

February 2018

## A Tale of Two Paranoids: A Critical Analysis of the Use of the Paranoid Style and Public Secrecy by Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán

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### Recommended Citation

Timmer, Andria; Joseph Sery; Sean Thomas Connable; and Jennifer Billinson. 2018. "A Tale of Two Paranoids: A Critical Analysis of the Use of the Paranoid Style and Public Secrecy by Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán." *Secrecy and Society* 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.31979/2377-6188.2018.010203> <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/secrecyandsociety/vol1/iss2/3>

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Within the last decade, a rising tide of right-wing populism across the globe has inspired a renewed push toward nationalism. Capitalizing on an increasingly chaotic public sphere, leaders are stoking fear in their constituents such that their radical ideologies and hardline policy decisions may be enacted. This article offers a comparative study of two leaders exploiting the vulnerabilities of their respective citizenries: United States President Donald Trump and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Drawing from and reimagining Richard Hofstadter's germane essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," we argue that both represent a new manifestation of the paranoid style as it enables (and is enabled by) "public secrecy." By controlling the media and redirecting collective attention by way of rhetorical sleight of hand, the two are able to sow disorder and confusion such that their secrecy may persist out in the open. Despite using similar issues to promulgate fear and paranoia, most prominently the refugee and immigration crises, and their similar end goals, the two must nonetheless engage in different discursive strategies that reflect the distinct cultures and histories of their respective countries.

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### **Abstract**

Within the last decade, a rising tide of right-wing populism across the globe has inspired a renewed push toward nationalism. Capitalizing on an increasingly chaotic public sphere, leaders are stoking fear in their constituents such that their radical ideologies and hardline policy decisions may be enacted. This article offers a comparative study of two leaders exploiting the vulnerabilities of their respective citizenries: United States President Donald Trump and Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán. Drawing from and reimagining Richard Hofstadter's germane essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," we argue that both represent a new manifestation of the paranoid style as it enables (and is enabled by) "public secrecy." By controlling the media and redirecting collective attention by way of rhetorical sleight of hand, the two are able to sow disorder and confusion such that their secrecy may persist out in the open. Despite using similar issues to promulgate fear and paranoia, most prominently the refugee and immigration crises, and their similar end goals, the two must nonetheless engage in different discursive strategies that reflect the distinct cultures and histories of their respective countries.

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In this article, we reimagine the role of the paranoid style by two world leaders, President Donald Trump of the United States and Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, in light of the cultural, political, economic, and technological changes that significantly altered the geo-political situation. In

particular, we examine Trump and Orban's rhetorical strategies as a manifestation of "public secrecy," which necessary to understand the current shift towards populism in Western democracies. As civic institutions are undermined, the public sphere is polarized, and collective memory obfuscated, the paranoid leader is able to hide their true motivations by relying upon the chaos they produce. Their success is due in large part to the ability to distract and divert attention on non-issues, control and manipulate the media, and provide false narratives via public gaslighting, all of which are made exponentially more effective with the creation of a nebulous, ill-defined enemy. Given the distinct cultures and histories of Hungary and the U.S., respective paranoid leaders deploy these strategies differently. We take a comparative approach in this article in order to illustrate how neither Trump or Orbán's rise to power is unique, but rather is representative of a larger populist turn that utilizes tactics that embrace public secrecy and threaten the legacy of Western liberal democracy.

### **The Paranoid Style and Public Secrecy**

Since its publication in 1964, Richard Hofstadter's germane essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," continues to be popular in academic scholarship, with a wide range of fields using his framework as a critical tool to deconstruct everything from Ancient Greek paranoia (Sagan 1991), the role of collective memory in South Africa (Fassin 2008) to grassroots calls to amend tax law (Zelenak 2014). The paranoid style has transcended

academic circles and is part of a broader lexicon, making fairly recent appearances in popular media like *The Atlantic* (Douthat 2008), *The American Conservative* (Jenkins 2013), *The Economist* ("The Paranoid Style in American Politics" 2006), and the *New York Times* (Edsall 2016). Within the rhetorical field, there is also a wealth of scholarship (Caliendo 1999; Goldzweig 1991; Howell 2012; Lattin 2000; Nikolaev and Porpora 2006), yet there is a failure to acknowledge the implications of technological advances (particularly social media) and the unforeseeable national and global crises that have greatly impacted the contemporary rhetorical situation. While the major themes remain relevant, the cultural, political, and economic landscape from which Hofstadter's original argument emerged, as well as subsequent scholarship, merits revisiting in light of the current circumstances. The increased ubiquity of news media, especially the swift rise of social media and the ability to personalize one's news experience, the shifts in educational priorities, and the rise of nationalism echo parts of Hofstadter's original position, but have come together to pose a problem unique in the current state of affairs. One important element that we stress in this article is the discursive connection between a paranoid leader and the collective mindset they are cultivating through ideological manipulation.

According to Hofstadter (2008, 4), the paranoid style is the driving force behind minority – sometimes fringe – leaders who adopt the view of "the hostile and conspiratorial world...as directed against a nation, a culture,

a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others.”

Unlike psychotic paranoia as defined by a clinician, (often uncontrolled and devoid of reason), the persecution expressed through the paranoid style “begins with certain defensible judgments” (Hofstadter 2008, 36), which are then extended to unreasonable demands by a “leap of imagination” (Hofstadter 2008, 37). Consequently, “catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of *paranoid rhetoric*” (Hofstadter 2008, 39, emphasis added). As a result, the paranoid rhetor is able to circumvent the necessary warrants and support required in traditional argumentation so as to arrive upon the extreme conclusion they desire.

U.S. history indicates a long-standing legacy of such rhetoric (and the subsequent policy revisions) surrounding critical moments, particularly during times of war. For example, consider the numerous times the United States limited constitutional rights in response to perceived threats. The XYZ Affair brought about the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. The Civil War led President Lincoln to suspend *habeas corpus*. World War I inspired the Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918, which were legitimized in the nation’s first Supreme Court decisions curbing the First Amendment. President Franklin Roosevelt’s internment camps responded to the presumed threat of Japanese-American citizens, again legitimized by the Supreme Court in *Korematsu v. United States*. McCarthy’s red scare, Nixon subverting his political opponents, and Bush’s “War on Terror” all illustrate the ease with

which a democratic nation can slip into authoritarian policies for fear that their way of life will be taken away, often at the behest of a leader stoking paranoia.

The paranoid style is not absent in European politics, though the theoretical lens has only recently been applied to understanding the political situation in the European Union (EU). The paranoid style has gone global partly due to the global economic crisis of 2008 and growing distrust in governing institutions (Drezner 2010). This distrust, Drezner argues, played out in many national elections, most notably the 2010 parliamentary election in Hungary wherein the right-wing party, Fidesz, took the majority, and the far right-wing anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy minority opposition party, Jobbik, finished third. Jobbik was able to successfully push the platform and the rhetoric of the established conservative party, Fidesz, further to the right. By appealing to Jobbik supporters, Fidesz gained the support of the public and gained control of public opinion – a position they have securely maintained to the present day. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Fidesz has introduced a number of nationalistic and isolationist policies that ostensibly serve to protect Hungary. Since 2010, numerous examples of the paranoid style have become evident in Europe (the Austrian, Dutch, and French elections, for example), but arguably Hungary was the first to employ the paranoid style as it currently conceived.

A common theme among invocations of the paranoid style is how the paranoid sees “conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events” and “conspiracy in apocalyptic terms” (Hofstadter 2008, 29). Given the perception of such high stakes, the paranoid possesses an unrelenting desire for victory:

The paranoid is a militant leader. He does not see social conflict as something to be mediated and compromised, in the manner of the working politician. Since what is at stake is always a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, the quality needed is not willingness to compromise but the will to fight things out to a finish. *Nothing but complete victory will do.*” (Hofstadter 2008, 31, emphasis added)

Enemies cannot be reasoned with, argues the paranoid, therefore they must be destroyed. Hofstadter (2008, 31-32) continues,

This enemy is clearly delineated: he is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving... He is a free, active demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself, or deflects the normal course of history in an evil way.

Important to note, the enemy crafted through the paranoid style is not simply targeting the paranoid leader, but also “the people” represented by the leader. Yet, much like the vague and shadowy enemy looming in the midst, “the people” is ill-defined for strategic reasons and allows the paranoid rhetor the ability to call a particular “people” into being. Michael Calvin McGee (2009, 344) argues that “the people” are created in a speech act if individuals make the choice to agree with the speaker:



When “one man stands up as the proclaimer of a general will,” what he says, *at the time he originally says it*, is a fiction, for it is his personal interpretation of his “people’s” history. Though he warrants his argument with abundant examples, he creates, not a description of *reality*, but rather a political *myth*.

These “myths” are at the heart of the paranoid style and serve to fuel further paranoia. By outlining the myriad of dangers set against “the people,” the right audience accepts the political myth and thus lives in “mass illusion” (McGee 2009, 345). During times of crises “the people” are more susceptible to paranoid appeals, which echoes David Hume’s claim that the crux of persuasion is not logic, but rather an appeal to an emotionally guided intuition (Hume 1983). As Hermann Goering so chillingly described, “Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country” (Gilbert 1995, 278-79). Both Trump and Orbán have been able to call a particular people into being by drawing upon the paranoid style to stoke feelings of fear and disgust while simultaneously undermining or outright ignoring contradictory arguments.

Much of the power of the paranoid style derives from fact that it is hidden in plain sight. Little of what the paranoid leader does in calling upon “a people” and crafting an enemy from which the people need to be kept secure is kept secret. They do not appear to be working behind closed doors, even if they are. Unlike earlier manifestations of the paranoid style, however,

the institutions that citizens once relied upon to shed light upon the opaque goings on in an administration have been significantly undermined. The danger of the current situation is that secrecy is in the open because of the proliferation and ubiquity of false narratives and “alternative facts.” The confluence of media messages coming from multiple venues and speakers allow for a kind of “public secrecy,” wherein attention economies have become so saturated and capricious that false narratives, alternative facts, and fake news obscure the reality and truth is increasingly more difficult to discern. Even when well-meaning citizens, organizations, and news agencies attempt to curb misinformation and report accurately, they are battling a hydra; when one false story is destroyed, two take its place. False and inaccurate information is easy to inject into public discourse, but much more difficult and time consuming to legitimately disprove.

The idea of public secrecy is by no means new with numerous disciplines addressing the idea in one way or another, including political science (Robertson 1982), queer studies (Sedgwick 1991), sociology (Ku 1997), anthropology (Taussig 1999), women’s studies (Mookherjee 2006), and legal studies (Young 2011) amongst others. The scholarship tends the idea of public secrecy in one of two ways. The first is what Michael Taussig (1999, 5) frames as “knowing what not to know.” Whether it is a small group or an entire public, such an interpretation of public secrecy is tantamount to being complicit in sustaining a state of appearances that does not reflect

reality for the sake of maintaining order and/or power. Susan Maret (2011, 11) calls attention to the second prominent conception of public secrecy, which stresses the immense challenge in knowing what is true and what is false when the public is oversaturated with too much information. As a result, the process of a public coming to a timely judgment on pertinent issues becomes complicated if not outright impossible (Gladwell 2007).

Rather than focusing on one conception of public secrecy, we argue that both contribute to and reinforce one another. Given the innumerable sources of news media and the ease with which their information (sometimes wholly illegitimate) may be spread via social media, the problems associated with oversaturation are exponentially worse since Gladwell documented them. The same can be said for Jack Bratich's (2006) analysis of public secrecy by way of spectacle in a post-9/11 U.S., which highlights the threat of cataclysmic war with a vague, unconventional enemy. Despite the harsh critiques of the Bush administration, current politicians nonetheless underscore the various ways in which they subscribed to traditional norms of governance. In the U.S. and across the Western world these norms have been all but abandoned. Drawing attention to this important issue, we argue that the tactics of public secrecy used by leaders Trump and Orbán, particularly their ability to divert attention through control of the media and rhetorical sleight of hand, serve as a contributing factor to the often *willful* blindness that allows the paranoid to work with the

appearance of transparency. Although the methods of obfuscation are distinct from traditional modes of secrecy, the end result is nonetheless the same. By drawing attention to this global issue, we hope to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of secrecy and call attention to the subtle power of public secrecy as an increasingly prominent authoritarian strategy.

### **Paranoid Styles in Hungary and the United States**

As Hofstadter notes, the paranoid style has a long and sordid history. There are many facets that make the contemporary moment different, but for the purposes of our analysis, we will focus on two aspects of this era that are relevant for our analysis of the paranoid style. First, the paranoid context in which we now find ourselves comes after a period marked by a shift toward liberalism. In 1989, following the end of Sovietism and the Cold War, there was a global transition toward Western liberal democracy and market economy. For Francis Fukuyama (1989, 3), this represented an “unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.” Fukuyama (1989, 4) argues that, “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period in post war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” Although not without his critics, Fukuyama was not alone in his sentiment that liberal democracy had won. Economist Amartya Sen (2001, 5) writes, “while democracy is not yet universally practiced, nor

indeed universally accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right." Thus, 1989 is a watershed moment in history when democratic governance became the *right way* to govern. As Fukuyama notes, many (citizens and political leaders alike) approached the end of the millennium with a sense of optimism that all opposition to liberalism would be exhausted. Given this, the current turn toward paranoia, and its associated nod to isolationism, xenophobia, and illiberalism, seems unexpected.

A second unique characteristic of this contemporary moment is how global it is in scale. Journalists and scholars alike have noted that authoritarian populism is on the rise in many Western democracies. Populism is meant to be a socio-political movement that represents the concerns of a largely alienated and underrepresented majority. However, populism has come to be code for far right-wing political movements. The right-wing party that becomes the populist party uses the language of "the people" and "democracy" in order to justify their almost unquestioned and unquestionable power. Populist leaders use dissatisfaction with "politics as usual," economic insecurity, and xenophobia as pivotal issues on which to base their claims that the popular opinion of the majority is that the country is headed in the wrong direction. From this platform, then, the leader can put forth actions that are justified given the desires of the people, even if

they are uninformed (sometimes *misinformed*) about the potential implications. Populism is now a driving political force in Europe and the United States. The Brexit vote, the election of Trump, far right-wing candidates in Austria, Italy, France, and The Netherlands, who have experienced great support (even though they did not win their elections), and the establishment of a strong right-wing government in Poland and a movement towards one in the Czech Republic, all are indications of the prominence of current populist movements. Hungary, however, was the first in Europe, and therefore provides an important case study with Orbán “a blueprint for a would-be strongman” (Frum 2017).

Due to its membership in the European Union, Hungary is by default a democracy. In order to be considered for admission, prospective countries must demonstrate an adherence to EU values such as freedom of speech, religion, press, and movement. However, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has unabashedly decried liberal democracy and instead favors an illiberal nation. In a 2014 speech given in Băile Tușnad, Romania, the Prime Minister proclaimed, “[The] Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an *illiberal state, a non-liberal state*” (Orbán 2014, emphasis added).

In calling for illiberalism, Orbán recognizes that his policies are unaligned with democratic ideals, but makes the argument he is acting in

accord with the Hungarian community. Thus, individual Hungarian citizens and members of the broader European community may reject Hungarian populist policies, but Orbán maintains that they are for the good of Hungarian identity. In the same speech, Orbán (2014) explained, “systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful.”

In order to understand the origins of the current political climate in Hungary, it is necessary to give some historical context. Hungary, like all of Central and Eastern Europe, was under Soviet rule from the end of World War II until 1989. Unlike other former Warsaw Pact countries, however, the transition from communism to market economy to democracy was relatively smooth. There was no demonstrable exchange of power. The Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party (MSzMP), the ruling party from 1956 to 1989 reformed themselves as the left-wing Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) in 1989 and continued to enjoy ruling power. Miklós Neméth, who was prime minister during the transition was not ousted but rather simply changed political affiliation from MSzMP to MSzP. With the exception of a brief period from 1998-2002 when the right-wing party Fidesz held control of the government under the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (the same Orbán who currently holds leadership), the liberals dominated leadership throughout the Communist era and well into the 2000s.

Hungary joined the EU with relative ease in 2004. At this time within Europe, Hungary was doing well in terms of social and economic issues, but among the populace there was a legitimate and growing distrust of the government. Writing at the time, political scientist Eric Beckett Weaver (2006, 157) predicted that “unless something changes radically in Hungarian politics, voters seem likely to remain entrapped in a choice between a former communist, corrupt socialist coalition, and a corrupt populist elite who insult the electorate’s intelligence for some time to come.” Weaver’s prediction came true in the same year that his article was written. In September of 2006, a recording featuring a long expletive-filled rant from then Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány was leaked. In this rant, Gyurcsány used fairly derogatory language to describe the country and his political party and even admitted to lying to the public. This leaked speech became the spark that ignited the powder keg of social, economic, and political tensions that had been primed and ready to explode throughout Hungary. Protestors from all over the country flooded into the capital city. The opposition parties, Fidesz or Jobbik, capitalized upon the dissent of the protesters to move their platform further to the radical right. Fidesz rhetorically aligned themselves with the will of “the people,” the protesters. Thus, they were well positioned to easily sweep the parliamentary elections in 2010. As a result, a populist right-wing government under the leadership of Viktor Orbán emerged victorious and positioned themselves as the people’s party.



Like Hungary, the cultural shifts over the past few decades in the United States have helped create an ideological landscape that has allowed contemporary right-wing populism to flourish. Hofstadter was inspired to write "The Paranoid Style" in large part because of Goldwater's campaign rhetoric. The paranoid style may have always been present to a certain degree, ebbing and flowing in times of crisis such as the constitutional restrictions noted earlier, but these are often considered shameful moments in American history with some even garnering presidential and congressional apologies. Nonetheless, one particular legacy of the Goldwater campaign has grown in power and remains today: the Southern Strategy.

Responding to the Civil Rights Movement and a demographic shift in party politics, the Southern Strategy characterizes the change from "Dixiecrat" conservative southern democrats to the Republican party as it exists in large part today. As African-American citizens left the South for Northern metropolitan areas throughout the "great migration" (1915-1960), Southern politics became increasingly tied to state's rights, segregation, evangelical religion, and conservative ideology. Barry Goldwater's Republican presidential campaign in 1964 and George Wallace's independent campaign in 1968, while unsuccessful in their short-term goal of winning the presidency, proved pivotal as they capitalized on the shifting racial demographics of the South and the growing tensions between the Democratic and Republican parties regarding a range of social issues.

Acknowledging the changing tide, Nixon adopted many of the same positions and tactics in order to entice Republican voters in the South, which ultimately won him the presidency and reelection. Once a stronghold of democratic politics, the South has been reliably Republican ever since and dominated by a conservative, Christian worldview.

Exacerbating the ever-growing ideological divide catalyzed by the Southern Strategy was the dismantling of the Fairness Doctrine. Implemented in 1949, the Fairness Doctrine was a policy laid down by the Federal Communications Commission that regulated broadcasters' coverage of controversial social, political, and economic issues. When addressing matters of public importance, broadcasters were required to air competing viewpoints fairly in order to provide citizens with a well-rounded perspective necessary to render an adequately informed judgment. The policy was repealed in 1987 on the grounds that it undermined the First Amendment rights of broadcasters. Given the exponential rise in media sources, the assumption was that the marketplace of ideas would provide enough competition such that the broadcasters, taken as a whole, would cover the issues without the need for governmental oversight (Ruane 2011). Removing the regulation resulted in a deluge of ideologically driven news media. While both liberals and conservatives have their broadcasting havens, conservatives were much more adept at creating wildly popular national programming. The advent of the Internet further magnified the ability of

consumers to cater their news experiences so as to complement and reinforce their ideological positions.

The terrorist attacks during and after 9/11 were decisive moments that continue to shape the socio-political landscape and offered rhetors in the U.S. and Europe a framework for defining internal and external threats. Following 9/11, the United States significantly increased its security infrastructure and ability to monitor communication at home and abroad. Waging wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to the numerous other military operations throughout the Middle East, Muslims became a primary target of fear, disgust, and paranoia overnight, even if they were long standing or natural born citizens. Since the terrorist cells were not affiliated with any particular government, the "War on Terror" provided ample resources to fuel the paranoid style as it undermined the traditional models of conflict in favor of a faceless, decentralized enemy force. As a result, xenophobia and isolationism became viable, if not necessary, positions for many Westerners.

Additionally, the global economic crisis beginning in 2008 provided yet another reason to be wary of an ill-defined "other." The U.S housing market alone is estimated to have lost over \$19 trillion in the immediate aftermath of the recession (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2012), yet untold trillions will be lost in the long-term. Moreover, nearly nine million jobs were lost throughout all corners of the U.S. workforce, many of whom also saw

significant losses to their retirement plans. Although the employment rate has returned to pre-recession numbers, wages have remained virtually stagnant for most workers, further increasing income inequality. The impact of the Great Recession is vast and will not be fully realized for years, if not decades. The immediate impact, however, is obvious in the political rhetoric deployed since, as politicians and pundits responded to the economic pinch felt by so many Americans. For our present purposes, the economic crisis continues to fuel populist appeals and serves as an economic threat that compliments the militaristic and cultural threat posed by Muslims. Combined, they set the stage for the internal and external threats utilized throughout paranoid discourse.

Despite their distinct political, cultural, and economic histories, Hungary and the United States share similar discursive themes as embodied by their populist leaders. The countries portray themselves as transparent, while portend conspiracy theories as a means to hide in plain sight. Indeed, with social media and 24-hour news coverage, the public is more aware than ever about what politicians *appear* to be doing, which becomes a performative element of the paranoid style. With their unique histories in mind, we argue that two prominent aspects of public secrecy-control of the media and sleight of hand-are embedded in the discourses of their paranoid leaders, yet manifest in discrete ways due to the different circumstances that led to their respective surges in populism.

## **Control of the Media**

Perhaps the most ubiquitous and effective way in which Trump and Orbán have been able to work in public secrecy is through the control of the media. The two leaders (and their respective parties and administrations) employ different strategies, but the end result is the same. The manipulations of the leader are hidden behind a veil of media chaos. For Trump, the media, unless favorable to him, is fake and conspiratorial. For example, on May 28<sup>th</sup> he tweeted, “the Fake News Media works hard at disparaging & demeaning my use of social media because they don't want America to hear the real story!” (@realDonaldTrump, May, 28, 2017). The media is the ideal scapegoat. Orbán has a far greater ability to construct and control the Hungarian mediascape, and justifies his control of media outlets, because unchecked they become enemies of the state.

Media in both the United States and Hungary are protected by the freedom of press, but in Hungary, Orbán found many means through which to control media dissemination. Such power is more available to him in a small country (population approximately 10 million), which is only a few decades removed from authoritarian rule. The media landscape in the United State can be characterized as an echo chamber. There are so many outlets producing messages in so many forums that consumers find it difficult to make sense of the many messages with which they are assaulted. Rather, as explained by the theory of selective exposure, audiences tend to seek out

media that affirm their already-held beliefs, and rarely venture from that space. To do so causes cognitive dissonance, an inability for the brain to comfortably negotiate information that it finds to be in conflict with strongly-held beliefs. While this is certainly not a new concept when it comes to media consumption, the 24-hour cable news cycle, the rise of Fox News and MSNBC, and social media use has magnified this. Individuals are flooded with an array sources and options for media consumption. What appears to be freedom of choice and access to endless sources has, oddly enough, turned into a prison of our own creation. Individuals have the illusion of control in this system, but are forced to pare down these choices, usually resulting in the creation of media bubbles and silos, echo chambers where individuals have selectively exposed themselves to like-minded thinking that not only doesn't challenge their worldviews, but sometimes represents "alternative facts" not rooted in reality. To venture out of these silos is to be inundated and buried under information that doesn't fit with the user's view of reality.

Selective exposure is impossible to avoid given the saturated media marketplace. It's true danger lies in the ideological amplification initiated by selective exposure and the echo chamber, which is capitalized upon by the paranoid leader. Ideological amplification occurs when an ideological position (e.g. liberal and conservative) is pushed toward a more extreme position, despite introducing new information or engaging counterarguments

(Sunstein 2007). Cass Sunstein (2003) notes three contributing elements: conformity, group polarization, and social cascades. Although the three feed off one another, the cascades and group polarization are more relevant to our discussion of media. This polarization allows for “secrecy” to flourish in plain sight; either audiences choose not to expose themselves to any disparate viewpoint or they are able to dismiss news that doesn’t fit their narrative.

Group polarization occurs “when group members, engaged in deliberation with one another, end up taking a more extreme position in line with their predeliberation tendencies” (Sunstein 2003, 11). For example, if a group of conservative supporters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment were to discuss gun rights, they are more likely to leave that exchange defending more extreme interpretations of gun rights. Important to note, there is often no new information contributed, just the power of the echo chamber. This problem is exacerbated when discussions take place online in self-selected enclaves. Internet users are able to select the individuals they follow on Twitter, the friends they have on Facebook, and the news organizations they visit. Since they are likely to seek out liberal or conservative websites that reaffirm their ideological beliefs, polarization is increasingly likely and growing ever more extreme. After years of unregulated cable news and talk radio, and the precipitous rise of social media, the paranoid leader has a group already primed to support their extreme positions. The result is an audience that

both accepts obfuscation, while contributing to it through the creation of self-limiting ideological positions that frame both the creation and consumption of public discourse. In an ironic twist, publicity, once thought of as an important aspect of healthy deliberation and a bulwark against the worst impulses paranoia, is now a successful part of the paranoid leader's strategy, whereas traditional forms of political secrecy, deliberations "behind closed doors," may in fact produce healthier, more critical discourse (Chambers 2004).

Donald Trump has used this abundance of (mis)information as a means of social control. Not only has his White House policies rewritten what is considered legitimate "news," but Trump has also taken this a step further by deeming certain outlets "fake news," and maligning the mainstream news enemy through his Twitter account and endorsing those sites, channels, and organization that paint him in a favorable light. This tweet, for example, shows both tactics: "The fake news media is going crazy with their conspiracy theories and blind hatred. @MSNBC & @CNN are unwatchable. @foxandfriends is great!" (@realDonaldTrump. February 15, 2017). Trump has essentially cashed in on a populace already divided not just politically, but in terms of reality and facts. He has deepened the chasm through Twitter. The irony that this medium was once seen as being a tool for democracy and open information (e.g., during the Arab Spring) should not be lost. At the same time, it also cannot be ignored that in Trump's tweets,



speeches, and interviews he adds fuel to the fire, more information to submerge actual fact beneath the ever-present cacophony of media stories.

While Trump attempts to control the narrative by maligning the press, Orbán has the ability to control it more directly. One of Orbán's first acts as Prime Minister was to change the mediascape to suit his purposes to help him maintain power and sway the political climate in Hungary. Orbán created a single, centralized media authority with a government appointed media official vested with ministerial-level powers such that media messages are filtered through the government. Media researcher Péter Bajomi-Lazar, explains,

in a plural landscape, media doesn't have much of an impact, but in Hungary, media have been put in the service of a majoritarian government dedicated to establishing ideological hegemony in an attempt to change public opinion and voting behavior in the long run in order to cement its power. (Howden 2016)

Such control is made possible because the majority of Hungarians get their news from television. As Anita (a pseudonym), another media researcher, explains, "you can find a lot of views and all sorts of different types of information online, so in that sense there is pluralism and all sorts of diversity, but as well all know, most Hungarians get their news from TV, from broadcasting and that is way more problematic" (personal communication, 2016).

As both Bajomi-Lazar and Anita indicate, the government control of the media in Hungary is successful because the mediascape is small, limited

in scope, and relatively homogenous. Thus, Orbán is able to manipulate media messages to create the illusion of openness, while, in reality, working in secrecy. There are only three broadcasting services in Hungary. The national station, MTVA, is essentially the mouthpiece of the government. Of the other two commercial stations, Anita states, "TV2 is now basically turning into another governmental channel. RTL is still standing but they're under pressure, constant pressure, because the government is using various means to influence media in Hungary" (personal communication, 2017). Anita asserts that the mediascape in Hungary is now a state media only representing the government's voice.

Control of media, however, is not limited to control of broadcast television. Print and online journalists also have found themselves under attack. In an article for the Web site *Refugees Deeply*, Daniel Howden provides examples of journalists from origo.hu (a well-known left-leaning online news source) and the *Budapest Business Journal*, who felt pressured to alter their stories or resign (Howden 2016). In both cases, the journalists resigned, rather than compromise their ethics; they felt remorse for not doing more to challenge the system from within and leaving a space in which journalists who aligned themselves with the ruling party could infiltrate the publications. In 2011, Klubrádió, a news and talk radio station known to be the voice of left liberal opposition that began broadcasting in 1999, was denied renewal of their license. This led to a fairly long legal battle which

Klubrádió eventually won in 2013. As Tamás Bodoky of *Átlátszó* (Transparent), a civil watchdog organization asserted, “there are fewer and fewer workplaces for journalists willing to expose corruption and they mostly exist on the internet” (Bienvenu 2016).

Perhaps the most notable example of the government’s overreach is the sudden closure of the country’s long-standing newspaper, *Népszabadság*. On September 30, 2015, the paper, one of the premier leftist national newspapers, was suddenly shut down. The owner cited loss of readership and loss of revenue, but employees saw the closing as Orbán’s doing. Journalists showed up to work only to find they were out of a job. Online readers logged on that morning to find a letter explaining the closure. Even the archives were removed, although they have since been restored. It is true that the paper was losing readers. While circulation numbers in the 1990s were in the hundreds of thousands, by 2013 circulation was only 46 thousand, but even with this drop off, the paper boasted the highest readership amongst the political dailies. As such, the closure of *Népszabadság* is seen as being highly symbolic. The word *népszabadság* means the people’s liberty. The left-leaning paper was founded during the 1956 Revolution and therefore is associated with the spirit of the people’s rebellion.

For both Trump and Orbán media is the enemy when it is the voice of opposition. The paranoid, in order to maintain his position of discursive

superiority, must frame the oppositional voices in the media as “fake,” “evil,” or conspiratorial. Given their disparate histories and media ecologies, Trump and Orbán must deploy different rhetorical strategies in order to achieve the control over the media they so desire. In the case of either, framing the oppositional voice as the enemy serves to illuminate a particular read of the media while simultaneously obscuring what truth the media may indeed offer. As public focus shifts to attend to the framing of media, other issues, policies, or ideologies are subsequently obscured. The result is an ability to be perceived of as a transparent voice of the people when their true machinations are hidden in plain sight. As such, the ability to engage in rhetorical sleight of hand becomes increasingly easy.

### **Sleight of Hand and the Element of Distraction**

A glut of information and limited attention spans allow the paranoid leader to draw attention to one particular issue while deflecting the importance of others. There are many ways in which paranoid rhetors distract the public but here we will focus on one: the creation of a real and present enemy. Through Twitter storms (Trump) or nation-wide referendums and billboard campaigns (Orbán), the leaders convince their public that 1) an enemy exists, 2) the enemy presents a real and present threat, and 3) the enemy is more dangerous than any other potential threat. This enemy is an ideal scapegoat into which all malice is poured. In his analysis of Adolf

Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Kenneth Burke calls attention to the rhetorical power of the scapegoat, especially for a population going through cultural, political, or economic tumult. The creation of a scapegoat provides "'curative' process" that allows one to transfer the complex, diverse problems of a society into a sacrificial other, "thereby accomplishing a purification by dissociation" (Burke 1974, 202).

Particularly important for the current rhetorical situation is the ability to provide a "noneconomic interpretation of economic ills" (Burke 1974, 204), which allows the paranoid a way to circumvent the complexities of the problems facing society. Thus, it follows that in sacrificing any responsibility for one's own problems and in identifying an individual group as the root of these problems, hatred and self-justification are allowed to grow. As time passes, this hatred builds until, as Hofstadter (2008, 201) outlines, "the enemy is thought of as being totally evil and totally unappeasable" and the only apparent solution is that "he must be totally terminated." As a result, these movements take the first steps of a process that can end only one of two ways: the complete eradication of the scapegoat or the failure of the movement.

As adherents to the paranoid style, both Trump and Orbán draw attention to evil forces in their speeches and rhetorical positioning. Trump relied upon the enemy of the "illegal" immigrant by Mexicans as "rapists" and "murderers." These people who purportedly committed the most heinous

crimes needed to be kept out at any cost, therefore necessitating the building of a wall that would cost billions of dollars. For Orbán, migrants are clearly posited as an external threat waiting to attack and the wall is not theoretical. In 2015, in response to the dramatic increase in asylum seekers entering coming into the EU, a razor wire fence was erected along Hungary's southern border specifically to keep them out. For Trump, democratic institutions become the "enemy of the people," which justified blocking press access and actively supporting the notion that American elections are rigged. Political opponents became the reason these evils pervaded all corners of American life and Trump positioned himself as the *only* person who could respond to these ubiquitous enemies. The political enemy for Orbán is the European Union, which he posits as serving the interests of Western Europe and does not stand for Hungary, as he does.

True to their paranoid style, the goals are unrealistic which can be a source of frustration for the leader. Trump has doubled-down on his goals when faced with opposition, tweeting "it is amazing how often I am right, only to be criticized by the media. Illegal immigration, take the oil, build the wall, Muslims, NATO!" (@realDonaldTrump, March 15, 2016). Trump reasserted his credibility and lists off the policy positions that he is correct about. Orbán makes similar claims. While not wont to make random statements on Twitter, in his speeches he holds himself up as the defender of Europe, the only one willing to stand up against the dangerous tide of

unchecked mass migration. In a 2017 essay written for the *National Review*, Orbán (2017) explains,

Hungary may not be counted among the larger EU member states, but owing to its geographical situation, it has more than once acted as a conduit of historic change...Responsibility for ensuring controlled crossing rests with those states on an EU external border, so we had no choice but to erect a physical barrier.

For the paranoid leader admittance of any type of wrongdoing or misguidance is not an option. Moreover, his public performance must exude strength thus allowing him to deflect criticisms as weak or complicit with the enemy conspirators.

The enemy is a careful creation—faceless enemies who lurk in the shadows, subversive cabals of particular ideological bent looking to unravel civil society, or terrorists lurking among the unwashed as they pour, unchecked, over the border. The enemy of each culture is, in part, an empty vessel, bound to a term or body of terms filled with culturally bound understandings. Michael Calvin McGee attempts to make sense of the power of these abstract terms and the way in which they are utilized to summon and promote collective commitment as a means of promoting a particular ideological or normative goal. McGee (1980, 6) defines the ideograph as "a high-order abstraction, representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal," a term that evokes a particular cultural understanding of reality. For a term to summon the ideological power of the collective at the level of an ideograph, McGee argues that it must

by-its-nature be abstract, representative of a collective, culture-bound series of beliefs, function to support an ill-defined normative goal, and in doing so, function to at times excuse eccentric behaviors or beliefs (McGee 1980, 15). The enemy is not, by itself, an ideograph. Rather, it is a part of our understanding of "security" as an ideographic expression. Consider, for instance, the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001. While the American public might not have been willing to sacrifice fundamental freedoms for the sake of stopping terrorism, a notion we see even today with the resistance to a surveillance state, significant sacrifices were made for the purposes of protecting the American "security." In his defense of the Act, George W. Bush (2006) stated:

The law allows our intelligence and law enforcement officials to continue to share information. It allows them to use tools against terrorists that they used against—that they use against drug dealers and other criminals. It will improve our nation's security while we safeguard the civil liberties of our people. The legislation strengthens the Justice Department so it can better detect and disrupt terrorist threats. And the bill gives law enforcement new tools to combat threats to our citizens from international terrorists to local drug dealers.

The focus on Bush's defense of the Act was not the enemy, but rather the security that the enemy undermined. In this way, the terrorist and the drug dealer become the scapegoat sacrificed on the altar of American "security." In the current context, when we consider the paranoid style utilized in the Orbán and Trump administrations, "security" rears its ugly head once again, but the nature of the enemy has changed significantly in both nature and



scope. This becomes particularly clear when we examine the manner in which peoples crossing the borders (whether they are called migrants, refugees, immigrants, aliens, or asylum seekers), are constructed as an enemy that threatens security.

In his the 2015 speech announcing his presidential run, Trump put a face on the Mexican immigrant:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (Washington Post Staff 2015)

In part, Trump's creation of the immigrant as enemy was dependent on drawing from an existential economic crisis. The proposed solution to this crisis was a border wall, funded by the Mexican government between the US and its southern neighbor. Although the illegal immigrant has long been viewed as an economic threat, Trump played to a narrative that could be traced back to the "War on Drugs," which began in the Nixon administration and gained additional traction under the presidencies of Richard Nixon and George H. W. Bush. Despite the fact that the war on drugs is now viewed as a failure, the narrative tying the immigrant to the trafficking of drugs along the U.S. southern border continues to persist as can be seen in the third presidential debate in October 2016; Trump's perspective on the immigrant continued to promote the narrative associating the immigrant with drugs and crime:

One of my first acts will be to get all of the drug lords, all of the bad ones—we have some bad, bad people in this country that have to go out. We're going to get them out. We're going to secure the border. And once the border is secured, at a later date, we'll make a determination as to the rest. But we have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out. (Zezima 2016)

While the immigrant poses a culturally understood economic and criminal threat, a second, more powerful manifestation of the paranoid style presents itself insofar as the immigrant is connected to Islamic terrorism. In many ways, terrorism represents the perfect enemy for a purveyor of the paranoid style, in that the terrorist, by its very nature, is a faceless enemy. Unlike the Communist threat of the Cold War, which was embedded within the context of a nation state, terrorism is a decentralized threat deeply embedded in the American cultural psyche since September 11<sup>th</sup>. As Trump stresses the immigrant as criminal narrative, he promotes the idea that suggests the terrorists wait to cross the border like wolves among sheep which lends itself to the kind of imaginative leap necessary to create and maintain a paranoid conspiracy. In a 2016 speech delivered in Youngstown, Ohio, Trump promoted the notion of extreme vetting of visa applicants to the US. In the speech, he suggested that they presented an existential threat to the "security" of American citizens, a claim made more plausible by the fears present within post-9/11 US culture, particularly after terrorist attacks in Brussels, France, and Germany in the months following his speech. In one sense, framing the immigrant as enemy is designed to evoke an ideological

response, drawing the current notions of the enemy to safety and security as a means of defining the relationship between the culture and the immigrant. At the same time, the manner in which Trump frames the immigrant as enemy draws upon the power of spectacle in public secrecy. The identity of the enemy, shrouded in abstraction, performed controversially, limits the interpretation of the identity of the enemy behind a wall of public outrage and discourse. "The secret has become spectacular, renewing the power of the spectacle as it appropriates the powers of secrecy for itself" (Bratich 2006, 498).

While Trump merely suggested a relationship between the immigrant and terrorism with his campaign speeches and tweets regarding a potential "Muslim ban," he made the connection between the immigrant, terrorism, "security" and the economy during his acceptance speech for the RNC nomination: "The American People will come first again. My plan will begin with safety at home—which means safe neighborhoods, secure borders and protection from terrorism. There can be no prosperity without law and order" (Associated Press 2016). Later in the speech, the Republican nominee for president seamlessly moved between discussions of stopping Islamic terrorism, vetting of Syrian refugees, and his profound sense of concern regarding violence at the U.S./Mexico border: "Of all my travels in this country, nothing has affected me more deeply than the time I have spent with the mothers and fathers who have lost their children to violence spilling

across our border” (Associated Press 2016). In making the terrorist and the immigrant synonymous, Trump evokes not one, but two ideologically fueled paranoid responses from his audience. First, he draws on the cultural history of America and terrorism to stoke the fears born out of the post-9/11 world and the paranoid concerns of the Bush administration. Secondly, Trump links those very fears to fundamentally change the cultural understanding of the immigrant—presenting the immigrant, the criminal, and the terrorist as synonymous and creating the opportunity for drastic measures to address the problem. After all, what American wouldn’t want to stop an army of terrorists from pouring over the southern border? In both cases, the power of linking the terrorist and the immigrants to “the enemy” limits the responses of the audience within the field of appropriate responses, obscuring what is possible beneath an ideologically grounded “appropriate” response.

Orbán has used similar strategies as Trump to frame outsiders as enemy. For Orbán, the outsiders in question are asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and northern Africa who began entering the country in unprecedented numbers in June of 2015. Their goal was to reach Germany, a country purportedly welcoming to refugees. However, to get to Germany, they first had to enter Hungary as the border country of the Schengen Area, the region within which free travel is permitted. Furthermore, according to the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers must request asylum in the EU

country where they first arrive. Thus, Hungary was overwhelmed with asylum requests. Interestingly enough, while Hungary was not prepared to meet the needs of the asylum seekers, Orbán was fully prepared to demonize them as a threat as he began the construction of the migrant as enemy months before the “crisis” began. Migration was not considered a national concern until January 2015. Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, Orbán made a now famous speech in which he warned the Hungarian people of the dangers associated with economic migration. At the time of that speech, Fidesz had experienced a decline in support, but the speech appeared to resonate with the populace. With that migration became an important political cause to rally public support. As one political analyst claimed, “as long as migration is top of the agenda, [Fidesz’s] popularity goes up. They have to keep up the momentum” (Howden 2016). In the months that followed, the government launched a national consultation meant to measure the public response on migrants through push-poll survey questionnaires. In letters sent with the questionnaires, Orbán writes to Hungarian citizens, “economic migrants cross our border illegally, and while they present themselves as asylum-seekers, in fact they are coming to enjoy our welfare systems and the employment opportunities our country has to offer.. This represents a new type of threat – a threat which we must stop in its tracks” (Website of the Hungarian Government 2017). With such biased questions as “Do you agree with the Hungarian government that support should be

focused more on Hungarian families and the children they can have rather than on immigration?," the survey revealed (or constructed) an anti-immigrant bias. As a result, the government engaged in an anti-immigrant, xenophobic billboard campaign, which displayed the country's stance and sent a message to migrants not to come to Hungary (Timmer 2017).

The billboard campaign preceded the actual influx of refugees. In June 2015, the crisis, as it came to be known, began. From June to September, thousands of asylum seekers fled across Hungary's southern border. An unprecedented number of volunteers mobilized to provide assistance to the refugees, but the government, already having taking an anti-immigrant stance, was unmotivated to act in manner that facilitated refugees' movement through the country. Instead, the government mandated the construction of a fence which began in July. In September 2015, the fence was closed at the Hungarian-Serbian border and in October at the Hungarian-Croatian border. They <who is they? made "irregular border crossing" illegal and declared Serbia a safe third country so that if an asylum seeker entered through Serbia, they could be sent back

Before the closing of the border fence, volunteers continued to provide refugees in the train station with food, clothing, tents, charging stations, and Wi-Fi access. Meanwhile, the government's position on the migrants made the volunteers into criminals. As the spokesperson of the government explained: "Is it an act of volunteerism or help or is it contributing to the

self-treating mechanism that's actually desired by the government, by the agencies, authorities trying to cope with this? If you give free Wi-Fi at Keleti train station, everybody is going to go there....it's against the law" (personal communication, 2016). To be clear, no volunteer was ever arrested or under threat of arrest, but the government treated the migrants as criminals, and thus helping them was ultimately a criminal act.

Humanitarians have faced recent threats by the current administration. On June 13, 2017, a bill passed Parliament that will require additional measures for foreign backed NGOs, a move that has been called an "intimidation of civil society" (Tait 2017). NGO workers, humanitarians, and volunteers are also seen to be on the wrong side of public opinion. This public opinion has been carefully crafted through not only the survey and the billboard campaign, but also government control of the media discussed previously. Meanwhile, the government has been bolstered. Due to a failure to act on the part of the EU and a movement toward right-wing populism throughout the Europe, EU policy on migrants and refugees has started to look more like Hungary's – one of exclusion. Hungary supports a policy of taking care of refugees outside of the borders of the European Union. **They** have been vocal supporters of an arrangement with Turkey in which the EU would provide funding to Turkey to keep refugees there. Orbán sees Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as evidence that the Hungarian policies are

to be lauded. In a speech, Trump said that Hungary has gone from being stigmatized and marginalized to being on the right side of history.

As in the United States, the effort to protect the borders in Hungary stems from the need to ensure the "security" of the citizenry. Orbán's xenophobic campaign began as a reaction to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris and every subsequent European attack has bolstered Orbán's claim that his anti-immigrant stance is the only right and moral one. For example, in a March 15, 2016 speech, Orbán decried European policies of integration and tolerance. "Europe is not free," he asserted,

Because freedom begins with speaking the truth. Today in Europe it is forbidden to speak the truth...It is forbidden to say that those arriving are not refugees, but that Europe is threatened by migration. It is forbidden to say that tens of millions are ready to set out in our direction. It is forbidden to say that that immigration brings crime and terror to our countries. It is forbidden to point out that the masses arriving from other civilizations endanger our way of life, our culture, our customs, and our Christian traditions. (Orbán 2016)

Orbán's speech continues in this manner. There have, however, been no attacks or threats of attacks on Hungary's soil. Furthermore, the success of the actions of the government will likely ensure that such attacks do not happen. The border fence serves as a visible reminder that the people are both protected and in danger. Because it is a fence that is easily traversable by cheap wire cutters, constant vigilance is needed in the form of border patrol guards. Due to recent legislation, patrollers can send anyone they catch back to the transit zone to legally make their asylum claim, a claim



that is almost guaranteed to be denied. Doctors without Borders have reported that those caught by the border guards are beat and forced under threat of bodily harm to admit their guilt of illegally crossing the border (Médecins Sans Frontières 2017). The guards, however, are justified in their actions because they are protecting the safety of the Hungarian people and even the people of the entire European Union.

As Orbán posits in this speech and many others, migrants threaten both Hungarian physical safety and economic livelihood. Recent terrorist attacks throughout Europe can lead to a heightened sense of fear. Evidence that these attacks have largely been carried out by radicalized second and third generation immigrants does little to alleviate fears that the terrorists are steaming in through open borders. Thus events, traumatic as they are, become tools populist leaders can use to maintain fear. Additionally, migrants threaten economic security. Many Hungarians report feeling a lack of economic security since salaries are low compared to other European countries and Hungarians find it difficult to save. As such, this too is an easily manipulatable fear. The billboard campaign, mentioned previously, draws upon both of these inherent fears. For example, one message read, "If you come to Hungary, you must keep our laws." A second read, "Do not come to Hungary to take our jobs." These messages were ostensibly sent to the migrants, but they were written in Hungarian – a language one can assume asylum seekers coming from the Middle East and Northern Africa do

not speak – so it is clear that the intended audience was the Hungarian public. Like the fence, these billboards sent the message to Hungarians that they are under threat but that their government could protect them.

Through Trump's speeches and tweets and Orbán's speeches, consultations, and billboards, both leaders carefully crafted a message of paranoia and fear. In doing so, they have distracted the public's attention away from other issues of great political importance. This rhetorical sleight of hand, through the creation of existential threats, provides another clear example of open secrecy.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we looked at the use of the paranoid style of two world leaders, highlighting how they have used the performance of "openness" to actually engage in extreme and dangerous forms of public secrecy. Trump and Orbán have controlled media narratives, constructed internal and external threats, and engaged in misdirection. At its most extreme, the American and Hungarian publics are the victims of gaslighting. Attempts on the part of both of these leaders to lead the public to question their own understandings of collective memory and history are exemplified through their public secrecy by which they assert control and maintain the illusion of truth in deception.

It is important to compare these two leaders; although they come from two very different nations with very different histories, since coming

onto the political stage, Trump and Orbán have employed very similar strategies and messages, representative of the paranoid style imbued with public secrecy. The two have followed very similar trajectories and in many cases Orbán, as a benefit of being in office longer, has already achieved what Trump has set out to do.

The relationship between Trump and Orbán beyond this theoretical one is unclear. Orbán could be seen in the now infamous video of the world leaders at NATO in May 2017 when Trump physically pushed the Prime Minister of Montenegro out of the way in order to move to the front of the pack. Prior to this moment, Trump was talking to Viktor Orbán. Another connection can be seen through the appointment of Sebastian Gorka, a Hungarian-American with clear connections to right-wing groups in Hungary, who served as the deputy assistant to the president until May 2017, when he was asked to leave his position. Orbán was the first world leader to endorse Trump's candidacy and announced that his inauguration represented the "end of multilateralism," and thus asserted that his country (and others) would now have carte blanche to put their interest above those of their neighbors and the broader good. In a *National Review* article, Orbán praised Trump specifically on three counts: first, his proposal to create the best secret service in the world; second, his abandonment of the policy of exporting democracy "as if it were soap or a cell phone, usable in all markets with no side effects;" and third, Trump's promise to reinforce borders. Orbán

(2017) writes, “Trump’s proposals at least acknowledges such threats and propose solutions to them Europe by contrast has avoided dealing realistically with threats.”

With the recent emergence of right-wing populism continuing to gain prominence, Western democracies are enduring yet another wave of growing pains as they reflect upon and respond to an ever evolving spate of political, economic, technological, and cultural changes. The impact of these changes and the responses to them may very well echo for generations to come, which makes the present moment all the more critical. Not all national or international threats are formulated through clandestine means; in the cases of Orbán and Trump, the secrecy and manipulation is happening in plain sight. History may not be a guide for the future, but it nonetheless provides a series of cautionary tales and we would be wise to heed them.

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