

Patterns of electoral behavior in marginal rural communes: case study from eastern Slovakia

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Electoral behavior is one of the central issues in the context of geography of elections which is currently considered to be an established subdiscipline of geography. Unlike traditional literature in this study we look at electoral behavior through a different perspective. Our attention is drawn to find out what is position of marginal rural areas in terms of electoral behavior. This research is carried out through a case study of Eastern Slovakia, which in the existing territorial structure and spatial polarization of Slovakia, represents an area with significant occurrence of marginal communes. Thus, we aim to focus on selected aspects of marginality that might be perhaps transformed into a pattern of specific electoral behavior and analyze what is happening with the electoral preferences and participation if the area is considered to be marginal. Moreover, we attempt to answer the question whether and to what extent certain relations between the above mentioned aspects can be identified.

Key Words: *Presidential, Municipal and parliamentary elections, Electoral behavior, marginality, Rural commune.*

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Introduction

Patterns of electoral behaviour represent an interesting topic emerging across several disciplines. It is mainly sociological and political research that approach this issue from different perspectives, whether in Slovak and Czech literature (Krivý 1999; Chytílek et al. 2009, Krivý and Bahna 2013, Smolík 2013, Nový 2013, Leška 2013, Kopeček and Hloušek 2010, Mareš 2003, 2011) or even abroad (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Siaroff 2000, Ignazi 2003, Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2007). In this

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respect, geography is rather neglected discipline although it offers several relevant contribution to the general discourses about elections and electoral behaviour and its spatial distribution. Nowadays, geography of elections seems to be an established subdiscipline of geography, which attracted quite a large number of researchers abroad. Among the most influential are Taylor and Johnston (1979) who tried to bring some of the social theory of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) into the geography. More detailed analysis of research combining elections and geography from the beginning of the 21st century can be found in the work of Warf and Leib (2011).

Issue of election gradually established its place in the Slovak literature as well. In 1990s, there were only a few authors focusing on more or less monotonous aspects such as introduction of a basic electoral behavior patterns and distribution of support for individual political parties, as for instance work of Mariot (1991, 1994), Blažek and Kostecký (1991). At the end of 1990s, some efforts appeared with an intention to provide more detailed analysis through evaluation of support for political parties representing different groups of communes (Krivý 1999, Mariot 1999). In the first decade of the 21st century, there have been several authors addressing the issue of electoral geography with more comprehensive and diverse focus (Szöllös 2000, 2006, Plešivčák 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014, Madlenák 2006, 2010, 2012, Mikuš 2013, 2014a, 2014b, Mikuš and Gurák 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

The vast majority of these studies, as they were analyzed precisely by Warf and Leib (2011), have yet addressed the issue of elections in three dimensions - in the context of spatial analytical tradition, political economy, and post-structural approach. Thus, this study emanates from the three above mentioned approaches with focus on their interconnection. Considering quantitative nature of our analysis, similarly to majority of geographic studies of this kind, this work would fit in the first approach. Reflection of political economy could be recognized in the connection of election with the process of identification of marginal regions based on economic indicators. Finally, in this study we also pay attention to these specific areas allocated through the set of selected indicators, thus an influence of post-structural approach can be seen here as well.

So far, research on marginality emphasised mostly theoretical conceptualization of approaches relevant to a socio-spatial polarization (Dickie-Clark 1966, Crewe 1991, Gurung and Kollmair 2005, Jeábek 2006, Havlíček et. al 2005) or precise identification of marginal regions (Marada 2001, Pileček 2005, Vaishar, Zapletalová 2005). Subsequent analyses of other characteristics, beyond those identifying marginal regions as such, occurred in a small number of works (i.e. Spišiak 2000, 2007). Similarly, even the electoral analysis of marginal regions has not yet been done in any study. In this respect, Mikuš (2014a) points out, some electoral characteristics may be to a certain extent linked to specific socio-economic indicators (e.g. unemployment rate) that are frequently used in identification of marginal regions.

Based on above mentioned theoretical background, our analysis aims to verify the following hypotheses:

- 1) In marginal communes there is less frequent variation of local mayors, which is the result of unpopularity of the office (low communal budget, low payroll for the mayor, sometimes even not enough interest in the office to have elections). This is most frequent in less populated rural communes that have different results than larger cities, where the behavior and the opportunities of the mayors are different

(French 2005). Mikuš (2013) noted that it was typical between 2002 and 2010 when more than 40 % of mayors in Slovakia has been re-elected.

2) There is generally greater support of the left-wing political parties in all types of elections, since we assume that economic instability leads people to the election of those parties promising the most significant economic incentives and social security.

3) Marginal communes have low voter turnout as it may be in correlation with some of the selected socio-economic indicators used for the identification of marginal areas (e.g. unemployment rate) (Mikuš 2014a).

4) At the same time, we can observe an escalation of negative factors with regard to the certain category of marginality, where category C1 represents the worst status of the selected indicators. Assuming that selected indicators of marginality proportionally affect the election results and voter turnout.

In this study, we focus on understanding what position does the certain marginal rural commune takes in terms of its electoral behaviour. Since rural areas are often described as marginal in general and based on persistent east-west polarization of Slovakia, the most appropriate area for our analysis seems to be rural areas in eastern Slovakia. Many authors dealing with the issue of elections have come to acknowledge the significance of space and place in analyzing electoral preferences (Jones, Gould and Watt 1998, Franklin and Wlezien 2002, Johnston and Pattie, 2006, Charney and Malkinson 2015, etc.) and point out the influence of place on electoral behaviour. Franklin and Wlezien (2002) further stress that many influences on electoral (voting) behaviour are geographically based and exploration of where (and how) people live could become central to future electoral studies. Although, sociological studies attempt to find out whether political (electoral) behaviour of individuals is determined by the environment where these individuals dwell (Plešivčák, 2013), as Johnston and Patti (2004) described, bringing space in means bringing geography in. Although geography represents only a supporting field in the study of election and electoral behaviour, importance of geography, however, is indisputable whether in the process of voter decision making, or issues of objectification of conversion of votes to mandates depending on the size of constituencies (ibid.)

In the past decade the voter turnout in western democracies dropped and some scientists blame the economic inequality (Mueller and Stratmann 2003). In democracies of the Central and Eastern Europe it is essential to look at the problem of voter turnout or conceptualization of support in time delay as the new democracies only formed in the 1990's. As Minkenberg (2002) noted in reference to the study of radical right parties: "Studying the radical right in transformation countries in Central and Eastern Europe not only resembles shooting at a moving target but also shooting with clouded vision." This statement applies to studying politics in general in relation to voter support as the new cleavages only started to form. Marginal regions are the representation of the far end in the inequality. Therefore studying these regions might expose the most extreme cases of behavior reflected by the economic inequality.

After the fall of the communism the future of the left parties in the Easter and Central Europe was strongly affected by what the communism created in the sence of social structures, economic interventions or political structures. After the fall of the communism the economic reforms and restructuring of economy cost high

unemployment and thus insecurity within the general population. In Slovakia, the phase of economic reforms of the early 2000's created ground for populist left parties which promised security and social justice. The situation during the communism in small communes outside the "central settlements" (favored within the centrally managed settlement system) was bad as the communes outside of the list were not able to develop. Situation today is not that different from communist era as the decentralization of power to local administrative was never followed by financial decentralization, which limits the local administrative. In the political structure the change was minimal as well. The old non-elected mayors in many cases just continued in governing the communes manytimes unopposed in the elections (Mikuš 2013). Subsequent to the above mentioned considerations, we attempt to point out several aspects of marginality, their possible transformation into a specific electoral pattern as well as analyze what is happening to the electoral preferences and voter turnout when the municipality is in certain respects labeled as marginal. Thus, in this paper we try to answer the question of whether and to what extent it is possible to identify interconnections between these aspects.

Methodology

Majority of works developed by geographers analyzes the presidential elections and parliamentary elections (Warf, Leib 2011). Similarly, Madlenák (2006) points out that electoral studies deal with elections and electoral data predominantly in a larger scale. Unlike many other authors, he looks at parliamentary elections at the regional level, where he analyzes these elections with focus on electoral characteristics of the Orava region. Above mentioned authors focused on evaluation of nature of elections followed by analysis of the support for individual parties in the parliamentary elections. Although Madlenák (2010) deals with presidential elections as well, vast majority of geographical studies in Slovakia is in favor of parliamentary elections. However, works on elections at regional, europarlamentar as well as local level, are generally absent. Studies of communal elections within the geography can be found in Slovak literature, for instance in the work presented by Buček (1998) who dealt with the efficiency of allocation of constituencies within the Slovak towns and Mikuš (2013, 2014b) who evaluated the effectiveness of representatives elected in 2010 and change of elected mayors with focus on regional differentiation in the period 2002-2010. In general, local level of elections is in particular of interest to sociologists, as in the case of Slovak (Benč et al. 2013) and Czech authors (Čmejrek and Čopík 2009, Ryšavý 2006). Thus, the importance of communal elections is obvious, even more when we consider that the relations between citizens and elections are most profound at the local level.

We build our analysis on three different elections that are according to research of Sociological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Science (ISSP 2008 SK), considered to be the most influential in Slovakia and also the voter turnout reaches the highest percentage - around 50 % (communal, presindetial and parliamentary elections). At the same time, we focus our attention on the position of marginal rural communes in terms of electoral behavior.

From a methodological standpoint, two aspects of the research can be indetified. Firstly, identification of marginal rural communes and delimitation of the case study

area was undertaken, followed by the quantitative analysis of the electoral data for the selected area.

Identification of marginal areas

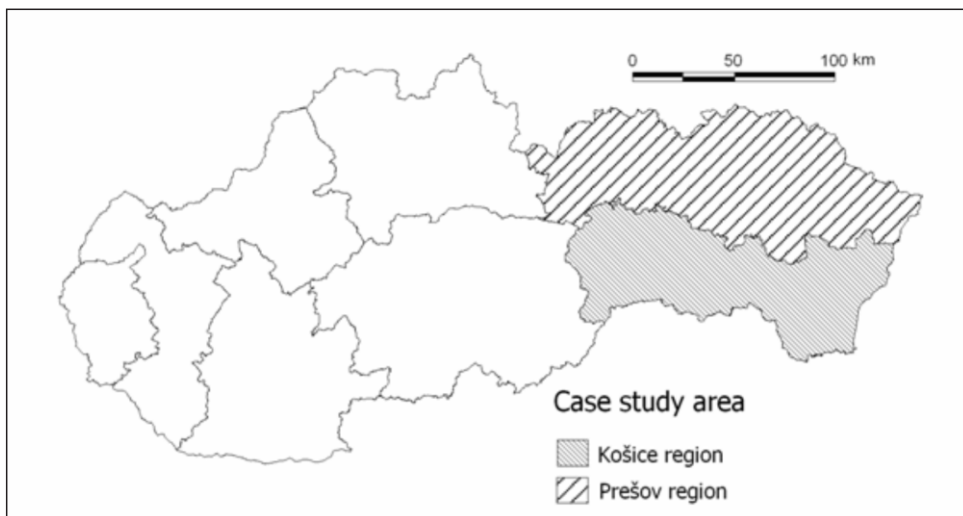
Identification of marginal regions based on different indicators attracted several authors both in domestic as well as foreign literature. As the most influential work within the issue of marginality may be considered those developed by Leimgruber (1994, 2004), Andreoli (1994), and Schmidt (1998), who point out different approaches to research on marginal regions and contribute to the discussion of the term marginality as such. Many authors further developed this issue in terms of theoretical (Clark 1966, Sommers – Mehretu 1988, Mehretu et al. 2000, Labrianidis (ed.), 2004, Andersson, 2007), methodological (Musil - Müller 2008, Cullen – Pretes 2000), as well as empirical research (Vaishar – Zapletalová 2005, Jenkins 2010, Seidl – Chromý 2010).

However, in this study we emanate especially from the Slovak and Czech literature where indicators of marginality were applied in geographically similar conditions. Falan et al. (1995) and Gajdoš (2005) focused on delimitation of marginal regions emphasising the social aspects of marginality, while research developed by Džupinová et al. (2008) and Halás (2008) analyzed spatial aspects of marginality and peripherality within the Slovak rural context. In latter contributions, Poláčková (2010a, 2010b) and Šebová (2013) point out the gradual from the examination of purely economic factors and processes rather to the socio-economic aspects of marginality. Number of indicators also varies from for example 6 indicators used in Marada (2001) and Jeábek et al. (2004), 13 indicators applied in Pileček (2005), to a more extensive set of indicators applied by Musil and Müller (2008).

With growing number of these studies, different approaches to identification of marginal areas were developed across the scientific disciplines, with regards to variety of indicators of marginality and hierarchical levels in which the marginal regions are identified. Máliková (2013) and Máliková, Spišiak (2013) add that for the delimitation of the marginal areas it is the socio-economic indicators that appear most frequently. Based on the above mentioned assumptions, these indicators are *unemployment rate, index of education, net migration, level of business activity, economically active population, and economic burden*¹. Among these 6 indicators in our analysis we included also ageing index and indicator of autochthonous population, both appearing less often in general discourses of marginality, however with focus on rural areas are likely to be important. At the same time it is important to emphasise that our delimitation of marginal rural areas represents only selected partial aspects of otherwise more complex phenomenon of marginality. Thus, it should not be considered as an ultimate and complex delimitation of marginal areas, rather as its approximation as an area with a significant representation of selected socio-economic indicators of marginality.

Case study – delimitation of area

Transformation of the territorial structure of Slovakia resulted in a persistent east-west polarization which nowadays seems to be more than obvious. Even more so



Map 1. Geographical location of case study area within Slovakia

with detailed focus on the rural areas, which even without exact statistical definition, may be considered as marginal. General view of Eastern Slovakia as “underdeveloped” part of the country, its fragmented settlement structure, diverse ethnic structure, and proximity of the EU's external border, all of this foreshadows the presence of martinal areas. Based on these assumptions, Prešov and Košice region appears to be the most appropriate are for research of this kind (Map 1).

Taking into account data accessibility at the local level, selected socio-economic indicators were analyzed with regard to the last census in 2011. Modest statistical analysis was applied on our dataset, using the quartile distribution of units with regard to the “bound by the order of the elements” approach. Furthermore, we worked with the third and mainly the fourth quartile, representing the worst position in terms of a particular indicator, thus pointing to the certain aspect of marginality. Data were subjected to standardization in order to ensure data compatibility and all rural communes were categorized into 6 categories, depending on the position of selected indicators in the quartile distribution (Table 1). Final results were processed cartographically which allows us to examine some spatial relations as well.

Analysis of the electoral data

In our analysis we focused on political affiliation and voter turnout in the parliamentary elections (2010, 2012), presidential elections (2009, 2014) and at the local level – communal elections (2006, 2010, 2014), where the change in the elected mayors and their political affiliation was monitored. Selected timeframe and the number of elections included in our analysis emanates from our effort to capture period before and after the census which provided us with the elementar statistical socio-economic data further processed in our analysis. All data on elections were obtained from the Statistical Office of the Slovak republic, whether through online database or individual inquiring.

Table 1. Scheme for categorization of the selected indicators of marginality

Commune	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	Category of marginality (categorization condition)
A	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	C ₁ (only 4, 3 while number of 4>3)
B	3	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	C ₂ (4, 3 + max one other quartile, while number of 4>50%)
C	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	C ₃ (number of 4>3)
D	3	3	1	4	4	4	4	3	C ₄ (4,3 + max one other quartile, while number of 4>3)
E	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	C ₅ (only 4, 3 while number of 4=3)
F	4	4	4	3	3	2	4	1	C ₆ (number of 4=50%)

Results

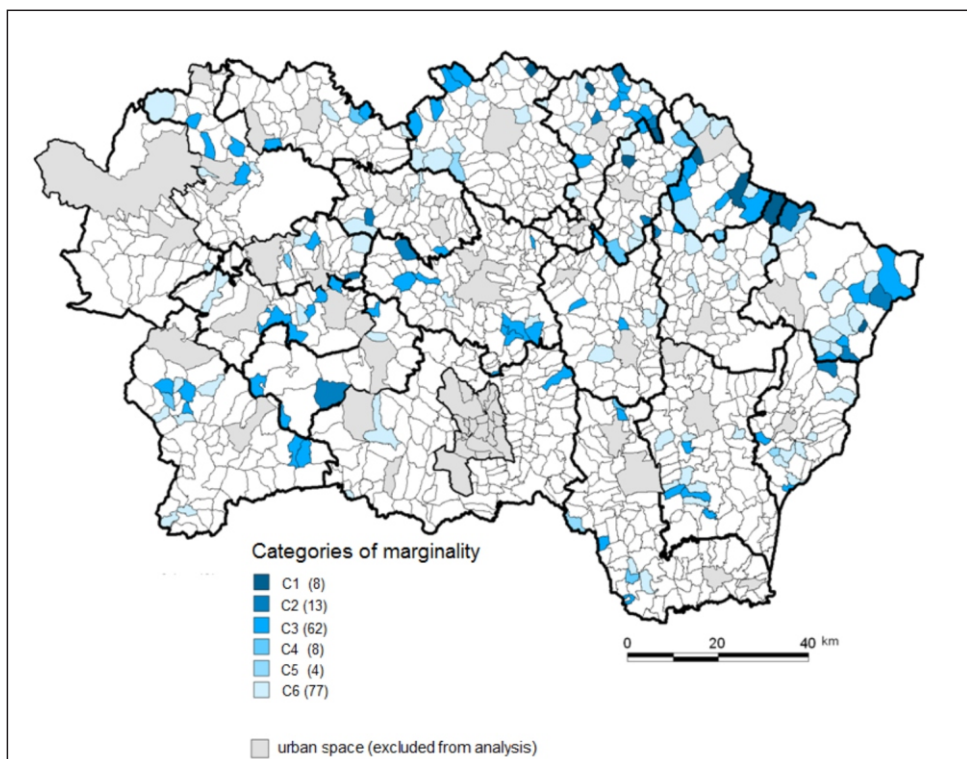
Altogether, 1065 communes were analyzed in our case study area, whereas 172 (16 %) reached negative values of selected socio-economic indicators and may, in this respect, be regarded as marginal. It is interesting that only ¼ of these units represented so called small communes with less than 1000 inhabitants, although it is generally believed that small communes have tendency to be less viable, with inadequate infrastructure and ultimately with worse socio-economic status.

In terms of spatial distribution of the analyzed communes within each category, there was no clear pattern but rather scattered arrangement in the case study area (Map 2). More intense occurrence of marginal communes can be seen perhaps only in the northeastern part of Prešov region. Considering the rural-urban context, these areas are not generally in the vicinity of the largest cities and regional centres (Košice, Prešov, Poprad).

*Communal elections*²

The character of the changes between the electoral years 2006-2010 and 2010-2014 is relatively similar. No changes at the position of mayor occurred in 62 % of all communes in 2010 and 67 % of all the communes in 2014. In 70 to 75 % of these communes even political affiliation remained the same. From 73 to 85 % of these communes represent less populated (population under 500). The change of mayors occurred in 37 % of all the communes in 2010 and 32 % of all the communes in 2014. Approximately 1% of mayors were not elected in both 2010 and 2014 (Table 2 and 3). In 49 communes there was no change at the position of mayor throughout the years, which represents approx. 28 % of all the marginal communes. None of the identified categories measured change of the mayors beyond 50%.

In elections of 2010 categories C1 and C4 of marginal communes reached above average change of mayors with change of political affiliation as well and categories



Map 2. Geographical distribution of individual categories of marginal rural communes

C2 and C6 reached above average without change of mayors and without change of political affiliation of the communes. In the categories C1, C3 and C5 almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the mayors has been re-elected but changed political affiliation. The change of the mayors without the change of the political affiliation was evenly distributed among the categories except from C5 (Table 2). In elections of 2014, categories C2 and C4 reached above average change of mayors with change of political affiliation as well and categories C1 and C5 reached above average without change of mayors and without change of political affiliation. In the categories C1 and C4 also $\frac{1}{4}$ of the mayors has been re-elected but changed political affiliation. In this year, two categories were specific - C3, which copies the trend of all marginal communes, and C5 where there were no new mayors elected (Table 3).

Because of the heterogeneity of categories we could not identify stronger relations between them. In 2014 more mayors stayed in their positions in comparison to 2010, but we can not consider it as a trend. On the other hand, we can conclude that most of the categories did not change majority of mayors, apart from C1, C4 and C5 categories in 2010 where 50 % of the mayors were changed.

The profiling of the marginal communes is different from the national profile when it comes to the affiliation to political parties³. Political party SMER-SD gained outside of coalitions 14,43 % of all the mayors in Slovakia and 29,07 % in marginal communes in elections of 2006. Similar trend can be identified in elections of 2010 (with 20,6 % on national level and 33,14 % in marginal communes) and in 2014 (with 29,11 % at national level and 44,18 % in marginal communes) (SOSR1,2 and 3). The second most represented group of mayors are mayors without any political

Table 2. Relative changes of mayors between the elections 2006-2010

Category of marginality	Change of the mayor without change of political affiliation	Change of the mayor with change of political affiliation	The same mayor without change of political affiliation	The same mayor with change of political affiliation	Not elected
C₁	12,50	37,50	25,00	25,00	0
C₂	7,69	15,38	53,85	15,38	7,69
C₃	11,29	27,42	37,10	22,58	1,61
C₄	12,50	37,50	37,50	12,55	0
C₅	0	50,00	25,00	25,00	0
C₆	10,39	23,38	54,55	11,69	0
Sum	10,47	26,16	45,35	16,86	1,16

Table 3. Relative changes of mayors between the elections 2010-2014

Category of marginality	Change of the mayor without change of political affiliation	Change of the mayor with change of political affiliation	The same mayor without change of political affiliation	The same mayor with change of political affiliation	Not elected
C₁	12,50	0	62,50	25,00	0
C₂	0	30,77	46,15	15,38	7,69
C₃	8,06	28,81	45,16	19,35	1,61
C₄	0	37,50	37,50	25,00	0
C₅	0	0	100,00	0	0
C₆	7,79	15,97	48,05	18,18	0
Sum	6,98	25,00	48,26	18,60	1,16

affiliation rising each election from 13,37 % (2006) to the level of 17,44 % (2014). All of these numbers are less than a half of the national representation of mayors without political affiliation (SOSR1, 2 and 3). Political parties KDH and SDKÚ-DS had proportion of mayors that exceeded national level, varying from 11 to 16 % of all mayors. The number of mayors of these two parties is decreasing, on the other hand, the number of independent mayors as well as mayors with the support of SMER-SD is increasing.

Parliamentary election⁴

We analyzed electoral support for the political parties that reached 5 % quorum to enter parliament in the elections of 2010 and 2012. The marginal communes were compared with the national results and results in the urban and rural areas.

In the elections of 2010 SMER-SD and KDH achieved results above national average, parties MOST-HÍD and SNS were a bit lower than national average and SDKÚ-DS and SaS fell far below the national average. When we compare these results in rural-urban context, for SDKÚ-DS and SaS and partially for MOST-HÍD and SNS the results in marginal communes were lower than their support in both cities and rural communes. In the case of SMER-SD and KDH the results in the marginal communes exceeded the results in the rural communes specifically. However, both of these parties achieved generally high support in the rural

communes in Slovakia. The electoral gain in all of the categories for SaS or SNS was generally the same with only small differences between the categories of the marginal communes. SDKU-DS gained more support in C2 and C4 and below the general support in marginal regions in C3 and C5. MOST-HÍD reached average support only in C3 and C6, the rest of the categories are below the average support in the marginal communes. KDH gained more significant support in C2, but in most of the categories the support was low. SMER-SD reached lower support only in C5. In C1 and C4 this party gained huge support reaching up to more than 60 %. When evaluating the preferences of the marginal regions in 2010 we can conclude that the support was predominantly conservative (KDH, SMER-SD) favouring left-wing parties (SMER-SD).

The character of the support was only intensified in the elections of 2012. Support for SMER-SD in the marginal regions became even more significant when compared to the national results, or even rural-urban context. For SDKÚ-DS, SaS and MOST-HÍD the support dropped rapidly due to their participation in the government that fell after a year and a half. For KDH, even though it took part in the same government, the support stayed approximately the same. Support of new political party OLaNO was similar to the rest of the right-wing parties apart from KDH. Support of MOST-HÍD on national level was strong in the rural communes with higher numbers of Hungarian minority. As the number of Hungarian marginal communes is limited to a few categories their support is generally low.

SMER-SD achieved support over 50 % in all of the categories in the elections of 2012 with the same character of support for C1 and C5 that now reached almost 70 % of support. KDH reached almost the same support with very little changes. The highest support was recorded again in the category C2. The support for SDKÚ-DS, SaS and MOST-HÍD in all of the categories fell under the value of the support from elections of 2010 with one exception in C1 for SaS. The support for OLaNO spread evenly among the marginal communes with a bit lower support in C1. MOST-HÍD, as it was mentioned before, has generally higher support in the south parts of Slovakia with higher number of Hungarian minority. It is therefore necessary to mention that categories C1 and C2, where party received low support in both elections, represent mostly areas with no Hungarian minority.

Taking into account second hypothesis, it is interesting that both SaS and SDKÚ-DS gained higher support than their average in the marginal communes in the category C1. On the other hand, extremely high support for SMER-SD in all categories. This verifies our hypothesis. During both elections marginal regions kept their character of conservative regions supporting left-wing parties.

*Presidential elections*⁵

In this analysis we considered only candidates who reached at least 5 % support at national level. We analyzed presidential elections in 2009 and 2014. There were seven candidates in the first round of elections in 2009. Four of the candidates received at least 5 % support (Gašparovič, Radičová, Mikloško and Martináková)⁶. The support for Martináková and Mikloško in the marginal communes was similar to the support at the national level, with small exceptions in rural-urban context.

Unlike Radičová's support, support for Gašparovič in marginal communes was higher than at the national level, in cities or in rural communes. Gašparovič's

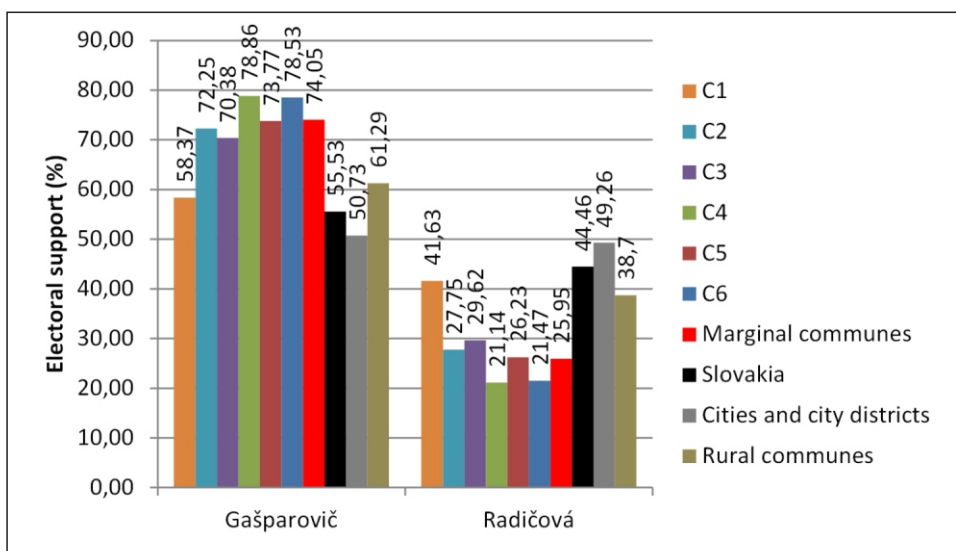


Figure 1. Second round of presidential elections in 2009

support increased with the decrease of the category of marginality (with exception in C4) which contrasted with the situation of Radičová. However, Radičová gained higher support in C1 by 15 % in comparison with the rest of the marginal communes and achieved almost identical support in comparison with the national level. The second round of presidential elections between Gašparovič and Radičová was without major changes in the proportion of all categories for both candidates. Gašparovič was able to mobilize voters in marginal communes as the increase of his support in the second round was greater by 16,45 %. This increase was almost twice the change of his support at the national level, and in rural-urban context as well. In comparison with the first round, Gašparovič gained more than 10 % in all of the categories (reaching up to 20,47 % for C5). Radičová was able to gain only 2,76 % of voter support in comparison with the first round, which was less than a half of what she was able to get at the national level, in the cities or in the rural communes (Figure 1).

In the first round of presidential elections in 2014, there were 14 candidates. Six of them received at least 5 % support (Bárdoš, Kražko, Hrušovský, Kiska, Procházka and Fico)⁷. In case of Kiska, Procházka and Kražko, their electoral support in the marginal communes was below their support at the national level, in the cities and in the rural communes. In case of Kražko, who received only 4,47 % in marginal regions, the difference was almost three times lower in comparison with the national level, two times lower in comparison with his support in the cities and three and a half times in comparison with his support in rural communes. Hrušovský with support of 6,06 % in marginal communes gained almost twice as much at the national level. Support for Bárdoš reached 4,3 % and was similar to the results on the national level, but reaching almost one and a half times the support in the cities and only half of what he received in the rural communes in general. Fico gained more than 17 % of support in marginal communes in comparison with the national level and more than 12 % of support if we compare the results with the rural communes, where he generally gained the highest support.

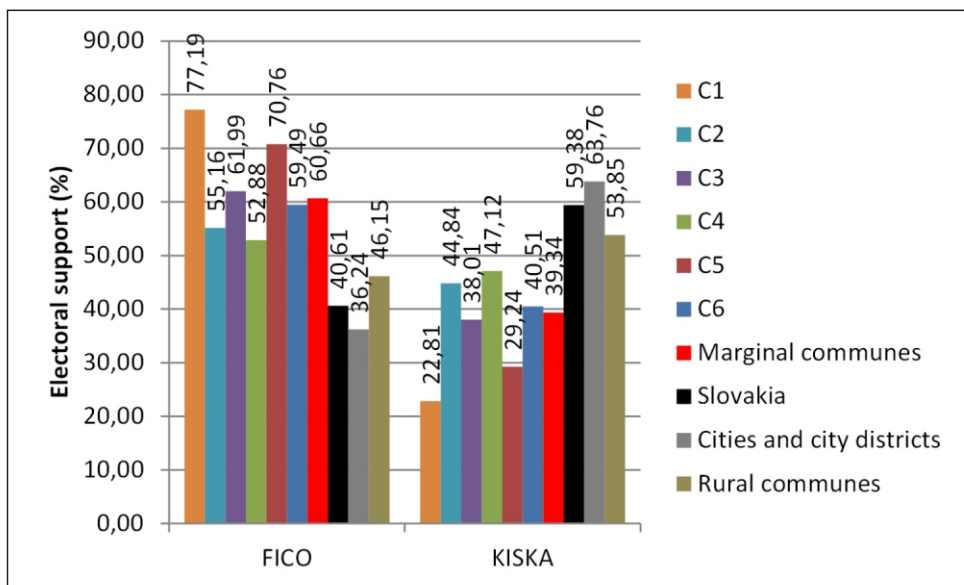


Figure 2. Second round of presidential elections in 2014

The differences between the categories for Hrušovský and Kražko are relatively small with an exception of C1. The support of Bárdoš is to a certain extent bounded to the Hungarian minority and is similar to support of MOST-HÍD in parliamentary elections. The proportion of categories for Kiska and Procházka were the same with exception of C4. The lowest support for all the candidates apart from Fico was achieved in C1. Fico gained more than 50 % in C1 and C5 and more than 40 % support in the rest of the categories besides C4. Kiska and Fico moved to the second round of the elections. Kiska was able to mobilize more voters in marginal communes in the second round (by 21,96 %) than Fico (by 15,45 %) In comparison with the national results, marginal regions were still more favorable to Fico as he gained more than at the national level, in the cities and especially more than in rural communes. Kiska was able to gain more on national level, in the rural communes and specifically in the cities. The most significant changes between the categories were in C4 for Kiska and C1 for Fico (Figure 2).

If we compare the elections in 2009 and 2014, there are two interesting findings. First of all, the results of the first round did not significantly herald the results in marginal communes in the second round. None of the right-wing or independent candidates received the expected aggregate support from the voters of the right-wing or independent candidates of the first round in any of the marginal communes in the second round. Secondly, there was surprising difference between the support in the second rounds of the elections for the left-wing candidates Gašparovič (supported by SMER-SD) and Fico (founding member, chairman and prime minister for SMER-SD). Gašparovič received more than 13,39 % of voter support in all marginal communes as well as in all of the categories C6 (by 19,04 %), C5 (by 3,01 %), C4 (by 25,98 %), C3 (by 8,38 %) and C2 (by 17,08 %) except from C1 where Fico gained more by 18,81 %. Category C1 is from this perspective very significant when compared with the general support for SMER-SD in the parliamentary elections.

Voter Turnout

In general, rural communes have always higher voter turnout than the cities, specifically in communal elections. The turnout in the marginal communes was higher than general turnout in the rural communes (Figure 3). The differences between the categories were insignificant.

In both, parliamentary and both rounds of presidential elections, the voter turnout in marginal regions was below the national average and general rural-urban average. The voter turnout in the marginal communes in both parliament elections of 2010 and 2012 was lower on average of 5 % in comparison with the national level and 6-7 % lower when compared with rural communes. Higher voter turnout in parliamentary elections was measured only in C1 and C5 which corresponds with the high support for SMER-SD and C4 which corresponds with high support for parties that did not reach 5 % quorum (in 2010: LS-HZDS ,SMK-MKP; in 2012: SMK-MKP) (Figure 4).

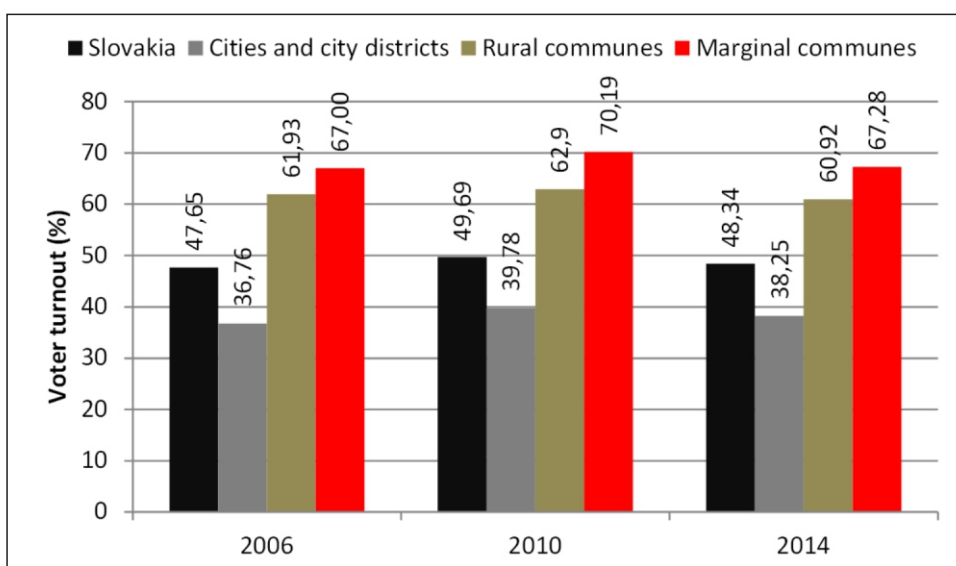


Figure 3. Voter turnout in communal elections in 2006, 2010, 2014

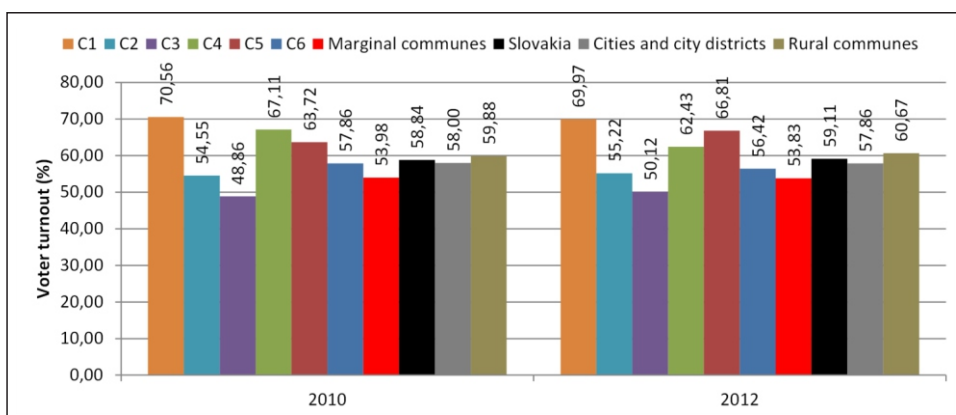


Figure 4. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2012

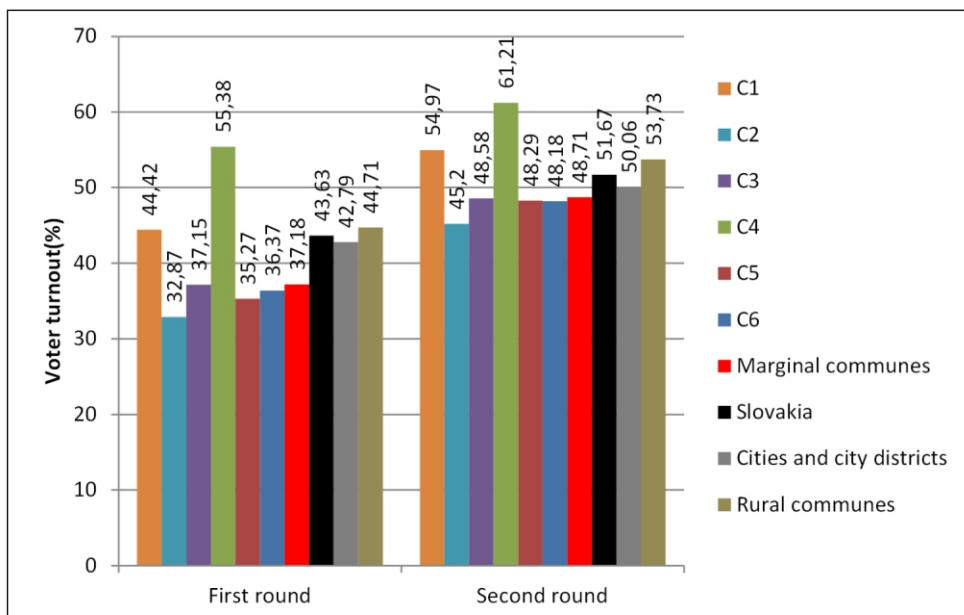


Figure 5. Voter turnout in first and second round of presidential elections in 2009

Voter turnout in the marginal communes in the first round of presidential elections in 2009 was lower by 6 % in comparison with national level and more than 7 % in comparison with turnout in the rural communes. Only category C4 reached more than 50 % turnout with high support for Gašparovič. More than 40 % turnout was reached in C1 where Radičová gained the highest support from all of the categories (Figure 5). The difference of the level of turnout in the second round of the elections in marginal regions shrunk to only 3 % in comparison with the national level. More than 50 % turnout was reached again only in C1 (54,97 %) and C4 (61,21 %) in which both of the candidates gained the highest support from all of the categories. Voter turnout in the first round of presidential elections in 2014 was lower in marginal communes by 10 % in comparison with national level and 9 % in comparison with rural communes, which is even larger difference than in elections 2010. The differences between the categories varied from 28,56 % in C3 to 56,74 % in C5. This factor can be explained by the general dissatisfaction with the right-wing political parties after the fall of the government.

Especially category C3 was favorable to support most of the right-wing parties. More than 50 % turnout was reached again only in C1 and C4, which dominantly supported Fico. The second round can be characterized as mobilization round for the marginal communes as the difference between rural communes was lowered to only 1 %. The proportion between the categories was preserved with only two categories C1 and C4 with higher turnout than 50 % (Figure 6). The mobilization effect of the second round of presidential elections was more significant in the elections of 2009. Mobilization was generally higher than at the national level, except from C4. In the elections of 2014 only half of the categories (C1, C3 and C6) reached higher turnout.

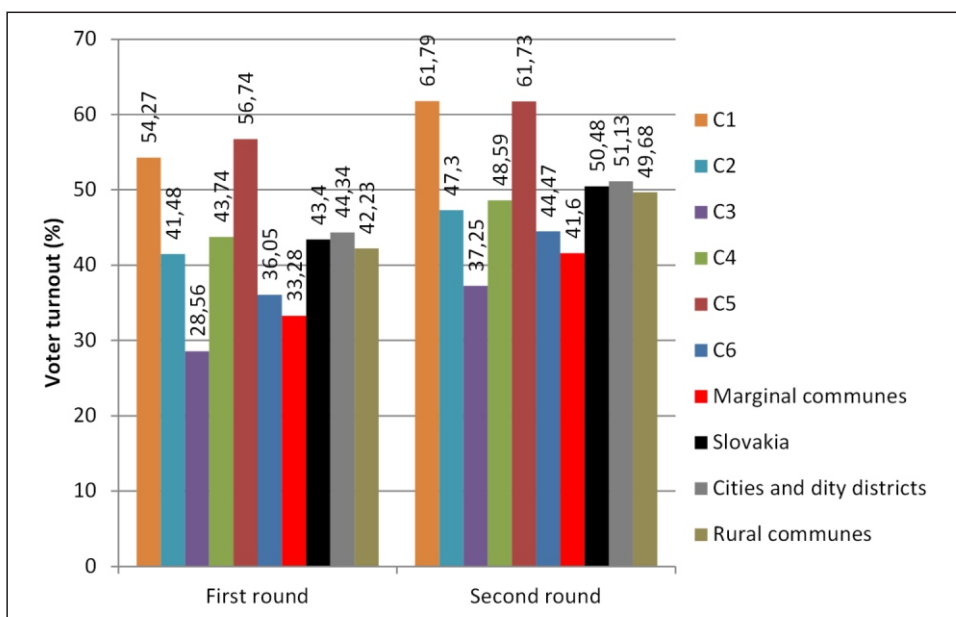


Figure 6. Voter turnout in the first and second round of presidential elections in 2014

Conclusion and Discussion

In our analysis we looked at the specific position of marginal rural communes in hierarchically different levels of the elections with an attempt to identify specific patterns of their electoral behavior. Based on theoretical and empirical research, we put four hypotheses through verification. Finally, two of our hypothesis have proven valid, one partially valid and one more or less invalid. Following section discusses the relevant outcomes. First hypothesis was that mayors do not change extensively in the marginal communes and that it might be related to the number of inhabitants in the communes. This hypothesis was validated as up to 28 % of all 172 communes had the same mayor and in between the years 2006-2010 and 2010-2014 approximately 60 to 65 % of all the mayors remained the same. There are only categories C1, C4 and C5 in 2010 that changed exactly 50 % of its mayors. Moreover, a strong connection between low population in communes and the number of unchanged mayors can be recognized as well.

The second hypothesis was that there is higher support for left-wing parties in the marginal communes. This hypothesis has proven valid. Marginal communes had high support both for main left party SMER-SD and all of its candidates in presidential elections in 2009 and 2014 or for the mayors in 2006, 2010 and 2014. In all of the cases the support was higher than the national level as well as in rural communes of Slovakia (where left-wing SMER-SD gained generally higher support). For parliamentary elections all of the categories reached above national level, with C1 and C5 being the most supportive categories. The same can be observed in the presidential elections with certain differences between Gašparovič and Fico. In the elections of mayors, SMER-SD supported outside of political coalitions more than 44 % of the winning mayors in marginal communes, having increased the number by 15 % between the years 2006 and 2014.

Moreover, marginal communes can be also characterized by their rather conservative choice, since the second most successful party KDH and its candidates (Hrušovský) received above average support. Together with SMER-SD these parties represent conservative political spectrum. In general, rural areas are considered to prefer left-wing parties (Krivý, 2000) which is related to the fact, that economic voting is strongly rooted in the support of the political parties (Bellucci 1984). At the same time Johannsen (2000) emphasizes, that although urban interest in political issues exceeds rural areas, it is really rural areas where higher voter turnout is usually recorded, which emanates from mainly conservative and traditional thinking. Moreover, building on several previous studies, in almost all post-socialist Europe, including Slovakia, rural residents sympathized more with the authoritarian style of management of public affairs, which means that urban areas tends to support democratic values more promptly than their rural counterparts (Plešivčák, 2014). However, as far as marginal rural communes are concerned, this does not apply exclusively, which bring us to the next hypothesis.

Third hypothesis was that the voter turnout in marginal communes will be generally low. This hypothesis is valid for marginal communes as a whole, in parliamentary and presidential elections. This does not fully apply to all categories specifically for C1 and C5 for presidential elections and C1, C4 and C5 for parliamentary elections. In categories C1 and C5 it is strongly connected to the high support for SMER-SD and its mobilization effect and in C4 it is linked with higher general support for right-wing parties and for parties that did not reached the 5 % threshold at the national level. Results from parliamentary and presidential elections oppose conventional statements, that strong electoral participation is a structural trait of rural local democracy (Nevers, 2008) and proves hypothesis of Schattschneider (1960) or concept of Withdrawal (Rosenstone 1982) tested by Solt (2010) in which the poorer stay away from the elections because of the increase in inequality in the society. However, this hypothesis proved invalid, and the statement of Nevers (2008) relevant, when it comes to the communal elections. Voter turnout at this type of election was higher than the turnout at the national level as well as in rural communes in general. Voter turnout in marginal rural communes was always higher in comparison with the turnout in the cities and city districts.

Marginal regions exceeded this trend only in the case of communal elections. In the case of presidential and parliamentary elections marginal regions fell far beyond the usual trends. The forth hypothesis expected graduability of the first, second and third hypothesis with the changing categories of marginality. Category C1 was supposed to be the category with the highest support for left-wing parties, with the lowest turnout and with the highest number of changes in communal elections and in category C6 vice versa. This characteristic did appear only in the presidential elections of 2009, nonetheless the graduability showed in the opposite tendency where the support of Gašparovič decreased with the increase of the category of marginality and it was the other way around for Radičová. This hypothesis was one of the most questionable, mainly after the creation of marginal regions and specifically categories of marginal regions. One of the biggest problems was that in the electoral geography of Slovakia, Hungarian minority votes predominantly ethnically not according to the economic situation (Madlenák 2012). Specifically categories C4 and C6 have higher number of Hungarian minority electorate. Therefore we consider this hypothesis as invalid.

Even though the graduability was not validated, we came to conclusion that category C1 is specific among the structure of the marginal communes. It has the highest voter turnout in contrary to the trend of the rest of the marginal communes. The communes in this category have been strong supporters of the SMER-SD and its chairman Fico, but not as strong in supporting Gašparovič, who was not in the party, but was only supported by it. The change of the mayors did not reach 50 % and more than 50 % of the mayors in each of the elections were elected with the support of SMER-SD

In general, we came to conclusion that the marginal communes with bad socio-economic conditions vote conservatively, favouring left-wing parties. Since rural communes represents predominantly smaller settlement units, this corresponds with correlation between the size of the settlement and occurrence of liberal values - the larger is the area, the greater occurrence of liberal values is expected (Krivý, 2000).

With some exceptions the voter turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections were low and on the other hand, very high when it comes to communal election, representing the closest and the most direct part of the state administration. It is the communal level and the mayor's office that can influence directly the development of the commune. In all of the categories the electoral turnout was high without significant changes. Stability is present in most of these communes, therefore the problem of these communes' shifts from political stability at the local level towards political stability at the national level and most importantly to the problem of financing the development of the communes itself. From the existing economic instability, specifically in the eastern Slovakia, it is understandable why most of the voters vote for SMER-SD. SMER-SD uses practices typical for populist left-wing parties (e.g. promises of better future and social security). Although our hypotheses were validated only partially, the results of this research points out the necessity of the study of marginal communes. Nonetheless, our research explained some characteristics of marginal communes in Slovakia and outlined several aspects of their electoral behaviour.

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Notes

1. Population density is also often included in the studies of marginality. However, it was not considered in our study, simply because we applied our analysis in the rural context, considering only rural areas that are generally characterized by lower population density.
2. System of mayor elections: Majority electoral system of the first past the post. Elections are repeat if the candidates have equal number of votes. Communes become one-mandate electoral districts. Total number of 2926 mayors in communes, cities and city districts of

Košice and Bratislava were voted in elections of 2014. In Slovakia the system of public administration on communal level uses the Baden-Württemberg model with the directly elected strong mayor (Jüptner 2012).

3. Main political parties in Slovakia are: SMER-SD (SMER- sociálna demokracia / The Direction – social democracy). From the elections of 2006 it is the strongest political party of the left. It is also one of the main conservative political parties. From the 2012 elections, governs without coalition, which is the first one-party government after the fall of communism. Southwest and northeast regions of Slovakia are the regions of the strongest support. KDH (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie / The Christian Democratic Movement). It is conservative right wing party that gains support in the predominantly strongly religious areas (Madlenák 2012, Mikuš 2014a). SDKÚ-DS (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana / The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party) was the main representative of the right-wing political spectrum.. Its regional support is predominantly in the cities. MOST-HÍD (from the Slovak and Hungarian words for "bridge") is right wing political party that separated from Hungarian ethnic party SMK- MKP (Strana maďarskej komunity - Magyar Közösség Pártja / The Party of the Hungarian Community) before 2010 parliamentary elections. Even though the party proclaims to be non-ethnic, its regional support is strongly connected to the regions of Hungarian minority (Madlenák 2012, Mikuš 2014a). SaS (Sloboda a Solidarita / Freedom and Solidarity) is the only liberal right wing party that gains support mainly in the cities. SNS (Slovenská národná strana / Slovak National Party) is nationalistic, conservative right wing party. Its regional support is situated in the northwest Slovakia (Madlenák 2012, Mikuš 2014a). OLaNO (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti / Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) is a conservative and centrist political party that was formed by non-politicians, activists before the 2012 elections. Its regional support shows that it has stronger support in the cities than in the rural communes, but the difference is not high (Mikuš 2014a); Other parties mentioned in this article: ĽS-HZDS (Ľudovej strany - Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko / The People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia), HZD (Hnutie za demokraciu / Movement for Democracy), ND (Nová demokracia / New Democracy), OKS (Občianska konzervatívna strana / Civic Conservative Party), KDS (Konzervatívny demokrati Slovenska / Conservative Democrats of Slovakia), Misia 21 (Mission 21) SF (Slobodné forum / Free Forum), SZ (Strana zelených / Green Party)

4. System of parliamentary elections: Proportional party list electoral system with preferential voting. Slovakia forms one 150-mandate electoral district. Hagenbach-Bischoff system is used for the allocation of the seats. The seats are allocated to the parties that reached 5 %, 7 % of 10 % threshold.

5. System of presidential election in Slovakia: Two round system with closed second round where the two most successful candidates from the first round compete, if none of the candidates reached more than 50 % of the general vote. Slovakia forms one electoral district. Till 1999 president was elected by parliament.

6. Nominations of candidates by parties : Gašparovič (SMER-SD, SNS, HZD a ND), Radičová (SDKÚ-DS, KDH, SMK-MKP, OKS and SaS), Mikloško (KDS, Misia 21), Martináková (SF).

7. Nominations of candidates by parties : Bárdoš (SMK-MKP); Hrušovský (KDH, SDKÚ-DS, MOST-HÍD, SZ); Fico (SMER-SD); Kiska, Procházka and Knažko (independent).

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