

**Poles on the rise facing each other
with a delicate balance in the Hungarian case**

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Introductory notes

1. To begin with, it may be in place to have a note on the paradoxical challenge of writing at the moment on the prospects of consolidation of the party landscape in the Visegrad countries, among them Hungary, a targeted theme of this section. While it will be a principal motive of this paper to argue for the reality of consolidation in a certain sense, to be outlined in the following, such an explication is to take place amidst a crisis situation in domestic politics, even if the existence and character of this crisis is debated in Hungarian public discourse. The situation implies certain ambivalence, probably not restricted, as a matter of fact, to the Hungarian scene. Due to the lack of experience, however, the scope of this paper will not extend to other countries in the Visegrad region.

2. In fact, the uncertainty regarding these matters is not of recent emergence. Hopefully not too subjective, a personal remark may help to illuminate the issue. Some one and half year ago, a discussion took place with the participation of a selective set of Hungarian social scientists, from the field of political science and sociology in the first place, about a volume on electoral behaviour and political stratification in Hungary, co-edited and partly written by the present author with Róbert Angelusz, in many respects a basis for this paper. It was one of the main lines of debate, with a stress from the side of political science, in the first place, what validity one may attach to the bloc-like crystallization in political stratification of the Hungarian electorate, as suggested by at least some part of the authors of the volume in question, with special regard to the prospective maintenance of such crystallization if any. As a representative of this type of interpretations, the present author argued for the socio-cultural and historical embeddedness of the political cleavages as supported by much of the empirical material underlying the volume, not questioning, however, the legitimacy of the doubts concerning future developments.

One and half year later, with two elections of this year behind us, one can be somewhat more informed, even if the cognitive benefit of hindsight is doubtful for a topic, so much loaded with evaluative components. Being convinced of the harm of the cultural-ideological segmentation implied by the chance of a lasting fixation of opposite political blocks, many commentators take a strongly normative standpoint concerning this issue (which is a decisive motive e.g. for a considerable part of the prestigious volume on the existence or non-existence of „two Hungaries”, see Gombár ed. 2005). Though not free of some evaluative points, like the threats of excessive polarization, this paper will attempt to stick to the empirical reality of these developments in the first place. As a next move, joining the descriptive part of this

paper, a discussion will follow, with an element of outlook to possible future developments. Though highly aware of the significance of inertia, a sort of path-dependency, it will not seek to project the tendencies of consolidation into the future, whatever their present salience. It will take account of upcoming shifts and potential strains principally capable of bringing about discontinuity after a period of the relative stability of the party landscape; this part necessarily containing some elements of speculation as well.

Decreasing volatility, increasing partisanship, concentration and polarization

3. To turn to empirical evidence, let us first see some simple data related to the diminishing volatility in Hungarian electoral behavior. For a temporal comparison, we may borrow thereby a table of Tóka 2005/a (contained by the volume Angelusz-Tardos ed. 2005), including aggregate variability of votes as a generally applied simple indicator of electoral volatility (see Mainwaring-Torcal 2004), added by two more characteristics of partisanship deriving from survey data: the rate of those with some kind of party identification (having a party close to them), and the distance of sympathy evaluations of the two parties enjoying most public support in the given period. Since the publication of the study in question the results of the 2006 parliamentary election are also available, just like recent survey data regarding the two latter indicators.¹

Table 1
Volatility and partisanship in Hungary through five parliamentary elections, 1990-2006*

| Date | Aggregate variability (%) | Being close to a party (%) | Sympathy distance by a 11-point scale (means) | Sympathy distance by a 7-point scale (means) |
|------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| March 1990 | - | - | 3.9 | 1.3 (Feb.90) |
| May 1994 | 25.8 | - | 5 | 1.3 (Sep.94) |
| May 1998 | 31.7 | 34 | 4.5 | 2.4 (Feb.98) |
| April 2002 | 22.0 | 52 | 6.1 | 3.1 (Nov.03) |
| April 2006 | 7.9 | 55 | - | 3.2 (Mar.06) |

*The main body of the table based on Tóka 2005/b.

To start with the most exact indicator, the degree of volatility based on changes of votes for parties – deriving from electoral statistics -, this year’s data reveal an especially low shift

¹ The survey data after 2002 derive from pre- and post-election surveys of the Hungarian Centre for Democracy Studies on the occasion of the 2006 parliamentary election in Hungary. The sources of the 7-point scale sympathy distance scores are Hungarian Public Opinion Institute (1990), Research Group for Communication Studies (1994), Szonda Ipsos (1998), HCDS basic survey (2003) and pre-election panel survey (2006), the former calculated for later panel participants.

reminding of similar indices of some older democracies with an aggregate variability below ten per cent. Data on partisanship also suggest a tendency of crystallization. The percentage of those with party identification, after some further increase, is, again, close to the pattern of mature democracies (for such comparisons see Tóka 2005/a again). While the time series of the index based on individual feeling distances with regard to the two parties being most popular at the given period is deficient due to this year's lack of a survey result corresponding to the former (11-point scale) measurement contained by the original table for the period until 2002, this may be well substituted by an additional time series based on a similar index from surveys with a 7-point party thermometer. Even if not always coinciding with the date of the elections (like the last but one piece from 2003), this latter set of data contains a whole series from 1990 to 2006, revealing a continuously increasing of sympathy/antipathy with regard to the most popular parties in Hungary (the set of which underwent much change from 1990 on, though constant since 1998)². Also, it can be observed that this increase was not quite even. The gap significantly grew by 1998, and then again during the next government cycle. The panel data for 2003 and 2006 still indicate a slight increase, its degree is not significant, though (as a matter of fact, the present index score, close to the half of the range of scale is rather high, particularly when taking into account the segment amounting to about one third of the population having practically no interest in political affairs and hardly making a distinction between parties). Feeling distance scores between parties with most support, from that time on based upon a MSZP-Fidesz opposition (the shift of the latter party from a liberal to a rightist/conservative platform already under way) exhibit a growing divergence by 1998, that is the end of the 1994-98 government period. As data also show, this gap of attitudes still grew later on in a significant way, although the scores from the last period reveal some stabilization, too (by all probabilities with some ceiling effect also contributing to this,).

Another study by Tóka (2005/b) in the volume above on the history of cleavages in the contemporary Hungarian party system attaches the start of the present setup to the elections of 1994, the establishment of MSZP-SZDSZ (left-liberal) coalition, an alliance having been maintained from that on, whether in government, or in opposition. If taking the 1998 data as resulting from the cleavage pattern having formed throughout the preceding the period, the data on the right side confirm this statement, to a degree.

² To be more concrete: MDF and SZDSZ (1990), MSZP and SZDSZ (1994), MSZP and Fidesz from 1998 on.

4. The decrease of volatility, doubtless consolidation of voting patterns is certainly related to the characteristics of the Hungarian electoral system heavily contributing to the concentration of votes and seats. The four-percentage threshold of party list votes, elevated from 1994 on to five, has posed a serious barrier for smaller parties. It occurred only once, in 1998, that a new party (the right-extreme MIEP) could pass this test (being unable to repeat this later on). Once-leading party MDF, coming up with an independent list in 2006 again (after an electoral alliance with Fidesz in 2002) could just surpass the threshold by 0,04 per cent (some 3000 votes). SZDSZ, a coalition member during three cycles, being a constant participant of the House from 1990 on, could also get in by a thin margin of 1 or 2 per cent (facilitated by a strategic voting pattern of a segment of left voters, too, lending a certain amount of votes for the party list). Supporters of new (or older small) parties tend to refrain from their initial idea in the decisive moment and choose instead the safer, second-best option. To a certain degree, this also relates to supporters, or at least their outer circles, of medium parties whose unsafe position (including the threat of failing the five-percentage test) apparently affects electoral decisions when choosing between them and their stronger partners.

Anyway, as data of Table 2 show, the process of concentration is still going on, although a kind of ceiling effect appears on the horizon in this case, too.

Table 2

Political concentration in Hungary through parliamentary elections from 1990 to 2006*

| | The proportion of votes for the two biggest parties (%) | The proportion of parliamentary mandates gained by the two biggest parties (%) | The number of parties getting into the parliament |
|------|---|--|---|
| 1990 | 46 | 67 | 6 |
| 1994 | 53 | 72 | 6 |
| 1998 | 60 | 73 | 6 |
| 2002 | 83 | 89 | 4 |
| 2006 | 85 | 92 | 4 ³ |

*Based on Angelusz-Tardos 2005/a.

It should be noted, however, that goals of a more complete concentration implying a two-party parliament, pushed to the foreground by Fidesz-politicians in the first place, but also

³ This number needs some qualification. After the 2006 parliamentary elections Fidesz made a tactical decision to permit the formation of an independent fraction of KDNP (Christian-Democratic Party, one of the allies of Fidesz, not aspiring for such a role formerly and having no independent list on the occasion of the parliamentary, not even somewhat later, the municipal elections of 2006). At the moment, there are five fractions in the Hungarian parliament in an official sense.

joined by some leaders of MSZP in certain periods, did not materialize in 2006. The certainty of coalition partnership by SZDSZ, paralleled by some tactical chances offered by the parliamentary presence of MDF, along with some calculations of political arithmetic were strong enough motives to dissuade left-wing politicians from supporting a two-party outcome. Voices against threats of a two-party rule vividly expressed in public discourse played a part, too, in bringing about the continuation of a multi-party setting.

5. Though the actual meaning of political cleavages in Hungary is a debated matter, an issue this paper will return to in somewhat more detail, both every-day experience and empirical data leave no doubt that left/right label is an anchor of self-identification with an increasing strength. While a decade ago or so it could be raised whether people could place themselves along this dimension at all (most people were capable of that, then, too), uncertainty has definitely diminished in this regard, not the least due to the self-definitions of the leading parties on the opposite sides,. As displayed by the last row of Table 3, both sources of data from the current year exhibit a lower percentage of missing self-placement on this dimension than before. However, this proportion was smaller earlier, too, than of those with no party preference.

Table 3

The distribution of self-placements on a 10-point left-right scale in 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2006*
(Adult population; panel respondents in the 2003/06 case; percentage)

| | Feb. 1990. (MKI) n=1000 | Apr. 1994. (MTA–ELTE KKCS) N=2000 | Fear. 1998. (Szonda Ipsos) n=3000 | Nov. 2003. (Tárki) n=1500 | Apr. 2006. (Tárki- Századvég) n=1000 | Nov. 2003. (Tárki, panel resp.) n=460 | May 2006. (Tárki, panel resp.) n=460 |
|--|-------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Left pole (1+2) | 9 | 9 | 9 | 17 | 17 | 19 | 21 |
| 3+4 | 22 | 26 | 23 | 16 | 22 | 19 | 15 |
| Centre (5+6) | 44 | 47 | 45 | 33 | 30 | 31 | 36 |
| 7+8 | 18 | 13 | 16 | 19 | 18 | 16 | 18 |
| Right pole (9+10) | 6 | 5 | 8 | 13 | 12 | 14 | 11 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>Poles together</i> | 15 | 14 | 17 | 31 | 29 | 33 | 32 |
| Polarization index (poles/centre) | .34 | .31 | .39 | .93 | .97 | 1.06 | .89 |
| No self-placement | 13 | 15 | 27 | 20 | 14 | 20 | 14 |

*Based on Angelusz-Tardos 2005/a.

The emphasis of the table is on the growth of poles versus centre positions, though, as can be observed in a simplified way by scores of polarization index. While a slow increase could be observed already during the nineties, this centrifugal tendency develops in a jump-like way throughout the current decade. More precisely, the polarization appearing on both ends came to a peak by the early years of this decade to be maintained on a similar level later on.

International comparisons rendered by similar data-sets (such as the World Values Survey, or a somewhat modified 11-point version of the 2002 European Social Survey) present these scores as rather high. Though new democracies exhibit a somewhat more polarized pattern on the basis of such computations, scores approaching unit value are rare (actually, it was only the Israeli case assessed by the 11-point version of ESS that displayed a heavier dominance of poles versus centre positions along the left-right dimension.)

This state of affairs is certainly inseparable from stages of political competition, even though not completely dependent on it as it will be dealt with in some respects. Around the change of system, two decades ago or so neither left-wing, nor right-wing identification was really popular in common speech. The former so because of the burden of recent past, the latter for its historical implications and lessons of preceding political socialization. The favourite of the times was liberal stand, while its usual antipode, conservatism still bore an ill connotation of reactionary world view, or just being behind the times. As some further data (on ideological labels and self-identifications) also suggest, left-wing voters, too, tended to opt for a liberal self-placement. The left label started its gradual recovery with the rise of MSZP, but it was only after the catch-up of the opposite right-wing pole (related to the growing support of Fidesz, then its getting to power), added by the slow withdrawal of the liberal platform (in its background with the standing coalition partner SZDSZ) that its attraction significantly increased. Data display a parallel growth on the right-wing end, though this increase is not overwhelming, still lagging somewhat behind the left identification.

As some tables displayed in the Appendix show, the liberal-conservative continuum had more relevance during the first government cycles in the first half of the nineties. Even though SZDSZ lays some emphasis on its liberal identity, this is not as salient as the left-wing character of MSZP. The secondary role of a liberal-conservative dimension is also conditioned by the difficulties of the now minor opposition party MDF to characteristically express its claim for valid conservatism. The increasing adoption of some conservative features by Fidesz (paralleled by the temporal improvement of the position of this ideological platform) also contributes to the weakness of the liberal-conservative dimension in structuring the political arena in an independent way, and a similar tendency can be observed at the other end with MSZP voters approaching the liberal character of the coalition partner.

Table 4

Left-right and liberal-conservative self-placements and party images between 2003 and 2006

(10-point scales, means)

| | Self-placement | | | | Party image | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| | National samples | | Panel samples | | National samples | | Panel samples | |
| Left-right 10-point scale | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA-project) N=1000 | Post Election Apr. 2006 (Tárki-Század-vég) N=1000 | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA-project) N=460 | Pre-election March 2006 (DKMKA) N=460 | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA-project) N=1000 | Post Election Apr. 2006 (Tárki-Század-vég) N=1000 | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA-project) N=460 | Pre-election March 2006 (DKMKA) N=460 |
| MSZP (gov.-major) | 3,00 | 3,17 | 2,91 | 2,78 | 2,84 | 2,27 | 2,79 | 2,58 |
| SZDSZ (gov.-minor) | 3,64 | 4,18 | 4,00 | 4,82 | 4,19 | 3,57 | 4,21 | 4,45 |
| Fidesz (opp.-major) | 7,59 | 7,81 | 7,53 | 7,50 | 8,19 | 8,49 | 8,26 | 8,19 |
| MDF (opp.-minor) | --- | 5,59 | -- | -- | 7,03 | 6,55 | 7,07 | 6,60 |
| Liberal-conservative 10-point scale | | | | | | | | |
| MSZP (gov.-major) | 4,44 | -- | 4,37 | 4,82 | 4,93 | -- | 4,80 | 4,35 |
| SZDSZ (gov.-minor) | 3,68 | -- | 4,18 | 3,58 | 4,02 | -- | 3,83 | 3,26 |
| Fidesz (opp.-major) | 5,94 | -- | 5,88 | 6,35 | 5,86 | -- | 6,16 | 6,60 |
| MDF (opp.-minor) | -- | | -- | -- | 6,09 | -- | 6,03 | 6,19 |

The election of 2006 brought an emphatic image campaign within distinct blocks as well, with the minor parties also seeking to stress their special character. The slogan, SZDSZ – the Hungarian liberal party was paralleled by the challenge of MSZP ‘let us dare and stand on the left’, and its symbolic support by the ubiquitous use of the color red. These manifested themselves by some corresponding shift of party images, and, to a lesser degree, some changes of respective self-identifications by the time of the elections. These minor shifts, however, did not basically change the closeness of these images and self-images. On the other hand, Fidesz, after taking the centre of the right-wing platform, has tended to occupy a similar position on the conservative side as well while its minor counterpart MDF went on approaching some middle stand with either axes, as far as these subjective assessments suggest as well.

Table 5

Indicators of the relationship of party preference and left-right identifications, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2006

(10-point scale self-placements, distances between means)*

| | Left-right dimension (10-point scale) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| | Feb. 1990. (MKI) n=1000 | Apr. 1994. (MTA-ELTE KKCS) N=2000 | Feb. 1998. (Szonda Ipsos) n=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA) n=1500 | Apr.2006. post- election (Tárki-Századvég) n=1000 |
| Distances between the supporters of government and parliamentary opposition parties ** | 0.39 (MDF-FKGP-KDNP 5.66/ SZDSZ-MSZP-Fidesz 5.27) | 1.81 (MDF-FKGP-KDNP 6.06/ SZDSZ-MSZP-Fidesz 4.25) | 1.83 (MSZP-SZDSZ 4.19/MDF-FKGP-KDNP-Fidesz 6.02) | 4.30 (MSZP-SZDSZ 3.22/ Fidesz-MDF 7.52) | 4.32 (MSZP-SZDSZ 3.27/ Fidesz-MDF 7.59) |
| Distances between the supporters of the two biggest parliamentary parties ** | 0,48 (MDF 5.27-SZDSZ 5.85) | 1.01 (MDF 6.34-SZDSZ 5.33) | 1.05 (MSZP 4.10-SZDSZ 5.15) | 4.37 (MSZP 3.14-Fidesz 7.51) | 4.54 (MSZP 3.17-Fidesz 7.81) |
| Distances between the supporters of the two parties on the ends of scale ** | 2.55 (MSZP 3.86-KDNP 6.41) | 2.65 (MSZP 3.71-FKGP 6.36) | 2.36 (MSZP 4.10-KDNP 6.46) | 4.37 (MSZP 3.14-Fidesz 7.51) | 4.54 (MSZP 3.17-Fidesz 7.81) |
| Explanations of self-placements by party preferences (analysis of variance, eta-square) | .09 sig.000 | .22 sig.000 | .16 sig.000 | .56 sig.000 | .64 sig.000 |

*Based on Angelusz-Tardos 2005/a.

** Modelled after Markowski 2000.

All these trends have entailed an increasing left-right gap in the pattern of party allegiance, followed by a moderate and less coherent one with the liberal-conservative dimension (see this latter on Table 2 in the Appendix). As displayed by Table 5, these distances have increased with all the aspects distinguished, reaching about half of the total 9-unit range. If we took earlier the two points on both ends of the ten-point scale as representing polar positions, the means for supporters of the two big camps (or, at least, the two big parties) now approach these characteristics. What is especially salient, the jump-like increase of the explained variance of left-right self-identification by party preference, coming close to identical entities. As a kind of inverse, Table 3 in the Appendix exhibits the explanations of belonging to the supporters of government and parliamentary opposition parties for various periods regressed on left-right and liberal-conservative self-placements at the same time. While these explanations have approached a maximum threshold again by the recent period, this has been almost completely exhausted by the left-right axe, after some initial influence by the liberal-conservative one. Though not completely insignificant even by now, the latter dimension has obviously withdrawn to a secondary position, constituting a kind of inner divide among supporters of the big blocks (with a reference to not only the distinction between major and minor parties, but the electorates of the bigger parties as well, with some latent tensions inside

these circles in the background.) Finally, one should not ignore its role in the fact of both minor parties' passing the threshold of admission at the 2006 parliamentary election.

With its growing emphasis in self-definition of parties on the one hand, and the increasing congruence of popular political and ideological orientations on the other, the left-right distinction has assumed a central organizing role in everyday categorizations. Expressions like the spontaneously emerging labels of 'leftists' or 'rightists' (or maybe closer in connotation, 'leftish' and 'rightish' people) have appeared time after time in public communication like sms-messages for political programs of commercial broadcasts. The increasing coherence of these beliefs is witnessed by some further evidence of survey findings of longitudinal and cross-sectional character.

Table 6.1
Temporal consistence of left-right and liberal-conservative self-placements by panel data from November 2003 to March 2006

Correlation coefficients, Pearson's R, DKMKA Political Stratification Project--Pre-election panel (TÁRKI subsample, N=451)

| Left-right | Liberal-conservative |
|------------|----------------------|
| .63 | .26 |

Table 6.2
Relationships between the left-right and liberal-conservative dimensions

Correlation coefficients, Pearson's R

| Apr. 1994. (MTA-ELTE-KKCS) N=1000 | Febr.1998. (Szonda Ipsos) N=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA-project) N=1500 | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA-panel) n=451 | May 2006 (DKMKA-panel) n=451 |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| .19 | .18 | .27 | .33 | .36 |

While the liberal-conservative self-placement exhibits a moderate temporal coherence based on responses of panel participants throughout a nearly three-year period, left-right categorizations stand out with a striking endurance as shown by the rather high correlation score, a kind of test of long-term reliability. To go on with the list of findings pointing to such a direction, deviations of left-right self-placements among supporters of various parties have diminished across a number of periods (see Table 4 in the appendix). In a certain sense, this kind of crystallization is even corroborated by the growing similarity of categorizations along the two dimensions. The frequent occurrence of the phrase 'left-liberal' in journalistic usage (whether in an in-group or an out-group context) is a proof for the emergence of a semantic concatenation like this.

The socio-cultural embeddedness of political cleavages

6. While the data above suggesting diminishing electoral volatility, the crystallization of political cleavages, the more or less clear-cut outlines of party blocks with their electorates, the question still may arise on the character of these developments, and the social embeddedness of these formations. Even if the realization of certain path-dependence may constrain notions of prospective developments, the direction of interpretations no doubt bears upon the respective beliefs.

Turning to these alternative interpretations, one necessarily faces the problem of personalism, as formulated among the main topics of this section as well. It may be the case, that all those sharp oppositions as outlined above can be attributed to the personal role (charisma, passions, power aspirations, etc.) of a few number of political actors, who have decisively influenced the course of events, and their further ascent or possible descent might imply huge differences for future developments, including the possibility of a sudden breakdown and radical transformation of the preceding setup. Though the characterization of this line of thought may involve certain simplification, it stands not far from the emphasis of the role of agency in the political sphere, a nice application of which by Enyedi (2005) for the Hungarian scene has attracted deserved attraction. On an abstract level, it is not easy to attack this issue, pro or con. It is obvious that the political is a sphere yielding a special importance to the role of agency, individual or collective will. It is a matter of historic-philosophical attitude, how we assess the potential playground and room of impact of individual actions, but the methodological focus is, no doubt, a legitimate one. On a more concrete plane, returning to our topic at issue, it is hard to operationalize in an empirical sense, how much weight we attach to this personality factor in the development of political boundaries and divides. One of the two parties, dominant in the political scene for more than a decade, MSZP, the one leading the left-wing block, underwent a series of changes in its leadership, although two of the top figures - Gy. Horn formerly and F. Gyurcsány recently – may have had a relatively greater impact on developments. Its right-wing counterpart, Fidesz has had, for almost two decades now, one top leader only. V. Orbán has certainly put his stamp on the path of the party and the formation of the respective block. The small „case number” and lack of possible comparisons gives no chance, however, to more or less exactly assess the influence of this personal input.

Another course of interpretation is similar in a way, as far the increased emphasis of agency is concerned, though it is less close to the problem of personalism. This ascribes no deeper substantive value to the apparent salience of political self-identifications like those observed

with the left-right scale (for example on account of the lack of its relationship with some issues of public policy, economic and social affairs etc.) but attributes this phenomenon more or less to the growth of partisanship. Tóka 2005 (actually both studies mentioned above) is an important example for this kind of interpretation of Hungarian developments, attaching special importance to institutional factors (like the electoral system, or parliamentary rules securing the stability of governments). While the role of the latter is unquestionable, again, this line of reasoning may entail a further point, a doubt with regard to any deeper (socio-cultural or ideological) roots of political cleavages, however sharp they may appear on the party landscape. This point, however, is open to further discussion, and the following part of this paper will take a brief account of arguments toward an opposite conclusion (for a more detailed explication see Angelusz-Tardos 2005/a).

A, It is the subject of a longer debate in the field of Hungarian political stratification, how much role social factors (class, status, locality or other types) play in the organization of party allegiances. The usual experience was a moderate influence; especially inasmuch traditional indicators related to skills, occupation or employment status were concerned. This lack of a stronger relationship could be attached on the one hand to the gradual disappearance of the party with the most characteristic social profile (the Smallholders embracing a lower-status rural population with some land property), and to the changing economic and social policies of the bigger parties depending on the shifts of government positions. Our study above, however, pointed to the role of some factors more or less ignored before in this regard. Ecological variables like type of locality, or region exhibit a significant influence (see Table 5 in the Appendix), but further analyses also point to the important role of the character of more immediate dwelling context (such as traditional rural, urban housing, suburban or panel quarters). Results of parliamentary and municipal elections witness a more and more conspicuous influence of these ecological factors.

Ideological embeddedness, past affiliations do in a way have, too, a structural implication related to political stratification. The inclusion of religiousness and ex-party membership significantly increase the explanations, in the expected directions. But some latent effects related to traditional indicators can also be brought to the surface. The parallel inclusion of

education and cultural background has pointed to their opposite roles connected with generation-specific social mobility and career paths.⁴

B, Although the meaning of the left-right divide in Hungary is far not unambiguous from the angle of its original character (related to the point above having to do with the cycles of government and oppositional positions, its economic content is especially blurred), its ideological and cultural contours present themselves in a well interpretable way. As it was revealed by the repeated application of a method (conjoint analysis) apt to assess the weight of various ideological issues in public thinking, the historical-political orientation (attitude toward the Kádár-regime) and the significance attached to the national problematics stand at the top of the list, followed by the attitude toward the role of religion in society (see Angelusz-Tardos 2005/b). While these latter two dimensions are matters of daily debates in public discourse and political confrontations, the former one is, however, a mostly latent phenomenon. (The salience of this axe, however, is also corroborated by item batteries directly related to historical figures.)⁵ Views on the role of state in economic affairs on the one hand, and law and order, versus human rights, both of a more ambivalent character in party strategies, with cyclical turns time after time, are clearly at the bottom of the list.

C, The role of organizational and institutional anchors is debated in the literature due to the partial decline of some of these factors. In a search of the existence of this type of embeddedness in the Hungarian practice, we followed authors like Bartolini and Mair (1990). Party and trade union memberships are of no overwhelming significance on account of their moderate numbers and their especially poor representation among younger cohorts, but their mobilization capacity is not completely negligible, especially on the left side. (Though some new tendencies are also observable related to the affiliations and issue-preferences of newer unions.)

The role of belonging to church organizations is a tangible factor of political preferences and mobilization, at least among an active circle of followers. Being an issue of repeated debates concerning the right place of churches in these matters, the significance of this institution is hard to ignore.

⁴ Further analysis of structural equation (by the use of the software AMOS) revealed an even more clear-cut manifestation of these opposite tendencies: higher cultural background (attached to the status of the older generation) related to right-wing and higher education (related to the career chances of a younger generation) to left-wing party preferences.

⁵ To add a timely evidence of everyday character, a new book on Kádár ranks No 1 for some time on the bestseller list, true, it was written by a writer of high-circulation popular books, Gy. Moldova.

Media institutions and virtual communities emerging through common exposure appear with an increasing salience. As the analysis of their segmentation reveals, types of left-wing and right-wing media consumption present themselves with an increasing coherence of content and audience. These latter can be conceived as sort of latent networks focused around favourite programs and commentators.

D, A central feature of our approach to the problem of cleavages has been its conceptualization attached to social networks, a theoretical tradition initiated by Rokkan, and followed along several lines by authors like Knoke, Huckfeldt, Diani etc. Political homophily/heterophily, social interaction inside and out of the frames of various camps is a core element of this way of theorizing. We have now a decade of pooled survey experience related to this aspect of socio-political integration. Data from the second part of the nineties already displayed quite a high level of political homophily which only grew later on, related by all probabilities to party concentration and the sharpness of political confrontation (for a more detailed picture see Table 6 in the Appendix).

Table 7
Political homophily/heterophily among the core tie partners of personal networks⁶ in 1997-98, 2003 and 2006 (%)*

| | 1997-98 (MTA-ELTE KKCS Omnibus) | | | | | 2003 (DKMKA Political Strat. Project) | | | | | 2006 (TÁRKI-Századvég Post-election) | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Supporters of | | | | | Supporters of | | | | | Supporters of | | | | |
| | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (lib.) party | Minor right-wing (con.) party | Major right-wing party | Total N= 714 | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (lib.) party | Minor right-wing (con.) party | Major right-wing party | Total N= 752 | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (lib.) party | Minor right-wing (con.) party | Major right-wing party | Total N= 476 |
| Pure homophily (the same party support by each partner) | 58 | 22 | 38 | 53 | 47 | 70 | 29 | 22 | 72 | 67 | 65 | 35 | 31 | 74 | 67 |
| Political kinship (the occurrence of other parties of the party bloc) | 11 | 29 | 28 | 15 | 16 | 4 | 33 | 22 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 35 | 31 | 4 | 6 |
| (Partial) heterophily (the occurrence of parties of the opposite party bloc) | 31 | 49 | 34 | 32 | 37 | 27 | 39 | 56 | 24 | 27 | 30 | 30 | 39 | 23 | 27 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

*Based on Angelusz-Tardos 2005/a

⁶ The measurement of political homophily-heterophily took place in the frames of a name-generator instrument modelled after the Fischer-McAllister and GSS types for the approach of core ties network. The 2006 survey involved some difference from the preceding ones by somewhat changing the stimulus situations, having not entailed a significant change in the character of partners and their political affiliations.

While the supporters of minor parties are still less homophilous in their political attachments probably having to do with their more diverse interests but pure size effect as well, this tendency is heavily offset by their decreasing weight in the party composition of the electorate. A kind of freeze in this regard throughout the present decade is also mirrored in the data above. The total picture of political relationships is, however, more varied if we also take account of weak-tie contacts related to wider acquaintanceship.⁷ This further approach attempts to assess what kind of personal experiences people have concerning supporters of various parties based on the wider pool of their ties.

Table 8.
Political homophily/heterophily related to circles of wider acquaintanceship

(DKMKA Political Stratification Project, 2003;
N=930; percentage)*

| | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (lib.) party | Minor right-wing (cons.) | Major right-wing party |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | supporters | | | |
| Homophily (party mentions from own block only) | 18 | 15 | 17 | 8 |
| Heterophily (parties from both blocks) | 59 | 63 | 65 | 65 |
| Lack of contacts | 24 | 22 | 17 | 27 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

*Source: Angelusz-Tardos, 2005/a.

Findings of this wider approach suggest some existence of everyday communication between members of the opposite camps, a circumstance no doubt modifying the image of a complete isolation of the two sides. Further analyses from this study also point to the fact that actors with a diverse pool of political nexus may capitalize on this resource in various ways.

E, During several cycles, left-wing mobilization capacity had the advantage of its traditionally stronger embeddedness in formal political and social organizations. After a longer-term focus on media-centred public relations policy, especially from its 2002 defeat on, Fidesz has opted for a change of strategy through informal ways of social communication based on network resources of the right-wing electorate. Not the least for its younger age composition, inclinations for non-conventional forms of participation are higher on the latter side (though, as shown by survey statistics, such manifestations are in Hungary as a whole at a relatively

⁷ The measure of political nexus diversity was based on a sort of party position generator modelled after the Lin-Dumin type of position generator.

low level as compared internationally). The data of the 2003 Political stratification project already witnessed such a tendency, then confirmed by later findings, too (this right-wing plus was somewhat offset by a more intensive media activity of left-wing supporters in recent developments of direct-call or sms-voting on radio and television broadcasts).

F, The notion consolidation, in its usual sense, has been present throughout this paper but it can also be applied in a more technical manner. The pair of concepts consolidation/intersection as cultivated by Blau (1994) for the interrelationships among structural parameters is actually not far from the given context. High or increasing correlations among such parameters, such as certain types of resources (tending toward consolidation in the given sense), may imply a tendency of stability (or consolidation according to common usage). A high degree of closeness of parameters (high consolidation or low intersection in Blau's sense) may, however, entail lack of flexibility and scarce interaction among various strata with unfavourable implications for social integration. Analyses based on the inclusion of economic, cultural, social network and political resources (see Angelusz-Tardos 2006) throughout two decades display some growth of correlation of parameters when compared to scores observed around the change of system some two decades ago.⁸

An outlook

7. Our findings were based on survey results extending to the late spring of 2006. The question may sound justified whether newer developments have not basically modified the situation. To back this suggestion in a way, polls from summer already indicated a sudden turn in the wake of announcements about coming restrictions, a big drop in the popularity of the governing coalition, unusual not much after a won election. The middle of September leak-out of the Prime Minister's coarse informal speech with a claim to change course and face harsh realities after years of pretence entailed a stormy aftermath and a lasting series of protest, with demonstrations still going on while writing these lines. The municipal elections in early October brought a significant victory of the opposition with take-overs in a number of medium-size settlements, implying a new division of central and local responsibilities, an exceptional occurrence throughout earlier cycles with a background of voters' inclination to opt for local candidates closer to centrally distributed resources.

⁸ Findings not far from this were observed by Mateju (1998) for the Czech Republic in the context of status crystallization.

Paradoxically, the results of the elections can in a way be conceived as a kind of corroboration of the existing party landscape. A rather high proportion of left-wing supporters insisted to vote for MSZP, and a partial balance was brought about victories by slight margins in some of the largest cities, with Budapest of strategic importance among them. Smaller parties, on the other hand, could not make use of the changed situation, what's more they suffered painful setbacks; the same was true of independent candidates with a significant loss of mandates. As taken together, the two biggest parties emerged from this election with more mandates than before. Last polls on party preferences from the middle of October⁹ confirm this impression with about a third of voters still standing on the side of the government, and about a quarter on the side of MSZP (undecided also taken into consideration with the total). The two smaller parties in the parliament lie below the five per cent threshold as far as their momentary popularity is concerned.

8. It would be untimely, however, to definitely suggest the continuation of the existing party setup for a longer period. Though some elements of social integration like the crystallization tendencies outlined above, or the inner cohesion of large political blocks may have pointed to such a direction, some further points might be discerned with an opposite sign. To give only a tentative indication of them:

- problems of communication between camps and the lack of consensus with regard to social norms and criteria of evaluation (exacerbated by a segment of elite actors interested in maintaining these divides, implementing a kind of strategic behaviour theoretically conceptualized in the social network literature by Burt [1992] related to the concept of structural hole)
- possible massive frustrations related to prospects of stagnation, or maybe drop of incomes and employment for some period, after years of dreams of a fast catch-up to standards of the core EU-countries.

Beside these aspects of social integration, concerns related to possible future problems of system integration may also be raised, in a sketchy way again:

- difficulties of governance with regard to coordination of central and local levels (increasingly non-congruent)
- emerging problems related to the (hopeful) influx of resources from EU, a source of

⁹ See Hann-Karácsony based on the latest Median poll.

relief on the one hand, that of new challenges of managing (re)distribution on the other, with a “new actor”, EU appearing on the scene thereby

- increasing complexity of concerting outside (EU) and inside (central-regional/local) poles of decision; temptations of centralization as a simple way of reducing complexity.

9. A final word with an element of uncertainty, involving the question of 'delicate balance', a phrase in the title of my paper, related to the continuation (or discontinuation) of the Hungarian model¹⁰ having worked for nearly two decades. The abstract hint to a state of rising complexity calls, in a system theoretic sense, to the chance of a chaotic constellation (with responses to stimuli of change, whether by minor events far away, in a non-standard way). I would not like to conclude, however, with an apocalyptic suggestion. For just a touch, though, it may be in place to have a glimpse outside. Developments in the Visegrad countries, implying much uncertainty themselves, are in fact quite close to having a potential impact on Hungarian affairs as well. Discussions like those upcoming at the Brno workshop may also contribute to a more informed assessment of our own prospects.

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¹⁰ For related concerns on the occasion of recent developments, see Tölgyessy, P. (2006)

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APPENDIX

Table 1

The distribution of self-placements on a 10-point left-right scale in 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2006*

(adult population; panel respondents in the 2003/06 case; percentage)

| | Apr. 1994. (MTA–ELTE– KKCS) N=1000 | Febr.1998. (Szonda Ipsos) N=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA- project) N=1500 | Nov. 2003 (DKMKA- panel) n=451 | May 2006 (DKMKA- panel) n=451 |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| Liberal pole (1+2) | 14 | 14 | 18 | 18 | 12 |
| 3+4 | 28 | 29 | 21 | 20 | 24 |
| Centre (5+6) | 41 | 33 | 33 | 34 | 31 |
| 7+8 | 12 | 16 | 16 | 13 | 18 |
| Conservative pole(9+10) | 5 | 8 | 13 | 15 | 14 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>Poles together</i> | <i>19</i> | <i>23</i> | <i>31</i> | <i>33</i> | <i>26</i> |
| Polarization index (poles/centre) | .47 | .68 | .94 | .97 | .84 |
| No self-placement | 19 | 26 | 28 | 30 | 21 |

Table 2

Indicators of the relationship of party preference and left-right identifications, 1990, 1994, 2003

(10-point scale self-placements, distances between means)*

| Liberal–conservative dimension (10-point scale) | | |
|--|---|---|
| Apr. 1994. (MTA–ELTE–KKCS) N=1000 | Febr.1998. (Szonda Ipsos) N=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA-project) N=1500 |
| 1.31 (MDF–FKGP– KDNP 5.68/ SZDSZ–MSZP– Fidesz 4.37) | 0.46 (MSZP–SZDSZ 4.57/MDF- FKGP–KDNP– Fidesz 5.03) | 1.41 (MSZP–SZDSZ 4.32/Fidesz– MDF 5.73) |
| 1.69 (MDF 5.75–SZDSZ 4.06) | 0.95 (MSZP 4.85–SZDSZ 3.90) | 1.31 (MSZP 4.44–Fidesz 5.75) |
| 1.88 (SZDSZ 4.06–KDNP 5.94) | 2.16 (SZDSZ 3.90–KDNP 6.06) | 2.21 (SZDSZ 3.54–Fidesz 5.75) |
| .07 | .05 | .08 |
| sig.000 | sig.000 | sig.000 |

Table 3

Belonging to the supporters of government or opposition on self-identifications along the two ideological-political dimensions from 1994 to 2006

(Optimal Scaling categorical regression analysis; beta-coefficients and Importance values, N=1000 (1994); 1000 (1998); 1500 (2003); 460 (panel for 2003 and 2006)*)

| | 1994 | | 1998 | | 2003 | | 2003 panel | | 2006 panel | |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
| | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. |
| Left-right (right +) | .37 | .84 | .44 | .99 | .77 | .97 | .85 | .99 | .77 | .98 |
| Liberal-conservative (conservative +) | .14 | .16 | .03 | .01 | .06 | .03 | .02 | .01 | .04 | .02 |
| R ² | .18 | | .20 | | .62 | | .65 | | .62 | |

Table 4.

Inner deviations of left-right and liberal-conservative self-placements among the supporters of four leading parliamentary parties from 1994 to 2006

N=1000 (1994); 3000 (1998); 1500 (2003); 1000 (2006)

| Support for | Left-right dimension (10-point scale) | | | | Liberal-conservative dimension (10-point scale) | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Apr. 1994. (MTA-ELTE-KKCS) N=1000 | Febr.1998 (Szonda Ipsos) N=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA-project) N=1500 | Apr.2006. post-election (Tárki-Századvég) n=1000 | Apr. 1994. (MTA-ELTE-KKCS) N=1000 | Febr.1998 (Szonda Ipsos) N=3000 | Nov. 2003. (DKMKA-project) N=1500 |
| MSZP | 1.85 | 1.96 | 1.87 | 1,67 | 2.13 | 2.32 | 2.40 |
| SZDSZ | 1.85 | 1.90 | 1.66 | 1,19 | 2.04 | 2.16 | 2.48 |
| Fidesz | 1.92 | 1.89 | 1.96 | 1,69 | 1.90 | 2.17 | 2.74 |
| MDF | 1.62 | 2.05 | - | 1,35 | 2.10 | 2.38 | - |

Table 5

Government/opposition party preference, left-right and liberal-conservative self-placements explained by two models of independent variables (2003)

Optimal Scaling categorical regression analysis; beta-coefficients and Importance values in the direction of opposition parties, right and conservative poles; DKMKA Political Stratification Project; N=1500

| | Model 1. (objective socio-demographic variables) | | | | | | Model 2. (obj. socio-demographic variables+ ideological-political embeddedness) | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|------|------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|------|---|------|------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|------|
| | Govt/opposition party preference | | Left-right scale (10- point) | | Liberal-conservative scale (10-point) | | Govt/opposition party preference | | Left-right scale (10- point) | | Liberal-conservative scale (10-point) | |
| | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. | Beta | Imp. |
| Education | -.03 | .01 | -.03 | .01 | -.08 | .11 | .07 | .01 | .06 | .02 | -.02 | .02 |
| Father's education | .08 | .05 | .12 | .11 | .10 | .06 | .03 | .01 | .08 | .05 | -.10 | .13 |
| Wealth | .04 | .03 | -.05 | .00 | -.07 | .10 | .00 | .00 | .02 | .00 | -.04 | .05 |
| Type of locality (rural+) | .20 | .27 | .15 | .14 | .15 | .14 | .17 | .14 | .13 | .07 | .12 | .10 |
| Region | .17 | .18 | .18 | .20 | .19 | .31 | .13 | .08 | .14 | .09 | .16 | .17 |
| Age | -.21 | .45 | -.26 | .53 | .14 | .28 | -.24 | .30 | -.25 | .30 | .07 | .09 |
| Sex | .04 | .01 | .03 | .01 | .04 | .00 | .00 | .00 | -.02 | .00 | -.01 | .00 |
| Religiousness | - | - | - | - | - | - | .25 | .33 | .23 | .23 | .18 | .37 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|
| Ex-party (MSZMP membership) | - | - | - | - | - | - | -.11 | .12 | -.20 | .25 | -.09 | .08 |
| R ² | .10 | | .14 | | .08 | | .17 | | .23 | | .11 | |

Table 6

The relationships of party preferences of respondents and their core network partners, 1997-98, 2003 and 2006

1997-98: MTA-ELTE KKCS Omnibus, 2003: DKMKA Political Strat. Project, 2006: TÁRKI-Századvég Post-election; (percentage)

| Respondent | 1997-98 | | | | 2003 | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (liberal) party | Minor right-wing (conservative) | Major right-wing party | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (liberal) party | Minor right-wing (conservative) | Major right-wing party |
| | supporters | | | | supporters | | | |
| Major left-wing party (MSZP) | 71 | 35 | 10 | 12 | 80 | 35 | 25 | 10 |
| Minor left-wing (liberal) party (SZDSZ) | 8 | 39 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 49 | 1 | 2 |
| Minor right-wing (cons.) party (MDF) | 5 | 12 | 53 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 23 | 2 |
| Major right-wing party (Fidesz) | 16 | 14 | 26 | 70 | 16 | 14 | 51 | 86 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N (of ties) | 658 | 179 | 337 | 680 | 1058 | 118 | 92 | 1088 |

| Respondent | 2006 | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Major left-wing party | Minor left-wing (liberal) party | Minor right-wing (conservative) | Major right-wing party |
| | Supporters | | | |
| Major left-wing party (MSZP) | 77 | 39 | 27 | 12 |
| Minor left-wing (liberal) party (SZDSZ) | 4 | 36 | | 3 |
| Minor right-wing (cons.) party (MDF) | 1 | 3 | 41 | 1 |
| Major right-wing party (Fidesz) | 18 | 21 | 32 | 82 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N (of ties) | 465 | 33 | 22 | 417 |