ABSTRACT—New democracies, including post-communist countries, are associated with weakly institutionalized parties and unstable party systems. Nevertheless, Hungary developed a stable party system, which is classified here as a two-bloc system. The paper presents the contingent events that led to institutionalization, and identifies the regulative, normative, cognitive and emotional mechanisms through which the party system reinforces itself.

KEYWORDS—party system, institutionalization, path dependence, Hungary

This paper was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Science.
I. Introduction

The establishment of new democracies means fundamental institutional change. An intuitive expectation is that new regimes are more fragile. Institutionalization takes time.

Competitive party systems also need time for consolidation. In the beginning, parties are often unstable. The breakdown or fragmentation of existing parties, successful formation of brand new parties, radical changes in party ideology, and high volatility of electoral support are all common in newly established democracies. The pattern of party competition also gets crystallized gradually. Party alliances are often temporal in the beginning, often resulting in unexpected coalitions.

The level and speed of institutionalization actually shows a large variance. Hungary, the subject of this paper, is an extreme case, if not an outlier, from the viewpoint of party and party system institutionalization. Section II presents the descriptive evidence pointing to the expectational character of the country.

The rest of the paper outlines a framework which may help account for the extreme case. As this is the very first paper of a multi-year research, the emphasis is on the establishment of a conceptual-theoretical framework and its potential explanatory value. This paper does not yet target at a thorough empirical verification.

The method is mostly qualitative, which fits to a case study. Section III reveals the basic assumptions and introduces the path dependence approach on which the paper relies. It also puts forward certain concepts which should turn into a full theoretical background at a future phase of the project.

Section IV presents the contingent events which eventually led to a historical path. The highly selective and analytical history between 1988 and 1998 emphasize the competing networks of intellectuals, the role of electoral rules, and the contingent decisions on party alliances and transformations.

The institutional mechanisms that reproduced and reinforced the party system are displayed in Section V. The paper argues that regulative, normative, cognitive and emotional aspects of the party system make any change highly difficult. The role of agency is limited by institutionalization.

A partial change still happened in 2010. Section VI gives reasons for the success of two small parties without dropping the organisation-centred and endogenous approach of the paper.

Throughout the paper, the Hungarian party abbreviations are used, which are explained in the Appendix.
II. The Party System in Hungary

Hungary is a third-way democracy. Its democratic institutions were established in 1989-1990. As a new democracy, it is expected to show all the symptoms of low institutionalization. Instead, the party system in Hungary has been conspicuously stable since the end of the 1990s. The main features of the party system are as follows.

1. Dominating Parties

In Hungary, trade unions and other interest organisations play a limited role. The political agenda is clearly set by parties (Enyedi-Tóka 2007). Section IV/2 presents the factors that led to the almost unchallenged position of parties. The situation is similar at the lower levels of government. While small local governments often elect independents, county and city councils have always been dominated by parties. The cognitive map of citizens and elites (see V/3) associate public life with parties.

2. Stable Parties

The first freely elected parliament was formed by six parties. Until 2010, only one new party could enter the parliament for a single electoral cycle (1998-2002). Even that party (MIÉP) was not really new, as it splintered off from a parliamentary party (MDF).

In 2010, two old parties fell out and two new ones entered. Still, 83 percent of MPs belong to parties that had factions already in 1990. (For a longer analysis, see Section VI).

Party factions are highly disciplined. Not voting together is an extraordinary event. Party centres effectively regulate deviation from the party line (see V/1). The systemness of parties is high (Enyedi and Tóka 2007).

3. Less and Less Parties

A decreasing number of party lists reach the 5 percent threshold and get into the parliament. While the effective number of parties was 3.4 in 1998 (and even higher in 1990), this number dropped to 2.5 (2002), 2.3 (2006) and 2.0 (2010). The number of relevant parties has decreased even better and reached the absolute lowest number, exactly 1, in 2010. (In all cases, common lists were counted together even if their parties formed separate factions for tactical reasons.)

The same pattern can be observed at the local and county level. Presently, the number of effective parties varies between 1.8 and 2.7 in counties. The change in the Laakso-Taagepera Index ranges between -0.6 and -1.9 since 1998 (Soós forthcoming).

4. Bloc Networks

Parties are embedded in organisational networks. As usual in democracies, all parties have satellite organisations like youth or women organisations. The bonds to these
associations are very strong. Party representatives sit in the boards of associations, which, in return, have some kind of representation in the party.

Parties also have strategic associates. The connection with them is usually formalized in written agreements. These organisations have more decisional autonomy and often have their own source of income.

Finally, parties allies with ad-hoc partners in an instrumental way. The links are expected to be temporary, but some connections deepen into a long-term relationship. The borders of part networks are blurred.

Party networks are inter-organisational resource networks. They mobilize resources as a joint effort. The resources include money, organisational infrastructure (like offices), information, access to media, ideology and activists.

What makes the party system interesting in Hungary is that networks are embedded in blocs. The parties do not have the same organisational ecosystems (though there may be overlaps). Sometimes, they fiercely compete with each other and their relationship is laden with many conflicts. Still, the networks cooperate with each other and form government coalitions.

In Hungary, there are two relevant blocs, which together form a party system.

5. **Two-Bloc System**

The party system in Hungary is closed. There is no party that participated both in a left-wing and right-wing coalitions. Parties cohere along the left-right division. The party composition of blocs can be found in the Appendix.

The left-right polarization is high in Hungary compared to other Central European countries (see Enyedi and Casal Bértoa’s computations based on the European Election Survey and other literature). The volatility of votes became low after 1998 and party identification exceeded the average of old democracies (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2010).

These data refer to a well-institutionalized party system with a bipolar structure. It is not a two-party system, as the competition takes place between party alliances. However, in terms of the institutionalized political logic, it has some resemblance to two-party systems. The internally more complex structure of blocs makes the management of unity within blocs more difficult. Section V presents the mechanisms which provide blocs with a relatively high level of stability.

Such a two-bloc system is not unique. In its organisational logic, it is similar to, e.g., the French party system.

While 2010 saw a step towards a dominant party system, this development cannot be interpreted as a sign of weak institutionalization (actually, the opposite might rather be the truth). One cannot know whether 2010 is the beginning of a new trend. If the right-wing party bloc loses its majority in 2014, the bipolar system may fully return.
III. Research Strategy and Conceptual Framework

1. Research Strategy

This paper implements a research approach with two distinguishing features.

1. Party system institutionalization (or the lack of it) is usually explained by electoral behaviour, e.g., with the theories of socio-economic cleavages or changing socio-economic status of voters. This paper chooses a different strategy by claiming that the high level of party system institutionalization can be explained in a politically endogenous way. The analysis will focus on organisations and their relationships and activities.

2. Unlike the survey-based and variable-oriented approaches, this explanation partially uses process-tracing to remain close to the empirical reality and provide a more valid account for an outlying case. Case study is an appropriate strategy for such research questions.

2. Conceptualizing Institutionalisation

The analytical framework is inspired by several theoretical approaches of organisational theory, political science, and sociology.

Path dependency analysis

The common scheme of every path dependence approach implies a contingent event and a subsequent deterministic causal pattern (Mahoney 2000). The path begins with an early historical event which cannot be predicted on theoretical basis. Such contingent events are unexpected for the theorist, but have long-term consequences. These consequences are the very historical sequences that are in the focus of path dependent analysts.

Path dependency analysis has two types: self-reinforcing and reactive sequences (Mahoney 2000). Reactive sequences are "chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events" (Mahoney 2000:526). Events in a reactive sequence are both reactions to temporally previous events and causes of subsequent events. While the historical process presented in the next section involves some level of reactive events, it is rather a set of contingent events than a single reactive sequence.

This paper is partly based on the idea of self-reinforcing sequences (see Section V). Self-reinforcing sequences are based on institutionalized patterns that reproduces itself. The reproduction relies on increasing returns. Self-reinforcing sequences are theoretically identical with institutionalization.

Institutional reproduction is explained by various mechanisms (Mahoney 2000): (a) The utilitarian explanation presupposes rational agents whose cost-benefit calculation under the given constraints and benefits results in institutional reinforcement. (b) Power explanations have similar assumptions concerning social actors, but focuses on the role of the power elite in institutions which distribute costs and benefits unevenly.
If an institution favours an elite, elite members have both the self-interest and means to support the institution. (c) The functional framework claims that institutions are reproduced because they serve a significant function for the system. Useful institutions are favoured by the system, which makes them expanded. As they serve the system even better, they eventually become consolidated. (d) Legitimation explanations emphasize the importance of social actors' beliefs about right and wrong. Institutions are reproduced because they are perceived legitimate. Once an institution gains some legitimacy, it may set the standards of right and wrong, which leads to a positive cycle of legitimation.

**Organisational and Sociological Theory**

Richard W. Scott defines institutions as a combination of regulative, normative and cognitive aspects: “Institutions are composed cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.” (Scott 2001:48) Economists and political scientists usually emphasize the regulative dimension, sociologists the normative aspect, and anthropologists and organisational theorists the cultural-cognitive component.

While Mahoney's utilitarian mechanism broadly covers the regulative component of institutions and the legitimacy explanation includes the normative side, the cognitive pillar must be added as a mechanism through which institutions are reproduced. Both radical constructionists (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and the organisational school of new institutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) point out that common understandings form the basis of all social life. People have a deep need to attribute meaning to the world in which they live. Weick (1979, 1995) believes that organizing is basically a sense-making activity and one needs organisations to eliminate ambiguous situations and give identity. Another useful approach focuses on frames, i.e., cognitive structures that interpret social life (Polletta and Ho 2006). A contingent event may trigger a self-reinforcing process by creating a frame which favors a group or organisation. This gives rise to further sense-making capabilities and the eventual institutionalization of the frames.

Scott (2008) has tentatively added emotions as another dimension to the concept of institution. Emotion management as a stabilizing strategy of political institutionalization should find a place in political analysis. Loyalty may stem from emotional identification, which hinders not only exit, but often voice as well. A historical contingency may result in some identification with an organisation, which provides competitive advantages. That, in turn, yields a virtuous circle and eventual institutionalization. Randall Collins (2004) points to interaction rituals that produce group solidarity and emotional energy. Rituals are potentially relevant social techniques in generating emotions.

**Incentive Theory**

Some authors approach the problem of order in organisations from the point of view of incentives. Clark and Wilson (1961) and Wilson (1989) distinguish among four types: (1) material incentives: tangible rewards like salary; (2) solidary incentives: intangible rewards such as socializing, team spirit and esprit de corps; (3) status
incentives: intangible rewards of prestige and recognition; (4) purposive incentives: intangible rewards related to the sense of common goals and group mission.

In party studies, Angelo Panebianco (1988) explored into the reasons why people become members of political parties. His typology includes three incentives that contributes to active political participation in the life of parties. (1) The incentives of identity include ideological as well as solidary incentives. (2) Material incentives comprising of welfare services and reward systems. (3) Status incentives refer to the reputation a party can provide its members with titles, medals etc.

Adding up

At this early stage of research, this paper does not transform all these typologies and theoretical constructs into a unified theory. Nonetheless, offers a good set of analytical concepts, which allows the researcher to explore into the ways in which party systems are reinforced.

What makes institutions like party systems solid? All the above presented typologies and theories offered mechanisms through which institutions are reinforced. Mahoney and Scott can be combined around four institutional dimensions: (1) regulative mechanisms, with an emphasis on the importance of coherent elites and their regulative power; (2) normative mechanisms, including legitimation activities; (3) cognitive mechanisms, involving sense-making and the creation and maintenance of frames; (4) emotional mechanisms generating attachment.

The other two approaches add important points. Incentive theory calls attention to what is at stake. Institutions are not neutral. Their stability is partly rooted in the capability of distributing material, status, solidary and purposive incentives.

The literature on rituals, and especially Collins' theory, points to a major means by which organisations, including political organisations, generate emotion and solidarity, maintain and alter norms, present the power of the leaders, and distribute status and benefits. Observing party rituals to members and/or citizens seems a promising theoretical approach from the viewpoint of party system analysis.

IV. Path Formation

Paths are created by formative events. The path dependence of the two-bloc system in Hungary was created by nine key historical events and processes.

1. Intellectuals' divided socialization.
2. Weak civil society and interest representation.
3. The Socialist party preserved the infrastructure of the former ruling party.
4. Majority institutional design.
7. Fidesz' strategic choice: becoming a conservative party.
8. Counter-reaction: the electoral alliance of the opposition parties.
9. Locking-in: leaders' decreasing room for manoeuvre and ever decreasing opportunity for strategic choice.

Apart from the first two points (which refers to historical processes), the role of agency was very important in all these cases. Structural constraints allowed a set of choices, although prior strategic decisions more and more limited the available options.

1. **Inherited Elite Divisions**

   Hungary inherited a traditional division of intellectuals between 'populars' (népiesek) and 'urbans' (urbánusok) from the 20th century. The division can better be understood in the context of central and peripheral countries in world development (Fricz 2009). Centre countries have universalistic thinking, as their ideas rule the world. Peripheral countries, which aims to catch-up, are divided between those who accept the Zeitgeist and those who promote the continuity of national heritage. Such a division between cosmopolitans and patriots exists or existed in many countries. What makes Hungary different is the historical process that formed two elite 'tribes' along this divisions. As a consequence, the opposition of the Communist system of the 1980s divided into two blocs. Parties was grounded on elite groups. SZDSZ, the liberal party, grew out of the urbans and MDF recruited populars. They became the two leading parties after the first free election in 1990.

   What can be seen here is not the power of ideas, but that of networks. Organisation usually comes from organisation. The pre-existing intellectual networks, watched but tolerated in Communist times, provided a good basis for parties in a poorly organized society (see next point).

   Not only is the division important in this contingent condition, but also the resulting elite cohesion. Especially urbans were active political dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s and felt much administrative harassment. The camaraderie, which emerged from common experience, yielded a relatively high level of elite cohesion. This was partly the reason why political parties proved to be strong relative to other post-Communist countries already in the 1990s.

2. **No Rival to Parties**

   Political parties are “the only game in town” (Enyedi and Tóka 2007) in the public life of Hungary. The lack of rivals is the outcome of several developments.

   1. One of the essential components and preconditions of the Communist system was the uncontested rule of the Party. At the end of 1940s and in the 1950s, almost all civic and business organisations were prohibited, taken over or – like the churches – placed under close and constant surveillance.

   2. The revival of the civil society at the end of the 1980s was a sign of political decline of the Communist party-state and the re-politicization of the Hungarian society. Anyway, it was a political phenomenon; in fact, a prelude to multi-party competition.

   3. The emerging civic elite was incorporated into the new parties. That happened
partly because of the personal ambitions of civic activists, partly because of the needs of parties for capable leaders. The loss of leaders impeded the country-level organisation of civic efforts.

4. The relatively low level and insecure of income and the consumption orientation of the middle class provide limited resources from donation. Many civic organisations depend on public money, which makes real opposition unlikely.

5. Like in general in Europe, the process of de-industrialization and transformation into a service sector-dominated economy has made trade unions less and less relevant. In addition, the largest trade unions had Communist routes and low credibility. Finally, trade union allied with the Socialists and their leaders were co-opted. As a result, they become part of one of the blocs, losing much of their autonomous power.

There are relevant interest groups in Hungary. However, all of them promote special interests. Therefore, they do not compete with parties in the visible scene of public life. The political agenda is always set by the parliamentary parties.

3. Transformation of the Communist Party in 1989

The communist system was about to collapse in Hungary in 1989. The only official party, the Party, of the ancient regime had to choose a path. One option was a renewal within the existing framework, the other the formation of a new party. By choosing the first, they could preserve the organisational resources of the mighty ruling party, while the second option could secure more credibility and a more reform-oriented party elite and membership. The choice was unconstrained in the sense that the uncertainties of the future made both options potentially acceptable. For idiosyncratic reasons, the first option was chosen: the Party became a party by preserving its extensive organisational resources (though changing its name). The price for organisational competitiveness was the lack of credibility. MSZP has always been vulnerable to the blame of having roots in the Communist dictatorship.

4. Institutional Choices

The establishment of democracy was equal to a radical institutional change of political institutions. From our point of view, two changes are relevant. First, the government system give priority to the prime minister, who hire and fire all the ministers without parliamentary consent and can be replaced only by constructive motion. That favors the head of the largest party even in a coalition government. Second, the electoral system was designed to discourage the fragmentation of representation and promote the formation of majority coalitions. Two institutional barriers proved to become especially effective. (a) Candidates had to collect 750 recommendations from citizens to be eligible. (b) Parties that gain less than 5 percent (4 percent in 1990) of the votes cannot send representatives to the parliament. These two criteria also have a joined effect. Parties have to run candidates in many districts to have the chance for the threshold, which, in turn, needs a relatively extensive organisation of collecting recommendation and managing local campaigns. As the later discussion in this paper demonstrates, these contingent choices eliminated certain path alternatives.
5. Right-wing Coalition in 1990

The electoral fight between the urban SZDSZ and popular MDF ended with the victory of the latter. To a certain degree, this result can be seen as a contingent event. The very existence of multi-party competition as well as the individual parties were new to citizens. Except for the former ruling party, choosing among parties without policy record was somewhat random for many voters. In this respect, the literature on the low level of institutionalization of new democracies is right. Small individual decisions in the campaign explain the victory of MDF over the main competitor SZDSZ better than any universal theory.

The winning party of the election, MDF, opted for a coalition with two other right-wing parties due to a combination of personal and ideological reasons. That was not only the option. A cooperation with MSZP, the former Communist party, was not excluded before the election. The weak electoral result of MSZP and its choice of organisational continuity made this option less attractive after election, but not impossible. MDF with its liberal-conservative ideology could have made a coalition with the liberal parties, SZDSZ and Fidesz, too. Intellectual networks and the strategic potential of a bloc formation explain post hoc, but do not predict the coalition of the three parties.


After the 1990 elections, the Socialist party, MSZP, was driven into a 'political ghetto', as it was said at that time. The transformation of the economy was painful. The new parties, especially the government parties, liked to blame former Communists on the uncompetitive conditions of the country and the dictatorship that had caused them.

The 'ghetto' experience actually made MSZP more united. The elite cohesion was high anyway as a consequence of the common socialization in the party state of the 1970s and 1980s. The leaders and activists developed a team spirit, which, in spite of factionalism, prevented any secession until today.

The situation began to change in 1992–1993. The parties were not deeply embedded in society, so they formed their sense-making identity around the specific elite conflict between 'populars' and 'urbans'. The two big parties, MDF and SZDSZ, almost inevitably sank into a culture war in order to gain clearer normative and cognitive borders.

The organisational logic began to work. SZDSZ looked for alliance. As Fidesz, the other liberal party, seemed an unproblematic partner, the liberals turned to socialists. They dropped anti-communist rhetoric and generated a symbolic conflict (the so-called Democratic Charta) in which liberal and former communist public figures cooperated.

The formative event was the aftermath of the national elections in 1994. The Socialist Party, the former Communist organisation, gained a parliamentary majority due to the electoral system which favoured the winner. As it still had the notoriety of being a non-democratic organisation, the liberal party (SZDSZ) was invited to form a coalition. This alliance disposed over a two-third majority, required for the amendment of the Constitution and basic laws. This choice had a long-term consequence.
7. Fidesz' Choice and the Right-wing Alliance

Fidesz, the small liberal party with a young leadership, could choose between more than one strategy. (1) Following its liberal partner, it could have joined the coalition, if not a member, at least an external supporter. This would have resulted in some good positions for the leaders, especially in county and local governments, and potentially government positions after the next elections. (2) It could have opted for the preservation of their ideological character with the hope of playing the role of king-maker. If neither the liberal-socialist, not the right-wing alliances would have gained a majority, Fidesz, open to both sides, would have had a considerable blackmailing potential. (3) Fidesz had the seemingly unlikely option of cooperating with the former members of the right-wing parties, which ruled between 1990 and 1994.

The choice, again, was unconstrained, although the number the above-presented set of options was limited by the prior decisions of other parties. Fidesz opted for an electoral agreement with the right-wing and, eventually, a conservative turn with the hope of becoming the leading force of the opposition. The organisational logic was far more important than ideological commitment.

The opposition parties accepted a limited electoral alliance for the local elections in the autumn of 1994. Despite the electoral rules which the government coalition changed right after the elections for its benefit, the right, written-off for its fragmented nature, was competitive with coalition parties. The cooperation at various levels continued. In 1998, the Fidesz—MDP electoral coalition won the national elections and could form a coalition with FKGP, an agrarian party.

The right-wing bloc was born.

9. The Road to the Path

1994 was partly reactive and partly contingent. The apparent organisational advantages of the Socialists and perceived ideological gains of the coalition put a high competitive pressure on the other parties. Under the given electoral and media circumstances, the logical reaction of the opposition parties was their alliance.

On the other hand, party leaders still had some decisional autonomy. They could choose a different path as the future seemed uncertain and players still perceived alternatives (Fidesz as a potential king-maker, a 'small coalition' of the conservative parties without Fidesz, SZDSZ as external supporter or internal opposition of the coalition). Nevertheless, all the parties made their respective decisions.

What might seem an ad-hoc cooperation for the two groups of parties became the basis of an institutionalized two-bloc system. What was possible for party leaders in the mid-1990s became practically impossible five or ten or fifteen years later. Leaving the bloc was impeded by self-reinforcing regulative, normative, cognitive and emotional mechanisms.
V. On the Path

Section III listed four self-reinforcing mechanisms which may contribute to the reinforcement of paths.

(1) Regulative mechanisms, which selectively distribute both material and status incentives. The analysis especially focuses on power elites, which reinforce themselves.

(2) Normative mechanisms, which provide the feeling of legitimacy of being right.

(3) Cognitive mechanisms, i.e. sense-making and frame management, which are not neutral, but favour certain behaviour and inhibit others.

(4) Emotional mechanisms. Emotional attachment makes certain behaviour uneasy and others rewarding. The sense of belonging to a (political) community and the identification with its goals imply such attachment.

1. Regulative mechanisms

The basis of regulative mechanisms is the existence of rules that are implemented in a predictable manner: you can be sure in advance what kind of sanction you can expect for a certain behaviour.

Regulation is of a coercive character. Its effectiveness is usually limited to the distribution of solidary and purposive incentives in voluntary organisations. However, parties are different, as they have access to government resources. Moreover, as parliamentary parties play 'the only game in town' (see IV/2), party statuses are also of higher value than in any other voluntary organisation. Therefore, parties' regulative power matters for leaders, activists and clients. It much less affects followers and the other parties and political organisations in the bloc.

The major regulatory mechanisms are as follows.

a) Party jobs. These positions are not particularly well-paid, but open up opportunities for ambitious people.

b) Cabinet positions. Party leaders strive for ministerial and other top government jobs.

c) Government-controlled positions. Due to the almost uncontested strength of parties, a kind of spoil system emerged in Hungary. The system is less extensive than e.g. the Austrian Proporz system used to be, but provides material and status incentives to a significant amount of party activists at both the central and local levels. The positions also include board memberships in public agencies and state-owned companies.

d) Opportunities in the bloc. Committed intellectuals and journalists may obtain jobs, contracts, scholarships and invitation to well-paid expert groups.

e) Elected positions. Party politicians want elected positions by definition. Parties thoroughly control the selection process.

An important stabilizing mechanism could be called career lock-in. In many cases, people have no specific party commitment. Such a commitment is often established
gradually and somewhat accidentally. Those who get a job, promotion or contract under a particular government may get stuck in their career or even lose their job after election. For personal reasons, they commit themselves to one of the blocs to win life opportunities back. On the other hand, those who exposed themselves in favour of a party may lose a lot if they lose their party’s support. Under the given normative, emotional and cognitive constraint, it is very unlikely that a person who committed to a bloc can successfully switch sides. What one can see in career lock-in is a kind of personal path dependence. It also contributes to the path dependence of the party system, as it strongly discourage exit and stimulate loyalty.

Another specific mechanism is, like in most democracies, candidate selection. The active use of this mechanism maintains a high level of discipline in the parliamentary and city factions. Those who do not follow the party line cannot run at the next election, or get only a symbolic position on the party list. The only major exception is the popular leaders with good name recognition. The party needs them anyway, so, in theory, they have more freedom. In fact, the normative and cognitive mechanisms (see later) limit their autonomy too.

A third mechanism is the dissolution of local organisations. Especially Fidesz like to use this tool to regulate the rank-and-file, but almost all parties adopted this measure. Members of the dissolved organisation do not lose their individual membership, but have to gain acceptance in another party chapter or in the reorganized local party organisation within a certain time. A major source of conflict is the support for the candidate chosen by the party centre against the will of local activists. As the question is often the preservation of party alliances, the dissolution of local chapters is sanction that provide stability not only to parties, but also to party blocs.

In all forms of regulatory mechanisms, parties create or exploit dependence. That provides the party with considerable stability. While the above discussion focused on the selective incentives of status and positions, regulation also maintains norms (excluding those who question them), affects cognitive maps (as they solidify the organisational borders of bloc and party) and generate emotions (by means of the ritualistic nature of many regulative acts).

2. Normative mechanisms

The two blocs provide a moral framework about social obligations, appropriate life, and common values.

In terms of content, the left represent antifascism, anti-antisemitism, Europeanism, and (at the same time) widespread welfare provision and self-care. The right values anticommunism, nation, order and family. Nevertheless, one must not attribute too much importance to these norms. They do not influence actual policies particularly deeply. For instance, Socialist had a xenophobe campaign in 2002 and Fidesz has always been very active in the European People's Party of the EP.

What really matters is bloc loyalty as a norm. The left and right labels of the blocs do not refer to sophisticated ideological systems (though parties have detailed programs), but moral communities. The left and right universes centre on a set of symbols: the left or right label, party name, the person of party leader, and strong opinions on historical events like the long statehood of Hungary and its dismantling in 1920, the political
system before and during the Second World War, the Communist system, the revolution in 1956, and the previous governing periods of the own bloc and those of the rivals. The priority of moral obligations to the political community does not allow any kind of policies, but focuses not on policy questions.

The two main normative mechanisms are socialization and symbolic inclusion/exclusion. Continuous socialization takes place in party activism and events where rituals play a central role. Participation in common activities also serves as a mechanism to inculcate certain values. Party rituals like commemorative events, congresses, mass demonstrations manifest the moral expectations of the party to members, followers and the wider public.

Symbolic inclusion and exclusion is an important tool of moral government. Symbolic inclusion certifies certain people or ideas that live up to community norms. Symbolic exclusion excommunicates the heretics. Symbolic communication takes place in rituals and media communication. Praises and blames follow the logic of appropriateness.

Other mechanisms are important. Career lock-in certainly plays a role. In such personal careers, normative commitment becomes ever deeper. The dissolution of local organisations is often triggered by a deviation from bloc norms and serves as a symbolic tool to strengthen the moral community of the left or right.

Normative mechanisms greatly contribute to the stability of the bloc-system. On the one hand, rival parties in the same bloc are kept together by normative action. On the other hand, the two blocs are separated by loyalty norms, which also further the cognitive component.

3. Cognitive mechanisms

Human beings have a need for the understanding of life. A repeated action which the same meaning is attributed to is institutionalized. A party system is cognitively institutionalized if there is a constitutive schema which is taken for granted by political actors.

The cognitive schema is built on (1) the recognition of parties as the main actors in public life and (2) a shared understanding of the left-right division.

As Section IV/2 presented, parties are uncontested to set the national agenda. This central position is reinforced by a notion of parties as the problem-solvers of public problems. When something is perceived as a problem, journalists and citizens alike attribute it to parties.

The two-bloc system has become institutionalized cognitively by the 2000s. The mental map of the left-right division is widely accepted in a tacit manner. This orthodoxy can bee seen when journalists automatically classify political actions as left or right, and when they invite a left and a right-wing representative for any debate. Through a mimetic mechanism, social actors subconsciously learn to structure public life as left and right. Many language constructs help this mechanism.

4. Emotional mechanisms

Emotional attachment to the party and bloc symbols is a potentially effective
stabilizing mechanism. Devotion to democracy or the idea of party competition is very low in Hungary. Still, the identification with individual parties is quite high. Enyedi (2005) indicates the parties’ power to generate identification. Enyedi and Tóka (2007) point out that partisan identification increased to 52 percent in 2002, which was higher than the average of the third-wave democracies (39 percent), and even more than the average of old democracies (49 percent). Such emotional bonds function as significant stabilizing forces.

This devotion is produced and reproduced by rituals and symbolic language. Especially the right organised mass demonstrations in the 2000s. Rituals like these allow people to feel community spirit and identify with it. Loyalty to the leaders is also generated by such events.

Political language is far from being neutral. Words are infused with emotions. References to community symbols have a positive connotation, while the words that describe the political enemy are packed with negative feelings.

The generation of emotions by parties generated increasing returns and, eventually, increased stability. Making the switching of sides becomes emotionally impossible for activists as well as committed citizens.

These four institutional mechanisms keep the party system on the path and account for the relatively high stability in Hungary.

**VI. Changing Path (or Not)**

**2010**

The elections in the spring of 2010 saw some major developments. SZDSZ and MDF, two parties which had been formed at the end of the 1980s, fell out of the parliament. On the other hand, two new parties, LMP and Jobbik, managed to reach the electoral threshold. What explains this institutional change? Is that a permanent transformation of the party system?

**Off-system Roots**

The two bloc system has the material, normative and sense-making resources to crowd out competition and maintain the system. This system, however, did not control all aspects of social and political life. After all, our story is going on in a democracy, not a totalitarian system. While official media and politics have been clearly dominated by the two blocs, the ever more important communication on the Internet, events like concerts and festivals and the activism of small circles can happen without much mainstream-party influence.

In this “underground” world, two subcultures organized themselves and eventually led to the organisation of two new and successful parties. Both greens/anti-globalists and national radicals spontaneously could establish their own worlds. These subcultures produce organisational resources, normative and cognitive structures which can
function independently of the mainstream distribution of resources, norms and sense-making. To a large degree, both are resistant to the pressure of the institutionalized politics.

Both subcultures had their own historical roots in Hungary. The first large anti-communist movement (“Dunakör”) protested against a dam on the Danube. While parties integrated their leaders at the end of the 1980s, many of the intellectuals and activists remained in contact in small circles. Anti-globalist groups were then influenced by global ideas like fair trade and environmentalism. Védegylet

The radical right had an already somewhat successful past before Jobbik, as MIÉP became parliamentary party between 1998 and 2002. MIÉP still exists, but the new generation replaced its old-fashioned, pre-WW II ideas and organisation with an Internet-oriented, creative approach, which use a language accessible to the youth of today. While MIÉP played an important role in the socialization of new radicals, the radical right movement survived more in (sub)cultural and social events than through the functioning of MIÉP. In all probability, concerts of nationalist bands, the self-organisation of football fans and national festivals contributed to the emergence of a national-radical movement.

**Opportunity Structure**

The two-bloc system became highly institutionalized by the end of the 1990s. Still, no institution is fully resistant to change. The weakening of reinforcing mechanisms may result in institutional change. It is not difficult to point to the dwindling institutional instruments in both major organisational components of the left bloc, which opened up opportunities for new political forces.

With the gradual leaving of the more or less unified elite of former dissidents, SZDSZ saw serious personal rivalry and factionalism without having appropriate methods of conflict resolution. The regulatory power of the centre drastically weakened, which also undermined the cognitive and normative mechanisms. As a result, SZDSZ practically collapsed internally as an organisation. It was a parliamentary party with as long a tradition as democracy in the country, and put up no candidates for the national elections of 2010.

MSZP’ leader, Ferenc Gurcsány, divided not only the electorate (which may be highly beneficial in the two-bloc system), but also its own party after his resignation as party president and prime minister. His rivals blamed him on the crushing defeat in the 2010 elections. That opened a still ongoing fight between factions.

The decreasing cognitive and normative capacity of the left seriously weakened its demonization capacity. Both Jobbik and LMP, based on their respective organisational background outside the two-bloc system, could successfully propagate their own interpretation of the social reality. The new sense-making forms broke in and got access to many voters. The two parties were in the right place at the right time.

**A New Trend?**

With independent organisational resources, and norm-making and sense-making capabilities, both national-radicals and green-alternatives could take the opportunity,
which opened up as a consequence of the losing balance of the two party-system.

Nonetheless, the disintegration was by far full. The right-wing bloc remained not simply intact, but internally reinforced by the large-scale victory over the 'old' enemy. MSZP was shaken, but preserved its extensive organizational capacities. Jobbik never wanted to step out of the left-right system. Its ambition is to be accepted into the right-wing bloc. LMP is the only party explicitly outside the two-bloc system, though an alliance with the Socialists is always on the table. Time will tell whether the end of the two-bloc system began in 2010 or it was just a one-time challenge.

VII. Concluding Remarks and Research Agenda

Hungary, a new democracy, has a relatively well-institutionalized party system: party blocs are closed and stable, fragmentation has become ever lower, volatility was low for a considerable period (though 2010 somewhat broke the trend) and polarization is high. (For a detailed comparison, see Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2010.) Among the post-communist countries in Central Europe, Hungary is an extreme case.

The stable path was formed several contingent events. Political agency played an important role in this process. Once the institutional path came into being, the regulative, normative, cognitive and emotional mechanisms reinforced the two-bloc system. Leaders might felt more powerful at the head of their stabilized parties, but their room for manoeuvre actually got more limited. The very institutions that was created by certain actors' decisions became constraints for the same persons.

Future research in this approach has to face at least three challenges.

1. Further empirical research is needed to better support the theoretical claims and deepen our understanding about the actual ways in which institutionalization and institutional reproduction take place.

2. The somewhat heterogeneous list of potential institutional mechanisms that stabilize and reinforce party systems proved to be useful as a loose analytical framework. However, such a list does not constitute a theory. Future research should contrast the various approach at a deeper level and generate a more coherent theory of institutionalization and path development.

3. The paper is a within-case study presently. An account for the extraordinary level of party system institutionalization requires more comparison at a later stage. This is the method which can show the country-specific reasons.
Appendix

**Parties in Hungary**

MDF = Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum). The largest party in 1990 and the leading force of the right-wing coalition of the first democratic government. It became a mid-size party in 1994, and a small party and the junior member of the right-wing bloc between 1998 and 2010.

Fidesz = the name was originally acronym (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége = Association of Young Democrats), later simply a trade mark with the addition "Magyar Polgári Szövetség" (Hungarian Civic Association). A small liberal party in 1990, the senior party of the right-wing bloc since the electoral period of 1994-1998.


FKGP = Független Kisgazdapárt (Smallholders' Independent Party).

KDNP = Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic Party). A historical party which was a small party in the 1990s, fell apart after 1998, and Fidesz gradually integrated its remnants into the right wing bloc.

MSZP = Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party), The former Communist party with a dark totalitarian past and, therefore, low democratic crediblity in the beginning. A small party in the first period, the leading party of the left-wing bloc since 1994, the senior party in the governments of 1994-1998 and 2002-2010.

SZDSZ = Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Association of Free Democrats). The second largest party in 1990, a small party and junior member of the left-wing bloc between 1994 and 2010.

LMP = Lehet Más a Politika (Politics Can Be Different). A green-alternative party, which surprisingly entered the Parliament in 2010, rejects the bloc logic and ideologically also balances between them.

Jobbik = the name has a double meaning: it means "the one that is better" and refers to the Right at the same time. A radical right movement which distinguishes itself with anti-gipsy policy proposals.

**Party Blocs**

Left: MSZP and SZDSZ (plus many organisations in their networks)

Right: Fidesz, MDF, KDNP, FKGP (plus many organisations in their networks)

Left out: MIÉP and the two new parties: Jobbik and LMP

**Electoral periods**

1990-1994: MDF+FKGP+KDNP coalition, SZDSZ, MSZP and Fidesz in opposition,
prime minister Antall József (1990-93) and Boross Péter (1993-1994), MDF.
1994-1998: oversized MSZP+SZDSZ coalition (Prime Minister Gyula Horn, MSZP), MDF, FKG, KDNP and Fidesz in opposition.
2002-2006: MSZP+SZDSZ (Prime Minister Medgyessy Péter and Ferenc Gyurcsány, MSZP), Fidesz and MDF in opposition
2002-2006: MSZP+SZDSZ (Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, MSZP and Gordon Bajnai, independent), Fidesz and MDF in opposition
2010-2014: Fidesz (Prime Minister Viktor Orbán) with a 69% percent majority, MSZP, Jobbik and MIÉP in opposition.

References


Scott, Richard W. and Gerald F. Davis. 2007. Organizations and Organizing: Rational,


