate seen in the previous section, the Slovak electorate would prove a tougher challenge for the challenger party.

Opportunity

Prior to 2011, the poorly institutionalized Slovak party system focused on the center-periphery and economic cleavages with a religious element. This manifests in the following camps: national-authoritarian vs. liberal-Christian vs. socialist vs. liberal-cosmopolitan.[415] SMER-SD exploited the pro- and anti-Mečiar cleavage on an anti-corruption platform, which enabled it to cast itself firmly as the alternative to HZDS.[416] The subsequent defeat of HZDS in 1998, according to Bútorová, represented the final settlement over the question of regime character with the victory of the liberal-democratic forces over authoritarian-nationalist ones.[417] Subsequently, the dominant tension in Slovak politics became the role of the state and economic

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[407] *Ibid*, 5.
[408] *Ibid*.
[409] Ibid
[410] *Ibid*.
[411] *Ibid*.
[412] *Ibid*.
[413] *Ibid*.
[414] *Ibid*.
[415] Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited." 26-27
[416] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."
[417] Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing." 92.

management, i.e. social solidarity.[418] Various scholars attribute the development of the Fico challenge to fallout from the EU accession, frustration over corruption, a weaker liberal tradition (contrary to the believe in the influence of the First Republic), and a persistent rural-urban cleavage exacerbated by the economic fallout from the transition.[419] SMER-SD's merger with the reformed Slovak wing of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa* – KSČ), the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) enabled Fico to present himself as the champion of a social democratic alternative to the neoliberalism now coming to dominate Slovakia.[420] SMER-SD's longevity in power, ruling for a total of 12 years is due in part to its organizational structure. The party developed from a leader-centric organization into a party with a strong organizational base capable of taking ownership over issues enabling it to dominate both the Slovak left and the national political scene.[421] Later in its rule however, SMER-SD remained a highly centralized party, operating with a low level of institutionalization.[422] Like PiS (see below), SMER-SD is an elite-driven party with minimal engagement from its regular membership.[423] Fico ruled as the party's uncontested leader, exercising significant control over party operations at all levels.[424] SMER-SD became a hegemonic party, co-opting the political left and building on the economic nationalism of HZDS while not quite managing to marginalize the right in the same manner that Fidesz and PiS would later accomplish (see below). The party managed to cast the right as irresponsible stewards of national governance, touting Fico's ability to take care of the poor amid allegations of the Dzurinda government's corruption that came to light in the so-called "Gorilla File" scandal.[425] SMER-SD's elite character is strongly charismatic. Fico and his party position themselves as protectors of the Slovak nation and people against migrants,

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[418] *Ibid,* 93.
[419] E.g. Jiří Pehe. "Is Central Europe a Basket Case?" *Bloomberg.* 10 October 2006. Accessed 7 August 2023. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2006-10-09/is-central-europe-a-basket-case-businessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice#xj4y7vzkg; Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing."
[420] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."
[421] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."
[422] Darina Malová. "Strengthening social democracy in the Visegrad countries: Limits and challenges faced by Smer-SD." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.* 2017. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/prag/13217.pdf
[423] *Ibid*.
[424] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."
[425] Malová. "Strengthening social democracy."

and increasingly, the US-Western bloc.[426] The party occasionally deploys a traditionalist narrative surrounding anti-LGBT rhetoric and defense of Slovakia's "Catholic legacy.[427]"

The opportunity structure presented by the Slovak party system suggests the reasons for SMER-SD's rise far more than economic reasons. The position of the left in Slovak politics influenced the ability of SMER-SD to gain an electoral hegemony. SMER-SD is, as its name suggests, ostensibly a social democratic party with redistributive economic elements and a conservative social discourse.[428] In spite of its ostensible leftism, SMER-SD worked to restrict the leftist political discourse to exclude far-left views, i.e. those that go beyond the conclusion that some form of capitalism is the only possible or desirable system.[429] In addition to its dominance of the left, the Slovak right's relative disorganization and fragmentation was an enabling factor for the party's overall electoral dominance. A stronger rhetorical, if not electoral, anti-system challenge emerged in the form of the People's Party Our Slovakia (*Ľudová strana naše Slovensko* - LSNS), a neo-Nazi, Russophilic, ultranationalist party seeking, among other social and ideological goals, to rehabilitate the memory of Father Jozef Tiso, the wartime ruler of the clerical-fascist Slovak State.[430] An extremist schoolteacher, Marian Kotleba, seized hold of the almost-defunct Party of the Friends of Wine and transformed it into a quasi-paramilitary neo-Nazi party, complete with black uniforms modeled on those of the Slovak State's paramilitary, the Hlinka Guard.[431] Kotleba's challenge remains largely social and political, opposing immigration, the US, NATO, and the EU. The electoral performance of LSNS (entry into parliament with eight percent and 14 MPs in 2016)

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[426] James Thompson. "Slovakia: Unhappily Into NATO's Frontline." *Center for European Policy Analysis.* 10 February 2022. Accessed 4 May 2023. https://cepa.org/article/slovakia-unhappily-into-natos-frontline/

[427] Boris Zala. "Paradoxes of the Slovak Left." *Progressivepost.eu.* 26 June 2018. Accessed 4 May 2023. https://progressivepost.eu/paradoxes-slovak-left/

[428] Tomáš Profant, "Excluding the Radical Economic Left from the Slovak Public Discourse: A Moderate Leftist Talk Show as a Case Study," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 34, no. 2 (May 2020): 326–50.

[429] *Ibid*.

[430] Grigorij Mesežnikov and Ol'ga Gyáfášová. "Slovakia's Conflicting Camps." Journal of Democracy Vol. 29, No. 3. 78 -90.

[431] Michael Colborne. "Marian Kotleba Wants to Make Slovakia Fascist Again." *Foreign Policy*. 28 February 2020. Accessed 28 June 2022. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/28/marian-kotleba-slovakia-election-right-wing-fascism/

represented a stronger right-wing challenge, especially as Kotleba's rhetoric on migration overshadowed Fico's own nationalist and xenophobic performance.[432]

In addition to the far right, a number of center-right parties contest SMER-SD and ultimately contributed to its defeat in 2020. The strongest challenger to SMER-SD has been Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (*Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* - OL'aNO), an anti-corruption party with a conservative outlook. Former OL'aNO Prime Minister Eduard Heger his own party, the Democrats, to run in the 2023 election.[433] Also contesting the election is a SMER-SD offshoot, HLAS-SD (Voice – Social Democracy), which, founded by former SMER-SD leader Peter Pellegrini, claims to pursue a pro-Western social democracy, though as Heger claims, still has the baggage of its parent party to contend with.[434] The fragmented right and virtual non-existence of the left outside SMER-SD suggests that a political comeback in the 2023 elections may be possible. If this is the case, it will represent a beneficial situation for challenger parties: entry into government amid a fractured party system and competing overlapping programs without significant differentiation.

Activation

The degree to which SMER-SD behaved as a populist party during its first governing period is debated in the literature,[435] though many scholars agree that by its second governing period Fico's administration was decidedly populist.[436] Like HZDS, SMER-SD alongside HZDS used nationalism and populism as a mobilization strategy.[437] Despite its early orientation, SMER-SD has taken a flexible approach toward ideology, depending on the requirements of political expediency. Initially portraying itself as a non-ideological, third-way party,[438] SMER-SD came to embrace anti-refugee, anti-migrant rhetoric and joined with its Visegrad neighbors in opposing

[432] Malová. "Strengthening Social Democracy."
[433] "Slovak prime minister starts new pro-Western party for Sept election." *Reuters.* 7 March 2023. Accessed 27 April 2023. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovak-prime-minister-starts-new-pro-western-party-sept-election-2023-03-07/.
[434] *Ibid*, PRVOMÁJOVÝ MANIFEST HLAS – SOCIÁLNA DEMOKRACIA. 1 May 2022. Accessed 27 April 2023. https://strana-hlas.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/prvomajovy_manifest_HLAS.pdf
[435] Deegan-Krause. "Populism, Democracy, and Nationalism in Slovakia."
[436] E.g. Seongcheol Kim, *Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism in the Visegrád Four*. London and New York: Routledge. 2022; Peter Plenta, "Conspiracy Theories as a Political Instrument: Utilization of Anti-Soros Narratives in Central Europe," *Contemporary Politics* Vol. 26, No. 5 (October 19, 2020): 512–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1781332; Mesežnikov and Gyáfášová. "Slovakia's Conflicting Camps."
[437] Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová. "Slovakia's Conflicting Camps." 83.
[438] *Ibid,* 83.

the EU's migrant quota system in 2015-2016.[439] Fico, a former KSČ member turned social democrat, essentially abandoned social democracy in favor of national-populist politics with "left-leaning socialist rhetoric.[440]" Much like Czechia's ANO (see below), SMER-SD began by offering a broad, non-ideological platform focused on pragmatic solutions to solve corruption and socio-economic issues.[441] This approach gradually changed to a program calling for a "third way" mixture of a paternalistic state, personal responsibility, and social solidarity.[442] As it entered the opposition between 2002-2006, the party slid further to the left as a reaction to the center-right Dzurina government's neoliberal policies. Following its return to power in 2009, the party embraced a program to build a Slovak welfare state. The concrete policies for doing so were "fairly random.[443]" The party's approach to social and identity issues remained fairly conservative, as traditional values (e.g. nation, family, and Catholicism), retained a strong appeal among voters and SMER-SD retains appeals to these values while "reduc[ing] human rights to social and economic 'securities' [and] ignoring ethnic and sexual minorities' identities and interests.[444]" The framing of the LGBT movement as an ideology and an agenda represents an attempt to increase the rhetoric of threat relative to Slovakia's traditional, Christian character. During the European migrant crisis of 2015, Fico adapted anti-migrant, anti-Islamic language, pledging that he would not "allow a single Muslim migrant on Slovak soil.[445]" This strategy ultimately backfired as the threat-based language became lost amid the variety of other parties (i.e. the Kotlebists) making similar appeals, decreasing SMER-SD's specific voter appeal.[446] On this key identity issue, SMER-SD took advantage of economic dissatisfaction and discontent over corruption to gain its initial entry into power. In spite of its domination of the left, the party was unsuccessful in the long term because it was unable to delegitimize its right-wing competitors and was ultimately brought down by a highly publicized and emotional series of corruption scandals. Amid the country's cost of living crisis and its position "on the frontline of

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[439] *Ibid*, 85.
[440] *Ibid*.
[441] Malová. "Strengthening Social Democracy."
[442] *Ibid*, 10.
[443] *Ibid*, 11.
[444] *Ibid*, 11.
[445] Malová. "Strengthening Social Democracy." 8. Bútorová, "The Pendulum Swing of Slovakia's Democracy."
[446] *Ibid*.

Russian disinformation,[447]" the intensification of a threat mentality seems to be propelling Fico back into power. Slovak philosopher Juliana Sokolova calls the LGBT paranoia "a created feeling," designed to intensify a threat mentality among the electorate.[448] The results of the fall 2023 election will tell us more information as to whether and in what ways this discourse was successful. At the time of writing (Summer 2023), the chances of this "Viktor Orbán wannabe" returning to power seem strong.[449]

Summary

During its ruling period, SMER-SD engaged in activities that threw the resilience of Slovakia's democracy into question, namely state capture, the manipulation of the judicial process, and gaining control over elements of the media.[450] No constitutional or systemic change was proposed akin to the Polish or Hungarian examples discussed in this chapter. Ultimately, Fico's government was brought down by mass public outrage over various corruption scandals coming to light. Because the Mečiar regime had "put Slovak society into a perpetual state of alarm, where any sign of power concentration triggers a counter-reaction,[451]" the Mečiar experience seems to have "inoculated" Slovaks against backsliding.[452] It is further possible that the Mečiar years facilitated some political learning with respect to Slovakia's comparatively high public tolerance of Muslim migrants.[453] This inoculation came into play as a series of scandals began to beset the Fico government. Allegations of corruption and organized crime links began to undermine the credibility of SMER-SD as an anti-corruption party, while the government's pension increase of a mere 1.90 EUR discounted its image of standing with the poor.[454] The fallout of the 2018 murders of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, following the former's investigation of SMER-SD's ties to the Italian mafia led to a collapse of public trust

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[447] Amanda Coakley. "A hard line Slovak nationalist plots his return to power." *Codastory.com.* 30 January 2023. Accessed 4 May 2023. https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/slovakia-elections-fico/
[448] *Ibid*.
[449] *Ibid*.
[450] Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová. "Slovakia's Conflicting Camps." 80
[451] Bakke and Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles*." 31.
[452] *Ibid*, 33.
[453] 47 percent in 2018, compared with 21 percent in Hungary and 12 percent in Czechia. Milada Anna Vachudova, "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe," *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 318–40. 324.
[454] Malová. "Strengthening Social Democracy."

in the state of Slovak democracy.[455] Fico blamed the backlash on foreign interference that included the region's perennial bogyman George Soros, sparking mass protests that culminated in his resignation, alongside his deputy prime minister, Robert Kaliňák.[456] Upon anti-corruption campaigner Zuzana Čaputová's election to the presidency in March 2019, the *Financial Times* called the event "a ray of hope" for democracy in the region.[457]

Looking at the causal model, Slovakia started with a mixed state of demand, with many Slovaks approving of the post-1989 changes, but many still harboring nostalgia for life under socialism. Concerns, if not "inoculation," over electoral authoritarianism from the Mečiar years, remained in the public consciousness. In the environment of the collapse of the electoral autocracy of the Mečiar regime, SMER-SD approached its challenge from a position of relative hegemony. Having co-opted the Slovak left, the party remained insulated from other left-wing challenges. SMER-SD's initial electoral appeal was based on its promises to clean up the corruption of previous Slovak governments while promising vague ideas of a solidaristic political economy. Such appeals, while initially highly appealing, are difficult to sustain, compared for example with Catholic conservative values as a rallying cry.[458] Fico's attempt to co-opt the right's ethno-nationalism during the migrant crisis ultimately backfired due to the far stronger discourse posed by the neo-Nazi Kotleba movement. Likewise, SMER-SD failed to survive corruption scandals culminating in the exposure of its links with organized crime, and in a moment of people's power, the upper echelons of the government resigned, effectively ending the challenge for the time being. Under the SMER-SD government, Slovakia did not undergo significant backsliding in the sense of Poland and Hungary (below) and Czechia's less successful effort. In its 2012 – 2018 electoral term, the SMER-SD of Robert Fico did not attempt to make a fundamental break from the post-1989 order, nor did it express strong ideological positions other than a vague brand of social democracy. SMER-SD's flexible approach to picking up new ideologies as political circumstances demand is

[455] Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová. "Slovakia's Conflicting Camps." 78.
[456] *Ibid*. Plenta, "Conspiracy Theories as a Political Instrument."
[457] "Slovakia offers a ray of hope in central Europe." *Financial Times*. 1 April 2019. Accessed 29 August 2019. https://www.ft.com/content/f0902de6-5255-11e9-9c76-bf4a0ce37d49
[458] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."

similar to ANO's own behavior as it attempted to embrace nationalistic, xenophobic language during the 2021 Czech election cycle. Neither effort was successful.

Throughout its time in power, SMER-SD attempted to exploit the corruption/anti-corruption cleavage and the traditional left-right cleavage, making it primarily a political-structural challenge. These appeals were successful in securing the party's entry into power, but amid corruption allegations and a failure to address economic conditions with meaningful policy action, the party lost credibility in these cleavages. An attempted shift to the ideational cleavage/values cleavage by adopting language of a threatened ethno-nationalist ideal during the migrant crisis backfired as that particular spot in the political spectrum was already successfully occupied by the Kotlebists. The party's attempt at utilizing more emotional language during the migration crisis attempted to raise enflame identity tensions, but this effort largely failed for reasons previously discussed. The SMER-SD challenge did not succeed in any structural changes or the implementation of new relations of the people to production, politics, or society. If anything, SMER-SD's corruption scandals entrenched democratic pluralism by evoking echoes of Mečiarism, making backsliding in the country more difficult. Ultimately, the SMER-SD challenge was only a challenge in the sense that the party attempted to circumvent the legal functioning of the state to augment its own power at the expense of its political opponents. The challenge was largely devoid of ideological or ideational content outside of the strategic rhetorical deployment of anti-migrant sentiment as a means of shoring up bleeding political support. The labeling of SMER-SD as a challenger party falls into question, since the party did not attempt to fundamentally alter the post-1989 order of Slovak politics or economics, instead engaging in cronyistic, corrupt political rule for its own sake. While such behavior falls beyond the ideal of liberal democracy, it is hardly unusual in liberal democratic polities.

Poland – the Fourth Republic

"*We want to transform Europe, this is my dream, to re-christianise it...we want Poland to be strong, but also to contain...Christian values. We will defend them against the background of laicization and a deepening consumerism."*

-Mateusz Morawiecki , in an interview with Radio Marya[459]

Background

Poland's challenger party emerged out of a conservative milieu experiencing "fears of loss of cultural identity and colonization by foreign capital [that lead] to the radicalization of the political scene.[460]" Founded by anti-communist campaigners and twin brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczynski in 2001, PiS considers itself to be a defender of Western traditions, culture, civilization, and Christian values. PiS utilizes policies ostensibly to counter globalization, growing inequalities, and ideological threats facing its own rule and the Polish nation.[461] Internationally, party leaders stress building relations with foreign partners on equal terms.[462] PiS rose to power following a series of left-wing governments, whose corruption scandals led to the development of the narrative of a "communist-liberal pact" that led to corrupt elites "steal[ing] the transition" from the Polish people.[463] Following its electoral victory with 37.58 percent of the vote and its assumption of single-party government in 2015, PiS enacted a radical program of state capture, converting public media into party mouthpieces and subverting the oversight of independent courts. Kaczynski described protests against these actions as "an attack by evil forces on the Polish nation.[464]" Such a stark moral description of political events is at one with PiS's overall discourse. At the core of PiS's ideology is the goal of all-encompassing replacement of the Third Republic (III RP) with a new Fourth Republic (IV RP). In PiS's paradigm, the III RP is a continuation of the communist People's Republic, and the communist elites continued as liberal, post-communist elites, enriching themselves on the transition of public property to foreign investors. The IV RP represents a clean break with the corrupt past, and a new beginning for Poland under the leadership of

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[459] Justyna Pawlak, Anna Wlodarczak-Semczuk. "Poland's new prime minister: a gamble that could backfire." *Reuters*. 13 December 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/cnews-us-poland-politics-morawiecki-anal-idCAKBN1E71KF-OCATP

[460] Krzysztof Jasiecki. ""Conservative modernization" and the rise of Law and Justice in Poland." In Bluhm and Varga. "New Conservatives." 135.

[461] *Ibid*.

[462] *Ibid* 131.

[463] *Ibid*, 341.

[464] "Wybory do Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2015." *Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza*. https://web.archive.org/web/20160613164659/http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349_wyniki_sejm ; *Ibid*. 342, 348.

PiS.[465] This ideology is concerned with the survival of the Polish people, and as such, cannot afford anything less than the black and white framing of a stark dichotomy.

A number of factors give PiS an authoritarian character: the dominance of its charismatic leader, radical language regarding the corruption of political elites, pathologies of the state as an institution, animosity toward civil society and NGOs, nationalist and xenophobic attitude toward immigrants, and the rejection of the axiology of liberal cosmopolitanism.[466] The concentration of power in the party's chairman, Jarosław Kaczynski, renders PiS "a highly authoritarian organization.[467]" Kaczynski exercises significant formal and informal power over the organization through the ability to control and sanction members, and influence policy through his oversight of core political committees.[468] The independence of lower levels of party organization is restricted in favor of the centralized, top-down leadership. Recruitment drives are minimal and rank and file members remain unintegrated into the party structure beyond mass mobilization during electoral campaigns.[469] The roots of this absolutist, uncompromising rhetoric arises from the connections between PiS and the Polish Catholic Church (see below). PiS's elite character is both traditionalist and charismatic. Traditional values, norms, and social hierarchies form not only a structure for PiS's internal organization and that of the Polish state, but the ideological underpinnings of its policy. PiS elites, especially its leader Kaczynski, exhibit charisma, representing a connection to the Polish people born of the party's legitimacy as representatives of the traditional construction of the people and their embodiment, the Polish state. PiS offers a view of the state as belonging to a homogenous definition of the Polish people, and working to protect the interests of the nation. PiS defines the nation as Catholic, and embraces the values associated with the Church. This ideationally-defined concept of the nation appears throughout the PiS discourse as being under attack by the degrading conditions of dependent capitalism, a corrupt and self-serving post-communist elite, and foreign values that run contrary to the traditional values of Catholic, conservative Poland. This in turn

[465] Dąbrowska "New Conservatism in Poland." In Bluhm and Varga, *New Conservatives*.
[466] Jasiecki. ""Conservative modernization," 134.
[467] Bartek Pytlas, "Party Organisation of PiS in Poland: Between Electoral Rhetoric and Absolutist Practice," *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 4 (November 24, 2021): 340–53. 340.
[468] *Ibid*, 347.
[469] Jasiecki. ""Conservative modernization," 134.

helps PiS to justify an economic program of redistribution and a political program that erodes liberal democratic mechanisms of accountability.

Demand

Demand for the scrapping of the post-communist order in Poland is not obvious. Poland's economic transition from state socialism to market capitalism was an ad hoc process; the result of multiple governments attempting to implement strategies for growth and development they thought best at a given moment.[470] Thus, economic decisions became highly politicized; leading to high expectations and tremendous disappointments as the standard of living slowly clawed its way upward amid chronic economic issues. 14 distinct governments between the end of one-party rule and PiS's takeover contributed to the lack of a coordinated developmental strategy, compared with, for example, the relative stability of Václav Klaus' government in Czechia, which was able to oversee a succinct program of economic transition before its ouster in 1998. While Poland avoided recession during the GFC, due in part to its strong domestic demand and macroeconomic performance without the high imbalances found elsewhere in the region, [471] the politicization of economic and social policy in the early years would help contribute to the overall "Poland in ruins" discourse, discussed below.[472] Pew's 2009 public opinion survey sheds light on the growing discontent, showing a drop of 9 percent since 1991 approving of capitalism (71 percent). The majority of Poles (70 percent) responded that life was better in a market economy, though 59 percent responded unfavorably to the current (2009) economic situation.[473] This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the country was suffering the effects of the GFC. These numbers, compared to Hungary's hemorrhaging support for capitalism, are not terribly startling. The numbers are less startling when we consider Polish support for democracy and multiparty government. Overall support for the change to democracy actually increased by 4 percent to 70 percent of the population since 1991.[474] Responding to the question whether life was worse under communism,

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[470] Jerzy J. Parysek, "Polish Economy in 1990–2018: Balance of Development in New Political Conditions," *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* 11, no. 4 (January 20, 2022): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2021.4.01.

[471] Bas B. Bakker and Christopher A. Klingen. "Poland: A Beacon of Resilience in Europe." In. Bas B. Bakker and Christopher A. Klingen (eds.), *How Emerging Europe Came Through the 2008/09 Crisis: An Account by the Staff of the IMF's European Department.* Washington DC: International Monetary Fund (2012).

[472] Parysek, "Polish Economy."

[473] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall."

[474] *Ibid*.

Poles had the highest response of any of the countries surveyed, with 47 percent more satisfied and 35 percent less.[475] Most Poles rated their lives as either highly satisfactory or generally satisfactory (44 and 49 percent, respectively), with the percentage of those who judged that their lives had improved actually increasing between 2007-2009.[476] Poles were also fairly optimistic about their futures, more so than Czechs and Hungarians.[477] Interestingly, fewer Poles rated economic prosperity as their priority, citing a fair judiciary as the top concern.[478] If Poles were so satisfied, where was the discontent evident that would lead to the rise of PiS? Looking beyond immediate economic satisfaction, we can see deeper tendencies among Poles relating to their political preferences and values. Poles rated a strong economy as preferential to a strong democracy, like Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians.[479] 35 percent of Poles voiced a preference for a strong leader over a democratic government, similar to Hungary's 49 percent but a shocking departure from Czechia and Slovakia's 15 and 12 percent.[480] Like the other Visegrad countries, there is a strong socially solidaristic impulse in the Polish population, with 71 percent valuing "nobody in need" over the "freedom to pursue life's goals.[481]" A strong current of Poles believe that the transition primarily benefited politicians and entrepreneurs (92 and 85 percent) versus the ordinary people (42 percent), highlighting a sense that the transition was ultimately unfair and that benefits remained stratified among a cloistered elite segment of society. This is reflected in the belief of the majority (60 percent) of respondents who did not believe that the state is managed "for the benefit of all people.[482]" In fact, a bare majority (53 percent) was satisfied with the way democracy was working in 2009 (though this was the smallest share in the Visegrad Four at the time).[483] In general, this was a country happy to have shed the Moscow-backed state socialist regime and happy to have begun moving closer to the West in economics and government. Problems existed, notably discontent over the current economic conditions and the division of benefits following the dual transition. Overall, the data are indicative of a general desire for democratic governance, but not at the cost of

[475] *Ibid*.
[476] *Ibid*.
[477] *Ibid*.
[478] *Ibid*
[479] *Ibid*.
[480] *Ibid*.
[481] *Ibid*, 28.
[482] *Ibid*, 31.
[483] *Ibid*.

economic prosperity and with a desire for a strong leader to light the pathway forward.

This data lend insight into the motivations for voters to support PiS. PiS voters, like their Fidesz colleagues, were attracted to their parties because the parties addressed specific socio-economic problems resultant of the flaws and frustrations with the transition to capitalism and neoliberal policies.[484] Because PiS takes an active approach toward correcting and opposing neoliberalism and the problems of the economic transition, much of the literature calls PiS an economically left party. PiS levels a critique of neoliberalism and its program of "market regulation, state intervention in the economy, the expansion of the welfare state, and wealth distribution.[485]" While embracing an economically left character, PiS retains its social conservatism by avoiding the "left wing vocabulary of class.[486]" This orientation is linked to a deep and lingering trauma left by Poland's neoliberal experience during the transition years. Shields explains how the pain neoliberalism has inflicted on Polish society has crystalized PiS' challenge to dependent capitalism.[487] Indeed, Poland shows many of the characteristics of a dependent market economy, notably large-scale foreign ownership over national firms and a prevalence of low-value added production in service of Western core economies.[488] PiS Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki decried Washington Consensus neoliberalism as inapplicable to post-communist countries, blaming this model for producing deep inequalities within Poland.[489] Indeed, it is this combination of redistribution and social conservatism that contribute to PiS's consistently strong electoral performance.[490] The reason for this linkage and the undeniable role of conservative, Catholic values lies in the nature of the response to the conditions of dependent capitalism and the transition. The neoliberal consensus that became latched onto Polish politics left no political channel

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[484] Roose and Karolewski. "The National Conservative Parties in Poland and Hungary and Their Core Supporters Compared." In: Bluhm and Varga, *New Conservatives.*
[485] *Ibid*.
[486] Stanley Bill and Ben Stanley, "Whose Poland Is It to Be? PiS and the Struggle between Monism and Pluralism," *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 378–94, 386-7. Rohač even calls Poland's renationalization of banks as a means of affecting credit policy "banking sector socialism." See Dalibor Roháč. "Poland's rush to banking sector socialism." *Financial Times*. 30 June 2017. Accessed 27 June 2022. https://www.ft.com/content/f7283548-5cd1-11e7-b553-e2df1b0c3220.
[487] Stuart Shields, "Neoliberalism Redux: Poland's Recombinant Populism and Its Alternatives," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 4–5 (July 2015): 659–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513501349.
[488] Jasiecki. "Conservative Modernization." In Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*. 136.
[489] *Ibid*, 137.
[490] Bill and Stanley. "Whose Poland." 386-7.

for opposition to the economic hardships experienced by many Poles during the transition. The anger was redirected toward social and cultural forms of exclusivity related to identity, religion, and sexuality.[491] Thus, the Polish right in general and PiS in particular channeled "economic anger for non-economic purposes", applying cultural solutions to economic problems.[492] PiS has repoliticized economic questions hitherto thought settled by the post-1989 consensus and linked them with a set of conservative, Catholic nationalist values (see below). The redistributive programs and generally left-wing economic approach have a strong justification in PiS's Catholic-Nationalist ideology, as I discuss in the following sub-sections. While it may seem odd that a right wing, Catholic nationalist party espouses a program of significant wealth redistribution, the justifications are a coherent framing with a populist dichotomy. Thus, while overt economic dissatisfaction did not directly facilitate the rise of PiS, a broader discontent over the transition and perceptions over the gains and losses therein provided a demand that PiS would fill by politicizing economic issues and linking them to identity tensions, essentially enflaming latent discontent by compounding the issues over which voters could be discontented.

Opportunity

Like Fidesz, PiS has been successful because it occupies a hegemonic position in the Polish right against a fragmented, discredited (through past performance) and ideologically isolated (through communism) left. For more than twenty years following the emergence of multiparty democracy, Poland's party system was "completely under-institutionalized.[493]" Centering upon ideological cleavages (communist and anti-communist) and the religious-secular cleavage, the distribution of Polish parties created an obvious space for PiS to orient itself against its competitors. Party loyalty among voters was low, and parties frequently changed their platforms and lacked follow through after entering government.[494] This contributed to an atmosphere in which parties could break the deep voter apathy through occasional mobilization of identities, values, history, and culture.[495] The high number of right-

[491] David Ost. *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2005. In *Ibid*.
[492] *Ibid*. "Whose Poland." 387.
[493] Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited." 18, 27-28.
[494] Jerzy Jaskiernia, "The Development of the Polish Party System: A Perspective of the Parliamentary Elections Results," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 2, no. 46 (December 31, 2017): 227–46, https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2017214.
[495] *Ibid*.

wing parties enabled the reformed communist party, the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* – SLD), to gain power in 1993. A revolving pattern emerged as right wing coalitions countered and took power, only to lose it again to the left coalition. This process continued until the right coalition fragmented and dissolved, clearing space for PiS to emerge, gaining power for the first time in 2005.[496] PiS would differ from previous right parties in its approach to the post-communist left. Casting the post-communist elite as holdovers from the communist period enabled PiS to activate feelings of opposition from the anti-communist movement while redirecting that energy toward its opponents. This justification, along with its uncompromising Catholic doctrine provides legitimization for PiS's push for illiberal governance as it comes into conflict with parties committed to maintaining the pre-2015 liberal model of government. To further isolate the left, PiS linked its religious values with a strong welfare state discourse (see below and Chapter 4), enabling it to coopt a core element of the left opposition's policy appeal.[497] In spite of a loss in 2007 to the Solidarity splinter party Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska* – PO), PiS retained its place as the leading right-wing party, but suffered electorally following the Smolensk air disaster that killed President Lech Kaczynski (brother of PiS chairman Jarosław) and senior military and political leaders. Finally, a wiretapping scandal would shake Donald Tusk's PO government and lead to PiS's election in 2015.[498]

At present, PiS rules in a coalition government called the United Right (*Zjednoczona Prawica* - ZP) with other minor Catholic, conservative, and nationalist parties. PiS's opponents within these cleavages are two blocs. The liberal-conservative alliance, Civic Coalition, led by PO and joined by the classical liberal Modern party (*Nowoczesna*), Greens (*Partia Zieloni* – PZ), and social democratic Polish Initiative (*Inicjatywa Polska* - iPL). The left-wing opposition has formed the Left (*Lewica*) coalition, consisting of the social democratic New Left (*Nowa Lewica*) and the

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496 *Ibid*.
497 *Ibid*; Aleks Szczerbiak, "The Birth of a Bipolar Party System or a Referendum on a Polarizing Government? The October 2007 Polish Parliamentary Election," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 3 (September 2008): 415–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270802267955.
498 Jaskiernia, "The Development of the Polish Party System."

democratic socialist Left Together (*Lewica Razem)*.[499] In this party landscape, the space for programmatic competition has become extremely limited, as shown by PiS's flagship program, the 500+ Program, becoming so popular that parties are forced to promise some form of assistance payments to stay competitive.[500] Opposition parties are left with ever diminishing options surrounding the idea that they are simply not PiS. This tendency can have the effect of deepening a perception of dependency on PiS's continuing political power, as the population comes to expect material support from the ruling party. PiS has, in effect, succeeded in shifting the scope of policies acceptable to the electorate, setting itself as the measuring stick by which all other parties are assessed. This move has a hegemonizing effect on the Polish party system, notably in PiS's ability to contract and dominate the right whilst coopting and neutralizing the left. Combined with its Catholic nationalist identity and threat discourse (discussed below), PiS establishes hegemony over the Polish party system that leaves it free to alter the legal and civic environment as it sees fit.[501]

Since its election, PiS has undertaken measures to restructure the electoral system in its favor, and thereby constrict the party system. The appointment of PiS-approved judges to the Constitutional Tribunal in 2015 appeared as a means for PiS to ensure acceptance of its further programmatic steps through court packing. As Poland's court of highest appeal, the Constitutional Tribunal holds enormous power in ultimately accepting or rejecting elements of the PiS programmatic challenge. Efforts to delay Civic Platform-appointed judges from replacing outgoing judges until PiS formally took power descended into a fight between the outgoing Civic Platform government and the incoming PiS government, ultimately culminating in an act of the Sejm (the so-called December Amendment) empowering the court to hear cases only if 13 of the 15 justices were present, thereby sidestepping the court packing issue by neutering the court's ability to realistically hear cases. The December Amendment further guaranteed that the court would be unable to act in the future without the participation

499 "Dane o posłach wg stanu na dzień wyborów." *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*. https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/page.xsp/poslowie_wybory
500 Bill and Stanley, "Whose Poland Is It to Be?"
501 Bill's article on elite replacement discusses this in greater detail. See: Stanley Bill, "Counter-Elite Populism and Civil Society in Poland: PiS's Strategies of Elite Replacement," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 36, no. 1 (February 2022): 118–40.

of new PiS-appointed justices.[502] A challenge against the December Amendment was brought before the Constitutional Tribunal, immediately raising questions about how the Tribunal, now bound to the provisions of the amendment, could legally proceed with the hearing. The Tribunal heard the case in contravention to the Amendment, with 12 justices participating, and struck it down as unconstitutional. PiS retaliated by declaring the Tribunal's judgment invalid according to the December Amendment and therefore invalid, and continued to pack the court with its appointees.[503] PiS's domination of the Constitutional Tribunal earned Poland condemnation by the European Commission for violating rule of law standards.[504] In spite of this, PiS continued to fill seats as justices reached the end of their tenure, and at the time of writing all members are PiS appointees.[505] The takeover of the Constitutional Tribunal has been a masterpiece of PiS's challenge. In coopting the judicial body with the power to arrest or overturn PiS's legislation, the party succeeded in removing a significant obstacle to its ability to implement its challenge. Overall, PiS has degraded the party structure since its entry into power by legally, programmatically, and rhetorically restricting the ability of its opposition to contest it in the political sphere. The Polish right has effectively ceased to exist outside of PiS, and the left has grouped into coalitions united only in their mutual opposition to PiS. Poland faces a parliamentary election in the fall of 2023, where the ability of the anti-PiS coalitions to form a successful opposition bloc will face a test.

PiS has been successful in mobilizing highly salient cleavages in the Polish political landscape. Focusing on cultural/axiological and economic cleavages and the interplay between post-communists/socialists, liberal-democrats, state interventionists, secularists, religionists, populists has enabled PiS to attain a high level of emotion and ideology in its political discourse.[506] PiS justifies its challenge primarily through anti-communism and religious, value-based nationalism. As a compliment to this, PiS has

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502 Lech Garlicki. "Constitutional Court and Politics: The Polish Crisis." Chapter. In *Judicial Power: How Constitutional Courts Affect Political Transformations*, edited by Christine Landfried, 141–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
503 *Ibid*.
504 "Press Release: Rule of Law: European Commission acts to defend judicial independence in Poland." *European Commission*. 20 December 2017. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_5367
505 "Kadencje sędziów – zestawienie." *Trybunał Konstytucyjny*. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://trybunal.gov.pl/o-trybunale/sedziowie-trybunalu
506 Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited." 27-28.

used the cleavages of traditional versus cosmopolitan values and residual communism versus anti-communism to frame itself as a bastion defending the Polish nation, while communists, post-communists, and malign foreign influences seek to destroy Poland's identity. More broadly, PiS seeks to exploit a liberal versus social-solidaristic cleavage in Polish society, juxtaposing the values and behaviors of the transnational, Western culture, and by extension the opposition parties, that resulted in the diminishing of Polish economic sovereignty and cultural stability with the traditional values that place the Polish nation above all else.[507] This cleavage mixture is overall valuable for PiS, as salient cleavages assist PiS's maneuvering in the party system as it uses deeply held ideas about Polish history and identity to attack its opponents. Justifying a policy from an attitude of solidarity meshes with the deep current of social solidarity among the Polish people (as noted above) and with the Catholic values system that encourages mutual assistance. Such a justification is far harder to criticize, as doing so can be made to appear as attacking fundamental aspects of morality. PiS can then link its opponents' criticisms to history, depicting the opposition as immoral communists seeking to oppose its inherently moral program.

PiS's elites, like their left wing counterparts, drove the salience of particular cleavages and ultimately contributed to the low institutionalization of the party system as elites changed electoral rules and caused various scandals.[508] PiS's elite structure embraced a deeply conservative (i.e. pre-communist) and traditionalist approach. The "Poland in ruins" discourse, which I discuss in greater detail in the following subsection, began as early as the early 1990s as conservatives began to criticize the direction in which reformers moved the new Polish politics.[509] The ultra-conservatism and nationalism of broad segments of the post-communist right converged with a deep streak of conservatism in the population, especially in Eastern Poland, to produce an empowered elite with a clear ideological perspective in direct opposition to the liberal post-communist settlement. Spurred by the ascension of former communists to leading government positions in the early years of the transition, a discourse coalition

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[507] Pytlas, "Party Organisation of PiS in Poland." 341, 342.
[508] Anna Gwiazda, "Poland's Quasi-Institutionalized Party System: The Importance of Elites and Institutions," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 10, no. 3 (September 2009): 350–76, https://doi.org/10.1080/15705850903105769.
[509] Dabrowska. "New Conservatism in Poland." In Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives.*

emerged to promote "storylines about the post-1989 political and social order that were not reflected in mainstream media.[510]" A network of think tanks, discussion clubs, and publications emerged to further Polish conservatism and push back against post-communists returning to power.[511] Many of these conservatives were intrinsically bound with the Catholic Church, a linkage I further discuss below. The discourse coalition surrounding PiS was highly organized and coherent; factors that ultimately contributed to the production of a unified ideological position for the party. This in turn contributed to the party's ability to maneuver among other parties in the political system, especially by delegitimizing the post-communists.

Several political conditions contributed to PiS's rise. First, an uninstitutionalized party structure allowed PiS to gain hegemony over the right while the strategic use of highly salient cleavages and the adoption of welfare policies enabled its delegitimization of the left. This hegemonization and delegitimization was, compared with that affected by Fidesz, not as complete, as PiS's primary challenger, the Civic Platform, possesses both conservative and progressive factions seeking to challenge PiS on a variety of fronts. The character of PiS's elite contributed to its use of salient cleavages, especially its ability to frame the contest between itself and its opposition as a continuation of the struggle against the communists

Activation

PiS's activation strategy rests on two pillars: the threatened nation and the church. The "Poland in ruins" narrative[512] allows PiS to rhetorically position itself as a savior, undertaking the work to rebuild Poland. This rhetorical glue seems to bind PiS supporters across socio-economic divisions.[513] Catholic nationalism justifies the redistributory economic program and the program of repolonization as necessary to ensure the unity, prosperity, and ultimate survival of the nation. Catholic nationalism justifies PiS's extraordinary actions in the political sphere by elevating politics to a moralized struggle of good against evil, of right against wrong[514] The emotional

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[510] *Ibid,* 96.
[511] *Ibid.*
[512] PiS used this as the slogan of its 2015 electoral campaign.
[513] Mieczysław P. Boduszyński, "Populism and Protest in Poland," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 4 (2016): 110–24, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0067.
[514] Recall the conception of populism according to Ostiguy. "The Voice and Message of Hugo Chávez."

nature of the ideological discourse, providing safe identities to people facing instability and hope to people for whom transition-era discontent caused an initial pessimism, combines with concrete economic solutions that demonstrate the PiS-led state's commitment to shoring up threatened identities through economic redistribution. The economic-identity linkage is a compelling factor in facilitating the traction of PiS's challenge.

In advancing its economic program, the Strategy for Responsible Development (also known as the Morawiecki Plan) calls for the government to serve as the engine of development in pushing forward Polish industrial upgrading through research and development activities, reindustrialization, and corporate-academic partnership.[515] This development is effectively state-led, as Morawiecki stated, "the state cannot be only in a supervisory role, but must be also a leader and a partner.[516]" PiS calls for a "Polish model of the welfare state" (*państwo dobrobytu*) as the solution to the "social Darwinism" of "neoliberalism.[517]" Families, as the basis of society and the nation, receive special support from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in the form of the Family 500+ program, which guarantees 500 złoty per month for the first child of low-income families and every subsequent child up to the age of 18.[518] Prior to the 2019 elections, PiS expanded the program to all children.[519] While this program serves a political purpose (see above), its ideological purpose is to secure the role of the family against perceived erosion at the hands of foreign influences that its ideologues deem hostile. Further redistributive programs include lowering the retirement age[520], raising the minimum wage, the elimination of income tax for workers under 25, and increases in disability and retirement pensions.[521] These measures address groups who are important or vulnerable within the Catholic-nationalist ideology, especially considering the emphasis the ideology places on

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[515] Martin Miszerak and Dalibor Roháč. "A Polish Plan Runs Into Economic Reality." *The Wall Street Journal*. 06 March 2017. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-polish-plan-runs-into-economic-reality-1488833317.
I discuss this in greater detail in the following chapter.
[516] Bill and Stanley "Whose Poland."
[517] *Ibid*, 385.
[518] "Family 500+ Programme." *Gov.pl*. 29 March 2019. Accessed 24 July 2022. https://www.gov.pl/web/family/family-500-programme
[519] Bill and Stanley. "Whose Poland." 385.
[520] 65 for men and 60 for women. See "One step forward, two steps back for Polish pension reform." *IHS Markit*. 22 June 2018. Accessed 24 July 2022. https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-for-polish-pension-reform.html
[521] *Ibid*.

families and childrearing as the bedrock of the Polish nation, and the threat perception and rhetoric surrounding children vis a vis the party's struggles against sexual minorities, which it and its Church allies decry as pedophilia (see below). Against the backdrop of the party's strategy for economic upgrading, discussed in detail in the following chapter, these policies of redistribution represent an effort to strengthen a new generation of Poles to build the new economy as a solidaristic, cooperative, and socially equal society against the conditions of dependent Poland as a "colonized" reservoir of cheap labor for exploitation.[522]" Simultaneously, the measures bolster the defense of the traditionalist Polish culture by encouraging young people to have large families, thereby boosting the number of people carrying the torch of traditional values.

PiS's strong religious identity and connection with the Catholic Church is especially important in conceptualizing its ideology. The Church maintains a "detached attitude" toward democratic procedure, prioritizing "the truth;" a truth decided upon by its bishops.[523] Writing in 2000, the Church quoted Pope John Paul II in an assertion that "democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.[524]" In establishing these political values, PiS ideologues proclaim the family as the basic unit of society. Families, in turn, formulate the nation, from which the state is built to govern and defend the nation. The Catholic Church advances the notion that all Poles are Catholic, and therefore the concept of Polishness and Catholicism are inseparable and interchangeable.[525] The Church derives its legitimacy as a defender and promoter of Polish national identity from its role in opposing communism during the period of the People's Republic; it's rhetorical and ideological linkage with the concept of Polish identity; and its vigorous denial of alternative moral paradigms and ideologies. Based upon these pillars, the Church expects to occupy a special place in Polish society, from which it is able to influence civil society and the political process. During the 2015 elections that saw PiS's election to a single party majority, the Church supported PiS while stating that an individual's choice in the ballot box is not only a matter of individual conscience, but of the

[522] *Ibid*.
[523] Piotr Żuk and Paweł Żuk, "Dangerous Liaisons between the Catholic Church and State: The Religious and Political Alliance of the Nationalist Right with the Conservative Church in Poland," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 27, no. 2–3 (September 2, 2019): 191–212.
[524] *Ibid*, 198.
[525] *Ibid*.

individual's responsibility to the Church and the broader religious community.[526] Consequently, the party received both electoral support and prayers from Church officialdom, from the level of the Archbishop of Poznań Stanisław Gądecki to parish priests.[527] Throughout the campaign and into the present, the ultra-Catholic radio station, *Radio Maryja* and its affiliated TV station *Telewizja Trwam* (Television I Persist) and newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Journal), led by the priest and political entrepreneur Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, serve as vocal advocates for the traditional values and their opposition to the so-called "gender ideology" that have come to define PiS social policy.[528] Father Rydzyk's Catholic media empire has provided special support for PiS candidates from MPs and MEPs to President Andrzej Duda, leading Kaczynski to praise the "Radio Maryja Family," without which "there would be no victory."[529] The traditionalism espoused by the Church influences conceptions of gender roles and family life as well. PiS opposes feminism and expanded rights for sexual and gender minorities, which it constructs as foreign ideologies imported from the West in opposition to traditional, Catholic values.[530] Criticism of the "gender ideology" ranges from its incompatibility with traditional Polish values to claims of pedophilia and child abuse.[531] Polish discontent is fostered by a crisis of expectations, as the anti-communists perceived the West's "normalcy" as one of religion and tradition, only to find once the borders opened that Western normalcy prescribed "secularism, multiculturalism, and gay marriage.[532]" The result of this crisis of expectations is that PiS, along with the other conservative backlash movements in CEE, see themselves as "the last bastion of genuine European values.[533]" This gives PiS a strongly moral ideological mentality, which in turn strengthens its populist dichotomization narrative. In this framing, PiS is inherently good and just because it upholds good and just values. Its opponents are inherently bad and unjust, as because

[526] Despite the fact that a majority of Poles (54 percent) in the 2009 Pew survey stated that the role of the Church in political life was "too great," though this is down from the 1991 opinion (71 percent). "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall." 83-84.
[527] Żuk and Żuk, "Dangerous Liaisons." 198.
[528] *Ibid*, 200-201.
[529] *Ibid*, 200-202.
[530] Anna Gwiazda, "Right-Wing Populism and Feminist Politics: The Case of Law and Justice in Poland," *International Political Science Review* Vol. 42, No. 5 (November 2021): 580–595.
Dorota Szelewa, "Populism, Religion and Catholic Civil Society in Poland: The Case of Primary Education," *Social Policy and Society* Vol. 20, No. 2 (April 2021): 310–25.
Żuk and Żuk, "Dangerous Liaisons."
[531] Szelewa, "Populism, Religion and Catholic Civil Society in Poland."
[532] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, "Imitation and Its Discontents," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 117–28. 121.
[533] *Ibid*, 122.

they embrace alternative values and oppose those held by PiS. This moral framing deepens PiS's political ability to delegitimize its opponents while providing hope to the disappointed and frustrated voters. Assigning blame for their discontent to the political opposition by arguing that the opposition seeks to thwart the people's fundamental values allows PiS to enter the position of a savior, i.e. a party in power that can give hope to the traditionally minded electorate.

Since PiS's ascension to power, its willingness to identify and call out its ideological opponents has manifested into concrete policies. PiS has taken measures to restrict cultural movements that run contrary to its values. The campaign against "LGBT Ideology" represents a major piece of the Polish challenge. Beginning in 2019, over 100 regions and districts in Poland declared themselves "LGBT-Free Zones," banning propagation of pro-LGBT statements and activities. Local officials justified the ban in terms evoking the threat of communism, with President Duda calling LGBT ideology "even more destructive" than communism.[534] In addition to its campaign against "gender ideology," PiS has made restrictions on access to abortion a priority. A 2015 proposal initiated by Catholic civil society groups called for a ban on abortion in all cases but those with a direct threat to a woman's life. The ban triggered mass protests, known as the black protests, culminating in the 2016 rejection of the bill.[535] In 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal overturned a law permitting abortions of malformed fetuses, resulting in a de facto near-total ban on abortions. The creation of a pregnancy register followed, permitting prosecution of women who illicitly terminated their pregnancies or even suffered miscarriages.[536] The abortion and anti-LGBT campaigns represent a highly visible and emotive part of the challenge to the liberal, post-1989 order. These actions are clearly the result of Catholic action in support of PiS, which constitutes a significant part of the activation phase of the challenge.

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[534] Lucy Ash. "Inside Poland's 'LGBT-Free Zones.'" *BBC News*. 21 September 2020. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-54191344

[535] "No Exceptions." *The Economist*. 14 April 2016. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/04/14/no-exceptions
Christian Davies. "Poland's abortion ban proposal near collapse after mass protests." *The Guardian*. 5 October 2016. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/05/polish-government-performs-u-turn-on-total-abortion-ban

[536] "Poland, With Near-total Abortion Ban, to Record Pregnancies." *VoA News*. 7 June 2022. Accessed 22 July 2022. https://www.voanews.com/a/poland-with-near-total-abortion-ban-to-record-pregnancies-/6606318.html

The strong ideological overtones derived from PiS's threatened identity paradigm leave little ground for compromise with political opponents as opposition to PiS's program means opposition to the Polish nation; essentially treason. Creating a formula that the nation is the family, the family and the church are one, and support for the traditional family is the means of raising up the nation, PiS succeeds in tying its economic program aimed at righting the wrongs of the neoliberal years to core personal beliefs of the people. When redistribution is a Catholic virtue and helping the nation a means of protecting cherished values for the vast majority of the people (over 97 percent of Poles identify as Catholic[537]), such policies receive a moral imperative, enabling the party to cast its opponents as enemies of both the nation and the people in its mission of protecting the values and beliefs on which, for PiS, the Polish nation depends. Linking economic dissatisfaction to its values is a critical part of PiS's success. PiS's economic policy lies in two core areas: the redistributive programs that support its socially-conservative agenda and ideology, and the repolonization of industry, aimed at improving the standing and prestige of the Polish nation by improving Poland's competitiveness in the global market. In promoting traditional values, PiS utilizes redistributory economic mechanisms to support the members of society it deems most vulnerable or most ideologically deserving of material support, i.e. those constituting the ethnically defined nation.[538] PiS's economically left, solidaristic reaction against neoliberalism and dependent capitalism represents a type of systemic dissatisfaction that it can easily illustrate through statistics on Polish emigration, depopulated post-industrial regions, the loss of sovereign control over economic assets to foreign buyers. This enables PiS to provide clear solutions from distributing money to young families, investing in domestically owned start-ups, and buying back foreign-owned assets. These are direct and tangible courses of action that justify the challenge by demonstrating a compelling need that harms the nation. Are economics alone sufficient to justify PiS's extraordinary measures? The effect of PiS's economic measures diverges from the rhetoric, with the continued attraction of FDI a priority under the Morawiecki premiership. Social insurance contributions of small firms are reduced in favor of "supporting entrepreneurship," a tax structure with

[537] "Statistics of the Catholic Church in Poland, 20.07.2016." *Holy See Press Office*. 20 July 2016. Accessed 30 January 2023. https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/07/20/160720b.html

[538] Milada Anna Vachudova, "From Competition to Polarization in Central Europe: How Populists Change Party Systems and the European Union," *Polity* Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2019): 689–706.

only two thresholds, and the highest share of precarious employees (1/3 of the workforce).[539] Apart from the evident success of Family 500+ (though these benefits are restricted to "traditional" families), PiS restricts the benefits to citizens that fall within PiS's conception of the deserving Polish citizen, i.e. "the homogeneic group of white, Polish, heterosexual, Catholic families, preferably married couples with [a] bigger number of children."[540] This makes PiS's conception of the nation and those worthy of receiving material benefits exclusionary, aimed at defining an in-group and rewarding it.

Conclusion

Next to Hungary, the PiS challenge to the post-1989 order has been the most successful challenge in the Visegrad Four. PiS's success is a combination of its anti-communism, linked with anti-corruption, and its promises to redress the failures of the transition to the market economy. PiS activates these factors through a linkage with religion and traditional values and a threat mentality that these forces are at risk from economic degradation and the influence of transnational forces and non-traditional values. By delegitimizing the left and dominating the right, PiS has placed itself in a hegemonic electoral position, where it has been able to degrade mechanisms of accountability and launch campaigns against its ideological enemies. Under PiS's leadership, Poland has moved in the direction of a new order of social and political relations: a rejection of the post-1989 neoliberal consensus coinciding with a rejection of the post-modern fluidity of values and transnational nature of identity. Poland under PiS is at once revolutionary and regressive, throwing off what the party sees as un-Polish and attempting to freeze human relations and values in an idealized past in which the universal Church reigned supreme within the boundaries of separate and distinct nations. The highly emotional and ideational content of PiS's challenge make it a fascinating case for further analysis of the linkage between programmatic ideas and ideational appeals that are necessary to this study.

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[539] Noemi Lendvai-Bainton and Dorota Szelewa, "Governing New Authoritarianism: Populism, Nationalism and Radical Welfare Reforms in Hungary and Poland," *Social Policy & Administration* Vol. 55, No. 4 (July 2021): 559–572.
[540] *Ibid*, 569.

Czech Republic – Entrepreneurial Populism

"What kind of industry [will it] be… A). Led by foreign investors, foreign patents and subcontractors for foreign firms? B) Or will it be our global firms, our patents and inventions, our activity and energy?...I want B to be the case."
– Andrej Babiš[541]

Background

ANO emerged in 2011 following its founder Andrej Babiš's late-night realization that he was fed up with corruption and would take matters into his own hands to fix Czech politics.[542] Babiš, a Slovak-born businessman and one-time collaborator of the socialist State Security agency[543] is the second-richest person in Czechia, whose company Agrofert owns a variety of subsidiaries from fertilizers to processed meats, and more recently the leading Czech newspapers. The rise of Agrofert was far from clean, with allegations of corruption, inside deals with the ruling Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická* - ČSSD), and outright theft dotting the road as Babiš turned the state enterprise Petrimex into the private sector monolith it is today.[544] In spite of his high economic position and persistent allegations of corruption,[545] Babiš depicted himself as a political outsider whose business acumen qualified him to run an efficient government for the benefit of the people.[546] ANO entered parliament in 2013 in a coalition with ČSSD and the Christian Democratic party (*Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová* - KDU-ČSL), with Babiš serving as finance minister. In 2017, he formed a minority government of loyalists and handpicked technocrats,[547] being joined the following year by ČSSD and the remnant of the communist vanguard party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy* – KSČM), for a governing period lasting until the party's narrow defeat in the October 2021 parliamentary election.

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[541] Andrej Babiš. *O čem sním, když náhodou spím*. Prague: ANO. 2017. 238.
[542] "Par Slov o ANO." *ANObudelip.cz* Accessed 29 June 2022. https://www.anobudelip.cz/cs/o-nas/par-slov-o-ano/
[543] *Státní bezpečnost* (StB) was the secret police and foreign intelligence service of Czechoslovakia until 1989.
[544] E.g. Hanley and Vachudova, "Understanding the Illiberal Turn."
[545] See, for example Lenka Buštíková and Petra Guasti, "The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* Vol. 33, No. 2 (May 2019): 302–330. 317 and Hanley and Vachudova. "Understanding the Illiberal Turn. 287-288.
[546] Babiš. *O čem sním.*
[547] Buštíková and Guasti, "The State as a Firm." 303.

While other Czech parties may be considered challenger parties (e.g. the far-right SPD, the catch-all Přisaha, the nationalist Trikolora, etc.) I limit my analysis to ANO for three reasons. ANO held legislative and executive power, albeit as a relatively short-lived minority government for one electoral cycle, as I indicate as the first among my selection criteria in Chapter One. ANO is an outsider party that arose with the expressed intent of challenging the traditional post-1989 political order. Finally, ANO provided a clear set of policies and goals with justifications for the voters. I exclude President Miloš Zeman, in office from 2013 to 2023, from this analysis due to his primarily symbolic power and limited ability to implement policy preferences. Despite his Russophilic statements and dismissive attitude toward liberal values, the largely ceremonial role of the Czech president ultimately confined his influence to the representative and cultural spheres.

In order to analyze ANO and understand the opportunity structures available to it, it is necessary to determine what kind of party it is. The literature does not offer a consensus of how to define Babiš's movement. Kopeček provides a novel interpretation of ANO as a "business-firm party;" a movement founded and led by a political entrepreneur who organizes the movement on business principles.[548] This definition rests more on ANO's managerial structures than its ideology, with attention drawn to human resources practices and psychological assessments used to assess and recruit staff. ANO's leadership structure is strictly hierarchical, with subordination of underlings to managers expected. The formal decision-making structures in the early years of ANO were often bypassed in favor of semi-formal consultation among members of an inner circle of leading party members and externally hired election gurus.[549] Its centralization renders ANO "merely an instrument of the political entrepreneur" (i.e. Babiš).[550] ANO's campaigns and member recruitment have a similar whiff of the corporate world, with membership applications carefully screened and international public relations firms hired to handle outreach.[551] A critical element of the business-firm party, beyond its managerial techniques, is its flexible ideology.

[548] Lubomír Kopeček, "'I'm Paying, So I Decide': Czech ANO as an Extreme Form of a Business-Firm Party," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* Vol. 30, No. 4 (November 2016): 725–749.
[549] *Ibid*, 735.
[550] *Ibid*, 735.
[551] *Ibid*.

Voters are consumers for whom political entrepreneurs tailor the ideology in order to gain votes. Indeed, the electoral manifesto was subject to change up until election day.[552] We can see this flexibility at work during the 2017 election cycle, as ANO revised its message, deemphasizing technocracy and the role of the entrepreneur and increasing its focus on the hard work of the common people, suggesting a more traditionally populist direction.[553] ANO's programmatic and rhetorical devices are thus a response to popular frustration, manifesting in the removal of the traditional political elite and an end to politics as usual. This definition ties into the technocratic and managerial interpretations of ANO (see below), which highlight performance over content. As a business-firm party, ANO differs from the other Visegrad challenger parties in that it is the product of a single individual, rather than institutionalized party structures.

Further definitions for ANO are worth consideration. Buštíková and Guasti describe ANO's model as one of *technocratic populism*, described as using "the appeal of technical expertise to connect directly with the people, promising to run the state as a firm, while…delegitimizing political opponents and demobilizing the electorate by instilling civic apathy.[554]" Technocratic populism relieves the people of the need to take an active role in government by placing responsibility for change in the hands of experts. It is non-ideological, rejecting corruption on the left and right in favor of expertise and know-how. Buštíková and Guasti trace this form of populism to the communist period, in which the ruling communist party mobilized the people against "the self-proclaimed elite" (dissidents and anti-communist intellectuals), and in Václav Klaus' technocratic populist discourse of markets during the voucher privatization program.[555] In the post-1989 context, "the category of the people as a nation" are seldom invoked, save for Roma anti-discrimination campaigns and the 2015 migration crisis.[556] Ordinary people, in the populist sense, resonates far more than the people as a nation or the people as underdogs due to the egalitarian heritage of socialism, strong economic performance, and low inequality.[557] The shared experience of many Czechs of being politically socialized in this discursive

[552] Kopeček, "'I'm Paying, So I Decide'," 739.
[553]Kim. "Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism." 88.
[554] Buštíková and Guasti, "The State as a Firm."
[555] *Ibid*, 305. Keith Prushankin. "Neoliberalism or Else."
[556] Buštíková and Guasti, "The State as a Firm." 306
[557] *Ibid*.

atmosphere influences voters' identification with Babiš's proposal to inaugurate technocratic rule in the name of the people.[558] This technocratic appeal consists of a mix of performance-based rule and anti-establishment appeals to communicate legitimacy, using its basis in anti-corruption to advance the narrative that political deliberation is pointless, and that it should have free reign to govern as it sees fit. As Buštíková and Guasti argue, "technocratic populism feeds on cynicism among ordinary people and diminishes the optimism inherent in civic engagement.[559]" In this sense, the technocratic populist party can present itself as the solution to voters' discontent, in effect outsourcing the demands and frustrations of political participation from the electorate onto the party.

Hanley and Vachudova identify ANO as an illiberal movement, engaging in democratic backsliding. [560] Contrasting ANO with PiS and Fidesz, they argue that its lack of a compelling narrative of Czech nationalism hampers its schemes of democratic backsliding. [561] However, Hanley and Vachudova do not rule out the fact that the lack of a "grandiose illiberal nationalism[562]" may represent a subtler, but no less effective form of backsliding.[563] A specific ideology for ANO is difficult to identify. In addition to its populist framing, Hanley and Vachudova identify ANO as having a "broadly right-leaning, pro-market" stance on economics, with an ambivalent stance on social and cultural topics (e.g. gender). ANO's dismissal of its political opponents as corrupt, if not criminal, serves as a justification for the depoliticized, technocratic approach to governing that carries, as Hanley and Vachudova argue, "the seeds of authoritarianism.[564]" ANO's rhetoric on immigration is perhaps the most similar rhetoric device to PiS and Fidesz, though as Hanley and Vachudova indicate, anti-immigration views are fairly common in the contemporary

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[558] *Ibid*, 305.
[559] *Ibid*. 319.
[560] Hanley and Vachudova, "Understanding the Illiberal Turn."
[561] *Ibid*, 278.
[562] *Ibid*, 278.
[563] President Zeman, the erstwhile social democratic leader turned president, presented more of an illiberal ideological opposition to the post-1989 order, rhetorically aligning himself with PiS and Fidesz, engaging in fear-based rhetoric surrounding migrants, and prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, promoting increased economic and diplomatic activity with Russia and China. Beyond rhetoric, Zeman's attempted assertion of presidential authority ultimately failed due to the robustness of Czech institutions and the comparatively few powers of the Czech presidency. *Ibid*, 280-281.
[564] *Ibid*, 282.

Czech political discourse.[565] Klimeš argues that ANO simply does not have an ideology, and adapts its program to a perception of what might appeal to voters at a given moment. This pragmatism makes ANO a purely reactive party, interested not in advancing an ideology but in gaining and maintaining power.[566] Kaniok and Havlík highlight the heavy proportion of valance issues compared to positional issues in ANO's programmatic documents.[567] This evokes ANO's image as a non-ideological, pragmatic party that constructs its program as a response to what voters want to hear, aiming for simple power gain rather than ideological promotion. Kaniok and Havlík conclude from their quantitative textual review that ANO is the least populist party in the Czech political spectrum, compared with the mainstream conservative Civic Democratic Party (*Občanska demokratická strana* – ODS) and other competitors.[568] Hanley and Vachudova further differentiate ANO from PiS and Fidesz in the means of their establishment and initial electoral victory. PiS and Fidesz, they argue, already boasted well-established conservative national party structures with rich civil society networks producing ideological coherence (see above).[569] To the contrary, ANO is a rigid, top-down structure with a superficial fig leaf of a grassroots movement, with its real power resting in the strategic cooperation of private sector elites and technocrats with Babiš himself.

Other definitions abound. Bartoszewicz calls Babiš a "celebrity populist;" a type of politician who sees politics not as a vocation or a mission, but as an opportunity.[570] For Císař and Štětka, Babiš's populism is simply *managerial*, relating to Babiš's approach to politics as being conditioned by his private sector experience. Babiš's "real-life experience is associated solely with the allegedly rational functioning of the private sector," and serves as a model of politics in which compromise has no

[565] *Ibid*, 282.
[566] David Klimeš. "Liberál Verhofstadt chce Babiše premiérem a sebe předsedou europarlamentu." Ihned.cz, 8 December 2016. Accessed 30 June 2022. http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/ evropa-slovensko/c1-65549340-liberal-verhofstadt-chce-babise-premierem-a-sebe-predsedou- europarlamentu.
[567] Petr Kaniok and VIastimil Havlik', "Populism and Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic: Meeting Friends or Passing By?," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*. Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2016). 20 – 35.
[568] *Ibid*, 29.
[569] Hanley and Vachudova. "Understanding the Illiberal Turn." 285.
[570] Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz, "Celebrity Populism: A Look at Poland and the Czech Republic," *European Politics and Society* Vol. 20, No. 4 (August 8, 2019): 470–485.

place.[571] Kim calls ANO an *entrepreneur populist* movement because of the party's discursive emphasis on the value of business credentials in managing a country, the efficiency of an entrepreneur relative to politicians, and the honesty of a wealthy businessman who is too rich to steal from the people.[572] Babiš, Kim argues, takes pains to differentiate ANO from the traditional political parties, highlighting his business credentials and even calling it a movement rather than a party to show "that we don't belong to them.[573]" In the entrepreneur populism discourse, hard work plays a defining role in identifying the people and their entrepreneurial leaders. In the interest of coherence, I select a definition for ANO's populism that I judge to be the most empirically accurate of the many definitions in the literature. Based on my analysis of ANO's discourse (see Chapter Four), I adapt Kim's definition through my understanding of the populist rhetoric of Babiš and ANO, which I define as entrepreneurial populism. This definition takes into consideration the largely-overlooked role of the entrepreneur (i.e. the business owner) in Babiš's discourse as a heroic, ideal type figure and features a dichotomous construction of development as a function of the virtuous private sector acting against and in spite of the corrupt, self-serving, and wasteful state and traditional political elites. The discourse prioritizes a hyper efficient, rather than equitable, reorganization of the productive processes of the national economy and upholds the entrepreneur as the ideal-type citizen. With a definition of ANO's populism in hand, we can proceed to examining how ANO fits into the causal framework of successful challenge = demand + activation + opportunity.

Demand

From a demand perspective in the general population, the Czech Republic is an unlikely candidate for the rise and success of a challenger party. The population maintains a high degree of support for the post-1989 political changes and a slightly lower, though still significant level of support for economic changes. The 2009 Pew survey reports no change in support for the democratic opening between 1991 and 2009, and a drop of eight percent in support of the change to capitalism (79 percent in

[571] Ondřej Císař And Václav Štětka, "Czech Republic: The Rise of Populism From the Fringes to the Mainstream," in Toril Aalberg (ed.) *Populist Political Communication in Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 295–308. 297.
[572] Kim. Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism." 84.
[573] *Ibid*, 85.

total).[574] Even in the midst of the GFC, more Czechs (+26 percent for a total of 49 percent) were highly satisfied with life.[575] Next to Poland, Czechia had the lowest share of the population that believed life was better under socialism.[576] Again, next to Poland, Czechia had the lowest number of respondents who did not feel they were living their "best possible life.[577]" 39 percent of Czechs said that in spite of the GFC, they had "made progress.[578]" Citizens felt more optimistic about the future than pessimistic,[579] and a full 80 percent of the population were satisfied with the transition to multiparty democracy; the highest in the Visegrad group except for the former GDR.[580] Likewise, 79 percent of Czechs approved of the transition to a market economy, the highest in the Visegrad Four.[581] However, a large number of Czechs (39 percent) regarded their economic situation as worse than under state socialism.[582]

Czechs ranked economic prosperity and a free judiciary as equally important, and had the highest share in the Visegrad countries of respondents for whom a strong democracy was more important than a strong economy (though more people still placed greater importance on a strong economy.[583] Czechs showed an evident aversion to a strong leader, with only 15 percent compared to 81 percent favoring one over a strong democratic government.[584] Like the rest of their Visegrad neighbors, Czechs held a strongly egalitarian outlook, though the 51 percent who prioritized "nobody in need" over "freedom to pursue life's goals" was the lowest such score in the grouping.[585] Surprisingly, the share of Czechs who felt that "the state [was] run for the benefit of all people" increased between 1991-2009 to 70 percent.[586]

If Czechs are generally satisfied with their political and economic situation, what other reasons could contribute to the rise of a challenger party? Initially, the post-communist Czech government pursued a policy of "neoliberal nationalism," in which

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[574] Pew. "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall."
[575] *Ibid*.
[576] *Ibid*.
[577] *Ibid*, 15.
[578] *Ibid*, 18.
[579] *Ibid*.
[580] *Ibid*.
[581] Ibid
[582] *Ibid*.
[583] *Ibid*.
[584] *Ibid*.
[585] *Ibid*, 28.
[586] *Ibid*, 31.

state property would be sold only to Czech citizens in the voucher privatization scheme.[587] While voucher privatization fulfilled its goal of creating a Czech capitalist class from whole cloth, the sense remained that "the entry of capitalism into Czechia was not an entirely clean game.[588]" Corruption scandals would eventually cause the fall of Klaus's government and its replacement with Social Democrats who quickly opened the Czech economy to foreign investors.[589] The result would seem to encourage economic-based demand for a challenge to the post-1989 order.[590] The value added to the Czech economy by foreign firms is almost twice as high as the EU average (42 percent compared to 22.6 percent). Foreign direct investment accounts for an extremely high percentage of GDP (171.3 billion USD or 67.8 percent in 2019[591]). Similarly, these foreign firms employ a high proportion of private sector employees (27 percent in 2013[592]). The appeal of the DME model for foreign investors is its significant industrial sector based on manufacturing (the so-called 'Fordist' model). The population's high degree of technical skill, inherited from the socialist education and training system that prioritized technical professions, and, following the transition, gave foreign firms an advantage in productive capacity relative to wages (39.6 percent of the EU average[593]). This led to an extremely high share of manufacturing employees relative to other professions (36.8 percent compared to the EU average of 21.9 percent). The Czech economy has the highest participation in global value chains (60 percent in 2017[594]), as inputs and raw materials from multiple countries enter, and are re-exported in their finished or semi-finished state. Much of the production, as in the rest of CEE, has been labor intensive but low value added

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587 Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment." 221.

588 Vítek Svoboda. "Kuponová privatizace. V Česku dodnes bolí rány z rychlé ekonomické transformace." *Český rozhlas*. 23 September 2019. Accessed 11 July 2023. https://wave.rozhlas.cz/kuponova-privatizace-v-cesku-dodnes-boli-rany-z-rychle-ekonomicke-transformace-8078249

589 Šćepanović. "National Interests and Foreign Direct Investment."

590 Martin Myant and Jan Drahokoupil. "Trade Unions in Transformation: An End to Cheap Labour-How a Public Campaign may become a Turning Point for Czech Unions' Strength." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. November, 2017, 3-4.

591 Simona Plavcová, Milan Nejman, and Ludmila Budíková. "Přímé zahraniční investice — 2019: Obecný metodický popis a komentář k vývoji přímých zahraničních investic." Czech National Bank. Available at: https://www.cnb.cz/export/sites/cnb/cs/statistika/platebni_bilance_stat/publikace_pb/pzi/PZI_2019_CZ.pdf

592 OECD (2017), Czech Republic: Trade and Investment Statistical Note.

593 Low pay relative to EU average (e.g. the share of personnel costs relative to total value added in the Czech manufacturing sector is 49.7, compared to Germany's 72.5 and the EU average of 64.3. See Myant and Drahokoupil. "Trade Unions in Transformation."

594 Tereza de Castro and Pavel Hnát. "Czech FDI Performance." In Szent-Iványi. *Foreign Direct Investment in Central and Eastern Europe*." 58.

production such as the assembly of complex electronics, chemicals, and cars. Much of the profits from the final sale of these products go to the country in which the firm is headquartered. These capital outflows (8.7 percent of the Czech GDP) reduce the capacity for domestic reinvestment and individual consumption, thereby stunting both economic growth and growth in the standard of living.[595] FDI repatriation contributed to an average loss of 2.8 percent of CEE countries' aggregate GNI between 2002 and 2012.[596] A class-based explanation for the absence of a more emotive discourse of economic discontent comes from Scheiring: the more domestic-focused privatization process facilitated the building of a stronger domestic capitalist class than in Poland and Hungary. Czech capitalists are therefore less in need of seeking the protection of nationalist populists. As the Czech national bourgeoisie was not pitted against the institutions of dependent capitalism, as in the case of Hungary, there is less drive to fundamentally transform the country's economic structure and enact a new accumulative strategy.[597]

In spite of the structural reasons for basing a populist challenge in economic dissatisfaction, the evidence indicates that it does not play a significant factor in influencing ANO's discourse. During ANO's debut election, voters who perceived the economic situation as good and bad were equally likely to vote for ANO.[598] Indeed, there was no "linkage between support for [Centrist Populist Parties] and groups usually considered to be losers of globalization, i.e. less educated, usually blue collar workers who evaluate the economy or their economic prospects pessimistically.[599]" In light of the generally low levels of dissatisfaction in the population present at the peak of the global financial crisis of 2008, a discourse of economic dissatisfaction would have been unlikely to generate traction with ANO voters. Amid an environment of general systemic contentment, citizens' broad disinterest in political participation

[595] Antonín Slaný and Hana Lipovská. "Economic and Social Policy in the Czech Republic as a Response to Economic Crisis and Growth." In: Astrid Lorenz and Hana Formánková (eds.), *Czech Democracy in Crisis.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 2020. Pp. 205-228. 211.
[596] The loss of Hungarian GNI was higher, at 5.5 percent between 2008-2012. Artner, "Inequalities of Accumulation." 161.
[597] Gábor Scheiring, "Varieties of Dependency, Varieties of Populism: Neoliberalism and the Populist Countermovements in the Visegrád Four," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 73, No. 9 (October 21, 2021): 1569–95. 1588.
[598] Vlastimil Havlík and Petr Voda, "Cleavages, Protest or Voting for Hope?" *Swiss Political Science Review.* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2018). 161-186. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12299.
[599] *Ibid,* 177.

beyond voting contributes to a weakening of the party system,[600] civic engagement primarily taking place in informal and unorganized settings,[601] the potential crystalized either for a vacuum giving way to illiberal populism, or a more resilient civil society whose decentralization enables it to better resist power concentration than traditional parties and organizations. In the case of ANO, it has facilitated the latter. Why did ANO lack the opportunity that PiS and Fidesz enjoyed in affecting state capture?

Opportunity

While factors in the structure of the political system contributed to the opening of a space for ANO to challenge the status quo, similar factors led to its ultimate failure to capture a hegemonic position. The party system in which ANO emerged was highly institutionalized, with a firm and predictable pattern of alternation between the leading parties' time in government. For the first two decades of post-socialism in the Czech Republic, the Czech party system was dominated by four major post-1989 parties: the neoliberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana* – ODS), the social democratic ČSSD, the KSČM, and the Christian Democrats.[602] The most popular parties, ODS and ČSSD, typified center-right and center-left stances and committed themselves to establishing a framework of durable laws that would guarantee the survival of the new regime past the tenure of any one particular government. Challenges to liberalism, when they arose, were extreme and broadly unappealing in the population (i.e. the neo-fascist Republican Party[603] or the ever-present but politically isolated KSČM). A series of scandals throughout the 2000s created a sense of frustration among voters with these parties, along with a discourse of corruption and incompetence that ultimately provided the public demand for alternatives to a disappointing and unchanging political spectrum. Similarly, discontent over the "intentional defrauding" of the Czech people during voucher

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[600] Stanislav Balík and Vít Hloušek. "Permanent Campaigning and Pitfalls of Proportional Representation with Fragile Parties. Elections and Party System in Czechia." In: Astrid Lorenz and Hana Formánková (eds.), *Czech Democracy in Crisis*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan. 2020.
[601] Stephanie Weiss. "Small and Fragmented: Civil Society in the Czech Republic in the Antagonism Between Liberal and State-Centric Ideas." In *Ibid*.
[602] Tim Haughton, Tereza Novotná, and Kevin Deegan-Krause, "The 2010 Czech and Slovak Parliamentary Elections: Red Cards to the 'Winners,'" *West European Politics* 34, no. 2 (March 2011): 394–402, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.546584.; "Havlík and Voda, "Cleavages, Protest or Voting for Hope?"
[603] Andrew T. Green and Carol Skalnik Leff, "The Quality of Democracy Mass-Elite Linkages in the Czech Republic" (1997). UMSL Global. Vol. 84. Available at: https://irl.umsl.edu/cis/84

privatization caused voters to punish the traditional parties by turning to alternatives.[604] Amid this "implosion of the left-right cleavage[605]" ANO quickly moved to target what it called the "traditional parties," namely ODS, which it blamed for creating a mafia order that stole from the people. Andrej Babiš's elite-led challenge would emerge against the ODS-ČSSD regime, though Babiš himself carried enough baggage as a major benefactor of privatization and a former member of the communist *aparat* and secret police informant to thwart the universal appeal of his anti-system challenger. It is not entirely surprising that Babiš would use a challenge based in entrepreneurial language considering that the party system retained a strongly economic cleavage. ANO would thus launch a program calling for the streamlining of the state through the application of private sector management tactics to the public sector as a means of fighting the oligarchy.

It was not surprising that a challenger party would recognize and exploit a newly opened space in the political spectrum. In fact, an earlier challenger laid much of the political groundwork for the rise of ANO. The Public Affairs (*Věci veřejné* - VV) party placed itself as a movement of the "left behind" people opposed to the rule of the post-1989 "political dinosaurs.[606]" VV drew a distinction between the post-socialist political generation and the need for a new generation of politicians in touch with the lives and concerns of the people, but was careful to distinguish that they were not opposed to the "dinosaurs" as individuals, but to their continued political rule and to the rule of the "godfathers" running politics behind the scenes.[607] VV even went as far as to question the continued relevance of the left-right cleavage, with party member (and later leader) Vít Bárta arguing that the left-right distinction no longer made sense, harmed society, and was better replaced with a centrist "ideology of correct solutions.[608]" The original left-right party system finally (albeit temporarily) collapsed with the emergence and rise of ANO and its ascension to power in 2017.[609] ANO embodied this "ideology of correct solutions" in its purportedly non-ideological, technocratic governing approach.

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[604] Buštíková and Guasti, "The State as a Firm." 312.
[605] *Ibid*.
[606] Kim. "Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism." 77.
[607] *Ibid*, 78, 80.
[608] *Ibid*, 79.
[609] Hanley and Vachudova. "Understanding the Illiberal Turn."

In spite of this flexible and at least partially successful means of entering power, ANO lacked the structural opportunity to enact much of its program once in power. The reasons for this are varied, from systemic to institutional explanations. A fragmented opposition plays a significant role in enabling a challenger party to gain the opportunity to enact their agendas. ANO, like SMER-SD, lacked this opportunity in a way from which PiS and Fidesz benefited.[610] Unlike Fidesz and PiS, ANO did not benefit from a hegemonized right and a discredited and absent left. On the contrary, ANO's character as a centrist,[611] technocratic, and entrepreneurial party placed it beyond the range of the Czech right, with its largely liberal-democratic character. ANO did not seek to coopt these parties, but rather spent a great deal of effort differentiating itself from the traditional right parties (see Chapter Four). This move was perhaps too successful, as a significant source of opposition to ANO came from its alleged violations of the liberal-democratic values held by many Czech citizens after 1989. The scandals surrounding Babiš's business affairs undercut his anti-corruption appeal, while his more radical plans such as eliminating the Senate and regional governorships enabled the center-right opposition to deploy a discourse promising a return to normalcy and stability in Czech politics. The Czech left was similarly an impediment, but in a practical sense. ANO's use of ČSSD and KSČM as coalition partners prevented it from using the contemporary left as a scapegoat for the country's problems. Similarly, the country's strict lustration laws which banned former communist party and state security officials from holding sensitive or influential positions in the post-1989 regime, made communists permanent outsiders. Contrasting the conciliatory model of Poland and Hungary with their lighter lustration laws, the severity of Czech lustration left little space for communists to actually or theoretically take advantage of the system at the expense of the people.[612] Communists appear in the discourse as the reason for the country's backwardness vis a vis foreign comparators (see Chapter Four), but the politically useful discourse of the communists' lingering influence on the post-1989 order, seen in the Polish and Hungarian parties, is absent. By preventing the party from creating an enemy posing an acute threat against which to mobilize, ANO's inability to neutralize its political

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610 Bakke and Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles*." 32.
611 This is not to say moderate, rather that ANO shuns left and right as ideologies.
612 Bílková. "Lustration: the Experience of Czechoslovakia/ The Czech Republic."

opponents as communist holdovers contributed to its weakness in government and its eventual demise.

A fragmented opposition on both the left and right sides of the political spectrum plays a significant role in enabling a challenger party to gain the opportunity to enact their agendas. ANO, like SMER-SD, lacked this opportunity in a way from which PiS and Fidesz benefited.[613] In spite of its disadvantageous position in the party system, ANO contested and narrowly lost the 2021 election, winning the largest vote share of any single party (being defeated by a coalition of parties pooling their votes). Its popularity remains strong in the population, and whether it is able to reformulate its strategy for approaching a strongly institutionalized and resilient party system remains to be seen. The cleavages ANO exploited were far less salient than those found in the Hungarian and Polish contexts. Prior to ANO's rise, the party system centered upon the economic cleavage: "social protectionists vs. market liberals" with the communist vs. post-communist cleavage effectively isolating the KSČM.[614] Much like ODS and VV, ANO deployed an entrepreneurial initiative discourse, substituting neoliberalism with managerial or technocratic governance.[615] In this paradigm, left and right lost their meaning as efficiency became the party's watchword, and whoever was willing to cooperate with ANO's model became a potential ally. In this way, traditional conceptions of left and right, with their basis in economic policy or socio-cultural values gives way to a simplified cleavage that efficiency is moral and of the people, and the corrupt inefficiency of the traditional parties is amoral and not of the people. This cleavage is less pronounced than the traditional left-right cleavage that has existed since the 1990s, due in large part to the ethnic, religious, and national homogeneity of the country.[616] While at least in its own paradigm, ANO is divorced from the traditional left-right scale, there is discursive and ideological continuity from

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613 Bakke and Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles*." 32.
614 Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited." 25.
615 Kim. "Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism." 85.
616 Lukáš Hájek, "Dimensions of Politics in the Czech Republic," *Politologický Časopis - Czech Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (2018): 131–51, https://doi.org/10.5817/PC2018-2-131. 146; Petr Účen, cited in Sean Hanley. "Czech Elections: How a Billionaire Populist Upstaged Established Parties." *E-International Relations*. 9 November 2013. Accessed 15 November 2021. https://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/09/czech-elections-how-a-billionaire-populist-upstaged-established-parties/

Klaus' ODS to Babiš's ANO.[617] The discourse centers on business efficiency and support for markets, and while the ideology of the former is strongly neoliberal, the ideological framing of the latter is significantly emptier. In this paradigm of continuity, Babiš's "entrepreneurial populism" and "state as a firm" language strongly echoes Klaus's "neo-liberal discourse of entrepreneurial initiative" and "cheap state" discourse.[618]

The anti-communism cleavage in Czech politics lacks the same salience that it possesses in other political contexts. The KSČM is effectively contained as a political pariah, and because it retained coherence as a party following the end of its monopoly rule, the movement of former communists into the mainstream and the lustration laws contained their continued influence. Because of these factors, ANO does not claim to challenge post-communism in the sense that Fidesz and PiS do. Rather, Babiš's goal centers upon creating a "State that Works," i.e. improving the efficiency of the Czech state to serve the Czech people.[619] In this sense, ANO reinforces the salience of the anti-corruption cleavage, which it uses to draw a comparison between itself as the anti-corruption party and its opposition, as parties responsible for, or at least complacent with, the corruption.

Why did ANO not attempt to capitalize on the economic cleavage to feed its populism? Other parties in the Czech political spectrum do obliquely address economic discontent. The far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie* – SPD) party program, for example, contains rhetoric that is weakly reminiscent of PiS rhetoric on economics, but in a watered-down form, though this is a tertiary concern compared to the party's primary rhetoric opposing Muslim refugee resettlement and the EU.[620] SPD has so far failed to force any new cleavages in the party system beyond the traditional post-1989 left-right cleavage due to resilient institutional patterns.[621] The KSČM uses rhetoric about general economic inequality, including the unequal relationship between Western European countries and the

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617 Seongcheol Kim, "Between Illiberalism and Hyper-Neoliberalism: Competing Populist Discourses in the Czech Republic," *European Politics and Society* 21, no. 5 (October 19, 2020): 618–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1709368.
618 *Ibid*, 630.
619 Babiš, *O čem sním*.
620 "Politický program SPD." *SPD.cz*. https://www.spd.cz/program-vypis/
621 Hájek, "Dimensions of Politics in the Czech Republic." 146.

transition countries, language about foreign ownership of domestic productive means, and the theft and corruption of the transition.[622] This implies that the economic discourse in Czech politics is more of an ideational left issue, complying with the notion of an unbroken left-right cleavage since 1989.[623] ANO's use of the anti-corruption cleavage provided it with broad support, but ultimately left it without a durable and believable worldview with which to affect the continuous mobilization the electorate. Combined with its failures in maneuvering within the highly institutionalized party system, these factors undermined its ability to carry out a successful challenge.

Returning to the Kaminski and Kurczewska's typology of post-communist elites, Czechia's post-communist ruling classes exemplified the liberal-capitalists committed to a new order in line with the prevailing Western model. In general, Czechia's post-communist ruling class was committed to liberalism; wishes broadly aligned with the strong civil society and civic-mindedness of large segments of the population.
As ANO's leading figure, Andrej Babiš represents a combination of Kaminski and Kurczewska's elite types. Babiš is a charismatic elite because of his rejection of the traditional order and his embrace of a personalistic relationship with the people (see Chapter 4). His bureaucratic elitism is evident from his managerial approach to government and his technocratic impulses to make the state efficient and develop top-down solutions to improve the lives of the Czech people. He is also interactionalist, having laterally entered government from the private sector, and viewing society as an interaction between citizens and entrepreneurs. That Babiš occupies three of the four post-communist elite types suggests that these types are far more overlapping than Kaminski and Kurczewska initially believed. The overlap may also suggest that these categories are far more instrumental than they are fixed stars of elite behavior. Elites will, it appears, adopt these alignments when they are suitable for a given political situation.

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[622] For comparison, this rhetoric is found in both electoral material for European-level elections, and for national parliamentary elections. "Volební program KSČM k volbám do EP v roce 2019." *KSCM.cz* https://www.kscm.cz/sites/default/files/soubory/uzivatele/martin.kalous/upload/obrazky/volebni_program_kscm_pro_volby_do_ep_2019.doc; Volební program do PS PČR (2017 - 2021) *KSCM.cz*. https://www.kscm.cz/sites/default/files/soubory/uzivatele/martin.kalous/upload/obrazky/volebni_program_kscm_pro_volby_do_ep_2019.doc
[623] Hájek, "Dimensions of Politics in the Czech Republic."

Activation

ANO justified its challenge primarily through anti-corruption rhetoric and a technocratic discourse of expertise (a non-ideational, credentials-based justification). ANO's initial challenge had a low level of ideational tension, though this rose during the 2021 election in an attempt, not unlike that of Fico, to ratchet up the stakes for voters, though this rhetorical strategy was similarly unsuccessful. Throughout its rise and governing period, ANO relied on an anti-corruption discourse to activate latent discontent in the population. Babiš's plans to streamline government by eliminating regional representations and the Senate were based not on calls to break from post-communism, but to break from the corrupt "mafia state" and make the government more efficient; part of his plan to run the government like a business.[624] As opposed to the other Visegrad challenger parties, ANO largely avoids language evoking threats to nationalist, ethnic, and religious values as a justification for its program. The explanation for the absence of religious language is obvious, as Czechia has the highest number of atheists and religiously unaffiliated people in Europe (25 percent and 72 percent, respectively).[625] The absence of nationalism may simply be a product of ANO's use of a technocratic discourse, choosing to eschew a rally-round-the-flag discourse in order to emphasize its technical competence and entrepreneurial spirit.[626] Alternatively, practical and logistical reasons may hamper the development of a nationalist discourse, in part because it lacks the network of academics and think tanks that contribute to the ideological production of PiS and Fidesz, relying instead on changes in public opinion to package and deploy messaging that its corporate public relations machine adapts depending on the public mood.[627] As Vachudova notes, nationalism "has never had much traction in Czech politics.[628]" Czechs are indeed among those Europeans with the least national pride. This is strongly influenced by perceptions of the Czech nation-state's problems with corruption, theft,

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[624] The term "mafia state" is used throughout Babiš's writing and speeches. Babiš, *O čem sním*.
[625] Jonathan Evans. "Unlike their Central and Eastern European neighbors, most Czechs don't believe in God." 19 June 2017. Accessed 25 August 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/19/unlike-their-central-and-eastern-european-neighbors-most-czechs-dont-believe-in-god/
[626] Hanley and Vachudová. "Understanding the Illiberal Turn." 289.
[627] I owe thanks to Daniel Šitera of the Czech Institute for International Relations for this insight.
[628] Vachudova, "Ethnopopulism and Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe." 320.

and fraud, among other "social pathologies.[629]" A number of scholars relate national pride to government performance and effectiveness,[630] and indeed high levels of the Czech population report low confidence in their government, and low satisfaction with both the development of Czech democracy.[631] Further questions still unanswered in the literature relate to the effect of Austrian, Nazi, and Soviet domination on national sentiment.[632] Overall, as we shall see in the next chapter, ANO offers a construction of Czech identity reminiscent of Klaus's neoliberal populism, constructing the virtuous Czechs as industrious and self-sufficient people inclined to a natural condition of entrepreneurship.[633] This image of Czechs avoids nationalistic depictions of Czechia as a great nation and quasi-militaristic appeals to struggle for the country, as we see in Poland and Hungary. A general sense of frustration with, for example dependent capitalism that comes up in the discourses of Fidesz and PiS is largely absent, except for a few oblique references that appear in connection to ANO's entrepreneurial populism dichotomizes Czech society between the hardworking, entrepreneurial people and the corrupt traditional political class. As ANO approached the 2021 election, the dichotomy expanded to include migrants among the out-group. With its defeat and removal from office, ANO left power without having accomplished its agenda, returning the country into the hands of the same traditional parties against which it originally oriented itself.

Summary

While Fidesz and PiS have called for structural and constitutional changes to break their political systems from the post-socialist past, Czechia has yet to see such a call to action. A series of scandals in the late 2000s, leading to resignations and the rapid rise and fall of parties caused Czech politics to gain the appearance of having lost touch with the people. Babiš was able to exploit this gap in public trust by presenting his movement as something from beyond the realm of the traditional political system. It is primarily the exploitation of this cleavage, traditional/corrupt parties versus new parties, that enabled ANO to break so successfully into national politics and within a short time gain power, albeit as a minority government. ANO took advantage of

[629] Klára Vlachová, "'This Country Is Not for Anyone': Explanations of Low National Pride in the Czech Republic," *Nationalities Papers* Vol. 47, No. 6 (November 2019): 1000–1012, https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.22. 1001.
[630] See *Ibid*, 1004, for a summary.
[631] *Ibid*.
[632] *Ibid*.
[633] Prushankin. "Neoliberalism or Else."

frustration with a series of political scandals to gain its initial entry into power. ANO was initially successful because it took advantage of a momentary disruption of the party system, which has since corrected itself with the reassertion of the center-right coalition as the ruling bloc. This may perhaps prove to be an overcorrection as both the moderate and radical left (ČSSD and KSČM, respectively) have been pushed out of parliament, their association with ANO harming their electoral appeal. The future of the Czech left is deeply uncertain. After making a run for the presidency in 2023, Babiš suffered defeat at the hands of the anti-populist and staunchly liberal Petr Pavel with a margin of nearly 17 percent.[634] ANO now competes against the center-right SPOLU coalition and several right-nationalist parties that have capitalized on discontent with the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising prices as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It remains to be seen what kind of systemic challenge, if any, will emerge from this new contestation.

The Challenges Compared

This chapter has asked how the Visegrad challenger parties differ from one another in the theoretical model of successful challenge = discontent + opportunity + activation. Using the framework devised in Chapters 1 and 2, I have analyzed the sources of discontent in each of the case study countries, the political-structural opportunities that helped or hindered the parties in obtaining political power, and the parties' strategies for activating ideational anxiety to build support. These analyses account for the diversity of challenges across the four countries and the ways in which challenger parties justify their programs. In general, Fidesz and PiS exhibit the formulaic approach of a successful challenge = demand + opportunity + activation by demonstrating the utility of economic discontent and political dissatisfaction; the need for a favorable structural opportunity, namely a weak and co-optable right and a discredited and scandal-ridden left; and the use of ideational tension to justify its programs, in these cases in the form of traditional values and anti-communism. These factors are not present in the ANO or SMER-SD challenges, which rely on a technocratic and anti-corruption discourse, suggesting that identity activates voters more effectively than a discourse of efficiency and performance. We will look deeper into how the parties activate voters further in the following chapter.

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[634] Michaela Rambousková. "Prezedentské volby 2023." *Seznam.cz*. Accessed 2 February 2023. https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/sekce/volby-prezidentske-244

The Limited Utility of Discontent

Discontent over where the country is relative to expectations is an indirect influence for challenger parties to gain a foothold in the national political space. The perception that post-communist governments were corrupt, that economic security was more important than a functioning democracy, and that only elites benefited from the regime change created a sense of detachment among the citizens to the post-1989 political order. This in turn opens an electoral space for parties attempting to oppose and replace that order to gain widespread electoral support. However, there is no direct relationship between higher levels of discontent and the success of a challenge. Poland experienced fairly high levels of support for post-1989 political and economic changes, but nevertheless has experienced one of the strongest systemic challenges in the region. Czechia, also with high levels of support for the post-1989 order, resisted its challenge amid a strong showing of democratic support. Likewise, Hungary demonstrated low levels of support for democracy, while Slovakia showed high levels thereof. Likewise, relative deprivation, in the form of unfavorable comparisons to other countries and expectations, is largely absent at the demand level (i.e. the individual), while appearing only in Babiš's discourse criticizing the Czech government in comparison to other countries (see the following chapter). Nostalgic deprivation, however, is far stronger, as many people across the Visegrad countries express a sense that their lives were, in some ways, better during the socialist period. It appears that discontent is only part of the puzzle and is far from sufficient to explain the success or failure of challenges. Similarly, ascribing the rise of political challenges to the post-1989 order to cultural anxiety alone misses the material factors that influence cultural anxiety, while focusing too heavily on the cultural factors ignores the economic conditions that cause individuals to more closely guard 'what is theirs' against outsiders. However, based upon electoral performance and the ideational content of challenger parties in the Visegrad 4, a pattern emerges that the parties that successfully utilize identity-based appeals, combined with economic redistribution (PiS and Fidesz) are generally more successful than those that do not (ANO and SMER-SD). How much does economic dissatisfaction actually influence challenger parties? Do voters vote more based on their rational economic needs or broader ideas about the national interest? An interesting comparison can be made between countries that embraced the role of a strong leader and those that preferred a democratic government. In 2009, 81 percent of Czechs and 81 percent of Slovaks responded to

the latter, while 35 percent of Poles and 49 percent of Hungarians voiced a preference for a strong leader.[635] While I do not have explicit data to explore this further (such would require tailor-made public opinion surveys beyond the scope of this work), there is a likely overlap between those who support a strong leader and those who embrace populist parties. Indeed, populist literature speaks to the affinity in populism for a strong leader.[636] The association is obvious as we consider that the two challenges that failed did so amongst a backdrop of strikingly high public support for democratic governance and a rejection of the strong leader, while in the countries in which the challenges have succeeded, preference for a strong leader was more substantial. Additionally, a far higher share of Hungarians (35 percent) disapproved of the transition to multiparty democracy than in Slovakia (23 percent), Poland (16 percent), and Czechia (16 percent).[637] The willingness to accept a hegemonized electoral system surrounding a dominant party in Hungary is obvious, though this is not sufficiently explanatory considering Poland's relatively low score on this metric. The comparison is enhanced when considering support for multiparty democracy in general, with Hungary again being an outlier (56 percent approving, down from 74 percent in 1991) and the remaining countries either unchanging (Czech Republic, 80 percent) or increasing (Slovakia from 70 to 71 percent, Poland from 66 to 70 percent).[638] The split in these examples is perhaps predictable, with overall younger, more educated, and urban individuals supporting the multiparty system.[639] Because Hungary scores consistently low in support for multiparty democracy and high in support of a strong leader and the prioritization of economic factors over governance factors, it should come as no surprise that Hungary experienced a successful challenge resulting in the consolidation of power surrounding a single hegemonic party and its strongman leader.

Visegrad public opinion shows a further division in terms of social solidarity when it comes into conflict with individual freedom. A far lower share of Czechs and Slovaks

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[635] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall." 26.
[636] E.g. Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities," *Studies In Comparative International Development* Vol. 31, No. 3 (September 1996): 3–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02738987; Kurt Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Comparative Politics* Vol. 34, no. 1 (October 2001): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/422412.
[637] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall." 29.
[638] *Ibid*.
[639] *Ibid*, 30.

(51 and 59 percent, respectively), expressed a preference for "nobody in need" over "freedom to pursue life's goals" than did Hungarians and Poles (67 and 71 percent).[640] This is especially striking when we consider PiS's heavy emphasis on social support mechanisms and its construction of dependent capitalism as harmful to the nation, versus for example, ANO's discourse of entrepreneurial efficiency and the role of the entrepreneur as a builder of society. Free enterprise is a far less powerful motivator upon which to build the foundations for collective action than the safety of values common to millions. This is because the nature of individual market behavior is compartmentalizing and atomizing, breaking down satisfaction to that which affects the individual and their immediate family, while the concerns of the broader society fade in importance. Conversely, building collective action on solidaristic notions such as support for *all* young families or bringing industry home to benefit the *nation* gains the utility of mass, broad scale solutions while avoiding the individualized goals necessary when considering the freedom of each individual to pursue their satisfaction in the blissful oblivion of its effects on others in the larger society. Therefore, popular perceptions of the national interest matter far more than individual economic circumstances. Recall our discussion in Chapter 2, that citizens essentially vote based on the national interest and not individual perceptions of gain or loss resulting from particular policies. It is clear from the success of party rhetoric in countries with higher (Poland) and lower (Hungary) economic and political satisfaction, as well as the failure of party rhetoric in countries with higher (Czechia) and lower (Slovakia) satisfaction, that there is no direct correlation between economic and political satisfaction and the success or failure of a challenge. The challenge's success therefore rests more on existing political cleavages and a party's ability to exploit them, the party's construction of the national interest as a function of ideational tension, and the presence of threats against the party's favored identities. The challenger parties do not directly frame their challenges as responses to unequal or unfavorable economic conditions, and when they do utilize these themes, they do so to support a broader discourse of improving the country and eliminating the problems of the communist and post-communist corruption. Overall, the four challenger parties demonstrate varying degrees of public discontent that can feed into a demand for systemic changes, though the intensity of the public discontent at the outset of the

[640] "Two Decades After the Wall's Fall." 28.

challenge period (2009-present) appeared the strongest in the countries that ended up producing the most successful challenges. Slovakia remains an outlier, having produced an early authoritarian populist party that left a mark on the country's political culture and the menu of palatable political alternatives.

In general, discontent over economic factors is not a strong direct influencer on the challenges. Ideological cleavages generate stronger and more successful challenges than purely economic cleavages, and that a political cleavage with a strong element of ideation will be more successful than those without. This would help explain ANO's unique and (as yet) unsuccessful challenge and the reasons for its inability to establish an electoral hegemony, in spite of a relatively salient political cleavage (anti-corruption). As a primarily economic party, largely unconcerned with identity politics, ANO failed to bring together the cleavages in Czech politics to garner sufficient support to obtain a hegemonic position. Contrary to the ANO example, Fidesz and PiS were able to combine economic and political cleavages with emotional appeals to identity-based cleavages in order to capitalize on a sense of threat that in turn impelled the electorate to act in their support. Because of the variation in actual discontent across successful and unsuccessful challenges, public discontent appears to aid, but not determine the initial conditions for a challenge. A skillful political entrepreneur can mobilize existing discontent when it exists, but can also create the appearance of discontent through the strategic mobilization of identity grievances, a romanticized past, and the assignment of blame. ANO, PiS, and Fidesz each have an idealized past, as does the American Republican Party and U.K. Independence Party. What each of these visions has in common its their ability to create a compelling discourse of discontent based on the idea that things were better at some point in the past. This enables the party to assign blame and propose solutions. Actual discontent is, therefore, not as important for a challenger party as its ability to present discontent. The challenger parties are storytellers, crafting a narrative that seems convincing in the hopes that enough of the electorate buys into their version of history.

The Importance of Opportunity

A favorable opportunity structure is essential to the success of a challenge. Fidesz and PiS enjoyed incredible advantages in terms of the party system and cleavages, enabling them to gain control of parliament and pass a series of legal and

constitutional reforms to cement their control. By activating highly salient cleavages in the political discourse, the successful parties justified these measures as necessary in order to thwart the leftover communist influences in their political societies following the transition to liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism in 1989. Indeed, the roundtable agreements that led to the continuation of the reformed communists in the post-communist political system enable the modern right parties to condemn the entire post-1989 order as corrupt and an outgrowth of the continued communist domination of their societies. This is problematic for the stability of the regime because it enables the entire foundation of the post 1989 order to be questioned. If the communists' remaining in power or at least with access to power after the end of one-party rule enabled the continuing corruption and access to resources and political control of the communist *apparatchiki*, then did communist rule ever actually end? It is not a stretch to condemn the entire system as corrupt and unworkable, and from there, to demand systemic change.

Though there was a clear difference in the level of institutionalization in Hungary and Poland, both Fidesz and PiS hegemonized the right and delegitimized the left. Fidesz took advantage of a weak right to develop itself at the center of a hegemonic right arrayed against a discredited and ideologically outcast left. PiS similarly took an opportunity to cast itself as an alternative to a delegitimized left, indeed the reformation of the communist vanguard party, while positioning itself as the hegemonic center of the political right. While it is perhaps logical to assume, it is nevertheless important to recognize that competition restricts a party’s ability to implement its electoral program. ANO’s program constituted a series of sweeping changes to the Czech bureaucratic landscape, but as it faced strong systemic opposition from the liberal-right party grouping and the far-right SPD, the implementation of its reforms remained out of reach. The role of the communists and post-communist successor parties is critical in determining the character and opportunity structure of a challenge. Communist parties that integrated into the system as reform-leftist parties initially created healthy competition and “formed the core of a robust competition both by anchoring the moderate left end of the political

spectrum…[and forced] other parties to respond.[641]" However, as this chapter shows, the role of the reformed communist parties also provided a rhetorical and structural opportunity for challenger parties to depict the system as unreformed, and still beset by the pre-1989 corruption, giving them a stronger appeal to fundamentally alter the system. The unreformed KSČM was severely isolated as a pariah party in the Czech system.[642] Combined with harsh lustration laws banning former ruling party *aparatnici* from holding political and bureaucratic offices,[643] this had the dual effect of leaving the KSČM open as a possible wild card, of which Babiš took advantage in building his minority coalition, and removing the possibility of casting communists as still casting a corrupting influence in the system. This opportunity structure appears critical in determining the success or failure of a particular challenge. ANO did not succeed because the Czech mainstream right was strongly consolidated and in spite of various scandals, retained strong parliamentary representation. The parties such as ODS and TOP 09, among others, banded together to form a coalition to defeat Babiš in the 2021 election, suggesting a system that has the institutional resilience to self-correct and eliminate rogue or altogether harmful elements from itself. From this perspective, the Czech system appears quite robust. In contrast with the Polish and Hungarian cases, ANO coopted the left rather than the right, governing in a coalition with both the communists and social democrats, which in spite of their evident ideological incompatibility, agreed to share power for strategic reasons. In fact, in cooperating with ANO, both parties were punished by the electorate, losing parliamentary representation in 2021 by dropping below the five percent electoral threshold.

Without opportunities in the party structure that enabled co-option or marginalization of opponents and a strong threat discourse over what will happen if the challenger party is not elected, the challenge will not succeed. This process is informed by Slovakia, which saw SMER-SD unable to successfully transition from the immediate, short-term electoral gains of an anti-corruption appeal to a more longer lasting nationalist, values-based appeal. Fico was ultimately defeated by the sheer volume of

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[641] Anna Grzymala-Busse, "Authoritarian Determinants of Democratic Party Competition: The Communist Successor Parties in East Central Europe," *Party Politics*. Vol. 12, No. 3 (May 2006): 415–37, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068806063089. 417.
[642] Haughton, "Exit, Choice and Legacy."
[643] Bílková. "Lustration: the Experience of Czechoslovakia/ The Czech Republic."

anti-corruption sentiment and a strong backlash generated by the highly publicized and emotional murders of Jan Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová; in a sense, the very corruption he was elected to prevent. This suggests that these examples of people power, i.e. political change forced by the broad masses, is possible under circumstances of outrage over relatively small events.[644] Similarly, SMER-SD is a center-left nationalist party that arose out of the milieu surrounding the Slovak wing of the KSČ, and was thus unable to use the anti-communist cleavage to justify its program. Nor was the party able to fully co-opt the right, as the far-right Kotleba movement was able to out-perform SMER-SD in fear mongering over migrants.[645] How this develops remains to be seen pending Slovakia's fall 2023 parliamentary elections.

In sum, specific combinations of rhetoric and opportunity structures lead to successful challenges, i.e. a party's ability to enter and maintain an electoral majority with sufficient power to enact its agenda. Cleavages over communism and post-communism, nationalism and multinationalism, and traditional and progressive values dominate the Polish and Hungarian challenges: all aspects that play on ideational threats and evoke anxiety over secure identities in the population. The institutionalization of the party system is les important than a party's ability to hegemonize its ideological position and delegitimize that of its adversaries. This is most effectively undertaken through the strategic use of highly salient cleavages that draw attention to the failures and flaws of the opposition by linking them with painful historical experiences. Communism and a post-communist party are not necessary for this to occur: a party mobilizing memories of a discredited past regime outside the post-communist context could link them to current opposition politicians. Such a move would require a political entrepreneur with sufficient rhetorical skill and ideological conviction, possibly backed by a sufficiently productive and coherent discourse coalition, to achieve this goal.

[644] E.g. the Romanian authorities' eviction of the dissident pastor László Tőkés that triggered mass demonstrations leading to the 1989 Romanian Revolution or the Iranian police's murder of Mahsa Amini that triggered widespread demonstrations in 2022.
[645] Bakke and Sitter, "The EU's *Enfants Terribles*."

The Essentiality of Ideology

Both Fidesz and PiS utilize nationalism (ethnic-national and Catholic, respectively) as the driving ideational force behind their challenges to the post-1989 order. Using identity to justify economic and political factors in the challenge strengthens the economic and political basis to the challenge, as we can see in the example of PiS and to a slightly lesser extent Fidesz. Identity factors, especially when conceived to be under threat, appear to make policy choices such as redistribution, renationalization, and political control over judicial and media machinery into struggles for the survival of the nation. Ideational cleavages are more successful than purely economic challenges and structural cleavages; a challenge will be more successful if it adds an ideational element to political-structural expediency or economic discontent. While a compelling argument appears in the literature that economic satisfaction is the primary determinate of support for Fidesz, more so than cultural factors,[646] this explains voter support, but not top-down voter mobilization and tends to minimize the role of status anxiety as a co-determinate of illiberalism, along with economic anxiety. Indeed, the argument assumes that voters should rationally penalize parties for enacting illiberal policies. Such a normative approach overlooks the role of identity anxieties, which the party can activate or enflame through populist rhetorical constructions dichotomizing the people against a threatening other. In short, illiberal outcomes may be desirable to voters, or at least tolerable, if they address identity anxieties. The average supporters of both PiS and Fidesz are initially motivated by social inequality under previous governments, generally embrace religion, and oppose homosexuality.[647] Supporters often live in rural districts and have a history of experiencing low political efficacy. Key differences emerge in the commitment to tradition, being higher among PiS supporters than among Fidesz supporters. A similar gap exists between PiS's generally lower income and Fidesz's higher income.[648] By combining "neo-leftist" redistributive measures[649] with ideational rhetoric, the parties are able to inspire support based on the promise of fulfilling the economic needs of their voters and maintaining ideational concepts that bind the people to the party's conception of the nation.

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[646] Scoggins, "Identity Politics or Economics?"
[647] Roose and Karolewski. "The National Conservative Parties in Poland and Hungary."
[648] *Ibid*.
[649] *Ibid*, 125.

Turning to the unsuccessful challenges, ANO failed to mix those promises of renewed economic and entrepreneurial greatness with a threat mentality activated around cherished and revered identities like nationalism and religion. The threat mentality produced by the ideational rhetoric of the Fidesz and PiS discourses is key here. By linking economic and political renewal with the possibility of harm or destruction of the nation and those key areas of identity that constitute it, the parties were able to inspire people with negative emotions to go to vote. This shows that a successful discourse is one that links calls to action with threats over inaction, i.e. failure to support X program will result in Y value being compromised or harmed by Z outside force. Unsuccessful challenges, for a variety of reasons, lack either a compelling rhetorical construction incorporating ideational tensions, an appropriate political opportunity structure, or both. Neither SMER-SD nor ANO conjure the sense of a nation under siege, of threatened national values, or a threatened people. The Czech discourse centers upon corruption and the need for entrepreneurial efficiency, while the Slovak discourse stressed anti-corruption and social welfare, albeit with a slipshod rendering of identity concerns. Neither of these discourses succeeded in evoking existential anxiety over secure identities. ANO maintained a framing of economic development in a positive light from its emergence into its first governing term, eschewing threat language suggesting that a failure to upgrade the economy would result in the destruction of the nation or irreparable compromise of the fundamental cores of Czech identity. Avoiding significant discussion of Czechia's economic situation, its discourse heavily featured themes of renewing First Republic-era greatness by investing in and supporting domestic entrepreneurs. This argument is similar to those advanced by PiS, though it lacks any of the threat mentality and veneration of a great nation or historically binding faith around which to rally the people. The absence of these elements undercuts the appeal of the party's rhetoric, depriving it of a compelling sense of destiny and making it compete along the same lines as the traditional parliamentary parties.

Identity is critical to activating the threat mentality and impelling the electorate to support the challenger party's program. Linking actual material anxieties to broad themes of a nation under threat and the erosion of values provides a compelling discourse that allows the challenger party to brand its opponents and detractors as traitors, anti-nation, and in collusion with malign foreign influences. Beyond the post-

communist states, the same linkages appear, for example, as the American Republican Party attempts to rebrand itself as a working-class party defending traditional American values against an assortment of left wing threats.[650] Similarly, Greece's Syriza linked its opposition to the EU's bailout conditions with moral language depicting them as victimizing the Greek people. Party leader Alexis Tsipras presented austerity as a "moral choice," juxtaposing economic and social ruin with Syriza's values of "solidarity, justice, democracy, rule of law, equality, meritocracy, dignity, [and] transparency.[651]" These examples demonstrate that the ability to construct a coherent identity and demonstrate that it is under threat is a fundamental ingredient in populist challenges; an ingredient key to the success of the challenge. In addition, the Syriza example show that the linkage of material and ideational anxiety is not restricted just to the political right. This linkage, like populist rhetoric in general, is a tool available to politicians from across the ideological spectrum to adapt to their particular goals and situation.

In this chapter, we have seen that the causal model presented at the beginning of this work in action. Demand, in the form of economic and political discontent, encourages a challenger party to take a political stance dedicated to righting the wrongs experienced by the people. The party must then exploit the existing cleavages, or open new cleavages, while delegitimizing, compartmentalizing, or coopting its competitors. Once the party obtains legislative power, it must begin to dismantle, disempower, or coopt institutions that exist to provide checks and balances on the parliament. As the party does this, if it is to succeed, it must create a sense of an imminent threat over secure identities, positioning itself as the only force capable of defending those identities. We have seen this play out successfully in Hungary and Poland, and unsuccessfully in Czechia and Slovakia. A deeper analysis of these successful and unsuccessful cases will be necessary if we are to determine how, exactly, the ideational activation occurs.

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650 Susan Davis. "Top Republicans Work to Rebrand GOP as Party of Working Class." *NPR*. 13 April 2021. Accessed 14 July 2023. https://www.npr.org/2021/04/13/986549868/top-republicans-work-to-rebrand-gop-as-party-of-working-class

651 Sophia Hatzisavvidou. "The Rhetorical Strategy of Moralisation: A Lesson from Greece." In: Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen, (eds.), *Populist Rhetorics: Case Studies and a Minimalist Definition*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87351-6. 153.

Table 4: Typology of challenges in the Visegrad 4

Party	Demand	Opportunity	Activation	Successful
Fidesz	GFC impacts on economic security and satisfaction	High system institutionalization; high cleavage salience; hegemonized right, delegitimized left	Trianon, Soros, Christian-national ideal	Yes (in power since 2010)
SMER-SD	Public generally satisfied with post-communist economics	Low party system institutionalization; low cleavage salience; rhetorical competition with far right and corruption scandals delegitimized reelection	Economic security, anti-corruption, immigration threat	No (lost power in 2018)
PiS	Latent discontent over transition, politicized economic issues, solidaristic impulse	Low system institutionalization; high cleavage salience; hegemonized right, delegitimized left	Anti-communism, traditional values under attack, nation under threat	Yes (in power since 2015)
ANO	Public generally prioritizes strong democracy, generally economically satisfied	High system institutionalization; low cleavage salience; strong right, weak left, third way failed	Corruption stopping Czechia's full potential, business can renew country, immigration threat (secondary)	No (lost power in 2021)

Chapter 4: Extreme Cases: The Discourses of the Czech and Polish Challenges

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the causal model in action across the four Visegrad countries. A successful challenge occurs when a party activates underlying discontent through ideational language and takes advantage of opportunities in the political system to obtain the requisite hegemony to advance its challenge. Ideational rhetoric creates status anxiety in the population; constructing threats to "secure identities" such as religion or nationality, producing more successful results than non-ideational challenges. Successful challenger parties will link an ideational element to their broader systemic challenges that encompass discontent over the country's economic position and anger over the corruption of the post-communist regime. The ideational activation point represents the make-or-break moment in the challenge. A challenge that fails to activate a sense of threatened identities will not succeed, therefore, this component of the model is worth closer study. How in fact does a party link discontent and political opportunities to constructions of an idealized nation-state? How does it portray economic discontent as linked to questions of national identity? How does it portray itself and its competitors? How do nationalism and patriotism occur in the discourse and to what end do the challengers instrumentalize these concepts?

To better understand the differences between a successful and an unsuccessful challenge, this chapter constitutes an examination of two of the cases. PiS represents a strong and successful challenger party both in terms of gaining and retaining power and implementing its agenda. PiS won the elections in 2015 and 2019 with stunning margins, and has developed a coherent ideological program demonstrating where Poland has come from, where it is now, and where it must go in order to be saved from the forces threatening it. PiS gains appeal through the promotion of an ideology built upon identity factors that have mass appeal in the Polish population. While Fidesz would seem, due to its longevity and the success of its state-capture, to be the quintessential challenger party in the Visegrad Four, several factors influence the selection of PiS for closer study. While it is unsurprising that Hungary, a country with

lower support for democracy and significantly higher economic dissatisfaction, would host a successful challenge, it is more mysterious as to what would influence a country with higher economic satisfaction and initial support for liberal democracy. Moreover, PiS presents a highly coherent, and moreover consistent, ideological worldview. This, as opposed to Fidesz's capable, yet more ad hoc ideological disposition, makes an interesting counterpoint to ANO's flexible ideology. Finally, researching Fidesz would not uncover anything particularly novel, as the party and its challenge have inspired a staggering amount of literature since its election in 2010. PiS, while also having attracted significant scholarship, offers more space for exploration as I am unaware of any systematic analysis of PiS's party literature.

Of the unsuccessful challenges, ANO represents a more interesting case than SMER-SD for several reasons. First, the ANO discourse is a self-proclaimed non-ideological party, relying on technocratic language to justify its challenge. The SMER-SD discourse, in comparison, retains ideological factors from its origins as a mainstream social democratic party to its rebirth as an alternative, pro-Russian, anti-US party. Secondly, ANO is a new party; a true 'outsider populist,[652]' compared with SMER-SD. ANO formed in 2011 and entered government only three years later. ANO presents itself as an extra-systemic party, arising to represent the people against the traditional parties. In this sense, it embodied the anti-corruption cleavage and an attempt to transcend the left-right cleavage and remake the Czech party system. From an elite perspective, ANO has no history beyond that of its leader, whose role in shaping and defining the party has been essential in creating its identity and behavior. SMER-SD, on the other hand, has existed in its current form since 1999, having previously been a faction of the Party of the Democratic Left, the successor party to the Communist Party of Slovakia.[653] SMER-SD has baggage that influenced public perception of it and its leader. The character of the party makes SMER-SD, despite its protestations of being a challenger party, far more systemic than ANO. ANO's extra-systemic challenger position makes it interesting because unlike populist parties that previously existed in the system in non-populist forms (e.g. Fidesz), it offers real credentials of being distinct from the traditional parties and offering new perspectives

[652] I.e. extra-systemic, purporting to challenge the system from without. See Steven Levitsky and James Loxton. "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization* No. 20, Vol. 1, 2013. 107–36.
[653] The Slovak wing of the ruling KSČ.

to the political scene. ANO's definition is also far more contested in the literature, as discussed in the previous chapter, suggesting that a deeper investigation into the party's rhetoric would help with these efforts in classification. Additionally, Czechia was an early success story in the democratic transition, in contrast to Slovakia's laggard status under the electoral-autocratic Mečiar regime. Examining the challenge in Czechia meshes with the examination of PiS, as Poland ranks as another early success story with a strong democratic inclination. Comparing two countries with high initial support for democracy adds empirical interest as to how different discourse play out across countries with similar initial demand conditions.

PiS and ANO constitute fundamentally different types of challenges. Where PiS presents an emotive, ideational challenge, ANO offers a technocratic and efficiency-based challenge that largely eschews identity-based justifications including appeals to ethnic and nationalistic constructions of the state. Where PiS takes bold action to remake the Polish state, ANO failed to gain the parliamentary power to undertake such actions, limiting its reach and overall impact. Where PiS has gained and retained the most significant parliamentary power of any Polish party since 1989, ANO has lost its government and returned to the opposition. From a demand perspective, ANO and PiS offer an interesting contrast of two parties in the Visegrad Four's most economically prosperous states. The purpose of this chapter is to delve deeper into these challenges to determine the discursive reasons for their performance, specifically, how each party activates discontent, either in ideational terms or otherwise. For each party case study, I present a source overview before examining the ways the parties use ideational elements (i.e. secure identities and threat perception) to justify their programmatic challenges to the post-1989 order. Specifically, I examine the following:

- How does the party structure the ideational element of its challenge?
- How does the party link the ideational elements to the economic and structural elements of the challenge?
- How does the party attempt to affect systemic hegemony i.e. by marginalizing, delegitimizing, or coopting its opposition?

Using the framework of Gameson and Modigliani discussed in Chapter 1, I distill these discourses into linguistic packages, based on the reoccurring tropes and constructions that occur in the party discourses. Subsequently, I compare the linguistic packages to determine the similarities and differences between the Czech and Polish discourses to determine the linkages between the different sources of discontent. In doing so, I identify the patterns that make these discourses successful or unsuccessful. I make this comparison by examining the following concepts within each party's rhetoric. These concepts emerged from the previous chapter, in which I examined the parties' behaviors and justifications at each step of the causal model.

- Economic: performance, upgrading and aspirations, relationship to the West[654]
- Political: other parties (specifically the former ruling party, the contemporary right and contemporary left), the post-1989 political system
- Ideational: the nation, religion, migrants, values, LGBT issues, history, sovereignty

I will begin with the PiS discourse analysis to set a baseline for the successful party before comparing it to the ANO discourse.

PiS Discourse Analysis

Source Overview

I identify the PiS discourse through a collection of government documents, party manifestos, and speeches by party leaders between 2014 and 2021. Notably, these include the 2014 and 2019 electoral programs, a pamphlet entitled *The Nation and Us: The Eight Deadly Sins of the Republic 5 Years Later*, the PiS magazine *Polska Ziemia,* and the *Strategy for Responsible Development.* I also use assorted speeches of PiS leadership from the party's time in office, which can be found in the digital archives of the offices of the president and prime minister. I selected these documents because they represent the public-facing material available to voters and the general public seeking to inform themselves about the program and plans of PiS, as well as the party's attempt to showcase itself to the population. Where possible, I utilize English versions, and where only a Polish version exists, I read with the help of Deepl translation software. Unlike ANO, which speaks with a fairly unified voice under Andrej Babiš, PiS is a far more structured, institutionalized party. The presence of a

[654] i.e. countries without socialist histories.

vast knowledge network consisting of think tanks and academics friendly to PiS lends itself to the institutionalization and therefore the spreading of communicative competences to multiple individuals.[655] The main individuals I identify as speaking for PiS are Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, former Prime Minister Beata Szydło, Deputy Prime Minister and Party Leader Jarosław Kaczyński, and the President of Poland, Andzrej Duda.

Linguistic Packages in the PiS Discourse

From the source material, I discern the following core discursive packages that occur in PiS's public-facing political discourse. These packages identify a problematic state of affairs, assign blame, and envision a promised land and the means to attain it. In general, the Polish packages are far more emotive than their Czech counterparts, using a higher degree of emotion and moralization in presenting their content. Throughout its discourse, PiS frames its policies as stemming from a need to "repair…the state, the Polish family, and the economic sphere.[656]" This repair is "a rethinking of various parts of the state apparatus, democratic mechanisms…[and] civil society" rather than a complete systemic overhaul.[657] PiS is successful in constructing a coherent ideological worldview based on the marriage of identity-based threats with political and economic causes and consequences. Threats to traditional values, family, freedom, solidarity, and the idea of the Polish nation exist in the form of the previous (i.e. pre-PiS but also communist) governments. Throughout the PiS discourse, party writers deploy the threatened identity, threatened by economic inequality (both among Poles and between nations), a corrupt government populated by self-serving elites, and malign foreign interests seeking to uproot, discredit, and destroy the elemental facets of Polish identity and nationhood. The successful linkage of these discursive elements gives PiS's discourse a powerful impact on voters. The connection of economic redistribution to the need to support traditional Catholic families, of financial support for Polish businesses to empower the national economy and attract expatriate Poles to return links economic conditions to ideational ones. The need to end the corruption of the communist and post-communist eras by removing communist influences in the legal, governmental, and political spheres reinforces the return to traditional values by positioning the communist period as an abnormal,

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[655] Dabrowska, in Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*.
[656] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014*. Warsaw: PiS, 2014. 14.
[657] *Ibid*.

harmful, and un-Polish time against which the resources and energies of the state and people should be arrayed. Identity tensions (i.e. tensions over a threatened identity) underpin these economic and political factors. The family is under threat by transnational ideas including the "gender ideology" and a perceived rollback of Catholic values. In PiS's paradigm, communism initiated the process of stripping Poles of their grounding identity, and the process continued as Poland underwent regime change and the communists remaining in power sold the nation out to Western interests for their personal financial and political gain, sabotaging the solidarity upon which the organic conception of the nation rests.

Victimized Poland

The Victimized Poland package is the moralization of economic and political history, as a result of three foreign influences: communism, neoliberalism, and post-communism (i.e. liberalism). Each creation was imposed upon Poland by foreign powers that had managed to place Poland in a vulnerable position and subsequently these ideologies attacked elements of quintessential Polishness – state, family, and relations between these entities – to implement new social and political realities. Those realities were anathema to PiS's perception of real Polishness, and it is the remnants of these ideologies it seeks to remove. The package broadly serves the purpose of linking concrete economic and political woes to an us-against-them narrative wherein Poland appears as a virtuous yet suffering country. In effect, this package moralizes politics and economics, tying it to ideational tensions of a threatened nation. While the package utilizes tones of outrage, anger, and victimization to present Poland's undesirable state vis a vis the West, it does not attempt to emulate the West, but rather to develop along a uniquely Polish path, highlighting the un-Polishness of neoliberalism. The 2014 electoral program, for example, does not often mention foreign comparators, and when it does, it describes their effect on Poland, rather than their superior performance as something to be emulated, as is the case in the ANO discourse. The emphasis is clear: Polish development cannot follow a foreign model. This represents a key difference between the Czech and Polish discourses; that the Czech discourse seeks to learn from abroad, while the Polish discourse rejects learning from other countries as a sign of humiliation and submission. The 2014 PiS program, for example, describes this in stark terms:

> Higher education, like lower-level education, fell victim to unfortunate reforms that were carried out in a similar way, i.e. by imitating solutions from other countries. There was a preposterous belief that such a structural transplant would have similar effects that in other words, by introducing the American model, we will soon bring up the appropriate one the number of Nobel Prize winners. The absurdity of this belief is that structures, especially those which are associated with the highest achievements of the human mind are not simple mechanisms that like machines, they can be imported and will run wherever you are.[658]

The differences between Poland and its European competitors and neighbors are often emphasized in the PiS discourse to illustrate the uniqueness of Poland and the harm done by foreign economies and economic models. Morawiecki, like Babiš, condemns the "two-speed Europe[659]" approach, addressing it directly in a speech to the Sejm after entering office:

> "The competitiveness of the Polish economy will be decisive in the context of the great programs we have started and I hope we will be able to continue. Our nation's place is among the most developed countries in the world…compared to other European countries, the productivity of Polish workers, Polish business and industry has increased the fastest in Europe over the last 3 years.[660]"

Language suggesting that other countries within the EU consider Poland as a second-class member state deepens the sense of outside-versus-inside struggle. "We do not agree to dividing the countries into better and worse ones…dear Europe, the Polish piece undoubtedly fits into the European puzzle but it cannot be placed the wrong way or by force. This might damage the whole puzzle, as well as the piece.[661]" The threat

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[658] *Program Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014*. 135.

[659] I.e., the idea that European integration can proceed at different paces for different countries. Critics fear this would lead to first- and second-tier member states. See Ron Synovitz. "'Two-Speed' Europe: A Plan For EU Unity Or Disintegration?" *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty.* 28 March 2017. Accessed 10 May 2023. https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-explainer-two-speed-multispeed-europe/28396591.html

[660] "Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: Vision and development are words that will set the direction for Poland." *Premier.gov.pl.* 24 June 2019. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-vision-and-development-are-words-that-will-set-the.html

[661] Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: Our goal is a thorough modernisation of Poland." *Premier.gov.pl.* 13 December 2017. Accessed 08 December 2021.

at the end of the statement helps reinforce the idea that Poland under PiS will be stronger than previous incarnations of Polish statehood, and will stand up for Polish interests in the Union. In a speech commemorating the 15th anniversary of Polish ascension to the EU, Morawiecki praises Poland's efforts to catch up: "After these 15 years, we take pride in ourselves. We stand at the forefront of European economic growth. We may now catch up with the countries that joined the Union many years before us and that have never experienced Communism. Our businesses compete with European companies as equals.[662]" In the same speech, Morawiecki goes on to proclaim, "it is now time for all Poles to attain the European living standard.[663]" This desire for equality continues in a call for equality of opportunity among EU citizens: "Previously the European Economic Community, the Union was created in order to bring peace to Europe after the Second World War. For all nations to work together and be equal. Poles, Germans, Czechs, French, Slovaks and Italians. All citizens of the United Europe deserve the same opportunities.[664]" Contrasting development with the traumatic experience of foreign occupation and the externally imposed system, and showing that in spite of this, Poland persevered, helps tie development with history. This collocation shows a past-oriented lens placed upon the present and future, reminding the audience of what Poland has endured to reach its current position. At the same time, the discourse contains warnings against unfair treatment. Kaczynski is unequivocal in his condemnation of the inequality between Poland and wealthier countries: "Poland must be a country that has development opportunities, and is not a source of cheap labor for those richer than us.[665]" This statement encapsulates the inequality of the dependent market economy model, and the determination to transform out of it. As already indicated, PiS is an anti-neoliberal party.[666] This is clear in PiS' social policy, as outlined in the SRD and the party

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https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-our-goal-is-a-thorough-modernisation-of-poland.html

[662] "Speech by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Poland's accession to the European Union." *Premier.gov.pl.* 01 May 2019. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/speech-by-prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-on-the-occasion-of-the-15th-anniversary-of.html

[663] *Ibid*.

[664] *Ibid.*

[665] "Rozmowa z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim, prezesem Prawa i Sprawiedliwości." *Polska ziemia*. November 2016.

[666] Stuart Shields. "Opposing Neoliberalism? Poland's Renewed Populism and Post-Communist Transition." *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (March 2012): 359–81; Stuart Shields. "Neoliberalism Redux: Poland's Recombinant Populism and its Alternatives." *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 4, No. 4-5. 663;

documents, which delineate a soldiaristic approach to development and the maintenance, if not increase, of social services. This is clear in Duda's speech to the 2020 Paris Peace Forum, in which he states "Economies are not going to self-regulate. What we need is an active role of social and economic systems based on dialogue and transparency.[667]" In general, the PiS state places importance on supporting entrepreneurs in building the capacity of Polish capitalism while retaining a welfare state: "a strong economy responds to the aspirations of talented and ambitious people. It is also intended to provide support for those who need it.[668]" This model of development is intended to have widespread societal benefit: "from the regulatory, financial and social perspective, the entire economic system will be built in such a way that it will serve well not only us but also, and above all, the future generations.[669]" Polish capitalism can only be guided forward by the active and patriotically inclined intervention of the state. The discourse of Polish capitalism is enthusiastic and optimistic in its predictions of a blossoming technological sector, while retaining a focus on the need for the state to ensure that the development occurs in the best interest of the Polish nation. This discourse of capitalist nationalism seeks to right the wrongs committed by the socialist government and its corrupt successors who made the post-communist republic into a subordinate, humiliated country.

PiS juxtaposes this humiliation with an idealized past. Much like the ANO discourse with its idealized depictions of the Czechoslovak First Republic as a golden age of the Czech nation, the PiS discourse has its own golden age; the interwar Second Republic (IIRP – 1918-1939). Similar to the Czech golden age, the Polish Second Republic suffered an untimely demise at the hands of an aggressive foreign power. Referring to IIRP and admitting its restriction of various democratic rights,[670] the 2014 PiS Electoral Program describes: "Employee rights and other regulations protecting weak economically protecting social groups were also introduced…these basic rights and

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Shields. "Opposing Neoliberalism."; Dabrowska. "New Conservatism in Poland: The Discourse Coalition Around Law and Justice." In, Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*. 93.

[667] „Speech by the President of the Republic of Poland during the Paris Peace Forum." *President.pl.* 11 November 2020. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://www.president.pl/en/news/art,1220,speech-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-poland--during-the-paris-peace-forum-.html

[668] "Prime Minister: "We are a country of economic success."" *Premier.gov.pl*. 08 October 2019. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-we-are-a-country-of-economic-success.html

[669] *Ibid*.

[670] IIRP was, after all, an authoritarian state under the rule of a series of military officers including the famous Marshal Jozef Pilsudski.

values that resulted were never challenged.[671]". PiS blames this in part on the attempted social engineering of the communist period, while linking the damage to economic freedom.

> "We are aware of the historical burdens that have left their mark on the definition of equality. We remember the terrible effects of social experiments, including crimes, justified by referring to equality. We know that the pursuit of equality cannot mean destroying the individual characteristics of each person and creating a system that would inhibit the positive energy of particularly creative people in various areas of life, including the economy.[672]

Equality and justice are priorities under the new economic developmental scheme; injustices to be righted, and are "tantamount to condemning and rejecting social exclusion and economic inequality, those forms of which are particularly painful for women.[673]" Imagery of the IIRP do not appear as widely as ANO's recollections of the First Czechoslovak Republic, and positive memories of that period appear less frequently than the communist period, and the outrages its mention is weaponized to generate. PiS' historical memory, at least pertaining to economics, relies more on outrage than optimism, revenge and not remembrance, to deliver its message.

Though the socialist government fell, PiS' narrative holds that the unnatural and harmful influences of communism lingered into the post-communist period. The PiS narrative of the transition from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism describes both as harmful to the Polish nation and against the traditional values of Poland. Moreover, one is a continuation of the other, and the corrupt and mismanaged transition process only brought more suffering and shame to Poland. "The only way to change Poland and depart from the model that was adopted after the political changes in 1989, and which is to some extent burdened with the remnants of communism, but also with the errors of the version of capitalism that was adopted and which was in force in the West in the 1980s. This combination turned out to be very toxic and harmful.[674]" PiS tells an effective story linking together post-communism and the misrule of the traditional parties, thereby explaining why Poland slid into economic submission:

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[671] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*. 9.
[672] *Ibid*, 7-8.
[673] *Ibid,* 8.
[674] "Rozmowa z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim, prezesem Prawa i Sprawiedliwości." *Polska ziemia*. November 2016.

> "our predecessors adopted a neoliberal, "dependent" model of state development in which the government should not obstruct the "invisible hand of the market." They also believed that capital has no nationality in a global economy. The crisis of 2008, preceded by an unprecedented scale of deregulation, proved, firstly, that the neoliberal approach did not work, and secondly, the greatest outflow of foreign capital from Poland took place in history. The banking system controlled by foreign entities did not care about the condition of the Polish economy - the capital was transferred to save the Italian or French economy. Law and Justice broke with this trend - the economy is to serve our state and Polish society, not the other way around.[675]"

Criticism of the liberal post-1989 order is a central piece of the PiS discourse pertaining to economic immiseration and the erosion of traditional Polish customs. The 2014 electoral program directly criticizes "the expansion of liberal ideology, which in practice took the form of something like social Darwinism masked by slogans of individual freedom. But this freedom more and more often meant permissiveness, that is, far-reaching consent to breaking social norms.[676]" The reference to individual freedom is indicative of PiS's collectivist discourse, which places the whole of the Polish nation and its increasing well-being at the forefront of the party's priorities. The post-communist order in general, and its state the IIIRP, are continuations of malign forces working against interests of the Polish nation:

> The pathology of the state apparatus was related to the pathology of the market and organized crime. This type of connection had a huge impact on the systemic shape of the Third Polish Republic. This system worked and works on what can be described as the inverse of the pro publico bono rule. By its very nature, it focuses on particular interests, even when it is not about criminal activities. It is fair to say that it prefers to organize around non-equivalent takeover of common or someone else's property.[677]

The SRD is explicit in its identification of the consequences of the pre-PiS economic model, arguing that "over the last 25 years, Poland has pursued a model of development, so that **only certain groups of the society could benefit from** [it].[678]"

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[675] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći: Polski Model Państwa Dobrobytu***.** Warsaw: PiS, 2019. 81.
[676] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 15.
[677] *Ibid*, 16.
[678] *Ibid*, 3. Emphasis appears in the original.

This establishes the populist dichotomy of a corrupt and abusive group benefiting at the expense of the whole people. PiS further deepens the dichotomy by showing how the state under the post-communist parties institutionalized and entrenched the corrupt system. The communists, past and present, bear the most responsibility for this state of affairs. Referring to efforts to increase media freedom, the 2019 program refers to the decommnuization of the press law "by eliminating legal terms referring to the Polish People's Republic.[679]" In the PiS discourse, the central "pathology" of the post-communist Third Republic is that the communists never left power. This pathology reappears throughout as a means of delegitimizing political opponents, placing blame for negative circumstances, and further dichotomizing Polish political society into friends and foes. The PiS program of 2014 provides a summary of the notion that the system changed, but the communists stayed in power:

> "The main founders of the Third Republic rejected consideration of the problem of the beneficiaries of privatization and the consequences of maintaining the old state apparatus, matters functionally related to each other. In the case of the state, the fundamental moves that changed the situation were the introduction of fully democratic elections (from 1990-1991), the transfer of the decision-making center from the Communist Party to the constitutional organs of power (president, parliament, government), and the introduction of municipal self-government. The military services were not changed at all, and the same was done for the army, the militia renamed into the police, the central state apparatus (ministries, central offices). There were new personnel appointments, but the old cadres still prevailed by far. Old cadres also remained in the banks. Slow and infrequent were the changes in enterprises, whose managers also came from parts of the former communist apparatus. The reconstruction of the civilian special services - the establishment of the UOP[680] - was the realization of plans prepared by the communist authorities, with relatively minor personnel changes - the elements of continuity definitely outweighed those of change, although the scope of operations and the manner in which tasks were carried out were largely modified.[681]"

[679] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći.* 196.
[680] *Urząd Ochrony Państwa* (the Office of State Protection) was Poland's intelligence service between 1990 and 2002).
[681] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 15.

This condemnation of the transition government identifies specific legacies of the communist government, creating the sense that the Third Republic government is not actually a new government. The structures did not change and the officials retained power, and only the branding of the state changed along with the model for economic distribution. Notably, the Civic Platform party bears responsibility in the PiS discourse for the institution of the so-called "Tusk System," which allowed corruption to flourish as "a special feature of the entire system." This made it "completely vulnerable to external influences, primarily to the activities of foreign services and external lobbying.[682]" PiS calls this vulnerability the "soft state," which constructs an image of the state being at once feeble in advocating the interests of the people, and strong in contributing to corruption: "the state is "soft", helpless or absent when it comes to the right interests of an individual, family, society and nation, but it can be aggressive, ruthless and brutal when it comes to the interests of people in power and influential, not always legally operating, interest groups.[683]" This statement draws on images of shadowy entities that manipulate the state against the interests of the people, similar to Babiš's godfathers (see below). At the same time, a soft state that is easily manipulated places the nation at risk. As we have seen, in PiS's ideology, the state is central to the maintenance of Poland's existence as a sovereign nation. A soft state cannot adequately defend the Polish people, and in effect becomes a risk in itself that will cause ever-increasing degradation of the nation and its core values. In the PiS discourse, the "Tusk system" was both anti-democratic and anti-developmental, thwarting the capacity of the Polish people to govern in their own best interests:

> …there has been a restriction of political power, some call it the abdication of the state in favor of independent institutions, which carry out important state functions, including regulations on the freedom of citizens, independently of political power. According to Tusk, the state, or at least a significant part of it, is a set of corporations operating independently of each other and not subject to democratic mechanisms. This solution means that the aforementioned corporations are also, in fact, independent of citizens, external to society. Appointed in a democratic process, and therefore in elections, the government is not responsible for them.[684]"

[682] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 16-17.
[683] *Ibid*, 47.
[684] *Ibid*, 30.

In response, PiS offers a program that breaks with the previous system "built on clear values derived from our tradition and at the service of the common good.[685]" This common good, according to Kaczynski, includes "restoring the dignity [of the Polish people], faith in social affairs, [and] the justice and the effectiveness of the government…which the PO-PSL[686] coalition took away from them.[687]" This dichotomization serves to establish an emotionally charged reason for PiS's struggle. The package draws black and white divisions between the good Poles who embrace patriotism, the nation, and who are suffering, and the bad post-communists whose corruption and selfishness is destroying the nation.

Victimized Poland creates a sense that the Polish nation has been the victim of historical wrongs that the post-communist government was unable and unwilling to address. These wrongs are the responsibility of the out-group, and threaten the stability of the Polish nation and the factors that compose Polish identity. This out group is diverse, and contrasts Polish values to foreign influence, from the Nazis who destroyed the IIRP, the communists and post-communists who corrupted and degenerated Polish society, the international capitalists who exploited post-communist Poland), to the transnational ideologues who erode traditional values. All of these foreign forces share the commonality of threatening Polish values and the Polish nation. These forces thus provide a compelling "other" for PiS's discourse; an enemy against which to rally the electorate.

Sacred Values

The second package in the PiS discourse defines the values under threat. These values are universal among Poles and serve to entrench the in-group's connection to the secure identities that serve as binding elements. Used in concert with Victimized Poland, Sacred Values deepens the meaning of Polishness and of national suffering, of threat and necessary defense. PiS uses threat language to construct urgency and danger surrounding the secure identities, in effect creating insecurity among the audience as an impulse to act. PiS constructs its policies as responses to attacks on its "fundamental principles of values…freedom, solidarity, [and] identity.[688]"

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[685] *Ibid*, 44.
[686] The center-right coalition of the Civic Platform and Polish People's Party.
[687] "Rozmowa z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim, prezesem Prawa i Sprawiedliwości." *Polska ziemia*. August 2017.
[688] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći*, 193.

Sovereignty anxiety colors the threat mentality, which centers upon the idea that the Polish nation-state is under attack by competing and harmful values systems. This anxiety has an historical base, the "123 years [in which] there was no sovereign Polish state" constitute an unacceptable "threat to Polishness.[689]" PiS's 2019 program begins with a discussion on freedom and human dignity. It recalls the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century and the abuses inflicted on the Polish population, the responsibility of the Polish government to "firmly defend life and oppose any form of violence that threatens it, both physical and ideological.[690]" PiS constructs freedom as being realized through belonging in different communities "from the family, through local and professional communities, up to a society constituted as a result of historical processes into a nation.[691]" Linking the individual to communities and the nation while discussing the responsibility of the state to defend freedom from both physical and ideological violence provides the setting of morality at the base of politics. This discussion of freedom forms the call to battle for PiS:

> Poles, as individuals and as a nation, have a particular liking for freedom. Over the centuries and today, we have proven that we do not allow it to be taken from us. We resist the social engineering that characterizes some societies and strips man of his dignity. Remembering the painful experience of the past, including the recent one, we reject the emerging legal systems built on a harmful ideology interfering with social structures - family, marriage, communities, and aimed at building a "brave new world" and a new man.[692]

The people are the nation, the nation is a combination of specific values and approaches. PiS thus undertakes the duty of upholding, protecting, and enriching its charge. The party bases its outlook on "the social teachings of the universal church" and invoking Pope Francis, sets its goal of fighting economic inequality: "This economy kills. The law favors the stronger, so the mighty devour the weak. As a result of this situation, great masses of the population are excluded and marginalized, without work, without prospects, without a way out.[693]" Religion plays an important role in moralizing the PiS discourse. PiS writers make frequent references to the unity

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[689] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości*, 11.
[690] *Ibid*, 7.
[691] *Ibid*, 7.
[692] *Ibid*, 8.
[693] *Ibid*, 8.

of the Polish Catholic Church, people, and state, for example, in the 2014 electoral program: "the teachings of the Catholic Church, Polish tradition and Polish patriotism were closely linked in building the political identity of the nation.[694]" A critique of the communism and post-communism uses Christianity's connection to freedom as its central argumentative point: "Freedom is at the center of the Christian science about man, the essence of our national history, freedom co-creates the sense of being a Pole, therefore Polish nationality, treated as a heritage of freedom, equality and respect for human life, has a universal meaning. We treat them as our nation's contribution to the universal history of freedom.[695]" Freedom, thus establishes a moral dichotomy for PiS. Those who stand on its side support freedom, Christian and Polish ideal. Those opposing PiS, inherently oppose freedom, Christianity, and Polishness. Indeed, the involvement of free citizens in community and public life are "the basis for the mature functioning of democracy.[696]" This democracy is local, as PiS promotes local activism in order to improve the functioning of Polish institutions as well as nurture a spirit of "mature patriotism" among the population.[697] The role of citizens in building the new regime extends to civil society. PiS makes significant investment into the building of its civil society infrastructure. Through the Program for the Development of Civic Organizations, the government has contributed 100 million PLN to NGOs, think tanks, local watchdog organizations, and civic media. In addition, a Solidarity Corps was launched in 2018 to encourage Poles to volunteer and serve their communities.[698] PiS closely associates the struggle for "a free Poland and free Poles" with "the Catholic faith and Universal Church.[699]" The identity and history of the country is bound up with the Catholic Church's doctrine and its governance of the family, all contributing to the "nation's contribution to universal freedom.[700]"

The Sacred Values package extends to the micro-level, encompassing ideas about the character of the people that compose the Polish state. Families compose the basic unit of the Polish nation: "we believe that social solidarity is best realized in families. They are the fundamental social subject for every human being. We will effectively

[694] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 10.
[695] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014,* 10.
[696] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći*, 201.
[697] *Ibid*.
[698] *Ibid*, 203.
[699] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 10.
[700] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 10.

support families socially, materially and legally; protect their autonomy from ideological offensives; take action against domestic violence.[701]" These ideological offensives include the LGBT movement, which as discussed in the previous chapter, PiS characterizes as a fundamental threat to Polish values. "Gender ideology" is constructed throughout as a threat to the family, which in turn is a threat to the nation as the family is the primary building block of Polish nationhood. PiS portrays the LGBT ideology as

> "Threatening to the family and parenthood in Poland…its proliferation is artificial, conditioned primarily by streams of funding, much of it external. Nevertheless, its influence is growing, especially among some young people, and contributes to the spread of attitudes unfavorable to starting families and having children. Putting up barriers to the spread of gender ideology is important. More important, however, are efforts to strengthen the family, defend parenthood, the special role of the mother and respect for motherhood, which should be treated not as a burden, but as a distinction and privilege[702]."

LGBT ideology is thus a threat to PiS's perception of the family and of its capacity to contribute to Poland's birth rate. While the family is the fundamental unit of the nation, PiS establishes the nation as the fundamental unit of the world: "The nation, which we understand as a community of culture, language, historical experience, political tradition and civilizational values, lived destiny, is the broadest social grouping that constitutes an effective basis for democratic political communities.[703] The nation as PiS defines it is not based on an ethnic composition: "… not only because of our negative attitude to national superstitions, also because of our knowledge of Polish history. The Polish nation was shaped and matured by uniting people of different ethnic affiliations into a community.[704]" Polishness, therefore, is a system of values commonly accepted by those living in the Polish nation-state. The 2014 Program gives further insight into the development of identity, and the Polish state's responsibility in developing it.

> "Identity is formed based on the often complex process of internalizing the value system of the dominant social groups in a given society. Values, in turn, are formed in

[701] *Ibid*, 212.
[702] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014,* 14.
[703] *Ibid*, 9.
[704] *Ibid*.

> processes of long historical duration, through the influence of social institutions, but also through the individual choices of members of a given national community. For these reasons, Law and Justice considers wise identity policy to be one of the basic duties of the Polish state, an important element of the Polish welfare state model. This policy must shape, strengthen and disseminate the values and attitudes necessary for the continuance and success of our political community, such as national and local patriotism, freedom, subjectivity, solidarity, a sense of mission vis-à-vis community responsibilities, a sense of social connection, honesty, professionalism, etc.[705]"

While accepting that identity is a dynamic process, PiS argues that certain values are inherent to the Polish community, casting itself in the role of their defender and promoter. This draws further lines of demarcation between the in-group, those who accept these values, and the out-group, those who oppose them. PiS's conception of diversity involves each nation-state existing within "the richness of [the European] continent and its civilization" and resisting attempts at "replacing cultural heritage with primitive experiments in civilization.[706]" This is reminiscent of the aforementioned attempts to engineer equality, reminding the audience of the alien nature of socialism, neoliberalism, and post-communism. The "gender ideology" and liberal values continue this threat mentality, presenting another challenge the Polish people must overcome to retain their traditional and unique way of life. Moving from its image of the Polish nation's traditional character, PiS's construction of minorities serves as a direct contestation of what it perceives as a threatening alternative social order:

> "We understand and accept minorities who have the right to have their diversity respected. However, we believe that the exercise of these rights must not violate the Constitution and be directed against the majority, which social constructivism seeks to impose. The freedom of each of us must not strike at the freedom of the other and should not be used against society and the moral order.[707]"

To this end, the government increased cultural spending during its first governing period (2015-2019) by 33.8 percent and developed a system of grant-based funding

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[705] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći*, 214.
[706] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*. 12.
[707] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći*, 211.

for cultural activities, which combined with EU-funded cultural activities, give the government approximately 4.3 billion PLN to spend on culture promotion.[708] PiS states that artistic endeavors under the Third Republic suffered from the government's "monopolizing the worldview (in accordance with the dominant ideology of the government of the day.[709]" Recognizing artists as important in building a "sovereign Republic, aware of its mission, affirmed by its own citizens and respected by foreigners," PiS plans tax reforms and social security payments for artists to help insulate them from market competition with Western Europe[710]

Patriotic Development

What is the solution to helping victimized Poland protect its sacred values? Patriotic development appears in the discourse in both justification and programmatic forms, calling for a new, Polish variety of capitalism that benefits the entire Polish nation, as opposed to elites and foreign investors. This new Polish capitalism is solidaristic, as it aims to improve the standard of living and enrich the country as a whole across social groups and divergent regions. Patriotic development is ultimately inclusive, Morawiecki calls on allies and opponents alike to get to work: "we have to do everything to make our common home a safe and wealthy place for long years to come. It is a task for today's patriots, for the government, citizens, and also for the opposition. Our common task.[711]" PiS ties economic pressures to the threat to freedom, identifying them as the foremost threat to Polish freedom and values.[712] The economic development and welfare programs are framed as means of guaranteeing citizens' freedom as part of a "freedom and dignity program" including salary increases, housing subsidies (the Housing Plus Program) and the Clean Air Program.[713] Continuing in this track, the 2019 Program states that

> Our collective wealth depends on the hard work and ingenuity of entrepreneurial people. Therefore, we are obliged to create the right conditions for them to work and develop their companies and businesses. The basic condition

[708] *Ibid*, 215.
[709] *Ibid*, 197.
[710] *Ibid*, 197-198.
[711] "Speech by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on the ocassion of the 100th Anniversary of Regaining Independence." *Premier.gov.pl.* 09 November 2018. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/speech-by-prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-on-the-ocassion-of-the-100th-anniversary-of.html
[712] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości*, 194
[713] *Ibid*, 195. These programs also include Family Plus, Mom Plus, Toddler Plus, Senior Plus, Good Start, Retirement Plus, all of which PiS proclaims on p 209 "will continue…because Poland is one!"

> should be freedom of farming: freedom to materialize business ideas and freedom from excessive tax burdens. The only limits to this freedom can be the *raison d'etre* of the political community and the limits of other people's freedom.[714]

PiS's means of facilitating the people's hard work and ingenuity is the simplification of regulations and the relief of ideological pressures on students and workers.[715] The Polish Model of the Welfare State expresses the party's conception of European values, i.e. having a state that cares about the public good and promotes human dignity through ensuring that "the fruits of economic growth must benefit all Poles, and not - as was the case before - primarily privileged interest groups.[716]" "Justice," according to PiS, "requires that we give "to everyone what is due to him," supporting above all the weakest and needy. Social relations should be based on social solidarity and love of neighbor.[717]" The Catholic and collectivist rhetoric is clear, but the construction of dignity has a distinctly material component relating to wage inequality. Aiming for 80 percent convergence with the EU average (real), PiS strives to correct the past mistake of a reliance on low wages as a means of competition.[718] This linkage of development with values is expressed in terms of national survival, which if we recall the previous packages, is a chief anxiety and goal of PiS:

> "It is worth it to be a Pole, to belong to our national community, and therefore it is worth it for it to last and to have a state. A sovereign, democratic, rule of law, but at the same time efficient state. It is worth it for Polish families to last and develop. Such a state is possible if we develop as a nation, a community of free Poles, a community of Polish families, an economic organism, a political entity and a cultural model. It is worth it if we can defend ourselves against threats to our freedom. We can achieve all this if we overcome the demographic crisis, the crisis of the family, the crisis of parenthood and the problem of emigration, as well as the so-called middle development trap in the economy. Rapid development and fundamental modernization of our economy are the best guarantors of improving the livelihood of Polish families. It is necessary to strengthen our state, democracy in

[714] *Ibid*, 207.
[715] *Ibid*.
[716] *Ibid*, 208.
[717] *Ibid*, 208.
[718] *Ibid*, 210.

> Poland, without them we will not be able to achieve the fundamental goals.[719]"

The 2014 electoral program refers to the Polish state as "the primary value," and Morawiecki refers specifically to "economic patriotism" as necessary for the success of the Polish economy.[720] When appointing the new council of ministers in 2019, Morawiecki embraced this rhetoric in stating that, "courage, determination and devotion to the Homeland are the values that we need the most in order to improve the Republic of Poland.[721]" PiS president Jarosław Kaczyński linked Polish development and tradition with the entitlement to Western living standards: "Poland must be a country deeply rooted in tradition, a proud country that is moving forward…Poles are deeply convinced that they deserve the same life as in the west.[722]" Throughout its electoral program, PiS frames a unique style of Polish capitalism as an alternative to "Anglo-Saxon capitalism," which "cannot cope with inequalities [while] the French model cannot keep up with economic competition. The Polish model is a combination of solidarity with the construction of a pro-export, innovative economy and Polish capital.[723]" This "model of development is the key to achieving the "western" standard of living," as it plans to elevate the standard of living measured by GDP per capita purchasing power to the level of Portugal by 2023, and 85 to 90 percent of the EU average by 2030.[724] An indirect comparison to comparator countries occurs in the statement expressing that PiS's goal of balancing Polish and foreign capital is normal and healthy: "Every large and significant economy in the world strives for a healthy and effective balance between foreign capital and local capital in strategic sectors of the economy.[725]" This legitimizing tactic serves to effectively say, 'everyone else is

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[719] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014,* 13.
[720] *Ibid,* 11.
"Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: Economy and society are one." *Premier.gov.pl.* 27 July 2018. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-economy-and-society-are-one.html
[721] "Prime Minister: Poland is and will be the most important thing for all of us." *Premier.gov.pl.* 15 November 2019. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://archiwum.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/prime-minister-poland-is-and-will-be-the-most-important-thing-for-all-of-us.html
[722] "Jarosław Kaczyński: Polacy są głęboko przekonani, że należy im się takie życie jak na zachodzi." *Wiadomosci.onet.pl*. 15 May 2021. Accessed 08 December 2021. https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/polski-lad-przemowienie-kaczynskiego-zmiany-w-podatkach-i-sluzbie-zdrowia/7hthpm5
[723] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći* 80. "
[724] *Ibid*, 82.
[725] *Ibid,* 104.

doing it, so can we,' and in so doing, Poland can become successful in the international capitalist system.

PiS's state is a driver of economic development. PiS calls for the state to "be more efficient because only the state may lead public policies in order to respond to challenges efficiently and responsibly.[726]" The SRD further prescribes the creation of a modern infrastructure to "fulfill economic needs and enhance the quality of life," a prioritization of human capital, and "inclusive rather than exclusive" development across rural and urban regions.[727] Overall, the primary goal stated in the SRD is "to create conditions for increasing incomes of the Polish citizens along with increasing cohesion in the social, economic, environmental and territorial dimension.[728]" Similarly to ANO's platforms, digitalization remains key. "The important element of the modern state, i.e. the digital service state, is the computerization of the servicing of the citizens and entrepreneurs.[729]" Building a Polish brand is similarly important,[730] but the time to start is now, because "it is the current economic policy that determines whether in ten years' time Poland will be a producer of advanced technology or a market for foreign companies.[731]" Similarly, a return to conservative values is expressed alongside a call for equality among EU nations: "A Europe without selfishness and a Europe of solidarity is better than a "two-speed" Europe.[732]" Drawing a comparison between the previous experiments at social engineering, Morawiecki calls for "a Europe based on family values is safer and more friendly than a Europe of revolution and cultural experimentation.[733]" This cultural and ideational linkage to economics continues throughout the PiS discourse. In commemorating 100 years of Polish independence, Morawiecki sketches a patriotic call to the development and growth of the Polish nation end economy, linked as one, and the shared responsibility of all Poles:

> The free Poland is a commitment to set ourselves ambitious goals, thanks to which we will make Poland stronger, and the life in Poland – happier. Therefore, the

[726] *Strategy for Responsible Development*. Warsaw: Government of Poland, 2017. https://www.gov.pl/documents/33377/436740/SOR_2017_streszczenie_en.pdf. 3.
[727] *Ibid*.
[728] *Ibid* 5.
[729] *Ibid* 6.
[730] *Ibid,* 11.
[731] "Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: Our goal."
[732] Morawiecki: Speech on the 15 Anniversary of Poland's Accession to the EU.
[733] *Ibid*.

> basic task of the Polish state must be a consistent improvement in the quality of life of the Polish families. Through pro-family policy, boosting the entrepreneurial spirit of the Poles, through creating ever better quality of workplaces, strengthening the Polish economy, in the perspective of the next several years we can achieve what has actually never happened in the history of Poland: we can catch up with the developed western countries. We have to do everything to make our common home a safe and wealthy place for long years to come. It is a task for today's patriots, for the government, citizens, and also for the opposition. Our common task.[734]

Morawiecki refrains from blaming other political parties in this particular speech by offering to work together with them in the name of patriotism: "I invite all Poles and all political groups to work together for our safety and economic development. These can be our cross-party commitments, which we will implement over political divisions. There is room for everyone under the white and red flag.[735]" From a programmatic standpoint, patriotic development involves the active role of the state in driving development. Under the PiS program, developmental politics are to be reconceptualized for a purpose, rather than as an end to themselves: "The role of the Ministry of Finance will be limited to strategic financial planning and keeping the state budget accounting. Public finances must be an instrument of economic and social development, not an end in itself. The dominant position of the finance minister in the government, which has been particularly visible in recent years, leads to excessive fiscalism, favors thinking according to the principle of "no matter what," and restricts thinking and acting in terms of development.[736]" The 2014 program continues; "For these three reasons alone, Poland needs an economic policy that lives up to its name, a break with the principle that "the best economic policy is the lack of such a policy.[737]" To address possible skepticism, especially after decades of neoliberal orthodoxy that cast state action as undesirable, PiS entrenches the link between its plans at correcting the path of Polish development with the idea that the state is the embodiment of the Polish people by defending the role of the state through the following illustration: "contrary to stereotypical opinions, state activity in the field

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[734] "Speech by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on the ocassion of the 100th Anniversary of Regaining Independence."
[735] *Ibid*.
[736] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014,* 49.
[737] *Ibid*, 74.

of stimulating the economy does not mean neither building state factories, nor printing empty money or artificial stimulation of the economic situation through primitive and harmful actions, such as stimulating consumption, especially luxury consumption, by means of lending.[738]"

The specific programmatic points of PiS's economic program are covered elsewhere,[739] and I will not reiterate them here, other than to summarize them as support for Polish businesses in the form of "tax and administrative preferences, as well as marketing assistance,[740]" increasing credit access for entrepreneurs,[741] the use of public money raised through sales of state treasury shares to fund companies "co-financing or even financing large investments in the field of technical, energy, road, rail and environmental infrastructure," and above all, projects with high-growth potential.[742]" These investments will contribute to innovation, designed to move Poland out of the development traps set by the post-communist regime. "The Polish economy must move away from the model of competing through low labor costs in favor of gaining competitiveness through innovation. The main sphere of innovation is industry. Modern industrial policy should focus on activities that most effectively support long-term economic growth and industrial development.[743]" In sum, "the sum of all the above-mentioned financial resources is over PLN 1 trillion, which we will spend on development. These funds will cease to be unused capital and will become resources involved in overcoming the middle development trap.[744]" The result of these investments will facilitate the "rebuilding [of] citizens' trust in the state and removing [of] the bureaucratic burden from Polish entrepreneurship.[745]" The central point in the PiS economic discourse can be summarized in the concept that capital is not a transnational force without national loyalties. "[The] strategic goal [of economic diplomacy] will be to strengthen the economic sovereignty of the state, because capital has both a nationality and a homeland.[746]" Thus, the repolonization of the

[738] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014,* 73. "
[739] E.g. Jasiecki. "Conservative Modernization." In Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*.
[740] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 75.
[741] *Ibid*, 76.
[742] *Ibid*, 76.
[743] *Ibid*, 92.
[744] *Ibid*, 78.
[745] *Ibid*, 78.
[746] *Ibid*, 78.

financial sector is a priority, not just from a practical perspective from as a point of pride in the nation reclaiming its self-determination over the economic sphere.[747]

Patriotic development stresses demographics at the same level as increasing business efficiency and outreach.[748] While these measures address a conservative socio-cultural values-based policy that includes the religious and cultural priority of raising the birthrate and preventing abortions,[749] they also serve to address the "outflow of people" from Poland to other Schengen countries; attracting them to remain in Poland through financial incentives to increase the "activation and currently unused potentials of human resources.[750]" Demographics and national self-esteem are critical pieces to PiS' construction of economics. The 2014 electoral program warns of the dangers that "self-esteem and the demographic crisis" present:

> we will not achieve this goal if we do not stop the processes that weaken us, especially the demographic crisis, exacerbated by depopulation of Poland through the emigration of people without work or disappointed with living conditions. There are strong indications that this is not a process determined only by the economy. It also has cultural reasons. It is enough to refer to Hungary to find a confirmation of this thesis. Lack of self-esteem, the value of one's own culture can be a decisive factor in the strength of negative processes.[751]

The solution to this prognosis is "rapid development and fundamental modernization [of the Polish] economy.[752]" The SRD specifically indicates Poles' "low level of social confidence" as an obstacle for economic development:

> A level of social capital must also be increased. The Poles express the low level of social confidence, they are often socially inactive and take initiative, bottom-up activities for common good to a limited extent. There is also low involvement of Poles in volunteering actions. This situation will be changed by the programs related to sport, development of civic society and volunteership.[753]

This, the document indicates, can be addressed through programs fostering the development of "readership, citizen culture, the network of museums as well as

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[747] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći,* 98.
[748] Strategy for Responsible Development, 11.
[749] See Agnieszka Wierzcholska. "Gender in the Resurgent Polish Conservatism." In: Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*. 198 – 222.
[750] Strategy for Responsible Development, 11.
[751] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći 2014*, 12
[752] *Ibid*, 13.
[753] Strategy for Responsible Development, 17.

organization of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Polish independence.[754]" The stress on heightening civic mindedness a in the population connects directly to the economic goal of repolonizing the national economy. Through raising awareness of and appreciation for the importance of Polish identity and building a community spirit, PiS crafts a call of action to propel patriotic citizens toward reclaiming the national economy. The call to action in Morawiecki's address to the Sejm shortly after entering office is clear. Stating that "in the last 25 years, Poland had grown dependent on foreign capital, which colonized the country" Morawiecki places blame on "the inaccurate model adopted in the Third Polish Republic." Morawiecki goes on to say "we want Poland to play a key role in economy, not a peripheral one," and that "capitalism on consumption of credit installed by foreign institutions at the beginning of the 1990's" must be replaced by "capitalism of savings and investments." Morawiecki concludes by framing this shift as "a struggle for Polish property and Polish capital" and adds an appeal "I'm asking everyone for help. Let's reclaim Poland together.[755]" To affect this goal, PiS calls for "getting out of the middle development trap" as a primary goal. To do this, PiS promotes the state-led developmental model:

> Breaking the middle development trap requires rejecting the thesis of inactivity as the only proper policy of the state towards the economy. Active politics, i.e. undertaking an economic policy by the state, is the first condition for success. The second condition is proper recognition and then the use of resources that are "dead" today or are used to a small extent. These resources include financial resources or other measures of social dynamics. One of the very important reasons for the insufficient or complete under-utilization of various resources today are numerous pathologies, especially corruption.[756]

In this passage, we can see the core of the state-led developmental model, i.e. the state taking an active role in economic policy and a linkage to the first package's corruption of the traditional parties as a cause for the struggles faced by Poland. Overall, the PiS economic discourse focuses heavily on issues of inequality and a solidaristic approach to its rectification. [757] The middle development trap is presented

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[754] *Ibid*, 17.
[755] Morawiecki: "Our Goal is a Thorough Modernisation of Poland."
[756] *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwość 2014,* 13.
[757] For example, *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwośći*, 81.

frequently and with a heightened sense of problematism. Patriotic development is framed not only as a project for the benefit of the Polish nation, but as supporting the proper functioning of markets as an antidote to the erosion of capitalism through its clotting into a handful of monopolistic multinational entities. "A phenomenon observed in all countries of the world is the monopolization of such orders by large corporations. The effects of declining competitiveness are: an increase in the prices of the solutions sought and the progressing difficulties in obtaining by public entities technological products meeting their needs.[758]" As a smart manager of capitalism, this calls for the state to "move away from the role of the state only as the administrator of funds for research and development and we will move to the role of an intelligent customer who, by ordering solutions for specific needs, i.e. products that do not exist yet, creates a market for new technological solutions.[759]" Much of the patriotic development discourse is actualized through the SRD, which calls for the *repolonization* of strategic industries, the creation of a Polish development fund, and investment into large-scale industrial projects. Repolonization includes the building of a Polish brand: "Building a positive image of the brand "Polska" abroad will be served, among others, by increasing expenditure on translating Polish literature into foreign languages.[760]" Unlike ANO's descriptions of a Czech brand (see below), the Polish brand is not only the product of technological innovation, but of the conscious promotion of cultural heritage and the uniqueness of Poland, its values, and its history.

Support for Polish industries and businesses is an essential part of supporting the repolonization of the economy. In its 2019 electoral program, PiS promises to create a 1 billion PLN strategic investment fund, which "means less bureaucracy, less formal obligations and greater opportunities for development for Polish companies and the Polish economy. Thanks to the change, Polish companies will have approximately PLN 0.7 billion annually in their pockets.[761]" The rationale for this massive state-led investment is that "Polish capitalism needs support from the state, and not creating formal barriers.[762]" The state appears as the benevolent caretaker and guide of Polish

[758] *2019 Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości*, 118.
[759] *Ibid*.
[760] *Ibid*, 124.
[761] *Ibid*, 108-109.
[762] *Ibid.* 109.

business, collaborating to raise the Polish nation to higher levels of economic prosperity. Part of its caretaker role is established in the Start in Poland Program, which as "the largest start-up program in Central and Eastern Europe…supports young, innovative companies locating their business in Poland, at every stage of their development, starting from the incubation phase, is extremely important for innovation and acceleration, through development, to international expansion.[763]" This incubation has patriotic reasons in addition to economic ones, seen in the example of support for audiovisual production to foster "the development of culture and the promotion of Polish cultural heritage in the world.[764]"Patriotic development does not rule out foreign investment, in spite of the discourse's use of foreign investment as a rhetorical enemy. The 2019 electoral program states that "in the long term, the key to the future of Poland and the entire region will be success in generating and attracting investments in the most innovative and technologically advanced areas, such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, Big Data, cyber technology and robotics.[765]" Such represents "an opportunity for Central Europe, including Poland, to attract global investors and create its own innovative solutions.[766]" Patriotic development ultimately plays on the same attitudes that appear in Victimized Poland; namely framing a policy choice as a moral duty to the state and the nation. Similarly, the discourse elevates economics to the level of a moral battle for survival of treasured values. Economic sovereignty is a key for national survival, and therefore, redistributive policies and support for Polish enterprises are moral choices that safeguard otherwise threatened identities.

PiS: Linkages of Ideology

The PiS discourse holds tightly to an idea that Poland as a nation, as a set of values, and as a people is under threat. The discourse is heavily patriotic, with frequent and reoccurring references to the value of being Polish, the uniqueness of the Polish nation, and the common good elevated through directed investment and a return of ownership into Polish hands. Victimized Poland serves to complete an image of the problem and responsibility: communists, neoliberals, and post-communists. Sacred Values establishes and raises the stakes, creating an image of a threatened way of life.

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[763] *Ibid,* 113.
[764] *Ibid*, 115.
[765]*Ibid,* 117.
[766] *Ibid*.

Patriotic Development demonstrates a solution to all of the problems in the shape of PiS's state-led developmental program, which will simultaneously enrich Poland and defend its values. The party establishes an ideational frame that colors its approaches to politics and economics. Social spending, the repolonization of companies, and solving the demographic problem are not simply political choices to improve the lives of people, they are means for national survival, especially when PiS communicates them against a backdrop of historical traumas and the loss of sovereignty. By linking policies with ideational elements, elevating politics to a question of national survival (recall Hawkins' "cosmic struggle[767]"), PiS dichotomizes Poland into those in favor of national survival, and by extension, the party, while those who oppose PiS can easily fall into the category of traitors, anti-patriots, and those who favor the destruction of Poland and its traditional values. Political opponents can thus appear in the same category as for example, the communists. This dichotomization enables PiS to challenge opponents not on policy grounds, but on moral grounds, lifting the political discourse to this hyper-moralized plateau on which debate and discussion are no longer the daily business of a democracy, but potentially treasonous acts. Ascribing political choice with the characteristics of a struggle for national survival has the power to inspire anxiety in the electorate while impelling them to act, if not for direct support of a specific policy, in support of Poland, the survival of the nation-state, and the integrity of its deeply-held traditions. Such a powerful, moralized discourse is extremely difficult for an opposition party to refute, especially a party burdened by the baggage of an authoritarian socialist past and one promoting a return to politics as an emotionally calm, technocratic exercise. Simply put, morality is difficult to refute.

ANO Discourse Analysis

Source Overview

I identify the core discourse of ANO stemming from the central documents of the movement. Considering his position as the founder, leader, and ideological force behind the party, it is fitting that Andrej Babiš's books and speeches represent the party's ideational motivations. The 2017 and 2021 electoral programs provides a concrete policy outline, while Babiš' book *What I Dream About When I Happen To Sleep* provides the ideational framework for electoral and governmental action. In

[767] Hawkins, "Is Chavez Populist?" 1043.

addition, the book provides insight into the leader's motivations and justifications for the party's policies. Similarly, Babiš's second book *Share Before They Ban It!* provides an updated set of policy priorities, as well as justifications for Babiš's reelection in the 2021 parliamentary campaign. Though Babiš takes authorial credit for the books, ANO's political marketing manager Marek Prchal is likely the author of these works.[768] I supplement these core texts with a number of Babiš's speeches, articles, and blog posts for the period of 2016-2019, which I identify as the electoral period and the first governing period. I then consider the second governing period from 2020 to ANO's defeat in 2021. As most of the material originally appears in Czech, I provide translations either in the paragraphs or in footnotes, depending on the context of the quote. All translations are my own.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is worth examining Babiš's discursive style itself. The discursive style differs heavily from the formal and somewhat dry tone of PiS documents and speeches and is an interesting mechanism of ideational transfer from the political entrepreneur to the voters. In his books, Babiš adopts an informal linguistic style that serves the duel purpose of making his ideas easily accessible to the average reader, and of making him appear to be in touch with the pedestrian expressions of everyday life. This technique of politicians appropriating casual language and imagery is not new, and these techniques are not only the province of populists. Recall Barack Obama's rolled up sleeves and open collar, creating an image of a politician voters could imagine having a beer with. Such is the effect of Babiš' books, which from their simplistic construction of complex topics to their cute cartoon illustrations, are an exercise in distilling and communicating a political plan to ensure maximum resonance with the average reader. The books are written in a conversational style, as though the reader is discussing politics with Babiš, asking questions and receiving answers as two equals. This contrasts heavily with the formal solemnity with which PiS presents its policy program and ideological underpinnings.

[768] Robert Břešťan. "Marek Prchal alias Andrej Babiš chystá pro předvolební kampaň novou knihu slibů." *Hlidacipes.org*. 18 May 2021. Accessed 9 June 2021. https://hlidacipes.org/marek-prchal-alias-andrej-babis-chysta-pro-predvolebni-kampan-novou-knihu-slibu/

Babiš affects the casual style in several ways. Short, holophrastic sentences for emphasis often follow a point and present themselves as conversational. [769] Personal stories and anecdotes often introduce political points. A story about a colleague showing Babiš the taxi app Liftago serves to introduce a plan for establishing a rating system for state employees while presenting Babiš as a humble guy who doesn't know it all, and who listens to the suggestions of the people around him.[770] Approachable, open minded, and innovative: the perfect businessman. The specific words Babiš uses also convey a sense of casual approachability. Examining the previous example on discovering the taxi service Liftago, we see an illustrative example of casual style to communicate a neoliberal ideal of hard work breeding success. "Everyone will want to ride with the driver who has five stars, so he will have better business (*má lepší kšefty*) and more money. Well, and who doesn't have five stars will probably have to hustle harder (*musí asi víc makat*).[771]" The casualness of these sentences is apparent in two words. The noun *kšefty* translates roughly to business, though it has an informal, ad-hoc connotation, almost like the English *hustle*. It is the perfect word for the hyper-commodified gig economy. Similarly, the verb in the second sentence *makat*, meaning to work hard, is a casual, slang way of eliciting an entrepreneurial hustle attitude. Babiš uses these colloquial terms to connect with his readers in a down to earth, familiar manner while subtly advancing neoliberal tropes of hard work, rugged efficiency, and a meritocratic-based sense of fairness. This idea can be seen in ANO's campaign material and billboards, which frequently offer slogans such as "We aren't like politicians. We hustle.[772]"

As discussed in the previous chapter, ANO is an entrepreneurial populist party. Entrepreneurial populism constructs development as a function of the virtuous private sector acting against and in spite of the corrupt, self-serving, and wasteful state and traditional political elites. Czech entrepreneurial populism possesses an anti-communist element, though it differs from PiS's anti-communism in that it blames the communists for degrading the Czech economy and ending the golden era of the First Republic. ANO does not instrumentalize the communists as a means of competing

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[769] . Babiš. *O čem sním.* 43. E.g. "Těch, kdo pomoc potřebují, přibývá. Raketově." *Those who need help will increase [in number]. Like a rocket*."
[770] *Ibid*, 35.
[771] *Ibid.*
[772] "*Nejsme jako politici. Makáme*." Billboards seen by the author throughout Czechia between 2014-2017.

within the party system as PiS has done with such successful results. As a specific variety of populism, it contrasts to state-led development as a hyper efficient, rather than equitable, reorganization of the productive processes of the national economy. Despite this difference, it promises to have positive effects on the growth and development of the national economy in particular, and the nation as a whole, as it raises the country out of the low-value added trap and propels it toward greater competitiveness and eventual economic convergence with the West. Through each of the linguistic packages in which it expresses entrepreneurial populism, I identify ANO as a right wing party, filling the neoliberal ideational space, albeit with a less intellectual discourse than the traditionally neoliberal ODS. The discourse of inefficient government, contrasted with the discourse of the heroic entrepreneur, mirrors existing right-neoliberal discourses, for example, those of US presidents Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan.

Overall, the ANO discourse presents a vision of a hyper-efficient technologically governed and business-friendly state. Babiš intersperses his own thoughts with those of a variety of experts and entrepreneurs, who lend an air of technocratic competence and expertise.[773] Through the comparison of Czech backwardness to the smart systems in foreign states, Babiš conveys an idea that Czechs have untapped potential that just needs to be liberated from the bounds of ossified, outdated bureaucracy. This posture links together a package of backwardness with one of business spirit. ANO frames itself as an anti-corruption movement, targeting corruption both on the left and right, in comparison to PiS' partisan orientation against left-wing corruption.[774] The discussion on foreign investment firmly demonstrates Babiš orientation as a national capitalist. While not overtly opposed to foreign investment, much of the rhetoric laments foreign domination of various economic sectors, and envisions an opportunity for Czech firms to take the places of those foreign firms, using Czech know-how and Czech capital to generate an ever-expanding model of economic growth for Czechia.

In terms of using ideational factors to strengthen his broader discourse, Babiš remains ineffective. While this does not take away from the fact that the party continues to

[773] E.g. cybernetics expert Professor Vladimír Mařík. Babiš. *O čem sním*. 241.
[774] *Teď Nebo Nikdy. Ten Jediný Program, Který Potřebujete. Program hnutí ANO pro volby do Poslanecké sněmovny 2017*. Prague: ANO, 2017. 2.

have significant appeal (as of the time of publication), the party's discourse never reached the level of intensity that that of PiS did. As we will see, Babiš's use of secure identities and a threat mentality appear almost as an afterthought designed to capture those voters to whom such rhetoric would appeal. Knowing that Babiš's political strategy rests on what his PR team tells him will attract voters; this is not surprising and speaks to a larger trend in Czech political society, that nationalism is not a reliable strategy for voter activation.

Linguistic Packages in the ANO Discourse

From the source material, I discern two core discursive packages that occur in ANO's public-facing political discourse. These linguistic packages are the amalgamation of reoccurring themes, phrases, elements, and images that occur in the speeches, texts, and pronouncements of Andrej Babiš and the ANO party machine. Together, these two packages serve to diagnose a problem, identify those responsible, and envision a solution. The packages create heroes and villains, and show a path to the promised land. In reading the ANO discourse, it is not difficult to see why the party was successful at gaining and retaining power. Such a simplified and morally bifurcated assessment of Czechia's political and economic situation requires little in the way of critical analysis and fact checking from voters, who in searching for an explanation for the unfulfilled promises of the Velvet Revolutionaries, can easily blame the legacy of communism and traditional politicians as Babiš outlines it. In addition, there is a third quasi-package that appears late in ANO's tenure in the lead-up to the 2021 parliamentary election. In a departure from the language of business-technocratic efficiency, Babiš made a dramatic ideational turn. This stark tactical change is reminiscent of SMER-SD's unsuccessful attempt to revamp itself as a right-wing ideational party prior to its defeat, and like SMER-SD, the rhetoric would prove insufficient to save ANO's parliamentary rule.

Backwards Czechia: Catching up to the West

The first of ANO's packages, Backwards Czechia, uses rhetoric on the backwardness of the Czech state in relation to foreign comparators, the damaging legacy of communism, the abuses of privatization, and the corruption of the traditional parties with an overall sense of relative deprivation vis a vis Western countries to create an image of an unsatisfactory state of affairs which ANO intends to rectify. Backwardness is an inherently economic concept when applied in the ANO discourse

as it holds that for a variety of reasons, "…western states are ahead as far as economics and industry.[775]" ANO creates Backwards Czechia in two ways: through the use of comparator countries, and exemplifying inefficiency. The comparator countries most frequently include Czechia's close neighbors; Germany and Austria, but also often include Switzerland and the Nordic countries, and at times the United States and the Republic of Korea.[776] *What I Dream About When I Happen to Sleep* is largely framed on the premise that Czechia must emulate these comparator countries if it is to succeed: a variation on the classic catch-up discourse that has existed in the former socialist counties since the beginning of the transition. The extensive fawning over comparator countries, especially Germany, runs in direct contravention to the PiS discourse, which, as we have seen, rejects emulation as a mark of servility, in favor of a uniquely Polish developmental model.

Backwards Czechia upholds Western comparators as aspirations, frequently utilizing examples from countries from Germany to the United States to South Korea to illustrate the desired direction for Czechia. Exemplifying inefficiency couples with comparator countries to contrast the current position of Czechia from its desired destination. Comparator countries frequently appear in *What I Dream About When I Happen to Sleep*. Babiš generalizes the sentiment of relative backwardness in the lament that "here, things don't work that work in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland.[777]" These laments extend to the medical sector ("in Denmark or Israel, hospitals operate practically without paper.[778]), digitalization (Estonia[779]), and sport (the US, Germany, and Switzerland[780]). Babiš contrasts Czech backwardness with the advanced status of comparator countries through illustrative examples, notably: "the thing is, we still endlessly fill out paper forms. By hand. In 2017."[781] One can hear the exasperation in the sentence. As a further lament to backwardness, Babiš describes how "the worst is the awful organization, the backwardness of hundreds of hours of lost time.[782]" All of these problems, in addition to creating headaches for Czech

[775] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 28
[776] *Ibid*, *passim*.
[777] *Ibid*, 60.
[778] *Ibid*, 73. "
[779] *Ibid*, 27.
[780] *Ibid*, 82-83, 85.
[781] *Ibid*, 28.
[782] *Ibid,* 26.

citizens, combine to repel businesses from establishing themselves in Czechia, and enriching the Czech economy. Linking inefficiency and foreign comparators is achieved through an example of "young politicians from Finland or Canada [who] attract technology companies and innovators to their countries, where they will create thousands of jobs.[783]" The 2021 electoral program places a much lower stress on emulating foreign countries. While foreign examples are mentioned, much greater emphasis goes to the Czech way of doing things, and the uniqueness and importance of Czechia and its approaches to growth and development.[784] In his second book, Babiš spun the discourse around to demonstrate how his government had successfully pulled the country out of its backwardness, while retaining the comparative element between Czechia and countries with a reputation for modernity and strong economic performance.[785] This change demonstrates a rhetorical flexibility, indicative of Babiš's instrumental approach to ideology.

Why is Czechia not as advanced as the comparator countries? The communist period (1948-1989) frequently appears as the reason for Czechia's backwardness and frequently contrasts with the golden age of the First Republic (1918-1938). Babiš directly blames Czechia's communist past for its reduced economic situation, as noted in a speech commemorating 15 years of Czech EU membership: "Unfortunately, we have 41 years of communism behind us, and that is a huge handicap for our economy. The Czech Republic during the First Republic was at the top of Europe and the world, [between] 1918-1938.[786]" The sense of frustration continues past the end of the communist period, however, with foreign investors and corrupt political parties taking the blame for the continuing economic ruin: "…we lived in that [system]…how long? 29 years. In the year 1989 we hoped, and for a long time still thought, that we would finally get rid of the unbearably corrupt system. It didn't happen. We are still fighting with it today.[787]" This provides a fascinating counterpart to PiS's discourse of the lurking communists. While PiS explicitly argues that the former aparachiki retained

[783] Mladí politici z Finska nebo Kanady lákají do svých zemí technologické firmy a inovátory, kteří tam vytváří tisíce pracovních míst." Babiš. *What I Dream About*. 27
[784] *Až Do Roztrhání Těla. Ten Jediný Program, Který Potřebujete. Jako Vždycky*. Prague: ANO, 2021.
[785] Babiš. *O čem sním.* 140-141.
[786] Andrej Babiš, "Projev předsedy vlády na konferenci 15 let členství České republiky v Evropské unii," *Vlada.cz*. 16 May 2019. Accessed 19 November 2021. https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/projev-predsedy-vlady-na-konferenci-15-let-clenstvi-ceske-republiky-v-evropske-unii-173770/
[787] *Teď Nebo Nikdy*. 2

power after 1989, Babiš avoids focusing on the communists themselves, but on corruption as a systemic problem. The communists and the post-communists were corrupt, but were two different groups, due largely to Czechia's afore-mentioned lustration law. This implies that Czechia did not experience the same continuity between the KSČ and the ČSSD as Poland's communist vanguard party and various left-wing parties. Recalling the KSČM's isolation, this rhetoric also implies that the communist successor party had no systemic power. The communists, therefore, serve a historical role as having harmed the Czech economy, but do not continue to occupy the role of a malign influence over the nation as Poland's communists do. Their influence, however, left a legacy that according to the ANO discourse, led to unequal relationships between Czechia and the West. In his presentation of the national budget in 2019, Babiš demonstrates significant frustration with the lost property during the transition, namely banks:

> You, hardworking and decent people, who worked honestly at the time when the smart guy stole, had to save and pay for all the mistakes and theft. Not only for ourselves, but also for our country to get it somewhere. However, the transformation errors of the 1990s have consequences and transcend to this day. Our banks are controlled by their mothers from Western Europe, who suck huge dividends. We had them looted in the 1990s, and then governments had no choice but to sell them for [a few] crowns to foreign owners. [788]

The juxtaposition of the "hard working and decent people" with the corporate behemoths helps reinforce Babiš's populist image: that he is on the side of the moral people whose struggle he understands and supports. Continuing in this vein, ANO calls for righting "a huge mistake, which occurred in the 90s; the sale of the water infrastructure and the total fragmentation of its ownership between foreign concerns: "we support the gradual return of the water utilities to the hands of the regions, districts, and cities.[789]" Here, we see the celebration of local control as a stand-in for the moral and good people: that which is local most directly affects the people and is therefore the best possible solution.[790] Babiš describes the sale of the water infrastructure as an "absurd abandonment of control over water distribution. From

[788] Babiš, "Projev předsedy vlády na konferenci 15 let členství České republiky v Evropské unii."
[789] *Teď Nebo Nikdy*. 35.
[790] For a discussion of the utility and pitfalls of the 'local is best' fallacy, see Eliane Glaser. *Anti-Politics: On the Demonization of Ideology, Authority and the State*. London: Repeater Books. 2018.

this, only the water giants profited, often run by foreign owners. Logically, they were more interested in increased water consumption to grow their incomes with.[791]" In the same vein as the harmful influence of foreign investors on the Czech economy, capital flight is a major, if not complicated issue for ANO's economic worldview. Babiš at once recognizes the problems while admitting that "foreign investment is quite key for Czechia.[792]" Babiš laments the fact that significant capital fails to be domestically reinvested; "I am concerned that our highly profitable financial sector is contributing to low investment by making its huge dividends disappear abroad every year.[793]" At the same time as his criticism of foreign ownership, Babiš upholds the sale of erstwhile national champion Škoda to German Volkswagen as a positive move: "[following its sale to Volkswagen, Škoda] became a leader of our economy, which directly accounts for 7 percent of our GDP. It is a shame that we did not sell more enterprises to strategic foreign owners, as was the case with Škoda."[794] One may speculate as to Babiš's reasons for this inconsistency.

In addition to communists and Western investors, the traditional political parties bear the blame for Backwards Czechia. Babiš draws parallels between the pre-1989 communist party and the traditional political parties to illustrate that the country is in the same supine position relative to entrenched political interests. During an interview with actor and television host Jan Kraus, Babiš said, "when there was the revolution on Wenceslaus Square, people shouted 'we aren't like them' 'we won't be afraid' 'we won't lie'…well, and now we're fighting again.[795]" The motivation and ideology of the traditional parties comes into question:

> Those parties from the nostalgic orders play at left-wingers and right-wingers, but in reality they don't care about any ideals or people. They want power, influence in the state, and the opportunity to control public finance. They enter politics to work without a vision, without higher goals. It's like, mom, I'm employed, I get a monthly salary for my

[791] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 105.
[792] Andrej Babiš, "(Ne)dostupné miliardy z daní," *Andrejbabis.blog.idnes.cz,* 9 May 2016. Accessed 19 November 2021, https://andrejbabis.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=519245.
[793] Andrej Babiš, "Projev předsedy vlády na konferenci Thirty years of growth," 8 September 2019, Accessed 19 November 2021. https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/projev-predsedy-vlady-na-konferenci-thirty-years-of-growth-176836/
[794] *Ibid*.
[795] "2. Andrej Babiš - Show Jana Krause 23. 9. 2011," *YouTube.com*, 23 September 2011, Accessed 19 November 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z135Q0G9K58. Timestamp 5:35.

> mandate, reimbursement, a bodyguard, somehow we're making a living.[796]

The ANO website recalls Babiš' recognition of the problems caused by the "traditional political parties and the Mafioso structures attached to them[797]" The website quotes Babiš during the aforementioned interview with Jan Kraus in 2011, during which he publically outlined the beginnings of his political philosophy:

> What are you afraid of? Jan Kraus asked him in 2011. "Well, I'm afraid that the godfathers will shoot me, for example. Because I'm the first person here to say what everyone is saying. Here, there is some group that knows no peace. Yeah, and they deal in billions. I counted that here in Czechia since the revolution, we wasted about two thousand billion [crowns]. So, if things worked here, we could have five hundred [thousand billion crowns] on the account, we could build those highways and we could have great schools and great teachers.[798]

Though Klaus' ODS shares ANO's neoliberal orientation, neither the party nor its founder are exempt from Babiš's criticism. Babiš evokes Klaus' stale infectivity through his recollection of a TV interview: "they're all the same. The same phrases, the same prevarications, the same giant ego.[799]" The book features a cartoon image of Klaus giving a televised speech, with words coming out of his mouth: "blah blah blah.[800]" The corruption ANO claims to be fighting transcends the traditional right-left spectrum, as opposed to PiS' discourse of a left-wing communist holdovers as the source of Poland's corruption. "Our movement was founded as a protest against traditional political parties, who played at leftists and rightists. [801]" The elevation of the movement above traditional left-right scheming, and the organicism of its styling as a movement rather than a party, serve to present ANO as a practical choice for those fed up with the system and the parties responsible for creating it. It is a mass movement (ostensibly) devoid of a bureaucratic structure; it is the direct connection of the people to their entrepreneur-leader. The program of such a movement is "totally

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[796] Andrej Babiš, "Pojďte se vsadit, že o mně do voleb nevyjde jediný pozitivní článek," *Andrejbabis.blog.idnes.cz*, 20 July 2017. Accessed 19 November 2021, https://andrejbabis.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=614717

[797] ANO – O Nás. *Anobudelip.cz*. Accessed 19 November 2021. https://www.anobudelip.cz/cs/o-nas/par-slov-o-ano/.

[798] *Ibid*.

[799] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 5.

[800] *Ibid*, 5.

[801] *Teď Nebo Nikdy*, 1.

foreign to traditional politicians," and is built upon a simple promise (perhaps the most patriotic of Babiš's statements): "we will not lie, we will not steal, we will fight against corruption and inefficiency and we will work for our people and our country.[802]" It is a simple promise, and one that is easy to understand. Lying, stealing, and corrupt behavior are the properties of the corrupt traditional parties on both the left and right. Inefficiency is the result of the corruption. ANO will be honest and will right these wrongs in the service of the people and the country.

Backwards Czechia at times features combative language related to discontent over Czechia's position relative to other EU member states. Czechia's relationship with the EU can be a source of tension in this discourse, notably in the idea of a 'two-speed Europe' as discussed during a conference on defining the Czech national interest, "Some talk about a two-speed Europe, so I ask, how do you measure it? The Czech Republic has one of the best speeds, the lowest unemployment, [best] growth, one of the lowest debts, stable conditions, [and] since 2014 we are lowering taxes. Therefore, our interest in Europe is not to allow some crazy ideas from some member states to go to the European Commission, which would harm our country.[803]" Babiš goes on to sharply criticize the unequal distribution of food items: "Second quality food items. It is definitely a problem, now on the table, everyone is talking about it. It is a shame that all Czech MEPs, that we are not in the same boat, that we are not fighting together to ensure that our chains can buy better quality food items, so that washing powder, where it is absolutely flagrant – the quality is totally different products and our chains in short say that the distributor won't sell to them, which is definitely against the internal market. I spoke with those chains and now I have the producer of those goods, and will talk with them about that, and if it is that way, that's a violation of the internal market. That's immediately a letter to [European Commissioner for Competition] Ms. Vestager."[804] The inherent Euroskepticism does not appear with the same force as it does in the Polish discourse, and is simply an opportunistic means of blaming Backwards Czechia on another external party.

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[802] *Ibid*, 3.
[803]"Projev předsedy vlády na konferenci Český národní zájem." *Vlada.cz.* 14 May 2019. Accessed 19 November 2021. https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/projev-predsedy-vlady-na-konferenci-cesky-narodni-zajem-173682/
[804] *Ibid*.

Backwards Czechia creates a starting point for the ANO discourse of entrepreneurial populism, and identifies enemies responsible for creating and maintaining that situation. By illustrating Czechia's current position, ANO creates a call to action. By identifying communism, foreign ownership of the economy, and the corruption of the traditional political parties as the reasons for Czechia's current position, ANO creates an evil against which to rally the electorate. Where there is an evil, there must be a hero to fight against it, and this hero naturally appears in the following package. Backwards Czechia however does not attain the same ideational intensity that Victimized Poland reaches because it avoids discussions of a threatened nation and does not attempt to link the political or economic situation ANO seeks to address with the fundamental survival of the Czech people's political agency. The anxiety that surfaces in Backwards Czechia is less existential and more status-based, manifesting in unfavorable comparisons with other countries ANO seeks to emulate. 'Things are bad because we aren't like Germany' is far less urgent than 'things are bad because our national identity is under threat.'

Business Spirit – Reclaiming the Golden Age

The path out of Backwards Czechia lies through Business Spirit. The package has a backward-looking nostalgic regret for the lost "golden age" of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), which creates an ideal to inspire the nation to future glories. In comparing the current Czech Republic to the First Republic, ANO affects a sense of lost prestige, lost wealth, and lost economic power for the Czech nation. The primary goal of Babiš's government is "to get this successful economy to an entirely new level, with a higher level of research and development, with higher added value, with a higher level of innovation.[805]" Through business spirit, Czechia will escape the middle development trap through business approaches taking the firm as a model for success and efficiency that the government should seek to emulate, and upholding entrepreneurs as ideal type citizens.

Business Spirit derives significant historical legitimacy through references to the golden age of the First Republic, and broader linkages with Czech national identity. In discussing Czech national interests, Babiš exhorts the people to "remember where we were during the First Republic, where we were in Europe, in the world, and I think

[805] Babiš, "30 years of growth."

this is very important.[806]" There is a sense of regret over the fate of the First Republic: "who knows what would have achieved if the war hadn't come.[807]" Famous Czech firms symbolize the spirit and potential of the Czech entrepreneur, for example Tomáš Bat'a, founder of the eponymous footwear company: "…only an independent and enterprising person, who believes in himself, who has a dream and goes after it. And together with his brother he said what was normal for our ancestors, 'we'll do it ourselves.'[808]" In embracing the model of the past, ANO envisions the promotion of a Czech "brand identity…which should be in common and required for every "product manager" – export, investment, culture, and tourism.[809]" The 2017 electoral program reminds readers of successful Czech companies and the conditions needed to facilitate their development: "The Czech Republic has gained a reputation of a developed country not only in Europe. Names like Škoda, Bat'a or Kolben are known through the entire world. In order to keep pace with the competition, fair and simple conditions for businesses are needed."[810] Similarly, those conditions must "beneficial not only for foreign investors, but above all for our traditional industrial firms and outstanding startups.[811]" Babiš draws a comparison to the high-performing firms of the past and the potential of Czech business today. Czech firms can succeed, but only if they enjoy fair conditions relative to foreign investors who have previously enjoyed outsized benefits in the Czech economy. The entrepreneurial populist model of ANO does not entirely eliminate the role of the state in coordinating development, though it does relinquish the primary role to the private sector. The state must undertake "real management of research, development and innovation…to ensure that the funds invested in research return…through funding, we will support development of those fields…which our economy and industry need."[812] In this sense, the state is a caretaker that guides the process to ensure investment is within the national interest, though it leaves the details to the private sector.

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[806] Andrej Babiš. "Projev předsedy vlády na konferenci Český národní zájem."
[807] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 270.
[808] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 271. It is interesting to note that Bat'a embraced a paternalistic relationship with his employees, providing social benefits including health care, education, and housing. See, for example, Gabriela Končitíková. "Sociální program v podnikání Tomáše Bati zakladatele." Bachelor's Thesis. Tomáš Bat'a University in Zlín. 2009.
[809] *Teď Nebo Nikdy.* 42.
[810] *Ibid,* 16.
[811] *Ibid*.
[812] *Ibid*, 33.

This idea of a business-led national rebirth ties directly into to escaping from the low value added that represents the centerpiece of ANO's economic program. "We will finish with investments and tax incentives for warehouses, assembly plants, and other production with low added value. These may be provided only in exceptional justifiable cases.[813]" The state's withdraw from the economic sphere, leaving behind only a few simplified regulations, is the key to enhancing the ability of the Czech economy to transition out of low value added activities.[814] Those regulations the ANO government seeks include

> [using] incentives to support only investment into industry, which has higher added value for the Czech Republic, thus the most modern technology. We want to support new projects that prioritize Czech entrepreneurs, [and] in case of foreign [entrepreneurs] with the condition that they move related research and development to CZ. Thus, we will support not only industry but also related education.[815]

Government as a firm frequently manifest in calls for the government to slim down, to streamline, and to modernize, primarily through technology and digitalization.[816] With regards to leadership, Babiš indicates the normality of entrepreneurs in politics, citing the United States as a positive example:

> Eventually when people get fed up, they tend to seek someone who is capable of both management and leadership, and I think that the entrepreneurs could be part of the answer to this call. Businessmen in politics are common in the US. The Bush family, Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, Herbert Hoover or Michael Bloomberg, the very successful mayor of New York were all successful businessmen before they entered into politics. There would not be national success without businessmen in America.[817]

The key in the above quote is the concept of national success: the notion that successful entrepreneurs are capable of creating the conditions for prosperity, and possess the energy to drive the country to success. This linkage legitimizes the involvement of entrepreneurs like Babiš in politics by indicating their capacity to deliver results. Entrepreneurs can bring organic growth where state action cannot: "if

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[813] *Ibid*, 16.
[814] *Ibid*.
[815] *Ibid*..
[816] Babiš. *O čem sním*. *Passim*.
[817] Andrej Babiš, "The vision of the future of the EU," *Vlada.cz*, 18 October 2018. Accessed 19 November 2021, https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/speeches/the-vision-of-the-future-of-the-eu-169079/

we want to really move our economy forward, we must drive this with a complex approach. Innovation is a starting point and research is a solid foundation for the strategic development of our smart economy. But we assume that the key is an organic approach.[818]" This organic approach, already established in the post-1989 Czech political discourse by Václav Klaus in the 1990s,[819] rests heavily on the notion that business is more efficient than government, and that personal self-interest naturally translates to the broad interest of the entire society and nation. This celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit continues in the narrative of the post-1989 transition. "And as always, the changes were started by strong and talented people. They see things differently. They are never satisfied with what they have. They find a way and show it to others. This is exactly our national talent. [820]" The emphasis is on individual initiative, and it is linked with national attributes as an illustration of what it means to be Czech. Babiš even describes the country as a "family firm," saying, "we want to show that we can be active, economical and loyal employees of this great family firm called the Czech Republic, which belongs to you.[821] This personalization is indicative of a larger personalization of business spirit with individual identity. Celebration of business spirit as a Czech characteristic commonly appears in the discourse. ANO seeks to instill this mindset in the population from a young age:

> "we're making science more attractive for young people. To develop a start up mentality and culture in the whole nation, support the creation of an open physical space for working on the ideas of pupils, students, citizens – a workshop in the style of Make It! in the USA or the open workshop FabLab, which you can find in Europe. These open workshops allow anyone to come with an idea, try to put something together, connect it, try out ideas using the available tools. This can occur in every town, in every school.[822]"

Echoing the conservative Republican discourse in the United States, Babiš decries a supposed negative effect of overly-generous social support as suppressing the necessity to work harder: "This shows exactly how badly we have it figured out. Many times, to work doesn't pay off. And so our state offices start to be known as

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[818] Andrej Babiš, "Jít příkladem: Národní inovační strategie ČR," *Vlada.cz,* 23 September 2019. Accessed 19 November 2021, https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/jit-prikladem-narodni-inovacni-strategie-cr-176482/
[819] Prushankin. "Neoliberalism or Else."
[820] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 22.
[821] *Teď Nebo Nikdy,* 5.
[822] *Ibid*, 34.

'handout offices.' The most important office is the cash desk. People want handouts from the office, not job offers. And firms are searching in vain for employees.[823]" This essentially delegitimizes seeking social support as malingering, thereby debasing the individuals living in precarity in the Czech economy while simultaneously undercutting the government services that seek to address poverty and rely on the private sector to pick up the slack: a method that, since first entering the popular imagination as a solution to public sector problems, has been proven to be a failure that only entrenches inequality.[824]

In the ANO paradigm, business spirit provides the antidote to this social and economic malaise. In a speech commemorating Czech membership in NATO, Babiš describes the role of entrepreneurs in the transition period, with Czech entry into NATO and the EU as having been a product of "work and the responsibility of all conscientious, polite, hard working, and entrepreneurial people in this republic." Furthermore, that the transition succeeded "thanks to hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs, who founded new firms and responsibly created job opportunities from which they only wanted to get rich."[825] Here, we see a linkage of economic self-interest with the national interest. This is strongly evocative of the Reaganist notion that wealth "trickles down," and that by allowing self-interest to operate unfettered, benefits will rain down onto the masses. Similarly, the simplification of regulations carries significant weight in the ANO programs: "We are simplifying the rules for investment and implementation preparation (construction law, law on public procurement, the concession law). In doing so, we will adhere to the principles of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.[826]" Unveiling the 2019 national budget to parliament, Babiš argues for greater "investment into development and innovation, [which] have an incredible multiplying effect and are investments into the future generation. The strategy of our economy, our industry, must be science, research,

[823] Babiš. *O čem sním.* 49.
[824] 2022 World Inequality Report. Accessed 10 March 2023. https://wir2022.wid.world
[825] Andrej Babiš, "Premiér: Po vstupu do NATO je třeba naše členství v EU považovat za návrat svého druhu do Evropy, kam patříme a vždy jsme patřili," *Vlada.cz,* 30 April 2019, Last Accessed 19 November 2021, https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/premier-po-vstupu-do-nato-je-treba-nase-clenstvi-v-eu-povazovat-za-navrat-sveho-druhu-do-evropy--kam-patrime-a-vzdy-jsme-patrili-173324/
[826] *Teď Nebo Nikdy*, 21.

innovation, and final stage production.[827]" The means of escaping the low value added trap are, in ANO's discourse, already present in the Czech society. At the "Thirty Years of Growth" conference in 2019, Babiš identified all of the components that Czechia already possesses to lead it to greater success in high value added fields: "we have a very qualified and educated workforce, and in the field of science we have many options for scientists working on artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and many other [areas]. We have successful technological companies and a leading global company, Avast, thus everyone can tell there is potential here.[828]" Thus, it only takes the government getting out of the way to unleash this potential. In its paradigm, ANO's business know-how and private sector experience place it in an ideal position to implement these changes.

Business spirit frames Czech growth and development as a national capitalist project, driven by Czech firms, in contrast to the previous model of transnational capitalism. In his vision that "Czechia will be an attractive world brand," Babiš explains that Czechia will compete in the global capitalist system because "talented people will no longer search for happiness abroad" because "the country works and does not burden people with unnecessary bureaucracy.[829]" In constructing his plan for business-led development and smart government, Babiš does not seek to remove Czechia from an uneven playing field, or to change the rules of the game as does PiS. Rather, Babiš seeks to win the game. Stating that Czechia is the most industrialized nation in Europe, with over half of Czechs working in industry, Babiš then poses the question, "it's about what kind of industry it will be. What do you think: A). Led by foreign investors, foreign patents and subcontractors for foreign firms? B) Or, it will be our global firms, our patents and inventions, our activity and energy? If we return to all the chapters I've written, it occurs to me that I've thought of about a million jobs and spent hundreds of billions [of crowns]. But, who reads carefully must see why. I want B to be the case.[830]" Babiš clearly recognizes the development trap that has created the conditions of a dependent market economy in Czechia, though in a clear contrast

[827] Andrej Babiš. "Projev premiéra k návrhu státního rozpočtu 2019." *Vlada.cz.* 24.10.2018. Accessed 08.12.2021. https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/projev-premiera-k-navrhu-statniho-rozpoctu-2019-169263/.
[828] Babiš. "30 Years of Growth."
[829] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 41.
[830] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 237-238.

to Polish rhetoric, he does not condemn the system itself as unfair, but rather seeks to live up to the system's expectations. In other words, Babiš uses an adapted catch-up discourse, positioning his country as the economic subordinate of richer countries, and urging it to become more like those countries. Babiš remains a realist however, saying: "I will not promise you here, that in the year 2035 we will catch up to Germany. We won't. Germany is a giant. Tremendous capital, the most innovation in Europe, hundreds of thousands of international patents, a strong middle class, political weight.[831]" While Czechia will not catch up by 2035, Babiš believes that developing the capabilities of domestic capitalists to grow the economy is the answer. Babiš frequently identifies the Czech capitalist class as an engine of progress, for example in his speech at the "Thirty Years of Growth" conference, "the country created an entirely new class of private entrepreneurs, who ensured the livelihood of themselves and their families, and an entire network of small and medium enterprises and new successful firms, which export their products to the entire world."[832] The state as a slimmed-down, hyper-efficient entity is a reoccurring image in ANO electoral rhetoric. Babiš illustrates the vision for the efficient state by comparing the current practice of visiting different public offices to acquire the necessary forms for a construction project. "In the digitalized Czechia, I would see things differently. You wouldn't have to gather anything. State offices would figure it out for you. No stress.[833]" The slimmed-down, more efficient state is here reducing burdens to doing business, enabling private sector actors to be the engines of development while simultaneously reducing overhead costs of operating a large state bureaucracy. In contrast to PiS's depiction of foreign investors as harmful to the nation, foreign capital has a role to play in Babiš's vision.

> I am not against foreign capital. The opposite [is true]. We don't live on a desert island. Foreign owners helped develop our economy after the year 1989. They invest. They also bring know how. Sometimes. They have higher productivity. But we should also say that Czech firms should mainly get support, grants, and subsidies, and not only foreign [firms]. We don't want to be a banana republic, so firms from all over the world in our country have to find something other than tax holidays and subsidies. They should find educated, qualified, and cultured people, reasonable taxes and social transfers, a transparent [business] environment and simplified

[831] Babiš. *O čem sním.* 237.
[832] Babiš, "Thirty Years of Growth."
[833] Babiš. *O čem sním c.* 35.

> rules. This is what a developed country should offer, so that investors rush in. But it must mainly support its domestic businessmen, above all small and medium businesses and freelancers."[834]

Babiš does occasionally lament foreign ownership over the Czech economy, for example, in his critique of foreign-controlled water management system:

> "The districts senselessly lost control over water distribution after 1989. Only the big water corporations, often run by foreign owners, profited from this. Logically, they were interested more in increasing water consumption to boost their profits. We now must find a way to return water systems back into the hands of local authorities and to invest in them."[835]

Babiš embraces the "national capitalist" designation, as he promotes the rise of Czech firms to supplant foreign firms in owning and running the Czech economy:

> "Those will be Czech firms. Czech strength. So far, it has been possible to talk about the extraordinary strength of foreign capital. 900 thousand people work in firms controlled by foreign owners, that is a third of all employees. They produce almost half of added value. But also every year, they cart off more than 200 billion crowns in dividends. Last year it was 289 billion. And there's another catch. The biggest share of foreign capital here is owned by Dutch owners. 12 percent. But often those are Czechs who move their firms there. Some do it because the Dutch managed to reduce the administrative burden by 25 percent. But also, because the Dutch have created a tax haven." [836]

Here, Babiš at once criticizes the Czechs who have moved their companies abroad while simultaneously reminding readers of one of the benefits of streamlining the efficiency of the government: that such streamlining will keep Czech businesses in the Czech lands. Business spirit at its maximum extent aims at affecting the total commodification of Czech society. Business spirit includes ideas on increasing efficiency in the government. A notable example is the establishment of a rating system for government employees, inspired by gig economy car sharing apps. State employees with superior ratings would receive bonuses and promotions, while those with lower ratings would be fired. Babiš justifies this in his typically informal

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[834] Babiš. *O čem sním*. 220.
[835] *Ibid*, 105.
[836] *Ibid,* 220.

style as "a little harsh, but that's life.[837]" Babiš takes the gig economy model to an extreme as he envisions a "shared economy" model, in which everyone is able to make money on an occasional or part-time basis, selling their time, skills, or products from parking spaces to "food from [your] neighbor who cooks great.[838]" Under this paradigm, the entrepreneurial model with its simplified entry into and exit from the profit-generating economy is espoused as an ideal system. This signifies linkage with the imagined golden age of Czech entrepreneurship, and the envisioned future in which the grafting of business practices onto the state and individuals creates a wealthy and efficient society. This is evident in Babiš's dualistic approach, in which progress is reached by returning to Czechia's roots: "and we Czechs have certain expectations to experience this revolution, and return to where we were a hundred years ago. Among the ten most developed states. At the pinnacle of the world. In the realm of technology. And the state will provide its citizens top services and will not burden them.[839]" Similarly, in a speech on the "Vision of the Future of the EU," Babiš at once condemns overregulation from Brussels while identifying the private sector as the engine of growth and progress: "It should be clear it is not the European Commission that is producing economic growth. It is the private sector, companies and entrepreneurs, and they can only do so by having the space to breathe more freely. New regulations do not create economic growth, free people do.[840]" A free people, unburdened by regulations and left to their own devices is a common and reoccurring trope in neoliberal discourses.

In his second book, Babiš frequently invokes the Czech firms and economic performance of the First Republic, specifically "the greatest Czech" Tomáš Baťa as examples to follow. Babiš believes that competence is something Czechs have in their genes, along with curiosity, creativity, and "unusual ingenuity…skill…[and] Czech tenacity.[841]" These traits, Babiš argues, will contribute to his vision of Czechia becoming a "second Israel…leaders in technology.[842]" Technological investment is the way ANO hopes to realize this ambition, starting with the digitalization of the

[837] *Ibid,* 36-37.
[838] *Ibid,* 38.
[839] *Ibid,* 28
[840] Babiš. "The Vision of the Future of the EU."
[841] Babiš. *Sdílejte, než to zakážou!* Prague: Czech Print Center (2021). 305.
[842] *Ibid* 305.

state.[843] After examining a list of the most famous global firms (e.g. Tesla and its subsidiary brands[844]), Babiš guides readers through "the [domestic] firms that are the future of this country.[845]" Babiš builds on his brand creation of a Czech nation of entrepreneurs by relating numerous mentions of his travels in Asia and the positive reception of Czech industry and firms there.[846] Additionally, Babiš credits the economic success of Germany and Austria (again as foreign comparators) with their strong small and medium business sector, and outlines this as the path Czechia must take: the path of the entrepreneur and its ultimately solidaristic growth that will enable the Czech people to "hold together [by] connecting activity and business [to produce] an economy of] thousands of small family-owned firms. That is a healthy foundation to which we want to return.[847]"

In its business spirit paradigm, ANO constructs an image of the heroic entrepreneur as a builder of the country through several methods. Reminders of the past greatness of Czech capitalism serve to illustrate what is possible. Simplified rules and a permissive atmosphere of business ventures will facilitate investment and growth to help return Czechia to its golden years of the First Republic. All citizens can participate in the renewal through their participation in the "shared economy" and through education at a young age, will view market-based innovation not only as accessible, but as a moral duty. Finally, the state will permit and facilitate the growth of Czech business through simplified regulation and increased efficiency. The Business Spirit package involves a veneration of business as a model for government; the use of business methods and approaches to solve social and political problems; and the celebration of Czech businesses as unique and capable entities to drive Czech growth vis a vis the EU and the global capitalist economy. Business spirit, in spite of its favorable foreign comparators, necessarily originates in Czechia. Development occurs through the innovation of Czech firms, and a continued reliance on foreign investment is undesirable.

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[843] *Ibid*, 328-330.
[844] *Ibid*, 306-309.
[845] *Ibid*, 310.
[846] E.g., *Ibid*, 175-193.
[847] *Ibid,* 406-6.

Through these two linguistic packages, ANO provides a map and a route on getting from A to B. The backwards Czechia paradigm illustrates "you are here," while recollections of the communist period provide a warning of the price of abandoning the market. Memories of the First Republic help showcase the destination and the goal. ANO's policies of streamlining and modernizing the state and promoting investment and the innovation of private entrepreneurs are the steps to reaching the promised land of a return to the golden age in which Czech firms were giants of the global markets.

An Ideational Turn? ANO in 2021

Share Before They Ban It!, Babiš's second book published in the lead-up to the 2021 parliamentary elections, suggests a significant transition in ANO's ideology from the technocratic, managerial party to a more traditional challenger party that uses identity-based anxieties as a justification for its challenge. This would appear to fit the blueprint of a successful challenge requiring ideational activation of latent discontent and political opportunity for actualization. By the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, ANO ruled with a governing coalition of social democrats and communists; a bloc whose weak electoral performance enabled only a minority government. Facing a center-right coalition with growing popularity, ANO would change its message to supplement its discourse with ideational anxiety and paranoia. The book opens with Babiš relating a meeting of the European Council in which powerful states (i.e. Germany, France, Italy) attempted to force migrant quotas on Czechia and the other Visegrad countries.[848] Indeed, the first 29 pages are devoted to migration and the cultural tension between Europeans and the migrants. Babiš draws a strict line between Czechs and migrants, referring to them as "from countries, with which we have almost no historical relationship such as Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan. People whose thinking and culture are vastly different than ours.[849]" Politicians from the traditional parties are included in the negative side for this equation, as Babiš names MEPs from opposition parties center-right STAN and TOP 09 as voting for the quotas "against their own country.[850]" Similarly, Babiš plays on similar tropes used by Fidesz and PiS of malign extraterritorial interests exploiting the crisis as a "business of

[848] Andrej Babiš. *Sdílejte, než to zakážou!*
[849] *Ibid*, 8.
[850] *Ibid*.

billions.[851]" Babiš's framing of the migrant quotas rests on sovereignty, the idea that "we alone will decide who will live and work here.[852]" This is frequently in rhetorical comparison to "Brussels bureaucrats" in whose hands Babiš's opposition seeks to place the decision.[853] Babiš similarly stands with Hungary and Poland in a sort of anti-Brussels international, citing his friendship with Orbán derived from their shared opposition to migrant quotas. Babiš goes as far as to devote a page to quoting Orbán verbatim, concluding the quotation with "Viktor, thanks.[854]"

A larger cultural anxiety is expressed, with Babiš citing Mohammed as the most common birth name in England, the practice of polygamy in France, and the functioning of " parallel Islamic courts in Britain.[855]" Babiš brings this fear to Czechia, quoting Pirate Party politician Ivan Bartoš's desire for open borders as a worry that Czechia will undergo a similar demographic trend as France or Germany (i.e. with a rising Muslim population relative to a declining Czech population).[856] Connecting migration to the Czech population, Babiš calls on Czechs to have more children in order for there to be "more of us. Really a lot[857]" so that "our nation does not disappear.[858]" This population anxiety, in contrast to the images of migrants discussed earlier in the book, creates an image of a nation under threat, whose values may disappear simply because of the mathematics of birth rates. However, in light of Babiš's rhetorical record, these statements seem to appear out of nowhere and are far from the deeply conceptualized ideology of PiS. Babiš again turns to his "friend" "Viktor" (Orbán) for inspiration, citing Hungary's various payment and tax schemes for mothers and young families and concluding that "we should be inspired by Hungary.[859]" Babiš goes on to describe a vision in which women have simplified access to maternal healthcare and child care facilities and families with three children can take advantage of interest-free loans for housing.[860] Intriguingly, Babiš's vision

[851] *Ibid*, 11.
[852] *Ibid*, 11.
[853] E.g. *Ibid*, 28.
[854] *Ibid*, 9.
[855] *Ibid*, 20.
[856] *Ibid*, 27.
[857] *Ibid*, 45.
[858] *Ibid*, 46.
[859] *Ibid*, 48.
[860] *Ibid*, 57.

for the mass production of ready-made flats echoes the oft-maligned socialist planners' *panelák* buildings.[861]

Did ANO really experience an ideational turn during the 2021 electoral period? Staying with Read This!, the answer is clearly no. In spite of its evident ideational turn, Babiš's rhetoric retains its technocratic nature as he takes readers through a series of technocratic proposals from simplifying the process of registering for construction permits to education reform aimed at improving children's entrepreneurial capacities.[862] These are not ideas with a basis in national history and the struggles of the nation, but technocratic, managerial goals aimed at improving efficiency of the state-firm. Populist language and ideas remain present in the book. For example, Babiš proposes moving state employees out of Prague's historical center into a new ministerial complex to be built in the Letnany district, envisioning a new, modern complex resembling Paris' La Defense and the new ministerial buildings in Berlin or Copenhagen.[863] Here, we see populist framing appearing, separating the people from the state employees. In this new ministerial quarter, the people would be welcomed to have a coffee instead of "having to cross an unpleasant reception area in a centuries old building, where they scowl at you like some intruder.[864]" Moving state employees out of the historic city center buildings, originally the property of lords and aristocrats, has a democratizing function: "You know what can happen with bureaucrats in those beautiful old palaces, that they start behaving like kings, rulers, or someone who stands above us citizens, voters. And they are your employees who you pay. In the new "government quarter," the bureaucrats will be together. Work together. Among each other and with you. As it should be.[865]" From this passage, we can infer that despite his years in government, Babiš still perceives, or derives a benefit from the perception of, the bureaucracy as a wasteful, detached "other." Babiš deepens this with a discussion of "who is a bureaucrat, who is a politician, and who is a pirate" as a direct means of condemning the Pirate Party in the lead-up to the 2021 election.866 A politician, according to Babiš need "the courage to improve and build something," and draws a comparison to himself for having "built a firm with 35,000

[861] *Ibid*, 61.
[862] *Ibid*.
[863] *Ibid*, 260-263.
[864] *Ibid* 264.
[865] *Ibid*, 264-5.
[866] *Ibid*, 267.

employees out of nothing" and having "rescued plenty of traditional Czech brands from bankruptcy and turned them into modern firms for the 21st century.[867]"Babiš contrasts this with "you know what party I'm especially thinking of" (i.e. the Pirate Party), whom he describes as one who wants to "demolish, destroy, tax, share, share cars, apartments and even our country.[868]" These are strong words designed to play on memories of communism, in which private property was confiscated in an effort to break traditional forms of social and economic relations. Casting the Pirates in the same vein essentially tells voters that opposing ANO risks upsetting established social and economic norms that have been successfully reasserted since 1989. This discussion leads into Babiš's depiction of ANO as a "movement for everyone,[869]" in which women can and should take up senior managerial and governing positions. This is a clear rejection of the trend in the milieu of other challenger parties that embrace more traditional roles for women. In a nod to nationalism, Babiš concludes his list of the important women in his life with a call to create a "day of Czech mothers and grandmothers since mother's day and international women's day are "…not ours. They are not Czech. They are international, the whole world has it and it is something to which we've joined. There is nothing that we should have thought of and only we should have. And because of that, I want it…and when I think this over, I want to give women something. Like a real populist I'll tell you straight away. A week in the spa for free for every women on her 70th birthday." A further idea is to give every mother and grandmother 1,000 CZK upon retirement as a reward.[870] In a fascinating, if not surprising, example of elitist rhetoric, Babiš recounts how President Zeman, upon asking the newly-elected PM to form a government, gave him a word of advice: "don't mind the dwarves who hit your ankles, they will not grow any taller.[871]" This seems to be an anomaly, as Babiš quickly returns to describing the ways in which his government has improved the lives of the population. In the chapter "What We Did for the People," Babiš recounts the ways in which the ANO government affected the lives of the Czech population. Raising the minimum wage and average income, especially those of certain public sector employees (e.g. nurses, teachers,

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[867] *Ibid*, 268.
[868] *Ibid*, 269.
[869] *Ibid*, 107.
[870] *Ibid*, 126.
[871] *Ibid* 128.

firefighters),[872] closing tax loopholes and increasing tax compliance,[873] and decreasing the value-added tax on certain items to give "money to the people.[874]" In each of these examples, Babiš makes unfavorable comparisons of his party's actions against those of his competitors, the traditional parties, to argue that the financial situation of the people has improved under ANO's rule. Babiš also repackages the programs he proposed in *What I Dream About When I Happen to Sleep*, such as improving children's fitness and investing in high-speed railroads.[875]

Babiš thanks the work of his government getting the Czech Republic into "great condition" for enabling it to survive the pandemic.[876] Babiš uses the pandemic to criticize his opponents, for example quoting his primary opponent and successor Petr Fiala's calls to reopen the economy and return the Republic "to normal life" and to end the mandatory wearing of masks.[877] Nearly two full pages are devoted to depicting Babiš's primary opponent (and current Prime Minister at the time of writing) Petr Fiala and his ODS colleagues as irresponsible with his politically motivated attacks on Babiš's COVID prevention measures. Babiš concludes the attack by calling on readers to imagine "how it would look here if our glorious opposition had to deal with the virus.[878]" Admitting that 2020 was "the hardest year of my life," Babiš credits the pandemic with giving Czech firms a push to develop further in the market, "mainly in e-commerce.[879]" Babiš calls for a restart for the country, during which the gains of firms and the lessons learned during the pandemic can be consolidated, especially in support of "sectors with high added value, next to cars support [for] aviation and space technology, aerospace, nanotechnology.[880]" Additionally, Babiš calls for the continuing development of digitalization, energy production, and medical science, while admitting that there is a challenge in a "missing work force," which calls for training and requalification courses.[881]

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[872] *Ibid,* 134, 135.
[873] *Ibid*, 136, 137.
[874] *Ibid*, 137
[875] *Ibid*, 150, 156.
[876] *Ibid*, 141.
[877] *Ibid*, 198.
[878] *Ibid*, 200.
[879] *Ibid*, 206.
[880] *Ibid*, 208.
[881] *Ibid*, 209.

At some points, *Share Before They Ban It!* reads almost like a personal diary, containing musings on a variety of political and personal subjects coming together in an electoral manifesto-cum-personal portrait. While Babiš's revised rhetoric contains more appeals to identity than his previous works, he still does not reach the intensity of PiS's grand history-spanning narrative of national struggle. Ideational rhetoric leading up to the 2021 election takes advantage of migration fears but fails to fit them into the populist dualism contrasted against the threatened historic nation with all of its traditional values and thwarted aspirations. Babiš's rhetoric on migrants and Brussels-imposed migrant quotas is thin, almost artificial, as if he is trying the rhetoric to see if it works with voters, before falling back to his tested entrepreneurial populist promises to improve the functioning of the Czech state. These policy ideas read almost as random thoughts that spring out of long treatises on different subjects, for example, following a discussion of the state of Czech highways, Babiš proposes to provide responsible drivers with free technical inspections on their vehicles.[882] Babiš titles such interventions "idea" and intersperses them throughout the book. These prescriptions for efficiency are interspersed with personal anecdotes in an apparent attempt to humanize the prime minister. A long passage detailing Babiš's relationship with his wife Monika and their interactions with Donald Trump, including a remark about how a gift of earrings for Melania Trump was paid for from Babiš's own pocket and not the state budget (and therefore Czech taxpayers) attempts both to elicit sympathy with Babiš by depicting him as a loving family man with the same experiences as the average Czech, and as a responsible leader who does not spend public funds, inviting an implicit comparison with his political opponents.[883] Anecdotes of Babiš's administrative staff, colleagues, and other inspirational people feature throughout the book. A recipe for Babiš's favorite Kaiserschmarrn even appears on page 100.[884] *Share This Before They Ban It!* shows ANO in a very different light than PiS electoral documents. Far from being a nationalist-conservative party that uses threat language to elicit emotional, fear-based responses from voters, Babiš attempts to create an optimistic image of what Czechia could be under ANO's rule, leaving the discussion of migration and the threatened Czech lands almost as a click bait intro suggesting to readers a false content of the book. The rest of the book

[882] *Ibid*, 148.
[883] *Ibid*, 104.
[884] *Ibid* 100.

reads as a technocratic manifesto for improving the efficiency of the Czech state and the systems that impact the lives of the citizens, from a National Battle Against Cancer plan and improvements in the health system[885] to the creation of a biotech campus in Prague's Albertov neighborhood[886] and investing in the preservation of national cultural heritage sites,[887] all generally calling for increased investment in new technology and the recruitment of more specialists: boilerplate rhetoric from *What I Dream About* suggesting technocratic fixes based on increased funding to improve the functioning of the state machinery and thereby improve the lives of the people. The ideational rhetoric the book began with remains window dressing. In spite of the similarities in rhetoric, the ANO Babiš presents in his 2021 book is a very different ANO to the movement he founded in 2011. 2021's ANO was a governing party deep in the game of politics, attempting to use the normal liberal-democratic mechanisms for implementing policy and drawing the voters' attention to ways in which their lives would improve through supporting its continued governing. Language about corruption and the need to renew the nation by shaking off the tired, self-serving political elite are largely absent. The ANO of the 2021 electoral period barely retains its credentials as a populist party, retaining only the flimsiest construction of the pure people and the corrupt elite, and all but eliminating the moralization of the political struggle. Where populist language occurs, it does so obliquely (as in the proposal to create a new ministerial quarter) or instrumentally (as in the migrant fear mongering). Threat language that assists with moralization also exists only as a pretext in the opening chapter of the book, and fails to develop into a deeper identity-based justification for a challenge to the post-1989 order. In general, ANO ceased to be a challenger party between its first electoral period and its defeat in the 2021 elections. ANO merged with the status quo, not seeking to replace a system that at best failed to serve the people and at worst abused them, but seeking to build upon that system, to improve it, and to perfect it. This is not the revolutionary rhetoric of PiS and Fidesz, declaring breaks with the past and new eras, new structures, and new laws necessary to protect the people against malign foreign influences. ANO has taken its place in the very system it set out to break, becoming a traditional political party, albeit one whose destiny is intrinsically linked with that of its leader in the absence of an independent

[885] *Ibid*, 250.
[886] *Ibid*, 275.
[887] *Ibid*, 278.

organizational structure. This is not to say that ANO will not return, and perhaps it may even radicalize were it to obtain an electoral majority or the domestic political scene should undergo some major shift that would prove permissive to such rhetoric. Despite the thinness of ANO's 2021 campaign ideational rhetoric, the party only lost the election by a margin of 0.6 percent.[888] This indicates that in spite of the hollow ideational rhetoric, the party retains significant support in the population. Indeed, ANO secured comfortable victories in the September 2022 local and Senatorial elections including winning 17 of the 27 largest cities.[889] An electorally empowered ANO could, after winning some future election, undertake a radical attempt to remake Czechia in its image. Judging by Babiš's electoral rhetoric, an extreme departure from the post-1989 order appears unlikely. Moreover, Babiš's personal political future is in question after his defeat in the January 2023 presidential election at the hands of the traditionalist liberal, Petr Pavel. Whether Babiš will be able to return to politics is a question left to the future. Throughout the time of his rise and fall, Babiš maintained a fairly consistent discourse in which he assigned blame for the Czech Republic's problems to the traditional political parties and recommended business solutions for the country's bureaucratic problems. Constructing a discourse of a backwards and inefficient country hamstrung by corruption, Babiš recommended looking toward other countries for inspiration, relying on the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Czech people in the form of entrepreneurial skill to deliver the solutions necessary to turn Czechia into an economy with global reach. An incomplete, inconsistent, and ultimately ineffective ideational component to the discourse was ultimately unsuccessful in overpowering the strong normative discourse of the SPOLU coalition that cast ANO as a departure from the values of the post-1989 democracy. It was this "challenge to the challenge[890]" that proved capable of blocking and, for the time being, reversing ANO's electoral gains and launching a counter-movement aimed at deepening the Czech center-right's electoral dominance and preventing the populist trend begun in 2011.

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[888] "Výsledky voleb v České republice - Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny 2021." *iDNES.cz.* Accessed 26.09.2022. https://www.idnes.cz/volby/parlamentni/2021

[889] "Czech opposition party wins most major cities in local election." *Reuters*. Accessed 26 September 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-opposition-party-wins-most-major-cities-local-election-2022-09-25/

[890] "The Challenge to the Challenge: The Belt and Road Initiative's Implications for Liberal Trade and (Digital) Finance and the Response in Other Countries." SCRIPTS General Research Project. https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/research/research-projects/General-Research-Projects/The-Challenge-to-the-Challenge/index.html

ANO and PiS Compared: Strengths and Weaknesses of Diverse Challenges

In this chapter, I discussed a successful and an unsuccessful challenge in the Visegrad countries. In Poland, Law and Justice has presided over the beginning of a break with the post-1989 order; a reaction to what it perceives as a witch's brew of holdout communists and corrupt traditional parties working with the transnational Eurocrats, the LGBT lobby, and malign foreign businesses to influence the degradation of the Polish nation-state. This degradation occurs through the targeting of Poland's traditional values and the ability of the state to reach its full economical potential. The solutions to this are to deepen the entrenchments of traditional values through a massive reallocation of wealth to those who best exemplify those values: the male-female childbearing family, which is in PiS ideology the basic unit of the Polish nation. Coupled with the Catholic Church, PiS claims to stand for the nation, working for a national renewal that will see the old values reaffirmed and the nation-state stabilized and protected for the long term. To support the traditional structures further, PiS will support economic upgrading and the renationalization of companies lost to foreign investors during privatization, in the hopes of escaping a disappointing future as a second-rate economy from which Poles emigrate to better performing economies. In Czechia, ANO sought to end the rule of corrupt traditional parties whose theft harmed the effectiveness of the state machinery and hampered efforts to regain the pre-war, pre-communist position of a globally recognized, influential economy. ANO's preferred solution was to streamline the bureaucracy and enable massive investments in administrative systems to reduce the burdens of starting and managing a business. In a last-ditch effort to shore up electoral support, ANO attempted to depict itself as a bulwark protecting the Czech culture and people against the threat of unrestricted and destructive immigration. The rhetoric proved insufficient to keep ANO in power, sending it into the opposition, albeit with sizable electoral support.

Backwards Czechia and Victimized Poland share several similarities. The first is the rhetorical problematization of the country's unequal status relative to its foreign comparators. Both countries experienced low value-added models of production, and depended on investment from wealthy economies. This situation was caused by a combination of the damaging legacy of communism and the corrupt post-communist elites. Core concepts in the Czech discourse are backwardness and a need to imitate Western comparators to achieve higher development through conversion to higher

value-added production. Key language that conveys these ideas centers upon mafiosi in government, the corruption of the traditional parties, the memory of the golden age of the First Republic and its destruction by communists[891], and dividend flight. Core concepts in the Polish discourse are the incorrect implementation of a foreign model of capitalism during the post-1989 transition, the damaging legacy of communism and post-communism on the national identity, the state serving the economy and foreign investors, and the effects of transnational capital on the integrity of the Polish state and society.

An analysis of the party literature yields three broad differences between the Czech and Polish discourses. First, PiS uses language depicting threats, fear, and identity tension PiS more often and more effectively than ANO; ANO left these questions in the background and launched a last-minute ideational discourse resembling other European populists' anti-immigration rhetoric in an attempt to sway a close parliamentary election. The tangible outrage in PiS's writing lends itself well to a state-led, patriotic developmental solution, as expressed in the developmental package. Patriotism, in the Polish case, represented as a positive concept, is often constructed as under threat by transnational and foreign interests, the legacy of communism, and the post-communist elite. ANO's patriotism is low, and the values under threat by these similar forces are more capitalistic in nature: entrepreneurship, competitiveness, and economic prosperity. Combativeness, being the sense of aggression and willingness to fight against the forces holding back development, is similarly expressed in the Polish discourse. Framing of the nation and patriotism turns the need to retake economic development into the hands of a righteous and collectively minded party and state into an imperative to fight against those who would hinder this progress. Fighting for development is fighting for the nation, and for that, no cost is too great. Moreover, it is a sacred duty, on which no patriotic Pole belonging to the national community can turn their back. In this atmosphere, a failure to act risks the destruction of the Polish nation and the values in question.

The ANO discourse lacks this kind of combativeness, with the notable exception of ANO's 2021 electoral program, and the concurrent campaign slogan "*Až do roztrhání*

[891] Oddly, Czechoslovakia's annexation by Nazi Germany, which actually signaled the end of the First Republic, is not mentioned as responsible for this.

těla" (literally, *until the tearing of the body* – i.e. "I will fight to the death for you"). This language is reflective of the party's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to embrace a more ideational challenge. Both discourses possess a high degree of positivity. Optimism creates a sense of assurance for voters in the final victory of the party in its righteous struggle against the elements holding back the party's project. That assuredness decreases the sense of urgency, and thereby decreases the feeling of the need to act. Threat language and the fear of losing a valued object, in this case Polish culture and identity, appears far stronger in mobilizing the population than the image of a happy future. This is perhaps unsurprising in the modern world where climate catastrophes, school shootings, wars, and pandemics saturate electorates' consciousness. Returning to the literature discussed in Chapter 2, amid uncertainty and hardship, people are likely to cling to the certainties they have regarding identity and belonging. In framing politics as a battle to strengthen and maintain those values, PiS succeeds in mobilizing voters while ANO's optimism and cheerful image of the future fails to activate the animal survival instincts that propel fear-based mobilization. To PiS theoreticians, "the economy is moral, too, alongside the state and the law, and so should be subordinated to considerations of what is just.[892]" This highly emotive moral judgment contrasts starkly with ANO's technocratic approach to economic policy, and its critique of the post-1989 economic order. While Babiš criticizes the traditional parties for their corruption, we see no similar calls to break with the post-communist past and enter a new age of conservatism (i.e. a Czech Third Republic). Similarly, the Polish discourse is highly combative, serving as a mobilizing call for Polish patriots to retake their country from foreign investors, protect their traditional values, and reclaim Poland's rightful place as a wealthy and proud nation. Business spirit fails to evoke patriotism and collective action found in PiS's discourse because the entrepreneur is by nature a solitary figure, whose self reliance and single-minded initiative toward profit making is inherently isolating from the broader collective. Business development does not directly speak of sacrifice and service to one's country, and considering Czechia's ingrained aversion to overt patriotism and a skepticism for messianic rallying cries, it is doubtful whether such rhetoric would have worked if ANO attempted to use it. ANO's discourse of development is far less emotive, based on a desire to reclaim a capitalist heritage and unleash the potential of

[892] Dabrowska in Bluhm and Varga. *New Conservatives*. 104.

the Czech capitalist class through the reduction of red tape and administrative support for entrepreneurs.

Second, PiS moralizes the economy while ANO discusses the economy for its own sake as a value whose promotion is self-evident. For PiS, the economy is a way to secure the nation by securing its fundamental building block, the family, and thereby reinforcing the stability of the traditional values it holds as fundamental to the Polish identity. ANO, on the other hand, places Czech identity in the image of a successful entrepreneur, and upholds success in business as the way to guarantee the success of the Czech people. A clear difference is the responsibility for and role of economic development. Babiš intends to outsource such development onto the private sector, aided by a slimmed down and hyper efficient bureaucracy. PiS sees the government as the engine of development and calls for more active and widespread state involvement in the allocation of funds and the setting of priorities for the private sector, which should operate as a privately-owned wing of the Polish nation-state, working for the good of the entire nation and people. Business Spirit and Patriotic Development are very different packages. Core concepts in the Czech developmental discourse are the return to a First Republic level of economic performance through the return of high-performing entrepreneurs such as those who made the First Republic prosperous. The role of the government in this process is to get out of the way, and to do so by running itself like a firm. Additionally, the cultivation of a business spirit among the population, especially the youth, will create the organic conditions for the growth of the Czech economy. Czech firms, reinvesting their dividends in the Czech economy, will make the country prosperous. Relative deprivation occurs far more often in the ANO discourse, as Babiš instrumentalizes Czech backwardness relative to other countries to justify his entrepreneurial vision. These unfavorable comparisons have the function of showing what the country could be, and of criticizing it for what it is. Their use would be inimical to the PiS construction of Poland as a virtuous nation, unique in its defense of Catholicism and tradition as sigils of the nation. The tone of Business Spirit is significantly softer, and frames development as a more organic process, rather than a state-led, planned and managed process. Patriotic Development centers on the notion that hitherto quoted idea that “capital has a nationality and a homeland.” Thus, development is a common task of all Poles, for the betterment of

Poland, and is directly linked to concepts of Polish identity, pride, and collective wellbeing.

Third, the role of communists and the communist period is differently utilized. Both discourses identify the communist period as a uniquely harmful experience, holding back economic development and delaying overall progress. The difference lies in how the party instrumentalizes the communist period and the communists themselves. PiS effectively weaponizes the communist period and the post-communist successor party and politicians as entities that, respectively, degraded the Polish nation by prostrating it before a foreign power (i.e. the Soviet Union), and which undermined the transition by stealing national assets and profiting from economic subordination to foreign powers (i.e. international firms). ANO, apart from blaming the communists for destroying the Czechoslovak economy – language hardly unique in the Czech political spectrum – refrains from any strategic use of the communist period or party to create an enemy. ANO's corrupt others are the traditional parties on the center-right and center-left. In partnering with both the communist party and the center-left ČSSD, ANO revealed its utilitarian approach to the traditional parties, showing that it is less concerned with broad narratives of corrupt parties destroying the country and more interested in obtaining the allies necessary to secure its governing position. This is understandable especially in light of ANO's coalition partnership with the communist party, which denuded of an opportunity for mainstream participation in the post-1989 political order, would serve no meaningful role as a political bogyman. Furthermore, amid allegations of Babiš's cooperation with the StB, a PiS-style discourse about post-1989 communist holdovers would appear hypocritical at best and self-defeating at worst.

Essential for Success: The Role of Appeal and Ideology

Despite their common goals of revising the post-1989 order in their countries, ANO and PiS present very different challenges. ANO is a pragmatic party that embraces ad hoc rhetoric to pursue solutions that may have lukewarm approval of a sufficient subset of the population to facilitate its successful election. PiS, on the other hand, is a party driven by a coherent ideological position grounded in its fundamental love of its perception of the Polish nation and its accompanying values and characteristics. The discourses and performance of the parties tells us that broad, universally applicable

rhetorical framing is necessary to bring together the electorate in support of a challenge. Ultimately, PiS's rhetorical strategies appeal to broad segments of the population: rural, poorer, and more traditional Poles. ANO's discourse, centered on the role of the entrepreneur as a heroic builder of the nation, appeals more to the current and aspiring executives of small and medium enterprises, while its proposals for more streamlined services simply lack a compelling call to action and fail to mobilize the population. People are simply more likely to act politically when their families and faith are under threat, than when they can get discounts on public transportation or submit a building permit through a streamlined virtual portal. Herein lies the key to PiS' success.

Returning to the model of successful challenge = demand + opportunity + activation, these factors, broad appeal and ideological content, show us that the activation stage is the difference between a successful and unsuccessful challenge. Both parties emerged from low demand scenarios, exploited spaces in their party systems, and then attempted to activate their challenges through appeals to identity. PiS, with its broadly applicable and powerful ideology, attained this while ANO, with its narrowly applicable and emotionless construction of the people as entrepreneurs, did not.
The continuing victory of an ideologically bound party over a pragmatic one is revealing of the strength and character of successful populist challenges. Ideology matters. Ideology still matters, and a self-proclaimed non-ideological party that deploys rhetoric and ideas on an ad hoc basis without a grand framing of history and the problems facing the nation cannot obtain the necessary depth of support to facilitate its path to dominance. While ANO claims that it is a non-ideological party, an ideology shines through as it proclaims its values of entrepreneurship, efficiency, and anti-corruption as integral parts of the Czech character. Unfortunately for ANO, its narrow conception of entrepreneurs as the fundamental Czechs was not sufficiently broad to enable it to attract the same large-scale and long-term support that propelled PiS to power. The success of a party still depends on how it frames big ideas like history, identity, and destiny. The entrepreneurial populism of Andrej Babiš reads like its source: management-speak solutions for an increasingly hyper-compartmentalized world in which everything is for sale and the savviest entrepreneurs are the movers and shakers of society. Judging by the success of PiS's ideational discourse, this is not the world people want to live in. A world in which grandmothers can monetize their

at-home baking and citizens can rate bureaucrats like they rate their Uber drivers will not inspire the population to the overwhelming support that enables the fundamental remaking of a country. PiS's continued victories, like the continued victories of Fidesz, show that a broadly appealing ideology is a critical component in promoting a political agenda. Ideas about the nation, about its enemies, and about what is at stake are necessary to mobilize a population. Without a broadly appealing and coherent ideology, a party is missing a core part of its appeal, a way to connect past the management-speak solutions and get to the hearts of voters: a way to bring the past to life and link it with the present and future in a broad arch of history to which the people can feel a connection. Far from living in a post-ideological world,[893] the cases of ANO and PiS prove that ideology is still very much relevant, even essential, for a party with the grand ambitions of the Visegrad challengers. Connecting that ideology with elements that inspire broad appeal, specifically over identities and values that can bind broad segments of the nation together, is a recipe for success far beyond slick marketing repackaging narrowly applicable ideals of entrepreneurs and business dreams.

[893] There is a discussion underway of the role of ideology in the contemporary political world. See, for example, Adriaan van Veldhuizen. "Defining the Old, Creating the New: Post-ideology and the Politics of Periodization." In Herman Paul and Adriaan van Veldhuizen (eds). *Post-Everything: An Intellectual History of Post-Concepts.* Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2021.

Chapter 5: Patterns of Contestation

At the beginning of this work, I set out my intention to understand what contributed to the success or failure of populist challenges to the post-1989 order in the Visegrad countries. I theorized that a successful challenge is the result of demand, political opportunity, and ideational activation. Challengers compete against the established liberal system by capitalizing on latent demand in the society. The political maneuvering occurs as the challenger attempts to isolate, delegitimize or coopt its rivals. This process depends as much on the pre-existing alignment of parties as it does the challenger's supposed orientation. Finally, as the election campaign is run and once the party takes power, the challenger will deploy a language of ideational fear mongering to present a situation of an impending threat to the population. This threat is based on values and identities embraced by a significant proportion of the electorate, for example, religion, nationhood, and traditional conceptions of the family. The party will present its policies as those capable of defending the threatened identities, linking identity to specific points of economic and political policy. Fidesz and PiS masterfully undertook this effort, creating with their intellectual communities and think tanks a coherent ideology, while the half-hearted SMER-SD and ANO use of ideational tension fell flat. In this chapter, we will review the key takeaways derived from our analysis of challenges in the Visegrad 4 and their implications for populist challenges in the wider world.

The Populist's Guide: Key Takeaways

In Chapter 3, I outlined the key takeaways from the causal model:

- The utility of discontent is limited: discontent in society over the state of the economy and democracy are helpful, though not essential for a challenger party to emerge.
- Opportunity presents strategic challenges: a party must hegemonize its side of the political spectrum while delegitimizing and isolating the other. Cleavage salience and elite character influence how this will occur.
- A compelling ideological narrative is essential for activation. A party needs to raise the stakes of the election to gain traction.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the role of ideational activation and what makes an ideational discourse successful:

- The discourse must be broadly appealing, addressing values important to a sufficiently large subset of society. Religion and the nation are more broadly appealing in this sense than entrepreneurial legacy and efficiency.
- The values at stake must elicit strong negative emotions. A discourse that, for example, the Catholic family is under attack by the transnational LGBT lobby creates fear and anger in the population, while a discourse that criticizes bureaucratic processes as inefficient does not.

How does a populist break a liberal democratic state? The process begins with the emergence of a party driven by societal discontent, whether economic or political, in response to political scandals or an unstable economy. The party claims to address some aspect of the discontent in its program, targeting its opponents as responsible for the undesirable condition. The party then endeavors to defeat its opponents, hegemonizing the side of the ideological spectrum on which it falls, and discrediting and isolating the other. Cleavage salience and elite character affect this strategy, as well as influence ideational activation. At this final stage, the successful challenger party deploys a discourse presenting a compelling ideology with broad appeal, and eliciting strong negative emotions. This effectively mobilizes the electorate, driving them to defend their nation against the perceived threat posed by the party's opponents, the threatening 'other.' Once the party secures parliamentary power, it works to dismantle the mechanisms of accountability and alter the electoral machinery to enable its continued grip on power. The liberal democratic state, with its legally mandate for free and fair elections, is eroded, transforming into a democracy for the in-group, in which the pure people and their vanguard party form a direct relationship against the out-group.

Challenges and the Liberal Script

Are the Visegrad challenges a real attempt to decouple from the post-1989 settlement and build a new order? If we take the rhetoric of the politicians and ideologists seriously, we might expect a fundamental break with the past and a turn to a new type of regime that places sovereignty first, upholds a rententionist approach to national identity, and at least to some extent attempts to decouple from the web of

transnational entanglements entered into by its predecessors. Europe, in the intervening 30 years since the fall of state socialism, has changed. These changes, both positive and negative, triggered anxieties over the evolving role of nation and faith in Europe, where borders are mostly symbolic as ease of travel and universalization of values promote the diffusion of ideas and habits at an unprecedented rate. The challenger parties are a symptom of this; indicative of both the promise and peril of democracy.

In spite of the autocratization of Poland and Hungary, liberalism appears secure in Czechia and Slovakia for the moment. However, in the long term, the liberal script can only survive in the region if the people subject to its rule internalize its values. If a democratic system is the system sought by both supporters and critics of a particular political regime, they must accept democracy as the rule of those living within a nation-state, whose sovereignty in determining their own course cannot be challenged. Similarly, if self-determination is a right under a liberal democratic system, it is incumbent upon a democratic electorate to choose policies for itself, along with how to implement them in a way that respects widely held beliefs and habits. This is ultimately a question of whether certain universal values exist or if values are defined by the culture perceiving them. If the former, to what extent can and should populations that accept these values require all of those living among them to do so? If no, what protections can be offered to people who fall afoul of their state's dominant value system, and when states go too far in upholding their values, how should other countries react? These are questions that fall well beyond the scope of this research, but perceiving the questions I have discussed in these macro terms helps us to remember that the actions and rhetoric of the challenger parties relates to broader questions under discussion not just in Central and Eastern Europe, but a host of other places in the world. When considering Central and Eastern Europe, judgment by the standards of other countries runs the risk of misunderstanding and oversight. Take for example sovereignty anxiety in the region: an understandable result of centuries of foreign domination and traumatic events that occurred within living memory. The propensity of individuals and their political leadership to feel that sovereignty is under threat from what they perceive as foreign values and actions is a reaction to a historically-conditioned experience of foreign ideologies and values imposed upon those communities, often at the point of a bayonet. It behooves both

scholars and policymakers interacting with challenger parties to understand those sensitivities and vulnerabilities, not to justify attitudes one might find do not mesh with one's own values, but to recognize the historical, sociological, political, and economic factors that shape these reactions. Patience and understanding are required, but that does not rule out the need to respond to the violation of the fundamental rights of European citizens. It is incumbent upon the European Union, should it wish to survive as a political subject, to hold regimes accountable for their behavior when they violates European law and the fundamental rights it stands to protect. The rights of every individual living within the EU, regardless of the factors that comprise their identities, are inviolable, and it is the duty of any government to ensure a dignified and secure life for its people, no matter who the are. That is the agreement made by each of the Visegrad states upon joining the EU, and short of secession, compliance is not optional. How the European Union intends to proceed with addressing rule-of-law infractions and civil rights violations also lies outside the scope of this research, but it is my hope that this research will inform those interacting on all sides of these subnational, national, and supranational tensions to look for resolutions that are historically informed and sufficiently understanding of national anxieties while ensuring the defense of the rule of law and civil rights. It is that understanding, cooperation, and forward-looking spirit with which the Visegrad countries entered the post-socialist age, and with which they can address the present-day challenges to attain the security, belonging, and prosperity sought by their citizens.

Contribution and Broader Relevance

The four cases described in this work represent challenges from within the liberal-democratic system. Thus, this work contributes an analytical tool to explain success and non-success of such internal contestations. At its core, this research is about explaining variation in populist challenges to liberal democracy, and understanding why some movements succeed and others fail. The model that I developed for this task is workable both in the post-communist context, and also with non-post-communist populist movements, which I briefly illustrate here with two of the most prominent cases of contemporary rightwing populism: Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro. During his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump, an outsider populist entering politics from the business and entertainment sectors, capitalized on economic discontent, especially in de-industrialized regions of the United States, showing voters

in those areas that he listened to them when other politicians declined to do so.[894] The Republican Party's electoral victory occurred under conditions far more simplistic than those occurring in the Visegrad countries' multiparty systems. The Republican Party exploited voter exhaustion after eight years of a Democratic administration in a process that typically occurs in the US. Parties that win presidential elections in the US typically alternate, with the examples of one-party rule continuation in the modern (post-1945) presidency occurring only upon the death or resignation of the incumbent of the same party, or in the exceptional case of George H.W. Bush's succession of the immensely popular Ronald Reagan.[895] Trump's rhetoric linked dangers to economic programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and social security with immigration to activate fears of threatened national identity and threatened economic wellbeing. In addition, security threats over Muslim immigrants, leading to the infamous "Muslim ban" helped further activate identity tension.[896] Democracy, as a fundamental discursive value, was similarly constructed by a variety of right-wing ideologues as under threat from "the tyranny of experts," i.e. technocrats who undermined the rule of the electorate.[897] The combination of underlying economic discontent, a simple party structural opportunity, threats of immigration, security threats from Muslims, and the idea of a democracy lost to technocrats combined to propel Trump into the White House and establish, in spite of his electoral defeat, the rise of Trumpsim that has pushed both the American right and left toward greater polarization. While Trump himself lost power after the 2020 election, I consider the Trump challenge to be a highly successful example of the model in action. The Trump movement has grown to constitute a strong force within the Republican Party, and remains the primary opposition, both to moderate Republicans and Democrats. Indeed, in spite of his criminal charges in August 2023, Trump remains the most popular Republican

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894 Thomas Ferguson et al., "The Roots of Right-Wing Populism: Donald Trump in 2016," *International Journal of Political Economy* 49, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 102–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/08911916.2020.1778861.

895 "Presidents." *Whitehouse.gov*. Accessed 23 June 2023. https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/; Jennifer Pinto. "Ronald Reagan's Presidency: A Polling Retrospective." *CBS News.* 6 February 2011. Accessed 23 June 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20221216110847/https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ronald-reagans-presidency-a-polling-retrospective/

896 *Ibid*.

897 Salvatore Babones. *The New Authoritarianism: Trump, Populism, and the Tyranny of Experts*. Cambridge: Polity. 2018.

candidate for the 2024 election cycle.[898] In addition, the structure of the US legislature is different than the parliamentary systems in the Visegrad Four, as a party lacking the presidency can still marshal significant power in Congress. The Republican Party controls the House of Representatives and constitutes a strong minority (49 of 100) in the Senate.

To demonstrate an unsuccessful case, I turn to Brazil, where Jair Bolsonaro, a former Army captain and member of the Chamber of Deputies, rose to prominence as the populist leader of Brazil's challenge movement. Hitherto thought of in the mainstream as a fringe right-winger, Bolsonaro rode a wave of discontent over rising crime rates and a deteriorating economic situation to win the presidential election in 2018.[899] Bolsonaro exploited popular discontent over the ruling left-wing Labor Party's corruption scandals to position himself as a savior who could restore law and order, while opposing the corruption and dishonesty of the establishment.[900] In activating his challenge, Bolsonaro depicted traditional families and the "values of the national community" as under threat from the LGBT community, who, as in the Fidesz and PiS discourses, appear as a consolidated socio-political conspiracy threatening "God, Homeland, and Family.[901]" In addition, Bolsonaro deployed rhetoric attacking international organizations for their interference in Brazil's internal politics. This included environmental organizations attempting to reduce logging in the Amazon, and medical experts distributing the COVID-19 vaccination.[902] In spite of his selection of elements that appeared successfully in other populist challenges, the lack of a grand narrative linking a core package of Brazilian values with history and a clear image of an enemy threatening to destroy those values contributed to Bolsonaro's downfall. A populist challenge based on machismo has no space for a leader who fails, and as the nearly 1,000,000 COVID deaths show, Bolsonaro's challenge rested primarily on bluster without substance. The former president's ban on political

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[898] A Martinez, Franco Ordoñez. "Donald Trump's Repeated Legal Woes Have Given Him a Boost in the Polls." *NPR.org.* 1 August 2023. Accessed 2 August 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/08/01/1191242168/donald-trumps-repeated-legal-woes-have-given-him-a-boost-in-the-polls

[899] Wendy Hunter and Timothy J. Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 68–82, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0005.

[900] *Ibid*.

[901] Paolo Ricci and Gustavo Venturelli, "Connections between Populism and Nationalism: Evidence from Jair Bolsonaro's Speeches," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (July 2023): 1057–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12949. 1069.

[902] *Ibid*.

participation until 2030 suggests that, along with the Labor Party's returning president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's enduring popularity, suggest that for the time being, Brazil's liberal democracy is stable.[903]

As we have seen with the cases of Trump and Bolsonaro, the model works in countries with developed party systems, a market economy, and generally liberal democratic political environment. The model is unable, however, to explain external contestations, e.g. developmental authoritarian regimes in East and Central Asia. The regime of Park Chung Hee in South Korea, for example, came to power in 1961 through a coup d'etat in order to remove a democratic regime Park believed to be "a continuation of degeneration, crudity, and stagnation" of Korea's 5,000-year history.[904] Park had no need of exploiting a space in the party system, though he did justify his regime through public discontent over poverty and the standard of living, and the threat of aggression from North Korea.[905] Similarly, the regimes of Central Asia cannot be explained through the model, having arisen out of the structure of the communist parties that ruled the erstwhile Soviet Republics. These regimes justify their rule as the pursuit of the common interest, state building, and symbolism, with an undercurrent of fear.[906] In these systems, there is little necessity for political maneuvering, and ideational activation occurs largely in the context of anti-Islamism, security, and stability.[907] Based on these brief examinations of alternative political regimes, the model I created in this dissertation is clearly not a universal explanation for anti-liberal political behavior; its utility being limited to regimes with real party competition. It is, in effect, a tool for populists, i.e. those willing to exploit fear and belonging for electoral purposes, to marginalize and overcome their mainstream political opponents and create a new type of democracy in place of liberal democracy.

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[903] Tom Phillips. "'Brazilians Tired of Him': How Bolsonaro the 'unfloppable' flopped." *The Guardian.* 4 November 2022. Accessed 2 August 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/04/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-election-unfloppable-lost

[904] Chong Sik Lee. *Park Chung-Hee: From Poverty to Power.* Palos Verdas, California: The KHU Press, 2012. 298

[905] Yong-Sup Han. "The May Sixteenth Military Coup." In Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Eds.). *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2011.

[906] Anna Matveeva, "Legitimising Central Asian Authoritarianism: Political Manipulation and Symbolic Power," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (September 2009): 1095–1121, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130903068624.

[907] *Ibid*.

In relation to the liberal-democratic state, the model for populist contestation in the Visegrad countries is a dangerous blueprint for how to break a state.

Future Research Agenda

Both Slovakia and Poland have parliamentary elections taking place in the months following the submission of this dissertation on 1 September 2023. The results have implications for the model I demonstrated in this work. The reentry of SMER-SD into power would demonstrate that its increasingly ideational discourse is gaining traction. If PiS is not reelected, this would suggest failures in the party's ability to maintain ideational mobilization over the long term, or that the opposition bloc was able to sufficiently mobilize the population around the an ideational discourse promoting a return to pre-PiS normalcy, much as the SPOLU bloc deployed to unseat Babiš. Whatever the outcome of these two critical elections, the model will serve as a useful tool in analyzing what happened, and considering the future of both the challenger parties and their opponents.

Beyond these upcoming elections, it will be useful to look deeper into SPD, which has as yet kept a relatively low profile in the literature on Czech populist challenges. SPD, while yet to obtain electoral power, combines much of the ideational rhetoric that would not look out of place in a PiS pamphlet.[908] It remains to be seen if an aggressively ethno-nationalist discourse can gain broad appeal in a country with a historically quiet brand of nationalism and a firm democratic tradition. It will likewise be necessary to examine the character of the emerging electoral coalitions in the region, as this appears to be the trend in attempting to dislodge the challenger parties from power. At the time of writing, only the Czech SPOLU coalition of center-right parties was able to defeat the challenger party, while the Hungarian and Polish coalitions have been thwarted by the various mechanisms of legalistic electoral meddling. Attempts by the challengers to use the law to insulate themselves from further opposition attempts to overturn their mandates will also need to be watched. In addition, it will be necessary to follow the effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the growing tensions over Chinese aggression in the Pacific on the challenger parties and populism in Central Europe in general. PiS has embraced a strongly anti-Russian, Euroatlantic discourse as it engages in a significant military build-up. Fidesz

[908] "Program." *SPD.cz*. Accessed 26 April 2023. https://www.spd.cz/program-vypis/.

and SMER-SD remain soft Putin apologists, while ANO instrumentalizes the war and the refugees to attack the Czech government over cost of living issues. The long-term trajectory of these shifting power relations and the role of the challenger parties is likely to influence political tensions in the EU at large going forward.[909]

The agenda for further research goes beyond the Visegrad context with refining the model by applying it to other cases of populism from different regions. As we have seen, a cursory review demonstrates that Donald Trump's Republicans successfully exploited public discontent and political opportunities and activated identity tensions to accomplish their electoral goals. A study of other populist movements, especially those outside of Europe, to determine how the model applies across different political and cultural contexts would be beneficial in expanding and strengthening the model. Such a broad review is especially important considering that different sets of values can cause variation in threatened identities across political discourses. Because the parties I reviewed in this work are variations of right-wing parties,[910] it would similarly strengthen the model to analyze left populist rhetoric, its constructions of threatened identity and its use of these to gain political power. There is still an enormous amount of work to be done on populism in all of its forms, and for better or for worse, we as populism scholars are unlikely to run out of new topics for our research any time soon.

[909] See Keith Prushankin and Kai-Olaf Lang. "Shifting Power Relations Since the Russian Invasion of Ukraine." *SWP Working Paper* (forthcoming).
[910] SMER-SD adopts typical right wing rhetoric on identity with respect to immigration. Its status as a leftist party is debatable.

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