



Introducing Jobbik: Hungary's Second Largest Party

Vassilis Petsinis

12 December 2016

Jobbik, described as a radical right-wing populist party, has enjoyed considerable success in Hungary's elections. What accounts for the party's popularity among certain segments of the Hungarian electorate?

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his FIDESZ party have consolidated their status as preponderant political actors in Hungary. Further along the right angle of the political spectrum, Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) currently stands as the second most popular party in the country. This short piece sets in context the reasons behind Jobbik's appeal to certain segments of the Hungarian electorate, including an overview of the party's formation trajectory and a brief assessment of Jobbik's prospects for the future.

Jobbik's political origins and intra-party structure

Jobbik was made up by a variety of grass-roots nationalist groupings. At its early stage (2003-2004), the party had brought under its auspices initiatives as diverse as an aggregate of nationalist student groupings (the Jobboldali Ifjúsági Közösség, Right-Wing Students Association) and a nucleus of political activists that later evolved, at least partially, into the (unarmed) self-styled militia of the *Magyar Gárda* ('Hungarian Guard'). From an instrumental perspective, Jobbik has been highly keen on political activism and the intensive mobilization of its popular bases of support. In particular, the party has been harshly criticized for its links with the *Magyar Gárda* and the ensuing implications for a more militant (occasionally violent) engagement into politics. By contrast to other far right parties across the 'new' Europe and the preponderant status of their leaders, the chairman Gábor Vona does not enjoy a status comparable to that of, say, Marian Kotleba in the 'Our Slovakia' party or Volen Siderov in

Latest

An Update on the Security Policy Change Programme

Chances for Peace in the Third Decade

A Story of ORG: Oliver Ramsbotham

A Story of ORG: Gabrielle Rifkind

Most read

The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities

Making Bad Economies: The Poverty of Mexican Drug

Bulgaria's *Ataka*. This more 'horizontal' and devolved arrangement has enabled Jobbik to approach a variety of target-groups within the frame of its political campaign.

Reaching out to the masses: Capitalizing on corruption and Hungary's economic crisis

The period between 2006 and 2008 saw the delegitimization of the Socialists (MSZP), on charges of corruption. This resulted into MSZP's rapid decline of popularity and the decisive restructuring of Hungary's party landscape. For a start, Jobbik demanded that *political* crime is introduced to the Hungarian penal code as a separate legal category. In light of these developments and the subsequent outbreak of the economic crisis (2008), the absence of potent political forces on the left of the MSZP facilitated Jobbik's campaign of *artificial anti-capitalism*. The party embedded the concept of so-called 'Eco-social National Economics' into its political programme (2010). In this platform, Jobbik has called for the renegotiation of Hungary's foreign debt, the establishment of a banking system independent from the interference of multinational corporations, the state-ownership of sectors such as health and education and the long-term renationalization of various others. This campaign of artificial anti-capitalism enhanced Jobbik's appeal to these segments of the society mostly imperiled by Hungary's economic stagnation. Jobbik's more concrete emphasis on social issues and adoption of an, ostensibly, leftist platform on the economy signified the major departure from MIÉP (Hungarian Justice and Life Party) and older initiatives of the Hungarian far right.

Appealing to the youth

Cartels

ORG's Vision

Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres

Jobbik's extensive involvement in social media such as Facebook serves as a rough indication of the party's popularity among the Hungarian youth. Its leadership has been successful in orchestrating a fashionable youth sub-culture around the party with plenty of happenings and other infrastructure (e.g. nationalist rock-bands such as *Hungarica* and *Kárpátia* and Internet portals such as *barikad.hu* and *kuruc.info*, etc.). In addition to economic and social welfare anxieties, Jobbik has managed to take advantage of a rather common grievance among the younger generation in Hungary and throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This is, namely, the allegation that mainstream parties are either built upon nepotism or dominated by the older generation, leaving little space for the political representation of young people. By contrast, Jobbik's links to the *Magyar Gárda*, and its political activism as a whole, have refrained pensioners and other elderly voters from opting for the party.

Centering on unresolved problems

Jobbik has also capitalized on social grievances and unresolved problems that do not necessarily interweave with corruption and the economic crisis. In its political programme (2010), the party dedicates an entire section to 'Gypsy Issues'. In its own words '... the coexistence of Magyar and Gypsy is one of the severest problems facing Hungarian society ... a potential time-bomb'. 'Gypsy crime' is introduced as a separate category and the programme acknowledges that '... certain criminological phenomena are predominantly and overwhelmingly associated with this minority'. Further along the text, the party equates 'Gypsy integration' with 'assimilation into society-at-large' through 'work and not welfare'.

Words have matched with deeds. Between 2007 and 2011, the *Magyar Gárda* performed a string of 'patrolling operations' in areas seen as threatened

by 'Gypsy crime' and other activities such as blood-donation and charity work. These activities took place in impoverished localities across the Hungarian northeast (e.g. Miskolc and Debrecen). This is one of the least developed parts of the country, with a long record of friction between the local population and the Roma minority. In October 2011, the successful mobilization of the *Magyar Gárda* in the northeastern district of Gyöngyöspata resulted in the departure of the Roma community, the resignation of the local mayor and the Jobbik candidate's victory in the elections that followed. The utilization of the *Magyar Gárda* undoubtedly brandished Jobbik's image to these rural residents that consider themselves excluded by the remote, or even absent, state. Most importantly, Jobbik has managed to establish its electoral stronghold in the northeast.

An apparent shift?

The last few years have witnessed the more decisive turn of the ruling FIDESZ towards the right. In particular, Viktor Orbán has displayed a tough stance in regards to the refugee crisis and staunchly objected to the *soft borders* principle within the EU. Back in autumn 2015, the Hungarian Premier rushed to justify the erection of a razor-wire fence along the Serbian-Hungarian border on the basis that 'European and Christian values must be safeguarded... Hungary must be free to defend its borders'. More recently, on October 2nd, 2016, Orbán called an (unsuccessful) referendum on the EU refugee quotas for Hungary.

Until lately, the ruling party's gradual shift towards the right also facilitated Jobbik's political engagement. Nevertheless, now this seems to be evolving into a boomerang for Vona and his associates. Although it remains Hungary's second most popular party in its own right, some of the latest opinion polls

demonstrate that Orbán's capitalization on public anxieties over the refugee crisis has cost a non-negligible percentage of voters to Jobbik. In this light, the party assumed a neutral stance during the latest referendum. Although he also objects to the refugee quotas arrangement, Vona refrained from granting his assent to what he dubbed 'Viktor Orbán's *personal* project'.

Consequently, the last months have witnessed an apparent shift on the part of Jobbik. In its programmatic statements, Jobbik's leadership declares the party 'non-Islamophobic'. Gábor Vona, Márton Gyöngyösi, and other high-rank affiliates have been networking extensively in countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan. Moreover, Jobbik has been quick to strike a 'pro-Palestine' outlook and castigate Israel not solely for its aggression against the Palestinians but also over the, allegedly, belligerent foreign policy towards other states in the Middle East (namely Iran). Nevertheless, the new realities of the refugee crisis and the wave of sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2016, have demonstrated that the party can be *situationally-adaptive* in its outlooks on the Muslim world. Endorsing a *body politics* approach, Jobbik has recently become highly vocal over the necessity to safeguard Europe's Christian pillars of identity and protect Hungarian and European women from the 'rapacious Islamic invaders'.

Furthermore, the party has intensified its charges of corruption against FIDESZ and ostensibly watered down its rhetoric on 'Gypsy crime'. The extent to which this new strategy may facilitate Jobbik to reclaim its lost voters from FIDESZ remains to be seen within the immediate future. Lastly, Gábor Vona's decision to purge the more extremist elements from the party (April 2016) was interpreted by various commentators, in Hungary and abroad, as an early indication of Jobbik's firmer shift towards the mainstream of Hungarian politics.

Nevertheless, it is still rather precarious to jump to concrete conclusions; let alone presume that Jobbik might drastically antagonize FIDESZ's predominance in the country's political scene in the near future.

Image by Leigh Phillips/Flickr.

Vassilis Petsinis is a visiting researcher at Tartu University (Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies). His specialisation is European politics and ethnopolitics with a regional focus on central and eastern Europe (including the Baltic States). He holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham. His personal profile on academia.edu can be accessed [here](#).

Share this page



Contact

Unit 503
101 Clerkenwell Road London
EC1R 5BX
Charity no. 299436
Company no. 2260840

Email us

Follow us



Useful links

Login
Contact us
Sitemap
Accessibility
Terms & Conditions
Privacy policy

020 3559 6745