

EMBEDDEDNESS AND DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE

-A CASE STUDY OF HUNGARY-

By

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ABSTRACT

The mainstream theory of democratization and consolidations calls for immediate consolidation of democracy to preserve and secure the achievements of regime change and to improve the democratic performance of the political system. Little work is done however on the long-lasting effects of the decisions made to secure initial stability.

This paper looks into the case of Hungary, where the initial decisions on the institutional settings as means of democracy building are burdening the state, reducing its performance.

INTRODUCTION

The first steps towards a working democracy were taken in 1989 by almost all Central- and Eastern European countries. Since then, they were progressing steadily towards a Western-type democracy. But building a democracy is not a one way road, examples are that semi-stable democracies can crumble, and some old regimes do deteriorate, and while a path chosen by a country may yield good results on the short term, it may turn out to be a real burden on a longer term.

The modern democracy has at its base the party system: the parties channel the inputs and feedback coming from the people into the political system; they make the political system stable, and capable of absorbing internal and external impacts so it is easy to understand why a healthy party system is necessary to a good working democracy.

Since early works (for example Huntington 1968) have managed to show that party system institutionalization has a positive effect on the consolidation of transitional polities, nowadays it is taken for granted that a higher level of institutionalization is desirable as a positive factor for democratic consolidation. Available literature portrays the relation between institutionalization and democratic performance of a party system as linear, with higher levels of institutionalization meaning a better system. With the underinstitutionalization of party systems being well described and analyzed, the overinstitutionalization is a problem which is mentioned but rarely researched.

In this paper I hypothesize that too high levels of institutionalization (or, more precisely, embeddedness, see below) has a detrimental effect on the functioning of the party system. The theoretical assumption is that the level of democratic performance rises with higher levels of embeddedness, but after reaching a certain point - a point where the positive effect of embeddedness reaches its maximum - the embeddedness has adverse effects, reducing greatly the democratic performance. The embeddedness of the party system is conceptualized along nine dimensions developed by Zsolt Enyedi (see next section), while the democratic performance of parties and party system is measured by how well they service their functions, using system-level measures of democratic performance.

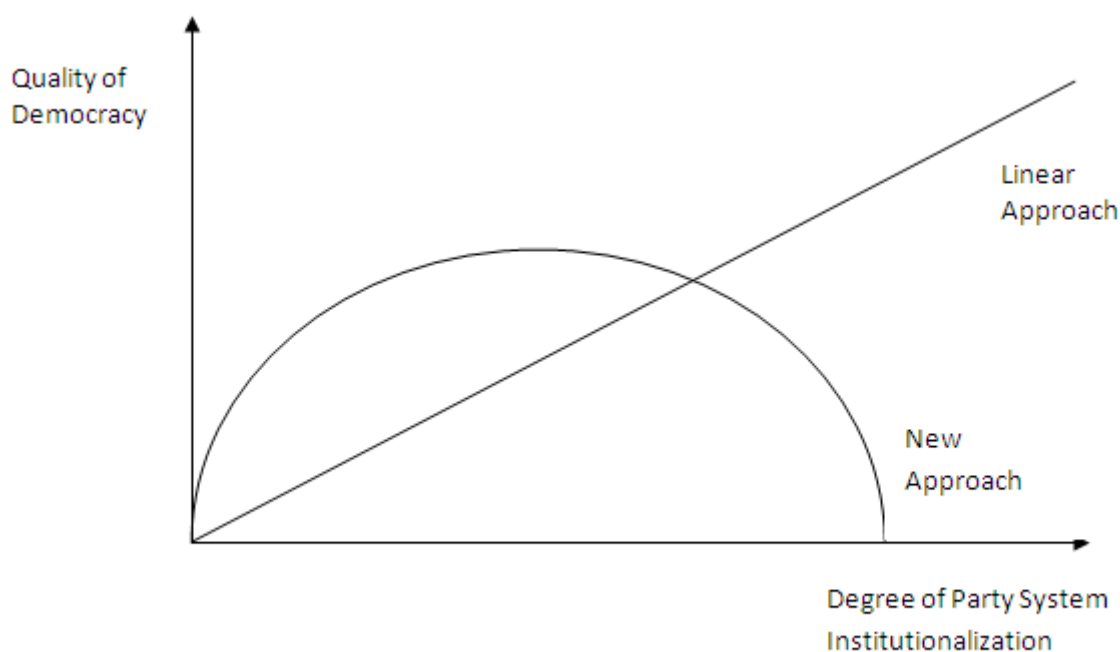


Figure: The difference of the 'classic' and the 'new' approach (after Schedler)

I use the case of Hungary to demonstrate the assumed causal relations. The argument is that the case of Hungary is not an exception, but that the party system overinstitutionalisation will automatically lead to a reduction in democratic performance of parties and party systems in any country satisfying the conditions present in Hungary in the given transitional period.

Hungary was generally considered to be the leader of the region in many aspects in the better half of the last twenty years (typical example: Lewis 2007), but all this changed lately as the political system failed to respond to the new challenges from the European and regional rivals as well as its internal problems. The country lost gradually its pioneer position, becoming the most problematic by the end of the second decade: its prolonged internal political crisis, the high vulnerability to the global economic crisis, the emerging conflicts between social groups are all pointing towards some moments in the last two decades where the initial positive impetus broke and the slow descent started (anecdotal evidence).

The paper targets specific areas of institutionalization and tries to develop a cohesive answer on the solutions of the previously raised problems. This problem is critical in Hungary and the lack of scientific research on this topic makes policy decisions unfounded, based only on the short term interests of the decision makers. By providing a starting point for further research, the paper can help design a political-legal-constitutional framework regulating party politics, which might solve some of the encountered problems.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of higher institutionalization equaling better performing political system was supported by many empirical data, as the most problematic countries were the ones with underdeveloped, non-institutionalized party systems (Kitschelt 2001). Examples like Poland prompted scholars to accept the hypothesis that too little institutionalization can adversely affect the democratization process (for example: Kitschelt 1995, 1999). The other prominent examples of chronic underinstitutionalized party systems are the Latin American states (Mainwaring et al.)

The latest developments from Hungary however are pointing to a new direction: the stability of the political system is becoming more and more of a problem (anecdotal evidence abundant): the entrenched parties are not giving up their territories, the society is deeply divided, and while the quality of governance is poor, there is no way to oust the government or to dissolve the parliament (Lijphart, 1992). These developments raise new questions: is there any limit where or when the too institutionalized party system can cause more problems than the ones it solves? Is there such thing as a too embedded party system? How can it be defined? What are the main properties of such a system?

The first part of the thesis concentrates on these questions, trying to answer them all, by a case study on Hungary. The working hypothesis is that *there is a hypothetical threshold, where the higher levels of the party system embeddedness burdens the political system and lowers its performance*. The paper does not try pinpoint the exact location of the threshold as that would be impossible considering the wide array of incommensurable independent variables, but upholds the novel

idea that there has to be a point where the additional benefits of more embeddedness turn into drawbacks burdening the political system. The paper thus takes the Hungarian case to demonstrate that the current hardships are closely linked to the stability of the party system.

CHAPTER 1: THE CAUSAL EFFECT

1.1 *Embeddedness, the independent variable*

I tackle the problem of describing a party system with the help of the notion of institutionalization. Generally, an institutionalized party system is less prone to dramatic changes, it preserves its defining traits for a longer period, making it more predictable, and less flexible (Mainwaring et al 1995, 1995, 2005). However the institutionalization is not just simply a product of time, it is not synonymous with getting mature (Pridham 1990). Institutionalization can be understood as the level of embeddedness of the parties into the fabric of society. The higher this integration, the stronger the influence of the parties is on the country and any intention of change of the political system has to go through their channel to materialize later in some form (Enyedi 1997). This gives the parties opportunity to oppose these changes and a very good fighting position against reforms that will decrease their aggregate power in the political system.

The party system institutionalization, stability and embeddedness are used somewhat interchangeable in this paper, although they are layered on each other. The exact definitions vary across the literature, the typical usage considering the *stability* the simplest term (regarding to the volatility and party stability), *institutionalization* is a broader term, containing stability, but also legitimacy accorded to the parties from various actors (Mainwaring, Torcal 2005). The *embeddedness* is the broadest concept; it contains the institutionalization, then added features outlining the leading role of the party system across the whole political system. As we will see,

the concept used in this paper is the latter, as it gives the widest selection of independent variables for the research, the narrower concepts not being able to grasp every detail of the causal effect, excluding important aspects.

The mainstream theory of party system institutionalization in relation to democratic performance is quite straightforward: the more the better (for example Lewis, 2006, Mainwaring, 1996). All authors tend to accept the idea that the stability of the party system is the single most important aspect of the transitional period, which in turn leads to high performance of the political system. The link between the stability and the performance during the transition is direct: the stable party systems are a sign of a healthy, well developed political system. The arguments are diverse, but the general idea is that predictability and the fact that only few parties are in control means that the corruption gets lower and helps parties to perform critical economic and administrative reforms. The existence of an institutionalized party system excludes other significant political scenes independent from the parties, thus creating a much focused area in the political system which is responsible for all decisions.

The notion of institutionalization consists of many dimensions. Following Zsolt Enyedi's work, I begin with nine dimensions which describe the grade of institutionalization a party system is experiencing: (1) the stability of party systems pattern, (2) elite support, (3) civil support, (4) inner organization of the parties, (5) adaptability, (6) autonomy, (7) monopolization of certain social and political functions by the parties, (8) intrusion of parties into other political subsystems, (9) party-friendly institutional environment (Enyedi, 1997). These dimensions give the broadest

definition of embeddedness, a much broader one that found in the mainstream literature.

The nine dimensions by Enyedi give a very good breakdown on the meaning of embeddedness. This disassembly of the term is necessary to point out plausible causal effects between the independent (embeddedness) and dependent (democratic performance) variables. As the political systems form clusters along the dimensions (Schedler, 1995), it is not an imperative to use all of them at once for research; a feature I will use on the comparative analysis.

The *stability of party system pattern* is a measure of stability of interparty interactions: in an institutionalized system the components are and their relationships are stable. The classic measure for this dimension was the volatility of the whole party system, but that does not measure the actual stability of the actors, just their popular support. Enyedi proposes another set of measures: the stability of the parties and the relationship between them. If so, high embeddedness means that the probability of emergence of new parties or disappearance of old ones is low, parties do not break up, they do not merge, and they do not change labels often. The measures of party system pattern stability are the mean longevity of the parties, the frequency of emergence and disappearance of significant parties. To measure the stability of interparty relationships we measure the stability of the affinity of parties to form government with each other (or other sorts of alliance). The opposite of this would be the willingness of the parties to form temporary alliances to reach short term goals.

The second dimension is that of *elite support*. It contains the notion of the political elite supporting the status quo and not engaging into disruptive actions. It

contains the “coalition-forming” potential against anti-system parties (as these parties can be the most disruptive to institutionalization). To measure this dimension, one must find out whether there are any popular views in the ranks of the political elite to change radically the relationship of the political system and the population or in contrast, the elite wants to defend the existing system against threats from the outside. The dimension is operationalized as the acceptance of election results by the loser side or they try to engage into activities to circumvent the rules of the game to defeat the winner side.

Citizen support measures the acceptance of the existing system in the population. The dimension contains the positive (or negative) attitudes towards the political system and the parties. Exceptionally low acceptance or trust rates indicate a less institutionalized party system, as the citizens will search more acceptable channels (instead of the parties) to transmit their needs towards the political system. The other measure is the volatility, which accounts for sudden changes in the patterns of citizen support, a sign of lower institutionalization; and turnout, which is high, but not excessive (excessive turnout would mean social turbulence, something alien to institutional system).

The *inner organization of the parties* is an important aspect of an institutionalized party system. Parties with highly standardized and formalized decision making processes are the building blocks of such a system: parties with little inner instability and flexibility are less likely to suddenly change their behavior. This aspect gains special weight in the case of transitional systems as their inner structure impacts their electoral and governmental performance, but also their longevity. Parties with weak inner organization are signs of political entrepreneurs who are a

major threat to the stability of the system. The solutions are parties which are independent of single personalities and can change their leadership if necessary. Measurements are the financial independence of the parties from their leaders; the power of the party to change its leadership, the loyalty is towards the party and not towards the leaders. In short, the more autonomous the parties are, the more institutionalized the system is.

The *adaptability of the party system* means its flexibility and resilience to cope with unforeseen shocks and blows from the outside. The measure is composed from the adaptability of the single parties. Although it is very hard to quantify, relevant conclusions can be drawn from how the parties handle critical situations (coalition forming, election loss, leadership change).

The *autonomy of the parties* means their independence from outer influence. A highly institutionalized party system accepts little influence from other institutions, while the single parties are defined as autonomous when it is independent from the background interests, the personal interests of the party members and other socio-economic institutions (Panebianco). The most critical aspect of the autonomy of the parties is their financial independence: here the state-financing can guarantee that the parties remain independent from economic actors and different sponsors. The other side of the autonomy of the party is the control of their MP's. The strict party discipline with enforceable sanctions in case of non-compliance means a strong, autonomous party. To summarize, the autonomy of the party is measured by its leaders' ability to control the party as they see fit.

Probably the most critical aspect of an institutionalized party system is the ability of the parties to *monopolize the market of their functions*. In the early years of

the transition period the hegemony over the control of the society is not a decided question, so the party system has to struggle to eliminate the alternative democracy-models to achieve institutionalization. By monopolizing the democracy, the parties secure their position as a non-circumventible part of the political system. This means that any interest which wants to produce an output from the political system has to go through the parties. If there are other entities with functions similar to the parties, the monopoly is broken, so is their importance is decreasing.

Parties in an institutionalized system try to get control over other subsystems of the society as well. *Intrusion into other subsystems* means that the parties wrestle for control of parts of labor unions, mass media, civil society, public sphere. This means that parties try to extend their reach to maximize their effectiveness, to secure additional resources and to gain even more importance.

The *party-friendly institutional environment* is the last property of an institutionalized system. It exists only when the constitutional-legal framework supports their independence and autonomy or in contrast, by what measure does it support change and the appearance of new actors. In institutionalized systems the parties try to secure the framework for themselves, thus closing the parliament before new actors, for example by raising the threshold of getting into the parliament. One notable aspect here is that for every change in the framework there is a learning period when the actors understand the consequences of the change (usually by employing trial-and-error approach).

1.2 *Dependent variable*

The dependent variables are harder to find, as the classic scales of democratic performance would show little to no difference between these countries, besides their very relevant conceptual and methodological flaws (Foweraker-Krzmaric, 1999). Because of this and the small-n nature of the research, I will include very general measurements, using system level scores to determine the democratic performance.

1.3. *How a system should be designed*

The general criticism towards constitutional design theories is that it is not in touch with reality: the games played within the system are not the ones expected when the constitution was drafted. The most prominent example is party politics, which is not part of the constitution in most of the democracies, yet it has the most important effect on the short and medium term directions a country is taking.

But being 'out of touch' is an inherent problem to constitutionalism, or is that just the fault of particular constitutions? I will use the example of the US constitution to show that by deliberation, a long lasting system can be devised which does exactly what it was created for. On a sidenote, I will argue that by matching the constitution to a general understanding of political culture, one can create a better constitution.

The case of the United States is probably the best example for that. In the States there are three major elected bodies, the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives, all of them elected after different rules. Although the base rule is the same for all of them (plurality and majority), the setting of districts, term

length and jurisdiction are markedly different. This is not a random occurrence: the design of the system contains slightly conflicting incentives for the entities of the political system. For example, in the case of the two parts of the Congress: the representatives are elected for two years and in smaller districts, thus making them more responsive to the voters, with a short time horizon, while senators are elected for much longer periods (six years), becoming much more resilient to temporary shifts in the mood of the voters. This is complemented perfectly by the President, who is elected for a middle ground 4 years and has the whole country as constituency. This difference of election makes their principal priorities different, thus placing some kind of strain into the system. First, the elected officials have to be responsive to different kinds of input, so they are not all vulnerable to the same kind of lobby for example. Second, they are constantly fighting each other because their different interests. Third, and probably the most important, these institutions are a lot harder to capture by a certain interest group if the support they require is so different.

I will go into more detail about the last property. The drafters had a double problem: first, they wanted to create a system, where none of the institutions can be 'trampled over' by the others, so they can remain interdependent and have a degree of autonomy. The second, they wanted to make it harder for a homogeneous social group/interest group can easily capture all three institutions. To solve the first problem, they induce a limited conflict of interest, so all institutions become vigilant guard of their exclusive rights and have the means to defend it (for example no state can be robbed of their two senators without their consent). The second (avoidance of easy capture) can be achieved by requiring wider support. In fact, the idea of the drafters was somewhat similar to the Swiss constitutional system: to be able to

achieve control in all these institutions, a group has to grow so large that the initial cause will be lost if it is not really widespread.

The whole logic is then complemented by the party system. Choosing plurality and majority as the electoral formula over proportional representation has its effect of reducing the number of parties to two, but what is lost in the diversity between parties is compensated by intraparty diversity: by making them fight for the median voter, they must try to cover all niches of the society, thus enabling them to singlehandedly represent all the interest of the society. The parties have to reach for all parts of the society, fighting for votes over all issues.

So the question can be raised: if this system is so elegant and successful, why not implement it in every country? The answer lies in the assumptions the system requires: a political culture which is strongly pragmatical and focuses on the problems at hand, concentrating in a solution which is attained through compromise. Only in such an environment can be a majoritarian system successful, since the prerequisite of a majoritarian system is that the winner (who takes all) does not try to bury the opposition, but tries to achieve a compromise.

Although the media system which links the political system and the voters developed quite differently than it was expected in the time of the drafters, it is clear that the constitution contains elements which put incentives to listen on the political system; so even if the information flow towards the voters is lacking somewhat, the political system still tries to reflect on everyday problems, on which they can achieve support.

To conclude, the criticism towards designing a political system by the means of a constitution is justified most of the times, but these problems are not inherent to the concept itself. By limiting the government (by dividing it and making the parts aware of their interests) and by limiting the people (also by dividing it and making sure that no group can rule by itself) a constitutional system can overcome most problems and can be stable on the long term.

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE OF HUNGARY

2.1. The beginnings of a party system

The Hungarian party system traces back its roots to the early 20th century, but the immediate beginnings of the current system presented themselves around 1985, when the first big opposition-led demonstration took place (Monori Tanácskozás), followed by the observing the 30 year anniversary of the 1956 revolution in October of 1986. These events saw the opposition united against the regime, regardless of their inherent ideological heterogeneity. The success of these events were a requirement for achieving the status of a force to be reckoned with in the eyes of the regime.

However as the anti-communist opposition gained more significance and media attention, the (proto)parties pushed for more individual and unique display of their political views. This led to a fast fragmentation of the opposition, groups forming (or just getting more defined) around different ideological views. The typology of the forming parties is as follows (Fricz, 1996):

- a. Original catch-all parties (MDF, SZDSZ, FIDESZ): characterized from the very first moment by their goal to gain support from all social groups, trying to produce an all-encompassing program of the regime change and the consolidation following that
- b. Historical parties (FKgP, KDNP, FNDP, MFP): parties with old historical roots, created to revive the traditional parties from before the communist era.

- c. Parties of post-communist origin (MSZMP, Münnich Ferenc Society, Baloldali Revízió Pártja): parties who attach value to the achievements of the Rákosi and Kádár regimes; staying communist in ideology
- d. Parties of pure ideologic origin: parties which define themselves as the representatives of large national or international ideologies (Magyar Liberális Néppárt, Szent Korona Társaság, Független Szociáldemokrata Párt, etc.)
- e. Parties representing a single social group (Agrárszövetség, Vállalkozók Pártja, Magyar Veteránok Pártja, etc.)
- f. Parties promoting postmaterial values (Magyarországi Zöld Párt, Voks Humana): parties promoting environmental and lifestyle issues and solutions.

The most important question in the moment of the 1990 parliamentary elections was that which party (parties) will gain mandate to lead the country through the rough part of the regime change. It seems to be obvious, that the largest support went to the all-encompassing parties, all of which offered a complex solution to the question of modernizing the country and the parties which offered a limited answer, directed towards social or ideological groups failed to attract large support. So the very specific reason why these parties happened to be there at the birth of the new democracy is that they gave a complete answer to the questions of the time.

The actors being more or less settled let us turn back to the time preceding the first elections, when the framework of the new democracy was decided upon: the National Roundtable.

The function of the Roundtable was to rehaul the Constitution, the electoral laws, functioning and financing of political parties, rewriting of the penal code and court procedures. The talks proceeded in relative secrecy, as the actors agreed on not making the topics public until a final agreement is reached, most importantly to limit the opposition in leveraging the power of mass demonstrations as a form of pressure.

2.2. The position of Hungary along the dimensions of embeddedness

2.2.1 The stability of party system pattern

As stated before, the stability of party system patterns relates to the stability of patterns of competition, and also to the longevity of single parties, as well as the emergence (or lack of) new parties. In our case, Hungary scores extremely high on all those scales.

The patterns of competition are unchanged since 1994 when the two governing blocks made their first appearance. Since then the MSZP and the SZDSZ are allied on the vast majority of the policy issues and campaign, while on the other side the FIDESZ was joining forces with MDF and later KDNP (after MDF became increasingly hostile towards FIDESZ, as the latter was gaining much ground between the voters of the former). The blocks are therefore very stable and there was no precedent of any alliance between the left and the right. This political landscape is virtually unchanged since 1994, as on one hand no parties are currently in the parliament, which were not part of even the very first 1990 parliament, while all the parties of the 1994 election are present in every parliament after (the only exception being FKGP, which disintegrated after 2002).

In conclusion we can state that the parties have an extreme longevity in Hungary, as all of the current parties are at least as old as the regime itself. The emergence of new political forces appeared sporadically (MIÉP, Jobbik to be expected in 2010), but they never reached governmental positions or stable position on the party roster.

Another aspect of the stability of party system pattern is the stability of the parties themselves. As pointed out earlier the parties themselves are very stable in time, the two big parties being as monolithic as they can be (with no sign of splitting or disintegrating). The two smaller parties are subject to much bigger stress as they constantly fight to get into the government, thus the internal opposition has a much bigger blackmail potential (by splitting, they can cripple the parties enough to fail reaching the threshold). The SZDSZ and MDF cope differently with the problem, the SZDSZ trying to reconcile all parties involved in such feuds, while MDF excluding the internal opposition from the party. Although both parties are under constant strain because of the threshold, the particularities of the electoral system are heavily pushing the party system towards a two-party system, possibly with one party in the middle.

In this section and the following ones I am not considering the KDNP separately, as it is a spinoff entity of the FIDESZ and cannot be considered an independent party. Most probably the KDNP will have a shared list and shared candidates with FIDESZ for the foreseeable future, voting the same way in the parliament, differing from FIDESZ only in style and topics of their rhetoric, making KDNP very much the part of the biggest right wing party.

2.2.2. Elite support

On the dimension of elite support the Hungarian party system is actually scoring rather low. The main reason for this is that the multitude of perceived problems stemming from the electoral system and the party financing are prompting the elite to pull their support from the status quo. Most of the elite, including the party elites themselves support a reform of the current political system, although obviously their views on how the reform should be done differ greatly.

The attitudes towards the anti-system parties are not united either. As Jobbik or before it, MIÉP was a right-wing anti-system party, challenging the standing system, they were deemed as extremists only by the leftist parties, but the FIDESZ was not actively refusing the party, presumably out of fear that it can lose voters on the not-so-moderate right by attacking the extremists.

Probably the most glaring problem related to elite support is the refusal by the opposition to accept the results of the elections. As it happened in 2002 and in a lot more violent way in 2006, the opposition was heavily protesting against the results, questioning the legitimacy of the government. It has to be added that the opposition was not questioning the legality of the elections, but the legitimacy of the government after the publication of the Őszödi Speech.

However it is to be admitted that the opposition did not try to organize the protesters, but tried to channel those dangerous feelings with a referendum, so the party system did try to extend its reach and solve the situation on its own. For this, it would have been necessary for the prime minister to resign and not to use the inherent stability of the government as a personal shield. Only this scenario could create a situation where the parties themselves can solve the situation. This was a

speculation until a couple of months ago, when the prime minister finally resigned, and the parties used the chance to solve the legitimacy issue at least temporarily.

2.2.3. Citizen support

In brief there was a short mention of citizen support in the previous section, as it started to falter after 2006. But until then, it is safe to assume that the citizen support for the party system was intact and healthy. This assumption is based on the fact that the parties always managed to capture all of the niches of the social reality, thus collecting support for themselves and implicitly the party system.

The conversion of FIDESZ into a mass party and later a catch-all party meant that it (along with MSZP) had developed into a state from where they could reach all segments of the political spectrum, thus securing their support.

A look at the turnout levels shows that the parties can mobilize large masses, the turnout levels staying high along the 16 years (falling below 60% only in 1998 and reaching 70% in 2002; first rounds of elections). This shows how the Hungarian society remains in a highly mobilized state, which is quite atypical to institutionalized systems in general. However in this case it can be attributed to the unhealthy level of embeddedness: the parties spared no energy and resources to build up a national network of activists and agitators, NGO's, media outlets to promote their views and in the critical moments mobilize the masses. It is a custom that the parties have a database with their supporters, which helps the parties to keep in touch with them, reminding them constantly to major demonstrations, signature collecting and of course voting. Thus the high mobilization is not because the society is in a highly

unstable, boiling status, but rather because the parties perfected their ways to attract attention.

Moving on to volatility, it is amazing, how constant the absolute number and relative share of votes for the parliamentary parties are. If not considering the first, 1990 election, which was the first stage of the trial and error process of the voters, the absolute number of votes does not really change for the parliamentary parties. This stability can be attributed to the very stable party identification of the voters, but it also signals that the parties are not really able mobilize new support groups, as all of them already maximized their support.

2.2.4. Party organizations

The sociology of party organizations is a small science on its own. The complexity of party organization structures is hard to understand, and since it can be approached from a purely theoretical approach (just by looking the official documents of the parties) or at the actual decision making processes working inside the parties, it can yield different results.

In this section I am following Csilla Machos' work on party organizations in Hungary, a work in which she takes the approach of analysis of founding documents of the parties. Machos found that the parties of the country are extremely diverse and the parties do not belong to one idealtype of party organization, but they differ in almost all dimensions. Machos concludes that the parties at the time (1990-1999) do cover all kinds of party organizations from the monocratic-oligarchic parties to the

typical stratarchies¹ of the modern Western democracies. It is worth noting that while the parties tending to be more monocratic and authority-based disappeared over time (MIÉP and FKGP), while the more 'modern' organizations became more successful (MSZP and FIDESZ). These findings are placing the Hungarian parties more to the institutionalized end of the scale, as the weaker parties of the authoritarian organization are short lived, while the parties with solid set of internal rules flourish.

The question however remains whether this approach is the best, as the informal decision making processes in the parties are not always following the set of rules. In the lack of related research this question remains unanswered.

Returning to the internal institutionalization of the parties we can conclude that the most institutionalized party is the MSZP, which is very independent of single personalities, and the party structure can work regardless of the actual persons filling the ranks. The other big party, the FIDESZ however is still struggling to step out from the shadow of its charismatic leader, Orbán Viktor. As Orbán led the party along its whole existence, by now his character had probably the greatest effect on the party. His leadership style called for a very powerful central figure, with a large number of low level semi-autonomous units spread through the country, with the 'officers' of the party notably lacking power (for example to depose the leader). A weakness of the party is very well signaled by that despite losing the last two elections Orbán is still leading the party, with nobody in sight to replace him. This is totally the opposite of MSZP, where the personalities are grayer, but a large pool of leaders is always

¹ "a nonhierarchical system of layers of control with diffused power and limited lines of accountability" (Eldersfeld 1982)

available (although admittedly none of them being so charismatic as the leader of the right).

The two smaller parties score a lot worse on this dimension than the larger ones. In the MDF the slow process to disappearance started a long time ago, with many rounds of exclusions of internal opposition, which led to the disintegration of the fraction in the parliament. The SZDSZ does not have a much better position, shown by the fact that a complete outsider managed to become the leader of the party in just a short time span. This indicates that the internal structures of the two small parties are severely lacking, and doing struggling to keep up with the external impacts.

2.2.5. Adaptability of the party system

As indicated before, the external impacts, especially the strain of the 5% threshold are taking their toll on the small parties, always looking for easy chances to survive the next elections. This short time horizon is characteristic for the two parties, and defines their political actions. They are more vulnerable to the actions of the political parties and to the changing political attitudes of the masses, being pressed to be very responsive to both those factors.

The special issue of party financing (analyzed later in detail) makes it harder for the parties to easily cope with change of power, but other than that, the government changes went without creating serious issues for the parties. The very short time horizon for the small parties meant that getting into the parliament was in itself a victory, while for the big parties the time horizon is long enough that they can wait out the next election to get a new chance on getting into the government.

Coalition forming was always a very smooth process in Hungary, the partners being poised to work closely, and in the case of the left-liberal governments, they even have a long history of working together, easing the process even more.

Leadership changes did not cause large ripples in the parties. The MSZP does not put high emphasis on the leader's person, so it becomes easily changeable if the winds change (the case of Medgyessy Péter or Gyurcsány Ferenc, both of whom were quickly deposed as the party rallied against them). Leadership change did not yet occur in FIDESZ, but with another lost election it can happen, and it is very hard to predict the party's future without Orbán.

We mentioned MDF related to the problematic of internal opposition, as the long-time leader (since 1999) being Dávid Ibolya, acting against every group forming as a potential internal opposition.

Leadership change affected recently the SZDSZ, as the election of Kóka János as the president of the party stirred some controversies and the repeated election one year later had a different result, a result which was later deemed acceptable by all parties involved.

2.2.6. The autonomy of the parties

The independence of the party system is the most valued property of any democracy, as they being influenced by other factors than the will of the voters introduces bias in the political process, lowering its performance. And probably this is the largest issue of the Hungarian party system: it is vulnerable to various interests.

The financial independence of the parties is formally guaranteed by the state grants based on their electoral performance. These grants are supposed to cover the

operating expenses of the parties and the costs of the campaigning as well. However the electoral law sets a very low cap on the campaign spending of the parties, meaning that if they want to spend more than that, they need to secure illegal or grey sources for the extra spending.

Initially, the Hungarian parties used legal resources for campaigning, mostly by selling their headquarter buildings. These buildings were provided by the state to the parties to enable their daily working environment and to make an 'investment' into the future democracy (the law was accepted in 1991 and based on their electoral performance the parties got parts of former state properties). But as the operating costs of the parties grew with time, they were forced to sell the properties and rent it back or move out to cheaper parts of the city. The income from selling these properties mostly went into campaign spending, as it was seen as a good investment (as being in government could yield more income than the initial investment in campaigning).

However as money from selling the main properties dried out, the parties had to look for other means of securing income. The ways the parties chose varies widely by time and by party, but generally speaking they were building up a wide network of foundations and companies to support the costs of campaigning and running the party.

It is widely believed that the parties are spending multiple times the value of the campaign cap, however until now no judicial action took place on this matter. Publicly, the parties do not admit overspending the limit, all stating that they spent just a bit under the cap.

The financial dependence of the parties shows really hard in times when they get to the government. The rewarding of former creditors happens instantly, as well as giving out orders to companies close to the government parties. This money distribution became the hallmark of the Hungarian state budget, with scandals on almost every government-funded program, from highway building to specially equipped computers for schools.

Anecdotal evidence is extremely abundant on all those problematic cases where the policy decisions were influenced by business interests, thus harming public good for individual profit.

The other side of party autonomy is towards the inside. An autonomous party can enforce its will on its MP's, and can ensure that the leadership has always the last word. On this dimension, again the big parties score high, as their leadership is making the all-important decisions and ruling the party with an iron fist (even fining the disobedient MP's in case of voting against the decisions of the party). The smaller parties however had always difficulty with managing dissonant voices, which more or less led to their disappearance, or in the case of still existing parties to allowing dissent (SZDSZ) to excluding members (MDF).

The party lists themselves are usually are decided upon by the party leadership, making it s strong weapon against dissenting MP's, by threatening to exclude them in the next elections.

2.2.7. Monopolizing the political system

The party system is not the only one to administer certain political functions: there are alternative models of political systems, contending for the position to run the state. However this is not the case in Hungary, as the political system is almost fully controlled by the parties, and the political system is fully capable of controlling the country. The specifics of the Hungarian path developed in such a way that non-party entities have no chance to achieve any political influence.

The party identification is much higher than the attachment to certain candidates, clearly demonstrated by the very low level of splitting votes between the individual candidate and the party list. This effect is in play when even the prominent politicians of the smaller parties fail to get into the government in the individual race, as voters are voting based on party color.

Important property of the Hungarian system that typically every political position is achievable by the party ladder, as parties change the whole upper leadership of the bureaucracy (not just the ones designated to be political), including management of state owned companies, heads of state institutions, etc. These persons after occupying their place are only accountable to the party delegating them, not to the general population or their immediate supervisors. This again has a damaging effect towards the output of different state owned companies and projects, as political loyalty becomes paramount instead of performance.

2.2.8. Intrusion into other subsystems

To understand how the media system interferes with the politics in Hungary, first we need to take a look at the political scene. The specifics of the Hungarian

party system history shaped the politics into an extremely partisan one. Political scientists rarely meet so much political tension which is between the right and the left-liberal wing of the Hungarian politics. This large amount of tension translates into very strong pulling forces in the media system too.

But how did this extreme tension develop? Most scholars point to the regime transition as the main source of this conflict: the regime change divided the country in two, the ones who profited from the advent of capitalism and democracy and subsequently those who lost. To generalize we can say that the first group is largely formed from younger generations, with white collar jobs/training, while the losers were the retirees, the older generations with no competitive training and the blue collar workers. Another cleavage was between the capital and the counties: the capital had a very prosperous period starting almost from the transformation, while the other parts of the country needed more time to restructure their economy and stop the economic decline.

These groups formed the supporters and opposition of the Antall-led (MDF) government: the winners and the intellectual broadly supporting it, while the workers and the losers of the transformation supporting the opposition, the post-communist party of MSZP. From there on the political cycle went on always changing the incumbent position: the first incumbent who was able to win an election was MSZP-supported Gyurcsány Ferenc.

Until this point the positions of support and the cleavages did not modify: the capital, the workers and the retirees are supporting the left (MSZP – Hungarian Socialist Party), a small number of intellectuals supporting the SZDSZ (Free Democrats – liberal party), while the ruins of MDF are still manage to get into the

parliament. On the right the major party is the FIDESZ (Young Democrats – conservative) in conjunction with the revived KDNP (Christian-Democrat Peoples Party) supported by the middle class and those not wanting more social spending. Naturally the landscape is littered with many topics and conflicts but the main divide is between the MSZP and the FIDESZ, the two parties which actually are able to win an election.

The state-run television and radio is considered to be the vocal supporter of the current government, because the main funding is coming from the budget and the government has many means to enforce the takeover of the media outlet. On every government change the supporter journalists are ousted from the public service broadcast to be replaced by the supporters of the new government. This makes easy to give money to the parties supporting satellite intellectuals by giving them jobs or highly profitable media contracts. One notable case is the MTV's morning program, which is a very hardcore supporter of the socialist party and is unimaginable to be tolerated by a right-wing government.

The commercial media is somewhat more difficult to categorize. The two commercial ground-based televisions had been known to have a bias towards the left, however in the last few years there was a large depolitization, their news following a more neutral path. However the major topics are almost always correlated to the topics of the liberal view, like heavy “antifascist” support, or heavy support for non-discrimination and anti-anti-Semitism. While these topics are present in every Western media, their overemphasis is actually harmful in some ways. For example the talks about the Roma-situation are very limited because everybody who tries to conceptualize the problem is immediately stigmatized as discriminator.

The satellite-based televisions are mostly apolitical, being (with the exception of three news channels) without news coverage. The Hír TV, the ATV and the Echo TV are sharing the news market with the three ground based televisions, but the satellite-based news channels are all heavily biased: the Hír TV and the Echo TV are supporters of the right while the ATV is stubborn supporter of the socialists. While this might not be a problem as almost all of the Western media systems have some sort of biased news coverage, in Hungary these channels have absolutely no common denominator. Their coverage faithfully gives back the communication methods of their respective parties, and while there is no direct funding involved from the parties or there is supposedly no day-to-day instructions given to the televisions from the parties, their presentation of the “reality” has nothing in common.

This can be stated as probably the most problematic point of the current Hungarian democracy. The audiences of the media outlets are so differently informed on certain topics that all communication between them becomes problematic, in some cases even impossible. This reflects the communication of the parties who on almost every instance occupy opposing stances on every topic. The situation is clearly escalating, and currently there is no hope for a bridge to exist.

The media system (or in this case these news channels) are in heavy parallelism with the political system, mirroring all of the topics and problems of the latter, framing problems in exactly the same way as their corresponding parties.

The market of radios is lead by many apolitical outlets (mostly music radios), however in the recent years some politically biased radio stations also came to existence as the development of the process of occupying the media system.

While the media system is underfunded, only the major, foreign owned media outlets can be neutral (or at least they can try to be), while most of the journalist community faces the question of whether support the left or the right, because no third way is existing.

A good example for this is the “quality” print press, continuously struggling with slower sales. The leaders in this category are the tabloids, selling in amazing numbers (these are owned by international investors), while the newspapers have continuous financial problems. This had made them susceptible to political influence from the very beginning. Right now the landscape is composed by the Népszabadság and Népszava on the left, and Magyar Nemzet and Magyar Hírlap on the right. The same is true for the weekly magazines, which are clearly biased toward the left or the right (the local newspapers have traditionally more independence, as their incomes are based more on politically independent local advertisements).

As we assess the professionalization of the media system, these heavy biases make it somewhat easy to measure the variable: the level of professionalization is very low, as the professional autonomy of the journalists is heavily limited by the political affiliation of their employer. The other aspects of professionalism, like public service orientation or generally accepted professional norms are almost non-existent. For example the main body of journalists, the MÚOSZ (National Union of Hungarian Journalists) has a clear liberal-leftist bias, mostly stemming from its communist roots. While they have an ethics council, their decisions have no consequences whatsoever (not like in other countries where the disapproving word of an independent journalist union is a stigma which makes the life of the journalist notably harder in the future).

The hope of independent journalism is in the online media. The two leading news sites, the previously mentioned origo.hu and the index.hu do not have the kind of bias experienced in other media. And while origo is a broad spectrum portal with relatively low emphasis on news, index.hu is clearly a news site with other branches as well. These continuously criticize both the left and the right for their missteps and create a prosperous and valid discourse on the most important topics.

While one might consider these outlets as fragile from an economic and political independence point of view, the myriads of different blogs strengthens the hope for bridging the viewpoints of the two camps: while most of these blogs are clearly biased toward left or right, their framing and agendas are not reflecting those of the parties, making them a relevant forum for political discourse. And although the internet penetration is not as high as it could be (thanks to some mistaken government incentives), it is constantly growing, reaching more and more people.

The effect of the internet is visible even in the traditional media: some news is picked up by mainstream outlets after they are heavily discussed on the internet, so we can say that it has a distinct influence on the traditional media and can even frame some problems for it.

The Hungarian media system is facing some serious problems, and one can say that it is not a viable source of strengthening democracy. As the matter of fact this state of media is clearly destabilizing the current political system, as it fuels the opposition of forces far from the real stakes, the loser of every clash feeling that the world has come to an end. This atmosphere is turning against the parties, for whom the expectation of the supporters is that they should do any means necessary to

seize the power, may those means respect the democratic values and the constitutional system or may not.

If this overheated state of Hungarian media and party politics is not cooled down in the near future, there is a certain possibility that the parties will be increasingly negligent of the “democratic rules” and overwriting them with their own values. And when this happens, the sheer existence of democracy in Hungary will be in peril: the situation is prone to spiral out of control and if the online media cannot lead the way on professional journalism, it can have serious consequences.

2.2.9. Party-friendly institutional settings

The electoral law of Hungary was born during the Roundtable Talks before the first elections of 1990. The resulting electoral system combines the majoritarian approach with the proportional one. The model for the implemented system was the German electoral law, which is also made from these components. The Hungarian parliament has 386 seats, 176 of which are individual seats, won in single-district elections, up to 152 seats are distributed in proportion to votes in the 20 regional districts and at least 58 seats are on a national compensational list. The exact number of proportional and compensational seats is decided on complex algorithm, designed to reduce disproportionality.

Theoretically thus the system is between a pure majoritarian and pure proportional system when considering the disproportionality. But even on the first election, the disproportionality came out a lot higher than the British elections between 1974 and 1987 (Lijphart 1992), and stayed high for the next elections as

well, giving the large parties (and especially the winning one) a large bonus of seats for a small difference in popular vote.

Another significant feature of the electoral system is the initial threshold of 4% which was raised to 5% after the second election. This threshold poses a significant entry barrier for smaller parties, as for example today only for the two large parties (and the ones sharing list with them) can be safe from the danger of falling out from the parliament. This kept the extremist parties out of parliament (with the exception of MIÉP between 1998 and 2002), but also kept new moderate parties from entering the political scene.

The general argument for implementing this system was to create election results which enable easy coalition forming and stable governments, by giving boost to the winners and limiting the number of the parties. But the design had some unintended consequences. First, the level of disproportionality was much higher than expected, reaching as high as 20% for winning parties, while punishing small parties for their inability to compete for individual seats. What was intended to be a series of minor modifications to the original German model induced high levels of disproportionality and the extreme limitation imposed on other parties than the two largest ones. Second, the better performer of the two large parties gains a large bonus compared to the second place, usually enough to achieve a comfortable position to create a coalition.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper had as its starting point to show how institutionalization can go 'wrong', or in other words, not all forms of governability are worth the added cost paid in the deep intrusion of the parties in the society.

As parties become embedded in the society, they structure it around themselves, distorting the 'normal' way of life into a new, more politicized, more dependent on politics. To pursue his interest, in a political system with highly embedded party system, one must take allegiance with one side or another, and not based on his belief, but based on the immediate benefits the sides can give.

The parties themselves see their survival and success as the paramount criteria for implementing certain decisions or not, appoint one to the position or not, etc. On every level, in every way, the actual merits of the persons get shaded by the allegiances he has. This is the first source of inefficiency in theory.

The second source of performance lacking is the government spending policy, which has to be constructed in a way that the governing parties can stash enough money from the companies working on projects that on the next elections

On the main research question, whether the level of embeddedness can decrease democratic performance, the answer is thus yes, as shown on the case of Hungary.

What the paper is missing, is the international comparative approach, which would demonstrate that the same set of socio-economic variables can sustain a better working democracy when paired with a less embedded party system, and

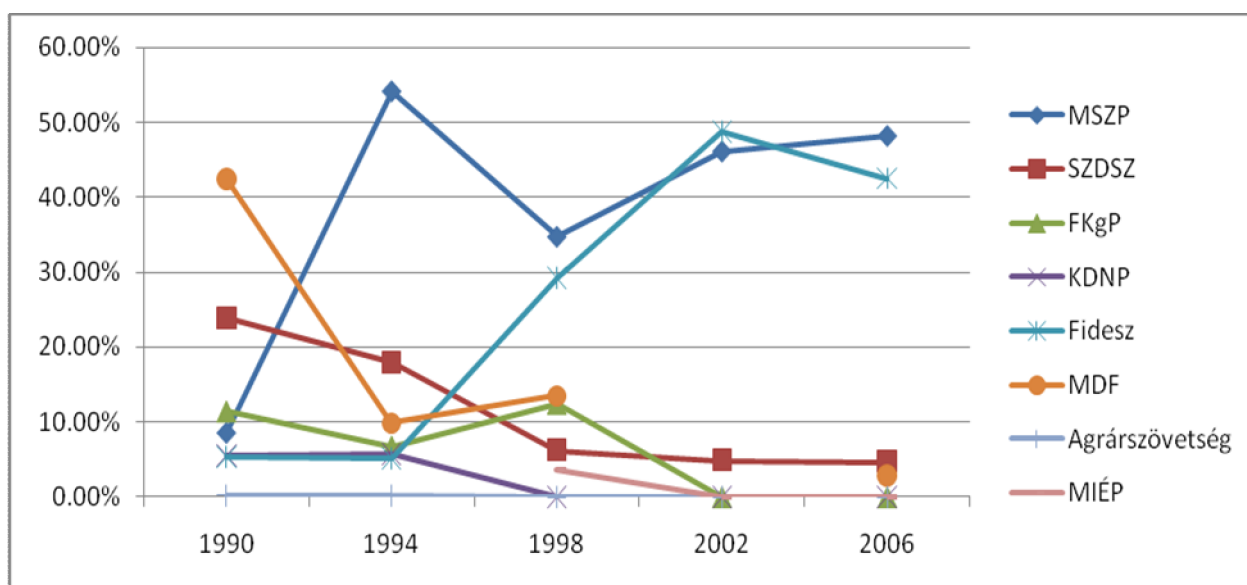
maybe better define those choices of path which triggered the decline in the case of Hungary.

Is notably missing the quantitative demonstration that the described processes do work as the theory said and while not a critical element, it would lend the paper more credibility.

ANNEXES

1. Results of parliamentary elections in Hungary (seat shares)

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006
MSZP	8.55%	54.14%	34.72%	46.11%	48.19%
SZDSZ	23.83%	17.88%	6.22%	4.92%	4.66%
FKgP	11.40%	6.74%	12.44%		
KDNP	5.44%	5.70%			
Fidesz	5.44%	5.18%	29.27%	48.70%	42.49%
MDF	42.49%	9.84%	13.47%		2.85%
Agrárszövetség	0.26%	0.26%			
MIÉP			3.63%		



2. Results of parliamentary elections in Hungary (1990, detailed)

Organization	Number of votes	Share	Number of votes	Share	Seats	Seat share
	(1st round)	(1st round)	(2nd round)	(2nd round)		
Magyar Demokrata Fórum (MDF)	1 213 825	24,72%	14 062 691	41,24%	164	42,49%
Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ)	1 050 452	21,40%	1 045 920	30,68%	93	24,09%
Független Kisgazdapárt (FKGP)	576 256	11,74%	355 112	10,42%	44	11,40%
Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP)	534 898	10,89%	216 496	6,35%	33	8,55%
Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Fidesz)	439 481	8,95%	630 642	1,85%	21	5,44%
Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP)	317 183	6,46%	1 266 362	3,71%	21	5,44%
Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP)	180 899	3,68%	86 402	0,25%	—	—
Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt (MSZDP)	174 410	3,55%	9222	0,03%	—	—
Agrárszövetség (ASZ)	154 004	3,14%	219 232	0,64%	16	0,26%
Vállalkozók Pártja (VP)	92 689	1,89%	5 292	0,16%	—	—
Hazafias Választási Koalíció (HVK)	91 910	1,87%	31 526	0,92%	—	—
SZDSZ-Fidesz	291 135	0,59%	29 017	0,85%	2	0,52%
ASZ-Szövetség a Faluért, a Vidékért (SZFV)	129 585	0,26%	15 394	0,44%	16	0,26%
SZDSZ-Fidesz-KDNP	64 735	0,13%	7 856	0,23%	1	0,26%
Independent candidates	3 129 975	6,31%	62 543	1,83%	5	1,30%
Other parties/organizations (17db)	837 648	1,70%	281 909	0,83%	—	—
Total	4 911 241	100%	3 424 800	100,44%	386	100%
Turnout	65,11%,		45,54%			

3. Results of parliamentary elections in Hungary (1994, detailed)

Organization	Number of votes	Share	Number of votes		Seats	Seat share
	(1st round)	(1st round)	(2nd round)	(2nd round)		
Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP)	1 689 081	31,27%	1 935 719	45,16%	209	54,15%
Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ)	1 005 766	18,62%	1 222 251	28,51%	69	17,62%
Magyar Demokrata Fórum (MDF)	649 966	12,03%	639 866	14,93%	38	9,84%
Független Kisgazdapárt (FKGP)	425 482	7,88%	253 283	5,91%	26	6,74%
Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP)	397 887	7,37%	126 616	2,95%	22	5,70%
Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Fidesz)	416 143	7,70%	29 391	0,69%	20	5,18%
Munkáspárt (MP)	177 458	3,29%	6 268	0,15%	—	—
Agrárszövetség (ASZ)	132 181	2,45%	14 544	0,34%	1	0,26%
Fidesz-VP-LPSZ-ASZ-SZDSZ	6 440	0,12%	7 666	0,18%	1	0,26%
Independent candidates	122 190	2,26%	20 134	0,47%	—	—
Other parties	441 318	8,17%	27 030	0,71	—	—
Total	5 401 687	100%	4 286 597	100%	386	100%
Turnout	68,92%		55,12%			

4. Results of parliamentary elections in Hungary (1998, detailed)

Organization	Number of votes	Share	Number of votes	Share	Seats	Seat share
	(1st round)	(1st round)	(2nd round)	(2nd round)		
Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP)	1 445 909	32,25%	192 640	39,84%	134	34,72%
Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Fidesz)	1 263 522	28,18%	187 609	38,80%	148	38,34%
Független Kisgazdapárt (FKGP)	617 740	13,78%	52 714	10,90%	48	12,44%
Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ)	353 186	7,88%	14 763	3,05%	24	6,22%
Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (MIÉP)	248 825	5,55%	19 707	4,08%	14	3,63%
Munkáspárt (MP)	183 064	4,08%	10 861	2,25%	—	—
Magyar Demokrata Fórum (MDF)	139 934	3,12%	—	—	171	4,40%
Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (KDNP)	116 065	2,59%	1 479	0,31%	—	—
Fidesz-MDF közös jelöltek	587 054	13,14%	954 794	21,17%		shared
Independent	75 965	1,70%	39 154	0,87%	1	0,26%
Other parties	115 729	2,57%	13 681	1,08%	—	—
Total	4 536 254	100%	489 216	100%	386	100%
Turnout	56,26%		57,01%			

5. Results of parliamentary elections in Hungary (2002, detailed)

Organization	Number of votes	Share	Number of votes		Share	Seats	Seat share
	(1st round)	(1st round)	(2nd round)	(2nd round)			
Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP)	2 361 997	42,05%	2 011 820	45,77%	178		46,11%
Fidesz-MDF	2 306 763	41,07%	2 196 524	49,97%	164 + 24 (188)		42,49 + 6,22 (48,71%)
Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ)	313 084	5,57%	126 966	2,89%	20		5,18%
Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (MIÉP)	245 326	4,37%	325	0,01%	—		—
Centrum	219 029	3,90%	5 280	0,12%	—		—
Munkáspárt (MP)	121 503	2,16%	—	—	—		—
Független Kisgazdapárt (FKGP)	42 338	0,75%	692	0,02%	—		—
Other parties	67102	0,77%	—	—	—		—
Independents	432 193	0,13%	—	—	—		—
Total	5 685 655	100%	4 423 805	100%	386		100%
Turnout	70,53%		73,51%				

6. Results of the parliamentary elections in Hungary (2006, detailed)

Organization	Number of votes	Share	Number of votes	Share	Seats	Seat share
	(1st round)	(1st round)	(2nd round)	(2nd round)		
Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP)	2 336 705	43,21%	1 510 358	46,63%	190 (186+4)	49,22%
Fidesz-KDNP	2 272 979	42,03%	1 511 176	46,65%	164 (141+23)	42,49%
Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ)	340 746	6,31%	64 501	1,99%	20 (18+2)	5,18%
Magyar Demokrata Fórum (MDF)	272 831	5,04%	16 355	0,50%	11	2,85%
Somogyért Egyesület	9 457	0,18%	13 801	0,31%	1	0,26%
MSZP-SZDSZ és SZDSZ-MSZP	155 619	2,86%	72 515	2,23%		
MIÉP-Jobbik a Harmadik Út	119 007	2,20%	231	0,01%	—	—
MDF-SZSZB, MDF-MNYP és MDF-Fidesz-KDNP	48 947	1,00%	36 669	1,13%	—	—
Other parties	54 916	1,01%	—	—	—	—
Independents	180 544	0,33%	135 984	0,42%	—	—
Total	5 408 050	100%	3 225 636	100%	386	100%
Turnout	67,83%		64,39%			

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