

HOW ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY CAN HELP IN STRUGGLE WITH THE FAR RIGHT: EXAMPLE OF SLOVAKIA

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Slovakia, as well as other European countries, have recently been facing an increase in populism and support for far-right politics. This is mainly related to the deteriorating socio-economic situation of a part of society to which standard political parties do not respond sufficiently. This creates space for the assertion of radical (especially right-wing) political forces. The article focuses on the issue of far-right support in Slovakia, given the socio-economic situation at the regional (district) level. Several indicators are taken into account - electoral support for the far right, the development of support for the far right, the average wage, the share of people with a university degree and the share of the Roma population. Based on the territorial concentration of these variables, a scale of urgency to solve the problem of support for the far right (risks of escalation of social tension / conflict) is created on a scale from 0-10 points. For this purpose, the so-called Far Right vs. Social Situation (FR-SS) Index linking the above variables was created. It is based on the election results of the far right in the parliamentary elections in 2016 and 2020 and socio-economic data close to the elections in 2020. The results show that Slovakia is relatively significantly differentiated in terms of urgency to address the problem of far right support. Large cities and the west of the country do not perceive this problem so much, on the contrary, the more rural parts, the south of central Slovakia and the northeast of the country are increasingly turning to the support of far-right political parties. The key to solving this problem seems to be the education and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of people living in lagging areas.

Key words: far right; socio-economic conditions; FR-SS Index; districts; Slovakia.

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1 INTRODUCTION²

The presence of social conflict is a predisposition for the emergence of radical and extremist parties. According to Betz (1993), this conflict has begun to gain strength, especially since the late 1960s. However, Backes and Jesse (1993) state that the origins of these parties can be dated to the first half of the 19th century, as an alternative to standard political parties, especially the conservative and socialist orientations. Their onset in that period also prompted a rise in liberal values (Jaschke 2006). Langenbacher and Schellenberg (2011) point out that although far-right parties have similar content features, they also have a way of communicating with the electorate, but an important moment to understand how they work is an awareness of regional differences within Europe.

The unfavorable socio-economic situation is one of the main reasons for the choice of radical parties (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). The relationship between unemployment, lower education and far-right support has been proven by several studies. e.g. in the case of the German elections in the 1990s (Lubbers and Scheepers 2001), but also of a set of 18 European countries in the following decade (Werts et al. 2012). This relationship is also evident at regional and sub-regional level.

It is traditionally assumed that a high level of economic inequality leads to greater support for the left, as they are the natural guarantors of a policy of redistribution of resources to less wealthy class of society. However, recent studies have shown that economic tensions can lead to support for far-right parties (Aggeborn and Persson 2017). Low-income voters reject left-wing policies such as financial and material support for immigrants, foreign humanitarian and development aid, and environmental protection. In this, they are in line with the offer of far-right parties that focus on supporting social policies with an impact on the local population. Similarly, this relationship may be affected by economic globalization and its effects on the domestic labor market (Malgouyres 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Dippel et al. 2018; Autor et al. 2020). The relationship between income inequality and political polarization has also been demonstrated in the United States (Duca and Saving 2016; McCarty et al. 2016). The inclination of people with lower education, lower socio-economic status and a lower degree of tolerance towards other ethnic and social groups towards authoritarian norms and strong political leaders has been proven by a series of researches. It is these values that are typical of the supply of far-right parties (Adorno et al. 1950; Gabennesch 1972; Mayer and Perrineau 1992; Lubbers and Scheepers 2000; Mudde 2007).

The aim of the study is to assess the risk of escalation of social tension at the spatially disaggregated level (at the level of districts of Slovakia), taking into account the electoral behavior of the population and the socio-economic situation at the regional (district) level. We assume that the higher the electoral support of the far-right parties and the less favorable the socio-economic situation within the territory, the higher the risk of social conflict. The information obtained in this way can be valuable for the decision-making sphere, both at the national, regional and local levels, in the fight against growing right-wing radicalism and extremism. The used methodological evaluation procedure

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can be, after appropriate adjustment respecting national and regional specifics, an inspiration for research in other countries as well.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A relatively large number of factors, the significance and weight of which are highly debatable in a given time-space context, play an important role in explaining the support of far-right parties. In principle, however, we can divide them into two basic groups (Eatwell 2003; Norris 2005). In the first, called "demand theory", attention is focused on the existing ethnic structure of the territory, socio-economic conditions, but also the phenomenon of protest voting against standard political parties (Mayer-Perrineau 1992; Lubbers et al. 2002). On the other hand, there is a supply-side theory emphasizing factors such as the shape of the party system, the personalities and leaders of political parties, and the role of the media (Golder 2003). In both cases, however, there is no unity within the academic community to the extent of the importance of individual factors. The issue of migration and thus the change in the ethnic structure of the territory is considered by one group of scientists to be very important in assessing the causes of support for far-right parties (Anderson 1996; Martin 1996; Knigge 1998), while other authors evaluate its impact as very limited (Mayer-Perrineau 1989; Givens 2000). The same applies to factors such as unemployment (Lewis-Beck and Mitchell 1993; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Knigge 1998) and the quorum for parliamentary input (Swank and Betz 1995; Jackman and Volpert 1996). Another related topic is the weight of the issue of Euroscepticism in national elections and its impact on the electoral support of far-right parties (Conti and Memoli 2011; Hartleb 2012), which tend to benefit from global issues (crisis - financial, economic, migration, COVID-19, security - war in Ukraine, energy, food, etc.), which have a different effect from territory to territory and undermine the belief that we are only able to manage these crises through joint action, within joint transnational groupings (EU, NATO, etc.) The problems of the informative value of such oriented studies are also in their methodological background (e.g. selection and compilation of explanatory factors), or the way of interpreting the achieved results (Golder 2003).

Previous research on far-right parties in Western European countries has confirmed that socio-economic conditions are a factor that significantly influences the electoral support of these parties. Far-right parties are expected to gain support, especially from people who are socio-economically marginalized, due to changes related to globalization processes and deindustrialization (Betz 1994). The same effect is observed in times of socio-economic decline (rising unemployment, falling real wages) or immigration crises (Zimmermann 2003; Csanyi 2020). Income inequality is another factor that affects the support of far-right parties. However, there is no consensus on how. E.g. Coffé et al. (2007) argue that growing income inequality reduces support for far-right parties, with some of their electorate (less wealthy) tending to support left-wing parties as natural guarantors of the rights and interests of the working and poorer social classes. The opposite view is represented by Jesuit et al. (2009), who declare that income inequality is reflected in the growing support of far-right parties as psychological distance (diversity) grows between different sections of the population, undermining their mutual social trust and social capital (Putnam 1993; Knack 2002; Uslaner 2002; Uslaner and Brown 2005; Shayo 2009), thus strengthening the chances of success for authoritarian forces, including the far-right ones. The weakening of social trust between social groups (also based on

the growth of income disparities) reduces the degree of tolerance for other groups in society, including respect for the principles of equality, minority rights and the rights of other groups in society (Andersen and Fetner 2008). However, this also applies to the relationship solely on the basis of economic differences (rich vs. poor), which is confirmed by several authors (Fukuyama 1995; Uslaner, 2002). This in turn leads to an increase in the popularity of far-right parties (Mudde 2007).

Together with the social class factor, another important element influencing the electoral behavior of the population is the level of education (Lipset 1981) and the degree of tolerance towards other ethnic groups, or social minorities. The issue of the choice of far-right parties in the context of education level has become a relatively frequent topic in recent decades (Betz 1993; Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Kitschelt 2007; Rydgren 2007; Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2013). People with lower education have been shown to make up the bulk of the far-right electorate (e.g. Lubbers et al. 2002; Kessler and Freeman 2005; Ford and Goodwin 2010; Werts et al. 2012; Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2013; Savelkoul and Scheepers 2017). However, some studies question such claims (Evans 2005; Norris 2005; Arzheimer and Carter 2006). Nevertheless, most studies agree that the higher a person's education, the less likely they are to choose an far-right party (Ford and Goodwin 2010; Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2013; Van Gent et al. 2014). It has also been found that the growth in income disparities is changing the structure of the far-right electorate, in favor of those with less education and lower incomes, and to the detriment of more educated, better-earning far-right voters. The lower and middle class people choose far-right parties not only for material reasons, but also in terms of ideological principles. They feel that they are the victims of the negative effects of globalization. Therefore, they form a protest against the socialist and left-wing parties, which, in their view, have failed to protect economically more vulnerable groups and are thus directly responsible for increasing socio-economic disparities within society (Betz 1994). The level of education of people in low-income jobs plays a key role in supporting far-right parties (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007), including the degree of tolerance for people who profess other values, resp. originating from another cultural background (Kitschelt 1995). On the other hand, people in management positions, or performing jobs with a higher degree of autonomy, thanks to their higher education they are able to accept a cosmopolitan view of society (Kitschelt 1994). Roemer (2001) argues that the transition of voters (e.g. also left-wing parties) to far-right parties can be explained by the growing importance of non-economic, socio-cultural issues (e.g. immigration and national identity at the expense of socio-economic issues such as tax policy, etc.). This change tends to be more pronounced as socio-economic (income) disparities increase (Han 2016).

Dorn et al. (2020) in their study showed that economic conditions have a significant impact on the support of extremist parties, even in a regional context. The lower the economic level of the region, and the higher the level of inequality and poverty in it, the greater the support of the far-right, or left-wing parties, with this effect being stronger in the case of support for far-right parties.

Within the Central European area, the issue of radicalism, extremism and support of far-right parties has also recently begun to receive increasing attention (Minkenberg 2002; Kopeček 2007; Mareš 2009; Mikuš and Gurňák 2012; Kluknavská 2012, 2013 and 2015; Gyárfášová and Mesežnikov 2015; Kluknavská and Smolík 2016; Mikuš and Gurňák 2016; Mikuš et al. 2016; Vasil'ková and

Androvičová 2019; Kevický 2021). Later, attention was also paid to the comparison between Western and Eastern part of the Europe (Polyakova 2015).

In the case of Slovakia, the issue of radicalism and extremism, both social and political, has recently been addressed by several authors (e.g. Štefančík 2013; Murínová 2017; Lichner et al. 2018; Štefančík and Stradiotová 2021). Authors from the neighboring Czech Republic also state that the growth of social problems in the form of unemployment or poverty leads to greater support for radicalism and extremism (Marešová et al. 1999). The impact of the economic recession on the electoral behavior of the population and its inclination towards the far right, especially from the economically most affected regions in Slovakia, have been confirmed by studies by several authors (Kluknavská 2013; Kluknavská and Smolík 2016). The phenomenon of (not only) economic migration and the consequent ethnic mixture of the territory has a similar impact, which can lead to xenophobic and extremist sentiments in society and the subsequent support of radical parties (Vašečka 2009). The very presence of the Roma ethnic group is an important factor in the geographical distribution of support for far-right parties (Mikuš and Gurňák 2012; Mikuš and Gurňák 2016; Buček and Plešivčák 2017), e.g. just *Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko* (ĽSNS, eng. *People's Party Our Slovakia*). Minkenberg (2002) and Kluknavská (2015) speak of "internal outsiders" as one of the key factors determining the emergence of far-right parties in Central Europe.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the paper responds to its main goal, which is to quantify the risk of escalation of social tensions arising from political radicalization and adverse socio-economic conditions at the level of districts of Slovakia (79 districts in total, Table 1). Five key factors (variables) are included in the overall assessment:

- political radicalism, measured by the *electoral support of the far right*, in % (election result of ĽSNS in the parliamentary elections 2020) (Elections and referenda 2022, data for 2020)
- development of political radicalism, measured by the *development of electoral support of the far right*, in % (election result of ĽSNS in the parliamentary elections 2016 and 2020 - growth index) (Elections and referenda 2022, data for 2016 and 2020)
- economic situation, measured by the *average wage*, in EUR (DATAcube 2022, data for 2020)
- educational situation, measured by the share of *university-educated population*, in % (Census 2021)
- ethnic situation, measured by the share of the *Roma population*, in % (DATAcube 2022, data for 2020).³

³ The indicator of the share of the Roma population was chosen because the rhetoric of far-right forces in Slovakia has deviated in the last decade from the topic of Slovak-Hungarian relations (including the scope of civil rights of Hungarians living in Slovakia) and recently in the context of 2015 migration crisis, focuses exclusively on Roma issues and anti-immigration policy. Given the very low number of processed asylum applications or temporary asylum (de facto until the outbreak of the new migration crisis due to the war in Ukraine at the end of February 2022), the share of the Roma population is therefore a key indicator from this point of view. However, statistics on the number of Roma are inaccurate. It is estimated that only one in six, or seven Roma (according to Census 2021, 67,000 people did so). However, according to the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019 (2021), there are about 450,000 of them living in Slovakia. However, this does not change the fact that the results of the census, resp. DATAcube data can capture relatively

In order to make the individual input factors comparable, we converted their values to a standardized form - for each of the five indicators, we calculated % value for the given district in relation to the median at the district level (of 79 districts is the value for the 40th district in order). In each of the five areas, every district was able to gain from 0-2 negative points, for a maximum of 10 in total.

- political radicalism, measured by the *electoral support of the far right*, in % (election result of LSNS in the parliamentary elections 2020)
- if value 100-110% to median = high support (1 point), > 110% = very high support (2 points)
- development of political radicalism, measured by the *development of electoral support of the far right*, in % (election result of LSNS in the parliamentary elections 2016 and 2020 - growth index)
- if value 100-110% to median = slight increase (1 point), > 110% = significant increase (2 points)
- economic situation, measured by the *average wage*, in EUR
- if value 90-100% to median = unfavourable (1 point), < 90% = very unfavourable (2 points)
- educational situation, measured by the share of *university-educated population*, in %
- if value 90-100% to median = unfavourable (1 point), < 90% = very unfavourable (2 points)
- ethnic situation, measured by the share of the *Roma population*, in %
- if value 100-110% to median = unfavourable (1 point), > 110% = very unfavourable (2 points)

Problem of the Far Right - Scale

Degree of urgency

0-2 points = very low

3-4 points = low

5-6 points = medium

7-8 points = high

9-10 points = very high

In the second phase of the research, we distinguish between those territorial units (districts) that have achieved the same number of points on the scale of the urgency to solve the problem of the far right (risks of escalation of social tension). For this purpose, we created so-called the *FR-SS (Far Right vs. Social Situation) Index*. In its construction, we assume that the support of the far right and the social situation are interrelated (the less favorable the social situation, the higher the electoral support for the far right parties). The FR-SS Index evaluates the election result of the far right (*fr*) in the context of the social situation of a given territorial unit, represented by factors of economic level (*w*), education (*ue*) and ethnicity (presence of a socially excluded ethnic group, *R*).

Its mathematical formula is then as follows:

$$\text{FR-SS Index} = \frac{fr \cdot frd}{w \cdot ue \cdot nR}$$

fr = far right party election result (% of national median value)

frd = development of the far right party election result (% of national median value)

w = average wage (% of national median value)

accurately the existing interregional differences in the spatial distribution of the Roma, albeit at an order of magnitude lower level.

ue = university educated population, of 18+ aged population (% of national median value)
 nR = non-Roma population, of total population (% of national median value)⁴

The FR-SS Index thus expresses the ratio between the electoral support of the far right and the social situation measured by the average wage, the share of the university-educated adult population and the share of the non-Roma population in a given territorial unit, given the median value at the district level.

The higher the value of the index is above the limit 1, the more significant the ratio of both variables in the given territorial unit is in favor of the far-right support indicator - the high value of the index is caused by a mutual combination of relatively high far-right support and relatively unfavorable social situation, either extremely high support of the far right, or extremely unfavorable social situation. The value of the index close to the limit of 1 means that in a given territorial unit the support of the far right is at a similar level as the state of the social situation, with respect to the national median value.

The lower the value of the index is below 1, the more significant the ratio of both variables in the given territorial unit is in favor of the indicator of the social situation - the low value of the index is caused by a mutual combination of relatively low support of the far right and relatively favorable social situation, either extremely low support of the far right, or extremely favorable social situation. As already mentioned, variables entering into the calculation of the index for a given territorial unit are, in terms of the correctness of their mutual comparison and ultimately the final informative value of the analysis, expressed in % of the national median value (converted to the relativized form).

TABLE 1: DISTRICTS OF SLOVAKIA AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

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

Source: DATAcube (2022).

⁴ Given the existence of a direct relationship between the level of far-right electoral support (in the numerator's formula) and the presence of the Roma population (in the denominator's formula), as well as respecting the orientation of the other two factors on the denominator, we have to include the value representing the proportion of the *non-Roma population*.

4 RESULTS

Applying the above methodological framework, we came to the conclusion that the extent of far-right support is most problematic in the districts of Gelnica, Poltár and Rimavská Sobota (districts on the Figure 1 marked by red colour), i.e. in districts located in the long-term socio-economically deprived south of the central Slovakia (Banská Bystrica Region), and in the east of the country. On the scale reflecting acuteness of the solution to the problem of the far right, they achieved from the 10-point scale 9, or even 10 points (Gelnica from the Košice region). Here we can see that the conditions for the support of far-right ideology are really very suitable and the risk of escalation of social tensions is very high. These districts are characterized by very high electoral support of the ĽSNS party (parliamentary elections 2020), which, moreover, has risen quite sharply over time (compared the parliamentary elections 2016 and 2020). In addition, the socio-economic situation in these parts of Slovakia is very unfavorable. There is a very low average wage, a significantly unfavorable educational level of the population and a high concentration of the Roma population. This mixture of negative factors means a high risk of escalating social tensions in these areas in the near or distant future.

The situation is far from ideal in other districts of Slovakia, on the Figure 1 marked in orange (group of 13 districts). These territories gained on the scale of urgency of solving the problem of the far right 7, or 8 points, which means a high risk of escalation of social tension. Again, these are districts located mainly in the south of central Slovakia (Krupina, Veľký Krtíš, Detva and Lučenec), or in the northeast of the country (Sobrance, Medzilaborce, Sabinov, Vranov nad Topľou, Stará Ľubovňa and Kežmarok). From this point of view, the Banská Bystrica and Prešov regions are the most problematic. Again, it is a synergy of factors of high electoral support of the far right, unfavorable socio-economic situation and territorial concentration of the Roma population. They are complemented by selected districts from the northwest (Čadca and Turčianske Teplice), and southwest of Slovakia (Komárno). In the first two mentioned districts, the spatial concentration of the Roma population does not play a significant role, as its share is very low in these parts of Slovakia. In these districts, far-right electoral support is based on historically entrenched patterns of local electoral behavior tending to nationalist (nationally oriented) political entities (formerly Hlinkova Slovenská ľudová strana – HĽS, eng. *Hlinka's Slovak People's Party*, later Slovenská národná strana – SNS, eng. *Slovak National Party*), but to some extent also on the relatively less favorable social situation of the population. This part of Slovakia (northwest) is also characterized by an inclination to the values of etatism or the feeling of "fear of the unknown" (e.g. in relation to the "non-existent" Roma minority). The district of Komárno, located in the southwest of Slovakia, is characterized by a high concentration of people of Hungarian nationality. Although the support of the far-right ĽSNS is only at the level of approximately 1/3 of the median value of Slovakia, its support increased from 2% to 3% between 2016 and 2020. In addition, the social situation in this district is also not very ideal (wages at the level of about 90% of the median, the share of the university educated population even only at the level of about 82.5% of the median). However, the FR-SS Index for this district is very low, which de facto minimizes concerns about the expansion of far-right support in this area (also given the high proportion of the population other than the Roma national minority - Hungarian).

Another group of territorial units consists of 14 districts (districts on the Figure 1 marked by yellow colour). Here, however, the risk of social tensions arising

from the socio-economic situation and political preferences of the population can only be described as medium. These districts form more concentrated units, especially in the western part of Slovakia in Horná Nitra (Partizánske, Bánovce nad Bebravou, Prievidza and Topoľčany) continuing to the southeast (Žarnovica, Banská Štiavnica) and a group of districts on the border of Banská Bystrica region (Brezno, Revúca), Košice region (Rožňava, Spišská Nové Ves) and the Prešov region (Levoča). These are completed by the districts of Trebišov (Košice region), Bytča (Žilina region) and Snina (Prešov region). They are also more diverse in terms of socio-economic situation than the two previous groups. Only the districts of Revúca, Spišská Nové Ves, Banská Štiavnica and Levoča received a higher grade (6 points) from this group.

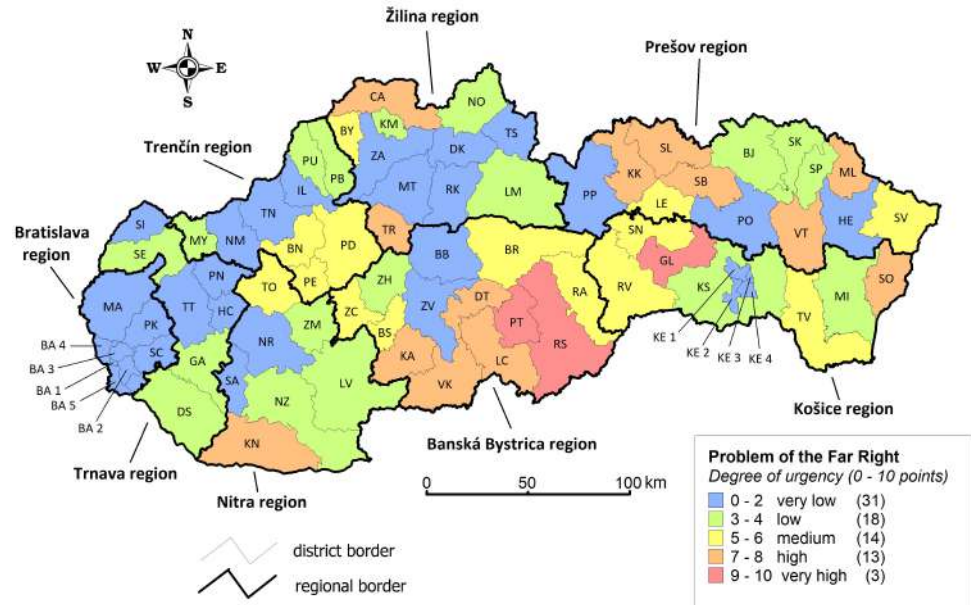
In another group of territorial units, we can state a low risk of escalation of social tension, given the economic situation, social conditions and electoral preferences. It consists of 18 districts, and from a spatial point of view it is a very variable group, represented in all regions of Slovakia (see districts on the Figure 1 marked in green). However, only one district (Žiar nad Hronom) is located in the Banská Bystrica region. Within this group, the situation is most favorable in the districts of Galanta, Senica (both Trnava region in the southwest of Slovakia), Myjava (Trenčín region in the west of the country), Levice (Nitra region in the southwest), Košice - okolie, Svidník, Stropkov (both Prešov region) and Žiar nad Hronom, in which the mentioned risk represents the value of 3 points out of 10.

The last, most numerous group of districts (31 out of a total of 79 districts in Slovakia, marked in blue on the Figure 1) is characterized by a very low risk of social conflict based on electoral preferences and the existing socio-economic situation. Their spatial concentration is tied to those parts of Slovakia that are most economically and transport infrastructure developed (northeast direction from Bratislava via Považie to Žilina and further east to the Tatras region), or represent a large urban center of a given part of Slovakia (districts of all regional centres, or other large cities, e.g. Zvolen and Humenné, within lagging regions). These are the parts of Slovakia that are the best in terms of living standards. These districts received 0-2 negative points out of a total of 10 possible. The very lowest acuteness of the solution of the far right support (0 points) in terms of possible socio-economic conflict was identified in the districts of Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Malacky, Nitra, Žilina, Trnava, Trenčín, Banská Bystrica, Pezinok, Dolný Kubín, Košice 4, Senec and districts of Bratislava 5, 4 and 2. These are predominantly districts from the western part of Slovakia, or districts of the largest cities in the country. In their case, the share of LSNS support is significantly below average, over time it has even decreased significantly in relative terms, and they are very favorable economically, as well as in terms of the educational level of the population. The share of the Roma population is very low in their case.

As already mentioned in the methodology, the FR-SS Index (Figure 2) was used in order to determine the specific order of districts with the same score within a given category (group) of districts. It declares that the problem of far-right support needs to be addressed especially in the districts of Gelnica, Poltár, Krupina, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca, Čadca, Medzilaborce and Veľký Krtíš (all had a FR-SS Index value higher than 2, the darkest red on the Figure 2. Up to 5 of them are located in the south of the Banská Bystrica region. In contrast, the FR-SS Index was below 0.5 in the case of 18 districts (on the Figure 2 the shade of the lightest red). Half of them are the city districts of Bratislava and Košice, and the rest are

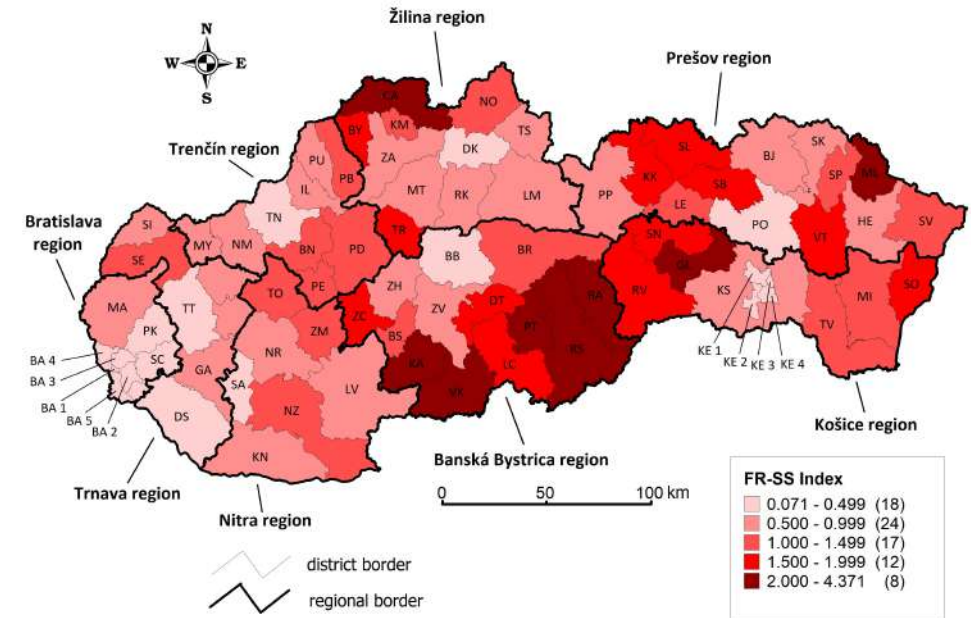
the districts of Dunajská Streda, Senec, Dolný Kubín, Pezinok, Banská Bystrica, Šaľa, Prešov, Trenčín and Trnava.

FIGURE 1: PROBLEM OF THE FAR RIGHT AT DISTRICT LEVEL IN SLOVAKIA IN 2020



Source: Census (2021); DATAcube (2022); Elections and Referenda (2022).

FIGURE 2: FR-SS INDEX AT DISTRICT LEVEL IN SLOVAKIA IN 2020



Source: Census (2021); DATAcube (2022); Elections and Referenda (2022).

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The regional and local context of far-right support cannot be underestimated. The connection between political radicalism and the poor socio-economic situation at the regional and district levels was addressed by Dorn et al. (2020). The authors state that the lower the economic performance of a given territory (district), the higher the share of votes in elections, whether for the far right or

left-wing entities. The authors conclude that the growth of economic inequality leads to political instability and the choice of non-standard, more radical parties. Social cohesion is weakening, extremist and populist parties are strengthening, leading to social and political polarization. Large negative macroeconomic events can have various political manifestations - demand for redistribution of resources (Brunner et al. 2011; Giuliano and Spilimbergo 2014), re-election of government parties (Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier 2000), but also support for populist and extremist parties (de Bromhead et al. 2013; Mian et al. 2014; Funke et al. 2016).

When evaluating the issue of electoral support of far-right parties in post-socialist countries, it is necessary to take into account various social, political, historical as well as geographical contexts (e.g. Nociar 2012; Kluknavská 2013; Kluknavská and Smolík 2016; Mikuš et al. 2016; Bahna and Zagrapan 2017). According to Vasil'ková and Androvičová (2019), the key to overcoming this threat is education, improving socio-economic conditions and the fight against corruption. Territorial context of support for the far right in Slovakia, as well as the explanatory factors, were discussed by geographers such as Mikuš and Gurňák (2012 and 2016), Mikuš et al. (2016), Buček and Plešivčák (2017) and Kevický (2021), and this approach certainly needs to be further developed.

The limiting aspect of the study is the fact that we did not assess the risk of smaller territorial concentrations of the monitored variables (e.g. Roma population, but also other evaluated socio-economic characteristics) within the districts, or within large cities that are part of them. Nevertheless, it can be stated that in rural districts with a high absolute and relative territorial concentration of the risk factor (e.g. low wages, low share of university educated population, high share of Roma population) the risk of escalation of social tensions is much higher than in districts, or in large cities with a relatively low level of risk factors.

We can state that in districts with a high FR-SS Index, the unfavorable social situation is a breeding ground for the support of far-right political entities, and that are these territorial units that should be assisted by public authorities (central, regional and local government) and third sector focus, e.g. in the form of implementing effective strategies to combat growing political extremism stemming from social tensions, together with the implementation of action plans to improve the standard of living, education and coexistence of the various social groups living in the area. On the contrary, in districts with a low FR-SS Index, the social situation is not a predisposition for the growth of support for far-right political entities. However, even in this group of districts, it is possible to identify territorial units on which the help of public actors should be focused, as several of them have a problem with a long-term, historically given inclination to support the far right.

The present study can be an inspiration for other countries that want to apply a regionally oriented approach in the fight against the far right. Addressing this issue will certainly gain more and more relevance and urgency, as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy and food crisis and the oncoming stagflation will almost certainly exacerbate the socio-economic disparities between the various social groups.

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KAKO LAHKO VOLILNA GEOGRAFIJA POMAGA V BOJU S SKRAJNO DESNICO: PRIMER SLOVAŠKE

Slovaška in tudi druge evropske države se v zadnjem času soočajo z naraščanjem populizma in podpore skrajno desničarski politiki. To je povezano predvsem s slabšanjem socialno-ekonomskega položaja dela družbe, na katerega se standardne politične stranke ne odzivajo dovolj. Slednje ustvarja prostor za uveljavitev radikalnih (predvsem desnih) političnih sil. Članek se osredotoča na vprašanje podpore skrajni desnici na Slovaškem glede na socialno-ekonomske razmere na regionalni (okrožni) ravni. Upoštevanih je več indikatorjev - volilna podpora skrajni desnici, razvoj podpore skrajni desnici, povprečna plača, delež visokošolsko izobraženih in delež romske populacije. Na podlagi teritorialne koncentracije teh spremenljivk je oblikovana lestvica nujnosti reševanja problema podpore skrajni desnici (tveganja stopnjevanja družbenih napetosti/konflikta) na lestvici od 0 do 10 točk. V ta namen je bil ustvarjen tako imenovani Indeks skrajna desnica proti socialni položaj (FR-SS), ki povezuje zgornje spremenljivke in temelji na volilnih rezultatih skrajne desnice na parlamentarnih volitvah leta 2016 in 2020 ter socialno-ekonomskih podatkih v času volitev leta 2020. Rezultati kažejo, da je Slovaška razmeroma močno diferencirana glede nujnosti reševanja problema podpore skrajni desnici. Velika mesta in zahod države tega problema ne zaznavajo toliko; nasprotno pa se bolj ruralni deli - jug osrednje Slovaške in severovzhod države - vse bolj obračajo k podpori skrajno desnih političnih strank. Zdi se, da je ključ do rešitve tega problema izobraževanje in izboljšanje socialno-ekonomskih razmer ljudi, ki živijo v zaostalih območjih.

Ključne besede: skrajna desnica; socialno-ekonomske razmere; indeks skrajna desnica proti socialni položaj (FR-SS indeks); okrožja; Slovaška.