

ZOLTÁN ALPÁR SZÁSZ

The Electoral Success of Dominant Parties Representing the Hungarian Minority in Romania and Slovakia

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to offer an institutional account of the electoral success of ethno-regionalist parties. Hence, it presents the preliminary results of a comprehensive project dealing with factors favoring the formation of ethno-regionalist parties and the determinants explaining their electoral, office-holding and policy success.¹ Ethnic politics acquired salience in the previous decade(s), both in Western and in Central Eastern Europe, hence, making it a promising topic for research. Furthermore, from the party analyst's perspective, in spite of quite an impressive geographical spread and enduring historical presence in various party systems²,

¹ This approach, the three concepts capturing the ethno-regionalist parties' impact and a taxonomy of determinants, was first put forward in Lieven De Winter: Conclusion: a comparative analysis of the electoral, office and policy success of ethnoregionalist parties. In Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.): *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. Rutledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science. London & New York: Rutledge, 1998. 204–247

² Regarding Western Europe, Derek Urwin identified 115 postwar (ethno-)regional(ist) parties in 17 countries, while a detailed compilation of political data lists 45 ethnic parties in 12 states. Even more impressive is the fact that Ferdinand Müller–Rommel counted 17 such parties in 5 countries, considering only those actors that obtained seats in national parliaments between 1980 and 1996. Finally, my own 'census' yielded a total of 94 ethno-regionalist parties in 10 Western European countries. See Derek Urwin: *Harbinger, Fossil or Fleabite? "Regionalism" and the West European Party Mosaic*. In Hans Daalder and Peter Mair (eds.): *Western European Party Systems: Continuity and Change*. London: Sage Publications, 1983. 228; Jan-Erik Lane, David McKay and Kenneth Newton: *Political Data Handbook*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 138–146; Ferdinand Müller–Rommel: *Ethnoregionalist parties in Western Europe: theoretical considerations and framework of analysis*. In Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), op. cit. 19. and

insufficient attention has been devoted – until recently – to ethnically based parties.

In this article, however, I will focus solely on the dominant parties claiming to represent the interests of Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia. This study is meant to be a plausibility probe³ regarding a possible hypothesis for further research. The preliminary findings could help refine or amend the initial hypotheses in order to conduct a well-grounded, full-fledged analysis of all post-Communist countries bordering Hungary and featuring Hungarian minorities (Croatia, Romania, Serbia– Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine). This case selection presents two advantages. On the one hand, the countries under scrutiny have been analyzed to a lesser extent, and on the other, the ethnic groups chosen allow a quasi-experimental research design entailing the control of certain variables that shape the cultural outlook of the groups in question.

In order to provide a (partial) institutional explanation concerning the electoral success of ethno-regionalist parties, I will examine how the institutions making up the *political participation dimension*⁴ of the political system affect the share of legislative power which minorities, or more precisely, dominant political parties claiming to represent them, can capture on the national level. The argument is structured into three parts. The first part is dedicated to theoretical and methodological issues. Its first section elaborates a definition of *ethno-regionalist parties* in order to delimit the universe of political actors, which must be considered in a larger context. Its second section identifies the *systemic variables* expected to influence the electoral fate of a party rep-

Szász Alpár Zoltán: Etnoregionalista pártok és választóik Nyugat-Európa hat országában. [Ethno-Regionalist Parties and Their Electorates in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Six Countries.] In Veres Valér – Gyarmati Zsolt (eds.): *RODOSZ–Tanulmányok III. Társadalom- és humán tudományok.* [RODOSZ–Studies III. Social Sciences and Humanities.] Kolozsvár: Kriterion, 2001. 138.

³ According to Harry Eckstein, modest comparative studies introducing more ambitious ones can be used as (empirical) plausibility probes meant to assess the potential validity of tentative theories or hypotheses. Cf. Harry Eckstein: Case Study and Theory in Political Science. In Fred Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.): *Handbook of Political Science. Volume 7. Strategies of Inquiry.* Reading, MASS: Addison–Wesley, 1975. 108, 110.

⁴ Frank S. Cohen, using only some of the variables that define the majoritarian or consensual nature of political systems, calls their *executive–parties* and *federal–unitary dimensions* suggestively *political participation* and *intergovernmental power relationship dimensions*, respectively. See Frank S. Cohen: Proportional versus Majoritarian Ethnic Conflict Management in Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 30, 1997. 609–610. and Arend Lijphart: *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty–Six Countries.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999. 3.

representing an ethnic/national minority. In the second part of the paper, the available empirical data are presented and analyzed, while the last part tries to formulate some conclusions banking on the findings of the previous one.

2. CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The notion of ethno-regionalist party

The classification of parties into *party families* takes into account three sets of characteristics: (i) the 'genetic' origin of parties, that is, the conditions under which they initially mobilized and the interests they claim to represent, (ii) their *links across national frontiers*, that is, their membership in party federations or institutionalized multinational political groups, and (iii) the *policies* they tend to pursue.⁵ For the theorist who coined the term, 'regional and ethnic parties' constitute one of the families he identified.⁶

Ethnic parties have been considered for a long time, at best, marginal aspects of political life and, thus, neglected as candidates for systematic research. Perhaps this explains the absence of a standard expression that refers to these parties, or put differently, the *embarras de richesse* in what concerns the technical terms used for labeling them. In what follows, I will briefly illustrate this lack of terminological consensus. Instead of using Beyme's expression, Gallagher, Laver and Mair speak of 'regionalist and nationalist parties', but consider them a residual group lending with their classification some credence to my previous claim.⁷ Ferdinand Müller-Rommel defines eight 'small party families' among which we find 'regionalists and nationalists' advocating the interests of various minority groups⁸, while Daniel-Louis Seiler writes about 'autonomist parties'.⁹ One may encounter the expressions 'eth-

⁵ Michael Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair: *Representative Government in Modern Europe*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995. 181. Alternatively, a fourth factor can be taken into account as well: the values underlying the policies advocated by various parties. Peter Mair and Cas Mudde: *The Party Family and Its Study. Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 1, 1998. 211–229. cited in Enyedi Zsolt and Körösnényi András: *Pártok és pártrendszerek*. [Parties and Party Systems] Budapest: Osiris, 2001. 75..

⁶ Klaus von Beyme: *Parteien in Westlichen Demokratien*. 2. überarb. Aufl. Serie Piper. Band 245. München: Piper Verlag, 1984. 160–174..

⁷ Michael Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, op. cit. 182.

⁸ Ferdinand Müller-Rommel: *Small Parties in Comparative Perspective: The State of the Art*. In Ferdinand Müller-Rommel and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.): *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*. SAGE Modern Politics Series, Volume 27. London: Sage Publications, 1991. 1–22.

⁹ Daniel-Louis Seiler: *Les partis autonomistes*. 2^e édition. Que sais-je? Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994.

nic party', 'ethnically based party'¹⁰ or 'ethnopolitical party',¹¹ as well. Most contributors to a relatively recent publication on the topic¹² prefer to use the generic term 'ethno-regionalist parties', which I readily borrow. The reasons for doing so are the following: first, this attribute of the notion 'party' covers two important aspects of contemporary politics on which the demands voiced by these parties rest, i.e., ethnicity and regionalism; and second, other adjectives (nationalist, autonomist etc.) reflect – most probably – only differences in degree with regard to the character of these demands.¹³

Nevertheless, both the multitude of terms and the need for an encompassing one testify to the confusing diversity of the (ethno-)regionalist group. For this reason, Derek Urwin wrote, more than two decades ago, that 'conceptual exactitude' should be sacrificed at the expense of an exhaustive, even eclectic, account. Hence, in line with what has been until recently the trend in party system literature, he mainly concerned himself with measuring and explaining regional patterns in electoral returns.¹⁴ From this perspective, it sufficed to delimit the universe of actors included in the analysis without devoting special attention to definitional matters. One should distinguish, however, between *regional parties*, i.e., parties exhibiting a regional concentration of electoral support without appealing to distinctive regional or ethnic identities, and genuinely *ethno-regionalist parties*, i.e., parties appealing to an ethno-regional constituency by voicing ethno-regionalist demands.

Under these circumstances, one can easily understand why Ferdinand Müller–Rommel argued that the most pressing tasks are the formulation of an empirical definition and the elaboration of a framework of analysis.¹⁵ I will focus now on the first problem, as it is instrumental to delimiting the uni-

¹⁰ Horowitz, Donald L.: *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. 2nd. ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000. 291.

¹¹ John T. Ishiyama: *Ethnopolitical Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Post Communist Eastern Europe*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Society for Political Psychology, Seattle, Washington, July 1–4, 2000.

¹² Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), op. cit.

¹³ The fact that international conferences and workshops are nowadays devoted exclusively to these parties proves their increased importance and the legitimacy of their conceptualisation as a distinct (and maybe new) party family, as I also try to suggest.

¹⁴ Derek Urwin, op. cit. See also Derek Hearl, Ian Budge and Bernard Pearson: Distinctiveness of regional voting: a comparative analysis across the European Community countries (1979–1993). *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1996. 167–182.

¹⁵ Ferdinand Müller–Rommel: Ethnoregionalist parties in Western Europe: theoretical considerations and framework of analysis. In Lieven De Winter and Huri Türsan (eds.), op. cit. 18.

verse of ethno-regionalist parties, both in Europe in general, and in Central (Eastern) as well as South-Eastern Europe in particular.

Three issues complicate the definitional task regarding ethno-regionalist parties. First, some regionally concentrated organizations either act as pressure groups or – in spite of claiming to be parties – refuse to participate in elections as a protest against what they consider an illegitimate authority.¹⁶ In contrast, there are several organizations presenting candidates at national, regional, local and even European elections in order to obtain a share of power as a means of achieving policy goals. Second, there are parties, which defend the interests of their potential supporters by demanding the allocation of certain resources to the (in-)group, and parties, which claim that other groups (namely, the out-groups considered by them ‘alien to the nation’) should be prevented from enjoying certain rights and resources.¹⁷ Finally, ethno-regionalist demands – going as far as overtly espoused secession – are often combined with the advocacy of specific socio-economic policies. This makes it rather complicated to identify the primary goals of such a party, i.e., whether it should be categorized as ethno-regionalist or not.¹⁸

One way to achieve conceptual exactitude – including all elements of the category in question while excluding all elements that do not belong to it – is using a minimal definition of ethno-regionalist parties. The definition should be minimal in a twofold sense: by placing a minimum requirement both on ‘partyness’ and on *ethno-regionalist character*. Throughout this paper, I will consider the ability to elect candidates to representative bodies as an indicator of electoral success, not of *partyness*. The sole indicator of partyness will be the willingness to compete in elections as a means of acceding to office (and being able to share in the exercise of policy-making power).¹⁹ Furthermore, *ethno-regionalist character* will be defined as a primary policy concern re-

¹⁶ This behaviour has been an enduring feature of the parties representing the Catholic community of Northern Ireland, namely the *Social Democratic and Labour Party* (SDLP) and *Sinn Féin* (SF). Their policy was either to boycott regional elections or refuse to take up the seats they have won in the Northern Ireland Assembly or the UK House of Commons. See Alan Day et al. (eds.): *Political Parties of the World*. 4th edition. London: Cartermill Publishing, 1996. 611–612. With regard to my complete set of cases, it must not be overlooked that the *Democratic Community of Hungarians in Vojvodina* boycotted the elections held in Serbia during the last weekend of 2003.

¹⁷ The xenophobic *Lega Nord* seems to be a good example for the second type of behaviour.

¹⁸ The latter two problems are also mentioned by Ferdinand Müller–Rommel, op. cit. 19.

¹⁹ As one can observe, I have altered slightly the abridged version of the Sartorian minimal definition. Cf. Giovanni Sartori: *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. 64.

garding the expression, recognition and protection of a distinct, ascriptive cultural identity and of the ensuing interests shared by the ascriptive minority group, including the accentuated development of the region inhabited by the groups' members. Thus, I treat the peripheral position and geographical concentration of minorities as being variables rather than definitional criteria, even if most minorities exhibit both characteristics. The reason for this is the fact that geographical concentration (or ethnic demography) is a matter of degree and affects the electoral success of these parties. More importantly, I do not use the official party name as an indicator of ethno-regionalist character.²⁰ Doing so could be misleading: there are some parties that include ethno-regional references in their names, but do not necessarily advocate ethno-regional interests and policies, and vice versa.

For this research, the units of analysis – i.e., the organizations that according to the criteria outlined above qualify both as parties and exhibit ethno-regionalist traits – are the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania* [Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség/RMDSZ/]; as well as the 'Coexistence' *Political Movement* [Együttélés Politikai Mozgalom /E/], the *Hungarian Christian–Democratic Movement* [Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom /MKDM/], the *Hungarian Civic Party* [Magyar Polgári Párt/MPP/] (formerly *Independent Hungarian Initiative* – Független Magyar Kezdeményezés /FMK/), the *Hungarian People's Party* [Magyar Néppárt/MNP/] and the *Hungarian Coalition Party* [Magyar Koalíció Pártja /MKP/] which resulted from the fusion of E, MKDM and MPP in 1998, in Slovakia.²¹ It must be stressed that while the RMDSZ emerges clearly as the dominant, or even hegemonic, party claiming to represent the Hungarians in Romania, ethnic Hungarian parties in Slovakia show a more variegated pattern of intra-ethnic political competition marked by a 'dominant coalition' forged for each separate election prior to the break-up of Czechoslovakia, and the formation of the stable 'Hungarian Coalition' after 1994.

²⁰ For other definitions see, for example, Ferdinand Müller–Rommel, op. cit. 18–19. and Jan Erik Lane and Svante Ersson: *Politics and Society in Western Europe*. London: Sage Publications, 1991. 104.

²¹ Apart from these parties, the *Hungarian People's Movement for Reconciliation and Prosperity* [Magyar Népi Mozgalom a Megbékélésért és Jólétért /MNMMJ/] contested elections in Slovakia in 1998, while three parties of the Hungarian minority in Romania also ran in elections: the *Independent Hungarian Party* [Független Magyar Párt /FMP/] in 1990, the *Hungarian Free Democratic Party of Romania* [Romániai Magyar Szabaddemokrata Párt /RMSZDP/] (in 1996 and 2000) and the *Forum of the Szekler Youth* [Székely Ifjak Fóruma /SZIF/] in 1996.

2.2. Analytical Framework

This paper operationalizes electoral success as a specific form of institutional power, namely legislative influence, and examines the conditions under which national/ethnic minorities can earn a share in it. Two qualifications are necessary. First, electoral success of an ethno-regionalist party can be interpreted in various ways. It may mean the sheer national vote share garnered by the party in question or ‘the proportion of the targeted electorate, [i.e., the population of a region or an ethnic group]’ casting their votes for the party.²² More sophisticated indicators based on electoral strength have been suggested by Jorge P. Gordin and Derek Urwin, respectively. The first scholar compares the vote share obtained by the ethno-regionalist party to the vote share of the region’s largest party,²³ while the second computes a hypothetical vote share estimating the proportion of votes a party would obtain if its electoral support were evenly distributed across the country, thus controlling for party size and the population of regions alike.²⁴ These measures all construe electoral success as mobilization of support. My suggestion is to concentrate on the legislative seat share obtained by the parties in question, as in this manner their possible political impact may also be assessed. The explanation is straightforward: legislative strength can be used both in coalition bargaining and for putting forward or blocking policy proposals.

Second, the specific sets of conditions that will be dealt with here pertain to the *participation dimension* of the political system. For the purpose of the present paper, the most salient systemic variables that *ceteris paribus* determine the chances of an ethno-regionalist party to be electorally successful are the *nature of the electoral system* used for electing the (lower chamber of) parliament²⁵ and the *format of the party system* – operationalized best as the *effective num-*

²² The second, more appropriate operationalisation, has been proposed in Lieven de Winter, op. cit. 211.

²³ Jorge P. Gordin: The Electoral Fate of Ethnoregionalist Parties in Western Europe: A Boolean Test of Extant Explanations. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2001. 156.

²⁴ Derek Urwin, op. cit. 229–230.

²⁵ I use this convention for the sake of comparability.

ber of legislative parties.²⁶ (*Ceteris paribus* refers mainly to factors intrinsic to the ethnic party and the nominal group, as well as to various influences from outside the national polity.)

Three further observations must be made in order to spell out the hypothesized relationship between these two variables and the dependent variable. First, since ethno-regionalist parties – according to a conventional approach – tend to be small parties,²⁷ they have better chances in more fragmented party systems. However, the electoral system seems to be the most important institutional element affecting the electoral fortunes of parties in general. It provides incentives to voters to support or refrain from supporting certain parties and, finally, transforms vote shares into legislative seat shares.²⁸ Hence the second observation, that ethno-regionalist parties, again by virtue of their apparent smallness, are expected to fare better in systems with a higher degree of proportionality, as voters will not fear ‘wasting’ their votes on them, nor will the transformational mechanics of the system severely punish them. Indeed, there is some empirical evidence suggesting that such a hypothesis may be warranted.²⁹ Finally, one must not exclude the joint effect of the party system and the electoral system, bearing in mind the relationship between the two. As a rule, a two-way relationship is noticeable:

²⁶ For the concept see Giovanni Sartori: *A Typology of Party Systems*. In Peter Mair (ed.): *The West European Party System*. Oxford Readings in Government and Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. 327. and for the measure Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart: *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989. 79. The formula is: $e = 1/(\sum_i^N p_i^3)$, where N stands for the ‘real’ (arithmetic) number of legislative parties in the system, while p_i for the seat share of party i .

²⁷ Ferdinand Müller–Rommel: *Small Parties in Comparative Perspective: The State of the Art*. p. 4. and Peter Mair: *The Electoral Universe of Small Parties in Postwar Western Europe*. pp. 44, 46–48, 60. (Both in Ferdinand Müller–Rommel and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), op. cit.) In spite of the momentary adoption of this ‘definition’, I do not wish to accredit or accept – once and for all – the idea that ethno-regionalist parties are small parties, or even worse, equate one concept with the other. Suffice, for the moment that the framework of analysis, which can be built on the basis of various contributions to the volume referred to in this note, might prove to be very useful for studying ethno-regionalist parties simply by virtue of the fact that they tend to operate under similar systemic circumstances with small parties.

²⁸ These are the so called *psychological* and *mechanical effects* of electoral systems discovered decades ago by Duverger. Maurice Duverger: *Political Parties. Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State*. London: Methuen, 1964.

²⁹ For instance, Peter Mair tested and proved such a hypothesis for small parties in general, op. cit. 54. (He used, however, not the measure of electoral system disproportionality that will be employed here.)

the electoral system shapes the party system, but the parties themselves may sometimes engineer changes in the electoral system, too. Nevertheless, the effect of the electoral system on the party system tends to be stronger than its converse in long-established democracies, whereas in new democracies the party system has a stronger impact on the electoral system than the other way around. This is attributable to a lesser extent to the phenomenon of institutionalization, which makes party system development somewhat independent of changes in the electoral system, and to a larger degree to the processes of bargaining and negotiation in which actors are involved in the early phases of constitution-making, up until the point where the main institutions of the political system become entrenched. As Kitschelt argued, one might conceive of this period as being characterized by an institution-free environment in which institutions are endogenous to party competition. Actors, or more precisely parties, choose or design institutions in accordance with their interests, beliefs and expectations regarding the probable outcomes of democratic competition.³⁰

Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- (H) *The chances of ethno-regionalist parties to obtain higher seat shares in national elections increases with the proportionality of the electoral systems and with party system fragmentation.*

The independent variables mentioned above (and the underlying concepts) are central to Arend Lijphart's seminal analyses concerning the distribution of power under different political systems and party systems. Consequently, for purposes of measurement, I rather extensively refer to his work on democracies.³¹ Lijphart's encompassing study on electoral systems in democracies characterizes them through a set of four *primary variables* (the electoral formula, electoral thresholds, district magnitude and assembly size) and four *secondary variables* (ballot structure, malapportionment, apparentement and presidentialism).³² However, the most comprehensive electoral system indicator,

³⁰ Herbert Kitschelt: The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe. *Politics and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 1992. 9. (A similar idea is to be found in Timothy Frye: A Politics of Institutional Choice. Post-Communist Presidencies. *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 5, 1997. 523–552.

³¹ Arend Lijphart: *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty–Seven Democracies 1945–1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. and Arend Lijphart: *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty–Six Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

³² Arend Lijphart: *Electoral Systems and Party Systems*, 10–12, 14–15.

which also suits the purposes of the present paper and which will be used as the primary electoral system variable, is Michael Gallagher's (*least squares*) index of disproportionality.³³ Two arguments can be offered in support of this approach. First, the proposed measure tends to point to or mirror *the electoral formula*, the most salient electoral system variable, without over- or understating its proportionality.³⁴ Second, on the basis of what has been previously said, this variable is expected to have quite a large impact on the electoral fortunes of ethno-regionalist parties and to be rather robust as well.³⁵

The following analysis linking the *electoral success* of ethno-regionalist parties to party and electoral system features should be carried out both *in time* – making *diachronic/longitudinal comparisons* by taking ‘snapshots’ of the political systems – and *over time* (by averaging the ‘snapshots’) in order to grasp the general trend of change.³⁶ Such a combined approach assures the validity of *synchronic/cross-national comparisons*, and facilitates *longitudinal within-country analyses* through multiplying the data points.

3. OVERVIEW OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Since 1989 four legislative elections have been held in Romania: in 1990, in 1992, in 1996 and in 2000. This yields four snapshots and three averages regarding the country's political system, provided that one does not consider the first (two-year) period as its own average and counts it twice. Over the same period, five national elections have been held in Slovakia: in 1990, in

³³ Michael Gallagher: Proportionality, Disproportionality and Electoral Systems. *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1991. 40. The computational formula is:

$$LSI_G = \sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N (v_i - s_i)^2} \text{ where}$$

N stands for the ‘real’ (arithmetic) number of electoral parties in the system, v_i for the vote share garnered by party i , and s_i for the seat share allocated to party i .

³⁴ Arend Lijphart, op. cit. 157–158. and Table 8.2. p. 62.

³⁵ Other electoral system variables might also have some direct impact on parties' electoral shares. Arguably, *the legal and the effective threshold*, *the size of the assembly* and *the (effective) district magnitude* are the most crucial dimensions in this respect. The first two act as barriers to the accession of ethno-regionalist parties to legislative power, whereas the latter ones might help them, since their increase makes the electoral system more proportional. Nevertheless, all these effects are captured by Gallagher's index of disproportionality. Furthermore, secondary electoral system variables, as *the ballot structure*, various *possibilities of appentement*, and to some extent *presidentialism* might also play a role.

³⁶ I borrow this distinction between temporary state and trend from Sartori. See Giovanni Sartori, op. cit. 347.

1992, in 1994, in 1998 and in 2002. Moreover, on the first two occasions state-level elections were organized simultaneously with the Czechoslovak federal ones. Since national legislative elections are considered first-order elections – that is, the most important ones – both in unitary and federal states, while state-wide elections in federal countries are deemed almost equally salient,³⁷ I will treat all these competitions as the same kind of elections. Hence, seven snapshots and six averages are obtained for Slovakia. (However, only three of the latter are Sartorian ‘over time’ averages, the first two being computed by considering simultaneous federal and state-level elections.)

The relevant data for assessing the electoral strength of Hungarian ethno-regionalist parties in the two countries and for computing the indicators used as independent variables are official electoral statistics compiled by the research fellows of the *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe* project of the University of Essex.³⁸ The computations carried out on the basis of this dataset, yielded the values synthesized in Tables 1 and 2 for the independent and dependent variables. (Figures representing averages are boldfaced).

Table 1 – *The electoral performance of the DAHR as a function of the Romanian electoral and party system*

	1990– 1992	1992– 1996	1990– 1996	1996– 2000	1990– 2000	after 2000	AVER- AGE
Disproportionality index (LSIG) ^{a)}	0.98	7.44	4.21	6.67	5.03	9.27	6.09
Effective number of parties (Es) ^{b)}	2.10	4.42	3.26	3.94	3.49	3.18	3.41
The proportion of lower house seats (S) obtained by the DAHR (%) ^{b)}	7.49	8.23	7.86	7.62	7.78	8.26	7.9

³⁷ Arend Lijphart: Unequal Participation: Democracy’s Unresolved Dilemma. Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996. *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 1, 1997. 5–6.

³⁸ Data available at [<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexElections.asp>]. (Last accessed on the 18th of January 2004.)

a) I discounted the political organizations of national minorities which gained representation in the assembly as a result of ‘positive discrimination’ and the ones which failed to obtain a seat because another organization representing the same ethnic group already secured a (at least one) seat, too. Furthermore, independent candidates were also eliminated from computations in order to work with ‘sufficiently disaggregated data’ on unrepresented contestants – a recommendation made by Gallagher (*op. cit.* 48.).

b) The seat shares possessed by various parties and the effective number of parties were again calculated by neglecting the national minorities, which obtained a seat each as a result of ‘positive discrimination’. (This is a more realistic assumption than considering the parliamentary group of these national minorities a unitary actor similar to the ones formed by mainstream parties.)

Table 2 – *The electoral performance of the ‘dominant coalition’ of Hungarians in Slovakia as a function of the (Czecho)Slovak electoral and party system*

	1990–1992a)	1990–1992b)	1990–1992	1992–1994a)	1992–1994b)	1992–1994	1990–1994	1994–1998	1990–1998	1998–2002	1990–2002	after 2002	AVERAGE
LSIG	3.59	7.22	5.41	11.19	12.49	11.84	8.62	5.94	8.09	2.94	7.23	7.04	7.20
Es	4.98	3.96	4.47	3.19	3.36	3.28	3.88	4.41	3.98	4.75	4.11	6.12	4.4
S(%)	9.33 ^{c)}	10.2 ^{c)}	9.77 ^{c)}	9.33 ^{d)}	9.8 ^{d)}	9.57 ^{d)}	9.67	11.33 ^{e)}	10	10 ^{f)}	10	13.33 ^{f)}	10.47

a) These figures were computed on the basis of data concerning the Slovak National Council, the parliament of the Slovak part of the federation.

b) These figures were computed on the basis of data concerning the Slovak Section of the Federal Assembly’s lower chamber, the Chamber of Nations.

c) Common list presented by the *Coexistence Political Movement* and the *Hungarian Christian–Democratic Movement*.

d) Common list presented by the *Coexistence Political Movement*, the *Hungarian Christian–Democratic Movement* and the *Hungarian People’s Party*

e) *Hungarian Coalition* (common list presented by the *Coexistence Political Movement*, the *Hungarian Christian–Democratic Movement* and the *Hungarian Civic Party*).

f) *Hungarian Coalition Party*.

In order to test hypothesis (H), I conducted correlation–regression analyses lumping together the data on both countries. First, I tested each part of

hypothesis (H) separately, assessing the impact of electoral system proportionality and party system fragmentation in isolation from each other. Then, I proceeded with multivariate regression. Each test was conducted twice: first, on the raw data excluding the averages, and second, considering all averages and thus multiplying the available data points.

On the one hand, the Pearson correlation coefficient between electoral system proportionality and the success of ethnic Hungarian parties was a low 0.123. However, even this weak relationship was not statistically significant (at the 0.1 level). (Considering ‘over time’ averages, the coefficient increased to 0.220, the significance improved, too, but still did not attain the 0.1 level.) On the other hand, party system fragmentation showed a strong and statistically significant correlation with the electoral success of these parties ($R = 0.720$, $R^2 = 0.518$ and $Sig = 0.006$) when only the raw data were plugged into the equation. (After including the ‘manufactured’ data points, both R and R^2 increased to 0.725 and 0.525, respectively, and the relationship became significant on the 0.001 level.) The trivariate analysis yielded the following estimate with the initial data:

$$S (\%) = 4.111 + 0.099 LSI_C + 1.177 E_s, \quad (1)$$

where $R^2 = 0.557$ and the only statistically significant coefficient is the one pertaining to party system fragmentation ($Sig = 0.014$). (All coefficients in equation /1/ are unstandardised.) Adding the ‘artificial’ data points the prediction changed to:

$$S (\%) = 3.367 + 0.146 LSI_C + 1.275 E_s, \quad (1')$$

with an $R^2 = 0.612$ (61,2% explained variance), all the coefficients being statistically significant: the constant and the coefficient of electoral system disproportionality on the 0.1 level and the coefficient of party system fragmentation on the 0.001 level. (The coefficients in equation /1'/ are again unstandardised.)

4. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings seem to suggest that contrary to previous theoretical expectations the electoral system, or at least its disproportionality as captured by Gallagher’s least squares index, plays little influence on the seat shares obtained by Hungarian ethno-regionalist parties in Romania and Slovakia.

However, the fragmentation of these party systems is the institutional feature that provides them with fair chances to compete successfully. This situation may have various methodological and substantive explanations. From a methodological point of view, the multiplication technique employed in the analysis showed that if more complete time series or perhaps data on more countries featuring Hungarian minorities were available, the trivariate model would probably gain in validity. Another methodological complication is the meaning of the ‘comprehensive’ least squares index. Unfortunately, as pointed out by Gallagher himself, disproportionality is usually affected by other electoral system dimensions (such as thresholds, district magnitude and *malapportionment* as well), not to mention the fact that the distribution of votes (and seats) among parties is also influential.³⁹ Thus, the second independent variable may have an effect on the first one.

From a substantive point of view, the complications regarding the possible entanglement of the model’s independent variables can be solved in two ways. One can, rather inelegantly, explain them away by repeating what has been said at the end of section 2.2. (Analytical Framework), namely, that in new democracies, party systems tend to develop relatively independently from the electoral system. Nonetheless, a more rewarding avenue of investigation would entail rephrasing the explanation as to allow the separate consideration of salient electoral system dimensions (e.g., the formula, the legal threshold, the district magnitude and *malapportionment*) as self-standing independent variables.

Still, another substantive point needs to be mentioned. This relates to the rather deceptive than apparent smallness of Hungarian ethno-regionalist parties in Romania and Slovakia. Both the Romanian and the Slovak party systems are at best *intermediate*, if not *small party systems*, because *small parties* polling less than 15% of the national vote each, on aggregate, almost always outperform *large parties*, i.e., parties that usually pass the 15% threshold. Moreover, in Slovakia only the *Movement for a Democratic Slovakia* (HZDS) [Hnutie za Demokratické Slovensko/HZDS/] qualifies as a large party, whereas in Romania the *Social Democratic Party* [Partidul Social Democrat/PSD/] (the party that was once the *National Salvation Front – Frontul Salvării Naționale/FSN*), the *Democratic Convention of Romania* [Convenția Democrată Română /CDR/] and perhaps more recently the *Greater Romania Party* [Partidul

³⁹ Michael Gallagher, op. cit. 43.

România Mare /PRM/] could count as large parties.⁴⁰ Taking into account these patterns of competition and concentration of power, it comes as no surprise that ethnic Hungarian parties capture the lowest share of legislative power when party system fragmentation is lowest, and the highest share when fragmentation peaks – thus converting their absolute smallness, an apparent disadvantage, into an advantage, a *comparatively large size*. This is also in line with the second part of hypothesis (H). What remains to be seen is whether the hypothesis receives stronger empirical support when electoral system dimensions are treated as separate variables.

In retrospect, the plausibility probe of hypothesis (H) may be deemed useful. It yielded two theoretically interesting conclusions, which may even be generalized later, unless, rather misfortunately, the cases examined here prove to be atypical or outliers. The first, namely, that ethnic parties – especially in new democracies – may be *comparatively salient* and ethnic minorities can control important power resources is amenable to testing on more complete datasets – certainly a task ahead. The second, the new avenue of theorizing on the impact of the electoral system on the ethno-regionalist parties' success should be explored perhaps simultaneously with the comprehensive tests on the political influence of this (new) party family.

⁴⁰ I borrowed this classification of parties and party systems from Peter Mair, op. cit. 44., 46–48.