

Beyond the ethnic vote. Shifting determinants of the electoral behavior of the Transylvanian Hungarians

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1. Introduction

Our study investigates empirically the determinants of electoral behavior in the context of ethnic block-voting. According to Horowitz (2000 [1985], 326-330) ethnic block-voting is likely to appear and to persist in societies where ethnicity has become politically salient. In these situations voting could become similar to a census, as electoral results depend primarily on ethnic demography.¹ However, this account *per se* does not explain what the motivations of people voting for ethnic parties are (Ferree 2004; 2011). Our study focuses precisely on this issue.

The paper focuses on the case of Transylvania's ethnic Hungarians, one of the politically activated ethnic groups of Eastern Europe. Some aspects of the ethnic mobilization of Transylvanian Hungarians are well documented. Csergő (2007) and Stroschein (2012) described convincingly the extensive mobilization along issues concerning ethno-national identity in the early- and mid-1990s, respectively the deliberation following it. Brubaker et al. (2006) highlighted the limits of the elite's capacities to mobilize along ethno-national issues in early-2000s. However, one could note a remarkable lack of systematic empirical studies analyzing minority electoral behavior at the micro-level. The classic literature on ethnic politics (Horowitz 2000 [1985]) and some of the authoritative works appeared in the last one and a half decade (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005; Ferree 2012) provide us different models of ethnic voter behavior. However, these models explore overwhelmingly examples from post-colonial societies. Our study could contribute to this literature in two ways. First, it tests different (instrumental and non-instrumental) models of ethnic voting in a post-Communist context, where ethnic vote is prevalent too. Second, it tries to highlight the dynamics of electoral motivations and argues that motivations could change over time, even if the very phenomenon of ethnic vote seems to persist.

2. Context and data

Hungarian is a politically activated ethnic category in Romania. RMDSZ,² a robust ethnic party³ representing Transylvanian Hungarians was established right after the fall of the regime, in January 1990. In the early 1990s Hungarians engaged in mass mobilization and contention on issues related to the reproduction of their ethno-national identity (public symbols, language use, education, ethnic autonomy). As Stroschein (2012, 7-11) highlighted, they found themselves disfavored and pushed in the situation of

¹ More recent studies emphasized the fluid character of ethnic demography (Laitin 1998; Posner 2005; Chandra 2012).

² In Hungarian Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, in Romanian Uniunea Democrtică a Maghiarilor din România (UDMR), in English Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). Throughout the paper, we will use the Hungarian acronyms when referring to Hungarian ethnic parties.

³ On ethnic parties see Horowitz (2000 [1985], 298-301), Chandra (2011).

permanent minority by the majoritarian principle of the emerging democratic regime. Under these circumstances they relied on mass-protests, as an extra-parliamentary tool of politics. However, in the mid- and late-1990s a process of moderation has taken place. Hungarians received some concessions concerning identity issues,⁴ while RMDSZ was incorporated in the new political field taking shape. The Hungarian party has been included repeatedly into governmental coalitions and has also gained important positions in the local administration (especially in Hungarian-majority settlements and regions). Thus, the party obtained – even if limited – access to policy decisions and public funds.

Meanwhile, the electoral behavior of Transylvanian Hungarians has remained remarkably stable. Transylvanian Hungarians – members of a minority community of around 1.3 million, representing 6.5 percent of Romanian’s population – have voted in an overwhelming majority for RMDSZ in each of the parliamentary elections since the change of the regime. As a consequence, RMDSZ has maintained its dominant position within the Hungarian community, in spite of an intra-ethnic split in 2003⁵ and the establishment of new Hungarian ethnic parties, namely MPP⁶ in 2008 and EMNP⁷ in 2011.

Table 1. Valid votes for RMDSZ at the parliamentary elections in the time period between 1990 and 2012

	Number	%
1990	991 583	7.23
1992	811 290	7.46
1996	812 628	6.64
2000	736 863	6.80
2004	628 125	6.17
2008	425 008	6.17
2012	380 656	5.14

Source: Central Electoral Bureau (electoral results)

Notwithstanding this, the number of valid votes obtained by RMDSZ has decreased considerably over time, even if this has happened in the context of falling rates of turnout throughout Romania. We will also discuss in greater detail that in other types of elections (European Parliament, presidential, local) RMDSZ had to face more serious inter- and intra-ethnic challenges.

A significant number of representative political surveys have been conducted among Transylvanian Hungarians since 1999. The majority of these surveys were carried out in pre-electoral contexts and, next to measuring political preferences, tried to quantify the popular support for different issues and policies advocated by RMDSZ. Besides quantitative surveys, a significant number of focus-group interviews were conducted during the same period of time.⁸ In this study we utilize quantitative and qualitative data which

⁴ The most important concessions were the broadening of Hungarian language education and language use.

⁵ In 2003 the so called radicals, led by László Tőkés left the party.

⁶ In Hungarian Magyar Polgári Párt, in Romanian Partidul Civic Maghiar (PCM), in English Hungarian Civic Party.

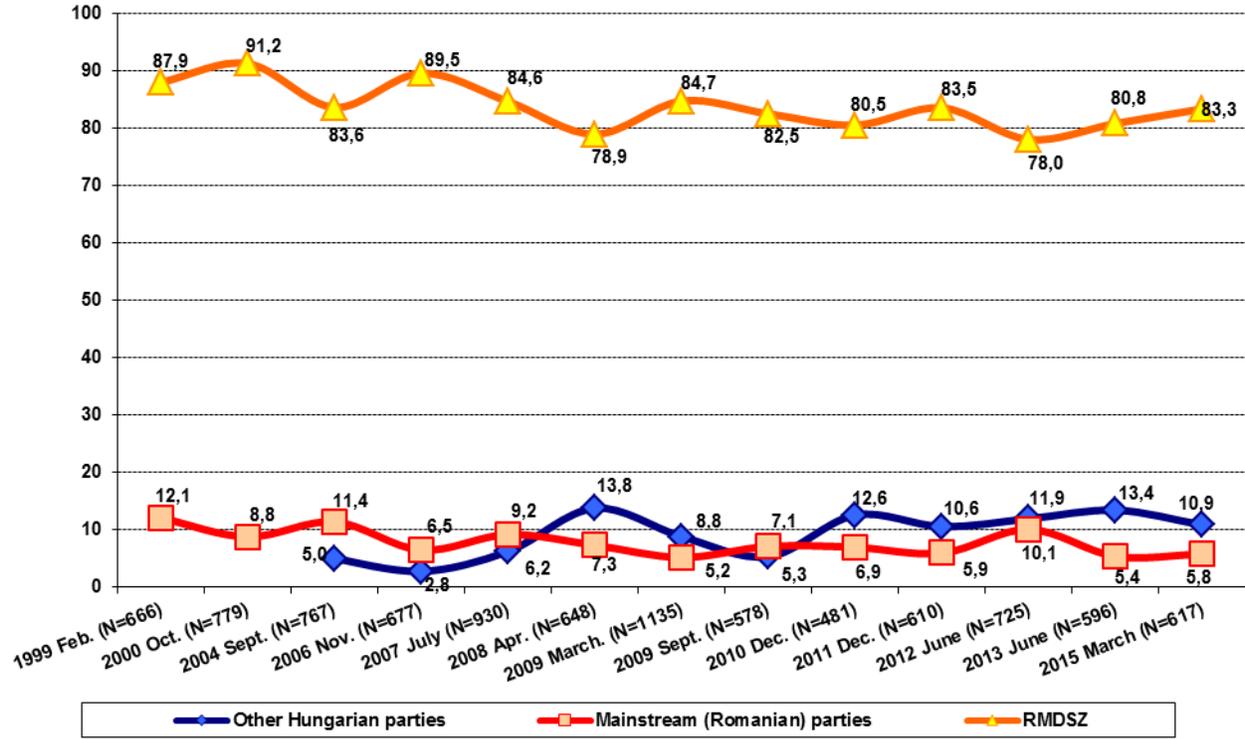
⁷ In Hungarian Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt, in Romanian Partidul Popular Maghiar din Transilvania, in English Hungarian People’s Party in Transylvania.

⁸ The Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities created a systematized archive of these investigations, containing 19 representative surveys and 38 focus-group interviews carried out in the time period between 1999 and 2015. The archive contains the questionnaire, the uniformly weighted database for each survey. Focus group interviews were archived both in form of video/audio registration and transcription.

could be useful in determining individual motivations of electoral behavior. We will mention in each case the source of our data and, in case of surveys, the number of respondents (N).

The above mentioned surveys also confirm that 78-91 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians casting a ballot have supported RMDSZ throughout the period for which data are available. Mainstream parties, respectively Hungarian intra-ethnic challengers have never reached 15 percent of the ballots cast by ethnic Hungarians.

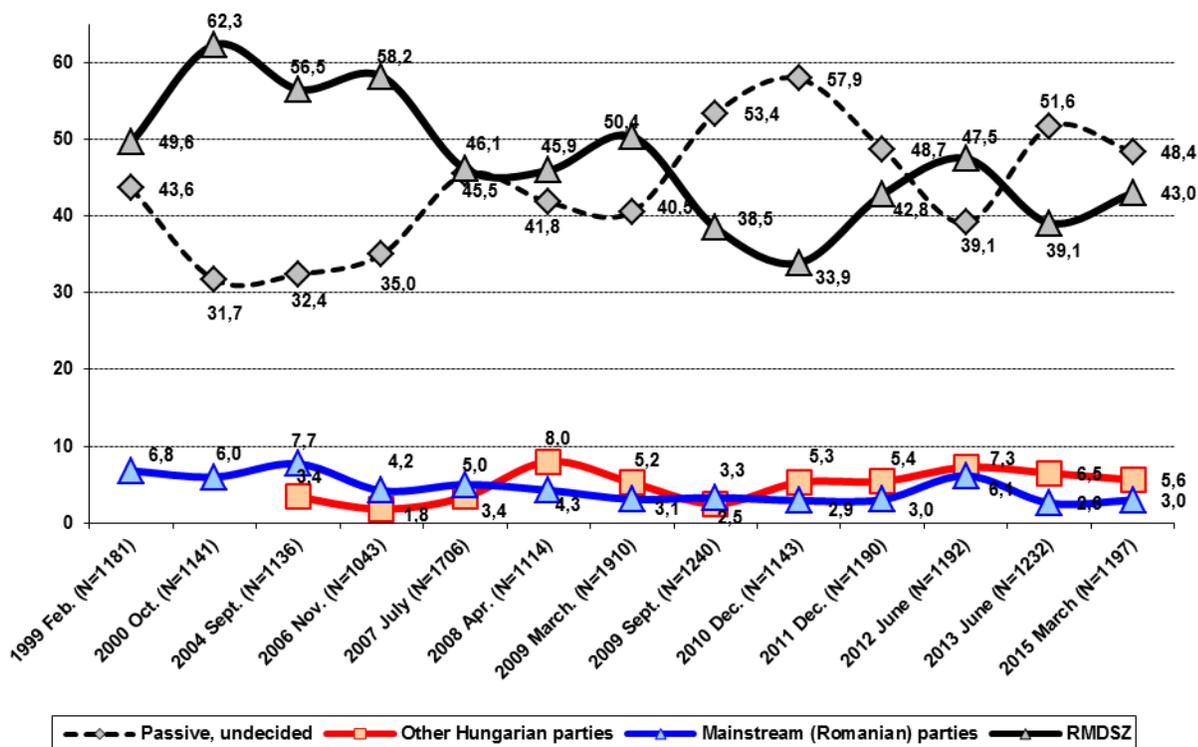
Figure 1. The party preferences of Transylvanian Hungarians between 1999 and 2014 (voters intending to cast a ballot and indicating a party preference)



Source: Surveys by CCRIT (February 1999, October 2000; September 2004; November 2006); Max Weber Foundation for Social Research (January 2005); TransObjective Consulting (July 2008), Kvantum Research (April 2008; March 2009; September 2009; December 2010; September 2014) and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (December 2011; July 2012; June 2013)

The surveys also show that the ability of RMDSZ to mobilize electorate has significantly decreased, even if it maintained its dominant position among the Hungarians vis-à-vis other parties. According to the results, in the early 2000s, 55-62 percent of the total Hungarian adult population had actively supported RMDSZ, but this proportion has never reached 50 percent after 2010.

Figure 2. The party preferences of ethnic Hungarians between 1999 and 2014 (total adult population)



Source: Surveys by CCRIT (February 1999, October 2000; September 2004; November 2006); Max Weber Foundation for Social Research (January 2005); TransObjective Consulting (July 2008), Kvantum Research (April 2008; March 2009; September 2009; December 2010; September 2014) and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (December 2011; July 2012; June 2013)

3. Conceptual tools: motivations shaping ethnic voter behavior

Theoretical models aiming to explain voting behavior in an ethnic context are highly diverse; however, one could identify two major points of debate. First, different approaches do not agree whether ethnic voter behavior could be considered instrumentally rational. Second, there is a disagreement whether motivations shaping voting behavior in an ethnic context are specific or are similar to motivations working in non-ethnic contexts. The following table tries to synthesize different approaches taking into account these two aspects.

Table 2. Models explaining ethnic block-voting

Determinants of voter behavior	Type of voter behavior	Type of reward/benefit	Likelihood in ethnic context
Following a charismatic leader	Not rational	Affective	- Not specific for ethnic context (Weber; Aldrich) - More likely in ethnic context and in case of nationalist parties (Kitschelt)
Demonstratively manifesting group identity	Not (instrumentally) rational	Expressive/affective (the act of voting itself)	- Specific for ethnic context (Horowitz) - Not specific for ethnic context (Brennan-Buchanan; Brennan-Lomasky; Brennan-Hamlin) - Less likely in ethnic context under the circumstances of patronage democracy (Chandra)
Choosing between political programs	Instrumentally rational	Beneficial policy	- Inexistent in ethnic context (Horowitz) - Polarizing policy options could sustain ethnic vote (Fearon) - Less likely in ethnic context (Fearon; Kitschelt; Posner; Chandra)
Direct resource allocation (clientelistic exchange, pork barrel, political patronage)	Instrumentally rational	Direct material rewards	- More likely in ethnic context (Fearon; Kitschelt; Chandra; Posner; Laitin-Van Der Veen)
Relying on cognitive shortcuts, cues	Rational with constrains (bounded rationality)	Beneficial policy, direct material rewards	- Not specific for ethnic context (Downs; Popkin; Ferree) - More likely in ethnic context/information constrains reinforce ethnic vote (Chandra; Posner)

Generally speaking, two main presumptions regarding voter behavior could be distinguished. The first one is the instrumental model of voting, which argues that voters are interested primarily in the outcome of elections, namely policy programs and governmental performances. One should highlight that this model is not only analytic but also normative. The rational, well informed and politically active voter carefully balancing between existing policy-alternatives is one of the most important corner-stones of the normative theories of representative democracy. However, from an analytical point of view, the model is problematic. Downs (1957), Riker-Ordeshook (1968), and Olson (1971) emphasized that non-zero voter turnout cannot be properly explained through the instrumental model of voting. As the weight of a single vote in determining the electoral outcome is insignificantly low and voters benefit from policy outcomes regardless of their electoral participation, the instrumentally rational option is not to turn out on election day. As a consequence, most scholars of electoral politics argue that electoral participation is determined (at least partially) by non-instrumental factors. The second model explaining electoral behavior is that of expressive voting. According to this model the reward of voters derives from the act of voting itself, through which they express “civic commitment”, “responsibility for community” or other forms of social identity. Some

adepts of rational choice theory emphasize that expressive voting is also rational and self-interested.⁹ We do not want to dispute this statement; however, it is important to note, that if we introduce one of the terms mentioned above, we will leave the more strictly defined terrain of (instrumental) rationality.¹⁰

Horowitz (2000 [1985], 326-330), in his seminal book, framed his model concerning ethnic vote against the theory of instrumental voting and emphasized that voter behavior in ethnic contexts cannot be other than expressive. He argued that adherents of ethnic parties are guided by affective considerations nurtured by strong emotional links towards their own-group. This approach – linking political preferences directly to ethnic identity – implies also the conviction that the political activation of ethnic cleavages is persistent and enduring. These considerations determined the tonality of scientific analysis until recently, and, even if nowadays the scientific literature of ethnic politics is dominated by the theory of rational choice, they have a significant effect on public discourse even today.

However, instrumental models have clearly gained ground in the literature of ethnic politics in the last two and a half decade. Meanwhile, the model of instrumental voting has become more nuanced, more realistic and less normative. First, the concept of bounded rationality, elaborated by Simon (1955) has become popular. The essential statement of the bounded rationality theory is that individuals make decisions in an environment where rationality is limited by information constrains, cognitive limits of the human mind and the lack of time/energy to consider different alternatives. Downs (1957) and Popkin (1991) argued that voters do not have sufficient information and time to properly balance between the policy-alternatives of the parties. Because of this, they rather rely on informational cues or cognitive shortcuts. This model was adopted to explain ethnic block-voting. Chandra (2004, 33-47) and Posner (2005, 152-160) argued that information on the ethnic background of the candidates is more easily accessible than information on their other attributes or on programmatic elements. As a consequence, information constrains explain why people engage in “ethnic headcount” instead of preferring other informational cues. This also means that information constraints are likely to reinforce ethnic politics. Ferree’s (2011, 36-40) argument is that people will prefer ethnic cues (instead of other, non-ethnic cognitive shortcuts such as ideological statements) if they consider that their ethnic background determines significantly their future life-chances. Further, Chandra, Posner and Ferree argued that in a political environment dominated by ethnic favoritism (or perceived by voters as such) and characterized by severe information constraints policy programs have little impact on electoral choices. In such contexts it is not the policy measures *per se* that are crucial, but expectations concerning their implementation. If voters presume that officials will favor their own co-ethnics, the question of who implements policy decisions will be much more important than the decisions themselves.

Second, instrumental models have also broadened the definition of possible benefits driving voter behavior. Aldrich (1995) and Kitschelt (2001) argued that modern catch-all parties not only elaborate political programs, but also establish organizational infrastructure to mobilize voters. In modern electoral politics these two aspects have equal significance in establishing linkages between parties and their electorate. This approach directed the focus of the research on political particularism, namely pork barrel, political patronage and clientelistic exchanges between parties and their electorate. A strong hypothesis of this literature asserts that political particularism is more likely in contexts where ethnicity is politically activated.¹¹

⁹ See Hillman (2010).

¹⁰ See Brennan-Buchanan (1984); Brennan-Lomansky (1994); Brennan-Hamlin (1998).

¹¹ See Fearon (1999), Kitschelt (2001), Chandra (2004), Posner (2005), Laitin-Van Der Veen (2012).

In what follows we will discuss the impact of both non-instrumental and instrumental factors on the voting behavior of Transylvanian Hungarians. In our understanding these models are not mutually exclusive but they could work simultaneously even at individual level. We also try to show the dynamics of Transylvanian Hungarians' voter behavior and to highlight that the relative importance of certain factors could change over time. We are also fully aware that, even if we are engaged now in micro-level analysis, we should consider macro-political and macro-institutional factors too. At several points of the analysis we will highlight the importance of such macro-structural factors.

4. Non-instrumental motivations of ethnic voting

4.1. Following charismatic leaders

According to Max Weber (1978 [1922]) charismatic leadership is one of the possible sources legitimizing authority. Charisma is related to the personal qualities of a leader. However, it is not necessarily real qualities that matter but the perceptions thereof of the followers (voters). Charismatic leaders are perceived to have an extraordinary political role in an otherwise ordinary political environment. Evidently, such personal qualities (and perceptions) are hard to define, to measure and to account for.

In models based on the theory of rational choice charismatic leadership has a strong negative connotation, as it is defined by the lack of rationality and accountability. For instance, Kitschelt (2001, 301) based on Aldrich (1995) distinguished between two main functions of the modern parties, namely, elaborating ideologically coherent political programs and building organizational networks. Either or both of these could help parties to establish stable linkages with their electorate. If a party does not elaborate a coherent political program and does not establish an effective organizational infrastructure either, then it could rely on a charismatic leader. However, for Kitschelt charismatic leaders are similar to populist tribunes, and there is also a more general hypothesis concerning the interrelation between charismatic leadership and populism (Pappas 2015).

In spite of the fact that political scientists are suspicious concerning charismatic leadership, this is evidently a factor strongly affecting electoral choices. As for the Transylvanian Hungarian political field, the example of the Reformed bishop László Tőkés is illustrative. He had been the honorary president of RMDSZ and the most important prominent of the party's more radical wing until 2003, when he was excluded from the Alliance. Afterwards, he became an informal leader of Hungarian political actors outside RMDSZ; however, he was quite unsuccessful in building an effective organizational infrastructure. Thus, it was only at the elections for the European Parliament in 2007 that he was able to successfully contest the intra-ethnic hegemony of RMDSZ. That time Tőkés could run as an independent candidate, requiring far less organizational infrastructure and being able to rely to a much greater extent on his personal charm than at other types of elections. He gained more than 176 thousand votes (3.45 percent of the total and approximately 36 percent of the Hungarian votes) and won a seat in the European Parliament. The intra-ethnic competitor parties (MPP and EMNP) have never been able to reproduce these results.

A survey representative for Transylvanian Hungarians conducted shortly before the 2007 EP elections (in October 2007) showed that 30 percent of the respondents (who intended to cast a ballot) preferred Tőkés, 52 percent RMDSZ, 4.5 percent some of the mainstream parties, the remaining 13.5 percent being undecided at

the moment of the survey. The survey also contained an open-ended question concerning the motivations of those preferring Tőkés. Following the post-coding of the answers it became evident that personal qualities of the candidate mattered a lot, and that in fact his radical stance in ethno-political issues was also legitimized by these personal qualities.

Table 3. Please, explain in a few words why you prefer László Tőkés! October 2007 (N=320)

Category	Examples
Not opportunistic, he would represent better the Hungarian community (20%)	<p>“He did not give concessions for Romanians for gaining positions”</p> <p>“He truly represents the Hungarian community and not only tries to gain money through politics”</p> <p>“He is not as opportunist as RMDSZ leaders”</p>
Represents the Hungarians (17%)	<p>“He represents the Hungarians”.</p> <p>“He fights for the Hungarians from the very beginning”</p>
Merits connected to the December 1989 events (15%)	<p>“He initiated the regime change”</p> <p>“He initiated the Hungarian democracy”</p> <p>“He started the revolution”</p> <p>“He made a lot for us and sacrificed his family”</p> <p>“He fought for the Hungarians in 1989”</p>
Trust (14%)	<p>“I trust him”</p> <p>“One can rely on his word”</p>
RMDSZ-protest (14%)	<p>„I am disappointed in RMDSZ“</p> <p>“I am fed up with RMDSZ”</p> <p>“I am fed up with this wolfish gang”</p>
Not corrupt (12%)	<p>“He has not become rich”</p>
Religion (4%)	<p>“I belong to the Reformed Church, he is my bishop”.</p> <p>“He is a clergyman, he should be honest”</p>

Source: survey by TransObjective Consulting

It is also quite obvious that RMDSZ could not rely on charismatic leaders to mobilize its electorate. During the 1990s and 2000s some RMDSZ top leaders were quite well known and relatively popular among ethnic Hungarians,¹² however, their popularity was intimately linked to their positions in the party. The situation of Hunor Kelemen, the president of the party since 2011 is similar. He has a relatively massive visibility and the overwhelming majority of the Transylvanian Hungarians shows some sympathy toward him. However, few Hungarians could evoke characteristic statements or actions made by Kelemen.¹³

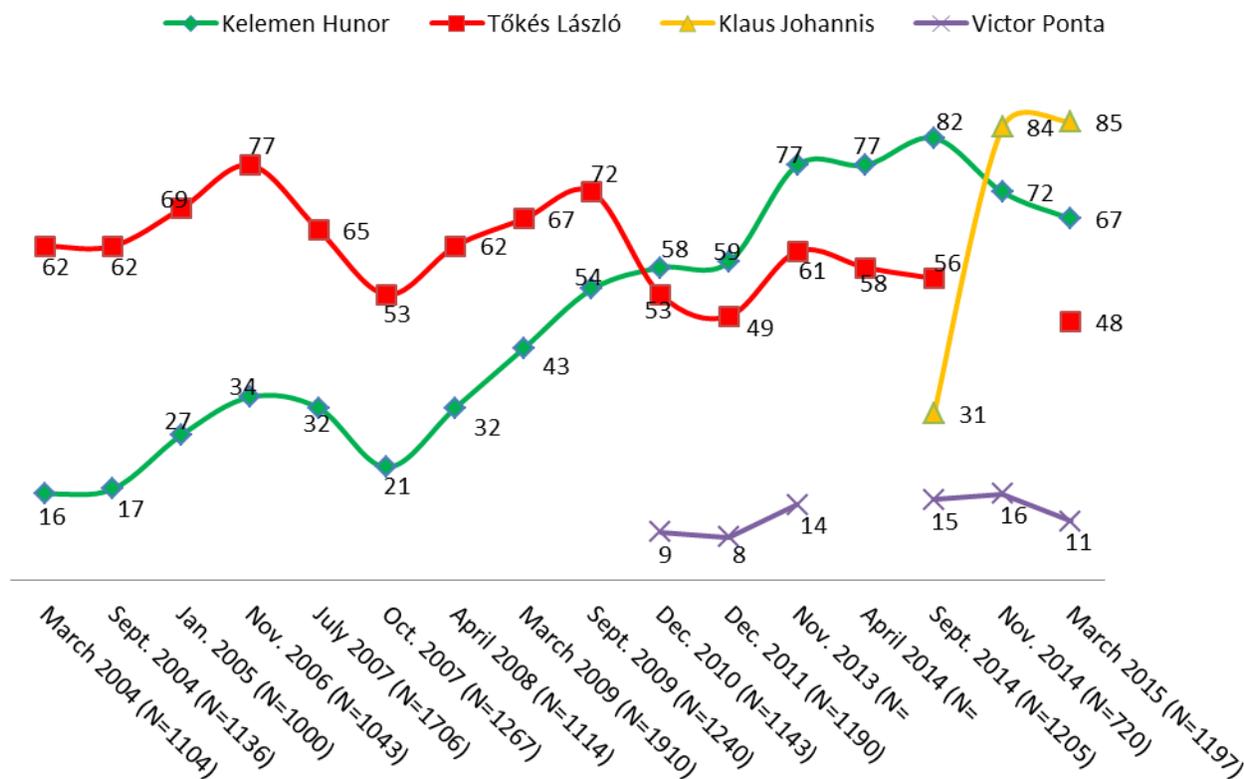
Following the 2014 presidential elections RMDSZ has to face a new challenge, namely that Klaus Johannis, the newly elected president of Romania had become more popular among Hungarian voters than RMDSZ leaders (and Transylvanian Hungarian politicians in general). He enjoyed great popularity in spite of the fact that he had never sent targeted messages towards the Hungarian electorate.¹⁴

¹² First of all Béla Markó, the president of the party between 1993 and 2011, respectively György Frunda, who ran twice for the presidency of Romania (1996 and 2000).

¹³ In the focus groups carried out by Kvantum Research in September 2014, none of the 42 participants was able to evoke a statement made by Kelemen. He was characterized by the participants as “*president of RMDSZ*”, “*we saw him from a bird’s-eye view*”, “*he could act more, he is very passive*” etc.

¹⁴ The popularity of Johannis among Hungarians is of a complex background. An important factor is that he is of Saxon origin and was perceived (at least during the elections) as the candidate of Transylvanians.

Figure 3. Trust in politicians (positive answers).



4.2. Manifesting group identity

According to Horowitz (2000 [1985], 326-330), people living in ethnically divided societies demonstratively manifest their group identity during elections. Thus, electoral behavior has a single determinant, namely the identification with one's own ethnic group. Here Horowitz relies on the social psychological model elaborated by Tajfel (1974) suggesting that individuals' self-esteem is derived from their sense of group belonging and, consequently, those who maintain favorable definitions of group membership will also exhibit positive self-esteem. According to Horowitz, this is related to a competitive model of ethnic relations, based on a continuous evaluation of the position of one's own group relative to competitor groups. In such context, individuals reinforce their self-esteem by voting for a party representing (and symbolizing) their ethnic community. Horowitz also sets up a sharp dichotomy between ethnic and non-ethnic contexts of voter behavior. In ethnic contexts expressive motivations are practically exclusive, while in non-ethnic contexts (instrumentally) rational considerations predominate. In contexts where ethnic differences are not salient, people could balance between existing policy alternatives, while the activation of ethnic cleavages leaves little room for such (instrumentally rational) considerations.

Today the state of the art in the literature of ethnic electoral behavior is quite different. On the one hand, a common view in political science is that expressive factors play an important role in shaping voter behavior in non-ethnic contexts too. On the other hand, many of the authoritative works concerning ethnic politics

employ models based on instrumental rationality, some of them even claiming that instrumental voting is more prevalent in ethnic contexts (Chandra 2004; Posner 2005). Our empirical results concerning the Hungarians of Transylvania show that expressive motivations evidently matter as determinants of voter behavior; however, it also seems that their influence has decreased over time.

In the literature concerning Transylvanian Hungarians, Biró (1998, 16-47) elaborated an expressive-affective explanation of the ethnic voter behavior of the early- and mid-1990s. He criticized Hungarian ethnic elites because of the lack of effective programmatic linkages with the larger Hungarian public. Biró found a huge gap between the “world from above” (discourses produced by elites, ethnic politics) and the “world from below” (ordinary people, everyday strategies). In the “world from above” elites were engaged in ethnic institution-building. They tried in fact to establish an institutionally sustained, ethnically integrated parallel society, which should have functioned as “an ethnic safety net” and which could have enabled members of the Hungarian community to live their life inside a well-encapsulated Hungarian world.¹⁵ However, according to Biró, ordinary people were not interested in these institutions and thus, the program did not resonate in the “world from below”. At the everyday level totally different informal institutions took shape and pragmatic cooperation between actors of different ethnic background was more widespread. Nevertheless, argued Biró, there was a tacit agreement between the Hungarian elites and masses. On the one hand, according to this (virtual) “social contract”, masses did contest the institution-building project of the elites, even if they did not participate actively in it. On the other hand, elites did not really expand their influence over the masses and did not require active participation in the emerging national movement. Consequently, ethnic politics (in which the elites were engaged) had little relevance at the everyday level. The linkages between masses and elites were in fact quite weak: elites lacked both a relevant program and an effective organizational infrastructure to implement their initiatives. They could rely solely on expressive motivations,¹⁶ namely on the desire of ordinary people to manifest affective nationalism. According to Biró, this factor led from time-to-time to ethnic mobilization.

Two aspects of Biró’s account should be highlighted. On the one hand, he outlined an elite-driven process of ethnic mobilization. On the other hand, however, he emphasized the limits of the elites’ capacities to mobilize masses. Elites had not elaborated a relevant program and had not developed effective organizational networks, so mobilization became quite accidental and restricted to moments when elite initiatives met the desire of ordinary people to manifest affective nationalism and group solidarity.

It seems that some of the spectacular failures of RMDSZ to mobilize Hungarian masses could properly be explained through this framework. First, RMDSZ has been evidently incapable to transfer Hungarian votes for second round candidates of the presidential elections. In 2004 RMDSZ supported Adrian Năstase, the candidate of the Social Democrats, however, Hungarians voted in equal proportion for him and for Traian Băsescu. In 2009 RMDSZ supported Mircea Geoană; however, this time a clear majority of Hungarians voted for Traian Băsescu. During the 2014 presidential elections RMDSZ was part of the government led by Victor Ponta and tacitly supported him during the campaign. However, more than 90 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians voted for his opponent, Klaus Johannis. Further relevant examples are the two referenda (held in 2007 and 2012) concerning the impeachment of president Traian Băsescu. During these Hungarian voters also acted quite contrarily to the recommendations of the RMDSZ leadership.

¹⁵ Lijphart (1977) introduced the term of pillar and pillarization, the English version of the Dutch *zuil* and *verzuijing*. Social pillars are in fact parallel societies built on a dense institutional net. One could say that Hungarian elites were engaged in establishing a Hungarian social pillar in the early 1990s.

¹⁶ Note that according to Kitschelt (2001) parties in a similar situation (lacking both programmatic linkage and organizational infrastructure) could rely on charismatic leadership. In Biró’s model “affective nationalism” has a similar function.

As for the 1990s, no survey data is available, but we accept Biró’s account (based on qualitative data and extensive fieldwork) that expressive motivations were crucial determinants of the Hungarian voting behavior (and more broadly of ethnic mobilization). As for the last one and a half decade, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that the expressive factor is still important, but its significance has declined over time.

(1) As for the importance of expressive motivations, both survey data and focus groups could be cited. The following table summarizes the motivations of RMDSZ voters based on the same 2007 survey cited earlier. As mentioned already, an open-ended question was asked. A total number of 690 RMDSZ voters gave usable answers. Data evidently show the predominance of expressive motivations. An overwhelming majority of RMDSZ adherents referred directly to ethnic identity and very few respondents mentioned programmatic elements or policy implementation.

Table 4. Please, explain in a few words why you prefer RMDSZ! October 2007 (N=690)

Category	Examples
I am Hungarian (37%)	<p>“Because we are Hungarian, for nothing else”</p> <p>“I am a Hungarian first of all”</p> <p>“The tulip [the insignia of RMDSZ] symbolizes the Hungarian community”</p>
They represent the Hungarians (32%)	<p>“They keep our Hungarianness alive, they fight for our rights”</p> <p>“Someone should protect Hungarians”</p> <p>“They fight for Hungarians”</p> <p>“They yield together the Hungarians”</p>
Habituation, routine, influence of the social environment (10%)	<p>“We have always voted for RMDSZ”</p> <p>“Everyone from my family votes for RMDSZ since the change of the regime”</p> <p>“We have voted for RMDSZ since it had been established, we hang on to it”</p> <p>“In fact I cannot explain, it is usual for us to vote for it”</p>
There is no [Hungarian] alternative (5%)	<p>“Ouch, we have no other party to choose.”</p> <p>“As a Hungarian I cannot vote for a Romanian party.”</p>
Trust, satisfaction (4%)	<p>“I can trust them”,</p> <p>“They are able politicians”</p>
Duty (3%)	<p>“Each Hungarian has the duty to vote RMDSZ”</p> <p>“Only thus can Hungarians survive in Transylvania”</p> <p>“It was said that we have to vote them”.</p>
Concerned about the Hungarian unity (2%)	<p>“I do not support the split among Hungarians”</p> <p>“At least we, the Hungarians should join our forces”</p>
Hopes for a better future (2%)	<p>“I hope that something better will come”</p>
Tőkés-protest (3.5%)	<p>“Tőkés should have remained a clergyman”</p>
Other (1.5%)	<p>Programmatic elements, policy implementation</p>

Source: survey conducted by TransObjective Consulting (RIRNM Archive)

(2) As for the decreasing significance of the expressive vote, investigations concerning elements of Transylvanian Hungarian ethno-national identity carried out by Veres (2000; 2007; 2010) are of key importance. Veres slightly modified the question-block used in transnational surveys¹⁷ to measure

¹⁷ See the 1995 2003 and 2013 ISSP (International Social Survey Program) questionnaires concerning elements of national identity. Databases and documentation is downloadable from zcat.gesis.org webpage.

determinants of national identity. His questions followed the standard formulation of “*some people say that the following things are important for being truly Hungarian. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?*” Consistent with the standard question, Veres enumerated items indicative of subjective identification (“*to feel Hungarian*”, “*to respect the Hungarian flag*”), cultural-linguistic abilities (“*to be able to speak Hungarian*”, “*to have a proper knowledge concerning Hungarian culture*”), ethnic background/ancestry (“*to have Hungarian ancestry*”, “*to have at least one of the parents Hungarian*”) and relation toward the Hungarian state (“*to be born in Hungary*”, “*to have Hungarian citizenship*”). However, he also added an item concerning voter behavior. In 2000 this item was “*to vote for RMDSZ*” while in 2007 and 2010 “*to vote for Hungarian parties*”¹⁸

Table 5. How important it is for being truly Hungarian to vote for RMDSZ/Hungarian parties (the cumulative proportion of rather and very important answers)

2000 (N=925)	57,0
2007 (N=894)	48,6
2010 (N=872)	41,7

Source: National identity and social stratification 2000; Carpathian panel 2007; 2010 surveys

According to the results, in 2000 57.5 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians agreed that it was (very or rather) important to vote for RMDSZ/Hungarian parties for being truly Hungarian. According to our hypothesis (which unfortunately cannot be tested), this figure was even higher during the 1990s. However, a significant decrease occurred between 2000 and 2010. In other words, casting an ethnic vote is less and less considered as one of the determinants/manifestations of the Transylvanian Hungarian ethno-national identity. As a consequence, one can also presume that the act of voting is less and less considered as an opportunity to manifest one’s ethno-national identity. It is important that we neither suggest that the desire to manifest group identity has decreased¹⁹ nor that ethnic-block voting has declined. However, the two phenomena overlap less and less.

(3) As for the second argument concerning the decreasing significance of expressive voting, the distinction between strategic and sincere voting is of key importance. Strategic voting occurs when people do not vote for their preferred candidate (considered to have too low chances to win) in order to influence the electoral outcomes (Blais-Young-Turcotte 2005). The opposite term of strategic voting is sincere voting, when one votes his/her preferred candidate irrespective of the probable electoral outcomes. We should highlight that according to the framework of expressive voting used by Horowitz ethnic voters are also sincere voters, as they are motivated by manifesting their group identity and not strategic concerns related to electoral outcomes. And conversely, scholars using the framework of instrumental voting behavior allow for the possibility of strategic vote also in ethnic contexts. Chandra (2004; 2009) argues that ethnic parties succeed to mobilize their followers only if they have the chance to be part of the winning coalition and to influence policy outcomes. Otherwise voters will act strategically and look for other possible alternatives.

It is relevant to compare the outcome of different types of elections. Presidential elections are of particular importance here. Hungarian ethnics constitute only 6.5-7 percent of the total electorate in Romania and, as a

¹⁸ As in 2003 an intra-ethnic split occurred inside the Transylvanian Hungarian political field.

¹⁹ Hungary offers extra-territorial citizenship for Hungarians living in neighboring countries. According to official figures more than 460 thousand Romanian citizens (approximately 36 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians) obtained Hungarian citizenship until September 2015. To cite a 2014 September focus-group participant: “*When I was taking the oath, I felt myself truly Hungarian*”. More generally, along practical considerations expressive motivations (the desire to manifest national identity) are quite important in applying for citizenship.

consequence, the Hungarian candidates (relying solely on Hungarian votes) have little chance to affect the outcome. One could certainly claim that Hungarians are interested in granting a better position for their representatives to bargain before the second round of the elections. However, as we saw, Hungarians regularly do not follow the recommendations of RMDSZ leaders in their second round options. As a conclusion, one can justly assume that expressive considerations matter a lot in the case of Hungarians voting for an RMDSZ presidential candidate.

Next, we analyze both survey and electoral macro-data to investigate the distribution of the Hungarian votes in presidential elections. According to pre-electoral surveys carried out in 2000, 2004, 2009 and 2014, the majority of the Hungarians casting a ballot voted for RMDSZ candidates in the first round of each election; however, the proportion of Hungarians voting for RMDSZ candidates shows a clearly decreasing trend.

Table 6. The options of Transylvanian Hungarian voters according to pre-electoral surveys at the 2000, 2004, 2009 and 2014 presidential elections

	Total voters				Voters intending to cast a ballot with definite option		
	RMDSZ candidate **	Other Hungarian candidate ***	Mainstream (non-Hungarian) candidate	Passive, undecided	RMDSZ candidate **	Other Hungarian	Mainstream (non-Hungarian) candidate
October 2000 (N1= 1141; N2=707)*	66.6	-	15.4	17.9	81.2	-	18.8
September 2004 (N1=1136; N2=776)	48.0	-	22.1	29.9	68.5	-	31.5
September 2009 (N1=1240; N2=652)	32.9	-	12.4	54.7	72.6	-	27.4
September 2014 (N1=; N2=)	31.3	3.2	17.6	47.8	60.2	6.6	34.0

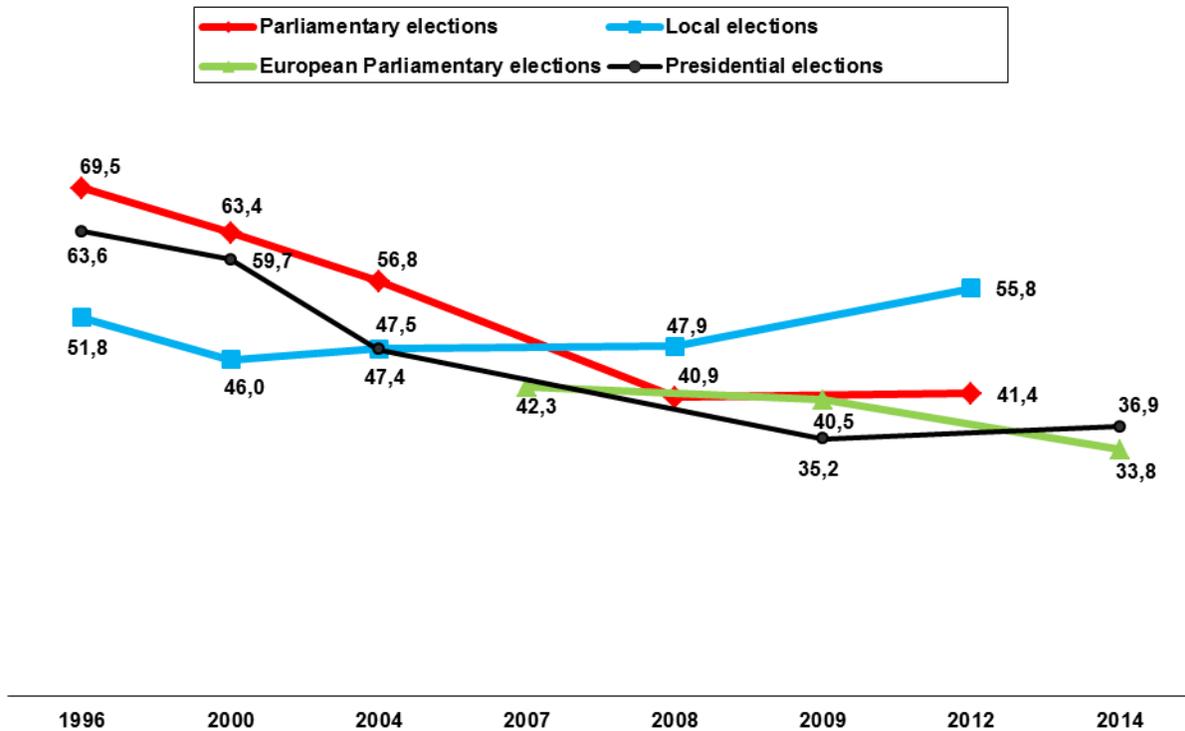
* N1=total numbers of respondents; N2=number of respondents intending to cast a ballot, having a definite option

**2000: György Frunda; 2004: Béla Markó; 2009; 2014: Hunor Kelemen

Source: CCRIT (2000 2004); Kvantum Research (2009; 20114)

RMDSZ has regularly obtained fewer votes for its presidential nominee than for its parliamentary candidates. In 1996, 2000 and 2004 the first round of the presidential election was held simultaneously with the parliamentary election. Thus one can rightly assume that the turnout of the Hungarians was the same for both elections, consequently the difference between the votes obtained by the parliamentary and presidential candidates is due to the fact that some Hungarian voters acted strategically and split their tickets between RMDSZ and potent presidential candidates. It is also evident that the difference between the two figures increased in 2004. The 2009 and 2014 presidential elections were not held concurrently with parliamentary elections; consequently, the results cannot be compared directly. However, the even more accentuated decline in the number of votes obtained by the RMDSZ presidential nominees could be perceived as indirect evidence for the decline of expressive motivations.

Figure 4. The proportion of voters casting a ballot and supporting a Hungarian candidate/party among voting age Hungarians at different types of elections



Source: Own calculations based on electoral macro-data.

5. Instrumental motivations of ethnic voting

5.1. Policy preferences of Transylvanian Hungarians

As for policy preferences, a further distinction, namely between unimodal and polarizing policies should be made. In the case of unimodal policies the distribution of preferences converges to the normal distribution. In other words, there are many voters in the center, while relatively few to left and to right from the center. It is well known that in this case a convergence of the party appeals statements towards the center in a Downsian manner is likely to appear. In case of polarizing policies however, the curve representing voter preferences has two or more peaks and between them (in the only virtually existent center) there are very few voters.²⁰ In this case a convergence of party appeals is unlikely to occur and there are chances for one group of voters to become a permanent minority. In this case political entrepreneurs, representing the minority option could try to convert some voters of the opposite alternative, or could rely on extra-parliamentary tools of politics.

²⁰ In the strict mathematical sense, the majority of polarizing policies are also unimodal (in the sense that preferences have a sole maximum value), however this consideration does not affect the argument.

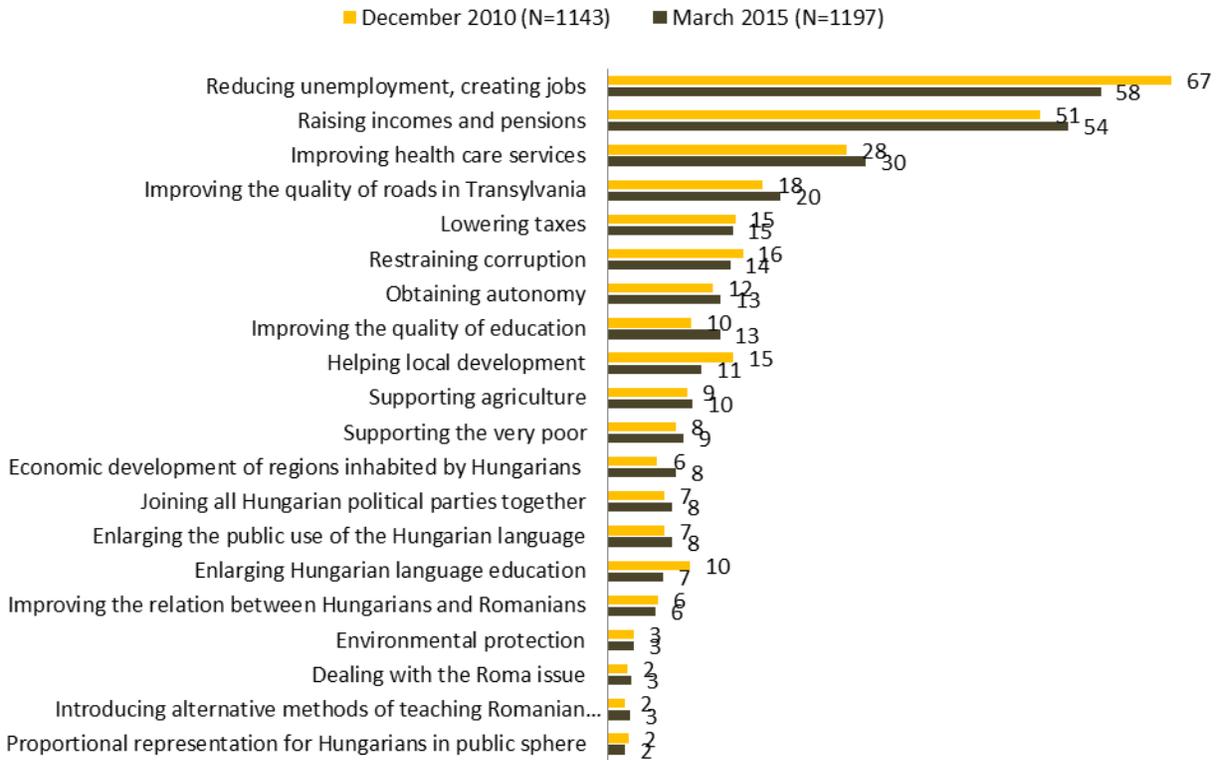
As Fearon (1999) highlighted, a stable ethnic division of the electorate can be sustained only by polarizing policies. In other words, if unimodal issues constantly overshadow the polarizing ones, the ethnic division of the polity is likely to dissolve.²¹ It is important that polarizing issues, such as use of symbols or official language are directly linked to ethnic identity.

As for Transylvanian Hungarians, competing accounts regarding the importance of identity issues have been formulated. Scholars investigating primarily the early- and mid-1990s emphasized the importance of such issues in the political mobilization of Transylvanian Hungarians (Csergő 2007; Stroschein 2012). Stroschein's findings are particularly consistent with the model provided by Fearon. According to her, polarizing identity issues had appeared publicly immediately after the fall of state socialism. As Hungarians felt themselves outnumbered and put in a permanent minority situation by the newly emerging democratic rules, they engaged in extensive mass protest. According to Stroschein, Hungarian elites had in fact a role in moderation and in the bargaining process with the majority elites. Nevertheless, their electoral support was firmly linked to issues concerning identity politics. Brubaker et al (2006) adopted a perspective similar to Biró (1998), however, without stressing the desire of masses to manifest (periodically) affective nationalism. They also found a huge gap between ethnic politics (focusing on "symbolic" ethno-national issues and identity reproduction) fostered by the elites and the more flexible and context-dependent forms of everyday ethnicity. Further, they found that Hungarians were concerned more about "unimodal issues", namely concerns affecting their living conditions, which they did not interpret in ethnic terms and perceived as being shared with the Romanians. At first glance, the two accounts are strikingly different; however, in our opinion they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. First, they refer to different periods: Stroschein's account to the early- and mid-1990s, while Brubaker's to the late 1990s and early 2000s. Second, Stroschein also described a process of deliberation conducive to the incorporation of the Hungarians into the regular functioning of the political field. The group led by Brubaker described in fact a phase following this process of deliberation.

Survey data largely confirm Brubaker's account that Hungarians are primarily concerned about "non-ethnic" issues affecting their daily existence. The majority of surveys contained questions concerning the most salient problems of the Hungarian electorate. Researchers routinely listed ethnic and non-ethnic issues and respondents were asked to choose the most constraining ones. It was common that ethnic issues were quite lowly prioritized, while general problems concerning daily life (such as creation of jobs, increasing incomes, improving health care etc.) were considered more stringent problems. The following figure compares 2010 and 2015 data, gathered with identical methodology.

²¹ Evidently, other factors, such as expressive motivations, or pork barrel could further sustain it. However, we consider now policy preferences as an analytically separable determinant.

Figure 5. The most important issues for Transylvanian Hungarians (respondents could choose three issues)



Source: surveys by Kvantum Research (RIRNM archive)

We should also note that expectations towards RMDSZ are quite different. Even if Hungarians did not consider that the identity issues were among the most stringent problems, they expected RMDSZ to deal exactly with these problems. This was clearly shown by an open-ended question in the already discussed October 2007 survey. According to the results, people expected RMDSZ to gain concessions concerning Hungarian education, respectively to “fight for the Hungarians” in general, while social and economic problems were mentioned in a lower proportion.

Table 7. Which are the three most important problems that RMDSZ should deal with? (October 2007 N=1267)

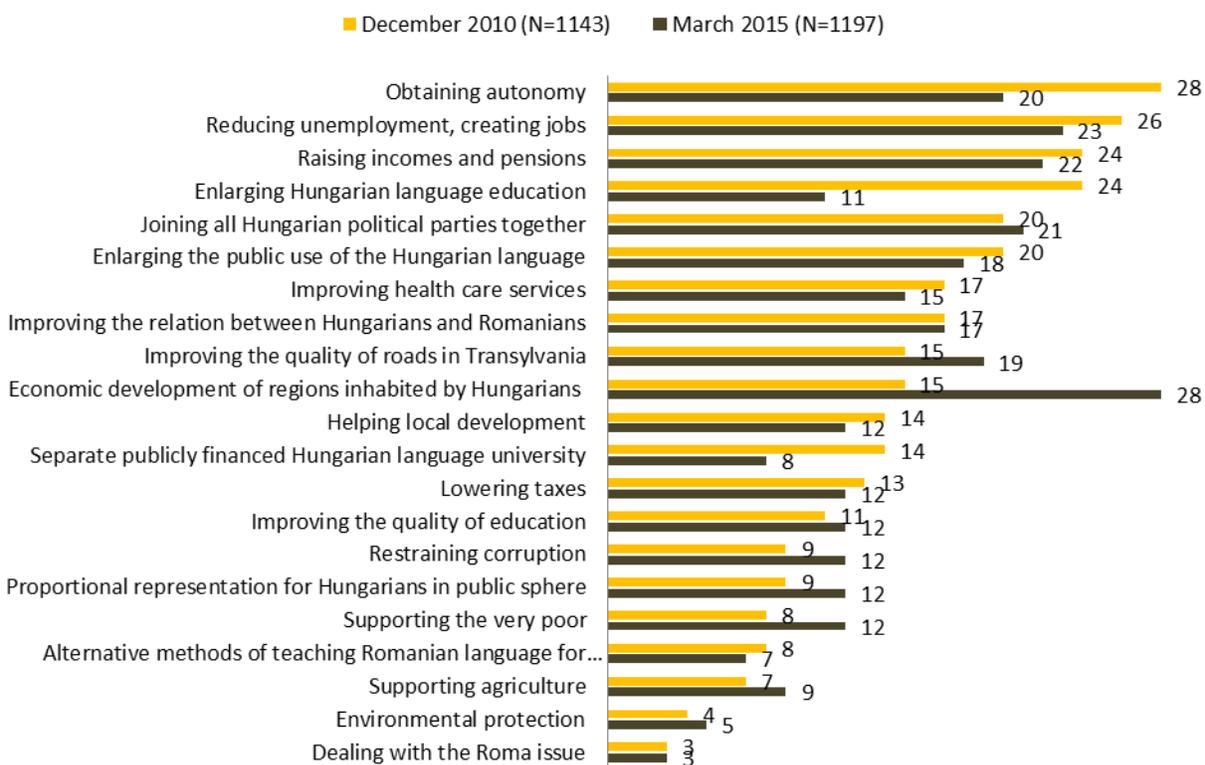
Category	Examples	Frequency	%
Hungarian language education	„Restoring Bolyai University”, „Separate Hungarian university”, „More Hungarian schools”.	256	32,3
Representing Hungarians	„They had to fight for us”, „They had to fight for minority rights”, „They had to support Hungarians”, „They should represent Hungarians in the parliament”	245	31
Social and economic concerns	„They should raise pensions”, „Combat poverty”, „Higher incomes”	223	28,1
Infrastructure, roads	„Better roads for Székelyland”, „Construct highway in Transylvania”	128	16,1
Restoring the unity among Hungarians	„They should stay together”, „They should agree with each-other”, „They should not fight each-other”, „Initiating unity among Hungarians”.	111	14,0
Benefits for certain social strata	„To be concerned about villages”, „Helping agriculture”, „They should help pensioners”	104	13,1
Autonomy	„They should realize autonomy”, „Self-governance for Székelyland”	92	11,6
Creating jobs	„Providing jobs for Hungarians”, „We need jobs”	71	9,1
Linguistic rights	„To be permitted to speak Hungarian”, „Hungarian language in public offices”, „Put the bilingual inscriptions according to the legal provisions”	62	7,8
The organization must be renewed	„Leaders must be changed”, „Young people should gain ground”, „Markó should renounce”	54	6,8
Health care	„Free medicine should be provided for everyone”	41	5,2
Combat corruption	„Without corruption”, „They shouldn't steal so much”	38	4,8
Respecting promises	„They should do what they promised”	26	3,3
Restitution	„Churches should receive back what was theirs”	25	3,2
Direct relation with the electorate	„Pay attention to what people say” „To listen to the people”	25	3,2
Strengthening economically regions inhabited by Hungarian	„They should provide some resources for Székelyland too”, „Softening economic oppression”	21	2,6
Community organizing	„Promoting cultural events” „Organizing national holidays”	17	2,1

Source: surveys by TransObjective consulting (RIRNM archive)

However, more recent results show a gradual shift in these expectations. The 2010 and 2015 surveys could provide some insight on this shift. Contrary to the 2007 survey, in these investigations a closed-ended question was used. The questionnaires listed the same options as in the case of the most important problems (combining ethnic and non-ethnic issues). On the one hand, it seems that here (as necessary exercises for RMDSZ) voters prioritized most highly issues affecting particularly the Hungarian community. On the other hand, it seems that these priorities have changed over the last half decade. Issues such as autonomy, Hungarian language education, or a separate Hungarian-language university, which previously used to have a central role in mobilizing the Hungarian community, have clearly lost importance. Conversely, items such “economic development of the regions inhabited by Hungarians”, “improving the quality of roads in Transylvania”, “supporting the very poor” and “supporting agriculture” became more important for the

Hungarian electorate. All of these items could be considered also as direct material benefits provided for the Hungarian electorate.

Figure 6. Which are the three most important issues that RMDSZ should deal with?



Source: Surveys by Kvantum-Research (RIRNM archive)

5.2. Neo-liberal elite-consensus in Romania and the lack of alternative for the ethnic vote

We have seen that Hungarian voters are much more concerned about economic issues affecting their daily life, than about issues related to the reproduction of the Hungarian ethno-national identity. They also think that their concerns are common with their fellow Romanian citizens. Then, why do they still vote for an ethnic party and how can this division along ethnic lines of the electorate be sustained? The question could be answered only partially through the ethnically segmented character of the patronage networks in Romania. The other part of the answer lies in the lack of alternative party appeals regarding the general social and economic issues.

One could note that a new elite-consensus concerning the desirable developmental pathways of Romania has emerged in late-1990s. Consensus on developmental pathways (or consensus on modernization) is a teleological construction, which may take shape in a field characterized by asymmetric power-relations if all actors owning significant amount of symbolic or cultural capital agreed on the desirable direction of the

social change. If this was the case, the subjective (more precisely the inter-subjective) nature of this teleological construction would be hidden²² and the desirable pathway would appear as taken for granted (as the only possible course of the events). The core idea of the new Romanian consensus was quite simple: the country should follow “Western social development”, perceived by Romanian political elites and intelligentsia as a coherent model.²³ Practically, this meant support for the geopolitical turn conducive to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and acceptance of neoliberal reforms fostered by transnational organizations. In the pre-accession period the main driver of policy-formation has been to meet criteria of EU accession. Later, unlike other Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Poland or the Czech Republic, in Romania no robust Euro-skeptic or anti-neoliberal political formations have appeared,²⁴ showing that the elite consensus that emerged in the late 1990s still holds. It is also important to mention that RMDSZ also subscribed to this neo-liberal consensus.

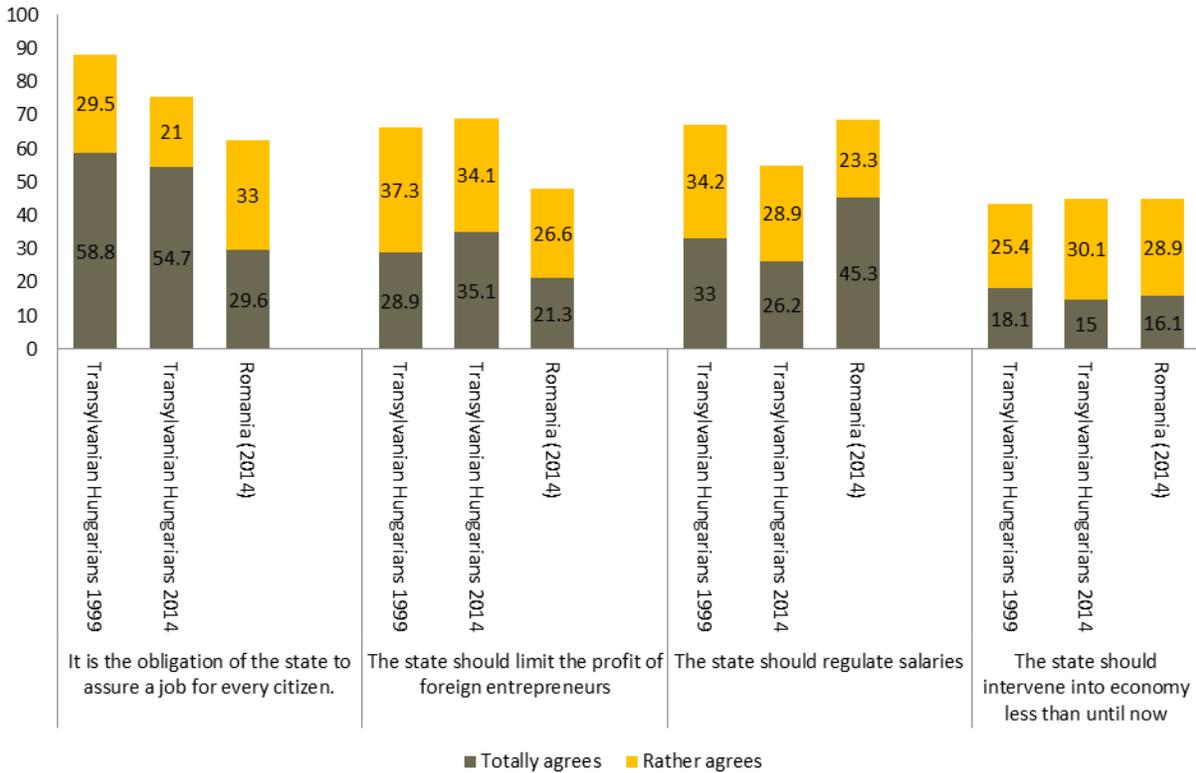
However, the popular support for this neo-liberal elite consensus is very scarce: the overwhelming majority of Romanians would support far more implication of the state in regulating economic processes and providing social security. These expectations are shared by Transylvanian Hungarians too. The table above shows that in 2014 75.6 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians considered that “*it is the obligation of the state to assure jobs for every citizen*”, 69.2 percent that “*the state should limit the profit of foreign entrepreneurs*”, 55.1 percent that “*the state should regulate salaries*” and only 45.1 percent agreed that “*the state should intervene less into the economy than until now*”. In 1999 these proportions were of 88.3, 66.7, 67.2 and 43.5 percent, respectively. As for the total population of Romania, anti-neoliberal attitudes are also prevalent. Data show that there is a huge gap between party positions (and more generally elite-discourses) and popular expectations with regard to the role of the state regarded as desirable. Most probably, if a well-articulated non-neoliberal alternative existed, it would be a serious challenge not only for existing mainstream parties, but also for RMDSZ.

²² On the difference between objective and subjective teleology see Elster (1982).

²³ A key text urging for new consensus on modernization is Boia (1997).

²⁴ The Greater Romania Party (PRM) and Dan Diaconescu’s People’s Party (PPDD) could be mentioned as exceptions. However, these parties did not succeed to stabilize their electoral support.

Figure 7. Attitudes toward the role of the state: the proportion of totally and rather agreeing answers (Transylvanian Hungarians 1999: N=1181; Transylvanian Hungarian 2014: N=781; Romania 2014: N=1200)



Source: Surveys by CCRIT (1999); RIRNM (2014) (RIRNM archive)

5.3. Bounded rationality and political patronage

During the last decades the model of bounded rationality has gained ground in the literature of ethnic politics. If we adopt this framework, we will certainly accept that voters generally have relatively scarce information on the policy programs and intentions of parties. They do not have sufficient time and knowledge to become properly informed regarding existing policy alternatives (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991). This is why they rely on informational cues or cognitive shortcuts. Chandra (2004, 33-47) and Posner (2005, 152-160) argued that ethnic markers are likely to become cognitive shortcuts because they can be easily identified. Skin color, wearing, name, language use or accent could all bear information about one's ethnicity, while knowledge about one's ideological commitment for instance is much more difficult to obtain. As a consequence, information constrains could reinforce the ethnic vote. However, there is another element in this model, namely favoritism in general, and ethnic favoritism in particular, which is a necessary precondition. Next to the easily identifiable ethnic markers, the presumption that elected officials will favor their fellow ethnics is also needed to sustain ethnic voting.

Chandra's term of patronage democracy is linked to this framework. According to her, patronage democracies have several common characteristics. First, the state is the main formal employer (or one of the main employers) and there is an interlocking between the political field and the economy (for instance, state institutions are important contractors for economic actors). Second, elected officials have a significant space of maneuver in the implementation of policy decision and in the allocation of public funds. Under these circumstances there is an increased likelihood that political particularism and the desire to obtain direct material benefits will motivate voters in their electoral choices. In Chandra's formulation both personally (jobs, social benefits etc.) and collectively (roads, schools, sewerage and other infrastructural investments) utilized benefits, obtained in exchange of electoral support enter under the label of political patronage. According to her, in patronage democracies voting behavior becomes more instrumental (expressive motivations lose ground), however, voters are scarcely informed regarding political programs and they find in fact this type of information quite inutile. What is of key importance is policy implementation. The main questions are who implements the policy and whether the interest of particular groups will be hurt during the implementation.

According to Chandra, under the circumstances of patronage democracy people will prefer candidates of their own ethnic background, thus tend to vote ethnic parties. However, not all ethnic parties succeed, but only those having a chance to gain offices and to provide material benefits for their followers. Otherwise the party will fail, irrespectively of its ethnic appeals. In other words, the success depends on three factors: (1) ethnic demography; (2) the monopoly of the party to represent the group under investigation, respectively (3) its access to public funds. If the ethnically defined segment of the electorate is not large enough, or the candidate does not have access to state resources, voters will act strategically and will support another candidate (even of other ethnic background) who is able to fulfill expectations concerning political patronage.

We should also note that in this framework political patronage is not an intrinsic characteristic of ethnic parties (or of certain parties) but a characteristic of the entire political regime (or of some segments of the political field). We also underscore that the shift toward linkages of a more clientelistic nature between RMDSZ and its Hungarian electorate cannot be properly interpreted without considering the broader political context in Romania. In Romania political patronage is a quite widespread phenomenon (Volintiru 2012), and political patronage networks in Transylvania are to a great extent ethnically segmented (Kiss-Székely 2016). Thus, RMDSZ has a quasi-monopoly to allocate funds for Hungarian cultural institutions. In this respect local administrations are of key importance. Romania has moved toward a more decentralized structure of administration in the pre-accession period, and, according to analysts the decentralization also reconfigured networks of political patronage. Mayors of major cities and county council presidents have emerged as important actors, as they have gained a central role in coordinating local level political actors. These further could lobby for investments through county level actors. We should highlight that, under these circumstances, RMDSZ gained broader possibilities in the Hungarian majority area (in Harghita and Covasna counties), where it dominated both the local administration and the county councils. However, in the ethnically mixed counties (Mureș, Satu-Mare, Bihor and Sălaj) the ethnic segmentation of patronage networks was also existent, with Hungarian mayors and local elites lobbying through RMDSZ for public funds.

We already saw that the importance of expectations towards RMDSZ to allocate material resources for Hungarian inhabited area has grown. In what follows we will provide further empirical evidence highlighting the importance of this factor.

(1) Hungarians overwhelmingly supported the governmental participation of RMDSZ in the past fifteen years (Kiss-Székely 2016). A survey conducted in the Hungarian majority area of Székelyland asked about

the factors lying behind this support. First, next to the fact that respondents presumed a generally positive effect on the community, the majority of respondents also thought that governmental participation has a positive effect on receiving public funds. Second, 40 percent of them felt that governmental participation had a positive effect on his personal life. We consider this a rather high proportion, showing that many people tend to link their personal life chances to ethno-political processes.²⁵

Table 8. In your opinion, what is the effect of the governmental participation of RMDSZ on the following (May 2011; Hungarians of Székelyland, N=2898)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
On the life of the Hungarian community	63,9	31,5	4,6
On your and your family's personal life	40,0	56,9	3,1
On public investments in Székelyland	58,1	39,1	2,7
On the enforcement of minority rights	49,9	43,4	6,7
On repealing nationalist attacks affecting the Hungarian community	53,7	38,8	7,5

Source: survey by Kvantum-Research

Focus group interviews also largely confirm that people expect RMDSZ to attract funds to their settlement/region. In particular, this is why the respondents found governmental participation as benefic. The following statements are taken from focus groups carried out in April 2015:

“It was better when they were there. It could be seen also from Lupeni [a largely Hungarian village in Harghita county]. Lots of amounts have been won from different funds. At least the roads have been repaired, the sewerage has been done. It had an effect.”

“It was good to have a say in these matters, to know what kind of applications exist, what kind of programs exist. They could promote the Hungarian community”

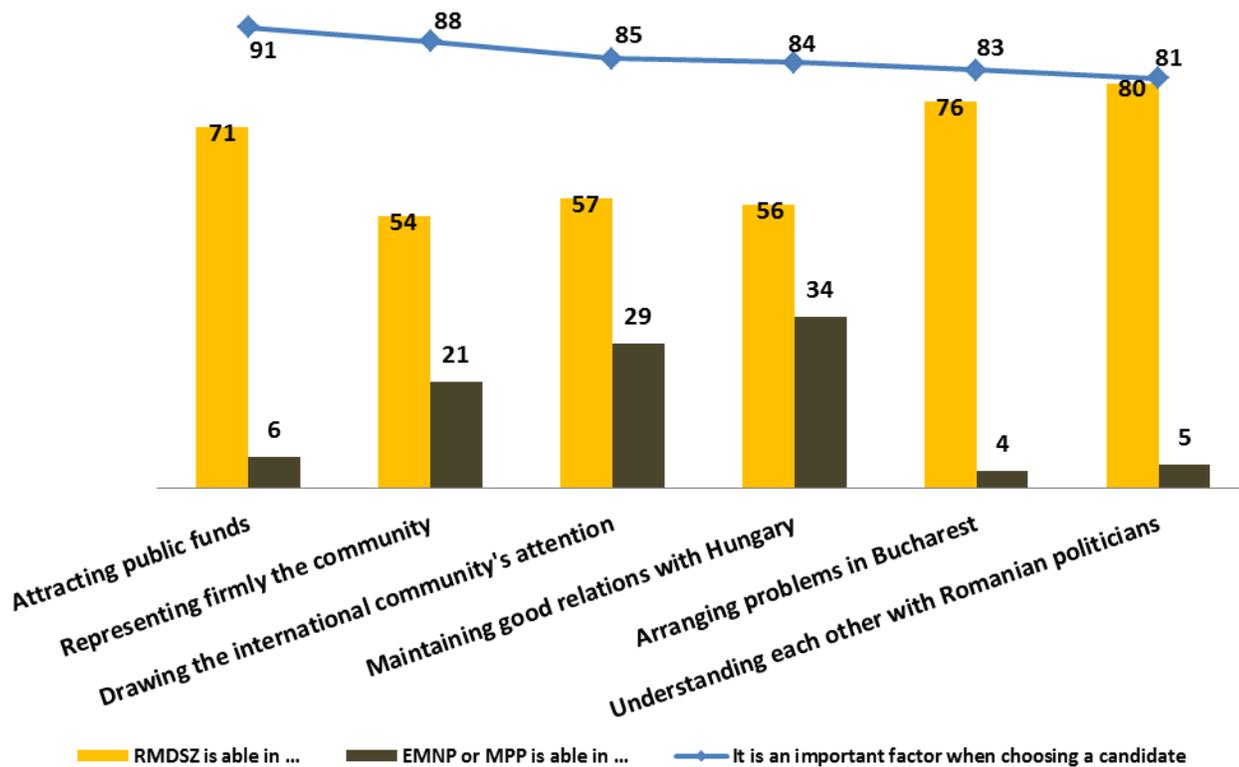
“Anyway, it's much easier to resolve the problems, if they are there. Take the example of the hospital [in Târgu Secuiesc, a largely Hungarian-inhabited town in Covasna county]. If RMDSZ had not been in the government, by no way could it have been realized.”

“They are closer to the money. This is why it is better also for us.”

(2) According to a 2013 survey, 91 percent of the Transylvanian Hungarians considered important the ability of a party/candidate “to attract public funds for the region/settlement” when making their electoral choice. 83 percent considered important to be able “to resolve problems in Bucharest” and 80 percent “understanding each-other with Romanian politicians”. Results also showed that these were the dimensions in which RMDSZ was clearly superior to its intra-ethnic challengers, MPP and EMNP. It is also evident that for Hungarian voters bargaining with majority actors for public funds and “representing firmly the community” are not mutually exclusive pursuits.

²⁵ See also Ferree (2011).

Figure 8. Factors influencing the electoral choices of Transylvanian Hungarians (N=1232)



6. Conclusions

Our paper argued that explanations concerning ethnic block voting are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Expressive and instrumental motivations can reinforce each other and their combination can be conducive to voting for ethnic parties. It is also important that the weight of different determinants can change over time.

We focused on Transylvanian Hungarians, as one of Central and Eastern Europe's politically activated ethnic groups, respectively on RMDSZ, one of the most stable ethnic parties in the region. Empirical evidence shows that while ethnic block-voting seems to persist, there was a shift in voters' motivations. In the 1990s ethno-political claims concerning language use, the educational system and national symbols were the primary factors driving ethnic mobilization. This was also linked to strong expressive-affective motivations of voting behavior. However, starting in the late 1990s a process of moderation has taken place. Hungarians have gained some concessions regarding identity issues, while Hungarian political elites have been incorporated in the consolidating democratic political field. Incorporation meant that RMDSZ gained (limited) access to policy decisions and allocation of public funds. This latter was of key importance in establishing linkages in post-Communist Romania. From our perspective, it is of key importance that

emerging patronage-networks were ethnically segmented. This means for instance that mayors of Hungarian inhabited administrative units lobbied through RMDSZ for public investments, while following the process of decentralization local actors became unavoidable in ethnic mobilization. RMDSZ also gained monopoly in the resource allocation for Hungarian cultural institutions and important positions in the educational system.

Analysts emphasized this process of moderation and emphasized that this moderation could occur even under the circumstances of intra-ethnic competition (Bochsler-Szöcsik 2012; Zuber 2013; Zuber-Szöcsik 2015). However, the regular focus of their analysis has been on programmatic elements. Our study emphasizes that a more complex model concerning shifting motivations is needed even in cases where electoral data suggest the stability of ethnic-block voting.

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