

## **Hungary. Are neglected regional elections second-order?**

Gábor Dobos, Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), [dobos.gabor@tk.mta.hu](mailto:dobos.gabor@tk.mta.hu)

Réka Várnagy, Institute of Political Sciences, Corvinus University of Budapest, [reka.varnagy@uni-corvinus.hu](mailto:reka.varnagy@uni-corvinus.hu)

## 1. Introduction

Hungary is a centralized unitary state with a strong municipal tier. Municipalities took advantage of the liberal regulation introduced during the early 1990s and the number of local governments doubled from 1526 to 3093. Despite the emergence of a highly fragmented system of local governments, the middle level remained a ‘missing tier’ (Zongor, 1999). There are 19 counties but these are deprived of all major responsibilities that they used to hold as agents of central government before the democratic transition. There is no hierarchy between local and county (“megye”) government. Local governments are autonomous actors and deliver a broad range of local public goods and services but they lack the financial resources to efficiently implement these policies. The counties have a complimentary role and almost no tasks are directly delegated to them (Pálné et al, 2004). Although the asymmetrical relationship between localities and counties quickly resulted in a lack of coordination and problems of economy of scale, the absence of a sufficiently powerful middle level has only been half-heartedly addressed in Hungary. The “central government was not interested in filling out the institutional vacuum at the middle level and local governments were not interested in the establishment of a potential rival in service delivery” (Soós and Kákai, 2010: 546). The introduction of direct election for the members of the county assemblies (“megyei közgyűlés”) in 1994 signalled an effort to strengthen counties but this reform did not bring a break-through and counties remained present but ‘invisible’ actors.

Hence, not much is at stake at in county elections which we consider regional elections for the purposes of this chapter since they are the ‘middle-level elections’ in Hungary<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter we are interested in the question whether the regional vote is nationalized or regionalized. We expect that regional elections are nationalized but there may be two ways in which nationalization may be expressed in the regional vote. First, we expect that regional elections are second-order elections since regional assemblies are weak and not much is at stake. When county elections are subordinate to national elections then government parties should lose vote share while opposition, small and new parties should gain vote share (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Second, the dominance of national politics, the relative homogeneity of the Hungarian society, and the timing of regional elections (approximately six months after national elections) may lead to similar election results and we expect small differences between the national and regional vote. While there is some research done about the role of national parties in local and regional elections local and national levels in terms of party dynamics (see for example Bóhm, 2006 and Wiener, 2010) regional level election results have rarely been analysed. In addition, major territorial reforms took place between 2010 and 2012 and the effects of these reforms have not been studied yet. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the extent to which Hungarian county elections are nationalized or regionalized. The next section offers an overview of regional government and regional

elections. In the third section we explore differences between the national and regional vote and in the fourth and fifth sections we respectively address the questions in how far these differences are caused by second-order election effects (nationalization) or are the result of a regionalization of the vote. The final section discusses the results and reflects on the second-order nature of regional elections.

## **2. Regional assembly and regional elections**

One may ask the question whether there is a county level of government in Hungary. Counties have almost no tasks and responsibilities of their own (Hooghe et al., 2010) and they are in a relatively weak position for structural, functional, and organizational reasons.

Historically, the current county system was defined in 1950 with 19 territorial units (see table 2) which during the communist regime were administrative units. In the highly centralized territorial structure the counties served as the local agents of the central party without real self-governing capacities. The democratic transformation emphasized the role of local communities and purposefully weakened the role of the other sub-national units (Pálné 2008: 141).

The current territorial structure of Hungary is defined by the Fundamental Law of Hungary which states that “the territory of Hungary shall consist of the capital, counties, cities and towns, as well as villages”. (Article F). Despite of being the only middle-level territorial unit defined in the territorial structure of Hungary, the county’s authority was challenged by various actors. First, the Hungarian territorial structure is not hierarchical in the sense that local governments function independently of county assemblies. Designed as complementary institutions the tasks of local governments and the counties are separated and the county has no right or responsibility to control the functioning of local governments. Second, the county assemblies do not respond to all voters living within their boundaries as cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants can choose to be ‘promoted’ to cities of county rank<sup>2</sup> (“megyei jogú város”), which means that they can fulfil tasks that are normally assigned to the county assemblies. These cities also operate independently from the county assemblies and while their geographical expansion is limited, they often host a significant share of the infrastructure (business, public services, education) in the county as a whole. At elections voters living in these cities do not cast a vote for the county assembly members but for their own city’s assembly members (which instead of being called local governments (“önkormányzat”) are called city assembly (“közgyűlés”) to emphasize their county rank). Third, the role of counties as an institution representing a middle-level territorial unit encompassing several smaller local governments is challenged by the merger of localities in local government associations (“társulás”) and micro-regions (“kistérség”). These mergers are motivated by financial incentives to obtain a higher level of economy of scale often hinder the capacity of county

assemblies in developing a comprehensive economic development policy. Finally, the role of counties is further weakened by deconcentrated central state administration. The central state introduced a parallel administrative structure with more than 40 middle level government agencies (currently called “kormányhivatal”) which are assigned with a variety of tasks (consumer protection, land registration, labour issues etc.) and which have offices in the counties, acting as the territorial sub-unit of the central state, in a deconcentrated structure.

The void at the middle-level of the Hungarian territorial structure was clearly a problem but the potential answers given by different political actors, especially governments varied to a great extent. During the beginning of 2000s the Socialist government aimed at reforming the territorial structure through regionalization. Supported by the European Union creating administrative regions was a must in order to be able to absorb European funds but domestic political actors resisted the idea of creating viable regional governments with wide responsibilities and capacities. As a result the already existing territorial structure with local governments and regional assemblies had remained, but a new, parallel institutional structure was introduced with regional and sub-regional units. The regional development councils (“fejlesztési tanácsok”) lack a democratic mandate since they have no directly elected members. However, these councils soon took over most of the planning activities of the counties. Due to the strong political resistance this new structure of development councils did not bring along a strong regionalization process, but as Pálné (2011: 20) points out, resulted in the centralization of power with the government dominating the councils despite the fact that regionalization dominated the political agenda on local reform between 1996 and 2011 (Pálmai, 2013).

Regionalization was often challenged by right-wing parties which saw regions as an administrative tool lacking political content (such as historical territorial continuity, shared regional identity or any other trait of political community). The alternative to region as middle-level actor in the territorial structure was the county preferred by the right-wing government coming to office in 2010. The reform introduced by the Fidesz Hungarian Civic Party’s (“Fidesz Magyar Polgári Párt”, Fidesz) – Christian Democratic People’s Party (“Kereszténydemokrata Párt”, KDNP) government and can be characterised by centralization accompanied by a strong degree of deconcentration. As a result of deconcentration, a new sub-national territorial unit, the district (“járás”) was created with 198 districts introduced as of 1 January, 2013. The districts are subdivisions of the already existing county government agencies (“megyei kormányhivatal”) and are responsible for carrying out magisterial and administrative tasks<sup>3</sup>. Along with the introduction of districts came the redefinition of the role of local governments and county assemblies with many tasks and responsibilities transferred to the districts. Thus the centralization is the result of shifting capacities from decentralized institutions – the directly elected local governments and regional assemblies - to deconcentrated governmental agencies.

The complex institutional setting at the middle tier of the Hungarian territorial structure clearly affected the role and function of county assemblies. After the transition to democracy, the county assemblies were assigned with two functions: (1) to fulfil the tasks of complex area development and planning (e.g. elaborating middle-term development plans) and (2) to provide services which cannot be efficiently delivered by municipalities because of scale economies (e.g. hospitals or secondary education). However, none of these functions could be properly carried out by the county assemblies because of the above mentioned complexity, especially with the other actors challenging the counties' authority. Furthermore, county assemblies have very few competences of their own, they mostly deal with local policies which can be more efficiently provided at a larger territorial scale such as waste and sewage management. Moreover, due to declining financial support from the central state, many local governments handed over their services to the county assemblies over the past two decades. Local governments have full autonomy in deciding which services are being transferred to the county level and this has resulted in varying and diverse roles for counties. The fiscal capacities for county assemblies are also very limited because they do not have taxes on their own nor can they set the rate of national taxes. Thus counties are fully dependent on the financial support from the central government. Finally, the reform of 2013 redefined and narrowed the role of county assemblies by making development and planning their priority while taking away the responsibility of managing public services such as secondary schools and hospitals and also limiting their fiscal autonomy. The county assemblies have become empty 'shells' without real power and entrusted only with the task of regional development and regional planning.

Finally, we can hardly speak of regional government because of the organization of the executive at the county level. There is no separate executive body at the county level. Councillors form party groups and decision-making is exercised by simple majority voting in the assembly. Coalition agreements are rare despite the fact that in most county assemblies none of the party groups have a majority. The chair of the assembly is elected by the assembly members but the powers associated with the office are minimal, including chairing the meetings and signing documents of the assembly.

Along with the changing role of counties the electoral system applied has been modified on several occasions. Direct regional elections were introduced in 1994 and have been held every four years. Subnational – local and regional - elections are held in the same year as national parliamentary elections; the latter are in spring and the former are held in autumn (typically in October).<sup>4</sup> Because local/regional elections are held shortly after national elections they are often considered as a second round of national elections (Böhm, 2006).

There have been two major electoral reforms at the regional level, one in 1994 and one in 2010. The reform in 1994 introduced direct elections for the members of the county assemblies (in 1990

the county assemblies were indirectly elected by the members of the municipal councils) and allowed for a 'cumul des mandats', i.e. the practice of holding elected positions at the local and/or regional and/or national level<sup>5</sup>. As a result, regional assemblies became part of a patronage-system for parties in which regional assemblies serve as a 'springboard' for inexperienced politicians and as a 'safety net' for the defeated candidates at the national level (Várnagy, 2008; Borchert, 2011). The personal links between regional and national levels were further tightened by the members of the national assembly (MPs) who also won mandates in regional and local assemblies. In 1994, 11% of MPs also had a seat in a regional assembly and by 2002 this proportion had increased to 28% and then slightly dropped to a bit below under 20% (Várnagy, 2012). The practice of 'cumul des mandats' was abolished in 2012.

The electoral systems at the local and regional levels are similarly structured and highly complex (Swianiewicz and Mielczarek, 2005: 20). Municipalities with a population of less than 10,000 inhabitants hold elections under a plurality formula with a block vote system and municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants combine majoritarian rule with compensatory lists which make the overall election results proportional. The list system induces political actors to establish party organizations to compete in elections (Soós, n.d.: 2). The block vote system helps the election of individual candidates and the compensatory lists allow national political parties to enter the local level (Kákai, 2004: 10). Until 2010, the regional electoral system was very similar to the local one: there were two types of electoral districts in each region. One district for municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and one district for municipalities exceeding 10,000 inhabitants. Both types of districts applied a proportional list formula (with Sainte-Laguë method and a four per cent threshold) and the total number of seats is proportional to the total population in the territory. Citizens in cities with county rank do not vote for county assemblies but elect municipal councillors and the assembly of the Municipality of Budapest is elected by 23 districts.

An electoral reform in 2010 (Act L of 2010) introduced two major changes to the local and regional electoral systems: first, the two types of districts were merged and second, the number of mandates in every local and regional assemblies were significantly decreased. On average the number of seats declined by 53.8%, ranging from a decline of 38% (from 40 to 25 seats) in Hajdú-Bihar county to a drop of 63% (from 40-41 to 15 seats) in Heves, Komárom-Esztergom, Nógrád, Tolna, Vas and Zala counties<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the threshold to stand for elections has increased from 0,3 percent to 1 percent of the voters. The electoral formula translating votes into seats was changed to the d'Hondt formula while the threshold for winning a seat was increased from 4 to 5 percent. All these reforms resulted in a less proportional party system which favours bigger parties. In the elections of 2010, only one non-national organization (the Association for Somogy County, "Somogyért Egyesület") was able to win mandates in a regional assembly.

A similar majoritarian turn can be observed for the 2011 reform of the national electoral system which was first applied in the election of 2014. Before 2011, 386 parliamentary mandates were distributed among three tiers: 176 mandates were allocated in single member districts (SMDs), a maximum of 152 mandates were distributed on the basis of regional proportional party lists, while a minimum of 58 compensatory mandates were distributed on the basis of national party lists. A two-round, absolute majority system was applied in the SMDs and a threshold of 5% was established for party lists. This electoral system greatly benefited the larger parties while the winners in the SMDs were overrepresented in terms of mandates compared to its share of the vote (Benoit, 2005). The 2011 reform reduced the number of parliamentary seats from 386 to 199 and 106 out of 199 mandates are allocated to SMDs which apply a single round, relative majority system. The other 93 mandates are distributed on the basis of national party lists according to the remaining votes from the SMDs which were not used to allocate seats (i.e. the votes of the 'losers' as well as the surplus votes of the winners). These mandates are allocated on the basis of the d'Hondt method with a 5% threshold. The regional lists have been abolished. Subnational government and subnational electoral systems have been constantly reformed and in the next sections we explore the question the effects of these reforms on the nationalization of the regional vote.

### **3. Congruence of vote**

Dissimilarity in the vote between regional and national elections can be usefully explored by three congruence measures. Party system congruence (NN-RR) compares the result of a national election to a regional election. Party dissimilarity scores capture differences between national and regional elections as well as between regional and national electorates. Two additional indices differentiate between the sources of variation. Electorate congruence (NN-NR) contrasts for national elections the result at the state wide level to the result within a region. This measure captures the extent to which a regional electorate votes differently than the national electorate. Election congruence (NR-RR) compares within a region the result of a national election to the outcome of a regional election and taps into the extent to which a regional electorate switches their vote between regional and national elections. Figure 1 displays the scores for the three congruence measures since 1990. Two observations stand out. First, electorate congruence is relatively high (indicated by low dissimilarity scores) and is stable over time with the exception of the first election of 1990 which can be explained by the newness of democratic elections. Second, variation in electoral congruence scores across regions is low (indicated by low standard deviations; results not shown) and this indicates that voters do not seem to express regional preferences in national elections

but rather base their vote choice on stable party preferences. Electorate congruence scores need to be interpreted with some care. A mixed electoral system applies for national elections whereby voters cast a vote for a candidate in a single-member district and for a regional list.<sup>7</sup> We calculated electorate congruence scores on the basis of the regional list vote and thereby we may underestimate dissimilarity in the vote since we do not take into account the possibility of split-ticket voting.<sup>8</sup> In 2011 the electoral system was reformed and the regional lists were abolished. The electorate congruence score for 2014 is based on the votes cast for national party lists and, despite the different ways of computing, the score is the same as for previous elections.

FIGURE 1 about here

Party system and election congruence gradually increases (indicated by lower dissimilarity scores) between 1994 and 2010 but decrease sharply in 2014. In addition, party system and election congruence closely follow each other indicating that differences between regional and national party systems is largely driven by vote switching between regional and national elections. However, it is important to recall that citizens living in cities with county rank do not vote at regional elections. To be more precise, they vote for their municipal council but not for the council of the county they live in. This means that we compare different electorates when we contrast the national vote to the regional vote; the national vote includes cities with county rank whereas the regional vote does not. Hence, we do not know whether the election dissimilarity scores reflect vote switching or differences between the vote within cities of county rank and counties. This is an important caveat while previous research has shown that a urban-rural cleavage shapes voters' party preferences (Evans-Whitefield, 1995; Körösényi, 1999) and has affected the development of the Hungarian party system (McAllister-White, 2005; Casal-Bértoa, 2014). According to Knutsen (2013: 29): "the correlation between urban-rural residence and party choice is moderate, but clearly significant". Hungary has a highly fragmented territorial structure and out of 3154 municipalities there are 328 towns – among others the capital Budapest and 23 towns with county rank- and 2,826 villages. The towns with county rank are important for the economy in their county and they play a key role in providing social services (Tábit, 2012). Data from the Central Statistical Office reveals that one fourth on the Hungarian population (Budapest not included) lives in towns with county rank and these towns host 34 per cent of all enterprises, 35 per cent of employment and 25 per cent of housing (KSH, 2012; Budapest not included). In sum, it is likely that the party system and election congruence scores displayed in figure 1 reflect an urban-rural cleavage alongside vote switching between regional and national elections.

The dissimilarity scores are comparable over time and both party system and election congruence increases (indicated by lower dissimilarity scores) between 1990 and 2010 but decreases sharply for 2014. This result raises two questions: what was the cause for increasing congruence and what



lead to the sudden decrease in 2014? The increase in congruence can be explained by the consolidation and nationalization of the party system whereby the major national parties are increasingly more able to capture larger shares of the regional vote (see table 1). Scholars have noted a “freezing party system” at the national level as early as 1995 (Ágh, 1995). During the transition process towards democracy, early-established parties were at an advantage and were able to attract voters across the whole territory and could prevent the establishment of new parties.

TABLE 1 about here

The party system at the national level was first replicated at the local level and easily spilled-over into regional elections. The number of regional lists presented in county elections declined from 489 in 1998 to around 100 in 2010 and 2014 and the number of regional lists which gained representation in a county assembly declined from 27 in 1998 to around 10 in subsequent regional elections (table 1). The largest party has been able to win absolute majorities since 2010 and the combined vote share for the two largest parties is more than 70 per cent since the county election of 2002 (table 1). Clearly, the large statewide parties dominate in regional elections. Their dominance is sustained by the nomination strategies of the statewide parties: most presidents of the county assemblies were members of the Hungarian Parliament at the same time (Várnagy, 2012) until the practice of having dual mandates was abolished in 2012. While the practice of cumul was ceased in 2014, the name recognition of parties still gave advantage to statewide parties.

Party system consolidation also entailed that a left-right dimension of political contestation became the dominant factor for election campaigns, voting behaviour and coalition formation. This development can be illustrated by the growth and decline of the Independent Smallholders' Party (“Független Kisgazdapárt”, FKGP) which explicitly capitalized on the urban-rural cleavage. After being in government in 1990 and 1998, the party started to disintegrate due to an increasing number of intraparty conflicts. The party opted out of the coalition government and this was followed by a party schism in 2001. As a result, the party booked poor electoral results at the 2002 elections and gradually disappeared. The urban-rural cleavage is not anymore explicitly represented by a party but the vote for statewide parties are still based on this dimension of political contestation. The left-wing parties are traditionally overrepresented in urban areas across national and local elections in Hungary even if this advantages for the left seems to erode after 2010 (Enyedi-Fábián-Tardos, 2014: 534).

The sudden decrease in party system and election congruence in 2014 can be explained by an increase in the number of regional lists (see table 1). The increasing number of regional lists is the result of a disintegration of the parties on the left. First, two new organizations were founded by ex-leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Party (“Magyar Szocialista Párt”, MSZP) which was the

largest opposition party until the elections of 2010. Second, the disintegration of the MSZP opened up a window of opportunity for new parties to enter national political arena.<sup>9</sup> The combined vote share for the two largest parties at the regional level suggest that these new parties were not very successful but it is still an open question whether the increase in the number of regional lists caused a decline of party system and election congruence. We will turn to this question in the next section where we explore nationalization further by looking at second-order election effects in regional elections.

#### **4. Second-order election effects**

Figure 1 shows a trend of increasing congruence between national and regional elections and dissimilarity in the vote decreases from almost 22 percent in 1994 to a bit more than 10 percent in 2010. However, party system and election dissimilarity scores are still significantly higher than those for electorate congruence which hovers between five and seven percent. In addition, we may observe a sharp increase in the dissimilarity scores for party system and election congruence in 2014.

In this section we explore in how far these observations are caused by second-order election effects. When regional elections are second-order elections we may expect turnout to be low and parties in national government to lose vote share whereas opposition, small and new parties should gain vote share. This voting behaviour comes about because voters, politicians and media perceive regional elections to be less important than national elections and when there is less at stake voters do not bother to cast a vote and those who do use their vote to send a signal of discontent by punishing parties in national government (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Figure 2 displays turnout for national and regional elections since 1990 and we may observe low participation rates for regional elections. Regional elections attract around 50 percent of the electorate despite the fact county elections are held simultaneously with local and mayoral elections. A factor contributing to low turnout may relate to the timing of regional elections relative to the national election. Subnational elections are held only six months after a national election. Most parties run out of financial resources after a national election campaign and are not able to fill up their campaign budgets within six months. Voter fatigue also may play a role. In 2014 three consecutive elections took place in Hungary: parliamentary elections on April 6, elections to the European Parliamentary on May 25, and local and regional elections on October 12. The regional election of 2014 records the lowest turnout figure since 1994 (see figure 2).

FIGURE 2 about here

Figure 3 displays vote share swings between regional and previously held national elections for four types of parties: government, opposition, new and no representation parties. New parties are

established in between national and regional elections and no representation parties participated in the previously held national election but did not manage to win a seat. In contrast to our expectations we find mixed evidence for the hypothesis that regional elections are second-order. Only in the elections of 1994 and 2006 do government parties lose and opposition parties win vote share. In 1998 and 2002 both opposition and government parties lose vote share while for the elections of 2010 and 2014 we may observe reversed second-order election effects and government parties win whereas opposition parties lose vote share. These results are all the more surprising since consolidation and nationalization went alongside with bipolarisation of the Hungarian party system both at the elite and mass levels (Enyedi and Casal-Bértoa, 2011). Between 1990 and 2006, the Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) dominated the political right and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) dominated the political left. The Fidesz took over the leading role of the MSZP on the political left from 2010 onwards.

Several explanations can be put forward to account for the mixed second-order election effects. New parties may be more attractive for the voter who is discontent not only with the parties in government but with the overall party supply. From figure 3 we may observe that new parties win significant vote shares in regional elections to the detriment of opposition parties. Government parties lose vote shares in regional elections held between 1994 and 2006 but the loss is particularly large for the 2006 election. In the autumn of 2006, the popularity for the governing MSZP was exceptionally low because of a leaked 'we lied' speech by Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány which ignited mass protests all around Hungary and riots in Budapest.

Government parties won and opposition parties lost vote shares in the elections of 2010 and 2014. These 'reversed' second-order election effects can be explained by the break-up of the main opposition party (MSZP) and the subsequent fragmentation of the opposition camp by the establishment of new parties. The governing Fidesz-KDNP<sup>10</sup> alliance could dominate both national and regional elections which induced a further disintegration of the political left. In the elections of 2010 and 2014 the governing coalition won more than two third of the votes and thereby gained a qualified majority in national parliament.

Another remarkable result is that no representation parties lost significant vote share in the 2002 elections; these parties lost more than nine per cent vote share when compared to the previous national election whereas the overall average is a loss of 2.5 per cent. This large vote share loss can be ascribed to two parties -the radical right Party of Hungarian Justice and Life ("Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja", MIÉP) and the agrarian FKGP- which did not get elected to the parliament but still had local organizations that managed to run at the regional elections. New parties won relatively large votes in 1998 when they gained 7.5 percent of the vote compared to an overall average of 3.7 percent. In 1998 there were 19 new organizations, which did not participate in the

previously held national election but ran for mandates at the regional level and twelve of these parties competed only in that particular election.

FIGURE 3 about here

In sum, we find mixed evidence for second-order election effects in regional elections. Turnout is lower than for national elections but government parties do not systematically lose vote share and in some regional elections opposition parties also lost vote share. The timing of the elections might be a crucial explanatory factor for the mixed findings. Regional (and local) elections are held six months after a national election and this is a very short period of time for voters to revise their preferences. The close timing of elections also leads to a long campaign during which opposition parties have often dried up their resources by the time when national elections are held. Finally, the short period between elections does not allow for much time for the manifestation of the disadvantages of being in government (such as implementing unpopular policies) and to induce protest voting in regional elections.

## **5. Regional election effects**

Dissimilarity between national and regional elections can also be the result of regional parties which tend to be more electorally successful in regional than in national elections. At first sight, regional parties are not to be expected in Hungary. The vote of minorities<sup>11</sup> in Hungary is not mobilized by ethnic or regional parties and minorities vote for the same statewide parties as other Hungarians do.

The Hungarian county system is one of the oldest mezzo-level institutions in Europe and the current counties have similar borders as the historical counties or are mergers of historical counties (see table 2). Yet Hungarian citizens have no strong regional identity (Bóhm, 2002). Finally, institutional barriers prevent the emergence of a strong regional party. As mentioned above, national elections apply a mixed electoral system with a national compensatory list. Before the reform of 2011, parties needed to be listed on the regional lists in seven counties before they could participate in the compensatory list. After the 2011 reform, parties need to have candidates for the single member districts in at least nine counties and in Bucharest.

TABLE 2 about here

However, table 1 shows that several hundred regional lists have been presented in county elections and since 2002 about ten of these lists gain representation in the county assembly. These regional lists are not regional political parties but are non-governmental organizations. The election law allows these organizations to participate in local and county elections and grants them a civil legal status. Hence, they are not political parties in the respect that they do not have the ambition to compete in national elections but they often contest both county and local elections. In the larger communities, these organizations often represent the interests of their

municipality at the regional level. In smaller communities the organizations often form alliances based on common interests (for example alliances of pensioner clubs or agricultural organizations) or for the purpose to combine electoral forces (in almost every county there is an 'alliance of mayors' or an 'alliance of villages').

Regional parties –i.e. parties that win vote in one region only- are not absent in county elections since most civil society organizations participate only in elections in their region. In this sense, the electoral success of these civil organizations can be considered as an indicator for a regionalization of the vote. Table 3 lists the number of 'regional parties' which managed to win more than five percent of the national or regional vote in the county. There are several regional parties but their average vote share in regional elections across counties is below five percent and is declining over time. The elections of 1998 are an exemption. One possible explanation is the electoral reform of 1994 which introduced the direct elections of county representatives instead of the delegation by local assemblies. This reform was implemented just before the subnational elections were held and civil society organizations had only two months to adapt to the new electoral system. By 1998, the organizations have had a sufficient amount of time to prepare.

TABLE 3 about here

There is one 'regional party' which has been able to gain and maintain strong regional support: the Association for Somogy County. This civil organization won 19 to 26 percent of the vote between 1994 and 2010 and also ran for parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2010 (and won one seat in national parliament in 2006). Additionally, its leader (István Gyenesei) was a member of the socialist cabinet between 2008 and 2009. The Association for Somogy County can also be regarded as a regionalist party, i.e. the party represents the specific interests of Somogy county in parliament. During his term in national parliament (2006-2010), István Gyenesei addressed (mostly agricultural) problems of Somogy County in a number of interpellations.

The increasing participation of civil society organizations in county elections have induced national parties to establish alliances with these organizations. This cooperation is beneficial for both partners: local organizations increase their chances of winning a seat in the county assembly and national parties gain a larger reach into the local society. The collaboration between national parties and locally based civil organization is fragile. The connections between national parties and civil organizations lasted until the regional elections of 2010, when national parties ran alone in all regions. This happened because the earlier discredited left-wing parties were undesirable coalition partners for the local organizations while the Fidesz could easily win the election without the help of the organizations. Once in national government and enabled by its two-thirds majority in national parliament, Fidesz quickly reformed the electoral system before the local and county elections of October YEAR. The aim of the reform was to reduce costs of subnational government by decreasing the number of representatives but the effect of the reform has been to introduce

majoritarian elements. Most importantly, districts were merged and as a result an average organization needs 6.7 times more recommendations in order to be allowed to present a list in elections. National parties which have broad horizontal organizational networks could easily adapt to the new system. The locally rooted civil organizations face great difficulties finding support outside their community. Before the reform of 2010, there were on average 22.1 party lists per county and this number decreased to 3.8 in 2010 and 5.6 in 2014. The electoral reform of 2010 can be interpreted as the end-point of a process whereby national parties have fully captured the regional vote and almost completely forced out civil organizations from the regional electoral arena (see Dobos, 2011).

## **6. Discussion**

County elections in Hungary are highly nationalized and over time one can observe an increasing dominance of national parties at both the local and regional levels (Bóhm, 2006:14-15; Wiener, 2010: 118). The nationalization of regional elections does not manifest itself in second-order election effects. Turnout in county elections is (much) lower than for national elections but government parties do not systematically lose and opposition parties do not constantly win vote share. Rather the regional vote seems to reflect government popularity at the time of county elections. Nationalization of county elections does not mean that regionalization of the regional vote is not present in Hungary. On the contrary, many new parties have been established at the county level and these have won significant vote shares. However, these parties are actually civil society organisations which are allowed to participate in regional but not in national elections. In addition, nationalization of the vote is enforced and maintained by constant institutional and electoral system reforms. County government is 'hollowed out' from below (micro-regions, local government associations, and deconcentrated central government offices), from sideways (cities with county rank and deconcentrated central government offices), and from above (macro-regions). Civil society organizations with strong roots in local communities have been able to successfully compete in county elections but various electoral reforms introduced majoritarian elements which have curbed the electoral strength of these organizations. In addition, the reforms have favoured the two large statewide parties which win more than 70 percent of the county vote. The latest reform introduced a five year mandate for local and county assembly members and was implemented with the 2014 elections. This reform entails that the timing of subnational elections in the national election cycle will change drastically. County elections have been held about six months after national elections but will now be held more than a year later. County elections are highly nationalized but we found only mixed evidence for second-order election effects. We think this is mainly due to the short time period between national and subnational elections which does

not allow voters to revise their preferences, which does not allow parties to fill up their campaign budgets, and which does not allow for the manifestation of the disadvantages of being in government. There will be now much more time in between national and subnational elections and we expect that second-order election effects will increase. However, we have to await the elections of 2019 before we can assess the effects of the reforms implemented in 2014.

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Figure 1: Congruence between the national and regional vote over time in Hungary

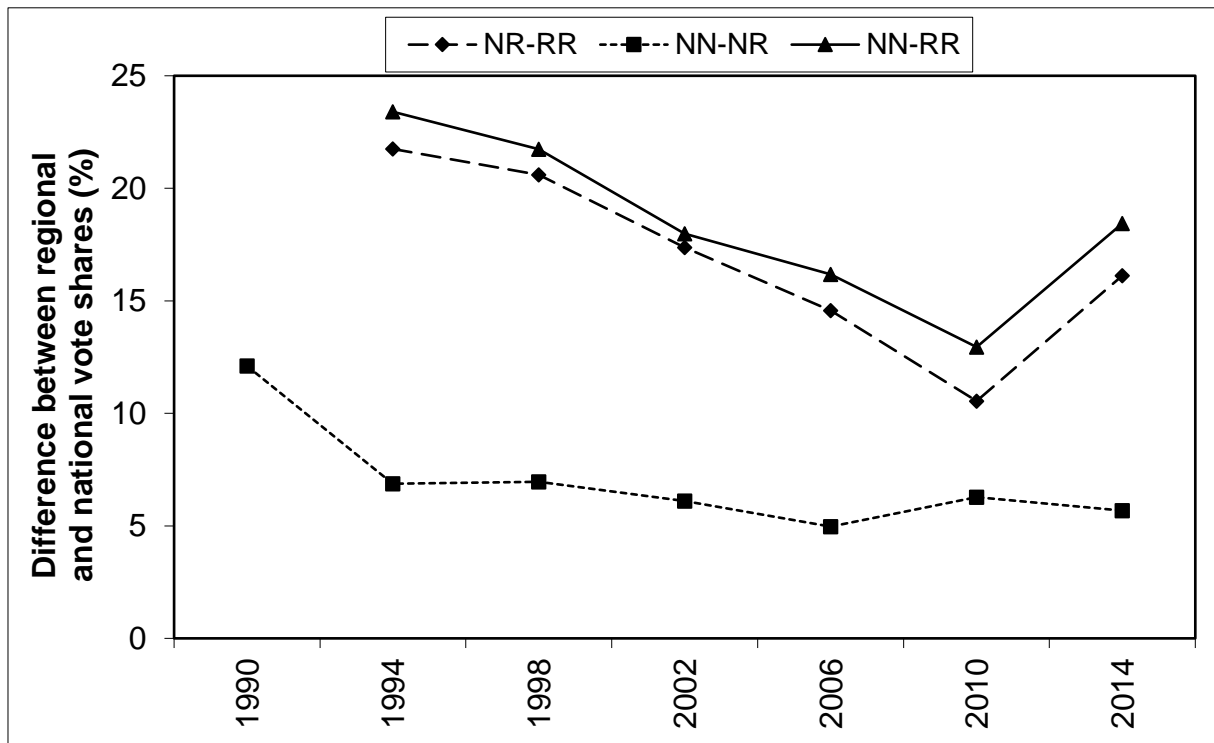


Table 1: Concentration of the party system at the regional level

Year	number of regional lists	number of organisations gaining representation	% of votes of biggest party	% of votes of the two biggest parties
1994	370	33	31.5%	48.6%
1998	489	27	29.3%	54.2%
2002	479	11	40.4%	71.3%
2006	347	9	49.5%	80.7%
2010	72	10	58.5%	79.9%
2014	107	9	52.6%	73.9%

Figure 2: Turnout in regional and national elections over time

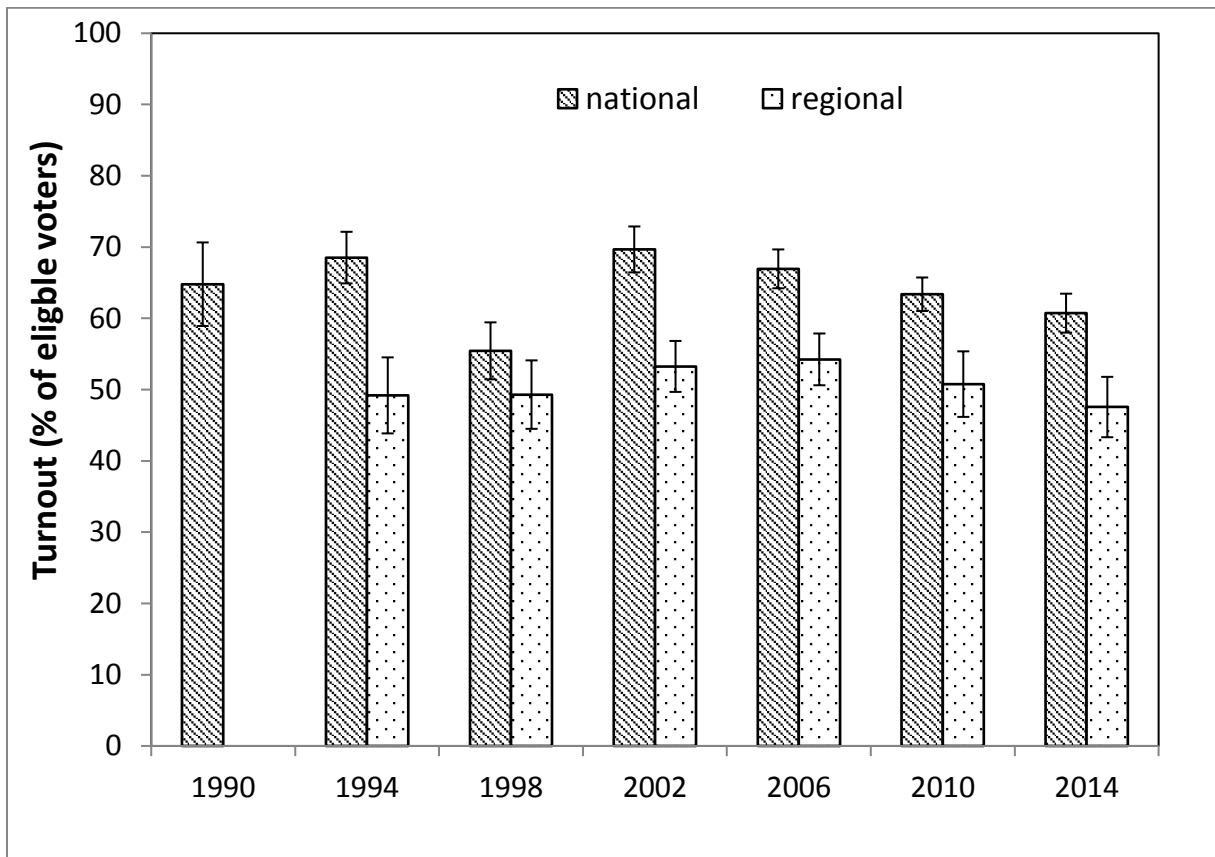


Figure 3: Vote share changes by party types

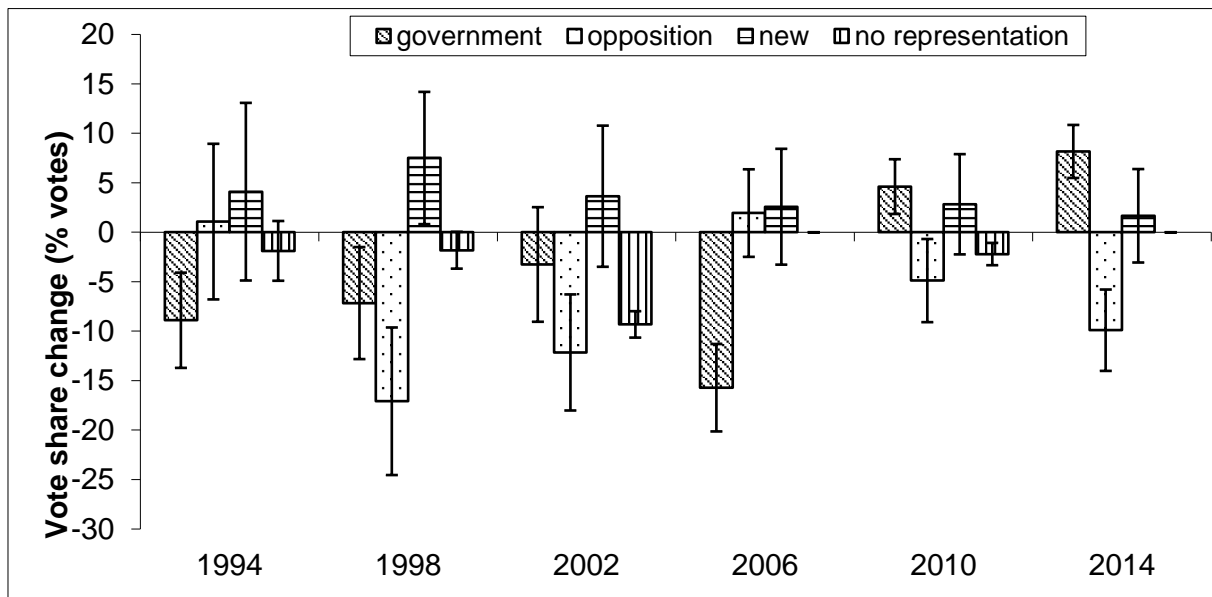


Table 2. *The counties of Hungary*

Historical regions: 63 counties (vármegye/megye)	Institutional regions: 19 counties (megye) established in 1950
Abaúj-Torna, Alsó-Fehér, Arad, Árva, Bács-Bodrog, Baranya, Bars, Békés, Bereg, Beszterce-Naszód, Bihar, Borsod, Brassó, Csanád, Csík, Csongrád, Esztergom, Fejér, Fogaras, Győr, Gömör és Kis-Hont, Hajdú, Háromszék, Heves, Hont, Hunyad, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Kis-Küküllő, Kolozs, Komárom, Krassó-Szörény, Liptó, Máramaros, Maros-Torda, Moson, Nagy-Küküllő, Nógrád, Nyitra, Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun, Pozsony, Sáros, Somogy, Sopron, Szabolcs, Szatmár, Szeben, Szepes, Szilágy, Szolnok-Doboka, Temes, Tolna, Torda-Aranyos, Torontál, Trencsén, Turóc, Udvarhely, Ugocsa, Ung, Vas, Veszprém, Zala, Zemplén, Zólyom	Bács-Kiskun, Baranya, Békés, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Csongrád, Fejér, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Komárom-Esztergom, Nógrád, Pest, Somogy, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Tolna, Vas, Veszprém, Zala  [Most counties of the Kingdom of Hungary were transferred to its neighboring countries as a result of the peace treaty of the World War I]

Table 3: *Number of regional parties and regional party strength*

Year	Number of party lists*	Average regional party vote share in regional elections
1994	8	4.10
1998	19	7.51
2002	6	3.65
2006	5	2.58
2010	6	2.83
2014	4	1.67

\* Number of regional parties which obtained at least 5 percent of the votes in the respective region.

<sup>1</sup> The term region was introduced in 1999 (Act XCII of 1999) when the country was divided into seven NUTS 2 regions. In 2006 a strategy of regionalization was developed which foresaw replacing the counties by regions with directly elected assemblies. This reform did not gain sufficient political support and was never implemented. The regions merely remained planning and statistical units.

<sup>2</sup> In 2015 there are 23 cities of county rank, out of which 18 are also the administrative centres of their counties.

<sup>3</sup> Before the reform, this duty was assigned to the notaries of local governments, who had two roles: they were the heads of the local administration (and directors of the mayor's office) and the agents of the central state. The reform's aim was to separate these roles, and let the notaries deal with local issues, while the government tasks were transferred to the district offices.

<sup>4</sup> The timing of subnational elections will change as of 2018. Local and regional representatives and mayors elected in 2014 have a mandate of five years.

<sup>5</sup> Before 2012 there were MPs in the Hungarian Parliament who were mayors of cities and members of regional assemblies at the same time.

<sup>6</sup> As the average number of seats was decreased from 43 to 21, the number of mandates became more proportional regarding the population of the counties.

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<sup>7</sup> In the Hungarian mixed-member electoral system MPs can obtain their mandate from the vote cast in single member districts, for a regional party list and for a national party list. Voters have two votes, one for the single member district and one for a regional party list. The national party list fulfils a compensatory role by distributing mandates based on surplus votes casted in single member districts and for party lists. For a detailed discussion see Benoit (2005). In 2011, a major electoral reform took place (see section 2).

<sup>8</sup> Split-ticket voting in the Hungarian context refers to a comparison between the vote in single member districts to the votes cast for regional list (see for example, Moser-Scheiner, 2009 and Benoit, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 suggests that in 2014 national elections were still nationalized (i.e. low electorate congruence (NN-NR) dissimilarity scores) but regional elections have become considerably regionalized (indicated by higher dissimilarity scores for party system (NN-RR) and election (NR-RR) congruences). This can be explained by parties from the left which participated in electoral alliances in national elections but contested on their own in regional elections. It is not possible to disaggregate the combined vote share for an electoral alliance to the individual partners of the alliance and the total vote share is attributed to the senior party which is the party that won the largest vote share in a previous election. Parties forming the alliance participate on their own in regional elections and the total vote share received by the electoral alliance in national elections is compared to the (most likely smaller) regional vote share of the senior party. Hence, the decrease in party system and election congruence for 2014 may be a result of party alliance strategies rather than of dual voting.

<sup>10</sup> KDNP: Christian Democratic People's Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt).

<sup>11</sup> Compared with the neighbouring countries, Hungary has no significant minorities: "the evolution of domestic minorities was less affected by the border changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even the more numerous and officially recognized groups (...) could not form larger blocs (...) and were much more exposed to assimilation and the homogenizing efforts of the emerging modern Hungarian state." (Dobos 2014: 278). There are thirteen minorities representing 6.5 percent of the population, from which the Roma society is the largest with 3.2 percent of the population (KSH, 2011: 21). The territorial differences are negligible, with the only exception of Romas, who mainly live in the north-eastern regions of Hungary.