

Refugees and Populism in Hungary: Primal Fear or Election Bait?

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Abstract

As the Post-Cold War world order emerged, the world got shrouded with a truck load of civil wars. A world order that would be witnessing and focusing on human displacement, forced migration, poverty and sustainable development appeared to be evident. With the appearance of these civil wars, forced migration and human displacement garnered the attention of the world and the media. The news of these events is all over the mass media and refugees or forced migrants are now a reality of the world. The new refugee crisis that started in 2014 has affected the East European country of Hungary. Hungary had been previously a communist state and it was included into European Union in 2004 and a new atmosphere was about to be found there. But as the refugee crisis now arrives with some core liberal challenges, what does Hungary do as reactions? This study therefore focuses on discovering what the Hungarian people and the government is thinking about the refugees. After discovering the mindset of the people and the government, the paper further moves forward to finding out if the government and the political parties are using or exploiting the refugee crisis for their electoral benefits by moving the people's minds with mentioning the risk factors regarding refugee inclusion into the country or the society. The paper's conclusive part aims to provide a balanced discussion regarding the Hungarian values, social norms and atmosphere along with exploring whether these norms go against the idea of refugees' inclusion into the Hungarian society. With all the major findings, the research thus wants to ascertain if there is a populist surge going on in Hungary and if yes, whether the surge is swelling or not.

Keywords: Hungary, Refugees, Populism, Border, Fascism

Introduction

The Cold War was mostly occupied with the proxy wars and the hegemonic ambitions between the two powers – the United States of America and the

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Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (Nye & Welch, 2015, p. 150). Key issues of that era included containment, nuclear weapon proliferation, ideology expansion, deterrence between the two powers and extension of the sphere of influence (Nye & Welch, 2015, pp. 150-199). But as the USSR collapsed, the hegemony that the Soviets had over the Eastern Europe was lost (Nye & Welch, 2015, p. 150). The Cold War's end did not promise any political stability worldwide (Cunliffe, 1995). Rather the mass forced migration in East Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa appeared to be intimidating the existence and the notion of nation-states (Cunliffe, 1995). Samuel P. Huntington (2003, p. 19) identified the period after the Cold War as a time of "dramatic changes in people's identities and the symbols of those identities". As Reece Jones points out (2016), the years of 2014 and 2015 had been attributed with the already emerged worldwide plight of migrants. In 2014, it was reported that 59.5 million people were globally displaced, a number double from the number in 2005 (UNHCR, 2015). By the end of the year of 2015, the refugee crisis is therefore the international story of the year (Kingsley, 2016, p. 259).

However, the international story of the year seemed to be producing one or more sub-stories surrounding this particular issue. The number of refugees, as we will see in the later portion of this paper, was mostly influential in one case. This particular case was that the European countries were the ones to face the immense pressure of a human-deluge. The question may therefore automatically come that why Hungary is chosen as the prime case study of this paper. It may also be said that Sweden and Germany would be the prime choice for this refugee crisis analysis since they have been acting with the most positive approach in the whole of Europe as we'll see in this paper later. Another argument can also be established that the refugee crisis should be analyzed on a specific case basis focusing upon Greece and Italy since they have been the countries dealing directly with the pressure of human force desperate to get into a safe haven. But this paper decides to move onto the other sub-story of this issue. It wants to focus not upon the dealing with this crisis or the positive approaches of the countries. Rather it wants to focus upon the rise of populism, malice and hatred in the European countries (also marked as 'Europe Fortress' owing to this refugee influx). It wants to ascertain the negativity in population sentiments regarding the refugee influx and crisis. By the time, it will be very much evident that Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary were acting as a defiance of the positivist approach from the pointed out references. This paper therefore wants to focus upon Hungary because it has led itself to the path of despise towards the refugees. The paper wants to find out whether the populist parties of Hungary are trying to capitalize this despising and utilize this opportunity for their electoral benefits or strengthening of supremacy. By this time, it is not anymore obsolete to people that Viktor Orban has been acting against the refugees

turning Hungary to the darker side of the coin ignoring the positive approaches (Stephens, 2017). Specific case studies on Czech Republic and Poland should also be explored in order to find out why they want to keep the refugees aloof from Europe similar to the case study on Hungary. This paper is thus an attempt to find out the case about Hungary only, keeping the cases of the other two countries away, as their inclusion will make this paper turn into a book or a prolonged version of the endeavor.

The further focus of the paper thus lies on what events are happening in Hungary regarding this refugee crisis and what are the responses from there. Throughout its whole progress, secondary data analysis procedure is utilized and the conclusive arguments are also derived from the collected secondary data.

Refugee Crisis and Hungary

The definition of a refugee can be found in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the status of Refugees (Koser, 2007, p. 71). Under the convention, a refugee is identified as “someone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality” (Koser, 2007, p. 71). The definition clearly identifies the people waiting at the borders of Europe coming from Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo as refugees because they have a well-founded fear of being persecuted as well as belonging to a particular group or have a political preference.

Patrick Kingsley (2016, p. 259) points out that in June 2015, the number of refugees landing on the Greek islands everyday was measured to be 1000 while in the mid-September it was found out to be 5000. The Balkan route, which includes Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary, was about to be shrouded by the same number of refugees as owing (Kingsley, 2016, p. 259). If the map is seen carefully, it is to be known that from the Turkish ports of Izmir and Istanbul, refugees leave for the Balkan states. Before Libya was fragmented into three portions and the war was going on there, the route from Libya to Italian islands was the most favorite for Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees (Kingsley, 2016, p. 5). But 2015 saw Greece emerging as the most popular gateway because of the changing Visa restrictions for Syrian refugees in the North African countries and the ongoing war in Libya (Kingsley, 2016, p. 5). The route shows that from Izmir, refugees were about to go to Athens from other Greek islands and then they were to go to Belgrade of Serbia. Now from Serbia, refugees tend to forward further to either Vienna of Austria or Budapest of Hungary. As the route to Vienna is a tough one to reach from Belgrade because of the distance and existence of more countries, Budapest had to be the other best choice for them. The route thus clearly shows us why refugees are gathering along the Hungarian border.

The refugee crisis hurt almost Europe's all bordered countries. Europe cannot perform like Australia, whether rightly or wrongly preventing or stopping the incoming flow of boats (Kingsley, 2016, p. 9). Europe's border with the nearest country of Turkey is only five or six miles far and the other countries of North Africa are almost similarly close to Europe whereas Indonesia is hundred miles apart from the Australian shores (Kingsley, 2016, p. 9). Therefore, it was evident that Hungary which was the borderline of EU (European Union) as Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia – all these Balkan countries near the port of Istanbul are not incorporated into EU, would have to suffer the burden of refugees. Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Italy, Croatia and Spain are also at the borderline of the EU. Only Greece and Spain were seen to be dealing with the refugee crisis calmly but all the other states had a violent feedback – both from the people and its bureaucracies (Jones, 2016). Spain negotiated with its North African neighbors – Senegal, Mauritania to prevent any further migration and the triple-phased border fencing deal with Morocco meant Morocco was no more a suitable place for smuggling or refugee migration (Kingsley, 2016, p. 60).

Hungary went under Communist rule immediately after the end of the World War II alongside ten other European countries (Mason, 2011, p. 157). Although most of the countries experienced industrialization, people's limited sovereignty and freedom pushed these Communist countries to further revolutions and eventual decline with the emergence of new democracies beside the end of the Cold War (Mason, 2011, pp. 158-159).

In the year of 2010, Hungary experienced only 2400 migrants in its border (Kingsley, 2016, p. 8). But only five years later, owing to the civil wars in the Middle East, Hungary had to experience a flow of huge number of refugees – about hundred times than it was in the year of 2010 – about 240,000 refugees waiting on its border to be allowed to enter in order to get themselves to the welfare/developed northern countries (Kingsley, 2016, p. 8). The Hungarian government built a fence along its border to prevent the refugees along its southern edge therefore (Kingsley, 2016, p.8). When people instigated to re-route themselves to Croatia, another EU member, Hungary countered with building a second fence along its border with Croatia (Kingsley, 2016, p. 8).

Although Serbia, Greece and Macedonia tried to prevent the refugees from entering into their countries, they created a de facto humanitarian corridor to Hungary (Kingsley, 2016, p. 264). The Hungarians eventually refrained from stopping the unstoppable refugees (Kingsley, 2016, p. 265). Hungary's famous fence had been built by early September 2015, but it remained just another useless barbed wire – possible to cross within thirty to forty seconds approximately (Kingsley, 2016, p. 266). Acknowledging the reality of the situation, Hungary was very much submissive to enter the refugees. It soon realized that filtering the refugees through one point was

much more feasible and fruitful than having them entered in the country through illegal border crossings (Kingsley, 2016, p . 266).

Against the European Humanism

By 15 September 2015, Hungary had built another fence, in fact, a much taller and better fence alongside constricting the refugees with a new law that criminalized unlawful border crossings (Kingsley, 2016, p. 266). Hungary was trying to manage the situation by the end of the year of the 2015 (Kingsley, 2016, p. 267). However once entering into the country, it was alleged that Hungary was treating them in inhumane ways (Kingsley, 2016, p. 267). Refugees were sent to Austria or Germany after being scrutinized and during the process of scrutiny; they had to lose their dignity because of the Hungarian sentiment (Kingsley, 2016, p. 267). An example was shown by Kingsley (2016, p. 267) that after entering along the Hungarian border village of Roszke, refugees were lined up in an empty field until there was enough space to allocate them in the refugee camps. In one leaked video as Kingsley points out (2016, p. 267), it was seen that refugees were kept in cages at the concentration camp until being registered and guards were throwing foods at them as if they had been animals.

Back when the Hungarian revolution happened in 1956 which saw a great amount of Hungarian people forcibly migrated towards Austria, they were warmly accepted (Kingsley, 2016, p. 272). At that time, the solidarity among people was such sublime but now, this refugee crisis is showing Europe that the European solidarity is at the brink of extinction (Kingsley, 2016). The Belgian refugees who were persecuted during the German invasion of 1915, they were also accepted with warmth and love (Gatrell, 2013, pp. 45-46). Even in the bureaucratic and official decisions, refugees were mentioned in humanitarian ways and statements of acceptance were present (Gatrell, 2013, p. 46). Germany, the most apt country in the EU, was also very vibrant in welcoming the refugees and Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor has been stating the problem of refugees in harmonious ways and the country has been very much humane in treating and accepting unregistered people gathering at the borders (Kingsley, 2016, p. 264). Italy and Greece are the two countries that were caught as the most suffered and most unprepared to deal with the huge influx of refugees and they found no explanation of dealing with the situation unilaterally (Kingsley, 2016, p. 6). Then negotiation for dividing the refugees between the EU countries was instigated and after weeks and months of failed negotiation attempts by these two countries, the EU finally agreed to its humanity and the humane cause of accepting refugees in the Autumn of 2015 (Kingsley, 2016, p. 6). Sweden has been the most responsive to the refugee crisis with allowing about 163,000 asylum seekers in 2015 (Mohdin, 2016). Although the Swede people are now skeptical about allowing more people to Sweden, yet the welfare government is trying to be as much humane as possible (Mohdin,

2016). Sweden now is fearful that their refugee system might collapse owing to a huge number of refugees and Goran Pearson, former Prime Minister of Sweden stated that “Sweden is falling apart” (Richmond, 2016, p. 1).

However, Italy, Greece, Sweden and Germany have been doing more than enough from their parts as mentioned before. On February 18, 2017 at Barcelona, 160,000 Spanish protesters criticized its government for acting not up to the expected response regarding the refugee crisis (Rosen, 2017). Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary have been criticized for their radical and stubborn policies alongside being reluctant regarding the refugee crisis (Nielsen & Zalan, 2017). The agreement regarding the relocation of refugees of the EU was denied by these states (Nielsen & Zalan, 2017). The EU is now planning to impose sanctions on these three countries for their reluctance and their vicious act against humanity which defies both the concept of European solidarity and compassionate response (Nielsen & Zalan, 2017).

The Hungarian Political Parties

Hungary is criticized for having billions of European dollars vanished from its European grants because of corruption (Lee, 2017). On 28 May 2010, Hungarian people elected Viktor Orban as the Prime Minister for the second time (Becker, 2010). Orban’s political party’s name is shortly known as ‘FIDESZ’ (Hungary Civic Union) (Becker, 2010). Orban ruled the country from 1998 to 2002 in the past and in the year of 2010 he entered the scene through defeating the MSZP (Social Democratic) (Becker, 2010). Since the late 1990s, Hungarian politics has experienced a polarization between a right wing conservative and a social liberal wing (Schmidt-Schweizer, 2007).

Viktor Orban’s party FIDESZ has always acted radically and created the polarization an extensive character of Hungarian politics (Becker, 2010). After 2006, it has frequently boycotted parliaments and demonstrated in the streets against the government (Becker, 2010). A culture of resentment and anger against the ‘Jews’, ‘Gypsies’ and ‘Communists’ have been formed structurally among people by FIDESZ’s political agenda and demonstrations according to Jens Becker (2010). Ferenc Gyurcsany, the multi-millionaire leader of MSZP who ruled Hungary from 2006 to 2010, was caught in a false position after his confidential speech to his party officials was leaked as he stated in that speech that “they had been lying to people for the last 18-24 months” (Mayer and Odehnal, 2010, p. 47).

Orban had previously accused that there had been electoral frauds when he was defeated in 2006 (Becker, 2010). All these statements and information tells us that there has not been much democratic atmosphere in Hungary since the fall of Communism. Although it was termed as

democracy, the patience and the ideology of perseverance on democratic norms lacks much in the electoral geography of Hungary. No wonder the people are therefore easily persuaded mentioning the false agendas or xenophobic arguments.

The main opposition of FIDESZ appeared to be ‘Jobbik’ in 2014 when Viktor Orban came to power for the third time (Paterson, 2014). The party gathered 20.9 percent votes in the election and the most surprising fact then was that it was a fascist Neo-Nazi party spreading hatred regarding Hungarian Roma (Gypsy) and Jews (Thorpe, 2016). Gabor Vona, the leader of Jobbik, then claimed that it was the ‘strongest national radical party’ in the EU and the ‘second largest political party’ in Hungary (Paterson, 2014). Previously, the party stated that it was necessary to have detention camps for the Roma deviants and the Jews were tagged as ‘national security risk’ by the party (Paterson, 2014). Its success in the election can be derived as a positive response of the Hungarian people to the cause of the party – xenophobic and hateful acknowledgement of persecuting the Roma and Jew people living in Hungary.

Gyorgy Dalos, a prominent writer and political biographer insisted that “FIDESZ and Jobbik had actually become the same” (Verseck, 2013). The scariest acts of the FIDESZ government were pointed out by Verseck (2013) as commemorating the Treaty of Trianon of 1920 as a day of national unity; statues of communist leaders blamed as traitors were forcibly descended and Miklos Horthy, the Hungarian leader responsible for killing ten thousands of Jews during the World War II had his appearance as a statue following the government decision. All these acts remind the world about Nazism again whereas Jobbik is resolute in positioning the Roma/Gypsies and Jews as villains and FIDESZ is seen to be following the similar path of Nazism and Fascism. Although hateful act and speech alongside existence of pro-government media are day-to-day characteristics of Hungarian politics, democratic elections and persecution of political oppositions have remained absent in the country so far.

Fear or Political Attention?

With all the hateful speeches of the political parties in Hungary, the question now comes to mind is – What do they fear? When you will ask if the Hungarian people actually fear the gypsies and the Jews, the answer will be affirmative because of the election results. The similar has happened when the Hungarian political parties have stated the refugee crisis. In Viktor Orban’s words, “It is a crazy idea for someone to let refugees into their own country, not defend their borders and say, now I will distribute them among you, who did not want to let anyone in” (Richmond, 2016, p. 4). This was a vicious counterargument against the European decision/agreement to relocate the refugees with the quota system. Every EU country had to take

the responsibility of refugees relieving the pressure upon Italy and Greece alone. But Hungary seemed to deter this idea through their governmental statements and procedures. As a result, they are now to be embedded with sanctions.

Viktor Orban also stated that it looked like a master plan of someone to destroy the European continent by pushing migrants and blemishing the nation states of Europe (Richmond, 2016, p. 2). Skeptical writers like Walter T. Richmond (2016) and some others have promoted the Hungarian idea of xenophobia regarding the Muslims. The Hungarians (also the Czech and Poles) fear that the Muslims possess a different culture and they will occupy the Hungarian people with their vicious dominance that they have been trying to expand through their terrorist activities (Richmond, 2016).

It is evident from the previous portion that owing to the political agendas of the parties, the Hungarian people have started fearing the Jews and the Gypsies. As a solid result, Jobbik earned 20.9 percent votes in the 2014 election and FIDESZ have also walked along the same path in order to retain its position. In that case, it is actually more entertainment than real fear. The people fear the Jews and the gypsies, but the fear is false. It is illogical and has no solid grounds. The parties took this cause to entertain the people and the entertainment would further lead them to victory in the elections which actually did in reality.

The fear regarding the Muslim refugees is somewhat logical in the reference of terrorist happenings in Paris, Munich and other cities of Europe. In the November 2015 Paris attacks, it was probable that ‘two of the nine’ were refugees/migrants who landed on the Greek shores a month earlier (Kingsley, 2016, p. 9). But this logical fear is broken when the other countries of Germany, Sweden, Italy and Greece even France where the Paris attacks happened, take refugees inside their countries. It seems only a populist agenda of the fascist and neo-Nazi political parties when it is observed that no terrorist/ violent refugee attacks have yet happened in Hungary and yet, Hungary alongside Czech Republic and Poland defy receiving the redistributed refugees where France, despite experiencing the brutal attack, agrees to the EU agreement.

Legacy Transferred from Communism?

Marc Morje Howard (2011, pp. 136-138) points out that there has been an existent transformative impact of communism upon the institutions of Post-Communist countries. Although he argued this and pointed the information in finding out the condition of civil societies in the post-communist Eastern European countries, it is also applicable for the discussion we’re having here. The lack of a vibrant civil society that existed only for a short period

instigating the anti-communist revolution has also made Hungary suffer much. Hungarian people have fallen prey to the false and populist agendas of the political parties because the media is pro-government and does not work properly according to democratic and freedom-based principles.

Communism made the East Europeans very conserved in their private life and the people further bothered to share confidential or oppositional information among them because it could have led them to being persecuted (Howard, p. 140). They had to be included into governmental organizations, as the government owned everything and controlled everything in the state (Howard, p. 139). Thus, the indifference of the Hungarian people seethed along their line of mistrust of organizations and they did not participate in the organizations willingly.

The final legacy of communism here can be derived as the political parties. The political parties have retained the system of controlled media and controlled atmosphere while in power in a democratic structure or framework. The elections have been run in democratic ways and democracy has prevailed in that context. But in governmental practice, the governments have been accused of corruption and restraining the freedom of people through controlling media and other instruments of formulating opinions. Thus democracy has been absent in governmental practice.

Conclusion

The new refugee crisis has presented the fascist and Neo-Nazi political parties of Hungary with new luring topic and electoral agendas for the Hungarian people. It currently seems to be electoral bait with the illogical and groundless points of the political parties. The sentiment against the Jews and gypsies has been successfully transcended with its implementation against the Muslim refugees. The fear of the Hungarian people, as the core question, remains to be absent as the answer and utilizing this influx for attracting people towards the chauvinistic and fascist points of the political parties for electoral victory seems to be dominant.

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