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Article

Political rhetoric in the Hungarian press during the communist regime

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Abstract

A previous analysis of post-1989 editorials in a Hungarian newspaper investigated ideological developments in Hungary in the first years after the communist regime had been replaced by elected governments. Using the same method, we here investigate whether the same developments may have extended prior to Hungary's democratic changes. Such extension might have entailed a gradual increase in modal rhetoric indicative of free market or social justice. However, no support is found for this in Hungary's pre-1990 state-controlled media. Instead, modal arguments only appear with noteworthy frequency after 1986 and then only ones emphasizing Hungarians' inevitabilities and possibilities without any consistent rationale.

Introduction

In 1989, countries in Central and Eastern Europe started a transition from communist to democratic political systems. Since then political parties have been established in these countries along with constitutions and democratic administrative bodies. Of concern in

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this article is how national issues were framed in Hungary's print media in the years leading up to these changes.

Like Roberts et al. (2009) and Popping and Roberts (2015), we start from the premise that social systems are justified via the discursive use of modal arguments (i.e. claims that an activity is possible, impossible, inevitable, or contingent for citizens, plus the rationales associated with each). Within authoritarian states, such modal discourse usually reflects a 'rhetoric of permission', within which possibility is a function of someone's (e.g. a comrade's) discretion – not unlike a woman's discretion when responding to a suitor's advances (cf. Simmel, 1984 [1909]: 140). Accordingly, permission comprises a dependent social context, where citizens' possible behaviors depend on the unknown intentions of those in power (Roberts, 2008: 155).

When an authoritarian state's entrepreneurs unite with the masses to overthrow their totalitarian leaders, the revolution is typically justified in terms of two mutually inconsistent discursive forms: a 'modality of achievement' (based on market justice among competitors) versus a 'modality of necessity' (based on social justice for the masses). For example, Roberts et al. (2009) provide evidence of both these types of rhetoric in Hungarian editorials published between 1990 and 1997. On one hand, they found evidence of growing achievement rhetoric in increasingly frequent claims of Hungarians' possibilities for economic reasons. On the other hand, evidence of an expanding 'modality of necessity' (aka necessity rhetoric) was found in increasingly frequent mentions of political reasons for Hungarians' inevitabilities (or necessities). Given that the latter trajectory is steeper than the former, the authors conclude that as late as 1997 Hungarian political discourse was heading more toward a modality of necessity (like the predominant political modality in Western Europe) than the achievement modality that is more prominent in US political discourse (Roberts and Liu, 2014).

Our research question in this article is whether a parallel analysis of Hungarian editorials prior to 1989 might provide evidence that these trends may have begun before the transition to democracy took place. If so, migration from a rhetoric of permission in Hungarians' national discourse would seem to have been gradual; if not, it would indicate its having been abrupt. In the following section, we outline our theoretical framework. Thereafter, we describe gradual changes in Hungarian economics and politics that took place before the transition – changes that might have facilitated this migration. The rest of this article consists of describing our data, explaining our methods, then presenting and interpreting our results.

Theoretical considerations on the press during the communist regime

At a time when press freedoms were virtually nonexistent, Karl Marx (1842) championed freedom of the press, arguing that media restrictions afford bourgeois elite means to oppress the masses. Yet according to Lenin, media controlled by a communist state have a dual purpose, functioning 'in clandestine conditions, for a press closely tied to the needs of the party apparatus, and, in conditions of mass upsurge, for a press closely tied to the expressions of the experience of the proletariat' (Sparks, 2000: 37). In contrast to multiparty and economy-driven societies in which state representative and governmental

organs serve as the terrains of parties' political activities, party-centered (e.g. soviet-style communist) political systems restrict 'representative' activities to within party and administrative policy-making organizations (Bihari, 1986: 303). Thus, in practice, communist societies allow virtually no press freedom. Horvát (1991: 191) points to the fact that newspapers reporting the truth are often used as a tool of the people. Therefore, information presented in these newspapers could be used against the communist regime. For this reason, the newspapers were under strict control. Because of this control, there was no freedom of the press. In Hungary, the party's control agency, the Propaganda and Press Department was abolished in June 1989. Until then permits to publish were only granted with the prior consent of that Department. The last change in the press law before 1989 dates from 1986. There was a lot of emphasis on the journalist's responsibilities, not on their rights (Horvát, 1991: 192).

Blumler et al. (1990) identify two stages of media control in communist societies. On one hand, political elites have *institutional* control over the procedures and mechanisms of state–media relations and the methods applied by the state and other social actors. This includes centralized ownership, news management, and direct personal dependence of journalists upon the party (Bihari, 1986: 292). On the other hand, there is *cultural-politics* control, involving the transference of messages to the masses. For the cognitively malleable, such transference might be considered a form of 'mind control'. For citizens with nonmalleable thoughts, media content merely conveys what they are permitted to acknowledge.

For example, national media in the former East Bloc provided ongoing 'proof' of political leaders' policy successes. Narratives relating these successes were broadcast not so much to make citizens' everyday experiences meaningful, as to replace these experiences with an alternative reality (Jakubowicz, 1995: 127). In this way, citizens became passive audiences to the party's official interpretations of 'what happened'.

A more active citizen role has been suggested by Benke (1979: 7–9), who argued that freedom of opinion increases as a communist regime gains stability. And indeed, implementation of Gorbachev's 'glasnost' (openness) policy seemed to bear this out. However, glasnost took East Bloc communist leaders by surprise and placed them in the unsustainable position of having to deal with opinions from the masses rather than from ideologically like-minded party members (Kunczik, 2001: 66). More commonly in these countries, critical comments from workers were only permitted in the presence of their communist supervisors (Gadourek, 1953: 179). Accordingly, one precondition of soviet-style communist states' political stability was apparently the elimination of serious political debates between leaders and the masses.

In this vein, Óvári (1980) points out that these states were maintained by self-sustaining patterns of social interaction and discourse. Control was attained through surveillance by numerous Communist Party members, who were integrated throughout the larger society. Beyond this, control resulted from campaigns to mobilize the broader population – campaigns that 'sought to brand as "class enemies" those social groups that were difficult or impossible to integrate into the communist system' (Körösényi, 1999: 7). Enemies were easily recognized given their (nonpermitted) disagreement with one's political leaders and were subjected to coercive 'rehabilitation' if they were deemed sufficiently incorrigible (Gulyás, 2001: 74; Wang and Roberts, 2006: 58). Thus, grassroots

interpretations of reality and opinions on policy were effectively silenced, because common citizens risked treatment as an enemy each time they expressed their own ideas.

Nonetheless, competing policy positions did exist, albeit restricted to party members linked to vying loyalty networks. Opinions from the vast majority of citizens were virtually ignored in these deliberations.[1] Members of the most powerful network would ultimately decide the party's 'official position' – leaving policy alternatives out of the media and thus excluded from public scrutiny. Journalists assisted in this censorship, due in part to the same pressures experienced by all citizens (namely, the insecurity of constantly being caught between the hoped-for possibility versus the feared impossibility of continuing in their livelihoods; cf. Gálik, 2004). Yet journalists were often willing censors as well. For example, the Association of East German journalists regarded itself as a 'fighting unit on the ideological front of socialism' and as 'a reliable fighter alongside the party of the working class and our socialist state' (Kunczik, 2001: 66). However, these journalists' actual opponent was their lack of credibility with the masses, especially given citizens' ready access to West German broadcast media (Kunczik, 2001; Roberts, 1997). Credible or not, journalists did provide citizens with the latest official news and thus with means to convince others of their fidelity to the powers that be.

Within such a national media system, news content serves to inform citizens of the policies they are permitted to support and the reality interpretations they are permitted to make. For example, one might find editorials in which citizens are told that they *may* (i.e. are permitted) or *ought* (i.e. are morally obligated) to endorse/facilitate the government's official policies and that they are *not permitted* or *not obligated* to endorse/facilitate enemies' objectives. Such expressions of a 'permission rhetoric' may have declined or abruptly ended with former East Bloc states' transformations to democracy. Yet given that the news media's role in shaping citizens' beliefs and opinions was limited by journalists' doubtful credibility, such modal rhetoric may not have been evoked at all (or, at least not until citizens' views posed a credible alternative to the one proffered by their communist leaders). Before formulating hypotheses, let us first turn to specifics of the Hungarian case.

Hungarian economic and political developments after World War II

In 1949, a new constitution established Hungary as a communist state (Romsics, 1999: 268 ff). There was a small uprising in 1953 against the communist regime, concerned primarily with the improvement of living conditions. A more massive protest occurred in 1956, stemming from popular demands for more freedom. Although this 'revolt' was crushed by the Soviets, 'representatives of the consolidating political power learnt another lesson from 1956. It was only possible to maintain the system of one-party state socialism in Hungary if the public could see their living standards and conditions rising year after year' (Ehrlich and Révész, 1995: 22). As long as the ruling communist party was the protector of the nation, and as long as Hungarians were able to improve their standard of living and quality of life, the government could be expected to enhance the legitimacy that it had gradually built up during its 30 years in power. 'This legitimacy of the regime rested on the political apathy of the masses and their pre-occupation with the

pursuit of material improvements, often referred to as "goulash communism," which some Hungarians preferred to call a 'dismal acceptance of reality' (Bigler, 1992: 438).

Some economic relief resulted after the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1964 (Adair, 2002: 54). This was a reform program to somewhat liberalize the economic system for the benefit of the workers. In the beginning of the 1970s, however, the pace of economic reform slowed, and a number of measures were turned down (see Comisso and Marer, 1986, for an overview). Nonetheless, the economic reforms not only gave more autonomy to the managers of state-owned enterprises, it also gave rise to a so-called second economy. Government officials tolerated citizens' starting small, semi-local private companies that operated after normal working hours (Andorka, 1993: 325; also see Róna-Tas, 1997; Seleny, 1999). The officials' legitimacy continued as citizens' quality of life improved.

Political changes came later. In 1982, Imre Poszgay, leader of the mass branch of the communist party, provided an informal arena where the democratic opposition and technocrats could meet and openly discuss social and economic policy questions (Adair, 2002: 56). These were formalized as Roundtable Talks in 1985. During a roundtable talk in 1987 at a conference in Lakitelek, the first democratic political party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), was formed with the express purpose of working with intellectuals and technocrats to achieve some degree of political reform. After this, other parties followed (e.g. the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) in 1988). By this time, reformers within the party had not only removed János Kádár (the leader of the old regime), they had also abandoned the communist party's monopoly on power and rejected socialism as the panacea for Hungary's problems. Even Károly Grósz, the leader of the apparatus coup who had overthrown Kádár, was himself disgraced and removed from effective power toward the end of 1988. According to a survey taken at the time, the vast majority of Hungarians favored even broader political reforms (Andorka, 1993: 332).

A growing number of independent political organizations convened in March 1989 as the so-called Opposition Roundtable, and negotiations with the Communist Party continued through the summer. In September, an agreement was reached, and on 23 October 1989, the Republic of Hungary was established. Hungary's first free democratic elections since 1945 were held on 25 March 1990 (see Barany, 1999, and Saxonberg, 2000, for more details on events immediately prior to and during Hungary's transition to a democratic state).

Hungary's democratic transition was thus much more gradual than the ones in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. In light of their pre-1989 economic and political modifications, Hungarians had more time to prepare their change of regime than citizens in the other three countries. There was also more trust than in the other countries between the ruling Communist Party leaders and members of new political parties.

Yet political developments such as the emergence of political parties (starting in 1987) and negotiations between them and the Communist Party remained absent from the news media until mid-1989. Apparently (and as confirmed by Hungarian academic colleagues), authoritarian press controls were retained throughout our study period, thereby bolstering our claim that this study's news content was consistently produced under authoritarian constraints. The Solidarity protests in Poland, the opening of the Berlin Wall, and other events in the autumn of 1989 came as a complete surprise to most Hungarians.

Hypotheses

In light of Hungary's gradual reforms in first the economic then political sectors, one might hypothesize that these gradual changes to have been simultaneously reflected in the country's news media. Yet prior to democratization, Hungary's press was totally under Communist Party control, which according to our theoretical overview suggests either that political rhetoric was strategically used to inform citizens of permissible interpretations and opinions or that such rhetoric was altogether avoided given the irrelevance of citizens' views to the security of those in power. For this reason, we divide our hypotheses into two parts – one under the presumption that Hungary's news media were sensitive to concomitant economic and political changes between 1982 and 1989 and the other under the presumption that Hungary's press freedom appeared suddenly in October 1989.

If press freedom developed gradually alongside Hungary's other reforms, we hypothesize upward trends in necessity and achievement rhetorics prior to 1989 that continue into later trends found by Roberts et al. (2009):

> *H1*. An increase in achievement-related modal arguments (namely, ones conveying economic reasons for Hungarians' possibilities) occurred between 1982 and 1989.

> *H2*. An increase in modal arguments indicative of political necessity (namely, ones conveying political reasons for Hungarians' inevitabilities) occurred between 1982 and 1989.

However, if during the years leading up to democratic transition the Hungarian Communist Party retained tight control over editorial news content, our hypotheses would be of a paucity of modal arguments overall or (when provided) of modal arguments directing citizens to act in permissible ways without linking either their claims of possibility to economic rationales (per achievement rhetoric) or their claims of inevitability to political rationales (per a rhetoric of political necessity):

> *H3*. Prior to democratization, few modal arguments were conveyed in Hungary's state-controlled news.

> *H4*. When modal arguments of possibility were mentioned in Hungary's state-controlled news, these arguments were not consistently linked to economic rationales (i.e. were not formulated as achievement rhetoric).

> *H5*. When modal arguments of inevitability were mentioned in Hungary's state-controlled news, these arguments were not consistently linked to political rationales (i.e. were not formulated as necessity rhetoric).

Given our position that permission rhetoric is primarily from an authoritarian leadership to a relatively powerless citizenry, we add following hypothesis:

> *H6*. As the democratic transition approached the subjects of permission, rhetoric in Hungary's state-controlled news shifted increasingly from references to citizens'

possibilities and inevitabilities to more self-critical references to the possibilities and inevitabilities of government and party officials.

We now turn to an explanation of our text analysis method for identifying and measuring the modal arguments analyzed in this study.

Modality analysis

Generally speaking, modal auxiliary verbs are verbs that are used with (usually, the infinitive form of) another verb to convey possibility, inevitability, impossibility or contingency. In each modal usage, there are two verbs associated with the subject, namely, a modal auxiliary verb (e.g. can, must and ought) and a main verb in infinitive form (typically an action). These usages are not intended to convey facts or to describe events; they are used to communicate something about the likelihood of the agent–action–object link. A semantic text analysis that investigates such uses of modal auxiliary verbs is called a 'modality analysis' (Roberts et al., 2010).

A modal claim is recognizable whenever it conveys intentionality in a way that can be transformed (in a manner agreeable to a native speaker) to a form that includes a modal auxiliary verb. For example, English speakers frequently use 'have to' instead of 'must' when indicating compulsion despite one's intentions. However, modal auxiliary verbs are sometimes used in ways entirely unrelated to modality. Probably, the best example here is the tendency among English speakers to convey future possibility rather than permission in their usage of the modal, 'may'. In modality analyses, the coder's challenge is to capture how a text's author understands others' motivations (thereby getting into the mind of someone who is getting into someone else's mind, as it were). Because modal auxiliary verbs convey intentionality, they can be used to learn about people's motivations, their characterizations of each other, and thus about intention-related ideological shifts between and within their societies.

The semantic grammar used in a modality analysis always has two parts at its core. There is a modal claim (conveying possibility, impossibility, inevitability, or contingency) and an associated rationale (e.g. expressed in neoliberal or social-democratic terms). Let us begin with a discussion of the four modal claims.

The modal claim of 'possibility' conveys to the reader that the modal's predicate is an option for the modal's subject. The modal claim of 'impossibility' conveys that the modal's predicate is not an option for the modal's subject. The claim of 'inevitability' conveys that the subject–predicate link is imminent. Finally, the modal claim of 'contingency' conveys the nonimmanence of the subject–predicate link. Modal claims can be used to understand human motives during interactions and distinguish subtle nuances in discourse. For example, a sentence such as 'I *can* do it' is coded as 'possible', implying capability (and, most likely, a sense of self-confidence), and a sentence such as 'I am *not able* to do it' is coded as 'impossible', indicating incapability (and a potential sense of futility). A sentence such as 'she *must* be a good person' is coded as 'inevitable', expressing certainty, and a sentence such as 'she is *able not* to do it' is coded as 'contingent', indicating alternatives (and potential avoidance).

The following are four illustrative modal claims taken from our dataset (with publication dates in parentheses):

Possible	'With the public interest in mind city councils *can* assist in the realization of these plans'. (3 December 1986)
Impossible	'At the same time the realization of total employment is such an important social value that we *cannot* ignore it, even though at this moment we are *not able to* realize it'. (14 April 1988)
Inevitable	'It is important that they [tr.: younger technicians] are aware of our present economic, political and ideological situation and they *have to* try to develop these further'. (26 October 1982)
Contingent	'It would be very good when [tr.: those in] the farming areas that are harmed by drought *do not have to* fight the bureaucratic lack of understanding; they already have enough [tr.: hardship] to worry about'. (29 August 1986)

Through modal use, a text's source (i.e. its author or speaker) socially constructs what constitutes the possible, the impossible, the inevitable, and the contingent regarding an agent–action–object link. In addition, it is always reasonable for the source of a modal claim to be queried as to the rationale for 'why' the agent is able, required, permitted, and so on regarding the claim's predicate. For example, the last of the above modal arguments offers a welfare-related rationale (farmers' current hardships) for why farmers will (hypothetically) *not have to* fight an unsympathetic (government) bureaucracy. (Note how modal predicates need not match rationales, as in this case where a *political* contingency is for *welfare-related* reasons.)

Finally, it should be noted that modality analysis is a text analysis methodology that lends itself to historical-comparative research beyond the Hungarian case. The method has already been applied in studies comparing health-care discourse in the United States and Canada (Roberts and Liu, 2014), political communications by former East versus West German journalists (Roberts et al., 2016), reports of domestic terrorism in the United States and Japan (Roberts and Wang, 2010), editorials published in India and Saudi Arabia (Roberts et al., 2010), as well as in *Népszabadság* between 1990 and 1997 (Roberts et al., 2009). As further extension of this study, its modality analysis might be replicated in present-day Hungary (or in other Central East European or Western states) to study, for example, changes in modal argumentation associated with recent increases there in nationalism and populism in the public sphere.

Data and design

Starting in 1956, *Népszabadság* (People's Freedom) was the official national newspaper of the Hungarian communist party (MSZMP), with a pre-1989 circulation of about 695,000 copies daily (about a third of Hungary's adult population; Gulyás, 2000). Our data consist of a probability sample of editorials that appeared in this newspaper's first section between July 1982 and June 1989. They were authored by relatively elite sources, including journalists, party workers, local officials, and university professors. Since our

generalizations are restricted to this text population, inferences regarding the study period should be understood as being made neither to the content of all Hungarian newspapers (or other news media) nor even to the total content of the newspaper, *Népszabadság*. Nonetheless, since the newspaper retained its format and broad readership throughout the study period, we submit that generalizations from our data will be to an important segment of official Hungarian national discourse having both consistent structural origins and a broad national audience.

Newspaper articles were sampled using a systematic area sampling design, whereby one weekday was randomly sampled from within every second week during the study period. A point-location was then randomly sampled from within *Népszabadság*, and the article containing this location was examined to determine whether it contained an inflected modal auxiliary verb. If not, another point-location was sampled from within the same newspaper issue until (or if) such an article was found. Out of the 183 sampled dates for the newspaper, 23 corresponding issues did not contain such an article and 1 was not a publication date (New Year's Day).

The first and last three paragraphs of the resulting 159 articles were transposed into literal English translations, preserving the same clause structure throughout to retain the text's original character as well as its subject–verb relations. The translator was encouraged to fill the translation with clarifying comments on idioms or other turns of phrase that might be lost on translation.[2] Entire articles were not translated to ensure that the volume of text representing each time point would remain relatively constant. From among these articles, only ones that met our definition of 'editorial' were included in the analysis.

For our purposes, an article was classified as an editorial if (a) its author was a Hungarian citizen, (b) the article's first or last three paragraphs contained at least one statement containing an inflected modal auxiliary verb (can, must, ought, etc.), (c) a rationale for the statement was made explicit in the article's first or last three paragraphs, and (d) the verb's subject was a Hungarian citizen. (According to this last criterion, a statement, such as 'conflicts can turn into hostilities', would not qualify an article for inclusion because its subject is not a person.) These criteria ensure that our study is one of modal arguments (i.e. modal-statements-plus-rationales) by Hungarians regarding Hungarians. After eliminating 83 articles that did not meet these criteria, our final sample consists of 76 editorials containing 229 of these arguments. As displayed in Figure 1, the vast majority of the modal arguments appeared as Hungary's transition to democracy approached.

Each modal argument was classified according to its modal claim (i.e. as conveying possibility, impossibility, inevitability, or contingency), depending on whether (and how) it was negated. Thus, nonnegated instances of *can* (including variants of *being able to* and *having the ability to*) were classified as indicating possibility, whereas those of *must* (including variants of *having to, needing to, ought to*, and *should*) were classified under inevitability. Impossibility was the classification of modal arguments containing expressions such as *cannot, unable to, have no ability to, must not, have to not*, and *need to not*. Contingency was the classification of arguments containing *able not to, have the ability not to, not something one must do, do not have to*, and *do not need to*. Double negations (e.g. *not able not to* and *do not need not to*) are exceptionally rare in natural language expressions and did not surface in our data.
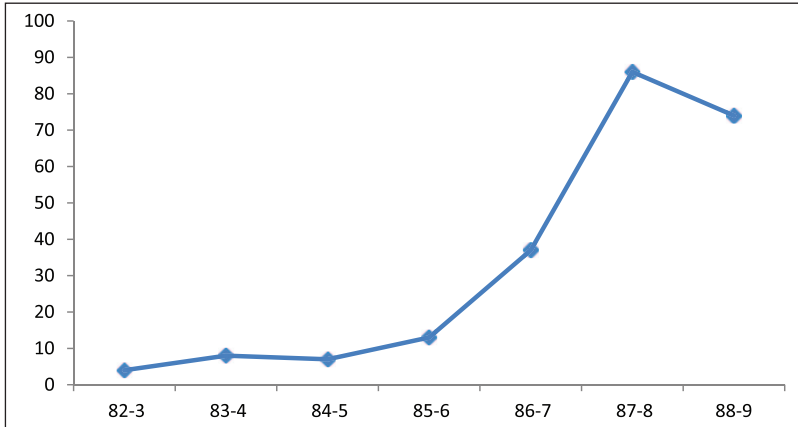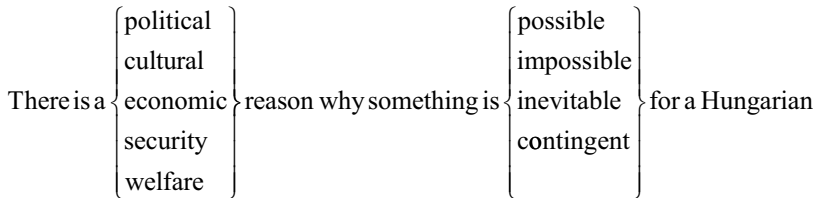
Figure 1. Number of modal arguments within sampled editorials by year.

Rationales associated with each modal statement were classified based on categories developed in Popping and Roberts (2009) and that have been recurrently found in studies on how national news is framed (De Vreese, 2005; De Vreese et al., 2001; Neuman et al., 1992; Price et al., 1997; Roberts and Liu, 2014; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Zillmann et al., 2004). In sum, each modal argument was encoded in accordance with the following 'readable' template

$$\text{There is a } \begin{Bmatrix} \text{political} \\ \text{cultural} \\ \text{economic} \\ \text{security} \\ \text{welfare} \end{Bmatrix} \text{reason why something is} \begin{Bmatrix} \text{possible} \\ \text{impossible} \\ \text{inevitable} \\ \text{contingent} \end{Bmatrix} \text{for a Hungarian}$$

Political reasons differ from *economic* ones in that the former account for the possibility, impossibility, and so on of Hungarians' actions as the consequence of activities by politicians and political bodies, whereas the latter account for them as due to aspects of the market and segments of the economy (e.g. agriculture or industry). *Cultural* rationales account for the contingency, inevitability, and so on of Hungarians' actions as due to Hungary's heritage, its language, and its morality. If a modal claim was justified via reference to a plight or remedy for Hungarians' suffering, its rationale would be coded as *welfare* related. When the potential for Hungarians' actions was attributed to such things as safety, order, and the military, the modal statement's rationale was classified as one of *security*.[3]

Table 1 lists frequencies of modal claim and rationale combinations found in the data. Nearly 63 percent of the editorials' modal arguments contained a claim that something was *inevitable* for a Hungarian, with the remaining claims being equally divided between

Table 1. Percentages of modality arguments according to rationale and modal claim.

Modal claim	Rationale					Total
	Politics	Economics	Culture	Welfare	Security	
Inevitable	16.2 (37)	20.5 (47)	21.0 (48)	3.9 (9)	1.3 (3)	62.9 (144)
Possible	3.5 (8)	3.5 (8)	7.9 (18)	2.6 (6)	0 (0)	17.5 (40)
Impossible	5.7 (13)	3.9 (9)	6.6 (15)	1.7 (4)	0 (0)	17.9 (41)
Contingent	0.4 (1)	0 (0)	1.3 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.7 (4)
Total	25.8 (59)	27.9 (64)	36.7 (84)	8.3 (19)	1.3 (3)	

Frequencies are in parentheses below percents (N = 229).

ones of *possibility* and of *impossibility*. As in previous modal analyses of national editorial news, there are almost no *contingency* claims in our data.

In contrast to the predominance of inevitability claims within welfare-justified modal arguments made in social democracies' editorials on national matters (cf. Roberts and Liu, 2014), our pre-1989 Hungarian editorials have less than 9 percent of modal arguments' rationales referencing the Hungarian people's welfare – possibly as part of a strategy to keep Hungarians' well-being from officially becoming a topic of debate. Instead, the most frequently mentioned rationales were (less controversial) justifications based on Hungarians' *culture* (e.g. on the preservation of Hungarian traditions). More in line with post-1989 editorial content in *Népszabadság*, both *economic* and *political* rationales were each appealed to in about a quarter of the arguments, whereas barely 1 percent of them contained *security*-related justifications (Roberts et al., 2009). Yet the pattern in Figure 1 overshadows these overall percentages, since the lack of modal arguments in 1982–1986 period indicates that older articles tended to be more descriptive than more recent ones.

Methods

Our unit of analysis is the modal argument, more than one of which may be nested within a single editorial. Given this nesting and the tendency for journalists to focus on a consistent message within their editorials, it is likely that modal arguments within the same editorial are more likely to have identical modal claims and rationales than modal arguments among different editorials. In a form-by-rationale table of such arguments, these clusters of identical modal statements will yield larger variations among cell frequencies than corresponding variations in the population of all such modal statements. Multilevel models were developed to deal with this problem, thereby allowing researchers to test hypotheses on how contextual variables (e.g. time) at one level are associated with relations (e.g. between modal claims and rationales) at another level. Given the lack of modal arguments in the period, 1982–1985, we aggregate these earliest years in our analysis.

With 76 clusters plus our modal claim and rationale variables, a table incorporating all this information would have 1520 ($4 \times 5 \times 76$) cells – too many to yield sufficient power for drawing statistical inferences about any but the most enormous of effects. Yet since

our hypotheses only deal with two modal claims and two rationales, we focus our analysis primarily on the two 304 ($2 \times 2 \times 76$) cell contingency tables appropriate to this study (namely, one with economic rationales for possibility and the other with political rationales for inevitability).

Our analysis proceeds in three parts. First, we examine modal arguments made early in our sample of editorials. Next, we consider differences with modal rhetoric during post-communist Hungary. Finally, we look at the actors specified in modal rhetoric prior to 1990.

Results[4]

Starting from the premise that permission rhetoric prevailed during communist times, we examine our data for evidence dovetailing with more democratic-heading trends reported in Roberts et al. (2009). In this vein, Figure 1 provides clear support for H3, namely, for a paucity of modal arguments prior to 1987, followed by a 3- to 4-fold increase. Thus, only 3 years prior to Hungary's first post-soviet democratic election, an escalation in political rhetoric (possibly of permission, achievement, or necessity types) occurred. Hence, although modal argumentation did not suddenly appear in 1989 with the declaration of the Hungarian republic, it fairly nearly did so 2 years prior to this.

After collapsing our relatively infrequent 1982–1985 modal rhetoric into a single time category, we now examine all modal arguments for patterns and trends suggestive of rhetorics of permission, achievement, and necessity. Each row in Table 2 corresponds to a single loglinear model fit to our data. While the second row is the model for testing H2, the third row is the one for testing H1. Not only do these models provide no support for upward trends in achievement (H1) nor necessity (H2) rhetoric, they afford no evidence of either of these types of rhetoric whatsoever. That is, the table provides no evidence of any modal-claim-by-rationale ($m \times r$) interaction indicative of either achievement arguments (possibility for economic reasons) or necessity arguments (inevitability for political reasons). Instead, we find – consistent with H4 and H5 – only a rhetoric of permission in Hungarian journalists' claims of possibility and inevitability, given their lack of consistent grounding in economic or political rationales. Thus, the upward trends in achievement and necessity rhetoric reported in Roberts et al. (2009) started suddenly as press restrictions were lifted in 1989.

However, across the models, one does find evidence in Table 2 of a shift in the types of permission rhetoric used. In particular, one finds a linear decrease ($\ell\lambda_{ie}^{M} = -0.25$; $\ell\lambda_{ip}^{M} = -0.13$) in the log frequency of inevitability claims accompanied by an increase-then-leveling-off ($\ell\lambda_{pp}^{M} + q\lambda_{pp}^{M} = 0.51\ell - 0.29q; \ell\lambda_{pe}^{M} + q\lambda_{pe}^{M} = 0.31\ell - 0.13q$) in those of possibility claims. Returning to the texts allows us to 'put flesh' on this shift in modal claims from ones of inevitability to ones of possibility.[5]

Regarding the decline in mentions of Hungarians' inevitabilities, one finds such modal claims to have generally been ones *directing* various segments of the population. Prior to 1986, these claims included Hungarians being told that they *have to* train younger technicians, find out problems, police crowded squares, maintain coal facilities, perform analyses, acknowledge that packaging sells a good product, and so on. Yet after 1986, the jump in references to Hungarians' possibilities involved modal claims *anticipating*

Table 2. Estimates from four hierarchical loglinear models of interactions among modal claim (m), rationale (r), and both linear (ℓ) and quadratic (q) time.

Model (L^2)	Modal claim by rationale (m × r)	Modal claim with time		Rationale with time		Three-way interactions	
		Linear (m × ℓ)	Quadratic (m × q)	Linear (r × ℓ)	Quadratic (r × q)	Linear (m × r × ℓ)	Quadratic (m × r × q)
Politics							
Possible (592.1)	−0.68 (0.53)	0.51 (0.27)	−0.29* (0.15)	0.28 (0.27)	−0.17 (0.15)	0.25 (0.27)	−0.17 (0.15)
Inevitable (658.3)	−0.02 (0.10)	−0.13 (0.07)	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.07)	0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.07)	−0.05 (0.05)
Economics							
Possible (606.6)	−0.07 (0.28)	0.31* (0.15)	−0.13 (0.10)	0.01 (0.15)	0.02 (0.10)	0.02 (0.15)	0.05 (0.10)
Inevitable (660.1)	0.43 (0.23)	−0.25* (0.13)	0.08 (0.08)	0.15 (0.15)	−0.08 (0.08)	−0.16 (0.13)	0.06 (0.08)

Units of m × r interactions are proportional to their log odds. Coefficients associated with two-way interactions with time (after collapsing the first 4 years, 1982–1985) represent 1-year linear or quadratic shifts from the average log frequency calculated among all 304 cells in each contingency table. Standard errors are listed in parentheses below estimates. df = 303 for all models.
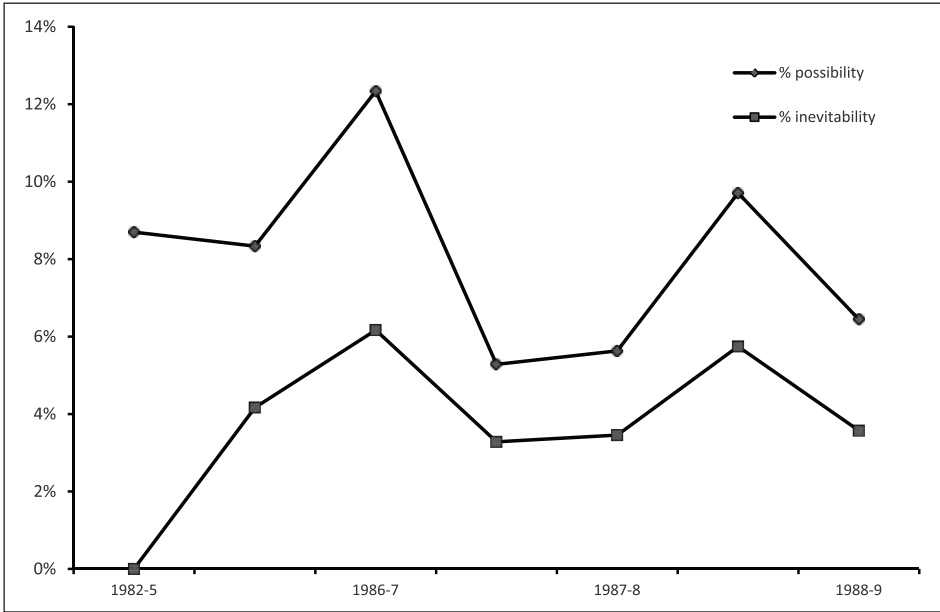*p < 0.05.

Figure 2. Percent of modal arguments with claims of government or party officials' possibility versus inevitability, 1982–1989.
Data are smoothed by averaging percentages from 3.5 years of collapsed data for 1982–1985 with those for the first 6 months of 1986 and thereafter averaging percentages for each pair of adjacent half-years. To obtain percents of modal claims with everyday citizens as subjects, subtract percents in the figure from 100%.

immanent freedoms. For example, the authors mentioned that Hungarians are *able to* guide their futures, both economic (improve market adaptations, get local agencies to work more effectively, get customers back, work for one's own benefit, participate creatively in decision making, and decide and choose freely) and political (judge leaders' activities, sense public sentiments, honor popular requests, decide on qualified leaders, confirm delusions resulting from a former lack of press freedom, bring forward local interests, notice painful points in the budget, increase our self-confidence as citizens, and strengthen our mutual trust). Thus, as formal roundtable discussions of liberalization were occurring, such modal claims of hopeful possibilities erupted in Hungary's still-state-controlled media.

Finally, despite an overall decline in claims of inevitability, it is only starting in mid-1986 that we find government officials mentioned at all as those who *need to*, for example, decide on how to distribute costs, perform their job better, show confidence, and make a budget that serves economic rather than political objectives. Yet as depicted in Figure 2, the ratio of permission rhetoric between political and party leaders versus everyday citizens remained otherwise relatively constant during the study period, with claims of leaders' possibility varying around 8 percent and those of their inevitability varying around 4 percent. Accordingly, we have no compelling evidence (per H6) of increasing references to government and party

officials' possibilities and inevitabilities during 7 years prior to Hungary's democratic transition, other than in the sudden appearance in mid-1986 of occasional references to leaders' inevitabilities.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that during the 7 years between mid-1982 and mid-1989 (i.e. just prior to its establishment of democratic institutions), Hungary's state-controlled media persistently used a rhetoric of permission in its editorial news. Primarily during the last 3 years of this period, newspaper journalists, albeit decreasingly, directed citizens in claims that specific actions were ones they had to do – directives proffered without any consistent rationale for these claims' inevitability. Moreover, during post-1986 grassroots demands for reforms, there was an increase in populistic 'permissions' as editorialists made anticipatory claims of citizens' possibilities, again void of any consistent (economic or political) framing.[6] The implication here is that in authoritarian states, journalists need not be consistent in how they frame the news. In anticipating what citizens will be *able to* do or in directing what citizens *must* do, these journalists need to only convey what is permitted. The provision of consistent rationales as to why these capacities and necessities exist is presumably unnecessary, as long as political forces are sufficiently powerful to ensure their possibility and inevitability. These findings are in contrast to increases in economic and political framing in post-1989 editorials reported in the same newspaper by the same journalists but then with newly granted press freedom (Roberts et al., 2009). More concretely put, we found no evidence of such achievement (H1) and necessity (H2) rhetoric in our editorials from 1982 to 1989.

Yet perhaps, this article's most important finding is a near absence of modal argumentation in Hungarian editorials authored prior to 1986. During an authoritarian state's 'normal functioning', there may only rarely be a need to 'remind' citizens of permitted actions (H3). However, challenges to state power apparently give rise to such needs, prompting anticipatory (H4), directive (H5), and possibly even self-critical (H6) rhetoric.

However, our lack of modal rhetoric in 1982–1985 yields research limitations. Not only does an absence of data result in an absence of findings, this study's relatively small sample size reduces the power of our hypothesis tests. Nonetheless, important inferences can be drawn from our evidence that in the relatively uneventful years of 1982–1986 Hungarian journalists eschewed modal arguments altogether, but as political leaders' power became increasingly challenged in 1987–1989, they made extensive use of modal claims that anticipated or directed citizens. On one hand, this implies that within authoritarian countries' state-controlled media, modal rhetoric is reserved for occasions when citizens begin questioning their leaders' capacity to enforce their will. On the other hand, our consequently weak hypothesis tests suggest which types of modal rhetoric (namely, ones of anticipation and direction) journalists in state-controlled media use on such occasions. Thus, our finding of a lack of consistency in the rationales journalists provided for their modal claims calls for replication in future studies – replication already found by Roberts et al. (2016) in a comparison of political rhetoric by journalists writing in a free-press environment but trained in state-controlled (East German) and free-press (West German) settings.

This study's findings have implications for democratizing nations other than Hungary. Numerous contemporary failing democracies (e.g. Russia, Iraq, and Egypt) clearly illustrate that changing from authoritarianism to democracy calls for more than institutions and a constitution. From the top-down, legislators need to shift their orientation from directing the citizenry to schooling it on the rationales behind their policies and its responsibility to vote (Ágh, 1994, 1999; Ágh and Ilonszki, 1996; Ágh and Kurtán, 1995). For instance, a country's shift from command to market economy always entails economic hardships for its citizens (Fitzgerald, 1991). The success of such an intervention depends on politicians' ability – in contrast to the kleptocrats, they typically replaced – to act responsibly with the money others (e.g. the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and taxpayers) supply to them and to explain to citizens why they spend this money as they do. Thus, one might speculate – given increasing problems of corruption during democratic transition as one moves eastward in Central East Europe (Kaufmann, 1997) – relative to countries farther to the east, Central European countries' politicians reduced their populist tenor in favor of keeping their electorates informed of the rationales behind their policies. From the bottom-up, citizens need to critically evaluate politicians' justifications for their policies, rather than settle for the immediate (populist) gratifications that they promise (Učeň, 2007). Roberts et al. (2009) provide evidence of such promise in 1990–1997 Hungary in the forms of editorialists' decreasing emphasis on the fading promise of political possibilities, offset by their increasing emphases on political responsibilities. Yet this trend may not have continued over the past decades, given evidence of a strengthening New Right in Hungary that began about the time that their study period ended (Bozóki, 2008).

By restricting one's analysis to mediated news produced within an authoritarian state such as pre-1989 Hungary, organizational mechanisms involved in this production remain unexamined. Nonetheless, considerable evidence exists that such news content is carefully orchestrated by virtue of journalists' loyalty requirements, their self-censorship, and their persistent fear of consequences for disloyalty (Gálik, 2004; Jakab, 1989; Jakubowicz, 1995). Yet as the previous paragraphs make apparent, little research is currently available on precisely how political rhetoric is formulated within state-controlled media. This study provides preliminary evidence that in these states, news remains primarily descriptive until challenges to the power structure arise – challenges then confronted in the media with modal claims that (such as a 'carrot' vs 'stick' for one's mule) both anticipate and direct citizens' actions.

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Notes

1. Although authorities allowed opinion research, neither the results nor their impact on policy formation was made public (Tworzecki, 2012: 453).
2. This translation was not performed to compensate for peculiarities in the Hungarian language, since both Hungarian and English share the modal auxiliary and if–then constructions

encoded in this study. Instead, translation was needed because our only available coders were not fluent in Hungarian. To ensure that information was not lost in translation (see Temple, 1997), native Hungarian speakers verified a sample of sentences for their translation accuracy. Based on this verification, our impression is that our coding differs little from what it would have been were it to have been done directly from the Hungarian.

3. Sentences containing inflected modal auxiliary verbs were coded a second time. Intercoder reliability for modal claims was $\pi = 0.80$ (standard deviation (SD) $= 0.05$, $Z = 198.06$, $p < 0.0001$) and rationales was $\pi = 0.91$ (SD $= 0.03$, $Z = 238.32$, $p < 0.0001$; Popping, 2010; Scott, 1955). The main discrepancy between the coders concerned whether the modal claim coded by the first coder was actually a modal claim. In 20 cases, the second coder decided the sentence contained no modal claim, thereby resulting in its elimination from the analysis.

4. All results are available from the first author.

5. One reviewer noted that such mentions of 'possibility' and 'inevitability' might differ between independent authors (journalists, scientists, and lawyers) and authors with government or party positions (politicians, officials, and policy workers). To evaluate this, we added a variable to our dataset that divides our 76 editorials into the 62 written by independent authors and the 14 written by government/party authors. Neither the proportion of mentions of possibility ($\Delta_{p(i-g/p)} = -0.25$; $p = 0.33$) nor of inevitability ($\Delta_{i(i-g/p)} = 0.25$; $p = 0.62$) were statistically significant between these two types of authors, suggesting that members of each group based their writing on official sources.

6. Of course, post-1986 changes extended to other domains of political culture beyond those voiced in *Népszabadság*'s editorials. For instance, the first political party, MDF, was founded in 1987. Until 1988, the intellectuals' focus was on pluralism, free speech, and human rights. In 1989, this changed to free elections and constitutionalism (Bozóki, 2009). Janke (2015) contains a good overview of how students' discussions of political freedom led to their founding the political party, Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (FIDESZ), meaning the Alliance of Young Democrats). Also, the position of the Communist Party changed during this period. Barany (1999) examines socialist political elites' attempts to regain their legitimacy through half-hearted political and economic reform proposals during a time of profound economic difficulties and pervasive social malaise. For instance, he documents how the Communist Party allowed other political parties to exist (albeit with restrictions) and civilians' protests against ecological damage to halt a potentially prestigious project to build a dam across the Danube.

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