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Antiliberalism and Counter-Enlightenment for the 21st Century: Viktor Orbán's Illiberal Political Ideology

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(Received 1 March 2024; revised 4 January 2025; accepted 13 January 2025)

Abstract

This article analyses the political speeches of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán between 2014 and 2023 by applying the 'ideational approach'. Questioning the description of Orbán as a politician whose career represents nothing but opportunism and kleptocracy, the article argues that his politics are driven and underpinned by an illiberal political ideology. Examining how Orbán conceptualizes illiberalism in the realms of (1) Hungarian domestic politics; (2) foreign and global politics; and (3) cultural politics (understood in the Gramscian sense as a battle for fundamental values), this article offers a systematic analysis of Hungarian illiberalism and of the interrelations of its main ideological components. The article also examines how and why Orbán portrays himself not only as the authentic voice of the Hungarian people, but also simultaneously as the genuine representative of original Europeaness.

Keywords: illiberalism; antiliberalism; liberalism; democracy; counter-Enlightenment

The concept of illiberalism gained widespread attention after the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, declared in 2014 that Hungary would become 'an illiberal state, a non-liberal state' (Orbán 2014). What had initially been a critical concept developed in academic and policy-oriented discussions (e.g. Zakaria 1997) thus became a self-description that would achieve broad influence in Europe and beyond (cf. Kallius and Adriaans 2022: 701; Laruelle 2022: 306; Lendvai 2017: 189–206; Mayer 2018: 24).

In recent years, the literature on the concept and different varieties of illiberalism has exploded, as exemplified by two major handbooks (Laruelle 2024; Sajó et al. 2022). While much of the literature has focused on analysing illiberalism in terms of regime types, democratic backsliding or authoritarianism, Marlene Laruelle (2022: 304, 309) has recently called for an examination of illiberalism as an emerging 'thin' ideology that constitutes a 'new ideological universe'. According to Laruelle,

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illiberalism, despite its fluidity, demonstrates ‘some degree’ of coherence, which differentiates it from populism and conservatism. Resisting contemporary liberalism in its various scripts, illiberalism calls for the restoration of sovereignty in the national, international, economic and cultural spheres. Illiberal ideology ‘pushes back against liberalism after having experienced it’ and attacks different varieties of postmodernism through a cultural war (Laruelle 2022: 309–311).

Interestingly, although Laruelle (2022: 306) notes that Orbán can rightfully claim the ‘paternity’ of the concept as used by politicians, her astute analysis does not examine Hungary in detail. However, various studies have examined the ideological aspects of Orbán’s politics and rhetoric. The historical-revolutionary aspects of his speeches (Szilágyi and Bozóki 2015), Orbán’s emphasis on Christian nationalism (Lamour 2021; Nyssönen and Metsälä 2021), his anti-immigration rhetoric (Bocskor 2018; Glied and Pap 2016), Orbán’s illiberal and populist argumentation in foreign policy (Visnovitz and Jenne 2021), his anti-Western propaganda (Demeter 2018) and his recent anti-LGBTQ+ campaign (Gera 2023) have been analysed. The ideological dimensions of Orbán’s political rhetoric have also been examined either in works that analyse how Hungarian conservative thought has influenced Orbán’s ideas (Buzogány and Varga 2018; Greskovits 2020; Lendvai 2017) or in studies that investigate Orbán’s illiberal ideas within the wider European political context (Bohle et al. 2024; Coman and Volintiru 2023; Enyedi 2020, 2024).

Taking Laruelle’s description of illiberalism as a working definition and reacting to the previous studies on Orbán’s rhetoric, this article argues that Orbán’s illiberal project is much more ambitious and ideologically driven than often presumed. Through a close reading of Orbán’s political speeches between 2014 and 2023, I maintain that the ideological goals of Orbán’s illiberal project cut across the arenas of domestic, foreign and cultural politics. Examining how Orbán conceptualizes illiberalism in the realms of (1) Hungarian domestic politics; (2) foreign and global politics; and (3) cultural politics, this article offers a systematic analysis of the Hungarian illiberal project and of the interrelations between its different ideological components.

The main data used in this article consist of the eight programmatic speeches Orbán gave between 2014 and 2023 at the Bálványos Free Summer University and Student Camp and Orbán’s commemorative speeches on the 1956 Hungarian revolution. In total, the article analyses 18 speeches, interviews and other statements that are available on Orbán’s official webpage. Analysing these speeches as elaborations of an emerging ‘thin’ illiberal ideology, the article applies what has been described by Cas Mudde and others as the ‘ideational approach’ (Moffit 2020; Mudde 2017a; cf. Enyedi 2024). Aiming to clarify how Orbán legitimates his disruptive policies in Hungary (cf. Kauth and King 2021) and envisions the future of illiberalism in broader terms, the article asks: how does Orbán conceptualize illiberalism in ideological terms? What kind of ideological elements constitute the core ideas of this project in different political arenas? Why does Orbán attack Western liberalism and how does he define the political ideology of his political enemies?

On the one hand, focusing on the ideological aspects of Orbán’s political rhetoric helps to clarify the different ways his politics are driven by what Dorothee

Bohle et al. (2024: 1781–1782) rightly describe as his ‘long-term counter-hegemonic project’ and Orbán’s ‘quest for ideological, moral, and cultural leadership’ in Hungary and Europe. On the other hand, this article challenges the widely accepted premise that contemporary illiberalism would be a mere ‘emotional and pre-ideological’ reaction to the failures of liberalism – a mere ‘cover-story’ defined by a fundamental ‘lack of intellectual originality’ (Krstev and Holmes 2020: 70, 75). Instead of seeing Orbán as an ‘opportunistic’ leader (Lamour 2021: 322) or as a ‘post-ideological’ politician (Palonen 2018: 314) whose thought would be defined by constant populist and kleptocratic shifts (Glied 2020), the article argues that Orbán’s illiberal political ideology must be taken seriously. For, as Orbán himself has consistently emphasized, ‘Let’s not underestimate the power of ideology’ (Orbán 2023c).

In the next section, I examine how Orbán conceptualizes his illiberal political project through the concepts of ‘illiberalism’ and ‘illiberal democracy’. Showing how Orbán selectively draws on the traditions of Western antiliberal and counter-Enlightenment thought, as exemplified in diverging ways by Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Carl Schmitt and Isaiah Berlin, I place Orbán’s ideological universe within these complex and internally heterogeneous traditions (cf. Canihac 2022; Garrard 2022).

The second section explores how Orbán actively seeks to reform the European Union (EU) through strategic and ideological alliances, as testified most recently by the formation of the Patriots of Europe group in the European Parliament. His fight for a sovereigntist ‘Europe of nations’ and multipolar world beyond American universalism is illustrated through Orbán’s political uses of history, which I elaborate through the conceptual framework of Raymond Williams (1977).

In the third section, the article moves on to examine Orbán’s distinctively Gramscian approach to politics, which calls for a cultural revolution and aims to replace liberal values with radically conservative ones. As shown in recent studies (e.g. Bohle et al. 2024), today the clash between the EU and Hungary is centred around the question of ‘core values’ that form a nodal point in Orbán’s political rhetoric. Orbán’s ideological battles against immigration and the LGBTQ+ minorities and his defence of Christian values are, as Orbán (2022a) emphasizes, the issues on which ‘the future will be decided’.

In the concluding section, I analyse the interrelations of these ideological elements in Orbán’s political rhetoric by drawing on the ideational approach developed by Mudde (2017a). Further, I also explore how and why Orbán’s battle for a Europe of nations and his cultural war have moved from the periphery to the centre of his agenda. I diagnose two central shifts in Orbán’s ideological discourse. First, having completed the constitutional revolution in Hungary, Orbán is today portraying Hungary as an example that the rest of Europe should mimic. Second, ever since the migration crisis of 2015, Orbán’s ideology has become more influenced by the ideas of the European new right, which has been promoting a cultural war in the Gramscian sense since the 1980s (Bohle et al. 2024; Pfahl-Traugher 1998).

Orbán on illiberal democracy in Hungary

Although Orbán’s rise to power in 2010 marked the beginning of a new era in Hungarian politics (Lendvai 2017: 91; Palonen 2018: 316), Orbán’s transformation

from a bleeding-heart liberal/libertarian to an illiberal has longer historical roots. Having committed himself clearly to the right wing of the political spectrum by the mid-1990s (Lendvai 2017: 36), Orbán's electoral success in 2010 was preceded by his taking control of civil society in the 2000s (Greskovits 2020). I will analyse how Orbán uses the concepts of illiberalism and illiberal democracy as descriptions of his own political agenda during and after 2014.

In his 2014 Bálványos speech, Orbán emphasizes the necessity for developing a novel political system and way of thinking as a reaction to the failures of Western liberalism. He claims that 'The stars of the international analysts today are Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey.' It has become crucial to understand political systems that 'are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, and perhaps not even democracies'. Hungary is a nation 'breaking with the dogmas and ideologies that have been adopted by the West'. For Orbán, 'a democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal. Just because a state is not liberal, it can still be a democracy.' An illiberal 'must break with liberal principles and methods of social organization, and in general with the liberal understanding of society' (Orbán 2014).

The illiberal Hungary builds itself as a backlash to the liberal forgetting of the 'white working class' in favour of 'immigrants' and 'freeloaders'. It takes a stance against 'political activists who are being paid by foreigners' and who promote foreign interests. The future Hungarian nation will be a community that no longer consists of a mere sum of individuals as in the West (Orbán 2014). In his 2015 Bálványos speech, Orbán comments on his 2014 speech as follows:

Following my success last year in causing uproar (provoked by my presentation on the end of the era of liberal democracies and the advent of illiberal democracy), this year my task is not an easy one: the bar has been set too high. Having searched through every available dictionary on political philosophy, I drew a blank: I could find nothing that representatives of today's western ideological mainstream could find sufficiently offensive compared with last year. (Orbán 2015a)

However, apart from criticizing what he calls 'the West's human rights fundamentalism' (Orbán 2015a), Orbán does not conceptualize illiberalism in more detail. His Bálványos speeches in 2018 and 2019, however, offer interesting augmentations to his previous theorizations. In 2018, he notes that 'liberal democracy has been transformed into liberal non-democracy. The situation in the West is that there is liberalism, but there is no democracy' (Orbán 2018a). While in 2014 Orbán emphasized the necessity to part from Western-liberal dogmas, he now moves on the attack against a supposed democratic deficit in the West:

The argument we can provide to support our assertion that there is an absence of democracy is that in Western Europe censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech have become general phenomena. Working together, political leaders and technology giants filter news items that are uncomfortable for the liberal elite. If you don't believe this, just visit these websites, visit social media sites, and you'll see the ingenious and cunning means by which they restrict

access to negative news reports on migrants, immigrants and related topics, and how they prevent European citizens from facing reality. The liberal concept of freedom of opinion has gone so far that liberals see diversity of opinion as important up until the point that they realise, to their shock, that there are opinions which are different from theirs. (Orbán 2018a)

The non-democratic nature of the West is crystallized in a supposed state-controlled censorship of non-liberal opinions. Orbán blames the West for something he himself has realized in Hungary, namely establishing a state-controlled media (e.g. Benková 2019; Bonet and Zamoran 2021; Plattner 2019: 9–11; Rupnik 2016: 78–80). In distinction to his earlier speeches on illiberalism, in 2018 Orbán also begins to connect illiberalism with his own vision of ‘Christian democracy’: ‘there is an alternative to liberal democracy: it is called Christian democracy’ (Orbán 2018a). As a result of Orbán’s reference to ‘Christian democracy’, it has been suggested that his 2014 reference to illiberal democracy might be a ‘potential lapse of judgement’ (Nyyssönen and Metsälä 2021: 274). However, instead of being just another populist turn, by connecting Christian democracy with illiberalism, Orbán’s is actually offering a more concrete definition of his central political ideas:

Let us confidently declare that Christian democracy is not liberal. Liberal democracy is liberal, while Christian democracy is, by definition, not liberal: it is, if you like, illiberal. And we can specifically say this in connection with a few important issues – say, three great issues. Liberal democracy is in favour of multiculturalism, while Christian democracy gives priority to Christian culture; this is an illiberal concept. Liberal democracy is pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration; this is again a genuinely illiberal concept. And liberal democracy sides with adaptable family models, while Christian democracy rests on the foundations of the Christian family model; once more, this is an illiberal concept. (Orbán 2018a)

The ideological sphere of illiberalism is thus connected to Christian culture, anti-immigration and traditional family models – all poised against the liberal West. Orbán elaborates on these ideas further in his 2019 Bálványos speech, in which he criticizes the Western interpretations of Hungarian illiberal democracy. According to him, Western liberals

have developed an interpretation for this expression that defines it as nothing more than an expression with a prefix, a sham democracy: a system that disguises itself as democracy, but which in reality is not democracy. And they’ve come up with two propositions: democracy is necessarily liberal; and Christian democracy is necessarily liberal. I’m convinced that these are two misconceptions, because obviously the opposite is true. (Orbán 2019a)

Arguing that Hungary was in a state of material, intellectual and biological decline before 2010, Orbán claims that the solution to this dilemma was provided by illiberalism: ‘We expressed this by saying “yes” to democracy and “no” to liberalism. And then there was the debate about what were these things called “illiberal

democracy”, or “old-style Christian democracy”, or a “national system” (Orbán 2019a). Here illiberal democracy is brought in a decisive connection with Hungary’s ‘System of National Cooperation’ launched by Fidesz after its 2010 electoral victory, and which is here referred to simply as the ‘national system’. As his 2018 and 2019 Bálványos speeches demonstrate, in Orbán’s terminology, illiberalism has two connotations: first, it describes a specific understanding of the national system, and second, it includes specific interpretation of Christian culture and values.

Defining the ‘national system’ by distinguishing liberalism and democracy, Orbán claims that the majority is nothing less than ‘the essence of democracy’. If understood in this manner, a democratic state must take a stance on such issues as ‘culture’, ‘family’ and to ‘what kinds of people – or who – are within the borders of your country’; it is the ‘illiberal person’ who defends the ‘borders’, the ‘national culture’ and ‘rejects external interference’ and all forms of supranational ‘empire building’ (Orbán 2019a).

Second, in defining Christian democracy, Orbán claims that the idea of all people created in the image of God originally formed the original foundation of all liberal democracies. However, by the 21st century, this notion has been challenged by ‘the spirit of the age’, which has forced liberal democracy to depart from its ‘Christian foundations’, breaking its bonds ‘to real life’ – a moment described by the liberal questioning of ‘a person’s sex’, one’s ‘religious identity’ and ‘national affiliation’ (Orbán 2019a). In other words, with the loss of this truly universal Christian culture and its conception of universal human nature – which according to Orbán ‘goes back to Kant’ (Orbán 2019a) – liberal democracy degenerates into self-destructive identity politics. Asking what will constitute the ‘future of illiberal democracy in Europe’, Orbán then concludes:

... putting forward an antithesis against the thesis of liberal democracy – the thesis of illiberal democracy – is an acceptable, viable and rational decision not only intellectually, but also from the point of view of a political programme. All we need to do is find the expression or phrase that gives a positive meaning to the essentially negative-sounding word ‘illiberal’, because it’s clear from what I’ve said that everything that we want to distil into this concept is good. And whatever way I look at it, I can’t give a better definition of the meaning of illiberal politics than Christian liberty. Christian freedom and protecting Christian freedom. Illiberal politics working for Christian freedom seeks to preserve everything that liberals neglect, forget and despise. (Orbán 2019a)

This passage exemplifies Orbán’s attempts to present illiberal democracy as a positive political concept (Canihac 2022: 4; Nyssönen and Metsälä 2021: 274). But what does illiberalism, as an ideological concept, actually entail for Orbán? What does Orbán mean when he emphasizes that the ‘emergence of an illiberal state’ is nothing less than a novel ‘model of state’ that includes a distinctive ‘political theory’ (Orbán 2019a)?

Democracy against liberalism

In April 2020, the then president of the European People’s Party (EPP), Donald Tusk, noted that ‘Carl Schmitt would be very proud of Viktor Orbán.’ In these

words, Tusk referred to the fact that ‘Orbán has been ruling Hungary with emergency measures since the refugee crisis’ and to Orbán’s self-proposed intention of changing the EPP into a political alliance that would follow the ‘authoritarian model’ of Hungary (Tusk 2020). As noted by Aron Buzogány and Mihai Varga, Schmitt, along with Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Michael Oakeshott and Edmund Burke, forms one of the crucial ideological sources for Hungarian conservative intellectuals. Schmitt’s friend–enemy distinction and his desire to make politics ‘political again’ against neoliberal economics especially serve as central points of reference (Buzogány and Varga 2018: 816, 818; cf. Békés 2023: 23).

Orbán’s (2014) claim that ‘a democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal’ and that ‘just because a state is not liberal, it still can be a democracy’ may be fruitfully analysed through Schmitt’s political theory. It was Schmitt (1985: 13) who, already in the 1920s, proposed that ‘liberalism and democracy must be separated from each other’ in order to perceive their unique characteristics. While liberalism is grounded on the abstract equality of human beings, democracy realizes the equality of citizens within a particular nation state. In short, democracy is essentially *homogeneity*, and unlike universalistic liberalism, it must distinguish between friends and enemies, between citizens and non-citizens (Schmitt 1985: 13–14, 2010: 226–227). From Schmitt’s perspective, democracy always necessitates the unequal treatment of non-citizens – the ‘elimination or destruction of the heterogeneous’ (Schmitt 1985: 14; cf. Schmitt 2010: 226–238). As we will see very concretely with Orbán’s reflections on immigration and sexual minorities in Hungary, it is something very similar that Orbán is implying when he declares that an illiberal person must be concerned with ‘what kinds of people – or who – are within the borders of your country’ (Orbán 2019a). Interestingly, Orbán is also aware of the historical differences between liberalism and democracy. This is exemplified by his statements on classical Greek democracy: ‘Let’s not forget the two principles of ancient Greek democracy: in addition to elections and representation, democracy is also about good governance. This is what we’re doing in Hungary’ (Orbán 2020).

In the case of both Orbán and Schmitt, the separation of democracy and liberalism is articulated with political motivations. Schmitt’s definition of democracy in terms of national homogeneity, and that of liberalism as a mere *external limitation* to democratic rule (Schmitt 2007: 70, 2010: 110) allows him to portray the governments of Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia as essentially democratic, or as Schmitt puts it, ‘like any dictatorship, indeed anti-liberal, but not necessarily anti-democratic’ (Schmitt 1985: 22). In fact, for Schmitt, ‘democracy’ demonstrates its power precisely by enforcing homogeneity – something exemplified by the Turkish policies of ethnic cleansing and Australian racist immigration policies (Schmitt 1985: 14).

Although Orbán is operating in an entirely different context with different intentions, his concept of illiberal democracy functions with a similar logic by portraying Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey as political systems which are neither Western nor liberal. It is in this very same sense that Orbán also praises Azerbaijan as ‘a model state’ (Lendvai 2017: 222). For him, abandoning the liberal methods and principles of organizing a society clearly implies a similar enforcement of national homogeneity, for as Orbán notes, as Hungarians ‘we do not want to become peoples of mixed-race’ (Orbán 2022a). Not only for Schmitt, but

also for Orbán, ‘politics is a battle’ that requires ‘risky decisions’. It is in this Schmittian sense that Orbán attacks the ‘European liberal blah blah’ that dominates European politics without discussing actual problems like immigration (Lendvai 2017: 142, 144, 202).

As already highlighted by Fareed Zakaria (1997: 30), the discussions on illiberal democracy agree that there is a tension between liberalism and democracy as historically and factually different doctrines (cf. Bobbio 2006). However, it is crucial to understand that Orbán’s reductionist portrayal of liberalism goes beyond that of the Cold War liberals (Moyn 2023) and is more radical than the somewhat similar recent attacks on liberalism (e.g. Deneen 2018). Analysing Orbán’s conceptualization of illiberal democracy in the light of Schmitt’s distinctions is well grounded by the fact that Schmitt’s conceptualizations constitute the ‘most significant and most influential’ model for attacking the liberal democratic state among the new right in both France and Germany (Pffal-Traugher 1998: 75). Interestingly, this is also highlighted by the founder of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, Alain de Benoist, who takes Schmitt’s ideas as his starting point and portrays Orbán as their contemporary inheritor (Benoist 2019: 251–265).

The spirit of counter-Enlightenment

It is not an accident that both Orbán in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland have described their shared political approach as ‘counter-revolutionary’ (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 36). Orbán’s speeches are defined by a critique of Enlightenment rationalism that draws on what Isaiah Berlin (1998: 243–268) described as the ‘counter-Enlightenment’ tradition (on the complex relations of different counter-Enlightenment traditions and illiberalism, see Garrard 2022). In a 2018 speech commemorating the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Orbán makes an implied reference to Joseph de Maistre, who, together with Edmund Burke, became well known as a harsh critic of ‘abstract’ human rights proposed by the French Declaration of the Rights of Man from 1789:

European people are born the sons and daughters of nations. When a European comes into this world, they are German, French, Italian, Polish or Hungarian. This is the order of history and nature. When a small child speaks for the first time, they say their first words in Polish, Croatian, Swedish, English – or Hungarian. This is why Europe is different from the other continents. Europe is the homeland of nations, and not a melting pot. (Orbán 2018b)

This passage reads like an updated version of Maistre’s famous words from *Considerations on France* (1796): ‘In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare that I have never met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me’ (Maistre 2006: 53). Drawing on Maistre and Edmund Burke (2004: 148–153), who would counterpose the ‘real rights of men’ against abstract human rights of the French Revolution, Orbán argues that rights are the rights of particular peoples, not abstract individuals.

During his 2023 speech at Bálványos, Orbán explicitly emphasizes that the ‘national’ and ‘Christian’ constitution of Hungary is ‘different from other European constitutions’. While the liberal democratic constitutions of the West are based on the egoistic ‘I’, the Hungarian constitution is based on a ‘we’ (Orbán 2023a) – again an insight that echoes the basic distinction between democracy (based on the ‘people’) and liberalism (based on the ‘individual’) at the heart of Schmitt’s (2010) constitutional theory. Instead of liberal rootlessness – something Orbán attributes to a liberal-leftist spirit of the Enlightenment and clearly rejects – it promotes cohesion and homogeneity:

[A]t the base of the Hungarian Constitution and the intellectual foundations of the new era there lies an anthropological insight. Two hundred and forty years ago, during the Enlightenment, left-wing, internationalist and liberal intellectuals and political leaders thought that the rejection of religion and Christianity would be followed by the emergence of an ideal, enlightened community based on an understanding of the good and the common good, living a free and superior life according to recognised, sociologically based societal truths ... But two hundred years have passed, and today we can see that it is pure illusion. (Orbán 2023a)

From Orbán’s counter-Enlightenment perspective, it was an illusion of the Enlightenment to believe that ‘the good and the common good’ could ever serve as a basis for politics (cf. Berlin 1998: 243–268; Schmitt 2007: 73). This illusionary belief has led to postmodern relativism that undermines all traditions and particularities of European nations. In a clearly Burkean and Schmittian vein, Orbán also draws on the ‘anthropological insight’ (Orbán 2023a) that all truly political ways of thinking presuppose that the human being is indeed ‘a dangerous and dynamic being’ (Schmitt 2007: 61; cf. Burke 2004: 151) and not an agent predisposed for realizing ‘universal human goals’, to express the matter in Berlin’s terminology (Berlin 1998: 243). Saying “yes” to democracy and “no” to liberalism’, Orbán (2019a) thus joins many Cold War liberals in their rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism (Moyn 2023), while transforming this argument into a legitimization of a new kind of authoritarian politics.

A Europe of nations or a European empire?

Orbán’s speeches also deploy illiberal political rhetoric in relation to the EU (cf. Bos and Lorenz 2023; Visnovitz and Jenne 2021). Orbán differentiates between the factually existing EU, described as a liberal-tyrannical empire located in Brussels, and his vision for a Europe of nations, consisting of an alliance of sovereign nation states, towards which he hopes to reform the EU.

According to Orbán, Brussels is ‘ruled by those who want to replace an alliance of free nations with a European empire’. Aiming to create a utopia of multiculturalism – a ‘brave new world’, as Orbán’s reference to Aldous Huxley makes clear – Brussels aims to turn ‘indigenous Europeans into a minority’. Instead of armed warfare, European imperialism is ‘justified on the grounds of the rule of law; and freedom of speech and the press which only extends as far

as the freedom to echo their ideas'. Orbán's central enemy here is the Hungarian businessman George Soros, who incarnates the idea of a European empire and the attempt to 'replace the European Union of nation states with a multicultural empire of mixed populations' (Orbán 2018b; cf. Kallius and Adriaans 2022; Lendvai 2017: 196, 207–220, 224, 230, 236).

The core argument that Orbán (2015a) repeats in virtually all of his speeches on the EU is that 'attempting to create a United States of Europe is a crazy idea'. However, his resistance to the contemporary EU also stems from more concrete political reasons. At the heart of his critique stands the role of the European Commission in the EU, which, by proposing to implement 'mandatory migration quotas', has 'by stealth appropriated some national competences', resulting in a legitimacy crisis within the EU (Orbán 2016). Blaming the EU institutions for engaging in what Schmitt would famously call 'apocryphal' acts of sovereignty (cf. Schmitt 2010: xii, 108, 150), Orbán describes the EU's migration quotas as being implemented by 'stealth' by the Commission (cf. Campani 2019). He also describes the Hungarian 'battles' in relation to the question of 'the rule of law' (Orbán 2019a; cf. Canihac 2021) in a similar Schmittian vein after the EU had voted in September 2018 to start disciplinary action against Hungary due to its breach of the EU's 'core values' (Benková 2019: 3; cf. Bohle et al. 2024). Reverting the usually assumed connotations of illiberalism, one of Orbán's key rhetorical strategies consists of blaming the liberals for the kind of negative illiberalism he himself is often taken to embody, as is highlighted, for instance, by his critique of European constitutional pluralism (Canihac 2021).

Illiberal Hungary as a model for a 'Europe of nations'

Virtually all of Orbán's speeches from 2014 to 2023 emphasize that 'Europe needs fundamental changes', for which reason 'it is important to try to jointly define at a European level what it is that we must fight against' (Orbán 2016). As Orbán notes, if one accepts the sovereignty of European nation states, it should not matter whether the individual states within the Union are 'liberal, illiberal, or indeed Christian':

The European Union's character and its direction of progress – assuming we want a democratic European Union, and that is what we want – may only be decided by its citizens. One can argue about different kinds of democracy – liberal, illiberal, or indeed Christian – but there is no doubt that what cannot be left out of the formula for democracy is the demos. (Orbán 2019c)

In his 2017 Bálványos speech, Orbán not only praises Donald Trump – with whom Orbán claims to share a 'spiritual community' (Lendvai 2017: 246) – but also declares that the Hungarians 'were forerunners of this approach, the new patriotic Western politics' (Orbán 2017). Historically, Orbán's illiberalism gained momentum through its handling of the 2015 migration crisis in Europe, during which Fidesz presented itself as the pioneer of a new anti-migration policy in Europe (cf. Glied and Pap 2016: 146; Krastev and Holmes 2020: 34–48; Lendvai 2017: 199–205). As Livia Benková (2019: 2) notes, 'Orbán started his fight against

Brussels in order to block the European Union's relocation quota scheme and provided an example for other Central European countries to follow.' Orbán himself declared in September 2015 that the migration crisis signalled

[t]he end of an era: a conceptual-ideological era. Putting pretension aside, we can simply call this the era of liberal babble. This era is now at an end, and this situation both carries a huge risk and offers a new opportunity. It offers the chance for the national-Christian ideology, way of thinking and approach to regain dominance – not only in Hungary, but throughout the whole of Europe. This is the opportunity. (Orbán 2015b)

It is precisely in this sense that Orbán ends both his 2017 and 2018 speeches at Bálványos by stating, 'Twenty-seven years ago here in Central Europe we believed that Europe was our future; today we feel that we are the future of Europe' (Orbán 2017, 2018a). Since 2015, Orbán's illiberalism has formed a crucial reference point within the Visegrád countries, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Germany and Austria (Coman and Volintiru 2023; Lendvai 2017: 189–206). For instance, the leader of the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), Jarosław Kaczyński, praised Orbán for providing an 'example' and declared that 'we are learning from your example' (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 47).

Today Orbán is no longer only a 'key-meaning maker in Hungarian politics' (Palonen 2018: 309), who has 'Orbánized' the political culture of Hungary (Wilkin 2018); he is also an 'innovative ideologist' (Nyyssönen and Metsälä 2021: 274) who serves as a 'role-model' both for existing 'illiberal democrats across Europe' (Mudde 2017b) and for those striving to become 'autocrats' (Mayer 2018: 24). This is manifested by Orbán's eagerness 'to circulate most of his public speeches beyond the limit of Hungary' (Lamour 2021: 323). If in 1997 the 'spreading virus of illiberalism' concerned mostly countries outside of the West (Zakaria 1997: 42), today some researchers speak of the 'Orbánization' of Europe (Kahn 2017: 81). In short, since Orbán's self-identification with illiberalism, it is today 'displayed as a badge of honour by many self-proclaimed illiberal leaders' (Laruelle 2022: 306) as 'Illiberal populism everywhere ... seems to be taking a page from Orbán's illiberal playbook' (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 47).

By 2018 Orbán (2018a) diagnoses a crucial 'shift to the right' in European politics and in 2023 declares that 'here in Europe the "Reconquista" has begun' – a conservative political shift signalled by the victories of Fratelli d'Italia in Italy and that of the conservative forces in Israel. Echoing the political slogans made well known by Trump's presidential campaign, Orbán declares the intention to 'drain the Brussels swamp' (Orbán 2023b). Elevating Hungarian illiberal politics to a general model for European nations, Orbán claims that Hungary provides 'the proof that only conservative policies can help in those places where the liberals, the leftists, have wrecked a country' (Orbán 2023b). While these words already reflected 'Orbán's ultimate aim' of 'unit[ing] the hard right under one umbrella' (Rupnik 2020: 35) and a call for West Europeans to 'imitate the East' (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 45), in the wake of the European parliamentary elections of 2024, the creation of the new political group, Patriots for Europe, has transformed this rhetoric into reality.

The historical Europe as illiberal

Orbán's vision for a Europe of nations draws on a historical interpretation of the European project: 'in thinking about the future we are not competing to looking far ahead of us, but rather competing to understand the past' (Orbán 2015a). For Orbán, history is an 'ongoing challenge, a trial and an aptitude test' that always carries a 'highly practical' aspect with it (Orbán 2019b). While the idea that 'all historical knowledge is knowledge of the present' (Schmitt 2007: 80) is a commonly accepted one, Orbán's use of European-Hungarian history seeks to claim 'the mantle of Europeaness' by describing Hungary as the true representative of European values (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 46).

Although Brussels is not the Soviet Union, Orbán claims that the two are 'close'. The Soviet Union is framed both as the empire from which Hungary has liberated itself and also as the potential threat that Brussels must not turn into (Orbán 2020; cf. Krastev and Holmes 2020: 34–76). Orbán's Europe of nations is one defined by such figures as Helmut Kohl, Jacques Chirac, Robert Schuman and Winston Churchill (Orbán 2018b, 2019a) and not by 'the conquests of Bonaparte or the Third Reich' (Orbán 2018b). Reading the history of Europe through the lens of his own illiberalism, Orbán notes:

For example, if you read the Atlantic Charter, which Roosevelt and Churchill jointly created and which laid the foundations for the future of Europe, I can say that it's a truly illiberal document. In it the Anglo-Saxons affirm that all peoples have the right to choose their own destiny ... So the great figures who are regularly cited as the creators of the idea of European unity would in fact not belong among the ranks of what today are called the liberal democrats, but to the illiberal democrats. This is why I think we should not be afraid to go against the spirit of the age and build an illiberal political and state system. (Orbán 2019a)

Thus, the founding statesmen of Europe are turned into Orbán's allies and Hungary into 'Europe's new core' (Krastev and Holmes 2020: 47). To use the terminology developed by Raymond Williams (1977: 121–127), the 'residual' features of Europe's past are thus turned against the 'hegemonic' and factually existing EU. It is precisely in this sense that Orbán describes Hungarians as the 'Gaullists' of Europe (Orbán 2015a) – as the strong sovereign state that represents an alternative to Brussels, which has created a dangerous 'open society' in which 'being European means nothing at all' (Orbán 2018a). While Orbán's 'illiberal' interpretation of European history is ideological, his ideas nevertheless draw on the broader conservative and Cold War traditions in understanding such central issues as Christian democracy (Accetti 2019) and liberalism (Moyn 2023).

Liberal imperialism or multipolarism?

Orbán also takes aim at liberal-cosmopolitan universalism globally. Already in 2014 Orbán notes, 'The current world order is not particularly to our taste' (Orbán 2014). Describing the current 'clash of civilizations' (Orbán 2022b) – a term popularized by Samuel Huntington – as the clash between Western and non-Western values, Orbán notes that

... other civilisations – the Chinese, the Indian, let's say the Orthodox world, and even Islam – have also undergone a process of modernisation. And we see that rival civilisations have adopted Western technology and have mastered the Western financial system, but they have not adopted Western values – and they have absolutely no intention of adopting them. Nevertheless, the West wants to spread its own values, which is something that the rest of the world feels to be humiliating. (Orbán 2022a)

The decline of American power is reflected by the rise of China that can 'neutralise the chief US weapon, the chief US weapon of power, which we call "universal values"'. The Chinese simply laugh at this, describing it as a Western myth, and noting that such talk of universal values is in fact a philosophy hostile to other, non-Western, civilizations' (Orbán 2023a). In fact, for Orbán, it is the liberals themselves who should be described as being 'illiberal' in the negative sense of the term. Instead of promoting a true value pluralism for different civilizations, 'European liberals are the ones who believe that in their hands they have a theoretical system that will bring salvation, peace and prosperity to all humanity' (Orbán 2019a). It is liberal ideology itself that divides the world into 'the good, the bad, Nazis, non-Nazis, democracies and autocracies'. For Orbán, this is 'textbook imperialism' (Orbán 2023b).

In 2022, Orbán refers to Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918), noting that the pillars of Western civilization are cracking: 'the reality is that a hundred years ago, when there was talk of the decline of the West, they were referring to spiritual and demographic decline. What we are seeing today, however, is the decline of the Western world's power and material resources' (Orbán 2022a). Today, it is not only Western values which are in decline, but also the political hegemony of the West in terms of resources and the economy. It is for this reason that 'a multipolar world order is now knocking on our door' (Orbán 2022a).

The war of culture: Orbán's Gramscian approach

As has been argued recently, the illiberal counter-hegemonic project in Hungary is fuelled by the attempt to replace the existing liberal Western hegemony with ultra-conservative and Christian values (Bohle et al. 2024). In his political rhetoric, Orbán constantly emphasizes that Fidesz must embrace 'a spiritual and a cultural approach' to politics. Arguing explicitly that cultural issues transgress and cut through both domestic and foreign policy, Orbán explains how ideological-moral issues form the backdrop for any lasting social order: 'An era is always more than a political system. An era is a special and characteristic cultural reality. An era is a spiritual order, a kind of prevailing mood, perhaps even taste – a form of attitude' (Orbán 2018a). Towards this end, Orbán cites the words of President Trump from 2016: 'Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield. It begins with our minds, our wills and our souls' (Orbán 2017). Describing the current situation in the West as a war, Orbán emphasizes that 'politics, my Friends, are not enough – this war is a culture war. We have to revitalize our churches, our families, our universities, and our community institutions' (Orbán

2022b). While the liberal propagation of multiculturalism and gender politics have brought a self-imposed civil war onto the West, Hungary has adopted a different approach:

Today the western half of Europe is waging a cultural war on its own past and on its Christian roots. The situation is different here: we do not see nation, faith and family as fossils which are embedded here, but far more as the inspiration for the most profound human feelings and passions, and as the source of beauty and goodness. We live at peace with our own history and our own culture – in other words, with ourselves. (Orbán 2018c)

Again, the echoes of counter-Enlightenment thought are clearly present in Orbán's rhetoric as he describes Hungary as a nation that, to cite Edmund Burke, understands liberties as 'an entailed heritage derived to us from our forefathers' (Burke 2004: 119). Orbán paints this struggle for illiberal values as one for the future of Europe, noting that if Europeans still want 'a Christian, Hungarian, and European culture here in a hundred years' time' then the task must be to 'defend our cultural essence, identity and sovereignty in the vortex of Europe's cultural war' (Orbán 2018c). Using history politically, Orbán's cultural war is a war *against* what Patrick Deneen (2018: 64–90) describes as the 'anticulture' of contemporary liberalism, and at the same time, a fight *for* values that supposedly represent the more original, 'residual' European values (cf. Williams 1977). Claiming to represent the peripheral and yet originally European 'illiberalism' against dominant liberal values, Orbán's ideological commitments come to the fore most clearly in his deployment of Gramscian cultural war that advocates 'Europe's return to its original moral self' (Bohle et al. 2024: 1788).

This cultural approach of Fidesz is set against those liberal, leftist and green forces, who opt for a Europe 'that has no roots and no spiritual identity' (Orbán 2018d). It is also concretely exemplified by the forced relocation of the Central European University (CEU) from Budapest to Vienna (Kauth and King 2021: 395–399). Beyond building alternative epistemic paradigms and academic institutions (Greskovits 2020; Paternotte and Verloo 2021: 566–567), illiberalism also supports specific cultural policies that strive to establish a cultural hegemony for revisionist and nationalistic historical narratives in various social-cultural arenas – including the media, theatre, the arts – which are either controlled directly through state-led institutions or through public–private cultural institutions and corporations. This is reflected in both Poland and Hungary by the fact that these countries have 'two of the highest public expenditure in cultural policies in the EU' (Bonet and Zamoran 2021: 561).

As noted by David Paternotte and Mieke Verloo, Orbán's 'culture war in favor of the true values of the Right' was already a part of his 1987 master's thesis, which examined Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony by analysing the Solidarnosc movement in Poland (Paternotte and Verloo 2021: 557; cf. Békés 2023: 27, 69; Greskovits 2020: 251). Orbán's rhetoric on culture and 'our souls' clearly corresponds with the prevalent 'Gramscian' political strategies of the far right (Békés 2023), broadly prevalent in Europe (Benoist 2019; Bohle et al. 2024; Pfahl-Traughber 1998) and among the American alt-right (cf. Braune 2019; Paternotte and Verloo 2021; Steinmetz-Jenkins 2018).

Orbán on population replacement, LGBTQ+ minorities and cultural Marxism

Orbán's cultural war for illiberalism in Europe and Hungary is waged against specific enemies: migrants, sexual minorities, feminists, the so-called foreign agents within Hungary, and cultural Marxists. In 2023, he argues that the sovereign states of the West are under attack by a liberal 'virus':

A virus attack has been launched against us. The virus was developed in progressive liberal laboratories. This virus is attacking the most vulnerable point in the Western world: the nation. It is a nation-devouring virus that will atomize and pulverize our nations ... The nation is the great invention of the West. It is the heart of the free world. (Orbán 2023b)

And as Orbán continues: 'Migration, gender, and woke: these are all just variants – variants of the same virus.' The aim of all these is to destroy the national community. Only Hungarian illiberalism can provide 'a serum for the progressive virus' (Orbán 2023b).

As has been noted, before the migration crisis of 2015, the majority of Hungarians did not consider migration a pivotal issue, despite widespread xenophobia (Glied and Pap 2016: 143). The anti-immigration narrative of Fidesz after the 2014 elections constituted a 'U-turn' in policy, aimed at taking political space from the more radical Jobbik party (Benková 2019: 2).

In his 2017 Bálványos speech, Orbán confronts the issue of migration as follows: 'there is no cultural identity in a population without a stable ethnic composition. The alteration of a country's ethnic makeup amounts to an alteration of its cultural identity' (Orbán 2017). The combination of culture and migration is crucial for Orbán; while 'the European people' take the equality between men and women for granted, 'for the Muslim community this idea is unacceptable' (Orbán 2017). Although Orbán clearly rejects liberalism as a way of looking at the world, it does not stop him from weaponizing some liberal premises for his own ideological purposes (cf. Moffit 2020: 75–83, 93).

By tolerating Muslim illiberalism, the hegemonic liberal ideology reveals its hidden purpose: 'Europe is currently being prepared to hand its territory over to a new mixed, Islamised Europe' (Orbán 2017). It is in this context that Orbán refers to the population replacement conspiracy theory, which was already framed by Jean Raspail in his dystopian and highly xenophobic novel *The Camp of the Saints* (1973), which described the destruction of Western civilization through mass migration:

There is an outstanding 1973 book on this issue which was written in French, and recently published in Hungary. It is called 'The Camp of the Saints' [*Le Camp des Saints*], and I recommend it to anyone who wants to understand the spiritual developments underlying the West's inability to defend itself. Migration has split Europe in two – or I could say that it has split the West in two. One half is a world where European and non-European peoples live together. These countries are no longer nations: they are nothing more than a conglomeration of peoples. (Orbán 2022a)

In his more recent speeches, the idea of ‘population replacement’ is portrayed as one aspect in a broader liberal-leftist conspiracy that ‘rejects Christian heritage’, manages ‘population replacement through migration’ and wages ‘an LGBTQ offensive against family-friendly European nations’ (Orbán 2023a). Although a ‘gendered modus operandi’ (Grzebalska and Pető 2018) has been operative in Orbán’s rhetoric and policies all along, Marton Gera diagnoses a shift in Orbán’s rhetoric from anti-immigration towards targeting the LGBTQ+ minorities by 2020 (Gera 2023: 116–117).

As Orbán notes in his 2022 speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), ‘family policy’ is nothing less than the ‘heart’ of Fidesz’s politics. Against the Western-liberal critique of the ‘so-called patriarchy’, Orbán notes, ‘If traditional families are gone, there is nothing that can save the West from going under’ (Orbán 2022b). The traditional family is constituted by the fact that ‘the mother is a woman, the father is a man’ (Orbán 2022b). As Orbán himself formulates the matter, both migration and gender constitute the decisive issues on which ‘the future will be decided. This is the great historic battle that we are fighting: demography, migration and gender. And this is precisely what is at stake in the battle between the Left and the Right’ (Orbán 2022a).

One of the recurring tropes in Orbán’s speeches is the conspiracy theory concerning ‘cultural Marxism’. Supposedly, after the failure of Marxism as an economic-political doctrine, the left assumed a radical Gramscian strategy seeking to undermine Western nation states through woke beliefs and gender ideology as well as population replacement (cf. Braune 2019; Paternotte and Verloo 2021; Steinmetz-Jenkins 2018). This conspiracy theory, often superficially connected to the Frankfurt School, was popularized by such far-right thinkers as Kevin MacDonald, William S. Lind and Paul Gottfried (cf. Braune 2019; Steinmetz-Jenkins 2018). During his recent speech at the CPAC Hungary conference in May 2023, Orbán invokes this conspiracy theory in the following way:

... the woke movement and gender ideology are exactly what communism and Marxism used to be: they artificially divide the nation into minorities, in order to foment discord between groups. This is their power base. The Hungarian conservative experiment is successful because we can detect Marxists from miles away – indeed by smell, without even needing to see them. (Orbán 2023b)

For Orbán, migration, gender, woke ideology and cultural Marxism are different facets of the very same problem, which is reflected in his simplistic categorization of his own political enemies as a homogeneous leftist-liberal bloc (cf. Lendvai 2017: 123; Nyssönen and Metsälä 2021: 283).

In conclusion

Drawing on Laruelle’s (2022) definition of illiberalism as an emerging ‘thin’ ideology, this article has analysed Orbán’s political speeches from 2014 to 2023. I have argued that instead of understanding Orbán as an opportunistic kleptocratic politician devoid of ideological convictions (e.g. Glied 2020; Krastev and Holmes 2020; Lamour 2021; Palonen 2018), his illiberal project is underpinned by a relatively

coherent ideological agenda (as also argued in different ways by Bohle et al. 2024; Coman and Volintiru 2023; Enyedi 2020, 2024).

As demonstrated above, this ideology cuts across the realms of Hungarian domestic politics, the EU and global politics as well as cultural politics, understood in the Gramscian sense as a battle for fundamental values. It is possible to illustrate these different aspects of Orbán's ideological agenda through the conceptual framework of Mudde (2017a): by portraying himself as the authentic voice of the Hungarian people and simultaneously as the genuine representative of original 'Europeanness', Orbán's illiberal populism is posed against a broad set of liberal-leftist enemies, who are described as anti-democratic, corrupt elites who do not respect the popular will. Orbán describes immigrants and sexual minorities as well as his domestic political enemies as representatives of elitist special interests that are corroding Hungary and European nations from within. Simplistically categorizing all of his own political enemies as liberals and leftist, Orbán portrays himself as a truly democratic leader fighting a non-democratic version of Western liberalism.

To utilize a helpful distinction developed by Jasper Kauth and Desmond King (2021), Orbán's ideological articulation of illiberalism allows for a (supposedly) democratic legitimization of the disruptive practices in Hungary: taking control of the media (Benková 2019; Bonet and Zamoran 2021; Plattner 2019; Rupnik 2016); enacting revisionist cultural-educational policies (Bonet and Zamoran 2021; Paternotte and Verloo 2021) and implementing constitutional changes leading to democratic backsliding (Pech and Scheppele 2017). As examined above, in legitimizing these changes within Hungary, Orbán's political rhetoric also draws selectively on the traditions of Western antiliberal and counter-Enlightenment traditions, as exemplified by Burke, de Maistre, Schmitt and Berlin.

How should we understand the relationship between Orbán's conceptualization of illiberal democracy within Hungary and his battle for a Europe of nations and his Gramscian attack on Western liberal values? I believe that we must take seriously Orbán's contention that in recent years we have witnessed not only the rise of illiberal democracy but also an illiberal political thought: 'there has been the emergence of an illiberal state and a true model of state and political theory: a distinctive Christian democratic state' (Orbán 2019a; cf. Békés 2023: 23, 81).

The development of Orbán's illiberal ideology from 2014 to 2023 is defined by two crucial shifts of emphasis. First, while in 2014 Orbán would portray such authoritarian states as 'Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey' as the role models for an illiberal Hungary (Orbán 2014), by the late 2010s, his emphasis had shifted. Having implemented a constitutional revolution within Hungary, it was now the illiberal Hungary itself that would provide an 'antidote' to the liberal 'virus' in the West. In short, Hungary moved from the liberal periphery of Europe towards forming the illiberal core of a Europe of nations.

Second, since Orbán has solidified his position of power within Hungary, he has been able to proselytize his ideas on an international scale. His striving to reform the EU into a Europe of nations and his attacks against 'woke ideology', 'population replacement', 'cultural Marxism' and LGBTQ+ minorities constitute examples of the way Orbán has moved towards pushing a more ambitious reform within the EU. As shown above, the issue of migration became a crucial nodal point in

Orbán's discourse with the migration crisis of 2015 (Glied and Pap 2016; Krastev and Holmes 2020: 34–48; Lendvai 2017: 199–205) just as his attack against sexual minorities would become a crucial issue by 2020 (Gera 2023). While these turns in policy might indeed include opportunism, they can also be viewed as further elaborations and applications of Orbán's counter-hegemonic illiberal project, as concrete ideological elements that form a part of the 'emergence' of illiberalism as a 'political theory'.

These shifts in Orbán's ideological agenda did not appear out of nowhere. As shown above, Orbán himself utilized Gramsci's theories earlier, in his master's thesis. Further, the idea of a Gramscian cultural revolution in the conservative sense – poised against immigrants and non-traditional family values – has been nothing less than the central theme of the European new right since the 1980s (Bohle et al. 2024; Pfahl-Traughber 1998). In this sense, the specific version of Hungarian illiberalism should in fact be seen in a much closer relationship with the ideological sphere of the contemporary far right than Laruelle (2022: 315–7) presumes in her otherwise excellent study (cf. Benoist 2019: 251–253; Canihac 2022; Enyedi 2024; Kahn 2017).

This conclusion is supported by the fact that the founder of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, Alain de Benoist (2019: 251–253), has recently celebrated Orbán's illiberal Hungary as overcoming the 'exhausted' Western liberal democracies, while creating a true 'democracy at once more sovereigntist and more respective of the popular will'. This is neither the time nor place to reflect if the principles of rule of law and individual rights necessarily constitute essential parts of democracies (cf. Moffit 2020: 72, 80, 111–114), or whether Orbán's illiberalism indeed constitutes an 'attack on democracy's very foundations' (Müller 2016). However, as a rhetorical strategy, Orbán's illiberal ideology is defined by a strategic exaggeration of the tensions between liberalism and democracy (cf. Bobbio 2006) – an exaggeration that serves the political purpose of capturing the concept of democracy for his own ideological and authoritarian ends.

Acknowledgements. The author would like to thank Gianfranco Baldini, Hugo Canihac, Tapio Raunio and Martin Cloonan for their comments on previous versions of the article. Previous versions were also presented at the ECPR 2023 conference and in various research seminars at the Tampere and Turku Universities, and I would also like to thank the participants for their comments.

Financial support. This article was funded by the Institute for Advanced Study (Tampere University, Finland) and by the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (University of Turku, Finland).

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Cite this article: Suuronen V (2025). Antiliberalism and Counter-Enlightenment for the 21st Century: Viktor Orbán's Illiberal Political Ideology. *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics* 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2025.5>