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THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AS THE KEY FACTOR
OF THE PARTY SYSTEM IN SPAIN[1]

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ABSTRACT
The article analysed the electoral system in elections to the Spanish Congress, its proportionality and impact on the shape of the party system. It is based on the assumption that long-standing dominance of two political parties is the result of settings of the electoral system. The main aim was to identify the key factors that influence the final results of elections. By analysis of the individual components of the electoral system, the paper identified the size of constituencies in combination with the electoral formula that have key impact on election results. Based on quantitative data the text showed that the adjustment of the system does not generate two party system format. However, under certain circumstances it can produce results with a significant disproportionality. The article also explained the institutional factors that allow the relevant representation of parties in third and fourth place. By knowing the facts, paper reviews previous theories that pointed to the direct closeness of the electoral system and the Spanish form of the two party system.

Key words: proportionality, electoral system, district magnitude, party system, electoral threshold

Introduction

Despite its proportional character, the electoral system of the Spanish Congress has shown disproportional results for many years. From the results have benefited in the biggest part two major parties. Practically, only at the beginning of new democratic era in Spain's history, the electoral results were quite different. Since these were the first elections after fall of Franco regime, the outcome can be explained by several factors, which occurred in Spanish political system (consolidation period, atmosphere of consensus, weaker

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psychological effect of electoral system, etc.). Despite the fact that the factors cannot be considered as relevant today, the party system has changed after many years and Spain of today is heading to a coalition government, which would occur for the first time in Spanish history.

The question of interactions between electoral and party system in Spain is not thoroughly examined in Slovak (or Czech) area. On the contrary, in Spain it is an object of interest of many authors, and is one of the most examined topics in general. For all works, we may mention **J. R. Montero** with his article *El debate sobre el sistema electoral* (1997) or **Antonio Martínez-Pujalte**, who in addition to evaluating the system also proposes its reform in *El sistema electoral español*: *Contribución a un debate* (2008). It is also important to mention that the interpretation of this topic has been influenced by that fact that the functioning of the system has not change for many years. This, in turn, has influenced the discussion, which started to focus on possible reforms of the system. Therefore, one of the ambitions is the reformulation of some older theories linked with the operation of the system. These assumptions result from a new situation, which occurred after 2015 election.

The main aim of the article is to identify key factors of the electoral system to the Spanish Congress and show their influence on the party system in the country. The article is a case study of Spanish electoral system, using quantitative data. The text works with the main research question: Which principal variables have an impact on the electoral system to the Spanish Congress and to what extend their effect shapes the party system in the country? The 2015 elections in Spain were (in some meaning) crucial. Two parties, which were (until that) dominant in the party system, lost their position. From institutional point of view, how is it possible to explain the success of parties in third and fourth place?

Theoretical framework of the work is mainly based on researches of interactions between electoral and party system, with emphasis on examination of variables of proportional electoral system. In this case, the text works with publications of **Sartori** (2001; 2005), **Duverger** (1964) or **Lijphart** (1994). Part about proportionality is mainly based on researches of topic expert **Gallagher** (1991) and a specialist from Czech Republic, **Tomáš Lebeda** (2001a; 2001b; 2008). Quantitative data necessary for our research were obtained from the official website of the Spanish Ministry of Interior.

The text is divided in several sections. First part shortly describes relation between electoral and party system, as well as shaping and development of the

party system in Spain from 1977 to the present. The part puts emphasis on understanding the system as a whole. Second chapter analyses proportionality and its values in Spanish case. Next part examines principal causes of disproportionality in Spain, with focus on the key variables of proportional electoral system. Last chapter analyses setup of electoral system in Spain and identifies main impacts of the electoral system on the party system.

1 Party System in Spain and its Relation to the Electoral System

Interactions between electoral and party systems are commonly known and popular topics in professional political science circles. Theories ascribing direct impact of electoral system on formation of a party system began to develop mainly after the Second World War. French theorist **Maurice Duverger** established an essential pillar for further discussions and research on this topic, formulating three basic premises (later also called laws) in this respect. In his book *Political parties*, **Duverger** supposes three effects of electoral systems to party systems. First, he argues that proportional electoral systems support multiparty format, where the parties are stable, independent and rigid. Then, he evaluates the impact of the absolute majority system, which according to his study (like proportional system) encourages multiparty system, but parties are flexible, dependent, and relatively stable in this case. As the last effect, he considers two-party system, strong supported by the first-past-the-post system (Duverger, 1964). These three premises (laws) were later reformulated into two better-known arguments, which are called **Duverger** hypothesis and **Duverger** law.

Significantly, **Giovanni Sartori** brings critical view of the above-mentioned theories. Italian political scientist recognizes the relationship between electoral and party system, but (compared to **Duverger**) comes with a slightly different view on the issue. Contrary to **Duverger**, he assesses the impact of electoral system on party system as more complicated. **Sartori** assumes broader context. Just like **Duverger**, who supposes so-called mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems, **Sartori** also understands the relationship between electoral and party system as two-fold. In addition to an effect on the political parties, he sees also an impact on behaviour of voters. "*The effect on the voters is generally described as a restraining, manipulative, constraining, or even coercive impact (in a feeble sense of the term). Let us*

settle for constraining effect…" (Sartori, 1994, p. 32). There is relative consensus in this respect between both authors and there are no serious contradictions. A discrepancy between the authors, however, is created by vagueness and inability of verification of **Duverger's** claims (according to **Sartori**). In relation to the so-called **Duverger** law, which concerns the impact of the first-past-the-post voting, **Sartori** believes there is a need to distinguish between the impact of the electoral system for structured and unstructured party system, respectively. The resulting effect of interconnections of these systems is very different, according to him (Ibidem, 1994). Due to the complexity of the relationship between electoral and party systems, **Sartori**'s effort is not to simplify, but – on the contrary – to grasp consistently and concisely the logic of this issue in pursuit of the adoption of certain generally valid rules. Besides **Sartori**, **Duverger's** concepts have been checked and modified by many other authors (Rae, 1967; Cox, 1997 Taagepera, Shugart, 1989, Riker, 2003). Despite this fact, the principal idea of interactions between electoral and party system is still valid.

Naturally, the relation between electoral and party system is an object of interest in Spai as well. Consequently, there are many authors researching the topic, especially the Spanish case. There is also broad consensus between them. **Martínez-Pujalte** claims that "*the electoral system favors by major form two strongest parties...and starting from third position cause strong damage to nationwide parties*" (Martínez-Pujalte, 2008, p. 9). **Montero** continues in the similar way. According to him, the electoral system and "*its mechanical effects generate over-representation of first two parties at the expense of smaller parties*" (Montero, 1997, p. 14). Authors **Oñate-Ocaña** come to nearly identical conclusion in their research. The authors argue that the congressional elections generate "*high disproportionality, which favors first two parties and harms third and fourth party*" (Ocaña, Oñate, 1999, p. 232). Despite very similar conclusions of several authors it cannot be stated that Spanish party system has been monotonous. Quite on the contrary, during 38 years since the first free election after the fall of the Franco regime, it has undergone several changes. It has happened despite the fact that the form of the electoral system remained unchanged. Although we may observe tendency to dominance of two political parties from the initial election, held in 1977, the dominant parties have not been the same from the beginning. The extent of their dominance during each election period has varied as well. From the typological point of view, due to these variations it is possible to discern three important phases in the

development of Spanish party system in the period from 1977 to 2015. These phases are limited by election results, which in more or less regular rhythm caused exchanges of political and ruling elites in the country.

The first phase is limited by period 1977–1982, which in **Sartori**'s terms can be considered as a moderate multiparty system (Sartori, 2005). The period is characterised by existence of two parties with significant electoral superiority. In addition to these parties, there are some medium-sized parties gathering approximately ten percent of votes. Regional parties that are achieving profits commensurate with their capabilities hold traditional position in the system. However, because of their territorial scope, they are considerably limited. A change occurred in the election in 1982, which meant large increases for the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). In terms of seats, the party gained the absolute majority, while its distance from the second most voted party was very significant. From that moment onwards, Spanish party system can be consider as a predominant party system. This period lasted until 1993, when the PSOE once again (for the fourth time in a row) managed to win the election, but this time with much narrower margin of votes. The loss of votes and seats symbolizes the end of the period associate with the Prime Minister **Felipe González** (Llera 2010). The following period until the election held in 2015 can be defined as a two-party system (Ware, 2009). This indication can be little bit controversial because the gains of two largest parties (People's Party and Spanish Socialist Workers Party) do not always reach values enabling them to create a majority government. For cases when gain of the major party is less than 50 % of seats, parties are obliged to cooperate with regional parties to obtain legislative support. However, as the government during this period always consisted of one party, the party system can be regarded as two-party system. Spanish two-party system in practice means existence of two strong political parties, reaching election results enabling them to take a self-governing majority position, with reaching the absolute majority of seats or as minority government with the support of one of the regional parties.

The illustration of development of election results shown as a percentage of votes gained in the elections compared with gained seats can be found in Table no. 1. In this case, we may observe the above-mentioned increase in the percentage of profits of two largest political parties, especially since the election of 1982 (from the 1993 election with an upward trend). The development peaked in 2008, when the most significant shift was recorded. In the 2011 elections, two strongest parties suffered small reduction of the percentage,

which in this case was mainly due to large loss of votes of governing PSOE. However, 2015 result can be described as a substantial drop, which marks the change of the party system in Spain.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of votes of two parties with the highest electoral gains[2]

	Votes	Seats
1977 (UCD + PSOE)	63,76 %	81,14 %
1979 (UCD + PSOE)	65,24 %	82,57 %
1982 (PSOE + AP)	74,47 %	88,28 %
1986 (PSOE + AP)	70,03 %	82,57 %
1989 (PSOE + PP)	65,39 %	80,57 %
1993 (PSOE + PP)	73,54 %	85,71 %
1996 (PP + PSOE)	76,42 %	87,71 %
2000 (PP + PSOE)	78,68 %	88 %
2004 (PSOE + PP)	80,30 %	89,14 %
2008 (PSOE + PP)	83,81 %	92,28 %
2011 (PP + PSOE)	73,39 %	84,57 %
2015 (PP + PSOE)	**50,73 %**	**60,86 %**

Source: Author (Ministerio del Interior de España, 2015).

Parliamentary election of December 20, 2015, was a major turning point in Spanish party system. The scheme that worked in the country for many years has changed dramatically. For the first time since 1982, there is a necessity to create a coalition government, in which also another party than just PSOE or PP will be represented. Although the changes in the party system were officially present since December's election in 2015, the Spanish party system has

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[2] Explanatory notes: PSOE – *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* – Spanish Socialist Workers Party; UCD – *Union de Centro Democrático* – Democratic Union; AP – *Alianzia Popular* – People's Alliance; PP – *Partido Popular* – People's Partyg

started to change already some time earlier. The beginning of the process goes back to June 2014, when political party *Podemos* (We Can) managed to gain representation in the European Parliament. It won 8 % of votes in the election, which has guaranteed five seats (out of 54). Although at that point was not possible to speak about the conversion of the system, the popularity of *Podemos* has gradually increased. One of the first surveys after the election in August 2014 measured 10.7 % for the new party. Three months later, its popularity almost tripled, reaching the value of 27.7 %. The party was at that time the most popular one in Spain (El País, 2015).

Podemos was not the only party that broke the sovereign status of the pair PP-PSOE. Just a few weeks after its rise in the Spanish political scene, party *Ciudadanos* (Citizens) appeared. Although a popularity of this group has not risen as straight forward as in the case of *Podemos*, the party gradually acquired significant position in the Spanish pre-election fight. The success of both new parties at the same time was made possible, among other things, because of their programmatic differences. While *Podemos* is considered a leftist-populist party (based on its program), *Ciudadanos* is considered as a liberal party. From this point of view, the voters in Spain were offered an alternative on both sides of the ideological spectrum.

Based on the relationship between electoral and party systems, overrepresentation of two strongest parties, and knowledge of the above-mentioned authors from Spain, it could be assumed that the electoral system in Spain leads to two-party system. However, the outcome of the election of 2015 suggests that even though the electoral system has a disproportionate results, it does not hinder the representation of other nationwide parties. Taking into account the above-mentioned facts, the following hypotheses can be formulated.

H1: The electoral system of the Spanish Congress favours two strongest political parties.

H2: Success of nationwide parties finished in third and fourth place is made possible by efficient territorial distribution of their electoral support.

First of the hypotheses is examined based on the relationship between electoral and party systems, research of proportionality and by focusing on key electoral system variables that affect election results and party system. Finally, it

also operates with a theory of effective electoral threshold, which quantifies the possibilities for parties to gain seats. Consequently, second hypothesis is examined by extension of the theory of effective electoral threshold, using quantitative data from electoral results.

2 Proportionality of the Electoral System

In electoral and party system interactions, the proportionality of election results represents one of the most significant indicators, which can affect electoral output by very inconspicuous way. Sometimes the results can be affected to such extent that, i.e. proportional voting shows signs more frequently associated with majority voting. The impact of these factors leads to situations that can be called overrepresentation, or under-representation of certain political parties. In other words, there is a situation when number of votes for a party do not equal to the number of seats allocated to it. As among other prominent authors, Czech political scientist **Tomáš Lebeda** concludes, "*the measure of proportionality of election results significantly determines the shape of party system*" (Lebeda, 2008, p. 29).

Probably the most credible way to determine a degree of proportionality of an electoral system is by mathematical calculations. There is a large number of views (indices), which are dedicated to the proportionality of electoral systems. Each one has some specific features, which cause different results of its measurements. Their mutual differentiation is based on the very logic of their functioning. Each index prefers a different electoral formula in its calculation, which creates variations in their conclusions (Gallagher, 1991). The text introduces the indices systematically, also with regard to their suitability for use to the political system of Spain.

Despite the fact that social sciences differ from the natural sciences in many ways, there is the imaginary linking at this point. Measurement of proportionality is, in fact, based on complex mathematical formulas that results in the so-called index of proportionality. Its main task is to know how closely results of an election are from real allocation of seats in a legislature. Although the function of these indices is to measure the proportionality of electoral systems, their real output is, by contrast, the rate of disproportionality[3] of the system. However, the fact does not change much on the examination process (Charvát, 2010). The

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[3] The exception is Rose index, which results in the measure of proportionality

question is how to measure proportionality with the highest accuracy? In literature can be found a large number of indices but it is not easy to identify the ideal one. The indices tend to be named by their authors. The starting one can be *Loosemore-Hanby index*, which is one of the most used. "*The value of this index (D) is given by half of sum of the absolute values obtained from differences between shares of votes and shares of seats of each party. The differences between the percentage of votes (v) and the percentage of seats (s) of each party are converted to absolute values, which are then counted and the result is divided by two*" (Chytílek et al., 2009, p. 81). The index measures the resulting value on the scale of 0–100, where higher value means higher degree of disproportionality.

The next one, *Rae index*, eliminates the shortcomings of the previous measurement, in respect of large number of parties. Unlike Loosemore-Hanby index, the Rae one does not divide the absolute sum by number two, but by the total number of parties (n). However, this index is also unable to avoid same shortcomings. The Rae index is characterised by sensitivity to excessive number of small parties, which leads to reducing the level of disproportionality compared to reality (Gallagher, 1991). The fact may be problematic in the case of Spain, since the number of candidate parties tends to be relatively high. A reduction of the number in next elections can attempt to compare results over time almost impossible.

A slightly different method of calculating the proportionality of election results is using *Least squares index*, designed by **Michael Gallagher**. The index is more difficult to calculate than the previous two, given the efforts to overcome the shortcomings mentioned in previous two cases. However, the results are still affected by preferred electoral formula, just like in previous cases (Lebeda, 2008). Number of indices measuring the proportionality of election results that can be found in literature is very extensive. With intention of comparing their results, only a few were selected in the section. *D´Hondt index* is the last one to be presented. The index is based on a completely different method of calculation than the above-mentioned. Its results are not measured on the scale 0–100, but by approximation to value 1, while number 1 is the symbol of perfect proportionality. This type of measurement makes it practically impossible to compare it directly with the other indices, which can be a seen as a disadvantage. The index is sensitive mainly to overrepresentation of small parties (Gallagher, 1991). However, an advantage can be the fact that the index is based on the same electoral formula, which is used to convert votes to seats in Spain. Mathematic expression of mentioned indices is displayed in Table no. 2.

Table 2: Mathematic expression of indices of proportionality

Index name	Calculation formula
Loosemore-Hanby index	$D = \frac{1}{2} \Sigma \ |v - s|$
Rae index	$I = 1/n \Sigma \ |v - s|$
Least squares index	$LSq = \sqrt{[\frac{1}{2} \Sigma \ (v - s)^2]}$
D´Hondt index	$H = \max s/v$

Source: Edited from Charvát, 2010

Using the previous knowledge in practice highlights the significant impact of the current form of the electoral system on the party system in Spain. In light of the displayed values, the electoral system seems quite disproportional. Table no. 3 works with the electoral data from 1996 elections until 2015 elections. To demonstrate the relevance of data we have used four indices presented above.

Table 3: Comparison of results of the proportionality indices from 1996 election

	LH index	Rae index	LSq index	D´Hondt index
1996	8,9	0,27	5,55	1,15
2000	9,95	0,21	6,08	1,17
2004	9,25	0,19	5,1	1,12
2008	9,05	0,19	4,88	1,10
2011	12,45	0,41	7,25	1,19
2015	10,55	0,38	6,05	1,22

Source: Author (Ministerio del Interior de España, 2015).

Through the data shown in the table, we may observe some interesting parallels in the measurement of referred indices. The indices display consensus in the entire range of examination. In this case, it does not matter how numerical expression of the indices is, they are increasing or descending symmetrically, depending on individual election. The exception in this regard is produced by *Rae index*, which measures the average value of disproportionality for one party. The index shows significantly distorted results, compared to the others. The fact results from a large number of candidate parties (in some cases it is even up to 97 political parties). The absolute majority of these parties did not win even one seat, as the electoral results of the parties are usually less than 0.1 %. This results in fluctuations that produced in comparison with other indices. The outcomes of the other indices can be interpreted with greater credibility. Their values indicate a discrepancy of the profits of seats of each party with a number of votes received by political parties in an election.

According to *Loosemore-Hanby index*, the average number of seats in the 2015 election, which should be reallocated in other way reached the limit of 10.55 %. In the same situation, *Least Squares index* comes to number 6.05%. The data from *d´Hondt index* can be explained in a different way. The index reflects the value of overrepresentation of the party, which shows the most significant difference between the number of seats and the number of votes received (for the party in positive meaning), by number 1.22. Put it simply, the value may be interpreted like there is a political party that has on average 22% higher proportion of seats than votes. Meanwhile, there is no other party with higher proportion in the political system. In conclusion, the results of measured indices appear different at the first sight, but in terms of the logic of their functioning they are very similar.

Despite the fact that the results of the indices may not seem high, we may conclude that there is significant number of seats, which in terms of fulfilment of perfect proportionality[4] should be allocated otherwise. Taking in account the nature of the party system, this reallocation could lead to some significant changes. The changes tend to be affected by setting of the variables of the electoral system. The topic is discussed in the next section.

3 The Main Variables of Proportional Electoral System

The elections to the lower house of the Spanish Parliament (Congress) are based practically on the rules unchanged from their establishment in 1977. They are implemented through the proportional electoral system. However, this indication may be confusing in many cases. The fact results from ability of proportional representation system to produce significantly different outcomes depending on its configuration. Many factors (variables) that modify the system to extend that speaking about the Spanish electoral system can result in finding that major cause for such behaviour is deeply embedded in the system.

By looking into the world of professional literature on the issue of electoral systems can be found multiple views of variables that can play the key role in the whole process. The most common are district magnitude, electoral formula, legal threshold, number and character of tier districting, and ultimately ballot

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[4] It has to be mentioned that achieving perfect proportionality is almost impossible. Perfect proportionality it is rather a kind of an ideal model, which the electoral systems should try to approximate.

structure[5]. Although differences among the authors are not as severe as they usually are in other areas, the relevance of the variables is also subject of preference of the individual authors. Among the most famous we can mention **Arend Lijphart** who presumes as the key variables the electoral formula, the district magnitude, the electoral threshold and the size of an Assembly (Lijphart, 1994). On the other hand, **Douglas Rae** considers the electoral formula, the district magnitude and the ballot structure to be the principal variables (Rae, 1967). A specialist from Czech Republic **Tomáš Lebeda** bases his research on the electoral formula and the district magnitude, which are complemented by legal threshold and the number and character of tier districting (Lebeda, 2001a). The above-mentioned shows that the overlap between the authors is in the area of district magnitude and the electoral formula, which means that these variables can be considered as the principal ones.

The electoral districts can be examined from different points of view. In this case, we are interested mainly in their size, which divides them into several categories. In general, there are small districts, in which 2–5 seats are distributed. Medium-sized districts are characterised by range of 6–10 seats and large districts are those in which the number of seats contains two and more digits (Taagepera, Shugart, 1989). In terms of proportionality, small districts represent the biggest problem. From their very nature, the results that they producing are not allowing to succeed a greater number of parties and very often produce disproportionate results. The results, therefore, cannot be corrected by any type of conversion of votes to seats. Less proportional results are often produced by districts of medium size as well. However, in this case, they are more correctable and the effect is not so strong. In case of constituencies with double-digit number of comparted seats, the disproportionate result comes rarely.

The district magnitude as the main variable used to be related to electoral formula. This term refers to a method determining how the votes for a party translate into the seats. The electoral formulas are divided into two basic categories, namely electoral divisors and electoral quotas (Dančišin, 2013). However, in terms of proportionality it is much more substantial another

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[5] Ballot structure is the way in which a voter is entitled to vote, in other words if it is possible for him to choose candidates freely, to choose limited number of them, or he has the opportunity to vote only for a uniform set of candidates.

criterion. None of the electoral formulas can be regarded as perfectly proportional. Moreover, their settings often favour certain type of party and they usually contain considerable shortcomings. This fact is reflected in their frequency. One of the most proportional one is *Hare quota*. Its drawback is that it is not able to allocate all seats in the first round. Other quotas (based on the previous one) are capable to allocate more seats in first round, but on the other hand, they are less proportional (Lebeda 2008). Selecting the most proportional formula among the divisors may be a little more challenging. The most commonly used divisor is admittedly *d´Hondt's,* which is able to produce proportional results mainly in large districts. This does not occur, however, in combination with small districts where its use causes severe disproportionality in favour of the biggest parties. On the contrary, some other divisors (e.g. *St. Laguë*) have the opposite effect in this respect. They are favouring the small and medium-sized parties, which also cannot be considered as proportional. The specific utilisation of electoral formulas is, therefore, in many cases tailored to the nature of districts. The formula can reduce or raise their effectiveness. The fact also demonstrates the interconnection of these two variables.

Which other variables in addition to these two basic can be considered as the key ones? We have already mentioned the ballot structure. An impact of this variable on the result of the electoral process cannot be considered significant. Whether there is a possibility for a voter to express with the party vote also personal preferences is relation to the question of proportionality of the results almost meaningless. The situation is quite similar when it come to the the size of an Assembly, preferred by **Lijphart**. Some authors consider as an important variable the number and character of tier districting. Certainly, this factor may influence the outcome of the election. However, in the case of Spain this variable does not have significant importance because all seats are allocated in one tier. The last mentioned variable is the legal threshold. It may be relevant indeed, especially when it is set quite high. Nevertheless, in Spanish congressional elections it seems to be rather symbolic. Since its relevance may not be clear at first, it is also included in the analysis in the next chapter. The basic variables, which will be assessed, are three. The legal threshold, the electoral formula and the district magnitude.

4 The Electoral System of Congress

The political system of Spain has undergone many changes in its history. From a monarchy it was gradually transformed into a republic to become a monarchy again; then a republic and after the Civil War a monarchy again. However, the monarchy was not headed by a king. The chief of the state was General **Franco.** Since the 1930s, the country was under the influence of non-democratic regime, which ended with the death of its leader (Gonzalez, 2006). Taking into account the period during which it is not possible to speak about a modern representative democracy, and with regard to the relevance of examined data, this part of the text, which is dedicated to the electoral system in Spain, is focusing exclusively on the period since 1977. It was during this period after the fall of Franco´s regime when the first free election after more than forty years was held. At the beginning of this part should also be noted that the legislature of Spain, which carries the name *Cortes Generales* is composed of two chambers, *Congreso de los Diputados* (lower house) and the *Senado* (upper house) (Guerrero et al., 2010). In terms of the competences of the interaction among the parliamentary chambers defined in the Constitution, the following lines of text devoted primarily to the lower chamber. The larger amount of powers of the Congress makes it more relevant element for the examination in relation to its impact on development of party system in the country, as it would be the case of the Senate. [6]

Electoral systems are usually designed with respect to demands of the political leaders who have a power at that moment. Naturally, the leaders want to preserve the continuation of the power and the electoral system can be a very useful instrument to achieve this goal. The similar opinion was expressed by a Spanish political scientist **Sven Wynants**, who talks about intentional modification of the electoral system in favour of one party. "*There is no doubt that the Spanish electoral system was set up with the aim of favoring the interests of the former pro-government political party (UCD)*" (Wynants, 2006, p. 98). From today's perspective, it may be added that regardless of whether the system was set up to favour one party or not, the system has served to maintain

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[6] The upper chamber of the Spanish Parliament (*Senado*) has only very limited impact on the adoption of laws in the country. The Senate has strong position in question of potential changes of the Constitution, and in such case the approval of both chambers is required. Otherwise, it is possible to outvote its decision by Congress (Kysela, 2004).

the hegemony of two parties for a long time. The parties have altered the power in Spain between themselves while one party have governed by itself or with the support of one of the local parties.

In question of the setting of the electoral system, several important factors with notable influence can be observed. Except for the fact that it is a system of proportional representation it should be emphasized that the elections take place in 52 districts, which have a different size. There are 350 elected deputies in total; each constituency is entitled to have at least two representatives (Ceuta and Melilla have guaranteed one deputy). The remaining 248 seats are distributed among the districts based on the population size (Ley Orgánica del Régimen Electoral General, 2011). The largest number of seats is allocated in the district of the capital city Madrid (36).

In context of conversion of votes to seats, it is necessary for a party to obtain at least three percent of the valid votes in a district. Given the number of districts in Spain, it is clear that the effectiveness of the legal threshold is close to zero and its effect on the outcome of the electoral process is practically identical with the efficiency. Mathematically, it is not even possible for the legal threshold to be applied in other districts, such as Madrid or Barcelona. All the other districts have, in fact, higher electoral threshold than the legal threshold. Therefore, as it was indicated above, in terms of application of specific variables defining measure of proportionality in an election, the legal threshold as the key factor can be excluded.

The much more significant variable in the case of Congress election is the electoral formula. The allocation of the seats is provided by D´Hondt method. In practice, this means that the electoral gains of parties are divided by series of numbers starting with one and continuing in the line of 2, 3, 4, 5 etc., until there are allocated all the seats belonging to the district. As it was mentioned, the electoral formula is considered as proportional only in a certain type of districts. However, the question is how the method can affect the results of elections and through it also the party system in Spain. To determine the impact of the electoral divisor on the overall results in this case it is appropriate to create a model situation with application of two other distinct electoral formulas and then compare their results with the original D´Hondt method. Since the D´Hondt method favours big parties (according to theories), to compare the effects the additional value is Sainte-Laguë divisor that is, on the contrary, protective to small and medium-sized parties. Finally, the Hare quota, which is considered as one of the most proportional electoral formulas at all, is also included in the

comparison (Lebeda, 2001a). In terms of representativeness, a district Asturias was selected. There are comparted eight seats. Additionally, the district is also interesting because of very similar nationwide results of the 2015 election in respect of the parties that gained top four places. Data from the electoral formulas comparison are shown in the Table no. 4.

Table 4: Comparison of the results of the election using different electoral formulas

	Votes	D´Hondt	Sainte-Laguë	Hare
PP	186 586	3	2	2
	30,2 %	37,5 %	25 %	25 %
PSOE	144 017	2	2	2
	23,3 %	25 %	25 %	25 %
Podemos	132 007	2	2	2
	21,3 %	25 %	25 %	25 %
Ciudadanos	83 885	1	1	1
	13,6 %	12,5 %	12,5 %	12,5 %
Unidad Popular	52 316	0	1	1
	8,5 %		12,5 %	12,5 %

Source: Author (Elecciones Generales, 2015).

Summarizing the results of the comparison of electoral formulas, Table no. 4 shows that through variation of the electoral formula some changes in distribution of seats occurs. However, it cannot be claimed that higher proportionality was achieved by this technique. From the table it is obvious that the D´Hondt method favours the winning party, but on the other hand, the other two formulas understate its earnings. On the contrary, the party with the smallest number of votes is protected. Although seemingly it is a case of a single seat, which does not have significant influence on the formation of the election results, the real situation may be very different. When accumulation of this type of district occurs, the electoral formula selection can affects the overall results quite significantly. Consequently, the electoral formula is quite significant determinant of the outcome of election. Limited size of the district, which makes it impossible to achieve a higher proportionality, suggests that the electoral formula is important, but not the major variable of the electoral system. Its principal role is even more limited in smaller districts.

The third major variable in determining a degree of proportionality of election results, the issue of the district magnitude in Spain, has already been indicated. Despite this, the problem deserves a special attention at this point. Out of the 52

constituencies in the Spanish Congress election, only 27 of them have character of small district, which means that between two and five seats are comparted there. Another 18 electoral districts could be characterised as medium-sized, and only in the remaining five districts more than ten seats are allocated, so they can be included among the large districts.[7] The average magnitude of a district is 6.73, while the median is expressed by number five (Hopkins, 2005). It means that more than half of the total number of constituencies has the small district character. As a reminder of the effect of small districts it may be noted that "*countries with very small (from two to five member districts) or small-medium (up, say, to a maximum of nine, ten member districts) constituencies, are for this very reason countries of least-proportional proportionality*" (Sartori, 2001, p. 9).

In determining the influence of the district magnitude to the overall disproportionality of electoral system it is very useful to work with a term *electoral threshold*, which is a sum factor of the district magnitude and the electoral formula (Lebeda, 2008). As it was mentioned above, these two variables are closely interconnected, while the electoral formula is in many cases limited by the district magnitude. The electoral threshold as the aggregate variable helps to identify the level on which a party is going to obtain a seat. Accordingly, it can be considered as a tool by which the influence of the district magnitude to the proportionality of the system can be effectively quantified. By knowing its value, it is possible to determine whether a constituency is accessible only for large parties with high election gains, or allows a representation of medium-sized and smaller parties, too.

The electoral threshold has three different levels of values. The first one is the so-called *lower threshold*, which determines the lowest possible number of votes by which a party is able to obtain a seat. In the case of a lower number of votes, the party is not going to gain a seat for sure. In contrast, the *upper threshold* sets the value at which a party obtains a seat certainly (it is not possible to reach the value and not receive a seat). As stated by **Tomáš Lebeda**, the compromise between the two values is the so-called *effective threshold*, the average of the previous two values. The effective threshold itself is usually the closest one to the real election results (Lebeda, 2008). Using the effective electoral threshold in different-sized constituencies in Spain is displayed in Table no. 5.

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[7] To total number of 52 remains the districts Ceuta and Melilla, in which only one seat is allocated. This means that there is the majority vote, thus they cannot be classified in the category.

Table 5: The effective electoral threshold in 2015 election

District magnitude	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	12	16	31	36
Mean of effective electoral threshold (in % of votes) [8]	21,2	16,6	13,6	11,4	10,2	9,2	8,1	6,8	5,9	4,6	2,8	2,3
Average gain of Ciudadanos	15,2	14,9	11,5	13,2	11,3	12,8	11,5	17,4	15	15	13,6	18,8
Average gain of Podemos[9]	16	14,5	16,9	17,9	16	20,9	23,9	16,1	20,6	27	26,9	20,9

Source: Author (Elecciones Generales, 2015).

Based on data from the table, the constituencies can be sorted into several categories. In the districts in which two or three seats are comparted, the effective electoral threshold is set relatively high. The value does not give much chance to representation of medium-sized parties in practice, small parties are not going to be represented almost for sure (this does not apply for parties with a regional scope which have strong electoral base in a district). Four-member districts are more favourable for medium-sized parties. The five-member districts certainly allow for representation of this type of parties. With continuation of increasing the districts magnitudes, the effective threshold is reducing naturally. In districts with ten allocated seats, also small parties have a chance to be successful.

Taking into account the fact that two thirds of the total number of seats are distributed in constituencies sized from four to eight, it can be stated that the electoral system does not prevent medium-sized parties to be successful. The effective electoral threshold does not allow smaller parties that operate nationwide to succeed in significant number of districts. The system favours large parties in the smallest districts especially, where the parties obtain seats (in contrast to smaller parties). The fact confirms the hypothesis no. 1, which refers to the electoral system and its impact on higher profits of seats of the first two parties in order. However, with the interpretation of the displayed data in relation to the party

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[8] The calculation of the effective electoral threshold: lower and upper threshold average. The lower threshold divides 100 by the number of comparted seats plus the number of candidate parties minus one (100/M+p-1). The upper threshold divides 100 by the number of redistributed seats plus one (100/M+1). For more about the calculation see Lebeda, 2008.

[9] The data shown in the table are the sum of gains of *Podemos, En comú Podem, Compromís-Podemos-És el moment* and *En Marea*. The titles mean territorial brands (coalitions), under which the party *Podemos* worked in the historical regions of Spain.

system, it is necessary to be cautious. Based on the results it is not possible to argue that the setting of the electoral system creates a two-party system. The system does not allow small parties (operating at national level) to succeed, and keeps their average earnings in single digits. Small parties are practically withdrawn from the competition of a large number of seats. However, medium-sized parties that achieve a double-digit number of votes are able to gain a significant parliamentary representation with current electoral rules. The fact was confirmed by recent elections of 2015 (shown in Table no. 6), when four political parties gained a relevant representation in Congress. The number of seats of each party is giving it a chance to participate in the future creation of the Spanish government.

Table no. 5 also shows that the success of the parties in third and fourth place was made possible because of the effective distribution of their support. Although both parties recorded stronger and weaker districts, the most important is that with the exception of the smallest districts they were able to reach the average effective electoral threshold in all other districts, which ensured them Congress representation. Consequently, it can be stated that in case of consistent distribution of support in electoral districts, the electoral system allows the existence of a multi-party system with a moderate number of relevant subjects. The party *Ciudadanos* managed to reach the effective threshold in 33 out of 52 districts, enabling them to gain 13.9 % of votes, which results in 40 parliamentary seats. The party *Podemos* was successful in 42 constituencies, which means 69 seats with 20.7 % support. The results are illustrated by maps no. 1 and no. 2, showing the districts in which parties *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* was able to gain a representation.

Table 6: The gains of parties in Congress election of 2015

	Votes share	Seats share
Partido Popular	28,7 %	35,1 %
PSOE	22 %	25,7 %
Podemos[10]	20,7 %	19,7 %
Ciudadanos	13,9 %	11,4 %
Other	14,7 %	8,1 %

Source: Author (Elecciones Generales, 2015).

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[10] The sum of gain of parties *Podemos, En comú Podem, Compromís-Podemos-És el moment* and *En Marea*.

Map 1: The effective electoral threshold achievement of the party Ciudadanos
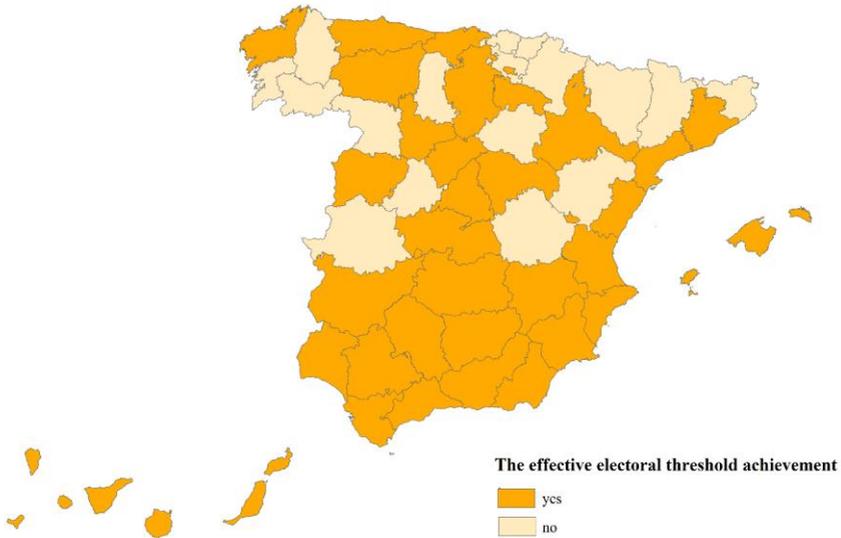
Source: Author (Elecciones Generales, 2015).

From the map no. 1, it is obvious that the party *Ciudadanos* managed to spread its electoral support in balanced way and achieve effective electoral threshold in two-thirds of all districts. The party was particularly unsuccessful in districts with magnitude three and four, geographically mainly in areas with strong regional parties. The parties pushed *Ciudadanos* into positions from which it was no longer possible to achieve a seat. Based on the success in the rest of the circuits, the party managed to get not strong, but at least relevant congressional representation.

Map no. 2 shows the success of *Podemos* party in achievement of the effective electoral threshold. The districts in which the party was not successful were (with one exception) represented by three of less seats. The alliances with local parties brought the success especially in historical autonomous regions, where *Podemos* (unlike *Ciudadanos*) managed to gain representation. The party successfully achieved the effective electoral threshold in almost entire territory, which means gain of 69 seats and the position of third most represented party in the Spanish Congress.

Map 2: The effective electoral threshold achievement of the party Podemos
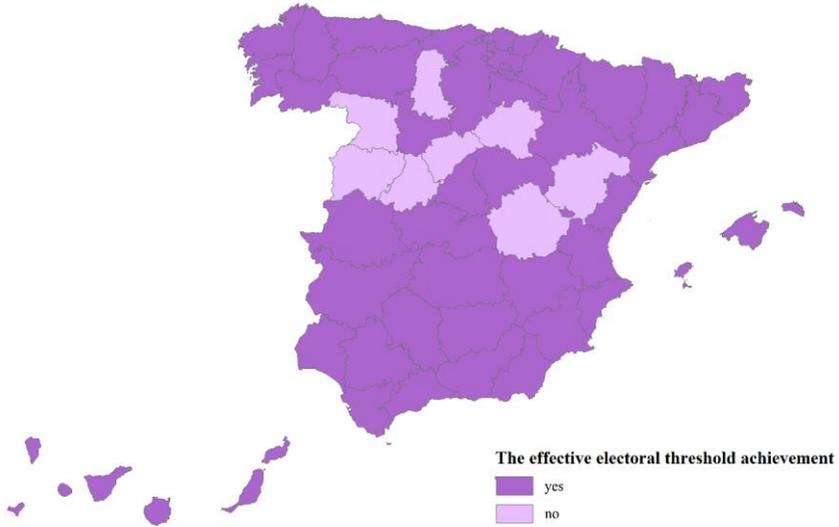
Source: Author (Elecciones Generales, 2015).

The data shown in the Table no. 5 and subsequently illustrated on the maps confirm the second hypothesis. Although the electoral system favours two strongest parties, this happens mainly in the smallest districts of the size from three to four. However, the system does not create a two-party system, as we have already mentioned above. The existence of a multi-party system is possible when the nationwide political parties in third and fourth place can be effective in question of spreading their support in order to reach the effective electoral threshold in the greatest possible number of constituencies. In that case, the parties in third and fourth place can be relevant actors in the party system.

Conclusion

The dominance of two political parties was the main sign of the Spanish party system. The cause of the situation was seen in the electoral system, which favoured the strongest parties and has not allowed other nationwide parties to participate in the exercise of power. The elections of 2015 have

shown that there is a possibility to gain relevant representation also for medium-sized parties, which can compete with the two major players.

As we have illustrated in our paper, the electoral system of the Spanish Congress is characterised by a certain degree of disproportionality. By focusing on the issue with using theoretical information and quantitative data, we proved that the district magnitude in combination with **D´Hondt** method used to the conversion of votes to seats are the key factors of the electoral system which to the most significant extent determine the election results. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be very cautious with conclusions about an impact of the electoral system on the party system. Initial theories connected with years of experience have suggested that the system with two dominant parties in the country, in place for such a long time, is generated by the nature of the electoral system. However, the setup of the electoral system in Spain does not lead to a two-party system, although its nature favours the most voted party in a district. The system character is influenced by few other factors. The effective electoral threshold is affected by a number of candidate subjects. The higher number of relevant candidate parties, the easier for the smaller parties to gain a seat. Medium-sized parties are able to gain an adequate number of seats to the number of votes obtained if their support is equally geographically distributed and they will achieve the effective electoral threshold.

The election rules allow a several number of parties to access the Parliament with relevant number of seats. The statement is demonstrated by the values of effective electoral threshold in districts, as well as by the actual outcome of the election in 2015. In the election, the parties on third and fourth place were able to gain a significant number of seats, which caused a change in the party system. The change occurred despite the same settings of electoral system. Whether the election of 2015 was an only exception and party system in Spain will return to the old form, dominated by two political parties, is still questionable. It will also depend on how the new parties will stratify their support in the future. In case of victory in several constituencies, the party system can be more balanced. Anyhow, it will be interesting to see its further development, as well as to identify the factors that will affect him. However, it is definitely possible to say that the electoral system (in this form) is not an obstacle of a multi-party system development in Spain.

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