



ABSTRACT

Martin Slosiarik: **Volatility Rate in the 2023 Elections**

Political parties are the most important actors in representative democracies. They are characterised by a significantly higher degree of variability and adaptation to current social challenges than is the case with other democratic institutions. This is also because they have to respond both to the changes in the wider social environment, that is, the social, economic or cultural events that occur, and to the swings in voter behaviour that these events provoke. Voter behaviour, with its variability, is one of the indicators of stability or instability of party systems. The aim of my paper is to analyse the degree of voter volatility in the 2023 parliamentary elections and the directions of this volatility.



ABSTRACT

Petra Grigelová: The Foreign Policy Dimension of the 2023 Parliamentary Elections

The presented study focuses on the analysis of the foreign policy dimension of the 2023 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The Slovak Republic's foreign policy and the problems the country is facing in this area are directly affecting the lives of Slovak citizens, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the war conflict on our eastern border, the growing migrant crisis and the increased movement of migrants on our territory. Opinions on the foreign policy orientation of the Slovak Republic differ across the political spectrum of the Slovak political parties. The study analyses and compares the foreign policy orientation of representatives of the political entities running in the 2023 parliamentary elections through the prism of their electoral programmes and positions.



ABSTRACT

Karen Henderson: **Analysing Euroscepticism in the 2023 Slovak Election Campaign**

Conventional classifications of party-based Euroscepticism assume that EU politics and policies are its object, but analysis of election manifestos and debates before the 2023 Slovak parliamentary elections shows that much Slovak criticism of the EU has a domestic political context.

To understand criticism of the EU, one needs to clarify what the EU and EU membership is understood to mean and look at how EU membership is conceived of in Slovak political discourse. There is also a difference between ideology and strategy: some parties have views and beliefs about how the EU should function, while others create arguments more pragmatically to gain electoral advantage. Inaccuracy and inconsistency in programmes lead to parties claiming firm support for the EU membership while demonstrating clear hostility to the EU'S fundamental values and principles.

A Slovak election dominated by arguments about political values, Slovakia's foreign policy orientation and the future of democracy highlights the challenges facing an EU confronting not only conventional Euroscepticism and the threat of member states leaving, but also member states who do not adhere to the values laid out in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union.



ABSTRACT

Tomáš Strážay: **New Geopolitics of the Central-European Space**

The security and geopolitical vacuum that emerged in Central Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union has been reasonably exploited by the vast majority of countries in the region through joining the European and transatlantic integration structures of the West. Despite the current increase in security threats associated with open military conflicts in their immediate neighbourhood, the return of geopolitics to international relations coupled with the growing ambitions of some global or regional powers and their attempts to interfere in the internal political affairs of the Central European countries, these countries are free to decide on their future foreign policy orientation based on the preferences of their own citizens as expressed in the parliamentary elections. From a geopolitical perspective, they are in a much more comfortable position than in the 1990s, but this does not mean that they are not in danger of slipping into geopolitical experimentation - this time not in the context of external circumstances but based on the impact of internal political developments. The paper focuses on Slovakia and its four Central European neighbours (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Austria) with the aim of identifying risk factors that, in the short- and medium-term perspective, could lead to the questioning of their foreign policy orientation, which could then have a destabilizing effect both within the EU and NATO and within selected formats of regional cooperation and bilateral relations with their immediate neighbours.



ABSTRACT

Dirk Dalberg: **German Media and the 2023 Slovak Election Campaign**

Although Slovakia is located in the center of Europe and its geostrategic importance is growing, it enjoys fewer international media attention than other countries in the region, such as Poland, Hungary, and possibly the Czech Republic. Media coverage focuses on issue-oriented articles on (political) events and personalities. Attention has been paid to the rejection of EU aid measures for Member States in need during the 2008/09 euro crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis, the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in February 2018, or the entry of the far-right People's Party Our Slovakia, LSNS, into parliament in 2020.

The paper deals with the reporting of German-language daily newspapers on the early elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 30 September. Based on a qualitative media analysis of Die Welt (Germany, center-right), Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany, center-right), der Tagesspiegel (Germany, center-left), die Tageszeitung (Germany, left), Der Standard (Austria, center-left), Die Presse (Austria, center-right), Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Switzerland, center-right), the following can be stated: The reporting on the elections is critical but not very analytical. The narrative of Slovakia's impending slide into authoritarianism and the end of aid to Ukraine as well as anti-European attitudes are at the forefront.



ABSTRACT

Nino Samkharadze: **Another Illiberal Toolkit for Emerging Democracies? Why Outcomes of Slovakia's Snap Elections Matter for Georgia**

Faced with a drastic backsliding of democracy, Georgian pro-democratic powers are hopefully looking at European actors as key mediums for keeping the country on the pro-Western tracks. While the Georgian populist government is experiencing “Orbanization”, as different pundits note (de Waal 2023), European mature democracies are seen as important supporters of Georgia’s democratization. Saying this, Slovakia’s democracy matters hugely for such turbulent democracies as Georgia. With some other European parties leaning towards conservative populism, Slovakia’s Smer-SSD will either become another illiberal toolkit for the Georgian Dream ruling party, or will safeguard the idea of European democracy in Georgian society.

Geopolitically, Slovakia’s anti-democratic leaning might be an additional piece of illiberal geopolitical puzzle in the eastern flank of Europe. This should raise concerns not only for the EU itself (Tarnok 2023) but also for struggling democracies in the neighbourhood. An additional physical barrier between Georgia and democratic Europe might make Georgia’s EU aspiration even more vulnerable to the Russian Anti-Western hybrid war (Seskuria 2021; Nilsson 2021).

Slovakia’s new foreign policy strategy matters, too (Yar 2023). The 2023 elections endanger European support for Ukraine as Robert Fico’s broadly expected U-Turn in Slovakia’s current foreign policy may swing Bratislava towards the pro-Russian vision of global security (Euractiv 2023). This trend jeopardises Georgia’s successful positioning as a country with a real European perspective.

Lastly, receiving another populist state in the CEE Europe can easily have an impact on Georgia’s internal political situation, which has recently been leaning toward populist conservatism (Samkharadze 2023). Not being a necessary game-changer, Slovakia, as a possible additional illiberal toolkit, might motivate Georgian political elites to point the finger at how trendy populist conservatism in Europe is. Hungary has been one of the most important platforms for the GD government to legitimize its power as a pro-Western but conservative one (Government of Georgia 2023).

Thus, based on the case of Georgia, the implications of Slovakia’s snap elections will definitely spill over beyond the EU, which might interestingly contribute to shaping Europe’s foreign policy strategies in the times of Russia’s war in Ukraine and bring about a swift change in the EU’s geopolitics.



ABSTRACT

Elisabeth Bakke – Juraj Marušiak: Three generations of Social Democracy in Slovakia: Same, same, but different

When former prime minister Peter Pellegrini resigned from his position as deputy chairman of Smer – Social Democrats to form his own party Hlas – Social Democrats in June 2020, he launched the third generation of social democratic parties in Slovakia since 1989. By then, his old party was in deep crisis, and for a while it seemed as if the third-generation Hlas would eclipse the second-generation Smer and take over its position as the major social democratic party in Slovakia. However, three years on, Smer won the snap election while Hlas finished third. In the end, Pellegrini preferred a government coalition with the “ideologically closer” Smer to a coalition with Progressive Slovakia, and Robert Fico could form his fourth government. In this article we explore how much these two nominally social democratic parties differ in terms of ideology, organization, and parliamentary elites, and whether and to what extent their electorates differ in terms of social groups and geography. To contextualize the findings, we also compare the two current social democratic parties to the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), the major first-generation social democratic party in Slovakia.



ABSTRACT

Vladimír Hurban: The Takeover of “Republika” Party as a Major Player on the Far-Right Scene after the 2023 Elections in Slovakia

In 2013, Slovakia witnessed a shock in a regional election when Marian Kotleba, the most prominent figure of the extreme right, won the election over the ruling party's candidate to become governor of the Banská Bystrica region. Three years later, this success was followed by a surprise parliamentary election in 2016, which brought his party with a neo-Nazi background into the Slovak parliament. Now, ten years later since the first electoral success of the former flagship party for Slovak extreme right, it is sinking in all relevant polls. In its place, however, a new party called “Republika” has emerged. This new party is more streamlined, with a different communication style, proclaiming to have cut off ties with its predecessor's past.

This paper will analyse the electoral results of the “Republika” party and LSNS in the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election. By examining the results of the past three elections, we will compare LSNS's previous electoral performance with that of the newly established “Republika”. The goal is to determine whether the factors connected to the previous success of LSNS still apply in the case of the new leader of the far right in Slovakia. We will investigate results at district level to define district level variables which could have a potential influence on higher support for a far-right parties.



ABSTRACT

Jana Lindbloom – Jana Strussová: **Rule of law and law enforcement: Rhetorical devices in competing narratives**

One of the major themes enacted during the political campaign for the Parliamentary election of 2023 was the concern for the state and prospects of democracy and rule of law in Slovakia. The unprecedented investigations of alleged corruption among high-ranked politicians and state officers resulted in an intense political controversy regarding the strategies and methods of law enforcement. Drawing on the concept and theory of sensemaking as well as studies in ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and narrative analysis, this presentation examines various devices employed in the effort to strengthen persuasiveness and reasonable position in the competing narratives and political contestation. In the midst of the extraordinary events, the main protagonists of the opposing viewpoints put forward compelling accounts in order to make sense of the ongoing affairs. These kinds of naturally occurring data allow for the inspection of both the congruent and divergent features of their sensemaking, interpretative and argumentative work. Focusing on the narrative plurality and framing contests, it is argued that certain types of sensemaking and particular institutional positions invoke distinct realms for action and imply various degrees of urgency, determination and political mobilization.



ABSTRACT

Jaroslav Ušiak: **Digital Struggle: The Dynamics of Political Parties on Social Media in the Slovak Political Space**

In the rapidly evolving European political landscape, Slovak democratic institutions are contending with the pervasive rise of anti-democratic ideologies disseminated through digital channels. This article probes the intricate dynamics between established political parties and emergent movements, particularly their exploitation of new communication tools in the digital space to woo voters. It zeroes in on the conflict manifesting on social media platforms, evaluating the communication strategies and narratives crafted to influence the Slovak electorate.

Employing critical discourse analysis, this research scrutinizes the communicative exchanges during pivotal periods, notably February 2020, January 2022, and September 2023, to track the evolution of political discourse on Facebook. The methodological approach combines qualitative analysis with a temporal case study, shedding light on the shifting digital rhetoric.

The findings reveal a pronounced shift among traditional parties towards more radical and populist themes, underscoring an adaptation to the digital medium's demands for attention. Such changes in communication strategies suggest an increasing complexity in the battle for voter allegiance. The conclusions drawn here underscore the imperative for democratic societies to navigate the intricacies of political communication in the digital era, offering insights into the broader implications for democratic engagement and policymaking.



ABSTRACT

Norbert Kmet': **Politicians and the Proclaimed Importance of Science and Research**

In the run-up to the elections, political parties mainly state in their agendas their intentions to improve the situation in society. Official documents often declare that a knowledge-based society cannot be created unless there is support for science, research or education. By analysing the election manifestos, especially of the relevant political parties, we will point out that politicians mostly acknowledge the importance of these sectors for society, clearly demonstrating their interest in these areas or lack thereof by the latter's position on the agenda and the extent to which they are mentioned. Technocratism, i.e., a constant need to quantify and rank everything, has been prevalent in recent decades. In the field of science policy, decisions are made not only by politicians but also by high-ranking officials who are involved in the preparation of various documents related to science, research and education. While most politicians express their support for science, they argue that there are currently more important issues to be attended to that require funding to be secured. What is more, some politicians even openly show their disrespect for humanities and social sciences. This may be part of politics, including the now-prevailing populism. The lack of interest in science and research and in the results achieved in these areas persists, even though politicians are happy to refer to scientific authorities whenever necessary, exploiting findings that are comparable with the results achieved abroad. Nonetheless, an opinion is created in society that there is no need for those scholarly disciplines that do not yield financial profit.



ABSTRACT

Peter Just: A Barrier Against Liberalism? Coalition Formation Process Following the 2023 Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic

The paper focuses on the coalition formation process that followed immediately after the 2023 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Using the framework of theories of coalitions, the paper analyses both the pre-election and post-election coalition strategies of the parties that succeeded in the parliamentary elections. It looks into the factors that have been influencing these strategies, as well as those that influenced the ultimate coalition formation. The paper also touches on major obstacles and challenges the new coalition may face in future. Eventually, the paper also focuses on the key cleavage that has recently been present in (not only) Slovak politics: illiberalism vs. liberal democracy.



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