

# **Rolling Stones**

## **Dissident Intellectuals in Hungary (1977-1994)**

András Bozóki and Agnes Simon

### **Abstract**

Extant studies about the role of Hungarian dissident intellectuals during the regime change focused mostly on the roundtable negotiations and the building of the democratic political system and market economy. In this article, we argue that this approach led to an incomplete account, and offer a more nuanced view of dissident intellectuals' contribution to Hungary's democratic transition Hungary. Looking at dissident intellectuals' activity from the late 1970s, when they worked to undermine the Kádár-regime, until the mid-1990s, when they lost their political influence, we depict the model of rolling regime change. Identifying different forms of political activities and using descriptive statistical methods, we show that rather than constituting an unchanging monolith group in the "long decade" of regime change, both the membership and the political activity of the dissident intellectual movement changed periodically. Yet, the goal and some characteristics of the group has lived on. It was this constant renewal, certain level of continuity, and adaptation to the changing circumstances that made them so effective in shaping Hungary's elite-led political and economic transitions.

## **Introduction**

Dissident intellectuals played a key role in Hungary's transition from communism to liberal democracy, yet our knowledge of them as a group is incomplete. When both academics and the public refer to Hungarian dissident intellectuals, they explicitly or implicitly assume that it was the same group of people over the years of their activity. In other words, those intellectuals who had participated in the dissident activities in the late 1970s/early 1980s were identical with those who became part of the new democratic elite in the late after the regime change. In this article, we argue that this “vanguard-approach” offers an inaccurate picture of Hungarian dissident intellectuals and their contribution to regime change.

Dissident intellectuals were never a monolith group and the differences between their constituting fractions have long been acknowledged (Bozóki 1994, 1999, Csizmadia 1995, 2001, 2015, Róna-Tas 1991, Tőkés 1979, 1996). These differences, however, were mostly described in one point in time, that is, as the parallel existence of viewpoints within the movement that shared the common goal of doing away with the non-democratic communist regime and its ruling elite. It was fairly easy to recognize these horizontal differences: once it was possible to establish parties, intellectuals organized themselves into groups based on their political beliefs and contested the first democratic elections in those parties that eventually became the main players of the new democratic playing field in 1990.

As the above description shows, dissident intellectuals were present at every stage of the regime change: at the beginning when isolated actions were taken against the ruling regime, later when the regime was retreating and organizations and parties could be founded, when political change was palpable at the national roundtable negotiations, and when the new government and its opposition were formed. Seemingly, they hardly changed: the image of dissident intellectuals was that of younger middle-class people, mostly from Budapest potentially with a background in the social sciences or humanities. The public did not perceive the group to change in age, appearance or in any other ways. However, if the membership of this group was constant, then those who were there at the beginning of the dissident movement in 1977 should have aged noticeably by the partial consolidation of the democratic regime in 1994. We demonstrate in this study that the makeup of the group of dissident intellectuals were not fixed but constantly evolving.

However, we claim more than that the group of dissident intellectuals changed over time. We argue that the group changed for a reason and in a particular way. The composition of the dissident intellectual group transformed as a response to the changing political context. Different environments required different behaviour and actions from dissident intellectuals,

and the intellectuals were effective because they were able to adapt to the challenges of the changing circumstances. Each new situation required new expertise and the renewal of the ranks of dissident intellectuals allowed those with the required expertise to come into prominence or join the group. This, however, did not result in a complete turnover in membership. Instead, participants of one period continued onto the next but with less activism and less influence. This continuity allowed the group to keep its identity, the common goal of doing away with communism and its image as a group of invariable membership. This duality of continuity and renewal is at the centre of the model of the rolling regime change.

In the following, we develop the thesis of the rolling regime change including the periodization of the 1977-1994 era. Afterwards, we describe the data that we used to test our hypotheses. In our analysis, we compare the participating dissident intellectuals as well as their most active subgroup based on their age, gender, occupation, and frequency of participation in dissident activities over the five periods. We find that, while certain proportions of intellectuals tended to carry the movement onward from one period to the next, the dissident intellectual movement evolved and showed notably different characteristics in the five analysed periods. These changes were not *ad hoc*, but manifestations of the groups' adaptability to the changing political and social environment. We conclude our article with the claim that, instead of having a monolithic vanguard group of intellectuals that fought the transition through from the beginning till the end, an increasingly speedy transition created new opportunities for different types of intellectuals who replaced each other by large proportion in each phases of the regime change.

## **Rolling regime change**

### *Intellectuals and regime change*

Between 1977 and 1994, politically-minded intellectuals had an unusually strong influence in Hungary. This period may also be called the "long decade" of intellectuals given that their efforts to challenge the dominance of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) predated and laid the groundwork for the regime change itself. Hungarian regime change was particular in that intellectuals were its driving force from the beginning to the end.

It is important to clarify two things about our conception of dissident intellectuals. We refrained from adopting one of the many definitions of intellectuals, first, because they contradict each other in several respects. According to the one of the most influential definitions intellectuals are those "who create, distribute and supply culture, that is, the

symbolic world of man” (Lipset 1958: 311). This includes the “bureaucratic intellectuals” who are interested in upholding the *status quo*, as well as the “independent” (Merton 1957) or “free floating” (Mannheim 1936) intellectuals who distance themselves from the existing institutions. According to their attitude toward their profession and political issues, one can distinguish between *professionals*, that is, the expert intellectuals of Western societies, and traditional *intellectuals*, who are socialized into political roles. Those who find the latter more important define intellectuals as “the initiators of public debates on ideas and values” (Jedlicki 1994: 104). Although in certain historical periods the intellectuals of underdeveloped societies were “class conscious” (Pipes 1961), in western societies intellectuals are pluralized (Zald & McCarthy 1987). On the basis of their relationship with the holders of political power one can make a distinction between those engaged in legitimizing the existing power and the critical intelligentsia that encompasses the “producers and consumers of social criticism” (Hollander 1988: 139). In Central Europe it is an old tradition that intellectuals, mainly with background in the humanities, engaged in politics. Since they were the well-educated elite of a country with great breadth of vision, their main aims were to further the development of the society by introducing radical social reforms. They believed that their knowledge and education entitled them to play the role of the “living conscience” of the nation.

Second, extant definitions describe intellectuals according to a certain pre-selected perspective—e.g. their social position, expertise, or social function (Aron 1962, Bauman 1987, Benda 1955, Coser 1965, 1973, Dahrendorf 1969, Gouldner 1979). Using a specific definition that focuses on a single characteristic of intellectuals would have been counterproductive in our case, because our thesis is based on the assumptions that the position, role, and function of intellectuals changed during the analyzed “long decade”. Thus, for the purpose of this article, we offer a rather broad definition, and describe intellectuals as educated individuals who belong to a social group possessing the cultural capital, striving to occupy the privileged role of shaping the discourse on the conception of society.

Moreover, we are not generally interested in the behavior of all Hungarian intellectuals of the time, but only those that were politically active and critically challenged oppressive political tendencies, namely dissident intellectuals. Therefore, intellectuals who remained neutral or supported repressive political entities or ideologies did not concern us because the first group remained invisible—and thus impossible to identify—and the second contradicted the fundamental defining feature of politically-minded dissident intellectuals,

namely, their quest for a democratic political system. Indeed, the dissident intellectual movement has called itself the democratic opposition.

The common goal is a necessary uniting force of every movement, and was clearly present in the Hungarian dissident intellectual activism, but it is a necessary rather than sufficient condition. Movements also live through their members that keep the common ideals alive and pass it on to those that join these movements at a later time. In the Hungarian case, the presence of shared objectives among dissident intellectuals about undoing the authoritarian communist regime and replacing it with a democratic system were long uncovered. However, for these objectives to live on when, there should be some proportion of members that continue on with the movement, and thus, a continuity present in the profile of the Hungarian dissident movement. However, what is crucial is the extent of this continuity. If dissident intellectuals formed a monolith group over time in accordance with extant temporal views of the movement, then an overwhelming number of group members should have continued on with from 1977 to 1994. Instead, our assumption that the movement changed overtime, which would presume only a small level of continuity. Therefore, we would expect that there was a small but noticeable continuity within the dissident intellectual movement over its existence.

### *The long decade of transition*

Political historians agree that transition to democracy occurred in Hungary between 1987 and 1990 (Ripp 2006). This was the period of the rise of social movements, the foundation of political parties, negotiating and writing a new constitution, and organizing free elections that led to the first democratic government. While we acknowledge this approach, we adopted a broader historical perspective which includes the preparation for change, the transition itself, and the early post-transition era. In order to analyse dissident intellectuals' contribution in its entirety, we established five distinct periods of dissident intellectual activity between 1977 and 1994, identifying as the periods of (1) dissent (1977-1987), (2) open network-building (1988), (3) roundtable negotiations (1989), parliamentary politics (1990), and (5) new pro-democracy initiatives (1991-1994). Each of these periods is characterized by a distinct domestic political environment, international political climate, and dissident intellectual activity. These elements were in constant interaction, resulting in the change that became the property of the next period.

The period of dissent lasted from 1977 to 1987 that coincides with the soft authoritarian phase of the Kádár regime built on the idea that everyone who was not against

the regime was a supporter of it and on providing a relative material well-being to the masses. Yet, it was an authoritarian regime that controlled all spheres of life and persecuted those who openly disagreed or outright challenged the regime. The MSZMP was the sole political party that was designated as the leading social force by the constitution, and thus, did not only control power-enforcement organizations and political structures but were also exclusively present in schools, work-places, social organization, or the media. Its interests and policies had to be advanced through both the formal and informal institutional structures and the media was its propaganda tool. Control over media outlets was selectively repressive: those closest to centre of power and reaching the largest number of the population was kept on the shortest-leash while marginal and often very specialized journals and magazines were under the least scrutiny. The contributors of unsanctioned publications or articles were subject to differential treatment: the extent of the reprimand for the same trespass varied from person to person in order to divide the opposition. Nonetheless, there were a grey area where indirect and well-masked criticism of the regime could appear. This led to further inconsistencies and *ad hoc* decisions in the control of the media. Finally, the international climate has changed, particularly with the impact of the Solidarity movement in Poland, and the rise of Gorbachev to power in the Soviet Union.

Intellectuals had a privileged position: the regime tried to co-opt rather than rule them with an iron fist. The MSZMP was divided into at least two major wings: traditionalists resisted any change and co-opted intellectuals to further the interest of the regime whereas reformists, without challenging the regime itself, sought policy changes mostly to remedy economic problems of state socialism and were willing to allow for or exploit dissenting voices from outside state propaganda if those served their own agenda. Dissident intellectuals exploited the opportunities inherent in inconsistent policies, divided party elite, and changing international climate. They pushed the boundaries of criticism that was tolerated in the mainstream press through clever writing and increased the level of public criticism through *samizdat* publications. It was primarily through discursive practices and symbolic politics that they could successfully challenge the communist regime. In the age of dissent, the public stances of dissident intellectuals mostly took the form of declarations, letters, and statements in support of a persecuted Hungarian or foreign dissident or events or policies that were considered taboo in the discourse of mainstream publications (see the relevant parts of table 1).

Table 1. List of dissident intellectual actions and events between 1977-1994.

No.	Event/Action	Year(s)
1.	Declaration of solidarity with Pavel Kohout, one of the imprisoned spokespersons of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77	1977
2.	Statement of protest to Chairmen of the Presidium Pál Losonczy regarding Charter 77	1979
3.	Publication of the samizdat <i>Bibó Memorial Volume</i>	1979–1980
4.	Meetings of the underground Open University	1978–1985
5.	Signatory of the Call to assist the Polish people	1982
6.	The democratic opposition's letter to the Minister of Interior István Horváth after street persecutions in 1982	1982
7.	Protest letter against street persecutions at Public Prosecutor Károly Szíjjártó	1982
8.	Call to support the imprisoned editors of the Transylvanian samizdat journal <i>Ellenpontok</i> (Counterpoints)	1982
9.	Opposition declaration about human rights and the cultural autonomy of national minorities	1984
10.	Statement of protest against the arrest of Charter 77 member Miklós Duray in Czechoslovakia	1984
11.	Call by the committee established to defend Miklós Duray an opposition activist in Czechoslovakia	1984
12.	Message of the Hungarian opposition after the murder of Polish priest and Solidarity member Jerzy Popiełuszko	1984
13.	Letter of protest to the public prosecutor about the police supervision of György Krassó, prominent dissident intellectual	1984
14.	Democratic opposition's meeting in Monor	1985
15.	The democratic opposition's call to the CSCE Cultural Forum	1985
16.	Call to Presidium against the building of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Waterworks	1986
17.	Call to the Austrian people regarding the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Waterworks	1986
18.	Joint call of the Central European opposition on the occasion of the 30 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 revolution*	1986
19.	Letter to members of parliament regarding the growing number of house searches	1987
20.	Declaration against the arrest of Zsolt Keszthelyi, a dissident intellectual	1987
21.	Letter of “the one hundred” to the members of parliament	1987
22.	Democratic opposition's meeting in Lakitelek	1987
23.	Founding of the László Rusai Committee	1987
24.	Journalists' call for founding the Publicity Club	1988
25.	Call for founding the Network of Free Initiatives	1988
26.	Statement about the founding of Fidesz	1988
27.	The welcoming the founding of Fidesz by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)	1988
28.	Statement of Hungarian citizens to the citizens of Romania	1988

29.	Declaration of “Historical Justice” by the Committee of Historical Justice	1988
30.	The Opposition Roundtable’s participation in the national roundtable negotiations	1989
31.	The election of intellectual dissident parties to the Hungarian national assembly (MDF, SZDSZ, Fidesz)	1990
32.	Issuing the Democratic Charter	1991
33.	Advertisement in defence of President of the Republic Árpád Göncz	1992
34.	Protest against the televising of Horthy’s reburial	1993
35.	Forbidding the Hungarian Public Radio and Hungarian Public Television to use their own works	1993
36.	Founding of the Association of Independent Thinkers	1993
37.	Open letter demanding the dismissal of Vice-president László Csúcs of the Hungarian Public Radio	1994

\* Hungarian signatories only

By 1988, the period of open network-building, the social and political circumstances had changed. The authoritarian regime was retreating and the opposition was gaining new momentum against the regime and among the wider society. In 1985, the election law was modified so that two candidates could run in each single member district, offering a choice—as the communist party envisioned—among two party members. Democratic intellectuals tried to exploit these opportunities from the beginning through nominating and, in the rare event of a successful nomination, running its own candidate at the 1985 elections and subsequent by-elections. In 1986, it became possible to establish journals with the party’s approval, leading to the emergence of new media outlets, through which dissident intellectuals could reach wider segments of the society.

At the same time, the public’s interest in and support for the ideals and arguments of dissident intellectuals grew. Unlike in the previous period when dissident intellectuals were operating in isolation, now their objectives enjoyed growing popular support and a civil society outside the structures controlled by the party emerged rapidly in the form of clubs and debating societies (Diczházi 1988). Opposition groups were connected in the environmentalist Danube movements (Haraszti 1990), the youth groups of the punk sub-culture (Szemere 2001), and the Network of Free Initiatives founded by the democratic opposition (Szalai 2018). The differences in how dissident intellectuals thought about the new regime came to the fore and centred in the newly created parties of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), and the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz). Intellectuals now operated within more formal institutional



structures. Public demonstrations became frequent without radical counter-measures by the state and table 1 shows that, in this period, the major dissident declarations centred on these key events. Symbolic politics was crucial and dissident intellectuals managed to reframe the discourse around the crisis of the regime and the need for a change. The ruling elite adopted this discourse and tried to live up to the opposition's demands: the party's reformist wing gained momentum and János Kádár was removed as the leader of the MSZMP.

During the roundtable negotiations of 1989, dissident intellectuals found themselves as negotiating partners of the regime that used to persecute them. By then, the ruling communist party rapidly lost ground. The Solidarity's success in forcing the government to the negotiating table in Poland gave a model to follow for Hungarian intellectuals and made the communist elite realize that its monopoly of power was lost. Communists now concentrated on transferring their political and economic power to the new democratic period, and individual party leaders jockeyed for leadership positions and tried to emulate the discursive practices of the democratic opposition in search for popularity. Dissident intellectuals relentlessly moved this discourse further away from the authoritarian regime and toward a new, cleansed narrative. Meanwhile, they created the Opposition Roundtable in order for the various opposition organizations to show a united front in anticipation of the divisionary tactics of the ruling elite at the National Roundtable negotiations during the summer of 1989. The national roundtable talks aimed at transforming the political and the economic landscape of the country. In this period, the constitutional and legal requirements of a new democratic political system was created that allowed from plurality of opinion and actors, adopted basic human rights, and created the fundamentals of a market-based economy. Even though the regime change was the result of negotiations between the elite, the new political system's legitimacy was strengthened due to the masses standing behind the Opposition Roundtable. In a referendum free of government control, the public decided about the issues that could not be settled during the negotiations. The communist trade union withdrew from the workplaces, the Workers' Militia and the MSZMP was disbanded in the fall. The international situation created a favourable momentum for the Hungarian political and economic transition: the Soviet Union made it clear that it would not intervene in its satellite countries and gave free hand to the Hungarian government in solving the issue of East German refugees who wished to relocate to West Germany. The Berlin Wall fell by early November and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia was completed later that month.

In Hungary, free elections were held on March 25, 1990 opening the period of parliamentary politics. The successor party of the communist ruling party, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) contested the elections along the many opposition parties. The strongest were those two—MDF and SZDSZ—founded by dissident intellectuals who were present in the movement from early on, whereas a third dissident intellectual party, Fidesz, whose members came relatively late to the movement, were the sixth most popular among the people and the last to pass the parliamentary threshold. Through these parties mostly, dissident intellectuals became part of the ruling elite; MDF joined the government whereas SZDSZ and Fidesz became part of the opposition. Their task was to finish the democratic transition and establish its practices.

In the period of new pro-democratic initiatives (1991-1994), dissident intellectual activity returned to its roots. It appeared as the defender of democratic values now in opposition to the perceived and real abuse of power by and extreme right tendencies within the governing parties. This era could also be defined as a clash between the practical materialization of democratic politics and the normative view of democracy. This time dissident intellectuals could rely on the tools offered to the opposition of the government in a democratic political system: mass demonstrations and free expression of opinion. Symbolic politics became important again and critical discourse dominated the early 1990s. With the 1994 elections dissident intellectuals lost their unique position in politics.

We have shown how the domestic and international environment in which dissident intellectuals operated between 1977 and 1994 changed and delineated five distinct periods. In each of these periods dissident intellectuals transformed their activities as their role and possibilities and opportunities changed. Hence, it is unlikely that a movement that remained unchanged could have stayed relevant in such highly volatile political environments or had the skill to engage in widely differing tactics and activities. The social movement literature offers telling examples about the change of the composition of participants, the transformation of membership and the dynamics of the rise and fall of collective actions (Eyerman 1990, Tilly 1978). Consequently, we postulate that the movement of Hungarian dissident intellectuals has constantly renewed itself through a change in membership to achieve a politically influential role, and to remain a strong political force during all periods of its existence.

We speak of renewal and not expansion of the movement because the model of the rolling regime change is not about expanding the movement but remaining relevant. First,

adding more of the same type of intellectuals whose activity resulted in a new environment in which their ways were no longer the best means to further their cause would be pointless. For example, the skills of intellectuals in the period of dissent who masterfully challenged the dominant discourse of the socialist government by witty arguments and relentless probing of the boundaries of what was and was not possible could not be as effective when the space that they created required the building of new social networks and reaching more of those outside the movement who could legitimize and give power to them vis-à-vis the dominant ruling elite of the authoritarian regime. Social support was important but it did not need to translate into growing numbers within the movement. Rather, it was important to bring those members of the group to the front and attract new intellectuals who could further the movement's goal in the new political environment (Bozóki 1996, Eyerman & Jamison 1991, Konrád & Szelényi 1991, Szalai 1994). Therefore, we do not expect the group of dissident intellectuals to grow in numbers but rather to attract the kind of intellectuals, who made the movement's adaptation to the new circumstances possible.

## **Data and methods**

Our analysis is primarily quantitative, which is a unique way of looking at the regime change in Hungary as analysis tend to be qualitative and often descriptive. We have collected the list of participants of thirty-seven dissident events and actions between 1977 and 1994 (table 1 above). This includes a variety of events and actions—statements, petitions, open letters, various meetings, committees, organizational affiliation—whose diversity is an attestation of the multifaceted work of dissident intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> We collected the signatories or participants of all these events and actions from contemporary newspapers and samizdat publications and considered each event/action as a separate variable, while participants/signatories became our cases. Each variable was coded as a dummy: we recorded whether a dissident intellectual participated in the given event (1) or not (0). The variable about membership in the three parties organized by dissident intellectuals, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz) requires further discussion. While each parliamentary party had some intellectuals and most had at least a couple dissident intellectuals, it was only these three parties that were the creations of

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware that these events differ in salience and length, however, we are not interested in their importance but the group of intellectuals who participated in them.

dissident intellectuals and given our interest in understanding this group we concentrate on these three parties only.

Even glancing at this list of events is telling. First, it is noticeable how the nature and focus of these activities changed from symbolic statements to more practical political acts over time. Second, it shows that intellectuals were aware of and actively responded to dissident activities in other Central European states. Third, the frequency of these events and actions varied between 1977 and 1994. This, together with the varying length of each period means a rather uneven distribution of events across periods as shown in table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of events and actions by dissident intellectuals in the five periods of the “long decade” of regime change

<b>Period</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of years</b>	<b>Number of events</b>	<b>Yearly average number of events</b>
Dissent	1977–1987	11	23	2*
Open network-building	1988	1	6	6
Roundtable negotiations	1989	1	1	1
Parliamentary politics	1990	1	1	1
New pro-democracy initiatives	1991–1994	4	6	2*
<b>Total</b>	<b>1977–1994</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1*</b>

\* Rounded to whole number

There were 2037 individuals who joined one or more of the dissident intellectual initiatives over the seventeen years. However, not all of them were intellectuals. On the one hand, in case of 181 participants (8.89%) it was not possible to establish their occupation (see more on this below), and thus, they were dropped from the analysis as we do not know whether or not they were intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> Among the remaining 1856 participants, there were 127 physical workers, plus 27 who worked in clerical jobs, 20 churchmen of various denominations, 11 pensioners, 4 businessmen, 2 sportsmen and one high-school student. The proportion of the listed non-intellectual participants (10.34%)—and particularly that of

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<sup>2</sup> The number of participants dropped due to missing data does not influence the results. Bozóki (2019: 401-466) used a different approach, assuming that all participants who did not name their occupation were intellectuals, and the results of his analyses and the ones presented herein are essentially identical when it comes to proportions.

physical workers—demonstrates well that intellectuals were the primary supporters of these initiatives and that intellectuals had relatively little connections with the working class.<sup>3</sup> Thus, regime change in Hungary remained a property of the elites, a peaceful transfer of power, in which dissident intellectuals had more reform ideas to share with reform intellectuals of the ruling party than with workers and other non-intellectuals (Bozóki & Karácsony 2002, Bozóki 2019). Since we are interested in the characteristics of dissident intellectuals and not all dissidents, we excluded all non-intellectuals from the dataset, leaving a pool of 1664 dissident intellectuals.<sup>4</sup>

Since this is possible that the general perception of dissident intellectuals was not based on the whole group but rather its most visible subset, we also delineated the vanguard of each period based on how active intellectuals were in that period, that is, in how many events they participated in. However, this approach to establishing the vanguard has not been possible in the periods of the roundtable negotiations and parliamentary politics as there was only one, albeit lasting, event in each period. Therefore, during the period of roundtable negotiations the activity of dissident intellectuals of the Opposition Roundtable were measured by the intensity of their involvement in the national round table negotiations and the Opposition Roundtable (Elbert & Bozóki 1999). Those who participated with the highest intensity, and thus, belonged to the vanguard of dissident intellectuals in this period, were those taking part in the meetings of the Opposition Roundtable and in either the plenary sessions or the intermediate-level political committee of the national roundtable negotiations. Anyone else were considered to be an average member of the dissident intellectual movement.

Regarding the period of parliamentary politics, the vanguard of the members of the factions of the three parties of intellectuals—MDF, SZDSZ and Fidesz—was identified by their role as leaders of the new government as either speakers, deputy speakers and notaries of the Hungarian National Assembly or as members of the Antall-cabinet (Kiss & Horváth 1992). Those representatives of the three parties who filled less prominent positions (for

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<sup>3</sup> Even when workers joined these initiatives, they tended to belong to the same profession suggesting that they came from the same factory, which further evidences that connections between intellectuals and the working class was meagre.

<sup>4</sup> It is probable that in a few cases intellectuals who were working in manual jobs because the government made it impossible for them to secure a job matching their qualification due to their dissident activities were deleted from the database inadvertently if they indicated no other profession during this period. However, their numbers must be rather low and likely their exclusion random, thus, it does not systemically influence the results.

example, as chairman or deputy chairmen of parliamentary committees) or none at all made up the ranks of average dissident intellectuals of this period.

We examined factors such the participants' occupation, gender and age in order to test our hypotheses. Identifying the occupations of participants, which were also used to establish the pool of dissident intellectuals as explained above, was relatively easy in most cases since signatories of various statements, declarations, letters and committee members often listed their occupation next to their names. If the occupation was not listed, in case of more notable persons, it could be discerned from biographies. Unfortunately, this was not possible to do when the person had a common and frequent name and/or was not well-known—as noted above, these people were removed from the analysis.

We categorized occupations into 38 job categories for analytical purposes. Our reasons were threefold. First, simply recording people's profession as defined by themselves created about 250 occupations, which was too diverse to identify any pattern. Second, often people with the same occupation had differing job titles, and keeping these variants would have distorted the data. Third, for our inquiry what mattered if a person, for example, was an artist but not the exact type of their artistic endeavour (e.g. painter, sculptor, actor, opera singer, director etc.). Of the 38 job categories 32 were of intellectual jobs and 6 of other occupations (see the non-intellectual professions and the proportions of their representatives listed above).

We also had to deal with the issue of certain individuals frequently listing different occupations, for example, the same person could be an aesthete, critic, translator, teacher, or in some cases even a blue-collar worker over a period of ten years. It was not atypical in the late Kádár regime for an intellectual to (be forced to) move from one job to another, especially if they opposed the regime. We resolved this issue by taking into account the profession that the person listed on the first occasion for the entire era and, when comparing periods, in each period.

Establishing the gender of all intellectual participants was unproblematic as Hungarian first names are gender specific. As for the age of participants, it was not feasible to collect the age of all dissident intellectuals because many of them were common people—e.g. teachers, doctors, researchers, freelancers—whose identity, and/or date of birth could not be established many years after the events. Therefore, we recorded the age of the members of each period's vanguard at the time when they took part in any of the thirty-seven dissident

intellectual events or actions. In the periods of open network-building, roundtable negotiations and parliamentary politics, this was straightforward as these periods lasted only for a year. In the other two periods, since we were only interested in the average age of dissident intellectuals, we took the average age of the most active participants per event first. Then we used the averages per events to establish the average by year and by periods.

## **Results**

### *The Dissident Intellectual*

Even the characteristics of dissident intellectuals over the entire period of 1977-1994 only partially confirms the common beliefs about the group's identity. As expected, they were predominantly men (78.13%), although it is notable that about one in every five participants was a woman. Looking at the most active of dissident intellectuals, we find that men dominated (89.01%) even more and only one in ten of the most active dissidents was a woman.

On average, they were about 46 years old, that is, somewhat older than the expectations although we are aware that (1) "young" is a relative concept and (2) the age gap between the youngest (23 years) and the oldest (75 years) dissident intellectuals were rather wide. Even though we only have information on the age of the vanguard and not that of all participants this should not be an issue when examining public stereotypes because it is likely that the most active members of the group were also the most visible for the public.

The top ten most frequent jobs among intellectuals primarily belonged to the social sciences and humanities: these were litterateurs (13.64%), artists (13.40%), economists (7.21%), historians (6.13%), teachers (6.01%), sociologists (5.95%), and university students (4.93%) but also journalists (12.62%), engineers (5.65%), and lawyers (5.59%). This suggests more variation in the identity than the common perception and implies that the success of dissident intellectuals was due to more than the activities of social scientist and humanists. Note the relatively large proportion of university students, which is interesting not because they participated in these initiatives—young university students tend to be particularly receptive to ideas intended and phrased to create a better world—but because this may partially be responsible for the stereotype about dissident intellectuals' youthfulness.

The job distributions of the vanguard of the group shows similar variation, although in the top ten most popular jobs among them we can find philosophers and health care

professionals rather than journalists and university students. The proportion of the occupants of the top 5 most frequent professions also differed somewhat: litterateurs were also the largest group (23.08%), but lawyers (16.48%) were the second and sociologists (12.09%) the third largest groups, economists (10.99%) retained their fourth place, while artists (7.65%) slid back to the fifth. However, these differences were drastic and the diversity in the occupation of dissident intellectuals remain.

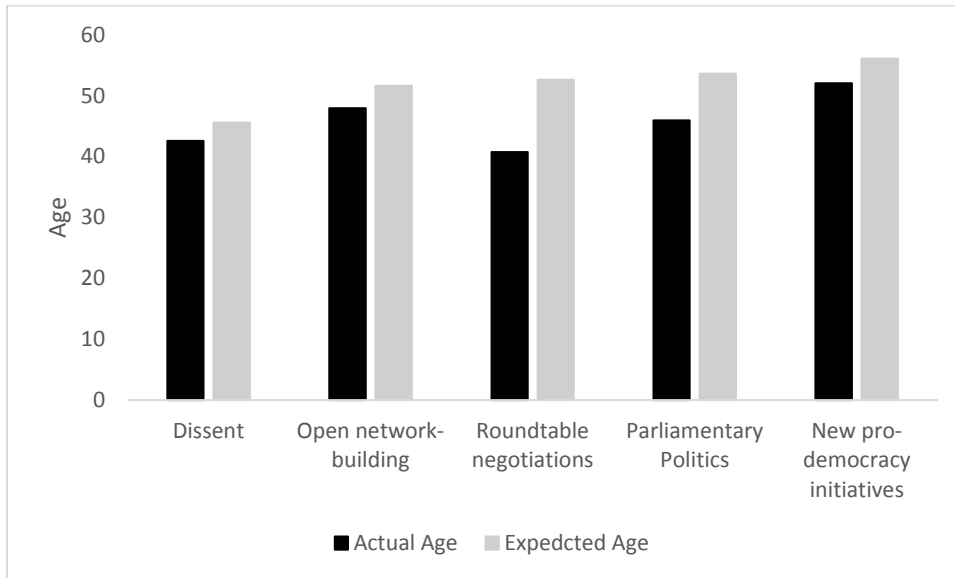
Overall, the makeup of the dissident intellectual group was far less monolith and does not fully live up to the contemporary public perception. Nonetheless, the above data establishes the picture of a more diverse group of dissident intellectuals than the common view of the group at the time but is not yet sufficient to support our claim that there was any level of discontinuity in the composition of dissident intellectuals over time. Yet, it is consistent with our claim that by looking at the periods of 1977-1994 as a whole, dissident intellectuals as a group *seem* more alike—even if not so alike as the public stereotype—than they really were. To show that the make-up of the dissident intellectual group was changing over these seventeen years, we study them in the five periods established above.

### *Discontinuity*

The variation displayed in the distribution of dissident intellectuals' age suggests that the dissident intellectual movement underwent notable changes even if data is only available for the vanguard of each period. First, simply looking at the actual average of each period (figure 1) shows a considerable decrease in age (nearly 7 years) at the time of the roundtable negotiations, and thus, that the dissident intellectual movement's vanguard experienced a notable rejuvenation at this time. Comparing the actual age against the age expected if the vanguard of the movement would have stayed the same revealed that the actual average age remained below the expected average age and in the period of roundtable negotiations with as much as 11.86 years. Hence, some change was evident within the movement, however, one may argue that the data on the most active members of the group only shows that different members of the group became active not that the makeup of the group as a whole changed. While this would partially also confirm our argument that the character of the dissident intellectual movement was not fixed, the analyses below show that as the vanguard changes so do the entire group.

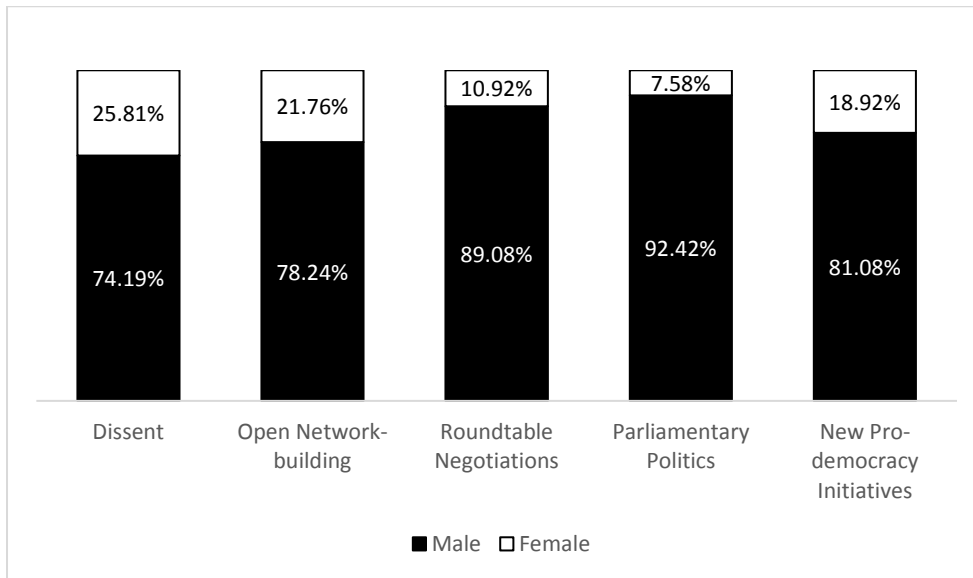


Figure 1. The distribution of the average actual age of the vanguard of dissident participants compared against that of the average expected age in each period



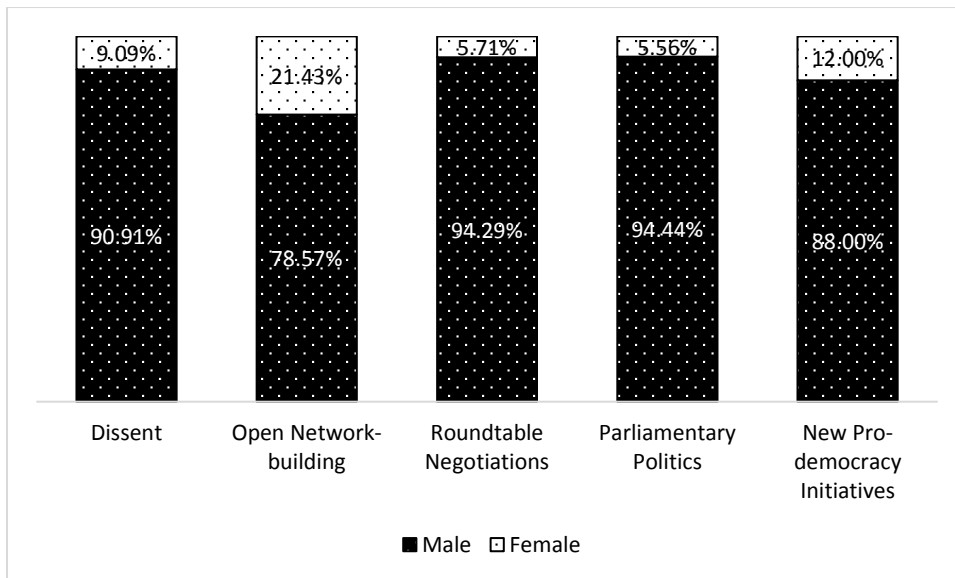
First, the gender distribution of all participants showed noticeable variation across the five periods (Figure 2). In line with the overall data, men dominated each period, but to different extent. Women were more strongly represented in the periods of dissent, open-network building and new pro-democracy initiatives. Compared to the previous two periods their number dropped by half during the roundtable negotiations and decreased even further when dissident intellectuals became part of the legitimate power structures. Once dissident intellectual activity concentrated primarily outside the government again, the proportion of women rose to levels close to what it used to be before the roundtable negotiations started.

Figure 2. Gender distribution of all dissident intellectuals in each of the five periods



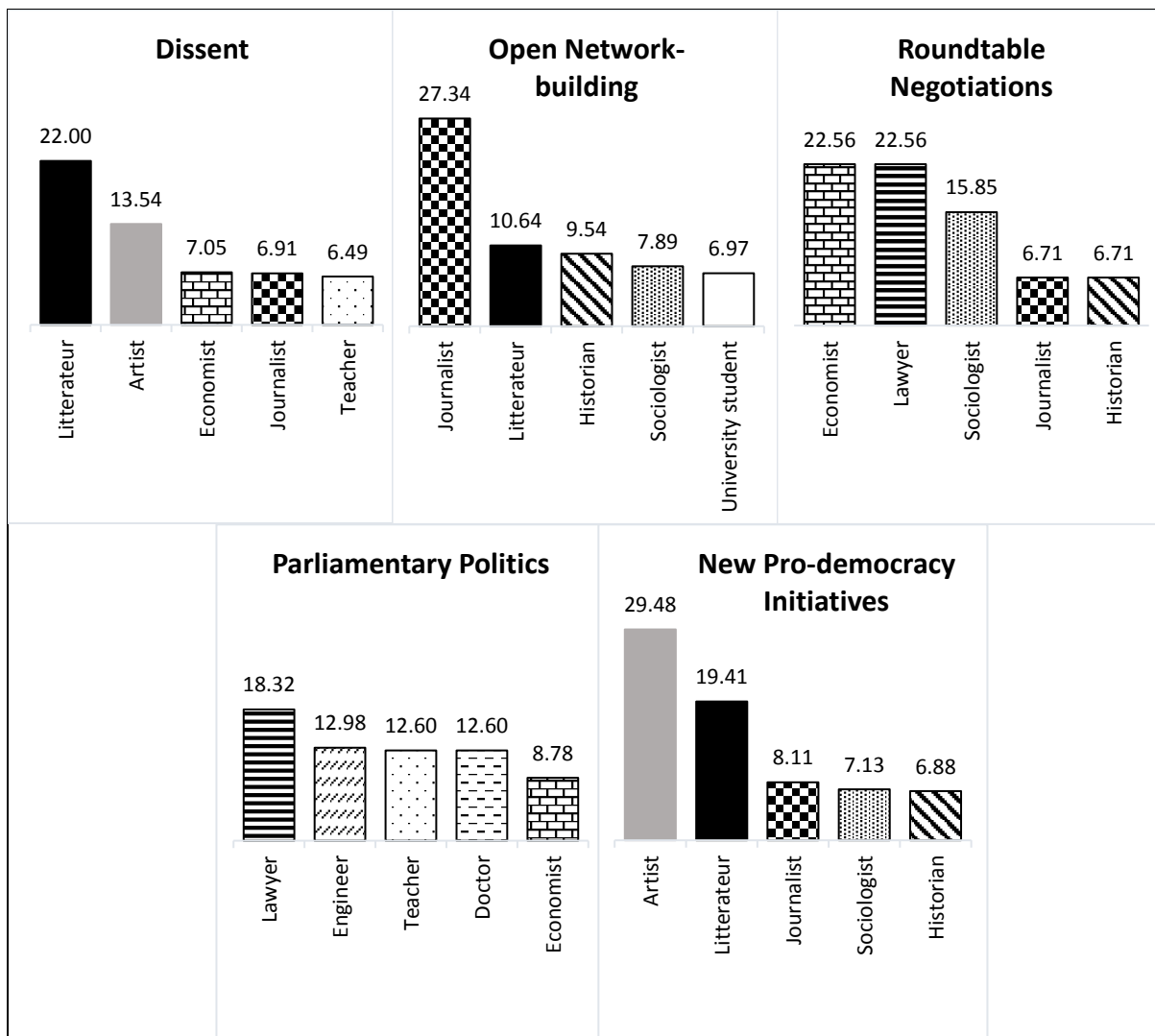
The pattern somewhat differed when we looked at the vanguard of each period, but by not much (figure 3). The obvious difference was that the proportion of women among the most active participants were even lower than among all participants. The only exception was the open-network building phase, when the percentage of women were practically identical to the one measured among all participants, but even then, the number of women remained at the same level throughout—between 1 and 3—and it was the number of frequently participating men that was substantially lower compared to other periods. All in all, this level of variation in gender indicates a change in the composition of the dissident intellectual movement over time.

Figure 3. Gender distribution of the vanguards of dissident intellectuals in each of the five periods



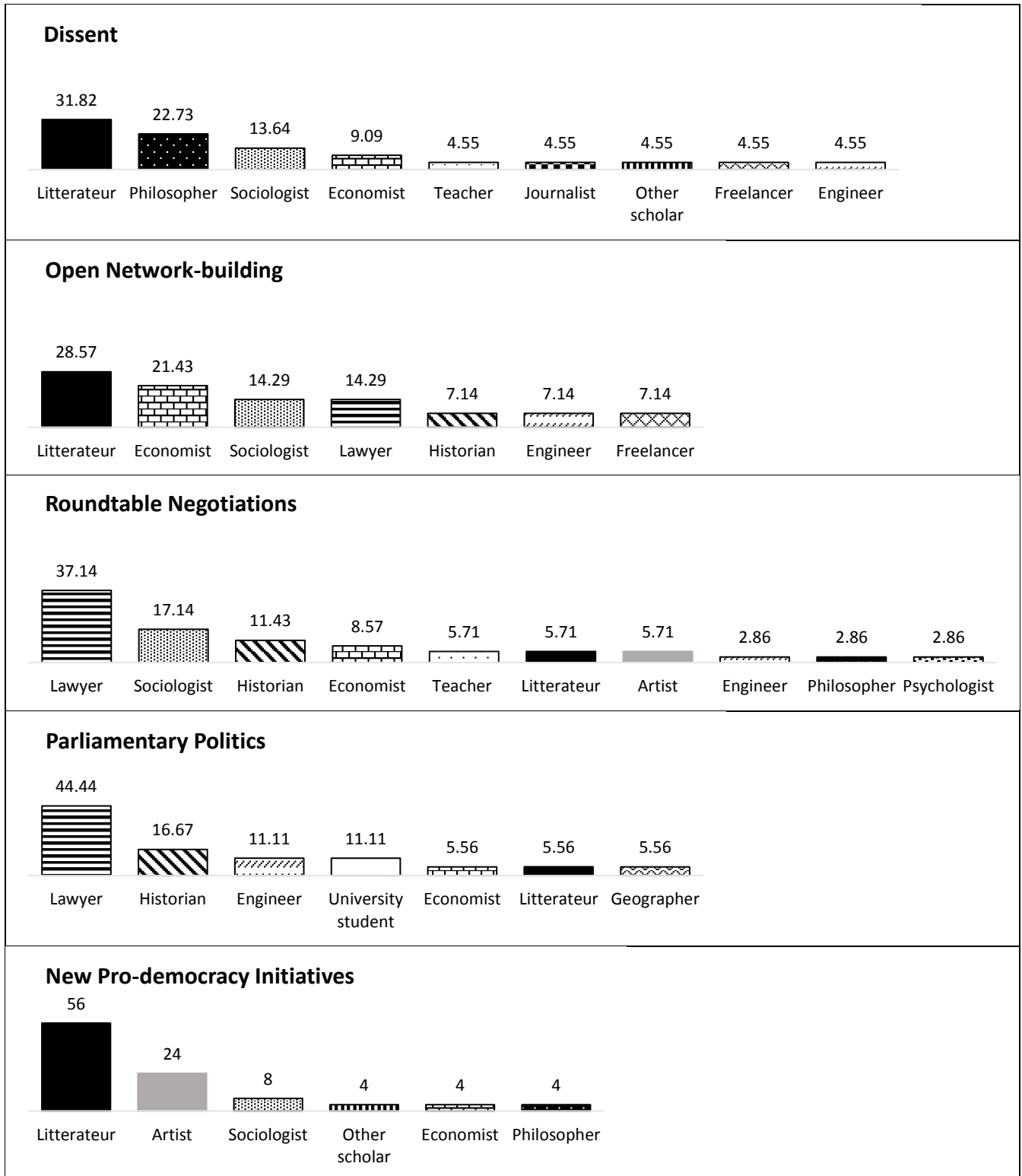
Second, the most frequent professions of all participants and the vanguard varied over time as well. Figure 4 shows the top 5 most frequent jobs among all dissident intellectuals in each period. Between each period, there was a change in the most dominant profession: litterateurs were the most populous group in the era of dissent, journalists in the period of open-network building, economists and lawyers during the roundtable negotiations, lawyers remained the sole dominant group in the period of parliamentary politics but were replaced by artists in the era of new pro-democracy initiatives. While no representatives of the most numerous professions completely disappeared from dissident intellectuals, there was not a single profession whose representatives could stay in the top five positions during the all five periods.

Figure 4. The proportion (%) of five most frequent occupations of dissident intellectuals by period



Among the vanguard of each period the variation was somewhat smaller (figure 5): litterateurs were in largest numbers in three periods—the dissent, open-network building and new pro-democracy initiatives—and lawyers sizeably outnumbered other professions during the roundtable negotiations and when dissidents entered the parliament. Smaller variation among the most visible figures of the movement could be partially responsible for the public’s perception that the movement was not changing and that it was dominated by intellectuals with social science and humanities background. Nonetheless, even vanguards varied: not only the number of represented professions varied between six and ten but only litterateurs and economists belonged to the most active group in each period. Even their proportions—and numbers—have varied considerably.

Figure 5. The distribution of the most active dissident intellectuals by occupation in each period (in percentage)

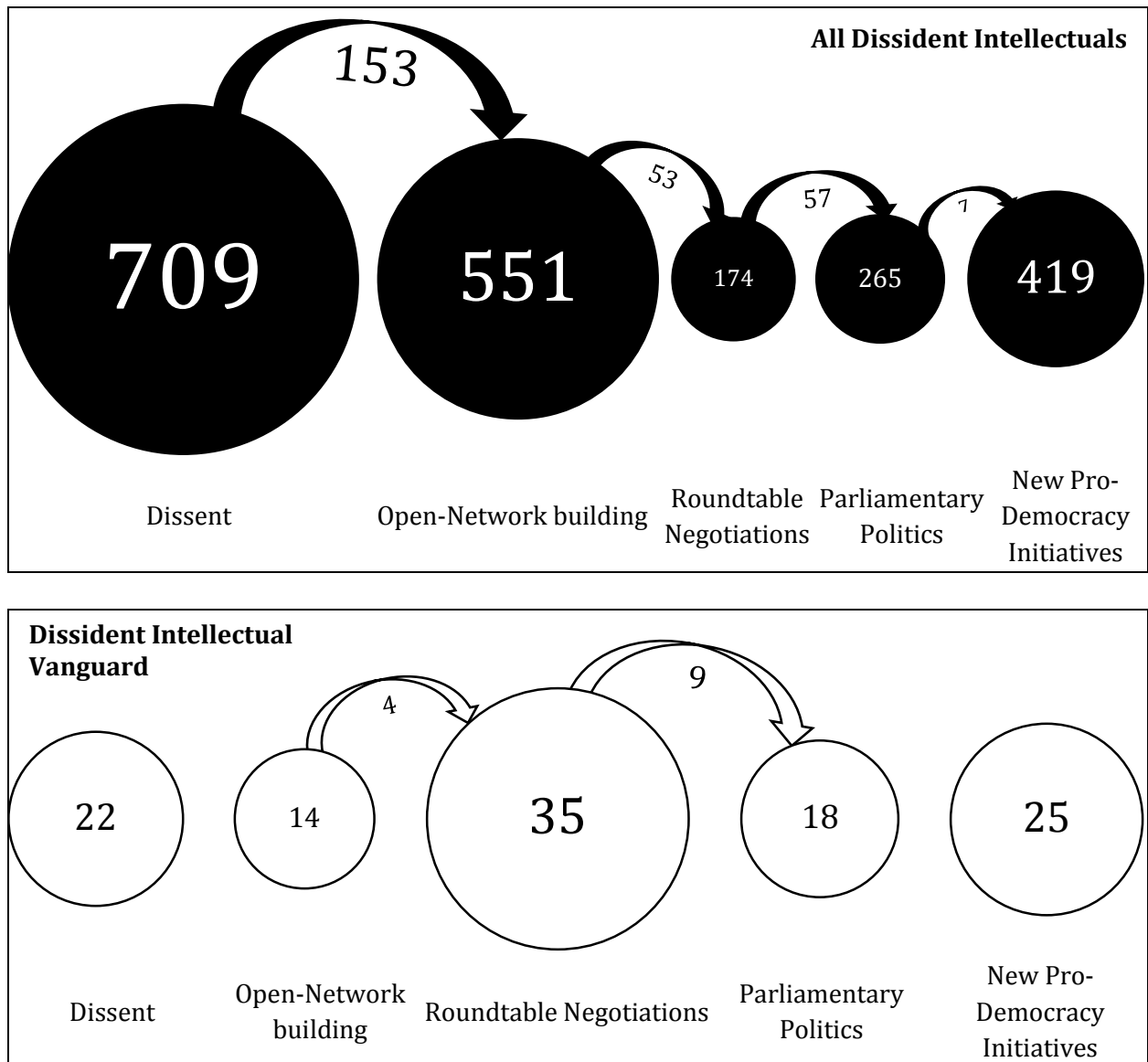


There was also some discrepancy in the role that members of an occupation played in the entire group and in the vanguard. For example, in the period of dissent, journalists have been the largest group among all activists but not a single one of them made it into the vanguard. During the Roundtable Negotiations, economists were as numerous among all activists as lawyers, but while lawyers dominated the vanguard as well, economists were much less active.

However, the strongest evidence to show that the dissident intellectual group went through several changes during its seventeen years of existence came from participation data. Figure 6 shows the number of all dissidents and the vanguard that participated in each period and how many actually went on from one period to the next. In case of both the entire group and its most active subset there were great fluctuations in membership. The patterns are different though: when looking at the number of all participants, there is a gradual decline until the Roundtable Negotiations, which is followed by a gradual increase whereas the membership of the vanguard fluctuates up and down from one period to the next. For our argument about the lack of a monolith intellectual group, the number of dissidents—displayed by arrows—that went on from one period to the other is more telling: no more than about a third (32.8%) of all dissident intellectuals continued on from the period of roundtable negotiations to that of parliamentary politics and that was by far the highest proportion that went on from one period to the next. There were only three dissident intellectuals who participated in all five periods.

As for the most the active members, the continuity between periods was even smaller: even though about one quarter (28.57%) of the vanguard of the open-network building period belonged to the most active group of the roundtable negotiations and then a similar proportion (25.71%) continued among the most frequently participating members of the period of parliamentary politics, from the vanguards of the dissident and parliamentary periods no one belonged to the most active group of the immediately following periods. As a consequence, not a single dissident intellectual who was present in the vanguard of each period.

Figure 6. Continuity in the participation of all dissident intellectuals and their most active groups between consecutive periods of regime change



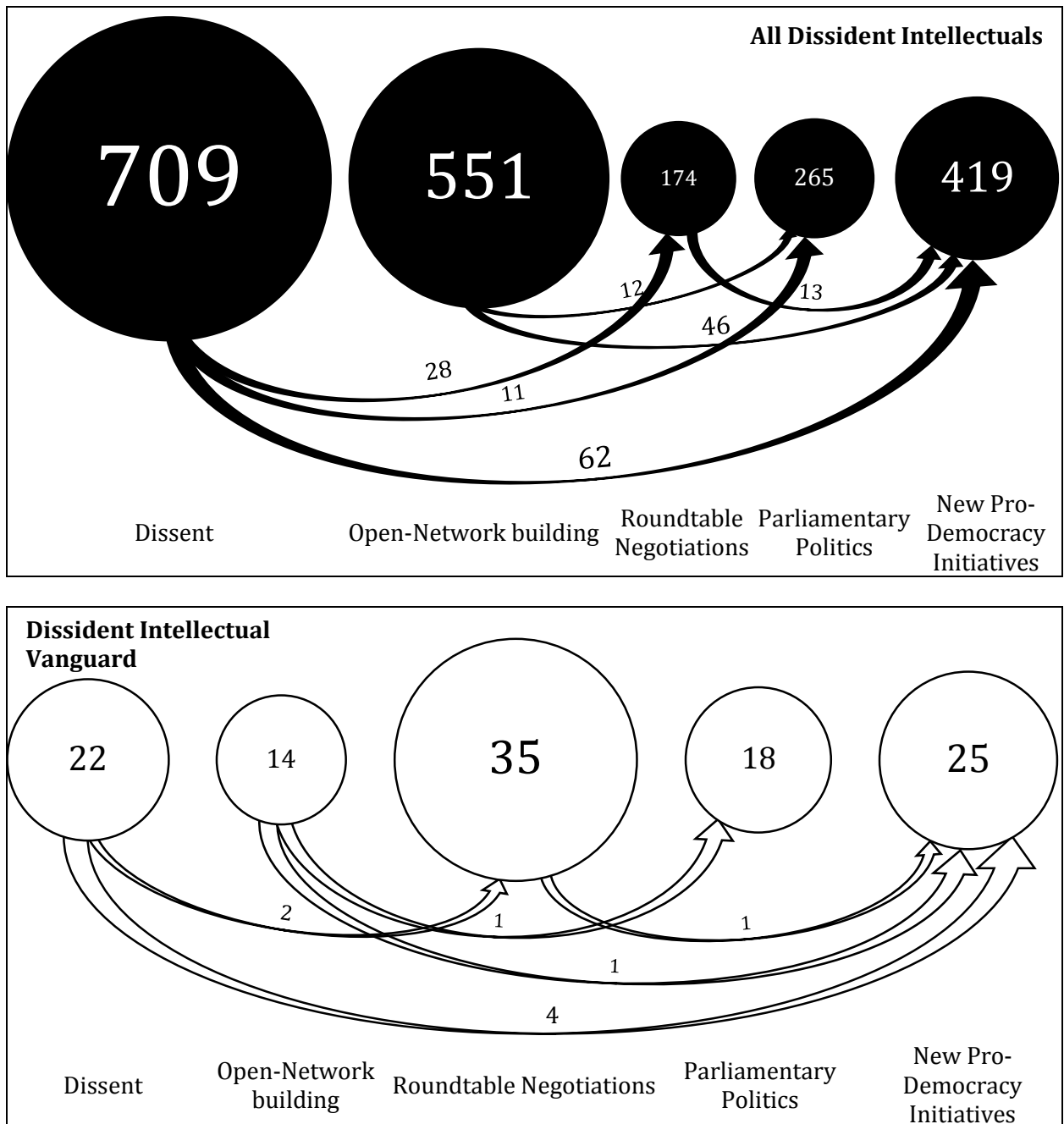
### *Continuity*

In the previous section, we demonstrated the variation in the composition of the dissident intellectual movement over its existence. However, the identified discontinuity, which was especially notable at the individual level, did not represent a drastic break with the earlier activities of the group. First, the cohesion of dissident intellectuals remained strong due to a shared commitment to a democratic Hungary and withstood—sometimes intuitively and at other times as a result of conscious decisions—the differences in how individual members thought about the essence or makeup of that democratic state.

Second and with regards to individual dissident intellectual activity, figure 6 also shows that there was some level of continuity between consecutive periods when it comes to all intellectuals and between some periods when it comes to the vanguard. However, the actual continuity was greater than what the number of dissident intellectuals from one period to the next could demonstrate because quite a few dissident intellectuals had left only temporarily and returned to the movement at a later period. Although only 21.58% of those dissident intellectuals who participated in the period of dissent remained active in the period of open-network building (figure 6), figure 7 shows that another 3.9% returned during the national roundtable negotiations, 1.6% during parliamentary politics, and 8.7% in the period of pro-democracy initiatives. Thus, 36.78% of those who took part in the initial period participated in at least one of the subsequent periods. From the period of open network building only 9.6% stayed on in the next period, but 2.1% re-joined as parliamentary representatives and 8.3% were active when new pro-democracy initiatives were launched, so the movement retained 20% of the activists from its second period. Finally, in addition to the 32.8% of dissidents who continued on from the roundtable negotiations to the next period, there were another 7.5% who came back during the era of new pro-democracy initiatives. These numbers show stronger connection between the periods of the “long decade” of regime change than a simple look at the continuity among consecutive periods. Continuity in the makeup of the full group of intellectuals were greater than in that of the vanguard of the five periods, suggesting that, contrary to public perception, it was not the most committed participants who carried the movement of dissident intellectuals through each phase of regime change but the activists outside this core.



Figure 7. Continuity in the participation of all dissident intellectuals and their most active groups between non-consecutive periods of regime change



Third, in the aggregate characteristics of the group there was less variation than at the individual level. Regarding the occupation of activists, it is clear that groups of dissident intellectuals from the same professions did not abruptly appeared or disappeared on this list even by looking at the five most frequently held occupations only (figure 4). Of the eleven occupations that appeared in the top five at least in one of the periods, eight were present in the top five of one or more of the other periods and all were present when looking at all

occupations. When it comes to the most active dissident intellectuals of all periods, we see a similar pattern: eleven of the fourteen professions whose members made these lists belonged to the vanguard of at least two periods (figure 5). Despite the abovementioned differences between the roles of the representatives of a profession in the entire movement and the vanguard, there were similarities as well: litterateurs dominated both groups in the period of dissent and lawyers in the period of parliamentary politics, while economists were the or one of the most numerous group during the national roundtable negotiations.

Even though there were variation as shown above in both the gender and age of dissident intellectuals across the five periods, some similarities appeared as well. As noted above, in the vanguard of each period the average age was lower than the expected age if the same group of people would have made the revolution (figure 1). While the average age varies across periods from 40.74% to 52.06% and the proportion of women varies from 7.58% to 25.85% among all intellectuals (figure 2) and from 9.09% to 21.43% in the vanguards (figure 3), typical dissident intellectuals were middle-aged men.

### *Adaptation*

Some sort of replacement within the membership of every long-term movement is inevitable since some of the members die while others leave due to developments in their personal and professional lives. The extent of organic replacement in oppressive regimes are exacerbated by the government's surveillance, harassment, and arrest of individuals whose activity is aimed at challenging and undermining the regime. Even then, the variation we have uncovered above surpassed the level that would be expected. Yet, continuous change did not lead to the demise of the group but fuelled its success. The key to this was the movement's ability to transform itself just so that it preserved its objective and was able to adapt to the challenges of the changed political environment. This can be best illustrated by describing the characteristics of dissident intellectuals and their vanguards in each period whose political environment we have discussed above when explaining the delineation of the five periods.

In the period of dissent (1977-1987), there were 709 dissident intellectuals who joined the movement's symbolic political activities at least once and an overwhelming proportion of them participated only once (68.54%). Individuals' activism was sporadic and fluctuating because it was still risky to openly criticize the regime and most could not risk their and their family's livelihood on continuously opposing the system. Only 22 of them participated at

least in one third of the events, and thus, belonged to the vanguard of the period. The typical dissident intellectuals at the time were men in general (74.19%) and even more so in the vanguard (90.91%). The average age of the most active members was 42.5 years. As for their occupation, the group lived up to the general public image of dissident intellectuals as many were from either the social sciences or the humanities: litterateurs (22%) and artists (13.54%) appeared in largest numbers and litterateurs were also the most numerous occupational subgroup in the vanguard (31.82%), followed by philosophers (22.73%) and sociologists (13.64%). These are typically the professions whose members were best suited to engage in witty intellectual discourses and whose skills in developing an alternative discourse, including wording the group's statements, were crucial. The prominent role of economists in both the full group and the vanguard was also natural as the underperforming state socialist economy was a driving force behind the emergence of critical voices among dissident intellectuals (and party reformists).

The number of dissident intellectuals shrank noticeably by 1988: only about one quarter of those previously active continued with the movement in the period of open network-building, and the remaining more than 72.23 percent of this period's dissident intellectuals newly joined the movement. Many left when the movement was reshaped to operate in more formal institutional structures. Women left the group in larger numbers—only 13% percent of the women from the period of dissent stayed on—but among the new activists, women still came in numbers similar to the previous period, so their overall proportion only declined with four percent. Now their proportion in the vanguard matched their presence in the full group. This vanguard was also about five years older than the vanguard of the previous period. Even though litterateurs remained its strongest force (28.57%) attesting to their importance in at least a partially discourse-oriented opposition strategy. However, the composition of the vanguard changed drastically as its former members either left the movement or became less active. With the shared agreement that economy was in crisis, economists gained in influence within the vanguard (21.43%). Meanwhile lawyers were emerging through the ranks becoming no less important than sociologists (14.29% each). The makeup of the full group of activists in this period has changed more drastically, showing the real face of the movement. Journalists, who were best positioned to spread the principles of the democratic opposition among the public became the strongest group (27.34%). They could now see the freedom of speech as an attainable goal and worked toward it. Social scientists were still present in larger numbers: even among the

representatives of the top five most frequent professions, 28.07% came from their ranks (litterateurs, historians, and sociologists). University students also appeared in larger numbers (6.97%): social movements tend to be attractive for younger idealist people who are eager to work toward their ideals and it was the case in this turbulent period in Hungary as well. Thus, a new generation of activists entered during the period of open-network building, who became intellectuals not by their university degree but by their political activity (Gramsci 1971, Eyerman & Jamison 1991).

The circle of politically active intellectuals declined sharply in 1989. The Opposition Roundtable delegated 288 participants to the various committees and meetings of the national roundtable negotiations, and thus, halved the number of the democratic opposition present at the open network-building stage of the negotiations. The attrition was even greater as only about 10% were previously active in the open network-building period. Some left the movement because of moral misgivings about negotiating with the authoritarian government, others did not have the skills or the time to take part in the meetings and there were only so many roles that had to be filled during these negotiations, which put a cap on the maximum number of participants. Accordingly, the number of active female participants declined sharply: there was an about 50% decrease in the full group and a 75% decrease in the vanguard. The average age of participants declined notably too, from 47.93% to 40.74%, attesting to an exodus of older members and an influx of younger generation people to carry on the torch. Expertise in legal and economic matters was a necessity for dissident intellectuals in negotiating about the transformation of the constitution and the legal environment of other political and economic changes, which was reflected in the fact that these two professions were represented in the largest numbers (22.56% each) among dissident intellectuals in this period. The notable proportion of sociologists (15.85%), journalists (6.71%) and historians (6.71%) also contributed through their knowledge of societal and political processes. The clear prominence of lawyers as the most active within the group and the still large proportion of sociologists and historians in the vanguard and the fact that each of these groups outnumbered economists point to the fact that negotiations about economic transition were overshadowed by political negotiations and brought little result. The government had already decided about the most important economic issues and the Opposition Roundtable did not feel competent to decide about matters about which their only source of information was their negotiating partner.

As many as 115 dissident intellectuals who were active in one or more earlier period became professional politicians and remained active in the period of parliamentary politics in the three parties of dissident intellectual roots: MDF, SZDSZ, and Fidesz. They came in roughly equal numbers from the period dissent (46 people) and roundtable negotiations (57) while a handful was from the open network-building period (12). Nonetheless, many from the participants of the Roundtable Negotiations elected to return to their profession rather than to enter politics. The group of dissident intellectuals, thus, received another transfusion through the influx of new, younger members. Even if marginally, this further reduced the proportion of women in both the full group and the vanguard and democratic politics became the playing field of men primarily. The average of the most active in the group increased by about five years and the oldest members occupied the senior positions within the government. The distribution of jobs became more even in the top most represented group. Lawyers have remained the most dominant group (18.32%) partly as a result of their contribution to the roundtable negotiations and economists could capitalize on their role in the transition process even if to a much smaller extent (7.78%). The representatives of those professions, including lawyers, gained ground that were vital to contesting the election successfully: for example, engineers (12.98%), teachers (12.60%), doctors (12.60%), who had daily contact with the members of the electorate, could most successfully contest the elections.

Continuity between the periods of parliamentary politics and new pro-democratic initiatives is meagre (7 from among all dissident intellectuals none from the vanguard) for a reason: dissident intellectual activity of the period was a reaction to the developments in the politics of the new ruling elite. As the crucial role of symbolic politics reappeared in the discourse and mass demonstrations returned to the toolkit of dissident intellectuals, so did artists and litterateurs come to dominate all intellectuals (29.48% and 19.41%, respectively) and the vanguard (24% and 56%, respectively) again, and lawyers and economists retreat to the background. Women also returned to the movement in larger proportions: they gave 18.92% of the whole group and 12% of the vanguard. Meanwhile there is a strong connection between the average age of the vanguard (52.06) increasing to heights not seen before in the movement due to the influx of dissident intellectuals who left the movement after the periods of dissent (62 intellectuals) and open-network building (46). One quarter of dissident intellectuals of the period of new democratic initiatives came from among them. They returned to guard the values of democracy against opposing tendencies and through means that they were familiar and comfortable with: symbolic politics and critical discourse.

Compared to their earlier experience, however, opposing the government did not threaten their livelihood any more.

## **Conclusion**

The contribution of dissident intellectuals to democratic transition in Hungary was pivotal. In this article, we offered deeper understandings of both the characteristics and success of the dissident intellectual movement by looking beyond the traditional timeframe of the regime change as well as dissident intellectuals' involvement in the roundtable negotiations. We established the model of rolling regime change, which refers to the fact that activities of Hungarian dissident intellectuals showed continuity but also considerable variation and adaptation over its seventeen years of existence.

The full group of dissident intellectuals passed the torch of the movement on from period to period and assured continuity and cohesion in working toward the same goal. Thus, it was not a small vanguard, as commonly believed, that carried the political initiatives forward but the larger overlapping and continuously changing groups. Even in the full group, the level of continuity is limited as best exemplified by the small portion of members that stayed with the movement in consecutive periods. All in all, instead of a vanguard party or one single broad social movement fighting against the regime, participants of the Hungarian transition are best characterized metaphorically as groups of runners in a relay race.

The movement shrank or expanded according to the opportunities and possibilities in front of it. This variation in size was also accompanied by a change in the most numerous groups of professionals as the group responded to the challenges of the—sometimes rapidly—changing political, social and economic environment. Hence, in the five periods that we established at the beginning of this article, the dissident intellectual movement had different profiles. Each period had its key activists: social scientists led the way when the rest of the society had less freedom to oppose the system and the fight was an duel of intellect and finesse; journalists came to the fore when ideas needed to be spread among the public; lawyers and economists dominated the negotiations with the government about the new political and economic systems; after the fall of the Kádár regime, those who were most electable due to their professions—teachers, doctors, and so on—became part of parliamentary politics, and social scientists and artists took over the movement to reassert the role of symbolic and critical challenge to the new ruling elite and mount their critique from

outside the institutional structures once again. Dissident intellectuals did not only succeed because of their relentless challenge to the system and the changing international environment, but also due to their ability to adapt to the new circumstances and press on where it could yield the most results.

Taking a quantitative approach to studying the regime change in Hungary and particularly dissident intellectuals' involvement in it contributed to a more nuanced understanding that had been so far uncovered by the customary qualitative approaches. Even descriptive statistical methods were sufficient not only to examine the questions raised in this article, but also to uncover details that were not formerly considered. For example, looking at ratio of male and female participants showed that women both in the full group and in the vanguard were represented in much smaller numbers than men and that the closer dissident intellectual political activity moved to power, the fewer women were present. It would be interesting to follow up on this finding to understand the reasons behind it in itself. We would also recommend scholars studying this period, to apply hitherto unused methods at liberty in search of an even more complex understanding of the politics of regime change and (dissident) intellectuals.

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