REPRESENTATION WITHOUT POWER: THE ACCESS OF ETHNIC ROMANIAN MINORITIES TO LOCAL EXECUTIVE POSITIONS IN COVASNA, HARGHITA, AND MUREȘ

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ABSTRACT

This study represents the first part of a broader research project regarding the relationship between demographic weight, electoral representation, and the access of numerically minoritised communities to local executive positions. This project will eventually be extended to the seven Romanian counties with the largest Hungarian populations. The current analysis focuses on the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and Mureș, covering the electoral cycles from 1992–2024. Data were collected primarily through requests based on Law no. 544/2001, addressed to county councils, town halls, and prefectures. The centralisation of these data includes the leadership of county councils, mayors, deputy mayors, and the composition of local councils in municipalities and towns where the numerical minority accounts for approximately 10% or more of the population. The findings indicate an "asymmetry" in the conversion of deliberative representation into executive access. In Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe, Romanian representation within local councils has not translated into comparable access to the position of deputy mayor. Throughout the analysed period, all deputy mayor positions in Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe have been held by the UDMR. In Târgu-Mureș, every mandate following the 1992–1996 period has included at least one UDMR deputy mayor, even after the demographic balance shifted in favour of the Romanian population; between 2000 and 2008, the deputy mayors were drawn exclusively from UDMR.

Keywords: political representation, numerical minority, local administration, ethnic vote.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

In sociological research, the relationship between the majority and the minority is more complex than a simple comparison of a group to the total population of a state. A national majority may become a numerical minority at a regional or local level, whereas a national minority may occupy the position of a demographic, electoral, and institutional majority within a specific territory. In Romania, Covasna and Harghita represent the most evident cases of this local reversal of the "majority-

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minority relationship", while Mureș offers a particularly useful case for comparison precisely because its demographic and political structure is more balanced. The 2021 census confirms the distinct ethnic character of these areas, and the National Institute of Statistics publishes data regarding ethnicity; Mureș County has a population composed of 54.4% Romanians and 35.6% Hungarians, in Covasna County the population consists of 23% Romanians and 71.8% Hungarians, and in Harghita County there are 13% Romanians and 85.7% Hungarians[35].

This research stems from the distinction between representation and access to power. In classical terminology, representation may be formal, descriptive, symbolic, or substantive; the fact that a group "is present" within a deliberative body does not, in itself, indicate its capacity to participate effectively in the exercise of executive authority – or, indeed, in the realization of one's political objectives[36]. Furthermore, descriptive representation can acquire additional importance under conditions of mistrust between groups, insufficiently articulated interests, or a historical experience of "political subordination"[37].

This distinction is essential because the deputy mayor is not directly elected by the citizens. Under current regulations, this individual is elected by secret ballot, with an absolute majority, from among the members of the local council, following a proposal made by either the mayor or the councillors; they are subordinate to the mayor, serve as the mayor's legal replacement in situations provided for by law, and may be assigned "delegated duties"[38]. Similarly, the positions of vice-presidents of county councils result from an indirect vote within the council. The local election law explicitly specifies the indirect nature of the election for both deputy mayors and vice-presidents. Therefore, occupying these roles constitutes a particularly relevant indicator of a political group's capacity to transform its deliberative mandates into access to "executive power", or "the executive branch".

The paper does not proceed from the hypothesis of a legal obligation that the positions of deputy mayor or deputy president must be shared proportionally between ethnic groups. No such rule exists in Romanian law. The focus of this

[35] National Institute of Statistics, „Tabelul 2.02. Populația rezidentă după etnie" ["Table 2.02. Resident population by ethnicity"], in *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor, runda 2021. Rezultate definitive. Caracteristici etno-culturale demografice [Population and Housing Census, 2021 round. Definitive results. "Ethno-cultural demographic characteristics"]*, June 2023, Available at: https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultaterpl2021/rezultatedefinitivecaracteristicietnoculturaledemografice/, Accessed on September 12, 2026.

[36] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967.

[37] Jane Mansbridge, „Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3/1999, pp. 628–657.

[38] The Government of Romania, „Art. 152, cu modificările și completările ulterioare" ["Art. 152, with subsequent amendments and additions"], in *Ordonanța de urgență nr. 57 din 3 iulie 2019 privind Codul administrativ [Emergency Ordinance no. 57 of 3 July 2019 regarding the "Administrative Code", as it is formally known]*, Availableat: https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/ 215925, Accessed on September 8, 2026.

research is different: if, over a period of more than three decades, persistent and distinct patterns emerge regarding the conversion of electoral weight into access to executive power, then these become sociologically relevant even in the absence of a legal violation.

This clarification is all the more important as international standards regarding minorities refer to "effective participation in public life", but they do not establish an automatic right for every community to the position of deputy mayor. The Lund Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities describe the "effective participation of minorities" as an important component of a peaceful and democratic society and explicitly address "representation at the national, regional and local level", "consultation" and "self-governance"[39]. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, in turn, requires the promotion of the participation of persons belonging to minorities in public life and acknowledges that the realisation of this objective may require measures adapted to the national and local "context"[40].

Furthermore, the report presented by Jean-Pierre Worms to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 19 January 1993 introduces a relevant benchmark for the analysis of relationships between national majorities and regional minorities. Article 11 of the draft additional protocol stipulates that

> "in regions where they are in the majority, persons belonging to a national minority should be able to benefit from appropriate local or autonomous authorities or a special status, corresponding to the historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the internal legislation of the state"[41].

The explanatory memorandum specifies that these arrangements are designed with respect for the integrity of the state – and may only be established in accordance with national legislation[42]. The formulation was incorporated into the draft protocol included in "Recommendation 1201 (1993)" of the Parliamentary Assembly[43].

This information is relevant to the situation of Romanians who are in a numerical minority, as Article 11 must be read in conjunction with Article 13, which

[39] OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, The Hague, OSCE, 1999.

[40] In particular, Article 15 and the thematic documents regarding the "effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life", in Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*.

[41] „în regiunile în care sunt majoritare, persoanele aparținând unei minorități naționale ar trebui să poată beneficia de autorități locale sau autonome adecvate ori de un statut special, corespunzător situației istorice și teritoriale și conform legislației interne a statului", in Jean-Pierre Worms, "Report on an additional protocol on the rights of minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights", in Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Doc. 6742, January 19, 1993, draft protocol, Articles 11 and 13, and the explanatory memorandum, along with the comments on Articles 10–11 and 13.

[42] *Ibidem.*

[43] Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 1201 (1993): Additional protocol on the rights of minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights, February 1, 1993, draft protocol, Articles 11 and 13.

explicitly extends the exercise of the rights and freedoms provided in the proposal to persons belonging to the state-wide majority, but who find themselves in a minority in one or more regions of that state. The relevance to the Romanian case does not arise solely from a subsequent interpretation; ***in the commentary on Article 13, the rapporteur expressly provides the example of regions in Romania where Hungarians are the majority and specifies that Romanians who are in a numerical minority in these regions must benefit from the protection of the proposed provisions***. The text does not establish ethnic quotas for deputy mayors or deputy presidents, but it supports the relevance of the question regarding the consistency of applying the principle of inclusion when the local "majority–minority" relationship is reversed.

Within this framework, the central question arises: *is the principle of effective participation applied in practice, in a reciprocal manner, when a national minority becomes a local majority and the national majority becomes a numerical minority*?

Existing literature offers consistent, albeit fragmentary, contributions; in the past, the representation of minorities in local councils has been evaluated, primarily based on the elections of 2004 and 2008 and the effects of electoral legislation[44]. Consequently, the competition between the UDMR and its rival Hungarian political organisations was examined by considering the relationship between local demographics, "ethnic enclaves", and the "fragmentation of the vote" – a process that provides valuable insight into how electoral dynamics function within specific communities[45]. Another avenue of research concerns the mechanisms of electoral participation and "bloc voting" among Transylvanian Hungarians, examining how the community's electoral mobilization is formed – and subsequently maintained[46]. These approaches are complemented by an analysis of the organization of the Hungarian political field, the strategies of the elites, and the relationship between political discourse, institutional structures, and the implementation of "assumed objectives" – as well as the broader framework of "political strategy"[47].

Following the bibliographic research conducted for this paper, no study was identified that systematically reconstructs – for the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and Mureș – the simultaneous composition of local councils and the holders of the offices of mayor, deputy mayor, and president or vice-president of the county council across all electoral cycles from 1992 through to the post-2024 elections, in order to

[44] István Gergő Székely, "The Representation of National Minorities in the Local Councils – An Evaluation of Romanian Electoral Legislation in Light of the Results of the 2004 and 2008 Local Elections", in *ISPMN Working Papers in Romanian Minority Studies. Institute for the Study of National Minority Issues*, Cluj-Napoca, No. 11, 2008.

[45] Sherrill Stroschein, "Demography in Ethnic Party Fragmentation: Hungarian Local Voting in Romania", in *Party Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2/2011, pp. 189–204.

[46] Tamás Kiss, István Gergő Székely and Gergő Barna, "Factors Affecting Turnout among Ethnic Minority Voters: The Case of Hungarians in Transylvania", in *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4/2017, pp. 87–119.

[47] Tibor Toró, "Hungarian Minority Politics in Post-Socialist Romania: Interests, Strategies, and Discourses", in *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, Vol. 10/2016, pp. 79–106.

analyse the "conversion of representation into executive access". The current study is, at the same time, merely the first stage. The broader project aims to apply the same methodology across the seven Romanian counties that host the largest Hungarian communities. This extended comparative analysis, which will allow for the verification of the hypotheses formulated here across a greater number of demographic contexts, will be the subject of subsequent research.

2. DATA, CASE SELECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical basis of this research was constructed not by relying on journalistic accounts or the memories of political actors, but rather on administrative documents requested from public institutions. The initial stage consisted of submitting requests grounded in Law no. 544/2001 regarding "free access to information of public interest". Article 1 of this law establishes the "free access to information of public interest", and "public information" is defined in relation to the activity of public authorities and institutions[48]. The requests covered each mandate since 1992: the names of the executive officeholders; their political affiliation; any changes that occurred during the term; the political composition of local and county councils; as well as the exact period during which the respective individuals held office. The administrative files for Harghita, Covasna, and Mureș contain both the requests and the institutions' responses and annexes, resulting in a total of nearly 200 pages of annexes, scanned documents, and local council resolutions that had to be centralized and analysed.

The collection process also highlighted a methodological difficulty, which is significant in its own right: local administration archives are not uniformly centralized for the entire post-communist period. The response regarding Covasna County, for instance, illustrates the limitations of a complete synthesis available at the level of a single institution and the necessity of addressing the administrative-territorial units directly. Certain gaps were filled through additional requests, individual responses from these units, and separate syntheses.

In Mureș, the request included the County Council and a broader range of municipalities and towns with mixed populations, including Târgu-Mureș, Reghin, Sighișoara, Târnăveni, Iernut, Luduș, Sovata, and Sângeorgiu de Pădure. The selection criterion was the presence of a community of approximately 10% or more belonging to the "other" primary ethnicity. The chosen formula is deliberately symmetrical. In a municipality with a Hungarian majority, the political access of the Romanian community is monitored; in a town with a Romanian majority, such as Toplița or Bălan, the access of Hungarian representation is also tracked. This choice

[48] The Romanian Parliament, Law no. 544 of October 12, 2001, on Free Access to Information of Public Interest, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 663 of October 23, 2001, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

transforms the research from a simple inventory of the situation of Romanians in two counties into a comparative model, capable of testing whether the observed mechanism functions in both directions.

The unit of analysis is not the individual, but the political mandate and the institutional distribution of offices. For each cycle, three variables are monitored:

a) demographic weight, which is the proportion of the respective community within the population of the administrative-territorial unit;

b) political weight, resulting from the mandates of relevant parties in the local or county council;

c) executive weight, measured through access to the position of deputy mayor or vice-president and, complementarily, to that of mayor or president of the county council.

This model can be described as an analysis of a representation conversion rate: to what extent does an electoral presence translate into an executive position? Its importance derives from the indirect nature of the election of deputy mayors and vice-presidents, as the result is not produced directly by the electorate, but by the internal political negotiation of the council. A terminological clarification is also necessary, as the current political discourse often uses the phrase "Romanian parties" for PSD, PNL, the former PUNR, PDSR, PD/PDL, etc., in opposition to the UDMR. From a scientific perspective, the equivalence between party and ethnicity is problematic. PSD, PNL, and other national parties are not ethnic organizations and may have members or candidates belonging to any ethnicity. In this work, where data does not contain self-identified ethnicity, we will use terms such as national/"mainstream"/Romanian parties only as a convention and not as a fixed trait.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS: FROM ELECTORAL FIGURES TO EFFECTIVE POWER

The most compelling finding from this longitudinal database emerges when comparing Miercurea-Ciuc, Sfântu Gheorghe, and Târgu-Mureș.

Both Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe serve as "eloquent examples". In Miercurea-Ciuc, centralized administrative records indicate that during the 1992–1996 term, Erdei István served as the UDMR deputy mayor; from 1996–2000, the positions were held by Erdei István and Bíró Albin, both from the UDMR; during 2000–2004, Papp Előd and Erdei István represented the UDMR; for 2004–2008, Antal Attila and Szőke Domokos were appointed from the same party. The subsequent cycles followed the same pattern, and during the 2020–2024 and 2024–present terms, the positions have been held by Bors Béla and Sógor Enikő, also representing the UDMR.

In other words, throughout the 1992–2024/present series, there has not been a single deputy mayor from Romanian national parties. This result is more

significant than a snapshot of a single term because it encompasses the entire duration of the analyzed "post-communist democratic administration".

This absence cannot be explained solely by the lack of opposition within the council. During the 1992–1996 term, besides the UDMR, there were two representatives from FSN+PUNR and other councilors unaffiliated with the UDMR; between 1996–2000, PDSR, PL '93, USD, and the Democratic Convention were present; in 2004–2008, the PSD and PNL collectively held four out of nineteen seats; from 2012–2016, there were two USL councilors; in 2016–2020, two PNL and one PSD representative appeared; and in 2024, there is a PSD councilor, while two seats belong to another Hungarian formation. Alternative representation has varied – sometimes modest, other times sufficient to form a visible group – but it has never transitioned into the role of deputy mayor.

At the Harghita County Council level, the pattern is equally robust. Administrative files record successive UDMR vice-presidents throughout all analyzed cycles: Minier Gábor and Kolumbán Gábor in the first legislature, followed by Minier Gábor and Zsombori Vilhelm, Dézsi Iosif Zoltán and Bunta Levente-Zoltán, Borboly Csaba and Petres Sándor, Petres Sándor and Sófalvi László, and subsequently Birtalan József, Petres Sándor, Barti Tihamér, Biró Barna-Botond and, in the most recent legislatures, once again UDMR officeholders. This "persistence" is more relevant than the nominal identity of the individuals. Throughout this period, there were also representatives of PSD, PNL, or other parties in the council, yet the vice-presidential positions were not allocated and did not function as an instrument for the inclusion of a party representing the Romanian electorate. This remains one of the major differences compared to Mureș.

In Sfântu Gheorghe, centralized records indicate consistent UDMR leadership at the mayoral level, held by Albert Álmos from 1992 to 2008 and Antal Árpád-András since 2008. Available administrative data identifies Vargha Fruzsina and Tóth-Birtan Csaba as UDMR deputy mayors for the 2020–2024 term, followed by Sztakics Éva Judit and Tóth-Birtan Csaba – also from UDMR – for the term beginning in 2024. For the purpose of this study, the observed pattern may be defined as follows: *a significant Romanian demographic presence that, due to fragmented political representation, remains unable to secure positions such as deputy mayor or vice-president.*

A significant counterpoint is found in Târgu-Mureș, where every recorded legislature since 1996 has included at least one UDMR deputy mayor. Furthermore, during the 2000–2004 and 2004–2008 terms, these positions were held exclusively by UDMR representatives. The composition of the Târgu-Mureș Local Council partially explains this continuity. UDMR secured 14 of 25 seats in 1992, 13 of 25 in 1996, 13 of 25 in 2000, 12 of 23 in 2004, 10 of 23 in 2008, 10 of 23 in 2012, 10 of 23 in 2016, 11 of 23 in 2020, and 10 of 23 following the 2024 elections.

This data series is likely the most vital indicator for explaining the phenomenon. Even during periods when the Romanian population becomes the

demographic majority, the Romanian vote remains divided among multiple parties, while UDMR remains a unified political bloc holding approximately 40–50% of the council. In the legislature resulting from the 2024 elections, for example, UDMR holds 10 of 23 seats – roughly 43.5% of the council – with the remaining 13 seats divided between PSD, PNL, AUR, and POL.

The Mureș County Council offers a similar perspective on the practice of power-sharing. During the 1993–1996 period, the county leadership included one UDMR vice-president and one from the PUNR; from 1996 to 2000, it included a UDMR vice-president and one from the USD/PDSR coalition. In the 2000–2004 term, when the council president was from the UDMR, the vice-presidents were drawn from the PDSR. Subsequent cycles have seen alternating "UDMR-PNL" or "UDMR-PSD" formulas, or, in periods where the president was from UDMR, two PSD vice-presidents. After 2020, we once again observe mixed "UDMR-PNL" and "UDMR-PSD" arrangements.

Compared to Harghita, the difference is clear: in Mureș, the position of vice-president is repeatedly used as an instrument for inter-party – and indirectly, inter-community – coalition building, whereas in Harghita and Covasna, the record is dominated entirely by UDMR.

The cases of Toplița and Bălan provide a highly useful and relevant inverse test. In both localities, Romanians form the majority, while the Hungarian population constitutes a local minority of 17% and 30% of the total citizenry, respectively. Available records indicate that Toplița had a UDMR deputy mayor during both the 2020–2024 term and the term following the 2024 elections, despite UDMR holding only two council seats in the 2020 legislature and three in 2024. In Bălan, the position of deputy mayor has been held by UDMR during several periods, including 1992–1996, 2020–2024, and the term that began in 2024.

This analysis demonstrates that, across the nine electoral cycles **from 1992-2024, *no deputy mayor in Miercurea-Ciuc or Sfântu Gheorghe has originated from the political factions identified in this study as representing the Romanian community***. This is not a matter of an isolated term or occasionally reduced executive participation, but rather a total absence over the course of more than three decades. ***At the Harghita County Council, the same continuity characterises the positions of deputy president, which have been occupied exclusively by UDMR representatives throughout the documented period***. At the Covasna County Council, the only recorded exception is the presence of a PNL representative during the 1992–1996 and 1996–2000 terms***; subsequently, these deputy president roles have reverted exclusively to the UDMR.***

Within these parameters, the findings highlight a persistent separation between presence in deliberative councils and access to executive leadership. The succession of elections and the changing of incumbents have not, in the cases analysed, produced an alternation of participation between these two political spheres. While explanations regarding electoral majorities, party fragmentation, and coalition

negotiations remain necessary, they do not alter the observed outcome. *The issue is not merely the extent to which Romanians are poorly represented in the executive; rather, it is why their deliberative representation has failed, for over thirty years, to translate into the occupation of the analysed positions, with the limited exception previously noted.*

4. COHESION, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE NEGOTIATION OF POSITIONS

The phenomenon that the data renders visible can be explained more convincingly by incorporating multiple factors rather than a single cause. The first factor may be identified in the organizational consolidation of the Hungarian vote. UDMR was established rapidly after 1989 and became the primary institutional vehicle for representing Hungarians in Romania. Numerous authors demonstrate that this position did not eliminate internal conflicts, yet it allowed the organization to structure the political field of the minority and occupy the central position in its relationship with the Romanian state and Hungary[49].

It is also observed that Transylvanian Hungarians have overwhelmingly supported UDMR since the change of regime, and this stability is explained by a combination of macro-political processes and micro-social mechanisms, such as networks, community integration, electoral habits, and identity-based motivations. In Târgu-Mureș, for example, even though the Hungarian population has become a numerical minority, UDMR remains the largest individual political group in the council. Parties predominantly voted for by Romanians may hold a majority together, but "together" is a political operation, not a demographic fact. PSD, PNL, AUR, POL, and other entities do not automatically form a Romanian bloc; they compete for the mayoralty, resources, positions, and the electorate. UDMR, holding ten or eleven councilors out of 23, can be far more coherent in negotiations.

The issue that must be analysed from a sociological perspective is that Romanians in Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe vote within the general structure of the Romanian political system[50]. Depending on the era, they have had to choose between FSN/PDSR/PSD, PNL, PUNR, PD/PDL, CDR, USL, and other political entities. The resulting fragmentation may generate a demographically significant sum of votes, yet it often fails to produce groups of councillors large enough to compel negotiations for the executive position. Furthermore, during the recent 2024 local elections, this fragmentation of the vote resulted in a situation in Sfântu

[49] Tibor Toró, *op. cit.*

[50] Maria Cobianu-Băcanu, „Românii minoritari din Covasna și Harghita. Despre o posibilă strategie a păstrării propriei lor identități naționale" ["The ethnic Romanian minority in Covasna and Harghita. Regarding a potential strategy for the preservation of their national identity"], in *Revista Română de Sociologie [Romanian Journal of Sociology]*, Bucharest, New Series, Year X, No. 3–4/1999, p. 315.

Gheorghe where no representative from the national political parties gained a seat on the Local Council – an unprecedented occurrence in the last century[51].

In localities firmly dominated by the UDMR, the incentive differs; furthermore, if the Hungarian party holds an outright majority or can form a majority alongside another Hungarian party, the electoral cost of excluding a Romanian party from the position of deputy mayor is minimal. The theory of coalitions specifically predicts that actors do not necessarily expand a coalition beyond the size required for the control of "functions"[52]. This mechanism may elucidate the reason for the discrepancy between the normative discourse regarding "minority participation" at a national level and the reality of "local practice".

The organization advocates for inclusion when it finds itself in structural opposition, yet it lacks the same incentive to share positions of power where it holds an outright majority. Furthermore, it demonstrates a duplicity in public discourse; the group demands inclusion and openness for Hungarian minority representatives, but it fails to offer the same treatment to Romanians who find themselves in a "numerical minority" status.

5. INSTITUTIONAL RECIPROCITY AND CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the nine electoral cycles from 1992–2024 highlights more than an imbalanced representation; it reveals the permanence of an executive absence. In Miercurea-Ciuc, the positions of deputy mayor have belonged exclusively to the UDMR; for Sfântu Gheorghe, the centralization of research identifies no deputy mayors originating from political formations associated with Romanian political representation. At the Harghita County Council, the vice-presidents have remained entirely within the UDMR. The exception recorded at the Covasna County Council, with PNL representation during the 1992–1996 and 1996–2000 mandates, remains relevant, yet its subsequent disappearance indicates a narrowing, rather than a consolidation, of executive openness. We are, therefore, not discussing a temporary electoral defeat, but the prolonged reproduction of a restrictive distribution of power.

The contrast with Târgu-Mureș is firm, however, when we analyse the fact that starting with the 1996–2000 mandate, every legislature analysed includes at least one UDMR deputy mayor; between 2000 and 2008, all these positions belonged to the Hungarian organization. At the county level, Mureș repeatedly records mixed

[51] Oana Mălina Negrea, „Covasna: Niciun român în Consiliul Local Sfântu Gheorghe; primarul UDMR propune un consiliu consultativ" ["Covasna: No Romanians on the Sfântu Gheorghe City Council; UDMR Mayor Proposes an Advisory Council"], in *AGERPRES*, June 10, 2024, Available at: https://agerpres.ro/politic/2024/06/10/covasnaniciunromaninconsiliullocalsfantugheorghe-primaruludmr-propune-unconsiliuconsultati-1310674, Accessed on September 4, 2026.

[52] See William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1962.

leaderships. Toplița and Bălan additionally show that executive access for the Hungarian minority is possible even in localities with a Romanian majority in Harghita and with a much smaller percentage of Hungarians. The uncomfortable question cannot be avoided: *why does executive participation reproduce in one direction, while in the county seats and county leaderships of Harghita and Covasna, the reverse direction remains blocked for over three decades?*

The cohesion of the UDMR and the fragmentation of national parties explain a significant part of the difference. Demonstrating that the inclusion of a partner becomes electorally useless does not mean that their permanent exclusion expresses an "inclusive democracy". When positions are shared only where the balance of power dictates it, the participation of minority members functions as a result of political constraint, not as an accepted rule of reciprocity.

The proposed distinction between "local minority" and "dominant minority" allows us to look beyond demographic arithmetic[53]. A minority is defined by its political influence and effective means of expression, rather than exclusively by the number of its members. In this perspective, the fact that Romanians belong to the national majority does not automatically compensate for their local institutional weakness. A citizen does not participate in the governance of their municipality simply by belonging to the country's majority population. The confusion between these two scales can transform the invocation of the national majority into an argument for ignoring local vulnerability.

In the sociology of borders, one examines the creation of "interior borders" – through the restriction of contact and cooperation between communities, without altering geographical boundaries[54]. For the cases under investigation, this perspective shifts the focus towards the inner workings of institutions: identical electoral procedures may coexist with a persistent separation between the population's actual community and the representation admitted to leadership. The relevant frontier here is not the state border, but the threshold of access to administrative leadership. When this threshold remains uncrossed by a community's representation throughout electoral cycles, we encounter an indicator of "executive closure", rather than merely a statistical difference between parties. The significant change may consist of the restriction of participation, rather than the formal disappearance of the institution.

In the case studied, the concept allows for a critical formulation of a "double standard", as inclusion is claimed against majority domination, yet it is not

[53] Radu Baltasiu (coord.), *Situația actuală a frontierei de nord-vest a României la 100 de ani de la Tratatul de la Versailles. Raport de cercetare [The current status of the North West Romanian border 100 years after The Treaty of Versailles. Research report]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2022, pp. 11–12.

[54] Ilie Bădescu, „Spiritualizarea frontierelor și partidele etnice" ["The spiritualisation of borders and ethnic parties"], in Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungaciu and Radu Baltasiu, *Sociologia și geopolitica frontierei [The sociology and geopolitics of the "frontier"]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, Floarea Albastră Publishing House, 1995, pp. 313–314.

generalised when the national minority organisation becomes the local majority. Reciprocity cannot be reduced to the goodwill of the powerful; it is precisely where the majority is not arithmetically compelled to share power that the sincerity of its public commitment to democratic inclusion is tested.

The conclusion does not call for "compensatory ethnic privileges", but for democratic consistency and political accountability. The rights of Hungarians are not diminished by examining the marginalisation of numerically minoritised Romanians. Instead, the credibility of an inclusive discourse is diminished when participation is defended for oneself while treated as dispensable for others. No organisation can transform the defence of minorities into an immunity from the evaluation of its own governance. After more than thirty years, this "executive absence" can no longer be presented as an administrative detail. It is a persistent political outcome, and its normalisation transforms proclaimed equality into a promise without reciprocity.

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