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Editorial: Hatred (Hate Speech) and Lies in Current Politics

Juraj Nemec¹, Daniel Klimovský², Mária Murray Svidroňová³

Motto: *“Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred.”* (Václav Havel)

Previous editorials of the NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy aimed to provoke discussion related to the most pressing issues in current public administration, public policy, and politics. This editorial focuses on an increasingly visible phenomenon – hatred and lies in current politics that have already influenced ordinary policy-making practice. The academic literature had already recognised these phenomena, but the scientific evidence, especially in our region of Central and Eastern Europe, is somewhat fragmented, and any systematic research in this field is lacking.

1 Faculty of Economics and Administration, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.

2 Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia.

3 Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

Manipulation of facts and lies

The fact that leading politicians not only manipulate facts but also directly lie was perfectly illustrated for the UK conditions by Osborne as early 2005. His book (Osborne, 2025) presents comprehensive evidence regarding the manipulations and lie perpetrated by UK politicians. Two examples:

a/ Manipulation of facts:

“The charge sheet against Margaret Thatcher begins before the 1979 general election. Labour leader Jim Callaghan claimed that the Conservatives would double VAT to pay for the income tax cuts they had promised. Margaret Thatcher dealt with his accusation by asserting, “we will not double it”. Her words were strictly true, but disingenuous. The Conservatives jacked up VAT from 8 per cent to 15 per cent within months of taking office, as near to doubling the tax as made no difference”. (Osborne, 2005, p. 15)

b/ Direct lie:

“John Major repeatedly stating that ‘I have no plans and see no need to increase’ VAT. His chancellor, Norman Lamont, issued the same message, insisting to the House of Commons in his budget statement of 10 March 1992 that ‘I have no need, no proposals and no plans either to raise or extend the scope of VAT.’ These pledges were, of course broken by the Tories, who soon raised VAT to its present level of 17.5 per cent (Osborne, 2005, p. 18).

A Google Scholar search using the search terms (politician, lie, Central Europe) does not provide evidence that the issue of lies in politics has been in-depth investigated by academia. Only one topic in a relevant blog (a non-scientific article) by Šimečka (2017) is visible on the first pages of this search. Šimečka (2017, p. 1) delivers a very critical warning, as follows:

“The fundamental difference between a dictatorship and liberal democracy lies in a social contract which, while allowing for freedom to lie, holds together by a common respect for truth, understood in the enlightenment tradition as coherence between word and reality. Today, this bond of liberal democracy is fracturing at a shocking speed, with cracks appearing in the most unlikely of places; lies have already dislodged the UK from the European Union and conquered the White House. I would never have believed that societies with such venerable traditions of rationality would be like those of Eastern Europe, where irrationality is a national sport”.

It is somewhat surprising that (if Šimečka is correct) the issue of political lies has already been somehow mapped for countries in Western Europe or in the US, but neglected in the region, where Šimečka expects that lies are “the national sport” because of path-dependence. The gap is fully evident and should be reflected in our future research.

Hatred

One of the most recent articles dealing with hatred was published by Pérez-Escolar et al. (2025). The authors analysed the 2023 Spanish election campaign and the summary of their findings is as follows (Pérez-Escolar et al., 2025, p. 1):

“The findings reveal regional variations in hate speech, with coastal candidates focusing heavily on Moroccans, while criticisms of unaccompanied minors are more prevalent in Madrid. Vox also violated electoral law by publishing hate messages on Election Day, May 27. The use of self-defensive discursive strategies—such as victimist, alarmist, and dehumanizing rhetoric—constructs a deliberate binary narrative of “us versus them,” further intensifying ideological polarisation.

The Google Scholar search shows some articles from the Central and Eastern Europe that address hatred and behaviour of politicians; however, there are very few. There is no doubt that more should be delivered on this topic by academia in our region, because hatred has started to deliver really critical outcomes. In Slovakia, there was an assassination attempt on the life of the Prime Minister, Robert Fico, in 2024; the subsequent investigations suggest that politics (and hatred) were behind this assassination attempt. In 2025, the former Czech Prime Minister (and the present-day hot candidate for this position), Václav Babiš, was attacked and injured during one of his party meetings. There is no doubt that things go too far today; therefore, we need to find some “brakes”.

Possible purposes

In 1987, the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair stated the following (cited by Osborne, 2005, p. 13):

“The truth becomes almost impossible to communicate because total frankness, relayed in the shorthand of the mass media becomes simply a weapon in the hands of opponents”.

This statement suggests that the existence and power of social media dynamise the concept of a “cognitive authority”. As cognitive authorities of their followers, politicians directly influence public perception of current news by sharing their own opinions and views (Böhmer, 2021). Politicians are more visible than ever and can interact with their electorate daily, therefore populism flourishes.

Devinney & Hartwell (2020) identify the following varieties of populism:

- Structural: populism is perceived as a social “call to arms” using large-scale cross-class coalitions, with leaders emphasising favoured factors of production, and local and domestic value chains (e.g. the US president D. Trump stressing the need to consume US products);

- Economic: populists exploit the fears of the least economically secure segments of society, those who may be more receptive to a policy of scapegoating elites, immigrants, the rich, or any number of “the other”;
- Ideological: populism conceives of society as representations of good and evil, superimposed onto the political process of a particular country;
- Political-institutional: populism is a sustained, large-scale political project intended to mobilise marginalised social classes into political action.

Populism is currently growing worldwide and is therefore not a problem exclusive to the Central and Eastern Europe region, affecting an increasing number of countries, as confirmed by research studies. For example, Funke, Schularik and Trebesch (2023) monitored almost 1,500 leaders in 60 countries from 1900 to 2020, identifying 51 of them as populist leaders. They also point out that if a country has elected a populist leader once, the chances of it doing so again are greater, because populists are very adept in gaining and maintaining a voter base. Benczes (2022) describes populism as addictive, as populist leaders stay in power on average twice as long as non-populist leaders.

Conclusions

Manipulation of facts, direct lies and hatred are the “daily routine” almost everywhere in the world today and are also fully visible across almost the entire Central and Eastern Europe region. These dangerous phenomena are, unfortunately, scarcely discussed in the academic literature, and the most glaring omission is the lack of effective proposals on how to cope with them. A few articles suggest that the reestablishment of real investigative and independent media may help; however, this kind of media probably does not exist in Central and Eastern Europe today. The other set of proposals is connected with the “better educated” voter; however, the existing data (such as PISA tests) suggest that the quality of all levels of education is deteriorating worldwide. Although a few other sources propose additional solutions, there is a pressing need to become familiar with all these issues, and researchers can provide a solid foundation for further meaningful steps.

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