Securitization as Enacted Melodrama:

The Political Spectacle of the Hungarian Anti-Immigration Campaign

András Szalai
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

andras.szalai@tatk.elte.hu
This paper seeks to expand on the empirical literature on securitization in non-democratic settings as retells the ongoing Hungarian anti-migration campaign as a case of securitization, with the explicit aim of seeking to theorize its empirical findings. It departs from the observation that the current Hungarian discourse on migration bears some striking resemblance to Western European discursive structures of the 1990s and early 2000s, yet, despite the liberal borrowing of tried and tested frames, the securitization campaign is unique due the conditions underlying its inception and its evolution. Its uniqueness also leads to a set of puzzles for securitization theory: the campaign remains extremely effective without the presence of a subject of security, emergency measures introduced do not require acceptance from an audience, and the current politics of xenophobia bear more resemblance to normal politics than a realm of state emergency.

In order to make sense of these empirical puzzles, the paper relies on a refined version of securitization theory that moves beyond the narrow speech act focus of the Copenhagen School, and expands it to include practices and processes of securitization (Balzacq, 2005; 2015; Balzacq et al. 2016). Securitization seen as a pragmatic act then invites three assumptions: effective securitization is audience-centered; it is context-dependent; and it is power-laden. A practice-based reimagining of the Hungarian case, however, still produces an incomplete picture. Therefore, as an extention of practice-oriented securitization theory, the paper problematizes the theory’s implicit bias, i.e. the heavy reliance on the stark ontological division between normal and emergency politics, where (de)securitization is seen as a mechanism that moves an issue from one to the other. Arguing that this in-built bias makes conventional forms of securitization theory blind to securitization in non-democratic and semi-authoritarian/illiberal regimes I offer a reconceptualization of the issue of context in securitization theory as a composite of political ontology and socio-political context proper. In this reconceptualization, democratic systems represent one of the extremes of a continuum of political ontologies wherein normal and emergency politics are clearly separable, and security can retain its exceptionality as something beyond the democratis process. Non-democratic regimes, especially totalitarian systems on the other hand completely blur the line between normal and emergency as any issue can be turned into a threat to the state, i.e. the regime in power. With this separation gone, securitization fulfils a number of different roles within a polity other than the legitimization of emergency measures, most notably as a control mechanism (see Vuori, 2008). Illiberal regimes, like the one in Hungary, are then the in-between where the boundaries of emergency politics is constantly blurred as securitization logics are normalized. This normalization however cannot be deterministic as the general population retains partial agency as the audience of securitization due to the regimes continued reliance on elections.

To account for the normalization of security within this illiberal context, the paper expands on Balzacq’s work by relying on Murray Edelman’s concept of political spectacle, returning to the
anti-migration campaign as its example. The political spectacle is a mechanism elites use constructed crisis situations to reinforce or reshape the identity of their audience through a Schmittian division between a threatened Us, and a threatening Other (Edelman, 1988; 2013). Seen through this analytical lens, the securitization acts of the Hungarian government vis-à-vis migration fit the definition of melodrama, wherein a moral panic is constructed around refugees and is promoted through the media that only the heroic protagonist (the state) can resolve. Once interpreted through this very specific, yet highly flexible practice of threat construction, the government’s policies on migration immediately recall previous instances of melodramatic spectacles that were used to mobilize Hungarians around contentious policies. Through this mechanism, the government elite is reinforcing supporters’ national identity as a band of rebels under attack from various, often very mundane menaces, ranging from banks and multinationals to utility costs; and in parallel it also constructs the prime minister as a capable leader in times of war. As televised melodrama, a heavily securitized interpretation of the migration crisis can thus become normal for a society at large. Thus, in sum, securitization attempts as melodramatic spectacles can be used to on the one hand gain legitimacy for the regime in power by mobilizing support, maintain an atmosphere of uncertainty, and to construct the prime minister as the leader of the political community and the only source of security. By visiting more and more contentious policy issues under this script, the illiberal regime is pushing the boundaries of what counts as emergency politics as it normalizes security discourses.

**The Problem of Context in Securitization Theory**

In its original formulation by the Copenhagen School (CS), securitization is the process when a securitizing actor uses the rhetoric of an existential threat on an issue, and thereby takes it out of the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where any appropriate measure can be taken to curb the threat (Buzan et al., 1998). This definition has since been applied to countless cases, but has also come under theoretical criticism due to its exclusive focus on securitization as a self-reflexive speech act, its under theorizing of appropriate audiences, and its strict separation of normal and emergency politics. Put simply, its underlying assumption is that the word “security” has a performative character—drawing on the speech-act theory of Austin—but there is disagreement on whether this act is independent from an audience (self-reference) or only acquires its performativity when used by particular actors in specific contexts (intersubjectivity) (cf. Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 24–25).

An updated, and practice-based formulation of securitization draws less of a strict line between the world of normalcy and the world of emergency politics. Its major proponent, Thierry Balzacq, defines securitization as
an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts and institutions) about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor’s reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be immediately undertaken to block it. (quoted in Balzacq et al., 2015, p. 2, emphasis added)

In this reformulation, securitization is contextual, audience-centered, and power-laden. This means that not everyone can do and undo security (the ability to securitize depends on power relations in a polity), and the audience together with the external context limit the topics that resonate when securitized. By now, most security scholars accept the contextuality of securitization, though they disagree on the specific nature of the context. In general, theorists highlight the difference between internal context (the speech act), and external context referring to “brute facts” that limit securitization, such as the historical experience of the audience with the topic at hand (Balzacq, 2005; Balzacq et al. 2016; Ciutà, 2009).

Yet even a practice-based understanding of securitization is limited in its explanatory power. Though it successfully highlights the importance of the external context in assessing the shape and success/failure of securitization attempts, it limits itself to instances where securitization was aimed at legitimizing emergency action against a perceived threat. It thereby glosses over cases where the language of securitization has more to do with everyday life than existential threats. Securitization theory’s blindness to the normalization of security discourses can be traced back to its origins: securitization is often criticized for being written by Western Europeans, for Western Europeans and about Western Europe (see e.g. Huymans, 1998). This inherent bias of the theory is reflected in its conceptualization of security and securitization. Security is understood as a realm separate from normal politics, and securitization is the process whereby an issue is transplanted from normal politics to security/emergency politics, thereby legitimizing the use of (non-democratic) emergency measures. Underlying this conceptualization is the liberal assumption of the separability of normal and emergency politics, as well as a normative preference for democratic governance, as well as a Western, eurocentric understanding of state-society relations (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2012). Due to its democratic and liberal bias, securitization theory is either blind to non-democratic regimes or it produces a sanitized account of securitization attempts (Wilkinson, 2007; Vuori, 2008). Non-democratic regimes namely lack the democratic processes that securitization is juxtaposed with. Without democratic processes, there can be no separation of normal and emergency politics, and the theory becomes meaningless.

However, two critical observations are in order. First, securitization scholars have since demonstrated that securitization can be used for a variety of purposes beyond the legitimization of
emergency measures (Vuori, 2008, p. 66). Vuori for instance argues that all political systems depend on legitimacy for their survival, and security is an obvious and effective legitimator. Second, the empirical literature has mostly avoided hybrid regimes, such as the illiberal regime in Hungary. Illiberal democracies, despite their turn towards more authoritarian forms of governance still feature remnants of the democratic process, mostly in form of elections. Put differently, the elite requires electoral victories to stay in power. Therefore, the audience—in this case the electorate—retains partial agency. Legitimacy is required, just as in non-democratic systems, and securitization can be used to mobilize the audience according to election cycles. Another important function that securitization can fulfil is maintaining support among supporters, delegitimizing opposition movements, and maintaining a general political apathy among non-supportive segments of the electorate. So, in sum, securitization can perform multiple functions as securitization is a strong legitimator across all systems (Vuori, 2008).

In order to be able to deal with non-democratic and illiberal systems, securitization theory needs to transcend its dogmatic reliance on the separability of normal and emergency politics, and rather treat these as a continuum. Whereas democratic regimes feature a strong division of normal

Table 1: Securitization across political regimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Systems</th>
<th>Political ontology</th>
<th>Context proper</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Normal and emergency politics are separable, securitization understood as lifting an issue from normal politics to emergency politics, i.e. abandoning democratic processes for ensuring survival.</td>
<td>Functional actors of the democratic setting, power relations embedded in institutional structures, disposition of audiences (public opinion) limit securitization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiberal</td>
<td>Normal politics partially present, the regime seeks to blur the line between normal and emergency by normalizing the latter. Securitization used for various purposes other than legitimizing emergency measures.</td>
<td>Remnants of democratic institutional structures (elections), and the disposition of audiences limit securitization. Functional actors that limit securitization largely, but not completely absent. General population as audience retains partial agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-democratic</td>
<td>Normal and emergency politics are blurred, extreme normalization of the language of security. Securitization used for various purposes other than legitimizing emergency measures. Securitization is a legitimator that ensures the survival of the regime.</td>
<td>State has total control over institutions. Veto actors are missing. General population loses agency, audience reduced to competing groups within the elite.</td>
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and emergency, with very different modes of governance associated with each, totalitarian regimes completely blur the line between the two as anyone and anything can be labeled as a (security) threat to the regime. Illiberal regimes on the other hand lie between the two archetypical endpoints. Though the lines between what counts as normal and what counts as exceptional are progressively blurred as a regime slides towards autocracy, not everything can be securitized, and security logics do not permeate all aspects of everyday life. Table 1 accordingly maps the difference between the three kinds of regimes, and their specific use of securitization.

Security problems, the political spectacle and melodramatic presentation

As Vuori (2008) shows, non-democratic regimes (as well as illiberal ones) rely on security discourses as legitimators, and seek to use securitization for a variety of purposes. Among other, constructed crises can be used to “negate other problems or to transform structural difficulties into easy targets” (Bigo, 2002). Thus, security problems are part of a political spectacle (Edelman, 1988), and are constructed with purposes of control.

In his work, Murray Edelman sought to investigate how modern, communication-based societies deal with the world of politics. Challenging the entrenched notion of (bounded) rationality, he suggested that voter are far from rational, and the communication revolution has not rendered democracies more just as voters receive more facts. Instead, building on the tenets of social constructivism, Edelman argued that mass communication is a powerful tool in the hands of the political elite whereby it can shape how voters see the world around them, most importantly the political problems, the policy solutions suggested to remedy those, and the leaders who are supposed to deal with the problem. Predating the age of fake news by several decades, Edelman realized that „facts” about what problems politics need to deal with are constructs and politics is a battle over interpretations. Politics is highly performative, even theater-like, and is presented in the form of a spectacle. He defined the political spectacle as such

Accounts of political issues, problems, crises, threats, and leaders now become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the societal and political world rather than factual statements. (...) Taken together, they compromise a spectacle which varies with the social situation of the spectator and serves as a meaning machine: a generator of points of view and therefore of perceptions, anxieties, aspirations, and strategies. The conventional distinction between procedures and outcomes loses its salience because both are now signifiers, generators of meanings that shape political quiescence, arousal, and support or opposition to causes. The denotations of key political terms becomes suspect because leaders are not originators of courses of actions, problems are not necessarily undesirable conditions to be solves, and enemies need not do or threaten harm. Instead, the uses of all such terms in specific situations are strategies, deliberate or unrecognized, for strengthening or undermining support for specific courses of action and for particular ideologies. (Edelman, 1988, p. 11)
Edelman made his observations vis-a-vis democracies, but arguably his logic is even more amplified in illiberal systems where the production of meaning over politics is largely in the hands of the ruling elite. As I noted earlier, with securitization this boils down to the absence of veto powers who can counteract securitization attempts. Thus, the main limit over securitization acts is the audience itself: if the attempt is accepted, the government gains legitimacy, which is crucial both in gaining support at elections, but also in pacifying segments of the population that could oppose the regime. Importantly, security problems favor the elite as the traditional understanding of security by definition relies on the emergency measures of the elite—legitimized by the audience—in averting threats (Waever, 1995). Therefore, accepting something as a security problem involves relinquishing rights on behalf of the audience. In order to further diminish democratic institutions within an illiberal system, the elite then seeks to normalize security logics across various policy fields, thereby blurring the line between normal and emergency politics. In the following, I will use Edelman’s conceptualization of political problems to highlight why the language of security/securitization is especially suitable for garnering legitimacy, while at the same time delegitimizing any opposition.

For Edelman, the solution for a problem comes first, both chronologically and psychologically before the problem. This also holds for security problems as they are used as reinforcements of ideologies. Problems signify the virtuous and useful, as well as the dangerous and the inadequate. They tell us what actions will be rewarded and which will be penalized. Problems equally constitute people as subjects with specific aspirations and fears. Most crucially, the define who exercises authority, and who needs to accept said authority (Edelman, 1988, pp. 12-13). This aspect of political problems is especially salient when it comes to security threats. As the Copenhagen School showed, the meaning of security, though non-objective, frequently conforms to a traditionalist understanding where security is equated with state security (i.e. the survival of the state), and decision-making authority is delegated to the governing elite to mitigate threat with any means necessary (Waever, 1995). When it comes to security threats, there is little room for debate on who exercises authority, and as soon as the threat is accepted, the audience loses its agency in countering it.

Political problems can be used to assign blame and responsibility. When it comes to security problems, blame clearly rests with the constructed Other—who may be both external and internal—while responsibility rests with the elite leadership. Through the construction of a particular problem, a certain kind of leader figure can also be constructed that is capable and competent (Edelman, 1988, p. 21). Strong leadership is crucial in illiberal regimes that are built on the charisma of a central figure, like Putin’s Russia, Erdogan’s Turkey or Chavez’ Venezuela. The term leader itself is an ideal type for Edelman, which public officials try to fit. The ability to construct oneself as befitting the ideal type is a source of legitimacy. In this sense, leadership is dramaturgy for Edelman
which with mass communications has become more central to politics (Edelman 1988, p. 40). The leader must construct himself—most crucially through the construction of political problems—as capable, innovative, strong, responsible, level-headed, and as possessing qualities in general that both followers and previous leaders lack. This rather banal image of a capable leader is built up through a number of ways, including political rhetoric, the construction of enemies, problems and crises, the leader's appearance and mannerism, as well as the construction of overarching historical accounts that contextualize his/her rule (Edelman, 1988, p. 40). Naturally, the media plays a crucial role in communicating leadership dramaturgies and interpretations of political problems.

The media plays a crucial role in communicating and shaping interpretations of political problems. In illiberal settings where opposition media is either non-existent or extremely limited, news outlets play the role of amplifiers of government-mandated interpretations, communicating a particular interpretation of the world with specific problems, players, and solutions. News are particularly important when it comes to framing security problems, i.e. securitization. As Edelman (1988, p. 35) notes, the political spectacle encourages people to sacrifice their welfare and accept the inevitable. Doing so, it encourages the acceptance of existing social structures and power inequalities.

When it comes to media reporting on security problems, most notably migration, the dramaturgy bears strong elements of melodrama. A melodrama is “a dramatic storyline where nasty villains enact evil deeds against virtuous victims who are eventually rescued and have their virtue reinstated by gallant heroes” (Anker 2005 as quoted by Wright, 2015, p. 1246). The depiction of characters of melodrama are extremely exaggerated and emotional so that the boundary between good and evil is clear. The audience is shown the suffering of the victim and given the opportunity to share that suffering. Thereby the audience feels empathy for the victim, and hatred for the villain. The villain becomes a catalyst for state action as the resulting struggle then can only be resolved by the her—i.e. the leader or the government—that swoops in and defeats the villain. This element of melodrama clearly resonates with the Schmittian aspects of securitization where audience acceptance sanctions sovereign power against a threat (Williams, 2003). The resulting catharsis after the resolution reinforces the identity of the audience, and the role leaders and ruled need to play in a given polity.

In the following, through the example of the Hungarian anti-migration campaign, I will empirically demonstrate the particular way securitization logics are used in an illiberal setting. Arguing that the script the Hungarian regime relies on when securitizing an issue bears multiple elements of melodrama, I suggest ways in which security discourses can be detached from security’s narrow understanding as something about the survival of the state/society, and become normalized as legitimators of the illiberal elite.
Hungary and the so-called migration crisis

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first mentioned his plans of regulating migration into Hungary in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, after which the government launched a coordinated, well-funded media campaign that has demonized migrants as a threat to national security, irrespective of personal motivations. The Hungarian government’s strong anti-immigration rhetoric and policies that followed—most importantly the construction of a border fence in the South—have shocked many observers, begging the question of what made such a shift possible and how it came about. Xenophobic tendencies in Hungary have been steadily increasing since the introduction of the campaign, and the discourse by now clearly dominated by the security frame. Though the precise mechanisms of persuasion and their effectiveness are still under investigation, this paper is based on the assumption that the increase in hostility towards migrants in Hungary can be linked to the government’s ongoing securitization campaign. Success so defined is puzzling as the campaign originally predated the summer 2015 wave of refugees, meaning that at the time of its launch, the everyday Hungarian had no real experience with mass migration. Thus, the rapid securitization of migration and the resulting increase in xenophobia therefore cannot simply be attributed to societal shock and feelings of insecurity at the sight of massive migrant waves (cf. Karyotis 2012). On the other hand, refugees and migrants were and still are constructed as both an economic and a cultural threat, despite it being clear that they were merely passing through the country. But perhaps the most puzzling aspect of this case is that the campaign continues well after the construction of a border fence on the Serbian and Croatian border, and after the conclusion of the EU-Turkey deal in the spring of 2016; all the while, despite the physical absence of refugees in Hungary, levels of xenophobia have been steadily rising, reaching all time heights (Tárki, 2016).

Following the guidelines of the practice-based approach to security, in order to better understand the Hungarian government’s motivations behind the securitization of migration, as well as the reasons why a large portion of the population so readily accepted the securitizing move, we need to have a closer look at the context.

Context

A cursory look at the domestic discourse on migration in Hungary, but also in other Central and Eastern European states—most notably Slovakia and the Czech Republic—shows clear similarities with Western European discourses of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. These states are therefore not pioneers of securitization when it comes to the rhetoric of migration, but rather adopters of a pre-existing Western European discourse about both the dangers of migration writ large, and
assimilation/integration policies referred to as multiculturalism. This adoption is most visible in the Hungarian campaign’s gradual securitization of migration as a threat along three axes: hard security (terrorism), welfare and job security, and identity/culture.

Using a contextual, pragmatic understanding of securitization, the specificities of the Hungarian case are more apparent. In terms of power relations, it is crucial to emphasize that traditional veto actors (or functional actors) that can limit securitization are missing in Hungary. The parliamentary opposition is weak, fragmented, and it has adopted the master frame of the government (cf. Herman, 2016). The media, which could either be a source or an amplifier of a counter-discourse is under near-total government control (Freedom House, 2017). Finally, courts that could problematize the constitutionality of government policy have also been taken over by government party loyalists (Freedom House, 2017). These elements mirror the general characteristics of illiberal regimes in that traditional veto actors do not pose a considerable limit to securitization attempts. In such an environment, the government can serve as the single effective securitizing actor and can turn its framing of an issue, in our case migration or political opposition hegemonic.

The audience and the context is also specific and helps us understand why and how this media campaign impacts so heavily on public opinion. Hungary has been steadily showing heightened levels of xenophobia—even in regional terms—since the early 1990s when measurements were first introduced (Zán, 2017). However, Hungarian xenophobia (and Eastern European in general) differs from xenophobia in Western Europe. It is less racially charged, but is more a fear of the unknown. Therefore, since hostility to migrants does not come from a history of cohabitation, diffuse threats such as migration can be securitized even without the absence of the „brute fact“ ie. the refugee/migrant. Also, due to the lack of historical experience with mass migration and colonialism, a politicized, pro-migration narrative is not available to opposition forces who are then forced into the master frame of the government, i.e. accepting migration as a threat and only problematizing the extent of the threat and the specific measures taken. Since crisis situations favor the incumbent, the opposition has had an uphill battle to fight (Szalai & Gőbl, 2015).

These characteristics make the Hungarian context receptive to securitization attempts targeting migrants and refugees. But, as I argue, the anti-immigration campaign is but an example of the securitization logics at work in illiberal Hungary. Most notably, securitization theory is ill-equipped to explain the extreme normalization of security discourses in a given society. Since FIDESZ took power in 2010, the government has framed almost every policy debate through a melodramatic, warlike security frame. Hungarians have had to deal with enemies such as multinationals, banks, energy companies, “Brussels” (the EU Commission), foreign powers, NGOs etc. By the time the migration crisis hit Hungary, audiences were already desensitized to this rhetoric. Put
simply, the construction of security threats and enemies has become part of the everyday. Or in securitization terms, normal politics.

**Melodramatic elements of the campaign**

The refugee and migration issue has been presented in a particular way in the media. Media representation is an example of identity production that is embedded in an organized campaign to create a moral panic about refugees and immigrants along a securitizing master frame. Here Hungary/Hungarians played the role of the victim, and “illegal migrants” were depicted as the villains. Media reporting stereotyped refugees and associated them with crime and diseases. Leaked memoranda from state television showed a conscious effort not to show women and children, but instead focus public attention to single young men.

Meanwhile the government’s interpretation of the problem dominated public discourse, with the prime minister taking a central role as the hero. His image as a capable leader was reinforced by the harsh rhetoric, by proposed measures, as well as the exaggeration of the threat and the depiction of the villain (migrants, people who assist migrant, the EU, etc.).

As mentioned, initially migration was securitized primarily as an economic threat. Following the exponentially increasing pressure of growing migrant waves, the “job loss” frame was dropped for an identity-based threat frame, wherein the economic threat only manifested in the costs Hungarians would have to bear while hosting migrants. Migrants therefore now threaten Hungarian culture, but also European civilization at large. Underlying this us versus them opposition is the strong national myth that a homogeneous Hungarian society had existed, and a loss of cultural and ethnic homogeneity would threaten social order. Within this frame, the future of the community is a choice for or against migration, leaving no middle road open for a more nuanced treatment of a complex issue, especially the state’s obligation to protect refugees. Here, the role of Hungarians is that of the crusaders, the last defenders of Europe from a Muslim threat: It is not for fun that we are doing what we are doing; no one likes serving in a border fortress [...] But this historic role of protecting the external borders has now fallen to Hungary”. In recent interviews, Historical role here refers to the now commonly used analogy of the medieval Turkish invasion of Hungary. This analogy consequently assigns the role of defenders of Europe to Hungarians, playing on their sense of

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exceptionalism. In turn, any European criticism, and the proposed quota system that would have migrants moved back to Hungary can be seen as betrayal.

The current politicization of migration in Hungary is part of a wider political spectacle—the creation and circulation of symbols in the political process (Edelman, 1988)—wherein the conditions of belonging are contested. Within such spectacles, politics emerges as a drama where meaning is conferred through evoking crisis situations and political myths. It legitimates political decisions through invoking threats and dangers, and also governs role-taking by the actors. Within this spectacle, one of the key issues is cultural identity, which in turn enables the politicization of migration (Huysmans, 2000, p. 762).

**Conclusion**

This paper sought to draft a conceptual framework for understanding securitization in illiberal regimes by building on the empirical observations of the Hungarian government’s continued attempts to securitize migration and expand the security frame to involve novel threats. Due to its liberal bias, securitization theory has a hard time explaining securitization in political systems whose ontology is not built upon a clear division of normal and exceptional politics. As I argued, illiberal regimes lie in-between democratic and non-democratic ontologies: the boundary between normal and exceptional is increasingly blurred, but normalization is still constrained by the presence of weakened democratic institutions. In such a setting, securitization is an excellent element for garnering support and legitimacy, but also for delegitimizing opposition and pacifying restless segments of the population. As the political elite relies on securitization with more and more policy issues, the boundary is further blurred, the political discourse becomes warlike and security logics become normalized. As securitization involves relinquishing power to the sovereign, securitization helps propel the regime further away from a democratic ideal type. In addition, security logics, through the introduction of new threats help maintain an atmosphere of uncertainty, where both certainty and security can only come from the regime itself.

As I argued along Edelman’s work, highly dramatized national security crises also garner public attention and support, and through securitizing certain issues, the elite can divert public attention from other fields, like a struggling economy. In turn, the successful mitigation of the newly constructed threat can provide a government with political capital, and can be used to discredit opposition. The easier an issue is to mitigate, the more likely such a shift in support is. The turn towards migration as a security challenge, which forms part of the political spectacle of FIDESZ’s governing style, has mobilized supporters, drawn in extremist voters due to its hard stance on aliens, divided up the population along familiar lines, and crucially avoided political costs traditionally
associated with securitizing migration in Western Europe. This latter point merits our attention: when securitizing migration, the elite runs the risk of engaging two different groups: a softer stance might alienate, while a more radical stance on migration might alienate pre-existing migrants and moderate voters. Given that Hungary has had no prior experience with migration and multiculturalism, and that the 2015 wave only passed the country, FIDESZ’s securitization attempt offered higher benefits than costs. Moreover, since a crisis script applied on migration evokes feelings of danger and insecurity, they are by default high on the public agenda. As such, securitizing migration was yet another way for the government to detract both public and media attention from high profile scandals that wrecked support: a steady increase in FIDESZ’s support is clearly visible ever since the launch of the billboard campaign².

As Edelman notes, uncertainty is key to managing audiences. Problems are constructed to focus public attention to certain issues and away from others. Problems constructed by the political elite also feature a ready-made solution—which, as noted, predates the problem—that reinforces the power positions of the elite itself, given charge of treating a problem. But such an official depiction of a problem is contestable in a democratic, and even a semi-democratic setting. The more the elite is able to turn their interpretation hegemonic, the better their position becomes. Edelman (1988, p. 25) contends that the motivations, consequences, and problems to which government solutions are attached are typically unclear. This is especially true for issues removed from daily life. Thus, the more uncertain surrounds a policy problem, the more influential official government cues to its meaning become. If the government interpretation then achieves dominance over competing narratives, the government becomes the only source of certainty and security.

² For a comparative graph of party preferences in Hungary, see http://kozvelemenykutatok.hu/partpreferencia/
Bibliography


