Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Hungary in the 1990s and 2000s

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Abstract

Using data on social protest the chapter demonstrates that after the collapse of communism the development of Hungarian civil society has been characterized by asymmetric trends. Over time, left-liberal actors, which due to inherited strengths were initially best endowed with organizational and ideational resources, lost their dominance in civil society, and the battle of mobilization for contentious collective action. Conversely, actors of the right have gradually worked off their initial disadvantage in social embeddedness, have taken deeper roots in society, and eventually became able to set the terms of civil organization and protest.

The chapter elaborates how these dynamics in civil society development might have interfered with the processes of democratic consolidation. The left-liberal practices of keeping democratic politics and policy making "above" the sphere of society might have impeded democratic consolidation by discouraging popular democratic engagement. By the same token, the rightist practices of bypassing parliament and appeal to the people directly through civil organization and permanent mobilization might have impeded democratic consolidation “from below” by not respecting the results of democratic elections and undermining trust in democratic institutions in yet other ways.

1 Introduction[1]

Hungary ought to have been a model of post-communist democratic consolidation. After the 1960s, its communist regime, led by János Kádár, became the most tolerant and economically innovative in the eastern bloc. Even before the collapse of communism many of the shortages which had been pervasive in the majority of communist states had disappeared in Hungary and citizens were allowed to travel abroad. The transition itself did not pit society against the state, as in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In Hungary the Party and elites representing opposition groups negotiated the end of the regime. It is not for nothing that Hungary earned the moniker "happiest barracks in the camp."

Throughout the decade of the 1990s and into the 2000s Hungary was in the forefront of market and political reforms, adopting all the key institutions of capitalist democracy, albeit with many bumps in the road. After the severe transformational recession of the early 1990s the economy grew continually until the 2008 financial crisis. The Hungarian party system was stable, with every single government serving its full four-year mandate, and featured an alternation of left and right parties elected freely and fairly. Along with the Czech Republic and Poland, which could point to similar experiences a decade and a half into the transition, Hungary was in the first wave of countries to enter both the European Union and NATO.

[1] Earlier versions of the chapter were presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, September 3-6, 2015, and at the international conference, "A Liberal Challenge? Civil Society and Grass Roots Politics in New Democracies, Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes," Seoul, South Korea, January 6, 2012. We thank Zoltán Várhalmi and Laura Jakli for their invaluable assistance with data, graphs, and tables, and Monika Nalepa for helpful comments.

With the landslide election of the conservative Fidesz party in 2010 the political consensus that supported Hungary's liberal democracy, which had already been fraying, collapsed. Enabled by its supermajority in parliament, Fidesz set about remaking the Hungarian social and political system. The details of this transformation are beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Kornai, 2015 for details), but the idea has been to create a "central arena of power" [centrális erőtér] with Fidesz and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the center. In this system the opposition has marginalized, checks and balances on executive power have been removed, and the formerly liberal state has been supplanted by, in Premier Orbán's own phrasing, an „illiberal" one (Bozóki, 2015). Hungary may or may not still be a democracy, but even if it is, it is certainly no longer a liberal one, and is far more vulnerable to an open authoritarian reversal.

A number of reasons have been adduced to explain Fidesz's 2010 victory, including the collapse of the Socialists in scandal, the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, and the failed reforms of the left-liberal coalition that ruled from 2002 to 2010. There is no gainsaying that Hungarians were "fed up with the system" by the time of the 2010 elections, but these explanations suggest that Fidesz's crushing 2010 victory was a result of a confluence of factors particular to Hungary, without broader significance for democratic consolidation. We disagree. We do not deny that the collapse of the Socialists and the financial crisis created an opening, but there is a difference between there being an opening and the direction voters go given that opportunity.

We argue that the surge toward Fidesz (and also to the radical right Jobbik, which in 2010 became a significant parliamentary party) was pre-figured by the growth of contentious civil society activity in the years of the prior left-liberal coalition. This paper

makes three interrelated points. The first two draw on empirical findings relevant to the debate about the strength and vibrancy of civil society in post-communist Europe. The third is a more speculative theoretical proposition about the relationship between civil society and democratic consolidation. Our first empirical finding is broadly consistent with arguments that in terms of the magnitude of contentious action *over the 1990s post-communist civil society has been weak* (e.g., Howard, 2003). Civil protest did spike in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism. Undoubtedly this represents in part a transition period between the "protest" politics that existed before the advent of multiparty elections and institutionalization of the new democratic political mechanisms. But after a short period protest activity diminished as citizens turned to diverse and less contentious forms of civil activism, while their political and policy demands were mainly channeled through the formal democratic political institutions. This low level of contention remained more or less constant throughout the first decade of the transition to democracy and capitalism, a period marked by painful economic and social transformations.

Our second finding is that beginning in the 2000s civil society protest gained strength, but this happened in a peculiar way. Specifically, the surge of contention originated in a *reversal of the initial asymmetry between civil society's left and right sectors' endowment* with organizational and ideational resources. The post-communist (leftist) civil sector was, due to its inherited and newly acquired social networks and political capital, initially rich in resources for mobilization toward both conflict and compromise. However, over time, and in particular under 12 years of rule by the left-liberal coalitions (1994-1998 and 2002-2010) these links were severed. The opposite

occurred with the right. During the first decade of transition the right, especially when in opposition, usually had to bandwagon on anti-government protest organized by the post-communist civil sector, or engage in "principled confrontation" with the power-holders to extend its own initially meager resources in civil society. Over time, however, the right gradually worked off its original disadvantages in social embeddedness, sunk deeper roots in society, and acquired increasing influence over civil organization and protest. Consequently, by the time of EU accession in 2004, left-liberals had lost the battle of mobilization for contentious collective action. Civil society activity rose dramatically in the 2000s, but much of this growth was on the right and far right.

We argue that this pattern has had implications for the quality of democracy. In particular, we suggest three ways in which formal politics might have negatively interfered with civil contention – ultimately bringing about de-consolidation of democracy in the Hungarian case. First, the left-liberal governments' practices of ignoring both a systematic deliberation with, and the protest by, civil actors and keeping democratic politics and policy making "above" the sphere of society, might have *impeded democratic consolidation by discouraging popular political engagement*. Second, the right-wing parties' practices of bypassing parliament and appealing to the people directly through permanent mobilization might have *impeded democratic consolidation "from below"* by not respecting the results of democratic elections and undermining trust in democratic institutions in other ways. Finally, the unprecedented landslide electoral victory of the right in 2010 – followed by five similarly sweeping victories at municipal, European Parliament, and national elections - was the *culmination of the long-term restructuring of state-civil society relationships*.

2 Peaceful Transformation to Capitalist Democracy, and the Emergence of Civil Society

2.1 Inherited Assets of Civil Society Formation

The initial success of the Hungarian transformation was supported by a number of inherited assets, which we list briefly here and then elaborate below. These assets included the modest but existing legacies of economic and political freedom due to the country's lasting reform-socialist experiments, a relatively less distorted and more western integrated economy, and a densely organized and multifaceted civil society prone to "innovative accommodation".

First, marketization and democratization under socialism meant less abrupt and dramatic changes in Hungary than in most other postcommunist countries (including even Poland). As a pioneer of economic and political liberalization under socialism, Hungary could count on these experiments' institutional and behavioral legacies. The liberalization started in the 1960s, and reflected the impact of the 1956 revolution. The revolution and the ensuing armed fight for national liberation had been crushed by Soviet troops and their domestic communist allies. Although the defeat was followed by several years of heavy repression, the memory of revolution became a lasting nightmare for the communist rulers. To appease society and avoid repetition, János Kádár's regime offered a limited compromise: economic reforms, some freedom of travel and of private life, and modest social protection and welfare in exchange for political quiescence. These attempts

at economic and political liberalization failed to save the communist regime but created the foundations for a more vibrant and accommodating civil society, and eventually an easier transformation path.

Second, and related to the above, while the task of economic restructuring to achieve international competitiveness was difficult, it was less formidable in Hungary than in many other countries. From the 1970s, Hungary integrated in the economy of the Soviet Empire as producer of light industrial goods and physical and human capital-intensive manufacturing products (e.g. machinery, electronics, road vehicles, and pharmaceuticals). Specialization in the latter type of export-industries implied substantial imports of western capital goods, licences and know-how, as well as joint-venture and subcontracting arrangements with transnational corporations. As a consequence, in the early 1990s Hungarian economic structure was closer to that of an advanced western than a centrally planned or a less-advanced market economy. At the time of collapse relatively moderate distortions produced milder economic and social shocks than elsewhere, eased adaptation and recovery, and provoked less protest on the part of losers.

These peculiarities of the economy also brought about the emergence of elite groups for whom at the moment of systemic change capitalism paid and democracy was acceptable. The first group of importance was the reform-bureaucracy, and its most powerful policy-making and financial apparatus. Due to market socialist reforms, external openness, and ironically the country's huge foreign debt, by the late 1980s these bureaucracies became integrated into international professional and financial networks. Integration resulted in special skills - dealing with IMF and World Bank staff and policy programs, statistical and monitoring capacities to analyze economic processes,

negotiating and bargaining with foreign creditors and investors, - which were even more badly needed when the changes came. One consequence was that in contrast to other postcommunist states the Hungarian transformation strategy could be relatively organic, gradualist, and "home-grown."

Western export-oriented state-owned firm managers experienced in mixed formal-informal, state-market strategies, and skills to conduct international operations were yet another influential group. These skills enhanced their competitive advantages against domestic rivals and made them attractive partners to foreign investors. All in all, such elites and their business associations formed a somewhat more entrepreneurial and less corrupt domestic bourgeoisie, whose acquisition strategies considered privatization less as a zero-sum game than, say, the Russian oligarchs did.

Finally, encouraged under the late Kádár-regime by softening repression, reluctant liberalization of the media, and increased freedom of speech and association, a relatively significant civil and political opposition emerged (although its strength and social embeddedness fell short of that of Polish opposition.) Further, notwithstanding their rivalry, the various pro-democratic groups were pragmatic enough to cooperate against (and even with) the communists in the most important matters of transformative politics. At the national round-table negotiations in 1989 anti-communist parties cooperated to design Hungary's new democratic system, and negotiated a compromise which allowed former rulers to retreat and transfer power without violence.

2.2 Trends in Organization, and Legal and Financial Regulation: A Brief Overview[2]

[2] In this section we draw heavily on expert literature on the trends, structure, and regulation of Hungarian civil society, in particular on Bócz (2009).

On the basis of informal civil society, which had flexed its muscles in opposition to Kádár's regime, once the regime collapsed, a vibrant, densely organized and diversified associational sphere has emerged. In Figure 1, we use data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) to demonstrate the fast pace of organizational transformation and growth. The Office collects data on the so called "non-profit sector". This is an umbrella term that, albeit not fully identical with the civil sphere proper (see more on this below), does cover its most important organizations and legal categories from private and public foundations and various associations to business and professional interest groups, trade unions, as well as church-bound or more broadly religion-based foundations and associations.

According to the KSH data, compared with 1989 the number of non-profit organizations tripled by 1992, and grew five- and seven-fold by 1996 and 2007, respectively. The sub-sector of foundations expanded at an even more staggering rate: from only 400 in 1989 their number increased to about 23000 by 2011. All in all, a plethora of new organizations – from self-help groups to those promoting leisure, culture, sports, educational or local patriotic activities, offering various community services, interest representation, or advocating the emancipatory agendas and unconventional new lifestyles of an "open society" - flourished after communism collapsed. At this point, however, two important caveats are in order.

First, not all of the organizational explosion can be attributed to the entrepreneurship of *new* civil actors. Rather, many organizations of the late Kádár regime's para-statal or "quasi-civil" associational sphere, which had served as

transmission belts for communist dominance over society, proved remarkably resilient. Changing their legal forms, name, mission statements, and recruitment tactics, these inherited organizations managed to adjust their functioning to the new postcommunist conditions quite successfully. The efficiency of their survival strategies is attested by the fact that "more than a third (36%) of the civil organizations existing in 1993 and a tenth (11%) of those existing in 2006, had been founded before 1989" (Bócz, 2009: 128).

Second, not all of the new non-profit organizations qualify as truly *civilian* either in terms of autonomy from central or local state authorities or in terms of reliance mainly on citizens' voluntary engagement. This is for the following reasons. Following the imperatives of fiscal austerity and privatization, public authorities started to "outsource" many of their services - in education, health, social care, or administration – to private and more frequently non-profit providers which were often founded by them. The Hungarian regulation of the non-profit sector has permitted and even encouraged this process. The new "quasi-civil" service providers were offered legal possibilities and generous financial benefits for taking over formerly public functions. This led to the emergence of a large number of hybrid organizations which depended more on state finance than private donations, and more on paid formal employment than citizen volunteering. In Table 1 we provide an overview of the structure and dynamics of "civil type" versus "non-civil type" non-profit organizations, their membership, paid employees, and volunteer helpers.

In turn, Figure 2 demonstrates that, overall, Hungarian civil organizations stand out for their "organizational capacity and financial sustainability, and the legal and political environment in which they function" even in a regional comparison (Nations in

Transit, 2011: 22). Following Bócz (2009), below we briefly touch upon three regulatory measures (introduced by left-liberal governments) which were particularly important in creating a supportive legal and financial environment for civil society formation.

An important law passed in 1996 allowed citizens to support a civil organization of their choice by donating 1% of their personal income tax for that purpose. In addition, a second 1% of personal income taxes could be designated to support various institutions and initiatives of public interest, which were determined on an annual basis by the government. The aim of this legislation was to establish a regular and direct link between civil society development, citizens' voluntary donations, and thus a new form of citizens' control over certain priorities of public spending.

The 1997 law on the public interest [közhasznúsági] status of particular non-profit organizations offered a definition of the meaning of public interest, determined clearer and more restrictive criteria for acquring such status. The law also regulated with more precision civil actors' eligibility for public funding and, most importantly, their rights to become owners of buildings or other infrastructure which were crucial for their activities but were still owned by the state. Finally, the law aimed to prevent repetitions of earlier abuses of the public interest status, such as the anomalous cases of non-profit organizations founded solely for the purpose of accessing tax or public funding benefits, or exploiting loopholes of other lax regulations.

Finally, the 2003 Law on the National Civil Base Program [Nemzeti Civil Alapprogram], followed by new bits and pieces of re-regulation until 2007, further extended the amount of resources available to non-profit organizations, among others by allowing them to apply for financing from citizens' accummulated personal income tax

donations (the already mentioned second 1%), designated to sponsor the public interest purposes defined by the government.

Although the above trends and policies are informative about the formation, structure, and driving forces of the path of new Hungarian civil society, they are less helpful in understanding the general dynamics and particular heightened episodes of civil contention, which are our focus. These are the issues to which now we turn.

2.3 Turning Points for Civil Contention

Despite the above assets for a relatively smooth transformation to a market economy, democratic politics, and a vibrant and accommodating civil society, for the majority of Hungarians the road to capitalist democracy has been rough, even if not impassable. Ever since communism collapsed, the fragile new market order was a danger to social cohesion and political stability. The new system was born amidst the crisis of the late 1980s-early 1990s and stayed vulnerable in its aftermath. This goes far in explaining the many instances of conflict and contention in the various arenas of Hungarian civil society. Let us highlight two crucial turning points over the period of 1989-2004 - each of which was important in shaping the intensity and structuring the form of contentious politics.

In line with common wisdom, this chapter views democratization amidst regime collapse and the *"transformational recession"* at the turn of the 1980s-90s (Kornai, 1995) as the first and foremost historical juncture that shaped civil society. Comparable with the Great Depression of the 1930's for its depth and length, the transformational

recession erupted from the agony of socialism. It is established in the literature that despite economic hardship, social dislocation and insecurity, the exposed societal groups contributed to the successful turn to democratic politics as patient losers (Greskovits, 1998).

The reforms of the 1990s paved the way for deeper transnational economic integration. Transnational capitalism seemed to function well in Hungary until the second half of the 2000s, when it was shaken world-wide. From the late 1990s through the mid 2000s, the Hungarian economy enjoyed a period of rapidly expanding foreign and domestic demand for its products, massive foreign capital inflows, declining unemployment, and rising living standards. However, the new capitalist economy also produced ample social and political stress and civil conflict, even in its brief „golden age."

All in all the intensity of contentious collective action increased rather than decreased during the golden age. Interestingly, however, unlike in the 1990s – but similar to the historical juncture of communism's collapse - protest in the new millennium was driven less by pure social welfare issues than by a combination of these with what could be called immaterial needs for competing identities and concerns about political power. Especially after Viktor Orbán's conservative coalition marginally lost the spring 2002 parliamentary elections to the Socialists and Liberals, *a new period of high frequency protest* set in, heralding a turning point in the development of Hungarian civil society that has continued to the present.

3 The Dynamics of Contentious Civil Society in 1989-2011: A Bird's Eye View

In this section, we offer an overview of civil protest over the analyzed period in order to identify broad patterns, regularities and lasting trends. We will make periodic reference to the governments in power over the period of 1989-2011. These governments are: the outgoing reform-communist administration of Miklós Németh in 1989-spring 1990; the first democratically elected right-wing coalition government led by József Antall (and after his death by Péter Boross) in 1990-1994; the Socialist-liberal government of Gyula Horn in 1994-1998; the right-wing coalition government under Viktor Orbán in 1998-2002; the return of the left-liberal coalition to power first under Péter Medgyessy in 2002-2004, then Ferenc Gyurcsány in 2004-2009, and Gordon Bajnai in 2009-2010; and finally the Fidesz government of Viktor Orbán from 2010 to the present.

Our analysis is based on the Hungarian protest event data collected as part of the comparative project "The Logic of Civil Society in New Democracies (Hungary, Poland, South Korea, and Taiwan). We define a collective public event as an act of protest if it is undertaken to articulate certain specified demands, if it is not a routine or legally prescribed behavior of a social or political organization, and if it's form deviates from the routinely accepted way of voicing demands. Certain kinds of action which are constitutionally or legally guaranteed, such as strikes, rallies or demonstrations, will be considered protest actions because of their radical and disruptive nature. Demands are "articulated" when the participants (whether organized or not) turn to institutions, organizations and enterprises, both public and private, and:

(1) demand that specific decisions, laws, or policies be changed; and/or

(2) demand the removal of individuals responsible for such decisions and policies; and/or

(3) demand the right to participate in the decision-making process; and/or

(4) demand the abolition or creation of institutions or laws and/or;

(5) make financial claims against the institution; and/or

(6) express general opposition to the policies of the institution; and/or

(7) demand recognition of their identity (subjectivity) and rights.

Events between 1989 and 1994 were coded from two daily newspapers, one left-leaning (Népszabadság) and one right-leaning (Magyar Nemzet); and two printed weeklies (Heti Világgazdaság and 168 Óra) of liberal orientation. Beginning in 1995 we consulted the online versions of Népszabadság and Magyar Nemzet, and also added MTI, the national news agency. This yielded a total of 4,868 protest events. Our discussion of the patterns of civil society activity will refer to the graphs and tables in the located in Appendix 1.

3.1 General Findings

Figures 3a and 3b illustrates the temporal trend in the magnitude of protest activity between 1989 and 2010. The year-to-year fluctuations in the number of protest events (including some missing data for 1994) are less important than three qualitative trends. The first is that on average *the frequency of protests was more or less constant*

during the first decade of the transition. This is consistent with the earlier observation of the literature that popular grievances during the decade of painful economic and social reforms were channeled less into protest than through formal political institutions, including the electoral victory of the former communists in 1994 (Greskovits, 1998). The second trend is *dramatic growth in popular contention beginning in 2003*, one year after the left-liberal coalition narrowly defeated Fidesz in a national parliamentary election. As we shall illustrate further below, this increase is primarily a result of increased activity on the political right. Finally, we vary the size of the data points in each plot to illustrate the changes over time in the average number of participants in and duration of protests. As is clear in both figures protests increased in size (Figure 3a) and duration (Figure 3b) beginning in the period of left-liberal rule in 2003 relative to the quiescent period of the first decade of the transition.[3]

Figure 4 offers a more granular view of the overall temporal trend, but with the data aggregated monthly and shaded bars six months before and after each parliamentary election. The smooth trend line charts the growth of civil society activity as seen in Figures 3a and 3b. Clearly there is monthly volatility in protest activity, but there is no visual evidence that that volatility is related to national parliamentary elections. This is perhaps more visible in Figure 5, which displays just the periods surrounding elections. Bunce and Wolchik (2010) argue that in less consolidated regimes elections can act as a focal point for incumbent and opposition contention, particularly when the incumbent is autocratic. Thus, our Figure 4 and Figure 5 provide indirect evidence of how "normal" elections have been in Hungary, at least until 2002. However, the spectacular increase in

[3] The sizes of the data points in the figures after 1989 is computed relative to the average size and duratiuon of protests in 1989.

the frequency of protest around and in-between the 2006 and 2010 national parliamentary elections seems to lend support to our proposition that by that time Hungarian democracy was on the *path of de-consolidation,* with civil contention being simultaneously a symptom and a factor of the process. (We lack the data, but we would expect still greater civil contention surrounding the 2014 elections, the first held since Fidesz started its "U-turn" from liberal state and democracy (Kornai, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, „low-cost" forms of contention - such as letters and petitions – are the most popular form of protest, comprising just over 25% of the total, while demonstrations and marches were nearly as popular (Table 2). Together these two forms of protest make up half of the events. By comparison, strikes, strike alerts, and other potentially "costly" actions individually comprised under 10% of all protests. To compute these numbers we considered only events that featured one single type of protest action, which encompassed 73% of the observations. While 40% of protests lasted less than a day (Table 3) 6% lasted longer than a week and can thus righlty be termed "campaigns" rather than individual events. Likewise, while roughly one-third of protests had fewer than 200 participants (Table 4), 4% had more than 50,000. 90% of these massive protests took place between 2008 and 2011. This was the period of greatest discontent with the left-liberal government and, after the 2010 election, with the policies of the new Fidesz administration.

Trade unions, social movements, and political parties took the lead in organizing contention (Table 5). Much of the trade union activity took place in the first decade of the transition. Radical political movements were less active overall, but appear with increasing frequency among the organizers in the new millennium. (See more on the role

of trade unions and radical movements below). The largest number of events appear in our database as unorganized or organized by undefined „other" actors. The interpretation of these two kinds of contentious events, however, becomes possible on the basis of qualitative information on the locus and/or aim of such protests.

Finally, protests have been overwhelmingly non-violent in nature (Figure 6). This can be partly explained by the initial lack of an urgent need to answer challenges of ethnic conflict, and nation and state building. Although Hungarian civil society featured the kinds of radical nationalist groups that hampered the prospects for democracy in other post-communist states (e.g. the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, or the former USSR), they only began to gain influence after the early-mid 2000s. Even then the uptick in violent protests was small relative to all such activity. We also distinguish between disruptive and non-disruptive events. The former include strikes, demonstrations, blockades, occupation of buildings and cyber-aggresion. The latter include letters, rallies, and symbolic actions such as displaying flags. Non-disruptive activities have been more prominent than disruptive ones with the exception of the period in 2007 surrounding the scandal that ultimately led to the crushing Socialist defeat in 2010.

We now investigate in somewhat greater detail the more spectacular and disruptive forms of contention, that is, demonstrations and marches, as well as strikes, and their organizers and sponsors, namely trade unions, social movements, and political parties.

3.2 Postcommunist Labor: Docile at the Workplace, Loud on the Streets?

According to our data in Table 5, the labor movement appears to have been by far the most active organizer of protests. The 771 cases of contention led or sponsored by trade unions, strike committees and work councils almost equal in number with the 822 events organized or sponsored by *all the other* social movements (whether radical or non-radical) taken together. Indeed, the number of union-led protests significantly exceeds the 592 instances of contention attibuted to *all* the political parties (whether in power or in opposition). Against the background of the widely shared notion of "labor weakness in postcommunism" that "consists of a low capacity to shape public policy or to win material benefits" as well as "low and ineffectual strike action" among others (Crowley and Ost, 2001: 219-220), Hungarian trade unions' prominent role in protests is puzzling. Can we characterize the strongest contributor to Hungarian contentious politics as being at the same time weak and ineffective nevertheless?

One often mentioned indicator of postcommunist labor weakness is the dramatic loss of union membership, especially in the expanding private sector. This is certainly the case in Hungary, where since the early 1990s trade union membership dwindled, and the private sector is all but union free. It is only in the public sector that unions could maintain a stronger presence. Ironically, however, Table 6 shows that, weakened as they are, in terms of their remaining (wo)manpower trade unions still represent *by far the largest organized force* in Hungarian society. As late as in 2005, trade union membership was still about 3 times larger than the total number of paid emplyees and unpaid volunteers of the non-profit sector, and ten times larger than membership in all the political parties combined. The question then is not whether trade unions still have

strength in numbers, but rather: in *what ways* do they mobilize their members for contentious activism?

A second indicator of labor weakness is incapacity to organize strikes or having them make a real impact. In this respect, too, there is ample evidence that the Hungarian labor movement should be counted among the least militant in Europe both over the 1990s and the 2000s (e.g. Vandaele, 2011: esp. Table 2). The docile behavior of Hungarian labor at the workplace is also confirmed by our data: during the two decades covered we only found evidence of 127 strikes and 182 strike alerts, i.e. a mere 6% of all protest events. This, however, indicates that classic forms of worker militancy have not been the main terrain of union-led or sponsored civil contention. In all likelihood, Hungarian unions have mobilized their members less for disruptive protest at the private workplace and more for giving voice to their grievances in public spaces: on the streets by joining marches, rallies and demonstrations, or in the media by petitions and other appeals to the authority.

While the substantiation of this intuition requires a more fine-grained and rigorous analysis of our quantitative data and more qualitative information on the details, the shift in the typical profile of union-led and/or sponsored protests in Hungary seems to be part and parcel of broader global and European trends whose factors and implications get increasing attention by social movement and industrial relations scholars alike (e.g. Gentile and Tarrow, 2009; Bernaciak, Gumbrell McCormick, and Hyman, 2014; Erne et al., 2015). As one of us has recently put it: "Aggrieved employees today protest less often as workers *tout court* empowered by labour's collective rights and motivated by common interests with fellow workers and trade unions. Instead…the traditional protest repertoire

has broadened to include, or became even dominated by, massive protest in the public space by public sector employees mobilized by the grievances, interests, and rights, which these actors share with other citizens and civil society organizations" (Greskovits, 2015: 282). This takes us to the issue of another group of civil society actors spearheading the protests, which led to the contentious turn of Hungarian civil society: right-wing parties and social movements.

3.3 Harbingers of Rightist Strength

While the right unquestionably benefitted from the loss of credibility of Ferenc Gyurcsány's and Gordon Bajnai's left-liberal government, the seeds of rightist mobilization and Socialist collapse were planted long before the 2010 election made things official. Let us begin with the right. Having lost both the 2002 and 2006 elections, Fidesz and other actors on the right opted to oppose government policy not just in parliament but on the street, primarily through the Civic Circles Movement that Fidesz created right after the lost Spring 2002 parliamentary elections.

The story of Civic Circles is as fascinating and important as so far under-researched. At its peak, the movement reportedly included about 16,000 local units from very small ones to those having several hundred members, and spread across the country from the capital to larger and smaller towns and even villages. The network was flanked and supported by a plethora of conservative and far-right media outlets, and was coordinated "from the top" by persons and institutions of or close to Fidesz. In their heyday, the circles organized many thousands of events – from political (especially

frequent around local, national or European elections) to cultural, recreational, local patriotic, religious, musical entertainment, charitable, self-help activities, and led or sponsored contentious actions too. The Alliance of Civic Circles served as an umbrella organization for many old and new civil associations covering the whole right side of the political spectrum, and offered its members networks of communication and organization, as well as an overarching social and political purpose. Its aims were to nurture Hungarian conservatism in all of its manifestations, and to prepare the ground for defeating the postcommunist Left and the Liberals, whom it considered alien and harmful.

Further, the growth of civil society on the right during the period of left-liberal rule beginning in 2002 was not limited to Fidesz and the civil organizations created and mobilized by the party. Increasingly, it also included extreme nationalist and even skinhead and other racist movements. Many of these organizations, which formed a vibrant but "nasty" (i.e. anti-Roma, anti-Semitic, generally xenophobic, and in the case of para-military Hungarian Guard potentially violent and aggressive) subsector of associational life, started as youth movements. Not infrequently, they were founded by disappointed right-wing activists as spinoffs of civic circles. For example, Gábor Vona, who later became leader of the far-right Jobbik party, started its political career as junior member of the Alliance for the Nation Civic Circle, which was led by Viktor Orbán himself. Their origins and disagreements with Fidesz notwithstanding, these movements became part of the opposition to left-liberal rule between 2002 and 2010, and were an important factor in mobilizing support for the Jobbik, which in 2010 gained nearly as high a percentage of the popular vote as the Socialists.

At the same time as rightist civil society was on the rise, leftist civil society lost ground. Gone were the early-mid 1990s, when Ottilia Solt, then a top politician of the liberal SZDSZ party commented thusly on the landslide Socialist victory in the 1994 parliamentary elections: “Despite their shrinking membership, the Socialists are omnipresent. They have a sufficient number of people on the ground ‘who can distribute red carnations on the International Womens’ Day, and propagate the party line in shops, playgrounds, and among pensioners playing cards. Reaching to the roots of [local] society, their campaign proved to be tremendously effective”” (cited in Kőszeg 2011: 285-286; translated by B. G.).

The waning of once-vibrant leftist mobilization might be explained by several factors, the clarification of which requires further research. One reason could be that the dominant liberal and socialist view of democracy equated citizens′ political involvement largely with voting and only very specific forms of civic activism, such as protection of civil rights and the rights of minorities, but barely anything else.

A second reason might be political. Within their coalition governments the left and liberal parties kept competing for influence over politics and policy making, and their struggle reinforced their mutual ambivalence, sometimes even suspicion, towards each other′s organizational bases in society. This was particularly true for the trade unions and professional associations inherited from communist times, which the Liberals tended to view as threats to marketization, sources of unwanted interference with parliamentary democratic representation and decision making, and saw as “natural” allies of the Socialists (Greskovits, 2015: 35).

Finally, and ironically, the lack of a perceived need for civil society backing could be explained by the electoral successes of the left-liberal political camp. Except for a cycle of Fidesz rule between 1998 and 2002, the Socialists and Liberals ran the country between 1994 and 2010. Given the strength of parliament and, before the party was hit with scandal, the Socialists' seeming entrenchment, it is perhaps not surprising that on the left actors chose to work through formal political channels.

The trends in leftist and rightist civil society activity are illustrated in Figure 7 (the strength of left and right civil society over time) and in Figure 8 (where the right and radical right trends are distinguished from one another). Note that what counts as rightist protest in Figure 7 encompasses both rightist and radical right protest as displayed in Figure 8. A couple of caveats are in order about these plots. First, they go back only to 1995 because the data collection protocol in use before 1995 does not allow us to make reliable partisan differentiations among protests. Second, the data represent all leftist, rightist, and in the case of Figure 8 radical rightist organizations that led, sponsored, or otherwise supported a given protest event, be they a party or a civil society organization. By demonstrating sympathy, an organization can support an event it neither sponsored nor led. We determined the partisan leaning of an organization based on qualitative knowledge of that organization's profile and activities. Our coding rules can be found in Appendix 2.

There are two remarkable features of Figure 7. The first is that until 2010 rightist protest was more frequent than leftist protest, albeit in some years just barely. This was true even between 1998 and 2002, Fidesz's first term in office, which was the only period between the fall of communism and Hungary's entry into the European Union in 2004

which saw a rise in leftist contention. One the one hand this pattern buttresses our claim about the asymmetry between leftist and rightist civil society. Leftist civil society actors channeled their energies to a greater extent that their rightist counterparts through the parliamentary system, even when the Socialists and Liberals were out of power between 1998 and 2002.

The second feature is the steep increase in rightist civil society activity after the 2002 Socialist victory. These are the years that the right and radical right (counted together as "rightist" in Figure 7) were sinking roots in society and creating the resources that would allow them, first, to mount credible opposition to left-liberal rule outside of parliament and second, to mobilize their electorates to vote the Socialists out of power when faith in the Socialists even by their own partisans was shaken by scandal and the financial crisis. By contrast, until 2008 leftist civil society was barely more active than it had been a decade prior. Only the financial crisis jolted leftist civil society into a higher level of activity.

Consider now Figure 8, which divides "rightist" contention into more centrist actors, sympathetic to parties in the rightist coalition that ruled from 1990-1994 and later to Fidesz; and radical right actors, sympathetic to parties such as István Csurka's MIÉP party in the first decade of the transition and later largely to Jobbik.[4] By and large the pattern of radical right contention mirrors that of rightist contention--- remaining more or less constant through 2002, and then rising dramatically during the two cycles of Socialist rule that preceded Fidesz's landslide 2010 victory. But it is noteworthy that despite liberal fear that after 2002 the radical right dominated the extra-parliamentary opposition

[4] We do not separate out a radical leftist component of contention because even in the first several years of the transition, when there still existed Marxist civil society organizations and the Workers Party (Munkáspárt), there were trivial numbers of protest actions.

to Socialist policies, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, in fact relatively more moderate civil society actors took the leading role.

Finally, though we have only one full year of data since Fidesz's 2010 victory, it is clear from Figures 7 and especially 8 that Fidesz's policies provoked a vigorous response from across the partisan spectrum of civil society. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the rise in left contention has been sharpest; Fidesz's aim since 2010 has been to dismantle the post-communist system build by the Socialists and Liberals. Radical right activity also rose in 2011. Although the right and radical right were ideological bedfellows while the Socialists ruled, Fidesz in power views Jobbik also as a threat, and has tried to coopt Jobbik support by adopting toned down versions of some of Jobbik's preferred policies. The rise in rightist civil society activity between 2010 and 2011 (Figure 8) seems puzzling given the magnitude of Fidesz's victory until one realizes that this activity, largely organized by Fidesz itself, is meant to show support for Fidesz policies in the face of much more numerous anti-Fidesz protests from left and radical right organizations.

4 Conclusions

In this chapter we explore the relationship between civil society and democracy in post-communist Hungary. This relationship has long been known to be reciprocal: one the one hand, the nature and vibrancy of civil society has consequences for the quality of democratic life; on the other hand the democratic rules of the game and the actions of democratically-elected leaders affect the kind of civil society that evolves, particularly in a post-authoritarian context. Considering first how democracy influences civil society, we

document the emergence of civil society in the waning days of state-socialism and continuing into the early years of the first post-communist government. Hungarians from a broad spectrum of society exploited their newly-won freedom to make their voices heard. The second pattern is the dramatic increase in civil society activity beginning in the 2000s, but with an asymmetrical evolution between the left and the right. Specifically, with Socialist rule in three of the four electoral cycles between 1994 and 2010, left civil society gradually withered away. At the same time, in opposition to left-liberal power the right and then the far-right increased its presence in society, especially after the Socialist victory in the 2002 election.

Considering now how the development of civil society influences the quality of democracy, we have more speculation than systematic data. We know that rightist social mobilization sharply accelerated in the second half of the 2000's, and that it was in response to the perceived misrule and corruption of the left-liberal coalition. We surmise that the right's decision to take to the streets rather than defer to the formal democratic process may have undermined trust in democratic institutions, a development with portentious consequences for Hungarian democracy once the right-wing political actors anchored in these organizations ushered in the era of Fidesz political dominance.

While the exact links between the tectonic shifts of Hungarian civil society to the right and far-right, and the "U-turn" of the country's democratic politics, call for further in-depth study, some building blocks of the logic might not be dissimilar to those preparing the ground for the breakdown of democracy in inter-war Germany and Italy (Berman, 1997; Riley, 2005).

Appendix 1

Figures and Tables

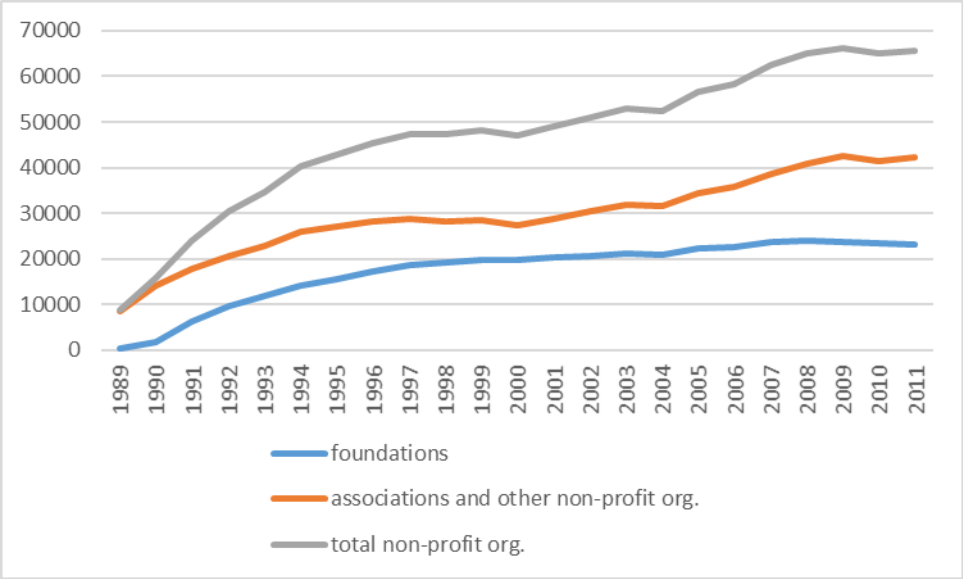

Figure 1- Annual number of non-profit organizations in Hungary. Data for 1989-2004 in Bócz 2009: table 7, 288. Data for 2005-2011 Central Statistical Office (KSH) available online at https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_qpg003.html, accessed on 11/29/2015.

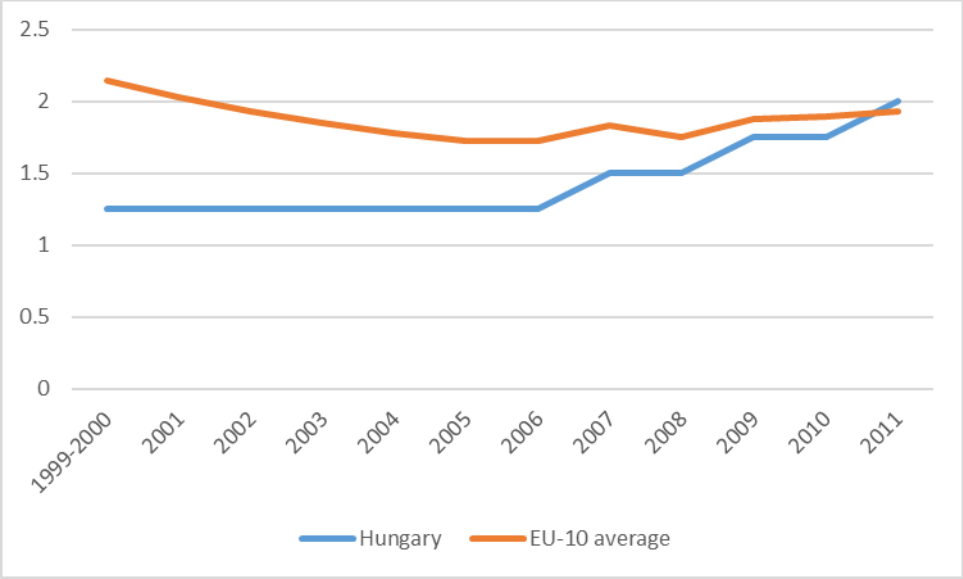

Figure 2- Nations in Transit civil society score based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of civil society development and 7 the lowest. The 2011 ratings reflect the period January 1 through December 31, 2010. Source: Nations in Transit 2009; 2011. EU-10: the ten former communist countries admitted to the EU in 2004 and 2007. The civil society score "assesses the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), their organizational capacity and financial sustainability, and the legal and political environment in which they function; the development of free trade unions; and interest group participation in the policy process" (Nations in Transit 2011: 22).

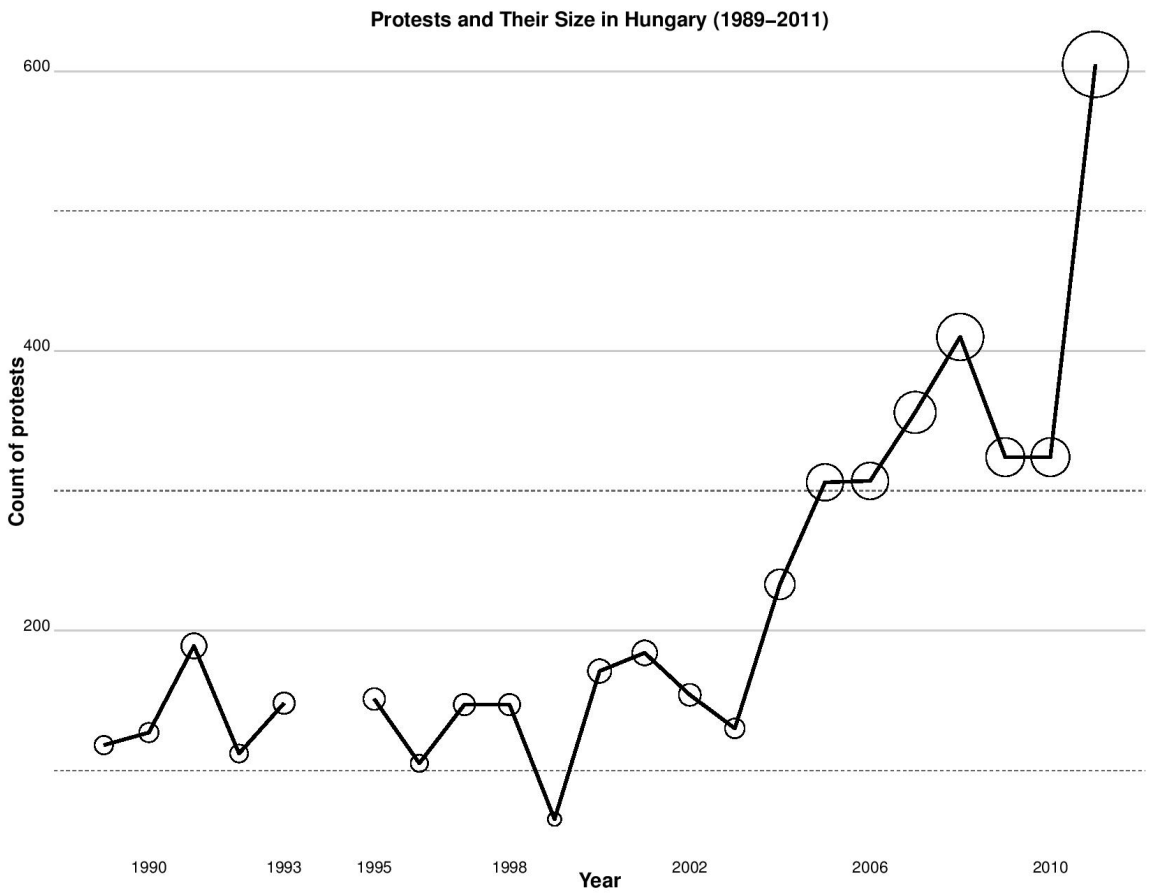

Figure 3a- Yearly Frequency of Protest Events and Their Size, 1989-2011. The sizes of the data points are proportional to the average number of protest participants in a given year, relative to 1989 as a baseline. We lack data for 1994.

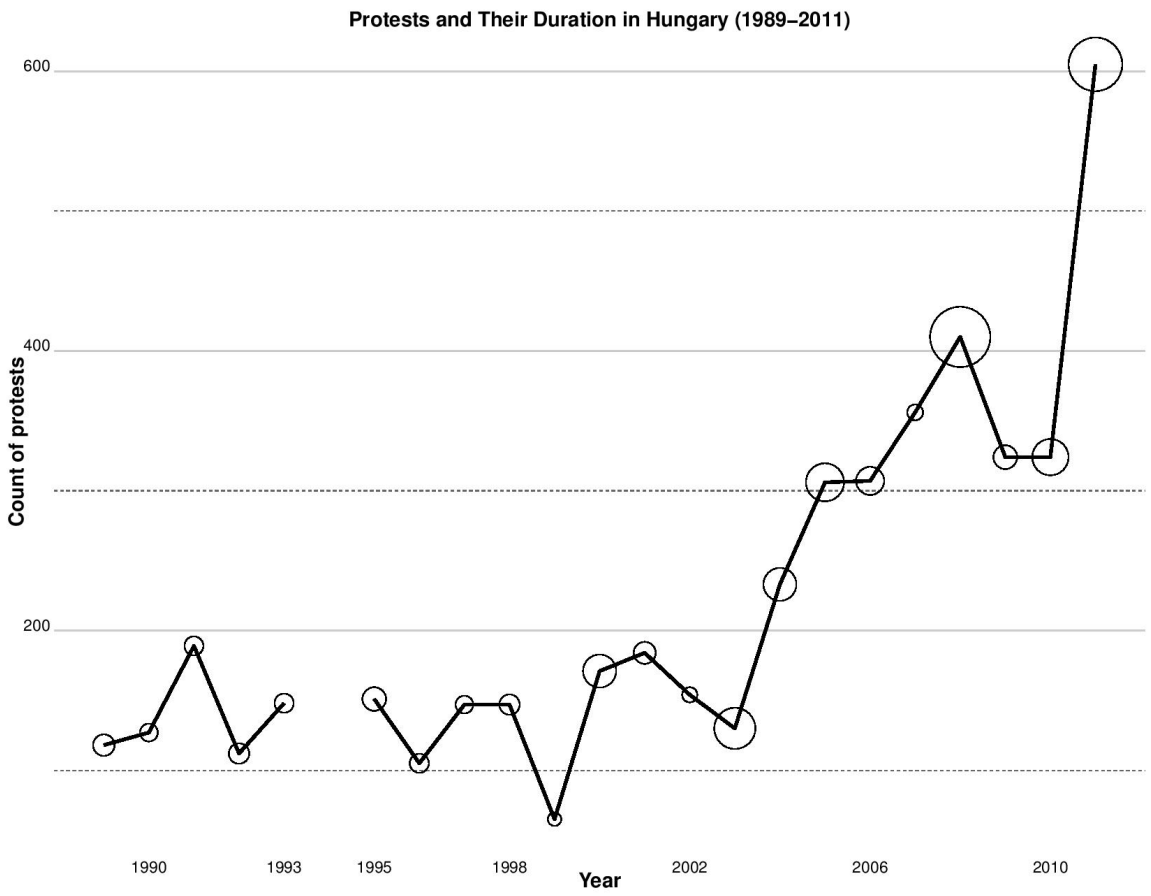

Figure 3b- Yearly Frequency of Protest Events and Their Duration, 1989-2011. The sizes of the data points are proportional to the average duration of protest participants in a given year, relative to 1989 as a baseline. We lack data for 1994.

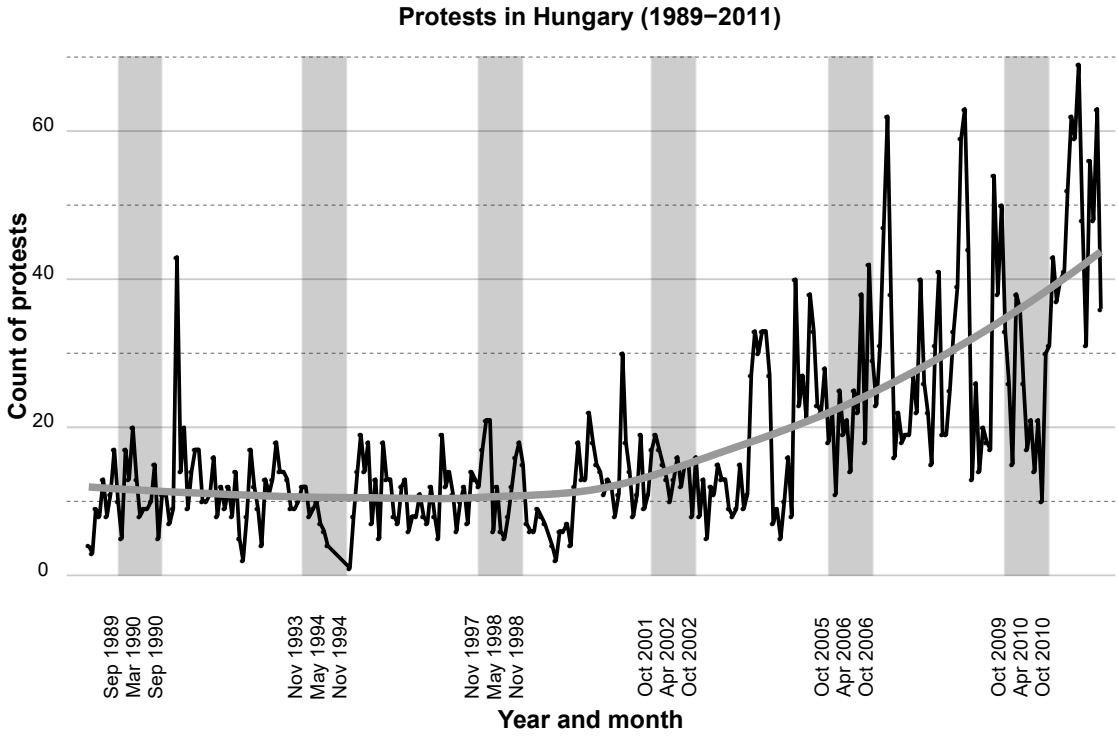

Figure 4- Monthly Frequency of Protest Events, 1989-2011 (with shaded bars indicating 6-month periods around national parliamentary elections). Data for 1994 is incomplete.

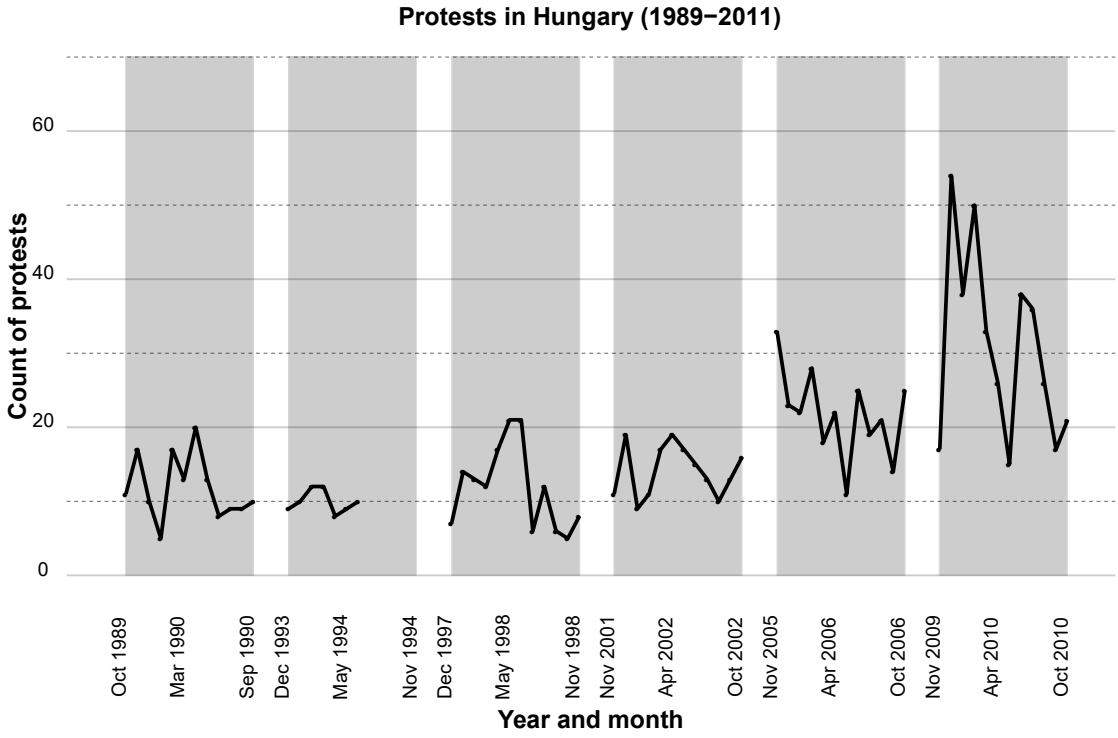

Figure 5- National Parliamentary Elections and the Pattern of Civil Society Contention, 1990-2010. National parliamentary elections occur at the midpoint of each shaded bar.

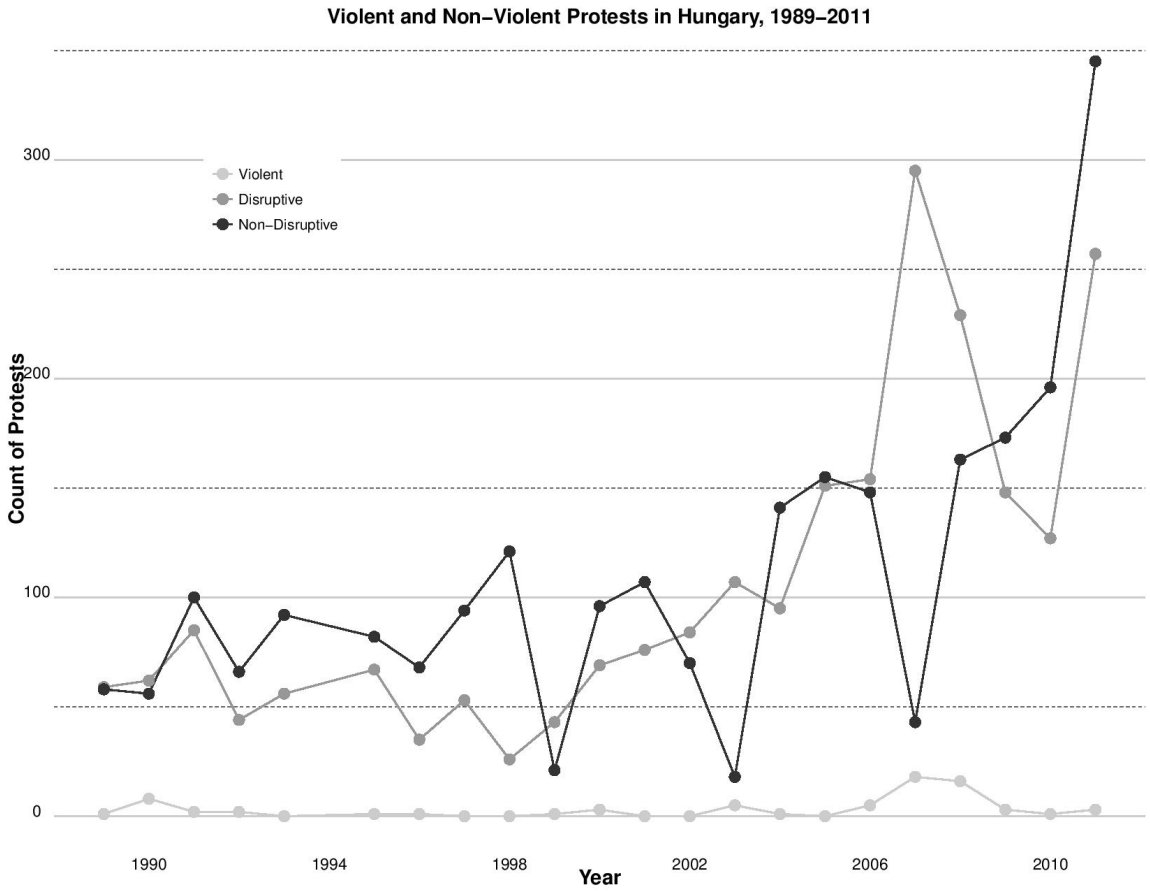

Figure 6- Violent, Non-Violent Disruptive, and Non-Disruptive protests, 1989-2011.

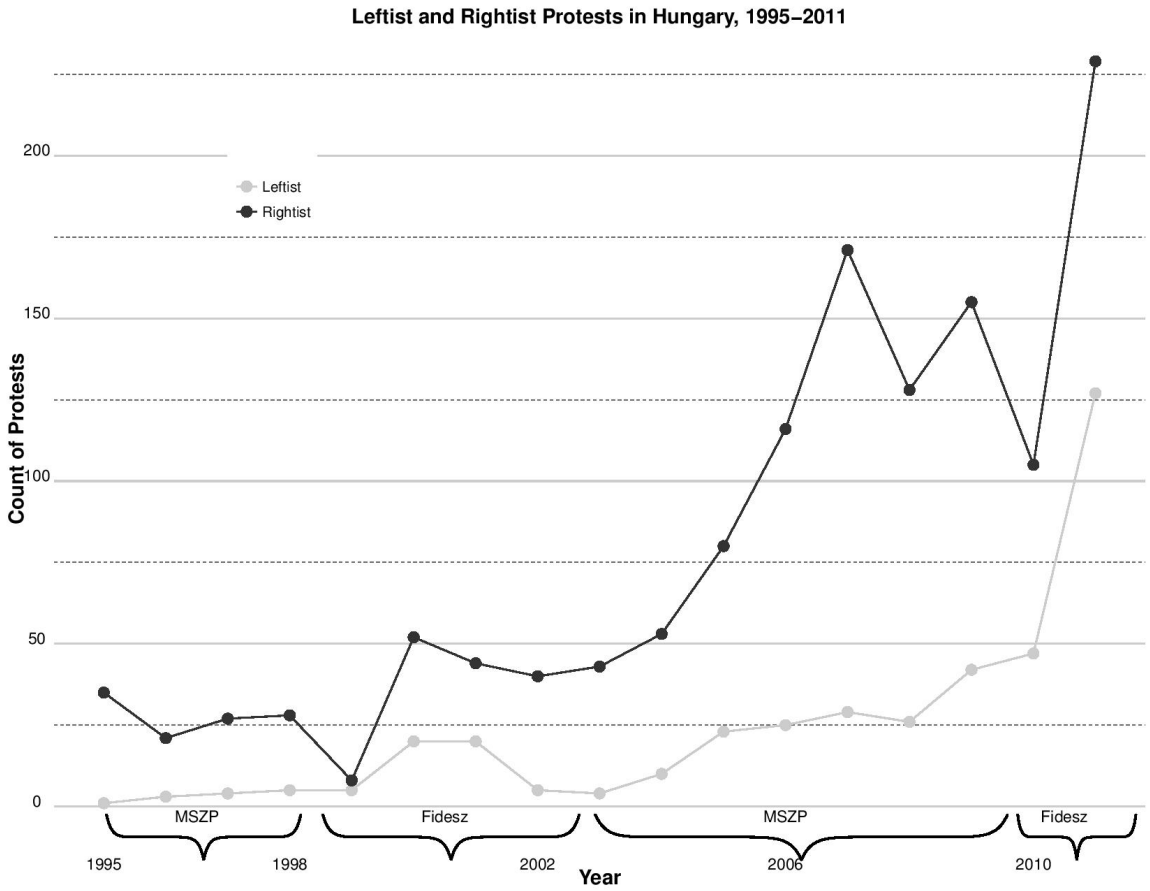

Figure 7- Left and Right-Leaning Organizations Leading, Sponsoring, or Otherwise Supporting Protests, 1995-2011. Rightist organizations include those of the far right. Leftist (MSZP) and Rightist (Fidesz) governments are identifies with brackets along the horizontal axis.

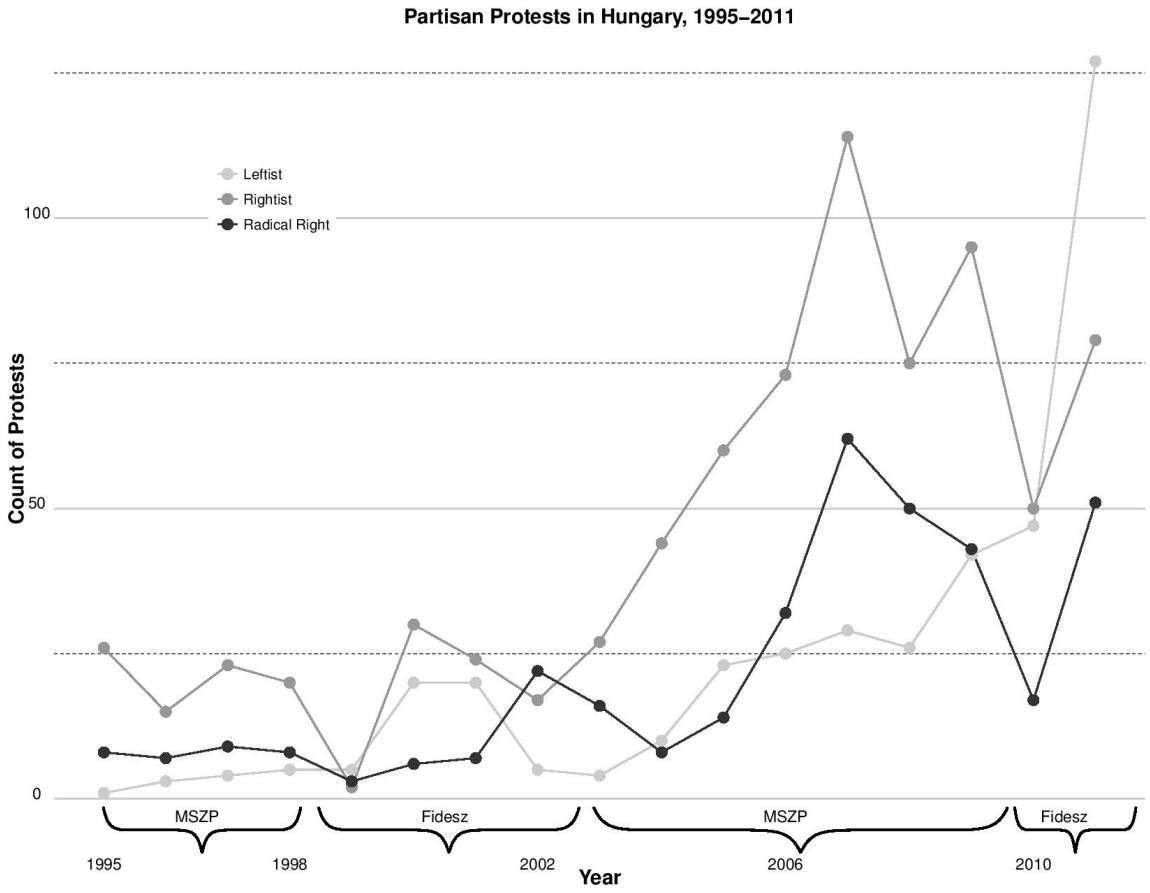

Figure 8- Left, Right, and Radical Right Leaning Organizations Leading, Sponsoring, or Otherwise Supporting Protests, 1994-2011. Leftist (MSZP) and Rightist (Fidesz) governments are identifies with brackets along the horizontal axis.

	1996	2006	PERCENT IN 2006 (1996=100)
Number of civil type non-profit organizations	40 627	50 890	125.3
Number of non-civil type non-profit organizations	5 004	7 352	146.9
Private individual members of civil type non-profit organizations	4 393 896	2 693 741	61.3
Private individual members of non-civil type non-profit organizations	2 134 020	1 061 665	49.7
Paid employees of civil type non-profit organizations	45 881	34 716	75.7
Paid employees of non-civil type non-profit organizations	25 299	64 944	256.7
Unpaid volunteers of civil type non-profit organizations	371 383	407 648	109.8
Unpaid volunteers of non-civil type non-profit organizations	29 618	30 245	102.1

Table 1- Organizational structure and empolyment in the Hungarian non-profit sector. Source: Bócz, 2009: Table 27. P. 300.

TYPE	NO. (FREQUENCY > 25)	% OF ALL PROTESTS
Letter/Statement/appeal	1296	27
Demonstration/March	1222	25
Legal action	280	6
Strike alert	182	4
Blockade	140	3
Strike	127	3
Rally, meeting	51	1
Hunger strike	60	1
Boycott	31	.6

Table 2- Type of Protest Action Among those Protests with Only One Type (73% of Total)

Duration		Frequency	Per cent
	8 hours or less	1954	40
	8 hours - one day	114	2
	2-7 days	166	3
	8 days - 1 month	125	3
	More than a month	152	3
	Other (letters, statements, etc)	1755	36
	data unavailable	588	12
	Total	4868	100,0

Table 3- Distribution of Protest Durations

No. of participants	Frequency	Per cent
0-20	674	14
21-200	817	17
201-500	357	7
501-1000	131	3
1001-2000	142	3
2001-10,000	172	4
Over 10,000	144	3
Over 50,000	19	.4
Data unavailable	2395	49
Total	4868	100,0

Table 4- Distribution of Participation in Protests

	n	% of Total
Political parties	592	12
Labor unions	751	15
Domestic social movements	544	11
Professional organizations	363	7
Radical political movements	278	6.5
Regional, local organizations	185	6
Youth Organizations	142	3
Ethnic groups or minority organizations	115	2
Domestic alternative-culture movements	79	2
Peasant/farmer organizations	62	1
Strike committees, employees councils	20	0.4
Roman Catholic Church	21	0.4
Reformed Church	16	0.3

Table 5- Major Organizations Leading or Sponsoring Protest

Total union membership	1 800 000 (1995)	1 440 000 (2005)
Net union membership (excluding pensioners, students, unemployed)	841 000 (1995)	580 300 (2005)
Paid employees of civil type non-profit organizations	45 881 (1996)	34 716 (2006)
Paid employees of non-civil type non-profit organizations	25 299 (1996)	64 944 (2006)
Unpaid volunteers of civil type non-profit organizations	371 383 (1996)	407 648 (2006)
Unpaid volunteers of non-civil type non-profit organizations	29 618 (1996)	30 245 (2006)
Total number of paid employees and unpaid volunteers of non-profit organizations	472 181 (1996)	537 553 (2006)
Political party membership	173 600 (1999)	123 932 (2008)

Table 6- Members, paid employees, and unpaid volunteers of Hunagrian trade unions, the non-profit sector, and political parties. Data from Visser, 2013; Bócz, 2009, and Van Biezen at al., 2012, respectively.

Appendix 2

Rules for Coding Leftist, Rightist, and Radical Right Organizations

	Right-wing, national, conservative	Left-wing, modern, liberal
Rhetorical emphasis	Nation, homeland, Hungarians	Democratic institutions, republic
Buzzwords	Religion, belief, church	Europeanness
	Family	Rule of law, legal system, law
	Order, security	Individual freedoms, tolerance
	Respect for work	Social justice
	Values, morals	Modernization, reform
Emphasized social groups	Middle class, citizenry	Wage earners, workers
	Rural residents	Minorities, disadvantaged groups
Opposing ideas	Communism	Fascism, nazism
	Liberalism	Nationalism

Radicalism

Beyond the left-right camps we can also measure right-wing radicalism. To do this we adapt items from the DEREX index (see http:..derexindex.eu):

1. Hostility to international institutions and corporations
2. Hostility to the legal system and law enforcement
3. Hostility to the political elite
4. Dissatisfaction with the existing political system
5. Racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic discourse

For each event the coder identifies the characteristic buzzwords.

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