

# Scary Stories

or the sum of all fears  
in political discourse  
in Poland and in Hungary

Study Report





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Study Report

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## Table of Contents

# 1 Preface 9

# 2 Methodology 13

2.1 Study Objectives 13

2.2 Research Methods and Techniques 16

2.3 Organisation and Schedule of the Study 18

# 3 Sum of All Fears: Study Results Analysis 19

3.1 Withdrawal from the European Union:

Fear of Poxexit or Hunexit 19

3.2 State Authoritarianism: Limitation of Civil Liberties 22

3.3 Politicisation of the Judiciary 25

3.4 Total Opposition 28

3.5 Government Actions – “Fearmongering about PIS/Fidesz” 31

3.6 Fear of Brussels – EU Sanctions 34

3.7 Threat Posed by Russia 37

3.8 Growing Intolerance of LGBT People (Homophobia)  
vs Fear of “Rainbow Revolution” 40

3.9 Return of Communist Elites to Power 44

- 3.10 Diffusion of “Civilisation of Death” 47
- 3.11 Nationalism vs. “Multi-Culti” (Refugees) 50
- 3.12 Social Divisions and Conflicts 58
- 3.13 Imminent Economic Crisis  
vs. Fear of Withdrawal of Social Benefits 61
- 3.14 “Deform” of Basic Education and Higher Education 66
- 3.15 Healthcare Disaster 69
- 3.16 Climate Change 74

## 4 Summary 78

Endnotes 84

About the Authors and Publishers 90



# 1 | Preface

*Those in the women's protest were afraid that after the ruling of the PiS-appointed Constitutional Tribunal the Church, with all its paranoia, phobias and dogmas, would stick its nose into their lives; that the state would turn into a Catholic version of Iran with a Catholic version of religious law. After all, why not: the policy of the ruling party is based on irrational paranoia. It is based on fear. Fear of the German who rewrites the history of World War II; of the Jew who will come back and once again "the streets will be ours but the buildings will be yours"; of Brussels which will leave Poland leftist and deprived of its national identity; of Tusk; of the leftist; of euthanasia for old people; of compulsory abortion of foetuses; of turning everyone into gay people.*

9

ZIEMOWIT SZCZEREK, „Boję się, jak wszyscy. Ale nie mogę sprawić, by ten strach nie pozwolił mi samodzielnie myśleć” (I am afraid like everybody else but I can't let that fear stop me thinking), *Gazeta Wyborcza* of November 14, 2020

Fear is present in public discourse around the world<sup>1</sup>, it affects our mental state, it is the strongest emotion used by politicians to influence society, manipulate it or change social attitudes.

Fear is believed to be most commonly used by populists<sup>2</sup>, who are more successful at reaching their often less-educated

voters and motivating them to vote thanks to the use of simple but expressive slogans<sup>3</sup>.

Inspiring fear is politically effective, which is attested by the successes of the populist right-wing parties in Poland and Hungary.

The latter is ruled by Fidesz since 2010 and the former by Law and Justice, or PiS (United Right) since 2015.

10 “Fears” are also helpful during the execution of power and are spread by government-controlled public media<sup>4</sup>. They are used to find scapegoats for failures and “cover-up” events that are inconvenient for the government. Fear is used in long and short-term political strategies.

What else do we know about fear?

Fear is clickable. It is instilled not only by politicians but also by the media for which “good news is bad news”.

Using fear is easy, especially in a society with a low level of education. Large-scale disinformation and fake news are conducive to fear<sup>5</sup>.

Making a judgement based on emotions, especially on a fear of something surreal, is relatively easy because it doesn't require any action but only a good rendition of scary stories. Fear can be overdosed, however, leading society to a state of panic and feeling of imminent danger<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, using fear is in itself very dangerous but both in Poland and Hungary it is a dominant political tool.

Both of these countries have experienced a combination of rightist and leftist fears.

Rightist in the social and ideological domain and leftist in the economic one<sup>7</sup>.

We are afraid of the unknown. Fear is exhausting and poisons our thinking. If we use fear, in a couple of years we will not be

able to control the society, which can lead to major conflicts. Populists intentionally use fear to magnify them because they benefit from polarization. We saw this clearly with Donald Trump who would use every single opportunity to escalate catastrophic violent conflict, posing a serious threat to the future of his people, and beyond<sup>8</sup>.

We have been threatened not only by the ruling party, but – a fact 11  
hard to admit – also by the opposition. The success of populists is too expressive and fateful, and their strategy – at first glance – very easy to copy, so it happens that the democratic opposition, including the liberal one, also reaches for fear hoping for electoral victories<sup>9</sup>. Political commentators note<sup>10</sup> that even though the dangers – or threats: threats to democracy, threats to open society, threats to European identity – posed by PiS and Fidesz are real<sup>11</sup>, fearmongering about them can be counter-productive. Because fear stops you from thinking. Playing fears up and growing radicalism, which ensues from it, have made opposition leaders lose their powers of persuasion. As long as the opposition fails to make a more hopeful narrative for the future, it will have difficulty in seizing power. Because both PiS and Fidesz are better at arousing negative emotions, a game in which it is difficult to outdo them. Or, perhaps, the opposition does not know how to scare the society because it fails to find the right “fears”.

Since both sides are involved in scaring us, we lock ourselves in our bubbles, which reinforce phobias and lead to radicalisation and polarisation, making fear hard to control.

Why Poland? Why Hungary?

These are the countries where the ruling parties employ similar political strategies, both in internal (rule of law, control of the

media, social transfers) and external policies (negative relations with the EU).

These are the countries where the ruling parties have successfully kept power, which appears to be unchallengeable.

In these two countries, the opposition is described as weak, divided and is faced with requirements that it often cannot meet.

12 In our study, we wanted to develop a catalogue of the “sum of all fears” and show which stories are the scariest. We did not focus solely on fears instilled by the ruling parties but also on those used by the opposition (understood mainly as centrist liberal and pro-democratic parties – in the case of Poland: Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition), and in case of Hungary: LMP – Hungary’s Green Party; Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party; Momentum Movement; Hungarian Socialist Party, Democratic Coalition)

We used mainly qualitative group interviews and quantitative Internet interviews. Additionally, we tried to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the Polish and Hungarian fears.

It turned out, however, that there were many more similarities than differences...

What did we not do? We did not attempt at explaining how to deal with the fears. Maybe because the answer is rather trivial: through education and rationalism. Maybe because we felt helpless: how do you look for rationality in a world whose image is pictured irrationally by television, social media and – as some respondents note – the Catholic Church?

What are the tools to tackle fear, dismantle it, tame it? We will have to look for an answer to this question again together. But, at least, we know what we fear.

## 2 | Methodology

In order to ensure the greatest possible reliability of the research process and accuracy of conclusions and recommendations, the research used a methodological approach based on the so-called triangulation, which is one of the foundations of social studies<sup>12</sup>. Triangulation or multiplication will concern three areas:

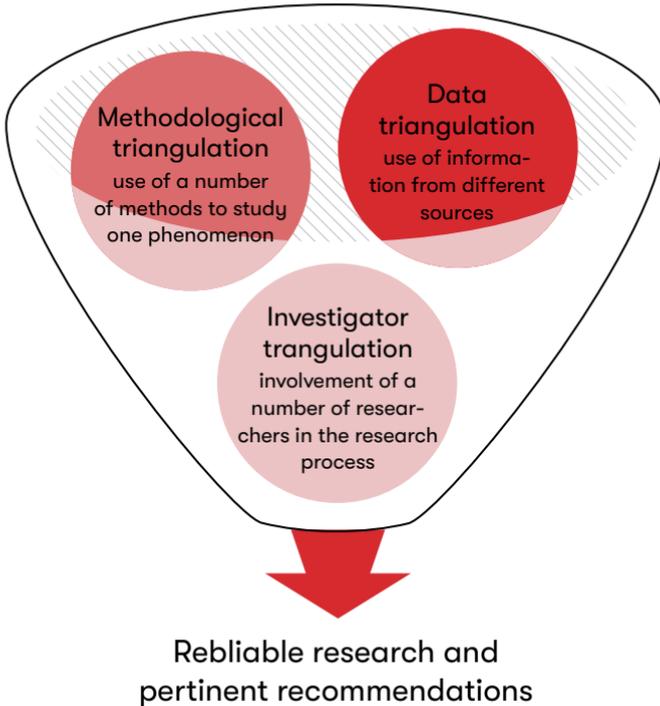
- Research methods and techniques (methodological triangulation), i.e. control of the consistency of conclusions formulated by using various data collection methods;
- Sources of information (data triangulation), i.e. use of multiple information sources while using the same method of collecting information;
- Research perspectives of researchers (analytical triangulation), i.e. analysis of research results by a team of several people.

### 2.1 | Study Objectives

The main objective of the study was to analyse fear-based discourse in Poland and Hungary among followers of government and liberal opposition.

Specific objectives included:

- 1 Identification and description of key “fears” in pro-governmental and liberal discourse.
- 2 Demonstration of the response of followers of government



Source: Own work, based on Konecki (2000).

and opposition to those “fears”: how “fears” are justified, explained and rationalised, how they are tackled.

- 3 Study of the scale of “fear”, i.e. isolation of areas which have the biggest impact on the followers of government and opposition.

Listed fears have been presented in the form of special “fear cards”, which are meant to ensure greater transparency and pragmatics of the analysis.

## *Fear Card*

Name of the fear

---

What is feared?

---

*definition of the fear based on desk research*

How do people perceive it?

---

*mostly based on interviews and workshops*

Who does the fear influence?

---

*results of an online questionnaire*

Commentary

---

*further interpretation based on recommendation workshop*

*Scary Stories Report*

## 2.2 | Research Methods and Techniques

16

Technique	Justification	Sample Choice and Size
Analysis of secondary data (desk research)	<p>Analysis of secondary data was the first stage of the study, an introduction to the actual research. It allowed us to explore not only the context of the study but also all documents relevant to it. Being an „office-based method“, it involved relatively low costs and good speed of execution.</p>	<p>The analysis covered feature articles from the Polish and Hungarian media, representing either the opposition or pro-governmental trend.</p> <p>The analysis included over 60 publications which are listed in the report bibliography.</p>
FGI (focus group interviews)	<p>Discussions followed a pre-developed scenario, which described the goal of each stage of the study (what information was to be obtained at each stage), and included topics to be touched upon during free discussions. The goal of discussions with influencers was to pinpoint the catalogue of “fears” defined during the desk research analysis, and obtain in-depth knowledge on the way given threats influence social consciousness.</p> <p>The goal of focus interviews with representatives of the opposition and pro-governmental electorate was to confront the “list of fears” with their personal perception of threats, and recreate the narration which is used to justify or negate them.</p> <p>The discussions were recorded as audio and/or video material.</p>	<p>The study included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 focus interviews with influencers/opinion leaders, 1 of each in Poland and in Hungary (zoom platform).</li><li>• 4 focus interviews with government and opposition supporters, 2 of each in Poland and in Hungary (direct meetings).</li></ul> <p>A detailed description of groups and interview scenarios are included in separate appendices.</p>

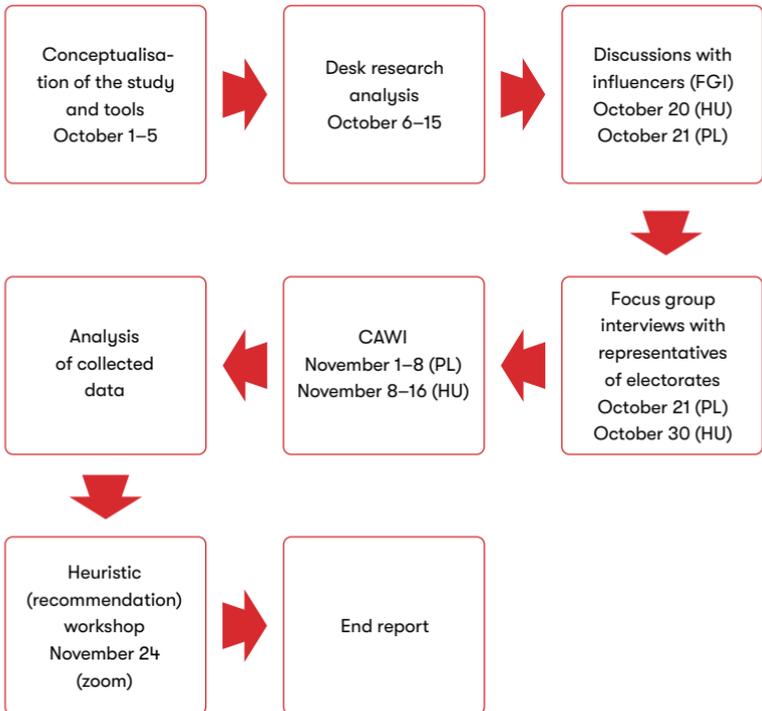
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CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interview	<p>In the CAWI-based study, respondents were interviewed via the Internet and the interview followed a special computer script. The script allowed for automation of the questionnaire. The goal of CAWI was to recreate the scale of fear of specific issues which had been discussed at earlier stages of the study.</p>	<p>The CAWI study featured 949 respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 497 in Poland</li> <li>• and 452 in Hungary</li> </ul> <p>The analysis included 724 respondents representing different political parties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Poland 339 respondents (Law and Justice or PIS: 213; Civic Coalition or KO 126)</li> <li>• In Hungary 385 respondents (Fidesz: 41; Liberal opposition: 344)</li> </ul> <p>The CAWI questionnaire scenario is included in an appendix to the report.</p>
Recommendation Workshop	<p>This workshop served as a recap of all the qualitative and quantitative research results. During the workshop, a group of experts catalogued the collected material and drew up guidelines and recommendations.</p>	<p>The workshop featured Polish representatives, Hungarian partners and the project coordinator.</p>

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## 2.3 | Organisation and Schedule of the Study

18



# 3 Sum of All Fears: Study Results Analysis

## 3.1 Withdrawal from the European Union: Fear of Posexit or Hunexit

19

### Name of fear

Withdrawal from the European Union: Fear of Posexit or Hunexit

### Who instils fear?

Opposition

### What is feared?

According to the opposition, the current governments and their foreign policy are embarrassments to Poland and Hungary. They present both countries as parochial and intolerant, involved in tilting at windmills (e.g. LGBT), instead of focusing on actual dangers (e.g. climate crisis). One of the possible implications of the government's policy is the threat of Posexit/Hunexit, i.e. withdrawal of a country which violates the rule of law from the European structures. The fear is often manifested in the form of "mental exit from the EU", meaning that a country formally stays within the European structures but follows a policy and cherishes values that are contradictory to those of the Union.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

Government supporters treat the threat of exit from the EU as a bogey that is practically impossible:

20

“Polexit is just to scare people, unrealistic” (FGI no. 1, PIS electorate)

“...EU has a strong interest to keep Hungary in the Union...EU gets more from Hungary than the other way around...” (FGI no. 3, man, Fidesz-KDNP)<sup>13</sup>

### Opposition supporters:

Supporters of the opposition are divided in their opinion on the subject, however, the fear is perceived as a very remote possibility:

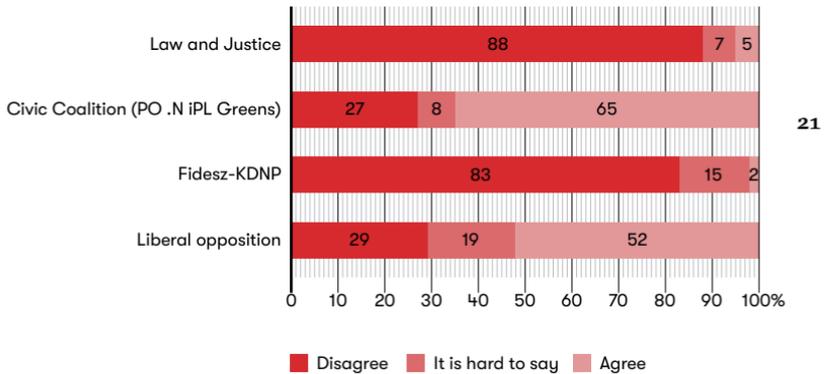
“I am afraid of Polexit” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

“I don’t think we will leave the EU and I’m not afraid of it.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

“Exit is not that simple” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Exit from the European Union



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=195, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=125, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=336

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

Exit from the EU or – put more broadly – attitude towards the EU is an important element differentiating government and opposition supporters, and building the identity of both groups (treated as a more important building block in the latter group). Exit from the EU is perceived as a concern of elites and politicians rather than the so-called ordinary people.

## 3.2 | State Authoritarianism: Limitation of Civil Liberties

### Name of fear

State Authoritarianism: Limitation of Civil Liberties

### Who instils fear?

22

### Opposition

### What is feared?

The opposition warns against a limitation of civil liberties, which is manifested in a multitude of ways, e.g. limitation of public gatherings, less scope for freedom of speech (nationalisation of the media), progressive surveillance of citizens, single-handed rule of Jarosław Kaczyński and Viktor Orbán, an exertion of influence on judges, the politicisation of Constitutional Tribunal, a publication of anti-Semitic books, violation of the Constitution, fight against LGBT<sup>14</sup>. All of these elements lead to authoritarianism and spread of hate speech targeting socially excluded groups, and to total totalitarianism in which Territorial Defence Forces will act as militias to fight with political opponents. “End of democracy” and “hybrid democracy” are also mentioned.

Interestingly, the topic of “limitation of civil liberties” (freedom of speech) is also discussed by representatives of right-wing media who define it as “political correctness”. According to its opponents, it only leads to the creation of artificial newspeak which prevents you from calling things “as they are” and, as a result, leads to constraints on freedom of speech.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

On the pro-governmental side, looking for a reflection that authoritarianism is a threat would be a futile endeavour. They treat authority in a predominantly transactional manner (“all people in power are evil thieves but at least this government shares with others”). Attitude towards public media, a propaganda mouth-piece, is defined in a similar manner. There are also opinions that a strong leader (Viktor Orbán) can fix the failures of democracy:

23

“Both TV channels (public TVP and private TVN) are two of a kind” (FGI no. 1, PiS electorate)

“...There is a national consultancy... it shows that the government is interested in our opinions – what is it, if not democracy...” (FGI no. 3, Fidesz-KDNP electorate)

### Opposition supporters:

Supporters of the opposition are dominated by fear and a sense of helplessness in the face of what in liberal discourse is known as “creeping dictatorship”:

“It is no exaggeration to claim that it is the end of democracy” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

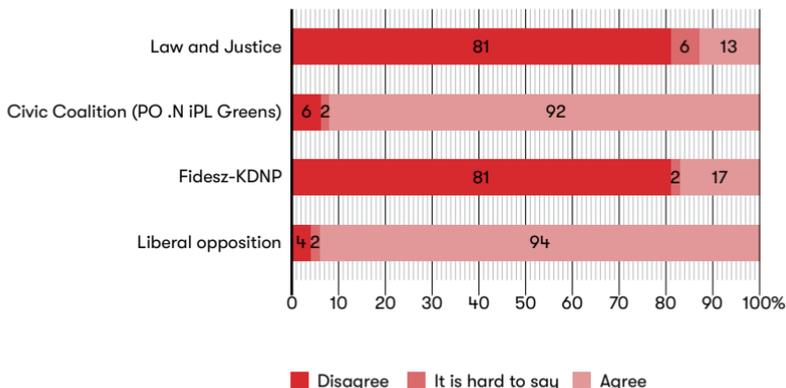
“Maybe the government won't change the political system because all they need to do is toss voters few coins before elections. A part of the society has become desensitised to all these PiS scandals because there were so many of them. And what changed? Nothing changed.” (FGI no.2, man, KO electorate)

“What I fear more is dictatorial methods” (FGI no. 4, man, Liberal opposition)

### Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: State authoritarianism – restriction of civil liberties

24



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=195, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=338

### Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The political conflict is clearly becoming more acrimonious and is resorting to radical slogans.

As opposing camps wage their war and the media blow up its radicalism, political opponents increasingly call one another fascists, which, however, from a rational point of view, must be treated as playing the Nazi card rather than making a sober assessment of the situation at hand.

### 3.3 | Politicisation of the Judiciary

#### Name of fear

Politicisation of the Judiciary

#### Who instils fear?

Opposition... and the government

25

#### What is feared?

According to the opposition, the ruling parties, both in Poland and in Hungary, have violated the sovereignty of the judiciary, by concentrating enormous power in the prosecutor's office (power over Ministry of Justice and Prosecutor General's office vested in one man)<sup>15</sup>, which is a threat to the independence of prosecutors from political decisions. In Poland political control over Constitutional Tribunal has been taken, members of the new National Council of the Judiciary are elected by politicians or by the people elected by politicians. The Minister of Justice arbitrarily replaced nearly 160 presidents and vice-presidents of common courts<sup>16</sup>. Following the changes introduced by PiS and Fidesz, the procedure under Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) was instigated to "determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach"<sup>17</sup> of the rule of law. Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that Poland breached Article 19(1)(2) TEU, which obliges all Member States to establish remedies sufficient to ensure effective judicial protection in the fields covered by EU law. Additionally, attempts have been made to slander and harass independent judges and prosecutors (activities by "Kasta" group)<sup>18</sup>.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

26 Government supporters treat the changes to the judiciary as a positive phenomenon, which allows to reform the institution, which is perceived as dysfunctional and distant from the needs and interests of ordinary people. They treat “old” judges as representatives of a different political system:

“A judge should be apolitical; they should be involved in courts, not in politics.

If I could go into these courts with disgraced judges I would plant a bomb there and let it all go up in smoke.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“The judiciary shit should be torn up, a judiciary reform is needed.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)”

“Eradication of the rule of law would be a real fear if left-wing parties and liberals took over the power.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS)

### Opposition supporters:

In the opinion of supporters of the opposition, the politicisation of the judiciary is seen from a different perspective and sometimes takes the form of a direct threat:

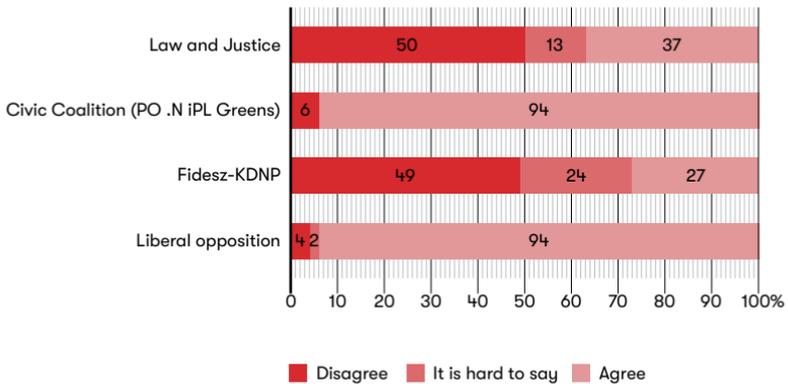
“What if you are involved in a car crash with a PiS member, and your judge and prosecutor are also PiS members? Whose side do you think they will be on?” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“I am afraid we can easily lose what we have already achieved – rights, democracy, human values.” (FGI 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

### Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Politicisation of justice

27



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=197, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=125, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=337

### Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The fear fits the narration of progressive authoritarianism, as it is its component. It is an important element of political debate in Poland. Group interviews and reviews of media content proved that in Hungary the discussion on the judiciary is not particularly heated, it is, therefore, surprising that it scores very high among fears of the Hungarian opposition followers. It may result from a more general dissatisfaction with the work of Hungarian

courts. Court and judiciary-related issues were one of the first to provoke mass protests. In time, involvement in them began to fade away due to the hermetic and difficult nature of the field.

### 3.4 | Total Opposition

#### 28 Name of fear

Total Opposition

Who instils fear?

Government

What is feared?

According to the government, the opposition is not constructive but aimed solely at regaining power and gaining greater financial impact<sup>19</sup>. This can have many negative implications for Poland and Hungary as countries (e.g. its submissive attitude towards the EU) and for their citizens and inhabitants of the so-called “provinces”, i.e. small-town residents who – according to the government – are largely despised by the total opposition and treated as a means to get more votes. The return of the total opposition to power could entail a deterioration of the economic situation, withdrawal of social benefits, raising the retirement age. Such prospects are reinforced by the state-owned media<sup>20</sup>, putting the blame for selected failures on political opponents. If opposition politicians regain the power it could only lead to chaos. Its return to power is also perceived as an imminent threat to the country’s stability and a source of many social conflicts.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

In focus interviews, government supporters expressed pity rather than fear of the opposition.

They take note of the helplessness of opposition leaders who find it impossible to outbid the government's proposals:

29

“They’re never happy with anything, we’re not really afraid of this, they have no ideas. They would like to re-gain power just for the sake of it. Let the best one win in the elections.” (FGI no. 1, man, PIS electorate)

“Actually, I can hardly wait for the elections, maybe they will give us more.” (laughs) (FGI no.1, man, PIS electorate)

In Hungary, supporters of the government have a generally hostile attitude towards the opposition.

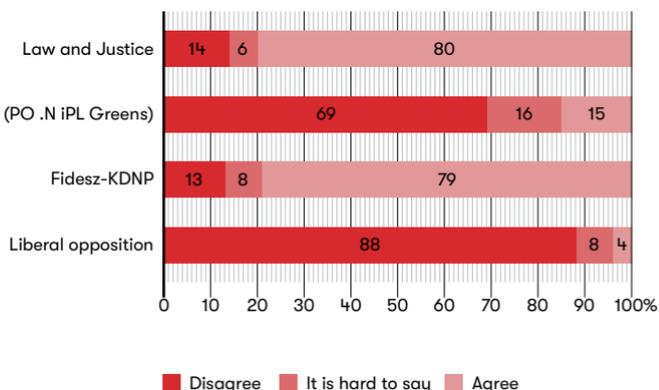
However, former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány is a source of more serious concerns:

“...I am afraid Gyurcsány cannibalizes all the opposition parties and gets stronger...” (FGI no. 3, woman, 10 Fi-desz-KDNP)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Actions of the opposition

30



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=206, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=119, Fidesz-KDNP, N=40, Liberal opposition, N=328

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The image of the opposition created by the government with the help of its media does not incite a strong sense of fear, but rather is a source of irritation and an object of ridicule. Lack of statements about fear of the opposition and a small number of such statements in interviews with opposition supporters can be interpreted as a lack of critical thinking about opposition actions and a result of living in a so-called filter bubble.

### 3.5 | Government Actions – “Fearmongering about PiS/Fidesz”

#### Name of fear

Government Actions – “Fearmongering about PiS/Fidesz”

#### Who instils fear?

31

#### Opposition

#### What is feared?

“Fearmongering about PiS/Fidesz” is a general collection of dangers that the country and its citizens can face during the party’s rule. It is, therefore, fear of the country’s withdrawal from the European Union, the “end of democracy”, introduction of an authoritarian system, restriction of civil liberties and escalation of negative emotions and behaviours towards minorities. “Fearmongering about PiS”, which some of the opposition is said to be involved in, is often criticised as an example of pure voter-swinging tactic<sup>21</sup>.

#### How is it perceived by people?

##### Government supporters:

Even though government supporters can critically assess the actions of their party, they are convinced that its predecessors (current opposition) behaved a lot worse and with complete disregard for the needs of ordinary people:

“PiS is what it is, they’re all one of a kind, but at least PiS shares a bit with others.” (FGI no.1, man, PiS electorate)

Government supporters in Hungary do not express similar opinions, they are confident that the current government is rectifying mistakes of democracy, which the opposition would exacerbate:

“Strong leader as Viktor Orbán can correct the failings of democracy.” (FGI no. 3, man, Fidesz-KDNP)

32 **Opposition supporters:**

On the other hand, supporters of the opposition are dominated by a sense of distrust, aggression and dehumanisation of the cabinet, which is not so much a proof of fear but of strong aversion (or even hatred) to political opponents:

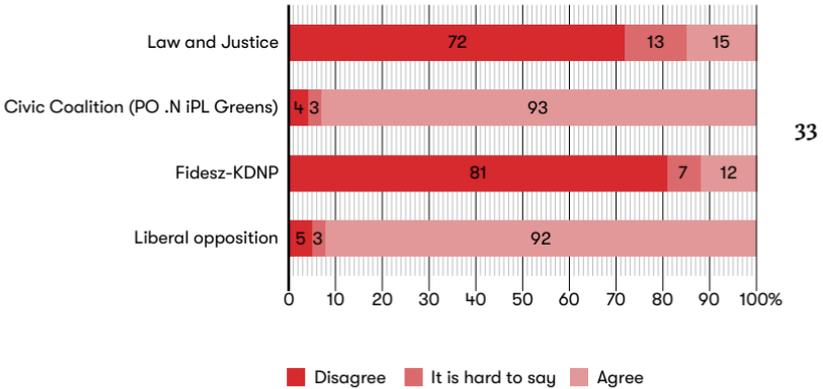
“Pis puts one against the other, because of Pis people don’t know what to believe in.

Kaczyński talks rubbish, which can only have negative consequences. You can’t talk to these fools and keep convincing them, it doesn’t make sense, you have to do your own thing.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“Fear that the current government will use dictatorial methods, which reminds me of old communist times” (FGI no. 4, man, Liberal opposition)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Government actions



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=195, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=124, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=339

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

Commentators point that fearmongering about Pis/Fidesz could be effective on several conditions.

Firstly, people would have to be afraid of the object of fear-mongering, e.g. the end of liberal democracy. In the Polish context, it could be more effective to fearmonger about Polesxit, which Poles could really be afraid of even though, as noted earlier, this fear has little to do with reality. Secondly, for fearmongering to be effective it would have to be reflected in reality, e.g. if an economic crisis followed the introduction of the Family 500+ programme (see: endnote 36). However, nothing like it has hap-

pened so far. Thirdly, fearmongers would have to be trustworthy and that, too, is an extremely difficult issue.

### 3.6 | Fear of Brussels – EU Sanctions

#### Name of fear

34 Fear of Brussels – EU Sanctions

#### Who instils fear?

Governmental side and opposition

#### What is feared?

Supporters of the right-wing express a fear (which is fuelled by the opposition) that if countries, such as Poland and Hungary, do not abide by the rule of law they will be cut off from EU funding.

It is hard to estimate how much Poland and Hungary could lose if EU funding was dependent on the rule of law<sup>22</sup>. In Poland, the fear is epitomised by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, European leaders who are perceived by the government as inimical to Poland. In the case of Hungary, George Soros is the one and only villain, the arch nemesis of Fidesz, who overhades all active politicians<sup>23</sup>.

Another component of the fear is the sense that the EU is “meddling” in internal affairs of a given country and attempts to impose its values, its agenda and its world-view, which is a threat to traditional values. The current governments in Warsaw and Budapest claim that they represent the best, national, or in the best case, regional path of development that Brussels wants to inhibit.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

This fear is accompanied by a sense of injustice that we are going to be punished for something which others can get away with. In Hungary, the fear is definitely less common.

“People are afraid that the EU will exacerbate things because when there is a dust-up in Poland, it is bad, but when the same happens in France, it’s OK. The issue of the judiciary and so on. The judiciary shit should be torn up, a judiciary reform is needed.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

35

“Hungary was strong without EU, and it still would be strong without the EU.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

### Opposition supporters:

In the eyes of the supporters of the opposition, the risk of sanctions is seen as the sword of Damocles that hangs over Poland and is sure to lead to political marginalisation:

“Maybe we won’t exit the Union, but because of sanctions we can surely be pushed to the margins.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

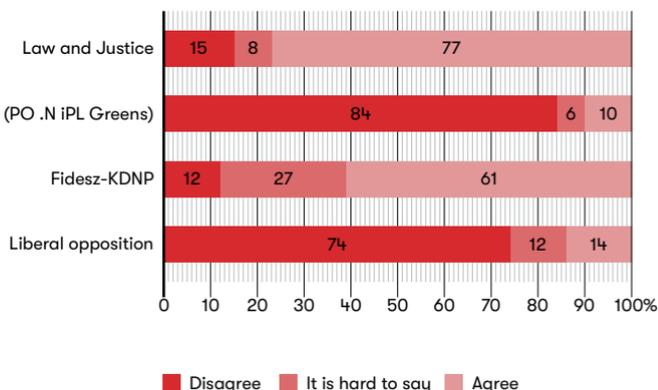
Some Hungarians express a strong belief that perceiving the EU as a threat and, therefore, seeking to leave it is foolish:

“Only stupid people are afraid of EU.” (FGI no. 4, man, Fidesz-KDNP)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: European Union policy towards our country

36



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=205, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=119, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=329

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

This fear is perceived as moderately realistic, but it captures imagination. This is evidenced by the government's consistently strong denials, reassuring that withdrawal of EU funding will not happen, and if such attempts are made the government will challenge them.

## 3.7 | Threat Posed by Russia

### Name of fear

Threat Posed by Russia

### Who instils fear?

Governmental side and opposition

37

### What is feared?

The fear is not so much about the direct military intervention of the great Eastern neighbour – country that brutally dominated over the region for half a century and still hopes to restore its sphere of influence in Central Europe – but about people's belief that Russia strives to destabilise the situation in the region, create chaos with the help of its spies and cut off energy (gas) supplies. The image of a dangerous Russia in the minds of Poles and Hungarians is strong and accusations of “acting in Putin's interest”<sup>24</sup> are brought on both sides of the political dispute<sup>25</sup>.

### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

Despite the fact the the “rotten West” is not very popular, Russia is a source of much greater concern:

“A threat from the East is more probable; Russia has always made enemies, they even have their national holiday on the day when Poles were exiled from Moscow”  
(FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“Putin won’t attack us because it wouldn’t be profitable, but he could cut off gas supplies” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“Something silly could happen because Putin seeks plaudits” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

38

“Maybe we do have some EU and NATO guarantees, but in 1939 we had alliances too and we all know how it all turned out.” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

“I’m more afraid of the East as well.” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

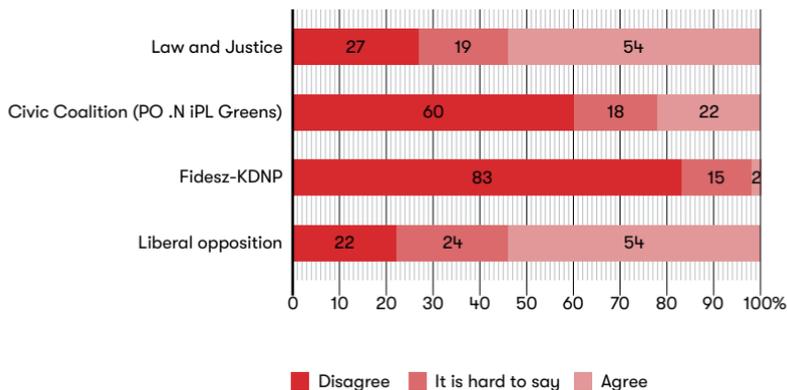
### Opposition supporters:

Supporters of the opposition have a more rational approach to these fears, citing economic arguments:

“I don’t think we’re in danger of war because it’s too expensive” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Aggression from Russia



39

\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=198, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=121, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=335

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The threat posed by Russia unites both sides.

What divides them is where they see the source of responsibility for causing this danger knowingly or not. Concern over Russia's aggression is visible among the supporters of the Polish government and in the Hungarian opposition and, to a certain degree, among the supporters of the Polish opposition. It is not present, however, among the supporters of the Hungarian government, probably because of Viktor Orbán's good relations with Vladimir Putin. Hungary has cooperated with Russia, following the policy of "Eastern Opening" for 10 years now. They

do not accuse one another of being Putin's agents but rather Soros' or Brussels' agents. The image of Vladimir Putin in the political discourse in Hungary is different than in Poland: Putin is a man with an impact on politics, a strong, tough player who can influence the fate of the world. It is worth noting that before 2010 Fidesz was very anti-Russian (it is a characteristic of its voters that they follow the party even if it significantly changes its views). Perhaps Hungarians' attitude towards Russia (more positive than in Poland) indirectly stems from the fact that the two countries do not border each other.

### 3.8 | Growing Intolerance of LGBT People (Homophobia) vs Fear of „Rainbow Revolution”

#### Name of fear

Growing Intolerance of LGBTQ+ People (Homophobia) vs Fear of „Rainbow Revolution”

#### Who instils fear?

Opposition and governmental side

#### What is feared?

Poland and Hungary are perceived in Europe as intolerant of the LGBTQ + community.

It gives rise to concerns over growing discrimination and a spiral of violence towards sexual minorities fuelled by the public media. Parallels are drawn between the homophobic smear campaign<sup>26</sup> and the situation in Russia, where the Kremlin implements

provisions of the so called “Gay Propaganda” Act<sup>27</sup>, which went into force in 2013 (“gay people must be prosecuted and treated”).

LGBTQ+ people are dehumanized in pro-governmental discourse and reduced to “LGBT ideology” or “gender ideology”. According to the right-wing, it is a dangerous utopia which aims at creating social chaos by denying objective reality. Under the guise of protection from the exclusion of minority groups, the “rainbow revolution” stigmatises people who disagree with its beliefs as intolerant and homophobic. Moreover, it undermines marriage as a union between a woman and a man, and leads to gender-related biological and identity problems. It is also strongly associated with premature sexualisation of children who – in the name of promoting tolerance – are introduced to sex education too early in their development (e.g. “rainbow Fridays” at schools). Being an LGBTQ+ person is often presented as the first step to being a paedophile.

41

### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

Sexual minorities do not arouse great fear but are perceived as a threat to the core of the right-wing identity, i.e. Catholicism:

“It’s always been present but minorities can’t have the same rights as majorities – let them have their clubs, etc., but we can’t let them spite the faithful or profane churches.

I’m not afraid of it, but I think it’s stupid.” (FGI no.1, man, Pis electorate)

There is considerable acceptance for gay marriage, however, the adoption of children is seen as an impassable limit:

“Gay marriages are OK but without adoptions!” (FGI no. 1, everyone, PiS electorate)

42 Additionally, ostensible tolerance is observed towards minorities who can be present in public space but are expected not to “flaunt”. According to government supporters, there are certain limits that must not be passed:

“It’s so strange when boys kiss; they shouldn’t make a show of it.” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

“Hungarians are tolerant, but exaggerations usually cross the red line.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP electorate)

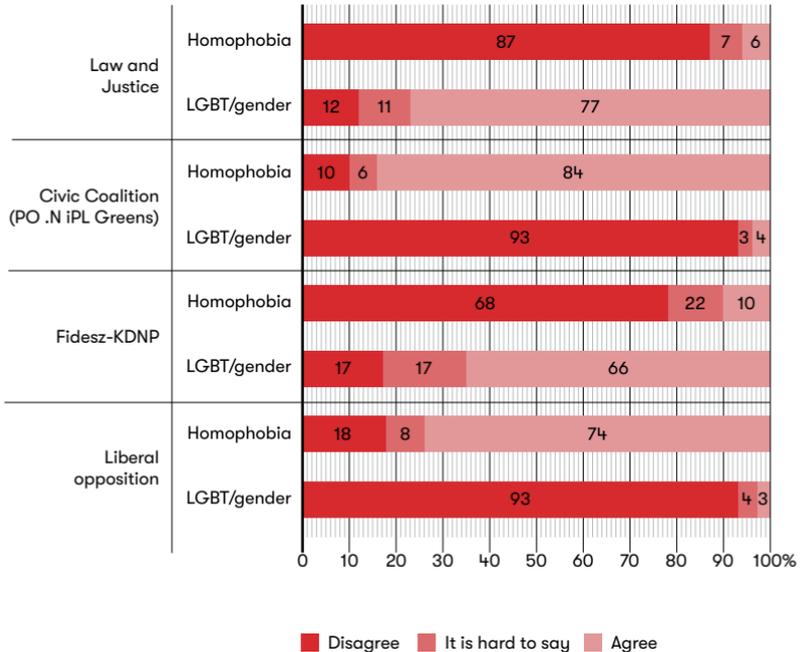
### Opposition supporters:

Supporters of the opposition take note of the growing aggression against LGBT people, which can lead to tragedies:

“This whole smear campaign against gay people is just disgusting. Of course, there is fear that they can get hurt.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Homophobia & LGBT/gender



43

\* Respondents – Homophobia: Law and Justice, N=196, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=124, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=338; LGBT/gender: Law and Justice, N=204, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=118, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=331

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The LGBT issue is one of the more controversial topics stirring emotions in public discourse.

Hence, the need to compare the fears related to sexual minorities. Liberal opposition fears that a negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ will contribute to the image of an intolerant country and give rise to violence (verbal, physical) against minorities. Government supporters fear that the traditional family (social) model would be brought into question and adoptions (which they do not agree to) would be allowed.

### 3.9 | Return of Communist Elites to Power

#### Name of fear

Return of Communist Elites to Power

#### Who instils fear?

Governmental side

#### What is feared?

According to the right-wing, neo-Marxism is a common denominator of many other dangers, such as:

LGBT, gender, ecological revolution, etc. Neo-Marxism is a threat to traditional culture and is represented by the left-wing and by a significant number of liberals. According to the right, neo-Marxism is a totalitarian ideology, a new version of communism, which aims to destroy the existing world order by persuading people to freely pursue their desires and reject the structures and values (especially Christian ones) present in social life and economy that constrain them.

It is said that Viktor Orbán's primary political motivation was his anti-communist DNA<sup>28</sup>. He wrote his Master's thesis on the Polish Solidarity movement and is known from his 1989 speech demanding withdrawal of Soviet troops. His obsession with ending all trace of Hungary's communist past helps explain many of his controversial policies<sup>29</sup>. He believes that transformation in the early 1990s was incomplete and it is now up to him to make the tough decisions. In the case of Polish communism, even though over 30 years have passed since the fall of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), the right still perceives the old elites, the beneficiaries of the Round Table, as a serious threat. According to supporters of the government side, Poland's statehood is still compromised by the "thick line policy"<sup>30</sup>, the fact that PRL's judges, officers and officials were not given vetting after 1989<sup>31</sup>. For years, it resulted in the privatisation and sale of "crown jewels", i.e. national property, such as factories and other industrial plants.

45

### How is it perceived by people?

#### Opposition supporters:

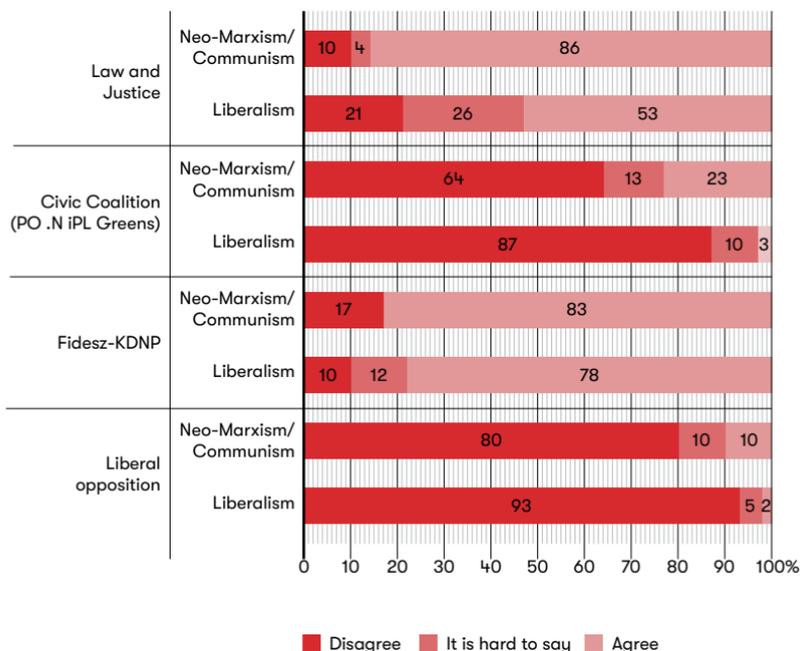
Communism is perceived as a non-existent threat; if communism is brought up, opposition supporters are more afraid that the current government will make use of methods characteristic of dictatorship such as communism:

"What I fear more is dictatorial methods, but they are typical in any authoritarian system... we met them in communism." (FGI no. 4, man, Fidesz-KDNP)

## Who does the fear influence?

### Are you afraid of: Neo-Marxism/Communism

46



\* Respondents: Neo-Marxism/Communism – Law and Justice, N=204, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=119, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=330; Liberalism – Law and Justice, N=195, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=117, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=328

### Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

Accusations of being a “communist” are a double-edged sword.

The opposition often draws a parallel between the current and the pre-1989 governments to demonstrate the absurdity of

their operating mechanisms. However, they remain with their arguments inside their own bubble.

This element is not a common component of public discourse but an integral part of the political identity of right-wing voters. The adjective “anti-communist” is simply a part of their worldview, even though in their eyes the former political system does not constitute a danger.

47

There is no strong conflict between communists and anti-communists in the collective consciousness.

People do not talk about it, which is attested by the fact that the participants of focus group interviews did not mention it.

There are, however, mutual accusations of fascism. From the right-wing’s perspective, neo-Marxism in Poland is an ideological background of LGBT, gender and ecological revolution. In Hungary, thus understood “communism” became a synonym of “liberalism” commonly used as a detternt.

### 3.10 | Diffusion of „Civilisation of Death”

Name of fear

Diffusion of „Civilisation of Death”

Who instils fear?

Governmental side

What is feared?

According to the right, the legalisation and normalisation of abortion and euthanasia are dangers that have strong links with

neo-Marxism and the rejection of the Christian culture. What follows is the diffusion of the so-called “civilisation of death”<sup>32</sup> and devaluation of human life, which can eventually be taken not only at the request but also against the will of the closest family<sup>33</sup>.

How is it perceived by people?

48 **Opposition supporters:**

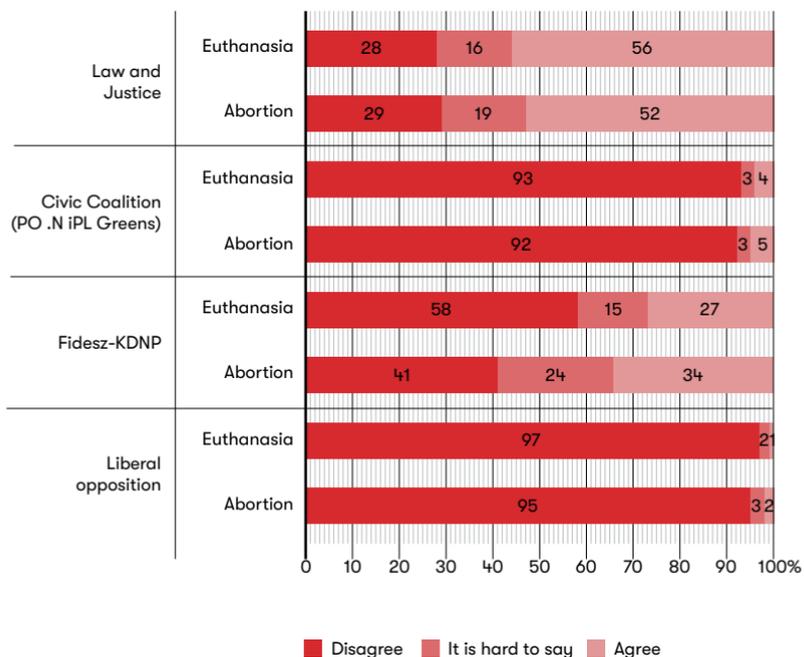
The plans to ban abortion and force women into heroism, which is how the situation is perceived by the opposition, have aroused vehement opposition and fear:

“The issue of women’s rights is driving me mad, this is where all the intellectual constraints of Pis are clearly visible, for example, the issue of prohibiting abortion in life-threatening situations. (...) their views are horrible.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“How can the Minister of Education’s wife even look at him after what he said?” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Abortion & Euthanasia



\* Respondents: Abortion – Law and Justice, N=200 Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=120, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41 Liberal opposition, N=331; Euthanasia – Law and Justice, N=202 Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=119 Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=329

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The fearmongering is on the governmental side, the opposition is frightened.

In Poland, the issue of abortion electrified public opinion after a ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, which effectively banned abortions due to serious foetal anomalies. In its aftermath, huge protests, mainly of women and young people erupted.

50 It shows that the fear of supporters of the government (and the abortion ban) triggered the opposition's reaction (proponents of status quo or liberalisation of the abortion law).

Abortion and euthanasia, however, are not mentioned, neither by the supporters of the government nor the opposition. The poll suggests that they are more often feared by supporters of the government, although the level of fear is average. It can be assumed that this is a fear created by the media and the government rather than an actual fear of voters.

Abortion and euthanasia are not currently an important topic in Hungary. Hungarian society is less religious than Polish society. In Hungary, abortion is legally regulated in a way that respects women's right to choose, and it is not controversial. Orbán's voters have much more liberal views on the topic than PiS voters.

### 3.11 | Nationalism vs. „Multi-Culti” (Refugees)

Name of fear

Nationalism vs. „Multi-Culti” (Refugees)

Who instils fear?

Governmental side and opposition

## What is feared?

Masses of culturally-alien migrants from the Middle East and Africa were one of the key hotbeds of fear in 2015–2017. Migrants were perceived Poles and Hungarian as an Islamic danger in disguise (Islamisation of society), people who do not really flee war but rather want to raise their economic status; they want to achieve this not through work, however, but through European social benefits. Refugees were perceived as people who do not want to work and will not respect European and national values<sup>34</sup>. Migrants coming to Europe are mingled with terrorists<sup>35</sup>.

51

While the fear of homophobia is strongly linked with LGBT, the issue of refugees and multiculturalism has strong ties with fear of nationalism. It is a fear over the growing importance of national and nationalist movements on the political scene, which can gain greater social support due to concerns about the loss of national identity caused by the influx of refugees and the spread of the policy of multiculturalism. Such movements spread openly racist, xenophobic, homophobic and fascist slogans. Compared to them, the ruling parties in Poland and Hungary may look moderate. However, there is a serious threat of their further radicalisation under the influence of extreme movements, and future government coalitions between right wing populists and alt right (e.g. PiS and the Confederation).

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

The fear of refugees is based on the experiences of neighbouring countries:

“They’d better not be here, my sister lives in Bielefeld and it is scary to go out there.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“They’re struggling in Sweden as well” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“I have daughters... I can see what is happening abroad... I am anxious about the dominance of Muslim culture here.” (FGI no. 3, man, Fidesz-KDNP)

52

There is a greater openness towards numerous Ukrainians in Poland, which, in turn, is influenced by Poles’ experiences from emigration to the United Kingdom:

“We’re not afraid of Ukrainians, they’re nice.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

“We’re kind of England for Ukrainians.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

What Poles are concerned about is the risk of being driven out of the labour market by cheaper workforce.

“Prices are being lowered by Ukrainians, so it should be monitored.” (FGI no. 1, women, PiS electorate)

In their statements, government supporters in Hungary do not pay much attention to the issue of refugees. They are rather concerned about the prospect of Hungarians leaving their country:

“I do not want my children to live abroad... I would hate commuting to London all the time.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

## Opposition supporters:

Opposition voters, too, have concerns about refugees:

“Of course, we’re afraid, everyone should live in their own country, we migrated looking for jobs and Syrians don’t adjust, they want to enforce their own laws and want social benefits. (...)”

53

We’re open, we’ve welcomed a lot of Chechens, Ukrainians, etc. but we shouldn’t overdo it.” (FGI no. 2, women, KO electorate)

The main concern is about the integration of people with a different cultural background:

“It’s OK when people with similar cultural background come to Poland.

Pis threatened us with refugees just for the sake of it, but problems are more complex, I mean the scale of it, cultural differences.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

“I’m not afraid of refugees in Poland. When it comes to Ukrainians I know that they have a difficult situation similar to what we experience in the West.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

Even though Hungary is EU’s southern border and the fear of refugees used to be very strong in this country, supporters of the opposition note that the fear has subsided, a phenomenon additionally spurred by the pandemic. According to opposition supporters and, to a degree, according to government supporters

as well, the problem is that Hungarians have been leaving their country.

“Fear of migrants has already subsided.” (FGI no. 4, man, Liberal opposition)

54 “Nobody wanted to come here, they would rather leave... half of Hungary lives in London” (FGI no. 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

“There has been no migrant since COVID came” (FGI no. 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

Opposition supporters notice a rise in nationalism, which they perceive as a threat of social conflicts and a complete rejection of liberal and democratic values. At this stage, they find the consequences of such a risk hard to imagine:

“There is also the risk of nationalism, it could be very dangerous if Confederation Liberty and Independence came to power in the future, there is a risk of spreading far-right views, and this tendency is getting more and more visible not only in Poland but also abroad.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“I’m afraid of the ONR (National Radical Camp) and the risk of war. For example, if a PiS and Confederation coalition came to power it would certainly lead to social conflicts.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

The fear of nationalism among government supporters takes the form of longing for positive consequences of globalisation,

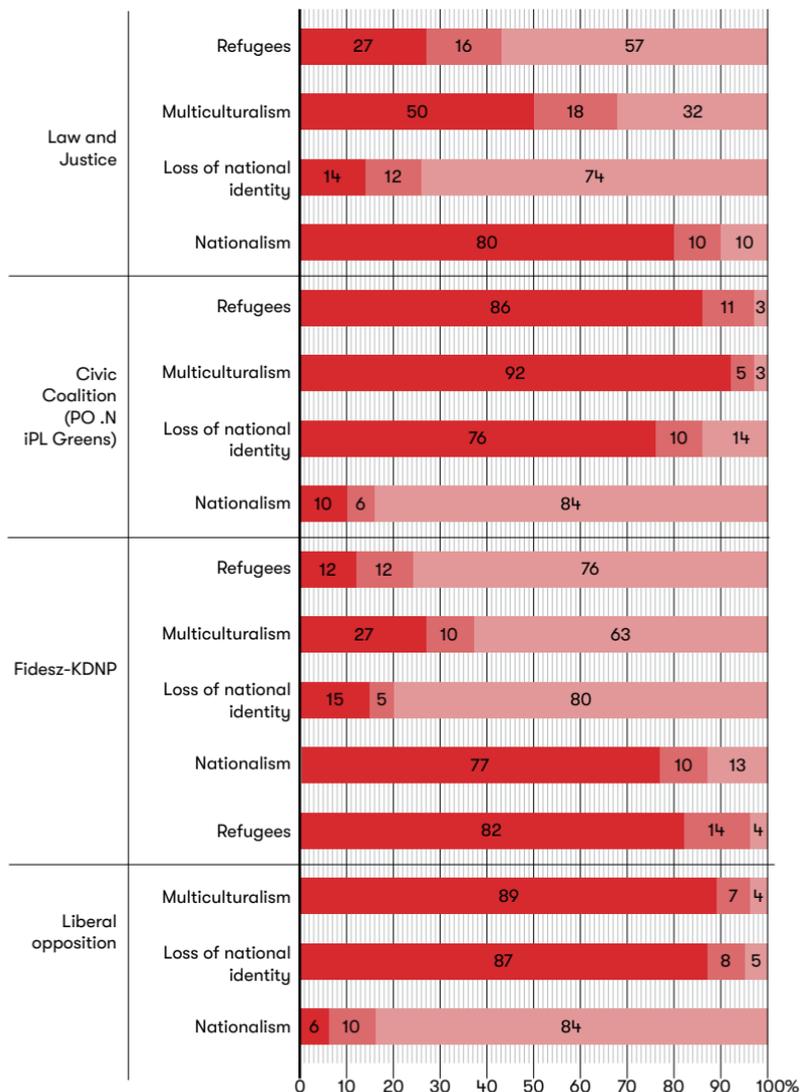
which could contribute to reducing unnecessary inequalities among people:

“One language, one currency is a positive effect of globalisation ... then we would understand each other better. The differences between one man and another would also disappear” (FGI no. 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

## Who does the fear influence?

### Are you afraid of: Refugees & Multiculturalism

56



\* Respondents: Refugees – Law and Justice, N=202, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=118, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=333; Multiculturalism – Law and Justice, N=196, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=119, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=330; Loss of national identity – Law and Justice, N=202, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=121, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=330; Nationalism – Law and Justice, N=198, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=40, Liberal opposition, N=338

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

57

Currently, refugees in Poland are not a widely discussed topic. It is “seasonal”, dependent on the situation around the world. An opportunity to manifest radical views presents itself, among others, during marches on Independence Day (November 11), which have become dominated by right-wing organisations and football hooligans. Every year, there are regular clashes with the police in the capital. In Hungary, the topic of migration is constantly present in politics, what was especially visible during the 2020 EU budget negotiations, when Viktor Orbán, scaring his electorate, repeated once again his old song about the Old Europe’s unacceptable blackmail in relation to those states which oppose migration. The Budapest-Brussels conflict is continuously incited by Fidesz because it helps in creating its image of the only party in Hungary that protects Hungarian identity and tradition.

- Disagree
- It is hard to say
- Agree

## 3.12 | Social Divisions and Conflicts

### Name of fear

Social Divisions and Conflicts

### Who instils fear?

58 No source of fear

### What is feared?

“People are divided like never before” – this sentence from one of our interviews reflects concerns over growing conflicts and social divisions, which also affect families. Lack of “national harmony”, life spent in separate bubbles, and lack of commonly recognised authorities create divisions and lead to the creation of a quasi-tribal society.

### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

Politically-motivated deterioration of relations among people has led to feelings of resentment and incomprehension among government supporters. They feel despised by the opposition or even persecuted for their views by people who consider themselves as tolerant:

“There are even divisions within families. Even those who think they are democrats exclude you if you have different views than them, they sever contact with you. There’s talk of tolerance but it’s not there. There’s disdain. These divisions and lack of communication are horrible.”  
(FGI no. 1, woman, Pis electorate)

“Poles don't know how to talk to each other. I admitted to voting for PiS and a friend of mine stopped talking to me. Once, when he came over to borrow something from my wife, I specifically hung up a calendar with Kaczyński's picture by the entrance.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

### Opposition supporters:

59

Supporters of the opposition seek the causes of conflicts in the policy of the government (divide and rule) and in a specific atmosphere of threat that affects people. They believe that the phobias of the government influence people who are then easier to manage:

“When intimidation increases, people can easily come into conflicts with one another.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“There are family feuds and violence; politics is not spoken of the way it used to be.

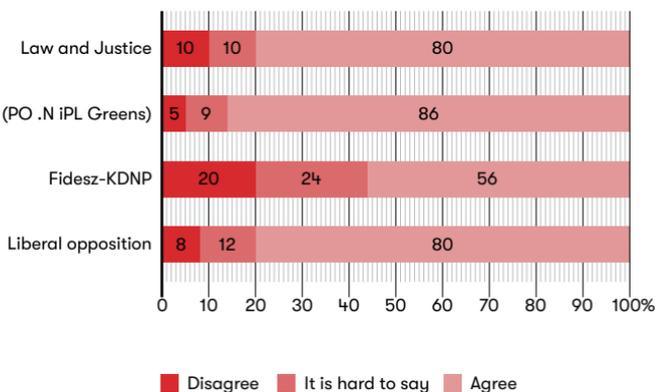
There are quarrels or even fights where there used to be arguments. People avoid political subjects.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

“There is a breakdown of family ties, which can lead to depression, mental crises.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Social conflicts in the country

60



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=201, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=122, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=341

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The source of the fear is not established.

Neither the government nor the opposition tells their supporters: “Fear social conflicts!” Everyone feels that politics has become an “issue”, whether it be because of Kaczyński or Orbán, who drives a wedge between people and fuels divisions, or because of the opposition that creates chaos. People are afraid that escalating social discontent could lead to an escalation of violence. Perhaps this is why it is one of the more real fears rather than a political bogey.

In Poland, the fear of social conflict is strong on both sides of the political dispute, whereas in Hungary, it is a lot more notice-

able among supporters of the opposition. Perhaps this is due to the fact that while some Pis supporters have a critical attitude towards the government, government supporters in Hungary are less critical of their government. Another explanation is that Hungarians perceive opposition as weak and unable to take action. It is hard to be proud of being an opposition supporter. The society is divided, but it would be highly unlikely for the conflict to escalate to violence.

61

### 3.13 | Imminent Economic Crisis vs. Fear of Withdrawal of Social Benefits

#### Name of fear

Imminent Economic Crisis vs. Fear of Withdrawal of Social Benefits

#### Who instils fear?

Governmental side and opposition

#### What is feared?

As social expenses rise (social programmes like PLN500<sup>36</sup> for every child, 13th and 14th pension<sup>37</sup>), the opposition increasingly voices concerns about an imminent economic crisis. Such opinions have become more common and have affected public opinion to a greater degree since the COVID pandemic started<sup>38</sup>.

The governmental side, on the other hand, scares the public that the social benefits will be withdrawn, should the ruling party change.

## How is it perceived by people?

### Government supporters:

Supporters of the government notice signs of crisis: rise in the prices of convenience goods and employment costs. However, they try to rationalise it, looking for causes in a wider economic context:

62

“There’s something cooking. Someone said that there is a crisis every 7–8 years and we can’t avert it.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

Interestingly, this group notices shortcomings of the 500+ programme:

“500+ is OK, though maybe not in its current form because dysfunctional families drink it away.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

However, there is no long-term perspective:

“Maybe the state does spend too much but so far so good, so I’m happy” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

Fear of an economic crisis is currently strongly linked with the pandemic:

“I am afraid of COVID’s negative effect on the economy, especially of losing my job.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

### Opposition supporters:

Much greater concerns are voiced by the supporters of Polish opposition:

“Job loss; so far we've had a reduction of hours and a risk of lay-offs. We don't know what's in store for us.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

Doling out welfare has been criticised but not strongly.

“Doling out welfare (500+, tourism vouchers) nowadays is completely thoughtless because they later take it all away in taxes.” (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

63

“The very fact that people get used to it is bad because the society gets addicted to aid, even though the idea in itself was not stupid...” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

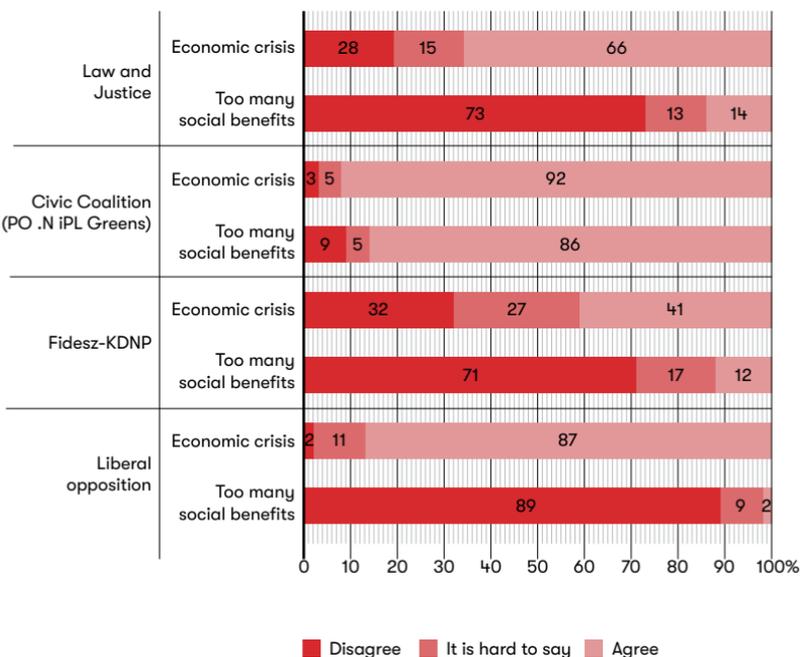
In Hungary, supporters of the opposition see a serious threat in the negative economic consequences of COVID. They claim that their government is right in this respect and the Hungarian economy is in danger because of the epidemic:

“... We are also afraid of the COVID's long-term effects on our economy, like Orbán...” (FGI no. 4, man, Liberal opposition)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Economic crisis & Too many social benefits

64



\* Respondents: Economic crisis – Law and Justice, N=207, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41 Liberal opposition, N=342; Too many social benefits (500 plus) – Law and Justice, N=200, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=329

### Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

If it were not for the pandemic, the risk of the economic crisis would probably not be treated very seriously. Before the pandemic, one could sense bitterness and resentment in liberal journalism. The Polish economy should not be growing but it does. The 500+ programme should have sunk the budget but it has not. Capital should have fled the authoritarian PiS but it did not. It all changed when people started losing their jobs due to the pandemic – the fear became real.

65

Concerns about an economic crisis resulting from too many social benefits are voiced only by the supporters of Polish opposition. Despite some criticism, social benefits are not considered a threat by supporters of the Polish government, probably because the PiS's flagship programme has vast support.

In Hungary, social benefits are not treated as a danger, neither by government nor opposition supporters. The 500+ programme does not have its equivalent in Hungary, although social transfers are well-developed. Withdrawal of social benefits is not treated as a concern. It was said earlier that Hungary does not have enough employees and that was one of the basic economic problems, apart from rising prices and living costs. Currently, the opposition awaits for greater financial support for the needy due to Coronavirus. Moreover, it is widespreadly believed that social benefits actually support the middle class. If there is criticism, it does not concern the programs themselves but the distribution channels of these transfers (corruption, clientelism, discretion).

### 3.14 | „Deform” of Basic Education and Higher Education

#### Name of fear

„Deform” of Basic Education and Higher Education

#### Who instils fear?

#### 66 Opposition

#### What is feared?

According to the opposition, the government has destroyed the educational system and worsened children’s and young people’s development opportunities for the sake of moulding youth into conformist and obedient citizens with the help of education. School curricula are subject to the selection that emphasizes a traditional, conservative vision of the world<sup>39</sup>.

With the destruction of basic education comes the destruction of higher education. Independent universities are threatened with withdrawal of grants if they support student protests against the government. In Hungary, there are opinions that the government is deliberately destroying higher education to drive the intelligentsia out of the country<sup>40</sup>. Fidesz aims at limiting the freedom of the academia, which is often the source of political thinking critical of the government<sup>41</sup>.

#### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

The interviewees express their concerns about the quality of their children’s education.

However, what they mean are the educational changes that resulted from the pandemic (remote education). Changes resulting from reforms have been overlooked:

“My son sits at the computer for 3 hours now, instead of 6 in the classroom, so he will learn less.” (FGI no.1, man, Pis electorate)

67

“There are few lectures in colleges now so there will be, for example, incompetent psychologists.” (FGI no. 1, Pis electorate)

“You can cheat during your A levels and google your answers.” (FGI no. 1, man, Pis electorate)

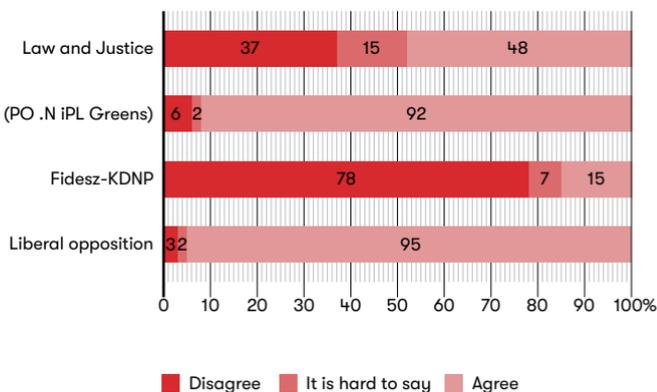
In Hungary, government supporters are concerned about what would happen with the educational system if the opposition came to power:

“If the ruling party loses the election, the quality of state institutions will decline due to increasingly liberal disciplinary rules. And only in private schools there will be high-quality education that only the rich can afford.”

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Destroying basic education and higher education

68



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=203, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=340

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

Education is a powerful tool for change, the effects of which can only be seen in the long run. The respondents did not talk much about the consequences of ideologization in education but in the quantitative research it was clear that Poles and Hungarians fear of it and do perceive it as an important factor in their children's education. A high level of fear over the destruction of education in Hungary probably results from the fact that at the turn of August/September 2020 there was a high-profile scandal over university autonomy. Students of Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) and their allies from civil society, art and culture and democratic opposition protested for the au-

tonomy of higher education. It can be assumed that the intensity of this fear is temporary – it comes in waves, e.g. earlier it was connected to the fight for the autonomy of the Central European University in Budapest.

### 3.15 Healthcare Disaster

69

#### Name of fear

Healthcare Disaster

#### Who instils fear?

Opposition

#### What is feared?

The government cannot tackle Coronavirus, it has no strategy, chaos prevails. A difficult situation in the healthcare system (queues, no access to some health services) has become catastrophic under the rule of the right due to the pandemic<sup>42</sup>. There is a growing number of infections, lack of medical equipment, partial lockdown, growing uncertainty about the future all against the backdrop of scandals over the purchase of face masks and respirators.

The fear also stems from a worsening economic situation.

#### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

Coronavirus has exposed all healthcare deficits. Regardless of their political convictions, people are afraid for their future:

“One’s afraid to fall ill; we’re not prepared for a situation like this.” (FGI no. 1, everyone, PiS electorate)

“You have to wait very long to be diagnosed, cancer patients can’t afford to wait, their lives are at stake.” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

70 Paradoxes in healthcare and differences in patients’ treatment in publicly-funded and private healthcare are noticed:

“State-funded healthcare only offers medical advice on the phone, but you can visit the same doctor you spoke to personally if you go to a private clinic; there is a difference in the treatment you’re offered.” (FGI no. 1, man, PiS electorate)

Fear of the pandemic is followed by a fear for jobs in the economy:

“I’m not concerned about health but about this spiral of lockdown, lockdown, lockdown. I’m afraid of unemployment, not my own but of my family and friends who work in more affected sectors.” (FGI no. 1, woman, PiS electorate)

In the context of the pandemic, it seems that there is a strong uncertainty not only about healthcare but also about other areas of life:

“We do not know the long-term effects of COVID – Neither in a medical nor economic sense.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

Healthcare in Hungary was in a bad condition before the pandemic, and Coronavirus has exacerbated the problem:

“The terrible state of the Hungarian health care system. I am afraid of getting into the hospital because of unacceptable health care system conditions.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

### Opposition supporters:

Most voters of the opposition in Poland are convinced that the government wasted time and did not prepare for the pandemic, and that it uses it for its political goals – when the government wanted senior citizens to vote during elections, the prime minister claimed that Coronavirus had been defeated:

71

“It’s hard in hospitals, staff fall ill as well, we could have prepared better, in Taiwan they prepared and reduced the number of deaths significantly (FGI no. 2, woman, KO electorate)

“Before the elections, the ruling party said that COVID was over, there was nothing more going on other than politics, and we could have prepared in that time.” (FGI no. 2, man, KO electorate)

In Hungary, criticism of the government over COVID-related response is not very common. Supporters of the opposition note the complexity of the pandemic fear, which is a threat to the foundations of the pre-epidemic free world, and are concerned about the bad condition of healthcare rather than afraid of contracting COVID.

“I’m afraid we will never have a proper vaccine for COVID and our life will never be the same again... the

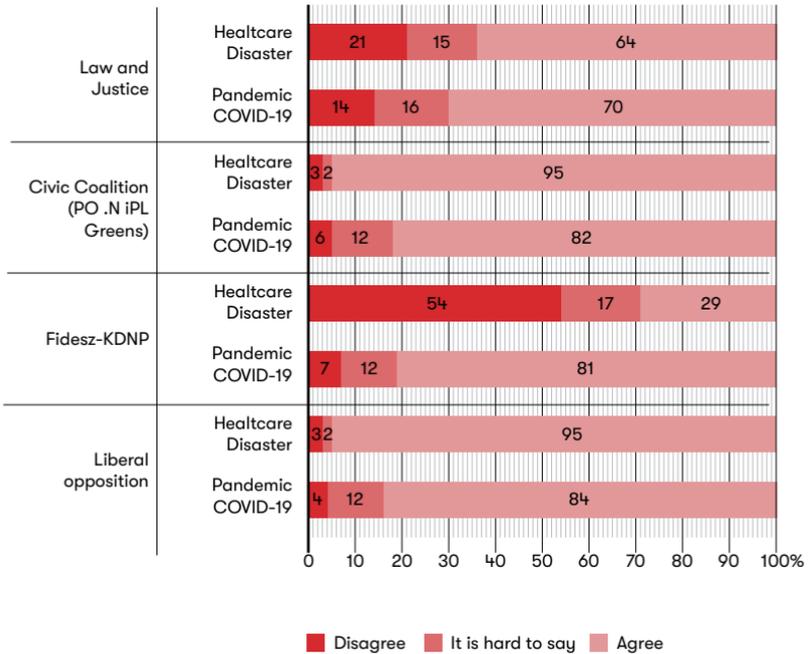
free world we had before...” (FGI no. 4, man, Liberal opposition)

“Hungarians are afraid of getting into the cachectic health care system... not the infection of COVID in itself” (FGI no. 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

72 “The fear of COVID is a complex ”(FGI no. 4, woman, Liberal opposition)

### Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Healthcare disaster & Pandemic COVID-19



\* Respondents: Healthcare disaster – Law and Justice, N=203, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=125, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=340; Pandemic COVID-19 – Law and Justice, N=211, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=125, Fidesz-KDNP, N=41, Liberal opposition, N=339

### Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

COVID-19 has denounced many problems in health care systems. Poles and Hungarians, who already before the pandemic, were seriously concerned with very bad situation in their hospitals indicating limited access to quality health services as their number one issue before every single election, understood that collapse can be even more catastrophic. This feeling was amplified by every day media coverage, “family stories” heard on the grapevine and online clickbaits. Hungary has plunged in European health ratings since Orbán’s appointment in 2010: health spending as a share of GDP has dropped year on year since 2003 reaching an all-time low of 4,41% in 2019. During the pandemic media have been criticizing the government for spending public funds for “Europe’s most modern mobile epidemic hospital” when public hospitals have been under austerity for decades.

In Poland, the collapse of the health care system became the main issue in the 2020 presidential elections (already before the pandemic) and fear of Coronavirus led to rescheduling the Presidential elections 2020 from May to July.

## 3.16 | Climate Change

### Name of fear

Climate Change

### Who instils fear?

74 (rather) Opposition

### What is feared?

According to the opposition, or rather non-governmental organisations, this is one of the most serious threats, completely ignored by the ruling parties<sup>43</sup>. Years of neglect have pushed our planet to the brink of a precipice, and the current government is pushing it further to make a step forward. The Polish economy is still based on coal<sup>44</sup> and the government does not care about the dangers resulting from climate change. Fidesz, in turn, counts on economic governance model dependant on fossil fuels import from Russia and the Causasus. Both Warsaw and Budapest block, side by side, ambitious climate policy goals of the EU<sup>45</sup>.

### How is it perceived by people?

#### Government supporters:

Supporters of the right-wing do not perceive climate change as a problem:

“The earth has its cycles and the changes will take place, that’s the way it goes.” (FGI no. 1, Mikołaj, PiS electorate)

It is also believed that Poland has complied with emission standards that have been imposed on it, so the situation is under control:

“Maybe there are anthropogenic changes, but in Poland we have quite strict emission standards.” (FGI no. 1, Kamil, PiS electorate)

Supporters of the government in Hungary approach climate change with greater concern “We have a convenient life, the good things are going without saying now.” (FGI no. 3, woman, Fidesz-KDNP)

75

“I am afraid that we won’t have enough water in the future.” (FGI no. 3, man, Fidesz-KDNP)

### Opposition supporters:

Supporters of the opposition consider it a problem, but due to its long-term consequences they feel helpless:

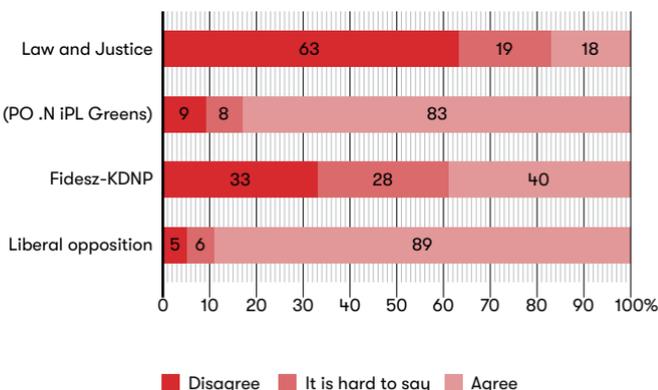
“I’m not worried about the fact that the government doesn’t care, but that many countries do nothing about it. The problem is huge and actions are small.” (FGI no., woman, KO electorate)

“We have to give up our comfortable life.” (FGI no.4, woman, Liberal opposition)

## Who does the fear influence?

Are you afraid of: Climate change

76



\* Respondents – Law and Justice, N=200, Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens), N=126, Fidesz-KDNP, N=40, Liberal opposition, N=336

## Comment (other remarks, additional observations)

The issue of climate change was one of the key elements of public debate in Poland until March 2020 (Coronavirus). The topic, however, is raised mainly by young people and also is treated as a “subject of the young” that is sometimes also discussed by older people. Research shows that climate change and environmental protections are main political issues encouraging teenagers to public activism.

While there is a visible disproportion between the government and opposition supporters in Hungary, they are more unanimous that climate change is a serious issue. There is a significantly bigger percentage of responses on the subject from both groups

than from their political “counterparts” in Poland. This is probably caused by many factors. Firstly, Hungary’s geographical location and related climate change consequences and extreme wather conditions. Secondly, the government’s change in the stance, in 2019 Fidesz was calling climate change a lie created by the “Soros Network”, but in 2020 it declared that climate deniers are insane and presented its own solution package.

## 4 | Summary

78 After analysing in detail each of the fears individually, it is time to rank them and present the title “sum of all fears” as it is seen by supporters of the different parties included in the study. Since such an approach requires a greater degree of detachment from the subject, we decided to focus more on the results of quantitative analysis, i.e. the interview.

The first obvious observation is that the top 5-6 positions are pretty crammed and their order is within the statistical error. To use a cycling metaphor, it would take a minor scandal – which in 2 months would be completely forgotten – a temporary spike in COVID infections or an unfortunate statement of one of the leading politicians, for one of the fears to break away from the densely packed peloton and take its moment to fight for the leader’s yellow jersey.

The second observation is that supporters of the ruling parties, both in Poland and Hungary, are mainly concerned about identity and ideology-related fears: liberalism, neo-Marxism, loss of identity or political actions of adversaries, including the European Union. They are the least concerned about issues that in a way contradict the primary fears, such as nationalism, actions of the ruling parties or exit from the European Union. The situation is quite similar in the group of opposition supporters; fear of authoritarianism or the leading parties’ actions entails lack of

fear of liberalism and actions of the opposition. The respondents are pretty consistent. Is it good or bad? It is up to the Readers to decide. The differences, of course, are in the details, e.g. the issue of social benefits, which we explained in chapters on individual fears; there are not many of them, however.

Thirdly, “average” fears that are in the middle of each graph are somewhat puzzling. They certainly do not loom large in the respondents’ minds. Nor are the key issues determining group identification, which could be said about a majority of fears at the bottom of each graph. What are they then? In our opinion, they are the issues that are not thought of very often, are a bit annoying but not crucial for the respondents. Terrorism, introduction of Euro (for the ruling parties) are currently abstract notions. “Exit from the EU” seems to be treated similarly by supporters of the opposition; it is talked about in the media, it sometimes gets a lot of coverage and the respondents are afraid, but deep down they know that it is not that simple, as shown emphatically by the case of the UK, which wanted Brexit but could not complete it for a long time.

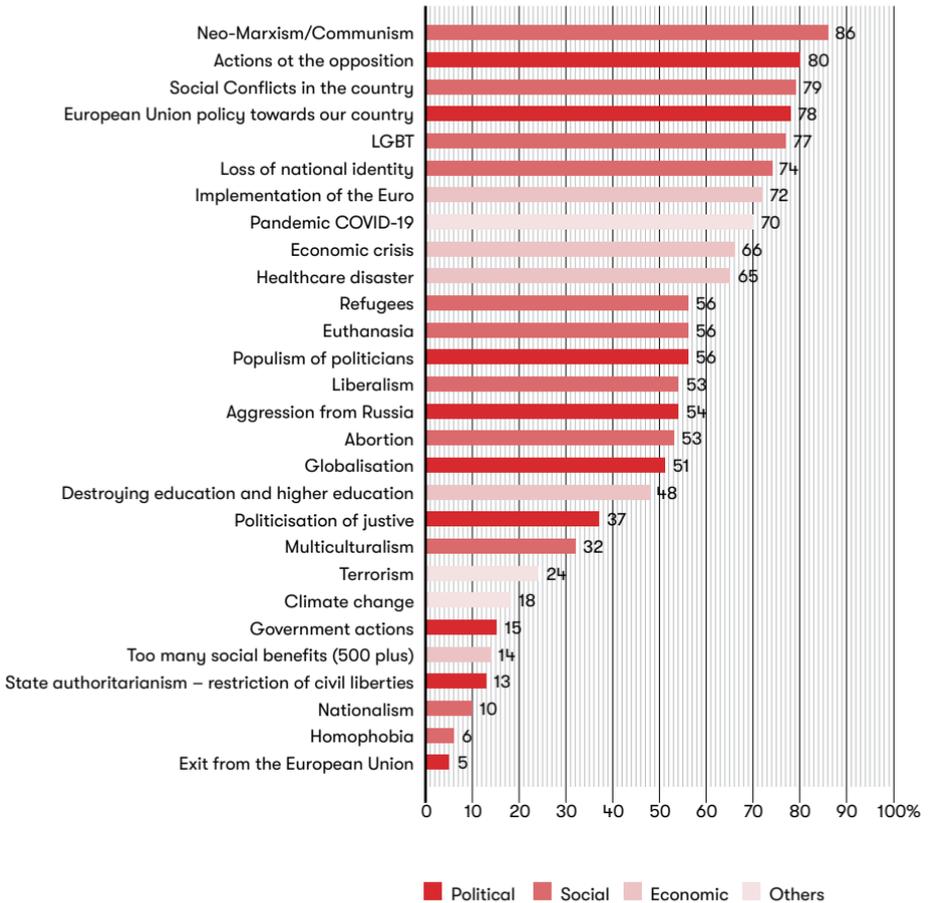
For the liberal opposition the list of fears, those from the very top and those from the middle, could become a signpost. Not a guideline in which domains they should use fears, starting a spiral of hate that will aim at further polarization and justification of verbal aggression or even hate speech. In this negative category liberals have no chance of winning and they should not race. They should, however, look at the fears of their supporters, and potential supporters, and forge them into positive and constructive proposals, much expected by the rational part of the society.

Finally, it is worth noting that fear is a method of managing society that is as old as the hills<sup>46</sup>. Egyptian priests used

to fearmonger with a solar eclipse, communists with exploitations by rotten capitalists, the Church with Hell, and the Nazis with Jews. It does not really matter whether a threat is real or not. What does matter is that it causes fear because those who are afraid are more impressionable and more easily controlled when beguiled with the promise of security. We hope that the present report will encourage you to rationally analyse fears to distinguish the ones that are good and warn against real danger from the imaginary ones.

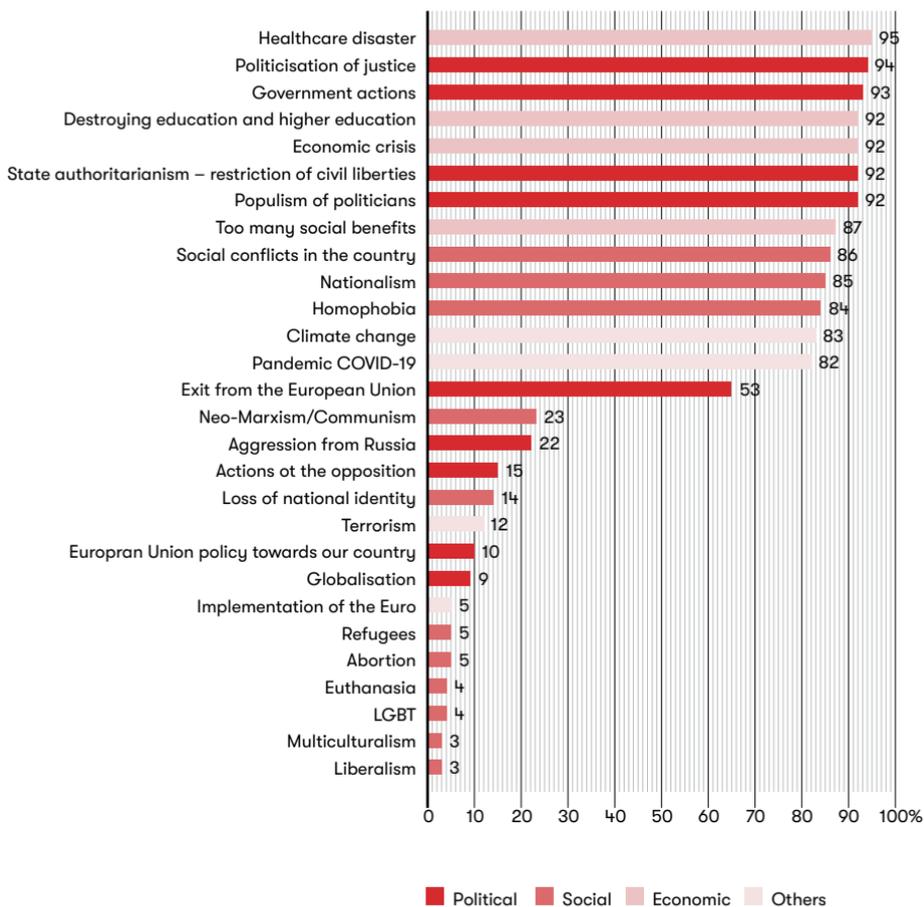
# Law and Justice

Are you afraid of:



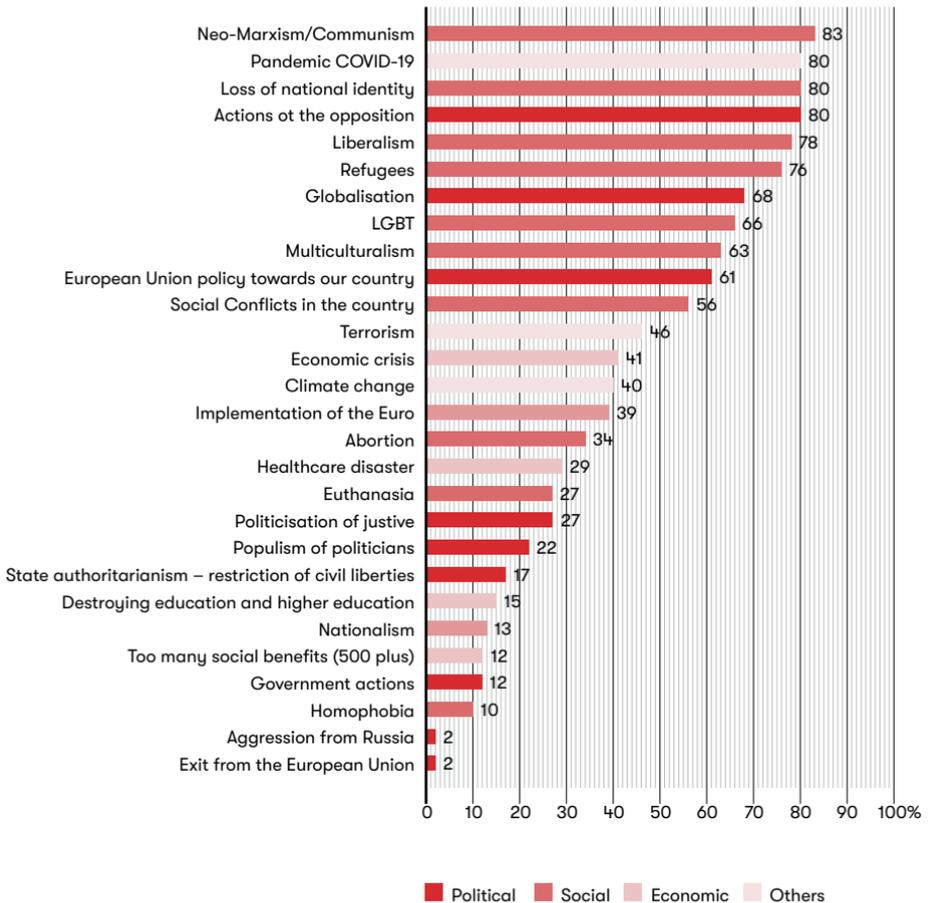
# Fidesz-KDNP

Are you afraid of:



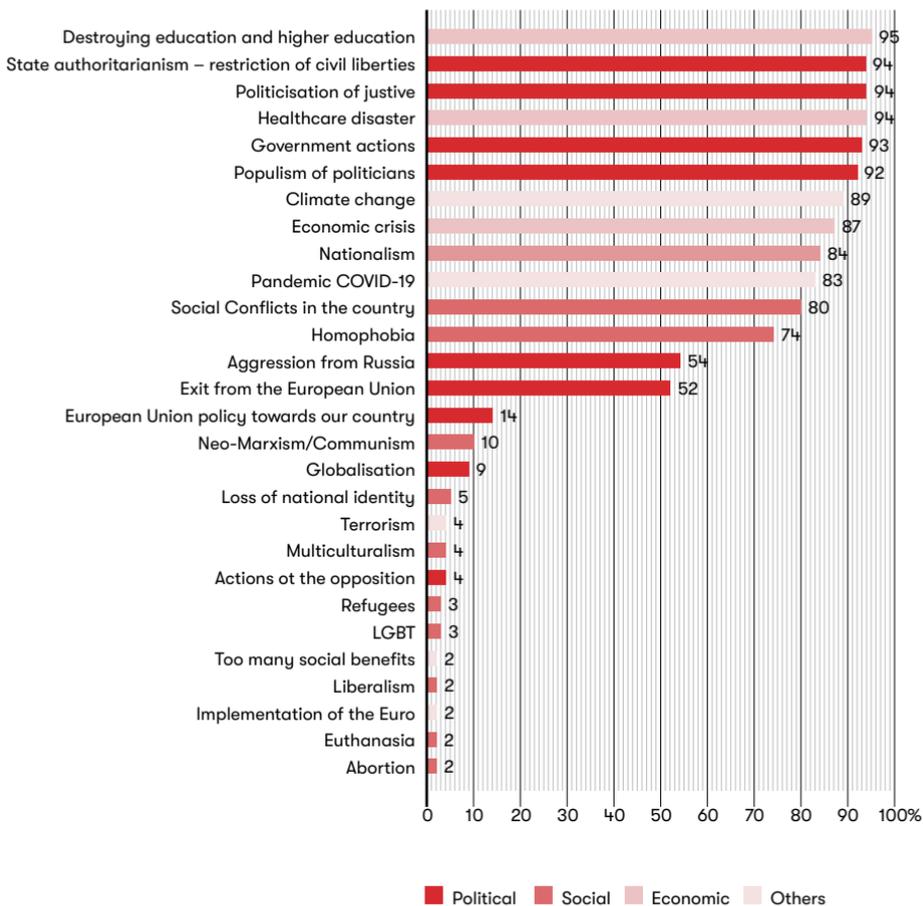
## Civic Coalition (PO .N iPL Greens)

Are you afraid of:



## *Liberal opposition*

Are you afraid of:



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88

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### European Liberal Forum (ELF)

is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 46 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in

the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen.

ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

### Haya van Somerenstichting/ VVD International

is responsible for the international activities and relations of the Dutch Liberal Party VVD. Its main aim is realising, maintaining and enhancing relationships with liberal sister parties and organizations around the globe and actively participating in international liberal networks. One of the priorities is contributing to the capacity building of liberal parties in Eastern Europe, at the Balkans, the Middle East and Northern Africa. The latter is made possible thanks to the MATRA and SHIRAKA programme of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which support countries in transition to a pluralist and democratic society, governed by the rule of law.

### Projekt: Polska

are people who are dreaming of a modern, open, and liberal Poland. Those, to whom a democratic, effective and citizen-friendly government is a key goal, and who help accomplish this goal while enjoying themselves, forming new friendships, and furthering their own interests. The Projekt: Polska Foundation is our framework, a group of professionals with immense experience in direct action: entrepreneurs, leading ngo heads, civil servants.

### Republikon Foundation

is a liberal think tank organisation based in Budapest, focusing on analysing Hungarian and international politics, formulating policy recommendations and initiating projects that contribute to a more open, democratic and free society. The goal of the Foundation is to promote discussion and implementation of liberal ideas, approaches and policies. Republikon believes that Hungarian politics can take a turn for the better only if liberal ideas and opinions are formulated in policy and public discourse.

# EUROPEAN ATLAS OF DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

edited by  
Mitosz Hodun



→ [www.liberalforum.eu](http://www.liberalforum.eu)

They are brazen, feral,  
anthropoids that de-  
mand pay without work  
and collect sickness ben-  
efits without being sick.  
US/THEM They receive  
child benefits for chil-  
dren Hate Speech at the  
Service of Politics that  
play with pigs on the  
street, and for women  
that have the instincts  
of stray dogs\* / edited by Miłosz Hodun

 projekt: potaka®

dr Krzysztof Mączka, dr Maciej Milewicz, dr Miłosz Hodun  
in collaboration with Andrea Virág and dr Dániel Mikecz

*Scary Stories, or the Sum of All Fears*  
*in Political Discourse in Poland and in Hungary*  
Study Report

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Relying on one's rule on emotions, especially on fear of something surreal, is relatively easy because it doesn't require any real action but only a good rendition of scary stories. Fear can be overdosed, however, leading society to a state of panic and feeling of imminent danger. Therefore, using fear is in itself very dangerous but both in Poland and Hungary it is a dominant political tool.

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