

Measures against right-wing extremism in an illiberal populist country: The case of Hungary

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Abstract: *The paper focuses on the question of what it means both conceptually and practically to talk about counter right-wing extremism (RWE) measures in an illiberal populist regime while the dominant political ideology or narratives are very close to those of right-wing extremists. Through a qualitative analysis of policies in the Hungarian context, the paper explores both the political and the policy scene to understand how the political context and policies identified as counter-RWE measures interact. Relying on the categorisation of counter-measures, different sets of policies are scrutinised: legal, security, anti-terrorism, and public order measures including education, prevention, exit, deterrence, training, and communication programmes. It was concluded that there is a lack of government strategy and policies for countering RWE including almost all relevant policy fields. It was also observed that hate crime incidents have increased under the illiberal regime while at the same time previously strong extremist militant activities have declined. However, as it is argued, it is not due to effective policies but the manipulating political strategy of the incumbent party.*

Keywords: *countering right wing extremism, right wing extremism, right wing terrorism, illiberal regime, hate crime, radicalisation*

I. Introduction

In our paper, we problematise how an illiberal regime with a populist core (Buzogány 2017) addresses right-wing extremism (RWE), and whether it makes any conceptual or practical sense to talk about counter right-wing extremism

measures in such regimes. Although a much-debated concept associated with multiple understandings, RWE in essence involves acts of violence committed by extremists who hate stigmatised groups, and believe in the superiority of the in-group and the need for the securitisation of certain groups and issues (Merkl – Weinberg 2003; Koehler 2016; Carter 2018; Perry – Scrivens 2021). These views that are held by extremists in many ways overlap with the mainstream political rhetoric of the ruling elite in illiberal regimes.

It has been widely addressed how such regimes borrow radical far-right narratives and even adopt their policies (Bozóki 2017; Brown et al. 2021; Wondreys 2020). While taking over narratives and policies and instrumentalising them for their own interests, the approach of illiberal populist regimes to the problem of violent attacks committed by extremists is not unambiguous. While implementing some legal repression of the most extremist actors and groups and relying on such policies may be characteristic of illiberal populist regimes (Ramalingam 2014), tolerating or emboldening certain forms of extremist violence when they are in the interest of the ruling elite can also be an attribute of the former (Perry – Scrivens 2021). These two approaches are two sides of the same coin: one involves the implementation of policies that promote security measures in the form of legal instruments that target violent extremist actions, while the other creates an extremist, securitised political environment in which violence is tolerated.

Illiberal populist regimes have been studied from different perspectives in various disciplines (Pappas 2014; Buzogány 2017; Scheiring – Szombati 2020; Zeller – Vidra 2021). However, there is a scarcity of focus on how these regimes tackle right-wing extremists whose political ideology is very close to theirs. From another perspective, the literature on countering RWE concentrates mainly on liberal democratic regimes where stable democratic institutions are a guarantee that extremist ideas and groups are persecuted, and policies aimed at preventing radicalisation or deradicalising and reintegrating extremists are implemented (Pedahzur 2015; Hardy 2019).

Considering the lack of focus on the nexus of RWE and illiberal populist regimes in the literature, we first explore the current approaches to RWE with an emphasis on how it is dealt with in illiberal populist contexts. Our aim is then to investigate both the political and the policy scene to increase understanding of how the political context and counter-RWE legal and policy measures interact in the case of Hungary. Therefore, the political scene is explored to highlight how extremism and securitisation are present in mainstream politics and to identify what political tactics are used in relation to the far right with the purpose of manipulating it in the interest of the incumbent populist party. A mapping of different RWE activities based on various data sources is then presented to give a rough idea of the extent of the problem and the recent trends. While the political scene and the RWE mapping rely mainly on second-

ary sources, the policy fields will be explored using policy documents, expert interviews developed within the framework of the research project Building Resilience against Violent Extremism and Polarization (BRaVE)¹ and relevant secondary sources. Policies will be categorised and the results will ultimately be interpreted within the framework of the conceptual literature with the objective of illuminating what counter-RWE measures exist and how they relate to the illiberal populist regime.

II. Current concepts about RWE and countermeasures

Attempts at determining RWE or far-right extremism have proven to be a challenging endeavour for scholars for many reasons. Essentially, very different political groups, parties and movements with different ideological positions are categorised under this same concept, which can best be seen as a cluster or family of entities rather than unique ones (Gaston 2017; Perry – Scrivens 2021). Other authors assert that while there is no unambiguous definition, a consensus exists among the different fields and scholars concerning what we should understand by RWE (Carter 2018). Most definitions share a number of components that distinguish RWE from other political and ideological stances. In almost all cases, the exclusionary nature of RWE movements is highlighted, whereby minority groups are presented as a threat to the dominant, racially-, ethnically- and sexually defined, primarily White nation (Perry – Scrivens 2015; Jackson 2021). States are perceived as illegitimate since they serve the interest of minorities, and thus undermine the legitimate power of the White man (Perry – Scrivens 2021). Or, as Gaston (2017) asserts, RWE can be understood as being in direct opposition to the founding values of liberal democracy as it refutes the idea of offering safeguards to minority groups, a civic-based conception of national identity and citizenship, and political pluralism. Carter (2018), based on a synthesis of definitions by several influential authors, argues that it is not definitions that we lack, but the meaningful organisation of them, and he attempts to give a minimal definition of the phenomenon. The author emphasises that ‘authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and an exclusionary and/or a holistic kind of nationalism are defining properties of right-wing extremism/radicalism. By contrast, xenophobia, racism, and populism are accompanying characteristics of the concept’ (Carter 2018: 18).

While the focus of the paper is the illiberal populist Hungary, our main intention is not to give a thorough definition of the regime. However, it is still crucial to briefly reflect on the term ‘illiberal populism’ and why we chose it to describe the regime under discussion. There are numerous studies that aim at defining

1 The BRaVE project aimed to systematise existing knowledge and assess the impact of policies and practices on preventing extreme ideologies and polarisation in European societies. <http://brave-h2020.eu/>

the current Hungarian administration's practice or in more general how and why populist parties are gaining more ground all around the world (Mudde – Kaltwasser 2013; Pappas 2014; Pappas 2020). The most consensual minimal definition of populism was provided by Cas Mudde who called it a 'thin ideology' (Mudde 2014) while other studies classified Fidesz – the governing party of the Orbán regime – as exclusionary populists (Mudde – Kaltwasser 2013). Some authors named it as authoritarian pluralism by putting the emphasis mostly on the polarisation in societies based on values and age (Inglehart and Norris 2019). The explanation relies on the assumption that different cohorts in societies have different values: older, more conservative voters vote for the authoritarian-populist parties while younger generations tend to choose liberal parties. According to this concept, authoritarian populists gain ground among the former group with the promise to reverse the breakthrough of liberalism. However, as others pointed out, this approach has weak empirical support and the cleavages in societies are not based on these categories (Schäfer 2021).

The illiberalism of the Orbán regime, besides being a buzzword to mobilise voters unsatisfied with the left-wing (liberal) governance of the post-transition period (Magyar 2016, Buzogány 2017), refers to the undermining of democracy by emptying its institutions while keeping a democratic facade. Although illiberal regimes are often authoritarian, the case of Hungary is often interpreted as being more a populist than an authoritarian one (Enyedi 2016; Bátor 2016). Pappas (2014) describes the Hungarian regime as an illiberal democracy, which is a subtype of democracy. He also differentiates between liberal and populist democracies, where the latter can also be illiberal. Illiberal democracy evolves in already established democratic systems followed by a crisis in the democratic representation (Pappas 2020). Although with serious limitations, in these regimes certain democratic procedures are still working (Zakaria 1997). Additional mechanisms might contribute to the development of illiberal democracy such as the 'politicization of social resentment', 'the forging of a community of "the people"' and, 'the successful political mobilization of those people to win an electoral contest' (Pappas 2020: 56). These mechanisms are characteristics of the Orbán regime. Other scholars pinpoint some regional specificities of the Visegrád countries where some inherited structures of illiberalism from the previous communist system are combined with the 'compromised form of liberalism' (Dawson – Hanley 2016). Furthermore, illiberalism can gain ground even more efficiently in the region as a consequence of the weak social and intellectual basis of democracy in the region (Krastev 2007). Based on these, we found illiberal populism as the adequate term to describe the phenomenon both of its regional and country-specific characteristics.

In this study our aim is to underline some of the typical exclusionary populist features of the Orbán regime that connect it to RWE. Taking the above approaches into consideration, it is intriguing that the core components of RWE

are to a large degree constitutive element of illiberalism. Illiberal politics and regimes almost always seek their legitimacy and attempt to maintain their power by turning selected groups – either internal or external – into enemies and using the political strategy of fearmongering and polarisation (Wodak 2019). Hence, illiberal populist political actors are intrinsically exclusionary, and similarly to right-wing extremists, many times they define citizenship on a (White) ethnic basis that they intend to privilege, protect and defend (Gaston 2017). Illiberal populism is a type of political regime or political practice that intentionally undermines civic liberties, the rule of law, democratic procedures and norms, and typically also embraces authoritarian values (Pap 2017; Kauth – King 2020). Essentially, these features mean that illiberalism has some of the traits of RWE as they are described in the literature.

Another issue that needs to be highlighted when addressing RWE and illiberal populism is the general trend that we find all over the (Western) world – that is, the mainstreaming of far-right extremism (Feischmidt – Hervik 2015; Stocker 2017; Mondon – Winter 2020). In brief, it means that far-right extremist ideas and often policies are adopted within the narratives and politics of central political actors (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2012; Gaston 2017; Brown et al. 2021). This has happened in many countries with strong liberal democratic regimes, but also in countries that have gradually embraced illiberalism. There are numerous consequences of this trend. As often quoted, previously marginalised or even taboo ideas become normalised and exclusionary discourses formerly rejected become increasingly accepted – this also makes the public environment more prone to extremist activities while ‘the parameters of what constitutes “extreme” views are shifting’ (Gaston 2017: 2). Normalisation of far-right discourses often happens by the blurring of boundaries between the mainstream and far-right extremism. Kallis (2013) formulates it as a transgression or shifting of boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable where ‘radical ideas are essentially attempting to remap these established cognitions and subvert the mainstream frames that support them’ (226).

As far as violent acts themselves are concerned, the literature mainly differentiates between three categories: far-right violence, terrorism, and hate crime, and the second and the third type are not always related to the far right (Sullaway 2017; Ravndal – Jupskås 2020). Hate crimes are mostly understood as bias-motivated acts against a vulnerable group, while terrorism is defined as an act that is intended to have a greater impact on a wider group. Sullaway (2017) further differentiates the former based on the level of their instrumentality: hate crime is considered more reactive, while terrorism is rather instrumental. It is also emphasised as a difference that terrorist acts are typically preceded by some degree of planning, while hate crimes are usually spontaneous in nature (Koehler 2019). The third category is far-right violence, which is mostly located under the larger umbrella of hate crime, although there are some differences

between the two. First, as we have noted above, not all hate crimes are committed by far-right actors. Second, hate crime is not always 'only' violence; and third, in some cases violent acts are not committed due to racial beliefs, such as in the case of attacks against politicians, which are thus not considered hate crime (Ravndal – Jupskås 2020). Hence, far-right violence is a third category that partially overlaps with both categories of hate crime and terrorism.

In the following, we focus on the context in which these violent acts take place so that we can explain the connection between the different political environments and RWE. In this respect, the political environment can have meaningful effects in many ways. While widely accepted legal and scholarly definitions of different violent acts exist, it is crucial to see that their local understanding and local practice can be highly politicised both in liberal and illiberal contexts (Gaston 2017; Bjørge – Ravndal 2019). In countries with strong populist-mainstream political forces that use far-right and extremist language, one may intuitively establish a relationship between violent acts committed in the name of some extremist ideology and a fearmongering political context. While it is fundamentally important to look into the nature of such violent acts in these contexts, it is also relevant to note that the link between the political environment and such acts is not well-established and the two cannot be equated (Blackbourn et al. 2019).

It is certainly hard to establish a link between violent acts and the political environment, or to understand how hostile narratives and propaganda about stigmatised groups can trigger such acts. However, one of the major issues when studying RWE in illiberal populist regimes is the question of the nature of extremist violence in these regimes; what kind of acts are committed (hate crimes, far-right terrorism, or other forms of violence?); and whether we see an increase in these acts. It has been observed that in the US under Trump, for example, while the presence of far-right parties diminished (in other words, the latter were partly neutralised by the political environment), the number of white nationalist groups increased by 55% between 2017 and 2019, and a new wave of racially motivated violence occurred (Gaston 2017; Gunter et al. 2020). From another perspective, the political environment in an illiberal populist regime can influence how violent acts are defined and persecuted. As Blackbourn and her colleagues (2019) argue, when persecuting far-right violent acts, ideological and political motivations have to be proven. This means that courts have to convict far-right terrorists for the same ideology that is dominant in the political environment of these types of regimes. The latter authors found that in India, for example, there have been no far-right terrorist convictions since the right-wing party has been in power.

Responses to RWE embodied in government and local policies and programmes are apparently very different in liberal democratic and illiberal populist regimes, and we aim to highlight some of these major differences. Many liberal democratic countries and political regimes are also faced with the influence of

the far right on mainstream politics, raising questions about how effectively they can or want to challenge RWE (Kundnani – Hayes 2018). However, there still seems to be some distinctive major features of different regimes in terms of how they address RWE.

In our paper, we focus on RWE and policies that aim to curtail activities related to right-wing ideologies – it is noteworthy how this policy field has come to the forefront of policy and scholarly debates. Most importantly, the policy field of countering RWE should be discussed together with the field of countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). Chronologically, countering RWE emerged after CVE/PVE policies – often labelled as CVE/PVE strategies or the CVE/PVE policy field (Koehler 2019) – which focused primarily on Islamic extremism, had been established in many countries. Major concerns about CVE/PVE are related to the fact that Islamic violent extremism was the main target of CVE/PVE policies. On the one hand, one of the drawbacks of CVE/PVE policies is that the field is highly securitised and Muslim communities and individuals have become the targets of security monitoring (Jensen et al. 2018; Blackburn et al. 2019). On the other hand, while CVE/PVE has become an industry (Gielen 2017), the expansion of policies and programmes that target far-right extremism occurred only later. There are many reasons for this, such as the fact that the latter type of extremism has been, from a security perspective, considered less important (Perry and Scrivens 2015) – and additionally due to seeing violence as more likely to originate in individuals (lone wolves) and thus having less of a community nature, therefore posing less threat to society (Perry – Scrivens 2021). It may also be that general public opinion is strongly xenophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, etc., which prevents states from concentrating more effort on far-right extremism that mostly emerges from the majority society (Gaston 2017). In the same vein, the blurring of the mainstream and extremism makes it very challenging to respond to RWE (Perry – Scrivens 2015). The evidence that in many countries extremist violent acts committed by individuals or groups from the far right exceed those committed by Islamists (Perry and Scrivens 2015) has often only become a concern following some major attacks, or other political factors (Blackburn et al. 2019).

We have seen how countermeasures often have securitised features; namely, when the emphasis is on repressive and punitive tools rather than those aimed at social integration. While the problem of ‘oversecuritization’ and legal repression prevail in some countries, we argue that liberal democratic regimes always look to apply other preventive measures as well – such as prevention, deterrence, exit programmes, monitoring, education, etc. The question we address in this paper is how in many respects an exclusionary illiberal populist regime is responding to RWE, given that it shares features of far-right extremist discourses and policies.

III. The Hungarian illiberal populist political environment: polarisation, extremism, and securitisation in mainstream politics

Now in its third term, the Hungarian government that has been in power since 2010 is labelled in the political science literature an illiberal, populist, anti-democratic, radical right-wing, nationalist and in some respects authoritarian government (Scheiring – Szombati 2020). Various political instruments are manifested in the political narratives that the regime uses to maintain power, such as polarisation, extremism and securitisation.

It has been asserted that the political success of the current government is largely due to the use of the polarising strategy: a constant state of war with enemies that they themselves create. Within this context of government-generated polarisation, civil society actors have also become the enemy, especially those who work to mitigate racism and extremism and want to reinforce democratic values, human rights, critical thinking, dialogue and partnership (Malomvölgyi 2017). This fearmongering rhetoric and strategy has been paralleled by the intentional erosion of democratic institutions such as revision of the electoral system in a way that blatantly favours governing coalition parties, restricting the freedom of the press and persecuting non-governmental organisations and public sphere actors.

The strategy of polarisation as used to weaken the democratic system is also supported by the mainstreaming of extremism (Bozóki 2017). Issues traditionally connected to the extremist far right are adopted by the mainstream political power (Krekó – Mayer 2015). This is also what characterises the government: it has borrowed themes from the far right and reframed them for its own purposes. The two most salient of these issues are immigrants and gender (Grzebalska – Petó 2018), but other less dominant themes have included rhetoric about and policies related to Hungarian Roma (Dinók 2021).

The regime's treatment of the far right constitutes its wider political strategy. Before the current government came into power in 2010, the popularity of the extreme-right Jobbik party and the viral far-right network around it was on the rise (in 2006 winning 2% of the votes, which increased to 14% at the 2009 European Parliamentary elections), political and public racism dominated public discourse, far-right extremist groups were proliferating, and extremists organised hate marches without the police effectively intervening (Spengler – Friedrich 2013). Even though the left-liberal governing coalition from 2002 and 2010 tried to introduce some legislation to manage this phenomenon, it constantly failed. This was especially due to the weak implementation of pre-existing legislation to counter RWE (hate crime and hate speech, and the banning of militant extremist groups) as well as the political climate imbued in mainstreamed extremism (OSCE, 2010).

Taking over important issues as well as adopting the policies of the far right started right at the beginning of the first cycle of the national-conservative government in 2010, which meant the gradual shifting of the governing coalition to the extreme right. However, it was only after their second victory (2014) that an even more extremist stance was taken by the illiberal populist government. It started using more explicitly polarising and extremist rhetoric with the strategic aim of weakening the far-right political party. In 2015, the refugee crisis provided the political opportunity to come up with an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim narrative. The anti-immigrant frame became one of the government's main political tools, while the more 'traditional racisms' such as anti-Roma and anti-Jewish talk, were more or less toned down. Even though harsh and explicit anti-Roma and anti-Jewish rhetoric is not typical, they are still part of the narrative in implicit ways. The political rationale behind this strategy is that the government tries to avoid being strongly criticised for being racist towards the Roma and Jews.

IV. Mapping RWE in Hungary

The far-right problem can be measured using qualitative and quantitative data (Bjørge and Ravndal 2019). The majority of the relevant international datasets focus on 'acts' such as hate crimes, far-right violence and terrorism (in different combinations). In theory, these data could serve as a basis for comparison between countries and for detecting tendencies over the years in single countries. However, they often suffer from some inherent methodological problems that make comparisons difficult or even impossible (Ravndal – Jupskås 2020). For example, Europol's annual EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) is a yearly report about terrorist events based on the information provided by Member States. In the case of Hungary, it highlights that some known members of far-right organisations have previously been convicted for violent crimes as an 'indication of a transaction-based convergence of low-level criminals and extremists, who frequently overlap socially in marginalized areas' (Europol 2020: 21). However, the report includes zero convictions for right-wing terrorism in 2019 (2020: 87). Based on these data, we could conclude that the far right is not a huge problem in Hungary as (deadly) attacks committed by far-right extremists are very rare compared to in other European countries. Although it is quite difficult to compare the different countries' records due to the already mentioned methodological shortcomings, as well as to the different sizes of the countries, one can confidently state that Hungary has a relatively high score using the ODIHR data set. From 2010 to 2014, cases doubled almost every year from 19 to 79 and grew even more dramatically from 2016 (33) to 2017 and

2018, with 233 and 194 incidents accordingly.² The numbers slightly decreased in 2019, with 132 incidents.

The already mentioned TE-SAT 2020 report describes Hungarian right-wing extremist organisations' activity in the following way: membership fluctuates significantly from a few people to up to ten, and such groups maintain relationships with the far right of neighbouring countries and some other EU countries, including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK. According to the report, typical activities are marches and rallies connected to the anniversaries of historical events, like the Day of Honour every February in Budapest that commemorates the German and Hungarian soldiers who 'broke out' from Buda Castle in February 1945.³ At these events, 'behavior, symbols and chanting disparaging political, religious or ethnic minorities has been observed' (Europol 2020: 68). Another activity typical of the Hungarian extreme right is paramilitary training and skills development, often connected to the use of firearms on private properties (farms) and abandoned military installations (Europol 2020: 69). Apart from this, there have been some confrontations in the last couple of years with groups labelled enemies, including an attack on the Aurora Community Centre (where, among others, Roma and LGBT civil organisations reside) by more far-right groups in 2018,⁴ and a toppling of a statue installed to honour the Black Lives Matter movement in the ninth district of Budapest by activists from the far right Legio Hungaria in 2021.⁵ However, acts mostly remain indirect, and violent attacks are the least common incidents.

As this report also demonstrates, data about country-level far-right actors and acts are not usually collected systematically in a comparable way but in the form of separate country reports that do not follow the same structure, even within one volume (Charalambous 2015). For this reason, we can only compare the data on Hungary with that of previous years. However, this is not an easy task either because of the different data collection criteria of the various organisations. The former Athena Institute collected data systemati-

2 The first year from where data is available on Hungary is 2009, when the number of incidents was 15. Source: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/hungary?year=2009> (accessed 15 February, 2023).

3 The Day of Honour can be used as a litmus test for measuring the attitude of current authorities towards far-right gatherings. After many years of allowing the event to proceed almost without restrictions, in 2020 the police were about to ban it on the grounds that it could threaten certain groups in society. However, this decision was repealed by the Metropolitan Court, which stated that the latter decree was not supported strongly enough with explanations. Therefore, the Day of Honour took place in 2020 after all. Source: https://index.hu/belfold/2020/02/28/budapest_becsulet_napja_rendezveny_biztositas_rendorseg_27_millio_forint_eloallitas/ (accessed 15 February, 2023).

4 <https://eeradicalization.com/between-moderation-and-extremism-the-strange-evolution-of-hungarian-far-right/> (accessed 15 February, 2023).

5 <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/02/black-lives-matter-statue-torn-down-a-day-after-its-budapest-unveiling> (accessed 15 February, 2023).

cally on hate groups for years. According to their collection,⁶ in 2010, 18, and in 2011, 16 hate groups were active on a countrywide basis that had an extreme-right ideological stance. In 2014, Sonkoly (2014) identified 23 far-right organisations involved in self-defense or paramilitary activity based on data from the Athena Institute and Political Capital.⁷ The period since the second half of the 2010s can be called the ‘post-Jobbik period’ for the Hungarian far-right scene due to the change in the political spectrum and in the party itself (Félix 2019). According to reports, in this changed scene, the extreme, violent far-right has become a much smaller group. At the same time, some new organisations have been formed in the last few years, like the Legio Hungaria movement and the Hungarian version of the international franchise Identity Generation. There are smaller and bigger organisations, with a few dozen members up to a few hundred. As of 2021, around five to eight main organisations and several smaller organisations can be distinguished that are active in organising events or other forms of action.⁸ On the party level, Our Homeland Party should be mentioned as the most significant and relatively new actor (founded in 2018) (Bálint et al. 2020). This party typically receives a relatively low percentage of all votes,⁹ as measured in opinion polls but enough to pass the election threshold.

IV. Policy fields that address RWE: Legal and repressive measures and public-order management

As mentioned in the literature (Ramalingam 2014), certain countries, including Hungary, have adopted a securitised approach that exclusively implements repressive legal measures against RWE. Following this empirical observation, we intend to further investigate the issue by bringing in more empirical data from Hungary and analysing it, before coming to a conclusion about whether this illiberal populist regime can be defined as having a fully securitised approach or if there is there any scope for other policies – i.e. in general, what can be said about the nature of the counter-RWE policy field in an illiberal regime.

6 Source: <https://boon.hu/magyarorszag/athena-intzet-gyulletcsoportok-magyarorszgon-3184813/#> (accessed 15 February, 2023).

7 The author of the cited article aggregated the smaller skinhead groups into one.

8 In its latest relevant study, Political Capital distinguishes five main organisations while mentioning that more smaller organisations also exist (Political Capital 2020). Other reports like the Antisemitism Report 2019–2020 of the Jewish Federation names a few more who were active in this period (Félix 2021).

9 It was around 2–3% that increased to over 5% in 2022 at the parliamentary elections and to 7% in 2023.

Methodology

Data was collected as part of the BRaVE project aimed at building a counter-extremism database.¹⁰ Policies and practices¹¹ were identified from policy fields relevant to RWE measures using purposive sampling. The timeframe for the database was set between 2014 and 2019; however, for our analysis we did further data collection to include policies prior to and after this period. Given the scarcity of the policies (some fields did not have any associated policies), our strategy was to rely on secondary sources (NGO reports and research reports), as well as some expert interviews that were conducted within the BRaVE project with NGO representatives and field experts.¹²

Our data were thematically clustered in line with Ramalingam's (2014) categorisation of counter-RWE policies and interventions. Legal and repressive measures include policies that address hate crime, far-right violence and terrorism. Based on the literature we examined (Ravndal and Jupskås 2020), while right-wing violence, terrorism and hate crime are overlapping categories, racial beliefs are a 'must' in the case of the latter and are not necessarily associated with acts classified as belonging to the second and the third categories. Therefore, we first discuss hate crime policies separately from policies targeting right-wing violence and terrorism. The legal framework and repressive measures serve to monitor, control and persecute extremist individuals and groups. These measures are necessary but not adequate if the objective is to reduce or prevent the presence of RWE in a country. Following the Ramalingam categorisation, second, we explore policy interventions that fall into the category of public-order management: i.e. prevention (school curricula and public institutions), deterrence and exit programmes, information and public communication policies, and the training and capacity building of relevant actors.

At this stage of the analysis, our aim is to provide a qualitative description (Braddock 2015) of each category by synthesising our data. The latter consist of policies (texts of laws, strategies and regulations), reports and interviews. During the analysis, in each policy field (category), we used all the collected narrative and qualitative data, put them alongside each other, and started an iterative process of comparing themes, arguments and narratives and identifying the most common and relevant points that best describe the state and nature of the given policy area. In the next step, interpretation of the data followed.

10 <http://brave-h2020.eu/database>

11 For the database, data were also collected on institutions and research; however, these were not included in our current analysis.

12 Interviews: hate-speech and hate-crime expert; representative of interdisciplinary think-tank running programme and research on counter-extremism; representative of think tank dealing with extremism; representative of NGOs dealing with informal education; representative of organisation on intercultural dialogue; representative of organisation dealing with conflict prevention.

Based on the relevant theoretical concepts from the literature on the one hand, and the major themes revealed in each of the policy categories on the other, various analytical dimensions were developed and policies interpreted using this conceptual frame.

Legal and repressive measures

Hate speech and hate crime policies

Although no legislation explicitly addresses hate speech or hate crime, there is some legislation that falls into this category. Incitement to hatred and violence against protected groups and members of protected groups is regulated in the Criminal Code.¹³ One of the criteria used for labelling an act as incitement is that the act should be committed in front of ‘the public at large’ (Free World Centre 2018). This can be a large number of people, or there should be potential that a large number of people witness it (e.g. will hear a speech). Based on a Constitutional Court decision,¹⁴ the third criteria is to consider a constitutional crime that leads ‘to the clear and present danger of violent actions or to individual rights’. In many cases, legal procedures fail at this stage because of the difficulties in proving a causal connection between an incitement and concrete bias-motivated acts that follow.

Online hate speech is also mentioned in the closing provisions of the Criminal Code as ‘a crime committed, inter alia, through publication in the press, or through other media services, by way of reproduction or by means of publication on electronic communication networks’.¹⁵ Apart from this section in the law, there is no such coordinated initiative against online hate speech.

Experts (Subjective Values Foundation, 2017) have found that the police do not usually classify incidents as hate crime, therefore no prosecution follows, or the latter are treated as crimes without a bias-motivation, thus no investigation is initiated.

It is also often observed that in the case of extreme right-wing attacks (the main targets are members of the Roma community, LGBTQ people, refugees and migrants, and Jews), when physical violence and racist verbal assaults happen, the police start an investigation into the crime of vandalism, and only in cases when complaints are made is the legal classification changed to hate crime. It is also important to note that if a crime is committed with a ‘bias-motivation’ it is considered an aggravating circumstance, and the court has to take this into account and pass down a more severe sentence. However, in

13 Criminal Code 332/2012

14 Decision 30/1992 (V.26) AB Resolution; 18/2004 (V. 25.) AB Resolution 18/2004 (V. 25.); 95/2008 (VII. 3.) AB Resolution

15 Criminal Code, 459 (22)

most cases courts do not identify and examine the possibly biased motive, or they tend to take biased motives into account only partially, and instead of hate crime they often classify such acts as minor offenses. There are also cases when perpetrators' biased motives are obvious (e.g. involve the wearing of specific symbols, skinhead clothing or the open declaration of extremist views), yet the court does not classify these incidents as hate crimes (Barna – Hunyadi 2016). Moreover, misinterpretation of hate crime legislation also complicates the situation insofar as the court has the tendency to associate hate crime as being perpetrated by the Roma. It has been found that Roma are more often convicted of hate crime (against Hungarians) than members of the majority against the Roma (Jovánovics 2017).

Nonetheless, some institutional changes have been introduced, partly as a result of the activities of the Working Group Against Hate Crimes that was established by five NGOs. A Police Hate Crime Network was established in January 2012, a network which consists of individual investigators who specialise in hate crime at each county police level, with a coordinator at National Police Headquarters. In addition, a protocol has been introduced so that law enforcement can identify and pursue investigations into hate crime more efficiently.¹⁶

Policies targeting right-wing violence and terrorism

The Criminal Code was amended in 2011¹⁷ by the illiberal populist government that entered into power in 2010 to curb far-right vigilant groups. The law became known in colloquial language as the 'law on crime in uniform', referring to the fact that members of vigilante groups often wear uniforms to signal their self-proclaimed law enforcement role. As described earlier, the pre-2010 period under the socialist-liberal coalition saw the rise of far-right political parties as well as the proliferation of RWE vigilant groups. These latter militant groups had formal and informal links with the far-right party, Jobbik. The new conservative government's political aim was to weaken the latter party, which was the second strongest party at that time. According to the law, those who intimidate others based on their national, ethnic, racial or religious identity can be sentenced to up to three years in prison, and those who engage in activities aimed at maintaining public security or public order without lawful authorisation for up to two years. The law was criticised by NGOs who pointed to the fact that RWE vigilante groups could have been curbed by relying on the existing legislation and that ineffective law implementation was the major obstacle to countering the activity of RWE vigilante groups, rather than the lack of legislation. They

16 National Police Headquarters' Protocol 30/2019 (VII. 18.)

17 Criminal Code, 2011/XL. 34/2011 (V.7.)

were concerned that the law served political purposes rather than being an effective tool for countering RWE militant groups (TASZ 2017).

Apart from this law, targeting far-right violence and terrorism is addressed by anti-terrorism and security policies. As the European Crime Prevention Monitor points out:

Central and Eastern European MSs, which are less likely to suffer from violent radicalization and terrorism, often do not have national strategies in place (or at least such strategies have not been reported).... Several other MSs do not have dedicated counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism strategies, instead (summarily) treating these phenomena in their general security strategies. Such is the case for Hungary, Lithuania, and Estonia (Aerts 2019).

What needs to be highlighted is how far-right terrorism and violence appear in policy documents, and what policies are formulated to monitor and persecute far-right organisations and leaders and members of these organisations.

Our research on policy documents¹⁸ reveals that terrorism is not identified as a right-wing threat – in fact, it is not defined what kind of terrorism the documents refer to. In the policy document on anti-terrorism, when extremism appears in connection with terrorism, it is not specified what the document means by extremism – ‘the priority security risks of our future are terrorism and organized crime as well as extremism that may pose threat to the democratic state institutions, and national and public security’.¹⁹ We find a similar perspective in Hungary’s National Security Strategy, according to which various security areas are identified (migration, drug trafficking, organised crime, natural and industrial disasters, etc.), one of which is ‘extremist groups’. The document says that:

A security challenge is posed by extremist groups exploiting social tensions and the freedom of association, assembly and expression provided by the democratic state based on the rule of law to restrict the basic rights of others, disrupt the functioning of... constitutional institutions, or promote their anti-democratic political aspirations.²⁰

Neither the anti-terrorism nor the security strategy specifies right-wing terrorism or violence as a separate concept or area.²¹

18 Anti-terrorism resolution (Terrorizmus ellenes végrehajtás), 2015; Anti-terrorism Draft Bill (Terrorizmus elleni fellépés), 2016; Hungary’s National Security Strategy 1035/2012. (II. 21.) Government Decree

19 Hungary’s National Security Strategy 1035/2012. (II. 21.) Government Decree

20 Ibid. 18.

21 Security and anti-terrorism strategies usually refer to and identify different forms of terrorism, e.g. Islamist, right-wing, or left-wing terrorism. See: <http://brave-h2020.eu/repository/PB-BRAVE-final.version>.

In light of the legal regulations and policies, how then are violent extremist far-right groups and individuals monitored and persecuted? A couple of arrests and persecutions of far-right leaders typically take place annually, although it is claimed by the experts that were interviewed that the police do not investigate very actively. There is also monitoring of the activities of extremist groups, and police are present when they organise events (demonstrations, marches and patrolling), but no harsh measures are applied to persecute them (Barna – Hunyadi 2016). Also ambiguously, the police have become more professional in handling the far right in terms of not allowing demonstrations or intervening in those that openly express hatred. It should also be mentioned that there is a local character to how events are handled, as municipalities have some authority to take measures against events that occur on their territory. Some of them use this opportunity when they oppose such events, while a few of them even actively cooperate with NGOs and minority communities regarding these issues.

The fact that extremist far-right organisations are not under strong state control is reflected in what members of the movement themselves say. As reported in interviews published by Political Capital (Bálint et al. 2020), they are left in peace by the police; some of them even mention that they have unofficial but friendly relationships with the police based on mutual respect. They can do their ‘nation-building’ work almost undisturbed.

Public-order management.

Prevention policies. The field of *prevention policies* is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of risk groups, promoting democratic values and attempting to develop school curricula to include materials on counter-extremism. The new National Core Curriculum that came into effect in September 2020 reflects the ideological leaning of the illiberal populist right-wing government. Building a stronger, ethnic-based, exclusive Hungarian national identity is the primary aim of the current regime, and this includes increasing knowledge, among other topics, about national defense. According to the research of Political Capital (Bálint et al. 2020), this strongly ideological curriculum gives no space for teaching democratic values. Hungarians as victims of history is one of leading topics in history books. Moreover, myths associated with Hungarian ancient history are presented as facts, some authoritarian regimes are glorified, and Islam is represented in a very negative light.

pdf; the United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716907/140618_CCS207_CCS0218929798-1_CONTEST_3.0_WEB.pdf; the Danish anti-terrorism legislation and strategy: https://curis.ku.dk/portal/files/91173827/Terrorism_legislation_National_report_Jrn_Vestergaard_Denmark_final_version.pdf; the European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend report (TE-SAT) 2020: https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/european_union_terrorism_situation_and_trend_report_te-sat_2020_0.pdf

Civil society actors are under strong pressure under the illiberal regime (Scheiring – Szombati 2020). Few are active in the field of education, such as running programmes on democratic values and human rights. As mentioned in the interviews we conducted, most of those that do have this function receive no government funding (they receive their support mainly from the EU and other international donors). This may lead to the situation that the NGOs initiate the programmes that can be funded by these donors, rather than focus on actual problems. These organisations try to establish partnerships with schools to introduce their programmes to students, teachers or both. Most schools are not open to these projects, or are afraid of the reactions of parents or the school authority (a government-controlled body). Another problem is that such projects are just ‘come and go’ efforts; they are not a part of the everyday life of schools. Therefore, they often do not have a long-term impact on students’ attitudes and/or behaviour (Simonovits – Surányi 2019). It is also a problem that – partly because of the lack of time and resources – activities are not tailored to the exact environment they are implemented in, thus no specific answers are given that can increase the chance of a positive outcome (Félix 2023). The illiberal regime’s ideological dominance of education exemplifies how unlikely it is that curricula and schools can have any significant preventive effects.

To further investigate prevention policies, we also looked at another area that usually appears in the literature as a relevant field – namely, youth policy. In the National Youth Strategy (2009–2024), the danger of engaging in extremist activities is highlighted: ‘some young people choose an extreme, sometimes disruptive form of self-expression [that] endanger[s] democratic values’.²² Here, the meaning of extremism is not defined properly; no reference is made to whether this is seen as an ideologically driven behaviour or as a product of other social factors such as social exclusion. The treatment proposed in the Strategy is similarly vague; it says that a *tolerant, inclusive attitude should be spread*.²³

Given the lack of focus on preventing RWE, it is not surprising that government *deterrence and disengagement and de-radicalisation exit programmes* are non-existent. Except for a very limited number of NGO programmes,²⁴ no government interventions can be found.

Information and public communication policies. Regarding the media and their strategies concerning how they talk about RWE, the first general conclusion is that there is no specific strategy (Bernáth 2014). On the other hand, three different but inappropriate ways are distinguished: overdramatising, portraying it

22 National Youth Strategy, 2009: 7.

23 *Ibid.* 46.

24 The Subjective Values Foundation mentioned some of their projects. However, no information is available about these projects, thus their potential short or long-term effects cannot be measured either.

as a bagatelle issue, or supporting radical ideologies and groups in a direct or in an indirect way (Barta 2008). Part of the latter include those cases from the last few years when far-right public figures were introduced in media as private individuals, which contributed to the normalisation and greater acceptance of RWE (Bernáth 2014). Analyses showed how the bad practices of the media contributed to the rise of the far right and to the normalisation of racist and anti-LGBT speech (Boros et al. 2013). Related to this, the topic of migration has also been represented in a very stereotypical way in the media, especially in public media, involving portraying migrants first and foremost as criminals and terrorists, thereby increasing prejudice against them (Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2015).

Another aspect of public communication, data collection on right-wing terrorism and violence, hate crimes and extremist groups, is best described as sporadic and random. As demonstrated, the government does not collect data systematically. The data that are publicly available are those that the government provides to international organisations that appear in reports, or from international organisations who collect data from various sources. Civil actors working in the field are very few, and given that most of these NGOs are viewed with suspicion, the government is not collaborating with them. Thus there is no information and knowledge sharing and transfer between government bodies and the civil sector (Mink 2017).

Training and capacity building. As revealed during the period of data collection, in the field of training and capacity-building state interventions are lacking. Instead, similarly to the field of education, civil society actors implement programmes funded by external – mainly EU – sources to fight hate speech, racism and extremism. Civil stakeholders have asserted that state institutions refuse to engage in dialogue. Therefore, for NGOs it is not possible to get access to government and state organisations and ministries, although it is very important that the interventions of NGOs are integrated into state services, especially if they are successful.

V. Discussion and conclusion

Based on the descriptive analysis of the policies, our aim is now to try to answer the question whether counter-RWE policies in an illiberal populist regime fall entirely into the category of security measures – that is, a legal and repressive approach. Or, in more general terms, how the policy field can be characterised given that there are several policy areas other than legal and repressive measures where some interventions can be detected. We do not seek to answer the questions that are raised about counter-RWE policies in liberal democratic settings (as mentioned in the literature) (Hardy 2018), but rather to see how an illiberal

populist political environment affects the policy field and, in response, what consequences this has on RWE in the country.

Relying on the main concepts in the literature about RWE in illiberal regimes, as well as the main themes the descriptive analysis of the policy fields has revealed, various dimensions are now developed to arrive at a deeper understanding of counter-RWE policies. The following dimensions are found to create the analytical frame for contextualising and evaluating the policies:

- (1) Interventions are first categorised in line with whether they are part of a wider government strategy or policy. This dimension allows us to see whether the given policy is considered a priority for the regime, and whether legal and repressive or other measures are more dominant.
- (2) The cooperation of government/state and civil society actors is a related dimension, but more specifically refers to the situation that, in illiberal regimes, civil society actors are often considered enemies, or even persecuted and oppressed as representing democratic values that are against the mainstream ideology (Malomvölgyi 2017). The lack of cooperation with civil society actors can be assumed to negatively impact policy making and implementation. Without the latter, the know-how, local embeddedness and flexibility that civil actors have are excluded from the policy field.
- (3) The assessment of policies and policy implementation is carried out in line with three sub-dimensions:
 - (a) how the policy affects or reflects the mainstreaming and normalisation of extremism and the blurring of boundaries in political and social life,
 - (b) what can be said about the policy, as measured by data (increase/decrease in such activities, behaviour, etc.), and,
 - (c) whether the intervention has securitising effects.

The following table presents these dimensions according to each policy that we identified and described qualitatively in our analysis.

The overall picture indicates that there is no government strategy for countering RWE. Our findings, based on a qualitative analysis of relevant policies, reveal that the RWE policies of the Hungarian illiberal populist regime cannot be strictly categorised as a security approach that relies exclusively on legal and repressive measures.

Applying the concepts from the literature on RWE and counter measures in illiberal populist settings, analytical dimensions were developed to enable us to interpret the Hungarian case. The political environment in which policies are drafted and implemented is dominated by extremist and securitising views. This is presumably a factor that explains the lack of government strategy and policies for countering RWE. It is only in the area of hate crimes that policies that target extremist activities exist – a finding that reveals that legal and re-

Table 1: Policies and dimensions of analysis

Type of intervention	(1) Government strategy/policy	(2) Cooperation of actors	(3) Assessment of policy and policy implementation
Hate crime policies	Yes, hate crime legislation exists	Some cooperation between state institutions (police, and judicial system) and civil actors, resulting in improvements in policy implementation	(a) Normalisation and blurring of extremist views can be detected in the fact that a large proportion of incidents are still not classified as hate crime by the police or courts. Practice of reversing hate crime accusations and applying them to minority perpetrators (b) Data show an increase in incidents since 2016 (unclear whether this is due to a higher number of incidents or an improvement in policy implementation that led to more classified cases). (c) The case of the reversal of hate crime law can be considered a securitisation feature
Far-right violence and terrorism	No, there is no government strategy and (the type of) extremism is defined neither in security nor in anti-terrorism policies	No cooperation reported	(a) Normalisation and blurring of extremism and non-extremism is manifest in non-persecution and non-monitoring of extremist activists and groups (b) Decrease in the number of far-right extremist groups with relatively wide membership (c) Extremist groups are deconstructed as a security threat by blurring
Prevention: education policy	No, curricula reflect nationalist conservative ideology, no proper civic education	Some cooperation between state (controlled) schools and civil actors, but given the strong state control of schools, this happens only in a very limited number of cases	(a) Mainstreaming of extremist ideas in curricula (b) Increase in number of church schools, centralised education system that secures loyalty to the government (c) By promoting the idea of Hungarians as victims throughout history, a general security threat is being built into the self-identification of the new generations
Prevention: youth policy	No, youth policy does not define extremism, but refers to it only in general terms, no strategy for countering extremism	No specific cooperation given the lack of policies	(a) Lack of definition of extremism may contribute to the blurring of boundaries (b) No specific policies, therefore no data can be specified to examine effects (c) No securitisation aspect
Prevention: deterrence	No state policy exists	Some small-scale civil initiatives	(a) Civil initiatives represent oppositional values to those of the government, and are intended to counter the normalisation, blurring and mainstreaming of extremism (b) Very few NGOs, little impact (c) NGOs countering a securitised approach

Type of intervention	(1) Government strategy/policy	(2) Cooperation of actors	(3) Assessment of policy and policy implementation
Prevention: disengagement/de-radicalisation/exit programmes	No government policy exists	Some small-scale civil initiatives	(a) Civil initiatives represent oppositional values to those of the government, and are intended to counter the normalisation, blurring and mainstreaming of extremism (b) Very few NGOs, little impact (c) NGOs countering a securitised approach
Information and public communication policies	No government policy exists	Some small-scale civil initiatives but no cooperation between them and the government	(a) Civil initiatives represent oppositional values to those of the government, and are intended to counter the normalisation, blurring and mainstreaming of extremism (b) Very few NGOs, little impact (c) NGOs countering a securitised approach
Training and capacity building	No government policy exists	Some small-scale civil initiatives but no cooperation between them and the government	(a) Civil initiatives represent oppositional values to those of the government, and are intended to counter the normalisation, blurring and mainstreaming of extremism (b) Very few NGOs, little impact (c) NGOs countering a securitised approach

pressive measures are only partially applied. In all other policy fields, including security and anti-terrorism as well as public-order management, policies are not explicit about RWE (e.g. security, anti-terrorism, education and youth policy) or simply do not exist (e.g. prevention, disengagement, de-radicalisation, exit, deterrence, information and training).

The indirect policies we analysed were found to reflect, as well as reinforce, tendencies that may foster more extremism. Normalisation and blurring of boundaries are found to characterise security and anti-terrorism policies insofar as far-right extremists are not properly persecuted and monitored. This was also pinpointed in the area of hate crime policy implementation (e.g. not specifying cases as hate crimes). Through a centralised education system and the prevalence of a favored ideological approach in curricula, education is similarly assumed to have a normalising and blurring effect.

These policies were also examined for securitising tendencies, and it was found that the securitisation of minorities is present (in hate crime prosecutions, for example). From another perspective, not defining extremism and extremist groups deconstructs them as a security threat to society. In education, the emphasis on a monolithic ethnic-national identity, enforced by teaching history through the lens of the victim and a lack of civic education, may be grounds for the acceptance of securitised narratives, typical of far-right extremists. Proper counter-RWE policies are being implemented only by small-scale NGO projects funded by the EU and international donors. While their activities aim at constructing an environment in which individuals are empowered to recognise and oppose extremism, their societal impact is limited. Among other

factors, this is mainly due to their small number and size, as well as the hostile political environment in which they operate.

Looking at the RWE mapping, we can see an increase of hate-crime incidents in previous years, and a decrease in the significance of militant and vigilant far-right groups. In parallel with this decrease, far-right violent activities and terrorism have also been on the decline. Compared to the pre- and early 2010s, when paramilitary far-right extremist and terrorist groups were active and highly visible, in recent years these activities have almost disappeared. The data reflect the changes that have taken place under the illiberal populist government: an increase in hate-crime incidents, and a decrease in far-right violent and terrorist acts.

The relatively positive picture of the minimal threat from far-right extremists may lead to the wrong conclusion that this is the reason why there is no RWE strategy or related government policy. While it did not constitute part of the empirical investigation of this paper, the explanation should be sought in the analysis of the political environment. As pointed out by analysts (Bálint et al. 2020), the government has a specific strategy regarding how to treat far-right extremist organisations: it needs extremists in order to be able to claim that it controls them, keeps them calm and prevents them from becoming stronger. Indeed, being ideologically very similar to the incumbent party, extremist groups are less interested in engaging in violent action than in the past. The political climate of top-down extremism and the securitisation of certain issues may thus be a contributing factor in the decline in the appeal of extremist far-right organisations and the fact that there are fewer supporters of these organisations.

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