Populist counterframing of the climate movement: The case of the Hungarian incumbent right

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Abstract

The paper's aim is to understand how the populist right in Hungary answered the challenge of the climate movement, which became a significant issue in the year 2019. The paper answers the research question whether the Hungarian populist right's narrative reactions differed from non-incumbent populist parties and movements, and to what extent the populist discourse defined these reactions. The paper analyses the content of the conservative, nationally circulated daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* and the government's press releases between the 2018 general election and November 2020, the onset of the second wave of the Covid-19 in Hungary. The analyses of the identified frames (N = 171) demonstrate that the climate movement was interpreted as the new left, and political interests were suspected of supporting the movement in the background. The accusation of serving hidden political and economic interests and being a new form of the political left served the effort to discredit the climate movement. The results also indicate that the narrative reaction of the Hungarian populist right followed the general communication and policy agenda of the Hungarian government, rather than the inherent discursive patterns of populism. It could be rightly assumed that this interrelation is the consequence of the incumbency and strong centralization of the populist right in Hungary.

Keywords: climate change; climate movement; climate denial; populism; frame analysis; Hungary; Fidesz

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2019, climate change became a major issue in Hungary, and a regular topic on the media agenda in different policy contexts in accordance with a generally in-

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creased climate awareness in Europe. 'Fridays for Future' held its first major protest in Budapest before the 2019 European Parliament elections. Due to the salience of the issue, politicians of the ruling Fidesz party, as well as right-wing commentators and pundits, reacted to climate change, yet in a variety of ways, from denying climate change to delegitimizing climate activists to reframing the issue in Christian, conservationist terms.

Following Viktor Orbán's 2014 speech, in which he described the post-2010 regime as an 'illiberal democracy', Hungarian politics has received a high level of international academic attention. The political system of Hungary, among other things, has become part of various debates on the conceptualization of populism. However, the present paper does not aim at describing the substantive debates around populism but will start from its basic characteristic of dividing societies into two distinct groups, namely the 'corrupt elite' and the 'pure people' (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). In this sense, populism is a strategy, a style, and a method; this framework allows populist politicians to adapt flexibly to changes in the political agenda. One such change in 2018–2019 was the prominent issue of climate change.

Since environmental politics in Hungary can be traced back to the anti-communist green movement of the 1980s, in which right-wing activists were also involved, environmental protection could have been a permanent feature of a conservative worldview, i.e. a proactive right-wing initiative or reaction to climate protection. In contrast, Fidesz politicians and opinion leaders have focused on interpreting the contemporary climate movement as a liberal, globalist, Western initiative. The paper investigates the counterframing of the climate movement by opinion leaders close to the government and the government itself. The paper analyses the frames of op-eds of a pro-government daily newspaper and climate change related press releases by the government between the 2018 general election and beginning the second wave of Covid-19 in Hungary. It aims to answer the question, what are the specific traits of the Hungarian populist right's counterframing of the climate issue? Also, we look into how it differs from the counterframing of other populist right-wing parties and movements in Europe and the USA. In doing so, the paper applies the theoretical framework and method of frame analysis in social movement studies and reviews populism in Hungary in the next sections. First the method of the inquiry will be presented.

2. Framing and counter-framing: A theoretical framework

Social movements can reach and mobilize their potential supporters most effectively through the media. In doing so, they develop their own coherent system of interpretations of their environment, their opponents, their goals and their role. Frames are interpretative schemas (Goffman, 1974) that help the movement to interpret and explain its environment, identify opponents and allies, and set goals. As the least institutionalized actors in politics, social movements do not have the organizational and ideological background of political parties. The profile of a movement is linked to a well-defined issue or conflict which, although it may be linked to a single set of values, does not have to develop

a closed, coherent ideology that affects all aspects of life in order to achieve its goal, but rather has to create a context of meaning for itself in which the mobilization and collective action necessary to achieve it can take place. The 'frame' is thus fundamentally action-oriented in its function. Snow and Benford (2000) distinguish three main types of frames. In their typology, they speak of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames of interpretation. The diagnosing frame is concerned with the identification of problems, but it is also where the naming of opponents takes place. The prognostic frame answers the question 'what to do?'; it covers the strategy and action plan of the movement, and the motivational interpretative frame encourages collective action. Frames also define the protagonists and antagonists of a given conflict. These roles can have a particular role in the mobilization and counter-mobilization of a movement and its adversaries as collective identities can be attached to them during the framing process (Benford, 2022).

Nevertheless, as Benford noted it (1993), opponents of a movement might counter the movement's frames by discrediting, challenging them. This so-called counterframing can be initiated by movements against the elite's frames, or by the elite against the movement's frames. In the case of environmentalism, the latter occurs in most cases; however, some movements, like the radical right, also aim to construct counterframes against environmentalists. Frames are basically publicly made interpretations, which allow per se the creation of counterframes. Nevertheless, as social movements' activity has a peculiar dramatic character, counterframes are not left unanswered, but movement actors reframe their original interpretations (Benford 2016). The framing, counterframing, reframing processes create a 'frame contest' in the public political arena, where the opposing parties are the social movements and their opponents (Ryan, 1991).

In the case of the climate change movement, a counterframe, namely climate denial, puts the very substance of the movement, anthropogenic climate change, into question. Hence, climate denial refers to the underestimation of the effects of climate change and denying the interrelation between climate change and human activities. It is predominantly an American phenomenon, where the denial industry involves fossil fuel companies, conservative think tanks and contrarian scientists (Dunlap & McCright, 2011). As the cutback in environmental protection during the Reagan Administration caused a growing public concern for the environment (Dunlap, 1987), climate denial was part of a new strategy by conservatives, which called into question not the protection of the environment itself but the evidence of environmental deterioration (Dunlap & McCright, 2011). As Jacques et al. (2008) noted, based on a thorough review of the literature on climate denial, the basic idea of it is deep anthropocentric epistemology, according to which human societies can be detached from nature. Climate denial supports the conservative concept of economic deregulation and surplus consumption by promoting an optimistic opinion on modernity and economic progress. Climate denial also claims that climate science is biased by the political left (hence 'junk science'), while climate denialists themselves are 'speaking truth to power'.

While in the USA climate denial can be connected to modernist, free-market political conservatism, in Europe radical right-wing parties have a slightly different environmental agenda. Gemenis and his colleagues (2012) studied the party manifestos of 13 populist radical right-wing parties in 12 western and southern European countries. They found

that most populist radical right-wing parties disagree with introducing GM crops into European agriculture, most of them are also against green taxes, but they are split on the issue of nuclear energy. While many European populist radical right-wing parties do not share the optimism of American conservatives in modernism and progress when it comes to GMOs or nuclear energy, most of them also deny the human factor of climate change and contradict environmental protection with economic development.

Some parties interlink environmentalism with the rejection of immigration, and a nationalist framing of energy independence is also a typical feature of European radical right-wing parties. A detailed comparative study of the British National Party and the Danish People's Party demonstrated a general contradiction of the environmental agenda of European populist radical right-wing populist parties (Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015). Both parties expressed their concerns for an aestheticized countryside, which is an authentic source of national identity. At the same time, however, the parties associated international cooperation on combating climate change as a threat to national sovereignty. Instead, they promoted energy independence and self-sufficiency, which could protect national sovereignty. As another study found, this idealization of the natural homeland and self-sufficiency is a common element of the populist radical right-wing narrative in Europe (Forchtner, 2019). Climate denial and climate change scepticism is not only the matter of party narratives but also reflected in voters' attitudes. In western European countries, left-wing voters tend to accept the threat of climate change and support policies which mitigate them, although in the new member states of the EU in East Central Europe such a correlation could not be found (McCright et al., 2016).

The green sensibility and public policy focus of right-wing populist parties in other European countries is more fragmented by comparison. An analysis of right-wing populist parties in Denmark, Sweden and Finland distinguished between climate change deniers, climate nationalists and climate conservatives in the Nordic countries (Vihma et al., 2020). Deniers do not see the responsibility of human actors in ecological processes. This manifests itself in underestimating the impacts of climate change and denying the link between climate change and human activity – stressing that the process of climate change is not scientifically proven. In political terms, it is seen as a conspiracy of the liberal elite, extending it to the global collaboration of liberals. Climate nationalists acknowledge the process of climate change and accept human factors as an explanation, but do not see national or EU action as the primary solution. Their logic is that their countries are responsible for a fraction of global emissions compared to China or the US, and therefore their own nation state's industry is less polluting than others. They accept the scientific claims, but also stress the uncertainties, without denying the responsibility of human activity. They interpret climate challenges realistically and, like climate conservatives, reject alarmist discourse. Climate conservatives differ from climate nationalists in that they believe that current new environmentally conscious technological innovations can address the changes and that there is a role for the national and EU levels to play, but only to the extent that this is done at minimum cost to nation state economies and national sovereignty (Vihma et al., 2020).

Beyond party politics similar topics and narratives can be discovered, as analysis of the German far right's climate change communication demonstrated (Forchtner et al.,

2018). Here we find anti-science sentiments, accusation of bias in the mainstream media, juxtaposition of climate policies with 'the globalist regime', interpretation of green politics as the new left, and claims that ordinary people will bear the costs of environmental policies. This latter recurring topos is a basic element of populist politics itself, which is basically the antagonization of the corrupt elite and the people. As Lockwood (2018) noted, right-wing populists are tendentiously sceptical about climate change, of which he found a structural and an ideological explanation. The structuralist approach suggests that environmental policies are threatening to the economic security of the social base of right-wing populism, namely the male working class, hence the sceptical stance. According to the ideological explanation – which Lockwood finds more convincing – populists see environmentalism as a liberal, cosmopolitan concept and the scientific reasoning is also alien to populist rhetoric. Nevertheless, climate change denial fits into an older tradition of populist rejectionism (Brown, 2014). Empirical evidence confirmed this interrelation of populist attitudes and climate scepticism among UK voters (Huber, 2020).

3. The Hungarian populist right at the crossroads of the climate crisis

The conceptualization debates on populism in Hungary provide a framework for the diverse use of the term (Böcskei, 2021). As indicated above, in the present study we start from a minimalist definition of populism, considering as its main characteristics political thinking in the rhetorical category of we-them (political), anti-elitism and the linguistic tools of vox populi. It should be noted that, since 2006, the way in which the concept of 'elite' has been given content by the governing right in Hungary has undergone a significant change. Whereas before 2010 it was predominantly the ruling left-liberal parties and, according to the right, the neoliberal economic elite associated with them, now the elite involves international financial institutions, senior EU bodies and officials, and transnational NGOs, independently from their agenda. The governing right regards local NGOs as allies of the 'green lobby' of the European Union, organizations which seek to meet the current lifestyle needs of a narrow economic and cultural elite (Kristóf, 2021), thus neglecting the 'real problems' of Hungarian society.

For example, in his article 'Conservative responses to the ecological crisis', published in the journal *Kommentár,* which presents the political thinking of the incumbent right in Hungary at a higher level of abstraction than traditional media content, Mihály Uri Dénes put it this way at the beginning of 2020: 'In its avant-garde fervor, the left often claims the right to insist that the environmental crisis was first called to attention by their commentators (…) The "fight against climate change" that has become a regular feature of recent years provides a generational sense and political identity for participants imagining the "fight against climate change" according to the scenarios of progressive (techno)social (and not a little leftist/revolutionary) utopias. This goal is also likely to precede environmental protection itself, insofar as the actionism characteristic of such demonstrations (see various performances such as the "dying-in") transforms the protection of nature into

a spectacle' (Uri, 2020, pp. 43–44). This position, in its more theoretical approach, is an exception in the contemporary Hungarian right-wing public sphere, although it also cites the anti-utopian, 'social engineering' characteristics of the green issue. The quote clearly illustrates how environmental issues are localized in the critique of a certain elite in Hungarian right-wing thinking. As the discourse analysis part of the paper demonstrates, the basic characteristic of populism, which interprets politics in terms of 'us and them', where 'us' embraces the people on whom 'they' (in this case international green organizations and lobbies) want to impose an agenda and ideology from outside, is well established in the media framing of the Hungarian right.

4. The environmental character of the governing populist Hungarian right

Before analysing the counterframing of the populist right in Hungary, it is necessary to present the environmental character of the Hungarian populist right governing after 2010, especially since we are looking at a governing force with strong ideological ambitions. However, it is typical that in its public policy making it represents heterodox ideas as well as orthodox ones, and that it uses pragmatism instead of deductive thinking. For the Fidesz-KDNP government, in the spirit of public policy tinkering, ideas are not so much 'nets' as 'toolboxes' from which it selects the ideologically appropriate ones (Körösényi et al., 2020, p. 176). The latter means that the government is not bound to a single public policy paradigm but conceives of public policy thinking and making in terms of changing circumstances and political utility. It acts within a flexible ideological framework, i.e. it also implements socially left-wing measures, for example as a conservative government. Despite its critique of neoliberalism, the ruling party's parliamentary group takes the initiative in adopting orthodox pro-market economic policy decisions and the government imposes special taxes on multinational capital, which in other cases enjoys tax advantages. In a similar way, the organization of the state is characterized by a strong centralization process in some areas and decentralized, parallel organizational structures in others. In the spirit of public policy tinkering, it borrows repeatedly from other ideologies and different conceptions of governance. In this case, this means acknowledging environmental issues and challenges, while adapting the solutions to the government's emphasis on nation state sovereignty and climate-conservative public policy.

After the Fidesz party won the 2010 election with a two-thirds supermajority, the new right-wing government reshuffled the ministerial structure to place green issues under the Ministry of Agricultural Policy. As a result, the Ministry of Environment was abolished as an independent institution in 2010. This move can be interpreted primarily as intended to relegate this issue to the background, since for Fidesz sustainable development cannot be understood within the framework of 'good governance' (Fodor & Stumpf, 2008) but is seen primarily as an obstacle. The implementation of green standards and environmental values in Hungary has been reduced, largely by abolishing or rendering impotent the institutions that had previously represented them.

An analysis by Stella Schaller and Alexander Carius (2019), looking at a number of dimensions, places Fidesz among the affirmative right-wing parties on the climate crisis, which acknowledges the claims and findings of science. Hungary's energy sector is less carbon-intensive, with a higher share of natural gas, oil and nuclear in the energy mix, so Hungary's national emissions are below the EU average. Fidesz has been an active supporter of the Paris Agreement, while taking advantage of its less ambitious regulatory policy at home. It should also be noted, however, that János Áder, the President of Hungary between 2012 and 2022, made environmental protection, especially water protection and safety, part of his political agenda. There are few examples where the issue has been taken up at the level of the prime minister, such as when Viktor Orbán announced at a press conference in January 2020 that the Hungarian government would develop a climate change action plan (2015–2022 miniszterelnok, 2020).

Unlike the governing right, that is Fidesz, in Hungary the Jobbik party was devoted to environmental protection and affirmed responsibility towards future generations in their 2013 programme (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2013). In Jobbik's manifestos from the early 2010s, in addition to the idealization of the national landscape, the dichotomy of global capitalism as a destructive, inhuman force and of natural local communities can be observed (Kyriazi, 2019). Nevertheless, anti-globalization in the radical right was already represented by the MIÉP party in the early 2000s (Rensmann, 2011). Environmental engagement beyond romantic nationalism is rooted in the historic development of environmentalism in Hungary. The mainstream environmentalist movement in Hungary included right wing, conservative streams as well, as originally environmentalism was an anti-communist catch-all movement before the democratic transition. In communist regimes the protection of the environment as part of 'the good life' had a legitimizing function (Berg, 1999), moreover as a soft issue it did not directly threaten the basis of the system, like criticism of the presence of Soviet troops for instance. The environmental, hiking and natural conservationist movement became a forum for dissidents. This was true for the most important environmental movement in Hungary, the Danube Circle, which protested against the planned Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam and hydroelectric power plant. The activists of the Danube movement later entered different parties including the right (Hajba, 1994).

Based on a literature review of right-wing climate change denial, and taking into account the Hungarian context, we examine the elements of right-wing counter-framing of the climate movement, such as the juxtaposition of climate change policies with the economic interests of 'ordinary people' and the needs of families. Other frames may include criticism of or even opposition to the West, and an emphasis on national sovereignty in the face of global climate change risks. In the context of energy policy, self-sufficiency and support for the use of nuclear energy could be framed. The discourse analysis will also examine whether the idealization of the domestic landscape and environment and references to Christianity also appear in right-wing framing.

5. Method and data

The right-wing interpretative frames on the climate movement were examined through content analysis. Content and frame analysis of newspaper data is an established method of research on climate change coverage in communication studies (Boykoff, 2007; Metag, 2016; Schäfer & Saffron, 2017). While in communication studies the method is applied in order to understand how certain issues, like climate change, are covered by the media, in this paper the content analysis was used to identify the frames, i.e. interpretative schematas, of the populist right in Hungary on climate change. For this reason, a rigorous, closed code book could not be used during the coding process, as some frames were not previously known even if the literature review gave some hints. On the basis of the literature review (Gemenis et al., 2012; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2015; Forchtner et al., 2018; Lockwood, 2018; Forchtner, 2019), 18 frame claims were defined in advance, yet six of them did not appear in the corpus (see appendix). The frames have been identified through these claims. In addition to the substance of the frame's claim, the type (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational), the protagonists and antagonists of the frames, and metadata, that is the publishing date, the source and the title of the article were coded.

To gain a comprehensive image of the populist right's narrative on climate change in Hungary, the government's direct communication and right-wing opinion articles were analysed. The reason for including only opinion articles in the analysis was the focus on the framing not by journalists, but by right wing opinion leaders. For this purpose, the sources of articles were the Hungarian government's central site for press releases, kormany.hu, and the online version of the daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*, Magyar Nemzet Online (mno.hu). After legal limitations were removed in 2010, the concentration of Hungarian media ownership increased. After 2010 investors with close connections to the government bought up media outlets, who later gave the ownership to the media conglomerate KESMA (Central European Press and Media Foundation) without compensation. KESMA has a portfolio of 476 media brands, and a share of 39.6% of the income in the political segment of the media market according to yearly income (Urban, 2022). Since September 2018, *Magyar Nemzet* has belonged to KESMA, which is the only countrywide circulated, daily political newspaper in the portfolio. While not every opinion article was written by self-identified right wing opinion leaders, it can be reasonably presumed that the editors' policy on opinion articles reflect the mainstream right wing political agenda in Hungary. The corpus of the content analysis consists of articles from the day after the 2018 general election (9 April) and 1 November 2020, the onset of the second wave of Covid-19 in Hungary, which had a general demobilizing effect on political participation due to the lockdown measures and drastically changed the political agenda.

On both sites the search term 'climate' was used to find relevant articles, and on mno.hu the results were narrowed down to op-eds. These opinion articles are also published in the print version of *Magyar Nemzet*. The articles were coded manually by one coder, the first author. If one frame's claim did not fit into a previously defined one, a new category was created. Intracoder reliability was ensured by the code book and by the revision of

the frames after the coding process, when some frames were merged into others. During the analysis 29 different frames (N=122) were identified in 97 articles on mno.hu and 15 frames (N=49) in 76 articles on kormany.hu. On mno.hu the quantity of frames for 2019 is 78 and 44 for 2020. On kormany.hu the frequency is one in 2018, 14 in 2019, and 34 in 2020. For the government, climate change appeared earlier as a policy issue, yet opinion leaders gave a political interpretation more rapidly, and reacted faster to the challenge set by the climate movement, than the government. Benevolent parties of the climate conflict were identified as protagonists, while antagonists were those whose actions are harmful. Diagnostic frames were those which aimed to make the conflict easier to understand, to shed light on the complex interrelations and interests. Motivation frames encouraged action, while prognostic frames offered a direction for the action.

6. Results of the content analysis

Most of the frames in *Magyar Nemzet* were diagnostic, hence they gave an interpretation of current events for the readers, identifying the adversaries and allies, while on kormany.hu the proportion of prognostic frames were much higher. Prognostic frames propose solutions to the problem, which in case of kormany.hu were the environmental policies, current measures, and future plans of the government (Table 1).

Table 1: Number and type of frames (N=171).			
	diagnostic	motivation	prognostic
mno.hu	111	0	11
kormany.hu	25	2	22
Source: The author.			

In the op-eds of *Magyar Nemzet* 14 protagonists and 15 antagonists could be identified (Table 2). The most frequent protagonist was the Hungarian government and equivalents, like the Fidesz party or the nation of Hungary. Humankind as a general entity occurred six times as a protagonist, but also four times as antagonist. In the first case it was an actor possibly protecting nature, while in the latter case short-sighted human nature could be blamed for pollution of the environment.

Senior citizens, families, and also the conservative political community were recurrent protagonists. While the reference to left-behind people is a standard feature of populist regimes, left-behind people were only once referred to as protagonists in the op-eds of *Magyar Nemzet*. The reference to 'local communities' appeared only once as well, yet they could be seen as a common key actor for environmentalists and the political right. The most common antagonist was the political left, liberals and the Hungarian opposition. This category included the European Left and liberals, as well. The second-most recurring antagonist in the op-ed articles was the global elite. While George Soros has been a prominent negative figure of Hungarian government campaigns since the 2015 refugee crisis, he

is only mentioned three times, mostly in conjunction with the global elite. Nevertheless, he was not the only specific person mentioned as an antagonist. Greta Thunberg, as the face of the climate movement, was also identified as an antagonist by right-wing opinion leaders. Scientists were mentioned seven times as antagonists, which demonstrates scepticism vis-á-vis climate science and science in general.

Table 2: Frame actors in the *Magyar Nemzet* daily newspaper (N=131).			
Protagonist	Frequency of appearance	Antagonist	Frequency of appearance
Fidesz, government, Hungary	19	leftists, liberals, opposition	31
humanity	6	global elite	10
senior citizens	5	environmental activists, climate movement	8
families	5	scientists	7
national conservatives, patriots	4	Greta Thunberg	6
sovereigntists	2	humanity, human nature	4
Europe, European politics	2	George Soros	3
sober-minded, ordinary people	2	consumer culture	2
Balkan countries	1	EU	2
Christians	1	immigrants	2
firms, companies	1	NGOs	2
local communities	1	communists	1
Nature	1	EPP	1
		German greens	1
		government	1
Source: The author.			

In the case of kormany.hu, more protagonists could be identified in the frame analysis as antagonists (Table 3). The analysed press releases focused on solutions and emphasized the competence of the government to act, rather than merely blaming antagonists. Here the Hungarian government was the most recurrent protagonist and the opposition the most frequent antagonist.

Table 3: Frame actors on kormany.hu (N=24).			
Protagonist	Frequency of frames	Antagonist	Frequency of frames
Fidesz, government, Hungary	14	opposition	3
future generations	2	Western, old EU member states	2
new EU member states	2		
sober-minded, ordinary people	1		
Source: The author.			

The frame concepts of right-wing opinion leaders could be classified into five broad categories (Table 4). To the most frequent category contained those claiming that the climate movement is politically biased (41). The most frequently recurring frame concept suggests that there is hysteria around climate change, which is amplified by political interests. This interpretation does not deny climate change, but surmises hidden political actors behind the climate movement. These actors, as Table 2 demonstrates, are liberal, left-wing political forces.

The second-most frequent frame in this category is more explicit in this matter, as it suggests that the climate movement is the new Left, or, as it is said, it is like a watermelon, green on the outside but red on the inside. Not only is the climate movement biased according to the op-eds of *Magyar Nemzet*, but climate science as well – a claim that appears in the American conservative narrative as well. In the category 'Antagonisms' can be found 27 frame concepts altogether. These highlight the conflict of the climate movement and global climate protection measures with conservative, right-wing values. Such a value is national sovereignty, which is contradicted by global climate protection regimes. Conservative pundits contrasted the climate movement with families as well, which was a reaction to the rather marginal opinion that having less or no children helps decrease one's ecological footprint. The op-eds of *Magyar Nemzet* also stressed the possible generational discord between the climate movement and senior citizens. Here climate activists were depicted as irresponsible, childish, and ungrateful towards previous generations. Among the antagonisms appear two frame concepts on the comparison of the local and global, which is part of the traditional narrative of the global justice and environmental movements.

The third category of frame concepts focused on the origins of climate change and the characteristics of climate protection, like those stating that climate change is a real problem (23). However, in most cases the real problem frame is followed by a frame about the political bias of the climate movement. As was assumed based on the literature review, opinion articles referred to the Christian roots of environmentalism. While the environmental movement in Hungary was an anti-communist catch-all movement before the democratic transition, there was only one frame, which stated that environmental protection is a right-wing issue. Among the frame concepts on policies (20), seven claimed that nuclear energy is climate friendly, while one frame concept in an article by an opposition MP stated the opposite. Other claims in this category emphasized the role of developed and polluter countries, which implies a certain anti-Westernism. Furthermore, there is also a reference to Christianity and families among policies. The last category of frames in the op-eds printed in *Magyar Nemzet* suggested that the climate movement lacks credibility (11). The American conservatives' 'junk science' narrative appears here, and also the suggestion that the climate movement serves economic interests. It is also said that the climate movement is overreacting the problem. Greta Thunberg's credibility is called into question by claiming that she is exploited by her family.

Table 4: Frame concepts, claims in the *Magyar Nemzet* (N=122).	
Categories of frames	Number of frames
The climate movement is politically biased	41
Opponents	27
Causes of climate change, features of climate protection	23
Policies	20
The climate movement is discredited	11
Source: The author.	

The vast majority of the government's frames on kormany.hu are about policies; nevertheless the 'real problem' and the 'climate hysteria' claims are present here as well. The government frequently stresses in its press releases that climate protection should not be pursued at the expense of poorer countries, which means that more developed, richer countries should contribute more to the costs of climate protection. The results demonstrate that the government's policy-related frames aim to fit the issue of climate change into the government's general political agenda. That is why the issues of nuclear energy as climate friendly and economic growth appear among the frames. Also, families and future generations, i.e. future generations, are key reference points of policy making. By stating that climate change can be combated with actions and not with words, the government emphasizes the importance of political action, and hence underlines its own competence to act, which is contradicted by the verbal and protest action of the climate movement and the opposition. Reference to the natural environment of the homeland appears only once here as the Carpathian basin's climate adaptive nature is acknowledged. Since the Carpathian basin was the geological space of the Hungarian Kingdom, this concept also has a nationalist connotation.

Table 5: Frame concepts, claims on kormany.hu (N=49).	
Frames	Number of frames
Policies	39
Causes of climate change, features of climate protection	7
The climate movement is politically biased	3
Source: The author.	

7. Conclusions

In the year 2019 climate change, global warming suddenly became a defining political issue in Hungary. While environmentalism in Hungary has an anti-communist, rightwing tradition as well, the populist right-wing Orbán government responded with its 'Climate protection action plan' only at the beginning of 2020. Nevertheless, opinion leaders and pundits of the populist right in Hungary reacted already in 2019. The paper investigated

the counterframing of the populist right in Hungary with the help of a frame analysis of op-eds in the major conservative, right-wing daily newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* and the press releases of the government's central communication site kormany.hu. The inquiry demonstrated that the Hungarian populist right had a similar agenda on climate change as the West European right-wing populist parties and movements since the climate movement was interpreted as the new Left and political interests have been suspected in the background of the movement. The accusation of serving hidden political and economic interests and being a new form of the political Left served to discredit the climate movement. At the same time, unlike some American conservatives, neither Hungarian right-wing pundits nor the government denied the fact of climate change.

The frames used in the opinion articles also highlighted the antagonisms between the climate movement and certain social groups and political concepts. This included senior citizens, families, and national sovereignty. The latter two are cornerstones of the Fidesz government's political agenda. When it comes to policies, the most important issue was the climate friendliness of nuclear power both in *Magyar Nemzet* and on kormany.hu. These frames are in accord with the government's agreement with Russia to expand the Paks Nuclear Power Plant. The other relevant policy-related frame claimed that climate protection should not be realized at the expense of poor countries or Hungarian families, which had a certain anti-Western connotation. The Hungarian government also contrasted its own ability to take political action and the verbal, protest action of the climate movement and the Hungarian opposition. Christianism, the idealization of nature in the homeland, and the explicit reference to 'left-behind' people were present but not significant in the reaction to the climate movement. The main protagonists were the Fidesz party and the Hungarian government, while the main antagonists were the liberal and left-wing parties, the Hungarian opposition, and the global elite. As specific persons of George Soros and Greta Thunberg were mentioned as antagonists.

The results indicate that the narrative reaction of the Hungarian populist right followed the general communication and policy agenda of the Hungarian government, rather than the inherent discursive patterns of populism. The main function of right-wing pundits' framing was to diagnose the climate movement, hence, to interpret and fit that phenomenon into the wider narrative of the Fidesz party and of the Hungarian government. As research indicates (Böcskei & Szabó, 2022), there is a consensus in the Hungarian society about the relevance of the climate change issue, which even Fidesz voters deem as an immediate problem. Consequently, denying climate change would contradict voters' attitudes. In many respects the diagnosis of right-wing pundits was in accordance with the general communication of the incumbent right in Hungary, whether it was about antagonists (George Soros, the global elite) or solutions (application of nuclear energy, rich countries should pay for their pollution). It could be assumed that this interrelation was the consequence of the incumbency and the strong centralization of the populist right in Hungary. The Hungarian incumbent right can be classified as climate nationalist based on the literature (Vihma et al., 2020). The right-wing pundits do not deny climate change, yet they deem international climate protection regimes as a threat to national sovereignty, as the counterframing of the climate movement demonstrates. Other aspects of climate protection are also seen as politically biased, used by the international Left to promote

their agenda. Hence, the Hungarian populist right's climate scepticism is rather ideological than structural (Lockwood, 2018), as environmentalism is perceived as being liberal, cosmopolitan. The economic dimension is apparent not on the individual level, but within the political community, as the government and pundits also emphasized the idea of the responsibility of polluting countries of bearing the costs of climate protection.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: The 18 frame concepts and claims deducted from the literature review
Christianity, constructivism
climate science is biased by the political Left
communism
conflict between environmental protection and economic development*
denying the human factor of climate change
disagree with introducing GM crops*
East vs. West
economic deregulation*
energy independence, self-sufficiency
global capitalism as a destructive, inhuman force*
global climate regime vs. national sovereignty
human societies can be detached from nature
idealization of the homeland's natural landscape*
immigration
nuclear energy
optimistic opinion on modernity and economic progress
ordinary people will bear the costs of environmental policies
speaking truth to power*
* the frame did not appear in the corpus
Source: The author. Source: The author.

Appendix 2: The detailed frames of *Magyar Nemzet*	
Frames	**Number of frames**
The climate movement is politically biased	41
'climate hysteria' – political exploitation of a real problem	23
the climate movement is the new Left	16
climate science is biased towards the political left	2
Policies	20
nuclear power is climate-friendly	7
polluters should pay	3
energy independence, self-sufficiency	2
a lifestyle change is needed	2
nuclear power is not climate-friendly	1
economic incentives should be introduced	1
Hungary is doing well in the fight against climate change	1
family and Christianity support climate policy	1
an optimistic view on science	1
pessimistic view of modernity and economic development	1
Opponents	27

the global climate regime limits national sovereignty	9
the anti-family and anti-ageing climate movement	8
globalization versus localism	2
climate change is increasing migration	2
human societies cannot be separated from nature	1
Causes of climate change, features of climate protection	23
real problem	17
Christianity is essentially environmentalist	3
climate change is nature's immune response	1
denial of the human factor in climate change	1
the environment is a right-wing issue	1
The climate movement is discredited	11
false science	3
the climate movement is overreacting	2
Greta Thunberg is exploited by her family	2
climate change is a middle-class problem	2
'climate business'	1
environmentalism stems from a guilty conscience	1

Source: The author.

Appendix 3: The detailed frames of kormany.hu

Frames	Number of frames
Policies	39
climate protection should not be achieved at the expense of poorer countries	7
nuclear power is climate-friendly	5
fighting climate change with action, not words	4
climate protection and economic growth are compatible	4
climate protection cannot be achieved at the expense of families	4
energy independence, self-sufficiency	3
Hungary is doing well in the fight against climate change	3
fight against climate change so future generations can inherit a better Hungary	2
make polluters pay	2
combating climate change requires broad social cooperation	2
the green economy as an opportunity	1
a safe, green environment for families	1
the Carpathian Basin can adapt to climate change through appropriate policy planning	1
Causes of climate change, features of climate protection	7
real problem	7
The climate movement is politically biased	3
'climate hysteria' – political exploitation of a real problem	3

Source: The author.