



# ***Towards a Social Network Model of Political Success: The Case of Origo.hu and the Populist Take-over in Hungary (2004–2019)***

**Working Paper**

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# MÁTYÁS Máté, MPA

- Hungarian minority family from Transylvania, Romania born in Hungary after the collapse of state socialism
- International Relations (BA) 🇭🇺 🇬🇧
- Master of Public Administration (MPA) 🇨🇳 🇺🇸
- International Political Economy 🇭🇺 🇸🇮

*“FATIGUE:*

*Delayed Transformational Fatigue in Central and Eastern Europe: Responding to the Rise of Illiberalism/Populism”*

**FATIGUE**





**Populism is NOT “popular” because of the “power” of the idea.**

**It is successful when and because social networks between populist political and media actors’ can dominate the rest.**

*Thus changing the lenses — building a social network model of political success — can help understand, explain, predict, and manage changes in politics, economy, and society.*

*Populism cannot be sufficiently understood and defined without its **strategic** element. **Media actors** play a pivotal role in it.*



**ORBÁN is the most successful case of populism**

**+**

**media capture has been crucial in this.**

**=**

***Populism (and the success thereof) is best explained incorporating media-polity relations.***

*Interpersonal  
interactions  
network model  
(social network model of  
political success)*



# Overview



The case study:  
Origo.hu & Hungary's populist take-over



The methodological background



The theoretical background



Summary & outlook







# *The case study*

Origo.hu & Hungary's populist take-over

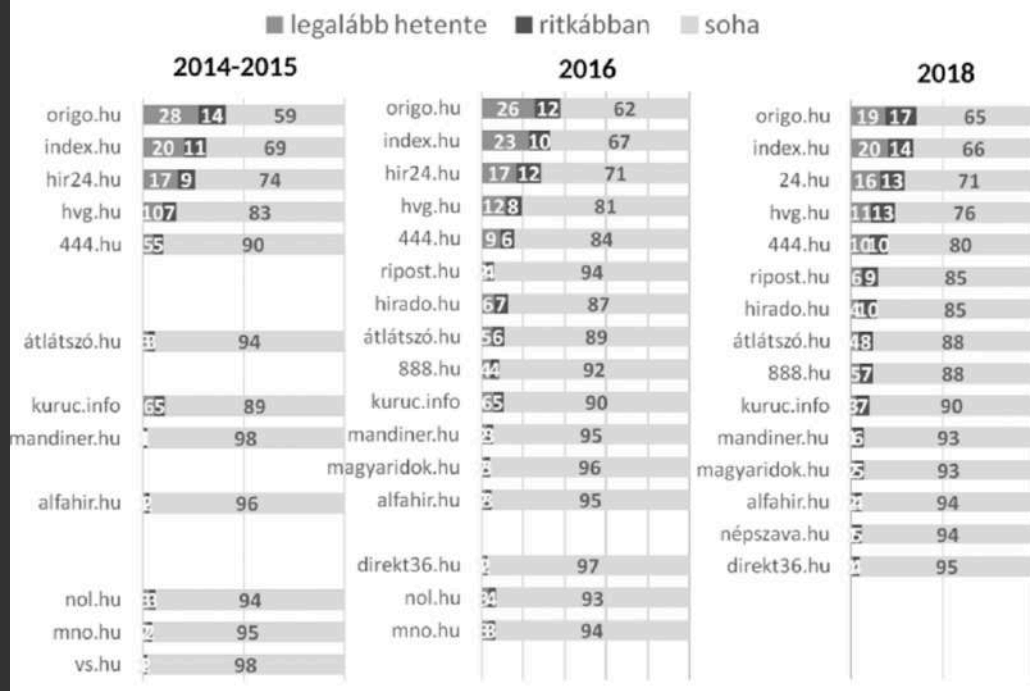


*This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 765224.*

# Case study selection: PM ORBÁN and Origo.hu 2004–2019

5. ábra

Internetes hírportálok olvasottsága (A teljes népesség százalékában)



6. ábra

Politikai-közéleti tájékozódás internetes hírportálokról  
(A hírportált legalább alkalmanként látogatók aránya pártpreferencia szerint)

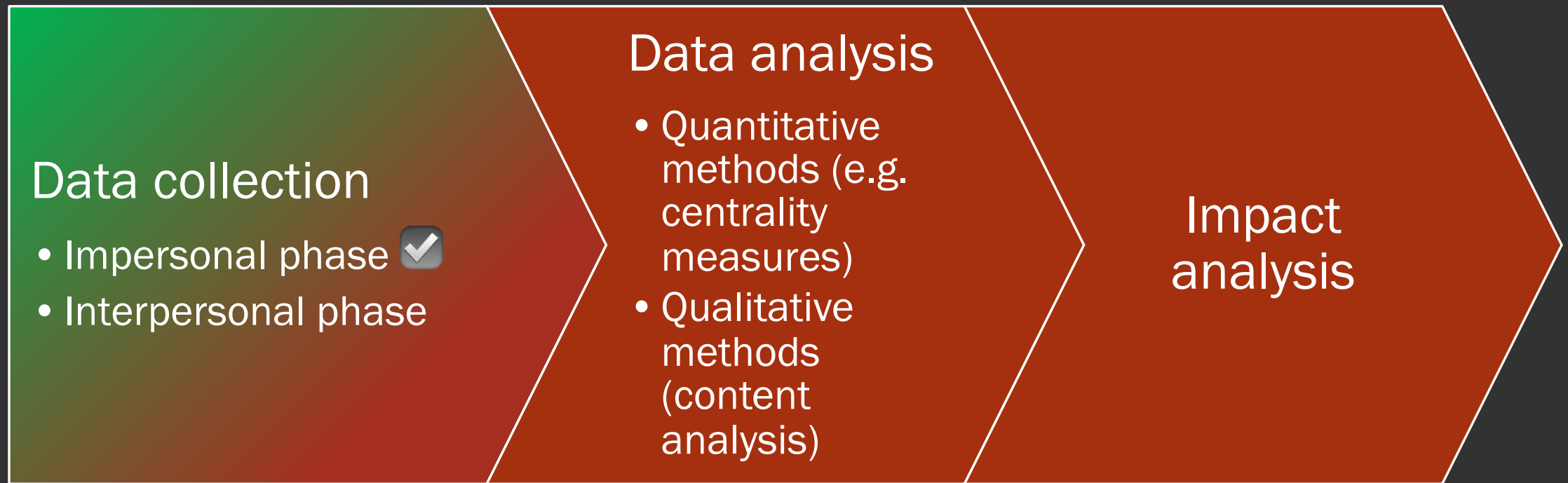
	teljes népesség	kormánypárti	ellenzéki (Jobbik nélkül)	Jobbik	nincs pártja
origo.hu	35%	36%	38%	47%	29%
index.hu	34%	31%	42%	42%	28%
24.hu	29%	28%	37%	32%	23%
hvg.hu	24%	18%	34%	29%	19%
444.hu	20%	18%	26%	22%	17%
ripost.hu	15%	15%	17%	19%	13%
hirado.hu	15%	14%	16%	15%	13%
átlátszó.hu	12%	11%	17%	10%	10%
888.hu	12%	13%	11%	15%	10%
kuruc.info	10%	9%	9%	23%	8%
mandiner.hu	7%	6%	7%	8%	7%
magyaridok.hu	7%	8%	7%	7%	7%
alfahir.hu	7%	5%	7%	13%	6%
népszava.hu	6%	5%	10%	3%	5%
direkt36.hu	5%	5%	6%	9%	4%

Source: Polyák Gábor, Szávai Petra, Urbán Ágnes: A politikai tájékozódás mintázatai (2019). Médiakutató vol. 20, issue 2





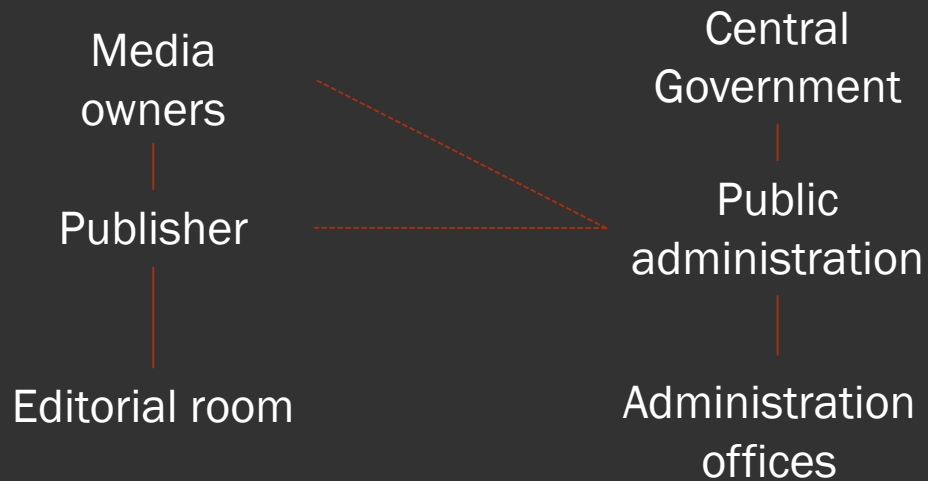
# Preliminary analysis



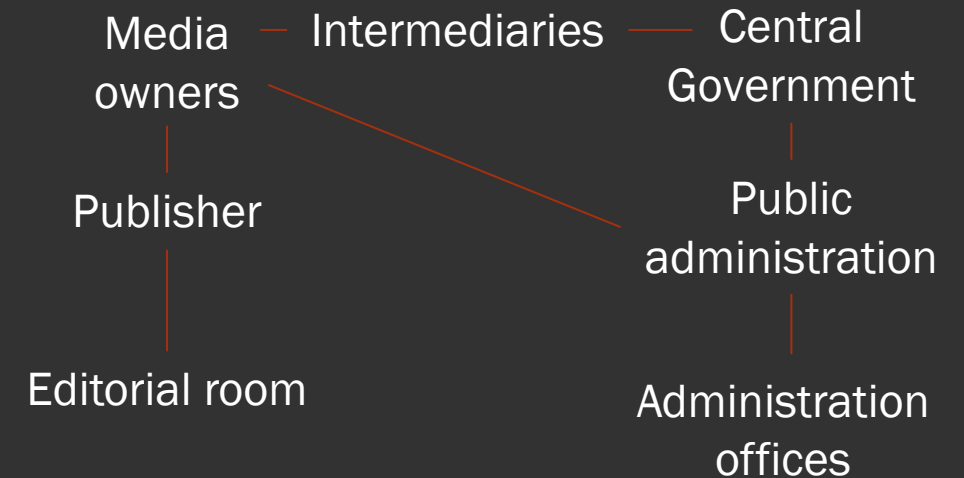


# Theoretical expectations

## Independent networks




## (Inter)dependent networks



# Preliminary findings based on the collected data

## Data collection

- Impersonal phase 
  - *Identification of legal persons*
  - *Identification of interactions*
  - *Identification of natural persons*
- Interpersonal phase

- Origo.hu's publishers: MATÁV, Magyar Telekom → New Wave Media Group (→ owned by Magyar Stratégiai Zrt.) → Central European Press and Media Foundation
- Owners, CEOs, editors-in-chief
  - Magyar Telekom Board of Directors
  - Origo.hu directors
  - NWMG: SZÁRAZ István
  - Magyar Stratégiai Zrt.: MATOLCSY Ádám György
  - CEPMPF founded by people involved in Fidesz, declared it acquisition activities "of national strategic importance" through a cabinet decree signed by PM ORBÁN
- Three major transactions
  - + role of political actors: LÁZÁR János, SIMICSKA Lajos





# Preliminary findings based on the collected data

## Data collection

- Impersonal phase 
  - *Identifying legal persons*
  - *Identifying interactions*
  - *Identifying natural persons*
- Interpersonal phase

	2006	2010	% Change	2014	% Change	2018	% Change
Turnout	5,408,050 (67.83%)	5,132,531 (64.38%)	-3.45%	5,047,363 (61.73%)	-2.65%	5,796,268 (69.73%)	+8.0%
Fidesz	2,272,979	2,706,292	+19%	2,264,780	-16,31%	2,824,551	+24,72%
Jobbik	119,007*	855,436	+718%	1,020,476	+19,29%	1,092,806	+7,1%
MSZP	2,336,705	990,428	-57,61%	1,290,806**	+30,33%	682,701**	-47,11%

\* as MIÉP-Jobbik

\*\* as MSZP-EGYÜTT-DK-PM-MLP in 2014, as MSZP-Párbeszéd in 2018

Source: data collection from the National Election Office website (<https://www.valasztas.hu/>, in English: <https://www.valasztas.hu/web/national-election-office>)

## Impact analysis

- *Origo.hu became a reliable government mouthpiece after 2015*
- *Election & polling data*



# Preliminary findings based on the collected data





# Preliminary findings based on the collected data

2018

(owned by  
MATOLCSY Ádám György)

Magyar  
Stratégiai  
Zrt.

(founded by  
LISZKAY Gábor,  
headed by  
Dr. SZÁNTÓ Miklós)  
CEPMF

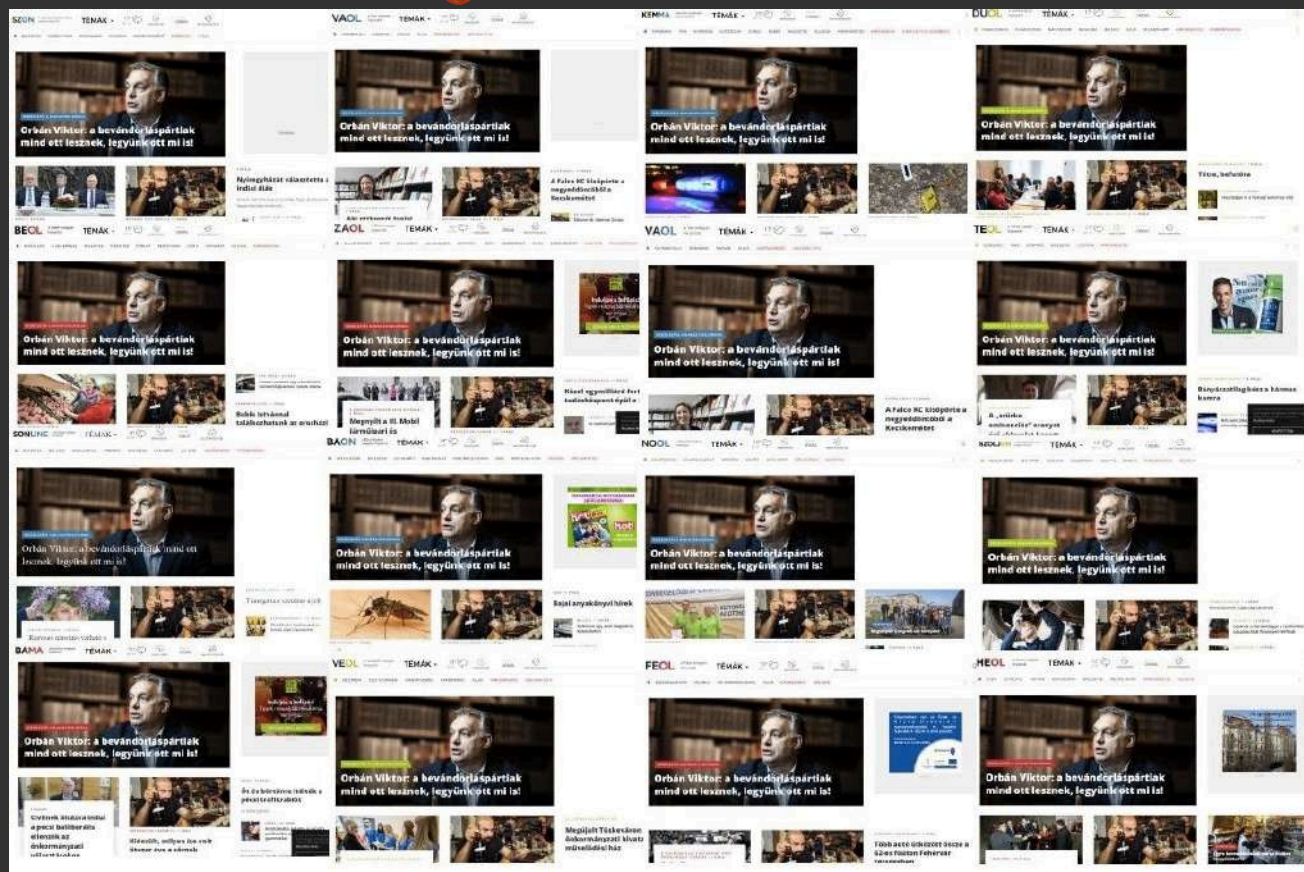
(PM ORBÁN Viktor)  
Government of  
Hungary


NWMG

Editorial room



# Preliminary findings based on the collected data

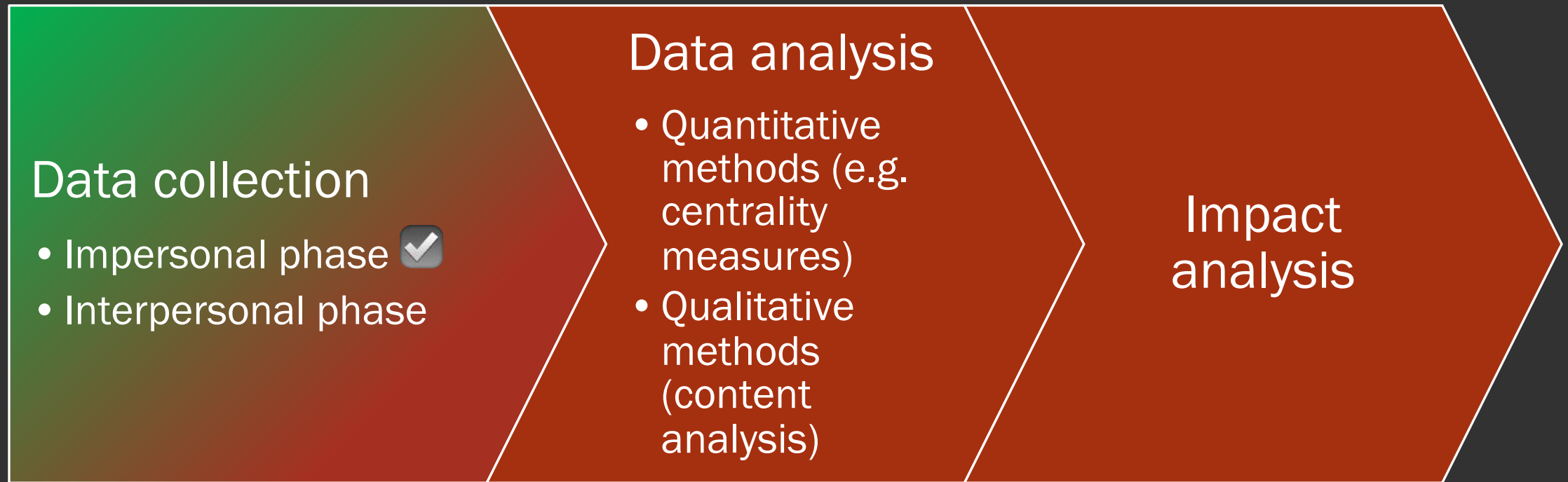


The scholarship and work by Médiakutató and Mérték Média Monitor :  
Hungary's media system  
undergoing a “media capture”  
in the 2010s seems to be entirely  
plausible





# Next steps and further questions





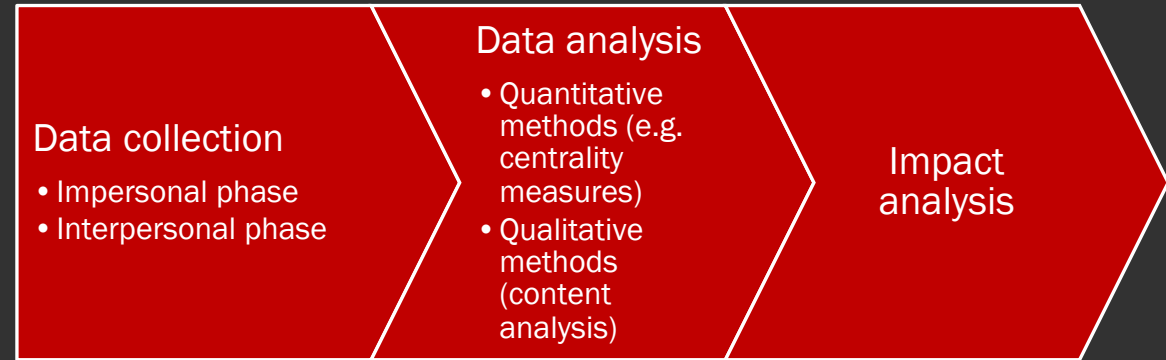
# ***The methodological background***

How to utilise the model of political success to explain the rise of populism





# Methods and the analytical process



- Corresponding multidisciplinary mixed methods
  - Archival research, expert interviews, etc.
  - Questionnaires, surveys, interviews
  - “Snowball” sampling → ego-networks
  - Social network analysis — centrality measures
  - Content and discourse analysis — Discourse network analysis
- Software-supported: UCINET, Gephi, NVivo
- Standardised, yet flexible and adaptive due to the basic theoretical considerations (emphasis on unit of analysis & intersubjective interactions)



# ***The theoretical background***

**Building the social network model of political success to explain the rise of populism**



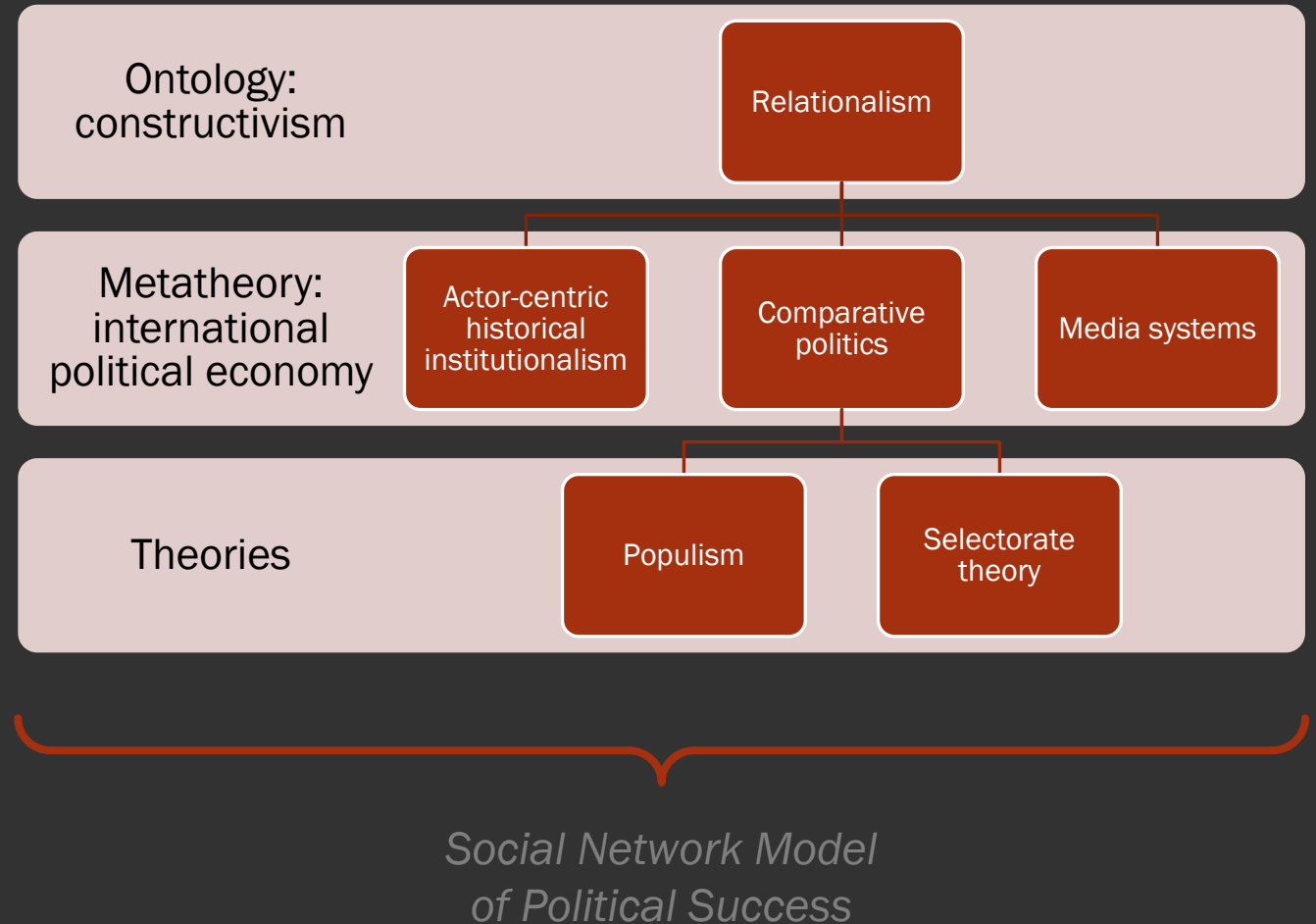
*This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 765224.*



# Overview

*of the scholarship  
informing the model*

- A consistent derivative multidisciplinary model
- Creating meaningful interrelationships between thus far unrelated strands of academic literature
- *Aim: creating a framework for understanding, explaining, predicting, and managing the success of political actors*



# Relationalist ontology

Ontology:  
constructivism

Relationalism

- “Relational sociology” school of thought (mostly after 1990)
- Unit of analysis: human individuals’ interactions
  - Intersubjectivity
- Anti-reification
- Cause-effect relationships: individuals’ interactions in social networks
  - Social network analysis

*This is not only a matter of theory. (...) The main discrepancy (...) is that sociological theory stresses the importance of the actor and her actions, whereas our research methods typically focus upon variables. It is not actors who act and interact in much sociological research, (...) but rather variables, a problem which we must redress.*

— Nick CROSSLEY referring to Andrew ABBOTT in Social Networks and Relational Sociology p. 167 (in: Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory by Seth ABRUTYN (2016))





# International political economy as disciplinary context

Metatheory:  
international  
political economy

Actor-centric  
historical  
institutionalism

Comparative  
politics

Media systems

- IPE's diverse nature (encompassing network research and comparative politics)
- Actor-centric historical institutionalism
  - Critical junctures (vs. path-dependency)
- IPE phenomena are network outcomes
  - Not “*who gets what, when, and how*”, BUT “*who knows what, when, and how*”
- IPE of communication, media systems theory
  - The relationships and interactions between polity, media, and consumers/society
  - Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini — Comparing Media Systems (2004), their concepts and typology
    - Also inspiring Hungarian media researchers (Médiakutató, Mérték Média Monitor)



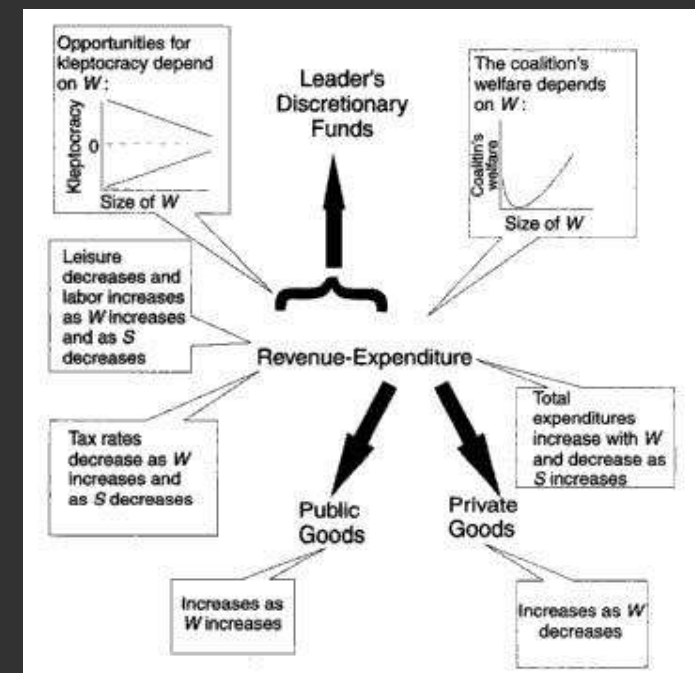
# Selectorate theory: the logic of political survival

Theories

Populism

Selectorate theory

- Comparative politics: *The Logic of Political Survival* (2003) — Bruce BUENO DE MESQUITA & Alastair SMITH
  - Leaders and followers — relationships and interactions
  - Winning coalition (size)
  - Selectorate vs. Electorate
- PM Orbán Viktor as the epitome of political survival (1998–2002; 2010–)





# Populism scholarship

Theories

Populism

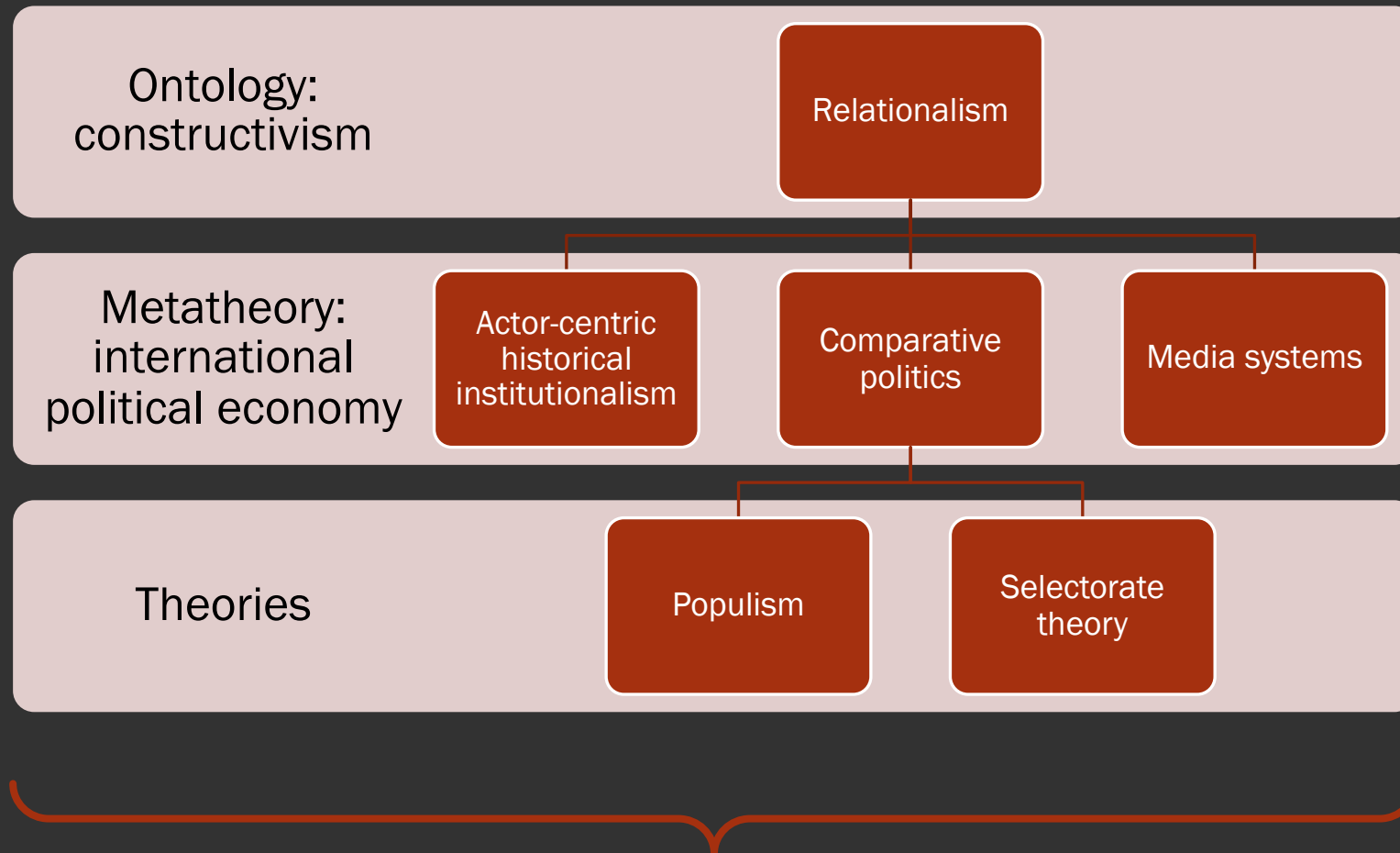
Selectorate  
theory

- Typology
  - Ideology
  - Style, narrative, discourse, etc.
  - Political strategy
    - Kurt WEYLAND (— based on Nicos MOUZELIS)
- Various causes: economic, social, political, cultural
  - Media — Gianpietro MAZZOLENI

*populism is best defined as 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.*

— Kurt WEYLAND 'Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics'. *Comparative Politics* 34(1): 1.  
AND 'Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford University Press





## The Social Network Model of Political Success





# *Summary and outlook*

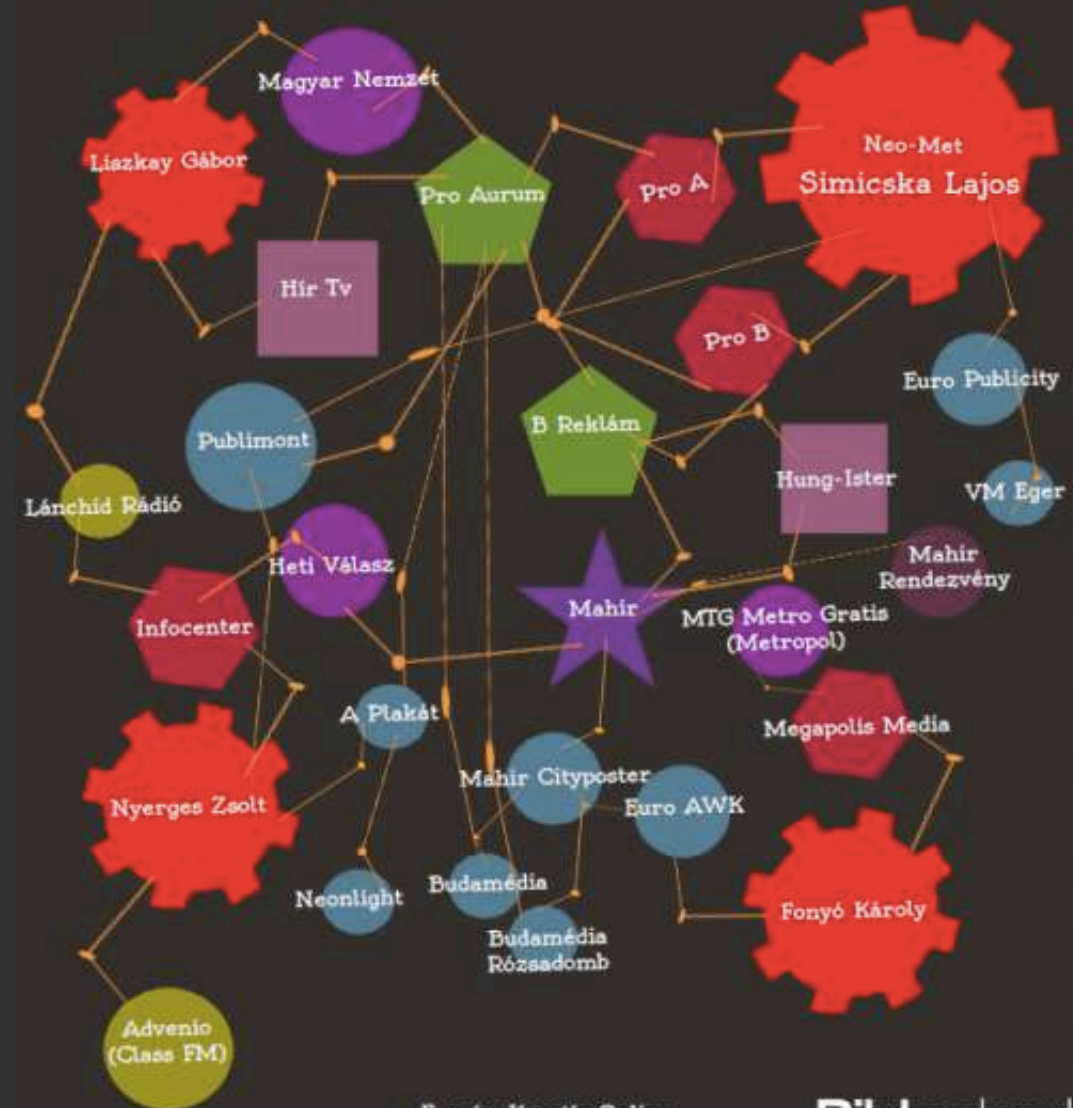
Summing up the research so far & remarks on its purposes



# Summary

- Preliminary case findings
  - Media capture plausible: traces of media–(business–)polity networks
  - The timing of Origo.hu’s capture seems to correspond with electoral events and results
- Theoretical-methodological considerations:
  - WEYLAND’s “unmediated” populist political leadership concept may not hold — further additions may be needed
  - An overall useful approach:
    - re-focusing the debate on populism by emphasising *personal responsibility* in the phenomenon
    - More “social” sciences

## A Fidesz-közei médiabirodalom








# Outlook

- The possibility and need for **extension** — media types; historical-political, geographical, and cultural contexts; and beyond media
- Methodological considerations: serious limitations and **challenges**, nevertheless an important analytical approach enriching **social sciences across disciplines**
  - Network concepts and re-definitions
  - Incorporation of real-world developments
- Practical political considerations:
  - The importance of media policy (+EU)
  - Media concentration and media capture
  - Power concentration — separation of powers, checks and balances
  - *The need to upgrade democracy to conform to a new age in communication?*







*Any failure to take into serious account the organisational aspects of populism not only results in the populist phenomenon appearing as a set of disembodied ideological themes, it also tends to dilute the specificity of a concept that could otherwise be very useful for the analysis of social movements.*

— Nicos Mouzelis: On the Concept of Populism. Populist and Clientelist Modes of Incorporation in Semiperipheral Polities (1985), *Politics & Society*, vol. 14(3), p. 341

***Thank you for your attention!***

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