

Where are the voters?

Three decades into a silent democracy (Electoral geographical approach)¹

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For a relatively long time, there was no wide range of academic literature on this research topic in Hungary, due to the fact that only a few researchers tried to examine the political elections in accordance with its spatial dimension (Kovács 2000, Hajdú 2006, Benkő 2008). During the communist era, political geography – like political study and human geography themselves – did not belong to the studies preferred by the communist authority. In 1990, general and local elections were held, which meant the official fall of communism in Hungary. In the country's history, these were the first, pure democratically held elections, where citizens could express their political minds; Hungarian political research originates itself from that time.

After these first elections (1990), initial publications about electoral geography were published by the help of more experienced Western European co-researchers (Kovács–Dingsdale 1998). Later on, Hungarian researchers (Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) started publishing their own recurring papers, in which annual sociological and political reports are found for every county, as well as for the capital, Budapest. These reports are sociological reviews where electioneering methods, social background of local candidates, etc., are provided, and geographical approaches are also maintained. Historical geographical works of László Hubai are also worth mentioning in this paper. He made an attempt to find a relationship between the results of elections of the early 20th century and the outcomes of recent ones (Hubai 2004). The territorial and ideological continuity of the votings' outcomes are described on a comprehensive appendix map of his book which is titled,

¹ This study is based on a previous research which was repeated by the authors. Therefore, eight elections were compared in Hungary; eight local elections and eight parliamentary elections assessing the citizens' participation between 1990 and 2019. Original study is: Bódi, F. and Bódi, M. (2012) "Where are the voters?" in Bódi, F. and Fábíán, G. and Lawson, R. T. (eds.) *Local Organization of Social Services in Hungary – Crises, Reactions, Changes*, Bremen: Europäischer Hochschulverlag, pp. 59–77.

The electoral atlas of Hungary in the 20th century. The author's works were also based on the achieved research results of Péter Benkő, whose name was also associated with the idea of regional electoral geography. He examines the phenomenon of domestic elections in regional aspects, seeking to find relationship between electoral results and socio-economic indicators of smaller territorial units (micro regions). Research on electoral geography by László Hubai and János Rechnitzer is also found in Hungarian political yearbooks.

In Hungary, political and electoral geographical works have been influenced by numerous factors during the past century. By the second part of the 20th century, much more complex examinations were published, in which moderate relationships, and social background of voters were investigated instead of simple monographic works (Weiner 2010), although these latter kind of works are still being produced (Hajdú 2006). After the political changes, Hungarian researchers also wanted to find the hidden connection between the voting behavior of citizens and their social background or even inherited cultural identity. As they learned, there was no clearly defined answer. Experts still have academic debates on how much historical continuity and/or cultural background of voters should be considered in geographical electoral researches. Clashing opinions of experts can be observed in Zoltán Hajdú's papers. Subsequent to his work, many examples (Europeans as well) show that there have been no direct connections between previous election results and those of present elections (Hajdú 2006). On the contrary, however, other authors pay their attentions on examining election results from the 1920s or 1930s or even from the 19th century to find relationships between those. As far as the authors of this paper are concerned, all political decisions (voting) are the result of a relatively long deliberation process. Voters with their individual ways of living, experience their individual lifestyles, which are also based on their individual experiences. Naturally, one's individualised experience is determined by many factors, including social, financial, educational, as well as geographical ones.

More recently, in case of Hungary, geographical analyses have been utilised to uncover aforementioned social cleavages (initially introduced in the 1960s [Lipset–Rokkan, 1967] and later adapted to Western parliamentary democracies). These works (Vida–Kovalcsik 2018, Kovalcsik–Bódi 2023) proved that the electorate of either the governmental party or its opposition can be described by defined social indicators (primarily by educational and income levels) and, as we proceed closer to our present, these correlations are getting stronger and stronger. Results also encouraged them to invoke the term “*class-voting*” (Bódi–Kovalcsik 2023), especially when it comes to the gradually strengthening Fidesz' electoral performances in areas with low social status.

Finally, a different kind of geographical approach must be mentioned which attempts to analyse the social background of voting differences (Angelusz–Tardos 2002). This work was published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, who have included for research focus indicators which were expected to influence voting outcomes. Their research results drew attention to the role of education, age, and

the type of municipality where voters lived. This was also confirmed by the report of Gábor Hegedűs (University of Szeged) whose empirical urban research work showed that people with low income would participate less than others.

The aim of the authors of this paper is to uncover the social background of the phenomena of voting, and, in essence: 'what makes people vote'. A major finding is that voter turnout in Hungary has a spatial characteristics which is observed year after year due to its spatial regularity (Map figure 1–2). As shown, voting results are not only explained by the unique hysterical atmosphere of pre-election campaign periods. All elections held since 1990 were examined to obtain an understanding of the spatial pattern and social characteristics of voting. The phenomenon which led the authors to include the geographic feature as one of the primary factors in election research is the almost firm spatial order of voting results with respect to participation in Hungary. This study examines the spatial feature of participation, the possible historical reasons for low participation, and tries to extend the authors' locality hypothesis onto a national level (Hegedűs 2007) and finally tries to justify another older hypothesis with quantitative methods (Bódi 2006).

Eight elections with one result – low voter turnout in Hungary

It is often considered that voter turnout is a significant feature of a society which is able to show how relevant political decision-making is among the citizens of a certain territorial unit. From the politicians' viewpoint, a high turnout is generally seen as evidence of the legitimacy of the current system; whilst others emphasize that more educated citizens are more likely to vote in France (Durović 2022) in Finland (Martikainen–Martikainen–Wass 2005) and in Cyprus (Kanol 2013). One of the special Hungarian features of voting is the huge difference between general and local elections in term of participation. Generally, much more citizens go to the polls at a general election than at a local election. This can be related to the size of the towns, as presented later, where relatively high voter turnout is observed at the smallest settlements, and where the role of local authorities is outstanding in social benefits. Even the local elections of 2006, which were characterised by the highest participation ever (53.1%) since 1990 didn't reach the participation level of the general election of 1998, which had the lowest turnout in general elections (56.3%).

Municipalities with larger populations have higher participation in general elections, and the smallest Hungarian municipalities behave the same way as the most populated cities. Thus, the social conditions of those smallest villages could be worth examining, in particular the distinct voting trends in rural areas. Another interesting fact is that, municipalities with urban statuses participate in general elections to a higher degree than rural municipalities with the same number of inhabitants. This may be due to the urban milieu of these smaller cities or the urban identity of their inhabitants which influence voter turnout.

The voter turnout of municipalities with rural statuses is in inverse proportion to the number of inhabitants (the smaller the population the higher the turnout), therefore, voting in local elections is considered to be a more important way to make political decisions by the citizens of smaller municipality groups, while bigger urban cities are characterized by a higher participation in general elections.

The fact that certain municipality types have no interest in local elections, while they keep their eyes on general elections, suggest that further examinations may be necessary (urban cities). Moreover, it raises questions about the society, within which local affairs are more important than national ones (smaller rural municipalities). Finally, the societies of the smallest municipalities (with less than 1000 or 500 inhabitants) are also worth mentioning, where both local and national elections are followed with high attention by their residents.

As shown, the sizes of municipalities make a huge difference between Hungarian cities and towns in terms of voter turnout. While reporting about the findings according to types of municipalities, the spatial dimension of voting habits is also important to be discussed (Map figure and Table 1 and Table 4).

When the spatial patterns of political elections' turnout are examined, year after year distinct regions can be described as areas with high or low participation levels. This distinction can be seen clearly, especially at the general elections of 2002 and 2006. Voter turnout, as a special social feature, has its own spatial patterns in Hungary, just like other socio-economic indicators. For delimiting the areas with extremely high or low turnout, aggregative methods were used in which every territorial unit (at municipality level) was rated from minus 8 to plus 8 for each of the eight general or local elections (Map figure 1–2). Using a rough generalisation, the northern (north-western) part of the country with its high participation can be distinguished from the southern (southeastern) part which has a relatively low participation in general elections, however, an exception to this generalisation can be seen around the bigger regional centre cities in the south.

Table 1
Voter turnout at the parliamentary elections 1990–2010 (%)

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Budapest	71.1	74.3	63.6	77.5	74.6	69.7	68.1	74.7
Cities of county rank	67.5	71.1	59.2	73.4	70.1	65.6	63.1	71.6
Cities*	63.6	68.7	54.6	69.3	66.8	63.4	60.0	68.5
Cities over 10,000	63.9	69.1	55.4	70.3	67.8	64.2	61.5	70.1
Cities under 10,000	61.5	66.7	51.8	66.2	64.1	61.4	57.1	65.4
Villages**	61.6	65.2	52.1	66.3	64.1	61.7	57.1	65.8
Villages over 10000	61.0	67.5	56.7	67.3	71.5	69.4	67.6	75.9
Villages 3,000–9,999	59.4	63.4	49.4	65.2	63.3	61.9	57.4	66.2
Villages 1,000–2,999	60.8	64.5	50.8	65.4	63.3	60.8	56.3	65.0
Villages 500–999	65.3	67.8	55.6	68.2	65.5	62.0	57.3	65.9
Villages under 500	70.4	71.9	61.8	71.9	67.7	64.1	59.4	67.6
Hungary	65.0	68.9	56.3	70.5	67.8	64.4	61.1	69.4

Source: calculated by Mátyás Bódi from the data of the Hungarian National Election Office (* without Budapest and towns of county rank, ** all the villages by legal status, *** calculated according to the votes on body of representatives).

Those municipalities which were in a politically active zone – the above mentioned smallest municipalities located on the northeastern and southwestern periphery – were basically suburbs of the relatively highly populated county centres in their broader agglomerations.

Some areas of Hungary can be described as politically active zones, whose relatively high participation rate is not related to the size or type of municipality. The western border land is a wide belted area characterised by a high participation in general elections. Additionally, a high participation rate occurs in the capital (Budapest) with its large agglomeration zone (especially the northern commuter-belt area). Here it is important to point out that Budapest had the highest turnout in every general election of all municipality categories (Map figure 1). Last but not least, the so-called Hungarian ‘sun-belt’, which contains the municipalities around Lake Balaton, is an area with a high participation.

As the opposite end of the participation rate a huge, almost continuous area with low turnout can also be seen. This area covers the Great Plain, in which smaller active zones can be found around the regional centres, but the lack of concern towards the general (as well as local) elections is the typical social feature of this region (Map figure 2).

It is the same outcome when the local elections in different municipality categories were examined. The geographical and economic peripheries of Hungary, where the least populated municipality groups are located, show the highest participation. The municipality structures of these northeastern or the southwestern rural areas are dominated by small villages where both general and local elections have really high turnouts at every election. The Great Plain (eastern, southeastern) area shows its political impartiality again, no matter what types of municipalities are included, however, in case of local elections, the region of the capital (Budapest) and its agglomeration are part of the passive voting zone. The smaller municipalities of the western bend area also have high participations, but they don't form a continuous area spatially. To summarise, there is no huge territorial continuous region with high voting turnout in Hungary, except for those smaller peripheral regions in which almost only small villages are found (Map figure 3).

Finally, the aggregate scores of every municipality were calculated (aggregate outcomes of general and local elections). The purpose of this method was to look into those municipalities whose turnouts were above the annual average in every year at both general and local elections. This way the so called *hyperactive* and *hyper passive* municipalities could be located with respect to political behavior. To clarify, hyperactive stands for those municipalities whose turnouts were above the national average in every election (eight general and eight local), whilst hyper passive stands for those whose turnouts were below the national average in every election. As seen, particular groups of the hyper passive municipalities exist form geographically distinct units on the Great Plain region, while only a few small municipalities appear hyperactive, scattered sparsely in the country. To conclude, municipalities with extremely low participations are concentrated in one certain landscape of Hungary (the Great Plain), independently from the size of municipalities, whilst the locations of municipalities with extraordinary high turnouts reflect the spatial structure of small municipalities in the country.

Regarding the spatial pattern of election turnouts, it can be deduced that socio-economic differences and inequalities do exist in Hungary in their spatial order and their territorial features driving political behavior. These factors can be well measured and tracked by their geographic dimensions.

Future researches by the authors are planned to further examine the social feature relations of those municipalities whose voting behaviors differ in any respect. What socio-economic indicators characterise the smallest municipalities in remote rural areas? Or, conversely, what social and/or cultural factors are related to individuals' voting in every election and also what factors are related to the lack of participation? In the latter case, the geographic feature of the phenomenon is worth studying (see the *hyper passive* Great Plain area) since these municipalities' turnouts were below the national average in both local and national elections.

Hungarian society as a whole is featured by this duality and a long-term rural-urban division is recognisable. The authors plan to develop studies to better understand of what social factors underlie this clear division which is evident among Hungarian voters.

Reasons for low voting turnout (socio-historical approach)

In the political era before the 1990s, the basic source of legitimacy was consumption based on pleasure and partial autonomy of private life. In the early 1980s, the Institute for Social Sciences conducted a survey on behalf of the governing communist state party to assess whether workers were truly loyal to socialism, and, if 'yes', primarily what was the basis of their faiths in the system. The research showed that the majority of the country was bound to the political system through consumption, therefore, only one element of the criteria in the Weberian sense of legitimate validity could be shown in the society before 1990.

The legitimacy of *traditional* patriotism, based on the principle that '*it has always been so*', could not work at that time as the system aimed at demolishing the past. The legitimacy of the *passionate faith*, newly declared and exemplary, could not work either since, even for egalitarians, it was clear that there were '*ones who were more equal*' in socialism. Legitimacy based on *value rationality*, the purest type of which is natural law, couldn't exist given that the politics building the socialist system cut back on its basic institutions. A *legality-based* system, however, existed, and was considered legitimate on the grounds that the stakeholders agreed with- or simply accepted it under constraint (Weber 1987: p. 63). Only the validity of the legality-based system could be shown in the socialist era. However, the welfare system (e.g. easily obtainable pension rights, free health care and full employment) underlying its legitimacy was built upon an extremely fragile economic basis.

The modern and so-called stable democratic societies and nations cannot exist permanently without *traditional bonds and value rationality*, because these hold together the old communities in the long-term and stabilise the modern states (Lipset 1995: p. 81).

Until the end of the 1940s, legitimate power could be built on the basis of passionate faith (devastating the rules of natural law). Then, until the amnesty of 1963, the political system gained its validity through constraints, which gradually converted to a consensually legitimate system agreed on by the stakeholders from the 1970s, wherein there was an emphasis on relative welfare. The value-based legitimation of the political system prior to socialism was built upon life experiences and the institutions of Church, school and family. The socialist system first overtly, and later covertly, made attempts to eliminate or 'revolutionarily' transmute and transubstantiate the former institutions. It was well known that, in order to achieve overall success, the changes had to be started in the 'clerical and reactionary' countryside (Kovách 2001).

Socialism abolished the basic institutions of the traditional local system in villages and in small towns, as well as the notary representing the former legitimate state, the priest or pastor representing the church, the teacher providing education and last, the free individual; the farmer (the so-called *kulak*). After demolishing the institutions underlying the legitimacy of the former authorities, the disintegration and disassembly of local communities followed; the culmination of which took place in the 1970s, when local councils and agricultural cooperatives were merged by orders from 'above'.

Socialism created a new society, which had no roots, but its almost forty years of reign was sufficient that even those who transitioned from the former pre-socialist times were not able to 'find their ways back' to the preceding era. The socialist system, which destroyed the previous system, failed, but left behind collapsing socialist large companies, districts of blocks of flats, ruined city centres (e.g. Miskolc), neglected small towns (e.g. Balassagyarmat, Esztergom, Sátoraljaújhely and Abaújszántó) and hundreds of depopulated and aging villages. The integrity of local communities has been damaged, reshaped and sometimes shattered into pieces - see centres of tiny and small villages - due to the migration caused by the political and then the economic constraints (Enyedi 1980, Andorka 1979). It's always easier to remediate the tangible damages of an era than the harmful legacy of it as the latter is much longer lasting in the deeper layers of society, in its spiritual components.

After 1989, democracy in rural Hungary essentially left only little room for local societies, since people could predominantly vote on parties or party representatives whom the national parties above them put in place. The disinterest of rural societies was shown in the absence of crowds who did not participate in general elections, even when the national turnout was close to the European (EU15) average.

This study seeks to answer the question whether the election participation willingness can be a feature of the society, especially in a geographically defined locality, i.e. in a local society. Voting behavior may be related to a number of social factors, such as religiosity, gender, age, income, educational attainment, etc. (Mészáros-Szakadát 1998). In addition, it may also express the relationship of a particular era to politics and society, provided that the institution of elections is an open system (direct and not excluding) and is based on free will, i.e. it is not obligatory. The following is a brief overview of socio-political factors which are likely to affect voter activity.

One of the components is '*civic duty*' (Milbrath 1981: p. 201), which originated in the archaic democratic culture, was derived from the ancient Greek democratic traditions, and is still in evidence in the modern age. *Aristotle* in his *Politics* considered dealing with public affairs to be the most manful act - today we would rather say the most human act - in the forefront of which stood to serve the public good, at least in that fragile equilibrium which the Greeks called *politeia*. Aristotle, who synthesised classical Greek culture, put elections as the focus of the selection system for the governance, which is one subtype of the twelve political systems. More precisely, he wanted to answer the question of who fills the positions by whom they are elected and how they are elected.

Political science also considers *patriotic acts* as a factor influencing voter turnout (Powell 1986, Milbrath 1968). High turnout is particularly prominent in countries which have recently obtained their independences or made many sacrifices to preserve it. A good example is Western Europe, which suffered at least two world wars, where at least four out of five citizens in each country went to vote in the 1950s (Borg 1995: p. 441). After the wars, electoral habits in Europe were strongly influenced by the fact that in two large countries (Italy and France) women received voting rights at that time. As time passed after the war, electoral activity strongly declined in the decades of prosperity and security, as if the system of the *welfare state* might have lulled politics as well. In the rebellious world of the 1960s, the young become estranged from their inherited freedom. By that time voter turnout in many countries had already decreased to 75%. By the end of the 1980s, electoral activity decreased even further and such was especially evident in Germany (77.8%) and in France (65.7%).

International political scientists perhaps don't ignore the most important factor; the purpose of "*impacting and influencing politics*" (Verba–Nie–Kim 1978). Why would we go to vote if not to politise? At this point, it is worth mentioning how effectively voters can influence the chances of candidates or those elected to take office. In this respect, European voters are rational and consistent (similarly to those of the United States) as local affairs, including local elections, have always been of greater public interest than regional or state-level politics, and notably exceeded voter turnout for European Union (or federal) elections. Oddly enough, Hungarian voters, similarly to voters of Eastern European countries, are lazier concerning local affairs. Where the impact on the governance is greater, that is, concerning local interests, much less people go to vote than in elections concerning national affairs. They do so despite the fact that their votes in general elections weigh much less than locally, where a small town mandate can be gained even by a few hundred votes. Furthermore, members of the local governments – and their political decisions – can be monitored more closely and held accountable. The highest voter turnouts at local elections have never exceeded the lowest turnouts at general elections. Let us start from the assumption that electoral activity, whether local or national level, can essentially be determined by three things:

- First, *patriotism, local patriotism and the experience of independence*;
- Second, *civic duty* as the classic component of active politics, where citizens vote out of duty;
- Third, *the intention and faith of influencing the government*.

After it obtained its independence, 85.6% of eligible voters went to vote in Slovenia at the first general elections. The same occurred in Lithuania (71.7%), the Czech Republic (76.4%) and Bulgaria (83.9%). In Slovakia at the first two general elections in 1994 and in 1998, voter turnouts were 75.6% and 84.2% respectively. Among all the Central and Eastern European states, only the Polish electoral activity was weaker than that of the Hungarians. In Hungary in 1990, more than a third of the citizens didn't participate in the moment of liberation at all – they didn't vote.

The regime change did not essentially affect the influence and privileges of the political elite of the old order since political influence was converted to economic benefits. The disintegrating system – along with the collapsing economy (through wild privatisation) – accelerated society's polarisation and social differences became evident, even spatially. In the first half of the 1990s, the country split into three parts, particularly in terms of income formation: 1) the urbanised and developed North Transdanubia, 2) the capital (Budapest) and its surroundings and 3) rural North East Hungary, South Transdanubia and the Great Plain which lagged behind the others (Bódi–Mokos–Obádovics 1999).

Contrary to the rational Western voters, the Hungarian voters seem particularly strange, even possibly irrational in the sense that in Hungary, at local elections about local affairs, a higher voter turnout can be expected, even where the competitive spirit is low and where there is no real stake in who to elect into a position. In many cases there is not more than one single candidate for one position or at least the number of the candidates is considerably fewer than the national average (Bódi 2006: p. 309–310).

In rural local societies, especially in the ones far from the towns – and not yet influenced by urban circumstances – the percentage of taxpayers in the working-age population barely reached 50%. The percentage of people living on social benefits was over 40%, thus, the majority of the working-age population got their minimum income by depending on the goodwill of the local authorities (Map figure 4, Table 6). Therefore, control of local politics could not evolve from such a mass of people whose existence depended so much on the local authority. In short; the local society didn't become able to control the local power (Bódi 2009).

The quality of life of the local society, as well as the existence and quality of the local services depended largely or completely on the goodwill and 'enlightenment' of the local elite. These rural societies also lived in social dependences where money, services and sources necessary to subsist personal and family lives were assured by the performers of local politics through benefits, public works and other means for the majority of the working-age population who lived there (Bódi 2005).

It is only worth examining the operation of the local autonomies and the local elections when the above-mentioned social factors are considered, as well as the knowledge of the referred social deficit. In municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants, because of the noted reasons, it wasn't the existence of a strong nominating organisational background (i.e. parties, civil organisations) which dominated, but rather strong individual personalities. This is the reason why first the local employers (entrepreneurs, institution leaders) and people with relatively larger economic potential, as well as *patres familias* of families having a greater number of relatives and secondary social relations (i.e. people likely capable to arrange official affairs, or at least told to be capable to do so) became members of the executive bodies of villages and small towns (Csire et al. 2002).

In the majority of rural Hungary, the local governing body of a village has become an exclusive institution of the local elite and the advocate for the interest of a narrow group of patricians rather than a forum of the larger local society. As no other organisation could undertake the articulation of interests of the local societies (due to the lack of advocacy groups for the interest of local social organisations in rural municipalities), the general assemblies and sometimes the mayors themselves have become the almost unappealable and exclusive executive leaders at the top of the local societies (Bódi 2005) (Map figure 4 and Table 6).

The higher activity of the villages in the elections, especially the ones with small population, does not suggest a greater need to have a larger social participation in public affairs, but it is simply the product of rural poverty. In the countryside the fact is that people are more likely to go and vote because they don't want to be ashamed in front of their local mayors. The high voter turnout is neither the result of the campaign, nor the consequence of a larger electoral competition, but is a kind of alignment with the expectations of the local authorities. Especially where the ratio of the people living on social benefits reaches or exceeds 40% of the taxpayers, there is a large likelihood that these villages are ruled by powerful local oligarchies, as there is neither a substitute nor control of these local authorities. They have no alternatives, for instance, due to the lack of local intellectuals. More than 800 schools and several hundred kindergartens have been closed and at the same time thousands of teachers have lost contact with the local societies between 1970 and 2002 (Bódi–Fekete–Bódi 2022: p. 559). The administrative exclusion from the public affairs of general practitioners can also be partially considered such exclusion of intellectuals; GPs could help people see problems or even organise alternatives to the local authorities. There is no local social control either, since there is no one to keep it alive locally and the local governments have no superiors at middle level (i.e. at county or district level) either where appeals may be lodged. This way the local oligarchies could be limited or at least could be restrained by law.

Such an experienced deficit in democracy is a reminder of the dependent and subordinate relations of earlier ages; this *deficit in democracy* revives and sustains the antidemocratic traditions of historical times. Here, especially in the impoverished rural Hungary, history hasn't caught up yet.

Reasons for low voter turnout related to social factors

When undertaking to summarise the relationship between the local authorities and the first twelve years of the local elections, a hypothesis of the *deficit in democracy* of rural societies was proposed (Bódi 2005) using the electoral datasets by the types of municipalities and summarising the local *in situ* experiences. Since then, this hypothesis has been applied in determinant handbooks (Pálné 2008, Enyedi–Pálné 2008, Kovách 2012) as a reference. The hypothesis that “*the more the population of a*

municipality was socially defenseless, the more active it was in the local elections” could not be confirmed directly using quantitative methods although it was supported by data tables in each election year showing that electoral activities were higher in municipalities with lower population than in ones with larger population. However, lower population is not always associated with poverty and social defenselessness in all cases.

Table 2
Percent of voter turnout in local elections (1990–2019) (%)

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2019
Budapest	42.1	39.3	43.7	52.7	55.9	43.6	42.5	50.3
Cities of county rank	33.8	31.2	37.6	44.9	48.8	37.9	36.6	44.2
Cities*	44.0	39.6	41.9	47.4	49.8	44.1	41.5	44.1
Cities over 10,000	36.3	38.1	40.9	46.5	49.5	42.4	39.6	43.3
Cities under 10,000	50.3	46.4	46.0	50.3	50.6	48.3	45.0	45.6
Villages**	59.3	54.6	53.8	56.9	57.3	56.1	50.7	50.4
Villages over 10,000	36.8	38.9	40.1	43.2	52.3	42.9	38.5	48.5
Villages 3,000–9,999	49.8	47.1	46.3	49.9	50.6	48.8	43.6	43.6
Villages 1,000–2,999	58.6	56.1	54.7	57.1	56.7	56.1	49.8	49.5
Villages 500–999	67.4	64.2	63.0	65.0	64.4	62.7	55.4	54.9
Villages under 500	76.2	71.5	70.6	73.0	71.5	70.8	61.7	61.2
Hungary	45.9	43.4	45.7	51.1	53.1	47.1	43.4	47.1

Source: calculated by Mátyás Bódi from the data of the Hungarian National Election Office (* without Budapest and towns of county rank, ** all the villages by legal status, *** calculated according to the votes on body of representatives).

The social and territorial context of social beneficiary status was explored in connection with more recent research into the local organisation of social services and, through this analysis, such local societies could be identified where the exact number of the social beneficiaries, i.e. the people receiving allowances could be determined (Bódi 2009: p. 19). The masses receiving social allowances (which reached about two million people in the nineties) are located mainly in those parts of the country where participations at the local elections were high, but at the general elections such were rather moderate. However, the statistics on social allowances at municipality level have been available only for the last few years representing only recent years.

The other component of the allowance index is the number and spatial distribution of taxpayers for which data has been maintained since the early 1990s, therefore, all the election years could be tested. The number of taxpayers – to be more exact, the number of people submitting a tax return – has been compared to the working-age population

in municipalities and in counties. In Hungary there are higher proportions of taxpayers in the northern counties of Transdanubia, in Budapest and in large enclave-like towns where higher voter turnouts could be shown at general elections. The proportion of the taxpayers within the working-age population in 2006 was above 70% in the following counties: Vas, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Zala, Fejér, Veszprém, Komárom-Esztergom as well as in Budapest, while in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Hajdú-Bihar counties such was only 50–60% (Map figure 1 and Map figure 4).

If we accept that taxpaying attitude is a reflection of civic duty, then we can also posit the hypothesis of the relationship between the Milbrathian civic duty and the activity in elections as a factor positively influencing the voter turnout. This hypothesis can be tested in those geographical territories of the country where the new economic system – which emerged following the regime change – didn't keep employment low for too long. The rate of unemployment has remained low even in the critical 1990s in the counties of West and North Transdanubia, in Budapest and its agglomeration (Bódi–Obádovics 2000). In addition to the number of the taxpayers and their average income, income differences should also be considered. It was seen at the end of the 1990s that in regions and areas with lower average income, most notably the northern regions of the Great Plain and North Hungary, there was higher income polarisation than in the North West Transdanubian counties with high average income (Bódi–Mokos–Obádovics 1999). It can be presumed from the above facts that higher voter turnouts at the general elections can be found in municipalities where, in addition to high local average income, a high ratio of taxpayers exists, income distribution is less polarised and – most importantly – where the main source of income is wages from official employment (any legal income – salary).

Table 3
Municipalities where the income/person
did not reach 60% of the national average

Elections	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018*	2019*
Parliamentary	63.7	48.7	63.6	61.9	60.1	53.7	61.5	.
Local election	49.8	53.7	56.8	56.8	50.9	51.1	.	52.3
Hungary in total								
Parliamentary	68.9	56.3	70.5	67.8	64.4	61.1	69.4	.
Local election	43.4	45.7	51.1	53.1	47.1	43.4	.	47.1

Source: calculated by Mátyás Bódi from the data of the Hungarian National Election Office and of the TeIR database "National Spatial Development and Spatial Information System"

*The local and parliamentary elections were in two different years in 2018 and 2019 because the local self-government mandate changed from 4 years to 5 years, as long as, the duration of parliamentary mandate did not change, it remained 4 years – according to 2010, Act 50; 2013, Act 34; 2011, Act 189.

Tax statistics of the last five election years were compared with voter turnouts in both general and local elections of the same years highlighting separately those municipalities where the personal income tax did not reach 60% of the national average. In each election year the turnouts at general elections were lower by 4–8% than the national average in municipalities with low average income. As for local elections, the tendency was just the opposite as figures were 4–8% higher than the national average. The number of local governments examined each year in the study where the income per person was below 60% of the national average totalled around 2,000 with approximately 2.5 million inhabitants. Derived from the data, the willingness to participate at general elections was highly related to the ratio of taxpayers in a county. In case of local governments, high ratio of people with lower income is related to voter turnouts at the local elections.

Thus, the former statement should be modified: *the Hungarian voter – similarly to the voter of any other country – is a rational social actor*. As it has been shown, a higher activity in paying tax at the state level goes together with a higher level of participation in the general elections, while a higher social defenselessness results in a higher level of voter activity in the local elections. Surely, in the first case the rational attitude towards higher level political involvement is a feature of the citizens of the modern states, however, in the second case – with respect to local level political involvement – a pre-modern social phenomenon can be seen. It is carried over from the past and is regenerated by a false system of local governance and by a rural existence that directs development down the wrong path, where there is no end of history.

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www.valasztas.hu

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Appendix

Table 4
Parliamentary Elections between 1990–2018 (score scale)

Municipality size/ legal status	0	1–3	4–6	7–8	0	1–3	4–6	7–8
Budapest (districts)	0	1	5	17	0	4.3	21.7	73.9
City of county rank	0	5	5	13	0	21.7	21.7	56.5
10,000–	32	27	26	34	26.9	22.7	21.8	28.6
3,000–10,000	169	75	35	44	52.3	23.2	10.8	13.6
1,000–3,000	434	247	97	98	49.5	28.2	11.1	11.2
500–1,000	209	228	126	104	31.3	34.2	18.9	15.6
500–	158	342	284	362	13.8	29.8	24.8	31.6
City	130	82	46	64	40.4	25.5	14.3	19.9
Village	872	837	522	578	31.0	29.8	18.6	20.6
Hungary	1002	925	578	672	31.5	29.1	18.2	21.2

Between 1990 and 2018, 8 parliamentary elections had been held in every four years. Municipalities with higher turnout rate than annual average were marked with +1, while the ones below average received 0 score. Thus, the highest rank, a single municipality can receive is 8, indicating the high voter turnout at each elections, while the lowest possible rank is 0, meaning that the city was always below annual turnout rate.

Source: calculated by Mátyás Bódi from the data of the Hungarian National Election Office and of the TeIR database “National Spatial Development and Spatial Information System”

Table 5
Municipal Elections between 1990–2019 (score scale)

Municipality size/ legal status	0	1–3	4–6	7–8	0	1–3	4–6	7–8
Budapest (districts)	6	8	4	5	26,1	34,8	17,4	21,7
City of County Rank	7	13	3	0	30,4	56,5	13	0
10,000–	32	57	24	6	26,9	47,9	20,2	5
3,000–10,000	26	101	124	72	8	31,3	38,4	22,3
1,000–3,000	5	81	362	428	0,6	9,2	41,3	48,9
500–1,000	2	23	220	422	0,3	3,4	33	63,3
–500	0	24	206	916	0	2,1	18	79,9
City	45	115	99	63	14	35,7	30,7	19,6
Village	20	171	837	1781	0,7	6,1	29,8	63,4
Hungary	78	307	943	1849	2,5	9,7	29,7	58,2

Between 1990 and 2019, 8 municipal elections had been held in every four years. Municipalities with higher turnout rate than annual average were marked with +1, while the ones below average received 0 score. Thus, the highest rank, a single municipality can receive is 8, indicating the high voter turnout at each elections, while the lowest possible rank is 0, meaning that the city was always below annual turnout rate.

Source: calculated by Mátyás Bódi from the data of the Hungarian National Election Office and of the TeIR database “National Spatial Development and Spatial Information System”

Table 6
Percent of recipients of social allowances compared
to the total number of taxpayers, 2009

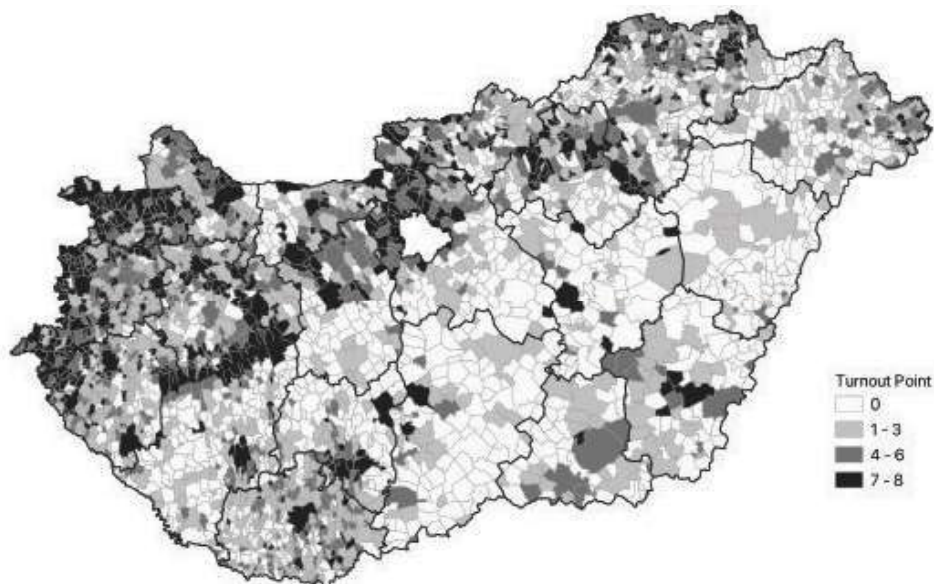
Municipality size and legal status	Number of taxpayers *	Number of aggregated social allowances	Distribution of number of taxpayers (%)*	Distribution of number of aggregated social allowances (%)	Percent of aggregated social allowances compared to the total number of taxpayers (%)
<i>Budapest</i>	no data	132,482	no data	10.1	no data
<i>Town of county rank</i>	941,441	246,272	25.8	18.7	26.2
10,001–	1,935,573	663,884	53.1	50.5	34.3
3,001–10,000	740,74	260,384	20.3	19.8	35.2
1,001–3,000	662,126	260,665	18.2	19.8	39.4
501–1,000	195,83	81,095	5.4	6.2	41.4
–500	109,563	48,107	3.0	3.7	43.9
<i>City</i>	1,378,679	426,166	37.8	32.4	30.9
<i>Village</i>	1,323,724	509,216	36.3	38.7	38.5
<i>Hungary</i>	3,643,844	1,314,135	100.0	100.0	36.1

Source: TeIR data “National Spatial Development and Spatial Information System”
calculated by authors

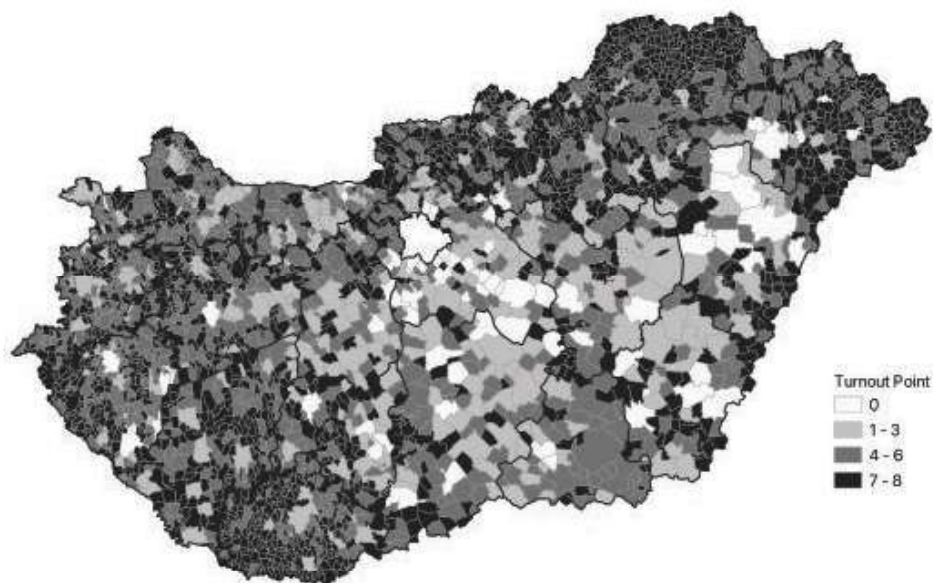
*Without Budapest

Method for the calculation of the Rate of Aggregated Social Allowance: Number of aggregated social allowances per total number of taxpayers = Number of Aggregated Social Allowance = disability pensioners (people on pension or pension-like benefits, disability pensioners under retirement-age and over retirement-age) + number of persons receiving an allowance for changed ability to work + number of persons who are recipients of regular social assistance + number of total unemployed per number of taxpayers multiplied by 100. It is an important criterion that a person who gets more social allowances at the same time, is taken into consideration only once.

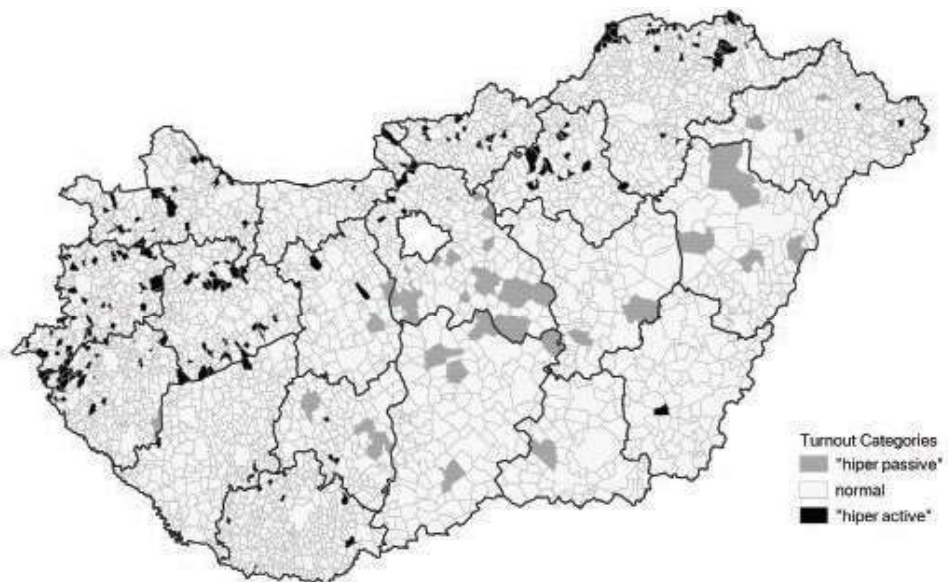
Map figure 1
Parliamentary Elections between 1990–2018



Map figure 2
Municipal Elections between 1990–2019



Map figure 3
Hyper active and hyper passive settlements, 1990–2019



Map figure 4
Percent of recipients of social allowances
compared to the total number of taxpayers, 2009

