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Regionálna diferenciácia volebného správania na Slovensku (1998-2010)

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The book here reviewed comprises seven chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter 1 lays down the methodology; chapter 2 discusses the electoral geography in relation to its current status; chapter 3 outlines Slovakia's political situation after 1989; chapter 4 focuses on factors determining regional variations in the support for political parties; chapter 5 discusses the election results of these parties at regional level; chapter 6 is devoted to regional variability in behavioural patterns in elections and chapter 7 proposes a regional typology of electoral preferences.

The study of regional variability in electoral behaviour in Slovakia is based on four successive elections (1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010) for the Slovak National Council, i.e. a single-chamber parliament consisting of 150 members elected for a four-year term.

The analysis is based on the results achieved by electoral committees (parties) in 79 units of the middle-tier local government administration known as the *okres* (district) level, which lies between the smaller *obec* (municipality; 2883 rural and 138 urban municipalities) and *kraj* (province, 8). The book does not limit itself to a simple analysis of subsequent elections and the spatial variability of their outcomes. The opening chapters discuss how the political situation in Slovakia evolved after 1989 and include descriptions of the country's major political parties. In this way, the spatial pattern of electoral behaviour can be linked to the political profiles of political parties and the political sentiment dominating at a given time. A number of socio-economic and cultural factors are proposed which have the potential to influence the spatial variability of election results, including the structures

of age, education, occupation, religious confession and nationality, as well as urbanisation and socio-economic development. The study discusses these factors and identifies their correlation with the election results.

The book continues to discuss the results of the selected elections from the point of view of the major political organisations. A map-based spatial classification is proposed using a method of cumulative sums of votes in three classes: the core area of electoral support (regions with the highest results up to the sum total of 25% of votes of supporters of a given party), peripheral area of electoral support (regions with moderate results equivalent also to 25% of votes of supporters of a given party) and areas outside the political power base of a given party (representing the outstanding 50% of votes for that party). Based on this classification the study proposes maps of the stability of the electoral support for each political party.

The study goes on to analyse the regional variability of the electoral behaviour of Slovak citizens. Using maps it presents the variability of election turnout, the winning parties and the structure of political support by regions. A more analytic approach was also proposed to the regional classification by breaking down the outcomes into three major political orientations: centre-right, nationalist-populist and left wing. For each election, the results of the two top winning parties were also presented using the method of cumulative sums of votes. This latter method in particular revealed an enduring political division between the northern and southern part of the country that existed despite the change in those active on the political scene. A regional typology was also proposed reflecting the party with the highest positive deviation from its average national result. A regional map produced in this manner offered another way of looking at political power bases from the approach based solely on winning parties. This analytical part of the study also included methods of measuring and presenting the degrees of political variability within the regions. Finally, a uniform typology of

regional election preferences was proposed. Each region was classified into one of nine types of electoral behaviour for each of the elections studied and for all of them together. In a detailed analysis of each of these types, a number of subtypes were also identified.

All these efforts have produced a highly insightful, professionally sound and richly illustrated analysis of the spatial variability of electoral behaviour in the Slovak regions. It offers valuable information in terms of the nature of this variability, its permanence and evolution. The author points to a range of factors that accompany the various types of electoral behaviour through which there are mechanisms which drive this variability.

The author's analysis demonstrates that features characteristic of Slovak electoral behaviour are similar to patterns seen in neighbouring countries. This includes, primarily, the role of the core-periphery division (large cities vs. rural areas) and that between nationalities and religious affiliations, i.e. Slovaks vs. national minorities (Hungarians, Ruthenians, Roma) and Roman Catholic (Slovaks) vs. other denominations (Protestant and Eastern Orthodox). In particular, the spatial distribution of the largest national minority (Hungarians) and the largest cities (Bratislava, Kosice) means that, despite changes on the political scene, there is a consistent division between the populist-nationalist 'mountain' Slovakia and the 'lowland' Slovakia with its liberal cities and a considerable percentage of Hungarians (a majority in some regions) voting for their own parties.

The book delivers a consistently high quality of material and analysis. Perhaps the only area where it might be considered lacking is the choice of the spatial units for the analysis. While sufficient to identify general spatial patterns of electoral behaviour, they seem too large to capture all of the nuances. This is particularly true of the urban-rural divide as only Bratislava and Kosice constitute such regions in their own right, while other towns are included in the regions together with their rural surroundings. The large size of the units also makes it difficult to analyse the impact

of national or ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Roma, Ruthenians and Ukrainians), religious groups (Roman Catholics, Lutherans, reformed evangelicals, Eastern Orthodox and Greek Orthodox) and regional affiliations (e.g. *Gorole*, or mountain people). Several of the *okres* regions (incl. Nové Zámky, Levice, Trebišov, Rimavská Sobota) combine areas dominated by ethnic Slovak populations with those inhabited by Hungarians. As the Hungarian votes tend to be concentrated and the Slovak votes are distributed between several parties some of the maps presenting the outcomes of the elections of 1998, 2002 and 2006 could be interpreted to suggest that about one-third of the Slovakian territory is dominated by Hungarians. The pattern of the 2010 elections, when the Hungarian votes became dispersed and the Slovak votes were unusually concentrated, gives an impression that the Hungarians had somehow disappeared in the meantime. Partly correcting this picture are the few maps with pie charts representing the support for individual parties in these regions.

This drawback, however, could be seen as a benefit, since the results shown in large local authority units reveal the effects of concentration or dispersal of votes among

groups of citizens otherwise identified as uniform in terms of election patterns.

The author's choice of local authority unit may also be justified by a high degree of dispersion at the subsequent lower tier of administration. The Slovakian *okres*, which corresponds to the county level elsewhere in Europe (e.g. *Kreis* in Germany and *powiat* in Poland), is divided into several '*obec*' that typically correspond to a village or town. This means that there is no territorial unit of the commune/municipality size (*gmina* in Poland and *Gemeinde* in Germany) and the number of *obecs* exceeds that of *gminas* in Poland, while Slovakia has only one-eighth of the Polish population.

In conclusion, the choice of *okres*, despite its limitations, as the territorial focus in this book is in itself correct. The study offers a characteristic appraisal of this territorial unit, outlines the spatial variability of election behaviour of Slovaks, and uses a number of interesting analytical methods. All of these aspects make this study highly valuable to election geographers and researchers of other disciplines. The study may also serve as a model for researchers wanting to analyse other aspects of elections or even different spatial phenomena.

