CONTEMPORARY RISKS TO BULGARIAN DEMOCRACY: CONTROLLED VOTING AND VOTE BUYING

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Abstract In the recent years, Bulgaria has witnessed excess levels of electoral volatility (especially in 2001 and 2009), marking critical elections that transformed the party system; and even broken them up into several other independent parties. One of the key events in the new political scenario is the rise of controlled voting and vote buying. This phenomenon, despite its criminalization, has been rampantly used by organized criminal networks to connect underworld figures with politicians, judges, prosecutors, local authorities and businesses, furthering corruption. One of the main reasons why this is possible is because of the sociological marginalization of several communities in the local ethnography. This paper aims at identifying the typical forms of controlled voting as a connecting bridge between political parties, criminal networks and public institutions. The work is based on empirical study comprising of representative survey and a series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews of victims, vote brokers, policemen and party functionaries.

Introduction

Contemporary Bulgarian democracy faces diverse issues with democratic representation and legitimacy as well as fluidity of the party system. In the last 25 years, we have witnessed excess levels of electoral volatility (especially in 2001 and 2009), marking critical elections that transformed the party system; and the fragmentation of the party system marked by the growing number of other parties.

Mainstream political science explains this fluidity with a crisis of political identification and collapse of trust in political parties among other political institutions, together with increased critical attitudes arising from economic hardships. Yet, another explanation is the growing number of controlled voting and direct vote buying which flourishes in recent years despite its criminalization and intensive policymaking on the issue. The corpus of specialized legislation and the firm codification of the electoral process proved fruitless in limiting the share of controlled votes in the overall turnout.

The expansion of the weight of controlled votes in the election results increased the demand for paid votes, thus, creating a well-developed market for votes controlled by criminal agents who diversify their portfolio of criminal activities. This market is organized by criminal networks connecting underworld figures with politicians, judges, prosecutors, local authorities and businesses. The ground for its expansion is the growing social marginalization of greater number of subgroups and local communities.

Competitive Network State Capture

Bulgaria is among the states that are most affected by the criminal wave stemming from the transformation of the totalitarian state and the transition to democracy (Bezlov, 2007). The term organized crime has become a universal metaphor for explaining the linkages between business and politics throughout the 1990s, when the social and economic foundations of the contemporary Bulgarian organized criminality were established. Three parallel process took place in that period: a) denationalization of almost all state-owned enterprises; b) trans-border smuggling of oil and other goods, catalyzed by the embargo against former Yugoslavia (1992-1995); c) the disintegration of the law enforcing systems; and d) the chaos arising from the transition to market-based economy (Bezlov and Gounev, 2012).

These processes provided fertile ground for two emerging groups of organized criminality (Pushkarova, 2010). The first group is a direct outlet of the Communist Party that operated throughout the transition and initiated the principle criminal practices while infiltrating the economy and the politics. The second group embrace all other criminal associations, which appeared spontaneously and are rather a product of the convergence of criminogenic factors than of the communist legacy. Most of them are short-lived and are specialized in niche markets.

The political and economic stabilization of the country in the 2000s, marked by the NATO and EU accession in 2004 and 2007 respectively, lead to the decomposition of the hierarchical structures of organized crime and some of the illegal markets collapsed. This process forced the accumulated criminal capital to find its way into official economy and incorporated the criminal elites into official economic and political elites, resulting in the emergence of new criminal networks capable of conducting more complicated and profitable white-collar crimes (Bezlov and Gounev, 2012). These networks managed to infiltrate and gain control over public institutions by means of political corruption and clientelistic practices, granting them access to manipulated public tenders and concessions, as well as, to some cartelized business sectors like the gambling industry, tourism and the real estate market (Bezlov and Gounev, 2012).

However, this is not a typical case of state capture, as defined by the mainstream literature (Andvig et al. 2000; World Bank 2000; Disch et al. 2009; Garay-Salamanca et al. 2010; Garay-Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán 2015) because we deal with competitive illicit networks and not monopolistic or oligopolistic agents. The periodic clashes of these networks become visible through arbitrary actions of the law-enforcing agencies and court cases used for retribution. Therefore, we have a case of competitive network state capture. What makes it different from classical political corruption is the relative reticence of the system against newcomers and ordinary economic agents.

These illicit networks are not strictly or hierarchically structured. They are rather loose webs with horizontal ties (Williams 2001; Finckenauer 2007). They involve not only criminals, but politicians, prosecutors, judges, policemen, bankers, businessmen and even famous actors and representatives of the church[38]. These networks are involved in a variety of criminal markets and activities and use similar corruptive tools (Bezlov and Gounev 2012c). Morselli defines these networks as self-organizing structures, operated by the unexpected behavior of their compounds, which could represent diverse actors, subgroups, clusters and even hierarchies that are absorbed in the imperatively flexible network structure (2009: 9-17). This structure, however, does not exclude the presence of central actors. As centrality varies in degree, the concept of *betweennes centrality* becomes relevant. It characterizes the strategic position of the brokers within the less cohesive networks who connect other agents. They make the connections between actors operating in different markets possible. The brokers are neither patrons, nor clients and at the same time, the agents dealing with them are not necessarily aware of the existence of the network that they are part of.

The illicit networks compete for control of public institutions at all levels. The struggle is most evident at the municipal level and has its peaks during elections when the redistributive power is at stake. These networks use vote buying and exert control over the polls as an instrument for state capture (Tsoneva et al. 2011). To do so, they need financial and operative resources and employ existing networks for drug distribution, racketeering, smuggling, trafficking, prostitution and illegal gambling. This makes the market for votes tightly connected and part of the organized crime. Therefore, we can classify it as an organized criminal market, operated by competitive illicit networks aiming at capturing public institutions.

The most frequently used method for controlled voting is direct vote buying through money or in-kind payments. This method usually relies on thee ways for compliance: instrumental, normative and coercive (Schedler and Schaffer 2007). The brokers monitor how individual voters vote directly or indirectly, depending on the specific situation either by relying on members of the electoral administration or by using diverse clues of how the vote was cast. The "aggregate turnout" is also used in controlling the vote of whole villages or neighborhoods. The latter is very effective when the votes are counted at the district level (Schaffer 1998; Schaffer 2002; Callahan 2002, 7) which is an established practice in Bulgaria, especially in marginalized and discriminated communities with high levels of poverty and illiteracy (Lehoucq and Molina 2002: 228-239) such as the Roma communities in the country. The result of the organized criminal market for votes is always a distortion of the political representation (Philipson and Snyder 1996). A typical landmark for such distortion is the high level of electoral volatility, a phenomenon often seen in Bulgaria and Poland in Central and Eastern Europe (Gherghina 2015: 156).

The Organized Market for Votes

In order to outline the major types of controlled voting in Bulgaria we have conducted a series of qualitative research in 2014 and 2015. We started with a focus group bringing

[38] Testimony of high-rank party functionary interviewed by the author.

together 9 experts in electoral process and controlled voting followed by a set of 35 semi-structured interviews with victims, 11 semi-structured interviews with high-rank policemen and representatives of the State Agency "National Security" and a set of 15 unstructured interviews with brokers, dealers, community leaders, representatives of the organized criminality, the political parties and former policemen. Then, in order to assess the scale of the problem we conducted a quantitative study with standardized questionnaire and representative sample for the adult population of the country. In this section, we present a typology based on interviews and the expert discussion.

As already outlined, the most effective method for competitive network state capture is vote buying and controlled polling. Since there is a competition between rival illicit networks, an organized criminal market for votes exists, operated by brokers including local community leaders, small employers and mayors. Demand and supply of votes peak in municipal and parliamentary elections. One of the respondents – a dealer of smuggled cigarettes who acts as a broker of votes in elections says that vote seekers "are most interested in elections for mayors and the parliament". In parliamentary elections, vote buying and the control of the voters is done in "centralized" way. The parties' headquarters instruct their local structures how many votes they have to obtain. In municipal elections, the mayors play central role as they try to remain in office or to secure it for their trusted person.

A Multi-level Marketing Approach

The interviewed buyers of votes outline as most effective the "classical scheme of Multi-level Marketing" or network marketing where participants receive compensations at each level of the organization and are, therefore, simulated to maximize the number of votes they manage to buy. The scheme works among neighbors, relatives and friends. The MLM distributors are selected based on thein interpersonal skills. They have to be "charismatic, to have influence in the community, to be able of attracting followers, to be very communicative".

Parties and candidates usually pay between 60 and 100 BGN (approximately 30 to 50 EUR) per vote and voters get between 20 and 50 BGN (approximately 10 to 25 EUR). Usually the payments are split in two installments, one in advance and one post the Election Day when the compliance could be verified. The compensations are not limited to money transfers. They include "support for initiatives and businesses" and "connections and contacts with the right people". The instructions are made orally and in person, and they usually do not leave any evidence of the deal. The dealings take place in the voters' homes, in groceries or pubs. The payments are always in cash or in-kind and are made tête-à-tête.

Several methods are used in controlling of the way the voters cast their votes. The most widely used practice is the listing of names and personal data such as addresses and ID numbers. Then listed persons are warned not to "play games, since the consequences won't be good". Another practice is to require voters to take a photo of how they voted with their mobile phones or to show their vote to a person from the electoral administration. There are also people standing in front of the polling section to monitor if negotiated voters come to vote. If all of the expected voters do not show up by afternoon, the hired goon goes to their homes to pick them up.

One of the respondents participating in MLM scheme for votes is a football player in a first league team. He says that the offer for participation came from the owner of the team. *"Shortly before the elections, he gathered the boys and offered us money if we manage to gather some votes for a party. We had to get votes from our relatives and friends and to take them to the polling stations on the Election Day. He offered money for each single vote – 30 levs for the voter and 10 for us. We received the money from a trusted person of the owner on the Election Day when we took the people to the polling stations. I'd brought five people, including myself. Two other guys brought three each, and for the rest, I have no memory."*

A similar story was shared by a person who sells smuggled cigarettes. His boss forced him to participate in the vote buying to keep his job in the black market. He had to find more dealers of votes at the market and to offer them participation in the scheme.

The increase in demand for votes in recent years has led to higher competition between networks which offer votes; some even began to target politicians with direct offers. One of the respondents, leader of a small party says brokers offered him votes for the last municipal elections and even to buy a mayor position in some municipalities directly, regardless of the number of votes need. He was assured that they will take care for that. The prices ranged from 30 to 70 BNG per vote. One of the brokers offered as many as 3000 votes.

Vote Buying through Brokers Controlling Large Number of Voters in Compact Ethnic Groups

Large-scale controlled voting most often take place in compact ethnic groups. The Turkish population concentrated in some parts of the country is relatively closed to outsiders (Ilieva 2010). The level of education of young representatives of the Turkish minority is still very low. Illiteracy has not been eliminated and is even increasing (Karahasan-Cinar 2011). The living conditions of this population are relatively poor. "Lower classes of Bulgarian Turks have largely moved downwards – to relatively deeper poverty, as well as below the line of absolute poverty. You can see the catastrophic rise in the population of this community belonging to the lowest classes – from 4% - 7%, it has rapidly swelled to 50% - 70%" (Mirchev 2011). The social marginalization allows local informal leaders and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) (defined as ethnic party of the Turkish minority (Karasimeonov 2010: 69-71) or as regional party[39]) to establish control mechanisms over that population. As one of the experts participating in the group discussion points out "MRF is an economic mafia-like structure which exert exceptionally powerful pressure at the local level… This is the most vivid manifestation of controlled voting".

Among the most important instrument for control used by MRF is the fear of ostracism. One of the respondents who was subjected to pressure from MRF shares that "there is a certain fear from the neighbours for those who want to or do defect. Something bad will happen if we don't vote their way. It is a small community and everyone knows everyone in the neighborhood, they know how many people are there in this area. Those who think differently are always at risk of being more threatened. They want us all think the same way - their way". The marginalization is further fueled by lack of interethnic dialogue "People are

[39])Rumyana Kolarova: personal conversation.

offending us, Bulgarians are a bit bad people, nothing personal, Allah knows that I mean nothing bad to anyone, but they isolate us" the respondent says.

Another mechanism applied by the MRF is to offer incentives or to threaten people with economic sanctions. Another respondent explains that "a month prior the elections, they come and give 30-50 leva per person and say: you know what to do". Sometimes they are offered nutritious products or are promised higher rates for their tobacco production. Third respondent has been threatened by the brother of a MP, who owns the local wholesale market in the area: "you either vote, or you will have to close your store because you will not get supplies from elsewhere. We get all our goods from his market: bread, soft drinks, beer, everything".

Another largely marginalized group is the Roma population living in ghettoes in the cities or in the countryside (Vassilev 2007). Most of the Romani people do not own land and rarely get involved in agriculture. It is not easy for them to get decent jobs mainly due to their low qualifications, resulting from their illiteracy. They usually work on a daily basis for other people, gather herbs in the woods to be sold to retailers or graze cattle, sheep or goats of other owners. Part of those people rely on social payments and some get involved in criminal activities, mostly illegal lumber felling and burglaries.

They live in closed and populous traditional communities. A typical couple has 5 to 8 kids; most of the parents are children themselves, as they enter in early marriages starting at the age of 12 for the females and 16 for the males. A major source of income are social payments by the government for each children, this further stimulates parents to have children irrespectively to their capabilities to ensure proper living conditions.

There are also isolated instances where parents teach their children how to simulate asthma, epilepsy or mental disorder symptoms in order to get extra social compensation. This is usually tolerated by respective authorities at the local level in a general framework of clientelism. Romani people are allowed to cheat the social security system or to indulge in criminal activities in exchange for their electoral support in favour of the local and national political candidates and parties. In most of the villages, Romani people vote almost unanimously for a candidate or a party. Their preferences are highly volatile through elections which is a clear indication of controlled massive voting. In the case with municipal elections, these votes determine outcome.

Typically, traditional communities are structured around powerful and wide family systems comprising of numerous representatives of several generations. The family serves as a basic economic unit and provider of social services. Authority within these families is concentrated in the head of the family, who takes full responsibility of the well-being of all of its members. The authority of the head of family substitutes the authority of public institutions in terms of regulation. Head of families establish parallel order and parallel economy. Head of families are money-lenders as well. By indebting members of their wider families, they foster their authority.

This allows them to make profit by controlling their debtors in elections as well. These heads of families trade the votes of their relatives to parties and candidates in exchange of money and political protection for their economic activities much often beyond the premises

of legality. This informal protection provides Roma leaders with *de facto* immunity against prosecution, which further strengthens their power within the community and discourages any incentive for change. These relationships could be classified as a new form of servitude since they subjugate whole families, leaving no place for free will.

One of the interviewed experts uncovered the cooperation mechanisms between Roma community leaders and organized criminality during elections: "they choose a ringleader who has an influence in the respective neighborhood and give him the money. Then he distributes the money and keeps part for himself, of course." The mechanism is confirmed by interviews of a representative of the underworld, who participates in vote buying schemes in the Vratsa region: "They give me the money, and I goh to the owner of the pub or to the Roma chief, the one who commands the business and generally, the other things in the neighborhood. I negotiate with them and they take it from there. The question is how many votes do you need. It's a matter of basic accounting. The money goes to the chief of the neighborhood along with food, drinks and other stuff and we warn him to comply with the deal or else." Then the ringleader systematically instructs his subjugates how to vote to assure compliance with the arrangement. One of the Roma respondents describes how this instruction usually goes. "Those who can read are told the right number in the ballot paper. They give a cord to the rest that should be stretched from the top of the ballot paper down to the correct tick box. Sometimes they give us a filled-in ballot paper."

Another widespread practice of the Roma ringleaders in the villages is to gather the people in front of the polling station in the center of the village and to wait for an offer. Sometimes they wait almost until the end of the elections day "…the car with the money to come." A respondent from a village in Northeast of Bulgaria, the district of Dobrich reports: *"People of all parties pass by, well these from the parliament I often see them, and give them (the Roma) 20, 30, 40, 50 leva. At most 50, not more. On the Election Day they come and sit in groups at the fence of the park in the center near the school (where the polling station is) and wait the whole day. Guys from all the parties come and pay them. When there are 15-20 minutes left before the end of elections they go to vote together for the party that gave most."* People who bring the money are usually representatives of the underworld. They give the whole amount to the chiefs who later distributes it to the people.

Controlling the Vote of Mafia-like Communities

There are locations where Roma leaders are directly negotiating with the mayors without any intermediation. In these cases we usually observe mafia-like social structures characterized by a lack governmental of regulation. The absence of the state and its impossibility or unwillingness to impose its rule over certain territories is compensated by the presence of criminal networks that provide not only security, but various social services along. Exerts are unanimous that Roma headmen decide the destiny of the people in their communities. Their power is unquestioned within the community and is informally legitimized by the institutions at the municipal and state level. "There are criminal groups patronized by the police and the other authorities. That is why the crimes committed by Roma are multiplying. The headmen have political protections because they provide votes. The

police conform to them because they are valuable in managing and suppressing potential revolts in the Roma ghettoes." The influence demonstrated by these headmen over the police enhances their authority in the community further. "This is how the state in practice paves the way of cooperation between the police chiefs and the Roma headmen. Police chiefs are afraid of being fired if their actions lead to loss of Roma votes."

Even if there are arrests of Roma people for criminal actions, things end up in the "*extremely ineffective judicial system. In most of the cases, these criminals are sentenced to probation because prisons are full. They go back to their villages and continue to plunder. Even if the main perpetrators are caught and imprisoned for a year or two, they come back and everything starts from the beginning. In this region, a young male Roma living in criminal family environment goes to prison at least four times on average between 18 and 30 years of age*." The common understanding is that institutions do nothing for crime prevention, hence increasing the crime risk levels.

Bukovlak, a village in the Northwest of Bulgaria near the city of Pleven, is situated in a region with high social insecurity and extreme levels of conventional crime generally attributed to the Roma population, but small criminal offences practically do not exist here. Respondents render this to the good cooperation between the mayor and the Roma ringleaders: *"We owe everything to the mayor. He takes care for us. If someone is ill, he drives him to the hospital in the city, he supplies us with logs for heating in the winter, he grants us access to social programs, if there is a burglary he goes to the Roma quarter and their guys deliver the culprit. He has a good word with their bosses and that's why we don't have robberies like in other villages. Look in Mechka, Koilovtsi, Brashlyanitsa it's terrible. These guys didn't chance on good mayors."*

The apparent security for the local people has its cost for the society, however. In exchange for their support in elections and in securing order, Roma ringleaders enjoy protection of their serious criminal activities like trade with drugs, smuggled cigarettes and illegal alcohol, prostitution and illegal logging. These activities provide jobs for the ordinary Roma people in the village, while the labour market is strictly controlled by the leaders of the clan. This structure replaces the state completely. Ordinary people either comply or are expelled from the community and their respective sources of income, which is their greatest fear because "they will perish from hunger if they solely rely on the social compensation of the state."[40]

Local people do not hide their gratitude towards their community leaders. One of our respondents from the Roma quarter of Bukovlak, an officially unemployed male of 38, who sells cigarettes illegally at the market in Pleven eloquently depicts the social situation in the village: *"We, the Roma, are illiterate and someone has to clarify the state of the art and to guide us. We don't vote under pressure. They tell us who's the best candidate and who can help us, and we vote for him. I personally think I vote freely and without fear. I vote, and they give me money; not only to me but to the whole neighborhood. All parties give money in elections 20, 30, 50 leva…*
Each neighborhood has 2 or 3 men who are cleverer and who have connections and are aware with politics, so we listen to them. They have people for everything. They come before the elections and give money to each family, to help. But these 50, 100 leva are not much. They are enough for 2, 3 days. We don't vote for this money.

[40] Opinion of a local mayor from the group discussion.

It is more important that these people help us a lot. They have connections in the labour bureau, the social agency, the tax office and they fix our issues there. If we have problems they call and resolve them. They are aware of the laws, they are literate and help us a lot. That is why it is important for whom we vote. We have to have reliable person in power to help us.
They take our women to sell cigarettes and tobacco at the marketplace. They have people in the police and warn us about inspections. They have people in the court and everywhere. That is why we vote as they tell us. This is not a pressure, it is help, because they help us to survive. It is them who help, not the state. If we rely on the state, we'll get nothing. The state doesn't care about us and left us without work and money for bread. It is like this everywhere – if you don't have connections, you are lost.
In different neighborhoods there are people connected with different parties. The parties give money to our guys and they give it to us to vote for the party.
We cannot speak about punishments because it is very important for us to vote as we should. No one ever thinks skip voting or to vote for another option. Some years ago, there was a family that has taken money from three places. After the elections it became evident and there were sanctions for them. They were left without work, without social aid. Then they left to Sofia because here no one wanted to help them.
I don't know what the problem with controlled voting is. We don't take it as a problem, but as help and protection. It has always been like this. Whatever they do, nothing will change, whatever laws they adopt, because we have our own laws which must be obeyed. It is a matter of survival. Nothing will ever change because people don't feel like victims and don't want change, journalists twist the truth."

The control of the voting process is very strict. The fear of sanctions by the leaders is the main motivation for compliance, the financial stimulus remains behind. Organizers apply diverse techniques for control like requesting voters to take a photo of how they have casted their votes with a mobile phone, by providing a filled ballot paper in advance etc. However, the greatest possibility for control is provided by the relatively small electoral sections of less than 1000 voters, which allow the organizers to count and crosscheck the number of votes when the protocols with the results are ready.

Control of the Votes of Servants and Workers in Small Towns and Villages

The poor economic condition of the peripheries driven by ineffective economic structures and corrupted institutions forces local people to keep their jobs at any cost. The loss of a job is equal to physical extinction. Employers utilize the influence they have over workers to preserve their own business. In such corrupted environment, the arbitrary actions of institutions can easily force a business to close. The business is, on one hand, dependent on the state because, in a biased and ineffective market, public tenders are the sole source of income; on the other hand, administrative pressure and financial sanctions can lead to insolvency. Therefore, private companies are dependent on political elites, who exchange their patronage for electoral support. When we add public companies and administration, it appears that all the jobs in small towns and villages are controlled by local and national political elites, whose sole interest is to retain power and to utilize it. This is how workers fall into a system of controlled voting, a form of workplace violence with no emergency exit.
In the affected settlements, employment opportunities are very limited. Those who had the opportunity to leave the district and look for better living in the big cities or abroad have already did so. People who stay usually have to look after their relatives, or are at an advanced age. Having no other option makes these people highly dependent on their jobs, which allows the employers to take advantage of their dominating position. Salaries are usually miserable and working conditions are poor, but these things are taken as granted. Workers, as a rule, do

not contest salaries or working conditions. The situation allows employers to exchange the votes of their workers' families for money and political patronage. Forcing the workers to vote for a specific party or a candidate together with their families is a common practice. These people are threatened with financial sanctions, dismissal and even physical violence by their employers and representatives of the lower management. The purpose of this threat is to create a state of fear and insecurity allowing the employers to control their employees during elections.

Several respondents' stories reveal the described mechanisms. One of the respondents, a woman of 48, who lives with her disabled husband, has children who have left the town. She works in a private clothing company and receives the minimum wage. She said that prior to the last parliamentary elections, one of the managers told her that if she votes for a given party she will receive an extra payment for the holidays. She was told where the polling section is and when she has to go to vote with her husband. Following this conversation, the woman was diagnosed with high blood pressure and was prescribed medicine for the ailment. Given the new development in health, she decided, together with her husband, that they have no choice because she may lose her job. Although they had another party preference, they voted as instructed. She says she didn't do it for the bonus, but because she was afraid to lose her job.

Another respondent, working in a small town's post office, speaks that a week before the parliamentary elections in 2013, the regional director of the post office organized a meeting between the personnel and the local leader of a big political party. She threatened everybody with dismissal if they didn't vote for that party. The respondent got very embarrassed and was afraid for her job. She felt completely helpless for the first time in her life and complied with the instructions.

The third respondent, a 37-year-old man, who work in a private garage and lives with his wife and their child, says that in the 2011 municipal elections, he was instructed how to vote by his employer who was a candidate in one of the party lists. The employer told him that business is not going well and he will cut the personnel soon. He was promised not to be dismissed if he arranges the votes of his family for the party list. He was instructed to call a member of the polling station committee who will meet him in front of the station to "register" the votes. The respondent did what he was instructed to "secure the bread for his family". In his opinion, there is no other way in this town.

Local mayors also take part in the development of clientele relations in their municipalities because they have a direct interest in elections. In smaller municipalities, local administration is a major employer. Together with their families, municipal employees are loyal to the mayor and represent a considerable share of the vote. They share an ingenuous interest in another term in office of the incumbent to preserve their jobs.

The described clientele relations affects local small firms, as well. Usually these entities are entirely dependent on the tenders of the municipality which are given out by the mayors. Workers in these firms, together with their families, are facing the choice to support the mayor and preserve their income or to vote for someone else and starve. "In most of the cases, the business has no choice… They are forced to organize the vote of their employees, especially the companies which are politically dependent on subsidies and orders." The companies

which do not "play with the mayor" are informally denied access to public tenders, become an object of systematic regulatory pressure and face no support, and even resistance, from the administration. Within this framework, employers usually cooperate with mayors and organize the vote of their employees. Large companies and foreign corporations are less affected since they are powerful enough to oppose local political actors, but usually comply when pressed from "above".

The pressure over the workers is mainly psychological. Before the elections, the employer initiates a downsizing of personnel so that everyone becomes frightened for his/her job. Wages are sometimes delayed. They "empty the supermarket and the pharmacy so we have to go to the city to buy what we need. Some were threatened with thrashing and racketeered. They badger you until they get what they want." Sometimes workers are promised additional bonuses of about 20 or 30, rarely 50 leva. It depends on the elections. If they are contested "the bonuses are higher to attract more people or postponed salaries are paid."

The control of the voting process is complex. People from the criminal network are allocated to each polling station. These include lower-level management of the company who know the workers and their families and check if everybody shows up to vote and tallies the respective number of votes afterwards. Others are members of the polling station committee or elections observers.
There is also a system of mutual control. Workers report to the management if they hear that some of their colleagues defect because the punishment is collective if the culprit is not identified. The moral excuse for this is that worker owe loyalty to their boss. As one of the respondents points out "it is normal to vote for our boss or for a person he tells us because he gives us our bread. Why should you vote for someone you don't know? It's not good that they force people like this, but there is no other way. People are a bit ungrateful and the boss must be sure… The boss, good or bad, gives us our jobs. We survive because of him."

Scale and Spread of Controlled Voting
Controlled Voting at the 2014 Parliamentary Elections

To assess the scale of these types of controlled voting, we have conducted a field study of the adult population with voting rights. We have made a two-stage clustered representative sample based upon the list of voters issued by the Central Electoral Committee for the 2014 parliamentary elections. The effective sample size is 1056 interviews at the homes of the respondents. The study was conducted between 20.12.2014 and 12.01.2015.

The results show that approximately 28% (95% CI 25.51%, 30.93%) of the respondents declare that they personally, or someone in their close circle, were/was subjected to some kind of pressure or were being offered financial and/or other material incentive to vote in a specific way (Table 1). Money offers are most frequent (81.5%). Offers of food and other small goods have considerably lower share (16.4%). Third comes offers of bonuses and promotions (10.4%). This indicates that the routine practice to encourage voters to support given party or candidate is the financial incentive. Other practices are: direct threats from local leaders (9.4%), psychological harassment and threats of financial sanctions by the employer (6.7% and 5.7% respectively).

There are no considerable gender-based differences in the responses of the respondents regarding material incentives and threats from the employer or the management. At the same time, promises for political protection of illegal activities and physical violence by local leaders are targeted more often towards male respondents.

Table 1. Scale of practices for controlling the vote[41]

In last elections, have you or someone of your closest circle been a subject or witnessed	f (%)
Money offers	81.5
Offers of food and other small goods	16.4
Offers of bonuses and promotions	10.4
Threats by local community leaders	9.4
Psychological harassment by the employer or managers	6.7
Promises for political protection of illegal business	6.0
Threats of financial sanctions by the employer	5.7
Threats and use of physical violence	4.7
Threats by a family member	4.7
Promises for access to public tenders	3.4
Partial imbursement of loans	3.0
Threats of financial sanctions by a creditor.	0.7

Money is offered most widely in the district centers and small towns, 87.5% and 90.2% respectively, while goods were most often offered in the villages (30.7). Threats by local leaders are encountered generally in larger cities and villages (11.5% and 13.3%). When differentiating across ethnicity, we find that Roma are being offered money more frequently than representatives of other (86.8% against 80.5% for Bulgarians and 80% for Turks). Offers of goods are more mostly encountered in the Turkish communities (25%). The offers are made mostly by people familiar to the voter (Figure 1), while local leaders, followed by employers, managers and family members are perpetrators of actions containing pressure.

[41] The sum of the frequencies exceeds 100% because respondents were allowed more than one option.

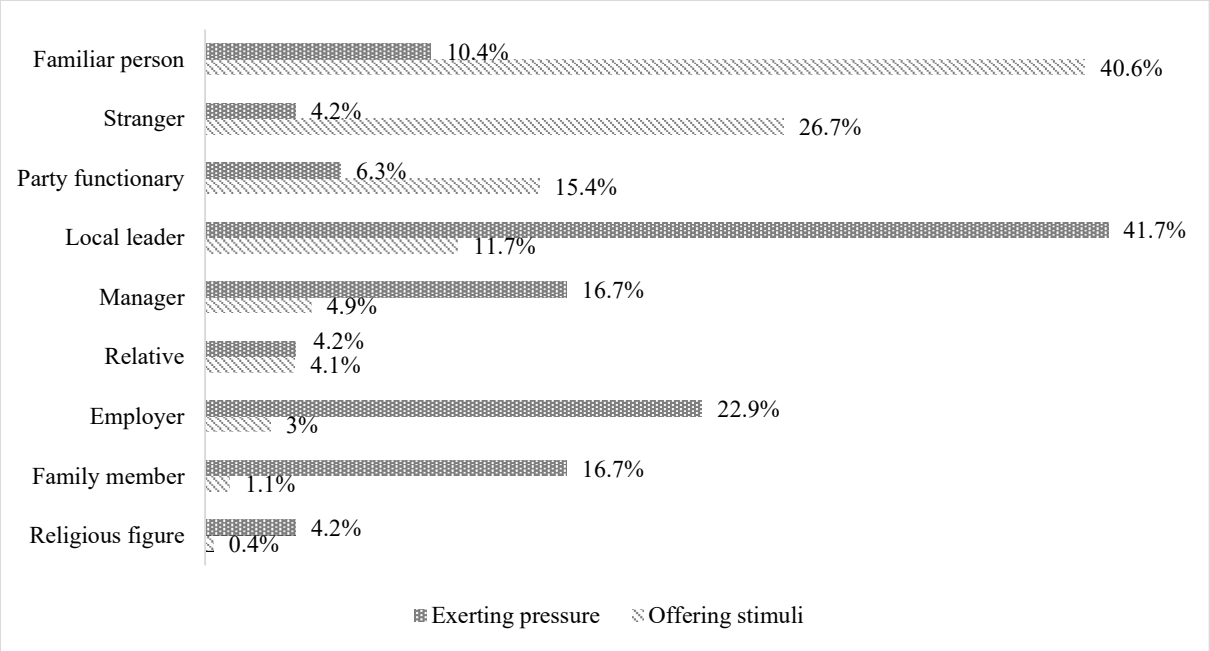

Figure . Agents making offers or exerting pressure

Data show that incentives have been offered mainly in public places whereas pressure is exerted at home or at the workplace (Figure 2).

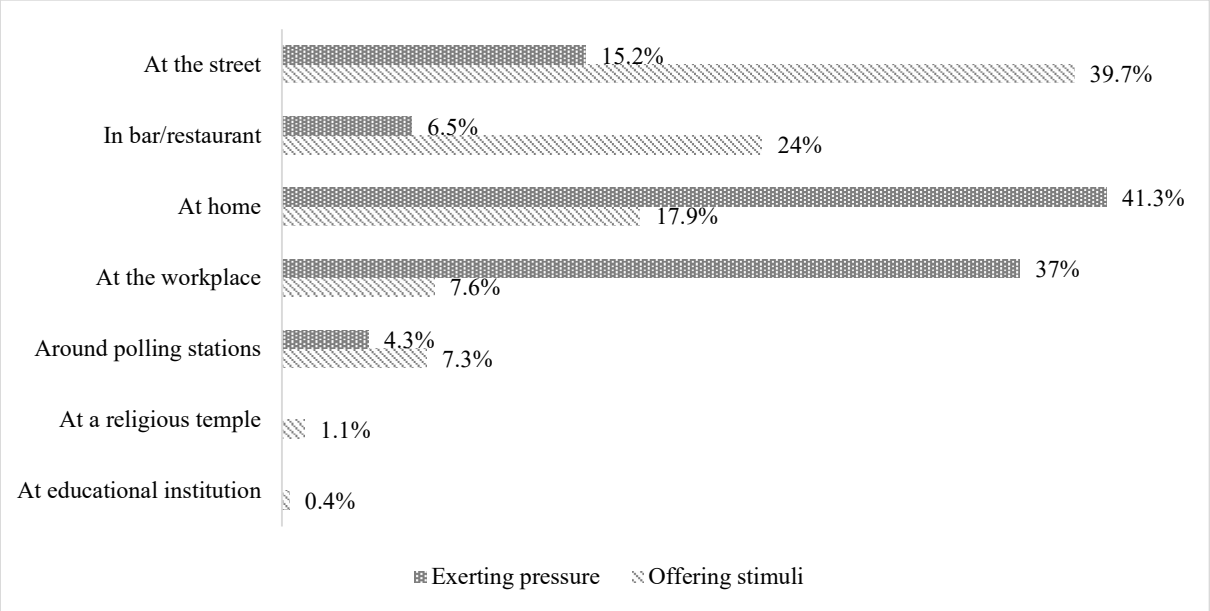

Figure 2. Location of the action

The average price of one vote in the country, calculated on the basis of the offers made to the voters (not the price organizers, charge parties/candidates) is approximated at 40 leva (1 lev equals 0.51 EUR). The price clients pay is, of course, higher since part of the payment remains in the hands of mediators and another part goes for technological expenses. Table 2 shows the average and median amounts offered to the respondents for each party, as well as, the number of responses used for the calculations. Data show that parties with access to more resources and some "boutique" parties offer more money, but offers vary in relatively narrow margins from 30 to 50 BGN. It should be noted that the data is for parliamentary elections.

In local elections, the offers vary in wider margins and sometimes reaches amount several times higher than this average because of the higher influence of a single vote in the relatively small but attractive municipalities in the mountain and sea resorts and in Dobrudzha region. It is also clear that most offers were made for MRF, the ruling CEDB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), BWC (Bulgaria without Censorship) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).

Table 2. Amounts offered to the respondents for their votes

Party	n	Average (BGN)	Median (BNG)
MRF	63	38.89	40
CEDB	51	44.41	50
BWC	43	36.74	30
BSP	31	32.9	30
Ataka	9	42	30
RB	8	31.3	25
Republic BG	3	43	50
Other party	3	40	40
ABR	2	40	40
New Bulgaria	1	50	50
PF	1	35	35
The Right	1	30	30
Total	216	39	40

The cross tabulation of the sum by party and the ethnicity of the respondent shows intriguing picture (Figure 3). CEDB makes no differentiation by ethnicity. BSP pays 10 leva more to Bulgarians than the others. With MRF, the differentiation is greater. Ethnic Turks are offered 25 leva per vote, Bulgarians twice that sum and for a Roma vote, the party offers 40 leva. BWC offered Roma 40 leva per vote, while the price for Bulgarians and Turks is 30 leva. The Reformatory Block pays 20 leva for Bulgarian vote and 40 for a Roma one. ABR pays the Roma 50 leva and Bulgarians 30. It turns out that the Roma votes are most expensive, which means that this ethnic group is the main target for the brokers that explains the existing diversity of mechanisms for control.

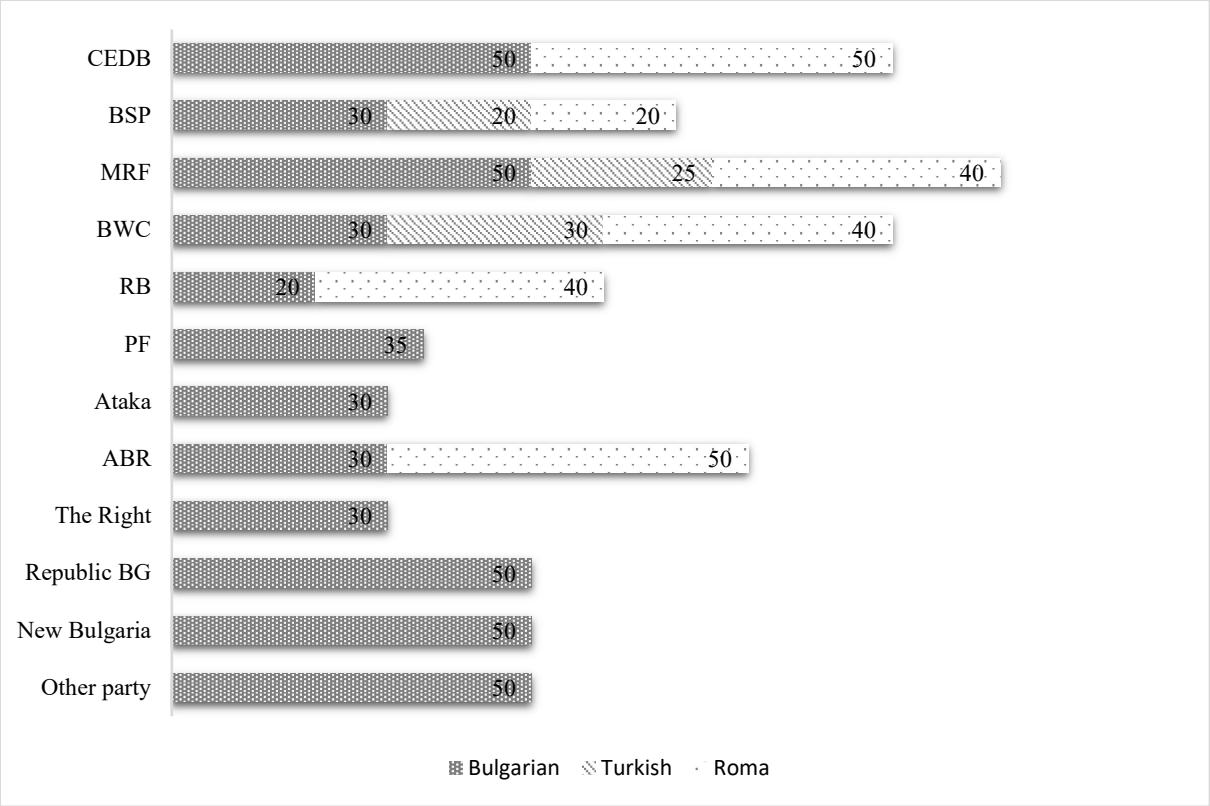

Figure 3. Amounts paid per vote by ethnic group

MRF is leading the chart in the exertion of pressure, as well, but this time with even greater gain, while BWC is missing (Figure 4). Pressure for voting for CEDB is used mainly at the workplace via one-on-one intimidation or in a group meeting with managers. The pressure in support of MRF and BSP is exercised mostly at home and in discrete conversation.

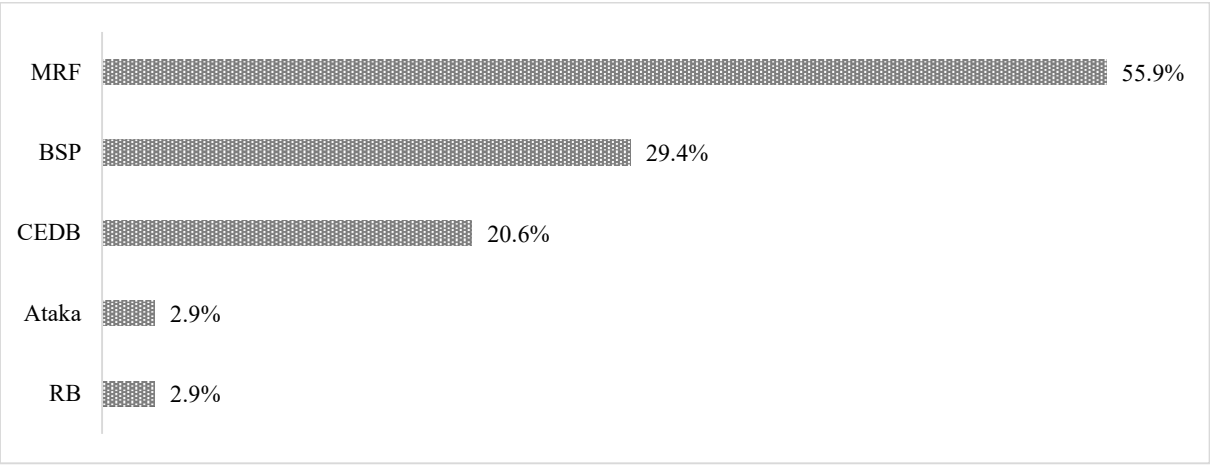

Figure 4. Pressure by parties

The most frequently used methods for control of the way the voter cast their vote is to place their name in a special list in advance or to make them take a photo of the filled-in ballot paper with a mobile phone (Table 3). Group voting and placing a special mark on the ballot paper (specific preference) are used less frequently. The lack of specific crosscheck and voting "on trust" is met at about 1/10 of the responses. Practically 17.9% (95% CI 15.59%, 20.21%)

of the respondents explain how the verification is being made, which could be taken as indirect indication that they voted according to the instructions.

Table 3. Methods for verification of the voting process[42]

How was your vote verified?	f (%)
By photo/video recording	34.4%
By a special sign (specific preference)	10.6%
Manipulation of the ballot paper by a member of the committee	6.9%
Through a list made in advance	34.9%
Through group voting	12.2%
There is no verification	9.5%
Matching the votes for the list to the number of observers for that party	3.7%
Other	1.6%

Controlled Voting at the 2015 Local Elections

We have already hypothesized that spread and scale of controlled voting vary across elections. Therefore, the current electoral cycle in Bulgaria (with different kind of elections each year between 2013 and 2016) allows us to estimate the differences. We have replicated our field study immediately after the 2015 local elections. 1517 respondents were interviewed in November 2015 with a slightly altered questionnaire.

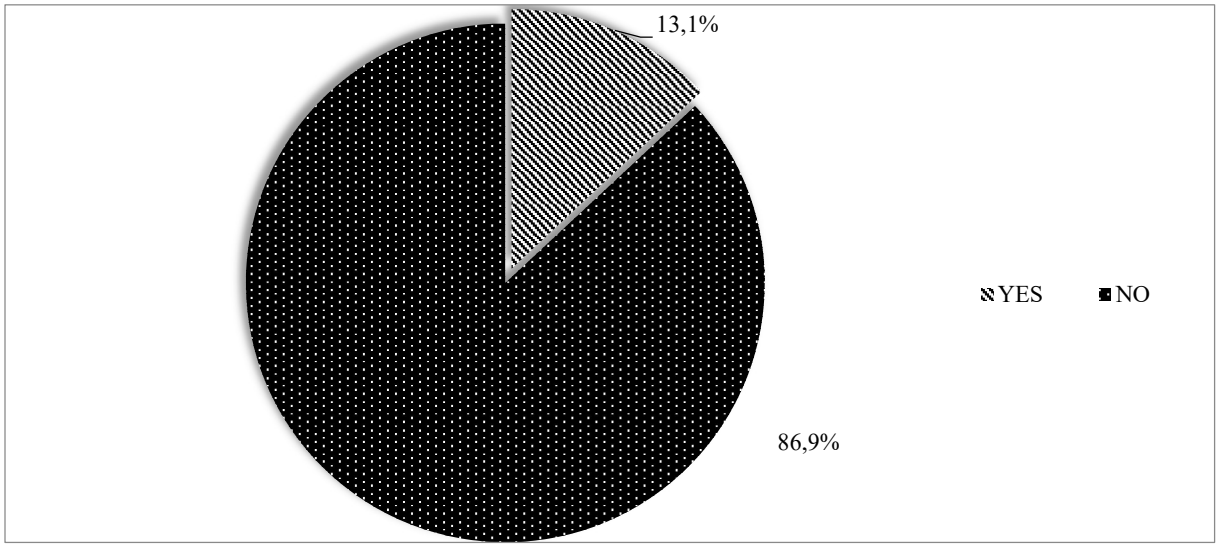

Figure 5. Percent of respondents who received an offer to vote for a specific candidate

In this survey we have stressed primarily on the personal experience. The data show that about 13% of the respondents were subject of an offer or pressure to vote in a specific way.

[42] The sum of the frequencies exceeds 100% because respondents were allowed more than one option.

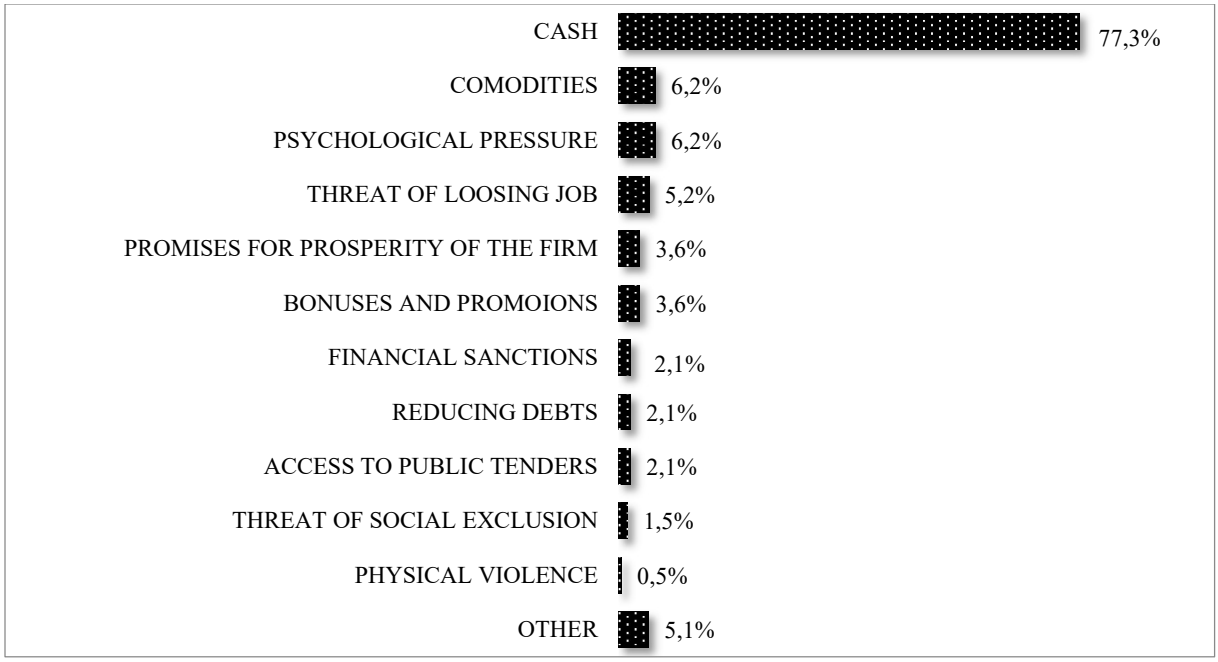

Figure 6. Type of offer or pressure

Most of these were cash offers with various forms of violence and/or pressure as low as 6 percent. These figures are disturbing because they demonstrate the growing aptitude of the electorate to sell their vote. Therefore, the value of voting rights is measured merely at a direct monetary benefit, which undermines the major prerequisite for a representative democracy: civil society and civic participation.

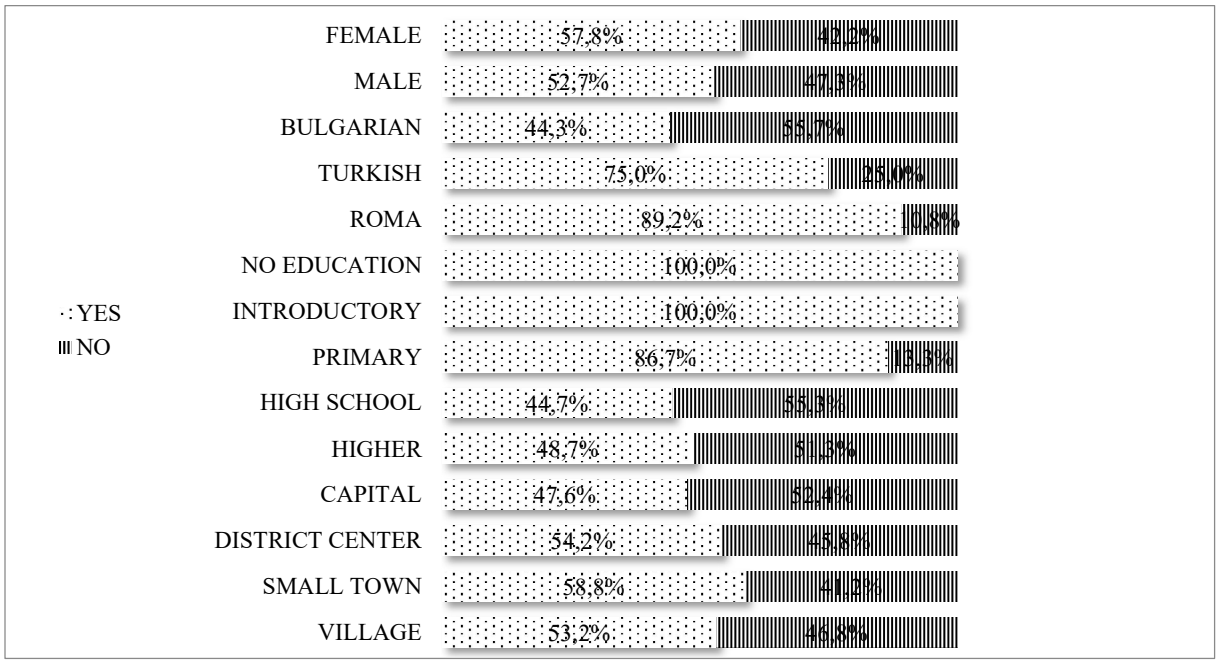

Figure 7. Respondents who did (not) follow the instructions

Not surprisingly, less educated voters tend to follow the instructions of vote buyers firmly, while more than a half of the people with higher education, reject or defect. The ethnic factor of compliance is also striking and supports the argument that Turkish and Roma

communities are kept in deep social marginalization and pre-modern social structures that allow for controlling their vote easily.

Based on the survey data, we have estimated that approximately 8% (95% CI 6.4%, 9.5%) of the votes caste at the local elections were controlled in one of the described forms. The average price of the vote was 20 EUR with a median at about 18 EUR. The turnout of about 3 million votes implies that the vote of approximately 240,000 people was controlled at a modest price, even for Bulgarian living standards (the average monthly salary reported by the national statistical service is 487 EUR for the first quarter of 2016). This makes controlled voting and vote buying major risks for contemporary Bulgarian democracy.

Concluding Remarks

Controlled voting could not be isolated from the complex social context in which it develops in order to avoid risking to mistakenly take it as an ordinary deficit of representative democracy. For contemporary Bulgarian society, this is a systematic, and to a certain extent, civilizational problem, which could not be normatively resolved what attempts are made so far.

The network state capture of public institutions requires network counteraction for their recapture by the public. This could be thought as a natural defense reaction of the society accomplished through spontaneously emerging activist networks. The prerequisites of success of this model occurred with the evolution and the operation of genuine protest networks of civil activism in 2013, "the year of the protest, the protest peak, the turning point marking the transition from party democracy to contestation democracy" (Krasteva 2013).

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