

# **Discovering the populist turn of Fidesz voters through personal values**

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## **Abstract**

Since for today populist parties became relevant actors in most European democracies, the number of comparative studies exploring individual factors of populist support is also increasing. In my paper I focus on voters of the Hungarian governing party Fidesz and their personal values. The main question of my analysis is, whether four personal values (power, security, universalism and benevolence) explain support for Fidesz more effectively after 2010 and 2012, since the party turned to represent populist politics and rhetoric. Logistic regression models show significant change in the effect of security and benevolence in both years, but not for power and universalism. Although researches in this field are in early stage yet, some conclusions regarding personal values and populism are drawn relying on the results.

## **Introduction**

The widely used term “populist zeitgeist” (Mudde 2004) does not only mean the emergence of new parties worldwide which apply populist framing and rhetoric in their political communication and strategy, but also the populist turn of long existing parties, where a remarkable change towards populist discourse in their represented politics can be identified. (Rooduijn et al. 2014) The Hungarian governing party Fidesz is a good example for the latter. Fidesz was founded in 1989 at the time of East-European system change as a young democratic alternative of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. The party’s ideology and political communication went through remarkable changes during the last almost 30 years, during which conservative christian democratic ideology, nationalist populism, and anti-elitist illiberalism became key values of their represented politics. In 2018 elections Fidesz gained the majority of votes and thus became the governing party with winning the two-third majority of the parliamentary seats for the third time since 2010. After Fidesz became able to make even constitutional reforms with its parliamentary majority, a significant populist turn in their represented politics was identified by many scholars (see e.g. Bozóki & Hegedűs 2017,

Antal 2017). Populist terms and frames are increasing in prime minister and party leader Viktor Orbán's speeches, Fidesz's represented issues approach to address voters opened for the Manichean worldview, where politics are understood as a constant struggle between the good (people) and the bad (post-communist and international elite) and people-centrism with reference to the homogenized general will of the people as an anti-pluralistic social order.

Along the changes in their politics and communication and as the supporting people of the party have increased dramatically, remarkable changes in characteristics of Fidesz voters can be detected as well. (Enyedi et al 2014) Most of related researches focus on socio-demographic characteristics of Fidesz supporters, although many studies have shown that traditional social cleavages has become less relevant by explaining party preferences, while preferred political values of voters can explain them more effectively. (see e.g. Schmitt & Scheuer 2011) My aim is to identify changes in Fidesz voters' represented personal values at the time of the party's populist turn. The data analysis presented below will attempt to make relevant conclusions regarding personal values and populist attitudes. The idea of the research question comes from the inconsistent findings of Bakker et al. (2015) and Schimpf and Schoen (2017), who investigated the influence of personality traits to populist voting and found contradictory results by agreeableness along various European and American populist parties' voters. While Bakker and his colleagues confirmed that agreeableness has a negative effect to both left- and right-wing populist voting, Schimpf and Schoen could not verify this finding in case of left-wing populist voters. An obvious critique to these works is, that the personality trait agreeableness or friendliness can be explained best by the personal values universalism and benevolence, which are linked with leftist ideologies according to related studies. However the interdependence of personal values and personality traits was proved by many scholars researching this issue (Caprara et al 2010), furthermore researches found that personal values many times even trump personality traits in models explaining voting choices (Capanna et al. 2006)

Contributing to previous researches in this field, my aim is to discover any existing turns in the represented personal values of Fidesz supporters in 2010 or 2012, at the time of the populist turn of the party itself. Analysed personal values will be power and security to test right-wing orientation, and universalism and benevolence, to test left-wing orientation of respondents. Main question of my research is, which personal values explain voting for Fidesz most effectively, and if there is a change of represented values after 2010 or 2012. Moreover my aim is to see if these values can be interpreted through the populist, nationalist and anti-elitist turn that has been characterized Fidesz since 2010. To my logistic regression analysis I

will use European Social Survey data between 2002 and 2016, and include Schwartz values as main independent variables.

The paper is structured as follows. First I give an overview about how personal values can be predictive for political values, then the literature of populist voting attitudes will be introduced. Second, I turn to the Hungarian politics and describe related knowledge so far about Fidesz voters, and why scholars define the party as a populist one since 2010. This will be followed by the logistic regression analysis of Fidesz voters as the dependent, and personal values as main independent variables. The paper ends with the discussion section where I interpret research results and make some conclusions related to personal values and populist voting in the Hungarian context.

### **Personal values and voting**

Besides socio-demographic characteristics, preferred political values of party voters (in line with but also beyond the left-right or liberal-conservative scale) became a focus of political scientists, as they might explain party preferences more effectively than earlier, or more effectively than traditionally applied variables. Respondents tend to choose politicians and parties which reflect their represented personal values the most (Capanna et al. 2006, Caprara et al. 2010). As politics became more mediatized, personalized and thus individualized, it results in new cleavages among voters, which may expand beyond traditional political value orientations and challenges the idea of social class voting.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the congruency model of political preference also states that voters will choose parties and candidates, which characteristics are the closest to theirs (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004).

A widely used approach of categorizing personal values is the one of Shalom H. Schwartz, who elaborated a universally applicable personal value system existing of 10 basic types of values<sup>2</sup> (1992). A significant number of studies examined the predictability of personal value system of Schwartz to individual political values. The theory that political values express basic personal values in the domains of politics and that based on these values political preferences of voters can be predicted have been justified in earlier researches (Barnea & Schwartz, 1998, Caprara et al. 2010). Most related studies describe personal values

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<sup>1</sup> Although this argumentation does not necessarily mean that personal values can not be based on social classes. Moreover it is also true, that people belonging to social classes with lowest income tend to vote less, which can influence the effect of classes on party preferences, because social groups with the lowest income level will not be represented in the analyses.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for a list of these values and related ESS sample items.

in the political left-right context as a trade-off between power, security and achievement values on the right, and universalism and benevolence values, which can be related to parties with leftist ideology. These results provide the basic approach to my data analysis as well.

Davidov and his colleagues tested the effect of Schwartz personal values on left-right orientation in 20 European countries using European Social Survey Data (2011). The verified concept behind their research was that basic personal values are mediated by core political values. Because of the application of longitudinal data, a casual impact of personal values on voting could be tested. In their study they differentiated between three groups of European countries and formed the liberal, traditional, and post-communist groups. One relevant finding of their study was that political orientation of respondents of post-communist countries is less coherent than that of the other two groups. This is because it is unclear, whether political left refers to political values of Western liberal democracies or that of communist regimes in the Central-Eastern European region. Moreover they proved that personal values explain more variance in political orientation than sociodemographic variables do in the liberal countries but less in the post-communist countries. According to their results, three values explained political orientation in Hungary most effectively: tradition, hedonism and power, all of them supported the right orientation on the political left-right scale. However it is important to note that they only investigated the first wave of ESS data from 2002, hence changes in the effect of these values were not represented in their results. Also in relation to Hungarian politics Caprara and his colleagues found among others that in Hungary tradition and conformity versus stimulation, hedonism and self-direction were the personal values, which explained party preferences most effectively. (2010)

Consistent with the above mentioned results Capanna and her colleagues verified the interdependence of personal values and political orientation. (2006) However they went further by the aspects of personality and connected personal values with personality traits in their analysis. As they write “traits are dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thought, feelings, and actions, while values are cognitive representations of desirable, abstract, trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people’s life” (citing McCrae & Costa, 1990 p. 23 and Schwartz, 1992). In other words, “traits describe what people are like, values refer to what people consider important”. They highlight the high correlation between personality traits and values referring to Roccas et al. (2002), and found the effective predictability of these variables on party preferences.

### **Previous findings on populist voting attitudes**

Most recent empirical studies which approached populism from the demand-side of politics relied on the analysis of party documents and/or politicians' speeches (see e.g. Rooduijn et al. 2014). The number of studies discovering populist attitudes of voters are increasing, however we have still limited knowledge about the demand side of populism, and many researches only investigate the extent of populist values in societies and do not link them to party preferences. It must be noted that although according to many scholars populism can be regarded as a universal thin-centered ideology (Mudde, 2007), a standardized measurement of populism (and in my case more importantly: populist voting attitudes) is not always applicable. Populist parties vary in terms of their political position (government or opposition), or the cultural context dependency of populist parties also influence their represented politics. Moreover, elements of populism on the party side includes many political values which also refer to other political ideologies, like the importance of representative democracy. Populism is rarely something that parties claim about themselves, but a political frame which characterises their represented politics, communication and attitude towards their voters. Although in many studies a cross-sectional analysis of populist parties or supporters is presented, in my research I do not aim to establish a generalized approach to populist support through personal values, and thus limit the analysis to Fidesz supporters and to the Hungarian context.

Research results so far show that people supporting populist parties tend to trust political elite and institutions less, acquire a cynical worldview, perceive lower internal and external political efficacy, fear economic insecurity and immigrants, who in their opinion threaten the national sovereignty of their country (Guiso et al. 2017, Inglehart & Norris 2016, Fieschi & Heywood 2004) which results are closest to and can be framed as the grievance theory (Gurr 1970). Inglehart and Norris, who established the approach of new political cleavages after WWII shifting the attention to post-materialist values in Western democracies, published a cross-sectional analysis of European populist party support using European Social Survey data as well, where they also focused on cultural values like anti-immigration attitudes and mistrust beyond socio-demographic variables (2016).

One of the most cited and applied method to measure populist attitudes was elaborated by Akkerman et al. (2013), who validated a populist attitude scale (including the sovereignty of people, opposition to the elite, and the Manichean division between "good" and "evil") among Dutch voters, where it was possible to validate their populism scale on right- as well as left-wing populist voters. The validation of populist attitude variables was the aim of the

cross-sectional analysis of Van Hauwert and Van Kessel as well (2018), who moreover found that populist attitudes can moderate the effects of issue positions of both left- and right-wing populist parties, like economic issue positions and authoritarian or anti-immigration policies.

It was Bakker et al, who extended the research of populist attitude further from traditional socio-demographic and political variables, and introduced a new approach by analysing the interrelation between personality traits and populist voting (2015). In their analysis they tested personality traits applying the earlier more business and marketing oriented but widely used Big Five Model, which most important advantage is that the established personality traits remain relatively stable throughout individuals' life. A recent critique to Bakker's and his colleagues' work is the one of Schimpf and Schoen, who presented contradictory results, namely they did not find evidence of negative effect of agreeableness to leftist populist parties (2017).

### **The populist turn of Fidesz and the characteristics of its supporters**

What are the key elements of the populist turn of Fidesz politics in recent years and how could it influence the party's voters? If contemporary Hungarian populism should be considered as a form of political communication and strategy, a political logic and discourse, or as an ideology is out of the focus of this paper (Antal, 2017). There has been a long scientific and public debate around the new regime type that Fidesz has been establishing since 2010 mostly but not entirely through institutional changes, but most scholars agree that the 2010 elections brought a significant shift from liberal democracy towards hybrid authoriter illiberalism in Hungary (Bozóki & Hegedűs 2017). First and foremost, the political leadership of Viktor Orbán has to be highlighted who is considered to be the key element of the Hungarian illiberal populist turn (Körösenyi & Patkós 2017). Besides illiberalism, Körösenyi and Patkós also put an emphasis on the presidentialization and personalization of politics in recent years and that Orbán not just reshaped the institutional but also the party system of the country. Moreover they claim that the usage of populist rhetoric in his communication was rather a tool to "justify his political purposes by referring to the will of the people" and that his "populism is an instrument of a top-down political leadership rather than a concrete institutionalization of decision-making by the people" (p. 331).

The mixture of paternalist populism and illiberal elitism elements was enhanced by Enyedi while investigating the new political era of Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary. He emphasized the nationalist characteristics of their politics as well, however surprisingly

Jobbik proved to be more nationalistic than Fidesz through his analysis (2016). He explains the definitions by stating that Fidesz's "preference for elitism, in a number of issue areas and their inclination to assign an elevated role to the state in structuring social relations (...) constitute a borderline subtype of populism, best labelled paternalistic populism" (p. 10). This statement is more or less consistent with the below described findings of Krekó et al., who did not find an interrelation between anti-elitist attitudes and Fidesz support (2018). Indeed, Fidesz does not necessarily aim to involve "ordinary people" to the policy making processes, however the apparent inclusion (like the "national consultation surveys" conducted several times by the governing party "discussing" certain issues with the public) sustains the pretense of such inclusionary and deliberative purposes.

However the term populism appeared in related political science literature after the system change, it was not used as a descriptive definition of the current Hungarian political system (Greskovits 1995), some researchers argue that populism appeared in Hungarian party politics and politicians' rhetoric already during the 1990's (Ágh 1998, Skolkay 2000), and some describe 2005 as the "year of populism" (Csigó & Merkovity 2016). Approaching the populist turn from theoretical pillars of Carl Schmitt, the Weberian leader democracy and political constitutionalism, Antal introduces populist tendencies of Fidesz government as the (false) promise of repoliticisation from 2010, because instead of "giving more political influence to people on political decisions, the Hungarian government excludes certain groups from politics" (2017, p. 6).

A comprehensive study investigated Hungarians' party preferences between 2002 and 2012 relying on European Social Survey data. (Enyedi et al. 2014) The research mostly focused on the effect of socio-demographic variables on voting (and therefore forms a reliable reference for the sub-hypotheses related to the independent variables in the analysis), although basic political value scales (left-right, liberal-conservative, moderate-radical) were also included. Through the investigated years Fidesz mobilized more voters from the elderly, less educated, religious and low income social groups, however it was longer the middle class voters in the focus of their political communication. One important finding of the analysis was that although some socio-demographic factors proved to be relevant in terms of party preferences, political ideology was the foremost divide between Hungarian voters. According to the results, Fidesz mobilizes right-wing, conservative and moderate voters most effectively. Earlier results also showed, that the relevance of class voting - and along: class identity - in regards of party preferences in Hungary have reduced since the system change. (Róbert 1999)

Another recent analysis found that previously developed social integration models do not prove to be relevant in terms of predicting party preferences in Hungary, and therefore alternative cluster models were formed to discover political groups (Gerő & Szabó 2017). In the newly formed cluster models the variables of democratic satisfaction, political interest, and the perception of politicians, leaders and certain types of perceived dangers were involved. According to the results a significant rate (68 percent) of Fidesz voters can be described as ‘satisfied rightists’ - this group included those who are most interested at political issues and processes, highly trust the country’s leaders and have positive expectations regarding their future, and they are satisfied with the current democratic system. Furthermore they regard immigration, terrorism and the influence of international capital as greatest threats to the country.

Discovering populist attitudes of Hungarian voters is in early stage yet, because most studies - analogue with the related international literature - focused first on the party level to understand the process of “populisation”. One of the first analyses was recently published, where the most relevant result was that socio-demographic indicators “predict receptivity to populism poorly”, and that it is rather “identity-based fears and nationalist sentiments” instead that explain the political success of Hungarian populism (Krekó et al. 2018). Hungarian populist voters share common historical narratives, which are crucial to their worldview and political preferences: most of them feel as victims of history, being ill-treated by superpowers and second-class citizens by the European Union, and they experienced the loss of their national sovereignty. The fact that many populist parties are in government these days reformulates the expectations about them. It is true for Fidesz supporters (who are the most likely to support populist ideas) that they do not share the anti-elitist worldview like most populists do according to classical political science approach, however they see the world very much in black and white when it comes to the judgement of others. The study introduces the term “tribalism”, which is defined by a “combination of Manichean worldviews and authoritarianism”. However populist parties in government like Fidesz usually do not lack the anti-elitist elements in their rhetoric, they just allude international elites as the centre of their others-blaming communication. Or, as Fidesz did earlier, blame the post-communist elite for the country’s economic and political crisis (Csigó & Merkovity 2016). Accordingly, the populist turn of Fidesz is a relevant aspect which should be considered by interpreting the personal value variables included to the regression analysis. Although there are considerable scientific work exploring Fidesz supporters along socio-demographic and traditional political variables, personal value orientation of them have not been tested comprehensively yet.

This study builds on the following assumptions. (1) Personal values can have relevant explanatory effect on political preferences of Fidesz voters, (2) Fidesz went through a populist turn since 2010, and that (3) this populist turn can be detected among Fidesz supporters along their preferred personal values as well. Accordingly, main research question of this study is, how do personal values of power, security, universalism and benevolence affect voting for Fidesz before and after 2010 and 2012. Moreover it investigates, whether the results can be linked to populist voting attitudes as well.

### **Data and method**

In order to test the effect of personal values on Fidesz voting I pooled the eight waves of European Social Survey data in Hungary between 2002 and 2016. The pooled dataset contains 13132 respondents from which 3952 reported to vote for Fidesz in the last national elections. Thus the dependent variable of my logistic regression models is a dummy variable which equates 1 if the respondent voted for Fidesz in the last national election, and 0 if the respondent voted for another party in the last national election. From the analysis I excluded respondents who did not vote and compare Fidesz voters with voters of other parties, because voting itself can have a significant effect on personal and political values.

Relying on previous research findings, as control variables I included religiosity,<sup>3</sup> if the respondent lives in a farm or village,<sup>4</sup> respondent's age, and the position on left-right scale<sup>5</sup> in the models. Along with the research findings described above, Fidesz supporters are supposed to be more religious, more likely to live in smaller villages, older people are more likely to vote for Fidesz, and they characterize themselves as rather „rightist” on the political left-right scale.

The European Social Survey includes the universal Schwartz personal values in every survey wave and thus makes it possible to analyse their long-term effects, although the longitudinal analysis is not possible since the cross-sectional nature of ESS data. Centered values scores of Schwartz value variables are included in the logistic regression models. (Schwartz, 2003) To verify changes along personal value variables before and after 2010 and 2012, I ran two logistic regression models with interactions. In Model 1, personal values are interacted with a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent filled out the questionnaire

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<sup>3</sup> How religious are you? 0 – not at all, 10 – very religious.

<sup>4</sup> 1 if the respondent lives in a farm or village and 0 otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> Placement on left-right scale. 0 – left, 10 – right.

before or after 2010. The methodology is the same in Model 2, the only difference is that the interacted dummy variable divides respondents by the year 2012. Thus it becomes possible to see, whether the effect of personal values has changed before and after the investigated years.

### *Results*

Table 1. and 2. present research results of logistic regression models. Firstly, important result of the analysis is, that none of the personal values alone show significant effect with Fidesz support. The effect of control variables proved to be as expected, except for age of respondents in Model 2, which show surprisingly significant negative effect to Fidesz vote. Thus, these two models could not strengthen the theory of decreasing effect of social class voting.

As for the interaction terms, we can see the followings. The effect of power does not explain Fidesz voting in any models. In Model 1 security, benevolence and universalism interacted by 2010 have positive effect on Fidesz support, in Model 2 it is only security and benevolence interacted by 2012, which have significant positive effect on Fidesz voting. Relying on the substance of personal values, the models suggest that Fidesz voters regard helping for others and loyalty to friends, furthermore safe surroundings and a strong government more important after the party's 2010 turn.

*Table 1. Model 1: Logistic regression model explaining voting for Fidesz.*

	<b>Exp(B)</b>	<b>S.E.</b>
Power*2010	0,934	(0,079)
Security*2010	1,270 **	(0,093)
Benevolence*2010	1,265 **	(0,105)
Universalism*2010	1,318 **	(0,123)
Power	1,045	(0,053)
Security	0,957	(0,065)
Benevolence	0,976	(0,071)
Universalism	0,905	(0,081)
2010	0,979	(0,102)
Age	0,995 **	(0,002)

Village	1,478 ***	(0,066)
Religiosity	1,104 ***	(0,011)
Left-right scale	1,840 ***	(0,016)
Constant	0,027 ***	(0,152)
Nagelke R Square	0,456	

Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parantheses.

\*\*\* $p < 0,01$ , \*\* $p < 0,05$ , \* $p < 0,1$

Table 2. Model 2: Logistic regression model explaining voting for Fidesz.

	Exp(B)	S.E.
Power*2012	1,020	(0,085)
Security*2012	1,301 ***	(0,097)
Benevolence*2012	1,298 **	(0,111)
Universalism*2012	1,207	(0,130)
Power	1,001	(0,047)
Security	,974	(0,059)
Benevolence	,992	(0,064)
Universalism	,960	(0,074)
2012	1,064	(0,103)
Age	,995 **	(0,002)
Village	1,480 ***	(0,066)
Religiosity	1,105 ***	(0,011)
Left-right scale	1,849 ***	(0,016)
Constant	0,025 ***	(0,149)
Nagelke R Square	0,454	

Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors in parantheses.

\*\*\* $p < 0,01$ , \*\* $p < 0,05$ , \* $p < 0,1$

## Conclusions

My analysis focused on the interrelations between Fidesz support and personal values. I tested the effect of four personal values (power, security, benevolence and universalism) to see whether they explain support for Fidesz more effectively after 2010 and 2012, since the party turned to represent populist politics and rhetoric. Logistic regression models showed significant change in the effect of security and benevolence in both years, but did not prove that of power and universalism. So Fidesz supporters turned to consider helping, loyalty, safe surroundings and strong government more important since Fidesz gained power after 2010. However the left-right scale is included as control variable, the significant effect of benevolence can be surprising, as most related literature connects this personal value more to the political left. Although, helping and loyalty might mean a tighter relation to the closest social circles and can be exclusionary with minorities and other foreign groups. The need for a stronger government is along with previous results showing that Fidesz supporters are not anti-elitist in general, as they rather oppose international elites and not those governing the country. I expected a negative significant effect with universalism, because this personal value could be interpreted as the one which most opposes populist politics, namely the idea of a homogenized, anti-pluralistic social order. The same stands for the personal value of power, where a negative effect would have meant the anti-elitism of respondents.

Although my argumentation and analysis could open platforms for further researches, it has its limitations as well of course. I included those personal values which (1) show consistent correlation with political preferences according to related literature, (2) show balance between previous findings on left- and right-wing party choice, (3) could have an interpretation along standardized populism attitude variables as well. However, there might be other relevant personal values explaining Fidesz support as well. Moreover, the effect of trust in political institutions and attitude towards immigration should be tested, as these variables are key to understand populist attitudes. The analysis of Schwartz values have not been extended yet to the relation between personal values and populist attitudes, although it can be assumed that the universal approach of populist attitude may correlate with particular universal personal value variables, as many political value orientation do. These will be the next steps of my future analysis.

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## Appendix

<b>Personal value</b>	<b>ESS sample item</b>
Universalism	Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities
	Important to understand different people
	Important to care for nature and environment
Benevolence	Important to help people and care for others well-being
	Important to be loyal to friends and devote to people close
Tradition	Important to be humble and modest, not draw attention
	Important to follow rules and customs
Conformity	Important to do what is told and follow rules
	Important to behave properly
Power	Important to be rich, have money and expensive things
	Important to get respect from others
Achievement	Important to show abilities and be admired
	Important to be successful and that people recognize achievements
Hedonism	Important to seek fun and things that give pleasure
	Important to have a good time
Stimulation	Important to try new and different things in life
	Important to seek adventures and have an exciting life
Self-Direction	Important to think new ideas and being creative
	Important to make own decisions and be free
Security	Important to live in secure and safe surroundings
	Important that government is strong and ensures safety