

DISTRICTS AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT – SIMILARITY OR DIFFERENCE IN POLITICAL PREFERENCES?

ANALYSIS OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SLOVAKIA IN THE PERIOD 1998-2020

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Abstract: The article focuses on the issue of territorial support of political parties, which formed the government coalitions in Slovakia in the period 1998-2020 after the parliamentary elections. Special attention is paid to the territorial variability of the support concerning the parties forming the current government coalition based on the results of the 2020 elections. We are interested in which districts (in terms of their election results) are most prominently represented in top politics in Slovakia (at the national level, i.e. at the level of the central government). For this purpose, we created an index of electoral support for the new government, taking into account the election results of new governing parties in the given district. In addition, we track their percentage gain and deviation from the national average. The goal is also to find out whether the territorial variability in the support of incoming governments decreases or increases over time. For this purpose, the coefficient of variation is used. The results of the analysis indicate that the interests (preferences) of Slovakia's largest cities, more economically successful regions and right-wing liberal politics were promoted to a slightly higher extent at the level of the central government during this period. On the contrary, the largest average deficit in electoral support for the new government parties in the territory and at the national level was identified in several lagging regions, in districts with a left-wing, social-democratic or nationalist orientation, close to the values of statism and egalitarianism. The research also found that territorial differences in support for incoming government parties gradually decrease over time.

Keywords: parliamentary elections, government parties, electoral support, coefficient of variation, districts, Slovakia

1 INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the territorial contexts regarding support for political parties has been a traditional topic of electoral geography for several decades. In his recent

work, Forest (2017) offers an overview of the historical development and current state of research within electoral geography. In general, the study by Siegfried (1913) analyzing the relationship between the physical-geographical and socio-economic characteristics of territorial units in France and their influence on the final electoral results is considered to be the starting work of electoral geography. Some authors, e.g. Prescott (1959) and Rowley (1970), however, refer to the work of Krebheil (1916) discussing electoral geography on the example of elections in Great Britain. After the Second World War, the French school of electoral geography in particular maintained a very strong position (Morazé, 1947; Siegfried, 1949). Nevertheless, it should also be added that the Anglo-American approach to election evaluation began to come more and more to the fore (Archer et al., 1985; Archer, 1988; Martis, 1988). We can currently consider the influence of this school as dominant within the scope of electoral-geographical research.

In addition to the description and explanation concerning the spatial mosaic of political parties' election results, the research also focuses on the influence of geographical factors on voting. It is a classic topic of electoral geography, which tries to answer why people from place to place vote for other political parties. The great expansion of election research within political geography meant the introduction of quantitative mathematical and statistical methods, especially in the second half of the 1960s, which made it possible to answer this and similar questions from a scientific point of view in a much more correct way and to objectify the entire research (Cox, 1969). The question can also be asked whether similar people in terms of socio-economic characteristics vote for similar parties regardless of where they live (Johnston, 2005). The question of whether place and locality influence electoral outcomes and, more broadly, people's voting behaviour is a fundamental dispute between classical political science and electoral geography (Johnston and Pattie, 2006). For example King (1996) declares that the electoral preferences of the population can only be explained by the disaggregated characteristics of individuals (composition effect). However, other authors (e.g. Johnston, 1986; Agnew, 1996; Pattie and Johnston, 1997; Pattie and Johnston, 2000) do not agree with such a clearly defined position and argue that space and location influence the individual to a greater or lesser extent in his / her decision, whom to vote for.

The aim of this contribution is to identify the extent of electoral support for government parties at the spatially disaggregated level of the districts in Slovakia. In other words, to quantify political preferences of which districts are most represented at the central government level. However, we will pay attention not only to the current situation (the results of the parliamentary elections in 2020), but we will also evaluate the monitored issue over a longer period of time, since 1998. The aim will also be to answer the question of whether the territorial variability of support for government parties at the beginning of their mandate increases, decreases or is at a stable level over time (period 1998-2020).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

From the point of view regarding discussions about the spatial differentiation of election results, the importance of geographical factors and contextual effect is very often emphasized, under the influence of which an individual (consciously or unconsciously) decides to cast his vote for certain political party or candidate at the time of the election. The contextual approach to electoral behavior research (Johnson et al., 2002; Sui and Hugill, 2002; Vilalta y Perdomo, 2004; Johnston et al., 2016) emphasizes the fact that the electoral preferences and political behavior of the population is, in addition to social characteristics (ethnicity, religion, age, education, socio-economic status, etc.) influenced by the local political climate and the people with whom voters interacts in the given space and who may come from different social backgrounds. The relevance of this point of view was even confirmed earlier by scientists from the field of classical political science (Key, 1949), when it was demonstrated that the support of several candidates in certain temporal and spatial contexts is significantly higher in home territories (at the regional or local level) than in other locations. This research approach is therefore indispensable for the overall level of knowledge regarding the explanation of the phenomenon of voting behavior (Gimpel et al., 2008). Only a few studies have attempted to simultaneously analyze the compositional and contextual effects on the voting behavior of electorate and the territorial mosaic of electoral preferences, mainly because such research requires relatively detailed statistical data of a different nature for relatively large spatial units (Walks, 2006; Gent et al., 2014).

Systematic research of electoral geography in terms of published works, topics and used methodological procedures within the area of Central and Eastern Europe and especially Slovakia was devoted in two works of the last period. Plešivčák et al. (2016) state that after the change in the political, economic and social conditions in the case of the Czechia and Slovakia (the end of communism, transformation processes related to the onset of democracy and a market-oriented economy at the turn of the 80s and 90s, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993), authors from these two countries began to focus on the issue of geographical research concerning election results and factors that influence the electoral behavior of the population and its territorial aspects. Among the relatively large number of works that had been published over the past three decades we can mention authors as Blažek and Kostecký (1991), Jehlička and Sýkora (1991), Jehlička et al. (1993), Brunn and Vlčková (1994), Buček (1994), Vlčková (1995), Kostecký (1993, 2000), Krivý et al. (1996), Mariot (1999, 2003), Krivý (1999, 2007), Szöllös (2000, 2006), Madleňák (2006, 2010, 2012), Kyloušek and Pink (2007), Plešivčák (2011, 2013, 2014), Mikuš (2014), Mikuš and Málíková (2015), Mikuš et al. (2016). Kevický (2021) in his recent work offers a systematic review of published literature in the field of electoral geography in the conditions of the Czechia and Slovakia. Based on his research, he considers the following topics to be crucial:

- spatial analyzes of support for selected political parties,
- identification of factors affecting election results and their spatial mosaic,

- historical-geographical studies of support for political parties (especially in the period of the interwar Czechoslovakia),
- analysis of the temporal and spatial stability of support for political parties,
- the issue of differences in electoral preference between urban and rural environments,
- territorial support of political parties based on their inclusion in the political-ideological and party family (most recently, attention has been paid to research on the support of far-right parties in particular),
- partly also the issue concerning the geography of voter participation and political representation.

In addition to works devoted to partial topics, comprehensively oriented regional analyzes of the electoral behavior concerning the population of Slovakia were created after 1990. In this context, the following two studies should be mentioned. Krivý et al. (1996) previously presented a systematic characterization regarding individual regions of Slovakia (18) respecting their demographic, socio-structural, cultural, historical, economic and electoral preference conditions. It emphasizes the spatial context when solving the issue of the electoral behavior concerning inhabitants in Slovakia at the regional level. The authors summarized the influence of population structures on political inclinations into three areas (characteristics of social groups): ethnicity, religious belief and level of education. They characterized individual regions of Slovakia based on the relationship between their electoral preferences and the existing socio-economic structure. Over time, Madleňák (2012) undertook to comprehensively revise the issue of the electoral geography concerning individual parts of Slovakia. Emphasis was placed on the spatial context of electoral behavior, creating a regional typification taking into account its geographical, political and sociological aspects.

As mentioned earlier, the analysis of the issue regarding territorial aspects of support for far-right parties in Slovakia has been growing in popularity, especially in the recent period. The spatial concentration of the Roma ethnic group is an important factor in the geographical distribution of support for far-right parties (Mikuš and Gurňák, 2012; Mikuš and Gurňák, 2016; Mikuš et al., 2016; Buček and Plešivčák, 2017; Štefančík and Stradiotová, 2022), e.g. *Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* (ĽSNS, eng. *People's Party Our Slovakia*). In a recently published work (Harmanoš and Plešivčák, 2021), the attention was paid to the socio-political conflict between the values of conservatism and liberalism at the spatially disaggregated level of regions and districts of Slovakia. On the basis of this conflict line, government coalitions are very often formed in the conditions of Slovakia, and thus the mentioned publication is also important in relation to the topic and goals of this study, which has the ambition to affect the variability in the degree of support concerning incoming government parties based on the spatially disaggregated results of parliamentary elections at the district level of Slovakia.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Following the declared goals of this work, in the practical part of the study we worked with data representing the results of the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in the years 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2020. We obtained these data from the database of Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (<https://volby.statistics.sk>). We analyzed data for the level of 79 districts of Slovakia (the list of their abbreviations is given in Table 1), as well as the national level. Considering the declared goals of the article, the election results of only those political entities (parties, movements) that formed a new government after the elections in question were taken into account.

In order to assess the difference in support for new government parties at the level of the districts of Slovakia, an *index of electoral support for the new government* was created. Its mathematical formula is as follows:

$$ESNG = \frac{1}{100} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n x_i ,$$

where: $ESNG$ – index of electoral support for the new government,
 x_i – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party i ,
 n – number of new government parties,
 i – new government party i ,

or in alternative notation as:

$$ESNG = \frac{(x_1 + x_2 + \dots + x_n)}{100} ,$$

where: $ESNG$ – index of electoral support for the new government,
 x_1 – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party 1,
 x_2 – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party 2,
 x_n – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party n (last in order),
 n – number of the new government parties.

The *ESNG index* can take on values in the interval (0; 1>.

The average for the period 1998-2020 was calculated as a simple average of values for individual partial periods (results of elections in question).

In addition, we also worked with a simple sum of the share of valid votes (%) for the new government parties in the practical part of the study. Its mathematical formula is as follows:

$$x_1 + x_2 + \dots + x_n ,$$

where: x_1 – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party 1,
 x_2 – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party 2,
 x_n – share of valid votes (%) for the new government party n (last in order),
 n – number of the new government parties.

The sum can take values in the interval (0; 100>.

Table 1 Districts of Slovakia and their abbreviations

Bratislava region		Trnava region		Trenčín region		Nitra region	
District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.
Bratislava 1	BA 1	Dunajská Streda	DS	Bánovce nad Bebravou	BN	Komárno	KN
Bratislava 2	BA 2	Galanta	GA	Ilava	IL	Levice	LV
Bratislava 3	BA 3	Hlohovec	HC	Myjava	MY	Nitra	NR
Bratislava 4	BA 4	Piešťany	PE	Nové Mesto nad Váhom	NM	Nové Zámky	NZ
Bratislava 5	BA 5	Senica	SE	Partizánske	PE	Šaľa	SA
Malacky	MA	Skalica	SI	Považská Bystrica	PB	Topoľčany	TO
Pezinok	PK	Trnava	TT	Prievidza	PD	Zlaté Moravce	ZM
Senec	SC			Púchov	PU		
				Trenčín	TN		
Žilina region		Banská Bystrica region		Prešov region		Košice region	
District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.	District	Abbr.
Bytča	BY	Banská Bystrica	BB	Bardejov	BJ	Gelnica	GL
Čadca	CA	Banská Štiavnica	BS	Humenné	HE	Košice 1	KE 1
Dolný Kubín	DK	Brezno	BR	Kežmarok	KK	Košice 2	KE 2
Kysucké Nové Mesto	KM	Detva	DT	Levoča	LE	Košice 3	KE 3
Liptovský Mikuláš	LM	Krupina	KA	Medzilaborce	ML	Košice 4	KE 4
Martin	MT	Lučenec	LC	Poprad	PP	Košice - okolie	KS
Námestovo	NO	Poltár	PT	Prešov	PO	Michalovce	MI
Ružomberok	RK	Revúca	RA	Sabinov	SB	Rožňava	RV
Turčianske Teplice	TR	Rimavská Sobota	RS	Snina	SV	Sobrance	SO
Tvrdošín	TS	Veľký Krtíš	VK	Stará Ľubovňa	SL	Spišská Nová Ves	SN
Žilina	ZA	Zvolen	ZV	Stropkov	SP	Trebišov	TV
		Žarnovica	ZC	Svidník	SK		
		Žiar nad Hronom	ZH	Vranov nad Topľou	VT		

In the evaluation, we also used the absolute deviation from the average value concerning the share of valid votes (%) for the new government parties. Its mathematical notation is as follows:

$$x_d - x_n \quad ,$$

where: x_d – share of valid votes (%) for incoming government parties in the district d ,
 x_n – share of valid votes (%) for incoming governing parties at the national level.

Finally, we evaluated the degree of difference in the values concerning the share of valid votes (%) for the new government parties at the district level. For this purpose, we used the coefficient of variation. Its mathematical notation is as follows:

$$CV = \frac{s}{(\bar{x})} \cdot 100 \quad ,$$

where: s – standard deviation of the dataset,
 \bar{x} – arithmetic mean (average value) of the dataset.

The coefficient can take on values in the interval (0; 100>.

During the calculations, we did not take into account the (different) level of voter turnout, as this would “distort” the findings (as the initial test itself showed). Districts with low support for the new government could come to the fore only because in their case a higher voter turnout was registered than in districts in which the voters participating in the elections supported the future government to a higher degree, but with a lower voter turnout. Therefore, we only took into account the amount of government support expressed during the given elections (only by voters who participated in the elections).

4 RESULTS

In this part of the study, we will look at territorial (district) differences in the electoral support of the new government in individual years, as well as differences between districts for the period 1998-2020 as a whole. For this purpose, we will use the already mentioned *ESNG index* in the given district and the difference in the district election result of the incoming government parties compared to the result for the national level. In the same way, we will comment on the degree of territorial variation in the support of incoming governments in this period using the coefficient of variation.

In the case of the parliamentary elections held in Slovakia in 2020, we can state (Figure 1) that the parties of the right-wing government coalition (OLaNO, Sme rodina, SaS and Za ľudí), which was formed on the basis of the election results, received the highest support in the very west of Slovakia (urban districts of Bratislava and the remaining districts of the Bratislava region, and the districts of Skalica, Senica and Trnava in the neighboring Trnava region), in the districts of the second (Košice) and third (Prešov) largest cities in Slovakia and in the Poprad district. In

the districts of Skalica (0.598; +14.50 p.p.), Senec (0.568; +11.58 p.p.), Malacky (0.562; +10.98 p.p.) and Košice 3 (0.541; +10.26 p.p.), these parties even scored a total of more than 10 percentage points (p.p.) more than the average for the Slovak Republic (0.453; 45.25%). In practical terms, this means that approximately 55-60% of the voters participating in the elections voted for the parties of the current government coalition in the above-mentioned districts. The current, right-wing government coalition was also supported by other districts located in economically developed western (Hlohovec, Myjava, Piešťany, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Trenčín) and northern Slovakia (Martin, Dolný Kubín, Ružomberok, Liptovský Mikuláš), and districts of other large cities in Slovakia (Žilina, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Zvolen). Based on these findings, we can assume that the parliamentary elections in 2020 were won by more economically developed parts of Slovakia, more civil and right-liberal oriented. On the contrary, the current governing parties were not supported so much by several districts in the south (southwest) of Slovakia (Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Veľký Krtíš, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca), in the bordering northwest (Čadca, Kysucké Nové Mesto) and northeast (Svidník, Medzilaborce, Snina, Sobrance). Compared to the Slovak average, by more than 15 p.p. lower scores were recorded in the districts of Rimavská Sobota (0.300; -15.28 p.p.), Medzilaborce (0.284; -16.83 p.p.), Komárno (0.277; -17.57 p.p.) and Dunajská Streda (0.268; -18.48 p.p.). Based on these findings, we can conclude that only 25-30% of the citizens participating in the elections voted for the parties of the new government coalition in these districts. In this case, we can talk about the influence of the ethnic conflict line, which significantly affects the election results, especially in areas with a considerable proportion of the people of Hungarian ethnicity (Rimavská Sobota, Komárno, Dunajská Streda). However, due to the current high degree of fragmentation of ethnic parties, none of these political subjects get into the national parliament (based on their election results) and therefore are not either part of the current government coalition. The second factor influencing the election results in these districts was the level of socio-economic development, and the traditional value-ideological orientation of these territories (Medzilaborce and other districts with more than 10 p.p. lower electoral results for the parties of the current right-wing government such as Kysucké Nové Mesto, Veľký Krtíš, Revúca, Svidník, Snina, Sobrance and Čadca) and the associated election of a strong party from the opposite part of the left-right scale (especially Smer-SD), or preference of more conservative, nationalist oriented parties (e.g. SNS, LS-NS). The districts of Levoča (0.461; +0.88 p.p.), Spišská Nová Ves (0.454; +0.16 p.p.), Hlohovec (0.451; -0.16 p.p.), Žiar nad Hronom (0.449; -0.37 p.p.), Šaľa (0.449; -0.38 p.p.) and Tvrdošín (0.443; -0.95 p.p.) were in significant agreement with the national share of votes for the new ruling parties, where the absolute deviation from the national average ranged only from -1 to +1 p.p.

However, our research primarily focused on the relatively long period of elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic since 1998 (marked by a considerable change in the electoral law, including the introduction of one national electoral district from the original four regional ones). Within this period of more than two decades, a total of seven parliamentary elections were held, in 1998, 2002,

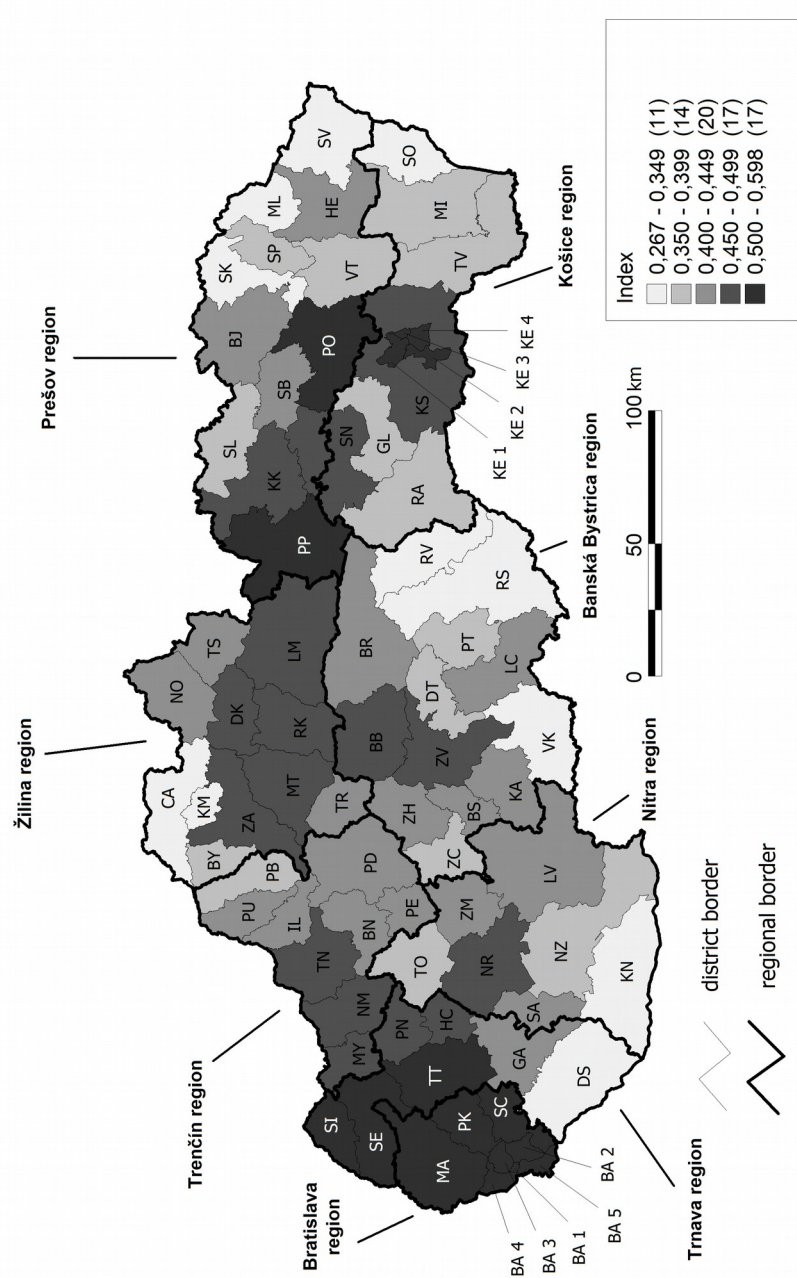


Figure 1 Index of electoral support for the new government at the district level of Slovakia in 2020.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2020), own processing

2006, 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2020. If we were to evaluate this period as a whole, we would conclude several interesting findings. Among other things, such an approach allows us to identify those parts of Slovakia whose value-ideological orientation was more represented at the level of the central executive power compared to others. However, for this period as a whole, the differences between the districts of Slovakia are not that striking. The difference between the most “represented” (Košice 3) and the least “represented” district (Kysucké Nové Mesto) is less than 10 p.p. (9.73 p.p.). Figure 2 informs about the spatial context of the election results concerning the new governing parties between the district and national levels (0.476; 47.60%). On average, a 50% or higher level of representation (the governing parties won a total of 50% or more of the votes cast in the given territory) for the period 1998-2020, we recorded in all four urban districts of Košice, which were also the districts with the highest average support of recent government parties, in the order of Košice 3 (0.527; +5.13 p.p.), Košice 4 (0.524; + 4.77 p.p.), Košice 2 (0.520; +4.36 p.p.) and Košice 1 (0.516; +4.04 p.p.). These districts are complemented by Bratislava 5 (0.507; +3.11 p.p.), Košice - surroundings (0.503; +2.71 p.p.), Prešov (0.503; +2.69 p.p.) and Bratislava 4 (0.500; +2.41 p.p.). However, other districts of the capital also achieved high positions – Bratislava 2 11th place and Bratislava 2 12th place. Mentioned areas are districts of the three largest cities in Slovakia (Bratislava, Košice, Prešov). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the political preferences of the inhabitants of Slovakia's largest cities were represented to the greatest extent at the government level in the last two decades. The political success of the “big city” environment, or centers of socio-economic development in Slovakia are also confirmed by the remaining two places in the elite ten districts, namely Senec and Skalica, located in the south-west of Slovakia in the most economically developed part of the country. On the contrary, it is possible to identify territories whose political preferences were manifested to the least extent within the framework of high politics in the form of the structure of the government coalitions in the period of 1998-2020. Among them are those districts in which, on average, less than 45% of the voters participating in the parliamentary elections voted for the government coalition parties. These districts are from the northwestern Slovakia (a compact belt of districts stretching from Ilava, through Púchov, Považská Bystrica, Bytča, Žilina, Kysucké Nové Mesto to Čadca), southern central Slovakia (Detva, Poltár, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca) and northeast (Stropkov, Medzilaborce). These are complemented by the districts of Zlaté Moravce, Žarnovica and Gelnica. To the smallest extent, local electoral preferences were reflected in the form of the national government composition in the districts of Poltár (0.440; -3.62 p.p.), Rimavská Sobota (0.440; -3.63 p.p.), Čadca (0.435; -4.14 p.p.), Považská Bystrica (0.433; -4.25 p.p.), Bytča (0.431; -4.53 p.p.) and Kysucké Nové Mesto (0.430; -4.60 p.p.). These are districts with a more conservative (even far-right) orientation and attachment to the values of, statism, egalitarianism or left-wing politics. Districts of Poltár, Revúca and Rimavská Sobota are among the ten districts with the highest unemployment rate. The districts of Medzilaborce, Stropkov and Gelnica are in the next ten. Almost identical average value of the new government support for the period 1998-2020

compared to the national average is shown by twenty-three districts of Slovakia, where the difference to the national value was identified only in the interval from -1 to +1 p.p. In twelve of them, this difference is even lower (-0.5; 0.5 p.p.). This group consists of the districts of Bardejov (0.481; +0.46 p.p.), Pezinok (0.480; +0.38 p.p.), Lučenec (0.480; +0.38 p.p.), Spišská Nová Ves (0.479; +0.34 p.p.), Galanta (0.479; +0.33 p.p.), Nitra (0.479; +0.33 p.p.), Nové Zámky (0.479; +0.31 p.p.), Zvolen (0.478; +0.15 p.p.), Martin (0.476; +0.05 p.p.), Liptovský Mikuláš (0.473; -0.34 p.p.), Dolný Kubín (0.471; -0.46 p.p.) and Piešťany (0.471; -0.47 p.p.). However, the internal redistribution of votes for individual parties of the new government coalition was quite different even in this set of districts.

Although the differences in the “degree of representation of local political orientation at the national government level” are not too large between the individual districts of Slovakia, a certain interesting trend can be seen resulting from the above-mentioned findings. Since 1998 the more economically developed parts of the country have been represented better (more often, to a greater extent) in top politics (in the form of the central government) than lagging parts of Slovakia. And the right and liberal representation of the political spectrum is slightly more successful than the rest of it. At this point, however, it should be noted that now we are talking about the period as a whole, not its given parts (individual election periods). An overview of the ten most successful and ten least successful districts in terms of electoral support for the new government parties is illustrated by Table 2. There, you can see how these districts supported individual incoming governments and how their support differed from the national average.

Through our research, however, we also tried to find out whether the difference in support for the parties of the new government is decreasing, increasing, or stable over time between individual territorial units (districts). For this purpose, we used the coefficient of variation. As can be seen in Figure 3, the inter-district differences in the support of new government parties decreased over time. From a certain point of view, it can be said that when assessing the degree of support concerning the parties of the new government, the districts are starting to “look more alike” from the point of view of electoral preferences. The largest inter-district difference (CV = 38.99%) in the support of the new government parties was recorded in the parliamentary elections in 2002, when the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda was established, consisting of SDKÚ-DS, SMK-MKP, KDH and ANO, with a clear pro-reform (economic reforms, reforms in the social system, etc.) and pro-integration (EU, NATO) oriented profile. His previous government, as well as the next three ones (1998-2002 government composed of SDK, SDE, SMK-MKP and SOP / CV = 28.14%, government 2006-2010 composed of Smer-SD, SNS and ĽS-HZDS / CV = 26.41%, the 2010-2012 government consisting of SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH and Most-Híd / CV = 28.47% and the single-party government of Smer-SD in the years 2012-2016 / CV = 26.41%) were typical of a very similar values concerning the coefficient of variation. On the other hand, in the case of the previous government (2016-2020 government in the initial composition of Smer-SD, SNS, Most-Híd and Siet' / CV = 13.38%), as well as the current government (2020-2023 government in

Table 2 TOP 10 and BOTTOM 10 districts of Slovakia based on the share of valid votes for the new government parties and its deviation from the national value in the period 1998-2020

Order	District	1998		2002		2006		2010	
		SDK + SDL' + SMK-MKP + SOP		SDKÚ + SMK- MKP + KDH + ANO		Smer-SD + SNS + ĽS- HZDS		SDKÚ-DS + SaS + KDH + Most-Híd	
		%	<i>Devia- tion in p.p.</i>	%	<i>Devia- tion in p.p.</i>	%	<i>Devia- tion in p.p.</i>	%	<i>Devia- tion in p.p.</i>
1	Košice 3	79,39	21,27	52,52	10,01	45,06	-4,60	55,03	10,83
2	Košice 4	78,56	20,44	56,13	13,62	40,90	-8,76	56,01	11,81
3	Košice 2	77,15	19,03	54,80	12,29	40,01	-9,65	57,83	13,63
4	Košice 1	79,44	21,32	59,56	17,05	34,56	-15,10	62,37	18,17
5	Bratislava 5	74,09	15,97	56,13	13,62	35,80	-13,86	63,58	19,38
6	Košice - okolie	72,82	14,70	54,87	12,36	40,82	-8,84	48,02	3,82
7	Prešov	68,19	10,07	48,78	6,27	48,03	-1,63	50,43	6,23
8	Bratislava 4	71,32	13,20	56,46	13,95	34,23	-15,43	64,57	20,37
9	Senec	69,37	11,25	58,41	15,90	33,23	-16,43	63,80	19,60
10	Skalica	66,44	8,32	45,31	2,80	42,57	-7,09	54,10	9,90
70	Ilava	36,56	-21,56	24,49	-18,02	66,45	16,79	33,44	-10,76
71	Detva	33,06	-25,06	22,13	-20,38	67,69	18,03	30,75	-13,45
72	Tvrdošín	35,89	-22,23	34,30	-8,21	59,65	9,99	45,25	1,05
73	Žarnovica	37,40	-20,72	25,04	-17,47	65,56	15,90	32,38	-11,82
74	Poltár	41,48	-16,64	18,35	-24,16	67,14	17,48	23,24	-20,96
75	Rimavská Sobota	70,99	12,87	52,95	10,44	34,95	-14,71	36,68	-7,52
76	Čadca	23,28	-34,84	17,39	-25,12	75,73	26,07	21,50	-22,70
77	Považská Bystrica	30,82	-27,30	21,22	-21,29	68,98	19,32	30,63	-13,57
78	Bytča	25,89	-32,23	19,59	-22,92	72,67	23,01	25,32	-18,88
79	Kysucké Nové Mesto	23,83	-34,29	17,48	-25,03	74,91	25,25	23,37	-20,83
-	Slovak Republic	58,12	0,00	42,51	0,00	49,66	0,00	44,20	0,00

Order	District	2012		2016		2020		1998-2020	
		Smer-SD		Smer-SD + SNS + Most-Híd + Siet'		OLaNO + Smerodina + SaS + Za ľudí		Governments	
		%	Deviation in p.p.	%	Deviation in p.p.	%	Deviation in p.p.	%	Deviation in p.p.
1	Košice 3	38,89	-5,52	44,06	-4,96	54,11	8,86	52,72	5,13
2	Košice 4	36,93	-7,48	44,31	-4,71	53,70	8,45	52,36	4,77
3	Košice 2	36,09	-8,32	42,27	-6,75	55,51	10,26	51,95	4,36
4	Košice 1	30,11	-14,30	40,28	-8,74	55,12	9,87	51,63	4,04
5	Bratislava 5	31,60	-12,81	39,19	-9,83	54,55	9,3	50,71	3,11
6	Košice - okolie	39,19	-5,22	47,70	-1,32	48,71	3,46	50,30	2,71
7	Prešov	41,64	-2,77	44,76	-4,26	50,17	4,92	50,29	2,69
8	Bratislava 4	31,17	-13,24	39,05	-9,97	53,23	7,98	50,00	2,41
9	Senec	27,68	-16,73	40,31	-8,71	56,83	11,58	49,95	2,35
10	Skalica	40,17	-4,24	40,86	-8,16	59,75	14,5	49,89	2,29
70	Ilava	56,42	12,01	53,38	4,36	41,46	-3,79	44,60	-3,00
71	Detva	60,35	15,94	56,60	7,58	38,66	-6,59	44,18	-3,42
72	Tvrdošín	42,95	-1,46	46,74	-2,28	44,30	-0,95	44,15	-3,44
73	Žarnovica	55,99	11,58	51,87	2,85	39,97	-5,28	44,03	-3,56
74	Poltár	63,14	18,73	58,98	9,96	35,52	-9,73	43,98	-3,62
75	Rimavská Sobota	33,36	-11,05	48,89	-0,13	29,97	-15,28	43,97	-3,63
76	Čadca	67,91	23,50	64,71	15,69	33,71	-11,54	43,46	-4,14
77	Považská Bystrica	56,51	12,10	56,25	7,23	39,01	-6,24	43,35	-4,25
78	Bytča	59,76	15,35	60,10	11,08	38,13	-7,12	43,07	-4,53
79	Kysucké Nové Mesto	64,76	20,35	61,68	12,66	34,96	-10,29	43,00	-4,60
-	Slovak Republic	44,41	0,00	49,02	0,00	45,25	0,00	47,60	0,00

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (1998-2020), own processing

the initial composition of OĽaNO, Sme rodina, SaS and Za ľudí / CV = 16.79%) we can talk about the lowest level of inter-district disparity in support of the new government parties for the entire monitored period. However, it should be emphasized that in this regard a lot depends mainly on the post-election political agreements between the parties that reached the parliament (the process of forming a government coalition) and subsequently on their political profiling – clearly oriented within one part of the political spectrum, or less defined, broader in terms of values, consisting of relatively diverse parties in terms of their value-ideological profile (especially the trend of recent years). However, it can be assumed that the territories are also being modified in terms of processes concerning generational change or migration (outflow or inflow of the population), which can result in the “mitigating” of the territories that were once strictly profiled from political point of view. The inter-district difference in the degree of support for incoming government parties in the period 1998-2020 as a whole measured by the coefficient of variation was only at the level of 4.80% in the set of 79 districts of Slovakia. However, this mutual (statistical) “similarity” of the districts is to a significant extent caused by the alternation of governments from different parts of the political spectrum (the governments of 1998-2002, 2002-2006, 2010-2012 and 2020-2023 rather right-wing, while the governments of 2006-2010, 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 rather left-wing or social-democratic oriented).

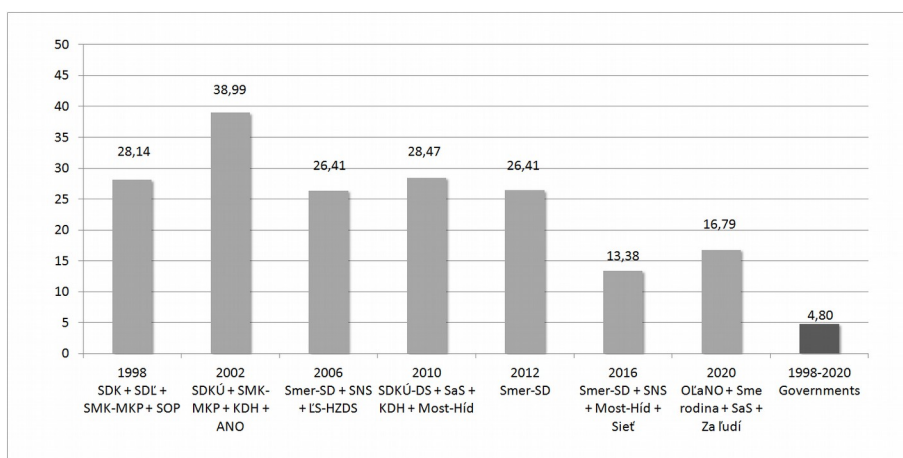


Figure 3 Coefficient of variation on the share of valid votes for the new government parties at the district level of Slovakia in the period 1998-2020. Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (1998-2020), own processing

5 CONCLUSION

The results of any elections, especially those for the national parliament, resonate in society for a very long time. One part of the electorate is satisfied, second is

not, another takes an apathetic attitude. The incoming government with its party or personnel composition and especially the value-ideological anchoring suits part of the electorate. While for others, it means a policy guarantee and the promotion of a ruling program they do not identify with, or they are openly against it. But do we know how the support for incoming governments is distributed in individual parts of Slovakia? And do we know what happens to it over time, when the composition of the governing parties is changed after the next election? People in which districts identify with the new government to the greatest extent, and in which the least? And during the last two decades, which governments (on average) suits them the most and which the least? Who can be satisfied – West or East, big cities or countryside? This study asked these and similar questions.

Findings of the study show that the differences between the districts of Slovakia for the period 1998-2020 as a whole are not that striking on average (which is mainly related to the relatively balanced representation of governments differing in terms of their value-ideological profile). As mentioned, the difference between the most “represented” (Košice 3) and the least “represented” district (Kysucké Nové Mesto) is less than 10 p.p. for the entire monitored period. In addition, the inter-district difference in the support of new government parties is decreasing over time. From a certain point of view, it can be said that when assessing the level of support for the parties forming the new government, the districts are starting to “resemble” each other more and more from the point of view of electoral preferences.

However, the topic of territorial variability concerning support for government parties has not yet been investigated in more detail. However, the following two studies are closest to the topic. Madleňák (2017) in his work identified the spatial patterns of regional representation on the candidate lists of political parties, and defined the formula of potential political representation of regions on the one hand and of real political representation (the number of elected deputies to the national parliament from a given region or district in relation to the number of eligible voters in a given region or district) on the other using the example of parliamentary elections from 2016. He assessed the existence of a connection between the patterns concerning representation of regions on candidate lists and the regional differentiation of the electoral gains of individual political parties. One of the goals of his work was to assess the degree of political representation of Slovakia's regions, and to highlight which regions are sufficiently represented, which are insufficiently or not at all. This corresponds to a large extent with the aim of our contribution, although we look at this issue from a different point of view (through the degree of political-ideological agreement between the national and district results of the governing parties as a whole, and not through the representation of candidates from individual regions and districts on the candidate lists of political parties and their representation within the national parliament). Based on the political representation index, he divided the regions of Slovakia into three groups – with above average, below average and districts without political representation. Based on the results, it is possible to identify a dichotomous division of the country into an above-average politically represented northwest and below-average or insufficiently represented southeast,

which more or less coincides with the dichotomy of the socioeconomic level of Slovakia's regions. His findings are in line with the conclusions of Latner and McGann (2005), who under similar conditions of the proportional and highly centralized electoral system of the Netherlands and Israel identified patterns of geographic representation of territorial units significantly favoring central metropolitan areas and regions. At the same time, these authors draw attention to the fact that insufficiently represented regions may be disadvantaged in the distribution of public resources in the territory.

The second mentioned article is a contribution by Plešivčák (2022). The author compared the results of the governing parties at the national, regional and local level at the beginning (elections that meant the formation of the given government coalition) and at the end of their mandate (elections at the end of their government period), taking into account the level of voter participation. The research focused on a relatively long period of almost two decades (2002-2020). He found that out of a total of five governments during the period in question, each of them preferentially declined during the performance of their mandate. However, while by 2010 the drop in government support was at the level of 90% compared to the previous support, in the next decade governments defend only about half or two third of their original support. The differences at the regional or district level were not (over the monitored period as a whole) too large (at the level of a moderately large decrease in electoral support for government parties).

The creation of any government coalition is a matter of political agreement between the parties and the voters have only minimal or no influence for the formation. This article has attempted to identify spatial differences in support for parties that created the governing coalition, ultimately benefiting residents of some parts of the country more than other voters residing in other parts and preferring different political-ideological values. The challenge for those who until now had a smaller representation of their preferences at the level of the central government is to mobilize the electorate in their territories to a much greater extent, to promote their common needs and the ways of fulfilling to be more felt in national politics and to be more massively supported in political agenda of central government. However, it requires more active and informed voters, as well as more active involvement of people from these regions in the forming of national politics. However, even the electoral system of one electoral district itself does not support this, as it centralizes power in the hands of the few most influential people within the national party structures and thus does not create sufficient space for the promotion of personalities (and interests) coming directly from the regions (Madleňák, 2017). It turns out that in the period after the change of electoral rule in 1998, the winners are mainly the largest cities of Slovakia and their surrounding areas, the south-west and east of Slovakia, while the losers are mainly the north-west of the country and the south of central Slovakia.

In the autumn of this year, early parliamentary elections await us, marked by the consequences concerning various crises of recent years – pandemic, energy, or Ukrainian. They together bring inflation and a noticeable reduction in the standard

of living for several groups of the population, which further limits the possibilities for political, economic, social, or ethnic reconciliation even in such a polarized society. For these reasons as well, there is a justified concern that these elections will bring “winners” and “losers” again. But cooperation is needed, regardless of who ends up forming a governing coalition. Because government is supposed to make politics also for the benefit of those who did not vote for it. Because we are all citizens of the same state, regardless of who we voted for in the elections, or which parts of Slovakia we live in.

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Okresy a centrálna vláda – zhoda či rozdielnosť v politických preferenciách?

Analýza parlamentných volieb na Slovensku v období rokov 1998-2020

Súhrn

Výsledky akýchkoľvek volieb, zvlášť tých do národného parlamentu, rezonujú v spoločnosti veľmi dlhé obdobie. Jedna časť voličov je spokojná, iná nie, ďalšia zaujme apatický postoj. Nastupujúca vláda svojim straníckym či personálnym zložením a najmä hodnotovo-ideologickým ukotvením časti elektorátu vyhovuje, pre inú však znamená garanciu politiky a presadzovanie vládneho programu, s ktorým sa nestotožňujú, resp. sú otvorene proti nemu. Vieme však, aká je podpora nastupujúcich vlád v jednotlivých častiach Slovenska? A vieme, čo sa s ňou deje v čase, pri zmene zostavy vládnych strán po nasledujúcich voľbách? Ľudia v ktorých okresoch sa v tomto smere v najväčšej miere stotožňujú s danou vládou zostavou a v ktorých najmenej? A ktorým za posledné dve dekády vlády (v priemere) najviac a ktorým najmenej „vyhovovali“? Kto môže byť spokojný – západ či východ, veľké mestá či vidiek? Tieto a podobné otázky si kladla táto štúdia.

Výsledky štúdie ukazujú, že diferencie medzi okresmi Slovenska za obdobie rokov 1998-2020 ako celok nie sú v priemere až také markantné (čo súvisí najmä s pomerne vyrovnaným zastúpením vlád odlišných z hľadiska ich hodnotovo-ideologického profilu). Rozdiel medzi najviac „reprezentovaným“ (Košice 3) a najmenej „reprezentovaným“ okresom (Kysucké Nové Mesto) je za celé sledované obdobie menej ako 10 p.b. Medziokresná rozdielnosť v podpore nových vládnych strán sa navyše v čase znižuje. Z istého uhla pohľadu sa dá povedať, že pri posudzovaní miery podpory strán tvoriacich novú vládu sa okresy na seba začínajú z volebno-preferenčného hľadiska čoraz „viac podobať“.

Vytvorenie akejkoľvek vládnej koalície je vecou politickej dohody strán, na formovanie ktorej majú voliči de facto len minimálny, resp. žiadny vplyv. Tento článok sa pokúsil identifikovať priestorové rozdiely v podpore strán, ktoré sa nakoniec dostanú do vládnej koalície, z čoho v konečnom dôsledku obyvatelia niektorých častí krajiny majú väčší prospech v porovnaní s inými voličmi obývajúcimi iné časti a preferujúcimi odlišné politicko-ideologické hodnoty. Úlohou tých, ktorí mali doteraz menšie zastúpenie ich preferencií na úrovni centrálnej vlády je mobilizovať elektorát vo svojich územiach v oveľa väčšej miere, aby potreby, ktoré sú im vlastné, a spôsoby ich naplnenia, bolo v celoštátnej politike viac cítiť a boli masívnejšie politicky podporované. Vyžaduje si to však aktívnejších a informovanejších voličov a rovnako tak aktívnejšie zapojenie sa ľudí z týchto regiónov do kreovania celonárodnej politiky. Tomuto však nepraje ani samotný volebný systém jedného

volebného obvodu, ktorý centralizuje moc do rúk najvplyvnejších ľudí v rámci celonárodných stranických štruktúr a nevytvára tak dostatočný priestor na presadenie sa osobností (a záujmov) pochádzajúcich priamo z regiónov (Madleňák, 2017). Ukazuje sa, že v období po zmene volebných pravidiel v roku 1998 sú víťazmi najmä najväčšie mestá Slovenska a ich spádové územia, juhozápad a východ Slovenska a naopak porazenými najmä severozápad krajiny a juh stredného Slovenska.

Na jeseň tohto roku nás čakajú predčasné parlamentné voľby poznačené dôsledkami rôznych kríz posledných rokov – pandemickej, energetickej či ukrajinskej, spoločne prinášajúcich rast cien a citeľné znižovanie životnej úrovne viacerých skupín obyvateľstva, čo ešte viac limituje možnosti pre politický, ekonomický, sociálny či národnostný zmier už i tak polarizovanej spoločnosti. I z týchto dôvodov je tu opodstatnený predpoklad, že aj tieto voľby prinesú “víťazov“ a “porazených“. Potrebná je však spolupráca, bez ohľadu na to, kto nakoniec zostaví vládu koalíciu. Lebo tá má robiť politiku i v prospech tých, ktorí ju nevolili. Lebo všetci sme občania toho istého štátu, bez ohľadu na to, koho sme vo voľbách volili, resp. ktoré časti Slovenska obývame.