Far-Right Fever: Examining the Electoral Rise and Political Persistence of Brazil and Hungary's Populist Radical Right

Giovanna Alexis Garcia
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES &
PUBLIC POLICY

FAR-RIGHT FEVER:
EXAMINING THE ELECTORAL
RISE AND POLITICAL
PERSISTENCE OF BRAZIL AND
HUNGARY’S POPULIST
RADICAL RIGHT

By

GIOVANNA GARCIA

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of International Affairs
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Bachelor of
Science
Spring, 2021
The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Giovanna Garcia defended on April 2, 2021.

_Amanda Driscoll_
Dr. Amanda Driscoll
Thesis Director

_Michael Creswell_
Dr. Michael Creswell
Outside Committee Member

_Holger Kern_
Dr. Holger Kern
Committee Member

_Marina Duque_
Dr. Marina Duque
Committee Member

Signatures are on file with the Honors Program office.
Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 2
Case Study Selection ..................................................................................................... 5
The Populist Radical Right and Why it Matters ............................................................ 8
Social Demand v. Political Supply ................................................................................. 10
  Electoral Systems ........................................................................................................ 11
  Presidential Systems v. Parliamentary Systems .......................................................... 12
  Political Parties .......................................................................................................... 14
Background .................................................................................................................. 17
  The Hungarian Context .............................................................................................. 17
  The Brazilian Context ................................................................................................. 19
Electoral Systems ......................................................................................................... 22
  Hungary ..................................................................................................................... 22
  Brazil ........................................................................................................................ 25
Presidentialism v. Parliamentarism .............................................................................. 29
  Hungary ..................................................................................................................... 29
  Brazil ........................................................................................................................ 31
Political Parties: Internal Structures and External Landscape ..................................... 36
  Hungary ..................................................................................................................... 36
  Brazil ........................................................................................................................ 38
Longevity ..................................................................................................................... 42
  Brazil ........................................................................................................................ 42
  Hungary ..................................................................................................................... 46
Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 53
References ................................................................................................................... 56
Introduction

From the United States to East Asia, a movement toward right-wing authoritarianism and a rejection of liberalism has shaped the 2010s. Though these movements may transform into organized political parties, they often remain unpopular, and largely sidelined, in electoral politics. However, in many other countries across the globe, far right parties have gained seats in legislatures, garnered significant favorable public opinion, and achieved an electoral majority that enables one of the parties’ leaders to assume the role of chief executive of a country. Such a trend where right-wing populist parties or individuals gain political and public favor has occurred all over Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the United States. Two of the most visible faces of this trend are Viktor Orbán of Hungary and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, both of whom are the tokens of far-right nationalism in their respective regions.

In this thesis, I contribute to the academic literature that focuses on how political supply factors, in contrast to social demand factors, facilitate the rise and sustainability of far-right regimes. I use Hungary and Brazil as case studies to examine how distinct institutions allowed for the rise of the populist radical right, and how said institutions may affect these regimes’ longevity. Throughout, I argue that no single institutional factor alone explains the rise of the populist radical right in either country. Rather, a confluence of institutional factors contributes to their rise and political persistence. In this thesis, I demonstrate how Hungary’s political institutions create a perfect storm for the electoral rise of Fidesz, Orbán’s party, and how these institutions themselves contained mechanisms which allowed for their own manipulation to benefit the ruling party. I contrast these conditions with those in Brazil, where the 2018 presidential election saw the rise of a radical right populist without a well-organized party or base and without substantial allies in the legislature. Although these institutions did allow for
Bolsonaro’s electoral ascendancy, I speculate that these same institutions do not bode well for his, and the movement’s, electoral future.

Throughout this thesis, I make the following assumptions: (1) parliamentary systems are more conducive to the far right’s political persistence than presidential ones, (2) a well-disciplined, highly loyal, and popular party is critical to long term success, and (3) overly complex and manipulated electoral rules allow for this maintenance and consolidation of power. I contend that all of these political supply factors are interconnected and thus not one factor alone explains the breakthrough and persistence of the populist radical right in Hungary or Brazil. However, this thesis seeks to explicate those institutional factors whose existence, in conjunction with other elements, may raise concerns about the possible sustained electoral and political success of populist radical right parties.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. I begin by explaining why I chose Hungary and Brazil as case studies through which to examine the role of institutions in the ascendancy of the populist radical right. These countries’ distinct political and electoral systems allow for meaningful analysis regarding how different political supply factors enable the breakthrough, and permit the persistence, of populist radical right parties and executives.

I follow this with a discussion of the relevance of this research to larger contemporary political discourses as far-right movements become increasingly popular globally. This discussion also establishes definitions for the populist radical right that are referred to throughout this thesis. I then dedicate considerable space to introducing the social demand v. political supply dichotomy that political scientists frequently employ when discussing the rise of the radical right, and then discuss how different political supply factors (electoral systems, presidential v. parliamentary systems, and political parties) are generally theorized to impact the breakthrough
and persistence of the populist radical right. I proceed by providing general background about
the Hungarian and Brazilian cases, with some discussion of social demand factors, to
appropriately contextualize the remainder of the thesis. I then discuss in detail how each
country’s electoral, presidential or parliamentary, and party system contributed to Orbán and
Bolsonaro’s electoral rise in turn.¹

I conclude with an analysis of how Hungary and Brazil’s different political supply factors,
which enabled the rise of the populist radical right, might affect their longevity. This section
includes a discussion of how the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the ways these countries’
distinct institutions have impacted these regimes and their predicted sustainability.

In all, this analysis should provide a nuanced perspective into how Brazil and Hungary’s
political supply enabled the breakthrough of the populist radical right in each country with
meaningful assumptions that Brazil’s institutions will likely serve as more effective checks to
Bolsonaro’s illiberal ambitions than those institutions in Hungary which have already been
manipulated to Orbán’s favor.

¹ These analyses elaborate on the fact that Brazil and Hungary both hold radical right leaders in their chief
executive positions despite these countries’ distinct institutions. Some may interpret these analyses as
insinuating that institutions are inconsequential when explaining the emergence of the far right, contradicting
the premise of my thesis. To address these points, I stress that while it is more than likely no democratic
institution is a guaranteed safeguard against the breakthrough of far-right parties, my thesis does not seek to
explain institutional hurdles to the far-right’s emergence but rather predict the ways these countries’ respective
institutions may aid or inhibit their persistence. My analyses of the distinct ways in which Hungary and
Brazil’s electoral, parliamentary v. presidential, and party systems facilitated the rise of the populist radical
right partially serves to contextualize how said institutions have or will influence these movements/leaders’
longevity.
Case Study Selection

Hungary and Brazil have both risen to prominence as the leaders of the populist radical right in their respective regions. Viktor Orbán is likely the most well-known face of this style of politics globally and has served as a model for populist radical right parties in Europe and abroad. Jair Bolsonaro, having gained his executive position more recently than Orbán, has managed to quickly gain recognition for his outlandish and incendiary rhetoric and brand. Aside from the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, Bolsonaro is the best-known leader of the far-right in the Western Hemisphere.

Both Orbán and Bolsonaro also represent a personalist style of political leadership characterized by charisma and loyal followings. Given their visibility, popularity, and positions as regional leaders of the far-right, Orbán and Bolsonaro’s rise to power in Hungary and Brazil, respectively, and the movements that support them, are obvious selections for analyzing those conditions that facilitate the rise of the far-right. However, Hungary and Brazil’s distinct political systems make these two countries even more apt cases for analysis and comparison when investigating those political supply factors that facilitate such a rise.

Despite their visibility as leaders of the far-right, both Bolsonaro and Orbán rose to power in decisively different ways and gained public/electoral support in different political systems. Using these two countries as cases for analyzing those political supply factors that enabled the rise of the populist radical right and the movements’ longevity provides an illustrative comparative politics perspective on how distinct political supply factors may contribute to the rise of, and consolidation of power among, far-right leaders/parties.

Despite both being electoral democracies, Brazil and Hungary’s political systems differ considerably. Brazil is a presidential democracy while Hungary is a parliamentary democracy;
thus, Brazil has a president as its chief executive voted directly to office by the public, whereas Hungary has a prime minister at its helm who is appointed based on whichever party or coalition holds the majority in parliament. Although both countries have multiparty systems, Brazil holds the record for most fragmented legislature in the world with the greatest number of parties represented. Moreover, in contrast to Orbán who leads a large, powerful, and highly disciplined party, Bolsonaro has effectively governed without a party since he exited the small Social Liberal Party under whose banner he ascended to the presidency (Hunter and Power 2019: 72, 79).

With regard to electoral systems, while both the Brazilian congress and Hungarian parliament use mixed proportional and majoritarian elections depending on the legislative chamber or seat, Brazilian presidents are elected in two-round majoritarian elections whereas Orbán became prime minister in 2010 as a result of incredibly complex electoral rules that granted his party a supermajority in parliament. Since then, Orbán and his party, Fidesz, have successfully manipulated the electoral system to facilitate the maintenance of this supermajority. In later sections, I detail how these dynamics of electoral manipulation represent a political supply factor unavailable to Bolsonaro whose presidential position does not enable such forms of manipulation.

Many more institutions distinguish the Hungarian and Brazilian political system and Orbán and Bolsonaro’s rises to power. However, these wide range of distinct party structures and landscapes, electoral rules, and presidential versus parliamentary systems provide a precursory look into why the rise of Orbán and Bolsonaro are appropriate case studies for examining how distinct political supply factors may influence the breakthrough and persistence of the populist radical right. These distinctions allow me to compare a presidential and parliamentary system in
their ability to enable the rise of the far right. The distinct party landscapes in Hungary and Brazil allow me to test some of Cas Mudde’s (2007) hypotheses about what aspects of populist radical right parties enable their breakthrough and political persistence. Moreover, the fact that Bolsonaro effectively governs as a president without a party, versus Orbán who is bolstered by a large, loyal, and well-disciplined party, allows me to explore how a well-structured party, or lack thereof, may influence the rise and longevity of such a movement. Finally, these countries’ distinct electoral systems, and the differing degrees to which each leader has been able to manipulate said system to his electoral advantage, allows me to both discern how electoral systems aid the rise of the far right and draw further connections to how presidential versus parliamentary systems facilitate such manipulation.

---

2 Cas Mudde is one of the leading scholars on Europe’s radical right.
The Populist Radical Right and Why it Matters

Scholars have long disagreed over how to define the far right and its parties. Some scholars define right-wing extremism as “progress-hostile forces.” Others define it as an ideology revolving around racism, xenophobia, and nationalism, or describe it as anti-democratic dispositions positioned on the “extreme right” of the left-right political spectrum (Mudde 2000: 10-11). Other definitions, like that of Falter and Schumann (1988:101), list at least ten features at the core of far-right politics: “extreme nationalism, ethnocentrism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-pluralism, militarism, law-and-order thinking, a demand for a strong political leader and/or executive, anti-Americanism and cultural pessimism.” These movements also tend to develop in societies facing economic stagnation or decline, changing social norms, or they develop as a counter-response to seemingly corrupt or inept governance. Whether or not these movements gain political power in the legislature or executive is dependent on even more factors: public opinion, the electoral system, institutions, etc.

For the purposes of this thesis, Cas Mudde’s (2007: 23) definition of the extreme right guides my analysis of the far right. He defines the extreme right as a combination of authoritarianism, antidemocracy, and nativism. Adding a populist element transforms the extreme right into what Mudde (2007: 26) identifies as the populist radical right. It is important to note that despite right-wing/conservative politics typically being most associated with an economic ideology based on free market principles and neoliberalism, the populist radical right further distinguishes itself from other right-wing ideologies in that it typically lacks a firm

---

3 Although populism is often defined in distinct ways, three core features distinguish populists from other types of leaders. Populists make appeals to the people, claiming to both speak for and as the people and champion against the elite. They additionally use crises as justification for overhaul or revolt, and they use inflammatory language that shocks the establishment. These charismatic leaders assume an executive mandate to overhaul the system and rail against institutions and opposition (Calhoun 2021: 227-228).
endorsement of an economic system. In fact, many populist radical right parties do not even hold neoliberal views on the economy. Instead, populist radical right parties typically use economic platforms as a means to propel their own ideological agenda and to expand their electorate; this underscores the importance that the three underlying positions of nativism, authoritarianism, and illiberalism play in distinguishing the populist radical right from other political movements (Mudde 2007: 119-120).

On the one hand, Orbán has largely abandoned neoliberal economic policies in favor of a more consolidated role of the state in the economy (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 119). Bolsonaro, on the other hand, was elected on a free market platform, despite nearly three decades in Congress supporting state intervention in the economy (Chatzky 2018). These distinct economic positions do not detract from both leaders’ positions as radical right populists.
Social Demand v. Political Supply

As the rise of the radical right has transformed 21st century politics, scholars have concentrated on investigating the factors that contribute to both creating a fertile breeding ground for the far right and to their long-term success. However, most of these studies have focused solely on social demand factors despite the fact that scholars consistently draw results from empirical tests in this realm that tend to be contradictory. For example, a popular hypothesis for explaining the rise of the far right is the economic crisis thesis that predicts a correlation between electoral success of populist radical rights parties and rates of unemployment; some studies find a relationship and others do not (Mudde 2007: 205-206).

Scholars have had similar struggles in discerning the effects of political crisis, drawing diverse results when investigating the correlation between political dissatisfaction and electoral support of populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007: 207). Analysis of ethnic backlash as another theory also yields highly contradictory results (Mudde 2007: 210-211). If economic and political backlash serve as the most salient factors to describe the social demand for the populist radical right, and yet fail to yield consistent analytical and empirical results in explaining why and how these parties gain electoral power, it stands that other sets of factors must at least partially account for the electoral success of the far right. Indeed, social demand factors are a necessary but insufficient condition for the electoral rise of the far-right (Mudde 2007: 230).

Institutions ultimately make the difference between far-right parties remaining on the fringe or rising to gain electoral power. This thesis thus proceeds from a political supply perspective seeking to contribute to the realm of literature that focuses on the ways that political institutions allow for both the electoral breakthrough and political persistence of populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007: 232-233). Mudde (2007: 253) identifies political opportunity
structures as a “facilitating rather than determining factors in the success and failure of populist radical right parties.” These institutional factors thus explain why and how social factors, like nativism and political/economic dissatisfaction translate into seats in a legislature (Mudde 2007: 253). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the ways that electoral systems, presidential systems, parliamentary systems, and parties themselves contributed to the rise of Bolsonaro and Orbán’s far right and how said factors may impact their longevity. I dedicate the remainder of this section to discussing the ways these different kinds of institutions generally affect the breakthrough and persistence of the populist radical right.4

**Electoral Systems**

Scholars contest the degree to which electoral systems contribute to the rise of the populist radical right. To be sure, electoral systems *can* obstruct the rise of populist radical right parties along with other new and/or small parties. This effect has been identified as strongest among countries with some kind of plurality system, particularly first-past-the-post. However, these effects are inconsistent; the United Kingdom, for example, has still seen the rise of the Greens and right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP) (Mudde 2007: 233). Two-tier majority systems, another variation of plurality systems, have also been identified as an institutional

---

4 My choice to focus on supply-side factors does not aim to understate the role demand-side factors play in enabling the emergence of the far-right. However, demand-side factors do not themselves guarantee the persistence of the populist radical right. Institutional factors more acutely allow for political sustainability, enabling such leaders and movements to entrench themselves in the political landscape. Indeed, supply-side explanations simply argue that economic, social, and other structural trends associated with the radical right are “filtered through institutions which determine how they are translated into political outcomes” (Berman 2020: 8). These explanations contend that populism is a *symptom* of institutional decay as limited government responsiveness and effectiveness popularizes antiestablishment, populist candidates. While demand factors are necessary for understanding the causes of populism, they do not/would not incite the kinds of mass mobilization that would lead to the breakthrough of the far-right if the establishment effectively recognizes and responds to such conditions (Berman 2020: 8). If the far-right gains power in this context and the country’s institutions allow the radical right party/leader to implement policy addressing these grievances, it follows that voters will have little incentive to amend the new status-quo. If they are able to achieve these outcomes, while using institutional rules to entrench their power, the radical right party/leader is effectively ensuring their longevity.
obstacle for the populist radical right as they lead to run-offs between two candidates which tend to hinder polarizing candidates. Even in these systems, however, bargaining opportunities arise for third parties. With regard to proportional or mixed systems, the range in proportionality results in varied findings about the effects these systems have in garnering electoral support for populist radical right parties. In summary, empirical analyses find that electoral systems have some obvious effect on the electoral opportunities for populist radical right parties, but these studies fail to account for the differences in success of these parties among different countries, times, regions, etc. (Mudde 2007: 233-234).

Despite the lack of consensus regarding the direct effects of electoral systems on the success of these parties, political actors have, and continue to, identify the electoral system as an important factor in hindering or aiding the success of the populist radical right. Just as some governments respond to the surprise rise of a far-right party with a change in the electoral rules, other governments, with far-right leaders at their head, can also alter the electoral system to strengthen the populist radical right. Indeed, this is one of the most blatant and frequent actions of any populist radical right government; Orbán’s actions in Hungary are evidence of this trend (Orbán’s alterations of Hungary’s electoral system will be discussed at length in later sections) (Mudde 2007: 234-235). For these reasons, despite the lack of consensus surrounding the impact electoral institutions have on the rise of the far-right, the ways in which Brazil and Hungary’s electoral systems allowed for, and have been manipulated to, contribute to Bolsonaro and Orbán’s rise and longevity merit further discussion in later sections.

**Presidential Systems v. Parliamentary Systems**

As antidemocracy constitutes one of the three distinguishing factors of populist radical right parties, it stands that traditionally democratic institutions may, and often do, inadvertently
contribute to the rise of right-wing authoritarianism. Scholars have dedicated much research into investigating the ways that presidential and parliamentary systems uniquely enable or hinder the breakthrough and persistence of an authoritarian right-wing leader. Arturo Linz’s seminal 1990 article, “The Perils of Presidentialism,” argues that parliamentarism is more conducive toward stable democracy than presidentialism. He claims that in presidential systems, where multiple actors make claims to democratic legitimacy, difficulties in resolving conflicts between the executive and legislature often call for the involvement of the military or external actors, thus destabilizing the government and allowing for the rise of right-wing authoritarians (Linz 1990: 53). Presidential politics also tend to rely more on the personalist nature of the leader; this factor, coupled with the zero-sum nature of presidentialism, means that presidents may claim a mandate to do what they want even if they came to power after having achieved only a plurality. Presidents may thus come to resemble autocrats (Linz 1990: 56).

However, parliamentarism is not necessarily a bulwark against authoritarianism. Linz (1990: 62-63) further argues that parliamentary systems with highly disciplined parties and a prime minister with an absolute majority of seats in the legislature tend to grow and behave similarly to the kinds of presidential regimes described above. This claim implies that parliamentary systems’ lack of dual-democratic legitimacy leaves no institutional body with the leverage to counter the prime minister when courts are packed (Bankuti, Halmai, Scheppele 2012: 139, 142).

While Linz does identify dual-democratic legitimacy as a potential source of authoritarian-inducing contention in a presidential democracy, the presence of dual-democratic legitimacy implicitly suggests that in presidential systems with functioning institutions, there are governing bodies that have the leverage and resources to counter an executive with authoritarian
tendencies. Presidents are also typically term limited (Linz 1990: 52). If a state has functioning and effective institutions, then even a president with authoritarian inclinations and an expressed desire to maintain office will be removed either when he loses an election or completes his legally designated terms.

Higashijima and Kasuya (2014) further complement the assumptions made by Linz by arguing that electoral authoritarian regimes with parliamentary regimes are less likely to democratize than those with presidential systems. The authors argue that parliamentarism allows dictators to institutionalize a dominant party and control opposition by taking advantage of coordination problems. Parliamentarism also gives leaders more ability to redistrict and apportion according to their interests, allowing dictators to maintain a parliamentary majority without engaging in more risky methods of electoral fraud (Higashijima and Kasuya 2014: 3).

Presidential and parliamentary systems can thus influence the breakthrough and persistence of authoritarian regimes in distinct ways. Although parliamentary systems are typically more conducive to democratic stability, such a system may produce contradictory results in the presence of certain conditions. Presidential systems, while more susceptible to political change and democratic instability, do have features that may resist antidemocratic movements/leaders. This thesis will later explicate Brazil and Hungary’s distinct presidential and parliamentary systems, respectively, discussing how Bolsonaro and Orbán rose in these distinct systems and how they have been able to, or failed to, use these systems to their authoritarian advantage.

Political Parties

Mudde (2007: 256) identifies “the party itself” as a major factor in explaining a populist radical right party’s own electoral success or failure. The party leadership’s charisma is an
important influence in bringing in new voters. However, a “well-structured” party transforms these new voters into true party supporters. In general, the literature identifies three internal party factors as contributing to the party’s success: a “moderate” ideology, a “charismatic” leader, and a “well-structured” organization (Mudde 2007: 276). The difference in ideology between radical and extreme right parties accounts for the more frequent success of the latter; populist radical right parties (either actually or strategically) hold a relatively moderate ideology compared to their extreme right counterparts (Mudde 2007: 257). However, moderate ideology itself does not account for electoral persistence or for the varying degrees of success among the populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007: 276).

The degree to which charismatic leadership advantages political parties depends on the political system and political culture. Personalist-style leaders, for example, will benefit more from majoritarian systems, particularly those in which prime ministers or presidents are directly elected, than from political systems that are consensual and where the party itself continues to play an important role within the political system (Mudde 2007: 262-263). Typically, charismatic leadership and party institutionalization are incompatible, as a successful external/charismatic leader that brings a party electoral victory is often simultaneously a bad internal party leader who disservices the organization and, subsequently, its political persistence (Mudde 2007: 263). Although most authors agree that charismatic leadership can be a liability, other research complicates these perceptions providing evidence that “charismatic parties” can be institutionalized (Mudde 2007: 264).

Regardless, effective party organization is critical to the persistence of the party’s electoral success (Mudde 2007: 265). For these reasons, I discuss Bolsonaro and Orbán’s former and current parties’ structures at length with additional discussion regarding how these differing
organizations contributed to the breakthrough and, probable or improbable, persistence of each of their regimes. As Mudde also identifies ideology as an important factor contributing to the electoral breakthrough of a populist radical right party, I additionally discuss Brazil and Hungary’s ideological and national party landscape.
Background

The Hungarian Context

Hungary’s turn towards far-right populism as a viable political movement can be traced to 2010 when Viktor Orbán’s party, Fidesz, earned a majority of seats in the parliament, propelling him to the position of prime minister. Fidesz’s political origins, though, do not lie on the nationalist right. Rather, the party began in 1989 as a liberal party firmly positioned in supporting the youth voice—it retained an age limit of 35 for membership until 1993. However, in a post-Soviet world, the left-liberal side of the political spectrum in Hungary was over-occupied while the most prominent party on the right was crumbling, thus leaving room for another party to gain momentum (Rupnik 2012: 134). According to Rupnik (2012: 135), Fidesz’s radicalization came in two stages. The first came in 2002, when Fidesz lost the parliamentary election to the Socialists by a narrow margin, raising rhetoric in the party surrounding the illegitimacy of the government. Then, in 2006, Fidesz won more votes than the Socialists but ended up with fewer seats. This outcome inspired Orbán’s revolutionary rhetoric, with Fidesz joining in a week of riots during the concurrent fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian revolution (Rupnik 2012: 135). The riots and the rhetoric harkened to a pre-communist, authoritarian past.

Fidesz and Orbán’s luck shifted in 2010 when the party won 53% of the vote, sufficient to give it a two-thirds majority in parliament. This supermajority enabled the party to radically revise Hungary’s constitution. Their efforts effectively weakened checks on majority rule and entrenched Fidesz’s control of the judiciary, the media, and other independent agencies (Plattner 2019: 9). This illiberal shift, though initially countered by the party, was eventually embraced by Orbán publicly. He endorsed the idea that a democratic state does not necessarily have to be liberal, painting his illiberal efforts as a denunciation of Western imperialism (Plattner 2019: 9-10). Rather than use the term “illiberal democracy,” however, Orbán has endorsed the idea of a
“Christian democracy:” a style of governance that seeks to protect “the ways of life springing from Christian culture” (Plattner 2019: 10). This is not necessarily an endorsement of democracy but a ploy to legitimize his illiberal views. His insistence that this brand of democracy is incompatible with liberalism is based on three key issues that Orbán cited as differentiating the two:

1. Christian democracy prioritizes Christian culture while liberal democracy favors multiculturalism;
2. Liberal democracy is “pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration”;
3. Liberal democracy supports “adaptable family models” instead of the Christian family model.

Orbán’s framing of liberal democracy paints it as fundamentally multicultural with loose immigration policies and nontraditional family structures including gay marriage. He attempts to equate the concept of liberal democracy to United States’ style progressivism (Plattner 2019: 10-11).

Orbán and Fidesz, however, gained electoral support and political power in the context of a global financial crisis and maintained this power by successfully using both institutional mechanisms of change (such as the changing the constitution) and populist rhetoric (like his anti-immigration stances/rhetoric amidst a global migration crisis). Orbán’s popularity has remained relatively stable, with his party receiving 47.4% of the popular vote in 2018, once again grasping two-thirds of the legislative seats. Orbán himself is the third most popular politician in Hungary after two other Fidesz members (Maygar 2019: 51). Orbán’s populist message, coupled with his successful methods of electoral and institutional manipulation, have made him and Fidesz the leaders of the far right in Europe and leaders in the movement’s global proliferation (Maygar 2019: 52).
**The Brazilian Context**

Brazil’s far-right populists’ success is a bit more recent than Hungary’s, with the election of Jair Bolsonaro—who was then part of the far-right *Partido Social Liberal* (Social Liberal Party)—as president in 2018 (Davis and Straubhaar 2019: 82). Bolsonaro became the leader of the fourth-largest democracy in the world after leading a campaign where he openly expressed nostalgia for the former dictatorship (during which he served as a military officer), demonized his opponents, and spewed anti-women, anti-LGBT, racist, and violent rhetoric that shocked people throughout the world (Hunter and Power 2019: 68; Solano 2021: 213). Bolsonaro’s vulgarity made his ascension to the presidency, for many political scientists and analysts, a shock (do Amaral 2018: 1).

However, widespread dissatisfaction with the leftist and infamously corrupt Workers’ Party (PT), which led Brazil from 2003-2016, set the stage for Bolsonaro’s election (Hunter and Power 2019: 68). The PT was embroiled in a huge corruption scandal in 2014 known as *Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash). What is often described as the biggest corruption scandal in the history of Brazil, Operation Car Wash started as an investigation into allegations that executives at the state oil company, Petrobas, accepted bribes from construction companies in exchange for granting them contracts at bloated prices. Then, it was found that the PT was involved in funneling some of these funds to buy votes, pay off politicians, and support political campaigns. The scandal resulted in Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Brazil’s extremely popular former president (mostly known as Lula) being sentenced to twelve years in prison (BBC 2018). Bolsonaro, a brash but charismatic politician facing a relatively unknown PT candidate, Fernando Haddad (who stepped in at the last-minute for the first round of elections when Lula was imprisoned), won 55.13% of the vote in the run-off (Hunter and Power 2019: 68).
Disdain for the PT, a sentiment known as *antipetismo*, though arguably the greatest force influencing Bolsonaro’s election, was not the only force propelling his victory. Bolsonaro’s incendiary and controversial messages were effectively transmitted by supporters via social media, particularly WhatsApp. Bolsonaro was also able to successfully mobilize the growing Evangelical population in Brazil who have proven to be a loyal voting bloc (Hunter and Power 2019: 68). An economic crisis produced by a protracted recession and intense political polarization were also important components that lay in the background of the election. These social trends and mechanisms, coupled with his “law and order” and anti-corruption message, enabled Bolsonaro to garner a broad, multiclass following (Hunter and Power 2019: 68, 70).

Simultaneous elections for the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Congress, saw Bolsonaro’s small Social Liberal Party (PSL), surge in seats; in 2014, it won only one seat compared to 52 seats in 2018 (Hunter and Power 2019: 68).

However, Bolsonaro lacked strong attachment to the PSL. In Brazil’s multiparty system, the PSL was one of many “parties for rent” that merely gave Bolsonaro a means by which to qualify for the presidential ballot (Hunter and Power 2019: 69). Thus in 2019, after clashing with the party’s leadership, Bolsonaro defected and formed his own party, the Alliance for Brazil, for which he and his son are the heads. This party formed as a vehicle for Bolsonaro’s political brand and a means to extend his goal of political disruption (Langevin 2020).

Bolsonaro’s politics are defined by traditional aspects of the extreme right such as scapegoat logic, and converting fear, anger, and insecurity among the working class and the (increasingly impoverished) middle class into political hatred. Bolsonaro defines the “enemies” of Brazilians as the PT, academics, the LGBT community, feminists, rural Black people, etc. His brand further
focuses on valorizing Brazil’s former dictatorship, heralding its old social hierarchies and the “rule of law” (Solano 2021: 213).
Electoral Systems

Hungary

Despite my earlier assertion that electoral systems have unclear effects on the rise of the far-right, particularly when those electoral systems are majoritarian, to understand the disparate relationship of vote share with seats in parliament, it is critical to have an understanding of Hungary’s unorthodox electoral system. Hungarians cast two votes in parliamentary elections: one for a representative for their home constituency and one for a party. These votes fill the 199-member National Assembly, in which 106 members are elected in single-member electoral districts and the remaining 93 come from national party lists. To win a seat in the parliament, candidates must win a plurality of the vote. The outstanding 93 seats are distributed among those parties that received over 5% of the party vote proportionate to the number of votes they garnered in the national party lists (Mécs 2018: 86). This electoral system is the product of 2011 reforms under Fidesz’s parliamentary majority.

Beginning in 2010, Fidesz has won a two-thirds majority in every parliamentary election by winning a little over or a little less than half the vote. This disparate relationship between vote share and seats in parliament is a product of the electoral system developed after the fall of the Soviet Union. The current system is a reform of this original structure which developed as a compromise during negotiations between the communist party and the opposition (Terry 2018). The Communists supported a Westminster-style voting system believing it more beneficial for their socialist successors. Opposition parties were split but grew to favor a mixed system. The result was a mixed system with majoritarian tendencies (Toka 2014: 1). In this original system, 176 seats were elected using a two-round system, 152 were elected from regional proportional representation lists, and 58 were apportioned from lists to compensate parties that fell below the
5% threshold to enter parliament (Terry 2018; Fumarola 2016). These compensatory seats required parties to run candidates in a fair number of districts.

The system was designed to institutionalize the main six parties into a permanent six-party system. However, the high level of candidates needed to qualify for compensatory seats meant that small parties soon dissolved and new ones failed to enter parliament. The results were so extreme that by 2002, only three parties entered parliament, with Fidesz and the Socialists holding 95% of the seats, effectively turning Hungary into a nearly pure, albeit stable, two-party system (Terry 2018; Toka 2014: 1). This arrangement gave way to the 2002-2010 socialist-led governments which discredited the left-wing side of the pseudo two-party system, ultimately leading to the 2010 parliamentary elections which saw Fidesz gain 53% of the vote and 68% of seats in Hungarian parliament (Toka 2014: 1). This was the electoral system through which Fidesz gained a two-thirds majority in 2010 and which the party subsequently altered.

While Fidesz, by all accounts, gained its 2010 majority without any electoral manipulation, the party has used its supermajority to redesign nearly every aspect of the electoral system to its advantage. The supermajority gave them the capacity to reduce the number of members of parliament from its original 386 members to 199 (Mécs 2018: 86). The two-round vote was converted to a one-round vote to assign 106 seats to parliament. The winner surplus vote was also introduced, where the difference between the winner and the second candidate, minus one vote, qualifies as a surplus vote and these votes are moved to the party list. The votes cast to the party lists and the surplus votes are then divided by a proportional formula among those parties reaching the 5% threshold—this method is used to assign the remaining 93 seats (Fumarola 2016; Mécs 2017: 89). The reduction of seats also involved redistricting and creating minority lists through which to extend the 5% threshold (Fumarola 2016).
These reforms had two major effects on representation. The first is unused votes from the majoritarian system are allotted to winning candidates from smaller parties. The increasing majoritarian nature of the electoral system emphasized the polarization between opposition and governing parties, resulting in additional seats for Fidesz. In conjunction with reduced parliamentary seats, this provision has resulted in greater disproportionality between seat allocation and a dissonance between the number of parties disputing elections and those actually sitting in parliament (Fumarola 2016). The second major issue is that reducing seats and reshaping districts impacted the impartiality and equality of the vote. Several international organizations and election observers condemned a lack of transparency in seat allocation to counties and in the process of redrawig or gerrymandering district boundaries (Fumarola 2016). The results of these reforms in Fidesz’s favor are obvious; in the 2014 elections, Fidesz gained 67% of seats (only 1.3% less than 2010) despite losing 7.9% of the vote share compared to 2010 (Fumarola 2016). According to Szigetvari, Tordai, and Veto (2011: 1), “in both 2002 and 2006, this system would have contradicted the majority will of voters at that time and would have led to rightwing governmental majority. This is a result of the growing influence of single-seat constituencies on the final outcome in the new system as well as of the transformation of the compensatory system.”

These reforms were made with the justification that the former electoral system had very real problems—which it did. According to Mécs (2017: 89), in the former electoral system, “the slightly disproportional territorial lists and the national list could not balance the single constituencies.” In other words, the constituencies were unequal, and the system was overly complex. This was the same system that caused Fidesz to gain more votes, but fewer seats, than the Socialists in 2006 (Mécs 2017: 89). When the electoral system worked in Fidesz’s favor in
2010, the party used its new supermajority to ensure the electoral system would be much more conducive to its political longevity. In this case, therefore, Hungary’s electoral system directly contributed to Fidesz, and thus Orbán’s, rise and consolidation of power. Fidesz used its constitutional majority to tinker with the country’s electoral system transforming their plurality into a supermajority (Krastev 2021: 157). Fidesz has thus created this political supply factor that enables its maintenance of power.

**Brazil**

Unlike Hungary, where Orbán manipulated a complex electoral system to sustain Fidesz’s parliamentary majority, Bolsonaro benefitted from the pre-existing complexities and idiosyncrasies of Brazil’s electoral system. Indeed, current Brazilian politics, typified by a highly fragmented multiparty system and characterized by personalist political characters, are a result of its electoral system. Brazil’s electoral system actually incentivizes individualism. In elections with many candidates and a disincentive towards party cohesion, candidates are incentivized to use personalist style politics to garner bases of support among the electorate (Mainwaring 1991: 23). For a candidate with far-right views, such incentives to anti-party behavior mean he is not bound to moderation to maintain party support or gain a nomination—party support is largely inconsequential, thus allowing the candidate to pursue and publicize their own incendiary brand of politics. As discussed below, such was the case for Bolsonaro.

Voting is compulsory in Brazil for all citizens 18 years of age and older. Brazil holds majoritarian elections for presidents, governors, mayors, and senators. The former three are elected by absolute majority, the last by a plurality. Presidential elections (along with gubernatorial elections and mayoral elections in cities with over 200,000 voters) go to a runoff between the top two candidates if the first round does not produce a winner with an absolute majority (Mainwaring 1991: 22). Some other positions, including federal and state deputies, are
elected in open-list proportional elections. The lower house of the legislature, the Chamber of Deputies, uses such a system. To elect candidates to the Chamber of Deputies, a citizen casts a non-transferable vote for one deputy and seats in the chamber are subsequently distributed according to a party’s total number of votes (accrued by all candidates of the party); those seats are then allocated to those party candidates who received the most votes (Mainwaring 1991: 23). Candidates are thus not only competing against members of other parties also vying for seats in the legislature, they are competing against their fellow party members to attain a seat. Thus while candidates from the same party likely express solidarity to fellow party members if they are competing for different positions, serious competition ensues among those competing for proportional positions like those in the Chamber of Deputies (Mainwaring 1991: 26).

Although the number of representatives is determined by total party votes, whether a candidate attains a seat is dependent on their ability to earn individual votes. As a result, candidates quickly fall back on highly individualistic campaigning in order to gain electoral favor (Mainwaring 1991: 26). Open-list proportional systems thus incentivize anti-party behavior and individualism in campaigns as loyalty to the party itself does not guarantee a legislative seat and grants candidates a certain degree of autonomy apart from their party (Mainwaring 1991: 24). Such an electoral system—where voters choose among many different parties and many different candidates from the same party thus giving the electorate more of a voice in choosing who runs for office—actually encourages, according to Mainwaring (1991: 40), “personalism among candidates, contentless politics, and demagoguery.”

Such a lack of party cohesion/loyalty bred by the electoral system contributes to the highly fragmented nature of Brazil’s party system and the country’s highly individualistic politics. This open-list proportional system in the Chamber of Deputies incentivizes personalist
politics and, according to Mainwaring (1991: 26), “has institutionalized a system that encourages weak party commitment, solidarity, discipline, and cohesiveness.”

In the case of Bolsonaro, who served in the Chamber of Deputies from 1991 to 2018, this open-list proportional representation system both incentivized and enabled his personal brand of populist radical right politics free from any party discipline. Despite the fact that two-round plurality elections tend to muddle personalist politics, Bolsonaro’s near three-decade long cultivation of a reputation for incendiary politics did not disservice him. On the contrary, an open-list proportional representation system allowed him to develop and popularize the image that ultimately helped propel him to the presidency, despite the moderating power majoritarian elections are purported to have (Hunter and Power 2019: 175). Thus, in Brazil’s mixed system, the influence that proportional elections have on propelling far-right politicians transcended from the proportional to the majoritarian realm.

The nature of Brazil’s two-round majoritarian elections may have also contributed to Bolsonaro’s presidential win. A highly saturated first-round of the 2018 presidential election included more than a dozen candidates, some of whom enjoyed significant popularity aside from Bolsonaro and Lula. Ciro Gomes and Geraldo Alckim, two centrist candidates, were particularly popular, garnering nearly 13% and 5% of the vote, respectively (LaSusa 2018; Gonzalez 2018). However, both candidates were eliminated in the first round in which no candidate received the absolute majority of the votes, leading to a run-off between the two candidates with the largest vote share in the first-round: Bolsonaro and Haddad. In a highly fragmented first-round contest coupled with a polarized electorate, candidates who are ideologically closer to the median voter can be eliminated in the first round. Such was the case with Gomes and Alckim who were decidedly much more centrist in their views that Bolsonaro and the PT candidates. Two-round
systems may eliminate a Condorcet winner in the first round of an election.\(^5\) While no data
confirms whether either Gomes or Alckim were Condorcet winners, it is fair to speculate that the
two-round system may have eliminated candidates who, in a second round, would have defeated
Bolsonaro. Thus, multiple layers of Brazil’s electoral system, in both Congress and the
presidency, might have enabled Bolsonaro’s electoral rise both explicitly and implicitly;
although, with regard to two-round systems, these assertions are likely premature.

\(^5\) Condorcet winners are those candidates who beat all others in pairwise comparisons. While two-round systems do
ensure that the Condorcet winner will win the second round if they make it that far, the Condorcet winner can be
eliminated in the first round, preventing the ascendancy of the most preferred candidate to the presidency. While we
cannot come to conclusions about whether Gomes or Alckim were Condorcet winners without further information
and analysis, it is possible such was the case in their election. Two-round systems complicate our perceptions of
majoritarian elections serving as a moderating influence in the election of a president. Two-round systems saw the
election of Bolsonaro in 2018 and the near election of far-right populist, Marine Le Pen, in France in 2017.
Presidentialism v. Parliamentarism

Hungary

Hungary’s parliamentary system, like any other, involves the selection of a prime minister from the party, or coalition, that holds the most seats in the legislature. In 2010, when Fidesz won a constitutional majority in the parliamentary elections by winning 263 seats and thus fulfilling the two-thirds requirement to rewrite the constitution by parliamentary vote, Orbán, having been the leader of Fidesz since its inception and having previously held the position, was the natural selection for prime minister. Hungary’s specific parliamentary rules allowed for essentially single-party rule, enabling Fidesz to rewrite parts of the constitution and gerrymander parliamentary districts to give the party further advantage in the next elections. The new constitution also expanded Hungary’s constitutional court, allowing the party to fill seats with Fidesz loyalists and consequently give themselves an even greater advantage and protection as this court decides whether laws passed by parliament are constitutional. After garnering this majority, parliament additionally passed legislation widening the scope of Fidesz’s authority, allowing the party to fire many civil servants and replace them with Fidesz allies. Most of these very significant changes were implemented within the first few months after the party took power (Beauchamp 2018).

Both Hungary’s old and new constitution were/are rooted in a parliamentary system with a unicameral parliament. However, in order to avoid majoritarian abuses, unicameral parliaments require checks. While the old constitution had many checks, Fidesz was careful to ensure the new one did not (Bankuti, Halmai, Scheppele 2012: 142). From 1990 to 2010, Hungary was heralded as a model for a successful post-communist transition from authoritarianism to stable democracy (Beauchamp 2018). However, Fidesz, following the rules of Hungary’s democratic system, managed to gain power and overhaul the system it rose within in a matter of months.
Following Hungary’s post-communist transition, the framers of the new constitution were concerned with the possible development of a fractured parliament where small parties would be unable to form stable majority coalitions. They attempted to resolve this problem by creating an electoral system that favored larger parties while using extra seat bonuses to ensure stable governance. They also worried about the creation of a deeply entrenched constitution that would be difficult to change as democracy and political institutions continued to evolve. To allay this concern, the framers included an amendment rule in the new constitution allowing a two-thirds majority of parliament to alter any provision of the constitution (Bankuti, Halmai, Scheppele 2012: 138). When Fidesz gained a supermajority in 2010, these provisions gave Fidesz and Orbán a practical mandate to do away with Hungarian democracy by writing a new constitution.

Parliamentary systems, unlike presidential systems, do not have separate institutions that claim democratic legitimacy. On the contrary, parliament is the democratic institution which grants the prime minister his authority and can, fairly easily, retract said authority. Courts serve as a check on parliament, but their success only goes so far—if the party in power is able to successfully pack the courts, the courts may serve only to further legitimize the ruling party. Such was the case with Fidesz, who quickly attacked the Constitutional Court, the primary check on the government. Fidesz expanded the court and amended the constitution to allow the governing party (Fidesz) to nominate candidates and let its two-thirds majority confirm their seats; this move effectively gave Fidesz the power to appoint judges without interparty support. Other provisions further limited the powers of the Court to serve as a check on parliament and the prime minister (Bankuti, Halmai, and Scheppele 2021: 139).

In parliamentary systems, the party itself may serve as a check for a rogue parliamentarian or prime minister (Mainwaring 1991: 30). But in the case of Hungary, Orbán has
cultivated a kind of personalized populism and built a movement that is loyal toward him personally and not toward Fidesz (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 117). Indeed, Fidesz derives its success from Orbán, not the inverse. Orbán’s public popularity, his tightly organized and disciplined party, and Fidesz’s supermajority practically ensure and secure Orbán’s personalist rule. Without courts to check him, with a party who fully backs him, and aided by altered electoral rules that benefit Fidesz and Fidesz only, Orbán and his party have successfully transformed a functioning democracy into a radical right autocracy. Fidesz’s sustained supermajority keeps Orbán as the executive with practical guaranteed decree power and no institutional checks. Hungary’s parliamentary system thus supplied an institutional condition that directly enabled and contributed to the rise of the populist radical right.

**Brazil**

Prior to his presidential victory, Bolsonaro’s congressional victories were largely attributable to Brazil’s use of open-list proportional representation in the lower house of the legislature which allots a high number of representatives per district and is thus a system conducive to the rise of more fringe candidates with narrow bases. Since he was first elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1990, Bolsonaro never attempted participation in a majoritarian election like those for mayor, governor, senator, or president, as he was restricted by his fringe base (Hunter and Power 2019: 75). Over time, however, Bolsonaro built a highly loyal following and gained some influence among the electorate at large, serving as a boisterous foil to the left. As such, a year before the 2018 election, Bolsonaro was viewed as one of two strong candidates in polling, the other candidate being Lula (Hunter and Power 2019: 76).

In preparation for the 2018 election, Bolsonaro accepted the nomination of the PSL. With the downfall of the MDB and PSDB, there was no other appealing or well-recognized candidate
from the center-right who could challenge Bolsonaro. While Lula maintained his popularity and led in major polls despite widespread antipetismo, his removal enabled Bolsonaro’s easier path to the presidency as he faced a weaker candidate, Haddad, in the runoff election. These dynamics ultimately led to Bolsonaro’s victory (Hunter and Power 2019: 78-77).

Typically, in presidential democracies, presidents are limited in the degree to which they can block or initiate legislation (i.e. their reactive or proactive power). Brazil’s 1988 constitution expanded both of these powers for the president, giving him much more executive authority. Under this new constitution, Brazilian presidents have among the most powerful presidential capacities in the legislative realm when compared to other presidential democracies (Mainwaring 1997: 12). This decree power, however, does not mean that a president can disregard Congress; Brazil’s highly fragmented multiparty system inherently has consequences for presidents. Congress can still reject presidential decrees and must intentionally pass provisional measures in order for them to be implemented (Mainwaring 1997: 9-10). Indeed, presidents require legislative support to fulfill their agendas. Moreover, in 2001, the Brazilian Congress adopted Amendment 32 which rolled back some presidential decree power. While this reform failed to limit the number of new decrees, it did limit the maximum life of a decree to 120 days. If within the first 45 days Congress fails to vote on the decree, then it automatically moves to the top of the congressional agenda, overriding any other item of business (Pereira et al. 2008: 6-7). Therefore, even this explicit executive decree power requires legislative approval and thus underscores the necessity of presidents to have some kind of productive working relationship with the dominating coalition.

Typically, presidents’ ability to achieve their agenda is inversely proportional to the degree of party fragmentation in the legislature. Although we can usually expect the president's
party to be more likely than other parties to support him, if the president’s party has a small share of seats, gaining critical legislative support and implementing major reforms will likely be more difficult (Mainwaring 1997: 18). A highly fragmented legislature also means presidents need support beyond their own party to gain the absolute majority needed to support their decrees; they need to assemble a broad legislative coalition (Mainwaring 1997: 19).

These realities present two conflicts for Bolsonaro. Upon entry to office under the flag of the PSL, he was initially associated with the party that newly acquired the second greatest number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, throughout his campaign, Bolsonaro railed against the other large parties in the congress, dampening his chances of substantive coalition formation particularly with the center-right parties PSDB and MDB, which more closely align with his platform than the center-left PT. Bolsonaro’s departure from the PSL has only exacerbated his struggle in gaining sufficient legislative support as this move left him

---

6 One could argue against the merits of institutional analyses by contending that, rather than institutions facilitating the rise and persistence of radical right leaders, it is the leaders themselves operating within the institutions that make the difference in terms of longevity. For example, what if Bolsonaro’s personality were not so incendiary and he were able to more successfully coalesce with the center-right parties to pass at least parts of his agenda? What if Orbán were not as politically savvy to alter electoral rules? These questions fall under the voluntarist explanation of populism which pays credence to how the choices and behavior of parties and politicians affect the rise of populism (Berman 2020: 10-11). I will not dwell on voluntarist explanations as they remain outside the scope of this thesis and do not themselves completely account for the breakthrough and persistence of the far-right; as I gesture throughout this thesis, no singular factor can account for either. However, with brief regard to the aforementioned rhetorical questions I presented, I provide two speculative responses. Referencing the former, while many in the Brazilian Congress have found Bolsonaro’s personality and political brand off-putting, many of his voters were attracted to his incendiary politics as they signaled an “outsider” mentality and an unwillingness to be politically correct. Bolsonaro’s personality was part of what got him elected (Philips 2018). Although Bolsonaro could have curtailed his anti-establishment rhetoric to gain necessary support for policy initiatives, these moves might have undermined the message which helped get him elected. Bolsonaro and his team might view abandoning this brand in political discourse/negotiations as impeding longevity. With regard to the second question, it does not require much political savvy to exploit a constitutional provision enabling a two-thirds majority to rewrite the constitution when a party has that supermajority; Fidesz was simply the first to take advantage of it. Voluntarist explanations are helpful in explaining some differences in breakthrough and longevity, but they are not themselves determinate of either. While Bolsonaro’s personality might ultimately be the factor impeding his political longevity, it is also what helped him emerge electorally. Moreover, while Orbán is undoubtedly a masterful politician, it is fair to speculate that anyone with similar antidemocratic leanings may have exploited the same provisions in similar ways.
without direct party backing in Congress (Solano 2021: 220-221). The issue of dual-democratic legitimacy in Brazil’s presidential system thus hinders Bolsonaro’s capacity to institute populist radical right policies.

Unlike under a parliamentary system, however, Bolsonaro does not require party support to maintain his seat. While parliamentary systems incentivize party cohesion, presidential systems disincetivize party cohesion. Moreover, whereas in parliamentary systems parties are nearly as, if not equally, responsible for governance, in a presidential system, presidents do not require party support of policy to avoid executive failure (Mainwaring 1991: 31). Therefore, as long as Bolsonaro gains an absolute majority of votes in the next presidential election in 2022, he will retain his position. If he is unable to form a viable coalition in the legislature, however, he will also retain the issues of his first term during which he has so far been unable to implement any substantive reform.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in contrast to a parliamentary system, the plebiscitary element inherent in most presidential systems—i.e. the more direct relationship between a president and the electorate—may inflate a president’s sense of their own “mandate,” conflating

---

7 Predictions on whether Bolsonaro wins a second presidential term may be premature but several developments speak to the increasing unlikelihood that he will win that absolute majority needed to retain his seat. Brazil’s poor response to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the country joining the United States and India as the countries with the largest death tolls, have seen Bolsonaro’s approval ratings slump from 41.2% in October 2020 to 32.9% in February 2021 (Andreoni 2021; Reuters 2021). This slump in approval also correlates to disapproval of Bolsonaro’s recent political appointments, including appointing a retired general with no oil and gas experience as chief executive of Petrobas (the state oil company). Throughout the pandemic, Bolsonaro’s policies have largely ignored public health guidance in favor of retaining an open economy, a move which Bolsonaro hoped would win him political favor in the 2022 election (Reuters 2021). However, as most polls show consistently growing negative ratings of Bolsonaro’s government as the death toll rises, this move has largely backfired. Negative polling also shortly preceded news that a Brazilian Supreme Court judge had annulled Lula’s corruption convictions, clearing the way for him to run for president in 2022. While Bolsonaro has reacted cavalierly to this news, in the 2018 election Lula led Bolsonaro in the polls before his corruption conviction prevented him from continuing as a candidate. A poll from early March 2021 also found that Lula was the only candidate in the field of candidates who could beat Bolsonaro in 2022. 50% of respondents said they “would certainly” or “could” vote for Lula unlike the 38% who said they would do so for Bolsonaro (Quinn 2021).
his supporters with the people as a whole. According to Linz (1990: 61), this populist element may be a source of strength for a president allowing him to surpass the limits of his presidential mandate despite the presence of a legislature with equal democratic legitimacy. Whether Bolsonaro will surpass these limits in an expansion of his mandate and institute a more robust far-right agenda also remains to be seen.
Political Parties: Internal Structures and External Landscape

Hungary

Fidesz initially defined itself as a radical-liberal youth movement but it radically shifted to the right beginning in 1992, and even more so after its dismal performance at the 1994 general election. This shift enabled the party to fill the vacuum left by the Hungarian Democratic Forum, a conservative party that collapsed after bearing the burden of heading the first post-communist government between 1990 and 1994 (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 117). By 1998, Fidesz was a member of a right-wing governing coalition. Despite his chauvinistic and authoritarian tendencies, in his first term as prime minister, Orbán’s cabinet pursued conservative policies that sought to strengthen the position of the middle class and develop a solid social base. But, after the party was defeated in the 2002 general election, it spent the next eight years in the opposition, becoming increasingly radical and populist. Although Fidesz’s core electorate includes middle-aged people, wealthier people from the countryside, and stronger support among smaller villages in the west of the country, the party’s base greatly expanded in this period, and it almost lost its traditional demographic composition (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 117).

Orbán has led Fidesz since its beginnings and became its undisputed leader after eliminating the party’s liberal faction in 1993. Orbán never lost his leading position and continued to make important decisions even when the position of party president was formally held by someone else. In 2003, Fidesz adopted highly centralized structural reform, further strengthening Orbán’s dominant position. The party has since been very successful in maintaining and broadening its base and reshaping their attitudes while manipulating Hungary’s political cleavages for their own benefit (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 117-118). Fidesz’s tight-discipline and hyper-organization align with Mudde’s (2007: 256, 276) description of those
supply factors that enable a populist radical right party to enjoy electoral success. Orbán’s increasing strides for personalized populism and his obvious charisma fulfill Mudde’s (2007: 276) additional requirement of the party requiring a charismatic leader.

With regard to fulfilling Mudde’s “moderate” ideology criterium, Fidesz’s current position in Hungary’s party landscape is the result of what Orbán calls a “central political power field” (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 118). On one side of the field stands a relatively strong Jobbik, Hungary’s extremist far-right party, and on the other an equally large in size, but fragmented, left. With these diametrically opposed poles, Fidesz positions itself in the middle and claim itself as the only guarantee of democracy in the country as it is the only party capable of preventing the even further-right party from gaining power. Fidesz is thus able to strategically use Jobbik as a shield for its radical right agenda; the parties have very similar ideas but Jobbik simply expresses them more brutally. This allows the governing party, Fidesz, to portray itself as “moderate” in comparison with Jobbik, while maintaining a relatively large and powerful partner in parliament (Kreko and Juhasz 2017: 118).

The left, within this political landscape, is largely an inconsequential form of opposition. Following the defeat of the left-wing in the 2010 election and the left’s subsequent implosion, Fidesz, with its two-thirds majority in parliament, could embark on its agenda with free reign (Kreko and Juhasz 2017:118-119). Hence, Fidesz’s internal party structure, and the political landscape it strategically works within for the party’s own benefit, enabled both the rise and consolidation of Fidesz’s political power.
Brazil

Brazil’s party landscape, like Hungary’s, emerged as a result of the left-leaning PT’s fall from grace. The multiple crises facing Brazil since 2013 sowed much discontent with the establishment parties and the PT, the latter of which had won the previous four presidential elections and was blamed for the economy’s severe downturn after 2013, *Lava Jato*, and record levels of crime (Hunter and Power 2019: 69). Widespread *antipetismo*, Lula’s disqualification as a presidential candidate, and Haddad’s unpopularity left a sizeable vacuum for an alternate party/candidate to fill.

The widespread rejection of the incumbent president, Michel Temer, also spoiled the two major center-right parties linked with the government: Temer’s own Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). Temer’s failure to mitigate the problems associated with the PT following his ascension to the presidency after Dilma Rousseff’s controversial impeachment in 2016, marred his party’s credibility and the credibility of those parties with which they were associated (Hunter and Power 2019: 69).

The fall of Brazil’s center-right parties, and twelve additional political parties implicated in corruption allegations, left a broad political space for a hostile takeover by fringe far-right elements (Hunter and Power 2019: 70, 80). The PT and PSDB framed Brazil’s party system since 1994; this implosion of two of Brazil’s largest and most mainstream parties left ample room within Brazil’s highly fragmented multiparty system for a fringe party, and fringe candidate, to ascend the ranks and ultimately ascend to the presidency. These political circumstances, compounded with rising crime rates and corruption, allowed for a small but visible far-right movement that expressed a “rule of law” and anti-corruption message to gain ground (Hunter and Power 2019: 72).
In 2018, with the major parties losing seats and high turnover in both houses, Brazil topped its own world record for party-system fragmentation. Candidates from 30 parties were elected to fill the lower house of the legislature, the Chamber of Deputies. This high degree of fragmentation in the legislature, coupled with an ideological extremist in the executive, complicates the formation of congressional coalitions necessary for effective and efficient governance (Hunter and Power 2019: 79). Indeed, the struggles Bolsonaro’s government has faced in executing its policy objectives are largely due to the Brazilian political structure that necessitates coalition presidentialism.

Moreover, Brazil’s presidential and electoral system have been critical in facilitating the lack of cohesion among the country’s parties as legislators have no incentive to follow the party line and because presidents have purposefully challenged parties in Congress (Mainwaring 1991: 31). Brazilian presidents require a solid base of allies in Congress to achieve policy objectives and rather than seek allies among the 513 deputies in Congress, Bolsonaro has dedicated himself to attacking the PT, PSDB, and MDB, and trying to implement his policy objectives undiplomatically and undemocratically. These efforts have alienated deputies and ceded much of the current political control to the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia, rather than Bolsonaro (Solano 2021: 220-221).

As far as those internal factors specific to Bolsonaro’s party, Bolsonaro ascended to the presidency under the flag of the small Social Liberal Party (PSL) of which he was quickly able to gain full control. The PSL espouses views that fuse libertarian economic policies with evangelical Christianity (Bradlow 2020). Bolsonaro, however, lacked strong ties to the party leadership, having switched party affiliation eight times before the 2018 election (Langevin 2020). Indeed, during his thirty years in Congress, Bolsonaro strategically used different parties
to his electoral advantage. He joined the PSL only after his cronies negotiated with the party’s leadership; the pact gave Bolsonaro the party’s presidential nomination and gave PSL leadership policy control and cabinet positions (Langevin 2020). Their pact evidently succeeded as Bolsonaro was elected and the PSL became the second largest party in the Chamber of Deputies.

This arrangement, however, quickly faltered as a series of scandals, including Bolsonaro’s attempt to exert personal control over the PSL, resulted in Bolsonaro leaving the party in November 2019 (Langevin 2020). This style of departure and party switching is not unusual in Brazilian politics. In fact, compounding issues within Brazil’s political institutions incentivize it. As I discuss throughout this thesis, Brazil’s highly fragmented party system is a result of electoral rules that incentivize personalism and individualistic campaigning. The country’s authoritarian past results in a distaste of norms of party loyalty and discipline (Mainwaring 1991: 39). As such, politicians exercise a degree of autonomy from their party, and they typically lack strong ideological or fealty ties to their party.

In fact, many politicians perceive parties as vehicles to support their election. At the time of his writing, Mainwaring (1991: 28) drew on data that found politicians in Congress had belonged to an average of 2.9 parties, insinuating that party-switching is not the exception but the rule. Politicians find it expedient to switch parties for their political gain, with the term *partido de aluguel*, or “party for rent,” becoming a popular expression to describe parties simply used for running for office (Mainwaring 1991: 28). Larger, more institutionalized parties like the PSDB, PT, and MDB exercise only minimal control over how their politicians vote. All of this speaks to the pervasiveness of party-switching and disloyalty to political parties which characterize the party landscape in Brazil.
Unsurprisingly given Bolsonaro’s personalist tendencies, amid his departure from the PSL, Bolsonaro announced he would create his own party called “Alliance for Brazil.” The party was launched fanatically, with Bolsonaro and his son supposedly at its head. However, the party and its prospects for success beyond Bolsonaro remain moot; most now consider Bolsonaro a president without a party (Arantes 2020). More than anything, the Alliance for Brazil has only resulted in only further party fragmentation, dividing the PSL between loyalty to Bolsonaro and loyalty to the party (Langevin 2020). As such, Bolsonaro lacks the kind of institutionalized and well-structured party Mudde (2007: 276) identifies as necessary to sustain prolonged power (Hunter and Power 2019: 81). Indeed, while Bolsonaro exudes charisma, nothing about his platform, rhetoric, or actions position him or either of the small/fledgling parties he associated himself with as president as part of a “moderate” ideology. Regardless, Brazil’s multiparty system did supply Bolsonaro with an opportunity to rise through the ranks despite being a fringe, right-wing candidate.
**Longevity**

At the time of this writing, both Bolsonaro and Orbán retain their seats of power. In this section, I attempt to predict how the aforementioned institutional realities in Brazil and Hungary may affect the longevity of their respective regimes. Throughout this paper, I have implied how Hungary’s political supply factors have enabled the sustaining power of Orbán and Fidesz while Brazil’s may imply a shorter tenure for Bolsonaro. I preface this section with the acknowledgement that the Covid-19 pandemic has presented an additional unprecedented, and likely very consequential, factor that may affect the sustainability of these regimes. My discussion of how institutional factors influence longevity will thus take into account these realities while attempting not to speculate what would have happened if not for the emergence of the pandemic. I proceed by respectively summarizing how Brazil and Hungary’s institutional realities, in spite of Covid-19, have and will likely continue to affect Bolsonaro and Orbán’s attempts at consolidating power. I reference Cas Mudde’s (2007) and Arturo Linz’s (1990) arguments throughout.

**Brazil**

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Bolsonaro is a personalist leader without an institutionalized party structure. According to Mudde’s (2007: 263) arguments, such realities hinder the political persistence of the populist radical right. Bolsonaro continues to lack a well-institutionalized movement behind him and is unlikely to construct one in the approximate year he has before he is on the ballot once again. While many eagerly waited for Bolsonaro to find illiberal paths around tedious institutional hurdles, Bolsonaro has not exercised decree power as successfully as expected. For example, though one of his first acts as president was the signing of a decree to loosen gun ownership rules, Congress voted into law a watered-down version of the
ruling (Foggin 2020). This is a clear example of the expectation that Bolsonaro’s lack of coalesced support among Brazil’s highly fragmented Congress would prevent the formation of coalitions that would enable Bolsonaro to enact his populist right agenda. His ambitions are further muddled by his lack of clear party support in the Congress (Hunter and Power 2019: 79).

Bolsonaro remains the most visible face in Brazilian politics after the PT and PSDB’s fall from grace. As a result, there is currently no single leader or party in Brazil with the kind of salient authority to challenge Bolsonaro in the 2022 election. Indeed, Brazil lacks a clear and legitimate opposition leader. Hunter and Power (2019: 80-81) predicted this reality would have troublesome implications for Brazilian democracy. However, Bolsonaro completely lacks an institutionalized party for support even more so now that he effectively governs as a president without a party. Brazilian politics already has a history of presidents with early public support falling from grace without a strong and sustained party base, like the case of former president Fernando Collor (Bradlow 2020).

Given that Bolsonaro has already lost much popular support, with February polls indicating an approval rating just below 33%, Bolsonaro’s prospects for a landslide reelection are weak. The results of the 2020 midterm elections further support this prediction. In November of 2020, Brazil held two rounds of voting in local elections with thousands of mayoral and city council seats on the ballot. Although Bolsonaro was not on the ballot, many viewed the midterms as a vote of confidence on Bolsonaro himself and his handling of the pandemic and a distressed economy. Of the 13 mayoral candidates Bolsonaro endorsed, only two won and of the 45 city council candidates he endorsed, only ten won (Bradlow 2020).

Although the results of the midterm elections do not bode well for Bolsonaro, it is still possible that he will win the 2022 election, particularly if the center-right bloc (otherwise known
as the centrão) reverses course and allies with Bolsonaro, granting him more public support and greater allies in Congress, but also a moderating influence (Bradlow 2020). However, a Bolsonaro victory in 2022 does not predict the sustainability of populist radical right politics in Brazil. Brazilian presidents are constricted to a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and thus Bolsonaro can serve a maximum of eight consecutive years as president. Unlike the United States’ presidential system, the two-term limit is not a lifelong restriction; a former two-term president can run for office again if at least one presidential term has lapsed (Political Database of the Americas 2011). Therefore, there is the possibility that following an eight-year tenure and a four-year enforced hiatus, Bolsonaro may run for office again.

However, a four-year gap in leadership leaves much room for political change and Bolsonaro, a populist personalist without a viable party and without a clear and charismatic successor, will unlikely be able to maintain his populist radical right agenda in the executive branch during this time. A four-year gap may also see a change in Brazil’s political, social, and economic climate, one that is much more hostile to Bolsonaro’s inflammatory brand. Therefore, while Linz (1990: 54) identified term limits as a potential drawback in presidential systems as they break “the political process into discontinuous, rigidly demarcated periods, leaving no room for the continuous readjustments that events may demand,” in the case of Brazil, term limits will likely serve a crucial role in limiting Bolsonaro’s radical right ambitions.

Given Bolsonaro’s open nostalgia for the days of military dictatorship and his ties to and support of the military, it is not outside of the realm of possibility that Bolsonaro, like many right-wing leaders throughout history, will vie for a maintenance and expansion of power via the security sector. Thus, this decidedly cynical possibility merits discussion. By December 2018, Bolsonaro had named seven current or former military officers to his cabinet and this number has
only increased with additional appointees including the recent appointment of a retired general as chief executive of the state oil company, Petrobas (Hunter and Power 2019: 81; Reuters 2021). For contrast’s sake, none of the five military presidents during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship had any more than seven officers in their cabinets.

These appointments, and Bolsonaro’s noted relaxed restrictions on police officers, suggest Bolsonaro’s intention to cultivate this source of power while also using this show of force to garner favor around voters’ expressed interest in ‘law and order’ (Reuters 2021). Concerns of military takeover to maintain Bolsonaro’s power if Bolsonaro fails to secure a second term, or if he completes two consecutive terms, are therefore not unfounded.

However, as demonstrated by Bolsonaro’s meager policy success, Brazilian institutions have thus far been successful in limiting Bolsonaro’s exercise of power and no military intervention thus far has been called upon to intervene when such obstacles arise. Moreover, as noted by Mainwaring (1991: 36), the same multiparty fragmentation elicited by Brazil’s mixed electoral system—largely regarded as an impediment to effective and efficient governance—was constructed in such a way to disincentivize party discipline and other factors that more directly allow for the rise of military dictatorships. Since the military dictatorship’s end in 1985 and the new constitution’s adoption in 1988, Brazilian democracy has remained relatively stable. Pending extenuating circumstances, Bolsonaro has been unsuccessful in reshaping Brazil’s institutions to his electoral and political benefit. Thus, while Brazil’s political institutions did

---

8 Brazil’s highly fragmented multiparty system is directly influenced by initiatives made during the military government. In 1965, the military government instituted an electoral law raising the electoral threshold parties had to pass in order to gain seats in Congress, effectively limiting in the number of parties in Congress. This law also included provisions to strengthen party control over congressional representatives. Laws followed that affirmed and strengthened mechanisms of party discipline (Mainwaring 1991: 35-37).
supply him with several opportunities to gain electoral favor, Bolsonaro’s populist radical right movement is unlikely to persist in an executive, productive, or far-reaching manner.

**Hungary**

Through my analysis of Hungary’s parliamentary system, political party landscape and electoral system, I have argued that Fidesz fulfills the three factors Mudde identifies as contributing to the success of a populist radical right party: a “moderate” ideology, a “well-structured” party and a “charismatic” leader. Benefiting from a party landscape that positions Fidesz as the “moderate” alternative to the extreme far-right party, Jobbik, and facing a highly fragmented left-wing, Fidesz can effectively present itself as the only safeguard of democracy in the country. This rhetorical positioning, however, is highly hypocritical. Through their two-thirds supermajority in parliament, Fidesz and Orbán have rewritten the constitution and electoral rules to give themselves a sustained advantage in elections, parliament, and the courts. As long as Fidesz maintains this electoral majority, Orbán will also retain his position as prime minister or, at the very least, as the leader of the party. Thus, he will remain a permanent figure in Hungarian politics pending no sudden changes in the political landscape.

However, for reasons already stated, and exhibited by recent developments, Fidesz and Orbán have been incredibly savvy in ensuring the longevity of Orbán’s personalist rule and Fidesz’s parliamentary supremacy. The party further benefits from a supportive electorate; public favor for Orbán and Fidesz remain high. Fidesz has been elected and re-elected three consecutive times in elections that were themselves free of fraud (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 331).

The government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic serves as a convenient microcosm through which to examine how Fidesz’s institutional manipulations facilitate further power consolidation and policy success. In March 2020, as panic around Covid-19 spread beyond East
Asia, many countries seized the crisis as an opportunity to grasp and consolidate power; Orbán was one of those leading this charge. The Hungarian Basic Law of 2011, adopted in Orbán’s first year after regaining his position as prime minister, contains a “state of danger” clause designed to deal with natural and industrial disasters. Under the Hungarian Fundamental Law (FL), the government must declare the state of danger, and under such a declaration the government is allowed to: “adopt decrees in a state of danger, suspend the application of particular laws, to deviate from statutory provision and to adopt any further extraordinary measure as defined by a cardinal Act” (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 338).

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government declared a state of danger on March 11, 2020. The FL, however, asserts that government decrees under a state of danger can remain in effect for only 15 days without parliamentary authorization for a government extension. Thus, on March 30, 2020, the government introduced a bill, voted in by a two-thirds majority in parliament, that gave Orbán and his cabinet broad decree powers as long as the state of danger continued (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 339). The law sidestepped the parliamentary process and gave Orbán and his government the ability to exercise unlimited power. The Coronavirus Defense Act, or the Authorization Act, extended Hungary’s state of emergency indefinitely and could be lifted only by a two-thirds majority in parliament. With Fidesz holding a two-thirds majority independently, lifting the state of emergency would fall to the party’s undisputed leader, Prime Minister Orbán (Gall 2020).

While the wide authorization enabled under these laws has not been abused to the extent that people feared, their existence creates a subconstitutional emergency regime that can be invoked at practically anytime (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 330). Under the Coronavirus Defense Act, the government has used its emergency powers to issue 146 decrees, nearly 18 decrees a
week during this constitutional emergency regime. Most of these decrees were clearly relevant to both containing and moderating the impacts of Covid-19 although others had only very loose connections (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 341). Under this law and the state of danger, absolutely no elections could be held. (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 340). Moreover, some of these decrees clearly targeted Fidesz opposition.

For example, the government introduced special economic zones on industrial developments valued at over 29 million euros that are of significant economic importance to the region. Upon establishing SEZs, ownership of this real estate is transferred to a greater administrative authority effectively amounting to expropriation from the local government. For local governments, such initiatives can cause a substantial cut in tax income. Since the implementation of this decree, establishment of SEZs has been selectively implemented in opposition strongholds, signifying flagrant abuse of emergency powers for political incentives. This happened in the opposition-run city of Göd where Samsung has a large industrial plant, stripping the city of 40% of its income (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 344-345). Certain decrees also create an information asymmetry as they reduced the transparency of governmental decision-making by suspending all ongoing freedom of information requests while also allowing the government to acquire and manage personal data to supposedly prevent and investigate the spread of the virus without having to notify those whose personal data is affected (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 346).

Not all new policy initiatives and legislation were devised via emergency decree, however. During the pandemic and state of danger, parliament has continued to legislate, having devised several draft laws that strongly suggest rights suppression (Gyory and Weingberg 2020: 346). One bill, for example, moved more than 20,000 employees at state cultural institutions
from public service contracts to normal employment contracts, effectively depriving them of many perks of public service employment. This move during the pandemic was intended to quell protests by individuals, trade unions, and the opposition (Gall 2020). Another legislative move sought to remove the rights of transgender people to choose their official identity based on their gender; the new law says only biological sex can determine legal gender. Most controversially, under the Authorization Act, the criminal code was amended, updating the existing crime of fearmongering with a new measure that criminalized the spread of “false” or “distorted” information, punishable by up to five years in prison (Gall 2020).

While this is only supposed to apply to such information that may negatively impact “epidemic defense” during the state of emergency, the law was extensively criticized as unconstitutionally vague and a move to further quell freedom of the press. Given Orbán’s historically contentious relationship with the media, these new measures expanded his ability to crack down on the press and raised concerns that the law aimed to crush any remaining opposition to Fidesz and Orbán (Gall 2020).

Indeed, under the law, many government critics have been apprehended and then released for Facebook posts criticizing the government (Novak 2020). More telling of the impact of Fidesz’s court-packing, the Constitutional Court found these criminal measures to be constitutional (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 347). This expansion of the criminal code, unlike other components of the Authorization Act that would be lifted after the state of emergency, became a permanent addition to Hungary’s criminal code (Gall 2020).

These decrees, provisions of the Authorization Act, and other laws enacted during the pandemic were not justifiably necessary in order to appropriately respond to the public health emergency. Instead, these measures constitute a badly disguised attempt at a power grab (Gall
On June 20, 2020, Parliament voted to end the state of emergency and Orbán’s government ended the extraordinary legal order (Novak 2020). However, the implemented law that terminated the state of emergency still enables the government to rule by decree by leaving open the possibility for the government to declare another state of emergency (Tanacs and Huet 2020). Three human rights organizations, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, and Amnesty International Hungary, warned that the draft law to end the state of emergency will make it easier for the government to rule by decree in the future (Tanacs and Huet 2020). An amendment in the legislation allows the government to use decree power to restrict freedom of assembly and movement in future states of emergency. Indeed, many view these moves as the final step in Orbán’s autocratic consolidation of Hungary (Tanacs and Huet 2020).

Supporters of Orbán contend that the law does not give the government any more power than similar laws across Europe. They argue the law grants powers proportionate to the times and stress it can be revoked any time by parliament or reviewed in the Constitutional Court (Tanacs and Huet 2020). According to Gyory and Weinberg (2020: 340), they also argue the Authorization Act itself includes a “general clarification that the granted authority only extended to decrees aimed at the prevention, control, eradication of the epidemic, as well as the mitigation or prevention the harmful effects thereof.” However, vague language leaves open the possibility of extending government powers as the predictable recession that will follow Covid-19 may serve to justify further “mitigation” efforts.

Moreover, as I have illustrated and argued in much of this thesis, neither parliament nor the Constitutional Court serve as effective checks on the power of the prime minister and his cabinet. Orbán and Fidesz have effectively shaped Hungarian institutions to be conducive
towards such potent opportunities for power consolidation. Indeed, Gyory and Weinberg (2020: 333) stress the importance that institutional underpinnings play in explaining these Hungarian developments. With Fidesz holding a two-thirds supermajority in parliament and having reshaped the electoral system to effectively maintain this majority, parliament is no more than a mouthpiece for Orbán’s illiberal, populist radical right agenda. Moreover, with such a majority allowing Fidesz to rewrite the constitution, they have expanded the Constitutional Court and filled it with Fidesz loyalists, once again undermining the ability of this institution to effectively check the party and the prime minister (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 335).

Although Orbán and Fidesz remain fully institutionally entrenched and in public favor, and benefitted further by a subconstitutional emergency regime, concerns about full authoritarian transition are likely stalled for several reasons including Hungary’s participation in the European Union (EU). While Orbán consistently challenges the EU’s core values and his political moves are continuously denounced by member states, Hungary maintains a vested interest in remaining part of the EU. The EU provides most of the financial means that propel Hungary’s economic development and greatly invests in public services. Oligarchic elites in Hungary also rely on EU funds as their major source of income (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 350). According to Gyory and Weinberg (2020: 335, 351), so long as the government is modest in its openly authoritarian gestures, this critical funding will continue and thus the EU serves, to a degree, as an external constraint.

Moreover, given that the institutional equilibrium continues to work in Orbán and Fidesz’s favor and the party retains public support, the government has very little incentive to initiate an openly autocratic transition.⁹ Indeed, unlike the unmitigated spread of Covid-19 in

---

⁹ Recent developments in Hungarian politics may contradict this assertion. Six opposition parties have announced they will work together to unseat Fidesz and Orbán in the upcoming 2022 national elections. In December 2020, the
Brazil under Bolsonaro’s watch, the Authorization Act enabled a rapid and effective response to the pandemic in Hungary, effectively bolstering Orbán and Fidesz’s popularity and further legitimizing illiberal rule. As a result, the government’s popularity remains high (Gyory and Weinberg 2020: 350).

However, the firm institutionalization of the party in parliament, facilitated by electoral manipulation and propelled by a charismatic personalist prime minister and the new subconstitutional emergency regime, speak to the predictable longevity of Fidesz’s parliamentary majority and Orbán’s position as prime minister. These dynamics also suggest the political persistence of Hungary’s populist radical right. Bolstered by public support, Orbán may have an incentive to refrain from blatant autocratic moves but no incentive to retract his radical right policy initiatives. His government’s reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic underscores how the institutions through which his party broke into the political scene, and later manipulated said institutions, enabled opposition crackdown, discriminatory measures, and power consolidation shadowed by a unilateral domestic response to the pandemic.

---

parties agreed to support a single joint candidate in each of the country’s 106 electoral districts to oppose Fidesz. They will also run on a common platform, holding a primary election to choose a joint prime minister candidate to oppose Orbán (Spike 2020). The parties are ideologically disparate (they include Jobbik and left-wing parties) but have chosen to coalesce despite their vast ideological differences in order to unseat Fidesz, citing such a strategy as the only way to democratically challenge Fidesz given the disadvantageous electoral laws. Although Fidesz continues to be Hungary’s most popular party, many believe this strategy will be successful in unseating Fidesz. A November poll by Publicus Research indicated that these six parties together held a four-point advantage over Fidesz. The 2022 election, thus, may serve as the greatest test to Fidesz’s institutional reforms in sustaining their rule. To be sure, Fidesz has already proven its efforts successful in longevity as, in November 2020, Orbán broke the 130-year record to become Hungary’s longest serving prime minister (Spike 2020).
Conclusion

Discussions of radical right movements typically focus on the social underbelly of these movements (nativism, economic insecurity, political corruption, etc.) and the societies they operate within. Little attention is paid to those factors that allow parties to institutionalize themselves within the larger political sphere. Political supply factors, i.e. institutions, are what transform social demand for the far-right into a political breakthrough. In this thesis, I attempted to explore the impacts institutional factors like electoral systems, political parties, and presidential and parliamentary systems had on the recent emergence of the populist radical right in Brazil and Hungary. Through this analysis, I also speculated how distinct political supply factors may, and have, affected the longevity of Prime Minister Orbán of Hungary and President Bolsonaro of Brazil’s regimes. Comparing these two case studies allowed me to draw several conclusions.

In both cases, no single institutional factor alone wholly explained the rise of either leader. On the contrary, the confluence of political supply and popular demand provided the facilitating conditions for the rise of Hungary and Brazil’s populist radical right. However, from these analyses, I do draw some general observations and assumptions. With regard to presidential versus parliamentary regimes, comparing Brazil’s presidential democracy to Hungary’s parliamentary democracy exposes the benefits of the former as compared to the latter. In presidential democracies, term limits and dual-democratic legitimacy between the executive and the legislature allow for checks and balances and an enforced tenure, limiting the long-term influence a president can have on policy while term limits ostensibly hinder longevity. These restrictions on longevity, to be sure, assume institutions are well-functioning. In parliamentary systems, as parliament is the legitimate democratic institution, there are fewer checks on a prime
minister when he holds a well-disciplined and loyal majority in parliament. Courts can serve as an effective check but court-packing by the dominant party can undermine this capacity as was the case in Hungary. Most parliamentary democracies also do not have term limits on prime ministers, allowing them to retain power so long as they retain a party/coalition majority in parliament and retain said majority’s favor. The longer a prime minister is in power, the longer he and his majority can institutionalize their own rule, as was the case in Hungary.

With regard to political parties, generally, a well-structured party with a charismatic leader will find more long-term success. This success is augmented when said party can position itself more centrally on the ideological spectrum within the broader party landscape—a party to the more extreme right renders the populist radical right party as comparatively “moderate” and thus more worthy of a vote. In Hungary, Fidesz, with Orbán’s personalist leadership at its helm, presents itself as the moderate alternative to the more extreme right party, Jobbik. This comparative centrism coupled with Fidesz’s tight discipline and structure have decisively contributed to the party’s long-term success.

In contrast, Bolsonaro’s undeniable charisma is not bolstered by any powerful, well-disciplined political party; he entered the presidential ticket under membership in a party for rent and left said party soon after he ascended to the presidency. He effectively governs as a president without a party and in Brazil’s highly fragmented party system, Bolsonaro lacks the benefit of a far-right leader/party with decent visibility against which to position himself as comparatively moderate. Bolsonaro has found this lack of party support particularly detrimental as he has thus far been unable to pass any significant legislation during his tenure.

Relating to electoral systems, both Hungary and Brazil hold distinctions for incredibly complex electoral rules. Both countries use mixed electoral systems, employing proportional or
majoritarian elections depending on the seat/ chamber in the legislature. Both systems, however, adopt a more majoritarian character, contradicting assumptions that majoritarian systems are generally better suited towards hindering the rise of the far right than proportional systems. While political science literature contends that few assumptions about electoral systems can be made regarding how conducive they are too far-right breakthrough and persistence, the electoral conditions that facilitated Bolsonaro and Orbán/Fidesz’s rise merited considerable discussion.

With regard to the former, Brazil’s open-list proportional elections in the Chamber of Deputies enabled Bolsonaro to gain his seat on an incendiary political brand and cultivate said brand in the legislature for nearly 30 years without needing to appease party wishes. This reputation was not moderated in Brazil’s two-round presidential race. Instead, the first round eliminated centrist candidates leaving Bolsonaro and the unpopular Haddad (from the left-wing PT party) as the two contenders in the latter round ultimately resulting in Bolsonaro’s victory.

Hungary’s complex electoral rules, in contrast, were borne from a post-communist compromise that yielded highly disproportional results in nearly every parliamentary election; these rules led to Fidesz gaining a two-thirds majority in 2010 with only a bit over half the vote share. This supermajority, under Hungary’s constitutional rules, enabled Fidesz to rewrite the constitution and redistrict and reapportion seats to practically ensure Fidesz’s long-term supremacy. The results have been effective: Fidesz has retained this supermajority in parliament ever since. In Hungary’s case, highly complex electoral rules, coupled with constitutional provisions that aided their manipulation, have likely been the central factor ensuring Fidesz’s proven political longevity. Electoral manipulation of this kind as of yet has been unavailable to Bolsonaro, in contrast.
These compounding factors and their implications suggest a shorter-shelf life for Bolsonaro’s presidency but have thus far secured Fidesz and Orbán’s parliamentary supremacy. The Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly useful in exposing these implications as Bolsonaro’s support has further faltered while Orbán effectively used the crisis to consolidate power.

While no predictions can be made with certainty regarding longevity, in this thesis I have attempted to expose the crucial role that institutions played in the political breakthrough of the populist radical right in both Brazil and Hungary. Drawing on theoretical literature, research, and contemporaneous news, I shed light on the importance of investigating institutional mechanisms when examining those conditions that breed political potency for the populist radical right. In doing so, I contribute to the growing literature which emphasizes political supply factors merit as much academic attention as social demand factors when attempting to understand those conditions that facilitate the rise of the populist radical right.

**References**


https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europppblog/2016/03/21/fidesz-and-electoral-reform-how-to-safeguard-hungarian-democracy/


Langevin, Mark S. 2020 “Bolsonaro’s new Alliance for Brazil is a lesson in the politics of loyalty and campaign finance.” *London School of Economics: Latin America and Caribbean Centre*, January 24, 2020.


LaSusa, Mike. 2018. “Brazil goes to the polls on Sunday. It could be the country’s most important election ever.” *Vox*, October 5, 2018.


https://pdba.georgetown.edu/ElecSys/Brazil/brazil.html


