

ELECTIONS IN A NON-TERRITORIAL AUTONOMOUS SETTING: THE MINORITY SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN HUNGARY¹

1. Introduction: The Theoretical Challenges of Minority Elections

Neither the claim for autonomy by various regional and ethnic groups or the regional and minority autonomies, and in particular the European autonomy arrangements are a new phenomenon, nor have they been understudied. There exists an extensive literature regarding autonomies, including seminal works (see Benedikter, 2009; Ghai, 2000; Kántor, 2014; Salat et al., 2014; Suksi, 1998; Weller, Wolff, 2005; Woodman, Ghai, 2013) but the primary focus of the studies has been on the issues of territorial autonomies. Although, more recently, there has been an emerging literature on non-territorial autonomies (NTA, see Cordell, Smith, 2008; Malloy, Osipov, Vizi, 2015; Malloy, Palermo, 2015; Nimni, 2005; Nimni, Osipov, Smith, 2013; Smith, Hiden, 2012), much less attention has been paid to this model of which – with its strong focus on individual participation – may be suitable for territorially dispersed minorities in particular. As an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of the former dynastic and multi-ethnic empires and communist multi-national federations, a considerable number of such minority communities live in Central and Eastern Europe despite the homogenization policies of the last century.

Since this kind of autonomy aims to cover those who belong to a certain group irrespective of its place of residence and size, there needs to be at least one institution that unites and organizes members of the group (Szarka, 2004, 249) – an institution established in public or private law. In creating their autonomy frameworks several countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Kosovo, Latvia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine), most prominently Russia, refer to the notion of NTA in their legislation and policies, and in public opinion this implies that special associations must be endowed with such public functions as maintaining educational and cultural institutions. In practice, this idea has been barely implemented in the Russian case (Osipov, 2010). Similarly, in Latvia, pursuant to the 1991 law on cultural autonomy, the so-called national societies have the right to develop their own educational institutions.² Besides, since membership in an association is voluntary, such an approach immediately poses the question of legitimacy in at least two ways: for a voluntary organization it is more difficult to reach the less active and committed members of the group; further, the great number of associations might easily undermine the potential for the autonomous organizations to represent the minority in interactions with the state authorities (Brunner, Küpper, 2002, 27).

¹ The research was supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary (NKFIH), project Nr. PD116168. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the international conference 'Cultural Heritage. Research, Valorisation, Promotion' at the Institute of Cultural Heritage within the Academy of Sciences of Moldova (31 May – 2 June, 2016, Chisinau, Moldova).

² Act of 19 March 1991 on the unrestricted development and right to cultural autonomy of Latvia's nationalities and ethnic groups. <http://www.humanrights.lv/doc/latlik/ethnic.htm> (accessed 18 June 2016).

Other countries, namely Estonia, Hungary, and some of the former Yugoslav republics, namely Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia, represent a different model, whereby registered minority voters are granted the right to establish new types of institutions by direct or indirect elections. Elections are not only a major component of democratic political systems but they, furthermore, may play a key role in certain NTA arrangements, and they were central to the process of establishing non-territorial cultural autonomy for the Austro-Marxist theorists of NTA – both Otto Bauer (Bauer, 2000, 281) and Karl Renner as well (Renner, 2005, 26).

The few findings that have been published regarding the non-territorial model in Central and Eastern Europe underscore the controversy between the continued dominance of the nation-state model, the large extension of state control on minority issues and interethnic relations, and all those positive expectations that led to the spread of various NTA regimes in the region. Thus, they suggest that these institutional examples were more likely created top-down in favour of imposing symbolic and apolitical, such as educational and cultural issues on minority groups, thereby preventing and neutralizing any potential territorial claims. This may be especially true for Roma, one of the largest ethnic groups in the region, especially if less effort is put in improving their socio-economic inclusion. Yet surprisingly little research has been devoted to assessing the extent to which these regimes meet minority demands, the findings by pointing out how the implementation and practice as well as the competences of these NTA organizations vary by state, emphasize also the need to support bottom-up activities and to strengthen democratic accountability and effective representation – such changes can be described as a shift to governance, too (see Osipov, 2010, 2013; Smith, 2010, 2013). From the above they argue that there needs to be a closer look on practices, and that more research has to be done to explore how both minority members and minority representatives perceive and use their own, above described, autonomy organizations in everyday reality, as well as how they view themselves, their identities and their role within the organizations, particularly in the context of the unfinished nation- and state-building processes. This argumentation gives prominence to minority elections as a potential tool to identify and critically assess the intra-group dynamics.

While a growing body of mostly Hungarian literature, predominantly from legal and sociological point of view, has examined the functioning of the NTA regime in Hungary, the so-called minority self-governments (MSGs), their capacities (see Bindorffer 2011; Csefkó, Pálné 1999; Kállai 2005; Váradi 2002), as well as the relevant legislation, the electoral rules and abuses (see for instance Gyóri Szabó 2006; Halász, Majtényi 2003; Magicz 2010), or elite dynamics (Tóth, Vékás 2011) other aspects of elections remain understudied (for the few exceptions, see Rátkai 2000, 2003).

This is highly remarkable, especially when considering that all electoral systems, including the above NTA cases and their elections, in this respect, have to be both understood as political institutions, products of the political process, a complex set of structuring factors that provides opportunities and creates institutional barriers to alternatives (see Körösényi, 2009, 41). Electoral systems and rules are per se not democratic and are in fact far from neutral; all of them have a political or social bias, favouring certain groups over others at a given time. The issue is particularly important, since many scholars have pointed out that choosing an

electoral system is not only about the electoral process, but also about competing normative values. As such, the decision is one of the most important in a democracy. It is not only about distinguishing or combining, and adopting majoritarian and proportional electoral formulas, but there seems to be an agreement that in every democratic political setting, the function of elections goes beyond simply filling posts with candidates, although the relevant literature usually emphasize only a few of them (see, for instance, Birch 2001; Dalton, Farrell, McAllister 2011; Frankenberger, Graf 2011; Harrop, Miller 1987; Hermet 1978; Horowitz 2003; Katz 1997; Wojtasik 2013). Accordingly, elections, both in theory and practice, may fulfil various different functions, and these are highly context dependent, depending foremost on the regime type³, the nature of the elected body (collegial or singular character, level of elections, competences, resources etc.), and the adopted electoral formula, and the relative importance and impact of the potential functions may change over time and vary from one political setting to another, too (Wojtasik, 2013, 26).

While there has been a consensus emerged throughout the 20th century regarding the minimal conditions under which general elections must take place in democracies, and both the institutional design and the policy consequences of electoral systems have been the dominant focus of comparative research, little is known about the role played by NTA elections in intra-community relations of minorities. Moreover, the key guiding questions are whether and how the functions and logic of regular parliamentary and municipal elections can be conceptualized in these special minority contexts, which of the possible functions of elections make sense, take particular relevance at this level, in these minority elections, and whether and how the major findings of the electoral literature can be applied to these special configurations. To address the issues above, after a brief overview of the institutional aspects of the minority autonomy, the paper seeks to explore both theoretically and in practice, the general patterns of elections of the minority self-governments in Hungary, one of most prominent cases of the five countries concerned, and aims to contribute to the better understanding of the role of elections in minority contexts. It uses the major goals and functions of elections as analytical tools to assess whether and how the elections of the recognized minorities in Hungary perform these major functions and meet the requirements of democratic elections. In sum, it examines whether and how the main functions of elections – freedom of voters, competition, choice from alternatives, legitimacy and accountability, mobilization for participation – as well as the main features of the electoral system, the adopted electoral formula, can be conceptualized and understood in special minority elections.

2. A Brief Overview of the Hungarian Model of NTA

In addition to the aforementioned Baltic countries, Hungary with its 1993 law on the rights of national and ethnic minorities⁴ and the system of minority self-governments was one of the first and classic examples of NTA arrangements in the region following the fall of the communist regimes. A growing number of scholars, however, by focusing predominantly on

³ In this regard, Guy Hermet has made a distinction among competitive, semi-competitive and non-competitive elections (Hermet, 1978).

⁴ The 2005 consolidated text of the 1993 Minority Rights Act (as of November 25, 2005) is available online at: <http://www.kisebbségiombudsman.hu/data/files/128317683.pdf> (accessed 18 June, 2016).

implementation, have accepted the argument that granting extended minority rights and non-territorial autonomy for thirteen officially recognized minority groups have been especially motivated by the concern to set an example abroad and to put pressure on the neighbouring countries, having regard to the situation of the more numerous Hungarian minorities abroad. They tend to ignore some other explanatory factors behind the Hungarian model but they are right in pointing out that minorities generally have not been politically mobilized in large numbers along ethnic lines, the ethnic, almost exclusively Roma parties were, without exception, unsuccessful at the parliamentary elections. According to the latest census data, between 2001 and 2011, the percentage of persons belonging to the 13 officially recognized minorities grew from 5 percent to 6.5 percent of the population (ca. 650 thousands of people, see Table 1).

Table 1: the censuses of 2001 and 2011 regarding national and ethnic minorities in Hungary⁵

Minority	Nationality (ethnicity)		Native language		Language used among friends, in family		Affinity with cultural values, traditions	Persons	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011		2001	2011
Bulgarian	1,358	3,556	1,299	2,899	1,118	2,756	1,693	2,316	6,272
Roma	189,984	308,957	48,438	54,339	53,323	61,143	129,259	205,720	315,583
Greek	2,509	3,916	1,921	1,872	1,974	2,346	6,140	6,619	4,642
Croat	15,597	23,561	14,326	13,716	14,788	16,053	19,715	25,730	26,774
Polish	2,962	5,730	2,580	3,049	2,659	3,815	3,983	5,144	7,001
German	62,105	131,951	33,774	38,248	53,040	95,661	88,416	120,344	185,696
Armenian	620	3,293	294	444	300	496	836	1,165	3,571
Romanian	7,995	26,345	8,482	13,886	8,215	17,983	9,162	14,781	35,641
Ruthene	1,098	3,323	1,113	999	1,068	1,131	1,292	2,079	3,882
Serb	3,816	7,210	3,388	3,078	4,186	5,713	5,279	7,350	10,038
Slovak	17,693	29,647	11,817	9,888	18,057	16,266	26,631	39,266	35,208
Slovene	3,025	2,385	3,180	1,723	3,119	1,745	3,442	4,832	2,820
Ukrainian	5,070	5,633	4,885	3,384	4,519	3,245	4,779	7,393	7,396

However, the fact alone that the estimated number is sometimes twice as high reveals the relatively high level of uncertainty surrounding minority identities in Hungary. Census results at first glance show a growing level of minority consciousness but others remain sceptical, due to the comparability of the two subsequent censuses, and particularly since the vast majority of them declared themselves to be Hungarian, too. So with the exception of Roma and Germans it is still questionable whether any kind of dissimilation in most of the cases could be observed. Minorities, furthermore, are mostly at an advanced stage of linguistic assimilation, clear-cut ethnic boundaries can be hardly defined. Several minorities have dominantly Hungarian-speaking subgroups (Roma⁶, Armenians), and the vague nature of

⁵ Source: Csordás (2014, 16-18).

⁶ The Roma constitute the largest minority in Hungary, however, the term is rather a politically constructed umbrella category covering at least three major subgroups: the overwhelming majority, over 80% of them are the

ethnic identities has often given rise to debates over the complexity of belongings and the so-called “ethnobusiness”. In addition, minority communities live dispersed throughout the country: according to census data out of the almost 3200 municipalities ca. 2500 had minority inhabitants, and ca. only in 50 settlements they formed local majorities, and the even more considerable extent of growth of diasporas almost preclude any possibility of territorial autonomy arrangements. Over the past decades, since the first 1994 minority elections the quite complex structure of minority self-governments has gone under significant changes as a result of the 2005 overall amendment of the 1993 law and the new 2011 minority law⁷ (see Table 2).

Table 2: Major elements of the Hungarian system of NTA

	MSG elections in 1994, 1995, 1998, and 2002	MSG elections in 2006 and 2010	MSG elections from 2014
Personal scope of the law	Freedom to choose identity	Freedom to choose identity, registration	Freedom to express identity, registration
	Minority definition and expandable lists of 13 recognized minorities and their native languages	Minority definition and expandable lists of 13 recognized minorities and their native languages	Minority definition and expandable lists of 13 recognized minorities and their native languages
	Elections: every Hungarian voter, and de facto non-citizens	Elections: minority Hungarian citizens, at least 30 registered voters. Additional requirements for candidates	Elections: registered minority Hungarian citizens and non-citizens (until 2019), at least 25 persons (30 from 2024) according to census data. Additional requirements for candidates
Local level	Three forms of MSGs Direct, majority system, Block Vote	One form Direct, majority system, Block Vote	Two forms Direct, majority system, Block Vote
Territorial level	Only in Budapest Indirect, majority system, Block Vote	Every county and Budapest Indirect, proportional, List PR, d'Hondt method	Every county and Budapest Direct, proportional, List PR, d'Hondt method
National level	Indirect, majority system, Block Vote	Indirect, proportional, List PR, d'Hondt method	Direct, proportional, List PR, d'Hondt method

Hungarian-speaking Romungro community, while less 20% of them speak either Romani or Beash. The latter, the smallest group refers to those who speak their own ancient Romanian dialect (see Marushiakova et al., 2001) and mostly in the South Western part of the country (about the various ethno-linguistic communities and their numerical changes, see Kemény, 2000).

⁷ The 2011 minority law is available online in English at:

[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2012\)014-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2012)014-e) (accessed June 18, 2016).

Until 2006 the law distinguished three types of MSGs at local level, including the districts of the capital city. The most prevalent was the one that was directly elected through a majoritarian system in which voters had as many votes as there were candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals won the seats. Similar electoral systems were chosen for both the territorial and national levels. However, creating legitimate, autonomous bodies within a NTA model has been closely associated with the challenging issue of defining community boundaries in Hungary. Whereas minorities originally refused any kind of registration of persons with minority background, and given the uncertainties around identities and the differences between census results and estimates, at the elections, however, there were understandably difficulties encountered in implementing and enforcing those provisions that declared the minorities' right to establish MSGs and that minority rights could be applied only to Hungarian citizens. As a consequence, until the 2005 overall amendment every adult Hungarian citizen had the right to vote and be elected at MSGs and non-citizens established in Hungary thereby also could vote but they could not be elected. Minority elections took place on the same days as local elections.

The number of MSGs increased from cycle to cycle (from 814 in 1994-1995 to 2,315 in 2010) which could be due to growing consciousness on one hand, but to another less favourable phenomenon on the other hand. As one result, the number of votes casted was mostly beyond even the estimated number of minorities, and that "sympathy-votes" from the majority introduced serious distortions in minority public life. In relation to candidates it was even more serious and posed a threat for the entire model that such persons tended to be elected, too, who presumably or obviously did not belong to that specific community. Since mostly local minority representatives elected indirectly the MSGs at capital and national levels those could also be affected by abuses.

In order to reduce the possibility of abuses, pursuant to the 2005 law, only those Hungarian citizens had the right to vote who belonged to recognized minorities and declared their affiliation by previously registering in minority electoral rolls that were held by the head of local electoral offices who, however, had no competence to assess the presence of minority belonging. Whereas it simplified the system by reducing the number of local types the election of the only remaining form could be held if the number of registered voters of a given minority at a municipality reached 30 by the established deadline. The law imposed further requirements on minority candidates: only certain minority associations had the right to run candidates who were furthermore obliged to state that they knew the native language, minority culture and traditions, and were not earlier member of MSG of any other minority. Despite the restrictions both the results of the latest elections and repeatedly some local scandals raised further doubts that the modification achieved its goal. Taking into account the needs of larger minorities the 2005 law created the county-territorial level of MSGs that existed only in Budapest before. Regarding their electoral system as well as of national ones there was a shift from majoritarian to proportional type in which each minority presents a list of candidates and they receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the vote. This three-level structure has been remained since the new 2011 law on the rights of minorities has come

into force but the elections of territorial and national MSGs have become also direct since the latest 2014 minority elections.

3. The Analysis of the Functions of Elections

The following section aims to review the major key functions of elections as stressed by the relevant literature, and in each aspect it addresses the question whether and how these requirements can be conceptualized in these special minority contexts and further, it explains and illustrates the theoretical problems with some country experiences. Taking the types and different levels of elections into account, the crucial questions are that how and to what extent the minority elections increased legitimacy and accountability, contributed to the channelling of debates, to the creation of effective representative structures, and to the selection of representatives and whether they encouraged voter participation, also need to be addressed. The analytical point of departure is the well-known and complex condition of “free and fair elections” in democratic political settings, referring basically on one hand to the freedom of voters that every eligible adult citizen shall have the right to vote and be elected on a non-discriminatory basis, and on the other hand to the possibility of choice, the competition between parties and candidates (Hermet, 1978).

As to the first, voter dimension, however, this kind of institutional setting almost inevitably raises questions and dilemmas, both in theory and in practice, about community boundaries (Bauböck, 2001), more precisely who belongs to the given minority and who does not, and, secondly, how this should be appraised, whether and how group members have to be defined and registered.⁸ In this regard, the data presented in Table 3 shows that in Hungary, at the previous elections, the number of registered minority voters was constantly much below the number of those who declared themselves as persons belonging to the officially recognized minority communities at the latest censuses and even below their estimated numbers. In addition, these data seem to demonstrate that by further modifying and restricting the electoral rules especially on the basis of the struggle against ethno-business, the recent Hungarian legislation has gone to the other extreme and has a demobilizing effect, even discouraging voters from participating at minority elections.

Table 3: Number of persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities in Hungary at the censuses of 2001 and 2011, and the number of registered minority voters at the 2006, 2010 and 2014 MSG elections and at the 2014 parliamentary elections⁹

Minority	Minority persons according to at least one response out of the four census questions	MSG elections	Parliamentary elections
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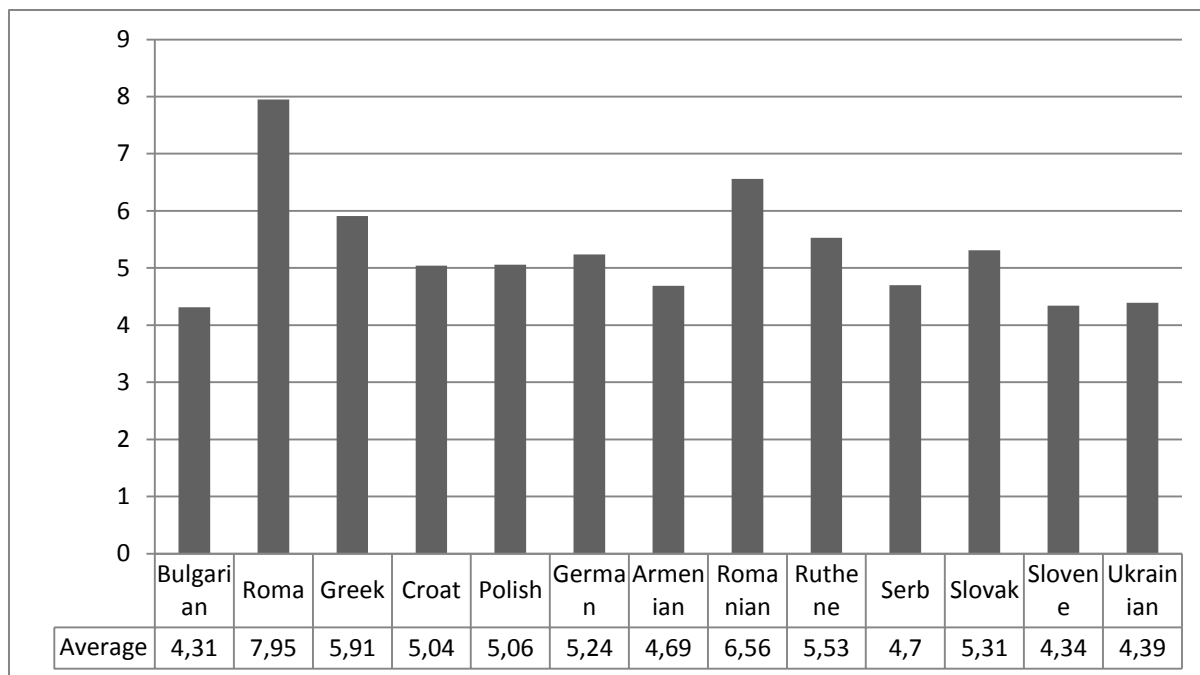
⁸ In all other countries concerned, a common feature is the compilation of electoral registers of minority voters. These are administered either by the minority organizations themselves (Estonia, Slovenia) or by state authorities (Croatia, Serbia). To a varying extent, they all take into account the census data concerning the local sizes of minority populations.

⁹ Source: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Central Statistical Office). Electoral statistics: www.valasztas.hu (accessed June 15, 2016).

	2001	2011	2006	2010	2014	2014
Bulgarian	2,316	6,272	2,110	2,088	654	104
Roma	205,720	315,583	106,333	133,492	57,824	14,271
Greek	6,619	4,642	2,451	2,267	675	140
Croat	25,730	26,774	11,090	11,571	7,231	1,623
Polish	5,144	7,001	3,061	3,052	1,148	133
German	120,344	185,696	45,983	46,629	30,526	15,209
Armenian	1,165	3,571	2,361	2,357	615	184
Romanian	14,781	35,641	4,404	5,277	2,350	647
Ruthene	2,079	3,882	2,729	4,228	1,213	611
Ukrainian	7,393	7,396	2,143	2,432	840	349
Serb	7,350	10,038	15,049	12,282	8,248	1,317
Slovak	39,266	35,208	991	1,025	519	199
Slovene	4,832	2,820	1,084	1,338	671	502

The second crucial aspect means that by delegating political representation and power from voters to representatives in order to make more efficient decisions, the voters shall have the option not only to elect but to select their representatives with appropriate skills and with whom they share some common views and values. This requirement is based on the assumption that voters have the possibility to choose from alternatives, different objectives, and various rival candidates and parties. Minority elections, moreover, enable to map the power relations in a given community (Kántor, Majtényi, 2004, 18). In this regard, the crucial question is whether real competition can be expected at all from the main subjects of the NTA regimes, the relatively small and dispersed minority groups being often at an advanced stage of linguistic and cultural assimilation? When examining the extent of electoral competition, Graph 1 below shows that for instance in 2010, when the number of representatives to be elected to a local MSG was four, real choice among different, contending organizations and candidates could only be observed in the fairly divided communities, like Roma or Romanians.

Graph 1: the average number of candidates for local MSG elections in Hungary, 2010



As to a further and crucial function, it is widely assumed that elected systems of NTA increase legitimacy, and provides democratic legitimacy to those elected to power. Although it is evident that the formal electoral procedure itself lends some legitimacy to the elected bodies (and the need for a legitimate leadership was an important concern in choosing this institutional form), ensures the peaceful shift of power, the term ‘legitimacy’ nevertheless gains an additional meaning in its application to community legitimacy in the minority context. This also relates to how and whether minority constituents perceive their representatives as legitimate. Taking into also account that this part of the continent offers various cases in which identities and group boundaries are contested and even the small and scattered groups perform a high level of internal diversity especially in the context of parallel and often rival nation- and state-building projects of the region. The issue of group legitimacy was especially striking and significant in the Hungarian case, in which, as noted above, until 2006, every Hungarian voter had the right to vote and be elected to MSGs, and as a result, on one side, the number of votes casted was even above the estimated number of the respective number (see Table 4), and on the other side, such persons were also successfully elected who obviously or presumably did not belong to the specific group, a phenomenon commonly referred as “ethnobusiness” seriously tended to erode the community legitimacy of the minority bodies.

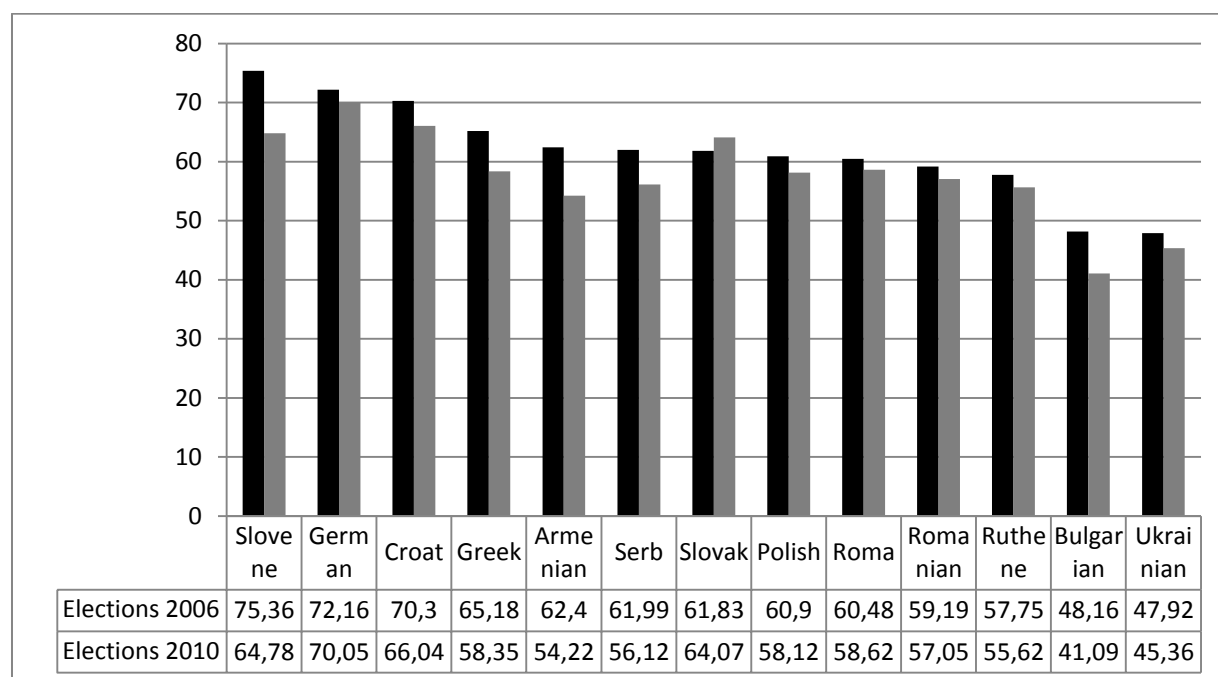
Table 4: the elections of MSGs in Hungary, 1994-2002

Minority	Number of MSGs elected in 1994-1995	Number of votes in 1994 and 1995	Number of MSGs elected in 1998	Number of votes in 1998	Number of MSGs elected in 2002
Bulgarian	4	2,882	15	21,998	31
Roma	477	888,279	768	1,092,044	999

Greek	6	10,635	19	61,605	31
Croat	57	98,005	75	102,956	108
Polish	7	3,220	33	82,743	51
German	162	560,620	272	966,324	341
Armenian	16	32,052	25	72,725	31
Romanian	11	19,844	33	36,430	44
Ruthene	1	1,323	10	7,117	32
Serb	19	37,319	35	34,642	44
Slovak	51	114,460	76	163,110	115
Slovene	6	5,660	10	9,558	13
Ukrainian	0	0	5	6,670	13
Total	817	1,774,299	1,376	2,657,922	1,853

The function of providing legitimacy is closely related to other aspects such as granting control over those elected and since many view representation as an ongoing process of three key elements, authorization, representation, and accountability, enforcing political accountability, therefore, is also a crucial, yet usually the weakest component of elections. Unlike appointed representatives or voluntary organizations, these minority bodies are more accountable to the people, thus, they are deemed to be more democratic. Both legitimacy and accountability are closely intertwined with the assumption that voters are encouraged and required to participate at the elections by casting their votes. The idea is that elections may create more accountable, effective, transparent, and potentially more visible organizations that have the potential to unite and mobilize communities as much as possible. In practice, however, data show decline from one election to another (Graph 2).

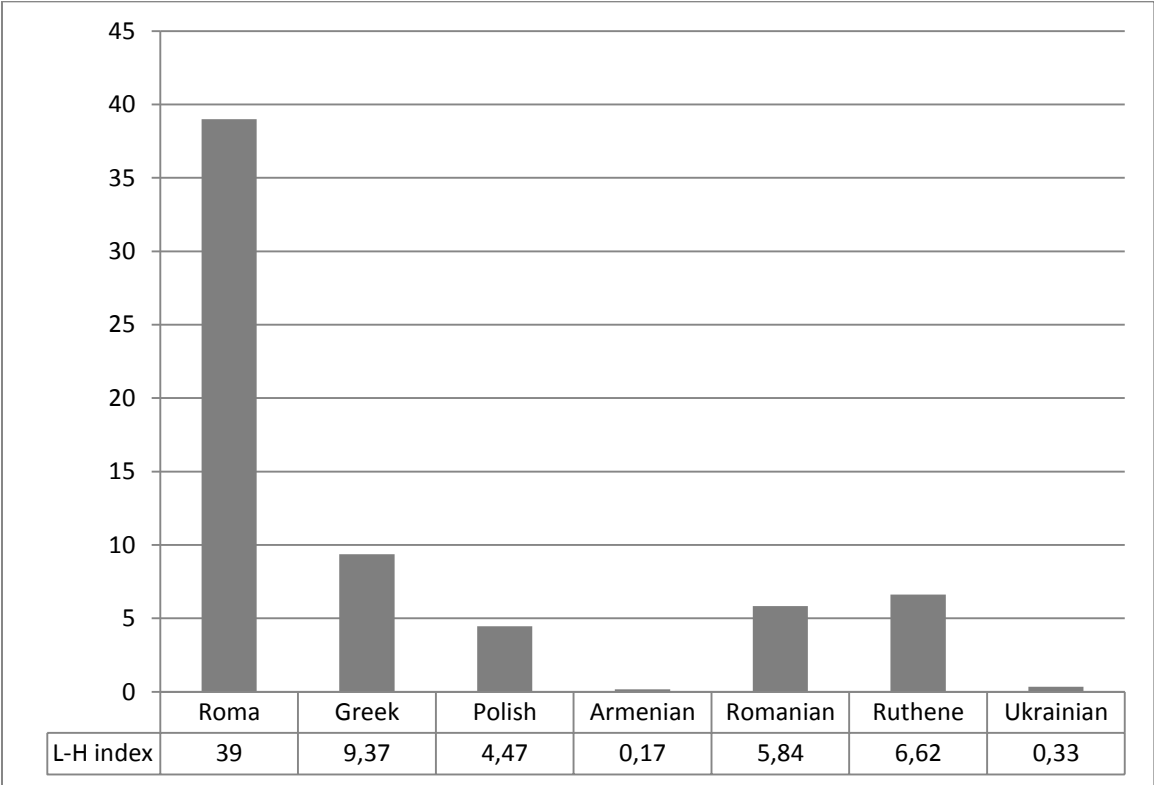
Graph 2: voter turnouts at the elections of MSGs in Hungary, 2006-2010 (%)



Voters' behaviour are certainly influenced by a number of factors, and firstly there is the need to assess how electoral systems affect them, to examine how institutions constrain it, with special emphasis on the procedures of electoral registration and the perceived efficacy, the meaningfulness of voting (voter turnout) as well as on the impact on both large- and small-party supporters. In all cases, it is also of crucial importance how community leaders, ethnic activists, and minority organizations, parties seek mobilize and integrate less committed members.

Last but not least the formulation and main features of the electoral systems, the extent to which elections reflect voters' preferences and patterns of potential internal cleavages, the configuration of minority parties, organizations also need to be carefully analysed. It not only involves that in case of scattered minority groups, the assessments whether and to what extent election results reflect accurately the territorial distribution, but first and foremost the adopted electoral formula, majoritarian, proportional or their combination is a serious matter. For instance, the majoritarian elections at national level between 1995 and 2006 resulted in highly disproportionate minority bodies in which, by the fairly divided communities, such as Roma, relatively large segments of the civil society and influential organizations could only gain few seats or none at all, as it is demonstrated by the Loosemore-Hanby index¹⁰ (Graph 3).

Graph 3: the elections of certain national MSGs in Hungary, 2003 (Loosemore-Hanby index)



¹⁰ The Loosemore-Hanby-index is a widely used measure of the level of disproportionality. The higher the index is, the less proportional the electoral result is.

Since the type of the electoral system is significantly related to the development of party systems, there is also a need to evaluate how it affects the parties' behaviour, how proportionality/ disproportionality, competitiveness affect efficacy, voter turnout, how they influence the number of competing and elected parties. To analyse whether and how the electoral systems force parties to express or aggregate diverse opinions, strengthen partisan attachments, offer greater choice, whether they lead to more fragmented party structures and electoral results, and whether they benefits more entrenched parties and foster durable coalitions.

4. Conclusions

The present paper aimed to address and highlight the question of whether and how some of the main functions elections can be conceptualized and understood in these special minority contexts in Hungary. Concerning the existing elected non-territorial or mixed autonomies of Central and South Eastern Europe, very little research has been carried out to explore other important and closely intertwined aspects and effects of minority elections, the logic and process of candidate selection, the relationship between minority constituents and representatives, the impact of the electoral system and voter registration on intra-community dimensions and dynamics, while taking into consideration the sensitive nature of the ethnic data, the varying levels of assimilation and alienation, and the internal democracy of the minority communities. Moreover, there is a significant lack of research data on how the electoral system and its incentives shape voting behaviour, on voters' perceptions of the electoral system, on whether it generates a more stable or divided leadership and moderates or encourages competition and internal rivalry. Future areas of research also need to address the issue of whether proportional electoral systems are more representative and can more effectively reduce intra-community rivalries or whether, on the contrary, they foster differences among subgroups (Norris, 2004). Overall, these factors have crucial influence on both the effective participation as well as on the future prospects of the minority communities.

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Summary

Elections are the primary institutional mechanisms that make rulers accountable, and therefore, they are major components and necessary conditions to ensure democracy. However, electoral systems and rules are far from neutral; all of them have a political or social bias. As political institutions, products of the political process, they are often defined as a complex set of structuring factors that provides opportunities and creates institutional barriers to alternatives. Furthermore, elections play a key role in certain non-territorial autonomy (NTA) arrangements, too. In Central and South Eastern Europe, a group of

countries, including Estonia, Hungary, and some of the former Yugoslav republics, namely Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia, have established a variant whereby registered minority voters are granted the right to establish their own representative institutions by direct or indirect elections. It is widely assumed that elected systems of NTA increase legitimacy, and may result in more accountable, effective, transparent, and potentially more visible organizations that have the potential to unite and mobilize communities. While there has been a consensus regarding the minimal conditions under which general elections must take place in democracies, and both the institutional design and the policy consequences of electoral systems have been the dominant focus of comparative research, little is known about the role played by NTA elections in intra-community relations of minorities. In addition to their importance in providing legitimacy, very little research has been carried out to explore other important aspects of minority elections, the logic and process of candidate selection, the relationship between minority constituents and representatives, the impact of the electoral system and voter registration on intra-community dimensions and dynamics, while taking into consideration the sensitive nature of the ethnic data, the varying levels of assimilation and alienation, and the internal democracy of the minority communities. To address the issues above, the paper seeks to explore both theoretically and in practice, the general patterns of elections of the minority self-governments in Hungary, one of most prominent cases of the five countries concerned, and aims to contribute to the better understanding of the role of elections in minority contexts. In addition, it examines whether and how the main functions of elections – freedom of voters, competition, choice from alternatives, legitimacy and accountability, mobilization for participation – as well as the main features of the electoral system, the adopted electoral formula, can be conceptualized and understood in special minority elections.

Key words: Hungary, non-territorial autonomy, minority self-governments, elections

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