

# POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES AND THE RHETORIC OF EMOTIONS: THE SLOVAK CASE STUDY

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## Abstract

*This article analyses the emotional rhetoric of the populist radical right parties in Slovakia - the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) - in their 2016 and 2020 election manifestos. Emotional rhetoric, or pathos, consists of emotional appeals, and this article looks specifically at four discrete appeals to emotions: retrospective anger and enthusiasm; and prospective fear and hope, and connects these emotional appeals with topics according to their relevance. This research utilises qualitative content analysis drawing categories from the field of political psychology. Unexpectedly, it is found that positive emotional appeals are generally more common than negative ones in the election manifestos of the populist radical right. The second finding is that populist radical right parties with government experience apply a very different strategy in their emotional rhetoric. The more extreme ĽSNS, without government experience, relies more on the negative emotional appeal of anger, and SNS, with extensive government experience, relies on the positive emotional appeals of hope and enthusiasm. Furthermore, these cases confirm the hypothesis that a populist radical right party that uses more appeals to anger has greater success in general elections.*

**Keywords:** *Emotional appeals, Emotional rhetoric, Pathos, Cognitive appraisal theory, The populist radical right, The far-right, Slovakia.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the appeals to emotions made by radical right political parties and by classifying the kinds of appeals used, it examines whether there are variations in the sorts of appeals used by individual parties. As a case study, the objects of research are populist radical right parties

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in Slovakia, namely Kotlebists - People's Party - Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana - Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS) and the Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS) (see: Kevický, 2022), and we investigate how these parties used appeals to emotions in their election manifestos for the 2016 and 2020 Slovak parliamentary elections.

SNS is a mainstream nationalist party that has been in parliament and government regularly since the fall of Communism and had ministers in the first government of independent Slovakia (1992 – 1994). However, SNS only formally became a part of the government coalition in October 1993 after the largest governing parties, Movement for Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko - HZDS), split and lost a number of its parliamentary deputies (Puskášová, 2009). SNS was also a government party from 1994 - 1998, 2006 – 2010 and 2016 - 2020. However, the party retained very radical positions on some topics (especially on the Roma minority and immigration). From its creation in 1990, it was very hostile to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The situation gradually changed with the new SNS Leader, Andrej Danko, in 2012 to the point where he was in a coalition government with the Hungarian minority party, Bridge (Most-Híd) from 2016 to 2020.

The second party examined in this research, ĽSNS, first stood in parliamentary elections in 2010 and is also strongly nationalist, with the Roma minority and immigrants currently its primary targets. However, the populist radical right ĽSNS is more extreme than SNS. This means that ĽSNS challenges the current democratic system and would like to see alterations to it. Some other experts have labelled the party as a far-right (Smolecová and Šárovec, 2021) or ultra-nationalist and extremist party (Kukovič and Just, 2022). In the past, the ĽSNS party used to proclaim itself as a non-political actor (Žúborová and Borarosová, 2017), in line with the party's populist self-identification with the 'pure people' against the 'corrupt elite'. If we look at the Slovak populist radical right in terms of its transnational party membership in the European Parliament (EP), ĽSNS has been non-aligned to any European political party since winning seats in the 2019 EP elections. SNS belonged to the Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Democracy group when it had EP seats from 2009-2014, so SNS is known on the European stage as well as being a well-established party actor in Slovakia.

Appeals to emotions are of high research importance as an important tool in political communication. The intention of the emotional appeal is to evoke a certain emotion in the audience, i.e. *pathos* in Aristotelian terms. The topic of appeals to emotions has mainly been researched by political psychologists

and political scientists. Some quantitative studies on emotional appeals are based on big data (see: e.g. Widmann, 2021; Valentim and Widmann, 2023), and they ascribe emotional appeals based on the meaning of a single word (e.g. the word *threat* or *danger* refers to an appeal to fear), not the whole sentence. This can be slightly misleading, as the same word can bear a different emotional appeal depending on the context in which the word is placed. Other researchers of emotional appeals have conducted experiments (e.g. Nerb and Spada, 2001; Brader, 2006; Valentino et al., 2011; Weber, 2012; Song, 2016) bringing valuable identification of emotional appeals but also of their effects on political behaviour. Yet another branch of research on appeals to emotions (e.g. Ridout and Searles, 2011; Searles and Ridout, 2017) is based on a qualitative design that does not allow for analysis of a wide population of data, nor the study of human behaviour, but may offer researchers a deeper understanding of the emotional rhetoric utilised in political discourse and then contextual understanding of emotional appeals.

The primary aim of this research is to clarify the nature of emotional rhetoric employed by populist radical right parties. Additionally, it presents an insightful approach to identifying emotional appeals within political discourse introduced to the Central and Eastern Europe context, specifically Slovakia.

Our research employs a qualitative design with some quantitative data processing with the aims to a) identify what emotional rhetoric is used in election campaigns and b) whether some difference between the parties of the common radical right sphere (within the Slovak political spectrum) could be observed. The analysis focused on a total of four election manifestos released by the SNS and ĽSNS parties for the Slovak parliamentary elections held in 2016 and 2020. Two independent coders coded manifestos. Every sentence in the manifestoes stands for a coding unit and each coding unit was assigned to one of five categories: 1) no emotional appeal, 2) appeal to enthusiasm, 3) appeal to hope, 4) appeal to anger, and 5) appeal to fear. When identifying the dominant appeal in the sentence. The coders, a PhD student of political science and a PhD Student of applied psychology, were instructed to consider context, i.e. the preceding and following sentences in the manifestos. Validity of the results was ensured by measuring such use of multiple coders and calculating inter-coder agreement.

When analysing the data, the hypotheses took into account that the literature on the populist radical right suggests that these parties should rely more on negative rather than positive emotional rhetoric (e.g. Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, Widmann, 2021, Valentim and Widmann, 2023).

We also had expectations, based on the functional theory, that incumbent parties should be more positive in their rhetoric than their challenging counterparts. Finally, based on cognitive appraisal theory (e.g. Brader, 2006; Valentino et al., 2011; Searles and Ridout, 2017), we hypothesise that parties with more anger appeals should have greater success in elections.

This article begins by exploring the literature on the populist radical right in Slovakia, with specific emphasis on the categorisation of the SNS and ĽSNS parties, pertaining to the role of emotional appeals in the discourse of these parties. Followed by a methodological section which introduces three hypotheses. Finally, the study advances to an analytical phase, culminating in the presentation of results. The article concludes with a comprehensive review of the findings.

## **1 THE POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT IN SLOVAKIA**

There are several ways of classifying ĽSNS and SNS. They could be designated as far right (Smolecová and Šárovec, 2021), radical right or even extreme right and in the case of ĽSNS also the national populist (Kukovič and Just, eds., 2022). This article embraces Mudde's (2007) term 'populist radical right'. Mudde defines it by specifying three core features: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Nativism means that the territory of the state should be inhabited only by the members of the nation, the 'native group', and non-natives are considered to be a danger to society; authoritarianism refers to a 'strictly ordered society', where any misconduct against the authority is severely punished; and populism depicts the ruling class as rotten in comparison to the 'pure people' (Mudde, 2007, pp. 22-23). Populists frame their rhetoric as if they were outside the political establishment (Mudde, 2007; Ernst, Engesser and Esser, 2017; Widmann, 2021). Both analysed parties bear traits of nativism (opposing immigration and the Roma minority), and populism, and display some authoritarian elements. Mudde (2007, p. 307) himself classifies SNS Party as a populist radical right party. ĽSNS proves all the three core features of a populist radical right party. However, there is a difference between the two parties since SNS could be viewed as a 'mainstream' nationalist party (Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová, 2016), well-established in Slovakia's democratic system. SNS, as mentioned above, was a member of several Slovak governments between 1993 and 2020, whereas ĽSNS is an inherently anti-system party (Filipec, 2017). Moreover, in 2019 it faced a threat of dissolution by the Supreme Court of Slovak Republic because Facebook posts of its members wished to

alter the current democratic political system. Other Slovak parties generally did not consider it a credible coalition partner (Garaj, Bardovič, and Mihálik, 2021). Nonetheless, both parties exploit the same topics of nationalism and nativism, immigration, minority issues, and populism. They support the role of a strong state and the 'firm hand' of the government, which are traits of authoritarianism. Therefore, they are categorised as belonging to the same family of the populist radical right.

### **1.1 The Role of Emotional Appeals in Populist Radical Right Rhetoric**

The literature on the far right recognises that the strategy of European populist radical right parties is based on fear. Fear is an essential tool by which the far right homogenises the in-group and polarises its relationship towards the out-group (Mudde, 2007, p. 109). Fear helps to create a societal bond, giving individuals the feeling of belonging to a community that will protect them against outside threats, and the politics of fear is a well-known concept in terrorist and anti-terrorist campaigns (Mudde, 2007). As Mudde (2007) explains, 'The perfect breeding ground for populist radical right parties is one in which there are widespread insecurities and resentment' (p. 297). Insecurity is a form of fear which stems from the perception of threat or danger, whereas resentment, or indignation at being treated unfairly, is a form of anger. Kazharski (2019, p. 6) notes that 'SNS' rhetoric contributes to the creation of an 'atmosphere of fear, mistrust and a general sense of degeneration of the system'.

Another important negative emotion in the literature on the far right is anger (Bustikova, 2019), and resentment against minority groups in particular fuels support for far-right parties. Resentment is a feeling of some loss connected to a desire to take revenge for harm caused so it is an intense form of anger that stimulates revenge. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 47) also stress the role of anger in the success of populist movements: '...the key strength of a populist social movement relies on its capacity to interpret a widespread feeling of anger with the establishment and convincingly propose that the solution lies in the sovereign people'. According to this definition, anger is an integral part of populist rhetoric directly aimed at elites: populist rhetoric positions the 'pure' people against a corrupt elite.

## 1.2 Appeals to Discrete Emotions

The model of discrete emotions allows for discerning between individual emotions. The valence model merely distinguishes between positive and negative dimensions of emotions, without a concern for specific discrete emotions, such as fear and anger - these represent the negative valence, whereas hope and enthusiasm represent the positive valence. This research adds yet another original and very important aspect to the valence, specifically the retrospective and prospective direction of emotional appeals. Therefore, the campaigns are analysed from the angle of cognitive appraisal theory. Based on its theoretical background (see, e.g., Marcus et al., 2000; Weber, 2012; Valentino et al., 2011, Brader, 2006; Ridout and Searles, 2011; Steenbergen and Ellis, 2006; Brader and Marcus 2013, Troost et al., 2013), this article identifies four main emotions that are considered to have a crucial impact on voting behaviour: hope and fear are prospective emotions, and enthusiasm and anger are retrospective emotions. Hope and fear share uncertainty about what will happen - fear with negative and hope with positive expectations - but both emotions are appraisals of the future (Robinson, 2008, pp. 155-159). Enthusiasm and anger are reactions to something that is already happening or happened in the past.

Hope has a forward-looking (prospective) orientation and is a very important political emotion as voters wish for their elected representatives to represent their goals, interests and values. Hope is wishing for a better future (Brader and Marcus, 2013, p. 175), and is connected to a specific object in the future (Just et al., 2007, p. 235-236). The expectation of a positive outcome creates hope. In the words of a professor of medicine, Groopman (2004, p. 19), hope involves the so-called 'affective forecasting', that is, 'the comforting, energizing, elevating feeling that you experience when you project in your mind a positive future. This requires the brain to generate a different affective, or feeling, state than the one you are currently in.' Moreover, it is a compensatory emotion to fear (Just et al., 2007, p. 236), so in order to mitigate fear, the speakers should elicit hope in their audience.

There is relatively little research on the effect that the discrete emotion of hope has on voting behaviour. The valence (positive/negative) model (e.g., Brader, 2005) does not distinguish between hope and enthusiasm: it places them both under the category of enthusiasm and does not specifically look at the separate effects of these discrete emotions. In political psychology, enthusiasm comprises a spectrum of positive emotions such as happiness, hope and pride (Zajonc, 1998; Brader, 2005; Marcus et al, 2000; Valentino

et al., 2011, Brader and Marcus, 2013), as well as optimism (Weber, 2012, p. 417), elevation, and gratitude (Haidt, 2003). This article understands the emotions of gratitude, elevation, joy and pleasure to be part of the broader concept of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is considered an important positive emotion in political psychology (e.g. Marcus et. al, 2000; Brader, 2006; Ridout and Searles 2011). It can lead voters to depend more on their prior beliefs. It increases commitment, strengthens involvement, and has a positive effect on motivation (Brader, 2005, p. 390). The result is that enthusiasm strengthens the conviction that what one is doing is right and that one should continue to follow a set path and keep existing loyalties. It stimulates political involvement and reinforces prior attitudes when making decisions (Marcus et al., 2000, Valentino et al. 2011, Brader and Marcus, 2013) and sparks greater interest in the campaign (Brader, 2005).

Hope should be differentiated from enthusiasm as a separate discrete emotion due to a difference between the events that elicit these emotions, according to the certainty that they will happen: retrospective events have already happened or are happening, while prospective events might or might not happen. Since negative emotions cause different voting behaviour depending on whether they are retrospective (anger) or prospective (fear), we believe that the prospective hope deserves the same academic attention as the retrospective enthusiasm and its effects on political behaviour should be specified.

Looking at negative emotions, fear is associated with a general (imagined) threat to someone's well-being (Kemper, 2004; Lazarus, 1991; Steenbergen and Ellis, 2006). The common unifying theme around which fear is centred is the perception of threat or danger (e.g., Marcus et. al, 2000; Brader, 2006, Steenbergen and Ellis, 2006). Put simply, 'Fear is a reaction to the threat' (Brader, 2005, p. 390). It is a reaction to dangers of unknown origin, like unexpected noises or objects; or it can be a reaction to something that previous experience suggests is associated with danger (Brader and Marcus, 2013, p. 177). Fear, or anxiety, is generally understood as a reaction to the risk or threat of imminent harm (Song, 2016), to new uncertain circumstances outside one's control, or to a threat to one's well-being or way of life and values (Steenbergen and Ellis, 2006, p. 112). It is a reaction to danger, and it is an appraisal of the future (Robinson, 2008) and is thus a prospective emotion.

According to cognitive appraisal theory, frightened individuals may shrink from 'costly political action' (Valentino et al., 2011, p. 2), such as taking part in a demonstration or petition, while fear also leads to an openness to

new information and therefore decreases the reliance on heuristics (see, Brader, 2006; Redlawsk et al. 2010; Brader and Marcus, 2013; Song 2016). Moreover, fear of other candidates increases the willingness of people to support their preferred candidate financially (Miller et al., 2017). Fear rhetoric is a good strategy for the incumbent, ruling party because in many instances the government needs to regulate the behaviour of the masses so that they are inclined towards inaction rather than action.

However, anger may be a stronger emotion in political campaigns. Anger is usually triggered by perceived injustice, insults, unfair treatment, or betrayal affecting the self or other members of the in-group (Haidt, 2003, pp. 854–856; Song, 2016). From a political perspective, Steenbergen and Ellis (2006, p. 110) find that anger (aversion) is elicited by affronts to core beliefs and values, or when voters believe they are being harmed on purpose, or that another person could have done something to mitigate the negative effects of an event but failed to do so (Steenbergen and Ellis, 2006, p. 113). Nerb and Spada (2001) conducted an experiment in which they portrayed a fictional scenario of an ecological catastrophe where a tanker spilt oil into the ocean. The less control there was over the accident (for example, if it was caused by bad weather conditions), the less angry people were; the more control they had over the accident (for example, if the damage was caused by neglect of safety procedures), the greater the anger of participants in the experiment.

Belonging to the in-group is also important for creating emotions. A group member personalises the events that harm or favour an in-group (Troost et al., 2013, p. 192). Anger can function as a motivator for voters to be more active and play a more participatory societal role (MacKuen et. al. 2010) and can boost participation, but it may also weaken the analytical approach and cause an over-reliance on heuristics, a person might not search for new information (Valentino et al., 2009) and selectively avoid some information, relying more on instincts (Song, 2016).

## **2 METHODS**

This research analyses four election manifestos presented by SNS and ĽSNS for the 2016 and 2020 Slovak parliamentary elections. These manifestos were divided into 1734 coding units, that is, sentences or phrases consisting of a subject and a predicate. Two independent coders coded manifestos: one was a female doctoral research student of Political Science, and the other was a male doctoral research student of Applied Psychology. Each coding unit



was assigned five categories: no emotional appeal, appeal to enthusiasm, appeal to hope, appeal to anger, and appeal to fear. Coders were instructed to consider the context (the preceding and following sentences) to choose the appeal that seems dominant in the sentence. The coding unit in this case is a *theme*, a phrase with its own meaning, so if a sentence includes several sub-sentences, this article considers each sub-sentence as a single coding unit. The list of themes or topics with short descriptions can be found in Table 1 below. Assigning no topic to a data unit was also a possibility. Coders assigned identical topics to the coding unit in 51.4% of total cases ( $\kappa = .44$ ). Points of disagreement were also discussed, and a consensus was reached.

**Table 1:** *List of topics*

	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1</b>	Social Security	Social benefits - help to pensioners, families, people in need and the poor.
<b>2</b>	Health / Health care	Healthcare issues, the health of the population.
<b>3</b>	Economy	Agriculture, industry, taxes, wages, banking sector.
<b>4</b>	Education	The educational system, schools and universities.
<b>5</b>	Immigration	Illegal immigration, immigration quotas.
<b>6</b>	Roma	Roma minority.
<b>7</b>	LGBTI/ Feminism / Gender Equality	LGBTI rights, feminism and gender equality-equality of women and men (equal conditions at work and pay), matriarchy (as opposition to patriarchy).
<b>8</b>	Patriarchy	Traditional roles - the main role within the family and society is attributed to men, a woman's value is derived from a man and from the role of a mother.
<b>9</b>	Conservatism	Christianity, Christian values, and traditional values are usually anchored in religion.
<b>10</b>	Liberalism	New (imported) values, open and equal society, opposition to traditional values.
<b>11</b>	Populism	Discontent with political elites: pure people vs. corrupt politicians/ oligarchs/financial groups.
<b>12</b>	Militarism	Guns, army and its importance.

13	Nationalism / Nativism	Protection and conservation of national purity of Slovakia, Slovakia to Slovaks.
14	EU	European Union, Eurozone, Euro currency.
15	USA / NATO	United States of America, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
16	The West	Combination of the EU, USA and NATO.
17	Russia	Russian Federation, the East.

To illustrate the coding process, here is an excerpt from the LSNS 2020 manifesto:

*'We are the only ones with the courage to protect Slovakia (appeal: enthusiasm, topic: nationalism/nativism), so that it is the same for our children as it was for us (appeal: hope, topic: nationalism/nativism)... The People's Party Our Slovakia and its partners are the only political power (appeal: enthusiasm, topic: nationalism) which can stop dangerous liberals in their aspiration to destroy Slovakia (appeal: fear, topic: nationalism/nativism) the same way that they destroyed the countries of Western Europe (appeal: anger, topic: the West).'*

## 2.1 Data Analysis

When the coding was completed, we checked the validity of our results by taking measures such as calculating inter-coder agreement. Inter-rater agreement was calculated to assess the reliability of our coding scheme. The coders agreed on the appeal category in 77.2% of the data units. However, because the percentage rate of agreement does not take the possibility of random agreement into account, we also calculated Cohen's kappa index, which showed a satisfactory level of agreement, over 0.6 ( $\kappa = .65$ ). The contingency table of codes assigned by the coders can be seen in Appendix 1. Points of disagreement were discussed among the authors and coders, and a consensus was reached for each of them. In addition to emotional appeals, coders also assigned topics to data units so that we could also evaluate the context in which emotional appeals are used by LSNS and SNS. The topics were pre-constituted, having been identified by the authors as the main topics of the manifestos when they broke the text down into single coding units and prepared the coding sheets.

Quantitative analysis was performed via IBM SPSS 20 and Jamovi. Apart from frequencies and percentages, we also calculated the Chi-

square test and Z-score for two population proportions to determine the statistical significance of differences in the frequency of appeals between manifestos. The Chi-squared test was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference when comparing multiple values, while the Z-score for two population proportions was used when comparing specific pairs of values (i.e., ratios of appeals in manifestos). Because tests of statistical significance only determine the generalisability of the finding, we also calculated pertaining effect sizes (Cramer's V and Cohen's h), which determine the strength of the difference when comparing values. Cohen's h was calculated additionally via a calculator on the Statistics Kingdom website (StatsKingdom, n.d.)

## 2.2 Hypotheses

During election periods, emotional discourse is ubiquitous, and emotions of fear and anger in particular are at the forefront when scholars and journalists refer to the 'nation's mood' (Valentino et al., 2011, p. 156). The success of populist radical right parties lies in their extensive use of negative emotional rhetoric (Widmann, 2021), which leads to the first hypothesis:

*H1: Negative appeals, such as appeals to fear and anger, are the prevalent emotional appeals in the rhetoric of populist radical right parties.*

The functional theory of political communication, on the other hand, holds that the rhetoric of incumbent parties is usually more positive than that of challenging parties, and that election campaigns function as an informal cost-benefit analysis for voters, where they consider 'costs (attacks and defence) and benefits (acclaims)' (Benoit, 2017, p. 197). Incumbents remind the voters of their accomplishments, whereas challengers point to their shortcomings. Both sides typically deal with the performance of the incumbent party more than with the record of the challenger, but they do so from a different perspective: the incumbents acclaim and challengers attack (Dudek and Partacz, 2009). Both types of parties would also defend if under attack (Benoit, 2017). The functional theory discerns merely the emotional valence of the rhetoric, with positive being the benefit (acclaim), and negative being the cost (attack and defence). We, therefore, present the second hypothesis:

*H2: Incumbent populist radical right parties use more positive than negative emotions than their opposition counterparts.*

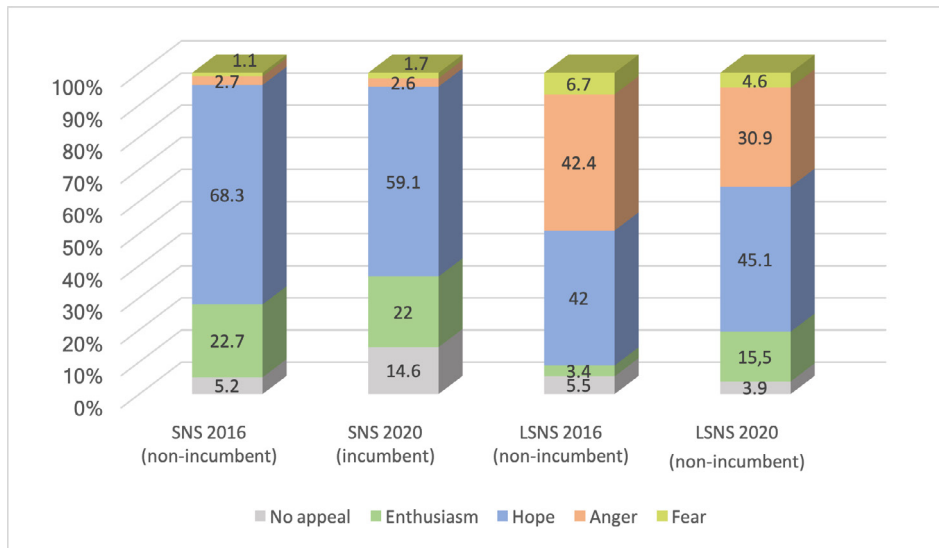
The cognitive appraisal theory assumes that anger and enthusiasm are mobilising emotions. Anger would appear to be a good emotional strategy for both incumbent and non-incumbent parties, as both need to secure participation in elections, and the avoidance of new information might discourage the voter from seeking more information about political matters so that their prior beliefs and voting affinity would not be challenged. Later research indicates that there is a strong link between anger and the success of populist right-wing parties (Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza, 2017; Salmela and von Scheve, 2018), so the third and ultimate hypothesis is:

*H3: A populist radical right party with more anger appeals enjoys greater success in elections.*

### **3 RESULTS**

As can be seen in Figure 1, the appeals to hope were the most prevalent in three of four manifestos. However, the frequency of the remaining appeals seems to be more varied. We had to use the Chi-Square test to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the manifestos. The Chi-square test confirmed that the differences in the frequency of appeals between the four manifestos are statistically significant (the results of Chi-squared tests are presented in Table 2). We have confirmed that the manifestos are not identical in their proportion of emotional appeals. We also looked at the differences between specific appeals and the analysis showed there were significant for each of them: none of the appeals was used in the same proportion by LSNS and SNS in 2016 and 2020.

**Figure 1:** *The percentual proportions of appeals in particular manifestos*



*Source: Created by the authors*

The first hypothesis (H1) was that ‘Negative appeals, such as appeals to fear and anger, are the prevalent emotional appeals in the rhetoric of populist radical right parties.’ This research showed that this only applies to LSNS’s 2016 manifesto, where negative appeals were identified in 49.1% of coding units, compared to 45.4% for positive appeals. In the other manifestos, there was a prevalence of positive emotional appeals, hope, and enthusiasm (see Figure 1). Although our research shows that negative appeals prevailed in only one case, we would stress that the occurrence of negative emotional appeals, especially the appeal to anger, is significantly more salient for the more extreme LSNS than for the more mainstream SNS. The most prevalent appeals are positive ones, namely the appeal to hope. In only one case – the 2016 LSNS manifesto – is the negative appeal of anger stronger, though not to a great extent (anger 42.4%, hope 42%).

**Table 2:** *Chi-square tests of all appeals across all four manifestos<sup>3</sup>*

<b>appeal</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>p</b>	<b>V</b>
anger		.298	< .001	.415
fear		21.9	< .001	.112
hope	3	74.7	< .001	.208
enthusiasm		49.2	< .001	.168
no appeal		49.1	< .001	.168
all appeals	12	385	< .001	.272

*Source: Created by the authors*

SNS had fewer appeals to hope in 2020 than in 2016: appeals to hope were present in 68.3% of their manifesto in 2016, compared to 59.1% in 2020. The difference was statistically significant, but it is on the margin between a small and a negligible effect ( $Z = 2.793$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $h = .19$ ). SNS, in general, appealed more to positive and less to negative emotions whereas in the case of LSNS, appeals to anger were used very frequently. They were present in 42.9% of the 2016 LSNS manifesto, while in 2020, it was 30.9%. As we can see, there is a decrease in appeals to anger that is small but statistically significant ( $Z = 3.197$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $h = .24$ ). Along with the decrease in appeals to anger, there was also an increase in appeals to enthusiasm in LSNS ( $Z = 4.890$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $h = .44$ ). Although negative emotions are very important for the rhetoric of the populist radical right, positive emotions, primarily hope, prevail in the rhetoric of the populist radical right parties. The in-party comparisons are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** *Z-tests of two-population proportions for in-party comparisons<sup>4</sup>*

<b>appeal</b>	<b>SNS 2016 vs. SNS 2020</b>			<b>LSNS 2016 vs. LSNS 2020</b>		
	<b>Z</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>h</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>h</b>
<b>anger</b>	0.081	.935	.00	3.197	.001	.24
<b>fear</b>	.675	.500	.00	1.29	.196	.10

<sup>3</sup> Note: In the case of individual appeals, their frequency was compared to the frequency of all other appeal categories.

<sup>4</sup> Note: For Hedges'  $h$ , the interpretation is following – over 0.2 for small difference, over 0.5 for medium difference, and over 0.8 for large difference.

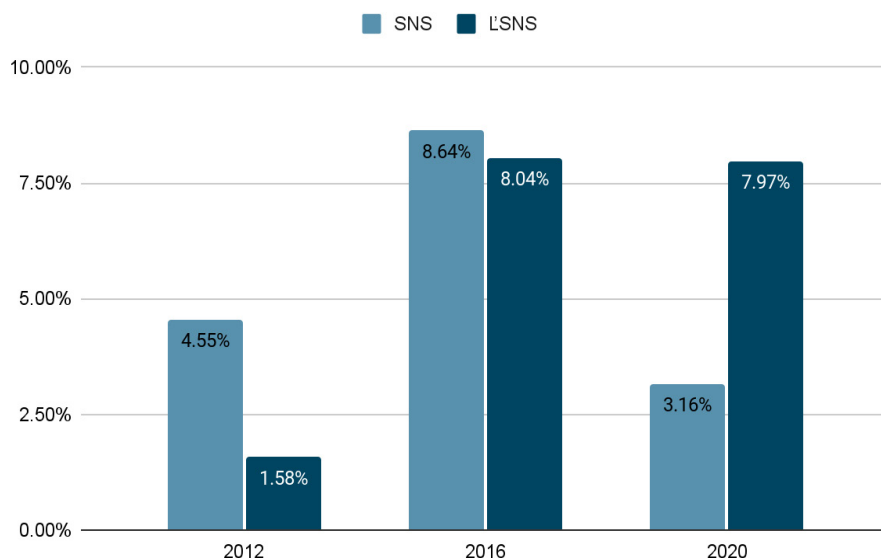
<b>hope</b>	2.793	.005	.19	.805	.421	.06
<b>enthusiasm</b>	.234	.815	.02	4.89	<.001	.44
<b>no appeal</b>	4.625	<.001	.32	.993	.321	.07

*Source: Created by the authors*

Our data also refutes the second hypothesis: ‘Incumbent populist radical right parties use more positive than negative emotions in comparison with their opposition counterparts’. In the case of the four manifestos we analysed, incumbency does not play a vital role in the use of positive and negative appeals to emotions. In the case of SNS, there was a change in incumbency, since the party was in government in 2020 but not in 2016, yet the total ratio between the positive and negative valence changed only slightly and without statistical significance. As we can see in Figure 1, in 2020, when the party had been in government, 94.8% of appeals were positive, compared to 95.6% in 2016. Our results do show, however, that there was a significant change in the overall use of emotional appeals, both positive and negative, between the incumbency and non-incumbency period. For SNS there was a small increase in sentences containing no appeal, from 5.2% in 2016 to 14.6% in 2020 ( $Z = 4.625, p < .001, h = .32$ ). In the case of ĽSNS, which was never an incumbent party, the difference in the proportion of sentences without emotional appeal between 2016 and 2020 was not significant. Based on this case we argue that the incumbent party uses fewer emotional appeals when compared to the campaigns of parties not in government.

Our research confirms the third hypothesis, ‘A populist radical right party with more anger appeals has greater success in elections’. The significance of this may be limited, as there are of course many other factors affecting the election result, but we present an overview of the electoral gains of the two parties in three Slovak parliamentary elections in Figure 2. The figure shows the 2012 election, where both parties were non-incumbent, as well as the 2016 and 2020 elections that were the focus of our research since the success of a party can be measured through comparison to its results in previous elections.

**Figure 2:** Percentage of the vote gained by SNS and ĽSNS in the Slovak parliamentary elections



Source: *Výsledky parlamentných volieb 2020, 2023a; Výsledky parlamentných volieb 2016, 2023b, Výsledky parlamentných volieb 2012, 2023c.*

Based on these results, ĽSNS is a party which managed to grow from a marginal party with 1.58% of the vote in 2012 – less than the 5% necessary to gain seats in the Slovak parliament – to a medium-sized party with 8.04% of the vote and 14 of the 150 seats in the Parliament in 2016. ĽSNS was highly dependent on anger appeals in 2016, even more than in 2020. The difference between the two parties in the use of anger appeals is far more significant, with ĽSNS appealing to anger more frequently in both years (42.4% in 2016:  $Z = 13.257$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $h = 1.09$ ; and 30.9% in 2020:  $Z = 11.298$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $h = .85$ ). In the rhetoric of SNS, on the other hand, the appeals of anger (2.7% in 2016, 2.6% in 2020) and fear (1.1% in 2016, 1.7% in 2020) were not utilised that much. There were no significant increases or decreases in these appeals.

As we can see in Table 4, the two parties became less different in the use of emotional appeals before the 2020 elections. In 2020, ĽSNS still appealed more to fear and less to enthusiasm with statistical significance, but the actual size of these differences did not even reach the margin of a small effect.



**Table 4:** *Z-tests of two-population proportions for between-party comparisons*

appeal	SNS 2016 vs. LSNS 2016			SNS 2020 vs. LSNS 2020		
	Z	p	h	Z	p	h
anger	13.257	< .001	1.09	11.298	< .001	.85
fear	4.01	< .001	.31	2.52	.012	.17
hope	6.63	< .001	.53	4.46	< .001	.282
enthusiasm	6.57	< .001	.62	2.67	.008	.17
no appeal	.137	.891	.01	6.19	< .001	.39

We did not compare the manifestos of the parties from 2012 as LSNS was only a marginal player at that time, but in the elections of 2016 and 2020, our results do suggest a pattern: the more anger appeals the populist radical right party uses, the better the election result.

### 3.1 Qualitative Text Examples: Appeals Assigned to Topics

We also looked at the topics to which the appeals are linked in the manifestos analysed (see Table 1). Analysis revealed that appeals to hope were quite prevalent across the manifestos, and as can be seen in Table 3, in the 2016 SNS manifesto appeals to hope were mostly linked to the economy ( $n = 85, 32.3\%$ )<sup>5</sup>, but also to nationalism/nativism ( $n = 45, 17.1\%$ ), social security ( $n = 36, 13.7\%$ ) and education ( $n = 30, 11.4\%$ ). Appeals to enthusiasm were the second most prevalent in the 2016 SNS manifesto and approximately half of them were linked to nationalism/nativism ( $n = 44, 50.6\%$ ), followed by the economy ( $n = 12, 13.8\%$ ). Appeals to fear and anger were scarce in the 2016 SNS manifesto. Half of the appeals to anger ( $n = 6, 50\%$ ) fall under the topic of populism (i.e. hatred against elites), while others were dispersed under other topics.

The association between the appeal to hope and the economy, which was strong in the 2016 SNS manifesto, was even stronger in 2020 ( $n = 85, 39.9\%$ ), after the party had been in government, and the following topics were also more prominent compared to 2016: healthcare ( $n = 27, 12.7\%$ ) and environment ( $n = 27, 12.7\%$ ). Appeals to enthusiasm were mainly linked to

<sup>5</sup> 'n' represents the number of data units and the percentage figure represents the proportion of the specific appeals that was assigned to the stated topic. All percentages except those below 10% are reported in the text.

the economy ( $n = 23, 31.9\%$ ) and education ( $n = 17, 23.6\%$ ), while negative appeals, anger and fear, were too few to make any meaningful inferences about their link to specific topics. As we can see, the focus of appeals to enthusiasm shifted from national pride toward presenting the achievements of the party during its time in government, and a greater emphasis was put on health/healthcare and the environment in appeals to hope.

Anger, which was the most prevalent appeal in the 2016 ĽSNS manifesto, was mostly associated with the Roma minority ( $n = 21, 21\%$ ), followed by populism ( $n = 18, 18\%$ ) and the West ( $n = 16, 16\%$ ). In 2020, the Roma minority and corrupt elites (populism) were also the target of ĽSNS's appeals to anger. However, instead of a geopolitical entity (the West), ĽSNS aimed its anger at an ideological opponent, liberalism ( $n = 18, 12.1\%$ ). In the 2016 manifesto, hope was mainly associated with nationalism/nativism ( $n = 20, 20.4\%$ ), welfare/social security ( $n = 14, 14.3\%$ ) and the economy ( $n = 13, 13.3\%$ ). However, as ĽSNS became more legitimised by its presence in the Parliament, appeals to hope were much less concentrated on national sentiment in 2020, and were mainly associated with the economy ( $n = 79, 31.1\%$ ), followed by social security ( $n = 41, 16.1\%$ ) and healthcare ( $n = 27, 10.6\%$ ). Appeals to fear, though lesser in number, were mostly linked to the West ( $n = 4, 25\%$ ) and populism ( $n = 3, 18.8\%$ ). Appeals to enthusiasm were too few to infer any meaningful findings about its association with specific topics in 2016, but as ĽSNS became more visible and had greater political power, appeals to enthusiasm increased, and in the 2020 manifesto they have been primarily associated with the following topics: social security ( $n = 11, 22.9\%$ ), conservatism ( $n = 7, 14.6\%$ ), populism ( $n = 6, 12.5\%$ ) and the economy ( $n = 5, 10.4\%$ ). Appeals to enthusiasm under the topic of social security mostly expressed the party's concern for, and effort to help, ordinary people, pensioners, young families etc.

**Table 5:** *Examples of Appeals in the Analysed Political Manifestos*

<b>Appeals</b>	<b>Example sentences</b>
<b>SNS 2016</b>	
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	The strong state and proud citizens are the foundation for Slovakia's success!
<b>Hope</b>	We will limit the influence of international monopolies and oligarchs on the socioeconomic development of Slovakia.

<b>Anger</b>	The old continent is facing an organised process of dismantling traditional civilization based on nation-state, ( <i>as well as efforts toward cultural, political, and ethnic destruction of ancestral European nations. - fear</i> )
<b>Fear</b>	Our country is still young and vulnerable.
<b>SNS 2020</b>	
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	We are continuing our successful work in building a strong country.
<b>Hope</b>	We will support Slovak food producers through food subsidy mechanisms.
<b>Anger</b>	We're against any form of discrimination, including so-called positive discrimination against the Slovak majority in mixed territories. The law must be applied to each individual equally.
<b>Fear</b>	We will not allow temporary or permanent military facilities of the United States to be positioned on the air bases Sliach and Kuchyňa, or any other military objects of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic.
<b>LSNS 2016</b>	
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	God has given us the most beautiful country in the world.
<b>Hope</b>	<i>(Once and for all, we will stop feeding antisocial parasites from our taxes. (anger) Whoever does not want to work, should not eat! - anger).</i> From the money that will be saved, we will support young people with enough for them to start a family.
<b>Anger</b>	While many decent families live in terrible conditions, robbers from our government are enjoying unimaginable luxury and parasites are given everything free of charge.
<b>Fear</b>	We will not let our women be harassed by aggressive immigrants, such as German women in Cologne.
<b>LSNS 2020</b>	
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	<i>(‘I got to know Marián Kotleba [the mayor of Rimavská Sobota] when he was the governor of the Banská Bystrica district. - no appeal) ... Now I’ve got to know him more personally and I’ve found he is no extremist. We’ve achieved a lot of good things together – we’ve built and repaired roads, helped pensioners and young people too.’</i>
<b>Hope</b>	We believe that the path to prosperity leads through sensible spending and not endless tax increases.
<b>Anger</b>	Even prisoners are taken much better care than pensioners by our state.

<b>Fear</b>	Andrej Kiska and Peter Pellegrini do not just have the support of LGBT people in common, but also the desire to rule at any cost!
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**Table 6:** Five Topics Most Frequently Associated with Appeals in Analysed Political Manifestos

Appeals	1st topic	2nd topic	3rd topic	4th topic	5th topic
<b>SNS 2016</b>					
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Nationalism / nativism (50.6%)	Economics (13.8%)	Health / Healthcare (9.2%)	Social security (8.0%)	Conservatism (6.9%)
<b>Hope</b>	Economics (32.3%)	Nationalism / Nativism (17.1%)	Social security (13.7%)	Education (11.4%)	Health / Healthcare (5.7%)
<b>Anger</b>	Populism (50.0%)	Nationalism / Nativism (16.7%)	Health / Healthcare (8.3%)	Conservatism (8.3%)	The West (8.3%)
<b>Fear</b>	Conservatism (25.0%)	Populism (25.0%)	Nationalism / Nativism (25.0%)	No topic (25.0%)	
<b>SNS 2020</b>					
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Economics (31.9%)	Education (23.6%)	Militarism (9.7%)	Nationalism / Nativism (9.7%)	Social security (8.3%)
<b>Hope</b>	Economics (39.9%)	Health / Healthcare (12.7%)	Environment (12.7%)	Social security (9.4%)	Education (9.4%)
<b>Anger</b>	Roma minority (30.0%)	Economics (30.0%)	Health / Healthcare (10.0%)	Populism (10.0%)	The West (10.0%)
<b>Fear</b>	Liberalism (50.0%)	No topic (50.0%)			
<b>LSNS 2016</b>					
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Nationalism / nativism (33.3%)	Economics (16.7%)	Conservatism (16.7%)	Populism (16.7%)	Environment (16.7%)
<b>Hope</b>	Nationalism / nativism (20.4%)	Social security (14.3%)	Economics (13.3%)	Populism (11.2%)	Militarism (9.2%)
<b>Anger</b>	Roma minority (21.0%)	Populism (18.0%)	The West (16.0%)	Social security (9.0%)	Economics (9.0%)
<b>Fear</b>	The West (25.0%)	Populism (18.8%)	Conservatism (12.5%)	Roma minority (6.3%)	Liberalism (6.3%)
<b>LSNS 2020</b>					
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Social security (22.9%)	Conservatism (14.6%)	Populism (12.5%)	Economics (10.4%)	Nationalism / nativism (8.3%)

<b>Hope</b>	Economics (31.1%)	Social security (16.1%)	Health / Healthcare (10.6%)	Populism (9.4%)	Nationalism / nativism (6.7%)
<b>Anger</b>	Populism (25.5%)	Roma minority (18.8%)	Liberalism (12.1%)	The West (8.1%)	Health / Healthcare (8.1%)
<b>Fear</b>	Liberalism (25.0%)	Populism (20.8%)	The West (13.7%)	Social security (12.5%)	Economics (8.3%)

*Source: Created by the authors*

## CONCLUSION

Despite our initial expectations, our findings show that populist radical right parties mostly rely on positive rather than negative appeals to emotions. There is a prevalence of positive emotional appeals in three of four manifestos and negative appeals prevail only in the case of the 2016 ĽSNS manifesto (negative 49.1%, positive 45.4%) where anger is the strongest, but only slightly (anger 44.4%, hope 42%). Negative emotional appeals are significantly more prominent in the manifestos of the more extreme ĽSNS than in the SNS manifestos. Populists are interested in portraying the current status quo as negative (Widmann, 2021), so this suggests that SNS is less populist than ĽSNS. The SNS party is also likely to be more positive in its rhetoric because it has previously been in government. The SNS rhetoric is mostly positive, the strongest being the appeal to hope. Mouffe (2005, p. 56) suggests that the success of far-right parties lies in their ability to provide people 'with some form of hope', and this is in line with our findings, where hope is an essential element in the rhetoric of the populist radical right in all the cases analysed, as shown in Figure 1. The dominant negative appeal in the rhetoric of the populist radical right parties we have examined is anger, and not fear as some literature on the far right suggests (e.g., Kazharski, 2019). This finding is in line with the argument of Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza (2017) argument that populism is linked to anger and not fear.

The incumbency of the party does not play a vital role in the proportion of negative and positive emotional rhetoric used by the populist radical right, but it appears rather to depend on whether the party has any government experience. In the case of SNS, there was a change in incumbency in the period examined in this article, but the total ratio of positive and negative appeals did not significantly change (see Figure 1: SNS incumbency 2020: positive 94.8% / non-incumbency 2016: positive 95.9%). What incumbency did affect was the overall proportion of both positive and negative appeals to emotions: based on the findings it appears that the incumbent party

uses fewer emotional appeals compared to campaigns conducted when not in government. SNS had a significant increase in sentences containing no appeal ( $Z = 4.625, p < .000, h = .32$ ) from its non-incumbent campaign in 2016 (5.2%) compared to its incumbent campaign in 2020 (14.6%). In the case of ĽSNS, which was never an incumbent party, the difference in the proportion of sentences without emotional appeal between 2016 and 2020 was not significant.

The article also hypothesised that a populist radical right party with more anger appeals has greater success in elections. ĽSNS was highly reliant on anger appeals in 2016, even more so than in 2020. The difference between ĽSNS and SNS in the use of appeals to anger is far more significant, with ĽSNS appealing to anger more frequently in both years (42.4% in 2016; and 30.9% in 2020). The rhetoric of SNS appeals to anger (2.7% in 2016, 2.6% in 2020) and fear (1.1% in 2016, 1.7% in 2020) were little utilised and there were no significant increases or decreases in these appeals.

ĽSNS is a party which managed to grow from a marginal party with 1.58% of the vote in 2012 to a medium-sized party in 2016 with 8.04% of the votes cast (209,779 votes), which brought 14 of the 150 seats in the Parliament. SNS made its comeback to the Parliament in 2016 with 8.64% of the votes cast, whereas in the previous elections failed to reach the 5% threshold for gaining parliamentary seats by less than half a per cent of the vote (they received 4.55% of the vote), but their growth was not so rapid as that of ĽSNS (see Figure 2). Comparing the results of individual political parties between 2012 and 2016, SNS (Slovak National Party) saw an increase from 4.55% in 2012 to 8.64% in 2016, which represents a gain of 4.09%. ĽSNS increased from 1.58% in 2012 to 8.04% in 2016, resulting in an electoral gain of 6.46%. This is significantly higher than the 4.09% improvement seen by SNS in this period. Therefore, we perceive that the success of ĽSNS is greater because its increase compared to the previous period was larger in comparison to SNS.

Moreover, in 2020 SNS suffered defeat again as they only received 3.15% of the vote, whereas ĽSNS at that point increased their total number of votes to 229,660, even though their percentage of the votes cast was lower (7.97%) because of the higher turnout, and it became the fourth strongest party in the Slovak parliament. This shows that ĽSNS's strategy of using negative appeals and appeals to anger was more successful than SNS's campaign strategies. Therefore, the article's results confirm the third hypothesis that a populist radical right party with more anger appeals has greater success in elections.

This research takes into account that there are other reasons for a party's electoral success than the extent to which it employs emotion in its rhetoric. For example, SNS's decline in popularity in 2020 could be attributed to corruption scandals and the fact that they were part of an unpopular government, under which Slovakia experienced the murder of a journalist for the first time in its modern history. Nonetheless, populist radical right parties strive to win over similar ideologically oriented voters, and the use of fewer emotional appeals to anger than their competitor could be one of the factors leading to SNS's votes declining substantially.

With regards to the final appeal examined, the appeal to enthusiasm, the authors of this article see the difference in the use of appeals to enthusiasm between the two parties, SNS with government experience and ĽSNS without any government experience. There is not a significant change in the use of appeals to enthusiasm in the rhetoric of the incumbent SNS (2020) and the non-incumbent SNS (2016) since appeals to enthusiasm were quite frequent in both SNS manifestos (22.7% in 2016 and 22% in 2020). For ĽSNS there was an increase in appeals to enthusiasm from 3.4% to 15.5%, although there was not a change in incumbency, so the reasons for the increase in enthusiasm appeals in 2020 are not clear-cut. One suspects, however, that a populist radical right party with government experience uses considerably more enthusiasm appeals than a party without any government experience.

The findings of this article could be tested by future research in two areas. Firstly, the methods employed for analysing the emotional appeals in election programmes could be employed more widely on radical right parties in other democracies, and on a broader range of political parties. Secondly, it would be useful to conduct similar research based on different data, such as Facebook, which are communication channels that are nowadays more widely used for the promotion of far-right parties (Garaj, 2018). Such material may be more prone to the use of emotional rhetoric by political parties, but it is ephemeral in nature. The authors of this article, therefore, opted on this occasion for election manifestos, since they are the most authoritative statements of a party's positions.

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**Appendix 1:** *Contingency table of inter-coder agreement*

		Coder 1				No appeal	Total
		Anger	Fear	Enthusiasm	Hope		
Coder 2	Anger	235	4	6	19	0	264
	Fear	42	16	2	38	1	99
	Enthusiasm	34	1	228	76	2	341
	Hope	34	2	9	795	7	847
	No appeal	21	1	24	71	66	183
	Total	366	24	269	999	76	1734