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ANTIZIGANISM AND THE RISE IN ELECTORAL SUCCESS OF EXTREME  
RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements.  
for the Honors in the Major Program in International and Global Studies  
in the School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Barbara Kinsey

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## Abstract

My thesis explores the association between Roma's perceptions of discrimination against them by native populations and electoral support of populist or extreme right-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Roma communities have historically been discriminated and persecuted; however according to findings in the literature, during the Cold War there had been improvements in terms of protection of their rights and their economic advancement. Following the end of the Cold War, however, Roma lost these protections and their status worsened. This deterioration is partly attributed to the rise of far-right parties in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; this connection, however, is understudied in the literature. Based on data gathered from a 2016 EU survey of the Roma populations in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and electoral data, i.e., the vote share of parties of the far right, I conduct a cross-country comparison of the link between Roma's perceived discrimination against them by native populations and far-right parties' electoral support.

## Introduction

The Romani communities around Europe are diverse, unique and hold true to their shared identity and culture as Roma. While there have been time periods in European history where the Roma people have experienced a sociopolitical standing higher than that of an outcast or of a segregated group, the current situation in Eastern Europe is, for the most part, one of systemic discrimination, racism and persecution against the Roma that live in Central and Eastern European states.

During the Soviet era of central and eastern European history, the Roma people's rights were protected. Literature regarding the status of the Roma during the Cold War and studies focusing on discrimination, generally agree that the Roma had robust minority rights in comparison to other points in their history. It was the official policy of the Soviet Union to promote the Roma, a nationality oppressed during the Tsardom. Soviet Roma were given full civil rights; they were able to work laborer jobs and have housing as the provision of essential goods and services was ensured by the Soviet system. The Soviet system also included providing jobs to its citizenry. In addition, they were able to accomplish several cultural achievements in literature, and education for their population among other achievements (Shapoval 159).

However, in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union, the situation for the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe became increasingly difficult. The Soviet social welfare system, which had provided some measure of support and protection for Roma, was dismantled and left the vast majority of Roma without a safety net. This coupled with the flood of technical advancements and automation from the West left many Roma without employment

(Iusmen 427, 2018). The loss of the Soviet welfare system and economic stability led to widespread poverty, unemployment and homelessness for the Romani populations in Central and Eastern Europe, resulting in socioeconomical collapse for the Roma (CORDIS 3, 2018).

In the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination survey about the Roma population in European Union member states, the findings suggest open discrimination against the Roma (*Situation of Roma*, 2012). Approximately 90% of all Roma in the European Union live impoverished in the nation they reside in (*Situation of Roma*, 2012). Fifty percent of all Roma children between the ages of 6 and 24 do not attend any institution of knowledge in the European Union, and a third of all Roma children sleep hungry at least once in the past month (FRA Roma, 2012). Roughly 43% of Romani adults legally participate in paid work. Along with violence being committed against Romani communities, primarily by far-right organizations and the de facto segregation of Romani individuals from non-Roma, the Romani situation is one characterized by discrimination and mistreatment (*Situation of Roma*, 2012).

There is increasingly more research in the literature about the negative and often discriminatory effect of radical right-wing parties (RPP) on Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe. The literature demonstrates that the far-right movements in Central and Eastern Europe began to germinate and gain popularity with native populations after the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 1990s (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 1-2, 2019). The movements appeal to members of the native population and focus efforts on scapegoating minority groups, minority ethnic immigrant groups and the Roma in many cases, for socioeconomic plights (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 1-2, 2019). In Eastern and Central European countries, the far-right organizations further exacerbate marginalization and discrimination for the Romani populations, leading to

increasing levels of poverty, social exclusion and violence (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 3-4, 2019).

In the literature the connection between the support for far-right movements and discrimination against the Roma is understudied; so, the question in my thesis is: To what extent does the electoral success of RRP affect the minority rights of the Romani communities of Central and Eastern Europe; specifically, what is the connection between the level of electoral support for RRP and perceptions of discrimination among the Roma? The reasoning behind selecting Central and Eastern Europe as the geographical scope of the study is as follows: while there are high levels of discrimination in Europe in general against the Roma, the Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe are not only larger than in Western Europe but have also lost a significant amount of minority rights following the fall of the Soviet Union. As evidenced by the existing literature, the marked increase in radical right-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union is likely to have a stronger impact on antiziganism<sup>1</sup> than in Western Europe as there are higher rates of RRP support and influence in the Central and Eastern European politics than in Western European politics (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 1-2, 2019).

This thesis will utilize the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) dataset provided by the European Union to examine the possible relationship in the support for RPPs and Roma's perceived discrimination against them by native populations in the following countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The 2016 MIDIS II dataset contains survey data and parliamentary election results; the elections

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<sup>1</sup> Antiziganism: hostility, prejudice or racism toward Roma

I use for the analysis take place the year of, or immediately prior to, the 2016 survey. The country cases were selected for their varying level of both RRP electoral support and Roma's perceived discrimination against them by native populations. This variation allows me to examine a potential association between the two phenomena. I construct a contingency table to observe the association between the cross-country electoral shares of RRPs and Roma's perceived discrimination against them.

The following section provides the contextual background on the issue of discrimination against Roma communities within Central and Eastern Europe. Second, I review the literature on the connection between the electoral support for RRPs and discrimination against minority groups; specifically, I rely on the mechanism of "threat perception" in the literature to develop my hypothesis. Third, I describe the data sources and methodology employed to analyze the hypothesized relationship between electoral support for RRPs and Roma's perceived discrimination against them, then describe the findings. Finally, the conclusion section reflects on the limitations of this study, and potential future research on this question.

## Discrimination Against the Roma in Eastern Europe

The Romani communities have been heavily discriminated against in most Eastern European countries (Thornton 110, 2014). Furthermore recently, interactions between Roma and RRP's have been often characterized by violent or contentious incidents (Kovarek 74, 2017). There have been several positive steps to ensure that the Roma do not live in open persecution in Central and Eastern Europe; however, a country where they are openly discriminated against is Hungary (Kovarek 74, 2017).

An example of how the Jobbik party took advantage of the Roma and diminished their minority rights was in the town of Tiszavasvári. Local leaders of the town, most of whom were Jobbik members, engaged in inducing the local Roma population to become dependent on the municipal governments through political schemes aimed at dividing the Roma population. Romani residents of Tiszavasvári were promised collectively several million forints (the Forint is the currency of Hungary) towards a Roma self-government budget in exchange for the Romani community's electoral support of a cooperation agreement between Tiszavasvári and another Hungarian village known as Érpatak. The mayor of Érpatak, Mihály Zoltán Orosz, was a controversial mayor who actively promoted RRP ideologies against minorities such as the Roma.

The Romani community of Tiszavasvári was in crisis because there was a significant risk for further social exclusion of their minority rights if the two municipalities signed a cooperation agreement due to the RRP ideologies of the towns' leaderships; for the Roma, the chance to have several million forints for self-government would allow them to support themselves and reduce dependence on the municipality. This question caused a rift in the Roma community, giving rise to a "pro-Jobbik" and "anti-Jobbik" division among the Roma; the disagreements between these

camps resulted in the community's inability to self-govern. Without being able to elect a president in 2011, the Roma community had to dissolve their autonomous government that worked to protect their minority rights. The Roma self-government became suspended until 2014 when it became fully defunct (Kovarek 74, 2017).

Vassilev (2004) suggests that the institutional ignorance of the Roma condition among the Central and Eastern European governments and people has created a new subclass in these societies that is the Roma; the government policies of the post-Soviet Union republics have also been known to reenforce the historical stigma against the Roma (pg. 43). Vassilev's (2004) main findings suggest that the lack of public and private support has caused the Roma to be in a socio-politically destitute state.

Within the last couple of years, cases where municipalities throughout Eastern Europe began to forcefully migrate entire sections of Romani communities to hazardous and maligned waste areas have started to become commonplace (Alexandrescu 2, 2021). This is due to gentrification or forced evictions from neighborhoods with the common denominator usually being discriminatory in nature (Alexandrescu 114, 2021). The Romani people have always been subject to forced removals and displacements throughout Europe, but according to Alexandrescu (2021) since the start of the twenty-first century they have been displaced more and more due to unfair urban development and purposeful gentrification efforts (pg. 2). Evidence of this process is evidenced by the increase in the number of forced evictions in Romania from 750 families in 2009 to 1300 families in 2013 (Alexandrescu 4, 2021). Most of the time, the Roma families that are affected are removed from their homes in inner city areas and moved to the outskirts where there are environmental hazards ranging from industrial waste to human biohazards (Alexandrescu 4-6, 2021).

Two instances where the Roma population was left severely disadvantaged were their forced removals from a municipality in Târgu Mureş and Miercurea Ciuc, Romania (Alexandrescu 4, 2021). The Romani community in Târgu Mureş used to live in Rovinari, once one of the “most beautiful quarter of Targu Mureş' '(Alexandrescu 4, 2021). Due to the economic hardships of the 1990s to early 2000s along with the housing market collapsing, the Roma were forced to either move to metal barracks or build primitive shacks on unwanted land outside the city (Alexandrescu 4, 2021). These evictions were justified on the purpose to refurbish Rovinari and were claimed to be temporary. However, Alexandrescu (2021) found that city officials placed the Romani that were in the barracks in peripheral housing to make way for Romanians to live in Rovinari (pg. 4).

There are other ways that the Roma community is subjected to discrimination, notably in the domains of education and the labor market. To illustrate, Slovakia presents a poignant case, where the Roma population is confronted with discriminatory and segregated education, aggravated by the dual constraints of the socio-economic conditions of Roma households and the significance of education in Roma culture. The outcomes of these factors culminate in hindrances that prevent the Roma from attending educational institutions: “Discrimination of the Roma people on labour market is often associated with stereotypes about unreliable labour lacking motivation, which in turn relates to the low level of education and absence of qualifications. The long-term development of negative phenomena creates a certain image about the way and living conditions in the margined groups. Such image is ‘hereditary’, and it is handed on from one generation to another” (Mládek and Pukacova 43, 2010). This ties heavily to the economic exclusion of the Roma because employers usually hold on to stereotypes about the Roma community (Mládek and Pukacova 42-43, 2010); stereotypes include the Roma as

unmotivated and lazy along with being stupid and only good for simple tasks (Mládek and Pukacova 43, 2010). The stereotypes and negative perceptions found throughout Slovakia enforce the negative treatment of the Roma (Mládek and Pukacova 43, 2010). In addition, these discriminatory behaviors result in lack of social mobility among the Roma which in turn reinforces these stereotypes for most Slovaks (Mládek and Pukacova 43, 2010).

In terms of employment, the Roma are very similar to other discriminated minority ethnic groups in terms of their under-employment rates. For instance, in Poland, although the Polish government has created subsidized jobs and constructed training and internship opportunities for the Roma, many times the Roma populations are not told of these opportunities; thus, these policies have not been enough to counteract the unemployment rate among the Roma community (Topińska 17, 2011). According to data retrieved from Poland's Roma population in 2010, the unemployment rate among the Roma in the provinces they resided varied from 50% to 100% (Topińska 9, 2011). This can be attributed to their "very low level of education, lack of skills and sometimes specific attitudes and prejudice. Also, the Roma population's willingness to exclusively live on social welfare" and not take up official forms of employment (Topińska 9, 2011).

Again, in the case of Poland, apart from trying to attain social welfare, Roma usually try to avoid going to social service agencies for several reasons. One of them is that they fear deportation if they are not legal residents or if they are legal residents, they fear discriminatory actions will occur against them (Puckett 626, 2005). These fears are not unfounded or incredulous. There are barriers to receiving social services such as proof of local residency for access to aid and benefits (Puckett 627, 2005). Puckett asserts (2005) that some social service agencies only serve Polish individuals and since the Roma tend to be excluded socio-politically

due to threat perception politics, some Roma do not even know about these services being available to them in the first place (Puckett 627, 2005). Since the Roma can be nomadic and part of traveling communities, Poland has a history of deporting nomadic Roma in recent history. As recently as the mid-1990s Roma who had lived in Poland for multiple years were deported themselves (Puckett 628, 2005).

The European Union has made several efforts to stop antiziganism. One of the main laws that was passed in the European Union to this end was , the Council Directive 2000/43/EC, highlights the current socio-political struggles of the Roma with a “framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin throughout the Union in relation to employment, education, social protection, including social security and healthcare, social advantages and access to and supply of goods and services, including housing”; the Council Directive was written back in 2000 (Council Directive, 2003). Highlighted in the European Council’s recommendation to the European Union on March 12, 2021, the document also elucidates the reader on the process that the European Union has taken to achieve relative tolerance and acceptance of the Roma people within the European member-states (Council Directive, 2003).

According to the European Convention of Human Rights’ Article fourteen, citizens in the European Union are to be treated without disrespect in the following manner:

According to Protocol No. 12, Article 1, EU citizens are entitled to the following (Article 14, 2022):

“1. The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion,

political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

2. No one shall be discriminated against by any public authority on any ground such as those mentioned in paragraph 1.”

With these two in mind, it is also important to note that the right to non-discrimination is further highlighted throughout EU laws but more notably in “Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 on the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (the ‘Racial Equality Directive’), and Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (the ‘Employment Equality Directive’)” (Council Directive, 2003).

With these two directives both focusing on employment practices, the Racial Equality Directive is limited in its scope along with educational, economic and social rights. These directives must be implemented to each member state of the EU’s domestic legislation with the directives themselves being adhered to by the EU institutions that are present throughout Europe. Within the Racial Equality Directive, the EU clarifies direct and indirect discrimination as the following:

a. “Direct discrimination shall be taken to occur where one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on grounds of racial or ethnic origin.

b. Indirect discrimination shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, unless that provision,

criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary” (Council Directive, 2003).

As we have seen above, discrimination against Roma in Eastern European cases, suggests the violation of the guidelines for both direct and indirect discrimination as described by the EU directives.

Czechia and Slovakia provide examples of violations of these guidelines (Cviklova 2144, 2015). The most blatant example of discrimination would be under their ‘separate but equal’ classrooms (Cviklova 2144, 2015). In Czechia, they have policies that are based on civilizing the Romani communities who were “primitive” (Cviklova 2144, 2015). Cviklova (2015) shows unjustly assigning Roma children into special schools for those with disabilities; conservative voices have defended this practice under the pretext that they were not as civilized as the rest of that society (pg. 2144).

This matter came under scrutiny during the landmark case *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*. Czech citizens who assert claims regarding discrimination may refer to the Anti-discrimination law, which has been deemed by some politicians and the general populace as redundant due to the existence of the ECHR and other national provisions. The antidiscrimination law delineates both direct and indirect forms of discrimination in various areas such as “business, education, medical care, social benefits and the provision/sales of goods and services including housing—under the condition that they are offered to the public” (Cviklova 2145, 2015).

The pivotal ruling in this case concluded that the harmful impact of the special school system on the Roma children's applicants constituted a legal discrimination, and thereby breached the fundamental rights safeguarded by the European Convention on Human Rights

(Cviklova 2145, 2015). This decision as well as Amnesty International's reports on the differential treatment of children and the Czech Republic and Slovakia, were key factors that prompted a shift in the balance of power and control between the Council of Europe and the Czech Republic regarding discrimination (Cviklova 2145, 2015).

As discussed in this chapter, the Romani communities in Eastern Europe have faced heavy discrimination from the native populations in Eastern Europe, leading to a destitute socio-political state. Using examples from the literature, Hungary's Jobbik party is an example of how RRP engage in actions that make the Hungarian Roma subject to open discrimination. Focusing on the example in Tiszavasvári, the Romani community were promised financial support for their self-government in exchange for the electoral support for a RRP cooperative agreement headed by Jobbik members, but the divided Romani community ended up losing their autonomous government due to disagreements, leaving the Roma community vulnerable to further social exclusion. There is also the case of the forced removals of Romanian Roma in Târgu Mureş and Miercurea Ciuc, being justified in that the municipalities needed to renovate the areas that the Roma previously resided in. They instead were moved to rudimentary huts in the periphery of the municipalities, often in unwanted land outside the city limits. In Poland, Slovakia and Czechia, the social exclusion of the Roma is the outcome of institutional ignorance; social programs designed to help the Roma are either not known to them or the Roma are secluded due to segregated education and lack of employment.

## Literature Review

Given that the radical right-wing parties (RRPs) in Eastern Europe are seemingly contributing to discrimination against the Roma, the literature review attempts to identify and specify a possible mechanism for the potential connection between the RRP and discrimination against the Roma in Central and Eastern European nations. Numerous studies point to the link between increased discrimination and ill-treatment of minorities, and the increase in popularity of extreme right populist groups or RRP (Szombati, 2018; Kende and Kreko, 2020). The literature also suggests that as the electoral support for radical, populist far-right parties increase, minority groups experience more instances of institutional discrimination, a decrease in laws protecting their rights, and, more broadly, an increase in hostile acts by the broader public (Csiki, 2014; Goll et. al, 2016; Lugosi-Schimpf 2015).

Hungary provides an example of a connection between the rise of radical right-wing parties and decreasing minority rights of the Roma people. Since the far-right nationalist Jobbik party assumed a position of political power in the 2000s, there have been incidents that have appear to have diminished the minority rights of the Roma (Kovarek 66, 2017). The Jobbik party engaged in political rhetoric that has promoted discrimination and violence against minorities including the Roma. Starting in the early post-communist era of Hungary, the economic crisis of 2008 allowed for radical right-wing parties to gain traction in disseminating ideas associated with an anti-establishment populist rhetoric combined with a negative perception of minorities. Kovarek (2017) expands on this point by explaining that “(g)iven that the core feature of the ideology of the far-right is *nativism*, enemies of the far-right are defined on an ethnic, national or racial basis. Examination of enemy images is important not only for

understanding the far right's ideology: enemy images influence not only the rhetorical, but the political and the policy output and 'behavior' of far-right parties, movements and leaders". (pg. 67).

The deep effect this had on the Roma can be most notably found in the widespread "Gypsy-crime" myth, which describes the Hungarian Roma as wholly immoral and genetically prone to criminality. This led to an "increased sentencing and public spending on police" to counter the risk posed by the Roma as perceived by the public. Local politicians used the widely popular "Gypsy Crime" myth to frame the Roma as a scapegoat, create a system to repress them and justify violent acts committed against them (Kovarek 73-78, 2017). Kovarek (2017) suggests that "(t)his ideological scapegoating mechanism serves as a basis of political and policy actions on the local level as well. The mobilization by Jobbik's paramilitary organizations against the 'aggressive Roma', for example, led to the violent escalation of ethnic tensions in a small locality in Northern Hungary in 2011 and consequently to the election of a Jobbik-affiliated mayor who promised to make order. The former village thus became a successful laboratory of anti-Roma mobilization on the local level for the Hungarian far-right" (pg.63).

One example of the implications of the "Gypsy Crime" myth is the case where 700 protesters gathered in the municipal capital of Ózd, Hungary because of a planned Roma Cultural Center (Kovarek 73, 2017). Jobbik rhetoric was used to declare the future of Ózd as the "Gipsy capital...and support murderous families" leading to Jobbik supporters gaining enough signatures to launch a referendum on the matter (Kovarek 73, 2017). Kovarek (2017) found that Jobbik supporters were successful in "exploiting not only anti-Roma sentiment and the fears of locals, but also the fact that the local Roma self-government was not consulted beforehand, and

that the city council made its supporting decision to adopt the project during a closed session” (pg. 73).

Another instance can be highlighted in the case of a parking dispute between Romani Hungarians and non-Romani counterparts in Devecser, Hungary, on whether a car was parked in the correct spot. (Kovarek 74, 2017). Kovarek (2017) notes that following the story becoming public, “on an extremist website, far-right groups (the Hungarian Guard, Army of Outlaws, etc.) held a demonstration against ‘gypsy crime’ with Ferenczi, who was to become Jobbik’s mayoral candidate two years later, as a speaker. Afterwards, the extremists marched to the house of the Roma family and started throwing stones at them, with riot police present at the scene but not intervening. Interviewees underlined how this incident gained Jobbik local fame, while substantially damaging the relationship of the local ethnic minority with non-Roma inhabitants at the same time” (pg.74).

Recent electoral success of radical right-wing parties in Romania have caused the Roma communities (CORDIS 1-2, 2018), to flee Eastern Europe to seek better political and economic opportunities in Western Europe. During the transfer to a market economy, Romanian Roma felt the harshest effects. With a loss of their state jobs and denial of land entitlements by redistribution, this exasperated the concomitant surge in financial adversity, together with a surge in overt instances of anti-Gypsyism and racially driven violence (CORDIS 6, 2018). With these conditions, the Romanian Roma were further excluded socially and led to their current state of being socially immobile at the bottom of Romanian society; emigration started in the early 1990s as there was no way to secure employment due to antiziganism, but it has only gotten worse (CORDIS 6, 2018).

The European Union funded a project in coordination with the University of Manchester where a team of academic partners investigated the reasoning and experiences of Romanian Roma migrants who migrated to Italy, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. The team examined push and pull factors of migration patterns and conducted an ethnographic study amongst new immigrants to said countries (CORDIS 2, 2018). The research members found that the Romanian Roma migrants are among the youngest and fastest growing migrant groups in Western Europe as “45% are children under 16 years of age and 80% are younger than 35 (CORDIS 7, 2018)<sup>2</sup>.

In the literature, one of the mechanisms linking RRP’s supporters to discrimination against minorities is “threat perception.” RRP’s influence native individuals to view minority groups through an ideological lens that opposes increases in minority rights (Crawford and Pilanski 559, 2014). For example, many personality traits associated with individuals who are politically intolerant are also antecedents of individuals who follow RRP’s (Crawford and Pilanski 559, 2014). The way that political intolerance and RRP ideologies are related is through the roots in threat perception; those who follow RRP’s “tend to be dispositionally high in threat perception” and due to this high level of threat perception, they are more likely to be politically intolerant (Crawford and Pilanski 559, 2014).

The attitudes of the RRP’s are not to be taken as always opposed to minorities but rather are undemocratic, as for example the Jobbik party and the now-defunct Hungarian Guard (Kovarek 2017). They view civil liberties and freedoms as a political capital worthy for them to

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<sup>2</sup> The Roma who left Romania, found themselves able to experience cultural hybridization; younger Roma were able to live within their customs and traditions, while also improving their quality of life (CORDIS 8, 2018). This was achieved by “attending desegregated schools, learning new languages and values and availability in principle of a variety of jobs” (CORDIS 8, 2018).

monopolize for their base and take away from any minority groups they deem counter to them (Crawford and Pilanski 559, 2014). High levels of threat perception by minority groups among the native populations lead to negative and hostile actions and attitudes toward minority groups.

I adopt the “threat perception” theory as a mechanism of RPP mobilization. To illustrate using the case of Romania, following the European Union's pressure on the Romanian government to adopt policies unpopular among the conservative bloc, the rise of far-right populism and nativist sentiments was amplified (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 2, 2019). The global economic crisis of 2008 further nullified the perceived benefits of EU membership, generating anger and confusion about the country's future (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 2, 2019). In this context, the New Right party, or Nouă Dreaptă (ND) in Romania, emerged as a voice for the agitated, opposed to the progressive policies promoted by the European Union and supported by the liberal bloc of Romania (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 9, 2019). By activating us-them boundaries through threat perception, the ND has positioned itself as a defender of far-right conservative values, promoting policies that separate native Romanians from perceived minority threats, including cultural, linguistic, religious, and racial groups, as well as individuals who identify as part of the queer community (Crețan, Remus and O'Brien 834, 2019).

In line with exclusionary practices characteristic of far-right populism, marginalized groups such as the Roma are among the primary targets of the far-right in Romania. Such groups are viewed as enemies of popular sovereignty and a threat to majority rule. This hostility toward minorities is amplified by the perceived loss of status and power among native populations that the far-right associates with the “threat” of marginalized groups.

Normative threat theory is the main motivator for those whose predisposition is toward authoritarianism (Crawford and Pilanski 556, 2014). The normative threat is a conceptual theory

that focuses on a premise of threat perception: the perceived challenge to the dominant cultural values and norms of a society; if the dominant group feels threatened minority groups, they will increase their support for restrictive policies and laws against these groups along with a greater willingness to use violence to suppress these groups (Crawford and Pilanski 556-557, 2014). The creation of negative stereotypes perpetuates the threats because they set an expectation that members of the minority groups will behave as they are stereotyped. Because of these stereotypes, the minority group becomes linked with negative attitudes from members from the ingroups which result in negative consequences for the minority group due to the negative emotions associated with the stereotypes; emotions such as fear and anger can result in acts of violence and lessening of minority rights (Riek, Mania and Gaertner, 2006).

The literature shows that a way European society attempts to counteract RRP influence on minority groups is through avoiding the concept of racism when dealing with minority rights. This is due to Continental Europe tending to legally codify that racism is “the product of random intentional actions by isolated, lunatic individuals or groups” (Grigolo et al., pg. 1636, 2011). However, this may be deemed counterproductive and allow RRPs and their followers to further entrench their views and deepen their sense of perceived threat. Grigolo et al. find that thinking of racism in this way “fails to address patterns of historical, structural, systemic, institutional and indirect racial discrimination generated by...European experiences of colonialism and (im)migration, besides the more recognized and recognizable forms of discrimination against Jews and Roma” (Grigolo et al., pg. 1636, 2011). Treating racism as an issue in isolation rather than viewed as a social and potentially systemic/systematic issue can be attributed to the injustices committed towards the Roma throughout European history. For a large portion of contemporary European Union history, there has been minimal legislation on a national level to

address employment discrimination, harassment, and violence against minorities (Grigolo et al., pg. 1636, 2011). When legislation was passed, it would only target singular actions or discriminatory expression rather than continuous sources of discrimination, direct or indirect (Grigolo et al., pg. 1636, 2011).

In the literature, the link between the rise of radical far right-wing parties and the diminishing minority rights of the Romani communities is understudied. I argue that Central and Eastern European countries with higher vote shares of RPPs will have a positive correlation with the Roma's perceived discrimination against them by native populations in their respective countries. I propose this through a mechanism which I describe below, as the support for radical right-wing parties increases, Roma's perceived discrimination against them will increase.

1. Rhetoric by far-right parties fuels negative public perceptions of the Romani communities in host countries and increases discriminatory behavior.
2. Due to poverty and relative low levels of political power, Roma are not able to defend themselves against such rhetoric
3. The historical negative perception of Roma emboldens members of the radical far-right to antagonize and suppress socio-economic opportunity
4. With pressure from external (radical right-wing parties) and internal sources (their constituents' perceptions of the Roma), mainstream parties that would usually support Romani communities support instead policies or policy changes that would diminish minority rights or access to socio-economic opportunity

In conclusion, the literature review explores the potential mechanism linking the rise in radical right-wing parties (RRPs) in Central and Eastern Europe to the native populations'

discrimination against the Roma. I establish a potential mechanism of *threat perception* as the basis of the connection between the RRP's and the discrimination against the Roma.

## Data, Methodology, and Findings

I expect that as support for RPPs increases across countries of Central and Eastern Europe, discrimination against the Roma will increase. To examine this association, I obtain data on (1) the vote share of the radical right-wing parties and (2) Roma perceived discrimination against them across countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

I use the EU MIDIS II dataset to obtain indicators of perceived discrimination against the Roma. The EU MIDIS II (Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey) is a dataset of a comprehensive survey conducted in the year 2016 (FRA, 2017). The survey was conducted in twenty-eight EU member states and focused on the following groups: the Roma, immigrants from outside the EU, queer individuals along with ethnic and religious minorities (FRA 11-12, 2017). The sample size was representative for each minority group and involved both the target groups and native populations; the survey encompassed all aspects of daily life such as employment, education and healthcare to record experiences of discriminatory practices (FRA 10-12, 2017). It is one of the largest survey datasets to document Roma's perceived discrimination against them. The following variables were selected as indicators of perceived discrimination due to their prevalence in relation to discriminatory activities against the Roma described in the literature. The EU MIDIS II interviewed 33,785 Roma respondents, the sample frame that I used for the study. The survey size for each country included in this study is as follows: 4,278 (Bulgaria), 3,245 (Czechia), 4,941 (Hungary), 836 (Poland), 5,764 (Romania), 4,987(Slovakia), 843 (Slovenia). These survey questions provide good indicators of perceived discrimination both in interactions with authorities and the public in general and include:

- Experiences of discrimination when in contact with school authorities in country in past 5 years based on the ethnic or immigrant background/ethnic origin (*School Authorities*)
- Specific experiences of discrimination when trying to rent or buy an apartment or a house in country in past 5 years. (*Prevented from Housing*)
- Specific experiences of discrimination when in contact with school authorities in country in past 5 years: Prevented from enrolling child in school because of Roma background (*Asked to Change Child's Schools*).
- How many times has somebody done this in the past 5 years in [COUNTRY] because of your [ethnic or immigrant / Roma / ethnic minority] background: made offensive or threatening comments to you in person such as insulting you or calling you names? (*Taunts and insults*)
- How many times has somebody done this in the past 5 years in [COUNTRY] because of your [ethnic or immigrant / Roma / ethnic minority] background: threatened you with violence in person? (*Violence due to ethnicity*)
- How many times has somebody done this in the past 5 years in [COUNTRY] because of your [ethnic or immigrant / Roma / ethnic minority] background: made offensive gestures to you or stared at you inappropriately? (*Social Cues*)
- How many times has somebody done this in the past 5 years in [COUNTRY] because of your [ethnic or immigrant / Roma / ethnic minority] background: sent you emails or text messages (SMS) that were offensive or threatening? (*Emails and SMS*)

- How many times has somebody done this in the past 5 years in [COUNTRY] because of your [ethnic or immigrant / Roma / ethnic minority] background: posted offensive comments about you on the internet, for example on Facebook or Twitter? (*Social Media*)
- Frequency of experiences of violence related to ethnic or immigrant background in the country in the past 5 years. (*Frequency of violence*)

The indicator of voting support for the RPPs is the vote share these parties received in the national election prior to or in 2016, the year of the survey. I collected these data using EU MIDIS II dataset for the following countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. These electoral parliamentary data were the indicators of the electoral support for radical right-wing parties. Below I list the RPPs parties by country:

- Bulgaria: Vázraždane (V), Bălgarski Vazhod (BV), VMRO-Bălgarsko Nacionalno Dviženie (VMRO). These parties were the nationalist conservative bloc of Bulgaria.
- Czechia: ÚSVIT – Národní koalice (ÚSVIT). This was the predecessor group to the current RRP in Czechia, Svoboda a Prímá Demokracie (SPD).
- Hungary: Jobbik Magyarorszáért Mozgalom (JOBBIK). In the literature this is classified as the major RRP party in Hungary
- Poland: Konfederacja Wolność I Niepodległość (KwiN). This party is listed as the Libertarian Nationalist Party of Poland.
- Romania: Partidul România Mare (PRM). Classified in the literature as the RRP in Romania.

- Slovakia: Kotlebovci-Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS) Classified in the literature as the Far-Right Nationalist party.
- Slovenia: Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka (SNS). Classified in the literature as the Nationalist party of Slovenia.

Table 1 shows the association between electoral success of RPPs and levels of Roma's perceived discrimination against them; I list the countries, by electoral share of RPPs in ascending order (from lowest to highest vote share). I provide the percent of Roma respondents who answered "yes" to the questions regarding *School Authorities, Prevented from Housing and Asked to Change Child's Schools*. I provide percent Roma who reported experiencing "incidences" of the following: *Taunts and Insults, Violence due to ethnicity, Social Cues, Emails and SMS, Social Media and Frequency of Violence*.

If my expectation of a positive association between RPP vote share and Roma's perceived discrimination against them is confirmed, we should be able to observe that across countries, as the RPP vote share increases perceived discrimination also increases; in other words, I expect a positive association between these two variables.

<b>Table 1: Vote Share of RRP's and Indicators of Roma's Perceived Discrimination against them</b>							
<b>Country</b>	Romania	Slovenia	Poland	Czechia	Bulgaria	Slovakia	Hungary
<b>RRPs Vote Share</b>	1.0% (2016)	2.2 (2014)	4.8 (2015)	6.90 (2014)	7.3 (2014)	8.0 (2016)	20.2 (2014)
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>							
School Authorities % Yes	09.20% (5,764)	05.90 (843)	97.00 (836)	11.20 (3,245)	03.87 (4,278)	09.10 (4,987)	10.60 (4,941)
Prevented from Housing % Yes	07.50% (5,764)	03.80 (843)	12.60 (836)	51.70 (3,245)	04.44 (4,278)	22.00 (4,987)	18.20 (4,941)
Asked to Change Child's Schools % Yes	01.50% (5,764)	01.20 (843)	03.00 (836)	06.70 (3,245)	02.26 (4,278)	08.30 (4,987)	01.90 (4,941)
Taunts and insults % Incidences	86.70% (5,764)	81.90 (843)	74.40 (836)	90.20 (3,245)	85.80 (4,278)	88.10 (4,987)	86.50 (4,941)
Violence due to ethnicity % Incidences	81.60% (5,764)	61.50 (843)	79.30 (836)	79.60 (3,245)	78.00 (4,278)	76.40 (4,987)	70.90 (4,941)
Social Cues % Incidences	92.70% (5,764)	80.80 (843)	74.20 (836)	94.40 (3,245)	87.60 (4,278)	90.40 (4,987)	83.20 (4,941)
Emails and SMS % Incidences	55.50% (5,764)	33.30 (843)	77.80 (836)	69.00 (3,245)	20.00 (4,278)	73.10 (4,987)	50.00 (4,941)
Social Media % Incidences	40.00% (5,764)	100.00 (843)	64.30 (836)	84.50 (3,245)	81.80 (4,278)	74.60 (4,987)	42.90 (4,941)
Frequency of Violence % Incidences	76.70% (5,764)	50.00 (843)	90.00 (836)	74.50 (3,245)	59.30 (4,278)	78.50 (4,987)	69.00 (4,941)

Frequencies in parentheses

Sources: EU-MIDIS II 2016, survey and electoral data

Drawing on the information presented in the table, it is noteworthy to observe the considerable extent of discrimination indicated by the incidences of verbal threats (Taunts and Insults) targeting the Roma populations in the selected countries. The lowest reported incidence

rate was 81.90% (Slovenia) and the highest was 90.20% (Czechia). Also interesting to note, Poland had over 97% of their Roma respondents claiming that they experienced discrimination when in contact with school authorities within the past 5 years based on their ethnicity. As Table 1 shows, there is no discernible association between the vote share of radical right-wing parties and the perceived discrimination by the Roma. The data in Table 1 suggest that the two variables are independent.

However, it is important to note an important limitation of this analysis. An upward trend in the electoral support for radical right-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe is well documented in the literature. Furthermore, findings in the literature suggest a possible correlation between the rising support for these parties and the discrimination perceived by the Romani communities in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the data utilized in this study do not permit a comparison of this association over time as all the indicator data takes place in 2016, and the analysis is limited due to lack of controlling factors that may account for alternative explanations across countries. A regression analysis that includes relevant controls would be more appropriate for analysis of this association.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I explore the connection between electoral support for RRPs and Roma's perceived discrimination against them in Central and Eastern Europe. This is an important question due to the high levels of discrimination against the Roma, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The attempt is to understand the sources of this discrimination.

The Roma are a unique and complex minority group, with a rich cultural heritage and a long-standing presence in Europe dating back to the 12th century. Despite their significant contributions to European culture, the Roma have been subject to persistent discrimination and persecution in many parts of Europe. As the largest minority group in Europe with an estimated 11 million people the Roma are an integral part of European society. They have developed distinct lifestyles cultural practices and languages that are shared across different regions and nations.

The Roma's long history of persecution and discrimination is rooted in the social political and economic dynamics of the countries in which they reside and in many Central and Eastern European countries, the Roma face significant barriers to education, employment, and political participation. These obstacles have been created by policies that institutionalized discrimination and failed to protect the Roma's human rights.

The Cold War period provided Roma with an elevated minority status with full civil rights granted to them by the USSR. However, with the transition to market economies and technological advancements, the Roma were once again relegated to the periphery socio-politically. This highlights the significance of this research question as it seeks the sources of

discrimination against the Roma people that threaten their rights and inclusion in European societies.

The negative impact of far-right rhetoric on public perception of Romani communities appears to be a crucial factor in the discrimination they face. Prejudiced views about the Roma are further fueled by the anti-Romani sentiment propagated by far-right parties. Due to their poverty and lack of political power, the Roma are unable to effectively counter such rhetoric. Moreover, the long-standing negative perceptions of the Roma also embolden supporters of the radical far-right to suppress opportunities for them. As a result, mainstream parties that would usually support the rights of the Roma may instead be influenced by external and internal pressures to support policies that diminish their rights or access to socio-economic opportunities.

In my thesis I find no association between the vote share of far-right parties and Roma's perceived discrimination against them. However, an important limitation of my study is lack of data; my analysis relies on a single year, 2016, and the comparison of the association takes place across countries. Therefore, my analysis does not capture change in the electoral support of far-right parties over time. In addition, the cross-country comparison does not account for alternative explanations, that is controlling factors are missing from the analysis; many variables vary across the countries included in my analysis.

The European Union has commissioned more MIDIS reports than the 2016 report but have only released the EU MIDIS II as a raw dataset for the public. Access to more extensive and updated datasets could lead to further research and robust findings.

In addition, research may focus on the impact of political rhetoric on the public perception of the Roma and analyze the influence of radical right-wing parties on mainstream policies. Research could also be conducted on the effectiveness of existing strategies by various

institutions aimed at challenging negative public perceptions and promoting positive social change for the Roma, such as anti-discrimination campaigns and community mobilization efforts.

Further opportunities for research could be to analyze attempts of Romani communities to defend or expand their minority rights. Mershon's (2022) study of the Sámi in Norway, the indigenous minority, shows that successful efforts to gain political power usually comes from minority groups using their vote as a group to gain influence in legislative elections (Mershon 1, 2022). The assumption about political party elite behavior is that political elites are "rational, strategic, and always engaged in competition with ever changing goals that can only be met through alliances with different aspects of the country" (Mershon 4, 2022). As competition increases, political elites must approach their tenure with a realistic perspective; to successfully maintain their power they seek to eliminate the possibility of their present and future rivals' ascension to power. The Sámi were able to gain more minority rights through courting political elites while advocating for themselves as a pivotal group with large amounts of political capital in the sense that their collective vote were enough to tilt political power to whatever political coalition could garner their vote.

During the 1980s, after decades of being persecuted and subjected to assimilation and other minority-harming tactics, the Sámi were able to use their vote to help elect a parliament (The Storting is the highest legislative body in Norway) that recognized their rights as the only indigenous population in Norway (Mershon 18-20, 2022). They did this through collective mobilization while playing the rivalries that threatened the de facto political establishment to ensure that the political elites would be persuaded into a higher degree of tolerance, allowing greater minority rights (Mershon 17-20, 2022). There is no documented instance in the literature

of a collective mobilization of Roma fighting for their minority rights. It is important to note that while the Sámi are the indigenous group of Scandinavia, the Sámi are different than the Roma as the Sámi engaged in an organized effort to expand their minority rights; meanwhile the Roma under Soviet Rule were granted full civil rights due to Soviet policy but were not collectively mobilized.

There have been a few instances of Roma communities attempting to expand and protect their minority rights. According to the European Roma Rights Centre (2009), there are rarely Roma that represent their minority group, even in countries with large Roma populations such as Romania and Hungary. In Hungary, the Roma have formed a political party (Magyarorszagi Cigany Part) to increase and protect minority rights (Jovanovski, 2014). While they are struggling to gain voters, Jovanovski notes that Roma citizens still are hesitant to vote for the Roma party as they believe it will not cause actual change. The Roma citizens in Hungary may perceive the Roma party as a continuation of political processes and institutions being inauthentic due to their discriminatory actions against their ethnic group. There are ways to increase political participation and lack of hope among Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe. Promoting Roma participation in national census through Roma-led grassroots campaigns may yield successful results; one campaigning effort resulted in a 200 percent increase in Roma census registration.

Another avenue for research could be to explore the effectiveness and role of international organizations and institutions in protecting Romani rights. Organizations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union have been active in advocating for the rights of minorities in Europe, including the Roma. Investigating the effectiveness of their interventions and assessing the degree to which they have contributed to positive change for Romani

communities could provide valuable insight into the potential for external actors to facilitate change regarding the rights of minorities. For instance, the European Union's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies aims to support the inclusion of the Roma in areas such as education, employment, housing, and healthcare. The Council of Europe has also been active in advocating for the Roma rights, with initiatives such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the European Roma Rights Centre.

While these interventions are important steps towards promoting Romani rights, it is essential to evaluate their effectiveness in bringing about lasting change. Research could explore the impact of such initiatives on the Romani communities' socio-economic status, political representation, and access to essential services, and investigate the challenges and obstacles faced by international organizations in promoting the rights of the Roma and the ways in which they can be addressed.

Furthermore, research could examine the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advocating for Romani rights and supporting Romani communities. NGOs have played a crucial role in raising awareness of the challenges faced by the Roma and advocating for their inclusion in European societies. Studying the strategies and approaches used by these organizations in promoting Romani rights could provide valuable insights into effective methods for advancing minority rights.

In conclusion, as we have seen, the issue of discrimination and persecution of the Romani people in Central and Eastern Europe is a complex and multifaceted one. Despite their long-standing presence in Europe, the Roma communities of Central and Eastern Europe continue to face discrimination and marginalization, often fueled by negative stereotypes and rhetoric from far-right parties. Such stereotypes are often perpetuated by media outlets and politicians, who use

them to advance their agendas. This, in turn, leads to discrimination in various areas, including education, employment, housing and healthcare, and to a cycle of poverty and lack of political power, making it difficult for Roma communities to defend themselves against such discrimination.

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