Voters and Suffrage in Hungary
(1920–1947)

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The principles and practice of regulating suffrage are important elements that define a political system. It is through this that the citizens of a country practise one of the most important of political rights by participating in the creation of legislation, which passes the laws that regulate their lives. In the twentieth century, there were eight multi-party parliamentary elections within the borders of post-Trianon Hungary.

There are two important prerequisites for an election. Firstly, it must meet the criterion of proportionality, that is, the composition of the parliament created by the election should reflect the political tendencies of the voters as much as possible. This might partially come into conflict with the principle of governability, which requires the establishment of a working governing majority within the given composition of the parliament. Legislation on voting in Hungary usually overemphasised this second factor, occasionally gravely limiting even the principle of the universality and equality of suffrage. All this meant that those in power considerably hindered the free expression of the political will of citizens, mostly by laws passed tendentiously in parliament, and, sometimes, by dodging these very same laws. The above phenomenon is reflected also in the somewhat exaggerated but certainly not unfounded popular opinion that laws are the very sources of the greatest "swindles". The present essay attempts to show what legal means were used

during the indicated period to hinder the free expression of political will.

The presence of political tendencies in elections have always had limits, and it was especially so in the period in question. Some of these limits can be regarded as historically justified and justifiable, as for example the exclusion of the Arrow Cross and national socialist parties from the elections after World War II. The other group of limits were defined by the legally formulated framework of the political intentions of those in power. These limits include the preconditions of elective franchise, regulating nomination by prescribing the number of supporting signatures, the rules of distributing party-list seats, the drawing of constituencies, and so on.

Comparing the elections in Hungary to the practices of other countries where multiparty elections have a century-old tradition has, of course, a restricted validity. The most important difference above all is that in the period under discussion acquiring power was not at stake in the elections. That was precisely what the governing political elite wanted to avoid. Series of constitutional and political means were deployed *to avoid parliamentary rotation precisely by having elections*. The elections were used to legitimise the political *status quo* rather than to independently create political conditions.

Within the given period, two different historical eras and corresponding political systems provided the "environment of the elections". The Horthy era between the two world wars was a mixture of authoritarian and democratic principles and institutions, with increasingly narrowing democratism, and with political conditions dominated by a conservative nationalistic "union party" under various names. After World War II, between 1945 and 1947, the system was a limited multiparty democracy with a broad party coalition in power; among the parties the political extreme right was completely absent, and there was no conservative nationalist party either in the traditional sense of

the word. The common features in both periods include limited parliamentarism and the predomination of the executive branch, although the government after World War II had significantly wider social support.

Most of the factors to be taken into consideration apply to the interwar period only because the regulations of the elections both in 1945 and in 1947 were basically adequate in terms of the most important democratic requirements. These elections were carried out on the basis of *universal and equal suffrage*, by *direct and secret ballot*. These basic democratic criteria were met, besides these two elections, by the electoral regulations applied in 1920 only.[1] One can safely say even without a precise assessment of the era that the system was "wanting democracy" with regard to parliamentary elections as well. For a substantiated critique of the elections of the period, neither a timeless and abstract model of democracy, nor an approach reflecting today's conditions and requirements will do. Instead, one should use as a norm the criticism of contemporary European practice, and of the political forces interested in democratising the Hungarian system.

The following brief survey will not only describe the legal means that assisted the political forces in power to keep their positions, but will allow a glimpse at the practice of contemporary political planning as well. For when legal regulation was formulated, calculations and estimates were also circumspectly made as to who would be deprived of the exercise of political rights by the planned restrictions and what social groups would be admitted within the walls of suffrage by the planned extensions.[2]

Regulating voting rights: by act or by decree

The basic principles and guarantees of electoral regulation are defined by laws, while the methods of execution are prescribed by lower level (prime ministerial or ministerial)

decrees. Parliamentary decisions also determine what laws will contain and what will be regulated by decrees.

In the autumn of 1919, Hungary had no legitimate legislation concerning voting rights in the form of laws, thus regulation was carried out in the form of prime ministerial and ministerial decrees. This, however, was not a serious problem because in its most important aspects it met the earlier intentions of the definitive parties (Smallholders, Christians, Liberals and Social Democrats). The scope of the people eligible to vote was wide (it had increased from 7 to 40 percent of the overall population), it included women, and ballot was secret. The victorious powers of the Triple Entente had also formulated a similar prerequisite aiming at democratisation. This had been influenced at least as much by the belief in the superiority of a democratic arrangement as by the desire to have the harsh peace conditions accepted by a Hungarian parliament with the widest possible social support.

By 1922, the situation had changed radically. A group of the political elite led by Count István Bethlen thought that the political consolidation they envisioned was impossible to carry out within the framework of the earlier electoral legislation. Having the example of dualistic Hungary in mind, Bethlen and his group intended to create a strong governing party that would be able to secure political stability despite all possible parliamentary storms. For that, however, it was necessary not only to significantly narrow the circle of those eligible to vote, but to reintroduce open ballot as well. Since, however, the parliament with a Smallholder majority could not accept this restriction, the prime minister proposed the bill in parliament for the sake of form only because he was perfectly aware that it would be impossible to pass and not only on account of the short time the legislation had left. (The decree regulating elections issued in 1919 had determined the term of the National Assembly in two years, and Regent Horthy dissolved the parliament when its term was up precisely to the day.) Thus, with the

mandate of the legislation expired, it was the duty of the prime minister to issue a decree regulating voting rights.

The Parliament that returned as the result of the elections based on the suffrage regulations of Bethlen was now ready to pass the legislation necessary for the political intentions of the prime minister and his group. After 1925, despite innumerable criticism from the opposition and several political manoeuvres, new legislative regulation was passed in 1938 only. The law prescribed secret ballot everywhere, but in order to counterbalance the very probably unfavourable effects, the suffrage was further restricted as a "corrective".

Hungary took part in World War II again on the side of the losers, and the Provisional National Assembly was established after the war, as the minimum of national sovereignty. During the first episode of its functioning, in December 1944, it made a promise to extend civil rights, including suffrage. In its second session, it passed the new law on voting rights: all earlier restrictions concerning suffrage were repealed. Among the restrictions that were sustained, the leaders of extreme right-wing organisations, and those who had earlier admitted to being ethnic Germans, were excluded form the elections. This again embodied both the will of the victorious Allied powers and the political efforts of the parties in the governing coalition. The 1947 amendment of the 1945 act on elections again overemphasised the importance of governmental stability, and, therefore, the supplementary part of the act contained a number of elements that made it difficult for a possible opposition coalition to come to power.

Defining those eligible to vote

Eligibility to vote is a basic form of political rights. The extension of that right depends on the result of the struggle among political forces. The proportion of voters to the total

(adult) population is an important qualifier of the political system because it indicates in what proportion the population is able to participate in the most important of public affairs, the creation of a legislative body.

Prior to World War I, the proportion of those eligible to vote was extremely low, under 8 percent of the population. Already at the beginning of the century, new political movements came into being that drew attention to the solution of new social problems on the fault line between the two earlier large parties, beyond issues of constitutionality. The Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Christians, and the Smallholders all regarded the extension of suffrage as a guarantee for the social groups they represented to become makers of policy through parliamentary representation. Long before the war, election reform plans and decrees were being made with the extension of suffrage in view.

The so-called Friedrich election decrees, created in the autumn of 1919, were the result of two factors. The victorious Triple Entente expected a parliament to be elected through as wide suffrage as possible to accept the hard peace conditions. (This factor may explain the fact that the proportion of those eligible to vote was usually higher in the vanquished countries than in the victorious.) At the same time, every political party with any significant popular support had been struggling for the extension of suffrage both in their earlier programmes and in their practical political activities.

Political consolidation was to be carried out by the group led by István Bethlen, but they regarded such an extension of political rights dangerous with regard to creating stability. Without a majority in parliament, suffrage was again to be regulated by decree in 1922.

The Friedrich decrees were not accepted as a base of comparison either then or in 1925, and decrees prior to the revolution were referred to only. This disenfranchisement, affecting at least 800 thousand citizens, was a huge step back, but even so, Hungary was still in the middle of the

European field.[3] With respect to the average European level, the decrees of 1919 were rather prematurely born, historically speaking. (The open ballot, already mentioned several times, was a different case.) At last, from 1925, elections were regulated by law, which, however, displayed essentially no difference from the decrees of 1922. The bottom with regard to the number of those eligible to vote, however, was hit by the figures of the elections in 1926. For in 1922, the lack of time did not allow the precise establishment of various qualifications, so in dubious cases the right to vote was usually granted. During the following two years, however, the shortcomings were made up, and the number of voters was further reduced.

The number and proportion of those qualified to vote increased naturally with the rise of the education level. Making the ballot completely secret was the most important demand of every opposition party, indeed, it was also urged by the inner opposition of the governing parties. This was introduced in the law of 1938 only. The solution was still ambiguous as in order to reduce the political risk posed by the abolition of open ballot, qualifications were made stricter. The restriction of suffrage and the impossibility of practising the right to vote affected nearly one million citizens. This was manifested in three areas:

- qualifications made stricter than under the previous law — at least 650 thousand
- tightening of qualifications for voting for single candidates — 180 thousand
- restriction of the suffrage of Jews — approx. 100 thousand

After World War II the parties that had the possibility to function were interested in making qualifications as narrow as possible, and that was in keeping with general tendencies of democratisation. The decree on suffrage issued in preparation for the elections in 1947 reflected the altered political

conditions: at the proposal of the MKP (Magyar Kom-
munista Párt, Hungarian Communist Party) further cate-
gories were excluded as a result of political motivations,
which curtailed eligibility figures 300-400 thousand.[4]

In the diagram below the columns indicate the propor-
tion of the eligible to vote within the total population, and
the continuous line marks how the proportion of the eli-
gible in each election related to the nadir of 1926. (This
index was determined by regarding the proportion of the
eligible at the 1926 elections as 100 percent, and comparing
the earlier and later figures to that.) The diagram con-
vincingly illustrated the way the stability of the system was
related to the definition of voting qualifications.

Changes in the proportion of those elegible to vote 1920–1947

Proportion of voters   Index 1926 = 100%
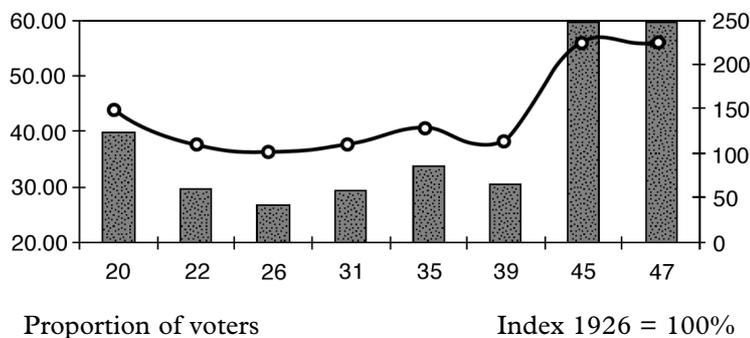
The state of the political system can be properly
described with the relevant sections of the index line. After
the consolidation by Bethlen, the number of voters signifi-
cantly decreased, indicative of the increase of the exclusion
from political participation. After 1926, their proportion
grew as a result of the rise in the level of the education of
the population. The number of voters again went down to
counterbalance the introduction of the secret ballot. After
World War II, growth took place simultaneously with the
solution of the various steps of democratisation.

Open ballot

In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy elections were always by open ballot. The political forces agreeing on the extension of suffrage were also fighting for the introduction of secret ballot. They achieved this objective, and in 1920 the ballot became secret everywhere. This, however, did not square with the ideas of Bethlen, and in 1922, open ballot was again introduced for 80 percent of the seats. All the provincial electoral districts voted in this way. In other parts of Europe this was no longer an existing practice. Secret ballot was possible in the capital and its neighbourhood, and in the municipal boroughs (Debrecen, Győr, Hódmezővásárhely, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged) only. The 1925 act on suffrage introduced additional restrictions, and from then on the three municipal boroughs with one seat each (Baja, Sopron, and Székesfehérvár) had to vote by open ballot. This state of affairs existed until the elections in 1939.

How was voting by open ballot done? The person entering the polling station was first identified, but then s/he *was given no ballot paper* and *did not retire into the polling booth* to express his/her sympathy undisturbed by anyone. Instead, she *publicly declared* before the election committee (at the time called the election delegation) for which candidate s/he wished to cast his/her vote. After that, the name of the voter and his/her identification number on the electoral register were entered on the *election document* under the name of the appropriate candidate.

This procedure blatantly violated the free exercise of political rights. For the elections were organised by the organs of the local administration, and they, in this way, acquired information on the political inclination of each and every voting citizen. The apparatus of public administration was strongly pro-government and government dependent (indeed, its leaders in most places made up the backbone of the election staff of the governing Union Party

Egységes Párt), so voters for the opposition could get into disadvantageous positions by openly confessing to their political sympathies. Naturally, there were always undauntable and impressionable voters, but what everybody was clearly aware of was that *they knew who s/he voted for.* So actual threats were not absolutely necessary for the voting citizen to consider the consequences of the political position s/he took. Open ballot in itself, through its socio-psychological effect, was enough to significantly alter the free expression of the voting citizen's will. The legality of the elections were, however, repeatedly and blatantly violated only in the electoral districts where the candidate of the opposition had a(n undesirable) chance to win the seat.

The regulation of election laws deliberately counted with the effects of open ballot. The reintroduction of open ballot was justified by saying that "secrecy is alien from the character of the Hungarian people", and save in large cities, one's political opinions would not remain secret before the community anyway. All this was based on the assumption that provincial Hungarian citizens were unable to feel the responsibility of their political decisions for the fate of the whole country. The 1945 elections would prove this claim false. Participation was very high (92.56 percent of those eligible to vote), but the proportion of annulled ballots was under 1 percent. This shows that the eligible population was not immature for voting and also that the election committees helped with citizen-friendly information those who were uninstructed in the election procedure. The distorting effect of open ballot was clearly demonstrated in 1926, when the citizens of the municipal boroughs of Sopron and Székesfehérvár were not allowed to vote by secret ballot. In both towns one needed thousand valid endorsements to run as candidate, but the number of votes the Social Democratic candidates got was lower even than that on account of the open ballot.[5]

Unanimous vote

Unanimous vote, an election without a challenger, was a peculiar characteristic of the period between the two world wars. "Unanimity", a direct continuation of the elections in the dualistic era, was widely applied between the two world wars. The term "applied" indicates the manifestation of a deliberate governmental intention even if there were constituencies that, on account of their backwardness, were not, or could not be the targets of any opposition parties out for seats.[6]

Unanimous constituencies, 1920–1939

Year of election	Number of single-member constituencies	Unanimous constituencies	
		Number	proportion
1920, winter	164	39	23.78
1922	215	25	11.63
1926	199	88	44.22
1931	199	67	33.67
1935	199	53	26.63
1939	135	14	10.37

The number and proportion of unanimously acquired seats indicates how intensive the struggle was during the various elections: the more intensive the political movements, the less the "unanimity", and *vice versa*. In that respect, the elections in 1926 were the peak, while the number of seats acquired in this way was strikingly low in 1922 and 1939.

Determining the seats distributed by unanimous voting was the exclusive privilege of the government party. The election of 1920 was, of course, an exception since in that year the agreement of the two large parties decided which electoral districts would not see competition. Most of the seats distributed in this way belonged to the Union Party,

and a smaller portion went to the Christian party (as long as it was a coalition partner) and to non-party allies. There were, naturally, rare exceptions, too. Albert Apponyi, the grand old man of Hungarian politics was allowed to get the seat of Jászberény several times in a row as a politician with legitimist inclinations.[7] The extremity of unanimity is represented by the electoral district with Abádszalók as its centre: election was always unanimous there at general elections: the district was represented by Gyula Gömbös until his death in 1936.[8]

Diósgyőr, Ózd, and Salgótarján were the three centres of heavy industry in the region. The good results in 1922,[9] and the high proportion of industrial population urged the governing Union Party to minimise the risk. It was especially important that "the misguided workers find their way back to the national side". Thus, the following two elections saw unanimous elections, without opponents, in all the three constituencies. The persons winning the seats were local notabilities, influential in national politics as well.[10] Not employing this solution in other districts, Bethlen had the Social Democrats defeated in Komárom-Esztergom county by weightless Christian Democratic candidates.

The number of competitors was minimised at the acceptance of nominations. The system of county multi-member and single-member districts makes it possible to show again that unanimous elections were manipulated. The list of Fejér county had only the governing Party of Hungarian Life (Magyar Élet Pártja) running, the nominations of the Arrow Cross were not accepted. In four out of six election districts, the single-member candidates of the Arrow Cross Party got more than twenty thousand votes, and they lost the seat of Mór by 82 votes only.

Extreme right-wing votes of Fejér county unanimous list,
single-member election districts – 1939

Single-member constituencies	Extreme right-wing votes	
	Number	proportion
Adony	5037	41.00
Mór	6836	49.70
Sárbogárd	5582	41.52
Székesfehérvár subordinate district	4269	35.60
Total	*21 724*	

It is absolutely improbable that there were no 1500 valid nominating signatories out of over 21 thousand extreme right-wing voters. Thus, if the right-wing had not been prevented from running, one of the list seats would certainly have gone to them. The Arrow-Cross did actually lodge an appeal, the result of the election was invalidated on account of the obvious violations of law, and by-elections were held.[11] The situation was very similar in Somogy county, where the extreme right had 4183 votes (33.61 percent) at Marcali, and 3391 votes (25.22 percent) at Tab, and these altogether 7574 votes should theoretically have been sufficient for the right to run. The refusal was in all probability legitimate because the county results were not petitioned. In 1939 opposition candidates were turned away in nine single-member election districts on account of insufficient nominating signatures. If we consider the number of votes cast on the list in these same districts at the same time, we shall see that the candidates had serious, at least 25 percent voters' support in most cases.[12]

The uneven distribution of election districts/constituencies

It is usually impossible to have all constituencies of the same size, or, in other words, to have to pay for every seat with an equal number of votes. In 1920, the earlier distribution of election districts based on simple majority was retained, and even in 1922 a few districts with great number of voters only were cut into half. Thus the inequality that had been created in the era of dualism was mostly retained. The rump districts mutilated by the borders of Trianon had especially few voters, but these were not changed in order to maintain revisionist claims. In these districts the parties of the opposition usually did not even attempt to set up candidates since it was virtually hopeless to run there without emphasising the demand for revision. Although the act of 1938 eliminated the most conspicuous differences, the disparities among the various districts were still rather great.

Extreme values of the number of voters per seat

Year of election	Size of election district		Their quotient
	largest	smallest	
1922	18,743	911	20.57
1926	17,851	676	26.41
1931	19,678	901	21.84
1935	24,431	1067	22.90
1939	22,810	4752	4.80

The tendentious distribution of districts is clearly visible around the capital, where support for the Social Democratic Party was very strong. Since the number of people moving into towns and villages in the vicinity of Budapest was very high, this disproportion continued growing, indeed, the new regulation in 1938 made it even more striking.

Extreme values of the number of voters per seat

Year of election	Voter per seat		Ratio
	Average in Budapest	Vicinity of Budapest	(per cent)
1922	14,099	18,446	130.83
1926	12,565	17,340	138.00
1931	13,125	19,780	150.70
1935	12,929	28,379	219.49
1939	13,298	29,835	224.35

According to the regulation of 1938, party-list con-stituencies were also distributed in a way favourable for the governing party. Naturally, every county list had to have two seats at least. However, in the districts with more than two seats it could be expected that seats would be dis-tributed among an equal number of voters, on an average. The requirement of proportionality, however, was seriously violated according to the figures of 1937 since strongly pro-government counties were given additional seats. Szabolcs-Ung and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties previously had often produced unanimous pro-government votes, so they were given two seats each as a reward. The method was applied in the opposite direction as well: Békés county was punished with "seat-withdrawal" (always too many opposi-tion candidates there), Southern Transdanubia (Tolna and Somogy counties) fell out of favour because of the strong influence of the Smallholders, while the seats of Fejér and Veszprém counties were diverted from being proportionate on account of the sudden advance of the extreme right.[13]

Changing the system of allocating seats

In 1920, single-member candidates competed in all con-stituencies, and one could get into parliament by getting at least half of the valid votes. In 1922, three multi-member

constituences were made in Budapest, and one was made of 22 towns and villages around the capital. This, on the one hand, resulted in that in the strongly opposition capital one seat had to be paid for by significantly more votes, on the other hand, it ensured that the governing party also got seats proportionately. With single-member constituences only, nearly all the seats could have been acquired by the opposition if the opposition had joined forces. It was for similar reasons that the act of 1925 made all the other municipal boroughs multi-member constituencies, too. Debrecen, for example, was represented from 1922 by three politicians of the opposition as a result of the collaboration of the opposition, while the governing party got no seats although it was supported by nearly one third of the voters.[14] The interests of the Union Party, which at that time had little influence in large cities, were best served if the fraction (or surplus) seats were to be distributed on the basis of the largest remainder.[15]

Act of 1938 introduced multi-member/party-list ballot in the case of counties as well. There the governing party was the strongest political force, and in the thirties it grew stronger in the cities, too. The distribution of seats with the method of the largest remainder, however, was advantageous for the relatively small parties. Therefore, the act on suffrage distributed the parliamentary seats on the basis of the method of largest average, which was much more favourable for the governing party.[16] For the sake of comparison, we have distributed the parliamentary seats with the method of the largest remnants as well. In order to prove this, we distributed the seats with both methods on the basis of the results of the 1939 party-list vote. The changes affected twelve seats, which was 9.6 percent of the multi-member seats. In the old system, the Party of Hungarian Life would have got nine seats less, while the Independent Smallholder Party would have got five more, the Social Democratic Party four more. The National Reform Party would have got a seat, the extreme right in

total would have had one seat less, and the distribution of seats among the extreme right-wing parties would also have altered somewhat.

The innovation in single-member constituencies introduced in 1938 was also advantageous for the governing party. According to the new rule, a relative majority of 40 percent was enough to get the seat. This was the case in 27 cases (20 percent of all the single-member constituencies!). Of these, 17 seats went to the Party of Hungarian Life, six to extreme right-wing parties, and one each to the Smallholder Party, the Unified Christian Party, and a non-party candidate. A 40 percent majority was usually sufficient at by-elections to get the seat, but there might be collaboration among the parties of the opposition that could keep the favourite candidate from getting the majority.

Act of 1945 was an effort to accomplish complete proportionality. The country was divided into 16 large multi-member constituencies, and in each 12 000 voters had one seat. The votes not conducive to seats were lost in that system, and/or were used in the case of the fifty-member national party list.[17] On the national list, the seats were distributed according to the method of largest remainder.[18]

The piecemeal amendment of election law in 1947, its alteration at the expense of proportionality was again an expression of the requirement of governmental stability. The election alliance of the government coalition enjoyed considerable advantage with the distribution of the national multi-member list, now grown to 60. Since they won 60 percent of the valid votes, the government parties had 80 percent of the national list, and all they distributed proportionately among all the running parties was 40 percent. By this method, the opposition parties, which had nearly 40 percent of the votes, won only 4 (6.67 percent) of the 60 seats on the national list.[19]

Differences in the seat-value of votes

The uneven distribution of constituences also caused sig-
nificant differences in the numbers of votes necessary for a
seat, and the regulation in 1938 added a new element to the
disproportion. The system of voting was similar to that
today, ballots were cast for individual candidates and coun-
ty party-lists. This, however, was the case in the country
only; in the multi-member election districts (in the capital
and its vicinity, and in the seven municipal boroughs),
where ballot had been secret earlier, too, it was possible to
vote for party-lists only. The table below contains the aver-
age number of voters for a member, and compares the data
to those in multi-member districts in the cities.

The number of votes necessary for one seat – 1939

Method and place of ballot	Number of those eligible to vote	Number of seats	Number of voters per seat	Rate (per-cent)
City party-list	709,915	49	14,488	100.00
Province party-list	2,051,703	76	26,996	53.57
Province single-member	1,867,875	135	13,836	104.71

On account of the "double" ballot, the votes of provin-
cial electors was worth 58 percent more (53.57+104.71)
than those of the voters in the cities in electing the legislation.
Such a negative discrimination against city voters was a
serious violation of the requirement of electoral pro-
portionality. Certainly, education was higher, material
conditions were better in the cities than in the country. This
social inequality, however, was not to be counterbalanced
by political (electoral) injustice!

Election deposit, "rolling marks"

Election deposit was also introduced by act of 1938 on elections. According to the law, every candidate wishing to run in an election had to pay a concrete deposit (2000 pengős at least) to indicate the serious social support behind his move. If the candidate failed to get one quarter of the valid votes (in a multi-member district, half of the votes necessary for a seat), the deposit passed into the state budget. All this was a serious problem for the left-wing parties. The Arrow Cross were receiving support from Nazi Germany, that is when the term "rolling marks" was born in the press. The Social Democratic Party set up party lists in three counties in addition to the ten secret-ballot city lists the party already had, but it had candidates in eight of the 135 single-member constituencies only. This cost the party a total sum of 300 thousand pengős. The introduction of the election deposit had a significant pre-filtering role, and all the governing party had to run against was no more than one or two rivals, typically. In the case of three rivals, one was usually from the extreme right, the other from the left (Smallholder or Social Democrat), thus the governing party certainly had a favourable central position to win the seat(s).

Nomination thresholds

Candidates wishing to run were required to collect supporting signatures of voting citizens in those days as well. This was also an important pre-filter. In 1920 the threshold was low, all a candidate needed was the support of five hundred persons. In 1922 it was raised to 10 percent of the citizens eligible to vote in a district, in more populous constituencies 1000 signatures had to be collected. If the candidate was the incumbent member, half the number of supporters was sufficient. By 1939 the supporting threshold

had been considerably lowered: in single-member, individual districts 500, in party-list districts 1500 authentic signatures were required. In the case of national parties, however, 150 and 750 supporters were sufficient, respectively. This latter rule obviously hurt the extreme right-wing parties since their factions in parliament had fewer than four members each, which was the criterion of a national party.[20] The high number of signatures provided ample opportunity to bar opposition candidates from running because signatures could be forged, or administratively tendentiously assessed.

In 1945, no supporting signatures were required, the National Committee *(Országos Nemzeti Bizottság)* decided —"by examining from a democratic aspect the goals, the leaders, and the composition of the party"—who could run in the elections.[21] In 1947 nomination signatures were introduced again, but—and this part was discriminative— for the parties that had not taken part in the previous election only. The necessary number of signatures was fifty times the number of the candidates that could be nominated on a multi-member list, but 3000 at most. This was not really high, there were 16 large election districts in the country, and the number of required signatures was less than half per cent of eligible voters.[22]

The following three "models" can be described according to the degree of freedom in the elections between the two world wars with regard to the administrative distribution of election districts, the method of voting, and the extent of political variety appearing in the elections.

- Ballot was *secret throughout the period* in the constituencies of *Budapest and the "vicinity of Budapest"* on party-lists from 1922, and there were always at least 4-6 parties participating in the elections. The parties of the political movements with significant influence (the Christian party, the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the National Conservative Party and the extreme

right) had practically no problem running. The small parties, belonging to these same movements but wielding considerably less influence usually failed to get the necessary number of valid signatures—due, to a little extent only, to the corrupt practices of election organs. Therefore, elections in these districts can be labelled *moderately limited*.

• The seven multi-seat *municipal boroughs* (Debrecen, Győr, Hódmezővásárhely, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged) also voted *by secret ballot* throughout the period, on party-lists from 1926. Depending on the particular city, at least two to four parties always ran. Although the running parties and their support were different from place to place, their *total* election results with regard to the large parties were identical with the previous group. In these districts more parties were turned down on account of insufficient number of valid signatures, and abuses were also more frequent. It would seem reasonable to label the elections in these cities *limited*.

• *In the country*, in the territory of the counties voting was for individual, single-member candidates between 1922 and 1939. Because of *open ballot system*, the high number of unanimous elections without opponents, and the fact that opposition candidates were frequently prevented from running, the election in the country between 1922 and 1939 should be labeled *imitated*.

The political will, transformed into election law, of the political elite, and its violatory but "lawful" abuses combined to shape the results of the elections. The effect of the factors that were expressly prohibited by law but nevertheless widely employed is more difficult to assess. These factors included deliberate omissions from voters' register, forged/fake nomination signatures, plying voters with food and drink, as well as various forms of intimidation. These were all inseparable from elections, often providing suffi-

ciant ground for lodging a great number of election com-
plaints. The systematic treatment of the latter could be the
subject of future research and study.

Translated by György Novák

NOTES

[1] In the period under consideration the basic rules of elections were
determined by prime ministerial decrees no. 5988/1919 and
2200/1922, and by acts XXVI of 1925, XIX of 1938, VIII of 1945,
and XXII of 1947.

[2] For the effects on various social strata, see Hubai, László. "A szociál-
demokrata párt a választásokon 1922–1947" (The Social De-
mocratic Party at the elections, 1922–1947), *Múltunk,* no. 2 (1997):
119–145.

[3] The most important causes of being excluded from the vote were the
following: the raise of the age qualification of women to 30 years, and
the definition of new educational requirements: successful absolution
of elementary grade four for men, and grade six for women. (For
women, it was enough to have absolved four grades in elementary
school if they supported themselves by independent means, or had
salaries.) Citizenship qualification was raised from six to ten years, the
requirement to live at one place was raised from six months to two
years. The stricter qualifications were meant to reduce the number of
the voters of the opposition, and this affected disadvantageously first
of all the Social Democrats and the Christians. The tightening of the
citizenship and permanent residence criteria affected mainly the
refugees from the territory of historical (pre-Trianon) Hungary, who,
with their discontent springing from their social position, created
mostly the social basis for the racists.

[4] The problem is not simple. We do not know exactly how many per-
sons could have voted according to the old conditions. Nor do we
know how many people were deprived lawfully, or unlawfully, of the
right to vote by the new electoral regulations, nor how many of those
excluded on account of political motivations had their right to vote
restored after complaints had been lodged. Reliable data are available
for the constituency of Greater Budapest only. Here there were
177,259 refusals, 131,712 individuals lodged complaints, and 40,644
additional persons were finally entered in the voting register.

5   In Sopron Ede Hébelt received 351, at Székesfehérvár Artúr Blaskó 835 votes only. The contrast is even sharper if we remember that at a by-election in 1922, Hébelt had been elected, and that Blaskó's predecessor, József Sütő had received 4904 votes, although that was not enough to be elected on that by-election.

6   Collecting electoral data, we went as deep as polling stations; the copies of protocols and material from the press have been deposited as a separate collection in the Archives of the Institute of Political History *(Politikatörténeti Intézet):* PIL Választástörténeti Gyűjtemény (Collection of Election History), fonds 969.

7   Albert Apponyi (1846–1933) was a record holder in other respects as well. He was the member of every legislation for 63 years, and in the last 52 years he represented Jászberény.

8   Between the two world wars, the by-elections in the autumn of 1936 saw two candidates run for the seat, and in 1939 voting was for the county list only.

9   Votes received by the Hungarian Social Democratic Party in 1922: Ózd 33.70 percent, Sajószentpéter 43.32 percent, and Salgótarján 60.05 percent.

10   Pál Bíró at Ózd, Miksa Hermann at Sajószentpéter, Sándor Sztranyavszky at Salgótarján. Pál Bíró was the manager-general of the Rimamurány-Salgótarján Iron Works, vice-president of the National Association of Industrialists *(Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége)*. Miksa Hermann was minister of commerce, 1926–1929; after he had resigned from his multiple seat, he was succeeded by his secretary of state, Aurél Dezseőffy. Sándor Sztranyavszky was prefect of Nógrád-Hont until 1926, then secretary of state for the interior until 1931, and chairman of the National Union Party (Nemzeti Egység Pártja, NEP) from 1932. Bíró and Hermann had already defeated their Social Democratic opponents in 1922.

11   The by-election was also unanimous, according to the protocol no party other than the Party of Hungarian Life wanted to run. So far, there is no information as to why the Arrow Cross gave up the nearly certain seat.

12   Independent Smallholders Party (Független Kisgazda Párt, FKGP) had 38.65 percent at Sarkad (only two candidates of the Party of Hungarian Life remained standing). At Kaposvár 30.42 percent and at Pécsvárad 26.07 percent, single-member elections were unanimous, while the Social Democratic Party had 28.07 percent at Sajószentpéter on the list.

13   Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county was divided into three also because of election tactics, every "part-district" receiving four seats. If the whole

county had been one single election district, several parties with weaker support could have won seats. In this way, however, different parties ran in the various parts of this vast county, and were not able to win seats because of the small number of seats.

[14] In 1922, a social democrat (Imre Györki), an agrarian liberal (Károly Rassay), and the non-party secretary of state of the interior of the Károlyi cabinet won seats. Bethlen was even more sensitively affected by the fact that Zoltán Jánossy was divested of his seat by petition, and in the by-elections early in 1924, Vince Nagy, former minister of the interior in Károlyi's cabinet won the seat in parliament.

[15] When seats are distributed according to the principle of largest remainder, the number of votes necessary for a seat are calculated, then seats are distributed among parties accordingly. If vacant seats remain, fraction seats are distributed according to the largest remaining votes. Mészáros, József–Szakadát, István. Választási eljárások, választási rendszerek (Election procedures, election systems). (Budapest: BME Szociológia Tanszék, 1993).

[16] The method of largest average elaborated by d'Hont was employed. In the first step every list is given as many seats as many times the valid votes cast for the list can be divided by the quota. If vacant seats remain, then in the next step all valid votes cast for each list have to be divided by the number of acquired seats plus one. The list getting the highest number receives the next seat. The procedure is continued as long as there are seats to be distributed. (The secondary distribution of seats among linked lists is done in an analogous way.) The purpose of d'Hont's method is to have the average number of votes paid for every seat on the list as close as possible. *Ibid.*

[17] In 1947 the fraction votes of constituencies were nationally added up, and the seats thus resulting distributed among the election districts according to the method of the largest remainder.

[18] The method of distributing seats employed at the elections of 1945 resulted in a parliament more proportionate than any parliament before or after, that is, it was at that time that the political composition of parliament best reflected the voters' choices of value.

[19] The majority of 60 percent can also be attributed to the exclusion-omission of a great number of opposition voters from the register, and to voting with forged registers.

[20] At the same time, the collection of nomination signatures was made more complicated with the introduction of a few additional rules. No more than a quarter of all the supporters could come from the same village, half of them had to be over 30 years of age, so that "only can-

didates enjoying the trust of mature and more circumspect voters, too, should be nominated".

21 The meeting of the National Committee in mid-September 1945 allowed two additional parties to run besides the five parties in parliament; these were the Hungarian Radical Party, and the Democratic People's Party led by István Barankovics. Authorising the Democratic People's Party was not simple since two Catholic political formations had presented themselves under that name. The National Committee accepted the nomination of the party led by Barankovics on the grounds that it was more to the left and not so strongly linked to the clergy as the party coming forward with the petition of Count Pálffy. The nominations of the National Democratic Party and the Christian Women's Camp were turned down. The invalidation of the seats of the Hungarian Independence Party in 1947 was, however, a serious violation of law when ten weeks after the elections the National Committee withdrew the right of the party to participate claiming that it was based on deception.

22 In Veszprém county, which was the smallest district, 900 signatures were necessary, which was 0.357 per cent.