Fragmentation of Politics: The Fall of Social Democratic Parties and the Rise of Anti-System and Far-Right Parties in Central Europe

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I. Introduction

a. Scope: far-right populism in Austria and Hungary

Volatile movements in party structure and democratic institutional systems are an important feature of the current political landscape. The rise of anti-system and far-right parties together with the concomitant fall of social democratic parties was perceived as an oddity in European politics at the beginning of this century, but by now has developed into a widespread pattern across the continent. Hans-Georg Betz (1993) calls this phenomenon the “new politics of resentment” and traces it to issues of identity and culture, which fuel insecurity and volatility of the popular mood. Can identity fully explain the fragmentation of politics in Europe? What other relevant domestic challenges and external shocks can help us understand the radical political shifts in the old continent’s politics? What does the fragmentation of politics even mean? This research project seeks to explain the fragmentation of “conventional” politics in Europe by undertaking a multi-layered conceptual and theoretical analysis and illustrate it with two case studies in Central Europe, namely, Austria and Hungary.

The essay argues that the key political development behind the fragmentation of politics is the increased prevalence of populism, which juxtaposes the pure common people against the corrupt political elite. This leads to the questioning and gradual erosion of legitimacy (here understood in the Weberian sense of social acceptance based on people’s beliefs about political authority) of representative democracy based on party competition. Following Schumpeter, representative democracy is understood as an institutionalized and periodical competition among political elites: “democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.”

Populism itself is a very ambiguous and conceptually elusive term in political science, which is why part of this essay will be devoted to illuminating this largely obscure concept. In general, populism can be found at the center, the left and the right of the political spectrum, but in the two case studies investigated here, it has established symbiotic links to far-right parties. Therefore, two intertwined political developments lurk behind this essay’s research question: populism and far-right ideology. This essay will overview the ideology and process of far-right populism, analyze different demand and supply causes behind its growing success, and look at political developments in Austria and Hungary to illustrate the arguments made. The two states historical paths and socio-economic developments are

different, yet there are similarities and clear patterns of the reasons behind the fragmentation of politics in both.

One of the most important reasons for undertaking the study is to decipher whether the resurgence of the far-right and the decline of social democracy is driven by the crises (which are a painful but passing issue), or whether they reflect a more fundamental structural problems in political landscape, which cannot be fully explained by current affairs (and is here to stay). The potential effects of these trends should not be underestimated. Many major countries in Central Europe (and many others in the rest of the continent) will have to battle to keep the far-right and populist movements out of government in the coming elections. Thus, understanding the reasons for their popularity is of practical significance. If expected structural explanations are correct, the social democratic parties and more generally the left must rethink its political economy, institutional framework and the ideological offering to voters. The salience of identity politics, belligerent nationalism and lack of governability all spell a period of instability. The continent is once again gripped by fear and intolerance and these developments should be taken seriously. Moreover, these trends are also closely linked to the ongoing crisis of the EU and present an existential threat to European integration. For these reasons, this research is both academically and practically relevant.

b. Case studies: status quo and how did we get here?
This essay seeks to bring the theoretical and empirical aspects together through research on Austria and Hungary. A quick overview of the present political situation in these states shows that they present pertinent examples of the trend under consideration. Importantly, while both countries exemplify the success of populism, they also reveal very different instantiations of it. This is precisely why they are so interesting to look at side by side - the two case studies are different in their economic development, historical influences and subsequent political traditions, yet the success of one political phenomena, populism, is driven by a set of shared factors. Understanding the underlying aspects that enable the success of the populist parties in two otherwise very different countries gives us a good start for understanding populism’s growing popularity in most modern democracies.

Austria³
In Austria, the grand coalition of the centre-right Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) fell apart in May after the resignation of Reinhold Mitterlehner from

his role as the leader of the ÖVP. Sebastian Kurz, the popular young foreign affairs minister, became his successor and pushed for an early election to capitalize on his popularity. Given tense relations among coalition parties and their continuing inability to agree upon and implement the reforms, Mr. Kurz’s move was supported by Christian Kern, the SPÖ chancellor. An early election is scheduled for the 15th October 2017. The election will be a contest between the SPÖ, the ÖVP and the FPÖ (Austria’s far-right Freedom Party). Before Sebastian Kurz’s leadership, the opinion polls had placed his party at the third place at about 21%, the FPÖ was gaining in popularity at 32%, and the SPÖ was not far behind at 29%. However, following his headship, the party polls at around 35%, which pushed SPÖ to the third place at 20% and FPÖ to the middle position at 26%. Given these public opinion trends and ÖVP’s public announcements, the most likely outcome of the coming elections is the coalition between the ÖVP as the leading party and FPÖ as the junior partner. This spells a serious rupture in the dominance of Austria’s politics by the ÖVP and the SPÖ, which have ruled the country almost continuously since the end of the Second World War. Moreover, Austria’s far-right populism gained not only through the electoral advances of the FPÖ, but also through the dissemination of its ideology to the political mainstream, with Mr. Kurz taking up a rigid stance on migration issues and ÖVP adopting harsher policy stand to appease public opinion.

While the far-right influence is growing, the strength of social democratic party or the left has been declining. The SPÖ served as the junior partner in the fallen grand coalition and the overall support for the party has dropped substantially. It has lost three quarters of its membership since the 1970s and the public polls show that less than 20% of Austrians would now trust a social democratic government to improve the social situation. To sum up, the Austrian political landscape is seriously troubling, as the status quo is marked by political instability, established parties’ inability to govern and growing popular discontent that has translated into growing support for populism and far right.

**Hungary**

Hungary presents the case where nationalist populism is part of the status quo. Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) is considered “conservative” rather than “radical right” by most academics and

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commentators. While it is true that the party largely steers clear of openly radical right policies and statements in its official election manifestos, it has been implementing controversial illiberal policies and made radical public statements. For example, its leader and incumbent Prime Minister Viktor Orban has declared that he wants to transform Hungary into an “illiberal democracy.”

Fidesz and its junior coalition partner, Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP), were re-elected for the second term in 2014 and thus have been effectively ruling the country since 2010. The two parties have lost their two-thirds majority after a by-election defeat in 2015, but continued to dominate Hungarian policy-making and retain significant popular support. An April 2017 poll shows Fidesz’s significant lead with popular support at 29% and its competitors, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), lagging behind with 12% each. Fidesz seeks to maintain popularity and prevent Jobbik from further electoral gains in April 2018 election. Fidesz seems to be intent to remain in power for the third consecutive term by further toughening its political stance on the issues of immigration and the EU. Momentum is another populist movement that has recently gained popularity in Hungarian politics and threatens to nick some votes from both the left-liberal opposition and Fidesz. The party is led by Andras Fekete-Györ and goes against the conventional left-right political divide, claiming to believe in issues not ideology.

To sum up, present politics are even more fragmented in Hungary than in Austria. The state is governed by the party that is perceptibly shifting further right with its intensely nationalist stance, the crackdown on the NGOs, the centralization of power, the decline in press freedom, the judicial reform and intolerance towards migrants. There is a growing support for a more radical right-wing anti-semitic party Jobbik, which has entrenched its position as the third largest party in the National Assembly and is likely to make significant additional gains in elections in May 2018. Hungary’s social democracy is barely alive, as the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) suffered the largest defeat since the 1990 parliamentary election in 2014 and is currently in the opposition with only 10% of the vote.

Now that we know where we are, it is time to understand how we got here. It is undeniable that populist far-right parties, have been part of the European political landscape for a long time, most prominent examples include France’s Front National, Denmark’s Progress Party and even Austria’s Freedom

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Party, all of which have been fighting for political influence as early as the 1960s and 1970s. In general, populism seems to be a lasting aspect of democratic politics. However, the inter-war period was the last significant time of resurgence in populism and the radical right wing parties have not seen such high numbers of popular support nor have they entered ruling governments. Thus, what we observe may not be a new phenomenon, but its growing popularity on all fronts of the political spectrum is disconcerting. This essay will explore the causes behind its modern-day resurgence to suggest that a lot of it has to do with the failure of traditional parties to effectively respond to change and utilize democratic institutions to their benefit. This corresponds to growing anti-political climate, which leads to a further erosion of legitimacy and effectiveness of the traditional party structure and creates fresh opportunities for populist political entrepreneurship. These developments themselves are a product of a plethora of socio-economic factors, structural changes and international events. This essay will seek to illuminate them by first addressing the conceptual questions related to populism and right-wing populism, then analyzing the support for far-right populism through the demand and supply framework and looking at Austria and Hungary to parse out the specific issues the parties address and the strategies they use to gain the support of their respective populations.

II. Defining far-right populism: ideology, issues and process

Populism is a fairly ambiguous and contentious term in the political science. Peter Wiles expresses an often-found discontent with the inconsistent and undefined way the notion is employed: “To each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds.” Different scholars and commentators have come up with different definitions that are often vague and sometimes partisan, which makes a conceptual consensus difficult to achieve. Yet, it is possible to extract a common denominator, which reveals that populism should not be conceived in terms of specific social bases, political programmes, institutions and issues, but should be looked at in terms of its process that is anchored in a foundational ideological core. The foundational core stems from the populists’ view of “society as divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite,” and argues that politics should reflect the general will of the people.” It positions itself against elitism, as it sees the people as a morally superior group to political elites, and pluralism, as it rejects the view that society is composed of different groups with diverse interests and instead proposes that people have uniform interests. Thus, their central ideological offering is the antagonistic positioning

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of the pure people against the corrupt political elite, which has deprived the sovereign people of their rights, prosperity, identity and voice.\textsuperscript{16} Importantly, besides this characteristic ideology, populists may not share much else in their views and can be very flexible in their political convictions. Therefore, their core ideological position can be seen as the framework through which they see the world, but the interpretation and application of this framework is then mediated by different populists’ groups experiences, context and often expediency.

What supplies populists with a thicker ideology and its second key antagonism is their relationship with other political ideologies; in this case, their connection to the far-right. Following their understanding of the people as culturally homogenous, right-wing populism promotes a singular identity and shared interests of the people that are contrasted and defined against the interests of “others”, which are the minorities and immigrants.\textsuperscript{17} Mudde uses the term nativism to describe nationalism espoused by the far-right parties. Nativism is an amalgam of nationalism and xenophobia, as it calls for the establishment of a nationally homogenous state and views the non-native state members as fundamentally threatening.\textsuperscript{18} The more ethno-centric the conception of the people, the more extreme the far-right movement is.\textsuperscript{19} Its views can range from biological and cultural racism that espouses natural hierarchy between different groups to ethnopluralism that considers different ethnocultural groups to be equal, but different and thus fundamentally incompatible.\textsuperscript{20}

Given these two positions, right wing populism is best seen as identity-based political mobilization, which creates divisions to gain popular support for the populist leaders.\textsuperscript{21} It is not so much institutional as personal, relying on its leaders, process and opportunities rather than a coherent ideology and party programme to win the popular vote. Therefore, the far-right populists use the strategy that “consciously appeals to widespread anxieties, prejudices, and resentments, and exploits them for political gain.”\textsuperscript{22} Instead of having a well-defined body of ideas, they focus on the voter sentiment, which makes them issue-driven and opportunistic.\textsuperscript{23} This makes populism hard to define, as their political positions are flexible and often lack coherence.

\textsuperscript{19} Greven, T., 2016. p.1
\textsuperscript{23} ibid
The two case studies illustrate these key traits of the populist parties. The FPÖ is a great example of right-wing populism and political flexibility. The party was established in 1955 and mainly attracted anti-clerical libertarians, academics and entrepreneurs favoring liberalization and also catered to a significant segment of pan-German nationalists, including neo-Nazi supporters.\(^{24}\) In the 1986 vote for party leadership Jörg Haider defeated the party’s former leader Norbert Steger, who was known for liberal views, and entered into coalition with the Social Democrats. Under Haider, the party was molded to adapt to changes in political climate and popular sentiment. The party that had been defined by middle-class anti-system protest was transformed into one defined by its radical claims based on cultural and ethnic identity.\(^{25}\) More generally, Heinisch discerns three phases that exemplify the party’s opportunistic mutations: (i) “the political rebel phase” (1986–91); (ii) “the social populist phase” (1991–96); and (iii) “the anti-internationalist phase” (1996–2000).\(^{26}\) Haider’s strategy of ideological flexibility was successful, as the support for the FPÖ grew from 5.4% in 1983 to 26.9% in 1999.\(^{27}\)

Fidesz, founded in 1988, presents another example of opportunistic and eclectic metamorphosis of the far-right populist party. The party’s founding name was simply Fidesz, meaning “Alliance of Young Democrats”, which reflected its ideology - it was a libertarian party and its membership had an upper age limit of 35 years. Thus, it had started as a mainstream liberal alliance and moved to the right only after electoral failures. Fidesz received 8.95% in 1990 elections and 7.02% in 1994. Following their disappointing electoral performance in 1994, the party added “Hungarian Civic Party” to its name and changed its position from liberal to conservative, favoring interventionist economic policy and illiberal authoritarianism.\(^{28}\) Just like in Austria, ideological flexibility has transformed the party’s fortunes and by 1998 elections Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party received 29.48% of the popular vote.\(^{29}\)

Both Hungary and Austria exemplify that the essence of populist parties does not lie in their political convictions, but in the style of politics they adopt and the issues they espouse, given the opportunities for populist political entrepreneurship. Therefore, if we want to understand the prevalence of the far-right populism better, we need to look at their strategy and process. To do so, we will look at the specific needs of the electorates in Austria and Hungary and the response of the far-right or nationalist populist parties, which will supply us with a more comprehensive understanding of what the far-right populism looks like.

\(^{25}\) ibid, p.67
\(^{26}\) ibid, p.78
\(^{27}\) ibid, p.78
\(^{29}\) ibid
III. Fragmentation: What explains the rise of far-right populism in Austria and Hungary?

We will apply demand and supply frameworks to analyze the support for the far-right populism. The demand side covers the bottom-up theories that capture the growing popular “demand” for the far-right populist parties and the supply side looks at the top-down institutional factors or the political opportunity structure in which they act to achieve their success.30

Demand

Looking at the demand side, we find a broad range of political, social, cultural and economic issues and anxieties that the populists capitalize on to gain political power. These issues are not exactly the same among the different states and there are national particularities, yet commonalities do exist and the popular grievances can be attributed to several general categories. I will focus on the issues of identity, economics and disenfranchisement. Important to note, these categories and issues are not conceptually exclusive and claims and sentiments associated with them often overlap.

a. Identity

In 1942 wartime England, Simone Weil wrote “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”31, identifying the modern condition of rootlessness and the need of ideological narratives to supply meaning to people’s lives. It is undeniable that since the end of the war, vast socio-economic changes have taken place, which has transformed the lives and identities of individuals. Inglehart’s seminal work Silent Revolution traces the evolution of the modern society to the post-modern one, which embodies a fundamental shift towards post-materialist values, including personal fulfillment, openness to new ideas and support for previously marginalized populations.32

This change in values has created two sociological channels for an increased support for the radical political movements. First, it means that part of the population embodies new values, which disrupt traditional social structures based on class, ethnicity and religion. The result of this is that “individuals lose a sense of belonging and are attracted to ethnic nationalism, which according to psychological research increases a sense of self-esteem.”33 Second, a significant part of the population continues to hold traditional beliefs, which produces a reactionary backlash or a “silent counter-revolution” that


may also increase the support for the far-right.\textsuperscript{34}

Far-right populism exploits the resulting uncertainty and readily responds to demands for meaning and identity by creating an imagined community - the people – who supposedly have homogenous interest and common enemies (the elites and the ‘others’). Far right populist discourse, based on the separation of those who belong and those who do not, becomes embodied in nationalism, which supplies a constructed identity and reaffirms traditional values. As discussed previously, nationalism can be explicitly racist and imply superiority of national ethnicity over other cultural groups, but it can also espouse ethnopluralism, which considers different ethnicities to be equal, but different and therefore incompatible.\textsuperscript{35} The modern far-right parties usually opt for the second form of nationalism and call for the protection of national identity and culture from the threat posed by diverse non-native elements.\textsuperscript{36}

We can observe this type nationalism in both Austria and Hungary. In Hungary, nationalist sentiments are propagated by both Jobbik and Fidesz. The Hungarian prime minister Orban publicly talks about the preservation of European and Hungarian way of life: “\textit{What we have at stake today is Europe, the European way of life, the survival or disappearance of European values and nations, or their transformation beyond recognition ... We would like Europe to be preserved for the Europeans. But there is something we would not just like but we want because it only depends on us: we want to preserve a Hungarian Hungary.}”\textsuperscript{37} He has followed his words through with political actions, including his staunch anti-immigration policy, the organization of xenophobic referendum campaigns and building walls on Hungary’s borders. Jobbik is an even more radically nationalist movement and has espoused an openly anti-Semitic and anti-Roma views and actions. For example, its leader Gabor Vona has set up the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary organisation that marched through Roma neighbourhoods and participated in ferocious street protests and rallies.\textsuperscript{38} Jobbik has recently been trying to rebrand itself into a “modern conservative party”, yet most of its radical views remain in place in party leadership and its electorate support base.\textsuperscript{39} The Jobbik supporters in the DEMOS countrywide survey based their allegiance to the party on the perceived threats to Hungarian national

\textsuperscript{36} Mudde, C. 2007, p. 19
\textsuperscript{37} Mudde, C., 2015. “The Hungary PM made a ‘rivers of blood’ speech ... and no one cares”, \textit{The Guardian}, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/30/viktor-orban-fidesz-hungary-prime-minister-europe-neo-nazi [last accessed: 30/05/2017]
\textsuperscript{39} ibid
identity coming from the EU, globalization and immigration. In Austria, the FPÖ also presents itself as the defender of the homeland against aggressive non-native forces. Before 2005, the party’s leadership has publicly expressed their anti-Semitism, but since this was not very popular among their voters, the new leader Heinz-Christian Strache has focused his party’s hostility on a different group – Muslims. The party has conveyed their anti-Islamic and nationalist position both verbally and practically. Strache has publicly proclaimed that “[p]olitical Islam is the fascism of today, and that is what we have to fight.” The party advocates clamping down on immigration and released a video, warning migrants to “keep your fingers off our women”.

Traditional parties were unable to respond to growing feelings of insecurity and uncertainty in the midst of change, which created a vacuum space that was filled by the far-right discourse. Importantly, Austria and Hungary illustrate that the ideological core has always been the antagonism of “us” versus “others”, but the target group and the level of nativism has been varied according to prevailing public sentiment and the far right utilized it successfully to grow their voter base.

b. Economic insecurity
Another aspect of change and source of instability stems from rapid structural changes in the global economy. The victory of capitalism at the end of the Cold War has led to weakened socialism and its values; goals of equality and solidarity have been replaced by individualism and competition. The shift in values and rapid economic development has led to structural changes in many states, such as weak labor unions, lower relative wages and less rigid labor laws. This has helped to foster growth and make the economic pie bigger overall, but it has also resulted in economic losers, socio-economic grievances and growing inequality. Scholars link economic difficulties to growing support for the far-right populist parties by applying conflict theory. They propose that different social groups competition over scarce resources increases in times of economic downturn.

The electorate worries about social and economic changes and the perceived inability of the mainstream parties to address these concerns leads to a search for alternatives. Again, this is where the far right can exploit economic grievances by blaming the outgroup for economic problems and the

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44 ibid
45 Campbell 1965 in Golder, M., 2016, p.483
political establishment for corruption and inability to deal with it effectively. Research shows that economic factors, such as unemployment, low income and expectation of deprivation, all lead to a rising support for the far-right parties.\textsuperscript{46} Importantly, these factors are mediated by labor market institutions that influence the costs and risks associated with economic crises. Halikiopoulou and Vlandas find that “where unemployment benefits and dismissal regulations are high, unemployment has no effect, but where either one of them is low, unemployment leads to higher far-right party support.”\textsuperscript{47} This can explain why despite the fairly uniform effect of the Eurozone crisis, some countries have experienced larger electoral gains for the far-right than others. Obviously, other factors have also influenced the rise of the far-right support, but economic hardship and the existence of institutions that provide social protection by managing economic and social risks play a significant role.

Looking at the development of economic concerns in Austria and Hungary provides evidence for the argument of economic insecurity as a reason for the far-right parties’ growing success. Heinisch traces changes in Austria’s economic sphere since the second half of the 1980s. Austria, like other European members have been increasingly exposed to external economic developments, happening both because of the globalization and Europeanization of their domestic economy. Global economic integration happening through free trade and free capital mobility and increasing labor mobility have weakened national boundaries and control the governments had over their state’s economic policy. The European Union (EU) membership and the integration into the Single Market and the European Monetary Union have further weakened policy tools available for policymakers.

The development of Austria’s economic problems in early 1990s illustrate the dilemma. While the public ownership and state sector jobs had previously been the core of the Austrian social democracy, growing fiscal problems and increased international competition resulted in the privatization of state-owned assets, resulting in a net loss of 70,000 out of 102,000 jobs, which were previously filled by the SPÖ voters.\textsuperscript{48} The older workers were the main economic victims and government used early retirement schemes to adjust the labor supply, which further aggravated fiscal problems by pushing social expenditure - it became as high as 27.4\% of GDP in 1991.\textsuperscript{49} This led to politically devastating austerity measures when Austria wanted to meet the criteria for EMU. The FPÖ was able to exploit these economic difficulties and surged in popularity. The present Eurozone crisis and continuing economic slump have led to the same problems and growing sentiments of anxiety in

\textsuperscript{47} ibid
\textsuperscript{48} Heinisch, R. 2008, p.73-74
\textsuperscript{49} ibid
Austria. Interviews with young Austrians on the Freedom party’s rise and Austria’s future powerfully reveal the prevailing economic concerns they observe in the society.50

“Our unemployment rate is rising and taxes are high. People have lost hope of a better future. I think our current centrist coalition government have got their priorities wrong for a long time. Social benefits and education should be the number one priorities but have been neglected by both SPÖ and the People’s party.” - Lea Eisinger, Vienna

And then there is the politics of fear. Of course, you worry about the security of your workplace, your country, your children as well as increasing prices when wages and salaries stay the same. There is nothing better than someone who makes you believe if you vote for him everything will become better again, because he is going to take care of ‘our’ Austria. I think support for the FPÖ reflects a longing for stability, safety and prosperity, with as little change as possible. - Cornelia, Purkersdorf, lower Austria

In Hungary, the 2008 economic crisis has also been one of the stimuli behind the successes of far-right populism among certain segments of the electorate. Importantly, before the crisis Hungary was one of the most prosperous and fastest growing countries within the former Soviet bloc. However, even before the 2008 crisis, Hungary was going through a period of economic austerity as it was following the EU convergence plan and was cutting its budget deficit to 3.4% by increasing taxes and implementing spending cuts. When the crisis began, larger cuts on public spending were required, which angered the Hungarians. The failure of the older austerity measures was evident and there was a growing anxiety among the most vulnerable citizens, such as pensioners, unemployed and other underprivileged parts of the population.51 Jobbik was quick to react to these changes and concentrated its rhetoric on disadvantaged groups and against the ‘corrupt’ and ‘treacherous’ policies of the conservative and the socialist parties.52 Economic grievances and far right rhetoric continued to grow and gain traction with the increased external pressures from the IMF and the EU that pushed for further expenditure cuts. The Hungarian government had to turn to IMF to finance its spending and in return it was forced to cut its expenditure to target a 2.6% deficit for 2009, which further hurt its economic growth.53 Unsurprisingly, the support for the far right was particularly strong among the social groups that were threatened the most by the deteriorating economic situation. The radical populists were quick to intensify the nationalistic debate as a zero-sum struggle for collective goods among the native

50 Stevens, T., 2016. “‘People have lost hope’: young Austrians on the rise of the far right”, The Guardian, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/young-austrians-on-presidential-runoff-freedom-party [last accessed: 30/05/2017]
51 Petsinis, V., 2015, pp.279-280
52 ibid
population and ‘others’. The government led by Fidesz has also adopted the same discourse. For example, it built giant roadside billboards “If you come to Hungary, don’t take the jobs of Hungarians!” all around the country.

To sum up, the same general narrative unfolds in both Austria and Hungary. Voters feel growing instability, which the mainstream parties are seemingly unable to deal with, which then opens up space for far-right populism that promises to prioritize and protect the national population (resulting in welfare chauvinism) and solve the roots of the problem (often by accusing EU and globalization and promulgating economic protectionism). The coherence or effectiveness of these economic proposals matters much less than the decisive call for a substantial political and economic reform. Especially since the mainstream parties have been exposed as incapable of finding an answer to economic crises. In Martin Wolf’s words, it “damaged confidence in — and so the legitimacy of — financial and policymaking elites. These emperors turned out to be naked.”

c. Disenfranchisement
The sense of powerlessness in the midst of socio-economic change has translated into feelings of disenfranchisement and growing political alienation. A growing number of citizens feels that the political system and politicians fail to represent their needs and interests. Moreover, globalization and European integration are perceived to have weakened the powers of the state to control its political and economic destiny, which leaves the citizens feeling alienated from domestic politics and threatened by international institutions and influences.

Far-right populism thrives during political climate beset with growing alienation from the established political parties and the formal process of representative democracy. It positions itself as a force for change that represents the common people. Importantly, the radical right has particularly hurt the left’s ideological space. Betz persuasively argues that “the populist right has appropriated and, in the process, radically refashioned and redefined the two major projects associated with the left: on the one hand, the traditional left’s focus on social justice and redistribution; on the other hand, the postmodern left’s concern with identity and recognition.” Moreover, their central antagonism between “us”, the unrepresented majority, versus “them”, the corrupt political elites, becomes a powerful weapon for challenging the present political system defined by orderly party competition between the right and the left. This leads to the fragmentation of politics as it is being transformed

54 Wolf, M., 2017. “The economic origins of the populist surge”, Financial Times, available at: https://www.ft.com/content/5557f806-5a75-11e7-9bc8-8055f264aa8b [last accessed: 30/05/2017]
into an unsystematic combat battle between random and often inconsistent issues rather than the competition between parties defined by their stable ideological offerings and associated, predictable policy packages. Importantly, the disillusionment also partly stems from the political convergence of the mainstream parties, the differences between which seem much smaller than before; this leads voters to issue- and protest-voting. We can turn to Hungary and Austria to illustrate these processes.

Hungary is a young democracy, born after the Roundtable Talks of 1989, which led to a peaceful transition from communism and planned economy to market economy and democracy. Ádám and Bozóki argue that many Hungarians have become disappointed with the post-communism transition: “they feel that “democracy was “stolen” from Hungarians and that a new transformation must be undertaken if Hungary is to be truly vindicated from centuries of indignity under various imperial powers and then of communism.” In 2009 Pew Research Center surveyed public opinion on democracy and economics in post-communist states, giving support to their argument: 77% Hungarians said they were dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in Hungary, 89% said politicians have benefited a great deal or a fair amount from the changes since 1989, but only 17% believed ordinary people have benefited and 72% said most people in Hungary are actually worse off today economically than they were under communism. A few months after the survey, these sentiments were reflected in 2010 parliamentary election. The conservative populist party won absolute majority with 53.4% and defeated the social democrats, the Hungarian Socialist Party, which scraped 19.3% of the popular vote. This is a big contrast compared to the previous 2006 election where the split was much more equal with Fidesz winning 42.0% of the popular vote and the Hungarian Socialist Party 43.2%. The biggest gains were made by the radical right wing party Jobbik, which rose from 2.2% in 2006 to 16.7% in 2010. Fidesz has used the popular mandate to overhaul the Hungarian institutions – the party has rewritten the constitution, dismantled checks and balances and cracked down on NGOs and the press - all of which ‘threaten’ Orban’s vision of future Hungary as an “illiberal democracy.”

If we look at Austria, Heinisch traces the origins of political distrust back to the late 1970s and mid-1980s, when the period of “affective dealignment” began. The period saw the emergence of post-

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59 Mudde, C., 2015
materialist value orientations and the growing desire for alternative political choices. Yet, the development of active disillusionment began later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which saw the emergence of strong separation from and hostility to those in power, Systemverdrossenheit. The mainstream parties were increasingly perceived as ineffective and inadequate because they could no longer guarantee the economic and social welfare of previous times. Furthermore, they were labelled as corrupt and unresponsive to the needs of the common people. For example, the poll conducted in 1994 shows that 47% of Austrians wanted ‘new parties in the political arena”, while in 1984 this number was only 10%. It points back to the key issue in modern democracies, namely, the failure of the mainstream parties to remain relevant to their electorate. Historically, the Austrian political system that had been based on consensus and stability, in which the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) reigned. However, these parties could not effectively react to change, which led to a crisis of legitimacy and created opportunities for protest movements and new parties. Today the situation is even worse and sentiments of disillusionment abound: “From being totally paralysed in the first months of the refugee crisis to not agreeing on any solutions to the increasing unemployment rate, people don’t trust our government to solve our social and economic problems anymore.”

Demand side causes expose the issues that made far-right populism appealing. It also illuminates the fragmented nature of modern politics. The rise of far-right populism is a reaction of the population to the failure of the traditional parties and conventional politics to address their needs in the midst of rapid change, such as cultural globalization, international economic crisis and shifting identities. People, who turn to populism, seek for new politics and new leaders that they can trust: “they want politicians who know (rather than “listen to” the people), and who make their wishes come true.” This lack of trust is evidenced by structural changes that expose the anti-political climate – low voter turnouts, declining party memberships in conventional parties and the growing perception of distance from politics. These changes in the political climate open up space for political entrepreneurship that has been successfully filled by the more radical alternatives, which co-opt the disillusioned and

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60 Heinisch, R. 2008, p.70
61 Plasser and Ulram 1996 in Heinisch, R. 2008, p.70
63 Heinisch, R. 2008, p.70-71
64 Marek Skalicka, Floridsdorf, in Stevens, T., 2016. “People have lost hope': young Austrians on the rise of the far right”, The Guardian, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/young-austrians-on-presidential-runoff-freedom-party [last accessed: 30/05/2017]
politically disappointed voters.\textsuperscript{66} One of the important effects of this can be seen by the blurring of traditional left and right divisions in the electorate. For example, historically, the left could rely on the support from the working class and the right could rely on the votes from the middle and upper classes. Yet due to the ideological flexibility of the far-right parties and the demand for alternatives from the voters, the socio-economic class is no longer closely tied to party loyalties. Far-right populism often adopts centrist or even leftist economic policies that promote protectionism and nationalist welfare state and has successfully secured an increasing share of the working-class votes.\textsuperscript{67} Jobbik is a prime example of the eclectic combination of political offerings that attempts to secure cross-class support. András Bíró Nagy identifies three main components of Jobbik’s campaign: hostility to minorities, a left-wing economic agenda, and cultural conservatism, all of which respond to popular grievances in Hungary.\textsuperscript{68} Flexibility in their policy programme is not the only way the far-right populist parties respond to voters’ changing demands - we will now turn to the supply side explanations to analyze how the populist movements exploit political opportunity structures to gain political support.

Supply: strategy and process
Supply side arguments include the ideological offering of the populist parties, which we have already looked at when discussing their response to the electorate’s demands for a new political ideology. We will now delve deeper into the process and strategy of the populist far-right parties, which enable them to capitalize on the broadening political opportunity structure.

Both agency and structure are important for the far-right success. The existence of exogenous conditions, or political opportunities, must coalesce with capable agents, or political entrepreneurs, who can convert these opportunities into political gains. Kitschelt defines political opportunity structure as “specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others.”\textsuperscript{69} It rests on various exogenous factors and institutions that determine the extent to which a political system is open to a political entrepreneur, including the electoral rules, media and nature of party competition.\textsuperscript{70} Sartori appropriately maintains that political actors both influence and are influenced by prevailing structures and opportunity changes.\textsuperscript{71} We will look at the main channels of party competition structure, public discourse style and the utilization of media to

\textsuperscript{66} Albertazzi, D. and McDonnell, D., 2008, p.1
\textsuperscript{67} Greven, T., 2016, p.5
\textsuperscript{68} Karl, P., 2017. “Hungary’s radical right 2.0”, Nationalities Papers, 45(3), p.346
\textsuperscript{70} Arzheimer and Carter 2006 in Golder, M., 2016, p.483
argue that the structure, the agency and their interaction are important for understanding the rise of the far right populism.

d. Party competition structure: political organization.

Previous analysis shows how socio-economic changes have led to changes in the political cleavage structure, creating room for new parties. One of the most important developments was the growing electoral volatility and an increasing group of voters who made their party choices based on issues and prevalent concerns rather than traditional party loyalties.\(^72\) Since most mainstream parties were not able to adapt quickly, this niche was exploited by the far-right parties. Their ability to do so, is enhanced or constrained by specific state’s political organization.

In the case of Hungary, the majoritarian single-member constituency system which accounts for 106 of the 199 seats in parliament, favors large parties.\(^73\) This enabled the nationalist Fidesz to retain power for two terms and makes it very likely they will win their third consecutive term at the coming election. On the one hand, the system has disadvantaged the fragmented liberal left parties. On the other hand, it also prevents the most radical parties, including Jobbik, from winning absolute majority.

The ascent of far-right populism in Austria can be traced to the systemic features inherent in the Austrian political model, and especially the features of Proporz and grand coalitions. The Austrian model is created to maintain consensus and minimize social conflict, which is reinforced through Proporz that has “allocated shares of political influence proportionally between the major two parties, not only ensuring their control over the country’s political institutions, the bureaucracy, labour market associations and public enterprises, but also extending to all areas of public life.”\(^74\) The two main parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP enjoyed vast membership and far-reaching patronage system, which led to their political hegemony at the expense of all other political parties.\(^75\) This has been institutionalized with grand coalitions, which denote the two parties’ formalized cooperation, both in government and behind the scenes. Such political organization meant stability, compromise and lack of transparency, which became increasingly criticized as anachronistic and self-serving.\(^76\) The new political opportunity was successfully targeted by the FPÖ that stood outside the consociational framework and positioned itself as the protest party fighting the corrupt elites on behalf of the people.\(^77\)

Importantly, this structural opportunity was complemented with political agency, which re-

\(^72\) Golder, M., 2016, p.488
\(^74\) Heinisch, R. 2008, p.68
\(^75\) ibid, p.68
\(^76\) ibid, p.69
\(^77\) ibid, p.69
shaped political organization structure within the FPÖ. The election of Jörg Haider as the party leader led to important structural changes, one of which was the growth of party’s obedient orientation towards its leader.\(^78\) This enabled Haider to extend control and maximized his power to act quickly, freely and decisively, which differentiated the FPÖ from the political organization of the mainstream parties. Moreover, the party itself became geared exclusively towards electoral success. The representation in the party’s decision-making body was now granted on the basis of electoral success rather than regional party membership, which “diluted the power of the traditional party apparatus and shifted the priorities away from programmatic development and membership-building to shorter term strategies, popular campaigns and fighting elections.”\(^79\) Both strategies proved successful and ushered in the golden age for the FPÖ.

### e. Scandalism and anti-political correctness

Another important strategic feature of the far-right populism is their battle against “political correctness”. It positions itself as the defender of the unrepresented majority or the common people, which influences its rhetorical tactics and political offerings. In their distinct communication style, the populists use plain language that can be understood by every common citizen and utilize emotional appeals and exaggerations to play on the voters’ concerns and fears. Their policy proposals come in the form of ‘common sense’ solutions, which often rest on gross simplifications of complex socio-economic problems.\(^80\) The far-right populist ideology views people as a homogenous unit that has the same aspirations and interests, which allows for stark generalizations and straightforward solutions: “Common sense will simply dictate how to address any situation; political compromise is unnecessary and weak.”\(^81\) This allows for effective distinctiveness when compared to classical political discourse and satisfies the widespread desire for change in the political sphere. It also enables the creation of calculated scandals and the breaking of hypothetical taboos through personal insults, disrespect for political rules and political culture, that are presented as yet another anachronistic instance of the modern political corruption.\(^82\)

The Austrian philosopher Rudolf Burger maintains that the FPÖ ideological and tactical distance from the political mainstream enabled Haider to act as “the personified antithesis to political correctness”.\(^83\) He and his party purposely violated the discourse conventions of Austrian politics to

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\(^{78}\) Heinisch, R. 2008, p.78  
\(^{79}\) ibid  
\(^{81}\) Greven, T., 2016, p.6  
\(^{82}\) ibid, p.1  
extend the boundaries of political realm and expose the constructed inauthentic nature of ruling political parties. For example, Haider heavily used pop culture and sports in his campaigns and staged carnival-type events, which signaled levity and entertainment that went against the conventions of the Austrian politics and attracted less political and young voters.\textsuperscript{84} His exaggeration, scandalism and simplification were equally effective and continue to be utilized by both the FPÖ and the BZÖ after the party had split in 2005. For example, during the 2014 election campaign, the BZÖ released an advertisement “Path to Freedom” that was developed to be shown primarily in movie theaters. It portrays Austria’s political leaders interposed with images of well-known dictators, such as Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu, Slobodan Milosovic of Serbia, and East German leader Erich Honecker.\textsuperscript{85} The FPÖ’s campaigns are not less provocative. For example, one of its leaders Andreas Moelzer publicly claimed that Nazi Germany looked "informal and liberal" compared to the EU.

In Hungary, Orban has repeatedly denounced political correctness by equating it with “the old world” that is “a political system riddled with taboos, which deprives us of the opportunity for innovative and honest talk.”\textsuperscript{86} On another occasion, in 2015, he proclaimed that he stands on the side of “political incorrectness” and that Europe’s political correctness was to blame for its inability to defend itself “against the cruel barbarism” of migrants.\textsuperscript{87} Orban’s inflammatory statements are accompanied by his appealing personality, as he comes across as casual, accessible and friendly. Peter Kreko, director of the Budapest-based Political Capital Institute, describes Orban’s political persona: “He’s like a rock star. He makes people laugh. He’s also a freedom fighter, a quintessential Hungarian mythical figure, who is not afraid to take on big powers, for instance, banks or the EU."\textsuperscript{88}

\textbf{f. Media utilization}

The most important channel for extending the populists’ reach has been the media. Ellinas shows how media coverage is particularly helpful at the inception of the far-right parties as it helps them to spread their message to a wide audience than their limited financial and organizational resources could.\textsuperscript{89} As they grow, their scandalism enables them to receive continued coverage and their provocative communication style receives a lot of free media attention. This entrenches their political visibility and

\textsuperscript{84} Heinisch, R. 2008, p.80
\textsuperscript{87} oibd
\textsuperscript{89} Ellinas 2010 in Golder, M., 2016, p.488
legitimizes their agenda in the social sphere, which then helps to cultivate the salience of the far-right issues.\textsuperscript{90}

In Austria, the media and especially the tabloids have been an important way for the Freedom Party to spread its views and agenda. For example, the Neue Kronenzeitung (‘Krone’), which is the largest and most influential newspaper in Austria, has helped Haider’s campaings with its messages on patriotism, hostility towards immigrants and negative views on European integration.\textsuperscript{91} The mainstream media might have stood against these issues and criticized the rise of the right-wing populism, yet its disproportionate coverage of notorious and scandalous leadership has also helped to promote FPÖ’s visibility as a rightful political actor.

Hungary’s Jobbik presents a growing trend of utilizing the social media for disseminating the political movement’s message, organizing political events and recruiting new members.\textsuperscript{92} While both Fidesz and MSZP undertake a more traditional approach to party communication policy (even though Fidesz readily utilizes sensational statements and has used its power to crack down on media opposition), Jobbik understands itself as a political movement and utilizes an amalgam of virtual and real world political activity to spread its political message.\textsuperscript{93} Peter Kreko maintains that Jobbik has been successful in capturing its support through the websites like Facebook and iWiW, a Hungarian social-networking service, and by organizing concerts and music festivals.\textsuperscript{94} The populist parties exhibited communicative flexibility and ability to utilize new forms of media to their benefit, while the old political elites that have historically monopolized political discourse failed to adapt to the new media landscape.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This research project analyzed the fragmentation of “conventional” politics in Europe by looking at key reasons behind the rise of the far-right populism and studying Austria and Hungary to illustrate its arguments. We find that fragmentation of politics is related to far-right populism in two intertwined ways. First, the socio-economic change associated with globalization, Europeanization, value shifts and neoliberalism has led to wide-spread resentment and growing uncertainty, which have challenged the effectiveness of ‘politics as usual’. We can conceptualize it as the demand for new, more effective and responsive, politics. Second, far-right populism uses provocative campaigning to promote its

\textsuperscript{90} Golder, M., 2016, p.488
\textsuperscript{91} Heinisch, R. 2008, p.76
\textsuperscript{92} Karl, P., 2017, p.348
\textsuperscript{93} ibid, p.352
ideology, defined by two key antagonisms: “we, the pure common people” against the “corrupt political elites” and “we, the native people” against all “others”. This can be broadly described as the supply of ideology geared towards anti-system mass-mobilization. It successfully exploits the latent resentment against political and intellectual elites, ‘the technocrats’, and amplifies popular sentiments of political disenchantment, frustration and cynicism. Together, these developments lead to a gradual erosion of trust in the procedures of representative democracy, which is based on organized party competition. Thus, the success of the far-right populists in Europe can be traced to the weakness of the political party systems, which were unable to respond to change and remodel themselves into effective institutions capable of representing popular interest.

Looking at two otherwise different instantiations of populist success in Austria and Hungary reveals a single underlying issue behind their triumph – the failure of the mainstream parties to remain relevant to their electorate in modern democracies. This relevance straddles both ideology and process. The ideological offering of the traditional parties fails to resonate with increasingly worried and lost citizens. While the far right and nationalist parties in both countries have varied their ideological positions to capture the widest possible audience, the political mainstream has lost its relevance as traditional allegiances no longer hold the society together. Making his first comments after the election of Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders has rightly pointed out that the president-elect has tapped into a real and justified anger. The only way to outdo the populist right is to acknowledge the validity of social concerns and respond to them by creating more effective political policies and challenge the far-right’s divisive discursive power through inclusive political debate and civic education. Just as importantly, we need to think more about the institutional make-up of modern democracies and its importance in stemming the populist tide. Democratic politics have always been rocked by popular moods and economic crises, but political blows of such shocks can be softened with the right systemic features. We touched upon the importance of the institutionalized checks and balances and the right social protection measures to support the stable functioning of democratic institutions. We must further analyze the intrinsic weakness of the traditional political party structure and electorate rules that create ripe opportunities for populist political entrepreneurship.

To conclude, this essay has outlined a framework for understanding and categorizing the populist strategies for gaining electoral victories, and by doing so, revealed the need to understand the failure of the mainstream parties better. Formerly major players that had monopoly over the political process in terms of both ideology and process (including values, media control, financial resources and policy

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95 Betz, H. G., 2003, p.206
96 Jones, E., 2007, p.37
agenda) have been failing and their weakness has enabled the populist parties to fill the vacuum and successfully capture both the demand and supply aspects of the political market.
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