

# Two Step Forward, One Steps Back: Electoral Coordination in the Hungarian Elections of 1998\*

Kenneth Benoit  
Trinity College, Dublin  
[kbenoit@tcd.ie](mailto:kbenoit@tcd.ie)

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## Abstract

Electoral coordination refers to the use by political parties of a concerted strategy that makes most effective use of electoral rules to maximize their interests in legislative elections. Coordination requires both strategic thinking and political discipline, however, and in relatively new democracies these conditions may not exist. In this study I examine electoral coordination in the Hungarian legislative elections of 1998, the country's third since its transition to democracy in 1989. Not only was there extensive electoral coordination among political parties aware of the strategic incentives presented by the complex electoral rules, but voters also responded to the cues signaled by party leaders, leading to the general success of the strategy. Coordination took two forms: joint party sponsorship of candidacies and the strategic withdrawal of candidates between the second and first rounds of voting in the single member districts, known in Hungarian as "stepping back." Careful selection and control of candidacies explains the bizarre aggregate result of that election, when the MSZP with the most total votes in each of three separate rounds of voting received only the second most seats. In addition, despite the expectation that contamination effects of its mixed-member system's PR component would produce and sustain multipartism, Hungary's party system has been steadily converging towards a two parties. Strategic coordination explains these outcomes as parties and voters employed the stepping back strategy to consolidate their forces around two poles.

**Key Words:** electoral strategy, coordination, parties, Hungary, two-round system

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Electoral coordination refers to the use by political parties of a concerted strategy that makes most effective use of electoral rules to maximize their interests in legislative elections. Coordination requires both strategic thinking and political discipline, however, and in relatively new democracies these conditions may not exist. In this study I examine electoral coordination in the Hungarian legislative elections of 1998, the country's third since its transition to democracy in 1989. Not only was there extensive electoral coordination among political parties aware of the strategic incentives presented by the complex electoral rules, but voters also responded to the cues signaled by party leaders, leading to the general success of the strategy. Coordination took two forms: joint party sponsorship of candidacies and the strategic withdrawal of candidates between the second and first rounds of voting in the single member districts, known in Hungarian as "stepping back." Careful selection and control of candidacies explains the bizarre aggregate result of that election, when the MSZP with the most total votes in each of three separate rounds of voting received only the second most seats. In addition, despite the expectation that contamination effects of its mixed-member system's PR component would produce and sustain multipartism, Hungary's party system has been steadily converging towards a two parties. Strategic coordination explains these outcomes as parties and voters employed the stepping back strategy to consolidate their forces around two poles.

## **Electoral Coordination and Democracy**

One of the key challenges in the overall quality of democracy in post-communist states is the consolidation of the party system. This consolidation occurs over time as an emerging process whereby the demand for parties and their supply by political forces reaches equilibrium (Cox, 1997). Initially when elections are opened to contestation by opposition forces, both the demand and supply of parties is typically high as previously suppressed groups enter the democratic contest. As successive elections occur, a learning process occurs wherein the constraints on winning office become clear to both parties and voters and market-clearing expectations lead to a restriction of both demand and supply. This reduction in the number of parties will be a function of both the particular electoral rules in the country and the shape of the electorate in defining their desires for representation. Yet a crucial part of this consolidation process will also be the adoption of strategy by parties and voters to make most effective use of voting in order to gain office (Duch and Palmer 2001).

An important ingredient of the consolidation of the party system will be the ability of parties to coordinate strategically in elections in ways that maximize their interests in the legislature. This form of strategy generally means forming alliances and pre-election pacts that restrict competition between allied parties and therefore maximize their chances of winning against common opponents; its exact form will be defined by the particular electoral rules. Strategic coordination places demands both on voters and on parties and their candidates. Party leaders must not only recognize potential strategies for coordination, but also act upon those strategies and maintain sufficient discipline within party ranks to make them credible and successful. Voters must recognize and follow the cues of party leaders to make strategies successful. The existence of electoral coordination, therefore, presumes a fairly high level of experience with the democratic contest in addition to the existence of rational and strategic parties and voters.

In post-communist democracies the question should be considered as open whether party coordination and strategy feature significantly in elections. In these systems, the argument goes,

both citizens and parties are inexperienced, possibly irrational, have restricted information, poorly understand the electoral rules, or represent interests that are too incoherent or poorly defined to pursue coordination properly.<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances the party system is unconsolidated and out of equilibrium. The normative implications for democracy are that voters are likely have their votes diluted by an overabundance of too many uncoordinated parties. Likewise, parties are likely to be too fragmented to effect policy that represents the needs and wants of the electorate. The quality of democratic accountability and responsiveness depends not only upon the quality of institutions, therefore, but also on the adaptation to and proper usage of the system by political actors (Kitschelt et. al 1999).

In this paper I examine electoral coordination and the adoption of strategic party behavior in Hungary, which in 1998 held its third freely contested election since 1990. Not only did parties exhibit remarkable strategic coordination in that election, but voters also showed strong evidence of following party cues in making the coordination strategies effective. This strategic coordination is remarkable given that this election was only the third since Hungary's transition, and because Hungary's electoral rules are notoriously complex to understand. Furthermore, coordination explains the curious result of that election: a legislative victory for the opposition Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party despite its losing the competition for aggregate votes.

### **Electoral Consolidation and Mixed-Member Systems**

The strategies employed in 1998 also represented a continuation of strategic behavior by parties and voters evidenced by a growing trend visible from the previous two elections whereby the party system in Hungary is converging on an equilibrium number of parties. Not only is this result curious because of the relative newness of Hungary's democracy, but also because even in more long-lived democracies mixed systems tend to promote multipartism. In the Hungarian case, therefore, a variety of theoretical reasons exist to expect that Hungary's electoral law would

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<sup>1</sup> While not necessarily typical, the proliferation of poorly defined parties in the Russian system and the number of independent candidacies exemplifies this pattern. See White, Rose and McAllister (1997).

produce and sustain a multiparty system. First, evidence from other cases generally suggests that mixed-member systems tend to behave more as PR than as SMD systems (Budge et. al. 1997). Herron and Nishikawa (2001, 13) explain that the PR and the SMD components produce an “interaction, or contamination, which undermines the acquisition of Duvergerian equilibria in the SMD component.” The expectation is therefore that mixed systems would encourage multipartism. Second, because of Hungary’s compensatory PR list at the national level, which further mitigates the punishing effects of majoritarianism in the SMDs, we would expect the overall tendency of the system to behave more like a PR than a majoritarian system.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the majoritarian component of Hungary’s electoral system is not plurality but rather a runoff system. For dual-ballot systems, Duverger’s original prediction was that such systems would not produce the tendency towards a two-party system (1954, 240; see also Sartori 1994, 67). Cox (1997) takes this logic further and demonstrates that a top- $M$  runoff system should lead to  $M+1$  parties. For these reasons, therefore, we would expect multipartism in the Hungarian political system. As the ensuing analysis shows, however, because of electoral coordination motivated by institutional incentives built into Hungary’s mixed-member system, electoral competition in Hungary is converging to bipolarity.

### **The Rules: Hungary’s Electoral System**

The Hungarian legislative electoral system, one of the most complicated in the world, is a hybrid model using elections from a combination of single-member districts, party lists, and a national compensation list. Hungary’s 386-seat legislature is elected from 176 single-member districts (SMDs), from 20 party list districts that have the potential to determine the allocation of 152 seats, and from a national list which proportionally allocates the remaining seats. Voters cast two ballots each: one for an individual candidate in the single-member district in which they are registered, and one for the party list in their county (or “territory,” in Hungarian election parlance). The national compensation list automatically allocates the remaining seats using aggregated votes from SMD and list the two ballots that did not go towards electing candidates.

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<sup>2</sup> This is similar to Lijphart’s (1994) classification of these types of mixed electoral systems as PR.

Woven into this three-level hybrid system is a two-round system as well, similar to that used in France and in other run-off systems around the world. In the 176 SMDs, should no candidate receive at least 50 percent of the vote cast, then a second round is held two weeks later between the top three candidates, and any other with at least 15 percent of the first round vote.<sup>3</sup> This provision was included in the 1989 draft of the election law at the insistence of the Socialist party, who at the time thought it would splinter the uncoordinated opposition by creating a series of run-off races between the regime and two candidates of the opposition (see Benoit and Schiemann 2001). But the rules do not bind qualifying candidates to participate in the runoff round, since they have the option of withdrawing, known in Hungarian as *visszalépés* or “stepping back”—hence the title of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

In classification terms, Hungary’s system falls messily into several categories. First, it is clearly a mixed-member system, although in two variants: a “fusion” type (Massicote and Blais 1999) coming from the direct PR at the district level, and a “compensatory” variant due to the use of surplus votes to distribute national list seats. Furthermore, while majoritarian, the SMD component is not only a runoff system but a mixture of what Cox (1997, 123) calls the “top-*M*” runoff system—since the top three candidates can compete in the second round—as well as a “fixed standard” (Greenberg and Shepsle 1987, 525) runoff system, since any candidate with at least 15% of the vote may also compete in the second round. If Hungary’s electoral rules pose such a challenge for students of electoral systems to classify, then it would be all the more remarkable to witness strategic coordination by parties and voters after just two previous elections. One result to be examined therefore is which element of the mixed system dominates, if any, the character of the aggregate election results and hence the psychological effect of the electoral law on parties and voters.

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, for both the SMD and the list balloting, if there less than 50 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots, then the election is held again for that district in the second round. This situation occurred in 31 districts in the 1998 elections.

<sup>4</sup> The electoral law also permits parties to sponsor single-member candidates jointly, running under both party labels but in reality belonging to only one of the sponsored parties. The national list surplus votes

## **The Hungarian Election of 1998**

Hungarian voters went to the polls on May 10 and May 24, 1998 to complete their third genuinely democratic election since its transition to democracy. The result: a textbook case of Huntington's "two-turnover test" of democratic consolidation. The ruling coalition of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), itself having defeated the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) in 1994, was ousted by a coalition of the rightist opposition parties led by the Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz-MPP<sup>5</sup>). For Hungarian democracy, therefore, the election was widely heralded as a victory. For scholars, on the other hand, the election was also a significant event. Because of Hungary's complicated electoral rules, the counter-intuitive result was achieved that the party with the most votes did not receive the most seats. Not only did the MSZP receive the most total list and first round single-member district (SMD) votes of any party, but it also received more second round votes than any other party. Despite this fact its main rival, the Fidesz party (Fidesz) won the most seats, a non-monotonic transformation not found in any previous election (see Table 1<sup>6</sup>). Another curious fact, noted by many observers, is that the MSZP's list votes were almost identical to its 1994 totals, an election in which it won a majority of the parliamentary seats. The first lesson of the 1998 election, therefore, is that the vote share a single party will receive is practically useless in Hungarian elections for predicting how many seats it will win. Instead this votes-to-seats conversion for any given party will be determined by the distribution of vote shares received by other parties.

<<Table 1 about here>>

A total of 32 parties legally registered for the election, with 27 actually fielding candidates in addition to 53 independents competing in single-member districts. This made for a total of 1,606

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for any such candidates that do not win the round are divided among the sponsoring parties according to a proportion declared before the election.

<sup>5</sup> This reflects the name change in 1997 of Fidesz from the Federation of Young Democrats to the Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party. Following common parlance I drop the -MPP part and simply refer to "Fidesz" hereafter.

<sup>6</sup> Because the Hungarian acronyms are used in the tables and text of this paper, the Appendix presents the list of parties participating in the 1998 elections as well as their abbreviations.

individual candidates in the first round of voting on May 10, and 498 competing in the second on May 24. A total of 218 territorial party lists were established by 15 parties, and 12 of these also qualified for setting up a national compensation list. Based on the first and second round valid voting, only five parties reached the 5 percent threshold necessary to receive list votes at the territorial or national levels. No party with less than 5 percent can receive list seats according to the election rules, although some, like the MDF and the single independent winning a seat, were able to elect candidates without the list mechanisms.

In contrast to previous elections, Hungary's parties made extensive use of pre- and between-round election pacts to coordinate electoral strategy. These took three forms. First, two parties, the main opposition party Fidesz and the electorally ailing Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) agreed to sponsor joint candidates in 78 electoral districts, an option permitted in the electoral law but used before only in 1990 by mostly minor parties and on a much smaller scale.<sup>7</sup> Second, the MDF and Fidesz, and the MSZP and the SZDSZ in a few cases, forged agreements not to compete against one another in several SMDs in the first round and urged voters of non-represented parties to support the allied party's candidate instead. Finally, and most importantly, electoral coordination took place between rounds in the form of the agreements that voluntarily reduced the number of candidates competing in the second round. This strategic phenomenon of "stepping back" in 1998 took place on an unprecedented scale, reducing most of the important would-be tripartite runoffs to two-person contests. Out of 727 candidates qualifying for second-round contests, 229 candidates voluntarily withdrew, causing massive shifts in voter support that moved Fidesz from second to first place in a significant number of districts. Together these factors explain why Fidesz, which came second to the MSZP in aggregate votes from three separate rounds of balloting—the first and second SMD rounds and the list voting—came first in seat shares and went

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<sup>7</sup> In 1990 there were 17 joint candidates, mostly between the SZDSZ and Fidesz and between the Agrarian Alliance and its partners, and four of these won seats (Toka 1995). Five joint candidates competed in the 1994 elections, and one won a seat (Benoit 1999). In neither of these two previous elections, however, were the joint candidacy agreements as widespread or as formal as in 1998. In the tables that follow the joint Fidesz and MDF candidates are denoted FIDESZ-MDF and MDF-FIDESZ, distinguishing between the actual party affiliations of the jointly sponsored candidates.



on to form the next government. To understand the outcome more fully we must examine each electoral round in turn.

<<Table 2 about here>>

### *The First Round*

The results of the first round of voting in the single-member districts indicated a lead for the MSZP, as shown in Table 2. The only party to stand candidates in every one of the 176 districts, the MSZP's overall votes led the combined Fidesz and Fidesz/MDF joint candidates in overall voting by approximately 8 percentage points. Since the seats are decided at the district level, however, it is more appropriate to compare results on this level. The mean district percentage column indicates that the joint (FIDESZ-MDF and MDF-FIDESZ) candidates were nearly as popular in their districts as was the MSZP. Nonetheless, the MSZP was the first-place finisher in 113 districts, far more than any other party, leading to a mild optimism among the socialists for a strong final outcome. This outcome was far from decided, however, since 175 of the 176 single-member districts—close to half of the seats in parliament—would be determined in the second round.<sup>8</sup>

Based on this first round result, it is not surprising that many observers declared the first round a qualified victory for the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party. With 4 percent more of the list vote than Fidesz, the first round numbers indeed seemed to indicate that the MSZP would lead Fidesz in the new parliament. Another interesting result is that the MSZP received nearly the same percentage of the list vote as it had in the elections four years previous: 32.9 percent. Many observers also commented on the fact that the total list votes for the MSZP in 1998 was less than 300,000 votes of its total list votes in 1994.

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<sup>8</sup> Turnout in the first round was uncharacteristically low. The electoral rules state that if not at least 50% of the eligible voters in a district turn out to vote, then the round of voting is declared invalid and must be repeated. Compared to the 1994 elections in which there were no districts declared invalid because of low turnout, in 1998 a total of 31 first-round SMDs were declared invalid, as well as two list districts. First-round turnout was just 56.2 percent nationwide, compared to 68.9 percent in 1994. Second-round turnout, in the past lower than that of the second round, actually rose slightly in 1998 to 56.3 percent.

<<Table 3 about here>>

The results of the list balloting (Table 3) were largely consistent with those of the first-round SMD results. The MSZP held the lead in 13 of 20 districts, and Fidesz in 7. These two parties were quite close in vote percentages, less than 3 percentage points apart. The next largest party, the FGKP, won less than half the votes of its nearest rival. In tertiary ranks, the Independent Smallholders (FKGP) held third place in all but one district where the SZDSZ came in third place. Of the 15 parties having established lists, only 5 qualified for seats by meeting the 5% minimum vote threshold.

### *The Second Round*

The second round of the 1998 elections took place two weeks after the first, on May 24. During these two weeks the party leaders had ample time to agree on which candidates would participate in the second round and which would “step back.” Explicit embrace of this strategy included encouraging voters of parties whose candidates had withdrawn to vote for friendly candidates who had remained. In general the strategy worked, at least for the opposition Fidesz party and its electoral partner the MDF. Table 4 reveals how Fidesz could win more seats with fewer overall votes: more of the added votes which make up the nationwide total for the MSZP were losing votes, relative to those cast for Fidesz. This is illustrated by the column comparing the district averages for Fidesz and the joint Fidesz-MDF candidates, both of which were higher than that of the MSZP.

<<Table 4 about here>>

Fidesz won 55 of the 82 SMD races where its own candidates competed, and 34 of the 46 districts where its candidates ran jointly with the MDF. The “stepping back” strategy also worked for the MDF, leading it to win 2 of the 3 districts where it had its own candidates and 15 of the 22 where its candidates ran jointly with Fidesz. This contrasted to the MSZP which won only 54 of the 169 second-round districts it contested. Considered individually or with its joint candidates, Fidesz moved from second to first place between rounds, winning 89 total seats compared to the

MSZP's total of 54. This shifted the election in Fidesz's favor and made it the largest party in parliament. In the end the three main opposition parties of the moderate right—Fidesz, the MDF, and the FKGP—took 121 of the 175 single-member second-round seats, compared with just 54 for the MSZP. The next section analyzes this shift in greater detail.

### **Trading Places**

The strategy of stepping back from the second round is not a new feature of the Hungarian electoral competition, but never before did the strategy play such a decisive role in the outcome. Electoral coalition pacts had featured in the very first election of 1990 and partially explained the success of the MDF over the SZDSZ, permitting the former to win seats in the runoff elections in 34 instances where it had trailed in the first round (Hibbing and Patterson 1992). Originally the design of the top-3 electoral rule was intended by the Socialist party to fragment the opposition and permit a plurality party to win in the runoff. Perhaps because of the explicitness of this manipulation, other parties were quick to recognize the incentives for coordination to prevent this fragmentation from occurring. It was not until 1998, however, that the Socialist party finally felt for itself the full failure of its institutional manipulation to function as intended, when the opposition demonstrated just how successful and decisive a coordinated stepping back strategy could be.

In the 1998 election the electoral pacts forged between the first and second rounds polarized the runoff contest into a two-way race: the incumbent coalition of the MSZP and SZDSZ versus the opposition parties led by Fidesz. This opposition included primarily the MDF, with whom Fidesz had run joint candidates in 78 districts, but also included the FKGP. The main point of the electoral pact was simple: should both friendly parties qualify candidates for the second round in a district, then the candidate whose first round votes were fewer would withdraw from the second round. Two candidates stepped forward, typically, and one stepped back.

<<Table 5 about here>>

The most significant decision to withdraw was made by the Independent Smallholders' Party, which withdrew its candidates from more than 60 percent of the second rounds where it had received fewer first-round votes than other opposition candidates. The Christian Democrats and the Hungarian Democratic People's Party each withdrew all but one of its qualifying candidates from the second round, encouraging its voters to support Fidesz, MDF, or joint MDF-Fidesz candidates instead. On the side of the governing coalition the withdrawal strategy was less cooperative. The SZDSZ withdrew only 35 of its 83 candidates to make room for the MSZP, which for its part withdrew 6 of its candidates from the second round, most as concessions to the SZDSZ. As later analysis shows, however, there were a total of 43 districts where both MSZP and SZDSZ candidates competed. As the last two columns of Table 5 demonstrate, Fidesz and the MDF (and their joint candidates) had the highest success rates in the second rounds. The FKGP won only 27% of the second rounds it contested, after withdrawing 61% of its qualifying candidates—the highest of any party because of its high numbers of candidates placing third in the first round.

<<Figure 1 about here>>

Figure 1 portrays the difference in round 1 versus round 2 results graphically, contrasting the performances of the MSZP against those of Fidesz and the Fidesz-MDF joint candidates. The two lines represent fitted regression lines for each party from a regression of second round vote shares on first round vote shares, controlling for party. The Fidesz second round votes were significantly higher than the MSZP second round votes, visually indicating the shift in ranks between rounds.<sup>9</sup>

Table 5 takes the analysis one level deeper by examining the shifts in ranks by party. Of the opposition parties in the top four rows, only two candidates (both FKGP) moved backwards in rankings between the two rounds, and a total of 66 moved forward. This contrasts sharply to the MSZP pattern of having moved backwards in rank in 59 districts and forward in only 2. Although

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<sup>9</sup> The graphic comes from an OLS regression of the 498 round 2 percentages on round 1 percentages using robust standard errors with dummies for MSZP and Fidesz/joint Fidesz-MDF candidates. The coefficient

the SZDSZ moved ahead in 17 districts, it won only two of these. Overall the opposition parties were far more successful than the coalition parties in moving forward in rank between rounds.

<<Table 6 about here>>

The axes of electoral competition emerge more clearly from a detailed analysis of the districts where candidate withdrawals narrowed the contest to two opponents (Table 6). In 91 second round contests, the MSZP faced a single Fidesz or joint Fidesz candidate. While the average round 1 district vote share of the Fidesz candidates trailed that of the MSZP, it leaped ahead by an average of 7.2 percent in round 2. The strategy also proved successful by and large for the FKGP, whose round 2 average narrowly led the MSZP in the districts where its candidates remained in the second round. Overall in every type of second round contest, the average opposition vote share led the average coalition vote share.

Not surprisingly, a critical element of the stepping back strategy was the exhortation by party leaders for voters to follow their lead in shifting support for remaining candidates. In other words, when a voter whose most preferred candidate withdrew, the party leader of the withdrawn candidate urged its voters to throw their support behind the remaining candidate. Although only aggregate data can be observed from the election, we can examine a post-election survey to gauge the success of this strategy. Table 7 presents the results of a post-election survey where two questions are cross-tabulated: For which party did you vote in the first SMD round, and for which in the second?

<<Table 7 about here>>

The results suggest strongly that more than any other party, Fidesz picked up the support of voters from outside its own camp. If we exclude the diagonal cases marked in bold—where we can assume voters stayed with their candidates in the second round when this was possible—then we can make the following claims. Fully 93% of those claiming to vote for the FKGP in round one

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estimates and standard errors are: constant -1.69 (.560), r1pct 1.31 (.067), mszp 6.10 (1.87), and fidesz

who did not claim to vote for the FKGP in round 2 voted instead for Fidesz.<sup>10</sup> For the MDF and MIEP these figures were 93% and 96% respectively. This contrasts to the MSZP's picking up only 54% of the off-diagonal SZDSZ vote and 53% of the off-diagonal Munkáspárt vote. Indeed, in the case of the SZDSZ 46% of its off-diagonal voters supported Fidesz candidates, along with 43% of the Munkáspárt respondents. In sum then, the survey results suggest that while Fidesz picked up many voters from both the ruling coalition parties and others such as Munkáspárt, the ruling MSZP-SZDSZ bloc gained almost no new voters in the second round from the opposition camp.

### **The Emergence of a Two-Party System?**

As stated previously, there exist a variety of theoretical reasons exist to expect that Hungary's electoral environment would produce and sustain a multiparty system. It is remarkable then that after three elections the Hungarian party system is clearly polarizing towards a two-party system. Contrary to expectations of multipartism, the growing use and anticipation of the stepping-back strategy has encouraged electoral competition in Hungary to consolidate around two sets of competing parties. A more general analysis of the effective number of parties in the elections since 1990 corroborates that the number of parties in Hungary has been decreasing. The average effective number of parties in the SMDs has been decreasing at the rate of nearly one full effective party per election, as shown in Table 8. The variance of the effective number of parties has also been steadily decreasing. A similar trend can be observed for the list districts. Overall the number of elected parties has also been steadily declining. The 1998 electoral results, indeed suggest a nearly two-party system: 1.6 effective parties elected from the SMD districts, and just 2.6 from the lists.

<<Table 8 about here>>

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17.08 (1.69).  $R^2$  was .87 and root MSE 7.26.

<sup>10</sup> This figure comes from subtracting the loyal FKGP-FKGP cell of 51.8% from 100, and dividing this into 44.7%.

The reduction in the number of parties is particularly visible in the transformation of the second round from a multi-party contest to a two-party contest. If we examine the distribution of candidacies in SMD rounds for the past three elections (Table 9), we see a growing tendency to observe a convergence toward two-candidate races in the second rounds.<sup>11</sup> The second round contests contained on average nearly 3 candidates in the 1990 and 1994 elections, but moved much closer to only 2 candidates in 1998. The number of candidates shifting ranks between rounds also increased markedly in 1998 over 1994, as did the number of candidates stepping back.<sup>12</sup>

<<Table 9 about here>>

The effect on the electorate appears to have been a mirroring in public support for the parties of the between-round reduction to a two party contest. In other words, the polarization into two groups of parties appears to have become a polarization simply between two parties. Recent trial-heat polls (“If the election were held Sunday, for which party would you vote?”) indicate an unprecedented concentration of support in just two parties. In an October, 2001 poll of 1,500 respondents taken by TARKI-Századvég, 24 percent of the respondents indicated they would vote for Fidesz and 21 percent for the MSZP. Respondents named no other party more than 3 percent.<sup>13</sup> Computer forecasts of the vote and seat distributions for the 2002 election based on this poll predict a legislature comprising 1.99 effective parties, based on competition by 2.8 effective parties receiving votes—in essence a two-party system.<sup>14</sup> These figures represent a bipolar concentration unprecedented in Hungary and highly unusual in any post-communist party system.

The movement toward reducing the number of parties runs contrary to trends in several other mixed-member post-communist electoral systems, such those found in Russia, Ukraine, and

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<sup>11</sup> For further details on the 1990 and 1994 elections, see Hibbing and Patterson (1992); Toka (1994); Benoit (1999).

<sup>12</sup> The relatively high number of place shifts in 1990 comes from a rally behind the MDF after the first round. Although stepping back pacts were forged in 1990, these tended to be between two parties only and did not result in nearly as many two-candidate second rounds as in 1998 (see Hibbing and Patterson 1992).

<sup>13</sup> The poll also indicated 13% non-respondents and 33% percent don’t know response.

<sup>14</sup> *Népszabadság*, “Kis előny nem elegendő a szocialistáknak,” October 16, 2001, p9. The forecasts of vote % and seats (from a total of 386) were: Fidesz-MPP 41.5% (203 seats), MSZP 43% (183 seats).

Lithuania. In the most recent elections in both of these states, the list mechanism seems to have driven the process and caused the effective number of parties to remain high. In the Russian elections of 2000, for instance 6.8 effective parties contested the election and 4.5 effective parties won seats. In the Ukrainian elections of 1999, 10.7 parties competed in the election and 5.5 effective parties won seats. The situation was only slightly better in the 2000 elections in Lithuania, where 5.5 effective parties competed and 3.4 effective parties won seats. In all of these mixed-member elections, the party system sustains far between 3 and 5 effective parties, despite the general trend in post-communist systems towards fewer parties.

The explanation seems to lie primarily the incentives exerted by the electoral rules. In the other post-communist mixed-member systems, the SMD and list mechanisms operate independently. In the Hungarian system, by contrast, the SMD and list mechanisms are linked by rules which govern the qualification for candidacies and lists.<sup>15</sup> In short, every party that runs a list has an incentive to field candidates in as many SMDs as possible. This creates a tight marriage between party lists and party candidates, causing parties to look first to the SMDs and secondarily to the lists. While the observed disproportionality of seats to votes comes predominantly from the SMDs, then, the psychological effect of the majoritarian SMDs acts to reduce the starting lineup of the overall race to serious contestants only. The reduction occurs not only in the effective number of elected parties, but also in the number of parties competing. Unlike in other mixed-member systems such as the Ukraine's which also allow dual candidacies (Herron 2000), the Hungarian SMD component does not encourage independent candidacies or loosen party discipline. Indeed, because of the incentives to forge "stepping back" pacts in the runoff round competition, parties tend to maintain tight control over their candidacies to follow party coordination strategies with other parties. The result in Hungary is that the reductionary tendency of the SMD component has overtaken the PR component's tendency toward multipartism, affecting the overall structure of

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<sup>15</sup> To establish a list in a territorial district, the electoral law requires parties to establish a number of SMD candidacies equal to one-fourth of the total number of SMD districts in the territory, or a minimum of one-



party alliances as well as the public perception for and support of these parties. While this result deserves to be examined more rigorously and in other contexts in order to be validated generally, the contamination effects of the mixed system appear to have worked opposite to that predicted. In effect the mixed member system in Hungary has resulted in a consolidation of electoral competition into two main parties, even though these institutions in principle could produce quite proportional outcomes capable of sustaining multipartism.

## **Discussion**

Not only were parties and voters in Hungary's most recent election aware of the strategic implications of their electoral behavior, but also they were sufficiently disciplined to have coordinated their pursuit of office into electoral strategies that made a substantial difference in the outcome. This level of sophistication is all the more remarkable given the extraordinary and frequently non-intuitive complexity of Hungary's multi-tiered electoral rules.

The contribution of this detailed look at Hungary's 1998 election has been threefold. First, it emerges quite clearly that a high level of strategic coordination among parties in post-communist democracy is possible, even in ones where rules are complex and electoral experience limited. A comparison of the results of 1998 to the two previous elections has shown, furthermore, that strategic behavior has been slowly increasing as experience accumulates. Second, the analysis explains the curious result of how, on the aggregate level, the party that came in first in total votes in every round and tier of voting came only second in total seats. By judiciously consolidating voters through voluntarily withdrawal from the second round contests, the opposition parties were able to concentrate votes efficiently, beating the coalition parties in districts where coalition candidates had led in the first round. Third, on a more general level, the analysis of Hungary's electoral outcome has shown how coordination among parties can affect outcomes in the relatively

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fourth. In order to establish a national list, a party must have established at least seven (of 20 total) territorial lists.

unusual top- $M$  runoff electoral contests. France uses a version of this system, for instance, and comparisons between the two systems could be made directly.

In the absence of a fuller understanding of the Hungarian two-round format and its consequences, the MSZP's response has been to advocate elimination of the second round in favor of a simple plurality rule in the 176 single-member districts. This suggestion predates the 1998 election, but was revived following the MSZP's frustrating electoral defeat that year. Not surprisingly, the proposal to pare the second round is opposed by Fidesz and its coalition partners. Because a two-thirds majority is required to amend the electoral law, there is very little possibility that the amendment could be approved. With the party system apparently consolidating to an almost two-party system, the 2002 legislative elections are likely to see alliances among smaller swing parties emerge as a central feature of the electoral contest, especially given the election experience of 1998. If the pattern identified in this study continues, then the months leading up to that election are likely to be marked by intense pressure to form strategic alliances among bipolar blocs, including joint candidacies and pre-election pacts related to withdrawing candidates from the second round.

Here I have focused more on what happened in the 1998 election rather than on a formal analysis or general comparison of the electoral strategies. Future research might proceed in several directions. A first area that remains to be explored is the effect on strategic behavior of interlocking tier rules in mixed-member electoral systems. While Herron and Nishikawa's (2001) analysis suggests that mixed-member systems encourage multipartism, the results from a decade of experience in Hungary suggest that this is not always the case. The Hungarian case is unusual in that its multi-stage electoral system links electoral tiers by qualification requirements and the national compensation list. The combination of the majoritarian SMDs, with their incentive for strategic coordination in order to win the second round contests, and the highly party-centric orientation of the system cause the majoritarian impulse to dominate, encouraging strategic coordination among the largest parties into a bipolar axis of competition. The results reinforce Mair's (1997, 220-1) observation that changes in party systems come not only from shifts in the

electorate, but also from changes in elite behavior and party strategy. These changes in elite strategy and the consequent stabilization of inter-party competition indicate that a process of democratic learning has taken place. As the study of the Hungarian case has demonstrated, the incentives presented by the electoral system and the way that it conditions strategies for successfully contesting elections play a key role (Toole 2000). Future research on the consequences of mixed-member systems might compare Hungary's party system to other systems both with and without linked electoral system tiers, in order to more fully explore the mechanism of this relationship and to test whether it might hold in other systems.

Another interesting direction for future research would be the relationship of ideological content of parties to their success in compelling voters to follow their strategic cues. The Socialist MSZP had a much harder time gaining the support of the centrist SZDSZ voters, for instance, than did the parties of the right in attracting each others supporters. In addition, the electoral coordination between the MSZP and the SZDSZ was not extensive: the coalition had announced its stepping-back pact a bit later than its opponents, and then announced a weaker pact affecting only a subset of districts. Fidesz and the FKGP, by contrast, had established joint candidacies before the election campaign began, and their pre-election pledge to form a coalition government apparently contributed to the sense among voters that the parties' policies were compatible. The tightly executed and extensive stepping back coordination between the FKGP and the Fidesz/MDF partners also contributed significantly to the opposition's electoral victory, successfully exhorting voters of withdrawn parties to support the candidates of the remaining parties. The psychology of voter response to these cues, and the extent to which the cues were followed, is an important aspect of the strategic coordination process that deserves more systematic investigation.

## Appendix: List of Parties in 1998

Abbreviation	Party Name
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party
FKGP	Independent Smallholders' Party
FIDESZ	Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Party
SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats
FIDESZ-MDF	Fidesz candidate as Joint Fidesz-MDF
MIEP	Hungarian Truth and Life Party
MDF-FIDESZ	MDF candidate as Joint MDF-Fidesz
MUNKAS	Hungarian Workers' Party
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum
KDNP	Christian Democratic People's Party
MDNP	Hungarian Democratic People's Party
FUGG	Independent Candidate
UJSZ	New Union
UNIO	Union for Hungary
NF	Party of National Minorities
MSZDP	Hungarian Social Democratic Party
VP	Party of Entrepreneurs
FPSZ	Independent Citizens' Alliance
MANEP	Hungarian People's Party
FK	Association of Independents
TARSK	Social Coalition
SZDP	Social Democratic Party
MSZMP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
NOK	Party of Women
MSZZP	Hungarian Social Green Party
MCDP	Democratic Party of Hungarian Gypsies
MNSZ	Hungarian Welfare Alliance
FEP	Party of Life on Earth

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Party	1998						1994		1990	
	Single-Member Districts	Terri-torial Lists	Nation-al List	Total	Seat %	(List) Vote %	(List) Seat %	(List) Vote %	(List) Seat %	(List) Vote %
FIDESZ	90	48	10	148		28.2	5.2	7.0	5.4	9.0
MSZP	54	50	30	134	34.7	32.2	54.1	33.0	8.5	10.9
FKGP	12	22	14	48	12.4	13.8	6.7	8.8	11.4	11.7
SZDSZ	2	5	17	24	6.2	7.9	17.6	19.7	23.8	21.4
MDF	17	0	0	17	4.4	3.1	10.1	11.7	42.5	24.7
MIEP	0	3	11	14	3.6	5.5	0.0	1.6	--	--
Indep.	1	0	0	1	0.3	--	0.3	--	1.6	--
MUNKAS	0	0	0	0	0.0	4.1	0.0	3.2	--	--
KDNP	0	0	0	0	0.0	2.6	5.7	7.0	5.4	6.5
MDNP	0	0	0	0	0.0	1.4	--	--	--	--
Other	0	0	0	0	0.0	1.1	0.3	8.0	1.4	15.8
Total	176	128	82	386	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 1. *Hungarian Legislative Elections, 1990-1998*

Party	Total	%Total	Number of Candidates	Mean District %	District % Std. Deviation	Number of Districts Placing:				
						1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
MSZP	1,329,035	29.8	176	29.9	5.8	113	59	4	0	0
FKGP	592,330	13.3	175	13.9	5.8	6	14	93	41	13
FIDESZ	573,841	12.9	95	23.7	4.9	20	62	11	2	0
SZDSZ	454,671	10.2	175	10.1	4.9	2	3	49	70	31
FIDESZ-MDF	396,955	8.9	52	29.2	7.3	21	25	4	2	0
MIEP	248,575	5.6	173	5.5	2.6	0	0	2	31	61
MDF-FIDESZ	188,053	4.2	26	27.9	7.0	11	12	2	1	0
MUNKAS	164,586	3.7	163	4.0	2.0	0	0	2	9	17
MDF	137,548	3.1	94	5.9	4.9	2	0	2	8	15
KDNP	129,642	2.9	146	3.6	2.0	0	0	1	6	23
MDNP	87,704	2.0	113	2.9	2.4	0	0	0	4	9
FUGG	75,912	1.7	53	5.8	6.2	1	1	6	0	4
UJSZ	23,047	0.5	47	2.1	1.4	0	0	0	1	1
UNIO	13,600	0.3	33	1.6	0.8	0	0	0	0	0
NF	11,922	0.3	22	2.1	1.5	0	0	0	0	1
MSZDP	11,787	0.3	24	2.2	1.7	0	0	0	1	0
VP	8,643	0.2	17	2.3	2.2	0	0	0	0	1
FPSZ	1,789	0.0	1	4.8	0.0	0	0	0	0	0
ZOLDEK	1,758	0.0	6	1.2	1.1	0	0	0	0	0
Other	5,038	0.1	15	15.8	1.8	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4,456,436	100.0	1,606			176	176	176	176	176

Table 2. *First-Round SMD Results, 1998*

Party	Total	%Total	Number of Lists	Mean District %		Number of Districts Placing:				
				%	Std. Deviation	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
MSZP	1,497,231	32.9	20	32.8	4.1	13	7	0	0	0
FIDESZ	1,340,826	29.5	20	29.9	4.6	7	13	0	0	0
FKGP	597,820	13.1	20	14.0	3.1	0	0	19	0	1
SZDSZ	344,352	7.6	20	7.0	2.0	0	0	1	16	3
MIEP	248,901	5.5	20	4.5	1.6	0	0	0	2	9
MUNKAS	179,672	4.0	20	4.2	2.0	0	0	0	2	5
MDF	127,118	2.8	20	2.9	0.6	0	0	0	0	0
KDNP	104,892	2.3	20	2.6	1.0	0	0	0	0	2
MDNP	61,004	1.3	19	1.3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
UJSZ	22,220	0.5	14	1.0	0.4	0	0	0	0	0
UNIO	8,786	0.2	9	0.5	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
NF	5,895	0.1	7	0.5	0.4	0	0	0	0	0
DP	3,504	0.1	4	0.8	0.3	0	0	0	0	0
VP	2,409	0.1	4	0.5	0.1	0	0	0	0	0
MSZZP	3,052	0.1	1	1.2	0.0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. *Results of Territorial List Voting, 1998.* Note: For valid rounds only.



Party	Total	%Total	Number of Candidates	Mean District %	District % Std. Deviation	Number of Districts Placing:				
						1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
MSZP	1,937,935	43.0	169	44.3	6.9	54	114	1	0	0
FIDESZ	1,085,538	24.1	82	49.6	7.7	55	27	0	0	0
FIDESZ-MDF	643,016	14.3	46	52.1	5.8	34	12	0	0	0
MDF-FIDESZ	311,778	6.9	22	53.4	9.5	15	7	0	0	0
FKGP	275,857	6.1	45	28.3	18.2	12	10	23	0	0
SZDSZ	142,876	3.2	48	12.3	13.9	2	4	27	9	4
FUGG	39,155	0.9	11	15.4	18.8	1	1	6	1	0
MIEP	28,608	0.6	31	4.1	2.1	0	0	9	11	6
MDF	22,714	0.5	3	36.2	28.9	2	0	0	1	0
MUNKAS	17,703	0.4	25	3.3	2.3	0	0	2	5	14
Other	4,803	0.1	16	16.3	3.3	0	0	0	2	1
Total	4,509,983	100.0	498	--	--	175	175	68	29	25

Table 4. Second Round SMD Results, 1998

Party	Candidates Qualifying for Round 2	Candidates Withdrawing	Actual Round 2 Candidacies	Round 2 Won	% of Candidates Withdrawn	% of R2 Wins	Rank Change		
							+	-	same
MSZP	175	6	169	54	3%	32%	2	59	108
SZDSZ	83	35	48	2	42%	4%	17	5	26
FIDESZ	94	12	82	55	13%	67%	36	0	46
FIDESZ-MDF	50	4	46	34	8%	74%	14	0	32
MDF-FIDESZ	25	3	22	15	12%	68%	4	0	18
FKGP	116	71	45	12	61%	27%	12	2	31
MDF	25	22	3	2	88%	67%	0	0	3
MIEP	32	1	31	0	3%	0%	27	0	4
KDNP	29	28	1	0	97%	0%	0	0	1
MUNKAS	27	2	25	0	7%	0%	18	1	6
Independent	17	6	11	1	35%	9%	2	1	8
Other	54	39	15	0	72%	0%	13	0	2
Totals	656	184	472	174	28%	37%	145	68	285

Table 5. Candidate Withdrawals and Shifts Between Rounds

<b>Type of 2nd Rnd Contest</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Rnd2</b>	<b>Rnd2</b>	<b>Rnd1</b>	<b>Rnd1</b>	<b>Note</b>
		<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Opposition</b>	<b>Avg%</b>	<b>Avg%</b>	<b>Avg%</b>	<b>Avg%</b>	
MSZP v. Fidesz, No FKGP	91	1,152,168	1,332,304	46.4	53.6	31.2	28.2	(1)
MSZP v. FKGP, no Fidesz	8	81,710	89,472	48.2	51.8	29	25.1	(2)
MSZP and SZDSZ	43	511,967	539,598	48.6	51.4	41.7	58.3	(3)
Fidesz and FKGP	22	221,963	279,499	43.1	53.5	38.4	40.4	(4)
SZDSZ v Opp, no MSZP	5	58,539	62,406	48.8	51.2	24	55.3	(5)

NOTES on Meaning of Coalition and Opposition for each row:

<b>Note</b>	<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Opposition</b>
(1)	MSZP	Fidesz + Joint MDF/Fidesz
(2)	MSZP	FKGP
(3)	MSZP + SZDSZ	Non-(MSZP or SZDSZ)
(4)	MSZP + SZDSZ	Fidesz + Joint MDF/Fidesz + FKGP
(5)	SZDSZ	Non-(MSZP or SZDSZ)

Table 6. *Types of Second-Round Contests*

First Round Vote	Second Round Vote								TOTAL
	Fidesz	FKGP	MDF	MIEP	MSZP	Munkas	SZDSZ	Indep.	
<b>Fidesz</b>	<b>95.3%</b>	1.7%	1.4%		1.3%		0.3%		100.0%
	298	5	4		4		1		312
<b>FKGP</b>	44.7%	<b>51.8%</b>	2.3%		1.2%				100.0%
	30	35	2		1				68
<b>MDF</b>	61.1%		<b>34.4%</b>		4.6%				100.1%
	14		8		1				23
<b>MIEP</b>	76.5%		3.1%	<b>20.4%</b>					100.0%
	12		0	3					16
<b>KDNP</b>	71.3%	22.5%			3.2%				97.0%
	8	3			1				12
<b>MDNP</b>	72.6%	27.4%							100.0%
	3	1							4
<b>MSZP</b>	3.9%	0.3%			<b>94.8%</b>		0.8%	0.2%	100.0%
	10	1			253		2	0	267
<b>Munkáspárt</b>	34.0%				41.9%	<b>20.6%</b>	3.5%		100.0%
	4				5	2	0		12
<b>SZDSZ</b>	25.7%				30.1%		<b>44.2%</b>		100.0%
	14				16		23		53
<b>Other</b>	50.0%				50.0%				100.0%
	4				4				8
<b>TOTAL</b>	51.2%	5.8%	1.9%	0.4%	36.8%	0.3%	3.5%	0.2%	100.1%
	397	45	14	3	285	2	27	1	775

Table 7. *Post-Election Survey Results.*

Responses to the question, "For which party did you vote R1 and R2?"

Source: Szazadveg-TARKI Post Election Survey, 1998. Note: All %s are weighted row percentages.

<b>Party</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1990</b>
Effective Competing Parties SMDs			
Mean	4.9	5.6	6.7
Standard deviation	0.81	1.10	1.52
Effective Competing Parties Lists			
Mean	4.5	5.5	6.0
Standard deviation	0.26	0.62	0.85
Effective Elected Parties SMDs	1.6	1.4	2.2
Effective Elected Parties Lists	2.6	4.3	5.1

Table 8. *Effective Number of Parties, 1990-1998*

<b>Total Candidates</b>	<b>1998</b>		<b>1994</b>		<b>1990</b>	
	<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Round 2</b>	<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Round 2</b>	<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Round 2</b>
1	.	.	.	.	.	.
2	.	214	.	24	.	84
3	.	111	.	483	.	360
4	.	.	.	4	2	16
5	.	.	1	.	2	.
6	6	.	4	.	6	.
7	20	.	4	.	21	.
8	34	.	17	.	33	.
9	47	.	22	.	39	.
10	38	.	36	.	30	.
11	20	.	34	.	21	.
12	8	.	29	.	14	.
13	3	.	13	.	4	.
14	.	.	11	.	4	.
15	.	.	1	.	.	.
16	.	.	3	.	.	.
17	.	.	1	.	.	.
Total Districts	176	145	176	176	176	171
Average Candidates	9.1	2.3	10.7	2.9	9.2	2.8
Total Candidates	1,606	325	1,876	511	1,623	460
Place Shifts +		145		40		76
Place Shifts -		68		41		57
No place shifts		285		430		362
Stepped Back		229		12		61

Table 9. *Candidate Distributions in Rounds 1 and 2, 1990-1998.*

The first set of columns are frequencies of districts with 1 through 17 candidates competing.

The last six rows of the table refer to numbers of candidates (shifting ranks, etc.)

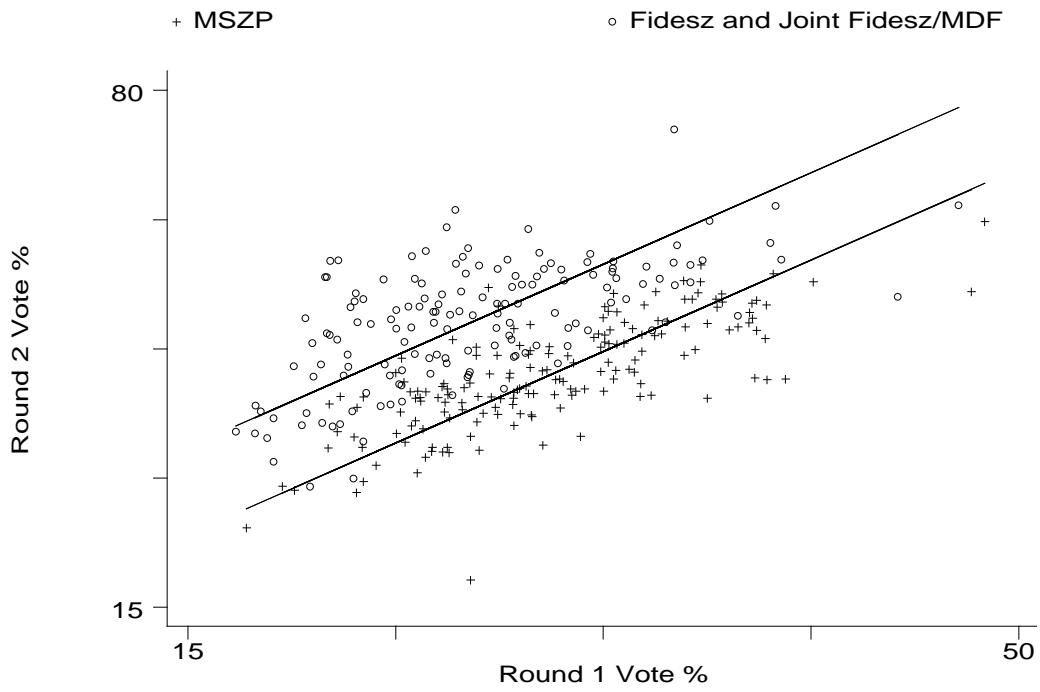


Figure 1. Round 1 Vote percentages by Round 2 vote percentages, 1998.