

Voting behavior and municipal elections 2014 in Slovakia

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Voting behavior and municipal elections 2014 in Slovakia. This paper attempts to clarify the patterns of voting behavior among citizens and determinants that could explain voting behavior. In its theoretical part, it deals with the role of party affiliation across several theories of voting behavior - sociological, economic and social-psychological approaches. In section dedicated to interpretation of municipal elections 2014 in regional cities, we evaluate the party identification as the most important factor in voter decision process. We argue, that regional cities are affected by party politics more than smaller cities. Face-to-face contacts with candidates are less frequented and party support plays more and more significant role.

Key words: voting behavior, municipal elections, party affiliation, independent candidates

Voličské správanie a komunálne voľby 2014 na Slovensku. Táto štúdia sa snaží identifikovať vzorce voličského správania medzi slovenským elektorátom a determinanty, ktoré by napomohli vysvetliť takéto správanie. Vo svojej úvodnej teoretickej časti sa zamýšľame nad úlohou straníckej príslušnosti naprieč teóriou voličského správania - sociologickými, sociologicko-psychologickými a ekonomickými prístupmi k tejto problematike. V časti venujúcej sa interpretácii výsledkov komunálnych volieb 2014 v regionálnych mestách hodnotíme práve úlohu straníckej príslušnosti a podpory ako najdôležitejšieho faktoru pri rozhodovanom procese slovenského voliča. Sme presvedčení, že politika v regionálnych mestách je v oveľa väčšej miere ovplyvnená práve straníckou politikou ako v menších mestách. Bezprostredné a osobné kontakty medzi kandidátmi a voličmi sú menej časté a podpora politických strán tu zohráva dôležitejšiu úlohu.

Kľúčové slová: voličské správanie, komunálne voľby, stranícka príslušnosť, nezávislí kandidáti

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Introduction

Voting (electoral) behavior is one of the many features of political behavior, which is mostly understood as a kind of social behavior with a political dimension. We need to distinguish between political behavior and political action. By the term behavior we understand an individual or group response to stimuli, and this response may be less or more deliberate and spontaneous, rational and affective, reflective and conscious. In contrast, the term action designates individual behavior characterized by a certain intention, purpose, goal and planned set of activities leading to the achievement of this objective. Besides voting behavior, political behavior therefore includes many other political behaviors and actions as membership in political parties, candidacy and execution of public offices, participation in social movements, protests, activities of interest groups, etc. „*We shall talk of action whenever we combine into one unit and goal-directed behavior of series that ends in a fairly distinguishable consummatory move*“ (Lazarsfeld 1959: 2). Political sociology views the electoral behavior as a part of political behavior or as a form of citizen participation in politics. We are dealing with political behavior and not political action, because it contains an element of rationality and emotionality, planning and spontaneity (Sopóci 2004).

Research of citizens' voting behavior is therefore part of political behavior or political participation studies and has been carried out since the first half of 19th century. Its aim is to clarify the patterns of voting behavior among citizens and determinants that could explain voting behavior. Regarding this knowledge, it could be possible not only to predict voting behavior but also to influence it. Thus, not only its theoretical but also practical applicability is evident. As early as George Simmel at the beginning of 20th century stated that parallel incorporation of individuals into different social ties causes different weight of the various determinants during an election choice. (Simmel, 1908: 403) Due to interconnectivity of individuals in the society, one concrete fact has a fundamental decisive influence at a specific time, but a few moments later, influence of another fact outweighs the first. Simmel's voting behavior research has generated a large number of factors and mechanisms based on empirical testing. But almost after any attempt to generalize empirical evidence into systematic theory, immediate criticism has emerged. According to some authors, voting behavior is such a versatile phenomenon, that any regularity, pattern and even causes can not be found during the electoral act. (Catt, 1996) Moreover, the diversity of political systems, electoral rules, political parties, as well as the political culture of the society and historical traditions make it impossible to generate a theoretical postulates of voting behavior applicable across countries.

Thus it is not surprising, that only brief axioms of voting behavior are accepted by the scientific community. One of the well known was created by Seymour Lipset in his

famous work, *The Political Man*: „*Men vote more than women; the better educated, more than the less educated; urban residents, more than rural; those between 35 and 55, more than younger or older voters; married persons, more than unmarried; higher status persons, more than lower; members of organizations, more than nonmembers*“ (Lipset, 1982: 182).

The study of voting behavior over the years has occupied a central position in the study of political behavior, both in terms of quantity and quality. It is so obvious that the authors are seeking to develop their own theoretical models of voting behavior, and this wide range of approaches can be distinguished by the nature of their central explanatory concepts into sociological, social-psychological and economic approaches. Although there were some attempts to synthesize knowledges across models into one theory - i.e. integration of party identification within a rational choice framework (see, for example, Fiorina, 1981; Achen, 1992; Gerber and Green, 1998), researchers tried to explain voting behavior using only one of the approaches and decided to ignore the others. In fact, these approaches are almost universally treated as incompatible (Andersen and Heath, 2000). This author suggests that all of the approaches have its merits and limitations, and that they should be seen as complementary rather than as opposing. This article argues that each approach is applicable under different conditions of political context (e.g., different party competition structures and strengths of social cleavages). The best way to understand general patterns of voting is to combine these approaches.

Sociological approaches

Sociological approach to voting behavior emphasizes the influence of social structure. Social group memberships has a major influence on voting choices in elections (Lazarsfeld et al, 1944, Alford, 1967; Rose and Urwin, 1969, 1970; Lijphart, 1979, 1980). Voters will vote for the party that best reflects the interests of their group are considered to be instrumental. The origins of this approach can be traced to the Columbia School, which conducted the first systematic survey of American voters. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues examined 600 potential voters in Erie County, Ohio. During the presidential election campaign of 1940 they interviewed respondents in seven panel interview waves and research has used in a combination of new and recurring questions in each subsequent interview. The study results were published in *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944). The second panel study conducted by a team from Columbia University took place in Elmira, New York in 1948 and constituted the basis for an even more influential book: *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954).

These pioneering studies identified the conditions for social group voting as the following: „*In sum, the conditions underlying persistent voting cleavages seem to be (1) initial social differentiation such that the consequences of political policy are materially or symbolically different for different groups; (2) The conditions of transmissibility from generation to generation; and (3) conditions of physical and social proximity for continued in-group contact in succeeding generations*“ (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954: 75).

Voters' social characteristics affect their electoral behavior by reflecting differences in politically relevant resources (e.g., gender, age, region and ethnic background) or because they reflect specific group interests (e.g., class, religion, ethnic background). The voter is a stable part of a politically clean-cut group with constant political behavior in the long term. An important modification of this sociological paradigm was the work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), who argued that not only the group identity influences voter behavior, but it is also significantly determined by the structure of cleavages. One could argue that this is an important extension of Columbia model, because such distinctions are important when politicized and organized in social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Conflicts between social groups form the ideological spawn of political parties with crystallized political agendas. Political parties are exclusive political representatives of particular socio-economic groups and represent the interests of selected social groups. Citizens in the elections express their membership in a concrete social group via the support of their political party.

It is difficult to deny the existence of social cleavages and their possible impact on attitudes and voting. However, this approach is unable to explain why the cleavages have in some countries a stronger effect on attitudes and vote than in others. The importance of electoral cleavages declined sharply in most established democracies somewhere between the 1960s and 1980s, a process documented by Crewe and Denver (1985), Franklin (1985) and, particularly, Franklin et al. (1992).

Social-psychological paradigm

When the so-called Michigan Four came up with the concept of party identification in 1960, it seemed that its authors Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes had just discovered a gold mine. Party identification explains better than any other independent variable the voting behavior of Americans. „*Few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachment of tens of millions of Americans to one of the parties.*“ (Campbell et al. 1960: 121) Theory thus became mainstream in electoral behavior research, and spread widely beyond the US borders and has been used in various modifications up to today.

The voter will vote for the party which he is identified with (i.e. has his sympathy

or has a positive relationship to). The basic assumptions of party identification theory is really so simple. In the 1960's, the following postulate has been in force: if the voter is not significantly affected by the short-term political factors, he will vote „normally“, i.e. in one line with his party identification and for one and the same political party on a long-term basis. (Converse, 1964). The greatest benefit of the party identification model is that it can accurately predict election. The explanatory power of party identification is reaching one hundred percent in the cases of voters with the strongest identification. But what causes it? Every individual's perception of every political question is significantly affected by an identification with a party. People often look at subject through the eyes of their political party: What is the attitude of my political party on this topic? What did the leader talk about it on TV yesterday? Party identification is crucial for the belief and value system of citizens and provides help in the formation of attitudes towards everyday political issues. Hierarchy of voters' and party's values is the same. This analytical shortcut is the stronger, the less individual information has voter on political issues and the less politically sophisticated is (Dalton, 2008).

Exclusive status of political parties among factors forming the attitudes and behavior of citizens is also emphasized by the fact that the parties are central institutions in representative democracy. But what does exactly „party identification“ mean? The above mentioned authors from the University of Michigan define it as follows: „*We use the concept here to characterize the individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment. Both reference group theory and small-group studies of influence have converged upon the attracting or repelling quality of the group as the generalized dimension most critical in defining the individual-group relationship, and it is this dimension that we will call identification. ... the political party serves as the group toward which the individual may develop an identification, positive or negative, of some degree of intensity.*“ (Campbell et al. 1960: 121-122)

In short, functioning and logics of party identification model could be described as follows. Citizens create relations to political parties. They in turn affect people's perception of everyday politics, forming the attitudes and especially parliamentary decisions. If the short-term effects do not outweigh, voter will cast a vote to the party which he feels identified with.

The original Michigan model considered party identification as more or less endogenous variable, which is relatively constant throughout the life and have the potential to change only in extraordinary circumstances. Such a concept is based on the assumption that party identification is inherently apolitical position formed by socialization during childhood and adolescence. And its strength grows over the years (Dalton, 2008; Holmberg, 2007). Criticism of the model arises soon from several sides. Problems became evident mainly after attempts to transfer the model that worked so well in the USA beyond its borders to other democracies. Because the model was developed in a

specific political system, problems arose after its application in countries with different political histories, fragmented party system, different voting systems, diverse form of party competition and less stable systems. The configuration of European political systems itself that historically established alongside the cleavages is different. While in the United States two large political parties are the central institutions of the whole system, several other institutions are also important in Europe such as church, trade unions, regions, linguistic and ethnic groups (Evans, 2004). Some European party systems are noway near the rate of US stability. Party identification will be lower in a countries with restoration of new party systems or where the party systems dynamically change (especially the emergence and dissolution of parties). And also the form of the electoral act makes a difference. While US voters elect at the same time many candidates at various levels³, in other countries election of candidates at different levels is carried out separately and for voters is less natural to adopt a mentality of party identification with only one party (Butler and Stokes, 1969). The most fundamental challenge for the theory of party identification, however lies in its transmission from US bipartism to European multipartism. In the 1980's, the assumption that the identification was limited only to one party, was called in question. Therefore, negative party identification was introduced as a variable in European comparative analysis. Negative party identification means such a relationship to the political party, which makes it repulsive in the voter's eyes. The need for this additional dimension is particularly acute in the area of European multipartism, where some parties may be quite close to each other and we can assume a number of positive identifications for one single voter. According to the theory of cleavages, European party systems are in its very essence based on the deep social divisions in the society and therefore, the electoral choice determined by negative bonds was confirmed in the case of Northern Ireland (Garry, 2007). In the seventies a lot of attention concentrate on retrospective economic voting (Fiorina, 1978). According to this theory, the voters take into account the performance of the economy in recent years (retrospective vote) and at the same time the possible future revenues from various parties (prospective vote).

Emergence of more and more factors that affect the choice of the individuals led to the creation of the revisionist counter theory. According to it, party identification is not described as independent and a constant variable, but as the dependent variable influenced by political factors as the economy fluctuations, attitudes to policy issues and performance evaluation of parties and candidates. Party identification has change from the endogenous variable to exogenous variable, which depends not only on

3 Election Day in the USA is the day of electoral choice of US President, Vice President, Congress, and in some countries even a local officials. From this perspective, only Sweden is close to American conditions, because Swedish voters choose a representatives for the national parliament Riksdag, regional and local parliaments at the same time.

socialization during childhood (Holmberg, 2007).

Economic theories

Although instrumental in its core as the sociological model, the rational choice approach is much more individualistic. It suggests that voting decisions are based on cost-benefit analyses where voters match their individual issue preferences with party platforms. As Olson states, *“only a separate and ‘selective’ incentive will stimulate a rational individual in a latent group to act in a group-oriented way”* (Olson, 1965: 51). According to Downs, if the voter *“is rational, he knows that no party will be able to do everything that is says it will do. Hence he cannot merely compare platforms; instead he must estimate in his own mind what the parties would actually do were they in power”* (Downs, 1957: 39). Accordingly, to the rational choice approach, policy preferences are exogenous. But final voting decision depends on the interplay between voters' issue preferences and parties' policy positions.

While the impact of social groups and party identification on voting behavior in recent decades declines, the issue voting, as a part of rational choice theory, seems to have a rising tendency. Class and party identification should explain the stable electoral patterns. But, theory of issue voting provides tools to a better understanding of dynamics of the modern political competition with large voter fluctuations and divergences in electoral gains of parties.

Each voter is interested in any topic. Even individuals with zero interest in political events have their areas of concern that affect their lives and everyday decision-making. This means that each voter has encoded topics, which could be used for addressing himself (Evans, 2004). If we add to this idea that the parties always have attitudes to political and social issues, we have the entire premise underlying the theory of thematic voting. Proponents of rational choice theory claim that the voter is a rational thinking individual who is trying to maximize his benefits in each decision. This voter actively identifies the parties' attitudes to topics relevant to him, and in the elections he votes for the party which is more favorable to his interests (Downs, 1957). Thus, voters and even political parties follow the basic rules of rational voter behavior, but from different vantage points. According to the model of Downs, political leaders and party organizations focus their activities on maximizing the vote shares in order to obtain or retain political power and the participation in government or at least in opposition. By contrast, voters try to obtain favors from governmental activities, so in the electoral process they vote for a political party whose participation in the government would bring them the most benefits. (Štefančík, 2007)

Following this theory, issue voting is regarded as the result of a sophisticated decision-making calculus. Rational choice theory worked with voters' effort to

maximize their economic benefits, and issue voting is seen as a „*reasonable and prudent efforts to voters about the decision based on the preferences of the (different) policies*“ (Carmines and Stimson, 1980: 78).

According to many authors (e.g. Dalton, 2008), an increase in the impact of issue voting at the expense of other influences has taken place in previous decades. In a broader context, the growing influence of issue voting is referred as a consequence of modernization, individualization of decision making, increase in post-materialistic values, increase in voter volatility and many more. In Central and Eastern Europe, this process is also enhanced by difficult democratic transformations, which the countries of this region experienced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this case, the theory is based on the assumption that the traditional and group-based cleavages were destabilized by democratic transition and completely new cleavages have been formed. Both simultaneous processes has limited the impact of long-term party identification (Dalton and Klingemann, 2007).

In addition, issues are important because they represent a dynamic component of the electoral competition (Dalton, 2008). While ideology and basic orientations of the parties remain constant, issues (obviously not all) change in each election cycle and become the core of election campaigns. Issue voting explains much better than any conventional models the growing voter volatility and associated large fluctuations in electoral gainings of parties in successive elections.

Theory has been mostly criticized for its assumption that the voter is a rational and deliberate individual in political issues. He is also capable of critical and abstract thinking. Converse (1964) in his study of cognitive thought processes figured out that these capabilities are symptomatic only of elites in American society that represents only 12% of the population. On contrary, ordinary people in this study are not capable of abstract thinking (they use symbolism), are not able to think in ideological dimensions, hardly find their bearings in politics and very often change their minds. Some related studies have found out that voters has strong political beliefs, which is often not based on precise facts. Moreover, they are not able to accept facts that are contrary to their beliefs and instead they devote their mental energy to maintain their exerted views (Kuklinski and Peyton, 2007). The discussion was enriched by Carmines and Stimson (1980), who divided the issue voting into two types - easy and hard. And so they denied generally accepted consensus that the issue voting is a sign of sophisticated voters. Simple themes are according to them: 1. more symbolic than technical, 2. deal more with the outcomes than with the ways to achieve them 3. have been long on the political scene. Complicated themes are important only for decision of well informed voters. Simple themes are not. The conclusion is that the decision on the basis of simple themes requires so much political sophistication as decision making based on loyalty to the party or sympathy to election leader.

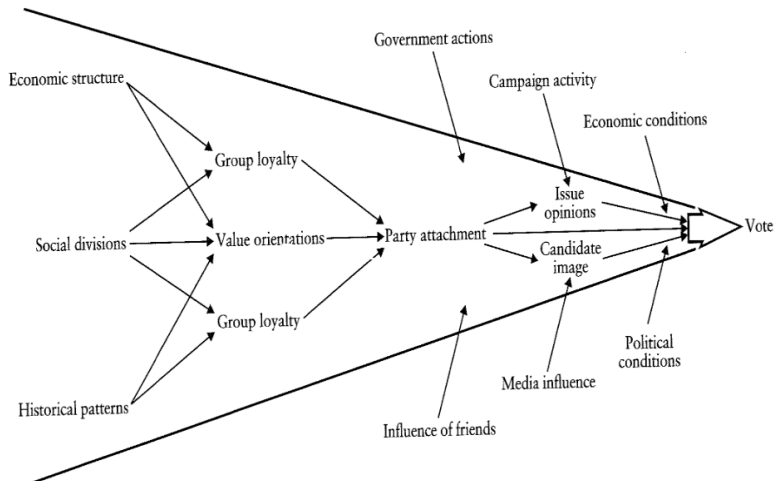
The synthesis of models in the causality funnel

„In principle, every political choice is a concatenation of motives, logical and random, early and deeply anchored.“ (Kunstát, 2006: 145)

In the previous interpretation three different models were presented - class voting, party identification and issue voting. To understand the electoral behavior of individuals, one needs to take into consideration all models and possible causes leading to election. Elegant explanation of how all factors affects the individual and ultimately reflects in a casting of vote, was presented by Campbell et al. (1960). For this purpose the authors introduced the metaphor of a causal funnel. In the widest part of the funnel are the most distant factors. The funnel narrows and approaches in causal mechanism to the dependent variable and flow into the act of voting decision. It is supposed that each factor is result of a previous ones and it simultaneously affects many others. The funnel narrows because all causes which have no direct influence on the choice are gradually expelled out. The choice may be affected only by personal (non-political) and political events. External factor can become personal if it is inter-pretet to voter by political party or candidate in this way. The same way, the status of events may change from political to non-political. The voter may think that gasoline price increase is caused by politicians.

Diagram 1 shows the causal mechanism of the funnel. The position of some factors closer to the funnel stem indicates their potential to influence the voter's decision in a short time. A typical example is the election campaign. It should be noticed, that the percep-tion of campaigns and candidates will be influenced by a large number of previous events such as membership in social class, party identification, etc. Social class membership is located at the very beginning of the funnel mouth. It's basically an endogenous factor that affects the large number of other events. However, it itself stands very far from the act of voting de-cision. Party identification may be placed in the funnel in two positions. In classic concept (pictured) it is located approximately in the middle of a causal chain. The position there ex-presses its specific characteristics. Previous events and various factors (education, socializa-tion, socioeconomic characteristics, etc.) influence the formation of party identification. Through party identification individuals perceive and interpret other events that are closer to funnel stem. The revisionist concept considers party identification as a variable dependent on actual circumstances, and so it is located closer to the funnel stem and cooperates with other factors that directly influence the choice. Issues, campaign, image leader and other similar factors stand nearest to the elections. This reflects the fact that they have the greatest potential to directly influence the choice of individual. But at the same time, they depend on a great number of previous events, experiences and factors.

Diagram 1: The causality funnel



Source: Campbell et al. (1960)

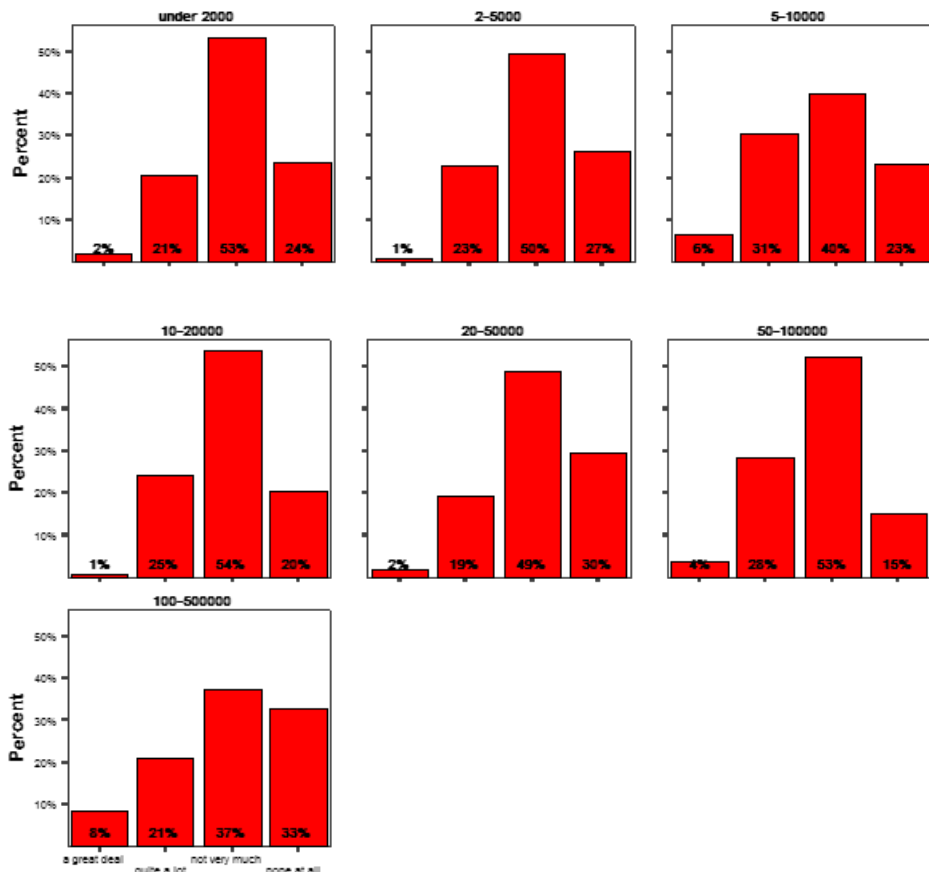
Municipal elections 2014

According to the latest data from Eurobarometer and the latest wave of European Values Survey, we can highlight some important characteristics of municipal politics, which can help us to interpret the results of the 2014 municipal elections in Slovak regional cities. Comparing to the other political institutions, the Slovak citizens tend to trust in regional and local authorities. The data suggest, that level of trust in local politics is under the average level of the EU28. But if we compare it with levels of trust in other political institutions, confidence to local authorities is more than doubled. We argue, that relatively high level of trust is determined by fragmentation structure of the Slovak local governments. 68% of Slovak municipalities has less than 1000 inhabitants and average size of Slovak municipality is 1900 inhabitants. (Swianiewicz, 2002) Local politicians are regarded as face-to-face authorities and not as members of political parties. Municipal elections are not controlled by political parties in such degree as regional and national elections. It can be claimed, that the role of political parties in Slovak local elections has lower importance in comparison with national, regional and European elections. Moreover, we observed that a trend of moderate increase in the level of trust in political parties occurred in big cities. Six regional cities (B. Bystrica, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín, Trnava, Žilina) lie in size range of 50 000 - 100 000 inhabitants, which has the lowest level of absolute distrust to political parties.

Table 1: The level of institutional trust in the EU and Slovakia (Eurobarometer spring 2014)

	Regional or local public authorities	The United Nations	The Nationality Parliament	The Nationality Government	Political parties
EU28	44%	40%	28%	27%	17%
Slovakia	40%	37%	19%	20%	12%

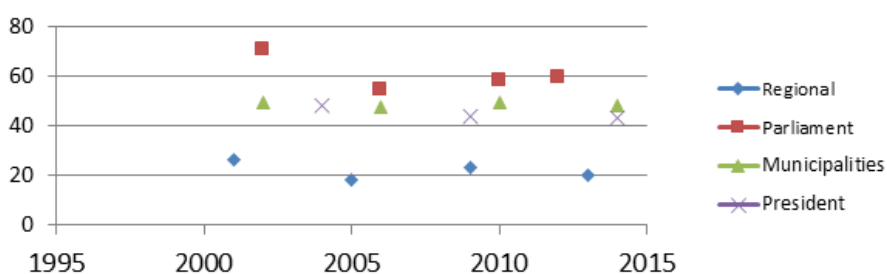
Diagram 2: The level of trust to political parties according to size of municipality



We can trace roots of another important feature of local politics and its relatively high level of trust to communist regime and its system of national committees (NCs). Although Law No. 65/1960 Coll. on national committees in its § 1 article 1 defined these administrative bodies as organs of the socialist state power and administration on regional, district and municipal levels and despite the fact that § 2 referred to them as „governmental bodies of self-governing character“, their level of autonomy was very weak indeed. We have to distinguished between specific positions of local national committees in hierarchical structure of communist public administration in Slovakia. Implementation of directive regulations kept the local national committees under regime control (not only administrative, but even political and personal control). But direct experience of their representatives with consequences of inefficient state policy forced the representatives of municipal national committees to find compromise solutions. Partial public involvement in decision making process through advisory local boards and resistance of local representatives to enforce unpopular solutions created among Slovak citizens more favourable image of municipal national committees. This lowest level of national committees was different from other types of NCs (district and regional), which were more closely linked with the leading communist party. Pragmatic approach to the solutions of local problems by the local NCs created preconditions for successful transformation into local governments (Valeš et al., 2006).

The relatively high confidence to local authorities together with level of (dis)trust to political parties and legacy of municipal national committees reflects into voter turnout. According to diagram 3, parliament is the most important arena of political struggle. Municipal elections have the second highest turnout and municipal assemblies are the closest level of government, so population considers them as one of the most important. Even the presidential elections are less popular.

Diagram 3: Comparison of voting turnout for different elections in Slovakia



But can we consider the party identification as the most important factor in voter decision process? We argue, that regional cities are affected by party politics more than smaller cities. Face-to-face contacts with candidates are less frequented and

party support plays more and more significant role. Especially candidates in election of mayors are trapped in ambiguous position somewhere between status of being independent and party candidates. Even party candidates are not strictly and pure party candidates, because they are supported by coalition of political parties, usually by very broad coalition. On the one hand they try to disavow party connections, on the other one, they realize mainly due to financial reasons the importance of political support. Party identification increases in cities with long-term stable party support. It is difficult to generalize local elections in regional cities in terms of party success, due to broad and very often even untraditional coalitions, which differs from city to city. We can call them pragmatic. We rate party coalitions as pragmatic, if it:

- is created from parties which cross the traditional government-opposition line on national level,
- is formed from small non-parliamentary party and parliamentary party,
- comprises of ideologically opposed parties.

Bratislava

Bratislava (and whole Bratislava self-governing region) has a slightly different position in Slovak electoral map. For a long period of time, it has been a region with strong support for centre-right The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ - DS). Nowadays, its preferences are falling under the level of electoral threshold, but its ex-voters relocate into the other centre-right parties and Bratislava is still a region with majority of centre-right electorate. Even on municipal level, election gains of social-democratic and governmental party SMER SD and its candidates are in Bratislava traditionally very small. (See diagram 4) The only exception were municipal elections 2010 and win of leftist candidate Milan Vtáčnik. Distribution of seats after 2014 hasn't changed significantly, but results of mayor election became a quite big surprise. Opinion polls before elections favoured former minister and unsuccessful presidential candidate Milan Kňažko and incumbent mayor Milan Vtáčnik. We claim, that political campaign in Bratislava drew a perfectly clear picture of relations between party identification, party support and candidate image in the Slovak municipal elections. Slovak voters at municipal level favours independent candidates or authorities distanced themselves from party politics. Both favorites in Bratislava presented themselves as independent candidates, but Kňažko has a support of KDH, NOVA, Siet', SDKÚ-DS, Most-Híd, SZ and Vtáčnik has a support of SMER SD. But one month before elections, liberal-right coalition of Siet', SDKÚ DS, SaS, Most-Híd decided to withdraw its candidate Tatiana Kratochvílová in exchange for support to Milan Kňažko. Few days later, another candidate, environmental activist Miroslav Dragun, withdrew his candidacy from the elections and claimed his support

to Kňazko too. Coalition parties and Dragun thus called for the same move made by another independent candidate Ivo Nesrovnal. However, he refused and on the contrary, he called such a move as *‘a political trade at the highest municipal level’*. Election results and win of underdog candidate Nesrovnal show an animosity of Slovak voters to political parties and their political moves.

Table 2: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Bratislava

2014		2010		2012	
MOST - HÍD, SIEŤ, SaS, SDKÚ DS	14	KDH, MOST - HÍD, OKS, SaS, SDKÚ DS	30	SMER SD	30,69
NEKA	12	SMER SD, HZD, SF, SNS, SZS	8	SaS	14,56
KDS, KDH, NOVA, OKS, OĽaNO, SMK-MKP, Zmena zdola, DÚ	11	NEKA	3	SDKÚ DS	14,06
SMER SD, SNS, SZS	6	SZ	2	OĽaNO	9,24
EDS	1	NF	1	KDH	9,5
NF	1			MOST - HÍD	7,81
				SNS	3,46

Trnava

Similar animosity to traditional political parties in Trnava resulted in an electoral victory of independent candidate and activist Peter Bročka. Additionally, there was a gain of 15 seats for independent candidates (NEKA) in the municipal assembly. Dissatisfaction with economic performance and city financial management led to the election failure of candidate Ján Žitňanský who had the support of the centre-right coalition dominated by KDH (all 3 previous mayors came from KDH). The same reason of dissatisfaction caused the electoral fiasco of SMER SD, which lost its comfortable majority from previous elections and its candidate for mayor, Bystrík Stanko, gained only 24,24% in comparison with 48,02% for Bročka and 24,49% for Žitňanský. The 2014 municipal elections confirmed recent trends that the electorate in Trnava tends to vote against party politics. Traditional support of KDH is disappearing and share of votes for OĽaNO increases. The rhetoric of OĽaNO's leader Igor Matovič is heavily nonpartisan and OĽaNO itself operates as a separate electoral list and not as a united political party.

Table 3: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Trnava

2014		2010		2012	
NEKA	15	NEKA	3	SMER SD	43,09
SMER-SD	3	KDH	8	OLaNO	18,63
KDH, NOVA, OLaNO, SaS, SDKÚ-DS, SZ	13	SaS, SDKÚ DS	3	SDKÚ DS	7,44
		HZD, ĽS HZDS, ND, SMER SD	17	SaS	6,81
				KDH	10,12
				MOST - HÍD	1,8
				SNS	3,11

Žilina, Košice, Nitra

The elections of 2014 in the regional cities of Nitra, Košice and Žilina proved quite similar. SMER SD had strong election support, demonstrated not only in the results of previous municipal elections, but in the latest parliamentary, presidential and regional elections. In these cities, political parties focused on election of mayors. Opposition parties tried to initiate a referendum against incumbent mayors, but all of them failed. In Žilina and Košice mainly due to political trades with support for candidates similar to Bratislava. The withdraw of Róbert Kašša in Žilina and Alena Bašistová in Košice as candidates in return for support for another rightist candidate did not reach the intended goal. A fiasco of opposition parties in Nitra lies in longstanding pragmatic coalition of political parties united against the Hungarian minority.

Table 4: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Žilina

2014		2010		2012	
NEKA	17	NEKA	6	SMER SD	44,31
SMER a SZ	6	SMER, SZ, HZD, ĽS HZDS	14	OLaNO	12,19
KDH	1	KDH, MOST - HÍD, OKS, SAS	3	SDKÚ DS	7,68
SNS	1	SNS	2	SAS	8,59
MOST - HÍD, NOVA, OKS, SIETĚ, SAS. SDKÚ DS	6	EDS	1	KDH	7,92
				MOST - HÍD	2,25

				SNS	9,06
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Diagram 7: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Košice

2014		2010		2012	
NEKA	18	KDH, SDKÚ DS, SMK-MKP	19	SMER SD	34,87
SMER SD	14	SMER SD, MOST - HÍD	18	OLaNO	11,38
SIETĚ	4	EDS	1	SDKÚ DS	9,99
DS, KDS, KDH, NOVA, OKS, SaS, SDKÚ DS, SMK- MKP	4	LS HZDS	1	SaS	8,34
Právo a Spravodlivosť	1	SDE, S.O.S	1	KDH	9,09
				MOST - HÍD	7,31
				Strana Slobodné Slovo - Nory mojsejovej	3,89

Diagram 8: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Nitra

2014		2010		2012	
KDH, SNS, SMER SD	19	KDH, SNS, SMER SD	28	SMER SD	47,92
NEKA	8	NEKA	8	OLaNO	8,15
SIETĚ	3	OKS, SDKÚ DS	1	SDKÚ DS	8,11
NOVA	1			SaS	8,83
				KDH	8,41
				MOST - HÍD	3,35
				SNS	5,34

Prešov

The recipe for a successful referendum against an incumbent mayor was found in Prešov, where the merging of political parties against SMER SD found a positive feedback in the electorate due to relative stable support for one of the opposition party. Support for KDH in Prešov can be seen in accompanying diagram.

Diagram 9: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Prešov

2014		2010		2012	
KDH, MOST - HÍD, SDKÚ-DS	13	NEKA	12	SMER SD	37,77
NEKA	9	KDH, MOST - HÍD, SaS, SDKÚ DS	11	OLaNO	14,14
SMER SD	5	SMER SD	8	SDKÚ DS	8,67
SIETĚ	3			SaS	7,06
NOVA	1			KDH	14,35
				MOST - HÍD	2,56
				SNS	2,62

Trenčín and B. Bystrica

SMER SD's popularity declined in favor of independent candidates in Trenčín. Looking at a composition of the city assembly, dramatic election success of independent candidates is observed, 20 seats out of 25. In B. Bystrica, the power balance between political parties became relatively stable and SMER SD controls the majority of municipal seats. In the election of mayors in both cities, formally independent candidates gained seats. It must be stressed, that both mayors had been independent only officially, because Richard Rybníček in Trenčín had the support of SMER SD and 7 rightist parties while Ján Nosko had the support of a coalition of Smer-SD, SNS, and SDKÚ-DS.

Diagram 10: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in Trenčín

2014		2010		2012	
NEKA	20	NEKA	5	SMER SD	42,82
SMER SD	1	SMER SD	13	OLANO	12,56
KDH, MOST - HÍD, NOVA, OKS, OLANO, SAS, SDKÚ-DS	4	KDH, ĽS-HZDS	2	SDKÚ DS	7,94
		MOST - HÍD, SDKÚ-DS	2	SAS	8,65
		Paliho Kapurková	1	KDH	9,24
		SAS	1	MOST HÍD	2,84

		SNS	1	SNS	4,83
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Diagram 11: Election results 2014, 2012 and 2010 in B. Bystrica

2014		2010		2012	
SDKÚ DS, SNS, SMER SD	17	SMER SD, SNS, ĽS HZDS	16	SMER SD	41,45
NEKA	14	NEKA	11	OĽaNO	12,54
		KDS, SaS, SDKÚ DS	4	SDKÚ DS	10,34
				SaS	9,14
				KDH	7,5
				MOST - HÍD	3,65

Conclusion

Comparing to the other political institutions, the Slovak citizens tend to trust in regional and local authorities. If we compare it with levels of trust in other political institutions, confidence to local authorities is more than doubled. We argue, that relatively high level of trust is determined by fragmentation structure of the Slovak local governments. 68% of Slovak municipalities has less than 1000 inhabitants and average size of Slovak municipality is 1900 inhabitants. Local politicians are regarded as face-to-face authorities and not as members of political parties. Municipal elections are not controlled by political parties in such degree as regional and national elections. It can be claimed, that the role of political parties in Slovak local elections has lower importance in comparison with national, regional and European elections. Moreover, we observed that a trend of moderate increase in the level of trust in political parties occurred in big cities. We argue, that regional cities are affected by party politics more than smaller cities. Face-to-face contacts with candidates are less frequented and party support plays more and more significant role. Especially candidates in election of mayors are trapped in ambiguous position somewhere between status of being independent and party candidates. Even party candidates are not strictly and pure party candidates, because they are supported by coalition of political parties, usually by very broad coalition. On the one hand they try to disavow party connections, on the other one, they realize mainly due to financial reasons the importance of political support. Party identification increases in cities with long-term stable party support.

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