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Counties in a vacuum: The electoral consequences of a declining meso-tier in Hungary*

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ABSTRACT

The significance of counties has been steadily declining since 1990 and in 2010 their competences were drastically reduced. The declining importance of counties is reflected in the 2019 county election results. Turnout was low and the alliance FIDESZ-KDNK has won absolute majorities in all 19 county assemblies. In addition, opposition parties and non governmental organisations (which can participate in county elections) were practically invisible and most statewide parties have abolished their county-level branches. Nevertheless, the opposition managed to achieve electoral successes in Budapest and in ten large cities. In this election report we discuss the impact of various centralization and electoral system reforms on the 2019 county election results.

KEYWORDS County governments; county elections; party system; declining voter turnout; government majority

Introduction, general frameworks

The uncontested winner of the 2019 county elections held on 13 October was the FIDESZ-KDNP alliance which won absolute majorities of votes and seats in each of the nineteen counties. As we will argue in this election report, this extraordinary victory was made possible by electoral system and centralization reforms implemented by FIDESZ-KDNP which won a two-third majority in the parliamentary election of 2010. We illustrate how a decade-long process of hollowing out county self-governments has contributed to voters' indifference towards counties and led to limited opportunities for opposition parties and civil organizations to make themselves electorally present in the counties. County self-government elections are increasingly

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subsumed under the orbit of national parties, relegating them to the function of second-order national political arenas.

Another interesting outcome of the 2019 county elections is a revitalization of an urban-rural cleavage. There has been a long-standing tendency of conservative, national(ist) parties to achieve better electoral results in rural areas, and left-wing, liberal parties to perform better in cities. This urban-rural divide was significantly reduced under the post-2010 government of the right-wing FIDESZ-KDNP, retaining a significant electoral advantage over opposition (left) parties across the entire territory of the country. The share of government supporters is higher among people with low education, income and wealth, manual workers, the rural population, the Roma and those deprived of internet access (Róna et al. 2020).

In the 2019 local elections, opposition parties were able to win majorities in the councils and to win mayoral contests in Budapest and ten large cities.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, we introduce the vertical relationships between central and county-level governance focusing on the changes of the national system of elections and their indirect impact on the power position of county self-governments. This is followed by a brief review of the declining role of counties and the introduction of the local and regional electoral systems. The third section discusses voter turnout and electoral results, drawing comparisons with national data and the situation characterizing larger cities and Budapest. In the concluding part of our study, we explore how the changes of the nation-wide party system are reflected in the party composition of county assemblies.

County government and county elections in Hungary

Counties are the traditional units of Hungarian territorial administration. Their role, however, has oscillated between two extremes for over a thousand years. They served as the king's rural bastions during the foundation of the state. From the 13th century, counties became county self-government units for the nobility and provided the framework for royal, state administration and the judiciary as well. Their scale was largely unaffected by a reduction of their number (triggered by the loss of two-thirds of the national territory pursuant to the Trianon Treaty closing World War I). Under the period of state socialism, between 1950 and 1990, counties were granted significant powers in terms of competences, resource allocation, and a right to control settlement councils. This, however, did not alter their subordinated role and exposure to central government.

A model of self-governance was introduced following the democratic transition of 1989–1990. The distribution of power between the local and county levels remained a divisive issue for the political elite. Over the past thirty years, a number of reforms were proposed to establish smaller or larger

territorial units as an alternative to the 19 counties but without success (Pálné Kovács 2015).

County self-governments cannot be considered to be equal partners of municipalities (especially cities) and the central government. A lack of own resources compounded by the gradual loss of their competences have prevented county governments from becoming embedded into the Hungarian system of multi-level governance. The deconcentrated organs of ministries and government offices, and the so-called spatial development councils charged with the management of EU Cohesion funds have further reduced the relevance of county governments.

In addition, most of the important policies and public services such as hospitals, children's and nursing homes, museums, secondary schools, have been nationalized and further contributed to the poor visibility of county governments (Pálné Kovács 2019).

County-level administrative units are divided into cities with county rank (county seats and cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants) and other municipalities. The 23 cities with county rank do not fall under the jurisdiction of county self-governments and residents of these cities do not vote for the county assemblies.

Budapest, the capital city of Hungary, is accorded an equivalent legal status with counties but is empowered with more public tasks. The district self-governments within Budapest have a strong mandate and their mayors have ex officio a seat in the general assembly of Budapest besides directly elected members.

Under the Hungarian local electoral system, voters elect local councillors (in villages, cities, cities with county rank and Budapest districts), county and Budapest councillors, mayors and minority representatives in a one-round election.

In 1990, county assemblies were elected by electors delegated by the municipalities. The electoral session was attended by three representatives from each settlement, which guaranteed the numerical supremacy of smaller settlements. As a result of this, the majority of general assembly members were candidates delegated by smaller settlements. This implies indirectly that these delegates had no specific party affiliation, but unfortunately, we were unable to retrieve concrete numbers from the data on elections.

Post-1994, direct county elections are conducted on list-basis. Counties are organized into two artificial electoral districts, formed by municipalities under 10,000 and over 10,000 inhabitants, respectively, except for cities with county rank.

The extension of the period of local /county elections from four to five years has led to a separate timing of parliamentary and local elections. The abolition of dual mandate ownership by MP and mayors increased

also the gap between the local/county and national political elite. The increasing number of MPs with dual mandates – mayors or presidents of county assemblies (68 in 1994 and 166 in 2010 out of the 386 MPs) illustrates the former strong relations between the central and local/county tiers (Várnagy 2012, 55; Pálné Kovács et al. 2016). The 2011 Local Government Act which significantly reduced the competences for subnational governments was paradoxically approved by a Parliament that included many mayor-MPs.

The post-2010 electoral law introduced a one-round model of parliamentary elections containing a built-in compensational mechanism and an extension of voting rights to Hungarian ethnic minorities living beyond the border (Szigetvári and Vető 2012). The number of MPs was cut in half (199), comprising 106 majoritarian seats (in single-member constituencies, 53.3% of mandates) and 93 national party-list seats. The delineation of single-member electoral districts, besides correcting population disproportionalities, reveals a logic of gerrymandering in its attempt to counter the leftist dominance of cities by integrating tiny peri-urban settlements (Vida 2020, 83).

A sharp decline in the number of representatives in subnational bodies (nearly 50 percent) was among the major changes brought by the post-2010 era. In the case of county assemblies, the abolition of the division of artificial electoral districts transferred each county to a single electoral district where nominating organizations could set up their list.¹ The legal minimum number of members of the smallest assemblies is 15, while the largest county assembly, that of Pest County, has 44 members.

Counties were negatively impacted by the abolition of county party election lists. The abolition of county lists marked the de facto end of county-level party politics. Due to the exemption of parties from announcing county programmes or conducting campaigns in the parliamentary elections, the county party apparatuses have been almost completely dissolved.

Electoral turnout and results

Electoral participation in Hungary is lower than in most Western and some Central and Eastern European countries (Swianiewicz 2001, 26; Loughlin, Hendricks, and Lindstrom 2011). Turnout in county and municipal remains consistently below the turnout in parliamentary elections (Figure 1).

Data from the last three (parliamentary, EU and local/county self-government) elections (Table 1) indicate the highest activity among the population of less developed, north-eastern and south-western rural counties and tiny villages along the more developed western border. As demonstrated by the analysis of Stumpf, voter turnout in parliamentary elections is higher in settlements under 500 inhabitants, steadily declining with the increase of settlement size, climbing upward again in the case of municipalities with

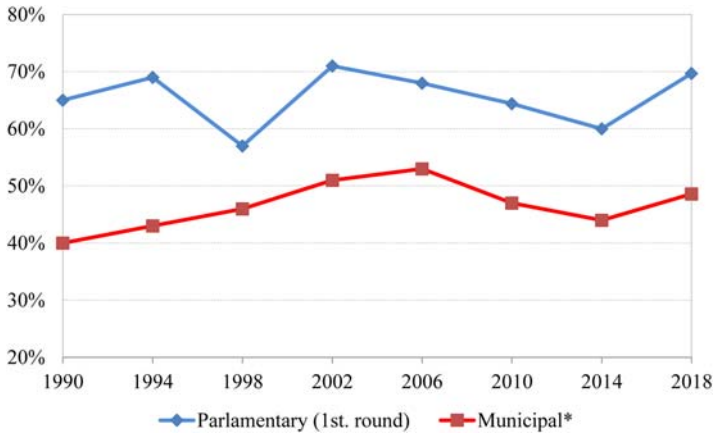


Figure 1. Voter turnout in local/county elections and parliamentary elections (percentage of participants), 1990–2018. Source: <https://www.valasztas.hu/>. Remark. The local government cycle labelled with * has been modified to 5 years pursuant to the Labour Code, postponing elections to the year 2019.

Table 1. Voter turnout rates during the last three elections, by county.

County	2018 Parliamentary elections	2019 EP elections	2019 local/county elections ^a
Bács-Kiskun	67.7	38.6	44.5
Baranya	66.1	39.8	53.4
Békés	68.0	37.6	47.1
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	66.8	36.9	53.6
Csongrád	70.6	42.2	48.2
Fejér	71.1	41.7	47.1
Győr-Moson-Sopron	72.5	44.7	49.6
Hajdú-Bihar	66.5	35.2	46.0
Heves	70.9	40.1	52.2
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	67.4	36.1	44.7
Komárom-Esztergom	70.0	40.1	44.7
Nógrád	67.6	38.2	53.6
Pest	71.3	42.7	45.3
Somogy	68.8	39.5	52.0
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	68.2	36.8	54.8
Tolna	67.4	38.9	49.8
Vas	74.2	47.0	55.3
Veszprém	72.1	43.9	49.2
Zala	72.7	43.2	52.4
National average	70.2	43.6	48.6

^aVoter turnout data is uniform for the whole county and cannot be distinguished by types of local/county self-governments for technical reasons. The vote is conducted simultaneously on several ballot papers (local representatives, mayors and county list).

Source: <https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok>.

over 10,000 residents, while the highest voter turnout is recorded in the Budapest. The situation is similar in the case of municipal elections, where the smallest settlements have the highest voter turnout, steadily declining

with an increase in settlement size. Budapest shows slightly above average figures (Stumpf 2019, 14).

In rural and small-town regions, outside Budapest and the major cities, the local election campaigns were almost exclusively shaped by the government-dominated public media (Mécs 2020,15–16). The modest campaigning activity conducted during municipal elections is explained by a lack of public budgetary funding. This highlights the fundamental role of public media. In Hungary, public service media does not communicate a balanced mix of information even during campaigning periods, as also noted by international organizations. The ownership structure of privately-owned newspapers and other media organs is overwhelmingly dominated by government parties. Opposition and individual candidates are practically deprived of instruments other than social media and direct on-site campaigning.

The social media played a more prominent role in urbanized regions with a higher percentage of young, educated people (Bauer 2019, 9–11). However, county governments (apart from a few advertisements and posters) had no recourse to using such channels, although this has not received empirical confirmation yet.

In contrast, no explicit campaigning was conducted by county government's candidates. County assembly representatives are not really strong party cadres, and chairmen of county assemblies are not directly elected.

Election results

The number of lists set up by parties and other nominating organizations during the 2019 county and Budapest city elections was slightly lower than in 2014. Following the nomination of candidates, a total of 104 lists were registered in the 19 counties, i.e. an average of 5.5 lists per county. The lowest number of candidate lists (2) were set up in 2 counties, 7 lists were presented on ballot papers in 3 counties.

The FIDESZ-KDNP party alliance launched a list in each county.² Despite the overall number of 414 obtainable seats, in total, 663 candidates were present on their county lists. In Hajdú-Bihar County, the number of candidates featuring on the list (24) matched the number of obtainable seats. In three counties the lists contained threefold as many names as the number of obtainable seats. In most cases, the rest of the parties presented a much shorter list of candidates. Besides the parties, a total of five non-government organisations set up a list in four counties, a modest achievement in comparison to previous elections.³

Among the 104 county lists, 89 managed to cross the 5 percent threshold of entry in their county. FIDESZ-KDNP emerged as the uncontested winner of county assembly elections, with lists winning absolute majority of seats in each county. The ruling party coalition gained 258 of the 414 seats (62%),

further improving its results achieved five years earlier, when it won 245 seats (59%). The analysis of the proportion of mandates obtained by the party alliance (varying between 73.3 and 54%) does not reveal any marked territorial pattern or rationale underlying the victory (Zongor 2020). The examination of the average proportion of mandates in individual general assemblies (Table 2) shows that the FIDESZ-KDNP party alliance obtained on average 63 percent of assembly seats. The General Assembly of Budapest is the only exception where it managed to win a 'mere' 39 percent of mandates. With a 70 percent share of mandates, it achieved above average results in six counties.

A comparison of our results with data on cities with county rank (Table 3) indicates a greater volatility in the latter settlement category, as illustrated by the declining share of mandates held by FIDESZ-KDNP, dropping from 65 to 48 percent by 2019. A comparison of data indicates no direct correlation in cities with county rank and county assemblies, since the FIDESZ-KDNP party alliance managed to win nearly two-thirds of mandates in the general assemblies of the counties around the 10 cities ruled by the opposition.

The most significant decline was observed in larger cities with county rank, ten of which were taken over by the opposition.⁴

In the case of the rest of the (small) towns and municipalities, FIDESZ has reaffirmed its dominance by winning 51 percent of mandates in the representative bodies of the these towns in 2019.

Table 2. The proportion of mandates held by FIDESZ-KDNP in county assemblies in 2014 and 2019.

County	2014	2019
Bács-Kiskun	58.3	69.6
Baranya	57.8	66.7
Békés	61.1	58.8
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	51.7	62.0
Csongrád	55.0	60.0
Fejér	65.0	70.0
Győr-Moson-Sopron	66.7	71.4
Hajdú-Bihar	58.3	66.7
Heves	53.3	66.0
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	57.9	61.1
Komárom-Esztergom	60.0	60.0
Nógrád	60.0	66.7
Pest	53,4	54.5
Budapest	60.6	39.3
Somogy	56.2	60.0
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	64.0	72.0
Tolna	53.3	66.7
Vas	66.7	73.3
Veszprém	58.8	58.8
Zala	60.0	73.3
Average	58.9	63.5

Source: <https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok>.

Table 3. Seat share for FIDESZ-KDNP in the assemblies of cities with county rank in the 2014 and 2019.

County	2014	2019
Pécs	71.4	26.9
Kecskemét	72.7	57.1
Békéscsaba	61.1	38.9
Miskolc	62.0	35.7
Hódmezővásárhely	73.3	33.3
Szeged	31.0	31.0
Dunaújváros	66.7	26.7
Székesfehérvár	66.7	61.9
Győr	66.7	69.6
Sopron	66.7	72.2
Debrecen	71.4	72.7
Eger	66.7	33.3
Szolnok	72.2	44.4
Tatabánya	66.7	44.4
Salgótarján	33.3	33.3
Érd	72.2	33.3
Kaposvár	72.2	72.2
Nyíregyháza	68.2	59.0
Szekszárd	66.7	46.7
Szombathely	47.6	38.0
Veszprém	72.2	61.1
Nagykanizsa	73.3	46.7
Zalaegerszeg	72.2	72.2
Average	64.9	48.2

Source: <https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok>

Many (other parliamentary opposition or non-parliamentary) parties failed to submit a list of candidates in every county. The party winning the second highest number of mandates was the left-wing Democratic Coalition (headed by the pre-2010 Prime Minister), drawing up an individual list for 17 counties and winning 33 seats, and the third was the right-wing Jobbik presenting their list of candidates in 14 counties and obtaining 29 county-list mandates. Momentum, a newly emerging non-parliamentary liberal party, popular among young people and performing well in EU elections, was highly successful with its joint winning lists in 4 counties and winning 27 mandates in 15 counties. The evident loser of the elections is the Hungarian Socialist Party, despite being represented in Parliament since the change of regime. The party, present in every county and winning 50 seats in 2014, has achieved its 'worst ever' performance with the number of its representatives dropping to 12. Out of the five civil organizations running in the elections, only three managed to win a total of four seats, each of which had prior representation in county assemblies.

Over the past three county elections (including the elections in Budapest), the proportion of party coalitions has shown a significant increase in comparison to 1998 (Table 4), while the proportion of individual mandates obtained by parties has dropped by nearly 10 percent. A concomitant decline has been observed in the proportion of individual mandates won by civil society

Table 4. Proportion of mandates of the Budapest and County Assemblies, by type of nominating organization, 2010–2019.

	2010	2014	2019
Independent parties ^a	36.5	39.5	26.3
Coalitions of parties	61.6	59.3	68.8
Parties' and social organizations' alliances	–	–	3.4
Independent social organizations	1.9	1.0	1.1
Coalitions of social organizations	–	0.2	–
Other (independent)	–	–	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

^aThis category illustrates the proportion of mandates held by parties individually without a coalition partner.

Source: Own calculation based on data of BM OVI, 2010; 2014; 2019.

organizations. Prior to 2006, the causes of the decline had been attributed to the rising popularity of joint lists of parties and social organizations, subsuming the latter under the influence of parties in county assemblies. However, the 2010 elections and the amendment to the Electoral Law did not facilitate the strengthening of such formations. The marginalization of joint lists is evident in the number of mandates (19 out of 461) won by non-coalition candidates.

While the data clearly indicate a growing trend towards bloc formation post-1998, the era commencing with the 2010 elections reveals the contours of a dominant one-party system⁵ (Sartori 2005; Horváth and Soós 2015, 275). Block formation was conducive to sharp ideological polarization and confrontation, with coalition building mostly limited to separate ideological blocs. This practically eradicated all forms of interaction between parties in various ideological blocs, giving a prominent role to social organizations in coalition building, a trend which is definitively reversed since 2010.

Already in 2010, the FIDESZ-KDNP alliance achieved a sweeping victory in all 19 counties. This trend has not yet been reversed, except in the case of the Budapest, where the Opposition obtained 18 of the 33 seats and won the mayoral election in 2019.

The Liberals dominated the General Assembly of the Budapest in the post-regime change period, and their mayor was re-elected five times. In 2014, however, he was replaced by the FIDESZ incumbent, governing with a comfortable majority between 2014 and 2019. The proportion of mandates held by the Alliance of Liberal Free Democrats fell from 35% to 0% (the party was practically liquidated), raising the share of mandates held by the left-wing MSZP from 7% to 36% between 1990 and 2010. In the meantime, the coalition formed by FIDESZ became the leading force of the Right, winning 45% in 2006 and holding almost 61% since 2014, in contrast to a mere 28% held by the fragmented Left (made up of three parties). This trend was interrupted in 2019, with left-wing opposition parties obtaining 54 percent of mandates in the general assembly of Budapest and the mayoral seat as well.

Prior to 2010, Hungarian local elections, only partially congruent with parliamentary election outcomes, could be analyzed in a left-right dimension.⁶ The distribution of seats between right-wing and left-wing parties according to the General Assembly of the Budapest and the counties produced a right-wing dominance of 296–250 in 1998 (when the Parliament was also dominated by the Right). By 2002, in the counties balance had shifted to a left-wing majority of 425–303, reflecting the transforming parliamentary power relations. However, the 2006 Parliamentary elections, despite bringing a victory for the left-liberal coalition, led to a 488–344 right-wing majority in the counties and the Budapest, while the year 2010 brought a 270–155 victory for the Right.

As a combined effect of the two-thirds victory of FIDESZ-KDNP in 2010, the ensuing disintegration of the Left and a wholesale transformation of the electoral law and the local government system, this right-left dichotomy is no longer valid. Hence, data should hitherto be analyzed in a government-opposition dimension, taking into account that the latter is not strictly composed of left-wing or liberal parties.⁷ Outside Budapest, FIDESZ-KDNP managed to increase its voter base in every settlement type (Table 5). In 2014, support for FIDESZ-KDNP varied between 48% and 61% in the 19 counties, and its support increased to 51–69% in 2019, a 4.6 percentage point rise in the national average (excluding Budapest and cities with county rank) within the space of five years (László and Molnár 2019, 3). FIDESZ-KDNP received 2,017,041 votes, while opposition parties received a total of 1,696,029 (Hont 2019).

The 2019 county elections in October followed five months after the European elections which were held in May 2019. FIDESZ-KDNP strengthened its voter base by almost one percent compared to the 2019 Spring European Parliamentary elections. Based on the number of received votes it was able to secure 62 percent of the mandates. While the number of votes obtained

Table 5. Distribution of votes between government and opposition parties during the past two local/county self-government elections.

2014 local/territorial local government elections					
	FIDESZ-KDNP		Opposition		Total voters
County lists	1,218,008	52.64%	1,040,992	44.99%	2,313,835
Cities with county rank	285,461	47.40%	284,720	48.93%	602,284
Budapest	290,675	49.06%	301,793	50.94%	592,468
Total	1,794,144	51.14%	1,637,505	46.67%	592,468
2019 local/county self-government elections					
	FIDESZ-KDNP		Opposition		Total voters
County lists	1,364,048	57.23%	979,056	41.08%	2,383,368
Cities with county rank	346,385	49.08%	332,408	47.10%	705,743
Budapest	306,608	44.10%	384,565	55.82%	695,218
Total	2,017,041	53.30%	1,696,029	44.82%	3,784,329

Source: Hont 2019, (https://hvg.hu/itthon/20191023_onkormanyzati_valasztasok_szamai_hallgat_a_melyi).

Table 6. Distribution of votes between government and opposition parties during the EU Parliamentary and local/county self-government elections in 2019.

	FIDESZ-KDNP							
	EP		Municipal					
				EP	Municipal			
County lists	1,138,015	56.97%	1,364,048	57.23%	859,514	43.03%	979,056	41.08%
Cities with county status	403,622	51.30%	346,385	49.08%	383,102	48.70%	332,408	47.10%
Budapest	282,583	41.17%	306,608	44.10%	403,730	58.83%	384,565	55.32%
Total	1,824,220	52.56%	2,017,041	53.30%	1,646,346	47.44%	1,696,029	44.82%

Source: Hont 2019, (https://hvg.hu/titthon/20191023_onkormanyzati_valasztasok_szamai_hallgat_a_mely.)

by government parties was slightly declining in the major cities and Budapest, their voter base increased by over 200,000 in small and medium-sized settlements (Table 6). This modest decline, however, did not trigger a restructuring of power relations outside the Budapest and a few cities with county rank, the county assemblies and the rest of the rural settlements are still overwhelmingly dominated by FIDESZ-KDNP.

The victory of the Opposition in the Budapest (14 districts), 10 (out of 23) city municipalities, as well as 32 local authorities with over 10,000 residents notwithstanding, the parties in government remained unchallenged in terms of the number of obtained votes and ruling parties continue to exert a majority in county assemblies.

Conclusion

Electoral mobilization encounters serious obstacles in countries where meso-tier government plays a marginal role in public service delivery. Fostering electoral support in the case of invisible, weak representative bodies is a challenging task.

County election outcomes did not pose significant political challenges to the government. The victory of the Opposition in Budapest and ten larger cities underlines their chance to regain political power in the national political arena. However, the dominant single party position of the nationally ruling FIDESZ-KDNP alliance in all other localities may prove to be an insurmountable barrier to overcome for regaining national power. The events unfolding since the October 2019 local/county self-government elections suggest that the opposition has only won a battle but not the war. In addition, the position of local and county self-governments has declined further due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Municipalities experienced severe budgetary cuts related to governmental measures countering the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, with the more prosperous municipalities, and Budapest, in particular, being the hardest hit. Forty percent of the vehicle tax collected by municipalities was centralized and the tourism tax was suspended. Municipalities do not receive funding from the government for delivering additional tasks (Kovács 2020). Information exchange and negotiations between municipalities and the government were practically absent during the period of the pandemic (Finta, Kovács, and Pálné Kovács 2020). Budapest had permanent conflicts with the Government, particularly with respect to state and EU-funded investments.

The signs of political division manifest themselves most clearly when elections foster the temporary emergence of opposition party coalitions with national ambitions. Local or county identities play a marginal role in forging together ideologically 'hybrid' party alliances (Kákai 1997, 2015).

The significance of county elections is seriously undermined by governmental centralization efforts and strict restrictions on competition between parliamentary parties. County assemblies are in a power vacuum since the government is apparently not seeking to strengthen county assemblies despite having (also) won the county elections.

Notes

1. Reducing the total number of county government representatives from 835 to 391.
2. Christian Democrats emerge as the traditional allies of FIDESZ in every election, almost dissolving the identity of KDNP, since party alliances, besides establishing unified lists, are also obliged to form unified factions in representative bodies.
3. It is important to note that in comparison to previous elections, national party centres have gained growing momentum in candidate selection (esp. in the case of FIDESZ-KDNP).
4. During the 2018 Parliamentary elections, 11 out of 13 individual mandates were won by FIDESZ-KDNP candidates in these settlements.
5. A dominant one-party system can be identified by a party which wins more than ten percent of the vote than the second largest party for three consecutive elections. FIDESZ fulfils this requirement.
6. This is due, amongst others, to the restructuring of power relations between parties: the sweeping victory of FIDESZ-KDNP post-2010, the dissolution of regime-changing (i.e. the government-forming party (MDF) in 1990 and the largest opposition party (SZDSZ) in the contemporary Government) centrist parties and the evaporating voter support of the Left. The modification of the Electoral Law was a further factor that fostered the unification of opposition parties in a single bloc. The defeat of the ruling party was facilitated by a joining of forces by the opposition parties irrespective of ideological background.
7. In this case, our analysis of the changing power position of left- and right-wing parties took into account the number of votes and not the number of mandates since the latter does not provide a good proxy for the effective size and changes of local level electoral support of the Left or the Right due to the distortive effect of the election system.

Disclosure statement

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