

Hungary's New Radical Right: Populist Outbidding, Democratic Backsliding, and the Fidesz-Jobbik Convergence

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The horrifying discovery of the bodies of 71 migrant refugees in an abandoned truck near the border between Austria and Hungary in August 2015 thrust Hungary into the international limelight, as observers decried the Hungarian government's cold-shouldered approach to refugees desperately seeking asylum within the European Union. In the ensuing chaos, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stood by his government's uncharitable approach to the migrant crisis, expediting the construction of a barbed-wire fence on the country's border with Serbia in an antagonistic effort to deter further influxes of migrants. Additionally, he has vehemently opposed the imposition of migrant quotas by the European Union.

Though Hungary is not unique in its refusal to adopt such quotas, particularly among the other Visegrád countries, it is unique in its outspokenly xenophobic reaction to the migrant crisis and in its manipulation of the situation to further a right-wing populist agenda and consolidate support for PM Orbán and his Fidesz party. Indeed, the migrant crisis would seem to almost symbolically coincide with a political crisis in Hungary as the country's political mainstream moves closer towards the radical right at an increasingly rapid pace. Fidesz's 2010 electoral victory over the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) was in itself surprising, but the third-place victor was even more so. Jobbik, led by former Orbán acquaintance Gábor Vona, came in a close third to the MSZP with 16.7 per cent of the total vote, a number that granted the extreme right party not insignificant power in parliament and that thrust what was once considered a radical fringe party into the upper echelons of Hungarian political power. By the 2014 elections, Jobbik had effectively established itself as the strongest and most popular standalone opposition party to Fidesz, receiving about 20.5 per cent of the vote. Though this was a third place victory, the second largest vote share (26 per cent) went not to a single party, but to a coalition of leftist

opposition parties that included the beleaguered MSZP. The elections were labeled by international observers as free but not fair.¹

Though Orbán had previously asserted opposition to Jobbik and its extreme ideology and platform, he and his Fidesz party have become increasingly amenable to promoting a strong nationalist ideology and hard right policies that are becoming more difficult to distinguish from those of Jobbik. It could perhaps even be said, especially given recent events in Hungary, that Fidesz is at this point merely a Jobbik proxy party disguised as a party of center-right moderates; in other words, Fidesz has consistently pushed further right and acclimated the political mainstream to its more radical agenda, creating greater space for the growth of right wing nationalist populism and making it incredibly difficult for a viable democratic opposition to build and sustain itself. As Fidesz moves further right and the distance between it and Jobbik narrows, a mask is slipping, revealing Orbán as an autocratic figure intent on consolidating power under a hybrid or mixed regime.²

Fidesz and Jobbik would seem to be natural allies—indeed, we will demonstrate that Fidesz has appropriated many of Jobbik’s policy stances and incorporated them into their illiberal ruling agenda. We will argue that the political distance between Fidesz and Jobbik has consistently narrowed and is only continuing to do so at a more rapid pace in the light of crisis in Europe, moving towards a new illiberal consensus on the far right. The primary mechanism by which this new consensus is being forged is through a strategic outbidding process through which Fidesz party elites have co-opted aspects of Jobbik’s platform that have been popular and repackaged them as their own in an effort to acquire more radical right voters, thereby expanding the Fidesz base and consolidating power.

Rabushka and Shepsle’s classic formulation of ethnic outbidding as a mechanism by which democratic societies may destabilize provides a conceptual foundation upon which we

¹ Cf. András Bozóki (2015a), "Broken Democracy, Predatory State and Nationalist Populism" in Péter Krasztev and Jon Van Tils. *The Hungarian Patient: Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*. Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 3-36.

² The notion of hybrid regime is used by Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2010), *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The concept of mixed regime, with the same meaning, is used by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (2011), *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

build our argument. According to their theory, ethnically heterogeneous societies are particularly susceptible to factionalism along ethnic lines at the hands of opportunistic political elites.³ Though Rabushka and Shepsle's formulation of outbidding was originally focused upon outbidding between ethnic groups, the concept of outbidding as an influence on electoral behavior and as a threat to democratic stability can be widely applied to a wide variety of cases. In the case of Hungary, Fidesz political elites have taken advantage of populist discord and discontent with the direction of Hungary after the collapse of communism to expand their voter base and increase the party's power; such manipulations have only increased as Fidesz has started to lose ground in parliament and Jobbik's viability as a legitimate party has grown, resulting in an attempt by Fidesz to outbid Jobbik in an effort to court a dominant swath of right-wing voters. In the process, Fidesz's situation on the political spectrum has moved further to the right and begun to close the gap between it and Jobbik, creating a new radical right consensus that is symptomatic of democratic backsliding in Hungary. As the distance between Fidesz and Jobbik narrows, so too does the space for a legitimate and viable democratic opposition. Even more concerning is the possibility of a radical right coalition government, as some observers add, between Fidesz and Jobbik.⁴

It is this phenomenon of a new illiberal consensus established by Hungary's right wing that we analyze in this chapter. We first examine the political evolution of Fidesz since its inception in the 1980s, with a particular focus on the periods from 2006-2010, when Fidesz was an opposition party, and the period from 2010 to the present, a period that has been marked by Fidesz's political dominance and stabilization of an illiberal regime with its mafia state.⁵ We examine Jobbik's general political orientation vis-à-vis Fidesz, an orientation which has remained relatively constant in contrast to that of Fidesz. We also outline what we interpret as increasingly disconcerting ideological and policy overlaps between the ruling Fidesz and radical right Jobbik as the former makes moves to outbid the latter. We will argue that the Fidesz-Jobbik

³ Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972), *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill.

⁴ Cf. Jens Becker (2010), "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Hungary," *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 13. 1. 29-40.

⁵ Cf. Bálint Magyar (2016), *Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary*, Budapest – New York: Central European University Press

overlap is effectively normalizing a radical right wing and gradually eclipsing democratic liberal opposition in a trajectory towards increasing illiberalism, with the overarching overlap between the two being a largely exclusionary nationalizing discourse and right wing policy agenda incompatible with liberal democracy.

1. Transition and its Discontents

This is a dangerous time for democracy in Hungary, as well as for Europe as a whole. The Hungarian case provides an example of the draw of radical right wing politics for a populace disillusioned with the promises of democracy made in 1989. What makes this even more dangerous is the lack of a deeply rooted democratic political culture and civil society, aspects that are vital for any democratic system to consolidate and sustain itself. Indeed, in a recent article, Diamond calls attention to a phenomenon he refers to as a “global democratic recession,” expressing concern over democratic backsliding in some third-wave democracies and democratic failure in others. Diamond describes characteristics of democratic breakdown that have occurred—an erosion of checks and balances, clientelism, decreasing accountability and institutions to guarantee it, and a shrinking civil society among them—and cites a “resurgence of authoritarianism” concurrent with this democratic deterioration.⁶ The case of East Central Europe and particularly Hungary since 1989 is an especially salient example of once great democratic promise turning sour.⁷

Though the round table talks of 1989 after the fall of the Iron Curtain led to a nonviolent transition from communism to a market economy and democracy, many Hungarians have become disillusioned by their post-transition situation. There has arisen a sense that the transition in Hungary was elite-driven and therefore “stolen” from Hungarians and that a new

⁶ Larry Diamond (2015), “Facing up to the Democratic Recession” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 26. No. 1. 149, 151

⁷ Cf. Béla Greskovits (2015), „The Hollowing and Backsliding of Democracy in East Central Europe” *Global Policy* 6. 1. 28-37.; János Kornai (2015), “Hungary’s U-turn” *Capitalism and Society*, Vol. 10. Issue 1. Article 2. ([http://capitalism.columbia.edu/journal/10/2.](http://capitalism.columbia.edu/journal/10/2/))

transformation must be undertaken if Hungary is to be truly vindicated from centuries of indignity under various imperial powers and then under communism.

A 2009 Pew Research report measured public opinion of democracy and the current state of affairs in post-communist states. Tellingly, 77% of Hungarian respondents indicated their frustration with the way Hungarian democracy had worked within the time period of 1991-2009, and 91 per cent of Hungarians thought that Hungary was not on the right track.⁸ Hungarian approval of democracy immediately following the fall of communism was at 74 per cent, whereas by 2009 this figure had fallen eighteen percentage points to 56 per cent.⁹ In 2010, shortly after these survey results were published, Viktor Orbán's conservative Fidesz party won a two-thirds parliamentary supermajority. Not insignificantly, Jobbik took 17 per cent of the vote to Fidesz's 53 per cent, representing a noteworthy increase in radical right wing representation in Hungarian elections.¹⁰ Though in the April 2014 elections Fidesz's total vote share fell to 44.1 per cent, this was still enough to easily constitute a second four-year term for Fidesz as a parliamentary supermajority; even more significant was Jobbik's increase in the total vote share, constituting 20.4 per cent and winning the radical nationalist party 23 seats in Hungary's parliament.

Such widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo and rising popularity of the right lends support to arguments regarding the "stolen" transition. Péter Krekó and Gregor Mayer have recently discussed the concept of a second transition vis-à-vis the convergence between Fidesz and Jobbik, ultimately arguing that Fidesz has taken advantage of the presence of Jobbik by using it as a "pioneer for the second transition," adapting and incorporating elements of Jobbik's ideology and policy platform and implementing them to the benefit of Fidesz: "Fidesz instrumentalized the threat Jobbik is posing to the democratic system as well as the negative 'image' of the transition as a justification...for changing an institutional framework in a way that

⁸ "Two Decade's after the Wall's Fall: End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations," 2009. *The Pew Global Attitudes Project* (n.d.): n. pag. Pew Research Center.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

strongly benefits Fidesz.”¹¹ Within the context of the Fidesz-Jobbik convergence, Fidesz’s political motivations are thinly veiled under the guise of protecting Hungary from the rise of Jobbik. However, this is notable not only in that Fidesz is willing to adopt a more right wing policy platform, but also in that Fidesz presents the future of Hungary in a way that implicitly precludes legitimate political competition. In justifying their further and further right policymaking by presenting Jobbik as a sort of boogeyman—a boogeyman with whom Fidesz is beginning to share more and more commonalities—Fidesz presents no real alternative to right wing policymaking but instead is charting a backwards course towards a less democratic government.

Where Krekó and Mayer are sparse in their discussion of the actual transition itself, others are less ambiguous as to the underlying factors that shaped the transition. Bruszt and Stark counter the view that a forceful, organized democratic presence in the final days of communism in Hungary enabled the transition, rejecting the notion that there was a strong and established civil society. Instead, they posit that the democratic transition was less an act of a strong democratic element in the waning days of communist Hungary than an example of weak state facing weak society.¹² Such a postulation indicates that the transition from communism was more of a phasing out of communist elements and institutions than it was an active assertion of democratic principles and institutions.

The relative dearth of democratic opposition and organization in the pre-transition era leaves a scant legacy, with the significant exception of the mass uprising of 1956 that was brutally crushed by Soviet forces. One of us asserted earlier that Hungarian political culture is one of “passive individualism,” a political culture that has exacerbated anti-establishment sentiment and rendered the electorate susceptible to manipulation by the rule of political parties.

¹³ To be sure, the importance of a vibrant civil society is tantamount to a thriving democracy and

¹¹ Péter Krekó and Gregor Mayer. "Transforming Hungary--together? An Analysis of the Fidesz-Jobbik Relationship." *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*. By Michael Minkenberg. N.p.: Routledge, 2015, 185

¹² László Bruszt and David Stark. "Remaking the Political Field in Hungary: From the Politics of Confrontation to the Politics of Competition." *Eastern Europe in Revolution*. Ed. Ivo Banac. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992, 14

¹³ András Bozóki and Eszter Simon (2010), "Hungary since 1989." *Central and Southeastern European Politics Since 1989*. Ed. Sabrina Ramet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 227.

democratic consolidation. However, the party-centric political dynamic of post-communist Hungary has become an obstacle to civil society enrichment and has allowed radical nationalist ideologies and movements to take root in the absence of inclusionary and democratically constructive political engagement by citizens. From this analytical vantage point, then, it would seem that the rightward shift of the Hungarian political mainstream constitutes not so much a “transformation of the transformation,” but rather a regression from democratic consolidation at the behest of the radical nationalist right.¹⁴

2. The Parallel Evolution of Fidesz and Jobbik

Fidesz has become nearly unrecognizable since its inception as a liberal party. Founded in 1988 during the mobilization of radical liberal student activists, Fidesz—in Hungarian, *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, or Federation of Young Democrats—has undergone a profound ideological and policy shift. Though the evolution of Fidesz has been nuanced and complex, the party has consistently and conspicuously adopted more populist nationalist stances as it has risen to power.¹⁵ Though at first embracing a liberal ethos, the Fidesz of today has been generally characterized as a populist-nationalist party that constitutes the center right of the Hungarian political spectrum.

Indeed, political scientists have observed the Fidesz phenomenon with great interest and growing concern. Edith Oltay has traced the development of Fidesz from its early days as a liberal party to its present occupation of the center-right, seeking to answer the question of how Fidesz established itself as the dominant center-right political entity in Hungary.¹⁶ Oltay casts Fidesz as an example of a party of “successful political entrepreneurs” who have driven a fundamental change in the party system by “building upon and creating cleavages that serve as a basis for a political identity.” Further, Oltay argues that Fidesz’s success as a party of political

¹⁴ Mudde, Cas (2015), „Is Hungary Run by the Radical Right?“ *Washington Post*, August 10.

¹⁵ “Fidesz-MPP” (2013), *CEE Identity: National Identities*. National Identity in Central Eastern Europe.

¹⁶ Edith Oltay (2012), *Fidesz and the Reinvention of the Hungarian Center-Right*. Budapest: Századvég.

entrepreneurs enabled it to “adjust” to a groundswell of political change in Hungary, though we argue that it has been more of an opportunistic driver of this change than a party merely adapting to it. We take Oltay’s work a step further in arguing that Fidesz’s skillfulness as a party of elite political entrepreneurs amid political crisis in Hungary has allowed it to move further right, effectively erasing the existence of a conservative center-right and replacing it with a radical right wing populist dominance. This, we argue, has paved the way not only for a rightward shift with Fidesz but also for the upsurge of Jobbik.

Jobbik (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*)—or Movement for a Better Hungary—has playfully embedded its political orientation within the name of the party itself. The Hungarian “*jobb*” could be interpreted as both “better” and as “to the right,” implying by its name alone not only that its politics are to the right on the political spectrum, but that the right is far better. Jobbik has been clear with its radical far-right nationalism from the beginning. Formed in 2003 by former history teacher Gábor Vona, Jobbik rose from relative obscurity by harnessing the deeply held anti-Roma sentiment following the countryside lynching of an ethnic Hungarian teacher by a group of Roma.¹⁷ In addition to its cries of rampant “gypsy crime,” Jobbik gained further notoriety—and followers—with the formation of a paramilitary force. The August 2007 founding ceremony in Budapest for the now-defunct neo-fascist *Magyar Gárda*, (Hungarian Guard) drew further concern among those alarmed by the burgeoning radical right in the country: then Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány called the paramilitary group “Hungary’s shame.”¹⁸ Gábor Vona, a co-founder of the guard, stated: “The Hungarian Guard has been set up in order to carry out the real change of regime [from communism] and to rescue Hungarians.”¹⁹ This theme of “rescuing Hungarians” is consistent with Jobbik’s self-conception as the savior of Hungary and radical redeemer of what they consider a failed transition. One of the most prominently displayed points in Jobbik’s manifesto on the group’s official webpage states as one of its core goals the “[completion of] the change of the political system” and “creating a more just society

¹⁷ Ibid., 188

¹⁸ Siobhan Dowling (2007), “The World from Berlin: Neo-Fascist Magyar Garda Is ‘Hungary’s Shame’” *Spiegel Online*. Der Spiegel, 27 August

¹⁹ Ibid.

than the current one.”²⁰ The movement-turned-party has led the charge to restore Hungary to its former glory, utilizing old national symbols and foundational myths to construct the image of a unified, homogeneous Christian nation that must take back what had been taken from it by centuries of foreign domination, communist rule, and a weak post-transition democratic state.

The party has become an ever more forceful presence on the Hungarian political stage, and its rhetoric and policy stances have rendered it one of the largest opposition parties to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s ruling Fidesz. In what Gábor Vona termed an “historic event” during the 2014 elections, Jobbik took its first win in a first-past-the-post election in the town of Tapolca, winning a seat in the Hungarian parliament.²¹ This marked the first time that a Jobbik member won a parliamentary election outside of the national-list system, in which voters choose a party rather than an individual. Recognizing the significance of this win, Gábor Vona went so far as to assert that Jobbik now represents the most formidable opposition to Prime Minister Orbán’s Fidesz instead of the left.²² Indeed, he has recently stated explicitly that “Jobbik is preparing to replace Fidesz.”²³

However, Fidesz’s steady movement further and further right has been concurrent with the rise of Jobbik and has been marked by Viktor Orbán’s authoritarian approach to power, a more radical nationalist rhetoric, economic populism, and a move away from the EU and towards the East. The trajectory of Fidesz from its origins to the present day would indicate that the party has astutely manipulated the political situation at hand in order to gain an advantage, and its turn towards the radical right vis-à-vis Jobbik is the most current—and consequential—example of this. It is with this in mind that we now turn to an analysis of Fidesz and Jobbik since the 1989 transformation.

In the Beginning: Fidesz in 1989

²⁰ "Manifesto." *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, n.d. Web.

²¹ "On the March" (2015), *The Economist*. 18 April.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "Y2018 Elections Will Be Centred on Corruption." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 6 October

At the time of its founding in 1988, Fidesz classified itself as a liberal party. Founded by young law students and led by Viktor Orbán, the dissident group turned party originally distinguished itself by drawing a hard line between itself and Hungarian communism. The group rejected what some termed the “Kádárist compromise,” a sort of tacit agreement during the more liberal era of communism ushered in by János Kádár that citizens would not oppose the regime if the situation remained stable and comfortable for society.²⁴ The group’s 1989 “Declaration of Political Program and Chronology” begins by asserting its commitment to liberal democratic values, couching its stances in the language of individual rights and freedoms.²⁵ The document states Fidesz’s opposition to repressive ideologies, stressing that the political system best suited to protecting and fostering individual and basic human rights is a parliamentary democracy. It further goes on to link a market economy with a parliamentary democracy as intuitively complementary systems.

Many of the statements in the original Fidesz manifesto and declaration of its mission contradict each other, however. While claiming a commitment to parliamentary democracy and market economy, the document discusses the caveats of these systems in a way that goes beyond addressing counterarguments; rather, they seem to be an indication of Fidesz’s low confidence in these systems, providing an embedded escape clause of sorts in the event that Fidesz were to decide that these systems are not superior after all, or at least not well-suited to their aims. After expressing support for a market economy as the optimal economic system, the document states its inherent flaws, including that it “begets and perpetuates inequalities,” thus necessitating the development of a vague “conscious social policy.” Additionally, the document follows its adherence to a liberal democratic ethos with thinly veiled appeals to divisive issues that would become popular among populists later on.

²⁴ Edith Oltay (2012), "Fidesz's Path to Power: The Reinvention of the Hungarian Center Right." *Paprika Politik*. 29 February.

²⁵ "Federation of Young Democrats Declaration of Political Program and Chronology" (1989), *World Affairs* 151. 4. 170-76.

Hungarian populism at the beginning of its democratic experiment was never defined clearly, but instead manifested itself in different forms.²⁶ However, the roots of populist ideas that would later be expressed in political actions were present in the official statements of Fidesz as early as 1988. In the Fidesz founding document, for example, it states—even before asserting its dedication to liberal democratic politics and a market economy—that it is a “basic human right for everyone to decide for himself...to which nation, community, or communities he wants to belong.”²⁷ Though ostensibly presented as evidence of Fidesz’s consideration of minority rights, it is presented in such a sufficiently unclear manner as to suggest that perhaps this statement is more a support of Hungarian revanchism than a defense of ethnic minorities living in Hungary. In a proposed typology of Hungarian populism, one of us asserts that populist ideas within all five subtypes have been “presented rhetorically as new forms of political inclusion while mostly serving exclusionary policies.”²⁸ Such ideas would prove to be effective tools of populist mobilization later on, particularly as a more xenophobic strain of Hungarian nationalism grew in the aftermath of the liberal-socialist decline.

It is vital to recall the shift of Fidesz from liberal to conservative party in the mid-1990s. The first five years of democracy in Hungary following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 failed to bring the results that Hungarians had so optimistically hoped for after the fall of communism. These shortcomings, combined with a sort of nostalgia for the relative security Hungary enjoyed in the twilight of communist rule, brought the former communists back to power with Gyula Horn and the MSZP. However, the liberal Alliance for Free Democrats (SZDSZ) entered into a coalition with the MSZP in 1994, which prompted a sort of identity crisis for Fidesz.²⁹ Always explicitly anti-communist, the Fidesz leadership made a strategic decision to detach itself from the liberal-socialist camp and designate the party a conservative one. According to Oltay, this

²⁶ András Bozóki (2015b), "The Illusion of Inclusion: Configurations of Populism in Hungary." in Peter Kopecek and Piotr Wcislik eds. *Thinking Through Transition*. Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 275-312.

²⁷ "Federation of Young Democrats Declaration of Political Program and Chronology" (1989), *World Affairs*, op. cit. 170.

²⁸ András Bozóki (2015b) op. cit.

²⁹ Jan Mainka and Edith Oltay (2012), “From Challenging Authority to Full Control!” Interview. *The Budapest Times* 20 September.

was the most pragmatic choice for a party that did not wish to join the liberal-socialist coalition but that still had high aspirations for power; in this way, Fidesz had the opportunity to join the weaker conservative camp and build a united front against the liberal-socialist coalition.³⁰ With its closer ideological similarities to the right, this would prove to be a natural partnership. This movement from the liberal to conservative camp was particularly significant in that it set in motion the pendulum of political polarization for Hungary writ large, facilitating the rise of Jobbik and rightward shift of Fidesz.

Setting the Stage: The Right in Opposition, 2006-2010

The period between 2006 and the 2010 elections that swept Fidesz and Viktor Orbán to power with a parliamentary supermajority was particularly vital in propelling a new right wing to power, and the increasingly antagonistic and populist politics of both Fidesz and Jobbik point to a mobilization of the political right in preparation for what would constitute a massive paradigm shift in Hungarian politics.

The political realities of the Hungarian democratic experiment after 1989 consistently fell short of the people's originally lofty expectations. After years of slow-moving reforms failed to mitigate a growing financial crisis, Hungarians were understandably displeased to hear in a leaked audiotape that the liberal-socialist coalition government had failed to introduce any effective reforms. In September 2006, a Hungarian radio station played an excerpt of a recording between government officials and Socialist Party MPs in which then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admits that his government had lied to the public on the economic situation of the country in order to win the general elections that had occurred the previous April.³¹ Anger and distrust with what the public increasingly saw as an ineffective, illegitimate regime spiked following the release of the tape, leading to a crisis of political legitimacy for Hungary's liberal-socialist government. Seeing an opportunity amid the wreckage, Fidesz merely added fuel to the flames.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "We Lied to Win, Says Hungary PM" (2006), *BBC News*. BBC, 18 September.

Revelations of the incumbent government's ineffectiveness sparked mass protests and public demonstrations, many of which were encouraged—at least implicitly—by Fidesz. Freedom House's 2007 report on Hungary saw Hungary's rating for electoral processes decrease from 1.25 to 1.75 due to the opposition's "[lack of] respect for representative government" and "favoring [of] demonstrations and intimidation as a way to gain political ground."³² In addition to these demonstrations against the government, Orbán took advantage of the fragile political situation, sending a public ultimatum to Prime Minister Gyurcsány shortly after the leak demanding his resignation within a 72-hour period. The shockwaves released by the 2006 leaked audio scandal eventually culminated in a change in government after a 2008 referendum on social reforms swept to power the first minority government in Hungary since the early 1990s.³³

With the MSZP holding a tenuous grip in Hungary's parliament, the June 2009 elections for the European Parliament indicated a surge in right-wing sentiments in the country—Fidesz and its de facto subsidiary in the KDNP took a majority of seats, while Jobbik won three of the total 22 EP seats. For the first time, no liberal parties won seats at the EP, a fact that pointed to a seismic shift in Hungarian politics and indicated an ever widening rift between left and right.³⁴ The results of the EP elections and what essentially was a phasing out of liberalism in Hungarian politics was merely a precursor to what was to come in 2010 and beyond.

Establishing and Consolidating the Orbán Regime: 2010 to Present

The actions of Fidesz and PM Orbán since their defeat of the MSZP in 2010 have set Hungary on an authoritarian path that will be hard to reverse. When coupled with this creeping authoritarianism and radicalization of the political space, the rise of Jobbik and Fidesz's attempt to keep up could spell the end of the Hungarian democratic experiment. In this section, we discuss Fidesz and Orbán's illiberal approach to governing since 2010 and its implications for

³² *Hungary: Freedom in the World 2007*. Rep. Freedom House, 2007.

³³ *Hungary: Freedom in the World 2009*. Rep. Freedom House, 2009.

³⁴ *Hungary: Freedom in the World 2010*. Rep. Freedom House, 2010.

Hungarian politics. Additionally, we will begin to discuss some fundamental similarities between Fidesz and its radical right opposition party Jobbik.

Since the beginning of Orbán's tenure as prime minister in 2010, he and his party have spearheaded a series of anti-democratic reforms aimed at centralizing power within a Fidesz "partyocracy."³⁵ Soon after the 2010 elections that thrust Fidesz to power, the party's two-thirds parliamentary supermajority effectively rewrote the Hungarian constitution, approving it without setting the decision of constitutional reform to a vote by referendum.³⁶ Since the 2012 advent of the new constitution, Fidesz has been able to push through countless amendments primarily aimed at cementing Fidesz's power and making it more difficult for the political opposition to gain any significant footing in positions of actual power. Under this new constitution, the electoral system has been adjusted so as to facilitate the continuation of a majoritarian governing system geared more towards guaranteeing a disproportionate amount of political power to one party. Indeed, the new constitution stipulates a much broader range of laws that require the approval of a supermajority for passage.³⁷ These and other egregious affronts to liberal democratic tenets have pushed the limits of Hungarian democracy, attracting attention from pro-democracy groups and prompting international observers to downgrade Hungary on most measures of liberal democratic governance.

The numerical indicators for Hungary in Freedom House's 2015 *Nations in Transit* report indicate a significant decline in democratic transparency and governance.³⁸ On nearly every measure, from electoral fairness to civil society to judicial independence from the party apparatus, the situation in Hungary deteriorated between 2014 and 2015—and that is not even considering the serious reversals in democratic consolidation that have occurred since Orbán's rise to power in 2010.

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of the concept of a Hungarian partyocracy, see András Bozóki (2015a), "Broken Democracy, Predatory State and Nationalist Populism" in Péter Krasztev and Jon Van Tile eds. *The Hungarian Patient: Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*. Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 3-36.

³⁶ Cf. Erin K. Jenne and Cas Mudde (2012), "Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Can Outsiders Help?" *Journal of Democracy* 23. 3. 148

³⁷ For full country report and explanations for ratings, see *Nations in Transit: Hungary*. (2015), Rep. N.p.: Freedom House.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

On the Freedom House scale of democratic progress—with 1 indicating the most progress and 7 the least—Hungary is currently ranked at an unimpressive 3.18. Additionally, Freedom House downgraded Hungary in 2015 from a “consolidated democracy” to a “semi-consolidated democracy,” a devaluation that constitutes the culmination of seven years of decreasing scores. By most sub-measures of the health of democracy in Hungary, the most significant declines have thus far occurred between 2010 and present. In addition to Fidesz’s unilateral rewrite of the national constitution in 2012, Orbán has stacked independent and semi-independent institutions alike with loyalists, and he has quietly eroded press freedom by making it more difficult for media sources not sympathetic to Fidesz to operate efficiently and without interference. It has become increasingly easier for the powers that be to silence the opposition, not only through an electoral system redesigned to protect the incumbent government’s position in power and prevent the emergence of any real opposition but also through the stifling of press freedoms and closing off of civil society.

Democracy Measures in Hungary: 2006-2015

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Electoral Process	1.25	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.75
Civil Society	1.25	1.50	1.50	1.75	1.75	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.25	2.50
Independent Media	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75
National Democratic Governance	2.00	2.25	2.25	2.50	2.50	3.00	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75
Local Democratic Governance	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.75	3.00
Judicial Independence	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	2.00	2.25	2.75	2.50	2.50	2.75
Corruption	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75
Democracy Score	2.00	2.14	2.14	2.29	2.39	2.61	2.86	2.89	2.96	3.18

**Source: Freedom House Nations in Transit Study, Hungary Country Report (2015)*

Fidesz's troubling rightward swing was exemplified in a speech Prime Minister Orbán gave at a July 2014 congregation of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. The speech contained revanchist appeals and aggressive nationalistic rhetoric. Most notable, however, was this bold assertion: "The Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened, and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state."³⁹ Aside from signaling a troubling move away from liberal democratic principles, Orbán's comment was one that strongly echoes the central ethos of Jobbik: whereas Jobbik has not exactly shied away from proclamations against the "liberal hegemony," Fidesz had—at least publicly—accepted liberal democratic tenets up to a certain point.⁴⁰

Despite Orbán's centralization of power within the Fidesz ruling apparatus, his continued grip on power could find itself at risk should Fidesz lose its supermajority in Parliament. In this event, Orbán may reach out to other parties for support in reconstructing the supermajority. The most likely choice in this alliance would be radical right Jobbik⁴¹ which indeed would seem to be a natural progression, particularly given the two parties' increasing similarities in ideology and policy.

In order to more systematically demonstrate the dangerous and democratically-incompatible phenomenon of the Fidesz-Jobbik convergence we will now turn to a comparative analysis of the parties' ideological similarities, as well as overlaps in three key policy areas: cultural, socioeconomic, and foreign policy, overlaps that render the lines between Fidesz and Jobbik, center-right and far right, increasingly blurry and difficult to distinguish.

3. Blurred Lines: Fidesz, Jobbik, and the Right's Radical Shift

³⁹ Csaba Tóth (2014), "Full Text of Viktor Orbán's Speech at Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014." *The Budapest Beacon*, 29 July.

⁴⁰ Péter Krekó and Gregor Mayer. "Transforming Hungary--together? An Analysis of the Fidesz-Jobbik Relationship." *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*. By Michael Minkenberg. London: Routledge, 2015, 191

⁴¹ Ibid.

The post-communism political landscape in Hungary in the past decade has been wracked by economic underperformance, corruption, and growing mistrust of those in possession of political power. A major consequence of this, we claim, is the emergence of a radical right populism with the political pioneers of Jobbik and the spread and normalization of this reactionary populism under Fidesz. Without a strong sense of political stability and accomplishment, many Hungarians have developed a defensive anti-political posture in the absence of conditions that would render a positive, democratic political culture appealing. By this we primarily mean that Hungarian politics writ large has become distinguished by an emphasis on negative political action rather than positive political action—on preventing some groups from success rather than promoting the success of all—allowing an exclusionary Hungarian nationalism and rejection of democratic political norms to flourish.

Carl Schmitt's work offers a helpful perspective on the Hungarian populist *Zeitgeist* that is rooted in political theory. Schmitt defines the "political" as the ability to decide—in other words, the ability of a leader to make unilateral decisions for the preservation of the political unit. In order to do this, he must distinguish an enemy and build order based on what he calls the "friend-enemy distinction".⁴² Schmitt's conception of sovereignty and of political power is consistent with the modern conception of the nation-state, with an emphasis on the nation as a major source of legitimacy. This friend-enemy distinction refers to entities, whether inside or outside of the bounds of the state, that pose an existential threat to the state and its people. Closely intertwined with Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction is nationalism, a belief system that is in itself predicated upon the distinction between friend—those fitting within the concept of the "nation"—and enemy, or those outside. Such a binary representation of the state can lend itself to extreme nationalism and authoritarianism if allowed to grow unchecked.

Schmitt's version of the political has in some ways become one and the same with Viktor Orbán and the pioneers of his illiberal state, both within Jobbik and Fidesz. Jobbik's upward trajectory towards greater political power has in no small part been dependent upon the party's creation of a binary conception of Hungarian vs. non-Hungarian, capitalizing upon xenophobia, fear and disillusionment within Hungarian society to prop up its exclusionary vision of the ideal

⁴² Cf. Carl Schmitt (2007 [1932]), *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Hungary. Jobbik's popular appeal has become impossible to ignore, and Viktor Orbán has taken note in his development of a Fidesz platform more amenable to electoral success. He and his Fidesz have continued to push further to the right and develop a more aggressive posture towards minorities and those not considered "true" Hungarians, culminating in a version of Hungarian nationalism that prioritizes a select group of Hungarians while largely excluding those outside of that group. Where Fidesz and Jobbik's propaganda may be considered largely a political construction, however, many Hungarians have become increasingly receptive to these exclusionary messages in the name of protecting a "traditional" Hungary from outside threats—whether they be real or imagined.

Of course, placing the onus for the decline of liberal democracy in Hungary solely on the shoulders of the ruling right ignores the role of the electorate itself in this authoritarian resurgence. The *Zeitgeist* within the country, and indeed throughout Europe, would seem to be nationalist populism fueled by disillusionment with the broken promises of liberal democracy and trepidation in regards to an uncertain political future. Hungary, it could be said, is one state at the forefront of this set of attitudes and convictions, and some Hungarians are its most vocal proponents.

An annual survey taken by Tárki Social Research Institute, based in Budapest, has measured levels of xenophobia and prejudice based upon ethnic cleavages throughout Hungary since 1992. Though these levels have fluctuated since then, they have always been relatively high and have only increased in recent years. The researchers conducting the survey ask respondents—all of them Hungarian citizens—whether they would accept or reject refugees of varying ethnic backgrounds into Hungary, with some of the primary groups including Arabs, Roma, Chinese, Africans, and Romanians.⁴³ The 2015 survey found that 46 per cent of respondents would categorically deny any refugees the right to enter Hungary, regardless of consideration for each refugee's political situation or ethnic origin. About 45 per cent of respondents stated that they would be willing to consider granting asylum to some refugees, and only 9 per cent stated that they were generally open to accepting foreign migrants and refugees.

⁴³ "Tárki survey finds xenophobia record high in Hungary" (2015), *Politics.hu*, 6 May.

On a more micro level, the number of respondents who would deny entry to people of particular ethnic groups was significantly higher. The only group less accepted than the long-despised Roma was the Arabs, whom 94 per cent of respondents indicated they would reject from entering Hungary. As this figure was recorded in April 2015, this rejection rate is only likely to climb amidst the upsurge in Syrian refugees crossing through Hungary and opportunistic fearmongering by the right wing. Indeed, an article appearing on Jobbik's official website a week after the November 2015 Paris terror attacks dramatically proclaimed this: "Hungary shall belong to Hungarians as long as we breathe."⁴⁴ The article also recounts a Jobbik-led demonstration held in protest against the EU's proposed migrant quota for member countries, with protesters in front of the building for the Representation of the European Commission in Hungary chanting "We don't want immigration! We don't want terrorism!" In an interview of Viktor Orbán conducted by *Politico* around the same time, Orban proffered the same categorical correlation between migrants and terrorists: "All the terrorists are migrants," he is quoted as asserting.⁴⁵

These xenophobic anti-migrant attitudes are nothing new. The 2006 Tárki survey inserted an experimental variable that tragically demonstrated that xenophobia in Hungary was moving in an increasingly disturbing and illogical direction—in addition to the other groups, the designers of the survey included a fictional ethnic group called the Pirezians, from Pirezia, and asked respondents to decide whether to allow these particular people into Hungary or not.⁴⁶ In 2006, 59 per cent of respondents indicated that they would reject Pirezians seeking refuge in Hungary, with this figure increasing to 68 per cent in the 2007 survey and falling slightly to 66 per cent in 2008. Aside from the significance of the 2006-2008 time period in the breakdown of support for the MSZP-led government and a rapid rise in support for the right wing, this data demonstrates that some Hungarians harbor a learned reluctance to accept anyone outside of the traditional ethnic Hungarian circle. In times of crisis, then, it would make sense that political

⁴⁴ "Hungary Shall Belong to Hungarians as Long as We Breathe." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. 20 November.

⁴⁵ Matthew Kaminski (2015), "All the terrorists are migrants," *Politico Europe*, 23 November.

⁴⁶ "Fictional minority again declared unwelcome by Hungarians," (2008), on *Observationalism.com*, 28 October. Full data report and analysis in Hungarian can be found here (www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2008/kitekint/20081001.html)

opportunists would view these sentiments as a minefield of potential support and purposely tap into them to gain votes and solidify party allegiance.

In the following, we will examine the Fidesz-Jobbik convergence in three key policy areas: cultural, socioeconomic, and foreign policy. Though at the time of this writing the political atmosphere in Hungary remains volatile and continues to develop, a preliminary look at the evidence indicates a quickly narrowing gap between Fidesz and Jobbik as the former seeks to consolidate power in the midst of a populist zeitgeist and widespread democratic disillusionment.

Promoting Hungarian Hegemony: Culture vis-a-vis Jobbik and Fidesz

In harnessing and playing off of many Hungarians' discontent with the post-transition situation, an issue of particular salience and emotional appeal has been nationalism. Indeed, this cultivation of a strong nationalist discourse has been a key boon for both Jobbik and Fidesz, which has manipulated Hungarians' disillusionment, prejudices, and fears in a way that has rendered the citizenry increasingly susceptible to extreme nationalist and radical right-wing ideologies. In the midst of widespread dissatisfaction with Hungary's direction in the aftermath of the Soviet communist hegemony, nationalist sentiment is particularly salient in that it gives citizens a common identity and sense of belonging within what would otherwise appear to be an alien land stripped of its rightful territory. Indeed, the power of nationalism and "nationalizing discourses," as coined by scholar of nationalism Rogers Brubaker, has arguably been the driving force behind Jobbik and its popularity among its constituents.⁴⁷ Viktor Orbán and Fidesz have taken note and adopted an aggressive Hungarian nationalizing discourse.

The right's "nationalizing discourse" has attempted to create and reinforce the perception of a common national identity among Hungarians that stretches back to ancient times. Jobbik has capitalized on the idea of a founding myth to bind together Hungarians with a sense of national pride and belonging, even including as part of its cultural platform such ideas as declaring a national holiday in commemoration of the "Hungarian people's" victory at the battle of Pozsony

⁴⁷ Rogers Brubaker (1996), *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

in 907 AD.⁴⁸ Additionally, the Jobbik cultural policy platform includes a call for constitutional protection of Hungarian “national symbols” such as the Holy Crown and the Turul bird, further solidifying this conception of an ancient nation with a common founding myth.⁴⁹ In constructing such a national identity, Jobbik has promoted a homogeneous nation of ethnic Hungarians at the expense of ethnic minorities, and the party’s vision of an ideal Hungary values these “true” Hungarians above all others—even if not explicitly.

Viktor Orbán has attempted to distance himself from charges of extremism leveled against his political relatives in Jobbik, though he has drawn ire on a number of occasions for adopting a similarly exclusionary stance. In 2013, he was accused of trying to gain favor among far right radicals by bestowing Hungary’s highest honor, the Táncsics Prize, upon some colorfully controversial figures known for their espousal of anti-Semitic conspiracies and extreme nationalist views.⁵⁰ Among the honorees was rocker János Petrás, the frontman of Jobbik’s de facto patron band Kárpátia. The band’s grungy style is complemented by lyrics promoting an extreme nationalist vision of the ideal Hungary, with songs ranging from odes to the Turul bird to calls for revanchist conquests in reconnecting ethnic Hungarians abroad with their rightful homeland.⁵¹ In awarding the highest national honor that can be bestowed upon Hungarians to such radical and controversial figures as János Petrás, the Orbán regime is essentially elevating these figures, their ideals, their actions, and their symbols as representative of the essence of Hungary—as Hungary’s pride and as figures to be emulated. Thus, Fidesz has recognized the power of these national symbols and radical nationalist myths in mobilizing popular support and consolidating power, prompting the party to pick up on Jobbik’s cues and repackage them so as to appear the originators of these nationalist ideals.

The refugee crisis of 2015 has provided a particularly powerful source for cultivating nationalist sentiment. The crisis sweeping across Europe has been met by a variety of responses by the nations affected by the influx of the desperate Syrian migrants, ranging from hospitable to downright hostile. Hungary’s response falls on the hostile side of the spectrum, and this hostility

⁴⁸ "Policies." (2015) *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ "Hungary Hands Awards to Well-known Anti-Semites." (2013), *DW.DE*. Deutsche Welle, 17 March.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

is in large part a product of Fidesz's attempts to appropriate Jobbik's stances on the crisis and what should be done to mitigate it. The result of this political outbidding, we will show, has been the development of a nationalist climate inimical to democracy and Hungary's authoritarian backsliding.

Underlying the Fidesz-Jobbik convergence on the refugee crisis is a very particular conception of "Hungarian-ness" that has been largely influenced by Jobbik's unabashedly exclusionary version of Hungarian nationalism. A cornerstone of Jobbik's ideological foundation is an intense wariness towards "multiculturalism". In a post on the party's official website, a Jobbik operative discussed the need to counter the wave of migrants crossing through Hungary, at the same time underscoring this exhortation with a condemnation of the principles of multiculturalism: "The failure of multiculturalism is obvious for everybody and even if the West is already lost, nobody can deprive Eastern Central Europe of its right to preserve the continent together with its traditional values, religion, and culture."⁵² Transparent through this condemnation of multiculturalism is a very particular conception of the ideal "culture" that needs defending. Jobbik's intimations that the West is beyond saving projects an image of Hungary as the guardians of Europe from individuals that they see as Muslim invaders, as undesirables who pose a dire threat to a homogeneous Christian Hungary.⁵³

In the case of immigration, it would appear that the so-called moderating effects of power have not done much to constrain Orbán and his Fidesz in promoting their stances towards the refugee crisis. Indeed, Fidesz's immigration policy appears to very closely resemble what immigration policy would look like under a Jobbik government. Echoing Jobbik's concerns, Orbán has asserted that Hungary is not sufficiently equipped to handle migrants because of the country's inexperience with "multiculturalism."⁵⁴ In addition to the construction of a 110 mile long fence along the Hungarian-Serbian border to keep out migrants in transit and Fidesz's fierce rejection of EU-imposed migrant quotas, the Orbán government channeled Jobbik's xenophobic

⁵² "Hungary Shall Belong to Hungarians as Long as We Breathe." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. 20 November.

⁵³ Zoltán Ádám and András Bozóki (2016), „State and Faith: Right Wing Populism and Nationalized Religion in Hungary” *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* Vol. 2. No. 1.

⁵⁴ Annabel Tremlett and Vera Messing (2015), "Hungary's future: anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism and anti-Roma?" *openDemocracy*, 4 August.

attitudes towards the crisis and set in motion a nationwide anti-immigration campaign that included posters and billboards throughout Hungary admonishing migrants and reminding them that Hungary is a nation for Hungarians. Among the poster quotes were the following: “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture!” and “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws!” This marked a clear political ploy by Fidesz to ingratiate itself to voters who feel threatened by migrants entering the country, especially given that the migrants towards which the signs were purportedly directed are unlikely to understand Hungarian. An additional aspect of Fidesz’s grassroots anti-migrant campaign, called the National Consult on Immigration, was a questionnaire sent in July 2015 to every Hungarian household in a supposed effort to collect data on Hungarians’ feelings on immigration. Clearly imbued with an anti-immigrant slant, the survey asked such leading questions as “There are some who think that mismanagement of the immigration question by Brussels may have something to do with increased terrorism. Do you agree with this view?”⁵⁵ Such aggressive posturing has been complemented by Orbán’s refusal to abide by mandatory EU quotas imposed on each member state to more evenly spread the financial and infrastructural burden. Additionally, the Fidesz-led government decided to unilaterally reject transfers of migrants to Hungary under the Dublin Regulations.⁵⁶

The political right’s hostility towards refugees has been complemented and preceded by a long history of its hostility towards certain subgroups of Hungarians as well: namely the Roma and Jews. This hostility has only worsened since the rise of the right wing and Fidesz’s attempts to outbid Jobbik in its xenophobic zeal. László Trócsányi, Hungary’s Minister of Justice was lambasted by the Hungarian and international press for a statement in May 2015 wherein he both criticized the EU migrant quota system and gave an interesting justification as to why Hungary can not accept Syrian refugees: because Hungary must first focus on integrating the country’s Roma population of 800,000.⁵⁷ In the process of making this assertion, Fidesz managed to do

⁵⁵ Ibid. Full questionnaire and introductory letter written by Orbán (all in Hungarian) can be found here: (http://www.kormany.hu/download/b/33/50000/nemzeti_konz_2015_krea12.pdf)

⁵⁶ Patrick J. Lyons (2015), “Explaining the Rules for Migrants: Borders and Asylum,” *The New York Times*, 16 September. Full description of the Dublin Regulations included therein.

⁵⁷ Christopher Adam (2015), “Hungarian justice minister says no to immigrants, because Gypsies already pose huge burden,” *Hungarian Free Press*, 22 May.

two things: assert that the Roma are not truly a part of Hungary and thus pose an urgent problem to be fixed, and appeal to anti-Roma voters who otherwise would only hear such a message from Jobbik. Indeed, analysts have pointed out how strikingly reminiscent of Jobbik Fidesz's scapegoating of the Roma is, warily stating that tying the immigration issue with the Roma is a "genius" tactic by Fidesz to win over the growing contingent of Jobbik supporters within Hungary.⁵⁸

Fidesz's Roma-blaming tactics echo Jobbik's cries of rampant "gypsy crime," or *cigánybűnözés* in Hungarian, an offensive term that has become more widely used and accepted as the Hungarian mainstream has shifted to the right. Jobbik officially denies that it is racist against the Roma people while also justifying their usage of the term; at the same time as the party officially asserts that it is not anti-Roma, it categorically equates the minority ethnic group with "the predominant commission of certain types of crimes." What is more, they support their claim by citing cases of increased crime rates in communities abroad that have seen large influxes of Roma migrants, saying that "when such Roma populations emigrate...the communities they come to suddenly find themselves victims of precisely these forms of criminality."⁵⁹

This anti-Roma rhetoric has been taken a step further with the formation of paramilitary groups affiliated with Jobbik. Gábor Vona himself founded the *Magyar Gárda*, or Hungarian Guard, in 2007, with its primary goal being to "strengthen national self defence" and to "[maintain] public order."⁶⁰ The group's members, almost overwhelmingly Jobbik supporters, wore fascist-era boots and coats adorned with the red-and-white-striped Árpád flag used by the anti-Semitic fascist Arrow Cross party in the 1940s. Though Hungarian courts ordered the disbandment of the Magyar Garda in 2008, the group utilized legal loopholes to reorganize into three separate but associated groups: the *Új Magyar Gárda* (New Hungarian Guard), *Magyar Nemzeti Garda* (Hungarian National Guard), and *Szebb Jövőért Polgárőr Egyesület* (Civil Guard

⁵⁸ Annabel Tremlett and Vera Messing (2015), "Hungary's future: anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism and anti-Roma?" *openDemocracy*, 4 August.

⁵⁹ "Frequently Refuted Lies." *Jobbik.com*.

⁶⁰ *Alapító nyilatkozat* [Establishment Manifesto], 25 August 2007.

Association for a Better Hungarian Future).⁶¹ Jobbik officially denies that it condones violence and racism, asserting that it is not against anyone but only “for Hungary.”⁶² However, these descendants of the original Magyar Garda wear similar fascist-era uniforms and employ intimidation tactics that sometimes spark outright violence. In March of 2011, these paramilitary groups went to Gyöngyöspata, a village northeast of Budapest, to carry out “military exercises” and “security patrols,” also setting up a training center in a part of town heavily populated by Roma.⁶³ The paramilitary presence there prompted the evacuation of some 270 Roma women and children, while the radical Hungarian National Front declared on its website that the conflagrations between the radicals and the Roma people marked the “outbreak of a cleansing civil war.”⁶⁴

Not only has Fidesz neglected to unequivocally condemn these racist paramilitary groups, but it has also pushed policies aimed at intimidating and marginalizing ethnic minorities.⁶⁵ The industrial city of Miskolc, for example, is a large city with a significant Roma population, within which there is a disproportionate unemployment rate; as a result, the hillsides are taken up by dilapidated Roma encampments. In an effort to outbid Jobbik’s approaches to the hot-button Roma question during the 2014 elections, Fidesz circulated a petition demanding the destruction of the Roma encampments in Miskolc, then later passed a measure authorizing payments to Roma families in exchange for their agreeing to move out of an encampment in a favored area of the city.⁶⁶ Though the Constitutional Court declared the bill unconstitutional, it is a demonstration of Fidesz’s employment of controversial tactics to expand its voter base among right wing populists and to consolidate its power in a fractious Hungary. To be sure, Fidesz has taken note of Jobbik’s focus on exclusionary nationalism and appropriated it for the sake of its own political gain.

⁶¹ Jeffrey S. Murer (2015), "The Rise of Jobbik, Populism, and the Symbolic Politics of Illiberalism in Contemporary Hungary." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 2. 88.

⁶² Adam LeBor (2008), “Marching Back to the Future: Magyar Garda and the Resurgence of the Right in Hungary.” *Dissent* 55. 2. 35.

⁶³ “Hungary Roma battle far-right vigilantes,” (2011), *BBC News*, 27 April. (www.bbc.co.uk)

⁶⁴ Athena Institute, Hungarian National Front Profile (www.athenainstitute.eu/en/map/olvas/20)

⁶⁵ Adam LeBor (2008), “Marching Back to the Future: Magyar Garda and the Resurgence of the Right in Hungary.” *Dissent* 55. 2. 34-38.

⁶⁶ James Traub (2015), “Shattered Factories and Rants Against the Roma.” *Foreign Policy*, 29 October.

An additionally important example of Fidesz appropriating policies and stances originating with Jobbik is the assertion that Hungary is a fundamentally Christian state. The Jobbik manifesto states that Jobbik is a “value-centred, conservative, patriotic Christian party,” and that “national identity and Christianity are inseparable concepts.”⁶⁷ One of the primary policy areas of Jobbik’s platform is “clerical:” the primary aim is to preserve, protect, and promote churches, thereby increasing the role of religion in everyday affairs.⁶⁸ Similarly, Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz has promoted Christianity as a core element in and of the Hungarian state, and his stated commitment to protecting Hungary as a “Christian nation” has become a rallying cry in his approach to the refugee crisis. The new constitution ratified by Orbán includes an explicit designation of Hungary as a Christian nation: “We recognize the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood.”⁶⁹ Also enshrined in the constitution is a reference to the radical right symbol of the Holy Crown as the “embodiment of...the unity of the nation.”⁷⁰ It is important to note that this new constitution was controversially pushed through by Orbán in 2013, and the timing of these clear plays towards more religious voters are surely at least partially strategic.

It is no coincidence that Hungary has witnessed a resurgence of Christianity as the political right has called upon a uniquely Hungarian Christian revisionism to consolidate support and legitimize their political strategy with the backing of a Christian God. Religion has become an important mainstay of rightist populist support in Hungary, though the substance and sincerity of the right’s appeal to Christianity is questionable. Indeed, as a state with a generally secular society, the Hungarian right’s adoption of Christianity and Christian values as a rallying cry is intriguing. However, the attention granted Christianity by the right and the actual political power of the church and affiliated religious institutions are mismatched. To be sure, the Church is more of a political tool for the governing populist right than the government is for Christianity.

An aspect of Fidesz’s cultural policy that has become more and more prominent in recent years is revanchism and the attempt to connect politically with ethnic Hungarians living outside

⁶⁷ “Manifesto” (2006), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik.

⁶⁸ “Policies” (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁶⁹ Péter Krekó and Gregor Mayer (2015), “Transforming Hungary--together? An Analysis of the Fidesz-Jobbik Relationship.” *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*. By Michael Minckenberg. London: Routledge, 2015, 198

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

of Hungary's borders. Nationalizing rhetoric and outreach campaigns, including Jobbik's proposed easing of the naturalization process to become an Hungarian citizen, have struck a tone of almost aggressive expansion and an attempt by the radical right to appeal to the electorate abroad. In April 2015, Jobbik vice president and MP István Szávay hosted a forum discussion with ethnic Hungarians on New York City's Upper East Side, with the aim of heeding the needs and requests of these Hungarians.⁷¹ Viktor Orbán's increasingly radical nationalist stances have been aimed at ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary's borders; the infamous statement of Hungarian illiberalism was made during a speech to ethnic Hungarians in Romania, for example. Fidesz's co-optation of Jobbik's revanchist policies can also be seen in a recent restructuring of the electoral system. The 2014 parliamentary election in which Fidesz achieved what has been called a landslide victory was the first election in which Hungarian dual citizens could vote from abroad; tellingly, about 95 per cent of this international vote went to Fidesz, indicating another significant area in which Fidesz has benefited from Jobbik's far right policies.⁷²

Socioeconomic Policy: Creating a Work-Based State

Since Fidesz swept to power in 2010, there has been a massive overhaul of Hungary's socioeconomic infrastructure as the party has adopted a model of "economic nationalism" similar to the proposed platform of Jobbik.⁷³ Underlying this new approach to economics is the sweeping centralization of power and state control of economic and financial institutions unprecedented in the history of post-communist Hungary.

Though Viktor Orbán and Fidesz began as proponents of the free market system, the PM's and party's positions on social/socioeconomic policy have advocated for increasing levels of government control over many sectors of society. Orbán has stated that he seeks to transform the Hungarian welfare state into a "workfare" society that shifts the socioeconomic onus to the people rather than the government.⁷⁴

⁷¹ "Jobbik Has Broken through the Glass Ceiling." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 20 April.

⁷² András Jámbor (2014), "Hungary: Establishing a Right-wing State." *Al Jazeera English*. Al Jazeera, 12 April.

⁷³ András Bozóki (2015a), "Broken Democracy, Predatory State and Nationalist Populism" 15.

⁷⁴ Zoltán Simon (2014), "Orbán Says He Seeks to End Liberal Democracy in Hungary." Bloomberg, 28 July.

Jobbik's official socioeconomic policy platform is more overtly extreme, but the idea is similar in that it incentivizes work through the threat of exclusion from social welfare benefits. Their official page asserts the following: "We will welcome and support everybody who wants to join the majority in building the country, but we will apply law enforcement measures and exclusion from the social care system to discipline those who fail to do their duty."⁷⁵ This punitive approach to increasing employment implicitly targets the poorest Hungarians living in the poorest rural villages, many of whom happen to be Roma; Bíró-Nagy et al term such a strategy "intensified scapegoating," which does not adequately address the legitimate issues underlying socioeconomic hardships.⁷⁶ Krekó and Mayer attempt to explain anti-Roma sentiment in the context of such policies, postulating that Jobbik sympathizers view the Roma as intruders who have benefited from welfare payments without contributing anything to society or bettering themselves through work.⁷⁷ Indeed, the Jobbik platform declares that it would bring an end to affirmative action that would "discriminate" against Hungarians on an ethnic basis, meaning that it seeks to apply economic policy and extend and withhold benefits on the basis of who fits into the "true ethnic Hungarian" typology.⁷⁸

Evidently, Fidesz harbors similar prejudices. Since 2010, the Fidesz government has created a new tax benefit system wherein working parents with children receive these benefits. However, this is a targeted restructuring of the tax benefit system when one considers the massive proportion of Roma with children who are unemployed and live in squalor.⁷⁹ Additionally, the Orbán government has criminalized homelessness and drastically reduced social spending for the purposes of alleviating poverty and dealing with the issue of homelessness.⁸⁰ Though Jobbik claims to disagree with the criminalization of homelessness, it

⁷⁵ "Policies." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁷⁶ András Bíró-Nagy, Tamás Boros, and Zoltán Vasali. (2013), 'Hungary,' in Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafin, eds., *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies, and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. 229-254. and 238.

⁷⁷ Péter Krekó and Gregor Mayer. "Transforming Hungary--together? An Analysis of the Fidesz-Jobbik Relationship." in Michael Minkenberg ed. *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*. London.: Routledge, 2015, 194

⁷⁸ "Policies" (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁷⁹ András Bozóki (2015a), "Broken Democracy..." op. cit. 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

does acknowledge the issue and states that a revamping of the social security system would be the best solution to the problem—in other words, the party wishes to slash government welfare spending and cut off aid to the disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged ethnic minorities that most need government assistance.⁸¹

Another key overlap between Fidesz and Jobbik in the socioeconomic sphere has been in each respective party's efforts to rein in multinational corporations operating in Hungary and bring them under the control of the Hungarian government. In their efforts at centralization and nationalization of the economy, both parties have advocated for and pursued policies that would benefit Hungary, even if at the expense of the corporations. Jobbik, for example, has stated that multinationals must provide at least 80 per cent of Western European salaries to their Hungarian employees, while Fidesz has arbitrarily levied “crisis taxes” on multinational corporations to boost revenue.⁸² Similarly, Orbán has initiated efforts to re-nationalize the foreign-dominated banking sector so that 50% of its assets can be under Hungarian control. What is more, Orbán has mandated that land leased by non-Hungarians in the past twenty years be returned to its rightful (Hungarian) owners, citing his conviction that these landowners had been manipulated by wealthy Westerners.⁸³

Though the long-term impact of this economic nationalization remains to be seen, both the current trajectory of Fidesz's socioeconomic policy and the consolidation of power under the populist right all but guarantees the continuation and intensification of the state's efforts to nationalize and centralize all aspects of the Hungarian economy.

Hungarian Euroskepticism and Fidesz's Eastern About-Face

Hungary, at least from the perspective of international news consumers, has been largely taken for granted as a strategically important member of the European Union since its accession. Recently, however, there has been a plethora of news articles and foreign policy analyses of

⁸¹ “Policies” (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 Feb. 2015.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ian Traynor, “Budapest Autumn: hollowing out democracy on the edge of Europe,” *The Guardian*, 29 October 2014.

Hungarian politics as Orbán has cultivated conspicuously closer ties with Vladimir Putin's Russia. Indeed, Orbán and his Fidesz government have adopted a degree of friendliness with the Russian authoritarian and have opposed EU sanctions against Russia while also criticizing Western leaders, institutions, and liberal ideals.

This "eastern opening," however, is hardly the brainchild of Fidesz; rather, Jobbik has exhibited an anti-western position without reservation, while at the same time promoting what some have termed a "Eurasianist" discourse.⁸⁴ Eurasianism in the Hungarian sense is marked by openness and kinship with the east, but also by a drive to improve standing with the help of western institutions and with the ultimate goal being an exalted position within the West. In other words, Hungarian Eurasianists would seek to cultivate ties with the east by emphasizing historico-cultural similarities but would at the same time attempt to maintain a certain respectability from a western perspective. Thus, this Hungarian Eurasianism pushes for closer relationships with Russia and other eastern neighbors while also espousing certain Western values, namely those of Western Christianity.

Consistent with this Eurasianist ethos, Fidesz has visibly espoused a policy of "looking both East and West." Orbán himself has simultaneously praised authoritarian non-Western states and denigrated Western ideals. In a July 2014 speech addressed to ethnic Hungarian leaders in Romania, he lauded Russia, Turkey, and China as states that are "maybe not even democracies, and yet making nations successful," while also advocating for Hungary's "parting ways with Western European dogmas [and] making [the country] independent from them."⁸⁵ In this same infamous speech, his assertion that he was building an "illiberal state" based on the Russian and Turkish models showed just how far from Western ideals Orbán and the Hungarian right had steered the country. In February 2015, Prime Minister Orbán hosted Russian President Vladimir

⁸⁴ Cf. Umut Korkut (2015), "Resentment and Reorganization: Antiwestern Discourse and the Making of Eurasianism in Hungary," Manuscript.

⁸⁵ Harold Meyerson (2014), "Hungary's Prime Minister a Champion for Illiberalism," *The Washington Post*, 6 August.

Putin in Budapest, during which time he pointedly reaffirmed Hungary's commitment to maintain a strong relationship with Russia.⁸⁶

Before Jobbik's rise to prominence, however, Fidesz had embodied a staunchly Western-oriented alignment and had affirmed its commitment to maintaining its status as an important EU member state. Jobbik, on the other hand, has maintained a hostile stance towards the West and the European Union from the beginning. Their foreign policy platform explicitly advocates for an opening to the East and the building of strategic relationships with three major powers: Russia, Turkey, and Germany. Additionally, the platform takes an overtly aggressive stance against the nations of the EU: "In addition to the policy of opening to the East, we also strive towards establishing a Polish-Hungarian-Croatian axis, thus enabling our nations to jointly enforce our interests against the Western European countries that dominate the European Union."⁸⁷

Traces of Fidesz's original orientation as a western-oriented liberal party have all but been eclipsed by its defenses of Putin's Russia and clear skepticism towards the European Union and the liberal democratic principles that it promotes, and differences between Fidesz and Jobbik's approaches towards the EU and Russia are increasingly hard to distinguish. To be sure, Orbán's rejection of liberalism and his complete disregard for solidarity with both the ideological commitments and policies of the European Union lead many to look at today's Hungary as a potentially dangerous member that could upset the balance and cohesiveness of the European Union.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most contentious is Orbán's blossoming relationship with Putin and his attempts to oppose EU policies not in the best interest of Russia.

While Jobbik remains staunchly opposed to Hungary's membership within the European Union—Gábor Vona has called for a referendum on Hungary's EU membership—Fidesz maintains a position of cautious distance. In response to questions about his loyalty to the EU project and to liberal democracy, Orbán said this: "Hungary's place is in the West. We criticize them because they are far from perfect, but the starting attitude of the Hungarians to Western

⁸⁶ Matthew Day (2015), "Vladimir Putin Receives a Warm Welcome from Hungarian PM Viktor Orban." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 17 February.

⁸⁷ "Policies." (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁸⁸ R. Daniel Kelemen (2015), "Europe's Hungary Problem." *Foreign Affairs*. 21 September.

institutions is always positive.”⁸⁹ At the same time, Orbán’s actions have not matched his words; rather, they have matched those advocated for by Jobbik. In January of 2014, Orbán’s secret trip to Moscow resulted in the procurement of a \$10 billion (£6.2 billion) credit from Hungary in exchange for his awarding nuclear power plant contracts to Russia.⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, one of the core points of Jobbik’s stated energy program is preferred cooperation with Russia in the development of the Paks nuclear power plant in central Hungary.⁹¹ Orbán also drew criticism months after negotiating the contract for meeting with the head of Russian gas giant Gazprom, after which he took a defiant turn away from EU consensus by refusing to pump gas from Hungary back to Ukraine in an effort to secure Ukraine’s energy independence.⁹² Former Minister of Foreign Affairs from Fidesz, Tibor Navracsics, spoke out regarding EU sanctions in response to Russia’s presence in Ukraine and claimed that they place more of an economic burden on Hungary than they do on Russia.⁹³

Just as Jobbik opposes EU sanctions against Russia and sides with Russia in the Ukraine crisis, then, so does Fidesz. In addition to opposing EU sanctions against Russia, Orbán has broken from the Union’s consensus on the Ukraine issue, even going so far as to claim that Hungarians living in western Ukraine should be granted Hungarian citizenship. Further, Orbán has stated that “Hungarian questions of the Second World War remain unresolved” [regarding the construction of borders between Hungary and Ukraine], an aggressive claim that closely echoes Russia’s claims to Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula.⁹⁴ In an even more extreme claim, Jobbik holds that the Carpathian region of Western Ukraine along the small Hungarian-Ukrainian border is rightfully Hungarian and should be returned to Hungary’s administrative control, a proposal that mirrors Putin’s contention that Crimea is Russian.⁹⁵ Moves such as these

⁸⁹ Matthew Kaminski (2015), “All the terrorists are migrants,” *Politico Europe* 23 November.

⁹⁰ Ian Traynor (2014), “Budapest Autumn: hollowing out democracy on the edge of Europe,” *The Guardian*, 29 October.

⁹¹ “Policies.” (2015), *Jobbik.com*. Jobbik, 21 February.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Jeffrey S. Murer (2015), “The Rise of Jobbik, Populism, and the Symbolic Politics of Illiberalism in Contemporary Hungary.” *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 2. 98.

⁹⁴ Richard Field (2014), “Viktor Orbán re-elected Prime Minister of Hungary,” *Budapest Beacon*, 12 May. (<http://budapestbeacon.com>)

⁹⁵ “A Jobbik gyűjtést szervez a kárpátaljai magyar családok megsegítésére” (2015), [Jobbik helps Transcarpathian Hungarian families], *Videk.ma*, 5 May. (www.videk.ma)

have led analysts to assume that Fidesz and Jobbik are in competition regarding their friendliness towards Russia.⁹⁶ Indeed, Murer notes that Jobbik and Fidesz's respective positions on foreign policy issues have posed one of the single greatest obstacles to creating a unified foreign policy front within the European Union.⁹⁷

In the context of Orbán and Fidesz's former commitment to the EU and friendliness towards the West, then, Orbán's conspicuous—one could almost say defiant—about-face towards Russia and Eastern powers is especially disconcerting. Though more blatant than some other policies Fidesz has co-opted from Jobbik's platform, this shift in foreign policy and re-orientation of Hungary towards the East could have potentially global implications and should not be understated as an indicator of Hungary's mounting radicalism.

Conclusions

The political history and evolution of Fidesz since its inception have been defined by an ethos of political opportunism wherein its elites have capitalized on popular sentiments to gain votes and consolidate power. Whereas in the beginning Fidesz appealed to liberal democratic tenets and principles as superior to those of communism, the party began to capitalize on disillusionment with the post-transition situation. Witnessing the salience of Jobbik's radical nationalist appeal and populist tactics in the aftermath of transition prompted Fidesz to adopt similar tactics, albeit at first more subtle. However, continued political uncertainty has swept the right wing to the forefront, and Fidesz has progressively embodied further and further right rhetoric and backed it up with policies that would have been unthinkable in a liberal democratic system prior to the ascendancy of the right wing. Fidesz's evolution since its birth and policymaking under Viktor Orbán since 2010 point to the party's determination to gain and consolidate power through the rhetorical and political outbidding of Jobbik, as well as to the success of this strategy thus far.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey S. Murer (2015), "The Rise of Jobbik, Populism, and the Symbolic Politics of Illiberalism in Contemporary Hungary." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 2. 98.

Following Viktor Orbán's speech in Romania in July 2014 and in the midst of widespread criticism, left-leaning Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* went so far as to compare Orbán's to Benito Mussolini.⁹⁸ Though Orbán's increasing authoritarianism is indeed troubling, what is arguably more troubling is the usage of Jobbik's policies and their incorporation into Fidesz's platform. This creeping authoritarianism is not so much blatant, then, as it is a subtle shift further right at the behest of what was once considered to be the "center-right" mainstream in Fidesz.

The direction of Hungary as a whole in a more radical direction is indeed problematic. The ruling party of Fidesz has shifted even further right by capitalizing on and co-opting Jobbik's popularity to legitimize its own illiberal rightist agenda. In these ways, then, Jobbik has been the primary mechanism through which the Hungarian political mainstream has shifted significantly to the right. Essentially, Jobbik's original exclusion from political office allowed the party to pursue a radical, extreme nationalist policy agenda without being constrained by threats to vote-gaining and electoral wins. This boldness, coupled with many Hungarians' disillusionment with their democratic system after an anti-climactic transition, has boosted Jobbik's popularity and allowed it more access to legitimate political power. In a sense, Fidesz monitored the popularity of Jobbik and utilized it as a political litmus test to push its own agenda further right. Orbán's increasingly emboldened approach to government and unveiled antagonism towards liberal democratic tenets indicates that Fidesz's rightward trajectory will only continue in the coming years, a trend that could spell disaster for Hungarian democracy and turmoil for the European Union if it is allowed to continue unchecked.

⁹⁸ Damien Sharkov (2014), "'Hungary's Mussolini' Vows to Make the EU Member an 'Illiberal State'" *Newsweek*, 30 July.

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