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The Rise of the Far Right in Post-Communist Hungary

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Introduction

A subject long debated in social sciences, the rise of the far right and the development of fascism has become a much discussed issue since its recent re-emergence in Europe. The re-emergence has become increasingly clear following the Eurozone Crisis and the subsequent electoral successes for extremist parties such as Greece’s Golden Dawn (~7%), Hungary’s Jobbik (~17%), Bulgaria’s Attack! (~10%), and France’s Front National (~18%).

Inevitably, social scientists have drawn parallels with the emergence of fascism experienced throughout the 1920s and 1930s, following the First World War and the Great Depression. The similarities often hinge upon the economic argument; that a disillusioned electorate, moved by financial desperation, opts for the political extremes.

Though often populist by nature and displaying old fascist tendencies, far right parties in the 21st century have rebranded themselves in a move to gain acceptance in an increasingly liberal society. The ability of modern far right movements to gain a certain degree of acceptance has meant that the parties have been able to properly mobilise. Taking its cue from its fascist predecessors, the new far right is often defined by social conservatism, racism, xenophobia, fundamentalism, nativism and the opposition of liberal and left wing politics (Mudde, 2007: pp. 18-24). Unlike traditional fascism however, the emphasis on the need for authoritarian rule has declined, with parties taking a more defensive and isolationist stand, advocating the protection of the native populace from ‘outsider threats’ rather than the imperialistic, offensive expansion of 20th century far right ideology (Blum, 1998: p. 3). While the principles of older far right movements are still clearly visible within newer parties,
the means and ends have changed as they attempt to capitalize on the void left behind by the failings of the political mainstream.

Contrary to historic studies on the rise of Hitler, Mussolini and -to a lesser extent- Franco and Salazar, modern analyses suggest that the economic argument is but one of many in explaining the revival of a redefined far right in Europe. Cultural, political and social considerations have progressively come to the forefront, in accordance with the development of international relations, the rise of globalization and the dawn of a new technological age. The factors behind the resurgence of the far right have both increased and diversified throughout Europe, leading to differing experiences between western, eastern and southern Europe.

A leading example of the rise of the far right in Europe is that of Jobbik’s success in Hungary. Led by Gábor Vona, Jobbik dubs itself the “movement for a better Hungary” and has displayed strong anti-Semitic, anti-Roma and homophobic tendencies, leading to it often being labelled a neo-fascist and neo-Nazi party. Founded in late 2003, Jobbik has experienced an exponential rise in electoral support and is currently the third largest party in the country having garnered 16.67% of the vote in the 2010 national elections. Jobbik experienced its first electoral success in the 2009 European elections where the party managed to gain 14.77% of the vote. Jobbik had previously taken part in the 2006 national elections as part of the ‘MIÉP-Jobbik Third Way Alliance of Parties’; a coalition of small far right parties that failed to make it into parliament with only 2.2% of the vote. The 2009 European Elections marked the first electoral success of the Hungarian far right since the national
assembly elected Admiral Miklós Horthy as regent of Hungary in 1920. As seen in the graph below, 2009 marks the beginning of the rise of Jobbik and the fall of MIÉP.

**Figure 1: Support for Jobbik and MIÉP between 2004 and 2012** (Medián, 2013)

A combination of electoral results and polls by Medián shows how Jobbik gained supremacy after 2006, achieving over 14% in 2009, over 16% in 2010 and polling at almost 20% in early 2013.

Prior to its quasi-absorption by Jobbik in 2006, the relatively simplistic and unsuccessful Hungarian Justice and Life Party MIÉP was the only political representation of Hungary’s far right. Led by the disillusioned playwright and founder of The Hungarian Democratic Forum István Csurka, it peaked electorally at 5.5% in the 1998 national elections.

The novel and extraordinary nature of Jobbik’s success has meant that very few studies exist on the phenomenon. While much has been said in the field of social sciences with regards to the general rise of the far right in Europe, literature on the Hungarian case is scarce. This dissertation intends to argue that, despite being affected by the general causes behind the resurgence of Europe’s far right, it is the
factors unique to the Hungarian case that are key to explaining the exceptional success of Jobbik. This paper will begin by presenting the main arguments put forward by social scientists on the rise of the European far right and assessing to what extent they apply to the rise of Jobbik in Hungary. It will then undertake a thorough scientific analysis of the unique conditions and socio-cultural mechanisms that have allowed Jobbik to prosper in Hungary over recent years, before finally comparing and contrasting the Hungarian case to those of similar countries that have had both comparable and differing experiences of the far right.

Though much of the current literature on Hungarian politics mentions Jobbik and the far right, they are often only mentioned briefly and no studies exist that cover the entire phenomenon. This paper will revolve largely around document and statistical analysis, relying on various qualitative and quantitative resources. The analysis will combine elements of the explanatory case study and the comparative methods in order to place the Hungarian case within the wider context of the rise of Europe’s far right, drawing from the methodological approaches explored by Robert Yin in *Application of Case Study Research* and Charles Ragin in *The Comparative Method*. The focus on Hungary requires a case study approach in order to cover both quantitative and qualitative research on the country’s political situation and account for the various complexities in the Hungarian case (Yin, 2012: pp. 10-11). Given that there is very little research on the rise of the far right in Hungary as a phenomenon, the case study approach is necessary in order to provide a complete account of Hungary’s situation and therefore compliment the comparative aspect of this study. The aim of the comparative approach is to highlight the general context of the rise of the European far right and provide perspective on the Hungarian case (Ragin, 2000: p. 148).
Chapter One

Social Sciences on the Rise of the European Far Right

The rise of populist far right parties is clearly a phenomenon that exists throughout Europe. Though literature on the Hungarian case is limited, there are many ‘general theories’ that attempt to explain the reasons behind the recent success of the European far right. The theories generally belong to two different categories. The first category is disillusionment with the political mainstream; the second is the rebranding of the far right. These are generally considered to be the two overarching factors of the far right’s success in 21st century Europe.

1. Disillusionment with the Political Mainstream

Numerous political theorists point towards the fact that economic crisis forced fascism to the forefront of European politics in the first half of the 20th century. The original rise of fascism happened in the context of the aftermath of the Great War. In Italy, the loss of 650,000 lives during the war, drastically increasing debt and economic failure allowed for Mussolini to unite a strongly disillusioned population to support his accession to power (Blum, 1998: pp. 56). In Germany, with the onset of the Great Depression, hyperinflation, debt, unemployment and complete economic collapse, the people turned against the government. In 1932, the year before the NSDAP’s election, unemployment in Germany had reached 6.2 million, a third of Germany’s able workforce (Blum, 1998: p. 10). This chaos, desperation and general confusion provided the Nazi party with the means to winning the national elections. In addition to the economic argument, there is the one of broader political mismanagement. Corruption, seemingly undemocratic institutions, undesired western-imposed governments and the rise of anti-establishment movements all fed into the people’s impatience with the governments that preceded fascists in Italy, Germany
and Spain. Blum points out that corruption and a history lacking in democracy explain how the fascist parties managed to impose themselves in authoritarian manner (Blum, 1998: pp. 7-8).

These various factors are best described as feeding into a greater disillusionment with the political mainstream. Economic desperation paired with anger towards a corrupt and inefficient state have often had an observable tendency to push voters towards the extremes. In times of political and economic crisis, election turnouts are often low and protest and desperation votes rise, while the extreme anti-establishment parties’ loyal followers continue to turn out to vote (Csaky, 2012). While low turnout cannot explain the rise of the Nazis, the other parties’ results and the success of the communists suggest that the dire political situation made voters opt for change in a time where non-extreme options were lacking. The general trend of voters moving towards the extremes is best illustrated by the fact that the communist movements in Italy and Germany also grew exponentially after the Great War (Blum, 1998: pp. 5-8).

Generally, the far right parties targeted the disillusioned masses, but their anti-communist rhetoric attracted the moneyed classes as well. Viewed as a bulwark against the rise of Soviet Russia, Mussolini and Hitler enjoyed the support of many industrialists, bankers and landowners and succeeded in overcoming their communist rivals (Blum, 1998: pp. 10-11).

Some believe that, much like the original rise of fascism, the economic crisis has once again led to major disenfranchisement with the political mainstream in countries such as Greece and Bulgaria, pushing the problem of turnout and increasing voter apathy to the forefront (Csaky, 2012). Turnout in Greece’s legislative elections went down by 9
points between 2009 and 2012 as the far right Golden Dawn party experienced increasing electoral successes. In Bulgaria’s last elections, turnout was around 51% and the far right Attack! party achieved 7% making them kingmakers (NSD, 2013). Around Europe, especially in Greece, Hungary and the UK, far right parties perform better in the European Elections, where turnout is often at its lowest.

The countries with the most prominent far right parties are all ones that have been deeply affected by the recession and the Eurozone Crisis; Greece has long been on the brink of economic collapse, Bulgaria is the poorest nation in the European Union, Hungary was barely saved by a bailout package in 2008 and France has experienced a recent rise of income inequality, only just avoiding a double-dip recession. Liang believes these populist parties are taking advantage of the faults in certain European party-systems and that the rhetoric of the far right is appealing to an increasingly disappointed electorate, turning on the ordinary parties (Liang, 2013: pp. 3-4).

Similarly to Liang, Cas Mudde believes anti-Semitism, islamophobia, and anti-Roma sentiments to be the driving factors of the far right in Europe. Mudde and Liang believe that the European far right is capitalizing on voters’ frustrations, cultivating a xenophobic culture by scapegoating Jews, Muslims and Romas for the economic and political failure of the current governments (Liang, 2013: pp. 15, 24 & 50). As the dissatisfied public increasingly turns its back on liberal parties such as the Liberal Democrats in the UK and the FDP in Germany, political competition is decreasing and leaving behind an electoral hole that the far right is attempting to fill.

The above statistics strongly suggest that economic mismanagement has, in part, caused popular disillusionment with the political mainstream, which has in turn
resulted in low turnouts and electoral moves towards the extremes, especially within the lower classes of society. The economic argument is seemingly echoed by Robert Ford’s statistics on the British National Party, experiencing an increase in support in recent years. Ford’s findings suggest that 68% of BNP supporters are working class and 68% have no qualifications beyond their GCSE (Ford, 2012). Kai Arzheimer’s argues that the decline of the ‘petty bourgeoisie’, and the deepening of ethnic competition due to the rise in unskilled immigration, have narrowed the focus of far right parties to the bottom and lower-middle classes of society (Arzheimer, 2012: pp. 3 & 10). These parts of society have been most affected by the economic crisis with the growth of inequality and the inflation of the lower-middle class.

However, despite the BNP’s rise in support, the party remains politically insignificant with no seats in parliament and only 1.9% of the vote (Ford, 2012). This is explained by the fact that the disillusionment argument alone cannot single-handedly explain the rise of the far right throughout Europe. Though emphasizing the far right’s focus on the lower classes, Arzheimer explains that certain parties’ ability to go beyond this narrow scope is integral to their success. Ford’s findings support Arzheimer’s claim that the most radical parties, such as the BNP and the NPD in Germany, have “frightened off” the middle classes, evidenced by the fact that the majority of their supporters are the uneducated members of the working class (Arzheimer, 2012: p. 8). It is for this reason that many far right parties have adopted a ‘softer’, more relatable image, with which both the working and the middle class can identify.

The success of UKIP in comparison to the BNP clearly demonstrates this. Though the economic argument is still of importance, as many in the middle class have suffered
during the recession, it is the combination of disillusionment and a rebranded far right that explains its recent success in Europe.

2. The Rebranding and Reorganisation of the Far Right

James Mayfield argues that the parties on the radical right can no longer be categorized as one movement or ideology, pointing out an important nuance that Mudde and Liang only address indirectly; given the many differences between far right parties throughout Europe, one must be careful when comparing them (Mayfield, 2013). One trend that can be observed amongst the successful far right parties is the attempt to broaden their horizons by rebranding the movement.

In recent years, the most successful far right parties in Europe have made significant gains amongst younger generations by placing special emphasis on cultural and social issues, rather than just economic ones. While continuing to cultivate the ‘traditional far right following’, the European radical right has undergone major changes in a bid to win over the disillusioned urban youth. The decision to give more weight to social and cultural policies has allowed parties such as the Front National and Jobbik to expand their influence beyond the countryside, the elderly, the poor and the uneducated.

Walker and Taylor quote political scientist Gavan Titley saying that “racist movements constantly adapt to political conditions and seek new sets of values” (Walker & Taylor, 2013). In an increasingly liberal European society, it is clear that many dated far right concepts would hold parties back; the consequences of the Second World War led to a taboo on fascism that is still relevant today (Liang, 2013: p. 24). As mentioned previously, this is the case with the BNP and the NPD. Such
parties take extreme standpoints and present themselves as violent and expansionist, which alienates a large percentage of the population. Groups akin to the English Defence League, closely related to the BNP, have no chance of attracting the masses because they are extremist in almost every respect (Arzheimer, 2012: pp. 7-9). The classical fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s were all staunchly authoritarian, imperialistic and fuelled by a mixture of hate and patriotism. Far right parties today have taken a much less offensive stance, instead promoting pride in tradition and the protection of the native populace from outsider threats (Kester, 2012). While the Nazis focused on scapegoating a minority that was long-established in the country – the Jews - parties like the Front National, Vlaams Belang and the Dutch Party for Freedom have chosen to focus on threats from the outside (Mayfield, 2013). They focus on Euroscepticism and immigration, something that is more relatable and socially acceptable than scapegoating minorities already established in any given society. These parties have chosen to scapegoat those that they believe threaten their native countries’ economy, society and culture (Walker & Taylor, 2013). As a result, in addition to capitalizing on the failings of the political mainstream, many of the major European far right parties have formulated their policies around the economic threat of immigration, the failings of the European Union and the perceived socio-cultural menace of Islam (Mayfield, 2013). Consequently, the policies of the far right are usually moulded to suit the scapegoat. The far right has replaced the old image of totalitarian fascists with one of a new, progressive far right, focusing on issues such as social welfare, democracy, pro-Zionism, women’s rights, religious freedom and sometimes even sexual freedom with which even the educated and liberal-minded can come to terms (Walker, 2009). The rebranding of the far right in Europe has had both a direct and indirect impact. On the one hand, people who for moral reasons would
never have considered voting for them have been given a justification to do so. On the other hand, by directly distancing themselves from the outcast historical fascism, far right parties in Europe have made themselves tolerable in modern society (Walker & Taylor, 2013). The latter is key to the parties’ ability to develop, evolve and manifest themselves in the political arena.

One example of a far right party that has adopted the aforementioned soft populist approach is the Dutch Party for Freedom, headed by Geert Wilders. The party made significant electoral gains in the past few years and various polls predict them to become the biggest party in the Netherlands. Wilders has dubbed himself a supporter of same-sex rights, gender equality and an anti-fascist (Walker, 2009). Nonetheless, his staunch anti-Islamic rhetoric has caused much discussion in Europe. Wilders’ Party for Freedom might only loosely be considered as a far right party, but it represents to what extent the movement has successfully rebranded itself in Europe. Wilders has capitalized on both economic concerns, such as rising immigration, and cultural ones, for example the outrage that followed the assassination of Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh by Islamic extremists (Walker, 2009).

As with Wilders’ Party for Freedom, the Danish People’s Party led by Kristian Thulesen Dahl, has formulated much of its policy around the supposed ‘islamification of Europe’ (Walker, 2009). Once again presenting the image of a protector, rather than an expansionist force, the People’s Party currently holds 22 seats in parliament and as Kingmaker, is the reason for the tightening of Denmark’s immigration policy (Walker, 2009). The Front National in France has also developed its policy around immigration from former colonies Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, blaming it for the
rise of crime and unemployment in addition to its threat to French culture. Rising islamophobia throughout Europe has led far right parties to take a more cultural approach to immigration (Mayfield, 2013). Wilders has labelled the Koran a fascist book and compared it to Mein Kampf in order to both criticize it and distance himself from fascism (Walker, 2009). Scandals related to Islamic extremists in Europe, such as the protests and death threats that followed the Mohammed caricatures in Denmark, have presented the far right with the chance to relate to younger voters. While immigration previously concerned older adults, the new cultural aspect of it has attracted the interest of many young voters. According to a study by Demos on European voter demographics, two thirds of far right voters are under the age of 30 (Bartlett et al, 2012). Some argue that the rise of islamophobia and its importance in modern far right policy has attracted a rebellious, disillusioned youth (Walker & Taylor, 2013). However, unlike its fascist predecessors, the modern far right has found a way to make its views acceptable through balanced policy. Wilders’ open support for same-sex rights, the harsh punishment he advocates for crimes against members of the Jewish and LGBT communities (Walker, 2009), the True Finns’ strong welfare policy in Finland, and the Front National’s emphasis on supporting small local businesses, have given far right parties a stronger moral hold, providing more legitimacy than fascist parties from the past.

In addition to their focus on immigration, far right parties have capitalized on the Eurozone Crisis. Labelling the European Union a failing institution that undermines democracy and cultural sovereignty, far right parties throughout Europe have placed euroscepticism at the centre of their policy. The EU has been made a scapegoat by numerous parties in the Netherlands, Greece, Hungary, Britain and France, amongst
others (Mayfield, 2013). Parties on both extremes of the political spectrum have blamed the EU for the continent’s economic stagnation. Far right parties in the EU’s leading countries blame their ties to failing economies such as Greece, Spain and Portugal for their economic troubles. Heinz-Christian Strache, head of the Freedom Party of Austria has been quoted asking “why do the Austrians, Germans and the Dutch, have to pay for the bottomless pit of the southern European countries?” (Walker & Taylor, 2013). In the weaker economies within the EU, the far right has taken a more populist approach, denouncing Germany, France and Benelux for having imperialistic intentions, draining the resources of Europe’s peripheral states and paralysing them with economic regulations that best benefit the leaders of the EU (Golden Dawn, 2014). By appealing to new issues such as the Eurozone Crisis and the rise of Islamic immigration, the far right has rebranded itself and capitalised on the insecurities of a disappointed electorate (Mudde, 2007: pp. 164-165).

In addition to reinventing itself, the far right has become increasingly efficient at garnering support. In Greece, France, Bulgaria and Austria, the far right is strongly united, unlike in Italy and Spain (Liang, 2013: pp. 27-28). Avoiding detrimental competition within the radical right has been vital for the movements’ success. Unity has shown strength and stability and has given far right parties the chance to pool their resources and collectively target floating voters. Far right parties have strengthened their ties to one another, creating national and trans-European unions such as the Alliance of European National Movements (Liang, 2013: pp. 286-289). By uniting the smaller anti-establishment movements on the right, parties such as Attack!, the Front National and Golden Dawn have monopolised the far right. These parties have managed to engage in public relations, organising events, demonstrations
and contacts with people directly through public speeches and political festivals (Economist, 2012). Golden Dawn and Jobbik publish political magazines named Chryssi Avgi and barlikád respectively to get their messages across. All far right parties from Vlaams Belang to the Front National have strong youth wings, responsible for the recruitment and development of the party’s future membership-base. The advances in technology and social media have given the European far right movements a forum to express their ideas freely and spread their propaganda rapidly (Bartlett et al, 2012). This efficient organisation of the far right has been largely achieved due to rebranding. While supporting fascist parties was considered a taboo throughout Europe after the war, the rebranding of the far right has meant that the parties and their supporters are more ready to speak publicly and commit to demonstrations and other publicity stunts.

Though parties such as Jobbik and Golden Dawn still display old-fashioned extreme views, they have managed to change their image and formulate their policies in a way that differs from the early-20th century fascist movements. The new far right’s approach relies on the promotion of national identity and the protection of traditions and culture from outsider threats. With an efficient organisational structure, a strong focus on public relations, and the embracing of modern technology, the far right has managed to achieve historic election results. By effectively targeting a strongly disillusioned youth and finding an acceptable approach, the far right has managed to provide a seemingly tolerable option to a population that is confused and distraught by economic and political mismanagement. The fact that the far right can no longer be described as one uniform movement shows the individual parties’ ability to mould their policies in accordance with the issues most important to their country’s people.
Chapter Two
Theories on the Far Right and 21st Century Hungary

There is something of a consensus on what has caused the rise of the modern European far right. The facts and figures above suggest that a combination of popular disillusionment and rebranding have made the far right a viable option for many in Europe. As mentioned above, far right movements are no longer the same across Europe; the situation in Hungary is different to that of other European nations in some respects. Nonetheless, numerous studies suggest that Hungary has been affected by both disillusionment with the political mainstream, and a reorganization of the far right.

1. The Crisis, Corruption and a Failing Hungarian Government

Social scientist Vassilis Petsinis supports the idea that Jobbik’s success is partly due to Hungary’s dire economic situation and explains that the main parties’ incompetence has seen a failure of the two-party system (Petsinis, 2013). Petsinis believes that Jobbik are using their rhetoric to capitalize on the electoral hole left behind by Fidesz’ and MSZP’s shortcomings. Once the nation that spearheaded the emergence of the former eastern bloc, Hungary now finds itself one of the most struggling economies in the European Union (Petsinis, 2013). The dire state of Hungary’s economy became apparent when it had to be bailed out by a package managed between the World Bank, the EU and the IMF worth $25.1 billion in 2008 (Connolly & Traynor 2008). Hungary’s current governmental debt represents 79.8% of its GDP, up 10 points since 2008. In comparison, the Czech Republic and Romania have public debts that comprise 46.2% and 37.9% of their GDPs respectively (Eurostat, 2014). Furthermore, unemployment in Hungary is at an all-time high at 10.9%, up from 7.8% in 2008; youth unemployment is also at a historic high at over
25% (Indexmundi, 2014). Hungary’s GDP growth rate experienced a collapse in 2009 with a recession of 6.3%, compared with 3.9% growth in 2006 and just below 2% in 2013 (Eurostat, 2014). Hungary’s GDP is below that of Poland, Romania and Greece, and its GDP per capita ranks as one of the lowest in the EU at 24th, just over Romania and Bulgaria (IMF, 2013). These figures suggest that Hungary’s economy suffered significantly from the economic mismanagement of the Hungarian Socialist Party MSZP. The most striking statistics however are those on poverty. According to Indexmundi, 14% of Hungarians live below the national poverty line, almost double of what it was in 1993 and drastically on the rise since 2008 (Indexmundi, 2014). A survey by the Tárki polling agency states that 46% of Hungarians live in poverty or at the subsistence level, 17.7% earn less than 60% of the national average wage and 36.7% live in “material circumstances of severe deprivation”, with no access to “elements of wellbeing” ranging from adequate heating resources to annual vacation time. According to the same survey, the proportion of income poor increased from around 12% in 2007 to almost 18% in 2012 (Landry, 2013). These figures are the most revealing in terms of how the crisis has impacted the life of average Hungarians, suggesting it might be one of the causes of their move to the far right. Furthermore, as in other countries of the former Soviet bloc, Hungary has experience significant problems with corruption. At 54, Hungary’s Corruption Perceptions Index ranks 47th in the world and 20th in the European Union. With 0 meaning ‘highly corrupt’ and 100 meaning ‘very clean’, Hungary’s index of 54 suggests a serious corruption problem, similar to Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Greece who all rank below 50 (TI, 2013). With economic policies and tax changes under the conservative Fidesz government only benefitting the upper economic classes, it is clear that the majority
of Hungarians are disappointed with both the current and previous governments (Landry, 2013).

A study by Demos on populism in Hungary undermines the economic argument, stating that most Jobbik supporters are well off and not the biggest victims of the economic crisis (Bartlett et al, 2012). However, the survey is limited to active supporters of the party and people following Jobbik on Facebook thus possibly excluding a large part of Jobbik’s electorate. Having received 855,436 votes (16.67%) in the 2010 national elections, Jobbik’s membership of 13,000 only represents around 1.5% of their vote and any sample based on Facebook followers would represent 170,000 (~20%) at most (Jobbik, 2014). Furthermore, the economic argument goes beyond the direct impact of voters’ electoral decisions; Hungary’s crisis affected turnout and contributed to the dissolution of certain major parties due to lack of support. Turnout has dropped since the end of the Cold War but the national elections of 1998 and 2010 stand out particularly with only 56.3% and 64.4% of the population voting, despite the tense political atmosphere prior to the 2010 elections. These are the only national elections that have seen the far right overcome the 5% hurdle with MIÉP achieving 5.6% in 1998 and Jobbik garnering 16.67% in 2010 (National Elections Committee, 2014). Though turnout has been low in other elections as well, there is a trend demonstrating the electorate’s disillusionment with many major parties. Two such parties, the Hungarian Democratic Forum MDF and the Alliance of Free Democrats SZDSZ have become defunct since late 2009 and did not participate in the 2010 elections. MDF was the first party to rule a free and democratic Hungary after winning 24.7% of the vote, followed by SZDSZ who were the second biggest party in parliament with 21.4%. MDF last governed in a coalition with Fidesz until 2006 and both MDF and SZDSZ made it into parliament in 2006 with 5% and 6.5%
respectively (White, 2013: p. 28). Recent polls by Medián show that 55% of the population want a change in government, but that 80% believe Hungary to be going in the wrong direction (Medián, 2013). This underlines the electorate’s confusion and disenchantment with both the government and the opposition. The decreasing turnout and disappearance of these parties have been significant in the success of the far right due to the lack of competition within Hungary’s political arena. The only new party, Politics Can Be Different, LMP achieved a mere 7.6% and failed to gain any directly representational seats in 2010. In addition to the failure of MDF and SZDSZ, the crisis and various scandals destroyed the image of the former ruling Hungarian Socialist Party, who only gained 19.3% of the vote in 2010, less than half of their vote of 2006 (Millard, 2013: p. 28). As Petsinis points out, Hungary’s political system has become largely bipolar over the years, meaning that the collapse of the economy in 2008 led to the fall of the ruling MSZP government in 2010. Given Hungary’s quasi two-party-system, it seems that the collapse of MSZP led to the demise of Hungary’s old party system, allowing Fidesz to gain 52.7% of the votes and a historic two-thirds of the seats, granting them the power to change the constitution.

Petsinis talks of the failure of the two-party system, in which MSZP has collapsed in what Paul Lendvai calls “the political suicide of the left” (Lendvai, 2010: p. 195). Numerous social scientists in Hungary have argued that there is a strong polarization between the political left and right in Hungary, allowing for Jobbik to pick up the voters that fall through the cracks of this bi-lateral system (Vago, 2009). The deterioration of Hungarian politics has contributed to the drastic rise in anti-establishment feelings and a popular move towards the only anti-establishment party: Jobbik. It seems that the disillusionment argument can, to an extent, explain the recent
changes in Hungarians’ electoral patterns. However, it is also clear that the disillusionment alone cannot account for Jobbik’s success; the far right’s efficient political approach is what has allowed Jobbik to capitalise on the shortcomings of Hungary’s political mainstream.

2. Jobbik’s Efficient Political Approach

Jobbik is a stronger and more violent party than most far right parties in Western Europe and is one of the few popular parties to openly express anti-Semitic, anti-Roma and racist views earning itself the label of fascist and neo-Nazi. For a variety of reasons -analysed in the next chapter- the taboo that has remained from the Second World War has been much less of an issue for Jobbik’s growth than one would expect. Jobbik’s manifesto as well as their populist magazine, barlikád, repeatedly mention ‘gypsy crime’ and allude to an Israeli plot threatening the Hungarian people (Jobbik, 2010)(Pörzse, 2013). Nonetheless, in common with various far right parties throughout Europe, Jobbik has benefitted from a degree of rebranding and reorganizing. This evidences itself when contrasting Jobbik’s success with the failure of its predecessor, MIÉP. Similarly to other far right parties in Europe, the party has moulded its policies to best attract the disillusioned Hungarian youth.

Both Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary are strongly anti-establishment. In their English ‘mini-manifesto’ entitled Radical Change, Jobbik presents itself as an alternative to the current ‘system’ suggesting that their radical change would go far beyond party politics (Jobbik, 2010: pp. 1-2). Acknowledging the disillusionment and anger of many young Hungarians, Jobbik uses its policies to address the rebellious nature of its support. Furthermore, Jobbik have rebranded themselves as a ‘protector’
rather than an expansionist force. Presenting Hungary as a defenceless martyr of history, Jobbik’s manifesto advocates strong nativist policies and the protection of Hungarian ethnics (Jobbik, 2010: pp. 11, 14-15 & 19). These policies also include the more attractive plans for supporting social equality, the development of small local business and a strong welfare programme (Jobbik, 2010: pp. 2 & 10-11). The party has gained further legitimacy through the surprising recruitment of Krisztina Morvai, former advisor to the MSZP government, expert in the UN commission on the Status of Women, and lawyer for the European Commission for Human Rights (Albrecht, 2013: p. 103).

Though Jobbik says little about Islam - Jobbik’s anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist policies have led to support for the Palestinians and Iran - the party has found a different scapegoat, more relevant to Hungary in the country’s Roma population (Whelan, 2013). Coining the term ‘Gypsy crime’ Jobbik has formulated radical views on the country’s Romas’, targeting rural regions with large gypsy minorities (Jobbik, 2010: pp. 11-12). Jobbik has also jumped on the euroscepticism bandwagon, claiming the EU crippled the Hungarian economy and labelling the EU and IMF’s bailout deal as an attempt to ‘enslave’ and colonize Hungary (Pörzse, 2013). As with the rest of the European far right, Jobbik has tried to take advantage of the ‘eurocrisis’ and has dubbed the EU an undemocratic institution that seeks to extract all riches from Hungary and undermine local businesses and producers (Jobbik, 2010: pp. 21-22). Alongside Latvia and the United Kingdom, Hungary is the third most eurosceptic country in the EU with only one third of the country’s population supporting EU membership, one third being neutral and one third being against (European Commission, 2009: pp. 91-92). The European Commission’s Eurobarometer Survey in 2012 stated that only 27% of Hungarians believe that the EU represents their
country’s interests (European Commission, 2009: p. 101). The high rate of euroscepticism in the country and Jobbik’s adoption of anti-EU policies has helped attract some supporters.

In Hungary, despite being more extreme than their western counterparts, Jobbik has managed to gain acceptance amongst large swathes of the electorate by reinventing itself. As a consequence, the party has been able to organise and mobilise freely and efficiently. The reorganisation of the party is the one of the keys to its success allowing it to take advantage of Hungary’s political and economic situation.

Jobbik’s efficiency is demonstrated by its electoral successes in the 2009 European elections and the 2010 national elections (National Elections Committee, 2010). The first step that Jobbik took to establish itself, despite being a new party, was to unite the smaller factions of the far right. In the 2006 elections, Jobbik and MIÉP joined with the Independent Smallholders Party to create the far right MIÉP-Jobbik Third Way Alliance of Parties (HVG, 2005). Though failing to pass the 5% hurdle with only 2.2% of the vote, the alliance established the concept and possibility of a united Hungarian far right (National Elections Committee, 2010). Contrary to the old and dated MIÉP party, Jobbik injected fresh blood into the competition for supremacy in a newly united far right support. By first targeting the countryside and then the youth, Jobbik became the most substantial of the three far right parties, absorbing many of the most prominent members and supporters of the other two. Electoral statistics show that MIÉP and the Independent Smallholders Party had only minimal involvement in the 2010 elections, clearing the way for Jobbik (White, 2013: p. 28).
Jobbik has also been one of the most active parties when it comes to advertising, activism, promotion, online presence and public relations. The party’s social media pages boast over 170,000 Facebook likes and 6000 twitter followers, a substantial number when compared to other parties. In a country with only 10 million inhabitants, Jobbik’s Facebook page has a larger following than that of the governing Fidesz (~94,000), MSZP (~73,000), the Front National (~120,000), and Attack! (~15,000), the NPD (~50,000) and the British National Party and UKIP combined (~140,000). Jobbik’s online following also exceeds that of most parties around the world including the Republicans in the US, the SPD and CDU in Germany as well as Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives in the UK (Facebook, 2014).

The importance of Social Media becomes more evident when looking at the offline involvement of Jobbik’s Facebook fans, as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 1: Offline Involvement of Jobbik’s Facebook Fans (Demos, 2013: p. 35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Under 30 (%)</th>
<th>Over 30 (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal members of Jobbik</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted for Jobbik in the last election (%)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken part in a march or demo last 6-12 months (%)</td>
<td>36 (3)</td>
<td>33 (2)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Demos’ survey, 82% of Jobbik Facebook followers voted for the party in 2010 and as much as 35% have been actively involved in a march or protest within the last year. In an age where internet communications are of key importance to political campaigns, it is evident that Jobbik has managed to target the Hungarian youth and capitalise on social media as the far right party with largest online presence, both nationally and internationally. The party has ties with the BNP and the Iranian
government, the latter in virtue of Jobbik’s anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist stance (Whelan, 2013).

Jobbik also have a large presence offline with many ‘mini-manifestos’ in circulation, especially when campaigning. These summarized manifestos provide a guide to the party that is easy for anybody to understand (Jobbik, 2010). The manifestos are available in English and provide an outline of Jobbik’s populist policies. The party also produces a radical right, anti-establishment magazine called bar!ikád (barricade) that has a circulation of over 10,000 and is available in most news stores around the capital (Pörzse, 2013).

Jobbik received much bad press for its more extreme events, organising festivals, protests and rallies that have garnered much controversy over recent years. The most infamous of these actions was the anti-Semitic rally held by Jobbik during the World Jewish Congress in Budapest in May 2013. Over 1,000 supporters joined to protest against Israel’s supposed plot to buy Hungary and turn it into a Zionist colony (BBC, 2014). A few months later, Jobbik held a homophobic protest during the gay ‘Budapest Pride’ parade. Jobbik is one of the most active parties in engaging people on the streets (Korkut, 2012: p. 18). The party created multiple groups to represent their ideology in various ways, the most controversial of which is the previously banned and newly reformed Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard), a pseudo-military organisation that has been compared to the Nazis’ Brownshirts. The organisation gathers and rallies for the protection of ‘ethnic Hungarians’ and its mission has been quoted as “defending a physically, spiritually and intellectually defenceless Hungary”
(Euronews, 2013). Once again the concept of defence is evident, used deliberately to court those who feel marginalised in Hungarian society.

Despite changing its image, the Hungarian far right still expresses radical views that are less tolerated in Western Europe, as evidenced by BNP’s and NPD’s electoral failure. The party’s extreme views might suggest that it has not rebranded itself to the same extent as other far right organisations in Europe; possibly because it hasn’t had to.

Though the Hungarian case differs somewhat from others in Europe, it is clear that the economic crisis, corruption and the rebranding and reorganisation of the movement have played a major role in the party’s rise. The reason why Jobbik’s extreme views have not as yet become an obstacle to the party’s success is based on factors that are unique to the Hungarian case.
Chapter Three
The Unique Nature of the Hungarian Case

Jobbik’s success can best be understood within the context of the broader rise of the European far right. However, it is clear that there are some important differences between Jobbik and other Western European far right parties. Despite taking a more extreme approach, Jobbik have managed to gain acceptance in Hungarian society. This is partially due to Hungary’s history and culture and partly due to the current government’s reticent stance when it comes to the far right.

1. Hungarian History, Society and Culture

There is much debate on the cultural factor in Hungary. According to Petsinis, the country’s history, culture and social makeup point towards a quicker tolerance of xenophobic movements (Petsinis, 2013). Jobbik deliberately focuses on ‘issues’ concerning Hungary’s Jewish and Roma communities; their manifesto as well as their populist magazine, repeatedly mention ‘gypsy crime’ and allude to an Israeli plot threatening the Hungarian people. According to Zselyke Csaky from Freedom House, anti-Semitism and far right tendencies have existed in Hungary for years and have even been on the rise over the past decade, as seen in the table below.

\[ \text{Table 2 Anti-Jewish Sentiment in Hungary (Csaky, 2012)} \]
According to the table, the number of Hungarians with extremely anti-Jewish sentiments has doubled between 2003 and 2011, which coincides with the rise of Jobbik. According to Csaky, Hungary is amongst the 4 most prejudiced European countries, behind Turkey, Ukraine and Bulgaria. Other polls show significant anti-Semitism in Hungary (Csaky, 2012). According to a survey, the proportion of Hungarians who believe that Jews have too much power in Hungary rose by 7% between 2009 and 2011 to over 65% and 40% of Hungarians presently believe that the Jews of Hungary value the interests of Israel over those of Hungary. Furthermore, 20% of Hungarians believe the country would be better off if Jews were to leave, up from 10% in 2006 and 19% believe that there should be a cap on Jewish people in certain professions, up from 12% in 2006 (Albrecht, 2013: pp. 100-102).

Marginalization of the Roma people in Hungary is also significant, with Romanis experiencing an unemployment rate of 60%, a life expectancy that trails 10 years behind that of Hungarians, a low rate of literacy and education and only a handful of Roma politicians in parliament over the past 20 years. The Roma community currently constitutes around 6% of the Hungarian population. Polls show that up to 90% of Roma believe to be victims of widespread discrimination with 60% having experienced some form of discrimination over the past year. The same polls also state that the Roma believe Hungary to be the most prejudiced country in Europe (Lendvai, 2010: pp. 180-181).

Hungary’s history has shown a tendency towards toleration of fascist politics, most notably evidenced by the the limited opposition to the appointment of the far right Admiral Miklós Horthy as regent of Hungary by the national assembly in 1920 and the subsequent imposition of the Arrow Cross Party by the Nazis (Heinrich, 1986: pp. 21-24).
Far right support in a country is usually due to many reasons and is often closely linked with strong national sentiment. In Hungary, this has largely to do with both its history and societal make up. Historically, Hungarians have seen their country fall victim to various oppressors, despite once being a major actor in Europe. Hungary was subjected to Mongol invasions in 1241, 158 years of Ottoman rule until 1699, Austrian Habsburg rule from 1699 to until 1918, Nazi influence from the 1930s to the end of the war and Soviet rule from 1946 to 1991 (Heinrich, 1986: pp. 5-12 & 19-21). As a result, the once powerful nation was one of the longest suffering martyrs of European history. Though disputed statistics on Hungarian national pride sometimes show the country to be below average, there are clear elements of national pride, national identity and isolationist close-mindedness. The country’s history has had a strong impact in terms of national identification, as a country that has overcome outside oppression and retained its existence for hundreds of years to finally become independent in 1991 (Heinrich, 1986: pp. 7, 90 & 138). A similar trend is visible in present-day Israel, where the fear of outsider threats has cultivated a strong, isolationist, national pride in a country that is regarded as quite liberal. The relevance of Hungarian history is clear in the overwhelming importance it is given in the Hungarian education system. Petsinis remarks that Hungarian bitterness concerning the nation’s history is prominent, with many still mourning the loss of 2/3 of the country’s territory in the 1920 Trianon Treaty; a theme heavily exploited by Jobbik (Petsinis, 2012).

Hungary is a unique country in Central-Eastern Europe and along with Romania the only one in the region that isn’t of Germanic or Slavic origins. The Hungarian people migrated from the steps of Asia in the 9th century and are ethnically, culturally and linguistically the ‘odd ones out’ in the region. This is believed to contribute to an
isolationist national identity and a desire amongst the people to preserve old customs that survived throughout the ages (Heinrich, 1986: pp. 1-3 & 5-7). While this doesn’t necessarily translate to nationalism, it has made Hungarians more sensitive to populist rhetoric, which may account for Fidesz’ tendency to nationalistic rhetoric itself. In the past year Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister, and János Áder, the President, have both expressed the importance of Hungarian national pride and the need to preserve the ‘Hungarian-ness’ of society.

In addition to a strong sense of Hungarian identity, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma feelings could in part be caused by the homogeneity of Hungarian society. Hungary has experienced little immigration or the effects of a cosmopolitan society, which could point towards a need for Hungarian society to adapt to a multi-cultural populace. In the 2011 census, Hungarians represented the absolute majority of the country’s inhabitants, with 98% of the population describing itself as fully or partially ‘Hungarian ethnic’. The only other notable ethnicities are Romas and Germans who represent 3.6% and 1.6% respectively with some ethnic overlap explaining the 98% (KSH, 2013). Unofficial figures believe the Roma to constitute up to 7% of the Hungarian population. Jews in Hungary represent less than 1% of the population. In comparison, the proportion of ‘white local ethnics’ in Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands are all around the 80% mark (CIA, 2014). Moreover, religious surveys label 52.8% of Hungarians as Christians with 45.3% of the population either refusing an answer or having no religious affiliation. Religious Jews only represent 0.1% of the Hungarian population (KSH, 2013). These statistics only amplify the lack of diversity in Hungarian society. Therefore, while Hungarian culture doesn’t itself contain discriminatory elements, the country’s history and societal make-up has
meant that national identity, isolationist views and discrimination are higher than in most other European nations.

Finally, in addition to the historic impact on modern Hungarian mentality, the Soviet occupation between 1946 and 1991 had a direct influence on the success of the far right. As mentioned before, the ‘political suicide of the left’ has been a key factor in the emergence of the right and is largely due to Hungary’s communist past. Economic crisis has made voters flock towards the extremes throughout Europe, with far left parties making significant gains in Germany (~9%), France (~13%) and the Netherlands (~10%) (Mayfield, 2013). The crippling legacy of Soviet domination has left the far left parties in the former eastern bloc very unpopular. In 2010, the Hungarian Communist Workers Party only managed to garner 0.11% of the vote, which is one of the lowest results for the far left anywhere in Europe (National Elections Committee, 2014). This means that anti-establishment Hungarians shifting towards extremes don’t have the radical left to turn to, leaving only Jobbik as an alternative to the mainstream. This is one of the major reasons behind the success of far right parties in countries of the former Soviet bloc.

The lack of a left-wing alternative not only reflects the historical and cultural impact on Hungarian perceptions and political tendencies, but it also shows the importance of Hungarian politics in explaining the success of Jobbik. While society, culture and history are important in understanding the rise of the Hungarian far right, the political climate under the current government is also significant in explaining how the far right has managed to sustain its support since its historic electoral success in 2010.
2. The Political Climate under Fidesz Since 2010

As mentioned above, societal acceptance is key to the far right movements’ ability to manifest themselves and gain supporters willing to openly support the party without the scrutiny of others in society. Some argue that the current Fidesz government has contributed a great deal to the tolerance of Jobbik in Hungarian society. Korkut argues that the failure of MSZP has allowed Fidesz to establish a powerful, staunchly conservative government that both reflects and influences Hungarian society (Korkut, 2012: pp. 48-49).

As seen with Orbán’s comments on national pride, Fidesz has a reputation for dabbling in highly populist and nationalistic rhetoric. While it has been an obstacle for the governing party in the past, the strong polarisation of Hungary’s political system meant that the right wing approach taken by Orbán managed to hit home in 2010 as it appealed increasingly to an electorate that was at odds with the failing MSZP government (Korkut, 2012: pp. 161-162). The success of Fidesz and Jobbik has brought nationalistic parlance into every day Hungarian politics, dominating academia, the media, the arts and the major political debates. The MSZP has been shunned in Hungary, dubbed incompetent, treacherous and even ‘communist sympathisers’, resulting in the political centre and left being largely silenced and underrepresented. Fidesz has been under harsh criticism since 2010 for the implementation of undemocratic laws that have homogenised TV, radio and the press amongst other undemocratic, right wing laws on abortion, same-sex marriage, immigration, the EU and homelessness (Korkut, 2012: pp. 180-185)(Lendvai, 2010: p. 65). There have also been other nationalistic changes under Fidesz, such as renaming a number of Budapest’s streets and bridges as well as placing quotas and
caps on museums, the opera, cinemas and the theatre to enforce the production and display of Hungarian works over international ones (Lendvai 2012: pp. 209-211 & 220-224). The presence of far right politicians from both Jobbik and Fidesz in parliament has made nationalistic rhetoric a common element in political debate that has to be tolerated. These changes have cultivated a general atmosphere of peer-pressured nationalism in which it’s almost more controversial to support MSZP than Jobbik. The predominance of right wing politics makes Jobbik’s radical policies almost indiscernible from the government’s own rhetoric at times, especially when it comes to issues concerning the EU, immigration, religion and tradition (Mudde, 2007 pp. 86-87). It is in fact common for Jobbik politicians to praise the Prime Minister and other Fidesz MPs, as Morvai and Vona have done repeatedly.

The current government’s reticence, it could be argued, has enabled and almost empowered Jobbik. Vago blames Fidesz for the rise of the far right, arguing that Viktor Orbán’s government has failed to crack down on Jobbik, thereby tacitly consenting to the use of xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic speech in politics (Vago, 2009). Fidesz’ hope to poach Jobbik’s more moderate voters has meant failing to properly address the most serious issues. Such issues include the anti-Jewish rally in Budapest during the World Jewish Conference in May 2013 (BBC, 2013), the killing of 6 Roma Hungarians in the countryside by Neo-Nazis in 2008, the illegal regrouping of the banned Hungarian Guard and Jobbik MP, Márton Gyöngyösi’s proposal to create a list of all Hungarian Jewish figures who pose a national security threat (Economist, 2012). While actively speaking out against the far right to the international press, Orbán’s government has been mute within Hungary.
Despite Fidesz’ apparent loss of popularity, the prospects for 2014 remain unknown with Hungary’ party system experiencing further disruption as major opposition parties succumb to division. Many sudden party splits have further factionalised the opposition, potentially weakening it. A number of MSZP members left the party to form the Democratic Coalition and the Together 2014 parties who will ally for the upcoming elections, and 100 members of LMP left to form the Dialogue for Hungary party (Politics HU, 2013). The appearance of 3 new parties might deliver a blow to Fidesz’ two-thirds majority in parliament, but it is thought that the parties are likely to get in each other’s way if they fail to form strong alliances amongst themselves. It is conceivable that the Hungarian far right will benefit from the confusion caused by all the new and unknown parties running in 2014.

It is obvious that Hungarian history and culture have strongly influenced the population’s views on minorities and discrimination, which in turn has resulted in a high tolerance of Jobbik’s activities. In the absence of any significant left-wing opposition, this tolerance has extended beyond that of the population to the current government, whose desire to court the far right electorate has been at the expense of a stronger bulwark against the radical right. The political atmosphere under Fidesz, and the transformation within Hungary’s political system have allowed Jobbik to sustain their support and continue spreading their ideology. It seems that Jobbik’s success can be explained by a variety of reasons, ranging from general factors to unique Hungarian ones. The way to best determine what exactly has allowed them to flourish is to compare the Hungarian case with other similar countries’ experiences.
Chapter Four

The Hungarian Far Right Experience in Comparison

The differences between far right parties have made it very difficult for social scientists to pinpoint the exact causes of the movement’s success in Europe. While most general theories seem to apply to Hungary, the country’s unique nature puts it in a position where the far right’s success appears to be more than just a matter of protest, as some would argue. In order to better understand which reasons are predominant in Jobbik’s success, one must look at other countries that have a similar political situation, society, culture and history to Hungary, such as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland. By comparing the cases, it will be clear which factors have differed as well as which ones have been similar.

1. The Far Right’s Failings in Romania and Poland

James Mayfield argues that while economic failure and other issues could be key reasons for the electorate’s turn towards far right parties, he also points out that other economically unstable countries such as Spain and Cyprus have not seen a significant increase in far right support (Mayfield, 2013). The factors become even more questionable when comparing the Hungarian case to that of countries that have a similar history and political situation as Hungary yet without the far right success, such as Poland and Romania. Out of these countries, Romania is the only one with a somewhat established far right, represented by the Greater Romania Party, the New Generation Party and the New Right (Totok, 2011). Neither have any seats in the senate or chamber of deputies despite the low turnout of around 42% in 2012 (NSD, 2013). In response to their lacking electoral success, the Greater Romania Party have been becoming less extreme, dropping anti-Semitism from the party’s ideology. In Poland, the far right is almost non-existent. The National Rebirth of Poland party has
no seats in parliament, failing to achieve any electoral success in the elections it has participated in to date (NSD, 2013). Despite other right wing parties, The National Rebirth of Poland is the only one that can truly be considered far right and has consistently failed to garner any electoral support over the years. The failure of the far right in these countries can be perplexing given their economic, historical and societal similarities to Hungary.

Poland and Romania could be used as examples against the disillusionment argument, despite having low government debt levels at 55.6% and 37.9% of their GDP respectively (Eurostat, 2014). While Poland has replaced Hungary at the spearhead of the emerging former eastern bloc, it was hit hard by corruption and the crisis. Poland’s unemployment rate has also grown from 6.9% in 2008 to 10.1% in 2013, with a current youth unemployment rate of over 20% (Indexmundi, 2014). Poland also has one of the lower minimum wages in Europe at €368.87 a month as well as being ranked 47th in the world for Gross national income, one position above Hungary. Poland has between 10% and 17% of the population living below the national poverty line according to the World Bank and CIA respectively (CIA, 2014). Furthermore, despite having a GDP that is almost 4 times higher than that of Hungary, Poland’s GDP per capita is only barely above Hungary’s suggesting lacking redistribution of wealth and potential corruption. This suggestion is mirrored by Poland’s Perceived Corruption Index, which at 60, places it only slightly above Hungary, still near the bottom of the European table (TI, 2013). Along with Bulgaria, Romania ranks among the lowest of nearly every economic table on the European Union. Although the population is twice the size of Hungary’s, the GDP is only around 40% larger with the GDP per capita actually being lower by 35% (Eurostat,
2014). Despite boasting a lower unemployment rate than Hungary and Poland, there has been a visible increase from 5.6% to 7.5% between 2008 and 2013, with youth unemployment at 20.8% (Indexmundi, 2014). Romania has the second lowest Gross National Income and minimum wage in the EU, the latter being just above half of Hungary’s at only €179.36 (Eurostat, 2014). Romania also has between 14% and 22% of the population living below the national poverty line (Indexmundi, 2014). These figures once again translate into mistrust in the government with a Perceived Corruption Index at 43, suggesting much higher perceived corruption than in Hungary (TI, 2013). In addition to highly perceived corruption indexes, the low turnouts at the latest Polish and Romanian election of 48.92% and 41.76% respectively suggest a strong popular disillusionment with the current political choices (NSD, 2013).

In addition to the economic experience, Poland and Romania have had a similar history and culture to Hungary. Both countries suffered the same fate as Hungary under the Soviet domination of the eastern bloc. Romania can also relate to Hungary as being one of the only countries in the region not to be ethnically Germanic or Slavonic (CIA, 2014). However, despite the clear signs of economic and political disappointment, Poland and Romania have not seen a move towards the far right. This is due to the lack of certain factors that have aided the far right in Hungary, Greece and Bulgaria.

There are two major reasons for the failure of the far right in Romania in Poland. The first is the parties’ failure to rebrand themselves and organize efficiently. In Poland, despite the far right’s attempt to brand itself ‘third way’, most of the electorate has found the National Rebirth of Poland unrelatable due to its extreme approach,
reminiscent of the Nazis’ propaganda. With slogans aimed at intimidating homosexuals, Jews and Romanis in the country, the far right party has alienated the Polish electorate (NOP, 2014). In Romania, the Greater Romania Party’s need to distance itself from its anti-Semitic past suggests early steps in a move to rebrand the party and the need to still gain wider acceptance in Romanian society (Liang, 2013: pp. 66-67). The New Generation Party has also failed to gain support as it increasingly shifts towards the radical right of the political spectrum. Though eurosceptic, neither of the parties have focused on the issues that most attract voters to the extremes such as the eurocrisis, the economy and immigration. Instead, the parties have laid a strong focus on discrimination against local minorities, religion and homophobia; issues that are only of secondary ‘importance’ in times of economic crisis (Totok, 2011). The refusal by these parties to rebrand themselves and present a tolerable image to Polish and Romanian society has left the far right cold in the face of competition. Their lack of popularity is mirrored in their virtual non-existence in national media and online, demonstrated by the fact that none of their social media pages exceed 1000 followers (Facebook, 2014). Competition is intensified by the presence of the populist PP-DD party, who with around 14% in both houses presents a veritable alternative to the mainstream parties (NSD, 2013).

The second reason is the fact that, despite economic difficulties, there was not as much of a collapse as in Hungary. The need for a bailout and the drastic collapse of the Hungarian economy destroyed the credibility of the MSZP government. Contrary to the Hungarian case, Poland and Romania only experienced a slight decline in comparison to Hungary, especially when it comes to debt and unemployment. Furthermore, the party-systems in Romania and Poland are far less polarized,
meaning that the two countries did not experience a collapse of the political liberals as in Hungary.

The third and most important reason for the failure of the far right in Poland and Romania is that their political situations differ from Hungary’s. Firstly, the lack of a party akin to Hungary’s Fidesz has made a major difference to the political atmosphere in Poland and Romania. Unlike in Hungary, there is no ‘veil of right wing politics’ that covers debate, media and the press. In Poland, this is partly due to the competition on the right between the Civic Platform and the Law and Justice Parties who garnered 39.2% and 29.9% of the vote respectively in 2011 (NSD, 2013). Though the latter slightly resembles Fidesz, the former is much more liberal, as mirrored by its governing coalition with the centrist Polish People’s Party. The liberal and the left-wing parties are usually the ones that oppose the far right the most. Therefore, unlike in Hungary, the opposition to radicalism in Poland is significant with liberal and left wing parties attaining over 33% of the vote in 2011 (NSD, 2013). Due to the competition on the right and the nature of the party, the Civic Platform can also be considered an opponent of the far right given that it has no interest to court or assuage the far right electorate as Fidesz does and Law and Justice potentially could. This means that the parties that have every interest to oppose the far right movements in Poland have over 70% of the vote (NSD, 2013).

In Romania, the political atmosphere is polls apart from Hungary under Fidesz, and the political intolerance of the far right is primarily due to the strong opposition of the centrist Social Liberal Union USL, who currently holds an absolute majority in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies (NSD, 2013). The success of the USL shows that Romania has not experienced a ‘political suicide of the liberal left’, unlike in
Hungary where the left is crippled. While in Hungary the political centre is non-existent, represented only by a fractured and weak LMP, Poland and Romania have a thriving centre and very little polarization.

Romania and Poland’s better economic fortune and larger political diversity, as well as the right’s inability to unite, have kept the extremes at bay. This strongly suggests that the most important factor in Jobbik’s success in Hungary was their ability to capitalize on the polarization and failure of Hungary’s quasi two-party system. However, it is important to look towards parties in similar countries that have succeeded in order to further distinguish the key factors to Jobbik’s success.

2. A Similar Experience in Greece and Bulgaria

Similarly to Jobbik, Golden Dawn and Attack! have experienced significant electoral success in the latest elections in Greece and Bulgaria respectively. Golden dawn has been very active in Greece over the past couple of years and has been involved in many scandals since achieving a historic 6.9% in both 2012 elections (NSD, 2013). While Golden Dawn’s support isn’t as great as Jobbik’s, the party’s following has been ruthless, loud and very active in Greek politics. Opinion polls have seen support for Golden Dawn grow to 9.8%, at times even 14.5% despite the arrest of its leader Nikos Mihaloliakos (Kolesidis, 2013). In Bulgaria, the radical Attack! party managed to achieve almost 10% in the last elections, making them the kingmakers in Bulgaria’s current, unstable government. Support for Attack! has continued and the party has a significant say in Bulgarian politics due to its crucial position (NSD, 2013).
In line with the general factors behind the far right’s success in Europe, Greece and Bulgaria have experienced serious economic issues. Much like Hungary, Greece’s economy has collapsed and was saved by a major bailout, leaving the country with a large deficit and governmental debt representing 157% of the country’s GDP, up from 100% in 2005 (Eurostat, 2014). Though Greece’s GDP per capita is relatively strong, unemployment has hit record highs at 27.4%, up from 7.8% in 2008, with youth unemployment slightly below the Hungarian rate at around 26%. Greece also has one of the highest European poverty rates with 20% of population below the national poverty line. About 35% of Greeks are at risk of poverty and social exclusion and 19.5% of people in the country are thought to be seriously materially deprived (Indexmundi, 2014). Bulgaria has had a comparable experience as the EU’s weakest economy. The country’s governmental debt is low at only 18.5% of the GDP, but the GDP and GDP per capita are the lowest in Europe ranked only 75th and 69th worldwide respectively (CIA, 2014). Bulgaria’s unemployment rate has also drastically risen from 5.7% to 13.2% between 2008 and 2013, with a youth unemployment rate of around 16% (Indexmundi, 2014). Bulgarians currently have the lowest minimum wage in the EU at €165 a month and between 10% and 20% of people are still considered to be living below the national poverty line (Eurostat, 2014). While proportionally Bulgaria’s economic decline is less obvious than that of Hungary or Greece, the government’s severe austerity measures have strongly influenced voters.

Both Greece and Bulgaria find themselves in an economic situation that is not too different from that of Hungary. In Greece, the people have been disillusioned by the collapse of the economy, the consequences of the Eurozone crisis and the development of mass poverty and unemployment throughout the country. In Bulgaria,
the population is experiencing the impact of tough austerity measures. Similarly to Hungary, the dire financial situation of Bulgarians has led to disillusionment within the poorest country in the EU.

Similarly to Hungary, the government and opposition have been out of touch with the electorate. Greece and Bulgaria have two of the worst European Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 77th and 80th in the world with indexes of 40 and 41 respectively (TI, 2013). Fear of corruption and mistrust are known to be serious issues in Greek and Bulgarian politics, which is reflected in the indecisiveness of the vote in the latest general elections. In the second Greek election of 2012, the leading New Democracy party only achieved around 30% followed by the Coalition of the Radical Left with 27%, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement with 13% and the Independent Greeks with around 11% (NSD, 2013). The even distribution of votes and the large success of the radical left show the confusion and dissatisfaction of the Greek populace. In Bulgaria, the political situation is also unstable with a minority coalition ruling a government within which Attack! were kingmakers. Despite having the highest percentage of the vote at 30.5%, the GERB party did not form a government as instead, the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms formed a government thanks to the boycott of certain Attack! MPs when approving the new government (Mayfield, 2013). Though the situations in Greece and Bulgaria differ from that in Hungary, it is obvious that there is a lot of disagreement and chaos within both countries’ party systems.

The rebranding and reorganisation of the parties have also clearly played a role in Bulgaria and Greece. Golden Dawn and Attack! have been constantly active with
protests, rallies and other events to attract supporters. Golden Dawn publishes a magazine and both parties have a decent online following, though far inferior to that of Jobbik (Golden Dawn, 2014). In Greece and Bulgaria the far right has become a relatively united force, with Golden Dawn attracting a younger demographic, while Attack! takes a more western approach, playing on the ‘Turkish threat’ and Muslim immigration to appeal to the older demographic (Walker & Taylor, 2013). It has been argued that economic desperation and a disenfranchised youth within Greece has led the party to take such an aggressive stance, involving itself in acts of violence, hooliganism, vandalism, hate crimes and numerous deadly clashes with the left (Mayfield, 2013).

Furthermore, Bulgaria and Greece both have a history and culture that might have cultivated a similar tolerance to that of Hungary. Bulgaria also experienced a history of homogenisation of society under Soviet influence, which could explain a part of the electorate’s nationalistic tendencies as well as the similar anti-Roma sentiments that exist in the country (Liang, 2013: pp. 24-25). Both Greece and Bulgaria have also experienced a recent rise in patriotism and nationalism, which would explain the recent successes of Golden Dawn and Attack!. It is clear that both Golden Dawn and Attack! have managed to find an approach that gains them enough tolerance in society to continue their activities openly.

The far right in Greece and Bulgaria have managed, not only to make significant electoral gains, but to also sustain their support. As seen above, Golden Dawn’s poll ratings have been growing despite numerous scandals and a focus on Attack!’s past shows that the party has been experiencing continuous electoral successes since 2005 (NSD, 2013). However, neither of the parties has managed to achieve as great a
success as Jobbik’s 16.67% in the 2010 elections. The reason for this is largely due to the unique factors in the Hungarian case that do not apply to either Greece or Bulgaria.

The main reason for the far right experiencing slightly less success in Greece and Bulgaria than in Hungary is the fact that the parties have not been tolerated as widely. Attack! and Golden Dawn have repeatedly had to face strong opposition from the press and other parties, particularly on the left. In Bulgaria, the government has taken a similar stance to that of Fidesz, mainly due to the far right party’s role in the forming of Bulgaria’s current government. In Greece however, the government has also become an obstacle for the far right with the arrest of Golden Dawn’s leader Mihaloliakos (Kolesidis, 2013).

One reason behind the increased resistance in Greece and Bulgaria might be due to the fact that their histories and cultures differ from Hungary’s. While generally the cultural and historic trends point towards a similar degree of homogeneity and national identification, both countries have been more subjected to immigration from the East, which might suggest that Greek and Bulgarian societies are more cosmopolitan and diverse (CIA, 2014). Moreover, due to Greece’s role in the Eurozone crisis, the country has been subjected to more international scrutiny than Hungary and Bulgaria.

Another factor is that neither Greece nor Bulgaria has been subjected to the same political atmosphere as Hungary. While the governments are equally tentative in Greece and Bulgaria, there hasn’t been a homogenisation in the media, arts and
political culture of the countries as has been experienced under Fidesz. This is due to the fact that neither Greece nor Bulgaria has as polarised a party-system. Unlike in Hungary, no single party has shouldered the blame for the economic crisis and therefore, no party has experienced the same “political suicide of the left” as Hungary has.

The fact that the political left is still active and relatively popular in both countries has meant that there is a well-supported opposition that challenges the far right and prevents the creation of a nationalistic political atmosphere. More importantly, it has also meant that there are more options for the disillusioned Greek voter than in Hungary. Firstly, due to Hungary’s bipolar party-system, Fidesz are much more powerful, in addition to being more nationalistic and populist, than the GERB and the New Democracy parties. This is due to the lack of competition that Fidesz enjoys, contrary to GERB and New Democracy, who have many conservative competitors (NSD, 2013). Secondly, the left has seen significant success in Greece, where the far left has by far outdone the far right with the Coalition of the Radical Left achieving a historic 27% of the vote (NSD, 2013). There has been very strong competition when it comes to courting an electorate that has moved away from the mainstream, meaning that unlike Jobbik, Golden Dawn must share the radical vote with the far left. While in Bulgaria the radical left is divided and insignificant in the elections with under 1% collectively, the liberal and the centre-left parties came in second and third in 2013 with 26.6% and 11.3 % respectively (NSD, 2013).

The relative weakness and divisiveness amongst the political right in Greece and Bulgaria have meant that there is much room for political resistance against the rise of the far right. Factors such as the economy, culture, and the efficient organisation of
the parties show that there are similarities between the respective successes of the far right in Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary. However, Jobbik’s overwhelming success in comparison is due to the lack of political resistance, caused by the failure of the party-system. The unique and absolute collapse of the left has led to the rise of a powerful right-wing government that continues to cultivate an atmosphere in which nationalistic and populist rhetoric has become acceptable and even common. Paired with Hungary’s history, culture and societal make-up, it seems that it is precisely the overwhelming dominance of the political right that has cultivated an air in which the far right can actively promote its ideology and mobilise.
Conclusions

It has been established that there are numerous factors behind the success of the European far right. Studying both quantitative and qualitative materials, it becomes clear that there are a variety of factors that have led to Jobbik’s historic 16.67% in the 2010 elections. Various statistics and surveys suggest that the disillusionment argument has played an important part in the emergence of the far right in Hungary, Greece and Bulgaria. However, comparing these countries to Poland and Romania, it becomes clear that it is not only the economic situation, but the evolution of it that plays an important role. While one can speak of an economic decline around Europe, Hungary and Greece experienced something that more resembles a collapse than a mere decline. Paired with a high level of distrust for the government, it is clear that popular disillusionment with the political mainstream has caused low turnouts, protest votes and a flock towards the extremes.

The development of a quasi two-party-system in Hungary over the years has resulted in a heavy polarization of party politics. This meant that MSZP alone was held responsible for the failure of Hungary’s economy, causing the party’s demise and the chance for Fidesz to gain an absolute monopoly of political power. Hungary’s history of communism and the political demise of the moderate left have resulted in voters only having one extreme to move towards: the far right.

Jobbik’s success has largely depended on their ability to capitalize on the failure of Hungary’s economy and political system. Throughout Europe the far right has been increasingly tolerated due to its rebranding of the movement, which has allowed it to properly establish itself as a realistic alternative to the mainstream. In Hungary,
despite being one of the more radical European far right parties, Jobbik has managed to unite the movement and gain acceptance by presenting itself as a protector of Hungarian interests and culture. With newfound tolerance, Jobbik has established itself through activism, the press and social media.

Tolerance is key to the success of the far right, as can be seen by its failure in Poland and Romania. The rebranding of the movement and the lack of alternatives in Hungary are only part of why Jobbik has been accepted in Hungarian society. Hungary’s history and culture has suggested that the country’s populace has a strongly isolationist view of the world. Due to the homogenous nature of Hungarian society and ethnic ignorance, there is a high tendency for discriminatory views to be held and accepted amongst Hungarians. As a result, Jobbik has more leverage when it comes to radical parlance than other far right parties in the West.

Tolerance of the far right has also been furthered by the political atmosphere under the Fidesz government. The polarization of Hungary’s political system has seen Fidesz adopting a strong anti-left and even anti-liberal approach. With an absolute majority and unlimited constitutional power, Fidesz has been criticized for its pseudo-nationalistic approach and undemocratic laws. In addition to dabbling in national rhetoric, Fidesz has largely tolerated Jobbik’s activities due to the party’s interest in courting the far right electorate.

Though there isn’t one factor that can be signed out as the main cause, it can be said that a combination of Hungary’s history and culture, electoral disillusionment, the polarization of the party-system, the ‘political suicide of the left’, the atmosphere
under Fidesz’ government, and the rebranding of Jobbik have all contributed to the rise of the far right in Hungary. When comparing Jobbik to other parties around Europe, it seems that the extent of its success is due to the failure of Hungary’s highly polarized party-system. With the splitting of Fidesz’ main opposition parties and the creation of 3 new potentially major political actors, it is conceivable that Jobbik’s success will eventually whither.
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