

**Doctoral School of International  
Relations and Political Science**

**THESIS SUMMARY BOOKLET**

**Csaba Molnár**

*A radikális jobboldal törvényalkotásra gyakorolt  
hatása*

A Jobbik esete  
doctoral dissertation

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Gabriella Ilonszki DSc.  
professor emeritus

Budapest, 2023

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## **I. Research background and justification of the topic**

Harold Lasswell's classic definition describes politics as 'who gets what, when and how'. And in practice, by the analysis of politics, our goal is to explore the power and influence of actors on the way of life of their community. The easiest way of analysis for this are the cases of the open holders of state power. However, research on seemingly powerless actors also has significant tradition both in the political science and in social sciences in general. Among deprived and subordinated groups, we can find some attention on actors who are weak and powerless because of their function: the opposition. This is the goal of this dissertation: we analyse the influence of a kind of opposition with especially weak position: the radical right-wing opposition.

Because of its controversial nature and novelty, authors of political science pay high attention on it: huge amount of books, journal articles and conferences discuss them from several perspectives. On the other hand, we can sense that analyses on their impact are often based on debatable starting points. Researchers often choose their most important issues by a cliché-like methodology and describe them in detailed case studies. However, they often fail to explore on a systematic empirical way these parties' actual agenda. On the

other hand, they often see these parties as alien (or even dangerous) to the contemporary democracies, thus they often exclude their analysis as consolidated and integrated actors of their nation's party systems. Third, mainly as a result of the sociological background of political scientists, these investigations generally describe the relatively homogenous environments of Western Europe. Hence, other regions' characteristics appears rarely in these researches.

Thus systematic exploration of radical rights' influence on the executive seems to be a prosperous field of research. Among previous research, we can find examples for investigations of radical right's influence on local politics' dynamics, on other political actors, on the party system as a whole, on legislative activity, on public debates, on law-making, on state budgets or on judicial decisions (e.g. Loxbo, 2010; Bale, 2003; Akkerman – de Lange, 2012; Zaslove, 2004, Schain, 2006).

Among them, investigations of law-making seems to be extremely important. First of all, their amount is observable, then they focus on national-level (thus relatively easily investigable) issues with almost all-encompasses competences. Thus data on them is available. They can be amended relatively easily; however, they are not too unstable. They regulate most fields of public life. Although

their preparation process in the executive phase is less transparent, its legislative phase is well-documented and publicly available. Thus we focus on the impact of radical right-wing opposition on law-making.

The next step is case selection: which radical right-wing party or parties should be selected for our analysis. Next question is the exact number of radical right-wing parties to be analysed. While a comparative analysis with many cases seems to fit our research goals, it also has serious disadvantages. A key element of our analysis is the exploration of causal mechanisms, which is possible only by a deep, holistic investigation. Thus it seems better to choose only one case. Our analysis can be facilitated by selecting a case, where the least possible other factors disturbs the relationship between the government and the radical right-wing opposition. Such disturbing factors can veto points blocking the free decision-making of the government and the parallel (and possibly more effective) influence of other opposition actors on the executive.

Of course, this causes a limit regarding the generalisability of our findings. First of all, by the analysis of a special kind of opposition (radical right), we can transpose our findings to other opposition actors. On the other hand, although the selection of a case such

close to an undisturbed government-opposition relationship helps us to understand to activity of an almost omnipotent or unlimited executive, in practice more widespread and much more limited governments may behave differently. However, such a ‘clear’ case does not necessarily mean atypical or deviant case. Observable characteristics, mechanisms of opposition’s influence (as we will see later) do not contradicts to results observed regarding other cases, but the more undisturbed relationship makes their clarification possible.

The Hungarian case fits these requirements. While a relatively popular and successful radical right-wing party operated there in the 2010s, at the same time a strong right-wing party hold power stably. Fidesz-KDNP has become the predominant actor of the Hungarian politics by maintaining its extremely high electoral support since the second half of the 2000s. This co-occurred by the breakthrough of Jobbik, which became the strongest opposition party from an irrelevant extra-parliamentary group. At the same time, the Hungarian left-wing experienced a serious crisis creating an almost unprecedented scenario possible: the analysis of an almost undisturbed relationship between a radical right-wing party and the government (Molnár, 2020). This means, governing parties

can take minimal care on consequences of other actors' activity during the selection of their strategy regarding initiatives of the radical right-wing opposition. As a conclusion, our analysis focuses on the impact of Jobbik on law-making between 2010 and 2018. Our main goal is to contribute to the research on opposition, which although does not lack big summarising volumes (see for example Dahl, 1966; Kolinsky, 1987; de Giorgi – Ilonszki, 2018), also deserves more attention.

## **II. Methodology**

After justification of our case selection, we continue with the description of our investigation's methodology. We investigate the influence of Jobbik on legislation in three level. First of all, the most obvious of them, their formally recognisable impact, the fate of their bill proposals will be investigated. We analyse what happened with these bills after their introduction. We classify them by the last stage of the law-making process they have reached. We also analyse their policy agenda and the exact content of the most relevant ones among them.

As we will present later, a party which has no control over any veto point (like the Jobbik) mainly influences government by agenda-



setting. Hence, we continue our analysis by its influence on the agenda of the legislative speeches of MPs of the ruling Fidesz-KDNP. As our analysis focuses on law-making, we finally investigate the Jobbik's influence on legislative agenda.

Our agenda analysis is based on the datasets of Comparative Agendas Project Hungary. These datasets classify all investigated documents into one of the 21 policy major topics by a uniform, systematic methodology (see Molnár – Sebők, 2021). Our analysis includes database on party manifestos, legislative speeches, bills and laws. We differentiate legislative speeches of own initiatives (e.g. interpellations) and reactions to other actors (e.g. speech on a bill introduced by someone else).

We measure the influence by comparing its agenda with a one-month delay of the Fidesz-KDNP agenda. If we analyse only one policy field, we simply compare the difference between saliences of the given policy topic in the parties' agenda. If we analyse agendas as a whole, we analyse the Euclidean distance of the two agendas. We analyse the agenda of speeches and law-making by the same methods: the only difference is that in the former case, we compare the agenda of the Jobbik's speeches to the Fidesz-KDNP's speeches' one in the next month, while in the latter one, we compare

the agenda of the Jobbik's speeches to the laws adopted in the next month.

We have tested seven hypotheses (and two subhypotheses of the third one) stating that:

- H1. The opposition has stronger influence on issues which are more salient elements of its agenda
- H2. Opposition initiatives with higher social support have stronger influence
- H3a. Opposition has stronger influence, if its electoral support is higher
- H3b. Opposition has stronger influence, if its electoral support is in increase
- H4. Opposition has stronger influence, if they control any veto point
- H5. Opposition has stronger influence in policy fields belonging to the portfolio of legislative committees whose chairmen are delegated by them
- H6. Opposition has stronger influence on policy fields found more important by the public opinion
- H7. Opposition has stronger influence on policy fields in which their position is closer to the governing parties' one

When we analyse policy agendas, we test these hypotheses by regression. Our dependent variable is the distance of the agendas, while we get our independent variables from various datasets (Medián, Eurobarometer, ESS, National Assembly of Hungary, CHES, Manifiesto). We present descriptive statistics of these variables in a separate chapter.

Beyond the systematic analysis of policy agenda, we analyse three issues (penal law, immigration, foreign currency mortgages) in details by distinct case studies to explore the main characteristics of Jobbik's influence. This means that our research has two pillars. Analysis of policy agenda is not enough on its own: ex ante unknown circumstances cannot be included to it. As a result, contradictory results can appear. However, case studies make it possible to resolve these contradictions by analysing in details only a handful issues, thus they help us to understand the mechanism of Jobbik's influence.

### **III. The findings of the dissertation**

The first problem regarding opposition's influence is that neither opposition's, nor influence's concept are without profound uncertainties. From the perspective of our research, it is seriously

important that opposition includes much more actors than mere opposition parliamentary parties. Our analysis by formal models show us that relationships between oppositions and between government and opposition are dynamic ones.

Thus appears the three channels of opposition's influence: through the executive, through the legislature and through other institutions (we do not analyse the third one because of our case selection).

Among our hypotheses, there were two which can be answered unequivocally. Agenda-setting of opposition parties has decisive impact on opposition's influence on government. Issues put on the agenda of Jobbik's legislative speeches with a higher salience has stronger influence on both future speeches of Fidesz-KDNP MPs and on adopted laws. It turned out by our case studies that they have serious influence not only on their agenda, but on their content too. It is an important consequence regarding strategies of opposition parties that they can successfully influence government even with overwhelming superiority by keeping issues on the agenda persistently.

Our results on opposition's influence through legislation are also unequivocal. Analyses of Jobbik's bills, and also the case studies corroborate its secondary role. Even their bills (and most of their

amendments to bills introduced by the governing parties) on their most important issues were formally rejected by the legislature. This means that among the two investigated channels of opposition's influence the one through the legislative in practice does not work, while the one through the executive seems to be mostly effective.

Our results on veto points are also unequivocal: they unequivocally falsify our hypothesis. Control over a veto point was insignificant or even had negative effect on Jobbik's influence. This result underlines that governing parties are not mere passive actors of the opposition's trials to influence them, but they participate on the setting of this process, as we will see it later.

These results on veto points should be specified by two circumstances. First of all, we can experience only the government's loss of control over a veto point with limited usability. Second, the control over this veto point was not got only by Jobbik, but by almost any opposition parties.

Our hypothesis on legislative committee's chairmen shows us contradictory results. When the opposition's goal is agenda-setting, and especially influencing the government's policy agenda, they formulate an effective tool for the opposition. However, they

are ineffective in influencing the process of law-making, as they are dominated by the governing majority. Thus the opposition cannot really use them to influence the legislative agenda.

We had limited tools to investigate the role of voter's preferences. These tools lead us to contradictory results. We found that its main reason is that the electorate of the governing Fidesz-KDNP is so numerous that it secures the governing parties electoral success on its own: they do not need to win the support of opposition voters for themselves. Of course, results may be significantly different by analysing a case where competition is more intense, and its result is more insecure.

Its explanation appears, if we investigate the consequences of the opposition's electoral support. None of the two subhypotheses were corroborated regarding it: neither the Jobbik's higher electoral support, nor the increasing tendency of its electoral support does not cause its influence's increase. Contrary to our expectations expressed by these subhypotheses, the potential growth of the Jobbik's electoral support is decisive. If it is more probable, governing parties try to prevent it, and increase their adoption to the opposition's initiatives.

The potential growth of opposition's electoral support leads us through the role of the public opinion's preferences. At first, we find our results contradictory. Although our available data is sometimes incompatible, the root of these contradictions is the issue-ownership. If an issue is connected to a certain opposition party, increasing public interest on the issue also increases the opposition's influence on the given policy field, however in other cases, it is irrelevant.

Last, but not least we analysed the effect of ideological and policy distance of government and opposition on the opposition's influence. Although our available data is sometimes also incompatible, it is not the reason of our contradictory results. Its main explanation is that governing parties are also active shapers of the government-opposition relationships. Especially regarding issues with lower salience on the public agenda, they have much broader scope of action. And of course, they use this on their own benefit: if higher level of ex ante attention does not bound them, they can mainly freely change their policy positions.

All these results mean that we should amend our initial theoretical background. The first important result is that the mechanism of influence through legislation is profoundly different from influence

through the executive. While we can experience the much stronger role of agenda-setting as we expected in the former case, we must pay more attention to governing parties as active actors regarding the latter one. It is revealed that they do not merely wait for opposition initiatives passively, they decide within a regularly wide scope action which initiatives they accept. We can state that consensus or 'pacification' of opposition actors are not inherent goals of governing parties. In many cases, they do not even try to get support of as many voters as possible: if they find their status secure, they often find it enough just to satisfy their own voters. Finally, we can find that the governing parties' way of thinking is much more future-centric as it was expected. While neither past changes, nor actual level of opposition's public support has no significant influence, the expectation regarding its future changes has serious impact on the level of the opposition's influence. Thus the potential growth of the opposition's electoral support (which can be estimated by the given issues' importance on the public agenda, by the voters' point of view on it, and by the seriousness of the socio-economical challenge behind it) has real strong influence on the oppositions' impact on the law-making.



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