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THE POPULIST CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN HUNGARY

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1 Inspiration and Delimitations.....	4
1.2 Purpose and Aims	5
2. Conceptual Framework	7
2.1 Civil society and Civil Society Organizations	7
2.2 Human Rights and Human Rights Organizations.....	8
2.3 Hybrid Regimes	9
2.4 Populism.....	10
3. The Case of Hungary.....	12
3.1 Orbán’s Path to Power	12
3.2 The First Hybrid Regime in the EU	13
4. Theoretical Framework	15
4.1 Restrictions on Foreign Funding.....	16
4.2 Smear Campaigns	17
4.3 Restrictions on Fundamental Rights	17
4.4 Severe Burdens on the Operational Capabilities of NGOs and Society Actors.....	18
4.5 Cooptation of Sectors of Civil Society	18
5. Methodology.....	19
5.2 Data Collection	19
5.3 Data Analysis.....	20
5.4 Limitations	21
6. Analysis.....	23
6.1 Restrictions on Foreign Funding.....	23
6.2 Smear Campaigns	25
6.3 Restrictions on Fundamental Rights	27
6.4 Severe Burdens on the Operational Capabilities of NGOs and Society Actors.....	29
6.5 Cooptation of Sections of Civil Society.....	30
7. Summary and Findings	32
7.1. Conclusion	33

Abstract

During recent years, the world has experienced a trend of diminishing freedoms. The failure of governments around the world to tackle polarization and inequality has resulted in a discontent amongst people. A discontent which has been exploited by autocratic and populist leaders claiming to have the right answers. Such a development has occurred in Hungary, where the Fidesz government has transformed what used to be a liberal democracy into a competitive authoritarian regime, all since their victory in the 2010 elections.

Through a qualitative content analysis, this thesis has gathered, and analysed data related to the case of Hungary, based on five populist strategies which are commonly used to restrict human rights organizations globally. The material used in the analysis have been gathered from 10 reports by various CSOs, along with 20 news articles. This thesis has thereby tested theory by investigating if the Hungarian government have used the five populist strategies to restrict domestic human rights organizations since 2010. The findings show that the Hungarian government indeed has used all such populist strategies to restrain actors in civil society since 2010, which raises questions concerning how such a development could have occurred so rapidly and without ample international constrains, within the context of the EU.

Key words: Hungary, civil society, human rights organizations, populism, hybrid regimes, CSOs

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, countries in all corners of the world have experienced a shift of diminished freedoms. According to Freedom House's report *Nations in Transit* (2021), the region of Europe and Eurasia has experienced a shift away from democracy in 2020, with a total of 18 countries suffering a decline in their democracy scores. This result implies that the number of democracies in the region currently is at its lowest point in the history of the report, which has been published annually for the last seventeen years (Freedom House, 2020).

Institutions' failure to manage inequality, pressing societal issues and polarization has spiked frustration. The uncertainty and lack of trust in governments has been exploited by various leading politicians promoting populist and antidemocratic norms as an alternative path (Freedom House, 2020). This phenomenon has been realised in countries as diverse as Venezuela (Chavez and Maduro), the Philippines (Duterte), Brazil (Bolsonaro), Turkey (Erdogan) and Hungary (Orbán). Authoritarian politicians have expanded their powers by, in an undemocratic manner, removing various constraints to their authority (Diamond, 2021). Moreover, it comes as no surprise that various such governments increasingly have targeted critical actors by "squeezing" the civic space (Buyse, 2018). Because of this development, CSOs in numerous countries are struggling to continue their operation and to take on the important role of scrutinizing government practices. According to Buyse (2018), this trend has not been effectively countered yet.

1.1 Inspiration and Delimitations

My interest for the interrelated fields of hybrid regimes, human rights, populism and the recent crackdown on civil society organizations was originally developed through reading Antoine Buyse's article '*Squeezing civic space: restrictions on civil society organizations and the linkages with human rights*' (2018), which discusses the recent global crackdown on civil society organizations in relation to human rights. In the article, Buyse (2018) emphasize the

magnitude of the problem for the human rights movement, which made me inclined to learn more about the subject. When I thus later came across the book '*Rising to the Populist Challenge, A Playbook for Human Rights Actors*' edited by Gomez and Rodríguez-Garavito (2018), the populist dimension of the issue further spiked my curiosity.

After taking part of the book, I decided to concentrate my thesis around five populist actions that Gomez and Rodríguez-Garavito (2018) identifies as being commonly used by governments to restrict human rights organizations (which are expanded upon in section 4). I decided to use the five strategies as a theory and test it in relation a relevant country case, in order to delimit and concentrate the field of study. I ultimately selected the case of Hungary. The country is relevant to the context as it has experienced a drastic shift from being a liberal democracy in 2010, to becoming the first “hybrid regime” in the European Union less than a decade later. Likewise, as the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the governing party Fidesz recently have applied various populist strategies to increase its influence and to limit CSOs in the country, Hungary makes out an appropriate case to study. Moreover, the study will be further focused by examining the specific time period between 2010 and present day, as 2010 was the year that the Fidesz government came to power and instigated crucial changes to the Hungarian system.

1.2 Purpose and Aims

According to Buyse (2018) much of the previous research that has been made on the issue of CSO restrictions has come from affected organisations rather than from academia. Similarly, Buyse (2018) further contends that most such studies mainly have come from a political science perspective, rather than from a human rights perspective. This study aims to fill such gaps by contributing to the academic literature on the subject, and by taking on an approach which focuses on human rights organizations in relation to the issue.

Furthermore, Gilbert and Mohseni (2018) argue that there has been limited cross-regional analysis on how electorally competitive regimes have used the legal regulatory environment of CSOs over time. Gilbert and Mohseni (2018) further contend that more studies are needed on nonviolent means for disabling civic organizational power, in order to increase

understanding on the subjects of democratization and democratic resistance. As this study has been produced under a limited timeframe, conducting a cross-regional analysis which Gilbert and Mohseni (2018) suggests would have been difficult. However, as this thesis will analyse the case of non-violent restrictions against CSOs in Hungary over time (since 2010), and relate it to theory on populist strategies, I still aim to contribute to an increased understanding concerning such strategies, and hence also to knowledge on democracy and democratic resistance.

Ultimately, this thesis intends to examine the case of Hungary in relation to five strategies frequently applied by populist governments to restrict human rights organizations. The study will investigate strategies used after the year of 2010. Furthermore, by testing theory, and by relating the results of the analysis to the concepts of hybrid regimes, populism, human rights and civil society in section 7, the study aims to increase the extremal validity of the findings.

The research question that will guide this thesis has been phrased as follows:

How has the Hungarian government used populist strategizes to restrict human rights organizations in the country since 2010?

2. Conceptual Framework

This section will discuss various concepts that are relevant within the context of this thesis.

2.1 Civil society and Civil Society Organizations

Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014, p. 22) points out that the disagreement of how to define civil society is grounded in the normative, ideological and political feature of the concept. Moreover, according to Grugel and Bishop (2014, p. 136) it is important to distinguish between liberal and radical standpoints on civil society, since they originate from diverse views on democracy. While the liberal perspective primarily views civil society as an aid to the state or as a check of it, the radical outlook holds that civil society has the potential of transforming the state and recognises that power structures and unequal access to resources shape civil society itself.

Moreover, while some understands civil society as the image of a “good” society, others disagree (Van der Borgh, Terwindt, 2014, p. 24). Toepler (et al., 2020) take on the latter view and argues that civil society, particularly in the contexts of so-called hybrid regimes, is everchanging and made up by three types of civil society organizations (CSOs): claims-making CSOs, non-profit service providers and regime-loyal CSOs, all with different objectives. Thus, it is argued that the heterogenous character of civil society challenges the perception that civil society is inherently linked to democratization, which has tended to be the conventional perception (Toepler et al., 2014).

Moreover, Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014, p. 27-28) argue that the definition of which actors that are included in civil society mainly tends to relate to actor’s relative autonomy from the state, political sphere and the market. Ultimately, the popular opinion amongst scholars tends to be that CSOs and other social movements are the main actors of civil society, and that political parties and criminal groups should be excluded from the

conceptualization (Feenstra, 2017). Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014, p. 27-28) however contend that most civil society organizations relate to one or more of the sectors presented above in one way or another.

In this thesis, I will utilize the definition provided by Scholte (Grugel, Bishop, 2014, p. 139) as it combines the liberal and radical sentiments provided above, and argues that civil society is a political space where voluntary CSO's try to promote social change, without trying to make financial gains or joining political parties. As for the definition of civil society organizations, I will take on Van der Borgh's and Terwindt's view of CSOs as "associations that aim to protect or extend their interests or values vis-à-vis a range of actors in society" (Van der Borgh, Terwindt, 2014, p. 26).

2.2 Human Rights and Human Rights Organizations

In this thesis, I define human rights in line with the thirty articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly. Human rights thereby belong to everyone, everywhere, regardless of "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (UDHR). Article number one of the UDHR embodies the spirit of the declaration:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."
(UDHR)

Furthermore, as this thesis is concentrated on human rights organizations, a definition is appropriate. As human rights organizations are included in the more general concept of civil society organizations, the definition of CSOs in the previous section (2.2) similarly applies to human rights organizations. However, as the name indicates, such organizations also have a particular focus on promoting human rights for all.

2.3 Hybrid Regimes

Between 1974 and 1990, during the third wave of democratization, a “new” variety of political regimes were generated around the globe which combined the systems of authoritarianism and liberal democracy (Wigell, 2008). During the 1990s, countries as diverse as Ghana, Albania, Taiwan, Russia and Mexico combined democratic rules with authoritarian governance (Levitsky, Way, 2002).

Considering the distinct range of countries which has experienced the shift, deciding upon one notion which encompasses all such geographical, political and institutional diversity has proved difficult (Van der Borgh, Terwindt, 2014, p. 15). However, despite the many difficulties of defining these regimes, various scholars have taken on the challenge, resulting in various concepts such as “hybrid regimes” “electoral authoritarianism”, “pseudodemocracy,” “illiberal democracies”, “liberalized autocracy” and “partial democracy” (Diamond, 2002; Van der Borgh, Terwindt, 2014, p. 15; Bogaards, 2009).

Levitsky and Way (2002) has argued that many of the definitions offered on such regimes are characterized by a democratizing bias and a tendency to overlook important differences among regime types. Levitsky and Way (2002) therefore present one type of a hybrid regime called the “competitive authoritarian regime”, which neither meets the minimum criteria for democracy by “holding free, fair, and open elections for all the principal positions of political power” as defined by Schedler (Diamond, 2002, p. 28), nor fulfill attributes of full-scale authoritarianism (Levitsky, Way, 2002). As competitive authoritarian regimes combine democratic institutions with autocratic features, such regimes are constantly performing a balancing act in order to prevent discontent amongst the public and gain electoral support, while similarly adhering to the interests of elites, as elite control of the state is often high in competitive authoritarian regimes (Robinson, 2017). Moreover, because elections make out a sphere for elites to gain influence, competitive authoritarian regimes thus are exceedingly motivated to restrain the power of CSOs that attempts to influence the electoral outcome (Levitsky, Way, 2002).

Thereby, over the past few years, competitive authoritarian regimes have increasingly targeted actors in civil society in various ways. At least 50 countries, commonly situated with

in the “hybrid regimes” spectrum, have recently set up restrictive legislation against civil society organizations (Amnesty International, 2019). According to Buyse (2018), the increase in restrictions have not only affected the civil society sector and actors within it, but also human rights. Moreover, according to a study by Bakke, Smidt and Mitchell (2020), governments which commit human rights abuses, despite the fact that they have committed to international human rights treaties, commonly appoint limitations on CSOs to alleviate the international costs of such actions, as well as to circumvent scrutiny (ibid.). Furthermore, Buyse (2018) argues that as human rights make out preconditions of democracy, the weakening of human rights also indirectly affects democracy.

2.4 Populism

The concept of populism offers as many definitions as the concepts of civil society and so-called hybrid regimes. For long, scholars have debated whether populism is an ideology, a discourse, or a strategy. Mudde (2004) has defined populism as:

*“...an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”*
(Mudde, 2004, p. 543)

Similarly, Robinson (2017) argue that populism can be used as a discursive frame in order to frame the interests of the ‘people’ as inherently different from another group in society, usually mounted as an elitist group.

According to Levitsky and Way (2020), rather than developing in unfavorable settings for democracy, hybrid regimes now has emerged in countries with traditions of democracy, such as in Turkey and Hungary. Levitsky and Way (2020) argue that this development has been difficult to obtain, considering the close political ties to the West and the external scrutiny which that entails. Similarly, it has likewise been challenging as prospective autocrats must gain electoral majority before being able to change electoral rules to their advantage (ibid.). Moreover, Robinson (2017) has argued that some hybrid regimes thus utilize official

populism as an instrument to overcome the challenges of gaining support from both elites and an electoral majority. Hybrid regimes can thereby develop populism to justify their democratic shortcomings, and consequently create a tool for regime stabilisation (ibid.).

The view of populism as a tactic used to gain power has been shared by Alston (2017), who argue that populism should be viewed as a tool rather than as an agenda. In Alston's article from 2017, he also discusses the relationship between populism and human rights, and argue that, as populism is a tool, the real threat to human rights is not that of populism per say, but of the nationalist usage of populist tactics.

3. The Case of Hungary

The following section will provide a short background on Hungary's current government, led by the Fidesz party and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and describe how the government has directed Hungary in an autocratic direction since 2010, despite being an EU member state.

3.1 Orbán's Path to Power

After Hungary's democratic transition in 1990, the nation was considered a stable democracy with strong institutions and a prospering civil society. However, only twenty years after its democratic conversion, the Hungarian system started to transform yet again, although this time in an autocratic direction (Levitsky, Way, 2020). The drastic changes started to take place in 2010, when the Fidesz party won a constitutional majority and Viktor Orbán became the Prime Minister of Hungary (Hopkins, 2020).

The Fidesz party was originally created by a group of students shortly before the 1989 communist collapse, under the name the "Alliance of Young Democrats". The party grew successful and won the 1998 election, with Viktor Orbán as the front figure. However, Fidesz was not re-elected in 2002, and similarly lost during the 2006 elections (Hopkins, 2020). According to Beauchamp (2018), Orbán never accepted the 2002 defeat and argued that election fraud had occurred. Furthermore, after 2002, Viktor Orbán made a drastic political turn and launched a nationalistic movement by the name "Forward Hungary" (ibid.). Levitsky and Way (2020) likewise has argued that Orbán changed course after 2002, taking on a more conservative, religious and nationalist approach. Orbán thus started to fuel Hungarian polarization by appealing to anti-elitist votes, particularly living in rural areas (ibid.).

When Fidesz and Orbán returned to power in 2010, the government acted swiftly by amending the Constitution and removing key checks on the prime minister's power by

enlarging the Constitutional Court and replacing members with pro-government actors (Levitsky, Way, 2020). Moreover, by adopting various electoral reforms that for instance included redrawing voting districts in the favor of the Fidesz party (ibid.) and prohibiting campaign marketing on private media outlets, Orbán's government managed to segment its electoral advantage and win the 2014 election, holding on to its two-thirds parliamentary supermajority (Levitsky, Way, 2020) Furthermore, in 2018, Fidesz once again won the election and increased its vote by just over four percentage points, to 49.3 percent, once again securing a parliament majority (TAPI, 2019).

3.2 The First Hybrid Regime in the EU

During the governing years of the Fidesz administration, the democratic quality has decreased rapidly in Hungary. The country went from a fully liberal democracy in 2010 to what Freedom House categorize as a “partly free” country in 2018, rendering their yearly report “Nations in Transit” (Freedom House, 2018). This is the first member state of the European Union (a member since of 2004) which has received the classification (TAPI, 2019). As, Bozóki and Hegedűs (2018) have pointed out, since Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that EU is made up of liberal democracies that are bound together by shared respect for the EU's value system, including a regime as Hungary, which no longer is viewed as a fully liberal democracy by various actors, is problematic. Bozóki and Hegedűs (2018) further contends that most scholars who have studied the Hungarian case in relation to the EU settle that the EU has failed to take sufficient action against the “constitutional engineering process” which has transpired in Hungary, and which eventually has resulted in its “hybrid” system. Moreover, Bozóki and Hegedűs argue that:

“The EU fulfils three different functions in Hungary's hybrid regime, serving as: (1) a systemic constraint; (2) a supporter; and (3) a legitimizer of the regime.” (Bozóki, Hegedűs, 2018, p. 1178).

Ultimately, Hungary has experienced a drastic transformation since 2010, and now gone from a liberal democracy to being classified as a “partly free” (Freedom House, 2019), “hybrid” (Bozóki, Hegedűs, 2018), “competitive authoritarian” regime (Levitsky, Way, 2020).

Likewise, Hungary has additionally been described by the Timbro Authoritarian Populist Index (2019) as the country in Europe where authoritarian populism has made its greatest inroads. The transformation is unique as it has transpired within the context of the EU.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis will draw upon sentiments presented in *Rising to The Populist Challenge: A New Playbook for Human Rights Actors* (2018) edited by César Rodríguez-Garavito and Krizna Gomez. The book has been written by various scholars with the intention of contributing to the content of a “playbook” on how human rights actors can combat contemporary challenges of advocacy work within populist contexts (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018, p. 13).

Within the first chapter of the book, the editors argue that the path towards populism commonly involves a succession of actions targeting human rights actors, which tends to be very similar across nations. Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez contends that most such actions aspire to undermine the efficacy and legitimacy of human rights actors (2018, p. 22). Moreover, they identify five actions that are commonly used by populist governments to achieve this. The actions are the following:

1) Restrictions on foreign funding; 2) smear campaigns; 3) restrictions on fundamental rights that strike at the heart of the work of independent media and NGOs; 4) severe burdens on the operational capabilities of human rights actors and civil society at large; and 5) cooptation of sections of civil society
(Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018, p. 22-23).

As this thesis intend to examine how the Fidesz government has restricted human rights organizations in Hungary through the use of populist strategies since 2010, I believe that taking on an approach which is human rights-centred, and which indirectly ties the Hungarian case to other populist settings goes well in line with the aim of this study. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis, as well as the analysis, will be based on the five actions presented by Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 22-23). I intend to test theory by departing from the five strategies and examining if the Hungarian government have taken these actions in order to restrict human rights organizations in Hungary.

Furthermore, this section will shortly present the five strategies presented by Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez in order to increase the understanding of the various actions before examining them in the context of Hungary. Some empirical examples of countries which have adopted such strategies will also be included in this section.

4.1 Restrictions on Foreign Funding

One strategy which Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 23) argue has been used by several governments around the globe to restrict CSOs, and which generally gains much attention due to its international dimension (Buyse, 2018), is the action of restricting organizations access to foreign funding. According to a study by Prakash, Dupuy and Ron (2014), between the years of 1993 and 2012, one-fourth of the world's nations adopted laws restricting foreign funding to local human rights groups. Some countries which have adopted laws restricting the receipt of foreign funding are Russia, Hungary, Venezuela and Egypt (Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez, 2018, p. 23).

There are various ways to restrict foreign funding to CSOs, one method for instance involves adopting laws which enforce reporting requirements of donations from abroad. Another includes freezing CSOs assets by arguing that they might be related to terrorism or money laundering, which for instance is a tactic that has commonly been used in Turkey (Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 24). Furthermore, Buyse (2018) argues that further potential actions include bans on certain organisations receiving foreign funding, or, as in Belarus and Uganda, mandatory channelling through designated banks.

Yet another way to increase the burdens of CSOs receiving foreign funding is by compelling organizations to register as receivers of foreign funds, which can delegitimize them in the public eye. One prime example can be found in Russia, where foreign-funded CSOs have to register as 'foreign agents' if they are involved in 'political activities', according to a law adopted in 2012 (Buyse, 2018).

4.2 Smear Campaigns

Another government strategy from the so-called “populist playbook” which have been identified by Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 24-25) is smearing human rights organizations and accusing them of various illegitimate activities in order to undermine their legitimacy. Such accusations are often made by claiming that human rights organizations either engage in illegal money-making activities or participate in anti-patriotic activities that serve the interest of foreign states. According to Buyse (2018) CSOs in Ecuador have been called: “agents of American influence seeking to destabilise the country” by President Correa. Furthermore, in countries with internal conflict, CSOs have also been accused of having ties to terrorist groups. For example, the government of Kenya has shut down over fifteen CSOs for fundraising terrorism (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018, p. 26). Moreover, according to Buyse (2018), states commonly use the tactic of smear campaigns and stigmatisation of CSOs in order to legitimize upcoming state action against such groups.

4.3 Restrictions on Fundamental Rights

According to Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 27), another strategy includes targeting rights which CSOs tend to promote and rely on for being able to continue their work. Populist governments for instance target the opportunity to protest and demonstrate publicly. For illustration, Tukey’s *Prevention of Terrorism Act* has been widely interpreted to include protesters, thus violating the freedom of assembly. Moreover, governments also tend to crack down on the freedom of expression by limiting spaces for communication, which for instance can be done by limiting the access to specific internet sources. Furthermore, in order to limit the freedom of movement, some governments also have introduced travel bans for certain groups and individuals, restricting them from going abroad (Ibid., p. 27-28).

4.4 Severe Burdens on the Operational Capabilities of NGOs and Society Actors

An additional action often taken by governments is, according to Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (2018, p. 29-30), the act of imposing restrictions on the operational capacities of CSOs, often in the form of administrative burdens or legal barriers. Such burdens aim at preventing organizations from being able to continue their work, and sometimes at shutting them down entirely. Imposed burdens tend to entail continuous reporting requirements, difficult procedures for CSOs to officially register, unannounced on-sight control visits by government staffs to CSOs offices and requirements to hand in personal information about CSO staff members. Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (ibid., p. 30-31) contend that failing to comply with such requirements can result in complete shutdowns or high fines, both for CSOs and individuals. In Turkey for instance, article 33 of the *Associations Law of Turkey* states that “the chair of the executive board of an association can be held personally liable for any fines or sanctions to which the organization is subject” (ibid., p. 31).

4.5 Cooptation of Sectors of Civil Society

The final strategy identified by Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez (ibid., p. 31-32) is cooptation of sectors of civil society. Such a development occurs when governments either create or assist so-called government-owned NGOs (GONGOs) that are loyal to the government. This strategy is used to create a support base within civil society which can contrast the opinions of CSOs critical of the government and thus increase the legitimacy of the ruling party (ibid., p. 32). Some GONGOs also use violent tactics in their promotion of the government. The Russian youth movement Nashi for instance supports Putin by commonly attacking his political opponents. However, more frequently than supporting acts of violence, governments selectively favor GONGOs by supporting them financially (ibid., p. 32). Bribes are similarly used as a tactic to ensure loyalty. According to Buyse (2018), a combination of these methods creates incentives for organisations to adjust to the will of government. Similarly, the credibility of the civil society sector decreases in the public eye, as “a sense of chaos” is created (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomes, 2018, p. 33).

5. Methodology

This section will discuss the research design, the method of data collection as well as the choice of analysis for this thesis. Section 5.4 will discuss limitations.

5.1 Research Design

The research design for this thesis will take the form of a single instrumental case study. In a case study, a bounded system is explored over time by using multiple data sources, with the intention to illustrate the issue and reach contextual understanding about one specific case (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Morales, 2007). Furthermore, Halperin and Heath argues that case studies can be used to apply theory in one setting to see if it still holds in another (2017, p. 214). Consequently, as this thesis aim to explore the particular case of tactics used by the Hungarian government to restrict domestic human rights organizations between 2010 and 2021, and test theory through using five populist indicators in relation to the collected data, the qualitative case study design is appropriate to employ as it aligns well with the objective of this thesis.

5.2 Data Collection

As discussed in section 4, a deductive approach will be applied in this study to test theory by exploring if the Hungarian government has utilized five specified populist strategies to restrict domestic human rights organizations between 2010 and 2021. The five tactics have been the point of departure in my data collection and has concentrated the sampling procedure.

Moreover, purposeful sampling of qualitative data has been carried out by searching for news articles and reports by various CSOs online. The emphasis has been on finding sources that

discusses relevant events taking place between the years of 2010 and 2021 in Hungary, and that contains key words that relate to each of the five populist strategies. The choice of concentrating on qualitative data has been based on the notion that such data tend to be concrete, vivid and detailed, which is well-suited to combine with the case study design of this thesis (Graebner, Martin, Roundy, 2012). Moreover, diverse types of sources in the shape of news articles and reports have been sampled in order to bring validity to the results through relying on multiple forms of evidence (Creswell, Miller, 2000). Some key words that have been identified and used to concentrate my selection were the following:

Hungary, smear campaigns, foreign funding, CSOs, civil society, Victor Orbán, Fidesz, George Soros, human rights, cooptation, immigration, media, populism and cooptation.

Ultimately, the final data sample included 20 newspaper articles and 10 reports. The larger fraction of information was gathered from reports published by Amnesty International, the Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and the Hungarian Helsinki Commission as such documents were rich in material relating to the five themes and strategies that makes out the focal point of this thesis. Moreover, newspaper articles from agencies such as the BBC, The Guardian and Financial Times webpages were included in order to complement the information in the reports and to provide a more nuanced picture.

5.3 Data Analysis

This study will use the method of qualitative content analysis, as it provides an opportunity to explore meanings and topics within textual information. According to Halperin and Heath (2017, p. 346) one “reads between the lines” when appointing a qualitative content analysis in order to discover latent content. Furthermore, the method of analysis “expose meanings, motives and purposes embedded within the text” (Halperin, Heath 2017, p. 346). Bryman (2012, p. 304) argues that two advantages of conducting a content analysis are that the method is transparent, as well as “non-reactive”. Halperin and Heath (2017, p. 344) similarly argue that one main advantage of the content analysis is biases are reduced as no participants are being interviewed and thereby affected by the “interview effect”.

Moreover, in the process of conducting a qualitative content analysis, one defines categories that are to be investigated, chooses a unit for recoding and creates a coding protocol.

Thereafter, one creates codes that indicate the target themes in the various texts (Halperin, Heath 2017, p. 348-349). This study aspires to test theory by departing from predetermined themes in the form of five populist strategies. Thus, the qualitative content analysis in this thesis relies on deductive coding. In the deductive process, I used a coding protocol to facilitate the process of identifying relevant data in accordance with each of the five themes, as well as to bring consistency to the way that data was being processed (Halperin, Heath 2017, p. 349).

As the aim of this thesis is to allocate and interpret meanings of data from textual sources connected to the Hungarian context and relate it to five populist strategies (themes), the employment of the qualitative content analysis is thus appropriate in relation to the chosen research design, data collection and general purpose of this thesis.

5.4 Limitations

As with all research designs and methods, the ones that have been applied in this thesis entail some limitations.

Although the case study design offers great advantages, case studies have received critique because of the difficulty of generalizing their results, as one context-specific case never can fully explain another case situated in a diverse setting. For this reason, researchers tend to be careful with generalizing the findings of a case study (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Morales, 2007). However, according to Halperin and Heath (2017, p. 214-215), it is possible to develop stimulating results through conducting a case study, that likewise are relevant to contexts beyond the case that is being studied. In order for this to be achieved, a case study must say something interesting both about a general political phenomenon, and the case itself. By including both aspects, internal and external validity is conveyed to the results. In this thesis, theory will be tested in order to relate the Hungarian case to a wider context, and thereby increase validity. Nevertheless, as this study merely is looking into one case, one must be

cautious about claiming that the results are applicable elsewhere (Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 214-215).

Furthermore, as for the data collection and limitations, one restraint has been the difficulty of allocating and dividing data equally between the five categories in the analysis. For instance, finding information for section 6.5, cooptation of civil society, proved difficult as located sources mainly were written in Hungarian. Section five is thereby shorter than the other segments in the analysis. The lack of information indicates a need for further international attention of the issue. Nevertheless, despite a lack of sources, relevant data was still managed to be gathered for section 6.5, fulfilling the aim of the segment.

Moreover, another possible limitation of the data collection method in this thesis is that the focus has been one-dimensional, mainly as most sources are written in English and frequently by organizations and actors that take a clear stance against the Hungarian tactics to limit human rights organizations. However, I deem the sources relevant as they contain current information and highlight the chosen focus of this thesis. As Murray and Overton has pointed out (2014, 22-24) social research is never value-free and cannot take place in a so-called “philosophical vacuum” (2014, p. 22-24). Therefore, it is always important for scholars to reflect upon, and be transparent about, ones’ positionality and world view as such often tend to affect the focus of ones’ study (Murray, Overton, 2014, p. 22-24). The perspective of this thesis mainly draws upon influences from the book *Rising to the Populist Challenge: A New Playbook for Human Rights Actors* (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018). This perspective has thus directed the emphasis of this thesis and provided the study with a human rights focus, which similarly lies as a foundation for the way that data has been collected.

The qualitative content analysis method likewise offers limitations that are similar to the issues with data collection. As the analysis is based on the researcher’s selection of data, the researcher “may influence aspects of the study, such as the types of information collected, or the way in which it is interpreted” (Stewart-Withers, et al. 2014, p. 61). Therefore, the researcher should engage in reflexivity by acknowledging one’s position in the creation of knowledge and be clear about one’s positionality (Stewart-Withers, et al. 2014, p. 62). As described in the previous section, this thesis draws upon previous literature which empathize the importance of protecting human rights. The data collection as well as the analysis has hence been guided by such a focus.

6. Analysis

This part of my thesis will analyse the amassed data in relation to the theoretical framework. As discussed in the previous section on methodology, qualitative data has been gathered from 30 different sources based on five strategies, as expanded upon in section 4, that are commonly used by populist governments to undermine the legitimacy and efficacy of human rights organizations. The strategies are the following:

- 1) Restrictions on foreign funding; 2) smear campaigns; 3) restrictions on fundamental rights that strike at the heart of the work of independent media and NGOs; 4) severe burdens on the operational capabilities of human rights actors and civil society at large; and 5) cooptation of sections of civil society
- (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018, p. 22-23).

The analysis will be structured in line with the categories, and each section will analyse the Hungarian case in relation to a specified strategy and discuss whether the Hungarian government has utilized such a strategy or not since 2010.

Subsequent to the analysis, a concluding segment will summarize and discuss the results and relate the findings to the previously discussed concepts of hybrid regimes, human rights, civil society and populism in order to situate the findings in a larger context.

6.1 Restrictions on Foreign Funding

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, restricting foreign funding to CSOs has been a commonly used strategy of governments around the globe to limit the influence of human rights organizations (Rodríguez-Garavito, Gomez, 2018, p. 23). The Hungarian government

makes out no exception. On June the 13th 2017, the Hungarian Parliament adopted the Act LXXVI of 2017 on the Transparency of Organisations Supported from Abroad. No public consultation was required before the proposal of the bill as it was submitted by members of the parliament. Act LXXVI necessitated associations to register as an organization receiving foreign funding, if they received more than 7.2 million HUF (around 23,000 EUR) from abroad yearly. According to the law, such organizations were similarly required to provide a label on each of their publications stating that they are funded from abroad. Foreign funded CSOs were also to be listed publicly on the government website (Helsinki Committee, 2017, p. 1-3).

The Helsinki Committee (2017, p. 2) contend that the Hungarian government has crafted Act LXXVI on the premises that foreign funded organizations may front a risk to national sovereignty and security by potentially serving foreign interests. Similarly, in the report '*Laws Designated to Silence*' (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 24) argues that the Hungarian government has justified the implementation of the law by arguing that it is essential to combat international terrorism and money laundering.

The LXXVI Act has been condemned by various actors, including the European Commission. In 2020, the European Court of Justice examined the Hungarian 2017 Act and ruled that it breached EU-law. In response to the ruling, the Hungarian government recently submitted a draft bill to the parliament to repeal the 2017 LXXVI Act (in April 2021). The repeal was well-received by various CSOs working with human rights, however, the Human Rights Watch (2021) and Amnesty International (2021) has both expressed concerns regarding potential future actions of the Orbán government. For instance, Amnesty International (2021) argue that the government already in April had proposed to replace the previous law with a new bill, which would continue to impede the freedom of civil society actors in Hungary.

Furthermore, the Hungarian government adopted a law in 2018 called the "special tax on immigration" which has made human rights organizations "supportive of immigration" obligated to pay a 25% tax on all funding activities (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 6). The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2018) argues that the definition of what constitutes an act that supports immigration is vague. According to the law, CSOs organizing media campaigns, education or propaganda that portrays immigration as positive will have to pay the 25% tax. The law hence affects CSOs capabilities to receive funding. The Commissioner for Human

Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, stated in a report following a visit to Hungary in February 2019 that:

“The imposition of the special tax has a chilling effect on the exercise of fundamental rights and on individuals and organisations who defend these rights or support their defence financially. It deters potential donors from supporting NGOs and puts more hardship on civil society engaged in legitimate human rights activities.” (Mijatović, 2019, p. 18)

6.2 Smear Campaigns

Since the year of 2013, senior Hungarian government officials have conducted smear campaigns against actors in civil society, targeting watchdog CSOs and human rights organizations in particular (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2020, p. 1-3). The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe observed in 2019 that human rights defenders in Hungary have been subject to “intimidation, stigmatisation and smear campaigns” (Mijatović, 2019, p. 5).

Negative statements concerning CSOs have regularly been made by Prime Minister Victor Orbán since 2013. In a speech in July 2014, Orbán specified that civil society organizations attempt to obstruct his ‘illiberal’ state agenda and that civil society actors are “paid political activists who are trying to help foreign interests” (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017). In April that same year, Undersecretary of State Nándor Csepreghy called organizations that assisted to operate the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund (supporting CSO activities in Hungary) “party-dependent, cheating nobodies” (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017, p. 3).

Various CSOs working with issues particularly tied to the promotion of human rights has individually been condemned by the Hungarian government and government-friendly news outlets. In 2018 for instance, a list with 200 names was published in a pro-government magazine named Figyel in order to smear certain individuals working for human rights (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 26). The list included staff members of CSOs such as the Amnesty International's Hungarian section, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and the

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (The Guardian, 2018). Smear campaigns that target human rights CSOs has likewise been instigated by highly ranked politicians within the Fidesz party. For instance, in June 2018, Amnesty International was accused of wanting to “flood Hungary with immigrants” by a spokesperson for the ruling party (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 26).

Furthermore, according to the Figyel magazine, individuals named on the list from 2018 were all a part of the so-called “Soros’ mercenary army”, a group which Prime Minister Orbán has specified as being paid to take down the government (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 26). Orbán’s comments along with the published list of names constitutes a small part of a directed smear campaign against the Hungarian billionaire philanthropist George Soros. Soros has created the Open Society Foundations, which has assisted numerous civic groups in the Balkans and Eastern Europe since the mid-1980s (BBC, 2017). The smear campaign driven by the government against civil society and Soros is for instance illustrated in a statement made by vice chairman of Fidesz, Szilard Nemeth, during a news conference in January 2017:

“Fake NGOs of the Soros empire are sustained to suppress national governments in favour of global capital and the world of political correctness,” (Reuters, 2017)

Similarly, the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has continuously attacked George Soros and human rights actors at numerous occasions. In an interview with Kossuth Radio in March 2018, Orbán made the following statement:

“According to the statements of officers in the Soros mercenary army, we know that around two thousand people in Hungary are being paid to work towards bringing down the Government in the current election campaign, and to create a new pro-immigration government acceptable to George Soros.... We know precisely who these people are, we know names.” (Freedom House, 2018)

Moreover, during a speech in March 2018 to commemorate the 170th anniversary of the 1848 revolution, Orbán expressed the following:

“We do not need to fight the anaemic little opposition parties, but an international network which is organised into an empire. We are up against media outlets maintained by foreign concerns and domestic oligarchs, professional hired activists, troublemaking

protest organisers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator, summed up by and embodied in the name ‘George Soros.’” (Freedom House, 2018).

6.3 Restrictions on Fundamental Rights

On World Refugee Day in 2018, the Hungarian parliament passed a so-called “Stop Soros” law package (Act VI of 2018). In the package, 9 laws were amended, including parts of the Police Act, the Asylum Law and the Penal code (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 25-26). Moreover, the Criminal Code (Section 353/A) was amended, making “facilitating illegal immigration” into a criminal offence (Mijatović, 2019, p. 16). The law thus makes the acts of providing material resources to asylum seekers and organizing activities to assist application processes unlawful. According to reasoning by the government, the Act has been introduced to prevent Hungary from becoming “a migrant country” (AP, 2018). Furthermore, in the same day as the “Stop Soros” package was adopted, the parliament also amended Hungary’s constitution, for the seventh time since 2011. Two provisions were added which stated that “state bodies must protect Christian culture” and that “foreign populations cannot be settled in Hungary (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, 2018).

The “Stop-Soros” laws have been heavily criticized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which contends that the law is: “shameful and blatantly xenophobic.” (Freedom House, 2020). Similarly, The United Nations refugee agency has called on the Fidesz government to revoke the legislation (AP, 2018). Ultimately, the Act VI of 2018 has directly restrained and targeted human rights organizations working with assisting refugees and asylum seekers (AP, 2018).

Furthermore, the Hungarian government has also restricted some fundamental rights of women in the country (Mijatović, 2019, p. 31). Women have for instance experienced different forms of discrimination within the various sectors of the labor market during pregnancy and while having young children. Such discrimination goes against the principles of non-discrimination, employment rights of women and equal treatment (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 8-9). Moreover, despite the fact that domestic violence is a widespread problem in Hungary (Mijatović, 2019, p. 31), the government has not chosen to follow

international recommendations to update legislation or to ratify the Istanbul Convention (Convention on preventing and combating violence against women). Rather, in 2020, the government stated that the Istanbul Convention “supports illegal migration” and “prescribes dangerous gender ideologies” (Mijatović, 2019, p. 16). Furthermore, the Fidesz government’s clear emphasis on the importance of family has also affected the rights of women. For instance, after an amendment of the Fundamental Law of Hungary in 2011, a part of the Constitution states that: “foetal life shall be subject to protection from the moment of conception.” (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 23). Although the government has not yet legalized abortion, this part of the Constitution has caused concern as it opens up the possibility for the Constitutional Court to further restrict women’s rights in the future by limiting women’s reproductive rights (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 23). Ultimately, these measures and attitudes by the government have restricted fundamental rights of women and made the environment for women’s rights activists increasingly hostile (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 5).

Moreover, as in various other nations around the world, CSOs working with the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Hungary face serious challenges (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 29). In recent years, Hungarian politicians have targeted LGBTQI people by making discriminatory remarks and by introducing various selective restrictions (CIVICUS, 2021, p. 2). For instance, in 2012, an amendment of the Constitution legalized same-sex marriages (ABC News, 2020). In 2013, yet another amendment of the Constitution resulted in a narrow definition of what constitutes a family by defining it as “marriage and parent-child relationships.” (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 22), a definition which excludes same-sex couples. In an interview in 2016 with the Portuguese newspaper *Expresso*, Prime Minister Orbán stated the following:

“We believe that the family is the foundation of the nation and that it must be defended. We make it clear that only a man and a woman can be married and establish a family.”
(Index, 2016).

Moreover, in May 2020, a new controversial law was passed which made it impossible for transgender or intersex people to legally change their gender (ABC News, 2020). Later that same year, in December 2020, LGBTI rights were further breached when the Hungarian

Parliament accepted a draft law that effectively banned same-sex couples from adopting children (ABC News, 2020).

In addition to restricting fundamental rights of women and the LGBTI community, the Hungarian government has similarly targeted independent media during the last decade. Since 2010, the Fidesz government has taken control over the media sector in Hungary and stripped it from independence and pluralism. This has been done systematically by manipulating the media market in the country (European Federation of Journalists, 2019, p. 1-2). Furthermore, according to a report by the European Federation of Journalists (2019, p. 3) “80 percent of the market for political and public affairs news is financed by sources decided by the ruling party”. Freedom House (2020) further argues that the Fidesz government has worked actively to “close or acquire critical media outlets since 2015”. In 2016 for instance, Hungary’s largest independent news outlet, Népszabadság, was closed down. Additionally, in 2020, one of the few critical media channels left, the radio station Klubrádió, did not receive a renewal of their licence by Hungary’s Media Council (CIVICUS, 2021, p. 4).

6.4 Severe Burdens on the Operational Capabilities of NGOs and Society Actors

In 2011, the Hungarian government imposed a law (*Act CLXXV of 2011 on the Freedom of Association, Non-profit Status and the Operation and Support of Civil Organizations*) which increased the reporting requirements of CSOs. According to the International Labor Organization (2017), the law required CSOs to publish yearly reports containing information on their activities, finances, given grants and budgetary support. Furthermore, apart from legally enforcing requirements concerning documentation, the government has likewise carried out on-site audit visits to organizations to gather information (Open Government Partnership, 2019, p. 4-5). In June 2014, the Government Control Office (GCO), a state agency that audit state funds, made visits at three out of four groups running the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund (one of the largest funding sources for NGOs in Hungary, financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). The GCO required the groups to hand in certain documents. Furthermore, a few weeks after the on-site audit visits, 58 organizations that had received funding from the NGO fund were contacted by the GCO and necessitated to send

documentation correlated with projects funded by the NGO Fund. This needed to be done within a week. Additionally, in September 2014, two offices of the groups operating the fund were raided by the Hungarian police in the search of extra documentation (Open Government Partnership, 2019, p. 4-5)

Moreover, as discussed in section 6.1, the *Act LXXVI of 2017 on the Transparency of Organisations Supported from Abroad* was adopted in 2017. The law did not only limit CSOs access to foreign funding, but also imposed operational burdens on such CSOs by expanding further reporting requirements. According to the law, donations of at least HUF500,000 per tax year needed to be reported, as well as the donor of each such contribution. CSOs not fulfilling the requirements could be suspended from the country or be greatly fined (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 24). Moreover, as legislation was already in place since 2011 obliging CSOs to report on received funding, Amnesty International (2019, p. 24) has argued that the Hungarian government generated the 2017 law to silence critical voices and target organizations working with human rights, rather than to "prevent terrorism and money laundering" as the government has maintained. However, as discussed in section 6.1, the Act LXXVI of 2017 was repealed in April 2021 following a ruling by the European Court of Justice claiming that the act violated EU law. Nevertheless, the government has already submitted a draft of a new bill that would necessitate financial inspections of NGOs that report more than approximately 55.000 EUR yearly to be directed by the national State Audit Office. If the bill is adopted, it could potentially give the government sustained leverage to impede civil society (The Human Rights Watch, 2021).

6.5 Cooptation of Sections of Civil Society

As reviewed in section 5.5, the strategy of creating or supporting CSOs sympathetic of the government in order to produce an opposition of critical CSOs has occurred in various countries. Such a development can similarly be identified in Hungary, although the government appears reluctant to talk about it (Atlatszo, 2012). In an article for the *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Péter Krekó argue that the Fidesz government has created "an alternative network of civil society organizations that serve as the domestic and international mouthpieces for the government" (Krekó, 2017).

It has proven difficult to allocate information concerning GONGOs in Hungary, and even more so in English. However, some information has been provided by the Hungarian online newspaper (offering certain articles in English) for investigative journalism *Atlatszo*.

According to the magazine, one of the most well-known GONGOs in Hungary goes by the name Civil Co-operation Forum (CÖF). CÖF is argued to have been created by people close to the Prime Minister, and the organization is considered as uncritically supportive of the governing Fidesz party. According to VOA News (2018) CÖF has been involved in arranging co-called “peace marches” that has demonstrated support for the Prime Minister. In 2018 for instance, a march was conducted in Budapest prior to a speech Orbán made in commemorations of the 1848 revolution against Habsburg rule, that included tens of thousands of people, the march was also supported by the Fidesz party.

According to *Atlatszo* (2017) and the online magazine *The Budapest Beacon* (2017), it has been evident for long that the CÖF has had political ties to the Fidesz party. In 2016 however, it became clear that a state-owned company had donated a large amount of money to the organization. The state-owned energy group MVM Zrt announced in 2016 that they had granted CÖF 508 million HUF (€1,7 million) during that year alone. The grant was five times more than entire annual operating budget of CÖF. Yet, when asked by the *Atlatszo* magazine for what reason the funding was given, MVM Zrt did not provide a clear answer. Moreover, *Atlatszo* magazine (2017) argues that CÖF tends to use much of their capital on campaigning for Viktor Orbán, as well as for smearing his opponents.

7. Summary and Findings

This thesis has investigated the case of how the Hungarian government has restricted its civil society, and human rights organizations in particular, through the use of populist strategies since 2010. Through a qualitative content analysis, 10 reports and 20 news articles fashioned by organizations and news agencies such as Amnesty International, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Freedom House, the Human Rights Watch, BBC News, Financial Times, The Guardian and Reuters have been analysed and situated in relation to the case of Hungary and five populist strategies originally offered by Rodríguez-Garavito and Gomez in 2018.

The results of the analysis confirm that the theory based off the five strategies holds, as the Fidesz government in Hungary indeed has used all five strategies to restrict human rights organizations and other civil society actors since 2010, to various degrees. This information similarly circles us back to the research question of this thesis: *How has the Hungarian government used populist strategies to restrict human rights organizations in the country since 2010?*

By taking part of the qualitative material in the analysis, it becomes evident that the Hungarian government have used populist strategies by applying restrictions of foreign funding (by introducing Act XXVI in 2017 and adopting the “Special Tax on Immigration” in 2018), smear campaigns (by accusing human rights organizations of being “paid political activists” and for serving foreign interests), restrictions on fundamental rights that strike at the heart of the work of independent media and CSOs (by restricting the rights of women, asylum seekers, LGBTI people and the independent media), severe burdens on the operational capabilities of human rights actors and civil society at large (by adopting the of Act CLXXV of 2011 and Act XXVI in 2017 and by carrying out one-sights visits to CSO offices, requiring further documentation) and finally, cooptation of sections of civil society (by donating €1,7 million from a state-owned company to the GONGO CÖF) in order to restrict human rights organizations in the country.

The five strategies proposed by Gomez and Rodríguez-Garavito has consequently guided this thesis towards providing an answer to its research question. Moreover, the aims of filling gaps of knowledge in current research on the topic (described by Buyse, Gilbert and Mohseni in section 1.2) has been achieved by conducting a study which looks into non-violent means for disabling civic organizational power over time in the unique setting of Hungary, by taking on a human rights focus. Moreover, basing theory on Gomez and Rodríguez-Garavito's populist strategies has, from what I am aware, not been carried out before. Particularly not in the context of human rights organizations in Hungary. This thus offers a contribution to the field by showing that the five strategies can be used as a means of comparing various nations populist actions against human rights organizations.

7.1. Conclusion

While taking part of literature on the case of Hungary it becomes clear that although Hungary has gone down a unique path in the sense of transpiring from a liberal democracy to a competitive authoritarian regime in less than ten years' time, within the context of the EU, its transformation also showcases tendencies which are fundamentally related to developments in other countries. Similarly, the Hungarian case transmits to literature related to the concepts of hybrid regimes, civil society, human rights and populism which have been discussed in this thesis. This in the sense that the Fidesz party and Orbán have used populist tactics such as the ones described in the previous section in order to legitimize the democratic crackdown in the country. For instance, using the "corrupt elite" vs the will of the "good people" is a common rhetoric used by the government, which can be seen in most other populist contexts. Moreover, Orbán's idea of the 'illiberal state' is also portrayed as something positive, a way of increasing government control to give the people what they want. This notion of impatience with democratic procedures has been described as a typical characteristic of authoritarian populism in the Timbro Authoritarian Populist Index from 2019. Similarly, the impatience and appetite for power has been illustrated by Fidesz act of amending the Constitution, within their first year of power, in order to ensure success in future elections. Moreover, as Hungary no longer abide to the basic requirements of democracy (by holding free, fair, and open elections) Levitsky and Way (2020) have defined Hungary as a competitive authoritarian regime. And as such, the government need to balance the act of

gaining votes from the public, and pleasing powerful elites. In order to prevent scrutiny and loose power during elections, the Hungarian government has attempted to limit human rights organizations by smearing them and restricting them by all tactics available in the populist toolbox. This also relates to the theory by Bakke (et al, 2020) which argues that governments who have approved to follow human rights declarations, but that continues to crack down on human rights such as the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, have high incentives to limit critical CSOs in order to receive less critique. This theory holds in the case Hungary as it has accepted the UDHR but keep limiting the rights of its people.

Ultimately, although the case of Hungary is a unique case because of its rapid autocratic shift within the context of the EU, the government similarly has widely used autocratic populist strategies during its transformation that can be seen in other national contexts such as in Venezuela, Brazil and the Philippines. The broad use of frequently used populist tactics globally in Hungary has not least been showcased in the analysis of this thesis. One might then ask, if Hungary has followed similar tactics as other authoritarian populist countries around the world to limit the freedoms of its people (which the result in this study indicates) why have not the Hungarian government been obstructed earlier? Why have not the international community acted more decisively against such abuses of human rights?

This thesis hope to highlight the importance of identifying populist strategies early on and taking actions against human rights violations and crackdowns on democracy. More research thus needs to be conducted which maps out restrictions used by populist anti-democratic governments to impede human rights, as well as on how to combat such restrictions. For as the case of Hungary has illustrated, democracy can erode quickly, even in the context of a fully liberal democracy which is a member state of the European Union. Consequently, when characteristics of democracy and human rights, which have taken numerous years and much suffering to attain are being demolished right in front of our eyes, we must act, and we must act fast.

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