

Spatial Distance and Representation in Closed PR List: Revisiting the U-Curve Argument

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Abstract: *The authors are testing the patterns of geographical representation in single nationwide district closed-list PR systems, in the framework of an earlier study made by Latner and McGann (2005), who suggested that MPs mostly reside in central metropolitan areas, as well as in distant regions, to the detriment of descriptive representation of areas adjacent to the capital. In this way, spatial distance serves as an incentive for parties to nominate lists comprised mostly of candidates from metropolitan urban centres who can easily reach the mid-distance municipalities for campaigning and constituency service, but also of those candidates residing in peripheral regions in which there is some sort of political or ethno-cultural saliency, prompting the voters to prefer their local candidates over capital city politicians. Authors are offering a novel approach of measuring and comparing spatial distance to the data on representation of local administrative units and regional subdivisions of four countries (Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia). While the findings indeed indicate overrepresentation of capital cities and underrepresentation of neighbouring areas, the representation of peripheral areas is not significantly pronounced and seemingly depends more on a contextual case-to-case basis than on a general pattern related to spatial distance producing political or ethno-cultural saliency.*

Keywords: *political geography, PR list, closed-list, single nationwide district, descriptive representation, Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia*

I. Introduction

The ever-increasing amount of literature focusing on various spatial dimensions of politics sometimes crosses paths with studies of representation, underlying the role localities play in the relation between voters and elected representatives. While the importance of the place of residence (or origin) is more pronounced in candidate-centred electoral systems, more notably single-member district, but also preferential voting, it is often argued that proportional representation list systems disregard local representation (Norton 1997; McLean 1991) or generally produce weak incentives for parties to offer regionally balanced lists (Carey – Shugart 1995). According to these studies, voters in PR lists, especially if the party lists are closed, don't have the opportunity to demonstrate potential hometown bias towards certain candidates, so parties won't employ the locality when nominating lists.

Various studies have identified localness as one of the main informational shortcuts voters seek in a candidate. Authors such as Childs and Cowley (2011) defined the concept of a descriptive representation of locality, indicating the importance to voters that their area be represented in the legislature by someone who originates from or is residing within its limits. This link is less clear in party-centred systems, where the potential conflict between territorial and political principles of representation can easily emerge. Closed-list PR systems provide more influence to parties and party elites to act as electorates and pick candidates, as opposed to the voters who can only choose between party lists, and not among the individual deputies within them. A similar point can be made about countries with a single at-large district, where the pendulum swings closer to the political principle, rather than to the territorial one, given the fact that lists are national. However, certain authors disagree. In their seminal work, Latner and McGann (2005) provide considerable evidence for the importance of spatial representation within two typical closed-list PR at-large systems, namely Israel and the Netherlands, while also explaining certain patterns of geographical representation seemingly typical for this type of electoral system. However, their findings remain limited to only one electoral cycle. The main aim of our study is to examine whether these patterns still hold true and whether parties in typical closed-list single district countries still produce regionally balanced lists. To test this claim, we are focusing on four cases of incumbent parliaments of European countries using a relatively similar, party-centred electoral system: Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia.

II. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the previous section, the issue of territorial representation is often treated as a form of descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967), operat-

ing within the idea that groups tend to elect individuals who manifest certain characteristics of the group, including gender, race, class, ethnic origin, spatial residence and others. Local preferences of voters are often taken for granted in many European countries, with the dimension of geography situated in the widely understood notion that politicians are sent to legislative bodies to, at least partly, represent the interest of their localities, a strategy also employed by political parties when recruiting candidates (Pedersen et al. 2004). There is a growing body of evidence proving that location indeed affects both the electoral performance of candidates and their respective parties, as well as their consequent parliamentary behaviour. Firstly, the hometown advantage can attract votes because voters can perceive local candidates as more knowledgeable and invested in local issues, but also due to their local presence and recognisability, local ties and connections, or simply because the candidates themselves make localness a part of their electoral brands (Munis 2020). The term ‘friend and neighbors voting’ came to be used to describe the support candidates mobilise in local communities mainly on the basis of spatial proximity and derived social ties (Rice – Macht 1987; Meredith 2013). Although the term emerged in single-member district countries, it is false to assume that voters in other electoral systems don’t apply similar informational shortcuts when making decisions. Voters can look for locals on party lists because their origin could be understood as a proof of dedication to local topics or as knowledge of local needs (Cain et al. 1987; Folke et al. 2021). Candidates tend to emulate the perceived local demand during their campaigns, but this also continues when they are elected MPs, through rooting the localness within their long-term identity as a way of seeking reelection. Examples include focusing primarily on constituency services (Brouard et al. 2013) or often signaling their hometown bias through activities such as plenary speeches and parliamentary questions (Zittel et al. 2019; Borghetto et al. 2020). One of the important means of cultivating the personal vote based on spatial origin is involvement in pork barrel style policies aimed at the redistribution of budgetary funds towards preferred local communities, which simultaneously bolsters the image of representatives dedicated to local ties even in at-large proportional systems (Carozzi – Repetto 2016; Fiva – Halse 2016).

Consequently, political parties also react to these incentives in their selection procedures, taking the place of residence into consideration when composing and nominating lists. This also happens in closed-list PR systems operating within a single nationwide district, such as Israel or the Netherlands,¹ where consideration for political geography is presumably low. As Latner and McGann

1 The Netherlands’ electoral system is officially flexible-list, but in effect operates as a closed-list. While there are 18 sub-national districts and regional nomination lists, the seats are allocated to party lists based on their national vote share. Subsequently, the share of MPs elected from the bottom part of the lists is low, averaging at 0.6% per electoral cycle (Passarelli 2020).

(2005) point out, parties in those countries tend to put forward regionally balanced lists, adopting internal procedures for spatial diversification. These authors discovered interesting patterns of localities representation, with their MPs' residence data analysis demonstrating that most of the central metropolitan areas are overrepresented in relation to their population share, which is somewhat expected due to the concentration of political institutions and economic power in capitals and other large cities in the provinces of Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland and Utrecht, as well as in the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem provinces of Israel. The ensuing findings seem more intriguing: Latner and McGann have found that the geographical pattern of representation in both case countries is U-curve shaped, with overrepresentation of both capital areas as well as peripheral regions, to the detriment of those regions adjacent to the metro areas. They see the issues of geography to be salient in faraway regions, where representation operates within one of three assumptions: either the national capitals are seen as distant and disconnected from local issues, or there is a distinctive culture (such as in the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Groningen), or, finally, these territories are intrinsically important for the national politics (such as the West Bank settlements in the case of Israel). Both voters and parties recognise the saliency, resulting in more local representation for these areas. On the other hand, regions neighbouring the capitals suffer due to the centralisation and peripheral saliency, but also (paradoxically) because of their proximity and connectedness to political centres. This is especially true for smaller countries, where MPs who live in capital cities can reach the municipalities nearby without much effort and expenditure, bearing in mind that constituency residence is not a legal requirement for nomination in most countries. This led to the widespread phenomenon of parachutists (Pedersen et al. 2004), namely the capital city resident politicians nominated in provincial constituencies.

Our main research question is whether this well-explained but understudied U-shaped pattern of representation in closed-list PR nationwide district countries replicates contemporary cases. There are currently six countries in the wider European area implementing similar electoral mechanisms: Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia. We will examine four of them, excluding Israel due to the lasting parliamentary crisis leading the country to hold five elections in the last four years, as well as Moldova, due to the lack of data on MPs' residence from that country. Apart from using similar party-centred electoral systems lacking institutional features that could force spatial representation, all four are smaller non-federal countries. The somewhat scarce previous research of these cases has partly confirmed some of our main assumptions. Charvat (2017) found a disproportionate overrepresentation of the Bratislava region in the Slovak parliament for the 2010, 2012 and 2016 electoral cycles, while Bursać (2020) demonstrates similar trends with regard

to Belgrade, while observing all Serbian elections since the reintroduction of the multiparty system in 1990.

In all four cases of our study, we expect to find the overrepresentation of both national capitals, due to the centralisation of politics, along with overrepresentation of distant regions where identity is salient. Moreover, three Eastern European countries in our study all have a strong presence of ethnic minorities concentrated in peripheral regions: Hungarians and Rusyns in Slovakia; Hungarians, Albanians, Bosniaks and other smaller minorities in Serbia; Albanians, Bosniaks and Croats in Montenegro. Serbs also claim a strong presence as an ethnic group in Montenegro, but for various reasons this paper is too short to explain, they do not seek an official minority status, and more importantly for our study, they are not regionally salient but widespread across the territory, with 18 out of 24 Montenegrin municipalities having 20% or more Serbs among their population. The situation gets even more complicated when the share of Serbian language speakers is considered, mostly due to the mutual fluidity of Serbian and Montenegrin identity. Nevertheless, Serbs within Montenegro do have their own ethnic interest parties, but they do not seek support, nor are they based, exclusively within the border regions.

Furthermore, minorities in some Eastern European countries have their own ethnic parties, in some cases because this kind of association is provided with special legal status and subsequent electoral incentives, most notably in Serbia and Montenegro, where minority parties are not obliged to pass the 3% electoral threshold to gain deputies. On the other hand, Slovakia upholds the 5% threshold for all parties regardless of their ethnic focus, which became an issue in recent years, with the Hungarian vote being split between two competing ethnic parties, denying this community representation for the first time in more than two decades. But, as in the Serbian and Montenegrin cases, candidates of minority origin in Slovakia can be freely nominated and elected as part of other non-minority lists, which could serve as an incentive for dominant national parties to offer more ethnically and thus regionally diverse lists. Conversely, the presence of Eastern European-style ethnic minorities is not highlighted in the Netherlands, although some of the border provinces linguistically differ (speaking Frisian or Limburgish along with standard Dutch) or historically had more Catholic presences than the rest of the protestant Netherlands, which could also contribute to the regional saliency.

Our main hypothesis reads as follows: Representation in single nationwide district closed-list PR systems operates as a function of spatial distance. It further separates into two specific hypotheses, the first about the overrepresentation of capital cities and capital regions to the detriment of the rest of the country's territory; the second one is about the overrepresentation of identity salient peripheral regions.

III. Data and methods

In order to test these assumptions, we have obtained the data on MPs' residence from four countries for contemporary parliamentary terms sampled as of March 2023: in total 81 MPs from Montenegro, 150 from Slovakia, 250 from Serbia and 149 from the Netherlands (with 1 case of missing data). Although some similar analyses also focus on the place of birth, we opted only for the residence, because it represents a current link to the community. Furthermore, this approach also eliminates possible mistakes due to the foreign-born MPs or people born in towns other than their actual residences due to the health system infrastructure of the given country. Simply put, place of birth, unlike residence, can be a result of an accident.

We will test the relation of distance between the countries' capitals (seats of parliament) and MPs' residence municipalities and regions. A dual level of analysis (municipality and region) is employed mainly because many studies of geographic representation fail to look beyond the district, underestimating the extent of descriptive representation of locality and the strategic dilemma both candidates and voters face: namely, whether the MPs represent all people in a region (district), or only some part of it, as Andre and Depauw (2016) demonstrated. We will test both instances, while also examining both an absolute number of MPs, as well as proportionality ratio – representation of a certain municipality or region relative to their respective population shares, where perfect representation stands at value 1. If Latner and McGann's findings are still in effect, we should identify a higher proportionality ratio ($r > 1$) of representation in capital regions, along with peripheral areas, while the adjacent areas of intermediate distance should have lower levels of ratio ($r < 1$).

Spatial distance is measured in two ways. We rejected the idea of utilising direct geographical aerial distance, because we are exploring the proximity of travel between localities, and people usually don't travel in straight lines due to various terrain obstacles and existing road infrastructure. So it left us with two possible measures: road distance and travel time. Google Maps was employed for both measurements, calculating the distance between the national capital and a centre of every municipality (or centre of a regional capital, when considering regions) in both road kilometers and driving time with a passenger car. The parachutist argument about representation of districts neighbouring the capital comes down to the possibility of access, and we are assuming that most MPs in these relatively small countries carry out their campaign activities and other constituency services while travelling by car. To ensure the uniformity of the data, the best road option was always selected, and the measurement in all four countries is executed during night time, when there is less traffic congestion and fewer accidents or road closures that could affect the results. In this way, we have mapped distances for a total of 145 local administrative units (cities and

municipalities) in Serbia, 24 in Montenegro, 352 in the Netherlands, as well as 72 districts in Slovakia. The level of analysis in Slovakia is slightly different, because the total number of municipalities there is almost 2900, which could be impossible to properly track and difficult to compare with the other cases. Thus, the level of district (okres) is employed, which structurally corresponds to the local administrative unit level employed in the other three countries, and with separate Bratislava and Košice districts treated as single towns.

Besides the municipal level, we will also analyse representation more on a regional level. Here things get complicated, mainly because of the non-uniformity of regions across the sample. Namely, as a smallest country case with only 24 municipalities and with a population of just over 600 thousand, Montenegro does not have any regional division. NUTS nomenclature is not applied in the country, while the Regional Development Law (Zakon o regionalnom razvoju 2011) dividing its territory into three macro-regions (Coastal, Central and Northern), which is not particularly useful for the purpose of our analysis, because none of the three could be exclusively treated as adjacent or peripheral. Slovakia and the Netherlands are a bit more suitable for examination, being divided into eight regions (kraj) or twelve provinces, respectively. Serbian administrative divisions present problems similar to Montenegro: there are only four NUTS 2 level regions, while the lower divide level is an administrative district (okrug). There are 25 districts in total. Due to the differences in levels of analysis, we won't create a unique model for the regions, but only a comparative analysis of different country cases.

IV. Findings

The initial strength of correlation tests demonstrates that, on a summary level of the four observed countries, the share of MPs is very strongly related ($p=0.911$) to more populous cities and municipalities, while also showing a statistically significant negative correlation to travel time and road distance, although the coefficient is much weaker ($p<-0.2$ in both cases). More importantly, on a summary level, proportionality ratio value (share of MPs in relation to the share of population) demonstrates only a weak correlation with distance variables ($p<-0.2$).

As for separate countries, distance and travel time seem to relate negatively to the number of MPs or MP share in all four individual cases, with coefficients ranging from $p=-0.161$ for the Netherlands to $p=-0.475$ for Montenegro, indicating weak to moderate correlation. This again leads us to the conclusion that central capital areas provide more parliament members, while the number of deputies decreases with geographical distance. The finding is supported by the population share variable, with all four countries displaying very strong levels of correlation between MP share and population share, ranging from $p=0.817$

in Slovakia to almost absolute correlation of $p=0.989$ in Serbia, meaning that metropolitan urban centres produce a majority of representatives. On the other hand, proportionality ratio, a measure indicating over- or under-representation of certain municipalities, demonstrates only a weak negative correlation with distance and travel time in just one case ($p<-0.2$), which is the Netherlands.

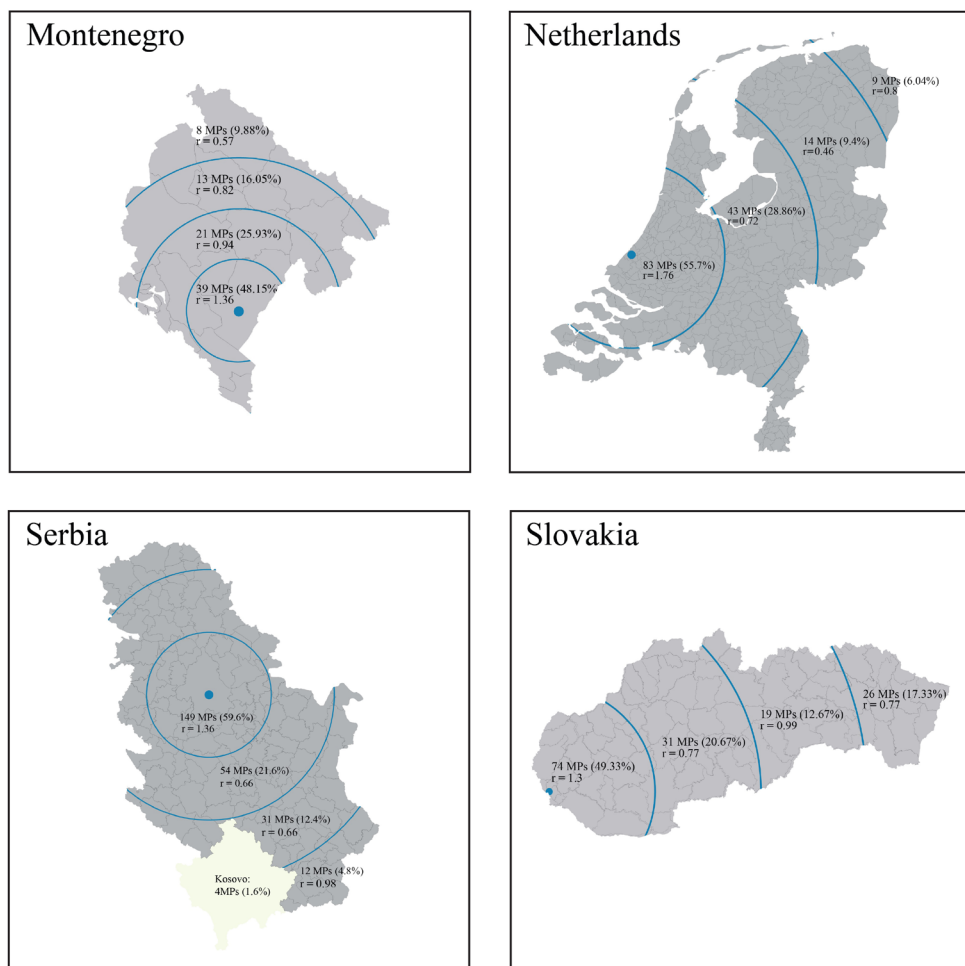
In order to create an analytical framework of the data, we have divided each of the four country cases into different distance categories (capital, adjacent, distant and border areas), according to travel time variable quartiles and with regard to the time needed to move from the capital city centre to a centre of a certain municipality, as presented in Table 1. The road distance and travel time variables proved to have almost identical territorial scope, differing only in definition of a handful of Serbian and Dutch municipalities, so we opted for the latter, believing it to be closer to the argument explaining campaigning of candidates or constituency service of MPs.

Table 1: Analytical framework: quartiles of travel time distance

	Montenegro	Netherlands	Serbia	Slovakia
capital area	within 40min	within 49min	within 1h10	within 1h26
adjacent area	40min to 1h20	49min to 1h38	1h10 to 2h20	1h26 to 2h52
distant area	1h20 to 2h	1h38 to 2h27	2h20 to 3h30	2h52 to 4h18
border area	over 2h	over 2h27	over 3h30	over 4h18

Maps (see: Illustration 1) created with regard to this analytical framework visually demonstrate the possible limitations of the U-curve argument, especially regarding the representation of border regions. Quantifying the argument, we could expect that capital areas hold a larger share of MPs, but also, given the fact that a plain percentage of deputies could be the function of a larger number of inhabitants (which was confirmed by the correlation tests), we also assume higher ratios of proportionality for capitals, meaning that these areas also provide more MPs than could be expected according to their share of total population. In all four cases, capital areas are indeed significantly overrepresented. In Serbia, the capital area as defined by a first travel time quartile holds 43.71% of the population and 59.6% of MPs, producing a ratio of 1.36. Identical ratio value is found in Montenegro, where the capital area of 35.49% of the population has 48.15% of MPs. Slovak capital ratio amounts to 1.3 (49.33% of MPs, 37.99% of population), while in the Netherlands it climbs to a staggering 1.76, with an area inhabited by 31.57% of Dutch citizens providing 55.7% of parliament members.

Illustration 1: Analytical framework applied to the territories of four countries



On the other hand, adjacent areas indeed seem underrepresented. Their ratio is significantly lower than perfect proportionality (value 1) in three out of four cases, with Montenegro being the significant outlier with 0.94 value. In Serbia, municipalities adjacent to the capital area hold a summary ratio of just 0.66, while values for Slovakia and the Netherlands are also low (0.77 and 0.72, respectively). The Montenegrin case requires further explanation. While the assumption of lower representation of areas close to the capital which are covered by the capital city politicians ‘parachuting’ into the area seems to hold true in the other three countries, the small surface area of Montenegro and subsequent geographical concentration of important urban centres could affect the argument here. Namely, our defined adjacent area in Montenegro covers the central part of the country as well as a significant part of Montenegrin coast,

standing in sharp contrast with the mountainous remainder of the country. The adjacent area here contains several important economic, cultural and urban centres on the coast, as well as the second largest city, Nikšić, which together provide more than a quarter of MPs. So in this particular case, the geography dictates the patterns of representation slightly differently than expected in a single nationwide district country.

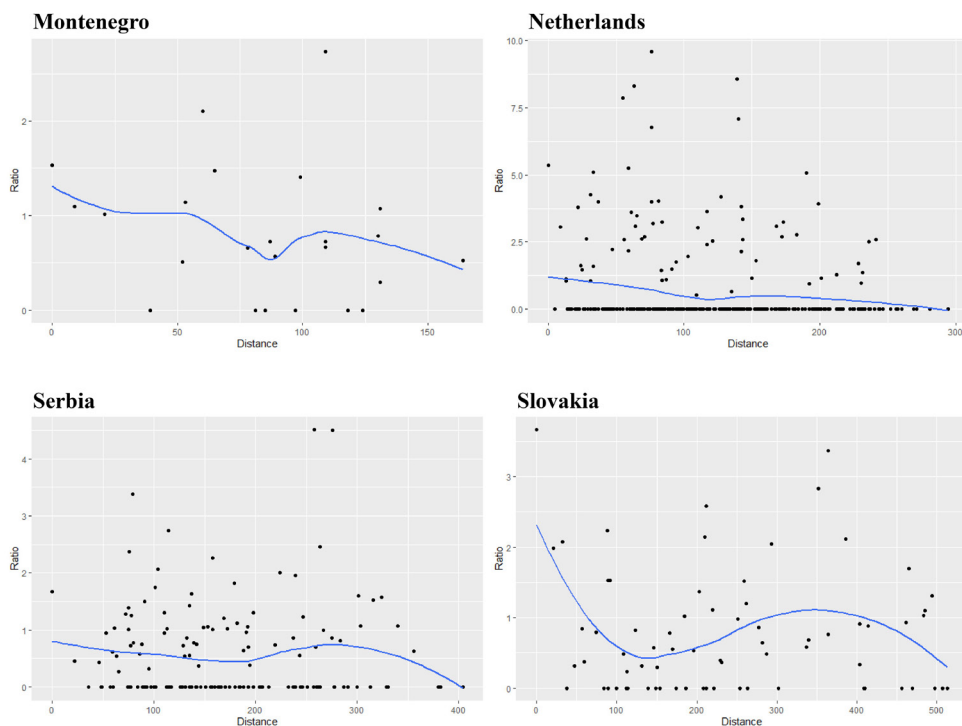
Our third category of distant areas is also less represented in three of the four cases, this time with Slovakia being the outlier with an almost perfect ratio of 0.99, in contrast with the Netherlands (0.46), Serbia (0.66) and Montenegro (0.82). The value for Slovakia could also be the result of the country's geography. Namely, the lengthy country stretching on a west-east axis, with national capital Bratislava lying on its very western border, could affect the way local actors (voters and parties) perceive the meaning of a peripheral region. In the other three cases, due to the country shape and relatively central position of capital, these areas could be defined in a series of concentric circles, which is not the case in Slovakia: some of the municipalities in our distant category of Slovakia are much further from the capital than municipalities in the last border area category in the other three cases. Simply put, the distant area of Slovakia, due to its remoteness from the capital, can have the saliency of a border area, producing higher values of proportionality ratio.

Finally, when it comes to the border regions, we cannot identify overrepresentation similar to the capital levels, but countries such as Serbia (ratio 0.98)² and the Netherlands (ratio 0.8) have higher representation of these areas in comparison with the adjacent or distant area category. On the other hand, ratio value for Slovakia stands at 0.77 and for Montenegro at a mere 0.57. So these areas are more represented than capital-adjacent municipalities in some cases, but their distance does not produce overrepresentation in any case.

The robustness of the U-curve argument of representation patterns in relation to the municipalities' distance from the capital can be easily seen in the graphs provided (see: Graph 1). Although the function in all four cases resembles a U-curve on its left side, due to the overrepresentation of the capitals and underrepresentation of adjacent municipalities; the representation of peripheral municipalities presented on the right side of the plots does not hold equal or indeed remotely similar values. Translated to our hypotheses, we could claim that, although a single nationwide district closed-list PR indeed produces higher representation of metropolitan areas and underrepresentation of areas neighbouring them, it fails to accomplish overrepresentation of peripheral regions, meaning that the political, geographical or even ethno-cultural salience of

2 It should be noted that an additional four Serbian MPs (1.6% of total) reside in the territory of Kosovo. Due to the lack of data (population shares) they are not included in the analysis, but their nomination on certain party lists could nevertheless indicate the signaling of importance of the Kosovo issue for some Serbian parties, especially the ruling SNS or the smaller right wing parties.

Graph 1: Scatter plots of municipalities' distance combined with the proportionality ratio



periphery does not strongly affect their representation (summary scatter plot for all 593 local administrative units in the sample is presented in Graph 2).

The second part of our analysis focuses on the regional level. As stated before, we have calculated proportionality ratios and mapped them for Dutch provinces, Slovak regions and Serbian districts. Correlation tests indicate that distance relates negatively to both MPs share ($p=-0.432$) and ratio ($p=-0.367$), while the ethnic composition variable does not provide any statistically significant values.

In Slovakia (see: Illustration 2), the adjacent regions of Trenčín and Nitra are indeed considerably underrepresented in contrast with Bratislava, while distant Prešov has almost perfect proportionality. This could be a case of pure peripheral saliency serving solely as a function of geography, with the regional capital being one of the furthest from national capitals in the whole sample. This is underlined by the fact that the Prešov region does not have a significant presence of minorities, especially in comparison with other parts of Slovakia. However, this could also be a consequence of a more recent political context.

Graph 2: Summary scatter plot of municipalities' distance combined with proportionality ratio for all four countries combined

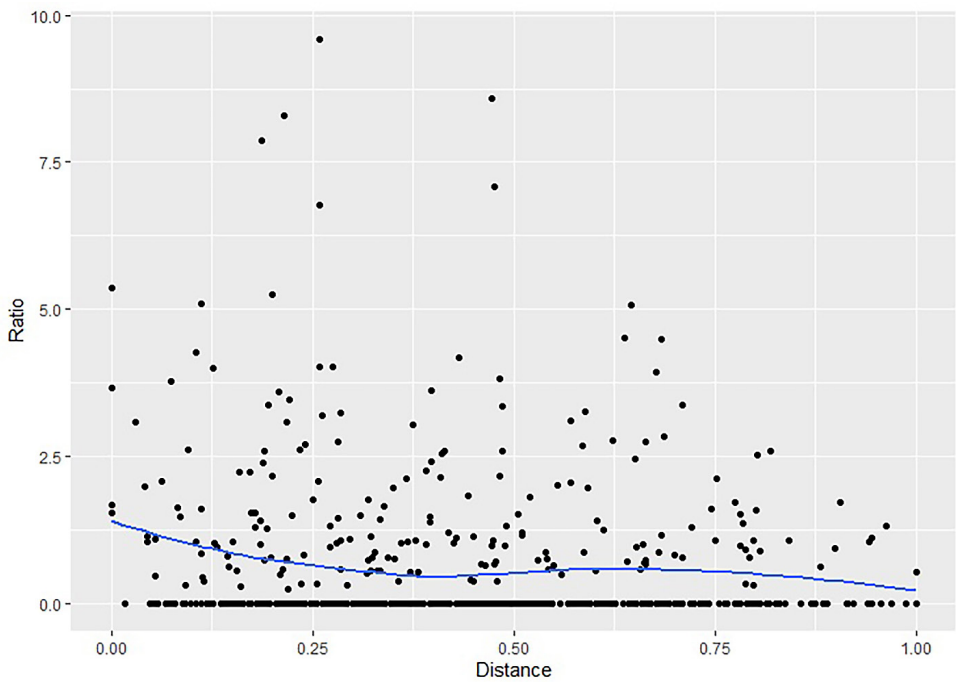
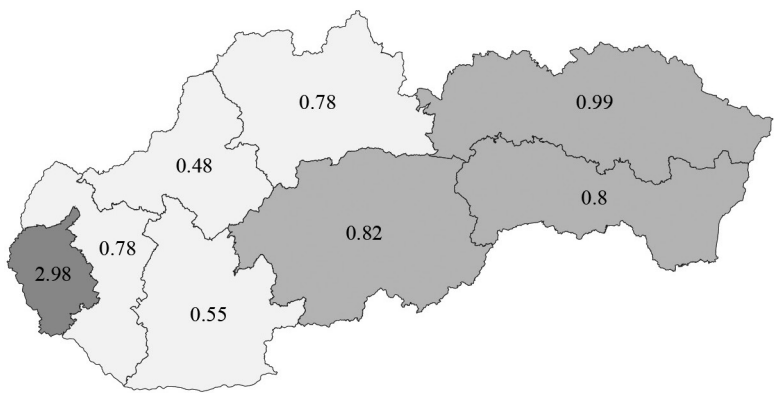


Illustration 2: Geographical representation of regions in Slovakia

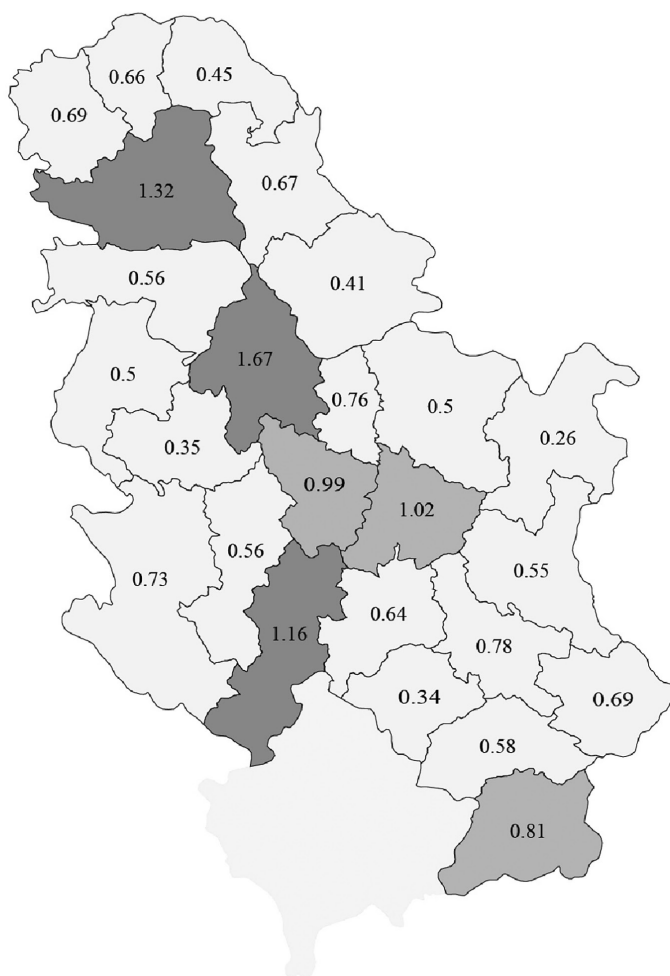


Namely, two of the most important parties representing interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (SMK-MKP and Most-Híd) split their votes in the last election and both failed to reach the 5% threshold, thus leaving Hungarians living mostly in southern parts of the Trnava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica and

Košice regions without descriptive representation, and most probably affecting the overall representation of these regions as well. Meanwhile, all Hungarian parties merged into a new Alliance party in 2021, which will probably have positive effects on regional representation ratios in the next election, if they manage to reach the threshold.

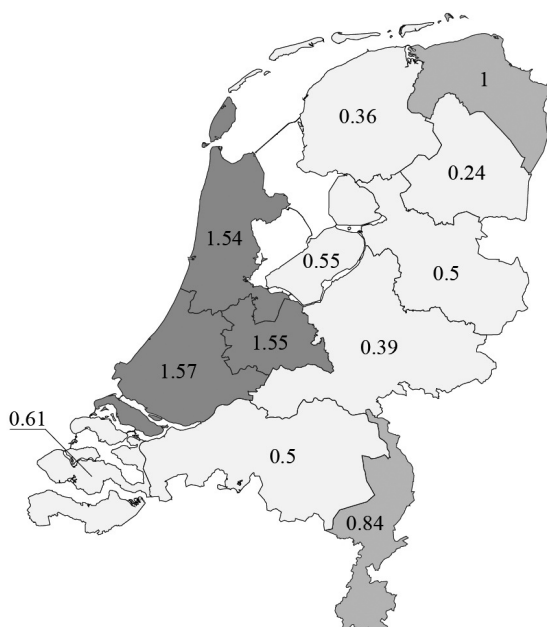
The Serbian case (see: Illustration 3) also seems more dependent on contextual explanations than on the saliency of distant regions based on their specific features or simply detachment from the metro areas. In some cases we could attribute higher-than-average levels of proportionality ratio to distance or ethnic composition, such as in the Raški and Pčinjski districts with the significant presence of Bosniak and Albanian minorities respectively. But in the latter

Illustration 3: Geographical representation of regions in Serbia



case, only one MP of Albanian origin was elected, leaving the overrepresented Raški district as a single instance where we can identify the ethnic factor as predominant, with five MPs from two Bosniak minority lists residing there, and with both of those ethnic parties having their headquarters in the city of Novi Pazar. However, another important factor explaining the overrepresentation of this area is the district seat city of Kraljevo, which holds five MPs (1.2 ratio, compared to Novi Pazar's 0.99) and which is an ethnically homogenous town inhabited by the Serbs. Furthermore, other minority-inhabited districts of Serbia, especially in the north, east and southwest of the country, do not replicate similar patterns of representation. Ratio values are similarly low for the only two districts (Severnobački and Severnbanatski) in which Serbs do not make up a majority of the population, but rather Hungarians – even though the Hungarian ethnic party SVM gains substantial representation in the Serbian Parliament. On the other hand, overrepresentation of Serbian districts seems to be a function of urbanisation, rather than distance or ethno-cultural saliency. Areas with higher ratio values, apart from Belgrade, also correlate to some of the most populous areas, with district seats of Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Kraljevo or Jagodina being the urban, economic and cultural centres of wider areas. This could indicate the importance of nominating the candidates from areas where there is a heightened rivalry for the local vote, which is also in line with one of the secondary explanations offered by Latner and McGann (2005:713), about

Illustration 4: Geographical representation of regions in the Netherlands



electoral competition providing more incentive for regionally balanced lists. Translated to the Serbian case, the aforementioned cities and their respective districts indeed provide more opposition votes or they are seats of some regional parties, all of which could prompt other actors to react by putting their local candidates forward.

The case of the Netherlands (see: Illustration 4) indicates huge overrepresentation of the three central metropolitan regions, standing in sharp contrast with the rest of the provinces. Corresponding to the Serbian case, economic and cultural centres of the country are situated in some of the largest cities. Adding to the cultural saliency argument, only two provinces with close-to-proportional ratio are Groningen, holding the strong Frisian identity and having West Frisian as one of its official languages, and the Catholic-majority Limburg, in which an additional regional language (Limburgish) is also widely used. Voters from these provinces could have preferences towards their own culturally similar representatives in line with descriptive representation theories, further prompting otherwise metropolitan-oriented parties to nominate more candidates from these areas on their lists as a vote maximisation strategy. But on the other hand, West Frisian is also broadly spoken in the Friesland province, while Catholics make up a majority of the population in Noord-Brabant, which both demonstrate low values of ratio, although they are closer to the capital area than Groningen and Limburg, so the effect of saliency could be weaker there.

V. Conclusion

We can argue that distance matter for the representation, but only up to a point. Our hypotheses are partially confirmed: namely, capital cities are indeed overrepresented and adjacent areas seem to provide fewer deputies in national parliaments than one could expect according to their population share, but as we explained in previous sections, this could be understood as a practical function of spatial proximity, with voters being only a short drive away from the capital city politicians. However, peripheral regions are not significantly overrepresented, although in some cases and depending on the political or ethno-cultural context, they provide higher ratio levels than other areas which lay closer to the national capitals. Thus, the U-curve argument of representation does not hold entirely true today, which is especially the case on the municipal level of analysis, where we could identify only a weak correlation of values further supported by the scatter plots created to test the function of geographical distance in representation of localities.

As for the regional level, some findings corroborate the initial argument (in the Dutch case and, to a limited extent, the Serbian case), but the spatial explanation is heavily limited and requires contextualisation from the framework of political dynamics. This is also the case with Slovakia, where current representa-

tion of salient regions could be massively affected by the inability of Hungarian ethnic parties to pass the threshold in the last election, thus probably omitting the parliament of local candidates belonging to that geographically concentrated community. In any case, the voter's decisions and party nomination strategies in closed-list PR single district systems seem to be incentivised by more than spatial constraints, although they do play a certain role.

Limitations of our study include the use of only basic statistical analysis, with more complex models based on distance explaining just a small fraction of variance, so they are not reported in the study. Moreover, limited temporal and territorial constraints of focusing on current parliamentary terms in only four countries provide us with partial conclusions not applicable elsewhere. Samples covering more countries and electoral cycles could potentially demonstrate significant differences between distinct electoral rules, as well as robustness of some conclusions through different time periods. It could also provide us with an opportunity to create more complex models including a number of variables predicting differences in representation levels of certain localities. However, this was not the scope of this initial study, which focused on testing the certain representation pattern in similar settings and demonstrated both pertinence but also constraints of the U-curve argument.

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