

ZOLTÁN KÁNTOR

## EQUALITY THROUGH MULTIPLE VOTES?

**Ágnes M. Balázs: *Többször szavazni és egyenlőnek maradni? A plurális választójog és a nemzetiségi képviselőlet útvesztőjében* [Multiple Voting and Remaining Equal? In the Labyrinth of Plural Suffrage and National Minority Representation]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2022. 348 pp.**

This book offers an in-depth examination of the complexities surrounding plural voting systems and the representation of national minorities, engaging critically with concepts of electoral equality and justice. It explores a fundamental question: can granting multiple votes to certain individuals or groups be reconciled with the principle of political equality?

At the heart of the study lies the issue of fairness and constitutionality in plural voting. Defined as a system where some individuals either cast multiple votes or have votes carrying greater weight than others, plural voting is often dismissed in contemporary discourse. However, various states still apply such systems, particularly in the context of minority representation (e.g., Hungary, Serbia, Croatia) or external voting rights (e.g., Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia). In the latter case, minority groups may influence political outcomes in both their country of residence and their kin-state. It is no coincidence that this issue holds particular significance for Hungarian political discourse.

The author argues that plural voting is a multifaceted phenomenon with diverse roles and implications, warranting scholarly reconsideration. The book explores both historical and contemporary applications of multiple voting rights, assessing their justification based on factors such as minority status, age, education, wealth, taxation, and moral considerations. This review, like the book itself, focuses primarily on national minorities. A key section of the study addresses the principle of electoral equality in the Hungarian context, evaluating the effectiveness of current self-government and parliamentary representation frameworks for minorities. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines constitutional law, political theory, and

historical analysis, the author provides a nuanced exploration of plural voting, both as a theoretical concept and as a practical institutional mechanism.

In Hungary, the debate over external voting rights for Hungarians living abroad and parliamentary representation for national minorities has been particularly intense. While there is a broad consensus on the establishment of and voting rights for minority self-governments, the parliamentary representation of minorities remains a contested issue.

Balázs traces the historical evolution of plural voting, demonstrating how it has often been used to reinforce social hierarchies, typically benefiting wealthier and more highly educated populations. The phenomenon of plural voting for minorities and kin-minorities, however, is a relatively recent development, emerging in the early 1990s.

The book's central argument is framed through a critical examination of a fundamental question: can plural voting be aligned with democratic principles of equality? While plural voting is generally viewed as incompatible with egalitarian norms in democratic theory, the author challenges this assumption. She argues that plural voting has historically served various functions and has theoretical foundations that merit further exploration, particularly in the context of ensuring fair representation for marginalized and underrepresented groups.

A significant focus of the book is its analysis of national minority representation. Balázs systematically assesses the institutional frameworks used in Hungary and other countries to secure political representation for minority groups. She distinguishes between symbolic representation, where minorities are granted parliamentary seats with limited real influence, and substantive representation, where they have proportional decision-making power. In countries like Romania and Serbia, substantive representation is more easily achieved, while in Hungary, a higher proportion of minority votes is required for full representation. Hungary's electoral system, which grants limited voting rights to certain national minorities, serves as a case study for evaluating the constraints of plural voting mechanisms. Drawing on comparative examples, the author offers insights into possible ways to enhance minority representation while maintaining electoral equality.

While a fully just and equal electoral system may be impossible—particularly regarding minority representation and external voting—a balance between formal electoral equality and affirmative measures for minority representation could be achieved. External voting, which allows expatriates to participate in national elections, raises important questions about the intersection of electoral rights, territoriality, and national identity.

One of the book's key strengths is its integration of rigorous legal analysis with empirical case studies. The author employs a methodologically robust approach, drawing on comparative legal frameworks and historical precedents to support her arguments. The case studies from Hungary and other national contexts enhance the empirical validity of the research, making it a valuable contribution to the fields of electoral law and democratic theory.

Ultimately, the book challenges established assumptions about electoral equality and encourages scholars and policymakers to adopt a more nuanced perspective on democratic representation. In the Hungarian context, it critically examines the country's electoral framework in relation to minority rights and political pluralism. By emphasizing the need for ongoing scholarly inquiry and policy innovation, the book contributes to broader debates on democratic fairness.

In conclusion, the book presents a thorough and empirically grounded analysis of plural voting and minority representation. It offers a fresh perspective on electoral justice and democratic equality, challenging conventional legal interpretations and making a significant contribution to academic discourse on the subject.