

THE FAR-RIGHT AND THE ROMA; REFLECTION OF ANTI-ROMA RHETORIC IN ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: The communication strategies of the far-right generally include negative statements about members of certain national, ethnic, or religious groups. In the case of the Slovak far-right, the negative attitudes are addressed in particular to the Romani minority. Since the beginning of the 1990s, several radical political parties have been represented in the Slovak parliament; in our text, we focus on the analysis of the communication of the People's Party of Our Slovakia. Although initially, the party presented hostile attitudes towards Jews and the state of Israel, as well as towards the USA, NATO, and the European Union, it gradually included a negative attitude towards the Romani minority and later also to immigrants in its programme. The aim of this paper is to find out what communication strategies the representatives of the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) used in relation to members of the Romani population. We are also interested in answering the question of how anti-Romani messages influence electoral behaviour in districts with municipalities with a higher number of Romani. We are interested in whether in districts with municipalities with a higher number of Romanies living there, the ĽSNS achieved significantly better electoral results than the national average. We use political discourse analysis and analysis of statistical data from the 2016 and 2020 elections to achieve the presented objectives. We analysed data on voting behaviour in districts with a higher number of Romanies and then we compared it with the election results in municipalities without a Romani minority in the same district. Based on our analysis, we can conclude that the presence of Romanies in a particular municipality may increase support for far-right political parties in a particular district, but we cannot unequivocally confirm a direct correlation between the presence of Romanies and the electoral success of the far-right.

Keywords: Slovakia, far-right, Romani, minorities, parliamentary elections, discourse, communication

1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of the coexistence of the Slovak population with members of the Romani minority has regularly appeared in political discourse since the beginning of

the 1990s. The politicians proclaimed, among other things, their interest in integrating the inhabitants of marginalised Romani communities, reducing the unemployment rate of Romanies, or improving Romani children's access to education. Most of the political parties presented the issue in the politically correct language, but representatives of some political parties – especially the ultranationalist Slovak National Party (SNS – Slovenská národná strana) – used the language of racism and xenophobia to communicate this topic (Gurňák and Mikuš, 2012; Mikuš and Gurňák, 2016; Vasiľková and Androvičová, 2019). The SNS first presented a negative attitude towards members of the Hungarian minority (Mikuš and Gurňák, 2012), later exploited the traditionally negative attitude and prejudices (Lášticová and Findor, 2016) of a large part of the Slovak population towards the Romani inhabitants.¹ The nationalist politicians talked about creating segregated communities for Romanies based on the American Indian reservations or presented Romanies as recipients of social benefits (Kluknavská and Smolík, 2016).

Critical statements addressed towards the Romani population have gradually become the part of one of the basic communication strategies of the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) (Smolík, 2013; Bahna and Zagrapan, 2017). This far-right party entered parliament for the first time in 2016, although it had gained the attention of the media, the public, and the professional community much earlier. Already in 2013, the president of this party, Marian Kotleba, became the chairman of the regional self-government in the Banská Bystrica region (Mikuš, Gurňák, and Máriássyová, 2016; Buček and Plešivčák, 2017). Unlike other far-right groups, the representatives of the ĽSNS (in the earlier period as representatives of the Slovak community) openly declared their support for the undemocratic regime of the Slovak Republic from 1939-1945, glorified political figures from this undemocratic period, in the past they also organised torchlight marches in uniforms that reminiscent uniforms of the Hlinka Guard. In their communication messages, we can identify signs of anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia (Hvasta and Koziak, 2019).

The object of our analysis is the language of the representatives of the extreme right in relation to the Romani minority. The language of the political party representatives, which are located at the extreme poles of the ideological spectrum, is characterised by specific stylistic and lexical levels. The ideological vocabulary of the far-right has special features (Schuppener, 2013; Štefančík and Hvasta, 2019); it is often based on an ideology that is incompatible with the values of liberal democracy. The main feature of the communication strategies of far-right parties is a dichotomous perception of reality in the sense of “us vs. them”, or “the other” (Kluknavská and Hruška 2019; Ižák, 2021). Within this communicative scheme, the language of the far-right is oriented towards the search for the enemy and the articulation of threat to evoke emotion, usually fear, in the recipients of political messages. The enemies are perceived by the far-right as a threat to the domestic society, and therefore they often call on the nation to defend the national or cultural interests of the domestic society. The list of the alleged enemies of the nation according to the

¹ For example, according to surveys at the time, most Slovaks consistently rejected Roma as their neighbours (Deegan-Krause, 2004). Strong prejudices against Roma are still present in Slovak society today (Lášticová et al., 2021).

Slovak far-right parties is broad (Štefančík and Stradiotová, 2021). While back in the 1990s the main enemy of the Slovak nation was supposed to be members of the Hungarian minority, gradually the attention of the far-right shifted to the members of the Romani ethnic group, and since the migration crisis in 2015 immigrants have also been included among them (Štefančík and Hvasta, 2019).

The aim of this paper is to find out what communication strategies the ĽSNS representatives used in relation to the members of the Romani population and how the anti-Romani messages were reflected in the electoral behaviour in districts with municipalities with a higher number of Romani inhabitants. We are interested in the answer to the question whether in districts with municipalities with a higher number of Romani inhabitants living there, the ĽSNS achieved significantly better electoral results than the national average. We also want to answer the question whether there is a link between changes in the communication strategies of the far-right in relation to Romanians and the electoral success of the ĽSNS in districts with a higher number of municipalities with Romanians. We deliberately chose districts as the object of our analysis and not only municipalities with Romani settlements. The presence of a larger Romani population may affect not only voters residing in a given municipality but also in the surrounding municipalities or municipalities of the entire district. Thus, the presence of mainly segregated Romanians may influence voting behaviour in Romani-free municipalities.

2 FAR-RIGHT AND MINORITIES

A characteristic communicative manifestation of the far-right is dichotomous thinking in terms of “us” vs. “them”, or “the others”, or “strangers” (Klein, 2012; Kmet', 2021). The category of “us” is represented by the nation as a homogeneous mass of people, without internal differences, as a monolithic, unified entity (Rydgren, 2017). The communication of the representatives of the far-right, who stress the importance of the people, is based on homogenization, simplification, and thus the exclusion of those who do not belong to the category of the people (Lehner, 2019). The inclusion of an individual in the category of “us” is usually conditioned by belonging to the “right” nationality, ethnicity, or relationship to a region or religion. These criteria serve not only to include an individual in the category of the nation but also to exclude them from this category.

On the other hand, against the nation stand they, or the others. This category is quite broad in the communication strategies of the far-right. It includes domestic and foreign elites (political, economic, cultural, but also academics and scientists), and it can include entire organizations or states. The list of “the others” is endless, usually depending on the current domestic or foreign political situation and the prevailing themes of political discourse. According to Cingerová and Dulebová (2019), the position of the “others” not only forms a fixed part of polarizing discourses, but also the construct of the others is also important, constitutive for the identity of the group

we, i.e. the (collective) subject who defines itself against the referent of the polarizing discourse.

In the language of the far-right, the category of “the other” is presented exclusively negatively. The values and behaviour of some “other” groups are considered to be incompatible with the general interest of the people by populists. Therefore, some specific groups of the population are stigmatised and excluded from the category of the people. The negative attitude towards the “others” creates an image of enemies of the nation who are blamed for the existing problems by the far-right political parties. According to Uwe Backes (1989), these political formations create an image of the enemy, a kind of scapegoat into which they project all kinds of negative characteristics. These groups are usually presented by the far-right as a threat and an economic burden to society (Demirkol, 2022). As a rule, the domestic population, the nation as a whole, the national and cultural identity, various traditions, the majority religion, the country, or the social and medical aid system are supposed to be threatened. A people may be threatened on an economic level if alleged enemies (e.g. economic migrants) are presented by the far-right as competitors in the labour market for the native population. Alternatively, if the far-right presents certain populations (e.g. Romani) as welfare recipients. Through articulating negative attitudes towards minorities, representatives of the far-right evoke a sense of threat and fear (Wodak, 2017), because fear is considered to be an important motivating factor for social action, including voting behaviour. The far-right articulates the view that these groups are responsible for the various misfortunes and accidents that afflict the people and should therefore be dealt with harshly, marginalised, or removed from the people's territory (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

According to the far-right, the traditional enemy of the nation is represented by various minorities, because it is minorities that undermine the national, ethnic, or religious integrity of the nation. According to this logic, immigrants, especially from Muslim countries, are an important enemy in Western European states. Conversely, in Central and Eastern European countries, members of various minorities, including members of the Romani community, are considered traditional enemies of the majority (Breazu and Machin, 2019). According to Kende and Krekó (2020), the reason for the success of far-right political parties in the Central and Eastern European states is not only the lack of a strong national identity but also a deep-rooted and socially accepted intergroup hostility towards minorities (especially towards the Romani minority).

Representatives of the Slovak far-right first (during the existence of the Slovak National Party) presented Jews, states such as Israel or the USA, the World Bank, and NATO as enemies of the nation (Kluknavská and Smolík, 2016); after 2015, the main enemy of the nation was to be migrants, especially economic migrants, as well as migrants from Muslim states or migrants from African states (Korec and Przybyła, 2019). The members of the LSNS and their voters have been extremely negative about members of the Romani minority for a long time (Ižák, 2021). On the contrary, they do not harbour negative attitudes towards members of the Hungarian minority, the largest national minority in Slovakia. In the 1990s, it was the Hun-

garian minority and its political representatives who were considered the greatest enemies of the “Slovak nation” by the nationalist parties. A shift in the perception of Hungarians by the Slovak majority occurred only with the entry of political parties representing this national minority into government in 1998. Since then, the “Hungarian parties” (the SMK and Most-Híd) have been part of several government coalitions and between 2016 and 2020 they even formed a government coalition with their rival Slovak National Party.

While the relationship between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority had positive tendencies, the relationship between the majority and the Romani minority was deteriorating. The cause of this state of affairs can be seen in the long-standing failure to address the problems associated with living in the conditions of marginalised communities, as well as the hidden or open discrimination of Slovak Romani people. The representatives of the far-right are aware of this fact and are exploiting this issue to maximise their electoral gains.

3 ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE SLOVAK FAR-RIGHT AND ITS CONTEXT

Since 2016, when the representatives of the ĽSNS entered parliament, several publications have been analysing the activities, content, electoral support in the regions, and political communication of the Slovak far-right parties. Before 2016, however, extremism was not the focus of Slovak political scientists. There were only a few Slovak academics (political scientists, geographers, sociologists) who studied the topic of right-wing extremism (Nociar, 2012; Mikuš and Gurňák, 2012; Kluknavská, 2013; Štefančík, 2013). With the electoral success of the ĽSNS in 2016, the interest of the scientific community in this political party has also increased (Mikuš, Gurňák, and Máriássyová, 2016; Bahna and Zagraban, 2017; Buček and Plešivčák, 2017; Vasil'ková and Androvičová, 2019; Štefančík and Hvasta, 2019).

After the success of the party chairman of the ĽSNS, Marian Kotleba, in the 2013 regional elections and his entry into the National Council after the 2016 elections, it was questionable whether the far-right would succeed in other types of elections. After all, there were elections to the European Parliament in 2019. Although the ĽSNS presented a negative attitude towards the European Union and an interest in the withdrawal of the Slovak Republic from the EU, it participated in the elections to the European Parliament. The ĽSNS won 12.07 per cent of the vote and sent two MEPs to the European Parliament (out of a total of 14 MEPs for Slovakia).

From the point of view of regional support, the right-wing extremists won in four districts: Krupina, Považská Bystrica, Bytča, and Čadca. As Figure 1 shows, they were strongly supported also in some districts of Žilina, Trenčín, Nitra, and Banská Bystrica regions (districts of Bánovce nad Bebravou, Topoľčany, Zlaté Moravce, Brezno), where the Smer-SD party is also popular. It can be assumed that the voter support of right-wing extremists in certain territorial units copies the suc-

cesses of the Smer-SD party (and also the SNS and the HZDS). It cannot be ruled out that this trend will intensify with the gradual decline in support for Smer-SD and that former voters of the Smer-SD party will vote for the right-wing extremists in the near future.



Figure 1 Electoral Support for the ĽSNS in the European election by districts in 2019. Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2019

The ĽSNS has also crossed the electoral threshold in the 2020 parliamentary elections. It was no longer an unknown party; its representatives were subject to various lawsuits precisely for spreading extremism. It was therefore questionable whether it would be able to achieve a similar result in such conditions as in 2016. With 7.97 per cent, they performed similarly in the 2016 election. In real terms, they had about 20 thousand more voters, but since the turnout in 2020 was higher than in 2016, the result was 0.07 percent worse. In terms of seats, the right-wing extremists won three more seats in the parliament than four years earlier.

As Figure 2 shows, the ĽSNS was successful in the central Slovak regions. The districts such as Krupina, Žarnovica, Gelnica, and Poltár once again became the strongholds of the Slovak far-right. They also scored a lot of votes in the western-northern areas, where in previous years either the Smer-SD party or the Slovak National Party had been successful. They scored very weakly in the southwestern regions, where the Hungarian minority lives. They also remained below five per cent in the in the capital city.

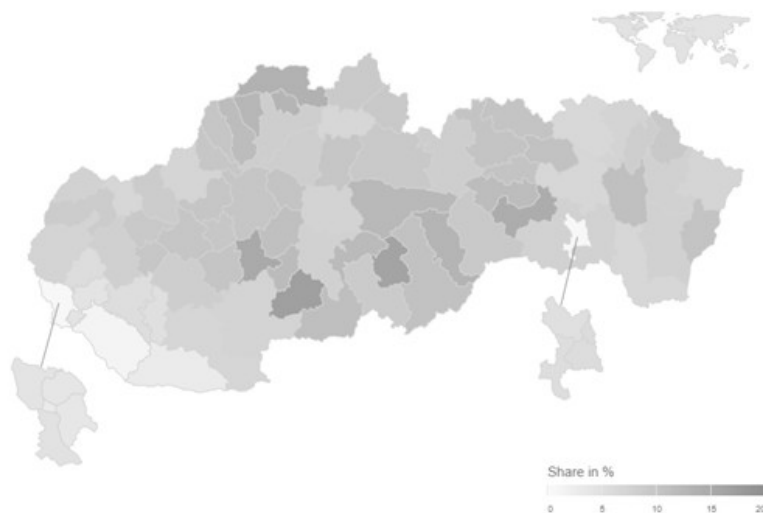


Figure 2 Electoral support for the ĽSNS in the Parliament election by districts in 2020. Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2020

4 METHODOLOGY AND DATA

We used political discourse analysis and analysis of statistical data from the 2016 and 2020 elections (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2016, 2020) to achieve the presented objectives. We are interested in finding out whether the content priorities of the representatives of the far-right have changed since they entered parliament in 2016. Their way of communication was influenced by one important fact. In 2019, the ĽSNS faced an attempt to dissolve the party by the then Prosecutor General Jaromír Čižnár, and some representatives of the far-right were convicted in individual court proceedings for manifestations of extremism. Because of the activities of the prosecutor's office directed against the ĽSNS, there is thus the assumption that the representatives of the far-right have changed the way they communicate. This change has also influenced their way of communicating negative attitudes towards imaginary enemies, including the Romani ethnic group.

In the first part of the text, we analyse the statements of the representatives of the Slovak far-right utilizing discourse analysis. According to Rheindorf (2017, 18), we can define discourse as “the totality of all meaning-making events (also called discourse events) that relate in content to a certain topic”, in our case the Romani minority. Eubomír Guzi (2016, 140) presents political discourse as “a part of political communication with its specific language, which is usually referred to as the ‘language of power’”. Randour, Perrez, and Reuchamps (2020) state that research on political discourse focuses mainly on the discourse of political elites, and in particular on oral monologues. Irina Dulebová (2012) takes a different view of political

discourse. According to this author, political discourse can be defined as the sum of all speech acts used in political discussions and also the rules of public policy, verified by tradition and experience (Dulebová, 2012). This means that the object of research on political discourse is not only oral speech, but it also includes individual statements of political actors, in our case the far-right, published on social networks, as well as official statements of the entire party published on the party's web portal. This approach is confirmed by van Dijk (1997), who argues that statements become political if they are contextualised in communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns and rallies, interviews published in the media, speeches at protest demonstrations, etc. Today, social networks are an important space for public discourse. They have significantly changed how we discuss social and political issues in society. Expressing oneself on social networks has become a mass affair with a significant impact on the degree of polarization in society (Breazu and Machin, 2019), which has greatly helped those political actors who base their political communication on deepening this polarization.

For our discourse analysis, we used the tools of the Digital Archive of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which offers textual transcripts of various forms of parliamentary debates. According to Zdenko Dobřík (2021, 74) “texts are often the space in which social struggles take place; traces of diverse ideological clashes for dominance and hegemony are present in them. It is therefore meaningful to focus on how linguistic resources are used in various manifestations and manipulations of power”. Since both spoken and written texts are a form of social and political action, we see political discourse as a political act, as part of a political process, at the end of which is not only the acquisition of power but equally its maintenance and vindication in the next election.

In the second part of our text, we analyse data from the Atlas of Roma communities (2019) and electoral data obtained from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2016, 2019, 2020). This Atlas of Roma communities, prepared by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma communities (ÚSVRK), provides a variety of information on municipalities with Romani settlements, as well as on segregated Romani settlements. The data from the Atlas are based on the perception of Romanies by their surroundings, i.e. by members of the majority, namely representatives of the local self-government authorities, not based on personal identification with this ethnic group. This approach based on the analysis of members of the Romani minority according to ascribed ethnicity is not new and is commonly used in scientific analyses (Matlovičová et al., 2012), and this is due to the fact that there are differences between official statistics and the actual number of Romanies (Rochovská and Rusnáková, 2018). In our paper, we also analyse the relationship between the proportion of the population of Romani ethnicity in selected districts and the results of the ĽSNS from the parliamentary elections in these municipalities. In the text, we compare the electoral results of the ĽSNS in municipalities with and without Romanies because we believe that the presence of the Romani minority in a municipality may also influence the electoral behaviour in other nearby municipalities.

5 ROMANI IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF THE SLOVAK FAR-RIGHT

The Slovak far-right targeted the Romani people before the elections in 2010, but their anti-Romani rhetoric was not yet enough to reach the five per cent quorum for entry into the parliament. Before 2010, other themes, such as the protection of the nation from domestic and external enemies, the glorification of the representatives of the undemocratic regime of the Slovak Republic from 1939-1945, the hostile attitude towards Jews, the USA, NATO, and the European Union were typical for the ĽSNS (Kluknavská, 2013). After 2012, negative attitudes towards Romanies intensified in the rhetoric of the ĽSNS. It is in the language of the ĽSNS that we can identify the party's extremely negative attitude towards the Romani community. Representatives of the ĽSNS and previously the Slovak National Party (SNS) fundamentally refused to use the term Romani. They replaced it with the politically incorrect substitute "gypsy". They regularly used pejorative and insulting terms such as parasites, antisocial individuals, half-monkeys, Indians, scum, terrorists, extremists, maladjusted, and blacks. When analysing the communication strategies of the representatives of the extreme right, we can identify a high degree of expressiveness. At the same time, we also identify the pragmatic component of the language, which contains certain emotional and evaluative attitudes. According to Slovak linguist Zdenka Kumorová (2022, 54), "this type of communication spreads hatred and xenophobia in society, which is then exploited by the right-wing parties for their interests".

Based on the research on the language of the far-right and their way of expressing themselves towards members of the Romani community, we can point to the mental connection of extremists with non-democratic regimes or ideologies. Indeed, the term parasite was used by Adolf Hitler (2000) in his book *Mein Kampf* (see also Bein, 1965). Hitler used the noun parasites to refer to Jews to emphasize in this way that they had, as originally in a biological context, a harmful effect on the organism. In Hitler's logic, Jews were supposed to harm the German nation (Schmitz-Berning, 1988); in the logic of Slovak extremists, Romanies were supposed to harm the Slovak nation.

The representatives of the far-right presented the Romanies as those who were supposed to undermine the security of the "Slovak nation" and abuse the social system. However, the idea of the Romanies as recipients of social assistance is not new; it has appeared in Slovak political discourse since the beginning of the construction of a competitive political system. The goal of defending the nation against the Romani minority was even given as a reason for the creation of the party *Slovenská pospolitost'* [Slovak Togetherness] which was the predecessor of the ĽSNS:

– "A year ago, it took place spontaneously in the wake of a criminal act by **gypsy parasites** who did not hesitate to mutilate a man for a few euros [...] Last year's action was the impetus for the start of a more intensive defence of our nation by nationalists led by Marian Kotleba against the gypsy terror..." (SP Blog, 2010).

The anti-Romani rhetoric was an extremely frequent topic among party leaders in the early period of the Slovak far-right. And it often had the character of speeches typical of former undemocratic regimes. For example, in 2012 the regional chairman of the ĽSNS, Marian Mišún, published in his document entitled “Strategy for solving the Gypsy problem”, among other things, the opinion that:

– *“Just as in the animal kingdom, in human society we must apply the principles of avoiding excessive reproduction of socially useless individuals and, on the contrary, support in every possible way those who are healthy and useful for society (social Darwinism)”* (Mišún, 2012: 8-12).

The ideas of the regional chairman of the ĽSNS have the character of the Nazi propaganda from the 1930s and 1940s, in which the German National Socialists explained the reasons for the segregation and subsequent liquidation of certain religious or ethnic communities. The extremely negative rhetoric towards the Romani minority continued after the party entered parliament in 2016:

– *“A 35-member gang of antisocials terrorised decent residents in Hurbanovo. They settled on someone else's land, drank, drugged, stole, and attacked decent families in the neighbourhood. They ‘decorated’ the whole street with their excrement, there was filth and rats everywhere. Really nauseating”* (ĽSNS 2019).

In describing such activities, the extremists are trying to create the impression that the state, or municipal or regional government, is failing in this area, and therefore it is they who must take justice into their own hands:

– *“The decent people on the street have not been able to help themselves with this gang for 15 years. They have called the police, filed criminal complaints, lawsuits, and petitions. All in vain, they were all immediately ‘racist’. That is why our members took up the case”* (ĽSNS 2019).

Nowadays, similar rhetoric can be found mainly in the communication of supporters of the ĽSNS and the Republic on social networks. The leaders of these parties do not articulate their negative attitude towards the Romani community as open as they used to. Although expressions such as *gypsies*, *parasites*, *settlers*, or *antisocial individuals* can still be found in the language of the far-right, the representatives of both parties are more carefully considering the context in which they use these expressions. There is a tendency not to communicate overtly racist messages or to present so directly the biological superiority of one race over others. However, if we look at racism from its broader perspective, in terms of denigrating members of other ethnicities, cultures, or religions, manifestations of racism are still present in Slovak public discourse.

One interpretation of why the ĽSNS has changed its rhetoric concerning the Romani minority may be an attempt to avoid individual criminal proceedings against

the leaders of this party, as well as a proposal made by Prosecutor General Jaromír Čížnár to ban the party's activities. One of the reasons why Čížnár wanted to ban the party formation concerned racism and xenophobia, especially concerning Romanies and Jews. Banning the activities of a party is also realistic in the conditions of the Slovak judicial system. It was the predecessor of the ĽSNS, Slovenská pospolitost' – národná strana that was dissolved by the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic in March 2006 because of extremist statements made by the party's leaders, because of its undemocratic internal regulations, as well as the programmatic goals, which were incompatible with the democratic order.

The problems of the Slovak society associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccinations, the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, inflation, and the energy crisis have shifted the attention of the far-right away from the Romanies to more topical issues. Although the communication strategies of the representatives of the far-right have changed, their language continues to contain derogatory expressions about members of the Romani minority:

– *“The long-term unsolved problem of the criminality of antisocial gypsies is causing problems for decent people in Kozárovce”* (ĽSNS newspaper, September 2021).

– *“Like your predecessors, you are not able to protect decent people from the acts of maladjusted antisocial individuals, from maladjusted settlers”* (R. Schlossár, NR SR, 16 June 2021).

– *“This type of criminality is a significant factor that determines life and behaviour in the settlements, where maladjusted antisocial individuals unashamedly exploit their underage children to commit crimes”* (S. Mizik, NR SR, 11. 02. 2022).

6 ELECTION RESULTS OF THE ĽSNS IN DISTRICTS WITH THE ROMANI POPULATION

In the context of the discussion on the influence of anti-Romani statements of the far-right, it is interesting to seek an answer to the question of whether the presence of Romanies in specific settlements has an impact on the voting behaviour of the local population. The Atlas of Romani Communities (2019) provides sufficient insight into which municipalities or towns record the presence of the members of the Romani population. The problem is that the existence of a marginalised settlement on the territory of one municipality can have an immediate impact not only on the voting behaviour of the inhabitants of the relevant territorial unit but also on neighbouring municipalities. For this reason, we decided to analyse both voting behaviour in a particular municipality with a Roma minority and voting behaviour in municipalities without Roma located in the same district. We also show what results were achieved by the ĽSNS for the whole district.

The following table shows ten Slovak districts with the highest proportion of the Romani population (RP) in municipalities. The Atlas of Romani Communities

(2019) provides information on what percentage of the population living in a given municipality is of Romani origin. Thus, the data in the table includes those districts in which the share of municipalities with Romani inhabitants is at least one percent. Table 1 shows that in most of the ten districts with the highest percentage of municipalities with Romanians, the electoral support for the ĽSNS was above average in both 2016 (the national result of 8.04 percent) and 2020 (the national result of 7.97 percent). On the contrary, a lower result than the national average was achieved by ĽSNS in the districts of Malacky, Michalovce, and Šaľa. Thus, the assumption is that the more Romanians live in a given district, the more votes the far-right political parties get with anti-Romani rhetoric. This assumption is true for some municipalities, but not for all. Support for the ĽSNS was weak not only in the three districts mentioned above but also in other districts in western and especially southern Slovakia. Especially in the southwestern districts with municipalities where Romanians live in larger numbers, the ĽSNS performed below average in 2020 (Galanta, Dunajská Streda, and Komárno).

Table 1 Districts with the highest number of municipalities with Romanians and the result of the ĽSNS in the elections in a given year

District	Number of municipalities with RP	Percentage from all municipalities	ĽSNS/2020 in the district (%)	ĽSNS/2016 in the district (%)	Difference between 2016 and 2020*
Revúca	30	71,4	13,07	13,63	-0,56
Poprad	20	68,9	8,37	10,3	-1,93
Spišská N.Ves	23	63,8	11,62	10,1	1,52
Gelnica	12	60	14,45	11,21	3,24
Rim. Sobota	63	58,8	10,76	8,65	2,11
Rožňava	36	58	9,39	8,68	0,71
Malacky	15	57,7	7,41	7,25	0,16
Michalovce	45	57,7	7,8	7	0,8
Šaľa	7	53,8	5,16	6,59	-1,43
Lučenec	28	49,1	8,92	6,81	2,11

Sources of data: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2016, 2020), Atlas of Romani Communities (2019), own processing

* The unit is the percentage point

The data in Table 2 show that the ĽSNS is also doing well in the districts with the lowest proportion of municipalities with Romani populations. These are mostly districts located in western or north-western Slovakia, where nationalist parties such as the HZDS and the SNS had strong support in the 1990s. Except for Trnava, these

are municipalities from the regions of Považie, Kysuce, Orava, and Liptov. Only in the district of Trenčín the ĽSNS achieved a worse electoral result than the national average. The ĽSNS obtained above-average results in the years under review and also in the districts without municipalities where the share of Romanies is at least at the level of one per cent. Thus, in these districts, immediate experience with Romanies is unlikely to be the primary reason for the behaviour of voters who decided to vote for the far-right.

Table 2 Districts with the lowest number of municipalities with Roma and the result of the ĽSNS in the elections in a given year

District	Number of municipalities with RP	Percentage from all municipalities	ĽSNS/2020	ĽSNS/2016	Difference between 2016 and 2020*
Bytča	0	0	12,69	10,53	2,16
Námestovo	0	0	9,08	10,46	-1,38
Pov. Bystrica	0	0	11,58	9,64	1,94
Tvrdošín	0	0	9,3	11,32	-2,02
Trnava	1	2,2	8,05	8,62	-0,57
Bánovce nad Bebravou	1	2,3	9,84	8,62	1,22
Trenčín	1	2,7	7,21	7,41	-0,2
Žilina	2	3,7	8,45	8,71	-0,26
Turč. Teplice	1	3,8	10,41	9,11	1,3
Ružomberok	1	4	9,81	10,78	-0,97

Sources of data: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Atlas of Romani Communities, own processing

* The unit is the percentage point

In our research, we were interested in finding out whether the presence of Romanies has an impact on support for the far-right not only in municipalities with Romanies, but also in municipalities in the same districts, but without a higher number of Romanies. For this reason, we analysed and then compared the electoral gains of the ĽSNS in the parliamentary elections in 2020, in municipalities with and without Romanies. We assumed that if the presence of Romanies had an impact on voting behaviour in a municipality with Romanies, it could also affect the voting behaviour of voters in other municipalities in the same district. This is because Romani settlements, especially socially excluded Romani settlements, are often located outside the main centre of the municipality, either on the outskirts of the municipality or completely outside the residential area of the municipality.

Table 3 shows the electoral result of the ĽSNS in the 10 districts with the highest percentage of municipalities with the Romani population in 2020. A comparison of the electoral results for the ĽSNS in municipalities with Romanies and municipalities without Romani minority shows that the ĽSNS performed above average even in municipalities without Romanies, even in some cases better than the average in municipalities with Romanies in the same district. This can be explained by the fact that in some municipalities more than 50 percent of Romanies live there. For example, in the Revúca district, out of 30 total municipalities, there are about 13 municipalities with more than 51 per cent Romani population. Since the far-right has a negative attitude towards the Romani minority, we assume only minimal support for the ĽSNS among the Romanies, which reduces the percentage of the electoral success of the ĽSNS in municipalities with a higher proportion of the Romani population. Previous research (Plešivčák, 2011) suggests that Romanies reject anti-minority policies and that short-term factors of electoral mobilisation, especially in the run-up to elections, may play a significant role in the voting behaviour of this minority. On the contrary, there is only one municipality in the Malacky district where 21-30 per cent of the Romani minority live, the other 14 municipalities have 1-10 or 11-20 per cent of the Romani population. In this district, the result of the ĽSNS was on average better in the municipalities with Romanies. Thus, the electoral behaviour and support for the ĽSNS may not be directly influenced by the presence of the Romani minority, but also by the socio-economic indicators of the inhabitants of the respective district, or by the degree of exclusion of Romanies from society, or on the contrary, by the integration of the Romani population in society.

When analysing voting behaviour in Slovakia, we must not forget that nationality plays a very important role in the decision-making of voters in some regions. Some studies (Kevický, 2021) show that the ĽSNS has lower support in the southern territories of Slovakia, where the Hungarian national minority lives. The results of our analysis have confirmed the conclusions reached so far. In the 10 districts with the highest percentage of municipalities with the Romani minority, there are several municipalities in which the ĽSNS did not win a single vote. In most cases, these are municipalities in ethnically mixed regions, where political parties representing the interests of the Hungarian national minority (the Most-Híd and the MKS) have been gaining a lot of support. The following Table 4 shows that in the municipalities of the surveyed districts where the ĽSNS did not receive any votes or had significantly low support, the parties representing the interests of the Hungarian minority achieved a good electoral result.

Finally, Table 5 shows the proportion of municipalities in those districts that are considered strongholds of the Slovak far-right. Half of them (Krupina, Poltár, Gelnica, Revúca, and Brezno) show more than one-third of the municipalities with Romanies. However, the district Bytča is also in this group, but this district, according to the 2019 Atlas of Romani Communities, does not show any municipality with more than one per cent of Romanies.

Table 3 Election result for ĽSNS in municipalities with and without Roma

District	Number of municipalities with/without RP	ĽSNS/2020 (%)	ĽSNS/2020 in the municipalities with RP (%)	ĽSNS/2020 in the municipalities without RP (%)
Revúca	30/12	13,07	12,74	16,14
Rimavská Sobota	63/44	10,76	9,88	15,73
Poprad	20/9	8,37	8,24	9,04
Spišská Nová Ves	23/13	11,62	11,5	12,45
Gelnica	12/8	14,45	14,56	14,13
Rožňava	36/26	9,39	9,92	7,67
Malacky	15/11	7,41	7,85	6,61
Michalovce	45/33	7,8	7,3	9,51
Šaľa	7/6	5,16	5,69	3,86
Lučenec	28/29	8,92	7,71	12,64

Sources of data: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2016, 2020), Atlas of the Romani Communities (2019), own processing

Table 4 Electoral results in municipalities with low support for the ĽSNS in districts with a high number of the Romani minority

Municipality	District	Estimated of Romanies (%)	Election result of ĽSNS (%)	Election result of MKS+Most+Híd (%)	Election result of other parties in total (%)
Drňa	Rim. Sobota	31-40	0	76,46	23,54
Dulovo	Rim. Sobota	81-90	0	92,09	7,91
Kaloša	Rim. Sobota	81-90	0	65,41	34,59
Kesovce	Rim. Sobota	91-100	0	74,23	25,77
Kap. Kľačany	Michalovce	31-40	0,69	84,02	15,29
Belina	Lučenec	31-40	0,91	77,97	21,12
Trenč	Lučenec	91-100	0,91	12,83	86,26
Hostice	Rim. Sobota	71-80	1,06	80,04	18,9
Silica	Rožňava	21-30	1,28	78,1	20,62
Zempl. Kopčany	Michalovce	71-80	1,47	38,22	60,31

Sources of data: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2016, 2020), Atlas of Romani Communities (2019), own processing

Table 5 District strongholds of the ĽSNS in the 2020 elections and the share of municipalities with Romanies

District	ĽSNS/2020 (%)	Number of municipalities with Romani people	Percentage of all municipalities in the district
Krupina	17,03	15	41,6
Poltár	16,27	8	36,3
Žarnovica	15,14	3	16,6
Gelnica	14,45	12	60
Čadca	13,53	2	8,7
Revúca	13,07	30	71,4
Kysucké N. Mesto	12,98	2	14,2
Bytča	12,69	0	0
Brezno	12,33	13	43
Detva	12,06	4	26,6

Sources of data: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Atlas of Romani Communities, own processing

7 DISCUSSION

The data in the presented tables show that the presence of Romanies in a particular municipality may increase support for the far-right political parties in a particular district, but we cannot confirm a direct correlation between the presence of Romanies and the electoral success of the far-right. The ĽSNS has its electoral stronghold in the Krupina district, i.e. in a district with a higher number of municipalities with Romanies. However, the ĽSNS also achieved above-average success in districts with municipalities where the number of Romanies did not exceed the one per cent threshold. In this case, we can talk about latent xenophobia. The inhabitants do not have everyday experience with Romanies but are afraid of their presence. This phenomenon is not new in Slovakia, and it also appears in connection with attitudes towards other population groups. In the past, for example, the nationalist and strongly anti-Hungarian political party SNS achieved its most significant successes in districts without a Hungarian minority. Since 2015, a rejectionist attitude towards migrants has emerged among a part of the Slovak public, even though the number of immigrants in Slovakia is low in comparison to typically immigrant countries (Štefančík, Stradiotová, and Seresová, 2022).

The anti-Romani motivation of the ĽSNS voters does not appear prominently in opinion polls that examine the reasons for voting behaviour. According to these polls, the ĽSNS voters give completely different reasons for their decision. Accord-

ing to an exit poll conducted after the 2016 elections by the agency FOCUS, the far-right appealed to voters primarily by defending the interests of the Slovak Republic and its anti-corruption programme. The party was thus able to convince voters that despite its undemocratic character, it could find ways to solve some of society's serious problems (Bahna and Zagraban, 2020). ĽSNS voters chose the party more because of its criticism of the political system and its corrupt elite and less because of its negative attitude towards the Roma minority. The anti-corruption programme was followed by a social programme, other unidentified causes, and then attitudes toward refugees and migration (Vasilko, 2016). In the presented reasons for the selection of the ĽSNS, a negative attitude towards the Romani community is not mentioned.

The election year in 2016 was a period when the pre-election political discourse in Slovakia was dominated by the topic of international migration after more than one million refugees from Africa and the Middle East had arrived in Europe in a matter of months since the spring of 2015 (Liďák, 2016; Přívara, 2021). It was also during this period that Slovak politicians, including those on the far-right, began to take notice of the topic of international migration (Přívara and Rievajová, 2021). Migrants were generally presented as an economic, political, and cultural threat to the nation. The economic migrants and Muslim migrants in particular were presented negatively (Lenč, 2019; Štefančík, Némethová, and Seresová, 2021). During this period, the ĽSNS responded to the trends of the political discourse and changed the object of its negative messages. Despite the changes in the content priorities of the ĽSNS, Romanies continued to be presented in a negative perspective by the party representatives.

Although anti-Romani statements are still present in the communication of the ĽSNS, it is not a monothematic party. This is proved by the changes in the content priorities in the policy of the party. In addition to criticism of Romanies, the 2016 and 2020 pre-election programmes featured prominently topics such as political corruption, clientelism, criticism of international institutions (primarily the EU and NATO), mainstream media, and NGOs. In addition to Romanies, the representatives of the far-right criticise the current ruling elite, migrants, Muslims, supporters of multiculturalism, and homosexuals. Thus, their communication continues to be based on a dichotomous perception of reality in terms of “us” vs. “them”.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The ĽSNS has long presented itself with radical anti-Romani rhetoric, but this is not a theme that the party has been presenting since the beginning of the political activity of the representatives of the party. The ĽSNS has gone through its development. The representatives of the ĽSNS were originally members of Slovenská pospolitosť – Národná strana (Slovak Togetherness – National Party) and were negatively defined towards Jews, Israel, the USA, NATO, and the European Union, but they started to use the anti-Romani rhetoric later on. The rhetoric beyond political

correctness, which they had presented until they entered parliament in 2016, was gradually toned down. The transformation of the communication strategies of the far-right can be explained by the desire to avoid both individual criminal proceedings for extremist attitudes and attempts by state institutions to ban the party's activities.

The more moderate rhetoric towards the Romanies was not directly related to the electoral results of the ĽSNS. A comparison of the results of elections in 2016 and 2020 shows that although the ĽSNS declined in percentage in the two districts with the highest proportion of municipalities with Romanies, it strengthened in five other districts. Thus, we cannot confirm a direct correlation between more moderate language towards the Romani minority and its electoral performance.

Based on the presented analysis of voting behaviour, we have likewise not confirmed a direct link between the existence of municipalities with Romanies and the success of the far-right in districts with such municipalities. The ĽSNS was successful in 2020 both in municipalities with Romanies and without them. The electoral bastion of the ĽSNS is Krupina, which has 15 municipalities with Romanies, which accounts for 41.6 per cent of the total. However, our statement is also valid from the opposite perspective. The ĽSNS achieved below-average results also in some districts with a higher number of municipalities with Romanies, especially in the southern districts where members of the Hungarian minority live. In opinion polls, the ĽSNS voters did not overtly present the anti-Romani rhetoric of the far-right as the primary reason for their voting decision. Rather, it was aimed at an anti-corruption and social agenda or a negative attitude towards migration.

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Krajná pravica a Rómovia. Odraz protirómskej rétoriky vo volebnom správaní

Súhrn

Cieľom tohto príspevku je zistiť, aké komunikačné stratégie používali predstavitelia Ľudovej strany Naše Slovensko vo vzťahu k príslušníkom rómskej populácie a ako sa následne antirómske posolstvá odrazili na volebnom správaní v okresoch s obcami s vyšším počtom Rómov. Zaujímá nás odpoveď na otázku, či v okresoch s obcami s vyšším počtom tam žijúcich Rómov dosahovala ĽSNS výrazne lepšie volebné výsledky ako bol celorepublikový priemer. Rovnako chceme odpovedať na otázku, či existuje súvislosť medzi zmenami v komunikačných stratégiách krajnej pravice vo vzťahu k Rómom a volebným úspechom ĽSNS v okresoch s vyšším počtom obcí s Rómami. Zámerne sme vybrali okresy a nie iba obce s rómskymi osadami. Existencia segregovanej rómskej osady totiž môže ovplyvňovať nielen voličov s trvalým pobytom v danej obci, ale aj v okolitých obciach, resp. obciach celého okresu. Niektoré segregované osídlenia tak môžu bezprostredne vplývať na voličské správanie viacerých obcí.

Z porovnania výsledkov volieb v rokoch 2016 a 2020 vyplýva, že v dvoch okresoch s najvyšším podielom obcí s Rómami síce ĽSNS percentuálne poklesla, ale v nasledujúcich piatich ďalších okresoch posilnila. Nie je teda možné potvrdiť priamu súvislosť medzi umiernenjším jazykom vo vzťahu k Rómom a jej volebným výsledkom.

Na základe predstavenej analýzy voličského správania sme rovnako nepotvrdili priamu súvislosť medzi existenciou obcí s Rómami a úspechmi krajnej pravice v okresoch s takýmito obcami. Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko bola v roku 2020 úspešná tak v obciach s Rómami ako aj bez nich. Voličská bašta ĽSNS je Krupina, v ktorej sa nachádza 15 obcí s Rómami, čo tvorí 41,6 percentný podiel. Naše konštatovanie však platí aj v opačnej perspektíve. ĽSNS dosiahla podpriemerné výsledky aj v niektorých okresoch s vyšším počtom obcí s Rómami, a to najmä v južných okresoch, v ktorých žijú príslušníci maďarskej menšiny. V prieskumoch verejnej mienky voliči ĽSNS neprezentovali otvorene protirómsku rétoriku krajnej pravice ako primárny dôvod svojho voličského rozhodnutia. Skôr malo ísť o protikorupčný a sociálny program alebo negatívny prístup k migrácii.