

ISSUES AND PARTY PREFERENCES IN HUNGARY

A Comparison of Directional and Proximity Models

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ABSTRACT

The article compares proximity and Rabinowitz/Macdonald directional models of issue voting according to their ability to predict preferences for the six Hungarian parliamentary parties. It was assumed that in a relatively new democracy directional models should perform better, since voters would have more difficulty recognizing the exact positions of parties on different issue dimensions. Furthermore, it was assumed that political sophistication would influence the observed relationships. The analysis is based on a Hungarian national random sample, and an additional survey of members of the Hungarian parliament. The data include voters' and representatives' expressed preferences concerning eight specific policy issues, as well as their positions on the Left/Right dimension. Although voters' issue preferences appear as relatively weak predictors of vote choice, the directional model generally outperformed the proximity model, the difference being greater in the less politically sophisticated group. In addition, the vote is better explained by positions on the left–right scale than on specific issues.

KEY WORDS ■ directional and proximity models ■ Hungary ■ issue voting

The assumption that citizens elect their representatives according to the political goals they wish to be realized has often been regarded as essential for representative democracy. When scholars started to analyse empirically the determinants of citizens' voting choices, it became obvious that the process included more than simply rationally selecting from available policies.

According to Dalton and Wattenberg, there are three approaches to the study of how individuals 'make reasonable political decisions at modest cost and without perfect information' (1993: 196): sociological, psychological

and economic. The sociological approach of the 'Columbia school' has focused on the role of primary groups as determinants of voting, whether through common group interests (Berelson et al., 1954) or as a reflection of social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

In the social psychological model of the 'Michigan school' (Campbell et al., 1960), social groups, among other factors, play a role in determining party identification, which then exercises its own influence on political decisions. Party identification helps in orienting in the complex political world through its simplification, and through simplification of the voting choice process. In their 'funnel of causality', issue opinions and candidate image are factors directly influencing voting decision, besides party identification. However, issue opinions are themselves partly determined by party identification, i.e. they are not based exclusively on individual self-interest calculation. Campbell et al. (1960) maintained that election results were weakly related to the policy preferences of the public, since they found that less than a third of all voters were 'issue voters' in the proper sense.

The economic approach to voting (Downs, 1957) views voters as active and rational decision-makers driven by the expected utility of an election outcome. While the Michigan researchers believed that stands on issues ought to be related to voting decisions but found weak evidence for it, the Downsian approach simply assumes that policy preferences determine voting. The most straightforward derivation from the Downsian approach is the spatial theory of voting (cf. Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Hinich and Munger, 1992; Merrill and Grofman, 1997, 1999; Westholm, 1997). In this view, voters cast their votes for parties that are closest to them on a continuum on a given issue. The model is simple if there is only one dimension of policy preferences. However, that is frequently not the case. In order to accommodate this fact, the model is simply extended. Now voters choose a party that is closest to them when distances on all relevant dimensions between a voter's and the parties' positions are summarized. According to Merrill and Grofman, the 'Downsian proximity model . . . specifies that utility is a declining function of distance from voter to candidate' (1997: 30). Formally, the voter's utility is expressed as

$$U(V, C) = -|V - C|^2,$$

where V and C are vectors of the spatial positions of a voter and candidate, respectively (ibid., equation 3, p. 30).

An alternative model, one relying more on a symbolic politics perspective, is the directional model of voting (e.g. Listhaug et al., 1994; Macdonald et al., 1991; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). In this approach, termed by Merrill and Grofman (1997) the Rabinowitz/Macdonald directional model (RM), voter's choice is determined by the direction and intensity (i.e. distance from a neutral point) of a voter and party/candidate. The more a party and a voter are distanced from the neutral point in the same

direction, the larger the voter's utility is for supporting the party in question. Intensity is determined by the distance and the sign by the direction. Merrill and Grofman (1997: 29, equation 1) formally express this model as:

$$U(\mathbf{V},\mathbf{C}) = \mathbf{VC} = \sum V_i C_i.$$

In other words, utility is obtained by summing of products of voter's and candidate's positions relative to the neutral point.¹

There is a growing literature assessing the relative contribution of these and other related models to the successful prediction of vote choices or candidate/party preferences (e.g. Granberg and Gilljam, 1997; Iversen, 1994; Karp and Banducci, 2002; Kramer and Rattinger, 1997; Listhaug et al., 1994; Macdonald et al., 1991; Maddens, 1996; Merrill, 1995; Merrill and Grofman, 1997; Westholm, 1997). The results are not in perfect agreement, not in small part due to different methodological approaches (cf. Granberg and Gilljam, 1997). For example, Merrill and Grofman after comparing directional, proximity and unified models (i.e. a combination of directional and proximity effects), concluded that 'voter utilities have both directional and proximity components and that intensity plays a role for challengers but perhaps not for incumbents' (1997: 45). Maddens (1996) found that proximity and directional models are approximately equally able to predict vote, except that vote for the far right is better predicted by the directional model. He also detected an interaction with political sophistication: directional model works better in the case of less sophisticated voters. Iversen, likewise, reports '*substantive* effects of both spatial and directional stimuli on the voting behavior of European electorates' (1994: 68, italics in original). These findings are interpreted as support for his 'representative policy leadership' model, according to which elites are rewarded for their leadership (directional effect), but punished if they become too extreme (spatial effect).

The task of this article is to compare the relative contributions of directional and spatial effects, both of specific issue preferences and Left/Right (hereafter L/R) ideological positions, on political party preferences among the Hungarian electorate. The reviewed literature on relative adequacy of proximity and directional models shows that both models have some empirical support, but that the relationships are influenced by factors such as the extremity of a party or political sophistication. However, previous comparisons of directional and proximity models have been basically limited to the established democracies. In the context of new democracies, it is important first to examine whether issues influence party preferences at all. The present research utilizes data gathered in connection with third parliamentary elections in Hungary held in 1998. Given this relatively short experience of Hungarian voters with the parties, and that the party system is still in the process of stabilization and ideological crystallization, it would not be surprising if voters had difficulties in recognizing the exact positions

of parties on different issue dimensions. Therefore, voters are expected to be more susceptible to symbolic politics, i.e. to opt for a more directional approach in developing their party preferences. In addition, the relative contribution of specific issues versus the general Left/Right ideological dimension will also be assessed.

It has been suggested that the directional aspect of a party is easier to recognize than its exact position on a policy dimension, and therefore the less sophisticated voters are more ready to use directional style of selecting a preferred party. More sophisticated voters, on the other hand, are expected to behave more according to the proximity model. This reasoning is endorsed by Maddens (1996), who found that proximity effects increase with increasing political sophistication, while directional effects remain relatively constant across different levels of political sophistication. Moreover, it could be argued that in relatively new democracies it requires more political knowledge to be aware of the different parties' policy positions than in older, better established party systems. Hence, the Hungarian case should reveal a particularly strong role of political sophistication.

The present analysis concentrates on the six parliamentary parties: MSZP, SZDSZ, Fidesz-MPP, FKgP, MDF and MIÉP. These parties have been the most important actors on the Hungarian party scene since 1990, and they formed the parliament in 1998. With the exception of the MIÉP, they achieved parliamentary representation in the 1990 and 1994 elections as well.² The left side of the Hungarian political spectrum is represented by the socialist MSZP, a reformed communist successor party, and the liberal Free Democrats (SZDSZ). The moderate right wing is represented by Fidesz-MPP, MDF and FKgP. Conservatism, nationalism and Christianity characterize the ideological profile of the MDF, while the FKgP is predominantly populist and agrarian (Fowler, 2003). Fidesz-MPP started as a liberal and libertarian anti-communist youth organization, but in the mid-1990s it shifted radically towards the right. In combining its charismatic leadership with the MDF ideological outlook, it basically squeezed out the latter from the scene. The main dimensions of the Hungarian political space seem to be related to attitudes to the communist past, nationalism and clericalism, rather than to the socio-economic left and right (Enyedi and Todosijević, 2003; Kitschelt et al., 1999). Nevertheless, the left-wing parties proved to be in favor of neoliberal economic policies, while the right wing espoused more protectionist philosophy, perhaps more as a sign of populist rhetoric than of firm ideological commitment.

The MIÉP is an extreme right party, known for its nationalism and anti-semitism. The party split from the MDF in 1993, and for the first time entered parliament in 1998.³ The presence of an extremist party allows for testing the hypothesis that preference for this type of a party is better captured by the directional model.

Method

Survey and the Sample

The analysis is based on two comparable surveys of the electorate and MPs in Hungary. The surveys included questions on party preferences, opinions on different policy issues and on Left/Right self-identification. Data on the electorate's policy preferences are based on the second wave of a panel study conducted in 1998 between the two rounds of the parliamentary election.⁴ The first wave interviewed a random sample of approximately 2500 voters nationwide in Hungary, in March 1998. The second wave was based on the same respondents re-interviewed in April 1998, with an attrition rate of approximately 40 percent. The sample was weighted so that it represented the adult Hungarian population according to the major demographic variables (N = 1453 before weighting).

The data on political elite opinions were derived from the questionnaire answered by 201 members of the Hungarian parliament in October 1998, that is in the first months of the new parliament.⁵ Of the 201 MPs interviewed, 186 are members of 6 political parties and of respective parliamentary factions (Table 1).

The elite data are especially useful because they allow relatively objective determination of parties' stands on policy issues. MPs assessing their own parties is obviously one of the most objective ways of determining 'true' party positions and of avoiding the problem of projection and rationalization.⁶ Authorities in the field differ in their practices in this regard. Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989) generally use average voters' perception of party positions, arguing that it reflects the message received by the voters. Westholm (1997) uses individual voter's placement of the parties. On the other side of the aisle are authors who use self-placements of party officials (Iversen, 1994; Maddens, 1996), or of party candidates at election (Karp and Banducci, 2002). The position defended here is that for any issue theory of party preference it is relevant where parties actually stand. A voter who votes for an extreme right party, but believes that the party is on the left and perceives herself as being on the left could hardly be regarded as a prototypical issue voter. The strong point of issue theories of party preference is precisely that 'reality matters'. The notion of spatial voting itself has an objectivist connotation, implying the relationship between voters and parties as independent entities. If 'objective' party positions are replaced with idiosyncratic perceptions, the notion of issue voting can easily become over-inclusive, and the model difficult to disprove because of its inability to distinguish between issue voting proper and de facto delusion. Since voters do not have direct knowledge of the parties' issue positions, the accuracy of their perceptions sets limits to the relevance of issues for party preferences.

Mass partisanship was determined by combining two variables. First, the

Table 1. Party membership of the sampled MPs

<i>Party</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party	69	34.3
SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats	17	8.5
Fidesz-MPP	Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party	69	34.3
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum	4	2.0
FKgP	Independent Smallholders Party	19	9.5
MIÉP	Party of Hungarian Justice and Life	8	4.0
Missing*		15	7.4
Total		201	100

*Did not indicate party membership.

respondents were asked for their party choice in the previous elections. Those who did not vote were then asked what would have been their party preference if they had voted in the previous elections. In this way the number of missing cases was reduced from 35.3 percent to 14.3 percent without damaging the validity of the measure.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Dependent variable is represented by the so-called 'feeling 'thermometer' item. This is an 11-point (from 0 to 10) bipolar scale, where respondents express to what degree a certain party is sympathetic (10 meaning very sympathetic, or likeable) or antipathetic to them (0 meaning very antipathetic). Such a strategy has been adopted previously by, for example, Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989), Macdonald et al. (1991), Listhaug et al. (1994), Merrill and Grofman (1997) and Karp and Banducci (2002). However, it has been argued that the vote choice is a preferable measure because it is politically more relevant. Maddens (1996) and Iversen (1994), for example, used expressed vote choice. The theoretical problem with the vote choice variable is that it is contaminated by a variety of considerations, not just by a voter's utility. For example, low chances of entering parliament may discourage potential voters of small parties despite their issue positions. In addition, multiple parties may have similar utilities for voters. Vote choice variable treats all the non-chosen parties equally, regardless of differences in the associated utilities. The notion of changing utility in relation to the voter-party distance implies a continuous dimension of evaluation, i.e. that each party is evaluated by all voters, rather than a discrete choice of a single party versus all other parties. 'Evaluation measures an individual's utility for a party, which is the fundamental prediction of the theories' (Macdonald et al., 1998: 659). Spatial models of

voting could be seen as a special application of spatial theory of the voter-party utility to the explanation of vote choice. Therefore, in order to avoid problems of strategic, expressive and other non-utilitarian motives for voting decision, the feeling thermometer seems to be the best approximation of a voter 'utility' of a party.

In fact, there is a close correspondence between feeling thermometer and vote choice. Preliminary analysis showed that the highest thermometer score was assigned to the party for which the voters voted. Thus, the feeling thermometer proves to be a valid measure of general 'party utility' for a voter. An additional, not unimportant, reason for the use of thermometer variable rather than vote choice is that the former enables the use of more powerful statistical methods.

Independent Variables

Policy Preferences. Policy preferences, or issue stands, are measured by eight bipolar items (Table 2), accompanied by an 11-point scale (from 0 to 10). Two opposing statements represented each issue, and respondents assigned their own preferred position between the two extremes.

It is assumed that the middle point (5 in this case) can be taken as a neutral point, which is needed in order to estimate directional effects (the neutral point is then set to zero). Introduction to the policy preference items explicitly states that score 5 means 'that the solution preferred by you is between the two offered'. This formulation of the issues allows the use of both directional and proximity reasoning logic.⁷

Left/Right Placements. This variable is operationalized by the standard item asking respondents to assign a place to themselves and/or to parties on the scale from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right). MPs were asked to assign a place to each of the six examined parties, but not to themselves personally. In the further analysis, when an elite's placement of a party on the L/R continuum is employed, it is done by using average placement of a party by its members. The mass questionnaire, besides the questions asking for the placement of the six parties, also asked the respondents' for their own self-placement on the L/R scale.

Preliminary Analysis of Issue Dimensions

According to Butler and Stokes (1974), issues can influence vote if three conditions are satisfied: voters should have different opinions about the issues, parties should take different stands on the issues and voters should care about the issues. In order to establish validity of the present examination of issue voting I present here the evidence bearing on these three points.

Average self-placements of the MPs and voters on the eight policy issues

Table 2. Eight policy preference items

1. State enterprises must be privatized quickly, the non-profitable ones to be closed down.	State enterprises must be kept in the hands of the state; the non-profitable ones must be modernized with the help of the state budget.
2. The difference between the underdeveloped and rich areas must be diminished by state regulation.	It must be left to the enterprises to decide where to invest. Territorial inequalities should not be artificially diminished.
3. Religion and churches must be kept away from politics.	Churches must fight for their right to implement their views and their justified demands in politics.
4. It is extremely harmful if the office-holders of the Kádár regime have a decisive influence in enterprises and institutions.	There are exceptions, but usually those are the best leaders who gained experience during the Kádár regime.
5. The inflow of foreign capital must be regulated, since it subordinates the Hungarian economy to foreign interests.	It does not matter whether the capital is Hungarian or foreign; the point is that it helps production and creates work places.
6. University studies must be free of charge for the students.	Tuition fees should be introduced to cover costs of higher education.
7. Our foreign policy should strive for joining NATO and the European Union as soon as possible.	Our foreign policy should strive for political and economic independence.
8. The proper family policy is that every family with children receives GYED, GYES and family allowance.	It is not proper if the rich families receive the same support as the others.

Note: Answers were given on an 11-point scale, from 0 indicating complete acceptance of the left-hand opinion, to 10 meaning complete agreement with the right-hand one. Score 5 was defined as preference for the solution in-between the two offered. In the further text the eight issues are presented in an abbreviated form.

are given in Table 3. On average, MPs are mildly supportive of privatization, diminishing of territorial inequalities, separation of state and church, exclusion of Kádár-regime officials, inflow of foreign capital, free university education, quite supportive of joining NATO and quite divided about family policy. The average voter tends to favour a middle-of-the-road position on most of the issues, except that it favours some welfare policies (e.g. free university education) and separation of the state and church more than the elite do. In addition, voters are less enthusiastic about privatization, foreign capital and NATO than the deputies are.

Certain of these issues polarize the Hungarian parties particularly

Table 3. Average scores on eight policy issues among MPs and voters

Issue*	MSZP		MSZP Fidesz-MPP		Fidesz-MPP		Mean issue salience**
	MPs	Voters	MPs	Voters	MPs	Voters	
Privatization	3.69	5.62	3.65	5.23	3.78	5.66	6.60
Territorial inequalities	3.12	3.76	2.59	3.71	3.07	3.97	7.85
State and Church	3.44	2.97	.97	2.39	4.81	3.34	5.18
Former communists	3.52	4.51	5.52	5.90	1.96	3.58	4.78
Foreign capital	7.42	5.03	8.65	5.61	6.90	5.01	7.66
Tuition fees	3.76	2.30	4.83	2.59	2.54	1.87	4.90
NATO and EU	2.03	3.58	1.20	2.75	2.15	3.55	8.98
Family policy	5.19	4.06	8.83	4.42	1.52	3.46	8.54

*11-point scale. **11-point scale of issue salience assessed by MPs. Lower numbers indicate lower salience.

strongly. The same table shows average scores for the main parties on the left and right, that is the MSZP and Fidesz, respectively. Elites of the two parties significantly differ in their position on issues of the separation of state and church, former communists, tuition fees and foreign investments. It is interesting that foreign investments are favoured more by the left wing, and that both parties are equally supportive of fast privatization. The largest difference between the two parties (7.31) is on the issue of family policy, where Fidesz supported the option favourable to middle-class families.

Voters of different parties in general are more like each other than are the elites. Concerning the family issue, for example, the distance between voters is only 0.96. The largest difference is on the main symbolically loaded issue of the former communists.

Table 3 also presents average salience of the issues, as assessed by the MPs. On average, all issues are perceived either as very important or as having average importance. Issues concerning joining NATO and the European Union, as well as family policy are perceived as the most salient, while issues of former communists and tuition fees as relatively less important.

There is a considerable agreement among MPs concerning the L/R placement of different parties (Table 4). Column *All* contains average placements of the entire sample of MPs. Column *All others* contains placements of all non-members of a certain party. Column *Partisans* presents a certain party's members' placements of their own party. While the general order of parties in all columns is similar, indicating a shared understanding of the positions of the different parties, there are a number of telling differences. Non-members of a party generally tend to perceive it as being posited more towards an extreme, whether left or right (column *All others*).

Obviously, parties try to attract voters not only by taking particular positions on the L/R dimension, but also by pushing the image of the other

parties towards the extremes. It seems that the 'region of acceptability' hypothesis fits this picture.⁸

The questionnaire administered to the sample of the electorate also contained a question concerning L/R self-placement. It was therefore possible to differentiate self-placement proper and placement of a party for which a respondent voted (Table 4, columns *Partisans' self-placement* and *Partisans*, respectively). The electorate's perception of a party's position on the L/R dimension is remarkably accurate in the sense that it corresponds to the MPs' placements of the parties. Moreover, it is closer to the MPs' placements of their own parties than to the average MPs, or MPs' placements of the 'other'. Average absolute distances between column *All* among voters and entries in columns *Partisans*, *All* and *All others* among MPs are 0.73, 1.03 and 1.20, respectively.⁹

Voters are able to distinguish their own position on the L/R scale and the position of a party they vote for. This is illustrated by the differences between columns *Partisans' self-placement* and *Partisans*. While voters relatively accurately perceive a party's position on the scale (compare columns *Partisans* for the elite and mass), individually they express more centrist positions across all parties. So, while the elite tend to see the competing parties as more extreme, the electorate does not display such a tendency. While the *perception of parties* is weakly affected by partisanship among the mass, voters place themselves individually more to the centre.¹⁰ At the aggregate level, it seems that the L/R scale position does not influence voting decision according to the proximity principle, but rather according to the directional model.

In addition, it may be noted that no party, according to the elite's assessment, occupies the central position on the L/R scale. Voters' mean self-placement on the scale is 4.91, but no party is particularly close to this point. This shows the 'total absence of centre parties that draw their predominant support from the political centre' (Listhaug et al., 1994: 144). So, the theory of the 'median voter' does not seem applicable in the case of the Hungarian parties and voters, not at least concerning the Left/Right dimension. The evidence rather supports the view of the 'empty center'. According to Listhaug et al.:

[W]hen ideology is viewed as a choice between the left and the right, there is no 'centre ideology' that can attract voters. Parties may eschew left or right ideology and base their appeal on something else, such as religion or farm issues or skill in managing the government. But they should be aware that moving to the centre on ideology will not generate ideological support. To build support, parties must indicate the direction they will move public policy. Voters then choose the direction they prefer. This is the heart of issue and ideological competition in democratic systems.

(1994: 144–5)

At this point, it could be concluded that the electorate perceives the position of the six Hungarian parties on the L/R dimension fairly accurately and

similarly to party elites. The order of the parties is generally the same across different subsamples of the elite and the electorate. Moreover, the numerical position assigned to the parties is generally similar among the elite and electorate.

Main Analysis

Estimation of Directional and Spatial Effects of Policy Preferences

Proximity and directional effects are estimated according to the formulae presented above. When thermometer scores are regressed on proximity and directional utilities (summarized across all issues, as the corresponding formula suggests) separately, the results reveal greater explanatory power of the directional model (Table 5).¹¹ In two cases (that of the MDF and SZDSZ, the two most ‘centrist’ parties in the voter’s perception), the two models are about equally powerful, while in the other four cases the directional model outperforms the proximity model. Differences between the explanatory power of the two models are obviously not great, so it could be concluded that there is a slight advantage in favour of the directional/intensity model. Concerning the particular parties, it should be noted that sympathies for parties of the moderate Right are rather weakly or not related to issues, particularly their proximity aspect (the proximity coefficients for the Fidesz-MPP and FKgP are not even statistically significant). On the other side, attitudes towards parties of the Left (SZDSZ and MSZP) are more issue-related. In the case of the MSZP the coefficient for the directional model is slightly higher.

Sympathies for the MIÉP are more based on issue stands (the effect of which is once again more in accord with the directional than the proximity model) than in the case of any other party. The fact that preference for an extremist party is more related to issue stands is in accordance with Maddens’ findings in Flanders (1996).

In order to examine which of the measures of issue voting remains as a

Table 5. Regression coefficients (beta) for proximity and directional effects of aggregated eight specific issues (separate equations)

	<i>MSZP</i>	<i>SZDSZ</i>	<i>Fidesz-MPP</i>	<i>MDF</i>	<i>FKgP</i>	<i>MIÉP</i>
Proximity	0.17**	0.19**	0.05	0.10**	0.05	0.21**
Direction (RM)	0.22**	0.19**	0.09**	0.09**	0.12**	0.28**

** $p < 0.01$. Note: Thermometer scores are regressed separately on aggregated proximity and directional utilities.

more robust predictor of party utility, they are entered together in a regression equation. This task is performed by regressing the feeling thermometer scores on two blocks of variables. The first one consists of the two measures of issue effects, the second one contains directional and proximity effects of the Left/Right self-placement (Table 6).

Coefficients from the first block show that the proximity terms almost entirely lose their effect once directional effects are controlled for. For voters of all parties except the SZDSZ the impact of issue proximity drops below statistical significance. Directional issue effects, on the other hand, remained largely significant, again particularly in the case of leftist parties and the extreme right. It seems that as far as pure predictive power is concerned, proximity can be left out of the equation. However, if the block R^2 is examined, it appears that even with both effects, a very small part of the variance of the feeling thermometer scores can be explained. Obviously, other variables are needed.

One such variable is L/R ideological identification. Coefficients for the directional effect of the L/R self-placement dominate the complete equation, and this applies for all six parties. The proximity effect of the L/R scale is quite small, usually even smaller than the directional effect of issues. It is interesting that the isolated L/R proximity effect in the case of the MIÉP is even negatively related to the thermometer score. It seems that MIÉP voters are attracted to the party primarily by its extremity.

The importance of the L/R dimension for party preference is shown also by the R^2 for the full equation. It is higher than for the first block – the change in the explained variance (incremental variance) is significant in all

Table 6. Directional and proximity effects of the issues (first block) and of the issues and L/R self-placement. Entries are standardized beta coefficients and R^2 estimates⁺

	<i>MSZP</i>	<i>SZDSZ</i>	<i>Fidesz-MPP</i>	<i>MDF</i>	<i>FKgP</i>	<i>MIÉP</i>
<i>Issues only model</i>						
Proximity	0.03	0.09*	-0.03	0.06	-0.07	0.02
Direction (RM)	0.20**	0.12**	0.11**	0.05	0.17**	0.26**
Block R^2	0.05**	0.04**	0.01**	0.01**	0.02**	0.08**
<i>Full equation</i>						
Proximity	0.02	0.04	-0.05	0.07	-0.05	0.02
Direction (RM)	0.16**	0.10*	0.11**	0.03	0.15**	0.22**
L/R direction	0.39**	0.33**	0.24**	0.23**	0.39**	0.57**
L/R proximity	0.02	0.07**	0.11**	0.04	-0.08	-0.28**
Total R^2	0.23**	0.16**	0.11**	0.08**	0.13**	0.20**

** *t*-, or *F*-test, $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

+ In all cases, R^2 change is significant, $p < 0.05$.

cases. Finally, it should be reiterated once more that the directional model displays greater ability to predict voters' party preferences.

Role of Political Sophistication

The generally better performance of the directional model could indicate the greater role of symbolic politics for the party preferences of Hungarian voters. Maddens (1996) compared the relative power of directional and proximity models by comparing their performance across four levels of political sophistication. In his reasoning, the proximity effect should be higher among the more sophisticated, because they can better recognize what exact positions parties occupy. Among the less sophisticated, the directional effect is expected to be stronger, since these voters may be more susceptible to symbolic (and extremist) appeals. His results confirm these hypotheses, but only in the case of the smaller role of issue proximity among the less educated. However, directional effects were not weaker among the more sophisticated – in fact they were slightly higher.

In the present analysis, political sophistication is represented by a proxy measure – the respondent's educational level. The variable consists of four categories, but the analysis is performed separately for the highest and lowest educational categories in order to emphasize the potential differences. The results show that directional effects are generally higher in both educational strata, and concerning both the issues and L/R identification (Table 7). Among the less educated (presumably less politically sophisticated), directional effects are either about equal as proximity effects (MDF, Fidesz-MPP) or greater (SZDSZ, MSZP, MIÉP). In the case of the MSZP, SZDSZ and FKgP, proximity effects are below statistical significance (in the case of the FKgP, even directional effect is insignificant). These findings confirm the hypothesis that among the less educated proximity is less relevant than direction. The same generally applies to L/R identification, though coefficients are higher and statistically significant.

However, among the better educated, directional effects are also higher than proximity effects, concerning both the issues and the L/R scale. The important difference is that the issue proximity coefficients are now generally significant. An interesting deviation from the general pattern is Fidesz-MPP. Namely, issue coefficients are significant and higher among the less educated, while insignificant among the better educated. I will leave it unresolved as to why, among the better-educated voters, support for the Fidesz-MPP is *not* related to their issue stands (though it *is* related to the L/R dimension).

The hypothesis about the interaction between issue voting and level of political sophistication can be reformulated according to the present findings. In the case of Hungarian voters, both the more and the less sophisticated conform to the directional model more than to the proximity model. However, the less educated in general base their party preferences

Table 7. Regression coefficients (beta) for proximity and directional effects (separate equations) of issues and L/R self-identification, for respondents with higher and lower educational levels

	<i>MSZP</i>	<i>SZDSZ</i>	<i>Fidesz-MPP</i>	<i>MDF</i>	<i>FKgP</i>	<i>MIÉP</i>
<i>Low education</i>						
Issue proximity	0.09	0.06	0.20**	0.17*	-0.01	0.20**
Issue direction	0.16*	0.16*	0.19**	0.19*	-0.03	0.32**
L/R proximity	0.42**	0.09	0.23*	0.27**	0.22**	0.36**
L/R direction	0.51**	0.37**	0.29**	0.31**	0.36**	0.41**
<i>High education</i>						
Issue proximity	0.38**	0.37**	0.15	0.26**	0.23**	0.38**
Issue direction	0.49**	0.43**	0.13	0.26**	0.33**	0.53**
L/R proximity	0.61**	0.13	0.32**	0.37**	0.27**	0.47**
L/R direction	0.69**	0.52**	0.41**	0.49**	0.48**	0.62**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

less on issues, particularly as captured by the proximity model. An optimistic conclusion could be, to quote Maddens, 'that even the relatively unsophisticated voters somehow manage to bring their party choice into line with their political attitudes' (1996: 66), thanks to directional vote choice. A somewhat more realistic conclusion would be that such voting is only slightly better than choosing parties at random.

Summary and Conclusions

Two theories on choice of vote with reference to the six Hungarian parliamentary parties have been compared: Downsian proximity theory and the Rabinowitz/Macdonald directional model. It was expected that in a relatively new democracy, due to the relatively short experience of voters with the parties, it would be more difficult for them to recognize the exact positions of parties on different issue dimensions. Therefore, they would opt for a more directional approach in developing their party preferences. The contribution of specific issues versus general Left/Right ideological dimension was examined as well.

The most important aspects of the applied methodology are the following: (1) For calculation of distances, the average issue positions taken by the MPs of the respective parties was used as a reference point. (2) Proximity was measured as a squared Euclidean distance, while the directional model was defined as a scalar product of distances. (3) The dependent

variable was operationalized as a feeling thermometer score, rather than as vote choice. Following Maddens' (1996) suggestion, I examined whether directional and proximity effects differ among the more and less politically sophisticated voters.

The results show that specific issues, whatever way a voter's distance from a party's position is operationalized, are weakly related to vote choice. The directional and proximity models together can explain between 1 percent (MDF and Fidesz-MPP) and 8 percent (MIÉP) of the variance in party utilities. Significantly more variance can be accounted for with a single Left/Right ideological dimension. This finding holds throughout different strategies of data analysis.

Preferences for the left parties are more based on issues than for the parties of the moderate right, regardless of whether proximity or directional model is used. Sympathy for the extreme right party, MIÉP, is consistently the strongest correlate of the voters' issue stands (and also of the L/R dimension).¹² It seems that taking strong and distinct stands on issues has particular relevance in the case of extremist parties.

To the extent that the proximity model reflects a rational, i.e. instrumental approach to evaluating parties, and the directional model stresses the symbolic value of issue positions, it seems that Hungarian voters are more inclined towards the symbolic interpretation of the political realm. With very few exceptions, the directional model resulted in higher parameters than the proximity model. However, the differences are small, and, more importantly, the effects of both models are weak in absolute terms. Voters' issue positions are weakly related to their party preferences. It is possible, despite the evidence on the salience of the included issues, that some other, more relevant, issues were not included in the survey.

However, the role of L/R self-identification proved to be much stronger than that of the entire set of specific issues. This finding is in accordance with Listhaug et al.'s (1994) claim that the L/R dimension is more relevant than any other specific issue. However, L/R self-placement may be seen by the voter as just another way of stating current party preference. If so, then the strong correlation obtains because L/R self-placement is a result, and not a cause, of party preferences, but this alternative interpretation of the meaning of the L/R scale moves us beyond the topic of issue voting.

Examination of the interaction of political sophistication with the two models of issue voting partly confirmed the hypothesis that issue voting is less common among the politically less sophisticated. However, Maddens' (1996) hypothesis that the proximity model, by requiring greater political sophistication, should be more pronounced among the better educated was not confirmed. While both effects are stronger among the better educated, the difference in favour of the directional model remains at all levels of political sophistication. These findings apply to the effects of issues and to L/R self-placement.

If the present findings are compared with findings in other countries, then

Hungarian voters do not appear exceptional. The directional model in general seems better equipped to capture the effects of issue voting.

Notes

Gábor Tóka, Zsolt Enyedi and two anonymous reviewers provided useful comments on earlier versions of the article.

- 1 In Westholm's (1997) terminology, this is the reduced version of the directional model, since it does not incorporate the effect of the region of acceptability.
- 2 Elections of 2002 left both the FKgP and MIÉP without parliamentary representation.
- 3 For recent accounts of the Hungarian party system, see Fowler (2003) or Gábor Tóka's chapter on Hungary in Berglund et al. (forthcoming).
- 4 CEU (Central European University) 1998. *The Development of Party Systems and Electoral Alignments in East Central Europe. The March–May 1998 Election Surveys in Hungary*. Machine readable data files. Budapest: Department of Political Science, Central European University. Access to the data file was generously provided by Gábor Tóka.
- 5 The Fidesz-MPP, MDF and FKgP formed the new government. The elite survey was mainly sponsored by the Strategic Researches Program of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, while the poll was conducted by Median, Budapest. This dataset was generously provided by Zsolt Enyedi, Central European University, Budapest.
- 6 See the debate on the problems of determining parties' spatial locations (e.g. Merrill and Grofman (1997) and their attempt to handle the problem of 'projection' versus Macdonald and Rabinowitz (1997)).
- 7 Concerning this question format, Westholm argues that 'the respondent is thus free to interpret the scale in either a positional or a direction-intensity sense' (1997: 868).
- 8 According to Listhaug et al., 'voters prefer parties that are on their side and responsible' (1994: 144).
- 9 Correlation in this case would suggest a misleading conclusion (cf. Achen, 1977).
- 10 Thus, the voters' centrist tendency cannot be attributed exclusively to random guessing of party positions (e.g. Powell, 1989). Cf. Himmelweit et al. saying that voters tend to 'see their own party as more flexible and "moderate", and the opposing parties as more dogmatic or extremist' (1981: 107).
- 11 Maddens, in order to exclude the effect 'structural determinants' of vote choice, controlled for religious denomination, social class, and age. He argues that this is needed in order to isolate the pure 'impact of issues on the vote' (1996: 60). While there is some merit in the argument, it is an ad hoc hypothesis that cannot be deduced from the Downsian model.
- 12 For the similar finding in Flanders, see Maddens (1996).

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Paper submitted May 2003; accepted for publication December 2003.