

Cameron Lallana

Pol 144A

Josephine Andrews

Immigration and Nationalism: Making Inroads Toward Understanding

Intro

Though 2016, proponents of liberalism (structural, social, political, and economic) found themselves increasingly worried as far-right parties and rhetoric gained across Western Europe and the US (Aisch, Pearce & Rousseau, 2017). The success of the Brexit *Leave* campaign, the election of Donald Trump, stories of nationalist party electoral success across Europe filled daily reporting, op-ed columns, and talking head segments. The rise of the far-right across societies previously considered liberal stalwarts was ascribed to the influx of migrants to European countries in both media reporting and academic study (Becker, 2019; Swain, 2019). This relationship is complex, inconsistent across different forms of migrants (economic, climate, or war refugee), exacerbated by normalization of nationalist rhetoric, and continually subject to study and evolving understandings (Swain, 2019; Trilling, 2019). Not entirely unmentioned in this process, but nonetheless underconsidered is whether or not these potential trends in Western Europe can be found in Eastern Europe. Though Hungary under Viktor Orban has become something of a case study in democratic backsliding, other Central and Eastern European (hereafter CEE) nations have not received similar attention. The object of this paper, then, is to investigate the rise of far-right and nationalist parties, and understand if there are any ties to immigration or attitudes about immigration, as is often assumed.

Literature Review

Before proceeding, it is necessary to briefly review why it is important to understand what motivates political decision-making in CEE countries. Although some CEE countries had self-governed prior to becoming members of the Soviet bloc, this was a minority; previous few of this already small number had experience with democratic governance (Minkenberg, 2017). When the USSR began to falter in 1989, Soviet satellites and republics broke away and were quickly attracted to the high living standard of West Europe and began to work with the European Commission (soon to be the European Union) and western economists to implement free market economics (albeit with varying degrees of compliance). The vacuum of the welfare state was quickly subsumed by a neoliberal economy, a sort-of grand experiment (Wagner, 2018). The hope of many in the EU was that their wayward brethren in CEE would not only join European markets, but come to identify with a ‘civic nationalism,’ create a pan-Europeanism identity based on shared legal, political, social values (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012). Though there have been some who have taken up this pan-European civic identity (12.7% interviewees in 2012 said they identified as ‘European’ some or all of the time), its flipside has also appeared: ethnic nationalism (which defines the nation as based on shared culture, history, and/or language) has appeared at both the state-level and European-level, which has in turn fueled a surge in far-right and nationalist parties across Europe (Fligstein et al., 2012).

In researching this topic, it can be difficult to make a determination on what *qualifies* as far-right due to lack of a standard definition. This paper will be borrowing a definition from Perliger’s conceptualization of the far-right in the US, slightly modified and simplified: a far-right party, first and foremost, will reject perceived ‘external’ influences that differ from the

national, cultural, ethnic, religious and/or normative elements that comprise the in-group nation (2012). This form of nativism creates a strictly defined *nation*, which excludes not only foreigners but also legal citizens “who promote what is perceived as non-native norms, practices, or values” (Perliger, 2012). Additionally, these parties may also be motivated by outright xenophobia and racism, may seek harsher policing and less-constrained judiciaries, and may adopt “revisionist views of the democratic system” (Perliger, 2012). Using this definition, we will be identifying certain parties as far-right and using their electoral success as a proxy for support for nationalist attitudes in CEE nations.

This all being said, a few shortcomings should be mentioned here. CEE national-communist parties, characterized by a more traditionally left-wing economic program and right-wing social beliefs, would seem to challenge the “far right” label heretofore used in this paper; however, because this particular definition prioritizes the party’s relationship to the *nation*, economic stances will be here be considered of secondary importance (Perliger, 2012; Mikenberg 2017).¹ Second, it can be argued that electoral politics are not the best measure of nationalist attitudes in society; Mikenberg points out that CEE nationalist parties tend to get smaller vote share than nationalist parties in Western Europe and are also subject to much shorter life span, averaging only 10 years (2017). This does not mean, however, that nationalist attitudes are less pervasive, just that this is reflective of the high electoral instability of the region; far right ideology persists in the absence of party in the form of mass movement and private organizations that still affect politics (Mikenberg, 2017). One of the other major successes of the

¹ This is not to say that left-wing parties with conservative views should automatically be considered right-wing. This paper is using a slightly skewed definition for the sake of including the *Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova*, which—despite perhaps more accurately described as a left socialist-nationalist party—has a non-insignificant amount of overlap with the views of right-wing parties.

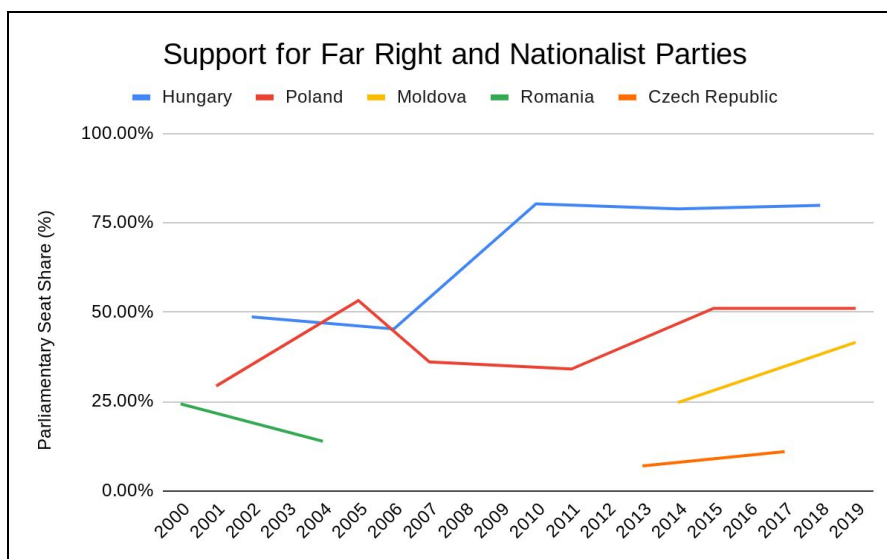
far right has been in not *expanding* its base, but *mainstreaming* its positions—Mikenberg highlights studies which conclude that the primary effect of far-right participation has not been in passing particular laws, but in “the radicalization of public discourse on minority and related issues” (2017). Both points mentioned above exist not to invalidate the premise of this paper from the outset, but to argue that further and more intensive research is needed in this area to match the complexity of the topic.

Methodology

In this paper, we will be examining five countries from the 2000s onward: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Moldova. These five have been chosen in order to reflect the variety of experience across CEE nations: they vary widely in GDP per capita, immigration counts, and polity score. Despite these differences, if there is still an apparent correlation between support for far-right and nationalist parties, then there is the possibility that immigration *is* affecting voting behavior (or, at least, that there is a common variable which may affect the two variables tested in this paper).

The Dependent Variable

The independent variable that we will be testing in this paper is support for far-right and nationalist parties, which will be represented by seat share in elections. Perhaps the best measure of popular support for nationalist attitudes would be opinion polling over time, but I was unfortunately unable to locate relevant data. Therefore, in lieu of this, I have proxied support for nationalism by recording the seat share for all far right or nationalist parties over time. The chart below contains data from all parliamentary elections (or the lower house in cases of bicameral legislatures) in the selected countries from 2000 to 2019.



The Independent Variable

The explanatory variable used here will be immigration statistics to each of these countries, pulled from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, and then arranged into the below table. Although it would be preferable to use opinion polling to determine attitudes toward immigrants, this data has not proven to be easily accessible. Gallup did conduct a study on this topic, though the resulting report aggregated Eastern European countries into a single polling bloc and did not contain information on the topic over time (Esipova, Ray, Puliese & Tsabutashvili, 2015).

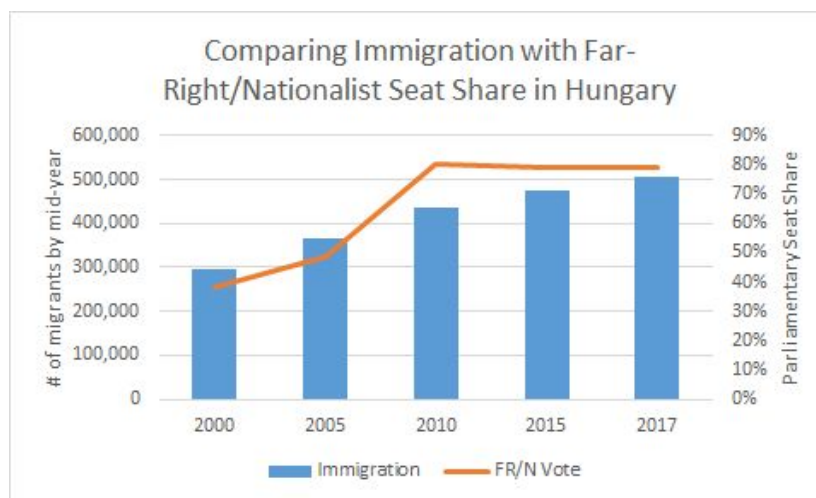
Immigration to Eastern European Countries, 2000-2017					
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017
Hungary	296,957	366,787	436,616	475,508	503,787
Poland	825,251	722,509	642,417	611,855	640,937
Czech Republic	220,789	322,540	398,493	416,454	433,290
Moldova	247,828	173,957	157,668	142,904	140,045
Romania	126,949	145,162	166,126	281,048	370,753

In comparing this data, I expect to see one of three outcomes: (a) there is an inconclusive relationship or one that is inconsistent across countries; (b) immigration numbers and far-right/nationalist support correlate (positively or inversely) concurrently, indicating that there may be an unknown variable (or multiple variables affecting both tested variables); or (c) far-right/nationalist support changes *following* immigration numbers, in which case we might expect either a direct relationship or that immigration affects a third variable, which in turn acts on support for far-right/nationalist parties. In all cases, it is important to note that the findings here are preliminary and should not be used to draw any conclusions beyond potential topics for further research.

Findings

Interestingly, the findings across each country are somewhat inconsistent and each deserves its own discussion.

Hungary



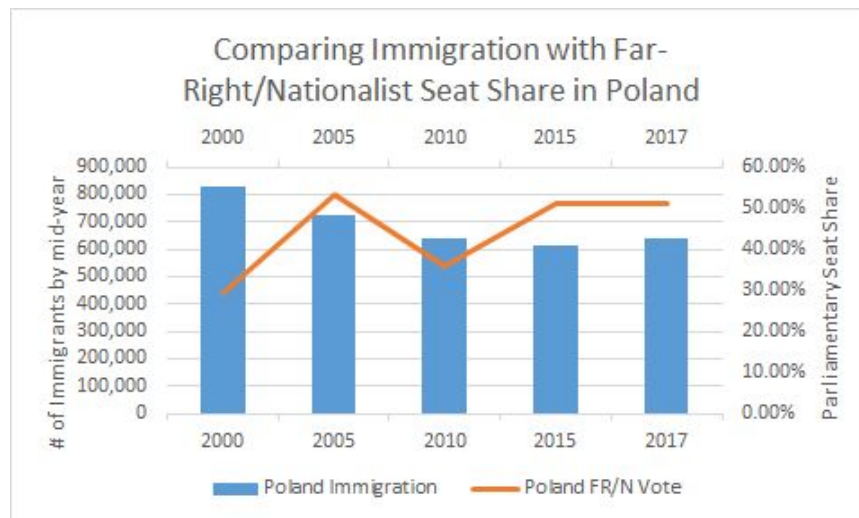
Of the five countries, Hungary is the only one where our initial expectation—that an increase in immigrants would correspond to an increase in support for far-right and nationalist

parties. This trend, however, has its limits. Although the combined total seat share of these parties has hovered around 80% for the last decade, immigration to Hungary has continued to increase. It is possible, though that any apparent relationship is entirely incidental. The above chart contains the results of the 2010 and 2014 elections, during which the leader of the dominant Fidesz party, Viktor Orban, passed laws that tightened control over the press and judiciary as well as gerrymandered single-member districts in Hungary (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). At the same time, Hungary's GDP per capita was relatively high among CEE nations (See Appendix A), which might provide an explanation for why immigrants might have yet been drawn to Orban's self-proclaimed "illiberal democracy" (Dettmer, 2019). This is not to say that anti-immigrant attitudes *aren't* a factor in Hungarian politics. Fidesz's rhetoric is deeply imbued with nativist and Islamophobic overtones, attacking the external forces as deleterious to Hungarian society—"How did we get to the point where it's a possibility that we need to fight for our lifestyle, our way of life, and our natural living space?" Orban asked at a campaign event in 2019, making heavy use of nationalist blood and soil symbolism (Heinrich, 2019; Dettmer, 2019). What this does suggest is that there is a more complex relationship than immigrants leading to knee-jerk reactions among the Hungarian populace.

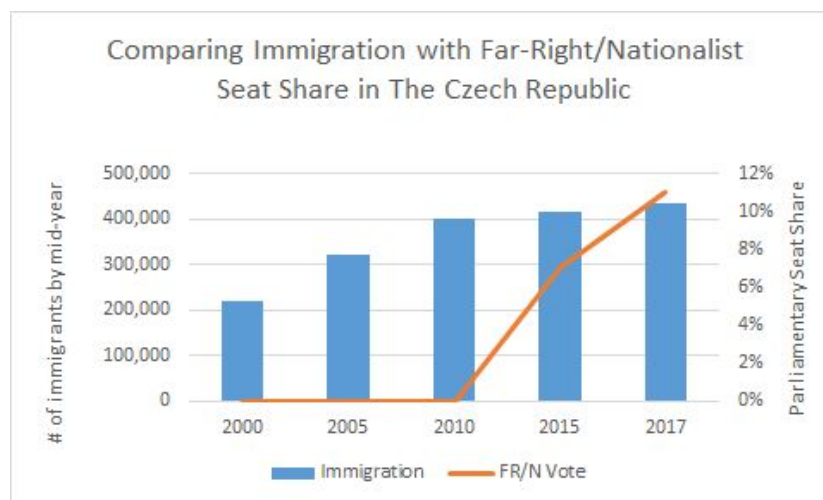
Poland

Poland, by contrast, has both a greater amount of immigrants as well as much less correlation between our two variables. Nationalist parties are still very strong in Poland, but their electoral flux does not follow either a positive or inverse trend with declining immigration. According to Rosenbluth and Shapiro, this result is likely due to a weak and fragmented opposition to Far-Right parties—in the 2015 elections, the collapsing left didn't win a single

seat; rather, all three major parties were right-wing and populist to varying degrees (2018). Two years later, in 2017, the Law and Justice Party pushed through legislation that gave the government increased control over the media and judiciary; the opposition, again, was too weak to provide effective resistance (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). In this case, similar to Hungary, although nationalism is not unimportant, the continuing success of Far-Right parties might be more directly attributable to structural features of government, than to direct reaction to immigration.

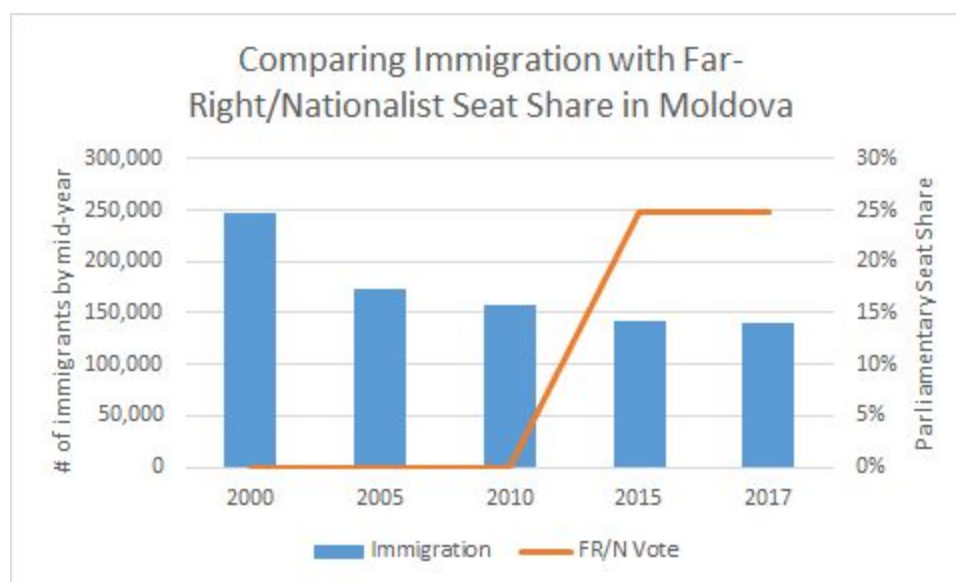


The Czech Republic



The Czech Republic is an interesting example—although immigration has been increasing steadily for the past two decades, we only see an expansion in the power of Far-Right and Nationalist politics within the last ten years. Even then, the share of government power is relatively small at 11%. One reason for this, proposed by Havlík, is that Far Right parties are not the only ones opposed to immigration; although the language and exact proposals may differ, parties (pro-Europe and Eurosceptic alike) generally call for either a *de facto* or *de jure* cap on immigration to the country (2019). Therefore, concerns about immigration may not necessarily draw inclined Czech citizens to the Far-Right if they see this view reflected in all parties, and therefore might rely on other primary or secondary concerns in party selection.

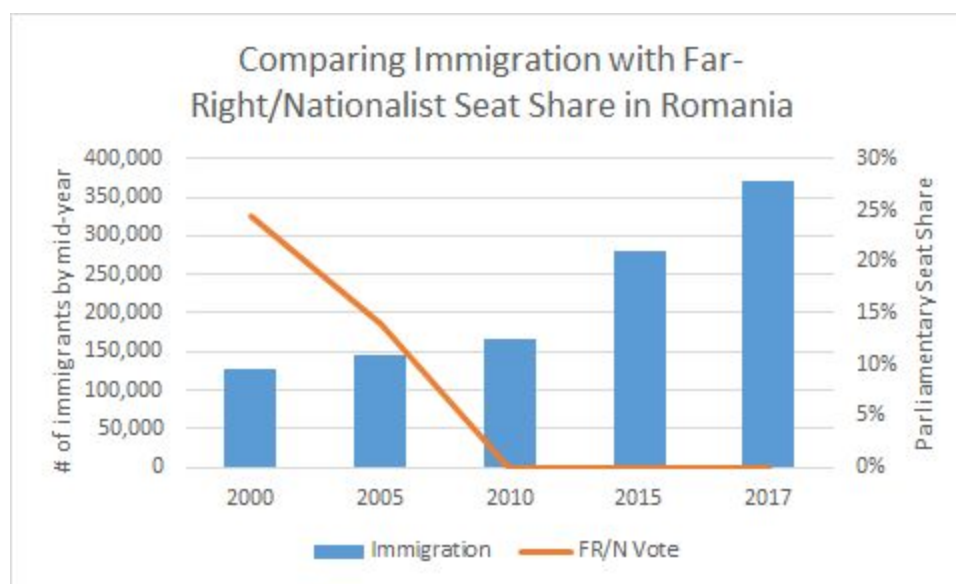
Moldova



Moldova provides an interesting counterexample to the usual far-right nationalism found through this paper with the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), who hold leftist economic policies along with nationalist and conservative social viewpoints. Whether or not immigrants have affected the rise of the PSRM has been difficult to tell as it is regarded as

the successor to the formerly dominant Communist party. While the rise in the PSRM's power does come as the number of immigrants decreases, it is impossible to draw any conclusions from such a tenuous correlation. Unfortunately, I was not able to locate any papers discussing the effects of immigration on Moldovan politics, making it difficult to buttress this finding. Edwards makes the argument in *Foreign Policy* that the focus of Moldovan voters in recent elections (of the 49% who voted in 2019's parliamentary elections) is more so on issues of corruption and of EU- vs. Russian-alignment party preference (2019). It is possible, then, that immigrants have a relatively negligible effect on Moldovan politics.

Romania



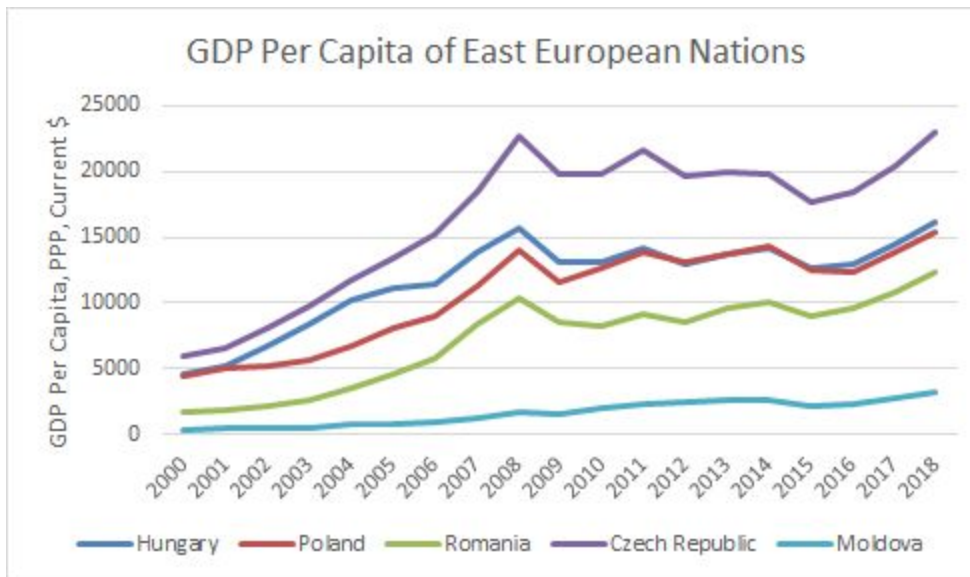
Among already interesting examples, Romania provides something entirely different: decreased support for nationalist parties with a steadily increasing number of immigrants. As Minkenberg noted before, the lack of Far-Right presence in government does not necessarily mean lack of Far-Right presence altogether (in fact, Minkenberg identifies Romania as having a strong Far-Right sector in 2014 and a Far-Right sector that has somewhat radicalized public

discourse, though with indeterminate effect on mainstream parties) (2017). It is likely that a more thorough assessment of nationalism and far-right politics in Romania would need to focus in much greater detail on the influence of non-government Far-Right groups and organizations to come to a true answer on whether immigration (or the perception of immigration) creates more nationalist sentiment.

Conclusion

After examining all case studies, it has become obvious that most of these nations (with the possible exceptions of Moldova and Romania) have some sort of relationship between immigration and politics, though the former does not appear to directly affect the latter. Rather, nationalist attitudes seem to be a popular rhetorical flourish for parties that are working on cementing their dominance in government. In the Czech Republic, anti-immigrant policies are popular enough that they have not been relegated to the right, which may have lessened the potential base for parties which prioritize nativist language. In short, immigration does affect society, but it cannot be reduced to simple domino cause-and-effect. Nations in CEE each have their own way of responding to this situation, which has produced a variety of different electoral outcomes. Further individual study on each of the above cases is needed to determine the true effects

Appendix A:



Works Cited:

- Aisch, G., Pearce, A., & Rousseau, B. (2017). *How Far is Europe Swinging to the Right?* The New York Times. Retrieved from:
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html>
- Becker, J. (2019). *The Global Machine Behind the Rise of Far-Right Nationalism*. The New York Times. Retrieved from
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/world/europe/sweden-immigration-nationalism.html>
- Dettmer, J. (2019). *Orban Presses On with Illiberal Democracy*. VOA News. Retrieved from
<https://www.voanews.com/europe/orban-presses-illiberal-democracy>
- Edwards, M. (2019). *People of the World, Stop Looking At Moldova!* Foreign Policy. Retrieved from
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/03/people-of-the-world-stop-looking-at-moldova/>
- Esipova, N., Ray, J., Pugliese, A., & Tsubutashvili, D. (2015). *How the World Views Migration*. Retrieved from
https://publications.iom.int/system/files/how_the_world_gallup.pdf
- Fligstein, N., Polyakova, A., & Sandholtz W. (2012). European Integration, Nationalism, and European Identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(s1), 106-122.
- Havlík, V. (2019). Europeanisation or renationalisation?: The Czech Republic facing the euro-, economic and refugee crises. In Liebert U. & Jenichen A. (Eds.), *Europeanisation and Renationalisation: Learning from Crises for Innovation and Development* (pp. 49-64). Opladen, Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich. doi:10.2307/j.ctvm202v5.6
- Heinrich, H. (2019). From Horthy to Orbán: Neo-Authoritarianism in Hungary. In Wiatr J. (Ed.), *New Authoritarianism: Challenges to Democracy in the 21st century* (pp. 100-128). Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich. doi:10.2307/j.ctvdf08xx.10
- Minkenberg, M. (2017). The Rise of the Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Between Mainstreaming and Radicalization. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 18(1), 27-35.
- Perliger, A. (2012). *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America's Violent Far-Right* (pp. 13-18, Rep.). West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center.

- Rosenbluth, F., & Shapiro, I. (2018). Creeping Authoritarianism in Eastern Europe. In *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself* (pp. 213-228). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Trilling, D. (2019). *'Protecting the European way of life' from migrants is a gift to the far right*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/13/protecting-europe-migrants-far-right-eu-nationalism>
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2017). *Migrant Stock by Origin and Destination*.
- Swain, A. (2019). *Increasing Migration Pressure and Rising Nationalism: Implications for Multilateralism and SDG Implementation*. Retrieved from
https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/SDO_BP_Swain.pdf
- Wagner, V. (2018). *Rising Nationalism, and EU's Split with the East*. DW. Retrieved from
<https://www.dw.com/en/rising-nationalism-and-the-eus-split-with-the-east/a-42073959>
- The World Bank, World Development Indicators (2019). *GDP Per Capita, PPP, Current \$* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>
- Wood, B. (2017). *Storm Clouds of Nationalism Gather Over Eastern Europe*. MarketWatch.
<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/storm-clouds-of-nationalism-gather-over-eastern-europe-2017-09-02>