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Spatial Distance and Representation in Closed PR List: Revisiting the U-Curve Argument

DEJAN BURSAĆ AND DUŠAN RADUJKO

sciendo

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Abstract: *The authors are testing the patterns of geographical representation in single nationwide district closed-list PR systems, in the framework of an earlier study made by Latner and McGann (2005), who suggested that MPs mostly reside in central metropolitan areas, as well as in distant regions, to the detriment of descriptive representation of areas adjacent to the capital. In this way, spatial distance serves as an incentive for parties to nominate lists comprised mostly of candidates from metropolitan urban centres who can easily reach the mid-distance municipalities for campaigning and constituency service, but also of those candidates residing in peripheral regions in which there is some sort of political or ethno-cultural saliency, prompting the voters to prefer their local candidates over capital city politicians. Authors are offering a novel approach of measuring and comparing spatial distance to the data on representation of local administrative units and regional subdivisions of four countries (Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia). While the findings indeed indicate overrepresentation of capital cities and underrepresentation of neighbouring areas, the representation of peripheral areas is not significantly pronounced and seemingly depends more on a contextual case-to-case basis than on a general pattern related to spatial distance producing political or ethno-cultural saliency.*

Keywords: ***political geography, PR list, closed-list, single nationwide district, descriptive representation, Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia***

I. Introduction

The ever-increasing amount of literature focusing on various spatial dimensions of politics sometimes crosses paths with studies of representation, underlying the role localities play in the relation between voters and elected representatives. While the importance of the place of residence (or origin) is more pronounced in candidate-centred electoral systems, more notably single-member district, but also preferential voting, it is often argued that proportional representation list systems disregard local representation (Norton 1997; McLean 1991) or generally produce weak incentives for parties to offer regionally balanced lists (Carey – Shugart 1995). According to these studies, voters in PR lists, especially if the party lists are closed, don't have the opportunity to demonstrate potential hometown bias towards certain candidates, so parties won't employ the locality when nominating lists.

Various studies have identified localness as one of the main informational shortcuts voters seek in a candidate. Authors such as Childs and Cowley (2011) defined the concept of a descriptive representation of locality, indicating the importance to voters that their area be represented in the legislature by someone who originates from or is residing within its limits. This link is less clear in party-centred systems, where the potential conflict between territorial and political principles of representation can easily emerge. Closed-list PR systems provide more influence to parties and party elites to act as electorates and pick candidates, as opposed to the voters who can only choose between party lists, and not among the individual deputies within them. A similar point can be made about countries with a single at-large district, where the pendulum swings closer to the political principle, rather than to the territorial one, given the fact that lists are national. However, certain authors disagree. In their seminal work, Latner and McGann (2005) provide considerable evidence for the importance of spatial representation within two typical closed-list PR at-large systems, namely Israel and the Netherlands, while also explaining certain patterns of geographical representation seemingly typical for this type of electoral system. However, their findings remain limited to only one electoral cycle. The main aim of our study is to examine whether these patterns still hold true and whether parties in typical closed-list single district countries still produce regionally balanced lists. To test this claim, we are focusing on four cases of incumbent parliaments of European countries using a relatively similar, party-centred electoral system: Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia.

II. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the previous section, the issue of territorial representation is often treated as a form of descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967), operat-

ing within the idea that groups tend to elect individuals who manifest certain characteristics of the group, including gender, race, class, ethnic origin, spatial residence and others. Local preferences of voters are often taken for granted in many European countries, with the dimension of geography situated in the widely understood notion that politicians are sent to legislative bodies to, at least partly, represent the interest of their localities, a strategy also employed by political parties when recruiting candidates (Pedersen et al. 2004). There is a growing body of evidence proving that location indeed affects both the electoral performance of candidates and their respective parties, as well as their consequent parliamentary behaviour. Firstly, the hometown advantage can attract votes because voters can perceive local candidates as more knowledgeable and invested in local issues, but also due to their local presence and recognisability, local ties and connections, or simply because the candidates themselves make localness a part of their electoral brands (Munis 2020). The term 'friend and neighbors voting' came to be used to describe the support candidates mobilise in local communities mainly on the basis of spatial proximity and derived social ties (Rice – Macht 1987; Meredith 2013). Although the term emerged in single-member district countries, it is false to assume that voters in other electoral systems don't apply similar informational shortcuts when making decisions. Voters can look for locals on party lists because their origin could be understood as a proof of dedication to local topics or as knowledge of local needs (Cain et al. 1987; Folke et al. 2021). Candidates tend to emulate the perceived local demand during their campaigns, but this also continues when they are elected MPs, through rooting the localness within their long-term identity as a way of seeking reelection. Examples include focusing primarily on constituency services (Brouard et al. 2013) or often signaling their hometown bias through activities such as plenary speeches and parliamentary questions (Zittel et al. 2019; Borghetto et al. 2020). One of the important means of cultivating the personal vote based on spatial origin is involvement in pork barrel style policies aimed at the redistribution of budgetary funds towards preferred local communities, which simultaneously bolsters the image of representatives dedicated to local ties even in at-large proportional systems (Carozzi – Repetto 2016; Fiva – Halse 2016).

Consequently, political parties also react to these incentives in their selection procedures, taking the place of residence into consideration when composing and nominating lists. This also happens in closed-list PR systems operating within a single nationwide district, such as Israel or the Netherlands,[1] where consideration for political geography is presumably low. As Latner and McGann

1 The Netherlands' electoral system is officially flexible-list, but in effect operates as a closed-list. While there are 18 sub-national districts and regional nomination lists, the seats are allocated to party lists based on their national vote share. Subsequently, the share of MPs elected from the bottom part of the lists is low, averaging at 0.6% per electoral cycle (Passarelli 2020).

(2005) point out, parties in those countries tend to put forward regionally balanced lists, adopting internal procedures for spatial diversification. These authors discovered interesting patterns of localities representation, with their MPs' residence data analysis demonstrating that most of the central metropolitan areas are overrepresented in relation to their population share, which is somewhat expected due to the concentration of political institutions and economic power in capitals and other large cities in the provinces of Noord--Holland, Zuid-Holland and Utrecht, as well as in the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem provinces of Israel. The ensuing findings seem more intriguing: Latner and McGann have found that the geographical pattern of representation in both case countries is U-curve shaped, with overrepresentation of both capital areas as well as peripheral regions, to the detriment of those regions adjacent to the metro areas. They see the issues of geography to be salient in faraway regions, where representation operates within one of three assumptions: either the national capitals are seen as distant and disconnected from local issues, or there is a distinctive culture (such as in the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Groningen), or, finally, these territories are intrinsically important for the national politics (such as the West Bank settlements in the case of Israel). Both voters and parties recognise the saliency, resulting in more local representation for these areas. On the other hand, regions neighbouring the capitals suffer due to the centralisation and peripheral saliency, but also (paradoxically) because of their proximity and connectedness to political centres. This is especially true for smaller countries, where MPs who live in capital cities can reach the municipalities nearby without much effort and expenditure, bearing in mind that constituency residence is not a legal requirement for nomination in most countries. This led to the widespread phenomenon of parachutists (Pedersen et al. 2004), namely the capital city resident politicians nominated in provincial constituencies.

Our main research question is whether this well-explained but understudied U-shaped pattern of representation in closed-list PR nationwide district countries replicates contemporary cases. There are currently six countries in the wider European area implementing similar electoral mechanisms: Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Serbia and Slovakia. We will examine four of them, excluding Israel due to the lasting parliamentary crisis leading the country to hold five elections in the last four years, as well as Moldova, due to the lack of data on MPs' residence from that country. Apart from using similar party-centred electoral systems lacking institutional features that could force spatial representation, all four are smaller non-federal countries. The somewhat scarce previous research of these cases has partly confirmed some of our main assumptions. Charvat (2017) found a disproportionate overrepresentation of the Bratislava region in the Slovak parliament for the 2010, 2012 and 2016 electoral cycles, while Bursać (2020) demonstrates similar trends with regard

to Belgrade, while observing all Serbian elections since the reintroduction of the multiparty system in 1990.

In all four cases of our study, we expect to find the overrepresentation of both national capitals, due to the centralisation of politics, along with overrepresentation of distant regions where identity is salient. Moreover, three Eastern European countries in our study all have a strong presence of ethnic minorities concentrated in peripheral regions: Hungarians and Rusyns in Slovakia; Hungarians, Albanians, Bosniaks and other smaller minorities in Serbia; Albanians, Bosniaks and Croats in Montenegro. Serbs also claim a strong presence as an ethnic group in Montenegro, but for various reasons this paper is too short to explain, they do not seek an official minority status, and more importantly for our study, they are not regionally salient but widespread across the territory, with 18 out of 24 Montenegrin municipalities having 20% or more Serbs among their population. The situation gets even more complicated when the share of Serbian language speakers is considered, mostly due to the mutual fluidity of Serbian and Montenegrin identity. Nevertheless, Serbs within Montenegro do have their own ethnic interest parties, but they do not seek support, nor are they based, exclusively within the border regions.

Furthermore, minorities in some Eastern European countries have their own ethnic parties, in some cases because this kind of association is provided with special legal status and subsequent electoral incentives, most notably in Serbia and Montenegro, where minority parties are not obliged to pass the 3% electoral threshold to gain deputies. On the other hand, Slovakia upholds the 5% threshold for all parties regardless of their ethnic focus, which became an issue in recent years, with the Hungarian vote being split between two competing ethnic parties, denying this community representation for the first time in more than two decades. But, as in the Serbian and Montenegrin cases, candidates of minority origin in Slovakia can be freely nominated and elected as part of other non-minority lists, which could serve as an incentive for dominant national parties to offer more ethnically and thus regionally diverse lists. Conversely, the presence of Eastern European-style ethnic minorities is not highlighted in the Netherlands, although some of the border provinces linguistically differ (speaking Frisian or Limburgish along with standard Dutch) or historically had more Catholic presences than the rest of the protestant Netherlands, which could also contribute to the regional saliency.

Our main hypothesis reads as follows: Representation in single nationwide district closed-list PR systems operates as a function of spatial distance. It further separates into two specific hypotheses, the first about the overrepresentation of capital cities and capital regions to the detriment of the rest of the country's territory; the second one is about the overrepresentation of identity salient peripheral regions.

III. Data and methods

In order to test these assumptions, we have obtained the data on MPs' residence from four countries for contemporary parliamentary terms sampled as of March 2023: in total 81 MPs from Montenegro, 150 from Slovakia, 250 from Serbia and 149 from the Netherlands (with 1 case of missing data). Although some similar analyses also focus on the place of birth, we opted only for the residence, because it represents a current link to the community. Furthermore, this approach also eliminates possible mistakes due to the foreign-born MPs or people born in towns other than their actual residences due to the health system infrastructure of the given country. Simply put, place of birth, unlike residence, can be a result of an accident.

We will test the relation of distance between the countries' capitals (seats of parliament) and MPs' residence municipalities and regions. A dual level of analysis (municipality and region) is employed mainly because many studies of geographic representation fail to look beyond the district, underestimating the extent of descriptive representation of locality and the strategic dilemma both candidates and voters face: namely, whether the MPs represent all people in a region (district), or only some part of it, as Andre and Depauw (2016) demonstrated. We will test both instances, while also examining both an absolute number of MPs, as well as proportionality ratio – representation of a certain municipality or region relative to their respective population shares, where perfect representation stands at value 1. If Latner and McGann's findings are still in effect, we should identify a higher proportionality ratio ($r>1$) of representation in capital regions, along with peripheral areas, while the adjacent areas of intermediate distance should have lower levels of ratio ($r<1$).

Spatial distance is measured in two ways. We rejected the idea of utilising direct geographical aerial distance, because we are exploring the proximity of travel between localities, and people usually don't travel in straight lines due to various terrain obstacles and existing road infrastructure. So it left us with two possible measures: road distance and travel time. Google Maps was employed for both measurements, calculating the distance between the national capital and a centre of every municipality (or centre of a regional capital, when considering regions) in both road kilometers and driving time with a passenger car. The parachutist argument about representation of districts neighbouring the capital comes down to the possibility of access, and we are assuming that most MPs in these relatively small countries carry out their campaign activities and other constituency services while travelling by car. To ensure the uniformity of the data, the best road option was always selected, and the measurement in all four countries is executed during night time, when there is less traffic congestion and fewer accidents or road closures that could affect the results. In this way, we have mapped distances for a total of 145 local administrative units (cities and

municipalities) in Serbia, 24 in Montenegro, 352 in the Netherlands, as well as 72 districts in Slovakia. The level of analysis in Slovakia is slightly different, because the total number of municipalities there is almost 2900, which could be impossible to properly track and difficult to compare with the other cases. Thus, the level of district (okres) is employed, which structurally corresponds to the local administrative unit level employed in the other three countries, and with separate Bratislava and Košice districts treated as single towns.

Besides the municipal level, we will also analyse representation more on a regional level. Here things get complicated, mainly because of the non-uniformity of regions across the sample. Namely, as a smallest country case with only 24 municipalities and with a population of just over 600 thousand, Montenegro does not have any regional division. NUTS nomenclature is not applied in the country, while the Regional Development Law (Zakon o regionalnom razvoju 2011) dividing its territory into three macro-regions (Coastal, Central and Northern), which is not particularly useful for the purpose of our analysis, because none of the three could be exclusively treated as adjacent or peripheral. Slovakia and the Netherlands are a bit more suitable for examination, being divided into eight regions (kraj) or twelve provinces, respectively. Serbian administrative divisions present problems similar to Montenegro: there are only four NUTS 2 level regions, while the lower divide level is an administrative district (okrug). There are 25 districts in total. Due to the differences in levels of analysis, we won't create a unique model for the regions, but only a comparative analysis of different country cases.

IV. Findings

The initial strength of correlation tests demonstrates that, on a summary level of the four observed countries, the share of MPs is very strongly related ($p=0.911$) to more populous cities and municipalities, while also showing a statistically significant negative correlation to travel time and road distance, although the coefficient is much weaker ($p<-0.2$ in both cases). More importantly, on a summary level, proportionality ratio value (share of MPs in relation to the share of population) demonstrates only a weak correlation with distance variables ($p<-0.2$).

As for separate countries, distance and travel time seem to relate negatively to the number of MPs or MP share in all four individual cases, with coefficients ranging from $p=-0.161$ for the Netherlands to $p=-0.475$ for Montenegro, indicating weak to moderate correlation. This again leads us to the conclusion that central capital areas provide more parliament members, while the number of deputies decreases with geographical distance. The finding is supported by the population share variable, with all four countries displaying very strong levels of correlation between MP share and population share, ranging from $p=0.817$

in Slovakia to almost absolute correlation of p=0.989 in Serbia, meaning that metropolitan urban centres produce a majority of representatives. On the other hand, proportionality ratio, a measure indicating over- or under-representation of certain municipalities, demonstrates only a weak negative correlation with distance and travel time in just one case (p<–0.2), which is the Netherlands.

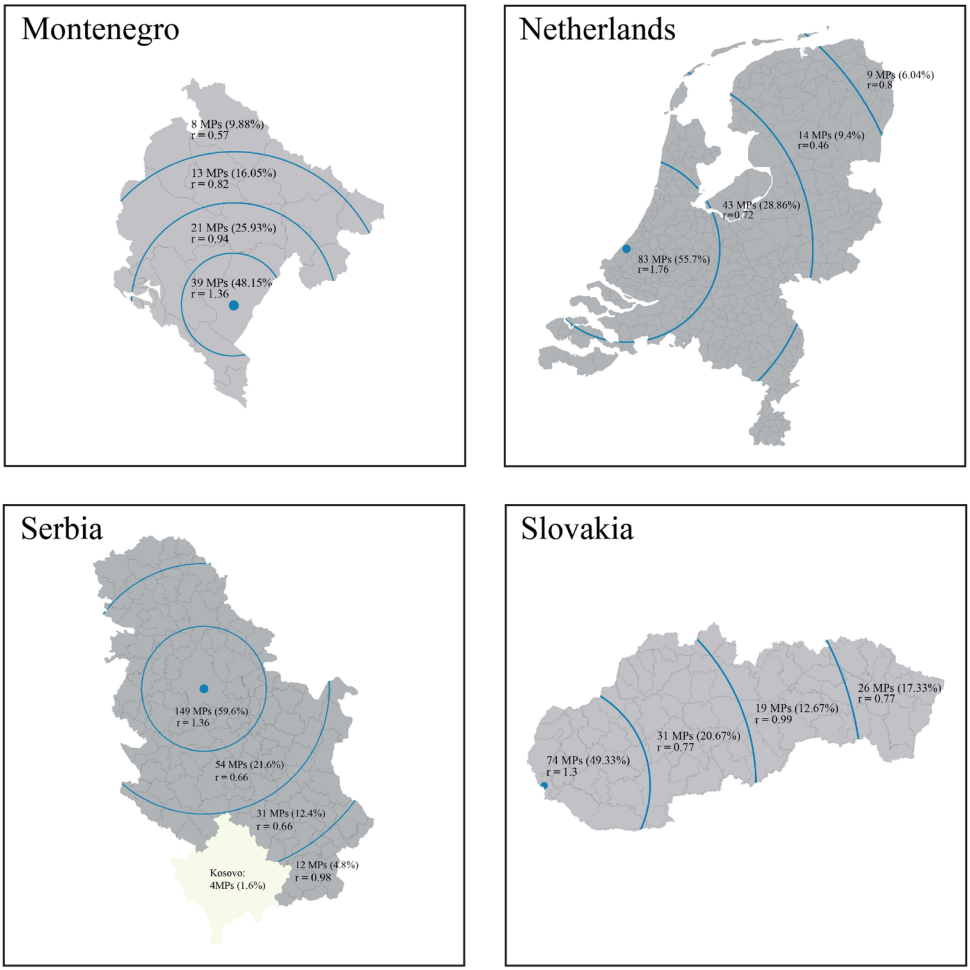
In order to create an analytical framework of the data, we have divided each of the four country cases into different distance categories (capital, adjacent, distant and border areas), according to travel time variable quartiles and with regard to the time needed to move from the capital city centre to a centre of a certain municipality, as presented in Table 1. The road distance and travel time variables proved to have almost identical territorial scope, differing only in definition of a handful of Serbian and Dutch municipalities, so we opted for the latter, believing it to be closer to the argument explaining campaigning of candidates or constituency service of MPs.

Table 1: Analytical framework: quartiles of travel time distance

	Montenegro	Netherlands	Serbia	Slovakia
capital area	within 40min	within 49min	within 1h10	within 1h26
adjacent area	40min to 1h20	49min to 1h38	1h10 to 2h20	1h26 to 2h52
distant area	1h20 to 2h	1h38 to 2h27	2h20 to 3h30	2h52 to 4h18
border area	over 2h	over 2h27	over 3h30	over 4h18

Maps (see: Illustration 1) created with regard to this analytical framework visually demonstrate the possible limitations of the U-curve argument, especially regarding the representation of border regions. Quantifying the argument, we could expect that capital areas hold a larger share of MPs, but also, given the fact that a plain percentage of deputies could be the function of a larger number of inhabitants (which was confirmed by the correlation tests), we also assume higher ratios of proportionality for capitals, meaning that these areas also provide more MPs than could be expected according to their share of total population. In all four cases, capital areas are indeed significantly overrepresented. In Serbia, the capital area as defined by a first travel time quartile holds 43.71% of the population and 59.6% of MPs, producing a ratio of 1.36. Identical ratio value is found in Montenegro, where the capital area of 35.49% of the population has 48.15% of MPs. Slovak capital ratio amounts to 1.3 (49.33% of MPs, 37.99% of population), while in the Netherlands it climbs to a staggering 1.76, with an area inhabited by 31.57% of Dutch citizens providing 55.7% of parliament members.

Illustration 1: Analytical framework applied to the territories of four countries



On the other hand, adjacent areas indeed seem underrepresented. Their ratio is significantly lower than perfect proportionality (value 1) in three out of four cases, with Montenegro being the significant outlier with 0.94 value. In Serbia, municipalities adjacent to the capital area hold a summary ratio of just 0.66, while values for Slovakia and the Netherlands are also low (0.77 and 0.72, respectively). The Montenegrin case requires further explanation. While the assumption of lower representation of areas close to the capital which are covered by the capital city politicians 'parachuting' into the area seems to hold true in the other three countries, the small surface area of Montenegro and subsequent geographical concentration of important urban centres could affect the argument here. Namely, our defined adjacent area in Montenegro covers the central part of the country as well as a significant part of Montenegrin coast,

standing in sharp contrast with the mountainous remainder of the country. The adjacent area here contains several important economic, cultural and urban centres on the coast, as well as the second largest city, Nikšić, which together provide more than a quarter of MPs. So in this particular case, the geography dictates the patterns of representation slightly differently than expected in a single nationwide district country.

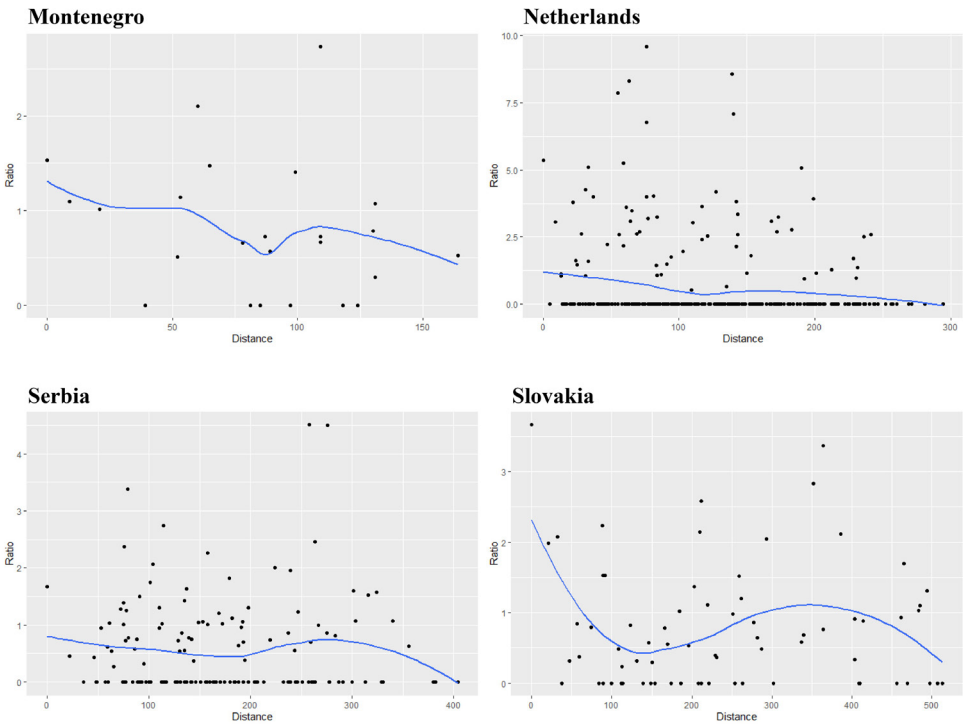
Our third category of distant areas is also less represented in three of the four cases, this time with Slovakia being the outlier with an almost perfect ratio of 0.99, in contrast with the Netherlands (0.46), Serbia (0.66) and Montenegro (0.82). The value for Slovakia could also be the result of the country's geography. Namely, the lengthy country stretching on a west-east axis, with national capital Bratislava lying on its very western border, could affect the way local actors (voters and parties) perceive the meaning of a peripheral region. In the other three cases, due to the country shape and relatively central position of capital, these areas could be defined in a series of concentric circles, which is not the case in Slovakia: some of the municipalities in our distant category of Slovakia are much further from the capital than municipalities in the last border area category in the other three cases. Simply put, the distant area of Slovakia, due to its remoteness from the capital, can have the saliency of a border area, producing higher values of proportionality ratio.

Finally, when it comes to the border regions, we cannot identify overrepresentation similar to the capital levels, but countries such as Serbia (ratio 0.98)[2] and the Netherlands (ratio 0.8) have higher representation of these areas in comparison with the adjacent or distant area category. On the other hand, ratio value for Slovakia stands at 0.77 and for Montenegro at a mere 0.57. So these areas are more represented than capital-adjacent municipalities in some cases, but their distance does not produce overrepresentation in any case.

The robustness of the U-curve argument of representation patterns in relation to the municipalities' distance from the capital can be easily seen in the graphs provided (see: Graph 1). Although the function in all four cases resembles a U-curve on its left side, due to the overrepresentation of the capitals and underrepresentation of adjacent municipalities; the representation of peripheral municipalities presented on the right side of the plots does not hold equal or indeed remotely similar values. Translated to our hypotheses, we could claim that, although a single nationwide district closed-list PR indeed produces higher representation of metropolitan areas and underrepresentation of areas neighbouring them, it fails to accomplish overrepresentation of peripheral regions, meaning that the political, geographical or even ethno-cultural salience of

2 It should be noted that an additional four Serbian MPs (1.6% of total) reside in the territory of Kosovo. Due to the lack of data (population shares) they are not included in the analysis, but their nomination on certain party lists could nevertheless indicate the signaling of importance of the Kosovo issue for some Serbian parties, especially the ruling SNS or the smaller right wing parties.

Graph 1: Scatter plots of municipalities' distance combined with the proportionality ratio



periphery does not strongly affect their representation (summary scatter plot for all 593 local administrative units in the sample is presented in Graph 2).

The second part of our analysis focuses on the regional level. As stated before, we have calculated proportionality ratios and mapped them for Dutch provinces, Slovak regions and Serbian districts. Correlation tests indicate that distance relates negatively to both MPs share (p=–0.432) and ratio (p=–0.367), while the ethnic composition variable does not provide any statistically significant values.

In Slovakia (see: Illustration 2), the adjacent regions of Trenčin and Nitra are indeed considerably underrepresented in contrast with Bratislava, while distant Prešov has almost perfect proportionality. This could be a case of pure peripheral saliency serving solely as a function of geography, with the regional capital being one of the furthest from national capitals in the whole sample. This is underlined by the fact that the Prešov region does not have a significant presence of minorities, especially in comparison with other parts of Slovakia. However, this could also be a consequence of a more recent political context.

Graph 2: Summary scatter plot of municipalities' distance combined with proportionality ratio for all four countries combined

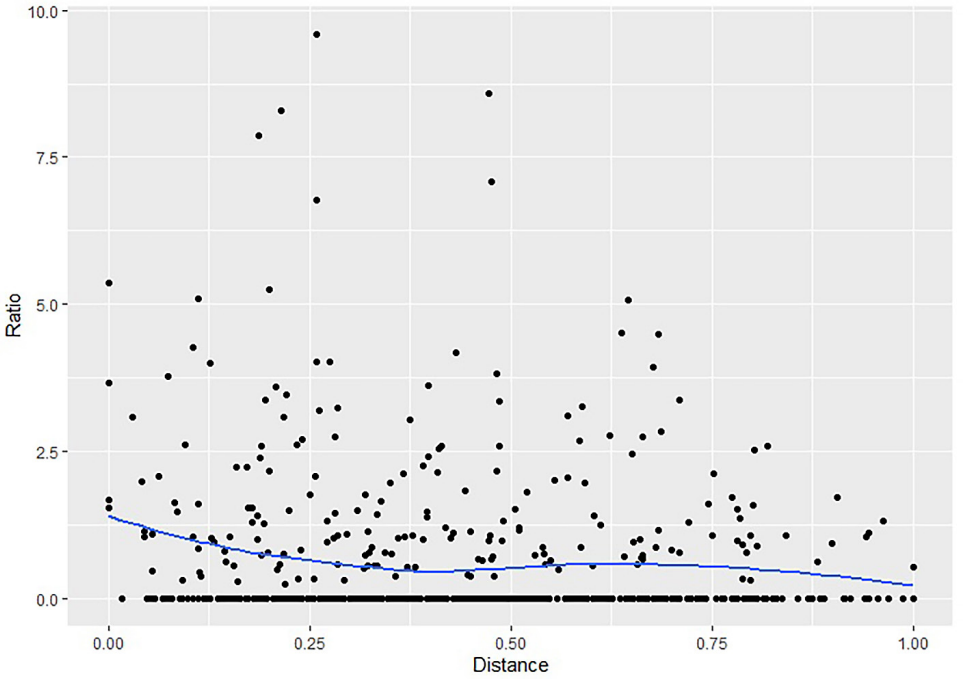
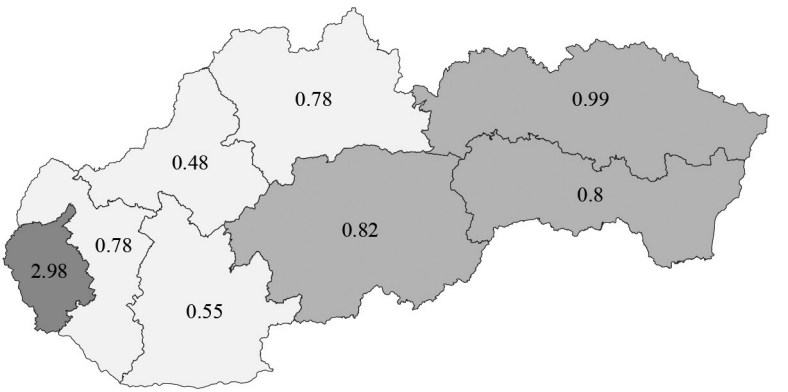


Illustration 2: Geographical representation of regions in Slovakia

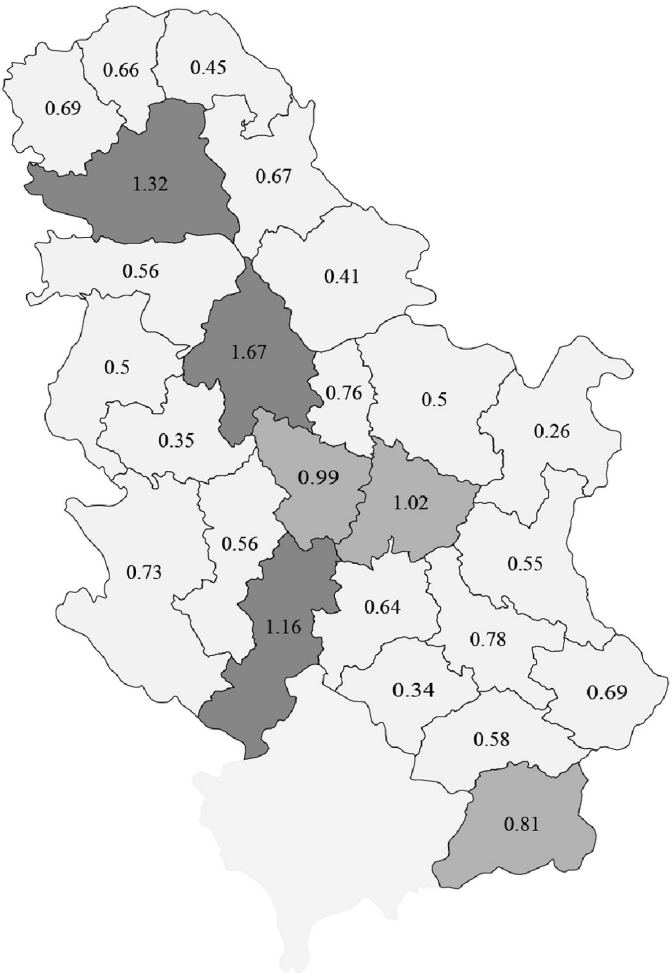


Namely, two of the most important parties representing interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (SMK-MKP and Most-Híd) split their votes in the last election and both failed to reach the 5% threshold, thus leaving Hungarians living mostly in southern parts of the Trnava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica and

Košice regions without descriptive representation, and most probably affecting the overall representation of these regions as well. Meanwhile, all Hungarian parties merged into a new Alliance party in 2021, which will probably have positive effects on regional representation ratios in the next election, if they manage to reach the threshold.

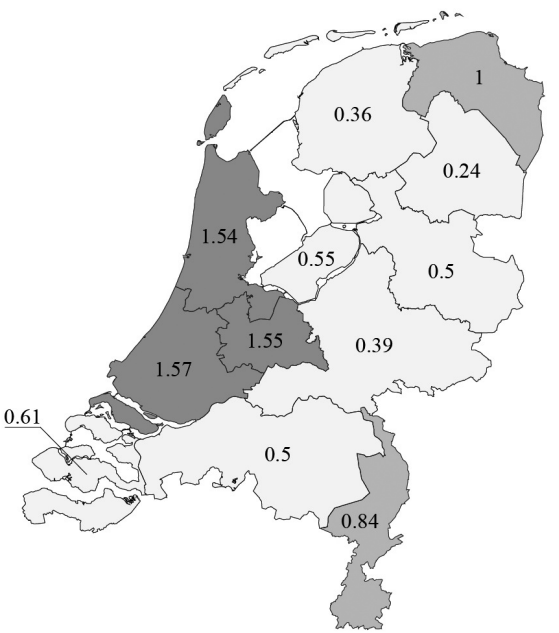
The Serbian case (see: Illustration 3) also seems more dependent on contextual explanations than on the saliency of distant regions based on their specific features or simply detachment from the metro areas. In some cases we could attribute higher-than-average levels of proportionality ratio to distance or ethnic composition, such as in the Raški and Pčinjski districts with the significant presence of Bosniak and Albanian minorities respectively. But in the latter

Illustration 3: Geographical representation of regions in Serbia



case, only one MP of Albanian origin was elected, leaving the overrepresented Raški district as a single instance where we can identify the ethnic factor as predominant, with five MPs from two Bosniak minority lists residing there, and with both of those ethnic parties having their headquarters in the city of Novi Pazar. However, another important factor explaining the overrepresentation of this area is the district seat city of Kraljevo, which holds five MPs (1.2 ratio, compared to Novi Pazar's 0.99) and which is an ethnically homogenous town inhabited by the Serbs. Furthermore, other minority-inhabited districts of Serbia, especially in the north, east and southwest of the country, do not replicate similar patterns of representation. Ratio values are similarly low for the only two districts (Severnobački and Severnobanatski) in which Serbs do not make up a majority of the population, but rather Hungarians – even though the Hungarian ethnic party SVM gains substantial representation in the Serbian Parliament. On the other hand, overrepresentation of Serbian districts seems to be a function of urbanisation, rather than distance or ethno-cultural saliency. Areas with higher ratio values, apart from Belgrade, also correlate to some of the most populous areas, with district seats of Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Kraljevo or Jagodina being the urban, economic and cultural centres of wider areas. This could indicate the importance of nominating the candidates from areas where there is a heightened rivalry for the local vote, which is also in line with one of the secondary explanations offered by Latner and McGann (2005:713), about

Illustration 4: Geographical representation of regions in the Netherlands



electoral competition providing more incentive for regionally balanced lists. Translated to the Serbian case, the aforementioned cities and their respective districts indeed provide more opposition votes or they are seats of some regional parties, all of which could prompt other actors to react by putting their local candidates forward.

The case of the Netherlands (see: Illustration 4) indicates huge overrepresentation of the three central metropolitan regions, standing in sharp contrast with the rest of the provinces. Corresponding to the Serbian case, economic and cultural centres of the country are situated in some of the largest cities. Adding to the cultural saliency argument, only two provinces with close-to-proportional ratio are Groningen, holding the strong Frisian identity and having West Frisian as one of its official languages, and the Catholic-majority Limburg, in which an additional regional language (Limburgish) is also widely used. Voters from these provinces could have preferences towards their own culturally similar representatives in line with descriptive representation theories, further prompting otherwise metropolitan-oriented parties to nominate more candidates from these areas on their lists as a vote maximisation strategy. But on the other hand, West Frisian is also broadly spoken in the Friesland province, while Catholics make up a majority of the population in Noord-Brabant, which both demonstrate low values of ratio, although they are closer to the capital area than Groningen and Limburg, so the effect of saliency could be weaker there.

V. Conclusion

We can argue that distance matter for the representation, but only up to a point. Our hypotheses are partially confirmed: namely, capital cities are indeed overrepresented and adjacent areas seem to provide fewer deputies in national parliaments than one could expect according to their population share, but as we explained in previous sections, this could be understood as a practical function of spatial proximity, with voters being only a short drive away from the capital city politicians. However, peripheral regions are not significantly overrepresented, although in some cases and depending on the political or ethno-cultural context, they provide higher ratio levels than other areas which lay closer to the national capitals. Thus, the U-curve argument of representation does not hold entirely true today, which is especially the case on the municipal level of analysis, where we could identify only a weak correlation of values further supported by the scatter plots created to test the function of geographical distance in representation of localities.

As for the regional level, some findings corroborate the initial argument (in the Dutch case and, to a limited extent, the Serbian case), but the spatial explanation is heavily limited and requires contextualisation from the framework of political dynamics. This is also the case with Slovakia, where current representa-

tion of salient regions could be massively affected by the inability of Hungarian ethnic parties to pass the threshold in the last election, thus probably omitting the parliament of local candidates belonging to that geographically concentrated community. In any case, the voter's decisions and party nomination strategies in closed-list PR single district systems seem to be incentivised by more than spatial constraints, although they do play a certain role.

Limitations of our study include the use of only basic statistical analysis, with more complex models based on distance explaining just a small fraction of variance, so they are not reported in the study. Moreover, limited temporal and territorial constraints of focusing on current parliamentary terms in only four countries provide us with partial conclusions not applicable elsewhere. Samples covering more countries and electoral cycles could potentially demonstrate significant differences between distinct electoral rules, as well as robustness of some conclusions through different time periods. It could also provide us with an opportunity to create more complex models including a number of variables predicting differences in representation levels of certain localities. However, this was not the scope of this initial study, which focused on testing the certain representation pattern in similar settings and demonstrated both pertinence but also constraints of the U-curve argument.

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From Respect to Nazi Allusions: The Changing Emotional Climates of Fidesz Towards Germany after 1990

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Abstract: *This paper aims to enhance our understanding of the foreign policy of Hungary by looking at the emotional underpinnings of the relationship between Fidesz and Germany. Inspired by the 'emotional turn' in social sciences in general, and IR in particular, this paper charts the changing ways in which Fidesz politicians (both in government and opposition) have perceived Germany and German politics on an emotional level since 1990. We show how a mostly positive emotional climate before 2010 slowly turned into anger, culminating in repeated allusions to Germany's Nazi past. The main question is: how can we account for the fluctuations in the way Fidesz politicians have perceived Germany over the past three decades? While 'rational' policy disagreements have certainly played a part (i.e. on migration), they cannot explain on their own the ever intensifying anger on the part of Fidesz decision-makers, especially as the two countries are still close political and economic partners and share a wide range of common interests. Complementing rational approaches, we propose that 'collective narcissism' informs the general emotional disposition of key Fidesz figures since 2014, leading to a continuing estrangement between the successive Orbán governments and its German partners.*

Keywords: ***Hungary, Germany, Fidesz, Orbán Viktor, collective narcissism***

I. Introduction

This paper aims to explain a particularly striking puzzle, namely the story of estrangement between two close allies and partners. On the one hand, Germany and Hungary have very close political, economic and cultural ties. The two

countries are EU and NATO allies. Germany is the biggest import and export partner for Hungary, and also the biggest investor in the country. German cultural influence is ever-present in Hungary. Vice versa, Hungary's role in the fall of the Berlin Wall is well-known and celebrated. The rather small country is also Germany's 14th biggest trade partner, set to overtake Russia for 13th place. In the 1990s, Hungarian president Árpád Göncz (1990–2000) went so far as to say that Hungary and Germany share a 'community of feelings' (quoted in Bilcik 2012: 164).

Yet over the last years, one could be forgiven for getting the impression that these two countries share an antagonistic enmity. From the migration crisis to rule-of-law issues in Hungary, political relations seem to be at rock bottom – on a rhetoric level, at any rate. Emblematic for this are repeated Nazi allusions of Fidesz politicians directed towards Germany and German politicians. These tensions have not gone unnoticed. A 2021 poll found that only 40% of Fidesz voters sympathised with Chancellor Merkel (Civitas Intézet 2021). (Meanwhile, Russian President Putin had a sympathy index of 61%.) On the other hand, only 29% of Germans thought that citizen rights were respected in Hungary (Nézőpont Intézet 2022).

To explain this discrepancy, we analyse successive Fidesz governments and their emotional climates towards Germany. The main research question is: how can we account for the fluctuations in the way Fidesz politicians have perceived Germany over the past three decades? Instead of using only tried-and-tested 'rationalist' approaches to answer this question, we will aim to complement them by integrating emotions into our analysis. As we will point out later, Hungary's current foreign policy is especially well-suited to be looked at through a psychology-oriented lens (and equally ill-suited to be explained purely by 'rational' cost-benefit approaches.) This paper claims that, based on the most frequently expressed emotions, it is collective narcissism which characterises the emotional climates of Fidesz' decision-makers after 2014 and explains the estrangement between the two countries. We base this claim on a wide range of sources which were analysed to aggregate their emotional content, to establish the prevailing emotional climates towards Germany. Specifically, we were looking at a group of Fidesz politicians, who, because of their bureaucratic position and authority, shape German-Hungarian relations to a large degree. In essence, we found that the emotional climate of Fidesz' decision-makers strongly resembles the emotional content of collective narcissism, but only since 2014. An important caveat applies: we attribute collective narcissism to a small group of Fidesz decision-makers, not to Fidesz voters or the Hungarian public in general. We also do not claim that Prime Minister Orbán (or any other decision-maker) is individually narcissistic.

The paper is structured as follows: after reviewing the literature and presenting our methodology, we go on to present our findings from the sources. Spe-

cifically, we are looking at parliamentary speeches and interviews of key Fidesz politicians concerning Germany over the last 32 years. In doing this, we aimed to establish what kind of emotional climates Fidesz politicians evinced when referring to Germany. In the fourth section, we offer three alternative explanations for the observed pattern of the change in emotional climates: (1) party politics, (2) policy disagreements and (3) the role of collective narcissism. We will find that a combination of the second and third explanation will be most convincing. A short conclusion sums up the findings.

One word of clarification. What do we mean when we say that the emotional climates of Fidesz politicians towards 'Germany' will be analysed? Given the political nature of the sources, this 'Germany' is mostly 'Germany as a political entity' in the widest sense. *Usually*, this version of Germany does not contain the totality of German society or culture. Instead, as expected, Fidesz politicians most typically express their emotions towards the German government of the day as well as the various German parties (or individual politicians thereof). Political issues such as migration, EU enlargement or economic policy are most often at the forefront: these are the topics which trigger positive or negative emotions. But, time and again, 'German' society or economy in their entirety are perceived and characterised. This is not surprising: obviously, it is impossible to completely separate the political system from the country it is governing.

II. Review of Literature and Methodology

German-Hungarian relations between 1990 and 2004 are relatively well researched (Hettyey – Rácz 2012; Bauer – Hettyey 2014). Publications analyse, among other things, the period of the regime change (Schmidt-Schweizer 2017), the relationship of the first democratic Hungarian government with Germany (Hettyey 2015), military cooperation (Marton – Wagner 2017), economic relations (Kőrösi 2009; Kőrösi 2014), German foreign direct investment (FDI) (Kondász – Engert 2004), Germany's role in establishing the chambers of commerce in Hungary (Zachar 2021) and cultural ties (Masát 2009). However, the period after 2004, and, especially, 2010, is much less well-researched. Cooperation in security and defence policy is fairly well-covered (Speck 2020; Etl – Csiki-Varga 2021) as well as some political aspects (Hettyey 2020). A recent in-depth article of investigative journalist Szabolcs Panyi offers an intriguing picture of day-to-day political relations (direkt36.hu 2020). But most of these contributions are focused on the description of the state of German-Hungarian relations and only rarely attempt to explain deeper causes and effects – and if they do, they mostly use rational approaches. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by including emotions.

Puzzlingly, the role of emotions is still a relatively under-researched subject as far as the foreign policy of the Central European countries is concerned (but

see Eberle – Daniel 2022). This is especially odd in the light of the important role populist parties play in many countries of the region. Given that, increasingly, 'the rise of emotional, identity-based politics is replacing the old norms of rational, analytical, and pragmatic decision making', we argue that it is essential to integrate emotions into the explanations of the foreign policies of populist states (Forgas – Crano, 2021: 2). Populism and collective narcissism are intimately connected: voting behaviour for populist politicians and parties suggests that collective narcissist belief lies at the core of populist rhetoric. For example, American collective narcissism was the second, after partisanship, strongest correlate of voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election, more important than factors such as economic dissatisfaction, authoritarianism, sexism or racial resentment (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019: 55). Collective narcissism also plays an important role in explaining the support for populism in Hungary (Forgas – Lantos 2021: 237) and Poland (Marchlewska et al. 2017). As can be seen, the literature has already provided first results as far as the effect of collective narcissism is concerned. However, these contributions almost exclusively focus on domestic developments, and have not been connected to foreign policy, as political scientists have not yet picked up on this contribution of social psychology. In giving an emotion-based explanation of the foreign policy of a populist party, our paper is one step in this direction, and thus may be of interest beyond Hungary and the Central European region.

This paper is based on two types of sources. The first are the verbatim minutes of the Hungarian National Assembly (Országgyűlési Napló). As part of a larger project, we have tracked down and analysed every plenary session speech since 1990 of the following Fidesz MPs in search of statements on foreign policy in the widest sense – around 550 speeches, ranging from a paragraph to ten

Table 1: The sample of Fidesz MPs

1990–94	**1994–98**	**1998–2002**	**2002–06**
Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Szájer József, Hegedűs István **(4)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Szájer József, Kövér László, Rockenbauer Zoltán, Wachsler Tamás **(6)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Szájer József, Balla Mihály, Búsi Lajos **(5)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Kövér László, Potápi Árpád, Áder János, Hörcsik Richárd, Gyürk András (2002–04), Firtl Mátyás (2004–06) **(8)**
2006–10	**2010–14**	**2014–18**	**2018–22**
Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Hörcsik Richárd, Navracsics Tibor, Potápi Árpád, Balla Mihály, Kelemen András, Gógl Árpád **(8)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Hörcsik Richárd, Balla Mihály, Nagy Gábor Tamás **(5)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Szijjártó Péter, Gulyás Gergely, Balla Mihály, Csenger-Zalán Zsolt **(7)**	Orbán Viktor, Németh Zsolt, Szijjártó Péter, Gulyás Gergely, Balla Mihály, Csenger-Zalán Zsolt, Zsigmond Barna Pál **(7)**

pages in length (see Table 1). Out of these, we have zoomed in on speeches on Germany, which expressed discernible emotions – we found 53 of them. Some speeches deal in their entirety with Germany, but more often it is just one topic amongst many.

The leader of the party and prime minister (1998–2002, 2010–2022) Viktor Orbán was included for every legislative period, as well as key foreign policy expert Zsolt Németh, who was, among other things, state secretary of the ministry of foreign affairs, MEP and is currently chairman of the foreign affairs committee (FAC) of the National Assembly. Among the Fidesz foreign ministers, only Péter Szijjártó (2014–2022) is included, because his predecessor, János Martonyi (1998–2002; 2010–14) was not a member of Fidesz. Chairmen of the parliamentary group of Fidesz such as László Kövér and József Szájer are also included, as well as many Fidesz members of the FAC over the years – some of them backbenchers.

The second group of sources were statements in the media from Fidesz politicians on Germany. The backbone of these sources was interviews of the aforementioned Fidesz politicians in two major Hungarian daily newspapers. To give a balanced picture, we included *Magyar Nemzet*, a right-leaning paper and *Népszabadság*, a left-leaning daily. The time period is 1990–2022 for *Nemzet* and 1990–2016 for *Népszabadság*, which was closed that year. Unfortunately, Fidesz politicians have basically not given interviews to the last remaining left-leaning daily, *Népszava*, nor to other left-leaning newspapers since that. However, this unfortunate situation has not distorted the data to a large degree, as we have found only eight relevant interviews anyway in *Népszabadság* or *Magyar Nemzet*. In addition to these interviews, we also use other media sources and also lean on the existing secondary scholarly literature on German-Hungarian relations.

Having parsed the pieces on Germany, we then proceeded to identify passages that show emotions. Why are emotions important? We strongly believe in the need to perceive and assess politicians as humans, with their own personalities, psychologies, wants and needs. This means rejecting the age-old mind-body dualism, or the artificial contrast between *ratio* and *emotion* (Plamper 2015: 17–19), according to which emotions are associated with irrational behaviour whereas the behaviour of states is based on rational factors. Over the last decades, 'neuroscientists have led the way in revealing the extent to which rationality depends on emotion. It is now evident that people who are "free" of emotion are irrational' (Mercer 2010: 2). Turning previous conceptualisations on their head, one can even go so far as to say that 'ignoring the emotional attributes of a decision is irrational' (Bleiker – Hutchison 2008: 121; also Mercer 2005).

The integration of emotions is all the more necessary for the Hungarian case for two reasons. The first one, as already indicated, is the populist nature of Hungary's political system. In order to understand the foreign (and domestic) policies of these states, it is essential to integrate the role of emotions. By do-

ing this, our paper aims to be a step in the direction of better understanding not only Hungary under the Orbán governments, but also the foreign policies of populist parties in general. Secondly, it is no secret that Orbán has been very successful in eliminating veto players from the decision-making process, giving his person (and his small group of trusted people) all the more leeway in guiding Hungary's foreign policy (Körösényi – Illés – Gyulai 2020). It is fair to assume that in the Hungarian foreign policy decision-making process, the personality of a few individuals informs actual foreign policy much stronger, than, for example, in the German system, with its multiple veto players.

To analyse emotions, we used emotion discourse analysis (EDA). Emotion discourse is concerned with 'how actors talk about emotions and how they employ emotion categories when talking about subjects, events, or social relations' (Koschut 2018: 277). In mapping the verbal expression of emotions in the text, we applied the three-tiered methodology of Koschut (2018: 283–285). First, we looked at emotion terms which convey emotional meaning explicitly by establishing a direct reference to an emotional feeling through an emotional term. Words such as *fear, pride, to condemn, to protest* or *shocking* refer directly to emotions. Secondly, emotions can be communicated implicitly through connotations. Such affectively loaded words and expressions include *partner, improvement, significant results* or *appreciate*. Thirdly, a typical characteristic of affective language is that it is highly figurative. 'Figures of speech, particularly metaphors, comparisons, and analogies, play an important role in encoding emotional expressions' (Koschut, 2018: 285). Metaphors especially conjure up images which directly evoke emotions.

For an example of our reading of the texts to establish the most salient emotions, here are two examples. The first is a short excerpt from a speech of Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó (Országgyűlési Napló: 22 November 2019). For context, he is defending the building of economic ties between Budapest and Moscow:

> *It is not our fault*, that… Gazprom is building North Stream 2 with the biggest Western European firms.
>
> [expression of **anger**, occasioned by unjustified criticism]
>
> *Interestingly*,
>
> [**scorn**, as an expression of **anger**]
>
> when we ask the Germans, French, Italians about this, what is the answer? Business issue. This time, it is a business issue, but when Russians have to be criticized and sanctions have to be approved, then it's *suddenly a political issue*.
>
> [**scorn**, and implicit accusation of double standards showing **anger**]

So we see a *classic case of double standards*….

[explicit accusation of double standards, showing **anger**]

Last year, do you know how the three continental G7 countries, Germany, Italy and France handled their relationship with Russia? *Do you know how?*

[repetition of question showing **intense anger towards** the opposition, but presumably also towards the three countries]

The Germans increased their trade volume with Russia by 56%, the French by 40% and the Italians by 37%. So there is an *unbelievable hypocrisy* in this matter,

[expression of **intense anger**]

because while they constantly accuse the Russian on a rhetorical level, they *do business under the surface.*

[further emphasis on the duplicitousness of Germans, occasioning **anger**]

The second example is a speech by Fidesz backbencher Mihály Balla (Országgyűlési Napló: 20 February 2012):

We have achieved *a lot*… Hungary has joined NATO and the EU, and in all this we were always able to count on the support of *our German friends*, for which *we are grateful.*

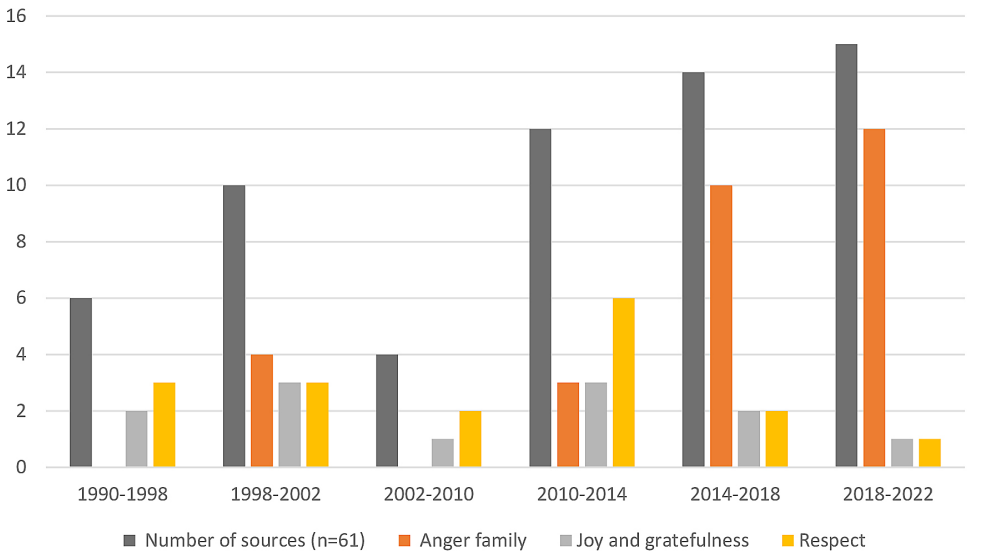
[**joy** over common achievements and explicit **gratefulness** for Germany's support]

Germany is Hungary's *most important* economic partner, this is why we expend *special attention* to the advice and proposals of our German friends.

[**respect** accorded to Germany's economic role as well as to its guidance]

In a next step, we counted the aggregate the emotions we found in the statements and speeches to establish the emotional climates towards Germany in a given legislative period (see results below). Emotional climates are 'sets of emotions or feelings which are not only shared by groups of individuals implicated in common social structures and processes, but which are also significant in the formation and maintenance of political and social identities and collective behaviour. Emotional climate therefore includes emotional tones and patterns which differentiate social groups or categories by virtue of the fact that they are shared by their members' (Barbalet 1998). In other words, emotional climates do not merely have a descriptive quality: it is not only how Fidesz politicians feel towards Germany. They also have a normative side: 'if you are a Fidesz member,

Figure 1: Emotions of Fidesz' politicians towards Germany



this is how you *ought to* feel towards Germany. Our social group (in this case, Fidesz) currently feels respect/anger/gratefulness towards Germany, and if you are a member, if you want to differentiate yourself from the members of other parties, you should feel about Germany in more or less the same way as we, the leaders of Fidesz, do'. It is this normative quality which makes emotional climates especially valuable to consider.

All in all, the following numerical picture emerges. We were able to find evidence for emotions towards Germany in 61 different speeches and interviews (53+8). Applying the methodology of Koschut, we grouped the expressed emotions into three broad categories: the 'anger family',[1] incorporating not only anger, but related emotions such as impatience, resentment and scorn; secondly, joy and gratefulness; and thirdly, respect.[2] These three categories capture more than 95% of all expressed emotions. Figure 1 shows how many speeches showing emotions were found in each of the six time periods, then how many of these speeches contained at least one expression of anger/joy and gratitude/respect. (One speech could contain more than one emotion.) As can be seen, the composition of emotions over the years changed considerably. The anger family was

1 I borrow the term 'family of emotions' from Thomas Scheff (2016: 68).

2 The difference between joy and respect lies mostly in intensity. Whenever emotions towards Germany were expressed in a positive but restrained way, I labelled it 'respect'. Whenever the expression was more intense and explicit, I labelled it 'joy'. Thus, expressions such as 'Germany is the dominant country in Europe' are signs of respect (Országgyűlési Napló, March 20, 2017). Expressions such as Germany and Hungary 'have achieved numerous important successes' in the scientific, cultural and educational field were grouped as 'joy' (Országgyűlési Napló: February 20, 2012).

already present prior to 2014, mostly in the form of impatience, but joy/gratefulness plus respect made up the majority of expressed emotions. After 2014, a completely different pattern emerges. The anger family makes up around three-quarters of the emotions while the others fall back to an almost negligible level.

III. Collective narcissism and two alternative explanations

In the introduction, we claimed that based on the most frequently expressed emotions, it is collective narcissism which characterises the emotional climates of Fidesz' decision-makers after 2014. Collective narcissism is associated with a distinct emotional profile and resulting action tendencies, and our core claim is that the politicians of Fidesz show precisely this profile and action tendencies since 2014. But what is collective narcissism? Ever since Sigmund Freud, (individual) narcissism has been a well-known concept in psychology (Freud 1957). Summarised briefly, individual narcissism can be defined as an excessive self-love or inflated, grandiose view of oneself that requires continual external validation (for a detailed view see Campbell – Miller 2011). Raised to a collective level by Agnieszka Golec de Zavala and her colleagues, collective narcissism describes 'an ingroup identification tied to an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the unparalleled greatness of an ingroup', in our case, the Hungarian nation (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009: 1074). The subsequent literature shows that among people who show this disposition, collective narcissism is likely to produce outgroup negativity (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009; Golec de Zavala 2011) and a biased and selective construction of the ingroup's past, picturing it as glorious, rejecting negative elements of its history (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019: 54).

As to emotions and emotion tendencies typical for collective narcissism, the literature points out that **anger** is central to both individual and collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019; Ettensohn 2016: 74; Pincus – Roche, 2011: 35). Also collective narcissism is uniquely related to negative emotionality (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019). We therefore should not find many manifestations of positive emotions such as **gratitude**, **empathy** (Górska et al. 2020) or **trust** (Cichocka 2016) in the sources. Especially important for our paper: collective narcissists are expected to be particularly prone to interpret the actions of others as signs of disrespect or criticism of an ingroup and to react aggressively. They are also expected to react aggressively to actual criticism and other situations that threaten a positive image of an ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009). Since the self-esteem of collective narcissists is invested in their ingroup's image, it cannot be dissociated from the ingroup. Therefore, they are hypersensitive to signs that their ingroup's entitlement is undermined such as negative feedback, criticism or exclusion (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019). Also, collective narcissists are shown to be unlikely to feel solidarity and out-group empathy (Górska et al. 2020).

How does collective narcissism differ from the related and better-known concept, nationalism? Couldn't nationalism be the explanation behind Hungary's behaviour? Collective narcissism and nationalism have in common the belief that one's own nation is better than others (Golec de Zavala – Keenan 2020). But whereas nationalists justify intergroup hostility as a means of achieving national supremacy, collective narcissists justify intergroup hostility as a means of achieving appropriate recognition for the ingroup. Therefore, while 'nationalistic hostility is actively aggressive and openly dominant, collective narcissistic hostility is subjectively defensive, as it is motivated by the desire to protect the ingroup's image and assert the recognition that is due to the ingroup. Thus, collective narcissists emphasize the need to assert appropriate recognition for the ingroup's exceptionality rather than the ingroup's dominance' (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019). A further difference is that collective narcissism, and not nationalism, was related to hypersensitivity to intergroup threat and retaliatory hostility (Golec de Zavala et al. 2016). Even more importantly, nationalism was also shown to be negatively correlated with internationalism and positively related to militarism (Li – Brewer 2004). As a small, internationally active and economically interdependent country without the ends and means to aspire to dominance, Hungarian decision-makers should be much more prone to evince collective narcissism than nationalism (see also Cichocka and Cislak 2020). Further underlining this point, Golec de Zavala and Keenan show that collective narcissism may inspire nationalism only when the nation is powerful enough to aspire to a dominant international position (Golec de Zavala – Keenan 2020) – which Hungary is not.

We offer two alternative, 'rationalist' arguments for explaining the trajectory of the emotional climate of Fidesz politicians towards Germany. One obvious explanation would be the role of party politics, the assumption being that Fidesz would have a more positive perception of Germany whenever fellow right-wing governments were in power in Berlin, and vice versa. As Raunio and Wagner have shown (2020: 523), parties and their ideological backgrounds do play an important role in the foreign policy of the given country. For example, right-wing parties in the EU, irrespective of country affiliation, tend to be more 'hawkish' and in favour of higher defence spending, military alliances and free trade. This is in line with research that leans toward indicating that in the EU, cross-national ideologies have more explanatory weight than countries – that is, membership in a party family is a better predictor of how individual parties view particular policies than the positions of other parties from the same country (518). Consequently, the party composition of governments should lead to a smoother relationship and more concord between two countries, if the parties leading them are from a similar political background.

This party politics-explanation is further based on the broad observation that transnational party cooperation (TPC), especially in the context of the European

Union, has been increasing in importance in recent decades (Day – Shaw 2003; Pridham – Pridham 1981). This is especially due to the European integration and its impact on the transnational party cooperation in broad political families/party groupings. Fidesz has been part of the European People's Party (EPP) between 2000–21, of which the CDU/CSU is the biggest and most important member. Orbán was even one of the EPP's vice-presidents from 2002 to 2012 and, generally, Fidesz and the German Christian democrats were close allies in the People's Party, with some even accusing Chancellor Merkel and her party of having ties to Fidesz that were too strong (dw.com 2017; Hettyey 2020: 135). Thus, this argument would explain the fluctuation of the emotional climates of Fidesz' decision-makers with party politics, leading to the expectation that the years 2010– 2021, when the two countries were led by the EPP partners CDU/CSU and Fidesz, should constitute the high-point. Before and after that, the emotional climate should be less positive.

The other alternative and slightly related explanation are policy disagreements over decisive issues (Ward 1982). This line of reasoning holds, intuitively, that emotional climates follow policy (dis-)agreements: whenever there are disagreements, emotional climates will become more negative and vice versa: policy agreements will lead to a more positive perception. Credence is lent to this explanation if we accept that Hungarian foreign policy can be characterised as 'transactional'. Often used to characterise the Trump administration, transactionalism can be defined as a foreign policy approach that focuses on short-term, quid-pro quo wins, favours bilateral to multilateral relations, rejects value-based policymaking and does not follow a grand strategy (Bashirov – Yilmaz 2020, 169). It has been proposed that populist governments such as the Hungarian one tend to enact transactionalist foreign policies in theory (Visnovitz – Jenne 2021), and it has been shown in practice how transactionalism is a guiding principle of Hungary's foreign policy (Nic – Rácz 2022). A transactionalist Hungarian government should thus focus on how Germany is reciprocating on decisive policy issues: whether there are agreements, joint wins, quid pro quos or not. The frequency of agreements/disagreements should thus be the explanation of the variation in Fidesz' emotional climates towards Germany.

From the myriad of political, economic, cultural, regional, European, North Atlantic and global issues in the whole spectrum of German-Hungarian relations, there were four issues which stood out over the years in salience, making them the benchmark for showing whether agreement or disagreement was more prevalent. The first was temporally constant, namely the state of economic ties. Germany has been interested in having a pro-free trade, open, lucrative economic partner in Hungary, where its firms could profitably invest and bilateral trade could flourish. Over the years, no serious disagreement has endangered this part of the relationship, with most expectations met from both sides and the Orbán government going out of its way to lobby for German automotive firms in

Brussels (direkt36.hu 2020). The second topic, Hungary's NATO and EU accession, constituted the main issue up to 2004, and this was again characterised by agreement. Thirdly, migration was the overarching topic for a while after 2014, with clear points of disagreement, but the issue receded in salience in the following years, with Merkel downplaying the issue in a visit to Hungary in 2019 (index.hu 2019). And fourthly, the main issue of recent years has been the rule-of-law situation in Hungary. Although playing out in a European context, the issue clearly caused disagreement between the two countries (politico.eu 2022).

The second and third explanations – party politics and policy disagreements – are proposed to contrast the first, emotion-based approach. They try to explain the trajectory of the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany by purely 'rational' variables. Their common assumption is that a responsible, cost-benefit oriented decision-maker will not let his/her foreign policy be distracted by psychological, emotional matters. In other words, interests are exogenously given – a core claim of such influential and diverse theories as realism (Sterling-Folker 1997), liberal intergovernmentalism (Kleine – Pollack 2018) or rational institutionalism (Leuffen et al. 2013). Our first explanation – the role of emotions captured by the concept 'collective narcissism' – in contrast, integrates psychological variables into the explanation. We find that this approach offers a much more convincing explanation to the trajectory of the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany. Throughout the next chapter, the paper will present evidence for this claim, mainly from the rhetorical level, but also from concrete political acts. In keeping with the 'narrative turn' in international relations, we see the rhetorical and implementation level as dynamically intertwined and consider both the rhetoric *and* the implementation level as constituting the relationship between Hungary and Germany. Statements, narratives, analogies and other verbal acts make certain 'action possible, allowing for some practices and policies, while foreclosing possibility for others. This further reproduces and entrenches dominant policies while marginalizing alternative ones' (Subotic 2016: 613). Thus, how key Fidesz decision-makers speak and feel about Germany must be part and parcel of an overall appraisal of the relationship between the two countries.

The main shortcoming of the paper is its mostly unidirectional nature. We only charted the emotional climates of Fidesz, i.e. Hungarian politicians. This is a problem because emotional climates do not form in isolation: often, they are reactions to actual events, such as policy disagreements or German criticisms, which in turn trigger positive or negative emotions towards Germany. None of the Nazi allusions came out of nowhere: they always had an antecedent. While we will try to hint at these antecedents, events and issues, we simply did not chart the emotional climates of German politicians towards Hungary in a comparable, systematic way. Thus, we will try to highlight the back-and-forth dynamics and the tit-for-tat of German-Hungarian relations, but we will only focus on what has been said from the German side and not on what has been felt.

IV. The evidence from the sources

3.1. 1990–2002: Between respect and impatience

'O.K., let's call the Graf', Viktor Orbán allegedly said on the morning after his first election victory on 24 May 1998.[3] 'The Graf' was none other than member of the Bundestag, former chairman of FDP, former federal minister of economics and mentor of the young Orbán, 71-year-old Otto Graf Lambsdorff. Two days later, Orbán was in Germany having discussions with leading economic figures thanks to the help of Lambsdorff (valaszonline.hu 2019). In the light of our sources, it seems fair to say that, prior to 1998, Fidesz had only very limited contacts to German political, economic or cultural actors. What relationship existed was mostly confined to party-to-party relations in the context of Fidesz' membership in the Liberal International. It was the FDP, and its party foundation, the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, which had the strongest ties to Fidesz (the director of its Budapest bureau, Gergely Prőhle later became ambassador to Germany). In the early 1990s, Graf Lambsdorff was certainly the most important mentor of the young Viktor Orbán, although after 1994 Fidesz slowly began a turn to the right, refashioning itself as a conservative party, leaving the International in 2000. By this time, in line with its domestic recalibration, it was the ex-chancellor Helmut Kohl who became a respected father figure for Orbán. This relative lack of contacts, and thus a lack of discernible emotional climate towards Germany is not surprising: Fidesz was a small opposition party before 1998 and its leadership had limited to no foreign policy functions.

After its election victory in 1998, Fidesz certainly extended its contacts to Germany and thanks to this, started to develop a more discernible emotional climate towards it. The issue of how Fidesz perceived Germany was, however, embedded into the much more important question of the enlargement of the EU, which was Hungary's main goal. By and large, Germany was a strong motor of the enlargement process, and Fidesz politicians duly appreciated this: while no love was lost between Orbán and SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Orbán acknowledged the positive 'personal contribution and goodwill' of his German colleague during the accession negotiations (Hettyey 2019: 174). But there were also periods of German hesitancy during the years of the enlargement negotiations between 1998 and 2002 as certain opposing interests between Berlin and Budapest were clearly visible, such as the freedom of movement for workers or agriculture. The perception of Germany among Fidesz was therefore ambiguous: if the accession process moved dynamically, there was praise, if obstacles came up, impatience, frustration and even anger shone through – not necessarily towards Germany per se, but towards the EU as a whole, of which Germany was an important part.

3 Personal communication with former Hungarian diplomat.

For example, Orbán lamented in an interview in late 2000 that the West had missed a great chance at the end of the Cold War by not incorporating the CEE region right away. Instead, Europe decided to deepen first, which was 'unfortunate for us' (magyarnemzet.hu 2000). The same 'Europe missed a chance' argument also cropped up in an interview with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* where the prime minister claimed that the EU had blown several opportunities since 1990 of enlarging itself eastwards (Hettyey 2019: 196). At around the same time, Orbán pointed out in a parliamentary speech that there exists an imbalance between the accession-ready Hungary and the accession-reluctant EU: if this imbalance continues, the interests of one of the parties would suffer (Országgyűlési Napló: 30 November 2000). Meeting German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in 1999, a disapproving Orbán stated that Hungary felts an 'ambivalence' from the German government: while accession negotiations continue, more and more enlargement-sceptical German opinions could be heard (Hettyey 2019: 176). Orbán also had qualms over Germany's goal to curtail the free movement of workers: this basically means that the new countries are supposed to forgo one of the basic freedoms which make up the essence of the Union, he said in an interview (magyarnemzet.hu 2000).

Further angering Fidesz decision-makers were two parallel developments: the first was the sense that Germany was favouring Poland over Hungary in the enlargement process. Overall, Budapest considered itself much more accession-ready, while Berlin made it clear that Poland and Hungary would join at the same time, thus effectively making Budapest wait for the laggard Warsaw (Hettyey 2019: 202). In other words, this 'positive German discrimination' of Poland constituted a negative discrimination of Hungary in the eyes of Fidesz politicians. The other issue was Budapest's nation policy, which never met with much enthusiasm from Germany at the best of times. Hungary's 2001 status law conferring certain benefits for Hungarian minorities (but not to other Romanian or Slovakian citizens) was heavily criticised behind closed doors in Berlin as it could have destabilised the Carpathian Basin shortly before the EU accession, according to German diplomats. This sparked anger from Fidesz member and Deputy Secretary of State Csaba Lőrincz, who summed up Germany's position (and his frustration) this way: 'the ostensible stability of the CEE region is more important for Germany than the proper resolution of the minority problems' (Hettyey 2019: 183). Overall, the emotional climate of Fidesz oscillated between respect and gratitude on the one hand, and impatience and low-intensity anger on the other.

3.2. 2002–2010: An interlude

During the opposition years of Fidesz in 2002–2010 it is again difficult to discern a particular emotional climate towards Germany – apart from the Iraq War of 2003. Contrary to Germany, Hungary did support the American inva-

sion, eventually also sending troops there. What angered Fidesz was the fact that the socialist-liberal Hungarian government gave unconditional support to Washington in an open letter of eight European heads of states in January 2003, without having consulted (or at least notified) its European partners. This would lead to a lack of trust and deep dissatisfaction from its major European allies such as Germany, said Fidesz MP Zsolt Németh – something that Hungary could ill afford (Országgyűlési Napló: 4 February 2003). Clearly, for Fidesz, friction with Berlin was to be avoided at all costs, showing the respect the party had for Germany.

3.3. 2010–2014: The high-point

The emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany was at its most positive after their election victory in 2010. Influential Fidesz MP Zsolt Németh stated after Orbán's first visit in Berlin that the two countries have the same 'intellectual-philosophical' foundations (Országgyűlési Napló: 22 July 2010). On the 20th anniversary of the 1992 'Hungarian-German agreement on friendly cooperation and European partnership', Fidesz speakers in Parliament vied with each other in praising Germany. 'Hungary will always be grateful' for the political, diplomatic and economic support; there is 'a special relationship' between the two countries; our 'German friends' have been 'trustworthy partners' over the years; projects such as the Andrássy Gyula German Speaking University are common successes, etc. (Országgyűlési Napló: 20 February 2012). In late 2014, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó underlined that Hungary would be grateful for German firms for their FDI and activity in Hungary. Szijjártó also praised his counterpart, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, for his personal engagement in the Western Balkans enlargement process, a huge interest for Hungary (kormany.hu 2014). These positive emotions from Fidesz are all the more remarkable because the German government had repeatedly (if rather cautiously) voiced its concerns over Hungarian domestic developments after 2010, as regards the controversial media law of 2010, for example (Hettyey – Rácz 2012).

In response to these criticisms, however, there were two angry remarks of Orbán, which, in retrospect, proved harbingers of things to come. The first was in 2010, when Merkel's vice speaker Christoph Steegmans expressed hope that Hungary would comply with EU norms as far as the new media law was concerned. Subsequently, Orbán tried to make believe that Steegmans spoke in his own name and referred to Merkel as 'the poor Lady Chancellor' who mistakenly got cited as being critical of Hungary (hvg.hu 2010). If this seemed a little condescending, the 2013 episode was far more concrete. To all intents and purposes Merkel wanted to be conciliatory when she remarked that one should not threaten Hungary with ejection from the EU, i.e. 'should not send the cavalry', even if there were problematic developments there. Yet Orbán

instantly shot back, for the first time using a Nazi parallel: 'The Germans have already sent one wave of cavalry to Hungary, in the form of tanks. Our request is, please don't send them again. It didn't work out' (dw.com 2013).

3.4. 2014–2018: Anger to the forefront

After 2014, the emotional climate changed drastically. The ensuing migration crisis certainly played an important part in this. As a result, ever since 2014, anger has been the master emotion of Fidesz towards Germany, steadily increasing in intensity, although the migration situation has eased significantly since then. Yet somehow German-Hungarian relations never really recovered from this disagreement, even though the topic lost most of its salience after 2018. Speaking about the issue, Orbán said in 2016 that 'the trouble was caused by parties and governments which answered naively to the challenges posed by migration' (Országgyűlési Napló: 12 September 2016). There can be no question that in the eyes of Orbán, the German was one of those governments. What was Berlin's answer to the problem according to Orbán? 'The Germans say *at home* that they will *get rid* of those who came in by redistributing them in Europe *all right*' (Országgyűlési Napló: 12 September 2016). In this sentence alone, two directions of anger play out: (1) towards the German government for being duplicitous and hypocritical – in Europe, it is cheerleading *Willkommenskultur*, while at home it tries to assuage fears by trying to assure the electorate that they will pass on the migrants to others; (2) towards migrants, who seem to be a disposable mass you can get rid of. As far as the migration crisis was concerned, the only positive assessment of Germany in the Parliament came from Fidesz MP Zsolt Németh, who considered it an 'outstanding achievement' of Hungarian diplomacy that Merkel successfully sealed the EU-Turkey migrant deal (Országgyűlési Napló: 9 October 2015). At least Germany was willing to let itself be shown in the right direction.

Starting from 2016, the intensity of anger towards Germany can be grasped for the first time in the practice of what can be called the 'emotional re-construction' of German domestic politics. Fidesz politicians started to vent their anger by assigning certain meanings to German domestic developments, which were in line with their own emotional climate: because they themselves were angry with Germany over the migration crisis or their European policy, Fidesz started to assign anger to German voters. The perpetual German state elections proved to be useful for that: AfD did well and CDU lost in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in 2016 'because the people see the *[migration]* situation and expressed their opinion accordingly' said a Fidesz backbencher in Parliament (Országgyűlési Napló: 19 September 2016). (He did not mention that six months earlier, in the midst of the migration crisis, the pro-*Willkommenskultur* Greens became the largest party in a state legislature for the first time after the state election in Baden-Württemberg). After Germany tightened its asylum regulations in 2016–7,

another backbencher went even further by saying that the era of the 'irresponsible' German migration policy was over. Granted, 'terror attacks with human casualties were necessary for the socialists *[he meant the SPD]* to come to this conclusion.' (Országgyűlési Napló: 20 March 2017). Once again, it was angry German voters who were needed to inject common sense into their politicians.

This mixture of anger and scorn extended to the assessment of the 2017 German election. While congratulating the CDU/CSU and humiliating the SPD by pointing out that they were moving towards the size of a small party, Fidesz MP Németh expressed his anger towards the German government in a passive-aggressive way: he said, that in light of the 'sobering' results, one hoped that Berlin would ditch its aims of a federal, two-speed Europe and that it would 'unequivocally return to the notion of European unity' (as if before Germany was against that). Even more remarkably, Németh went on to say that 'if our expectations are met, we can offer our cooperation, and Hungary and the Hungarian people will extend the hand of friendship' towards Germany (Országgyűlési Napló: 25 September 2017). Summing up the emotional climate of Fidesz around the high time of the migration crisis in a neat metaphor, Orbán said that because of the disagreements with Berlin he constantly had a 'German boot' on his chest, which was not nice – but he did not cave in (mandiner.hu 2022).[4]

3.5. 2018–2022: Intense anger

Even though migration as an every-day topic faded somewhat after 2018, the intensity of anger towards Germany only increased, irrespective of the composition of the German government. Traditional areas of common German-Hungarian interests were characterised by diametrically opposed world-views and, accordingly, emotions. Take European policy: 'Brussels wants to create a German-led European state against us', said Orbán in 2021 (magyarnemzet.hu 2021). Or the question of EU funds: Western propaganda paints a picture as though Hungary was a net winner of EU funds while other countries were net contributors, said Orbán. 'This is not the case. This is not the case. If there is a real net winner of the financial system of the European Union, it is Germany itself, who is the biggest winner of the European economy, although the first impression might be that he is a contributor. But no, he is a net beneficiary of the whole system' (Országgyűlési Napló: 16 November 2020). Leaving the question of how to measure such things out, the intensity of anger shows itself in the repetition of the core claim. This citation also tells us about the emotional need to compare the 'wins' of individual countries and to point out who is the 'bigger' or the 'real winner'. Apparently, common wins or joint benefits for both Germany and Hungary were out of the question. In another 'competitive

4 I did not count this as a Nazi allusion.

comparison' from the same interview, Orbán claimed that Hungary is much less corrupt: for proof, one only had to look at the list of names of the new Scholz government (magyarnemzet.hu 2021). (Unfavourable) comparisons with Germany leading to anger were also typical of Foreign Minister Szijjártó, who pointed out the hypocrisy of Germany in three different parliamentary debates in 2019 alone. Each time, the issue was the Hungarian rejection of normativity in foreign economic policy. Szijjártó defended his building of ties with Russia or China by pointing out that 'the Germans' did the same, only more so. Nord Stream 2 was prime evidence, as was the 25% increase of the German-Russian trade volume between 2016 and 2018 (Országgyűlési Napló: 13 June 2019).

Yet a zero-sum world view and allegations of hypocrisy were only part of the evidence for intense anger as the Hungarian master emotion. The others were six separate instances where high-ranking, experienced Fidesz-politicians made undeniable Nazi allusions.

1. In 2019, minister of the prime minister's office Gergely Gulyás said that in Germany the state media is an instrument of the left-liberal propaganda and that the German propaganda has a tradition of being good (444.hu 2019).
2. In 2020, Minister of State Michael Roth claimed that antisemitism is gaining strength in Hungary. Gergely Gulyás answered that Roth's criticism reminds him of the German propaganda of the 1930s and that Roth's impertinence is 'the shame of German foreign policy' (hvg.hu 2020).
3. In 2020, Vice President of the European Parliament Katarina Barley (SPD) said that the EU should 'starve' Poland and Hungary financially. In response, government spokesman Zoltán Kovács asked on Facebook 'which German starving know-how is about to be performed on Hungary? The Stalingrad, the Leningrad or the Varsaw version?'[5]
4. In the third such instance in 2020 alone, offence was taken by a piece in the satirical heute-show in which a comedian called Orbán, among other things, 'a Hungarian goulash with ears'. Spokesman Kovács answered that he remembers a time when Germany felt itself superior and looked down on everybody else. 'It did not work too well'(dw.com 2020).
5. In April 2021, football club Hertha, Bsc. sacked its Hungarian goalkeeper coach, Zsolt Petry over his remarks that 'a moral degradation has swept over Europe' and that 'if you don't approve of migration because loads of criminals have befallen Europe, you are branded as racist'. Questioning whether rule-of-law still exists in Germany, Gergely Gulyás reminded everybody that in the 20th century there was a type of totalitarianism which originated in Germany and that 'we don't want that to happen in the 21st again' (telex.hu 2021).
6. In his 2022 Tusványos speech, Orbán mused about how the European Commission might force the member states to cut their gas consumption

5 https://www.facebook.com/308154079343580/posts/1685820724910235/

by 15%. 'I don't see how they can coerce [the member states] to do that, but the Germans have know-how on this – back from the old days, I mean' (miniszterelnök.hu 2022).

Turning to the new German government, we might assume that if anger was reserved for the CDU-led cabinets after 2014, this must have become all the more intense after 2021. But this is only half right. Writing in the autumn of 2022, there seems to be no improvement, but also no deterioration in the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany. Anger remains at the forefront: by emptying the concept of 'nation of its meaning, by aiming for a federal Europe, by defining Germany an immigration country and by refusing to categorize society into men and women, the new German government throws up many "question marks"', Orbán said (magyarnemzet.hu 2021). But as of yet, 'only' one new Nazi allusion has come up during the first months of the Scholz government.

So far this is the evidence from our various sources about the emotional climates of Fidesz towards Germany. Let us now summarise the findings and try to find patterns, and explanations for them. First, prior to 1998 there weren't enough contacts to really speak of a well-formed attitude towards Germany – apart from respect towards individual German politicians like Graf Lambsdorff or Kohl. Between 1998 and 2002 positive emotions such as respect and gratefulness meshed with impatience, even anger, if Germany was seen as failing to support Hungary's EU bid. After an eight-year opposition period where Germany was not in the focus of Fidesz, the first years after 2010 saw a very positive emotional climate centred on gratefulness and respect. However, after 2014 emotions changed drastically: anger and scorn came to the forefront in the context of the migration crisis. Although the issue faded after around 2019, anger only intensified on the part of Fidesz, to the point where comparisons with, and allusions to, Germany's Nazi past became a regular occurrence, mainly triggered by German criticisms of the Hungarian rule-of-law situation. Negative emotions were absolutely dominant in the speeches and interviews.

Table 2: Emotional climates of Fidesz towards Germany

	1998–2002	2010–2014	2014–18	2018–22
Master emotions	impatience, respect, low intensity anger	gratefulness, friendship	anger, scorn	intense anger
Main issue(s)	Hungary's EU accession	rule-of –law issues	migration crisis	rule-of-law issues
Nazi allusions	0	1	0	6

V. Three possible causes for variation and the role of collective narcissism

Having established the emotional climates, let us turn to the main research question: how can we account for the fluctuations in the way Fidesz politicians have perceived Germany over the past three decades? One obvious answer would be the role of party politics. To recapitulate: the assumption would be that Fidesz would have a more positive perception of Germany whenever fellow right-wing governments were in power in Berlin, and vice versa. Is this borne out by the facts? Quite the opposite. Between 1998 and 2002 there was a total political mismatch: in Hungary, Fidesz led the government while in Germany an SPD-Grüne left-wing coalition was in power. Yet the emotional climate of Fidesz was balanced: positive emotions such as respect meshed with impatience and anger to give a mixed and ambiguous picture – but very far from the overall negativity characterising Fidesz after 2014. Between 2010 and 2022 the emotional climate should have been the most positive as there was only a partial mismatch: Fidesz was in power in Budapest, while the CDU led all the governments in Berlin (until 2013 with the FDP, after that with the SPD – thus the partial mismatch). Both parties were also members of the EPP until 2021. But this continuity and parallelism did not make for a continuity and positivity in the emotional climates: while the situation was arguably the best up until 2014, things quickly and dramatically deteriorated after that, although no government change happened on either side. It is too early to tell reliably how Fidesz perceives the new left-leaning German government, but the first signs point to at least no deterioration, which is once again counterintuitive.

Discarding the party politics argument, we turn to the other 'rational' argument, namely policy disagreements over decisive issues. To recapitulate, this line of reasoning holds, intuitively, that emotional climates follow policy (dis-) agreements: whenever there are disagreements on issues of high salience, emotional climates will become more negative and vice versa: policy agreements will lead to a more positive perception. In the context of German-Hungarian relations, four salient issues stand out, through which we can measure the validity of this argument. The first, Hungary's EU accession prior to 2004, supports this explanation: there was clear agreement on this issue, thus the mostly positive emotional climate. The second issue was the common interest in having strong economic and trade ties between the two countries. Although our sources shed somewhat less light on this, based on the existing literature we can claim that there has been a constant agreement on this issue since 1990. Yet this did not prevent the deterioration of the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany after 2014.

The third issue was migration, which dominated the years 2014–2018, but its salience in our sources receded significantly after that. The positions of

Berlin and Budapest were wide apart and disagreements over how to handle the migration and refugee crisis are amply documented (Beger 2021). Overall, the migration issue does not seem to support the assumption that emotional climates follow policy disagreements. True, the topic contributed greatly to the deterioration of Fidesz' perception of Germany after 2014. Yet as the issue faded, the emotional climate never recovered.

The fourth topic was (and is) disagreements over Hungary's rule-of-law situation. Starting with Hungary's controversial 2010 media law, this topic has overshadowed all the years since, increasing in salience with the start of the Article 7 procedure in 2017, the Sargentini Report in 2018 and the initiation of the rule-of-law mechanism in 2022. This issue *does* fulfil the expectations following from the policy disagreement-explanation. The observed pattern is intuitive, and also supported by the facts: in the first years after 2010, policy disagreements were (in retrospect) of a low salience, hence the good perception. However, after the initiation of the Article 7 procedure in 2017, compounded by the negative effects of the disagreement over migration, the emotional climate went downhill and anger intensified in lockstep with further EU (and thus German) pressure on Hungary.

Overall, the emotional climate of Fidesz as far as the rule-of-law issue was concerned can be explained by the policy-disagreement-argument, but not migration or the issue of economic ties. In fact, a striking pattern emerges: somehow, policy disagreements do have the capacity to influence emotional climates in a negative way, but the opposite is not true: policy agreements after 2014 did not lead to an improvement. After an inflection point had been reached around 2014–15, there was only one direction, namely southwards, and the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany never recovered. So, we must conclude, that the 'rational' policy disagreement-approach only explains one half of the picture, namely the rule-of-law issue.

But what about the other half? Why has Fidesz been stuck in its emotional climate since 2014 despite the receding of the migration issue and constantly strong economic ties? But also: how can we explain the level of anger, i.e. the extent of negativity of Fidesz' emotional climate? We have seen that German rule-of-law concerns over the last years have led to continuous Nazi-allegations from Fidesz. How can we explain that these criticisms have warranted such a strong, intense response from Budapest? Using a 'rational' cost-benefit approach, one would need to conclude that Hungarian decision-makers would not allow themselves to feel (or, at least, articulate) this emotional climate towards their most important ally and partner. This paper proposes that the explanation lies in complementing 'rational' approaches with insights from social psychology and thus propose that the explanation for this odd behaviour lies in the peculiar emotional underpinning of Fidesz decision-makers since 2014, namely collective narcissism.

Simply put, the main finding of our research has been a striking overlap between the emotional foundations of collective narcissism on the one hand, and the composition of emotions of Fidesz politicians towards Germany on the other. In a nutshell, Fidesz politicians feel the way collective narcissists feel, but only since 2014. To recap, consider the emotional make-up of collective narcissists:

- anger as the most important, most frequent emotion. Intensity of anger grows after 2014, culminating in repeated Nazi allusions;
- lack of positive emotions, such as gratefulness, joy or respect, despite common interests and success stories;
- hypersensitivity to criticisms of Hungary's rule-of-law situation, causing aggressive reactions such as Nazi comparisons;
- unwillingness to feel solidarity and out-group empathy; and
- an unwillingness to forgive, as seen in the fact that once an inflection point has been reached in 2014, the emotional climate of Fidesz towards Germany never recovered, despite common interests.

We should also point out, that these above features only came to the fore after 2014. While subliminally present, Fidesz decision-makers showed signs of collective narcissism in their emotional climates towards Germany much less frequently before 2014. One example, however, was the aforementioned 'theory' that the EU should have welcomed Hungary much earlier than 2004. In this proposition lies the germ of collective narcissism, because it implies that the EU should have made an exception to its rules on accession for the sake of Hungary. Anger that the ingroup's exceptionality is not sufficiently externally appreciated is a core feature of collective narcissists (Golec de Zavala et al. 2019). But, prior to 2014, these considerations were outweighed by more positive feelings. Why did Fidesz allow itself to express its collective narcissistic disposition after 2014? Here we cut back to the second explanation: what triggered the open expression of these emotions (and resulting action tendencies) were the increasing German criticisms from the press and the government over the two aforementioned areas of policy disagreement: migration and rule-of-law. As these grew more frequent, Fidesz decision-makers reacted more often and more strongly in collective narcissistic terms and having this disposition, it is hard, if not impossible, for them to turn around and forgive the sleights. Overall, these policy disagreements should intuitively lead us to expect a deterioration in the relationship, but it is only in combination with collective narcissism that we can explain the way criticisms have impacted on the emotional climate of Fidesz, its constantly negative trajectory and the increasing frequency of Nazi allusions.

IV. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to enhance our understanding of Hungary's foreign policy under the Fidesz governments. We argued that because of its populist nature and its lack of veto powers in foreign policy decision-making, tried-and--tested rational explanations have to be complemented by an approach which integrates the insights of social psychology. By focusing on and aggregating the emotional content of speeches, and interviews of Fidesz politicians, we aimed to show how collective narcissism informs the way Germany is perceived and felt towards, especially since 2014. Two alternative, rational approaches have, on their own, not produced satisfactory results in explaining for example why Fidesz politicians routinely insult their most important economic and political ally by comparing it to its genocidal predecessor. Going forward, more research should incorporate psychological variables in line with our admittedly limited case-study. We believe this is essential to better understand the foreign policies of populist states in the Central European region and beyond, otherwise their seemingly 'irrational' behaviour might remain unfathomable.

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Forget about voting, we are going on vacation! Examining the effect of school holidays on turnout

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sciendo

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Abstract: *Media and politicians widely debate the relationship between holidays and political participation, but research in the field is underdeveloped. To test the impact of holidays on election turnout, we use a natural experimental setting in general elections in Slovakia with respect to the presence of holidays near election day. More specifically, while a part of the country had no holidays, other regions either experienced holidays for the first time or had the holiday in a repeated manner. The results from difference--in-differences and OLS regressions employed in the analysis show that experiencing a holiday near election day decreases electoral turnout. However, this negative effect of holidays on turnout is found to be significant only in territories that experienced holidays for the first time, while it is absent in territories that had holidays near elections repeatedly. This finding points to a potential habituation of the electorate and the holidays' influence in the long run. The paper thus contributes to our understanding of how different time aspects of holidays affect electoral turnout.*

Keywords: ***holidays, turnout, elections, Slovakia, difference-in-differences***

I. Introduction

Many types of conventional wisdom have been surrounding election day turnout. For example, there have been claims that bad weather, long queues or distant polling stations can decrease turnout. Moreover, some of the turnout literature argues that the individual temporal state of the citizen may play a role in their voting decision. In recent years, political science literature has exam-

ined these circumstantial conditions and come up with more or less substantial effects impacting participation rate (see, for example, Gomez et al. 2007; Garnett – Grogan 2021; Pettigrew 2021; Ksiazkiewicz – Erol 2022). Yet, one factor commonly believed to influence turnout has not been examined thoroughly by scholars: holidays.

Based on rational choice theory, if the citizens' expected utility from the voting act is higher than the costs, they will participate in elections (Downs 1957). However, if the costs for voting are increased, and the motivation to participate is not high, even small costs may persuade a 'fragile' citizen and be the last straw to abstention. This might mean having a holiday in the winter or summer season that could be used for free-time activities with families or friends outside their town. A handful of studies address this question and confirm that organising elections around a holiday depresses turnout (Dubois – Lakhdar 2007; Anderson – Beramendi 2012). On the other hand, to our knowledge, these are only two systematic empirical tests that have been made about the possible effect of holidays on turnout, neglecting the role of this seemingly unrelated factor in other places and conditions. What is more, there has been no investigation on whether repeated holidays in the same place over the years can have a detrimental effect on turnout or not.

Slovakia's 2020 parliamentary elections provided a unique experimental setting where a part of the country did have a school holiday for the whole week, whilst the part of the country operated as usual with no free days. The setting allows us to employ a difference-in-differences (DID) strategy comparing the turnout rates of Slovak municipalities that had school holidays and did not have them before and after the 2020 elections. Using data from all 2,926 municipalities in Slovakia, we find that experiencing the spring holiday for the first time decreases turnout between 1.9 and 2.9 percentage points (depending on the model). We also demonstrate that exposure to the holiday season for several elections does not change turnout significantly. Hence, we are the first to show that repetition of holidays affects turnout differently than holidays occurring for the first time. Additionally, the study contributes to the ongoing debates about how much effort it takes to vote in a specific situation. Finally, the results expand our understanding of the holiday effect by its confirmation in the Central Eastern European region.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in the next section, we will summarise the literature on turnout and seemingly unrelated factors related to it, holiday behaviour and the Slovak case. Then we will describe the methodology and data. To help explain the variation in electoral participation, we also include various control variables. Finally, we discuss the statistical results, implications and conclusions.

II. Voter turnout and holidays

One of the main theoretical frameworks of political participation is the rational choice model, which sees citizens as actors calculating the potential benefits and costs associated with voting (Downs 1957; Riker – Ordeshook 1968; Blais et al. 2000).[1] Regardless of the perceived personal benefits from the electoral outcome, the sense of civic duty or any other motivations driving a voter to polling stations, the individual generally needs to overcome certain costs of voting. Since Downs (1957), researchers have distinguished between the cost of time needed to choose a preferred candidate and the cost associated with the actual voting. The latter category has become one of the research topics of political science scholars, who have been examining some of the logical truisms associated with election day turnout. For example, registration laws (Wolfinger – Rosenstone 1980), long queues formed outside the polling stations (Pettigrew 2021), changes in polling locations (Brady – McNulty 2011) and a longer journey one must take in order to get to the polling station (Gibson et al. 2013; Garnett – Grogan 2021) decrease the likelihood that a citizen will turn out to vote.

When people decide to vote and travel to a polling station, they sacrifice their time that they could use differently. In other words, they are overcoming the opportunity costs incurred by giving up alternative options such as spending time with family, sleeping or doing other non-voting related activities (Kang 2019). It is clear that as the turnout in most democracies is relatively high, for most people most of the time voting is easy, and they are comfortable with sacrificing their time voting (Blais – Daoust 2020). However, sometimes the circumstances can change, and our voting costs suddenly increase, making voting more complicated. One of these circumstances can be when we are away from home on the day of the election, or at least we were planning to be. More pressing situations can overwhelm us and make our temptation to abstain strong. In this study, we argue that seasonal factors may alter the perception of voting costs, and the start of a school holiday that lasts more than a week can represent this temptation. The causal mechanism proposed here is relatively straightforward: school holidays for most voters and pupils can serve as a time for vacation or more time for other activities than voting because pupils do not

1 The rational choice model originally developed by Downs (1957) works with the equation R = PB – C. R denotes the aggregate utility of participation, P is the probability that a particular decision to participate will be decisive for the outcome, B is the benefit that the individual will receive from participation if the choice is successful (such as the preferred party wins the election), C is the cost associated with participation. However, there is little chance that the citizen's vote will determine the election's outcome, so the P value is almost always zero (objectively). Therefore, costs should, by definition, almost always outweigh the benefits, making participation in collective action irrational for the individual. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) extended the model and added that the reason why citizens tend to vote is also because of the expressive benefits they get from the voting act. These expressive benefits (D), frequently called civic duty, include the satisfaction one gets from adhering to ethical principles (Blais – Achen 2019).

have to abstain from school. Therefore, due to increased opportunity costs, having a school holiday near elections is worse for electoral turnout than having a regular working week ahead.

Not all voters are immune to increased opportunity costs that may cause abstention. As Dubois and Lakhdar (2007: 145) put it, seasonal factors can be used by 'fragile citizens' as an excuse for not voting. They value their holidays, so they travel away from their town even if they do not return home by election day. It is well established that many voters do have a higher value of civic duty, are interested in politics and see elections as an essential act for the future of the country (Blais et al. 2000). However, a certain part of the electorate in the society does not feel a great motivation to vote, is not interested in politics and while the election day is approaching, they are still not decided whether they should vote or not. The so-called 'fragile citizens' or 'late-deciders' sometimes make the final decision on election day and could be persuaded by other than political factors.[2] In these cases, even small changes in perceived costs, such as inclement weather on election day or holiday, can swing the personal decision to the abstain side.[3]

Why would the citizen prefer holiday time instead of election time? Atkinson and Fowler (2014: 57) argue that what non-election-related events do is that they distract citizens from the political process. They examine saint's day fiestas organised close to election days in Mexico and conclude that the events decrease turnout by 2.5 to 3.5 percentage points. Moreover, Stoker and Jennings (1995) show that younger people tend to abstain more around the time of their weddings.[4] The distractions that could be created by circumstances unrelated to political processes make voting a lower-priority activity. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the greater the satisfaction and value a voter receives from these alternative activities, the greater the costs of voting are.

Holidays are a special time when students and working people can take time off and are able to do activities they want. In many ways, the behaviour of people during holidays is changing. Generally, most people travel, read or sightsee (de Bloom et al. 2009). Younger vacationers tend to seek more relaxing travel experiences (Gitelson – Kerstetter 1990) and make fewer trips (Romsa – Blenman

2 Late deciders can be divided into two categories: the first consists of voters generally interested in politics, who follow the election campaigns and therefore leave their decision to the last minute, based on as much information as possible. The second, larger group (also referred to as non-sophisticated late deciders) is generally not very interested in politics, does not have much information about candidates and parties, and is less likely to vote (Yarchi et al. 2021; Brox – Giammo 2009; Irwin – Van Holsteyn 2018).

3 For example, research has found that rain significantly reduces turnout in several developed democracies around the world (see, for example, Gomez et al. 2007; Stockemer – Wigginton 2018; Garcia-Rodriguez – Redmond 2020).

4 On the other hand, events do not have to decrease turnout per se. Addonizio et al. (2007) show that festivals specifically organised to attract citizens to participate increase turnout. However, those activities are election-related, while the study focuses on events that have nothing to do with political processes.

1989). When looking at family activities, children are a factor that influences the type of vacation the family has (Tagg – Seaton 1995). A higher income and education increase the probability of a family vacation abroad (van Loon – Rouwendal 2013). Finally, families that travel a lot have the highest family cohesion among the types of families (Lehto et al. 2012), and when flying on vacation, most of them pursue sun or beach (Prebensen – Kleiven 2006). Other studies looked at different behaviours, effects and changes. For example, the intention to use bike-sharing increases during holidays (Kaplan et al. 2015), the number of car crashes (Anowar et al. 2013) and energy consumption increase when staying at home (Román – Stokes 2015). People spend more prior to holidays (Dodd – Gakhovich 2011), they gain weight more (Turicchi et al. 2020) and their suicide rate decreases (Hökby et al. 2021). The activity of thieves and burglars decreases (Cohn – Rotton 2003). Overall, holidays and vacations have health benefits facilitated by free time for oneself, warmer (and sunnier) vacation locations, exercise and good sleep (Strauss-Blasche et al. 2005), while mood, energy level and satisfaction also increase (de Bloom et al. 2010).

As implied above, the range of activities for families and individuals increases during leisure, from staying at home or outside the house to travelling outside the town or country. Therefore, the plan to take one of the trips may be related to when students have school holidays – mostly on winter and summer holidays, but also during shorter autumn or spring holidays. The rationale for why to opt for this period is logical – the students do not miss school, and at the same time, they can 'kill time'. All of those conditions highlight that when people do not work, their opportunity costs of voting are increased. On the other hand, having a weekend or holiday election decreases the possibility that the citizens will be at work and are more able to organise other activities during the day as they wish (when near polling stations), voting included.

Surveys about the abstention rate suggest that travelling out of town could be one of the reasons for not participating. LeDuc and Pammet (2010) show that around 40% of non-voters in Canada do not come to polling stations because of personal reasons such as they are too busy with work, family and school, they are on vacation or that they just forget. A recent poll in YouGov conducted just after the 2022 congressional elections in the USA stated that a major reason for not voting was in 23% of the time respondents were busy, and 8% said they were out of town (Orth 2022). The most important elections in Canada and the USA are held during the workweek, but most countries have first-order elections during weekends or holidays. In the study of Dubois and Lakhdar (2007), the authors use a survey where 16% of non-voters in the 2002 French presidential elections did not participate because they were on holiday, away for the weekend or out for a walk. Last, a poll report about the abstention in 2004 regional elections in the Czech Republic is available, and almost 14% of non-voting respondents stated they did not participate because 'they were

out of home, on vacation or a business trip' (Machonin 2005). However, these surveys do not tell us about the potentially significant effects of holidays on turnout and the magnitude of these effects.

Although the supposition of a holiday-turnout linkage has received attention from social scientists (see, for example, Downs 1957; Abrams 1970; Blondel et al. 1997; Rolfe 2012; Blais – Daoust 2020), only a handful of studies conducted an empirical investigation of the plausible effect. In the most exhaustive test to date, Dubois and Lakhdar (2007) studied turnout in French presidential elections between 1988 and 2002. France offers an experimental setting when examining the holiday effect because people do not have the same type of holiday at the same time – depending on geographical area, some of the locations were experiencing the school holidays, while others were not. The authors find that having a holiday near elections decreases turnout by about 1.7 percentage points. The extended and updated version of the French case using data from the sixties and seventies indicates that holidays affect the turnout by about one percentage point (Dubois 2012). The work of Dubois and Lakhdar is the only quasi-experimental research focusing solely on the holiday effect. Some other studies use the holiday variable, but only as a controlling factor. Anderson and Beramendi's (2012) analysis focuses on turnout in 14 OECD countries (mainly from Western Europe and the Commonwealth) from the 1980–2002 elections. They report that countries with holiday elections decrease turnout by about 0.1 percentage points. Grey and Cauls (2000) use a similar dataset and conclude that changing the elections to weekends or holidays when it was not a holiday before does not increase turnout. Finally, two studies from Canada show similarly negative effects during winter and summer elections that they generally associate with the holiday season (Blais et al. 2004; LeDuc – Pammet 2010).[5]

To sum up, the empirical evidence from macro-level studies and polls indicates that the voters are susceptible to holidays as a seemingly unrelated factor. During holidays, they might have decided to go out of town and plausibly forget about the elections. Some others might have known about the election date, but the holidays with their families or friends created a conflict between their personal and civic duties. One way or the other, this non-political variable does not seem to increase the participation rate, quite the opposite.

Could there be any conditionality to the holiday effect? Scholars did not pay much attention to the fact that holidays could be experienced differently if they are repeatedly part of the election process and if they are only circumstantial once-in-a-while events. The distinction may lay in so-called habituation. The habituation points to the research on classical conditioning, which demonstrates

5 When focusing on winter elections, citizens in Canada who spend winter outside of the country in warmer climates are called 'snowbirds'. In their case, voting by post or returning for elections might be too costly (Stockemer – Wigginton 2018).

that human reaction can quickly fade after repeated exposure to a given stimulus. This means that when we experience a specific situation or stimulus for the first time, the event tends to be more pronounced than the nth repetition of the same stimulus. For example, a person jumps when they hear a loud noise, but if repeated many times, they jump less (LeDoux 2003). The habituation patterns are well-known to neurobiologists and behavioural psychologists (Harris 1943; Grissom – Bhatnagar 2009; Rankin et al. 2009). In the area of electoral behaviour, this suggests that voters would eventually adapt to changing conditions that are part of the election process and that this adaptation should mitigate the impacts of the certain change – in our case, holidays.

Some countries like Israel or South Korea designate a special holiday during elections, and most other countries have elections during a regular weekday or a weekend. So, they are either used to repeated holiday conditions or do not have them at all. The comparison of the turnout among countries with holidays and without holidays is problematic for many reasons (i.e. due to different political cultures, electoral laws and electoral systems), and the possible examination of the repetition effect would be most suitable in the setting of a single country, which had holidays repeatedly in one part and had holidays only once in the other part. The case of Slovakia we analyse in this paper fulfils this condition.

III. Holidays and parliamentary elections in Slovakia

Students in Slovak schools have more than 14 weeks of holidays during the year. The holidays are divided into religious holidays (with more than one day), including Easter and Christmas, one-day holidays, also called 'days of rest', and seasonal holidays. The longest summer seasonal holidays last around eight weeks. On the contrary, autumn holidays tend to last only two days. The last type of seasonal holiday is the spring holidays, usually scheduled for mid-February until mid-March. The biggest specificity of spring holidays in Slovakia is that not all students have them at the same time. While all the other holidays start and finish the same day, spring holidays divide the country into three parts: western, central and eastern Slovakia.[6] Depending on the part of the country, the students are granted one week of holiday (five working days). The specificity of this setting is also that every year, a different part of Slovakia starts the 'spring round' of free time. For example, the western part had holidays in 2020 as the first, while in 2021, they were the third in line (after the central and eastern part).

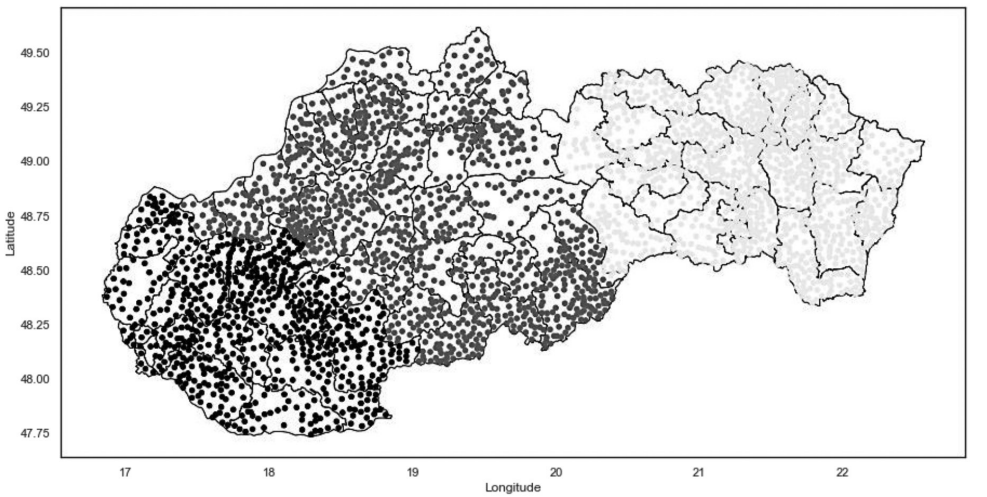
Between 2016 and 2020, the parliamentary elections in Slovakia were always held around the spring holidays. This temporal overlap of holidays with three subsequent elections created a quasi-experimental setting where both holiday-

6 Central Slovakia contains three smaller regions (Banskobystrický, Žilinský, Trenčiansky), and eastern Slovakia contains two smaller regions (Prešovský and Košický). The western part of Slovakia contains three more regions (Bratislavský, Nitriansky and Trnavský).

-turnout hypotheses could be verified. More specifically, the 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia were held on Saturday, 29 February, just when the central part finished the holidays and the eastern part's holidays began. Therefore, municipalities that were part of the 'holiday treatment' were from the central and eastern parts of Slovakia, while western municipalities had holidays way before the election day (from 17 to 21 February). Additionally, in the logic of the second hypothesis, the two-holiday groups did not experience the treatment the same way. The central part had holidays near election day in 2016, and this was not the case in eastern Slovakia, with only the 2020 holiday elections.

Media and political analysts widely debate the relationship between holidays and lower levels of voter turnout in Slovakia, but no empirical test has been made to this date.[7] This paper fills the gap in the research and answers if organising elections near free time events is a good idea for political participation.

Figure 1: The Slovak municipalities divided by the time of their spring holidays



Note: The black spots represent municipalities with no holidays around the election day, the grey spots represent municipalities with holidays in the 2020, and 2016 elections, and the light grey spots represent the municipalities with holidays only in the 2020 elections
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, and authors' computations

7 For example, setting the date of the regional and local elections in 2022 became one of the pre-election themes. The date of the elections was set prior to the autumn holidays. While the chairman of the Slovak parliament argued that more people would participate (as they would return to their permanent addresses) (RTVS 2022), there have been voices raised about the potential decreased participation of voters travelling to their families and outside of the towns (Markíza 2022).

IV. Data and empirical strategy

This paper examines the impact of holidays on voter turnout in general elections in Slovakia. The theoretical part of the text discusses previous research on this topic, which suggests that holidays are likely to decrease turnout. Furthermore, past studies have found that repeated exposure to a stimulus can diminish its expected impact. Based on that, we develop two hypotheses:

H1: The holidays during elections decrease turnout.
H2: The negative effect of holidays on turnout is larger in territories that experience holidays during elections for the first time than in territories that experience such holidays repeatedly.

Our dataset contains all Slovak municipalities in two parliamentary elections between 2016 and 2020. To examine the plausible effect of holidays on turnout and investigate the validity of the first hypothesis, we divide the municipalities into two groups. The first group, coded as one, contains municipalities experiencing holidays near election time. In our case, this includes the municipalities from the central and eastern part of Slovakia. The second group, coded as zero, contains municipalities that did not experience any state-imposed holidays in the 2020 elections. Out of the 2,926 municipalities in the study, 2,232 were assigned to the holiday (treatment) group, while the other 694 units were in the non-holiday (control) group.

Municipalities in the treatment group did not have the same conditions regarding the perception of holidays. While the parliamentary elections in the central part of the country were repeatedly held around the spring holidays, the eastern part did not have them in the 2016 elections. To compare the different plausible effects of holidays, we distinguish between repeated and one-time holidays in our analysis and look at the turnout change between them. In this setting, we have three categories: control group (west), repeated holiday group (central) and one-time holiday group (east). The division of Slovak municipalities into three categories based on holiday status is seen in figure 1.

We opted for presenting the results of the difference-in-differences (DID) regression models as they are easier to interpret. The DID strategy examines (mostly) two groups of units. It is a common type of analysis studying the differential effect of a treatment on a treatment group versus a control group and compares the same units before and after a treatment (holidays) to find the effect (Lee 2016). Our case compares the turnout data in holiday municipalities with non-holiday municipalities before (in the 2016 elections) and after the spring holidays in 2020 (with elections in the same year).

We used DID regressions to examine whether turnout varied significantly in holiday areas compared to non-holiday areas. This approach answers the ques-

tion of how the turnout changed in several areas depending on the existence or absence of spring holidays near election time. The independent variables in the analysis were categorical and used as dummy variables. The reference point in the analysis always represents the absence of the condition (non-holiday places), and, depending on the model, it is compared to the whole group of holiday municipalities (N = 2,232) or part of it. The former direction serves to investigate the first hypothesis, while the latter direction focuses on the second hypothesis. Specifically, we focused on models investigating repetition condition variables: a repetition event dummy (N = 1,107), represented by the central Slovak municipalities and a one-time dummy (N = 1,125), represented by eastern Slovak municipalities. Our models control for several socioeconomic factors associated with voter turnout. Specifically, we include logged population, the median age in a municipality, % of women in the municipality, % of married citizens, % catholic, and % of tertiary education as part of the fixed municipality effects. The data repository for control variables was the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic which published some of the information after the

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for municipalities with holidays and without holidays

	Holiday 2016		Holiday 2020		West 2016	West 2020	Total 2016	Total 2020
Mean	60.559		64.100		61.269	66.112	60.727	64.578
SD	10.446		10.251		8.565	9.032	10.035	10.011
Diff.	**3.541**				**4.843**		**3.851**	
Min	4.126		8.492		0	0	0	0
Max	100		94.311		77.473	88.455	100	94.311
N	2232		2232		694	694	2926	2926
	Central 2016	Central 2020	East 2016	East 2020	West 2016	West 2020	Total 2016	Total 2020
Mean	62.341	66.561	58.805	61.679	61.269	66.112	60.727	64.578
SD	9.864	9.777	10.707	10.134	8.565	9.032	10.035	10.011
Diff.	**4.220**		**2.874**		**4.843**		**3.851**	
Min	21.418	24.559	4.126	8.493	0	0	0	0
Max	100	94.311	93.750	94.117	77.473	88.455	100	94.311
N	1107	1107	1125	1125	694	694	2926	2926

Note: Mean turnout is stated as a percentage. The holiday variable contains data from the Central and East part of Slovakia
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, and authors' computations

2021 census (marital status, catholic population, tertiary education) and some of the information is released annually (population, median age, proportion of women in municipality).[8]

Our research relies on an equal trend assumption. In other words, we expect that the change in turnout throughout the years will more or less follow a similar trend. We assessed this assumption by performing additional placebo DID estimations on a fake treatment group and fake outcome. Both tests showed zero impact of holidays on the DID estimates. Alongside DID analyses, we also employ OLS regressions of holiday and turnout results from the 2020 parliamentary elections to create a reference analysis framework. The models are controlled for the same variables with fixed-year effects.

V. Results

Descriptive statistics in table 1 from two parliamentary elections in Slovakia reveal the average turnout rate in municipalities and the difference between the 2016 and 2020 spring elections. Municipality turnout is defined here as the percentage of eligible voters in a municipality who voted in the election. Both parliamentary elections attracted more than 60% of the citizens, and the 2020 elections showed more than a 3.8 percentage point increase in overall turnout than previous elections. This claim holds regardless of the area or holiday treatment. When we look at the difference in participation rates depending on whether the municipality had spring holidays around elections or not, the results show that the former did not report such a visible increase in turnout as non-holiday municipalities. What is more, the turnout differences do not point to a similar trend in participation within the holiday group. While the central part (with repeated holidays) mirrors the control group more, there is a distinct pattern in the east, suggesting that one-time holiday shock could be more substantial. The following sections provide deeper insight into the holiday-turnout relationship and answer whether these differences have significant changes.

The results of the analysis are presented in model 1, table 2. The DID estimations show that holidays decrease turnout by almost 0.9 percentage points, and this effect is statistically significant. Hence, the results confirm our first hypothesis. The DID estimations confirm our intuition from table 1 that the holiday group did not show a similar change in turnout. Model 1 demonstrates that holidays decreased turnout by around 0.87 percentage points. Moreover, the P value in the model is statistically significant, confirming the study's first hypothesis. Figure 2 only mirrors our results from the first model and shows that although the turnout was higher in the last elections compared to the 2016

8 The models use data from 2020 (population, median age, proportion of women) and 2021 (marital status, catholic population, tertiary education). We also employed the control variables from 2016 (in the pre-treatment period), and the performance of the models was virtually the same.

Table 2: Regressions measuring the effect of flooding on turnout

	Turnout in municipality			
	Difference-in-differences (2016–2020)		OLS (2020)	
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Holiday	-0.87 (0.24) ***		-0.89 (0.22) ***	
Repeated holidays				
One-time (East)		-1.91 (0.28) ***		-2.89 (0.25) ***
Repeated (Central)		-0.23 (0.25)		0.33 (0.23)
Controls				
Pop. (log)	0.62 (0.09) ***	0.54 (0.09) ***	-0.16 (0.09) *	-0.43 (0.09) ***
Median age	-0.09 (0.02) ***	-0.13 (0.02) ***	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02) **
Gender	0.08 (0.04) **	0.07 (0.04) *	0.05 (0.02)	0.27 (0.04)
Marriage	0.08 (0.02) ***	0.12 (0.02) ***	0.18 (0.02) ***	0.27 (0.02) ***
Catholic	0.02 (0.00) ***	0.00 (0.00) *	0.04 (0.00) ***	0.03 (0.00) ***
Tertiary	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.26 (0.02) ***	0.29 (0.02) ***
Constant	-4.42 (2.34) *	-2.61 (2.33)	7.83 (2.19) ***	13.16 (2.15) ***
Year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-sq.	0.067	0.082	0.778	0.793
N	2,926	2,926	2,926	2,926

Note: Regression coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. DID regressions in models 1 and 2 are based on municipality election data from two elections (2016 and 2020). The dependent variable is the difference between the 2020 and 2016 turnout. OLS regressions in models 3 and 4 are based on municipality election data from the 2020 elections and are controlled for the 2016 elections. The dependent variable is the 2020 turnout in a municipality. All models use fixed municipality effects – population (logged), median age, gender (%), marital status (%), catholic proportion (%) and tertiary education (%). All the independent variables were treated as dummy variables, with reference categories always considered the non-holiday municipalities. The holiday was coded as one when the municipality had spring school holidays in the week preceding or following the 2020 elections. A one-time holiday event was coded as one when the municipality experienced holidays only in 2020; repeated holiday events were coded as one when the municipality experienced holiday events prior to elections in 2016 and 2020. Significant values of independent variables are in bold. Significance: *p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0. 01.
Source: Authors

elections, the municipalities with holidays did not experience as substantial growth in turnout as municipalities without holidays.

We now turn to the second variable of our interest, the repetition of holidays in our treatment group. As figure 3 shows, both the towns with repeated holidays and municipalities that experienced only one-time holidays witnessed an increase in turnout in the 2020 election; however, to a different extent. In

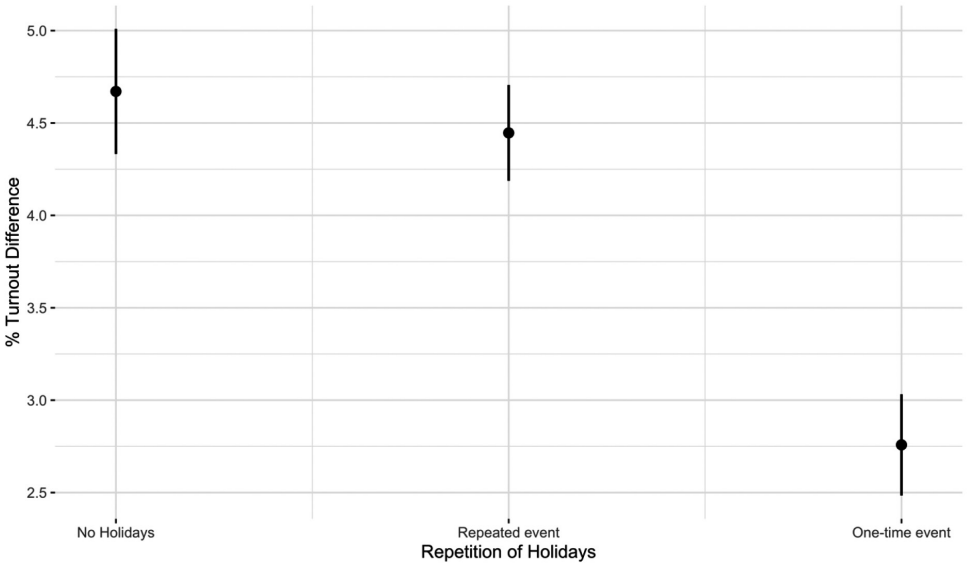
the case of the former, the rise of turnout does not differ from western Slovak towns that had no holidays during elections. For both these regions, the turnout in 2020 increased by roughly 4.5 percentage points compared to the 2016 elections. On the contrary, in eastern Slovakia, i.e. the region with only one-time holidays, the turnout increase is significantly lower and reaches less than 2.8 percentage points. The existence of the negative effect in the eastern part and non-existence in the central part confirm the second hypothesis about the differential effects of holiday treatment. Model 2 also shows that when control variables are present in the model, the effect of repeated holidays does not significantly affect turnout.

The OLS regressions take a different approach than the DID strategy. They look at the 2020 turnout in a municipality, which is controlled for all the available variables and fixed-year effects (2016 turnout). The logic behind employing independent variables is the same here, and they produce similar results as the first procedure. A slight contrast is seen in the coefficients of the repeated holidays variable, but it still does not show significant results. On the other hand, the effect of a one-time holiday event is negative and statistically significant. As seen in model 4, having a holiday for the first time in a long time decreased turnout by about 2.9 percentage points. After seeing the results from models 2 and 4, it is clear that the one-time event category essentially creates the entire difference between the holiday and non-holiday group.

Figure 2: Mean difference in turnout (2016–2020) depending on the character of a municipality (Without holidays vs With holidays)

Note: Confidence intervals are displayed at 90%
Source: Authors

Figure 3: Mean difference in turnout (2016–2020) depending on the character of a municipality (Without holidays vs With repeated holidays vs With one--time holidays)



Note: Confidence intervals are displayed at 90%
Source: Authors

The control variables used in models also deserve our note of caution. Several fixed municipality effects report statistically significant results. The coefficients in models 1 and 2 demonstrate the effect of the variables on the turnout change in the 2016 and 2020 elections. More specifically, more populated, younger, married and catholic-dominated municipalities in 2020 reported a more substantive increase in turnout throughout the years. Additionally, control variables in OLS regressions highlight that the more catholic, university-educated and married citizens the municipalities had, the higher the turnout in the 2020 elections was.

VI. Discussion and conclusions

The turnout literature forms one of the most extensive parts in the field of political behaviour, and the pursuit of variables explaining variation in electoral participation is one of its main aims (Blais 2006, Cancela – Geys 2016). While some of the 'turnout variables' have been focusing on the circumstances affecting the voters' decision directly (e.g. weather, long lines, depression), the little systematic knowledge was dedicated to events seemingly unrelated to elections and occurring in their time proximity. This paper looks at the spring holidays' effect on turnout in the 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia. Dominant

theories hold that voters could get distracted by more pleasurable activities and prioritise something different than voting. On the other hand, the more time available for voters during vacation could allow them to choose the time more suitable for them. The findings point more to the first direction – while voters could apply for a voting card and vote wherever they wanted, a significant part of the electorate did not vote due to holidays.

That said, we stress that there is a difference between the Slovak municipalities that had spring holidays before elections only once and municipalities that repeatedly voted during holidays. It seems that when the elections are held under similar circumstances (as in central Slovakia with multiple elections taking place around holidays), the effect of free time does not seem to persist. It is clear that the 0.9 percentage point effect in total and the two to three percentage point effect in a one-time holiday setting is not huge, and other socioeconomic variables will still be visible in the turnout models.[9] However, the centre of our interest was parliamentary, first-order elections, which are generally more medially important and other seemingly unrelated factors plausibly do not have the chance to manifest as much as in the case of 'less-at-stake' elections. It is reasonable to assume that if the spring (autumn or another school) holidays were held around regional or even European elections in Slovakia, the demobilising effect would be even higher.

These findings not only add to our knowledge about the behaviour of voters during special circumstances but also carry implications for understanding when to schedule elections (if possible). While some Slovak politicians believed that having elections around holidays could gather more families in their permanent residences and subsequently increase the turnout rate (Markíza 2022), our results imply that, at least in the case of spring holidays in Slovakia, it is probably not the correct assumption. The holiday-induced depression in turnout seems to result from increased opportunity costs of voters who could use the vacation time elsewhere than in a polling station. Perhaps some voters wanted to participate, but in the rush of their activities, they forgot, as some of the abstention surveys indicate. Or for some of the voters, the application for proxy voting just represented the increased costs they were unwilling to undergo. One way or the other, whenever the cost of voting becomes high, the temptation to abstain becomes strong, and evidence from this paper confirms that holidays are adding costs to the voting calculus.

In addition to identifying the effect of holidays as a seemingly unrelated factor, looking at its substantive impact on electoral and policy outcomes is essential. If the state actors have the opportunity to set the election date, they have the power to decrease or increase the turnout rate based on their decision.

9 Applying this finding to the context of the 2020 Slovak election, roughly 20 thousand voters in municipalities of eastern Slovakia did not go to polling stations due to holidays. We build this prediction based on the exact number of citizens that turned out at the polling stations.

It seems that the winter or summer period and the holiday season might not be a good way to have a higher turnout. However, if the government party generally relies on the support of responsible voters with higher civic duty, placing elections near holidays may help them increase their vote share (as the supporters of other parties could abstain more).[10] Another argument is related to legislators who are trying to increase turnout and assume that the connection between the election and the holiday may persuade more voters to be at home and include voting in their holiday mix. Although the intentions might be genuine, the evidence from abroad and this paper does not seem to point in this direction.[11]

With respect to the implications for the turnout literature, the policy outcomes in the future should focus on timing the elections in Slovakia around the 'normal' time of the year when people do not massively ask for vacations, or the students do not have school holidays. The discussion about the turnout increase is in Slovakia's mainstream theme, mainly due to the former PM Igor Matovič, who proposed several policies that should attract more voters to the voting booths (TASR 2023). In line with rational choice theory, politicians should not forget about the need to decrease direct and opportunity costs that could stand in the way of 'fragile' and late-deciding citizens. Postal and proxy voting for all types of elections, more polling stations or the 'right time' of the year should become one of them. As we have seen in the strength of the holiday effect, it may not be the quest for millions of new votes, but attempting to increase turnout by a few percentage points is a noble and worthy task (Blais et al. 2019).

It is important to note, however, that the effect of holidays could be, in the Slovak case, partly compensated by the fact that some of the vacationers could apply for voting in other than their permanent residence. In Slovakia, proxy voting is possible – if the voter (electronically or by person) requests a voting card before elections, they can vote in any municipality in Slovakia. When a voter shows the voting card, the electoral committee then writes the name of a citizen into voting records. Therefore, the municipality's total number of eligible voters increases in terms of the number of proxy voters. Indeed, the turnout results from the 2020 elections showed that 13 of the 30 municipalities with the highest turnout rate are places around ski resorts, many of which are in the central part of Slovakia.[12]

10 Dubois and Lakhdar (2007) attribute, in part, the defeat of the major leftist presidential candidate to the abovementioned high number of non-voters in the 2002 election.

11 For example, the chairman of the Slovak Parliament argued that having elections near a holiday in 2022 local and regional elections is a good idea (Markíza 2022).

12 Some media coverage focused on the increased number of voters who wanted to vote in the municipalities near ski resorts. For example, Slovakia's most visited ski resorts (Vysoké Tatry and Donovaly) reported longer queues and a higher percentage of voters who were not originally from the area (TASR 2020; SITA 2020). However, not all the voters wanted to overcome the higher voting costs and were open to applying for voting cards (TASR 2020).

What is more, although we used several turnout-explaining variables in the model, there exists a possibility that other unobservable variables could decrease turnout in eastern Slovakia or holiday-affected municipalities, respectively. The compared areas were quite large and did not correspond with the classic natural experiment setting, where the treatment affected the units randomly. If the holidays were distributed to the municipalities and not the regions, the confidence in the interpretations would be higher. In this sense, we need to be cautious about the conclusions of this research because there is a chance that other factors affected the researched municipalities. Future research should combine individual and macro-level data from the same event to enhance the turnout research about holiday and abstention behaviour and could identify other factors that are interfering with the decision to participate.

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The Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry in the Austrian National Council – Influence and Impact from the Perspective of the Austrian National Council Members

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Abstract: *Committees of inquiry in the Austrian National Council gained a significant upgrade through a reform in 2015: for the first time, a parliamentary minority can now demand the establishment of a committee of inquiry. This reform meant not only a strengthening of control rights, but also an increase in parliamentary investigations in Austria. The aim of this article is to shed light on the parliamentary perspective and to deepen the understanding of investigative committees. In this way, it is to be shown which potentials, but also weaknesses, can be found in the investigative instrument from the MPs' point of view. A first-time survey of members of committees of inquiry showed that the perceptions of the reform and the democratic benefits differed greatly between the governing party ÖVP and the opposition party SPÖ. The increasing polarisation of the political debate also led to a further divergence in the approval or rejection of the investigative instrument. These developments may not only result in a weakening of the investigative instrument, but also directly challenge parliamentary democracy.*

Keywords: ***committee of inquiry, reform perceptions, Austrian National Council, political control, instrument of control, Quality of Democracy***

I. Control in Parliamentarism

Parliamentary committees of inquiry are an elementary component of political control within democratic systems. In the Austrian National Council, this instrument of control underwent a significant upgrade after decades of discussion. For

the first time in the history of the Second Republic, a parliamentary minority can demand the establishment of a committee of inquiry (CoI) (Konrath et al. 2015). With this decision, the number of investigations set up increased significantly from 2015: of six CoIs, five were set up at the request of the parliamentary minority. There were sufficient reasons for these increased investigations. In this regard, it seems that in Austrian domestic politics there has been a never-ending string of scandals and political malpractices in recent years. A highlight was the publication of the so-called 'Ibiza video', the consequences of which were the dissolution of the federal government, new elections of the National Council, and the establishment of a corresponding committee of inquiry. Investigations into the purchase of combat aircraft or a house search of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT) were further 'highlights'. Despite this significant upgrading of parliamentary control and the thoroughly controversial topics of investigation, only isolated analyses of the investigative instrument have been carried out in Austrian political science. Legal analyses of CoIs continue to dominate, which can be considered quite astonishing, since not only is the Reform of the Rules of Procedure itself already an interesting political science topic, but so too is the role of parliamentarians or that of the media. In particular, the way parliamentarians deal with the media has changed noticeably in recent years and has also shaped the public perception of CoIs.

This article is dedicated to this reform to obtain, for the first time, a comparative assessment of the parliamentarians of the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) and SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria), of CoIs of the Austrian National Council on the effects of the reform as well as the democratic political influence of CoIs. The analysis of these assessments is intended, on the one hand, to shed light on this internal parliamentary perspective by focusing on the micro-level and, on the other hand, to discuss their (subjective) influence on parliamentary control in the Austrian National Council. In this context, the tension between government and opposition, which is often analysed in parliamentarism research, is of interest, as is how the effects of the investigative instrument are perceived by the parliamentarians themselves. The overall aim is to contribute to the internal perspective of parliamentarism research (Schindler – Schüttemeyer 2010: 151–152) by illuminating the function of a CoI from the point of view of the parliamentarians, thus closing a research gap in Austrian parliamentarism research.

This article focuses on the following central research question:

How do members of CoIs of the Austrian National Council assess the reforms of the right of inquiry that have taken place and the impact and influence of parliamentary CoIs in the context of political control?

Empirically, this work is based on two surveys using a standardised questionnaire and three hypotheses, the intention of which was to record the attitudes and perceptions of members of CoIs of the National Council on the reforms that have taken place and the influence of the instrument of control in a comparative manner:

#1*: The strengthening of the minority right when setting up a parliamentary CoI is evaluated more positively by parliamentarians of the SPÖ than by parliamentarians of the ÖVP.*
#2: *SPÖ parliamentarians make greater use of information from external sources than ÖVP parliamentarians.*
#3: *SPÖ parliamentarians perceive a stronger democratic-political benefit of parliamentary CoIs than ÖVP parliamentarians.*

The ÖVP and SPÖ parliamentarians were suitable for the survey not only because of their strength as parliamentary fraction but also because of their political opposites: in the three committees used for the inquiry (BVT, Eurofighter and Ibiza CoIs), the ÖVP was always in government and the SPÖ in opposition.

Based on an extensive literature analysis, the potential of the parliamentary CoI as an object of research for political science is to be assessed. By illustrating this potential, a first step is to be taken to enliven the political science discourse in Austria on the instrument of control. Through the generation of hypotheses, the results are also to be given greater relevance in an international context.

Herein, the research and theoretical background of this thesis is firstly presented (Section 2). Thereafter, an academic discussion of the topic is summarised, and the current significance of parliamentary CoIs in Austria is outlined (Section 3). Subsequently, in Section 4 both the methodological approach of this thesis is described in more detail, and the results of the survey of members of CoIs are presented. In the fifth section, the results are summarised, analysed and discussed so that in the sixth (last) section, the potentials and weaknesses can be identified and put up for discussion.

II. Research and Theoretical Background

The research and theoretical background of the present work focuses on the micro-level of the members of CoIs and the internal parliamentary perspective of parliamentarism research as well as parliamentary control through CoIs. A comprehensive overview of parliamentarians, their activities and parliamentarianism were created for the German-speaking world by Schüttemeyer (1998), Wolfgang C. Müller et al. (2001), Helmar Schöne (2010), Werner Patzelt (2014), Siefken (2018) and Bröchler et al. (2020). With the help of different approaches, these works are dedicated to an intensive analysis of the German

members of the Bundestag and Austrian members of the National Council, whereby, for example, the multitude of activities of the parliamentarians, such as their work in the constituencies, the daily parliamentary work and their social networking, are taken up.

One of the most comprehensive works on the parliamentarians of the Austrian Parliament is that by Wolfgang C. Müller et al. (2001), which focuses on the political behaviour of parliamentarians. This is to be understood as the behaviour that is set in the exercise of the mandate or is related to it (cf. ibid.: 15). In preparing the study, the elicitation of both qualitative information and quantitative information was undertaken to be able to evaluate the data obtained not only in-depth but also in breadth (cf. ibid., 19). In this context, all 183 members of the National Council of the XX legislative period (GP) were interviewed, and a written survey was conducted.

One result of particular interest for the present article is the Austrian National Council members' understanding of their office and their activities. Müller et al. (cf. 2001: 65) determined this understanding, on the one hand, using a spontaneous (unaided) answer of the parliamentarians and, on the other hand, by an additional written survey. When asked what the most important tasks and duties of parliamentarians were, only 13% of the National Council members spontaneously answered 'parliamentary control'. In the written survey, on the other hand, 68% of the respondents reported control as important. Müller thus sums up that 'one of the most important parliamentary functions is only weakly anchored in the consciousness [sic] of Austrian parliamentarians' (ibid.: 70). As expected, differences in the importance of parliamentary control could be found above all between parliamentarians from government factions and opposition factions. Parliamentarians who belonged to an opposition faction considered scrutiny as much more important than parliamentarians whose party was in government.

Control, as one of the core functions of parliamentarism, is not unexpectedly in tension between government and opposition factions. This relationship, often referred to as the 'new dualism', (cf. Siefken 2018: 42 or also Gehring 1969: 85–94) forms the basis of parliamentary control, which can be expressed in a variety of control options (right of interpellation, right of resolution, etc.) (cf. Konrath 2020: 233–238). However, in addition to these control rights, the concept of control itself is subject to a narrow and broad understanding of the term. Accordingly, parliamentary control does not exclusively encompass the verification and evaluation of completed actions, but also involves co-creation or co-steering (cf. Siefken 2018: 49–50). If this view is followed, the 'new dualism' and the tension between government factions and opposition factions are by no means reflected. Analyses of the parliamentary control functions in the German Bundestag bear this out and show that control in parliamentarism takes place in many ways and has a scattering effect. The opposition parliamentary

groups, for example, rely more on public criticism but cooperate constructively in committees (cf. Oertzen 2006: 281).

One parliamentary control instrument that does not seem to support this constructive approach to the greatest possible extent is the parliamentary CoI. Although the intentions of the respective investigation are always presented by the parliamentary groups in a factually objective manner, the actual political procedures are usually designed for a confrontation between opposition and government (cf. Thaysen 1988: 23). In particular, the minority right to set up a CoI ensures that they are available to the representative of the sharp-critical control function, the opposition, to a far-reaching extent as a publicly-effective control weapon and thus enable the parliamentary minorities, at their discretion at the given moment, to poke the deep probe of the investigative institute into the real or supposed wounds of the state administrative body (Steffani 1960: 123).

Winfried Steffani was one of the first political scientists to provide a comprehensive analysis of CoIs in his contribution to the CoIs of the Prussian Landtag of the Weimar Republic. The starting point of his work was the extensive examination of CoIs by legal scholars and the lack of political science analyses. Notably, Steffani saw examining the political effectiveness and significance of CoIs as the impetus for his work (cf. ibid.: 9). He meticulously worked out not only the potential but also the factual significance of the CoIs of the Prussian Parliament, whereby the detailed presentation of the interrelation of the five components of the politological doctrine of separation of powers is to be emphasised (cf. ibid.: 299–302). This comprehensive analysis made it possible to describe an understanding of CoIs that was unique for the German-speaking world up to that time, which emphasised the importance of the parties and their parliamentarians. Steffani recognised in the investigative instrument a 'weapon of control' that had to be thoughtfully drawn by the parliamentary parties and their party-political advertising strategies. CoIs were therefore not exclusively an instrument of control by Parliament, but rather a parliamentary weapon that could be used by the parties within the framework of their main function (cf. ibid.: 329–330).

This finding was also confirmed by quite a few other analyses, such as those by Thaysen (cf. 1988,:28) and by Siefken (2018). Siefken's interview partners also described CoIs as a 'weapon of the opposition' (ibid. 196) and sometimes went so far as to cast doubt on the actual gain in information from UAs (cf. ibid.: 196).

This line of argument is persistently chosen above all by those who are being investigated – the government parties/factions. However, it is not only the executive who is to be controlled who doubts the usefulness of CoIs; these concerns are also persistently expressed by the public media. A superficial (online) search is usually sufficient to find exemplary articles from both the 1980s (Jeschke – Lamprecht 1985) and the present (Frasch 2020).

In the case of the CoIs of the Austrian National Council, Franz Fallend took up these accusations of the investigated right in the title of his work with the following question: Are CoIs 'Democratic Control or Inquisition?' Inspired by the former Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ), who after his testimony in the Noricum CoI said that it resembled an 'inquisition procedure' (Fallend 2000: 178), Fallend picked up on scepticism about CoIs that still pervades today: The fundamental problem of public acceptance and the practical usefulness of parliamentary CoIs by political actors as an instrument of political control. CoIs were originally conceived to uncover political grievances, which is why the new separation of powers between government and opposition has essentially transferred the control function to the opposition. The opposition would use the opportunity to damage the government's image and increase their election chances (cf. ibid.: 178).

The scepticism of the population cannot always be substantiated by corresponding surveys. Towards the end of the Ibiza-CoI, surveys showed quite different perceptions: 54% of the respondents[1] said that a parliamentary CoI is an effective means of uncovering political corruption (Profil 2021a). Another survey commissioned by an online medium attributable to the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), however, showed that for 57% of the respondents no sufficient clarification work was done in the Ibiza UA (APA-OTS 2021).

However, apart from the possibility of gaining extensive insight into government and administrative documents, it is mainly the creation of publicity that opposition factions can use as an instrument of scrutiny for political attacks against the government. For example, the interviews with important government representatives are subject to greater media interest than the actual results of the investigation (cf. Riede – Scheller 2013: 113–114).

An evaluation of the research instrument carried out by Siefken (2018) revealed that the symbolic significance of CoIs in the German Bundestag since the 1950s can be classified as consistently very strong. The preliminary effect (e.g. through more intensive question answering) of a CoI can also always be regarded as very strong during this period. The de facto use varied between a very strong (1950s) to a very weak (1970s) assessment, with Siefken currently (2010s) assessing it as strong. 'The sanction potential of this instrument must be rated as a medium throughout since on the one hand there is strong sanction potential for the investigation itself, but not for directly influencing executive action' (Siefken 2018: 197–198).

This assessment confirms that, in contrast to control by law, the core idea of political control must not be the proof of violations of law, but the disclosure of government or state action. This should make a subjective evaluation possible,

1 Method mix: Telephone and online survey, Target group: Austrian population aged 16 and over, Sample size: 800 respondents, Maximum variation in results: +/–3.5%, Fieldwork: 10 to 12 May 2021

based on which further political decisions can be made (cf. Lauth 2004: 83). Parliaments and their mandataries have effective possibilities of control here at the parliamentary level. With their extensive possibilities for investigation, COIs create a special form of transparency and thus have an important function in a democratic system (cf. Keppel 2019).

III. Committees of Inquiry: Reform and Subject of Academic Analysis

3.1 Reform of the Committees of Inquiry in the Austrian National Council

The reform of the rules of procedure of the committees of inquiry fulfilled a decades-old demand of the opposition and made it possible to set up a committee of enquiry by minority right. The negotiations on the implementation of this right lasted from 2008 and were finally introduced as an independent motion in the National Council on 22 October 2014. The regulations for investigative committees of the German Bundestag served as a model for the reform of the CoI, which was also often emphasised during the negotiations in the National Council. However, in the end an independent regulation was found, which is based on both state and federal regulations in Germany (cf. Konrath et al. 2015: 216).

According to the new regulation, a committee of inquiry can now be set up on the basis of an independent motion by five MPs or on the basis of a request by a quarter of the members of the National Council. The establishment of a CoI by means of a motion is unlimited, whereas an establishment by means of a request is limited. This restriction applies to all MPs (who had previously submitted a request) until the activity of the already appointed CoI ends with the beginning of the consideration of its report in the National Council (cf. Parliament 2023). This minority right also extends to the procedure itself, in that, for example, supplementary requests for evidence and the summoning of respondents can in principle also be carried out by a quarter of the members of the CoI.

The protection of the fundamental rights and personality of the respondents has been improved in that three officials are now responsible for their protection. In addition to the already established procedural lawyer, the chair was taken over by the president of the National Council and the position of a procedural judge was created to support him. All functionaries now have to ensure that the rights of the respondents are respected. The creation of the position of a chairperson was preceded by a political debate in which a chairmanship by a judge was debated, since this is the way it is done, for example, in committees of enquiry of the Salzburg Landtag. Whereas in the old rules of procedure the

presidents only played a mediating role, for example when it came to requests for files to ministries, in the new rules the president of the National Council became the chair ex-lege of a CoI. He is supported in this function by the procedural judge, who can also conduct the initial questioning of a respondent on behalf of the president and ask supplementary questions if there are no more requests to speak.

3.2 Subject of Academic Analysis

The academic debate on CoIs in Austria is dominated by legal studies. The structure of the procedure, which is not only based on classical mechanisms of parliamentary control but also includes mechanisms of the judiciary, seems particularly attractive. Decision-makers who answer questions as respondents to the members of the investigative commission, procedural judges who are to conduct the proceedings, as well as procedural lawyers who protect the personal rights of respondents suggest parallels to court proceedings. In addition to the general position of the investigative institution in the state and administrative structure as well as the structure of the proceedings, the rules of procedure are also important for a jurisprudential discussion. Topics such as the evidence-gathering procedure (Weisgerber 2003), criminal procedural protection rights and parliamentary clarification (Lucke 2009; Schiesbühl 2021), secrecy in parliament (Bußjäger 2009; Jedliczka 2015) or the holistic view of the rules of procedure (Konrath et al. 2015; Schrefler-König – Loretto 2020) are of interest to Austrian legal scholars. In this context, a comparative perspective is also regularly adopted, which represents added value for the cross-border understanding of CoIs (Bußjäger et al. 2016; Bußjäger 2016).

Looking at the available political analyses of CoIs of the Austrian National Council, contributions in annual reviews dominate here, which can primarily be classified as reports on the experiences of (partially) involved persons (Lopatka 2015; Jedliczka – Hansy 2017) or politically assignable personalities (Krisper – Tauchner 2019; Kohl 2021). Only a few contributions, such as the one by Bauer and Friedl (2020), can be classified as political science analyses in addition to their jurisprudential background.

When political science analyses of CoIs are undertaken, they predominantly have a qualitative approach, as Keppel (2022) showed in his comparative analysis of several committees of inquiry in the Austrian National Council and the German Bundestag. His analysis focused on the official final reports of three CoIs of the National Council and five CoIs of the German Bundestag. It showed that CoIs can have a multifaceted influence on the quality of democracy in a political system if the findings and recommendations of the investigations are precisely defined and all parties support these recommendations (Keppel 2022, 18–21).

IV. Perceptions of Members of Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry on the Effect and Utility of the Instrument of Control

A strong expression of functioning control is the obligation of governments to justify their actions to parliament, in which they publicly justify their actions based on responsiveness as well as accountability (cf. Lauth 2004: 81). However, if events within the executive are considered by the parliamentarians to be so serious that they cannot be clarified by a simple interpellation, they must themselves directly examine those circumstances that have led to a political event requiring clarification. With this method, the legislature can succeed in penetrating areas that otherwise would possibly not have reached the light of day without further effort (cf. Bräcklein 2006: 5).

CoIs offer precisely these possibilities and have developed a role in Austrian parliamentarism that should not be underestimated. Starting with the investigation into the use of Marshall Plan aid funds; arms exports by the Steyr-Daimler-Puch company; the awarding of contracts for the construction of the AKH, Lucona, Noricum, Bawag, Buwog and many more; the investigations into the procurement of the Eurofighter Typhoon combat aircraft and the house search at the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT) took place in the XXVI GP (cf. Parliamentary Correspondence 843/2018).

The BVT CoI attracted a great deal of media attention, as the actions of the police against the state's constitutional protection service represented an extraordinary event (cf. Schmid 2019). However, the Eurofighter CoI, which ran alongside it, also showed its importance not only through the revelations surrounding a bribery network of Airbus amounting to millions but also by highlighting disputes in the judiciary around the handling of the associated criminal file (cf. Klenk 2019).

In the current XXVIIth GP of the Austrian National Council, an investigative committee on the alleged venality of the Turkish-Blue federal government (Ibiza Investigative Committee) was also set up at the request of a parliamentary minority (1/US 2021, 6). The starting point for this investigative committee was the publication of the 'Ibiza video' on 17 May 2019, which showed the then party leader of the Freedom Party Austria (FPÖ) Heinz-Christian Strache talking to an alleged Russian oligarch in a villa in Ibiza in the summer of 2017 (Baumgärtner et al. 2019). Strache spoke to the 'Russian' about possible party donations to the FPÖ and the subsequent countertrades. He outlined ways in which the donations could flow past the Court of Audit to associations affiliated with the party and indicated which persons were already making such donations for other parties. The woman, who claimed to be the niece of a Russian oligarch, turned out to be a decoy and the conversations were recorded by hidden camera. The publications not only led to Strache's resignation as vice-chancellor of the governing coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), they also meant

the end of the coalition after all FPÖ ministers resigned from office, as Interior Minister Herbert Kickl (FPÖ) was removed from office by Federal President Van der Bellen at the request of Chancellor Kurz (ÖVP) (Profil 2021b).

In addition to the political consequences, the publication of the Ibiza video was followed by an anonymous complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office for Economic Affairs and Corruption (WKStA). In it, allegations were made that the various companies had used staff without the necessary qualifications, solely for the purpose of gaining influence over politics (1/US 2021, 83). This was followed by another complaint in September 2019, which also made political collusion around board appointments an issue. Both ads thus had allegations as their content, which Strache described in abstract terms during the conversation with the Russian oligarch. The Ibiza video and the anonymous advertisements were therefore not only connected in time, but also in content, which is why the WKStA initiated investigations, which were ultimately also extensively discussed in the Ibiza-CoI.

As in the case of the establishment of the BVT CoI, the request of the minority was also accompanied by controversial discussions and decisions. The government factions, consisting of the ÖVP and the Greens (G), determined in the Rules of Procedure Committee of the National Council that the request was partially inadmissible regarding the topics of evidence. With a majority of votes in the committee, the members of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Green Party (Grünen) shortened certain topics of evidence and thus restricted the subject of investigation demanded by the SPÖ and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS) (cf. Parliament 2020a). Only the ruling of the Constitutional Court (cf. Constitutional Court 2020a), which declared the decision of the Rules Committee partially inadmissible and established illegality, finally led to the full investigation (cf. Parliamentary Correspondence 228/2020). The inquiry thus began with legal disputes between government factions and opposition factions, which continued throughout the committee. An example of this is the dispute over the delivery of the 'Ibiza video', which was only transmitted to the CoI in a redacted version by the Ministry of Justice. Four out of five parliamentary groups then applied to the Constitutional Court requesting that the Ministry of Justice submit the video to the CoI in full length without redaction. The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the applicants, which ultimately meant that the video had to be transmitted to the CoI (cf. VfGH 2020b). This application showed that in committees of inquiry a strict separation between opposition and government may not always be accurate (cf. Ismayr 2014: 44–45). One of the requesting parties was the Green Party, which has been part of the government since January 2020. This behaviour revealed a new dynamic in a CoI for the first time, which, among other things, identifies a double role of the Greens. The Greens were not only exposed to a certain responsiveness as a government faction but were also able to increase the exercise of their parliamentary control function during the past investigation period.

4.1 Methodological Approach

The examples around the procedures of a CoI indicate the fact that there can be consistently different positions of parliamentary groups during an investigation. With the help of this article, this micro-level of MP activity, parliamentarism and political control will be analysed: the parliamentary CoI.

This primary analysis aims to empirically record for the first time the perceptions of ÖVP and SPÖ members of CoIs regarding their workloads, intra-factional preparations, political strategies and their attitudes towards democratic political benefits.

The exclusive focus on two parliamentary clubs was made for several reasons:

a) The clubs of the ÖVP and SPÖ are those with the most mandates, which means that their weight in terms of speaking time, voting time, available resources, etc. is the most significant.
b) In all three CoIs, the ÖVP was in governmental responsibility and the SPÖ was the strongest club in opposition.
c) When the reform of the rules of procedure was passed in the National Council in 2014, the SPÖ and ÖVP formed a government coalition. Possibly different attitudes to this reform are therefore also of interest from this aspect.
d) Due to the number of committee members stipulated in the Rules of Procedure, the smallest parliamentary groups are represented with only one seat in the committee. This would no longer guarantee anonymisation of the survey results.

In the first part of the study, 14 interviews with experts were conducted, which showed that a wide variety of perceptions prevail on single points, some of which also diverge within the parliamentary groups themselves. As an example of the large number of transcripts and notes from the interviews, short excerpts are also presented in this article as examples of the individual topics queried. For this purpose, mainly excerpts from interviews with parliamentarians of the smaller clubs were chosen, as their interview data could not be included in the analysis. The purpose of the interviews was, on the one hand, to code the results obtained and to apply them to the questionnaire and, on the other hand, to use the interview transcripts as illustrative quotations in this article to depict the parliamentarians' work and understanding of their office as vividly as possible. The interviews took place in the period from spring 2017 to fall 2018 and in summer 2021. The duration of the individual expert interviews was generally between 30 and 45 minutes. Participants provided their informed consent verbally.

Based on the results of the personal interviews with the parliamentarians as well as the insights gained from the literature by Steffani (1960), Müller et al.

(2001), Bräcklein (2006) and Siefken (2018), among others, three hypotheses were developed for a standardised questionnaire that was distributed to active and former active members of a CoI of the ÖVP and SPÖ. Of these 62 questionnaires, 36 were returned, of which 34 were complete and eligible for evaluation (see Table 1). Likert scaling with a seven-point scale was used for the questionnaire. 1 meant 'I fully agree' and 7 meant 'I disagree'.

Table 1: Questionnaires

	EFT and BVT CoI		Ibiza-CoI	
	ÖVP	SPÖ	ÖVP	SPÖ
Handed out	24	22	10	6
Responses	13	11	6	4
Response Rate	54%	50%	60%	67%

4.2 Rules of Procedure

With the reform of the Rules of Procedure and the establishment of the minority principle, a strengthening of the right of inquiry, which had been demanded in Austria for decades (already in Neisser 1986, 719 and Widder 1986, 329, among others), was accomplished. All interview partners, when asked about this, stated that the new rules of procedure represent a particularly important step towards improving political control in Austrian parliamentarism.

MP 5 (opposition) on how the reform came about:

> *Certainly, the control instrument was made possible, on the one hand, by great pressure from some parts of the opposition and, on the other hand, by great pressure from the public. Various petitions were signed by several 100,000 people, and, in addition, I would say that the topic, namely HYPO Alpe Adria, was simply too big, and also created too much political media pressure, where the ÖVP and SPÖ simply could not say no anymore. NEOS and the Greens of course fought together on this issue. The FPÖ was also in opposition, but of course, they were not happy with the HYPO Alpe Adria issue, so they were rather reserved. And the Red and Black parties are in the good old tradition of generally not wanting CoIs to become a minority right, because then of course everything could be investigated, or at least a lot of things, and that is exactly what they wanted to prevent.*

While the presidents of the National Council only played a mediating role in the old Rules of Procedure, for example, when it came to requests for files to

ministries, in the new Rules of Procedure the president became the chair of a CoI. He is assisted in this function by the procedural judge, who can also conduct the initial questioning of a respondent on behalf of the president and ask supplementary questions. The procedural judge also has the new task of drafting the (final) report of the CoI. This report must contain the course of the proceedings, the evidence taken, the presentation of the facts established and the result of the investigation. Likewise, it is possible to assess the evidence and recommendations in the report (cf. Chapter 3.1).

The reform of the Rules of Procedure has also given the Constitutional Court (VfGH) a more far-reaching role. The Constitutional Court is always called in 'if the (appointing) minority consisting of at least 46 parliamentarians on the one hand and the majority, on the other hand, cannot agree on the subject of the investigation and further procedures in the committee' (VfGH 2018). The specific tasks are regulated in Art 138b Federal Constitutional Act (B-VG) and in § 56c to 56k Constitutional Court Act. They concern:

- The decision on the request of a minority to appoint a CoI; the background to this regulation is that the majority can declare a request for the appointment of a CoI in the Rules Committee of the National Council (GO Committee) inadmissible in whole or in part. In this case, the (establishment) minority can appeal to the Constitutional Court. The legal decision of the VfGH thus stands above this majority decision of the GO Committee (Schrefler-König – Loretto 2020: 13).
- The scope of the basic evidentiary decision of the GO Committee and further evidentiary decisions of the Committee.
- Disagreements with organs subject to information requirements (ministries, etc.) concerning the submission of information.
- Differences of opinion concerning the summoning of respondents.
- Differences of opinion with the federal minister of justice concerning the consideration of the activities of the prosecution authorities.
- The violation of the personal rights of respondents in the CoI.
- The classification regarding the secrecy of files (VfGH 2018).

This new role and involvement of the VfGH in the procedural order implemented what Lauth (2004, 96) already illustrated in his discussion of political and legal control: the need for legal control as the core of political control.

The parliamentary CoI of the Austrian National Council is to be classified as particularly significant because of one power: the request for files and documents from all organs of the federal government, the Länder, the municipalities, the associations of municipalities, as well as other self-governing bodies that are obliged to produce them. Based on the CoI's evidence resolution, the organs concerned are obliged to submit all files and documents of abstract relevance to the SC. In addition to the original evidence requirement, 229 supplementary

evidence requirements were decided during the Ibiza-CoI (1/US 2021: 21–26). These mostly result from findings obtained during the proceedings, such as data from interviews with respondents.

During the Ibiza-CoI, disagreements arose several times between ministries obliged to produce documents and members of the CoI in connection with the provision of documents. In all these disputes, the Constitutional Court ultimately had to clarify the situation, for example in the case of the submission of the Ibiza video. The delivery of all the video material kept the CoI busy for months because, at the beginning of the file deliveries, the evaluation of the video material by the investigating authorities had not yet been completed. Justice Minister Zadić (G) also announced that she would not submit the entire video to the committee. The SPÖ, FPÖ and NEOS criticised her, accordingly, accusing her of a cover-up (Der Standard 2020a). It was not until September 2020 that parts of the video and transcripts were delivered to the CoI by the Vienna Chief Public Prosecutor's Office (OStA), most of which, however, had been redacted. These redactions were allegedly due to unclear responsibilities of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice, which did not mitigate the criticism from the opposition ranks (Der Standard 2020b). A joint application by the opposition parties to the Constitutional Court finally led to clarification of the facts and to the realisation that the Ibiza video must be made available to the CoI at its full length and uncovered (VfGH 2020b).

The intense dispute between the CoI and Finance Minister Gernot Blümel (ÖVP) caused much more excitement. His department, the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF), was accused by the opposition parties of incomplete file deliveries. Among other things, important e-mail boxes of the head of the investment management in the Ministry of Finance as well as other correspondence of ministry employees had not been delivered. After Blümel showed no willingness to provide the documents, the representatives of the SPÖ, FPÖ and NEOS turned to the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court then concluded that Finance Minister Blümel must indeed submit the required documents in full to the CoI. If documents are not required to be submitted, the Minister of Finance must submit substantiated reasons for every single decision not to submit them. This was not the case, as the minister of finance only made assertions, but did not give reasons (VfGH 2021a).

After Blümel failed to comply with the Constitutional Court's ruling, the opposition parties filed a new application with the Constitutional Court to enforce the delivery of the files using execution by the federal president. The Constitutional Court then ruled for the first time that according to Art 146 para 2b-VG, the decision on the submission of files must be made by the federal president (VfGH 2021b). The Ministry of Finance, however, did not let it come to execution and promptly delivered more than 200 folders to the parliamentary directorate with the file classification 'secret'. This classification massively

limited the CoI members' access to the files and made the investigative work much more difficult. Only after repeated requests by several parliamentary groups in the CoI were the documents also transmitted in electronic form with a lower classification level by the Federal Ministry of Finance (Parliamentary Correspondence 2021). However, the Federal Ministry of Finance was unable to refute the suspicion that it had not delivered the documents in full. The parliamentary groups SPÖ, FPÖ and NEOS then directly approached Federal President Van der Bellen to order the provision of the missing documents. In an unprecedented step, Van der Bellen instructed the Criminal Regional Court of Vienna to execute the Constitutional Court ruling and to obtain the missing documents from the Federal Ministry of Finance (Federal President 2021). The Criminal Regional Court then delivered many further e-mails, which were copied directly from the Federal Computing Centre. After comparing the newly delivered emails with the emails already in the CoI's file, it turned out that the BMF had not delivered all documents to the CoI for months (Schmid 2021). In addition, even the delivered documents had been transmitted in incompatible file formats, so several thousand emails were not readable for the members of the CoI (Parliament 2021).

In addition to the 'BMF' case, other defective or incomplete file deliveries were made public, all of which were decided in favour of the committee minority based on the findings of the Constitutional Court. In all these file deliveries, the bodies obliged to deliver were directly or indirectly part of criminal investigations, which repeatedly led to accusations of cover-ups (Grabner – Schmid 2021).

The course of events surrounding the file deliveries leading up to the eventual intervention of the federal president shows how pronounced the polarisation between the opposition factions and the ÖVP was. While the investigation into the events on Ibiza was ostensibly intended to shed light on an FPÖ scandal, the actions of ÖVP politicians quickly also became the subject of the investigation. It can therefore be assumed that the SPÖ is more positive about the new procedural order than the ÖVP since it is the responsibility of the opposition to control the work of the government, and the control rights are accordingly upgraded by the Constitutional Court.

H1: *The strengthening of the right of minorities when setting up a parliamentary CoI is assessed more positively by parliamentarians of the SPÖ than by parliamentarians of the ÖVP.*

Keppel_Table_2

When analysing the results of Hypothesis 1, the differing opinions of the ÖVP parliamentarians are particularly striking. Whereas the ÖVP members

Table 2: Reform of the Rules of Procedure of Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry

	EFT and BVT CoI		Ibiza-CoI	
	ÖVP	SPÖ	ÖVP	SPÖ
The 2015 reform of the parliamentary investigative committee is a positive further development of political control	1,62	1,82	2,83	1,75
The assumption of the chair by the Presidium of the National Council is a positive further development of the procedure	1,46	2,64	3	2
The role of the procedural lawyer is sufficiently broadly defined in the current Rules of Procedure	1,23	1,64	2,83	1,25
To enable more effective scrutiny, the Rules of Procedure should allow MPs to take more far-reaching measures	4,62	3,09	5,67	2,75
In order to enable more effective control and better information for the public, the Rules of Procedure should make live (TV) broadcasts of interviews possible			5,33	1

of the BVT and EFT-CoI perceived the Rules of Procedure, the assumption of the chair by the Presidium and the role of the trial lawyer as positive further developments of the procedure, the ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI expressed a significantly more negative assessment. The SPÖ members of the Ibiza-CoI almost consistently perceived these points positively; only the chair of the presidium was perceived as having a somewhat worse attitude.

The sceptical attitude of the ÖVP parliamentarians manifested itself in the question of more far-reaching measures for all parliamentarians during an investigation. While this was already viewed rather negatively by the members of the BVT and EFT-CoI, the parliamentarians of the Ibiza-CoI clearly rejected this position. Among the SP parliamentarians, on the other hand, a rather approving assessment could be seen, which again developed slightly more positively among the Ibiza-CoI parliamentarians.

One question that was only discussed politically to a greater extent during the Ibiza-CoI was that of public (TV) broadcasts of a CoI. This discussion developed out of the conspicuous behaviour of respondents who had many memory gaps and showed no willingness to cooperate in the interviews. Above all, Chancellor Kurz and Finance Minister Blümel (both ÖVP) stood out here. This is not only because Blümel had more than 80 memory gaps regarding past incidents during his questioning (Parliament 2020b), but also because Kurz was accused of making false statements by the WKStA because of his questioning before the CoI. This led to extensive investigations and discussions about the questioning style of the parliamentarians and the tense atmosphere in the CoI sessions (Nikbakhsh – Melichar 2020). Statements such as those made by Blümel and Kurz were considered a mockery of Parliament and an expression of a lack of willingness to cooperate, not only by the opposition parliamentary groups but also by the Green coalition partner of the ÖVP (Der Standard 2021a).

The mutual accusations around the questioning and answering style led to the onset of a debate about making CoI sessions accessible. Either through live TV broadcasts or public participation in CoI meetings, the public should gain a better understanding of how a CoI works. Likewise, this measure is intended to de-emotionalise the questioning and answering style of all participants. Corresponding motions were introduced by SPÖ (Parliament 2019), NEOS (Parliament 2020c) and FPÖ (Parliament 2020d) but did not find a majority in the National Council.

The responses of the ÖVP and SPÖ members of the CoI clarified the attitudes already publicly articulated: the ÖVP rejects public broadcasts of CoI sessions, while the SPÖ is clearly in favour of broadcasts.

4.3 Communication

MP. 11 (Opposition) on the background of a CoI:

> *I think the division into political groups is not good. If one were to go and say that each parliamentary group can send someone, but at the end of the day it is a CoI that has joint meetings across party lines and prepares for the questioning, then you have more coordination among each other. And at the moment, you only get to hear the votes on the sidelines via the speakers, in which directions the single questionings of the respondents will go. But you are not a joint inquiry committee team; it is divided up among single parliamentary groups. And I think that fact is detrimental to the clarification.*

The core idea of political control is the disclosure of government and state action to make subjective assessments. These evaluations turn out differently in parliamentarism since government factions and the opposition have completely

different perceptions of political events (cf. Lauth 2004: 83–84). While the government factions defend the government's decisions, it is the responsibility of the opposition to expose possible misconduct (cf. Campbell – Keppel 2018: 281–284). Since the opposition is often unable to access government documents, in many cases, so-called whistleblowers or investigative journalism are also used (cf. Der Standard 2019). In this context, it has been repeatedly shown that in modern democracies the role of the media is extremely important. As the 'fourth power' in the state, it is incumbent on the media to critically question the actions of those in power through media dissemination and commentary (cf. Diamond et al. 1999: 3–4). Accordingly, media coverage of parliamentary investigations is particularly intense, not only because the possibility of scandalisation is extremely high, but also because parliamentarians and journalists help each other to gather information in special cases. On the one hand, parliamentarians are the latest to present investigative research during interviews with respondents, and, on the other hand, the media are often given access to the documents of a CoI (Der Standard 2008; Salzburger Nachrichten 2018). The role of the media in CoIs has also increased due to the possibility of 'live tickers' from CoI meetings. In addition to the parliamentarians' questions, the answers of the respondents are also communicated to their online readership within seconds. Not infrequently, the personal impressions of the journalists on the spot are also sent as part of the ticker.

H2: *Parliamentarians from the SPÖ make greater use of information from external sources than parliamentarians from the ÖVP.*

Table 3: Perceptions on communication

	EFT and BVT CoI		Ibiza-CoI	
	ÖVP	SPÖ	ÖVP	SPÖ
The cooperation with other colleagues in the committee of inquiry is productive and objective	3,23	3,82	5,67	1,25
I draw (drew) on information made available to me through external sources	3,77	4,82	5	5,75
Investigative journalism promotes the scrutiny activities of committees of inquiry	3,85	3,55	6,33	2,25

While the ÖVP members of the BVT- and EFT-CoI had a neutral position both in terms of cooperation with their colleagues and in dealing with external sources and investigative journalism, this position changed to a negative

one during the Ibiza-CoI. The SPÖ parliamentarians, on the other hand, took a much more positive position compared to the position of their colleagues in the BVT- EFT-CoI. They perceived a positive influence of investigative journalism on the work in CoIs, and, likewise, the cooperation with colleagues from other parliamentary groups was perceived as productive and objective. However, ÖVP and SPÖ parliamentarians were united in their position in dealing with external sources: both made almost no use of external sources during the Ibiza investigation.

3.4 The Democratic Benefits of Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry

MP. 3 (FPÖ) on the importance of CoI:

> *Compared to court proceedings, the parliamentary CoI has, in my opinion, a relatively low status. This is also because certain professional groups, due to their profession, such as tax advisors and lawyers, can evade the answer, due to their professional duty of confidentiality…. and the fact that makes it a bit of a farce. I am aware that no one has to incriminate themselves there. I also have experience because I am a court-certified expert, but I am sometimes surprised how toothless… the parliamentary committee of inquiry is.*

Dualism as a prerequisite for functioning control in parliament was analysed in detail by Gehring (1969) and Steffani (1989), among others and Ismayr (2016) also noted that it is the duty of the opposition parliamentary groups to control the government in a way that is effective for the public. This is also connected to the functioning of parliamentary democracy, which depends to a large extent on 'whether the opposition can perform its control tasks in a way that is effective for the public and whether the control processes are transparent enough that they can trigger citizens to think and react' (ibid.: 54).

In the academic debate on CoI, but also in the public media, however, the view has prevailed that CoI has degenerated more into an instrument of scandalisation for the opposition (cf. Riede – Scheller 2013, 113–114) and is used as a political stage (cf. Ennser-Jedenastik 2020; Siefken 2018: 196). While government factions criticise the appearances of opposition factions in this regard, opposition politicians often take the view that the government – and indirectly also the parliamentarians of the government factions – would obstruct the investigative work of a CoI.

Hypothesis 3 aimed to map all possible positive effects of CoIs and to survey the members of CoIs accordingly. According to this, positive effects for a democratic system that are discussed and, concurrently, recognised in academia are the clarification of political responsibilities, making government work transpar-

ent (cf. Siefken 2018: 195–197; Ismayr 2014: 46–47) and, consequently, possible exposure of political grievances, which lead to a self-cleansing of the political system and accordingly raise the image of CoIs (cf. Lauth 2004: 83–84).

Therefore, towards the end of an investigation, there is always a struggle for the interpretative sovereignty of the results. The reformed rules of procedure make it possible for the parliamentary groups to introduce their own view of the investigation at the end. This is then appended as a separate part to the final report of the procedural judge. It is not uncommon for the parliamentary groups or media close to the parliamentary groups, nor the media in general, to publish surveys on how the population perceives the results of a CoI.

H3: *SPÖ parliamentarians perceive a stronger democratic political benefit from parliamentary CoIs than ÖVP parliamentarians.*

Table 4: Perceptions about the democratic political utility of investigative committees

	EFT and BVT CoI		Ibiza CoI	
	ÖVP	SPÖ	ÖVP	SPÖ
For the democratic self-cleansing of the political system	2,85	2,55	5,33	1,75
For clarifying political responsibilities	2,69	2	3,67	1
The parliamentary committee of inquiry has a positive image in the public perception	4,23	2,36	6,83	2,5
For making government work transparent	3,31	2	4,17	2,25
For exposing political grievances	2,92	1,27	3,83	1,25
For the support of the judiciary	4,77	4,36	6,5	1,5
Committees of inquiry have not yet been able to deliver sustainable results that would have cleaned up the political system	4,46	3,91	3,17	6

The results of the series of questions on 'democratic political benefits' focused primarily on the core function of the control instrument and the actual results of the parliamentarians' work. It became apparent that the emotional debate on the Ibiza-CoI strongly influenced the perceptions of the ÖVP and SPÖ compared to those of the BVT and EFT investigations. The ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI took a more negative position in all aspects than their colleagues in the previous CoI. Defacto, no benefit of a CoI for the democratic self-cleansing of the political system is seen. No clarification of political responsibility is perceived, nor in making government work transparent or in exposing political grievances. The ÖVP members of the Ibiza CoI gave particularly little approval to the two statements concerning a positive public image and the role of the CoI in supporting the judiciary. These positions underline the public disagreements about the role of the CoI in various corruption cases and the criticism by the CoI of the CoI itself. Information provided by public prosecutors during interviews as well as findings from ongoing investigations were the reasons for a political dispute on the fringes of the CoI, the central content of which was the role of the Office of the Public Prosecutor for Economic Affairs and Corruption (WKStA) in the investigations into the Ibiza affair. Since the investigations focused on some persons who had a close relationship to the ÖVP, the ÖVP repeatedly attacked the investigating public prosecutors as well as the judiciary in general by attesting to their 'political bias' and 'mistakes' (Der Standard 2021b).

The members of the SPÖ in the Ibiza-CoI, on the other hand, consistently took approving positions on the questions posed. This was evident in their approvals of the democratic self-cleansing of the political system, the clarification of political accountability, the positive public image of CoIs and support for the judiciary. There was a particularly significant change in the position on whether CoIs have so far been able to deliver sustainable results that would have cleaned up the political system: here, the members of the SPÖ in the Ibiza-CoI noticed very clearly perceptible changes that their colleagues in the BVT- and EFT-CoIs had not yet perceived.

V. Analysis

Hypothesis 1 (see Chapter 4.2) was tested using a series of questions specifically aimed at assessing the positions of the ÖVP and SPÖ parliamentarians on the reformed Rules of Procedure. It was found that the ÖVP members of the Ibiza--CoI agreed with the reformed Rules of Procedure to a lesser extent compared to their colleagues in the BVT and EFT committees. In general, the reform was no longer viewed so clearly positively, and, in particular, the assumption of the chairmanship of the presidency and the role of the trial lawyer was no longer viewed predominantly positively. Especially regarding the statement that the parliamentarians of a CoI should be allowed to take more far-reaching measures to exercise control, the position of the ÖVP members shifted even more

clearly towards one of disagreement. The SPÖ members in the Ibiza CoI, on the other hand, viewed the Rules of Procedure slightly more positively than their colleagues in the BVT and EFT committees.

The members of the ÖVP and SPÖ took completely different positions on the statement on enabling TV broadcasts of CoI meetings. While the ÖVP is opposed to this idea, the SPÖ fully supports this proposal. The idea of a live broadcast is not only a controversial one from the point of view of the ÖVP and SPÖ parliamentarians; in the interviews with parliamentarians from smaller parliamentary groups, this topic was also judged differently. There was predominant approval, but there were also more critical assessments:

MP 9 (opposition) Influence of the media on the development of a CoI:

> *In general, media coverage is important because the public simply gets to know what is being discussed. If this were not the case, i.e. not in the media… I would find it positive because it would be more objective. So, you wouldn't have all the party games anymore. No SPÖ would feel attacked if an SPÖ member was invited as a respondent…. Of course, one could also say that it would be less transparent if everything was not made public. But certain questions are certainly only so intense because they are publicized in the media. Some questions are only asked because the journalists are there.*

The events during the Ibiza-CoI have, in any case, had a perceptible negative influence on the attitudes of the ÖVP parliamentarians. The decisive factor may have been their position in the investigation, which increasingly turned defensive due to the extended investigations by the public prosecutor's office (see Chapter 4.2). As a result, the ÖVP may have felt compelled to criticise the investigation instrument itself, in addition to debunking the accusations. The ÖVP thus resorted to the mechanism of general criticism of the investigation instrument, which has been known for more than 100 years, to divert attention from the substantive to the procedural level. The SPÖ MPs, on the other hand, want to focus even more on the behaviour of the ÖVP parliamentarians, but also that of the respondents, by introducing live transmissions from the CoI sessions so that the ÖVP cannot distract from the content. One argument in favour of live broadcasting from the point of view of the SPÖ is the fact that all persons participating in a CoI would be forced to show impeccable behaviour. Incidents such as intense memory lapses by respondents or heckling by parliamentarians should thus be minimised.

Both the majority approval and the critical aspects of the live transmission of CoIs are comprehensible in their analysis. Helms (2015) indirectly takes up this problem in his article 'Why parliamentarism has not played out'[2]: Responsible

2 Orig.: ‚Warum der Parlamentarismus nicht ausgespielt hat'

politicians are expected to have a certain basic attitude which is 'aligned with criteria of personal and office-related integrity' (Helms 2015: 148). Representative democracy, therefore, requires a certain degree of 'leadership', which, in conjunction with the reputation of decision-makers, is identified as political 'leadership capital' (Helms 2015: 149). The heated, sometimes not very factual, discussions in CoI meetings and the associated public reporting certainly contribute to the rather negative image of CoIs held by the public. It is certainly not the control instrument itself that is responsible for this, but the acting actors, who shape the perception of the parliamentary control instrument – and thus also of parliamentarianism – through their behaviour.

The critical perception of the ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI also continued in the series of questions on communication (see Hypothesis 2 in Chapter 4.3); in all statements, the position of the ÖVP towards the BVT and EFT investigation became significantly more negative. In particular, the role of investigative journalism and the influence on CoIs were not regarded as relevant. While the ÖVP perceives no influence here, SPÖ members do perceive that investigative journalism promotes the investigations of a CoI. One connection that might explain this is that opposition parties have a stronger urge to go public to showcase their substantive position in a CoI. It is therefore not uncommon for information to be passed on to journalists. This exchange may also lead to journalists passing on information to (opposition) politicians in the expectation that this will promote the mutual exchange of information. There is no doubt, however, that the interplay between media and politics around CoIs is highly relevant to the public perception of the investigation. The increasing populist flattening of media coverage is not only partly responsible for the conspicuously low standing that politicians enjoy in society (Helms 2015: 149–150), but also contributes to the fact that findings and events of CoIs are either truncated or conveyed to the public in a scandal-oriented manner.

The perception of the core functions of a CoI by the parliamentarians should be determined with the third series of statements (Hypothesis 3 in Chapter 4.4). Here, too, the ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI were more critical than their colleagues in the BVT and EFT investigations. All seven statements were rated more negatively and indicate that the ÖVP members perceive the democratic political benefits ensuing from the events during the Ibiza-CoI to be only minimally pronounced. Only on the points concerning the clarification of political responsibilities and the exposure of political grievances, did the ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI not have a negative position. Other statements, such as those on the democratic self-cleansing of the political system, are not agreed with, and a positive image of a CoI cannot be perceived at all by ÖVP parliamentarians. A negative basic attitude towards the parliamentary CoI can be discerned in the ÖVP, which is completely different from the SPÖ. The SPÖ members in the Ibiza-CoI show greater approval of the instrument of control

and have reinforced this in comparison to their colleagues from the BVT and EFT investigations.

Based on the evaluations carried out, the following findings can be derived:

a) The SPÖ members of CoIs assess the reforms of the right of inquiry as consistently positive, while the approval of the ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI has decreased compared to that of their colleagues from the BVT and EFT investigations.
b) The ÖVP members of the Ibiza-CoI perceive little to no democratic political benefit from a CoI, while the SPÖ members of the Ibiza-CoI perceive an even greater benefit than their colleagues of the BVT and EFT CoIs.
c) The polarisation that took place in public around the Ibiza-CoI is also reflected in the perceptions of the parliamentarians. While the members of the BVT and EFT CoI showed little differences in perceptions, these diverged significantly during the Ibiza investigation.

The results show how strongly negatively the opinion of the ÖVP parliamentarians was influenced by the events during the Ibiza-CoI. While the position of the ÖVP during the BVT and EFT-CoI could still be classified as neutral to slightly approving throughout, this has changed to an almost consistently negative position.

This development must be viewed critically for several reasons and also leads to analytical results already described by Steffani (1960) in his comprehensive examination of the CoIs during the Weimar Republic: if the party with the most mandates rejects one of the central control instruments of parliament, this can lead to a general rejection of the parliamentary system (Steffani 1960: 357). However, in this respect, the opposition forces, which have become the driving force of the investigation through the minority right, are also challenged. If the investigation is not an effective administrative check but becomes a high-profile stage for agitation, the opposition also contributes to impeding the role of the investigation as an instrument for lasting change.

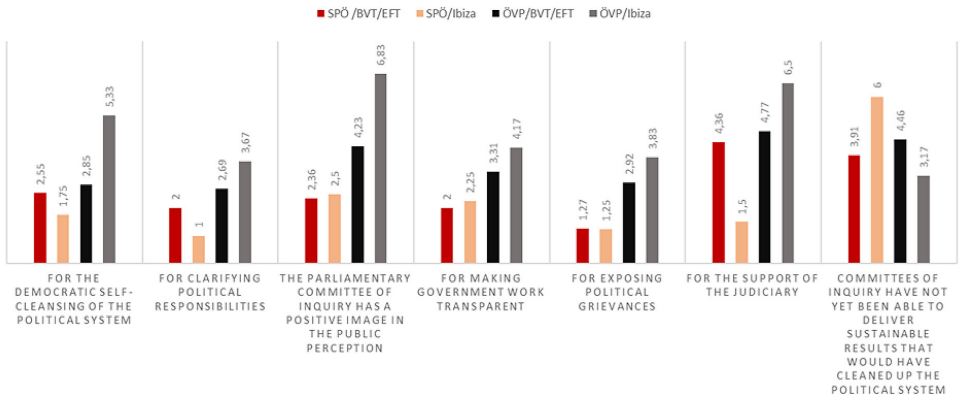
The pronounced opposing positions of the ÖVP and SPÖ suggest a mirror image of the general party struggle, in which the groups are irreconcilably opposed to each other. This ultimately leads to the fact that 'the more radical and hostile the antagonisms on the one hand, but also the more cover-up and forgiveness--friendly the party relations on the other – two extremes – the smaller will be the gain ultimately to be achieved for the whole by an investigative institute of this kind' (Steffani 1960, 332–333).

VI. Conclusion and Future Directions

Based on the research questions: 'How do members of CoIs of the Austrian National Council assess the reforms of the right of inquiry that have taken place and the impact and influence of parliamentary CoIs in the context of political

control?' the comparative analysis of the ÖVP and SPÖ members of three CoIs of the Austrian National Council impressively showed a clear divergence of attitudes towards the investigative instrument. While the SPÖ further deepened its approval of the investigative institute during the Ibiza-CoI compared to the BVT and EFT-CoI, the approval of the ÖVP members decreased significantly during the same period (see Table 4, Chapter 4.4).

Figure 1: Perceptions about the Democratic Political Utility of Investigative Committees



In particular, the democratic political benefit is doubted by the ÖVP committee members. This along with the simultaneous clear approval of the democratic benefit by the SPÖ, suggest that the polarisation during and around the Ibiza CoI has deepened the rifts between the two largest parliamentary groups in the National Council.

The strong rejection of the CoI by the party with the largest mandate in the National Council sometimes carries the risk of a general rejection of parliamentary control instruments and thus also of parliamentary democracy. Although this conclusion serves as a worst-case scenario, the associated dangers for democracy cannot be dismissed if central functions of parliamentarism are not fully accepted by elected parties.

Helms (2017) pointed out in this context that political polarisation can have both costs and benefits for democracy. Positive effects can be generated primarily by opposition parties. If they rely on political polarisation, the public pressure for justification by decision-makers increases. The public debate then creates transparency, clarity and orientation so that the quality of democracy is positively influenced. Negative effects can be decision blockades, such as the 'gridlocks' known in the US Congress. Likewise, a loss of trust in political decision-makers by those voter groups whose party does not govern is identified as a consequence of increasing polarisation. This connection between

polarisation and trust must be deemed as a fundamental threat to democracy (Helms 2017: 61–63).

The survey results and interviews of the members of CoIs in the National Council point to many partial aspects to exactly those events that became clear in Helms' analysis: The public and political pressure leading to the establishment of a CoI creates transparency and demands public justification by the decision-makers. However, the polarisation that accompanies this creates a defensive attitude among the investigated, who react by rejecting the investigation instrument. The quality of democracy is thus increased on the one hand by the creation of transparency but is at the same time weakened by the negative attitude of the investigated.

The above analysis already impressively shows the political science potential that can be found in the analysis of CoIs. From the perceptions of the parliamentarians, questions and hypotheses can be identified that can contribute to a revival of the political science debate on parliamentary CoI. Exemplary of this are the following questions:

a) How does the cooperation of the parliamentary groups during a CoI influence the results of the investigation?
   - The more factual and substantively focused the cooperation of the parliamentary groups is, the more likely the results will positively influence the subject of the investigation.
   - The more positively the members of a CoI perceive the cooperation with other members, the more positively the results of the CoI will be rated by the members.

b) The more difficult it is for a party to justify itself before a committee of inquiry, the more likely the party is to reject this element of political control.

c) The more a party comes under political and media pressure during a committee of inquiry, the more likely it is to try to discredit the ongoing investigation.

d) How and through which measures do members of CoIs influence public reporting on investigations and how are the results of a CoI influenced by this?
   - The more factual and content-focused the manner by which CoI members report from about the events of investigations, the more likely the results of the investigation will be perceived as successful by the public.

It also makes sense to take a closer look at the external influencing factors surrounding a CoI. The role of the media must be considered essential here. The SPÖ parliamentarians in particular saw the work of investigative journalism as enriching the work of the Ibiza CoI. However, the question remains open as

to exactly what contribution the media make and how this promotes the processing of the object of investigation. Here, in addition to the political science perspective, a communication science perspective also offers itself, with the help of which an empirical analysis seems fruitful. Above all, the manner of media coverage is of particular importance: factual media coverage of CoI meetings is especially significant for informing the public. The media have the responsibility to present political events and contexts in such a way that enables society to judge the work of CoIs as objectively as possible. However, since quality media are constantly being pushed back and political polarisation is closely linked to media polarisation, it would be perfectly understandable if CoI sessions were broadcast live in the future so that the interested public can form their picture of the events and acting actors.

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Economic Parameters vs Voting Behaviour in the Polish Presidential Election in 2020: Poviat level analysis[1]

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Abstract: *Voting behaviour is affected by various factors and the effect varies in individual countries. Economic and geographic factors are among the major criteria taken into account in electorate segmentation. The present study analyses them in the case of the Polish presidential election in 2020, held under the circumstances of strong polarisation within the society and controversies surrounding the rule-of-law and democratic standards. The present study analyses voter turnout and results of the second round of the election, focusing on the subregional level of poviats (counties). The analysis considers macroeconomic factors (such as GDP per capita, unemployment rate, average remuneration), financial condition of the local government (measured by budgetary revenues) and urbanisation (comparing the biggest cities to other counties). The findings confirm correlation between the macroeconomic parameters of the subregion and voter turnout. In the case of voting results, the hypotheses concerning macroeconomic parameters and the status of the biggest cities are confirmed, but there's no evidence of correlation of the average remuneration on the poviat level and support for the centre-liberal candidate.*

Key words: ***Poland, elections, segmentation, economic determinants, poviat, voting behaviour***

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I. Introduction

Democratic states nowadays, including Poland, face significant transformation of political and electoral competition (Norris – Inglehart 2019; Przybylski 2018; Schmitt et al. 2021). The changing communication between candidates and voters, development of new movements, as well as the progress of globalisation stimulated establishment of new political cleavages (Kriesi et al. 2012; de Vrees et al. 2018). In Poland, their significance is evidenced both by the increasing voter turnout (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza), and marked increase of social involvement (CivicSpaceWatch). This corresponds to the discussion on social participation and its meaning in legitimising democratic political systems. Voting in elections is a major component of civic participation (Cześnik 2007), which affects shaping a conscious public opinion, articulation of interests and effective representation (Sommerville 2011). These circumstances highlight the importance of research on political participation – including electoral participation.

Ideological and cultural issues have become key to modern cleavages, but this does not mean that no role is played by economic parameters whose effect on voting behaviour has been well documented (Lipset – Rokkan 1967; Kriesi 1998; Lewis-Beck – Stegmeier 2000; Markowski 2019). There are also studies concerning specific factors determining voters' decisions in individual countries, including Poland (Zarycki 2015). Scholars have analysed differences in voting behaviour between rural and urban areas in the Polish case, too (Zarycki – Nowak 2000). Recent elections allowed identification of cleavages associated with voters' education, job type and place of residence (towns/countryside, eastern/western regions) (Szymczak 2020). These observations must be referred to the long discussion of segmentation on the voter market and its criteria (Cichosz – Skrzypiński 2014).

The main focus of the present study was political participation in Poland. Poland is an important and interesting case as a country that underwent democratic transition in the 1990s and in the 2010s and 2020s became a leading example of illiberal transformation. The Polish society has become polarised on many issues. On the other hand, since 2015, Poland has witnessed a marked increase in political participation measured by electoral turnout. These changes and developments require exploration and verification of their relationship with characteristic of the Polish political life observed earlier.

The study concerned geographic and economic segmentation through identification of differentiating voter participation and behaviour on the level of poviats. It analysed voter turnout and results of the second round of the presidential election in Poland in 2020 set in the context of geographical nature and economy on the poviat level. Its objective was to verify existence of a correlation between the poviat's economic situation and location on one hand and voter turnout and results of the presidential elections on the other.

II. Significance of participation in democracy: Elections in Poland after the post-communist transformation

Citizen participation in the democratic processes is key for democracy. Competitive elections are the fundamental defining element of a democracy and voter turnout is listed among indicators of the quality of democratic systems (Kriesi – Müller 2013: 188). While the philosophical exploration has evolved to combine participation with deliberation (Floridia 2017) and in the practice of decision-making there are diverse and changing forms of both participation and deliberation (Gastil – Knobloch 2020), elections remain the cornerstone of any democratic system. Elections serve to shape a connection between citizens' preferences and opinions on one hand, and public policies on the other, and therefore to ensure representation – a translation of voters' convictions and expectations into the composition of representative bodies – and accountability – the possibility to remove from power those who, in the voters' opinion, failed these expectations (Thomassen 2014: 1–2).

In Poland, there are direct elections of the Parliament and the president, as well as three tiers of the local and regional government (Ustawa 2011). Presidential elections are held every five years and a candidate can be re-elected only once. The elections are held in the majority system with a second round two weeks after the first one, if necessary. The universal election strengthens the president's legitimacy, which corresponds to important constitutional competencies the Polish head of state holds: legislative initiative, veto with respect to acts passed by the parliament, role in appointing the prime minister and international relations (Konstytucja 1997). However, in political practice after 1997, the Polish presidents were usually strongly associated with their political milieus or else they tried to act as mediators and neutral statesmen building the nation's unity. Other than Aleksander Kwaśniewski, president from 1995 until 2005, none attempted to gain a strong and independent political position.

The first post-WWII fully democratic presidential election in Poland took place in 1990 and it was also the first fully free national election. Despite its being held in the context of post-communist transition, it was a clash of two anti-communist candidates, Lech Wałęsa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki. However, Wałęsa's counter-candidate in the second round was the underdog, an unknown entrepreneur returning from emigration, Stanisław Tymiński. He surprisingly took the second spot in the first round, with a voter turnout of 60.6%. In the second round, with a turnout of 53.4%, Wałęsa won in a landslide. After five years of a quite contentious and controversial presidency (Nałęcz 2017), he stood for re-election, but lost by a very narrow margin to a former communist Aleksander Kwaśniewski – in the second round Kwaśniewski acquired 51.7% of votes against 48.3% for Wałęsa (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza). Kwaśniewski's presidency was marked by historic events for Poland, including introduction of the new

constitution in 1997, admission to NATO in 1999 and then (during his second term) accession to the European Union in 2004, but also by the president's active involvement in parliamentary politics, both during the times of cohabitation with rightist governments and in periods when Kwaśniewski's political allies were in power (Kasińska-Metryka, 2005). Kwaśniewski was also the first president to be re-elected and his victory in 2000 was the only one achieved in the first round (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza).

In the next election, in 2005, the post-communist division played a diminished role and the second round was a confrontation of two non-communist candidates. Lech Kaczyński, representative of the conservative and rightist Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), prevailed over Donald Tusk of the centre-right and liberal Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) in the first big clash of what would become the key line of polarisation in Polish politics. Kaczyński's vision of the presidency was also quite proactive, as he was associated with the party he had created which was led by his twin brother Jarosław Kaczyński (Hartliński 2019). Lech Kaczyński did not serve his entire term. He announced his will to seek re-election despite discouraging opinion polls (Wądołowska 2010), but his death in the plane crash in Smolensk forced an election several months later than planned. The PiS' candidate was Jarosław Kaczyński, but he lost to Bronisław Komorowski of PO.

The 2005 presidential elections also coincided with the parliamentary campaign. Poland's bicameral Parliament is chosen by two separate elections organised together, however, on different terms. The lower chamber, the Sejm, is elected by proportional representation in 41 districts electing from 7 to 20 members of the Sejm each. Application of the d'Hondt method and the electoral thresholds (5% for party lists and 8% for coalitions) is designed to ensure a stable majority in the Parliament. The solution is efficient in terms of the number of candidate lists that win seats: six in 2019, six in 2015, six in 2011, five in 2007 (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza). On the other hand, it was not uncommon for governments to lose majority support and operate as minority governments. The Senate is elected in plurality elections with each of the 100 senators elected in the separate district (Ustawa 2011).

The current polarising conflict is centred around two major parties: PiS and PO (the latter currently better known by the name of the coalition it operates in – Koalicja Obywatelska, Civic Coalition, KO). Initially both centre-right parties were formed based on the anti-communist tradition in opposition to the then governing post-communist and leftist Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD), though at the turn of the 21st century and in the 2005 parliamentary elections, they previewed a coalition government. However, the rivalry – both in the presidential and parliamentary contest – led to tensions that ultimately caused a failure of the coalition negotiations and PiS forming first a minority government and then a coalition with two smaller populist parties

of the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) and Self-Defence (Samoobrona). It was in the elections of 2005 that PiS defined the new dividing line between 'liberalism' – assigned to PO, and social 'solidarity' – PiS identified with. However, PiS was unable to retain power with unpredictable allies and called an early election in 2007, in which PO's offer of progressivism, focus on economic development and liberalism prevailed. In almost a decade of PO's rule in coalition with the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), PiS played the role of the most significant opposition force, presenting itself as the voice of the powerless, the poor and losers of the post-communist transformation in general. Its message became increasingly anti-elite and populist (Pytlas 2021).

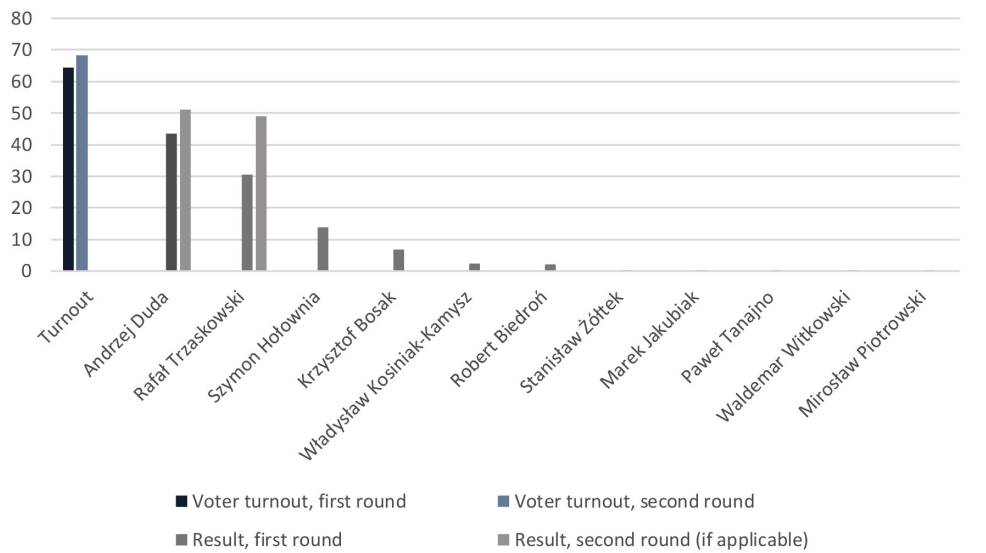
Law and Justice's campaigns succeeded in 2015. The party won 37.58% of votes; however, with a high proportion of votes won by committees below the thresholds (including a combined 11.17% for two leftist committees), this guaranteed a majority in the Seym (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza). The ruling coalition's efficiency was also conditioned by the fact that the presidency was held by a politician associated with PiS and its candidate in 2015, Andrzej Duda. Since 2015 Poland has been ruled by the government of the United Right, a coalition led by Law and Justice, frequently accused of breaking the rule of law and limiting Polish democracy (Ágh 2017: 21; Skrzypek 2021). This general tendency, as well as some of the ruling party's decisions (most notably, those restricting women's reproductive rights, including access to abortion) led to radicalisation of opinions both on the political arena and in the society. In many aspects, the 2015 election is perceived as a breaking point in the history of post-communist Poland (Jaskiernia 2017), as PiS won it based on an agenda of rightist, nationalist and religious rhetoric (Folvarčný – Kopeček 2020), combined with a strong pro-welfare economic programme.

While the opposition parties express their commitment to democratic and European values, they have not formed a uniform bloc. The dominating anti-PiS party is still the Civic Platform and despite repeated attempts at building new parties labelled as 'new' or 'third' option, the two main parties managed to enhance and keep their position, winning between them either a majority or a vast majority of votes in all parliamentary elections since 2005 (from 51.13% in 2005 to 73.62% in 2007; 69.07 in 2011; 61.67% in 2015; 70.99% in 2019) (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza). On the other hand, newly established parties were able to gain momentum (Kosowska-Gąstoł – Sobolewska Myślik 2019), even if only in the perspective of one or two elections: Palikot Movement, Kukiz'15, Modern Party and possibly Poland 2050. This lasting duopoly with fluctuations in duration and relevance of smaller parties, especially new ones, has become an important feature of the Polish party scene since 2015 (Szczerbiak 2017). Poland has also become a prominent case of extreme political polarisation in the context of democratic backsliding (Tworzecki 2019), as confirmed by the

results of the 2019 parliamentary election: PiS maintained a majority in the Seym by winning 44% of votes, while the opposition presented candidates for the Senate together and won 51% of the seats (Markowski 2020). However, the Senate's position in the Polish political system does not provide it with tools to efficiently hamper a majority in Seym, so the results ensured PiS the second term in power and an opportunity to continue its policies.

These circumstances of the presidential elections in 2020 also coincided with the organisational challenges due to the pandemic (Flis – Kamiński 2022; Sula et al. 2021). The health circumstances led to multiple legal changes, unpredictability and delays, but the presidential elections were held in June (first round) and July (second round) (Sula et al. 2021). In the first round, Andrzej Duda had the best result, gaining 43.5% of votes, followed by the candidate of the Civic Platform – the biggest opposition party, Rafał Trzaskowski who attracted the support of 30.5% of voters. Out of the other nine candidates, Szymon Hołownia was supported by 13.9%, Krzysztof Bosak by 6.8% and none of the rest exceeded 3%, as illustrated in Figure 1. It may be concluded that the first round of the presidential election confirmed the polarisation of the Polish society with two dominating parties, whose candidates later competed in the second round, won by Andrzej Duda by a narrow margin with 51.5% of the vote. The electoral campaign was very heated and controversial in many aspects, and it culminated in a record turnout of 64.5% in the first round and 68.2% in the second round.

Figure 1: Voter turnout and results of the presidential elections in Poland 2020



Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza

Considering the role of the president in the Polish political system on one hand and emotions raised and voters' involvement on the other, it can be said that the presidential election in 2020 was a major event of significant consequences for the state and in the society.

III. Economic and geographic determinants of electoral results

In acquiring voters' support, political parties resort to various strategies (Mares – Young 2019: 48–49). The classic theory of cleavages referred to lasting divisions within societies that were based on shared interests and led to the formation of political parties in the process of articulating these interests: the economic status of the individual was among the characteristics that frequently led to permanent and politically relevant cleavages (Lipset – Rokkan 1967). Nowadays, in the changed conditions of the globalised economy, it is still widely quoted and analysed in the modern contexts (Kriesi et al. 2012). Modern evolutions of the impact of both economic and cultural factors on individual voters' decisions have been thoroughly discussed (Dalton 2019), but it has also been shown that the impact of specific voter's social and demographic characteristics can be mediated and changed by characteristics of the environment, including macroeconomic parameters (Schmitt et al. 2021). A particular voter's social condition is affected not only by individual features, but also by the social and economic situation of their environment, including the region and subregion. Therefore, the consequences of an individual's wealth, education, religious status etc. may differ – if not in the direction, then certainly in strength – depending on the voter's place of residence.

As these elements, among others, shape the voter's motivation and determination to participate in the elections (Gallego 2015: 37–40), the macroeconomic situation, characterised by the level of GDP per capita, GDP growth, unemployment rate, as well as resources available to the regional or subregional authorities may account for differences in voter turnout in different parts of the same country, as well as for voters' choices. Economic voting and its impact on electoral campaigning and candidates' decisions has been a mainstay of political science (Hart 2016: 5–6), as well as political marketing practice (Kriesi – Müller 2013: 364). The effects of GDP change, unemployment rate and unemployment change were studied on the general level (Becher – Donnelly 2013) and for individual countries (Goulas et al. 2019).

Undoubtedly, 'many phenomena of the social sciences exhibit spatial effects' (Chi – Zhu 2020: 3) and voting behaviour is certainly one of them. Geographic patterns of voting have been studied in multiple states over different continents (e.g. Mancosu 2014; Weaver 2015; Johnston et al. 2018; Rule 2018). Poland has also been known as an example of similar processes. There are two major aspects of geographic differentiation in the state: one being the urban/rural cleavage,

and the other the difference between the north-western and south-eastern part of the country. Urbanisation has been shown as a very strong predictor of voters' decisions in Poland, with rightist or conservative parties and groups gaining more supporters in rural areas and cities tending to side with the left or centre (Marcinkiewicz 2017: 711–712). Spatial determinants of voting behaviour were analysed in detail for the 2015 parliamentary elections (Grabowski 2019).

The regional differentiation in the case of Poland is usually associated with historic heritage related to the partitions period (Bański et al. 2013; Zarycki 2015: 345–349; Zagórski – Markowski 2020). However, it should be highlighted that western parts of Poland (formerly parts of Prussia/Germany and territories gained from Germany after WWII) are characterised by higher urbanisation, and when controlling for the post-partition divide, the urban-rural cleavage is still a very important factor in predicting election results in Poland (Marcinkiewicz 2017).

These tendencies also have a significant impact on the planning of electoral campaigns. Referring to the general findings of the science of marketing, political marketing research also confirms that 'political markets... have been segmented using geographical, behavioural, psychographic and demographic methods' (Baines et al. 2003). Therefore, identification of voter behavioural patterns is also of practical importance for politicians and analysts.

IV. Study objective and hypotheses

The objective of the study was to verify the existence of a correlation between the poviat's economic situation and location on one hand and voter turnout and results of the presidential elections on the other. The economic condition of the given poviat was defined by the GDP per capita, unemployment rate and average income, as well as the poviat's budgetary revenues, which on one hand depend on the taxes paid by the local residents (and thus indirectly reflect their level of wealth), and on the other determine the poviat's financial resources available for local investments and ensuring the expected quality of public services.

The study was designed to analyse the following hypotheses:

- there is no significant correlation between the level of revenue of the poviat and voter turnout (H1)
- poviats of higher unemployment rate have lower turnout than poviats of lower unemployment (H2) and the Law and Justice candidate Andrzej Duda gained higher support than on average (H4)
- poviats of higher average income have higher turnout than poviats of lower average income (H3) and Civic Platform candidate Rafał Trzaskowski gained above average support there (H5)

- in poviats located in subregions of lower GDP, support for Andrzej Duda was higher than average (H6)
- in subregions including voivodeship capitals support for Rafał Trzaskowski was higher than average (H7)

V. Material and methods

A database was developed based on publicly available data of the National Electoral Commission (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza) and Statistics Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny). Poviats were selected as the analysis units for three reasons. Firstly, there were practical factors related to availability of data about poviats in Statistics Poland's databases. Secondly, the study responded to the identified gaps – most prior research concerned either communal (local) or voivodeship (regional) level, while studies about the supralocal level of poviats were missing in the case of the 2020 election, although it was analysed for parliamentary elections, yielding important results (Lasoń – Torój, 2019). Thirdly, poviats are more easily targeted in electoral campaigns than communes (considering the number of almost 2,500 communes in Poland) and allow more specific appeal than regions, therefore voter market segmentation on this level may have a practical impact.

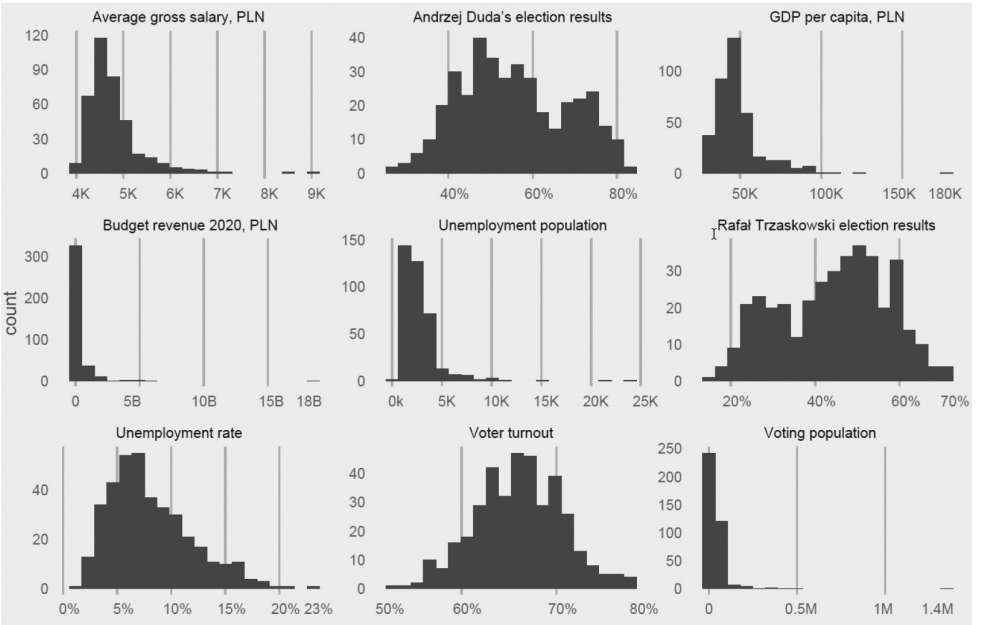
The database included the following parameters to characterise poviats:

- poviats' budget revenue
- unemployment rate in poviats
- average gross remuneration in poviats
- location in the region and subregion
- gross domestic product in poviats/subregions
- voter turnout in the second round of presidential elections in 2020 in poviats
- results achieved by each candidate in the second round of the presidential elections in poviats

The data are summarised in Figure 2.

This allowed for characterisation of particular poviats. It should be stressed that the selected parameters serve to describe the economic and political situation of the local government and territorial units, without allowing for de-aggregation of the data to analyse individual residents and their economic condition or political attitudes. Thus, the study results and conclusions cannot be projected on individual voter behaviour.

Figure 2: Distributions of the variables in Table 2 in the form of histograms (with 20 bins)



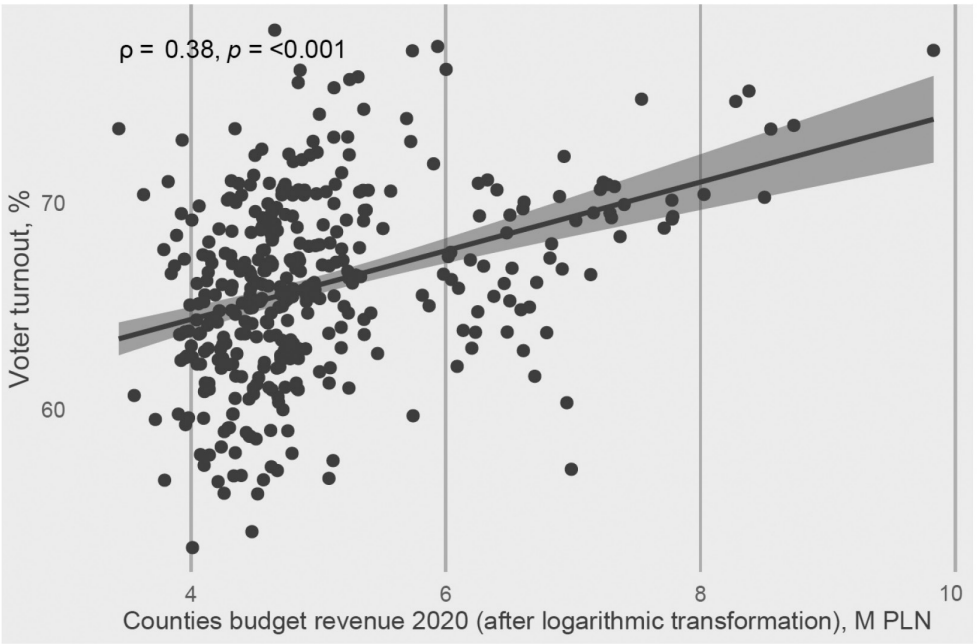
For hypothesis 1, concerning correlation between the poviat revenues and voter turnout, linear analysis was applied. Otherwise, as the hypotheses provided for comparing the characteristics between below- and above-average observations for the individual variables, the respective independent variable was used for grouping observation and then distribution in two groups was compared. The computations were performed with R software. For voter turnout analysis, tWelch test was applied with confidence interval = 95, and in the case of candidate support – one-sided t-test for a sample with normal distribution, confidence interval = 95.

VI. Findings: Voter turnout

H1. There is no significant correlation between the level of revenue of the poviat and voter turnout.

Considering the level of skewness of the budget revenue, this variable was subject to logarithmic transformation before further analysis. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The scatterplot for Poviats Budget Revenue 2020 (after logarithmic transformation) and Voter turnout with linear fitted line with CI 95% and correlation results



The analyses revealed a highly significant large positive correlation between the studied variables, $\rho = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$. This means that as the *Poviats Budget Revenue 2020* increased, *Voter turnout* increased accordingly. Thus, the hypothesis of no correlation was falsified.

H2. Poviats of higher unemployment rate have lower turnout than poviats of lower unemployment.

For verification of this hypothesis, the unemployment rate variable was treated as a grouping variable, and therefore transformed into a dichotomous variable with a cut-off point at the median. Thus, the tests concerned two groups of poviats, those with unemployment rate ≤ 7.3% and > 7.3%. The data for those two groups were analysed with the t_{Welch} test ((377.64) =7.47, $p < 0.001$, $\hat{g}_{Hedges} = 0.76$, *CI 95%[*0.56, 0.97], $n = 380$), which yielded the following results: in poviats with an average unemployment rate or less showed the voter turnout was significantly higher ($M = 67.55\%$, $SD = 4.21\%$) than in poviats with an above-average unemployment rate ($M = 64.41\%$, $SD = 4.26\%$). Therefore, hypothesis H2 was confirmed. For a graphical representation, see Figure 4.

Figure 4: Distribution of the voter turnout by groups of unemployment rate (with test results)

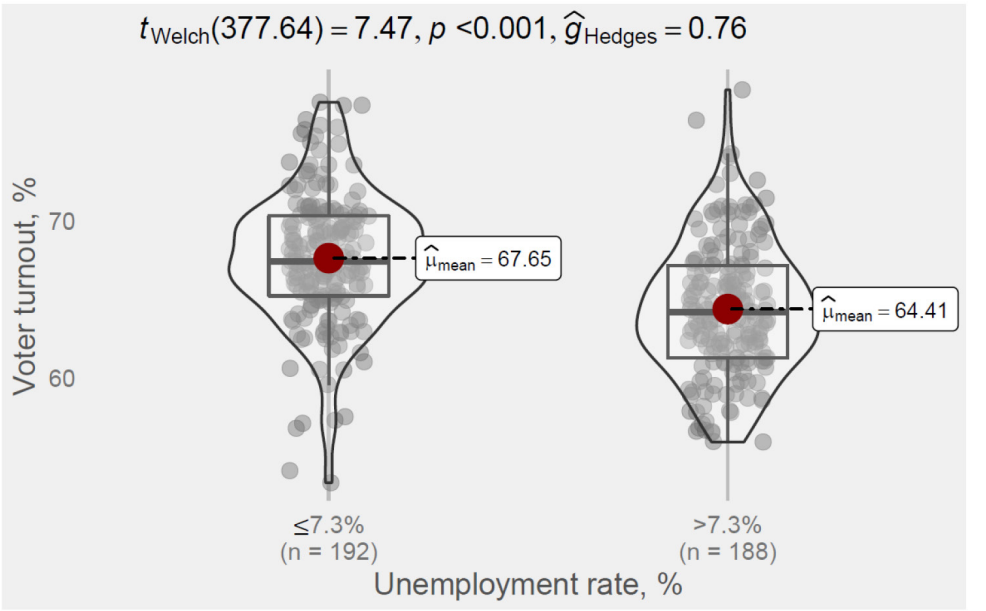
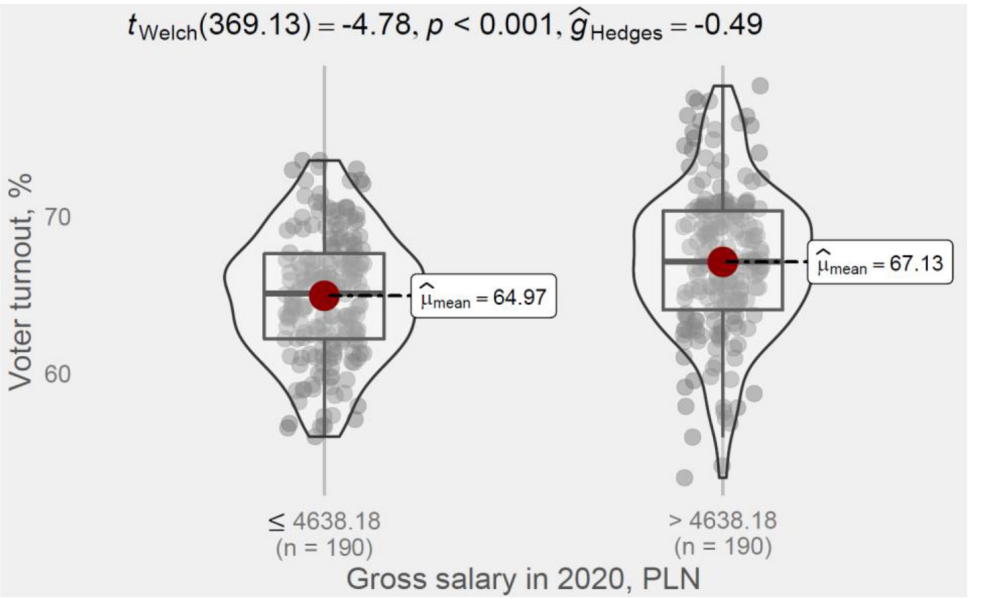


Figure 5: Distribution of the voter turnout by groups of average gross salary (with test results)



H3. Poviats of higher average income have higher turnout than poviats of lower average income.

In a similar way, the gross average income was treated as a grouping variable. For this purpose, it was transformed into a dichotomous variable with a cut-off point at the median (groups of "≤ 4638.18 PLN" and "> 4638.18 PLN").

Once again, t t_{Welch} test was computed ((369.13) =–4.78, $p < 0.001$, $\hat{g}_{Hedges}$ = –0.49, *CI 95%* [–0.69, –0.29], n = 380) showing significantly lower voter turnout in poviats with an average gross salary or less (M = 64.97%, SD = 4.05%) were significantly lower than in poviats with above average gross salary (M = 67.13%, SD = 4.26%). Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed, as it refers to the existence of a difference in voter turnout in correlation with the average gross salary. However, the strength of this relation does not ground further conclusions with reference to this connection, as the effect of average gross salary on average turnout was found to be 'small'.

VII. Findings. Election results

For election results, two hypotheses concerned higher support for Andrzej Duda in poviats of lower macroeconomic parameters, and then one – on the opposite – referred to higher support for Rafał Trzaskowski in poviats of higher macroeconomic parameters.

H4. The Law and Justice candidate Andrzej Duda gained higher support than on average in poviats of higher unemployment rate.

In this case, too, the tests were based on application of grouping variables, where: μ – the presidential election 2020 results (51.03%), m – the election results for Andrzej Duda in poviats with an unemployment rate above the median (> 7.3%).

A one-sided t-test for a sample with normal distribution, *95% CI* [56.38, Inf], $t(187) = 7.61$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.56$, *95% CI* [0.43, Inf] was applied to compare Andrzej Duda's election results in poviats with unemployment rates (m = 57.86%, n =188) that are above his average election results (μ = 51.03%). As the former were significantly higher, the hypothesis was confirmed.

H5. Civic Platform candidate Rafał Trzaskowski gained above average support in poviats of higher average income.

The analysis was based on two grouping variables where: μ – the Rafał Trzaskowski's election 2020 results (48.97%), m – the election results for Rafał Trzaskowski in poviats with above median gross salaries (> 4,638.18 PLN).

The results of a one-sided *t*-test for a sample with normal distribution, *95% CI* [47.89, Inf], $t(187) = 0.35$, $p = 0.365$, $d = 0.03$, *95% CI* [–0.09, Inf], showed that Rafał Trzaskowski's election results in poviats with above median gross salaries (m = 49.26%, *n* =190) were not significantly higher than his overall election results (μ = 48.97%). Along with its insignificance, the effect size was estimated to be 'very small'. Thus, the hypothesis was not confirmed.

H6. In poviats located in subregions of lower GDP, support for Andrzej Duda was higher than average.

The same approach was applied in the case of H5 with μ – the presidential election 2020 results (51.03%), m – the election results for Andrzej Duda in poviats with below-average GDP per capita (45 346 PLN).

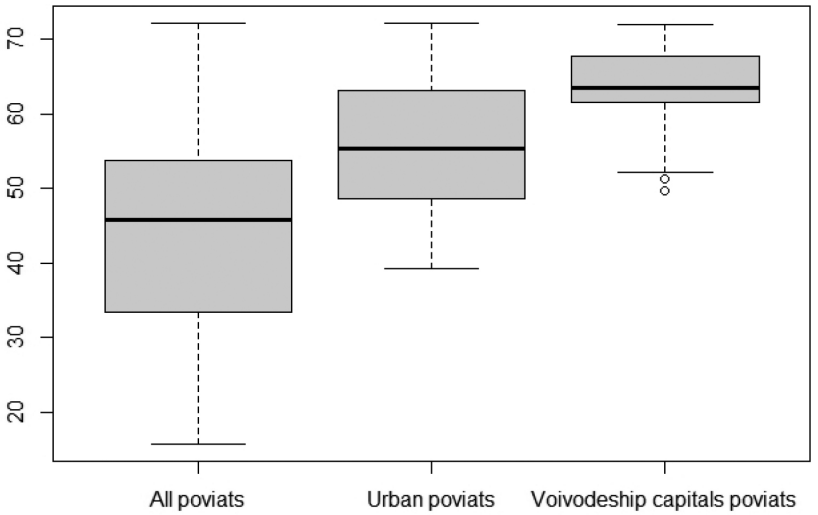
The results of a one-sided *t*-test for a sample with normal distribution, *95% CI* [58.54, Inf], $t(187) = 7.61$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.72$, *95% CI* [0.59, Inf], showed that Andrzej Duda's election results in poviats with below-average GDP per capita (m = 60.04%, *n* =188) were significantly higher than the average election results (μ = 51.03%). The effect size was estimated to be 'moderate'. The hypothesis was confirmed.

H7. In subregions including voivodeship capitals support for Rafał Trzaskowski was higher than average.

The final hypothesis referred to the type of poviat, analysing the level of support for contestants in the second round of the presidential election by comparing the main cities (regional capitals) with other poviats. Poland is divided into sixteen regions (voivodeships), and in two cases, the role of the regional capital is shared by two cities, thus in all there are eighteen regional capitals in Poland. All of them are classified as urban poviats, which means a poviat containing exactly one city with no neighbouring areas.

A comparison of Trzaskowski's results in those eighteen urban poviats to his results in all poviats shows the clear difference of the voter behavioural pattern. In all regional capitals Trzaskowski's result in the second round was higher than his total result, and in 17 of them he obtained more than 50% (in the final one, Rzeszów, his result was 49.68%). Fourteen of them were among the top 30 poviats with the highest support for Trzaskowski. The figure also shows the level of support in urban poviats, which comprise sixty-six bigger cities in Poland. In this case, the support for Trzaskowski is higher than on average in all poviats, but lower than in voivodeship capitals.

Figure 6: Support for Rafał Trzaskowski in poviats with voivodeship capitals and all urban poviats as compared to all poviats



VIII. Discussion. Voter turnout

The analysis provided consistent results showing that the economic status of the subregion can be used as a predictor of voter participation. This also corresponds to prior results, concerning the overall effect of economic condition on the decision to vote (Schmitt et al. 2021), as well as the impact of improved income levels on voter turnout (Markovich – White 2022) and negative impact of economic inequality on participation (Ehs – Zandonella 2021). Both better macroeconomic condition, measured by lower unemployment rate, and better financial condition of the subregional government, measured by its revenues, correlated with higher voter turnout. The same was found in the case of the indicator concerning the average income of the poviat's inhabitants – subregions where residents earn more on average recorded a higher overall voter turnout. This latter result, concerning the poviat level may be associated with corresponding findings concerning the level of individual voters, showing that economic challenges may discourage voters from participation (Wilford 2020). This association may be an important field of future research.

In view of the significance of citizens' involvement for legitimacy of democratic political systems, these results may also serve as support in pro-participation campaigns. Such initiatives are undertaken in Poland (Adamik-Szysiak 2014), as well as in other states (Ellis et al. 2006). The results confirm the need to address such campaigns especially to inhabitants of worse-off regions and subregions. Their geographic profiling and adaptation to the specific situation

of particular regions may have a positive impact on their effectiveness, considering the significant differences between regions of below- and above-average development parameters.

IX. Discussion. Election results

In the case of the results of the second round of the presidential election in 2020, the hypotheses concerning higher unemployment rate and lower GDP were confirmed. Both those parameters were found to correlate with higher support for the representative of Law and Justice, Andrzej Duda. This finding confirms that this party with its agenda and prior achievements, is more attractive in worse-off regions, while in those territorial units which achieve better macroeconomic results, the more centrist and liberal Civic Platform is more popular, which reflects the division associated with partitions: eastern and south-eastern regions dominated by PiS and PO stronger in the western and north-western parts of Poland (Wilczyński 2019). On the other hand, the higher average income of residents did not translate into higher results of Rafał Trzaskowski. Even though it has been confirmed that he achieved better outcomes among higher-earning voters (Roguska 2020), this does not translate onto the poviat level, proving that the Civic Platform should address their agenda to chosen groups and remain more careful in geographic profiling.

The findings confirm the impact of macroeconomic parameters on voters' party preferences; however, importantly, they don't match the incumbency pattern. Residents of better-off regions tend to support the centrist and liberal Civic Platform, which is currently in opposition, and thus the ruling Law and Justice is not rewarded by them for the economic success.

The hypothesis concerning the urban-rural cleavage was confirmed, too. The voivodeship capitals displayed significantly higher levels of support for the representative of the centrist-liberal opposition than in all poviats. This conforms to prior published findings, evidencing the Civic Platform's strong stance in big urban centres (Biskup 2020: 298). Thus, the Civic Platform has so far built and enhanced a lasting relationship with voters in these specific constituencies; however, it needs to develop a further strategy of attracting residents of other types of poviats. It is worth noting that this potential may involve other urban poviats, i.e. medium towns, where support for Trzaskowski was lower than in the voivodeship capital, but higher than in poviats comprising small towns and countryside.

X. Conclusion

The presented study confirmed that macroeconomic parameters affect voting behaviours and that voting decisions display characteristic patterns on the poviat level. This level of analysis is important in terms of development of po-

litical agendas and electoral campaigns, as well as building lasting party-voter relations. The Law and Justice party effectively attracts voters in poviats of below-average development, while its effectiveness in vote gaining is lesser in regions where residents have more reasons to be satisfied and hopeful about the local economy. The centrist opposition, on the other hand, fares much worse in worse-off subregions, and thus it should face its image of representatives of the financial elite.

The findings are also important in terms of promoting participation and voter turnout. Residents of regions of below-average development are at risk of social exclusion (Faura-Martínez et al. 2020) and lower sense of agency. It is especially important to construct pro-participation measures and campaigns so as to encourage them to take part in key elections.

Finally, the study opens perspectives for further analyses, especially concerning comparison between different levels of analysis and the intercorrelation between the economy of the region of residence and the individual voters' situation. Another important area should concern temporal series, comparing situation in repeated presidential elections. This would allow for verification whether this type of cleavage is lasting in Poland or is still volatile with voters more willing to change their party affiliations election by election. A comparison between different types of elections (especially parliamentary, presidential and European Parliament elections) and juxtaposing the current findings with similar analyses concerning the first round of presidential votes would also provide insight valuable both in terms of understanding the mechanics of voter behaviour in Poland and in terms of exploring the framework of building voter-party relations.

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Frames and sentiments of the Twitter communication by German Chancellor Scholz during the Russian invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract: *In a complex information environment, Russia's invasion of Ukraine presents a major challenge to the communication of political leaders throughout the world. The objective of this article is to analyse the frames and sentiments used by German chancellor Olaf Scholz, employing a novel data set of his Twitter communication (N = 612) during the Russian invasion of Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023. A combination of computational text analysis approaches with natural language processing (NLP) techniques was used, including the Valence Aware Dictionary and the sentiment Reasoner (VADER) model for sentiment analysis and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) for topic modelling. This research investigates the prevalent frames and emotions in the chancellor's communication, providing valuable insights into the German government's stance and strategic communication during this critical geopolitical event. The results of the study revealed that the chancellor used the frames 'effects of the Ukraine invasion', 'climate & environment', 'solidarity' and 'Russian aggression' and communicated with positive sentiments. By examining the chancellor's Twitter communication, this study contributes to the understanding of political communication in the digital era, particularly in the context of international crises, and offers implications for policymakers, scholars and the broader public.*

Keywords: ***Olaf Scholz, Russian invasion, sentiment analysis, social media***

I. Introduction

After the Soviet Union (USSR) had dissolved in 1991, Ukraine declared itself an independent country on 24 August 1991 (Bukkvoll 1997). Tensions between Ukraine and Russia have been on the rise for decades, but have substantially increased in the past few years, leading to the annexation of Crimea by Russia through non-military and military means in March 2014 (Biersack – O'Lear 2014; Marples 2022) and culminating in Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a disaster for the Ukrainian people and their nation, causing millions of people to flee their homes and villages, with many seeking refuge overseas. War is a disguised humanitarian crisis that disrupts communal harmony and fosters violence, terrorism, social inequality and exclusion (Jain et al. 2022).

International crisis management is of the highest significance for Western nations participating in transnational events and local and regional conflicts overseas in today's globalised world (McNair 2016; Schwarz – Seeger – Auer 2017). In response to recent disruptions in Europe caused by the euro, Ukraine and the migrant crises, the German government has abandoned its policy of moderation. The German government was placed in a leading role in international crisis management with its impact on the stabilisation of the currency of the European union (2010–2015), during peace negotiations in Ukraine (2013–2015) and by the temporary suspension of the Dublin agreement during the migration crisis (2015–2016) (Daehnhardt 2018; Wright 2018).

Every piece of verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect information supplied by political leaders during an invasion or war is crucial. In these times of crisis, leadership is improved not only by taking appropriate actions but also by showing the appropriate attitude or emotion (Boin et al. 2017). The disputes extend beyond military warfare; the dramatic disparities in terminology used to describe war are indicative of efforts to manipulate public opinion, which has been an effective military technique throughout history. Accordingly, Russia and Ukraine manipulate information to pursue their objectives in this conflict, although to varying degrees (Roman et al. 2017).

The government's use of social media to communicate has risen considerably in recent years, making them a crucial battlefield (Criado et al. 2013). Social media platforms allow governments and politicians to choose their political agendas and communicate directly with their audiences (Yang et al. 2016). The essential concern regarding digital media and government communication is whether or not the government loses power as a consequence of using political communication. Some argue that institutional rules shared by governments and media organisations no longer control political communications, since social media are the medium of the people (Warnick – Heineman 2012). It should not be forgotten that the role of user-generated online media is a blessing and a curse at the same time: On the one hand, scientists argue that social media

serve as venues for the growth of participatory culture (Bertot et al. 2012) and as facilitator of the mobilisation of the public (Papacharissi 2016); on the other hand, others emphasise that social media simply strengthen pre-existing power structures in the media environment and in society (Fuchs 2013: 62) and serve as platforms for the expression of right-wing discourses (Ekman 2019) or result in the formation of echo chambers (Brundidge 2010; Flaxman et al. 2016).

The aim of this article is to provide a systematic overview and demonstrate the evolution and dynamics of the media discourse of the political leader of Germany. It investigates the framing of the Ukraine crisis by analysing Olaf Scholz' Twitter communication during the Russian invasion of Ukraine from 24 February 2022 until 24 February 2023 and addresses the absence of integrated assessments on strategic media frames (Borah 2011). This research focuses on social media due to their enormous interactive possibilities and wider reach than traditional media in crisis communication (Xu 2020). The goal of this analysis is to understand 'what' and 'how' the political leader communicated to society. By investigating the dynamics of emotional and content-related components of Olaf Scholz' communication, I aim to discover changes in his framing and the emotions used to communicate during the invasion by Russia. Hence, this study addresses the following research questions:

Q1: What are the common frames used by Chancellor Scholz on Twitter during the invasion of Ukraine?
Q2: How did the prevalent frames change during the invasion?
Q3: How did the sentiments use change during the invasion?

This study contributes to previous research by systematically analysing Twitter communication of the German chancellor during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to provide a more systematic and nuanced understanding of the crisis communication and to identify its key components. By analysing the social media content within a longer period, between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023, this research should also give insights into and understanding of discourse shifts. This is the first study so far analysing the social media communication of the German chancellor during the Russian invasion, applying computational text analysis tools to perform the analysis.

II. Literature review / Frames

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined frames as central organising story lines or ideas, which can influence individual opinion and understanding of an issue by highlighting specific characteristics or elements of a broader picture (Nelson et al. 1997), to promote a specific issue definition, causal interpretation,

moral evaluation or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993), integrating framing as a fundamental part of political communication (Chong – Druckman, 2007a). In addition, frames have the ability to give meaning to problems and propose how others should think and interpret them. (Nelson – Kinder 1996; Sniderman – Theriault 2004). Frames can be detected within the content of cognitive structures of journalists, news media, in the minds of individuals and strategic communications of political and organisational actors (Matthes 2011). Communicators with unequal resources, including activists, political elites, lobbyists and social movements build frames about an issue and attempt to establish them in news media and public discourse (Benford – Snow 2000; Hänggli 2012).

Nevertheless, people do not blindly accept the framing of news media; on the contrary, many criteria determine whether people are affected by frames. For example, Matthes (2008) found that only a consistently scheduled frame has the probability of causing an effect (also known as frame repetition); and that if there is a competing frame, the frame effects are weaker (Chong – Druckman, 2007b). This phenomenon is relevant to all subject matters in modern democratic societies due to two primary factors: Firstly, there is a prevalent competition among political elites for the determination of frame definitions, and secondly, journalists are generally inclined towards conflicts, subsequently adhering to the journalistic norm of presenting diverse perspectives. Moreover, frames supported by feeble arguments yield diminished effects. Efficacious frames necessitate persuasive and compelling evidence, or the utilisation of emotions such as anger or fear (Chong – Druckman, 2007b). Ultimately, the impact of framing is significantly contingent upon the credibility of sources, individuals' prior opinions and citizens' interpersonal communication (Matthes 2008).

Framing has a crucial role when dealing with crises such as armed conflicts (Makhortykh – Sydorova, 2017), healthcare emergencies (Bolsen et al. 2020) or natural catastrophes (Houston et al. 2012). By emphasising specific interpretations of a crisis, frames possess the capacity to significantly influence its trajectory by dictating the reactions of pertinent stakeholders and shaping their anticipations of the crisis. Within the realm of armed conflicts, the consequences of framing can manifest in a multitude of ways, ranging from fostering reconciliation and attenuating hostilities to facilitating amicable resolutions (Bratic 2008), as well as exacerbating violence and hindering the adoption of de-escalatory measures (Hamelink 2008).

Nevertheless, besides emphasising the issue, media frames can also invoke and associate emotional connotations with the situation under consideration. A prior study demonstrated that positive emotions exhibit a contagious effect among followers (Kaur et al. 2021). Manuel Castells devoted his book, *Communication Power*, to the exploration of communication in the digital era,

scrutinising the manner in which individuals interpret information obtained from media sources and the influence of media on the 'framing of the public mind' (Castells 2013: 157). In particular, he concurs with Entman's assertion that emotionally charged frames exhibit a greater propensity to interact with pre-existing cognitive frames and elicit specific emotional reactions (Castells 2013: 157). Consequently, media frames capture the audience's attention when their understanding of a specific event aligns with the interpretation proffered by the frame. Castells employed the United States' war in Iraq as an illustration, during which 'patriotism' and 'war on terror' frames were employed, evoking fear of death as the principal emotional undertone (Castells 2013: 169). This is highly pertinent to the subject matter this research endeavours to analyse, as it also represents an emotionally charged topic. In this investigation, I aim to identify various emotions, such as joy, love, surprise, sadness, fear and anger, which are linked to or incited by different media frames and the issue of migration in general (refer to the Methods section).

2.1 Framing the Russian aggression against Ukraine

Since the inception of the hybrid conflict in 2014, the scholarly domain has exhibited substantial interest in the framing of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. For instance, the research focus of Pasitselska (2017), Ojala et al. (2017) and Nygren et al. (2018) has predominantly centred on the media framing of the Ukrainian conflict. Ojala et al. (2017) conducted an analysis of the visual framing of the war within a sample of major Western European media, revealing a tendency to underscore the humanitarian aspects of the conflict as well as the involvement of Russian political leaders. Nygren et al. (2018) examined the framing of the conflict in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish and Swedish television programmes and publications, identifying considerable country-specific variations in the propensity to emphasise neutrality over partisanship concerning the war. The findings suggest the existence of significant disparities in framing. Pasitselska (2017) explains how two prominent Russian television channels crafted a persuasive message, fostering robust unity and garnering extensive support among the national audience.

Research has thoroughly investigated social media responses to the events surrounding the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula (Suslov 2014), including images (Pantti 2019), hashtags (Makhortykh – Lyebyedyev 2015) and memes (Wiggins 2016). However, the portrayal of the Ukrainian conflict on social media remains underexplored. Additionally, Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) utilised a content analysis of the Russian social media platform 'Vkontakte' to assess how the conflict was interpreted and depicted online within pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian communities. In another study conducted by Nikolayenko (2019), which analysed Twitter during the peace march on 21

September 2014 in Moscow, the frames consisted of peace activists, whereas opponents of the march held contrasting frames. Gaufman (2015) investigated textual and visual framing of the war in 'Vkontakte' communities and observed a tendency to draw upon references to previous armed conflicts (such as World War II) to augment the emotional impact of the frames, as well as the inclination to dehumanise Ukraine and the West as part of the framing process.

Besides the relatively limited number of studies examining the framing of Russian aggression against Ukraine on social media, further research gaps warrant attention. The first of these pertains to the absence of a systematic investigation of the framing of the invasion in the context of the subsequent stage of the war that commenced in February 2022. In the academic literature, the concentration has predominantly been on the communication strategies employed by the aggressor party. However, to date, merely a single study has undertaken an analysis of the communication approach adopted by the political leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, spanning the invasion period from February 2022 through February 2023 (Nisch 2023). Moreover, none of the prior studies have scrutinised the communication of political leaders which are indirectly involved and their social media communication utilising frames and emotions.

2.2 Government social media communication

Communication of the government serves an educational purpose by informing citizens, and Gebauer (1998) defines it as public relations for policymakers to justify or explain their decisions. Therefore, the government, which is represented by elected officials, is expected to inform the public about its activities and political decisions to justify them to the public (Gebauer 1998). According to Hill (1993), government communication should inform and assist individuals in influencing and participating in government activities, decisions and proposals. Citizens should have access and the ability to approve or reject government choices, actions and ideas that have an impact on their daily lives. Governments legitimise their actions by informing their citizens. Previously, the governments largely addressed these issues through press releases and made them public in newspaper articles, radio interviews and television appearances. Due to the growth of social media lately, governments are broadening their choices to educate and engage with the public in order to meet their requirements and expectations (Borucki 2016). One major source of friction in the relationship between governments and citizens is a lack of trust, which can be improved primarily through transparency, engagement with stakeholders and effective action. Therefore, a government's use of social media must be viewed as a paradigm shift aimed at increasing citizen participation and empowerment through increased government accountability, transparency and open collaboration (Bonsón et al. 2014).

Despite these potential advantages, not all technological advances or adoptions are entirely useful. Farazmand (2012) defines technology as both a facilitator and a destroyer, a platform capable of facilitating and restraining emancipation and tyranny, development and deterioration, and democracy and despotism. Among these negative aspects are the exponential surge in fake news since the emergence of social media and the restriction of social media channels in some nations.

Twitter is widely utilised in the socio-political sphere as a tool for spreading information and ideas. The adoption of social media by political leaders to disseminate information has been widely increasing. One of the most popular users of Twitter was the former president Donald Trump (Ross – Rivers 2018). Furthermore, Bertot et al. (2012) found in their study that governments centred their activities on social media. The study found that the Obama administration's use of social media focused on contact with the public, the spread of information and the distribution of services (Bertot et al. 2012).

The literature also discusses the use of social media by opinion leaders to bypass conventional media; politicians, journalists, celebrities and others are enabled to use social media to maintain direct contact with their audiences. In the past, they relied on the mainstream media for coverage and visibility, while today, they utilise their social media accounts to communicate with their audiences directly without the participation of the traditional media (Lev-On 2018). Early studies on politicians' internet use centred on their worries and the potential harm that social media could do to their reputations. Politicians are exposed to public criticism in social media spaces, are forced to respond to uncomfortable enquiries and need time and resources to be appropriately managed (Stromer-Galley 2000). Digital platforms are transforming the landscape of political information, but they are not replacing journalism and conventional media, they coexist alongside them, each offering their own advantages (Casero-Ripollés 2018).

The architecture of each digital platform varies, resulting in distinct features unique to each platform (Bossetta 2018; Nahon 2016). These differences significantly impact the distribution of content across these platforms. For instance, prior research emphasises that Twitter focuses on disseminating news and current affairs, whereas Facebook focuses on fostering user communities and, consequently, facilitates mobilisation and organisation (Stier et al. 2018). Researchers all over Twitter's world use the database for their research because of its significance in the political discourse, since many politicians use it as an instrument for campaigns and elections or the society for movements and protests in political events (Jungherr 2016). The paradox lies in research focusing on Twitter despite Facebook's larger user base. This can be attributed to factors such as Twitter's data accessibility, its alignment with political discourse through news dissemination and its status as a hub for

political influence due to the presence of prominent political and journalism figures (Casero-Ripollés 2018).

There is a geographical bias in research on public leadership and crisis management, since the majority of studies analyse US-American situations, while there is little empirical research about other countries (Helms 2008). This research addresses this gap by analysing the tweets of Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Germany.

2.3 The setting Germany

Germany is a representative democracy. The country has a multiparty political system structure, its electoral system is based on the principle of proportional representation, and it has a consensus-based political culture. The German Federal Government (also called Federal Cabinet or in German Bundeskabinett or Bundesregierung) can be defined as the chief executive body of the Federal Republic of Germany. It consists of the federal chancellor and federal ministries. The current and 24th federal Government of Germany has been in office since 8 December 2021 and governs for four years. It consists of 16 ministries and the chancellor (Bundesregierung 2022).

The use and expanses were debated in Parliament in 2015. Therefore, the following information was disclosed. The German government uses social media offerings on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter as a contemporary extension of its public relations work. In this way, it fulfils its constitutional mandate to inform citizens about its activities, plans and goals. These offerings are citizen centric and dialogue orientated. They provide a direct insight into government activities, and thus ensure greater transparency. The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (BPA) operates social media accounts on behalf of the entire federal government, which are managed by a social media editorial team at the, BPA. Social media information does not replace traditional channels such as the www.bundesregierung.de website or print products. Numerous brochures, guidebooks and leaflets provide citizens with information on important government policy issues (Deutscher Bundestag 2015). To create an initial social media strategy, the amount of EUR 196,350 was invested, and each ministry has employees who work on the social media channels, which can range from 0.2–10 employees, depending on the workload (Deutscher Bundestag 2015).

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has two social media accounts: An Instagram account like his predecessor Angela Merkel's, and a newly created Twitter account, which has been in use since February 2022 to communicate with the public.

2.4 Emotions

During campaigns, the strategic use of emotions by political leaders for communication depends on how they want to be seen by the audience in order to evoke comparable sentiments from them. Emotions of political leaders may have a significant impact on their public (Paul – Sui, 2019). Leaders are evaluated based on how they respond to issues which they are faced (Bucy – Bradley 2004); consequently, even the briefest demonstration of emotion, lasting less than a second, may lead to intense reactions from followers (Stewart et al. 2009). Therefore, the importance of emotions in communication to influence supporters may grow. During a crisis, non-verbal expression of emotion may backfire, so it is crucial to be conscious of how one expresses oneself.

In general, individuals are more inclined to engage with entertaining and inspiring articles than those causing fear and anger (Borah 2016). Furthermore, when positive feelings are conveyed, a positive attitude may spread (Barsade 2020). Consequently, individuals who follow the leader on social media are more likely to echo their emotions. Lewis (2000) utilised filmed speeches to evaluate the emotions of leaders and how they influenced their followers. He found that neutral emotions are more effective than angry or sad ones. In addition, followers showed less enthusiasm for leaders who conveyed negative feelings. Consequently, it is essential to study the detection of emotions in leadership communication during crises.

Numerous researchers are engaged in emotion detection utilising text, picture, audio and video, among other media (Shrivastava et al. 2019). Nevertheless, this research is focused on the text analysis of tweets using a machine learning technique that classifies the text into emotions, such as 'anger', 'anticipation', 'disgust', 'fear', 'joy', 'sadness', 'surprise', 'trust', 'negative' and 'positive'. The extraction and analysis of leaders' Twitter posts may reveal their emotional states.

III. Methodology

3.1 The Data

This study uses tweets posted from the official Twitter account from the chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz (@Bundeskanzler) from 24 February 2022 until 24 February 2023 to examine his communication towards the population. Raw data was collected on March 2023 using the rtweet package R package rtweet (Kearney et al. 2023) and the official API, and a total of 612 tweets were collected. The data collection included the written text content as well as the creation data and the user's Twitter screen name. The following procedures were used to process and analyse the Twitter dataset using R and Python:

1. Raw data extraction: After gathering the data in R the data is exported as an Excel sheet.
2. Text Pre-processing: The extracted tweets were preprocessed using regular expressions and Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods to clean up the content, eliminate irrelevant data and make them processable.
3. Sentiment analysis: VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sentiment Reasoner) (Hutto – Gilbert 2014) was utilised to conduct sentiment analysis on the collected tweets with the goal of identifying and extracting attitudes, emotions, evaluations and opinions.
4. Topic Extraction: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was used after proper preprocessing to identify the primary subjects in the collection of tweets and their changes over time.

3.2 Data Pre-Processing

A tweet is a microblog message posted on the Twitter platform. The textual content of a tweet is limited to 280 characters; the inclusion of a hyperlink reduces this limit to 257 characters. Raw tweets contain redundant information and are very unstructured. The R, Python and NLP approaches were utilised to do the following pre-processing stages with the goal of transforming raw data into a format that can be simply read and used for sentiment and topic analyses:

1. Pre-processing in R: Subsequent to the acquisition of data, regular expression was employed to eliminate mentions, URLs, hashtags, HTML characters (replacing '&amp' with 'and' or tags (such as , <p>, etc.). Additionally, unnecessary line breaks, special characters and punctuations (except exclamation points since VADER uses them for sentiment analysis), were removed as well as numbers and dates.
2. Twitter posts of the chancellor of Germany are sometimes written in different languages; therefore, the text was converted into English using the 'googletrans' tool (Google LLC 2023).
3. As in the second part, a higher quality dataset is needed for the LDA. The vocabulary was pruned by removing stop words, and terms unrelated to the topic (such as 'as', 'from', 'would', etc.), and a bigram model was created. Further, lemmatisation and tokenisation could improve the model to achieve better results (Ghosh – Gunning, 2019). The text was then tokenised using the Gensim library (Rehurek – Sojka) to ensure that every word appears in a consistent format. Finally, the spaCy library of NLTK (Bird et al. 2009) was utilised to achieve lemmatisation.

3.3 Sentiment Analysis

Humans associate phrases, sentences and words with emotions. Sentiment analysis utilises computational techniques to extract and analyse the emotions portrayed in a document. In the current study, the Valence Aware Dictionary and sentiment Reasoner (VADER) model was used to interpret and evaluate sentiments, opinions and emotions from the collected tweets of the German chancellor.

Vader is a pre-trained sentiment lexicon and rule-based sentiment analysis tool that was first introduced in 2014 by Hutto and Gilbert (2014) specifically tailored for social media text analysis. It works exceedingly well in microblogging contexts where the short-text data are a complex mix of a variety of features and a sentence may contain multiple sentiments at once. Freely accessible as a 'vaderSentiment' module included within the Python NLTK library, VADER Sentiment Analysis can be used to analyse unlabelled text. Notable advantages of VADER over conventional sentiment analysis approaches include:

- Training data are not needed. It is built using a crowd-validated, standard sentiment lexicon (accompanied by corresponding sentiment intensity measures) that is specialised in analysing the sentiment of social media platforms such as Twitter.
- Evidence of outperforming individual human raters and exhibiting equal or superior performance compared to other highly-regarded sentiment analysis tools in determining tweet sentiment (Hutto – Gilbert 2014).
- It performs computationally quickly and does not significantly suffer from a speed-performance trade-off.
- Vader was already used in several similar studies before (Stracqualursi – Agati 2022; Rustam et al. 2021; Moussa et al. 2020; Monselise et al. 2021).

VADER can perform sentiment analysis based on its rules, employing an array of lexical features such as capitalisation, punctuation, degree modifiers, the contrastive conjunction "but" and the negation-flipping trigram.

The sentiment score (*Ss*) of a phrase is determined by summing the lexical rates of each word that is included in the VADER dictionary. Following appropriate normalisation, VADER generates a 'compound' *Ss* that ranges from 1 to –1, from most positive to most negative. Threshold values can be applied to classify tweets as negative, neutral or positive once the *Ss* is known.

In this study, the VADER model yields a sentiment score, which is used to apply the following thresholds in order to classify each tweet with its polarity: positive, neutral or negative (see Table 1).

Table 1: Threshold of sentiment score and polarity

Ss	Polarity classification
Ss > +0.05	Positive
Ss <-0.05	Negative
+0.05 ≥ ***Ss*** ≤ -0.05	Neutral

3.4 Topic modelling

The objective of the unsupervised machine learning approach known as 'Topic Modelling' is to find the topics that most accurately represent the content of a collection of documents. It is a text mining technique that identifies the topics of texts from a large corpus of documents that have been gathered (Blei et al. 2003). One of the most commonly used topic modelling techniques is the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model. This three-level hierarchical Bayesian probability model serves to represent a corpus effectively. The concept of LDA is that each document contributes to a topic and the topic is characterised as a word distribution (Lee et al. 2018). The procedure for creating documents inside a corpus, especially in LDA models, is as follows:

1. θ is sampled from a Dirichlet prior mixture of t topics, which is parameterised by α.
2. Following that, a topic t_n is then sampled from a multinomial distribution, $p(\theta \mid \alpha)$ which is the document topic distribution and models $p(t_n = i \mid \theta)$.
3. The number of topics was set to $t = 1\ldots, T$, and the distribution of words with t topics is described by ϕ, which is also a multinomial distribution whose hyper-parameter β follows the Dirichlet distribution.
4. Through the topic t_n, a word w_n, is then sampled via the multinomial distribution $p(w \mid z_n; \beta)$.

A document or, in our specific case, tweet $'k'$ containing words is described as:

$$p(k) = \int_{\theta} p(\theta \mid \alpha) \left(\prod_{n=1}^{N} \sum_{t_n=1}^{t} p(k_n \mid t_n; \beta) p(t_n \mid \theta) \right) d\theta$$

Furthermore, with LDA it is possible to observe how the various topics of texts evolve over time. The collected data set corpus used for this research (from February 2022 until February 2023) contains twelve months and is then calculated by the model provided by gensim (Rehurek – Sojka).

Finding the right number of topics is a crucial challenge in LDA. Coherence scores were suggested by Roder et al. (2015) to rate the effectiveness of each topic model. The measurement used to evaluate the coherence between topics inferred by a model is specifically topic coherence. For the coherence measure, *Cv* was used, which is a measure based on a sliding window that employs cosine similarity and normalised point-wise mutual information (NPMI). These values represent how much a topic's words 'make sense' and are meant to mimic the relative score that a human would probably give it.

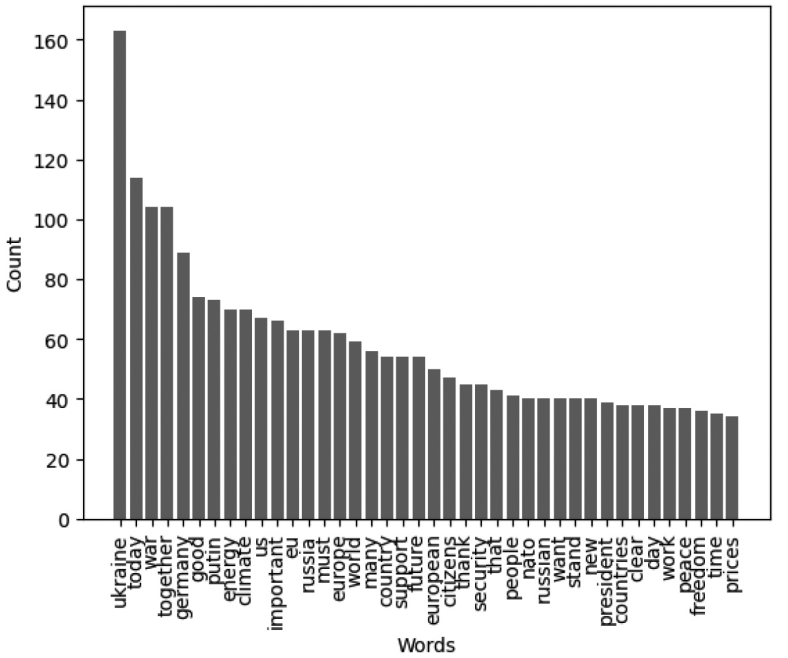
These ratings suggest the degree of coherence among the 'top' words within a particular topic. Additionally, the distribution of the principal component analysis (PCA), which can display the topic models in a spatial framework with two dimensions, is taken into account. It is preferable to have a uniform distribution, which is perceived as having a high degree of independence for each topic. Higher coherence and an average distribution in the primer analysis displayed by the pyLDAvis are the criteria for a good model (Sievert – Shirley 2014).

IV. Results

4.1 Exploring the Twitter content

The word frequency of the 40 most used words is shown in Figure 1, offering valuable insights into the themes and foci of the communication. The most used words are related to the Ukraine invasion like 'Ukraine', 'war', 'Putin' and 'Russia'. These keywords indicate that the political dialogue is primarily centred around the conflict and the key players involved. Only words like 'peace' and 'freedom' are towards the lower end of the frequency spectrum, suggesting that these concepts, while still present, are less frequently emphasised in his tweets. This could imply that the overall communication is more focussed on the unfolding situation and the challenges it presents. Further words which could be related to the invasion are found 'together', 'support', 'Nato' and 'security'. These words imply a focus on international cooperation, alliance-building and the broader implications of the conflict on global security. It is worth noting that the analysis also reveals the presence of words unrelated to the invasion, such as 'climate.' This observation suggests that the political communication encompasses broader issues and concerns beyond the immediate crisis, highlighting the multifaceted nature of his tweets.

Figure 1: Total text frequencies



4.2 Sentiment analysis

The output of the VADER model reveals that the German communication by the chancellor of Germany was mainly positive on Twitter (see Table 2). In addition, three examples with different polarities and their respective sentiment scores are shown in Table 3.

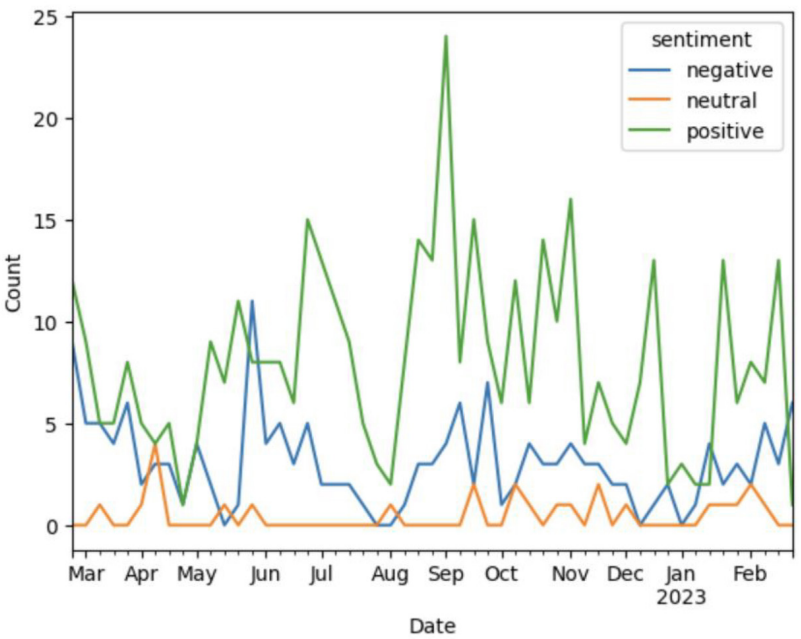
Table 2: Number of tweets with their polarity

Polarity	Absolute values	Percentages
Positive	425	69,4%
Negative	162	26,5%
Neutral	25	4,1%

Table 3: Example tweets with polarity and the sentiment score

Polarity	*Ss*	Tweet
Positive	0.9691	Ukraine will survive Freedom and security will triumph, just as freedom and security triumphed over bondage violence and dictatorship years ago Contributing to this as best we can today means never again! Therein lies the legacy of May
Neutral	0	The Russian president miscalculated both in regard to the resistance of Ukrainians and the unity of the European Union
Negative	-0.9847	It is a cruel war and the killing of civilians is a war crime Responsibility for these crimes lies with Russian President Putin We call on Russia to keep their guns silent The war must stop, and stop it now!

Figure 2: Timeline showing the sentiment of tweets



The detailed overview of the sentiment distribution of Olaf Scholz' Twitter communication can be found in Figure 2. Most of the months throughout the examined time period show a higher percentage of positive tweets than negative and neutral ones. This indicates that the chancellor's communication predominantly conveys an optimistic and encouraging sentiment. May, June, August, September and October 2022 in particular show a relatively high number of positive tweets, indicating that the political debate during

these times centred on promoting achievements, positive developments and constructive initiatives.

Negative sentiment appears to be consistently present in the chancellor's tweets but at a lower frequency compared to positive sentiment. The months with the highest number of negative tweets are March and June 2022, as well as February 2023. This implies that particular occurrences or problems during these months might have necessitated the chancellor addressing challenges or expressing concerns in his communication.

Neutral sentiment, on the other hand, is relatively infrequent across the analysed months, with the highest occurrences in April and October 2022, as well as January 2023. This indicates that the chancellor's communication infrequently adopts a neutral or impartial tone when discussing different topics.

4.3 Topic Modelling

To find out about what topics the chancellor writes about on Twitter, the LDA model was applied to the cleaned corpus, using only the following tagger components: nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

As described previously, to determine the appropriate number of topics, *Cv* was used as a measure of topic coherence, which expresses the coherence between topics inferred by the model (Röder et al. 2015). Additionally, the distribution of the primer component analysis (PCA) is taken into account, which displays the topic models in a spatial framework with two dimensions. It is preferable to have a uniform distribution, which is considered to have a high degree of independence for each topic. A high degree of coherence and an average distribution in the primer analysis shown by the pyLDAvis are the criteria for a successful model (Sievert – Shirley 2014).

We initialised the LDA models with topic numbers *k* ranging from 2 to 24 and determined the coherence of the model. The coherence score reached its maximum for 4, 9, 11 and 15 topic numbers, as shown in Figure 3. By selecting 9, 11 or 15 topics, this would lead to a non-uniform distribution on the primer component analysis (PCA), which would result in a low degree of independence for each topic (see the results of the LDAvis interactive map in Figure 4). By choosing the four topics, the model intersects with no other topics, the whole word space is well summarised, and the topics are independent (Syed – Spruit 2017).

The LDA analysis result with its words is shown in Table 4. They are listed in order of their frequency. The first topic represents 28% of the total tokens and includes words such as 'energy', 'price', 'gas' and 'cooperation'. On the basis of this, the deduction was made that the communication addressed the effects of the invasion resulting domestic measurements and finding new cooperations and solutions to reduce the dependence from Russia. The second topic had 27%

Figure 3: Coherence value

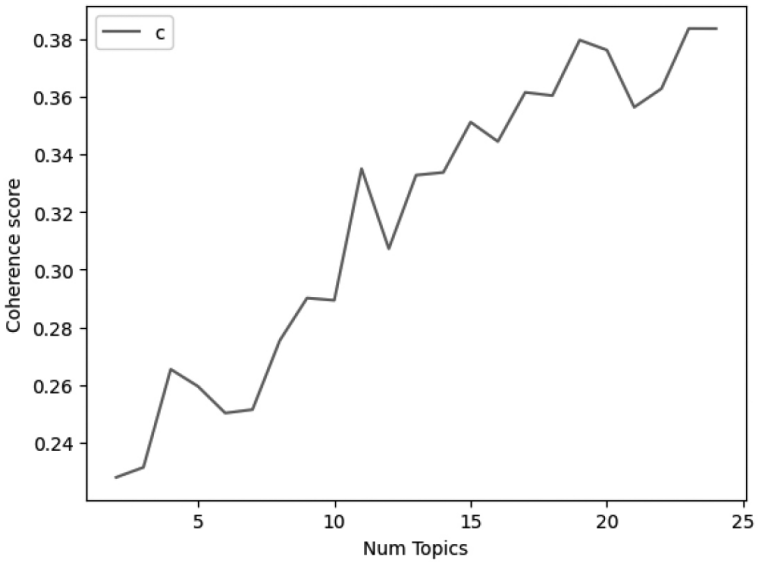
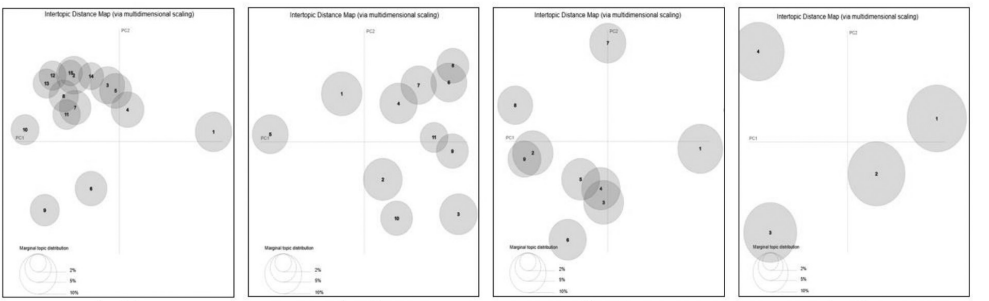


Figure 4: LDAvis interactive map of the topic model distribution



of the total tokens, including the words 'climate', 'future', 'neutral' and 'energy', which led to the conclusion that the chancellor addressed the current challenges and his goal of achieving climate neutrality and protecting the environment. The third topic with 23% of the tokens included words like 'family', 'support', 'peace' and 'freedom', which can be inferred to of the expression of solidarity towards the Ukrainian population and the wish for peace. The last topic with 22% of the tokens included words like 'Russian', 'aggression', 'attack' and 'crime' which shows that the attacks were condemned in the communication of the Chancellor.

Table 4: LDA results: Topic size and with the 15 most used words

Number	Topic 1 (28%)	Topic 2 (27%)	Topic 3 (23%)	Topic 4 (22%)
1	energy	climate	today	war
2	price	good	country	russian
3	today	country	important	aggression
4	gas	future	war	country
5	time	world	family	good
6	citizen	energy	summit	people
7	future	neutral	decision	world
8	supply	protection	support	new
9	cooperation	important	peace	right
10	close	democracy	good	terrible
11	friend	security	year	peace
12	good	today	freedom	attack
13	high	commitment	right	crime
14	company	strong	accession	ukraine
15	world	crisis	partner	support

The Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model produced four key topics that persisted throughout time:

- Topic 1. Effects of the Ukraine invasion: consequences of the invasion and new cooperations
- Topic 2. Climate & Environment, such as sustainability, and focus on using renewable energy
- Topic 3. Solidarity: wishes for freedom and peace and addressing the victims of the invasion
- Topic 4. Russian aggression: addressing Putin's rough approach towards Ukraine

Figure 5 shows the dynamic changes in the occurrences of each topic between February 2022 and February 2023 to identify a discourse shift. The prevalence of the identified frames varied over time, reflecting the evolving priorities and concerns of the chancellor's Twitter communication. The Russian aggression frame was the most prevalent throughout the first three months, showing greater attention to the developing situation in Ukraine. This frame then frequently

reappeared in response to particular incidents and developments involving the aggression towards Ukraine.

Between June and October, the Climate frame emerged as the second most frequently employed topic, emphasising climate change and environmental sustainability. This focus can be attributed to Germany's dependence on Russian fossil energy and the requirement to move towards more sustainable energy sources.

From July to October, the Effects frame dominated, as concerns over the approaching winter and potential peak on energy prices grew among the population. This frame emphasises the consequences of Germany's prior reliance on Russian gas and oil and the need for alternative strategies to deal with these dependencies.

The Solidarity frame, although less prevalent compared to the other frames, experienced notable peaks in March, June and October. This variation suggests that it was primarily driven by specific events or developments during the analysed period.

Figure 5: LDA topic timeline

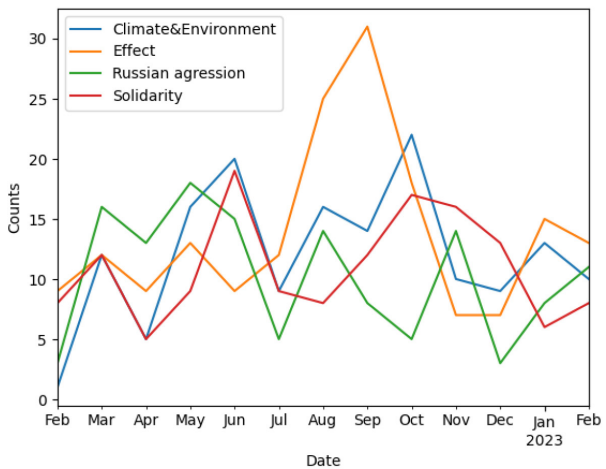
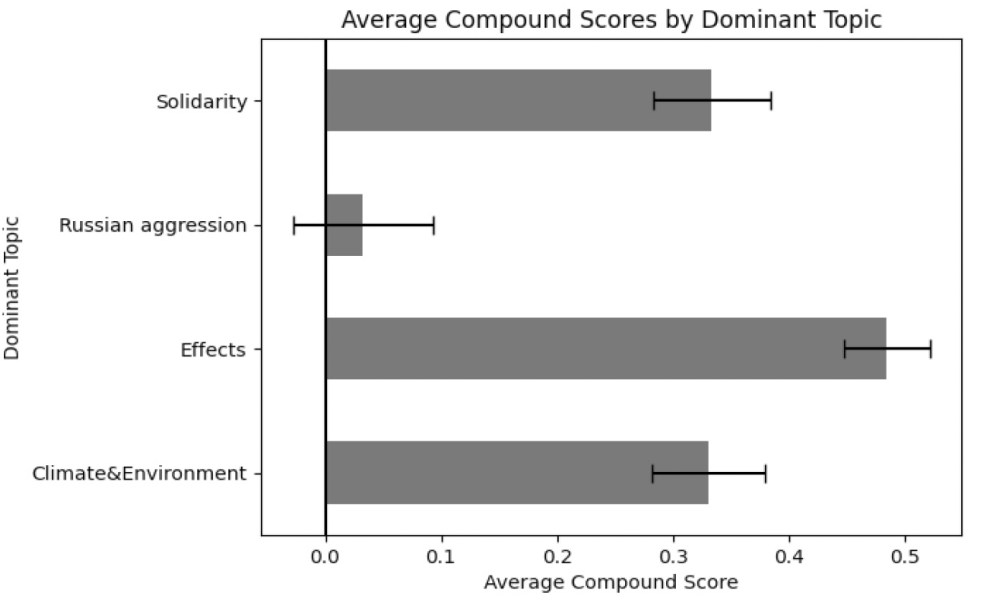


Figure 6 can help to investigate the frames and their average compound scores further. This data analysis provides valuable insights into the emotional nuances of Chancellor Scholz' communication on Twitter, enhancing our understanding of the sentiment conveyed within the identified frames. The Effects frame exhibits the highest average compound score of 0.48, suggesting that the sentiment in tweets containing this theme is predominantly positive. This may indicate that the chancellor's communication aimed to emphasise the beneficial outcomes or positive implications of various policies, events or decisions within this frame.

The Climate frame has an average compound score of 0.33, also revealing mainly a positive sentiment in tweets related to environmental issues and sustainability. This indicates that the communication regarding climate change mitigation and sustainable development was generally optimistic or constructive in nature.

The Solidarity frame demonstrates an average compound score of 0.33, reflecting a positive sentiment as well. This suggests that the chancellor's focus on fostering unity, collaboration and support among various stakeholders was conveyed in an encouraging and affirmative manner.

Figure 6: Average sentiment score for each topic



V. Discussion

According to Entman (1993), framing involves choosing and emphasising elements of information to create a specific reality. The initial stated research questions can be answered by the following findings.

- Q1: In the context of the Twitter communication by the German chancellor during the invasion of Ukraine, our analysis identified four key frames – 'Effects of the Ukraine invasion', 'Climate & Environment', 'Solidarity' and 'Russian aggression'.

This finding is consistent with the research on framing in political communication, where key issues and themes are often structured around specific frames (de Vreese 2005).

- Q2: The initial focus on Russian aggression reflects the immediate attention on the conflict, while the subsequent emphasis on the frames 'Climate & Environment' and 'Effects' shows how communication has been adjusted to address broader concerns, such as energy security and the consequences of the invasion.

The dynamic nature of the prevalent frames throughout the invasion is consistent with the literature, emphasising that framing is not static and can change in response to external events and political developments (Scheufele 2000). The frequent occurrence highlights the role of specific events or developments in influencing political discourse (Gamson – Modigliani 1989).

The sentiments conveyed in the chancellor's Twitter communication provide insight into the emotional undertones of his messaging.

- Q3: The findings indicate that the sentiments of the tweets were primarily positive. Negative sentiments appear to be consistently present in the chancellor's tweets but at a lower frequency compared to positive sentiment and neutral sentiments were relatively infrequent.

This aligns with the literature on political communication, which often employs optimistic language to foster public support and project an image of competence (Graber – Dunaway 2017). The positive sentiment connected with the 'Climate & Environment' and 'Effects' frames suggests a focus on promoting achievements, positive developments and constructive initiatives. For example, with the tweet from 17 December 2022 from Olaf Scholz (2022b):

> *As of today, our energy supply is a bit safer and more independent. The first LNG terminal in #Wilhelmshaven has opened – built in record time and also ready for the future with hydrogen. Three more will follow soon. We know how to set off and speed!*

The 'Solidarity' frame's positive sentiment underscores the aim to convey collaboration, unity and support in an affirmative manner. For example, on 18 March 2022 Olaf Scholz (2022a) published the following message on Twitter:

> *I would like to express my sincere thanks to the many volunteers who helped me. Your overwhelming solidarity, your tireless efforts make it possible for us to help the people fleeing the terrible war in Ukraine.*

The interplay between framing and sentiment in the chancellor's Twitter communication during the invasion of Ukraine demonstrates how language is strategically used to shape public perceptions and opinions (Entman 2004). By focussing on key frames and using predominantly positive sentiment, the chancellor sought to manage the narrative around the invasion and address the concerns of various stakeholders.

These findings will assist future leaders to communicate more effectively to gain the public's support amid crises. Taking emotions into account, the outcomes will assist leaders in their social media communication. To provide accurate information to the public, communication strategies must be properly prepared, with an emphasis on word selection. A compelling message that evokes emotion may connect the public and leaders in order to communicate effectively during a crisis such as the invasion of Ukraine, when a mistake might foster distrust and increase the threat.

This study has several limitations. First, this research focused only on the Twitter communication of the German chancellor. However, users may be spread over many social media platforms. Nevertheless, the techniques used in our study may be applied to a variety of social networking sites.

It is important to note that according to the most current data on social media use, 83% of Twitter users globally were under the age of 50 (STATISTA 2021). This suggests that research using Twitter often has a bias toward underestimating the views of people over 50 years of age.

For sentiment analysis, the VADER model was used with a lexical approach. This implies that it employs vocabulary or words that have been given fixed positive or negative ratings. The ratings are based on a pre-trained model that human reviewers have designated as such. As a result, this strategy also has certain drawbacks:

- Grammar and spelling errors might lead the analyst to miss significant terms.
- Sarcasm and irony might lead to misinterpretation.
- There may be difficulties interpreting discriminating jargon, nomenclature, memes or turns of phrase.
- Pictures or videos were not analysed.

The main drawback of topic analysis when using unsupervised learning methods like LDA is that there is some subjectivity in determining the topic formed (Kwok et al. 2021).

In summary, this study contributes to the understanding of political communication on social media during major geopolitical events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The results highlight the evolving priorities, sentiments and concerns that shape the discourse and offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of political communication. The findings of this study have

implications for both political communication theory and practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of the key topics and concerns driving political discourse during such important global events.

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Does the state of emergency create an opportunity for democratic erosion? Lessons from post-communist Central and Southeast Europe

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Abstract: *The paper's key puzzle is the variation in lockdown-related democratic decline in the region of Central and Southeast Europe given the incumbents' ideological and regime (dis)similarity. Why did similar regimes not respond to the pandemic in the same manner by using the opportunity to grab more executive power and diminish the authority of other institutions? While some argue that a state of emergency provides an ideal opportunity for democratic decline due to reduced costs, others believe that autocratic regimes with a 'pre-existing condition for autocracy' are more vulnerable. To contribute to this discussion, I examine three examples from post-communist Central and Southeast Europe (Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia) during the pandemic-related state of emergency and lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. I consider several relevant factors, the most important of which is the prospect of winning the next election. To erode democracy, autocratic incumbents must feel insecure about the outcome of the next election to use the opportunity created by the state of emergency. If they are uncertain of victory, they may prefer to expand their executive powers during the state of emergency, thus undermining democracy.*

Keywords: ***democratic decline; executive aggrandisement; hybrid regimes; state of emergency***

1. The Problem

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments across the world have imposed restrictions on the wider population and, in cases, assumed excessive executive power. Some governments imposed weak (smart) lockdowns, some declared a state of emergency and some went as far as to impose general curfews. This created an opportunity not only for the temporary abuse of office but also for the introduction of more permanent regime changes via the concentration of power. A textbook example of this would be Hungary, a country whose democracy has slumped under the second Orbán cabinet in ten years, saw additional democratic decline on 30 March 2020 when Premier Orbán was given indefinite authority to rule by decree with legislative force, thus practically suspending the Parliament (Juzová 2020; Krekó 2020). After the state of emergency was lifted, this legislation was abolished in June 2020, but a new one has been adopted under which the executive can declare state of emergency without consulting the Parliament (Vegh 2021; Guasti 2021: 93). Its effect, therefore, could still be felt in 2021 and beyond (Hajnal et al. 2021: 7; Ádám – Csaba 2022).

Granted, the excuse of the pandemic has served many other autocrats, among other things, to extend incumbents' time in office (Venezuela, Guyana, Nicaragua, Bolivia), introduce a variety of disproportionate measures to intimidate the opposition and the press (Hungary, Thailand), remove protesters from the streets (Algeria, Montenegro), arrest people for 'spreading misinformation' (Turkey, Bolivia) and vilify ethnic minorities (India). According to the V-dem Pandemic Backsliding Index (Pandem) that assessed democratic standards in 144 countries from March 2020–July 2021, worrisome developments were recorded in 131 countries *vis-à-vis* the media, side-lining the legislature and abusive enforcement (Edgell et al. 2020; Lührmann et al. 2020).

Despite the fact the state of emergency creates the opportunity for different kinds of abuse of office, not all incumbents did so. Which incumbents did use the 2020–21 lockdown, curfew or state of emergency to enforce more permanent system changes, thus redesigning the system toward less democratic or more autocratic? Most recent reports and scholarship on the political responses to the pandemic have been overly focused on short-term violations of human rights, abusive enforcement of protective measures, restrictions of media freedom and the like (IDEA 2020; Edgell et al. 2021). Granted, these aspects are critical to taking stock of how the 2020 pandemic has affected politics and political institutions worldwide. However, we need to look beyond short-term responses. To be able to address the problem of democratic erosion under state of emergency, I suggest we look at *permanent regime changes* introduced in 2020–2021, which may be less visible and more informal. In other words, we should ask if the incumbents used a state of emergency to change the system to accomplish more

lasting executive aggrandisement to ensure their future comparative advantage after the pandemic is over.

The text's contribution is twofold. The discussion can help us conceptualise the problem of democratic decline under emergency situations (state of emergency, curfews, lockdown, etc) in general. But it also contributes to the ongoing discussion about democratic decline in post-communist Europe, which in some the post-communist regimes began well before the pandemic (Ágh 2015, 2016, 2019; Kapidžić 2020; Stojarová 2020; Csaky 2020).

To achieve this goal, I propose to explore an aspect of democratic decline that has been overlooked in discussions about how states of emergency affect the deterioration of democratic institutions. Specifically, I will focus on the potential impact of upcoming elections (Section 2a). I will assume, as defined in Section 2d, that incumbents hold autocratic preferences, which essentially means that they are committed to some form of extremist and anti-democratic ideology. Recent experiences in post-communist Europe have shown that such preferences are primarily held by right-wing and populist political parties. Therefore, the key question for the incumbent is whether they can win the next elections. If they believe they can, they will likely make no permanent changes to the regime. If they have doubts, they may take advantage of the state of emergency to permanently expand executive powers, thus undermining democracy. In my discussion of the pandemic lockdowns from 2020–2021, Serbia serves as an example of the former case, while Slovenia represents the latter. My conclusions can be seen as a contextual rebuttal of arguments suggesting that democratic decline is more likely during an emergency because a state of emergency reduces the cost of democratic decline (Lührmann and Rooney 2020; 2021), and that regimes with so-called pre-existing conditions are less likely to resist the expansion of executive powers (Croissant 2020; IDEA 2020).

2. Research Design

2.1 Theory

I offer an alternative theory to the one claiming that a state of emergency offers an opportunity for democratic erosion because the cost of the erosion goes down. The main claim of the cost theory is that democratic erosion under such circumstances becomes easier because the executive can use natural disasters, pandemics or an armed conflict threat as a pretext to accumulate power and divest other branches of government of their powers (Rooney 2019; Lührmann – Rooney 2019; 2020; Maerz et al. 2020).

Although these extraordinary measures may be viewed as short-term solutions, they can provide tools that facilitate long-term (lasting) changes. Research shows that a regime is 59 percent more likely to undergo some sort of democratic

erosion or reversal under a state of emergency than in normal times (Lührmann and Rooney 2020). This thesis is supported by recent reports and research on democracy during the 2020 lockdowns. The IDEA report claims that 59 percent of governments across the world declared some sort of state of emergency in response to the pandemic in 2020, and 61 percent of these introduced measures were problematic from a democratic point of view. Another variant of this theory is that regimes with so-called 'pre-existing conditions' (i.e. those which are already in a hybrid form) are more likely to deteriorate during a state of emergency. Incumbents who expanded their powers prior to the pandemic are more likely to make the regime more autocratic. In contrast, democracies are at a lower risk of democratic erosion (Croissant 2020; IDEA 2020).

In this paper, I build on these arguments. Based on the experiences of the Central and Southeast European post-communist countries, I claim that democratic decline may have nothing to do with the 2020 pandemic-related states of emergency or lockdowns. Granted, a state of emergency may open up the possibility for an autocratic incumbent to introduce more permanent changes. However, even if such incumbents have adopted a preference for autocratisation and the regime has already been rigged to ensure an ample possibility that the non-democratic incumbent will win the next elections and remain in office, they may not take the first subsequent opportunity to grab more power. Conversely, if incumbents feel unsafe (say, about the outcome of the next election), they might do the opposite. Therefore, we should focus on an episode of democratic erosion that involves a prospect of long-term executive aggrandisement.

The theory expounded here states that an incumbent who has adopted an autocratic preference but is safe as far as the upcoming elections are concerned, may not use the opportunity to expand their powers. Consider what President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did in Turkey 2016–2018, or Mahinda Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka in 2015–2020. Granted, during the 2020 lockdown, Erdoğan did harass the oppositional mayors of Turkey and Ankara but stopped short of further expanding his presidential prerogatives during the pandemic. Why? 'If the Turkish president has not used the pandemic as an opportunity for a blatant power grab à la Viktor Orbán of Hungary, that is because such a feat was already achieved in Turkey between 2016 and 2018' (Akkoyunlu 2020). Erdoğan began executive aggrandisement with the 2016 state of emergency (which he saw as 'the gift from God'), the 2017 constitutional changes and the 2018 presidential elections he won without a runoff. However, recall that these constitutional changes came in the wake of the 2015 hung parliament, which was the first sign for Erdogan that his next electoral victory was not safe.

Consider another example of executive aggrandisement from Sri Lanka under President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He was elected president in 2005. Though his rule after 2005 was ripe with corruption, nepotism and gradual degradation

of democratic institutions (DeVotta 2011; Ginsburg and Huq 2018), it was not until 2015 that Sri Lanka saw a radical democratic decline. This is the moment Rajapaksa felt uncertain about the outcome of the next election. When Maithrpala Sirisena, former minister of health, decided to run on her own for the next elections, Rajapaksa considered imposing a state of emergency and cancelling the result if he lost (DeVotta 2016). At that moment, he was blocked by the non-elected and non-majoritarian agents, but he used another opportunity which emerged in 2020 during the pandemic (DeVotta 2021).

These changes have been lasting. Erdoğan still uses these powers to ensure his continued rule. In my analysis, this aspect is exemplified by the case of Serbia (to follow in Section 4b). Rajapaksa is not using them anymore, but only because he had to resign and flee Sri Lanka in order to escape the popular uprising in July 2022.

My theory draws on the literature that explains the behaviour of the incumbents with the prospect of winning the next elections (Wright 2009; Miller 2017). Joseph Wright argues that an autocrat will accept foreign aid as a condition to building democratic institutions only if they believe they can win elections under these new democratic rules (Wright 2009). The autocrats' willingness to allows democracy is contingent upon their chances of winning the next elections (which depends on the type of incumbent coalition and economic growth). A similar argument can be found in Miller's discussion on why autocrats are not against multiparty elections. He argues that 'autocrats are more likely to adopt contested elections if they anticipate that they can reliably win them' (Miller 2017, 17). The cases of Turkey and Sri Lanka, referred to in Section 3, confirm this theory in a more general sense. I argue here that the same logic applies to an incumbent when they consider if they would like to use the opportunity to autocratise the system under the emergency situations.

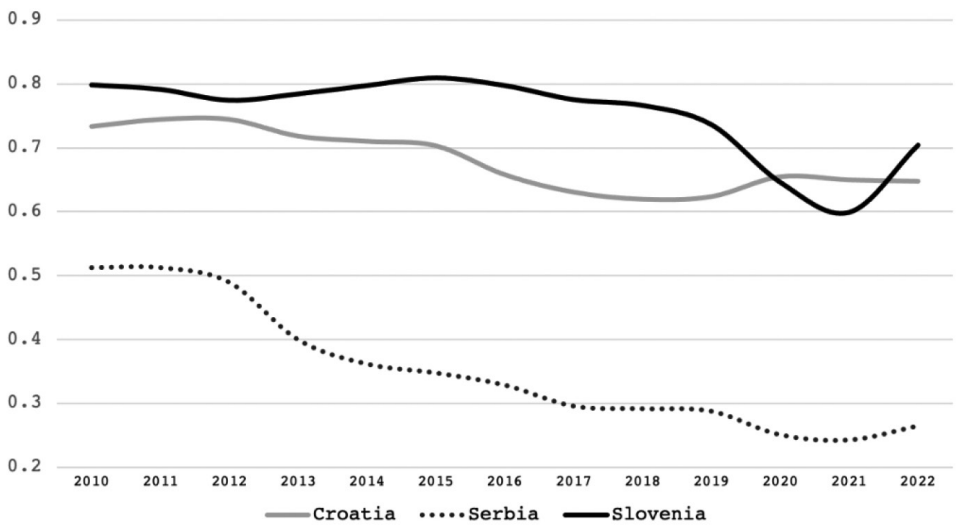
As the Section 3 analysis shows, if the incumbent feels safe about the next elections, they may miss the opportunity created by the pandemic state of emergency. This was the case in Serbia and Croatia during and after the pandemic. Andrej Plenković and his HDZ were confident that they would win the 2020 parliamentary elections. Aleksandar Vučić and his SNS were confident that they would win the 2020 and 2022 parliamentary elections and they did win them. (Vučić himself won the 2022 presidential elections with a landslide majority.) If, in contrast, they feel uncertain about the next elections' outcome, they may try to erode democratic institutions, thus autocratise the institutional design. As discussed in Section 4a, this was the case in Slovenia. Janez Janša and his Slovenian Democratic Party (SNS) was right to worry about electoral loss in the April 2022 parliamentary elections. They did lose them.

2.2 Case Selection

The key puzzle of this paper is the variation in lockdown-related democratic decline in Central and Southeast Europe, considering the ideological and regime (dis)similarity of the incumbents. The post-communist region of Central and Southeast Europe provides empirical cases that allow us not only to understand democratic decline during a state of emergency, but also to study 'near misses' – cases where democracy started to decline but then bounced back (Ginsburg and Huq 2018; Boese et al. 2021). In this regard, I follow King, Keohane and Verba's suggestion to select more than one dependent variable. An effective approach to comprehending the reasons behind the decline of democracy during a state of emergency involves carefully choosing observations based on specific explanatory factors, while also allowing for the possibility that the dependent variable, i.e. the level of democratic decline, could vary widely, ranging from minimal to severe (King et al. 1994: 107–109).

In the region's regimes which are considered democracies (under the V-dem index), we should expect all regimes to go one way, thus experiencing no changes in the status of democracy during the pandemic. Yet we see different developments in Slovenia and Croatia under the most similar systems' design (Figure 1). Likewise, in hybrid regimes like Serbia,[1] we would expect a deeper

Figure 1: Democratic Decline in Croatia, Slovenia and Srbia in 2010–2022 (V–dem)



1 Serbia is the region's only hybrid regime among many, meaning we could have also looked at Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro or North Macedonia, and would have arrived at same conclusions. Bieber's work on nationalism and covid-19 contains a similar research design (Bieber 2022).

democratic decline during the pandemic (per the pre-existing conditions for autocracy argument). And yet, we observe similar outcomes in Serbia and Croatia under the most different systems' design: neither the Croat nor the Serbian incumbent attempted to introduce permanent institutional changes during the lockdown. However, their response to the lockdown protest (in terms of resorting to violence) differs significantly. Serbia used violence to move the protestors off the street, while Croatia did not. However, as I explain in the next sub-section, such acts are not new in the repertoire of the Serbian incumbent, as we had already seen them during the first inauguration of President Vučić in 2017 (Damnjanović 2018). I suggest in the next subsection we focus only on novel acts that constitute a more permanent expansion if power.

2.3 Descriptive Inference – Where to look?

Since this is a small-n research, random selection cannot be used (King et al. 1994: 128). To avoid selection bias, I explain what will be omitted from the analysis. As previously mentioned, I will only consider political actions that result in a permanent expansion of powers. If the incumbent repeats some undemocratic or violent actions, the regime type will remain the same. However, if the incumbent acquires new executive powers during a state of emergency or diminishes the power of other institutions (such as those responsible for oversight, media, civil society organisations, etc.), and these changes persist *beyond* the state of emergency, we can speak of permanent changes. Such gradual but permanent changes have been a frequent practice of so-called Golem parties in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989, particularly in countries where the initial post-communist party system collapsed (Ágh 2015; Ágh 2019: 170–180).

The distinction between these two states corresponds roughly to the two non-democratic paths defined by Coppedge (2017: 3–5). The first path may involve a heightened level of repression, which may involve no additional concentration of power and no lasting changes. The V-dem Pandemic Backsliding Index (PANDEM), put together in March 2020, is another good example of an approach that largely considered this aspect of democratic decline (autocratisation episode). It measures six critical types of violations, restrictions and abusive enforcement, informing the readership about the level of repression (Edgell et al. 2020; Kolvani et al. 2020). The reports did not consider whether these actions belonged to the regime's previous repertoire, or are rather a new practice that is likely to remain after the pandemic is over and lockdown measures are lifted.

The second path to autocratisation involves the weakening of democratic institutions or strengthening of authoritarian institutions, primarily by way of (gradual) executive aggrandisement, or executive takeover, which aim at enabling the concentration of power and discretionary decision making of the executive whilst weakening control institutions (Bermeo 2016; Svolik 2019; Ágh

2019). To be non-short-term and permanent, such changes must remain in force when the pandemic's state of emergency is over. In contrast to the first path, these may involve neither heightened repression nor human rights violations. As outlined in Section 3a, during the 2020 lockdowns, Slovenian premier Janez Janša tried to expand its executive prerogatives without using overt repression. In contrast to Serbia (section 3b), where the regime type remained as it was in pre-pandemic times, the Janša cabinet continued with this practice in 2021 as the health crisis persisted and some lockdown measures were re-reinforced.

2.4 Preference Formation

As mentioned at the outset, the main independent variable is the incumbent's belief about the likelihood of taking the next elections. However, other variables, such as the preference of incumbents who are engaged in executive aggrandisement, are critical and used in the analysis. I submit that that the incumbent must have an autocratic preference to erode democracy but it does not immediately follow that such incumbents will do it whenever the opportunity appears.

I adopt Florian Bieber's definition under which 'the term "autocrats" describes prime ministers or presidents who rule informally democratic systems while displaying patterns of rule that either erode or bypass democratic institutions' (Bieber 2020: 7). Granted, every politician dreams about staying in office forever and they use their office's resources to increase their chances of winning the next elections. However, not every incumbent will take the opportunity to abuse office to prolong their stay. Some politicians will reject flouting the rules, concentrate power, hush up corruption scandals and will be prepared to acknowledge an electoral loss and yield office (Przeworski 2019: 19).

However, there may be incumbents who take their office as a kind of religious--like mission. As Przeworski explained, highly ideological incumbents such as those in Poland, Hungary, Venezuela or Turkey might believe that all other political groups are enemies that must be stopped by any means (Przeworski 2019). Typically, such leaders are more prepared than others to irregularly grab additional power. Such agents will take advantage of opportunities to solidify their chances when the opportunity is right. Usually, the latter engage in tweaking, corrupting, violating and changing rules to remain in office. When they feel they could be removed (by, say, losing the next elections), they change the rules in the middle of the game without the consent of the other players to reduce the likelihood of this happening. Let me call such agents incumbents with non-democratic or autocratic preferences.

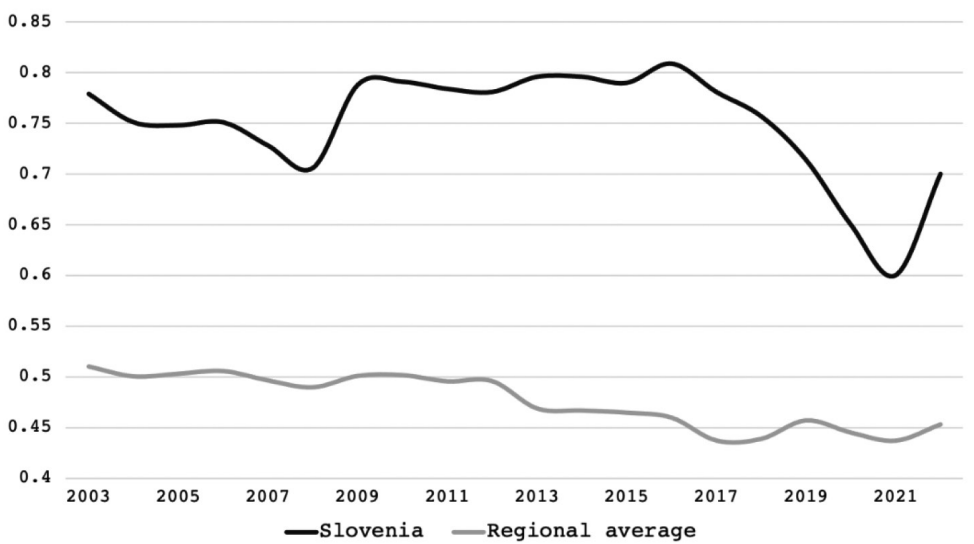
To ideologically define these agents, we can apply the qualifier 'illiberal' or 'populist', which has been commonly used since 2008 in Europe and the US to explain democratic backsliding. Nearly all declines of democracy that happened after 2006 in post-communist Europe were initiated by right-wing, illiberal or

populist cabinets. Ideology could play a significant role in the preference formation of such incumbents (Bustikova 2014; Ágh 2015; 2016; 2019; 2022; Rupnik; 2017; Bertelsmann 2018; Przeworski 2019; Bieber 2018; 2020; Kapidžić 2020; Kapidžić – Stojarová, 2021; Svolik et al 2023).

3. Post-Communist Central and Southeast Europe during the 2020 states of emergency

Recent democracy reports point to new authoritarian trends in post-communist Central and Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans under states of emergency induced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (BIEPAG 2020; Juzová 2020). I claim only two cases exemplify such trends: Serbia and Slovenia. Consider first the current state of affairs in the region. Figure 2 represents the democracy score for the eight post-communist Southeast European regimes[2] measured by the V-dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) between 2003 and 2022, and separately for Slovenia. We can observe that the average score for the region already dropped below 0.5 in 2013.[3] The LDI score for Slovenia has, in contrast, always been high and has never dropped below 0.7, until 2019 when the downturn was the sharpest, hitting 0.6.

Figure 2: V–dem LDI for Slovenia and Average for Southeastern Europe (2003–2022)



2 These are: Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, N. Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Slovenia.

3 The 0.5 score is the cut-off point for the regime to be categorised as a democracy under the V-dem regime classification system.

According to the lower cost for autocratisation thesis, the whole region would have used the opportunity to become more autocratic, although Slovenia would be the least likely to do so, which is contrary to what V-dem score suggest for 2020–2021. According to the pre-existing condition thesis, the regimes with LDI scores under 0.5 were more likely to use the opportunity for executive aggrandisement than those with scores above 0.5. Yet, we observe differences in the behaviour of these regimes, thus resisting these predictions. For example, the Serbian executive under Aleksandar Vučić used excessive force to handle political street protests in July 2020 but did nothing to expand its prerogatives (in terms of grabbing more power) during the lockdown. In contrast, Slovenian Premier Janša undertook no actions against anti-government cycling protests that started on 2 May 2020 in several Slovenian towns and was repeated every Friday, but did try to grab more power by interfering with the media. The Croatian cabinet under Plenković, as the third case being studied for this article, did nothing either in terms of violence, or in terms of expanding its prerogatives. In the next three subsections, I look more closely into each case.

3.1 Slovenia

Until 2019, Slovenia was a poster child of post-communist reforms and one of the most advanced post-communist new democracies. Rizman concludes that Slovenia has passed the threshold of democratisation and shown early signs of democratic consolidation (Rizman 2006).

Slovenia enjoyed a long period of political stability as one of the most successful post-communist transition countries (Fink-Hafner – Hafner-Fink 2009) due to the broad corporate consensus established in the country after the breakup of former Yugoslavia (Krašovec – Johannsen 2016; Krašovec – Lajh 2021). However, the control (oversight) institutions remained weak, politicised and underdeveloped (Bugarčić – Kuhelj 2015). The cracks in this consensus already appeared in 2004 with the election of the first cabinet of Janez Janša, who had already expressed a preference to abuse office but did not have a suitable opportunity to do so (Krašovec – Johannsen 2016).

Janša has been active in Slovenian politics since 1988 when Slovenia was still a part of former Yugoslavia. He was premier twice (2004–2008 and 2012–2013) and a minister several times. In 2013 he was convicted for corruption and sentenced to two years in jail and given a € 37,000 fine (Haček 2015). The constitutional court struck the sentence down in December 2014, and let Janša out (Krašovec and Lajh 2021). His connections to illiberal circles go as back as far as 2011 when journalist Anuška Delić exposed his party's ties to neo-Nazi groups. Janša's ideas to change the Slovenian political system by establishing the so-called 'second republic' (Janša 2014) have been known for quite some

time under the name 'Janšizem' (Fink-Hafner 2020). In developing these ideas, Janša has been getting closer to other post-communist autocrats.

An opportunity for Janša to implement his version of democracy for the third time opened up shortly before the pandemic on 27 January 2020, when Premier Marjan Šarec submitted his resignation. A new cabinet headed by Janez Janša was voted in on 3 March. Janša began his third term as premier with the immediate removal of the heads of the police and army, including the head of military intelligence (Lukšić 2020a)[4] According to some, such removals were done to stop ongoing investigations into media ownership (Zgaga 2020). Some members of Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) are the founders and initial owners of a TV network (Nova24TV) and a weekly newspaper (Demokracija), through which the party propagates the idea of the abolition of the state's public broadcaster (Radio televizija Slovenije). Janša believes that state television is biased against the SDS, spreads lies about him and employs too many overpaid people (Faktor 2020; Lovec 2021; Krašovec – Lajh 2021: 165–166).

Both media outlets are majority-owned by people who have close ties to the Hungarian incumbent party Fidesz (led by Viktor Orbán) and have invested over €1.5 million in their Slovenian media ownership. Since this kind of foreign investment is illegal in Slovenia, the ownership structure has been under investigation. Nevertheless, since the head of the police was replaced during the first lockdown, it is unclear how these investigations will end (Faktor 2020; Zgaga 2020). This fact has brought about fears of the 'Orbánization' of Slovenia (Vladisavljević 2020).

Another move that can be qualified as executive aggrandisement were changes the Janša cabinet made to the Public Broadcaster Program Council on 29 April 2020. The Council is a regulatory institution that issues and withdraws broadcasting licenses. The Janša cabinet installed seven new members in the council, thus ignoring a representative from the largest opposition party, as a continuation of the precedent established during the Cerar cabinet (2014–2018) when Janša's SDS did not have it representative as the largest oppositional party. The new majority subsequently removed the head of the Council in May 2020 (Lukšič 2020b, 40).

Such personnel changes in regulatory institutions have been part of the new face of hybrid regimes (Levitsky – Way 2020). Rather than scrapping controlling and regulative institutions, incumbents in such regimes allow their existence but pack them with yes-men, often young and professionally inexperienced people. This applies to media regulatory bodies and a whole array of other institutions charged with oversight – the courts, public prosecution, electoral commissions, budget office, national bank, human rights protector, agency for the fight against corruption, to name a few. Such institutions are converted into

4 Granted, this is done by his predecessors Cerar and Šarec as well as his successor Golob.

toothless agents with a merely decorative purpose. The change is gradual and, at first, may not undermine the democratic structure of the system. But, with time, these institutions do not perform their duties but rather imitate them. Recent literature on non-democratic regimes refers to this as isomorphic mimicry or authoritarian innovations (Andrews et al. 2017; Morgenbesser 2020; Pepinsky 2020). If such practices continue, they may gradually convert a democratic regime into a hybrid one.

The final and most effective blow to media freedom was dealt by an administrative institution that was supposed to fund the Slovenian Print Agency, a state-sponsored news agency founded in 1991 when Slovenia got independence (Novak – Lajh 2023). The 2020 decision to deny funding remained valid throughout most of 2021, thus adversely impacting the Agency's long-term operations. Its head stepped down and over 15 journalists left the job. The Agency was nearly brought to a financial collapse in November 2021, after which the government endorsed the funding, but only until the end of the year.

Similar strategies were applied to civil society activities. The Janša cabinet attempted to limit the protests and demonstrations organised by NGOs during the pandemic, impose administrative obstacles on their activities, tarnish their public image through media under the control of his cabinet and suspend the financing of NGOs from the state budget (Novak – Lajh 2023).

The outcome of the April 2022 Slovenian parliamentary elections confirms the hypothesis developed in Section 2a. Janša was not certain he would win the next elections, which is why he attempted to grab more power in an informal manner. Although his Slovenian Democratic Party won a significant share of the electorate (nearly 24 percent), it did not have enough coalition partners, and thus had to vacate the office and go into opposition.

3.2 Serbia

After some 15 years of democratic development (2000–2014), Serbia's path to democracy was halted in 2014, and the country moved back to a hybrid regime where it was during the 1990s (Vladisavljević 2019; Pavlović 2020). This is how it entered the 2020 pandemic. Under the Pandem Index, Serbia was categorised as one of the countries where major violations of democratic practice were noted, together with Hungary, El Salvador, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Uganda (Edgell et al. 2020). Serbia is a country that, during the 2020 lockdown, saw no regime changes during the state of emergency (second path) but did see a rapid rise in violence (first path).

A state of emergency was imposed on 15 March 2020. The Assembly, which is the only legitimate institution to pass such a measure, was deliberately bypassed. Instead, the Assembly was declared as being unable to meet, while the decision was co-signed by President Vučić, Premier Brnabić and Assembly

Chair Gojković. (The Assembly met only on April 28) (Orlović 2020). The most critical event involving executive aggrandisement was the 1 April government decree under which no institution was supposed to print information about the pandemic without the explicit approval of the government. Any media outlet that would print such information was made liable to criminal charges. One journalist was detained for writing about the situation in a Novi Sad hospital but released the next day after the decree was withdrawn. Even the judiciary behaved in a non-constitutional manner. During the state of emergency, some trials were carried out via Skype, and one person was fined up to € 1,300 for not abiding by the self-isolation rules and 'not listening to the advice of the President not to do it', following the president's words about the pandemic on TV days earlier (Orlović 2020).

Granted, such behaviour of an incumbent points to democratic erosion—legislative side-lining, human right violations, media harassment and abusive/selective enforcement of rules. The rise of violence (the first path to autocratisation) was vivid on 7–8 July when President Vučić declared the re-imposition of a three-day curfew in response to a new wave of infections. This enraged a part of the population that came together before the Assembly the same night to protest against the curfew. The police responded by brutally dispersing the protestors. The police reaction was reminiscent of the 1990s when the police, controlled by then-President Slobodan Milošević, used water cannons, batons and tear gas to move people off the streets. However, we saw this practice under Vučić's incumbency in 2017. During his inauguration, citizens gathered before the Assembly to protest. Although the protestors were peaceful, the police used force to drag them off the street. The same act appeared in December 2021, when the protestors blocked the highway to protest against proposed new expropriation legislation. Although in all three cases the demonstrations were not violent, the police used (sometimes brutal) force to remove the protestors. Again, this practice has been a usual repertoire of the Serbian regime over which its grade has been low since 2017 when it occurred for the first time under Vučić.

Other practices have also represented nothing new for Serbia. Tzifakis claims Aleksandar Vučić 'put the Serbian Assembly under quarantine' during the 2020 pandemic (Tzifakis 2020). However, the Serbian Assembly was transformed into a rubber-stamp institution back in 2014. Tighter control of broadcasting brought about a decline in media freedom the same year. When the state of emergency was lifted on 6 May, the regime's nature did not change. It remained the hybrid regime similar to what it was before 15 March 2020.

Vučić simply had no reason to resort to grabbing new or expanding existing executive powers. His popularity has been rising and continued to rise amidst the pandemic. In the April 2016 parliamentary elections, his electoral list won 1.85 million votes. In the June 2020 elections (one and a half months after

the emergency was lifted), his list won 1.95 million votes.[5] In the April 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections, Aleksandar Vučić won 2.2 million votes, and the electoral coalition he led garnered 1.63 million votes, which was way ahead of the United coalition, which received 0.52 million votes. In other words, Vučić had already achieved his preferred level of autocratisation in previous years, felt secure about the next elections and did not need to concentrate power further.

3.3 Croatia

Croatia is an example of a weakly consolidated democracy that has experienced partial democratic decline since 2013 (Čepo 2020: 143; Petak 2021). However, Croatia also confirms that an opportunity for autocratisation will be passed by if the incumbent does not hold autocratic preferences. Croatia's response to the pandemic was a set of measures that were restrictive but not repressive and demonstrated full respect towards media freedom (Zakošek 2020a). In other words, we could observe neither of the noted paths to autocratisation primarily because the incumbent did not appear to hold autocratic preferences.

Consider first this presumed absence of autocratic preferences. Premier Andrej Plenković was brought to power after an attempt at executive aggrandisement under the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ)-led cabinet in 2015–2016. The then-cabinet was formally headed by the technocrat Tihomir Orešković (no party affiliation) but was under the heavy influence of the HDZ and its head Tomislav Karamarko, who was also vice-premier. The HDZ attempted to push forward several revisionist and right-wing policies and decreased media freedom by not reacting to an assault by right-wing groups against Mirjana Rakić, then-head of the Broadcasting Agency, over the broadcast license of Z1 (Čepo 2020). (Z1 is a local TV network that broadcasts shows involving right-wing hate speech – precisely why the Agency stripped it of its license.) After Rakić stepped down, the HDZ-led Ministry of Culture started installing loyalists in it. After this move, the Orešković cabinet, pushed by Karamarko, removed the general manager of the Croatian state TV network and made the management (over which it has official influence) employ around 70 people loyal to the HDZ (Mikleušević Pavić et al. 2020; Petak 2021).

Further confirmation of the absence of an autocratisation preference was confirmed by Plenković's handling of corruption. A corruption scandal broke out in mid-2016 involving the former wife of Tomislav Karamarko. To protect her, Kara-

5 While it is true that the increase in electoral popularity can be partly attributed to the significant opposition parties boycotting the 2020 elections, it is worth noting that the opposition had already announced their boycott in mid-2019 and would have done so even if there was no pandemic. Furthermore, even if the entire opposition had participated in the elections, Vučić would still have won, as demonstrated by the 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections in which the opposition participated.

marko wanted to hush up the scandal. However, the party Most, HDZ's coalition partner, was not prepared to approve this move and effectively brought down the Orešković cabinet. (Officially, the cabinet was brought down by HDZ, but this was because Most refused to support Karamarko.) When a similar corruption scandal broke out during the lockdown (29 May 2020), Plenković handled it differently from Karamarko. This affair involved Josipa Rimac, a high-level HDZ and state official under Karamarko and Plenković's leadership, alongside several other mid-ranking HDZ officials. Rather than hushing it up, Plenković immediately kicked Rimac out of the party, potentially signalling his lack of autocratic preferences.

This, somewhat longer, analysis of pre-pandemic events in Croatia, emphasises the importance of autocratic preference for democratic erosion. Tomislav Karamarko wanted but failed to achieve what Orbán and Kaczyński achieved in Hungary and Poland, respectively, prior to the pandemic (Pecnik 2021). In contrast, Plenković did not use the opportunity created by the 2020 pandemic because he was a different kind of politician. He governed Croatia for the entirety of the first wave of the pandemic. The biggest issue during the crisis emerged at the start of the pandemic when the cabinet decided to curtail citizens' freedoms and movement (but did not declare a state of emergency). According to articles 16–17 of the Croatian Constitution, the executive can do this only with a 2/3 supermajority, meaning the executive must work with the opposition. Although the pandemic would justify a state of emergency, nobody wanted to act on these articles. Instead, Premier Plenković wanted to activate another mechanism (the so-called legislative delegation under Article 88) to allow his cabinet to make parliamentary decisions for one year. This has been done in the past, but after an initial meeting with opposition leaders, Plenković dropped this idea. It turned out that it was more straightforward to handle the pandemic under regular procedures.

The Plenković cabinet drafted a bill that would allow it to track the electronic devices of citizens in self-isolation, but this was met with outrage from the opposition, civil society and the media, after which the cabinet forwarded this bill into the regular procedure of the Sabor (the Croatian Parliament). However, the Sabor never considered the bill.

As in all of the countries in the Balkans, party patronage thrives in Croatia. The cost of this came to a head when 18 residents of a care home in Split died from COVID-19 within a few days of each other. This was the highest death toll in a single institution and was, according to many, a consequence of the professional incompetence of the care home's head, Ivan Škaričić, a member of HDZ. Škaričić was mayor of Omiš, a municipality near Split. When HDZ lost local elections in Omiš in 2013, Škaričić was appointed to head the care home simply because he had nowhere else to go. Moreover, he had no professional qualifications relevant to the running of such an institution (Zakošek 2020b).

Granted, this is an example of the party patronage that has been troubling Croatia's democracy for decades (Šimić-Banović 2019), but this example took place long before the lockdown.

Similar examples of rent-seeking and clientelism are the Agrokor affair or the Karamarko affair in 2018 (Petak 2021). Neither of these affairs resulted in establishing legal consequences for the two main agents – Ivica Todorić and Tomislav Karamarko. However, these features of the Croatian political system were known before the 2020 pandemic and did not change during the period under consideration (2020–2021).

As we can see, before and during the pandemic, some incumbents simply did not hold a desire for autocracy, which is why nothing happened when an opportunity emerged. Croatia's most observable democratic erosions took place in 2013 and 2015 when the ruling HDZ and the cabinet were effectively under the leadership of Tomislav Karamarko. With the arrival of Plenković, Croatia re-embraced its former role as the 'good European pupil' (Čepo 2020). Plenković has been a member of HDZ since 2011 and a civil servant in the Croat Ministry of Foreign Affairs who spent the few years prior to becoming prime minister as a Croat representative in the European Parliament. His ambition to obtain a new position in the European bureaucracy after his premiership made him most likely to embrace democratic rather than autocratic options. Therefore, he decided not to act when the opportunity for the expansion of executive powers opened up.

4. Conclusions

We can draw several conclusions for both the theory of democratic decline during a state of emergency and the ongoing debate about democratic decline in Central and Eastern Europe. Specifically, we can examine how the general theory of democratic decline can benefit from the Southeast European experience by considering two types of state of emergency: endogenous and exogenous. The first type is a kind of autogolpe, which is an auto-coup d'état (Przeworski et al. 2000: 21) declared by the incumbent to expand their powers more permanently.

The 2020 pandemic has been an exogenous state of emergency. My argument, thus, rejects the view that state of emergency in itself contributes to democratic erosion because the cost of autocratisation go down. In fact, I show that the democratic development during the 2020 pandemic has been largely a path-dependant continuation of the pre-pandemic trends. The argument here is that the process of democratic decline during the Covid pandemic has been broadly a part of a broader process of the democratic backsliding that has started in the early 2010s (Ágh 2019). Such a thesis has already been discussed and confirmed in the cases of Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia (Guasti 2020, 2021; Guasti – Bustikova 2023). The Hungarian and Polish incumbents, who

started the process of executive aggrandisement prior to the 2020 pandemic, continued with this process during the state of emergency. The events in the Czech Republic and Slovakia could be interpretated as 'swerving' rather than democratic decline (Guasti 2021).

The thesis about pre-existing conditions also does not apply to the countries under consideration here. The likelihood of losing the next elections, given the autocratic preference, matters more than the regime type. If the accomplished level of executive aggrandisement ensures an easy win in the next elections, autocratic incumbents may shy away from further aggrandisement. This was the case with Serbia during the pandemic. We did see an aggressive use of violence during a protest against the pandemic-related measures in July 2020. However, Aleksandar Vučić did not attempt to change the system to accumulate more power. Even if the regime is hybrid (non-democratic) and the incumbents hold an autocratic preference, they may not use every opportunity to grab more power.

In contrast, even if the regime is democratic, but the autocratic (illiberal) incumbent is not certain about their future in office, they may attempt to assume more power in a piecemeal manner, especially if autocratic preferences were developed in the pre-pandemic times. This was the case in Slovenia in 2020–2021. As argued in Section 4a, the outcome of the Slovenian 2022 parliamentary elections confirmed this hypothesis.

The example of Croatia emphasises the role of autocratic preference. Under the Karamarko leadership (2015–2016), the incumbent HDZ was prepared to achieve some sort of executive aggrandisement and move toward illiberal public policies, as were seen in North Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia and Poland during the 2010s. Karamarko attempted to abuse office even though the opportunity was narrow (or next to non-existent) simply because he held an autocratic preference. His attempt collapsed in 2016 precisely because the opportunity was not right (Pavlović 2019). In contrast, the HDZ under Plenković attempted no such aggrandisements, even during a state of emergency and several lockdowns that his cabinet imposed in 2020–2021.

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