

Attitude radicals in Hungary – in international context

February 29, 2012

Looking at Europe as a whole, social demand for far-right ideas has not increased significantly in the wake of the current economic crisis in the past few years. In Southern and Western Europe demand for far-right ideologies shows a rising trend: in particular, prejudice has intensified dramatically in Switzerland, Belgium and Finland, and to a lesser extent, in France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Great-Britain. In Southern Europe – Portugal and Spain – the degree of anti-establishment sentiment has risen dramatically. At the same time, in some Eastern European counties, the DEREX index declined (however, it has remained much higher than in Western Europe¹). The threat of high level of attitude radicals is that they can be “seduced” by radical political forces; and even more importantly, a prejudicial, nationalist and anti-establishment public can push mainstream parties and political leaders toward a more radical position. In Hungary, confidence in political institutions shows extreme fluctuation. Such swings are a source of threat in itself as they may work to the benefit of radical political forces exploiting sudden shifts in public sentiment.

About DEREX Index – who are attitude radicals?

Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index (DEREX)² measures the size of the group in a given country susceptible to far-right ideologies and political messages. A country's DEREX score is determined by the rate of respondents who belong to at least three of the four categories (prejudices, anti-establishment attitudes, right-wing value orientation and fear, distrust and pessimism) all at once. Using these strict criteria, the DEREX Index examines the percentage of people (the “attitude radicals”) whose radical views could destabilize a country's democratic political system and free-market economy – if these views continue to gain credence.

The DEREX Index makes it possible to track changes in social phenomena that threaten to radicalize a society. High demand for right-wing extremism poses a broad array of risks:

- Low levels of trust can render the democratic system unable to function.
- Anti-elitism and economic protectionism can destroy the investment climate.
- Xenophobia and aggressive nationalism can endanger both domestic and regional peace.

The differentiation between the “political radicalism” (the radical right forces and organizations) and “attitude radicalism” (the radical tendencies in the public opinion) is an important focal point of our approach. It means that DEREX index does not reflect party preferences and the group under review (“attitude radicals”) is not identical to the far-right's electoral base; yet there is a partial overlapping between the two sets. The vast majority of those susceptible to far-right ideologies supports moderate parties or do not vote. The political relevance of the group under review lies in the fact that

- based on their attitudes they may be susceptible to messages coming from the far-right, i.e., they can be “seduced” by far-right political forces; and
- under pressure to meet the demands of the attitude radicals in their own camp, moderate political forces may shift towards a more radical position.

¹ In our previous report - based on the 2008-2009 dataset - we could observe a reverse tendency: While the demand for the radical right was on the rise in several Eastern European countries, the same threat seemed to decrease in Western Europe. See details: http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/back-by-popular-demand_411.html

² The word „demand” refers to the social receptivity of the ideas of the radical right. The distinction between the „supply” (party) and the „demand” (voter) side of right-wing extremism is quite typical in the academic literature of the field.(E.g. Norris, Pippa (2005): Radical Right. Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market. Cambridge University Press),

European trends

- Looking at Europe as a whole, social demand for far-right ideas has not increased significantly in the wake of the current economic crisis in the past few years. **In other words, theories primarily aimed at highlighting a causal connection between the economic downturn and growing public support for far-right extremism appear to be unfounded.** Even in Western countries where prejudices have been on the rise, the tendency was not impaired by strengthening economic worries.
- Reverse trends can be detected in Southern and Western Europe on one hand, and Eastern European countries on the other. **In the South and West the demand for far-right ideologies shows a rising trend:** in particular, prejudice has intensified dramatically in Switzerland, Belgium and Finland, and to a lesser extent, in France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Great-Britain. In Southern Europe – Portugal and Spain – the degree of anti-establishment sentiment has risen dramatically. At the same time, in Eastern Europe, (e.g., in Hungary, Estonia and Bulgaria) the DEREX index declined. **However, demand for the far right remains significantly higher in Eastern and Southern European countries than in Western Europe.**

Graph 1: The „Champions” of Demand for Right Wing Extremism (2011)³

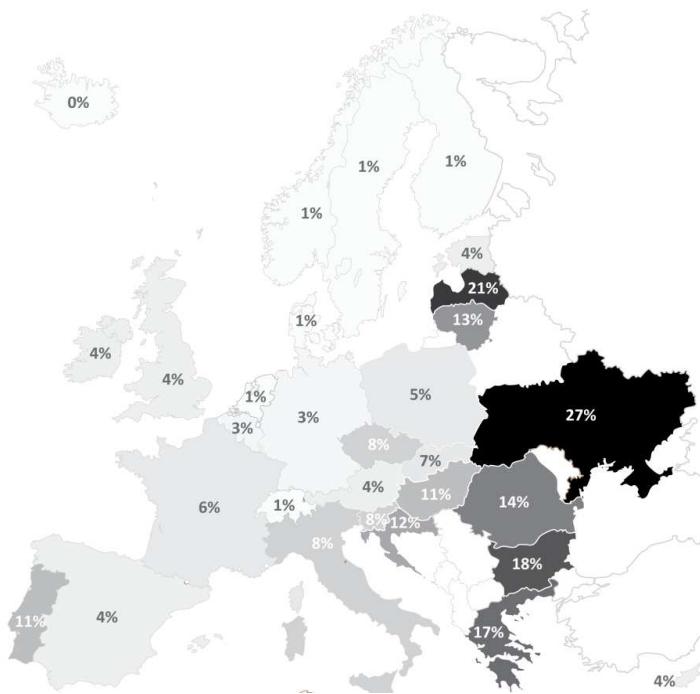
	DEREX	Prejudices	Anti-establishment	Right-Wing Value Orientation	Fear
1	Bulgaria (18%)	Hungary (48%)	Bulgaria (45%)	Hungary (32%)	Bulgaria (39%)
2	Hungary (11%)	Estonia (41%)	Portugal (37%)	Bulgaria (30%)	Hungary (19%)
3	Portugal (11%)	Czech Republic (36%)	Slovenia (35%)	Poland (30%)	Portugal (19%)
4	Czech Republic (8%)	Portugal (30%)	Czech Republic (28%)	Czech Republic (20%)	Slovenia (14%)
5	Slovenia (8%)	Bulgaria (29%)	Poland (22%)	Spain (20%)	Czech Republic (14%)

- **In general, attitude-radicalism poses a bigger threat to the countries of the East than the West.** In Northwestern Europe, only 1 to 3 percent of the population expresses sympathy for the combination of radical ideas. Even so, we could see electoral successes in many of these former “bastions of tolerance”. (including Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands). This contradiction can be easily solved using Cas Mudde’s theory on the “tolerance of the intolerant”⁴- that is, many dominantly liberal voters support radical right parties in Western Europe to express their stance against Muslims, who they perceive as a threat to core liberal values. It even means that in these countries, there are much fewer risk factors threatening the democratic establishment.

³ESS Round 5: European Social Survey Round 5 Data (2010-2011). Data file edition 1.0. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

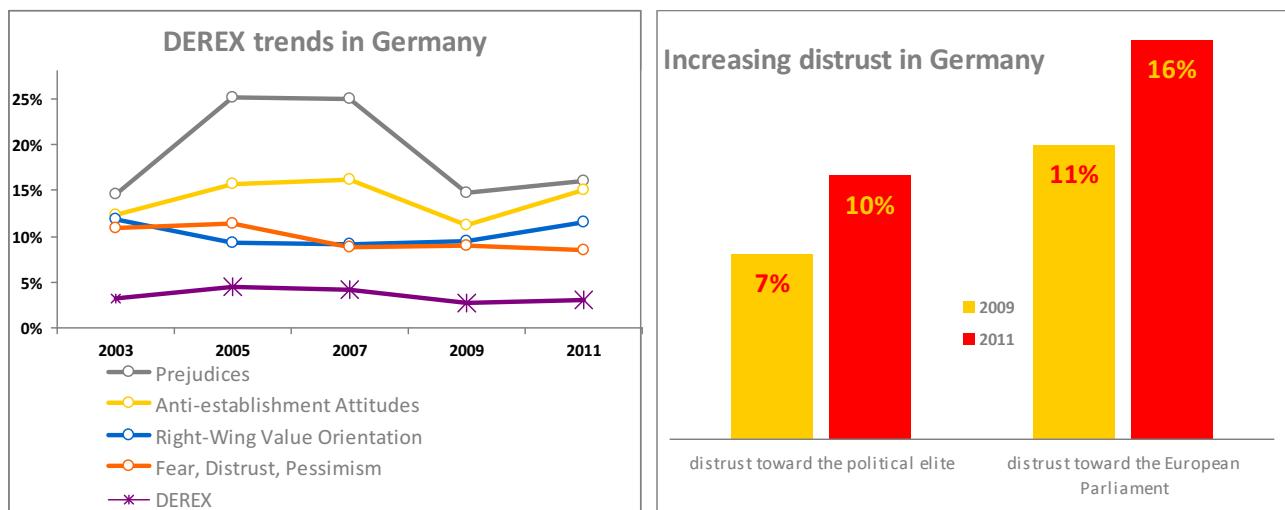
⁴ Intolerance of the Tolerant. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/cas-mudde/intolerance-of-tolerant>

Graph 2: Demand for Right Wing Extremism in Europe



Looking at the map, we can see that radical right ideologies are most attractive in countries where authoritarian or totalitarian regimes played a key role in shaping society in the XXth century. Germany is an important counterexample with a relatively low ratio (3%) of attitude radicals. There have been no dramatic changes between 2009 and 2011, however the distrust towards the political elite and the European parliament showed an increasing trend. But in general, fears of a general radicalisation trend in Germany seem to be unfounded, and the demand for right wing extremism is lower in the country now than it was in 2005 and 2007.

Graph 3-4: data on Germany

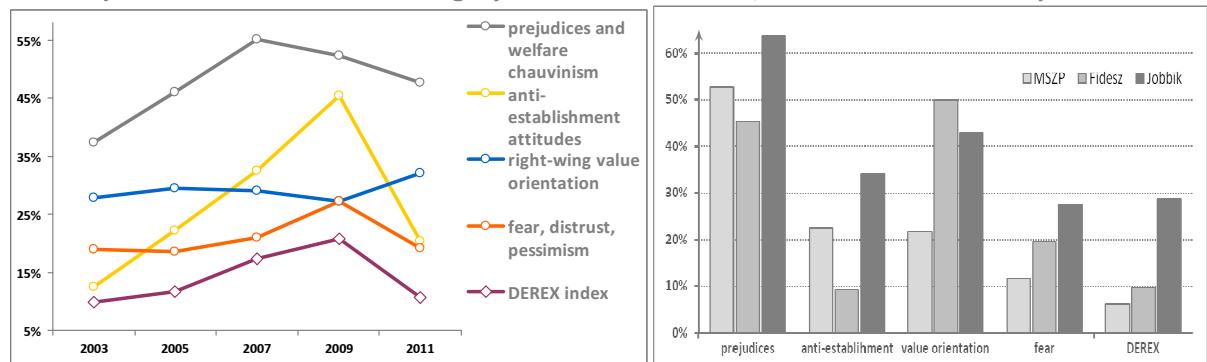


Hungarian data

- Based on a survey conducted in the autumn of 2010, **48% of the population over 16 is extremely prejudiced in Hungary, 20% can be described as anti-establishment, 32% expresses strong right-wing values and 19% are characterized by fear, distrust and pessimism.**
- **In the autumn of 2010, attitude radicals (characterized by at least three of the four traits listed above) accounted for 11% of the total population.** This represents a steep decline compared to the 21% measured in 2009, although this is fundamentally due to a drop in anti-establishment sentiment following the 2010 elections. At the time of the survey, support for Fidesz and the government was at its peak and the majority of the electorate believed that things were heading in the right direction. Based on recent research, (e.g. of Medián Institute) since then a general sense of malaise has returned to previously high levels. All this leads to two conclusions:
 1. **In Hungary, confidence in political institutions shows extreme fluctuation.** Such swings (representing rapidly rising tendencies of mistrust most of the time) are a source of danger as they may work to the benefit of extremist political forces exploiting sudden shifts in public sentiment.
 2. **At the start of its term in office, Fidesz had an excellent chance to pacify Hungarian public opinion, and strengthen democratic attitudes in order to orchestrate a genuine consolidation,** yet the party failed to seize that opportunity.
- **In comparison to the 20 European countries surveyed in 2010, Hungary is in the lead in respect of prejudice and far-right value orientation.** When it comes to prejudice, there's been a slight improvement since the 2009 survey. At the same time, right-wing value orientation has increased, recently reaching its highest level, and the drift to the right in party politics seen in the past few years has been followed by a value shift to the right as well. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that an increasing number of people position themselves at the "far right" of the political spectrum and, on the other hand, that over the years Hungarian society has adopted more "law and order" values. **The parallel presence of hostile prejudiced attitudes, fear and the high degree of right-wing value orientation gives a fertile soil for the politically and ideologically motivated conspiracy theorizing in Hungary. Nevertheless, this tendency is exploited by political parties to the furthest possible extent.**
- **During the past decade, at least three remarkable ways of 'balancing' could be observed in respect of demand for right-wing ideas:**
 1. **The DEREX index sharply increased in large urban centers, while it declined in villages.** As a result, an initial two-fold gap seen between urban and rural areas had completely disappeared by the time the latest survey was conducted. While in 2002, those living in small towns and villages were the most prejudiced and anti-establishment, by now the urban population has "closed the gap" in respect to prejudices and the urban population has become distinctly more hostile to political institutions.
 2. **Since the first data collection carried out in 2003, Central Hungary, previously the region least open to radical ideas, has interestingly caught up on Eastern Hungary,** hence the proportion of attitude radicals is estimated at 12 per cent in both regions (whereas the ratio in Western Hungary is significantly lower at 7 per cent).

3. Whereas in 2003, the proportion of attitude radicals within the youngest age bracket (under 30s) was significantly lower than that within the oldest cohort (70 and older), the difference has by now narrowed remarkably: the ratio of attitude radicals within the youngest age bracket is estimated at 8 per cent along with 11 per cent measured within the oldest cohort. (Note that the highest proportion of 14 per cent was measured within the age group of those just before retirement).

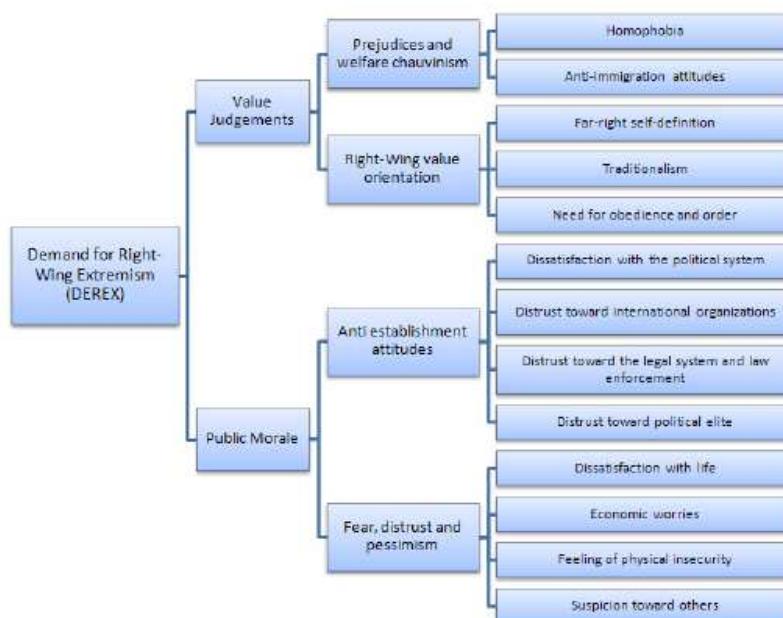
Graph 5-6 : DEREX trends in Hungary and values in MSZP, Fidesz and Jobbik camps



- The ratio of attitude radicals is the highest in the Jobbik camp (close to 30%) and significantly lower among Fidesz and MSZP voters (10 and 5%, respectively). However, it is interesting to note that the followers of Jobbik are not in the lead in all categories: while they are the most prejudiced, anti-establishment and pessimistic, Fidesz voters score higher when it comes to right-wing value orientation. At the same time, in respect to prejudices, socialist voters are not far behind Jobbik and produce higher values than Fidesz supporters. (see graph 3).

Graph 6 : DEREX structure

The following hierarchy shows how the 29 questions of ESS are grouped into the different DEREX levels.



Methodology

Political Capital Institute designed the Demand for Right-Wing Extremism (DEREX) Index using its own theoretical model and data from the European Social Survey (ESS), a biannual study that tracks changes in societal attitudes and values in 33 countries in Europe and the Middle East. Political Capital developed the model, chose the questions, determined subject groupings and set the criteria over the course of roughly one year. We took both inductive and deductive approaches to constructing the DEREX Index. We began with a theoretical model, relying on the ESS questionnaire and correlations between variables to create the sub-indices.

We developed the methodology in four steps: 1) Building the theoretical model; 2) choosing the appropriate questions to include from the ESS survey; 3) deciding how to qualify the respondents' answers to the survey questions; and 4) assigning numerical values to the answers, which allowed us to calculate scores for DEREX and its sub-indices. At the end of the process we also tested the model's reliability and validity.

We divided demand for right-wing extremism into four basic categories. We took care to ensure that these four categories describe the concept of "the far-right," both in the language of previous academic studies on the far-right and everyday language.

These are:

- 1) Prejudice and welfare chauvinism
- 2) Anti-establishment attitudes
- 3) Right-wing value orientation
- 4) Fear, distrust and pessimism

Right-wing extremism is therefore defined by these four qualities; however, we define an individual as a potential right-wing extremist if his answers to the ESS survey questions evince attitudes and ideas that meet the criteria for at least three of the four categories.

Our definition of right-wing extremism is thus based upon both ideological and psychological elements. The first three sub-indices (prejudice and welfare chauvinism, right-wing value orientation and anti-establishment attitudes) are inherent parts of extreme right-wing ideology according to practically every author who studied the subject. The fourth (fear, distrust and pessimism) includes emotional factors that typically fuel the first three components, according to previous research. Right-wing extremism is therefore defined by these four qualities; however, we define an individual as a potential right-wing extremist if his answers to the ESS survey questions evince attitudes and ideas that meet the criteria for at least three of the four categories.

Please find a more detailed description of the methodology in our previous report:

http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/derex_study.pdf

The theoretical background of DEREX Index (in Hungarian, but under translation):

Krekó, P.; Juhász, A.; Molnár, Cs. (2011): Radikalizmus és szélsőségesesség – A szélsőjobboldal iránti kereslet növekedése Magyarországon. In: Politikatudományi Szemle, [2011/2](#).

The study and the conference on the 29th of February in Budapest was supported by **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**, while **Open Society Foundations**, the **International Task Force for Holocaust Education and Research** and the International **Visegrad Fund** also contributed to the conference.