



Doctoral School of Political Science

Ph.D. Thesis

Dániel Róna

**The Jobbik phenomenon. Reasons behind the strengthening of
the Movement for a Better Hungary**

Abstract

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I. The subject and its research antecedents

On 7th June, 2009 the Movement for a Better Hungary (Hungarian: *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, shortly *Jobbik*) accounted for probably the greatest surprise in the political history of Hungary since the change of regime by gaining 14.77 per cent of votes and three seats in the European Parliament. Observers were taken aback seeing the comet-like explosion, particularly after the under-estimation of pollsters, but the success of Jobbik is unique from several aspects. The party's popularity had risen from one per cent with extreme rapidness but getting into the National Assembly as a party out-of-the-Parliament was unparalleled as well (the only previous exception being the MIÉP, i.e. the Hungarian Justice and Life Party). The party system, which previously was believed to be closed and institutionalized (Enyedi 2006) expressly discriminated the new competitors (high explicit and implicit threshold on elections, way less access to state funds and media). In spite of all these, Jobbik not only got into the National Assembly in 2010 with 16.7 per cents, but developed into one of the most powerful radical-far right parties of Europe as

well. As for me, the greatest curiosity – and the most exciting scientific development –, however is the breaking-up of the bipolar party system by the Jobbik, meaning that the party steadily supported by 15 per cents of voters (September 2013) ended the party system existing since 1998 and had become the strongest rival of both Fidesz and MSZP since then.

How could Jobbik manage to do all these? What happened in 2009 that pushed the party so high within just a half year? Why was the Jobbik able to increase its support until and to stabilize it after 2010? What resources did the far right relied on while reaching so far? How could it drive the media's attention to itself? Did the other parties' reactions contributed to the Jobbik's boom? What deeper social processes set the ground for the strengthening of the far right? Why radical right parties are considered significant factors nowadays all over Europe? How the rise of Jobbik fits into the broader frame of European happenings, what similarities and Hungarian specialties can we notice? Finally, what effects does the breakthrough of Jobbik has on the other parties and the party system itself? My dissertation aims to answer these questions in order to help us to understand the 'Jobbik-phenomenon'. To put it briefly, I seek for the cause of the

popularity of Jobbik.

At the beginning of the paper I examine the question of defining radical right, far-right and neo-Nazi parties (Norris 2005, Mudde 2007, 2011, Capoccia 2002, Filippov 2011), then I find the place of Jobbik in this network of concepts. In the next part I use several independent approaches in the given chapters to present the causes of the far-right party's success. The second chapter is dedicated to the social and economic macro processes that can trigger the susceptibility of citizens to radicalism: economic crisis, the break-up of traditional social classes (Lubbers et al 2002, Arzheimer 2009, Bornschieer 2010), immigration (Kitschelt and McGann 1995, Ivarnsalten 2008) and disillusionment from the elite (Fenemma 1997, Bélanger and Arts 2006). In the third part I examine decisions made by other parties and their impact on Jobbik's electoral success. What positions did far-right and bigger parties take concerning major issues, what distances did evolve between them (De Lange 2007, Van der Brug - Von Spanje 2007); how did the civic society and other parties react on the appearance of the far-right (Art 2007, 2011); what already existing bases and subcultures could the radical party rely on (Art 2008, Minkenberg 2013), what path did it take, what was the party's leadership and

organization like; and finally, what institutional features did help or hinder its strengthening (the proportionality of electoral system, access to media and state funds, etc.). In the fourth chapter I take a look on media appearances of radical parties and study that in which cases and to what extent can the appearances of issues owned by them increase their support (Ellinas 2009). Then I use these regularities in the case of Jobbik's breakthrough in 2009; finally I present the online world of the party in details. Then comes the most unique chapter since the Jobbik's outstanding popularity amongst the youth is – only with one exception - unparalleled in Europe. In this fifth chapter I will interpret the generational patterns of the party's support building on the particularities of the far-right subculture and use the previous approaches as well.

In the sixth chapter I examine what happened to Jobbik after 2010: what determines its popularity as a parliamentary party, what effects did the institutional system and other parties have on it and contrary: what effects did Jobbik have on Hungarian parties? Here I use the international literature again (Schain 2006, Van Spanje 2010, Alonso-Claro da Fonseca 2012, Mudde 2013) to explain the interactions between Jobbik and other actors, then I

take one potential field after the other in which the mechanisms of action are interpretable; finally I show the displacements of recent years in these dimensions. The Jobbik could ‘stuck’ in the political elite: it is proven by that it could influence the political agenda, the public opinion, the government’s public policy and the other parties’ stances to a way greater extent than its actual support would suggest. This chapter is also necessary to present the chain of causation since the causal relationship is an interactive one(e. g. the appearance of ‘gypsy question’ on the agenda is both a cause and an effect of the expansion of political radicalism).

II. Methods used

In my thesis I mainly used the approach of political sociology, and it applies to the hypotheses and the methodology as well. First of all, when it comes to confirm or deny my findings, I use public opinion polls’ data to demonstrate it. I analyze in details the data of Hungarian Election Research Program from 2009 and 2010, the aggregated omnibuses of Median from 2012, the database of Tárki’s prejudice-research from 2011, the database of the fifth wave (2010) of the European Social Survey and the youth research of the Active Youth in Hungary Research Group from

2011-2012, in which I personally participated. Besides these, I also use other sources of data as bases for comparison (for instance the Facebook survey of Political Capital and Demos), in the forms of direct analysis or citation of studies built on them. Media analysis is the second in the order of importance thus I present the political agenda of 2009 and 2010 by detailed analysis of the main media channels. The online network of the far-right is also included in the content analysis, just like the quantified data of the covers of *Barikád* and Jobbik's activity in the Parliament (Gábor Vona's pre-agenda speeches and amendments, etc.) and outside of it (protests) as well. Systematic data collection helped to describe the party's organization and other supply factors, while when it came to examine the far-right subculture I used in-depth interviews and focus groups. I concentrated on the young: I had interviews with six leaders of the youth organization of the Jobbik, two former members of the allied Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hungarian abbreviation: HVIM) and two central party leaders as well. Besides that I myself have done the majority of the standardized interviews of the Active Youth in Hungary Research Group; similarly I myself made the interviews with Jobbik MPs in 2010 as part of the elite research. Moreover, during the surveys of Active Youth (and on other occasions as

well) in the countryside I spoke with young Jobbik supporters several times informally. Besides the impressions from the media and the scientific literature, the foremost mentioned knowledge base is what my paper is built on.

Hungarian scientific literature does not lack research on Jobbik. I dedicated a separate subsection to summarize the results of previous empirical works. The media-centered analysis (Karácsony-Róna 2010, Jeskó-Bakó-Tóth 2012) that has stressed importance in my view and the popularity research amongst the youth (Sörös-Róna 2012) is not common yet. In the other hand we had several explanations based on demand approaches: Péter Krekó and his colleagues focused on attitudes and value preferences (Krekó-Juhász-Molnár 2011, Bernát-Juhász-Krekó-Molnár 2012), while others tied the rise of Jobbik to the economic crisis and social-financial status (Tóth-Grajczár 2011, Rudas 2010). The research of Dániel Mikecz (Mikecz 2013) is built on the supply side, using the subcultural explanation, while I myself examined the Jobbik's history and course with András Bíró-Nagy (Bíró Nagy – Róna 2011). So far it was András Kovács (2013) who studied the voters of Jobbik on the broadest empirical base.

III. Results of the dissertation¹

The main aim of the dissertation is to find explanations to the rise of Jobbik and to point out those causes which led to the party's success. To do this, we have to find the party's place and name in the family of radical and far-right parties in Europe. My comprehension puts the parties on ethnocentric bases into one family of parties, since other features (euroscepticism, anti-immigration and anti-elite feelings) can be derived from this. However, it is an important dividing line whether these parties are antisystemic ones or not, which includes two questions: are their views compatible with democracy and whether they are interested in sustaining or overthrowing the system?The latter one usually cannot be answered until they form a government, the previous one, however, provides ground for me to classify Jobbik as antisystemic and far-right party.The views and historical role models of the party and its chairman are not compatible with democracy and by sustaining the successor organizations of the Hungarian Guard the Jobbik consciously confronts the current system.Anti-gypsy and anti-Semitic statements often appear with

¹In this abstract, naturally, only some highlighted moments of analyses and concise versions of statements can be found. For complete understanding, however, it is indispensable to read the whole text of the dissertation.

great emphasis amongst the party's pronouncements, they seemingly relate to these two ethnicities in a different way than the others. Their generalizing negative prejudice is more than what Western radical parties represent on the issue of immigration. However, it is an even bigger dividing line that distinguishes the members of radical-far-right party family (including Jobbik) from neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazi parties are ethno-centrists as well, but in addition they are racist and violent too: this means more than prejudice and it includes ethnic-based discrimination as well – this latter one, however, is not a feature of far-right ones.

After the chapter dealing with the appellation and typologies I presented causal mechanisms in four theoretical frameworks explaining the rise of Jobbik. Without any detailed research it was known that both demand, supply and media approaches contain some of the truth, while the explanation based on generations was inevitable as well. With this dissertation my aim was that the given groups of theories become more crystallized and based on broader empirical bases than previously. I also want to present the hierarchy of different approaches based on the explanatory power to show to what extent did the given ones contributed to the rise of

Jobbik and how these processes are linked to each other. The findings are the followings:

1. After studying the presented survey data it seems obvious that all aspects of ethnocentrism characterize the supporters of Jobbik. A great bulk of Jobbik supporters highlight “national commitment” as his primary motivation and the party’s program and statements reflect this thought as well: ‘Hungary belongs to Hungarians.’ This motto is the foundation stone of all European radical-far-right parties’ identity and leads to several other factors, like xenophobia. However, I tried to go beyond the hackneyed allegation ‘anti-gypsy sentiment led to the strengthening of Jobbik’.

First of all, the prejudice of Jobbik voters is not only selective because it targets mainly Jews and Gypsies, but in their heads they have several situative considerations attached to these two ethnicities. They connect Jews with negative ideological notions and conspiracy theories, although it depends on the circumstances whether these notions and theories surface or not – moreover, in some situations they can even be positive ones (for instance, rich and clever Jews).The anti-gypsy

sentiment is more dominant and explicit since in case of gypsies the general negative predisposition and the negative personal experience reinforce each other. However, one of the most important lessons learned from the data is that the far-right does not differ the most from other voters in the *extent* of anti-gypsy sentiment, but the importance: Jobbik voters regard this problem way more important than any supporters of any other parties. Likewise, supporters of Jobbik do not have bad experiences with gypsies at a significantly greater rate. The real difference is that these experiences affected more their lives and surroundings thus having had a greater effect on their thinking as well.

2. According to the lessons of multivariate analyses, anti-elite feelings (as a demand factor) have maybe more modest, but still very important role. Jobbik follows the European tendencies, just like to its 'sister parties' it gains a lot from the people's disillusionment from the reigning elites. According to the youth survey this not only means anti-elite but anti-system feelings too, since young voters of Jobbik are dissatisfied with not only the working of democracy, but the system itself as well.
3. I attribute weaker explanatory power to the most popular and

most studied theory in literature that trace the expansion of radicalism back to the crisis of economy and modernization. Recent studies I present deny the linear connection between income, property, working conditions and far-right preference all over Europe; what is more, the financial status of Jobbik supporters is especially good in European comparison. In multivariate analyses the variables showing financial deprivation were rarely significant and usually the weakest ones; likewise, very few respondents mentioned such motives for voting to Jobbik in open survey questions. Moreover, in this context the outstanding support of Jobbik amongst the youth is uninterpretable as well. Western literature does not even measure this hypothesis this way: in recent days it is assumed that some kind of feeling of loss or endangerment contributes to radicalization, but this is only partly financial. Based on theories of Fromm, besides the frustration caused by crime, it is loss of identity, the lack of social self-respect and insecurity that describes the mechanism more precisely. If the social dividing line is not based on status but instead ethnicities it can restore the self-assurance and self-image of some of the down-and-out radicals and they can find scapegoats as well. This cannot be tested with the

thoroughness needed on the data I use, however I assume this hypothesis would be more likely confirmed than the original one. In the youth research the young Jobbik-voter respondents were unsure and pessimist about their future while their financial status wasn't significantly worse than that of the others.

4. It becomes even harder to compare if we look from the supply approach. It is obvious that demand and supply approaches are complementaries of each other. There can be social need for any policies, if there is no political party to benefit from it; similarly, not even the most brilliant leadership of a party can achieve success if there is simply no demand for what they represent.

Within the supply part it was the political constellation which had a very strong role in the strengthening of Jobbik. Although the endowments of the system were unfavorable for the party (high electoral threshold, lack of access to mainstream media and state funds) the dissatisfaction with the political elite was bigger than ever in 2009. A relevant far-right party had existed in Hungary previously, but it was in its ruins by 2006 – this and the extremely virulent subculture provided the intellectual

ammunition and the bulk of the human resources without dividing voters between two contemporary rivals. Compared to this the party's organizational structure and leadership had only secondary importance – it was the mass of enthusiastic activists what the party itself really contributed with to the success. Without thousands of active members (as of 2009) Jobbik could have never reached so many people and convince them personally. Finally, the charismatic Gábor Vona, Krisztina Morvai (who was then far more known than the chairman) and the Hungarian Guard were the most efficient weapons of the party: with them it could draw media's and the voters' attention, and – to a smaller extent – it was even helped by its political rivals' counterproductive anti-campaigns. From this we can see that the supply-side is linked not only to demand but the media as well. Evaluation of its independent explanatory power can only be even more arbitrary than previously since we lack numbers, but I think it was medium-strong. The most inevitable helping factors in the success of Jobbik were the Hungarian Guard, the established organizational power and the favorable political constellation.

5. The significance of media is valorized primary by the time dimension: if a party rise so high during such a short period of

time, that it definitely needed active media presence. (Ellinas 2010). Neither the antipathy against the Roma, present since decades, nor the anti-gypsy rhetoric of Jobbik or the Hungarian Guard could result in progress for the party if the issue had not become part of the agenda pushing the Jobbik to the media in the beginning of 2009. In the chapter dedicated to this I presented in details how strong the connection was between the presence in media and the public's perception of the agenda. Perception of agenda is the nearest step to party preference. Framing has significant effect on it as well, but data show that not even negative framing could cause harm to Jobbik since the party could transmit its messages and arguments to its voters via its alternative channels of media. Thus appearing on the main media channels and on the websites of the counterculture (mainly on the kuruc.info) gave a huge push for Jobbik. Again, this cannot be quantified, but I assume that this was the strongest factor in the victory of 2009. As the European Parliamentary election of this year and its results had a great determining effect on the party's later results I regard the media approach as a strong explanation.

6. The study of Jobbik's extreme popularity among the young is linked to demand-supply theories, however, I regarded it as an

independent explanation. In the database representing university and college students it was more common to have anti-gypsy or anti-elite feelings and to reject democracy as political system among the supporters of Jobbik; however, the strongest odds ratio was linked to (respondents with) subcultural affiliation.

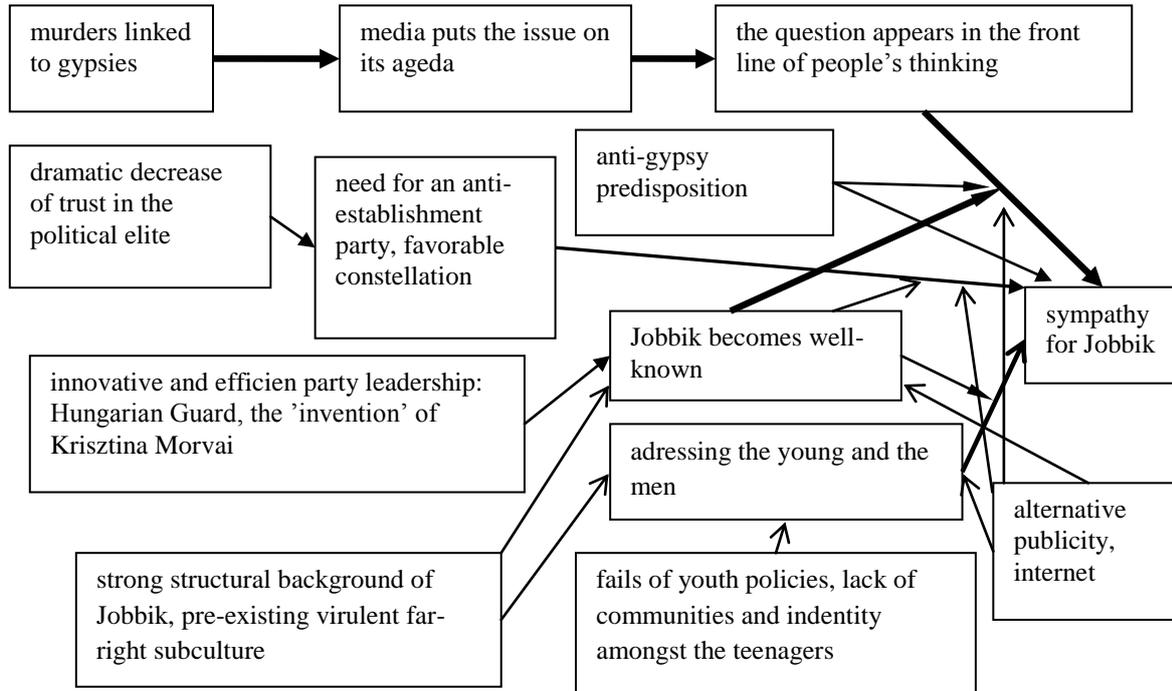
No surprise that reading kuruc.info, listening to national rock or attending the Hungarian Island Festival (Hungarian: *Magyar Sziget*) lead to ballots casted to Jobbik, but the conclusion of qualitative interviews offers a new frame of interpretation. According to this, several young voters do not join Jobbik for ideological reasons; moreover, this could be even hard for them since their value preferences are usually immature and inconsistent, with the simultaneous presence of liberal, radical, order-minded, authoritarian and prejudiced values. They only join because they need a community that offers them identity and the interpretation of the world – and in their surroundings, it is uniquely the Jobbik. The radical party is not only popular among the young, but according to the data of Medián, its popularity reaches the highest peaks in the cohort of those who are under 22 years old. According to

my analysis, the main reason for it is that youngest ones have the most free energy: they live in relationships, work or members of civic organizations at a way smaller rate than their older peers. This is, of course, true to all young people, but – according to the data – characterizes Jobbik-supporters to a greater extent than those who are of the same age but vote for other parties. Demand meets supply: for those who want to do something there are not much alternatives (mainly in Eastern-Hungary) besides the hardly even existing political left and the ‘old hat’ Fidesz. Jobbik puts a lot efforts in addressing them: it organizes a variety of camps, professional events, protest and cultural programs greatly backed by ‘national rock’ bands and other elements of the far-right subculture (for instance organizations of material arts and folk traditionalists). This approach explains the most why Jobbik is likeable for lots of young people, making the low mean age the most characteristic feature of the far-right party’s audience. I would evaluate then this explanation as a strong one.

Nevertheless, there is an other aspect of evaluation: the place of the explanation in the chain of causation. It is possible that behind an explanation, found to be very strong, lies another,

less strong phenomenon. Until now I used strength in statistical sense, but we have to examine this other aspect as well besides the magnitude of correlation. Speaking the language of the diagram: until now I tried to express the strength of the arrows, but now, as we untangled casual relationships we have to place these arrows, too.

Figure 1. Reasons behind the strengthening of Jobbik



First of all, I'd like to emphasize that the figure is infinite if it aims to represent the reality. Every cause is an effect as well: a separate dissertation could be dedicated to the features lying behind the decline of trust in the political elite. The happenings of the autumn of 2006 could be highlighted as well – these events have a determining place in Jobbik's identity as well as in the speeches of Gábor Vona even until now. Secondly, note that a great part of the causes is not direct, but indirect. Becoming well-known and the expansion on the internet in itself would have not resulted in sympathy for the far-right party. What else was needed is that Jobbik took stances in topics that interested people and had influence on their everyday lives; moreover, it used such way of speaking that a significant part of the society needed.

It can be clearly seen from the figure that the deepest causes (the ones from which the arrows start) are the anti-gypsy feelings and the murders committed by or against gypsies drawing attention to it; the decrease of trust in the political elite and the supply features: the four valuable resources of the party: the Hungarian Guard, Kriszina Morvai, the far-right subculture and the internet. With their help could the Jobbik reach the people – personally or through the media.

To put it briefly and simply: several factors contributed to the rise of Jobbik; even the ones with weaker explanatory power were necessary, but I see two key moments: the media agenda of 2009 that transformed the anti-gypsy feeling into political will and the subculture enabling the involvement of the young.

It worth to distinguish the situation after 2009 when the party relied on less the gypsy question. We know from Ellinas (2010) that a party primary needs strong structural background and social embeddedness accompanied with diverse ideological ammunition to preserve its support after sudden boom. Features determining party choice on the long run are currently given in the case of Jobbik: the party's organization was strong enough in its 'boom period' as well and it has only improved since the success of 2009. The diversity of ideological ammunition is necessary, because the Jobbik's popularity cannot solely depend on the presence of the questions of gypsies and public safety on the agenda. I have presented previously that Jobbik could well adapt to the current political agenda by representing topics like anti-communism, anti-globalization, anti-Western and anti-elite feelings ('political criminality'), FX loans, land question zestfully. The ideology offered by Jobbik is a complex

interpretation of the world, giving palpable answers and scapegoats for all the problems of its audience.

The party's effect on governmental policies can have both positive and negative consequences on its future popularity as well. Naturally, it is a real danger that Fidesz will pinpoint the topics of Jobbik (euroscepticism, war of independence, legislature favoring order-minded voters) to attract a great share of radical voters. In the other hand, it is also possible that with this Fidesz only makes the ideas of Jobbik more popular with leaving the radical audience basically untouched. This also makes Jobbik a more legitimate actor who can claim that it's worth voting for it: even if it cannot form a government yet, it still has a significant influence on the central decision-making.

The success of Jobbik has a broader reading as well, and this is what my paper's title refer to. The Jobbik phenomenon does not only mean the exact results of the party – it also includes the question how a new force can achieve such breakthrough in a highly institutionalized political system. How could the far-right grow over 15 percent in a country, where it did not even nearly had such support since the change of regime? Finally, what does it take to have a critical election like the one in 2010 and to have

such radical change in the party system? These questions go beyond the frames of my dissertation, but it might be worth to think about them. In my opinion, the interpretation of a middle-sized party on subcultural basis is something of a new approach compared to the international literature. Naturally, the usual demand and supply models explain a lot concerning the rise of Jobbik, just like media theories; even behind the popularity amongst the young there are reasons linked to demand, supply and media. Nonetheless, there are some specialties in the Hungarian (and the seemingly analogical Austrian) case. The socialization and the stage of life of teens and twenties (again, classic concepts of Inglehart) simply predestine the young in Hungary to choose a party that radically differs from the previous ones. With minimal ideological identity – or even consciousness –, just with habitual and stylistic elements, by offering an alternative community and identity, young people in completely different situations could be addressed as well. This approach helps us to understand the expansion of not only the Jobbik, but the LMP as well. Way of speaking fitted to the young, forms of appearance, programs, freshness, almost exclusive presence in certain regions – altogether they are enough to gain the sympathy of a teenager who has unsettled views and who could have found him or herself in a

completely other political family if it weren't they who had spoken to him or her first.

However, it was somehow regular that the Fidesz and the MSZP can find its way only to a smaller and smaller part of the young. This is a European phenomenon as well: new voters are more critical with traditional parties while being more open to new and alternative movements. Another general rule is that an inveterate party system – that is artificially narrowed down against the will of voters with state regulations – can easily explode after its decades of (apparent) rest. Voters were longing for a new party for long enough, the trust index of all politicians and institutions were constantly decreasing even before 2006. The happenings of fall 2006 only accelerated this process. The only reasons because a new force had not emerged preciously were the electoral system discriminating small parties and the limited access to media and state funds. This time, however, discontent reached such levels that not only Jobbik, but the LMP (organized way worse, embedded way less than the radical party) could benefit from as well. This again, shows us that other 'revolutionary' party could have reached similar success; the breakthrough of Jobbik was not the result of the rightist shift of the society's political

preferences. The party can thank its success to the fortunate constellation of the previously mentioned factors. The Jobbik-phenomenon maybe shows us that political constellation always provides plenty of opportunities to both new and old actors, but it is very rare that a political formation can benefit from them at such a good rate, in such favorable conditions with such efficiency.

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