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The new Hungarian middle class?

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ABSTRACT
According to a widely held view, a broad and strong middle class is a criterion for social stability and a decisive force for democratization. This paper first examines this normative concept of the middle class before investigating how the situation of the middle class changed in Hungary after the regime change and how broad and strong it is today. Finally, we examine to what extent today's Hungarian middle class can be regarded as a pillar of democracy and an engine of democratization.

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Toward the end of the first decade after the regime change, Angelusz and Tardos (1998)—two leading Hungarian scholars—pointed out that while the middle class had become wider and stronger in the last two decades of state socialism, this was not accompanied by an increase in civic-mindedness; and while embourgeoisement and democratization indeed took place after the regime change, the process of middle-class formation stopped and the middle class weakened. They referred to these contradictory processes as the central paradox of the development of Hungarian society. This situation was indeed paradoxical because a broad and strong middle class is widely considered to be linked to embourgeoisement, democratization and the spread of civic values. This paper focuses on recent developments regarding these two processes. An analysis of this issue is all the more important, given that by the 2010s, this contradiction seemed to have disappeared, and the paradox seemed to have resolved itself: according to recent research the middle class is narrowing and the process of embourgeoisement and the spread of civic values that started with the regime change have come to a halt, despite all the optimistic expectations to the contrary.

Research focusing on changes in the social structure after the regime change has shown that the Hungarian middle class has been shrinking rather than growing. According to these findings, as a result of growing inequalities, Hungarian society has become increasingly polarized, meaning that the proportion of people belonging to the middle class has decreased, while the size of the lower classes and, to a lesser degree, that of the upper class has increased (Kolosi 2000; Tóth 2016a, 2016b; Éber 2016). In fact, as István György Tóth has pointed out, in Hungary, people with average income

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typically do not possess the social status associated with the middle class, as a significant portion of this group suffers from various forms of material deprivation. The middle class, in this sociological sense, is thus rather to be found in groups with higher income.

However, according to recent publications, there is another reason why the middle strata in post-regime-change Hungary cannot be regarded as a true middle class. This is due to the fact that the normative implications associated with the concept of the middle class simply do not apply to them. This conclusion is best exemplified by the book *A magyar polgár* [The Hungarian Bourgeois/Citoyen] (Morcsányi and Tóth 2016), which comprises a multitude of studies examining the middle class, the chances of embourgeoisement and the spread of civic-mindedness using different approaches. The title of Szalai's (2020) latest work, "Middle Class Without Civic Values" also illustrates this conclusion. According to her, social exclusion as well as the dependence on the state explain the deficit in civic and democratic values among the Hungarian middle class. It is also striking that a recent study (Sik and Szeitl 2016) analyzing the constitutive elements of the societal figure of "citoyen/bourgeois," focusing not only on the material dimension but also on the role of education, political participation, and commitment to democratic values, comes to the conclusion that this group constitutes only a small minority in Hungarian society (about 4% of the adult population).

In the following, we will first reconstruct the widely held belief that the middle class constitutes the basis of democracy, as this is the theoretical framework within which the growth of the middle class and the democratic development of a society can be connected to each other. Then, we will seek to answer two questions: How wide and how strong is the middle class in today's Hungary based on its structural characteristics? And, bearing in mind the normative implications of the concept of the middle class, to what degree can the middle class in Hungary be regarded as an engine of democratic development?

Notes on the concept of the middle class

The middle class is one of the most controversial concepts in sociology and social or political philosophy, and the use of the term raises numerous problems and questions. To a significant extent, the meaning of the term depends on the time, culture and language context in which it is used. In the Hungarian context, the concept of the middle class overlaps with the term "polgár," which combines the notions of bourgeois and citoyen in one. A "polgár" is thus a person who is independent and enjoys self-determination, ideally in economic, cultural, as well as political terms. As such, this Hungarian expression merges the social categories of bourgeois (people defined by their wealth) and citoyen (people defined by their committed participation in public life).[1] The Hungarian concept mirrors its German equivalent, as the term "Bürger" also incorporates both of these two meanings. In Hungarian academic discourse, embourgeoisement is closely linked with the spread of civic-mindedness, as expressed by the social process known as "polgárosodás," which is very similar to the German term "Verbürgerlichung." Both in German and in Hungarian, the concept refers to embourgeoisement and the spread of civic values at the same time. In the following, we will

account for both meanings of polgár and polgárosodás by choosing formulations reflecting this dualism; however, where only one of the two meanings applies, the terms citoyen or bourgeois will be used instead.

Although in the Hungarian context, the middle class is closely linked to the normatively laden bourgeois/citoyen ("polgár") concept, the difficulties associated with defining it also arise in any other society. The dominant concept of the middle class incorporates two layers of meaning. First, the term middle class denotes a unit in the social structure which is positioned somewhere between the lower and upper classes. Second, the middle class is linked to specific normative elements. This dualism is apparent in a recent publication of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in which the authors state that

> the success and well-being of the middle class is of crucial importance for whole societies as "it contributes to economic growth, as well as to social and political stability" (Pressman 2007, 181). A large and healthy middle class provides a large labor force, increases consumption and serves as a sort of 'buffer' between the two extremes, mitigating class struggle and benefiting democracy (Vaughan-Whitehead et al. 2016, 3).[2]

According to this definition, which dates back to Aristotle by way of Lipset and Barrington Moore, the middle class is not only an interesting object of study in itself, but also allows us to draw conclusions regarding the whole society. In Aristotle's view (2017), a wide middle class is not only important for moderating social inequality, but also because those in the middle possess the civic virtues required to govern the polis. After an in-depth reconstruction of the historical genealogy of Western societies, Barrington Moore comes to the conclusion: "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" (1966, 418). According to Seymour Martin Lipset, in developed capitalist societies, the middle class plays an important role because "A large middle-class tempers [social] conflict by rewarding moderate and democratic parties and penalizing extremist groups" (1960, 66). Lispet argues, based on a comparison between European, North and South American and a few Middle Eastern countries, that the more developed a society, the wider and stronger its middle class and the better the chances of democratization and democratic stability. Fukuyama also believes that the middle class was the basis of democracy in Western societies, since highly developed societies tend to have a large middle class whose economic situation is stable.[3] By contrast, in less developed countries where the middle class is smaller and economically weaker, it frequently lends its support to authoritarian regimes (Fukuyama 2014, 438–43).[4]

In recent years, however, new analyses have emerged, mainly in the field of political science, that criticize this normative model of middle-class formation (Bellin 2000). Chen (2013, 3–7; Chen and Lu 2011, 706–7) distinguishes between two groups of theories: a unilinear (in this paper, normative) model, according to which middle-class formation and economic development not only contribute to greater democracy but also to its stabilization; and the contingency model (favored by him), which rejects the existence of a clear connection between economic development, democracy and the middle class, given the unsteady political tendencies of the latter. According to Chen, members of the middle class usually become supporters of democracy if they do not depend on the state; by contrast, if the welfare of the middle class depends on the state and its members are afraid of losing their socioeconomic status, they will support the current political establishment even if it is authoritarian (Chen 2013; Chen and Lu 2011).[5]

The normative approach to the middle class envisions it as a quasi-universal class that bears great resemblance to the way Marx described the proletariat and its social role. In both cases, the interests of a specific class are deemed to be identical with the interests of society at large. Marx depicts the proletariat as the basis for the creation of a just society in exactly the same manner as the proponents of the middle-class theory of democracy portray the middle class as a guarantor of social stability, prosperity, and democratic development. Viewed from this angle, the middle class and the proletariat are therefore rivals when it comes to determining the general interests of society.

Social categorization thus plays an important role in class formation (Bourdieu 1985). Any two-class theory of society that divides it into the many and the few always carries within itself the need to overcome the current establishment. A three-class division with a wide middle, however, implies the maintenance of the status quo (Dahrendorf 1961; Popitz et al. 1972 [1957]). The debates around the development of British society after the Second World War illustrate the significance of class-based classification. How do we classify a manual worker paid by piece rates, doing serious overtime, who is—according to his contract—in an asymmetric relationship with his employer, but whose income and consumption level exceed those of many white-collar employees? In other words, does an affluent worker belong to the proletariat or the middle class (Goldthorpe et al. 1971)? This problem presented a special dilemma for the British Labor Party: If its political strategy were based on the former position, the result would be a more radical, anti-capitalist politics, while the latter approach would demand a more conservative stance (Goldthorpe et al. 1971, 157–95). In any case, "fictional" classes or "classes on paper" can only become real social classes if they are politically defined, represented and mobilized (Bourdieu 1985).

It is the dual—descriptive and normative—concept of the middle class that views the decoupling of the processes of middle-class formation and the spread of civic values as a paradox, in line with Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos. The two authors also point out that the widening and strengthening of the middle class does not necessarily go hand in hand with the spread of civic values and democratization; these processes can—and indeed often do—separate from each other.[6] As a result, we will first examine the two processes of middle-class formation and the development of civic values separately before drawing conclusions about their relationship in light of empirical data.

This is all the more necessary in the case of Hungary. While the state socialist *élite* set the proletariat as its social base, the regime change brought with it vague promises and desires of middle-class formation, embourgeoisement and the spread of civic values as well as democratization. Thus, in the following, we will analyze the latest tendencies in middle-class formation by examining changes in the Hungarian social structure, before turning to the issue of democratic development and the spread of civic values. It is important to note that our analysis covers the period up to the end of the 2010s. While it is highly probable that the COVID-19 crisis, which erupted at the beginning of 2020, will have significant effects on the social processes under discussion, their exact nature cannot yet be determined.

Changes in the social structure

In the following, we will examine the transformation of Hungarian society from three different points of view in order to better understand the situation of the middle class. To assess how Hungarian society has changed since the regime change, we will first look at the occupational structure, followed by the income distribution, before finally examining people's subjective perceptions of their social position. This will provide insights into three processes associated with middle-class formation. The first of these is structural mobility, which denotes the extent to which changes in society make it possible for individuals to leave their parents' or their own occupational group and acquire middle-class occupations. The second process refers to changes in the income structure and consumption, that is, the share of the population that is able to maintain middle-class living standards. The third and final process are changes in subjective identification, meaning the percentage of those who consider themselves to be part of the middle class.

By scrutinizing these three processes, we can illustrate the main characteristics of middle-class formation in Hungarian society. However, this approach is limited in at least two respects. On the one hand, in order to gain a better understanding, further variables—such as education, cultural practices and social networks—could be included in the analysis. On the other hand, we only aim to identify the main tendencies rather than to investigate how the various dimensions of structural change interrelate.

Occupational structure

Examining the occupational structure is a key tool for the delineation of the middle class, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the commonly used schemes based on occupational characteristics and labor market status are predominantly hierarchical (Huszár 2013). These schemes thus make it possible to estimate the share of those belonging to the upper, middle or lower strata of society. On the other hand, occupation also allows us to consider certain quality dimensions of stratification. For example, various categories can thus be differentiated, such as blue-collar and white-collar workers or the special group of private entrepreneurs.

After the regime change, two main processes determined the transformation of the occupational structure in Hungary. The first was the drastic decline in the employment-to-population ratio after 1990, which resulted partly in mass unemployment and partly in the flow of the economically active into various forms of inactivity. Although unemployment began to decrease from the end of the 1990s onward, the low employment ratio remained a central problem in Hungary during the first 20 years after the regime change. The other main trend was the polarization of the occupational structure, as the positions on the extremes expanded at the expense of the middle (Bukodi and Záhonyi 2004; Bukodi 2006; Kolosi and Pósch 2014; Huszár 2015; Huszár and Záhonyi 2018).

The two main processes of the first two decades after the regime change therefore had a negative effect on the enlargement of the middle class, not to mention that unemployment again started to grow after the 2008 global financial crisis. After 2010, however, the labor market went through a fast-paced transformation. Table 1

Table 1. Distribution of the employed population aged 15–64 by occupational classes in Hungary, %.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2011–2018
					%				
Managers	5.8	5.1	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.5	−1.3
Professionals	15.8	16.1	16.0	15.5	15.6	15.0	14.6	15.2	−0.5
Technicians and associate professional employees	12.9	13.3	13.9	13.9	13.5	13.5	13.9	13.6	0.6
Small entrepreneurs	8.5	8.2	8.0	8.0	7.7	7.6	7.6	7.5	−1.0
Clerks and skilled service employees	11.7	11.7	11.4	11.4	11.5	11.7	11.4	11.6	−0.1
Skilled industrial employees	26.0	25.7	26.1	26.1	25.9	26.3	27.0	27.5	1.6
Lower status employees	19.3	19.8	19.8	19.8	21.0	21.1	20.8	20.1	0.8
Persons in the labor force whose occupation or status in employment is not known				0.4	0.2	0.1			0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.0
	In thousands of people								
Managers	218	192	187	202	200	204	207	198	−20
Professionals	587	612	617	629	650	646	638	671	84
Technicians and associate professional employees	482	505	535	564	565	582	608	598	116
Small entrepreneurs	317	313	308	326	320	327	335	330	13
Clerks and skilled service employees	436	446	439	466	479	502	497	513	77
Skilled industrial employees	967	976	1,007	1,061	1,080	1,134	1,179	1,214	247
Lower status employees	718	750	765	807	876	910	910	886	168
Persons in the labor force whose occupation or status in employment is not known				16	7	3			0
Total	3,724	3,793	3,860	4,070	4,176	4,309	4,373	4,411	687

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey (LFS).

summarizes the changes in the occupational structure in Hungary according to the occupational scale of the *European Socioeconomic Groups* (EseG).[7]

By examining the development in the proportion of the various occupational groups, smaller changes can be observed, which mostly follow earlier trends. The most noticeable characteristic of the data series is, however, the increase in the share of the lower occupational groups. While in 2011, skilled industrial employees and lower-status employees made up just slightly over 45% of the total, this number was closer to 48% in 2018. This aside, the share of almost all other groups decreased, most significantly that of managers and small entrepreneurs. Besides the lower occupational groups, only the share of technicians and associate professional employees increased in recent years. As such, the occupational structure did not polarize further after the two decades following the regime change, but definitely shifted downwards.

It is important to note, however, that these changes occurred in parallel with a significant increase in the number of the employed. While in 2011, the number of people in the labor market was 3.7 million, by 2018, this had grown to 4.4 million. Except for managers, employment grew across all groups; most significantly so in the lower occupational classes, but this growth was present at all levels of the hierarchy. As a result of these changes, the number of jobs that can be attributed to the middle class also increased by 10%, which suggests that after the freezing of social mobility following the regime change (Bukodi, Paskov and Nolan 2017) a certain shift toward the middle class took place in the second half of the 2010s.

These processes are not unique to Hungary at all. After the global financial crisis, unemployment decreased dynamically in most countries of the European Union while the number of the employed increased. The fundamental characteristics of the Hungarian occupational structure, which make it stand out in international comparison, did not change. After Bulgaria, Hungary's share of unskilled and skilled industrial workers is the highest in the EU, while the percentage of the managerial and professional occupational groups is especially low in international comparison.[8]

Income distribution, living conditions

The income-based approach is another frequently applied method for determining the size of the lower, upper and middle classes and to draw conclusions about the general characteristics and transformation of society. According to this approach, a society is to be viewed as a middle-class society if the number of people whose income is significantly higher or lower than the median is low, with the vast majority of the population scattered around the middle zone of the income distribution.

Several comprehensive analyses have recently been conducted that apply this approach to examine the situation of the middle class in Hungary and in other European countries (Vaughan-Whitehead et al. 2016; Tóth 2016a, 2016b; OECD 2019; Eurofound 2019). These studies have diagnosed a significant increase in income inequality in the years after the global economic crisis, which has resulted in a narrowing of the middle class across Europe, including in Hungary. If we examine only the structure of income distribution, the share of people with incomes close to the median is not at all low in Hungary. However, an important feature of the Hungarian middle-income strata is that its financial situation and living conditions are rather unstable,

and that a significant portion of people in this group are affected by material deprivation. This is the reason why Tóth (2016b) comes to the conclusion that the middle class cannot be identified with the middle-income group. In a sociological sense, the middle class is thus rather to be found in the top deciles of Hungary's income distribution.

However, in the years following the recession due to the global economic crisis, Europe as well as Hungary experienced a long economic boom of unprecedented duration, the positive effects of which manifested not only on the labor market but also at the level of incomes. Earlier studies—including those by Tóth (2016a, 2016b)—that diagnosed the decline of the middle class in Hungary used data from the worst years of the recession, which failed to reflect the positive trends of the subsequent boom. But what happened to the Hungarian middle-income groups during this period?

During the past 15 years, the middle segment of the income distribution was at its widest during the global economic crisis and in the years directly preceding it (Figure 1). In the 2010s, as a result of the apparent increase in income inequality, the middle-income group first narrowed and then stagnated. However, as confirmed by Tóth's results, compared to other EU member states, the middle-income segment in Hungary is still relatively large.[9]

The latest studies also support István György Tóth's finding that the position of the Hungarian middle-income group is especially weak by European standards. Although in recent years, those at the top of the social structure have accumulated considerable wealth and income,[10] there have been no significant changes regarding income distribution as a whole. In fact, compared to the EU average, the Hungarian median equivalent income—expressed in Euros—has stagnated in the last 15 years. As regards the incomes between 70% and 130% of the median that define the middle-income group, among the EU member states only Romania and Bulgaria have lower absolute thresholds than Hungary. Hungarian income levels are therefore low even compared to other countries in the East-Central European region. And compared to Northern and Western European countries, the Hungarian middle-income group is positioned well below the poverty line. However, the economic boom from 2012–2013 to the end of the 2010s has brought significant changes in one aspect. Besides income levels, Western European countries differ considerably from their Eastern counterparts in that absolute poverty is a marginal rather than a mass phenomenon. It seems, however, that this division has become blurred to some extent. Based on EU statistics, the index of material deprivation has improved significantly in recent years, and it did so most significantly in the poorest EU countries. By 2018, compared to the worst figures measured during the crisis, the share of those affected by material deprivation had decreased from 45.7% to 20.9% in Bulgaria, from 32.1% to 16.8% in Romania and from 27.8% to 10.1% in Hungary. This process may be highly important for middle-class formation, as it indicates not only its width but also its strength or weakness (Tóth 2016b, 79–80). Figure 2 shows the changes in material deprivation at different levels of the income structure in recent years.

The index of material deprivation, which showed a decreasing trend in the period preceding the crisis, started to rise sharply after 2008, affecting primarily those in the lower half of the income structure. In 2013, the worst year on record, material

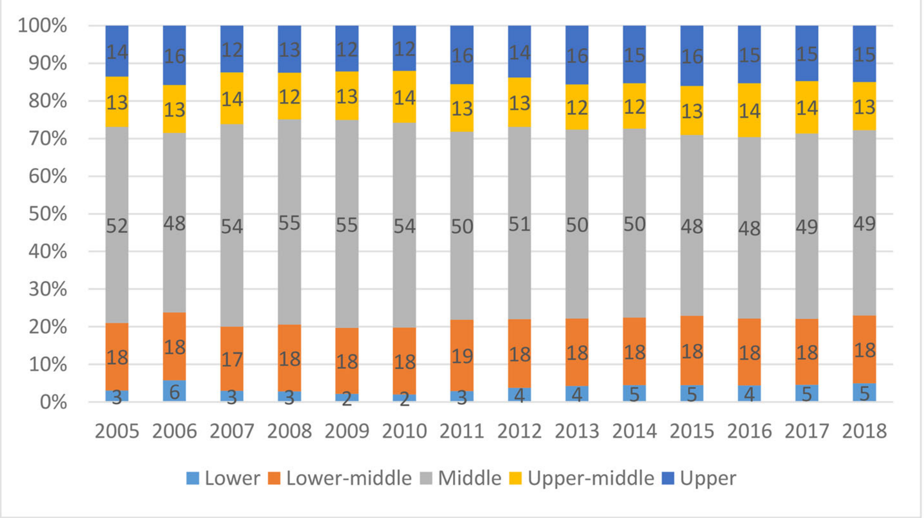

Figure 1. Distribution of the population by income groups in Hungary (%). *Source:* European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).
Note: The figure shows the distribution of the population by different income groups, which are defined relative to the median equivalent disposable income. The group borders are the following: lower: lower than 40% of median income (MD40), lower-middle: MD40-MD70, middle: MD70-MD130, upper-middle: MD130-MD160, upper: MD160+.

deprivation affected two-thirds of the first quintile, one-third of the second quintile and more than 20% of the third quintile. After 2013, this trend reversed and by 2016–2017, the index was even more favorable than in the years preceding the crisis. In addition, these positive changes had an impact at all levels of the income structure: The rate of material deprivation fell to about one-third in the fifth quintile, to 10% in the fourth and nearly disappeared in the case of the third quintile.[11]

Some of the variables of the deprivation index are exceptionally relevant for middle-class living standards and thus ought to be highlighted. While in the worst years of the crisis, 67% of the population could not afford to go on vacation, 27% had arrears and 58% said that they could only barely make a living from their income, in 2018 these figures stood at 43%, 13% and 35%, respectively. As such, these changes indicate significant improvements compared to the first half of the 2010s, while also illustrating the vulnerability of the middle class (OECD 2019).

Subjective social position

After examining the occupational structure and the income distribution, we will now focus on how the affected individuals themselves perceive their social position. While such subjective beliefs are ill-suited to capturing the reality of the social structure, how people view their place in society may have greater significance for their actions and attitudes than their objective social position (Harcsa 2018; Huszár 2018).

Among others, Ágnes Utasi (2000) has examined how individuals subjectively assessed their social position in the decade following the regime change. Her results

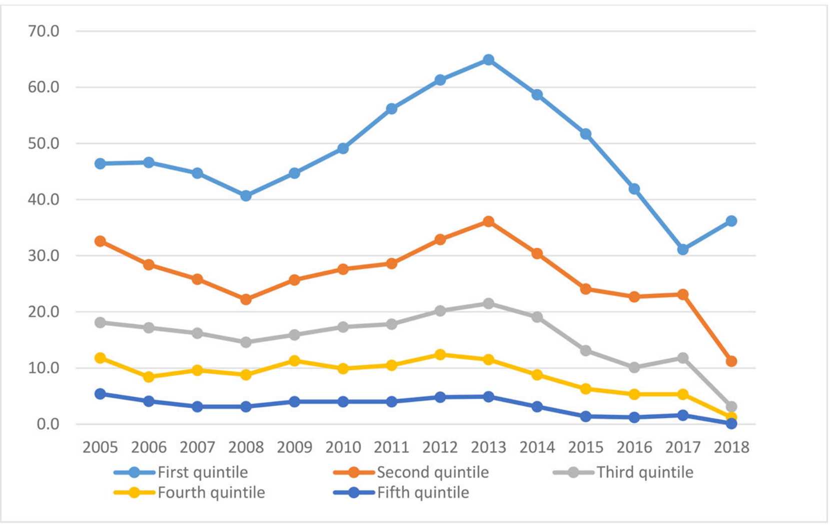

Figure 2. Material deprivation by income quintiles in Hungary (%). *Source:* EU-SILC.

show that in the 1990s, the number of those who identified themselves as part of the working class declined, with those leaving this category instead classifying themselves as belonging to either the lower-middle or the middle class. Thus, according to subjective assessments, Hungary's middle class expanded by the end of the 1990s, which certainly had to do with the fact that, after the regime change, the term 'working class' had negative political connotations.

In our study, we examine people's subjective assessments based on data that differ from those used by Ágnes Utasi. In the survey we use, the respondents could not choose from pre-determined categories, but rather had to rank their position on a scale from 1–10 that represented the social ladder. These data facilitate an analysis of changes in the perceived social structure in the pre- and post-regime change era. Figure 3 shows the results, converted to a five-class scale (by merging groups 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and so on).

As these figures show, it was during the era directly preceding Hungary's regime change when the highest proportion of respondents (52%) defined themselves as middle class. By comparison, the percentage of those who saw themselves as belonging to higher social classes was relatively low (9%), while the share of people who identified as belonging to the lower-middle (28%) or the lower class (11%) was higher.

This pattern, however, transformed instantly after the regime change, and radically and permanently so. By the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion of those identifying as middle class decreased by 20 percentage points, and the figures for the upper and upper-middle class also halved. At the same time, the share of those who assessed themselves as belonging to the lower-middle class increased significantly and the proportion of the lower class doubled. These statistics also illustrate the significance of the transformations following the regime change: While more than 60% of the adult population viewed themselves as middle class or above in 1987, by 1992, almost two-thirds self-identified as lower-middle or lower class. The profound nature of these changes is

shown by the fact that the subjective structure that emerged immediately after the regime change is almost identical to the results of the surveys conducted at the end of the 1990s.

As far as these fundamental characteristics are concerned, no significant changes took place during the 2000s either. The share of those who placed themselves at the top of the social ladder practically did not change, though there was some movement at the middle and lower part of the ladder. By the middle of the decade, the proportion of those who put themselves on the lower steps of the ladder had fallen, which above all strengthened the middle class. However, in the years after the 2008 financial crisis, the share of the lowest two groups increased once more.

While these subjective assessments appeared to be rather steady in the first two decades after the regime change, they underwent a rapid and significant transformation in the few years since 2010. The share of those who identified as belonging to the lower or the lower-middle class decreased greatly. The changes at the lowest step of the ladder are the most notable: Not even in the era directly preceding the regime change was the lower class as narrow as it has been in recent years; in parallel, the percentage of those who view themselves as middle class expanded at unprecedented levels. However, the changes at the top of the ladder may be even more interesting. While the proportion of those who consider themselves to be upper or upper-middle class was less than 10% in 1987 and then remained virtually unchanged, at around 5–6%, in the first two decades after the regime change, it reached 15–20% in recent years. As a result, the 2010s not only saw a considerable expansion of the middle, but also the emergence of a class that positions itself at the top of society or near it (at least according to its own assessment). This is not only a new phenomenon compared to the post-regime change history of Hungary but also compared to the era of state socialism.[12]

It is important to note that these processes are not at all unique to Hungary.[13] After the 1990s, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and other Eastern European countries also experienced similar downward shifts in subjective self-evaluations of social class, though in these countries, the middle was never as narrow as in Hungary. In the 2010s, similar changes can also be detected, as the share of subjectively perceived upper and middle positions increased significantly across the region. What is more, even in countries such as Germany and Sweden that are otherwise fundamentally different, the same trends have emerged during the past decade, resulting in an upward shift of the subjective social ladder.

* * *

The changes in the social structure after 1990 did not fulfill the post-regime change expectations concerning the expansion and strengthening of the middle class. However, the processes that started in the second half of the 2010s are without precedent in recent history. On the one hand, the proportion of those who are excluded from the middle class due to their labor-market or financial situation has never been so low since the regime change. On the other hand, the proportion of those who self-identify as members of the middle or upper levels of society has never been higher, including during the last years of state socialism.

Will these changes contribute to the resolution of the paradox described by Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos, the question is whether they will also contribute to the

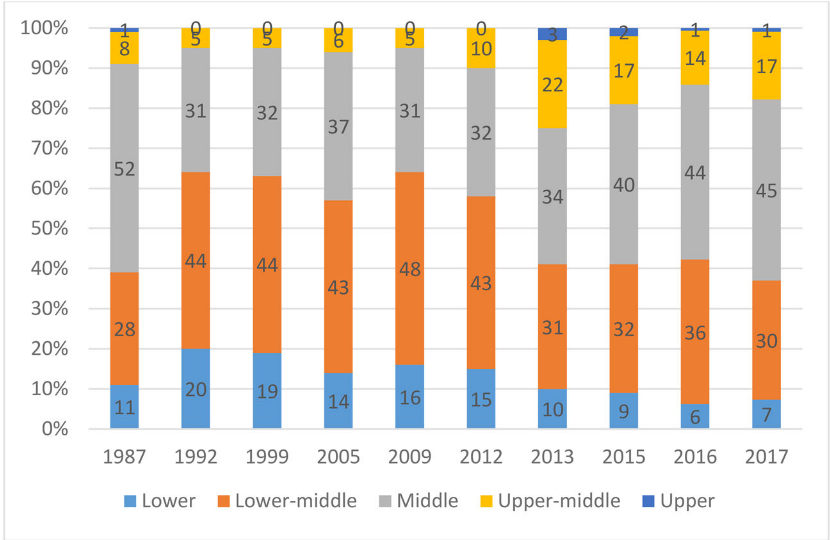

Figure 3. Distribution of the population by subjective social classification in Hungary among people aged 18 and above, %. *Source:* International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) 1987–2016.

spread of civic and democratic values, as the normative concept of middle-class formation would suggest. In other words, has a wide and strong middle class formed in Hungary in recent years that can be regarded as the basis of a stable social order and an engine of democratic development? If this were the case, it would be a significant novelty considering the historical weakness of the Hungarian middle class (Tóth 2016a). In what follows, we will try to answer this question.

Commitment to democracy, political participation and solidarity

Gaining a full overview of all the factors that are relevant for judging the normative expectations linked to the concept of middle class is virtually impossible. And in the era since the regime change, it has become even more difficult to evaluate the changes in this complex group of factors. In the following, we will nevertheless endeavor to examine the abovementioned question on the basis of the available evidence by focusing on three different aspects. It is also important to note here that, as in the previous part, our aim is only to ascertain the main trends. We analyze the presence of these factors at different levels of the social structure and how they have changed, but this study cannot answer the question to what extent these changes can be attributed to the transformation of the social structure itself or to other causes.

The main assumption of the normative view is that a wide and strong middle class will be committed to a democratic political system, and that the strengthening of the middle class will thus contribute to the stability of democracy. This issue is of particular relevance in Hungary, given that the declared aim of the ruling political elite is to create and maintain an 'illiberal' form of democracy, different from the Western pattern. On the other hand, however, there are also sharp debates in the field of political science about how to characterize the Hungarian political system, and whether it can still be

considered a democracy at all (see, for example, Kornai 2017; Szelényi and Csillag 2015; Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018; Böcskei and Hajdu 2019; and Scheiring 2019).

As far as evaluations of the current political regime are concerned, a contradiction emerges between the prevailing academic discourse and public opinion. While the former questions the democratic nature of the political system, it seems that voters are more and more satisfied with it. The following graph shows voter satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Hungary based on data from the *European Social Survey*. Figure 4 depicts the average responses on a 0–10 scale by occupational classes[14] between 2002–2018.

The results point to several conclusions. First, that people in the upper segment of the social structure are more satisfied with the "actually existing democracy" than the lower social classes. While this correlation could be observed almost throughout the entire period, there was a significant deterioration in the perception of democracy among higher managers and professionals in 2018.[15] Moreover, the results fit into specific trends that more or less took place at all levels of the social hierarchy. Since the beginning of the 2000s, voters' assessments of the functioning of democracy in Hungary deteriorated continuously until 2008, when this trend reversed and then continued to improve until 2016.[16] Although the most recent results from 2018 indicate that this process has come to a halt, overall, respondents perceived an improvement in the functioning of democracy throughout the 2010s, thereby highlighting the stability of the existing political order.

A recent study also provides further insights into how committed Hungarian society is to democratic values in general. Márton Gerő and Andrea Szabó's (2019, 47–45) findings show that the proportion of those who believe that democracy is better than any other political system grew significantly (from 48% to 56%) between 2015 and 2018, while the share of those who believe that dictatorship is acceptable in certain circumstances also increased (from 7% to 11%). The strengthening of these two opposite views can be attributed to a decrease in the share of respondents who do not really care about the political system in place.

The results are all the more interesting if the social position of the respondents is also taken into account. For instance, in 2015, the assumption that people in the upper classes are more committed to democracy indeed proved true, whereas the situation changed considerably by 2018. From 2015 to 2018, the commitment of the upper and middle classes to democracy decreased while that of the lower classes increased significantly. The pro-dictatorship view followed a somewhat different pattern: The share of those who accept dictatorship under certain circumstances also increased in the lower classes, but the most significant increase occurred among the middle and upper classes. As a result of these changes, by 2018, pro-dictatorship views were most prevalent among Hungary's middle and upper classes.

While no far-reaching conclusions about the underlying trends can be drawn on the basis of this study, it can be argued that it contradicts the normative expectations linked to the concept of the middle class. What is more, if popular assessments of the state of democracy are also considered, the results suggest that far from being a pillar of democracy, the Hungarian middle class is broadly supportive of the current illiberal system. However, this question should be clarified with the help of additional, more detailed studies focusing on the internal divisions of the middle class.

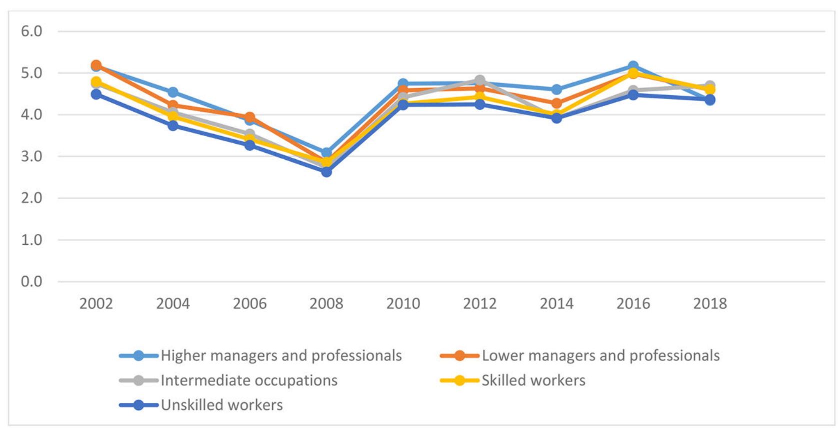

Figure 4. How satisfied are you with the way democracy works? (Average). *Source:* European Social Survey.

Another fundamental assumption of the normative model of the middle class is connected to political participation. According to this view, the middle class is important for the functioning of democracy, as its members have an interest and participate in public affairs and control the political regime in place. A wide and strong middle class is therefore seen as a safeguard of democracy and the key for the further democratization of society.

It is difficult to get a clear picture of whether political participation has changed in Hungary. There are different ways to be politically active, ranging from voting in general elections through different forms of protests and strikes to membership in various political organizations. Different types of political participation may be more easily available or appealing to different social groups, so that participation cannot be treated uniformly. The intensity of participation may also depend on several contingent factors—for example, the current political agenda—which make gaining insights into this question even more challenging.

However, based on newer research on political participation, it is possible to draw a number of cautious conclusions (Szabó and Gerő 2019; Szabó and Oross 2019). Andrea Szabó and Márton Gerő (2019, 103–11) differentiate six forms of participation—contact with politicians, party membership or participation in a political movement, wearing political symbols, signing petitions, protesting, and boycotting—and examine these for the period from 2000 to the present. From among these categories, contact with politicians was the most frequent type of participation, while the significance of the others was rather small. In the period under examination, there was no definite tendency regarding the scope of participation. Changes in participation seem to be connected to fluctuations in political cycles and thus do not confirm the expectations of the normative model of the middle class. Overall, the data instead suggest that the degree of political participation decreased in the post-2010 period compared to the 2000s.

Another way to gain insights into political participation is to analyze the extent to which citizens are interested in politics. This factor indicates the basic level of political activity which precedes all forms of political participation. In fact, interest in politics is

a precondition for citizens to manifest their values and interests through political action. Figure 5 shows the development of interest in politics since 2000 by social position.

Interest in politics, just like the different forms of political participation, appears to fluctuate in line with the general elections cycles. Beside cyclicality, however, more specific trends can also be observed. It seems that from the beginning of the 2000s until 2006, interest in politics rose steadily but has since then declined continuously.[17] This trend came to a halt only at the end of the period under examination, which raises the question whether this turning point marks the beginning of a new trend. Although people with more advantageous social positions were generally more interested in public affairs throughout the entire period, the difference between the upper and lower classes is not consistent. Throughout the whole period, the lower classes showed a low interest in politics that slightly decreased further after 2006. In the case of the middle and upper classes, however, there was a much more marked loss of interest in politics. The general decline of interest in public affairs is mainly due to the fact that those at the upper levels of the social structure generally turned their backs on politics after the 2010s.

The third factor that we will briefly analyze is *solidarity*. A central element of the idea of a middle-class society is that income and wealth inequalities are moderate, and that there are no serious conflicts between the social classes. The existence of a wide middle class means that there are few people at the top or at the bottom of society and that these groups do not separate sharply from each other but are rather connected by solidarity.

This issue is the main theme of Júlia Szalai's previously cited work (2020). She bases her grim diagnosis regarding the chances of middle-class formation in Hungary on the lack of solidarity and the pronounced tendency of social exclusion. On the one hand, the antagonistic moral, ideological and interest conflicts among the different fractions of the middle class are indicative of a lack of solidarity. On the other hand, discriminatory discourses affecting the poor and other vulnerable groups also indicate a lack of solidarity. According to Szalai, these discourses legitimizing social exclusion are induced by the struggle of different social groups for redistribution through the state (Szalai 2020). At stake in these struggles is the question whether public resources should be used to support the lower social classes, or if they should instead be allocated to the various fractions of the middle class that are dependent on the state (Szalai 2007).[18] These conflicts also play a decisive role in constructing the identity and defining the borders of the middle class, given that the most important mechanism of middle-class formation is differentiation from lower-class groups deemed to be unworthy of membership in its ranks.

Referring again to Bourdieu's (2010) theory on class formation, these discourses are to be interpreted as constitutive moments in the transformation of the middle class—which became the primary point of reference for the post-regime change political forces after the fall of state socialism and the disappearance of the proletariat—from a vaguely defined "virtual" group existing only on paper into a conscious "real" class with political representation that enforces its interests. In terms of class formation, it is thus crucial how political forces aspire to represent the middle class and how they define and establish its borders.

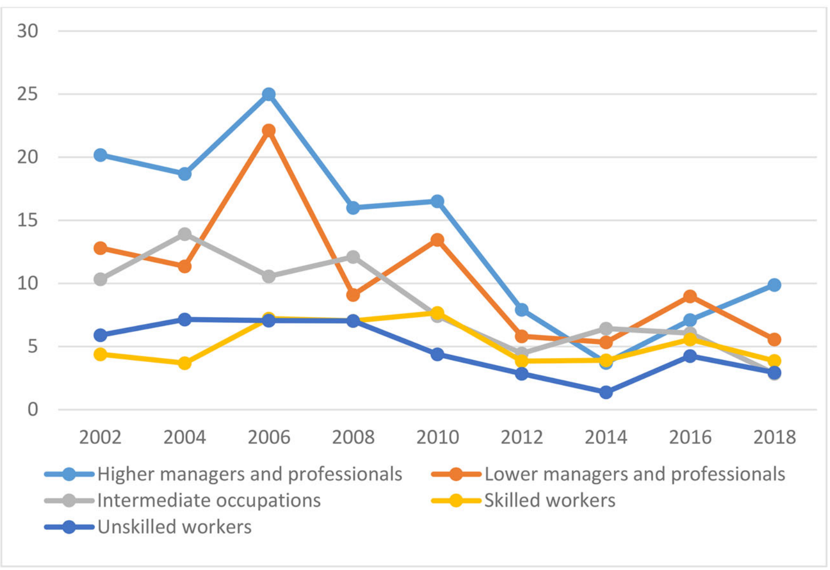

Figure 5. The proportion of Hungarians who are very interested in politics by social class (%). *Source:* European Social Survey.

In this regard, the phenomenon that Éber (2015) calls the "power management of recognition and disrespect" and which Endre Sik defines as the "systematic pressing of the moral panic button" (Sik 2016; Lázár and Sik 2019; Gerő and Sik 2020) is a decisively new development. Both describe the mechanisms by which the political elite tries—through the use of various means at the disposal of the state—to systematically manage the distribution of social recognition in accordance with its own political interests. A central element of this process is the designation of enemies and the instigation of fear and hatred toward them. The role of the enemy can be assigned to any group, from the unemployed through the homeless and drug abusers to the Roma, the poor or refugees. This consciously applied power strategy of mass manipulation both establishes the borders and draws the contours of the middle class (the class which the power elite is willing to represent) and further erodes solidarity in society, with unforeseeable future consequences.

In recent years, the strength and the social consequences of the operation of this mechanism on the political agenda could best be measured by the changing attitudes toward refugees, who were used in the most extreme way to cause moral panic (Sik 2016; Lázár and Sik 2019; Messing and Ságvári 2019). Undoubtedly, there are other indicators of (the lack of) solidarity, even more nuanced ones, but we are convinced that the stances toward refugees represent, overall, an adequate indicator of the erosion of societal solidarity and shows well the operation of the moral panic button. Figure 6 presents the evolution of attitudes toward people from poor countries outside of Europe coming to Hungary, who have been one of the most important embodiment of the enemy in government communication since the 2015 refugee crisis.[19] Figure 6 shows the evolution of attitudes toward people from poor countries outside of Europe coming to Hungary.

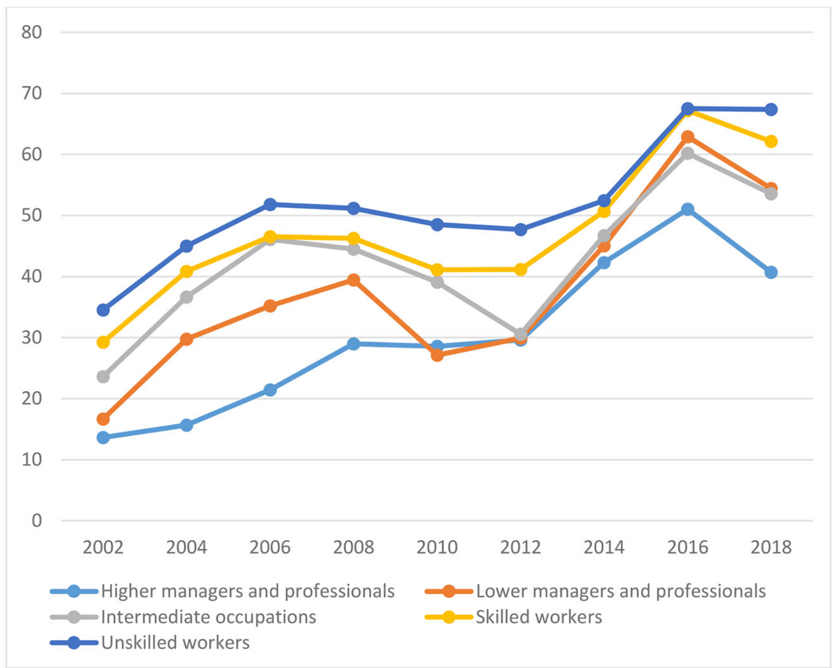

Figure 6. The proportion of people who would not allow entry into the country for anyone coming from a poorer country outside of Europe under any circumstances (by social position of the respondents, %). *Source:* European Social Survey.

In Hungary, dislike toward refugees has been consistently high compared to other European countries during the entire period under examination. These negative attitudes grew significantly throughout the first half of the 2000s, before stagnating between 2006–2012 and then finally decreasing slightly. By 2014, however, hostility toward refugees began to grow significantly, reaching unprecedented levels (at around 60%) by the second half of the 2010s. This figure stands out compared to the rest of Europe—among the countries participating in the European Social Survey, the next highest figure (also recorded in 2016) was Russia's, at around 40%.[20] Regarding the social position of respondents, it is clearly visible that dislike toward refugees is highest among those in the lower positions of the social structure. While in recent years, negative sentiment toward refugees has been on the rise at all social levels, it is still a new development, with the most dynamic increase occurring in the higher strata. As a result of these changes, dislike toward people coming from poor countries outside of Europe became almost a majority opinion even among the middle and upper middle classes.

To sum up, empirical data suggest that we are witnessing the formation of a "new" middle class in Hungary characterized by improving material conditions but not characterized by stronger commitments to democratic values and civic virtues.[21]

Conclusions

According to Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos, the paradox of the development of Hungarian society is the fact that the processes of middle-class formation and the

spread of civic values have become detached from each other. They argue that the middle class grew and widened in certain periods of the Kádár regime, albeit without any connection between embourgeoisement and the strengthening of civic-mindedness. By contrast, after the regime change, despite the narrowing and the decline of the middle class, civic democratic values slowly started to develop. Our findings regarding recent trends in the development of Hungarian society confirm this logic.

On the one hand, it seems that the narrowing of the middle class that began after the regime change stopped or even reversed in the second half of 2010s. The general increase in the employment rate, which affected all occupational groups, also points in this direction. In the period since the regime change, the number of people employed in occupations that supposedly allow them to lead an upper-middle class life has never been as high. The Hungarian middle class is, however, still weak by European standards as regards its income and living conditions—and the distance to other social classes has not actually shrunk. After the global economic crisis, however, the proportion of people affected by material deprivation or absolute poverty decreased sharply. This may have enabled many Hungarians to experience improvements in their living conditions or a feeling of upward mobility, which is also reflected in their subjective evaluations of their social position. In the last thirty years, the proportion of those who place themselves on the middle steps of the social ladder or above has never been as high as it is now. These trends, which started after 2012–2013, have been interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis whose impact cannot yet be precisely assessed; it seems, however, that post-2010 illiberal Hungary comes closest to fulfilling the expectations of a wide and strong middle class that was widely touted after the regime change.

Based on the normative concept of middle-class formation, we would expect this strengthening and widening of the middle class to have a positive effect on the spread of civic-mindedness and the democratic functioning of the political system. While it is still too early to determine whether or not this is actually happening, recent findings provide little support for this conclusion. Although citizens are more and more satisfied with how democracy actually functions in Hungary, and the commitment to a democratic political system also seems to have been increased, there has been a simultaneous rise in the share of those who would accept dictatorship under certain conditions, especially among the middle and upper classes. Consequently, there is no strengthening of political participation and interest in public affairs to speak of, as the middle class appears to be turning its back on politics. It is also quite difficult to find evidence for the strengthening of social solidarity—instead, discriminatory and intolerant attitudes have gained prevalence in the middle and upper strata of society. Thus, contrary to the expectations formulated during the regime-change period, the new Hungarian middle class can hardly be characterized as a bearer of civic virtues and democratic values; rather than functioning as an engine of democratic development, it can therefore be seen as a pillar of the current illiberal political order.

These conclusions reveal two particularly important problems. On the one hand, it increasingly appears that the Hungarian paradox identified by Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos is not paradoxical at all, but that the trends analyzed here can be regarded as the main rule in the development of Hungarian society. On the other hand, the Hungarian situation also supports the assumption that the decoupling of the

processes of middle-class formation and democratization seems paradoxical only in light of the normative concept of the middle class. But as the contingency model suggests, the middle class may—under certain conditions—act as the bedrock of democracy and the engine of democratic development, while in other cases it contributes to the emergence and consolidation of authoritarian regimes. Understanding the Hungarian case may thus help us to clarify which conditions are decisive in this respect.

Notes

1. Although he did not invent it, it was Rousseau who described the distinction between bourgeois and citoyen in the most effective manner in his 1762 work *The Social Contract*.
2. This definition by the ILO can be regarded as a common basis for understanding the middle class. It is almost literally repeated in Tóth (2016a, 279; 2017b, 75) and even in recent OECD (2019, 17–18) and Eurofound (2019, 1) publications.
3. Özbudun (2005, 97 footnote 4) lists many other authors, from Coleman to Dahl, who connect democracy with the middle class and with socioeconomic development in a similar manner.
4. In this normative discourse of middle-class formation, instances where a wide and strong middle class supported authoritarian movements or regimes are regarded as exceptions to the rule. The most famous exception is the case of Germany, where the middle class gradually came to endorse the Nazi Party (on the German case and the role of legal positivism, see Füzér 2008).
5. The Chinese middle class has not turned into a champion of democracy for exactly the same reason. For the opposite role played by the South Korean middle class, see Koo (1991). More generally on the role of middle class in different political systems, see Füzér (2018).
6. In fact, the separation of this dual process only seems paradoxical if seen from the perspective of the normative or unilinear concept of modernization, which assumes that regions “lagging behind” will, with a certain delay, follow the course of the “developed” West—because it fails to take into account their path dependencies (see Gagyi 2018; Éber 2019). Viewed from the perspective of world-systems theory, Hungary is not an exception from some kind of rule, but displays properties produced by uneven, dependent (semi-)peripheral development (Gagyi 2021).
7. For more information on ESeG, see: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/nomenclatures/index.cfm?TargetUrl=LST_NOM_DTL_LINEAR&StrNom=ESEG_2014&StrLanguageCode=EN&IntCurrentPage=1
8. See Table 1 in the Appendix.
9. See Table 2 in the Appendix.
10. Cf. in this regard Szelényi and Tóth (2018), who diagnose the social closure of the upper middle.
11. Although the income and poverty data provided by Hungarian Central Statistical Office should be treated with caution, this conclusion is, however, reinforced by other data sources. See, for example, the measurements of material deprivation conducted by TÁRKI (Gábos et al. 2016), the living wage calculations published by Policy Agenda, and Huszár (2019).
12. Thus, this subjective indicator shows a much more marked transformation than what we have seen in the case of the occupational structure and income distribution. On the one hand this is due to the fact that structural changes are always much slower. On the other hand, the role of political propaganda cannot be neglected on this issue either (Huszár and Szabó 2020).
13. See Table 3 in the Appendix.
14. The respondents’ social position was operationalized using the collapsed version of the European Socio-economic Classification (EseC) (Rose and Harrison 2010).

15. Naturally, supporters of different parties have different opinions on the state of democracy (Bíró-Nagy 2019).
16. Compared to other countries participating in the ESS, the Hungarian results are still rather moderate (see *Table 4* in the Appendix).
17. Hungary is among the countries with the lowest level of interest in politics (see *Table 4* in the Appendix).
18. Entrepreneurs in Hungary, a central fraction of the middle class, are characterized by more traditional and hierarchy-oriented values than their Western counterparts (Bodor, Grünhut, and Pirmajer 2019), and there is reason to assume that a relatively large proportion of them are dependent on the state and political actors.
19. At the time when the authors finalized this paper, Russia's invasion of Ukraine resulted in a significant wave of refugees to Hungary and Europe, which added new twists to the Hungarian discourse on refugees. The government recognizes refugees from Ukraine as 'real refugees' who deserve the solidarity and help of Hungarian people. However, they see this as a confirmation of their previous refugee policy, which saw non-European arrivals as economic immigrants and even conquerors.
20. See Table 4 in the Appendix.
21. In this context "new middle class" means something else than what is usually meant by the term. Usually, "new middle class" refers to employees in white collar jobs as a growing fraction of the middle class and as the opposite of "old" middle classes (small entrepreneurs) (cf. Giddens 1994 [1975]; Lederer and Marschak 1994 [1926]; Mills 1994 [1951]).

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Appendix

Table 1. Distribution of the employed population aged 15–64 by occupational classes in the EU member states (2017), %.

	Managers	Professionals	Technicians and associate professional employees	Small entrepreneurs	Clerks and skilled service employees	Skilled industrial employees	Lower status employees	Persons in the labor force whose occupation or status in employment is not known	Total
Austria	4.7	20.0	15.7	7.6	13.5	17.3	21.2	0.0	100.0
Belgium	8.4	24.3	12.2	7.2	15.8	14.7	17.3	0.0	100.0
Bulgaria	5.7	16.3	9.5	8.0	11.9	24.8	23.8	0.0	100.0
Croatia	5.0	17.8	14.0	7.3	13.8	20.3	21.7	0.2	100.0
Cyprus	4.3	19.1	12.7	8.9	16.3	13.2	25.6	0.0	100.0
Czechia	4.5	15.8	14.9	12.4	12.4	25.6	14.4	0.0	100.0
Denmark	2.7	26.9	16.0	5.2	15.0	11.6	22.0	0.5	100.0
Estonia	12.8	20.9	13.1	4.2	9.1	23.6	16.2	0.2	100.0
Finland	3.3	25.8	18.0	8.4	12.9	15.2	16.3	0.0	100.0
France	7.3	18.1	19.6	7.1	14.8	13.8	19.1	0.3	100.0
Germany	4.7	17.8	21.2	4.9	15.2	17.4	18.7	0.1	100.0
Greece	3.1	19.3	7.7	25.6	14.5	10.8	19.0	0.0	100.0
Hungary	4.5	15.2	13.6	7.5	11.6	27.5	20.1	0.0	100.0
Ireland	8.5	23.7	10.8	8.1	15.3	12.1	20.8	0.7	100.0
Italy	3.7	14.8	14.3	14.9	16.6	15.9	19.8	0.0	100.0
Latvia	10.6	15.7	13.7	5.9	9.6	21.1	23.2	0.1	100.0
Lithuania	9.2	23.3	8.9	8.6	8.0	23.3	18.8	0.0	100.0
Luxemburg	2.4	37.3	15.7	4.0	11.2	10.7	14.9	3.9	100.0
Malta	10.3	18.0	13.8	9.8	19.8	11.2	17.1	0.0	100.0
Netherlands	5.1	27.3	14.1	8.4	13.9	9.7	20.4	1.1	100.0
Poland	6.2	19.8	11.9	15.4	8.7	22.5	14.9	0.6	100.0
Portugal	5.7	19.4	10.9	9.1	14.6	19.9	20.5	0.0	100.0
Romania	2.3	15.8	6.5	21.7	8.4	27.3	18.1	0.0	100.0
Slovakia	4.4	12.4	13.9	11.4	13.9	24.9	18.9	0.0	100.0
Slovenia	7.5	22.3	11.9	8.9	10.5	21.9	16.0	1.0	100.0
Spain	4.2	17.8	10.4	11.3	16.1	15.4	24.8	0.0	100.0
Sweden	6.4	28.8	17.1	5.5	16.5	12.9	12.7	0.1	100.0
United Kingdom	11.2	25.0	11.5	8.9	17.2	9.3	16.4	0.5	100.0

Source: Labor Force Survey.

Table 2. Distribution of the population by income groups in the EU member states (2017), %.

	Lower	Lower-middle	Middle	Upper-middle	Upper	Total
Austria	5.2	16.6	50.6	13.5	14.1	100.0
Belgium	3.4	22.0	48.3	15.0	11.3	100.0
Bulgaria	10.6	19.5	36.2	11.3	22.4	100.0
Croatia	8.1	19.3	42.5	12.9	17.2	100.0
Cyprus	2.7	22.1	44.4	12.8	18.0	100.0
Czechia	2.2	14.7	57.3	13.1	12.7	100.0
Denmark	4.1	16.4	53.7	13.9	11.9	100.0
Estonia	6.5	22.4	38.1	12.1	20.9	100.0
Finland	1.9	18.1	53.9	13.6	12.5	100.0
France	3.1	17.9	52.0	11.8	15.2	100.0
Germany	4.4	19.3	47.5	13.1	15.7	100.0
Greece	9.3	17.2	41.5	12.8	19.2	100.0
Hungary	4.6	17.5	49.2	14.0	14.7	100.0
Ireland	3.1	21.5	44.1	12.2	19.1	100.0
Italy	8.8	18.9	41.5	13.2	17.6	100.0
Latvia	8.2	21.9	35.3	12.7	21.9	100.0
Lithuania	9.1	21.7	36.1	11.3	21.8	100.0
Luxemburg	5.8	20.5	42.4	12.1	19.2	100.0
Malta	2.8	21.6	46.7	12.4	16.5	100.0
Netherlands	3.6	17.9	51.0	13.3	14.2	100.0
Poland	5.2	17.2	48.9	11.7	17.0	100.0
Portugal	7.5	17.9	43.7	11.3	19.6	100.0
Romania	12.1	17.7	37.4	12.5	20.3	100.0
Slovakia	5.3	13.0	60.0	12.7	9.0	100.0
Slovenia	3.3	17.5	54.4	13.8	11.0	100.0
Spain	10.5	18.7	37.8	11.8	21.2	100.0
Sweden	4.6	20.0	48.7	14.0	12.7	100.0
United Kingdom	5.1	20.7	42.5	11.3	20.4	100.0

Source: EU-SILC.

Table 3. Distribution of the population by subjective social classification in some European countries among people aged 18 and above (%).

Czechia

	1992	1999	2009	2010	2012	2014	2016	2017
Lower	10	12	7	11	6	4	6	6
Lower-middle	32	33	28	32	27	22	26	24
Middle	47	43	50	41	45	52	45	53
Upper-middle	11	11	14	15	20	20	21	17
Upper	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Poland

	1987	1992	1999	2009	2012	2015
Lower	13	20	17	5	5	10
Lower-middle	31	30	30	23	19	27
Middle	48	39	41	50	53	48
Upper-middle	8	8	11	19	21	14
Upper	0	2	1	2	3	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Germany

	1987	1992	1999	2005	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Lower	4	5	4	5	3	4	1	1	2	2	1	2
Lower-middle	17	22	22	20	16	12	9	9	7	11	9	10
Middle	55	49	55	51	51	49	46	41	44	40	37	41
Upper-middle	21	22	18	21	29	32	41	45	43	44	45	43
Upper	3	1	1	2	1	3	3	4	4	4	7	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Sweden

	1992	1999	2005	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Lower	6	4	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	2
Lower-middle	13	16	11	13	12	11	9	11	12	8	11	7
Middle	51	49	50	50	52	50	49	48	49	48	52	48
Upper-middle	27	30	32	33	30	33	37	36	32	37	32	39
Upper	3	1	4	2	4	3	3	4	4	5	4	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Slovakia

	1992	1999	2009	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017
Lower	13	17	10	3	7	4	4	5
Lower-middle	32	34	29	23	27	20	23	24
Middle	46	35	48	50	45	56	53	44
Upper-middle	9	12	12	22	19	19	18	22
Upper	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: ISSP.

Table 4. Satisfaction with democracy, interest in politics and xenophobia among those aged 18 or above in some European countries (2016).

	How satisfied are you with the way democracy works? (average)	The proportion of those who are very interested in politics (%)	The proportion of those who would not allow entry for people from poorer countries outside of Europe under any circumstances (%)
Austria	5.8	18	20
Belgium	5.4	10	10
Czechia	5.1	3	31
Estonia	5.1	8	26
Finland	6.1	11	8
France	4.2	16	13
Germany	5.8	23	6
Hungary	4.8	5	64
Iceland	5.8	23	2
Ireland	5.4	11	9
Israel	5.0	16	38
Italy	3.9	5	18
Lithuania	4.7	4	26
Netherlands	6.1	15	8
Norway	7.1	11	2
Poland	4.7	7	14
Portugal	4.9	9	7
Russia	4.2	10	41
Slovenia	3.8	6	14
Spain	4.4	14	7
Sweden	6.4	17	2
Switzerland	7.4	18	7
United Kingdom	5.4	19	9

Source: European Social Survey.