

It's Not Just Hate: Attitudes toward Migrants in a Dominated Sphere of Communication in Hungary

1. Introduction

Although the refugee crisis has been a main and highly politicized issue all over the EU, the case of Hungary has some interesting peculiarities. Picking up the topic in early 2015, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán put the crisis in the center of his communication and used immense governmental resources and media power to send his messages to the people. The opposition could neither use such means nor had an effective, coherent counter-narrative to combat Orbán's own. This resulted in a dominated sphere of communication, with Hungarians receiving governmental interpretations of the refugee crisis almost exclusively. In effect, the people adopted the government's views on refugees and this yielded a huge growth in popularity for the ruling party Fidesz, securing its position as the most popular party in Hungary to date.

Political commentators, mostly in line with the Hungarian opposition's response, usually criticized Fidesz's anti-migrant communication as "scapegoating," a series of "hate campaigns" which "brought the evil out" of Hungarians by endorsing racism and xenophobia (Balogh 2015; Haraszti 2015; Rev 2015; Gall 2016; Graham-Harrison 2016). This condemning—and morally satisfying—approach however oversimplifies Fidesz's anti-migrant narrative, making it look like a one-dimensional emotive story with simple rabble-raising on one end and unarticulated hatred on the other. Indeed, none of these are correct: Orbán's messages constitute a complex worldview with special discursive dynamics, which must be seen in order to understand its effects and durability, and the people's attitudes reflect similar complexity instead of a simple indiscriminate refusal of migrants.

In this paper, I would, first of all, like to give a detailed picture of the government's anti-migrant campaigns vis-à-vis the opposition's messages about the issue. This makes up the first part of my essay, in which I show how the government's messages were built up, what means were used to communicate them, and how they compare to the opposition's messages and occasional campaigns in the same period.

In the following part, the attitudes of the Hungarian people toward refugees are described. Using survey data compiled by Republikon Institute in December 2016 and first published in this paper, I show the people greatly correspond in their opinions with the pillars of Orbán's narrative. With a closer look to the same dataset, however, we can also find some aspects of the people's attitudes which could have been (and, potentially, could be) used by the opposition, building a persuasive set

of messages or even a counter-narrative to Fidesz on them. The final part sketches two ways of argumentation along these lines. I conclude with a short summary of the essay's main points.

2. Refugee crisis in the Hungarian public discourse: the dominated sphere of communication

2.1. A shaky start: after elections, Fidesz loses media and message

For most of the year 2014, Fidesz was in a highly favorable position. It had been leading polls for almost a decade and it managed to secure this position confidently for the general elections, taking place that year (Győri, Bíró-Nagy, and Boros 2016). The success of the ruling party was greatly the result of the combination of two factors: a strong, uncontested message and a near monopoly of political media to spread it. The opposition could not really find an adequate answer to the enormously popular welfare measure “utility-price cuts” (which was also embedded, for more devoted Fidesz-voters, into Orbán’s narrative as a *par excellence* “national interest” which had to be “defended against Brussels” and other hostile critiques by the government [MTI 2014]), and as Fidesz had access to state privileges such as taxpayers’ money and state media, even if the opposition had had an answer, it could have only been spread on a very uneven playing field (OSCE 2014). This state with the combination of strong message and media, vital to Fidesz’s political success, may be called “a dominated sphere of communication” where, as opposed to the more-or-less balanced spheres of liberal democracies, one party owns the news and most of information assets and other parties are being marginalized.

This very state of dominated sphere of communication fell apart in late 2014. The government attempted to impose, for political reasons, a blatantly unfair advertising tax on Hungary’s leading commercial TV channel, RTL Klub. The channel, however, decided to fight back and became a *de facto* opposition medium, reaching people who the opposition could never have reached before (Győri, Bíró-Nagy, and Boros 2016). And besides its media monopoly, Fidesz also lost its message. The government came up with the plan of internet tax, which riled up a youthful and previously apolitical segment of the population; started reconstructing motorway fees in a rather confusing manner; and had to face a series of scandals, including the case when six Hungarians—including the head of the tax office—were put on the U.S. travel ban list due to corruption accusations (Reuters 2014). These issues thematized the Hungarian political discourse, causing a series of street protests as well as a rapid decline of Fidesz’s popularity. From October to January, the party lost 13 percentage points in the polls, falling from 37% to 24% in the total population (Török 2017).

2.2. Regaining message: the “wonder weapon” of migration crisis

2.2.1. In search of the appropriate topic

Facing the above described problems, Fidesz attempted to regain its dominance in the political discourse. To do that, it first had to find a message—something which could later be spread by its loyal media. Several attempts were made to do that, the two most notable ones being the promotion of death penalty and the rejection of immigration in the face of the imminent refugee crisis (BBC News 2015; AFP 2015). Both topics had obvious advantages as political tools. First, they could be expected to be popular: death penalty had been supported by a relatively high percentage of the population (Mikola 2012; Kovács 2015) and Hungarians have a rather closed-minded thinking with a traditional value set, which suggests a potential refusal of Muslim migrants (Kozák 2017). Second, as both topics appeal to a law-and-order mindset, they could be expected to fight off Jobbik, Hungary’s far-right party which was virtually the only opposition party which could profit from the Fidesz’s popularity loss, quickly becoming a genuine alternative (Győri, Bíró-Nagy, and Boros 2016).

Eventually, death penalty was dropped and it was the migration crisis which became the central topic of Fidesz’s communication. The reason for this decision was that the two topics had different narrative prospects: whereas the death penalty is a rather narrow issue and only a limited number of cases and topics can be associated with it, the migration crisis came as an expansible “umbrella topic.” Migration had a good chance of lasting for several years, producing a series of ever newer events, and also had the possibility to include in its related discourse topics from terrorism through economic fears to various European leaders and their measures. This difference between the topics is important because it affects their durability and comprehensiveness. The longer a topic in which the party can take a popular position lasts, the better; and the more comprehensive the topic is, the more upcoming events can be associated with (or framed into) it, meaning it can last longer without becoming too repetitive and overwrought.

2.2.2. The Fidesz’s two-tier narrative

For the migrant crisis, Fidesz used a two-tier narrative—the first tier being developed for the migrants and the second one adopted from Fidesz’s earlier general narrative. The first tier identifies migrants as a threat to *safety*. By “safety,” I mean the people’s wish to maintain a secure and calm life, unmolested by great changes. The government presented migrants as people who aim at making such changes, carrying potential threat to people’s bodily integrity, workplace, their familiar culture, and their nation’s borders. As Orbán put it in one of his first remarks on refugees, right after the Charlie Hebdo attack in January 2015: *“While I am PM, Hungary will definitely not become an immigration destination. We don’t want to see significantly sized minorities with different cultural characteristics and backgrounds among us. We want to keep Hungary as Hungary”* (Rettman 2015).

Orbán made it rather clear that the main problem with migrants is that they change the way of life as we know it, something which Hungary does not want (Orbán 2015). Later on, as the message became central and the narrative developed, he covered more of the above mentioned areas of safety and explained how the government can grant protection—the symbol of which became the fence built on the Hungarian-Serbian border against illegal refugees. In a lecture in 2016, he summarized: *“Border protection – particularly when we need to build a fence and detain people – is something which is difficult to justify in aesthetic terms, but believe me, you cannot protect the borders – and thus ourselves – with flowers and cuddly toys. We must face this fact. [...] Migration poses a threat, increases terrorism and increases crime. Mass migration fundamentally changes Europe’s cultural make-up. Mass migration destroys national culture. If we do not accept this view, if this does not become the European position, we will be unable to act against this threat”* (Orbán 2016b). He furthermore spoke about preserving Hungary’s ethnic and cultural *“homogeneity”* (by which he meant—as it becomes clear from the context—the current state of diversity which should not be subject to change (Orbán 2017a)) and also about that *“we’re not aware of any examples of successful integration. [...] if people with diverging goals find themselves in the same system or country, it won’t lead to integration, but to chaos”* (Orbán 2017c).

While this first tier of narrative may be called nativist, which would put Orbán in the same group with Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, the second tier is certainly populist (cf. Pappas 2016). Here the notion of *sovereignty* is put in the center of the argument which stems from Fidesz’s *“national-narrative,”* the party’s core ideology which Orbán had built for nearly two decades and used to derive all of Fidesz’s main and most popular messages (Madlovics 2015). In its original form, the narrative starts from a peculiar understanding of democracy which asserts that a government which is elected by the majority represents the national interest *per se*—*“doing so without constant debate, but rather representing the national interest through its own natural existence”* (Orbán 2010). Consequently, Fidesz argues, those who criticize the government are against the national interest, so are those who try to restrain the government from reaching its goals. This follows the notion of the above mentioned sovereignty, that is, being independent from foreign influence in national-interest-seeking.

What makes this argument populist, and this is how it actually connects to the refugee crisis, is that in the communication sphere it perceives one single cleavage existing in the society—namely the one between the legitimate government and *“imperialist nations”* or various international actors such as George Soros or the European Union (*“Brussels”*) which *“interfere illegitimately”* with Hungarian national sovereignty (Pappas 2017). This argument was used against the EU’s proposed refugee quota system, saying *“Hungary is a sovereign country, and we Hungarians alone shall decide who we wish to live alongside”* (Orbán 2017d); it was used every time the Hungarian border-fence

was criticized by the EU as an inappropriate measure (Orbán 2016a); and also such accusations were brought up against George Soros, saying he finances various NGOs to interfere with Hungarian politics in order to carry out his “Soros-plan” of resettlement of one million migrants per year (Vastagbőr blog 2017a, 2017b; Reuters 2017; Orbán 2017b). This clearly shows the logical connection between the two tiers of Fidesz’s narrative: Orbán wants to ensure the people’s safety from migrants on behalf of the Hungarians but foreign forces—as well as their internal allies, the opposition parties (MTI 2017)—try to prevent that as they have an agenda different from protecting the Hungarians. This is the core of Fidesz’s argumentation in the migrant crisis, and this is with which virtually every topic, event and scandal has been framed by Orbán and Fidesz’s other politicians since the migration crisis became central in the government’s communication in 2015.

2.3. Regaining media: three years of constant campaigning

2.3.1. State means, stately costs

For Fidesz, to restore the dominated sphere of communication, it would not have been enough to develop a coherent and comprehensive narrative for the migration crisis but it had to be spread—on a larger scale than what was available to any other party or private opponent. This was achieved by the usage of governmental means including the institutions of national consultation, information campaigns, the state media, and a referendum in 2016.

National consultation is a political questionnaire, introduced by the second Orbán-government in 2010. Being sent out to every Hungarian voter by mail, national consultation included loaded questions re-enforcing the governments’ narrative about certain issues—in our case, about the threats refugees posed. Still in search for the right topic to get crawl out of the trough, the government sent out 8 million mails in May 2015, inquiring about terrorism, refugees, migrants, and the European Union (Orange Files 2015). In an open statement, 58 leading migration experts claimed that the very tendentious questionnaire did not meet “*any scholarly and moral criterion*” (narancs.hu 2015) and private pollsters in a similar statement called the consultation “*a political tool disguised as public opinion poll*” (Kettős Mérce 2015).

The mails were accompanied by a so-called “information campaign” which, though legally this means is devoted to spreading data of public interest, was used by Fidesz to spread messages underpinning its narrative. This first campaign featured billboards, appearing countrywide and saying, in second person singular, that if you come to Hungary, you “*cannot take Hungarians’ jobs,*” “*must respect our culture*” and “*must respect our laws*”—all of this in Hungarian language, underlining the fact that the real addressees were the Hungarian people, not the migrants.

In sum, this national consultation campaign cost ca. 3 million EUR (Zalán 2017). It was followed by another campaign that year, focusing on the government’s achievements and only mentioning the

migration crisis cursorily. The state media, however, with its several TV and radio channels, constantly dealt with migrants in its news broadcasts (The Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2015; Dercsényi and Gergely 2015). The most notorious example of this was the so-called “1 minute news,” a program broadcast in every break of the 2016 Olympic games, focusing almost exclusively on negative pieces of information about refugees (M. László 2016). It would be unfair to list the ca. 260 million EUR annual budget of the state media as campaign costs, but it must be noted that Fidesz was in a privileged position to use public media to carry out excessive campaigning (Máriás et al. 2017).

The most extreme campaign spending for spreading Orbán’s migrant narrative took place before the referendum of 2016, also initiated by Fidesz to thematize the public discourse with the topic of migration. The question focused on, and used the terminology of, the second tier of the Fidesz’s two-tier narrative: *“Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?”* The referendum took place on 2 October, 2016, but the government started campaigning long before that—in the form of an information campaign, spreading half-truths in line with the Fidesz’s narrative. When the actual (legally defined) campaign period started, Fidesz started an own, separate campaign, and also after the referendum there was a new governmental information campaign, telling the public about the landslide victory of the government-proposed “No” vote (getting 98%, but the result was invalid because of relatively low turnout—several opposition parties boycotted the referendum). For the entire referendum, ca. 50 million EUR were spent from the state budget—more than four times as much as what Fidesz spent during the general elections in 2014 (Sepsi and Erdélyi 2016).

Several other campaigns have taken place around the refugee topic since, including the “Stop Brussels!” national consultation and information campaign for 13 million EUR and a series of information campaigns against George Soros and his alleged interference to Hungarian affairs for 18.4 million (Zalán 2017), and definitely more campaigns can be expected as we are approaching the general elections in 2018. All in all, what can be said about these governmental campaigns in general is that Fidesz, using state means, managed to thematize the political discourse with refugee crisis framed according to Orbán’s narrative—and to restore the dominated sphere of communication it lost in late 2014 as well. The expansible structure of the narrative has made it possible for Fidesz to use the refugee crisis basically without stopping since 2015 to date, covering a wide range of topics under the narrative from economics fears to quotas and George Soros.

2.3.2. The effects of restoration of the dominated sphere of communication on party preferences

In line with the expectations, Fidesz rebuilt much of its popularity with the aid of the migrant campaigns, already by the end of 2015. From the above mentioned 24% in January 2015, Fidesz

reached 28% in October and 31% in the following January. Since the beginning of 2017, Fidesz's support in the total population has not gone below 33% (Török 2017).

As I mentioned above, Jobbik was the only party which was able to gain popularity during the Fidesz's downward spiral, showing a steady growth from 8 to 14 percent by April 2015. After Fidesz started exploiting the refugee crisis, however, Jobbik's growth stopped--and other opposition parties' growth did not even start (Török 2017). Besides minor changes in a few parties' support, the Hungarian political landscape seems just as obviously dominated by the ruling party a year prior the election as it was in 2013, one year before that election which Fidesz eventually won with two-thirds supermajority.

2.4. Neither media, nor message: the opposition and the migration campaign

With a few occasional exceptions, the last three years of political discourse in Hungary was dominated by Fidesz, always using one of the sub-topics of its migrant narrative. The opposition parties had little chance to fight this off, having more limited resources at their disposal. However, given the government's excessive campaigning and that migration has been on the floor for three years now, one would expect that the opposition parties have already developed effective counter-messages to Orbán's narrative. However, the case is almost the exact opposite. But certainly a variety of replies have been developed—the most important ones are briefly described, together with a few words of criticism, below.

2.4.1. The serious replies: Jobbik and the leftist parties¹

Before Fidesz monopolized the topic, migration was Jobbik's issue. Although it never started large-scale campaigns with a special focus on refugees, the far-right party made several statements about—mainly African, not Syrian—refugees as early as 2013. Its views were similar in some ways to Fidesz's current opinion, although such views seemed, in contrast to other parties, a bit radical back then: “*zero tolerance*” against refugees who bring a “*massive*” amount of criminals with them, locked down refugee camps with no free leave for the residents etc. (Z. Kárpát 2014; Magvasi 2015). When Fidesz started speaking about the issue, it put Jobbik in a very difficult situation. First, as one of Jobbik's MPs noted in a parliamentary debate, it was “*hard to overtake Fidesz from the right,*” meaning Fidesz started expanding to the extreme right—leaving little to no space for Jobbik to differ (Dull 2015a). And secondly, Jobbik was an opposition party and Fidesz was in government—whatever idea the Jobbik could have come up with against the refugees, it would have been Fidesz which had a chance to carry it out. Consequently, Jobbik mainly remained silent, almost totally abandoning the

¹ I published my criticism toward the leftist parties' communication in two earlier articles (Madlovics 2016a, 2016c).

2016 referendum campaign. The only instance when Jobbik could effectively counter Fidesz's narrative was when it attacked the government's residency bond program—saying the Fidesz should allow neither poor nor rich migrants to enter Hungary without proper vetting, which Fidesz had apparently done with several residency bond buyers (Novak 2016; B. Nagy 2016). The program was ended in 2017, though, which made Jobbik weaponless again against the Fidesz's migration narrative.

The obvious response to Fidesz's anti-migrant campaign would have been a pro-migrant campaign—especially for someone on the left. However, although there were proposals along these lines from certain leftist intellectuals (Tamás 2016) the truly pro-migrant approach has been virtually non-existent in the Hungarian political discourse. That was because the numerous opposition parties on the left-liberal spectrum acknowledged that Orbán's opinions and measures, controversial though they were among foreign commentators, were very popular with the Hungarian people—including even leftist voters as well as uncertain ones.² Given they decided that taking a pro-migrant stance would be politically suicidal, the leftist parties adopted different tactics: they either tried, similarly to Jobbik, to ignore the refugee crisis under the hardly intelligible slogan of “positive neutrality” (Dull 2015b) or they tried to change the entire political discourse. The latter—and more interesting—approach included attempts both to reframe the refugee crisis and to drop the entire topic for ones which were more favorable to the opposition.

The reframing attempt appeared in the referendum campaign, among the messages of the two more important leftist parties, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and Democratic Coalition (DK). They called for a boycott of the referendum, saying “Stay home to stay in Europe”—suggesting that those who participate and help the referendum become valid, risk Hungary's EU-membership. According to this argument, Orbán, by rejecting EU's migration policy and the reallocation quotas, acts as a populist hater who turns his people against the EU for short-term political gains, not unlike the British Conservative Party and UKIP before Brexit (Ara-Kovács 2016). As a Socialist politician put it, “*the referendum is the government's first step to lead the country out of the EU,*” so the people should not accept Orbán's views but should stay with the opposition if they wanted to stay in Europe (Ujhelyi 2016; Gyurcsány 2016).³

This reframing attempted to change the discursive division between the parties from “supporters v. non-supporters of immigration” to “supporters v. non-supporters of the EU”—which puts the opposition on the right side, given that most Hungarians do find Hungary's EU-membership beneficial (Eurobarometer 2017). However the slippery slope argument remained greatly ineffective because,

² Surveys indicating such results will be shown in the next part.

³ A smaller party, Liberals, used similar argumentation but they concluded that if accepting the quotas is the European standpoint then the logical step is not the boycott but the „Yes” vote (Tóth 2016).

although the people indeed supported the EU, they did not support it indiscriminately—in fact, polls showed that they would prefer much less interference and EU-imposed duties and would rather cherry-pick the benefits of the membership (Závecz 2016). Furthermore, this argument did not say anything about the refugees themselves, which on the one hand was indeed the very point of this tactics, but on the other hand it made the condemning “hate campaign” and “bringing the evil out” rhetoric against Orbán either neutral or counterproductive. It could be neutral because even if many people agreed that the above described campaigns were excessive and often unnecessarily insulting or simplifying (Panyi 2015; Navracsecs 2016) they could also think—and, as we will see it from the polls, did think—that Orbán was right about calling migration a real threat and at least he offered a solution, unlike the opposition here. And it could also be counterproductive, because calling the only solution in town “evil” could easily alienate voters who wanted to think something about the refugee crisis and had no other alternative but to adopt Fidesz’s narrative—which was here not refuted but offensively condemned.

The same problem arose with that approach which tried to drop the refugee topic from the discourse by simply stating the issue was a distraction “*from those problems which Fidesz cannot and does not want to deal with: public health-care, public education, the economy, poverty and the theft of public funds.*” (Szegő 2016). Again, this tactics built on that Hungarians did indeed perceive other problems on the listed areas, but labelling something “distraction” and something else “the real issue” is, after all, arbitrary. It is not trivial that people accept such labels—and many of them indeed did not, believing migration was too an important issue for the country which should not be abandoned from the problems to be addressed.

2.4.2. The humorous replies: the Two-Tailed Dog Party

Interestingly enough, the only real counter-campaign to Fidesz’s anti-migrant “information” campaigns came from Hungary’s joke party, the Two-Tailed Dog Party. Both in 2015 and 2016 it collected ca. 100.000 EUR from micro-donations and started countrywide billboard-campaigns, depicting satirical parodies of the government’s messages. Although the financial means the Dog Party could use were only a small fraction of what Fidesz used, they still spent more than other opposition parties in spreading any of their messages—virtually taking the job of “serious” opposition parties by fulfilling their expected role of actively opposing the ruling party (Thorpe 2016; Graham-Harrison 2016).

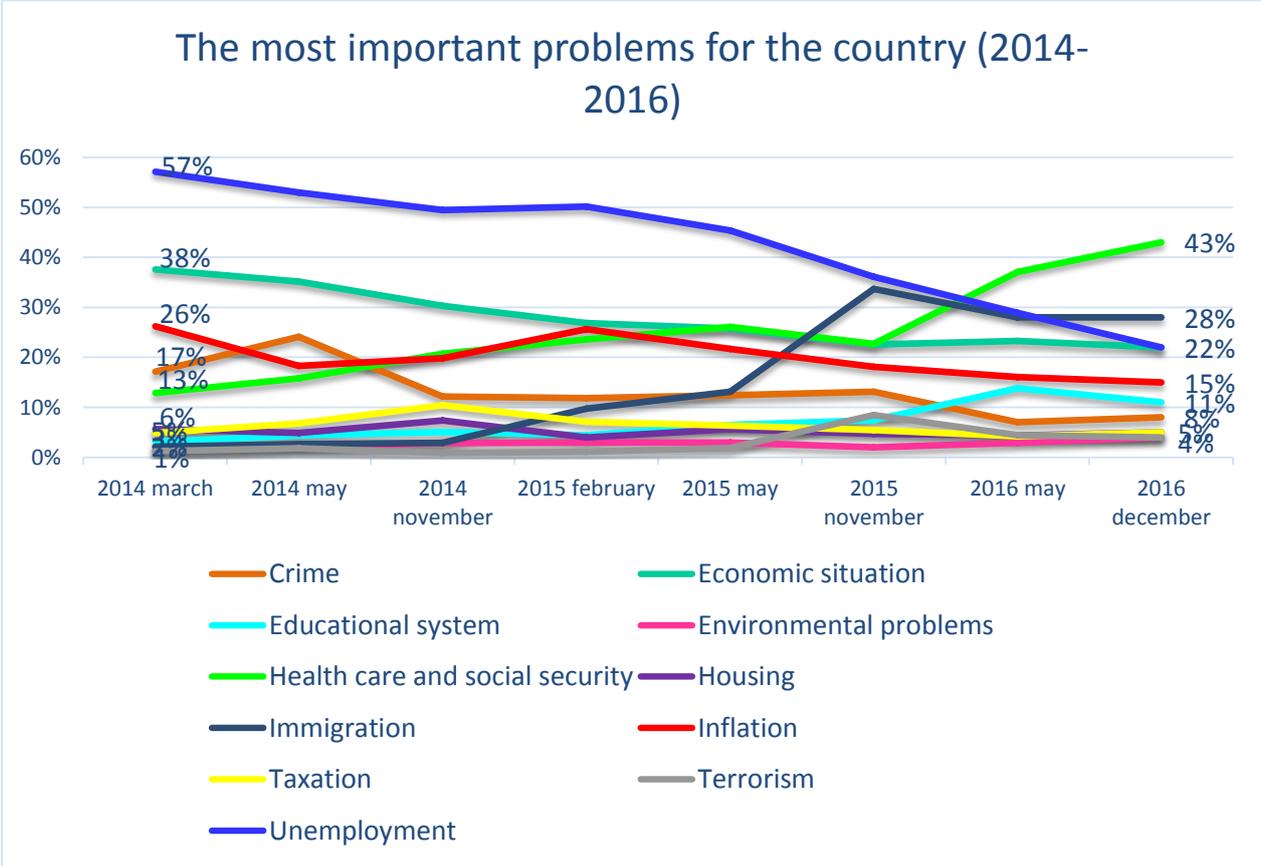
The Dog Party, similarly to other European joke parties, does not want to win the elections so it would be unfair to criticize its campaigns in terms of vote-seeking. However, as the question of whether humor is an effective weapon against anti-migrant campaigns has been raised (Case and Palattella 2016) it is worth spending a few words on this. Although joking may be more easily and enjoyably absorbable than serious statements, argumentatively it works very much like the above

described distraction-argument. Parodying a political statement implies the statement itself is absurd or, as in the Dog Party’s case, that the issue it deals with is not that real or important. And although this judgement was accompanied by actual (humorous) arguments on the billboards—claiming “an average Hungarian sees UFO more often than migrant,” for example—joking with something which the receiver believes to be very serious (indeed, potentially dangerous) may turn out to be flippant and/or insulting rather than funny (cf. Z. Nagy 2016; Madlovics 2016b).

3. The effect of campaigns on the people’s mindset: the attitudes of Hungarians toward refugees

From the previous description of the migrant campaigns as well as the situation of the sphere of communication in Hungary, we can expect two things about the attitudes of Hungarians toward refugees. First, that they started dealing with the issue when Orbán introduced it in the public discourse, and second, that they adopted the views of Fidesz’s two-tier narrative about the crisis—given there was virtually no other narrative offered to them. In this part, I use survey results by the Republikon Institute and others to explore the views of the Hungarian people and see whether these two hypotheses can be confirmed.

3.1. Getting started: restructuring threat perceptions



1. Figure: The most important problems for Hungary according to the Hungarian people (2014-2016). Source: Eurobarometer.

Eurobarometer has measured what the most important problems have been for the peoples of EU countries on a standard set of variables from crime and unemployment through education and healthcare to terrorism and immigration. Using their data collected from March 2014 to December 2016, we can see a stable confirmation of the first hypothesis (Figure 1). We can see that before 2015, the people clearly regarded unemployment, economic situation, inflation and healthcare as the main problems before the country, and immigration was ranked way below their level, as one of less significant problems. But it left that company already in February 2015, soon after Orbán's first statements about protecting the country against immigration. While in November only 3% of the population claimed migration to be an important problem, in February the corresponding number was 10%. The number kept growing as Fidesz started to put the refugee crisis in the middle of its communication, yielding 13% in May, and after the national consultation and the government's information campaign it boomed to 34%—an almost threefold growth compared to the previous number. Terrorism, although it did not reach the level of its umbrella topic of immigration, also started growing after May, from 2% to 8% in November (2015).

It is important to note that Fidesz's campaign resonated not only in its own voter base but among other parties' voters as well. If we look at the data in Table 1, compiled by Republikon Institute,⁴ we

What do you think are the two most important problems Hungary has to face? (%)

	December 2016				July 2017			
	Fidesz	Left-liberal	Jobbik	Total population	Fidesz	Left-liberal	Jobbik	Total population
Terrorism	7	3	7	4	8	4	3	6
Immigration	38	15	33	28	31	9	24	24
Economic situation	20	18	31	22	16	18	23	18
Health care and social security	40	54	36	43	39	59	53	46
Unemployment	22	22	17	22	22	19	21	20

1. Table: Threat perceptions for the country in December (2016) and July (2017), according to which government the respondent wanted to see govern after the next elections. Source: Republikon.

can see that although there was a decline between December 2016 and July 2017 in the ratio of respondents who claimed immigration and terrorism were the most important problems to the country, their distribution among party groups seem steady. Fidesz voters are the most devoted in the question, they are followed by Jobbik voters and then the voters of the left-liberal camp. Compared to other topics, these data are consistent with Eurobarometer's surveys, showing health care was regarded a more important issue by the camps than immigration—especially in July, by when the threat perception of immigration declined, and also especially for the left-liberal camp.

⁴ The data collection for July was commissioned by 24.hu.

Indeed, while in case of Fidesz voters, health care and immigration are roughly in the same magnitude, the left-liberal camp in both periods (and Jobbik voters in the latter period) ranked health care much higher than immigration.

The fact that these differences are communication-induced is underlined by the data shown in Table 2. When people are not asked about what the most important problems for the country are, about which they can inquire mainly from the news, but what the problems that they personally face

And what are the two most important problems that you momentarily face? (%)

	December 2016				July 2017			
	Fidesz	Left-liberal	Jobbik	Total population	Fidesz	Left-liberal	Jobbik	Total population
Terrorism	1	1	4	1	1	2	3	2
Immigration	10	3	7	6	6	4	4	5
Economic situation	7	14	14	10	7	10	6	7
Health care and social security	25	40	24	28	28	31	25	29
Unemployment	11	6	11	9	7	8	12	8

2. Table: Personal threat perceptions in December (2016) and July (2017), according to which government the respondent wanted to see govern after the next elections. Source: Republikon.

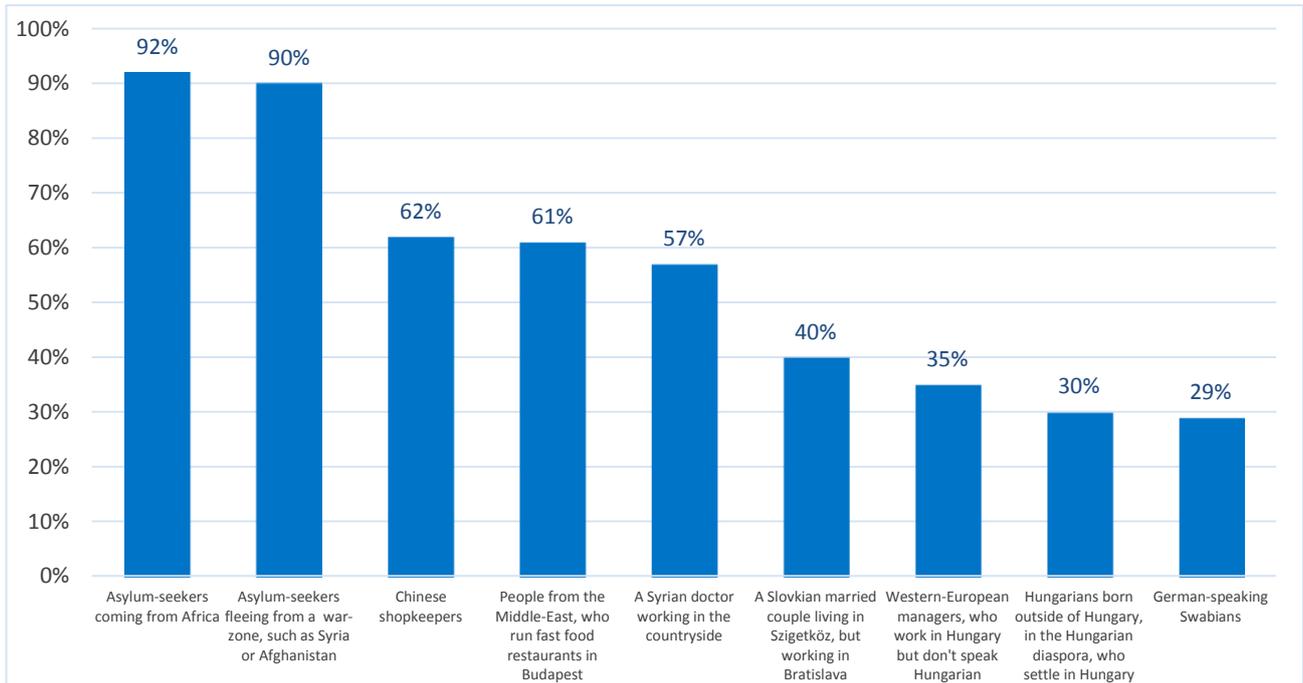
are, which is influenced by their own experiences, the differences are less spectacular between the voter groups. Furthermore, much more people believe immigration is a problem to the country than how many say it is a problem in their lives, once again illustrating the power of influence of communication over people's threat perceptions.

3.2. Anti-migrant attitudes – in line with Orbán's narrative

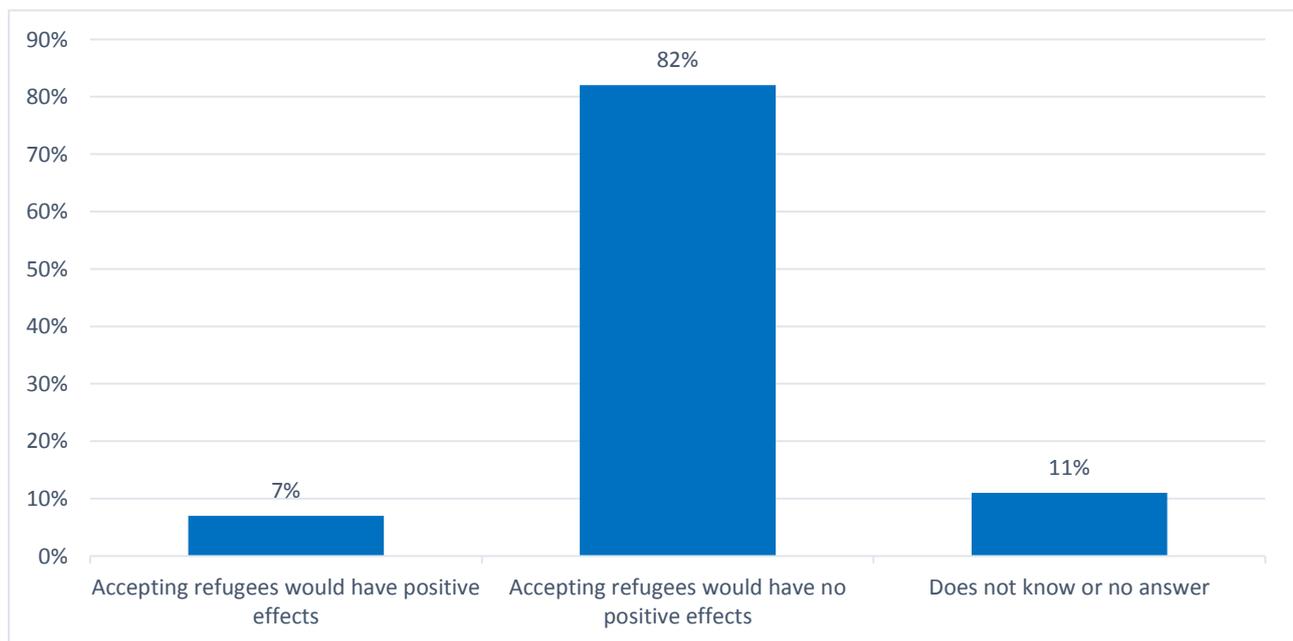
The data presented in the previous point suggest that people's attitudes toward migrants were shaped entirely by Fidesz's communication, following that Orbán's framing was the first (and only) one in which they heard about the issue. But before looking into some of the more important points of the Fidesz's two-tier narrative, we should first see who actually we talk about—who the "refugees" or "migrants" are according the people and who are not. Related data is presented in Figure 2.

When exposed to certain social and ethnic groups and asked whether they belong to migrants or not, almost every respondent said asylum-seekers from Africa and Syria were immigrants—92% and 90%, respectively. Interestingly enough, almost thirty percentage points less people said that Chinese shopkeepers and people from the Middle-East who run fast food restaurants in Budapest were migrants. This may suggest at first that the respondents' definition of "migrant" was influenced by the public discourse—Fidesz talks about Syrian migrants and refugees, not the Chinese. But we get a more detailed picture of the influence when we notice that a Syrian doctor working in the

countryside is called by even less people, only 57%, an immigrant. The reason for the differentiation between Syrian refugees and the Syrian doctor can be explained by looking at Figures 3-4.



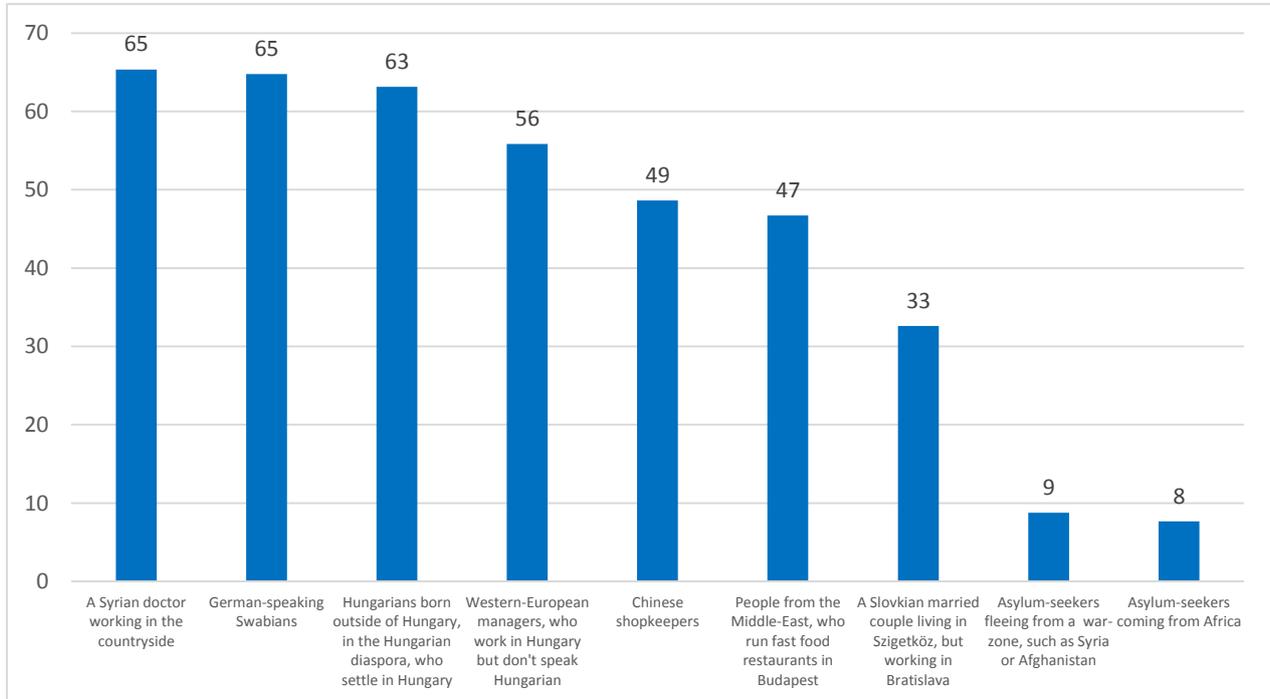
2. Figure: Answers to the following instructions: “We listed a few actual social or ethnic groups below. Please, indicate in each case whether you think the given group belongs to migrants or not!” Source: Republiikon.



3. Figure: Answers to the following question: “Some people say it would be good for the country if immigrants were allowed to settle in Hungary. Others say this would be rather harmful. What do you think?” Source: Republiikon.

Figure 3 contains data about what the people think about the (economic or other) effects of immigration. The results are striking: 82% claim that immigration would have no positive effects and only 7% say that positive effects are probable. Here we arrive to the first tier of the Fidesz’s narrative which asserts that migrants pose a threat to our safety: our lives, workplaces, culture, and borders.

Given this assertion, it is very logical to say that the settlement of a migrant in Hungary would have no benefits at all—or, conversely, that if someone has positive effects then he cannot be a migrant. This is illustrated in Figure 4 which contains data about which peoples from the already listed ones Hungarians think are beneficial. The results are almost the diametrical opposite of those in Figure 2.

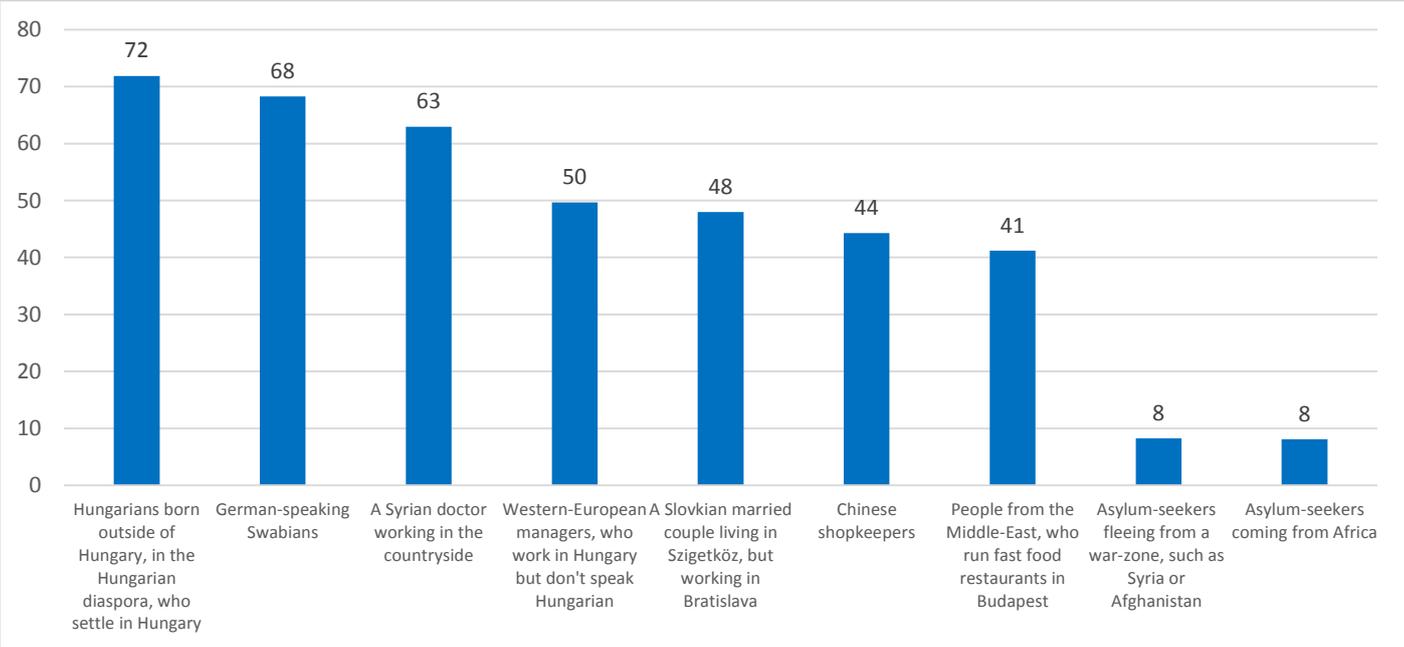


4. Figure: The sum of the ratio of those who “agreed” or “totally agreed” with the assertion that the already listed social/ethnic groups contribute to the nation’s economic development. Source: Republikon.

Here those who were noted as migrants, listed as having no contribution to the economy—whereas the Syrian doctor jumped to the top of the list, ahead of Chinese shopkeepers, German-speaking Swabians, and even Hungarians from the Hungarian diaspora. This is probably due to that the image of “Syrian doctor” seems so absurdly idealistic for Hungarians who developed their views about migrants in Orbán’s dominated sphere of communication that they regard him higher than the social/ethnic groups they more regularly see.

Similar polarization can be seen between the people’s judgements about the Syrian doctor and the Syrian migrant when we ask which group could easily integrate in the society (Figure 5). Although here now the Syrian doctor is overtaken by foreign-born Hungarians, asylum-seekers—who respondents mainly identified as “migrants”—are again on the end of the list. This is very much in line with the first tier of Orbán’s narrative by claiming one of the problems with migrants is that they cannot peacefully coexist with Hungarians, thus threatening their safety.

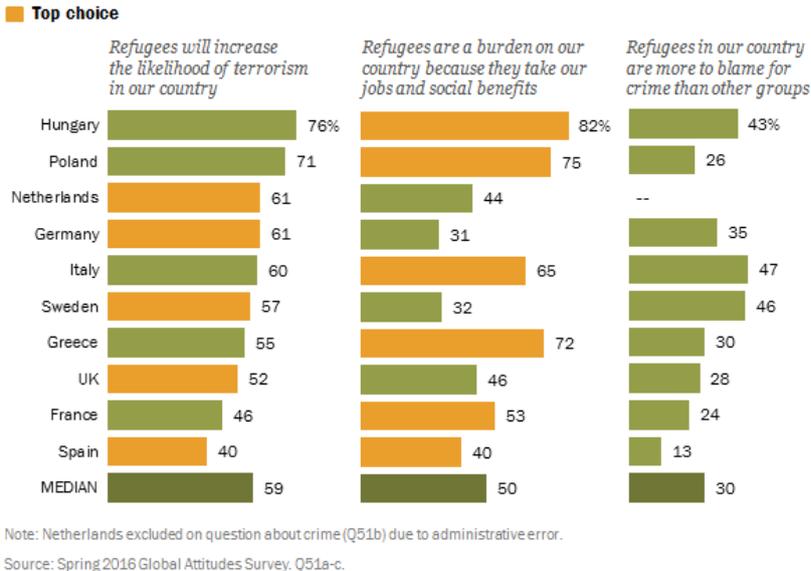
More on the correspondence between Hungarian’s attitudes and the first tier of Fidesz’s two-tier narrative can be seen on Figure 6. Depicting the results of Pew Global’s research from Spring 2016, this figure shows Hungarians were by the most worried about migrants among European peoples, being concerned with security and economic repercussions of the refugee crisis (Wike, Stokes, and



5. Figure: The sum of the ratio of those who “agreed” or “totally agreed” with the assertion that the already listed social/ethnic groups can easily integrate, without much problem. Source: Republikon.

Simmons 2016). Furthermore, Hungary has also seen a rise in xenophobic attitudes in the population. TÁRKI, a Hungarian polling firm which has measured xenophobic attitudes since 1992, pointed it out that the level of xenophobia in April 2015, soon after Orbán started speaking against immigration, jumped to a rather high level and reached its peak in January 2016 with 53% of xenophobes, 46% of “thinkers” who may let refugees in under some special circumstances, and only 1% of xenophiles

(Simonovits and Bernát 2016).



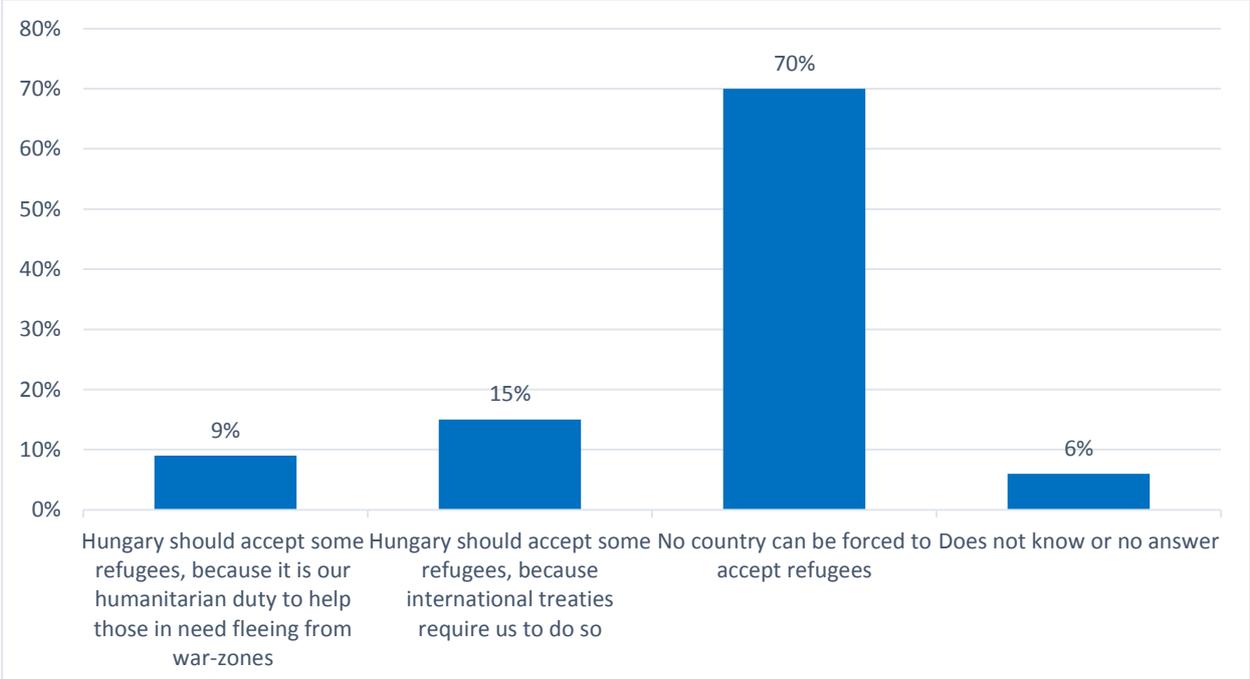
6. Figure: European peoples’ concerns about security and the economic repercussions of the refugee crisis. Source: Wike, Stokes, and Simmons (2016).

Analyzing the voter bases, Simonovits and Bernát found ambiguous results. On the one hand, the data showed that being the potential voter of a nationalist/right-wing party increases the probability of xenophobia and reduces the probability of xenophilia significantly. On the other hand, left-wing affiliation had a less strong

but still significant impact: MSZP voters were less likely to be xenophiles. (Non-voters tended to be xenophobes.) These results are consistent with the results shown above and they indicate it again

that the assertions of the first tier of the Fidesz’s two-tier narrative affected Jobbik as well as leftist voters, whose parties did not communicate a strong, firm opinion about the refugee crisis.

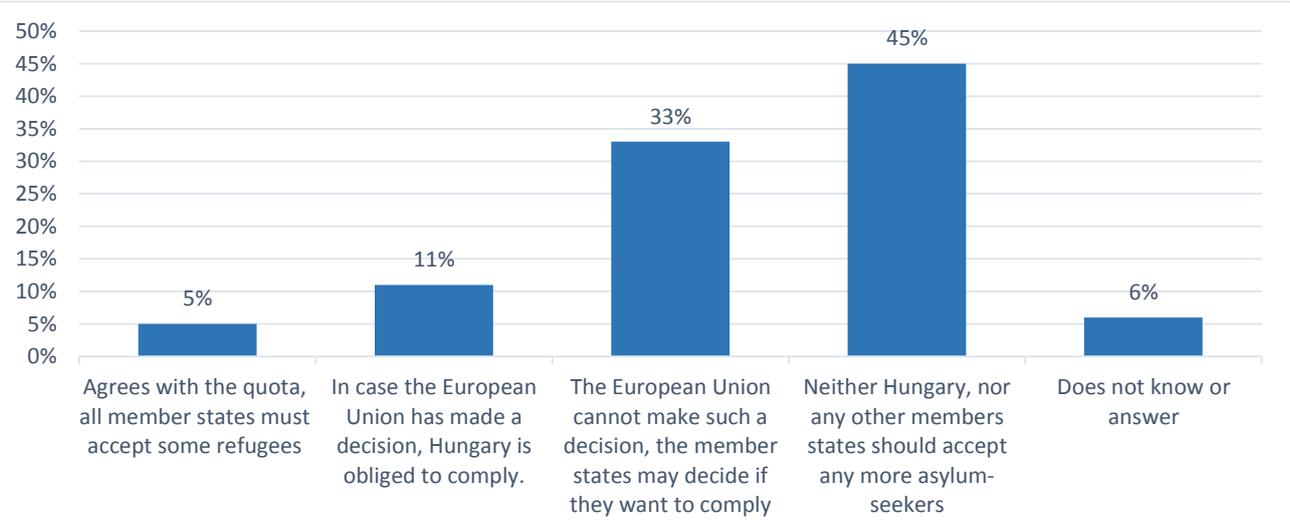
As far as the second tier of Fidesz’s narrative is concerned, similar correspondence can be noted. Turning back to Republikon’s data, shown on Figure 7, Hungarians apparently accept Orbán’s



7. Figure: Answers to the following question: “Some people think those fleeing from war-zones are entitled to protection and integration, whereas others say no country can be forced to do this. Which opinion is closer to yours?” Source: Republikon.

sovereignty narrative as the bulk of them believes that no country can be forced to accept refugees. Only 15% of the population said that we should obey the corresponding international treaties, and even less, only 9% asserted that refugees should be accepted out of humanitarian duty.

Similar results can be found in relation to the EU’s proposed migrant quota (Figure 8). The



8. Figure: Answers to the following question: “According to one of the EU’s ideas, refugees arriving to Europe from third countries should be reallocated according to a quota among the EU member states, considering their population and economic development. Which of the following opinions do you support?” Source: Republikon.

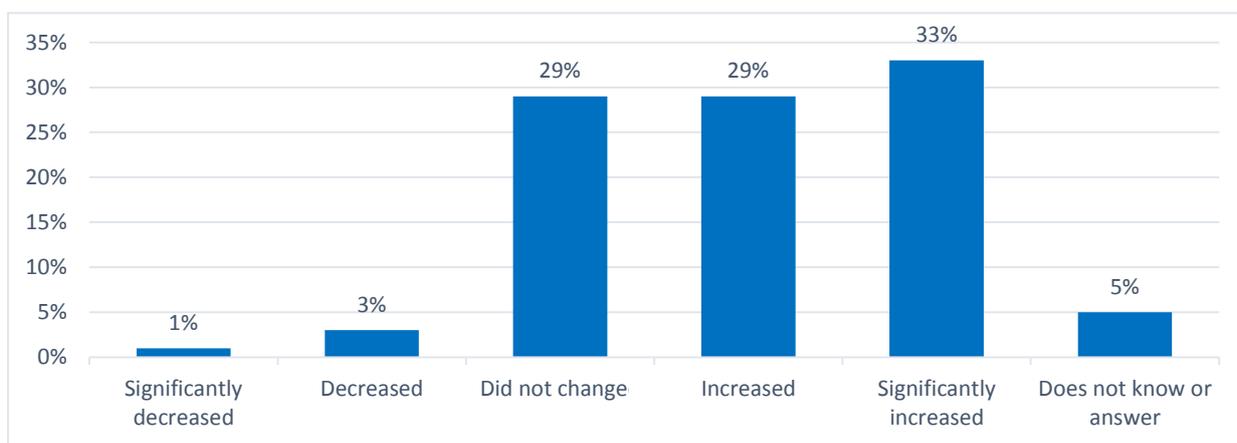
question which became the central issue of the referendum as well as the government’s campaigns thereof conjures up again a massive rejection of the quota’s idea in the population. What is interesting, though, is the difference between respondents who agree with the EU cannot make such decisions (which is in line with the Fidesz’s narrative 2nd tier) and those who say no countries should accept more asylum-seekers (more in line with the 1st tier). We can see that the latter one was the more popular option, with 45% as opposed to the former one’s 33%. These results indicate that people like Orbán’s narrative more because of its 1st tier than its 2nd. But given that those who had an explicitly different opinion only made of 16% of the respondents, and especially in the light of the previous findings, we can definitely register a strong acceptance of Fidesz’s narrative as a whole in the Hungarian population—meaning my second hypothesis is confirmed as well.

4. Opportunities then and now: narratives for the opposition

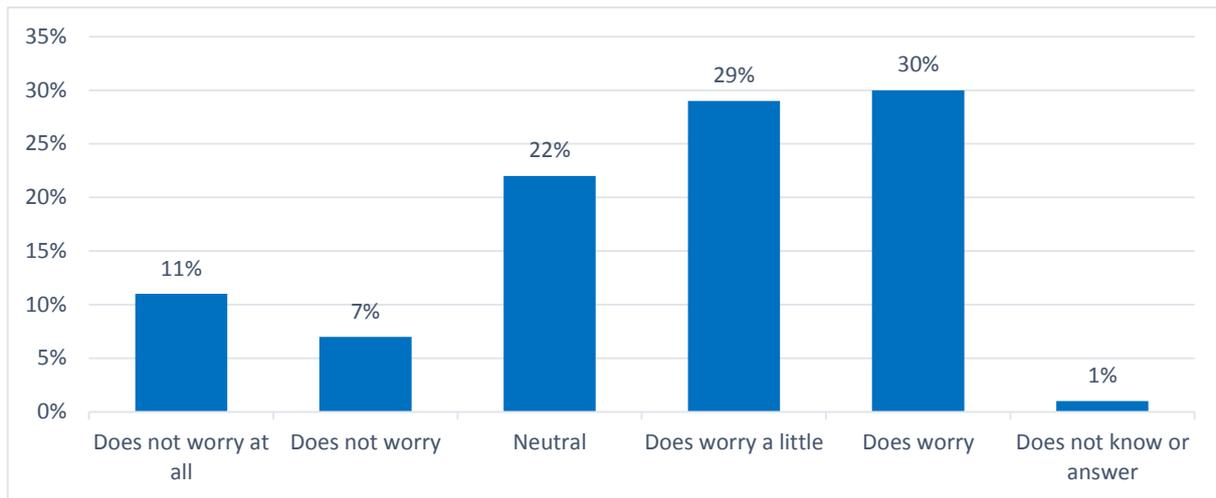
4.1. The unsatisfied demand

Much of the opposition’s communication strategy concerning the migration crisis was driven by the belief that Fidesz’s messages and campaigns were enormously popular with virtually every group of Hungarian voters, leaving no room for a politically viable pro-migrant narrative. *“MSZP cannot win this refugee fight, it is better to remain silent in such cases,”* said one of the leaders of the socialist party (Dull 2015b). However that, as it has become clear in the last three years, is not a politically viable option either. Orbán renews his narrative over and over, filling the public discourse up with migration related topics—and the people have not lost interest either. Although it has been seen a less important threat than it was in 2015 or 2016, migration is still one of the key issues for many voters. It does not seem politically ingenious or tactically correct to simply abandon the issue if it is possible to give a better answer.

But is it possible? Is there a room for a response opposing Orbán’s anti-migrant stance? Figures 9-10 may hint the answer. What we can see is that, when people are asked whether xenophobia and



9. Figure: “In your opinion, have xenophobia and racism decreased or increased in the last two or three years?”
Source: Republikon.



10. Figure: “And does this tendency worry you personally?” Source: Republikon.

racism have increased in the last two or three years, more than 60% say they have. What is more, roughly the same ratio of respondents claimed they were worried about this trend. If we put this together with the opinions we have seen in the previous part⁵ that suggests a number of voters who agree with Orbán’s narrative in broad strokes but do not like its xenophobic parts, its oversimplifying and unnecessarily insulting messages spread on billboards and TV studios in very plain text. In other words, there are many voters who agree with the goals of safety and sovereignty and now they also agree with that Orbán’s solution is functional. But the fact they believe it also raises worrisome xenophobia, they may be interested in another solution. They may be interested in hearing something which accepts at least the strongest one of Orbán’s points, safety, and offers a way to reach it in relation to immigration without the Fidesz-type aggression (cf. Ungváry 2015; Madlovics 2016a).

Such a counter-narrative was just as required in 2015-2016 as it is now—and it was similarly possible, too. To illustrate this, I will first sketch briefly a narrative which could have been used by the opposition, making a pro-migrant stance in line with the Hungarian people’s attitudes. Then, I will give a similarly brief sketch about the basic argumentative idea which could be used now, in the current political discourse by the opposition.

4.2. Could have been: presenting migration not as a threat but as an opportunity

Presenting migration not as a threat but as an opportunity is far from being a new idea. Liberals and libertarians who support immigration had developed various economic arguments long before 2015, explaining why it is beneficial for a country which relies not on natural resources but on human capital to accept, or even encourage, the inflow of immigrants (Friedman 1973; The Economist 2015). The question therefore is not what could have been said in favor of immigration but why Hungarians

⁵ Distribution of answers here was roughly equal among different party groups as well as the uncertain voters.

would have accepted it. Why would have they believed that newcomers who they knew nothing about, and who had been described to them by Orbán as dangerous barbarians, could actually contribute to the wealth of Hungary?

The answer lies in Figures 2, 4 and 5. What people think about migrants depends on who they think migrants are. If it is thought that migrants are poor, helpless asylum-seekers from Africa and Syria, barely anyone will believe “migrants” can contribute to the economy. But if we include among “migrants” such people as Chinese shopkeepers and Arab fast food restaurant owners, the economic contribution of “migrants” becomes evident for nearly 50% of the population. This is the basic reframing which the opposition could have based its economic argument on, changing the meaning of the word “migrant” in the political discourse. Leftist or liberal politicians could have used the term “migrant” to the Chinese and the Arabs consistently, speaking about successful and fruitful integration of immigrants with very different culture from ours to the Hungarian society. Given these immigrants had been well-known to many Hungarians, using their examples to refute Orbán’s claims about “unsuccessful integration” may have sounded credible to large number of voters.

This line of argument might have also been reinforced by the fact that refugees were coming from war-zones. To a humanitarian, this fact means that we have a duty to help these people; to a utilitarian, it means that not only the lower class left the country but the middle class as well. This latter recognition could have been used to underline the economic potential of people who had left their country not because they had had no work there and decided to try their luck in Europe but because their workplaces had been destroyed. A country which needs skilled workforce, such as Hungary, should have definitely wanted these people to come and continue their work here.

The image of “Syrian doctors” was not an absurdity; they existed, and they were coming.

4.3. Could be: the problem is that they go forward⁶

The year is now 2017; much fewer immigrants come to Hungary and Fidesz uses different topics within the framework of its migrant narrative, too. For the first tier, Fidesz now claims the upcoming election is about “Orbán or the border fence,” suggesting an opposition victory would bring about the breakdown of that symbol of defense of people’s safety from migrants (MTI 2017). For the second tier, George Soros has been attacked, saying he wants to interfere with Hungarian sovereignty by “settling one million migrants annually” according to his “Soros-plan” (Novak 2017).

We have seen that the first tier holds stronger resonates more with Hungarians than the second one, and a deeper analysis of Republikon’s data suggest that voters who have not yet chosen their parties—and thus are the main target group of the opposition—also find Fidesz’s narrative

⁶ Cf. Bede (2015).

convincing for the first tier. Thus, the opposition's response to Fidesz's messages must build on the notion of safety—showing that they can grant it and Orbán cannot, or does not.

Just like in the previous part, this debate depends on how you define the term in question—just the term is not “migrant” now, but “safety.” The opposition here has an excellent chance of conceptual re-framing, altering the discursive definition of safety from “protection from great changes” to “guaranteeing normal living conditions to the people”—in connection to which they could criticize the government's performance in some areas Hungarians find the most problematic, including unemployment, social security, and health care (see Figure 1). In other words, what opposition members could speak about is that Orbán, while claiming to maintain “safety” in fight with foreign enemies, forgets about his own people and fails to guarantee the Hungarian people's safety in terms of the aforementioned areas. Connecting this argument to the topic of migrants, opposition politicians could reply to Fidesz's above mentioned messages always with re-framings, such as: *“It does not matter how many migrants Soros wants to send here—because none of them would stay in Hungary, given they earn more from governmental subsidies abroad than here as members of the lower middle class. We saw that in 2015-2016 that refugees almost immediately left for Western Europe, precisely because the country after 7 years of Orbán's reign could not—and still cannot—guarantee safety to its residents, up to the middle class, in terms of having a job, having social security and having access to proper health care.”*

5. Conclusion

In my essay I wanted to show that the labels “hate campaign” and “xenophobia,” although they are often used by critical commentators, make considerable simplifications regarding the dynamics and effects of Fidesz's communication in the migrant crisis. Fidesz first utilized the refugee topic as a political tool in early 2015 and later it managed to build a two-tier narrative around it. This narrative was, firstly, which helped Fidesz develop a dominated sphere of communication and keep the issue of migration on the floor for nearly three years, and secondly, which was adopted by the Hungarian people. Indeed, Hungarian people do not simply “hate” refugees but want to live, in line with Fidesz's narrative, in a safe and sovereign country; many of them even worry about xenophobia itself.

Among other things, this worrying indicated the public's demand for another solution to the refugee crisis—however the opposition parties failed to deliver it because they started from the false premise of that Fidesz's campaign was too popular among Hungarians and so it left little to no room to oppose it. The opposition's attempts to deflect the public discourse from Fidesz's migrant narrative and its sub-topics have been unsuccessful, suggesting it should try to develop, albeit on an uneven playing field, a successful attack on the narrative itself; whether this happens by the elections of 2018 remains to be seen.

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