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Abstract

Illiberal governments have been widely associated with democratic backsliding, the erosion of the rule of law, and executive aggrandizement. However, their impact on the various domains of knowledge production has not received enough scholarly attention. Through what policies do illiberal actors ensure the reproduction of their narratives? Do illiberal political leaders see education and culture as vehicles that serve ideological purposes or do they consider them as another arena where power, positions, and material resources are at stake? This paper addresses these questions through the analysis of educational and cultural policy changes in two crucial cases of illiberals in power: Hungary after 2010 and Poland after 2015. The paper distinguishes between overt and hidden policy agendas; that is, initiatives and aspirations that are driven by values and social or economic goals versus policies serving purposes that cannot be openly represented because they contradict widely accepted ethical norms or constitutional principles. Through the analysis of legislative changes, party programs, and party discourse, complemented with semi-structured expert interviews, the study finds that, despite sharing similar policy agendas, Fidesz and PiS have considerably differed in the extent to which they transformed values-based political narratives to educational and cultural policies while in government. While the main feature of educational and cultural policies in Hungary has been radical concentration of political power for its own sake, in Poland they rather served the ideological goals of the illiberal culture war. The paper concludes that these differences were caused by the latitude afforded to these parties by their respective legislative majorities, that in turn resulted in very different governance contexts for policymaking.

About the authors

Bálint Mikola is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow working on the project "Neo-authoritarianisms in Europe and the Liberal Democratic Response" (AUTHLIB), his current research mostly focuses on what policies illiberal regimes adopt in power, and what variations might be detected across different policy areas, with a focus on education and culture. Beyond that, he also he also pursues research on how illiberal actors communicate with their electorate, with a specific interest in top-down consultations and the use of social media as a campaigning tool. Until June 2021, Bálint has served as Head of Communications and Research at Transparency International Hungary, involved in various research and advocacy projects related to party financing, corruption perceptions (in particular in the Hungarian reports on the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Global Corruption Barometer), the gendered aspects of corruption, investigative journalism, as well as civic participation in democratic processes. Before joining Transparency International Hungary, Bálint worked as a PhD researcher at Central European University (CEU), Budapest, doing research on party membership, online political participation, movement parties, and intra-party democracy, focusing on the cases of Spanish Podemos and the Italian Five Star Movement, with extensive fieldwork in both countries and a visiting scholarship at Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS), Florence. His work has been published in several international journals and presented at international conferences and workshops. He has successfully defended his PhD at Central European University in 2019. During his PhD, he also taught courses at CEU, ELTE, and Milestone Institute. Due to his experience in media and public relations, Bálint has an interest in the interrelation between media and politics, and a broad network in both fields, as well as in the Hungarian NGO sphere.

Péter Radó's special field of research is educational policy analysis, planning and evaluation, educational governance, and equity in education. He teaches related courses at various university programs at two faculties of the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest and in colleges for advanced studies. He graduated as a historian at ELTE Budapest in 1983. Till 1994 he was the head of the Research Group for Minorities in the Hungarian National Library of Foreign Languages. Between 1994 and 1997, Peter was the head of the Directorate of Civil Relations in the Ministry of Culture and Education. Later he worked as a research associate of the Research Center of the National Institute for Public Education. From 1998 to 2001 he was the assistant director of the Institute for Educational Policy in the Open Society

Institute, Budapest. From 2001 he worked as the policy advisor to the Minister of Education in Serbia. Between 2003 and 2007, he was the director of the Center for Educational Policy Analysis in Hungary. From 2008 until 2019, he was the senior consultant at Expanzio Consulting Ltd. where he worked as an expert and evaluator for various international clients, such as the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, UNICEF and the Open Society Foundations. Between 2019 and 2021 he was the lead researcher of a Central-European comparative research on the adaptivity of education systems at the Democracy Institute of the Central European University. Péter published six books and more than hundred studies.

Introduction

Background and Methodology

This paper is part of a larger endeavor of mapping what policies illiberal parties adopt in power, which is one of the main ambitions of the AUTHLIB ("Neo-authoritarianisms in Europe and the liberal democratic response") project. As such, it primarily seeks to analyze policy proposals and measures put forward by European illiberal political actors in the field of education and culture in the 21st century. The fundamental question we seek to answer in this paper is how the value- and ideology-driven political narratives of illiberal parties are transformed into actual educational and cultural policy interventions? More specifically, we address the following questions: What are the leitmotifs of the political ideologies represented by illiberal parties? How much weight do interventions for ideological purposes have in the overt and hidden public policy agenda of the illiberal parties in power? What impact does a strong commitment to values and ideology have on the educational and cultural policymaking practices of the illiberal parties in power? What are the results of these policies?

Since only two of the countries covered in the AUTHLIB project (Hungary and Poland) have had illiberal governments in power for sustained periods, our focus is mostly on these two countries when analyzing the implementation and the impact of such policies. However, we also take stock of the policy proposals included in the electoral manifestos of illiberal parties in our other country cases (Austria, Czechia, France, Italy[1]). Therefore, we apply a two-tier approach: for analyzing the composition of the public policy-relevant narratives of illiberal parties we include evidence from Austria, Czechia, France, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. When analyzing actual educational and cultural policymaking we focus only on Hungary and Poland, and attempt to map out similarities and differences in the light of the specific context within which illiberal parties in these two countries exercised power.

In terms of its scope and methods, the paper mostly relies on the analysis of legislative documents and electoral manifestos of eight European populist/illiberal parties,[2] as well as fourteen expert assessments gained through a series of qualitative interviews with policy experts, academics, and journalists working on these subjects. The paper also relies on the

[1] Even though the United Kingdom is also involved in the AUTHLIB project, it arguably did not have any illiberal parties, either in government or in opposition, that were able to significantly shape policy agendas in the field of education and culture. Therefore, parties in the United Kingdom are not included in our analysis.

[2] Recent electoral manifestos of the following parties had been consulted: FPÖ in Austria, ANO and SPD in Czechia, FN/RN in France, Fidesz in Hungary, FdI and Lega in Italy, and PiS in Poland.

valuable contributions of experts from our partner institutions in the AUTHLIB project (contributors are listed in the Appendix) who have provided us with a detailed analysis of illiberal party programs on education and culture from their respective countries of expertise. The comparative overview on the following pages heavily builds on the reports of various independent organizations at the international and national levels, as well as on the results of previous research, such as the Eastern European comparative research of CEU Democracy Institute on education. (Radó, 2021/b) The collection of inputs from the many contributors of this analysis was based on a common pre-prepared analytical framework.

Conceptual Framework

The main objective of the paper is to identify the most important changes in policy narratives and agendas brought about by illiberal political actors in Europe, especially in those countries in which illiberal parties were in power for a longer period of time. This requires a better understanding how ideological narratives are transformed to actual educational and cultural policies.

Studies addressing the relationship between the ideological alignment of rightwing illiberal parties and their public policy programs tend to short-circuit the two. For example, the analysis of the manifestos of 15 Western European rightwing populist parties proves that there is a strong connection between their ideological alignment and the educational policies they propose. (Espelang at al., 2023) This strong relationship can be also easily established in the documents that Fidesz and PiS made public while in opposition in Hungary and Poland respectively. However, strongly connecting political ideologies and policies in texts is not identical with ensuring ideological coherence while in power. When conservative illiberal parties come to power, this relationship immediately becomes indirect and contextual. In other words: in power the discursive and substantive elements of educational and cultural policies might be much more strongly separated. (This is less salient in the case of cultural policies that might be driven more by ideological drivers.) Ignoring this complexity involves the risk of leaving invisible the context, outside of political ideologies and current political dynamics, that determines what educational and cultural policy changes these parties will initiate once in power. Therefore, while the shortcut between value orientations and policy proposals may well serve the understanding of the behavior of illiberal parties in opposition, the analysis of educational and cultural policies of illiberal parties in power calls for taking into account the wider context within which policymaking occurs.

Since the transformation of political ideologies into policies takes place in a complex context through a multistep process, we applied a multilayered analysis. For each layer we

developed analytical tools that were extracted from the evidence we collected for this study. The five layers of analyzing educational and cultural policymaking are the following:

1. The analytical tool for the first layer of the analysis was the identification of the key value elements of educational and cultural policy narratives that European illiberal parties use. The comparative analysis addressed the value composition of the policy narratives of different European illiberal parties to determine the specific features of those of the Central and Eastern European parties.
2. The second layer of the analysis required determining a taxonomy of the primary purposes that educational and cultural policy initiatives intend to serve. Based on this instrument a comparative analysis of the educational and cultural policy agendas of illiberal parties in power (Fidesz and PiS) is provided. The analysis of the policy agendas is partly based on the distinction between overt and hidden policy agendas. By overt agendas we mean initiatives and aspirations in educational or cultural policy that are driven by the values and social or economic goals that are openly represented by illiberal political parties, regardless of the extent to which these goals and values are accepted in the mainstream international discourse. In contrast, hidden agendas refer to initiatives and policies serving purposes that cannot be openly represented because they contradict to widely accepted ethical norms or constitutional principles. Examples of such hidden objectives may include the concentration of state power for the sake of maintaining political power, the various forms of corruption, the purchase of political alliances, or the elimination of political opponents.
3. For the sake of allowing a better understanding of the actual policies, the third layer of analysis is based on the identification of the key elements of the political and governance context of educational and cultural policymaking in Hungary and Poland. This allowed for the comparative analysis of the various hard and soft policy instruments applied by the two illiberal parties in power.
4. Since illiberal parties typically determine their policy goals in contrast to the international mainstream represented by influential international organizations, as well as by other domestic political parties that are perceived as "serving the interests" of these international organizations, the fourth layer of analysis is supported by the identification of the key terms used to frame the contemporary mainstream educational and cultural policy discourses. Based on this reference a brief comparative analysis is provided of the way in which illiberal parties in power reframe the educational and cultural policy discourses. This allows for reflection on the political propaganda-driven "post-truth" policymaking pattern of Central and Eastern European policymaking in education and culture.

5. The last layer of the analysis required the identification of a few indicators for the assessment of the effectiveness of educational and cultural policies. This allows for a limited but evidence-based analysis of the outcomes of the educational and cultural policies of illiberal parties in power in Hungary and Poland.

Table 1. Summary Outline of the Analysis

Analytical tools	Analysis
Identifying key value elements of policy narratives	Comparative analysis of value composition of the narratives of illiberal parties
Determining a taxonomy of primary purposes that policy initiatives serve	Comparative analysis of educational and cultural policy agendas of illiberal parties in power
Identifying key political and governance factors determining the context of countries	Comparative analysis of the policy instruments applied by illiberal parties in power
Identifying the key terms framing mainstream international educational and cultural policies	Comparative analysis of illiberal framing of educational and cultural policies
Identifying indicators for the assessment of the outcomes of educational and cultural policies	Analysis of the outcomes of the educational and cultural policies of illiberal parties in power

1. Overview of Key Value-Based Illiberal Narratives

When illiberal parties at the extreme right of the political spectrum are striving to strengthen their popular support, especially when they gain power, they typically engage in a culture war. This struggle in the symbolic space of politics is based on relentless efforts to reframe the political discourse along certain ideological values, such as conservative traditionalism, nationalism, and exclusionary religious dominance, while in terms of regime characteristics, it combines "the formal aspects of liberal democracy with many of the goals and instruments of [...] authoritarian and totalitarian regimes" (Bonet and Zamorano 2021:562). What links these ideological elements is the political narrative of the protection of traditional identities that are perceived to be endangered by real or imagined enemies. Since—whether or not it is substantiated—education is traditionally perceived as the most important institutional vehicle through which ideological values can be promoted, culture wars immediately turn education into a battlefield, too. Especially when conservative illiberal parties form

governments and gain control over all means of policymaking these culture wars intensify. Nevertheless, as it will be demonstrated by the differences between the Hungarian and Polish cases, in spite of these similarities, the scope and intensity of transforming ideological narratives and doctrines into concrete educational policy measures is determined by a lot of nonideological factors. As the overview on the educational and cultural policies of the illiberal parties in the following sections will demonstrate, cases when ideological principles are directly transformed into policies are rather rare.

While the above list already hints at some of the most important ideological currents that determine the educational and cultural policies of illiberal governments, the paragraphs below offer a more detailed and systematic overview, and they highlight potential overlaps between such ideologies.

Conservatism

One core feature of the educational and cultural policy narratives of right-wing illiberal actors is a quest to return to the cultural ideals of previous historical periods (especially the late 19th century and the interwar period), combined with a desire to resist contemporary cultural pressures that are mostly associated with progressivism, "the West," and individualism. The narrative justifies these tendencies with the necessity of strengthening (mostly national) communities to resist the atomization of societies, alienation, moral relativization, and the loss of (national, cultural, and Christian) identity. This narrative is often closely intertwined with religious and nationalist narratives; however, what differentiates it from the other two is that it has a predominantly negative view on human progress (with the potential exception of technology and economic growth) and aims to use education and culture to protect communities from value changes that it deems dangerous or immoral. In the postcommunist context that some of our cases share, these pursuits have mostly focused on the preservation of conservative cultural values regarding issues such as family, gender, and respect for authority that has also been referred to as a special blend of "postcommunist traditionalism" (Csillag and Szelényi 2015).

When it comes to specific policies from our sample, several of the illiberal parties (ANO, FDI, Lega, RN) emphasize the preservation of cultural heritage in general, and especially traditional regional or national folklore culture. This is often intertwined with nationalist appeals in an inseparable manner. For instance, in its 2017 and 2022 electoral manifestos, the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN) of Marine Le Pen sought to enshrine "national identity, values, and the traditions of French civilization," as well as "the promotion of our historical and cultural heritage" in the constitution.

A conservative tendency has also been noticeable in the case of the initially regionalist Lega (Nord) party in Italy: as underlined by Albertazzi et al. (2018), their party leader, Matteo Salvini, produced a "nativist" turn that has become the key element of the political offer of the party. In their 2022 electoral manifesto, the main conservative traits (focusing on lowering taxes, supporting employers and especially small and medium-sized enterprises) have been matched with more populist radical-right proposals.

Nevertheless, conservatism rarely appears in a pure form in the educational and cultural policies of illiberal parties but is most often coupled with either nationalist or religious values, or both, as the paragraphs below illustrate.

Nationalism

Strongly connected to the narrative above, illiberal actors often refer to nations as the core vehicles and embodiments of a shared identity that can safeguard communities against the pressures of globalization, uniformization, and moral demise. Often defined in ethnic, linguistic, or nativist terms, the construction of the nation also provides an opportunity for illiberal actors to draw clear boundaries between in and out groups, to discursively exclude minorities from the concept of a shared community, and to ostracize certain groups as the "enemies of the nation." Through making nationalism a central ideological tenet of such regimes, illiberal actors often end up monopolizing the term and creating controversies regarding the use of national symbols, constructing a space in which their liberal opponents may be portrayed as "traitors"—a practice that Bonet and Zamorano (2021:569) referred to as "exclusionary nationalism enforced through historical revisionism."

Nationalist appeals are especially prevalent in the education and cultural policies of the parties we have scrutinized. In the Austrian case, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), which has been involved in coalition governments between 2000-2005 and 2017-2019, favors the promotion and subsidization of regional customs and traditions as expressions of national identity, as well as the preservation of cultural monuments. The FPÖ views the German language as a central culture-forming element. In pursuit of this, the party has advocated for free admission to Austrian federal museums for Austrian families, as well as for increasing the share of Austrian films and music in public broadcasting. The party has also criticized the provision of public funds to artists who do not conform to traditional artistic norms.

In the Czech context, two parties may be considered illiberal, with nationalist traits: the ANO party of Andrej Babiš and the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party of Tomio Okamura. Despite ANO's nonideological character, a book published by its leader, Andrej Babiš, (2017) emphasizes that culture is the core of a national identity that makes Czechs

unique among other nations (Babiš, 2017: 162). The book lists an array of famous Czech pieces of art, architecture, and literature, especially mentioning the need to promote regional culture and tourism. The nativist-populist right-wing SPD's long-term program (SPD, 2021) states that "culture has a clear meaning for society in terms of maintaining national identity and preserving its historical legacy," (SPD, 2021) therefore creating a considerable connection between culture and nationalism. Although much has already been written on ANO's relationship to populism and illiberalism in general (Hanley and Vachudova, 2018; Havlik and Voda, 2016; Buštíková and Guasti, 2018), very little direct evidence related specifically to cultural proposals or concrete policies can be found. One of the reasons for this might be the fact the ANO's approach to politics is not ideology-driven, but more interest-driven (Cirhan and Kopecký, 2019). In contrast to this, the main ideology behind the SPD is nativism combined mainly with populist features (Suchánek and Hasman, 2022).

In the French case, the policy proposals of the Rassemblement National (RN) are based on the defense of traditional values, and particularly national sovereignty, in education and in culture. In terms of specific policy proposals, this translates to increasing the share of French history and language in school curricula, as well as promoting a peculiar understanding of national history that is based on a romanticized interpretation of the "national myth" and therefore contributes to the construction of national identity. In 2022, Marine Le Pen also suggested introducing a "national patrimonial service," on a voluntary basis, during which young citizens would work toward the restoration, protection, and enhancement of national heritage. Moreover, RN suggested having a French flag on permanent display on all public buildings and to remove European flags.

Religiosity

Although the intensity of state-church relations varies considerably across our countries of interest, illiberal political actors have closely relied on especially the Catholic church but to a lesser extent also on other Christian denominations as a source of legitimization on the one hand, and as an embodiment of a set of coherent values that are deemed desirable by illiberal politicians on the other. As the intensity of religious affiliation and faith varies considerably and is diminishing in most European countries, illiberal actors have routinely referred to the church not necessarily in religious terms, but rather as the guarantor of certain values mostly associated with social conservatism, such as a strong preference for nuclear families, heteronormative relationship models, traditional gender roles, and opposition to abortion.

Even though emphasizing religious values as a form of legitimation strategy is a pattern shared by PiS and Fidesz (Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville 2022), it is not as relevant in the other cases, or when it is it is instrumentalized as a disguise to justify anti-

Muslim appeals. For instance, in its most recent electoral manifesto, the Austrian FPÖ refers to religious symbols as markers of "occidental"—as opposed—to "oriental" (read: Muslim) identity. Similarly, in the French case, RN is explicitly in favor of secularism (*laïcité*) mostly as a means to curtail the growing influence of Islam in certain schools, whereas it does not extend this argument to state-contracted private schools (which are mostly Catholic). RN also advocates banning wearing the Islamic veil for persons accompanying school excursions. Therefore, religion is used by illiberal actors for different purposes, depending on the national context: either to rely on the church as an ally and an external source of legitimation, or to marginalize non-Christian minorities.

Majoritarianism, Anti-Pluralism

Arguably one of the central tenets of illiberalism is its strong preference for majority rule; that is, the idea that the core mandate of government is to represent the interests of a well-defined plurality of citizens at the expense of dedicating less attention to or even ignoring the preferences of social minorities. This understanding is closely related to populist actors' self-definition as the sole representative or even embodiment of "the people" as opposed to corrupt elites or out groups defined by different terms (globalists, atlanticists, traitors, "Brusselites," etc.). Besides strongly favoring the emergence of a dominant actor and a cohesive constituency that supports it, this narrative also entails that the plurality of opinions and diversity are not seen as values but rather as necessary evils that governments cannot openly oppress but are also not worthy of special support or protection. This preference for majoritarian views has severe implications for how the importance of debates, different styles and genres of cultural expression, and minority opinions and lifestyles are viewed by decision-makers in the fields of education and culture.

Several examples of majoritarian narratives may be found in the electoral manifestos of the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party in Czechia, which target various minorities (immigrants, LGBTQ+, muslims, other ethnic minorities, etc.). In its cultural policy proposals, SPD makes a distinction between cultural manifestations that are desirable and acceptable—when they represent "our" (Christian, European) culture and traditions, as opposed to other forms that are perceived as "foreign" (Islamic, non-European, and therefore inherently barbaric) and deemed undesirable and unacceptable. This assumed cherry-picking of cultural facets via a predetermined nativist set of attributes makes for a substantially xenophobic (in terms of race, religion, gender, sexuality, etc.) approach of the SPD toward culture.

In the case of France, Marine Le Pen's party is strongly against positive discrimination in secondary and tertiary education, and advocates the elimination of courses that emphasize that national identity is based on diverse cultural backgrounds (ELCO, Enseignements de

langue et de culture d'origine), therefore strengthening a majoritarian understanding of French nationhood.

Authoritarianism, Paternalism

Finally, illiberal actors tend to favor strongly hierarchical state-society relationships in which individuals and self-organized groups (NGOs, civil society, interest groups, unions) do not make strong claims for interest articulation, something that has already been done by the homogenous "people" who elected the government. Therefore, good citizens are expected to respect authority, not to protest or only do so within well-defined boundaries (making the concept of "civil disobedience" problematic in such regimes). Moreover, especially in the case of postcommunist countries, such respect for authority is coupled with limiting the space of citizens as autonomous actors and intensifying their reliance on a centralized state bureaucracy when it comes to the provision of basic social services, distributing funds, or awarding licenses for business activities. This results in a large majority of obedient citizens who depend on the state, with a minority of financially well-off and more autonomous economic and cultural elites who can afford to opt out from public services.

While authoritarian and paternalist attitudes are well-documented features of post-socialist societies (Csillag and Szelényi 2015, Enyedi 2016) and therefore are expected to surface in Hungary, Poland, and Czechia, this assumption is less obvious in our non-Central and Eastern European cases. However, we can identify certain instances of authoritarian narratives used in the manifestos of illiberal parties in these countries, too.

For instance, the French RN's policy proposals routinely emphasize respect for authority and discipline as desirable outputs of the education system, especially insofar as the authority of teachers and disciplinary measures against teachers are concerned.

However, when it comes to financing cultural institutions, we find some counterintuitive examples, too, that favor pro-market solutions rather than statism. For instance, the Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) of Giorgia Meloni, in its most recent electoral manifesto (2022) emphasized the centrality of private support for culture, and underlined the relevance of the role of private funding in the management of public sites, especially those that have been closed to the public. Also in the case of Lega, an entire paragraph of its most recent (2022) electoral manifesto is dedicated to "culture and Italian identity," in which the role of societal organizations and private actors are seen as key in making cultural sites more accessible. Furthermore, the manifesto underlines the relevance of liberalizing the management of cultural sites and, broadly speaking, of the Italian cultural heritage. These findings suggest that the extent to which authoritarianism and paternalism are compatible with illiberal parties' agenda is a factor of national historical contexts.

2. Measures Serving Overt Educational and Cultural Policy Agendas in Hungary and Poland

In the area of educational and cultural policies, illiberal actors seem to be most concerned with implementing a canon that emphasizes national values as opposed to cosmopolitanism, globalism, and cultural liberalism. However, the extent to which such considerations are made explicit varies regionally and as a function of whether illiberal political parties are in government or in opposition. This section explores educational and cultural policy agendas in Hungary and in Poland (where illiberal actors have been in power for a sustained period of time and therefore had a chance to implement their policy agendas), grouped into four categories: (1) policy measures that serve genuine cultural policy purposes; (2) measures that are meant to indicate a radical break from/reversal of the policies of previous governments; (3) policies designed to directly promote ideological considerations; and (4) policies driven mostly by power-related motives/autocratic centralization (to be discussed in the next section).

The distribution of these categories is not symmetrical across educational and cultural policies: since the latter are mostly concerned with the distribution of power and resources between rival elite groups, their relevance to the vote-seeking motivations of political parties is limited. Therefore, the second category listed above does not surface in the cultural field, while it is one of the predominant categories within educational policy that has direct implications on the daily lives of a large share of the population. However, genuine ideology-driven policy measures are prevalent in both fields. The following sections first review the main policy agendas in education, followed by culture, in Hungary and Poland, respectively.

2.1 Educational Policies

Hungary

The educational policy agenda of the Fidesz government is largely determined by two contextual political factors. The first was the landslide victory of Fidesz at the 2010 elections that led to a two-third supermajority in the parliament, and which opened the way for the complete unilateral rebuilding of the constitutional frame for exercising power. The second was the two unexpected elections defeats in 2002 and 2006. They created an extremely strong drive among the leading politicians of Fidesz to implement a critical mass of irreversible changes that secure the long-lasting power of the party. (As it was frequently

said in the party during the 2010 elections campaign, “we only must win once, but for at least 20 years.”) In the meantime, Fidesz had no plans of any sort for changes to be implemented in the education sector. The 2010 elections program of Fidesz did not contain anything about education. The Christian Democratic People’s Party—in theory the coalition partner of Fidesz, in fact a subordinate group in the parliament—issued a rather lengthy educational program,[3] but it was no more than an ideological manifesto on the role of education in promoting the rise of the nation and in strengthening the Christian and national foundations of the identity of the state, but it did not contain any concrete measures or changes. (Radó, 2022)

The complete lack of constitutional boundaries, the drive to change everything, and the complete lack of a preliminary program created a unique situation: the government initiated a great mass of changes at the systemic scale without any deliberation. This amounted to a complete reshuffle of the education system that was justified only with rather empty ideological and propaganda narratives. (Radó, 2021/a) Another important contextual political circumstance that influenced the direction of educational policies of the government was the fact that the left-wing and liberal opposition has been almost completely eroded while the far-right Jobbik party has been significantly strengthened. In order to avoid being overtaken on the right in the political race, Fidesz, once in government, has implemented a shocking number of measures from the far-right party’s program, including in the field of education. (Radó, 2022) (In a sense, the unscrupulous cherry-picking from the education program of Jobbik has partly filled the void created by the complete absence of an education government program.)

These are the reasons why certain underlying goals that are normally part of hidden agendas of political parties in power in 2010 and 2011 largely became part of the government’s open educational policy agenda among the special circumstances of the fast creation of the overall framework of autocratic governance. Consequently, the educational policy agenda of the Fidesz government after 2010 serves several different intentions that are inextricably linked: (1) the extreme concentration of power in the hands of the government, (2) the typical aim of populist parties to demonstrate how different they are from previous governments, and (3) the practical application of certain ideological values. (As will be seen in the following sections, due to the much more incremental pattern of educational policymaking, in Poland these different intentions are much more easily separated.) However, genuine educational policy goals that aimed at solving economic, social, or any other problems are almost never on the educational policy agenda of Fidesz.

The educational policies of the consecutive Orbán governments during the last 13 years can be divided into three main periods with distinct governance behavior. The first period started with the enacting of new legislation on primary and secondary education, on

[3] See https://kdnp.hu/files/Barankovics_oktatas_kiadvany_web.pdf

vocational training, and on higher education at the end of 2011 and lasted till the end of 2015. The main feature of this period is the perpetual chaos that was caused by the very poor management of the implementation of a large number of major systemic changes. (Radó, 2021/a) The main characteristic of the second period between 2016 and 2022 is non-governance that was the result of a more than half-year-long resistance movement of a large number of teachers. During this period, the number of government initiatives was very small, and the focus of the educational policy interventions shifted from systemic changes to serving ideological agendas and to higher education, as discussed later. (Radó, 2022) After 2022, the shift of emphasis of educational policy was the result of the renewed intensive teacher and student resistance to the government that was fueled by the appalling devaluation of teachers' salaries and the very high workload of teachers, the worsening shortage of teachers, and the further erosion of quality. In this period, the government responded to the resistance with ever more open repressive measures (for example, by firing protesting teachers) and regulations (for example, the de facto abolition of the right to strike and the new law on the employment status of teachers). Beyond these, the government addressed certain problems in vocational education and training that it had previously created.

Bearing in mind the above-described circumstances, the following attempt to categorize the many policy and institutional changes implemented by Fidesz under one of the overt or hidden intentions is an attempt of relative value. Their separation is based on dominant intentions, while each measure may have served several different purposes. Nevertheless, the most dominant purpose underpinning the great majority of changes is obviously power concentration: the extreme centralization of the governance of the school system, the complete abolition of the autonomy of all institutions (schools, universities, research and development institutions), or the exclusion of autonomous actors from education (such as textbook publishers, professional service providers, professional associations, NGOs, trade unions, etc.), and replacing all these with mechanisms for bureaucratic administrative control. The public justification for these institutional changes revolved around two major themes: the statist doctrine of the need to increase the role of the government that alone is able to guarantee a uniform quality, and the populist narrative on the need to restore order in education after the decade long "liberal destruction." Beyond these main narratives, the government's propaganda used only empty generalities, such as the creation of "education that serves the rise of the nation" or the "restoration of the balance of rights and duties" in education.

Thus, the large majority of institutional changes implemented between 2011 and 2015 served naked power concentration and control. All public educational institutions—with the exception of kindergartens—were taken over from self-governments and maintained by the newly established Klebelsberg School Maintaining Authority (KLIK). (The

facilities of the schools in theory remained self-government properties.) For a short period of time, the operational costs of education were funded by self-governments, but in 2015 the responsibility of funding the returning operational costs was also taken over by the local government authorities that completely eliminated any self-government responsibility in education. This process is widely referred to as the "nationalization" of schools. The state-owned schools were terminated as separate legal entities and were merged into KLIK. Ever since, schools have been directly micro-managed by 198 de-concentrated departments of KLIK called school district directorates. The only correction in this system occurred in 2016, when the de-concentrated network of school district directorates was amalgamated into 58 directorates.

On the basis of the new legislation school directors are directly appointed by the minister responsible for education, and school district directors took over all employment-related decisions-making competencies from school directors. The financial autonomy of schools was terminated. Schools do not have a budget; all minor expenses are covered directly by the school district directorates. The new financing system is based on centrally managed input financing. Teachers' salaries are transferred directly from the State Treasury, and schools do not have a set-aside budget even within the annual budget of the local school-maintaining directorates. At the time being, there are six parallel financing systems in place in Hungary, each with a different level of centralization, with different underlying allocation mechanisms, and each using different methods to calculate funding (Ercse-Radó, 2019; Radó, 2021/a).

The organizational and professional autonomy of schools was also terminated, and its scope was reduced to a symbolic extent. A New National Core Curriculum and supplementing framework curricula (in fact, centrally issued detailed syllabi) were issued in 2012. A new system of professional supervision was introduced in 2013 that focuses on the administrative control of individual teachers and school directors. To exclude teachers' unions from decision-making a "Teachers' Chamber" was established in which membership is mandatory.

Finally, in order to push out nonprofit and for-profit actors from the education sector the system of textbook publishing, textbook distribution, and all sorts of pedagogical services were nationalized. Instead, a single government textbook system and a small network of government operated regional pedagogical centers were created that enabled the government to directly control the content of textbooks and teacher-training programs.

Other educational policy measures and institutional changes had a strong populist character in the sense that they were popular among conservative teachers and parents who belonged to the constituency of Fidesz. These were, for example, the termination of operating quality management systems that since 2002 was a mandatory task of schools, the gradual

introduction of a career scheme for teachers in which advancement depended on predetermined criteria and procedures and was administered by qualifying committees, the introduction of three years mandatory preschool attendance and making textbooks free for all pupils.

The number of interventions that directly served ideological indoctrination was very limited, but their impact on the value orientation of the educational practice was significant. The first was the introduction of religious classes—one per week—delivered by the educators of the Christian churches and funded by the state budget. The alternative offered to the parents was signing up their children to ethics classes for which a big number of teachers were trained very fast. Beyond the government-incited process of the rapid expansion of the school network owned by the churches, this was a gesture to the bigger Christian churches that are strong political allies of Fidesz (Ercse-Radó, 2019; Radó, 2019).

Another very much ideological project of the government was the development and introduction of the new national core curriculum. The 2012 curriculum did not overtly serve ideological indoctrination yet. Its main purpose was establishing direct government control over the content of teaching and learning in the classrooms. At the peak of the 2016 teachers' protest movement, the government announced a package of symbolic minor alterations to the system, the majority of which has not been implemented. One of them was the promise to develop a new national core curriculum that will reduce the workload of teachers. The development of the new central curriculum was started on a professional basis, but in 2018 the control of the process was handed over to a few ideological consultants of the government who turned it to an overtly culture-war weapon. The new national curriculum implemented in 2020 did not reduce teacher workload; instead it changed the curriculum in a few subjects (especially history, language, and literature) in an extremely nationalistic and conservative manner.

In certain cases, the underlying narratives that serve the justification of educational policy measures appear to be strongly values-based approaches, but in fact they are the simple products of the current output of the political propaganda machinery of the government that actually framed the political agenda. The prohibition of the gender studies programs in higher education or making the operation of the Central European University impossible by administrative means fall under this category.

There is one area in which there are examples of genuine educational policies in the sense that they are aimed at solving problems: vocational education and training. (Having said that, we do not suggest that the underlying understanding of problems or the implemented changes were appropriate.) The supervision of vocational education was taken over by Ministry of National Economy in 2015, which by consecutive interventions partially corrected the fundamentally wrong policies of the government that were based on an

extremely narrow vocationalization of upper-secondary education. This policy was based on the notion that the most important function of education is serving the short- and medium-term needs of the "labor market" (that is, employers). This narrow approach has been taken to the extreme by Fidesz under the political doctrine of the "work-based society" that had major implications for other public policy areas too, such as economic, social, and employment policies. (Radó, 2022)

Since 2010, the unified governance of the education sector has fallen apart in Hungary. Therefore, similarly to vocational educational policy, higher education policy has become a parallel story. Although the overall intention of Fidesz of expanding government control and of eliminating institutional autonomies applies to higher education too, due to the specificities of higher education and its much greater advocacy capacity, this process has been much slower. The most important milestones in this process were: the enactment into law of the right of the minister of education to appoint rectors independently of the Senate in 2011, the elimination of the independence of the higher education accreditation committee, the introduction of the position of government-appointed chancellors who supervise the economic, financial, and organizational management of higher education institutions without being subordinated to the rector.

Poland

What the ruling illiberal parties in Hungary and Poland have in common in their educational policies is their strong desire to differentiate themselves from the political groups that have governed earlier. Both Fidesz and PiS started their first government terms with various institutional and policy changes that aimed at "restoring normal circumstances" prior to the "destruction and damage" in education caused by the reforms of previous governments. However, the constitutional space within which they were able to consider changes was very different. While Fidesz in 2010 with a two-thirds majority in parliament immediately broke down the constitutional barriers to changing anything in the education system, PiS after the 2015 elections had no such huge latitude for action. In addition to this, while Fidesz became a large political conglomerate incorporating various value alignments held together by the interests of power—and, in no small part, by the vested interests created by the control over the flow of resources—PiS represents a more unambiguous and streamlined value character. As a consequence, the educational policies of PiS are more targeted to ideological aims, so in the case of Poland we can establish a more direct connection between ideological values and specific educational policy interventions.

Having these differences in mind, when reviewing the changes initiated by the PiS government in education after 2015, we can more easily separate the above-mentioned four

distinct groups of measures and initiatives. The first type of changes is policy measures that serve genuine educational policy purposes without being obviously directly connected to political or ideological agendas. This list is the shortest, containing a single, although complex, change: the reform of vocational education and training by further strengthening the system of qualifications that is reinforced by external examinations. (Jakubowski, 2021) This measure is complemented with higher financing for training in in-demand professions as an incentive. However, even this set of interventions is not entirely independent of ideological orientations; while conservative parties tend to focus strongly on vocational training in order to meet the needs of the labor market, liberal and left-wing policies rather emphasize general education that serves broader social and educational purposes, as well as future-oriented economic goals.

The second and longest list of educational policy measures implemented by the PiS government after 2015 includes various institutional and policy changes designed to demonstrate a radical break with the educational policies of previous governments. They can be described as populist policies as—according to Polish education experts—their selection was based on opinion poll results: those elements of the 1999 education reform were targeted that were unpopular with the constituency of PiS, especially among conservative teachers.

To a great extent, these changes eliminated certain symbolic elements of the 1999 reform. These included the reversal of key elements of the early-education reform, such as making preschool education no longer obligatory for five-year-olds and postponing schooling start again to the age of seven. Probably the most iconic element of the 1999 reform was a shift to a 6+3+3 school structure, from which the government turned back to the earlier 8+4 structure. The return to the traditional eight-year primary school education that is followed by secondary education automatically reduced the number of school-leaving examinations from three to two, at the end of the primary and secondary cycles. Nevertheless, these exams remain external and standardized; therefore, the basically test-based accountability system that was created earlier remained untouched. (Jakubowski, 2021) These measures were supplemented with an intervention of the same kind in 2017: the partial reversal of the prior gradual curriculum modernization by the removal of interdisciplinary curricular blocks and project-based learning programs from the national core curriculum. All other elements of the 1999 reform and the various follow-up changes in 1999-2015 remained in place. Therefore, the education system remained decentralized and liberalized, and the changes did not have a negative effect on the effectiveness of the education system, as happened in Hungary. (Radó, 2021/b)

Bearing in mind the strong ideological alignment of the communication of the PiS government, the third set of educational policy interventions that contains measures

designed to directly promote ideological considerations is rather small. However, since these are the types of changes that may have the highest political costs because they have the potential of generating strong resistance, it is not so surprising.

The first initiative is the part of the anti-LGBTQ legislation that aims at reducing the impact of "liberal elites" trying to "sexualize" Polish children that is a threat to their "morality." The goal of the government in this respect is increasing oversight of extracurricular activities run by NGOs. To this end, the government appointed regional superintendents whose approval is required to host any extracurricular activities in schools. Although this legislation was vetoed by the president, the government announced that it would pass the amendment of related regulations anyway. This initiative was obviously a gesture to the government's main political ally, the Catholic Church. Critics of the measure drew attention to the fact that, if this legislation were enacted, this instrument of control could be used for any other purposes beyond sexual education.

The other already implemented change is connected to another major theme of the culture wars: protecting the historical identity of Poles. This policy is based on the false claim that previous governments removed Polish history from the curriculum. In other words, major emphasis on historical memory with resistance to external aggression in the center serves well a policy legitimized by resistance to present imagined enemies. The educational policy initiative that served this purpose was a new curriculum for social studies; the Knowledge About Society curriculum was replaced by the History and the Present curriculum in 2022, which presented the worldview of PiS. This is the most obvious case for turning education into an ideological and political propaganda instrument.

The last type of policies of the PiS government served pure power-related changes; that is, measures to extend central government control for political ends. We will discuss these changes in the following section.

2.2 Cultural Policies

Hungary

While one may argue that most Fidesz's cultural policy measures have either been motivated by ideological motives or power-grabbing motives (see Section 4), there have been certain initiatives that simply served to improve the quality of cultural production, to make the allocation of public funds more efficient, or to make such cultural products more accessible. One key example that fits into this category is the five-year plan for revitalizing popular music production that was commissioned by the Petőfi Cultural Agency, in consultation with

industry experts, and was adopted in 2021.[4] The plan laid out several policy objectives that aim at addressing problems raised by professionals, including improving the availability of rehearsal spaces and concert halls[5] in the countryside, as well as allocating public funds for popular music education and the development of music studios. Even though some elements of the plan (such as the potential relocation of a popular alternative music venue, A38, in Budapest) sparked controversies, most observers and professionals agreed that it successfully integrated the experience of music industry interest groups and experts and made an honest attempt to address some of the structural problems of music infrastructure and funding.

In a similar vein, the restructuring of the allocation of public funds for film production under the leadership of Andrew G. Vajna, a previously established Hungarian-born film producer in Hollywood, also addressed legitimate concerns regarding the international marketability of Hungarian films. Vajna served as a government commissioner responsible from film production from 2011 until 2019, and oversaw the establishment of a dedicated fund for film production that made the selection process more competitive and more weighted on expected popular reception and international success. Although this approach has been criticized by directors who did not receive funding for being too market-based and too personalistic, it nevertheless managed to bring long-unseen achievements to the film industry, which did not only materialize in numerous festival nominations and an Oscar in 2016, but also in the rapid growth of the international film production sector in Hungary (Valocikova 2017).[6] The achievements of the Vajna era seem even more significant in retrospect: following his death in 2019, film financing has been influenced by political pressures to an unprecedented extent, leading to the production of a series of mediocre "historical movies" that reinterpret significant episodes of Hungarian history from a conservative perspective, often serving direct political purposes.

When it comes to cultural policies designed to directly promote ideological considerations, nationalism seems to prevail as an ideological umbrella that determines cultural policies; however, they are intertwined with the promotion of conservative cultural values (Kristóf 2021), mostly regarding issues such as family, gender, and respect for authority. The extent to which such values are enforced through policies differs across subsectors: while theatres and the literary scene have been especially considered by the Fidesz-led government as the primary arenas of its self-declared "culture war," classical and popular music have been less central during most of Fidesz's tenure. However, pressures to

[4] See details in the following article: https://www.valaszonline.hu/2020/06/24/demeter-szilard-popzene-terv-exkluziv/

[5] The "houses of culture" were omnipresent in the Soviet bloc; however, they were often abandoned and left to erode due to the depopulation of the countryside after the democratic transition in the region (See Rindzevičiūtė 2021:151).

[6] See https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/hungary-news/item/122427-hungarian-film-industry-is-booming-in-2021

extend the scope of culture war to these spheres have intensified from 2018 when, in his regular speech at the Baile Tusnad Free University, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said that: "An era is determined by cultural trends, collective beliefs, and social customs. This is now the task we are faced with: we must embed the political system in a cultural era. (...) after the third two-thirds victory, we really need to adopt a spiritual and cultural approach."[7][8]

Nevertheless, as the interviews conducted for this paper[9] with music researchers and industry experts revealed, this was not an easy task since Fidesz has in general had a hard time connecting with young audiences (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2022), and especially popular music was driven by spontaneous, bottom-up dynamics that were hard to influence through institutional politics—nevertheless, attempts to do so have significantly intensified since 2018, as will be explained in Section 4. In the case of fine arts, the opposite dynamics may be observed: while Fidesz has engaged in the institutional restructuring of this field with a strong ideological fervor after its first two-thirds majority in 2010, by 2021, even Orbán realized that not all artists can be abused to serve direct political purposes.[10]

However, Fidesz has clearly prioritized fine arts after its first two-thirds majority in 2010 and in 2011, it even granted the status of a public entity to the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), a conglomerate of conservative artists that was previously not eligible for state funding, unlike its liberal counterpart, the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts (Kristóf 2017). The prevalence of ideological motives in fine arts was further exacerbated by the activist role of MMA's then-director György Fekete, who heralded a conservative turn in cultural policy and gave several controversial, ultraconservative statements to the press that emphasized the role of religious and national values in cultural production. The same discourse was amplified by Imre Kerényi, a theatre director who was nominated as a prime ministerial commissioner for promoting national culture, a (tailor-made) position that was marked by several controversial milestones, including the publication of an arbitrarily selective series of Hungarian literature's masterpieces, as well as the procurement of a series of paintings to illustrate the core values of the country's new constitution adopted in 2011. The nomination of theatre directors was even more heavily politicized and, while it can partly

[7] Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/

[8] One should note that Orbán's commitment to changing the country's cultural elite date back to at least 2010 when, in an influential speech, he said that "the task of cultural policy is to find, appreciate, and inspire those individuals and groups who create value, and to distribute the patterns thus created to the people, using the right forms and channels—if you like, to make them part of mass culture". See https://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/cikk/megorizni_a_letezes_magyar_minoseget

[9] WP6-0003, WP6-0014

[10] See Orbán's speech at the funeral of movie director Marcell Jankovics, in which he explains how he came to understand that Jankovics's mission was not to deliver political messages in his work, even though he received generous support from the state. See the full transcript of the speech (in Hungarian) https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-gyaszbeszede-jankovics-marcell-temetesen/

be understood as an element of institutional capture, related decisions were also cast in a heavily ideological disguise. Chief among such events was the nomination of a former leading figure in conservative theatre circles that challenged the "intellectual hegemony" of liberal intelligentsia as the new director of the Hungarian National Theatre in 2012, replacing the previous director who was very popular among urban liberals (Kristóf 2021). Similarly controversial was the appointment of a radical-right actor to head Új Színház, a theatre in Budapest, which also happened in the same year. Successive debates on theatre focused more on power- and finance-related issues; however ideological debates surfaced again after the adoption of the "Child Protection Law" of 2021 (Linnamäki 2022), which conflated pedophilia with LGTBQ identities and prescribed unrealistic requirements for theatres, leading to the accusation of specific theatres of promoting "LGBTQ propaganda" in their performances.

Even though Fidesz has managed to dominate institutions and the allocation of resources in the cultural sphere, its achievements regarding the transformation of the ideological landscape and the creation of a new, conservative national canon have been modest. The party elite's related disappointment became apparent in 2023, when prominent cultural policy leaders of the party engaged in public discussions[11] at the Baile Tusnad Free University regarding why conservative cultural products cannot complete with the Western mainstream. In sum, despite generous state funding, nationalist and ultraconservative cultural institutions did not succeed in redefining the cultural mainstream in Hungary since 2010, but they were used to justify the reallocation of resources and positions (Humán Platform, 2020).

Poland

In the case of Poland under PiS, the ideological underpinnings of cultural policies carried out after 2015 are coherent with the broader ideological narrative of PiS government. In this sense, a key ideological element of culture policy discourse is nationalism, ethnocentrism, and narrowly defined "patriotism." The PiS government treated culture instrumentally, as a mean to construct ethnic and national identity, and to increase patriotic feelings and a sense of belonging to the nation (Kopeć, 2019). Thus, only patriotic culture—that is, one that glorifies the nation—was valuable to the PiS government. Moreover, as Polish national identity was characterized by its historical fusion with Catholic religion (Grzymała-Busse 2015), the values that serve national identity building were, according to PiS, of a clearly religious nature. In this vision, cultural polices should aim at promoting traditional catholic

[11] See https://telex.hu/kult/2023/07/19/tusvanyosi-fesztival-kulturalis-trendek-l-simon-laszlo-hoppal-peter; https://telex.hu/kult/2023/07/21/tusvanyosi-fesztival-l-simon-laszlo-demeter-szilard-zavogyan-magdolna

values and morals and defend national identity from threats (from the left, from the EU, from "moral relativism," and so on). This brings us not only to a clearly conservative agenda that characterized PiS policies but to the politics of exclusion characteristic to illiberal policies. Exclusive conception of who pertains to the community of Poles proud of their nation together with the narrative of a besieged fortress traces clear frontiers between "us" and "them," consequently discriminating against immigrants, the LGBTQI+ community, and those with non-traditional gender identities, and altogether stigmatizing minority cultures. Also, populism was present in the ideological narrative of PiS cultural policies, in the sense of the anti-elitism of the call for "replacement of elites" and support for popular culture (folk and mass) as opposed to elite culture.

Culture is of course a crucial element in identity politics. One of the fundamental battlefields of the culture wars in the Polish case is the past and collective memory of it. PiS cultural policies are characterized by historical revisionism and martyrologic vision of the country's history invoking "a specific albeit totalizing mythology of the national past to gain control over the present, including its political aspect" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019, 458). A substantial part of its discourse refers to how Poles were unilateral victims during World War II and the Holocaust, and claims that any effort to shed light on possible collaboration should be cancelled. What PiS cultural policies search for is building national identity through a narrative portraying Poles as only the victims of history and creating a positive nostalgia for a guilt-free past. All those who think differently (especially dissident artists) are labeled enemies, "Poles of second sort," or directly anti-Polish elements. Therefore, PiS is a perfect example of what Bernhard and Kubik (2014, 4) call "mnemonic warriors" when referring to political actors that treat history instrumentally to construct a vision of the past legitimizing their effort to gain and hold power by drawing "a sharp line between themselves (the proprietors of the «true» version of the past) and other actors who cultivate «wrong» or «false» versions of history" (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 17).

In line with a clear effort of centralization, control, and censorship exercised by the government, support for independent cultural enterprises was reduced, particularly for civil society organizations and community activities not aligned with the vision promoted by PiS, freedom of speech was limited, and citizen empowerment through culture also suffered. In PiS's vision, the community is strictly dependent on the state, with government policies leading rather than to corporatism (present also before 2015 in the field of culture to a great degree) to state clientele networks. Culture in such position "is deprived of the elementary freedom of expression and is subordinated to the goals of historical policy: image-creating (outside) and patriotic upbringing (inside)" Kurz (2019: 29).

A closer look at the shifts in the financing of cultural services shows a clear picture of centrally planned effort of national identity building in which culture served primarily to

strengthen patriotic-religious identity aligned with the electoral interests of PiS and to indoctrinate citizens constructing hegemony through propaganda. Already in the 2014 electoral manifesto of PiS, a clear statement that "Culture needs support from the state" was followed immediately by an important disambiguation: "the scope of this support must go hand in hand with the sphere of values that are promoted by the state" (PiS, 2014: 139). In other words, only those artists and institutions who promote such understood "values of the state" in their work could count on support, while those critical of them could not. Thus, as discussed above, only art national in form and patriotic in content could count on public support. After reaching power, PiS started to financially strangle certain cultural enterprises: for instance, by cutting all subventions to ideologically distant magazines, such as Political Critique or Liberal Culture.

Only one policy intervention with genuine policy-related objectives may be singled out among the cultural policies of PiS: the reintroduction of fiscal deductions of 50% on expenses related to artistic work, which helped to ease the otherwise precarious financial situation of artists.

3. Measures Serving Hidden Educational and Cultural Policy Agendas in Hungary and Poland

3.1 Educational Policies

Hungary

As it was mentioned earlier, in the very special Hungarian context educational policy measures aiming at establishing administrative centralization for the heavier control of teachers, schools, and other education actors is part of the overt agenda; an intention that government officials openly represent on the basis of nationalist or "law and order" narratives. The hidden component, or—according to many observers and analysts—the real driving force behind extreme centralization, is using the administrative control by government agencies as a transmission belt to reach out to all these actors with political control. In the autocratic system built by Fidesz national, regional, and local government agencies and education authorities are not neutral; they operate under direct political control and they serve political agendas. The leaders of these agencies are selected on the basis of political loyalty, and they select managers for the institutions they supervise on the basis of political loyalty, too. The politicization of public education administration has become a norm, which is not openly pronounced but has become informally an everyday phenomenon (Humán Platform, 2020; Radó, 2022). Since the 2011 shift to a system in which the minister

responsible for education directly appoints school directors—for which the selection process is managed by the local school-maintaining directorates—the majority of directors were replaced by loyal new ones. Therefore, the chain of political control became complete in the education sector. This fits the overall pattern of attempting the replacement of elites with people who are loyal to the regime: in addition to the directors of the schools, this also extended to the managers of educational administration at all levels, the educational research and professional service institutions, and the management of universities.

It is important to keep in mind that loyalty in autocratic systems is not necessarily based on shared ideological values. Statements of nationalistic or ideological commitment are the verbal instruments of expecting or demonstrating political loyalty that further erodes the authenticity of value-based preferences. Beyond the language framework that is created by the nationalist, Christian, and conservative value references, the machinery of government propaganda conveyed by the Fidesz-controlled media also perpetually feeds elements into the linguistic toolbar of enforcing and expressing political loyalty.

Another important element of Fidesz's hidden educational policy agenda is the continuous remuneration of political allies. In this respect the most important beneficiaries of educational policies since 2010 have been the various Christian churches. Its most important strand is the government-generated and -incited privatization of a large segment of the school system to the churches that occurred parallel to the "nationalization" of all publicly owned schools. The government's school privatization policy has applied a combination of three types of instruments: (1) creating special rules for churches via regulations that reduce public control over their institutions and over the use of public resources they receive; (2) the alleviation of the bureaucratic, centralized administrative control in the case of church schools, particularly in relation to the greater autonomy of church schools; and (3) preferential financing for church schools, including the application of various positive and negative financial incentives. The expansion of the school network owned by the churches took many different forms. Between 2012 and 2015, the churches took over schools from the municipalities and then from the state in a large number, reopened schools in small settlements that had been closed by the municipalities in the previous decades, or founded new schools in settlements where there was already enough or more than necessary educational capacity (Ercse-Radó, 2019; Radó, 2019). This rapid artificially generated expansion did not respond to a growing demand for religious education. In fact, the opposite occurred: the government attempted to reverse the declining demand for it by establishing incentives for the local elites to send their children to church-owned private schools.

An important element of the hidden educational policy agenda of the Fidesz government is the political control of the flow of public resources. In general terms, the political control of decisions on awarding public resources to any developmental or economic

projects is one of the most important instruments by which the party establishes and maintains those informal local and regional networks that contribute to the stabilization of the regime. The education sector is not an exception: this hidden mechanism includes the generous funding provided to various stakeholder organizations allied with the party: primarily the Christian churches, but also the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and various conservative and or religious NGOs. The political control of financing expanded to the use of the EU development resources that are almost exclusively directed to schools, settlements, and institutions that are loyal to the ruling party. Some of them are independent in theory but led by politically allied leaders. (Radó, 2022) To facilitate the operation of this mechanism, the government almost completely eliminated the transparency of the use of state budget and EU funds. Needless to say, this creates huge latitude for corruption.

The control of financial resources is not only an objective but also a political instrument. In primary and secondary education when the government nationalized all public schools that were maintained by local self-government earlier and returned to the old input financing system, most of the funding decisions were made on a case-by-case basis within the discretional decision-making authority of district directors. From this point onward, school funding has been dependent on the goodwill of school district directors, which has become the most important means of enforcing political loyalty. The same happened in higher education. In 2012 and 2013, the government reduced the normative state budget funding of higher-education institutions to a dramatic extent. At the same time, a significant proportion of the funding lost has been compensated through individual discretionary decisions for granting mainly EU funds for “development” purposes, which were channeled into the funding of operational costs. This has perpetuated the political dependence of higher-education leaders. This new financing system is instrumental even for ensuring the persistent political support provided by the allies of the government, because they became dependent on one-off funding decisions too.

A new item on the list of serving intentions that cannot be openly communicated by the Hungarian government is connected to the repressive turn in the educational policies as a response to the second wave of the teachers’ protest movement in 2022 and 2023. Due to the fact that within the existing legal framework teacher unions are not able to organize strikes, many teachers used the instrument of civil disobedience to express their opinion. The government responded with the dismissal of many teachers and with additional restrictive regulations. This line of repressive measures culminated in the adoption of a new law on the employment status of teachers, which forces them into a status similar to that of members of the law-enforcement services. (The new law has been widely referred to as the “revenge law” by trade unions and other teachers’ organizations.) Although the government justified the new legislation with some the dysfunctions of the career scheme for teachers that was

established by the 2011 law on public education, the new law contains several measures that significantly increase the income and employment risks of engaging in civil disobedience.

A new means of ensuring stable political control is the privatization of the vast majority of public higher-education institutions through asset-management foundations (trusts) in 2021, because the government has filled the boards of these trusts with trustworthy Fidesz politicians and other people close to the party.

Poland

As far as the public policy goals of the PiS government that are could not be openly represented (that is, underlying purposes that add up to the hidden agenda of policymaking) are concerned, the judicial reform proved that PiS was also inclined to overstep the boundaries of the established constitutional system in order to concentrate power in the hands of the executive branch of the state, which it controled. However, as already mentioned, due to the lack of a supermajority in parliament, the PiS government's latitude in this respect was much more limited than that of the Fidesz government in Hungary since 2010. Therefore, in contrast to Hungary where the Fidesz government started with an almost complete education system reshuffle with an enormous number of major systemic changes, the attempts at power concentration in Poland followed a much more incremental pattern with small changes within the existing overall governance system. As a consequence, the number of educational policy initiatives serving power concentration and political control through administrative government agencies were incomparably smaller and much less radical in Poland than in Hungary. Still, the overall decentralized character of governing education remained intact.

The educational management agencies through which the Polish government is able to exercise a rather limited degree of control over schools are the Regional Education Superintendents (*kuratorzy oświaty*) who are appointed by the minister in charge of education. Among other tasks these agencies perform pedagogical supervision of public and nonpublic schools and kindergartens, participate in the general administration of education in the region, and implement national educational policies. (Jakubowski, 2021) As part of the legislation package aimed at withdrawing some of the changes of the 1999 education reform, the government initiated an amendment to the legislation on education by which the superintendents would receive the right to appoint school directors, but the president vetoed the bill. However, since this centralization initiative was connected to the return to the old 8+4 school structure, this enabled the government to appoint new directors for primary schools, many of whom were selected on the basis of loyalty to PiS. Unsuccessful attempts were also made to increase the role of the superintendents in the committees that participate

in the selection of school directors. Beyond centralization efforts for greater political control, this intervention also fit to the typical illiberal policy pattern of striving for forced elite change.

The only other minor case when the government was able to strengthen central political control over education through the regional superintendents was the introduction of accreditation of all institutions providing teacher-training programs through a rather bureaucratic process. Another attempt of this kind was the plan to establish a teacher-evaluation system that might have been an effective instrument for controlling individual teachers, but the government could not get it through. Beyond the expansion of administrative control and the replacement of personnel in certain managerial positions, the latitude for ensuring political loyalty is much smaller than in Hungary. For example, since the transparent and normative financing system is still in place in Poland, the government is not able to use discretional one-off funding as a political weapon.

One of the pillars of the power of the PiS government was its strong political alliance with the Catholic Church. This alliance had its costs in the sense that—regardless of the personal values of the leading PiS politicians—the government had to prove continuously its commitment to the very conservative, often fundamentalist, values represented by the leadership of the church and needed to be responsive to the policy demands of the Catholic Church leaders. It is important to keep in mind that during the previous decades the most important driving force behind the culture wars in Poland was always the traditionalism of the influential Catholic Church. Therefore, the political alliance between the Church and PiS had a great impact on the educational policy agenda of the government, even if the initiative seemed to come from the government. For example, this was why sexual education and historical identity were so much at the heart of the educational policy agenda of the government.

Similarly to the Hungarian government's practice, in some cases the PiS government also tried to turn the interest groups representing education stakeholders against each other in order to get popular support for its initiatives and to label noncooperative ones as opposition political players. However, the Solidarity Trade Union that is another political ally of PiS paid a heavy price for this affiliation. During the 2019 spring teacher strike, Solidarity was the only trade union representing teachers that signed an agreement with the government accepting a very modest salary increase offer. Consequently, the membership of Solidarity seriously declined because it betrayed the cause of teachers.

Another means for concentrating power for the PiS government was the wide use of the fast-track legislation procedure, which allows the government to avoid lengthy prior consultation with different interest groups. This misuse of parliamentary majority was frequently applied in connection with education-related matters. Finally, unlike in Hungary, in Poland serving vested financial interests did not seem to be part of the hidden educational

policy agenda of the PiS government. Despite various individual corruption cases and the relatively high level of overall corruption in the country, it has not been scaled up to a systemic level (Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała 2019), but educational policy measures almost always raise the suspicion of promoting the material interests of individuals who are close to the ruling party.

3.2 Cultural Policies

Hungary

While ideological motives undoubtedly played a role in shaping the cultural policies of the Fidesz governments from 2010, it seems justifiable to argue that creating highly centralized institutions directly controlled by the government, and "the suppression of autonomous intellectuals, as well as their replacement by intellectuals loyal to the regime" (Humán Platform, 2020) have been even more important cornerstones of their policies.

Institutional takeover and elite change are motives that have permeated all fields of cultural policy since 2010, along with a radical reallocation of public resources. Starting with the field of theatre, the Fidesz governments have actively sought to replace theatre directors that were known to belong to left-liberal intellectual circles with loyal allies who were prone to implement a national-conservative cultural doctrine. Beyond the emblematic cases of the Hungarian National Theatre and Új Színház (New Theatre) discussed above, the majority of theatre directors in the countryside were also replaced within few years after Fidesz gained power (see Kristóf 2021:131-132). In the field of literature, Fidesz has not only sought to reshape the canon by integrating previously ostracized conservative (and in several cases, anti-Semitic) authors into the national curriculum (Pető 2017), but also through the drastic reallocation of funds: alternative writing academies set up by previously marginal right-wing authors received generous public funds from the Ministry of Human Resources (a department that merged administrative functions in the field of education, healthcare, social care, and culture), and support from pro-government media outlets to publish their journals. However, even more drastic changes started to unfold in 2018 when an Orbán loyalist was appointed as the leader of Petőfi Literary Museum, a landmark institution of Hungarian literature that later acquired control over other fields (including popular music) and became a cultural agency with a vast budget financed from public funds. In the field of fine arts, the ideological implications of the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Culture had already been discussed above but granting it the status of a public body and enshrining it in the constitution in 2011 also guaranteed a steady influx of public resources (including real-estate property) and an opportunity to co-opt previously autonomous artists. However, as MMA has

lost some of its ideological character after the end of chairman György Fekete's tenure in 2017, it has also become more inclusive and accepted as a mainstream cultural institution. The most emblematic exhibition spaces and collections, including the National Museum of Fine Arts and the Hungarian National Gallery are also headed by Fidesz loyalists, but their professional standards and reputation have not been severely compromised.

In the field of music, the reallocation of resources has materialized through several different channels. First, through the appointment of loyal leaders to head the Hungarian Academy of Music, a debate that resurfaced in 2023.[12] Second, through the allocation of special grants, some financed from the National Cultural Fund (NKA) and a newly established fund (Cseh Tamás Program) and others discretionally awarded by the minister in charge, which tended to favor established artists who more or less openly expressed their support for the government, putting young and alternative artists at a disadvantage (Barna and Patakfalvi-Czirják 2022). Third, the same group of artists also received symbolic (and monetary) recognition through state awards, the most important of which being the Kossuth Prize, which conservatives have long argued discriminated against them. Finally, ancillary services such as stage building, the provision of light and sound equipment, and catering services at large concerts and festivals have been outsourced to companies that have close ties to the government, creating an oligopolistic market where independent events also need to rely on a specific group of suppliers.

In sum, while it seems that Fidesz has genuinely sought to redefine cultural space through adopting a new, national-conservative cultural canon, this has not yielded outstanding success. Nevertheless, it managed to reallocate cultural funds to loyalists, sidelined intellectuals whom it could not (or did not) want to co-opt, appointed trusted allies as heads of institutions when it could, and created alternative institutions when state control over the old structures had been insufficient. Even if cultural-ideological motives hav e been strong, Fidesz was much more successful in implementing its hidden policy agenda; that is, that of institutional takeover and financial control over cultural production.

Poland

In the case of Poland, one of the key institutional changes introduced by PiS after forming the government was to raise the profile of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage portfolio by promoting Minister Gliński to Deputy Prime Minister. After years of lack of major attention from previous governments, culture became a pivotal part of PiS policies.

Different strategies were employed to implement changes in line with the ideological underpinnings of the illiberal cultural policies of PiS: from indirect pressure and prioritization

[12] See https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/08/23/zeneakademia-rektor-palyazat-ot-jelentkezo-kim

of certain fields/actors, through staff appointment according to fidelity criteria and cutting or increasing levels of public subventions and expenditure, to censorship and persecution of dissident artists. Importantly, these changes were introduced in a coherent and comprehensive manner, many times in coordination with other ministries (particularly those of education, foreign affairs, and justice). All of them followed the logic of increasing centralization and control. Although most of the existing legal framework remained untouched (with the basic 1991 "Law on organization and conducting cultural activities" amended once), the Polish cultural landscape has changed dramatically during the last eight years.

Taking stock of the actions of Minister of Culture and National Heritage during this time, in the first place, regarding the important number of cultural institutions dependent on it, several of them were subjugated in the name of "state interest" (strongly correlated to party interest in this case). The change in leadership of these institutions was carried out in often not fully legal way (as several legal suits lost by the ministry manifest: for example, the dismissal of the director of Adam Mickiewicz Institute) without respecting the rules and procedures of dismissal and appointment of new directors in a transparent way. The appointments of politically aligned staff were usually centrally planned and not in consultation with the employees of the institution nor with other co-financing entities such as regional or local governments. This led to conflicts, boycotts, scandals, mobbing, etc. What followed was a change of program with contemporary arts being marginalized, while national heritage, folk and popular culture, and religious values-based cultural enterprises emphasized. The next step was usually a collapse of the institution. Not in a literal sense but in the sense of a loss of public and a number of artists and collaborators leaving the institution or ceasing to collaborate. The National Museum in Warsaw, the Contemporary Art Museum in Warsaw, the Modern Theater in Wroclaw, the National Old Theater in Cracow, the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk, and many others have shared such a fate. The arguments behind the subjugation of these institutions range from accusations of displaying porn in theatre to that and exhibition on the Second World War was not "Polish" enough and was too "civil" and "anti-war."

If capture of a particular institution or cultural enterprise proved impossible, either funds were cut to a legally required minimum or alternative institutions were created to represent a more "national," "patriotic," and "classic" repertoire. These newly created institutions sometimes directly 'double' the functions of the original ones. This is the case of the Institute of Heritage of Solidarity, which was created to "duplicate" the European Center of Solidarity, or of the Council of National Media that "duplicates" the function of the National Broadcasting Council and was created only to gain more control over public media. Other newly created institutions or institutions that saw the public financing of their activities

increase were clearly profiled to follow the ideological, patriotic-religious, underpinnings of the cultural policies of PiS: for example, the Institute of Defense of the "Good Name" of Poland and Poles, the Polish League Against Defamation, the Theatre of Polish Classics, the Museum of John Paul II and Primate Wyszyński, the Pilecki Institute of Solidarity and Bravery, and the Polish National Foundation.

Other actions in the repertoire of Minister for Culture and National Heritage Piotr Gliński were not singing off nominations of nonaligned staff (for example, Dariusz Stola, director of Polin—Museum of History of Polish Jews), indirect censorship delegated to the newly appointed (for example, the case of newly appointed director of the National Museum in Warsaw taking off works of art supposedly "demoralizing" youth) and favoring self-censorship, "artistic audits" (as in the National Old Theater in Cracow), more informal pressures, or directly blocking certain exhibitions or events. These actions sometimes end up even in the persecution of dissident intellectuals and artists, as in the cases of Elzbieta Podlesna—an artist and activist persecuted for distributing an image of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow in her veil, or cutting all financing to events in which the theater director Oliver Frljic participated.

4. Educational and Cultural Policymaking

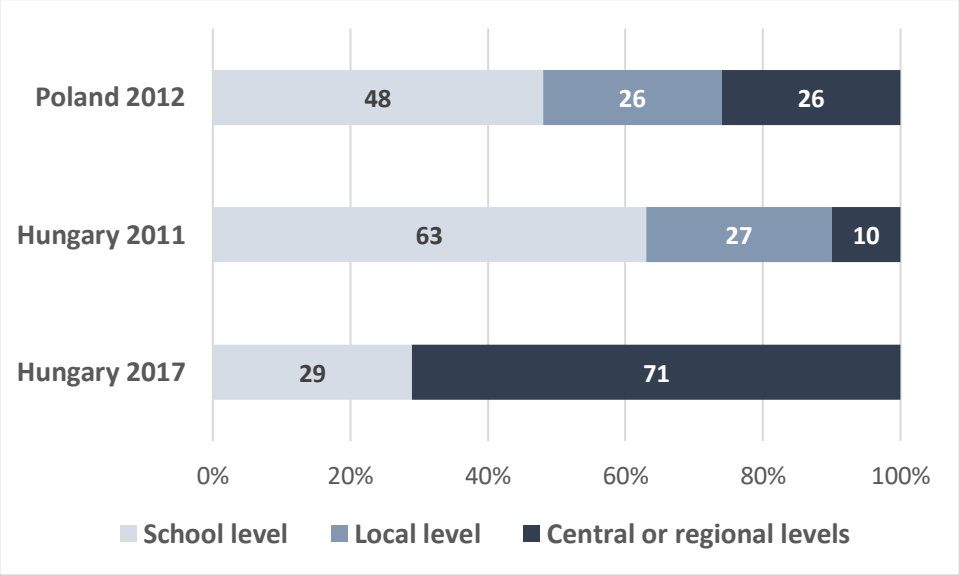
4.1 The Governance Context of Policymaking in Education and Culture

Which instruments educational and cultural policymaking illiberal parties apply when in power is largely depends on the actual governance context. As far as education is concerned, in very general terms, in centralized governance systems governments use various hard policy instruments, such as detailed regulations and wide discretional decision-making competencies deployed to de-concentrated authorities of government for case-by-case decisions and earmarked funding. In decentralized systems, however, the dominant instruments are soft ones aiming at influencing the behavior of lower-level autonomous actors. These soft instruments are typically procedural regulations, clear definition of the decision-making competencies of different actors at different levels, financial and other incentives, outcome standards, and general-purpose grants. (Radó, 2010)

In the light of these differences, it is obvious that the latitude for selecting educational policy instruments was almost completely different for the Fidesz and the PiS governments. In other words: autocratic-style governance of education requires certain structural conditions that Fidesz with a supermajority in parliament was able to create with systematic accuracy. In contrast, not having the necessary political mandate for deep constitutional

changes, PiS was not in a position to overcome the highly institutionalized framework of liberal policymaking. Therefore, it basically further operated the decentralized education governance system that it inherited from previous governments. (Radó, 2021/b) The very different governance context in the two countries is illustrated by the following figure on the role of different decision-making levels in Poland compared to that in Hungary before and after the all-encompassing education system reshuffle between 2011 and 2015. (The division of labor among the different levels in Poland basically did not change after 2015.) This is the most important underlying reason for the differences observed in the number of actual systemic policy interventions that the two parties implemented, as well as in the actual composition of their educational policy agendas.

Figure 1. Proportion (%) of Decisions Associated With Public Lower Secondary Education Taken at Each Level of Government in Poland in 2012 and in Hungary Before and After the 2011-2015 System Reshuffle (OECD 2013, OECD 2018)



While the educational governance context in the two countries became very different, the situation in relation to the latitude for cultural policies was very similar. This similarity stems from two characteristics of the cultural sector. The first is the fact that artistic freedom makes the various cultural institutions automatically autonomous and only openly repressive dictatorships can constrain this to some extent. The second equally important limiting factor for government influence is the market of cultural products that even in less well-off countries ensures certain chances of survival for artists and their institutions. Therefore, in contrast to education, culture is not a public service that is funded almost exclusively by public funds and provided by government-controlled institutions. Consequently, the cultural policies of Fidesz and PiS attempted applying almost the same policy toolkit. For serving

ideology or political propaganda driven purposes both parties (1) aimed at capturing cultural institutions to turn them their ideological agents and (2) used the means of controlling the flow of public funds based on ideological and political priorities.

Although, to different extent, both governments used—or attempted to use—constraining or even repressive measures, such as prohibition, withdrawal of public financial support, banning, or threatening with other negative consequences. Some of these instruments, such as restricting the activities of NGOs is a typical instrument used by other Central and Eastern European autocratic actors. However, the intensity of applying repressive measures was very different in the two countries. While in Poland the instruments were rarely applied and were rather limited in their nature, the Fidesz operated system became more and more repressive over time. Pushing out the Central European University from Hungary or the dismissal of protesting teachers in 2022 were drastic measures that were not echoed in Poland. It is important to note that both governments were careful to maintain the appearance of legality; any autocratic or outright repressive measures were taken with the proper legal authority and were therefore "lawful."

4.2 Framing Illiberal Educational and Cultural Policy Narratives

The relationship between values-based political narratives and actual policy measures in education and culture is rarely direct; therefore, shortcuts between values and government action might be very misleading. As the overview in Section 3 illustrates, even in the case of political parties that in power attempt to enforce the monopoly of a certain political and ideological alignment, the number of educational and cultural policy initiatives that directly and overtly ignore the pluralism of values orientations might be relatively small and is often secondary to other components of the policy agenda.

The realm that bridges values-based political narratives and actual educational and cultural policy action is how governments frame the policy discourse. The different policy narratives can be well described by certain keywords they use. The very function of using certain buzzwords creates an easily communicated reference for those who subscribe to a certain value or political community, and reinforces cohesion within the group. In this way, the use of buzzwords in policymaking is able to bypass the highly institutionalized liberal framework of policymaking by communicating directly with citizens. The meaning of these buzzwords is rarely properly defined; that would be even counterproductive. However, they are ideally suited to provide a values-background for education and cultural policies, to orient the selection among possible problems to be addressed and to help their interpretation, and to set the direction and objectives of educational policies.

As was mentioned earlier, the distinct characteristic of the educational and cultural policy narratives of illiberal conservative parties is that they typically do not frame their policies in comparison to other political parties, but against the "mainstream discourse" on educational and cultural policy as it is represented by international organizations. The practice of constructing educational and cultural policies in opposition to the international mainstream is to a large extent based on turning away from the liberal institutionalization of policymaking. This is the reason why, for example, a recent analysis of the social policies of Fidesz is also based on a comparison with the mainstream social policy discourse. (Bartha et al., 2020)

In education the "international mainstream" is constructed by cooperation frameworks such as the European Union, the OECD, the UN organizations, the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, and other development and charity organizations. The educational policy narratives generated by cooperation within these institutional networks is deliberately values-neutral because they must ensure the involvement of governments, institutions, and experts with very different values backgrounds. Due to the internationalization of educational policymaking, how the educational policies of political parties in the center are shaped basically remains within the mainstream discursive framework. Even if different conservative, liberal and leftist parties in the political center determine their priorities and design their policies in different ways, these policies are all well understood within the linguistic and public policy frameworks created by the international mainstream discourse. Illiberal conservative parties, however, tend to step outside these boundaries. When they seek alternative public policy frameworks that reflect their values, they do not create new ones but return to the language and educational policy goals of previous eras. The emphasis is typically not on creating a positive agenda but on a rejection of the actual mainstream.

Table 2. Educational Policy Narratives (Bridging Political Narratives With Actual Policies): Different Key Motives of the International Mainstream and the Illiberal Conservative Educational Policy Discourses

Contemporary Mainstream Educational Policy Discourse	Illiberal Conservative Educational Policy Discourse
• Focus on learning • Targeting skills/competencies • Applying multiple cultural references • Emphasis on individual adaptation to work requirements • Attention to children rights	• Focus on teaching • Targeting knowledge/literacy • Applying national cultural traditions • Emphasis on the short-term "needs" of the labor market • The "protection" of children • Teachers centered

• The scope encompasses individual learning environment • Emphasis on global changes • Emphasis on social skills/ethics • Special attention to disadvantaged/vulnerable pupils • Procedures for cooperation and innovation • Emphasis on multilevel governance	• The scope is limited to schools • Emphasis on national traditions • Emphasis on religion • Special attention to "talented" (i.e. middle class) pupils • Procedures for order and tradition • Emphasis on government

Based on various policy statements and interviews with experts, it seems that the educational policy narratives of illiberal parties in Hungary and Poland use very similar elements. But if we look at the measurable results of the educational policies of the illiberal parties in power in the two countries, we can see the huge differences between their specific contexts.

Although internationally recognized benchmarks and performance indicators are less straightforward in the field of culture, Western European mainstream political actors tend to base their cultural policies on a well defined set of values that illiberals routinely challenge with a counter-narrative. The table below, similarly to the "liberal" vs. "illiberal" cultural policy ideal types proposed by Bonet and Zamorano (2021:563), provides an overview of what core values mainstream liberal vs. illiberal cultural policy narratives are based upon, which also provides hints about the benchmarks such regimes would use for internally assessing the success of their policies. It is important taking into account that the relationship between values orientations and actual policies is much more direct in culture than in education, because the mainstream international discourse on culture is much less "neutral" and "technical."

Table 3. Cultural Policy Narratives (Bridging Political Narratives With Actual Policies): Different Key Motives of the International Mainstream and the Illiberal Conservative Cultural Policy Discourses

Contemporary Mainstream Cultural Policy Discourse	Illiberal Conservative Cultural Policy Discourse
• Diversity seen as a value • Multiple cultural references • International • Innovation	• Uniformity seen as value • National cultural traditions • National • Tradition

• Independent/alternative/underground artists seen as an indispensable source of creativity and innovation • Preference for culture that is universally relevant • Focus on cross-regional cooperation • Funding for small-scale, local events embedded in local community • Public funding programs oriented towards international networking and outreach • Focus on youth culture, helping new generations of artists	• Mainstream popular culture seen as an asset for solidifying national community • Preference for art that focuses on/reinterprets national history • Focus on domestic/national market • Public funds disproportionately allocated to "national heroes" and major events • Less public funds for international networking • Focus on older, established artists

4.3 "Post-Truth" Policymaking in Education and Culture

Beyond stepping out from the frameworks and language of international mainstream policies and determining educational and cultural policies against the "liberal mainstream," a common characteristic of the policy narratives of Fidesz and PiS is their "post-truth" nature. Both parties in power have relied much more on the emotions and beliefs of their constituencies than on analysis based on facts and science. The leading politicians themselves have showed very little respect to hard evidence and research if it contradicts their convictions. This is well illustrated by Viktor Orbán's famous statement to the party's leading education politician during a debate on education within Fidesz in 2010: "You can tell me the numbers, but I see it differently."[13]

The common feature of the "populist" or "ideology-driven" changes that both parties initiated in education and culture is that they basically address nonexistent problems, such as the decline of the quality of educational provisions, the detrimental effect of foreign influence on children, or the endangered national identity of Poles. At the same time, this fixation on problems that cannot be proven by evidence means that the real problems of education and culture remain completely outside the horizon of illiberal policymaking, with a few exceptions. For example, low teacher salaries in Poland and Hungary, the poor condition of school facilities, the poor digital skills of Hungarian and Polish students, or future challenges in relation to the climate crisis have not been addressed by the two governments. Consequently, these well-documented problems appeared on the policy agenda of the

[13] https://168.hu/velemeny/szamok-nelkul-161078?fbclid=IwAR2CyzS-CAcnx5pu1-qShWb5sjiYtgGtF2dkWDXcfh5abkq_mnJR3iL4T6c

governments only in the very rare cases of strong external pressure, as was the case with the problem of teacher salaries at the time of the 2019 teacher strikes in Poland.

In the post-truth model of policymaking analysis and planning are replaced by propaganda that is based on highly ideological narratives. In other words, educational and cultural policy initiatives are not interventions to solve problems anymore but translations of the propaganda of political communication into government action. (For example, the official justification for all the changes introduced by the 2011 new legislation in Hungary in higher education was "the intellectual and spiritual renewal of the nation.") All this suggests that the intensive use of ideological narratives is not fueled only by the drive for representing Fidesz or PiS party values or by the political alliance with the Christian Churches, but also by the fact that values-based communication serves as a substitute to making public policy. This narrowing of the scope of policymaking is made possible by the fact that illiberal parties very often do not necessarily "do" politics for the whole of society; therefore, illiberal parties in power typically do not seek to convince everyone of the rightness of their planned actions but rather to rally and strengthen their supporters. In the practice of both illiberal parties the most important role that values-driven policy narratives probably have played is feeding the political propaganda through the media over which they gained control.

Overall, in both countries values-based, ideological, and nationalistic political propaganda has been a substitute for policy analysis and planning. In many cases the messages conveyed by simple political communication have made referring to facts unnecessary. In certain cases, propaganda messages serving the political communication needs of the moment took on a life of their own and generated public policy interventions. This was the case, for example, with the initiative for controlling the educational work of NGOs in Poland or with the banning of gender studies programs in higher education in Hungary, as well as in the case of ousting from Hungary of the Central European University, which was treated as a "Soros university." In other cases, conflicts artificially fueled by political propaganda have had serious public policy consequences. The Hungarian government, for example, keeps postponing promised increases in teachers' salaries on the grounds that "Brussels" has frozen a significant part of the EU funds available to Hungary under the rule-of-law procedure.

What makes post-truth policymaking work in practice is the occupation of the media space, which offers ample room for the interpretation of policy issues independent of the facts through government propaganda. In Hungary, after its formation in 2010, the Fidesz government immediately set about gaining full control of the media. (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013) This process included placing media financed with public money under total control, boosting media companies close to the government with public resources, and ousting opposition media outlets. One of the most important instruments for gaining control over the media was

the placement of advertisements in friendly media while discouraging companies from buying commercials from independent media outlets. (Bátorfy and Urbán 2020) In 2010, the media funded by public money lost its public-service character and became the means of overt government propaganda. In the government-controlled public media not only political programs serve the interest of the ruling party, but also cultural and educational programs produced according to political expectations featuring almost exclusively artists, scientists, and public figures who support the government's policy.

The original "business model" through which Fidesz gained control over independent media was mobilizing oligarchs closed to the prime minister—who were rewarded with huge public contracts—to buy independent media companies in large quantities. This business model changed in 2018 when the government established the Central European Media and Press Foundation (KESMA) to which all the oligarchs have handed over their entire media portfolios for free. The foundation owns almost 500 media products by now, including 18 county daily newspapers; every channel of public television; *Origo*, the second-largest internet portal; TV2, a national commercial channel with the largest viewing figures; and many other TV channels, internet news sites, all the biggest commercial radio channels, lifestyle magazines, etc. This large media portfolio is managed from one single center, making sure that all convey the same messages of the political propaganda of Fidesz. This overwhelming propaganda media machinery creates a single media space that effectively shapes the discourse on educational and cultural policy and serves the government well in reframing policy problems, such as the continuous protest movement of teachers. The remaining independent print, electronic and, online media reaches out only to a minority of Hungarian citizens, although online media has remained somewhat more decentralized and therefore more competitive than the rest. (Humán Platform, 2020)

Although, PiS did not manage to gain comparable control over the media in Poland, it did take over control over the public media channels. The most striking example of instrumentalization of culture, however, is the case of public broadcasting service, an area to which vast amount of funds were transferred to secure not only politically aligned editorial offices but to incorporate blunt propaganda into the daily news offer. The amendment of the Broadcasting Act was one of the first laws to be introduced by the new government in 2015 and it gave the minister responsible for the state treasury the power to appoint and dismiss members of public media organizations' management and supervisory boards without resorting to open and public competition procedures. After replacing the management of all public media, they followed a path from aligned editorials to outright propaganda. The funds transferred to public broadcasting made up most of the increase in the share of expenditure on culture in Poland after 2015 (Kopeć, 2019). In fact, after considering the millions of zlotys streamed into mostly public TV in recent years, the increase in expenditure on culture (see

Figure 1a and 1b), though notable in absolute terms (not as much in relative to GDP ones, contrary to in Hungary), was restrained to financing newly established institutions. What did skyrocket was the expenditure on “Broadcasting and publishing services” in Poland (from €240 million in 2015 to €928.8 million in 2021).

5. The Effectiveness of Educational and Cultural Policymaking in the Two Countries

5.1 The Effectiveness of Educational Policies

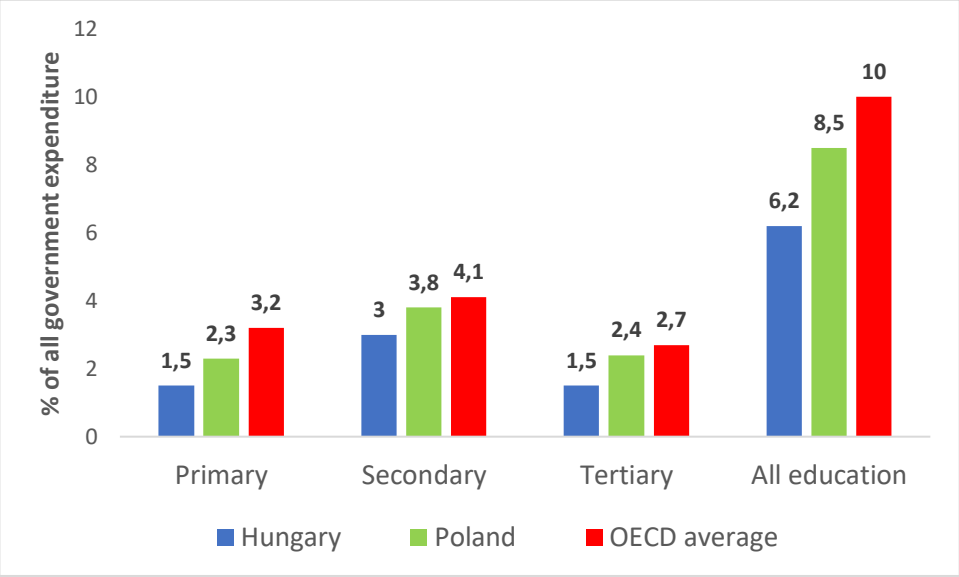
While there are many similarities between Hungary and Poland in terms of the values orientation of educational policies, in the way how the educational policy discourse is framed, and in the way educational policy agendas are shaped, the very different political and governance context has meant that the Fidesz government has done enormous damage while the PiS government did much less damage to the quality of education. (Neither government has been particularly ambitious in improving the performance criteria generally accepted in international discourse.)

Before assessing the effectiveness of the educational policies in the two countries against the criteria that are widely used for this purpose, it is important to look at the indicator that shows how much education has been a priority of the Fidesz and PiS governments. The already mentioned qualitative analysis of 15 manifestos of Western European populist radical right parties aimed at confronting with evidence the earlier widely shared assumption that moving into the political center results in broadening their policy profile. (Espeland et al., 2023) In the case of education the study raised doubts about the validity of this assumption. However, regardless of these findings, it is important to keep in mind, that getting into power has the same effect: governing parties cannot afford to ignore issues that were rather low on their political agenda while in opposition. This definitely does not mean that, once in government education, becomes a high priority on the agenda of populist right-wing parties. In the case of parties in power the most important measure of the relative importance of a certain sector is the level of its government funding.

The generally accepted comparative indicator of the level of education funding is the ratio of funding to GDP for each level of education. However, this indicator shows the funding level relative to the financing capacity of each country. A much better indicator of government priorities is the share of education spending in the total state budget expenditure. The figures in the graph below show that education has not been a top priority for any of the two governments—state budget funding for education at all levels is significantly below the

average spending levels in developed countries. However, the gap with the OECD average funding level has been significantly larger in Hungary than in Poland. This difference is explained by two factors. The first is that the remaining decentralized normative financing system in Poland has certain financing inertia, as it is much more difficult to extract budgetary resources through an allocation mechanism based on the operation of transparent automatic mechanisms. (Busemeyer, 2008) In Hungary the return to the centralized input financing system completely removed this obstacle from financial allocation system. The other important fact is that, unlike in Hungary, the Polish teachers' unions' right to strike was not abolished, so they were able to negotiate a salary increase during the 2019 strike.

Figure 2. Government Expenditure on Education in Hungary and Poland as a Percentage of Government Expenditure in 2020 (OECD, 2023)

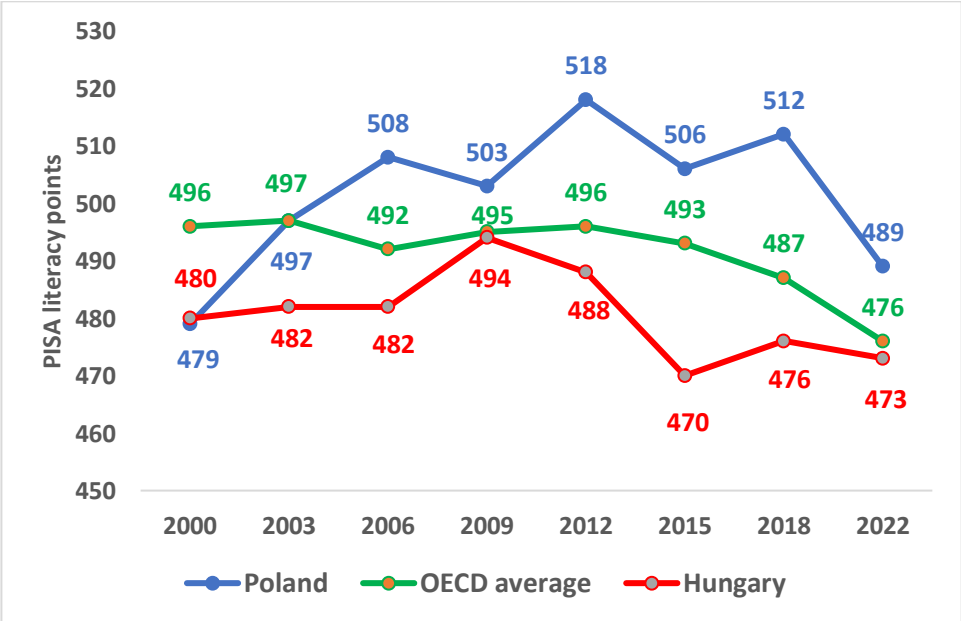


A wide range of indicators can be used to assess the success of educational policies in international comparison. For the sake of illustrating the above-mentioned differences between the Hungarian and Polish contexts, we offer two educational outcome indicators. The first is the change of the average reading literacy performance of 15-year-old students in Hungary and Poland in comparison to the average results of the most developed countries. In connection to this indicator, at the turn of the century, the two countries performed basically at the same level: well below the average performance of the OECD member countries. As far as Poland is concerned, a successful education reform in 1998 resulted in a very rapid improvement in learning outcomes in the first half of the 2000s, bringing Polish education up to the level of Scandinavian countries in connection to all major performance criteria. The 2018 PISA results did not yet indicate any change in this respect, but the 2022 data showed a dramatic drop in performance—together with all Northern European countries

that have previously performed exceptionally well, such as Finland, the Netherlands, or Norway. The reading literacy performance of Polish 15-year-olds declined by 23 points. Most of this decrease is attributed to the impact of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic; therefore, the responsibility of the educational policies of the PiS government for this decline is not clear. However, the PISA results indicate certain profound changes that are clearly the results of the policies of the PiS government. Above all, the alarming and sudden rise of social selection in the Polish education system is clearly the consequence of the return to the pre-reform school structure.

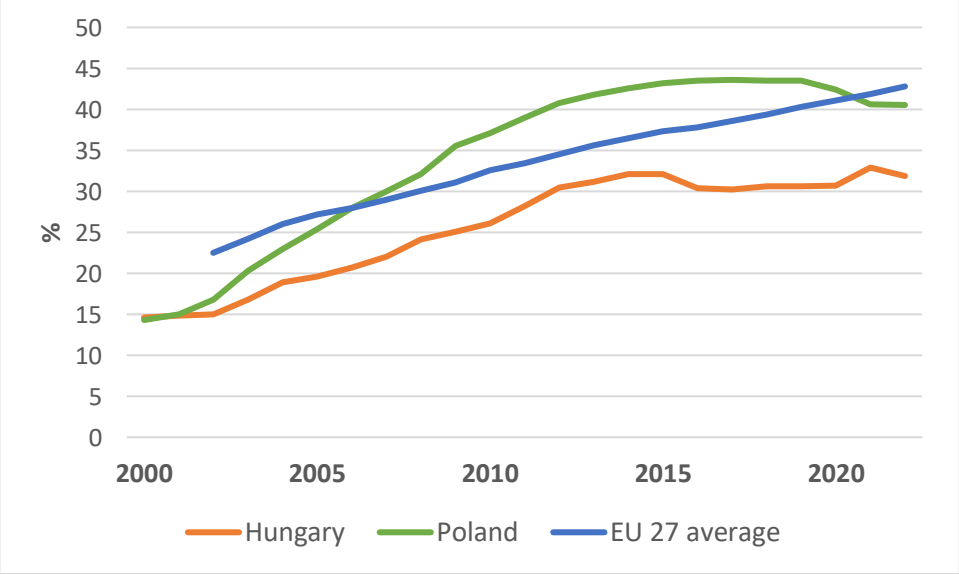
In Hungary a much slower improvement resulted in a closing up to the average performance of OECD countries till 2009. However, the "transformational recession" (Kornai, 1993) that was caused by the complete restructuring of the education system by the Fidesz government between 2011 and 2015 has had a devastating impact on educational performance, leaving the education system seriously behind the average results of those of developed countries. According the 2002 PISA results, similarly to other Central European countries, such as Austria, Czechia, Romania, and Croatia, the Hungarian education system has resisted the destructive effects of the Covid-19 school closures. However, the functional decline caused by the extremely centralized character of the system and by the repressive educational policies of the government since the turn of the decade has further eroded the capabilities of schools as measured by learning outcomes. Consequently, in a global comparison Hungary by now operates the most selective education system with the lowest capacity to compensate for the consequence of social disadvantages.

Figure 3. The Change of Reading Literacy Performance of 15-year-old Students in Hungary and Poland Between 2000 and 2022 (OECD PISA)



Another educational outcome in relation to which Hungary and Poland have started from the same level at the turn of the century is the proportion of young people who have a higher-education diploma. The data show that Poland has been much more successful in catching up with the educational attainment rates of Western European countries, partly because the higher success of Polish primary and secondary education has meant that the intake pool of higher education became larger. In the 2010s, the increase in the proportion of higher-education graduates was replaced by stagnation in both countries. However, if we dig deeper into the reasons for this, we find partly different explanations. In Poland, the stagnation is almost fully attributed to demographic changes outside the control of educational policy, and PiS coming to power in 2015 did not change these circumstances. In contrast, in Hungary the stagnation is the combined effect of the somewhat milder demographic decline and the policies of the Fidesz government that artificially constrained enrolment in higher education and reduced the enrolment pool for further studies.

Figure 4. The Change of the Proportion of 30–34-year-olds With Tertiary Education Attainment in Hungary and Poland in 2000-2022 (EUROSTAT)



When assessing the success of educational policies, we need to measure their outcome against international educational outcome indicators, but we must also do this against the ideological objectives of illiberal parties once in power. Therefore, the question is how effectively these policies served the ideological agenda of illiberal parties? We do not have reliable data to answer this question, partly due to the short time that has passed. However, based on the accumulated knowledge on what works in educational policies, we may work with certain “educated guesses” about the impact of illiberal policies.

What we know with a high level of certainty is that the role of government-issued curricula in determining the actual content of teaching and learning is seriously overestimated in Central and Eastern European countries. The same applies to the impact of indoctrination on the values and identities of pupils, which is also overestimated by many politicians. Indoctrination is capable of conveying behavioral expectations and is able to impose the use of a certain language code on pupils, but this is a far cry from influencing how they think and feel. Consequently, we cannot assume that the rather limited policy instruments with which the illiberal governments in Hungary and Poland have attempted to influence the socialization of children were effective.

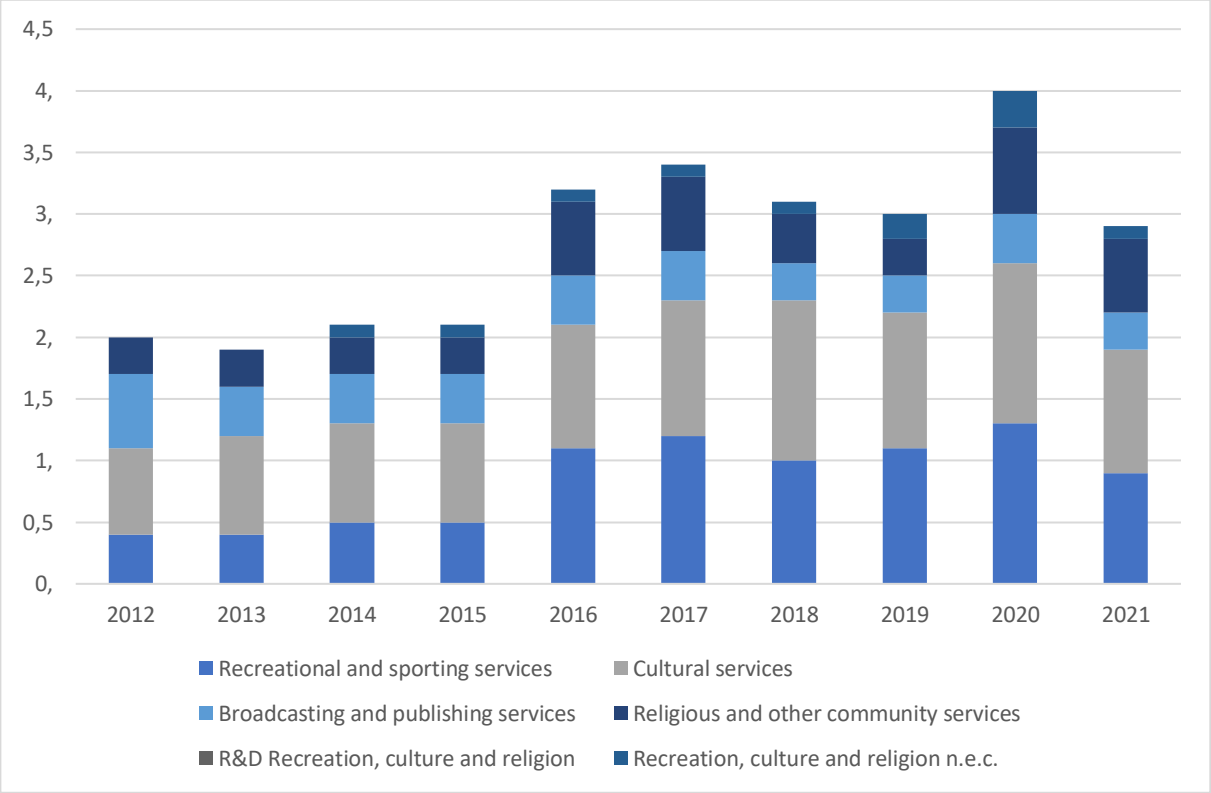
5.2 The Effectiveness of Cultural Policies

Whereas in the case of education there are internationally recognized indicators of performance that allow us to evaluate the output of illiberal government's policies, universally accepted standards for such evaluations are available to a much lesser degree in the field of culture. Beyond the fact that cultural performance is much less measurable, this is also due to the fact that cultural policy tends to be more values-driven and, therefore, also defines the range of desirable outputs on the basis of a preferred set of values.

Thus, rather than taking a normative stance in such debates, the remainder of this section evaluates the output performance of illiberal cultural policies in terms of more objective measures that are also used by international organizations such as overall spending on culture, as well as access and inclusiveness.

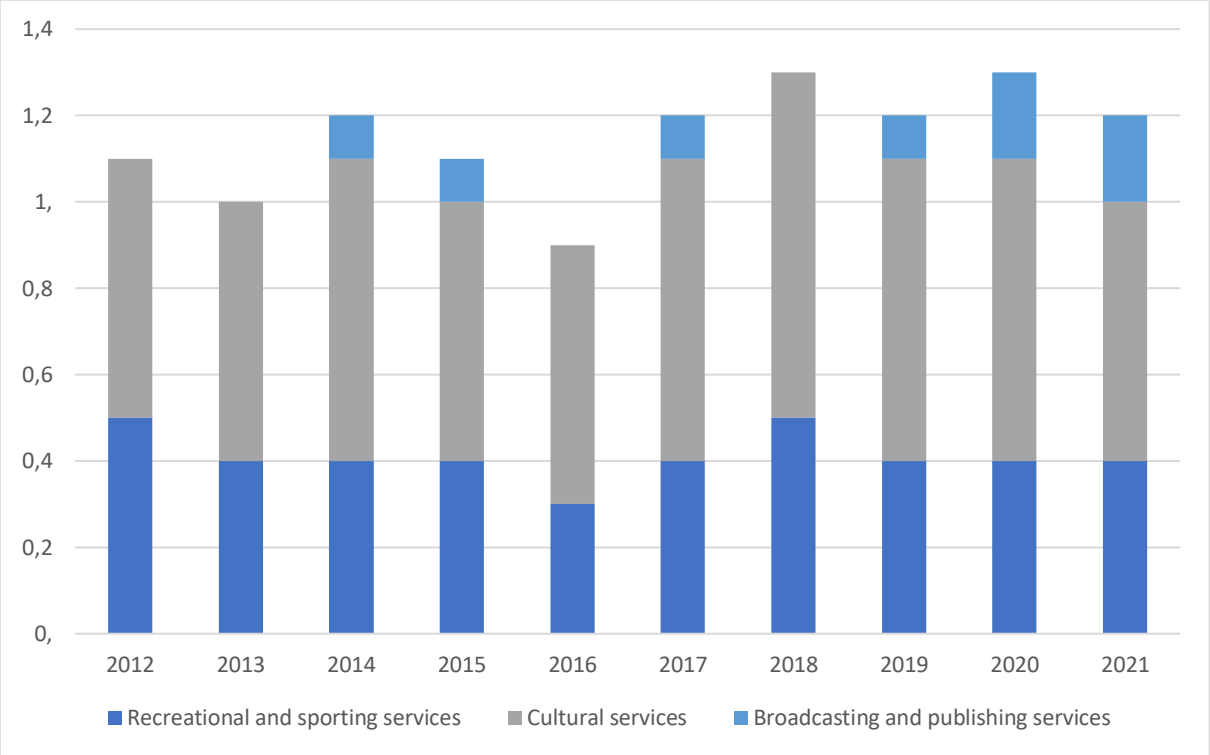
Concerning cultural expenditure, a comparison of Poland and Hungary reveals two interesting trends, as shown by the graphs below. First, taking into consideration all expenditure that is reported by Eurostat under "Recreation, culture, and religion," the average spending in Hungary has been more than twice as high (2.74%) as in Poland (1.22%) during the 2012-2022 period. However, this may be due to a reporting anomaly, since Poland reported zero spending on "religious and other community services" and R&D costs related to culture—the former especially is highly unlikely in a deeply Catholic state. Therefore, it is more likely that religious services were budgeted in a different category, thus distorting the comparison. More importantly, whereas in Hungary the overall share of cultural spending had almost doubled by the second half of the 2010s, it remained relatively stable in Poland.

Figure 5. Culture and Recreation Spending in Total Government Expenditure as a % of GDP in Hungary (EUROSTAT)



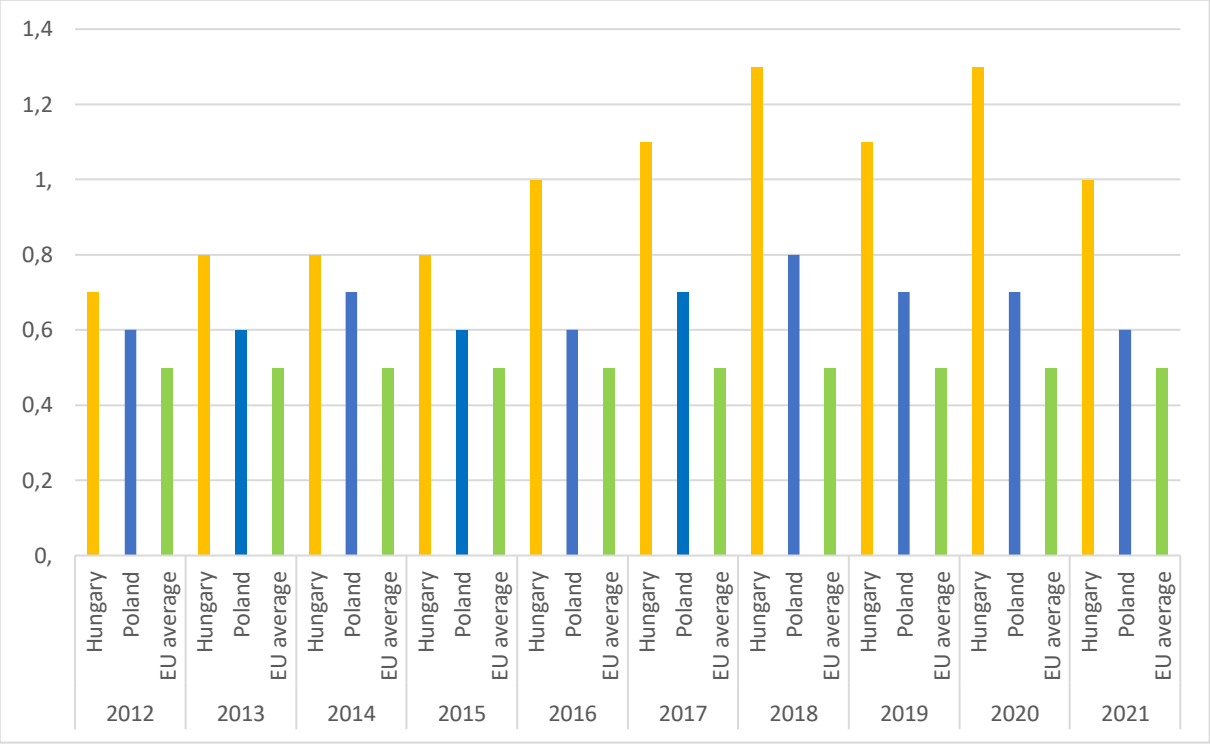
In a first reading, this finding largely confirms our assumption that the Fidesz government in Hungary has had much more room for maneuver to implement its ideological agenda that the PiS one in Poland, which is also expressed in how much of the budget it could devote to such purposes. However, the picture becomes more nuanced if we disentangle cultural spending into subcategories and try to identify which of these have been the main drivers of growth. In the Hungarian case, the growth of spending on "recreational and sporting services" deserves special attention, having been much more dynamic than that on the other subcategories and almost tripled by the end of the past decade—in line with the Hungarian government's much-criticized priority for funding spectator sports, especially football (Molnár and Whigham 2021), which has also been fueled by a favorable tax deduction system (dubbed TAO) that allowed companies to write off a specific share of their corporate tax base if they devoted these sums to sports associations. One should note that the same system of corporate tax deductions has also been extended to the cultural sphere; therefore, the significant bias toward funding sports associations cannot be explained by the lack of this opportunity, rather by the more pronounced political significance of sports under the Fidesz regime, which has made it a more fruitful avenue for corporations to express their political loyalty.

Figure 6. Culture and Recreation Spending in Total Government Expenditure as a % of GDP in Poland (EUROSTAT)



However, even when one considers spending on cultural services only (that is, theatre, film, music, literature, and fine arts production), Hungary has a notable edge over Poland, which indicates that, even though strengthening national identity through culture and memory politics was also a priority for PiS, Fidesz devoted much more resources to this task, which allowed for a much more radical restructuring of the institutional landscape than in Poland. In the Polish case, in line with the policy preferences discussed above, only public broadcasting stands out as an area where public spending increased significantly (but did not reach the same proportion of overall expenditure as in Hungary). However, one must note that not only Hungary but also Poland has consistently featured among the countries with the highest cultural spending in the EU during the 2010s, well above the EU average, as the figure below illustrates.

Figure 7. Total Government Spending on Cultural Services as a % of GDP in Hungary and Poland (EUROSTAT)



However, government spending is only a very crude indicator of the effectiveness of cultural policies, and it tells us little about how accessible, popular, and inclusive these services are. Unfortunately, those aspects of cultural consumption are systemized to a much lesser extent and can only be deduced from national statistical reports and market research insights. From the limited evidence that is available, it seems that in the Hungarian case attendance of cultural events, if anything, increased steadily and drastically between 2010 and 2018 (a period also marked by notable economic growth) with a small drop in 2019,[14] which seems to suggest that cultural consumption is much more closely associated with economic cycles than with political agendas. Nevertheless, a much more systematic content analysis would be needed to decipher the extent to which the representation of conservative or illiberal views has increased within all the cultural content that is being consumed by the population, a pursuit that goes beyond the aims of this study.

Beyond domestic consumption patterns, another objective indicator of cultural output could be the embeddedness of the national cultural scene and venues into international networks, expressed through the number of artists touring in these countries, as well as the

[14] See the number of theatre and cinema visits per year as registered by the Hungarian Central Statistics Office (KSH): https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_zkk004b.html

share and cultural offer of major international events such as book, film, and music festivals. However, the experts interviewed for this study argeed that demand for such events was largely based on commercial factors such as the availability of suitable venues as well as purchasing power rather than ideological factors; therefore, there are no traceable signs of a "cultural boycott" against these countries, despite their illiberal tendencies that are incompatible with contemporary mainstream cultural discourses.

In sum, it seems that the redirection of public resources, the takeover of cultural institutions, and the financing of cultural products that serve the aim of ideological indoctrination have had a limited impact on the cultural output and consumption of Hungary and Poland. Nevertheless, certain recent developments, such as the 2023 takeover of the largest book publisher in Hungary by a pro-government think tank[15] calls for keeping an eye on such developments, since a critical concentration of market share may allow pro-government actors to push through an illiberal narrative with unprecedented resources, with the potential of leaving a lasting mark on popular cultural tastes.

Conclusions

1. The educational-and-cultural-policy-relevant political narratives of European illiberal parties that justify using political power to fight culture wars are composed of a very similar set of ideological values: conservatism, nationalism, religiosity, anti-pluralist majoritarianism, and authoritarianism. Although the key ideological sources of educational and cultural narratives of illiberal parties are very similar, their actual composition adapts to the cultural and political contexts within which they are constructed. For example, while references to religious values—and to the churches that embody these values—is a key element in the policy narratives of Hungarian and Polish illiberal parties, these references are much weaker in the rather secularized political context of Czechia and in the French context that widely shares the republican principle. Also, authoritarian tenets based on anti-pluralistic political views are more typical to Central and Eastern European illiberal parties than to those in the western part of the continent. The authoritarian policy narratives of Western European illiberal parties are rooted more in a "law and order" approach, than in a political philosophy. As a consequence, ***although the similarity of illiberal narratives may result in very similar educational and cultural policy initiatives, the actual content of these initiatives may***

[15] See this report with details of the transaction and authors' reactions: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/23/authors-leave-hungarian-publisher-in-protest-at-sale-to-orban-linked-college

serve very different purposes that cannot be understood while leaving aside the specific context of each country.

2. The analysis of the composition of educational and cultural policy initiatives of the Fidesz government Hungary and the PiS government in Poland is based on the distinction between overt and hidden agendas, and on a taxonomy of underlying intentions that separates measures/initiatives serving genuine policy goals, populist intentions (that is, demonstrating a radical break from the policies of previous governments), policies serving power concentration, and policies driven by ideological missions. As far as the overtly represented educational agendas are concerned, there are significant differences between the two countries due to the very different political contexts. ***While the educational policy agenda of the Fidesz government is dominated by measures that serve the extreme expansion of central government control and the elimination of autonomies, the agenda of the PiS government basically was composed of initiatives serving populist and ideological purposes***. Power concentration ("strengthening the role of the state") was part of the overt agenda in Hungary. In Poland on the other hand, this intention was part of the hidden agenda because of a humbler approach. Therefore, while in Hungary the populist and ideological goals play only secondary legitimization role, in Poland the lack of supermajority in parliament set serious constraints for PiS to expand the administrative control of the government. In both countries policies addressing genuine educational problems have been very rare.
3. The composition of the overt agenda of the Hungarian government in culture is somewhat different from that in education. For example, the weight of genuine public policy interventions—especially in popular music and film production—is bigger. In contrast, in Poland we found only a single cultural policy measure falling under this category. The cultural policies of Fidesz and PiS basically have served ideological purposes that aimed at establishing the hegemony of strong nationalism mixed with cultural conservatism. While in the first eight years of Fidesz cultural governance the emphasis was on creating a network of art institutions on the basis of conservative and "national" values, after 2018 a strong cultural war has been initiated in the fields of literature, film, and theater. The cultural war in Poland shows a lot of similarities to that in Hungary. The most important driver of cultural policies was also strengthening the role of culture in promoting patriotic identities with the special Polish fusion with Catholicism. ***The most important common characteristics of cultural policies in the two countries have been turning public funding into an instrument to promote the values of the government, the capture of cultural institutions, and the attempt to create and strengthen an "alternative" cultural elite.***

4. The most important hidden element of the educational policies of the Hungarian illiberal government is ***using the overtly represented administrative centralization by government agencies as transmission belts to reach out to all educational actors with political control***—in other words, building an autocratic regime. This hidden political function of administrative centralization became more visible in 2022 when the government started to use repressive measures, such as the dismissal of a dozen protesting teachers. In contrast, due to the lack of the necessary political conditions, the attempts for power concentration in Poland followed a much more incremental pattern with rather small changes within the existing overall governance system. Therefore, the hidden intentions of the PiS government in education had much more to do with serving the ideological agenda of the Catholic Church. ***Overall, while the main feature of educational policies in Hungary is radical political power concentration for its own sake, these policies in Poland rather served the ideological goals of the illiberal culture war.*** Another major difference between the hidden educational policy agendas of the two illiberal parties is that, unlike in Hungary where the control of the flow of educational development funds played an important role in feeding the actors of a fully-fledged autocratic regime, in Poland serving vested financial interests did not seem to be part of the hidden educational policy agenda of the PiS government.
5. The hidden cultural policy agenda of the Fidesz government is somewhat mixed; on the one hand the suppression of autonomous intellectuals and their replacement by intellectuals loyal to the regime is a clear political intention, on the other hand the strong ideological convictions of the cultural leaders appointed by the government made cultural policy extremely values-driven. In Poland serving illiberal ideological goals were more honest and overt. Despite this difference, ***institutional takeover, elite change, and the control over the flow of cultural funds have been strong underpinning intentions in the cultural policies of both illiberal parties.***
6. ***In spite of the many similarities in relation to ideological alignment and educational policy agendas, the latitude for selecting educational policy instruments was almost completely different for the Fidesz and the PiS governments***, because autocratic-style governance of education requires certain structural conditions that Fidesz with a supermajority in parliament has created with systematic accuracy. In contrast, PiS not having the necessary political mandate for deep constitutional changes, basically further operated the decentralized education governance system that it inherited from previous governments. ***While the educational governance context in the two countries became very different, the situation in relation to the latitude for cultural policies was very similar.*** This similarity stems from two characteristics of the cultural sector: artistic freedom maintains the various cultural institutions automatically and the market for

cultural products, even in less well-off countries, ensures certain chances of survival for artists and their institutions. That said, the Polish and the Hungarian government made concentrated efforts to direct the majority of public funds to institutions that served their ideological agendas, and they created new institutions when needed—even if the impact of these changes on cultural consumption patterns has been marginal.

7. The relationship between values-based political narratives and educational and cultural policy measures is rarely direct. ***Values-based political narratives and educational and cultural policy action is bridged by the way in which governments frame the policy discourse. In this respect the similarities between Hungary and Poland are striking, and in both countries they represent a shift away from international mainstream education and cultural narratives.*** Beyond determining educational and cultural policies against the "liberal mainstream," a common characteristic of the policy narratives of Fidesz and PiS is their "post-truth" nature. ***Both parties in power have relied much more on the emotions and beliefs of their constituencies than on analysis based on facts and science.*** Analysis and planning have been replaced by propaganda that was made possible by the occupation of the media space, which offers ample room for the interpretation of policy issues independent of the facts. While PiS gained control mainly over the public media, Fidesz gradually took control almost over the entire media landscape.
8. ***Due to the very different political latitude for the two illiberal parties, and consequently to the dramatically different governance context that they were able to create, the actual outcomes of the educational policies of Fidesz and PiS have been very different.*** While the all-encompassing education system reshuffle implemented by the Fidesz government has inflicted serious damage to the quality, effectiveness, and equity of the Hungarian education system, the Polish system basically remained well governed and the positive results of earlier education reforms have been sustained. As far as their ideological goals are concerned, both parties have achieved very limited success. The actual outcomes of cultural policies are much harder to measure. One of the possible measures of success is spending; ***even though strengthening national identity through culture and memory politics was also a priority for PiS, Fidesz has devoted much more resources to this task, which has allowed for a much more radical restructuring of the institutional landscape than in Poland.*** Another measure might be the impact of cultural policies on cultural consumption. However, available data suggest that cultural consumption is much more closely associated with economic cycles than with political agendas and policies. In sum, ***it seems that the redirection of public resources, the takeover of cultural institutions, and the financing of cultural products***

that serve the aim of ideological indoctrination have had a limited impact on the cultural output and consumption in both countries.

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