

Voting Patterns on Hungarian Parliamentary Elections in 2002–2006
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Legislative elections in constitutional democracies everywhere reflect different variables of voting motivations determined by multiple factors. The most frequently observed causes are education, economic status, political orientation, religion, gender and psychological determinants often cutting across geographical areas which significantly differ from other regions.¹ The process of voting expresses citizens' sentiments primarily through political parties: the voting preferences mirror historical–economic–cultural and other determinants of political behavior.

In the post–communist transitional era, Hungarian elections show diverse results among various areas, raising the question if there are firmly embedded differences between some parts of the country. In the light of the election returns between 1985–2006, it appears that there is a more or less definite pattern. This study will examine the 2006 legislative returns and compare the results with the previous trends and especially the 2002 data, testing the validity of the findings indicating the presence of some fairly constant regional standards of voting. As a main indicator of past trends we use mostly the territorial (party) lists which provide more accurate picture of voting preferences than individual districts which in runoffs carry an indirect distortion of voters' primary preferences by other considerations.² For a deeper analysis of the recent 2002 and 2006 elections, we will compare the first run individual district voting outcomes, as they give the more accurate picture of the voters' real preferences.

The Background: From Reform–Communism to System Change (1985–1990)

The early signs of geographical diversity in voting appeared on the last one–party elections. The emerging voting pattern proved to be a precursor of later more steady trends on the political map of the transition. Although the 1985 election took place still under the one–party system, it became meaningful because the new Parliament became the system–changing legislature surrendering the monolithic party power in 1989–1990.³

The 1983 III Electoral Law prescribed a compulsory multi–candidate contest and candidates could be nominated against the official Patriotic People's Front (PPF)⁴ lists. Seventy–eight of seven hundred sixty–six independent candidates, who still had to pledge to the party platform were endorsed by local electoral meetings competing with the PPF preferred delegates. Of this slate, 43 won; most of them were Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP)⁵ members. Nonetheless the personality characteristics of these new legislators and their interpretation of the party platform reflected an increasingly emerging reform orientation within the ruling party, still dominated by party conservatives.

The electoral data about close contests and runoffs highlighted marked differences between the western part of the county (Transdanubia) and other regions with the former displaying more “independent” initiatives. This result was an early appearance of later trends on subsequent elections in a very different political atmosphere. The traditional East–West contrast or more precisely, the South–West/North–East voting axis already surfaced this time. The meaning of the modest appearance of “independents” at this juncture, however, was subdued: it claimed to reflect an attitude which “only wanted to move as far away from the party–state determined life as circumstances permit” but still stayed within the system.^{APPENDIX I}

Although the 1985 multi–candidate voting displayed the appearance of territorial differences, the first multi–party democratic elections in 1990 revealed distinct territorial

diversification. The “negotiated revolution” and compromise between competing elites resulted in the cornerstone Election Law (1989: XXXIX Law) which remained in force through 2006 with only minor modifications.⁶ The March 1990 territorial lists reflect the embryonic trends already present in 1985 and produced the first right-of-center conservative coalition government with the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) Independent Smallholders “Party (ISP) and Christian Democratic People’s Party (CDPP).⁷ The horizontal diversification of party preferences show that in the majority of the provinces in the West (Transdanubia), out of nine, five were won by the AFD and only three by the HDF while in all other northern and eastern areas the HDF scored pluralities. It is noteworthy in this respect that the AFD this time was a liberal anti-communist party and their alliance with the socialists followed only a few years later in the 1994 elections.^{APPENDIX II}

The highest percentage of the left votes on territorial lists and individual districts also emerged in the north and on the Plain but not in Transdanubia. Not surprisingly, the distribution of the communist vote also conformed to the national trend. The eastern and northern parts of the country delivered more HSWP II (later named the Workers’ Party)⁸ votes than the Transdanubian provinces and the strongest support was in Budapest with almost one-quarter (43,000) of their total.

Perceptions about the horizontal factors and their meaning vary: factual differences are palpable between the two major regions and were recognized by historians.⁹ The major vote return profiles show very graphically on the electoral map of the lists. The liberal AFD and the nationalist center-right HDF color the west of the Danube area decisively but not the east and center. Average returns for the liberals were between 17% and 30%, for the Forum 23%-28% and for the socialists only 9%-18% in the broad region. Both front runners scored lower in the east where socialists were relatively stronger with 10%-14%.

The Return of the Left (1994) and Right Backlash (1998).

A tectonic change took place in 1994 with the return of the Left in governance. The reborn Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) scored absolute majority in 1994 (54%) and entered into coalition with the liberals (AFD).¹⁰ Once again the horizontal schisms were observable on the political map. On all 20 territorial lists the HSP came on top and the AFD second and the margin of voting for non-leftist lists generally was still higher in the west. Likewise in individual districts candidates other than the socialists did better in the western areas but only in one province (Vas) did the Liberal AFD gain overwhelmingly. In three (other) Transdanubian provinces, however, right-of-center candidates won more mandates proportionately, while the socialists retained their overall controlling position (Győr, Veszprém and Zala) but on the average their winning margins in these areas were smaller.

The voting returns show the HSP relatively weaker in the southwest (Vas, Veszprém, Zala) and stronger in the east. The AFD retained strength in the west especially in the southwest corner. The total balance in a more muted way still reflects the already familiar pattern of earlier regional dissimilarities.^{APPENDIX III}

The pro-Left trend reversed itself in 1998 with the Fidesz-ISP-CDPP alliance’s clever electoral maneuvering. While the HSP won on the lists (32.92%) against the Fidesz (29.47%), the runoffs and individual districts put the Fidesz alliance in power.^{APPENDIX IV} The formerly liberal platform Fidesz underwent of a 180 degree change: it became a nationalist-conservative

alliance with the ISP and CDP and with HJLP¹¹ background support. The relative youth of the party, the (re) discovered nationalist appeal so far hidden under the surface proved to be a strong potion for voters affected by the previous government's radical economic restructuring plan.¹²

The vote return ratios show that in the far west corner the Fidesz–CP dominated and generally in Transdanubia the Fidesz margins were higher than elsewhere. In the close race the HSP scored higher in Budapest, the north and east but the Fidesz was also stronger in the south. Overall the 1988 results reflect similar geographic tendencies observed previously in 1985, 1990 and 1994, but the configuration of the political map changed: the preference for parties which are “further from the post–communist and/or social democratic forces” became stronger in the west and in many areas elsewhere.

2002: The Second Socialist–Liberal Coalition

Since the regime change, the political confrontation between Left and Right reached its climactic pinnacle in 2002. The right–of–center coalition gradually succumbed to the pressure of the dominant Fidesz–CP. Both the Independent Smallholders' Party and the Christian Democrats disintegrated as autonomous parties and were absorbed by the Fidesz–CP, which on common tickets with the HDF, stood alone in the 2002 showdown against the Left coalition. The voting results were almost the opposite mirror images of the 1998 pattern: the HSP narrowly outvoted the Fidesz–CP on the territorial lists but the individual districts and runoffs proved insufficient to reverse the outcome in favor of Fidesz–CP: the left coalition ended up with a narrow ten seat majority in the Parliament; the rift between the two opposing camps was the highest ever.¹³

The regional voting patterns were blurred but once again reflect ideological–economic factors. Participation was exceptionally high (70.53%) and there were regional differences: in the west there was an average of 70–75%, in Budapest 77% and the rest of the country only 65–70%. The runoffs resulted in even heavier voting: nationally 73.50%, in Transdanubia 71–77% while in the east and north–east only 65–70%. The arch of higher voting extends from the south–west in north–east direction (Vas, Veszprém, Zala) to Borsod–Nograd ranging from 66% to 91%. This compares favorably to the center (Plain) and western provinces where participation was typically 51–65% or lower.¹⁴

The HSP party territorial list results show low returns in Transdanubia and in the Center (16–30%) except for Budapest. Higher percentages were present in the north–east (BAZ, Heves, Nograd 60–80%), similar in main lines to 1998. The WP has no viable concentration except in the north–east and very low, while the AFD has some clusters in Budapest and East but polled lower in the eastern areas than in 1998.

The Fidesz–HDF lists show strength comparable to the 1998 figures: the strongest presence was in Transdanubia, especially in the west (56–70%) competing neck to neck with the HSP. The HJLP was the loser in this election – but still scored 4.51% nationally. They were weak across the map; their 1998 returns were higher and involved more votes in some central and eastern pockets.¹⁵ Nine out of twenty provinces preferred the HSP and AFD (popular vote 2,675,081) and eleven of the Fidesz–CP/HDF (2,306,763): the popular vote majority of the left was significant. With the exception of two (Baranya and Komárom), all left voting provinces were in the east and the Fidesz carried five in the center and east (Bács, Csongrád, Hajdu–Bihar Pest and Szabolcs).

The fluidity of voter preferences between the two rounds was corroborated on the

October 2002 self-governmental and local elections when a substantial shift materialized in the Left's favor. The right conservative forces lost their lead in many areas where they had prevailed in April but essentially they were still able to retain control in three western provinces (Győr, Vas, Zala); in all other areas the HSP and AFD gained the upper hand, signaling again the consistency of historical trends. The reasons are varied and they are related to already mentioned economic and cultural development levels.^{APPENDIX V}

EU Elections: 2003–2004

The European Union elections were not legislative elections but they were nationwide and thus the regional pattern is noteworthy. The 2003 accession referendum showed that 40% of Fidesz supporters but only 20% HSP voters stayed at home.¹⁶ The outcome was substantially influenced by the right oppositions rhetoric: "The referendum is indirectly a report card on the socialist-liberal government." The national participation ratio was 45.62% with 83.76% "yes" votes.¹⁷ Thus Hungary's voting was lowest among the ten joining countries but the approval rate was average. The regional picture shows the Transdanubian provinces (Baranya Győr, Vas and Zala) with higher than average turnout, but this did not translate into proportionately increased approval.

The participation was highest in Budapest (52.25%) and the west Transdanubia provinces of Győr (50.56%) and Vas (50.45%), the lowest in the northeastern agricultural areas, Szabolcs (36.21%) and Hajdu (36.88%). However, these western provinces barely cast affirmative votes over the national average, 83.76% (Győr 85.16%, Vas 85.25% and Zala 84.25%) which should have been higher if the right side had supported the accession more. In contrast, the eastern low participating districts had higher than average "yes" votes out of the pool of fewer active voters (Hajdu 84.39%, Szabolcs 87.30%, and Borsod 86.32%). In summary, the accession referendum did not deviate significantly from the traditional regional pattern.

The spread of voting is not significantly different on the 2004 European parliamentary elections. In west Transdanubia the HSP scores were low (below 20–25%) while in south Transdanubia higher (50%); this was surpassed in the north-east (BAZ, Heves, Nógrád). Unusually, the HSP was also low in the center this time as it was also in the eastern areas bordering Romania. Comparing to the 2002 party lists the pattern is similar but the percentages are significantly lower.¹⁸ The Fidesz-CP was the winner across the board, capturing all provincial capitals. Correlating to the HSP results, the south-Transdanubia Fidesz numbers are somewhat lower as well as in areas where the HSP was stronger, (Budapest and north-east) similar to 2002.

The HDF scored better in west Transdanubia as expected and also in two more clusters in Transdanubia and in the Plain;¹⁹ the HJLP did not show higher percentages anywhere.

2006: Continued Left Renaissance vs. Return of the Right

The parliamentary election campaign was an even more negative confrontation than in 2002. Since then the country has remained sharply divided between the right/left political camps, each including only one main force and several minor satellite parties. Because of the narrow majority of the socialist-liberal coalition, legislative and political confrontations remained on a peak for four years. The widening alienation in the society came to a showdown: the voters finally had to decide in which direction to move. The coalition gradually lost support after a

good beginning: the less than cautious wage increases combined with international economic trends had a negative effect on the Hungarian GDP. The weakening of the HSP under prime minister Medgyessy was reversed in the “last minute” (2005) by Ferenc Gyurcsány’s energetic socialist leadership challenging Viktor Orbán’s charisma on the right. The conservative–nationalist forces still pursued an “anti–communist” platform, a nostalgic foreign policy, took critical positions both against the US and EU and interfered in minority policies abroad. This populist position reinvigorated nationalistic appeals in the electorate which, however, in the end rejected this path.

Since the outcome of the elections resulted in a stronger socialist–liberal coalition and weaker right–of–center, the latter was expected to refrain from the excessive hostility displayed in the aftermath of the 2002 defeat, but this optimism proved to be groundless. The stakes were raised very high on both sides: according to the Fidesz expectations, a victory would have meant a final defeat of “communists and their descendents” while the left hoped if they lose, the right will have to redefine themselves. The outcome resulted in a more pragmatic and internationalist governance which ought to balance the excesses of the populist conservative side.

There were several parties competing but only four passed the legally required 5% threshold of national vote to enter Parliament. We concentrate only on these: the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) and the Association of Free Democrats (AFD) on the left, and the Alliance of Young Democrats–Citizens’ Party (Fidesz–CP)²⁰ and the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) on the right. To explore the political spectrum more accurately, we will also include for analysis the long standing extra–parliamentary reform communist Worker’s Party (WP) and the significant far right Hungarian Justice and Life Party (HJLP/Jobbik)²¹; as well as the Centrum Party, each of which gained over 1% but remained below 5% in 2002; and all of these parties failed to pass the 5% in 2006 as well.²² We will disregard all other minor parties with votes cast below 1% on both elections.

On the April 9 first round, the Socialists on territorial lists won by a narrow 1% over the Fidesz (43.21% and 42.04%), the Liberals followed with 6.50% and the Forum with 5.04 % respectively. These four parties are the only ones in the new Parliament; the HJLP/Jobbik gained a respectable 2.20%, while the WP (0.41%) and Centrum (0.32%) suffered humiliating defeats. In individual districts the socialists and liberals were leading in more districts than Fidesz and after the political maneuvering for the runoffs on April 23, a clear socialist–liberal coalition win firmed up and resulted in a comfortable parliamentary majority for them, albeit short of the two–thirds vote needed in important constitutionally defined questions. The HSP Parliamentary faction had 190 mandates of the total 386, the coalition partner AFD 20, Fidesz–CP/CDPP 164, HDF 11 mandates, and there is 1 independent (Somogyért).

TABLE 1

<u>Voter Population Bases in % of Territorial List Votes</u>											
<u>Left</u>			<u>Center</u>				<u>Right</u>				
<u>1998</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2002</u>		<u>1998</u>		<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>			
HSP	32.92	42.05	43.21	Centrum	3.90	Fidesz	29.47	Fidesz–CP/HDF	41.07	Fidesz/CP/CDPP	42.03
WP	3.95	2.16	0.41			ISP	13.15		0.75		—
SD	0.08	0.02	—			HDF	3.12				5.04
ADF	7.58	5.57	6.50			CDPP	2.59		—		—
						HJLP	5.48		4.37		2.20

44.53 49.80 50.12 (3.90) 53.81 46.19 49.27

Source: Magyar Közlöny (Official Gazette) Budapest No. 59, 6 May 2002 and No. 56, 15 May 2006.

TABLE 2
The Distribution of Parliamentary Mandates 2006

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats</u>
Hungarian Socialist Party	190
Association of Free Democrats	20
Hungarian Democratic Forum	11
Fidesz CP	141
Christian Democratic People's Party	23
Somogyért (Independent)	<u>1</u>
	386

Source: OVB (Election Committee), Népszabadság, 12 May 2006, p. 10.

The participation was somewhat lower than in 2002: nationally on the first round 67.83%, while on the runoffs only 69.39% (in 2002 70.53% and 73.50%). In regional spread, the voting participation conforms to the already established historical pattern and highlights traditional differences between west and east. Higher than average voting participation took place mostly in the western provinces and Budapest while the lowest remained, as always, in the east. With a few exceptions, the figures are similar to the 2002 numbers.

TABLE 3
Participation in National Elections on Territorial Lists in %'s

	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>		<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>
Budapest	77.52	74.25	Jász–Nagykun Szolnok	66.65	62.58
Baranya	71.82	68.00	Komárom–Esztergom	70.98	67.68
Bács–Kiskun	64.95	63.92	Nógrád	69.29	67.05
Békés	66.89	64.26	Pest	70.60	68.68
Borsod–Abauj–Zemplén (BAZ)	68.03	63.89	Somogy	67.96	65.21
Csongrád	67.33	66.26	Szabolcs–Szatmár–Bereg	65.83	65.51
Fejér	69.61	66.85	Tolna	68.53	66.61
Győr–Sopron–Moson	73.89	70.74	Vas	74.17	69.82
Hajdu–Bihar	65.96	64.66	Veszprém	72.61	68.87
Heves	70.12	66.52	Zala	70.74	67.42

Sources: Magyar Közlöny, No. 59, 6 May 2002 and No. 56, Vol. 2, 15 May 2006.

The territorial party list division among left–right parties does not register substantive deviations from the historically emerged model: the west is more dominated by right–of–center parties and vice versa the east by the left. To wit: Budapest, Baranya, BAZ, Csongrád, Heves, Jász–Nagykun–Szolnok, Komárom–Esztergom, and Nógrád were left controlled in both years; the

right was stronger in Bács–Kiskun, Fejér, Győr, Hajdu–Bihar, Pest, Sopron, Szabolcs, Tolna, Vas, Veszprém, and Zala, while Somogy moved from left to right column in 2006.

The electoral map numbers on the provincial level underwent only minimal changes between the two election years. As compared to 2002, about 5–10% increase is registered for the left in Csongrád, only but two other provinces recorded significant decreases: Fejér which went over to the right and Nógrád. There was somewhat more dynamics in the right votes: in Budapest, Békés, Hajdu–Bihar, Jász–Nagykun–Szolnok, Pest, Somogy, Tolna, and Zala. On the average there were about 5% more right votes in these areas and the only meaningful loss was in firmly conservative Vas from 56.54% to 52.66%. While these changes appear to boast successes on the right, these numbers correlated to the national returns showing that the right was (soundly) defeated.

TABLE 4
Territorial List Returns in 20 Electoral Units (provinces) in %'s in 2002 and 2006

	<u>LEFT</u>		<u>RIGHT</u>	
	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>
Budapest	55.48	56.68	38.54	43.31
Baranya	53.77	54.69	41.68	44.67
Bács–Kiskun	41.93	42.02	53.46	56.79
Békés	50.39	49.27	44.66	49.44
Borsod–Abauj–Zemplén (BAZ)	54.06	54.81	41.47	44.31
Csongrád	46.44	50.24	46.83	48.32
Fejér	48.90	43.83	46.75	50.11
Győr–Sopron–Moson	41.84	43.08	54.41	56.54
Hajdu–Bihar	45.09	43.67	50.47	55.12
Heves	58.47	54.32	41.12	44.60
Jász–Nagykun- Szolnok	54.30	53.14	41.64	46.76
Komárom–Esztergom	56.54	56.07	39.45	43.93
Nógrád	54.07	50.28	42.48	43.22
Pest	48.50	48.77	46.69	50.22
Somogy	48.66	46.78	47.32	52.15
Szabolcs–Szatmár–Bereg	46.79	48.76	47.80	50.26
Tolna	48.30	45.10	48.01	54.41
Vas	39.02	41.35	56.54	52.66
Veszprém	44.02	46.03	51.38	53.96
Zala	42.62	42.34	53.25	57.54

Source: Author's compilation based on National Election Committee (OVB) reports, Magyar Közlöny, No. 59, 6 May 2002 and No. 56, Vol. 2, 15 May 2006.

It appears then that the historical “south–west/north–east axis” is still firmly cemented and there is not much fluidity on the regional level. This is not necessarily a negative phenomenon in a democratic system, but it does need analysis and campaign planning in the special Hungarian context.

The participation and the breakdown of voting profiles in the geographical areas reflect ideological–economic factors influencing voter behavior. The configuration of these voting figures indicates that the disintegrated Independent Smallholder's Party's (ISP) hidden votes went more in favor of the Fidesz–CP than the socialists.²³

The individual districts' candidate preferences are also not significantly different between 2002 and 2006; however, as the following cluster analysis indicates, there was some fluctuation between the parties on the voting district level. In 2006 in West-Transdanubia the right dominates the individual districts while in the middle the left prevails, evening out the votes. In Budapest, the selected cluster districts in Buda are right but the Pest units are colored left. The south of the country is again more conservative but the east and north, particularly BAZ, are as usual left; the total balance was tipped in favor of the left candidates. While the distribution is very similar to that in 2002, at that time the result was in favor of the Fidesz-led coalition.²⁴

Comparing some data of the 2002 and 2006 elections, we will focus on certain cluster areas and investigate if there was a significant change between the right-left ratios. For this purpose, the selected clusters are those provinces/districts which since 1990 demonstrated stable (typical) voting patterns. In the cluster analysis we used the following party classifications:

Left Parties

Association of Free Democrats
Hungarian Socialist Party
Workers' Party

Right Parties

Alliance of Young Democrats-Citizens' Party
Hungarian Democratic Forum
Hungarian Justice and Life Party²⁵

The selected cluster areas are as follows:

Predominantly left dominated:

Budapest/Pest/VII and VIII districts
BAZ province

Mostly right dominated:

Vas
Zala
Budapest/Buda/I, II and XII districts.

In south-west Transdanubia the two provinces (megye) Vas and Zala are traditionally conservative areas (each includes four districts). In the capital city the conservative areas are in Buda (I, II, XII city districts) while in Pest, among others, the VII and VIII city districts are typical left dominated. In the north-east of the country, Borsod-Abauj-Zemplén (BAZ) province includes 13 individual districts with heavy left of center voting. The selection responds to the traditional south-west/north-east model, but by no means suggests that these areas are exclusively right or left; however, the predominant voting records indicate that these are the most stable regions showing little or no change since 1985.²⁶

A closer assessment of the two voting outcomes in the selected clusters sheds some light on the prevailing political sentiments in these geographical areas. As Table 5 below shows, overall there were no decisive differences between 2002 and 2006 numbers in the predominantly left and right provinces/districts as a whole. The differences move within 1-3±% and hence these are irrelevant politically. This however has a meaning in itself because it underlines the extremely rigid political culture in the clusters.

TABLE 5
Voting Results %'s in First Run Individual (Cluster) Districts 2002–2006

	LEFT		RIGHT	
	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2006</u>
Vas	39.60	40.47	57.03	58.17
Zala	33.69	39.17	54.22	55.57
Budapest I	46.68	44.31	48.09	55.10
Budapest II	45.37	46.99	49.15	53.07
Budapest XII	44.28	44.04	50.78	55.93
Budapest VII	58.62	59.53	36.27	41.76
Budapest VIII	57.98	57.24	37.83	42.27
BAZ	51.59	55.06	41.31	44.32

Source: Author's compilation based on OVB reports in Magyar Közlöny, No. 59, 6 May 2002 and No. 56, 15 May 2006.

Some experts foresaw the possible shift in certain cluster areas as a result of changing economic/social conditions, but this failed to materialize.²⁷ On the contrary, statistically meaningful changes took place mostly in favor of both the left and right clusters, further solidifying their homogeneous composition. We identified two clusters showing around 5% or more voter preferences in the first round for the left as compared to 2002: in Zala 33.69% to 39.17% and in BAZ 51.59% to 55.06%. These figures are based on the cumulative province-wide percentages and we disregarded the final outcome on the runoffs because the political maneuvering inbuilt in the Electoral Law distorts the original motives of voters: lower ranking candidates can “withdraw” “in favor” of potential preferred winners.

In the right clusters the combined figures of the candidates on the first round generally did not change significantly but in the Budapest districts I, II, and XII – all dominated by the right in both years – the right candidates further increased their voting share: in District I from 48.09% to 55.10%, in District II from 49.15% to 53.07%, and in District XII from 50.78% to 55.47%. In these areas the numbers prove that close support to the right-of-center parties increased instead of decreased, despite the lower national averages, meaning an even more strict adherence to their views and their strong resentment of left (“communist”) choices.

These differences are 5% or more, though they but sometimes fall below 5%; yet the change is noteworthy. In the left-dominated Budapest VII and VIII districts, some gains appeared in favor of the right, while it lost the election both nationally and locally: in District VII from 36.27% to 41.76% and in District VIII from 37.23% to 42.27%. These cases are intriguing because the overall national right-wing share declined as compared to 2002 (see Table 1); the districts were won by leftist candidates, yet the right votes increased – meaning that a right oriented radicalization took place in spite of economic and existential hardships, poverty and job insecurity.

A more detailed inquiry into the cluster areas on the voting district level (subclusters) provides some interesting information about the fluctuating voting preferences between 2002 and 2006. The left voting ratios did not change significantly in Vas and Zala provinces, nor in any of

the Budapest districts. On the other hand, in BAZ province in about half of the 13 electoral districts the left candidates' increased their share between 5–10% in already left dominated areas (Districts 1, 2, 5, 9, 11, and 12). This is compatible with the overall left dominance in the province. Interestingly, the right wing candidates increased their share in Zala where they dominate anyway. In Buda the right increased their presence in the I, II and XII city districts but surprisingly, also in the left dominated Pest VII and VIII city districts in all electoral units – yet lost to the left on the individual district level. This can be seen as a right oriented drift by some formerly left voters in the direction of nationalist conservatism. Similar phenomena also appeared in 2006 as compared to the former elections in BAZ province, where in six individual districts out of 13 the right advanced between 5–10% (Districts 1, 2, 4, 7, 10 and 11) but lost on the province level – this is a similar phenomenon to that observed above. These changes, albeit minimal and only on the local (district) level, are still meaningful because they indicate the possibility of softening the rigid party faithfulness and these local results run contrary to the national trend where the right declined in comparison to 2002.

Conclusions

In constitutional democracies horizontal divergences are more the rule than the exception in voting preferences and the examples are too numerous to cite.²⁸ The phenomenon is a natural one and it is an expression of the essence of democratic pluralism and diversity of political culture. The analyses in this study point to several factors causing the relatively steady voting patterns in certain regions. First, historical traditions seem to have influence on voting preferences. This is apparent in the 1985 results and can be also traced back to voting patterns in the 1945–1947 period. The Christian nationalist traditions were stronger in the west and this translated in 1990 and 1998 in a HDF and respectively Fidesz preference, partly because the region was a “winner” in the economic transformation.

On the average between 1994 and 2002, the left was stronger in the less developed areas than in some modernization-driven provinces. Within the capital city in the typical working class districts, the left retained dominance while in Buda in the affluent communities of both old and new elites, the HDF, Fidesz and the right radical HJLP prevailed. The right conservative parties retained some strongholds in 1998, 2002 and 2006 in the far western region with solid majorities. The economic playing field for Hungary being limited, the right parties advocate left principles in right packaging and the apparent conflicts often boil down to ideological confrontations instead of pragmatic alternative economic policies.

The findings about the selected clusters in this study indicate that basically the voters' preferences remained static over a long period of time. This is also related to the standard participation ratios among different areas in the country. The relationship between participation, geographical profiles and voters' motivation falls outside of the perimeters of this study and is difficult to research because of the legal constraints about privacy in voting; consequently we rely on survey data and relate these to empirically available territorial factors.²⁹ The observed shifts in our cluster areas do not point to a weakening of the political coherence of these concentrations of left/right forces, on the contrary, our data convey the strengthening of the ratios especially in the right camp. The phenomenon underlines the significance of the rigid confrontation of the main political ideologies in the country and we cannot conclude that there is definitely a move away from the traditional clusters. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that on the sub-cluster level

there were movements both for and against the continued dominant cluster status quo.

There is no space here for a detailed sociological analysis of clusters but some key characteristics ought to be stated. In the Transdanubian right dominated provinces of Vas and Zala, there are deeply embedded religious traditions where Christian (Roman Catholic) values and mentality still have a broad mass basis.³⁰ The proximity of the area to the West, to the Austrian border, the former Habsburg influence and the absence of Turkish occupation in the 16th–17th centuries may also be regarded as historically influencing voter choices more in favor of national conservatism than social democracy and liberalism.³¹

In the capital city, the left–bank clusters are typical former working–class districts where in spite of economic–social problems and concomitant unemployment, the left remained dominant and aside from some infra cluster shifts, maintained their socialist/liberal profiles. The Buda administrative districts include the affluent communities of both old and new elites and as our analysis proves, they are center–right and radical dominated; in these clusters the right vote shares even increased in 2006.

The left cluster BAZ province was historically more Protestant influenced and in the post–WWII era it became the favored location of the newly developed socialist industrial centers. Because of worker migration and economic improvements in the party–state era, the population basis is understandably left leaning: not only is the HSP strong but it also gave the relatively highest votes for the former reform–communists: The Workers’ Party.³² The infra–cluster numbers on the local level prove, however, that the province is not quite homogeneous and includes relatively strong right voter sub–clusters.

The assessment of these clusters must be related to the broader context of the 2006 elections. The contest between the two sides of the political divide remained as sharp, if not sharper, than in 2002 and the confrontation continues. The balance of votes remained extremely close but it is better for the left than in 2002 and the parliamentary majority is definitely more in favor of the winners. Both sides of the political map conducted their campaign as if it would be an either/or choice and the “political survival or death” of Hungary would depend on the outcome. While this appears to be an overstatement, there is a grain of truth in it. At risk was the future trajectory of the country for a longer period of time. In case of the Fidesz allies’ victory, the outcome would have been cast in the colors of the “ultimate defeat of communism and post–communism”. Re–emerging past historical nostalgias, Hungaro–centrism and radical nationalism could have caused a deteriorating relationship with the surrounding countries and the international community at large, especially the EU and the US.

The prevailing left political forces – at least in their self–image – promise a smoother, more moderate internationalist and cooperative policy instead of confrontation. The outcome may lead to a critical self–assessment of the right policies and possibly a more effective major force could emerge on the right. The socialist–liberal victory formed the 3rd coalition and proved that the left policies are a steady stream in Hungary and not just an aberration originating in the party–state system. If the left would have failed, the right would have focused on this and, taking the governance the third time since 1990 would have emphasized its role as a permanent ruling force.³³

Looking at the regional electoral map and within it, the clusters, it is obvious that in individual districts the first round voter choices were extremely close. Approximately half of the voters are leaning toward the national conservative views depicting a divided insecure society.

Thus the survival and success of the 3rd socialist–liberal coalition depends on their ability to avoid major mistakes as well as the right parties’ success in their recovery and reform.³⁴ The new governments’ task is not easy: significant restrictive steps are needed to balance the budget for continued financial confidence of international investors; there is need to secure GDP growth, manage the entry into the Euro–zone and simultaneously to cope in substance with key institutional reforms (healthcare, welfare, and pensions).³⁵

Thus the future success of the new/old left, leaning toward the Blair–Giddens concept of social democracy, depends primarily on the economy and on cooperation in society as well as by a “reformed” right – the future is wrought with serious uncertainties.³⁶ A positive outcome could dampen the deep ravine splitting society and conversely a failure would deepen the abyss and probably cause further radicalization.

The lessons of 20 years electoral patterns suggest that regional dissimilarities are deeply rooted in past traditions and cultural influences and urban–rural differences tied to relatively low population mobility.³⁷ It could be reasonably expected that with Europeanization, further economic growth especially in the current underdeveloped areas,³⁸ the breakup of traditionally homogeneous communities might speed up. Such trends combined with generational changes, public administration reforms and the replacement of the entire electoral system³⁹ could offset deeply rooted both left and right dominance in some regions. Likewise, the seemingly ossified political party system may also undergo mutations and could ferment in unexpected ways, possibly including a stronger center party.⁴⁰

Taking these factors into account, the identified major voting patterns, including the clusters, ought to serve as a compass in future campaigns. The clusters together provide twenty–eight individual mandates in Parliament, which could have serious significance in close elections. If the major political forces aim at changing the geographical status quo, they ought to put in place effective policies for substantive developments of hitherto losing regional areas in the transition process. This would also conform to the EU integration expectations.

APPENDIX I
Correlated Percentages of Run-Off Elections and Close Races
by Geographic Distribution (1985)

<i>No. of Seats</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>No. of run-offs</i>	<i>No. of close races</i>	<i>Combined Percentage</i>	<i>35% And Above</i>
14	Baranya	3	2	35.7	Transdanubia
20	Bács	1	3	20.0	
15	Békés	1	5	40.0	Plain
26	Borsod	4	5	34.6	
67	Budapest	6	15	31.3	
16	Csongrád	3	4	43.7	Plain
13	Fejér	2	2	30.7	
15	Győr	3	5	53.3	Transdanubia
18	Hajdu	3	3	33.3	
12	Heves	0	3	25.0	
10	Komárom	1	4	50.0	Transdanubia
8	Nógrád	1	4	62.5	North
29	Pest	4	5	31.0	
12	Somogy	0	1	0.8	
20	Szabolcs	2	6	40.0	North-East
15	Szolnok	2	3	33.3	
9	Tolna	1	3	44.4	Transdanubia
10	Vas	1	2	30.0	
13	Veszprém	2	3	38.4	Transdanubia
10	Zala	2	3	50.0	Transdanubia

Comments: Out of the 10 counties with above 35%, 7 are in Transdanubia and the North and 3 are in the Plain and North-East.

Source: 'Az Országgyűlési Választások Eredményei'; data computed on basis of Election Results Reports, *Népszabadság*, 10 June 1985, pp. 2-3.

APPENDIX II
Territorial List Results (1990)

<i>A) First Round Totals: Territorial Lists</i>	<i>B) First Round Totals Budapest</i>	
Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF)	24.73%	28.38%
Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD)	21.39%	27.13%
Smallholders Party (ISP)	11.73%	5.06%
Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP)	10.89%	12.90%
Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ)	8.95%	11.52%
Christian Democratic Party (CDPP)	6.46%	5.71%
Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP)	3.68%	4.13%
Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP)	3.55%	3.54%
Agrarian Alliance (AA)	3.13%	N.A.%

Sources: Magyar Hirlap, 28 March 1990; Magyar Közlöny, 13 May 1990, pp. 1082–83.

Note: Only parties which scored above 3% are listed. 4% was needed for entry to the legislature.

APPENDIX III
The Highest Scoring Parties on the Territorial Lists (1994)
(Percentages)

	<i>HSP</i>	<i>AFD</i>	<i>HDF</i>	<i>ISP</i>
Budapest	35.15	20.77	14.94	4.60
Baranya	32.09	21.75	10.27	8.48
Bács	26.70	18.07	12.82	12.36
Békés	31.93	19.35	9.75	12.40
Borsod	40.12	16.26	9.60	6.93
Csongrád	26.88	20.64	10.64	11.38
Fejér	33.37	19.52	9.85	10.42
Győr	26.75	22.21	12.68	10.89
Hajdu–Bihar	35.47	17.49	10.49	9.91
Heves	34.61	20.84	9.68	7.45
Jasz–Szolnok	34.97	19.39	9.57	10.27
Komárom	38.72	22.89	8.64	8.37
Nógrád	34.79	16.61	10.41	6.23
Pest	29.88	20.69	12.00	9.62
Somogy	40.60	15.42	9.03	12.37
Szabolcs	32.64	16.25	12.00	8.79
Tolna	31.25	18.07	10.65	8.88
Vas	25.83	25.63	12.31	11.32
Veszprém	29.00	22.31	12.23	10.44
Zala	29.37	18.87	12.35	13.91

Source: Janos Kecskes, Gyorgy Nemeth (eds.), *Országgyűlési Választások* (Parliamentary Elections 1994) (Press and Print Lapkiadó, Kiskunlacháza 1994), pp. 393–403.

APPENDIX IV
Territorial List Returns (1998)

HSP	32.92%	HJLP	5.48%
FIDESZ-CP	29.47%	WP	3.95%
ISP	13.15%	HDF	3.12%
AFD	7.58%	CDPP	2.59%

Source: National Election Committee (OVB) reports 25-30 May 1998.

APPENDIX V
Territorial List Returns of Three Left Parties and FIDESZ/HDF (2002)
 Combined left HSP–AFD–WP votes (Highest–Lowest % Returns)

	<i>Highest Vote Range</i>		<i>Lowest Vote Range</i>
Budapest	55.47%	Bács	41.92%
Baranya	54.26%	Győr	41.82%
Borsod	54.06%	Vas	39.01%
Szolnok	54.29%	Veszprém	44.02%
Komárom	56.54%	Zala	42.61%

FIDESZ-CH/HDF votes (Highest-Lowest % Returns)

Bács	49.83%	Budapest	31.57%
Győr	57.14%	Borsod	37.80%
Vas	53.48%	Heves	36.68%
Veszprém	48.07%	Szolnok	37.96%
Zala	49.48%	Komárom	36.34%

Source: Author's compilation based on National Election Committee reports *Magyar Kozlony*, 6 May 2002, No.59, pp. 3785–3952.

Comments: These seemingly contradictory results indicate that the left forces did not fare the best in the west but did better in the rest of the country. On the contrary, even if the FIDESZ numbers are proportionately similar, their firmest stronghold still remained in the west, where they retained exclusive control over four counties (Tolna, Vas, Veszprém and Zala).

Notes:

¹ For purposes of elections, generally the following regional identifications are used. There are 20 self-governing administrative units in Hungary, 19 counties (“megye”) and Budapest.

Center

Budapest
Pest

Plain (East)

Bács–Kiskun
Békés
Csongrád
Jász–Nagykun–Szolnok

Transdanubia (West)

Baranya
Fejér
Győr–Moson–Sopron
Komárom
Somogy
Tolna
Vas
Veszprém
Zala

North

Borsod–Aabauj–Zemplén (BAZ)
Heves
Nógrád

Northeast

Hajdu–Bihar
Szabolcs–Szatmár–Bereg

The full names of the counties originate in the post-Trianon border changes which cut across county lines; these traditional names are still used.

² For an in-depth discussion of regional voting patterns, see Barnabas Racz, “Regional Voting Trends in Hungarian National Elections 1985–2002,” East European Quarterly XXXVII, No. 4, January 2004, pp. 439–459.

³ Barnabas Racz, *The Hungarian Parliament in Transition* (The Carl Beck Papers, Pittsburgh, 1989). See also “L’Ungheria al bivio: Il recambio delle istituzioni politiche” in B. Racz, R. Tokes and I. Szelenyi, *Partiti, Parlamento e Società nell Ungheria post-Comunista* (Rome: Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1990), pp. 13–32.

⁴ Hazafias Népfrent, the front mass organization of the Communist party.

⁵ Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt–MSZMP.

⁶ Generally recognized as satisfactory, the electoral law is one of the most complex systems in Europe. Citizens have two votes: one for the individual district candidates and one for 152 territorial (party) lists. Since parliament has 386 seats, the remaining 58 mandates are derived from the “fragment votes” on the basis of complex mathematical formulae favorable to the entrenched party elites. For complete text of the amended law, see *Magyar Közlöny* (Official

Gazette) 1994, 7, 20 January 1994, pp. 288–295; for a full analysis see Barnabas Racz and István Kukorelli, “The Second Generation Post–Communist Elections in Hungary in 1994; *Europe–Asia Studies* 47, No. 2 (1995), pp. 251–279.

⁷ Magyar Demokrata Fórum (MDF) Független Kisgazda Párt (FKP), Keresztény Demokrata Néppárt (KDNP).

⁸ Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt II (MSZMP) later named Munkáspárt (MP).

⁹ Mihály Vajda, the philosopher referred to this on election night on TV Budapest, as the “South–West–North–East axis”, see Heti Világgazdaság (HVG) 6 April 1990, pp. 72–74. The concept is not quite accurate: the southwest in Transdanubia is a conservative corner, but the North–East tip of the arch is left–dominated in BAZ province. In the middle the Budapest region is mixed. Nonetheless it is approximately correct that “north” of this axis the country is more developed while “south” of the arch is less so. The former mostly was free of the 16–17 Century Turkish occupation while the areas “south” of the arch were controlled by the Ottomans. Yet the reference to this “axis” is a helpful orientation point.

¹⁰ Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP) Association of Free Democrats – Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (SZDSZ).

¹¹ Magyar Igazság és Iret Pártja MI P.

¹² The economic “shock programme”, submitted by Lajos Bokros finance minister in 1995, introduced radical measures reducing actual wages and increasing taxes to provide a solid foundation for an economic recovery. Partly successful, it gave powerful ammunition for the opposition against the government.

¹³ Consult Barnabas Racz, “The Left in Hungary and the 2002 Parliamentary Elections” Europe–Asia Studies, Vol. 55, No. 5, 2003, pp. 747–769.

¹⁴ The 1988 party lists show a similar pattern, see Jozsef Meszáros–István Szakadár, Magyarország Politikai Atlasza (Hungary’s Political Map) (Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest 2005) Map 26.

¹⁵ Ibid, Map 4.

¹⁶ Szonda–Ipsos Poll 15 April 2003. The same polls also indicate that 54% thought that the HSP and only 21% that the Fidesz did the most for Hungarian EU membership.

¹⁷ See National Election Committee /OVV/ final report Magyar Közlöny (official Gazette) 18 April 2003, pp. 19–24. A summary survey of relevant data about all joining countries in Népszabadság 10 April 2003.

¹⁸ The Fidesz took a more skeptical position on the referendum, consult Meszáros–

Szakadar Magyarország ...Map #30.

¹⁹ Ibid, Maps # 27, 28.

²⁰ Fidesz ran in an electoral alianace on common tickets with the Christian Democratic People's Party – in Hungarian KDNP.

²¹ The HJLP ran on common ticket with the smaller right radical “Jobbik” party.

²² The Centrum and WP were below 1% in 2006.

²³ For the complete election reports, see Országos Választási Bizottság (OVB) National Election Committee Report in Magyar Közlöny (Official Gazette of the Hungarian Republic) #56, Vol. 2, 15 May 2006, pp. 4465–4629.

²⁴ OVB Report Népszabadság, 25 April 2006, p. 7, and Mészáros–Szakadár...Maps #9–14.

²⁵ Since the Centrum scored below 5% in both years, their votes could not be included in the comparative scales.

²⁶ There are some others we could use for illustration purposes but we found more fluctuations elsewhere.

²⁷ György Fischer, “Sikerek es Kudarok”...(Successes and Failures in Election Forecasts) in J. Mészáros and I. Szakadár, Magyarország Politikai...pp. 17–37. Also János László Lazányi, “A 2002-es országgyűlési képviselőválasztás térképen” in Kurtán–Sándor–Vass, Magyarország Politikai vkönyve (Demokrácia Kutatások 2003), Vol. II, pp. 1028–1042.

²⁸ E.g. most states and regions (South) in the US, Spain and Italy.

²⁹ See for a discussion of these issues Robert Angelusz and Robert Tardos, “A választási részvétel hazai atlaszához” (Election Participation) in Mezáros–Szakadár, Magyarország Politikai Atlasza, (Gpndolat Kiado Budapest 2005), pp. 67–83.

³⁰ For a political–sociological analysis of Tolna, Vas, Veszprém and Zala provinces, see György Szoboszlai, Parlamenti Választások 1990 (MTA Társadalomtudományi Intézet, 1990), pp. 345–414.

³¹ See also Robert Angelusz & Robert Tardos, “A választási részvétel hazai atlaszához” (The electoral participation on the political map) in J. Mészáros, I. Szakadar: Magyarország politikai...pp. 67–83. (Authors refer to the Iván Szelényi research project about the status–consciousness in society as electoral determinant.)

- ³² Barnabas Racz, “The Far-Left in Postcommunist Hungary: The Workers’ Party (The Carl Beck Papers, University of Pittsburgh 1998).
- ³³ Françoise Fejtő, “The Voters Rejected the Populist Alternative” Népszabadság 29 April 2006, p. 5.
- ³⁴ “Orbán and Leadership Crisis”, Népszabadság 3 May 2006, pp. 1–3.
- ³⁵ Péter Bihari, “Therapies After the Elections”, Hétvége 6 May 2006, pp. 2–3.
- ³⁶ Péter N. Nagy: “Politikai Cooltura” Népszabadság–Hétvége 6 May 2006, p. 1, and Iván Vitányi “Mi történt?” (“What happened?”) Ibid, p. 3.
- ³⁷ A major migration from rural to urban areas, from agriculture to industry took place by the 1970’s, see Lewis A. Fischer and Philip Uren, The New Hungarian Agriculture (London: McGill–Queen’s University Press 1973), especially Ch. Six, pp. 93–103.
- ³⁸ For questions of horizontal and vertical mobility, see Zsuzsa Ferge, “The Strata in Our Society” in Társadalmunk Rétegződése, (Budapest Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1983).
- ³⁹ For Bureaucratic and Administrative Reforms, see Oszkár Füzés, “Changes 2007” Hétvége 29 April 2006; see also “System Reform” István Tanács, Népszabadság 18 May 2006, pp. 2–4.
- ⁴⁰ The 3rd socialist–liberal coalition programme in the Summer of 2006 calls for the replacement of the county (megye) system and organization of seven administrative regions instead. The plan is sweeping, needs 2/3 majority vote in Parliament and the approval of the opposition is uncertain.
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