

AUTHORITARIZATION OR DEMOCRATIZATION: DIRECTIONS OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN PRESENT-DAY SLOVAKIA

Yevheniy HAYDANKA¹

V-Dem experts have proposed an empirical methodology to determine the dynamics of authoritarianism/democratization of the electoral process (Electoral Democracy Index). In the Slovak Republic, the successful institutional reforms of the late 1990s and early 2000s, followed by the deepening and implementation of Euro-integration processes, were among the main factors affecting the electoral process democracy level. Factors influencing the authoritarianization of electoral processes include the relationship between the voter turnout and the electoral process transparency, radicalization of the political party space, and the dominance of one political actor in the party system and government structures (SMER-SD). Slovakia managed to go through all possible stages in the electoral process dynamics, this accounting for the complex democratic transformation of the country, e.g.: the decline of authoritarianism (1993–2000), stagnation (2001–2016), and increasing authoritarianism (2017–2019). In early 2020, parliamentary elections, following a deep political and governmental crisis, became an electoral snapshot of Slovak society.

Key words: V-Dem; Electoral Democracy Index; electoral process authoritarianization; electoral process democratization; Slovak parliamentary elections.

1 INTRODUCTION

A number of exogenous and endogenous factors determine the success or failure of transition countries on their path to a consolidated democracy. An effective and transparent electoral process is a necessary political mechanism that ensures political pluralism in the making. Eventually, the quality of the political elite and the level of political (electoral) activity of citizens can dramatically increase the new democratic regime legitimacy. On the other hand, in the post-socialist era, electoral fraud and administrative resource abuse are often looked upon as much more effective means of legitimizing hybrid political regimes

¹ Yevheniy HAYDANKA, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Trnava University, Slovak Republic. Contact: yevheniy.haydanka@truni.sk

(those belonging neither to the old model of authoritarianism nor to underdeveloped political procedures of the new democracy).

Following more than two decades of democratic transformations, some post-socialist countries tend to lean to the authoritarian leadership. For instance, a more liberal type of the so-called “*illiberal democracy*” (Zakaria 2007) manifested itself in the Slovak Republic (Wiatr 2018, 8). Among other former socialist countries, Slovakia is the one with traceable struggles between authoritarian and democratic tendencies in electoral processes. The country was able to overcome the complexities of the post-socialist era and successfully complete the formation of new democratic elites in the 1990s. In 2000, Slovakia implemented effective institutional reforms with the purpose of Euro-Atlantic integration, trying to adapt to the new conditions, arising out of EU membership. In the second decade of the 2000s, the Slovak party system begins to display signs of monopolization, this fact leading to the development of what could be the biggest political crisis in the run-up to the 2020 parliamentary elections. Notably, electoral processes at both the national and regional levels proved utterly ambiguous (Martinkovič 2019). Eventually, transparency and honesty in electoral cycles testify to either the positive level of democratic dynamics in Slovakia or, conversely, confirm the authoritarian tendencies in the electoral space.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The global spread of authoritarian tendencies in various segments of both non-democratic (deepening authoritarianism) and democratic regimes could be yet another factor to account for complex trajectories of modern transformations. Proponents of the “three waves of authoritarianism” concept along with V-Dem Institute experts Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) point out that authoritarian tendencies are hard to identify due to various variations of modern democratic regimes. The third wave of authoritarianism, which began in 1993 and concerned post-communist transits, seems most threatening. The most prominent feature of the third wave of authoritarianism is its very nature. It presupposes that a certain level of authoritarianism is mainly typical of institutionally democratic countries due to the non-democratic activities of the political elite, rather than military coups or revolutions (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1107-1108). That is, fatal changes for a democratic future are likely even in the format of a democratic state. For instance, a potential “authoritarian” or “autocrat party” can gain the highest level of electoral support on a completely legal basis (through elections). Their further actions do not de facto lead to the collapse of the democratic foundations of the country (elections, constitution, etc.). However, due to the available legal potential and political capital, the ruling elite will gradually reduce the overall level of political competition, creating a favourable electoral space. Experts note about 68% of all cases of “*third wave*” *power authoritarianisation* that took place in countries with future liberal democracy persecutors coming to power in democratic elections (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1108). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that in the future, in countries with significant authoritarian tendencies, the practice of holding elections on a multiparty basis will remain unchanged. At the same time, the basic rules of political struggle are sure to be determined by the ruling forces or the leader, setting a priority goal – to maintain the balance of political forces with their dominance. In the event of either authoritarian elites coming to power or the situational pursuit of undemocratic policies, the country faces up against real threats of authoritarian transformation. In such a case, as Lührmann and Lindberg argue, the two most likely behavioural strategies of the political regime

can be distinguished. In the first case, the liberal democratic opposition wins in the struggle between authoritarianism and democracy due to the strong democratic institutions, and the country successfully resumes its previous democratic state. Alternatively, the onsets of authoritarianism penetrate firmly into the political system, gaining a high level of social legitimacy and becoming the future model of the political regime (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1108). In both the first and the second cases, electoral processes play the leading role in determining the authoritarianism or democratization of the regime.

To gain a deeper insight into the nature of authoritarianism, it is necessary to consider political transformations (since 1993) from two different angles. Firstly, it is worth determining the so-called quality of a democratic regime (the actual political competition and the existence of liberal democracy). The existing number of democratic institutions (elections, multiparty system, parliamentarism or presidentialism, etc.) illustrates the normative character of a democratic regime, whereas democratic practices need empirical explaining. Secondly, growing is the weight of electoral processes, since a high level of Euroscepticism and populism in the electoral space often leads to non-democratic political forces in the higher echelons of power. Although the multipartisanship and competitive elections cannot fully protect the country from authoritarian threats, these mechanisms of recruiting political elites remain an effective tool of the modern democratic regime.

Undoubtedly, the V-Dem experts' concept of authoritarianism needs empirical confirmation. Although the conceptual basis of authoritarianism does not raise any objections – first of all, the “*waves of democratization*” by Huntington (1991) and the “*end of history*” by Fukuyama (1992) – modern political science prioritizes the empirical verification of any experiments. Also, transformations of many years in Eastern and Central Europe often facilitate the emergence of transitional or hybrid regimes, the term that needs explaining. Notably, determining the very forms of political regimes against the background of the systemic transformation is one of the priority tasks of modern comparative political science (particularly the “*meta-concept of 'hybrid regimes'*” (Procházka and Cabada 2020). Lührmann and Lindberg make methodological excursus into political science, primarily into F. Fukuyama's legacy, claiming that “*the end of history*” or “*the end of democracy*” statement by the American scholar is too precocious (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1108).

Under the influence of both exogenous and endogenous factors, each political regime undergoes a permanent transformation. As a rule, the so-called young democracies strengthen the current level of democracy, leaning towards liberal democracy or, vice versa, the democratic regime is heading towards authoritarianism. In this light, it seems necessary to determine the amplitude of the political regime fluctuations (< democracy/authoritarianism >) at respective time intervals (preferably one year). If we apply the V-Dem empirical methodology, we can outline several blocks: a) a total of 182 countries are under study; b) the period covers the timespan from 1900 to 2018 (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100); c) the methodology takes into account 5 sub-indices and 25 indicators (Democracy Facing 2019, 57). The key indicator that determines the institutional difference between an operating democracy and the so-called democratic ideal is the *Electoral Democracy Index*. On its basis, experts find out the difference between the ways the state's democratic institutions implement strict requirements of Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy* (1972). The analysis considers 4 main attributes (requirements) of an efficient polyarchy: 1) universal suffrage; 2) free and fair elections; 3) freedom of speech; 4) freedom of association (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100).

Of course, the empirical method of calculating the *Electoral Democracy Index* measures the numerical values of the level of the political regime's authoritarianism. The proposed scale of the democratic institutions' authoritarianization metering enables us to fully assess either the positive or negative dynamics of the country's democratization. Primarily, it takes into account the minimum values (initial dynamics – 1% (0.01 of the index) and the beginning of systemic authoritarianism 10% (0.1 of the index). Secondly, it covers the indicative time frame of empirical analysis (the minimum monitoring period is 1 full calendar year, whereas the minimum period of invariance (statics) of the studied indicator is four years) (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100-1101).

Like any empirical methodology, based on the principle of rating democracy/authoritarianism of different countries (e.g., well-known world ratings by Freedom House: *Freedom in the World* (Freedom in the World 2019) and *Nations in Transit* (Nations in Transit 2018) or transitive studies of the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2020), the V-Dem empirical method can also be the subject of constructive criticism (Coppedge et al. 2017). Having said that, we can provide a comprehensive analysis of modern political and economic transformations only from a comparative perspective. Firstly, we consider various instances of authoritarianizing the existing democratic regime, which, from our vantage point, can serve as a far better indicator of the country's transitive direction than that of modelling the democratization level. It's the V-Dem experts that point out four main benefits of the *Electoral Democracy Index* in modern comparative political science (Lührmann et al. 2019; Coppedge 2017), e.g.: 1) the analysis tackles the degree of authoritarianism in more than 200 hundred countries over 100 years; 2) it reflects the correlation between the actual and normative operation of democratic institutions; 3) the conceptual proximity of electoral democracy to the model of electoral democracy by Robert Dahl (1972); 4) the index of electoral democracy is a dynamic indicator that can capture the country's fluctuations towards authoritarian tendencies (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019, 1100).

Our first hypothesis concerns the subject of scientific analysis (regularities of the impact of electoral cycles on the level of democracy or authoritarianism in Slovakia) only indirectly. At the same time, we need to identify empirical material for analysis.

Hypothesis 1. The level of voter turnout in the parliamentary elections reflects the actual political orientations of the electorate and the allocation of political actors in the country.

According to the subject of election criterion, elections fall into four main groups: a) elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (*Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*); b) elections of the President of the Slovak Republic (*Prezident Slovenskej republiky*); c) elections to self-government bodies of the Regions (*orgány samosprávnych krajov*); d) elections to the European Parliament. The election dates and, respectively, the procedures of elections to collegiate bodies or presidential elections considerably differ: e.g., the first competitive elections in Slovakia were the parliamentary elections of 1990 (the period of the Czechoslovak federal model). In 2004 and the latest of all, Slovakia began to elect delegates to the European Parliament. To conduct a comprehensive analysis of voter turnout, the year 2004 serves as the starting point, considering all the elections during 2004–2020.

Hypothesis 2. The decline of voter turnout leads to an increase in the degree of democratic nature of the electoral process (Free and Fair Elections).

To confirm this hypothesis, it is necessary to compare and analyse the main indicators that enable us to see the objective correlation between the increase/decrease in voter turnout and the increasing/decreasing democratism of the electoral process. V-Dem proposed a range of empirical indicators, among which it seems expedient to consider the following: a) free and fair election, b) election vote-buying, c) election turnout (Varieties of Democracy 2019). Based on the correlation of the three variables, we get an objective explanation of the 1994–2019 electoral cycles in the Slovak Republic.

Hypothesis 3. The radicalization of the political environment (the extreme right parties winning up to 1/6 of electoral support) does not significantly affect the level of the electoral process democratism in Slovakia.

In recent years, the factor of political environment radicalization in numerous post-communist countries is becoming far more conspicuous. With this in mind, it is sufficient to analyse the results of parliamentary elections in several Central and East European countries, as well as Western Europe (Germany, Austria, France). Of course, the popularity of far-right political ideologies at the electorate level should affect the level of authoritarianism of the country. Above all, it may lead to the polarization of the party system and the decline in democratic actions in the Government. Hence, it is important to find out the approximate quota of extreme right-wing parties in the Slovak parliament, which won't significantly worsen the democratic nature of the electoral process. The analysis (comparison) tackles a sample of seven extreme right-wing parties operating in the Slovak electoral environment, outlined by Kluknavska and Smolík (2016, 337) and the *Electoral Democracy Index* from V-Dem.

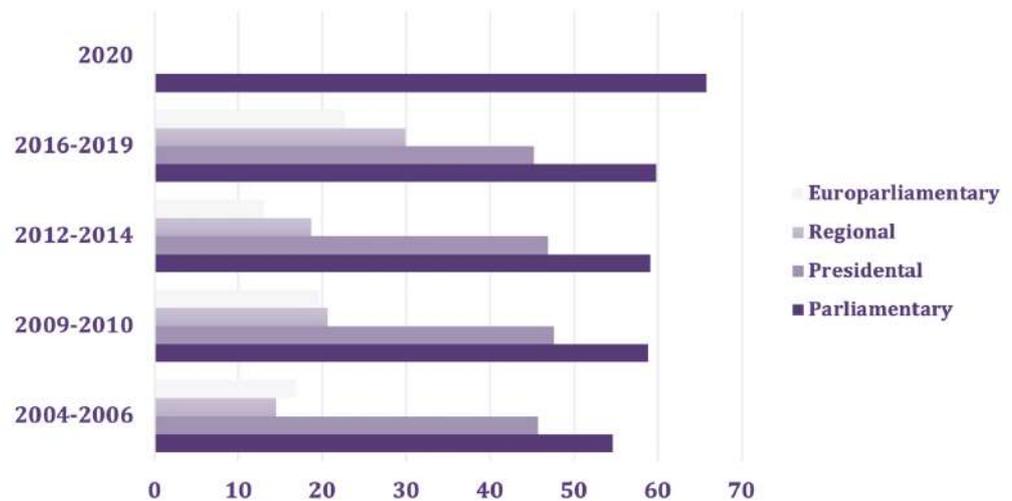
Hypothesis 4. The authoritarianization of the electoral process in Slovakia is declining and evolves with fits and starts.

Authoritarianization or democratization of the electoral process correlates to the dominant trends in the political and party environment. Notably, the post-communist nature of the reforms, followed by the successful European integration, the dominance of one political actor in government structures, and the recent systemic crisis appeared the key factors influencing the authoritarianization of the electoral process in Slovakia.

3 ELECTORAL ACTIVITY OF A SLOVAK VOTER

In 2004–2020, the Slovak electoral preferences were quite heterogeneous, which is proved by voters' interest in the all-national level of politics. That is, the electorate associates parliamentary structures and the head of state with central authorities. The regional (Regional Assembly and the President of the Region) and the European (the European Parliament) levels are significantly lagging (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: THE LEVEL OF ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF THE SLOVAK VOTERS, IN % (2004–2020)



Resource: own calculation on the basis of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Vol'by a referenda 2020).

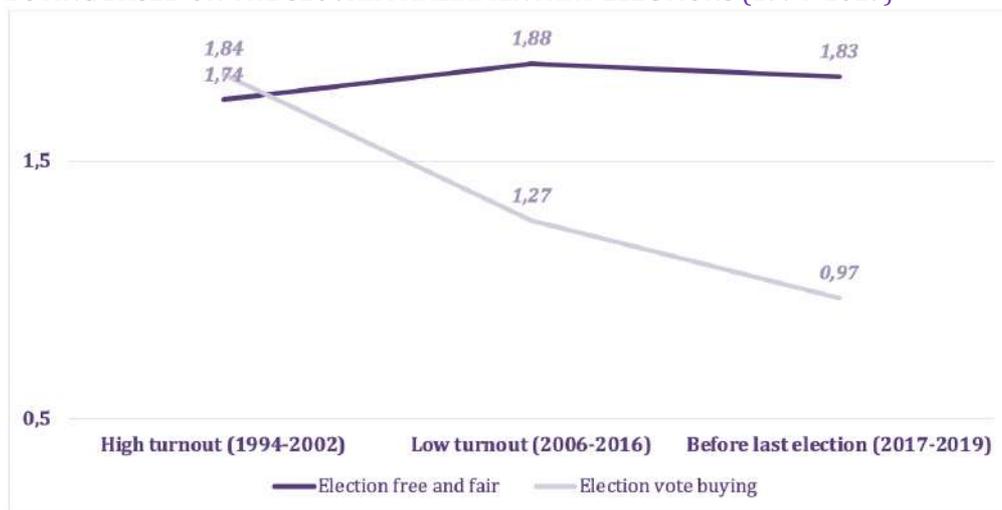
In general, we can calculate the average turnout for a specific type of election (according to the subject of election): 1) parliamentary elections – 59.6%; 2) presidential elections – 46.3%; 3) regional elections – 20.9%; 4) elections to the European Parliament – 18%. We can point out several trends in the electoral process. There has consistently been a high voter turnout in the parliamentary elections, however, electoral growth (+6% of voters) began only since the last elections. It is during 2018–2020 that the political crisis, stipulated by the assassination of journalist Ján Kuciak, has been running rampant. The desire to reboot the power and bring the ruling *SMER-SD* to the background significantly mobilized the electorate. At the same time, the non-systemic politician Zuzana Čaputová winning the presidency in 2019 never considerably increased the turnout. One way or another, every second voter votes in the presidential election. Elections to the Regional Assembly have never been a priority for Slovaks, as is traditionally the case in post-socialist countries. After all, the national level of politics is far less popular with the electorate than that of the regional. Only in the last 2017 regional elections voter turnout increased noticeably (+11% of voters). The “European elections” prove to remain the least popular among the Slovak population. Simultaneously, Slovakia demonstrated the lowest turnout among the other EU member states (European election results, 2019). Even though voter turnout nearly doubled in the last European elections, the country retains an outsider position in the European ranking. Among the reasons for a low voter turnout in the “European elections” has traditionally been a low interest of the Visegrad and Baltic countries in European politics, accompanied by quite a high level of Euroscepticism in Slovakia in the first decade of adaptation to the new EU requirements.

4 THE LEVEL OF AUTHORITARIANISM ACCORDING TO V-DEM AND ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

V-DEM experts perform calculations of the level of authoritarianism/democratization of countries based on the entire set of indicators, including those of the electoral process dynamics. Among electoral factors that comprehensively explain the electoral trends is “free and fair

election". This electoral process factor is traceable through the dynamics of voter turnout and vote-buying (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: CORRELATION OF INDICES ELECTION FREE AND FAIR AND ELECTION VOTE BUYING BASED ON THE SLOVAK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (1994–2019)²



Resource: own calculation on the basis of V-DEM (V-Dem. Varieties of Democracy 2019).

The main regularities of the democratic electoral process in Slovakia (1994–2019):

- 1) over 1994–2002 (the period of high voter turnout), there was a consistently high level of “election free and fair” indicator (1.74). Likewise, the election vote-buying is high, comprising 1.84. This trend is typical of the three parliamentary election campaigns in the post-socialist period of the Slovak Republic.
- 2) since 2005, the level of electoral process democratism has been gradually increasing. This trend continued until the 2016 parliamentary elections (the average value of “election free and fair” indicator is 1.88) against the background of a significantly decreasing turnout (in 2006 the turnout dropped to 54% compared to 70% in 2002). Also, the indicator of election vote-buying depreciated from 1.83 in 2005 to 1.16 in 2006. Further on, the level of the vote-buying was fluctuating on the eve of the 2010 elections, it increased to 1.63 (2009), decreasing to 1.15 in the 2012 elections. Before the next election, it increased to 1.64 (2015). Already in the election year, it drops to a record low of 0.91 (2016–2018).
- 3) the last parliamentary elections in Slovakia in the focus of attention of the V-DEM experts were the elections to the People’s Council in 2016. The “election free and fair” indicator is gradually deteriorating, comprising 1.75 in 2019. Paradoxically, the value of “election vote-buying” index decreases and reaches 0.91 (2016–2018). Separately, we should call attention to the last year of V-DEM monitoring. It was in the period 2018–2019 when the political crisis in Slovakia was running rampant, leading to a declining trend in the level of the electoral process democratism. First of all, this is true of the “election free and fair” (-0.12) and “election vote buying” (-0.19) indices. It was under these conditions that the last parliamentary elections in Slovakia took place at the end of February 2020.

² Having analysed the turnout in Slovakia since 1994, we get two groups – high turnout and low turnout. By high turnout we mean the turnout of 70%>, low turnout covers the numerical area of 50–60%. Thus, the electoral cycles in the Slovak Republic should be divided into three groups: 1) high turnout (1994 – 75.6%, 1998 – 84.2%, 2002 – 70%), 2) low turnout (2006 – 54.6%, 2010 – 58.8%, 2012 – 59.1%, 2016 – 59.8%) and 3) high turnout (2020 – 65.8%).

5 RADICALIZATION OF THE PARTY ENVIRONMENT AND THE LEVEL OF ELECTORAL PROCESS DEMOCRATISM IN SLOVAKIA

We define the party system radicalization as the increasing weight of extreme right-wing political forces. The higher the electoral support for right-wing radical parties and, consequently, their growing representation in parliament, the more radical the Slovak electoral environment. Traditionally, right-wing radical parties have advocated socio-political values that are far from liberal, which results in society radicalization.

In the Slovak Republic, seven parties stand out as the most influential “extremist parties” (Kluknavska and Smolík 2016, 337). As the results of the 1994–2020 parliamentary elections indicate, right-wing radical parties displayed varying electoral support levels. From the spectrum of all right-wing parties, there are two the most influential parties that stand out – *SNS* and *ĽSNS*. Both the former and the latter were elected to parliament, particularly the *SNS* (won seats in parliament in 1994, 1998, 2006, 2010 and 2016). In the most recent 2020 elections, the *SNS*, headed by Andrej Danko, won only 3.16% of the votes and did not get into the parliament. Instead, *ĽSNS* led by Marian Kotleba almost replicates the 2016 result of around 8% (7.97%) in the region. On the whole, the 2020 elections proved the “stable instability” state (Gyárfášová 2020) in Slovak electoral sentiment and the need to form a parliamentary coalition to retaliate against political forces of the former Prime Minister Robert Fico. The other right-wing political parties did not play an important role in Slovak politics. For example, over 1994–2002, the closest to the parliament was the *PSNS* in 2002 with a result of 3.65% (Vol'by a referenda 2020).

The right-wing radical political parties triumphed in the 2016 parliamentary elections (together *SNS* and *ĽSNS* won 16.68%), the 2006 elections (*SNS* received 11.73%), and the 1998 elections (*SNS* won 9.07%) (Vol'by a referenda 2020). If we compare the data of the Electoral Democracy Index of Slovakia during the period of independence, we can see a weak correlation between the electoral process democratism and the level of electoral support for right-wing radical parties. Thus, in 1998 in Slovakia, a fairly high democratic electoral process index (Electoral Democracy Index) was recorded at the level of 0.74 (V-Dem. Varieties of Democracy 1993–2019). Moreover, until the 2002 election, the level of democratism displays positive dynamics, within 0.74–0.85. Already in 2006, the Electoral Democracy Index was at 0.83, and before the 2010 parliamentary elections, it ranged from 0.83 to 0.84. At the same time, the situation in 2016, with the best aggregate indicator of right-wing radical parties, looks illogical. After all, after the 2016 parliamentary elections, a high rate (0.84) of democratism is gradually deteriorating, and as of 2018, Slovakia received -0.03 (0.81). However, in 2019 there was a slightly positive dynamics of the electoral process democratism (+0.02).

It should be noted that the electoral support level of right-wing radical political forces does not depend on a significant deterioration in the level of electoral process democratism. The most noticeable decline in the dynamics of democracy occurred after the 2016 parliamentary elections, yet with no critical results. In the numerical plane, 1/6 of the electoral support of right-wing radical parties (2016 – 16.68%) does not lead to the authoritarianization of the electoral process.

6 AUTHORITARIANISATION OR DEMOCRATISM OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN SLOVAKIA?

The Slovak Republic belongs to a cohort of present-day post-socialist countries that have generally managed to step over the “socialist experiment” and overcome the complexities of the post-socialist period. It was also able to join the group of new national democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Like any reform, the pluralization of the party environment and the electoral processes liberalization were going within two extremities – authoritarianism and democratization. Based on the V-Dem expert assessment, modern Slovakia bears relatively sufficient dynamics of electoral processes (Table 1).

TABLE 1: DATA OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX IN SLOVAKIA (1993–2019)

1993	0,76	0	2002	0,85	0	2011	0,86	+ 0,01
1994	0,73	- 0,03	2003	0,85	0	2012	0,85	- 0,01
1995	0,71	- 0,02	2004	0,85	0	2013	0,84	- 0,01
1996	0,71	0	2005	0,85	0	2014	0,84	0
1997	0,71	0	2006	0,83	- 0,02	2015	0,84	0
1998	0,74	+ 0,03	2007	0,83	0	2016	0,84	0
1999	0,83	+ 0,09	2008	0,83	0	2017	0,83	- 0,01
2000	0,85	+ 0,02	2009	0,84	+ 0,01	2018	0,81	- 0,02
2001	0,85	0	2010	0,85	+ 0,01	2019	0,83	+ 0,02

Resource: own calculations on the basis of V-DEM (V-Dem. Varieties of Democracy 1993–2019).

We believe that the results of the Electoral Democracy Index for Slovakia formed in the following three periods of socio-political transformation:

- 1) 1993–2000 – *decreasing authoritarianism* (a rapid decline of the electoral process authoritarianisation);
- 2) 2001–2016 – *stagnation* (weak dynamics of the electoral process authoritarianization);
- 3) 2017–2019 – *increasing authoritarianism* (a gradual increase of the level of the electoral process authoritarianization).

Also, for independent Slovakia, it is the most controversial period of electoral processes as in 1995 and 1996 the recorded level of authoritarianism was the highest. This is due to the turbulence of the Slovak political system in the first years of independence along with the strengthening of Vladimir Mečiar's executive power after the 1994 parliamentary elections. Despite the complexity of the economic transformation and the post-Czechoslovak period of development, Slovakia was able to achieve a rapid increase in the level of electoral process democracy. The political confrontation between Vladimír Mečiar and Mikuláš Dzurinda, reaching its peak in the 1998 parliamentary elections (Rhodes 2001), proved decisive for Slovakia not only in domestic policy but also in the search for real opportunities for the post-socialist Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, the second factor that led to the growing electoral process democracy was the country's preparation and the accession to the European Union. As a result, in the year Slovakia acquired membership in the European Union (2004), the total Electoral Democracy Index was 0.09 higher than in the year of its independence (1993).

In fact, the period of preparation for accession and adaptation to the new economic and political conditions of coexistence with the other EU countries had little to no effect upon either progress or regression of the electoral process democracy in Slovakia. Thus, the Electoral Democracy Index during 2001–2016 ranged from 0.83 to 0.86. Notably, two years when electoral process slightly leaned towards authoritarianization are the following: 1) 2012 (-0.01) – parliamentary elections, with *SMER-SD* winning 44%, and the second political

force *Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH)* – only 8% (Vol'by a referenda 2020), whereas Robert Fico heads the Slovak Government for the second time, 2) 2013 (-0.01) – “post-election” period caused by the *SMER-SD* single majority in parliament.

As of today, the third and final period of authoritarianism/democratism of the electoral process has lasted the shortest span of three years (2017–2019). The Electoral Democracy Index decreased noticeably in 2017 (-0.01), due to Robert Fico's premiership, and yet another victory of *SMER-SD* in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Since 2018, the growing political crisis has largely affected the results of the 2020 parliamentary elections, introducing a new configuration in the Slovak parliament. Lately, Slovak politics has borne elements of *soft populism (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (OLANO))* led by Igor Matovič, and *oppositional tendencies (SMER-SD)*. Based on these political dynamics, we can predict that the level of electoral process democracy in Slovakia will slightly improve after 2020, although V-Dem has not yet conducted empirical monitoring.

7 CONCLUSION

The level of the electoral process transparency and democracy in the country remains one of the most showcase indicators of the current political regime democratism. It is especially true of post-socialist countries, in particular Slovakia. On the one hand, the Slovak Republic had to introduce a competitive electoral system as an invariable attribute of the “*new democracy*” from scratch, on the other hand, during the late post-socialism period, the country had to ensure the proper level of the electoral process democratism to reduce the level of authoritarianism of either the ruling party or the Government. To gain insight into the logic of development and dynamics of electoral processes, particularly in Slovakia, V-Dem experts proposed the empirical methodology. Their Electoral Democracy Index reproduces the peculiarities of the country's leading political institutions formation (the Parliament and the Government), explains the behavioural patterns of the Slovak voter, and determines the level of the electoral process democratism/authoritarianism.

Firstly, parliamentary elections remain the undisputed priority of the Slovak voter. On average, this election provides about 60% of the turnout. In contrast to parliamentary elections, only one in five voters votes in the European Parliament elections (average 18%). On the one hand, such ambiguous data indicate the traditional interest of post-socialist countries in the national level of politics, as well as a significant weakening of electoral interest in regional elections. It means that the highest collegial institution of power epitomizes the future of both the democratic development and positive change in the country, rather than deepening local democracy and strengthening the foundations of administrative decentralization. On the other hand, the actual neglect of the “European elections” occurs due to a consistently high level of Euroscepticism and the so-called distancing of the Slovak voter from European politics. The last electoral situation ensures a favourable electoral field for the popularization of traditional Eurosceptics – right-wing radical political forces and populists.

Secondly, the “election free and fair” index, as well as the activity of the Slovak voter proved the most important factors, affecting the level of the electoral process democracy in the post-socialist Slovakia. Notably, the higher the voter turnout, the higher the electoral manipulation (e.g. election vote-buying),

whereas the lower turnout, the more transparent and democratic elections. It is during the high voter turnout in the parliamentary elections (1994–2002) that the level of election vote-buying remained high, although it is markedly decreasing now. This state of affairs is due to complex but on the whole successful democratic reforms in electoral processes (changes in electoral legislation, the search for the optimal electoral model). Preparations for the EU accession and adaptation to the new EU conditions have determined a fairly high level of the “election free and fair” index in Slovakia over 2005–2016. At the same time, voter turnout is falling considerably. Already in 2016–2019, the significance of the “election free and fair” index is slightly decreasing. We believe that this is due to the 2016 parliamentary elections and the dominance of *SMER-SD* in the party and government structures. Eventually, the level of election vote-buying is diminishing.

Thirdly, the popular electoral wave of right-wing radicalism in Europe has had little impact upon the level of the electoral process democratism in modern Slovakia. Undoubtedly, *SNS* and *L'SNS*, the two largest actors of the radical spectrum in recent years, are polarizing the Slovak Parliament. However, despite little support they gained in the 2016 parliamentary elections receiving a total of about 17%, did not become a factor, considerably changing the level of the electoral process democratism. Moreover, in the 2020 parliamentary elections, only the *LSNS* remained of the Slovak right-wing radical duo. The right-wing radical spectrum of Slovak politics may gradually lose its electoral support.

Finally, the bottom-line Electoral Democracy Index in Slovakia confirms the success of democratic reform in the post-socialist period (1993–2000), steady performance of democratic electoral mechanisms in the EU post-adaptation period (2001–2016), and growth of authoritarianism in recent years (2017–2019). Interestingly, the deterioration of the electoral process democratism in Slovakia is caused by a continual political crisis that began in 2018 and lasted until early 2020. The future monitoring of V-Dem experts in 2020 will clarify the situation regarding the Slovak electoral processes, illustrating either democratic or authoritarian tendencies.

REFERENCES

- Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI). 2020. Available at <https://www.bti-project.org/en/home/>.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Staffan Lindberg, Svend-Erik Skaaning and Jan Teorell. 2017. “V-Dem Comparisons and Contrasts with Other Measurement Projects.” *V-Dem Working Paper* 45: 46. Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2951014>.
- Coppedge, Michael. 2017. “Eroding Regimes: What, Where, and When?” *V-Dem Working Paper* 57: 30. Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3066677>.
- Dahl, Robert. 1972. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Democracy Facing Global Challenges. 2019. *V-Dem Annual Democracy Report*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
- European election results. 2019. *European Parliament*. Available at <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/>.
- Freedom in the World. 2019. *Democracy in Retreat*. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/democracy-retreat>.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Gyárfášová, Olga. 2020. *Slovenské voľby 2020: potvrdenie “stabilnej nestability” (Slovak Elections 2020: Confirmation of “Stable Instability”)*. Kancelář v Praze: Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Available at <https://cz.boell.org/cs/Slovak elections 2020>.

- Huntington, Samuel. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Kluknavska, Alens and Jozef Smolík. 2016. "We Hate Them All? Issue Adaptation of Extreme Right Parties in Slovakia 1993–2016." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49 (4): 335–344.
- Lührmann, Anna and Staffan Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New About It?" *Democratization* 26 (7): 1095–1113.
- Lührmann, Anna, Sandra Grahn, Richard Morgan, Shreeya Pillai and Staffan Lindberg. 2019. "State of the World 2018: Democracy Facing Global Challenges." *Democratization* 26 (6): 895–915.
- Martinkovič, Marcel. 2018. Regionálne voľby do VÚC ako prejav krízy funkčnosti strán v Slovenskom straníckom systéme (Regional Elections as a Manifestation of the Crisis of Party Functionality in the party system of the Slovak Republic). In *Politologická analýza regionálnych volieb 2017 na Slovensku (Political Analysis of Regional Elections 2017 in Slovakia)*, eds. Dudinská, Irina, Michal Cirner and Székely, Gabriel, 39–49. Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej University.
- Nations in Transit. 2018. *Confronting Illiberalism*. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit>.
- Procházka, David and Ladislav Cabada. 2020. "Exploring the "Grey Zone": The Theory and Reality of "Hybrid Regimes" in Postcommunist Countries." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 13 (1): 4–22.
- Rhodes, Matthew. 2001. "Slovakia after Mečiar: A Midterm Report." *Problems of Post-Communism* 48 (4): 3–13.
- V-Dem. *Varieties of Democracy. Country Graph*. 2019. Available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph>.
- V-Dem. *Varieties of Democracy. Electoral Democracy Index, Slovakia, 1993–2019*. 2019. Available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/VariableGraph/>.
- Volby a referenda (Elections and Referenda). 2020. Štatistický úrad SR (*Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic*). Available at <https://volby.statistics.sk/>.
- Wiatr, Jerzy. 2018. "Democratic Experience in Central Europe: 25 Years Later." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 11 (1): 5–11.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 2007. *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. New York: W.W. Norton.



AVTORITATNOST ALI DEMOKRATIZACIJA: SMERI VOLILNIH PROCESOV V DANAŠNJI SLOVAŠKI

Strokovnjaki, ki delujejo v projektu V-Dem so predlagali empirično metodologijo za določanje dinamike avtoritarnosti oz. demokratizacije volilnega procesa (indeks volilne demokracije). Na Slovaškem so bile med glavnimi dejavniki, ki so vplivale na demokratičnost volilnega procesa, uspešne institucionalne reforme poznih devetdesetih in prvih letih tega stoletja, ki jim je sledilo poglobljanje in izvajanje evro-integracijskih procesov. Dejavniki, ki vplivajo na avtoritarnost volilnih procesov, vključujejo razmerje med udeležbo volivcev in preglednostjo volilnega procesa, radikalizacijo prostora političnih strank in prevlado enega političnega akterja v strankarskem sistemu in vladnih strukturah (SMER-SD). Slovaška je šla skozi vse možne faze v dinamiki volilnega procesa, kar je pomenilo zapleteno demokratično preobrazbo države, npr. upad avtoritarnosti (1993–2000), stagnacijo (2001–2016) in ponovno večanje avtoritarnosti (2017–2019). V začetku leta 2020 so parlamentarne volitve po globoki politični in vladni krizi postale volilni posnetek slovaške družbe.

Ključne besede: V-Dem; indeks volilne demokracije; avtoritarnost volilnega procesa; demokratizacija volilnega procesa; slovaške parlamentarne volitve.