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The Far-Right's Popularity in Europe

A Study of France, Austria, Hungary, and Poland's
Far-Right Parties

Bachelor's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Anna Brigevich

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Abstract

The far-right (or the populist radical right) has become increasingly popular in past decade. With the election Donald Trump in 2016 and the close, but ultimately, defeat of Marine Le Pen this year, it is safe to say that the far-right have become a very popular choice among voters across the world. This thesis is going to investigate why they have gained so much popularity. Specifically, Europe. The timeframe the thesis is focusing on is from the late 1990s to today. The thesis will go through the far-right parties of France, Austria, Hungary, and Poland systematically and show data that are connected to their electoral success. The conceptual framework is presented in the beginning, data is presented in the middle and possible explanations are discussed in the last chapter. The conclusion will outline the findings which is that far-right popularity is tied to external factors like the countries economic situation and the rate of immigration and refugees.

Sammendrag

Den ytre høyresiden (eller populistiske radikale høyreparti) har blitt stadig mer populær det siste tiåret. Med Donald Trumps seier i 2016 og den nære seieren til Marine Le Pen in år, er det trygt å si at ytre høyre har blitt et veldig populært valg blant velgere over hele verden. Denne oppgaven skal undersøke hvorfor de har fått så mye popularitet.

Nærmere bestemt Europa. Tidsrammen oppgaven fokuserer på er fra slutten av 1990-tallet til i dag. Oppgaven vil gå systematisk gjennom de høyreekstreme partiene i Frankrike, Østerrike, Ungarn og Polen og vise data som er knyttet til deres valgsuksess. Det konseptuelle rammeverket presenteres innledningsvis, data presenteres i midten og mulige forklaringer diskuteres i siste kapitel. Konklusjonen vil skissere funnene som er at høyreekstrem popularitet er knyttet til eksterne faktorer som landets økonomiske situasjon, immigrasjonsraten og antall flyktninger.

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Abbreviations

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

IR: International Relations

EU: European Union

UN: United Nations

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

LREM: La République En Marche!

RN: Rassemblement National (National rally)

FN: Front National (RN's predecessor)

FPÖ: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)

ÖVP: Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party)

KDNP: Keresztyendemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic People's Party)

FKgP: Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt (The Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers, and Civic Party)

MDF: Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum)

PiS: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)

FR: First Round

SR: Second Round

MSZP: Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)

Introduction

The far-right has been around a long time in some form or other. It has taken the form of fascism, right-wing radicalism, and extremism in the past, but now it has emerged as what researchers call the populist radical right (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 1) (Rydgren, 2007, p. 242). This paper will refer to them as the far-right for the sake of clarity. What characterizes the contemporary far-right is that they

“[...] share an emphasis on ethno-nationalism rooted in myths about the distant past. Their program is directed toward strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and by returning to traditional values. They generally view individual rights as secondary to the goals of the nation. They also tend to be populists in accusing elites of putting internationalism ahead of the nation and of putting their own narrow self-interests and various special interests ahead of the interest of the people. Hence, the new radical right-wing parties share a core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and antiestablishment populism” (Rydgren, 2007, p. 242).

With that in mind, why has they then been so successful in both western and eastern European democracies? This paper will discuss the far-right's recent electoral victories in four European countries. Two western countries and two eastern countries. This inherent difference in countries will help make the point that the far-right can flourish regardless of country and culture. The paper will success of France's RN, Austria's FPÖ, Hungary's Fidesz, and Poland's PiS. France and Austria have a left-wing party in office while Hungary and Poland both have a ruling far-right party. This difference is obviously affecting the parties' strategy and agenda, but this paper argues that they are still dependent on certain factors. These factors are the economic situation of the country, the number of immigrants and refugees that are migrating to the country, and the rate of crime.

The thesis is split into three chapters. The first chapter presents the conceptual framework of the thesis. It will go in depth on the core issues of far-right parties as well as how far-right parties relate to economic issues. In chapter 2 the thesis will provide data on the aforementioned factors and connect them to the four countries separately. This is paired with tables describing the electoral results for the far-right parties. Chapter 3 will be a case study. This chapter will do a case study for each country in the light of the data that is presented in chapter 2. Finally, the last part is the conclusion, it will tie up all arguments made in thesis and present a conclusion that is grounded in the literature that has been presented. The study found that there is not a “one-size-fits-all” statistic. The four countries that are part of this paper have demonstrated that their far-right parties are not bound to all the statistics presented. However, the parties' success is still dependent on them to some degree.

Chapter 1 Conceptual Framework

In order to be able to analyze the far right in the countries of France, Austria, Poland and Hungary the paper must first put forth the aspects that characterize the far right and sets it apart from other "ideologies". This section will explain the four main themes of far-right politics according to Cas Mudde: immigration, security, corruption, and foreign policy (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). And lastly, the paper will discuss economic policy in far-right parties and how that is relevant to the thesis.

1.1 Immigration

Immigration is a core issue for many, if not all, populist far-right parties. The immigration issue can also be split into immigration proper and integration. Far-right parties tend to have both as a core issue in their manifesto. The phenomenon of having immigration as a core issue has been especially prominent in North American and European far-right parties (with some exceptions like Brazil and Japan etc.) (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Far-right parties that inherit this core issue often claim that "mass immigration" is a major threat to their way of life and state as they know it. There is a distinction here, however, the more 'extreme' right-wing groups bring a racial bias to the discussion and claim that "western countries are facing a "white genocide" because of mass immigration and state-sponsored multiculturalism" (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). A more recent theory however, is "The Great Replacement" conspiracy theory. This theory is prevalent in a lot of right wing and anti-immigration rhetoric. This theory, that dates back to the late nineteenth century, states that the west is being "overrun" by non-western immigration and by extension is slowly wiping out the original population, being effectively replaced. The politicians and citizens that wield this theory is claiming that immigration is not caused by poverty and insecurity in developing countries, but progressive politicians that invite them to the country they reside in because they either hate their own country or are trying to make up for loss of electorate by bringing in new "votes" from other countries (Mudde, 2019, P. 36). This conspiracy has gained traction with several politicians, most notably Hungarian premier Viktor Orban. He claims that the Jewish US-Hungarian billionaire philanthropist George Soros is the "evil genius" behind the curtain and pulling the strings (Mudde, 2019, p. 36).

Perhaps the most important point regarding immigration policy in terms of the far-right is the "othering" of both native and non-native citizens. Many would maybe consider a citizen that was born in their country and possesses citizenship a native, but this is not the case for far-right supporters and politicians. Calling people that are born and bred in their country immigrants can therefore be seen as demonstrably false (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). What has become particularly popular in the 21st century is the othering of Muslims. Muslims have been a major part of far-right propaganda throughout this century mainly due to islamophobia (which is far from exclusive to the far-right) (Rydgren, 2007, p. 244). But the fear of "Islamization" is very prevalent in far-right speech and messaging. The fear is further backed up with "domestic and foreign developments (that) are combined with conspiracy based on dubious statistics or simplistic narratives" (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Muslims can therefore be put under the far-right rhetorical "umbrella" of things they do not like. The term "alien" is also a term that far-right speakers try to push into public speech. However, under the guise of discreteness, far-right propagators express their nativism in the neutral terms of ethnopluralism. (Rydgren, 2007, p. 244). However, the propagators always argue or imply that their culture I.E the "native" culture is superior to the "alien" one(s) (Mudde, 2019, p. 36).

1.2 Security

Security is, like immigration, a very important issue for far-right parties and supporters. Far-right groups have, however, used the term security in reference to both individuals as well as collectives (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Collectives here represents both nations and racial groups and it brings a cultural, economic, and physical component (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Far-right propagators claim that the nation is constantly facing a threat to the "natural order" which creates insecurity. This insecurity can take the shape of almost anything political. Be it drugs, immigration, unemployment the solution is always an authoritarian policy that favors harsh penalties over incentives, stick over carrot (Mudde, 2019, p. 36). Security is often linked to immigration because far-right propagators claim that "aliens" are the source of the nation's insecurity.

Crime is major factor in security. Crime is of course a major factor in any state's security, and, of course, a threat to a state's monopoly over violence. But according to the far-right, crime is an "alien" issue. Insinuating that natives do not commit crime, but perhaps more aptly, they only focus on non-natives that commit crime. Natives that do commit crimes are primarily "progressive" political elites that are caught for corruption (Mudde, 2019, p. 37). Far-right propaganda is therefore filled with stories of immigrant crimes and crimes committed against natives, further cementing the "black-on-white" narrative. Furthermore, when confronted by statistics showing that crime is declining, they often dismiss it as lies and "fake news" "produced by "the corrupt elite" and their "politically correct" minions to cover up the failures of multicultural society" (Mudde, 2019, p. 37). Tough law and order programs are therefore among the most important issues regarding crime for the far-right. The far-right believe in tougher sentencing for crimes, as well as getting more police officers on the streets (Mudde, 2019, p. 37). Additionally, the far-right do believe in school reform, or rather "deform", meaning that schools should go back to teaching more discipline, respect, and "traditional values" (Rydgren, 2007, p. 242). Within "traditional values" lies the "importance" of a heterosexual family. This is reminiscent of Florida governor Ron DeSantis' "Don't Say Gay" bill that would effectively open teachers to lawsuits if they said anything about homosexuality or even if they were gay themselves (Sopelsa, Bellamy-Walker & Reuters, 2022). The alleged rampancy of crime is therefore blamed on corruption and/or the weakness of mainstream liberal politicians.

How does the far-right propose to solve the rampancy of criminality? Easy, stop immigration. Immigration is after all, the source of "aliens" in the nation. And since crime is almost exclusively an "alien" phenomenon, the ceasing of immigratory operations would solve the crime problem (Mudde, 2019, p. 37). Far-right propaganda then often includes attempts to associate less immigration with more security. And in the post 9/11 world, the far-right have gotten a new reason to try to reduce immigration. Trying to create the association between Islam and terrorism. Since a lot of non-western immigration constitutes Muslims, their slogan then transforms into less immigration = less terrorism. "France's Marine Le Pen even went so far in 2017 as to call multiculturalism a weapon for Islamic extremists and claim that (multicultural) France has become "a university for Jihadists"" (Mudde, 2019, p. 37).

1.3 Corruption

Corruption is the third core issue for far-right groups. Corruption is the one thing that far-right groups can use to target “native” individuals. In fact, charges of corruption are almost exclusively linked to “native” individuals and almost never against “aliens” (Mudde, 2019, p. 38). Corruption through the far-right claims that it is largely the political elite, mainstream politicians, and economic elites that are corrupt. Economic elites are accused of stealing from the people while the political elite (broadly described as “the left”) are corrupting the nation with “postmodernist” and “cultural Marxist” ideas (Mudde, 2019, p. 38). Anti-establishment is therefore a very important narrative for the far-right, pushing the narrative that it is the “pure” people against the corrupt political elite (Rydgren, 2007, p. 245). Corruption is of course a serious and plaguing issue for many countries, ironically, corruption tends to be a larger problem in more authoritarian countries. Far-right parties and groups that reside in a country that actually has corruption issues, however, does not have to invent such allegations, it is however worth noting that politicians from the far-right in countries with corruption tend to have allegations of corruptions against them (LN’s Bolsonaro in Italy for example) (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). The fact remains that in countries that are largely considered to not be corrupt or have trace amounts of corruption, far-right groups still call the mainstream politicians, economic elites, and political elites corrupt. Under corruption one could also put the far-right’s tendency to claim that the political elite are behind rampant voting fraud and the rigging of elections. Like for example Trump’s “stop the steal” crusade during the 2020 US election resulting in the infamous January 6th insurrection at the Capitol. But it is not only financial corruption that the political elite is guilty of. The far-right also claim that the left-wing political elite is also corrupting the minds of the people. A multitude of far-right politicians are accusing academics, artists, journalists, and politicians for being anti-national and poison the minds of the population with Marxist thoughts and ideas (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). Thereby making these individuals traitors of the nation, which is the worst insult a nationalist could utter (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). Far-right propagators also harass organizations as well as individuals “[...] the BJP has harassed domestic and foreign NGOs, including the Ford Foundation and Greenpeace, and has accused left-wing professors of having “occupied” academia and turned the youth against the nation” (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). The corruption of minds is closely linked to parts of “the great replacement” theory. Extreme-right groups being obsessed with “race-mixing” and stating that this is a form of genocide (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). This is frankly just another form of the “white genocide” conspiracy theory, but it is central to far-right thinking and explains why antisemitism is so prevalent in the far-right. Antisemitism is central because, according to the “white genocide” conspiracy theory, “the Jews” are the masterminds behind the subjugation and eradication of the “white” race (Mudde, 2019, p. 40). Corruption as a core issue of the far-right movement shows the populist aspects of their politics. One could even go as far to say that the far-right is in essence a populist movement. They are, after all, often referred to as the “populist radical right” (Lonsky, 2021, p. 98).

1.4 Foreign Policy

The far-right's view of foreign policy or IR are very reminiscent of the theory of political realism aside from the obvious racial overtones that permeates their politics. Thus far-right foreign policy is centered around the interests of your own state and has a pessimistic (realistic) view of other states, in that, every state is out for their own success while simultaneously increasing their own power (Mudde, 2019, p. 41). In spite of this, cooperation in foreign policy is nothing but normal and states are willing to cooperate as long as the cooperation does not interfere with the states domestic policy. The states' domestic policy is the state's primary concern, hence Trump's "America First" policy (Mudde, 2019, p. 41). Perhaps more importantly is the distrust to supranational organizations. Organizations like the EU and the UN are something that far-right leaders actively work against for a new world order. However, they do not really have any clear alternatives for the current world order, let alone a unified vision across country borders of what that could be (Mudde, 2019, p. 41). Far-right groups outside of Europe are more concerned about the UN than anything else. US far-right groups claim that the UN intend to occupy America, and for example Israeli far-right groups claim that the UN is an antisemitic organization controlled by Arab states hell-bent on destroying the state of Israel (Mudde, 2019, p. 42). European far-right groups however, are obviously more concerned about the EU and fear for their loss of sovereignty by "submitting" to EU "subjugation". Euroscepticism started after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and most of the far-right parties became more outspoken against European integration (Mudde, 2019, p. 42). And it only picked up more steam after the refugee crisis of 2015 with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's pro-refugee policy and the EU's failed refugee redistribution plan (Mudde, 2019, p. 42). It is fair to mention that most of the far-right parties does not actually want to leave the EU even though they are thoroughly Eurosceptic. There were a few politicians that wanted to leave, but after the proverbial trainwreck that was Brexit the far-right leaders instead sought to reform the EU and attempt to gain more sovereignty for member states (Mudde, 2019, p. 43). Many far-right groups and parties also have irredentism high on their foreign policy agenda. Especially in central and eastern Europe. Because of the frequent changing of borders many far-right groups think that claiming previously held territories is an important act that must happen (Mudde, 2019, p. 41). An example of this is Hungary's loss of territory after the Treaty of Trianon: "[...] Hungary lost almost two-thirds of its territory – something that all the country's far-right organizations are obsessed with reversing." (Mudde, 2019, p. 41).

1.5 Economy

Most far-right parties perceive the economy as a secondary issue. These parties are smart enough to know that economic issues are less important when the country is going through a period of economic prosperity (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 1). Just like it is more important if the country is going through an economic recession. Sipma & Berning (2021, p. 1) argue that voters are less likely to vote for far-right parties (or populist radical right parties) when the country is going through a recession. This is because of the perception that far-right parties are less competent to deal with economic issues (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 1). Public perception is not that misguided as far-right parties seem to have lackluster economic agendas. Of course, the perception of a country's economic situation can differ from its actual economic position. And the handling of an economic issue could skew the public's perception of the incumbent party if it is handled poorly (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 2). This implies that if a hypothetical economic issue was handled well in an already prospering economy that party would receive less popularity than if that same issue was solved in a reseeded economy. Furthermore, there are major disagreements among far-right parties how the economy issue should be solved.

“[...] Successful PRR parties combine their anti-immigrant and nativist agenda with economic neo-liberalism. In 2004, Kitschelt (2004) updated his claim and argued that these parties shifted to the economic centre, which is empirically supported in Belgium, France, and The Netherlands by De Lange (2007). Others argued that these parties are more economically left-leaning with a more egalitarian and welfare chauvinist ideology (Andersen, 1992; Derks, 2006). The economic ideology even changes within PRR parties, as Ivaldi (2015) showed that the French Front National has moved from the economic right to the economic left.” (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 2).

The far-right's position to economic issues is therefore blurred. The RN's shift to left-wing economic policy could be a result of the recent recession in France which results in public support valuing competence in financial and economic management (Ivaldi, 2015, p. 349). An important and fascinating point is that the far-right “barely mobilizes support when unemployment levels are high or increasing” (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 3). There are two proposed reasons as to why this is. The first is that voters have a fear of downward mobility, and that fear fosters anti-immigration sentiments and by extension far-right voting. People of relative wealth or people living in relatively wealthy countries are therefore likely to vote for far-right parties because of the fear of losing their wealth (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 3). The other reason is that individuals that are less wealthy are more likely to vote for a far-left party in times of economic recession. This is because of the left's better economic agenda and that they tend to be (at least be perceived as) more competent when dealing with financial issues (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 3).

Chapter 2: Data

This section will present data that has been gathered during the course of the semester. The section will start by presenting election results from the four countries of France, Austria, Hungary, and Poland. The purpose of this is to show the trend towards the far-right in both eastern and western European democracies. The second part of this section will present immigration, refugee statistics, crime, and unemployment rates for the four countries. These statistics are being presented to investigate whether there is a connection between far-right popularity and economic factors. In the service of brevity will the following statistics only represent issues on the national level, I.E no election results from regional government nor results from the European parliament. Furthermore, the election results presented will only be from the late nineties (Where applicable) to as close to today as possible (2022). It is also worth noting that even though these four countries have different political systems (Poland’s bicameral semi-presidential system, Hungary’s pluriform multi-party system etc.) the election results presented are still just as reflective of the far-right parties’ popularity as if they all had the same electoral system.

The hypothesis is that one can see an increase to far-right party popularity connected to the increase of immigration, refugee, crime, and unemployment statistics. Based on the arguments of immigration, security, corruption, and economics discussed in the previous chapter, will the following graphs highlight how they relate to real world statistics. Immigration is tied to immigration statistics, refugee statistics is tied to security, crime rate is tied to corruption and unemployment rate is tied to economy.

An acknowledgement must be made about the use of Wikipedia for the election results. Wikipedia is only used for the convenience and tidiness of the tables and bibliography. If this paper were to not use Wikipedia for this, table 1 would have six different source and table 2 would have seven etc. The numbers have been cross-referenced with national news reports and are correct.

2.1 France

France is especially relevant now that the French election is drawing to a close. With LREM’s Emmanuel Macron winning over RN’s Marine Le Pen the second round in the presidential election now on the 24th of April. This year’s election did not break the apparent family tradition of the Le Pen’s losing the presidential election. It was however a significant improvement over the previous elections, getting 23,15% of the votes in the first round and 41.46% in the second round.

RN/FN election results 1995 -2022

Year	Presidential (FR)	Presidential (SR)	National Assembly (FR)	National Assembly (SR)
2022	23.15%	41.46%	N/A	N/A
2017	21.3%	33.9%	13.2%	8.8%
2012	17.9%	N/A	13.6%	3.7%
2007	10.4%	N/A	4.3%	0.1%
2002	16.9%	17.9%	11.1%	1.9%
1995-1997	15%	N/A	14.9%	5.7%

Table 1 (Wikipedia, 2022a).

Regarding this table, Jean-Marie Le Pen was the leader of RN (then FN) up until 2007, and the years after that the party has been led by Marine Le Pen. Additionally, N/A here means that the party did not get enough votes to enter the second round of presidential elections except for in 2022 where the National Assembly election has not yet been held at the time of writing. It is also worth noting that the RN has not won a single presidential election.

Technicalities aside, one can see that the popularity of RN has hovered in a steady 15-18% range for a long time before it really took off in the 2017 and 2022 election. Not enough for a win, but a substantial increase compared to previous election years. The question remains, what is causing the increase in popularity?

French Immigration rate 1990-2015

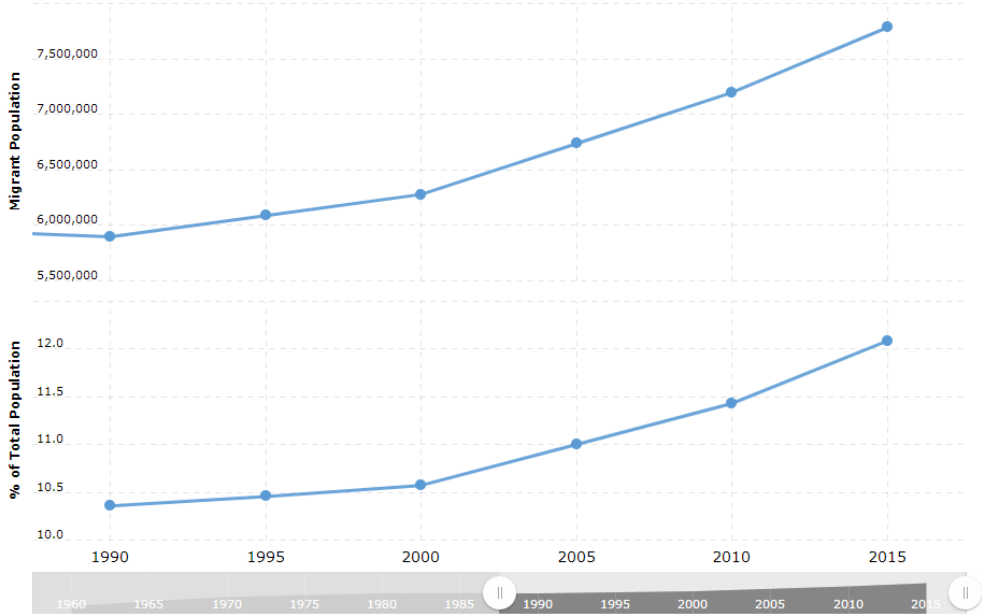


Figure 1 "Immigration Statistics of France from 1990-2015", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/FRA/france/immigration-statistics>)

It is worth noting that this graph has a point every 5 years and not yearly like the other graphs. In this graph one can clearly see the increase in immigration in the timespan 1990-2015. This plays nicely into the hypothesis of this chapter as the increase in immigration matches the increase in RN's electoral results.

French Refugee Statistics from 1994-2020

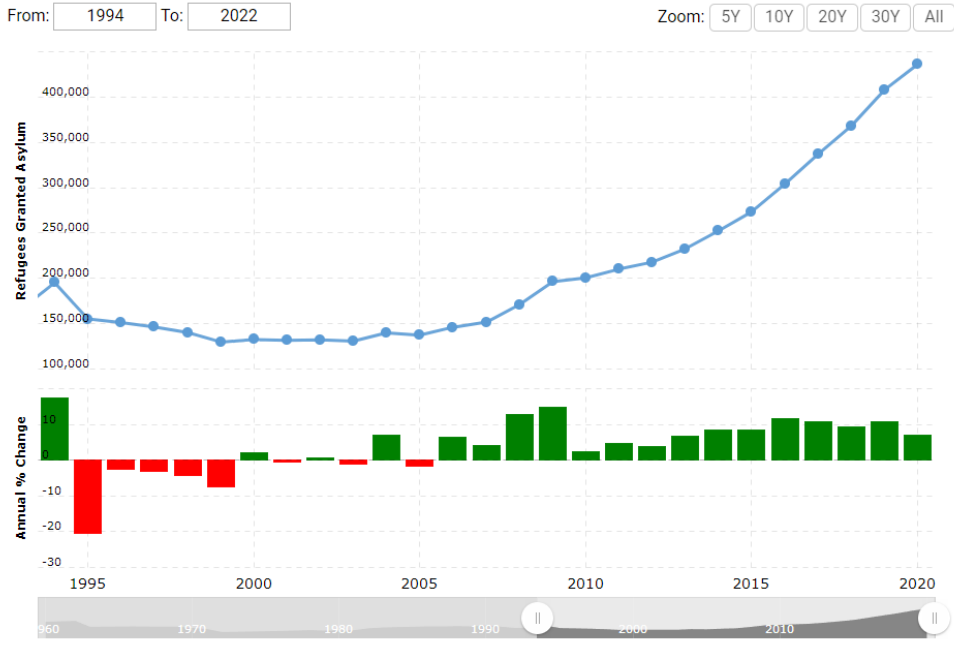


Figure 2 "Refugee Statistics of France from 1994-2022", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/FRA/france/refugee-statistics>)

This graph shows a clear trend towards an increase in accepted refugees. The rate of accepted refugees has been on the rise since 2006 and has never declined since. This fact coincides with the increase of RN's electoral support.

French Crime Rate from 1990-2018

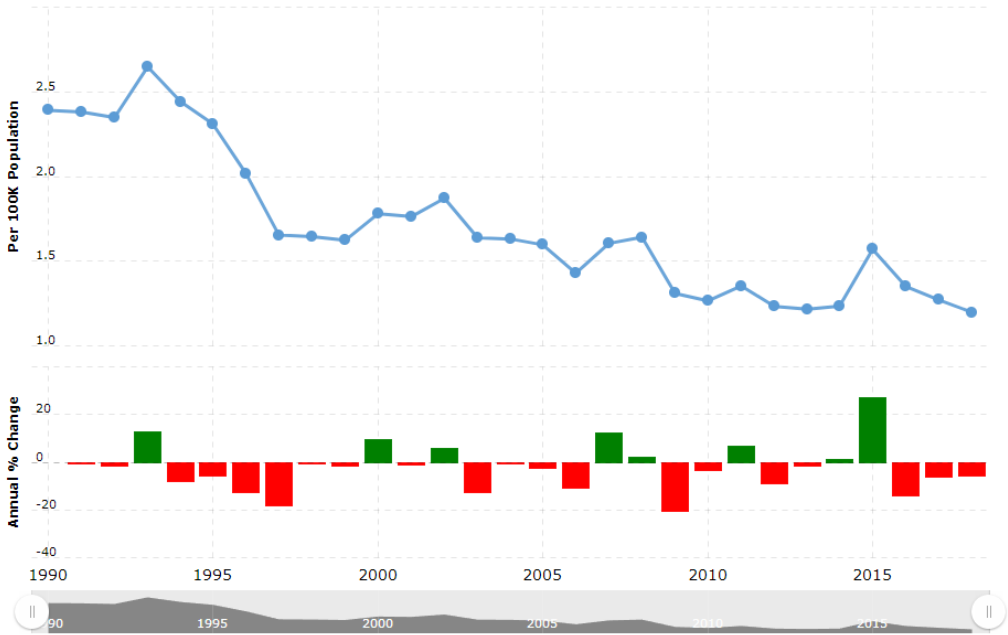


Figure 3 "Crime rate of France from 1990-2018", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/FRA/france/crime-rate-statistics>)

France’s crime rate is turbulent. In the early nineties it is the highest it has been in recent history. But it reaches its peak in 1993 and declines a great amount until 1999. The crime rate then hovers around 2-1.5 range until 2009 where it then hovers around 1-1.5 range with a declining trend in 2018.

French Unemployment rate from 1990-2020

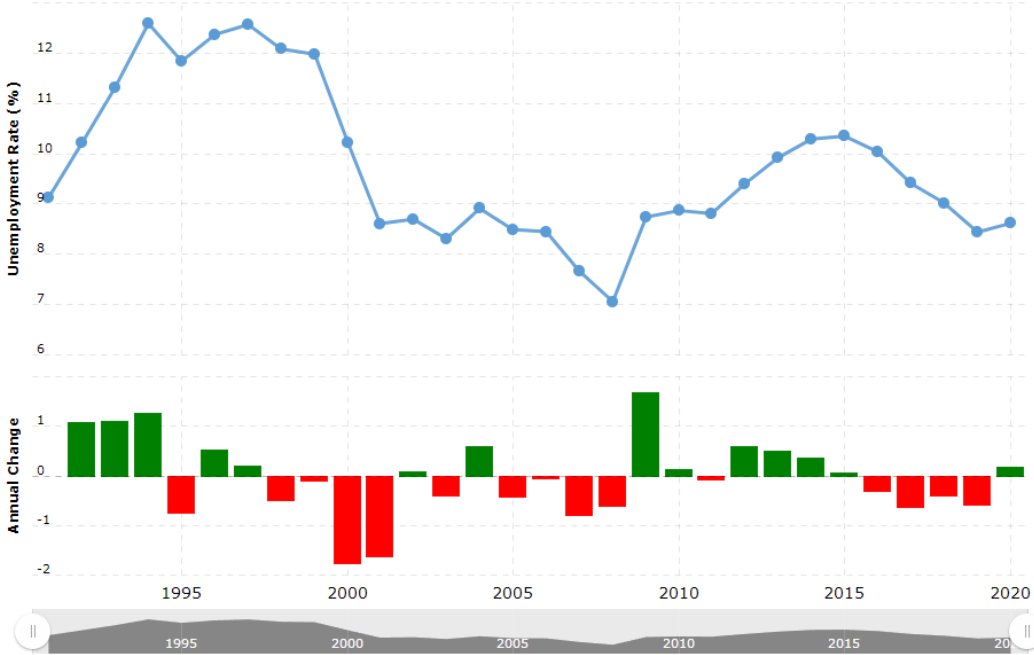


Figure 4 "Unemployment rate of France from 1991 to 2020", 2022, from MacroTrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/FRA/france/unemployment-rate>)

The unemployment rate is similar to the crime rate in that it is high in the early nineties and declines into the 2000s. It is worth noting the “dip” from 2006 to 2008 as this coincides with the worst election the RN has had in recent time. Unemployment is also on the rise from 2010 to 2015, but it then declines until 2019. This coincides with RN’s popularity; it is possible that this is a result of their policy changes in government. It also confirms the claim that far-right parties receive less votes in economic downturn.

2.2 Austria

The Austrian FPÖ is the oldest of the parties that are going to be discussed. And is like France's RN in opposition to the ruling party ÖVP. Austria's far-right party has like RN had increases and decreases in popularity over the years. What is interesting is that they both share the increase in popularity through the 2010s, however FPÖ has a sudden and steep decrease in popularity in the last election, which remains an anomaly and will be discussed in chapter 3.

FPÖ Election results 1999-2019

Year	Leader	Result (%)	Role in government
2019	Norbert Hofer	16.17	Opposition
2017	Heinz-Christian Strache	26	Coalition with ÖVP
2013	Heinz-Christian Strache	20,5	Opposition
2008	Heinz-Christian Strache	17.5	Opposition
2006	Heinz-Christian Strache	11	Opposition
2002	Herbert Haupt	10	Coalition with ÖVP
1999	Herbert Haupt	26.9	Coalition with ÖVP

Table 2 (Wikipedia, 2022b).

This table looks different to the one regarding France's election results. The reason for that is because of Austria's different electoral system and the fact that the party has been led by three different individuals since 1999. Something which is worth highlighting.

Austrian Immigration statistics 1990-2015

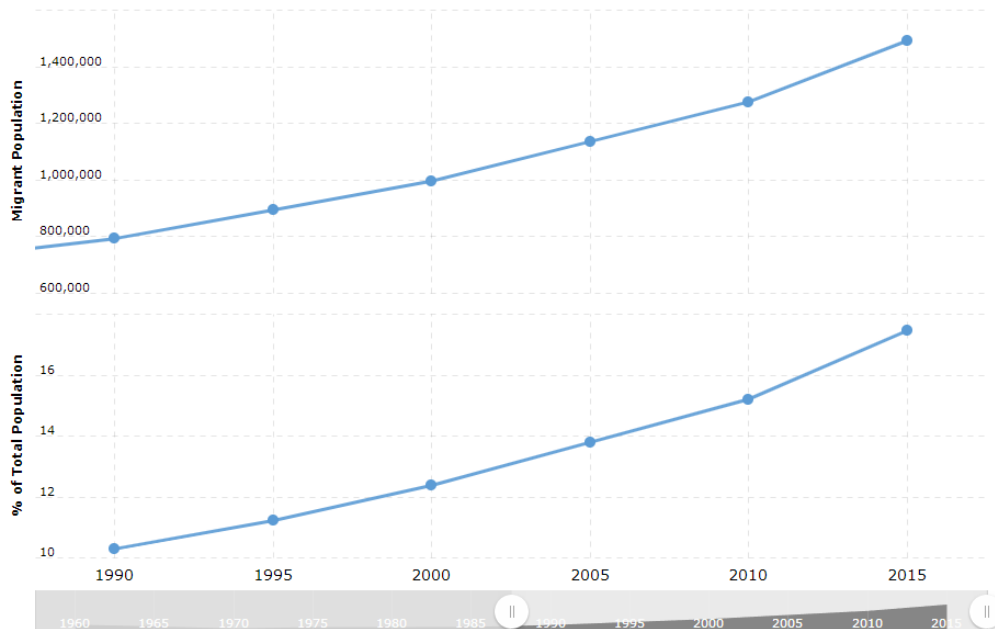


Figure 5 "Immigration Statistics of Austria from 1990-2015", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AUT/austria/immigration-statistics>)

A clear increasing trend in immigration, supporting the hypothesis regarding FPÖ support for anti-immigration.

Austrian Refugee statistics 1998-2020

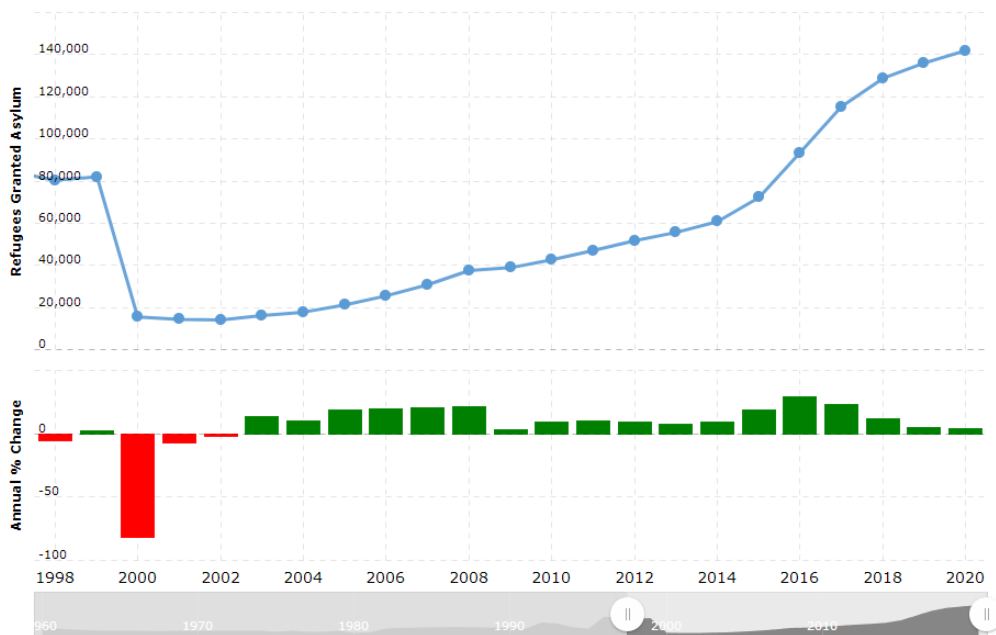


Figure 6 "Refugee Statistics of Austria from 1998-2020", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AUT/austria/refugee-statistics>)

A clear rising trend is shown here in the number of accepted refugees since 2003. This is supporting the hypothesis.

Austrian Crime rate 1990-2018

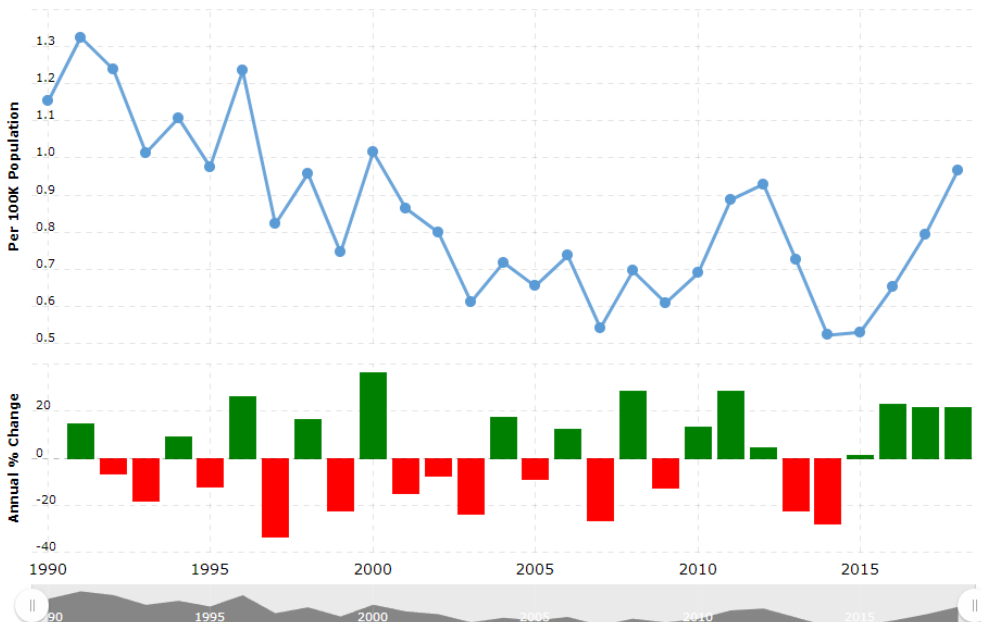


Figure 7 "Crime rate of Austria from 1990-2018", 2022, From Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AUT/austria/crime-rate-statistics>)

This graph shows no clear trend nor correlation to the hypothesis of this chapter.

Austrian Unemployment rates 1998-2020

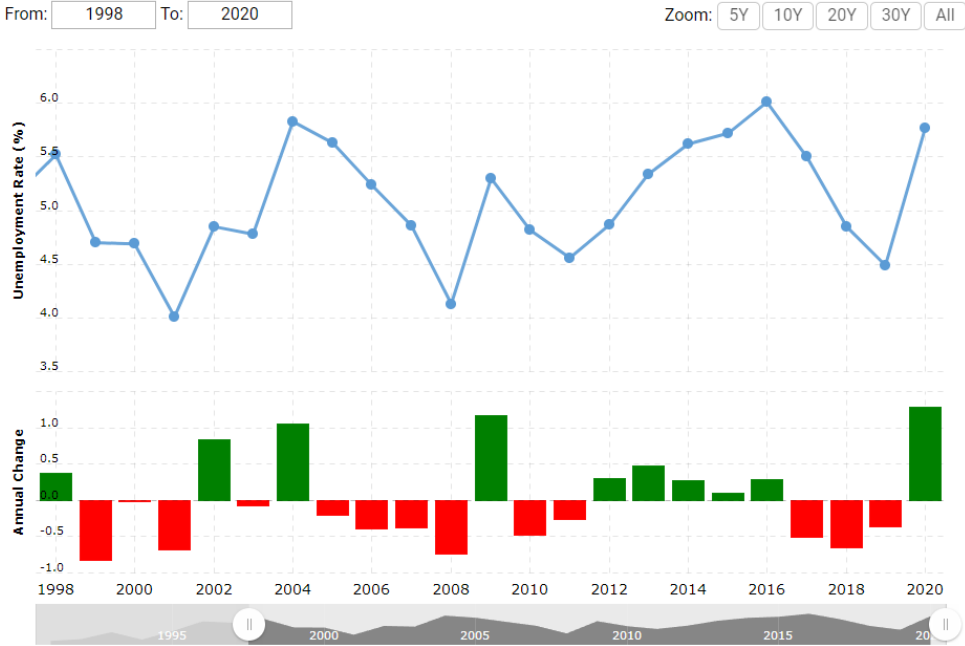


Figure 8 "Unemployment rates of Austria from 1998-2020", 2020, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AUT/austria/unemployment-rate>)

This graph seems to show unemployment rise during the FPÖ’s best election cycles (2008-2017) except for a short period of two years (2010-2012). This shows that the FPÖ’s policies are not that effective against unemployment. And, more importantly, it confirms the claim that far-right parties are doing worse in economic downturn.

2.3 Hungary

Hungary is the first eastern European country to be discussed in this paper. And with that it brings some differences to the western countries of Austria and France. One of the main differences is that in Hungary the far-right is not in a “underdog” position, in fact it is the ruling party, and has been for several election cycles. Viktor Orbán, who has been discussed previously in the paper, is the leader of the party Fidesz which is the current ruling party of Hungary in coalition with KDNP. The election results of Orbán’s party will date back to 1994 to show fidesz’s growth properly. Results dating before the 2006 election is displaying Fidesz led by Orbán on its own before entering a party alliance with KDNP (which happened in 2005).

Fidesz (-KDNP) Election Results 1990-2022

Year	Result (%)	Role in Government
2022	54.13	Winner with KDNP
2018	49.27	Winner with KDNP
2014	44.87	Winner with KDNP
2010	52.73	Winner with KDNP
2006	42.03	Opposition
2002	41	Opposition
1998	28.18	Coalition with FKgP & MDF
1994	7.02	Opposition

Table 3 (Wikipedia, 2022c).

Hungarian Immigration Statistics 1990-2015

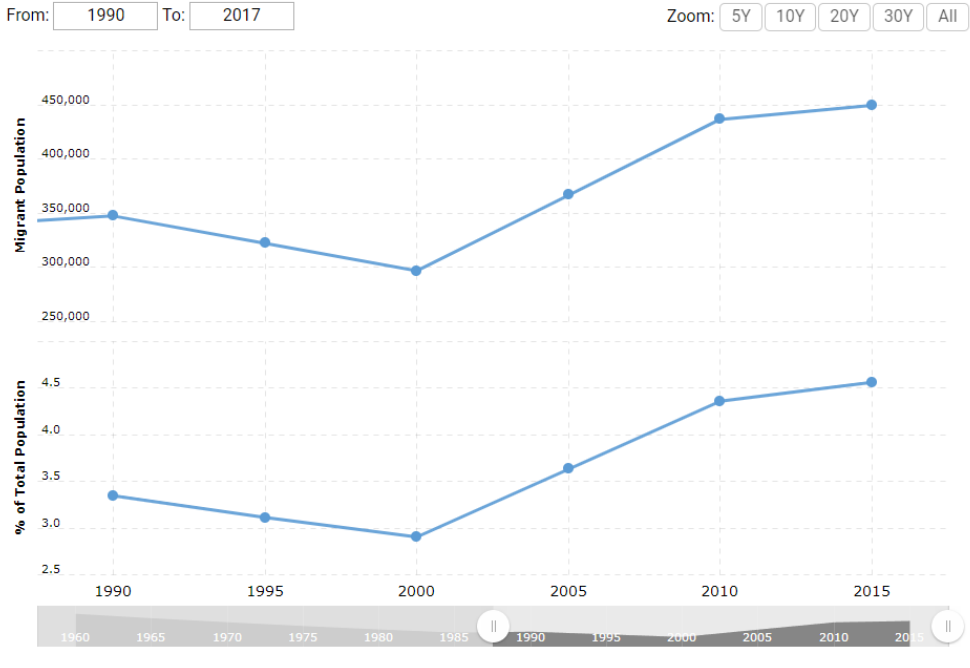


Figure 9 "Immigration Statistics of Hungary from 1990-2015", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/HUN/hungary/immigration-statistics>)

This graph shows a downward trend until the year 2000. It then increases and levels out from 2010 to 2015. It is worth noting here that the immigration numbers are really low compared to France and Austria’s rates.

Hungarian Refugee Statistics 1990-2020

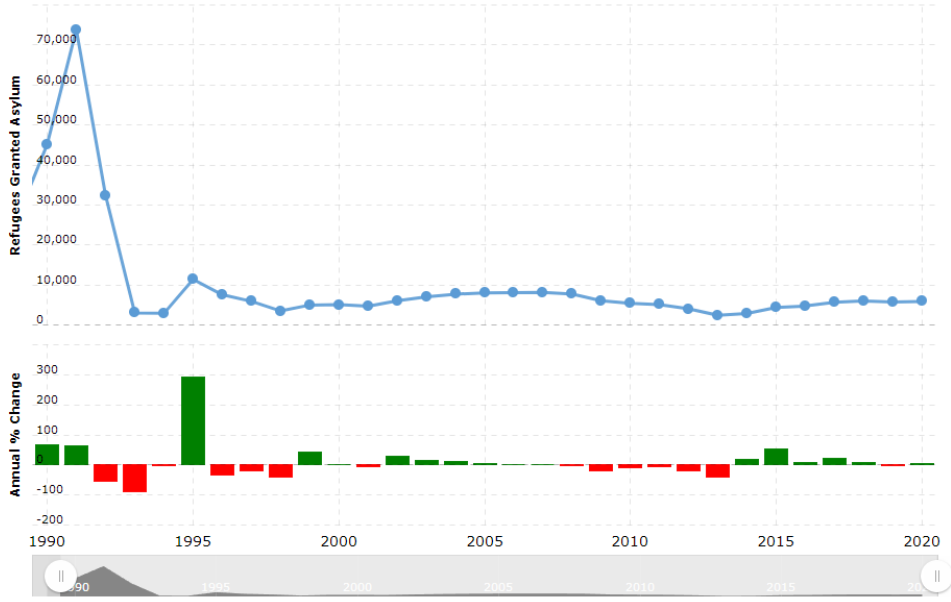


Figure 10 "Refugee Statistics of Hungary from 1990-2020", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/HUN/hungary/refugee-statistics>)

The refugee statistics tell a similar story to the immigration graph. A really high peak in immigration before fidesz got any political power and after they got power the number of accepted refugees became really low. This is more a sign that the refugee statistics are so low because of Fidesz’s policies. Not, like in France for example, where the party is popular because of high immigration and refugee statistics.

Hungarian crime rate 1990-2018

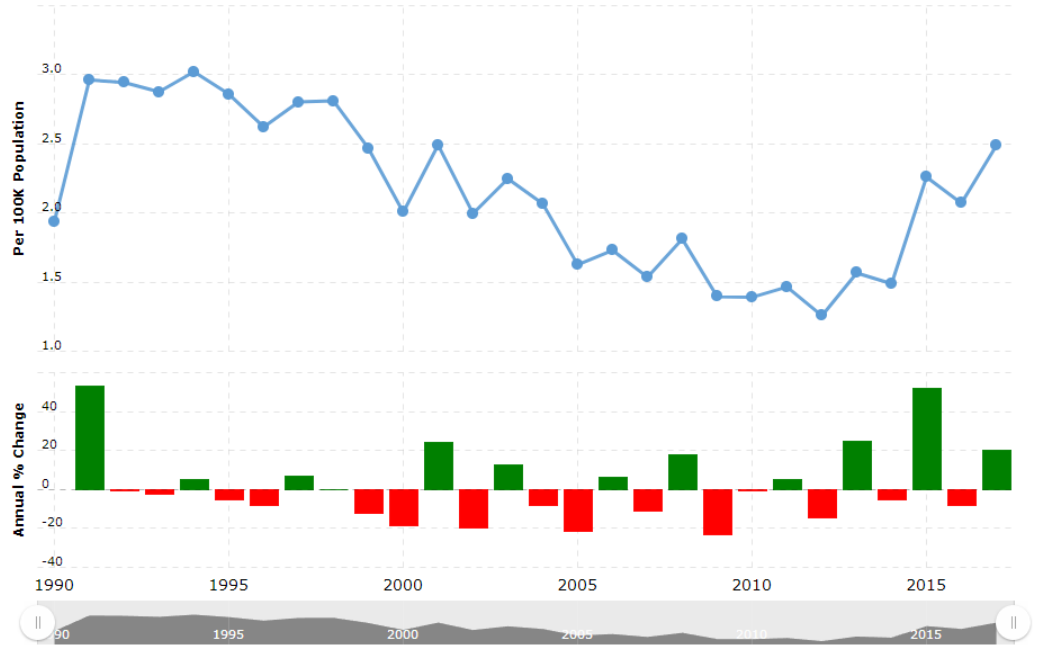


Figure 11 "Crime rate of Hungary from 1990-2017", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/HUN/hungary/crime-rate-statistics>)

Hungary’s crime rate is somewhat unique in the sense that it has a temporary low-point but “bounces” up to about the same levels as decades before. And the fact that it switches between increase and decrease almost each year. This could tell us that Fidesz’s policies do not have a significant effect on crime as the graph is so unpredictable and unstable.

Hungarian Unemployment Rates 1991-2020

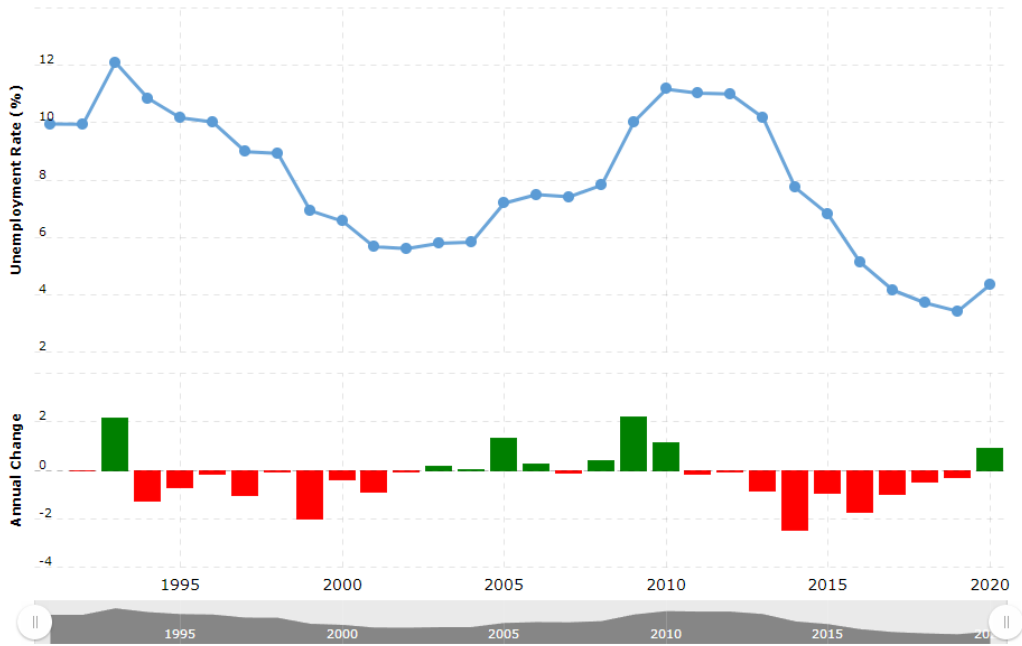


Figure 12 "Unemployment Rates of Hungary from 1991-2020", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/HUN/hungary/unemployment-rate>)

This graph shows the relatively stable unemployment rates of Hungary. One could see that after Fidesz is elected in 2010 that there are three years of very slight decreases in unemployment although very stable. And the years following that they are on a steady decline, indicating that Fidesz’s policies are effective against unemployment and that this is a very probable reason for their continued re-election since 2010.

2.4 Poland

Poland, like Hungary is ruled by a far-right party. The party in question, PiS, has been in power since 2015 and has so far served one term and is halfway into its second. Like the Austrian FPÖ, PiS has had several leaders since its inception and foundation in 2001, the table will reflect that. The first table will present the presidential election and the second table will reflect the parliamentary election. It is important to include both to underline the growth the party has received during the years.

Presidential election Results for PiS from 2005-2020

Year	Presidential FR	Presidential SR	Outcome
2020	43.5%	51.03%	Andrzej Duda Winner
2015	34.76%	51.55%	Andrzej Duda Winner
2010	36.46%	46.99%	Jaroslav Kaczynski Loser
2005	33.10%	54.04%	Lech Kaczynski Winner

Table 4 (Wikipedia, 2022d).

Parliamentary Election Results for PiS from 2001-2019

Year	Result (%)	Role in Government
2019	44.3	Majority Victory
2015	37.6	Majority Victory
2011	29.9	Opposition
2007	32.1	Opposition
2005	27.0	Coalition with SRP & LPR
2001	9.5	Opposition

Table 5 (Wikipedia, 2022d).

It is worth noting that during the 2019 and 2015 elections PiS was in a political alliance called 'United Right'. Despite this however, PiS is still the number one party in the alliance, and it is widely known that PiS is dominating the alliance through their popularity.

Polish Immigration Statistics from 1995-2015

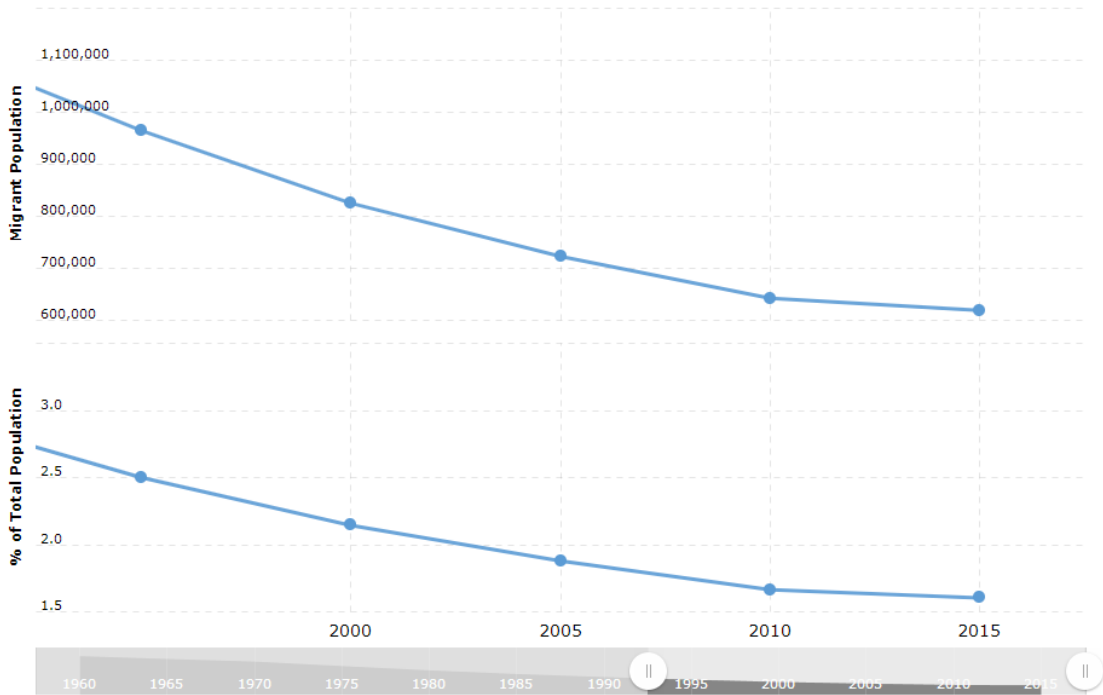


Figure 13 "Immigration Statistics of Poland from 1995-2015", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/POL/poland/immigration-statistics>).

The polish immigration graph represents a steady decline in immigration. This decline in immigration is prevalent long before PiS entered office. But one could make the argument that they might have reinforced the anti-immigration policy after they first entered government in 2001.

Polish Refugee Statistics from 2000-2020

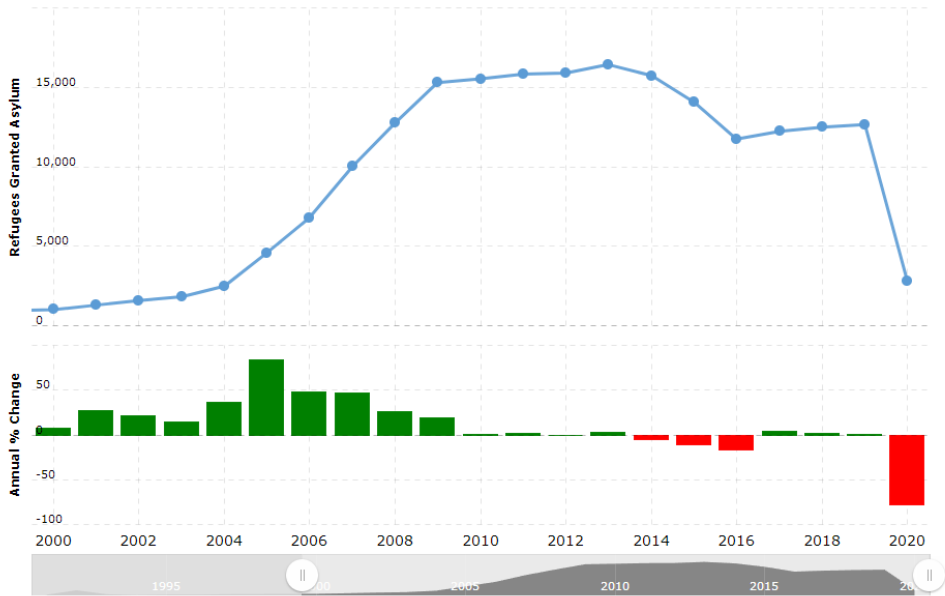


Figure 14 "Refugee Statistics of Poland from 2000-2020", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/POL/poland/refugee-statistics>).

These refugee statistics are interesting because of their apparent increase after PiS took office. Even though the peak is at around 15,000 refugees which is low compared to the western countries, there is a higher acceptance than Hungary. However, one can see a major “dip” in 2020, one could argue that this is a result of their major victory in the 2019 election and subsequent victory in the presidential election in 2020.

Polish Crime rates 1990-2018

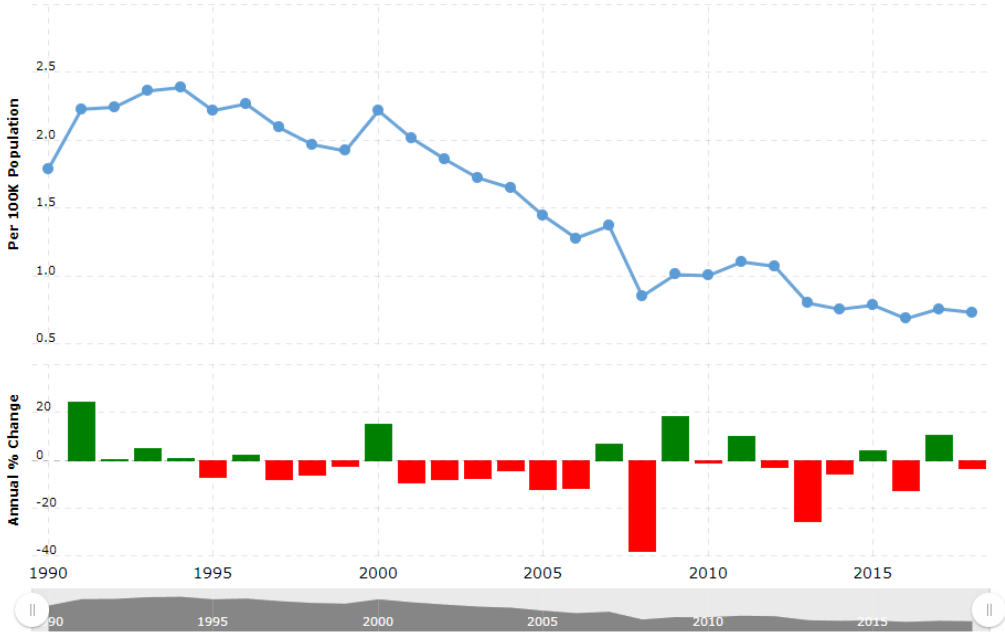


Figure 15 "Crime rate of Poland from 1990-2018", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/POL/poland/crime-rate-statistics>).

This graph shows a clear declining trend in crime. This reflects one of the core issues of PiS. Which is its actual name, Law and Justice. This gives them a strong platform and one could easily argue that this is a major reason as to why they are getting so much support in elections.

Polish Unemployment Rates from 1999-2020

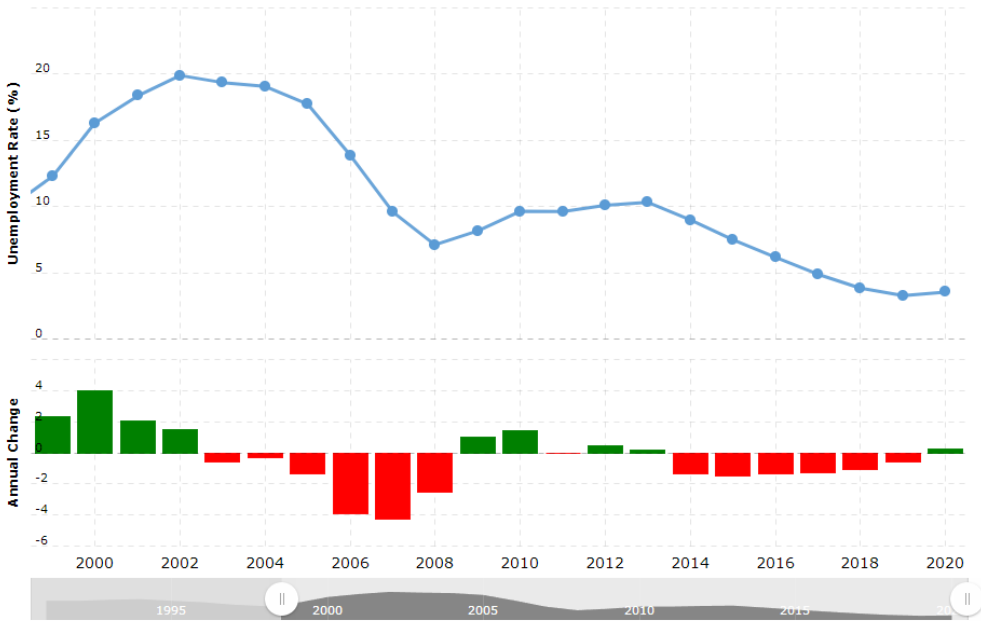


Figure 16 "Unemployment Rates of Poland from 1999-2020", 2022, from Macrotrends (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/POL/poland/unemployment-rate>)

This is too a favorable statistic for PiS. After they first entered office in 2005, unemployment has been on a decline. The exception here is the slight increase from 2009-2013 where it leveled out and started declining again in 2014. One could also easily argue that this is a platform that they have delivered on and is just cause for reelection. This, however, goes against the claim that far-right parties receive less votes in economic recession.

Chapter 3: Case Study

This section will discuss and compare the data presented in the last section. The chapter will start by discussing the data found in chapter 2 in the light of the themes of chapter 1. This section will be structured in the same order as chapter 2. So, France, Austria, Hungary, and Poland in that order. The section will perform a case study into all four countries and conclude the findings in the following section (the conclusion)

3.1 France

Comparing figure 1 and 2 with table 1 shows a clear correlation between RN's electoral success and the number of immigrants. The reason they have yet to win an election could come down to the number of pro-immigrant voters that reside in the country. It is also fair to assume that French immigrants are decidedly pro-immigration. This could in turn "water down" the anti-immigration voters and give more support to the pro-immigration liberal parties. However, France's RN and Austria's FPÖ are still seeing positive numbers despite the pro-immigration immigrant voters. This further enforces the idea that the initial and continuous waves of immigration have enkindled and motivated the anti-immigration voters to the booths. There could be a plethora of reasons for why such a large percentage of the electorate are choosing the far-right parties. It could be xenophobia, fear of losing their job to "aliens", or it could very much be the conspiracy theories that permeates far-right rhetoric. Inventing an immigration problem that they connect to crime, insecurity, and terrorism. The RN's economic platform could also be part of their lack of electoral victory. Like discussed in chapter 1, the RN has shifted their economic agenda to one that a left-wing party would have. Their lack of votes from voters with economy as their core issue could be what was holding them down. And shifting their economic agenda might have helped their cause.

Looking at table 1, one can see that their percentage is increasing every election from 2012. Figures 1, 2 and 3 are all showing the perfect situations where a far-right party can flourish and, frankly, the RN is. Immigration numbers are high which sow discontent from the anti-immigration voters. what is interesting is the "dip" in the RN's voting share in the 2007 election. In table 1 one can clearly see a significant decline from the 2002 election and a significant increase in the 2012 election. So why did they do so poorly in this specific election? One hypothesis is that because of the 2007-2008 financial crisis that shook the whole world is to blame. As previously discussed, the economy is a weak point in the far-right's proverbial "toolbox" and when that crisis hit the world, immigration became a low priority for voters "McMahon (2017) found that the immigration issue became less salient during the 2008 financial crisis" (Sipma & Berning, 2021, p. 3). Refugee numbers are on the rise which (according to far-right propagators) increases insecurity. Especially important is the fact that most of the refugees are from developing and Muslim countries. This is something the far-right connects to terrorism, crime, and insecurity and when these numbers are increasing, people are being incentivized into voting from them. With France and Europe's Muslim population on the rise, is it easy to see how the RN and other far-right parties garner support through their Islamophobic rhetoric (Pew Research Center, 2017). RN's economic policy is an interesting topic that could well be a paper on its own. But within the context of this paper a brief dive is sufficient. As mentioned above, the RN has shifted their economic policy to the left to attract voters that value economic issues. By looking at table 1, one can see that the largest leap in voting shares is from the 2012 election to the 2022

election. By comparing that to figure 4 can one see that the largest decline in unemployment is around the same time, roughly 2014 to 2020. One can then argue that the electoral success in that period can be tied to the fall in unemployment and therefore proving the point that in times of economic prosperity, the far-right's popularity grows.

3.2 Austria

Austria is a country that has a prevalent far-right party, the FPÖ. They have, like the RN in France, been getting consecutive electoral victories during the recent election cycles. Austria has, like France, a rising immigration and refugee rate that shows no sign of stopping. This gives ground to argue for their electoral success. This will be discussed later in the section. What is interesting is the statistics shown in figure 8. Figure 8 shows a relatively low unemployment rate during the years the FPÖ are gaining most votes. Specifically, the 2017 election can arguably be said to have been affected by declining unemployment numbers. The two previous elections do not, however, correlate with this hypothesis as unemployment is on the rise and the FPÖ is increasing their electoral share from 11% to 20% in the course of these elections. It may be that during this time immigration was the "hottest" issue among Austrian voters.

There is, however, an anomaly that seems to go against what has been stated here. Austria's FPÖ seems to be struggling, as in Austria's latest election the FPÖ saw a 10% decrease in popularity (pictured in table 2). With unprecedented refugee and immigration statistics, the far-right should be flourishing in Austria. How then, did they lose so many votes in the most recent election?

FPÖ's incredible loss of popularity could be explained by a similar situation in Finland. The Finnish far-right party 'Finns Party' saw their share of votes decline as a direct result of immigration. The Finns Party like any other far-right party is thoroughly anti-immigration and with an influx of immigrants on an unprecedented scale similar to the one Austria saw. One would expect a surge in votes for the Finns Party because of their anti-immigration stance. But, in fact, the opposite happened.

"Considering the effect of immigration on voting for other parties, I find that the strongly pro-immigration Green League and Swedish People's Party gain votes. Indeed, their positive coefficients roughly add up to the negative estimate for the Finns Party. These positive effects are also relatively large; a 1 percentage point increase in the foreign share increases the Green League's vote share by 23% and the Swedish People's Party's vote share by 57% with respect to the sample means" (Lonsky, 2021, p. 99).

In this scenario the progressive green party and the left-wing Swedish People's Party (who are pro-immigration) gained votes based on immigrant voting. "The IV coefficient from the preferred specification suggests that 1 percentage point increase in the share of foreign citizens in a municipality (68% of the mean) decreases the Finns Party's vote share by about 3.35 percentage points (28% of the mean)" (Lonsky, 2021, p. 99). What happened in the Austrian 2019 election could be a similar situation. The Austrian ÖVP and the progressive Greens finished the election with the best result in over a decade. The Austrian Green party is a very pro-immigrant party which is arguably the party immigrants gravitate to. Resulting in the FPÖ losing votes and the Greens gaining votes. The ÖVP did also see an increase to their popularity, why? One could argue that the votes they received are from voters that used to vote for the FPÖ. Because the

immigration issue is so prevalent and so rooted within far-right and right-wing rhetoric, other parties that are not fully far-right but very conservative and are against immigration can draw some of the voters from the far-right party. Because of the recent changes to the ÖVP's manifesto in 2017 and 2019 one could argue that they have positioned themselves as anti-immigrant in an attempt to attract anti-immigration votes (Abdou & Ruedin, 2021, p. 385).

3.3 Hungary

Hungary is, like Poland, an eastern European country ruled by a far-right party. Fidesz first came to power in the 2010 election and has stayed in power since then with impressive electoral results. As one can see in table 3, the party did not "take off" until the 1998 election where their voting share stayed at a high level until 2010 where they seized the majority victory and has done so ever since. Hungary is of course a very different country compared to western countries like Austria and France. The post-communist background of Hungary is an inescapable thought when discussing eastern European countries, but this study is limited to the four themes discussed in chapter 1 and 2.

Looking at Figure 9, one can see that Hungary's immigration numbers are really low compared to western countries' numbers. Even though they are low, one can see an increasing trend from 2000 and onwards. Since this is such a minimal increase, this paper will deem that statistic unimportant and ultimately inconsequential to Fidesz's electoral performance. Figure 10 shows the refugee statistics of Hungary, and they tell a similar story to the immigration statistic. A really low number of accepted refugees for as long as Fidesz has been in parliament. One could argue that this is a result of Fidesz's policies, but this paper begs to argue that these numbers are not the main reason why Fidesz keeps getting reelected. Fidesz's economic policies are what keeps them in power. By looking at figure 12 one can see an increase in unemployment leading up to the crucial 2010 election. After 2010 the unemployment rate is dropping significantly, almost exponentially. For the sake of transparency does this paper admit to seeing the contradictory nature of this argument. For France and Austria has the paper argued that increases in unemployment are ultimately bad for far-right parties because of their blurred position to economic issues. But "fixing" the economy is an enticing incentive for voters to keep voting for the same party.

"In addition to the scandal surrounding Prime Minister Gyurcsány, Hungary did not fare well economically in the second half of the 2000s as that period experienced the economic crisis commencing in 2008 (Molnar and Doczi, 2020). A combination of political outrage and economic instability led to the landslide 2010 general election victory for FIDESZ, which the party referred to as a 'revolution at the polls'" (Molnar & Whigham, 2021, p. 139).

Their electoral success could then be tied to their performance in the economic crisis of 2007-2008 combined with the political scandal of the ruling party MSZP. As scandals fade away, the takeaway is that Fidesz's economic agenda worked, and voters are more than happy to keep them in power.

3.4 Poland

Poland is, like Hungary, ruled by a far-right party. So, the case here become how they stay in power and how they first got in power considering the information that has already been provided. Looking at table 4 and 5 one can see that straight after their inception, PiS are doing exceedingly well in the elections with the exception of the 2001 election. That can be excused by the fact that the party was founded the same year. Immigration is declining, as shown in figure 13, and since PiS stand for anti-immigration, one would assume that the decline is their doing. But they cannot take full credit, since Poland has never really been a popular place to migrate to (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021, p. 9). But like discussed previously, there is a significant difference in perceived immigration and actual immigration. If the public believe that immigration numbers are high, they are more inclined to vote for far-right parties in the fear of losing national identity or their jobs. Taking into consideration that every fourth Pole believe that their country consists of more than 10% foreigners when it really consists of less than 1%, could one see how the immigration argument helps PiS get re-elected (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021, p. 9). Additionally, looking at figure 14 one can see that the number of refugees is relatively low compared to western countries like Austria and France. Still PiS is proclaiming a "mass migrant invasion". This claim became central to PiS's presidential and parliamentary campaign platform and is a large part as to why they got elected (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021, p. 9).

Another large part of their merits has been what their name says, Law and Justice. Shown in figure 15, can one see that since they entered the political stage crime has been steadily declining, delivering on their promise of clamping down on criminality. PiS are of course connecting Muslims and other minorities to crime, but crime has nevertheless declined since their inception. Unemployment is also something that has declined under their rule. After their first win in 2005, unemployment has been declining. It was, to be frank, already declining before they entered office, but this coincides with the economic hypothesis.

Conclusion

Western European countries are usually governed by a more left-leaning party, often a liberal party. However, as is the case with France and Austria, there are very popular far-right parties that are bringing a thorough challenge in every election. And as shown in table 1 and 2, the parties that represent the far-right have a significant portion of the country's overall electorate. Like discussed in chapter 1, the far-right is very anti-immigration. And under immigration is the acceptance of refugees. Figure 2 and 3 shows the increase to the number of immigrants and refugees that are moving into France. Europe as a whole saw massive immigration spikes after the fall of the Soviet Union by former soviet citizens moving to western countries (the East to West migration) (Lonsky, 2021, p. 98). This immigration shock coupled with the EU's enlargement from 1990s into the 2000s is arguably one of, if not a very likely reason as to why the far-right received such a large spike in popularity.

“The rise of the far-right appears to be driven—in large part—by immigration. Since the early 1990s, Europe has experienced significant migration flows. First was the East to West migration from post-communist countries that began with the fall of the Soviet Union, and accelerated after the EU enlargements in the 2000s. Recent years saw a large inflow of asylum seekers from Asia and Africa fueled by a number of armed conflicts. Both of these immigration shocks likely kindled anti-immigrant sentiments across the continent, contributing to an unprecedented wave of electoral success among far-right parties” (Lonsky, 2021, p. 98).

In western countries it seems to be immigration and economy that is the most prevalent factors for far-right popularity. In France's case, the economy seems to be the most important factor for far-right popularity. While in Austria, immigration seems to be the most prevalent. If the proposed reasons are to be correct at least. In Hungary security and economy is by far the most important issues. Immigration issues seem to be used as a justification for their policies, while they stay in power because of the issues they solve in unemployment. Poland meanwhile is barely affected by immigration, yet PiS are still proclaiming a massive immigration wave and that over a tenth of their population is refugees and immigrants. Their strengths and cause for reelection are however their fulfilled promises of law and order and a strengthened economy with minimal unemployment.

Far-right parties are dependent on factors like the economic situation and how much immigration there is to the country in order to be successful. Admittedly this explanation does not cover all the bases. For example, why is not crime a factor for Austria, when it clearly is for Poland? And taking just one of these statistics and focusing on just one country could be a plethora of other full-length theses on itself. There are obviously some questions of causality, regarding what causes what. Meaning, is it the parties' policies that create the economic situation? or is the party elected because of the economic situation?

The conclusion is therefore: the rise of the far-right is a result of economic situation, perceived immigration numbers, and the extent of false xenophobic, Islamophobic and nationalist propaganda.

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