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Scapegoat-Based Policy Making in Hungary: Qualitative Evidence for How Jobbik and its Mayors Govern Municipalities

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Abstract

The far-right has been widely studied in the last decades, but little attention has been paid to its local activities. Nonetheless, in countries without far-right national government records, like Hungary, this might be the only way to explore the aims and characteristics of the former parties. This study sets out to explore the activities and main policy initiatives of local far-right leadership in Hungary that are driven by ideological scapegoating mechanisms. The research this paper is based on employed qualitative techniques – in-depth interviews and content analysis of local sources – to grasp the patterns of the local governance of Jobbik. The main foci of the fieldwork-based research are the manifestations of enemy images and ideological scapegoating in the field of symbolic politics, Roma – non-Roma cohabitation, social policy, the public work scheme and public safety – fields where (Jobbik) mayors have substantial room for maneuver, and also areas to which the party’s ideological predisposition and scapegoating can be traced back. The paper also examines how local enemy images relate to national ones and to the political strategy of Jobbik during a period when the party underwent important changes such as moderation and de-radicalization, having lost their ownership of the migration issue and witnessed the government take over the monopoly on enemy images. The analysis reveals how Jobbik-mayors employ conscious strategies for enemy-making and scapegoating with respect to – chiefly, but not exclusively – the Roma population, and how this drives the policies they try to implement. The research also sheds light on the remarkable tension between ideological and pragmatic considerations, and on how the former limits the enforcement of scapegoat-based policies.

Keywords: Local Politics; Far-right; Jobbik; Mayors; Scapegoat-based Policy Making; Hungary.

1. Introduction¹

In 2015, a small Hungarian village close to the Serbian border, Ásotthalom, made headlines in the international media when its Jobbik-affiliated mayor formed a ‘migrant-hunter’ militia and introduced a plan to ban Muslims and gay people from the village from 2016.² Érpatak – another Hungarian village led by a far-right politician – attracted similar attention when its mayor symbolically hanged the effigies of Simon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu in protest against the Gaza War.³ While these events may only appear to be sensation-seeking activities aimed at attracting one minute of fame, they are still symptomatic of local far-right politics. The initiatives and approaches of these two politicians currently or previously serve(d) as models for Jobbik when the party was designing the national policies it planned to implement in the case that it had a chance to form a government.

This article sets out to explore the activities and main policy initiatives of the far-right at the local level in Hungary with a special focus on how scapegoats and enemy images serve as starting points or ideological inspiration for mayors when implementing and designing policy measures for mobilizing constituencies and maintaining power. We examine ‘scapegoat-based policymaking’: a reliance on ideologically construed enemy images and scapegoats in policy-related decision-making. We mainly employed in-depth interviews and content analysis of local sources to address this issues. With two dozen Jobbik-supported mayors gaining mandates at the 2014 municipal elections, Hungary provided a great opportunity for such research.

The results of our fieldwork have a theoretical and practical relevance for many reasons. First, according to party chairman Gábor Vona, local governance is a laboratory for national governance.⁴ Out of the six members of Jobbik’s presidium, three are mayors of cities discussed in this study. Secondly, how the far-right governs on the local level is rarely examined, despite the relatively robust literature about the far-right. Third, we examine if the general ‘rule’ about far-right politicians and parties becoming ‘domesticated’, losing their radicalism and gravitating towards the center after gaining executive power (Akkerman and Lange, 2012) is applicable at the local level. Related to this, this study examines whether Jobbik’s conscious strategy of ‘moderation’ and centrist shift at the national level since 2013 is manifest at the level of settlements – or, in contrast, the local level remains the ‘reservoir for radicalism’ for the party; a place in which to implement the most extreme ideas from its manifesto. In the context of Jobbik’s moderate shift, the question is whether the enemy images of Jobbik rather reflect a populist, anti-elitist approach by referring to ‘the People’, or an extremist approach that involves pointing to specific (minority) groups and enemies (Geró et al., 2017). We also aim to generate some insight into how the refugee crisis

¹ The research and the current study that summarizes its results were supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation within the project ‘Strategies against the Far-Right’.

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/muslims-gav-people-not-welcome-hungary-mavor-asotthalom-laszlo-toroczka-lgbt-rights-islamophobia-a7566916.html>

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/far-right-hungarian-mavor-mihalv-zoltan-orosz-filmed-hanging-effigy-of-benjamin-netanyahu-in-protest-9647954.html>

⁴ https://alfahir.hu/vona_g%C3%A1bor_tiszavasv%C3%A1ri_mintav%C3%A1ros_lesz-20101012

and the Hungarian government's anti-immigrant campaign changed the enemy images on the far-right: i.e., to what extent the far-right 'adopted' the newcomers as enemies, and whether it depicted them as an even more dangerous group than Jobbik's 'usual' scapegoats, the Roma and Jewry. What is not the aim of this exploratory study, however, is to provide an explanation for the reasons behind Jobbik's success at the national level (see: Karácsony and Róna, 2011) or even at the local level. A qualitative inquiry such as that described in this paper is not suitable for this purpose; nor can such an approach be used to assess the impact of the decisions made by local politicians of the far-right.

The focus of the research is thus on examining how scapegoats and enemy images shape the symbolic politics and policy initiatives of these Jobbik-affiliated mayors. This is done by reviewing initiatives mostly related to cohabitation of Roma and non-Roma, public safety, the public work program and social policy. In other policy dimensions - such as education or health care - municipalities have very limited jurisdiction and budgets due to the legal changes introduced by the second Orbán government to the municipal system, which were designed to centralize these policy fields (Hegedűs and Péteri, 2015). These recent changes signaled the intentions of the Orbán-regime to separate and dissociate 'grand politics' from subnational ones, as well as to eliminate the latter's autonomy and accentuate its secondary nature. Legal changes such as forbidding dual mandates served the role of depriving MPs of their hinterlands (that they had had as mayors) and centralizing the system by suppressing a group that could potentially challenge (and rival) the *central party* (Várnagy, 2012: 143) - as well as emphasizing the superiority of national politics.

Consequently, the analysis only covers policy dimensions where local governments have substantial room to maneuver. Despite benefits and public work programs being financed by the central budget, municipalities can define a wide range of criteria for beneficiaries or those volunteering for work. Town halls are free to organize events and community programs; local (symbolic) measures thus reflect the worldview of mayors and their aides. Hence, these areas reveal how Jobbik exercises power at the local level. It is noteworthy that Gábor Vona, chairman of the party, clearly valued experience in local governance when nominating Jobbik's new vice chairmen in 2016; his statement about Jobbik aiming to govern the country 'the way its mayors govern locally' received widespread publicity and attention.

In this article, we first provide a brief overview of the role of enemy concepts and scapegoating in the ideology of the far-right. This is followed by a summary of the context-specific literature on Hungarian local politics and far-right ideology. After elaborating on the methodology we used, the article explores the main patterns of local-level leadership in settlements governed by Jobbik. Finally, the paper highlights some possible implications from this study of the nature of local governance of the far-right in general.

2. Theoretical background

The dramatic upswing of Jobbik in 2009 and 2010 – at European Parliamentary and general elections, respectively – provides fertile ground for an exploration of the factors that contributed to the electoral success of the party (Karácsony and Róna, 2011; Bíró-Nagy and Róna, 2011; Krekó, Juhász and Molnár, 2011; Varga, 2014; Havlík and Mares, 2016; Róna, 2016). Recent scholarly research has presented analyses of Jobbik's MPs (Hajdú, 2014) and candidates of single-member districts (Hajdú, 2016; Kovarek and Farkas, 2017), mass communication channels and internet presence (Jeskó, Bakó and Tóth, 2012; Szabó and Bene, 2015; Karl, 2017), voter base (B. Szabó, 2013) – with a special emphasis on the party's outstanding support among the youth (A. Szabó, 2013) –, the construction of the party's internal organization (Kovarek and Soós, 2016), policy relevance and legislative influence (Böcskei and Molnár, 2017), rhetoric and discourse (Pytlas, 2013; Vidra and Fox, 2014; Petsinis, 2015; Kyriazi, 2016), electoral campaigns (Zentai, 2011) and ideology (Enyedi, 2016). The latest works also focus on the de-radicalization of Jobbik, emphasizing that efforts to establish a more moderate and 'detoxified' image were restricted to communications and campaigns, and left the party's elite and rank-and-file membership largely untouched (Krekó and Mayer, 2015; Bíró-Nagy and Boros, 2016; Kovarek and Farkas, 2017).

Nonetheless, the municipal-level political activity of the party – whether campaigning, activism or local governance – has never been subject to empirical investigation. This is partly explained by the smaller number of relevant Jobbik-affiliated political actors – the party was able to seize only a handful of municipal positions both in 2010 and 2014 – and the under-researched nature of subnational politics in Hungary in general. While some of the aforementioned empirical work does study the *party in office* with respect to Jobbik, it was solely the party's parliamentary group and parliamentary candidates that have been subject to excessive scrutiny – never its mayors or local councilors. Similarly, the very few comprehensive studies of Hungarian local politics and its recent developments (Hajnal and Rosta, 2014; Soós and Kákai, 2011; Tamás, 2014; Dobos and Papp, 2017) almost entirely ignore the activity of Jobbik at the subnational level. In the first two papers listed above, for instance, the party is not mentioned on a single occasion, while the third cited source, a detailed monograph about the politics of municipalities in Hungary, touches upon Jobbik exclusively in connection with the mayor of Érpatak, who is not a member of the party and won his two consecutive mandates as an independent candidate. If at all, Jobbik's presence on the municipal level is only illustrated by case studies which involve the presence of the Hungarian Guard or other paramilitary groups (formerly) affiliated with the party (Virág, 2016).

The intersection of local politics and the far right is not completely neglected by the international literature, but most scholars have restricted themselves to explaining their electoral success at the municipal or federal level. The former typically use formal models and the statistical analysis of vote share and turnout data (Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir, 2007; Kestila and Söderlund, 2007; Arzheimer and Carter, 2009; Jesuit, Paradowski and Mahler, 2009; Rydgren and Ruth, 2011). Other researchers have employed data about the grassroots activities of far-right

organizations gathered from interviews and content-analysis of the press (Goodwin, 2010; Art, 2011; De Lange and Art, 2011; Dinas and Rori, 2016; Ellinas and Lamprinou, 2016). This line of research usually highlights the links between leadership and local organizations: how solid (extra-parliamentary) organizations have resulted in the party's persistence at the national electoral level (Art, 2011; Bolleyer and Bytsek, 2013), or how local far-right party organizations have reacted to national leadership crises (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016).

Some studies have relied on extensive fieldwork and municipal-level case studies (for example, see: Váradi and Virág, 2014), but they did not examine how the far-right governs locally; instead they concentrated on understanding the experience of female activists who promote the far-right's culturally racist agenda at the municipality level (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2015) or the way extremist parties exploit the circulation of violence at the local level to attract sympathizers and discourage opponents (Petrou and Kandyliis, 2016). A few scholars have focused on the impact of the far-right on other political actors at the local level (Loxbo, 2010; Bracco, Paola and Green, 2017), but they did not investigate cases where the far-right was in power.

The extensive use of enemy images is, in most cases, not irrational, but strategic, and can pay off politically. The need for enemies and allies is a general feature of humans and human communities (see, for example: Volkan, 1985). Due to their utmost importance in human societies, enemy concepts and enemy images have a central role in politics (Szabó, 1998). The 'enemy' is different from the 'rival': while the latter is an integral part of the political community, and therefore a legitimate player in the democratic process, the former is not – therefore it should be excluded or even eliminated from the political community (Edelman, 1988; Szabó, 2007). But of course, enemies do not just divide communities, but can unite and mobilize them as well. As Kenneth Burke (1974: 193) wrote in his essay about Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*: *'Men who can unite on nothing else can unite on the basis of a foe shared by all.'*

Enemy images and concepts, as well as ideology-based scapegoating, are the 'sine qua non' of the politics and policies of far-right parties and movements, which are best defined and characterized by their enemies (Mudde, 2007). Given that the core feature of the ideology of the far-right is *nativism*, enemies of the far-right are defined on an ethnic, national or racial basis. Examination of enemy images is important not only for understanding the far right's ideology: enemy images influence not only the rhetorical, but the political and the policy output and 'behavior' of far-right parties, movements and leaders.

The importance of enemy concepts and images lies in their capacity to drive political and policy processes in the direction of escalating intergroup conflict. Enemy images are the prerequisites of racism, discrimination and armed conflict (Oppenheimer, 2006). In the presence of frustrations over perceived difficulties (for example: economic problems, crime, ethnic conflicts) and pre-existing stereotypes about scapegoated enemy groups, the scapegoating ideology can mobilize not only spontaneous, but organized action against this outgroup – from verbal attacks through discriminative measures to mass violence and even genocide. Such actions can be justified as necessary and ethical, 'a matter of self-defense against an inherently malevolent "enemy"' (Glick, 2002: 119).

The enemy images and concepts of the Hungarian far-right share the more ‘universal’ logic of the ethnicized enemy images in Europe (Szele and Tófalvi, 2012). The image of the criminal, lazy minority shows many similarities in two substantially different European countries – Hungary and the United Kingdom – towards two totally different minority groups: the Roma, and Muslims. The two most important aspects of these stereotypes are *parasitism* and *criminality* (ibid; Bernáth-Messing, 2011). Both have policy implications. According to Jobbik’s narrative, the parasitism and laziness of the Roma go hand in hand with the notion that they receive a lot of unjustified social benefits that they do not deserve – and that this injustice calls for urgent correction.

The most trivial enemy for the Hungarian far-right is the Roma minority, the most unpopular minority group in Central-Eastern Europe, who face widespread political efforts to criminalize or mobilize against them (Feischmidt, Szombati and Szuhay, 2013). As a consequence, the ownership and appropriation of the ‘Gypsy crime’ issue, and Jobbik’s successful attempts to put this issue on the political agenda, were the main reasons for the electoral breakthrough of the Hungarian far-right (Karácsony and Róna, 2011). Nonetheless, enemy images of the Hungarian far-right are not limited to the Roma, as they are frequently directed at other enemies: the liberal international political, cultural and financial elites and their ethnic symbol, the Jew. As the narrative goes, lobby groups financed by international capital, through their local lackeys, are executing their plot to destroy nations and indigenous values.⁵ The main ‘axiomatic enemy’ for the Hungarian far right – which can serve as a final explanation for the World’s ills – is traditionally the international liberal elite and Jewry, who, through conspiring with the pseudo-national elites, and using the Roma as a tool, are ruining the country. So, in Mudde’s typology (2007), this is a grand conspiracy involving players who are ‘within the state, outside the nation’ (the Roma, and more generally, the ‘parasites’), along with others who are ‘outside the state, and outside the nation’ (Jews, the international financial elite, ‘background powers’).

Jobbik’s politicians frequently combine enemy images to simplify the scapegoating process, claiming that ‘Gypsy crime’ is a weapon in the hand of ‘Zionism’ that weakens the Hungarian nation.⁶ This ideological scapegoating mechanism serves as a basis of political and policy actions on the local level as well. The mobilization by Jobbik’s paramilitary organizations against the ‘aggressive Roma’, for example, led to the violent escalation of ethnic tensions in a small locality in Northern Hungary in 2011 and consequently to the election of a Jobbik-affiliated mayor who promised to make order. The former village thus became a successful laboratory of anti-Roma mobilization on the local level for the Hungarian far-right (Political Capital, 2011). Feischmidt and Szombati (2017) describe in detail this successful grassroots mobilization of the far-right using enemy images, the dynamics these images can bring

⁵ See, for example: Jobbik.hu. (2010a) Municipal Campaign Manifesto of Jobbik’s Basic Party Unit in Derecske [Online, in Hungarian]. Available at: <http://derecske.jobbik.hu/sites/default/files/images/JMM%20Derecskei%20Alapszervezetek%20Onkor%20manyzati%20valasztasi%20programja.pdf>

⁶ As did, *inter alia*, Lajos Rig, who is currently the only MP of Jobbik to gain a mandate in a single-member district in 2015, on his Facebook page a few years ago: <http://24.hu/belfold/2015/02/14/tapolcai-jobbik-jelolt-a-ciganvok-a-zsidok-biologiai-fegyvere/>

to local politics, and the way they escalate intergroup conflict. Our research starts where theirs ends, seeking to answer the question whether anti-minority mobilization, rooted in structurally generated antagonisms and discourses that build on enemy images, can provide fertile ground not just for winning local elections, but for governing municipalities afterwards through the employment of scapegoat-based policy making.

3. Methodological considerations and case selection

We explore the scapegoating attempts of Jobbik politicians at the local level and compare enemy images used in various localities, while also trying to relate them to the earlier scapegoating strategies of the party at the national level. The selected cases are settlements where the far-right is *already in power*, hence we do not aim to explain local or national electoral success, but rather to investigate the extent to which scapegoating and enemy-making serve as inspiration for policies and regulations. To achieve this, we employed qualitative methods (mainly in-depth interviews and on-site fieldwork); the exploratory phase of the inquiry similarly relied on non-quantified desktop research such as content analysis of national and local media – independent, Jobbik-affiliated and local government-financed alike –, budget proposals, as well as cultural and welfare policies. The research was carried out in five of the total eighteen municipalities that are led by Jobbik mayors: Ásotthalom, Devecser, Ózd, Tapolca, and Tiszavasvári. Four of the municipalities selected are towns (Jobbik only controls five towns in Hungary), while Ásotthalom is a village. The list of municipalities under investigation includes settlements from Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western Hungary, as well as Jobbik's politically most significant three municipalities whose mayors are vice-chairmen of the party.

Also, these settlements represent policy areas that are of utmost importance for Jobbik. Ásotthalom, led by László Toroczkai, one of the most radical far-right politicians in Hungary, stands for the extremist stance and the strict anti-immigration policy of Jobbik. Devecser, Ózd and Tiszavasvári are of key importance because of their Roma population. Tapolca, a former Fidesz-stronghold with a small Roma population, represents Jobbik's challenge of gaining support beyond its core electorate while abandoning its anti-Roma rhetoric. In addition, the case studies are diverse in terms of political composition: divided town halls and an absolute majority in the council behind the far-right mayor are both present in the selection. Our aim was to create a diverse pool of settlements with the expectation that this would yield more generalizable results. It also enabled us to create 'settlement pairs', which were similar to each other in many respects, yet differed in one or two key variables relevant from Jobbik's perspective, using Mill's Method of Difference (MSSD). As a rule of thumb, the larger settlements are, the more political relevance they possess; nevertheless, by selecting towns, we also had the chance to do fieldwork on settlements that spend a sizeable portion of their budget on freely designated objectives, reflecting the local government's ideological (or pragmatic) priorities. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the demographics, ethnic distribution and political characteristics of municipalities selected as cases for analysis.

Table 1. Main features of the settlements examined

	Population (2001)	Population (2015)	Proportion of Roma population (2001)	Proportion of Roma population (2011)	Proportion of unemployed (2011)	Vote share of Jobbik's mayoral candidate (2014)
Ásotthalom	4218	3871	0.4%	0.4%	5.26%	100%
Devecser	5161	4330	2.54%	12.38%	35.4%	54.2%
Ózd	38 405	34 481	6.6%	11%	8.6%	38.57%
Tapolca	16 964	15 582	2.34%	1.26%	5.4%	39.34%
Tiszavasvári	14 698	13 040	8.91%	12.6%	6%	52.1%
HUNGARY	10 322 099	9 855 571	1.84%	3.18%	5.7%	-

Given our aim of understanding the style and character of (and motivation behind) Jobbik's municipal-level governance, the research primarily relied on in-depth interviews with a wide circle of local public actors with considerable experience in local public life and a deep understanding of the local characteristics of Roma-non-Roma cohabitation. Altogether, 36 interviews were conducted with mayors, opposition politicians, entrepreneurs, activists and representatives of Roma communities and local NGOs. The interviews focused on the social and political circumstances, key policy areas and the performance of the local government, and the impact of local policies on the Roma and the local community in general.

All interviews were conducted by one or two authors of this paper; interviewees received no financial compensation, were assured of their anonymity and that conversations would be recorded and transcribed. Unless specified otherwise, statements presented with quotation marks and references to our fieldwork denote ascertainties based on interviewees' everyday experiences and beliefs. Topic guides were semi-formalized: while detailed templates existed for specific groups of interviewees, researchers were free to expand and personalize guides based on their pre-existing knowledge about local specificities. The latter also conveyed to respondents that we 'did our homework'; i.e. helped us to be taken more seriously, using context-specific details as effective tools in the power play between interviewer(s) and interviewee (Rivera, Kozyreva and Sarovskii, 2002: 685). While the positive relationship between the 'publicness' of interview location and the extent of control a researcher can claim over the interview situation (Ostrander, 1995) is well-known, the vast majority of venues were selected by the interview subjects - either for reasons related to their convenience or with the aim of ensuring the secrecy of their participation. Table 2 in the Appendix includes some relevant characteristics about all of the interview subjects we talked with.

4. Empirical results

4.1 Symbolic politics

We found that symbolic political measures play a key role for Jobbik and are usually starting points for their scapegoat-based policy making. The party uses symbolic politics to present both the inclusionary and exclusionary elements of the party's ideology. In addition, symbolic politics might be used by local authorities to divert attention from some pressing issues and to soften the expectations of the electorate until practical policy solutions are created. Our fieldwork indicated that mayors of Jobbik felt the pressure to carry out spectacular changes in symbolic politics after coming to power. Interviewees from Ózd often ridiculed how 'statues were relocated to here and there', and similarly, the leadership of Tiszavasvári also financed the restoration or renovation of *existing monuments* instead of installing new ones. After his election, Mayor László Toroczka was also keen to renovate existing statues in Ásotthalom. This is also the result of the hollowing out of Jobbik's own ideological space. While the party's most popular role models and symbols have already been 'domesticated' by Fidesz as part of its efforts to put Jobbik's political program into practice, Jobbik has also started to present the image of a 'mainstream' party, leaving little room for maneuver when trying to identify new right-wing topics or heroes without returning to its extreme and toxic image.

As far as enemy images are concerned, the Roma constitute the main target of Jobbik, which is also reflected in their symbolic politics. In Ózd, Jobbik used the topic of the Roma Cultural Centre to score points by inciting anti-Roma sentiment before the 2014 elections. In Tiszavasvári, when replacing street names commemorating 'heroes' of the Socialist system, one of the new eponyms was *Lajos Szögi*, a local teacher, who was lynched and murdered by a Roma gang in the nearby town of Olaszliszka. Naming a street after the victim of this highly politicized murder is interpreted by some as an 'ever-hanging threat over [the head of] Gypsies'.

Anti-communism, which is another key area of Jobbik's identity, is reflected in symbolic measures too. After *Gábor Ferenczi* became mayor of Devecser, he introduced a commemoration honoring the victims of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. Based on our discourse analysis of articles from local media (daily and weekly newspapers with county- or settlement-wide circulation), this occasion serves as a 'valve' for releasing anti-communist sentiments and feelings. Ancestors of the mayor and the vice-mayor – both Jobbik members and nominees – had been murdered or imprisoned by local officials of the short-lived Soviet Republic. These memorial days are also used to present communism as the direct cause of Hungary's territorial losses following the Treaty of Trianon. Such discourse is underpinned by artistic performances – for example, by the radical-right rock band *Ismerős Arcok*, or recitation of the poetry of Albert Wass, who mainly wrote about the loss of Transylvania to Romania – emphasizing the painful fate of the Hungarian minority abroad. Whereas anti-communist sentiment is indeed a clearly identifiable stance in programmatic documents of the party (Bíró-Nagy and Róna, 2011), it rarely manifests at the level of individual politicians (Kovárek and Farkas, 2017: 47).

Even though anti-Semitism constitutes a core element of far-right ideology in Hungary, Jews are less frequently targets of symbolic political measures at the local level. While there are some examples of symbolic local actions of an anti-Semitic nature from across the country, we did not identify any such measures initiated by the local Jobbik leadership in the municipalities that were researched. Tapolca's mayor even abandoned the party's campaign promise to revise the Holocaust Remembrance Day after getting elected in 2014 (Vajda, 2010: 2).

While an anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stance were not significant elements of far-right ideology in Hungary before 2015, refugees, migrants and Muslims have become a major enemy since then. A symptomatic example is the initiative of Devecser's mayor, Gábor Ferenczi, who proposed the exclusion of migrants from the public works program to the local council and called on mayors of nearby villages to act likewise. Given that the town was not affected by the migration crisis and no migrant ever intended to join the program in Devecser, the move can only be considered a symbolic political action intended to build on xenophobic attitudes that culminated at the time of the refugee crisis.⁷ A similar symbolic act was the resolution of Ásotthalom's local council that, upon the proposal of the mayor, banned the building of mosques, muezzins for reciting the call to prayer, wearing of the burqua, chador, niqāb or burkini, as well as the dissemination of 'gay propaganda' in the village's public areas in late 2016.⁸ Another symbolic measure of Ásotthalom's mayor was an initiative to erect a statue of Saint John of Capestrano kneeling on the body of a defeated Muslim fighter, representing that 'Europe would be defended against the invasion', a reference to the mayor's strong animosity towards (predominantly Muslim) refugees and migrants.

Liberalism and liberal, globalist elites constitute another enemy group of the Hungarian far-right. Whereas the fight against them was less prevalent at the municipal level than in Jobbik's national-level communication, an example was offered by the party organization in Tapolca, which called for the 'immediate extermination of the liberal, foreign-hearted approach' from public education in 2010 (Vajda, 2010: 2). The 'cultural war' against liberal elites is reflected in the unveiling ceremony of the statue of Archangel Michael in Ásotthalom, which provided Mayor Toroczkai with an opportunity to mock Brussels for its *Manneken Pis* statue.

Besides pointing out enemies and scapegoats, symbolic political measures also aim at fostering a common community identity by creating positive heroes and other elements. Despite the efforts of Jobbik's politicians, many topics and symbols have been taken over and 'domesticated' by Fidesz. While installing the Szekler flag on public facilities is a measure that is just as likely to be taken by Fidesz-led municipalities, the use of the Árpád-striped flag is exclusive to Jobbik mayors: Tiszavasvári's Mayor Erik Fülöp replaced the EU flag with the latter in his study room, while *Dávid Janiczak*, mayor of Ózd, even had the interior walls of the City Hall painted with red-and-white stripes. The installation of flags in Ózd reflects the

⁷ Ferenczi's declaration was met with strong objection from his colleagues who criticized his endangering of governmental funds for the public works program for the sake of politicizing the sub-regional administration along party lines. See: the majority opinion of the Sub-Regional Association's Presidium. Available at: http://www.devecser.hu/sites/default/files/articles/files/elnoksegi_tajekoztatás.pdf

⁸ The proposal was later rejected by the constitutional court.

‘theatrical’ nature of symbolic politics: locals reported that ‘at first, there were lots of Árpád-striped flags, but it’s no longer typical nowadays.’

Among the municipalities researched, symbolic politics was used by the local Jobbik leadership in Tapolca least. Here, Mayor Zoltán Dobó has not effectuated visible changes in symbolic politics, because topics and issues jointly owned by Fidesz and Jobbik had already been realized by the previous Fidesz mayor.⁹ In contrast, Ásotthalom’s Mayor Toroczkai has been most active in terms of applying the tools of symbolic politics, also with respect to constructing ‘positive’ elements of identity. Toroczkai has created the cult of a local hero via the ‘rediscovery’ of Sándor Rózsa, a nationally well-known outlaw from the nineteenth century of local origin. Toroczkai, a co-founder of the paramilitary ‘Army of Outlaws’ organization, created an annual festival, an house of entertainment, and a statue dedicated to the outlaw, who is praised for confronting the law and fighting against the injustices of the elites – just as Toroczkai is by his followers. Toroczkai, who also founded the revisionist organization the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, has been utilizing symbolic tools to commemorate territories that Hungary lost due to the Treaty of Trianon. Close to the Serbian-Hungarian border, he created the Memorial to Hungarian Martyrdom.

4.2 Roma-non-Roma cohabitation

Scapegoating the Roma has been the most important element of Jobbik’s political strategy. This has had a key effect on Jobbik’s agenda and served as the main source of policy making at the local level. The cohabitation of Roma and non-Roma was on the top of the political agenda in three Jobbik-led localities: Tiszavasvári, Ózd, and Devecser. Roma and non-Roma relations were hallmarked by violent and/or rancorous events before the radical right came to power, deciding the outcome of local elections. In Tiszavasvári, the saddest of such events was the death of the town’s geography teacher, Lajos Szögi, but this was not the first ethnicity-based conflict: generations remember the segregated graduation ceremonies of 1997, organized separately for Roma children.

In Ózd, Jobbik radicals experienced a rapid upswing in support due to the protests they organized against the planned Roma Cultural Centre. This would have been a methodological and educational institution realized from EU funds. Jobbik depicted the project as something that would ‘turn Ózd into a Gipsy capital, help settle Roma in, and support murderous families’ and organized a sizable-for-the-locality crowd of cca. 700 protesters for a demonstration in front of the town hall. Local party activists also managed to collect enough signatures for a local referendum on the issue, exploiting not only anti-Roma sentiment and the fears of locals, but also the fact that the local Roma self-government was not consulted beforehand, and that the city council made its supporting decision to adopt the project during a closed session.

In Devecser, a violent confrontation escalated between a Roma and a non-Roma family following a petty conflict over car parking; after the story was made

⁹ E.g. Trianon Park, signs with Hungarian runic script on them, or renaming the city library after Albert Wass.

public on an extremist website, far-right groups (the Hungarian Guard, Army of Outlaws, etc.) held a demonstration against ‘gypsy crime’ with Ferenczi, who was to become Jobbik’s mayoral candidate two years later, as a speaker. Afterwards, the extremists marched to the house of the Roma family and started throwing stones at them, with riot police present at the scene but not intervening. Interviewees underlined how this incident gained Jobbik local fame, while substantially damaging the relationship of the local ethnic minority with non-Roma inhabitants at the same time.

One issue our interviews uncovered in Jobbik-led municipalities was how mayors consciously exploited internal conflicts within the Roma community. In these settlements, lines of division were, *inter alia*, ethnicity (Romungros vs. Vlachs), place of origin/birth (Ózd and Tiszavasvári had a significant share of Roma relocated from nearby cities, often with serious crime records), the segregated neighborhoods they live in – and, of course, their stance on how to relate to Jobbik. Shortly after winning the mayoral mandate in Ózd, Dávid Janiczak appointed a so-called local Roma rapporteur who had previously held a high-ranking position in the Roma self-government, but in the most recent election his electoral list was largely ignored by Roma voters, thus the rapporteur failed to gain a seat in the ethnic minority self-government. Janiczak’s move is best understood as an attempt to ‘weaken the voter base of the local minority self-government’ and form a new, alternative political pole within the Roma community. After Lungo Drom, a Fidesz-ally, obtained most of the seats in the local Roma self-government, Jobbik-councilors cut its annual budget by more than 33 percent.

In Tiszavasvári, local leaders either attempted to force local Roma into a situation where they were dependent on the local government (e.g. through the public works scheme) or – according to our interviewees – by promising several million forints to the Roma minority self-government if they were willing to support a cooperation agreement with Mihály Zoltán Orosz, the infamous extremist mayor of Érpatak. This issue has led to division among local Roma – councilors and politically active citizens alike –, and the local minority government was eventually dissolved in 2011 because the ‘pro-Jobbik’ and ‘anti-Jobbik’ members could not agree on who should be president, consequently followed by an ‘interregnum’ that lasted until 2014. In Devecser, several well-to-do and widely respected Roma are required to explain themselves to others for cultivating a positive, fruitful relationship with the political leaders of the town; at the same time, discourse has emerged on the side of non-Roma Jobbik supporters that labels the aforementioned group ‘Roma, but not like the rest – better than the others’.

The introduction to this subchapter already mentioned how the Roma World Tent project was able to amplify and invoke the anti-Roma sentiment of locals, but also helped Jobbik to successfully frame Fidesz as a party that locally represents *solely* Roma interests. In Ózd, multiple interviewees confirmed that the second (repeated) round of local elections was ‘basically about the antagonism between Hungarians and the Roma.’ They referred to the large-scale campaign event of Fidesz, held shortly before the second election, which targeted Roma voters only, attracting a sizeable crowd and effectively generating fear in non-Roma voters. Another advantageous strategy for Jobbik in these settlements was colligating corruption (related to the then-

governing Fidesz politicians) and the Roma question: a good illustration of this strategy concerns the Türr István Program, an educational initiative designed to help Roma to catch up, which offered either ‘superficial’ courses and ones ‘of dubious value’, or did not even enroll students on fictitious ones.

The Jobbik-led government of Ózd also swore to fight against those who fail to pay their utility bills on time. Animosity against the insolvent locals from the underclass prevails, as it became clear that Janiczak was more interested in punishment than a long-term solution: the mayor refused to co-operate with the Roma self-government and Reformed Church Aid in installing prepayment electric meters. Moreover, the government installed spikes on electricity pylons and raised their height to combat power theft. Similarly, the local government of Tiszavasvári, in cooperation with service providers, switched off electricity to large areas of the town as part of a crackdown on electricity theft. As this was done in the cold season, leaving numerous people without heating, the measure generated considerable media attention that eventually led to its revocation.

One way to assess local governments’ attempts to shape the public image and perception of Roma is to review what literary works are available locally that were purchased from public funds. Our brief content analysis of library holdings revealed that in Devecser only two Roma-related acquisitions have been made since Jobbik took power: one deals with the events of the murder spree against Roma in 2008/09, while the other – according to its blurb – ‘declares war on human rights activists and gypsies who do politics for a living.’ It says a lot that Berhida – a nearby town led by an independent mayor, with a sizeable Roma population and situated in Veszprém county, just like Tapolca and Devecser – purchased books both ‘on topics related to Roma and in Romani language’ whenever it had funds for expanding its stock in the 2000s and the 2010s alike.

Whereas Jobbik’s mayors (except for Tiszavasvári’s) have proven to be quite pragmatic concerning their relationship with Fidesz appointees in public administration (or representatives and MPs from the governing party) with regard to issues of regional development, public safety and education and welfare, NGOs and alternative schools struggling to make progress with the same causes were treated badly and with strong hostility, especially with regard to initiatives aimed at helping the Roma and the underclass in general. Foundations (*Van Helyed!*), remedial schools and extracurricular vocational training institutions (*Abigél, dr. Ámbédkar, Abakusz*), and even well-established charity organizations (a high school founded and maintained by the *Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta*) were displaced, chased away – or at best, support was withdrawn from them – because of their perceived liberal affiliations, or simply due to the fear that they would attract the poor (and especially the Roma) from the surrounding communities.

4.3 Social policy and the public works scheme

In Hungary, social benefits are covered by the central budget, but their distribution has largely been the prerogative of local governments since March 2015. Consequently, the nature of local welfare benefit systems are quite illustrative of the attitudes of local government. In many cases, provision of social assistance is closely

connected to ‘law and order’ policies, thus this becomes a tool of pacification by being bound to requirements unrelated to the financial situation of applicants.

Tying social assistance to the neatness of the applicant’s place of residence is a common practice employed throughout Hungary. The principle is based on the scapegoating of certain groups of society, mainly the Roma. The resolution in Ásotthalom defines the maintenance of hygienic conditions, the preservation of a usable state, and the consistency and cleanliness of the estate, gardens, pavements and storm water ditches as preconditions for receiving housing benefits.¹⁰ In Ózd, the mayor wanted to tie the accelerated, fast-track lease of apartments – one of his discretionary powers – to a certificate of good conduct, but this idea was not implemented due to legal obstacles. On the other hand, the ‘clean garden, neat house’ policy was in place under the previous Fidesz leadership as well, giving the public area oversight authority the power to fine residents for breaching this rule. In Tapolca, this policy is complemented by ‘soft’ requirements (e.g. concerning applicants’ ‘way of life’) involving significant room for subjective and arbitrary decision-making by the mayor.

The desire to pacify the minority is engrained in the welfare system: another example of this is the public works scheme. Public work is financed by the state budget but operated and supervised by the municipality; the way the latter selects workers, monitors their activities and evaluates their work tells us much about the approach of the local authority. For Jobbik, the public works scheme is thought of not as a means of training participants and preparing them for reintegration into the labor market, but for the protection of public safety, and for ‘teaching a lesson’. This may be one of the reasons why Janiczak wanted to monitor public workers in Ózd with cameras – so he could check their performance. He was forced to give up this policy proposal, as it would have violated the basic rights of workers. The public works scheme became one of the key elements of the law-and-order program in Tiszavasvári, under the oversight of ‘public safety expert’ György Gyula Zagya, a former Jobbik MP. Public workers are under tight control, expected to show maximum discipline, and the local government also restricts the rights provided to them by law.

4.4 Public safety

The topic of public safety, utilized by Jobbik to incite anti-Roma sentiment, has been on the top of the party’s agenda ever since its foundation. Jobbik’s policy proposals and measures regarding public safety are clearly based on the scapegoated image of the Roma. Party politicians claim that Roma are overrepresented among criminals and that the Roma disproportionately commit certain crimes. The invention and conscious usage of the term ‘Gypsy crime’ was the main reason for Jobbik’s rapid upswing in the late 2000s (Karácsony and Róna, 2011). Even though the term has disappeared from the party’s discourse since 2013, local politics takes more time to change: topics of public safety and the crimes reportedly perpetrated by Roma were

¹⁰ The resolution on social benefits contains examples: firewood should not be scattered around, there should be no trash in gardens, and on arable areas residents must grow vegetables. See <http://www.njt.hu/njtonkorm.php?njtcp=eh6eg1ed8dr9e06dt7ee0em9cj4cf7bz2cf9bx4bx1k>

the engines behind the increasing popularity and electoral victories of Jobbik both in Ózd and Tiszavasvári. The examples of Tapolca and Ásotthalom show that even in places where the proportion of Roma population is low and crime statistics are somewhat better than the national average,¹¹ measures to improve public safety were key elements of Jobbik's local election programs. In the latter settlement, refugees are also depicted as the main threats to public safety.

In all localities featured in the study, local governments had created their own law enforcement authorities, working in cooperation with the Police. Jobbik mayors and representatives allocated significant resources to setting up these bodies; in Devceser a new tax was even levied to cover the expenses of the 'field guard'. During his campaign, the mayor of Ózd promised to establish a police cavalry unit, as well as acquire quads and drones; nonetheless, for financial reasons these plans have not yet come to fruition. As opposed to other, non Jobbik-led localities, Ásotthalom chiefly uses its field guard to stop refugees and migrants – not to prevent the theft of agricultural products.

Roma interviewees complained about the law enforcement agencies such as the Gendarmerie, but also about police measures. In Tiszavasvári, strong penal measures were introduced in 2012: the police increased the frequency of inspections and started to hand out disproportionate fines undoubtedly aimed at the Roma population (e.g. 10,000 HUF fines for users of bikes with insufficient safety accessories, or fines for 'endangering underage persons' for parents of children who play 20 meters or further from their homes). Nor is this phenomenon unheard of in other Hungarian settlements.¹²

Tiszavasvári's local government also signed a cooperation agreement – reportedly no longer in effect – with the Legion of Honour (Mihály Zoltán Orosz's organization), causing panic and anger among the Roma. According to the former, the Legion were required to perform law enforcement duties, increase the efficiency of the child protection system, and propagate a healthy, drug-free lifestyle. Legionaries were also charged with preventing illegal waste disposal, the theft of wood and electricity, drug abuse and loan sharking; however, they also unexpectedly showed up in neighborhoods to march and patrol in camouflage uniforms, or to film neighborhood residents. Their appearance destabilized inter-ethnic relationships, sowing the seeds of animosity between Roma and non-Roma and, incidentally, also legitimized the racist-extremist discourse about Roma. The heightened tensions that followed the measures in Tiszavasvári were inconvenient for party leader Gábor Vona who was trying to reposition Jobbik as a people's party at the same time; consequently, cooperation between the local government and the Legion ended in early 2017.¹³

To sum up, Jobbik's scapegoats are 'lazy', 'untidy', 'anti-communitarian' citizens and 'criminals': anyone who is not a 'builder' but a 'destructive element' of the city. The main job of local political leaders is to maintain 'order', and protect 'builders' from 'destructive' people. According to the politicians of Jobbik, anyone

¹¹ Source: official statistics of the Ministry for Domestic Affairs. Available at: <https://bsr.bm.hu/SitePages/DokumentumtarLista.aspx?libraryName=ElkBunelkAdatok>

¹² 'Absurd Fines Imposed against Hungary's Roma', *TASZ*, September 5, 2014. Available at: <http://tasz.hu/en/romaprogram/absurd-fines-imposed-against-hungarvs-roma>.

¹³ Interview in Heti Válasz, December 1, 2016.

may be 'destructive,' regardless of race and skin color. However, as demonstrated above, mayors of the locales investigated were predisposed to connect the problems with minority Roma society with their 'restore order' slogan in their respective towns during their campaigns.

5. Conclusions

This study has described the scapegoats and enemy images consciously used by Jobbik mayors that anchor their local policies and political strategy. We have highlighted the broad range of enemy images, the way they shape policy initiatives, and the political goals behind choosing and consistently employing them. Whereas 'scapegoat-based policy making' was found to be present in all municipalities scrutinized, we found notable differences as far as its actual implementation was concerned.

The Roma still serve as the main scapegoat and enemy image for local Jobbik politicians. Despite the party's conscious strategy of moderation at the national level, the settlement-level appears to remain the 'reservoir for radicalism' for Jobbik. An anti-Roma stance is the party's key distinguishing mark, and is also of great importance for the voter base. In four out of the five Jobbik-led localities we examined, anti-Roma policies and rhetoric constitute a key element of the activities of Jobbik's local leaders. The most striking examples were Ózd and Tiszavasvári, but the Roma are in the crosshairs in Devecser and Ásotthalom too. Jobbik mayors and representatives use the Roma as scapegoats who are deemed partly responsible for the ills and problems of the local community, but also as enemies who pose a financial-cultural threat to the future of the locality and also to the social-physical wellbeing and security of its non-Roma dwellers. Jobbik politicians act this way to unite their electoral base against a common enemy, divert attention from their own inability to solve complex problems efficiently, legitimize policy decisions, and support the feeling of superiority of the local non-Roma population. The scapegoating and enemy images of the Roma clearly mirror a far-right ideology based on nativism.

The refugee crisis had a significant impact on Jobbik's enemy images, both at the national and local level. The enemy image of the Migrant reflects nativism and strongly identifies Muslims as enemies who pose a direct threat to both the local community and also to the nation, similarly to the Roma. This enemy image serves as founding principle of policy decisions in the field of symbolic politics, but also in public security (in Ásotthalom) and social policy (in Devecser). The strategy of portraying migrants as enemies is designed to divert attention from the problems of the localities and the inability of the local Jobbik mayor to solve these problems efficiently, while also competing with the government's anti-immigration stance.

Scapegoating and making enemy images of communists involves identifying them with historical evils such as the Treaty of Trianon and historical mass killings in Hungary. By linking communists with the current opposition (both said to be pitted against nationalist ideologies), they are also presented as a current enemy. Accordingly, this strategy is designed to create a nationalist identity within the local community and to restructure local history. In addition, anti-communist sentiment might also disguise anti-Semitism, which otherwise does not appear in the policy

decisions of local Jobbik politicians. Anti-establishment narratives are mainly reflected by how local Jobbik politicians are antagonized by liberalism. Liberal cosmopolitan elites, just like communists, are perceived and portrayed to pose an indirect cultural threat and therefore serve as a basis for symbolic policies that are designed to help build a common, local, political identity, and to unite Jobbik's own electoral base. Anti-communist sentiments were utilized by Jobbik in Devecser, while anti-liberal narratives related to the migration issue were mainly restricted to Ásotthalom. The LGBTQ community, an otherwise important enemy image for Jobbik at the national level, was identifiable only in Ásotthalom, which was the only locality that introduced discriminating policies against this group.

Our research also highlighted how changing political circumstances have changed the enemy images of the far-right. While the Roma remain an uncontested scapegoat and enemy image at the settlement-level, Muslim refugees and migrants, as well as liberal elites, have also become targets of Jobbik mayors. However, to what extent and in what form these enemy images are used depends on local peculiarities and the personal political interests and considerations of the local leaders. For instance, in Ásotthalom, situated at the Serbian-Hungarian border, with a negligible Roma population, the mayor employed a harsh anti-immigration stance to emphasize his 'radical' image and counter-balance (or even challenge) the de-radicalization strategy of the party chairman.

While Jobbik locally presents a rather radical face and group of politicians, local peculiarities also shape the extent of this display. Tapolca proved to be the most moderate among the municipalities researched, better reflecting the new national political line of Jobbik. Consequently, there is also local variation in to what extent the general observation of Akkerman and Lange (2012) – that the far-right becomes 'domesticated' after gaining executive power – is applicable at the local level; based on the findings of our fieldwork, the statement does not apply to most Jobbik-led localities. Except for in Tapolca, municipalities featured numerous policy measures based on scapegoated and enemy images of specific groups.

This research was designed to identify the face of the Hungarian far-right at the settlement-level, but the task is far from over. We conclude that scapegoat-based policy making manifested in every municipality, even though the actual *scapegoat* differed from settlement to settlement, based on local circumstances. Jobbik mayors face serious difficulties in the everyday implementation of scapegoat-based policies. Investigation of the localities has underlined that, regardless of the high expectations of locals and their own party, local Jobbik leaders are not miracle-workers: most of the problems of the localities are long-standing and structurally defined, offering little room for maneuver. Feeling the pressure, Jobbik representatives extensively use the tools of symbolic politics which clearly express their ideology, even if such scapegoat-based policy making does not yield substantial results, or if its outcomes are downplayed for legal or political reasons. Finally, the differences among the policies identified by the research, as revealed in the current paper, emphasize that understanding the personalized and context-dependent nature of local level politics is of utmost importance.

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Appendix

Table 2: Overview of interviewees.

ID (Settlement + No.)	Position / Occupation	Gender	Political affiliation
Ásothalom01	Priest	Male	N/A
Ásothalom02	Local councilor	Female	Independent
Ásothalom03	Politically active	Male	formerly MSZP, then
Ásothalom04	Former local councilor	Male	Independent
Ásothalom05	Local entrepreneur	Female	N/A
Devecser01	High-ranking politician	Male	Fidesz
Devecser02	Roma representative	Male	N/A
Devecser03	Roma entrepreneur	Male	N/A
Devecser04	Political activist	Female	PM
Devecser05	Teacher and politician	Male	Fidesz
Devecser06	Roma musician	Male	N/A
Ózd01	Mayor	Male	Jobbik
Ózd02	Local councilor	Male	Fidesz / Independent
Ózd03	Local politician	Female	PM
Ózd04	Journalist	Male	N/A
Ózd05	Local politician	Male	MSZP
Ózd06	Roma representative	Male	N/A
Tapolca01	Roma representative	Female	N/A
Tapolca02	Local councilor	Male	Fidesz
Tapolca03	Local councilor	Male	MSZP
Tapolca04	Local politician	Male	MSZP
Tiszavasvári01	Roma representative	Male	N/A
Tiszavasvári02	Roma representative	Male	N/A
Tiszavasvári03	Roma representative	Male	N/A
Tiszavasvári04	Roma representative	Female	N/A
Tiszavasvári05	Roma intellectual	Female	Fidesz
Tiszavasvári06	Local councilor,	Male	Fidesz
Tiszavasvári07	Local councilor	Female	Independent
Tiszavasvári08	Regional development	Male	formerly MSZP, now
Tiszavasvári09	Local entrepreneur	Male	N/A

Tiszavasvári10	Social worker	Female	N/A
Tiszavasvári11	Social worker	Female	N/A
Tiszavasvári12	Social worker	Male	N/A
Berhida01	Teacher	Male	N/A
Berhida02	School director	Female	N/A
Berhida03	Mayor	Female	Independent