The process of eroding democracy

A comparative analysis between Orbán’s Hungary and Erdogan’s Türkiye

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Abstract

The process of going from relatively established democracies to not being classified as such in Hungary in Türkiye during the time of their leaders, Orban and Erdogan, in the executive branch of government is an interesting one. The research question “How have Erdogan and Orban’s parties been eroding democratic values with their policies since the leaders came into executive power in Türkiye and Hungary?” will work as the main guideline for the thesis. In addition, the purpose of researching the two states and leaders based on their governmental policies will give a clear understanding of how the thesis will be written.

Using the strongmen theory as a theoretical framework will contribute to the understanding of how democracy has been eroded in the countries based on for example the strongman leadership style. The methodology being used will be two separate idea and ideology analyses and two separate case studies. That methodology will contribute to getting a deep and nuanced understanding of how the political leaders and their parties have eroded democracy.

Key words

Democracy, Hungary, Türkiye, authoritarianism
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1 Introduction

Democracy as a phenomenon is complex to understand, but still something that has been the goal for states in the modern world. According to the EIU, an observer that measures democracy in states globally, only 24 can be classified as “full democracies”. That number is notably low and shows how democracy cannot be seen as a given, even in the era of liberal democracy that should have been dominating after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is the democracies that are unstable and flawed that have the greatest possibility to one day achieving a full democracy, but also turning into an authoritarian state. This is where Hungary and Türkiye can fit (EIU 2022, p. 2-3)

After a period with democratic values being introduced into Hungary after the fall of communism in the 1990s, things have changed for the worse. Ever since Viktor Orban came into power in 2010 there has been a shift in the democratic values of the country. Fidesz, the party that Orban is a leader of, has had an interesting journey. From being an anti-communist party that started in the shadows of the communist regime in Hungary in the late 1980’s, to a party that became liberal, to the party it is today. During the 90’s when Hungary started to liberalize and democratize, the party was at its liberal peak. But in the late 90’s and early 2000’s the party had an ideological shift, from centre-right to right-wing. This subsequently led to the situation of Hungary today, with democratic erosion (Cubas & Czyz 2018, p. 48-51)

Türkiye also had periods of democratic success in around the same time as Hungary got rid of the communist system and started to amplify a more democratic system. Türkiye has had many ups and downs in its journey to consolidate its democracy, a journey that peaked in the early 2000’s and has since been in a rapid decline since Recep Tayyip Erdogan came into power in 2014 after a long period of being prime minister. AKP, the party Erdogan leads, has had an interesting journey. It was founded on Islamist grounds in the 1970s, went under another name before being established again in the
early 2000s, with an identity of strengthening democracy in Türkiye. Joining EU was a goal for the party, which became increasingly harder after democracy slowly but steadily got eroded in mainly the years Erdogan got into executive power (Yilmaz & Bahsirov 2017, p. 1863-1864)

An article that researched about the democratic erosion in Türkiye gives insight into how AKP and Erdogan have eroded democratic values. Ironically, AKP has gone from a pro-democracy party in the early 21st century to be in the forefront for democratic erosion in the country. Understanding this shift in character by the party and its policies can provide a better understanding of why the party went from a democratization process with aspirations of joining the EU to do the opposite and go further and further away from joining. The article also mentions how the change went slowly but steadily from a democracy on the rise to a dramatic backslide, with factors such as the rule of law and checks and balances that will be further analysed in this paper (Emrah Oder 2023, p.474-476)

To give more context to Hungary and its democratic backsliding, a quote from another article gives an understanding of how the democracy could be eroded: “constitutional coup d’état” describes what this essay will keep researching, constitutional changes that allows Orban and his party to, in a mostly legal way, make anti-democratic policies to further consolidate its power. The article also gives a context of the “uniqueness” of its democratic erosion, that the process arguably has not been seen anywhere else. The research that will be conducted in this essay will try to further analyse and take inspiration from the article (Bogaards 2018, p. 1482-1483)

1.1 Problem formulation

Democracy in the world is in decline. There are more countries that are not democratic compared to the ones that have a democratic system. Growing populism, changing attitudes on pluralism, and unbalanced checks and
balances are all factors that contribute to this change in societies and systems all over the world (Freedom House 2023, p.1) Central values of democracy, which can be summarized for the benefits of simplicity into two different sections, liberal democratic values and electoral democratic values.

These values are central for a working democracy to prevail, and to maintain its strengths in a world where democracy is not seen as a given. Unfortunately, these democratic values seem to erode more and more in recent years. What happened to the optimistic mindset that was so prevalent in the 1990’s after the fall of communism and the celebration of liberal democratic values? Why do authoritarian states keep growing their anti-democratic values and spreading them to other places in the world? (Lindberg 2018, p. 2-3) Why is it that democracy can erode in states where there have been democratic winds and consolidation? All these questions are interesting by themselves, and there are plenty more of these hypothetical questions that can be asked. In the case of Türkiye and Hungary the most central one is how their once relatively strong democracies are in a process of democratic backslide that never seems to end.

1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this essay is to by analysing AKP and Fidesz, the leading parties in Türkiye and Hungary, to achieve an understanding of how their ideas and policies have led to democratic erosions in the countries. Focus will also lay on how the leaders have influenced the democratic erosion with their ideas and policies through the eyes of the strongmen theory. It will be exemplified by two case studies, one for each country. The banning of the Kurdish oppositional party HDP will be the case study of the Turkish side, and Orban´s war on media will be the Hungarian case study. The purpose of the case studies will be to get a deeper understanding in how the parties affect democratic values in the countries. In the case of Türkiye, it will focus on political pluralism and free and fair elections, and in the case of Hungary, the focus will instead lay on the freedom of independent media.
Understanding how democracy has been eroded in the two countries, to find similarities and differences is also part of the purpose of the thesis.

This leads up to the section of research question, a question that will cover the main theme of the essay which will be democratic erosion through the method of an idea and ideology analysis. It will be formulated in this way:

“How have Erdogan and Orbans parties been eroding democratic values with their policies since the leaders came into executive power in Türkiye and Hungary?”

This research question comprises the central focus of the essay, which will be democratic erosion, and narrows it down to the years of Orban and Erdogan in power.

1.3 Limitations

The subject of democratic erosion could be a very broad subject, which will have to be narrowed down to allow the essay to be as clear and concise as possible. The main limitation that will be done to the structure of the essay is to focus on the countries after the leaders got into power. For Hungary, that is 2010. For Türkiye, it is 2014. That allows the essay to be as clear as possible. Another limitation is that the thesis will focus on certain aspects of a free democratic society. These will be freedom of the press and freedom of speech as liberal values, and free and fair elections, and political pluralism as electoral values. Adding themes of the rule of law and separation of power will add supplementary depth to the research and limit the themes of the essay to make it as clear and concise as possible while still giving it depth.

1.4 Disposition

The essay will be structured in the way of different chapters, where chapter one is an introduction to the subject and includes how it will be structured through the purpose and research question. Chapter two will focus on the theoretical framework, and a literature review of the material that will be
used, and what research has been done before in the sphere of democratic erosion in the countries Türkiye and Hungary. Chapter three will include the methodology of the essay, and a section of material with descriptions of what material will be used and an explanation of the validity and reliability of that material.

Chapter four will be the main body of the text, where the essay will have two separate idea and ideology analyses for each country where the focus will be to understand how the party policies have affected their democratic trajectory using the six principles stated in the limitations section. The analysis will be complemented with two case studies. One of the banning of the HDP party in Türkiye, and one of Fidesz's control over the media in Hungary. Chapter five will present the results, a comparative analysis and have a section of a discussion. Before chapter six ends the essay with conclusions of the findings and ties the knot to answer the research question. Chapter six will also include a section of future research.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework will include one theory, which is the strongmen theory. The strongmen theory is a theory that analyses how leadership traits in leaders can lead to democratic erosion and authoritarianism. Traits of strongmen are for example the recycling of old authoritarian symbols and rhetoric, a trait that will be analysed deeper in the section of the idea and ideology analyses. Another trait of the theory of strongmen leaders is that the leaders have some type of personalist rule. This personalist rule can vary from leader to leader, but common denominators can be for example that the individual is above the party, and that the people working in the leader’s team must be loyal to the leader instead of just being loyal to the party. The personalist rulers also tend to stay in power longer than “normal” leaders, since they are controlling the political networks with loyal allies and fear (Ben-Ghiat 2020, p. 6-7)
The strongmen theory also shows how one strongmen leader observes and learns from other strongmen leaders in their ruling style, which makes them interconnected in a way. If one leader has successfully dismantled his political opposition in the 1970’s, another leader can try to follow the steps in the 1990’s for example. As the name itself, strongmen put a lot of importance on being as masculine and manly as possible for different reasons. It could for example be to push the agenda that other groups in society are weaker than the leader, LGBTQ and women are common “punching bags” for strongmen leaders. If a strongmen leader wants to rule by fear it is also important that he is perceived stronger and above everyone else, which is another factor why extreme masculinity is appealing for these types of leaders (Ben-Ghiat 2020, p. 7-9)

Research about the theory has also concluded that strongmen leaders tend to succeed in weak states. In contrast to more stable states, that usually has a conservative party that is limiting the power of the populist party in for example an coalition, comes the fragile democracies. In this category, authoritarian strongmen leaders can get broad support for promises such as law and order, and therefore take control over the country. After some type of “state failure” the new strongmen leaders focuses on restoring the glory and also maintaining the order (Foa 2021,p.57-61)

The strongmen theory can also be described as a theory that focuses partly on how a decline in party responsibility has led to individual leaders using an increasingly more prevalent strongmen type of rule to consolidate their power. Scholars have described irresponsible parties as a reason that strongmen leaders can act unconstrained from the party’s ideology and ideas to pursue its own visions for the country. The balance of power in government will be unbalanced if the leader cannot be constrained by its party or other parts of government, which is why scholars have shown the importance of responsible parties (Popkin 2019, p. 363-364)
Furthermore, Ben-Ghiat describes the underlying factors on how these types of leaders truly come into power. A period of increased liberalization with growing rights for groups in society that previously had been below straight men, such as women or LGBTQ, can breed the strongmen ideas to gain support in these types of countries. Another underlying factor that could lead to a strongmen leadership is the politicians that focuses on domestic negative emotions, such as previous losses in wars or territory, to manipulate the population to think that these strongmen leaders would be the saviours of the nations. One example of this could be a strongmen leader that plays on the feelings of the people about when the country was successful and using the leaders as symbols for that success. This could be summarized as a form of “cultural conservatism”, working on past success and deep internal feelings about that to paint the picture that these leaders would let the nation relive those glory days (Ben-Ghiat 2020, p. 9)

Additionally, a consequence for the international community when leaders are strongmen is the complication of maintaining working international cooperation, because of the hypermasculinity of the strongmen leaders. According to one scholar, the actions of strongmen leaders have a tendency to go unchecked in the international community, something that according to him should be deemed unacceptable (Higgott & Reid 2023, p. 452) This theory will help to answer the research question and follow the purpose of the essay for different reasons. Arguably, Erdogan and Orban can be classified as strongmen leader, which will be further examined in the thesis to provide further classification.

Using this theory will also benefit the research since it will study the relationship between a strongmen leader and its ruling party, to analyse and compare how the different leaders’ strongmen leadership styles are intertwined with the parties they are members of. This theory will additionally allow the essay to get a deeper understanding of how Erdogan and Orban uses the strongmen ideal types of leadership to consolidate their power, but also give fear to the opposition parties and individuals that are
against their leadership and policies. The strongmen theory will mainly focus on the leaders of AKP and Fidesz, but it will also be intertwined with the parties’ policies and ideas because even if the leaders have become increasingly personalistic over time, they are still part of the parties and the organizations behind them still have executive power. It is not only the leaders with the power in other words.

2.1 Previous research

2.1.1 Previous research about the countries, parties and leaders

There has been a lot of previous research on the topic of democratic erosion in Türkiye and Hungary. The central themes have been many, but as a summary there are a few that are central in most research about the topic. A central theme has been about the leaders, and how an increasingly personalistic rule is affecting the democratic trajectory of Hungary and Türkiye. Another theme in the previous research has been about how the policies from the ruling parties have slowly but steadily made the democratic situation worse in the countries. These policies could for example be centralizing of power, but also regarding elections and other central democratic ideals.

A synthesising of the previous research leads to interesting findings. In a general overview on the case of democratic erosion in Hungary, the research has focused on various policies and how they have contributed to an increasingly less democratic state. Examples of this is consolidating of power and the dismantling of the institutions in the country. A synthesisisation of the previous research on the topic of democratic erosion in Türkiye comes up with similar findings. In addition to the themes mentioned in the section of Hungary, a synthesising of the previous research also finds that it has been focusing on the crackdown on opposition and “Erdoganism”, even more than the personalistic rule of Orban in Hungary.
To exemplify how different scholars have researched about the topic is interesting to get a picture about how the previous research is going to inspire this paper and its research. Some scholars have focused on different themes and causes when it comes to understanding the democratic trajectories of the countries. In the case of Türkiye, some scholars have focused on how the dismantling of the democratic institutions through different measures and how that has affected the democratic backslide. For example, the dismantling of the institutions has been made from for example changing of the constitution in favour of the ruling party (Sommer 2019, p. 53-54)

Other scholars have focused on the party’s policies when it comes to the economic sphere, to understand how that affects the democratic backslide (Esen & Gumuscu 2020, p. 10-11) and (Onis 2019, p. 209-213) This research mainly focused on the economical politics in the countries, and how they have been used to erode democracy. To exemplify the previous research about Hungary and its democratic erosion, the theme of de-Europeanisation has been researched about, with focus on its growing gap with EU and its democratic values (Agh 2022 p.14-17) and (De Burca 2022, p. 16-20)

The previous research that has been conducted on the democratic erosion of Hungary and Türkiye has also focused on the theme of populism, to see how populist narratives have affected the democratic backsliding in the two countries. One example is focusing on Orban’s populism (Körösényi & Patkos 2017, p. 327-331) and another one is focusing how Erdogan used populist rhetoric to erode democratic values (Esen & Gumuscu 2023, p. 23-26) In addition to this, research has been conducted on the two parties that this thesis will write about, the Fidesz party in Hungary and AKP in Türkiye. For example, there has been research made about the euroscepticism of the Fidesz party. The research has been focusing on for example the institutional eurosceptism within Fidesz. (Hargitai 2020, p. 189-203) and the increasing jump from moderation to radicalization with the AKP, that can be
exemplified from the shift towards increasing autocratization in their policies. (Bashirov & Lancaster 2018, p. 1210-1220)

To further solidify the groundwork for the previous research, it is important to find research on the leaders themselves, to get an understanding of how they have been contributing to the democratic downfall in each country. There has been research conducted on Erdogan and how his leadership rule has affected Türkiye’s democratic trajectory. Scholars have argued that Erdogan has a style of autocracy that puts great focus into that the elections themselves should be free in something called a “competitive authoritarianism”. This is when the elections themselves are perceived as fair, but other things contribute to them not being completely free and fair, such as tilting the political playing field to the ruling party’s favour. The same research also studied how Erdogan has worked to deepen ties with other autocratic countries such as China and Russia, while he goes further and further away from western cooperation (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay & Fuat Keyman 2023, p. 89-90)

In addition to this, there has been extensive research about Orban and how he has impacted the democratic downfall in Hungary. Scholars have researched about how Orban has used the term “illiberal democracy” to legitimize his rule as being a new type of democracy, far away from the western perspective of what a democracy is supposed to be. The fact that he gets funds from the EU, while still in an obvious way denouncing everything the organization shows how much space he has to maneuver with. His illiberal style, according to scholars, also leads to him connecting with other similar leaders to spread his ideals as a form of soft power (Krekó & Enyedi 2018, p. 30 & 49) Other scholars have focused on Orban and how he succeeds to win important elections in Hungary. Even if elections can look close on paper, the structure of the system that Orban has been part of orchestrating will favour his Fidesz party and make it harder than it should be in a democratic system for the oppositional parties. There are many small changes to the democratic system in Hungary, especially in the electoral sphere, that might
not seem big one by one, but as a whole it has been leading to a system that favours Orban and his party so he can solidify his power hegemony over Hungarian politics (Scheppele 2022, p. 45-54)

These central themes from the previous research will contribute to the research that will be made in this essay, even if they will be altered with a different focus point, they will still lay as a base for the research about the topic. These themes are directly connected to the research that will be conducted in this research, with focus on the leaders with support of their parties have made policies in the countries that have eroded the democratic values with severe consequences for democracy.

2.1.2 Strengths and weaknesses on the previous research

The strength of the previous research about the topic is that it provides a clear insight into the causes that lie behind an increasingly anti-democratic stance from the governments in the countries. The previous research also has a strength when it comes to the comparative perspective, with comparisons to not just other countries with a negative democratic trajectory such as Poland, but also some comparative research about Hungary and Türkiye. These examples of strengths are something this essay can carry on and add research to.

There are also weaknesses with the previous research about the topic. The main one is that there will be potential biases when it comes to conducting research about various political topics. What drives someone to write about politics, and is it possible to write the research in a completely objective way? Another weakness from the previous research is that it might be complicated to find out why certain countries take certain trajectories when it comes to democracy, is it possible to count for every variable that contributes
to the democratic erosion? These weaknesses will be considered when writing the essay, to learn from previous research so that this essay can build on it and possibly making it better.

2.1.3 Discussion and conclusion on the previous research

Using a thematical structure will give the section a deep dive into different themes on the democratic erosion in the countries. A chronological structure would also work, but since this essay mainly focuses on the themes and policies of the parties a thematical structure makes more sense in the sense of the purpose and research question. The research will therefore be analysed in a thematical way, to better understand central themes and ideas, and how they have affected the democratic trajectory of the countries.

Even if there has been plenty of research about the topic before, there has not been an idea and ideology analysis that focuses solely on AKP and/or Fidesz. There is an argument to be made that there is a clear gap in the research of the topic of democratic erosion, a gap that this research can fill with an idea and ideology analysis of the two parties and how their ideas and policies have affected the democratic erosion in each country.

There have been comparative studies between the countries and their democratic backslide before, but not in the same way this research will be made with an idea and ideology analysis. Using the specific case studies will further make this essay and its research more unique and less of a copy of another research. It is also important to note that it is impossible to be unique in this research, but finding some parts of the essay that can be made different from other research will add something to the sphere of research about the topic.

The previous research has inspired this essay’s whole structure. The research question was inspired by a comparative study about Hungary and Poland (Glied & Zamecki 2020, p. 74-80) a study this essay will take inspiration from but with switches in for example the countries being studied, and the
methodology being used. To conclude this section, there has been plenty of research on the topic before, with themes such as personalistic leaders and anti-democratic policies. The previous research also has left gaps for this essay to fill, especially in the type of methodology being used. The essay will work on the existing research, to try and fill those gaps and set the stage for the research that will be conducted.

3 Methodology

3.1 Description of methodology

The methodology that will be used in this essay is mainly an idea and ideology analysis, with additional case studies to deepen the understanding of AKP and Fidesz while the focus is democratic erosion based on their ideas and policies. A comparative analysis will be an additional method, to get an understanding of similarities and differences in how the different countries have eroded democracy, based on the strongmen theory and the democratic principles. An idea and ideology analysis is fitting when it comes to answering the research question and following the purpose of the essay, since it can focus on describing the ideas and ideology of a party to put it into different contexts, in this case, democratic erosion. Using an idea and ideology analysis also allows the research to in a deeper way understand why certain parties’ certain things do by understanding underlying factors of the ideas and ideologies that contribute to making change in society, in the case of this essay negative democratic change (Bergström & Svärd 2018, p. 134-140)

The case studies that will be made will further deepen the understanding of the subject to get a better answer to the research question. Case studies also fit for the study since they give the research the possibility to generalize, which in this case would help the research since generalizing one case of democratic erosion could generalize others (George & Bennett 2005, p. 17) A comparative analysis is deepening the understanding of the topic of democratic erosion because it can work as a tool to get a comparative
understanding of how two entities, in this case Hungary and Türkiye, have been eroding democracy and understand similarities and differences in the way it has been done. A comparative analysis also allows the paper to in a complementary way understand the democratic erosion, in other words to build on the idea and ideology analyses (Essaison 2017, p. 105)

3.2 Material

The material that will be used in this essay will be broad to get a deep and nuanced understanding about the democratic erosion in Hungary and Türkiye. Using primary sources will be the central material of the essay. This material is official documents from AKP in Türkiye and Fidesz in Hungary for the idea and ideology analysis. Using those primary sources will give the essay the best understanding of the parties’ ideas and policies and how they have affected the democratic trajectory in the different countries. To further nuance the research, the sources will also include reliable third-party sources and observers to further examine how AKP and Fidesz affects democracy and scrutinise if they are following their own party statements. This will be various organizations, such as Freedom House and parts of the EU. The essay will also compliment these sources with different peer-reviewed reports and articles, which together will contribute to answering the research question while still using primary and reliable sources.

Using reliable sources is immensely important for the subject of analysing democracy and political parties, which is why using a broad array of mainly primary sources will give the essay high validity and reliability. It is also important to nuance the sources, in this essays case through peer-reviewed academic articles about the topic of democratic erosion. The material that will be used will in other words be broad, nuanced, and credible to reach a high validity and reliability. There are also eventual shortcomings when it comes to the material that have been picked. Using parties from countries that have different languages than English makes it harder to find the manifestos and party documents since the documents must be translated into
English. The good thing is that the parties themselves has done that to a few documents, which are the documents that will be part of the primary sources in the research. In the cases of documents not being translated, google translate will help to analyse those.

4 Empirical research

4.1 Idea and ideology analysis: AKP

An idea and ideology analysis of the AKP party in Türkiye will, as stated before, connect to the main democratic principles to get an understanding of how the party has affected the democracy in the country. Firstly, the essay will use the parties’ own side of the coin and how their policies affect the country. Then the essay will look at how third-person observers such as the EU and Amnesty look at the issue for a nuanced view. When it comes to the perspective of law and justice, the party has a clear view that fair trials and rule of law is important in society. Furthermore, the party documents states that the principle of justice is a principle that should be followed and the notion that power originates from law (AKP 2021, p.13) Political pluralism is also a central part of the party’s thoughts about politics.

The idea that Turkish politics should be competitive and pluralistic in nature is according to the party eminent for Turkish society (AKP 2021, p.12) "AK Partı believes that the national will can enjoy sovereignty only through use of all political rights in a free manner, and that the use of political rights freely is possible only through a pluralistic and free democratic order" This is another part of the party’s main thoughts about how they describe their society and how democratic it is. The notion that the Turkish society is supposed to be pluralistic and free is something AKP showcases here, and it also intertwines with the principle of free and fair elections since “free democratic order” means that the system should be free for actors to fight for power. (AKP 2021, p. 12)
In an interview with the news source CBS, Erdogan is being pressed about the issue of how his government treats independent media and the fact that many have been jailed and mentions how people have been jailed for simply insulting the president. Erdogan was getting defensive and discredited the allegations, even given the fact that the allegations came from not only credible organizations but also the US government. “Well, you're being deceived actually, and you're led to believe. Are you looking at the source of these allegations? Are you researching these claims? Please do, if you're not”

This interview ties to both freedom of the press and freedom of speech, two of the most central principles in a democratic society that Erdogans claims Turkey respects and follows. (CBS 2021)

In a message to the nation on their 100th anniversary of the Turkish state, Erdogan mentions that “We have implemented historic reforms in every area, from democracy to economy, security to justice, education to healthcare, and agriculture to foreign policy” (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye 2023)

AKP states, about the principle of independent media, that everyone has a right to their own opinion and that the versatility of opinions is part of Turkiyes “cultural wealth” (AKP 2021, p.12) According to the party, exceptions can be made if the media is spreading “disinformation” about the government and the nation. This is according to the party lawmakers something to tackle the disruption of public order. (Butler 2022)

Erdogan and the AKP paints a picture of a country that is in a positive progress for the future with working democratic principles like any other democracy. Under the surface on the other hand, lies many contradictions and lies that credible third-party observers have concluded.

One of these observers, Freedom House, has a lot of critique against AKP and its leader Erdogan when it comes to following democratic principles and the fact the country is in a democratic backslide. On the principle of free and fair elections, that AKP has painted as “democratic and pluralistic”, another picture is being shown. The elections were being manipulated into AKP’s favour while AKP accused its opposition of supporting terrorism. The fact
that the media is controlled and biased towards AKP does not make the election process fairer. Proxy voting in areas of low support, intimidation from the state towards the opposition and electoral advantage for AKP are other things Freedom House deem as affecting the principle of free and fair elections (Freedom House, 2023, p.3).

On the principle of rule of law, AKP labels themselves as a party that cares for “justice” Freedom House finds evidence of the opposite. The judiciary has become more and more controlled by the government since the coup attempt in 2016 which left many places vacant, vacancies AKP filled in with loyalists. The fact that the members of the courts are appointed by the government raises the question of separation of power. The judiciary cannot be independent from the executive branch of power if that branch appoints them. The case study, of the banning of HDP, is also described in Freedom House, as politically motivated pursuing the opposition party and members (Freedom House 2023, p. 14-15).

Justice and the rule of law should cover everyone in the Turkish state, states the party in its program. How their ideas and policies are being applied differs according to Freedom House. Individuals that are being held in detention for many years without trial on vague accusations are an example of how undemocratic the due process in Türkiye is. Freedom House mentions how a political prisoner, Osman Kavala, has been in detention for years on vague accusations. His case exemplifies how the rule of law is not respected by the AKP and Erdogan, and the lies they are putting out in their party channels about the greatness of the country and how democratic it has become (Freedom House 2023 p. 15).

The European Commission has also made a report about Türkiye and how AKP’s policies and ideas have affected the democratic backslide in the country. One example is their critique of Turkey and the democratic principle of separation of power. The separation of power in Turkey, which was briefly mentioned by Freedom House, has become increasingly centralized
towards the executive division of government. Instead of having a healthy balance between the executive, judiciary, and legislative, the unbalance gives AKP and Erdogan more power than they should have. This allows the party to go through with policies that might not been possible before the separation of power became unbalanced, such as the case study of the banning of HDP that will be analysed deeper (European Commission 2023, p.1).

The European Parliament had remarks on the democratic erosion when it comes to the principle of freedom of speech and freedom of media. Expressing yourself in a society that, according to the government, is democratic and accepting the notion of “voicing what they think” Türkiye has instead of accepting opinions started to restrict them. Lawyers, journalists, and regular people have gotten silenced by the Turkish state for simply stating opinions. The constant labelling of opposition voices as “terrorist”, with new laws implemented by the AKP-controlled legislature does not make the democratic backsliding any slower, quite the opposite. Election campaigns with unproportionate support towards AKP did not make the freedom of speech and expression any better, since media did not give the citizens enough coverage of the opposition (European Parliament 2023, p.5-8).

How Erdogan and his ruling party AKP have affected the principle of political pluralism will be exemplified in the case study about the process of banning the oppositional party HDP.

4.1.1 Case study: AKP and the banning of HDP

HDP is a left leaning pro-Kurdish party that was founded in 2012 and before its banning had its strongest support in the mostly Kurdish populated southeast area of Türkiye. It has been a strong opposition party for years.

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1 The European Commission is the executive branch of the EU
2 The European Parliament has three main parts, legislative, supervisory, and budgetary. In this thesis, the main information will come from the legislative and supervisory sections.
with great success in for example the election 2015 when they got over the
 ten percent threshold for parliament (Grigoriadis 2015, p.39) They repeated
 the same success in 2018 and started to get more and more embedded into
 Turkish politics as the left alternative to AKP and other right-wing
 nationalist parties.

 The party always had a hard time getting ethnic Turks to vote for them, since
 they have been labelled to be the political wing of the PKK, a Kurdish militia
 aiming to fight Turkish state interests. The consequences of this label would
 not only affect its election results, but also had a role to play in the banning
 of the party that will be written about further in the essay. Even though
 they’ve had a hard time securing votes from left leaning ethnic Turks, the
 success in the elections were still enough to come into parliament and also be
 an increasingly influential opposition force (Grigoriadis 2015, p.40)

 But this success as an oppositional force in Turkish politics would come to a
 halt for other reasons than losing electoral support. In 2021, the process of
 banning the party and its politicians from Turkish politics started as a court
 case by a party intertwined with AKP, MHP. The allegations that the court
 had against the HDP party were many, but the most central ones were that
 they had a connection to PKK, in Türkiye that would be enough for a ban.
 Challenging the unity of the Turkish state was another allegation, but both of
 these had insufficient evidence. A lot of the allegations put forward could be
 interpreted in this way, to be unclear and politically motivated by the
 government. “Terrorist propaganda” and “acts against the existence and
 integrity of the state” are examples of allegations that could seem politically
 motivated. The main criticism is that the connection to PKK is made up of
 assumptions and vague interpretations, and should not be enough for a ban
 (Can 2021, p. 1-5)

 There has been widespread condemnation from different organizations about
 the potential ban and its effect on democracy in Turkey. Amnesty
 international has been one of the organizations that has been a fierce critic to
the decision. The alleged links to PKK are being critiqued as the Turkish
definition of terrorism is, according to Amnesty, overly broad and leaves
room for interpretation. Arbitrary decisions based on weak evidence has been
happening for HDP members by the Turkish court, with for example freezing
of bank accounts and the ban of former and sitting party members. “An
attack on the rights to freedom of association and expression” states the
organization. The fact that the party and its members have been repressed by
Turkish authorities due to vague evidence of any wrongdoing is, according to
Amnesty, not acceptable (Amnesty 2023, p.3)

4.2 Idea and ideology analysis:Fidesz

An idea and ideology analysis will help to better understand the party and
how their policies have affected the democratic backslide in the country. It
will have the same structure as the section about Türkiye, with the party’s
own opinions and ideas being stated firstly, and secondly third-party
observers will scrutinise these ideas to see if they have contributed to the
democratic decline in the country.

Fidesz as a party can be described as national conservative, an ideology that
will get a better understanding of how the democratic erosion of Hungary is
intertwined with the ideas and ideology of the party that has led Hungary into
the democratic backslide (Parties and elections 2022)

The democratic principle of rule of law is something that Fidesz deems
important for a democratic society. In their party programme, they state the
importance of it and the notion that it is intertwined with the perspective of
freedom. In addition to this perspective of rule of law lies a part of the party
programme. In its party programme, the party states the importance on
following the domestic laws to strengthen democracy in the country (Fidesz
2021, p.3)

When it comes to the democratic principle of free and fair elections, the party
states the importance of representatives coming to power from elections on
every level in society, from local to national level (Fidesz 2021, p.4) To find policies and other things the Fidesz party has done, according to them, is through speeches since they are the main entities available in English. In a speech addressing the accusations from the EU of not respecting the democratic principle of rule of law, Viktor Orban comes at the organization. In the speech, Orban stated how EU could be compared to the old soviets in their leadership style, while calling the whole situation with accusations of the lack of rule of law as a “bad parody” from EU. It is not the first time Orban tries to brush off these types of allegations (Gergely 2023)

A couple of years before that, Orban had another speech that mentioned the alleged lack of rule of law in the country. Orban stated that when other states and organizations critique Hungary of their lack of rule of law, they insult and “step on our honor”. Furthermore, in the speech, Orban stated that other democratic principles such as freedom of the press, was not a “political tool” and that it was taken seriously by the government (Kovacs 2019) ³

When it comes to the democratic principle of freedom of speech and expression, the country has a constitution that guarantees this belief of being respected by the authorities. Fidesz has made it clear in their own channels that this is indeed what the situation looks like in the country. “Hypocrisy” is a word that has been thrown around by high standing party officials about allegations of mishaps. (About Hungary 2021)

Fidesz’s part in the constitutional change also guarantees freedom of speech. On paper, the democratic principle is therefore constitutionally protected and consequently also deemed from the party as a democratic principle that is being respected (Constitute 2011)⁴

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³ About Hungary will be a central part of the sources from Hungary, an English-speaking outlet that shows remarks and speeches from the Hungarian government, and will be important for the primary sources.
⁴ Constitute is a website that has constitutions written in English that will contribute to the primary sources.
The democratic principle of free and fair elections has been brought up by the party as something that the western media is spreading disinformation about. They claim that the party has done measures to guarantee elections flowing smoothly and in a democratic way. The message from the party in 2016 was that critics should look at the successful elections, that was labelled free and fair by the party. “With every vote cast, citizens have the chance to express their preferences” The party also claims that a 2014 change in the electoral system would allow the country to get increasingly democratically correct elections, on par with its other democratic counterparts. (About Hungary 2016)

The system of checks and balances have been changed since Orban came into power. In 2011, he and his ruling party passed a new constitution that allowed the changing of hundreds of laws. The checks and balances in the country are according to the constitution. “The functioning of the Hungarian State shall be based on the principle of separation of powers” is clearly stated in article C in the foundation of the constitution. Furthermore, Fidesz states in the recent constitution that “Judges shall be independent and only subordinated to laws and may not be instructed in relation to their judicial activities.” (Constitute 2011) To summarize Fidesz’s own ideas and policies based on the democratic principles being used, they are claiming to follow them and respect the democracy in the country and says that allegations of mishaps are wrong and that the democracy in Hungary is strong and prosperous. How has these allegations from third party observers looked like, and can they compel enough evidence to prove their claims?

One observer, the European Parliament, has come with the claim that Hungary can’t be classified as a democracy anymore. The observer wrote in a report that the situation in the country had deteriorated, and that democracy is gone, in its place is instead an electoral autocracy. The Parliament
describes it as a system with elections, but where democratic norms are not being respected. The separation of power is one democratic principle that has been critiqued in the report, and also freedom of expression (European Parliament 2022, p. 2-3) In a speech in the European Parliament, Johannes Hahn and Peter Kullgren criticized the lack of respect for the democratic principle of rule of law in the country. The speech stated that the country was not considered to respect the democratic principle, with deliberate actions from the Fidesz government to try and create a system that would undermine the core values of the European Union. Furthermore, the speech opened to work with the Hungarian government to try to in a constructive way solve the issue. “Time for Hungary to find adequate solutions” is summarizing the speech about the breeches of rule of law (European Parliament 2023)

The democratic principle of free and fair elections has been brought up as a concern from Freedom House in their report from 2023. Even if the constitution states that the elections should be free and fair, exactly what Fidesz are saying, something else has been found by Freedom House. Elections that are disproportionately favouring Fidesz with rules that led to the principle of free and fair elections being eroded, elections that the organization labels as “flawed” The report also stated how the principle of political pluralism has been affected by the system that disproportionately favours the ruling party. (Freedom House 2023, p. 3)

Freedom House also states in their report that equal opportunities among characters were flawed, which in addition to favourable election laws the government made also led to elections that could not be classified as free and fair (Freedom House 2023, p.3) Another observer, Human Rights Watch, has analysed how Fidesz’s ideas and policies have affected the democratic principle of separation of power. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Fidesz passed a law that they could rule with indefinite power for an unlimited amount of time. “Extraordinary circumstances” according to the party, but HRW states that it is a blow to the democracy in the country and especially
the separation of power. It also shows how it is another step in the direction of authoritarianism, according to the observer (Dam 2020)

The principle of freedom of the press will be further examined in the case study that follows.

4.1.1 Case study: Fidesz and controlling the media

To get a deeper understanding of how Fidesz have affected democratic principles in Hungary, analysing the case of the media will provide an understanding of how far Fidesz has pushed their influence in the once democratic state of Hungary.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Hungary’s media landscape has changed for the worse in recent years. They are describing Orban as a “press freedom predator” after the things he and his party have done to subdue independent media in the country. There are reports that the organization puts forward that Fidesz has de facto control over about 80% of all the media outlets in the country. This has been made possible for a few reasons. The main one is corruption by the elite in Hungary has led to oligarchs intertwined with Fidesz buying large media outlets to give Fidesz control over it (Rsf 2023)

There has been a process of private websites that has either been subdued or completely been taken over by the government. These private media outlets are the only ones that can paint a picture to the Hungarian people that the ruling party wants to silence for their own political gain. Even if there are parts of the media landscape that are still, on paper, independent and with no connection to the government, they face constant challenges to keep their activities running. Arbitrary shutdowns by the government have been a regular occurrence for independent news sources in the country. Different types of rhetoric are being used to attack, for example, liberal news sites in
the country. Propaganda such as being “too liberal” or spreading “false information” that is being spread can lead to shutdowns and court cases (Rsf 2023)

In an economic standpoint, controlling the media becomes easier for Fidesz because of increasingly harder times economically for the independent news sources that don’t get the same financial support as the state “puppets”. This allows Fidesz to take over these news sources and transforming them to pro-government media. Even if the takeovers might not seem like being directly connected to Fidesz, they still have de facto control through entrepreneurs (Rsf 2023) There are also other organizations that have critiqued Hungary for eroding democratic values through its war on the independent press. The European Parliament has critiqued the government for not being a democracy anymore, by not respecting European values. They are for example critiquing the country for not respecting the media pluralism and freedom of expression for its citizens (European Parliament 2022, p.1-3)

The European Parliament warned for the attack on the free press already in 2013, with the so called “Tavares report”. The report focused on many democratic principles, but when it comes to the principle of freedom of the press, the report had worrying news. For example, it stated that legislative changes would threaten media pluralism and make it more and more state centralized. It also stated that state-owned media had gotten more and more monopoly over the Hungarian media sphere (European Parliament 2013, p. 26) Freedom House states that even when the Hungarian law guarantees freedom of the press, the situation for independent media is far from free. This is because of a process of undermining by the ruling party, that has led to an erosion in media freedom in the country. Their report also mentions the scandal of wiretapping independent journalists, which is an indicator of how much the freedom of the press has deteriorated in the country (Freedom House 2023, p. 10)
What does Fidesz say about this supposed war on independent media? There have been accusations of the government wiretapping journalists, something that the party denies. High standing politicians that are attacking journalists on social media is also something Fidesz has done, labelling them as spreading “Hungarophobia” and “fake news” (Kovacs 2020). Spreading this type of information from high standing politicians adds to the war on independent press, something that makes the situation even worse.

5 Empirical findings

5.1 Presenting of results

The results of this essay’s research have been broad and fulfilling to get an understanding of the democratic erosion in Türkiye and Hungary. Based on the research question, that states “How have Erdogan and Orbán’s parties been eroding democratic values with their policies since they came into power in Türkiye and Hungary?” it is clear that there have been many ways it has happened, and this paper has solely focused on the democratic principles of: Free and fair elections, political pluralism, freedom of speech, freedom of the media, separation of power and rule of law. Having this structure, in addition to the theory of strongmen, has shown how the democracy has been eroded in the countries since Orban and Erdogan came into power.

A summary of the research about the democratic principles and how the government policies have affected democracy starts with the principles of free and fair elections and political pluralism. Regarding this is that both countries have made certain policies that has affected them negatively, such as the process of banning the HDP party in Türkiye (Amnesty 2023, p.2-3) and manipulating the election process in Hungary by the Fidesz government (Freedom House 2023, p. 2). The democratic principles of freedom of media and freedom of speech has also been negatively affected by policies by the
two governments. In Türkiye, this can be exemplified by restricting different opinions on the internet, where both regular people and news outlets have been silenced by the AKP government (European Parliament 2023, p.7) in Hungary, the erosion of these democratic values can be seen through mainly the increasing control over the media landscape, which consequently also affects the freedom of speech in the country (Rsf 2023)

Furthermore, the democratic principles of separation of power and rule of law has been affected by political policies. In Türkiye, it has been done partly by an increasing power for the executive branch of government (European Commission 2023) and partly from an almost non-existent respect for rule of law, with for example arbitrary arrests (Freedom House 2023, p.17) In Hungary, similar things has been revealed by this research. Orban and his government have gotten an increasingly centralized power (Dam 2020) and how the government has gotten strong critique from the EU of not respecting rule of law (European Parliament 2022, p.1-3)

The results from the research connected to the strongmen theory can be summarized with a few bullet points. One is the leadership style of ruling by romanticizing past glory, in Türkiye the Ottoman Empire (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018) and Hungary with the romanticization of a past revolution and supposed freedom (Kovacs 2017)

Additionally, the strongmen theory is central in presenting the results of the research about democratic erosion by focusing on the leadership style of intertwining the country's government and leading sphere with loyalists to consolidate its own power. In Türkiye, this has happened, for example, in the form of Erdogan loyalists in the court system to make the checks and balances uneven (Freedom House 2023, p.15) and in Hungary Orban has intertwined the government with loyalists to also include the media landscape with loyalists buying media outlets that he gets de facto control over (Rsf 2023)
5.2 Comparative analysis

This comparison will follow the aim of the essay and the research question, to focus on the relevant parts of the democratic erosion in Hungary in Türkiye, which will be based partly on the theory of strongmen, and partly of the main democratic principles that have been researched in the idea and ideology analyses and been furthered researched by the two case studies in the research. The process of democratic erosion in both countries have a strong connection to the theory of strongmen, which is a big similarity in the way the leaders of the countries have been at the forefront in the democratic backsliding. Using the core of the strongmen theory will explain how it is intertwined, and similarities and differences between how Erdogan and Orban has ruled to erode the democratic values in respective country.

The personalist rule, something that is central in the strongmen theory, is a similarity for both leaders. This personalist rule can be described as something caused by a centralized power by a leader to make the country about him and ruling on his terms. Both leaders are ruling by some type of personalist style of leadership, one example of this is how they have intertwined the politics into favouring them and their loyalist allies. In Hungary, it can be shown in the way Orban has taken control over the media de facto with the rich elites buying media outlets but indirectly being controlled by the government (Rsf 2023) In Türkiye’s case, the personalist rule by Erdogan can be described by how he uses his unbalanced democratic system of for example elections and the media to, in a disproportionate way, paint him as the favourable suggestion for president instead of giving the other candidates a chance (Freedom House 2023, p. 5-6)

Another similarity in the two leaders when it comes to the strongmen theory is how they are playing on the feelings of their countries about their past
success. Erdogan romanticizes about the past glory of the Ottoman Empire and how he aspires his country to reach those heights again, communicated in for example speeches to gain support. “The Republic of Turkey is also a continuation of the Ottomans” makes it clear how he aspires Türkiye to be (Presidency of the republic of Türkiye, 2018) Furthermore, Erdogan has made policies that could be described as neo-ottoman in the sphere of its foreign policy to achieve regional hegemony. This can be described as something straight from the strongmen playbook, to gain support from the people by playing on the feelings on the population by past successes (Foà 2021, p.57-61)

This is something Orban and his party Fidesz also has done in a similar way. This has mainly been done commemorating the 1956 revolution against the communists, to celebrate its freedom. Orban paints a picture that freedom is central for Hungary, which arguably can work as a distraction from the declining freedom since he came into power in 2010. The irony in the quote “If we lose our freedom,” the prime minister said in closing, “if we lose our national independence, we will be lost, too.” is striking, when it is apparent that the freedom has been declining in the country according to observers (About Hungary 2017)

In addition to this, Orban has been romanticizing about past Hungarian empires, and the trianon agreement that minimized Hungary’s borders in the 20th century and left deep wounds, wounds that Orban plays on to gain support. In a speech, prime minister Orban talks about “taking Hungary to victory” and “The West raped the thousand-year-old borders and history of Central Europe”. Building resentment against the West and an agenda of appearing strong and restoring past success is clearly connected to the strongmen theory (About Hungary 2020)

The strongmen trait of complications with international cooperation is interesting to look at from a comparative perspective. This thesis has not directly been focusing on the international perspective of the two countries,
but indirectly the research has found that the democratic erosion of the countries might have hindered international cooperation, such as worsening relations with the liberal west in both countries. In Hungary it can be exemplified from remarks by Orban on “Western world under attack from virus developed in progressive liberal laboratories” (About Hungary 2023) and in Türkiye by shutting down the criticism on mishaps on democratic values by questioning the reliability on western observers (CBS 2021)

Comparing the leaders in the context of eroding democratic values, there are mainly similarities between them, but also a few differences.

One central difference between the two eroding democracies is how the democratic values of political pluralism and free and fair elections has been affected by policies. In Hungary, no party has been banned in the years of Orban in power, in a system that lets the opposition parties go into the elections, even if there are biases towards ruling Fidesz (Freedom House 2023, p.4) In other words, a system that is on paper fair and does not, in an overly authoritarian matter, differ when it is being researched.

This in sharp contrast to Türkiye, which has been affecting the principle of political pluralism with its planned banning of the HDP party, a banning that was a blow for the opposition (Amnesty 2023, p. 3) It affected the principle of free and fair elections, which already was criticised for not being free and fair enough according to the observer Freedom House (Freedom House 2023, p. 3) To sum it up, Türkiye has affected the principles of free and fair elections and political pluralism in a more aggressive way compared to Hungary, mainly because of the proposed shutdown of the HDP.

Another similarity in how the parties have eroded the democracy based on the democratic principles is freedom of speech and freedom of media. The policies from both parties have been affecting the freedom of speech in ways such as restricting the way individuals can express themselves on the internet in Türkiye (Hrw 2022) and in Hungary the freedom of speech has been
affected by the policies of controlling the media, which directly connects to the principle of free media (Right livelihood 2023) The principle of free media has been eroded by both countries in a similar fashion, with control gradually going from independent sources to the centralized government (RsF 2023) The media freedom in both countries have a big similarity in on paper being classified “free”, but de facto being either completely controlled by the government or indirectly controlled by the government from for example loyalist elites (Freepresslimited 2023)

Comparing how the different leaders through their ideas and policies have affected the democratic principle of separation of power is important to get an understanding of the similarities and differences. One similarity is that both leaders slowly but steadily have made the system of separation of power increasingly unbalanced in favour of the executive branch of government. In Türkiye, it has been done with policies that favours AKP influence in the legislative body in Türkiye (Freedom House 2023) and in Hungary it can be exemplified from the Covid-19 pandemic when Fidesz passed laws to give the executive branch unlimited power to rule, which directly affected the democratic principle of separation of power (Dam 2020) To further illustrate the democratic erosion in Hungary and Türkiye, a democracy index will be used. The two variables in the V-dem democracy index will be the liberal democracy index and electoral democracy index, the main themes that have been brought up in this essay as the democratic principles.
This graph of Hungary, which is from the time period with Orban in power, focuses on the electoral democracy index and liberal democracy index. The graph clearly shows a steady decline in democracy, based on the policies of the Fidesz party and its leader Viktor Orban have gone through with.

This graph of Türkiye shows a clear democratic downfall since Erdogan came into power in 2014, with policies he and his AKP party has made
during the years that have steadily been eroding the democratic values in the country.

Both tables show how the erosion of the democratic principles, that can be classified under the electoral democracy index and liberal democracy index, have been clear and rampant. It is not just propaganda from Brussels, as Orban says (About Hungary 2017), the democracy in both countries is in a process of backsliding, a process that can be explained by the strongmen theory and the main democratic principles.

All the parts that have been researched, mainly the strongmen theory and the main democratic principles, have in some way affected the democratic erosion in the once democratic countries of Türkiye and Hungary. The policies from the leaders Erdogan and Orban have had an evident negative effect on the democratic trajectory in the two countries. There have been minor differences in the modus operandi of the increasing authoritative nature of Hungarian and Turkish politics based on the policies by the leaders, an erosion that show distinct similarities in how the leaders have succeeded in consolidating its own power at the same time democracy has been in an backslide. The comparative analysis shows how two leaders in around the same time in comparable countries have been in a process of democratic backsliding, largely because of the ideas and policies of their ruling parties and strongmen ideals.

5.3 Discussion
This part of the thesis will be the thoughts of the writer, and as such sources will only be provided about the objective truths. Can you generalize the findings to other studies? That is a complex question, with different sides of the argument. One side, the one that favours a generalization with other similar cases, argues that it would be possible. For example, to generalize with other countries with a similar profile, with periods of democratization
after some type of authoritarian rule and then experiencing democratic backsliding. Countries that fit that profile could be Poland (Freedom House 2023) or India (V-dem 2022). This perspective is minimalistic, and only takes these variables into consideration for its generalisation.

On the other hand, there are arguments to be had that implies that this study cannot be generalized to other similar countries with similar democratic trajectories. There are many variables to take into consideration when making a generalization to other countries. History, democratic culture, and ideology, in addition the countless other variables can all matter and make a generalization between two countries complex. There is also a discussion to be had if there can be alternate interpretations to the results of the study. It is impossible to cover all variables in the democratization sphere, but focusing on the six democratic principles and the strongmen theory allows the study to get a relatively broad framework. There will be different interpretations of the findings of the study. For example, when Hungary removed the separation of power out of the way during the pandemic, some can argue it is positive with a government taking direct action instead of looking at it as a negative implication for democracy.

Looking at the previous research on the topic, the results is arguably similar, with the main points being a clear democratic erosion since the leaders came into executive power, by eroding the main democratic principles. There are minor differences in how this study and other studies have interpreted what principle matters the most, with some focusing on the rule of law (Glied & Zamecki 2020, p. 59-60) and others focusing on the principle of independent media (Kubas & Czyz 2018, p. 55)

It is arguably important that the results of the study can be applicable to other cases in the future. Using the methodology of this study with slight alterations can contribute to further studies about democratic erosion, since it is likely that the democratic principles will be those that affect the democracy in a country the most. Additionally, using the strongmen theory will possibly
apply to future studies about democratic erosion since many cases of
democratic backsliding can be caused by a strongman leader dismantling it.
Since politics are complex with various factors contributing to if a
democracy will succeed or not, it will be hard to say if this methodology will
be appropriate to other cases in the future.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Connection to the research question and purpose
“How has Erdogan and Orban’s parties been eroding democratic values with
their policies since the leaders came into executive power in Türkiye and
Hungary?”

Throughout the research of this paper, material has been collected to get a
deep understanding about how democracy has been eroded in Türkiye and
Hungary. Not respecting the democratic principles of free and fair elections,
political pluralism, freedom of speech, freedom of media, rule of law and
separation of power have contributed to the erosion of democracy. The
strongmen theory has in addition to this helped get an understanding of the
connection between a certain leadership style and how it can contribute to
democratic backsliding and increasing authoritarianism.

Central causes for the democratic backsliding are for example the
dismantling of democratic institutions, to contribute to the erosion of the
democratic principles of political pluralism in Türkiye and rule of law in
Hungary. It is not clear what factor matters the most to erode democracy in
the countries, and it is likely a mix of the erosion of the democratic principles
and factors such as a strongmen leadership that all contribute to growing
autocracy. In other words, and to sum up, democracy has been eroding in the
two countries because of ideas and policies from the ruling parties and
leaders that have not respected the six democratic principles and have ruled in an autocratic way as strongmen.

Answering the research question directly connects to the purpose of the thesis, which mainly focuses on the central themes of democracy and the strongmen theory. The research that has been conducted in this thesis has not only answered the research question, but it has also thoroughly focused on solely the purpose of the thesis that was stated in the introductory chapter. The structure has allowed the research to be conducted clearly and concisely, to help answer the research question and follow the purpose of the thesis.

6.2 Future research

Possible further research on the topic could be to do a complementary study in a few years on the countries to compare the period studied in this thesis with another period in the future to get a comparative understanding about different eras. Another way the further research could be conducted could be by using another theory, to focus on another aspect of democratic erosion, such as institutionalism. Changing the methodology could also work for further research on the topic, with a more quantitative focus on a specific index, with more variables to get a broader field of research.

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