

THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS ON THE NATIONALIZATION AND/OR DENATIONALIZATION OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PROCESS: THEORIZATION AND EMPIRICAL MANIFESTATIONS ON THE EXAMPLE OF POLAND AND HUNGARY

The article theorizes and offers empirical manifestations of the impact of elections and electoral systems on the nationalization and/or denationalization of regional political process, in particular on the example of Poland and Hungary. It is argued that regional elections in these countries are mostly nationalized, albeit on the basis of different instruments. At the same time, it is noted that parties in Poland and Hungary mostly use national schemes to promote their party brands and make adjustments into regional electoral campaigns, mainly under the influence of significant regional peculiarities. However, the most important thing is that the type and features of electoral systems used in a country at both regional and national level have a significant or decisive influence on the phenomenon of nationalization of regional political process. On the other hand, it is found that the process of regionalization of regional political process in Poland and Hungary is insignificant and is characterized only by personification and departyzation of regional political space and process. Accordingly, regional elections in the analyzed countries are regarded and positioned as second-tier elections, both in importance and consequences.

Keywords: nationalization of party system, nationalization and denationalization of political process, regionalization, local elections, electoral systems, regional level of government, Poland, Hungary.

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ВПЛИВ ВИБОРІВ І ВИБОРЧИХ СИСТЕМ НА НАЦІОНАЛІЗАЦІЮ ТА/АБО ДЕНАЦІОНАЛІЗАЦІЮ РЕГІОНАЛЬНОГО ПОЛІТИЧНОГО ПРОЦЕСУ: ТЕОРЕТИЗАЦІЯ ТА ЕМПІРИЧНІ ВИЯВИ НА ПРИКЛАДІ ПОЛЬЩІ Й УГОРЩИНИ

У статті здійснено теоретизацію та запропоновано емпіричні вияви проблематики впливу виборів і виборчих систем на націоналізацію та/або денационалізацію регіонального політичного процесу, зокрема на прикладі Польщі й Угорщини. Аргументовано, що

регіональні вибори у цих країнах здебільшого є націоналізованими, хоча й на підставі різних інструментів. Паралельно з цим, констатовано, що партії у Польщі й Угорщині здебільшого використовують загальнонаціональні схеми просування своїх партійних брендів та вносять корективи у регіональні виборчі компанії головню під впливом значних регіональних особливостей. Однак найважливіше те, що значний чи визначальний вплив на феномен націоналізації регіонального політичного процесу мають тип й особливості виборчих систем, які застосовують у тій чи іншій країні як на регіональному, так і на національному рівні. З іншої сторони, виявлено, що процес регіоналізації регіонального політичного процесу й урядування в Польщі та Угорщині є незначним і характеризується лише персоніфікацією та департизацією регіонального політичного простору й процесу. Відповідно, регіональні вибори аналізованих країн розцінюються і позиціонуються як вибори другого порядку, причому як по важливості, так і по наслідках.

Ключові слова: націоналізація партійної системи, націоналізація і денационалізація політичного процесу, регіоналізація, місцеві вибори, виборчі системи, регіональний рівень урядування, Польща, Угорщина.

The phenomenon of nationalization of regional party systems and regional political process in general is being quite actively, especially recently, discussed in the research literature. Therefore, at least three aspects of its interpretation have even been proposed in this regard. The first aspect is that the nationalization, or rather a type of dynamic nationalization, of regional political process is understood as the extent to which party support in the administrative and territorial units of certain countries changes over time. In contrast, the second aspect outlines the nationalization or the so-called “national nationalization” of regional political process and governance as a set of actions, events and measures that focus on the equal distribution of votes for different parties within different administrative and territorial units of certain countries. Finally, the third aspect of understanding the nationalization of regional political process in Political Science usually tends to the so-called nationalization of party ties, which concerns the extent to which candidates and representatives of certain parties at the regional level are united under national party brands in their activities and rhetorics. Nevertheless, despite the considerable diversity of approaches to the interpretation of the nationalization of regional political process and regional party systems, the scientific literature on this subject is still characterized by significant theoretical and methodological prejudices. The main one of them is typically the tendency and intention of researchers to appeal to the analysis of mostly not regional and national, but exclusively national level of governance, and hence national level of electoral process in this context. Although, as known from some empirical scientific researches¹, a practical comparative analysis of the nationalization

¹ Schakel A., Nationalisation of multilevel party systems: A conceptual and empirical analysis, “*European Journal of Political Research*” 2013, vol 52, nr. 2, s. 212–236.

of party systems and regional political process, at least in European countries (including Central and Eastern Europe and, in particular, Poland and Hungary), shows that their regional authorities and regional governance, in particular on the basis of taking into account the peculiarities and results of national and regional elections, have a significant impact on regions and regional elections, but not always on political parties, party systems and the level of nationalization of electoral support of such parties and systems in regions. Consequently, the presented research is actualized by the scientific task to theorize and reveal empirical manifestations of the impact of elections and electoral systems on the nationalization and/or denationalization of regional political process, in particular on the example of Poland and Hungary.

Starting to solve the research task, we proceed from the already axiomatic remark of researchers that the processes of the nationalization of party systems and regional level of governance in general position and outline a fairly broad historical evolution towards the formation of national electorates and party systems of certain or all countries of the world, as a result of which peripheral and regional specifics disappear². In view of this, it is habitually in Political Science to theorize that the development of national parties and party systems and nationally homogeneous electorate has a stabilizing effect on political systems in general. Accordingly, as D. Bochsler points out, the post-communist (in the temporal sense) democracies in Central-Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe are of significant research interest and resonance, since they combine a particularly relevant set of cases in this context, at least because some of them have highly regionalized party systems³. A clear manifestation of this is the fact that regional elections in certain countries have been or remain associated with denationalization and territorial differences in voting and electoral systems. The reason is that regional political arena, regional level of governance and the growing powers of regional governments inevitably give political actors the opportunity to politicize local or regional interests and to create regional parties⁴. As a result, regional elections can develop and even strengthen territorial differences in political process, which may ultimately hinder the nationalization of parties, party systems and political process⁵. This, in turn, additionally highlights the feasibility of a comparative analysis of regional elections for the problem of nationalization or denationalization of party systems and political process in general, at least in some countries.

Among the factors influencing the nationalization or denationalization of party systems and political processes, the researchers primary appeal to the level of decentralization of power in a certain country. The reason for this is that the relative power and strength of power of each level of governance in a certain country is often seen as a key institutional variable that can influence regional electorates and regional party strategies, and thus regional party systems. However,

² Caramani D., *The nationalization of politics: The formation of national electorates and party systems in Western Europe*, Wyd. Cambridge University Press 2004, s. 1.

³ Bochsler D., *Territory and electoral rules in post-communist democracies*, Wyd. Palgrave Macmillan 2010.

⁴ Schakel A., Nationalisation of regional elections in Central and Eastern Europe, *East European Politics* 2015, vol 31, nr. 2, s. 229–247.

⁵ Schakel A., Nationalisation of regional elections in Central and Eastern Europe, *East European Politics* 2015, vol 31, nr. 2, s. 229–247.

only a very small number of scholars clearly determine the causal link between administrative decentralization or centralization and its impact on party systems. P. Chhibber, K. Kollman⁶ and L. Thorlakson⁷ are the most famous among them. In particular, P. Chhibber and K. Kollman⁸ proceed from the fact that politicians are always guided by certain individual and collective interests, which are aimed at controlling their constituencies (electoral districts), maximizing their electoral preferences in such constituencies, in particular through the formation and development of regional (formally or actually) or national parties that may influence the activities of governments and policy-making process in general. Moreover, the degree to which politicians are grouped into regional or national parties depends on the correlation of authority/powers at the national level with authority/powers at the regional level of political process. For example, if local governments are empowered to make important decisions, then it is not only important, but also necessary (if possible) for politicians to create local and/or regional political parties that allow them to outline regional issues and problems, as well as their individual and collective interests⁹.

The opposite situation arises when national governments make much more important decisions and, consequently, the powers of regional authorities are relatively smaller. Candidates from different political parties and political actors in general then need to promote and use the brands of national parties, in particular to position themselves in relation to the national policy of governments and to make it clear that they can become the part of the process of national governance. In this regard, P. Chhibber and K. Kollman¹⁰ argue that the amplitude of political centralization and incentives of political actors to promote party brands may vary depending on the degree of centralization or decentralization of state power in a certain country. Similarly, L. Thorlakson¹¹ claims that decentralization of power provides both parties and voters with an incentive and opportunity to mobilize and respond to local and/or regional issues that may lead to the development of “unique” party systems at the regional level. As a result, the regional level becomes an extremely imperative, if not more important place of political competition with the decentralization of power and governance. In addition, voters can independently recognize the importance or primacy of the regional level

⁶ Chhibber P., Kollman K., *The formation of national party systems: Federalism and party competition in Canada, Great Britain, India and the United States*, Wyd. Princeton University Press 2004.

⁷ Thorlakson L., An institutional explanation of party system congruence: Evidence from six federations, *“European Journal of Political Research”* 2007, vol 46, nr. 1, s. 69–95.; Thorlakson L., Patterns of party integration, influence and autonomy in seven federations, *“Party Politics”* 2009, vol 15, nr. 2, s. 157–177.

⁸ Chhibber P., Kollman K., *The formation of national party systems: Federalism and party competition in Canada, Great Britain, India and the United States*, Wyd. Princeton University Press 2004.

⁹ Schakel A., Nationalisation of multilevel party systems: A conceptual and empirical analysis, *“European Journal of Political Research”* 2013, vol 52, nr. 2, s. 212–236.

¹⁰ Chhibber P., Kollman K., *The formation of national party systems: Federalism and party competition in Canada, Great Britain, India and the United States*, Wyd. Princeton University Press 2004.

¹¹ Thorlakson L., An institutional explanation of party system congruence: Evidence from six federations, *“European Journal of Political Research”* 2007, vol 46, nr. 1, s. 69–95.; Thorlakson L., Patterns of party integration, influence and autonomy in seven federations, *“Party Politics”* 2009, vol 15, nr. 2, s. 157–177.

of governance and vote according to their own assessment of the performance of regional and national authorities. All this means that parties at the regional political level often have incentives to divert/distance their policies from the national one, especially when the compliance with the policy of national party or parties presupposes and determines the electoral risks of political actors and the electorate at regional level. This is quite often reflected in the fact that regional institutions of power can use specific forms and manifestations of policy to construct distinct state identities. This is the case, for example, when political actors mobilize and politicize issues related to linguistic, cultural, industrial, agricultural or economic activities and areas, where differences can be effectively applied to regional voters, if they vary as a whole in a certain country¹². Another important element and perspective of the study of nationalization or denationalization of party systems and regional political process is the notion of congruence of elections and volatility of the electorate, which should be analyzed in terms of electoral support for political parties during several electoral cycles at the national and regional levels. To track the links between national and regional elections and their consequences, we will analyze and compare the experiences of two countries of Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. Poland and Hungary.

In *Poland*, electoral congruence is relatively higher than electoral volatility, as evidenced by the fact that the Polish electorate votes relatively stably in national elections, but, at the same time, voters tend to change their votes between national and regional elections. In addition, electoral statistics also show that electoral congruence is fairly stable, while electoral volatility is much more instable. Accordingly, the stability of the Polish party system covers both electoral congruence and electoral volatility, and therefore it can be observed that the congruence of this party system is largely due to changes in electoral variability. However, there are certain factors that cause territorial differences in voting. Among them, there are two main factors, such as historical heritage and economics¹³. In general, in order to differentiate between voting in national and regional elections, it is advisable to take into account the electoral consequences of not only national, but also regional elections. The point is that regional elections can be characterized by lower voter turnout, a more active anti-government position, and thus by electoral preferences for the opposition, small and new parties and movements, especially compared to national elections. At the same time, the main assumption that explains the differences in voter turnout is mainly that electoral behavior in regional elections is formed because voters consider regional elections less important than national ones.

In this regard, using public opinion polls to observe the importance of Polish regional elections, it can be stated that Poles consider local elections as more important than national

¹² Schakel A., Nationalisation of multilevel party systems: A conceptual and empirical analysis, "European Journal of Political Research" 2013, vol 52, nr. 2, s. 212–236.

¹³ Bartkowski J., *Tradycja i Polityka: Wpływ tradycji kulturowych polskich regionów na współczesne zachowania społeczne i polityczne*, Wyd. Akademickie "Zak" 2003.

parliamentary or presidential elections¹⁴. In addition, two thirds of respondents traditionally mention local government as a very important section in the system of government and governance, and therefore show interest in elections at the level of local government¹⁵. However, other data from the analysis of public opinion show a completely different picture. For example, when respondents are asked to rate the importance of different types and levels of elections, they clearly label national parliamentary and presidential elections as far more important than regional or local elections. Nevertheless, regional and local elections instead are generally considered as much more important than elections to the European Parliament¹⁶. As for outlining support, then traditionally about 80–90 percent of respondents say that they have no problems deciding whom to support in presidential or mayoral elections, but about 40 percent of the electorate have difficulty deciding whom to vote for in regional elections. Similarly, voters take into account very different factors when voting at different types and levels of elections, so that it seems that respondents decide the fate of their choice on the basis of likes or dislikes of parties and movements rather than individual candidates within regional elections. This is reflected in the fact that, according to various estimates, about a quarter of respondents adhere to their party commitment when voting in regional elections, while only about ten percent of voters adhere to party commitment in municipal council elections and about 20 percent of voters – in the county elections. In practice, however, more than half of respondents explain the nature of their vote in regional elections by appealing to the characteristics of the candidates rather than the parties and movements they represent. This is complemented by the fact that public opinion data on the importance of subnational governance show that the turnout in regional elections should not differ significantly from the turnout in national elections. In addition, regional elections are held separately from national elections, but simultaneously/synchronously with the elections for mayoral office and in general at the local level that inevitably contributes to the turnout at regional elections.

At the same time, the situation regarding the nationalization or denationalization of regional political process in Poland is significantly complemented by other party and electoral factors, including the role of the so-called non-state national parties, electoral alliances/blocs and the congruence of governments and governance. The specificity of non-state national parties is that they are political organizations that seek to maximize their electoral votes and dividends only in one or more regions, and therefore their priority policy is often to represent only specific regional interests. A striking example of the phenomenon of such political parties is the situation in Poland, where, based on the specifics of distribution of votes and mandates

¹⁴ *Polacy o wyborach samorządowych ponad miesiąc przed głosowaniem*, Wyd. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2010, źródło: https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_145_10.PDF

¹⁵ *Czy trzeba chodzić na wybory? Przyczyny absencji wyborczej*, Wyd. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2011, źródło: https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2011/K_118_11.PDF

¹⁶ Wojtasik W., *Drugorzędność wyborów samorządowych w teorii i badaniach empirycznych*, [w:] Baranski M., Czyż A., Kubas S. (eds.), *Rola samorządu terytorialnego w modernizacji Polski*, Wyd. Śląsk 2010, s. 261.

in regions, there are at least two non-state parties, but they differ significantly in how they represent regional interests. The first of these political parties is the “German Minority” (MN), which is the only non-state party at the national level that participates in national elections and is represented in national parliament (or at least in the Polish Sejm). The peculiarity of this political party is that almost all the votes it receives in elections come from the Opole Voivodeship, and since 1997 the MN has been represented by one or two members in the national parliament (although previously its representation was even larger). However, its representation in the national parliament is possible only because the “German minority” according to formal norms is exempted from the obligation to overcome the 5 percent electoral barrier (which it never overcame). All this allows the political party, even at the national level and in party manifestos, to appeal primarily to the representation of the interests of the German minority, such as bilingual education in the Opole region, substantial support for multiculturalism, decentralization of economic development, education and social development at the regional level¹⁷. Though, the MN has no specific claims regarding the autonomy status of Opole Voivodeship. As for the second non-state national party, then it is about the “Movement for Autonomy of the Silesian Region” (RAS), which should be considered as an autonomist party. It is interestingly that the RAS emerged as an important non-state party in the 2010 regional elections, when it received 8,5 percent of the vote and won three seats in Silesia. The RAS also ran in the 1991–2015 national elections, but it was unsuccessful. The RAS ideology is based on the recognition of the Silesian nationality, which the party considers different from the Polish identity¹⁸. At the same time, the party is inspired by the Western European regionalism and the EU regional policy and calls for strong and independent voivodships, which should not be financially dependent on the central government and which should have independent tax powers, as well as autonomy in decision-making in the field of culture and education policy.

In addition to non-state national parties, local or regional electoral alliances or blocs formed either by former members of previously established and existing parties, or by other non-partisan representatives, or by some local representatives, such as city officials and mayors, are also important in this cut. It is interestingly that none of such alliances or blocs, at least in Poland, has autonomist or regionalist ambitions, nor does base its ideology on ethnic or regional differences and identities. Nevertheless, such electoral alliances and blocs do bring regional differences or peculiarities into regional elections, and therefore they are important in theoretical, methodological and empirical contexts. The fact is that the relations between the partners in electoral alliances or blocs can be interpreted as nationalization (when a larger national party clearly dominates) or as regionalization (when a certain non-state party dominates in a certain region and thus a particular national party can benefit from such a merger). Accordingly,

¹⁷ *Program wyborczy Komitetu Wyborczego Mniejszość Niemiecka w wyborach do Parlamentu 2011*, MN 2011, źródło: <https://www.mniejszoscnieiecka.eu/program/>

¹⁸ Pędziwiatr K., *Silesian autonomy movement in poland and one of its activists*, Wyd. Tischner European University 2009.

there are electoral alliances and blocs that participate in regional elections, but they are created purely at the national level and quite often by national parties. Since these electoral unions and blocks participate in elections in the same region, but within different types and levels of elections, it is safe to conclude that such electoral alliances can be considered as behaving like state parties. In addition, there are also electoral alliances that are specially created to participate in elections at the regional level. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of the electoral alliances, which are specially created to participate in elections at the regional level in Poland, are formed by national political parties.

From all the above, it is safe to say that the results of the analysis of several factors of nationalization or denationalization of regional political process indicate the nationalization of the Polish regional elections and the Polish regional governance. Though, it was stated that the most of the differences in the voting process between regional and national elections can be attributed to electoral congruence. This indicates that voters tend to change their votes between regional and previous national elections. Moreover, a significant part of such changes during voting arises as a result of electoral effects, due to which opposition parties gain electoral advantages compared to government political parties. In addition, the volatility between government and opposition parties appears to be linked to unemployment rate and deteriorating the economic development. However, despite the significant nationalization of regional governance and regional political process, some signs of regionalization of political process in Poland can also be identified. In particular, the voter turnout in regional elections is about the same as in national elections. In addition, the correspondence between regional and national voting depends on historical regional features. That is why national political parties are interested in creating and quite often create regional electoral alliances and blocs to get as many votes as possible at the regional level¹⁹.

As for *Hungary*, then it is evolutionarily and empirically established that the congruence of elections in this country is relatively high and stable over time, although with the exception of the first democratic elections in 1990, which, in turn, can be explained by the novelty of democratic procedures. At the same time, the difference in electoral congruence in the regions of Hungary is small one, which indicates that voters are more likely not to show regional preferences in national elections, but rather to make their choices based on stable party preferences. However, the assessments of the congruence of elections in Hungary should be interpreted with caution, especially in the context of retrospective analysis and taking into account the specifics of electoral systems applied at different types and levels of elections in this country, including after significant changes in electoral rules. In particular, it is known that there was used a non-parallel/dependent mixed electoral system in the national parliamentary elections in Hungary until 2011. Under this electoral system, voters voted for a candidate in a single-member constituency and for

¹⁹ Gagarek W., Kotmarowski M., *Poland: Nationalization Despite Fear of Regionalization* // [w:] Schakel A. (ed.), *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe: Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*, Wyd. Palgrave MacMillan 2017.

a regional electoral list. Thus, voters had two votes, i.e. one in a single-member constituency and one for a regional party list in a multi-member constituency. At the same time, the national party list played a compensatory role, allocating the seats on the basis of surplus votes cast in single-member constituencies and by party lists²⁰. However, in 2011 the electoral system was reformed and regional lists were abolished. Therefore, the assessment of the congruence of elections in 2014 and beyond began to be based on the votes cast for national party lists and despite the different ways of calculating and using for analysis various types of electoral lists (regional, national). Nevertheless, the congruence rate was similar in size to previous elections²¹.

However, it was found that the stability of party system and the congruence of elections in Hungary still gradually increased in 1994–2010, but decreased slightly since 2014. In addition, party system and the congruence of elections began to have a stronger influence on each other. This showed that the differences between regional and national party systems in the country are largely determined by changes in electoral preferences in regional and national elections. However, it should be mentioned that in assessing the stability and linkage of voting in regional and national elections (or vice versa), different voters are analyzed and compared, especially due to the peculiarities of the electoral systems used in regional elections in the country. This is an extremely important caveat, since the previous research has shown that the split/cleavage between the city and the countryside forms the party preferences of voters and affects the development of the Hungarian party system²². This is also complemented by the fact that Hungary has a fragmented territorial structure, which affects the relationship between urban and rural residence and the choice of political parties during voting²³. In summary, it is likely that party system and the results of electoral congruence reflect the urban-rural division along with the change in votes between regional and national elections. The increase in congruence can also be explained by the consolidation and nationalization of party system, thanks to which the main national parties strengthen their ability to receive and attract larger shares of regional votes²⁴. At one time, this manifested itself in the fact that relatively early established parties had a significant advantage and were able to attract voters throughout the country, and thus prevented the creation of new political parties in the process of democratic transition. Therefore, in 2014, the party system at the national level, especially after the beginning of some autocratization of the political regime in Hungary, was spread at the local level and easily “merged”

²⁰ Benoit K., *Hungary: Holding back the tier*, [w:] Gallagher M., Mitchell P. (eds.), *The politics of electoral systems*, Wyd. Oxford University Press 2005, s. 231–252.

²¹ Benoit K., District magnitude, electoral formula, and the number of parties, *European Journal of Political Research* 2001, vol 39, nr. 2, s. 203–224.; Moser R., Scheiner E., Strategic voting in established and new democracies: Ticket splitting in mixed-member electoral systems, *Electoral Studies* 2009, vol 28, nr. 1, s. 51–61.

²² Evans A., Whitefield S., Social and ideological cleavage formation in post-communist Hungary, *European-Asia Studies* 1995, vol 47, nr. 7, s. 1177–1204.; Korosenyi A., *Cleavages and party system in Hungary*, [w:] Enyedi Z., Toka G. (eds.), *The 1994 elections to the Hungarian national assembly*, Wyd. Sigma 1999.

²³ Knutsen O., Social structure, social coalitions and party choice in Hungary, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 2013, vol 46, nr. 1, s. 29.; Tabit R., Towns with county status in Hungary, *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration* 2012, vol 12, nr. 2, s. 101–114.

²⁴ Agh A., The early-freezing of the East-Central European parties: The case of the Hungarian Socialist Party, *Budapest papers on democratic transition* 1995, vol 129.

into regional elections. Thus, it is clear that large national parties dominate regional elections in Hungary. Their dominance is supported by the strategies for nomination and promotion of national political parties in regions²⁵. In turn, the consolidation of party system has also led to the fact that the left-right ideological dimension of political competition has become the dominant factor in electoral campaigns, voter behavior and coalition formation. The sudden increase in the dimension of party system and party representation in the legislature since 2014 can be explained by the increase of the number of regional lists, and thus of the influential political parties of national importance. Although many of them arose as a result of the disintegration of previously existing and stronger left/center-left political parties.

The analysis of the data on the electoral turnout in national and regional elections in Hungary specifies a difference in their indicators and, in particular, the lower turnout in regional elections. A factor that contributes to lower voter turnout in regional elections may, among the other things, relate to the timing of regional elections compared to the timing of national elections. The fact is that regional elections are mostly held only six months after national elections. Therefore, most parties lose financial resources after national electoral campaign and are unable to fill their election budgets and funds for only six months. Voter fatigue from several consecutive electoral cycles can also play a role. For example, there were held three consecutive electoral cycles in 2014 in Hungary, including parliamentary elections, elections to the European Parliament and regional elections. At the same time, the latter ones were characterized by the lowest voter turnout. It is also noted that in the period between national and regional elections, there are also often formed new parties. They can receive some electoral support, but it is typically insufficient to win seats, especially if such parties did not participate in previous, particularly national, elections. In general, the analysis of the Hungarian party system shows that its nationalization and regionalization used to take place and still take place in parallel²⁶. To explain such mixed consequences of electoral processes, it can be assumed that new parties are popular with voters who are dissatisfied with government political parties and their position on regional issues. Therefore, in conclusion, one can draw ambiguous conclusions about the connection between national and regional voting in Hungary. The fact is that the turnout in regional elections is typically lower than in national elections, but historically (except for the last decade) government and opposition parties alternately, depending on the electoral cycles, lose or gain their electoral support. Thus, the time or breeding in time (electoral asynchrony) of national and regional elections can be a decisive explanatory factor for such ambiguous conclusions. As mentioned above, regional (and local) elections are held six months after national elections, and this is a very short period of time for voters to review and change their electoral preferences. The imminent timing of national and regional elections also leads to a lengthy

²⁵ Varnagy R., *Polgármesterek a Magyar Országgyűlésben*, Wyd. Ad Librum Kiado 2012.

²⁶ Enyedi Z., Casal-Bertoa F., *Patterns of party competition 1990–2009*, [w:] Lewis P., Markowski R. (eds.), *Europeanising party politics? Comparative perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe after enlargement*, Wyd. Manchester University Press 2011.

electoral campaign, during which opposition parties often exhaust their resources before regional elections. Finally, the short period between national and regional elections does not provide much time and space for identifying and analyzing the shortcomings of parties in government (e.g., pursuing unpopular policies) and encouraging protest voting in regional elections.

The discrepancy between national and regional elections in Hungary is or may also be the result of the activities of regional parties that are more successful in regional rather than national elections. At first glance, it is not appropriate to expect the phenomenon of regional parties in Hungary, as the voting of national minorities in this country is not mobilized by ethnic or regional political parties, and national minorities vote for the same parties as other Hungarians²⁷. Finally, the emergence of strong regional parties is also significantly hampered by institutional barriers. On the one hand, the peculiarities of the electoral system applied at the local/regional level certainly allow public associations to participate in regional electoral campaigns. However, on the other hand, the election law, by allowing these organizations to participate in regional elections, gives them exclusively a civil legal status. Thus, they are not political parties in the sense that they have no ambition to run in national elections, but they often run in regional elections. This is reflected in the fact that such organizations often represent the interests of their municipalities in large communities at the regional level. Instead, in smaller communities, organizations often form electoral unions and alliances based on common interests (for example, the alliances of retirement clubs or agricultural organizations, etc.) or to unite the electorate (since in almost every district there is one or another “alliance of mayors” or “alliance of villages”). At the same time, regional parties, i.e. parties that receive votes and win seats only in one region, are absent in constituencies, since most civil society organizations participate in elections only in their regions. In this cut, the electoral success of these public organizations can be seen as an indicator of the regionalization of voting and electoral process. That is why the growing participation of civil society organizations in elections has encouraged national parties to form alliances with these organizations. Such cooperation is beneficial to both partners, because: local organizations increase their chances of gaining power in regions; national parties receive wider coverage in local communities. Although, in contrast, the cooperation between national parties and local civil society organizations is rather weak. This has been particularly pronounced since 2010, when the local electoral system was reformed before the next regional elections, as a feature of which the elements of the majority (two-round) electoral system were introduced. This novation contributed to the further ousting of public associations by national parties from the regional electoral process, and thus from the regional level of government²⁸.

²⁷ Bohm A., *Lokális és regionális identitás, "Comitatus"* 2002, vol 12, nr. 4, s. 29–33.

²⁸ Dobos G., *Elmozdulás középszinten: A 2010-es önkormányzati választási reform hatásai a megyei önkormányzatokra, "Politikatudományi Szemle"* 2011, vol 20, nr. 4, s. 61–83.

Accordingly, in general, it can be stated that elections in Hungary are very nationalized, and over time we can see an increasing dominance of national parties at both local and regional levels. At the same time, the electoral turnout in regional elections is (much) lower than in national elections, but government parties do not systematically lose, and opposition parties do not always win a share of votes. Rather, regional voting reflects the option of testing the popularity of national government during elections in regions. However, the nationalization of elections in regional constituencies does not mean that there is no regionalization of regional voting in Hungary. On the contrary, many new parties are being formed at regional level, which receive or at least have previously received a significant share of votes. Though, such parties actually are civil society organizations that are allowed to participate in regional, but not national elections. In addition, the nationalization of electoral system and electoral process is carried out and supported by ongoing reforms of the institutional and electoral systems. Thus, despite the fact that civil society organizations with strong roots in local communities used to be able to compete successfully in regional elections, today, mainly due to the majority (two-round) electoral system at the local level, the strength of these organizations is significantly restrained. In addition, the recent electoral reforms have contributed to two major national parties that are positioned as the governmental ones. This is mainly due to greater synchronization of national and regional elections, i.e. resource impact on the opposition, especially at the local level, that will inevitably continue to have a significant impact on the congruence of elections²⁹.

In conclusion, it should be noted that based on the analysis of the impact of elections and electoral systems on the nationalization or denationalization of regional political process, in particular in Poland and Hungary, it can be concluded that regional elections in these countries are mostly nationalized. Each electoral cycle at a different level of elections establishes certain relationships, which are both long-term (traced over several elections) and temporary (disappear after the next elections). At the same time, the phenomenon of decentralization of power is an important aspect of the analysis of the nationalization of regional electoral process in two countries. Since it has been established that the more powers an electoral body has, the more interest it arouses among political actors and the more weight it has in the eyes of voters. In view of this, national parties in Poland and Hungary mostly use national schemes to promote their party brands and make adjustments to regional electoral campaigns, mainly under the influence of significant regional features. However, the most important thing is that the type and features of the electoral system used in a country at both regional and national levels have a significant or decisive influence on the phenomenon of nationalization of regional political process in Poland and Hungary. Such criteria as the method of nominating candidates, the possibility of participation of independent/non-partisan candidates, the possibility of creating electoral alliances, blocs and public formations are significant in this regard. In

²⁹ Dobos G., Varnagy R., *Hungary: Are Neglected Regional Elections Second-Order Elections?*, [w:] Schakel A. (ed.), *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe: Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*, Wyd. Palgrave MacMillan 2017.

general, the process of regionalization of regional political process and governance in Poland and Hungary, especially at the background of their erosion of democracy, is insignificant and is rather characterized by personification and departyzation (if the type of electoral system allows it) of regional political space and process. Accordingly, regional elections in all the analyzed countries are regarded and positioned as second-tier elections, both in importance and consequences. In turn, parties use regional electoral process as a way to “investigate” the situation and/or obtain an assessment of the actions of government political parties and teams.

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