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# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POPULIST ATTITUDES, POLITICAL EFFICACY, TRUST AND COGNITIVE BELIEFS: A NETWORK ANALYSIS APPROACH

Alexander Loziak<sup>1</sup> and Ivana Piterová<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Political attitudes, trust and political efficacy are important indicators of the state of democratic countries. Along with cognitive beliefs, they shape the way people approach political and societal problems or situations. This study aims to (1) examine the relationship between populist attitudes, external political efficacy, trust and cognitive beliefs in a global network model, and (2) test the invariance of the network structures across several moderating variables. A sample based on representative quotas for gender, age, education and region of Slovakia ( $N = 254$ ) was analysed. The structure of a network of populist attitudes and related variables was examined using a network analysis and moderation analysis. Within the network, mistrust of experts and a conspiracy mentality scored highest on both the strength and closeness index, while the belief in simple solutions had the smallest centrality indices. For moderating variables, relative deprivation, anger, anxiety and powerlessness caused invariance in the network's global strength or structure. Efforts aimed at reducing populist attitudes may be more effective if they prioritise the enhancement of trust in experts while mitigating tendencies toward conspiracy beliefs. Further replication of the proposed network analysis is, however, needed.

**Keywords:** Populist attitudes, Trust, Cognitions, Political efficacy, Network analysis, Moderators.

## INTRODUCTION

Populist attitudes have garnered considerable attention due to their influence on political landscapes, trust and the perceived credibility of information sources that polarise public discourse and intergroup

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Social Sciences of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Karpatská 5, Košice, Slovakia, E-mail: [loziak@saske.sk](mailto:loziak@saske.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2407-0970>.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Social Sciences of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Karpatská 5, Košice, Slovakia, E-mail: [piterova@saske.sk](mailto:piterova@saske.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8966-9277>.

relations (Egelhofer et al., 2022; Loew, Faas, 2019; Martínez et al., 2022). Populist attitudes, being a multifaceted phenomenon, coexist with various cognitive beliefs, external political efficacy and trust and collectively shape individuals' responses to diverse situations and problems (Hameleers et al., 2019; Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

The relationship between populist attitudes and beliefs, political efficacy and trust can vary depending on sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics (Pruysers, 2021), perceptions of one's own disadvantage compared to that of others (Spruyt et al., 2016) and emotions (Rico et al., 2020).

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interconnections among these constructs is crucial for comprehending the current state of a country and devising effective interventions to address populist attitudes. Although previous research has focused on the relationship between populist attitudes and related variables (e.g., Erisen et al., 2021; Geurkink et al., 2020; Rico, Anduiza, 2019), it has provided no further insights into the underlying structure of these relationships.

This study's main aim is to explore the network of relationships between the components of populist attitudes, cognitive beliefs, external political efficacy and trust. The secondary aim is to research the role of moderating variables in the network. These aims contribute to existing literature on populist attitudes and related constructs, offering valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate their adverse effects on societal well-being.

Consequently, there are two main research questions: 1. What is the underlying structure of the relationships between populist attitudes, cognitive beliefs, external political efficacy and trust? 2. How is this structure affected by moderating variables?

This study adopts a network analysis approach to identify central variables and uncover contextual factors influencing the configuration and dynamics of interconnections within the network. A Slovak sample (N = 254) based on representative quotas was analysed. The structure was examined through network analysis and moderation analysis, using R software. Centrality indices (strength and closeness) were utilized to access in-network associations.

Populism has gained widespread support in many countries, with economic problems, cultural causes, globalisation, digitalisation and policy failures being contributing factors. Regional issues, inequality, spatial imbalances and migration also fuel its acceleration. While existing research

has examined populist attitudes in relation to many relevant constructs, such as belief in conspiracies, trust or external political efficacy (Eberl, et al., 2021; Geurkink et al., 2020), the findings of these studies do not provide insights into how populist attitudes operate within the structure of relationships with related variables. Moreover, despite the success of populism in Slovakia, populist attitudes are under-represented in the research, with research focusing more on the supply side of populism or electoral behaviour (Gazarek, Uhrecký, 2022; Kevický, 2022). Recent research has confirmed the relationship between populist attitudes and relative deprivation, a belief in simple solutions, external political efficacy, trust towards experts and a conspiracy mentality (Loziak, Piterová, 2023; Piterová, Loziak, 2024), but to date we are not aware of any studies that use networks to show their relationships and to examine their dynamics and structure.

Addressing a research gap, this study examines relationships between populist attitudes, external political efficacy, various trust types (political trust, trust towards the media and mistrust of experts), and cognitive beliefs (including a conspiracy mentality and belief in simple solutions) within a comprehensive network model. Additionally, the research explores moderating variables such as sociodemographic and economic factors (age, education and relative deprivation) and emotions (anger, anxiety, powerlessness and threat). The contribution of this study, then, is the comprehensive and interconnected findings that provide new insights into populist attitudes in the context of multiple variables that reflect the complex realities of social, psychological and political relations.

The article is divided into four parts. The first section provides a concise overview of the literature and is intended to introduce current research in the field. The second part covers the research methodology and the measurement tools employed. The third part presents the results of the research. The fourth section discusses the most important findings and situates them in the context of previous findings.

## **1 POPULIST ATTITUDES AND RELATED CONSTRUCTS**

In numerous countries across the globe, populism has attracted significant popular support (Mudde, 2019). This may be attributed to “economic problems, cultural causes, the speed of change generated by globalisation and digitalisation, and last but not least the failure of policy to manage a transition to higher welfare, globally and locally. It accelerates

with regional problems, inequality, spatial disequilibria and migration” (Aigigner, 2020, p. 38). In part, the populist attitudes held by citizens may also play a role, but they are not clearly connected to voting behaviour (Jungkunz et al., 2021). Populist attitudes encompass a range of beliefs, including anti-elitist sentiments, which involve challenging distant elites (such as political and academic elites and the media) who are considered disconnected from the needs and realities of ordinary people (Fawzi, 2019; Mede, Schäfer, 2020; Schulz et al., 2018). Another key component is the demand for popular sovereignty, aiming to empower ordinary individuals by placing power in their hands. Additionally, populism emphasizes a sense of homogeneity among people, promoting the idea that they are unified and share common values and interests. The relationship between the people and the elite is often portrayed in an antagonistic manner, adopting a Manichean perspective that dichotomises good and evil (Schulz et al., 2018).

Populist attitudes coexist and are connected with several other beliefs and attitudes. They are associated with a conspiracy mentality and belief in conspiracy theories (Balta et al., 2022; Castanho Silva et al., 2017; Eberl et al., 2021; Erisen et al., 2021; Papaioannou et al., 2023; van Prooijen et al., 2022). A conspiracy mentality refers to a general tendency to perceive significant events as being covertly controlled by powerful and sinister groups (Imhoff, Bruder, 2014). This belief system has gained considerable attention in modern psychology and sociology, as the proliferation of internet and social media platforms has vastly accelerated the spread and impact of conspiracy theories (Cinelli et al., 2022). Individuals who hold such beliefs tend to perceive the world as a dichotomy between powerful elites and vulnerable individuals. Populist attitudes involve criticising those in power positions (Vittori, 2017), which aligns with the underlying premise of a belief in conspiracies. On the other hand, the development of a conspiratorial mentality arises from resentment towards elites, authority figures (Imhoff, Lamberty, 2018) and even experts or scientists (Oliver, Rahn, 2016), who are purportedly involved in conspiratorial acts against the broader population (van Prooijen, van Vugt, 2018). Anti-elitism is further linked to a lack of trust in the media: leading individuals who harbour mistrust towards the political elite also hold negative views of various media outlets that could be perceived as influenced by the (political) elite (Fawzi, 2019). The collective scepticism directed at elites, authorities and experts thus establishes a connection between populist attitudes and a conspiratorial mindset and reflects a faith in common wisdom (Oliver, Rahn, 2016). A lack of trust in political institutions and in established, universally accepted

truths is connected to favouring simplistic explanations or solutions for complex problems (Erisen et al., 2021). In fact, the belief that society can be divided into virtuous individuals and corrupt elites, often referred to as a Manichean worldview, represents an oversimplified perspective of reality. Populist attitudes, but mostly anti-elitism, are connected to the belief that the political system is not responsive to people's demands (external political efficacy), thereby emphasizing the detachment of elite groups and their apparent disinterest in meeting the demands of the general public (Geurkink et al., 2020). However, "the antagonism between the pure people and the corrupt elite and the notion of the general will are absent in the concept of external political efficacy" (Geurkink et al., 2020, p. 252). External political efficacy is also related to institutional trust but those two constructs are conceptually different (Geurkink et al., 2020; González, 2020).

The relationships between these beliefs and attitudes (the structure of the belief system) can differ depending on sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics. Higher levels of populist attitudes are frequently linked to lower levels of education (Fatke, 2019; Geurkink et al., 2020; Pruyssers, 2021; Rico et al., 2020) or increased age (Pruyssers, 2021; Rico et al., 2020). Support for populism is associated with perceptions of relative deprivation, whereby individuals perceive themselves as being disadvantaged compared to others (Spruyt et al., 2016). Consequently, people holding populist attitudes firmly believe that their personal circumstances or the state of the nation are tainted by imminent threats and scarcity (Hameleers et al., 2016).

The second set of factors that can potentially influence the network of beliefs and attitudes revolves around emotions. The increasing support for populist parties partly originates from the emotional appeals employed by populist movements to mobilise voters (Hameleers et al., 2016; Wodak, 2015). Populist attitudes reflect an identification with non-elite segments of society and a perceived lack of influence over important societal decisions (external political efficacy). Consequently, empirical evidence suggests a robust correlation between populist attitudes and feelings of powerlessness (Papaioannou et al., 2023; Rico et al., 2020). Emotions characterised by other-person control (anger) influence trust (Dunn, Schweitzer, 2005) and predict the populist attitudes (Rico et al., 2020). Furthermore, anxiety regarding perceived economic threats (Dennison, Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022) arises from individuals comparing their own economic circumstances with those of others (relative deprivation).

## 2 METHOD

Data collection took place from the end of December 2022 to the beginning of January 2023, utilizing an online panel operated by 2muse research agency. The sample of participants was selected based on population quotas for gender, age, education groups and the eight regions in the Slovak Republic. The agency approached individuals who met the established quotas, and those who completed the questionnaire were rewarded with credits redeemable for products offered by the agency.

Out of the initial 278 respondents who met population quotas, the final sample consisted of 254 participants who correctly responded to two attention check items and did not exhibit longstring or Mahalanobis distance exceeding two standard deviations. The final sample, which represents the Slovak population, comprised 48% men and 52% women, and encompassed individuals ranging in age from 18 to 75 years, with an average age of 44.8 years ( $SD = 15.4$ ). Regarding education level, 39% had primary and lower secondary education, 34.6% had upper secondary education and 26.4% had tertiary education. The regional affiliation of the sample aligned with that of the overall population.

### 2.1 Measures

Variables were derived from multiple items combined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). For scales with only three items, the CFA model becomes saturated, which means we cannot calculate standard fit indices. Instead, we provide the reliability of these scales using McDonald's Omega to assess their consistency.

The populist attitudes scale, developed by Schulz et al. (2018), comprises 12 items distributed equally across three dimensions: anti-elitism (e.g. "MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people"), popular sovereignty (e.g. "The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums"), and homogeneity of people (e.g. "Ordinary people all pull together"). The scale includes a Manichean outlook that cuts across all dimensions. The scale has been translated and validated on a Slovak sample by Ivana Piterová and Kováčová Holevová (2022). It demonstrated a good fit with our data, as indicated by the following fit indices: CFI = .984, TLI = .988, SRMR = .054, RMSEA = .093. All items exhibited adequate factor loadings ranging from

.623 to .934 on the three factors, which showed moderate correlations ( $r = .35$  to  $.63$ ). The internal consistencies of the dimensions were satisfactory: anti-elitism ( $\omega = .83$ ), popular sovereignty ( $\omega = .91$ ), and homogeneity of people ( $\omega = .91$ ).

The conspiracy mentality questionnaire (CMQ), developed by Bruder *et al.* (2013), consists of 5 items (e.g. "I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about") rated on an 11-point scale ranging from "0% certainly not" to "100% certain." The fit indices for the CMQ were as follows: CFI = .972, TLI = .979, SRMR = .042, RMSEA = .206. The internal consistency of the CMQ was good ( $\omega = .89$ ).

The belief in a simple solution was measured by scale that was developed by van Prooijen (2017) and comprises 3 items (e.g. "With the right policies, most problems in society are easy to solve") measured on a 7-point scale ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree." The reliability of the scale was initially low ( $\omega = .59$ ), but increased to an acceptable level ( $\omega = .68$ ) when one item was removed. We thus used 2-item version of the scale.

Mistrust of experts was assessed using 3 items (e.g. "I'd rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than the opinions of experts and intellectuals") based on the research of Oliver and Rahn (2016), employing a 5-point scale ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree." The scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\omega = .81$ ).

Trust in politicians was measured using 3 items from the European Social Survey (2020), assessing trust in Slovak politicians, political parties and parliament on an 11-point scale. The scale exhibited high reliability ( $\omega = .93$ ).

Trust in the media was evaluated using 3 items (e.g., "I think you can trust most news most of the time.") based on the research of Kalogeropoulos *et al.* (2019), employing a 5-point scale ranging from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree." The scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\omega = .89$ ).

External political efficacy was assessed using 2 items (e.g. "How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?") from the European Social Survey (2020) on a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a great deal." The scale exhibited good reliability ( $\omega = .84$ ).

Sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics were assessed using the following measures: age (in years), highest level of education (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, tertiary), and relative deprivation, which was measured using 7 items (e.g. "It is always other people who can profit from all kinds of advantages offered in this society") adapted

from Elchardus and Spruyt (2016) on a 5-point scale ranging from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”. The fit indices for the relative deprivation scale were as follows: CFI = .974, TLI = .982, SRMR = .042, RMSEA = .102. The internal consistency of the relative deprivation scale was satisfactory ( $\omega = .87$ ).

Emotions were assessed in terms of feelings of anger (including angry, outraged and disgusted), anxiety (including anxious, nervous, and worried), and powerlessness (powerless) regarding the future prospects of people in the country. This measurement was adapted from Suhay and Erisen (2018). The anger scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\omega = .94$ ), as did the anxiety scale ( $\omega = .9$ ). Also, as an emotion-related variable, perceived economic threat was measured using a 5-point scale ranging from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree” with 4 items indicating fear of the future (e.g. “I’m afraid I’m going to lose my job in the near future”) proposed by Stephan *et al.* (2009). The fit indices for the perceived economic threat scale were not satisfactory: CFI = .846, TLI = .691, SRMR = .071, RMSEA = .232. One item was removed from the scale due to a low loading (.30). The shortened scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\omega = .73$ ) and was used in the analysis.

## 2.2 Network analysis

Domestic and foreign research on populist attitudes focuses on relationships with other variables, but less on their structure and dynamics. In recent years, network analysis has become increasingly popular as a valuable method in social sciences (Epskamp *et al.*, 2018). It has gained recognition across diverse fields of psychology, including social psychology (Dalege *et al.*, 2016). However, it is important to note that there is a limited amount of research applying the network analysis approach to the study of populist attitudes. To date, only one paper has been published on this topic using network analysis (Pellegrini, 2023). Further exploration and investigation using network analysis could shed light on the intricacies of populist attitudes and their underlying dynamics.

This approach helps us comprehend complex psychological behaviours by examining the relationships between different factors. Through network analysis, a visual representation is created wherein nodes represent observed variables and edges depict their connections and associations (Epskamp *et al.*, 2018). Network analysis uses centrality measures to help reveal the nodes that play crucial roles within a network. These measures are invaluable for understanding the significance of nodes and

their contributions to the overall structure and dynamics of a network. Two common centrality measures are strength and closeness. Strength is the sum of the weights of the edges connected to a node, which reflects how much a node interacts with others (Isvoranu et al., 2022). Closeness is the inverse of the average distance from a node to all other nodes in the network, which reflects how quickly a node can reach others (Isvoranu et al., 2022).

Identifying the core components of a belief system poses a significant challenge. However, this study aims to tackle this challenge by representing populist attitudes and related beliefs as interconnected nodes within networks. The study delves into the centrality of adhering to populist attitudes and examines their association with external political efficacy, trust in politicians, media and experts, a conspiracy mentality and belief in simple solutions. Through this approach, the paper investigates the role of the three dimensions of populist attitudes (anti-elitism, demand for popular sovereignty, belief in the homogeneity of people) within the larger framework of the belief system.

### **2.3 Data analysis**

Data were analyzed in R software (R Core Team, 2022; RStudio team, 2019). The initial removal of careless responses was performed using a careless package (Yentes, Wilhelm, 2021). The reliability (McDonalds' omega) of scales is presented. The structure of the network was examined using a network analysis (Epskamp *et al.*, 2018). Within the framework of the network approach, nodes represent indicators, and the connections between them are depicted as edges (a relationship's strength is reflected by the thickness of the corresponding edge; blue lines represent positive relationships, red lines represent negative relationships). The strength (how strongly a node is directly associated with others) and closeness (how strongly a node is indirectly associated with others) indices were estimated. Bootstrapping examines the network accuracy and stability of centrality indices. The correlation stability (CS) coefficient, which signifies the percentage of cases that could be removed from the analysis while still maintaining a correlation of at least 0.70, was estimated. For the moderation analysis, the networktree function (Jones et al., 2021) was utilised to find an optimal splitting point (a threshold that leads to a significant alteration in the network structure). The analyses were conducted in R software using the following packages: bootnet (Epskamp et al., 2018), networktree (Jones

et al., 2021) and NetworkComparisonTest (van Borkulo et al., 2022). Data and coding are publicly available at OSF (OSF Storage, 2024).

### 3 RESULTS

The descriptive statistics (means, scales, standard deviations and 95 % confidence intervals of means) of all the measures used are reported in Table 1. This table highlights the response tendencies of the sample and presents how populist attitudes, conspiratorial attitudes, belief in simple solutions and trust in experts, politicians and the media are pronounced. The table also provides descriptive statistics for the so-called moderating variables (e.g. age and levels of anxiety, anger and helplessness), which illustrate the overall profile of the characteristics of the surveyed sample.

**Table 1:** *Descriptive statistics of all measures*

Variables	M	scale	SD	95 % CI	
				lower	upper
populist attitudes	5.28	1-7	0.89	5.17	5.39
network components					
anti-elitism	6.14	1-7	0.86	6.03	6.25
sovereignty	5.74	1-7	1.22	5.58	5.89
homogeneity	3.96	1-7	1.40	3.78	4.13
conspiracy mentality	6.57	0-10	2.45	6.27	6.87
belief in simple solutions	5.06	1-7	1.22	4.91	5.21
mistrust of experts	2.91	1-7	0.99	2.78	3.03
trust in politicians	1.92	1-10	1.96	1.68	2.16
trust in media	2.43	1-5	0.99	2.31	2.55
external political efficacy	2.07	1-5	0.98	1.95	2.19
moderating variables					
age	44.80		15.38		
relative deprivation	3.38	1-5	0.82	3.28	3.48
anger	4.09	1-5	0.94	3.98	4.21
anxiety	3.63	1-5	1.05	3.50	3.76

<b>powerlessness</b>	3.92	1-5	1.14	3.78	4.06
<b>perceived economic threat</b>	2.93	1-5	1.04	2.80	3.06

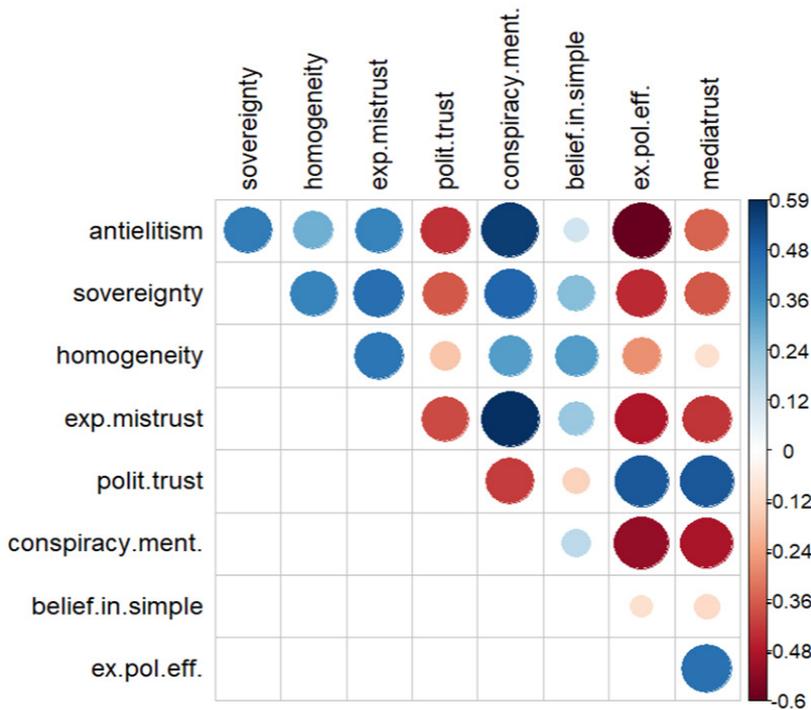
*Source: Authors' own elaboration*

As shown in Table 1, the average score for populist attitudes is quite high (5.28 out of a maximum of 7), indicating a significant prevalence of populist beliefs within the sample studied. Notably, one of the three dimensions of populist attitudes, homogeneity (the belief that ordinary people are united and share common values and interests), scored lower than the other dimensions, at 3.96 out of 7. This suggests that anti-elitism (dislike for distant elites disconnected from ordinary people, which scored 6.4 out of 7) and sovereignty (the belief that power should be placed in the hands of ordinary people, which scored 5.74 out of 7) are much more prominent. The average conspiracy mentality score is also alarmingly high. In terms of measured trust, the most notable result is the very low trust in politicians. Additionally, the sample expressed a considerable sense of relative deprivation and scored high on all three negative emotions, particularly anger, which, given the wording of the items, can be interpreted as significant frustration with the direction of societal events in the country.

In Figure 1, correlation relationships of the variables used in network analysis that are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) are plotted. This analysis reveals the most significant relationships between the measured variables.

The analysis reveals the expected positive correlations between the dimensions of populist attitudes. These dimensions are also strongly positively correlated with a conspiracy mentality, aligning with previous research findings (Castanho Silva *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, they are negatively correlated with trust in politics and the media, as well as with external political efficacy. This negative correlation suggests that individuals with stronger populist attitudes are more likely to distrust political institutions and the media, perceiving them as untrustworthy or ineffective. Moreover, lower external political efficacy may reflect a belief that these institutions are not responsive to the needs or concerns of ordinary people, further reinforcing populist and conspiratorial mindsets.

**Figure 1:** Correlation figure of statistically significant relationships



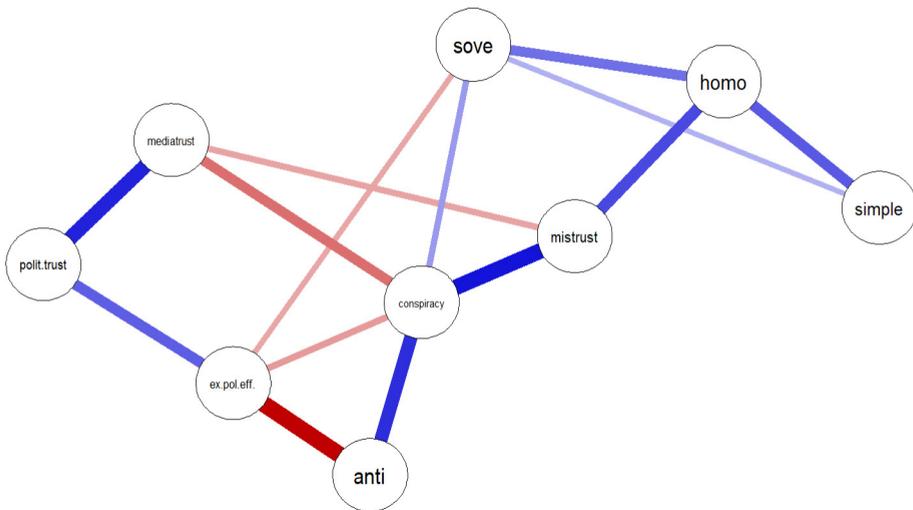
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Note. Blue indicates a positive relationship, red indicates a negative relationship. Size of dots indicates strength of relationships.

### 3.1 Network analysis

The network is visualised in Figure 2. The minimal threshold for edge inclusion has been set to 0.1 (for correlation coefficient). Visualising the network is a crucial step in network analysis because it allows for a clear and intuitive understanding of the relationships between variables, such as populist attitudes, a conspiracy mentality, trust in politics and the media, and external political efficacy. By representing variables as nodes and their relationships as edges, the network visualisation helps identify the strength of these connections. This approach makes it easier to detect clusters or patterns within the data, such as which dimensions of populist attitudes are most interconnected or how they are collectively related to a conspiracy mentality and other variables.

**Figure 2:** *Visualisation of the network*



*Source: Authors' own elaboration*

*Note. Blue indicates a positive relationship, red indicates a negative relationship. Thicker lines indicate stronger relationships.*

*Note. polit.trust – political trust, mediatrust – trust in media, ex.pol.eff. – external political efficacy, anti – anti-elitism, conspiracy – conspiracy mentality, sove - popular sovereignty, mistrust – mistrust of experts, homo – homogeneity, simple – belief in simple solutions*

In the figure, we observe that the dimensions of populist attitudes, distrust in experts, belief in simple solutions and a conspiracy mentality are positively linked, forming a cohesive cluster. This suggests that these beliefs mutually reinforce one another, with individuals who hold populist attitudes also likely to exhibit distrust in experts, a belief in simple solutions to complex problems, and to subscribe to conspiratorial thinking.

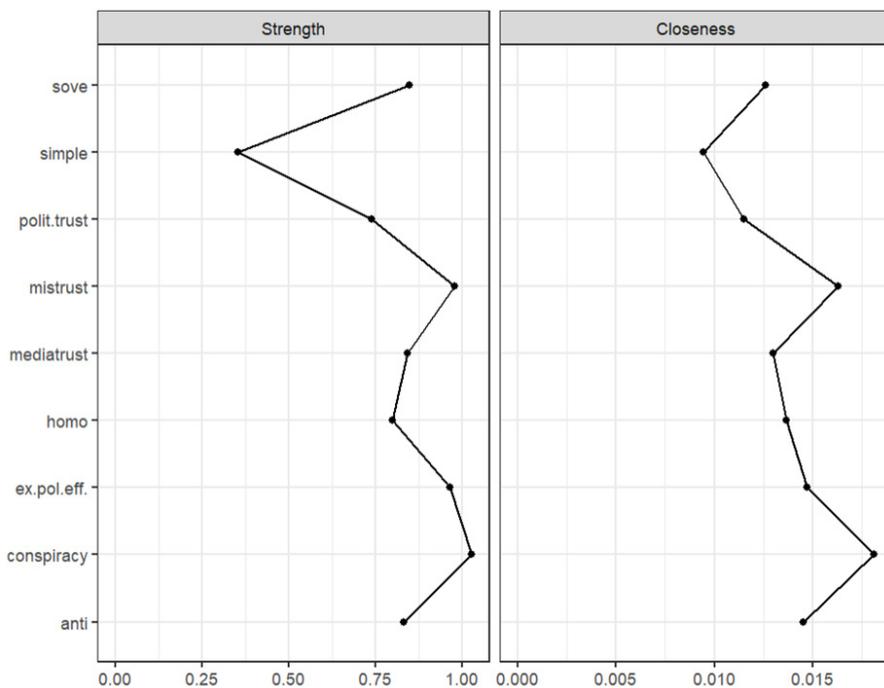
Simultaneously, another cluster emerges, consisting of positive relationships between trust in the media, trust in politicians and external political efficacy. This indicates that individuals who have faith in the media and political institutions are also more likely to believe that these institutions are effective and responsive to their needs.

The key insight from this network is the existence of an inverse relationship between these two clusters. As trust in political and media institutions increases, the likelihood of holding populist, conspiratorial and simplistic beliefs decreases, and vice versa. Essentially, the stronger

one cluster's characteristics are within an individual's belief system, the weaker the characteristics of the opposing cluster tend to be. This reflects a dynamic where increasing distrust and a conspiracy mentality correlate with declining confidence in established institutions, highlighting how these belief systems operate in opposition to one another.

In order to further develop the analysis, calculation of centrality indices is needed. Centrality indices (strength, closeness) of network components are available in Figure 3. These indices are crucial as they help determine the relative importance and influence of each variable within the network, allowing us to identify key nodes that drive relationships across the network.

**Figure 3:** Centrality indices of network components



Source: Authors' own elaboration

The highest strength was observed in mistrust of experts, external political efficacy and conspiracy mentality. Mistrust of experts and conspiracy mentality also scored highest in closeness. Belief in simple solutions had the smallest centrality indices. The stability of the network can be considered sufficient (CSedges = .59; CSstrength = .52; CScloseness = .36).

### 3.2 Network Invariance (Moderation Analysis)

Network invariance was tested for socioeconomic characteristics and emotion-related variables. In the case of socioeconomic characteristics, significant alterations in the network structure were observed only for relative deprivation. We did not observe significant alterations according to age or level of education. For variables related to emotion, there were significant differences in anger, anxiety and powerlessness, but not in perceived economic threat (Table 2).

**Table 2:** *Network invariance across the moderating variables*

<b>Moderating variable (significant splitting value identified)</b>	<b>Significance of alternation in network structure (p-value)</b>
age	without alteration in network structure
primary - secondary education	without alteration in network structure
secondary - tertiary education	without alteration in network structure
primary - tertiary education	without alteration in network structure
relative deprivation	0.003
anger	0.047
anxiety	0.024
powerlessness	0.035
perceived economic threat	without alteration in network structure

*Source: Authors' own elaboration*

Even though alterations in the network structure were observed for relative deprivation and emotion-related variables, the analysis unfortunately could not pinpoint the exact nature of these changes. Despite this limitation, the findings still represent a significant contribution to our understanding of how relative deprivation, anger, anxiety and powerlessness affect the network dynamics. The alterations observed suggest that these factors have a meaningful impact on the relationships between variables, particularly in shaping populist attitudes and conspiracy thinking.

## 4 DISCUSSION

The results of the network analysis underline the interconnected nature of populist attitudes, external political efficacy, trust and cognitive beliefs, which form a dynamic network that undergoes changes when feelings of relative deprivation, anger, anxiety and powerlessness are considered.

Specifically, the results presented align with previous literature that has suggested a significant relationship between populist attitudes (anti-elitism and popular sovereignty), a conspiracy mentality (e.g., Balta et al., 2022; Castanho Silva et al., 2017; Eberl et al., 2021; Erisen et al., 2021; Papaioannou et al., 2023; van Prooijen et al., 2022) and external political efficacy (Geurkink et al. 2020). Additionally, within the network, we confirmed the relationship between external political efficacy and political trust, which is consistent with the results reported by Geurkink et al. (2020). Moreover, a conspiracy mentality is linked to a distrust of experts, which is likely to stem from the development of conspiratorial beliefs, often rooted in resentment towards elites, authority figures, experts or scientists (Imhoff, Lamberty, 2018; Oliver, Rahn, 2016). Belief in the homogeneity of the people is tightly interwoven within the network, particularly with a distrust of experts and a preference for simplistic solutions. This underscores how populist perspectives, characterized by a simplistic view of the world divided into two homogeneous groups, tend to seek uncomplicated solutions to complex problems (Erisen et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the centrality indices suggest that when aiming to reduce populist attitudes in the population, it could be effective to focus on decreasing both the conspiracy mentality and distrust of experts because they can potentially contribute to the deactivation of interactions between variables. However, due to the nature of the data examined, we do not assume causality and further studies are needed to confirm these results. Nevertheless, these results are significant and need to be interpreted and highlighted in the context of Slovakia, which is one of the countries with the highest conspiracy index (GLOBSEC, 2022). Slovakia's high conspiracy index reflects a societal landscape where distrust in institutions and expert knowledge is deeply entrenched. In this context, our findings suggest that efforts to reduce populist attitudes must directly address these deeply rooted beliefs. Targeted interventions aimed at fostering trust in experts and debunking conspiracy theories could play a critical role in shifting public opinion. These measures are vital for stabilising Slovakia's political landscape and ensuring a healthier, more informed public discourse.

Regarding the stability of the network structure, it was relatively consistent across various moderators, including age, education and perceived economic threat. However, significant alterations in the network structure were observed concerning relative deprivation, anger, anxiety and powerlessness. This suggests that when individuals experience feelings of disadvantage compared to others, or anger, anxiety and powerlessness about the future of people in the country, the network of relationships can undergo changes. These emotional and psychological factors that introduce heterogeneity into the network could possibly be considered when designing interventions targeting populist attitudes, but further studies are needed to confirm these results. The role of emotions in populism are supported by other studies that have found that anger expressed in the context of an economic crisis is associated with support for populism (Rico et al., 2017); or that in the context of the pandemic “anger is positively related to populist attitudes while fear is negatively linked to populist stances” (Filsinger et al., 2023). In simple terms, anger is positively correlated with populist attitudes, while fear is negatively correlated with them. In the Slovak context, the interplay of emotional drivers like anger and anxiety may be particularly impactful, given the country’s high conspiracy index and the existing distrust of political elites, and this suggests that emotional appeals could further fuel populist sentiments. Indeed, research in Slovakia has shown that populist radical right parties have experienced greater electoral success when leveraging anger-based appeals (Gazarek, Uhrecký, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is important to interpret these results with caution, as the study has several limitations: 1) The research sample, while representative in some aspects (gender, age, education, regional affiliation), is drawn from a single-country online panel, potentially excluding certain population segments and introducing non-naivety biases. 2) Due to its cross-sectional design, the study does not encompass the intra-personal dynamics of relationships across different time points and cannot establish causation or the direction of relationships between dimensions of populist attitudes and other variables. 3) This network analysis is exploratory, necessitating validation through replication in additional samples. 4) Unobserved or uncontrolled variables (confounding variables) could influence the interpretation of network relationships. 5) The use of arbitrary thresholds for edge inclusion (determining which relationships between nodes in a network are considered significant enough to be included) may impact the interpretation of network connections and potentially exclude meaningful relationships.

Despite these limitations, this study advances the literature by applying a network analysis approach that has offered a novel perspective on variables that have not been previously explored using this methodology. While prior research in populist attitudes predominantly concentrated on examining correlation and mediation relationships, the use of network analysis has allowed for a deeper understanding of the structure of their relationships. By emphasizing the strengths of direct and indirect interactions, network analysis has illuminated intricate relationships that might have been overlooked by traditional approaches. Future studies can build on these findings, using network analysis to investigate populist attitudes and related variables across different contexts and datasets, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding in this field.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study offers a unique perspective on the relationships among populist attitudes, external political efficacy, various forms of trust and cognitive beliefs, all of which hold significant relevance for shaping how individuals approach political and societal challenges. Our network analysis findings suggest that the underlying structure of these relationships is characterized by strong positive links between populist attitudes, a conspiracy mentality and distrust in experts, while trust in political and media institutions is inversely related to these clusters. This indicates that individuals who are more inclined toward populist and conspiratorial thinking tend to reject traditional sources of authority and expertise, while those with higher levels of trust in institutions are less likely to exhibit populist attitudes.

Our network analysis findings suggest that efforts aimed at reducing populist attitudes may be more effective if they prioritise the enhancement of trust in experts while mitigating tendencies toward conspiracy beliefs. These variables were strongly linked to the three dimensions of populist attitudes and had the greatest strength and centrality in the network. Also, the closedness of the political system to the people (external political efficacy) played a role in the network, with a direct link to more negative anti-elitist attitudes and higher distrust of politicians. The structure of connections found in the network changes when emotions such as anger, anxiety, powerlessness or feeling disadvantaged in comparison to others are taken into account. This may suggest that emotional states can act as amplifiers of negative attitudes toward elites and political institutions, deepening the divide between trust and distrust clusters within the network.

Given the exploratory nature of our study, it is essential to replicate these findings in future research and conduct studies employing repeated-measures designs. Moreover, broadening the scope of network analysis to encompass other psychological constructs would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationships among these variables.

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**Data availability statement:** All data and code underlying the results presented in this study are available from OSF: <https://osf.io/7nhqt/files/osfstorage>.

# THE ANTI-SYSTEM IN THE SYSTEM: THE FAR RIGHT IN SLOVAKIA

Tatiana Tökölyová<sup>1</sup> and Peter Orosz<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*The study deals with the Slovak far-right movement known as Republika. The objective is to substantiate the theoretical concept of accommodation as it pertains to radical and anti-system political subjects within a liberal-democratic system. The research employs the original Far Right Index (FRIx) to analyse the ideological profiling of the Republika movement. The FRIx quantifies the theoretical concept of accommodation in a measurable form. Based on an in-depth political analysis of the positions and pronouncements of the Republika movement in the period 2021-2024, the study demonstrates how they present their political programme effectively without activating democracy's defence mechanisms, while preserving their true ideological framework. The paper reveals that Republika demonstrates attributes of far-right ideology, but from both a normative and a public perspective, it is regarded as a conventional right-wing party with a populist narrative.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Accommodation, Far right, Extremism, Radicalism, Republika, Slovakia.

## INTRODUCTION

Given the existence of discernible characteristics commonly associated with far-right political entities in the field of political science, it is imperative that research concentrates on the manner in which far-right ideologies are manifested in the political activities of these entities within the context of the Slovak Republic. It is uncommon for far-right entities to explicitly articulate their intentions in programme documents, as this might precipitate the implementation of measures designed to safeguard democratic processes. Historically, far-right entities have exploited crises to undermine the authority of responsible governments. They offer easy solutions for solving

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ss.Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Bučianska 4/a, Trnava, Slovakia. E-mail: [tatiana.tokolyova@ucm.sk](mailto:tatiana.tokolyova@ucm.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3367-7379>.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ss.Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Bučianska 4/a, Trnava, Slovakia. E-mail: [orosz1@ucm.sk](mailto:orosz1@ucm.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0354-8018>.

complex issues and present themselves as an alternative to current solutions and sometimes to the system blamed for the problems. Moreover, far-right discourse is often intertwined with populist narratives, which mask their true ideology and appeal to broader audiences by exploiting popular sentiments and fears (Wodak, 2021, p. 35).

This research is centred on the Republika movement in Slovakia from 2021 to 2024, and is based on Kolman's (2021) concept of far-right accommodation. While Kolman originally focused on Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (Kotlebists – People's Party Our Slovakia; ĽSNS), we have examined the Republika movement. Our primary objective is to substantiate the theoretical concept of accommodation (Kolman, 2021) of radical and anti-system political subjects within the democratic system, exemplified by the Republika movement. This study yields an original Far Right Index (FRIx), which enables us to quantify the extent to which originally non-democratic political subjects adapt to democratic conditions (accommodation). Applying the theoretical concept of far-right accommodation in a quantitatively measurable form constitutes the authors' contribution to the advancement of existing knowledge.

The research is based on qualitative analysis of the documents of the Republika movement and her predecessor ĽSNS in order to ascertain the fundamental ideological stances of the political entity examined. Our article is divided into six main parts. After introducing the relevant background to the research in this introductory part, the first section is devoted to an overview of the most relevant literature in the field to date, with a special focus on authors dealing with far-right movements operating in today's democracies (which Kolman identifies as accommodation). This enables us to present the theoretical framework of the study in the second section, and this is critical for the research as our original *Far Right Indicators* were identified based on this framework. The subsequent third section on methodology details the methods used to gain the results and findings presented in the fourth section, which is followed by the last section, conclusion.

It is essential to examine this subject because ĽSNS and the Republika movement are currently characterised by a multitude of far-right typologies. However, a more comprehensive analysis of the existing literature reveals a dearth of empirical evidence in the research on Republika's to date. Consequently, we need to develop a methodology that utilises sources obtained in an authentic environment. We note that although some members of ĽSNS and Republika have been prosecuted for their extremist and radical pronouncements, this did not lead to the Supreme Court of the Slovak

Republic formally dissolving these parties (Hanák, 2019). In terms of the Slovak political landscape, both entities are operating within the confines of the constitution, with no restrictions on democratic competition. This allows them to be considered as having the fundamental characteristics of a systemic party (Kysel, 2022).

## **1 STATE-OF-THE-ART RESEARCH AND CRITICAL LITERATURE OVERVIEW**

The definitional basis of the far-right family is a complex matter for political science research, despite the substantial body of literature on the subject. The terms 'right-wing extremism', 'extreme right', 'far right', 'Rechtsextremismus' or 'ultra-right' are frequently used in political science to designate such parties (e.g. Mudde, 2000, p. 12; Smolík, 2013, p. 387; O'Sullivan, 2002; Katuninec, 2010; Mann, 2004; Eatwell, 2011, Griffin, 2021). In this study, the term 'far right' is employed to describe subjects and individuals whose actions and ideological orientation are situated at the farthest extent of the right wing of the political spectrum. Their agenda is an expression of their antagonistic stance towards democracy, encompassing anti-social and terrorist activities.

Our research is based on the Backes and Jesse (2003) conceptualisation of political extremism as the antithesis of the democratic constitutional state. This term is used to denote anti-democratic views and actions, which are directed against the basic values, rules and institutions of the democratic state (Backes, Jesse, 2003, p. 464). Furthermore, it is used to describe a political position that denies the modern concept of human equality, which is considered to be one of the fundamental foundations of a democratic constitutional state (Backes, Jesse, 2003, p. 53). Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive rejection of democracy and its fundamental tenets, principles and mechanisms, though it should be noted that certain values, rights and obligations are subject to questioning in specific instances (Mareš, 2003, pp. 34-35). Notwithstanding their proclivity towards anti-systemic deviations, the radical right currently evinces a constitutionally conformist orientation while operating within the system (Rataj, 2015, p. 1; as activist style at O'Sullivan, 2002).

It is evident that the far-right political spectrum is not a monolithic entity, yet it does display a number of shared characteristics and activities. These are incorporated in the FRlx. The Far Right Index (FRlx) introduced in this research helps us determine the degree of inclination towards

far-right ideologies. It also allows us to identify discrepancies between officially declared programmes ('compatible' with democratic and rule-of-law conditions) and the actual rhetoric used in communicating with voters ('incompatible'). This index is crucial for understanding the nuanced differences within the far-right spectrum and provides a more comprehensive analysis of their political strategies and communication methods.

Some recent studies (e.g. Bartels et al., 2023; Coppedge, 2023) indicate that democracy is experiencing a decline and confronting novel challenges, underscoring the pressing need for research on the far right. The far right is the subject of numerous academic studies bringing a variety of interpretative approaches. As Orosz and Mihálik (2023) posit, the term 'far right' encompasses a diverse array of political ideologies and movements that espouse radical and populist tenets. As posited by Štefančík (2013), Štefančík and Hvasta (2019), Drábik (2014, 2019) and others, the term 'political extremism' is a complex and ill-defined concept that encompasses a range of ideas and ideologies. These ideologies and movements are, therefore, characterised by a tendency to combine themes present in diverse conceptions and ideologies through the so-called 'isms', including radicalism, populism, extremism, communism, fascism and neo-fascism, religious fundamentalism, racism, Nazism and neo-Nazism, nationalism and neo-nationalism, right-wing and left-wing radicalism, populism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and, in the contemporary era, anti-immigration ideologies. Consequently, a number of ideological currents are categorised as political extremism.

As demonstrated by Katuninec (2010) and Mihálik (2019), the far right has had a profound impact on the trajectory of modern Czech and Slovak history, as well as on the formulation of policy in both states. In the context of research on LSNS's programme and critical topics reflected in their programme, it is pertinent to cite Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová (2016), whose research was based on the results of public opinion polls conducted on the aforementioned topics. The development and foundations of fascist doctrine in Italy, Germany, Great Britain the Czech Republic and Slovakia is also mapped by Drábik (2019). In defining fascism, he primarily draws upon Griffin's concept (2021), which is based on the myth of rebirth, and he offers a brief analysis of LSNS, openly identifying it as a neo-Nazi party (Drábik, 2014; Drábik, 2019, p. 20). As Smolík (2013) asserts, the concept of the nation occupies a pivotal position in contemporary political far-right research. Despite this, it is not explicitly defined; rather, it is delineated through attitudes towards culture, language, history, other ethnicities and foreigners.

Political science research of the far-right therefore primarily concerns the content or ideological orientations of its representatives, including both formal and informal groupings. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on the examination of power systems, which represent the ideological basis of the current far-right doctrine, and its associated philosophical and ideological roots.

This research builds upon the theoretical concept of accommodation, as presented by Kolman (2021), which identifies efforts to align anti-systemic political subjects with the constitutionally guaranteed democratic standard through programmatic means. As Kolman posits, the fundamental objective of accommodation is to avoid triggering the defensive mechanisms of democracy, which could culminate in the dissolution of the 'incompatible' entity or the curtailment of its right to take part in political competition. The process we now call 'accommodation' has been touched upon by a number of authors who have indirectly identified the concealing abilities of the far right in a democratic environment (Papasarantopoulos, 2023; Ganesh et al, 2020; Vicenová et. al, 2022; Žúborová, Borarosová, 2017; Kluknavská, Smolík, 2016; Kazharski, 2019).

As Kolman (2021) asserts, the process of accommodation is founded upon three fundamental elements. Firstly, there is no open questioning of the system of representative democracy. In lieu of a comprehensive critique, there is merely tactical criticism of the shortcomings of the system in which the subject operates. Secondly, the subject endeavours to reform the system with the objective of eliminating the political and institutional elements that permit the penetration of liberal and exogenous elements from external sources, or that themselves act as carriers of such elements. Thirdly, there are anti-systemic tendencies, which are deliberately concealed and aligned with the legal framework and constitutionality.

Kolman (2021, p.89) defines accommodation as the process of functioning of a political entity, where *'Despite the anti-democratic tendencies inherent in the ideological basis of this ideological stream (the far right; note)... At the same time. This intention, in its latent form, exhibits anti-systemic tendencies, which are, however, deliberately concealed and aligned with the legal framework and constitutionality.'*

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This section presents the fundamental theoretical framework of our investigation into the far right and also defines the concepts that will be employed in the course of the research.

The investigation of value attitudes within any ideological spectrum must be approached in a holistic manner, bearing in mind that freedom has its constitutional and legal limits and it is difficult to combat anti-systemic tendencies without compromising democratic values. Freedom of expression can only be restricted when strictly necessary, as it is a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment and sustenance of a democratic system. The term 'suppression' refers to measures by the State aimed at enforcing non-restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms.

In the case of the Slovak Republic, the acts of 'suppression' are covered by the Penal Code (Act No. 300/2005, § 421, §422), which also applies to their violation in the online space, including social networks. Slovakia, like the majority of democratic countries, responds by limiting the political participation of groups and political parties that are deemed to be acting in an unacceptable manner or espousing opinions that violate human rights and freedoms. Consequently, the LSNS party – Republika's predecessor – underwent a gradual process of systemic accommodation (Kolman, 2021) due to the pressure exerted by criminal prosecutions and court proceedings.

The predecessor party of LSNS, Slovenská Pospolitosť – Národná strana (SP-NS) was dissolved by a Slovak court judgment in 2006, which is an example of the paradox of democracy, whereby the protection of democratic principles may inadvertently limit freedom of expression and narrow the political and electoral arena by excluding certain subjects (Diamond, 1990). These democratic restrictions on freedom of speech and political competition are of great importance for the protection of the so-called fragility of democracy. Our fundamental premise is that the primary protective mechanism of the democratic establishment is the prohibition of extremists' participation in the electoral arena. There are many historic examples in which extreme political actors have aligned with democratic norms and practices in order to maintain their activities or enhance their electoral prospects. It is therefore essential that political scientists pay close attention to the survival tactics and operational strategies of such political actors, who seek to maintain their political activities without facing criminal prosecution or court proceedings for their extremist rhetoric. This is particularly relevant in contexts where such rhetoric may lead to the banning of their activities as a means of safeguarding the democratic process, as happened in the case of SP-NS.

We determined, and subsequently analysed, Republika's ideological framework based on criteria that are characteristic of far-right thinking and methods of political work (see, for example, Drábik, 2019; Charvát,

2007; Smolík, 2013; Griffin, 2021; Papasarantopoulos, 2023; Ganesh et. al, 2020; Vicenová et. al, 2022; Žúborová, Borarosová, 2017; Kluknavská, Smolík, 2016; Kazharski, 2019). We used the work of these authors, who had conducted research on far-right entities in democracy, including works devoted to aspects of ‘accommodation’, to identify the key elements that define the essence of far right (including fascism). The group of 16 indicators we identified is listed in Table 1. These characteristics are presented as a set of interconnected indicators, which are referred to below as Far Right Indicators (FRIs).

**Table 1:** *Far Right Indicators (FRIs)*

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Ultrationalism</b>	A particular form of nationalistic fervour predicated on the utopian notion of the nation as a robust, virtuous and heroic organic entity. It contrasts to the liberal concepts of citizenship, multiculturalism, individualism, or the general acceptance of human rights or cultural assimilation as the foundations of society.
<b>Belief in a crisis threatening the nation</b>	Presence of real or imaginary threat is interpreted in the sense of ‘crisis’, ‘decadence’, and ‘degeneration’ (i.e. narratives associated with demographic, moral or cultural decline, collective loss of memory regarding the heroic past, racial mixing with racial, ideological, dysgenic, or moral enemies).
<b>A new order</b>	Departure from decadence is interpreted as a process of renewal and a new beginning for the ultra-nation, based on traditionalist values and, in some cases, on the concept of the ‘purity’ of the superior race.
<b>The spread of conspiracy theories</b>	Fear, emotions and a focus on conspiracy theories to secure political capital in contrast to rationality and correctness. Furthermore, it gives rise to the formation of an internal and external adversary perceived as a threat to the nation.
<b>Racial concept of the nation/ Ethnoculturalism</b>	Assumption that a nation represents an organic unit, comprising members characterised by a common identity primarily based on biological characteristics. In contrast to migrants within the nation, while simultaneously excluding all members of ethnic minorities.
<b>Economic programme and social doctrine</b>	Preference of strong economic and social doctrines with a superior role of the state evidenced by a chauvinistic social security programme predicated on the assumption that a robust state should undertake social policy exclusively for the benefit of its own nation. It is primarily family-oriented, with the overarching objective of ensuring the future survival of the nation or race.
<b>Historical continuity</b>	Adoration of and reference to, historical patterns. In our context of the Republika movement, the Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945) - a cleric-fascist regime - is thus key. Fundamentalist Catholicism forms part of the ideological basis of neo-fascists and the far right (Charvát, 2007, pp. 74–77).

<b>Anti-rationalism</b>	Directed against the Enlightenment, which exalted reason in contrast to fascism, which preferred the soul, emotions and natural instincts.
<b>Struggle</b>	Fascism, as the historical ideological foundation of the far right, built upon Darwin's ideas of natural selection, with a particular emphasis on the value of strength and the perceived harm of weakness.
<b>Leadership and elitism</b>	Refusing equality in the light of natural and desirable leadership. Society was thus divided into three parts: the leader, the military elite and the masses.
<b>Socialism</b>	According to O'Sullivan (2002) and Katuninec (2010, p. 7), the economy should be governed by the ideology of 'national socialism,' which involves active government intervention in the economy, in contrast to socialist principles.
<b>Anti-capitalism</b>	A collectivist approach and implementation of a compatible economic policy.
<b>Corporatism and syndicalism</b>	Regarded as an alternative to both capitalism and socialism. O'Sullivan (2002, p.130) states that the fascist interpretation of corporatism is based on the idea of unity between employers and workers, which must be achieved through the use of various economic methods and institutions, such as unions.
<b>Permanent revolution</b>	A rejection of reason and stability is evident, with an emphasis on myth and dynamism. This has led to the concept of permanent revolution.
<b>Messianic mission</b>	The concept of a redemptive mission, one nation is deemed to be inherently superior to another, and the entity is a vital part of this mission.
<b>Self-sufficiency</b>	The capacity of the state to operate autonomously, without being unduly influenced by external factors. The objective is to reduce reliance on imports and foreign corporations.

*Source: Authors based on Heywood (2008), O'Sullivan (2002), Griffin (2021), Papasarantopoulos (2023), Ganesh et. al. (2020), Vicenová et. al. (2022), Žúborová and Borarosová (2017), Kluknavská and Smolík (2016), Kazharski (2019).*

Our research focuses on the period after 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 when the Republika Movement (MINV, 2024) has been attempting to create a new identity for the far right (MINV, 2024). This was launched by individuals who left ĽSNS following an internal party split (TASR, 2021). Despite ongoing efforts to reform ĽSNS's communication and accommodate far-right ideology within the system, Republika continues to bear the historical burden of the activities, symbolism and membership base of ĽSNS.

The Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Milan Uhrík was appointed as the new chair of the Republika movement, while former prominent ĽSNS members assumed the roles of vice-chairs. Other individuals with unconventional political backgrounds were also given a platform in Republika, including Andrej Janco, a proponent of Vladimir Putin, opponent

of homosexuality and purveyor of misinformation and Marek Géci, a former colleague of the far-right politician Tomáš Taraba (Benčík, 2017), who in 2023 became the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic in Robert Fico's fourth government.

In contrast to the personal party cast, the Republika movement does not officially declare any far-right ideology. As Uhrík stated, *'We are establishing Republika as a movement for all citizens who are dissatisfied with the liquidation policy of this government coalition and at the same time frustrated by the scandals of the compromised and corrupt opposition,'* (TASR, 2021). Uhrík was keen to emphasise that the new entity would not be a clone of ĽSNS, but there was no clear rejection of ĽSNS's activities to date. In 2021, in his farewell video on ĽSNS's social network page, he emphasised his previous efforts towards achieving an independent and free Slovakia. He also expressed gratitude to the ĽSNS leader and other party members in his video on the social network: *'I would like to express my gratitude for your friendship over the past few years. For all the fruitful collaborations we have enjoyed. ... I will always remember them with pride'* (Facebook, 2021). By doing so, the leadership of the new entity was effectively endorsing the far-right rhetoric of ĽSNS without attempting to disassociate themselves from their previous statements.

The visual identity of Republika has undergone a significant transformation, moving away from the original ĽSNS symbols. The Republika movement has omitted the symbolism of the clerico-fascist first Slovak Republic (1939-1945) from its official materials. Republika has gradually adapted its own identity to align with Slovakia's constitutional framework, particularly by modifying the styling of the guardist double cross and incorporating a traditional triple crest. The basic visual sign is a blank map of the Slovak Republic with the prominent inscription 'Republika' in a white-blue-red design, which refers to the Slovak tricolour. The name 'Republika' is derived from the initial letters of Slovak words that encapsulate the core values of the movement: reasonable, energetic, professional, successful, militant, humane, innovative, conservative, and authentic.

Despite their clearly conservative and anti-globalist stance, they reject being labelled as a fascist association. On their website, in the 'Our Opinions' section ('Naše názory'), they provide explanations or refutations of their previous activities. To this end, a separate, freely available brochure entitled 'We Explain the Most Common Hoaxes About the Republika Movement' (Hnutie Republika, 2023b) was produced. In the introduction, the authors primarily criticise the media and the non-governmental sector

for labelling Republika's members as fascists: *'The use of the term 'fascist' is a simplistic and unsubstantiated characterisation employed by those who are unable to engage in a reasoned debate.'* The term 'fascist' is primarily used by Republika to label progressive political groups collaboration and NGOs activists (funded by the EU, NATO or the USA as proclaimed in this brochure). The brochure provides an overview of Republika's fundamental political positions, including its foreign policy. It believes that the war in Ukraine was instigated by Western powers, specifically the USA and NATO, Republika provides support for Russian interests and justifies Russia's reasons for invading Ukraine in this brochure.

The Republika movement is particularly active on social networks. At the time of Slovakia's 2023 parliamentary election, the political accounts of prominent Republika members were among the most influential. In terms of the number of interactions, its leader, Milan Uhrík, ranked second among Slovak politicians on the Facebook social network between January and April 2023, followed by other Republika's representatives, with Tomáš Špaček in third place and Milan Mazurek in fifth position. This also shows that Republika is particularly interested in engaging with young voters. Almost 40% of the movement's electorate falls into the 35-54 age category, with a further 36% under the age of 34. After the liberal *Progresívne Slovensko* (Progressive Slovakia) party, Republika has the second youngest electorate in Slovakia (Miškerík, 2023).

However, due to the dissemination of content that is the subject of controversy on social networks, Republika is regularly faced with the blocking of its accounts on social networks, and is therefore gradually implementing a strategy of diversification and content selection based on tolerance. This involves publishing controversial topics on alternative, less controlled platforms, including Telegram, Tik Tok, Rumble and Odysee. The publication of risky content is primarily facilitated through related proxy sites and media outlets that Republika indirectly funds and controls, as detailed below. From a legal standpoint, it is the medium, rather than the movement itself, that is held accountable for the content published. In the event of sanctions or cancellation, the direct activity of Republika remains unaffected. Such was the case of the portal of the movement, 'Denník Republika', which features the visuals of the movement and its individual posts are mainly comments from its members but it is officially operated as an independent entity. The movement declares that *'Denník REPUBLIKA is not the official website of the REPUBLIKA movement, but a fan website created by sympathisers of the movement.'* (Denník Republika, 2024).

Furthermore, the movement has been outsourcing political campaigning for an extended period through the formally 'independent and apolitical' conservative media portal Kulturblog, which is registered as a civic association of young conservative people aimed at disseminating values associated with national identity and Christianity through audiovisual media. Kulturblog has declared its independence, with funding sourced exclusively from contributions from fans and subscribers. At the time of the portal's establishment, the main personnel of Kulturblog were paid assistants of ĽSNS parliamentary deputies. The leaders of Kulturblog also held positions within the ĽSNS youth organisation (Ľudová mládež) and were remunerated for the production of promotional materials. Following the dissolution of the ĽSNS parliamentary group, Kulturblog's collaboration with the newly-established Republika movement (Benčík, 2019) continued also due to personal ties. Republika's Vice-President (Mazurek) is a regular contributor to Kulturblog, together with the wife of the portal's founding member, Lívia Pavlíková, who has been a member of Republika since 2023. Other contributors are the founder of Kulturblog and former ĽSNS candidate Ján Pastuszek, or Uhrík's assistant in the European Parliament and conspiracy theorist, Ľubomír Huďo.

A portal that analyses alternative media (Konšpirátori.sk) has given Kulturblog a negative assessment for the dissemination of content that is both conspiratorial and extremist in nature. The content is characterised by the presentation of information in a manipulative and emotionally charged manner with the intention of creating a false impression of threats posed by liberalism, multiculturalism, globalisation, Western Europe, various religious or sexual minorities and migration. *'The website plays on various fears and stereotypes, particularly on the topics of migration and, more recently, vaccination.'* (Konšpirátori.sk, 2024) Furthermore, ongoing analysis of Kulturblog reveals signs of the accommodation process analysed here as far-right ideology adapting to the norms of the democratic system in which it operates.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The key tool for identifying the profile and degree of accommodation of the political subject investigated will be a series of selected indicators (FRIs = far right indicators). Each of the indicators represents a condition that allows us to determine the extent to which the subject in question is aligned with the ideas typically associated with the far right. In the absence of a

general definition, the indicators will serve to define the parameters of far-right groups in accordance with the theoretical framework of the research.

We have compiled an initial Table 1 presenting 16 selected indicators of leaning towards the far right. In line with the primary objective of the project, the goal is to confirm the theoretical concept of accommodation (Kolman, 2021) of radical and anti-system political subjects within the system, using the far-right movement *Republika* as a case study. The indicator fulfilment values (1 – P=present, 0 – N=absent; Table 2) will be assigned to two independent categories based on *Republika*'s official declaratory programme ('programme') and activities on social networks or public gatherings ('activity'). The use of binary values minimises the risk of inconclusive results that could be affected by the symptoms of accommodation, i.e. ambiguous attitudes relative to a particular indicator. The degree of leaning towards the far right (DoFR) will be determined by scaling, namely by the ratio of the sum of points obtained in individual categories to the total number of indicators in the table.

**Table 2:** *Sixteen 'far right indicators' (FRIx)*

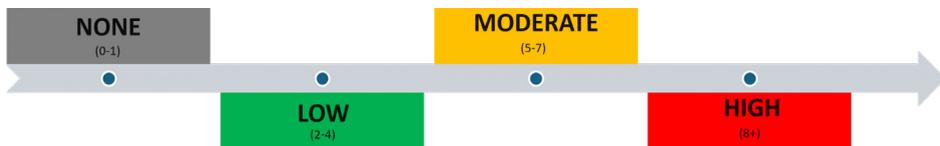
<b>FRIs order</b>	<b>FRIs</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Activity</b>
1.	Ultrationalism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
2.	Belief in a crisis threatening the nation	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
3.	A new order	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
4.	The spread of conspiracy theories	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
5.	Racial concept of the nation/ Ethnoculturalism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
6.	Economic programme and social doctrine	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
7.	Historical continuity	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
8.	Anti-rationalism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
9.	Struggle	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
10.	Leadership and elitism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
11.	Socialism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
12.	Anti-capitalism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
13.	Corporatism and syndicalism	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)

<b>14.</b>	Permanent revolution	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
<b>15.</b>	Messianic mission	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
<b>16.</b>	Self-sufficiency	(1 – present, 0 – absent)	(1 – present, 0 – absent)
	The resulting DoFR score	(sum of indicators)	(sum of indicators)
		Low rate - from 5 to 8 Moderate - from 9 to 12 High rate - from 13 to 16	Low rate - from 5 to 8 Moderate - from 9 to 12 High rate - from 13 to 16
	Deviation	None - from 0 to 1 Low - from 2 to 4 Moderate - from 5 to 7 High - from 8	

Source: Authors based on Heywood (2008), O’Sullivan (2002), Griffin (2021), Papasarantopoulos (2023), Ganesh et al. (2020), Vicenová et al. (2022), Žúborová and Borarosová (2017), Kluknavská and Smolík (2016), Kazharski (2019).

The FRlx table indicating the degree of alignment with the DoFR’s right-wing stance contains a comparison of the presence of indicators between the official programme of the political entity and its public activities. The comparison is achieved by calculating the difference in scores in separate categories. This results in a deviation map that illustrates the consistency between the party’s official programme and the rhetoric of individual members on social networks and in the media space. The deviation is a quantitative representation of the degree of accommodation within the political system.

**Picture 1:** *FRlx- Based Deviation Rate*



Source: Authors

The scale determining the level of deviation is set more sensitively than the main measurement of the far-right inclination. In terms of content, each of the indicators examined represents relatively extensive areas of activity by a political entity and not their partial manifestations or aspects of activity. For this reason, we have set the degree of deviation rigidly in the sense that a value of 8 (out of a total number of 16 indicators) means a high deviation.

For example, deviation in an indicator ultranationalism represents a serious departure from the standard expressions of a democratic political actor, and the individual indicators are not indicators of democratic political parties (for example, according to Sartori), but are specific indicators expressing a leaning towards fascism (or to the far right), while respecting the set methodology.

In line with the established methodology, we concentrate on the comprehensive identification and analysis of pivotal indicators, which are represented in tabular form and quantified. The model presented will be applied in the research to the relevant far-right subject, namely the Republika movement. We also aim to provide a comprehensive descriptive narrative to complement the numerical data. This narrative will include an analytical assessment of trends identified and patterns and statistically significant differences, providing a deeper understanding and interpretation of the results in the context of the specific research interest.

A qualitative analysis of Republika's publications was conducted to ascertain the fundamental ideological stances of the political entities examined. This entailed a critique of the sources, coupled with an interpretation that considered the full range of contextual factors. The sources analysed primarily comprised party press, posts from the Facebook social network, recordings of speeches, photos, audio recordings and posts from the website archive. Furthermore, the subject of the analysis encompassed appearances of party representatives in the media, as well as videos sourced from the YouTube website. The key benefit of this approach is that the data is not susceptible to the potential errors or distortions that could arise from external influences. The analysis of sources from the far right-wing environment reveals that the documents examined are influenced by the ideological framework of their originator (Hendl, 2005, p. 133). We therefore believe that the qualitative analysis of documents is an effective method for clarifying basic ideological positions.

#### **4 RESULTS**

The main goal of this section is to introduce the results of the research defining the FRIx index as applied to the Republika movement based on the methodology outlined above, with a reasoning grounded in a theoretical framework and Republika's website and publications with an overview of basic values and vague political visions. As evidenced, a multiplicity of FRIs is sometimes present in a single statement.

The introductory information leaflet *Predstavujeme hnutie Republika*, (Hnutie Republika, 2021) explains the basic programmatic and ideological goals of the movement, which are based on ĽSNS's long-term priorities, and we have categorised them based on the FRIs above.

As illustrated in Table 5 below, Republika has continued the established trend of adapting far-right ideologies and narratives to align with the requirements of the democratic system. The fundamental objective of this programme is to avoid triggering the protective mechanisms of democracy, which would directly threaten the functioning of this political entity within the system. The current political system of the Slovak Republic is therefore undergoing a process of latent revision, during which far right-wing views are being presented. Republika's attitudes and opinions are aligned with legal norms and do not explicitly incite violence, in contrast to the original rhetoric of the ĽSNS.

**Table 5:** *The FRIx index applied to Republika (2021-2024)*

FRIs order	FRIs	Programme	Activity
1.	Ultranationalism	0	1
2.	Belief in a crisis threatening the nation	1	1
3.	A new order	0	1
4.	The spread of conspiracy theories	0	1
5.	Racial concept of the nation/ Ethnoculturalism	0	1
6.	Economic programme and social doctrine	1	1
7.	Historical continuity	0	1
8.	Anti-rationalism	0	0
9.	Struggle	0	0
10.	Leadership and elitism	0	0
11.	Socialism	0	0
12.	Anti-capitalism	0	0
13.	Corporatism and syndicalism	0	0
14.	Permanent revolution	0	0
15.	Messianic mission	1	1
16.	Self-sufficiency	1	1
	The resulting DoFR score	4/16= 0.25	9/16=0.56
	Deviation	5 - moderate	

Source: Authors

The ultra-nationalist Republika's nature is evidenced in their rhetoric by its rejection of the European Union and NATO, which *'are damaging both Europe and Slovakia through immigration, LGBTI+ and green policies'* and, as declared by the movement, are responsible for the outbreak of conflicts such as the one in Ukraine. At the same time, Republika will *'try to stop Brussels from accepting immigrants and forcing nonsense into our lives'*, with the ambition of pushing for a *'fundamental reform'* of the EU. Republika's official statements describe NATO as a relic, and its functioning is said *'to serve only as an extended arm of American interests in Europe'*, pushing Slovakia towards war with Russia. In the opening address of the Republika's leader, a negative attitude towards international organizations such as the EU and NATO is visible (FRIs 1, 16; Hnutie Republika, 2021).

A frequent theme is the appeal for *'absolute but decent change'* and the call to *'put your hand to work in saving and restoring our beautiful Slovakia.'* (FRIs 2, 15) Part of the opening page is also the vision to *'protect traditional, national and Christian values.'*

In this context, Republika fulfils another far right defining element, namely the belief that a crisis is threatening the nation (FRIs 2). They identify liberalism and *'perverted gender ideology'* as the primary external threat to Slovakia, emanating from Western Europe and the USA. The movement employs *'gender ideology'* to instil fear in the public about the potential risks of gender reassignment surgery, particularly the perceived risk of self-harm or mutilation.

Republika describes these influences as *'progressivism'*, perceived negatively. This is directly related to the movement's appeal to *'rescue and restore'* Slovakia, addressing the shortcomings that the system is unable to resolve (FRIs 3, 16).

Additionally, they disseminate conspiracy theories (FRIs, 4). Environmentalists, NGOs and the media, which are perceived to be influenced by Western oligarchs such as George Soros, are also regarded as adversaries. In their social media posts, the movement's negative stance towards liberalism and the non-governmental sector is highlighted as this sector is financially and ideologically influenced by George Soros, as declared by the movement. Republika, however, generally rejects the glorification of previous totalitarian regimes, although it has not specifically condemned Nazi and fascist ideology. In their brochure, attention is drawn to the *'totalitarian trends'* of the current establishment. The call for the *'rescue and restoration'* of Slovakia may be indicative of its anti-systemic nature, given the dissatisfaction expressed with current developments.

The far right's ideological foundation is further reinforced by the assertion that the first Slovak Republic (1939-1945) was a satellite of Nazi Germany, necessitating historical revisionism (FRIs, 5). In contrast to ĽSNS, the Republika movement employs a more moderate tone in its official communications and is inclined to accommodate the far right within the system. This is evident in their efforts to mitigate the negative legacy of the first Slovak Republic (1939-1945) and its president Jozef Tiso, while avoiding explicit mention of the Jewish issue: *'... many tragedies occurred during its existence ..., we consider this moment in history to be an undeniable historical milestone in the struggle for the self-determination of our nation... We view President Tiso as a leader who guided the nation through the most challenging period in human history. We believe that he did everything possible to protect Slovakia as much as possible in that difficult time.'* (Hnutie Republika, 2023b; (FRIs, 5). The official brochure presents a highly evasive stance on matters pertaining to the first Slovak Republic (1939-1945) and the Holocaust (Vražda, 2017). The movement maintains that *'people hold varying perspectives on historical events. Nevertheless, we will not tear ourselves apart and argue over them.'* It has a similarly ambiguous stance on the issue of mass murders. The text does not explicitly condemn the plan for the final solution of the Jewish question, but it does not deny the existence of the Holocaust, although there have been multiple accusations of Holocaust denial against Republika's representatives.

The movement's economic and social doctrine (FRIs 6) was presented in a consistent manner across the official programme and the rhetoric on social media.

Republika's negative attitudes towards minorities, migration and other nations and religions in their direct communication continuously emphasise the idea of national hegemony (FRIs 7). However, Milan Mazurek, the current Republika's vice chair, publicly apologised for the verbal attack on a Muslim family in 2015 (which he explained as the mistake of a youngster driven by anger; Osvaldová, 2021), although this apology only related to the form of the hatred towards foreigners presented and did not indicate any change in his stance to the acceptance of Islam as a religion. The movement has expressed concerns regarding the Roma people and the LGBTQ+ community. The Republika movement believes that the most appropriate way to resolve issues with *'settlers'* (i.e. Roma people) is to impose stricter penalties for breaking criminal and social norms with cuts in social benefits as one of the penalties suggested. Mazurek also accuses the LGBTQ+ community of promoting *'gender ideology'*, which he considers to be perverted, and he

regards any concerns about gender identity as a psychological disorder. The lack of public distancing from previous ĽSNS political views allows for a direct comparison of the rhetoric employed by Republika's representatives during their time in ĽSNS and then in Republika.

In conclusion, Republika has modified its stance on certain traditional mobilisation issues in order to gain broader societal support and in response to heightened scrutiny from state security and legal authorities. However, on social media, they have been vocal in their opposition to what they term as the *'ideology of liberalism'*. Yet despite their critical stance towards liberalism, the Republika movement does not officially oppose liberal democracy and supports the constitutionally enshrined establishment (Hnutie Republika, 2023a). Therefore, FRIs 8 – 14 show no deviation (value 0 in the programme and activities).

Individual Republikamembers provide examples of openly far-right rhetoric on unofficial proxy channels, including Kulturblog and Denník Republika. As a result of the regular moderation of these platforms, the content in question is regularly moved to new, unregulated social platforms, including Telegram, Rumble and Odysee, as discussed above. The original YouTube and Facebook accounts were removed on multiple occasions for violating the terms of the community (O médiách, 2022). Republika's members frequently present strongly-held opinions in a satirical manner, effectively avoiding prosecution and the blocking of web domains. However, this satirical approach was also employed during election campaigns (2023, 2024) and for promoting the Republika movement's positions (Dale, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study analysed the discourse of the most prominent representatives of the Republika movement, whose members have been active in the Slovak far-right environment for a considerable period of time. It is notable that they (to the date) declare themselves to be democratic, which suggests that there may be a discrepancy between the official form of the movement and its internal ideological basis.

Following an in-depth analysis of sources on their political attitudes, this study presents a new conceptualisation of the far right in the shape of an index measuring leaning towards far-right ideology in Slovakia. This index reflects the political activity and ideological framework of Republika, which is in line with that of its predecessor, ĽSNS party. To gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, a qualitative document analysis was

conducted to provide a detailed clarification of Republika's political thinking, activity and establishment.

Kolman's (2021) concept of 'accommodation' was tested on a movement other than his original research subject, ĽSNS party, thus confirming the validity of his theoretical conclusion (Kolman, 2021). Our research has enriched Kolman's theoretical framework with the introduction of FRIx, which in future will also allow researchers to measure the degree of adaptation of originally non-democratic political subjects to the democratic conditions of political and electoral competition, referred to as accommodation. This index provides a nuanced approach to identifying subtle shifts and patterns that traditional methods might overlook. By analysing various indicators, the FRIx index helps to uncover the underlying ideologies that far-right entities attempt to conceal. Consequently, it plays a crucial role in safeguarding democratic principles by exposing efforts to undermine them from within. This study makes a contribution to the research and discussion on the potential ways that far-right entities can effectively implement their political programmes on an official level even in democratically constituted and functioning institutions.

This research identifies the discrepancy between Republika's declared programme ('programme') and its rhetoric ('activity'), which contains the ideological basis of the far right. Based on the deviation identified, the authors confirm the achievement of the set goal and present the real ideological profiling of the subject as being far right for the period 2021-2024. This finding, through the deviation measured, also allows us to identify a form of *accommodation by an anti-system/undemocratically positioned subject to the conditions of democratic competition*, in an active form. Such accommodation ensures that the democratic system does not resort to legal action against them, thereby highlighting the fragility of the democratic process.

The accommodative far right in the democratic system is defined by an integrally nationalist concept of the nation. This is achieved through the use of value-based traditionalist principles and historical myths, with the aim of building a homogeneous society that will ensure the future survival of the nation in today's globalised and multicultural world. Concurrently, there is a demarcation against liberalism, which is perceived through the lens of the penetration of foreign elements into society, resulting in a perceived decline in racial and moral standards. There is no open questioning of the system of representative democracy, only a tactical criticism of the system's shortcomings that the system is unable to address in the long term. By employing this approach, it is feasible for such entities to disrupt the system from within and establish a legal alternative.

One of the additional outcomes of the research is the confirmation of Kolman's concept (2021), which identifies a further far-right period, namely the *accommodation period*. In light of the above, we propose a *three-phase model for the evolution of the far right* in Slovakia, after 1989, based on a set of defining characteristics.

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# PARTY NOMINATION AND LEGISLATIVE GENDER QUOTAS IN THE 2020 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE: THE CASE OF RIVNE REGIONAL COUNCIL

Vitalii Lebediuk<sup>1</sup> and Yurii Moroziuk<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This article analyzes the impact of legal gender quotas on party policies regarding the positioning of candidates on electoral lists for the 2020 local elections in Ukraine, and voters' reaction to this. This research utilizes a unique dataset on elections to one of Ukraine's self-government bodies (Rivne Regional Council) because the Central Election Commission of Ukraine does not publish detailed data on the results of local elections. The 2020 local elections in Ukraine showed that the introduction of legislative gender quotas did not fully work because political parties demonstrated gender bias by nominating predominantly male candidates for viable positions. The difference between the share of women candidates and the share of women deputies did not increase significantly in favor of women deputies compared to the 2015 local elections in Ukraine. In addition, voters did not show a gender bias, and, in most cases, were guided by political parties' proposed order of candidates. The article contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in local elections in Ukraine under a new electoral system.*

**Keywords:** Political parties, Local elections, Gender quota, Party nomination, Ukraine.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2020 local elections in Ukraine were held under a new electoral system with a new administrative-territorial division. They were preceded by two key institutional changes. The first was the entry into force of the Electoral Code (1 January 2020), which introduced a proportional electoral system with flexible lists and gender quotas (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020a). A voter at the local level must first vote for a party and, if they wish, can also exercise the right to preferential voting by choosing one candidate.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of International Relations and National Security, The National University of Ostroh Academy, Seminarska 2, 35800 Ostroh, Ukraine. E-mail: [vitalii.lebediuk@oa.edu.ua](mailto:vitalii.lebediuk@oa.edu.ua), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6308-6778>.

<sup>2</sup> The School for Political Analysis "POLIS", The National University of Ostroh Academy, Seminarska 2, 35800 Ostroh, Ukraine. E-mail: [yuriy.moroziuk@gmail.com](mailto:yuriy.moroziuk@gmail.com), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2037-1647>.

The second key change was the amalgamation of territorial communities in accordance with a procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020b). The new administrative-territorial division significantly reduced not only the number of territorial units, but also the number of local deputies. Thus, political parties had to consider several legislative innovations in the process of nominating candidates.

The legislative gender quotas introduced in 2020 formally worked, as the number of women deputies increased due to an increase in the number of women candidates (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020b). The share of candidates increased from 34% to 43.9%, and the share of deputies increased by the same amount from 22.7% to 31.6% in the regional, district, and city councils in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine (Table 1). This raises the research question of whether political parties promoted or opposed gender quotas in the process of placing candidates on ballots during the 2020 local elections in Ukraine.

**Table 1:** *The share of women among candidates and the share of mandates received in the local elections of 2015 and 2020*

Local councils	2015			2020		
	Candidates (%)	Elected (%)	Difference (%)	Candidates (%)	Elected (%)	Difference (%)
Regional councils	29.9	15.0	-14.9	43.2	27.8	-15.4
District councils	35.6	24.0	-11.6	44.0	34.3	-9.7
City councils	36.6	29.2	-7.4	44.6	32.6	-12.0
<b>Total</b>	34.0	22.7	-11.3	43.9	31.6	-12.3

*Source: Official election results obtained from the Central Election Commission of Ukraine.*

The new electoral system with flexible lists allows us to test the behavioral patterns of political parties in nominating candidates for their respective positions on the electoral list and the behavioral patterns of voters during preferential voting. The 40% gender quota introduced obliged political parties to adhere to this principle when compiling lists of candidates for deputies. Two candidates for the five positions on the list had to be of different genders (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020a). Preferential voting was not mandatory, but its impact was significant: 52.6% of candidates

from all parties in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine passed the statutory threshold of 25% of preferential votes from the electoral quota necessary for the list order to be changed (Opora, 2020).

The purpose of this article is to explain the strategy political parties followed in placing their candidates in constituencies on the one hand, and how voters reacted to this proposal using the right to preferential voting on the other hand.

This study addressed the following research questions:

- *Q1: Did political parties demonstrate gender bias in ballot ranking patterns?*
- *Q2: Were there equal chances for politically experienced female and male candidates to take viable positions on the electoral list?*
- *Q3: Did voters follow political parties' suggestions by giving preferential votes to candidates in the top positions on the list, or did they reject the parties' suggestions?*

Our hypotheses concern the placing of candidates in viable positions by parties and the electoral chances of being elected.

- *H1: Women candidates are less likely to be in a viable position on the electoral list regardless of their political experience.*
- *H2: Voters are gender-biased toward female candidates even when controlling for a candidate's political experience and position on the electoral list.*

To answer these research questions and test our hypotheses, we collected a unique dataset based on elections held to the Rivne Regional Council of the Rivne Region (oblast)<sup>3</sup>. The dataset contains information about candidates included in the electoral lists for the Rivne Regional Council in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine, which contained a total of 631 candidates (Rivne Oblast Council, 2020). This methodological step was taken because there are no detailed electoral results for local elections in Ukraine. The Central Election Commission of Ukraine does not publish detailed information on candidates, but only provides the aggregate results of local elections (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020a). A detailed operationalization of the variables is presented in Section 2.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Electoral Code of Ukraine, during local elections, voters elect representatives to local self-government bodies: regional councils, district councils, city councils, district councils in cities (in cities with district divisions), village councils and settlement councils (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020a).

Studies have shown that gender quotas should not be seen as the main way to promote gender equality in politics (Pansardi, Pedrazzani, 2023), although they can also be used to increase the number of women in representative bodies (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009), and the effectiveness of gender quotas in increasing women's representation in parliament has been demonstrated in several European countries (Murray, 2010; Gwiazda, 2017). However, the effects of quotas on women's representation are different in proportional electoral systems. In proportional systems with open lists, a party selects candidates for a viable position higher on the electoral list depending on the candidate's personal characteristics, which may hinder the representation of women in high positions (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Thames, Williams, 2010). The party leadership, when determining the order of candidates on the ballot, is guided by a pragmatic approach to maximizing the party's result in the elections (Marcinkiewicz, 2014; Thames, Bloom, 2023).

Most studies on women's representation in Ukrainian politics focus on parliamentary elections (Kostiuchenko et al., 2015; Thames, 2018; Birch, 2003), while there is little research on women's participation and representation in local elections (Dean, Dos Santos, 2017; Thames, Bloom, 2023). There are no studies on the impact of gender quotas and the new electoral system in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine on women's representation in local representative bodies. This study thus contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in local elections in transition countries by providing empirical evidence of the effects of legislative gender quotas and a proportional representation system with flexible lists in the 2020 Ukrainian local elections.

The article is structured as follows. The first section provides an extended literature review. The second section is dedicated to a review of the specifics of the electoral system in the 2020 Ukrainian local elections. The third section describes the methodological approach, data and statistical methods used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. The fourth section presents the empirical results of the analysis. The final section outlines the conclusion, discussion and further research directions.

## **1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Proportional representation (PR) systems with flexible lists provide for two key stages of the electoral process: the placing of candidates in certain positions on each party's electoral list and selecting candidates by voters through preferential voting (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Dvořák, 2023). These

two selection processes are interconnected, as political parties offer a list of candidates ranked according to their own criteria, and voters respond to these offers according to their own demands. Voters can change the ranking of candidates proposed by the parties through preferential voting. Existing research shows that parties tend to be biased against women candidates and place them in disadvantageous positions on electoral lists (Luhiste, 2015; Krook, 2010; Kjaer, Krook, 2019; Meserve et al., 2020), even when the women are in office and have previous electoral experience (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Dahlerup, 2007; Górecki, Kukołowicz, 2014; Gherghina, Chiru, 2010; Chiru, Popescu, 2017). If political parties have not been gender-biased in the placement of candidates on the electoral list, women candidates should have the same chance as men of being placed in viable positions provided that they have an equivalent level of political experience.

At the same time, it is not clear how voters make their choices. On the one hand, voters rely heavily on the order of the list of candidates nominated by political parties (Kukołowicz, 2013; Dvořák, Pink, 2023); on the other hand, voters tend to favor female candidates slightly based on their political experience (Shugart et al., 2005; Stegmaier et al., 2014; Jankowski, Marcinkiewicz, 2019). Therefore, as Gendźwiłł and Żółtak (2020, pp. 5–6) argue, an increase in the share of women candidates due to the introduction of gender quotas should significantly improve their chances of entering the representative body if other factors do not impede this process. The position of a candidate on the electoral list may affect voting behavior, since candidates placed in high positions on the list may receive more attention and votes because of their position (Górecki, Kukołowicz, 2014). The gender bias of political parties, which manifests itself in the placing of male candidates in higher positions on the electoral list, can serve as a signal to voters to support these candidates. If voters are not gender biased, the gender of a candidate does not affect the distribution of preferential votes, even when the candidate's political experience and position on the electoral list are considered.

Gender bias in local elections manifests itself in various ways, affecting both the representation and the perception of female candidates. Gender bias in the placing of candidates on electoral lists can be defined as a candidate's gender having a significant impact on the probability of them being placed in a viable position on the electoral list, and gender bias in voter preferences can be defined as a candidate's gender having a significant impact on the probability of them winning a mandate (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Buisseret et al., 2022). Studies of candidates' placement on electoral lists operationalize

the concepts of “viable position” or “realistic position” in different ways (Dvořák, Pink, 2023). For example, van Erkel (2017) argues that, in addition to the top position on the electoral list, the last position can also be a viable position, as it is often used to appoint well-known and influential politicians who can easily overcome the electoral threshold. At the same time, there are discussions in the literature regarding the number of first positions on the electoral list. Górecki and Kukołowicz (2014) suggest that the number of “viable” positions should be gender-balanced, and at least the first two positions on the electoral list should demonstrate gender parity. Kunovich (2012) believes that the first three positions on the electoral list are decisive as he bases his view on the size of the gender quota, which is 35% for Polish elections. Gendźwił and Żóltak (2020) propose a more focused approach to the definition of a “viable position” as they believe that it should be based on the party magnitude, i.e. the number of seats won by parties in a particular constituency. If gender quotas and the same electoral system are applied in more than two election cycles, the number of “viable” positions is determined by the number of seats won by parties in the previous elections (Put et al., 2021).

Political parties exhibit varied behaviors when forming candidate lists under gender quota systems, influenced by both the design of the quotas and the internal dynamics of the parties (Aldrich, 2020). Despite the intention to promote gender equality, parties often find ways to circumvent these measures. For instance, in Italy, parties have used multiple candidacy to hinder women’s chances of election despite strong quota laws (Pansardi, Pedrazzani, 2023). Similarly, in France, parties initially nominated women in less-winnable districts, a strategy that persisted longer in right-wing parties than left-wing ones (Lippmann, 2021). The bureaucratization of candidate selection processes within parties also plays a crucial role: parties with more bureaucratized procedures tend to comply better with quota laws, although this does not necessarily translate into more women being elected (Bjarnegård, Zetterberg, 2016). In Portugal, the Parity Law has led to moderate compliance, but implicit and explicit resistance have limited its success in empowering women beyond mere numerical representation. The interaction between party and legislative quotas, as seen in Portugal and Spain, shows that existing gendered practices and norms within parties can limit effective compliance with legislative quotas (Verge, Espírito-Santo, 2016). In Belgium, strict gender parity rules have not always resulted in women-friendly candidate selection procedures, highlighting the importance of who controls the selection process and how it

is organized (Vandeleene, 2014). Additionally, non-quota strategies such as women's sections, mentoring programs and campaign funding for women, along with the influence of central party gatekeepers, significantly impact the representation of women, as evidenced by local elections in Germany (Ruf, 2021). The rational choice and selectorate bias theories suggest that parties may support gender quotas to increase incumbency advantages or respond to electorate demands, but male bias at the selectorate level and the effects of incumbency and ideology can affect implementation levels (Brennan, Elkind, 2015). Overall, while gender quotas have been effective in increasing the number of women candidates, the behavior of political parties in forming candidate lists often involves strategies to mitigate the impact of these quotas, influenced by internal party dynamics, electoral system characteristics and broader socio-political contexts.

## **2 THE FLEXIBLE-LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE**

In July 2020, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine made institutional changes to the territorial organization of power and the functioning of the electoral system<sup>4</sup>. The new administrative-territorial division in Ukraine not only reduced the number of administrative units, but also substantially reduced the number of local deputies. There were 1,469 territorial communities (including 31 communities in temporarily occupied territories) instead of 10,721 local councils at various levels. Consequently, the number of mandates to local governments decreased by 78% compared with the previous local elections in 2015. This, in turn, led to more intense competition between candidates for preferential votes as the weight of the mandate increased. For example, for the councils of territorial communities throughout the country, where elections were held under the proportional electoral system with flexible lists, nine candidates ran for one mandate, which was 18% more than in the previous elections in 2015, where the ratio was 1 to 7.

The new electoral code, adopted almost three months before the local elections of 25 October 2020, provided several innovations. The main changes were related to both the algorithm of the electoral system and ballot design. The main difference concerned the territorial communities in which elections would be held under the majority electoral system or the proportional electoral system with flexible lists. Different electoral

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<sup>4</sup> As in the previous local elections in 2015, voters were electing deputies to municipal and regional (oblast) councils.

systems have been applied to representative bodies at different levels. A proportional electoral system with flexible lists was introduced in elections to village, town and city councils in communities with 10,000 or more voters, as well as in the elections to regional, district and city councils, and a majority electoral system was introduced in communities with up to 10,000 voters. Compared to the 2015 local elections, the threshold for proportional elections was lowered from 90,000 to 10,000 voters. Consequently, political parties played a key role in territorial communities with more than 10,000 voters due to the fact that self-nomination was retained only in territorial communities with up to 10,000 voters. Simultaneously, the proportional electoral system with flexible lists gave political parties more power to influence who would be elected to the representative body. The reason for this was the legal requirement that a candidate should receive a number of preferential votes that was at least 25% of the electoral quota in order to “improve” their position on the party list (Table 2). Thus, party leaders play a decisive role both in the selection of candidates and in determining the order of candidates on the electoral list, which affects their electoral chances. Their positions on the electoral list are determined by their loyalty to the party. The proportional electoral system with flexible lists that was introduced in Ukraine provides that each candidate for deputy is placed in order on a single-party list (except for the first number, which was automatically assigned to the leader of the party list) and is accordingly placed in a certain position in the territorial electoral lists. In each constituency, a political party may place five to twelve candidates on their list. Each candidate can run simultaneously for two levels of council (for example, city and region).

The ballot design was divided into two parts. In the left part of the ballot, voters had to choose one political party, and in the right part of the ballot, they could (but were not obliged to) write the number of candidate from the political party’s territorial electoral list (a voter can choose only one candidate by putting his or her the list number of the candidates in the ballot). The system for calculating the mandates won by a political party comprised two stages. First, the number of votes cast for a particular political party list from a constituency was divided by the electoral quota. At this stage, we find out how many mandates a political party has received in a particular constituency. In local elections in Ukraine, the territory covered by each local council is divided into several multi-member constituencies. The number of multi-mandate constituencies depends on two factors: the number of deputies to be elected to the council, and the number of

voters residing in the territorial communities or administrative units<sup>5</sup>. In the second stage, the residuals from the division are distributed among the lists of political parties. Voters had little influence on this part of the electoral algorithm, as the congresses of political parties determined the single-party lists. However, if a candidate passed the threshold of 25% of the electoral quota, they could move up in ranking order. If a candidate failed to “improve” their position on the electoral list, the party list was not changed and remained in the order determined by the political party. Out of 52.6% of candidates who passed the statutory threshold of 25% of preferential votes from the electoral quota only 42% received a mandate. (Opora, 2021).

**Table 2:** *Comparison of legislative features in the 2015 and 2020 local elections*

Legislative features	2015	2020
<b>Electoral system</b>	Majoritarian in elections to councils with up to 90,000 voters. Proportional to closed lists in elections to councils with more than 90,000 voters.	Majoritarian in elections to communities with up to 10,000 voters. Proportional with flexible lists in elections in communities with more than 10,000 voters.
<b>Electoral threshold</b>	5%	5%
<b>Subject of nomination</b>	Political party or self-nomination in elections based on the majority system. Political party in elections based on the proportional system.	Political party or self-nomination in elections based on the majority system. Political party - in elections under the proportional system with flexible lists.
<b>Type of gender quota</b>	Legislated candidate quotas	Legislated candidate quotas
<b>Gender quota</b>	30% on a single electoral list (proportional representation).	30% of the list of candidates nominated by the party (in territories with up to 10,000 voters). 40% in the single-party list and territorial electoral lists (under the proportional system with flexible lists).

<sup>5</sup> The number of local council deputies ranged from 22 deputies in communities with fewer than 10,000 voters to 120 deputies in communities with more than 2 million voters. The number of multi-mandate electoral districts for each council is determined by dividing the total number of council members by 3 for communities with fewer than 10,000 voters or by 10 for communities with more than 10,000 voters.

<b>Sanctions for non-compliance with the gender quota</b>	Not provided.	Refusal to register an electoral list.
<b>Type of ballot paper</b>	The closed electoral list is determined by the party.	Two types of lists: a single closed party list and an open territorial electoral list.
<b>Type of preferential voting</b>		Preferential voting with the possibility to choose one candidate, although this is not compulsory.
<b>Formation of the final order of candidates in the territorial election lists</b>		The ranking of candidates determined by the party is preserved for candidates who do not receive 25% of the votes from the electoral quota.

*Source: Authors, based on data from the Electoral Code of Ukraine.*

The 40% gender quota introduced for the candidate lists (in both single closed party list and an open territorial electoral lists) was mandatory, unlike in the 2015 local elections, when a 30% gender quota was applied without appropriate sanctions for non-compliance. The gender quota stipulates that two of five candidates on the list must have a different gender. Thus a political party must nominate at least five candidates for each electoral district. For example, in a election for seats on an average city council with 42 deputies, a party must nominate at least 26 candidates, of whom at least 10 are women. The effect of quotas was an increase in the share of female candidates on electoral lists, but other characteristics of candidates (previous experience as an election candidate, party affiliation, incumbency) can significantly counteract the effect of this and reduce the chances of women candidates being placed in viable positions on the electoral list and thus entering the representative body.

### **3 DATA, MEASUREMENT AND METHOD**

In our study, we used the results of the elections to the Rivne Regional Council in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Owing to the publicly posted protocols of the Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission on the official website of the Rivne Regional Council, we were able to obtain information on the placement of candidates on the individual party lists in constituencies<sup>6</sup>, their electoral results and their socio-demographic characteristics (Rivne

<sup>6</sup> In elections to the Rivne Regional Council, the territory of Rivne Region was divided into eight constituencies.

Regional Council, 2020). Moreover, the PolitHub platform, developed by the CHESNO Social Movement, allowed us to collect data on the political experience of candidates (CHESNO, 2020).

Ukrainian researchers have conducted a general analysis of the main effects of the introduction of the new electoral system in local elections based on the example of the elections to Lviv Regional Council (Boyko, 2020), Rivne Regional Council (Lebediuk, 2022) and Kharkiv Regional Council (Fisun, Avksentiev, 2021). These studies provide only an overview of the results of local elections in three oblasts of Ukraine, but none of them investigate or test hypotheses about the factors that explain party nomination policies. In this article, we try to bridge this research gap. Therefore a deeper analysis of how candidates were placed on the electoral lists and the preferential votes they received in the Rivne Regional Council elections is a starting point for understanding the gender bias of political parties and voters toward candidates in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine as a whole.

In our study, we used a combined approach and considered “viable” positions based on electoral results. In our case, these were the first or the first two positions in the territorial electoral list, since no political party had won more than two mandates in a particular territorial district. We created three dependent variables. To test for gender bias in the placing of candidates on the electoral lists, we estimated the odds of a candidate being nominated for the first position and of being placed in a “viable” position on the electoral list (one of the first two positions). To test for gender bias in preferential voting, we estimated the odds of being elected. Given that our dependent variables are categorical, we used a binary logistic regression to analyze candidates’ electoral chances.

The main explanatory variable in our analysis was the candidate’s gender. We distinguished between two continuous variables: the candidate’s age and a standardized measure of party size<sup>7</sup>. We operationalized political experience through several variables that reflected candidates’ personal attributes (party affiliation; current elected office at the local level; participation in previous elections; and winning a mandate in previous elections). Moreover, we considered the additional personal experience the candidate had of holding a managerial position in a budgetary institution (local office). It was important to control this in view of the procedure for appointing heads of budgetary institutions (e.g., chief physicians, school principals, etc.). For example, the head of a municipal institution

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<sup>7</sup> Constructed around the overall mean and standard deviation to account for the number of nominated candidates in the constituency.

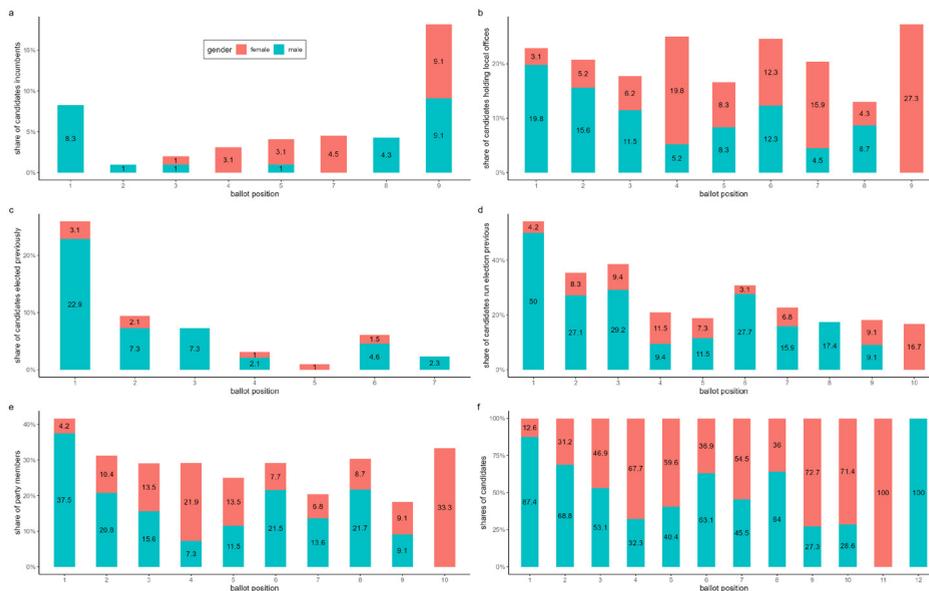
or institution financed by the city budget is appointed and dismissed by the head of the territorial community, while the plenary sessions of the regional council decide on the appointment and dismissal of the heads of budgetary institutions managed by the regional council. Since budgetary institutions are the main places of work in most territorial communities, the heads of such institutions and agencies may have a significant advantage in the struggle for preferential votes or the opportunity to be nominated for viable positions on the electoral list. In this way, political parties try to capitalize on their influence by appointing or influencing the appointment of heads of institutions and agencies that provide basic public services. We distinguished between the status of a candidate depending on whether they were nominated by a parliamentary or a non-parliamentary party. We assumed that parliamentary parties have more resources to recruit politically experienced candidates, which may create an additional advantage in the struggle for preferential votes. To estimate the chances of winning a mandate, we controlled for the effects of the first and last positions in the electoral list.

#### **4 EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

The analysis of the placement of candidates on election lists showed that, on average, political parties favored politically experienced male candidates (Graph 1), which is in line with our initial expectations. The results showed that female candidates are an absolute minority in viable positions on the electoral list in terms of having won a mandate in previous elections (4.2 times less frequently than male candidates) and having participated in previous elections (2.6 times less frequently than male candidates).

Candidate data on party membership and holding local offices showed a clear pattern (graph 1, chart e and b), in which the share of female candidates increased only from the fourth position on the electoral list. The aggregate data on the placement of candidates on the electoral lists demonstrated a significant disproportion in the share of female candidates in viable positions, while in the next positions, we observed a tendency to smooth out this effect. The identified patterns indicated that equally politically experienced female candidates were placed in lower positions on the electoral lists than were male candidates.

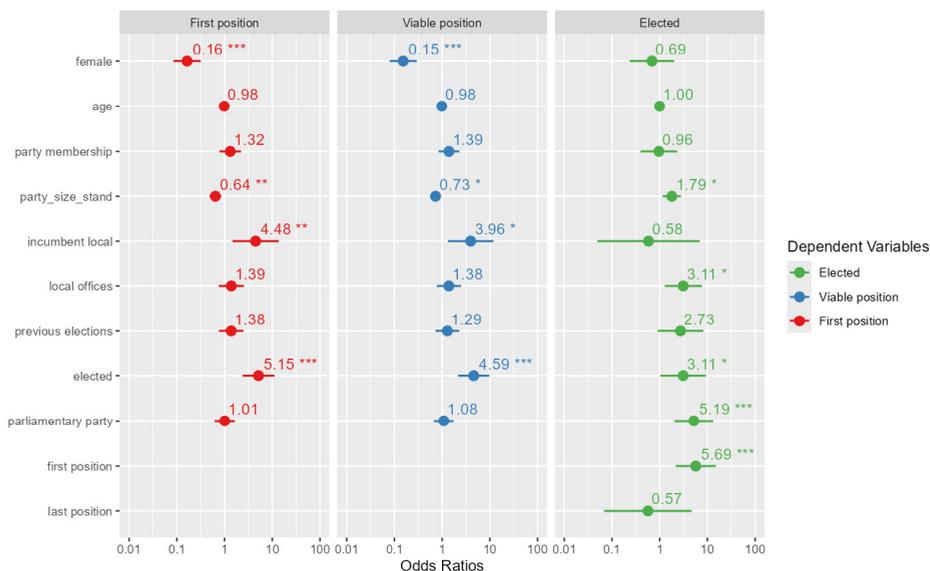
**Graph 1:** Shares of candidates placed at different ballot positions in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine to the Rivne Regional Council



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

Graph 2 presents the results of binary logistic regression analysis. The models differ depending on the explanation of the chances of obtaining a first position (model 1), a viable position on the electoral list (model 2) and the chances of winning a mandate (model 3). Model 3 additionally includes variables describing candidates' positions on the electoral list. At the same time, all models take into account the candidate's political experience. We transformed the regression coefficients into log odds ratios to facilitate the interpretation of the results since the relationship between the dependent and independent variables was not linear. Thus, we interpreted the results in terms of their probabilities. If the value is statistically significant and greater than one, the probability of the influence of a certain independent variable increases, and if it is less than one, the probability decreases.

**Graph 2:** Estimation of the impact of legislative gender quotas on ballot positions and preferential voting



Significance codes: \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

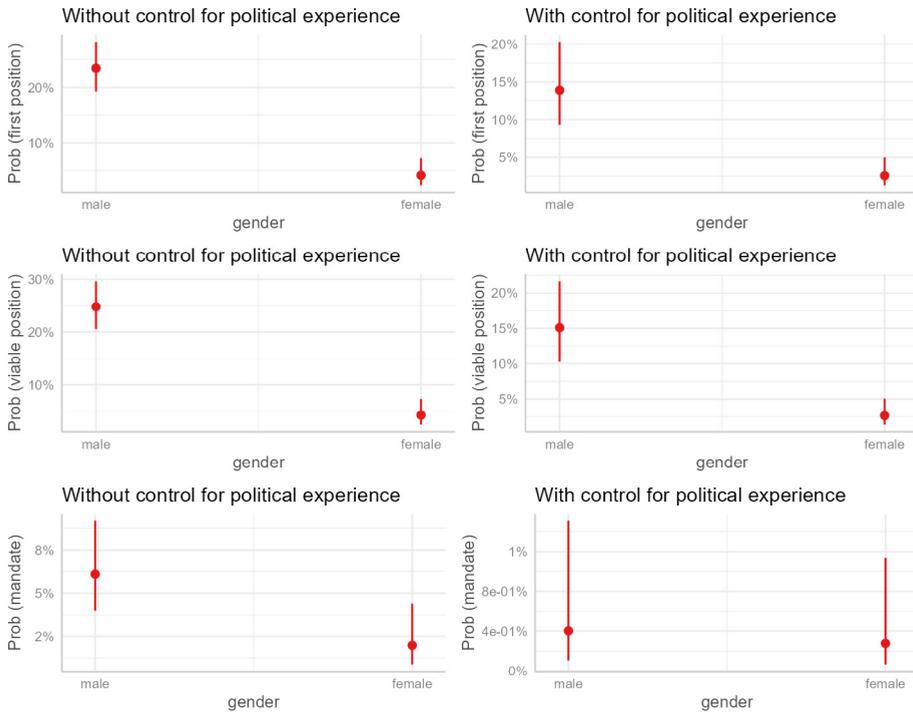
Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

Regardless of whether we controlled for the political experience of the candidates, the probability of nominating female candidates for viable positions on the electoral list was significantly lower than in the case of male candidates (Graph 2). The results confirmed our first hypothesis, meaning that political parties counteracted the legal gender quotas and systematically placed female candidates in lower positions on the electoral list.

We visualized the results and calculated the probabilities of candidates taking viable positions on the electoral list and receiving a mandate based on the results of preferential voting (Graph 3). For example, the probability of a politically inexperienced male candidate taking the first position on the electoral list was on average 23.4%, while for a female candidate it was 4.1%. When looking at the probability of a candidate taking a viable position on the electoral list, the gap between politically inexperienced male and female candidates increased (for a male candidate, the probability was 25% and for a female candidate 4%). Thus, political parties were gender-biased in placing candidates in viable positions on the electoral list even if they did not have relevant political experience. During the local elections, there was

a mechanically determined effect of the number of nominated candidates on the electoral list, which, on the one hand, increased the electoral chances of women candidates and, on the other hand, reduced the chances of them getting a viable position.

**Graph 3:** *Marginal effects<sup>8</sup> of gender on being placed in a viable position and winning a seat*



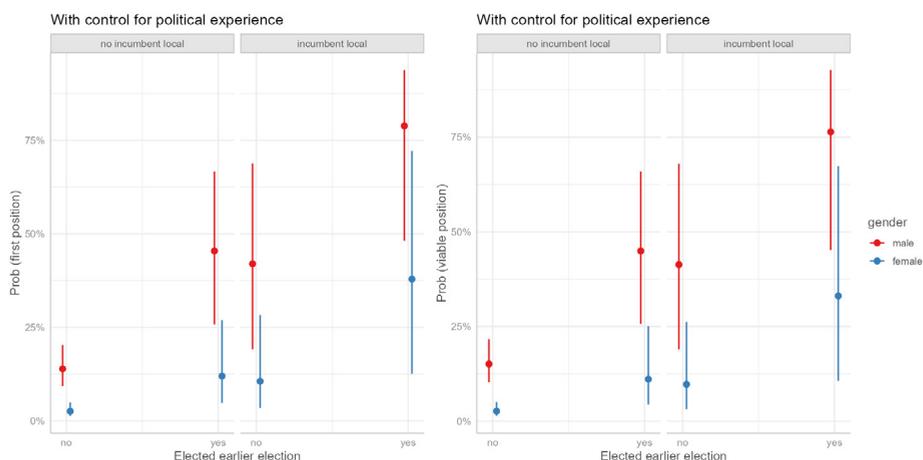
Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, author's calculations in R.

When controlling for candidates' political experience, we also observed significant disparities in the probability of being nominated for viable positions on the electoral lists (Graph 4). For example, the probability of taking the first position in the electoral list for an incumbent male deputy was on average 42%, while for a female deputy it was 11%. For candidates

<sup>8</sup> When calculating marginal probabilities, we take into account the values of all other independent variables in the model, which are equal to their average values in the entire data set.

who had won a mandate in the previous election, the probabilities were 45% and 12% respectively. If these two types of political experience were combined, the gap became even larger (79% and 38% respectively). The likelihood of taking a viable position on an electoral list did not significantly reduce the gap between politically experienced candidates. For example, the probability of taking a viable position on an electoral list for an incumbent male MP was on average 41%, whereas for a female MP it was 10%. For candidates who had won a mandate in the previous election, these probabilities were 45% and 11% respectively, and in the case of a combination of political experience, the gap became even more significant (76% and 33% respectively). Thus, these results indicated that the effects of political experience were much greater when candidates were placed in viable positions than gender effects.

**Graph 4:** *Marginal effects of gender on being placed in the first or a viable position*



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

When it came to how political parties placed candidates on their election lists, no particular differences were observed. No political party had gender parity when placing candidates in the first position on the electoral list. Among all candidates nominated for the first position on the electoral list, 87.4% were men. For example, the political party “Freedom” placed only male candidates in viable positions, while the political party “Servant of the People” filled the first three positions on the electoral list with male

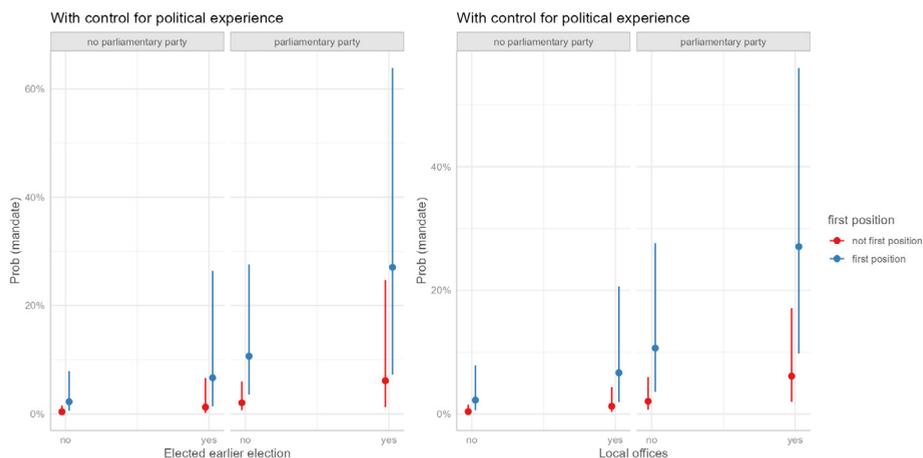
candidates. When examining whom political parties recruit to run as candidates, there was a significant disparity in the distribution of their political experience. For example, the political party “Voice” equally placed male and female candidates from the second to the fifth positions on the election lists, but almost all female candidates had no political experience. At the same time, the political party “Opposition Platform – For Life” also placed the majority of female candidates from the second to the fourth positions on the electoral list, but almost all of them had political experience (they had participated in previous elections and were members of a political party).

Political parties took a formal approach to the process of complying with legislative gender quotas, placing politically experienced candidates, who were overwhelmingly male, in viable positions. Thus, the decline in the share of women in representative bodies of power at the local level was related to the uneven distribution of political experience among candidates. The distribution of electoral capital was influenced by previous candidate nomination strategies and existing gender biases in the political sphere (Kukovič, 2023). Despite the fact that the 2015 local elections used a proportional electoral system with closed lists, political parties adhered to the gender quota in those city councils with more female deputies (Thames, Bloom, 2023). The proportional electoral system with flexible lists in the 2020 local elections created additional challenges for political parties, as they had to comply with the legal gender quota on the one hand, and, on the other hand, place candidates on the electoral lists in such a way as to maximize the electoral result. Therefore, the gender bias of political parties has been manifested through the systematic placement of women candidates in unfavorable positions on the electoral list from election to election, creating a cumulative effect of uneven distribution of political experience among candidates, which counteracted the desired effect of gender quotas on increasing women’s representation in representative bodies of power. An interesting question is whether political parties will change their strategies for placing candidates on election lists if the overall share of female candidates with political experience increases.

According to the regression analysis, we found no empirical evidence that voters were gender-biased toward female candidates, even when controlling for candidates’ political experience and positions on the electoral list (Graph 3). Thus, we reject the second hypothesis. When the political experience of the candidates and their positions on the electoral list were considered, the effect of gender became insignificant. The gap in the probability of winning

a mandate by preferential voting was minimal in the case of politically inexperienced male and female candidates (4%) and absent when their political experience was considered (Graph 3). Voters generally did not oppose the order of candidates on the electoral list established by the party as only 20.3% of deputies received a mandate as a result of a change in their position on the electoral list.

**Graph 5: Marginal effects of gender on seat-winning behavior**



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

In Graph 5, we observe asymmetry in the probability of winning a mandate based on the results of preferential voting. For example, the probability of winning a mandate for a candidate nominated by a parliamentary political party for the first position on the electoral list was, on average, 11%, whereas for a candidate who held a senior position in a budgetary institution or who had been elected in the previous election, the probability increased on average to 27%. Candidates nominated for other positions on the electoral list with similar political experience were less likely to receive a mandate, at 6%. In the case of a combination of candidates' political experience (holding a managerial position in a budgetary institution (local offices), having been elected in previous elections, and having been nominated by a parliamentary political party), the probability of winning a mandate increased on average to 54%. Therefore these results support our third hypothesis, that the effect of a candidate's position on the electoral list is more important than the candidate's political experience. Moreover, almost all female candidates

who received a mandate as a result of preferential votes were ranked first, and in one case second, on the electoral lists.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study delved into the critical question of whether political parties exhibited gender bias in how they ranked candidates on ballots during the 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Political parties were found to have a gender bias in placing candidates for viable positions on the electoral list, showing a preference for male candidates over female candidates regardless of their political experience. This indicates a clear pattern of gender bias in the ballot ranking. Despite the introduction of a 40% gender quota aimed at increasing female representation, the bias in ballot ranking by political parties suggests that the quota alone was not sufficient to overcome gender biases in the candidate selection and ranking processes.

Thus, the first hypothesis confirmed that women candidates were indeed less likely to be placed in viable positions on the electoral list, irrespective of their political experience. This was observed through the analysis of candidate placements, where female candidates were systematically placed in lower positions than their male counterparts, even when they had comparable political experience. In addition, the study showed that in most cases, voters tended to follow the proposals of political parties, giving preference to candidates in higher positions on the electoral list. The overall trend suggests that voters did not significantly alter the initial rankings provided by the parties, thereby supporting the parties' candidate placement strategies.

The second hypothesis was not confirmed, as voters did not show gender bias in their voting patterns. This suggests that the issue of gender bias in candidate placement was more on the part of political parties than the electorate. Voters were generally guided by the parties' proposals without discrimination based on candidate gender. The gender bias issue lies more with the political parties' nomination strategies rather than with the electorate's voting behavior.

At the same time, the unclear institutional mechanism for ensuring compliance with the legal gender quota creates unfavorable conditions for ensuring equal opportunities for candidates. Electoral law does not clearly state that electoral lists must comply with the legally established gender quota at the time of the elections, but only at the time that the entire candidate list for the respective council is registered. According to

the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, about 17% of political party election lists did not meet gender quota requirements at the time of the local council elections. This is further evidence of our finding that political parties do not pay sufficient attention to women's involvement in political life. Therefore, political parties exploited loopholes in electoral rules, and more often withdrew female candidates after the registration of the electoral list. Women candidates are thus at a disadvantage because their lack of political experience prevents them from taking higher positions on the electoral list.

Although the share of female candidates in the electoral list increased in the 2020 local elections, their overall political experience was significantly less than that of male candidates. A study of Ukrainian cities conducted during the 2015 elections indicated that the share of women deputies elected in the 2010 local elections had the strongest effect on the likelihood of parties' complying with the gender quota (Thames, Bloom, 2023). Thus, we can argue that political parties paid less attention to internal party democracy regarding equal opportunities for women and men to be nominated for viable positions, both before and after the introduction of legislative gender quotas. Informal selection criteria and the placement of female candidates in unattractive positions on the electoral list contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics.

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on legislative gender quotas and their impact on electoral dynamics, particularly in the context of local elections in Ukraine. By focusing on the specific case of the Rivne Regional Council under a new electoral system, this article enriches the discourse on how legislative interventions such as gender quotas interact with party nomination practices and voter behavior. This contributes to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's representation in politics in a country during democratic transition.

The results obtained from the example of one region may differ from those of other regions, but the overall effect is likely to be similar. Therefore, there are still open questions which can be tested after the next election (assuming that the current electoral system remains in place): will political parties change their strategies for placing women candidates on election lists if women's political experience has increased significantly, and will voters remain gender-neutral in their choice of candidates?

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## REGIONAL ELECTIONS TO THE COUNCIL OF THE KOŠICE SELF-GOVERNING REGION IN 2022

Jana Šutajová<sup>1</sup> and Alexander Onufrák<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*The study analyses the results of the 2022 elections to one of the bodies of the Košice Self-Governing Region (Košický samosprávny kraj, KSK). Its main objective is to find out the success rate of candidates for the KSK Council in selected groups of candidates (independent candidates, candidates of political parties representing the Hungarian national minority and candidates of other political parties) and to find differences between them with respect to selected socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, occupation) in the 2022 regional elections. An important source of data is the official electoral statistics published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that the voters of Hungarian political parties vote differently, especially regarding the education and occupation of the candidates they choose. Voters for independent candidates voted the same as the majority of voters in KSK in terms of the education and occupation of candidates.*

**Keywords:** Regional elections, Košice self-governing region, Council, Hungarian political parties, Independent candidates, Political parties.

### INTRODUCTION

Although a number of research articles and monographs have been written on elections, electoral issues and electoral mechanisms in Slovakia over the last two decades, elections to the European Parliament and elections to the Self-Governing Regions remain in the background. Even less attention has been paid to analyses of elections in specific regions, and it is rather sporadic (e.g. Maškarinec, 2018). This study is devoted to the analysis of the results of the 2022 elections to the Council of the Košice Self-Governing Region (KSK) and its main objective is to determine the success rate of candidates among three groups of candidates and to find differences with respect to selected socio-demographic characteristics. The groups looked

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Moyzesova 9, 04001 Košice. E-mail: [jana.sutajova@upjs.sk](mailto:jana.sutajova@upjs.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4120-6024>.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Moyzesova 9, 04001 Košice, E-mail: [alexander.onufrak@upjs.sk](mailto:alexander.onufrak@upjs.sk); ORCID-ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6830-3487>.

at were: A) independent candidates; B) candidates of political parties representing the Hungarian national minority, SZÖVETSÉG-ALIANCIA (Alliance) and Magyar Fórum-Madžarské forum (Hungarian Forum) and C) candidates of other political parties. The following research questions were posed: *What were the success rates of these groups of candidates in the 2022 KSK council elections in the individual categories covering socio-demographic characteristics? How did the groups specified differ with respect to their socio-demographic characteristics?*

We chose the three groups of candidates for various reasons. Independent candidates are important because in regional (and local) elections the number of successful independent candidates has gradually increased, as pointed out by several authors (Klimovský, Maškarinec, 2016; Sloboda, 2017; Šutajová, 2018). The number of independent deputies elected to regional councils has been steadily increasing since the first elections in 2001, when they won a total of 4.49% of seats across Slovakia. In the 2005 election they won 9.46%, rising to 13.48% in 2009 and 17.89% in 2017. However, the most significant increase occurred in 2017, when 38.70% of seats were won by independent candidates (Šutajová, 2018).

The second group monitored, candidates from Hungarian political parties, was chosen because they were the second most successful group of deputies elected (hereinafter ed) in the 2022 KSK elections after the independent deputies. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Hungarians were the largest national minority in the Košice region (66,210 persons, or 8.46% of the region's population). The largest concentration of Hungarians inhabits the southern border constituencies of the region: Rožňava, Košice-okolie, Trebišov and Michalovce (SO SR, 2021). In 2022, three political parties representing the Hungarian national minority competed for votes in the regional elections in Slovakia as a whole, but in the Košice region only Alliance and Hungarian Forum stood.

Candidates of other political parties formed the third group in the KSK elections, but no single party won more than 10% of the seats.

The success of each group of candidates is measured by several parameters, namely:

1. The proportion of seats on KSK Council won by each group of candidates;
2. The proportion of seats won compared to the number of candidates who stood for each group;
3. The proportion of KSK Council seats won in terms of gender, age, education and occupation;

4. The proportion of seats won in terms of gender, age, education and occupation for the three groups of candidates under consideration;
5. The proportion of seats won in terms of gender, age, education and occupation for each of the groups of candidates compared to the number of candidates in each group.

The research processed relevant secondary data, and an important source of data was the official electoral statistics published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (SO SR).

This article consists of two parts, which are further subdivided. The first part consists of a literature review while the second part deals with the 2022 elections to the KSK Council and the success of candidates from the three groups with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics.

## **1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

For this research topic, monographs on regional self-governing bodies and on specific elections to regional self-government bodies are of particular benefit (e.g. Machyniak ed., 2018; Mesežnikov ed., 2006a). The Institute for Public Affairs has published several articles analysing the results and context of regional self-governing elections in Slovakia (Mesežnikov, 2009; Mesežnikov, 2017) and until 2011 it also published annual reports on the state of society (Kollár, Mesežnikov eds., 2001; Kollár, Mesežnikov, Bútora eds., 2006), although only in 2009 was there a separate chapter devoted to the regional elections (Krivý, 2010). The other reports analysed the elections in the chapters on internal political developments in Slovakia (Mesežnikov, 2001; Mesežnikov, 2006b; Mesežnikov, 2010).

When analysing regional elections, a number of foreign and domestic authors use the concept of second-order elections (e.g. Šaradín, 2008; Brtník, Havlík, 2009; Havlík, Hoskovec, 2009; Šaradín, 2012; Vašát, Čermák, 2016; Majcherkiewicz, 2018; Marušiak, 2018; Hajek, 2020), which was elaborated by Reif and Schmitt (1980). It was created primarily to explain the results of European Parliament elections, but it is also used for other types of second-order elections (regional, municipal). According to Šaradín (2007), second-order elections are those in which legislative and executive bodies are not decided at the national level.

Similarly, Krivý (2009, p. 3), looking at the 2008 ISSP research on Slovakia, discusses “important” and “unimportant” elections. While the survey respondents considered municipal, parliamentary and presidential

elections to be “important elections”, elections to the European Parliament and to regional self-governing bodies were considered “unimportant elections”. The secondary importance of these elections is confirmed by the lower voter turnout in these types of elections not only in Slovakia but also in other European states (Hajek, 2020; Maškarinec, 2018; Foltýn, 2005).

However, the second-order concept is not the only frequently used approach to studying regional elections. Similarly to our study, some research has analysed election outcomes based on selected socio-demographic characteristics. This approach is not only found in research on Slovak elections. For example, the analysis of election results from a gender perspective has been addressed by Maškarinec (2018) and Cichosz and Tomczak (2019). Maškarinec (2018) analysed the representation of women in Czech and Slovak regional elections from 2000/2001 to 2016/2017. He noted the low success rate of women in regional elections compared to municipal and national parliamentary elections in Slovakia. However, the representation of women was higher in more economically developed regions than in regions with more Catholics and Hungarians, where women were less likely to be elected. Women who are already established in politics also influence the willingness of other women to enter politics, according to Maškarinec (2018). Cichosz and Tomczak (2019) analysed regional council elections in Poland between 2010 and 2018 and looked at how effective women were in winning the available seats, what their position on candidate lists were, and which parties managed to get the most women on to councils.

In general, more attention has been paid to socio-demographic characteristics at the municipal level (Bernard, 2012; Ryšavý, Šaradín, 2010). Bernard (2012) focuses on two types of individual characteristics of candidates in municipal elections, those that are clearly known to voters because they are listed on the ballot paper (gender, age, university degree, party affiliation, occupation) and the incumbency effect (i.e. the advantage that candidates running for re-election may have over their opponents), and he examines their impact on electoral outcomes. According to Bernard, the impact of the individual characteristics examined is broadly consistent with findings from other (mostly foreign) studies. These confirm that incumbency has a positive effect on the chances of being elected, and they identified having a university degree and median age as socio-demographic characteristics that increase a candidate’s chances of being elected to the council.

Ryšavý and Šaradín (2010) in their study of municipal elections in Czechia between 1990 and 2006 focused on three types of candidates

(members of political parties, non-partisans on political party lists, and independent candidates) and examined them in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, occupation). The authors concluded that as the size of the municipality increases, the success rate of political party members increases significantly and the representation of non-partisans and independent candidates decreases. The authors further found that the representation of women in municipal politics ranged from 24-35% over the period under study. In terms of age, they found that younger candidates are more likely to succeed in small municipalities. Educational levels, according to their findings, were slightly lower for party candidates than for non-partisans and independent candidates.

Electoral research can also be categorised geographically. While some studies focus their attention on elections in general and thus on the whole territory of the country (e.g. Ivančík, 2021), some studies focus only on certain parts of the territory, e.g. regions, districts or constituencies within a specific region or district, either, in comparison with each other or in an individual perspective (e.g. Krno, 2018; Kopúnek, 2018; Meluš, 2018). A specific approach to studying regional elections is the microanalysis of a specific constituency (e.g. Balík 2005). This study has taken a similar approach, focusing not only on the results in the Košice region as a whole, but also in analysing the differences between the individual constituencies in the region.

In these and other publications, authors with an interest in Slovak elections mainly analyse the election results and examine issues such as low voter turnout (e.g. Marušiak, 2018), the legitimacy of elected representatives (e.g. Horváth, Urc, 2021), the issue of independent candidates (e.g. Šutajová, 2018), the process of forming pre-election coalitions (e.g. Marušiak, 2018; Vojtovich, 2023) or defects in legislation (e.g. Domin, 2017; Bardovič, Mihálik, 2023; Onufrák, 2022). Authors have also dealt with the positive and negative effects of regional and local elections taking place on the same day (Benkovičová, 2006; Ivančík, 2021; Domin, 2017; Horváth, Urc, 2021; Onufrák, 2022). All authors conclude that such a coupling of elections is not only confusing for the voter in several ways, but also brings about unintended consequences in practice, both in the act of voting and in the processing of election results. However, all authors predicted increased participation in regional elections would be one of the positive effects of holding two elections at the same time.

A further issue is discussed by the Spáč, Voda and Zagraban (2016) who examine the effect of the order of candidates on candidate lists. They

concluded that the electoral system used for regional elections in Slovakia has certain shortcomings as it creates inequality between candidates resulting from their placement on the candidate list in alphabetical order. The theoreticians of constitutional law, Domin and Orosz, have also focused on the legislative dimension of regional elections in their publications. In his commentaries, Domin (2018) tries to analyse the individual provisions of the Electoral Code in a systematic and clear manner. Orosz et al. (2015) view electoral law as a relatively independent part of constitutional law. They discuss the issue of regional elections in both a contemporary and also a historical context.

## **2 ELECTIONS TO THE COUNCIL OF THE KOŠICE SELF-GOVERNING REGION**

On 29 October 2022, the first combined municipal and regional elections were held as a result of an amendment to the electoral legislation. This also affected the Košice Self-Governing Region, which is the second largest of Slovakia's regions in terms of population (SO SR, 2021) and consists of 11 districts, within which 440 local self-governing units operate, 17 of which are run as towns. The population of Košice city itself makes up 31% of the total population of the region (SO SR, 2021). For the election of the Self-Governing Region Chairman (predseda samosprávneho kraja), the region comprises a single-mandate electoral constituency. For the election of members of the regional council, the Košice region is divided into 11 electoral constituencies (hereinafter EC), which follow the boundaries of the individual districts of the region.

A total of 477 candidates (hereinafter ca) stood in the KSK Council elections in 2022. Of these, 82 (17.19%) ran as independent candidates, 34 (7.13%) as candidates of Hungarian political parties and the remaining 361 (75.68%) candidates ran for other political parties.

Based on the election results, the current composition of the Council is fairly heterogeneous. In Table 1 we can see that the most successful candidates are clearly independent candidates, who won 23 seats (40.35%). If we measure the success of candidates through the ratio of the number of mandates won by each group of candidates compared to the number of candidates running for the that group, the most successful group was the candidates from Hungarian political parties, where 35.29% won a council mandate. Independent candidates were slightly less successful, with 28.05% of them winning a council mandate.

**Table 1:** Number and proportion of candidates, seats won and success rate in the KSK Council election for each group of candidates monitored

Groups Parameters	A		B		C		Total	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Candidates in each group in relation to the total number of candidates	82	17.19	34	7.13	361	75.68	477	100
Seats won by each group in relation to the total number of seats	23	40.35	12	21.05	22	38.60	57	100
Success rate of candidates in each of the groups monitored in relation to the number of candidates in the respective group		28.05		35.29		6.09		

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

Among all the political parties, the most successful candidates were from Alliance, one of the two Hungarian parties. It nominated 30 candidates, who stood in eight of the 11 constituencies. Hungarian Forum nominated four candidates in three constituencies (Table 2). While Hungarian Forum was unsuccessful in the elections, Alliance won 12 deputies, which was 21.05% of the total (two in EC5 Košice-okolie, three in EC8 Rožňava and seven in EC11 Trebišov).

The candidates of other political parties won the remaining 22 seats (38.60%). The coalition Smer-SD (Direction-Social Democracy) and Sme rodina (We are the Family) won five seats, Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH - Christian Democratic Movement) won four seats, Starostovia a nezávislí kandidáti (Mayors and Independent Candidates) and the coalition Dobrá voľba a Umiernení, Progressívne Slovensko and Sloboda a solidarita (Good Choice and Moderates, Progressive Slovakia and Freedom and Solidarity) won three seats each. The remaining seven seats were divided between Hlas-sociálna demokracia (Voice-Social Democracy); Slovenská národná strana (SNS - Slovak National Party); Občianska konzervatívna strana (Civic Conservative Party); the broad coalition OĽaNO, Nova, Kresťanská únia, Zmena zdola, Za ľudí and Demokratická únia Slovenska (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, Nova, Christian Union, Change from Below, For the People and Democratic Union of Slovakia); the coalition Demokratická strana, ODS-Občianski demokrati Slovenska, Spolu and Šanca (Democratic Party, ODS-Civic Democrats of Slovakia, Together and Chance). As can be seen in Table 2, within the group of 'other political

**Table 2: Composition of the KSK Council by political affiliation and electoral constituencies**

Groups/Political Party	Electoral Constituency																		Total							
	EC1 Košice I		EC2 Košice II		EC3 Košice III		EC4 Košice IV		EC5 Košice-oholie		EC6 Gelnica		EC7 Michalovce		EC8 Rožňava		EC9 Sobrance		EC10 Spišská Nová Ves		EC11 Trebišov		ca	ed	ca	ed
	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed
<b>Σ</b>	10	3	9	4	1	1	10	3	15	3	3	2	6	3	5	1	5	1	4	2	14	1	82	23		
<b>A</b>	4		2		1		4		7	2		2		5	3						9	7	34	12		
<b>B</b>	4		2		1		4		5	2		2		4	3						8	7	30	12		
Alliance																										
Hungarian Forum									2					1							1		4			
<b>C</b>	47	2	49	2	12	2	17	1	52	4	10	51	5	26	13	1	46	5	38	361	22					
Direction-Social Democracy, We are the Family	5		5		1		4		7	1	1	8	3	1	2		6	1	5	45	5					
Christian Democratic Movement	2		4	1			2	6	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	4	1	4	28	4						
Mayors and Independent Candidates	5	1	2		2	1	1	1	3		2	2			1				16	3						
Good Choice and Moderates, Progressive Slovakia, Freedom and Solidarity	2		2	1	1			3	1		8	1			2	1	7	4	30	3						
Voice-Social Democracy	5		6		2		3		5	1	1	7	1	3	1		4	1	41	2						
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, Nova, Christian Union, Change from Below, For the People, Democratic Union of Slovakia	5		6		1	1			6	1	4	4			1		4		36	2						
Slovak National Party									3	1	1			1			1	1	7	1						

Democratic Party, ODS-Civic Democrats of Slovakia, Together, Chance	5		5		1		2		2		1		2		1		3		1		1		25	1
Civic Conservative Party	1	1				1			2														5	1
Political parties that did not win any mandates	17		18		4		5		17		4		17		4		17				14		128	
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>57</b>

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

parties', the largest number of candidates stood for the joint electoral coalition Direction-Social Democracy and We are the Family (45), followed by the Voice-Social Democracy (41). Political parties that did not win any seats had nominated 128 candidates.

## **2.1 Elections to the KSK Council in terms of gender**

The total number of male candidates was 387 (81.13%) and the number of female candidates was 90 (18.87%). Looking at individual groups, the number of male running as independents in 2022 exceeded the number of female candidates. Among the 82 candidates who ran as independents, there were only 18 women (21.95%). Of the 64 men running as independents, 19 won a seat (a 29.69% success rate), while of the 18 women running as independents, four women (22.22% success rate) were elected. So female independents accounted for 21.95% of all independent candidates and won 17.39% of the seats gained by independent candidates. If the gender distribution of candidates were more proportional and more women were encouraged to run for office, the representation of women might increase.

The number of male candidates in both Hungarian political parties in 2022 also significantly exceeded the number of female candidates, and only 17.65% of candidates were women. Men running for the Hungarian political parties were the most successful candidates in the election. Out of 28 candidates, ten won a mandate, a 35.71% success rate. Of the six women running for Hungarian political parties, two women made it to the council, which was a 33.33% success rate.

The number of male candidates from the other political parties also significantly exceeded the number of female candidates. The success rate of candidates from other political parties was in general relatively low. Of the 295 men standing, only 17 won seats (a 5.76% success rate) and of the 66 women, only 5 won seats (a 7.58% success rate).

The ratio between male and female candidates is similar in all three groups, 78.05-82.35% for males and 17.65-21.95% for females. This is also matched by the ratio of successful males and females in all groups. Men gained 77.27-83.33% of the seats and women 16.66-22.73%, as can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3: Summary by gender in the three selected groups**

Groups		A		B		C		Total	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Gender / Parameters		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Males	Candidates in each group	64	78.05	28	82.35	295	81.72	387	81.13
	Seats won by candidates in each group	19	82.61	10	83.33	17	77.27	46	80.70
	Success rate of candidates in each group		29.69		35.71		5.76		11.89
Females	Candidates in each group	18	21.95	6	17.65	66	18.28	90	18.87
	Seats won by candidates in each group	4	17.39	2	16.66	5	22.73	11	19.30
	Success rate of candidates in each group		22.22		33.33		7.58		12.22
<b>Total</b>		<b>82</b> <b>23</b>		<b>34</b> <b>12</b>		<b>361</b> <b>22</b>		<b>477</b> <b>57</b>	

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

Table 4 shows that in absolute terms the highest number of women ran in EC2 Košice II (15 candidates / 25%) and EC7 Michalovce (14 candidates / 23.73%). In the other constituencies, the percentage of women candidates was even lower. The total number of women elected was 11. In percentage terms, this represents 19.30% of the 57 member council. However, this was the highest representation of women in the KSK Council to date. Compared to the results of the previous regional elections held in 2017 (5)<sup>3</sup>, this is more than a twofold increase.

## 2.2 Elections to the KSK Council in terms of age

In terms of age, the highest number of candidates (153) was in the 41-50 age group. Of these, 22 were elected. The second largest number of candidates was in the 51-60 age group (135), of whom 13 were elected. We would like to draw attention to one more age category of candidates, those aged 61-70. Ten candidates out of 63 in this category became deputies, which this is the highest number of deputies in this age category elected in any of the 8 self-governing region councils. As can be seen in Table 5, in two age categories - 18-30 and over 71 - none of the candidates managed to win a seat on the KSK Council.

<sup>3</sup> Representation of women in the KSK Council after the regional elections: 2001 (6), 2005 (9), 2009 and 2013 (10), 2017 (5), 2022 (11).

**Table 4:** Gender composition of candidates and deputies elected to the KSK Council by electoral constituencies

Gender	Electoral Constituency																		Total				
	EC1 Košice I		EC2 Košice II		EC3 Košice III		EC4 Košice IV		EC5 Košice-okolie		EC6 Gelnica		EC7 Michalovce		EC8 Rožňava		EC9 Sobrance		EC10 Spišská Nová Ves		EC11 Trebišov		
	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	
<b>Σ</b>	48	3	45	4	13	2	24	3	65	7	11	2	45	6	31	3	15	2	39	6	51	8	
<b>Males</b>	8	2	6	3	1	8	3	11	2	4	3	4	1	5	1	3	1	3	1	11	1	64	
<b>A</b>	3		1		1		3		6	1		2		4	2					8	7	10	
<b>B</b>	37	1	38	1	11	2	13		48	4	8		39	3	23		10	1	36	5	32		
<b>C</b>	13	2	15	2	1	7	1	9	2	2	2	14	2	5	1	3		11	1	10		90	
<b>Females</b>	2	1	3	1		2		4	1			2		1				1	1	3		18	
<b>A</b>	1		1			1		1	1					1	1					1		6	
<b>B</b>	10	1	11	1	1	4	1	4		2	2	12	2	3		3		10		6		66	
<b>C</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Total</b>																							<b>477</b>

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

The highest number of independent candidates were aged 41-50 (30). Eight of them were elected, a 26.66% success rate. The second most numerous category of candidates based on age were candidates aged 31-40 (21), who won five seats, a 23.81% success rate. The most successful category was the 61-70 age group, where out of eight candidates, three candidates gained a mandate (a 37.5% success rate), and the second most successful category was the 51-60 age group, where out of 20 candidates, seven candidates gained a mandate (a 35% success rate).

The highest number of candidates for Hungarian political parties were aged 41-50 (12), and seven were elected (a 58.33% success rate). The second most numerous category of candidates based on age were 51-60 (9), but this age category won only two seats (a 22.22% success rate). The second most successful category in terms of gaining a mandate were the 61-70 age group, where out of four candidates, two gained a mandate (a success rate of 50%).

In the group of candidates from other political parties, the highest number of candidates were aged 41-50 (111), and seven of them were elected (a 6.31% success rate). The second largest category of candidates were 51-60 (106), but this age category won only four seats (a 3.77% success rate). The most successful category was the 61-70 age group, where out of 51 candidates, five won a mandate (a 9.80% success rate). The second most successful category in terms of gaining a mandate was the 31-40 age group, where out of 70 candidates, six were successful (8.57% success rate).

As can be seen in Table 5, in all three groups, the highest number of candidates (between 30.75 and 36.59%) was in the 41-50 age range. Candidates from this category also won the highest number of seats (31.82-58.33%).

**Table 5:** Summary by age in the three selected groups

Groups		A		B		C		Total	
Age	Parameters	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
18-30	Candidates in each group	1	1.22	1	2.94	14	3.88	16	3.35
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		0		0		0

31-40	Candidates in each group	21	25.61	8	23.53	70	19.39	<b>99</b>	<b>20.75</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	5	21.74	1	8.33	6	27.27	<b>12</b>	<b>21.05</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		23.81		12,5		8.57		<b>12.12</b>
41-50	Candidates in each group	30	36.59	12	35.29	111	30.75	<b>153</b>	<b>32.08</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	8	34.78	7	58.33	7	31.82	<b>22</b>	<b>38.60</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		26.66		58.33		6.31		<b>14.38</b>
51-60	Candidates in each group	20	24.39	9	26.47	106	29.36	<b>135</b>	<b>28.30</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	7	30.43	2	16.66	4	18.18	<b>13</b>	<b>22.81</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		35		22.22		3.77		<b>9.63</b>
61-70	Candidates in each group	8	9.76	4	11.76	51	14.13	<b>63</b>	<b>13.21</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	3	13.04	2	16.66	5	22.73	<b>10</b>	<b>17.54</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		37.5		50		9.80		<b>15.87</b>
Over 71	Candidates in each group	2	2.44	0	0	9	2.49	<b>11</b>	<b>2.31</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		0		0		<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>82</b>		<b>34</b>		<b>361</b>		<b>477</b>	
		<b>23</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>22</b>		<b>57</b>	

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

Table 6 shows that candidates in three age categories (41-50, 51-60 and 61-70) stood in all 11 constituencies. This was not the case in the remaining three age categories, with the least represented age category being candidates over 71 years of age, who did not stand at all in five constituencies (Košice III and IV, Gelnica, Michalovce and Sobrance).

### 2.3 Elections to the KSK Council in terms of education

Regarding the educational composition of the candidates, 343 candidates (71.91%), had at least one university degree listed on the ballot paper. Of these, 64 candidates had at least two different degrees listed next to their names, and five of them were Associate Professors (Doc.). Table 7 shows that the remaining 134 candidates (28.09%) did not indicate any academic degree, and 11 of these were elected.

The highest number of candidates with a university degree – 154 - had the title 'Engineer' (Ing.), which is a form of Masters' degree. Candidates

**Table 6:** Age composition of candidates and elected deputies of the KSK Council by electoral constituency

Age	Electoral Constituency																		Total					
	EC1 Košice I		EC2 Košice II		EC3 Košice III		EC4 Košice IV		EC5 Košice-okolie		EC6 Gelnica		EC7 Michalovce		EC8 Rožňava		EC9 Sobrance		EC10 Spišská Nová Ves		EC11 Trebišov			
	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed
<b>Σ</b>	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	16	0
18-30	1																						1	0
A																							1	0
B																							1	0
C	1	2																					14	0
<b>31-40</b>	10	9	2																				16	1
A	4	1	3	1																			14	1
B																							1	4
C																							1	5
<b>41-50</b>	6	6	1																				3	1
A	17	2	19	1	10	2	17	3	21	3	3	21	2	14	3	7	1	6	1	18	4	153	22	
B	3	1	3	1	1		5	2	6	1	1	1		2	1	2	1	1	1	5	1	30	8	
C	1						2		2	2	1	1		2	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	12	7	
<b>51-60</b>	13	16	8	2	10	1	13	1	13	1	2	19	2	10	5	5	5	19	1	15	1	111	7	
A	22	1	17	3	3		6	20	1	4	1	14	3	9	1	6	1	19	1	15	1	135	13	
B	2	1	2	2			2	2	4	1	1	3	2	1	1	2	2			3		20	7	
C	18	13	1	3	3		1	2	2	2	2	1		1	1	1	4	1	19	1	11	9	2	
<b>61-70</b>	7	1	10	1	1	3	10	2	10	2	1	5	1	7	3	3	4	1	8	4	10	2	63	10
A							2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	8	3	
B	1	1																					4	2
C	6	1	9	1	1		3		8	1	1	4		3	3	3	6	3	7	7	51	5		
<b>Over 71</b>	3	3							1					2					1				11	0
A																							2	0
B																							0	0
C	3	2							1					2									9	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>57</b>

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

within this category were also the most successful in these elections, and 17 of them became members of the KSK Council. A further 14 candidates with the title Mgr. (Master) also won seats.

The highest number of independent candidates (34 / 41.46%) claimed the degree of Engineer, with the second largest category (18 / 21.95%) having other forms of Masters degree. The third largest category (10 / 12.20%) had no degree. Independent candidates with an Engineer's degree were the most successful, and won 43.48% of the seats gained by Independents (10 seats). However, Table 7 also shows that the most successful group of independent candidates were medical doctors: three out of four candidates with a 'MUDr.' degree made it on to the Council, which was a 75% success rate.

Of the 34 candidates from Hungarian political parties, the highest number of candidates from Hungarian political parties (11 / 32.35% of the candidates) did not list any degree. The second largest category of candidates (10 / 29.41) had an Engineer's degree, followed by candidates with other Masters degrees (6 / 17.65%). The most successful category were those without a degree, who won seven mandates, which was 58.33% of the seats won by Hungarian political parties. Thus, the success rate of candidates who did not claim any academic degree was significantly higher in the Hungarian parties than in the other groups: seven candidates out of 11 without a degree were elected, which was a 63.64% success rate. However, the most successful candidates for Hungarian political parties were candidates with the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (MVDr.), who had a 100% success rate.

Of the 361 candidates standing for other political parties, the highest number (113 / 31.30%) did not indicate any academic degree. The second largest category had an Engineer's degree (110 / 30.47%), followed by candidates with any other Master's degree (70 / 19.39%). Candidates with Masters degrees (Mgr.) were the most successful, winning eight seats, which was 36.36% of the seats won by the other political parties. Slightly fewer seats (5) were won by candidates with the title of 'Engineer'. The largest category of candidates, those without a degree, was not very successful and won only two mandates. However, the most successful candidates from other political parties had a RNDr. degree - meaning they were doctors of the natural sciences - and two out of seven candidates with this degree won a seat (a 28.57% success rate).

Comparing the different groups in Table 7, while in the Hungarian political parties and the group of other political parties the most numerous candidates were those without a degree, in the group of independent

candidates the most numerous candidates were those with an Engineer's degree. The largest group of independent and Hungarian political party candidates also won the most seats (engineers for independent candidates and candidates without a degree for the Hungarian political parties). For the candidates of the other political parties, the master's degree (Mgr.) holders won the most seats, although they were second to those without a degree and engineers in terms of the number of candidates.

**Table 7:** Summary by academic degree in the three selected groups

Groups		A		B		C		Total	
Academic degree / Parameters		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
No degree	Candidates in each group	10	12.20	11	32.35	113	31.30	134	28.09
	Seats won by candidates in each group	2	8.70	7	58.33	2	9.09	11	19.30
	Success rate of candidates in each group		20		63.64		1.77		8.21
Bachelor (Bc./Dip.I.F)	Candidates in each group					10	2.77	10	2.10
	Seats won by candidates in each group					0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each group						0		0
Masters (Mgr./M.A./Mgr. Art./Dis. Art./MMF)	Candidates in each group	18	21.95	6	17.65	70	19.39	94	19.71
	Seats won by candidates in each group	5	21.74	1	8.33	8	36.36	14	24.56
	Success rate of candidates in each group		27.77		16.66		11.43		14.89
Engineer (Ing./Ing. arch./CA)	Candidates in each group	34	41.46	10	29.41	110	30.47	154	32.29
	Seats won by candidates in each group	10	43.48	2	16.66	5	22.73	17	29.82
	Success rate of candidates in each group		29.41		20		4.55		11.04
Doctor of Medicine (MUDr.)	Candidates in each group	4	4.88	1	2.94	18	4.99	23	4.82
	Seats won by candidates in each group	3	13.04	0	0	2	9.09	5	8.77
	Success rate of candidates in each group		75		0		11.11		21.74

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (MVDr.)	Candidates in each group	4	4.88	1	2.94	5	1.39	<b>10</b>	<b>2.10</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	1	8.33	1	4.55	2	3.51
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		100		20		20
Paedagogicae Doctor (Paedr./Ing. Paed. IGP)	Candidates in each group	4	4.88	2	5.88	9	2.49	<b>15</b>	<b>3.14</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	2	8.70	0	0	1	4.55	3	5.26
	Success rate of candidates in each group		50		0		11.11		20
Doctor of Philosophy (PhDr.)	Candidates in each group	5	6.10	1	2.94	11	3.05	<b>17</b>	<b>3.56</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	2	8.70	0	0	1	4.55	3	5.26
	Success rate of candidates in each group		40		0		9.09		17.65
Doctor of Natural Sciences (RNDr.)	Candidates in each group			1	2.94	7	1.94	<b>8</b>	<b>1.68</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group			0	0	2	9.09	2	3.51
	Success rate of candidates in each group				0		28.57		25
Doctor of Laws and Doctor of Public Administration (JUDr./LL.M./DPA)	Candidates in each group	13	15.85	2	5.88	25	6.93	<b>40</b>	<b>8.39</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	1	8.33	1	4.55	3	5.26
	Success rate of candidates in each group		7.69		50		4		7.5
MBA/MPH/MPA	Candidates in each group	9	10.98	2	5.88	9	2.49	<b>20</b>	<b>4.19</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	0	0	0	0	1	1.75
	Success rate of candidates in each group		11.11		0		0		5
Philosophiae Doctor (PhD./CSc.)	Candidates in each group	5	6.10	4	11.76	26	7.20	<b>35</b>	<b>7.34</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	1	8.33	3	13.64	5	8.77
	Success rate of candidates in each group		20		25		11.54		14.29

Assoc. Prof. (Doc.)	Candidates in each group	1	1.22			4	1.11	5	1.05
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0			1	4.55	1	1.75
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0				25		20
<b>Total</b>		<b>82</b> <b>23</b>		<b>34</b> <b>12</b>		<b>361</b> <b>22</b>		<b>477</b> <b>57</b>	

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

From Table 8 we can see that three educational categories – those without a degree, and those with masters and engineers degrees – were represented in all constituencies. As engineers were the most numerous category overall (154), it is not surprising that this academic degree was the most frequent in EC2 Košice II and EC5 Košice-okolie, where it appeared 24 times in both cases. The highest number of candidates without a degree was in EC5 Košice-okolie (26) and EC11 Trebišov (24). Three of Košice's constituencies (I, II and IV), EC5 Košice-okolie and EC7 Michalovce had one candidate each with an Associate Professor's title.

## 2.4 Elections to the KSK Council in terms of occupation

The final socio-demographic characteristic covered by the research is the occupation of the candidates. The occupation listed on the candidate list may not correspond with the actual employment status of a given candidate. Examples include the occupations of director, manager, district deputy and so on. Some candidates gave a different occupation to the one they actually exercise. It is a completely new phenomenon that some candidates have started to indicate more than one occupation (e.g. artistic blacksmith/guildmaster, manager/member of parliament, disabled pensioner/operator, international referee/entrepreneur, etc.). This may be related to the fact that more and more people are doing multiple part-time jobs and not just one main job. On the other hand, their current occupation and the occupation for which they are trained may be different.

The data in Table 9 show that the highest number of candidates across all 11 constituencies worked in Economics and Management (93), of whom nine were elected (a 9.68% success rate). Five of these report their occupation as Director. The second largest category of candidates were Self-Government employees (79), and 31 of them were elected. Of the 31, 14 are mayors of villages, nine are mayors of towns, three are deputy mayors and the remaining five work in various other positions (controller,

**Table 8: Educational composition of the candidates and elected deputies of the KSK Council by electoral constituency**

Academic degree	Electoral Constituency											Total						
	EC1 Košice I	EC2 Košice II	EC3 Košice III	EC4 Košice IV	EC5 Košice-okolie	EC6 Gelnica	EC7 Michalovce	EC8 Rožňava	EC9 Sobrance	EC10 Spišská Nová Ves	EC11 Trebišov							
Without	12	13	1	3	6	1	4	15	4	4	13	1	24	4	134	11		
A	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	3	2	10	2		
B	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	5	5	5	4	11	7	7		
C	11	11	3	5	24	1	4	10	4	13	13	1	16	113	2	2		
Bachelor (Bc.)	1				1		4	2		1	1		1		10	0		
A															0	0		
B															0	0		
C	1				1		4	2		1	1		1		10	0		
Masters (Mgr./M.A.)	12	3	1	1	11	2	12	2	2	11	2	10	1	3	1	15	8	
A	6	2	2	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	
B	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
C	5	1	6	2	1	1	10	1	1	11	2	8	1	1	14	7	70	
Engineer (Ing.)	18	3	24	2	9	1	10	2	3	7	2	16	7	7	12	2	20	2
A	2	2	4	2	1	5	1	10	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	5	3
B	2	2	2	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	10	2
C	14	1	20	8	1	4	1	11	1	5	15	5	5	11	1	12	110	5
Doctor of Medicine (MUDr.)	3	3	1	1	1		8	4		1	3	1	2		23	5		
A							2	2			1	1	1		4	3		
B			1												1	0		
C	3	3		1	1		6	2		1	2		1		18	2		





administrative worker, municipal employee). The success rate of candidates in this category was 39.24%. In the 2017 elections, 67 candidates were in this category, of whom 20 were successful (29.85%). Consequently, 35.09% of the members of the KSK Council worked for Self-Government (20 out of 57 members) (SO SR, 2017).

Health care employees were also relatively successful. Out of 32 candidates, seven were elected, five of whom were medical doctors. Candidates working in other jobs, in transport, security, agriculture and services, and economically inactive persons accounted for just over 11% of the total number of candidates (54 in total). Only one of them managed to win a council seat. Most of these candidates were running for political parties at both extremes of the political spectrum such as Komunistická strana Slovenska (Communist Party of Slovakia), and the far-right parties Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko (Kotlebists – People’s Party Our Slovakia), Hnutie Republika (Republic Movement), Slovenské hnutie obrody (Slovak Revival Movement) and Slovenský patriot (Slovak Patriot).

Candidates who listed their occupation as “Member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic” (that is, members of the Slovak national parliament) were equally unsuccessful. In total, there were eight of them. Five were nominated by the broad OĽaNO coalition, one by the Christian Union, one by Direction-Social Democracy and We are the Family jointly and one by Voice-Social Democracy.

The largest number of independent candidates (24 / 29.27% of the independent candidates) worked for Self-Government. 13 of them were elected as members of the KSK Council (a 54.17% success rate). Therefore 56.52% of the independent deputies elected work in local government. The second largest category of independent candidates (18 / 21.95%) worked in the field of Economy and Management, of whom four (22.22%) were elected. This was 17.39% of the seats won by independent deputies.

The largest number of candidates from Hungarian political parties (9 / 26.47% of the candidates from Hungarian political parties) worked for local councils. Eight were elected, a 88.89% success rate, which meant they gained 66.67% of the seats won by the Hungarian political parties. They were mayors of villages and in one case the mayor of a town, a deputy mayor, the head of a municipal office and a municipal employee. The second largest category of candidates from Hungarian political parties (7 / 20.59%) worked in the field of Economy and Management. Only one of them was elected – a 14.29% success rate. The candidate concerned listed their job title as “Director”. Candidates in this group working in the field of the Executive

and legislative also fared well. One of two such candidates, who represented 5.88% of all candidates in the group, was elected – a 50% success rate.

The highest number of candidates from other political parties (68) worked in the field of Economics and Management, which represented 18.84% of candidates from other political parties. Only four of them were elected – a 5.88% success rate – which meant that they occupied 18.18% of the seats won by other political parties. The second largest category of candidates from other political parties (59) said they worked as an ‘Entrepreneur’, which accounted for 16.34% of the candidates of other political parties. However, none of these candidates won a seat. The third largest category of candidates from other political parties (46) worked for Self-Government, accounting for 12.74% of the candidates from other political parties. Ten of them were elected, which was a 21.74% success rate. Thus, 45.45% of the elected deputies from other political parties work in self-governments.

Comparing the different groups, it can be seen that while most independent candidates and candidates for Hungarian political parties worked in the field of Self-government, in the group of candidates from other political parties the most numerous candidates worked in the field of Economy and Management. Among independent candidates and candidates from the Hungarian political parties, candidates working in Self-government also won the most seats, but although candidates from other political parties who worked for Self-Government also won most seats, they were only third in terms of the number of candidates in this group, behind the candidates from Economy and Management and candidates who were Entrepreneurs. Table 9 shows that in all three groups, candidates from the Self-government field proved to be the most successful, so that 54.39% of all those elected work in this field.

**Table 9:** Summary by occupation in the three selected groups

Groups		A		B		C		Total	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Occupation / Parameters		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Executive and legislative	Candidates in each group	7	8.54	2	5.88	29	8.03	38	7.97
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	1	8.33	0	0	2	3.51
	Success rate of candidates in each group		14.29		50		0		5.26

Self-government	Candidates in each group	24	29.27	9	26.47	46	12.74	<b>79</b>	<b>16.56</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	13	56.52	8	66.67	10	45.45	<b>31</b>	<b>54.39</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		54.17		88.89		21.74		<b>39.24</b>
Entrepreneur	Candidates in each group	7	8.54	2	5.88	59	16.34	<b>68</b>	<b>14.26</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		0		0		<b>0</b>
Economy and management	Candidates in each group	18	21.95	7	20.59	68	18.84	<b>93</b>	<b>19.50</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	4	17.39	1	8.33	4	18.18	<b>9</b>	<b>15.79</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		22.22		14.29		5.88		<b>9.68</b>
Healthcare	Candidates in each group	6	7.32	1	2.94	25	6.93	<b>32</b>	<b>6.71</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	3	13.04	0	0	4	18.18	<b>7</b>	<b>12.28</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		50		0		16		<b>21,88</b>
Social Care	Candidates in each group					8	2.22	<b>8</b>	<b>1.68</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group					0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group						0		<b>0</b>
Education and Training	Candidates in each group	5	6.10	4	11.76	31	8.59	<b>40</b>	<b>8.39</b>
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	0	0	2	9.09	<b>3</b>	<b>5.26</b>
	Success rate of candidates in each group		20		0		6.45		<b>7.5</b>

Social Science	Candidates in each group	6	7.32	4	11.76	23	6.37	33	6.92
	Seats won by candidates in each group	1	4.35	1	8.33	2	9.09	4	7.02
	Success rate of candidates in each group		16.17		25		8.70		12.12
Technical Professions	Candidates in each group	7	8.54	2	5.88	23	6.37	32	6.71
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		0		0		0
Safety and Security	Candidates in each group					5	1.39	5	1.05
	Seats won by candidates in each group					0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each of group						0		0
Transportation	Candidates in each group	1	1.22	1	2.94	7	1.94	9	1.89
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0	1	8.33	0	0	1	1.75
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0		100		0		11.11
Manual Professions	Candidates in each group			2	5.88	8	2.22	10	2.10
	Seats won by candidates in each group			0	0	0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each group				0		0		0
Economically Inactive Persons	Candidates in each group	1	1.22			29	8.03	30	6.29
	Seats won by candidates in each group	0	0			0	0	0	0
	Success rate of candidates in each group		0				0		0
<b>Total</b>		82 23		34 12		361 22		477 57	

Source: SO SR, 2022; authors' calculations

Looking at the occupational composition within electoral constituencies (Table 10), only three occupational categories – Self-government, Entrepreneur, Economics and Management – were represented by candidates across all 11 constituencies. However, only candidates working in Self-government won at least one seat in all constituencies. While in EC3 and EC4 Košice and also EC9 Sobrance it was just one seat, in the case of EC5 Košice-okolie it was eight seats.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, looking at the success of candidates through the ratio of the number of seats won by each group of candidates in the KSK Council compared to the number of candidates from the respective groups, the most successful were candidates from Hungarian political parties. 35.29% of candidates in this group won a seat on the Council. Independent candidates were slightly less successful, with 28.05% of them winning a seat. In the group of other political parties, the success rate was only 6.09%.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the ratio between male and female candidates was similar in all three groups. This is also matched by the ratio of successful males and females in all groups. Men won 77.27-83.33% of the seats across the 11 electoral constituencies, and women won 16.66-22.73%. In terms of age, in all three groups, the highest number of candidates was in the age group 41-50. Candidates from this age group also won the highest number of seats - 31.82-58.33%. In terms of education, in the group of Hungarian political parties and the group of other political parties the most numerous groups of candidates were those without a degree, while in the group of independent candidates the most numerous group of candidates were those with the degree of 'Engineer'.

While for independent candidates and candidates of Hungarian political parties the most numerous category also won the most seats (engineers for independent candidates and candidates without a degree for candidates of Hungarian political parties), in the case of candidates from other political parties the most seats were won by holders of Masters degrees, although in terms of the number of candidates they were the third most numerous, behind candidates without a degree and those with the degree 'engineer'. In terms of occupation, we can see that while in the group of Hungarian political party candidates and the group of independent candidates the most numerous candidates were those working in the field of Self-government, in the group of candidates from other political parties the

**Table 10:** Occupational composition of candidates and elected deputies of the KSK Council by electoral constituency

Occupation	Electoral Constituency																		Total					
	EC1 Košice I		EC2 Košice II		EC3 Košice III		EC4 Košice IV		EC5 Košice- okolie		EC6 Gelnica		EC7 Michalovce		EC8 Rožňava		EC9 Sobrance			EC10 Spišská Nova Ves		EC11 Trebišov		
	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed	ca	ed		ca	ed	ca	ed	
<b>Σ</b>	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	2	4	4	2	2	6	6	7	7	3	3	10	10	3	3	38	2
<b>Executive and legislative</b>																								
A		1																						
B																								
C	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	6	6	5	5	3	3	3	3	7	7	29	0
<b>Self-government</b>	6	2	9	3	1	1	2	2	8	8	2	2	7	7	3	3	1	1	10	10	3	3	79	31
A	3	2	3	1					8	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	24	13
B									3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	4	4	9	8
C	3		6	2	1	1	2	1	14	3			5	1	3	3	1	1	9	2	2	2	46	10
<b>Entrepreneur</b>	6	11	2	4	2	4	4	4	12	2	3	3	8	8	3	3	1	1	9	9	9	9	68	0
A	1								2				1	1					1	1	2	2	7	0
B		1											1	1									2	0
C	5	10	2	4	2	4	4	4	10	10	3	3	6	6	3	3	1	1	8	8	7	7	59	0
<b>Economy and management</b>	9	1	8	3	6	1	9	1	8	8	4	4	10	10	6	6	8	8	12	12	13	13	93	9
A	1	3	3	3	1	4	4	1	2	1	1	1			1	2	2	2			3	3	18	4
B	1						2	2	1	1					1	1					2	2	7	1
C	7	1	5	5	5	1	3	5	5	3	3	3	10	10	4	4	6	6	12	12	8	8	68	4
<b>Healthcare</b>	5	3	3	1	1	1	3	3	4	1			9	4	2	2	1	1	4	4	1	1	32	7
A													2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	6	3
B																							1	0
C	5	3	3	1	1	1	3	3	4	1			7	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	25	4
<b>Social Care</b>			1						1						1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	8	0
A																							0	0
B																							0	0
C		1							1						1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	8	0



most numerous candidates were those working in the field of Economics and Management. However, candidates working in Self-government not only won the most seats among independent candidates and candidates of the Hungarian political parties, but also among the candidates of the other political parties, even though this group had more candidates from Economy and Management and Entrepreneurship. Therefore 54.39% of all elected members of the KSK Council work in self-government, indicating a close personal interdependence between local and regional government in Slovakia.

It can be concluded that there are no significant differences between the three groups of candidates in terms of gender and age. The biggest differences can be observed in terms of candidates' education and occupation. Voters who chose independent candidates voted in the same way as the majority of voters in KSK. In terms of education, candidates with an 'Engineer' degree were preferred by voters of independent candidates, in line with the overall election results. In terms of the occupation of candidates, candidates working in the field of Self-government were the most successful among voters of independent candidates, again corresponding to the preferences of voters in the region as a whole.

However, voters of Hungarian political parties voted differently from the majority of voters in the region. In terms of education, candidates without a degree were the most successful among voters of Hungarian political parties, while overall engineers were the most successful. In terms of candidates' occupation, candidates working in the field of Self-government and Executive and legislative were the most successful among the voters of Hungarian political parties. This also corresponds to the preferences of KSK voters as a whole, but in the case of candidates of Hungarian political parties working in self-government the success rate was as high as 88.89% and for candidates working in Executive and legislative 50%.

Voters of other political parties preferred candidates with Masters degrees, but the most successful in the group of candidates for other political parties were candidates with a Doctor of the Natural Sciences degree (RNDr.), as out of seven of them, two were elected – a 28.57% success rate. Candidates working in the field of Self-government were the most successful among voters of other political parties, which also corresponds to the preferences of voters in the region as a whole.

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