

From Equal Rights to Far-Right: A study of the role of women in the political and social legitimization of far-right movements.

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"I'm not a misogynist, I respect any woman who knows her place."

- Stephen Braithwaite

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ABSTRACT

During the last 10 years there has been a disturbing global political trend. Indeed, far-right movements have been on the rise in both Europe and the United States, and they have already had documented effects on the decline of Western liberal democracies. Their draconian views on race and gender, along with their penchant for authoritarianism are driving factors in a need to better understand how these movements rise in popularity despite their polarizing and extreme views. While there exists a vast collection of literature on the topic, one element remains under studied and will be the subject of this paper. The question of gender remains a guiding principle in the ideology of the far-right. However, those who study these movements often disregard the role women play in the popularization of these political parties. This paper seeks to close that gap by outlining what role women play in the social and political legitimization of far-right movements. This is illustrated using two case studies: The Jobbik party in Hungary and the Republican Party in the United States. Despite the existing gender gap among the supporters of the far-right, the number of female supporters continues to rise. Women are clearly seeing a benefit to adhering to and participating in this ideology. Understanding this phenomenon is essential to understanding the movements and ways to counter them.

List of Abbreviations

ADL: Anti-Defamation League

CAWP: Center for American Women and Politics

CPAC: Conservative Political Action Conference

GOP: Grand Old Party (another name for the Republican Party)

KKK: Klu Klux Klan

NGOs: Non-governmental organizations

WASP: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant

Introduction

“The globalists can all go to hell” declared Viktor Orbán during his opening remarks as one of the most important guests at this year’s CPAC conference in Texas. His presence, along with the entirety of his remarks, are stark reminders of the growing affinity between the far-right in the United States and in Europe. Moreover, they are a representation of a disturbing global trend spanning the last decade. Orbán has been Prime Minister of Hungary for 12 years and has served as a global role model for other far-right political figures and parties. His presence at the 2022 CPAC conference raised eyebrows as he overtly sided with an opposition party – the Republicans – rather than the governing Democrats (Smith, 2022). Despite Orbán being an outlier in Europe for the moment, the trend continues with Marine Le Pen in France gaining the far right’s biggest share of votes yet in the most recent presidential election. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni, head of the political party with a history of neofascism, was just elected Prime Minister and is slated to be the most right-wing leader since Benito Mussolini. Back in the United States, Donald Trump has just announced his candidacy for the 2024 presidential election in a political climate much less favourable than expected. Indeed, the midterms were predicted by many to be in the Republican’s favour, some going as far as stating there would be a “red wave”. However, as the results continue to trickle in, the most extreme – and often Trump-backed candidates – were widely rejected by voters and the Republicans barely won the House. This was far from the expected Republican gains on which Trump was hoping to build on when announcing his candidacy. Only time will tell if this trend continues into the Presidential elections or if the Republicans can regain some momentum. Generally speaking, the far-right is continuing to establish its roots in mainstream American politics

and its rhetoric is being legitimized both in political and social circles, despite recent setbacks.

While the sentiments of the far-right aren't new, they have visibly been propelled into the mainstream over the last decade and have had disastrous consequences on Western liberal democracies like the United States and Hungary. This topic has been and continues to be the subject of a large variety of research in academic fields. However, significant gaps still exist in the literature to better understand their rise in popularity and the political and social legitimization of some of their most polarizing stances. One of the most important gaps is the role of gender, more precisely women, in far-right movements. Indeed, often the role of women is understudied and underestimated as it relates to the social and political legitimization of these movements. There are many reasons as to why the role of women is understudied and will be further explored below. This paper begins to explore these gaps by asking: what is the extent of the role women play in the political and social legitimization of far-right movements, specifically when looking at Hungary and the United States?

Why study women in the far-right?

As mentioned above, the rise of far-right movements globally poses a threat to existing liberal democracies and could eventually lead to a loss of freedoms, as seen with the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling against abortion. Considering this threat, it is important to fully understand these movements, how they are formed, how they are legitimized and, eventually, how to counter them. In order to do so, all elements must be studied, including the role of gender in the political and social legitimization of their once fringe rhetoric. Contrary to popular perception, women play a key and integral role in far-

right movements and their influence has grown in the last decade. According to a 2018 study in European countries such as Poland, Greece, Hungary, Germany, Sweden and France, more and more women are considering the far-right parties as a viable solution to rebalance socio-economic and political dissatisfaction (Taube, 2018). Indeed, academics such as Iyer and Jain (2021) have stated that “evidence suggests that the gender gap in far-right support decreasing”. Moreover, women are increasingly playing not only a supporting role, but are also becoming members and leaders, bolstering their influence and prominence within the movement. As the paper will explore below, women are key in the softening of the fringe far-right rhetoric that may have alienated voters from joining previously. Their participation within far-right movements not only help disseminate their messaging more broadly, but they also allow the parties to be seemingly more representative of the society they are trying to change. As Eksi (2021) explains, “these women are there to give these parties a more open, modern guise and to appeal to female voters”. Considering these elements, women are an important but overlooked variable in the rise of far-right movements and their influence should be better understood.

More personally speaking, this research question is important to me for a variety of reasons. Firstly, I have dual citizenship – both American and Canadian with close family members still living in states like Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. While it is expected to have political differences with family members, it was especially jarring to witness their radicalization in real time. Indeed, certain values that I thought transcended political parties were quickly forgotten once Trump announced he was running for office. What was even more surprising to me was the women in my family, who are extremely well educated and well-rounded individuals, be easily influenced by the far-right rhetoric being touted by

Donald Trump and the Republicans during his time as President. While the broader question of why my family, along with so many Americans, could have shifted so easily to the far-right has been with me since 2016, the question of the role of women in the legitimization of this rhetoric dawned on me more recently. After four years of low approval ratings, blatant corruption, abuse of power, and a disastrous pandemic response I expected the 2020 presidential elections to be overwhelmingly tilted in the Democrat's favour. At the least, I was expecting Donald Trump's base to shrink, especially women and non-white voters. However, once the National Election Pool (2020) came out with their data as it related to gender and their voting patterns – I was shocked. Data demonstrated that Trump had gained more support from women in the 2020 election compared to 2016. The percentage change was even more significant with white women voters. This led me to research the role of gender and women in far-right movements to try and understand why women would be persuaded to vote and join parties of this nature. Once I started researching, I realized very quickly that there was a clear gap within existing literature and writing this Major Research Paper is my attempt to make a small contribution to this very important and overlooked topic.

Defining concepts

Before moving forward, it is important to provide a brief overview of the concept of far-right movements more broadly. As it will be explored more in depth later in the paper, the far-right is a broad term that can have various definitions depending on which political climate or country it is applied too. However, despite these variations, there are three main pillars of this ideology that are found in almost all its forms: nativism, authoritarianism, and appeals to “tradition” (Mudde, 2007). These concepts will be further

defined and explored later in the paper. One pillar will be of focus for the introduction: the far-right's appeal to "tradition" which often criticizes modern approaches to issues such as gender and sexuality which usually takes the form of culture wars, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and the unequal status of women. Surprisingly, despite the openly sexist and anti-women rhetoric touted by the right, women are still joining the movement, in ever-growing numbers.

Traditionalism

In this paper, a wide variety of concepts will be used to analyze far-right movements. This paper explores the concept of Traditionalism in the far-right. According to Berard (2020) traditionalists believe that there is a "single unified Tradition, a cluster of universal wisdom and lore that once held all humanity together in harmony". In other words, Classical Traditionalists believe that Tradition does not come from the traditions (small-'t') of any given culture or nationality. For far-right movements, their goal is to restore or protect this tradition from outside forces that seek to change it. According to them, should Traditions be lost or changed, mankind would experience a fall. Moreover, as Berard (2020) explains, the far-right believes that the only way to improve as individuals and societies, is to get back in touch with their definition of 'Tradition'. However, modern Traditionalists, represented for instance by well-known far-right media executive and political strategist Steve Bannon, believe that Tradition and tradition are the same, the ways of the past of a given people make up the 'Tradition' far-right movements seek to restore a better society and country (Berard, 2020). Traditionalism, however, as its defined, relies on mythology based on cherry-picked 'victories' of the past and comparing them to the current reality that they deem as failing. Examples of traditions to protect according to

Traditionalists include ‘traditional’ marriage, ‘traditional’ respect for law and order, ‘traditional’ holiday celebrations, etc. (Berard, 2020). There are clearly racist and homophobic undertones to what can be considered ‘traditional’ by far-right movements in the United States and Europe. Indeed, there is a clear rejection of globalism, which promotes and celebrates diversity and the mixing of various cultures in society. This poses a direct threat to the T/traditions that need protection according to far-right movements. More precisely, T/traditions are often as way for the far-right to mask their racist motives by protecting the “white” culture from being influenced or mixed with other races and cultures. In other words, T/traditions are tools used by the far-right to keep their countries racially ‘pure’.

Feminism

Feminism as a concept has a variety of uses and meanings, and they are often contested within the academic community that studies it. Indeed, what may seem like a concept simple to define with a shared quest, feminism, and its various definitions are based on a wide variety of social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena. In the name of simplicity, the definition chosen for this paper is the one outlined by McAfee (2018). McAfee (2018) describes feminism as both “an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms” and, necessarily, implies gender equality. This definition was chosen as it provides a broad enough picture of the goals of feminism that can be applied both in the American and Hungarian contexts.

Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism is an important concept in the context of this paper as it is often used to describe certain political actors on the far right. This ideology is predominantly found in the United States, but its principles have influenced far-right movements around the world. Neoconservatism is neither libertarian nor classically conservative, however, it shares similarities. Similar to libertarianism, as defined by Chamberlain (2021), neoconservatism emphasizes free markets, privatization, and economic growth, but is “much more comfortable with a strong state in other areas, including criminal justice, foreign affairs, and cultural issues”. Domestically, neoconservatives promote the importance of law, order, and traditional cultural values. Moreover, Chamberlain (2021) continues by explaining that neoconservatives believe that a healthy democratic culture can only be preserved “if the state takes an active role in preserving it”, sharing similarities with classical conservatism’s desire to preserve social health. Neocons achieve these goals by supporting strong and active police forces, harsh criminal punishments, and government censorship of materials that threaten traditional values (Chamberlain, 2021). In the context of this paper, neoconservatism is often used to describe certain policies within the Republican Party, in which many have broken ranks with the traditional conservative wing and are directly related to but also preceded the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

Traditional Conservatism

Broadly speaking, conservatism as a social attitude has always existed. Outside of political definitions, the term conservative expresses the fear of sudden change and tendencies of habitual actions. Conservatism as an ideology has been the subject of much debate between scholars as it relates to defining it. As Hamilton (2019) explains,

conservatism can be characterized as an “approach to human affairs which mistrusts both a priori reasoning and revolution, preferring to its trust in the experience and in the gradual improvement of tried and tested arrangements”. Kekes (1997) argues similarly that conservatism, “contrasts with liberalism and socialism in rejecting a priori value-commitment”. While defining this ideology remains a complex endeavor, Hulgreen (2022) presents a simplified definition as follows: classical conservatism “is a political philosophy emphasizing the need for the principles of natural law and transcendent moral order, tradition, hierarchy, organic unity, classicism, high culture, and the intersecting spheres of loyalty”. In the context of this paper, conservatism will be used both in the political sense, using the definition above. However, the concept will also be used in the social sense, whereas individuals are guided by conservative values such as tradition, family, religion, and the importance of preserving the state.

Liberalism

Much like the concept of conservatism, liberalism is a dizzying concept to define with a wide variety of definitions at our disposal. As Shklar (1998) explains, the concept of liberalism has been overused and is the subject of ideological conflict, rendering it an ‘all-purpose word’ employed for both abuse and praise. For the purpose of this paper, a single definition will not be provided. Rather, a set of values and elements of liberalism will be outlined to properly portray the ideology in all its nuances. Shklar (1998) defines liberalism as a “political doctrine” with “only one overriding aim: to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom”. Gerstle (1994) adds that liberals represent the foundational principles of “rationality, emancipation, and progress”. Dunn (1991) furthers this thought by stating that liberalism includes political

rationalism along with a “hostility to autocracy, cultural distaste for conservatism and tradition, tolerance, and individualism”. Essentially, as defined by Duncan (2014), liberalism, as it is understood, is “constructed from the interpretations of the meaning and inter-relation of core concepts such as liberty, authority, autonomy, and equality”. These values are essential to understanding the concept of liberalism and the critiques it faces from conservatives and the far-right. They reject liberalism’s embrace of modernity and progress to return to a more ‘traditional’ way of living. Liberalism, to the far-right, represents the catalyst to the current issues countries are facing and it is their goal to rid the world of the ideology and promote theirs instead. As Mounk (2018) outlines, liberalism is defined by institutional checks to executive power in service of the rights of individuals and minorities. There exist three main institutional checks within liberalism: the media, parliament, and the court. Populism attacks these institutions to erode the strength of liberalism.

Ethnonationalism and its related ideologies

When defining ethnonationalism, it is important to present it as distinct from other ideologies such as White ethnocentrism (Kinder & Kam, 2010). Thompson (2020) defines ethnocentrism as the act “by which an individual or a group of individuals from a common ethnocultural group judge another’s culture relative to the preconceptions of the values and standards of their own ethnic culture”. The concept of white identity also plays into the ideology of ethnocentrism. Indeed, white identity is a highly politicized concept within the far-right in both Europe and the United States and is a driving factor in their recruitment strategy. Jardina (2019) defines this as a lens through which many ‘Whites’ interact and engage with the political world. In this view, those who are racially aware and identify

themselves as White feel as though they are discriminated against as a racial group, and thus support collective action to maintain their dominant status (Thompson, 2020). Ethnonationalism then is “linked with an emphasis on the importance of the ingroup – in this case, members of the national ethnos – at the expense of putative outsiders” (Thompson, 2020).

Unlike ethnocentrism and the concept of White identity, ethnonationalism per se is not necessarily linked to race. White ethnonationalists are thus of American or European ancestry/descent and “differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups via the use of cultural markers” such as “their ability to speak English (or the dominant language in their respective country) and their Christian faith” (Kaufmann, 2018).. Anyone who does not fit in this ethnicity is thus a threat to the far-right movement, hence their opposition towards diversity and immigration from countries whose population is seen as non-White. The definition of Christian nationalism feeds into this as it is a foundation of many far-right movements both in the United States and in Europe.

Miller (2021), defines Christian nationalism is the “belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way”. In other words, America (or any other nation in which the far-right movement is politically significant) is and must remain a “Christian nation”. For Miller (2021), this is a “prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future”. Scholars such as Samuel Huntington argue that America is defined by its Anglo-Protestant past, and it will “lose its identity and its freedom if it does not preserve its cultural inheritance”.

Christian nationalism is often linked with nativism. As Mudde (2017) explains, nativism is almost exclusively an “American concept that is rarely discussed in Western

Europe.” Originally born in the 19th century, nativism used to portray Catholic immigration from countries like Germany and Ireland as a threat to native-born Protestant Americans. According to Friedman (2017), in Europe, the concept of nativism is often replaced with ultra-nationalism or xenophobia or racism. Mudde (2017) describes nativism as “xenophobic nationalism” that is an ideology that promotes a “congruence of state and nation – the political and cultural unit” and wants “one state for every nation and one nation for every state”, thus perceiving all non-natives as ‘threatening’. However, it is not only non-natives that are a threat, but it can also be ideas. Nativism has arisen often throughout America’s history and is often popularized when people feel the harmony between state and nation has been degraded (Mudde, 2017). In the case of this paper, Christian nationalism and nativism will be essential in understanding both the far-right movement in Hungary more broadly and specifically as it relates to the Republican Party in the United States. These concepts are the foundation of their ideologies and are a driving factor in recruiting both men and women to their ranks.

Populism

Populism is on the rise in both the United States and Europe and was a crucial factor explaining the election of Donald Trump in 2016. This paper will be using Mudde’s (2017) definition which states that populism is the idea that “society is separated into two groups at odds with one another – the pure people and the corrupt elite”. For Benjamin Moffitt, a true populist leader claims to speak on behalf of the unified “will of the people” and seeks to fight an “enemy”, usually represented by the “liberal elite”.

It is important to note that populists can also originate from the left. However, as Mudde (2017) explains, the most successful populists currently are on the right. Moreover,

in the context of this paper, the focus will be on right-wing politicians both in the United States and Hungary. While populism may vary from one country's context to another, politicians that fall into this category on the right often combine populism with anti-immigrant nativism and authoritarianism (Molloy, 2018). Populism on the right in Europe and the United States arose in part due to societal changes such as multiculturalism, globalism, and other more concrete crises. Specifics relating to these social changes elaborated by Molloy (2018) will be further explored in this paper in the sections related to Hungary and the United States.

The History of Women in Far-Right Movements

As this paper will demonstrate, there is a significant debate between scholars when it comes to the role women play in the far-right movement and their motives for adhering to the ideology. These disagreements are examples of the lack of research and information related to the role gender plays in popularizing this ideology. As Provost and Whyte (2018) outline, the far-right is often seen or assumed to be filled with misogynistic and anti-women rhetoric. This often leads the role of women in this movement to be underestimated or even ignored, damaging our ability to better understand how these political parties rise in popularity. However, there is a documented history of women's participation in far-right movements in the last century. Historian Linda Gordon estimates that at least 1.5 million American women were members of the KKK in the 1920s, including one-third of all white Protestant women in Indiana. Beyond the sheer number of women in the KKK at the time, they also played a vital role in the group. They organized Klan rights of passage, baptisms, graduations, marriages, and funerals (Gordon, 2020). As Gordon explains, these women "may not have been vigilantes themselves, nevertheless, supported vigilantism".

During World War II, German women were actively involved in the Nazi movement despite the party's propaganda that a woman's place was strictly in the home as mothers and child-bearers. Estimates place roughly thirteen million active German women in the Nazi Party who helped further the regime's goal of "racial purity, imperial conquest, and global war" (Holocaust Encyclopedia). As Lower (2013) explains, women in the Third Reich had internalized the Nazi's racist rhetoric and sought "careers, paychecks, and independence", The Nazis presented a better alternative to their current reality and allowed these women to leave the "repressive laws, middle class mores, and social traditions" that were "regimented and oppressive" (Lower, 2013). As Lower (2013) details, their roles ranged from regular office work among the occupational elite to the killing fields of Eastern Europe, where some of the worst atrocities of the war were carried out. Roughly 30,000 women are estimated to have been directly involved in the planning and execution of the Holocaust, demonstrating that women have played a very real and active role in history's most brutal far-right regimes (Lower, 2013). Evidently, women have historically participated in far-right movements. However, historians have been influenced by "prevailing prejudices about the 'apolitical nature of women', and women's supposed 'predilection for the domestic sphere'" (Provost and Whyte, 2018).

The Gender Gap in Far-Right Movements

There is a well known and well studied gender gap between men and women as it pertains to their voting patterns. Indeed, in the United States, Pew Research Center survey data was analyzed back more than two decades and showed a significant gender gap in partisan affiliation between men and women (Pew Research Center, 2020). More precisely, in 2018 and 2019, women favoured the Democratic Party with 56% of them either

identified or leaned towards the party. Only 38% of the women surveyed identified as Republican or leaned towards the GOP (Pew Research Center, 2020). In contrast, 50% of men identified as Republicans or leaned towards the GOP, while only 42% identified or leaned Democrat (Pew Research Center, 2020). This same trend was observed in Europe during a comparative analysis of voting behaviours in 12 EU countries with women favouring left parties over right parties, and men doing the opposite (Giger, 2009). This is departure from the traditional gender gap in which men were more left-wing than women in ideology and voting pattern. Scholars now refer to the gender gap switch as the “modern” gap, where women are more left-wing than men (Shorrocks, 2015). Despite this switch, the rise of far-right movements in Europe has shaken up the “modern” gender gap, as it continues to narrow, albeit slowly, in countries where these movements are gaining traction.

While there continues to be a gender gap between men and women when it comes to the support of far-right movements, Jain and Iyer (2021) explain that there has been a sharp and documented increase in women supporters globally, thus decreasing the existing gap. Academics have studied this question and have landed on a variety of hypotheses. Kimmel (2007) explains that the gap originally existed because of the masculine character of far-right parties. Gidengil et al. (2005) believe that a contributing factor to women pivoting back towards the far-right is due to the different levels of religiosity between men and women, while Fontana et al., (2006) believe that gender has influenced anti-immigration attitudes and differences in political interests. Despite what was previously outlined, Elverich (2007) has raised the question that these kinds of statements can be incorrect perceptions that could easily lead us to wrongly interpret the phenomenon.

Evidently, the existing explanations do not provide us with a comprehensive enough picture to understand the relationship between women and the far right. Thus, this paper seeks to reframe the question, by understanding the role women play in the parties and how this contributes to the political and social legitimization of these movements. More precisely, it will look to explore how this manifest in both the Jobbik party in Hungary and in the Republican Party in the United States. The goal will be to outline women's roles in their respective parties, determine the differences and similarities between both countries and conclude how these contribute to the party's rise in popularity.

The Far-Right, The Radical Right, The Right Wing, or The Extreme Right?

There exists a considerable amount of literature attempting to define and differentiate between terms such as the Far Right, the Radical Right, the Right Wing, and the Extreme Right. Scholars in this field tend to prefer the usage of 'Extreme Right' over 'Far-Right' as it evokes the idea of political extremism (Rush, 1963) and could be considered less vague than other options. While it is a complex term to define as its definition changes depending on the political and social context, extremism, essentially, can be defined as any political theory that holds to "uncompromising and rigid policies or ideology" with its followers acting in a manner that is "far beyond the norm" (Public Safety Canada, 2009). For this paper, far-right was chosen as the appropriate term as it also incorporates some aspects of mainstream conservatism which have been pivotal to their rise in global popularity. The term 'extreme right', as Mudde (2007) explains, is a group that acts with violence to promote and reach their social and political goals. While far-right groups are not immune to violence either, it is not a dominating factor of their ideology. The far-right can be defined as "right-wing political, social, and religious movements that

exist outside of and are more radical than mainstream conservatism” (ADL, 2022). As Mudde (2016) explains, populist radical right parties “do not self-identify as populist or even (radical) right” and some insist they are “neither left nor right”. However, despite this, we will be using Mudde’s (2016) definition and theoretical framework for this paper. According to Mudde (2016), there are three core features (at least) that populist radical right movements share: “nativism, authoritarianism, and populism”. Evidently, and as this paper will demonstrate in the chapters focusing on the United States and Hungary respectively, each group will express their ideology differently, framing the three core features to the reality of their “own people” (Mudde, 2016). Moreover, all populist radical right parties devote “disproportionate attention to crimes by ‘aliens’, whether in Hungary, the United States, or anywhere else in the world where these movements are based in (Mudde, 2016).

This definition was chosen as it is broader and encapsulates the various nuances within right-wing movements and can be applied to both the Republican and Jobbik parties. Essentially, it is an umbrella term that captures all forms of right-wing politics without too much emphasis on the movement’s propensity for use of violence as it is not as applicable to the two cases being studied in the paper. While the specific differences between the far-right in Hungary and the United States will be explored later in the paper, there exist overarching principles within the ideology. When an individual begins to adhere to a far-right ideology and often begin to believe harmful conspiracy theories. Leidig (2021) provides an example of prominent conspiracy theories within far right movements: that “the entire spectrum of feminists, Marxists, socialists, and liberals have conspired to destroy Western civilization and culture” often these individuals were state that they have

been “awakened” to the “reality of ‘white genocide’ and the ongoing ‘race-war’”. Essentially, in the myth of far-right ideology, there is always an ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’ dynamic in which the movement must protect the nation/race/culture from an external force. Moreover, while there exists a wide variety of far-right groups, they still share commonalities such as their affinity for nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and anti-democratic attitudes, and their universal support of the idea of a strong state (Mudde, 2000).

In order to better understand the far-right, the concept of populism must be defined and explored. As Mounk (2018) explains, European countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, and Germany have witnessed far-right populist movements celebrate unprecedented success in recent years. The same was witnessed in Hungary and the United States with the elections of Viktor Orbán and Donald Trump respectively. Those who support the rise of populism in Europe celebrate its popularity and deem it proof of healthy democracy with one British sociologist stating that being “anti-populist” was often “anti-democracy” (Mounk, 2018). While there is generally a “genuine democratic element” to populism, as explained by Mounk (2018), there is an important caveat that is ignored by its supporters. Indeed, populism often leads to the rise of illiberal strongmen and can usher in autocratic tendencies as these figures often attack independent institutions and the media, leading populism down a path towards dictatorship. However, Mounk (2018) explains that this is not always the case and historically, far-right populists often glorified fascism and explicitly sought to abolish democracy. He continues by adding that this has changed, and Trump is an example of this shift, viewing voting as a way for “ordinary people to assert their voice”. Because the face of populism has changed and continues to change, Mounk (2018) reframes the nature of populism is both “democratic and illiberal”. In other words,

populism seeks both to “express the frustration of the people and to undermine liberal institutions” (Mounk, 2018).

The rise of populism as we know it today stems from deep and growing inequalities between the elite and the middle class. Indeed, while inequality is diminishing globally due to the continued development of the global South, Western countries have seen their economies stagnate and inequalities rise (Mounk, 2018). Rising inequality in the West is a complex issue with many causes but countries who have fallen victim to this reality already dispose of the tools necessary to remedy the issue. However, as Mounk (2018) explains, these policies are neither simple, immediate, or popular among the electorate. This has left traditional and establishment politicians in a difficult situation, often having trouble selling the message that these issues are complicated and difficult to resolve. For populist leaders like Donald Trump, they are able to thrive in this type of political environment as they over-simplify complex political issues and capitalize on the population’s anger and frustration over traditional political inaction (Mounk, 2018). The same logic can be applied to Viktor Orbán’s political strategy in Hungary and can explain why it has many similarities with Trump’s despite certain ideological difference. Despite the simple solutions offered by populist leaders like Trump and Orbán, more often than not their policies not only fail to solve the issue at hand, they also often exacerbate the problems they are trying to fix.

Populists represent a very real dissatisfaction within society vis à vis liberalism and traditional political institutions as they have failed to address the inequalities they currently face. Populists take advantage of this reality and oversimplify complex issues to manipulate voters in their favour. As Viktor Orbán stated, “Trump’s victory marked America’s

transition from ‘liberal non-democracy’ to ‘real democracy’ (Mounk, 2018). Ironically, these two leaders stand blatantly against democracy as we define it, with Orbán stating that his country was an “illiberal democracy” which, as Mounk (2018) explains, are inherently undemocratic and pose a grave danger of transforming into outright dictatorship. Unlike far-right movements of the past, populists are open about their desire to deepen certain democratic elements and claim to be the voice of the “real people”, an important distinction that defenders of liberal democracy must counter (Mounk, 2018).

Women in the Far-Right

In recent years, many female leaders have emerged in the far-right scene globally and have been the primary focus of attention. However, this has left a blind spot for those who study these parties as women members outside of the leadership role still have the capacity to mobilize other female supporters through their activism and implication. As Petó (2012) explains, in every country, there are women who consistently support the far right and their contributions are vital but often ignored. Kathleen Bee (1996) explains, as it relates to the KKK, women joined because they saw promise and hope in the movement. This remains true in modern times, with women joining far-right movements because they see a benefit for themselves. Something that can seem counterintuitive considering the very real misogynistic ideology they outwardly represent. Félix (2017) proposes a theory as to why women are drawn to these movements. Essentially, the far-right has multifaceted characteristics that provide women opportunities to feel ‘seen’ and have the possibility to make their voices heard in the subculture, providing women with a sense of purpose and belonging within a group. Indeed, individuals of both genders who join these groups often feel abandoned economically, socially and politically. Providing a space where individuals

can feel ‘seen’ and have their concerns be voiced and listened too is an attractive proposition for any gender, including women, to join. As she explains, this can raise their self-esteem, enjoy equality with men, or even allow them the possibility of making a career in the far-right subculture. Félix (2017) connects these findings with Durham’s (1998) work concerning the “rational calculation” of Nazi movements. He states that Nazi movements “must be open to female supporters” in order to be successful (Durham, 1998). Miller-Idriss and Pilkington (2019) argue that the increase in women’s engagement in right-wing parties and movements is the result of a shift in their positions on gender and sexuality.

While the majority of far-right movements remain opposed to principles of gender equality and LGBTQ rights, some have shifted their perspectives. Newer far-right groups argue that western democratic traditions and values include “supporting women’s rights, a wider range of sexualities, and tolerance toward the LGBTQ community” (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2019). For example, far-right parties such as the Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands and the Danish People’s party have not explicitly stated they would protect gay and lesbian citizens but have become more ambiguous on LGBTQ issues. As mentioned previously, these changes are to contrast Western civilization with the perceived “threat” from Muslim immigrants. In other words, nativism (anti-immigration) remains one of the defining factors as to why women join the far-right, while appeals to tradition (role of women) may actually vary across far-right groups, as it is the case in the United States and Hungary. So far, this strategy has attracted female voters to the far-right, with more than 40% of votes for the populist far-right coming from women in Europe according to an analysis of the European Social Survey (Spierings & Zaslove, 2015). Other surprising

examples in Europe include the Latvian National Front, where women make up half of its members and they depict women as spiritually superior to men. This belief places women in this group in leadership positions tasked as pioneers to safeguard the Latvian nation (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2019). In Germany, neo-Nazi terrorist Beate Zschäpe was recently convicted to life in prison for her role in 10 murders, two bombings, and other crimes, demonstrating that women are playing an extremely active and violent role in far-right movements across the world (Oltermann, 2018). The George Washington University's Program on Extremism estimates that roughly 14% of arrests made related to the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol were women (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). Moreover, the University's Program on Extremism found that the significant role women play in terrorism and extremism has been "drastically underestimated and overlooked", thus affecting the U.S. and other country's ability to create effective counterterrorism efforts (Matfess & Margolin, 2022).

Despite far-right movements being painted as predominantly filled with 'angry white men', scholars and society often ignore women's anger. Indeed, as Miller-Idriss and Pilkington (2019) explain, women are often more vulnerable during economic crises, a driving factor in the rise of far-right movements globally. Chrisafis, Connolly, and Giuffrida (2019) further elaborate on this topic, stating that working-class women feel just as 'left-behind' as their male counterparts. Moreover, women are disproportionately affected by cuts in public services, greatly influencing their support for far-right groups, especially as they present an alternative to the damaging current status quo. In Europe especially, driving factors in far-right movements are immigration and Islam, along with

persistent economic hardships and inequality which are all powerful topics to recruit both women and men to the movement.

The Role of Gender in the Far-Right

Before moving forward, it is important to outline exactly what role gender play in the far-right. Building off the work from Skjelsbæk et al. (2021) gender is referred to here as “the roles, behaviors, activities, attributes, and opportunities that culture, ideology, and society considers appropriate for girls and boys, women and men”. As expected, gender serves as a foundation of the far-right movement in which they anchor their ideology, identity, values, norms, and behaviors (Skjelsbæk et al., 2021). Men and women are both supporters and members of far-right parties, organizations, and movements. However, gender norms, and how they are attributed, shape the role they play. When reading the existing literature on the role gender plays in the far-right, certain themes reoccur. With their main focus being Europe, Fangen and Skjelsbæk (2021) outline that these publications highlight the anti-gender ideology agenda and its various outcomes – including “the resurgence of conservative Christian family values and growing resistance to the LGBTQ rights and recognition and, on the other, the instrumental use of women’s and gay rights in arguments against Islam”. In other words, the far-right, especially in Europe, has weaponized traditional feminist and LGBTQ rights rhetoric to recruit women to the cause.

To garner support and recruit women to their movements, far-right groups, especially in countries that have seen an uptick in immigration from Muslim countries, have used progressive policies and rhetoric to promote Islamophobic attitudes. According to Fangen and Skjelsbæk (2021), these groups base themselves on principles of gender equality and women’s emancipation that are ‘threatened’ by immigration from Muslim

countries, thus mobilizing along the lines of more progressive parties but for an anti-immigration purpose. For example, in Denmark, the populist right's approach to immigration was so popular that the ruling Social Democrats adopted one of the harshest refugee policies in the world in order to counter the movement (Poulsen 2021). The far-right in Denmark strategically postured itself in a way that is supportive of the existing progressive policies in the country as long as it excludes immigrants, a stark contrast to the far-right in the United States which is openly opposed to progressive policies such as the welfare state. Not surprisingly, this 'progressive' messaging is conditional to this specific issue and far-right movements also mobilize frequently against gender equality, an approach that has also proven useful. Indeed, gender equality and pro-gender norms, including the legal rights for the LGBTQ community, are often framed as part of the "globalization agenda".

Far-right movements in both the United States and Europe are fervent critics of globalism and unite against what Fangen and Skjelsbæk (2021) call the 'gender ideology', a term that encompasses "attitudes that oppose 'full' gender equality and sexual citizenship". In order to resist the globalist gender ideology, the far-right proposes traditional gender values and roles for men and women as the remedy. The ideals of '*Kinder, Kirche, Küche*' are often recalled when this approach is promoted. As explained by Morgan (2020), *Kinder, Küche, and Kirche* translates to children, kitchen, and church were the ideal roles of women in Nazi Germany outlined by Hitler. Essentially, the role of women was limited to them caring for the family structure, attending church, and raising the next Aryan generation (Morgan, 2020). This approach has been recycled and repackaged in almost all far-right movements globally and remains a constant within these

groups. Considering this, gender equality and its norms, play a key role in defining what the groups are for and what they are against. However, as mentioned above, there remains inconsistencies and the same principles they stand against can be weaponized for anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric. Far-right movements encourage women to avoid entering the workforce or public roles to better align themselves with their “natural, feminine roles” as nurturers at home (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2019). As Miller-Idriss and Pilkington (2019) explain, women who challenge the traditional norms promoted by the far-right are a threat to their worldview and triggered many far-right men to feel discomfort with the world, seeking to return it to a ‘simpler time’ with pre-defined and rigid gender roles.

Methodology

This paper seeks to investigate what is the role of women in the political and social legitimization of far-right movements in both the United States and Hungary. To better understand the case of the United States, and the role women play in legitimizing the far-right rhetoric in the Republican Party, the case of Hungary and the Jobbik party seemed like an interesting choice for this exercise. The Jobbik party was once known as one of the most extreme far-right parties in Europe, characterized by its strong masculine subculture. Despite this, when the Jobbik party first entered Parliament in 2010, there was only a 4% gap between male and female supporters (Félix, 2015). This was a surprising finding as their rhetoric should have alienated women from voting for them, in theory.

Similarly, in 2020, Donald Trump and the Republican rhetoric, in general, had radicalized further from their original campaign in 2016, owing to the normalization of this discourse throughout his presidency. Many assumed that this radicalization would alienate

female voters. However, the opposite happened, and the Republicans were able to grow their base of female supporters (National Election Pool, 2020).

Moreover, Hungary seemed like the appropriate country of choice considering that the modern Western far-right movements originated in the country and have continued to serve as a model for both Republicans and other far-right movements globally. This paper will employ the method of comparative analysis to compare and contrast how women influenced the far-right parties of Jobbik and the Republicans in their respective countries. More specially, it will be using the method of encompassing comparison which “places different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relationship to the system as a whole” (Adiyia & Ashton, 2017). In this case, I will be explaining the differences and similarities between the two political parties, attributing the role of gender in the far-right to these variables.

The first part of the comparison will focus on the Jobbik Party and will be comprised of a brief overview of its history and rise to popularity, its recruitment strategies for women, specific data on party membership by gender, and finally the role that women played in their rise in popularity before their decline. The same exercise will then be done for the Republican Party in the United States. A final section will be dedicated to comparing both cases and concluding what differences and similarities exist and how they help inform the broader question of the rise and continued legitimization of far-right parties globally.

The case of Hungary

Brief overview

Hungary's political landscape is extremely unique as the political spectrum has skewed right over the last decade – providing the ideal breeding ground for right-wing and far-right movements to flourish leaving little to no room for the traditional political center present in other countries, along with left-wing movements. Much like many of the countries currently plagued with the rise in far-right movements, Hungary fell victim to an economic crisis, and also a political crisis, contributing to the established ruling parties losing the majority of their support. Félix (2015) explains that at the time, political dissatisfaction and mistrust in Hungary were measured as some of the highest in Europe. This provided the perfect breeding ground for fringe far-right groups to take hold of traditional political structures. By 2017, two extreme far-right parties made up most of Hungary's National Assembly, the governing Fidesz, and Jobbik. For this paper, the Jobbik party will be the main subject of comparison. However, to better understand the current status of the party, a broader context must be provided on far-right movements in Hungary and the political landscape in which they exist. In Hungary, right-wing ideologies circulate widely thanks to a publishing house called Arktos Media (Schaeffer, 2017). Schaeffer (2017) explains that Arktos Media, as with most far-right groups, promotes ideas that it qualifies as “alternatives to modernity” that are critical of “liberalism, human rights, and modern democracy”. Ideas promoted by Arktos Media are to most extreme and fringe and would be widely criticized in other countries. However, because of the skewed political spectrum in Hungary, these ideas are now in the mainstream and rarely criticized by those in power. Considering this, far-right culture leaders have flocked to Budapest from all over

Europe and the United States, creating a “structured propaganda circuit” that has helped spread their ideas far and wide (Schaeffer, 2017).

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was the first European leader to publicly endorse Donald Trump as he was running for President in 2016. This was a worrying decision as Orbán was a figure that was openly against everything that liberal democracies stood for. In 2014, he declared that his vision for Hungary was to construct an illiberal state:

“the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach.”¹

This speech, and the project as a whole, has sparked a great interest from other far-right leaders internationally, including those in the Republican Party (Bayer, 2017). The two main points of interest in this new ‘illiberal’ model for the American far-right are Orbán’s radical approach to immigration and refugees along with his crackdown on NGOs.

Formally known as the Movement for a Better Hungary, Jobbik is a play on the Hungarian word ‘jobb’ which means ‘right’. Essentially, the name means the ‘right choice’ and finished third in the 2010 and 2014 elections (Hutt, 2022). Previously, far-right groups around the world, and more specifically in the United States, favored the Jobbik party over the governing Fidesz party in Hungary. Following the April 2018 elections, Jobbik stood as the second-largest party in the Hungarian parliament with 26 out of 199 seats (Petsinis, 2020). Despite this, the party’s public appeal has steadily declined in the last couple of

¹ Bayer, L. (February 15th 2017). The American Alt-Right’s Hungarian Love Affair. *The Budapest Beacon*. Retrieved from: <https://budapestbeacon.com/american-alt-rights-hungarian-love-affair/>

years. Surprisingly, in 2020, Jobbik's popularity in the polls was around 7%, this is below newer and less established centrist parties like Momentum Movement (MM) and the center-left party Democratic Coalition (DK). More recently, in 2022, the ruling Fidesz party won their fourth consecutive election and their fourth supermajority in parliament in a row (Hutt, 2022).

In the United States, far-right groups, such as the white supremacist National Policy Institute have begun to gravitate toward the Fidesz party rather than Jobbik, especially since the beginning of the refugee 'crisis' in Europe (Bayer, 2017). As Hutt (2020) explains, this is a surprising shift as Jobbik was once described as a neo-Nazi group but has since moved to the center in an attempt to capture conservative voters who were against the autocratic tendencies of Fidesz's government. Led by László Toroczkai, those who were on the more extreme side of the Jobbik party have since split to create the Our Homeland Movement in 2018 (Hutt, 2022). Currently, of the 199 seats in the Hungarian parliament, 151 are controlled by the far-right. Overwhelmingly, 135 seats are controlled by both the Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). Seven seats are controlled by our Home Land. As the Fidesz party continues to radicalize, the Jobbik party has seen its numbers dwindle – forcing the party, and its current leader Péter Jakab, to do some serious soul-searching. While it had previously been criticized for its violent antisemitic and homophobic rhetoric, among other hateful views, it has recently shifted its approach from identity politics to a debate on corruption in an attempt to challenge the current Fidesz rule (Hutt, 2022). The de-radicalization of the Jobbik party is a strong factor in its recent decline in popularity. However, this does not take away from the very real and

documented influence that women had in the early days of the party and aiding its political and social legitimization. This will be further explored in the below sections.

Gender in the Jobbik Party

The radical right gender gap phenomenon is well known and studied by scholars. This refers to the over-presentation of men and the underrepresentation of women in far-right and radical right movements. This phenomenon can be observed in the Jobbik party, where men dominate in terms of the number of supporters within the party. However, female members and their roles should not be neglected as it provides essential context to understand how this party operates and how it rose to the mainstream. As mentioned previously, when the Jobbik Party first entered power in 2010, they were supported by 3.9% of women and 8.5% of men, placing the gender gap at around 4%. However, in recent years, the gap has grown, with Jobbik being supported by 8.1% of women and 15.5% of men, placing the gap around 7.4% (Félix, 2015). Generally speaking, if we look at the trends, almost twice as many men than women vote for the far-right, and the rates have not greatly varied over time. Data on party affiliation as it relates to gender is scarce and hard to find. However, it is interesting to note that women voters began to decline as the party started to deradicalize. Contrary to other parties, Jobbik never prevented women from joining their ranks since they were founded in 1999. However, this still did not allow women to access leading positions within the organization. In 2013, as Félix (2015) explains, women's presence within the party has become more visible owing to their desire for a new image, one that included smiling young girls and boys standing around the party leader.

Despite women playing an active role in the party, organized forms of their participation are marginal. In other words, their roles within the party are more informal in nature. The Jobbik party does have women's divisions across the country and their work is mainly focused locally and is often limited to some charity events organized during the last few years (Félix, 2015). As within most far-right groups, women are championed as those who bear the main responsibility for the reproduction of the 'pure culture' (Mostov, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The Jobbik party is no different, with their defined role of women being mainly tied to rigid gender stereotypes. Members of this organization seek to recruit 'proper' women to bear children, mainly using eugenic discourses to justify their choices (Félix, 2015). People within this party and many other far-right movements believe that if they do not reproduce enough 'pure' children that outsiders will eventually outnumber the 'nation' (in this case Hungary), thus losing the majority, and eventually their culture and themselves will disappear completely. While this is the role of women, in theory, it often manifests itself differently in practice. Indeed, women have taken creative liberties in Jobbik's 'pure Hungarian' project. Women within the movement sell 'healthy' and 'truly Hungarian' products in local markets around the country, and thus sell the idea of purity ideology through this (Félix, 2015). These women mask what were once considered very unpopular and fringe ideas into locally made products, thus softening the ideology enough to be consumed by the masses. This recruitment strategy also places women in a favorable position financially. Indeed, the money accrued by these very successful endeavors provides women with enough financial capital to gain power and influence within the party, all while still being able to practice their biological reproduction and other stereotypical roles.

Biological reproduction is not the only reproduction that women are tasked with within the Jobbik party. Indeed, in order to preserve the 'pure Nation' (Hungary), women are tasked with cultural reproduction (Félix, 2015). This is comprised of women teaching children and even the whole community to preserve the Nation's value. Women in these movements are often discouraged from pursuing careers and instead, told to stay home and take care of their children and home. However, professions such as teaching are not as frowned upon, and their skills are utilized to further their ideology both within and outside the subculture (Félix, 2015). Outside of teaching, women often lead in the propagation of cultural programs like exhibitions and performances, helping the overall Jobbik propaganda machine.

As mentioned previously, women join far-right movements when they see a benefit for themselves. In the case of the Jobbik party, women were influenced in joining as there was a general project of protecting the nation from outside forces, including the rise in immigrants and refugees of Muslims descent. They bought into the xenophobic and racist party ideology which framed this phenomenon as a threat to their nation, language and culture. This call to action was a driving factor in women's adherence to the party. Once the party began to de-radicalize their positions, especially as it relates to immigration, the Jobbik saw their members and popularity decline, including with women. This is an interesting phenomenon as in other far-right movements, the softening of rhetoric is what attracted women to the ranks as explained previously.

Political Figures

The Jobbik party's rise to popularity can be attributed to a variety of factors as mentioned previously. However, its former leader, Gábor Vona, was a driving factor in

their rise to power. He has been described as charismatic and the ideal figure to help soften the extremist image of the party. Moreover, as Kébel and Delaforge (2015) explain, he brings out a “cool and trendy potential” to the party as he posed with dogs, kittens, and babies. Their social media strategy at the time garnered them even more popularity on Facebook than the ruling Fidesz party – attracting a new wave of young and impressionable voters (Kébel & Delaforge, 2015). In 2013, the Jobbik’s president was voted Hungary’s sexiest man by a women’s magazine, adding a cult-like image to Gábor Vona. While women play a significantly lesser role than men in the party’s highest ranks, one star, Dóra Dúró, was the youngest representative of the Parliament at 28 years old. Dúró represents the ‘perfect’ woman touted by the principles of the Jobbik Party. Despite entering into politics and making quite a name for herself, she has been married since she was 19 to another Jobbik representative Előd Novák and already the mother of three children (Kébel & Delaforge, 2015). While Dúró represents the ideal Hungarian woman as presented by the Jobbik party, she serves as a role model to women on the far-right and is an important figure in promoting and legitimizing the extremist rhetoric. For the Jobbik Party, this is only a question of image, as there were only two women representatives of their party, which occupied 23 seats in the Hungarian Parliament in 2015 (Kébel & Delaforge, 2015). In total, the Hungarian Parliament counted only 10% of its members as female in 2015. While Dúró’s presence in Parliament help to soften and legitimize the party, some of its supporters, some even women, weren’t convinced about a women’s place in parliament, even if she had already accomplished her child-bearing duties. Overall, women’s formal participation in the Jobbik movement was fairly limited, even at its peak. But figures like

Dúró were weaponized to present both a role-model to Hungarian women and as a political tool to soften their image and legitimize their inflammatory rhetoric in the country.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, the Jobbik Women's Division was weak and women's participation within the party was much more informal and unofficial but was still extremely effective in achieving its goal. Indeed, despite many of their roles being limited to rigid gender stereotypes, women have found innovative ways to contour these limitations and acquire a significant amount of financial and influential power within the party. Through their locally made goods, and cultural and biological reproduction, women have played a significant role in the political and social legitimization of the Jobbik party. Because their actions may not be outright political and often the fringe messaging are softened, they are effective tools for propaganda and recruitment. Given that the Women's Division is much weaker than other far-right movements, the party has less control and oversight over the actions of women within their group. This offers women more freedom and opportunities to play active and influential roles within the party. Their presence has helped the Jobbik party develop a less radical, more mainstream image and has become a driving force within the party and its social and political legitimization.

The Case of the United States and the Republican Party

Brief overview

One can argue that Republicans, and conservatives in general, have long harnessed the ideas of far-right extremism within their policies and political discourse. However, rarely has there been a time in the last two decades where we have seen a collective party shift toward extremist rhetoric once absent from mainstream politics. Indeed, we often hear

of Trump and his followers saying the ‘quiet part out loud’ pointing to these ideas and positions that have always existed within the party but communicated in subtle and hidden ways to their base. Since Donald Trump’s election in 2016, the Republican Party and its base have become emboldened by the continued normalization of racist, misogynistic, and inflammatory discourse by the country’s most important political figures. The United States was facing a very real social and economic crisis and, as misguided as it may have been, Donald Trump’s populist and highly nationalistic discourse served as what voters thought of as a viable alternative to the traditional political elite that had so often failed them. Despite Trump’s less-than-desirable track record in office riddled with failures and corruption, along with the gross mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was hope that he would lose the election and become a one-term President. His opponent’s wishes were granted in the 2020 elections when Joe Biden and the Democrats won the presidential elections. However, it was not easily done and somehow Trump was still able to grow his base with both minority groups and women. This came as a surprise to some considering the Republican rhetoric being so inflammatory and harmful toward the two aforementioned groups.

Going back to the 1980s, the gender gap in voting choices in presidential elections has always placed women favoring the Democratic party of the Republicans. 2020 was no different as the majority of women voted for Joe Biden, while the majority of men voted for the Republican candidate, Donald Trump (CAWP, 2022). However, it is extremely important to note that women are not a monolithic voting bloc. White, Black, Latinx, and Asian American voters all vote differently, but as an entity, they vote in the majority for the Democratic candidate. The majority of white women voters, since 2000, have voted for

the Republican candidate (CAWP, 2022). This was no different during the 2016 and 2020 elections where the majority of white women voted for Donald Trump. However, what is worth noting is that while Trump failed to expand his base with women overall in 2020, he was able to persuade more white women to vote for him than in 2016, as demonstrated in the tables below.

Total Votes by Women for Republican Presidential Candidates (2012-2020)²	
2012 (Mitt Romney)	44%
2016 (Donald Trump)	41%
2020 (Donald Trump)	42%

Votes by White Women for Republican Presidential Candidates (2012-2020)³	
2012 (Mitt Romney)	56%
2016 (Donald Trump)	52%
2020 (Donald Trump)	55%

As the data taken from exit polls by Edison Research demonstrates, Donald Trump’s overall female base diminished between 2016 and 2020, but his female white voter base grew during that same time period. This coincided with Trump’s further radicalization, with misogynistic rhetoric and policies being pushed more boldly and blatantly by himself and the Republican Party. Data from 2012 was included as Mitt

² Data taken from the National Election Pool (ABC News, Associated Press, CBS, CNN, Fox News, NBC). Conducted by Edison Research

³ Data taken from the National Election Pool (ABC News, Associated Press, CBS, CNN, Fox News, NBC). Conducted by Edison Research

Romney was viewed, especially when compared to Donald Trump, as a moderate candidate. Despite the Republican Party losing white women voters between the 2012 and 2016 elections, they were able to almost gain them back fully by the 2020 election.

Outside of their influence at the polls, women play an organized and integral role in the social and political legitimization of the far-right rhetoric of the Republican Party. This chapter will explore these roles and how they helped the Republican Party to almost fully regain their white women voter base following the 2020 election. According to Leidig (2021), women play several roles in far-right movements, including as key recruiters, propagandists, organizers, and fundraisers. Leidig's (2021) observation is represented within the Republican Party. As Darby (2020) explains, "women have been in backrooms and classrooms, chat rooms and newsrooms, boardrooms, and bedrooms. Far from being incidental to white nationalism, they are a sustaining feature". This quote illustrates the complex and integral role women play in the Republican Party.

Recruitment and Propaganda

In the United States, social media has been the tool of choice, both for Donald Trump and his female supporters. Indeed, social media is used by women of the far right to recruit followers and build audiences for the movement (Leidig, 2021). Before this rhetoric was normalized, far-right ideologies were spread mainly on the dark web and fringe forums. While this still happens, women prefer to spread their message on mainstream platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This is done on purpose, as Leidig (2021) explains, using mainstream platforms helps to transition fringe ideas for popular appeal and women are the ideal vessel in which they are conveyed to the masses. Content on social media channels such as YouTube is often tailored in a way that

feels personable and accessible to the viewer, something that is often a contrast to mainstream political discourse, which can often feel inaccessible and too theoretical. Experts in social media marketing describes this as “networked intimacy” which makes the influencer seem “authentic, relatable, accessible, and responsive”, something that is difficult to achieve by traditional politicians (Leidig, 2021).

Oftentimes, women are mistakenly understood as having joined far-right movements through the influence of their conservative fathers or husband. As Leidig (2021) explains, this is a false assumption that erases the true lived experiences of women on the far-right. Many of these women join with their own accord, often stemming from feelings of deep unhappiness that they blame on feminism and liberalism. Feminism is an obvious and expected culprit of the far-right and women who subscribe to this ideology believe that feminism has encouraged women to be ‘unnaturally’ competitive, with the only remedy of this being to return to a society where women and men have clear and rigid gender roles both domestically and publicly (Leidig, 2021). In other words, the traditionalism pushed by the far-right becomes the solution to the ills of feminism. Women far-right influencers use tactics to soften the rhetoric on the far-right, promising those they want to recruit of sisterhood and friendship, encouraging women to find their ‘true happiness’ in the movement. Their argument, as explained by Leidig (2021), is that modern and mainstream society is dominated by feminism and women are thus unhappy because they are “forced to go against their supposed natural instincts i.e., becoming a housewife and mother instead of a professional career”. While traditional conservative women are an easy target to be recruited to the far-right, these social media influencers also tailor their messaging to appeal to “recovering feminists” in their early thirties’ victims of the “alpha

females” created by feminism that destroy friendships between women to achieve social dominance (Leidig, 2021). Rather than selling the far-right ideology to women outright, these influencers repackage their ideas as a solution to their unhappiness and, in the process, demonize the current modern society which encourages women to pursue both personal and financial independence.

Outside of recruiting women, female far-right influencers also play a role in recruiting men to their ranks. However, the messaging from women changes and their discourse is centered upon masculinity. As Leidig (2021) explains, these women claim that the “feminist-controlled” mainstream society is anti-men and prevents men from asserting their ‘natural’, biological masculinity. They explain that the far-right movement is the only space in which men are able to demonstrate “aggression, dominance, and leadership” (Leidig, 2021), something that they claim mainstream society has restricted them from doing. Moreover, far-right female influencers provide men with “tool kits” on strategies to red pill women, which includes pointing out the contradiction that women have “all the power” but are still “woefully unhappy” (Leidig, 2021). Essentially, these men are encouraged to be strong men who promote traditional gender roles both in their relationships and in society as a whole. Ironically, as pointed out by Maly (2020), these female influencers are often criticized by their male peers within the movement. Because the idea of traditional marriage is so important within the far-right movement, influencers like Brittany Pettibone are often criticized very publicly despite playing an integral role both in the recruitment and propagation of the ideology. In Pettibone’s case, she recently had to address the flurry of criticism she was receiving by, mainly men, as to her lack of focus and devotion towards her marriage. She responded to their accusations by stating that

she would leave political life and prioritize motherhood once she has children (Maly, 2020). As mentioned previously, the far-right believes that modern society is opposed to traditional family values, including marriage and having children – pointing to the high divorce rate and the fact that polyamorous relationships are “promoted”. As Maly explains (2020), having children is a “political act” for the far-right as they believe that’s what their “enemies” want. In other words, it’s a revolutionary act against the modern world as families are the foundation of a homogenous society and rest on traditional values and traditional gender roles. Family, to the far-right, is the “blood and soil building blocks of the homogenous (white) community” (Maly, 2020), and women are key elements to this. In order to accomplish their goals of recruitment, female social media influencers will often position themselves as “fair, balanced, and only producing evidence-based discourse” while simultaneously promoting a political ideology that is based on facts, fiction, lies, and news taken out of context and shaped into a very different narrative, one that serves as a major recruiting agent for membership to the Republican Party (Maly, 2020).

Ironically, despite women’s undeniable role in the political and social legitimization of far-right movements in the world, gender continues to be a polarizing issue in the movement, with female figureheads often having to negotiate their identity within the hyper-masculine environment promoted by these groups (Ebner and Davey, 2020). As mentioned previously, far-right movements lean on women to soften their image and make their regressive values appear normal and even attractive to those they would harm the most. Ebner and Davey (2020) explain that traditionally male-oriented agendas found on the far-right and within the Republican Party have now been repackaged as

reconcilable with female interests, an appealing offer to “women searching for clear gender roles in an increasingly fast-paced culture”.

Political Figures

Liz Cheney and Marjorie Taylor Greene are some of the most influential Republican women at the present moment. They also represent the party’s two opposing poles, one of moderation and the other of extremism. However, both are highly influential and power women, capable of influencing the popularity of the party’s politics and could be pivotal figures in the upcoming 2022 midterm elections. While Liz Cheney took a principled stance against former President Donald Trump’s role in the January 6th insurrection at the Capital, Marjorie Taylor Greene took the opposite stance and double down on Trump’s actions that day. Greene is a freshman representative who very publicly supports the extremist ideology of Qanon and has become one of the main faces of the ‘Trump faction’ of the GOP (Wineinger, 2021). As Wineinger (2021) explains, and much like the right-wing social media influencers mentioned above, Republican congresswomen weaponize gendered rhetoric tailored to the GOP’s ideological positions and electoral goals. In other words, they serve as the messengers that convey the party’s ideology in a way that is appealing to the women in their base but also allows expansion to larger audiences. This was quite successful as a record number of Republican women were elected to congress during the 2020 election, despite their party radicalizing further and further from the principles of feminism and female liberation.

As reported by Kurtzleben (2020), 35 Republican women are currently serving in Congress, breaking the previous record of 30 and a sharp increase from the 13 GOP women elected to the House of Representatives in 2018. This demonstrates that the Republican

Party is not gender-blind and realizes the strategic importance of having significant female representation within their party ranks. Moreover, in the past, Republican congresswomen used to be significantly more moderate than their male counterparts within the party (Wineinger, 2021). This is no longer the case, as Congresswomen like Liz Cheney are seeing sustained resistance from inside and outside the GOP, while Marjorie Taylor Greene and her positions are viewed as the way forward. In an attempt to address the current voting gender gap between the Democratic and Republican parties, the GOP has attempted to mobilize female voters mainly through gendered messaging. This strategy is not new, however, with The Republican Conference, the party's main messaging vehicle, remains a space in which women are well represented in leadership positions as compared to other elements of the party. Indeed, since 1995, Republican women have always been the conference chair or vice chair (Wineinger, 2021). The GOP also touts the idea that women are electorally valuable, which gives the male-dominated party leadership an incentive to invest in an image that they are including women (Wineinger, 2021). Essentially, women are powerful recruitment, propagandist, and political tools that have helped to normalize and popularize some of the Republican party's most radical positions, positioning the party further right.

Comparison and Conclusion

Similarities

Broadly speaking, and much like all other far-right movements, the Jobbik Party and the Republican Party share many similarities. Both of these movements have populist rhetoric, born out of serious economic crisis. Indeed, this crisis and the lack of political action to alleviate the burden on the population led to a lack of confidence in established

political parties and functions. Considering this, voters in both Hungary and America were searching for an alternative option, someone who could stand up to the current political order and bring about true changes to the country. While their problems were very real, voters were persuaded by false messaging on the true “culprits” of their misfortune. Both the Jobbik Party and the GOP took strong stances on immigration (legal or not), explaining that it was one of the driving factors in people’s current misery. For women specifically, their unhappiness and economic instability were both attributed to the modern “left-wing” feminist dominated society. According to them, society and feminism has steered women (and men) away from the “biological” and “natural” destinies. For women, this destiny is to live within rigid traditional gender structures. The Jobbik and GOP parties both used the principles of religion as a foundation to their arguments. Indeed, women, as stated in the Bible, had to reproduce and take care of the children and the overall family unit. Both parties essentially recycled the Nazi principles of *Kinder, Küche, and Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church) (Morgan, 2020). The target audience for the Jobbik and Republican parties was also the same; white and Christian, speaking the same language as was founded by their country (English for the United States and Hungarian for Hungary). This audience was essential to the recruitment strategies of both parties to ensure they protect their country from loosing its “culture” and ultimately disappearing due to globalism, multiculturalism, and immigration.

As it relates to women within both parties, many similarities exist. Indeed, women are used both in the Jobbik and Republican parties to soften their image and make them seem more inclusive from the outside. These women also serve as a way to demonstrate that these parties, despite their fringe ideologies, represent society as a whole. Moreover,

these women served as vehicles to help spread their propaganda to the masses and recruit more members. Both the Jobbik and Republican women used subtle and often apolitical ways of spreading their message. For the Jobbik women, it was through locally made, clean and “pure” Hungarian politics that they were able to spread their message and recruit further members. For Republican women, this was achieved through social media, especially professional influencers. In both cases, the ideology is promoted through what seems to be apolitical mediums such as locally made products and family vlogs on YouTube. Hungarian and American women of the far-right are also tasked with propagating the far-right messaging through the venues of education. Indeed, as they are usually expected and encouraged to stay in the home and focus on reproducing the next ‘pure’ generation, these women are also tasked with teaching their children about the movement and raise them with the traditional values and appropriate religion. This is all done in the name of preserving and protecting the Nation (a White homogenous Hungary or United States).

Differences

Despite both the Jobbik and Republican parties sharing a wide range of similarities, especially as it relates to the participation of women within the parties themselves, they also have a lot of differences that are worth pointing out. Indeed, women’s formal participation in the Republican party is much higher than within the Jobbik party and is even encouraged. As it was mentioned previously, the Jobbik party does not have much formal participation from women within its ranks, outside of only two representatives they use to have in the Hungarian Parliament. However, this does not diminish their impact within the party, instead it favoured them as they were able to be more creative and trace

their own place within the ranks. Through their efforts in local markets throughout Hungary, these women were able to soften the party's image and propagate their ideology to individuals who may not have been inclined to adhere to it. Despite gaining financial capital through their endeavours, Jobbik women were still at a disadvantage as compared to certain Republican women as it relates to their ability to influence the movement from higher up. Indeed, Republican women have a much more documented history, with their formal participation being encouraged and championed by some of their most powerful members. However, because their participation is formalized, they are also under intense scrutiny and cannot fall out of line from the movement's messaging, providing them less freedom as it relates to their engagement with the party. Another major difference between the Jobbik and Republican parties are often the recruitment strategies to entice women to join their ranks. In Hungary, the messaging is more related to women joining the far-right to protect the nation and whiteness from outside influences, especially as it relates to immigration. For America, the rhetoric is often centered around combatting the "feminism" and its effects of both men and women, and their happiness. They blame modern society and the left for their economic and social discontent and argue that the United States should be brought back to simpler, more traditional times. Despite these differences, one thing remains, women in both parties are essential to their social and political legitimization, no matter their participation (informal or formal) within the groups. Indeed, these women serve as recruiters, propagandists, fundraisers and even figureheads that are essential to the success and popularization of the parties.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, women play an integral role in the social and political legitimization of far-right movements around the world. However, as we've seen, their roles are often underestimated and understudied in the current academic landscape. Women, generally speaking, serve as a way for far-right movements to soften their image and seem more appealing to the masses, hiding behind false principles of inclusion to justify their extremist ideologies. As this paper has demonstrated, depending on the political context and the specific movement, the level and importance of women within the official structures of the organizations vary greatly. In the case of Hungary, women were not as formally involved in the party and instead turned to other avenues to recruit and propagate their messaging. For Republicans, women's participation in the party and the movement more broadly was more formalized, with women like Liz Cheney and Marjory Taylor Greene being important and influential figureheads. This paper only begins to scratch the surface as it relates to the role of women within these movements. However, one thing is clear, women in the far-right must be taken seriously and their roles should be studied more closely. As the world continues to be polarized, far-right movements will only continue to grow and further be legitimized within societies. In order to combat this, we must understand the subtle ways in which their messaging is being promoted, whether it's a farmers market in rural Hungary or on a popular family channel on YouTube.

Limitations

While this paper presents a brief overview of the current status of women in far-right movements, and more specifically in Hungary and the United States, it only begins to scratch the surface as it relates to this issue. Indeed, this paper and the research done

have several limitations that merit further academic research and exploration. Firstly, this was a specific research, basing itself only on two case studies. Moreover, it is focused mainly on established political parties such as the Jobbik in Hungary and the Republican Party in the United States. This is limiting as it does not include other elements of the far-right, including fringe groups that do not have legitimate political power, but have immense social influence. For example, it would of value to study the role of organizations like the Oath Keepers during the January 6th Capitol insurrection where women leaders were instrumental in coordinating the attack. The question of Qanon was also briefly brought up in the paper but merits being further explored in a different paper as it is extremely popular amongst women and has often served as their gateway into the far-right movement. Another limit found within the paper relates to data collection. Indeed, the data as it relates to women's adherence and support of the Jobbik movement is scarce and hard to come by. This makes it difficult to understand the trends within the party and how many women are members and voted for them, especially at their peak. This would've helped reinforce the arguments presented in the section and offered a more tangible perspective of the trends of gender participation in the party. Finally, and most importantly, this paper could've benefited from interviews with real women on the far-right. Having that perspective could've provided this paper with more nuance and a deeper understanding of the reasons why women join these groups and what they get out of them. Essentially, this paper serves as a starting point for a larger discussion on these movements, why they are rising so fast in popularity and how are women contributing to this phenomenon.

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