

THE SPATIALITY OF SOCIAL-POLITICAL ACTIVITY

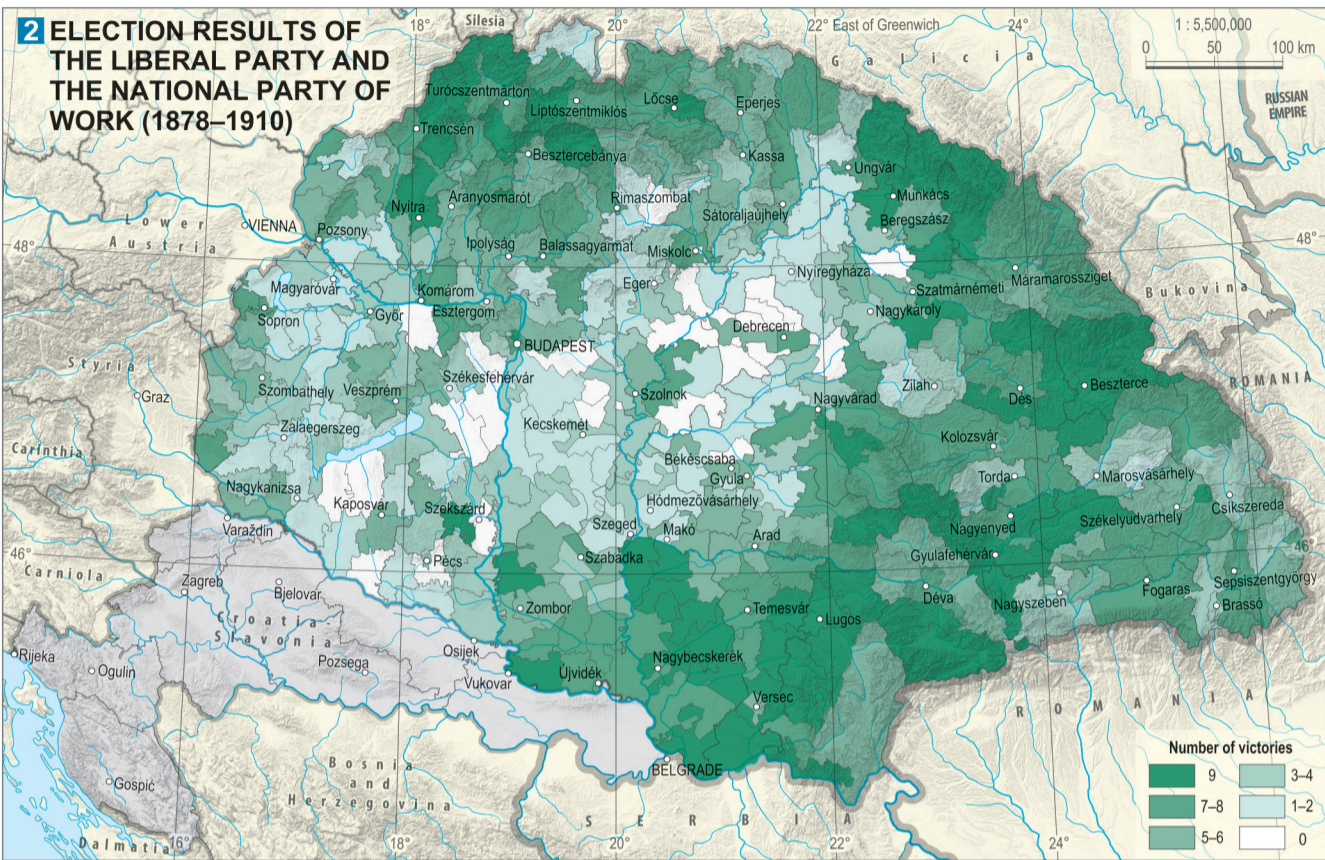
ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY

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Democratic elections are a fundamental institution in modern parliamentary democracies, including in Hungary. At regular intervals, eligible citizens elect national (parliamentary), regional and local (municipal) representatives, who, based on the principle of popular representation, make decisions on their behalf and express opinions on national or local issues. In Hungary, the roots of modern parliamentarism go back to 1848. Since that time, however, the country has experienced several political turning points, which serve to delineate the main periods in its recent history. Before 1945, except for a short interruption, the Hungarian Parliament was bicameral (with lower and upper chambers). The analysis in this chapter relates to the lower chamber.

Parliamentary elections before World War I

Article V of 1848 abolished the estates system and laid the foundations of modern Hungarian parliamentarism. It divided the country into constituencies, introducing a framework based solely on individual mandates. The right to vote was tied to certain conditions. Men aged 21 or over were eligible to vote based on their property, income or education. Those who had been entitled to vote before 1848 retained their right to vote, but they could not pass it on to their offspring. Around one in four adult males were eligible to vote, which was viewed as a high suffrage rate in Europe at the time. Under the Dual Monarchy, the electoral system changed only marginally up until the last parliamentary elections in 1910. A crucial change occurred in 1867, when, pursuant to the emancipation (equal rights) law, people of Jewish faith also acquired the right to vote. The electoral law of 1848 stipulated open voting, the justification for which was the low average level of education. The constituencies created in 1848



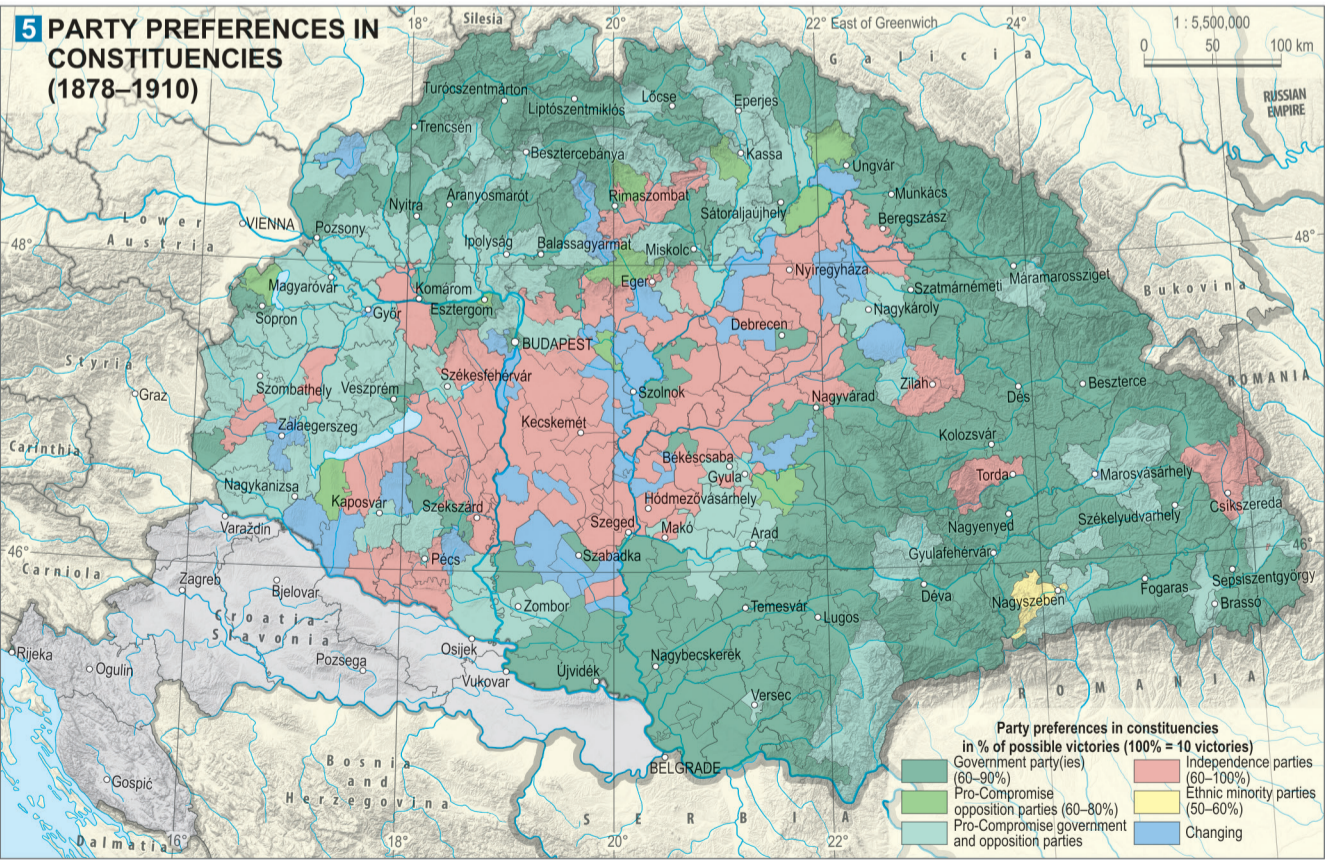
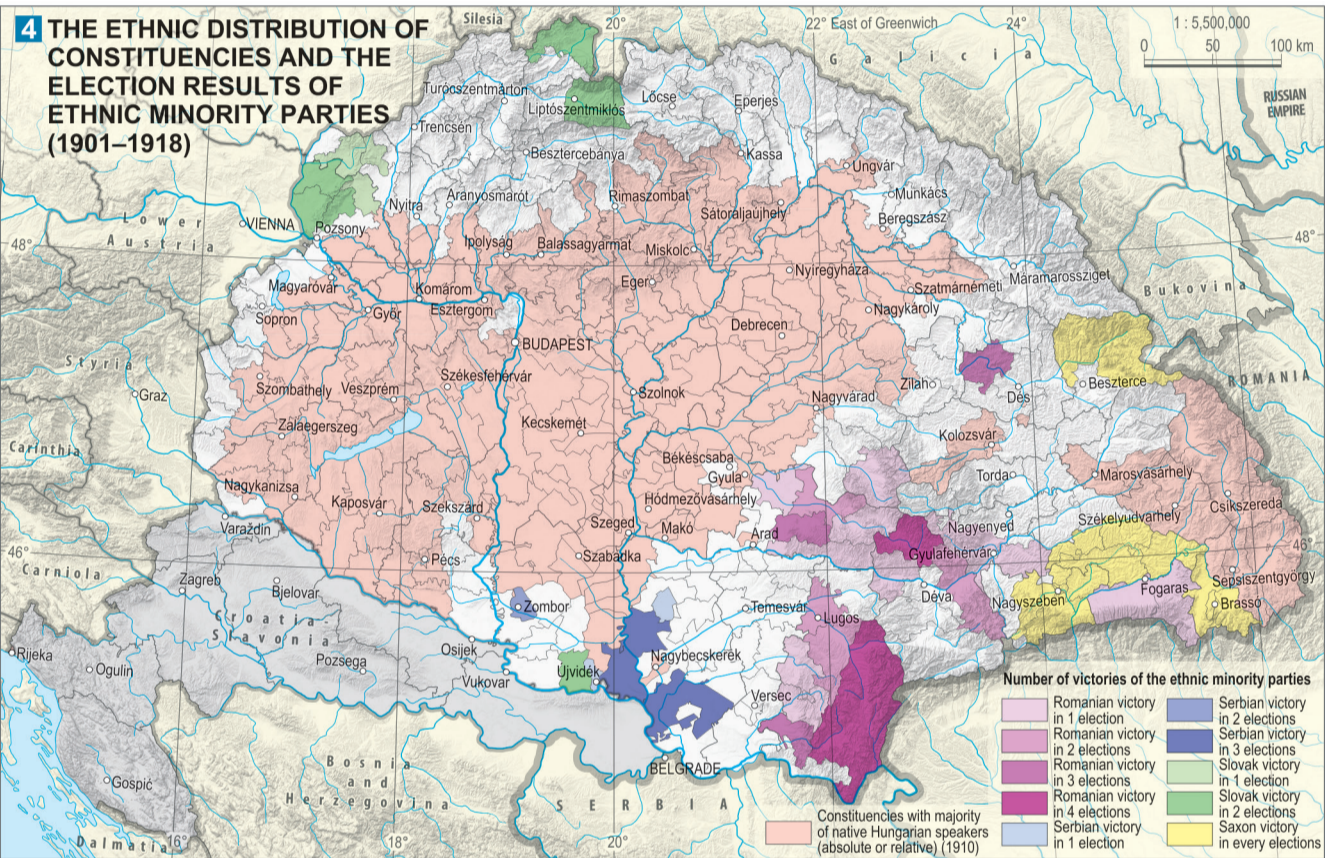
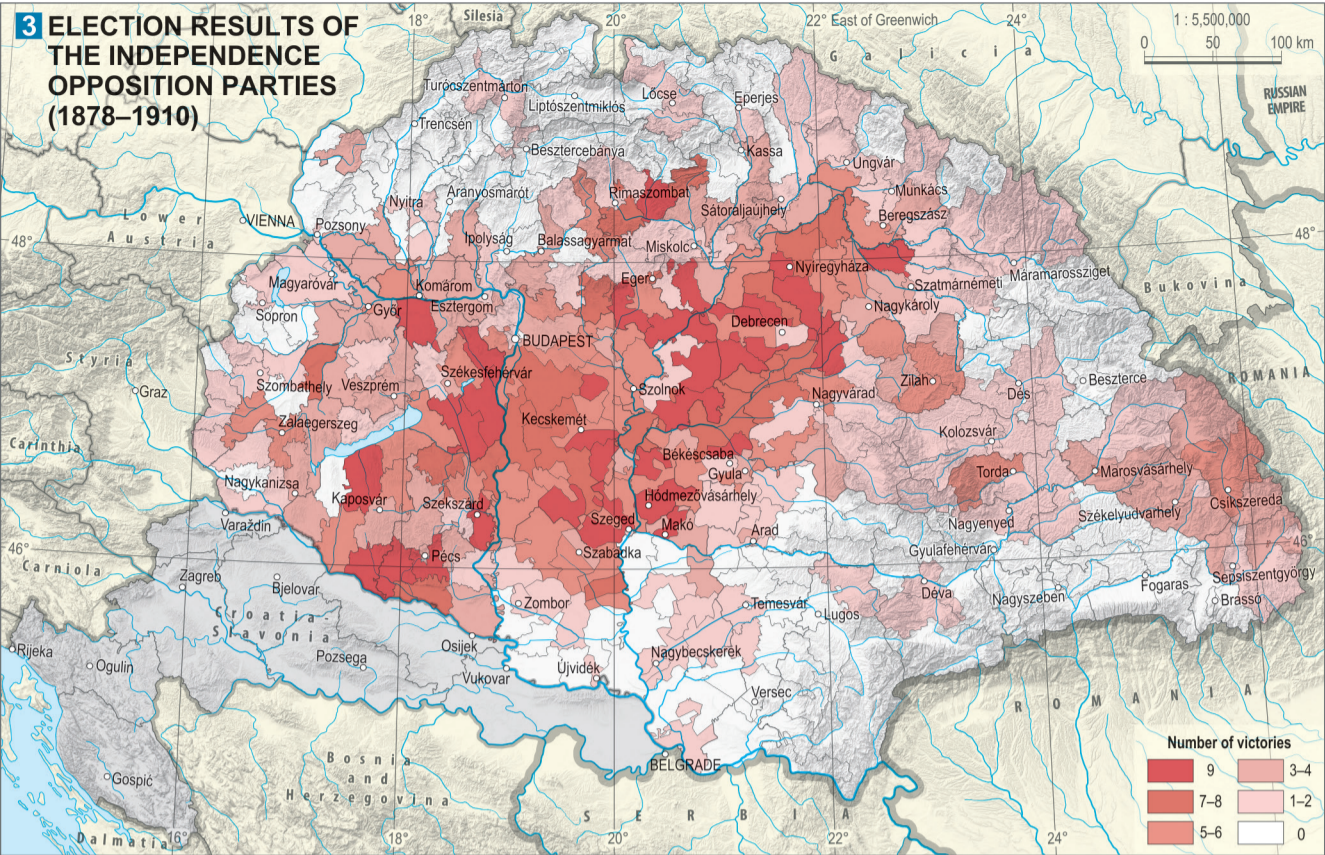
were tied to the number of inhabitants, with a parliamentary mandate for every 15–20 thousand people in the larger towns. In rural constituencies, however, a population of ca. 30 thousand was required. Severe anomalies arose, both in terms of the population of the constituencies and the proportion of voters. By 1876, a structure consisting of 413 individual constituencies had been established. At the time of the Dual Monarchy, 13 general elections were held. Initially, there were three-year parliamentary terms, but this was then raised to five years (X.1.1.).

After 1867, a fundamental issue in Hungarian political life was the relationship with Austria. After the Hungarian defeat in the war of independence, it seemed that the country would be absorbed into a centralized

Austrian Empire. Later, however, foreign and domestic political realities forced the two sides into a compromise, resulting in the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. Acceptance or rejection of the system created by the 1867 Compromise was at the focus of many domestic political debates. The leading force in Parliament and the main proponent of the political ideas of 1867 was the *Liberal Party* (X.1.2.). The party was founded in 1875 following the merger of the former ‘government party’, the Deák Party, with the Left Centre, a major opposition party. *Kálmán Tisza*, who had led the Left Centre, then served as prime minister of the country for fifteen years (1875–1890). Between 1890 and 1905, the Liberal Party continued to be the leading parliamentary force. In the 1905 election, however, it was defeated, and the party was disbanded in 1906. A new ‘government party’ – the *National Party of Work* – was created by *István Tisza* (Kálmán’s son) in 1910. Both the Liberal Party and then the National Party of Work had a strong voter base in the peripheral areas of the country inhabited by minorities. Their influence was less in the central areas of the Carpathian Basin inhabited predominantly by Hungarians. Both parties were committed to the values of *classical liberalism*. In the late 19th century, the separation of church and state was a pivotal issue in the conservative–liberal debate. A new conservative party (the Hungarian Catholic People’s Party) utilized this issue to gain support, being in favour of the 1867 Compromise but rejecting the liberal course on religious policy. The *independence parties* formed another major political grouping at the time of the Dual Monarchy. Their ideology was grounded in the complete *rejection* of the institutions that had arisen out of the *Austro–Hungarian Compromise of 1867*. However, the various parties in the grouping took diverse positions on social issues. Their support was greatest in areas *inhabited predominantly by Hungarians* (X.1.3.). In the pre-

1 SUMMARY OF DATA OF ELECTIONS DURING THE DUAL MONARCHY (1869–1910)									
Year	Number of seats*	Number of parties with representatives in Parliament	General election result (%)						One candidate runs in the election (%)
			Pro-Compromise government party(ies)	Pro-Compromise opposition parties	Independence parties	Ethnic minority parties	Left-wing party	Independents	
1869	409 (499)	3	59.9	0.2	36.4	3.4	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1872	412 (441)	6	60.4	1.2	34.7	3.6	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1875	413 (468)	6	79.4	5.3	9.2	6.1	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1878	413 (456)	4	57.4	23.0	17.4	2.2	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1881	413 (450)	4	56.8	18.7	22.1	2.4	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1884	413 (445)	5	56.9	21.1	18.6	3.4	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1887	413 (475)	4	61.9	17.0	19.2	1.9	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1892	413 (473)	6	59.3	16.0	24.5	—	—	0.2	38.7
1896	413 (476)	5	70.5	14.5	14.3	—	—	0.7	29.3
1901	413 (467)	9	67.4	6.5	22.0	4.1	—	—	28.3
1905	413 (423)	9	38.0	17.7	41.2	2.4	0.5	0.2	19.9
1906	413 (470)	13	—	32.0	61.3	6.3	0.5	—	47.9
1910	413 (547)	17	62.0	8.2	27.6	1.9	0.2	—	21.3

*The value in parentheses shows the number of representatives who reached the parliament during the elections.
n.d. = No data available



dominantly Hungarian constituencies, their chances of victory were further enhanced by the traditional anti-Habsburg attitudes of the Calvinists and the strength of the ‘Kossuth cult’ among the peasant-farmers. Even so, the independence parties had no meaningful chance

of winning elections for most of the period, as ethnic minority voters were dominant in nearly a half of the constituencies. The collapse of the Liberal Party in 1905, however, created an opportunity for them. Accordingly, *between 1906 and 1910*, they were the *leading gov-*

ernment force. However, this fleeting role in government ended in 1910 when ideological differences tore their coalition apart.

Ethnic ties were a defining aspect of elections for the duration of the Dual Monarchy (X.1.4.). According to the 1910 census, Hungarians constituted the majority of inhabitants in only 216 (i.e. 52.3%) of the 413 constituencies. Germans formed the majority in 19 constituencies, Romanians in 65, Slovaks in 53, Rusyns (Ruthenians) in 9, and Serbs in 4 constituencies. The parties in power benefitted from open voting, limited suffrage, and the eccentricities of the electoral system. In addition, there were several important reasons for the success of the government parties in ethnic minority areas. In constituencies with predominantly Serbian or Romanian populations (mostly in Hungary and not in Transylvania), most candidates supported the Compromise of 1867 regardless of their ethnicity. Indeed, during the entire period of the Dual Monarchy, no more than 16 of the 246 ethnic German parliamentary representatives, 80 of the 240 ethnic Romanian representatives, and 26 of the 137 ethnic Serbian representatives were nationalist party politicians opposed to the 1867 system. Political parties that were organized on an ethnic basis were weakened by the dominance and popularity of the ‘government parties’, which divided the ethnic minority vote. Having suffered election failures in the aftermath of the Compromise, by the 1880s the nationalist ethnic minority parties had decided to boycott the elections. After 1901, the nationalist ethnic minority parties gradually abandoned their passive stance and endeavoured to assert their political demands in the Hungarian Parliament. Their greatest success came in 1906, when those ethnic minority politicians who were supportive of liberalism chose not to run in the elections. Nevertheless, after the 1910 election victory of the National Party of Work, the status quo ante was restored, with ethnic minority parliamentary representatives – from the Transylvanian Saxon, Romanian and Serbian communities in particular – being more numerous within the ruling party than in the opposition parties.

Turning to long-term party preferences in the ten elections that followed the 1867 Compromise, we observe a spatial structure that supports the previous findings (X.1.5.). In areas inhabited mainly by ethnic minorities, the government parties (the main proponents of the 1867 framework and ideology) are dominant. This dominance declines somewhat in areas inhabited by Slovaks and in certain western parts of Hungary with a predominantly Hungarian population. In those area, the weakness of the government parties is reflected in the strength of the conservative parties that supported the Compromise of 1867, in particular the Hungarian Catholic People’s Party. In the predominantly Hungarian areas of the Alföld, the Kossuth tradition and the spirit of Hungarian independence were far more influential. Considering the Trianon borders, we observe that this more conservative and independent-minded area remained in Hungary after 1920. This may well explain why the libertarian (liberal) period in Hungarian parliamentarism ended with the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the creation of Trianon Hungary.

Parliamentary elections between 1920 and 1939

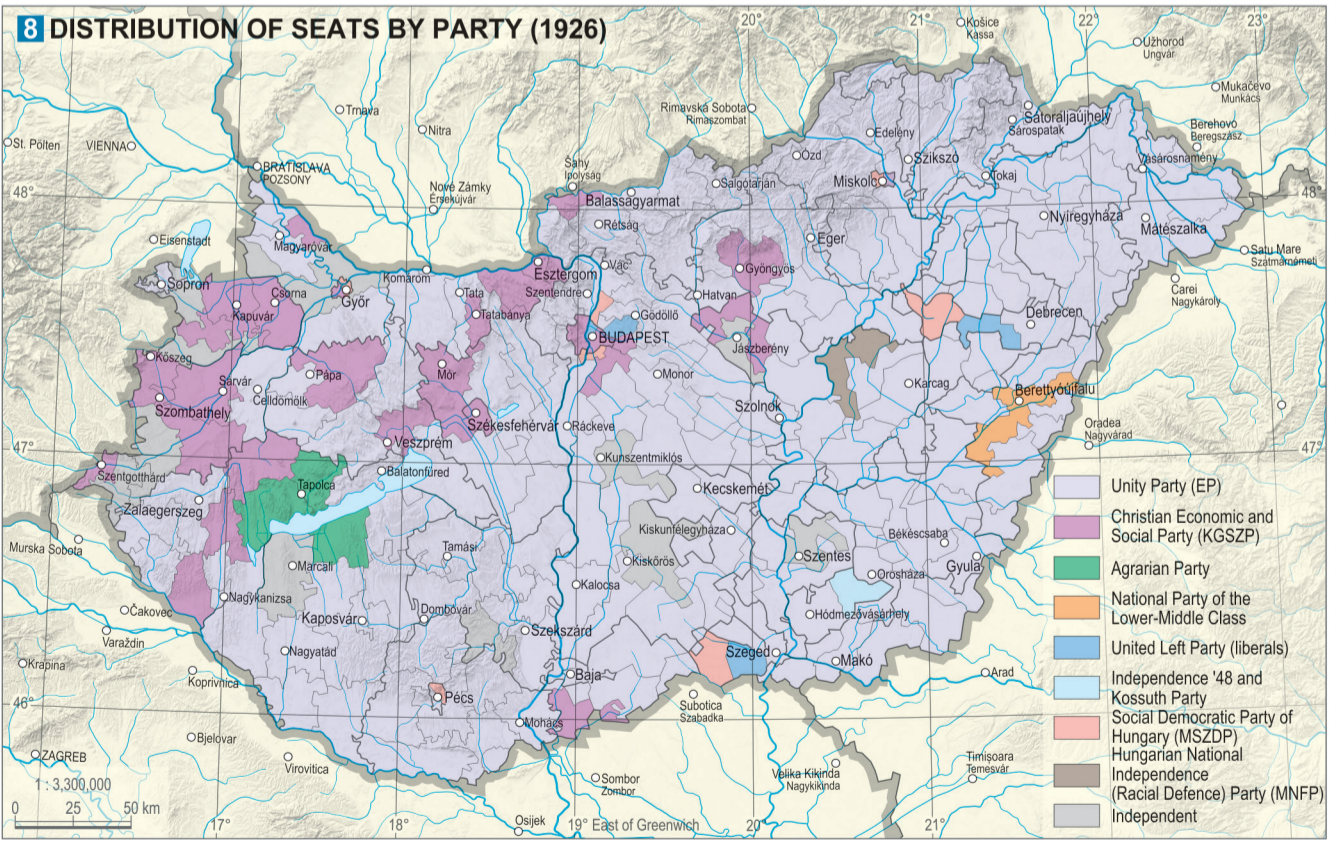
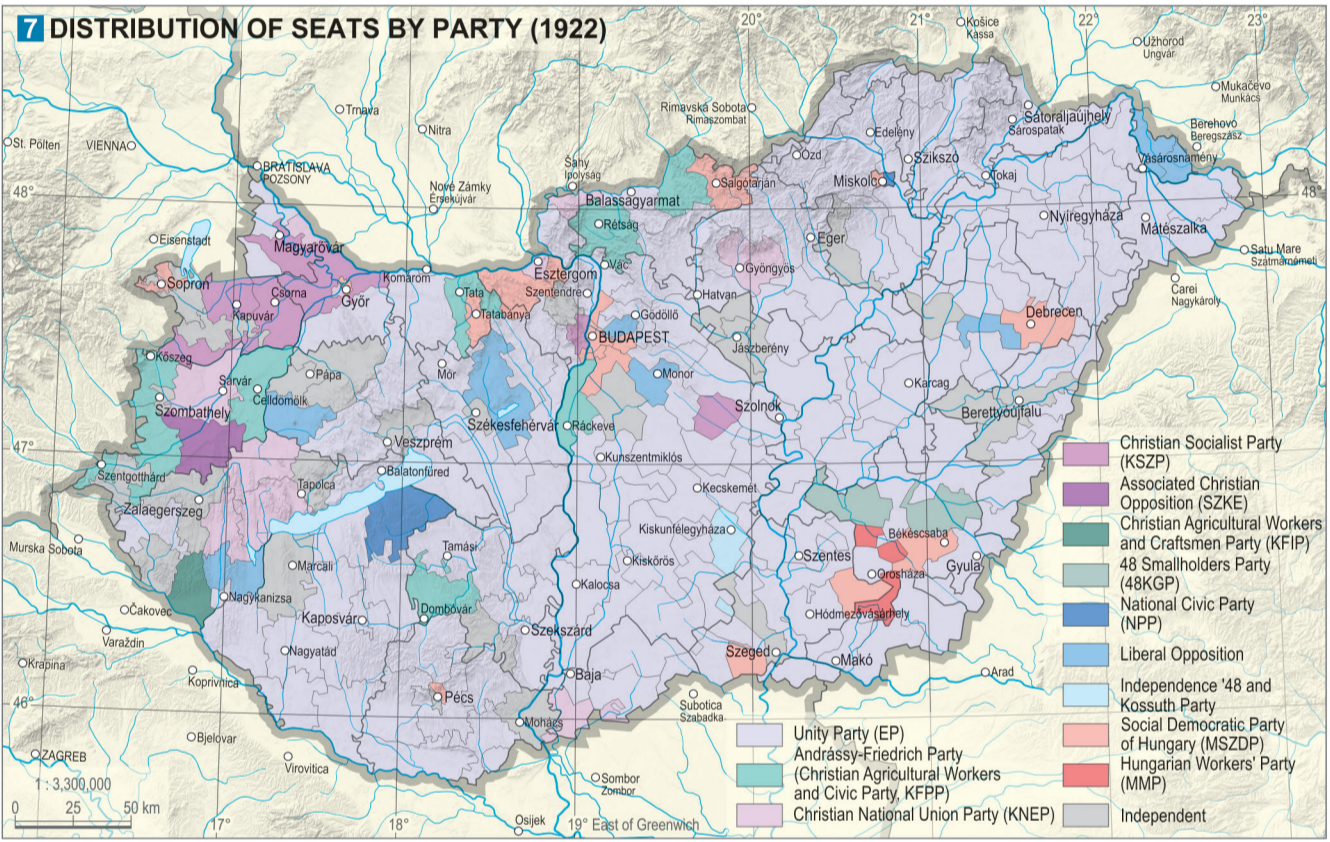
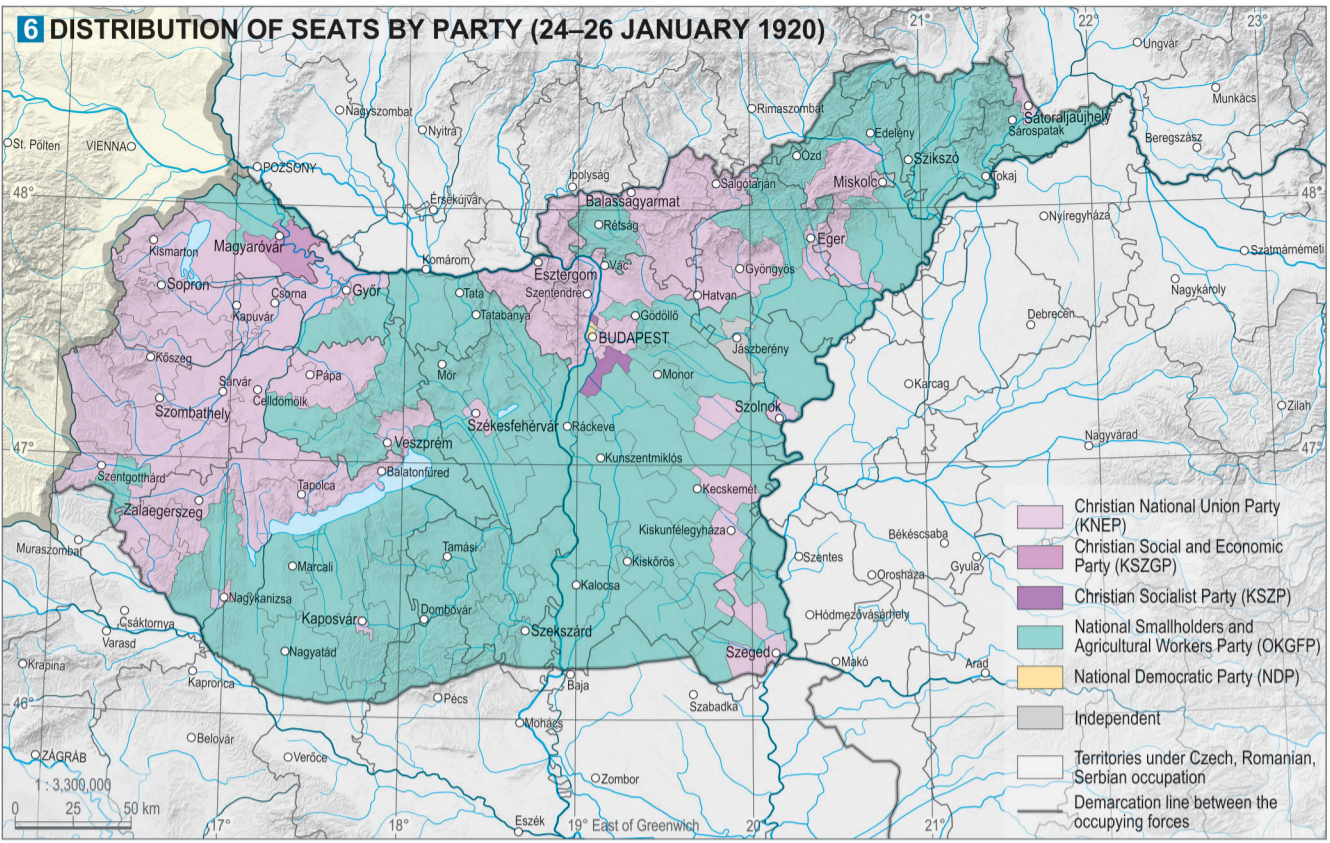
Defeat in WWI had many grave consequences for Hungary and its inhabitants. The Dual Monarchy was dissolved, and much of the country fell under the oc-

cupation of the Entente's allies in the region (the Czechs, Romanians and Serbs). In what remained of Hungary, three radically different political regimes and governments followed each other in less than a year. None of them, however, were recognized by the Entente. Finally, in November 1919, with the help of a British diplomat, a *coalition government* led by Károly Huszár was formed. The victorious powers were willing to recognize this government in anticipation of a general election.

The first elections took place in late *January 1920* in the territories that were not under foreign occupation. At this time, the western border of the country was still the historical (pre-Trianon) Austro-Hungarian border. The election stood out in legal terms from both earlier and subsequent elections. The ratio of eligible voters in the population increased from 6–7% at the time of the Dual Monarchy to 40%. This voter eligibility rate was higher than the corresponding figure in the leading powers of the Entente. There were two principal reasons for this: an easing of the conditions for voting and the granting of the vote to women. Further, voting was secret for the first time. The age limit on the right to vote was set at 24 years. However, in an act of positive discrimination, soldiers who had completed at least three months of service at the front received the right to vote regardless of their age. The electoral rules were still based on the 'people's law' of 1918, which had been adopted by the Hungarian National Council at the time of *Mihály Károlyi's* leadership in the aftermath of the Aster Revolution. The provisions of that law formed the basis of Prime Minister *István Friedrich's* decree on the holding of an election.

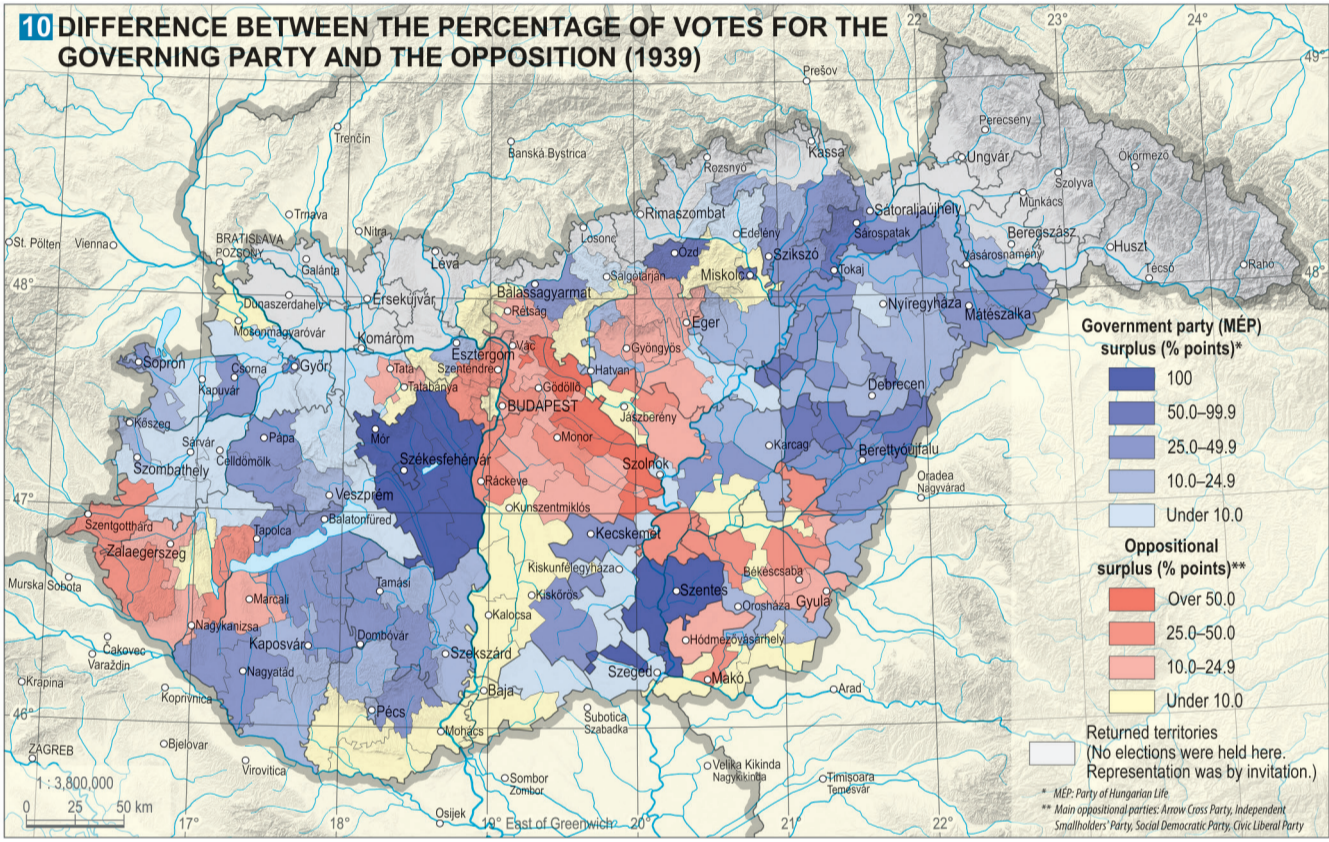
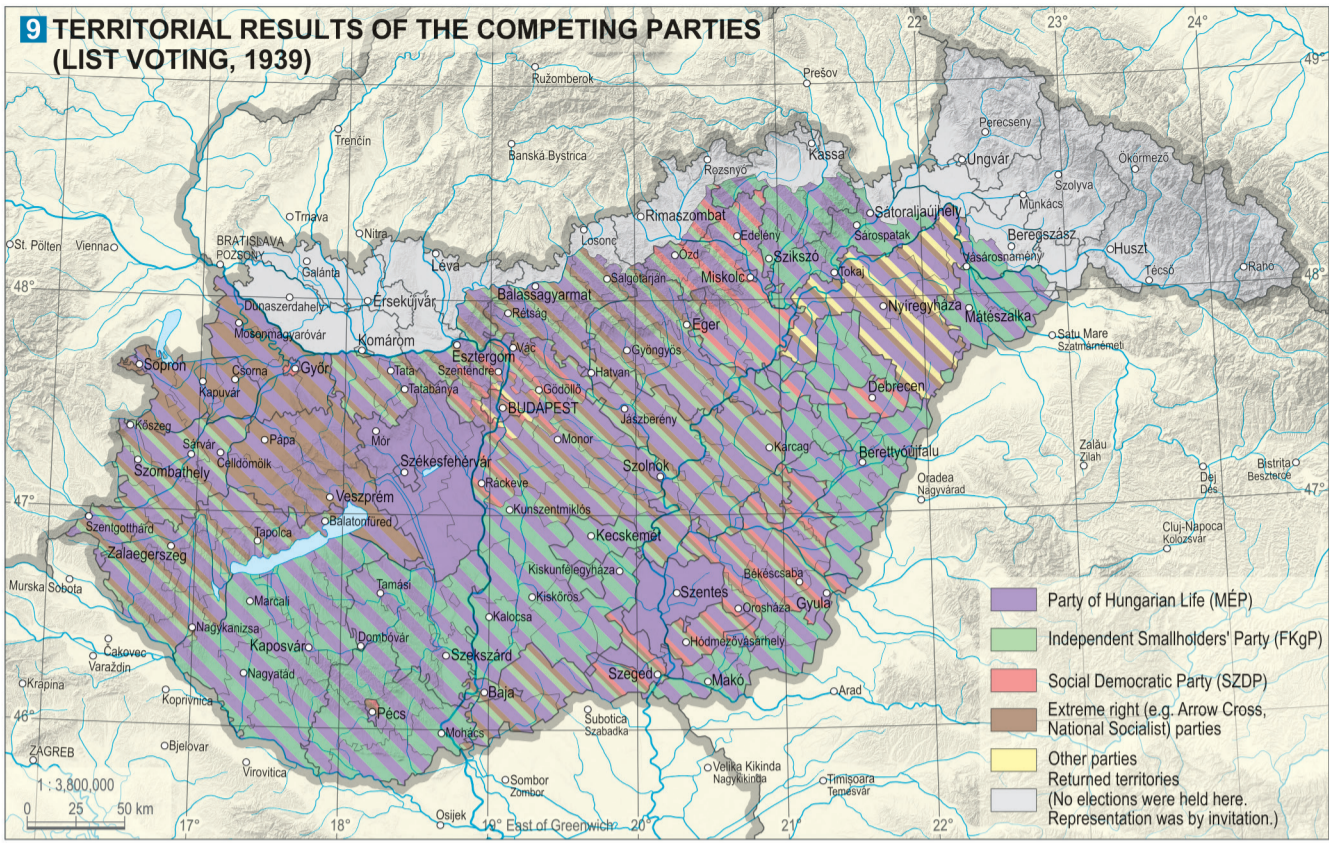
In 37 of the 164 individual constituencies situated in unoccupied parts of the country, the candidates were elected unopposed in so-called unanimous elections. In these constituencies, the *Christian Party* and the *Smallholders* in effect divided the seats between themselves. The two aforementioned parties tended to fight for seats in rural areas, while in the capital city, the Christian Party's main rivals were the liberals. The victorious Smallholders won nearly 48% of the parliamentary seats, while the Christian Party won 47%. The Christian Party was victorious in the northwestern part of Transdanubia, in Budapest and its environs, as well as in the counties of Nógrád and Hont [X.1.6.](#) A grand coalition was evidently required both for reasons of parliamentary mathematics and in order to stabilize the country, which was in a dire state. Hungary's delegates to the peace conference travelled to Paris shortly before the elections. Despite their efforts, the borders dictated by the Trianon treaty resulted in the loss of two-thirds of Hungary's pre-war territory and population. As the Entente powers were vehemently opposed to a member of the Habsburg dynasty ruling in Hungary, the new Parliament elected *Miklós Horthy* (1920–1944) as regent, thereby retaining the monarchy as the country's form of government.

After two more changes of government in rapid succession, the task of creating a '*Christian-national*' Hungary fell to *István Bethlen*, who served as prime minister from 1921 until 1931. The *Bethlen consolidation* saw the creation of the *Unity Party* and substantial *electoral reform*. After the shock of Trianon, much of the political elite was convinced that, just as at the time of the Dual Monarchy, the country needed a unified party that could not be swayed from governing. The two attempts of Charles IV to retake the Hungarian throne (he returned twice to the country in 1921) tore the Christian Party apart. In response, the prime minister established the Unity Party based on the Smallholders. The political structure created by Bethlen survived up until the German occupation of Hungary



in 1944. The prime minister introduced several electoral reforms by decree. *Open voting* was reintroduced in the *counties* (constituting 80% of the parliamentary mandates). Meanwhile, in the capital and its environs, four party-list constituencies were established. Both here and in the individual constituencies of towns with

municipal rights, secret voting was retained. The Social Democrats demanded this, and it was a prerequisite for a compromise with them. Thus, although the Social Democrats remained in opposition, they were able to influence political life, having received the votes of many urban workers.



The purported aim of the 'reforms', which reduced the share of eligible voters from 40% to 30%, was to exclude elements that were prone to extremism and could undermine the stability of the government. A certain level of education was made a prerequisite for voting (four grades of elementary school were required for men and six grades for women). The age limit for men remained at 24 years, but for women it was raised to 26. In the elections of 1922, the Unity Party received 57% of the vote, and won the vast majority of seats in rural areas, with the northwestern part of Transdan-

ubia being the sole exception. In contrast, it won no seats in Budapest or in the towns with municipal rights [X.1.7.](#)

The election law was finally passed in 1925. With minor amendments, it raised to the rank of law the prime ministerial decree of 1922. The so-called Bethlen Consolidation was successful in other fields as well. This success undoubtedly contributed to the Unity Party's victory in the election of December 1926, when it secured nearly 70% of the vote. At that election, the Unity Party won the overwhelming majority of seats

in rural areas (where its candidates often stood unopposed). At the same time, in Budapest and in other towns with multiple seats, the Social Democrats came out on top [X.1.8.](#)

The same law established the framework for the next two parliamentary elections (held in 1931 and 1935), both of which were won by the Unity Party. After World War I, Hungary was the only country in Europe to retain open voting. Secret voting was the norm in the parliamentary democracies and even in authoritarian states with legislatures. The elections of 1939 were regulated by a new law that *made voting secret everywhere*. At the same time, however, 'corrections' were introduced to guarantee the victory of the 'government party' (which had been renamed the Party of Hungarian Life). In the individual constituencies, a parliamentary seat could be won with a relative majority of 40% or more, while the system of lists introduced by the new law was favourable to the ruling party in terms of the distribution of seats. In view of the increase in the general population's level of education, the proportion of eligible voters once again approached 40%. With the strengthening of the extreme right in Hungary, the ruling party found itself at the centre of the political spectrum. To its left were the Independent Smallholders' Party, Károly Rassay's liberal party, and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, each of which fielded candidates [X.1.9.](#) The *Party of Hungarian Life* remained the ruling party, having obtained 55% of the parliamentary seats, with 48% support in the lists. It won a resounding victory in Transdanubia and in the northeastern part of the country [X.1.10.](#) Reflecting the party's growing influence throughout the country, it received the most votes in towns with municipal rights. Only in Budapest were the opposition parties ahead.

All the party-political ideologies that were a force in interwar Europe could be found in the Hungarian Parliament. The sole exception to this was communism, as the communist party had been banned in the autumn of 1919. The far right of politics was represented by the so-called 'defenders of the race' (Hung.: fajvédők) in the 1920s and by the Arrow Cross and National Socialist parties in the 1930s [X.1.11.](#) The main proponent of national conservatism was the *Unity Party*, which was the dominant political party in Hungary from 1922 onwards. The parties representing political Catholicism merged and then split or even renamed themselves. Their support among voters decreased over time. Agrarianism as a political ideology was represented with varying degrees of success by the parties of the landed peasantry and the smallholders. In the wake of their victory in the 1920 election, they were integrated by Bethlen into the Unity Party. During the world economic crisis, the Unity Party's disaf-

11 SUMMARY OF DATA OF ELECTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS (1920–1939)											
Political grouping	Jan. 1920*	1922		1926		1931		1935		1939 list*	1939 individual**
	Vote share %	Vote share %	of which in secret %	Vote share %	of which in secret %	Vote share %	of which in secret %	Vote share %	of which in secret %	Vote share %	Vote share %
Extreme right	—	—	—	3.8	48.2	0.6	38.5	4.2	21.5	25.0	25.4
National conservative	1.7	39.6	8.2	50.7	16.0	45.5	17.5	48.1	17.8	49.7	54.9
Political Catholicism	41.7	13.5	46.3	15.3	42.7	15.4	40.3	11.4	40.6	2.0	1.3
Agrarian parties	46.2	1.7	0.0	2.7	—	13.3	12.0	20.9	5.2	15.5	15.3
Liberals	6.0	11.3	52.2	9.1	70.8	6.7	67.1	4.1	93.0	2.6	0.1
Social democrats	—	17.0	75.0	11.1	85.1	11.0	79.4	6.7	100.0	5.2	0.9
Other parties	0.9	8.1	29.1	0.1	—	0.4	—	0.9	46.7	—	0.6
Independents	3.5	8.9	22.1	7.3	—	7.2	2.5	3.7	—	—	1.5
TOTAL/average	100.0	100.0	52.2	100.0	32.3	100.0	29.3	100.0	26.1	100.0	100.0
unanimous/ total mandates	37/164**	25/245**	1/50	92/245	2/46	67/245	0/46	53/246	0/46	4/125	10/135

*Fully secret voting **Only the winner is known, 1920: 15, 1922:1 constituencies

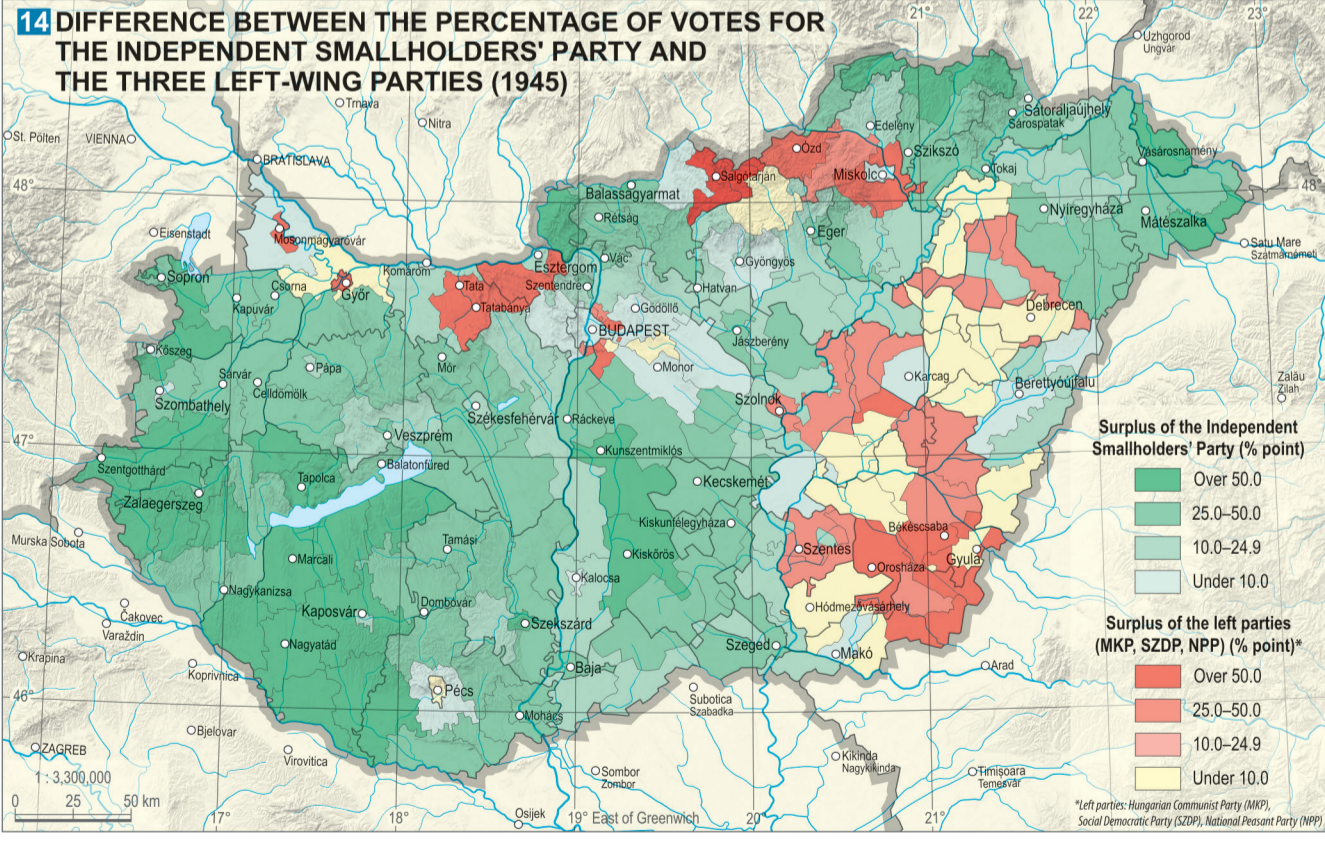
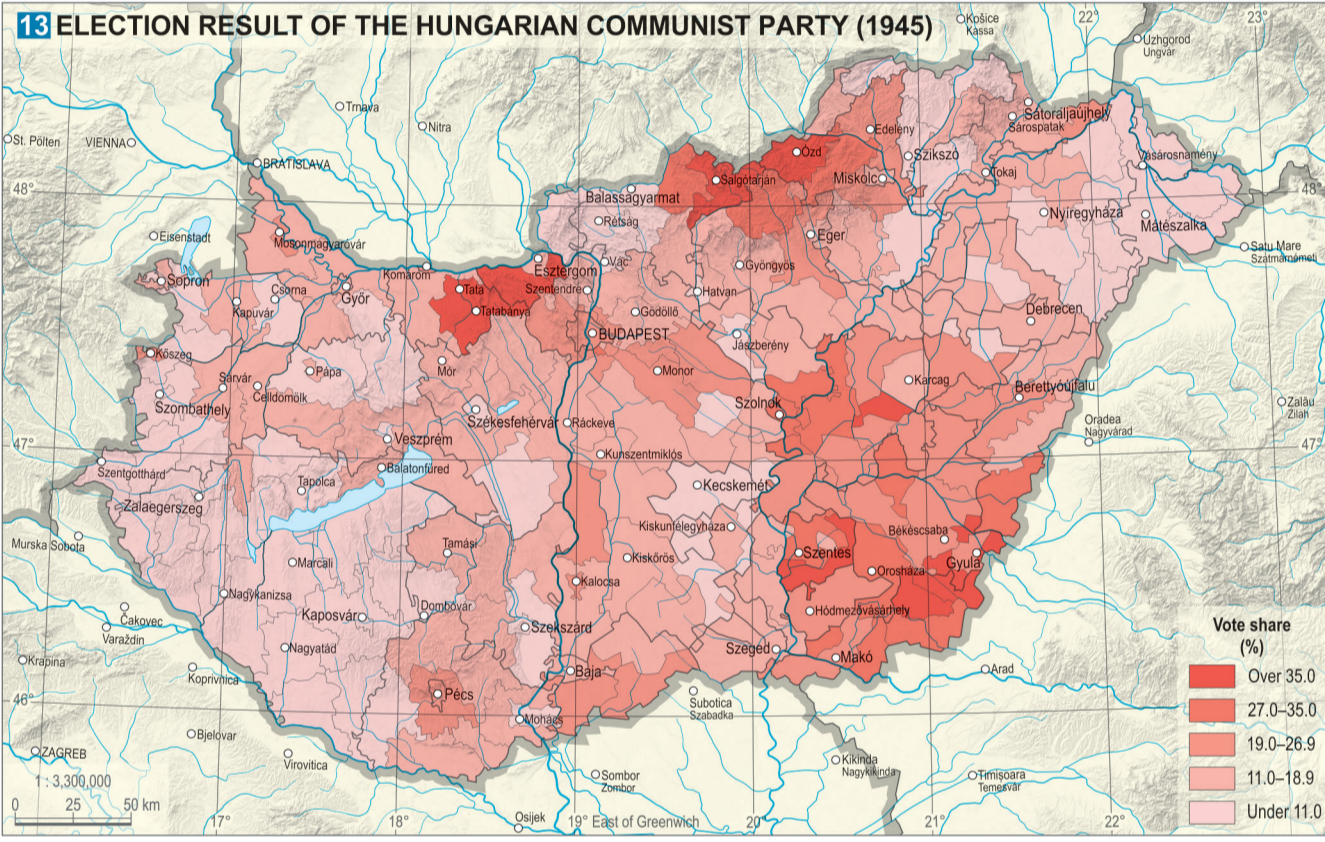
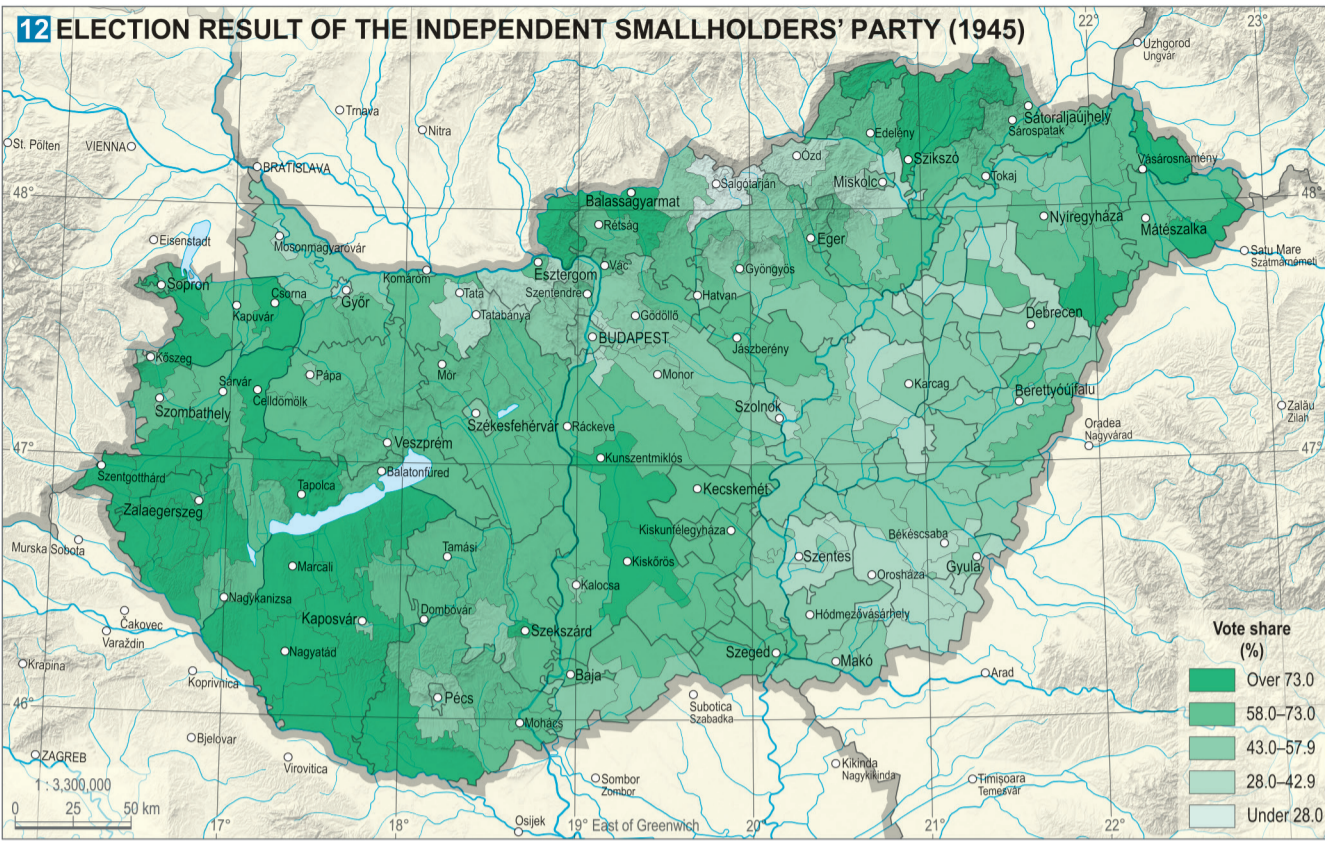
fected smallholders established their own party, the *Independent Smallholders' Party*, which from 1931 until 1939 constituted the largest opposition force in the country. Despite the re-emergence of an independent agrarian party, the majority of the rural population continued to support the 'government party' (the Unity Party and then the National Party of Work). Liberalism was represented by two major parties, which sometimes cooperated but at other times competed for votes. The political left was represented by the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, which fielded candidates for the first time in the 1922 elections, becoming the largest opposition faction with 10% of the parliamentary representatives. However, its support steadily declined during the rest of the period.

Parliamentary elections between 1945 and 1949

In the final stages of WWII, the troops of Nazi Germany and its ally in Hungary, the Arrow Cross regime, turned the country into a battle zone for more than half a year. The result was immeasurable suffering among the population, coupled with the destruction of 40% of the national wealth. Even the neutral countries refused to recognize Szálasi's puppet regime that was beholden to Nazi Germany. The country's regent, Miklós Horthy, was forced to resign after an unsuccessful attempt to take Hungary out of the war. As the Soviet forces advanced westwards across the country, the absence of an executive authority (a government) in the liberated areas became a growing problem. Thus, similarly to the autumn of 1919, once again the victors in war – this time the Soviet occupiers – assisted in establishing a national government. Because the war was ongoing, regular elections could not be held throughout the country. Thus, in 45 larger towns located behind the front, delegates were selected at public meetings for what was termed the *Provisional National Assembly*. Esteemed anti-Nazi politicians then came to *Debrecen*, the chosen venue for the Provisional National Assembly. At a meeting held on 21–22 December 1944 and having identified itself as the custodian of Hungarian national sovereignty, the 230-member Provisional National Assembly duly elected the *Provisional National Government* and declared war on Nazi Germany. In a manifesto, it proclaimed the construction of a free, democratic and independent Hungary. In the aftermath of the war, various democratic political parties were (re)established. Indeed, despite the Soviet occupation, the country set out on the path to a *limited form of democracy*. At the September session of the Provisional National Assembly a provisional decree on *land reform* was enacted in law and a new electoral law was also adopted.

The *new electoral law* granted the right to vote to all citizens aged 20 or over and ended the discrimination against women. The country was divided into 16 list constituencies, and in each constituency a mandate was awarded for 12 thousand votes. In contrast to the situation in 1939, suffrage in Hungary became essentially universal. Even so, in addition to a relatively narrow group excluded on political grounds, people who had self-identified as Germans in the 1941 census were denied the vote. The application of collective guilt as a general principle reflected the expectations of the leading powers in the struggle against Nazi Germany and its allies.

The first post-war parliamentary election – held in early November 1945 – saw a particularly high turnout, with votes being cast by 92% of eligible voters.



The election was recognized as free, fair and democratic by the allied powers, the international press, and the ordinary Hungarian public. The *Independent Smallholders' Party* won the election with 57% of the vote. This striking accomplishment was due in part to the (forced or voluntary) absence of parties representing

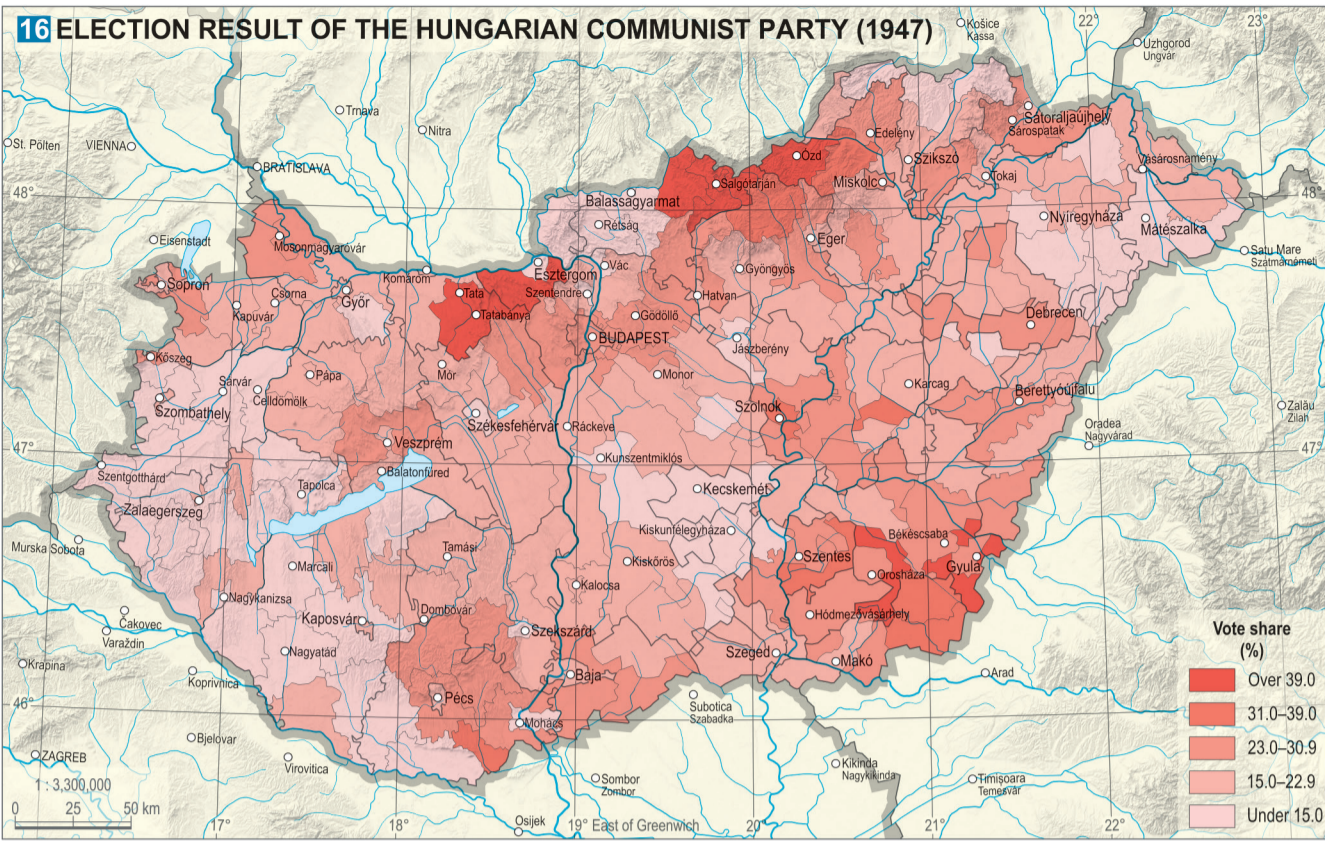
Catholicism and national conservatism. Support for the Smallholders was particularly strong in the western and southern parts of Transdanubia and in Szabolcs and Szatmár counties [X. 1. 12.](#) The *social democrats* and the *communists* each received 17% of the vote, while the National Peasant Party, which was compet-

ing for the first time, received almost 7%. Support for the Communist Party was above average in the industrial regions in the north and in parts of the Alföld with agrarian leftist traditions [X. 1. 13.](#) In these regions, the three leftist parties received a majority of votes [X. 1. 15.](#) According to researchers, women were more likely than men to vote for the conservative parties [X. 1. 14.](#)

At Soviet behest, the governing parties agreed prior to the elections that they would continue to form a coalition government and that the election results would only affect their relative shares in government. Thus, although the Independent Smallholders' Party received the post of prime minister, the Hungarian Communist Party could choose the minister of interior, a key post in the exercise of power (with control over the police and the domestic security force).

The first legislative act of the new Parliament was to change the *form of government*. Thus, the Kingdom of Hungary was replaced by a *republic on 1 February 1946*. The main political fault line lay between the Independent Smallholders' Party and the three leftist parties. The chasm soon became so wide that government policy *lurched from crisis to crisis in 1946*. The leadership of the Independent Smallholders' Party governed under the watchful and critical eye of the left and right wings of the party. In the end, the latter grouping had to be expelled in the spring of 1946. Following this development, however, the Communist Party merely stepped up the pressure on the Independent Smallholders' Party. The *communists were better prepared* than their opponents and benefited from Soviet support.

With the active support of the Soviet occupying authorities, the *communists* soon found a means to *overturn the balance of power between the Independent Smallholders' Party and the leftist parties*, utilizing the infamous State Protection Department. This latter body was subordinated to the Ministry of Interior, which the communists controlled. The case of the Hungarian Community was portrayed in the state-controlled media as a conspiracy against the republic, with the authorities initially ordering the arrest of several young Smallholder politicians, who were accused of being members of the Community. Then, during preparations for a show trial, senior leaders of the Independent Smallholders' Party were also accused of aiding and abetting the conspiracy. The Hungarian Parliament, however, refused to suspend the immunity of Béla Kovács, secretary general of the Independent Smallholders' Party. In response, the occupying Soviet authorities



arrested him on 25 February 1947, ultimately dragging him off to the USSR. This event was a milestone in Hungary's post-war history: occurring shortly after the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty (10 February 1947), it dashed all hopes for the restoration of Hungarian sovereignty and the country's democratic development. The State Protection Department then turned the trumped-up conspiracy charges against Prime Minister *Ferenc Nagy*, who was forced to resign under duress during a stay in Switzerland. On hearing news of this, the third leader of the 'peasant farmer central faction', the Catholic priest Béla Varga, who was speaker of the Parliament at the time, emigrated from Hungary. Several representatives proceeded to leave the Independent Smallholders' Party, which lost its parliamentary majority while shifting significantly to the left.

Citing the new balance of power in Parliament, the leftist parties called for elections. Rather than adopt a new electoral law, Parliament chose to amend the 1945 legislation in a novel fashion. Under the amendment, around half a million people were deprived of their right to vote on the basis of various criteria. Most of the people affected were thought to be unlikely to vote for the leftist bloc, especially the communists. Another tool used to *manipulate the election* was the '*blue ballot fraud*'. Provisional voter registration slips were now made available to virtually anyone who opted to vote outside their permanent place of residence. The communists exploited this change by unlawfully printing

multiple ballots and distributing them to party activists, who then voted under the same or different names at several polling stations. As the provisional registration slips were printed on pale blue paper, the scam became known as the 'blue ballot fraud'.

The parliamentary elections were held on 31 August 1947 in unaltered list constituencies (16 constituencies). Once again, voter turnout was high, at around 90%. Each of the three governing parties and two opposition parties received between 13% and 22% of the vote [X. 1. 14.](#) The *Hungarian Communist Party* came out on top with 22%, a figure that nevertheless fell far short of its expectations. The party had anticipated benefiting both from its fraudulent methods and from an intervention by Stalin, who, at the request of *Mátyás Rákosi*, general secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, had personally arranged for the release of tens of thousands of Hungarian prisoners-of-war in advance of the election. As in 1945, support for the Communist Party was above average in the country's industrial areas and it also gained new voters in Budapest and its environs [X. 1. 16.](#) The *Democratic People's Party*, which represented *political Catholicism*, achieved second place with 16% of the vote. This was a remarkable accomplishment, given that the party had refrained from presenting a list in two of the 16 constituencies. It exercised particular influence in the northwestern part of Transdanubia, where its share of the votes exceeded 50% in places [X. 1. 17.](#) The industrial areas, the eastern half of Transdanubia, and the counties of Békés, Heves, Hajdú and Bihar accounted for more than 60% of the votes cast for the leftist bloc [X. 1. 18.](#)

On the day after the election, the Communist Party leadership decided to *eliminate* the strongest opposition party, the *Hungarian Independence Party*, which had received 13.4% of votes in the election. Accordingly, in late November, the authorities declared the retrospective invalidity of all 650,000 votes cast for the party. The party's representatives in Parliament were stripped of their mandates and the party's operations were banned. Concurrently, in the international arena, relations between the Western allies and the Soviet Union deteriorated, marking the advent of the *Cold War*. In response, the USSR established Cominform (i.e. the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties), whose founding meeting was held in late September 1947. At this meeting, Stalin instructed the communist leaders in Central and Eastern Europe to accelerate the *Sovietization* of power structures in their respective countries. In Hungary,

15 SUMMARY DATA OF ELECTIONS IN 1945 AND 1947

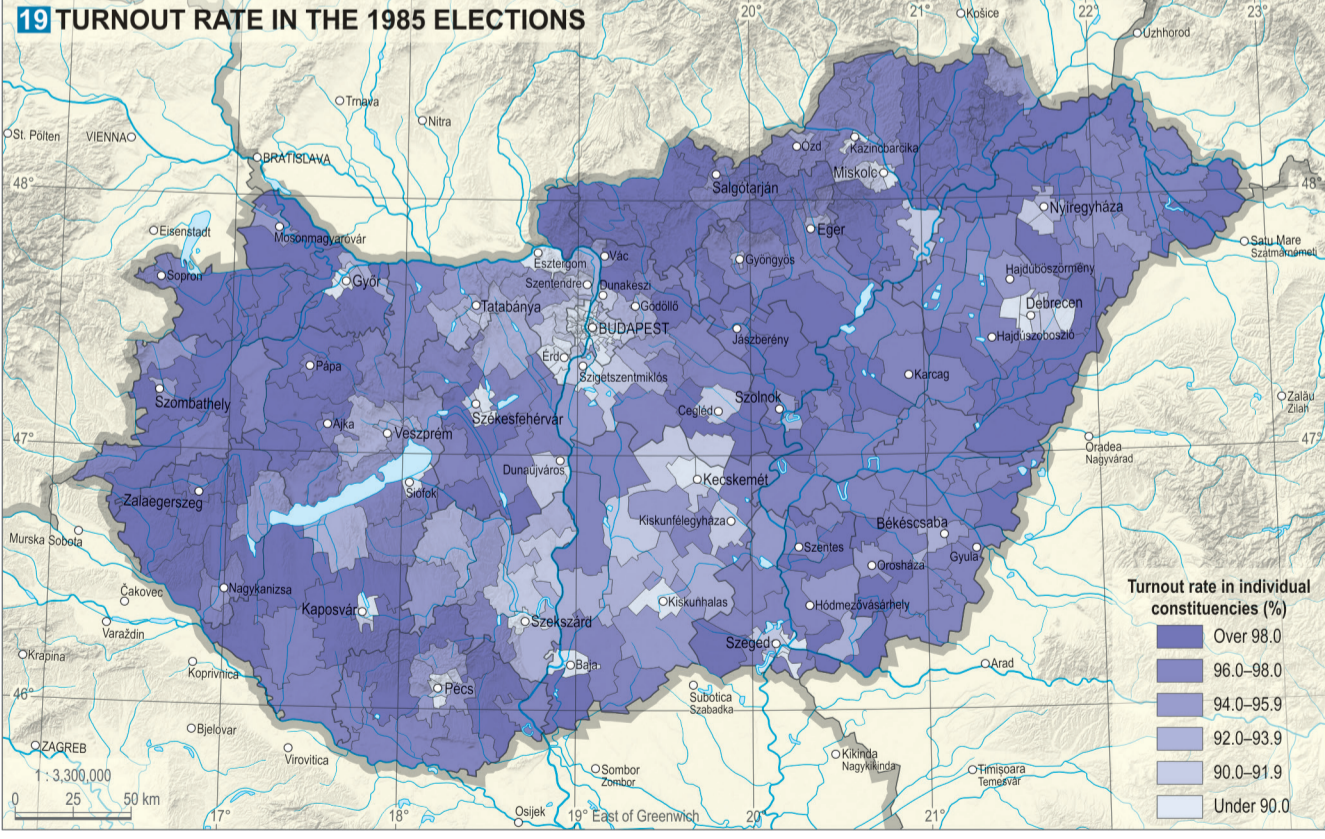
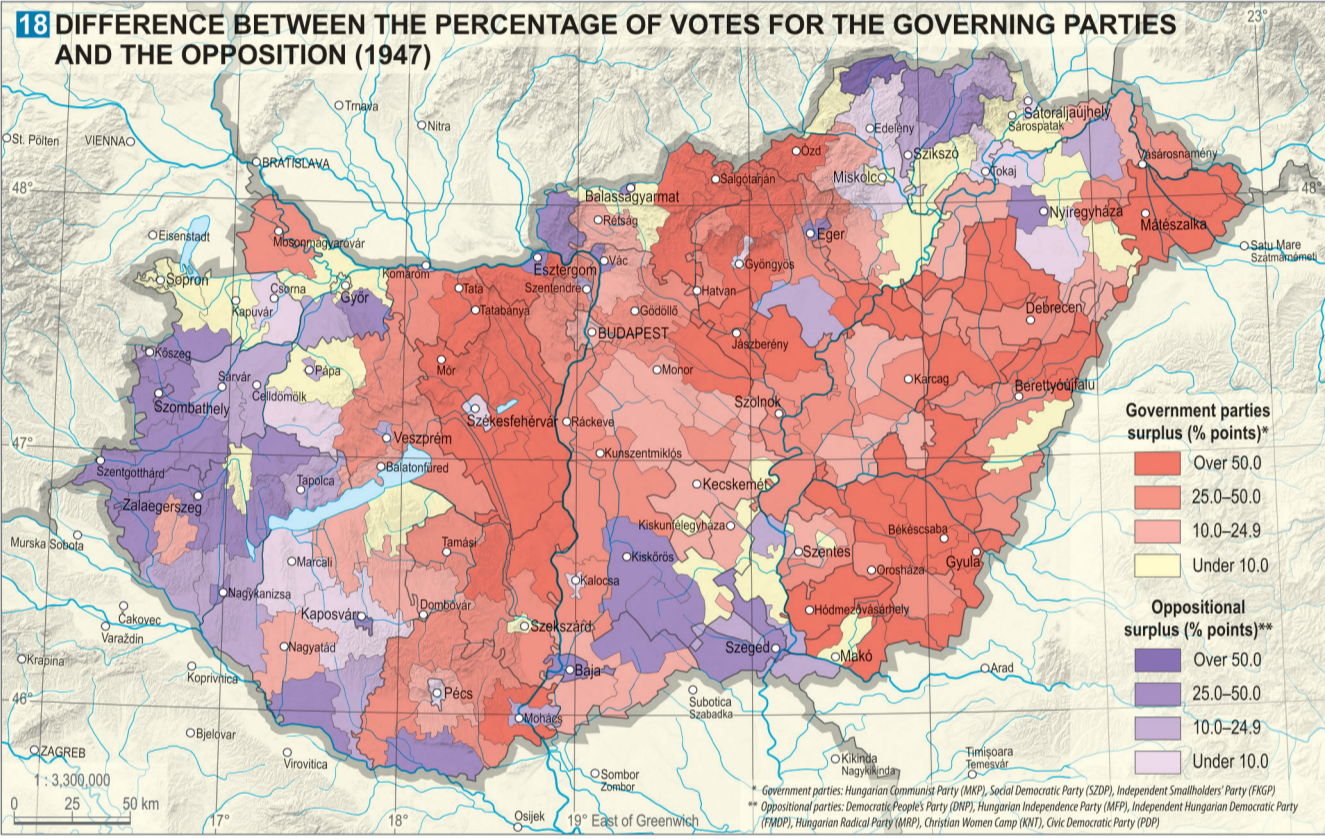
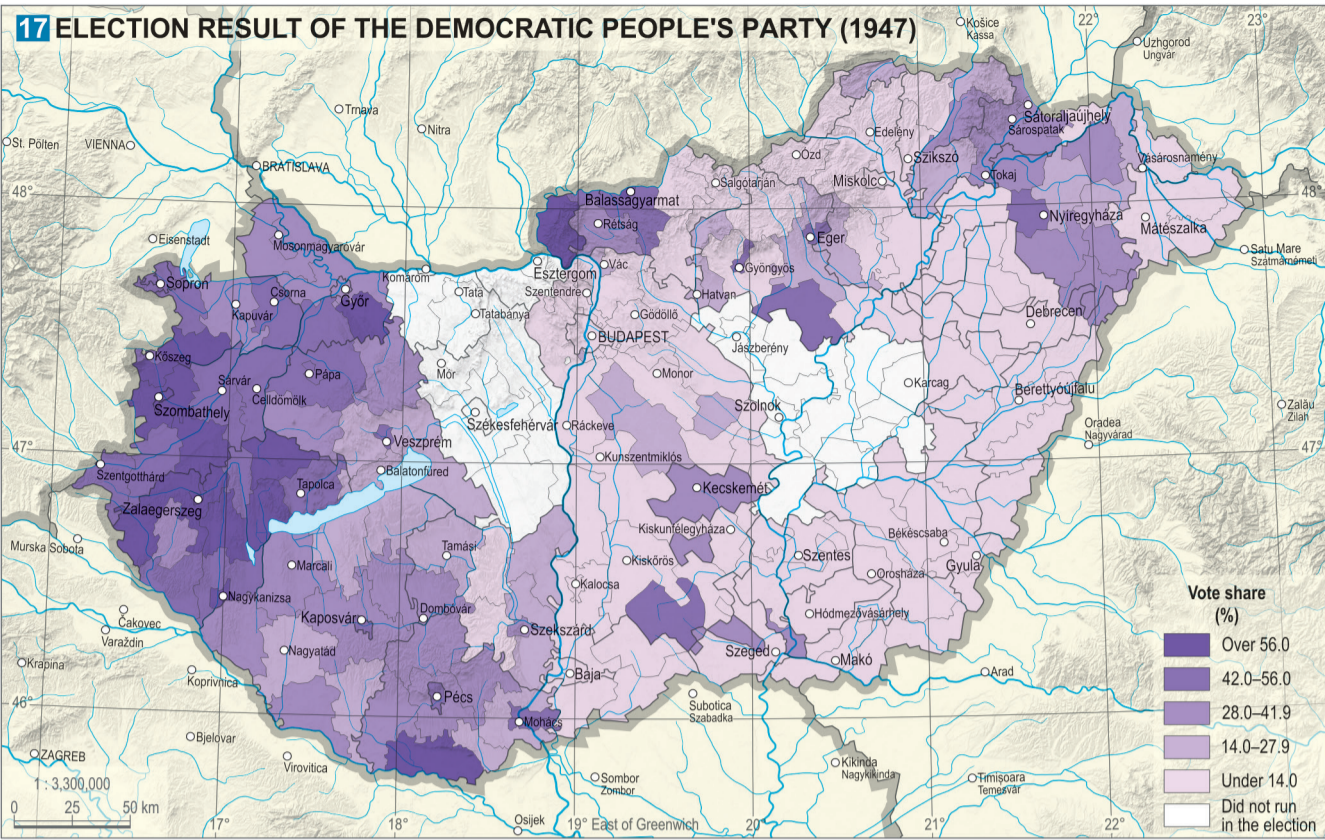
Party	04 November 1945				31 August 1947			
	number	%	Share of women's votes	Women's votes per 100 men	number	%	Share of women's votes	Women's votes per 100 men
Hungarian Communist Party (MKP)	797,786	16.9	51.0	106	1,066,865	22.2	46.8	88
Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP)	2,687,651	57.1	58.8	143	735,389	15.3	51.2	105
Social Democratic Party (SZDP)	819,824	17.4	53.4	112	724,640	15.1	48.5	94
National Peasant Party (NPP)	323,817	6.9	52.5	110	399,439	8.3	47.9	92
Democratic People's Party (DNP)	—	—	—	—	776,197	16.1	57.4	135
Hungarian Independence Party (MFP)	—	—	—	—	650,535	13.5	60.0	150
Independent Hungarian Democratic Party (FMDDP)	—	—	—	—	256,951	5.3	56.4	129
Hungarian Radical Party (MRP)	5,760	0.1	56.1	128	80,799	1.7	54.8	121
Christian Women's Camp (KNT)	—	—	—	—	69,531	1.4	73.1	272
Civic Democratic Party (PDP)	76,188	1.6	55.6	125	48,610	1.0	52.8	112
TOTAL/average	4,711,026	100.0	56.0	127	4,808,956	100.0	52.4	110

the summer of 1948 thus saw the Communist Party's absorption of the remnants of the Social Democratic Party. This 'merger' led to the foundation of the *Hungarian Workers' Party*. Meanwhile, the party of political Catholicism, the Democratic People's Party, having been starved of 'political oxygen', was coerced into dissolving itself in January 1949.

All these developments radically restructured politics in the country. The Communist Party thus decided to call new elections, a decision accepted by the two other parties in the governing coalition. The parliamentary elections of May 1949 were conducted after the merger of all the nominally existing parties in the *People's Front*, which was led by the communists. Thus, in the election, people could vote either for or against the People's Front. Soon, however, the second option would be removed. In August 1949, the new Parliament adopted the *country's constitution*, altering the *form of government* from a republic to a *people's republic*. Ever since the autumn of 1947, it had been *communist policy* to use all means to eliminate systematically the remnants of Hungarian democracy. In the new *Sovietized Hungary*, people would have to wait 40 more years for the return of multi-party politics.

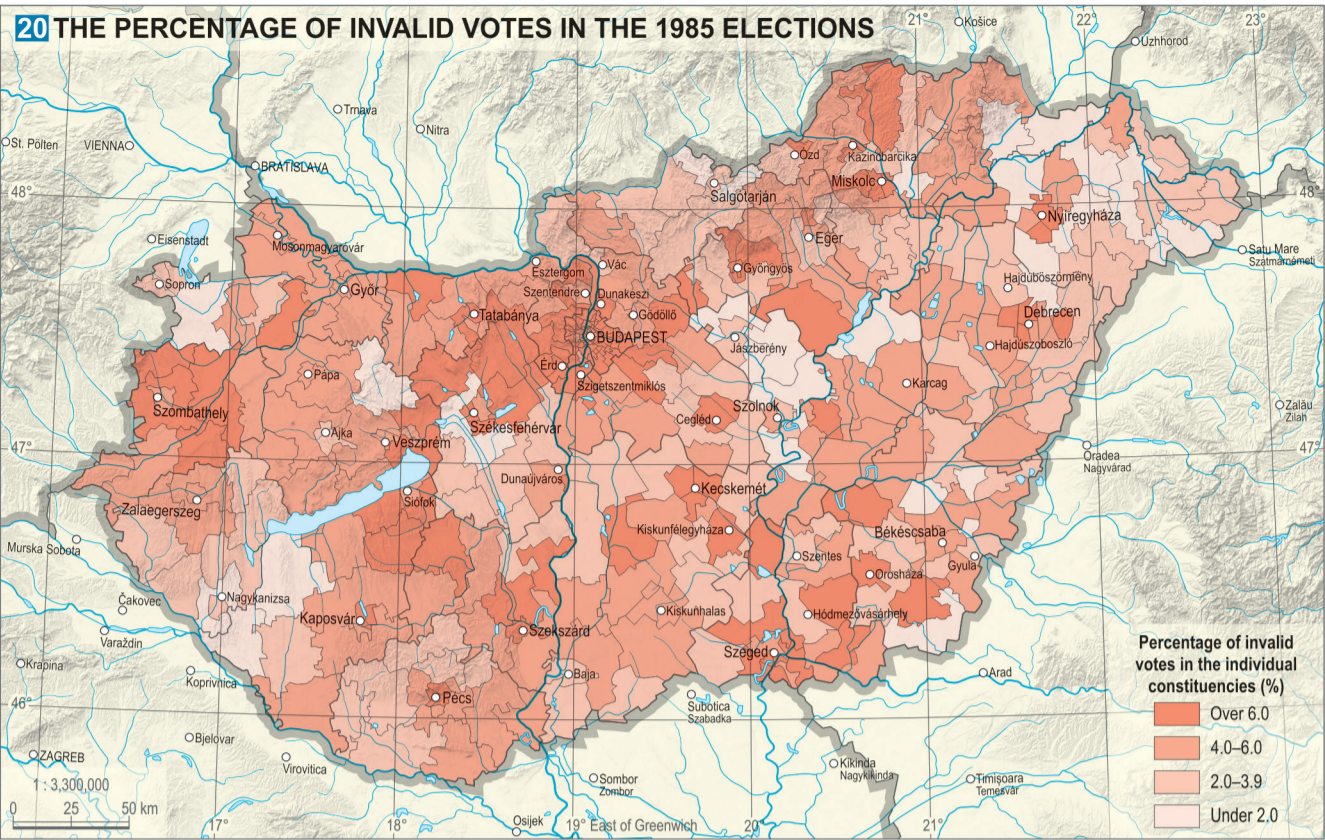
Parliamentary elections between 1949 and 1989

Between the adoption of the constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary on 20 August 1949 and the (re)proclamation of the republic on 23 October 1989, *parliamentary elections* were held on eight occasions. Yet, the impact of these elections on political developments was negligible, given the *dominance of the one-party system*. All major political decisions were taken by the leadership of the *state party* (initially, the *Hungarian Workers' Party* and subsequently, from 1956, the *Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party*), which in turn was tightly controlled by Moscow. Parliament usually convened on no more than four occasions in each year. Its role was further diminished by the fact that the *Presidential Council of the People's Republic* concurrently exercised legislative powers as an organ of state power. The Council's 21 members were handpicked from representatives of the Parliament. For the duration of the communist dictatorship, single-round elections were the norm. The *monopoly of the Patriotic People's Front on candidate nominations* was finally abolished in 1970, but this had minor impact until the 1985 elections. The function of elections was *to legitimize communist power*. Based on the voter registration lists, it was easy for the authorities to determine who had stayed away from the elections and then target the 'culprits' with reprisals. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that up until 1985, candidates were mostly elected to Parliament with 98–99% 'support'. In electoral terms, the first softening of the dictatorship was the adoption of Act III of 1983, introducing *multiple candidate nominations* as a mandatory requirement. Under the provisions of the Act, in addition to the two candidates nominated by the Patriotic People's Front, further candidates could also be nominated. This measure, which counted as unique in the Eastern Bloc, was made in response to the economic and political bankruptcy of the communist system and widespread public disillusionment. It also reflected a willingness to reform on the part of the state party. For its part, the increasingly robust democratic opposition saw in the elections an opportunity to change the system from within. Finally, in the elections held on 8 June 1985, 766 candidates competed for 352 individual mandates, 71 of which had



not been nominated by the Patriotic People's Front. Alongside the individual constituencies, the Act reintroduced the national list, which had been abolished in 1966. Candidates on the national list were mostly the prominent communist leaders of the period, 35 individuals in total. Overall, therefore, 387 representatives

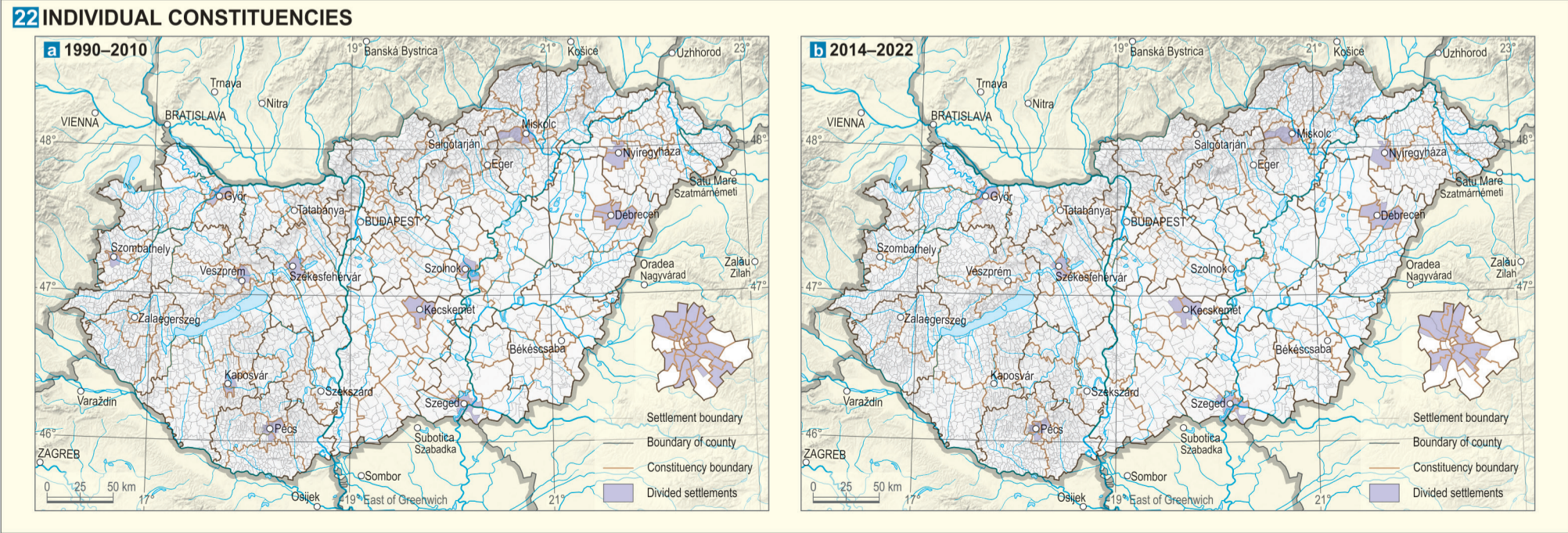
won seats in the new Parliament. In fifty-four constituencies, there were three candidates, and in 4 constituencies as many as four candidates. In 42 constituencies, second-round (run-off) elections were needed. A reduction in turnout to 'merely' 94% of eligible voters also indicated a weakening of the communist grip on



power. *Staying away from elections was a way of protesting against the regime*, as indicated by the fact that in major cities with more educated populations (e.g. Budapest) the turnout was less than 90% (X. 1. 19.). The holding of the election in the early summer meant that many eligible voters in rural agricultural areas were kept from voting. Another possible form of political protest was to spoil one's vote. In the end, 5.4% of votes cast nationally turned out to be invalid. In a democracy, this would be considered an unacceptably high share of votes cast. Spoilt votes were more common in Budapest and its agglomeration, as well as in major towns in other parts of the country (X. 1. 20.). Signs of this 'passive resistance' were also detectable in some areas of Transdanubia, as well as in the southern part of the Alföld.

Parliamentary elections since 1989

The *Third Hungarian Republic* was proclaimed on 23 October 1989, marking another major turning point in the country's history. An important aspect of Hungary's change of system was the *transition from a one-party system to a modern parliamentary democracy*. The adoption of a *new democratic electoral law* and the establishment of the *conditions for periodic changes in government* constituted the cornerstone of the new system. With the successful holding of the first free elections of the post-communist period on 25 March 1990, Hungary returned to the family of democratic nations. The results of the nine parliamentary elections



held since democratization provide a comprehensive view of political developments in Hungary during the past 32 years (X. 1. 21.).

Suffrage and the electoral system

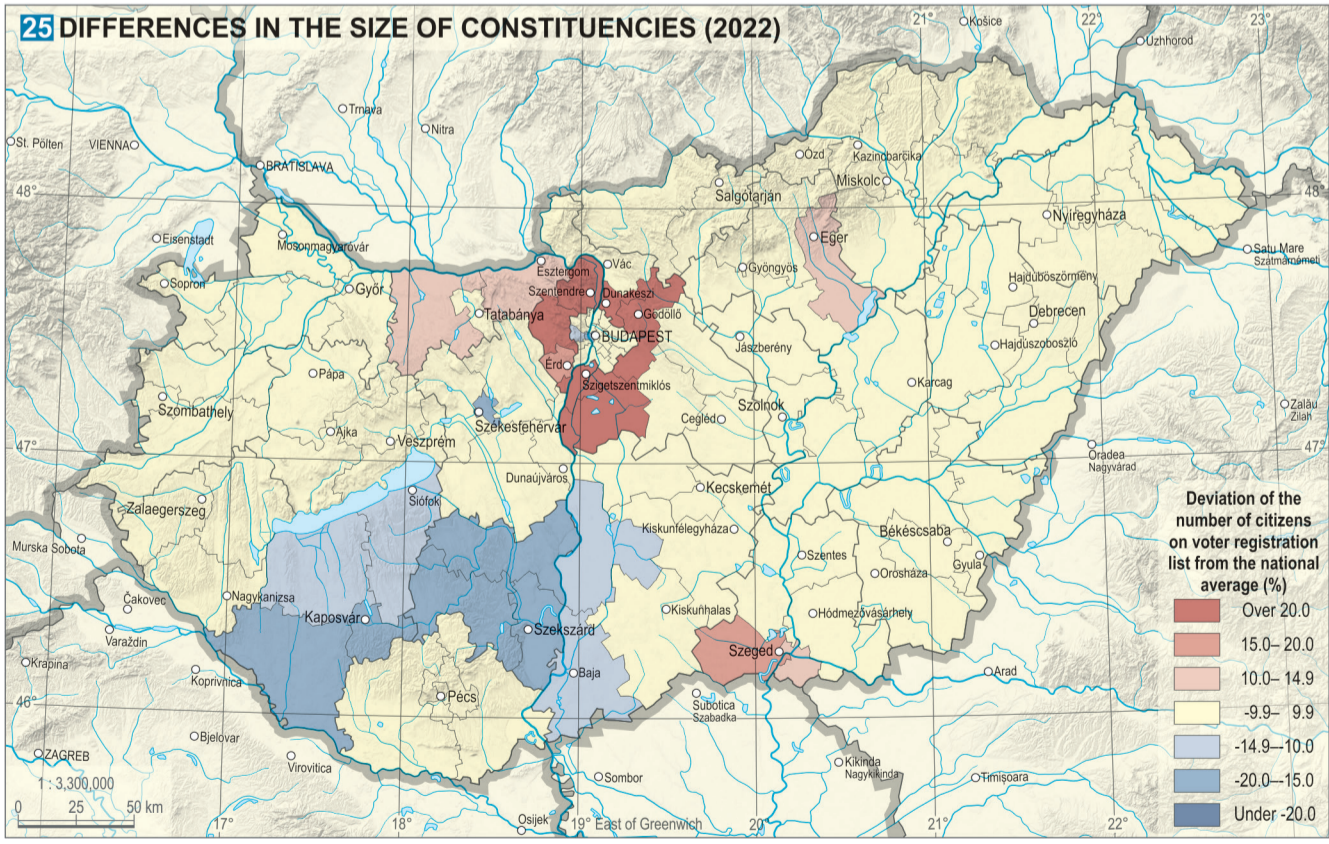
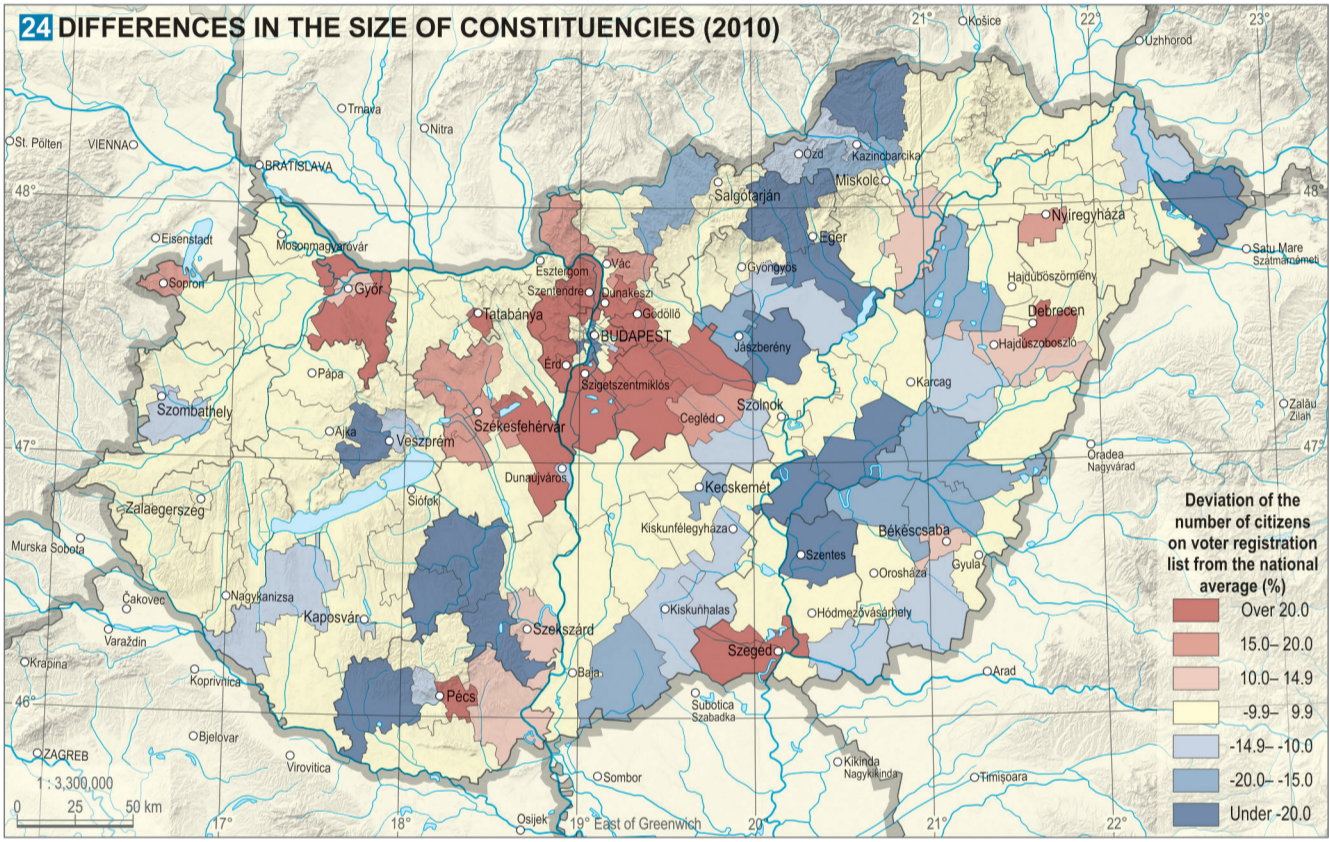
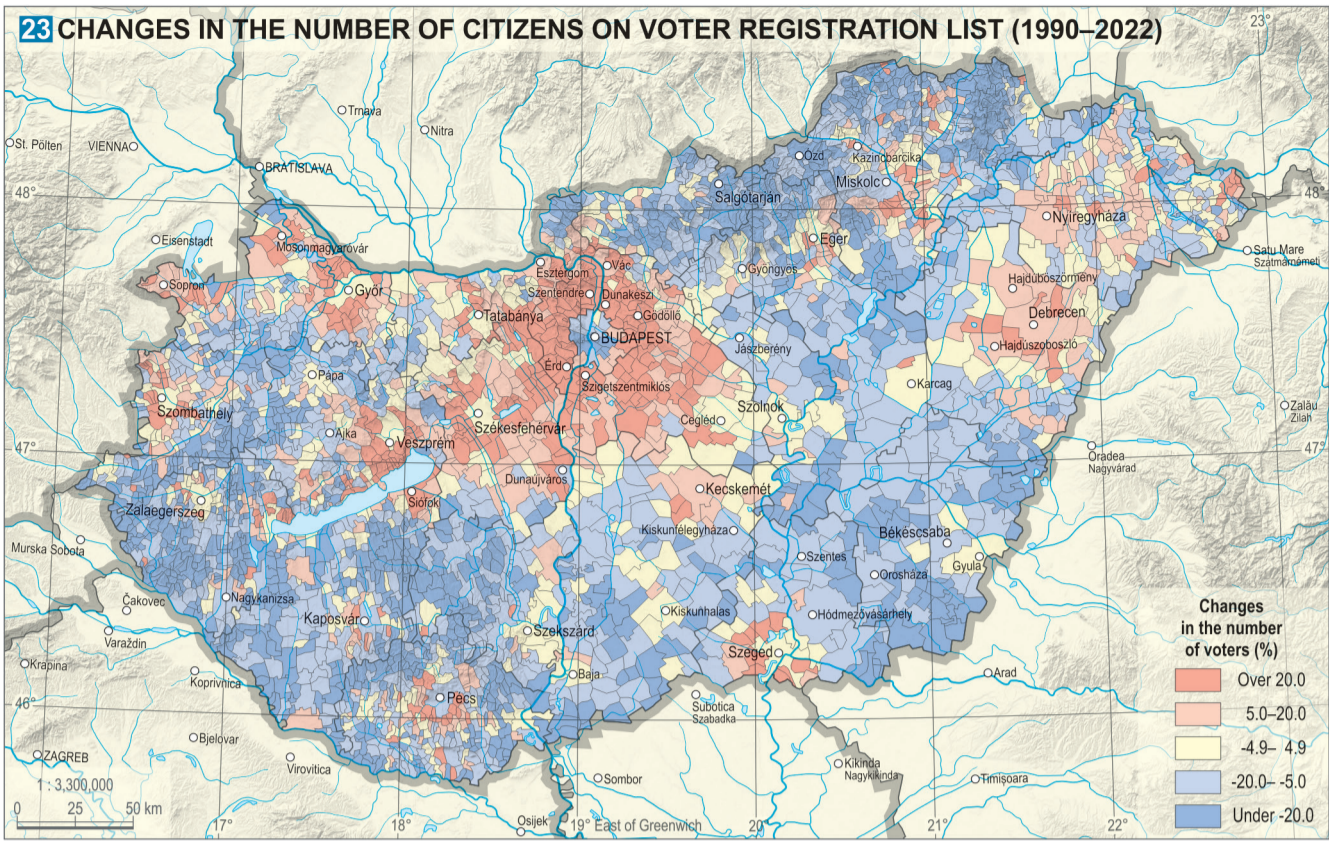
Hungary's parliamentary elections in the post-communist period were initially regulated by Act XXXIV of 1989. With its *individual constituencies and party lists*, the *Hungarian electoral system* is essentially a hybrid of the two basic types of system found in modern democracies. Eligible citizens vote both for individual

candidates in the constituencies and for parties on the party lists. The *hybrid electoral system* in use in Hungary was first introduced in the Federal Republic of Germany in the aftermath of WWII. Under the system, each voter has two votes, with some representatives being elected in the individual constituencies and others on territorial lists. Representatives from individual constituencies are, among other things, responsible for asserting local interests. For their part, the territorial lists enable parties to send candidates to Parliament who have a national reputation but who do not wish to compete as candidates in the constituency elections.

Under the provisions of the *electoral law of 1989*, Hungary was divided up into 176 *individual constituencies* (32 of which were in Budapest), based on the county boundaries and those of the municipal districts in the capital. The substantial number of constituencies meant that 11 major towns outside of Budapest were divided by one or more constituency boundaries (X. 1. 22 a.). An attempt was made to delineate constituencies of similar population size, with the benchmark being an average population size of just over 44 thousand based on 1990 data. One representative from each constituency could enter Parliament. A prerequisite for the nomination of individual candidates was the submission of 750 recommendation slips. Alongside the individual constituencies, 20 *territorial constituencies* were also created (the 19 counties and the capital). In these constituencies it was possible to vote on the territorial lists launched by the parties. In each county, a party could only set up a territorial list if it had a certain number of individual candidates in the given county (candidates in a quarter of the constitu-

21 SUMMARY DATA OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SINCE 1990 (1990–2022)									
	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
Number of voters	7,822,764	7,948,052	8,062,708	8,061,114	8,046,129	8,034,394	8,047,695	7,933,815	7,759,337
Number of individual candidates	1,623	1,876	1,606	1,426	1,100	810	1,555	1,652	663
Turnout (%)	65.1	68.9	56.3	70.5	67.8	64.4	61.8	70.2	70.2
Fidesz*	9.0	7.0	29.5	41.1	42.0	52.7	45.0	49.3	54.1
MSZP**	10.9	33.0	32.9	42.1	43.2	19.3	25.7	11.9	—
MDF	24.7	11.7	2.8	—	5.0	2.7	—	—	—
SZDSZ	21.4	19.7	7.6	5.6	6.5	—	—	—	—
FKgP	11.7	8.8	13.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
KDNP	6.5	7.0	2.3	—	—	—	—	—	—
MIÉP***	—	—	5.5	4.4	2.2	—	—	—	—
Jobbik	—	—	—	—	—	16.7	20.3	19.1	—
LMP	—	—	—	—	—	7.5	5.4	7.1	—
DK	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.4	—
Together for Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	34.4
Our Homeland Movement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.9

*2000: Fidesz–MDF, since 2006: Fidesz–KDNP **2014: Unity, 2018: MSZP–Dialogue ***2006: MIÉP–Jobbik



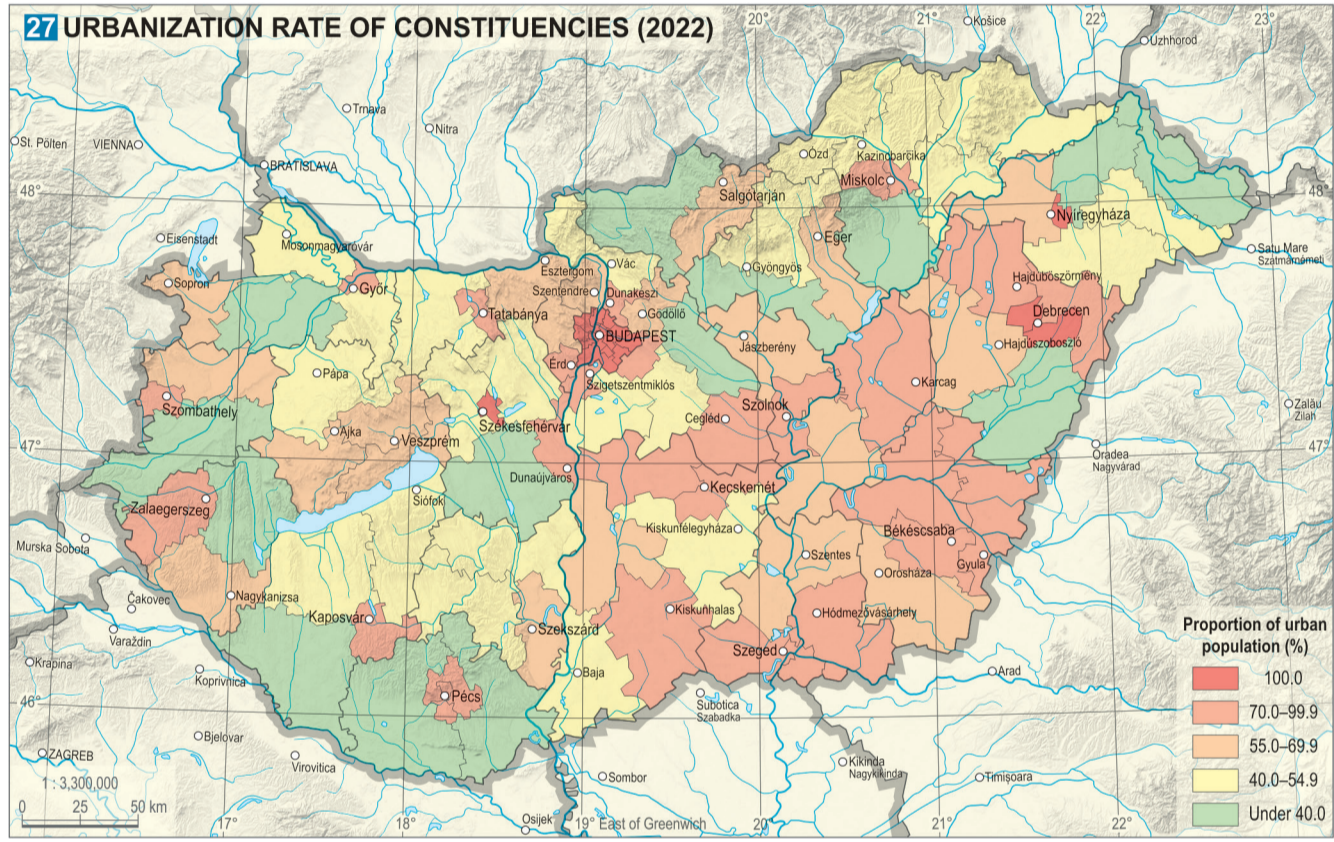
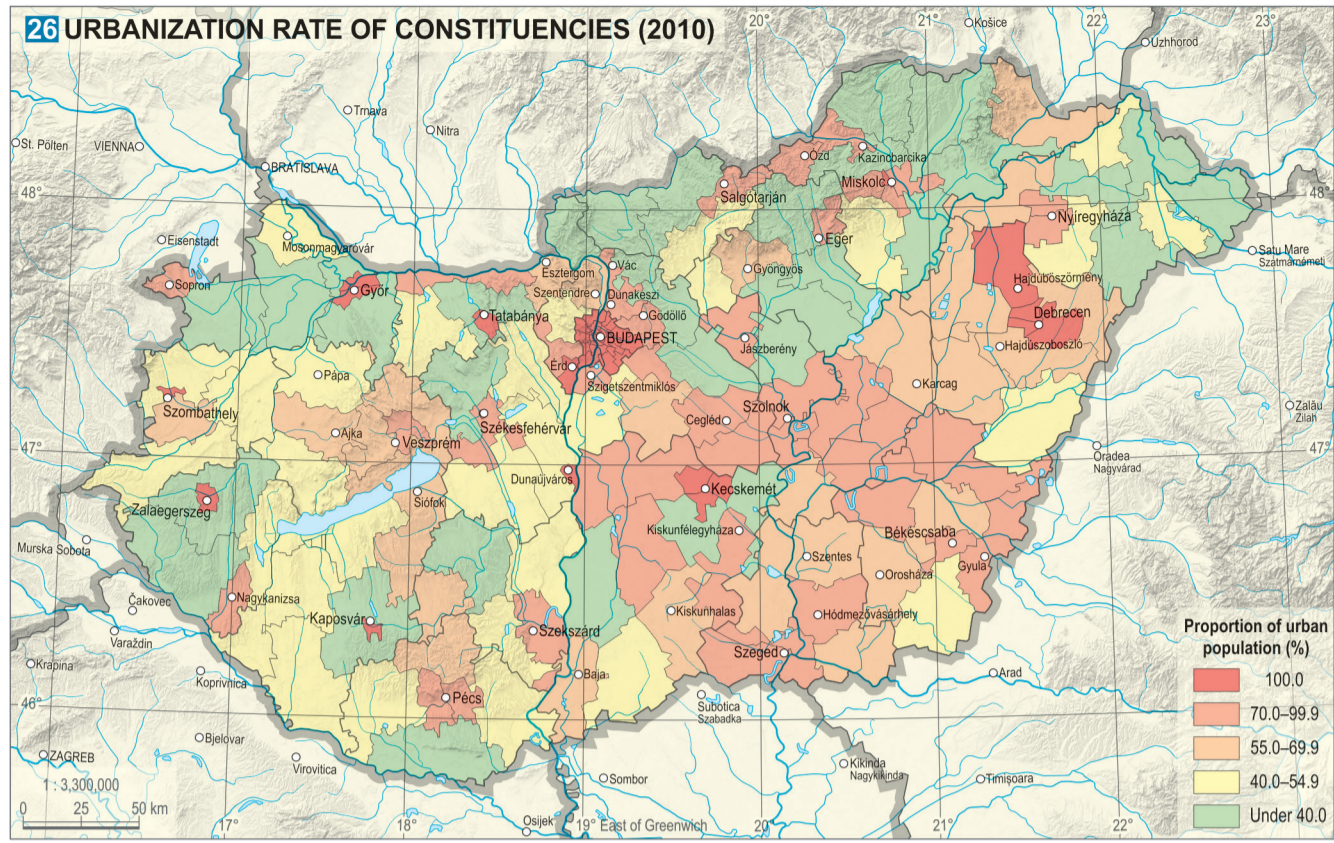
encies and in at least two of them). Any party with lists in at least seven territorial constituencies could submit a national list. Based on this, 152 county list mandates and 58 national list mandates (i.e. a total of 210 list mandates) were allocated in proportion to the votes received.

Together, the 176 constituency representatives and 210 list representatives made up *Parliament's 386 members*. Concurrently, with a view to preventing the excessive fragmentation of the parliamentary seats, a threshold of 4% (raised to 5% in 1994) was set as a condition for any party to enter Parliament.

The number of persons eligible to vote in each municipality changed significantly after 1990, owing to variations in demographic and migration trends [X. 1. 23.](#) The map shows both the ageing regions affected by natural population decline and outward migration as well as other regions that benefitted from migration. As a result of such divergent demographic trends, the constituencies had become very uneven in population by the time of the elections of 2010. For instance, the number of eligible voters in the Szigetszentmiklós constituency was 2.75 times their number in the Veszprém constituency. Moreover, there were 61 constituencies with populations deviating from the national average by more than 15% [X. 1. 24.](#) Such variance in the population size of constituencies raised grave democratic concerns, since many more votes were needed to obtain a parliamentary seat in the more populous constituencies. Having examined the issue, the Constitutional Court ruled in a judgment (no. 22/2005) that differences in the size of constituencies were unconstitutional. The Court called upon Parliament to amend them. The adoption of boundary changes, however, required a two-thirds parliamentary majority, which at the time was politically unfeasible, given the intensity of political rivalries. Only after the elections of 2010, which produced a two-thirds parliamentary majority, could attention be given to a reform of the electoral system and the redrawing of constituency boundaries. The new law – Act CCIII of 2011 on the election of members of parliament – introduced the required changes, with the procedural details being regulated by Act XXXVI of 2013 on electoral procedure.

Together, these new laws created a new structure for parliamentary elections in Hungary. The number of members of parliament was reduced from 386 to 199, while the number of individual constituencies declined from 176 to 106, based on new constituency boundaries [X. 1. 22 b.](#) The average population of the constituencies increased, while the number of towns outside Budapest divided into parts by constituency boundaries was reduced to eight. The ratio between individual constituencies and list mandates was altered in favour of the former. The two-round election framework was replaced by a single-round election system, with a relative majority of votes in a given individual constituency sufficing for a parliamentary seat. This measure was particularly detrimental to the smaller parties, as they could not obtain individual seats by means of tactical retreats. In a further simplification, 500 rather than 750 recommendations were required to nominate a candidate. Regarding the party lists, the county lists were discontinued, and the rules for establishing national lists were altered. National lists could only be presented by parties with candidates in at least 27 individual constituencies in nine counties (including Budapest). A further change was that from 2014 onwards, Hungarians with dual citizenship residing in the adjacent countries became eligible to vote, although the majority of them – lacking a registered place of residence in Hungary – could only vote for the party lists. The distribution of the so-called fractional votes also changed; from 2014 onwards, winners in individual constituencies also received fractional votes. This amendment also tended to disadvantage the smaller parties. Overall, the new electoral law resulted in a smaller Parliament and a shift in its composition towards territorial (i.e. constituency) representation.

The new electoral law also set the maximum permitted deviation in the size of individual constituencies (i.e. the number of eligible voters) at 15% from the national average. Where the discrepancy was greater



than this, boundary changes were recommended – with Parliament being obligated to make such changes where the deviation was greater than 20% and the next elections were not due for at least a year. In the event of any such amendments, county borders (and the boundaries of Budapest) are considered inviolable, as is the principle of contiguous constituencies.

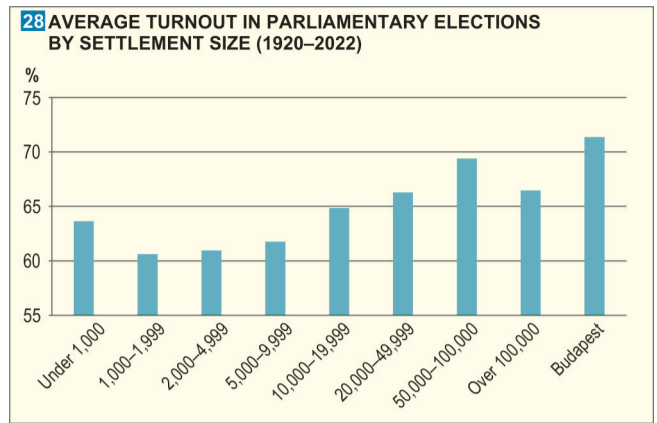
The individual constituencies mapped out in 2011 and introduced in 2014 resolved most of the previous anomalies. With the passing of time, however, demographic changes within the country resulted in new imbalances. Indeed, at the time of the parliamentary elections of 2022, there were seven constituencies that deviated in size (i.e. number of eligible voters) from the national average by more than 15% [X. 1. 25.](#)

In the elections, voter turnout and the level of support for the various parties are greatly influenced by the settlement structure of individual constituencies, the average size of settlements, and the proportion of urban dwellers. The practical concerns and ideological orientations of voters in rural constituencies tend to differ from those of urban voters. Although a majority of individual constituencies include both urban and rural areas, some of them are predominantly urban or rural in character. In 2010, 27.3% of all constituencies were exclusively urban, while 17% were predominantly rural (i.e. with an urbanization rate of less than 40%) [X. 1. 26.](#) The reorganization of constituencies in

2011 created larger constituencies but a smaller number of them, resulting in an increase in the proportion of districts with a mixed (urban and rural) population [X. 1. 27.](#) Thus, the share of purely urban constituencies decreased to 20.7% and the share of predominantly rural constituencies declined to 13.2%.

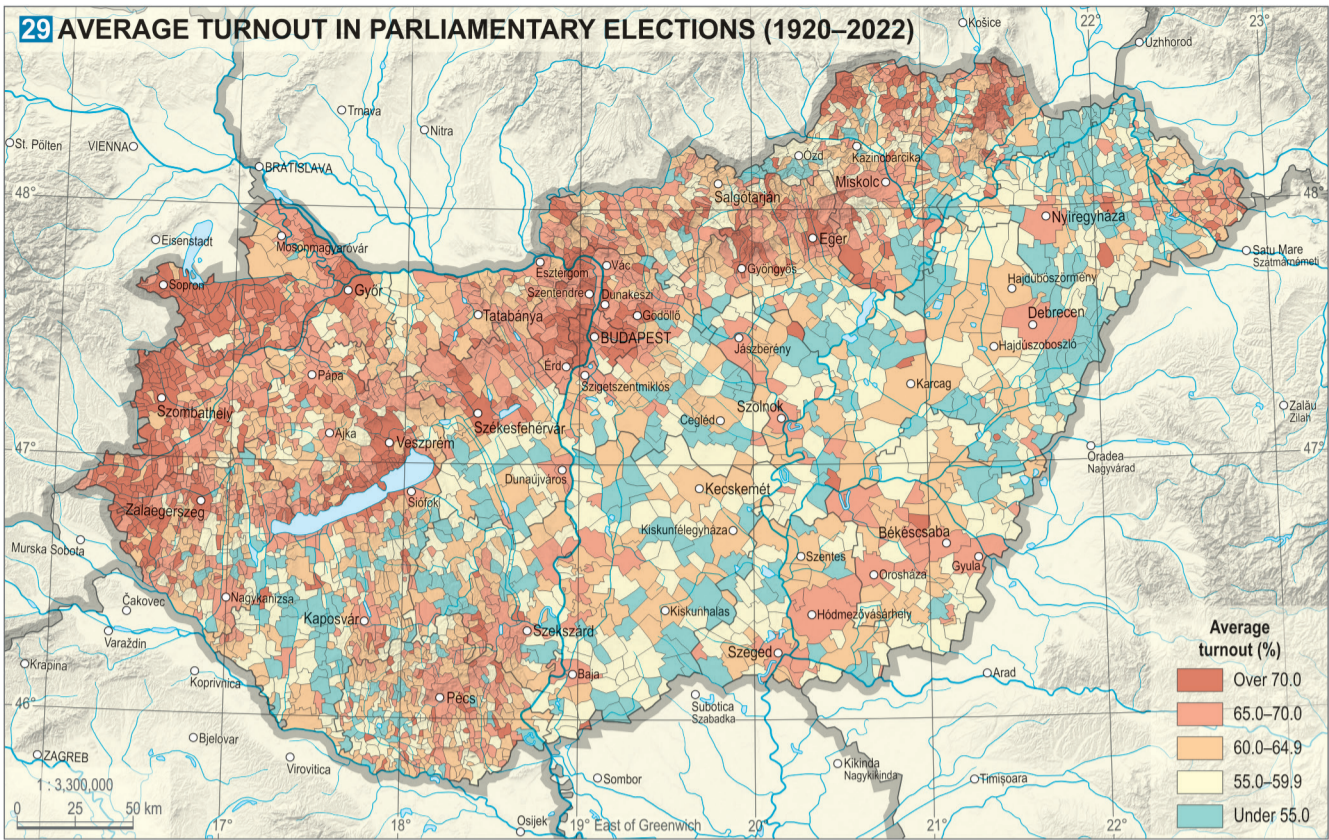
Electoral turnout

The electoral turnout rate is a measure of the public's engagement in politics and the maturity of multi-party democracy. In this context, it was assumed with good reason in the 1990s that the 65% turnout rate of the 1990 parliamentary elections would gradually increase, ultimately matching the 70–80% turnout rates commonly seen in the advanced European democracies. This did not happen, however. Indeed, twenty years later, the turnout rate in the 2010 elections closely resembled the 1990 level, and in 2014 it even fell to 61.8%. In the nine parliamentary elections held since 1989, average voter turnout has been 66.1%. Only on three occasions (in 2002, 2018 and 2022) has it exceeded 70%. On each of those occasions, there was a particularly intensive campaign coupled with extensive voter mobilization. Since the change of system, Hungary's average turnout rate has resembled that of Czechia (65.1%) and Slovakia (64.4%), while significantly exceeding the average rate in Romania (56.2%) and in Poland (49.5%).



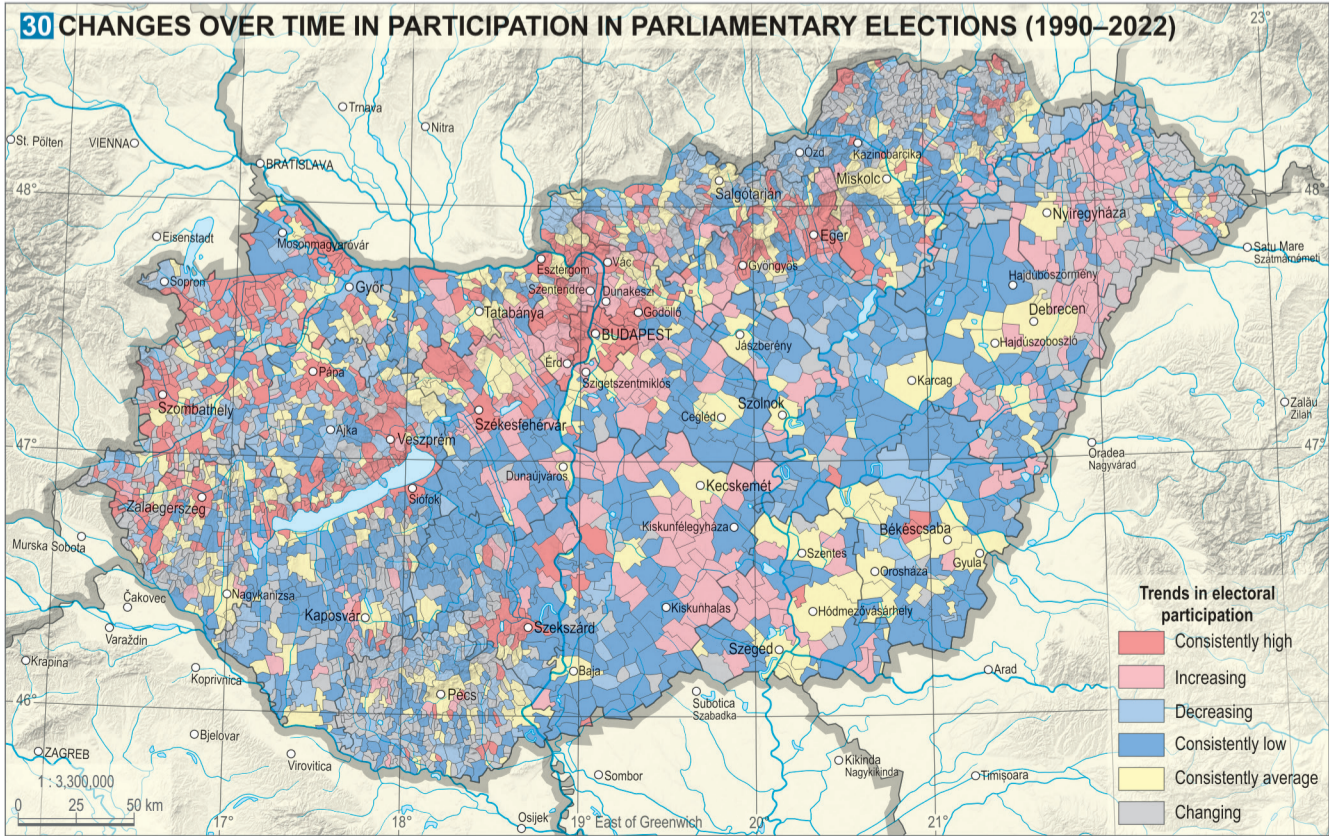
Electoral participation varies considerably among the various settlements. In terms of the settlement hierarchy, the turnout rate forms a U-shaped curve [X. 1. 28.](#) In all elections, the highest voter turnout rates have been registered in Budapest. However, the average rate for the city conceals significant differences between the various municipal districts. Turnout has tended to be exceptionally high (around 75–80%) in certain areas of Buda inhabited mostly by intellectuals. In contrast, it has often been below the national average in the poorer urban neighbourhoods that are home to less educated social strata (e.g. districts VIII and XXI). After Budapest, turnout tends to be highest in towns/cities with 50–100 thousand inhabitants, declining with the size of the settlement, with the lowest rates (around 60%) found in villages with one to two thousand inhabitants. In smaller villages with less than a thousand inhabitants, however, the average turnout increases once again. The heterogeneity of these smallest villages, however, is indicated by the fact that the highest and lowest turnout rates in absolute terms have been recorded in such settlements. The lowest turnout figure was recorded in Pálmajor, a village of 290 inhabitants in Somogy County, where as few as 21.2% of eligible voters took part in the first round of the 1998 parliamentary elections. At the other end of the spectrum, in the villages of Keresztéte and Iborfia all eligible voters turned out in 2002. In 2018, this happened again in the villages of Felsőszenterzsébet and Iborfia, both of which have 20–30 inhabitants.

The turnout figures reveal noteworthy geographical differences [X. 1. 29.](#) In the nine parliamentary elections held since 1989, turnout has exceeded the national average in Budapest and Western Transdanubia, but the more populous cities and their environs also stand out with their higher turnout rates. A line running from Nagykanizsa in the southwest to Sárospatak in the northeast is also discernible, dividing the country into two markedly different halves, with turnout tending to be higher in settlements to the northwest of the line. Meanwhile, it has tended to be lower in areas to the southeast of the line (i.e. South Transdanubia and the Alföld). In the latter, cities with county rights (Szeged, Debrecen) or other major settlements (Baja, Orosháza) are the only significant exceptions. The existence of distinct levels of development within the country (e.g. level of education, income, urbanization) is well known, and such differences are clearly reflected in the regional turnout figures. Historically, western parts of Hungary and the Budapest area have been the country's more urbanized regions, contrasting greatly with the less urbanized eastern parts of Hungary, where agriculture has traditionally been more important. The timing of elections also affects turnout in such areas: in the spring (March–April), rural populations are focussed on agricultural work. Indeed, the lowest turnout rates have been recorded in areas with intensive agriculture and extensive farming. In contrast, a younger age structure and a higher average level of education evidently contribute to the higher levels of political



participation registered in Budapest and the western part of the country.

Over time, turnout rates have not been constant even in the same settlements. *Changes in turnout occurring over time* can provide useful insights into social change in a given settlement or region [X. 1. 30]. People living in settlements with consistently high (above-average) turnout rates are evidently more likely to participate in political life. They thus exert greater influence on decision-making. In Hungary, such places include Budapest and settlements in the Balaton region, West Transdanubia, and the Eger area. An important subgroup comprises areas with increasing voter participation rates, which may be the result of changes in local society or a general increase in voter activity. An example of the former is the Budapest environs, where the suburbanization of younger and more highly educated people has contributed to an increase in turnout. Meanwhile, the latter is exemplified, among the rural areas, by the eastern part of Bács-Kiskun County and the central part of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. Areas with declining or fluctuating (volatile) turnout rates are typically found in Hungary's crisis zones. The only exception to this is Western Transdanubia, where the exceptionally high turnout rates of the 1990s have since decreased slightly. This decline, however, appears to be unrelated to the development dynamics of that region.



Election results

In the nine parliamentary elections held since 1990, there have been steady declines in the number of *candidates standing in the individual constituencies* and in the number of *parties presenting national lists*. Whereas in 1990, 1,623 individual candidates succeeded in collecting the sufficient number of recommendations, in 2010 only 810 did so [X. 1. 21]. Subsequently, despite a decline in the number of individual constituency seats from 176 in 2010 to 106 in 2014, the number of individual constituency candidates doubled by 2018. Thereafter, however, it fell sharply to 663 in the 2022 elections. All this would appear to be linked with the nature of the Hungarian electoral system and its transformation in 2011. Since then, only larger parties (or party coalitions) can come near to being in a position to form a government.

Since 1990, which marks the start of the contemporary period of Hungarian parliamentarism, 11 parties and political movements have succeeded in entering Parliament, doing so either independently or in party alliances on the lists. Inside Parliament, 13 formations have formed factions (i.e. parliamentary groups) during the same period, yet only two of them – Fidesz and the Hungarian Socialist Party – have done so in each parliamentary term. Having participated in five elections since 1990, in 2010 the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Alliance of Free Democrats

(SZDSZ) – both of which had played instrumental roles at the time of the change of system – failed to win any seats. In the meantime, however, several new parties and movements have gained seats in Parliament. Most of these parties have altered their names over time, with their official names in 2023 being as follows: Jobbik – Conservatives, LMP – Hungary's Green Party, Democratic Coalition, Dialogue – The Greens' Party, Momentum Movement, and Our Homeland Movement. The appearance of new parties and movements is indicative of an *evolving party system*. The new parties have benefitted from public disillusionment with Hungary's difficult post-communist socio-economic transition, with many voters turning away from some of the more established parties. Consequently, the composition of Parliament has changed considerably over the past thirty-two years [X. 1. 31], although the *two-thirds parliamentary majority* maintained by Fidesz–KDNP since 2010 has brought a measure of stability to the system.

The spatiality of public support for the various political parties and for the ideologies they represent can be analysed and elaborated. To analyse the results of the nine elections, we take the constituencies as a basis, giving attention to the result of the winning party on the territorial list in the first round. In the 1990 elections, the main contest was between two parties, the liberal *Alliance of Free Democrats* (SZDSZ) and the moderate conservative *Hungarian Democratic Forum* (MDF). The MDF emerged victorious from this contest, due to stronger support in the eastern parts of the country [X. 1. 32]. Alongside Central Transdanubia, the party achieved its best results in the constituencies of the Alföld. The 1994 elections were won by the *Hungarian Socialist Party* (MSZP), which obtained more than half of the parliamentary seats. In view of the severe economic challenges of the transition period (e.g. mass unemployment), eastern Hungary, the part of the country most affected by economic decline, was of particular salience in the election. It was here that the MSZP achieved its greatest successes, with the mobilization of its voters being in part a 'vote of defiance' against the MDF government [X. 1. 33]. In the 1998 elections, on the party list, the MSZP (32.9%) overtook Fidesz (29.5%), which had become a right-wing party in the meantime. Yet, the MSZP suffered setbacks in the individual constituencies, with its rival winning many more seats. In this way, *Fidesz*, having become the largest force in Parliament with 148 representatives, was able to form a coalition government. The victory of Fidesz was due mainly to staunch support for the party among voters in western parts of Transdanubia, coupled with declining support for the MSZP in eastern Hungary [X. 1. 34]. In the 2002 elections, although Fidesz won nine more seats than its rival, the MSZP, a *left-liberal* (MSZP–SZDSZ) *coalition government* was formed, as the two parties together had more seats [X. 1. 31]. By this time, a Fidesz base in western Hungary had emerged, and the party could also mobilize voters in the counties of Bács-Kiskun, Hajdú and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg [X. 1. 35]. Only in the industrial area of Borsod could the MSZP retain a stronger (above average) influence. This spatial pattern changed little in the 2006 elections [X. 1. 36], but on that occasion the *left* won a clear majority of the individual constituency seats and could once again form a *coalition government with the liberal SZDSZ*.

In the 2010 elections, the emerging bipolar party system was dissolved by the overwhelming victory of the *Fidesz–KDNP* (which won 52.73% on the national list and a two-thirds majority in the legislature), with new actors emerging on both the right (Jobbik – na-

31 DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS (1990–2022)

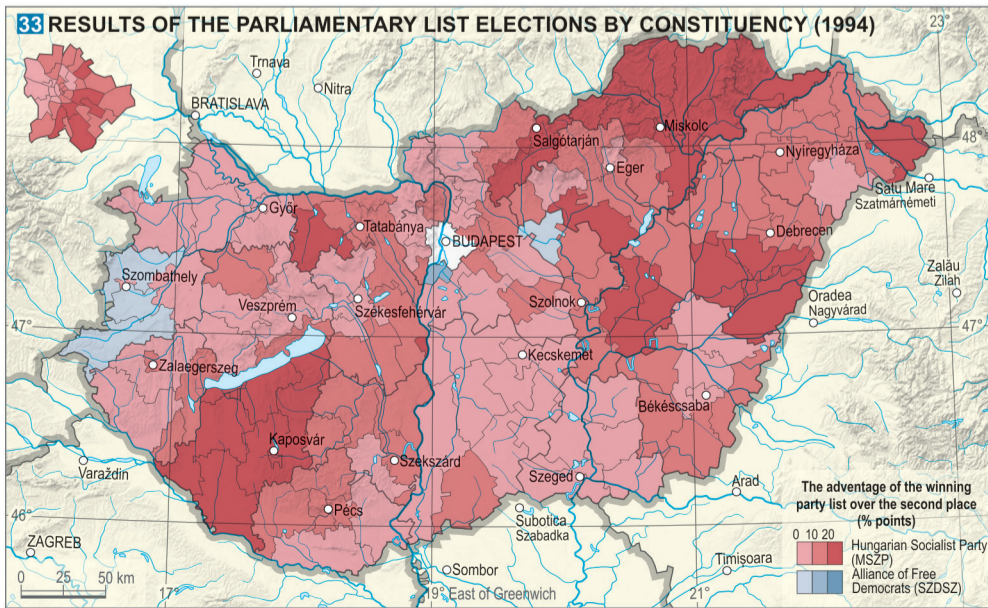
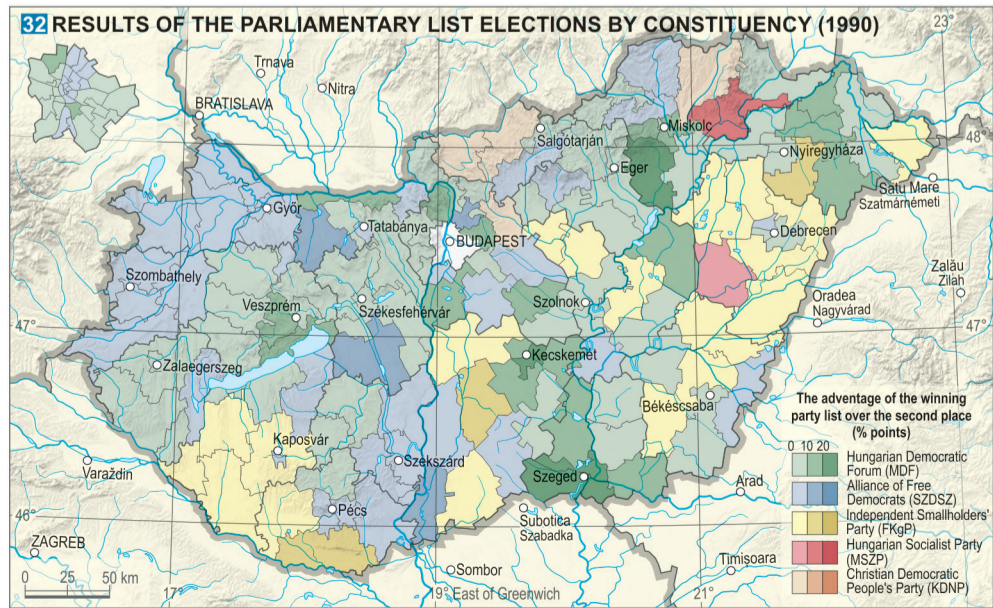


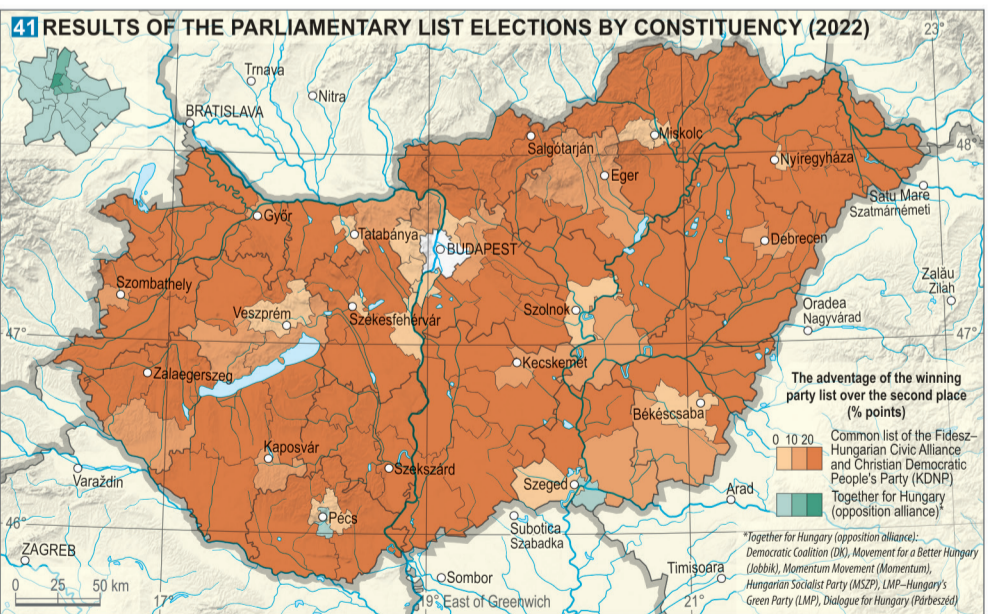
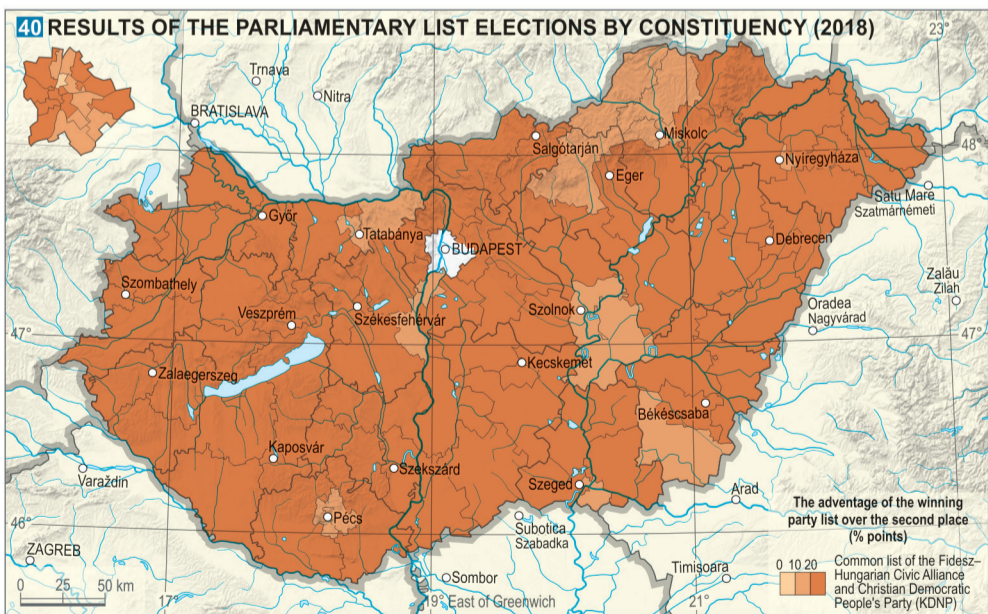
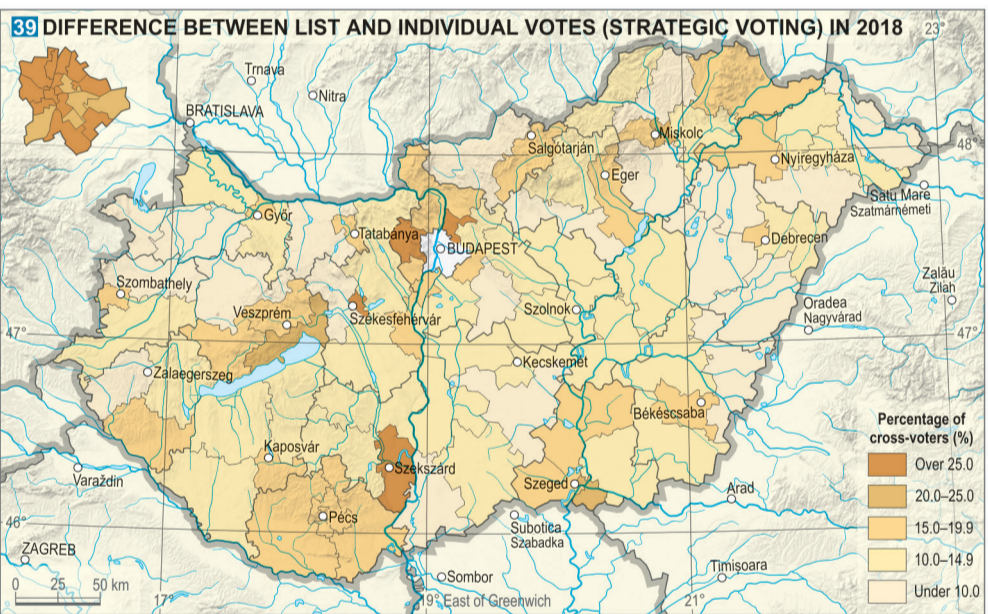
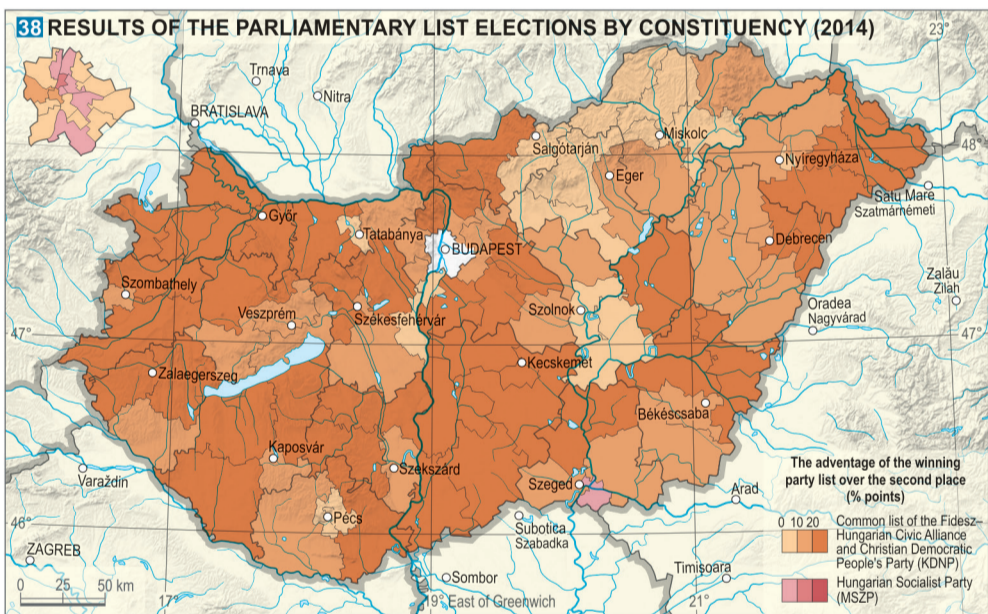
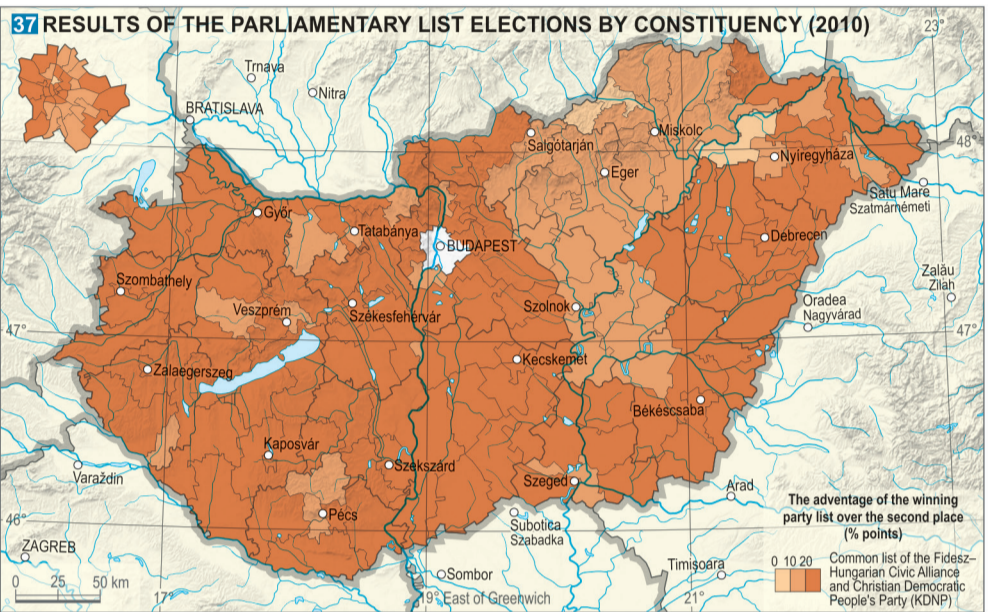
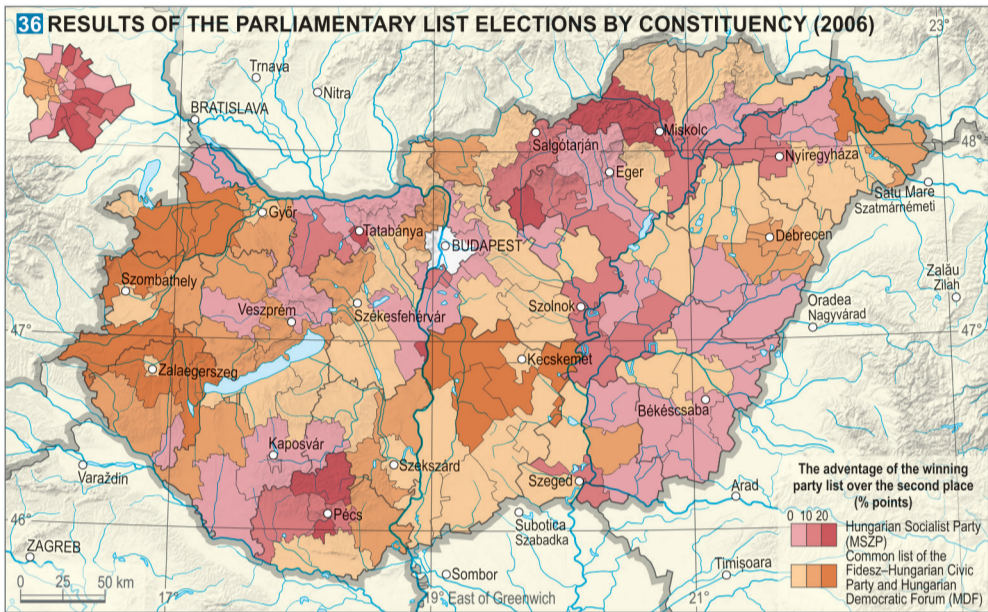
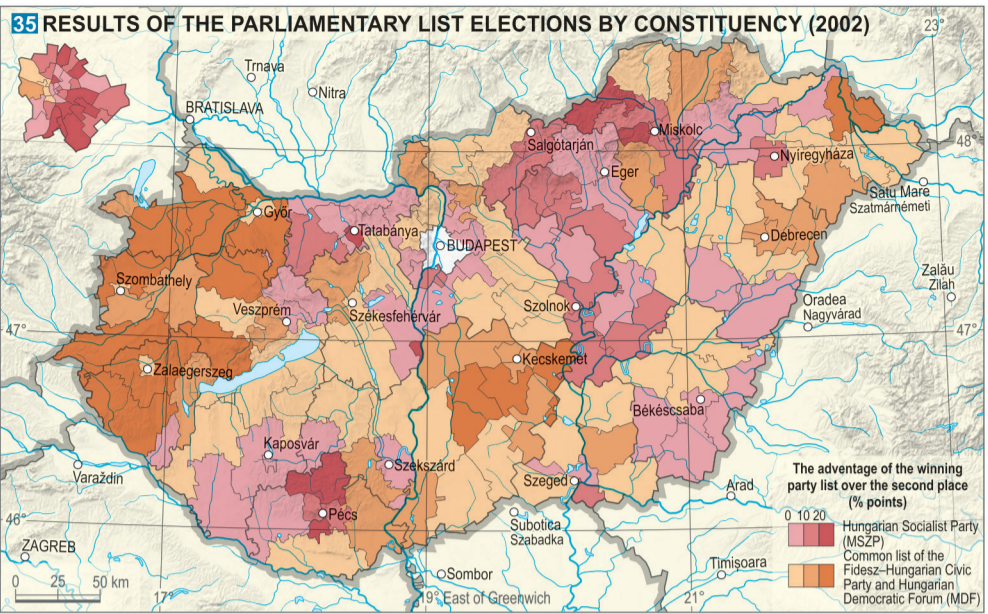
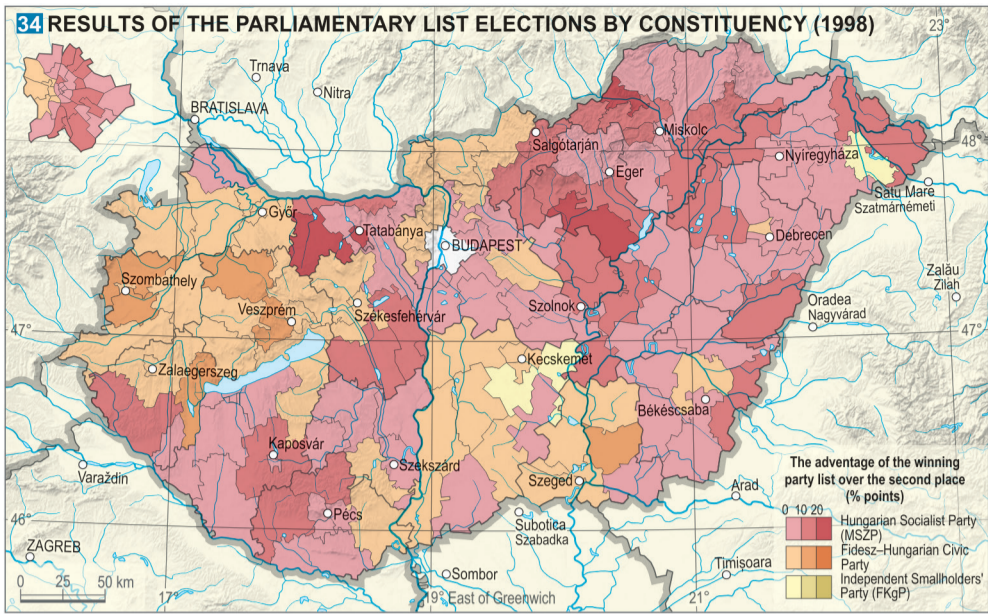
tional radicalism) and left (LMP – green policies) of politics. Meanwhile, the MSZP lost more than half of its voters, owing to its mediocre performance in government during the previous parliamentary term. Support for the MSZP declined the most in rural areas and in the former industrial areas, where both Jobbik and Fidesz–KDNP were able to appeal to disillusioned voters on the left [X. 1. 37]. The 2014 elections were the first to be held *on the basis of the new electoral law*. Although the mixed system was retained, there were fewer individual constituencies (106) and even fewer national list seats (93) than before. Although support for *Fidesz–KDNP* declined somewhat nationally, it retained an elevated level of support in its traditional voter bases (western Hungary, Bács-Kiskun County, and Szabolcs County) [X. 1. 38]. As a consequence, the ruling party – Fidesz–KDNP – once again obtained a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The divisions among the opposition parties were still evident at the time of the

2018 elections, nevertheless, the leftist parties did put forward candidates in a coordinated manner.

Since the change of system, a *significant alignment between individual constituency votes and the list votes has typically been observed*. In a majority of cases, the candidates in individual constituencies have run with the support of nominating organizations (parties) which also presented territorial lists. Researchers observed that voters typically voted for the same party in the constituency as on the list. However, this was not the case in 2018, when although the opposition parties were far from being united, a joint effort was made in each individual constituency to persuade voters to support whichever candidate had the *best chance* of defeating the Fidesz–KDNP candidate, with the aim of preventing a Fidesz–KDNP two-thirds parliamentary majority. Accordingly, in many instances, voters put aside their party preferences and voted for another party's candidate in the individual constituencies.

That is to say, the differences between the individual and list votes grew [X. 1. 39]. In a majority of the Budapest constituencies, every third to fourth voter cast their vote differently in the individual constituency, a trend also observed in some other towns (e.g. Székesfehérvár and Szekszárd). Despite this, the share of the vote won by the governing party (Fidesz–KDNP) increased by more than 3 percentage points (compared with four years earlier). Even so, they won five fewer parliamentary seats than in 2014, owing to the coordinated nomination of opposition candidates and a willingness on the part of opposition voters to switch their votes to other constituencies. As the opposition parties ran separately, the Fidesz–KDNP finished in first place in all constituencies. Only in a few urban districts did one of the opposition parties trail Fidesz–KDNP by a small margin [X. 1. 40]. In 2022, the *six opposition parties* (Demokratikus Koalíció, Jobbik, LMP, Momentum, MSZP, and Párbeszéd) fought the election on the ba-



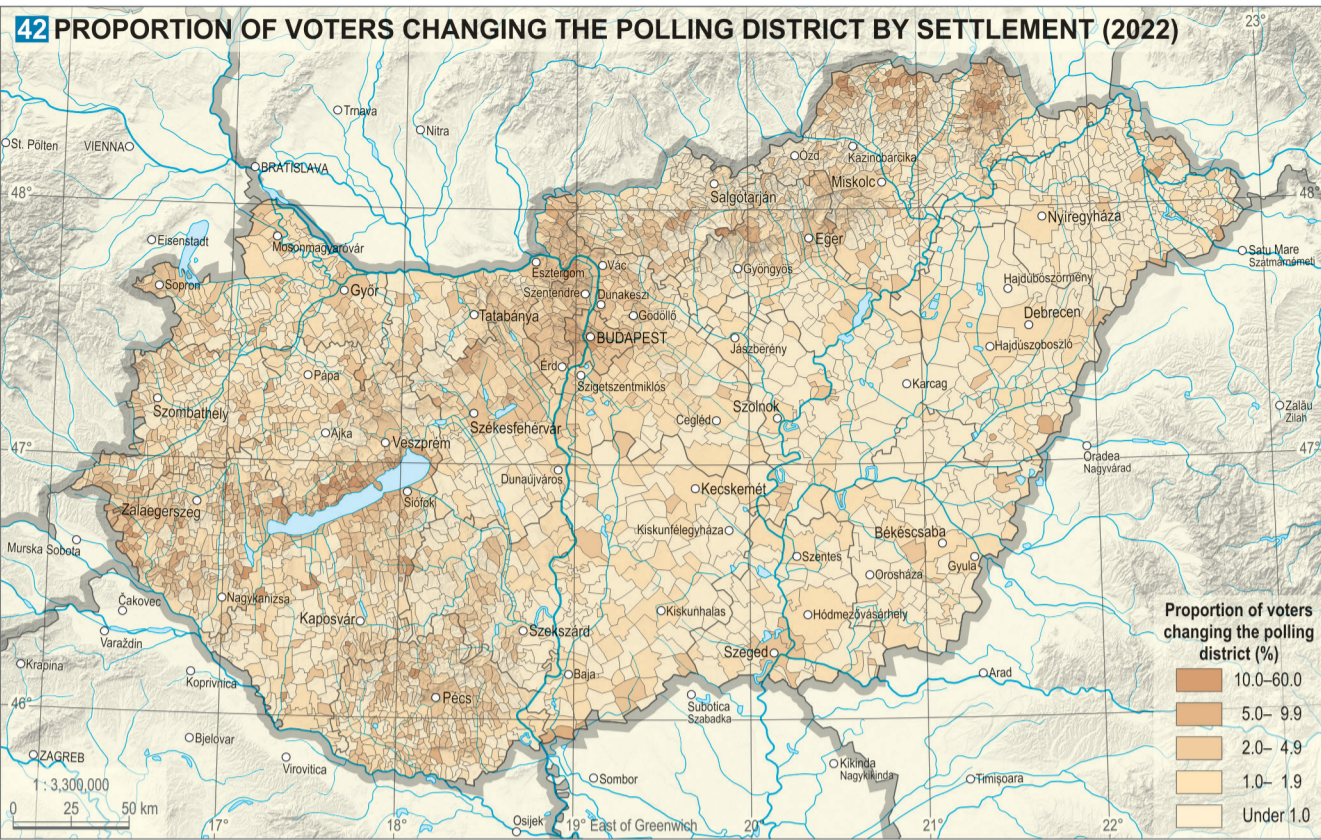


sis of *joint candidates* and lists. Even so, the election once again resulted in a two-thirds parliamentary majority for Fidesz–KDNP. In part this was due to the predominance of pro-government media coverage of the election, but a further factor was the opposition campaign's weakness in mobilizing voters, especially in rural areas. Thus, in terms of the spatiality of voter

behaviour, a deep urban-rural fault line emerged, with candidates of the opposition alliance winning individual mandates in Budapest and two regional cities (Pécs and Szeged) but nowhere else. Conversely, the Fidesz–KDNP was unquestionably victorious in rural areas (X.1.41).

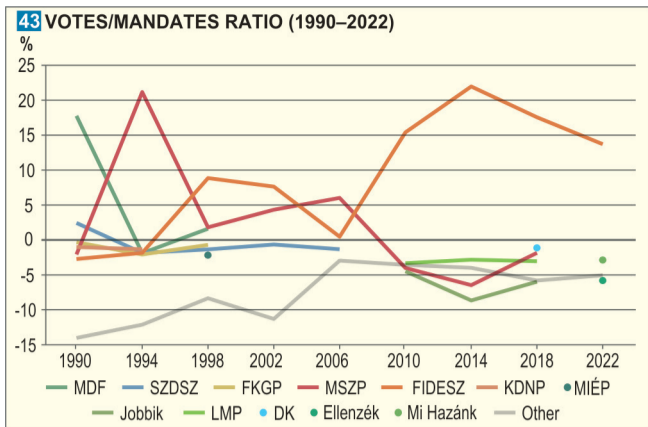
A relatively new element in Hungarian elections is

voter transfer registration, with the voter opting not to vote in his or her permanent place of residence. Voter transfer registration can be requested from the National Election Office no later than one week before an election. This opportunity is available not only to holiday-makers and other travellers but also to anyone living away from their permanent address (workers, students



etc.). In the 2022 elections, 157,551 voters (2% of all voters) made use of this opportunity. As far as the spatial patterns are concerned, voter transfer registration occurs at a higher rate in the major cities and on the north-

ern shore of Lake Balaton (X.1.2.). In the former case, voters working or studying away from home probably comprise the main group, while in the latter case, pensioners predominate.



The disproportionality of individual electoral systems can be measured using various indicators. Perhaps the simplest and best-known method is to calculate the difference between the number of votes and the number of seats. This reveals how many more or fewer seats a party obtained in relation to its national vote. In electoral systems based on proportional representation, this indicator only relates to the votes that were cast for parties that failed to enter Parliament (owing to a threshold). In majoritarian and mixed electoral systems, the indicator is suitable for measuring the distorting effects of constituency boundaries and mechanisms that benefit the winner. This indicator can offer insights about Hungary too. Reflecting the nature of the Hun-

Outside Hungary, the most significant political grouping of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin is the **Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ)**. In the nine Romanian parliamentary elections held since 1989, the RMDSZ has always reached the 5% threshold required for entry into the Romanian Parliament. Beginning in the 2000s, however, several factors began to reduce public support for the RMDSZ, including the establishment of rival ethnic Hungarian parties, increasing political passivity (coupled with a gradual decrease in voter turnout), changes in the party preferences of Transylvanian Hungarians (with some switching their support to the Romanian parties, especially in urban districts), and accelerating demographic decline. As a result of all these developments, in 2020 the main issue at stake was whether the RMDSZ would enter Parliament.

In Romania's electoral system, each county forms an electoral district (constituency), with candidates of the parties receiving seats in proportion to their votes. There are in total 43 constituencies: 41 county constituencies, one capital city constituency and one constituency for Romanian citizens living abroad. The position of RMDSZ in the elections was facilitated by the existence of an all-Hungarian agreement in Transylvania. This agreement was concluded in the month before the

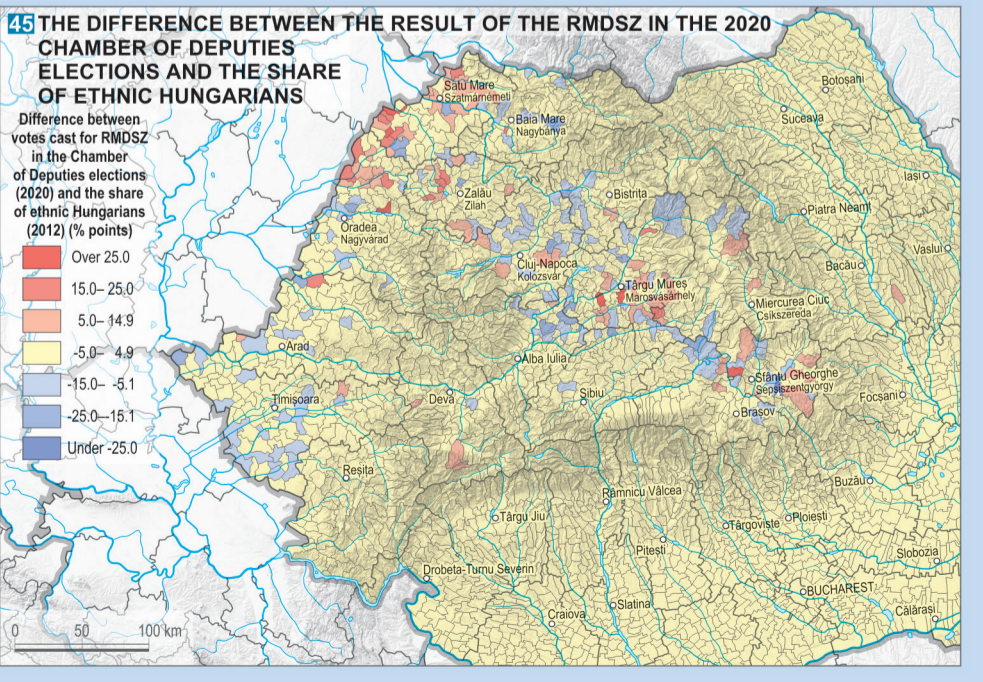
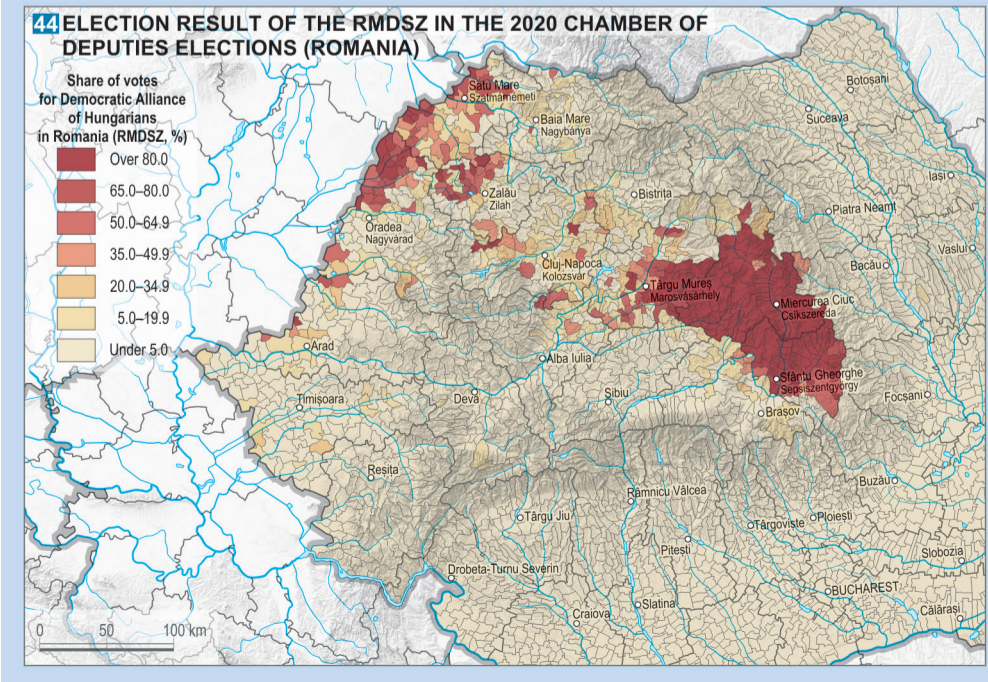
elections between the RMDSZ and the Transylvanian Hungarian Alliance (an alliance between the Hungarian Civic Party and the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania); the latter had still run independently in the local elections held in the autumn of that year, securing about 15% of the Hungarian votes in Transylvania.

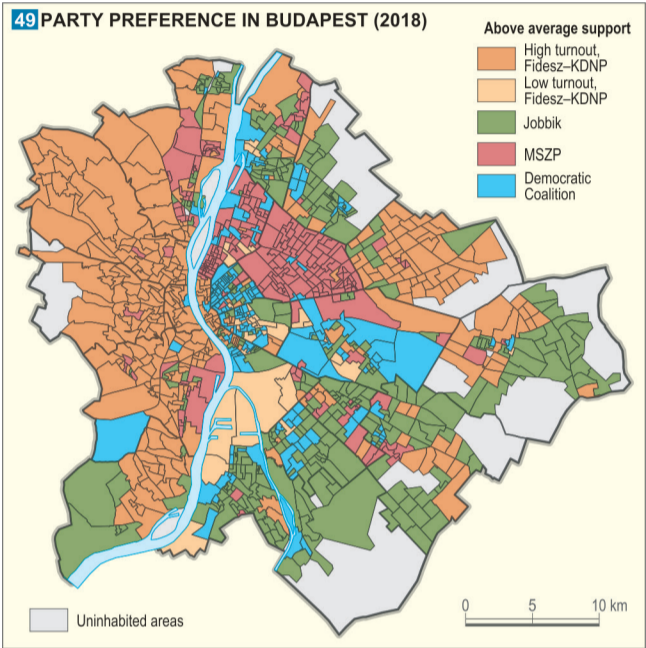
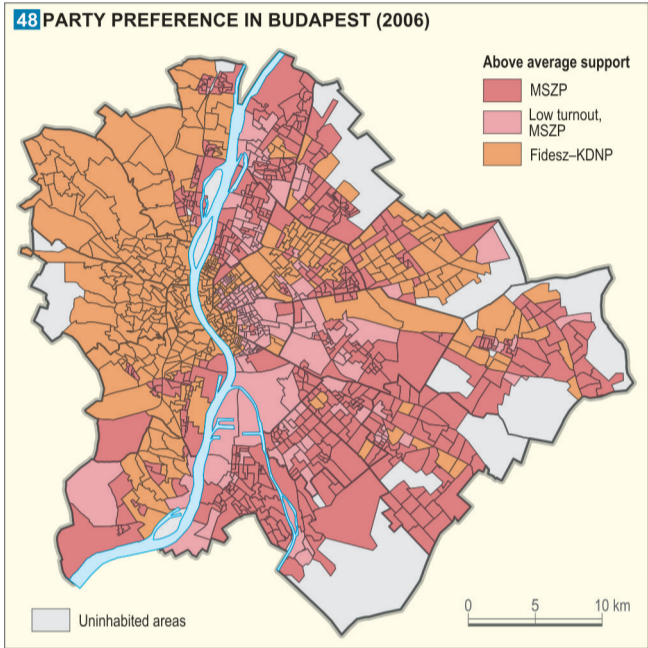
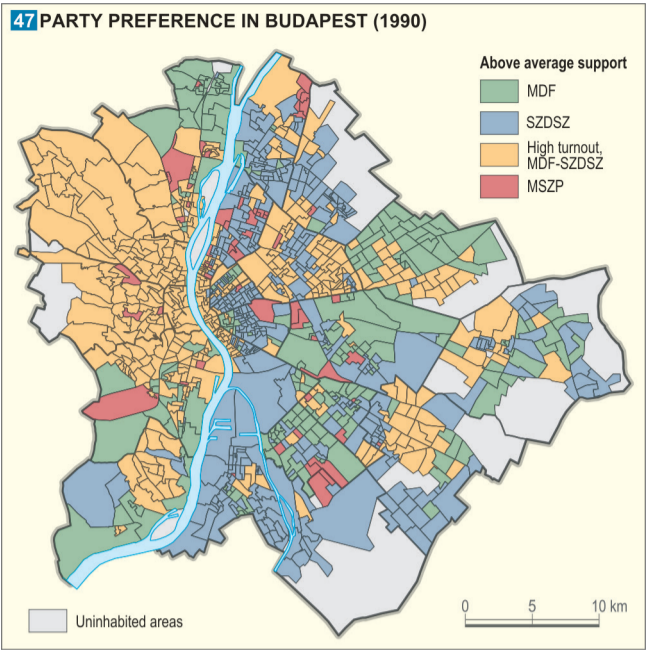
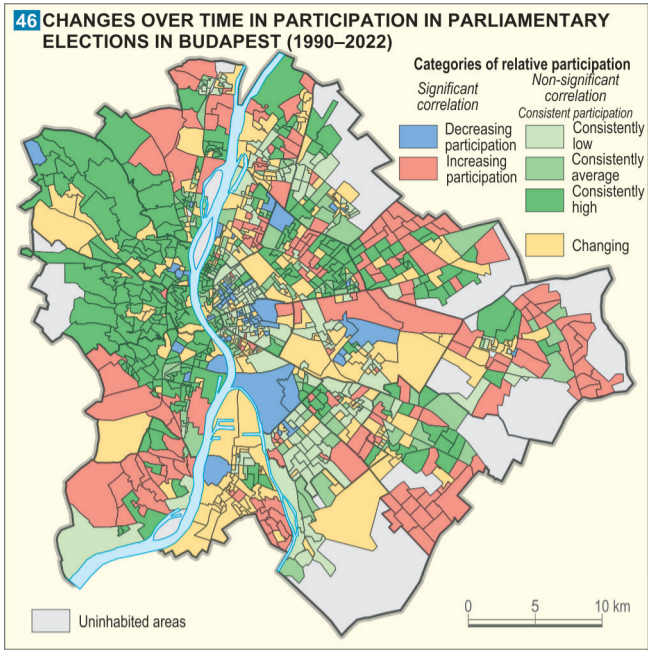
In the end, with a voter share of 5-6% (Senate: 5.89%, Chamber of Deputies: 5.74%), the RMDSZ once again gained parliamentary representation, against the backdrop of an unprecedentedly low turnout rate (33.30%), the lowest in Europe. A higher rate of political mobilization helped RMDSZ to reach the 5% threshold: ethnic Hungarian voters in Romania were more likely to vote than the general population, although the counties of Cluj and Covasna were exceptions to this.

Regarding the spatial distribution of votes cast for RMDSZ, three distinct geographical areas of support can be observed (X.1.44.). The first of these lies in eastern Transylvania, including the counties of the Székely Land, where RMDSZ typically secures the majority of votes cast in the predominantly Hungarian settlements of Harghita, Covasna and Mureş counties. The second area lies in western Transylvania and includes the Hungarians of the Partium region, who vote in the constituencies of Bihor, Satu Mare and Sălaj counties. Reflecting the spatial distribution of the ethnic Hungarian pop-

ulation, this second area (or block) is smaller and less compact than the one in the Székely Land. The third area has a more scattered spatial pattern, lying in the mixed-ethnic areas of central Transylvania. Here, the RMDSZ typically secures a majority of votes in rural areas, that is, in the villages of Cluj and Mureş counties.

In southern Transylvania and the Banat region, where the ethnic Hungarian population is rather dispersed, the election results were more modest. Examining the relationship between the votes received by the RMDSZ and the ethnic Hungarian share of the population (X.1.45.), we find a negative correlation in the villages and towns of southern Transylvania, the Banat and central Transylvania with a scattered ethnic Hungarian population. At the same time, a significant positive correlation can be observed in villages with communities that speak Hungarian as their native language, but which are of German (Swabian) or Roma ethnicity (typically found in the northern part of Partium and the southwestern half of the Székely Land). Notwithstanding all this, the overall balance is clearly negative from the perspective of the RMDSZ, due to voting trends in the major cities with scattered ethnic Hungarian populations. Overall, around 20% of the Hungarians in Romania voted for Romanian parties.





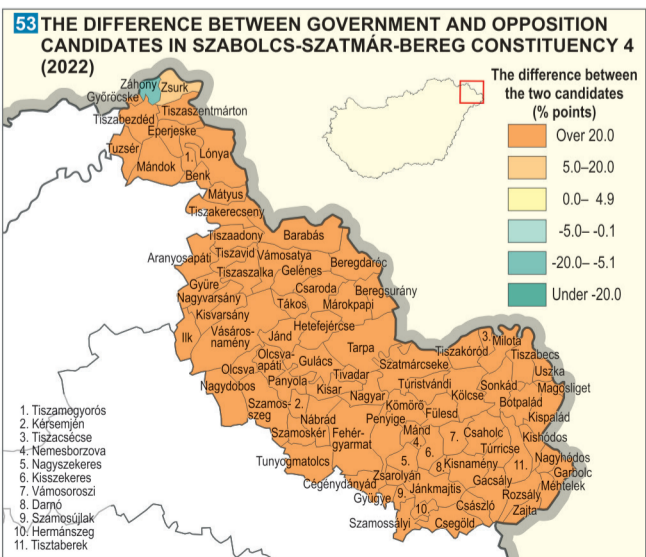
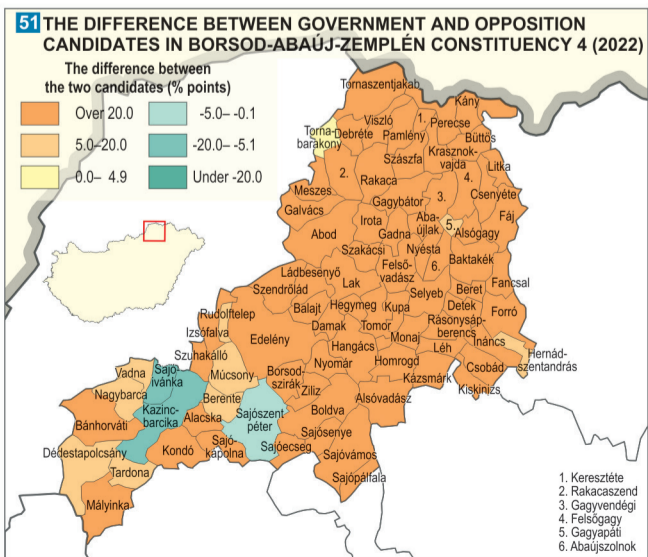
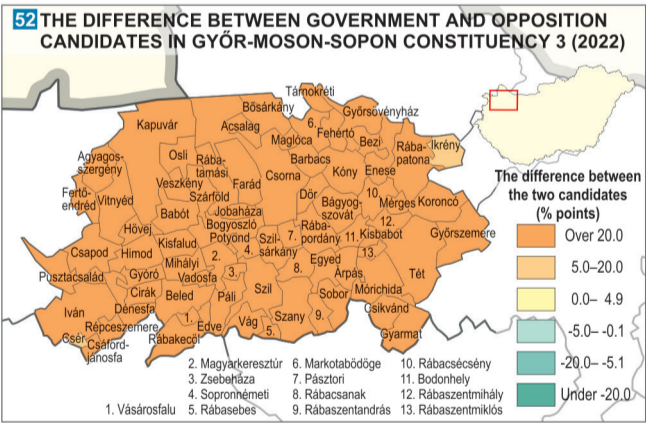
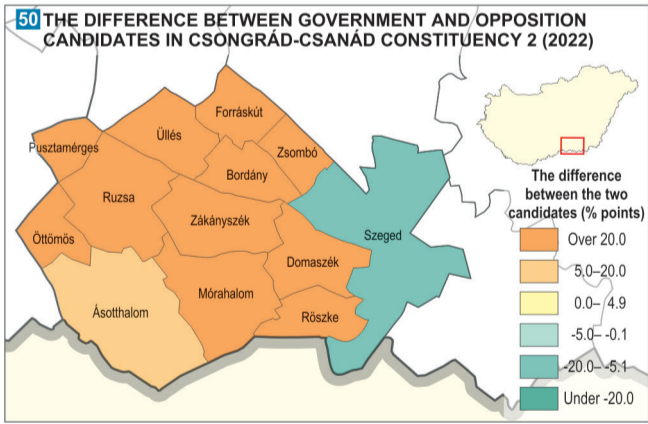
garian electoral system, more seats were won by the MDF in 1990 and by the MSZP in 1994 than were justified based on their national vote [X. 1. 43.](#) This was a consequence of the fragmented party structure of the period, with a high proportion of votes being cast for parties that won no seats in Parliament. A secondary factor was the manner in which the mixed election system benefitted the winning party. This problem was subsequently alleviated by the formation of the two large political blocs.

However, with the collapse of the left in 2010 and

the fragmentation of the opposition parties, the distorting effect of the electoral system returned, to which was added a shift among voters towards the majority. The disproportionality, however, was no more extreme than that seen in the 1990s.

Distinct areas in terms of electoral geography

The national election results often conceal significant spatial differences, which are rooted in the composition of the population, the structure of settlements, past traditions as well as contemporary influences linked



with particular politicians. With its 1.7 million inhabitants, *Budapest*, the capital of Hungary, comprises nearly a fifth of all eligible voters. Since the change of system, the election results in Budapest have deviated in many respects from the national average. In terms of electoral participation, Budapest usually registers the highest turnout rates, although significant differences can be observed within the city [X. 1. 46.](#) The areas of Budapest with above-average turnout rates are located in the highly educated and high-income neighbourhoods of Buda. In addition, higher turnout rates are also an indicator of migration within the city (internal suburbanization), since the suburbanized areas are mainly located in the peripheral districts. A further factor is that those areas characterized by declining or consistently low participation rates coincide with the industrial rust zones and with the gentrifying neighbourhoods. After the change of system, the fault lines did not appear in the capital city at the time of the first free elections. The two leading parties at the time – the SZDSZ and the MDF – performed similarly in Buda, in the city centre, in Zugló and in some outer urban districts [X. 1. 47.](#) Smaller parties ran candidates in these areas, and this is where the turnout rate was highest. In other parts of the city, however, the two major parties were dominant: the SZDSZ prevailed in parts of the city lying along the Danube from Újpest to Csepel, while in the outer parts of the city, the MDF was dominant.

After the 2006 elections, the fault lines in the capital city were clearly perceptible. In areas with higher social status, voters preferred the right-wing Fidesz-KDNP, whereas in areas characterized by lower social status, voters tended to support the leftist MSZP [X. 1. 48.](#) The 2010s, however, saw a major overhaul of voter behaviour. The left lost much of its support, which split into many parties. Meanwhile, alongside Fidesz-KDNP, a new actor appeared on the right, Jobbik, a party representing national radicalism. Jobbik partially succeeded in winning over voters who had turned away from the MSZP in Budapest [X. 1. 49.](#) Support for the left (MSZP and Demokratikus Koalíció) was limited to the inner city; increasingly, it politicized for the more highly educated voters. Meanwhile, the right proved attractive to the losers of globalization, the poorer social strata.

At the time of parliamentary elections in Hungary, so-called ‘swing’ districts are perceptible, where voters are particularly divided and there is often a fierce struggle between the various parties. Constituency No. 2 in Csongrád-Csanád County is a good example of a constituency with significant social differences, comprising both urban neighbourhoods as well as rural settlements (even farms). This constituency includes the western part of Szeged and the southern part of the Kiskunság area [X. 1. 50.](#) In 2022, the opposition list won in the former area, while the Fidesz-KDNP list won in the latter. The situation is similar in Constituency No. 4 in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, where voter behaviour in Kazincbarcika, an old industrial town from the communist period, differs greatly from voter behaviour in the villages to the northeast [X. 1. 51.](#)

There also exist constituencies where voters are homogeneous in terms of their party preferences. Such constituencies include, for example, Csona-Kapuvár (Constituency No. 3 in Győr-Moson-Sopron County), where, in 2022, the Fidesz-KDNP candidate secured a lead of more than 20 percentage points in nearly every settlement in the constituency [X. 1. 52.](#) Similar voter behaviour was observed in Constituency No. 4 in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, where the opposition candidate won in just one settlement (Záhony),

54 SUMMARY DATA OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS SINCE 1990 (1990–2024)

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2019	2024
Number of eligible voters (thousand persons)	7,868	8,044	8,129	8,125	8,125	8,186	8,167	8,025	7,850
County assembly – Number of representatives	835	835	835	835	835	391	385	381	381
Body of representatives – Number of individual constituency representatives	2,108	2,073	2,055	2,072	2,076	1,629	1,638	1,628	1,586
Body of representatives – Number of representatives from list	1,960	1,409	1,402	1,415	1,415	641	640	637	621
Body of representatives – Number of representatives from small list	20,401	21,477	21,427	21,637	21,491	14,633	14,561	14,522	14,528
Number of independent (elected) mayors	2,424	2,646	2,662	2,747	2,684	2,471	2,447	2,465	2,521
Number of mayors (elected) with party support	668	491	491	395	476	692	716	712	656
Number of minority self-government representatives	—	2,877	5,818	7,869	10,225	9,260	7,479	8,696	8,859

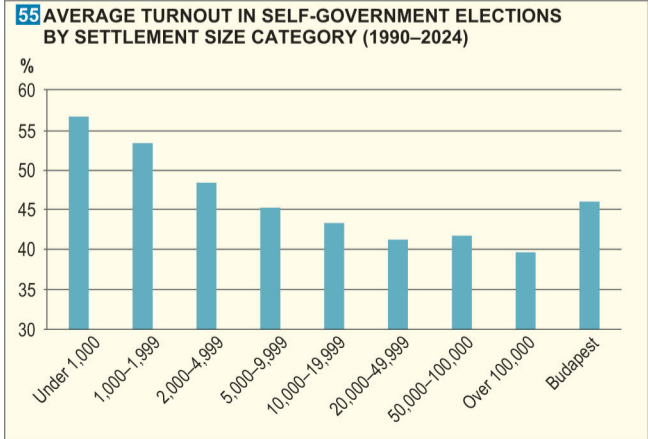
whereas the governing party was well ahead in the vote in all other settlements [X. 1. 53.](#)

Other elections

Alongside the national elections, voters in Hungary take part at regular intervals in *local government* or *European Parliament elections*. Occasionally, they may also vote in *referenda* held on certain issues.

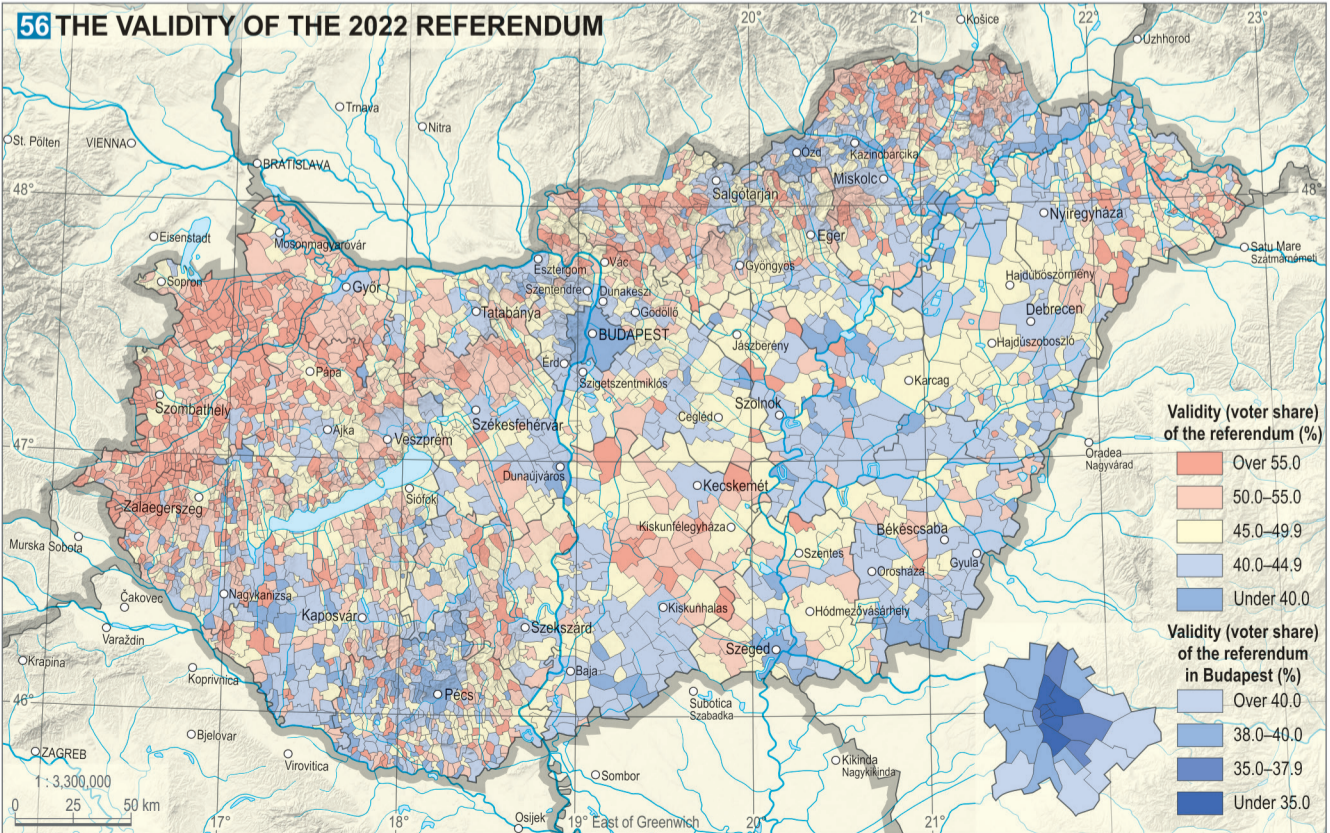
After the change of system, Act LXIV of 1990 on the election of local self-government representatives and mayors provided the legal foundation for local government elections. The first such elections took place on 30 September and 14 October 1990. Uniquely in the history of Hungary since 1989, they were *two-round local government elections*. Act LXIII of 1994 abolished two-round local government elections and the threshold of validity, replacing them with single-round elections. Thereafter, local elections were held similarly to the parliamentary elections and in the same year as them. Act L of 2010 on the election of municipal representatives and mayors brought about a momentous change in the system, reducing the number of municipal representative seats. Under the new Fundamental Law of Hungary, which entered into force on 1 January 2012 (thus affecting the 2014 municipal elections), local elections must be held every five years. In these elections, eligible voters elect local representative bodies, mayors (including the mayor of Budapest and the mayors of the municipal districts), and the members of the county (capital and municipal district) assemblies. *Since 1994*, eligible voters in Hungary have also been able to vote (after prior registration) for representatives of *minority self-governments*. Local representatives are elected in a mixed electoral system (in settlements with more than 10 thousand inhabitants) or in an individual list system (in smaller settlements).

A summary of the data for the nine local government elections held since the change of system, reveals a



decline in the number of county assembly representatives from 835 to 381 (i.e. by more than 50%) and a decrease in the number of (list and individual) mandates in the municipal representative bodies from 24,469 to 16,735 [X. 1. 54.](#) These figures indicate a significant reduction in the average size of the municipal representative bodies and, consequently, a simplification of local decision-making. In contrast, the number of elected mayors increased slightly between 1990 (3,092) and 2024 (3,177), with mayors being elected in practically every independent settlement, including the municipal districts of Budapest. In the mayoral elections, the vast majority (80%) of candidates who were successfully elected as mayors ran as independents. The proportion of mayors with a party affiliation was 21.6% in 1990, with the proportion declining until 2006 (15%). From then onwards, it increased once again, reaching 20.6% in 2024.

The average turnout tends to be 15–20 percentage points lower in local (municipal) elections than in parliamentary elections. Additionally, turnout in the local elections is the highest in small settlements [X. 1. 55.](#) This indicates that in smaller settlements greater importance is attributed to the mayor and to members of the representative body. The relative strength of personal relationships in such settlements has a strong mobilizing effect. Similarly to the parliamentary elections, a U-shaped curve can be identified for the turnout rate in local elections within the settlement hierarchy. The other extreme occurs in Budapest, where once again a higher turnout rate is observed. This is



THE SPATIALITY OF SOCIAL-POLITICAL ACTIVITY

CIVIL SOCIETY

Viktor Pál, Lajos Boros, Olivér Kriska, Károly Kocsis

Society consists not only of individuals but also of communities serving a variety of purposes – and these communities make up civil society. In the course of everyday life, people address challenges and issues that by their very nature lie outside the purview of the state and other institutions. In doing so, they create cultural values and enhance social cohesion. In a democracy, civil society plays a vital role in strengthening individual responsibility. People acknowledge that there are many fields in life where legislation is unnecessary and where the required action is not the responsibility of the state. Engagement in civil society creates opportunities for individual fulfilment, thereby reinforcing social and community cohesion and identity. It serves, furthermore, to *limit the power of political and market actors, while facilitating interaction between the state, private enterprise and the general public.*

Action can be taken by individuals themselves or through the work of civil society organizations with specific goals. The range of possibilities is broad, covering almost all areas of life. Aside from charitable activities, the objective may be to preserve traditions and culture, to express and enhance identity, to disseminate knowledge or to protect interests. The actions of civil society in national life seek not only to solve problems but also to create values and enhance social cohesion and solidarity. Individuals and organizations undertake their voluntary activities on a non-profit basis without seeking financial compensation.

The meaning and significance of civil society

There are multiple definitions of the concept of civil society, but the starting point is always the ‘civic ethos’, with individual citizens taking action in society while living in line with the laws and institutions of the democratic state. The resultant civil society is a complex and multilayered structure comprising social groups and communities. These communities constitute – alongside private individuals – the main pillars of civil society. In civil society, the individual as a citizen undertakes community and social activities, doing so either

alone or by joining various organizations and thus assuming social and political responsibility. Civil society constitutes, therefore, a set of free-thinking individuals and communities acting independently from the state. In democratic societies, operating in tandem with market (private) and state (public) actors, civil society organizations comprise a third group of actors that belong to the private sector in a legal sense, but which serve public purposes.

Civil society is strongly linked to the democratic system of government. As such, it is a basic feature of modern Western societies. Yet, similar aspirations can also be observed in many other cultures. Although the notion of civil society arose at the time of the Enlightenment and the emergence of modern society in the 17th and 18th centuries, its ‘prototypes’ were the various charitable institutions and foundations that were originally connected with the Church and were established by way of donations from rulers and lords.

Civil society consists in part of voluntary organizations (e.g. associations, foundations) that constitute organized forms of public action. Laws govern their operation, management and supervision. Political parties and trade unions are not usually classified as such organizations. Yet, a sizeable number of civil society organizations do address public and political issues.

Civil society organizations are often referred to as ‘non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs). This underlines their separation from the state. Nevertheless, the relationship between civil society and the state is often viewed as symbiotic, with NGOs forming the foundation of civil society. They operate alongside the state rather than in opposition to it. Where appropriate, co-operation between the two sectors can arise.

Civil society operates not only through the work of formal organizations; individual citizens can also take action (e.g. by donating or volunteering). Further, self-organizing groups belonging to the non-institutional model may also come into being (e.g. reading circles and hiking clubs).

Since civilians take action – either individually or within organizations – without seeking financial gain, civil society is often called the non-profit sector. Indeed, its entities are frequently referred to as non-profit or-

ganizations. Yet, although some non-profit organizations are created by individuals as civil society organizations, others are established by the state (e.g. public foundations and public bodies). For this reason, the two concepts are not always synonymous. In addition to helping others, the most common motivations for civil society engagement are membership of a community or a religious/moral commitment. An additional factor is a desire to gain experience, seek self-improvement, and expand one’s network of relationships.

Civil society around the world

The concept of a separation between civil society and the state arose in Western Europe during the Enlightenment and the advent of capitalism and urbanization. The ending of the Cold War and the rise of globalization resulted in an increase in the number of civil society organizations in the eastern half of Europe. The involvement of NGOs in social dialogue and decision-making has often been viewed as vital to the functioning of democracy. At the same time, civil society can stand for different things in various parts of the world. Indeed, in each country it is influenced by the specific path of historical development and by existing traditions and power structures. Where the state is excessively powerful, grassroots communities will be few in number and limited in their public role. In contrast, in less centralized states, there may well be a multitude of organizations striving to influence socio-economic and political processes, even on occasion assuming certain functions of the state.

According to each of the various definitions, civil society should be independent of the state. Nevertheless, in some places, civil society is subject to the influence of government and the political parties, which seek to determine the methods and goals. This is unfortunate because such ‘state intervention’ inevitably undermines civil society’s capacity to serve as a guarantor of democracy.

Reflecting the divergent history, the evolution of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe differs from the Western European model. In the eastern half

Hungarian Geographical Society

There are many examples of national organizations in Hungary, but this society (founded in 1872) is one of the oldest of its kind. ¹ The Society aimed ‘to promote interest in the science of geography by spreading geographical knowledge and to encourage research on the geography of Hungary and its dissemination.’ Reflecting its popularity, it attracted 300 members in the year of its foundation, with its membership increasing to 600 by the turn of the century. The Society, which is still active today, has always pursued a broad range of activities: it publishes one of the country’s oldest scientific journals, the *Geographical Review*, while also organizing domestic and international study tours, conferences, and lectures.



¹ Pál Teleki, Archduke József and Jenő Cholnoky on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian Geographical Society (1922)

of Europe, WWII was followed by a communist takeover, decimating civil society and imposing limits on the range of civil society organizations (angling and sports clubs were permitted). The free expression of political opinions was prevented wherever there was a precedent for it (e.g. Central Europe). Elsewhere (e.g. in some of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union), civil society was smothered by the hierarchical social structure. After the change of system (1989–90), in contrast to the Western European model, a top-down development model took hold in the region. That is to say, the democratization of the state was followed by the formation of civil society. Although civil society in the eastern part of Central Europe is still underdeveloped, there do exist movements that are strongly committed to democracy and favour Western values. In Western Europe, civil society has traditions stretching back hundreds of years; in the United Kingdom, for instance, social welfare associations appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries. In German corporate culture, a functional and effective division of labour has evolved between civil society organizations and the state. Today, among the various EU countries, Sweden has the highest proportion of citizens involved in a NGO, but civic engagement is also high in Czechia, Portugal, Ireland and Luxembourg. In contrast with Czechia, post-communist Bulgaria and Romania are

Transylvanian Museum Society

Among the various regional Hungarian civil society organizations, the Transylvanian Museum Society (EME) is a particularly important one. It was founded by Imre Mikó in 1859. It was looted in 1919 and liquidated in 1949 by the Romanian state. Since its re-establishment in 1990, the Association has remained a professional organization promoting scientific and cultural life in the Transylvanian Hungarian community. Comprising several departments, it maintains a research institute, organizes conferences and exhibitions, and publishes numerous journals and other publications.

characterized by a low level of engagement, as is Hungary ^{X.2.1.} ^{X.2.2.} ^{X.2.3.}

Looking beyond Europe, mention should clearly be made of the USA, where civil society is founded on individualism and a traditional mistrust of the state. Around the world, the decisive factor is often the role played by the state: in Japan, for instance, strict regulations preserved the leading role of the state in many fields of public action, leaving few opportunities for the organized development of civil society. At the same time, however, community cohesion is strong, as individuals often help each other in everyday life. In the developing countries (e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa), the number of civil society organizations increased rapidly during the post-independence era. Today, such organizations provide a variety of services and supplement (or even replace) action by the state. Throughout the developing world, civil society has been instrumental to democratization, the protection of human rights, and the resolution of economic and social problems. This is especially true in countries struggling with domestic strife and civil wars, where civil society is often organized according to kinship, tribal or religious ties. A key role is also played by organizations financed from abroad, which can become a target for government repression or attacks by armed groups in a civil war.

Civil society and civil society organizations in Hungary

The roots of self-organization in Hungarian society go back to the Middle Ages, at which time there already existed both charitable institutions and voluntary organizations (e.g. patient care, ‘patronage, guilds, and self-help associations). After the expulsion of the Turks, the Habsburgs sought to exercise control over the private foundations and self-help initiatives. In the first half of the 19th century, the ideas of the reform era strongly encouraged civic engagement. The political aspects of civil society were particularly important in reading circles and student associations, which, in turn, represented the starting point for organizations seeking national self-determination. The process was interrupted by Hungary’s defeat in the War of Independence of 1848–49. Although the associations were not banned, many of them were closed down or intimidated (even the politically neutral ones, such as the Royal Hungarian Society of Natural Sciences). Although modern civil society began to develop in Hungary in the early part of the 19th century, its flourishing occurred under the Dual Monarchy after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. At that time, much of the activity was conducted by civil society organizations rather than by individuals. All fields of life were affected, resulting in a blossoming of art and science as well as charitable activities. Alongside a considerable number of national organizations based in Budapest, many organizations addressed local issues and community building in other major cities throughout the country.

Scientific organizations increased in number and scope in Hungary in the late 19th century, reflecting developments in science and a growing demand for civil society organizations. The latter could facilitate the exchange of scientific ideas outside the academic framework.

The period was characterized by a kind of exclusivity: it was deemed an honour to be a member of an academic or scientific society, and members were usually recruited through recommendations. Philanthropy was expected from the elite in society, who acquired prestige in return. Consequently, in the initial period,

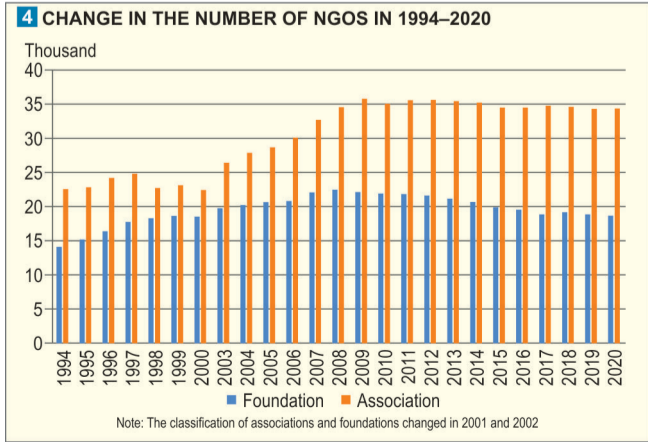
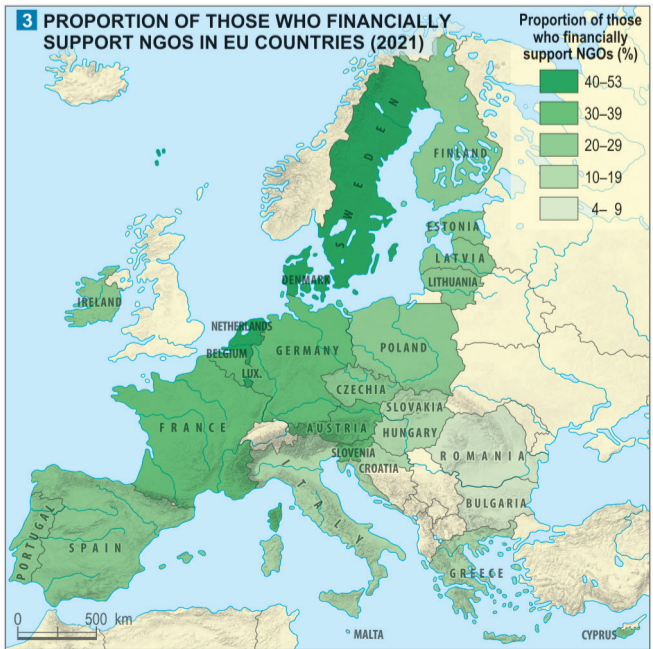
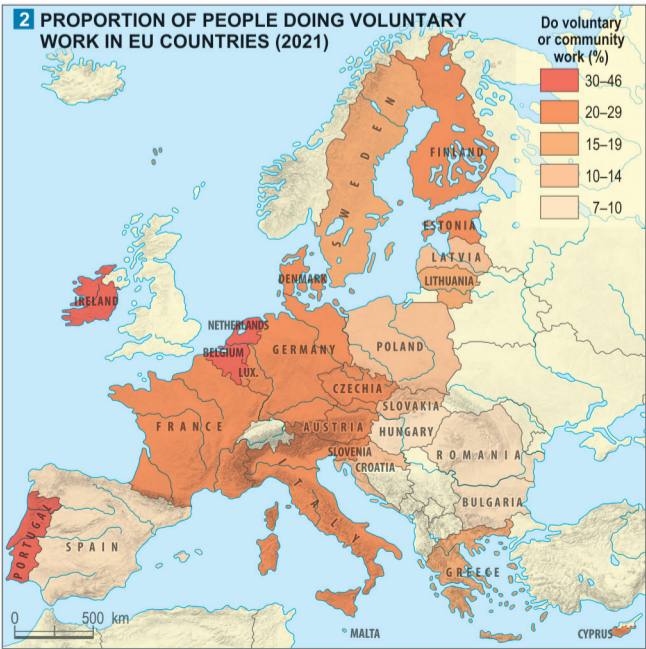
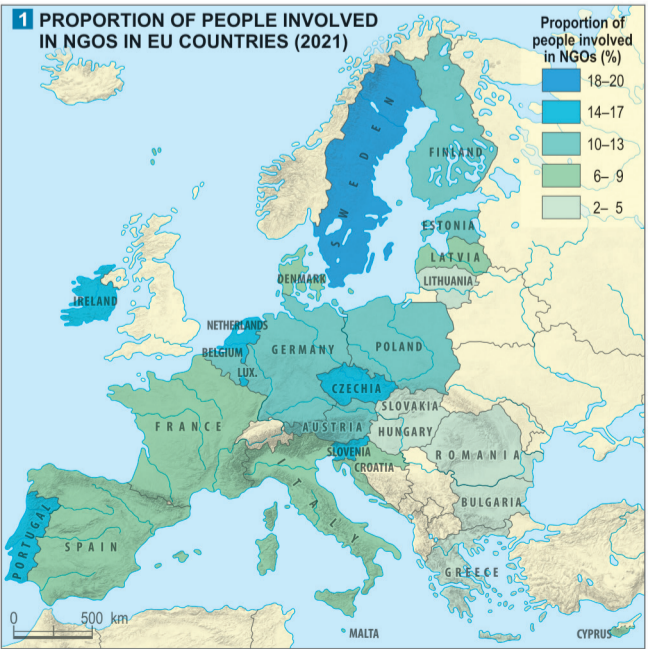
The Dugonics Society

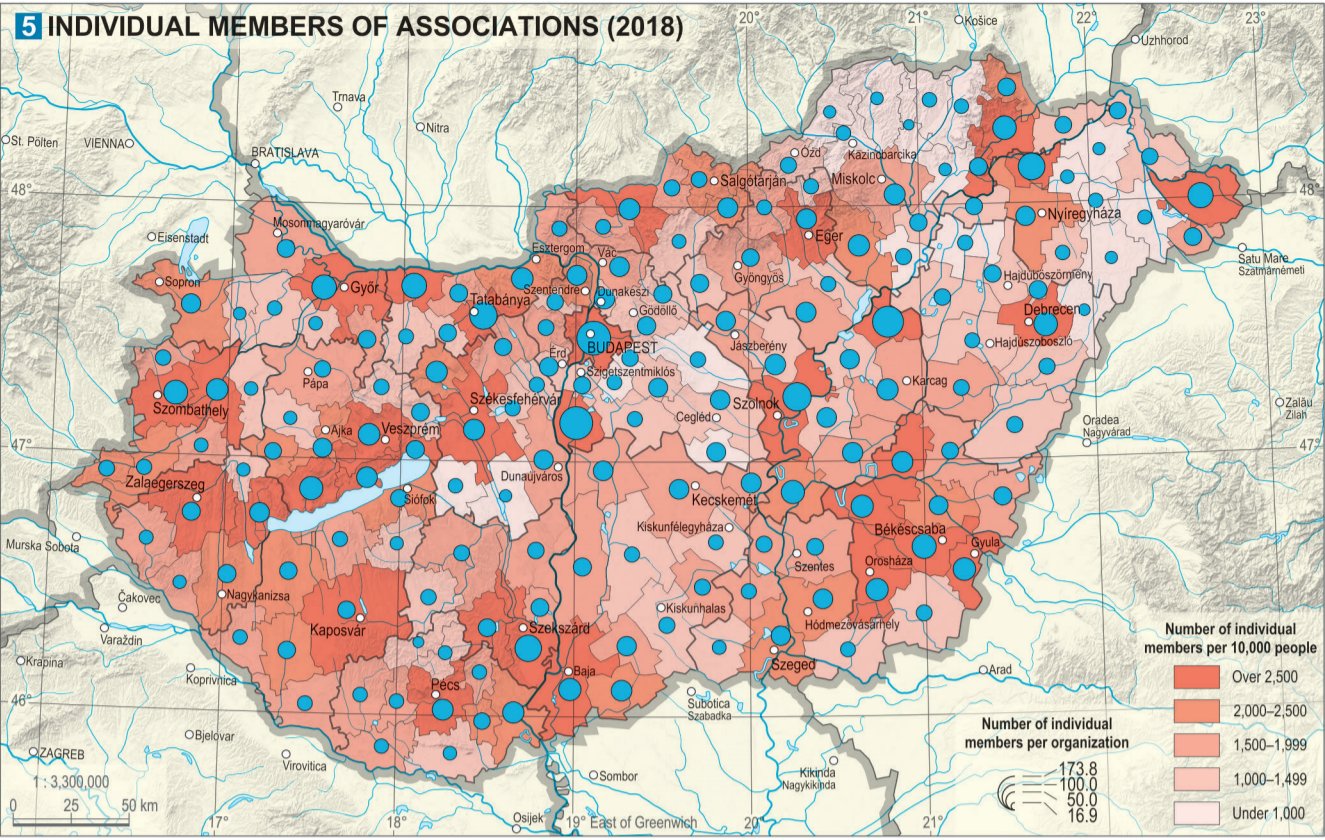
Szeged’s first civil society organization was founded in 1892 by artists, writers, and city leaders with the aim of fostering the intellectual heritage of András Dugonics, a Piarist monk, writer, mathematician from Szeged. The Dugonics Society also provided a framework for intellectual life in the city: ‘The Society’s aim is to support the cultivation of Hungarian science and the arts in the Alföld and especially in Szeged and the surrounding area and to disseminate and popularize its results.’ The Society held reading sessions at the city hall where renowned writers, poets, academics, teachers, physicians, and city officials shared their ideas with the public. The Society was dissolved in 1948. After a long wait, it was re-established in 1991.

foundations were usually created by nobles or other wealthy citizens. The need to obtain a licence from a national administrative body is indicative of the emergence of a consistent legal framework for associations in the late 19th century.

Despite changes in the regulations (resulting in periodic restrictions), the range of foundations and associations continued to expand in Hungary in the first half of the 20th century, up until the end of WW II. Beginning in 1948, however, the communist regime imposed tougher restrictions on civil society organizations, ultimately banning most of them. The only ones to remain were those that did not threaten the party state. For instance, scientific and professional organizations could exist, but the Hungarian Geographical Society, which was considered anti-establishment, was prohibited from operating between 1949 and 1952. The framework for public action was provided by movements organized from above and controlled by the Patriotic People’s Front. Action at the grassroots level was severely limited or even expressly prohibited. Voluntary organizations were regulated by a law adopted in 1959, but it was not until 1987 that foundations were granted legal status. Yet, associations could be founded and operated under communism.

In 1989, Hungarians were granted freedom of association. This resulted in the creation of a multitude of organizations throughout the country after 1990; they may have numbered several tens of thousands ^{X.2.4.} The legal grounding for such organizations was created by legislation adopted in 1989, 1997, and 2011. Based on the ‘civil code’ of 2011, civil society organizations are approved and registered by the courts. Their operations remain subject to legal checks, and they must prepare annual reports. The law also defines the concept of public utility as the performance of a public task laid down in an organization’s articles of association and contributing to the satisfaction of the common needs of both society and the individual. Under Hungarian law, associations (excluding political parties, trade unions and mutual insurance associations), foundations, and societies that are created to





satisfy various interests and needs can be classified as civil society organizations. Although civil society organizations do not seek to make a profit, they are not synonymous with the non-profit sector, for the latter is a broader category that includes non-profit business associations, political party foundations, public foundations, sports associations and sports federations.

As citizens, individuals can participate in civil society either by joining an organization or through their own efforts. They can donate to or perform voluntary work for an organization. Alternatively, they can take action themselves. Compared with most European countries, Hungary exhibits low levels of civic engage-

ment. Few people in Hungary are actively involved in the work of civil society organizations. Volunteering is also relatively rare. The most usual form of action is the donation of money.

Civil society organizations

Civil society organizations in Hungary can be categorized based on various criteria. There are three basic types: 'classical' civil society organizations (associations and foundations), interest-representation groups, and non-profit enterprises. The classical civil society organizations are by the far the most numerous, accounting for nearly 90% of all civil society organizations.

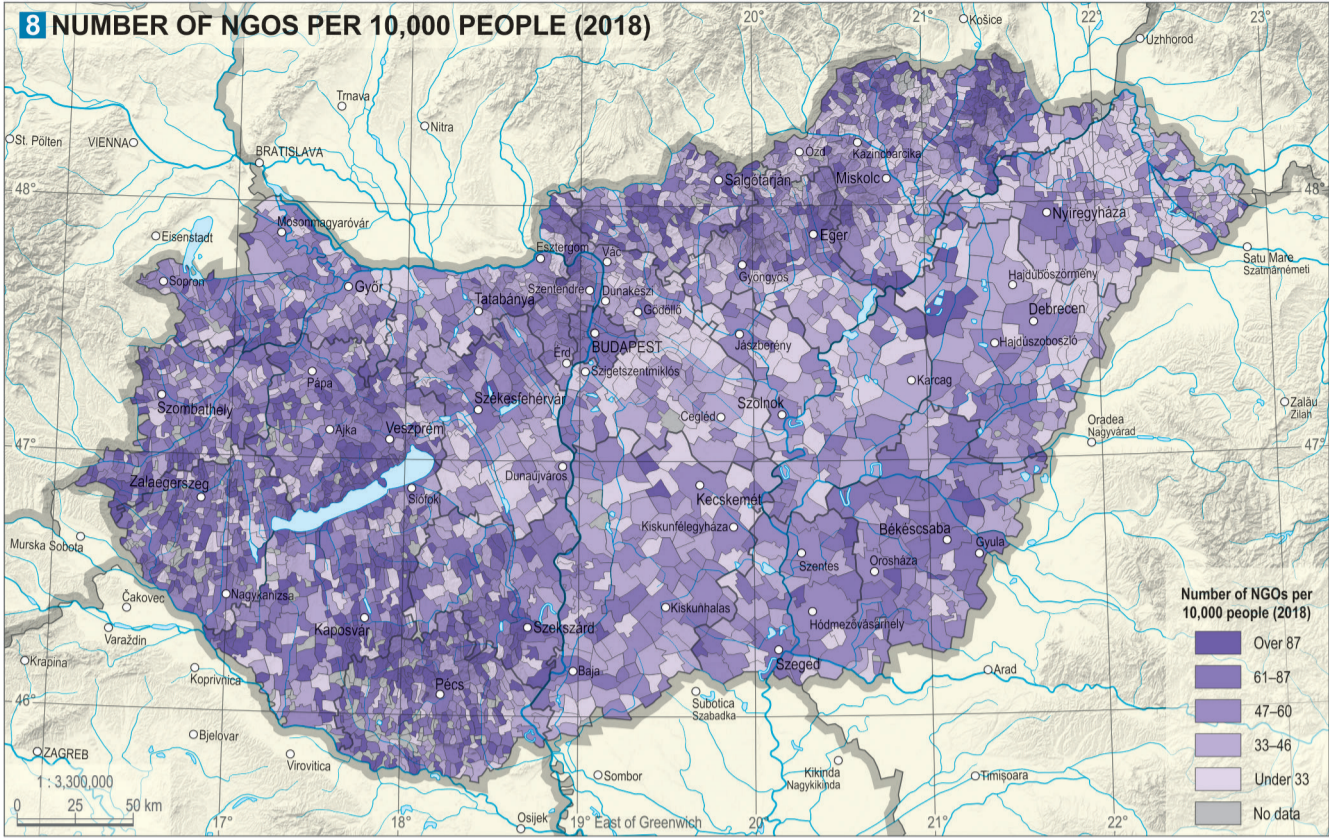
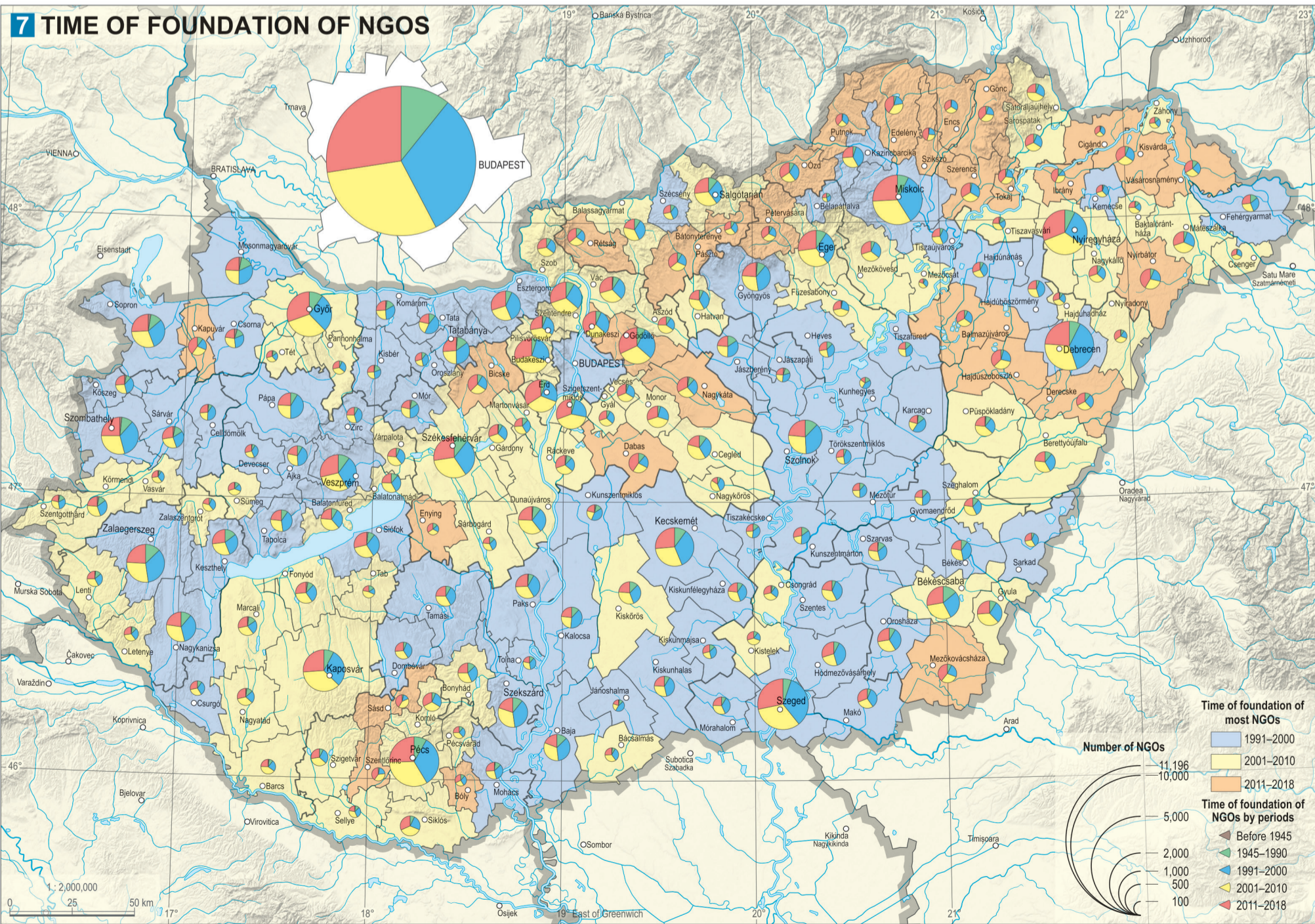
6 NUMBER OF ASSOCIATION MEMBERS BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT (2020)

Type of settlement	Individual members	
	number	proportion (%)
Budapest	941,195	39.8
County seats	441,674	18.7
Other towns	617,220	26.1
Villages	363,036	15.4
Total	2,363,125	100.0

Under Hungarian law, civil society organisations may operate as foundations, public foundations, associations, clubs, interest representation organizations, non-profit business associations, and institutions. *Associations and foundations*, as classical civil society organizations, make up the largest proportion of such organizations. Their number increased rapidly after the change of system. The number of associations fell in the latter half of the 1990s, with their number stabilizing or slightly decreasing in the 2010s. Foundations, however, have declined sharply in number since 2010

X. 2. 4. The decrease in the number of non-profit organizations was greater in Budapest (an 18% decline between 2009 and 2020) than nationally (8%).

The participation of individuals in the activities of civil society organizations is indicated by the membership figures. Another key indicator is membership of such organizations per 10,000 people in a given district **X. 2. 5.** Such data reveal higher levels of civic engagement in the urbanized areas, especially in Transdanubia, although several districts in the Tiszántúl also exhibit above-average participation rates. Nearly 40% of individuals who are members of civil society organizations reside in Budapest, with a little more than 15% being rural dwellers **X. 2. 6.**

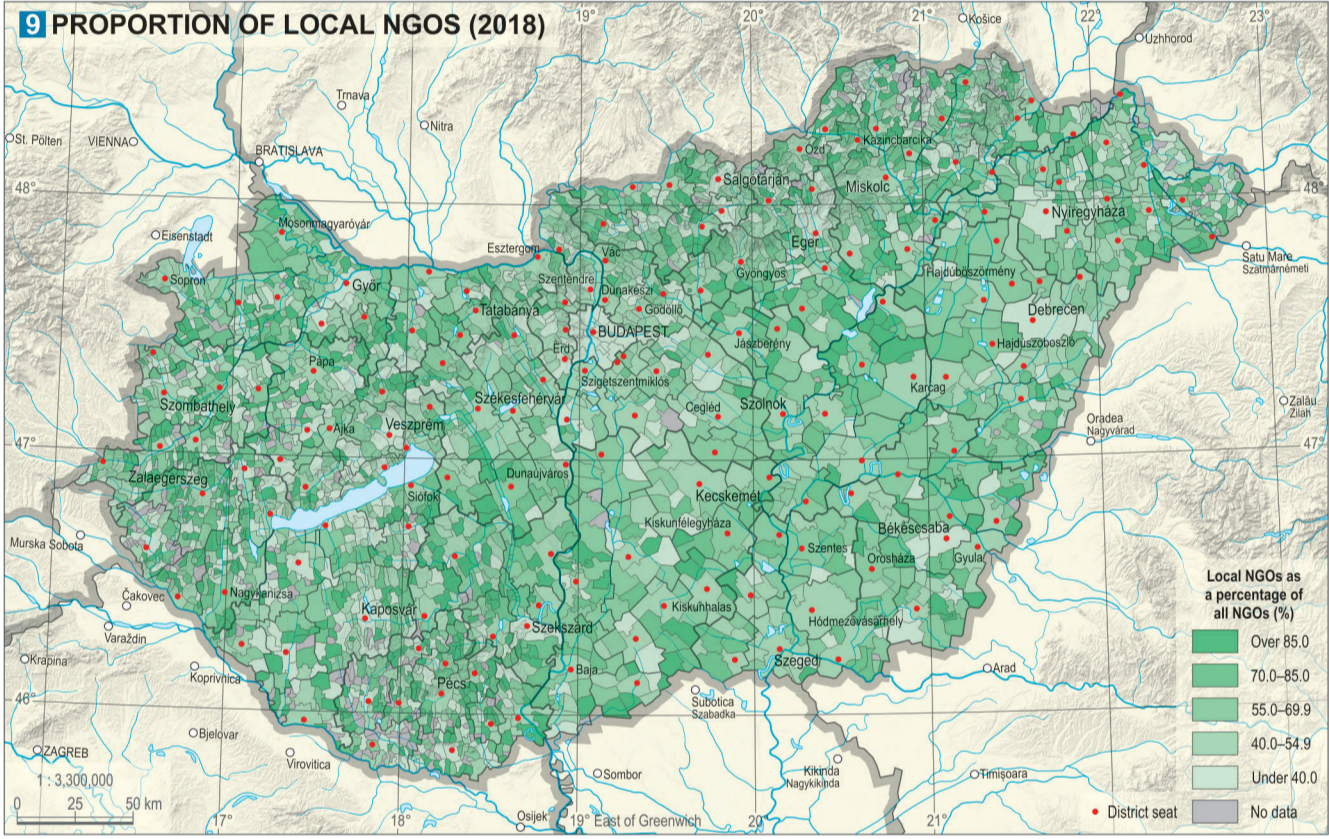


Noteworthy, the spatial pattern of the foundations differs from that of the associations. It corresponds more closely with the settlement hierarchy, as foundations are relatively more numerous than associations in towns with county rights and in other major urban centres. A similar trend can be observed in terms of the distribution of civil society organizations according to their scope: in the more populous cities and in the district seats, organizations with a national or regional scope operate in larger numbers. A common occurrence is that despite a scarcity of civil society organizations registered locally, some small settlements are the location for the activities of national or regional organizations. Accordingly, the proportion of national or regional organizations will be high there **X. 2. 9.**

Most civil society organizations have a single purpose (e.g. cultural, sports or leisure activities) **X. 2. 10.** **X. 2. 11.** **X. 2. 12.** Sometimes, however, a wide range of activities are performed. For instance, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta is involved in caring for the elderly, the homeless, and refugees, and it is also active in such fields as social care, education and healthcare.

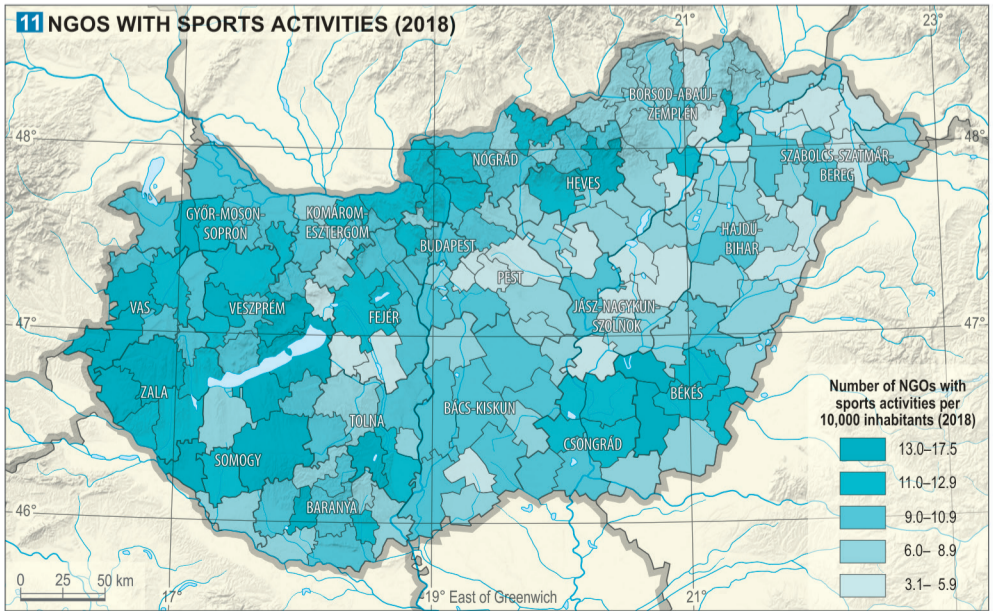
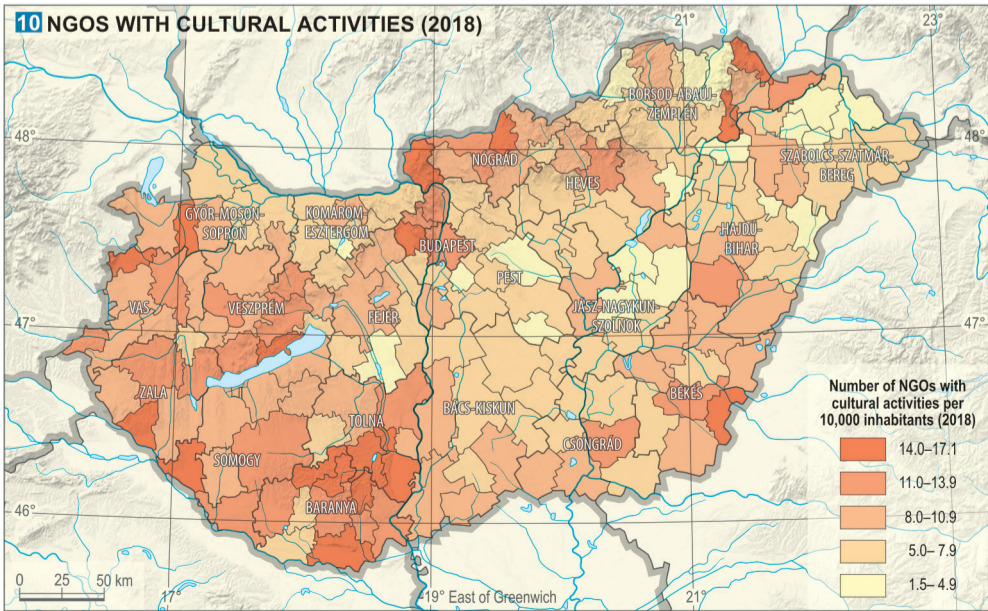
Funding of civil society organizations

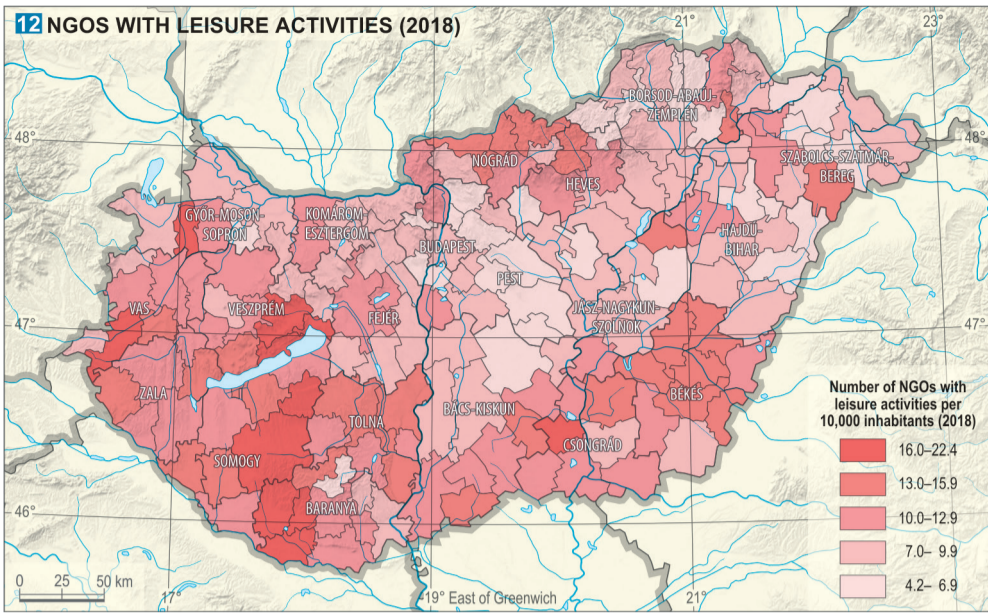
Adequate funding is essential for the operation of civil society organizations. Various sources of funding are available in Hungary, with the Hungarian state being the largest source (48%) in 2020. Normative budgetary support is funding granted by the state to civil society organizations in the form of a supplement that matches the donations received from other sources. Non-normative support comprises the funding received from the state or from local government in excess of this; it accounts for approximately 20% of the total income of civil society organizations in Hungary. State support can be task oriented, and it may comprise grants or ad hoc assistance. Funding stemming from corporate tax revenue accounts for about 3–8% of the total income of civil society organizations, while 1–3% of their total income comes from the 1% personal income tax donations. In absolute terms, revenue from the 1% donations peaked in the second half of the 2000s **X. 2. 13.** Regarding the 1% donations, differences within the settlement hierarchy are clearly discernible: in Budapest, the revenue from this source targeted at foundations and associations is the highest **X. 2. 14.**, and the sums offered are relatively high in more economically developed areas. **X. 2. 15.** Since 2014, the amount of state funding received by civil society organizations has increased significantly (by roughly a factor of three). Consequently, non-profit organizations are increasingly dependent on state funding. A further explanation for the increase is the creation of multiple public foundations in recent years, each of which receives substantial financial support from the state (e.g.



Although many civil society organizations were founded in the aftermath of the change of system, there are regions within the country where a greater number of such organizations were founded in another period. For example, in the northern parts of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, associations and foundations established between 2011 and 2018 constitute the largest share of the currently active ones. In this and other similar regions, the operation of civil society organizations is dependent on funding sources. Consequently, more foundations and associations are created when funding is readily available. Regarding the time of es-

tablishment, there is a difference between the associations and the foundations, with most foundations having been established between 2001 and 2018 **X. 2. 7.** Settlements in Transdanubia have a higher number of foundations and associations, relative to population numbers. To address the negative effects of mass tourism, many organizations have been created in the region with the aim of protecting and preserving the cultural and natural heritage. In rural areas with tiny villages, the number of organizations is relatively high, given the low population numbers (South Transdanubia and Northern Hungary) **X. 2. 8.**

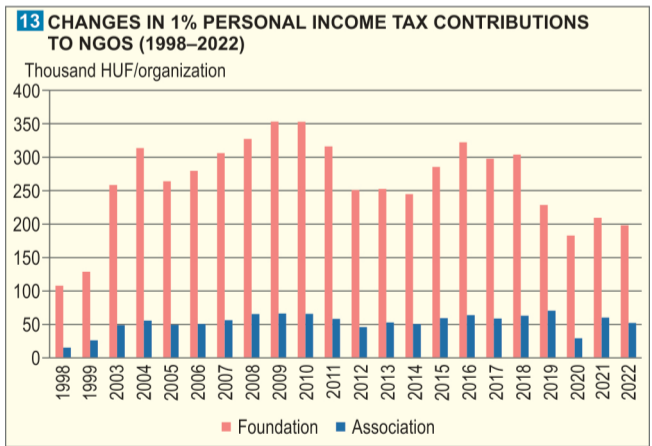




the formerly state-funded universities which now operate as foundations).

Local governments contribute to the civil society sector by providing direct support or by means of a competitive grant system. NGOs undertaking certain public tasks (e.g. education or social care) are more likely to receive funding from local governments. Funding for civil society organizations is relatively more plentiful in the county seats and other major urban centres, which offer non-normative support (i.e. funding that is not tied to the performance of a task). In Budapest, for instance, such funding amounted to more than HUF 5 billion in 2018. The amounts provided in the other major urban centres fell well short of this. At the same time, however, the amount of support provided by local governments per organization is higher in districts that include smaller settlements. The availability of local government funding depends on the income and demographic composition of the local population, the financial status of the local government, and the relative strength of local civil society. Where a municipality's revenues are higher in view of its tax revenue (e.g. the settlement is inhabited by people with higher incomes and/or many businesses are based there), it will have more opportunities to support civil society initiatives. An active local civil society is, however, a prerequisite for this. All of this reflects the strength of the relationship between local governments and civil society organizations in each region [X. 2. 16.](#)

Civil society organizations can also benefit from their own revenues, including income from core ac-

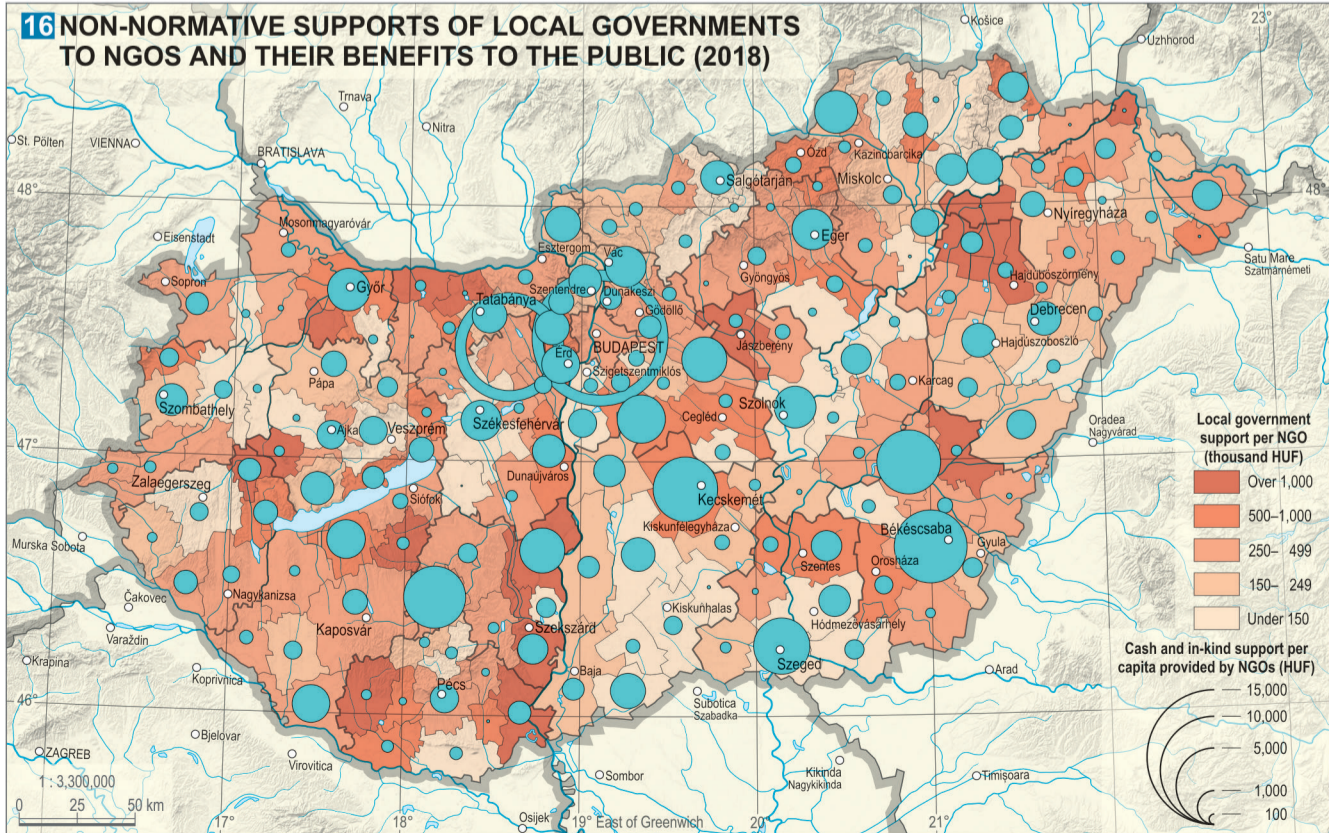
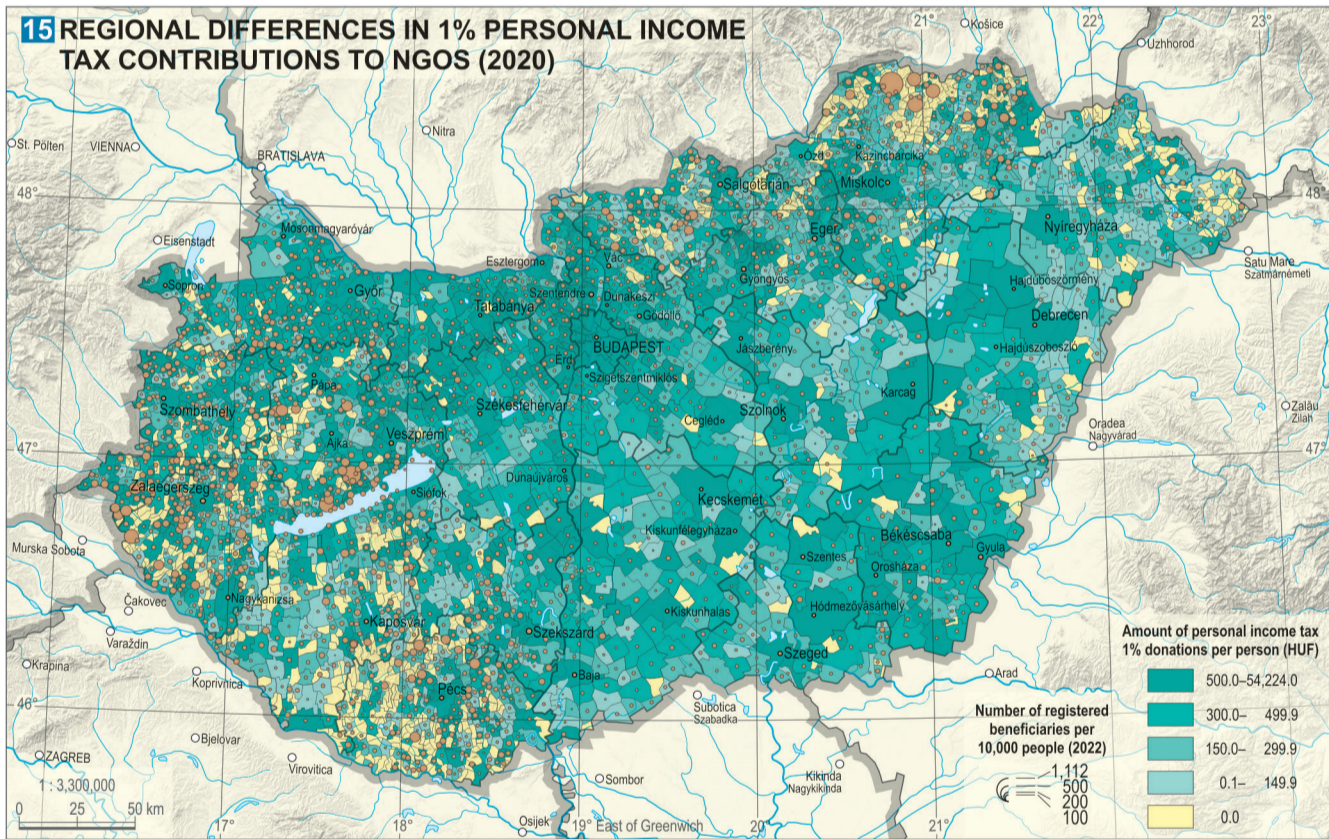


Type of settlement	Founda- tion		Associa- tion	
	(million HUF)	%	(million HUF)	%
Budapest	2,193.7	64.4	439.4	44.8
County seats	507.4	14.9	195.8	20.0
Other towns	469.3	13.8	251.6	25.7
Villages	234.6	6.9	93.1	9.5
Total	3,405.0	100.0	979.9	100.0

tivities (e.g. membership fees). In 2020, such revenue constituted 22% of their total income. In this regard, a marked difference can be observed between the western and eastern parts of the country [X. 2. 17.](#)

– and the difference is not solely related to the economic status of the given region. Income from membership fees reflects the relative activity rate of the local population, including membership of civil soci-

ety organizations, as well as the scope of their activities. The membership fees of associations operating in fields that are more expensive (such as hunting or yachting) are much higher than those active in less expensive fields. Income from membership fees exhibits significant differences at certain levels of the settlement hierarchy, with Budapest's decisive role being clearly discernible [X. 2. 18.](#) Income from economic activities is also a major source of funding, accounting for approximately 8–12% of total income. This includes income from commercial enterprises as well as from rent and the sale of tangible assets.

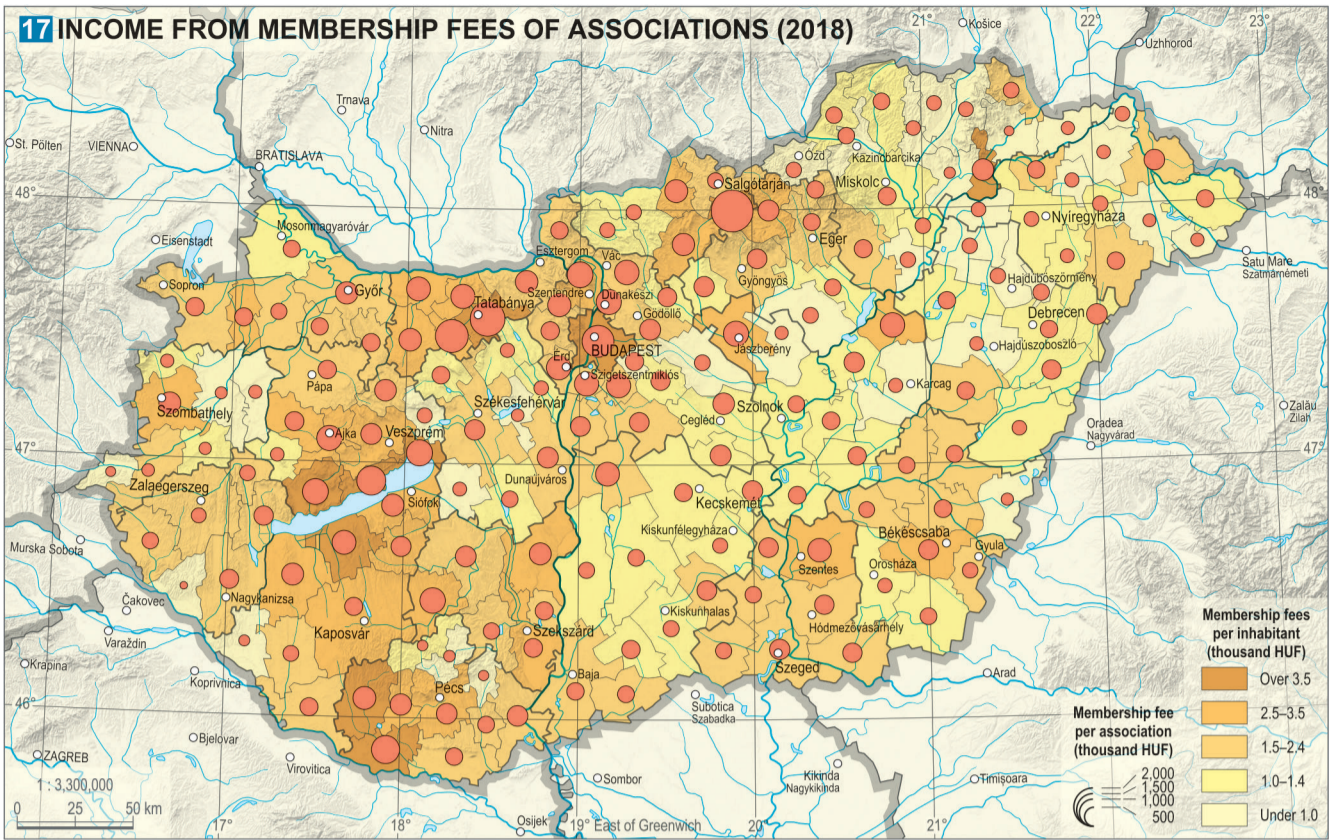


In 2020, donations accounted for 12% of the total income of civil society organizations. Donations were far more significant in the early 1990s. Reflecting the diminishing role of tax allowances, private giving as a percentage of the total income in the sector underwent a decline. Even so, in absolute terms, private donations have been increasing ever since the early 1990s (as the value of money has decreased due to inflation). The largest shares of income from donations stem from corporations, private individuals and foreign sources.

Civil society organizations are also involved in funding activities, providing financial and in-kind support to people or organizations in need. The amount of such support per inhabitant will depend on the position of the town/city in the settlement hierarchy, as the headquarters of organizations providing financial support to the population are mostly located in the major cities. Even so, such organizations may well undertake activities in the surrounding areas or even nationally. In the case of the less populous districts, funding can be more substantial in the underdeveloped areas, where direct support is given to local people and organizations.

Case studies: civil society organizations in Hungary

Two outstanding NGOs in Hungary are the Nationwide Civil Self-Defense Organizations and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, both of which have been in operation for decades. Many peo-



Type of settlement	Membership fees	
	amount (million HUF)	proportion (%)
Budapest	9,038	35.3
County seats	4,102	16.0
Other towns	7,005	27.3
Villages	5,476	21.4
Total	25,621	100.0

ple are engaged in their activities, with their presence and impact being considerable at the local level.

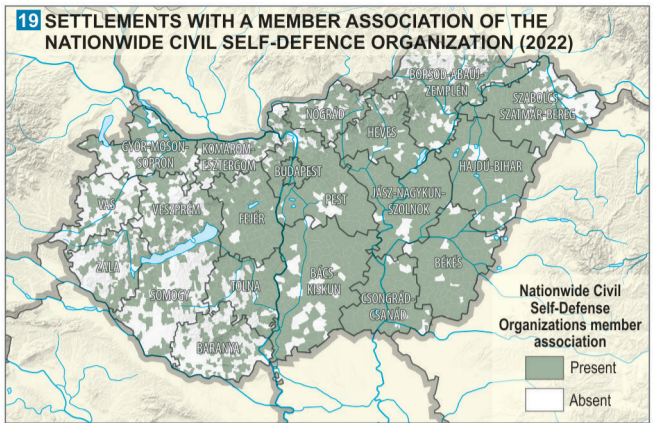
Nationwide Civil Self-Defense Organizations

The aftermath of the change of system saw the establishment of Hungary's largest civil society initiative, namely the Nationwide Civil Self-Defense Organizations (est. 1991). The NGO has at least one local branch in 54% of settlements. More than 90% of the country's population thus have access to this NGO, a force of nearly 65 thousand [X. 2. 19.](#)

The presence or absence of the branch in a given settlement depends mainly on the characteristics of the settlement network. There is often no local branch in settlements in areas with tiny villages. In the more urbanized areas [VI. 7. 18.](#), the NGO is present even in smaller settlements. This explains why the counties of Nógrád and Zala have the most intensive citizen guard networks at county level, both in terms of the number of associations and the number of citizen guards relative to the population. The tasks of the citizen guards include crime prevention, the provision of security at local events, policing the border, and general duties. The number of service hours per citizen guard is the highest in the counties of Békés and Hajdú-Bihar. In the eastern half of the country as a whole, this figure is typically higher than elsewhere in



[2](#) The headquarters of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta in Budapest



ations or foundations. A measure of the impact of such voluntary work at a civil society organization is the number of volunteers. This will reflect the location of the various foundations or associations. Sometimes the number of volunteers working in a district may be higher where there is a high ratio of foundations. Equally, the share of associations may be higher [X. 2. 22.](#)

People living in poorer areas are more active in terms of their voluntary work. The explanation for this is possibly that there are more tasks to be resolved here – which activates people. Thus, for instance, in Northern Hungary and the northern part of the Alföld, the proportion of people doing voluntary work is remarkably high. In contrast, the corresponding share is lower in North Transdanubia and in Csongrád-Csanád County [X. 2. 23.](#) In those areas, citizens typically refrain from undertaking voluntary work, having not been asked to perform it. As people are typically of the view that the tasks are the responsibility of the state, the spatial differences are considerable. [X. 2. 24.](#)

Although each taxpayer in Hungary can donate 1% of their personal income tax to an eligible civil society organization, no more than around 33% of taxpayers make use of this opportunity. The proclivity to do so varies greatly from region to region, with the highest rates being registered in Budapest and Pest County, where 40% of the total amount of income from this source arises [X. 2. 25.](#) Compared with the average, citizens tend to be more active in the capital city, where about 40% of taxpayers donate 1% of their personal income tax to civil society organizations. The corresponding figure in Northern and Northeastern Hungary is less than 30% [X. 2. 26.](#) Since such organizations are basically dependent upon the income from taxpayers, in spatial terms the amounts received correspond to the differences in economic development. The number, ratio and amounts are higher in those areas where the employment rate is also favourable [X. 2. 27.](#)

the country. The reason for this is the high number of border police tasks in the eastern counties, as they lie on the external border of the Schengen zone [X. 2. 20.](#)

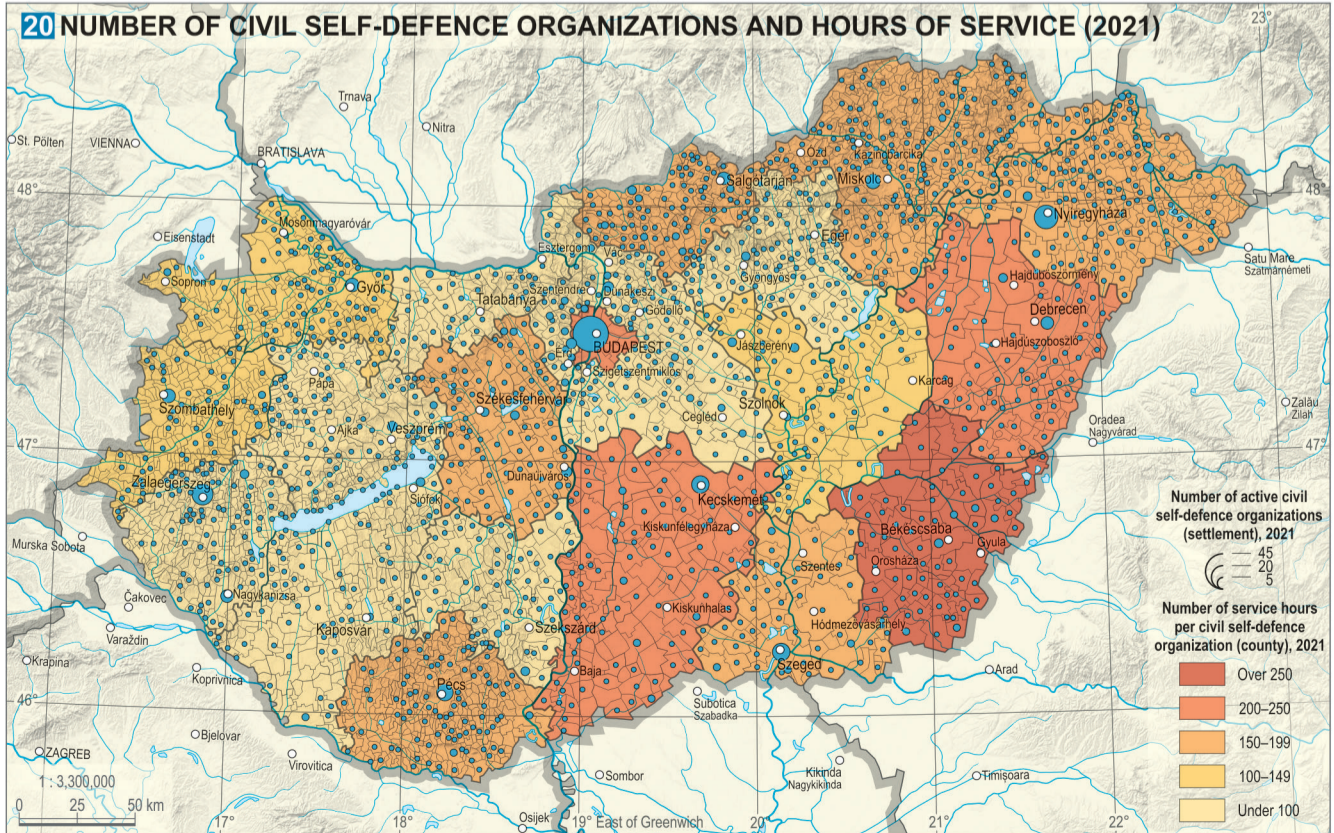
Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta

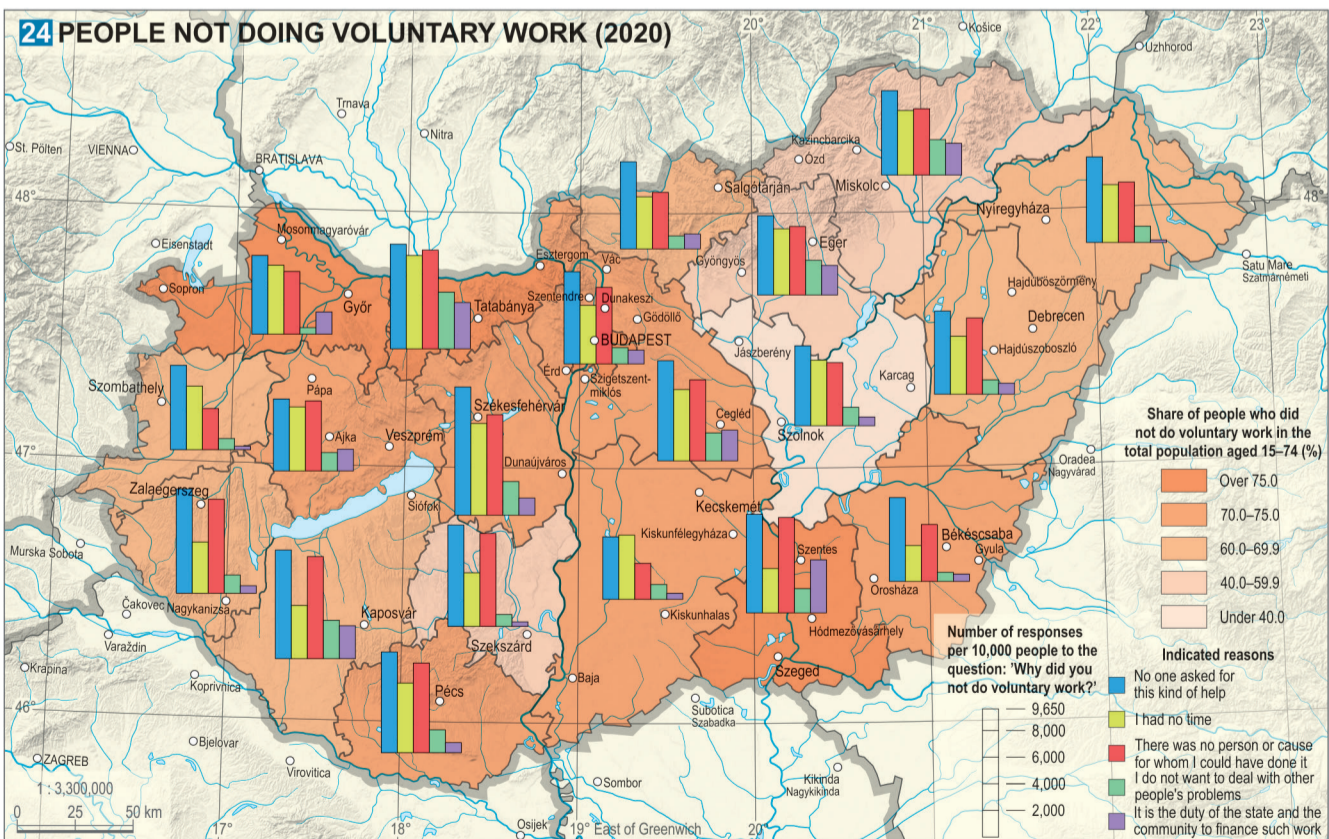
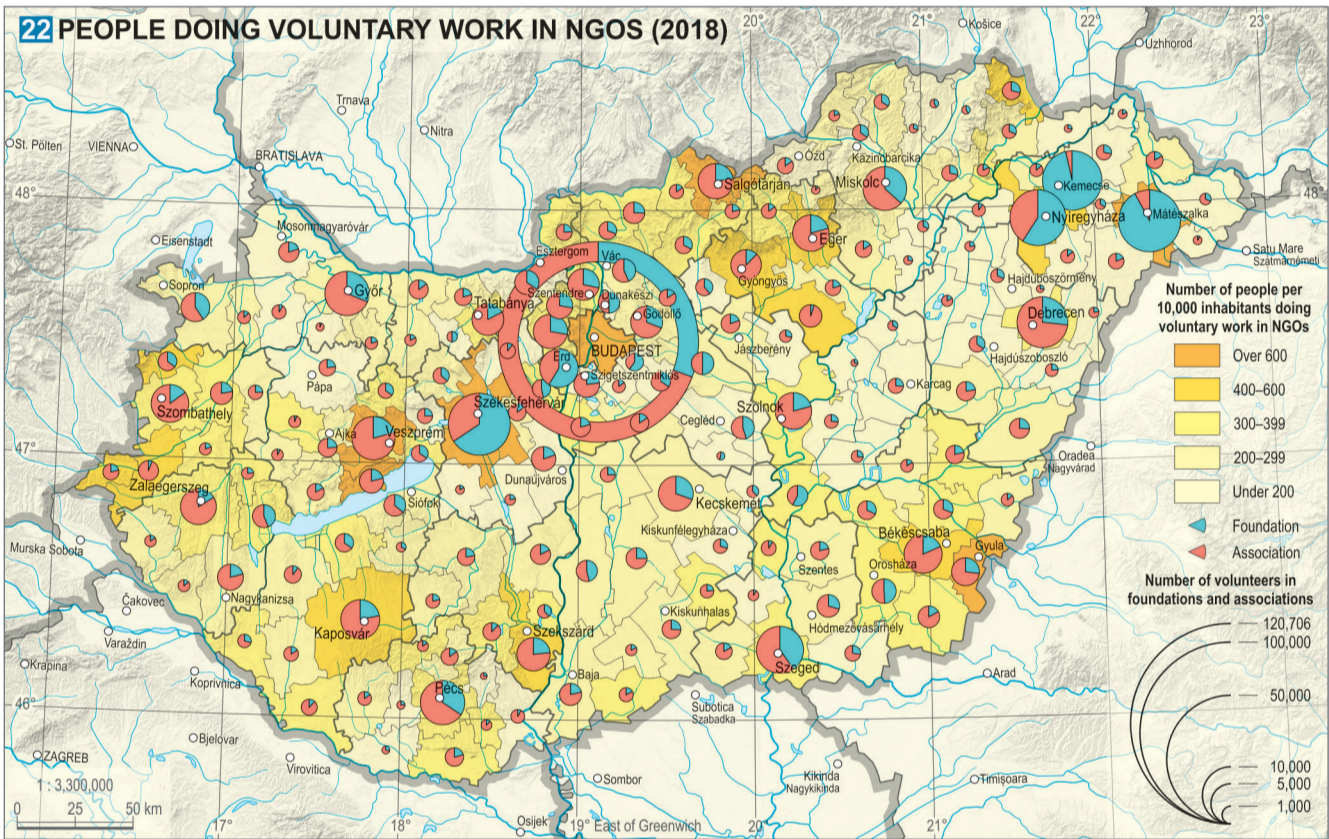
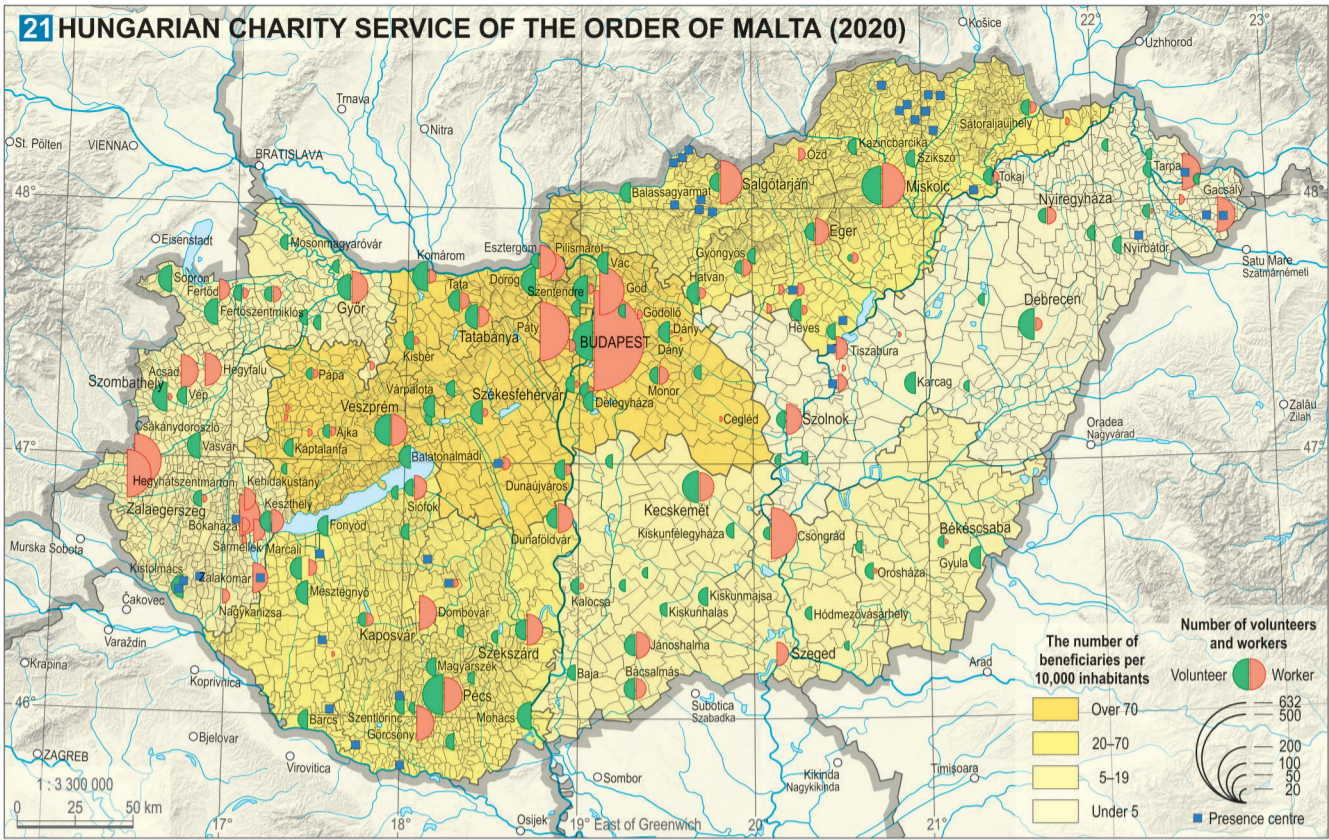
Founded on 4 February 1989, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta has become one of the largest NGOs in Hungary with more than 2,700 volunteers and almost 4,000 employees. Its volunteers and employees can be found throughout the country. All this indicates a willingness on the part of local people to help the organization [2](#). The number of volunteers per capita is higher in the western half of the country and in the major cities/towns. Even so, the organization's *Presence* programme has facilitated a presence even in small and disadvantaged towns, thereby enhancing community building and the provision of assistance in everyday life. People working at the *Presence* centres pay special attention to improving opportunities for local children, while ameliorating the effects of the inherent disadvantages [X. 2. 21.](#)

Direct action by citizens

As well as participating in various organizations, citizens can also become engaged in civil society as individuals. The most common ways of doing so are volunteering or donating.

Citizens may undertake voluntary work at associ-

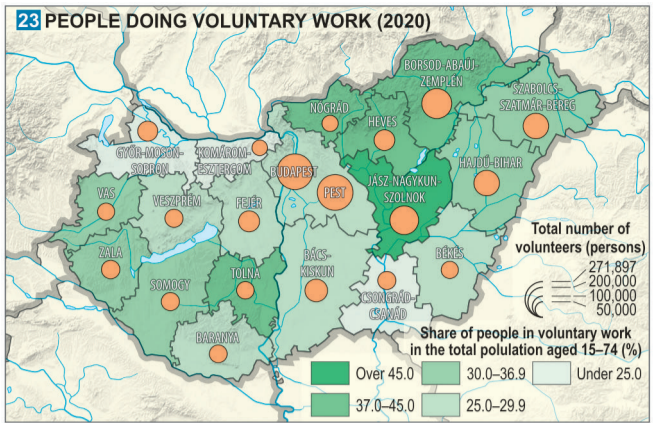




Hungarian civil society organizations abroad in the Carpathian Basin

Being an active member of a Hungarian civil society organization means something completely different in one of the adjacent states than it does in Hungary.

In the Hungarian ethnic minority communities, such engagement can be a way of expressing one's Hungarian identity. In the interwar period the neighbouring states sought to impose restrictions on the functioning of the civil society organizations of the minority ethnic Hungarian populations. Under communism, the near-

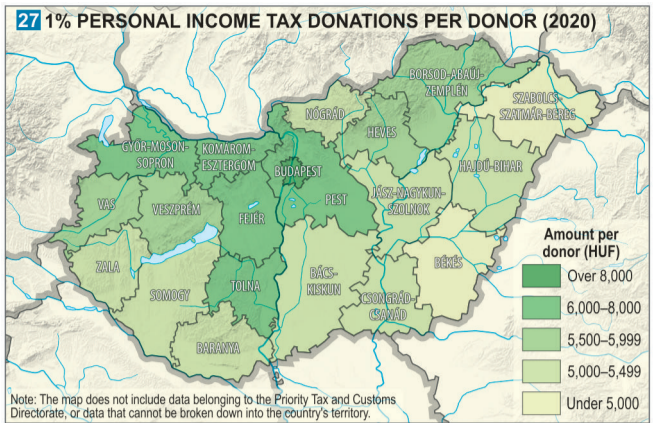
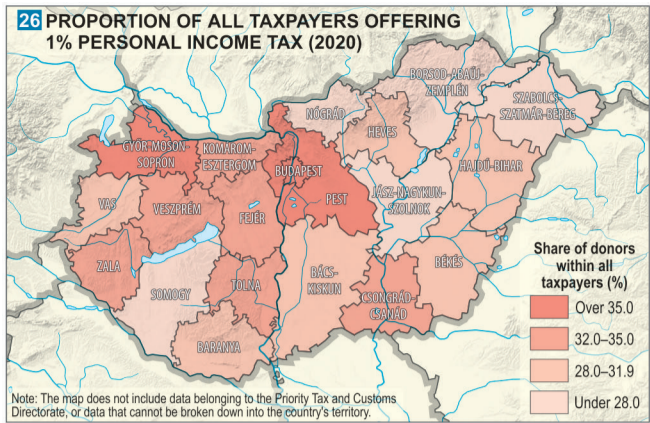
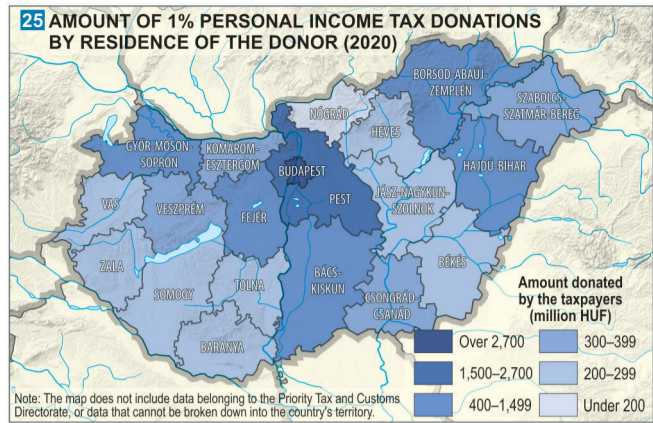


universal prohibition on civil society organizations greatly affected the Hungarian communities in the neighbouring countries. Yet, there were also occasions when the Communist Party created a Hungarian 'civilian' organization, which was then directed by the authorities (e.g. Csemadok in Czechoslovakia, est. 1949).

Since the change of system, many tasks have been performed by the Hungarian civil society organizations in the neighbouring countries. The main fields of activity are culture, education, language use and the protection of interests. All of these are fields that should be addressed by the given state, with a view to developing the individual and the community. In response to this situation and in order to strengthen ethnic culture, identity and a sense of belonging, the Hungarian state elaborated and implemented a national policy strategy from 2013 (*State Secretariat for National Policy, Prime Minister's Office*). When implementing this strategy, the government first created a central budgetary appropriation (*National Cooperation Fund*), which supports the work of civil society organizations. In early 2023, the Hungarian state supported 5,477 Hungarian civil society organizations in the Carpathian Basin beyond the country's borders, of which 52% were registered in Romania, 24% in Slovakia, 15% in Serbia, and 6% in Ukraine. Among these, 50% are cultural, 13% educational, and 10% youth organizations.

In *Transylvania*, there are 2,854 Hungarian civil society organizations, of which 62% are based in Székely Land, 18% in Partium, and 20% in other parts of Transylvania and the Banat. In terms of their activities, 44% are cultural organizations, 16% are educational organizations, and 11% are youth organizations. The Transylvanian Association of Hungarian Civil Organizations (est. 2004) seeks to coordinate the operation of nearly 14 thousand Hungarian NGOs in Transylvania. The umbrella youth organization is MIÉRT, the Hungarian Youth Conference (est. 2002), which has nearly 400 branch organizations in Transylvania. The Hungarian Teachers' Association of Romania (est. 1991) is an important body in the field of public education, while the Sapientia Foundation (est. 2000) promotes the work of the Hungarian private university network. The oldest Hungarian civil society organizations in Transylvania are the Transylvanian Museum Society (EME, 1859–1949, 1990–) and the Transylvanian Hungarian Educational Association (EMKE, 1885–1946, 1991–). A majority of the Hungarian civil society organizations operate in the 'cultural and economic capital' of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), and in the larger Székely towns (50–65 Hungarian NGOs per 10 thousand Hungarian inhabitants, compared to the Hungarian average of 29 in Transylvania) [X.2.30.](#) The lowest level of civil society engagement in the Transylvanian Hungarian community can be observed in the Banat region and Partium, which are near the major towns of eastern Hungary. The only exception in this regard is Oradea (Nagyvárad), with 9–16 Hungarian civil society organizations per 10 thousand Hungarians.

In the Hungarian ethnic areas of *Slovakia*, there are



1,326 Hungarian civil society organizations (63% of which are active in the cultural/educational field). The major organizations include Csemadok (est. 1949), a cultural society of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, the Forum Minority Research Institute (est. 1996), the Association of Hungarian Teachers of Slovakia (est. 1990), the Association of Hungarian Parents in Slovakia (est. 2004), the Hungarian Scout Association of Slovakia (est. 1990), the Via Nova Youth Group (est. 2007), and Pro Civis (est. 2003). As many as 70% of Hungarian civil society organizations in Slovakia are based in the western parts of the country, with the largest number being found in Komárno (Komárom), Dunajská Streda (Dunaszerdahely), and Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Other centres of civil society activity in Slovakia's Hungarian community are Kolárovo (Güta), Šahy (Ipolytság), Filakovo (Fülelek), Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat) and Veľké Kapušany (Nagykapos).

In the former Yugoslav territories, changes to the law enabled the creation of civil society organizations from 1982 onwards. The subsequent period saw the foundation of many Hungarian cultural and other organizations. In *Vojvodina*, 819 ethnic Hungarian civil society organizations currently receive funding from the Hungarian government. In comparison with elsewhere in the Carpathian Basin, the proportion of cul-

tural and educational organizations is low (35% and 10%, respectively). This reflects the fact that the Serbian state and the Vojvodina provincial government provide funding for educational and cultural tasks, with the level of funding being more substantial than the amounts received by the Hungarian minorities elsewhere in the Carpathian Basin. Umbrella organizations (e.g. the Association of Hungarian Civil Associations of Vojvodina, est. 2008; the Vojvodina Hungarian Cultural Association, est. 1992; and the Association of Professional Associations and Societies, est. 1965) play a vital role in coordinating the work of multiple organizations. Most Hungarian civil society organizations operate in the northern part of the Bačka region and in the provincial seat, Novi Sad. The highest rate of civil society activity (50–90 civil organizations/10 thousand Hungarians) can be observed in this area.

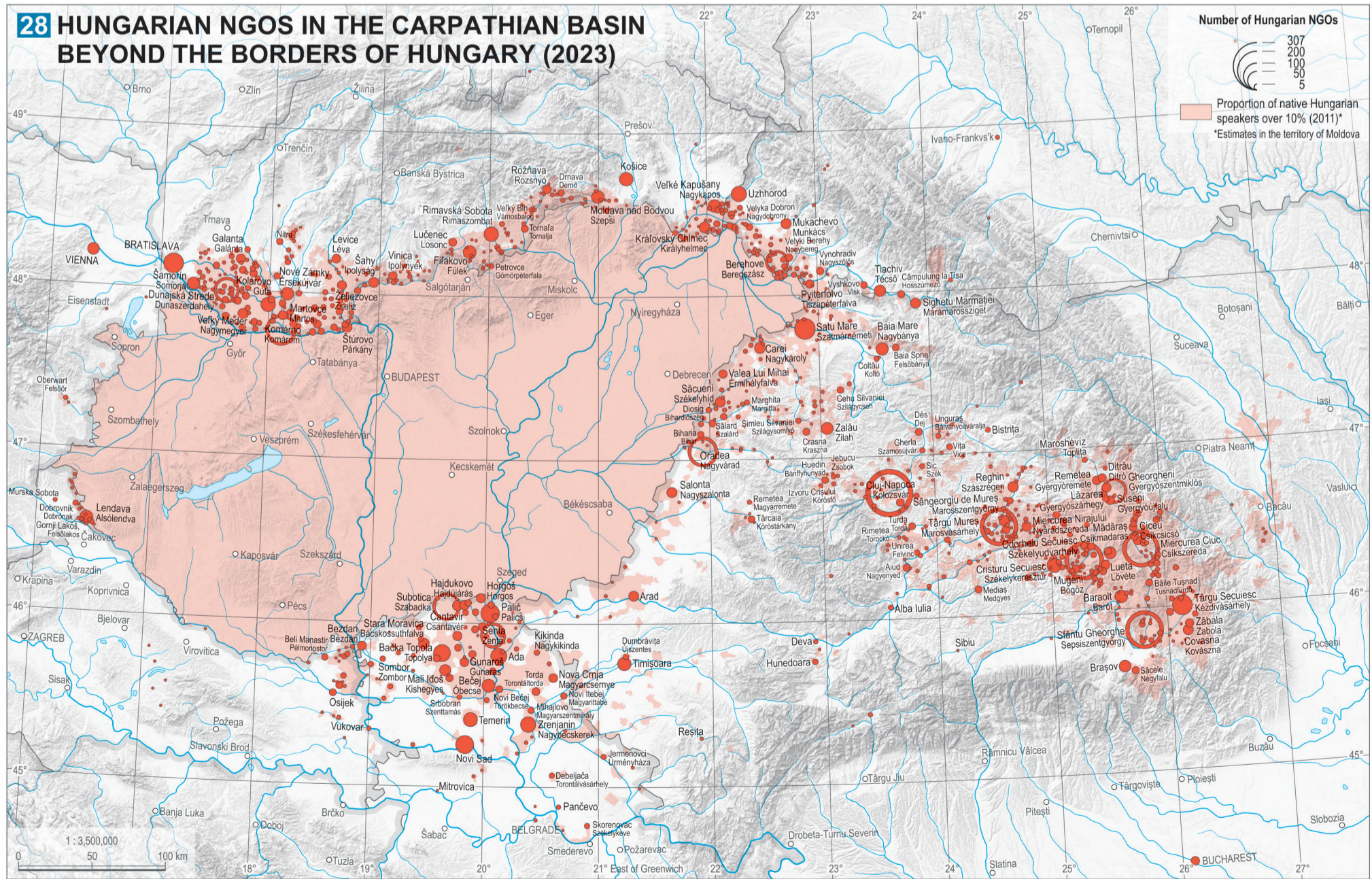
Many civil society organizations are active in the Hungarian community in *Zakarpattia*, Ukraine. The oldest and largest organization is the Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Zakarpattia, which was established in 1989 and promotes the interests of ethnic Hungarians in the region. Sixty-four of the 342 supported organizations are affiliated with the Cultural Alliance. Almost half of the civil society organizations serve cultural purposes. In view of the grave economic situation, how-

ever, a relatively large proportion are devoted to social topics. Most of the organizations operate in the largest Hungarian communities (Berehovo/Beregszász, Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Tiachiv).

In the Pannonian areas of *Croatia*, 70 civil society organizations of the local ethnic Hungarians (9,217 in 2021) receive funding from Hungary. Three-quarters of them are active in the cultural field, with two-thirds operating in South Baranja. The largest umbrella organizations – the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Croatia (est. 1993) and the Central Association of Hungarian Associations (est. 1998) – are based in the same region. The main centre for journalists, teachers, and linguists from the Hungarian community is Osijek, while the main academic centre is the capital, Zagreb.

The estimated 5,000 Hungarians living in *Slovenia's Prekmurje* region operate 59 civil society organizations, half of which are active in the cultural sphere. As many as 40% are based in Lendava (Alsólendva), at the heart of the mixed-language border region.

The Hungarian community in *Austria's Burgenland* has grown in recent times, with new arrivals from Hungary and Romania. The community currently comprises around 12,000 people. Yet, there are just five civil society organizations, two of which are based in Oberwart (Felsőőr) and one in Unterwart (Alsóőr).



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