Critical Elections?

Party Identification and Party Preference at the 2010 Hungarian General Elections

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Abstract

The 2010 general elections presented something that post-transition Hungary has rarely seen before. The parliamentary elections, described as ‘revolution in the polling booths’ led to a two-third majority of the joint list of Fidesz and KDNP. This fact provides a motivation to investigate the event by placing it into the framework of critical elections. The paper grasps the changes in the level of party identification and its relation to the shift in party preferences, assuming that the changes are not only deviations from the long term trend but manifestations of processes that have not been visible before. An extensive analysis is performed with three different methods to measure party identification, on three datasets. First, the Hungarian ESS data is used for the traditional measure to follow the changes from 2002 to 2010. Second, a new method is applied to examine voters’ preferences in two different points in time, while changes in electoral bases are also considered. Third, the transformation of the electoral support for the two main Hungarian parties, Fidesz and MSZP, is analyzed, using monthly data between 2006 and 2010. The paper concludes that it seems to be grounded, both empirically and theoretically, to assume that a critical election occurred in Hungary in 2010.

Keywords: critical elections, party preferences, party identification, trends in voting, Hungary
1. Introduction

The 2010 general elections presented something that post-transition Hungary has never seen before. The unique character of the landslip-victory of Fidesz-KDNP lies not in the 2/3 majority of the government coalition\(^2\) but the extraordinary shift in party preferences from one election to another. It is no surprise that a substantial part of the latest Hungarian political science literature deals with this phenomenon. The centre of inquiry is mostly the proportion of votes cast for the winner parties along with the percentage of seats the government coalition holds in the Hungarian Parliament. In this paper, we go beyond the logic of previous research and approach the subject in the framework of critical elections. Investigating from this point of view we focus on other things than solely the degree of victory. Of course, phenomena that are easy to observe, like the emergence of new parties, the changes in the party system, or the unusually high turnout, can also give us guidelines of what was happening; still we feel the need to dig deeper to interpret the 2010 election results. Only a few factors that we cannot observe directly, but they might help us understand the ongoing processes: the shift of positions on the left-right continuum, the relative importance of the election results, the changes in cleavages, the changes in long-term party identifications, or the significance of protest-voting.

All these factors should be examined, in order to answer the question whether the 2010 Hungarian general elections satisfy the conditions of a critical election. The difficulty to give an exact answer does not only derive from the scale of our research but from the fact that critical elections have a very important ‘prerequisite’ that only arises long after the election, namely consolidation of the new order. Whether an election is critical or not depends on – among other factors – the public satisfaction with the new government, the reaction of the opposition, the international economic and political situation and every geopolitical occurrence out of the national government’s scope of action (Crewe and Thomson 1999, 65). What a researcher can do is to identify symptoms that refer to the election being critical and nothing more. Therefore, in our paper we do not intend to give a definite answer to the main question but to provide guidance by investigating an important sub-phenomenon, namely the changes in the relationship between party preferences and party identifications.

In the next section we briefly review the literature of critical elections, putting special emphasis on the different types of elections, followed by a brief description of the Hungarian political context. In the fourth part, the changes in party preferences and identification are analysed using various methods of measurement. First, the traditional measure of party identification is applied, followed by an introduction of a newly constructed indicator. Finally,

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\(^2\) The 1994 elections also lead to the 2/3 majority of the winning coalition of MSZP and SZDSZ, who won 71.77 % of the mandates.
we describe the changes in preferences and identities using monthly data. In the fifth part, conclusions are drawn and an answer to the main question is suggested.

2. Election types – A theoretical introduction
The idea of critical elections was introduced by V. O. Key in 1955. In his work he argues that an election should be considered as critical if the voters are extraordinarily concerned with the election results, electoral turnout is unusually high in relative terms, and new cleavages structure the electoral competition (Key 1955, 4). The above factors bring the party system into a new equilibrium and the changes prevail through time (Nardulli 1995, 11). Critical elections, however, are pretty rare events to find (Nardulli 1995, 10). The reason for this is that it is essential to look beyond party preferences or election results and consider politics as the encounter of different processes. The problem is that the end of one and the beginning of the other is not easy to identify (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Nardulli 1995), and the whole purpose of investigation is to find the break between the ongoing processes.

In this paper the definition described in the edited volume *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective* (Evans and Norris 1999) is applied. The authors further operationalize Key's (Key 1955) original definition to make distinction between elections easier. The starting point is that elections differ in terms of degree, endurance and direction of the evoked change (Evans and Norris 1999, xxvi; see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Election types in terms of changes induced](source: Evans - Norris (1999), xxvii, Figure 1.3)

*Maintaining elections* reflect the status quo, where no new issues, cleavages have risen and no substantial change can be observed in voters’ party identifications. Previous research indicates that the 2006 Hungarian general elections met these criteria, and the movement between the

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two blocks – evolved in 2002 – decreased to its minimum (Karácsony 2006). Maintaining elections do not allow votes to shift between party blocks in large amounts, only to a degree that leaves the balance of power relatively unchanged.

*Dealining elections* are characterized by the weakening relationship between the parties and their voters, potentially destabilizing the current party system setup. *Deviating elections* involve drastic decline in the electoral support of one or more parties. The sharply increasing amount of protest votes against the governing parties that not necessarily involves a corresponding decline in the proportion of voters identifying with these parties is the most expressive example of an election of this kind. These changes running their courses simultaneously lead to the growing distance between party preferences and party identification. Government party identifiers vote for the rival party or for small, newly emerging ones due to their dissatisfaction with the government’s policy-making. The main point in this case, however, is that dissatisfaction does not change party identities in the long run. Since party preferences tend to follow long term identifications, the change of preferences show “trendless fluctuations”, not causing any significant changes in the setup the party system. *Secular dealignment* on the other hand entails the slow and gradual changes of the long-term party identifications, but does not involve the strengthening of other commitments. A majority of the contemporary elections fall into this category (Evans and Norris 1999, xxix).

*Secular realignment* is the continuation of the above process, in other words it is the persistent strengthening of recently emerged party identifications. Dealignment has to come first to give way to the development of new commitments.

*Critical realignments* are elections where party identifications suddenly change to a great extent, causing long-term effects regarding the party system. Changes might occur along three dimensions. (i) Ideological realignment occurs in the form of the emergence of new, dividing issues, sudden changes in party images and the shifting positions of citizens and parties on the left-right scale. (ii) Social realignment is indicated by the radical change in the parties’ social basis and the weakening or transformation of the cleavages. (iii) Along with these processes, after a short weakening phase party identifications stabilize in new forms. Critical elections are not different from the starting point of this stabilization of identities. In this paper, out of the three stages of critical elections the third one is studied.4

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4 The ideological dimension is discussed by Benoit and Enyedi, who prove that the parties and citizens in Hungary shifted towards the right end of the left-right continuum (Benoit and Enyedi 2011). Bíró Nagy argues that the emergence of the new system is largely a consequence of the growing gap between Fidesz and MSZP in terms of their location on the ideological scale (Bíró Nagy 2011). This political polarization is the concern of the paper by Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos, who report the growth in the value of the polarization index (Angelusz and Tardos 2011). Studies analysing the change in the party system focus mainly on the sharp decline in MSZP’s electoral support. Benoit and Enyedi argue that the main reasons for this are the economic downfall followed by austerity measures, and
3. Political context

In this paper we investigate the change in identification with two Hungarian parties: Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the joint list of Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) and Christian-Democratic People’s Party (KDNP). Since Fidesz and KDNP acted as one during the whole campaign and in the months elapsed since the elections, and because the electoral support of KDNP was not measurable throughout the period under investigation, we decided to treat them as one. In the following sections, however, we use the term 'Fidesz-KDNP' when the data concerns both parties and 'Fidesz', when the two parties were handled separately.

MSZP is the successor of the former communist party, while Fidesz was newly formed as a democratic youth organization in 1988. As a historical party, KDNP became politically active again during 1989. From the transition on there was a clear confrontation between MSZP and Fidesz for the obvious reasons that became a major factor in shaping the Hungarian party system. From 1994 on, Fidesz and KDNP found themselves on the same side of the conflict, and eventually formed a party alliance that manifested in a joint list at the 2006 general elections. From 2002 on the Hungarian party system consisted of two opposing party blocs lead by the two main parties, MSZP and Fidesz. This dichotomy was broken in 2010, where MSZP lost its role as a leading party, leaving Fidesz with the potential to dominate the political competition in the foreseeable future.

Hungary has a three tier electoral system, out of which one is single member (176 seats), and two are list levels. The distribution of votes at the first tier follows the logic of a majority run-off system. On the regional list tier a maximum of 152 seats are distributed among 20 fixed party lists according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff formula. District magnitudes are defined by law and range from 4 to 28 and supposed to be proportional to the population of the given county. On the national list level, a minimum of 58 seats are available. As this tier is of compensational nature, no votes are cast to the lists of the different parties. Obviously, the regional and national list tiers try to compensate for the ‘overwin’ at the SMD level. Even with this, the Hungarian electoral system cannot be considered proportional. In 2010, Fidesz-KDNP won the competition in 173 constituencies, and took the first place in all of the counties and Budapest, with a proportion of votes ranging from 45.78 % (in county Heves) to 62.77 % (in county Vas). The weakening of SZDSZ, the former coalition partner (Benoit and Enyedi 2011). Agenda-centred explanations claim the frequent MSZP-scandals to play the lead in the “fall” of the Socialists (Beck, Bíró Nagy, and Róna 2011).

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5 Magyar Szocialista Párt
6 Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség
7 Keresztténydemokrata Néppárt
8 Before 1994, the Hungarian party system was rather threefold, separating Fidesz and KDNP for four years.
9 For further details on the Hungarian political systems see Körösényi, Tóth and Török (Körösényi, Tóth, and Török 2009).
10 A threshold of 5 % is calculated based on the 1st round votes on the regional list level.
11 The average number of seats available per county is 7.6.
overall vote percentage of the coalition on the regional list level almost reached 53% (52.73% to be exact). The disproportionality of the electoral system, however, does not diminish the peculiarity of the election results on the level of the votes. Table 1 shows the party votes of the two parties in 2006 and 2010.

Table 1. The overall proportion of 1st round list votes cast to MSZP and Fidesz-KDNP in two consecutive elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSZP</td>
<td>43.21</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidesz-KDNP joint list</td>
<td>42.03</td>
<td>52.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.valasztas.hu

The values in Table 1 do not represent the election results accurately, since it only shows 1st round regional party list votes, but they properly reflect the degree of change in party support between the two elections. Taking a look at the data, it becomes obvious that the 2/3 majority in Parliament is not the main issue here – since it very well could have been the result of the different territorial distribution of preferences - , but the sharp changes in party votes from 2006 to 2010. MSZP lost 45% of its base, while the joint list of Fidesz and KDNP gained slightly more than 10 percentage points.

4. Results

4.1 Party identifications and party preferences - The traditional approach (2002-2010)

In our research a sharp distinction is made between long term partisan commitments and actual party support. Talking about the former we use the expression 'party identification', which is different from 'party preference’ that denotes voters’ momentary party affiliations. Our starting point is the diversity of votes cast for the same parties. Some vote for a given party because of their strong partisan identification12, others choose parties without any long term commitments (dissatisfaction with other parties, charismatic leader etc.). The higher the proportion of partisan voters in the society and in the different parties’ electoral base, the more stable party preferences are and the less likely it is to witness a fast dealignment.

In the event of a critical election party identities and preferences gradually shift into the same direction (Crewe and Thomson 1999, 67). The percentage of partisan voters in the electoral base

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12 For further details see the Michigan-model of voting behaviour. Converse et al. argue that party identification just adds to the voters’ personality during the process of socialisation (Converse et al. 1960). Partisan commitment is a long-term phenomenon and changes only on rare occasions, one of which being critical elections.
of a party increases simultaneously. Furthermore, voters vote for the parties they feel committed to; otherwise we would speak of deviating realignment, where the sudden change in party preferences is not preceded by a corresponding change in identifications. This means that deviating elections produce a gap between identities and preferences, because voters are motivated to choose parties different from their affections (strategic voting, protest voting etc.). Setting critical elections against deviating realignments - and the investigation of the viability of both explanations - is important since the two types of elections share exactly the same peculiarities on the level of the election results. Both seem to change the party system, the number of parliamentary parties and - with only a few exceptions - both induce the formation of a new government.

In this section, we analyse the change in the traditional measure of party identification using the data from European Social Survey. Figure 2 shows the change in the proportion of partisan supporters of Fidesz and the overall amount of votes cast for the party between 2002 and 2010.

Figure 2. The change in the proportion of Fidesz voters and partisans between 2002 and 2010

The traditional measure of party identification is widely criticised in the international literature of political science. The basis of the critiques is that many have shown (i.e. Butler and Stokes 1969; Holmberg 1994; Johnston and Pattie 1996; Brynin and Sanders 1997) that respondents interpret the question as if it was related to their actual party preferences, resulting in no

\[ \text{Source: European Social Survey, 2002-2010.} \]
\[ \text{Note: The question on partisanship is formulated as "Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?"}. \]

\[ \text{Underestimation might be a problem in this case since an open-ended question is used to identify the party the respondent feels close to. However, the larger the support of the parties under investigation, the lower this potential bias. Since we are only interested in the processes related to the two largest parties (Fidesz and MSZP), the problem is neglected this time.} \]
difference between the data on partisan commitments and party preferences.\textsuperscript{15} It is also true that both international and Hungarian political science literature use this measure of partisanship – with reservations (see Karácsony 2006; Tóka 2006).

Another problem arises in the case of measuring actual party preferences: respondents are asked about their votes at the last national elections. This solution approximates preferences in election years (2002, 2006, 2010) rather well\textsuperscript{16}, but enlarges the bias in-between (2004, 2008). By this reason figures only show election year party preferences. Figure 2 indicates a simultaneous change in party identification with Fidesz and party preferences. According to the data, the proportion of Fidesz-voters only slightly exceeds the percentage of partisan Fidesz supporters (the difference is 2.3 percentage points) in 2002, while in 2010 this difference is even smaller, 1.2 percentage points. The difference between Fidesz-identifiers and Fidesz-voters is the highest in relative terms in 2006 (4.4 percentage points): identification with Fidesz was higher than the number of actual votes cast for the party. On the whole, identification with Fidesz grows during the period between 2002 and 2010 more steeply, and is gained upon the preferences in 2010.

Figure 3 indicates completely different trends in the case of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). Identification with MSZP decreased in the first two years from 50 to 36 % which did not lead to an election fiasco since vote loss hardly reached 10 percentage points. In the second half of the period under investigation identification fell with more than 20 percentage points (from 36 to 15) and lead to substantial vote loss as well. While in 2006 the difference between the voters and identifiers amounts to 7.5 percentage points, preference and votes meet again in 2010.

\textsuperscript{15} This assumption is supported by the measures of association between the two phenomena in the case of Hungary: in 2002 and 2006 the value of Cramer’s V is 0.738 (p<0.00), 0.842 (p<0.000) in 2010, indicating that party identification and party preference are heavily interconnected in election years.

\textsuperscript{16} Data collection usually takes place during the fall and lasts 2-3 months. The relatively wide time interval enables party preferences to change during the fieldwork, which questions the overall practicability of the data. Respondents reported votes were compared to actual election results, and a slight tendency of the ‘bandwagon-effect’ was found. In addition, the possibility of reported votes being more of attitudes than actual votes cannot be neglected.
According to Figures 2 and 3, in 2006 party preferences are not in accordance with partisanship in the case of the major parties, disadvantaging Fidesz, whose electoral support lagged behind the level the proportion of partisan voters would have justified. Nevertheless, in 2006 Fidesz outgrew the Socialists both in terms of electoral support and identifications. Moreover, the 2006 general elections hit the MSZP in the middle of a dealigning process. While in 2002 67% of the MSZP-supporters were partisans to different degrees, to 2006 this proportion fell to 59%. This indicates that the majority of votes for the party in 2006 came from non-partisan voters, which made maintaining the voting base more uncertain on the long run. Both, the decline in the percentage of the partisan socialist voters in the whole population and among the MSZP-voters are clear signs of dealignment of the socialist electoral base. The voters of Fidesz show a completely different picture: the proportion of partisan Fidesz-supporters among the electoral base of the party grew from 63 to 71% between 2002 and 2006. It might appear a viable scenario that the 2006 elections were just a stage in the process of de- and realignment running simultaneously, which did not change the balance of political power. The escalation of these processes could lead to the 2010 victory of Fidesz. Therefore, if we accept the traditional measure of party identification to properly portray partisanship, the 2006 elections were most probably not maintaining – as some have argued –, but we witnessed a secular realignment process between 2002 and 2010. The hypothesis of realignment (either secular or critical) is further strengthened - opposed to the hypothesis of a deviating dealignment - by the fact that the measure of association (Cramer’s V) increased by 0.1 from 2006 to 2010 indicating that party identification and party preference moved closer to each other in the period under examination. The strength of the relationship, however, might be misleading, since it veils the different trends occurring in the case of the different parties. The percentage of Fidesz-voters
among Fidesz partisans increased from 82 to 86 % between 2006 and 2010, while in the case of MSZP this proportion changed from 89 to 81 %. The latter suggests that the protest factor is something that we cannot ignore when talking about the vote loss of MSZP. In the case of Fidesz we find the encounter of identity and vote. Findings seem to support the hypothesis of realignment, and its pace prevents us to reject the hypothesis of a critical election even if we are being aware of the possibility the 2010 elections being a part of a secular realignment process.

4.2. Different degrees of partisanship and party preference – An alternative approach (2005-2009)

In the second part of the analysis we extend the research with factors not available in the ESS dataset. The need for bringing in the new aspects is the problem discussed earlier namely that closeness to a party might change along with the party preference; therefore it is of little use when examining long term party identifications. Enabling this goal when defining party identification, apart from party sympathies previous party preference (in the form of vote cast at the last general elections) is taken into account.

The analysis is performed in two separate points in time. One of the main shortcomings of our approach is that we are not able to directly identify the trends associated with the changes, but conclusions are drawn from the differences we observe in the electoral bases of the two parties. Data - being made available by the Hungarian Electoral Study\(^\text{17}\) - was collected in 2005 and 2009\(^\text{18}\). The new party identification variable was created using current party sympathies\(^\text{19}\) and former party preferences\(^\text{20}\). The method is based on the logic of Campbell et al., who argue that the essence of partisanship is given by identifications with the given parties and their durability (Campbell et al. 1986). In practice, this means that party sympathies are amended by the votes in the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) round at the previous national elections.

\(^{17}\) http://www.valasztaskutatas.hu/front-page-en?set_language=en


\(^{19}\) Party sympathies are measured on a scale of 1-7, where 1 displays ‘not appealing at all’, and 7 mean ‘extremely appealing’

\(^{20}\) One disadvantage of our approach is the voters’ imperfect memories on who they voted for, and their conformity with the actual political climate (Angelusz and Tardos 1998). Another problem is the hidden preferences which are caused by the fact that previous votes for MSZP were not the ‘trendiest’ in 2009. In our case this means that in 2009 the proportion of votes cast for MSZP will be lower than in reality, and the opposite will be true in the case of votes cast for Fidesz. Solving this problem is beyond the scope and intentions of this paper, therefore, we presume that this phenomena does not change the proportion of partisan voters substantially. But still, results should be handled with care. A further problem is the indirect nature of the measure, since it does not grasp the attitudes directly, but it takes the behavioural manifestation of that attitude into consideration (Blais et al. 2001) – in this case past party preferences. Additionally, other authors (i.e. Campbell et al. 1986) claim party sympathies to be a consequences of party identifications. Consequently, our approach is based rather on the effect of identification than identification itself.
Table 2 shows the four groups displaying the different degrees of partisan commitments. Former voters of party X who find the party appealing\textsuperscript{21} three years after the elections are considered strong partisans. Former voters of party X who do not find X that appealing anymore\textsuperscript{22} will be called dealigning voters, since distance seems to grow between them and their formerly preferred parties. In the case of a realigning voter the exact opposite is taking place: the respondent did not vote for party X at the previous elections but (s)he finds X attractive at the time of the data collection. Finally, non-partisan voters are who did not vote for party X and do not find it appealing either. This division makes it possible to describe elections inside the framework of de- (dissolution of party identities) and realignment (the evolution of new ones). Moreover, by taking a dynamic factor into account we are able to relax the disadvantages that come from the data being rather static. The new partisanship variable is defined both in the case of Fidesz (PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}) and MSZP (PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}), therefore respondents are described in terms of their affiliations toward both parties\textsuperscript{23}.

### Table 2. The degrees of partisan alignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does not find party X appealing</th>
<th>Finds party X appealing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted for party X</td>
<td>[3] dealigning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[2] realigning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between 2005 and 2009, irrespective of party affiliations, the proportion of non-partisan voters declined from 35 to 32 % (category [4]). Contrarily, taking only the two major parties into account, the group of strong partisans gained 13 percentage points (from 38 to 51). Within the whole population, the percentage of MSZP partisans hardly changed (from 15 to 16 %), while the proportion of respondents strongly affiliated with Fidesz grew sharply from 22 to 35 %. According to this, strong Fidesz partisans outgrew strong MSZP partisans already in 2005, and the gap between the two parties just widened in the next four years.

The acceptance of the leading party of the opposite block (the common set of PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[1]+PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[2] and PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[1]+PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[2]) declined from 5.3 to 2.3 % indicating the moderate growth of the abyss between the two sides which might lead to the further polarization of voting behaviour. Respondents close to the Socialists (PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[1]+PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[2]) who refuse to sympathize with Fidesz (PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[3]+PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[4]) decline in numbers (from 21 to 17 %). We observe the opposite regarding sympathizers of Fidesz who

\textsuperscript{21} The party was given the value of 5 or higher by the respondent.

\textsuperscript{22} The party was given the value of 4 (middle of the scale) or lower by the respondent.

\textsuperscript{23} The analysis can be extended to parties that gained any voter at the previous elections. Long term party affiliations are not defined in the case of new parties. As to the relationship between PARTISAN\textsubscript{F} and PARTISAN\textsubscript{M} categories PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[1] and PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[1], PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[1] and PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[3], PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[3] and PARTISAN\textsubscript{M}[1], PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[3] and PARTISAN\textsubscript{F}[3] are mutually exclusive.
distance themselves from MSZP: their proportion increased from 31 to 40% between 2005 and 2009. Thus, it seems that the reduced and supposedly more homogeneous (and probably more leftist) potential\textsuperscript{24} voting base of MSZP is less distant from Fidesz, compared to Fidesz’s enlarged, more heterogeneous potential group of voters from MSZP. This implication might prohibit a future re-adjustment of the current trends. Table 3 shows the changes in the different levels of commitment toward the two parties.

Table 3. The changes in the different levels of commitment toward Fidesz and MSZP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSZP</td>
<td>Strong partisan [1]</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realigning [2]</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealigning [3]</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-partisan [4]</td>
<td>+12.9</td>
<td>-4.7</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>+12.4</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>-5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hungarian Election Study 2005, 2009
Note: The whole population represents 100%; percentage points; rounded values

Examining the actual electoral base\textsuperscript{25} of Fidesz and MSZP both in 2005 and 2009 becomes clear (Table 4) that the proportion of ‘moving’ voters declined between the two elections. The 2009 situation, therefore, seems to be more static compared to 2005 in both cases. This stability is further supported by the fact that the group of strong partisans grew in proportion within the electoral base of the two parties.

Table 4. The electoral base of MSZP and Fidesz described in terms of the different levels of party commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60.3 (252)</td>
<td>81 (340)</td>
<td>10.8 (45)</td>
<td>4 (17)</td>
<td>11.5 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.5 (73)</td>
<td>8.3 (35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.5 (404)</td>
<td>70.5 (947)</td>
<td>13.2 (87)</td>
<td>9.2 (123)</td>
<td>7.3 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18 (118)</td>
<td>17.9 (240)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hungarian Election Study 2005, 2009
Note: Percentages; number of cases in parentheses

\textsuperscript{24} Here we do not talk about actual party preferences, but the different degrees of affiliations, that do not necessarily turn to votes.

\textsuperscript{25} „Who would you vote for if there were elections to be held this Sunday?” was answered with MSZP or Fidesz-KDNP (closed question). Willingness to participate was not taken into account in sync with the Hungarian election forecast practice, outside campaigning periods.
In the case of MSZP, the 20 percentage points jump in the proportion of strong partisans is caused by the drop in the party's support, which is the result of the drifting voters who had only loose ties to MSZP. This reasoning seems suitable since the overall proportion of MSZP-partisans in the population did not change substantially between 2005 and 2009 (+0.3 percentage points, see Table 3). The growth in the percentage of partisan Fidesz-voters on the other hand, was accompanied by the growth in the electoral base indicating a sharp strengthening of party affiliations among Fidesz voters. This is one additional reason why the 2010 elections could be considered critical.

As to the strongly partisan voters' actual party preferences, 96 % of partisan Fidesz voters would vote for Fidesz, which is 86 % in the case of the Socialists that supports the “protest absence” scenario. The reason why this low value is not considered as one of the signs of deviating dealignment is that in 2005 89 % of the MSZP-partisans would have voted for the Socialists, which is about 5 percentage points less than in the case of Fidesz. This implies that respondents strongly attached to MSZP originally vote more irrepressibly than Fidesz-partisans do, and this difference did not change substantially from 2005 to 2009.

4.3 Trends in party preferences and –identification – Complementary measures (2006-2010)

In this section the analysis on party preferences and –identification is extended in two respects. Firstly, a different time frame is taken into account: 2006-2010 instead of 2005-2009. It is more important, however, that measures are available for each month between May 2006 and April 2010. Data covers 47 months – basically the whole government period before the last parliamentary elections we investigate. Secondly, since direct party identification questions are not available in the data, indirect indicators are used, hoping that they are suitable to measure identity. Thus, we intend to test whether the 2010 elections have been critical or not in a complementary way. All indicators used for this purpose measure party preferences in some way. Changes in the current voting preferences are detectable and information is present on the voting behaviour in 2006. The latter enables us to follow the changes in party preferences at the individual level. A negative preference measure is also available for each month, i.e. which party the respondent would not vote for sure. Here we assume that if the voter was committed

26 No data are available for October 2008.
27 Current party preferences are measured by using show card.
28 The measurement error for the previous voting behaviour and the related concerns, mentioned earlier, hold again.
to one of the main competing parties in Hungary then (s)he would have had negative attitudes towards the other main party and would definitely not vote for it.

The main trend in the current party preferences is not surprising: the proportion of the MSZP-supporters dropped among all respondents, those with party choice and definite voters\(^{29}\) between 2006 and 2010 (See figure A1 in Appendix.) While 36.5 % of all respondents would have voted for MSZP in May 2006, this proportion is only 12.6 % in April 2010. At the same time, a continuous but smaller increase is observable for the Fidesz-KDNP voters (from 33.1 to 46.3 %) (See Figure A2 in the Appendix.)

Based on retrospective party preferences from 2006, Figure 4 presents the trend of the 'electoral mobility' of respondents who claim to have voted for MSZP or Fidesz-KDNP in 2006. There is no single MSZP supporter in May 2006 expressing a different party preference from MSZP; while nearly 40 per cent of the former (2006) MSZP supporters turned away from their previous party choice by April 2010. This is a strong indicator of the decline in MSZP's support: even those respondents who report to have voted for the MSZP in 2006 in April 2010 choose a different party at the same time. As to Fidesz-KDNP, the proportion of electoral mobility always remains below 10 % – though there is an increase of voters who tend to remember to have voted for Fidesz in 2006.

**Figure 4. Actual and 2006 party preferences in the case of MSZP and Fidesz-KDNP**

Source: Medián, May 2006-April 2010

Note: The 2006 electoral base represents 100 %

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\(^{29}\) Definite voters are those who claimed that they would attend the elections for sure or most probably. This definition deviates from the conventional one because we aim to measure the real intention in voting in 2010 and this is always higher than the intention in the times between two campaign periods. In other words, we want to get those e.g. in 2007 who attend the elections in 2010 most probably. We assume that 'probable' voters will move to the category of 'definite' voters due to the effect of the campaign.
Trends on Figure 5 are based again on the report on voting at the general elections in 2006. Here we investigate the former (2006) MSZP and Fidesz-KDNP supporters from the perspective of their ‘negative’ party preferences between 2006 and 2010. The results can be interpreted from the viewpoint of party identification and reveal characteristic differences for the two parties.

About 36% of the MSZP supporters from 2006 would not vote for Fidesz-KDNP in May 2006. This proportion, however, decreases significantly and reaches the lowest value of 18% at the time of the European Union elections, in August 2009. Then, the trend is increasing again but all in all there is a drop of 15 percentage points in the ‘negative’ votes for Fidesz-KDNP among the former (2006) supporters of MSZP by April 2010. This fact is regarded as a sign of the strong decline in the identification with MSZP.

Apparently, very few of the former (2006) supporters of MSZP claim not to vote for the MSZP again at the beginning of the period investigated, while their proportion reaches 10% by April 2010. This proves again that MSZP has lost its support even among those who report to have been voted for the party in 2006. Rejecting MSZP is a bit less widespread, 33%, among the former (2006) supporters of Fidesz-KDNP in May 2006. However, it grows sharply and peaks at 52.7% by April 2010. We interpret this tendency as an increase in party identification for Fidesz. At the same time, the proportion of the ‘negative’ votes for Fidesz-KDNP remains lower than 3% among the former (2006) supporters of Fidesz throughout the whole period investigated. From this perspective, unlike the voters of MSZP, the voters of the Fidesz-KDNP have a stable party identification.

Figure 5. ‘Negative’ party preferences of the 2006 electoral base of MSZP and Fidesz-KDNP

Source: Medián, May 2006 – April 2010
Note: The 2006 electoral base represents 100%
The trends in preferences are investigated further on the ground of the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ party choices, of the pulls and pushes of the questions on ‘which party you would vote for?’ vs. ‘which party would you not vote for under any conditions?’. Trends are displayed on Figure 6 and 7.

Figure 6 refers to respondents with a party choice. The data does not reveal significant differences between the two main competing parties. Then, the trends start to diverge: the share of those not voting for the Fidesz drops from 38 to 15 % among the MSZP supporters; while the proportion of those not voting for the MSZP rises from 35 to 55 % among the supporters of Fidesz-KDNP. These trends suggest that party identification dropped among the voters of MSZP and became stronger among the followers of Fidesz-KDNP.

Figure 6. ‘Positive’ and ‘negative’ party preferences of respondents with party choice in the given month

![Figure 6](image_url)

Source: Medián, May 2006 – April 2010
Note: Respondents with party choice represent 100 % in each month.

The results on affiliations and rejections presented so far refer to all respondents who expressed some party preference. This makes them biased to some extent because the indicator contains the dynamics in the two electorates: the number of the voters of MSZP declined, while that of Fidesz-KDNP increased. This effect has been sorted out by the voters of the parties representing 100 % in each month. These results, presented on Figure 7, are probably more correct but, in fact, reveal less dramatic changes over time in the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ party preferences.

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30 In fact, we get the same result if focusing only on the definite voters.
31 While this data control for the relative trends in party preferences among all respondents with a party choice, the absolute trends between 2006 and 2010 are present, i.e. less people vote for the MSZP and more people vote for the Fidesz-KDNP.
In this context, about 80% of the voters of both parties would not vote for the adverse party under any conditions. This proportion fluctuates for the MSZP but it is the same at the beginning and at the end of the period investigated. This means that party identification in terms of not voting for Fidesz-KDNP remained stable, neither increased nor decreased in contrast to the declining electoral base of MSZP. At the same time, the growing voting base of Fidesz-KDNP did not ‘attenuate’. On the contrary, the proportion of the ‘negative’ votes for MSZP has increased from 80 to 90%. This means that party commitment in the growing group of Fidesz-KDNP-supporters has even increased between 2006 and 2010.

Figure 7. ‘Positive’ and ‘negative’ party preferences of the supporters of MSZP and Fidesz-KDNP

Source: Medián, May 2006 – April 2010
Note: The 2010 electoral base of the different parties represents 100%
5. Conclusions
At the end of the study, the results are summarised and the research question is discussed whether or not the 2010 general elections in Hungary has been critical. Changes in party identification have been investigated; we intended to grasp the formation of partisanship with various forms of identity measures. Table 5 provides an overview of the results of the empirical analysis for the two parties in question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Change in identification with MSZP among all respondents</th>
<th>Change in identification with Fidesz-KDNP among all respondents</th>
<th>Change in identification with MSZP among the voters of MSZP</th>
<th>Change in identification with Fidesz-KDNP among the voters of Fidesz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The traditional measure of party identification, 2002-2010</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of partisanship, 2005-2009</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in party preferences, 2006-2010</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>+*</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’Negative’ preference in contrast to voting at the 2006 elections, 2006-2010</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>−*</td>
<td>+*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’Negative’ preference in contrast to the 2010 elections, 2006-2010</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Voters in 2006 have been regarded as 100 %

Temporal analysis of party identities and party preferences based on the various indicators presents us with a complex picture. The level of partisanship has grown between the two elections both in general and in the electoral base of the two parties. On the other hand, indicators of ‘negative’ voting preferences suggest something different: the level of commitment seemed to decline in the electoral base of MSZP. This does not contradict the hypothesis of critical elections as an increase in the partisanship among voters of the ‘loser’ party is not required by theory. More conclusions can be drawn from the findings on Fidesz-KDNP. Since the electoral basis of the party has grown in absolute manner, the increase in partisanship reveals a true rise in party identification. This fact and the absolute decline in the identification with MSZP seem to support the hypothesis on critical elections. Loosening affection for MSZP and tightening
identification with Fidesz-KDNP is a typical example of the dealigning – realigning elections in Hungary.

It is worth making cautious statements on the secular character of the realignment process. After the analysis of the data for 2002 – 2010, we have strong doubts whether or not the turn from MSZP to Fidesz-KDNP has occurred so suddenly. Figure 2 and 3 suggest that the parallel processes of dealignment and realignment could be observed already after the 2002 elections. This questions the previous conclusion on the maintaining type of the 2006 elections. According to the results, we seem to witness the process of secular dealignment and realignment – though its consequences did not surface at the general elections in 2006 yet. Alternatively, there is an even more challenging interpretation. Differences in party identification and preferences reveal even the symptoms of deviating dealignment. In fact, these two successive phenomena, namely that the deviating dealignment obscured the consequences of the secular dealignment in 2006 have led researchers to think that the 2006 elections were maintaining. Then, the ‘normal’ situation reappeared during the cycle between 2006 and 2010, leading the landslide-victory of the Fidesz-KDNp. This is, however, just speculation given the data at hand. Nevertheless it is worth to re-examine the 2006 elections in the future, as well.

A further extension of the analysis can also involve the investigation of the concrete political events. Monthly data between 2006 and 2010 allow this possibility: the contradicting, decreasing vs. increasing trends seem to ‘speed up’ as getting closer to the general elections in 2010. The data allows even to discover the impact of the uncertainties within MSZP regarding the unfortunate candidate nomination for the position of the Prime Minister. E.g. the proportion of those turning to another party in the 2006 electoral base of MSZP rises sharply in the spring of 2009 (Figure 4). Similarly, in the spring of 2009, the proportion of those who decide not to vote for MSZP anymore (‘negative’ party preference) ‘jumps’ to 10 % in the 2006 electoral base of the party. Simultaneously, the decreasing share of those claiming that they would never vote for Fidesz-KDNP begins to rise again in the summer of 2009 (Figure 5).

In sum, we intend to give a cautious positive response to the question in the title of the paper. In the analysis, we found more supporting and less opposing evidence for the critical elections. Nevertheless, we want to call the attention to two important considerations. On one hand, our data is far from perfect; we had to make compromises in this respect. The ideal data for such an analysis would have been a longitudinal panel survey where the trends in the party preferences and –identities of the same respondents could have been investigated. Alternatively, we used various kinds of cross-sectional data. We had a strong intention to define different indicators for party identification, to draw conclusion based on a rich empirical material. This goal turns, at the
same time, to limitation in the interpretation of the results since the outcomes are consequences of the various definitions, stronger and softer conditions applied for describing the phenomena.

On the other hand, the analysis ends shortly before the 2010 general elections. The real test of critical elections will be the elections held in 2014. In this regard, we can only refer to the data published by the various public opinion research institutes. The general picture indicates more stability and less change in terms of party preference change after the 2010 elections. Even if the gap between the two big parties has narrowed, the difference remained significant. At this point it is impossible to say what is going to happen in the next two years until the elections in 2014. Respondents’ answers to the question on ‘which party would you vote for if there were general elections on next Sunday’ do not much allow us to make predictions given that a large proportion of the respondents does not report any voting preferences in the present times, in the middle of the governing cycle. Furthermore, some changes in the electoral rules have just been accepted in the Parliament\(^3\), mainly by the majority of the governing party, and the analysis of the consequences of these legal changes is beyond the score of this paper.

An important conclusion of methodological kind - on the ground of the analysis of the ESS data -, seems to claim that the traditional indicator of party identification does not measure the long-term party affiliations properly in Hungary at present. In practice, the traditional measure for party identification – similarly to the party preferences – seems to reflect the current political climate ‘too’ accurately. A possible goal for further research can be to define new indicators for measuring party identification or even to redefine the notion of party identity. In fact, the usual definition is based on the requirement of ‘long-term-ness’ and this results in a difficulty in investigating new parties like Jobbik in Hungary. The notion of ‘expressive voter’ by Angelusz and Tardos, involving elements of emotional kind (Tardos 2011, 316), is rather close to the idea of partisan voter. As Tardos (2011) makes it manifest, a large proportion of the voters of the Jobbik are people with expressive motivations. Consequently, it can be worth to define party identification in a more complex manner, also depending on values and attitudes – partly in order to expand the circle of the voters analyzed in the study.

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\(^3\) The new law passed on 23rd December 2011.
6. References


7. Appendix

Figure A1. The change in MSZP's support between May 2006 and April 2010

Source: Medián, May 2006-April 2010

Figure A2. The change in Fidesz-KDNP’s support between May 2006 and April 2010

Source: Medián, May 2006-April 2010