

# **The Relationship between Populism and Polarization: A Case Study on Turkish and Hungarian Democratic Backsliding**

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## **Abstract**

Both Turkey and Hungary have long been governed by the same political party and the leader with populist rhetoric while their democracy level has been showing a declining trend. This in-power populism has a vital impact on political polarization through the reflections of populism on the media and civil society organizations. This comparative case study suggests that even though the differences in the domestic and international system, the populist politics have been damaging the democracy level of both Turkey and Hungary. This effect shows itself in the parliamentary system of Hungary and the presidential system of Turkey through political polarization. Populist politics reflects itself in the media and civil society organizations and creates political polarization in Turkey and Hungary. Also, the different positioning in the international arena is considered to understand the effects of populist politics while being an insider and outsider for the European Union. It is argued that populist politics even under different international order shows similar tendencies.

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## Introduction

In recent years, populism has become one of the most discussed topics of political science. Especially the relationship between populism and liberal democracy and its values has become a crucial issue with the rise of right-wing populism. Phenomenally, there is no common definition of populism that would make researchers establish a clear relationship with liberal democracy while the field and research on populism have expanded. This complexity of the issue derives from the decisions of scholars using the concept without defining it while some of the other scholars' approach populism as a type of political discourse, ideology, leadership, movement, phenomenon, strategy, style, syndrome, et cetera (Mudde, 2017, 46). The other possible reason which makes the issue complex is that if this situation is attributed to the different democracy levels and political culture of each country, it is plausible that the populist rhetoric that is created will be varied accordingly. Therefore, a case study has the potential to be one of the convenient ways to understand the relationship between populism and democracy.

By considering the above factors, this study focuses on the effects of populism on liberal democracy by emphasizing the relationship between populism and polarization in the Erdoğan regime in Turkey and the Orbán regime in Hungary since 2000. The issue of freedom of the press and civil society organizations are examined to be able to conceptualize the relationship between populism and polarization. For the sake of the conceptualization, the first dimension of this study argues that populism fosters political polarization through restrictions over freedom of the press and it leads to the erosion of democracy both in Turkey and Hungary. While analyzing the freedom of press dimension, media pluralism, the position of media outlets, and censorship are observed to be able to answer how does populism create a relationship with

polarization that negatively affects democracy. The second dimension of the study argues that populism fosters polarization through restrictions over civil society and liberties. The patronage networks and repressive state actions are discussed to understand the dynamics between populism and polarization that affect democracy and its liberal values.

In order to understand the dynamics between populism and Turkish and Hungarian democracy, their political systems, the charismatic leadership, and their positioning in the international arena should be compared to each other to clarify the effects of populism more apparent. While Turkey's regime has decided to be changed from a parliamentary system to a presidential system with weak checks and balances in the 2017 referenda, Hungary is still governed by a parliamentary system. This difference has the potential to clarify how do effects of populism vary across different political regimes. Even though Hungary has a parliamentary system, there is clear executive aggrandizement by changing the constitutional framework that leads to erosion of check and balance in the country just like in Turkey. Therefore, it is important to analyze these two countries to highlight that right-wing populist incumbent parties have the potential to use the same dynamics to guarantee their positions even under different political regimes. Also, analyzing the leadership of these populist incumbent parties highlights the same point that right-wing populist leaders tend to show similar characteristics and rhetoric even under different political regimes. However, the institutions of these two countries could be weak even before these two populist incumbent parties came into power. Therefore, this study only compares the power of the executive branch during the year that they came into power, and the recent power of the executive branch to understand the effects of constitutional amendments on democracies.

Even though Turkey and Hungary have been ruling by right-wing populist parties and have similarities in party discipline and leadership, their positioning in the international context is quite different from each other. The most important factor in the international context is the

European Union membership which Hungary has and Turkey does not. This difference may affect the understanding for “the people” and “the others” of these two right-wing populist parties and the populist rhetoric of Erdoğan and Orbán disclose this difference. This EU membership plays a regime legitimizing role for the Hungary case, while Turkey does not have that kind of an external legitimizing factor (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018, 6). This difference needs to be analyzed to understand the various legitimizing sources and their limits for both Hungary and Turkey. Also, there is a de-democratization pattern that comes after the democratization process for both countries together with the EU membership for Hungary and Europeanization process for Turkey. This similar pattern presents the instrumentalization of the European Union under different conditions by the populist leaders.

Consequently, the link between populism and polarization has great importance in the democratic decline of Turkey and Hungary. The aim of this study is to add the populism factor in the literature on polarization and to add the polarization factor in the literature on populism. Basically, this study brings these two important political phenomena and discusses them together to analyze the effects of this relationship on the democracy level of Turkey and Hungary.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework: Populism, Polarization and Democracy

### 1.1 Populism

Since populism has various types and definitions or interpretations, according to Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, and Ostiguy (2017) in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* consider three definitions since they approach these concepts as the most important ones in the literature. These three definitions are namely Mude’s (2017) ideational approach,

Weyland's (2017) political-strategic approach, and Ostiguy's (2017) socio-cultural approach.

According to Mudde (2004), populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”. In this ideational approach of Mudde's (2017), there are three core concepts of populism as a thin-centered ideology and these are the people, the corrupt elite, and general will. This thin-centered ideology approaches populism as a set of ideas and it is suitable to context-dependent studies as opposed to thick-centered ideologies which can be considered as macro ideologies that handle the ideas that can be an answer to all political issues.

The other issue on this approach is the inclusionary and exclusionary populism and this is an important division for the debate between populism and democracy. According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013), there are three dimensions of exclusionary and inclusionary populism as material, political and symbolic. These three dimensions examine the character of populism, therefore, it is helpful for case studies to understand the framework. The material dimension looks at the distribution of state resources to specific groups in society (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2013, 15). This dimension explains whether material inclusion or exclusion of certain groups are promoted by populist leaders. The political dimension is crucial to understand the features of democracies such as political participation and public contestation (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2013, 17). This dimension examines the populist parties' or leaders' attitudes about preventing certain groups from political participation and representation or promoting them. Therefore, this dimension is essential for minority rights and majority rule in populist countries. Lastly, the symbolic dimension clarifies the boundaries of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2013, 20). This dimension explains how these essential terms of populism are exclusive or inclusive according to the populist leaders' rhetoric.



According to Weyland (2017), populism is “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers”. This conceptualization highlights the role of personalistic plebiscitarian leadership and claims that these leaders avoid ideological radicalism to be able to make political maneuvers easily through making calculations and strategies. Also, this approach highlights the importance of the ruler by considering the type of the ruler, principle power capability, and ruler’s relation to the support base (Weyland, 2001, 13). Therefore, it can be said that this approach considers an individual political or a leader as an essential part of populism because it is important to have a powerful leader who creates his or her autonomy and dominate other types of political actors through using his or her populist politics as a political strategy. Furthermore, it is crucial to sustain their authority through mobilizing ‘the people’ by attacking ‘the elite’ (Weyland, 2017, 82).

Ostiguy (2017) mentions the lack of a sociological component in the conceptualizations of other definitions of populism while explaining the socio-cultural approach. According to this approach, social-cultural historical reasons enable us to understand populism in different political spaces and take the discussion beyond discourses (Ostiguy, 2017, 104). This approach mentions the high and low political appeals of populism. This understanding explains populism as a two-way phenomenon or relationship between political leaders and their supporters in a socio-cultural and politico-cultural content, therefore, it is not a top-down phenomenon (Ostiguy, 2017, 104). This normative approach argues that populism, which is a relational phenomenon, is about identity creation rather than an ideology or a world view. This low and high appeal of the issue explains a society’s history, culture, identities, and differences among them. In this sociological approach, these high and low appeals can be seen in the socio-cultural and political-cultural components. Therefore, it can be argued that this argument considers

populism as an antagonistic mobilization of politics of culturally popular and a personalistic decision-making process (Ostiguy, 2017, 117).

This study applies the ideational approach to observe the effects of populism on Turkey's and Hungary's democracy since the 2000s. Since this is a case study, the thin-centered ideology of this approach is appropriate to analyze the populism in Turkey and Hungary. Also, the exclusionary type of populism conforms both to Turkey's and Hungary's populism and this is going to be helpful to highlight the importance of the relationship between populism and democracy as it is mentioned before.

Since the division between 'the people' and 'the elite' is highly important for the ideational approach, it is necessary to explain in which context these two constructed frames are portrayed. According to Kyle and Gultchin (2018), there are three types of populism by considering the ways of framing the divisions between 'the people' and 'the elite' by the populist leaders and parties. These three types are cultural, socio-economic, and anti-establishment populisms.

Cultural populism defines the division between 'the people' and 'the elite' through identity politics such as ethnicity, race, and religion (Kyle and Gultchin, 2018, 22). This means that only the native part of the society belongs to 'the true people' and the other part of the society or the outsiders who are presented as threats to the nation-state. According to cultural populists, these outsiders can be opposition parties, immigrants, international organizations, etc. The countries such as Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Hungary under Victor Orbán are prime examples of cultural populism.

Socio-economic populists draw this 'us and them' division through economic classes. Unlike cultural populists, the national border is not a necessary part of the argument for socio-economic populism because the pure people who belong to a specific social class might be considered allies (Kyle and Gultchin, 2018, 23). Therefore, it is clear that there is an

inclusionary understanding of ethnic division. The elites or the outsiders are the people or the organizations that prop up an international capitalist system. Bolivia under the rule of Evo Morales and Venezuela under Hugo Chávez are qualified examples of socio-economic populism.

In anti-establishment populism the division is between establishment elites and hard-working citizens, therefore, they are considering establishment elites as the primary enemy. In this type of populism, the focus is on political elites rather than an ethnic or social group since their aim is to clean the state from corruption. Italy under the Five Star Movement is a good example of this type of populism.

As it is mentioned above, cultural populism is the best fit for both Turkey and Hungary. In Table 1, it can be observed that the political discourse of these two countries is nativist by mentioning the national identity when constructing the Manichean worldview. On the other hand, constructing ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ varies from government terms which depend on the political environment. This means that the way of mentioning “the people” or “the elites” is varied accordingly to the political subject of that particular political term.

### **1.1.1 Turkey**

For the Turkish case, when JDP first came into power in 2002, they defined themselves as conservative democrats and a center-right party. They took a pro-EU positioning and started to establish reforms of the European Union process which was started by the previous coalition government in 1999. Therefore, this period was about democratization, economic growth and improved foreign relations thanks to Europeanization Process. During this first period of the JDP government, there is no practice of populism. On the other hand, the changing political tone of the JDP government in later periods together with increasing power consolidation suggests that they were populists from the very beginning. They were new in power and they need political survival and legitimacy. Thus, the European Union Process and its reforms were

instrumentalized because they need other power centers and European Union was ideal and it also helped them to break the secular state elite's influence on power (Gürsoy, 2019, 10). Therefore, even though the first period of the JDP government does not seem like a populist party in practice, the attitude of later periods suggests that they were populists and there was a strategic alignment with the European Union. This means that even though there was no appeared Manichean attitude, the later periods show that "the elite" were secular military and judicial establishment in the early years of the JDP government (Gürsoy, 2019, 10).

The second term of the JDP government is considered as selective Europeanization by implementing laws that they want and many of the controversial issues were untouched (Yılmaz, 2016a, 90). During this period, they had chosen to focus on the judicial system and civil-military relations together with the 2010 Constitutional reform packages to consolidate their power in these institutions. (Gürsoy, 2011, 298). Therefore, considering the secular military and judicial establishment as "the elite" has started to appear clearly in practice.

Once they consolidated their power, which coincides with the beginning of their third period in power, the JDP government no longer need European Union as a legitimacy source, thus they no longer represent themselves as a pro-EU or reformist party. On the other hand, they portrayed themselves as the primary democratizing force in Turkey and it was granted by the public in the 2011 elections in which the JDP government received %50 votes that legitimizes the JPD rule (Yılmaz, 2016a, 94). Also, this popular vote is an indication that the charismatic leadership of Erdoğan has increased both within the party and in the political arena (Selçuk, 2016, 576). The highest point of this charismatic leadership was in 2014 which is the year that Erdoğan became the first popularly elected president of Turkey. This gave him another source of legitimacy and he started to portray himself as man of the people and voice of all marginalized groups while mentioning the supremacy of the ballot box since it directly represents 'the will of the people' (Selçuk, 2016, 576; Aytaç and Elçi, 2018, 98). This new

political environment was mentioned as the beginning of the ‘New Turkey’ by the JDP government. In this ‘New Turkey’ era, the subject of ‘the elite’ had shifted from the military and judiciary to the main opposition party (Republic People’s Party, CHP or RPP) and opposition-minded intellectuals, academicians and journalists, since they consolidate their power in the institutions of military and judiciary. The other reason for this significant shift in construction ‘the elite’ is the Gezi Protests which happened in 2013. President Erdoğan claimed that these protests were systematically planned by internal and external “mastermind or higher intellect” (Aytaç and Elçi, 2018, 99; Özen, 2020, 253). The constructing enemy period of this term shows a break in relations with the West by scapegoating them to be the organizers of the Gezi protests.

The 2016 coup attempt by the Gülenist movement, which was previously a strategic alliance of the JDP government, had led to increasing tension with the West because Erdoğan continued his political strategy to blame them and this time it was for supporting the coup attempt (Aytaç and Elçi, 2018, 99). The state of emergency after this coup attempt was declared by the Erdoğan and lasted for two years. This long period of the state of emergency led to executive aggrandizement by making the executive branch to be the dominant form of lawmaking and decreasing the role of the parliament because even some laws were not related to the state of emergency (Aytaç and Elçi, 2018, 100). This de facto presidential system situation led Erdoğan to even increase his executive power and decrease the political space for the opposition. Therefore, while opposition continued to be declared as ‘the enemy’ by Erdoğan, he added their former allies, the Gülenist movement and its sympathizers to this constructed ‘the enemy’ group.

During these years, especially after the 2015 elections, another group who was excluded by the JDP government was the opposition, secular and non-Sunni part of the Kurdish ethnic minority or simply the group in the Kurdish society who are not supporters of the JDP

government (Gürsoy, 2019, 4-10). This is also another part of the populist politics of the JDP government because there is a conceptualization of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ division even in an ethnic minority group by creating a sense of belonging through using religious divisions. This means that the populist politics of the JDP government use and shape already existing divisions among groups who are already divided from the majority of the society. Even though the JDP government initially showed positive steps toward the Kurdish issue, there was no concrete action toward recognition of Kurdish identity and their rights in the constitution (Karakoç and Sarıgil, 2020, 252). Even this situation creates a question of whether Erdoğan and the JDP government were willing to solve this ethnic issue peacefully or these initial steps were part of the populist and majoritarian politics.

In 2017, Turkey voted in a referendum on whether to accept the single-handedly prepared constitutional amendments of the JDP government or not. The main subject of the amendments was the executive presidency which constitutionalized Erdoğan’s de facto presidential system and change the Turkish political system fundamentally together with the %52.2 ‘Yes’ votes. In these elections, there were two camps as ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. The main support of the ‘Yes’ bloc was composed of the JDP and the ultra-nationalist MHP/NMP (Nationalist Movement Party) while the supporters of the ‘No’ bloc contained several actors that share different political ideologies because some groups within the Islamist and nationalist parties joined the secular CHP/RPP (Republican People’s Party) and pro-Kurdish HDP/PDP (People’s Democratic Party) to prevent the constitutional reform (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2017, 310). Even though during these periods, the opposition continued to be referred as ‘the others’, the group of people who have included ‘the others’ by president Erdoğan has started to grow because of his populist politics. This flexible enemy construction has been continuing since the present day of the JDP government under Erdoğan’s presidency.

For the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ construction, the Justice and Development Party frames a Manichean worldview between the conservative masses and secular elites. This framing shows that any opposition group that does not support the government is accused of being against the nation-state and the values of the nation-state and its true people (Gürsoy, 2019, 11). Therefore, it can be argued that the key themes of populism in Turkey are nativist, Islamic, and exclusionary.

### **1.1.2 Hungary**

When Victor Orbán came into power in 2010 as a leader of a formed coalition of Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance and the Cristian Democratic People’s Party, the effects of the economic and financial crisis were still observable in the political environment. Therefore, the important part of the constructed ‘the elite’ was composed by the previous socialist government in the first term of the Orbán government by mentioning them as ‘the speculators’ (Csehi, 2019, 1016). This displays the accusatory attitude of the Orbán government towards the previous government for the current problems of the country. While he clarifies who are ‘the corrupt elite’, he also added all opposition parties to this group as if they are united under one aim which is to restore a post-communist political environment in Hungary. Furthermore, this government under the Orbán rule had enough seats (68 percent of it) in the parliament to make changes in the constitution and democratic institutions and the Orbán government has used this power for executive aggrandizement through practically removing the separation between legislative and executive branches (Kornai, 2015, 35).

While growing executive power led the Orbán government to undermine democratic institutions and rule of law, they were not satisfied with this and rewrote the constitution without any wide public discussion. The main purpose of this new constitution, called Fundamental Law, was to end the post-transition era and its crisis. As a response to this new constitution which lacks popular approval, the power and support of the political opposition to

create a campaign against these new legal developments was not enough because of the growing executive power of the government. Therefore, the role of the EU was crucial to protect liberal democracy in Hungary in this term and they criticize some elements of this new constitution. However, this led Orbán government to expand ‘the corrupt elite’ groups by adding ‘European bureaucrats’, ‘Brussels bureaucrats’ and ‘foreign bureaucrats’ to his populist rhetoric (Csehi, 2019, 1016).

Together with the electoral victory of the Fidesz government in the 2014 elections, the political tone of Orbán was considerably about ‘the new illiberal state’, ‘illiberal democracy’ and ‘illiberal state’ (Bogaards, 2018, 1487; Csehi, 2019, 1016). This political rhetoric claims that a state can still be considered as democratic while not respecting liberal values. This new political trend opens a fresh frame in ‘the corrupt elite’ for NGOs which are considered as political activists paid by foreign actors. This shows that while the actors who are framed as ‘the corrupt elite’ were increasing, the blame was still on the foreign actors and European bureaucrats. On the other hand, the 2015 migration crisis has shifted the political environment and subjects from financial crisis to border security and migrants with more nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, the ‘Brussels bureaucrats’ remain in his populist rhetoric but this time he blamed them for trying to reshape change national structures against the will of the people (Csehi, 2019, 1016). It is clear that there is increasing nationalist rhetoric by creating a climate of fear which is about changing the cultural and national structures of the country by blaming the migration politics of the EU.

Furthermore, George Soros is a significant part of Orbán’s populist rhetoric by claiming that ‘the corrupt’ part of the civil society belongs to the “Soros’ mafia network” (Csehi, 2019, 1016). The reflection of this populist rhetoric of Orbán in the legislative act happened in 2018 with the ‘Stop Soros’ legislative package. It is a legal reflection of blaming civil society organizations and NGOs for establishing the “Soros Plan” which helps illegal migrants enter



the country. The Central European University was attacked as a part of this populist rhetoric and legislative package.

The other groups who were constructed as ‘the others’ by the Fidesz-led government were LGBT+ members of the society and Roma people. In 2021, Orbán announced an anti-LGBT+ law by claiming it as a child protection issue. Even though the rights of the ethnic minority populations are guaranteed by the constitution, there is no enough representation of these groups in the political environment and government, especially Roma people. They have been the target of the populist and nativist politics of the Fidesz government. These populist politics show that these groups are not constructed as ‘the pure people’ who are seen as part of the sovereign nation.

According to Csehi (2019), there are three faces of the Orbán government to define ‘the people’. The first phase has an inclusionary tone in reference to ‘the people’ compared to the other terms of the Orbán government. He used “the free Hungarians”, and “we Hungarians” and this discourse was supported by the peace march to support the government and its policies by the pro-government civil society organizations (Csehi, 2019, 1017). This discourse shows that he identifies himself as part of ‘the people’. In the second stage, together with the migration crisis, this discourse shifted to “the European people” and “we Europeans” (Csehi, 2019, 1017). Also, this discourse was supported by a national referendum about migration to show that the Orbán government gives importance to the voice of ‘the people’. In the third phase, this discourse narrowed down by considering the East-Central European regional area with “new Europe”, and “we Central Europeans” (Csehi, 2019, 1017). Together with this discourse Orbán creates an opposing position to mainstream Western European countries. Also, it is clearly observable that by analyzing the approach of ‘the people’, one can understand the approach towards ‘the corrupt elite’.

**Table 1: Turkish and Hungarian Cultural Populism**

|  | <b>Turkey</b>   | <b>Hungary</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>The People</b>                            | Turks, Muslims<br>My nation, my police,<br>religious generation <sup>1</sup>  | We Hungarians, the country<br>of the Hungarians<br>The European people, We<br>Europeans<br>We Central Europeans, New<br>Europe <sup>2</sup> |
| <b>The Elites/Others</b>                     | Secular politicians, media<br>intellectuals<br>Terrorists, traitors to the<br>homeland, etc. <sup>3</sup>   | Representatives of the past,<br>Brussels bureaucrats, civil<br>society, opposition parties,<br>George Soros <sup>4</sup>                    |
| <b>Key Themes</b>                            | Nativist, Islamic,<br>exclusionary populism   | Anti-plural nature, popular<br>sovereignty, exclusionary<br>populism  |
| <b>Primary Antagonistic<br/>Relationship</b> | Old Turkey: coalition<br>government, instability,<br>exclusion, economic crisis,<br>corruption<br>New Turkey: single party<br>government, stability,<br>inclusion, advance<br>democracy, wealth | Previous political and<br>economic elite  |

The primary antagonistic relationship of Turkey and Hungary shows some elements of an anti-establishment populism besides cultural populism because both governments' rhetoric refers to the country's political establishment by positioning themselves against this political era and elites. The anti-establishment type of populism is about the discourse formation of the 'old and new'. For the Turkish case, this 'old and new' discourse shows itself by mentioning old governments as unstable and corrupt to make the public believe the strength and stability

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<sup>1</sup> Orçun Selçuk, 577

<sup>2</sup> Robert Csehi, 1017

<sup>3</sup> Orçun Selçuk, 578

<sup>4</sup> Robert Csehi, 1016

of the single-party rule of JDP by stating that this is the new Turkey. This political rhetoric has shown itself with the first presidential election in Turkey in 2014. In the first term of the Orbán government, this antagonistic relationship was about the economic arena because the effects of the economic crisis were still ongoing and the previous political and economic elite were blamed for this situation. In later terms of the Orbán government, he continued this ‘new’ and ‘old’ narrative by mentioning the ‘new illiberal state’. Also, it is clear for both Turkey and Hungary that these two leaders did not leave it in their ‘new’ and ‘old’ discourses because they actually change the constitutions and created a new political environment. This situation creates fundamental changes for these two countries. Authoritarian leaders predictably choose to use political maneuvers by bending or breaking the law without actually changing it and getting away with it because of the low levels of accountability (Jenne and Mudde, 2012). In contrast, this is not the case for both Turkey and Hungary. As another similarity, the low capacity and support of the opposition parties both in Turkey and Hungary is one of the reasons behind it because of the executive aggrandizement of these two governments.

It is crucial to mention that both governments and leaders have used political history to victimize themselves. For the Turkish case, the JDP party victimization comes from the antagonistic understanding of ‘the secular corrupt elite’ who are the establishers of the Republic of Turkey and their supporters and ‘the pure people’ who share same values, religion and ethnicity. The personalization of the process of victimization for Erdoğan began in 1994 while he was the mayor of Istanbul. He was banned from politics and handed a 10-month prison sentence for reading a poem with Islamist tones. Therefore, this event let him present himself as a victim of the secular political establishment and highlights the problems between the people and the elites. In the Hungarian case, the feeling of victimization also comes from the political history by mentioning the ill-treatment of superpowers (Kreko and Juhász, 2019, 73). This means that the Fidesz government use memory politics for his antagonistic understanding of

politics by mentioning the politics of previous governments. Both examples illustrate that these two leaders frame a political environment where they can reach political legitimization by using historical memory.

As another similarity of these two populist leaders' rhetoric, they both scapegoat one person for all the events which are not pleasant for them and their governments. This creates a flexible enemy for both leaders to accuse them on various issues. In the Turkish case, this person is Feytullah Gülen who was the former ally of the JDP government. After the 2016 coup attempt and JDP and the Gülenist movement split, Erdoğan blame this Islamist movement to be the organizers of the Gezi Park protests which happened in 2013. This constructed common enemy helps Erdoğan to create a new reality by scapegoating and erasing the old political memory of alignment. In the Hungarian case, this person is George Soros and he is accused of being against 'the people' and the source of the migration problem by the Orbán government. This constructed common enemy helps Orbán to be flexible on every issue to blame that specific person. It is also crucial to mention that this is recognized rhetoric by these two leaders. For example, Erdoğan referred Osman Kavala, who sentenced to life in prison in April 2002 for organizing the Gezi Park Protests, as "Turkey's Soros" (Hacaoğlu, 2022). It shows that these two leaders are familiar with their rhetoric, shares the same political perspective, at least about George Soros, and even transform each other's rhetoric to their own countries.

Even though Erdoğan and Orbán have highly similar populist rhetoric on various matters, they differ on the issue of migration. While the JDP government demonstrates an inclusive approach to the 2015 migration crisis, the Fidesz government has a clear exclusionary populist approach towards it. The inclusionary attitude of the JDP government is the result of Islam being absorbed into the party ideology, therefore, Syrian refugees were not made part of the exclusionary populist politics. Also, the historical part of the story suggests that migration

has never been part of the exclusionary nativist politics of Turkey because people mostly emigrate especially to Europe (Gürsoy, 2019, 5). Thus, migration is historically a non-issue for Turkey. Besides from all these reasons, the 2016 Turkey and EU migration deal creates economic reasoning for Erdoğan because Turkey promised to seal its borders in exchange for six billion euros from the EU (Öztürk, 2021). Therefore, this refugee deal would help Turkey to boost its economy. Also, it gives Erdoğan political leverage in front of the EU because he instrumentalized this issue and threatened the EU to open borders (DW,2016).

In this regard, the Fidesz government has an exclusionary populist political approach toward the migration issue just like any other right-wing populist party in Europe. On the other hand, Orbán regarded this issue as a European-level problem and he built his antagonistic rhetoric between “Central Europeans” who are ‘the pure people’ and “Western European countries” who are ‘the corrupt elite’ (Csehi, 2019, 1017). This highly Eurosceptic tone of Orbán can also be observed in his speeches such as he stated that “The obstacle for us not Islam, but the bureaucrats in Brussels” (Gutteridge, 2016). One of the reasons for this exclusive populist rhetoric is the fear of cultural loss (Kreko and Juhász, 2019, 73). This approach suggests that populist leaders create a political fear for ‘the pure people’ who hold the traditional values to lose their cultural and traditional values by pointing out ‘the others’ who do not share the same culture and values. Therefore, foundational norms and values of liberal democracy are relegated in the face of a nation-state. The other reason for this exclusionary populist rhetoric is about political opportunism (Naggy, 2016, 117). This approach suggests that in the years in which the migration crisis had emerged the popularity of the Fidesz government was decreasing and adopting this exclusive discourse for migration would help them to repair this situation.

## 1.2 Polarization

While a certain degree of political diversity and competition is vital for democracy and its consolidation, the deepening of social cleavages and political differences leads to political polarization. One of the early definitions of polarization focuses on ideological distance among parties (Sartori, 1976, 120). On the other hand, more recent scholars argue that considering only ideological elements is not sufficient because polarization at the mass level has gained importance as a result of political identities (Lauka, McCoy and Fırat, 2018, 109). This explains that party identities are started to be considered as social identities in a society. As an addition to that argument, Enyedi (2016) suggests that this political rivalry turns into “a choice between competing political regimes” in a polarized political environment.

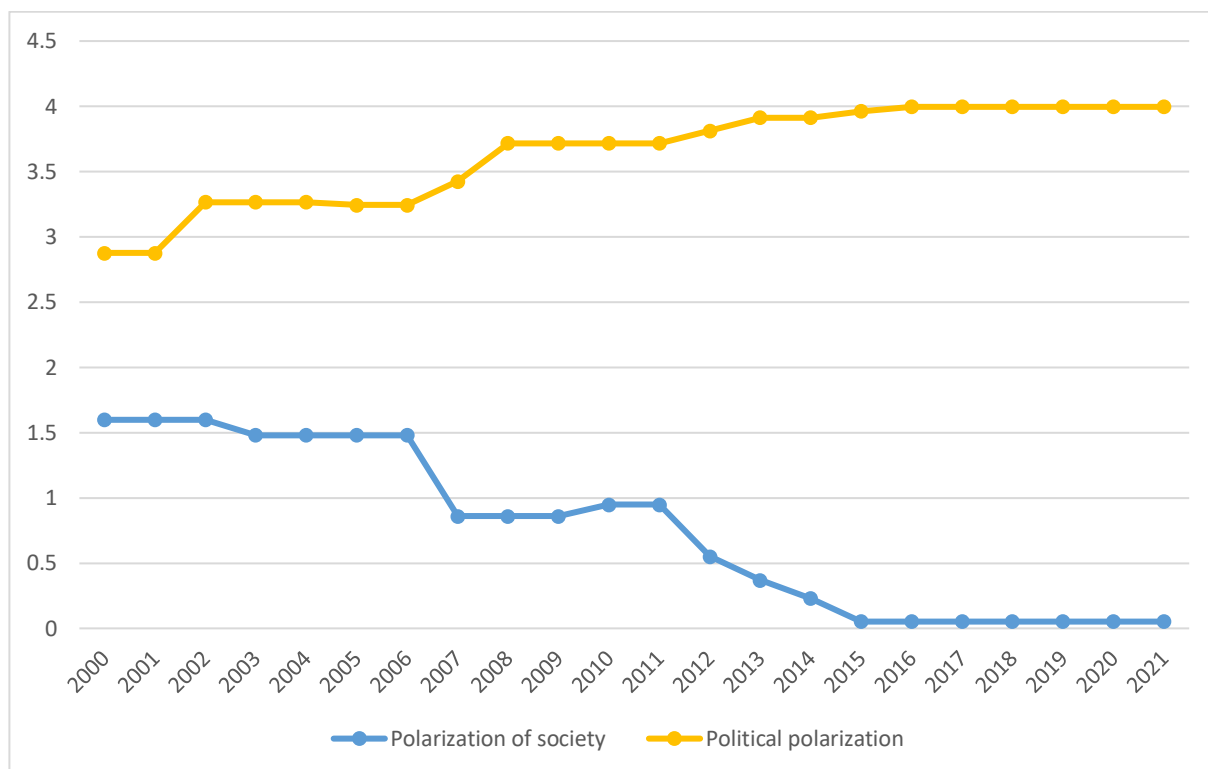
Since when explaining a concept, it is as crucial to determining what it is as well as what it is not. In that case, for the sake of conceptualization of polarization, it is important to highlight that polarization is not synonym with fractionalization (Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2021, 287). This means that a heterogeneous society that has different levels of ethnic, religious, linguistic divisions is not necessarily polarized, while a homogeneous country that does not have political or social divisions might be polarized. In this study, Turkey represents the heterogeneous society with high level of polarization and Hungary represents the relatively homogenous society with relatively high level of polarization.

As a result of a slight consensus reached on the issue of polarization, it is argued that there are two concepts as ideological and affective polarization that are compete with each other (Lelkes, 2016, 393). It can be argued that the ideological polarization aspect follows the Sartori's (1976) explanation and defines polarization by considering ideological differences and distance between parties (Dalton, 2008, 900). The backbone of this argument is the positions of political parties in a political space and their diverse approaches towards political issues without sharing a common ground. The affective political polarization aspect relies on the emotional side of the issue by explaining it through the increased correspondence between

ideology and social preferences (West and Iyengar, 2020, 808). This explains that an ideology become the main source of partisanship which creates in and out groups and then social identities based on these groups. That is the concept of emerging or existing negative feelings of supporters of a party or partisans towards the opposite party, its politicians and supporters.

While these two concepts explain the polarization's causes of occurrence, it is also important to mention the elite and mass polarization who are the objects of polarization. Political polarization which occurs at the elite level clarifies the polarization between party officials and representatives in terms of policy positions. Also, polarization at the mass level captures the political preferences of voters and citizens through political cleavages (Krasa & Polborn, 2014, 34-35).

The notion of this study on the issue of polarization is considering all of these conceptualizations because the argument of this study is that the divergence of policy between parties affects the diversity of preferences of voters. Also, this means that this study adopts both ideological and affective; elite and mass level polarization understanding for the sake of cases which are Turkey and Hungary because all these conceptualizations can be observed in Turkish and Hungarian polarization. Furthermore, this study argues that the polarization is an elite driven phenomenon in both Turkey (since 2002) and Hungary (since 2010) as a result of in power populism. This means that in power populist politics has increased the political polarization both at the elite and mass level.

**Figure 1: Polarization in Turkey**

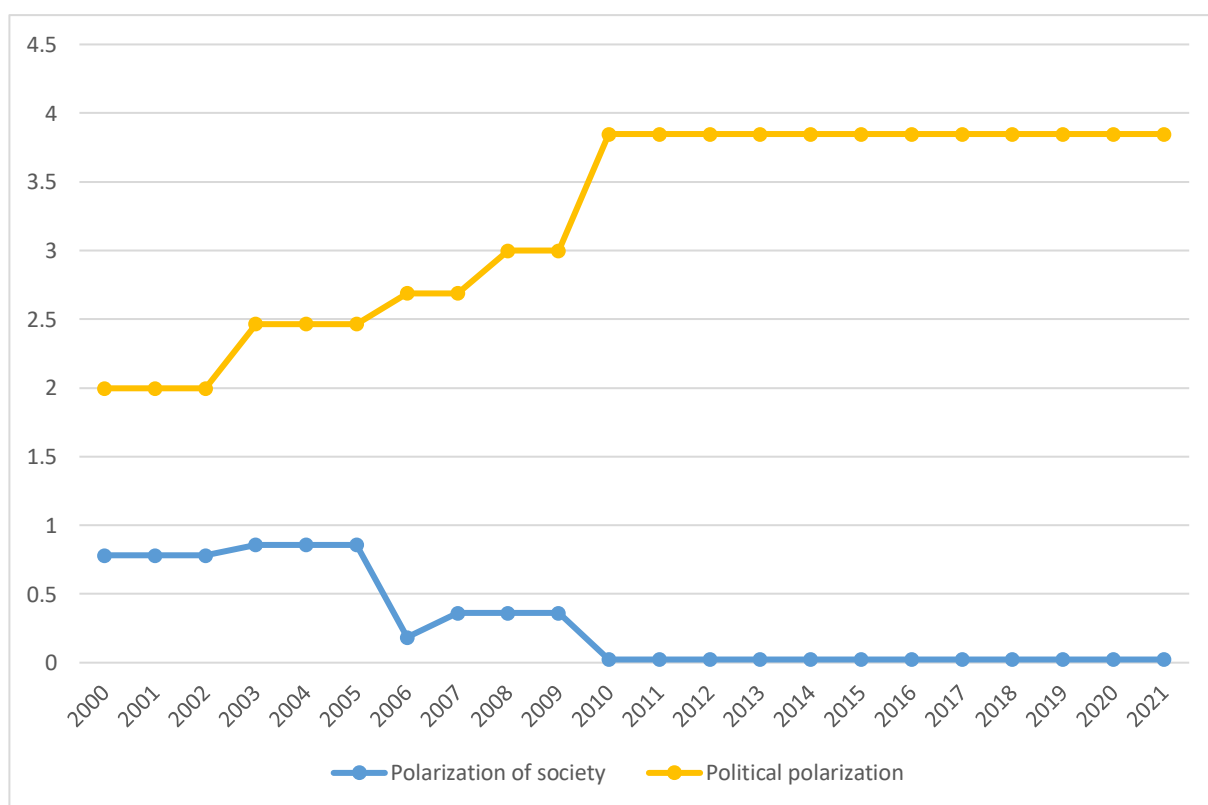
Source: V-Dem. **Polarization of Society** 0: Serious polarization, 1: Moderate polarization, 2: Medium polarization, 3: Limited polarization, 4: No polarization. **Political Polarization** 0: Not at all, 1: Mainly not, 2: Somewhat, 3: Yes, to noticeable extent, 4: Yes, to a large extent.

It can be observed that both Turkey and Hungary has some level of political polarization and polarization of society even before the JDP and the Fidesz governments in Figure 1 and Figure 2. This index, which is extracted by the V-Dem, defines political polarization according to what extent political differences affect social relationships beyond political discussions to clarify whether society is polarized into political camps. Polarization of society looks at whether society can develop a general agreement or there is a major clash of opinions. The level of political polarization and polarization in the society before the populist governments shows that there are existing cleavages and groups in these societies. Together with the populist governments the level of political polarization and the polarization in society has increased.



This shows that the political polarization has increased as a result of populist politics and the polarization in the society has increased as a result of increase in political polarization. The effectiveness of populist governments and leaders to create new cleavages and recreate, reshape or underline already existing cleavages through their populist politics and rhetoric is the main reason for increasing polarization. Therefore, this study argues that even though some level of existing polarization, the elite level polarization is the leading reason for increase in mass polarization in Turkey and Hungary as a result of in power populism. This argument can be observed in Figure 1 and Figure 2 through the increasing gap between political polarization and polarization in society indexes since 2002 for Turkey and 2010 for Hungary.

**Figure 2: Polarization in Hungary**



Source: V-Dem. **Polarization of Society** 0: Serious polarization, 1: Moderate polarization, 2: Medium polarization, 3: Limited polarization, 4: No polarization. **Political Polarization** 0: Not at all, 1: Mainly not, 2: Somewhat, 3: Yes, to noticeable extent, 4: Yes, to a large extent

### 1.2.1 Polarization and Populism

While the conceptualization comes to what is polarization, in the literature, there are several similarities between definitions of populism and polarization. For example, Somer and McCoy (2019) define polarization which has the potential to divide electorates into mutually antagonistic “us” vs. “them” camps that have mutually exclusive identities. Also, they treat populism as a subtype of polarizing politics by claiming that populism’s cross-cutting differences are the “elite” versus “people” (Somer and McCoy, 2019, 13). However, this study suggests the opposite by arguing that the bigger title above political polarization is populism that creates or fosters divisions in the political realm so the political polarization. This means that a heterogeneous society is not necessarily polarized but if this heterogeneous society is ruled by a populist incumbent party, there must be a polarization because of the populist rhetoric. These antagonistic groups that Somer and McCoy (2019) mention are one of the important parts of the definition of populism itself. As an effect or leading factor of that division, populism creates or triggers the tension between pre-existing groups thus, political polarization occurs. Therefore, one of the difficulties of this study is while studying these two concepts, the definitional and conceptual relationship of them should not be confused with each other.

As an important contribution to the literature Enyedi (2016) labelled the populist politics and polarization as “populist polarization” by claiming that the polarized atmosphere of Hungary leads parties to adopt populist strategies. For the sake of the time limitation of this study for the Hungarian case, this study only looks at the polarization during the Fidesz government. Therefore, this study argues that the populist politics of Fidesz government incentivizes the polarization by deepening this already existing polarization through its populist rhetoric and politics.

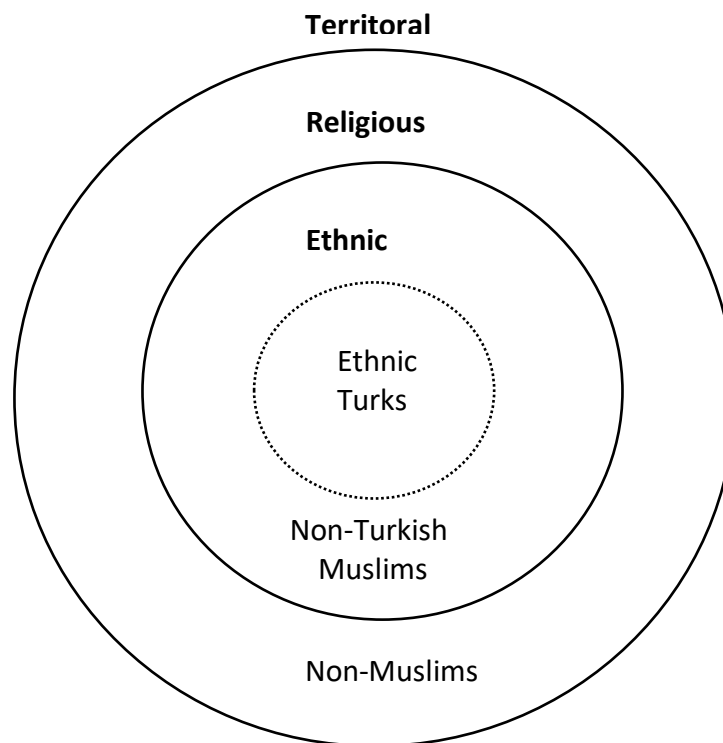
It is crucial for this study to show the effects of the relationship between populism and polarization on the democracy level of Turkey and Hungary. In this context, Svobik’s (2019), a

short definition which is “deep social cleavages and acute political tension” and Esteban and Ray’s (1994) definition which is “a population of individuals may be grouped according to some vector of characteristics into ‘clusters’, such that each cluster is very ‘similar’ in terms of the attributes of its members, but different clusters have members with very ‘dissimilar’ attributes” will be considered. These definitions are much more valid for the conceptualization part of this study. Also, Svobik’s (2019) argument about the polarization versus democracy discussion that explains the relationship between the value of partisanship and democratic principle makes the conceptualization of polarization part of the study strengthen. This relationship explains that the political polarization makes people more willing to trade off basic democratic principles for their partisan interests which creates support for anti-democratic leaders (Svobik, 2019, 24). This explanatory relationship has the potential to make this study’s argument about polarization as a subtype of populism clear because populism is about the political elite’s indirect division of public as “us” versus “them”, while polarization is a direct division of “us” versus “them”. In this context, indirect division explains that the populist political elites make the division through their rhetoric and exclusive politics. Sometimes, they create political divisions and sometimes they foster the already existing divisions in the society. The direct division explains that the public or society that is ruled by a populist party or a populist leader, embraces this division and starts to act according to that division that is subjected by their populist parties or populist leaders. That is also why this study determines polarization as a subtype of populism. That determination suggests that polarization is a reflection of populist rhetoric.

To mention the case study part of the research, Turkish polarization is considered under two dimensions which are ethnic-based (Turkish – Kurdish) and religious and secular. This approach is also compatible with Cagaptay’s (2006) three zones of Turkishness argument in Figure 3. According to this argument territorial zone is the most inclusive one because it

considers all inhabitants of Turkey as Turks. When the second zone, which is religious, is entered the discussion, it excludes non-Muslims from the definition of “real Turks”. The last and third zone is an ethnicity that is the least inclusive one by excluding both non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups of the society. Historically, step by step leaving these different groups out, the definition of “real Turkishness” is made. It is illustrated with Figure 3 that the closer you go to the innermost circle, the closer you get to “real Turkishness”. This illustration is important for understanding the polarization path in Turkey, solving the boundary problem of populism about what constitutes “the people”, and on the issue of minority rights which is discussed under the civil society and liberty title of this study.

**Figure 3: Three Zones of Turkishness (Cagaptay 2006, 160)**



The Hungarian part of the discussion includes also religious and ethnic-based sentiments. The anti-Semitism and anti-Roma characteristics of the political climate draw the general lines of the polarization in the country (Murer, 2015, 79). According to Murer, this anti-Semitism for the case of Hungary explains that Jews cannot be “true Hungarians”. Just like the

Jews, Roma people, the largest ethnic minority group in Hungary, are excluded. Murer (2015) claims that Jews and Roma become two sides of the same threatening coin and they become the main subjects of conspiracy theories concerning large-scale of financial crimes. Just like the Turkish case, this exclusiveness draws the line of polarization in Hungary. Since these arguments also appear as important elements under the title of minority rights, it also strengthens the argument that the relationship between populism and polarization has an impact on the democracy level of Turkey and Hungary.

### **1.2.2 Polarization and Liberal Democracy**

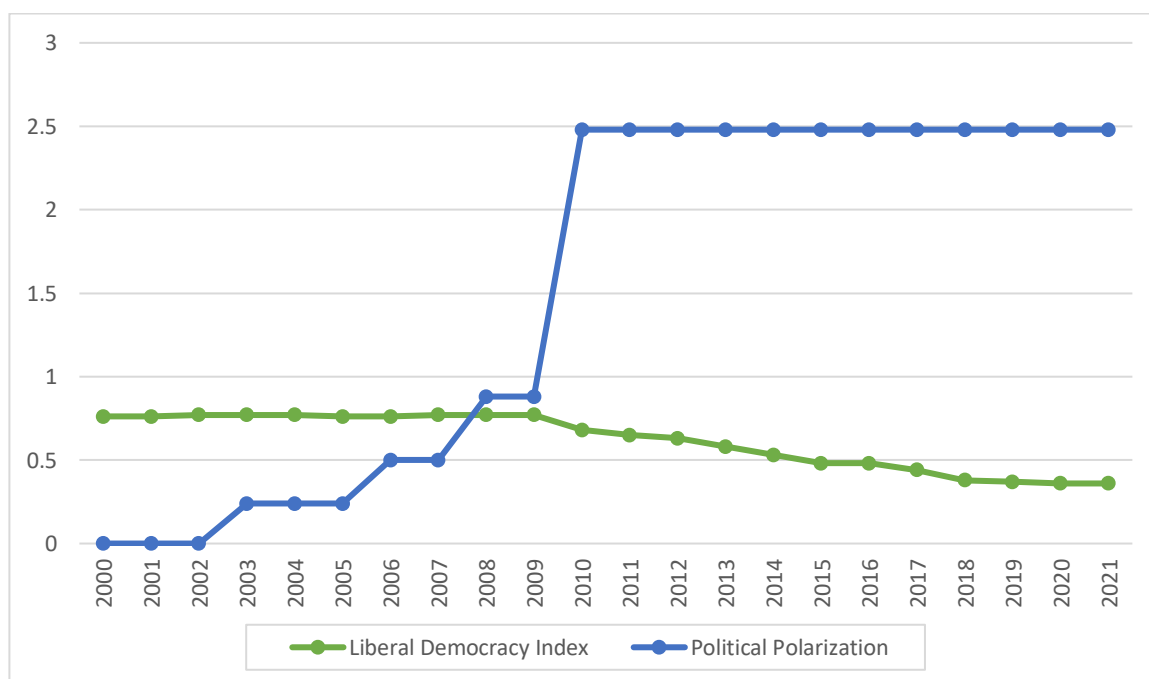
The literature has two perspectives about polarization and its effect on democracy. The first perspective focuses on the positive effects of polarization on democracy by claiming that polarization can have transformative effects and institutionalize party systems (McCoy and Somer, 2019, 235; Somer and McCoy, 2019, 11; McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018, 17). This view suggests that polarization can have transformative role by addressing imbalance in different levels of democracy (McCoy and Somer, 2019, 235). Also, polarization can institutionalize party systems because it can mobilize voters around identifiable differences (Somer and McCoy, 2019, 11). The second approach, on the other hand, argues that polarization threatens both democracy and support for democratic values (Svolik, 2019, 24; Vegetti, 2019, 79). This view suggests that the politically polarized societies have more partisan tendencies with biased approaches in their political ideologies and opinions.

This study considers the second approach because even though their polarization is different from each other, both Turkey and Hungary have high level of polarization together with decreasing level of liberal democracy. It is crucial to accept that some level of polarization is natural to democracy because it has potential to strength opposition by mobilizing voters. Even without certain level of polarization everything in a democracy would lose its meaning.

However, opposition is constructed as the enemy in countries that are ruled by populist parties and leaders, just like in Turkey and Hungary. Therefore, political victory is more important than keeping and protecting the democratic norms and values in the eyes of populist leaders and parties. This is the main reason for this study to argue that populism increase political polarization, thus damages the liberal democracy.

This reverse relationship between liberal democracy and political polarization can be observed in Figure 4 and Figure 5. As it is explained before, 2010 is the turning point of Hungary's political history together with the Fidesz government. In Figure 4 it can be observed that the gap between political polarization and liberal democracy has been increasing since 2010 mostly as a result of the decrease in the liberal democracy index.

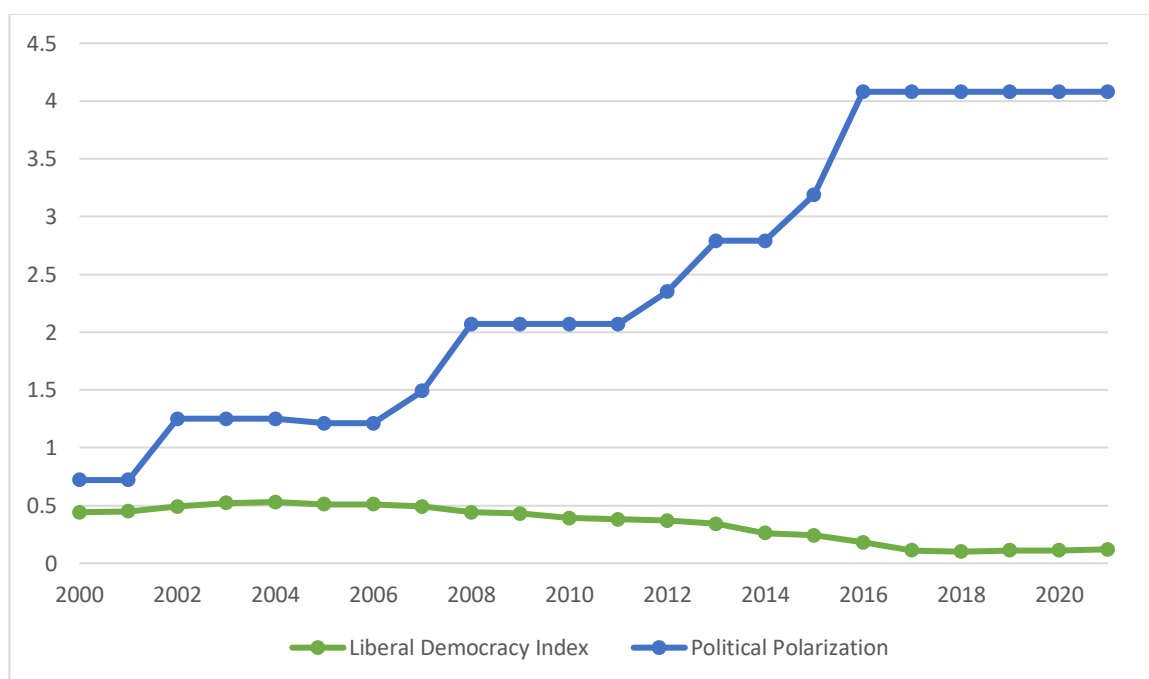
**Figure 4: Political Polarization and Liberal Democracy Index for Hungary (V-Dem Institute)**



The same reverse relationship can also be observed in Figure 5 for Turkey. It is important to mention that Turkey's liberal democracy index is lower and political polarization level is higher than the Hungarian case. On the other hand, it can be observed the same increasing gap pattern between these two political phenomena. It is also crucial to mention that

the starting point of this increasing gap pattern is the coming to power of these two populist governments. One can argue that when the JDP government first came into power, there are neither authoritarian tendencies nor populist rhetoric of the party. On the other hand, even though policies of the first and second periods of the AKP government cannot be considered as authoritarian, one can still argue that they are always populists. The democratization politics of the first and second periods were just related to power consolidation and gaining support both in the national and international arena. While they do not seem like a populist in practice, their use of power in later periods indicates that they were populist from the very beginning in theory.

**Figure 5: Polarization and Liberal Democracy Index for Turkey (V-Dem Institute)**



### 1.3 Democracy

The democratic theory part of the study should be grounded because it is crucial to explain what are the key elements of democracy is this research talking about and which kind of democracy is this study address.

In the democratic theory literature, there are several types of elements that scholars have been highlighting. One of the conceptualizations is the minimalist or Schumpeterian approach to democracy. This minimalist approach defines democracy as a simple mechanism for choosing political leadership (Przeworski, 1999, 12). There are no references to freedom and individual rights in this definition, it simply explains electoralism part of democracy.

Powell and Dahl (1990) create wider characterizations of a democratic political system and these are free, fair, and competitive elections, right to vote, right to be elected, freedom of expression, strong civic life, free press, civilian supremacy, and rule of law. These eight elements of the democratic political system highlight the importance of free and open elections, genuine political competition, and the protection of civil liberties.

The other conceptualization has been conducted by Linz (2000) and he claims that freedom of association, information, and communication is crucial for the free formulation of political preferences to provide free competition between leaders and prevent any members of the political community from the exclusion of expressing preferences. After that definition, Linz and Stephan (1996) formulate the characterization of democracy under four elements which are the rule of law, the institution of civil society, free and fair elections, and the extent to which governors are held accountable.

According to all various conceptualizations or definitions, this study will consider twelve features of a democratic regime. First of all, the right to vote and equality in voting is a crucial element for inclusive suffrage. This explains that practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials. The second one is the right to be elected which assures the rights of all adults to run for elective offices. The third element is the competitive party system which ensures the rights of political leaders and political parties to compete for support and votes. The fourth one is free, fair, and competitive elections where elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon. The



fifth one is freedom of association which protects citizens' right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups. This right provides citizens to participate through civil society. The sixth feature is freedom of expression which creates a free environment for the political community to express their preferences. The freedom of information, which is the seventh element, is crucial for this political environment because the existence of alternative sources of information and opportunities to learn about different policies, that can be provided by freedom of the press helps the political community to create their objective preferences and opinions. The eighth feature of democracy is accountability which explains the responsibility of power holders to the electorate for their political actions. The ninth element is the rule of law to prevent arbitrary rule and to provide implementations of law equally. The tenth element of a democratic regime is control of the agenda by the elected officials which helps the accountability feature of it. The other one is civilian supremacy which explains the ability of elected officials to exercise their constitutional powers without being significantly by unelected officials, such as bureaucrats and members of the military. The last one is sovereignty which is possessing the ability to act independently of the constraints of an overarching political system, and minimum consensus or support among the general public for values such as respect for the rights of others and tolerance.

These all twelve elements are going to be grounded to understand what the democracy discussed in this study is based on.

In this democracy part of the research, liberal democracy will be considered as a political regime to be able to analyze the fundamental rights, which are protected by independent and effective institutions, and majority rule. The controversy about the most desirable form of democracy has been going on in the political science literature, just the conceptualization of populism. On the contrary to populism literature, liberal democracy as a particular model of

democracy has been accepted worldwide (Heywood, 2013, 99). According to this point of view, there are several important features of liberal democracies.

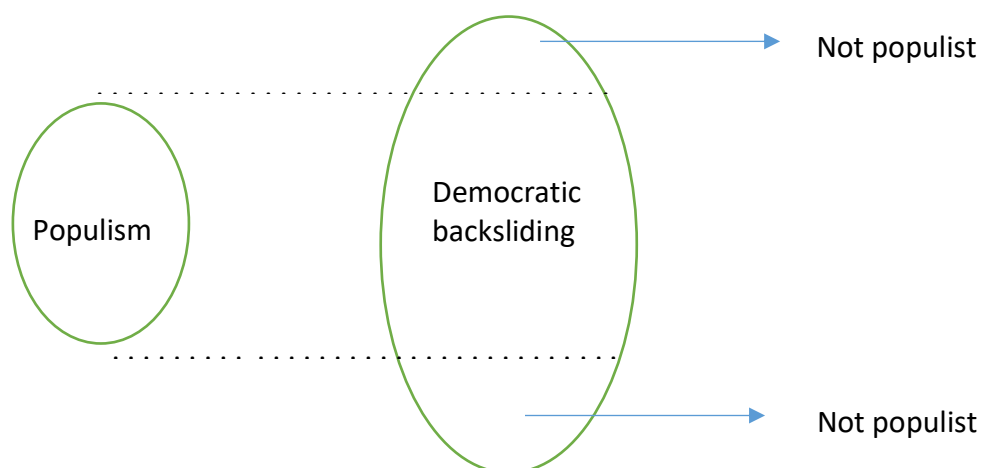
First of all, formal political equality is key to provide an indirect and representative form of democracy through regular elections (Heywood, 2013,99). The way to ensure this feature is existing competition between political movements and parties. This means that there should be tolerance towards this political pluralism. According to Heywood (2013), there should be a clear distinction between the state and civil society to achieve this plurality to be able to characterize democracy as liberal. The other important element is the protection of minorities and individuals through providing equal rights (Heywood, 2013,100).

### **1.3.1 Democratic Decline and Populism**

Just like there are different definitions and conceptualizations of populism, there are also different views of populism and its effects on democracy. This thesis took the approach that populism is a threat to democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2017; Urbinati, 2019). In fact, there are several different arguments on that issue such as Mouffe (2018) argues that the progressive populism is a crucial way to save democracy; Stavrakakis (2014) claims that the real threat for democracy is anti-populism; Wodak (2021) suggests that right-wing populist parties create both short and long term threats to democracy; Pappas (2016) consider that populists are anti-liberal democracy rather than anti-democratic.

It is crucial to consider that there are several reasons for democratic backsliding rather than populism. Figure 6 illustrated that populism can be a sufficient condition for the democratic decline, but not a necessary condition for it. There are some countries that are struggling with democratic decline and are not ruled by a populist leader or a populist incumbent party.

**Figure 6: Relationship between Populism and Democratic Backsliding**



Therefore, this paper considers this reasoning and focus on the triggering effects of populism and political polarization on democratic backsliding. The consideration is that the political polarization is a triggering effect of populism through restrictions over the media and civil society organizations.

## Chapter 2: Case Selection

The reason behind the case selection is that democracy both in Turkey and Hungary has been showing a declining trend during the last several years. These two countries have long been governed by the same political party and the leader with populist rhetoric. Therefore, in-power populism is discussed rather than opposition populism. Even though these two countries have long been governed by the populist party and the leader, their democracy level and initial situations of their institutions were relatively different from each other. Thus, this comparison may clarify the different effects of populism on countries that have already fragile democratic regimes (in this case Turkey) and those others are not (in this case Hungary). This study

analyses the political system and charismatic leadership for the sake of making this distinction clear and highlighting the differences and similarities between these two countries since 2000.

## **2.1 Political System**

Since Turkey and Hungary have different political systems, this difference is matter while comparing these two countries. Turkey is a presidential system since 2017 referendum while Hungary is a parliamentary system. However, they have been long governed by the same populist party and leader. In liberal democratic systems, whether under a parliamentary or presidential system do not predominantly depend on charismatic or strong leadership. On the other hand, the growing personalization as a result of charismatic leadership what happens in Turkey and Hungary despite their different political systems. Therefore, populist politics is the main attributer in spite of their political systems.

On the other hand, this political system difference is the reason behind the different levels of democratic backsliding, political polarization and populism. The presidential system in Turkey does not support strong checks and balance as a result of strong executive presidency (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2019, 320). This system provides Erdoğan to consolidate his personal power on the executive branch while reducing the power of other branches and power centers like media and civil society. Therefore, this political system change has institutionalized his executive power. The effects of this political change on liberal democracy and political polarization is empirically illustrated in Figure 9 and Figure 10. This political system change does not happen at one night in Turkey. The first step towards this change was the 2014 presidential election which is the first election in Turkish history that the president is elected directly by popular vote under the parliamentary system. Also, this is the year when the populist rhetoric (Figure 8) in Turkey has dramatically shifted and contained its position since then.

The Hungarian quasi majoritarian parliamentary system has given opportunity to Fidesz government to come into power in 2010 as a dominant political force in a coalition and in later

terms govern alone. Even though under a parliamentary system, the Fidesz government has managed to reduce checks and balance through constitutional changes and implementing a new constitution that creates a new system (Kornai, 2015, 41). The same practice, which is changing the constitutional framework for “executive aggrandizement” that leads to the erosion of checks and balance, has been accomplished by the JDP government too (Bermeo, 2010, 6). This similar party discipline shows that there are similar patterns that derive from populist politics and leadership in Turkey and Hungary. Because both populist parties under the parliamentary system have started to change the constitution, weaken checks and balances to consolidate the power of the executive and reduce the power of other power centers. These same techniques to mobilize their electorate and consolidate their power is the result of populist politics. Under the presidential system in Turkey, the same populist politics of the JDP government have been proceeding. Therefore, the political system can be a determining factor of populism only for determining the level of it and its effects on democracy and polarization.

## **2.2 Charismatic Leadership**

Charismatic leadership is the key factor for populist politics because the populist leaders habitually mobilize people through their personalistic authority both in the party and political space. Therefore, charismatic leadership supports them to clarify the relationship between the leader and those who are ruled as it is stated in the Weberian definition of charismatic leadership. Weber (1978), defines charismatic leadership with three important characteristics which are heroism, vision, and a sense of personal responsibility (Green, 2010,143). According to these characteristics, heroism stands for the political battles that are created to mobilize people and strengthen the power of the leader. These created artificial political battles or struggles is a crucial instrument for populist leaders’ Manichean view of politics which is part of populist rhetoric. The second characteristic is the vision which is the creation or

interpretation of reality such as about family, nation, religion, et cetera. This is also a practical dimension for populist leaders or parties because reconstructing or redefining certain political phenomena (such as illiberal democracy, conservative democracy, new Turkey) both creates and supports their charisma while it provides leaders with a wider range of action. The third characteristic is the sense of personal responsibility that explains the creation of a political environment in which the general will of the people is above the political institutions. Hence, this environment produces the growing personalization of a leader through the elimination of the power of institutions.

The first characteristic is heroism.

To avoid the reputation, the subjects of the artificial battles for Turkey and Hungary can be observed in Table 1 under ‘The Elites/Others’ section. The important point that has to be considered is that the subjects of the artificial battles have been growing according to the specific political conditions both in Turkey and Hungary. This means that these political leaders’ populist rhetoric is actually highly inclusive in a negative term. Because it is clear that ‘the corrupt elite’ part of their rhetoric has been growing together with almost every political event. This growing trend can be considered as an important substantial element for polarization.

The second characteristic is the vision or interpretation of realities.

There are several different interpretation of reality cases in Orbán’s populist politics. The first one of them is the Western European countries and leaders, that lead his Eurosceptic discourse, because he claims that these countries and leaders are trying to reshape Europe, erase the national structure and pushing something on Hungary about the migration, therefore Hungary has to find its own solution (Csehi, 2019, 1016-1017). This interpretation of reality decreases the role of the European Union and questions its legitimacy. The most notable new interpretation of reality is the ‘illiberal state’ in Orbán’s rhetoric. He increases the importance

of the national state and sovereignty by claiming that a state can be still a democracy without being liberal. Also, the new reality of Erdoğan's populist rhetoric is the 'New Turkey' by claiming the rebirth of Turkish nationalism under the strong leadership of Erdoğan. This new Turkey understanding has created a unique ideology of Erdoğanism which indoctrinates a conservative and nationalist generation and claims that Turkey has a unique and independent path in the world order (Aydıntaşbaş, 2020, 6). Both leaders have increased the importance of national sovereignty and drawn a political path to their countries where they are alone in the world order. This alone path supports them to reshape and interpret the realities accordingly to their benefit in the public eye. On the other hand, these two populist leaders' interpretations of reality are not only at the political level, they also cover different bases of social life in their populist discourse. They both suggested to have four or more children while Orbán introduces a tax regulation, it is only in Erdoğan's speeches. This demographics-oriented discourse is about their vision to affect different bases of social and daily life.

The third characteristic is the sense of personal responsibility rather than institutions.

This characteristic shows itself both in Erdoğan's and Orbán's rhetoric as mentioning the importance of 'the general will' of the people and their decisions rather than the institutions. The reflection of this view on the political realm is referenda. This understanding eliminates the responsibility of the leader since the sense of responsibility is based on 'the people' and their decisions, therefore, it creates another legitimacy instrument for these populist leaders and their decisions.

It can be observed that the charismatic leadership of Erdoğan and Orbán has similarities that are not supporting the level of democracy, in fact, it is damaging because the charismatic leadership of populist leaders has increased the power of the executive branch and personalization of politics. It can be concluded that the charismatic leadership of populist leaders creates artificial battles to be able to declare themselves heroes; creates and interpret

the realities to provide a solid base for their political action and creation of a sense of responsibility to legitimize their politics as ‘the general will’ of ‘the people’.

### **2.3 International Arena**

It is vital not to leave this issue at the domestic level, but also to examine the issue in the international context to highlight and understand the reasons for the differences and similarities between these two countries. The major player for both Turkey and Hungary is the European Union membership which is important to analyze the different understandings for “the people” and “the corrupt elite” and the democratization and de-democratization processes of both countries. This international context has the potential to explain the populist strategies of both political parties since there is an observable democratization pattern that came with the Europeanization process and European Union membership which is followed by a de-democratization pattern and increasing authoritarianism.

Even though Hungary is a member state and Turkey is an outsider to European Union, there are similar patterns as a result of populist leadership. The first similarity comes from their Eurosceptic understanding and it shows that their populist politics is not limited to domestic politics. Their antagonistic perspective composes Western countries, European countries and their values versus national and traditional values. This moral antagonism highlights the superiority of nation.

The second similarity is the notion of dissatisfaction about the European Union. For Turkey, this comes from the 2005 decisions of the European Union as privileged partnership rather than full membership. The breaking down negotiations after that development even increased the populist rhetoric. The common dissatisfaction for Turkey and Hungary is about the refugee crisis. Hungary’s dissatisfaction is about the security problems and blaming European Union to abolish national structures. For the Turkish part of the issue, the



dissatisfaction derives from the reluctance of the European Union about borders. As a result of this, the both populist leaders create populist rhetoric from a national view against the European Union.

The third and the last similarity is that both Turkey and Hungary have governed by populist leaders that have consolidated executive power together with weak opposition. When the weak opposition situation matches with the dissatisfaction with the European Union and being critical to its values, it is inevitable to have a strong executive branch and weak checks and balance in a political system.

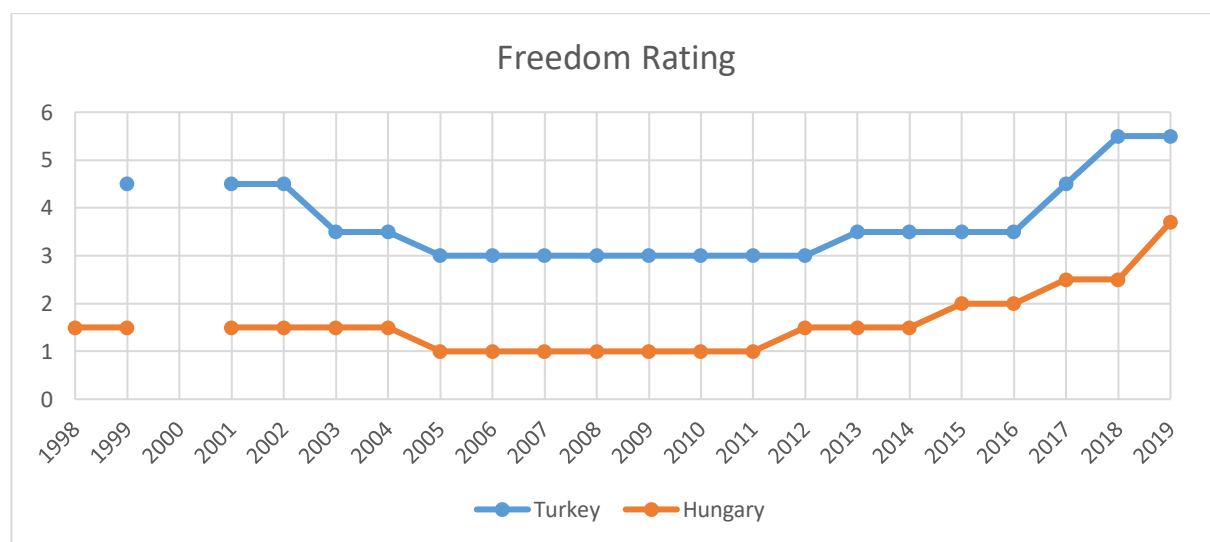
On the other hand, there are important differences about these two countries' European Union stand. The first one is that even though Orbán's Euroscepticism, he shows no intention to leave the union because it creates a legitimizing factor for the system (Bozoki, Hegedüs, 2018, 6). This means that this legitimizing factor lets him to say that a system can be democratic and illiberal. In Turkey, there is a strong divergence from the European Union membership because of the increasing authoritarian tendencies and the abolished intentions of the JDP regime to be the part of the European Union. In the first term of the JDP government, European Union had played its role as being a part of pure power politics at the domestic level and the populist incumbency does not need it anymore since it consolidated their power. This shows that even this difference comes from a populist point of view. This means that they both use the European Union for their populist politics but from a different condition.

Another difference is coming from the being a member state and not being one. Since Hungary has been a member state of the European Union, the leverage over Hungary inherently is more than Turkey. Even though the criticisms that come from the European Union for the Hungarian illiberal system lead even more populist and Eurosceptic discourse and politics, the disciplinary effect of the European is a political fact that Turkey lacks.

Even though the refugee crisis has created a common dissatisfaction political environment for these populist leaders, they differ in some parts of this issue. During the refugee crisis, Hungary closed its doors and increased his Eurosceptic rhetoric as it is mentioned. He used this issue to mobilize his supporters in the domestic level. However, Turkey opened its borders because religion is an inclusive part of his populist politics. He used this crisis towards the European Union by criticizing them and this rhetoric legitimized his Euroscepticism in the domestic political landscape. This shows that even though the different attitudes of these two populist leaders toward the refugee crisis, their populist politics have created a common legitimizing factor.

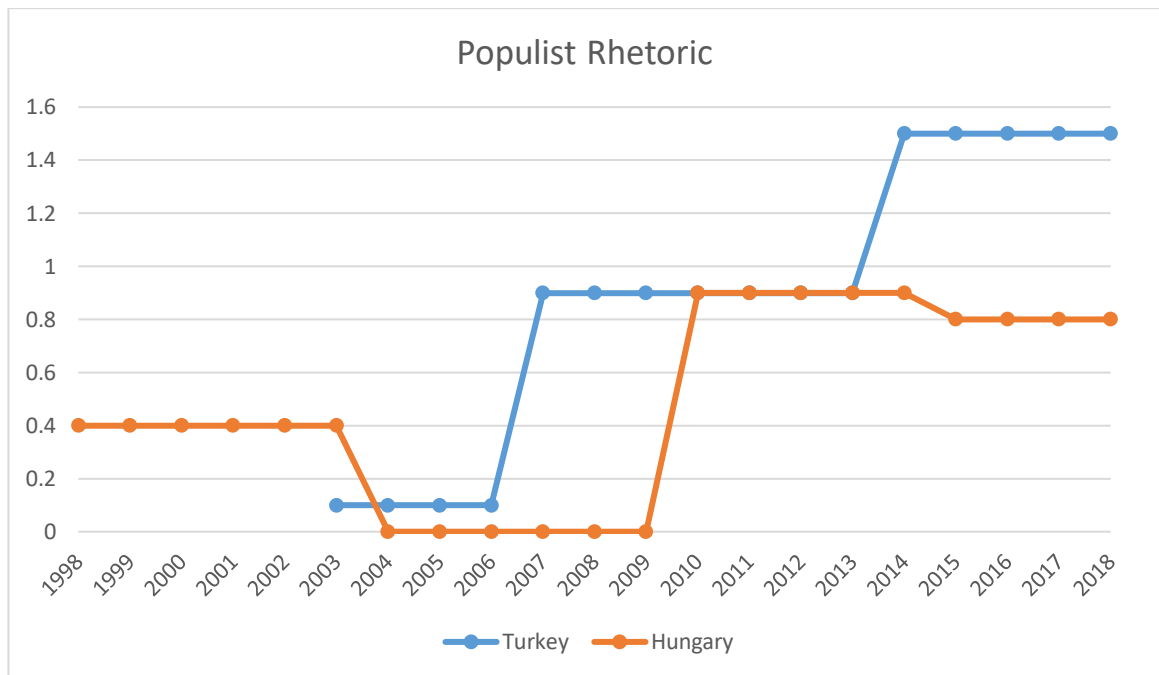
All these similarities and differences show that Euroscepticism is a political reality both in Turkey and Hungary as a result of populist politics. The serious similarities show that even being a member state does not effectively protect the democratic system from populist politics.

**Figure 7: Freedom Rating of Turkey and Hungary (Freedom House)**



(1=Most free; 7=Least Free)

**Figure 8: Populist Rhetoric of Turkey and Hungary (Global Populism Database – Guardian Version)**



(0,0-0,4=Not populist / 0,5-0,9=Somewhat populist / 1,0-1,5=Very populist)

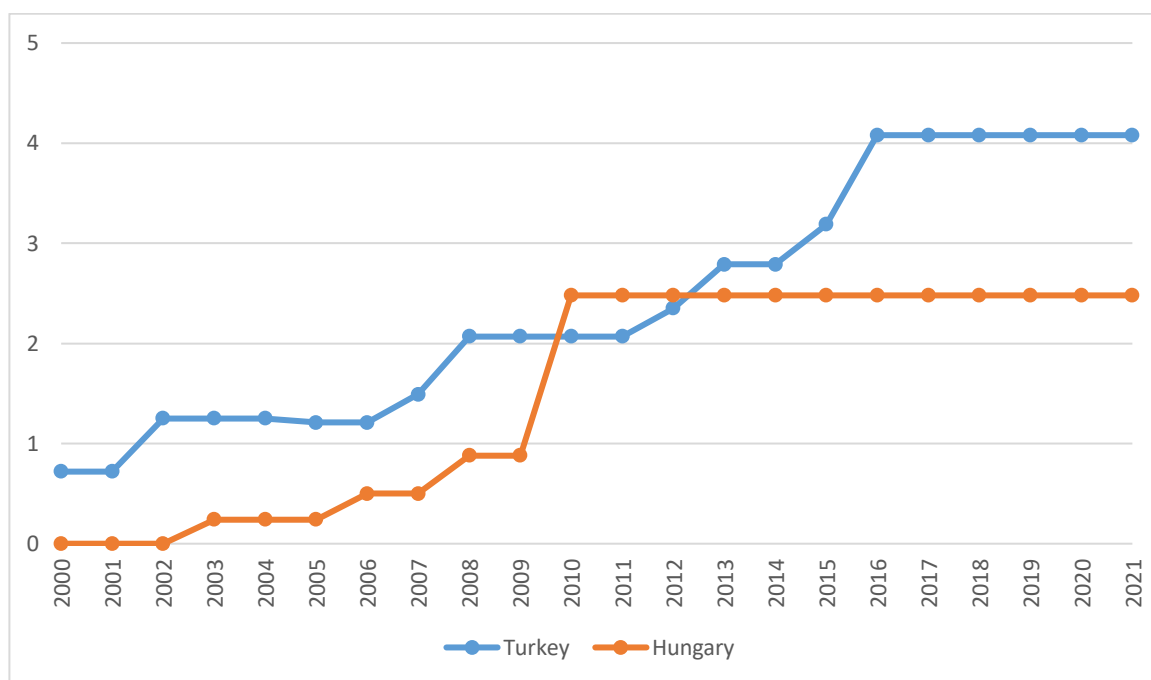
According to Figure 7, there can be seen that there is a similar pattern between Hungary and Turkey. In the Turkish case, there is major democratization in the early 2000s and it is not a coincidence because this was the time that Europeanization Process gained momentum and it can be observed in Figure 7. There was both elite and mass level support for Europeanization, therefore there was a huge consensus and clear support of the parliament even from the nationalist opposition party (National Movement Party). The incumbent party (JDP) was new in power at that time and they need other power centers and legitimacy need like European Union, which can be considered as political survival for the incumbent party at that time. This strategic alignment or golden age era continued until 2005. Between 2005 and 2010 there was a selective and limited Europeanization and the government just implemented laws which they

want and the reflection of this pause period can be observed in Figure 7. In 2011, the incumbent party consolidated its power and no longer need European Union. The state of emergency was declared in 2016 and lasted for two years after the 2016 coup d'état attempt leads executive aggrandizement and turned the Turkish parliament into a law factory. Lastly, the biggest blow was the transition from the parliamentary system to the de-facto presidential system that was voted with a referendum in 2017.

When Figure 7 is compared to Figure 8, there can be observed that there is a similar path between an increase in populist rhetoric and a decrease in freedom rating for Turkey. This effect can also be observed when the liberal democracy index of Figure 5 and the populist rhetoric of Figure 8 are compared. There is an inverse relationship between freedom rating and populist rhetoric; and liberal democracy index and populist rhetoric for Turkey. This inverse relationship explains that in every decrease of liberal democracy index and freedom rating, there is a constant or increasing populist rhetoric index is reflected in Figure 8 for Turkey.

While the same path can be observed for Hungary too, the only exception is the years between 2014 and 2015 in Figure 8 because it shows a slight decrease in the populist rhetoric of Hungary. This means that even though in the years between 2014 and 2015 there is a decreasing liberal democracy index and freedom rating for Hungary, there is a slight decrease in populist rhetoric. Even though this decrease is not remarkable enough to challenge the main argument of this study, it is still crucial to discuss the reason for this decrease. As it is mentioned in the first chapter, Orbán's populist rhetoric has shifted from financial crisis to migration crisis in 2015. While the Brussels and globalist elites was the focus of his populist rhetoric, the major issue for him was the border security and migrants, thus the nationalist rhetoric of him. Therefore, this shift might be the reason behind this slight decrease.

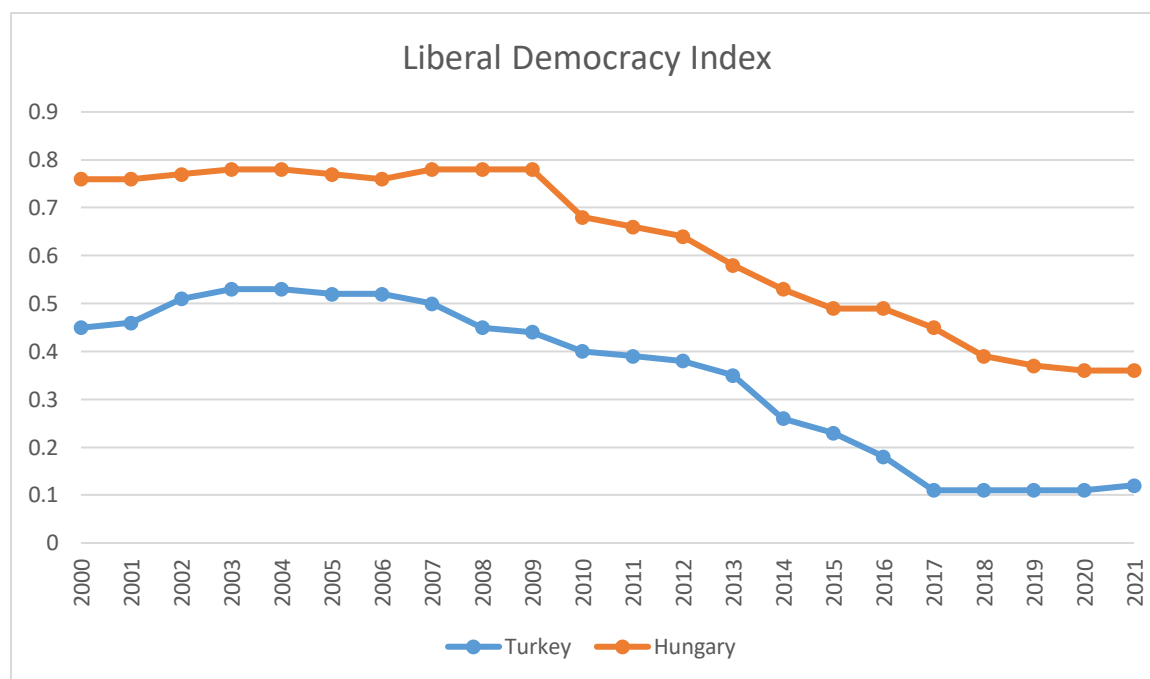
**Figure 9: Polarization in Turkey and Hungary (V-Dem Institute)**



(0: Not at all; 1: Mainly not; 2: Somewhat; 3: Yes, to noticeable extent; 4: Yes, to a large extent)

Figure 9 shows the level of political polarization in both Hungarian and Turkish societies. When this graph is compared both to Figure 7 and 8 there is an observable relationship between the paths. This relationship explains that populist rhetoric and political polarization are directly proportional to each other. In the years in which populism has increased, an increasing or stable pattern in the polarization table can be observed when the relatable tables are compared to each other.

**Figure 10: Liberal Democracy Index for Turkey and Hungary (V-Dem Institute)**



Also, when Figure 10 is added, the relationship between populism, polarization, and liberal democracy and their effects on each other become more visible. If the breaking points in these five graphs are compared to each other, it can be observed that they coincide with each other most of the time. In the case of Turkey in Figure 10, the years in which liberal democracy decreased the most are 2007-2008, 2013-2014 and 2017-2018. These years can be also observed in Figure 8 as the years in which populist rhetoric shows an increasing pattern in 2007 and 2013 while a stable pattern can be observed since then. The same year intervals in Figure 7 and Figure 9 and shows itself as decrease in freedom rating and an increase in political polarization.

A similar effect can be observed for Hungary too when these five tables are compared to each other, only the years which can be framed as breaking points are different than the Turkish case. In Figure 10, it is illustrated that 2010 - 2015, and 2016 - 2018 are the years that

liberal democracy has damaged. For the populist rhetoric table, it can be observed the increasing pattern in 2010 while a decreasing pattern in 2014. Also in Figure 9, there is an observable increase in 2010 and a stable political polarization level since then. Therefore, all these graphs together support the argument of this study that populism fosters polarization and this relationship negatively affects the liberal democracy in Turkey and Hungary.

### **Chapter 3: Hypothesis**

After that explanatory part of the comparison, which highlights the different effects of populist politics on different political systems, this study argues that populism has a negative effect on the democracy level of two countries by increasing political polarization. This political polarization as a result of populism occurs through restrictions on freedom of the press, civil society and liberties. Including the political polarization effect of populist politics into the discussion would explain the democratic backsliding patterns of countries that are governed by right-wing populist parties, especially for Turkey and Hungary. The political polarization as a result of the Manichean view of populist politics creates nepotism in several power centers of politics such as media and civil society organizations. Therefore, this political environment where monaural views are presented and supported has huge potential to foster political polarization through the instrumental use of various power centers. Thus the main argument of this study is that populism negatively affects democracy levels because of its potential to increase political polarization.

*H1. Populism fosters political polarization through restrictions over the media, therefore this situation negatively affects the democracy level of both Turkey and Hungary.*

**Figure 11: Chain of Reaction for Media**



The first power center which is used instrumentally by populist governments is the media. It is argued that populism fosters political polarization through restrictions over the media, therefore it negatively affects the democracy level of both Turkey and Hungary. This study suggests that media environment is affected by the populist politics and becomes the instrument of populist communication. This affected or captured media environment becomes the reflection of populist politics and polarized within itself as a result of abolishment of media plurality. This abolishment has done through establishment of pro-government media and censorship. Since the media is considered as the fourth branch besides from the executive, legislative and judiciary, a polarized media environment as a result of populist politics is one of the major feeding factor of political polarization in Turkey and Hungary under the long-standing populist governments.

The idea behind this chain of reaction is that the populist governments institutionalized their populist rhetoric on the media by articulating in and out group media outlets as a result of formed pro-government media outlets. Therefore, media become a tool for their populist politics and one of the significant elements which highly affects the political polarization. Populism manifests itself in the media thus, it is disseminated through the media. This creates a demanding reason for right wing populist parties to monitor or control the media. Thence, the



media become the playground between government and business people and loses its plurality. Since media plurality defines having different and plural voices, it is an important source for hindering the Manichean view of populist politics and political polarization. Due to the same reason eroding media plurality is a crucial source for populist politics to manage their power over the media.

### **3.1 Turkey**

Several important developments that have affected the Turkish media environment and its plurality under the JDP government are analyzed to understand this chain of reaction. Since the motivation of JDP government in their first terms (2002-2007) was to prove their “conservative yet secular stance towards the military, the judiciary and intelligentsia”, they adopted several harmonization packages which allowed broadcasting in different languages and dialectics for private radio and TV channels (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012, 307). It is clear that this development was extending the freedom of expression and fostering the media plurality. On the other hand, even in this first period when the Europeanization Process and its packages were dominant, it can be observed that the dominance over the media began to be established. The initial changes of media ownership took place in this first period by changing hands of Ciner and Uzan media groups to pro-government owners (Çay, 2019, 96). Also, members of the Radio and Television Supreme Council, also known in short as RTÜK, were started to be elected by the parliament as a result of the constitutional amendment. This amendment has caused RTÜK, which is an instrument to put pressure on TV and radio, to be dominated by majority party in the parliament. Therefore, it can be argued that even though the positive developments of Europeanization Process and JDP’s effort to prove itself in the secular political environment, the tendencies to dominate the media had begun.

The major change took place in the second term of the JDP government and it was a turning point for Turkish media. In 2007 Ergenekon trials, there was a wave of arresting

journalists who are accused to be involved in a coup plot. The 2009 was the year of blackouts and bans because during the 2007 election campaigns the opposition effectively used the social media to raise their critical voice about the JDP government and as a result of that the government used its authority to regulate or ban any website or content they found disturbing (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012, 308). Another important development that made the second term of the JDP government the turning point for the Turkish media is the dispute between the biggest media group (Doğan) and JDP government which used taxation as a tool to pressure this media group. All these events create an environment where criticisms of the government will not be tolerated. This media environment that illustrates the clashes of interests between media owners and the government leads other media holders to adopt this monopolizing atmosphere through self-censorship (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012, 309). This high biased media which is a result of pro-government media outlets and self-censorship during this period reduced the media plurality. Especially, the establishment of pro-government media outlets that are so-called pool media is the major reason for this. These media companies are spokespersons of government and the biggest area in which the government manifests its populist politics. Since these pro-government media companies have diverse business interests such as energy, mining industry, construction, etc., they have interests to have close relations with the government for the profit that they would gain from government contracts and concessions (Corke et al., 2014, 5-6). This patronage network inherently creates a parallel relationship between financial interests and government interests of the media owners and this overlapping dynamics of interests are damaging the media plurality by repressing and decreasing critical voices. Thus, patronage and clientalist relations between the media groups and the government led to financial and political pressures on media, which limited pluralism in media environment and contributed to a high political polarization.

The other crucial event that affected the media was happened during the Gezi Park protests because the government censored the media from broadcasting, blocked social media platforms, many journalists and media workers lost their jobs and pro-government media groups pushed the populist arguments of the government by claiming that there were certain internal and external figures behind these protests (Yılmaz, 2016b, 158; Özen, 2020, 245). During this intense political period the journalists, media outlets and businesspersons accused of being against the people and synonymously attempting to overthrow the government.

The effects of populist politics can also be observed during the 2016 coup attempt crisis. When the JDP government declared the state of emergency, government permanently closed Gülenist media outlets. However, the government closed critical media outlets or put pressure on them through fines because the state of emergency allowed the government to take those actions too. For example, pro-Kurdish TV channels and radio stations were closed for “national security concerns” (HRW, 2016, 6). This shows that the populist politics reflects in the media environment and increases the political polarization as a result of this reflection. Also, it is important to mention that during the coup attempt Erdoğan effectively used the media to mobilize ‘the people’ and called them to take streets and defend against this coup attempt. He said “There is no power higher than the power of the people” (Çay, 2019, 95). This mass mobilization is the result of his populist communication. It proves that during a crisis his populist rhetoric enables him to address ‘the people’, and consolidates his power. Under this Manichaeism it is inevitable to foster polarization.

This monopolized media environment brings an enormously small space for opposition. It is stated that the JDP government received a biased and disproportionate coverage in the state-owned media outlets during all the elections since 2015 (Castaldo, 2018, 480). This is a systematic elimination and monopolization of the media. Besides from that, the systematic arrestments of journalists put Turkey in the second place in the ranking of the world’s worst

jailer of journalists after China (Buchholz, 2021). This harsh environment, where journalists are arrested or fired for not to be included ‘the people’ which is defined by the government leads to widespread censorship and self-censorship. This environment, in which the supporters of the government are rewarded and those who oppose are punished, is the result of right-wing populist politics that makes political polarization inevitable through the media.

This attitude of the populist JDP government can also be observed in the social media too. The Freedom House states that the dozens of social media users were detained for sharing their critical opinions about different issues (Freedom House, 2022). This repressive atmosphere leads self-censorship among the citizens. Also, the government censor is an issue too by forcing digital media channels to cancel or censor LGBT+ characters in shows and series (Freedom House, 2022). Since censorship is a significant way to suppress different voices, it is a crucial instrument for populist politics to produce or foster the Manichean view and create antagonism which is a natural source for polarization. This type of repressive action proves that the populist JDP government does not accept the existence of ‘the other’ in every type of the media. This othering action is vital source for political polarization.

For the sake of an empirical evidence for the chain of reaction between populism and polarization, the effect of decreasing media plurality besides from other elements which is discussed in this study, can be observed in Figure 8 and Figure 9. 2007 is the year when the first increased in populist rhetoric and polarization took place. Therefore, it can be argued that the populism has affected polarization through the restrictions over the media in Turkey.

### **3.2 Hungary**

The same chain of reaction is applicable for Hungarian case too because the populist politics of Fidesz government has increased the political polarization through the media in Hungary. The patronage network between the media ownerships and the government has damaged the media plurality together with censorship and self-censorship.

Even though pro-Fidesz media had emerged before the 2010 when they were in opposition, the media environment has changed dramatically since 2010 (Körösenyi et al., 2020, 103). First of all, together with the Fidesz incumbency the conglomerate of public media has emerged thanks to support of loyalists as similar to the Turkish case. This increasing centralization has produced a Fidesz friendly environment where media outlets provide a collective mouthpiece for the government (Kornai, 2015, 40). This media colonization by the government gave them an opportunity to institutionalized their populist rhetoric on the media because the patronage relationships between the party interests and business cycles support them to repress ‘the other’ media outlets that have ties with the opposition. Thus, this institutionalization inevitably generates obstacles for remaining critical independent media channels.

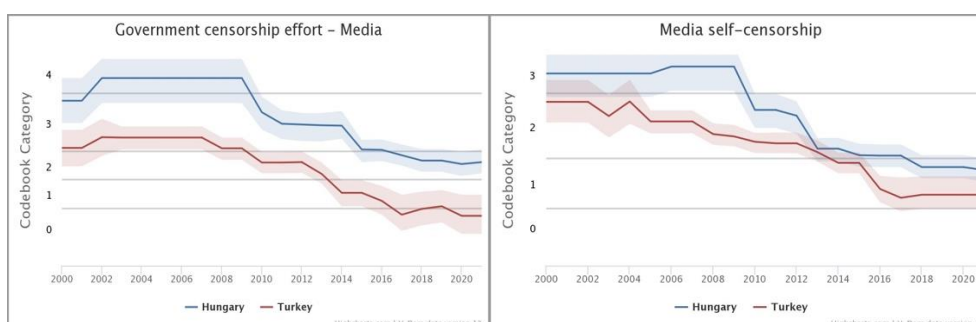
This centralization has even shifted together with the creation of National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) to oversee the media market. The emergence of such institution inherently increases the control over the media. In fact, the appointment of the head of the institution by the government further increased the influence of the party on the media. It should be noted that this is the same technique that JDP government has used in the Turkish case. These types of regulatory actions form a media landscape that is occupied by the pro-populist statements and leaves quite a few space for opposition and their critical views. Since this media environment is friendly only for supporters of the government or ‘the people’, the increase in political polarization is unavoidable. This type of populist understanding and actions together with high pro-government expression in the media produces a horizon that only they are the representatives of ‘the people’ and those who oppose it are ‘the corrupt elite’. This is the pure reflection of populist politics on the media. In this damaged media diversity, the legitimacy of the opposition media and the existence of the citizens who are not supporters of this government is questioned by the populist Fidesz government.

As an exception, it is noted by the Körösenyi et al. (2020) that this patronage network that has been build by the Fidesz government broken in 2015 for three years. It is stated that

“The trend that of increasing Fidesz influence in the media that began in 2010 was broken in 2015 for three years, when Simicska, the long-serving and most powerful Fidesz oligarch, who had a wide media portfolio, switched sides and turned against Orbán. This way, the opposition parties enjoyed strong media backing in the 2018 electoral campaign” (Körösenyi et al., 2020, 109).

This proves the importance of the media on the political landscape and how the patronage relations have supreme influence on political issues. Also, this exceptional event can be explanatory for the slight decrease in populist rhetoric of Orbán in 2015 that is illustrated in Figure 8. When the pro-government scope in which he enjoins his populist rhetoric is narrowed, inherently the visibility of this populist rhetoric in the media is reduced. This argument is also demonstrating the importance of the media for populist politics. That is why populist governments instrumentalize this important power center; to have disproportionate visibility through institutionalize their populist rhetoric on the media and polarize society through their Manichean worldview to clarify their support base.

**Figure 12: Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey and Hungary**

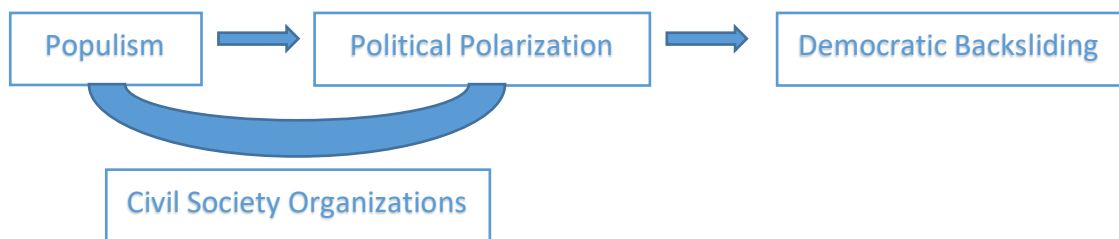


As an expected consequence, in this captured media environment both Turkish and Hungarian media has suffered from self-censorship and censorship. Even though the similar techniques of these two populist governments to consolidate their power on the

media, they differ in one issue. As it is stated before, there are serious numbers of arrestments and jailed journalists in Turkey, while Hungary luckily does not have that serious problem. Thus, self-censorship in Hungarian media derives from fear of losing their jobs or being exposed to tax retaliation by the government while in Turkey it also derives from the fear of being arrested. This situation displays a media environment where the employment and their life depends on their political preferences. Additionally, the systematic content control, domination of pro-government outlets and provisions on sanctions are the reasons for systematic censorship both in Turkey and Hungary.

*H2. Populism fosters political polarization through restrictions over civil society organizations, therefore this situation negatively affects the democracy level of both Turkey and Hungary.*

**Figure 13: Chain of Reaction for Civil Society**



The second chain of reaction suggest that the populist politics fosters polarization through civil society organizations, therefore it negatively affects the democracy level of both Turkey and Hungary. The repressive actions and patronage networks of populist JDP and Fidesz governments are considered to analyze this reaction.

Linz and Stephan (1996) defines civil society as “arena of the polity where self-organizing and relatively autonomous groups, movements, and individuals attempt to articulate values, to create associations and solidarities, and to advance their interests”. The first perspective about the relationship between civil society and democracy in the literature suggests that the civil society plays an important role for democracy by providing opportunity for disadvantaged groups, producing accountability of government, balancing state power etc.

(Doyle, 2017, 245). On the other hand, the second and critical view rejects that positive relation and claims that civil societies are not independent, thus they do not challenge the state power instead they extend the power (Doyle, 2017, 245). Unfortunately, this is the case both for Turkey and Hungary. Both populist governments have created their own civic organizations and used repressive actions to reshape the realm of this important power center. This reshaping is the result of their populist politics because creating a pro-government civil society atmosphere support them to survive through proving their claim that they are the true representatives of the people. This reflection of populist politics in the civil society increases the level of polarization.

### **3.3 Turkey**

The problem of the civil society environment in Turkey is not about quantitative but qualitative. In fact, Yabancı (2019) claims that there are two waves of expansion of civil society as the EU friendly first term of JDP government and even after the 2010 when the authoritarian tendencies of the government have increased. However, the quality of these civil society organizations is challenging because of the populist politics of JDP government. They have used repressive actions, created patronage networks and led the increase of political polarization.

Even though the legislative changes during the first term of the JDP government had improved the situation of civil society by removing the restrictive provisions, the legislative regulations of later terms have even increased the government control over civil society organization (Yabancı, 2019, 291). The usage of ambiguous frameworks in the Civil Code such as ‘Turkish family’, ‘national integrity and national interest’ produce a ground for state repression and arbitrary usage of state power (Yabancı, 2019, 291). Also, this kind of frameworks are the reflection of populist rhetoric and politics because the populist incumbent build values which only belongs to ‘the people’ or ‘the general will’. This reflection of populist



politics on the civil society organizations increase the government repression on ‘the corrupt’ or ‘the other’ civil society organizations that are oppose to the government.

Furthermore, another form of government repression shows itself in the populist rhetoric of Erdoğan through claiming that the aim of ‘the corrupt’ civil society organization are overthrowing the government during the moment of crisis. The aim behind this accusation is intimidating and repressing the opponents of the JDP government in the civil society. This division proves that the populist politics of the JDP government is not only at the political level but also shows itself in the different power centers as civil society, thus the populist politics of the JDP government increases the polarization through restrictions over the civil society organization.

Moreover, the creation of their own civic circle is one of the reason for the mentioned expansion of civil society organizations because in this way they have expanded the area of civil society that they can control. Also, the patronage network has an impact on democratic backsliding because the creation of an organic relationship between government and these organizations increases political polarization. This means that the Manichean view of populist politics has several reflections and one of them is on the civil society organizations. This antagonism that has been created by the populist leaders also reflects these organizations by creating “us vs them” understanding that fosters political polarization. Thus, this pro-government civil society organizations become the reflection of populist JDP government in the civil society landscape by reproducing and extending its rhetoric by claiming that they are the representatives of ‘the people’. This populistly politicized civil society environment contributes the increasing political polarization.

It is also important to mention that the civil society is highly fragmented in Turkey (CAP, 2017). This fragmentation is the outcome of heterogeneous society because these fragmentations derives from cultural, ideological and identity based lines. This means that as a

result of ideological or ethnic divisions, different groups are operating the same issue. Therefore, there is a divided civil society rather than strong unified civil society in Turkey. The populist politics of the JDP government and its reflection on the civil society fosters the hostility between these organizations and polarize them in this fragmented environment.

### **3. 4 Hungary**

Like in the media sector, the populist Fidesz party started to build its own civic circle even before came into power. Orbán started to establish his top-down civic circle by forming Civic Circles Movement in 2002 after he lost the election and Civic Union Forum in 2009 (Körösenyi et al., 2020, 37). This top-down organizations supported him to establish a direct communication with his voters. Therefore, this populistly created direct linkages helped him to mobilize ‘the people’. After he came into power, he revised the the civil society law in 2017 to put this populist stance on a solid foundation. This revision requires civil society organizations’ to announce their financial supports that comes from the abroad. As a complete example to reflection of populist politics of Orbán on civil society, it shows his intention to detect ‘the corrupt’ civil society organizations which are foreign-financed and working for their interests as oppose to ‘the pure people’. In such an environment where the distinction between state and civil society is ambiguous, it reflects itself as political polarization because government’s populist politics establishes this even by legal means too. Furthermore, ‘peace marches’, mass demonstrations that are organized by pro-government civil society organization, is another example for this ambiguity between state and civil society.

Moreover, in 2018 ‘Stop Soros’ law was introduced by the Fidesz government to regulate sanctions for civil society organizations who helps asylums and illegal migrations. With this legalizations, Fidesz government labels and clarifies that there are civil society organizations who are in illegal acts and pointing them as ‘the corrupt’ ones who oppose to ‘the general will’ of ‘the people’. Under this clear populist notion, the legality of the civil society

organizations who are opposing the Fidesz is questioned by the government. This populist notion created a sense of togetherness for ‘the people’ by highlighting that the state is the reflection of ‘the people’ (Csehi, 2019, 1020). That populistly derived rhetoric generates an understanding about who belongs where as a pure people or corrupt ones, thus increases the political polarization and this has been done through instrumentalization of civil society organizations.

To sum up, the patronage network between pro-government civil society organizations and the government has created a direct link for populist communication for leaders, therefore, helps them to mobilize with their electorate. The aim of this populist communication is to highlight and clarify they are the true representatives of ‘the people’ and they are the ones who serve ‘the general will’ of the people. This clarification that is established through instrumentalization of civil society organizations has increased the political polarization.

### **3.5 Turkey and Hungary**

It should be considered that nor the repressive government actions towards the media and civil society organizations neither the establishment of pro-government media outlets and pro-government civil society organizations are exclusive for populist governments. However, opposition in media and civil society destabilize their populist claims that they are the true representatives of the people. Therefore, these actions gain importance for populist leaders or parties to prove their points against ‘the corrupt’ media and civil society. This is the case that has been happening in Turkey and Hungary during the incumbency of populist parties. Both Erdoğan and Orbán have created direct links to ‘the people’ through these two significant power centers for democracy. This way they are mobilizing their support base and increasing the political polarization.

Moreover, it should be considered that populism in both Turkey and Hungary is a process. Erdoğan started this process in 2002 while in the power and Orbán started this process

in 2002 while in opposition after losing the election. They are both using the same techniques to mobilize their electorate. Both leaders have been using patronage network and repressive state actions in media and civil society organizations through their populist policies. Hence, the political polarization has increased in Turkey and Hungary as a result of reflection of populist politics.

### **3.6 Methodology**

In order to address the research question, this study applies a comparative case study approach which helps to ask how and why questions to understand the relationship between political phenomena which are populism, polarization and liberal democracy. Both at the within-case and cross-case level comparison is considered in this study to analyze each case and compare them to identify what each case has in common, as well as which differences make them unique. This study considers the V-Dem data to analyze and visualize the similar but different levels of mentioned political phenomena in Turkey and Hungary. This helps to observe and compare the effects of political events, movements, and strategies on Turkey's and Hungary's political environment. Also, V-Dem data is used to measure and visualize the fluctuations in liberal democracy and political polarization. Furthermore, Global Populism Database (2019) will be indicated to support the arguments related to Turkish and Hungarian populism. The visualization of these existing data will be helpful to observe whether there are yearly parallel patterns between populism, polarization and democracy level. As opposed to the different democracy levels of these two countries, there are important similarities between the two leaders' ways of creating populist rhetoric and its reflections on political polarization and democracy levels.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

This thesis attempted to analyze populism and polarization to understand the democratic backsliding in Turkey and Hungary since 2000. The empirical illustrations show that Turkey

and Hungary have been suffering from democratic backsliding, increasing political polarization and populism. To understand these political phenomena, this thesis analyzes the reflection of populist politics on the media and civil society organizations and argues that populism has increased political polarization through these two important power centers in Turkey and Hungary. Even though the different levels of democratic backsliding, political polarization and populism, there are various similarities between these two countries and the way the populist politics have been managed by the leaders to mobilize their power.

This thesis shows that even though the differences in the domestic and international system, populist politics have been damaging the democracy of Turkey and Hungary. The similar techniques of these populist leaders have a common ground. Both leaders' populist politics reflects itself the media and civil society organizations. Therefore, in Turkey and Hungary populism has increased political polarization through these power sources. Being ruled by a parliamentary system or a presidential system does not effectively limit the growing executive power of populist leaders just like being a member of the European Union does not effectively limit either.

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