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## **ANALYSIS OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2018 IN CONTEXT OF K. REIF AND H. SCHMITT'S THEORY**

**Natália Kováčová\***

### **ABSTRACT**

Self-governing regions are a significant place for free decision-making of inhabitants on public affairs and a place where we can decide on the quality of our everyday life. Only strong municipalities, towns and regions create the concept of a strong country. The study is mainly focused on the current topic of municipal elections held on November 2018 in the Slovak Republic. In the light of the nation-wide climate full of tensions the feedback from voters to the political parties and message that the elections would bring were impatiently expected. The content concept of the study primarily focuses on the importance of the participation aspect and points out the obstacles of political participation at the municipal level. The second part of the study focuses on the evaluation and analysis of election results, and points out the conclusions of electoral behaviour denouncing the trend of electoral behaviour in the context of the growing phenomenon of independent candidates and, on the contrary, the decline of trust in the political parties. Based on the analysed election results and electoral behaviour, the ambition is to evaluate the characteristic features of the municipal elections from the view of the second-order elections theory presented by the German political scientists K. Reif and H. Schmitt.

**Key words:** municipal elections, participation, political parties, electors, self-order elections

### **Introduction**

According to the **K. Reif** and **H. Schmitt's** theory, electoral behaviour experts, the elections can be categorized on the basis of the popularity into primary and second-order elections. The nature of second-order elections was described by German political scientists after the first European Parliament elections in 1979. The primacy of the elections is determined by the political system of the country. In the case of parliamentary democracies, we mean the

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elections to the national legislative bodies and, in the case of presidential democracies, it is the elections of the president of the country. Elections that belong to the second category include municipal, regional, and European Parliament elections.

Municipal elections in the Slovak Republic are not as primary from the view of electoral behaviour as, for example, elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which belong to the group of the primary elections, and are also characterized by the highest electoral participation. However, electoral participation in municipal elections is higher in comparison, for example, with the European Parliament or regional elections, which are clearly second-order. But even at the level of municipal elections, there are some specific features that are characteristic for second-order elections. Municipal elections in our country present a specific category, which we will try to prove in our study, even though they also have some characteristic features of second-order elections.

Using the **K. Reif** and **H. Schmitt's** theory, the characteristic features of second-order elections may be defined as follows: (Kováčová N., 2014)

- „less at stake“
- generally lower electoral participation in comparison with national elections
- institutional-procedural level
- the nature of electoral campaigns is diverse and the content concept, apart from secondary topics, also coincide with the primary themes
- are held in the mid-term of the government office
- the success of smaller, new and radical political parties, the gain of opposition political parties.

Since municipal elections in our country are held in the mid-term of the government office, voters tend to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the governing parties. The main emphasis of the following study is put just on the electoral behaviour, assessment of election results and their applicability to the **K. Reif** and **H. Schmitt's** theory.

After November 2018, the election results will influence the life in each municipality or town for the period of four years. It is important to note that the councils have the decision-making power on using local taxes and fees paid by citizens. They manage local roads, kindergartens, schools, primary art schools, lighting, cleanliness, vegetation, municipal waste, drinking water supply, etc. The important original competencies of the municipality include school canteens, leisure centres, nursing services and cultural facilities. In relation to

the transferred performance of state administration, municipalities have the competences funded by the state in the field of primary schools, building procedures, vital records, election organisations and referendums, and the environment.

## **1 Electoral Participation in Municipal Elections and Assessment of Election Results**

The most frequent manifestation of political engagement is the participation of citizens in the elections. In the Slovak Republic, this is voluntary participation when the voters cannot be forced to participate in the decision-making process. So, as the voter has right to express its active attitude to the elections in the form of voting, or in the form of candidacy, his or her right is also to ignore the elections themselves. The decision to participate in the electoral process is an individual matter of every individual and electoral participation as such is an aggregate phenomenon. In order to understand the electoral participation properly, it is necessary to analyse not only its impact on the election results, but also the way in which the voters' decision to participate or not to participate in the decision-making process is influenced. According to **M. Franklin**, an important network of information flows providing knowledge about elected institutions and especially "*knowledge of the country's population structure and its changes*" (Klingemann, 2006, p. 56) is important in the case of participation. Plutzer's *habitual voter model* (typical voter model) became a typical example of explaining the electoral participation. The voter makes a relationship to the electoral act by acquiring passive electoral right. However, if the voter does not use its right in the first elections, he will not probably participate in the second-order elections. Low electoral participation denotes a certain democracy crisis, when it is necessary to discover and subsequently eliminate the factors that contribute to the democratically unfavourable trend.

Supporters of desirable participation, for example, **R. J. Dalton**, **R. A. Dahl**, **É. Durkheim**, **A. Tocqueville**, emphasizes the importance of electoral participation, as it contributes to greater democracy. The more citizens show their interest in public action and participate in decision-making processes, the more likely it is to achieve the desired state of society, which is the satisfaction of citizens associated with socio-political progress. Participation as a key concept of political participation is desirable and necessary in democratic societies that emphasize the primary idea that the power comes from the

citizens. Contradictory views are presented by the supporters of undesirable participation, for example, **A. Downs**, **J. A. Schumpeter**, **M. Weber** and others, who may be identified as supporters of elitism. Representatives share the opinion that citizen's participation in the political sphere can have negative impacts on the entire society. Decisions should therefore be exclusively in the hands of political actors elected as legitimate representatives by citizens in the electoral process. Political activity of citizens is thus limited only to the election of political candidates. At this point is also the end of citizen's participation.

Some political scientists do not see low electoral participation of citizens as a problem, but on the contrary, as a positive phenomenon, socially desirable. **R. Hardin** and **W.H.M. Jones** does not consider political apathy as a negative phenomenon, but they perceived it as a hidden expression of voters' satisfaction with an existing state when their ambition is not a change in the current state (Dančišin, 2012). A sympathizer of low electoral participation was also **M. Rosem**, because in this case *"is increasing the importance of vote by informed citizens, who are engaged in political activities and who examine the activities of political elites and their programs. In such a case, low electoral participation cannot be considered problematic"* (Dančišin, 2012, p. 2). The low electoral participation is also reflected in the conclusions of **E. Shearer** and **J. Doppelt**, who in their analyses of electoral behaviour mention civil ignorance as the main reason for political non-participation of citizens. If the voter does not have enough information about the electoral issue, the political parties, or the leaders, he will rather ignore the electoral act due to the fear that his vote could contribute to a deterioration of the social situation. The benefits of the school of rational choice are also significant in the area of participation issue. By making the voter aware that its vote will not be decisive in high electoral participation and will not influence the election results in a decisive way, he will take a rational attitude to the elections and will not participate. In the case of a decision to participate in the elections, the voter must count on certain costs that will not turn into the gain in high electoral participation, and since the vote of one voter is not decisive, the voter loses more by its participation than he gains.

If we focus on municipal elections, in the pre-election period 2018 there appeared the forecast of the electoral participation, but with regard to the current social climate, it did not exceed 50%. Municipal elections were the first elections held in the Slovak Republic after a sad February event, which shook the whole society and led to national protests crossing the state border. To the forefront are pushed the opinions that the electoral participation could be, not

significantly, but somewhat higher compared to the previous elections, thereby the voters would turn the demand for calling change of protests into the election results.<sup>6</sup> “*For democratic societies, the electoral participation is an important expression of the quality of democracy, and the electoral act allows various groups in a pluralistic society to support the representation of their interests on the political scene*” (Világi, 2016, p.140).

In connection with municipal elections, it is necessary to point out the barriers that lead to electoral indifference and the lack of interest in the decision-making act itself.

- *lack of awareness*: People often do not have information, what competencies the self-government has, and why it is important to participate in the elections. A survey of 1009 respondents conducted by the agency 2Muse between 10 and 13 May, 2018 revealed that a third of the respondents did not have enough information. As the primary reason, 42 % of respondents reported poor awareness from the side of the self-government, and another 12 % considered the data provided to be often out of date. The third most common reason was the lack of information on the local website or Facebook social network. From a content point of view, citizens would most appreciate the information on reallocation of financial resources, publishing the visions and direction of the self-government, plans for renovation and construction activities, plans for events, and what are the activities and competencies of individual authorities, which is most absent from the information point of view. However, the results of the survey were generally optimistic, as they noted that up to 91 % of Slovaks are interested in their town or municipality they live in (Výsledky prieskumu hovoria ..., 2018).

Municipal elections are the most complex not only from the organisational but also the informative point of view, because there is no comprehensive information brochure, which would include the names of all candidates for the post of councillors and mayors. Therefore, the voters have to look for this information on their own, which can eventually lead to their disengagement.

- *irritation from the political situation*: the loss of citizens' trust in politicians is nothing unusual. Failure to fulfil political commitments, political causes, or corruption scandals deepens the level of distrust, which results in voters' passivity against political engagement.

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<sup>6</sup> The electoral participation in the municipal elections 2014 was 48.3%.

Currently, independent candidates, who are not directly linked to any political party and are thus exempt from the assessment of the party's political actions and the various causes, are at the forefront of the municipal elections. Especially in the towns, the pre-election struggle is rather personalized to candidates for the mayor who are already largely independent. In many cases, these are unreadable people, their personal history is unknown, and thus the inability to predict their future actions is difficult. Even this factor may affect the electoral participation.

- *promoting the idea “my vote won't make any difference”*: this theory is rather dominant in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, when a proportional electoral system is applied. But, in the elections of mayors, each vote has its importance, as we vote them by the majority system. If every voter would say, why should I participate in the elections, if someone else decides, but then the question should be followed, for example, “How would the municipal politics be managed? Who would decide?”
- *one candidate (for mayor)*: may also be negative for the electoral participation because the winner is definitive and the voters do not feel any competition.<sup>7</sup>
- *voter fatigue*: in the case of frequent elections, voters may lose interest in electoral acts. A particular solution in this context could also be the merging of some types of elections, respectively decision-making acts so that the voter is not given excessive time pressure. “Some voters will assess which elections have a greater impact on their lives, and based on this they will determine in which elections they will participate and which are irrelevant for them from beneficial point of view” (Cevárová, 2018, p. 23).
- *the rule to vote in municipal elections in the place of permanent residence*: in the municipal elections, unlike the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic or the presidential election, it is not possible to register the voter ID card and thus to vote from a place other than the permanent residence.
- *stay abroad*: the percentage effect of electoral participation is also greatly modified by citizens staying abroad on the election day.

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<sup>7</sup> In the municipal elections 2018, there was only one candidate for the mayor in 700 municipalities and towns.

However, under the conditions of the Slovak Republic it is not possible to vote abroad in the elections other than the parliamentary. According to the initiative Srdcom doma, the expansion of the elections from abroad, even in the case of presidential elections, the European Parliament or municipal elections, is currently supported by 76 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Petition by the initiative of September 16, 2018 has been personally signed by 830 people, 2390 joined online (Štát nechce rozšíriť ..., 2018). The proposal received positive expression from the parties, such as SaS, OĽaNO, Sme rodina and ĽSNS. The Press Department of the Ministry of the Interior in September 2018 informed that currently they are not preparing, nor planning an amendment to the law allowing the Slovaks to vote from abroad in the elections other than the parliamentary (Možnosti vol'by zo ..., 2018).

According to sociologist **P. Haulík**, in general, a change in the electoral system could contribute to higher electoral participation. *“The system is currently built in such a way that it is not clear in advance what groupings of people are being formed in the council, what solutions they support, and what proposals they bring. Every self-government program is created after the elections when an ad hoc grouping is formed. There are individuals who run for the office, and it is not clear in advance what they can promote. Even if someone votes a candidate and is convinced that he will contribute to self-government, but then this voter will not be aware what this candidate actually did in the council. If the voter cannot have better understanding, participation will not be higher”* (Filová, 2018).

### **1.1 Attitudes of the First-Time Voters in Municipal Elections**

Young voters represent a group characterized by low electoral participation and a high rate of influence. Based on their electoral behaviour, which is variable, it is difficult to predict whom they will vote on the election day, if they decide to participate in the elections. Unstable electoral behaviour and change in their decision-making can be based on the absence of past experience, lack of political orientation, easy suggestibility, respectively voting according to their parent's opinion.

During September and October 2018, “We are on the move” - the campaign by the Erasmus+ National Agency, based in IUVENTA - the Slovak Institute of



Youth, and the Association of Towns and Villages of Slovakia, was conducted. The campaign was mainly focused on the participation of youth and first-time voters in the municipal elections. Its final output is a publication with the same title and its mission is to bring participation possibilities of young people closer to the municipal level. *“In terms of status and activity, and also by taking into account the competence and participation legislation, towns and municipalities are mini states that govern their region. We can even see them as political, civic and economic subjects”* (Sme na ľahu, 2018, p. 4). “The Youth Report 2018” revealed that within the youth the idea that they only have a negligible influence on the functioning of self-government is dominant. The scope and content concept of youth participation at the municipal level also comprehensively defines, for example, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. *“The Charter indicates basic ways to facilitate the participation of young people in decision-making processes on themselves in individual sectors of municipal politics”* (Youth Report, 2018, p.36). In this context, the Youth Parliaments have an important position. According to the Report, there are totally 45 such parliaments in our towns and villages. In order to bring together individual town parliaments, a National Youth Parliament was created, which brings together municipal youth parliaments and represents their needs and interests at the national level. It is worth to mention the initiative of the National Youth Parliament of 2017, whose ambition was to include the Youth Parliament in Act no. 369/1990 Coll. However, the request was not finally reflected into the legislative conclusion.

Within local self-governments, the important project called “Communities Friendly for Children and Young People” by Children of Slovakia Foundation, deal with participatory activities. The project aims to create communities that focus on the current needs of children and young people, to find out about the life of community and to engage young people in creating the activities to strengthen and develop the community. The project is being implemented in partnership with the Susan Kovalik Association and Jungwacht Blauring Schweiz (Switzerland) (Komunity priateľské deťom, 2013). In general, the primary idea is to *“build communities where children and young people, adults, organizations and institutions that devote to them, are connected with local self-government under a partnership principle”* (Správa o mládeži ..., 2018, s. 36) .

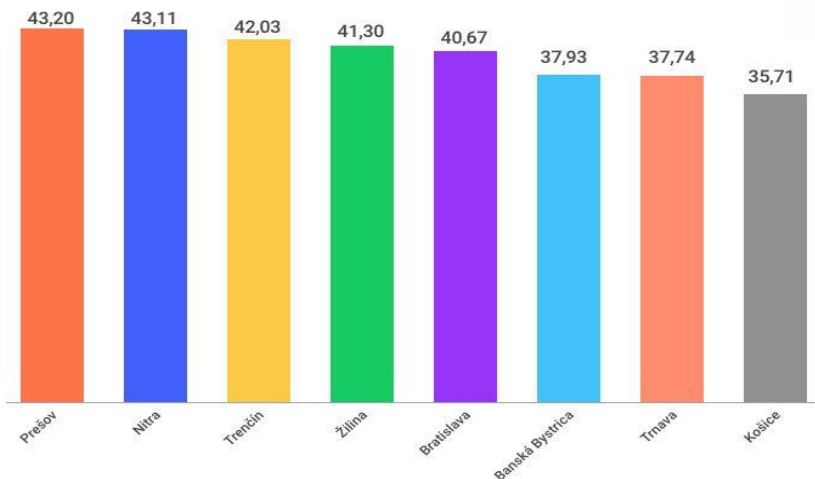
In the municipal elections in November 2018, approximately 55,000 first-time voters had the right to vote their representatives, while in the previous municipal elections this number was 28,000. The number of first-time voters who already

participated in different elections, but they could vote for the first time in the municipal elections 2018, was around 227,000, which represents 4.17 % of the total number of eligible voters (Voliť môže v..., 2018). The group of first-time voters does not belong to a decisive group that would significantly influence the results of any election. In the pre-election prediction of the electoral participation in the municipal elections, there was a very low, or even negligible percentage of first-time voters who decide to participate in the municipal elections, which was eventually confirmed.

## 1.2 Assessment of the Results of Municipal Elections and Their Impact on Society

Municipal elections were held totally in 2919 towns and municipalities. In general, the electoral participation reached 48.67 %, and in the context of the Slovak Republic, we can speak about regular participation, which is not unreachable by our common indicators. The election results reflected the need of the public calling for change that was already implied by the regional elections in 2017. The primary essence of democracy thus confirmed the need for change in the municipal elections and resulted in generational exchanges. Among towns with the seat of region, the highest electoral participation was recorded in Prešov (43.2 %) and the lowest in Košice (35.7 %) (see Fig.1).

Fig. no. 1: Electoral participation in the towns with the seat of region



Source: (Municipal elections 2018..., 2018).

In four towns with the seat of region, in Trnava, Trenčín, Banská Bystrica and Prešov, the candidates for the mayor defended their mandate. In general, it is possible to state that large towns are governed by independent and opposition mayors after the November elections. Demand for the new type of politics was fully demonstrated in Bratislava, where the winner was **M. Vallo** with 36.5%. The fact that the public demanded change and another approach to public administration also implied the results in Nitra, where after 12 years ended **J. Dvonč**, who relied on the support by political parties SMER and SNS. The mayor became a young activist **M. Hattas**, who received support from 42.3% of voters, and so he joined **M. Vallo** and **P. Bročko**, who again won in Trnava (37.7%), to the progressive candidates. The self-government of Žilina was after **I. Choma** with the support of the political party SMER, who did not run for these municipal elections, taken over by the independent candidate **P. Fiabáne** (48.1%). Based on the election results, Košice are governed by the opposition candidate **J. Polaček**, who was voted by 43.3% of eligible voters. The seat of mayor in Prešov was again filled by the opposition candidate **A. Turčanová**, who received 45.7% of votes, followed by **J. Nosko** as independent candidate in Banská Bystrica with the support by the political parties SMER and SNS, who received 75.2% of votes, and independent candidate **R. Rybníček** in Trenčín, who received 72.4% of votes (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2018).

As in the previous elections, the electoral success was achieved by non-party candidates, as evidenced by 42.47% of elected mayors who candidate as independent for the seat of the mayor. While in 2014 were elected 1104 independent candidates, in the elections analysed by us, there were elected 1227 independent candidates. The dominance of independent candidates confirmed the visible trend that we predict to predominate in this type of elections, when the political strategy of the candidates for councillors and mayors is to present yourself without a party label, because the affiliation to the political party may be more damaging due to the decreasing citizens' trust in political subjects. The electoral success of independent candidates may also be stated in the case of councillors. They filled 7 301 seats in the councils, which represents 35.36% of all councillors in Slovakia. However, it is necessary to underline that many candidates present themselves as independent only in formal way. An example may be, for example, the candidate for the mayor of Bratislava Old Town **M. Borguľa**, who shortly before announcing his candidacy, withdrew from the political party SMER (Krbatová, 2018). However, this

candidate was not eventually successful, which can be justified by the explanation that although he withdrew from the political party, the voters had not forgotten his past political activity.

The success in the elections was declared by the non-parliamentary party "TOGETHER-Civic Democracy (SPOLU)" of **M. Beblavý**, which at that time existed only nine months, but gained 300 councillor seats, as well as the non-parliamentary party of **I. Štefunko** "Progressive Slovakia", which together with the party of **M. Beblavý** supported the candidate **M. Vallo**. According to the sociologist **O. Gyárfášová**, *"these elections confirmed the generational exchange in Slovak politics and the establishment of the new political generation, which is made up of young urban professionals. People who can attract by their expertise and transparency"* (Sociologička: M. Vallo ..., 2018).

Among the political party candidates, the candidates of the political party SMER-SD filled 20.45% of the mayoral seats. The election results thus brought a certain decrease for this political party, as in 2014 the voters elected 847 representatives that were candidates of the party SMER-SD, and in the current elections 590 representatives were elected (see Fig. 2). This was the symbolic loss of the political party that lost its mayors in the towns with the seat of region, such as Košice or Nitra, which were considered to be the stronghold of this political party. The political party SMER-SD lost its position in Košice in favour of the opposition candidates, in Nitra and Žilina in favour of progressive independent candidates, and similarly the candidates of this political party did not win in Trnava, Bratislava and Prešov (Fila, 2018). In terms of future forecasts of social democrats' popularity at the national level, it should be noted that Košice and Prešov can be identified as the most important regions in Slovakia, as they account for almost a third of the overall population of the country, and therefore applies that who can achieve very good results in the municipal elections, also can achieve very good results in the parliamentary elections. After the municipal elections, political scientist **P. Baboš** commented the loss of the mayors of political party SMER in large towns with statement that *"the problem of the political party SMER is that they have old cadres who have failed in many elections and they are not able to acquire young faces and educate the new generation"* (Krbatová, 2018). The seat of mayor was only re-defended by **J. Nosko** in Banská Bystrica, who was as an independent candidate, but with the support of the party SMER-SD. Therefore, there were opinions that the political party SMER-SD experienced a considerable loss in this elections, whose part was also the defeat of the former mayor of Humenné

**J. Vaľová.**<sup>8</sup> In order to analyse the first part of this idea, it should be noted that while the party SMER-SD lost its representatives at the level of large regional towns and experienced a certain deficit in comparison with 2014, on the other hand, the party dominated in the number of elected mayors within the party spectrum. The election results decided that the party SMER-SD filled 3692 councillor seats in the municipal councils. The chairman of the party, **R. Fico** similarly as in the last year's regional elections, marked the election results as success and stressed that the current government coalition is the only one that has standard political structures. Thus, the phenomenon of regional elections was repeated again, when the party SMER-SD filled the most seats in the municipal councils compared to other political parties, but on the other hand, it lost the chairmen of the self-governing regions. The political party SMER-SD proved in the elections that is a strong political party, but not a party that can clearly win. According to the sociologist **O. Gyárfášova**, two reasons can be seen for the decline of social democrats in the towns with the seat of region, which are "*weak mobilization of the voters of the party SMER-SD and weak personnel capacities of the party*" (Knapko, 2018).

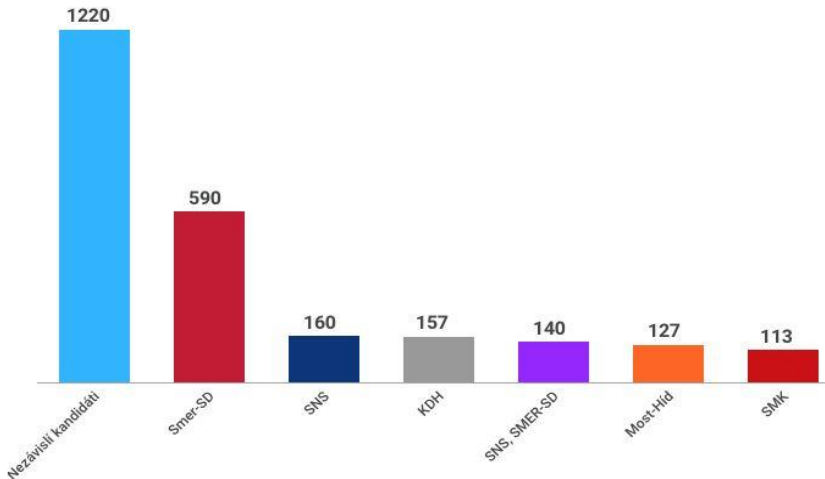
In comparison to the previous municipal elections, the party SNS has been significantly strengthened, as in 2014 its nominees filled seats in 41 municipalities, and four years later up to 160 mayor seats (6%) and 1670 councillor seats. The chairman of the party, **A. Danko**, stated that the party achieved a historic success in the elections. The strengthening was also noticed in the case of the political party KDH, which is currently non-parliamentary political party, although it filled more than 150 mayor seats (5.5%) and 2350 councillor seats in the municipal councils (Minúta po minúte ... 2018). On the other hand, it should be noted that the political party KDH dominated for a long time in Trnava, but as proved by the results, this dominance was lost in the municipal elections 2018 and, on the contrary, its dominance was manifested in Prešov. After the municipal elections 2018, the non-parliamentary SMK-MKP filled 114 mayor seats and 1248 councillor seats, and the coalition party Most-Híd filled 127 mayor seats and 915 councillor seats. According to **B. Bugár**, the objective of the party Most-Híd in the municipal elections was to receive 10% of the mayors more in comparison with the elections in 2014, but eventually the

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<sup>8</sup> Massive media pressure, anti-campaigns, revealed causes, multiple scandals, non-transparent proceedings of the self-government, as well as inappropriate, too self-confident and aggressive communication of town administration with the public contributed to the defeat of J.Vaľová.

party received 30% more. By this, Bugár pointed out the gradually growing trend of the party Most-Híd (Opozícia podľa Fica ..., 2018).<sup>9</sup>

Fig. no. 2: Number of elected mayors by political parties



Source: (Municipal elections 2018..., 2018).

Voters, by their decision, demonstrated the need for change, but not in the form of the dominance of opposition parties as we might think. The opposition party SaS, which is strongly opposed to the political party SMER-SD at the national level, filled 7 mayor seats and 110 councillor seats (in comparison with 2014, it is 24% more councillors and 40% more mayors), while the opposition party OĽaNO filled only 1 mayor seat and 84 municipal councillors, the party ĽSNS filled 3 mayor seats and 42 councillors seats, and the most successful opposition party was “Sme rodina” with 11 mayors and 123 councillors (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2018). Therefore, it is not possible to state that the elections were a clear success for the opposition parties. An example may be also candidate **J. Mrva**, who was nominated by the party OĽaNO and eventually finished in the 4th place. The problem of the opposition parties (mainly SaS, OĽaNO) lies to a certain extent in the absence of

<sup>9</sup> For example, in the district of Revúca, the party did not have any mayor so far, but the election results have decided on six representatives, in addition, in the district of Trebišov the party increased the number of mayors from three to eleven.

structures, and so in terms of strategy, they solve their position by merging into wider coalition. This trend was also visible at the level of regional elections in 2017.

In its statements, the political party SaS marked the election results as success because it improved in comparison with 2014, which is the evidence that the party raised, in the coalition where was a member, by 120% for councillors and by 279% for mayors. Within the coalition, the party filled 53 mayor seats (in 2014, there were 14) and 672 councillor seats (in 2014, there were 305) (SaS *zhodnotila komunálne ...*, 2018).

As we already mentioned, the party “Sme rodina” achieved the best results in the elections among parliamentary opposition parties, said the chairman of the party **B. Kollár**, who used the number of elected mayors as a measure.

From the view of coalition groupings, the most successful party was SNS, SMER-SD, in which 142 mayors were elected. Followed by a coalition copying the government line (Smer-SD, SNS and Most-Hid), which filled 45 mayor seats, and the third most successful was the opposition coalition KDĽ, OĽANO, SaS, in which 10 candidates were elected.

### **1.3 The Reif and Schmitt Concept of Second-order Elections and the Issue of Their Application to Municipal Elections**

We already outlined certain theoretical features of **K. Reif** and **H. Schmitt's** concept at the beginning of this study. In order to analyse the individual characteristics, it should be noted that the municipal elections are different and diverse in comparison with other types, as they are individual elections with different results and other type of electoral mechanism than the one applied, for example, in parliamentary or transnational elections.

In general, municipal elections to certain extent confirmed the **Reif** and **Schmitt's** theory of second-order elections in terms of some specific elements. Since we are already familiar with the election results, we consider it necessary to further analyse the outlined idea by referring to the characteristic features of the second-order elections.

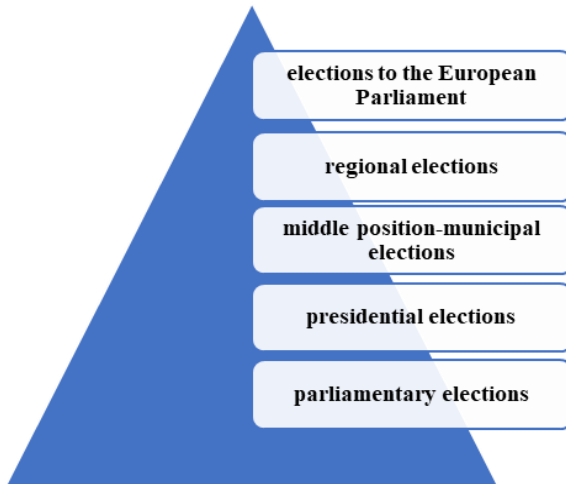
One of the dimensions of second-order elections is the so-called “less-at-stake” concept. *“Citizens are convinced that all primary decisions that have a significant impact on social life come from the national level,”* thereby another type of elections is pushed into the background (Kováčová, N. 2014, p. 120). At the same time, this also predicts the lower participation in elections other than

national, which we include in the group of primary elections. From the view of the electoral participation in our conditions, the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic are constantly dominant, in terms of popularity followed by the presidential elections, and subsequently the municipal elections. But in comparison with regional elections and the European Parliament elections, which clearly belong to the category of second-order elections, the participation in the municipal elections represents on average 45%, which is, for example, three times more than in case of the European Parliament elections. As an example, we mention the last electoral participation in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2016, which reached 59.8%, the participation in the municipal elections in 2018 reached 48.7% and 13.05% of the eligible voters participated in the European Parliament elections in 2014. In terms of second-order elections, the concept of lower electoral participation can be confirmed, but only in comparison with the national level and also the presidential elections. Given the level of intensity of voter's interest, we cannot speak about clear ignorance of this type of elections in the Slovak Republic, as on average the percentage of the electoral participation is higher than the electoral participation in other decision-making processes. Our conclusion to the electoral participation, in comparison with another type of elections in our conditions, is the so-called "Middle Position". If we imagine an electoral pyramid, the lower part of which symbolizes a high rate of electoral interest and the popularity of the elections, then within this pillar the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic with the highest percentage indicator of the electoral participation will be dominant. Upwards the rate of participation decreases gradually (see figure 3).

As we already mentioned, based on the rate criterion of the electoral participation, the municipal elections hold the middle position in the diagram, and therefore we will not clearly include them in the category of primary or second-order elections. Electoral participation in this type of elections is average, it does not reach too high indicators, nor electoral indifference. As a result of these arguments, we state that, from the view of the intensity of electoral participation, we include the municipal elections in a specific category, which we call the "intermediate category of primary and second-order elections".



**Fig. no. 3: Diagram of the popularity of each type of elections based on political participation**



Source: processed by author

Another dimension is the institutional-procedural level. The method of voting in second-order elections can be differently adjusted compared to national elections, which can significantly determine the electoral participation. Voters do not have to have sufficient knowledge of the way of elections, therefore due to the ignorance of how to vote, they do not simply participate in the electoral act. On the other hand, in the case of a simplified election of candidates or, the possibility of individuals' candidature, or the movements, can be expected a favourable growth of the electoral participation in second-order elections. Political system setup itself has a significant influence on the electoral participation. In this context, we mean the number of elections per country for a certain period of time. In the event of incorrect timing of each type of elections, there may occur the public remobilization. If a state expects national, regional, or European Parliament elections in the near time period, citizens may experience a sense of exhaustion from the electoral process and, for example, they will prefer to participate in the national than the European Parliament elections. In our conditions, the municipal elections 2018 were held one year after the regional elections and a year before the presidential and the European Parliament elections.

According to **Reif** and **Schmitt**, the nature of the election campaign and political marketing in the second-order elections is characterized by a low mobilization of voters, which is underlined by the weak motivation of political parties. The fact is that the media presentation is weak in small municipalities compared to large regional towns, and some candidates for the councillor seat, mainly in municipalities and small towns, let the election campaign take a free course. Their strategy lies in the belief about the reputation of their name, and therefore they do not invest much in political marketing. In comparison with the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the intensity of municipal election campaigns is generally weaker, which confirms the feature of second-order elections. In the municipal elections 2018, the opposition parties (SaS, OĽaNO) were reproached of absent regional structures that could stimulate stronger mobilization of voters. However, **R. Sulík** states that the party SaS focuses mainly on the national level.

Municipal elections have confirmed the **Reif** and **Schmitt's** second-order rule, as they were held in the mid-term of the government coalition. In this context, political scientists highlight protest electoral behaviour, where voters simply tend to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the big political parties, and they prefer a new, non-parliamentary parties. This phenomenon was only partially confirmed in the sense of the success of the new political parties Progressive Slovakia and TOGETHER-Civic Democracy (SPOLU), and the non-parliamentary party KDH. The most mayor seats were filled by the politically strongest party SMER-SD, which, on the other hand, failed to get the mayor of any large regional town. The party in the elections 2018 has fallen by the number of mandates in comparison with 2014. The voters by their votes showed a certain need for change, but the fact is that the party SMER-SD, which is still the strongest political party at the national level, dominated the numerical indicators from the view of party success. Leaders of the coalition parties SNS and Most-Híd showed their satisfaction with the election results, as in comparison with the previous elections, they recorded the improvement of percentage. Therefore, it cannot be stated that the voters demonstrated their dissatisfaction to the strongest political party, even though its preferences have fallen, and neither can be said that voters have diverted from coalition political parties.

Political scientists state that, in addition to the new political parties, opposition and radical parties also show the success in the second-order elections. However, this cannot be confirmed on the basis of election results and definitely not in the

case of the Kotleba's political party. **Reif** and **Schmitt** argue that *"shortly after the parliamentary elections is dominant the voter's euphoria, which is visible in the form of an increase in the gain of government political parties. By passing the term of office, the voter's favour of the government coalition gets weakened, so the opposition political parties, which are not responsible for the government's outputs, come into the game"* (Kováčová, N., 2014, p. 121). Based on the above, we can agree with the decline in the preferences of the political party SMER-SD, but we cannot agree with its total downfall and dominance by opposition parties and the success of radical parties.

This analysis, therefore, states that it is strictly not possible to include the municipal elections in the category of primary or second-order elections, as they represent some intermediate group among the mentioned categories.

## Conclusion

One day after the elections, political analyst **J. Baránek** stated that *"the clear winners of the elections are independent candidates, it is a signal to the political mainstream. But the voters do not care who candidate for which parties, but they care about their environment. These elections confirmed direct democracy"* (Online: Komunálne voľby ..., 2018).

The conclusions brought by the municipal elections may be summarized as follows:

- dominance of independent candidates
- expansion of independent movements
- elections of generational exchange
- the first elections after protests
- there is no interest in municipal elections in large towns
- in general, the loss of political parties, credibility of political parties and trust of people in politicians decrease in the Slovak Republic
- the decline of the political party SMER-SD, which fails to address new voters (did not fill any mayor seat in large regional towns)
- poor results for opposition parties
- weak regional structures of opposition parties
- the strongest opposition party in the municipal elections was the non-parliamentary party KDH (157 mayors and 2350 councillors)
- the winners of the elections are new faces, people without a political past (for example, M.Vallo in Bratislava)

- the municipal elections brought a positive reference in the sense of people's need for decent politics and they call for change

To a certain extent, the municipal elections copied the line of the last regional elections, denounced electoral distrust in political subjects, and indirectly outlined the prediction of the following development of the political scene and the future possible distribution of parliamentary political forces at the national level, which can only be discussed at a hypothetical level.

The parties Progressive Slovakia and Together-Civic Democracy (SPOLU) made them visible through media during the municipal elections, and proved to the voters that they were able to provide and promote their candidates, creating a positive advertisement for them in the next parliamentary elections.

After the elections from 13 to 15 November, the AKO agency conducted a survey of public opinion by means of a telephone inquiry, which concerned the voters' satisfaction with the results of the municipal elections. A representative sample was made up of 1,000 respondents, of whom 47.2% of voters expressed complete satisfaction with the election results, 27.5% of respondents were rather satisfied, 9.3% rather dissatisfied, and 10.6% of voters expressed their total dissatisfaction (Viac ako polovica ..., 2018). 1.7% of the respondents said that they had no information on who became the mayor in their municipality/town, 0.3% of the respondents chose the option that they do not care who became the mayor, 2.7% was not able to comment on the election results, and 0.7% of the respondents did not answer the question. From the voter's view of the individual political parties, the sympathizers of the party TOGETHER (SPOLU) are the most satisfied with the results, up to 61.3% of them chose the option of absolutely satisfied, followed by the Social Democrats (SMER-SD) (53.1%), KDH (52.3%), SaS (50.4%), SMK-MKP (50.0%), Most-Híd (48.9%), Progressive Slovakia (48.6%), SNS (48.5%), Sme rodina (44.2%) , OĽaNO (43.3%) and ĽSNS (37.9%) (Viac ako polovica ..., 2018).

In the period from 7 to 14 November 2018, the Focus agency conducted a survey of 1,012 respondents, the issue of which concerned to which political parties the voters would express their sympathy if the parliamentary elections were held in November 2018. According to the results, the parliament would be closely filled by the new political parties that succeeded in the municipal elections, namely the party Progressive Slovakia (5.3%) and TOGETHER (SPOLU) (5%). Preferably, the strongest party SMER-SD would be voted by 20.9% of eligible voters in November, which would continue to favour it. A slight deterioration also noticed the party of **A. Danko**, which can be attributed to the

current cause of rigorous work, and this party would be voted in the parliamentary elections by 8% of voters. According to the survey, the strongest party of opposition parties is still SaS with 12%, followed by the party ĽSNS, which would be voted by 9.8% of eligible voters in November 2018, the movement OĽaNO would receive 9.5%, and "Sme rodina" would address in the parliamentary elections 8.1% of voters. The non-parliamentary party KDH with 7.7% of voters, would also fill the seats in parliament, and the coalition party Most-Híd would be voted by 5.9% of voters. (Krbatová, 2018)

The first measure of post-electoral preferences was made by the AKO agency, which was conducted in the period from 13 to 15 November, 2018 on a sample of 1,000 respondents. Of the respondents, 23.9% would vote for Smer-SD, 16.1% for SaS, 10.1% for Sme rodina, 9.2% for SNS, 8.1% for OĽaNO-Nova, 7.8% for ĽSNS, 6.1% for Most-Híd, 5.9% for KDH, 5.0 % for Progressive Slovakia, and the party TOGETHER-Civic Democracy (SPOLU) with 4.2% would not fill the seats in the parliament (Prieskum volebných preferencií..., 2018).

It is important to note that public opinion surveys are only indicative and mostly are considerably deviated from real results. It is difficult to predict the future party formation at the national level two years before the parliamentary elections, as it may eventually be completely different from the current public opinion surveys, and it is also difficult to predict the future character of the social climate, which can influence the election results at the parliamentary level in 2020.

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