

# IDEOLOGY, CLEAVAGES, AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN 2009 AND 2013 REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN SLOVAKIA

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## ABSTRACT

When explaining electoral behaviour, cleavage theory with its practical consequences constitutes a traditional question in established Western democracies, but is just emerging in post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The general objective of this study is to identify the spatial patterns of election results and inter-electoral shifts in support of politico-ideological blocs (measured by distribution of mandates, gained by parties at 2009 and 2013 regional elections) at the level of self-governing regions of Slovakia, and evaluate the impact of socio-political cleavages that these territorial discrepancies within the country are caused by. Elections for regional self-government held in Slovakia in 2013 are properly evaluated, when a total of 408 regional MPs were delegated to parliaments of eight NUTS3 level regions. Spatial patterns of numbers and inter-electoral changes of the mandates gained by individual political blocs representing the right wing, statist stream, parties of ethnic orientation, so-called '*Slovak coalition*' and independent candidates are displayed not only at the regional scale, but also at the hierarchically lower level of election districts (with 90 territorial units). For regional elections, socio-economic and ethnic cleavages are considered the most important determinants of spatial differentiation related to the voting behaviour of the electorate, and then distribution of power in regional politics, but the phenomenon of independent candidates has the potential to compete with their explanatory value increasingly.

**Keywords:** region, regional self-government, politico-ideological bloc, election outcome, socio-political cleavage

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## 1. Introduction

The persistent lack of interest in the use of suffrage is a society-wide phenomenon that blurs the lines between the voting behaviour of Western countries and the post-socialist part of Europe, having a relatively brief experience with democratic election for their political representatives. Electoral lethargy can be understood as a manifestation of the natural reluctance of some citizens in the political situation of the country, region, city, town or commune where they live in, but this can also be the result of disappointment in tenure governed by more consecutive garnitures of different politico-ideological orientation. To many of them, a protest voting is not a solution or sufficient motivation to cast their vote on Election Day, which is also related to the slim chance of success for lesser-known candidates with a discreet election campaign of low budget. In the case of elections for regional and local self-government, low public awareness of powers delegated into the appropriate region, city, town or village is also very often the cause of a low turnout. In the former Eastern Bloc countries, this is associated with a very short experience of the electorate with the presence of self-government in the public space, and then the option to elect representatives having the powers just at the finer regional or local level.

The above mentioned facts are the reason that interest in elections at other than the general level is not sufficient.

Historical heritage of the former regime prior to 1989 caused people of post-socialist countries to not act in the regional and transnational context yet. Just these types of elections are often perceived by them as either a vote of the second order or referendum on socio-economic themes rigidly present at the national level, ignoring the peculiarities of regional and European issues, which should be their main topic naturally.

The aim of this contribution is not to verify the validity of the second-order election concept, however. We are interested in current regional and intra-regional patterns related to politico-ideological and cleavage concepts of electoral behaviour, what their geographical and socio-political context is and what level of volatility is shaped over time. We will map the election results (measured by seats won) of different value and ideological blocs of parties whose electorate is either similar each other or very distinct from inherent political rivals representing the opinion counterbalance as a consequence of differences in voting behaviour that reflects dominant socio-political contradictions as left-right and ethnic. However, a central research question of the present contribution is what kind of socio-political cleavages affect the final election results at regional level (traced via distribution of mandates) and to what extent they do so (percentage of seats for political-ideological blocks aligned along the same kind of contradiction). This stems from the analysis of both pre-election political agreements between the parties

and the electoral success of particular politico-ideological alternatives actually affecting the regional dimension of the politics. Use the concept of dividing lines would require a more systematic assessment of the factors that influenced the distribution of seats in regional elections, mainly in terms of socio-economic stratification of territorial units under study. In such a case a deeper analysis would be required, reflecting the relationship between electoral preferences and socio-economic characteristics of the territory, for example through the use of tools of spatial econometrics (e.g. Durbin model of spatial regression). This was not ambition of this contribution. It focuses more on the relationship between political agreement (value-ideological profile, partisan, coalition affiliation of candidates) and their successfulness (representation) in particular regional parliaments.

## 2. Theoretical background

The assumption that citizens' voting behaviour is mainly due to their position within the social structure is a major element of political-sociological approach examining elections, usually associated with Berelson and Lazarsfeld's Columbia School. In the case of European literature, the original study *'Party Systems and Voter Alignments'* by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) is generally regarded as the theoretical framework for the politico-sociological standpoint to research this issue. Under this approach, the structure of social cleavage is reflected by the divergence in value orientation. The central position of the party identification concept as the main determinant of voters' political attitudes, his perceptions and political behaviour constitutes an essential element for the political-psychological school of Michigan, while the idea of an ideological continuum, i.e. left-right dimension in the meaning of the concept aimed at conservation of values and information for voters and political parties, is viewed as a cornerstone of the economic theory of democracy established by Downs (1957). Assessment of political parties and candidates in relation to political issues and government performance is a key component for any explanatory model presuming the behaviour of voters based on their own interest (Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996).

As mentioned earlier, the political and sociological approach taken in Europe (the idea related to electoral choice on the basis of a limited number of social cleavages) is based on the well-known Lipset and Rokkan's claim that the party systems of the sixties of the 20th century (with few, but all the more significant exceptions) reflect the social structure of the twenties (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). They argue that the party systems originated in Western Europe at the time when universal suffrage was established reflect four historical cleavages as follows: between centre and periphery, church and state, agriculture and industry, and employers and workers, while these party systems almost without exception have

withstood all the turbulent political events experienced in the first half of the last century. Of these four dividing lines just social class (employers and workers) and religion (church and state) have become the most important and durable at the same time in most Western countries.

In the past, scholars interested in the voting behaviour of the electorate paid attention to its regional context sporadically. However, analyses focused on a wide scale of the individual aspects of either crucial political parties or smaller, autonomist ones, as well as the electoral behaviour of citizens at elections for self-governing regions, thanks to a multidisciplinary study approach explicitly applied to socio-political phenomenon of regional election have gradually found their place (Jeffery and Hough 2003; Pallarés and Keating 2003; Wyn Jones and Scully 2006). The volatility of electoral support for political parties at regional elections on one hand or its stability on the other can be seen as one of the traditional topics being studied by academics. In this context, there has been an attempt to answer the question concerning the importance of internal factors such as the organizational structure of the party, its election program or the local and regional political climate (Hopkin 2003; van Biezen and Hopkin 2006; Hopkin and Bradbury 2006; Roller and van Houten 2003; Fabre et al. 2005). In this respect, expertise of the party is important as well, which determines its ability to solve upcoming problems (Fiorina 1981; Petrocik 1996). Moreover, a significant part of the electorate is interested in the personality of party leader and his preconditions for holding high public office (Clark et al. 2009).

In general, the importance of elections at the regional level has been growing not only in established countries of the Western type, but also within territory beyond the former Iron Curtain, the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Schakel 2013). As Schakel (2011) concludes, in this geopolitical space, a number of countries gained experience with elections at this spatial level during the 1990s already, just after the fall of communism (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Poland or Hungary), about a decade later in the Czech Republic and Slovakia – the countries which for nearly seven decades constituted a common state (with the exception of the short period during World War II).

However, interest from the academic community in the regional elections of Central and Eastern European countries has been minimal. Political science and electoral geography studies have been almost exclusively concentrated on various aspects of general elections, which have traditionally enjoyed the greatest focus of the citizens as well. These issues have been discussed systematically by Tucker (2002), who found out that only about one-tenth of academic works devoted to the election of a particular type had closer analysed regional or local elections. This lethargy of both academia and the public can be explained that, in terms of area, most post-socialist countries belong

to territorially smaller ones, often without further internal division of the territory considering the delegation of administrative functions and decision-making powers to the territorial units of a lower hierarchical level (Hooghe et al. 2010). Several authors, such as Soós and Kálmán (2002), Pop (2002), and Buček (2002), agree that turnout for this type of election moves below 50%, in some cases even at a level of a third or quarter of eligible voters (e.g. Slovakia) can be considered the main evidence of generally little interest in regional elections. The low level of party competition at the regional election constitutes another reason for the political apathy, since formation of electoral coalitions grouping several parties usually led by one dominant party is very common there (Ivanišević et al. 2001). In some cases, parties at the regional level are even able to form a coalition with such political rivals, which are located on the opposite side of the value and ideological spectrum (Buček 2002). Reif and Schmitt (1980) found that the party result at elections to the European Parliament does not take into account the relevance of European issues and degree of their support by the electorate of member states properly, but they are primarily a reflection on national political issues and debates present on the domestic political scene. Reif (1985) concluded identical statements on the occasion of other directly run elections to the European Parliament five years later. Similar conclusions on the voting behaviour of the electorate in countries of the Anglo-Saxon world (Canada, United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, etc.) can be pronounced also for regional elections, when national policy issues play a crucial role again. The degree of general topics relevance may differ from place to place significantly (Jeffery and Hough 2006).

For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Schakel (2011) comes to the conclusion that the traditional concept of a second-order election is affected by the quality of the party system present in this area, mainly by the number of parties seeking support of the electorate, which is several times higher than in countries with a system of few parties. Individual political orientation is not created without reference to the environment where the individual lives (Kostecký 2003, 2012; Bernard and Kostecký 2014). Therefore, prediction of the regional election results is still quite difficult even if we comprehend the phenomenon of second-order election, especially in the former Eastern bloc countries with a lack of experience with the democratic election of representatives to public office. In general, the ruling parties are less successful at regional elections, while opposition or regional ones usually gain more votes compared to general ballots. These findings were also confirmed by Voženílek et al. (2010), who decided to evaluate the electoral results of the main political parties acting on the Czech political scene in the context of peculiarities concerning elections for regional self-government held in the communities of Olomouc region during the first decade of the new millennium. However, the party's likelihood to succeed at

elections for regional self-government must be seen in a more complex way respecting the election commitment of voters, the presence of (relatively wide) electoral coalitions, the state of the national (regional) economy, etc. The effect of the general election cycle can contribute to the final form of the election mosaic as well.

Mesežnikov et al. (2006) provide a detailed analytical interpretation of the results concerning elections for regional self-government – both parliaments of 'higher territorial units' and the chairmen of self-governing regions. The authors offer an analytical perspective on the election results in the context of the overall political impact of fundamental changes made under the decentralization of public administration. They examine the regional aspect of public administration reform, experience of local government operation in the very first term, public opinions on regional self-government, activities of political parties and their mutual electoral competition as well as the actual election results.

All sorts of aspects concerning regional politics and public administration, elections to the regional self-government in relation to the representation of the Hungarian minority included are described by Kling (2008). The electoral behaviour of the population in southern Slovakia is largely influenced by its ethnic composition. In this part of the country it is essentially being elected according to the ethnic principle – a territory with a significant representation of the Hungarian minority overwhelmingly supports political parties developed under the ethnic contradiction, which regularly gain electoral support of ten percent at the national elections. In general, the local level is more sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities than the central one is (Buček 2001).

The phenomenon of 'ethnic mobilization', i.e. activation of 'non-Hungarian' candidate voters is more pronounced by Dostál (2002) and Krivý (2002). Based on electoral participation at ballots, Krivý (2002) formulated a hypothesis on the dominant influence of the 'Hungarian factor' affecting polls and their outcomes. Investigating the relationship between the election results of the 'right-wing bloc', which the SMK (Party of Hungarian Coalition) was a coherent part of, and the level of voter participation in both all municipalities and municipalities with a territorial share of Hungarian nationality under five percent, he figured out that municipalities with a higher turnout support mostly the right-wing bloc mainly due to the SMK and its electorate.

In addition to above-mentioned ethnic cleavage of the electorate, Madleňák (2012) speaks of five other socio-political conflicts simultaneously operating, which have formed the electoral behaviour of voters in the history of independent Slovakia and whose validity can be considerably different when regarding their temporal and spatial context – centre vs. periphery, *mečiarism vs. antimečiarism*, conservative-liberal cleavage, socio-economic (left-right) cleavage, urban-rural cleavages and ethnic cleavage.

Stressing the role of a geographical approach in solving a wide variety of issues related to the phenomenon of elections, their organizations, political parties, or the behaviour of voters at the ballots has found a firm place also in several works of Czech, Polish and Slovak authors (Blažek and Kostecký 1991; Jehlička and Sýkora 1991; Jehlička, Kostecký and Sýkora 1993; Kostecký 1993, 2000 and 2002; Zarycki 2000; Zarycki and Nowak 2000; Čmejrek 2008; Kostecký and Krivý 2015; Zyrický 2015; Mikuš et al. 2016) during the last three decades.

### 3. Methodological issues

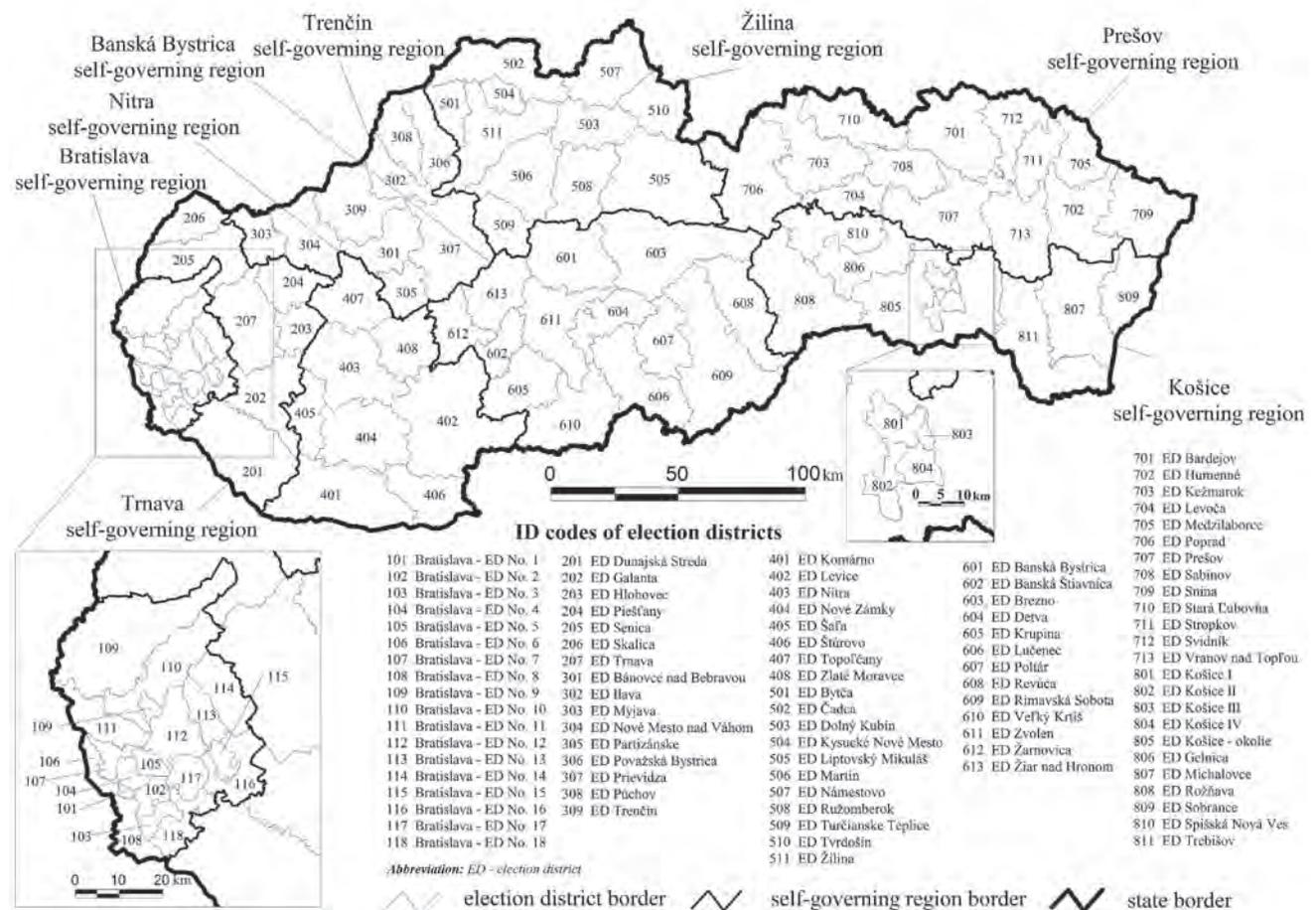
By present study, we want to take a closer look at the representation (potential to enforce certain perception of politics, based on election results, mandates won) of individual value-ideological blocs in the political decision-making during the term of regional self-government – i.e. through the analysis of the election results we want to catch potential dividing lines in political decision-making process that could emerge during tenure (based on division of power via candidates elected), and not directly in the voting behaviour of electorate prior election.

Electing both deputies and chairman (president) of the self-governing region (regional parliament), one-round

elections of the deputies and two-round elections of the president are defined by the law. The second round of presidential election is held when no candidate gains more than 50 per cent of all votes cast in the first round. The second round is featured by two most successful candidates of the first round. The mandate is secured by the candidate who gains most valid votes in the second round. Tenure of both chairman and regional deputies is four years long. The first elections to regional parliaments took place in Slovakia in 2001, after the setting up the regional self-government by the Slovak legislation.

In total, there are 408 deputies of eight regional self-governments elected in Slovakia occupying the office for four-year period of time, most in Prešov (62) and least in Trnava region (40), which is determined by their population size. At regional elections, the territory of the Slovak Republic is divided into election districts. In the case of regional chairman election, the country consists of eight election districts, one for each self-governing region. For the members of regional parliament elections, the territory of Slovakia is divided into 90 electoral districts (see Fig. 1), oscillating from 18 (Bratislava region) to seven (in the case of Trnava region) depending on individual region.

The main analytical goal of the presented paper is to evaluate the territorial differentiation of election results



**Fig. 1** Territorial composition of self-governing regions and election districts at regional elections in Slovakia.

Data source: Act No 180/2014 Coll. on Conditions of the Exercise of Voting Rights and on amendments to certain laws, author's processing.

concerning the ballots to the regional self-government on the basis of the seats won by political blocs representing the opinion alternatives in the struggle for political power, not only at national but also regional level. This enables the definition of both the geographical distribution

of political power within the regional parliament on the basis of left-right or ethnic contradictions (socio-political cleavages), and the spatial differentiation in the success of independent candidates, not only in the Slovak Republic as a whole, but also the partial regions and their

**Tab. 1** Basic outcomes of 2009 and 2013 regional elections in self-governing regions of Slovakia.

Self-governing region					Absolute numbers					Relative numbers				
	D	T	OCH	OP	R	ET	EM	SC	I	R	ET	EM	SC	I
<b>2009</b>														
Bratislava	44	19.46	R	R	28	14	1	0	1	63.64	31.82	2.27	0.00	2.27
Trnava	40	20.46	I	F	11	11	12	0	6	27.50	27.50	30.00	0.00	15.00
Trenčín	45	20.59	ET	ET	8	27	0	0	10	17.78	60.00	0.00	0.00	22.22
Nitra	54	21.81	SC	SC	0	0	13	38	3	0.00	0.00	24.07	70.37	5.56
Žilina	57	23.68	ET	F	18	28	0	0	11	32.46	48.25	0.00	0.00	19.30
Banská Bystrica	49	27.06	ET	ET	7	30	7	0	5	14.29	61.22	14.29	0.00	10.20
Prešov	62	26.31	ET	F	27	28	1	0	6	43.55	45.16	1.61	0.00	9.68
Košice	57	22.93	ET + EM	ET	10	30	4	0	13	17.54	52.63	7.02	0.00	22.81
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>22.90</b>	–	<b>F</b>	<b>109</b>	168	38	38	55	26.72	41.18	9.31	9.31	13.48
<b>2013</b>														
Bratislava	44	21.65	R + EM	R + EM	36	2	0	0	6	81.82	4.55	0.00	0.00	13.64
Trnava	40	17.46	I	F	7	12	15	0	6	17.50	30.00	37.50	0.00	15.00
Trenčín	45	17.37	ET	ET	9	25	0	0	11	20.00	55.56	0.00	0.00	24.44
Nitra	54	17.90	ET	SC	3	1	14	32	4	5.56	1.85	25.93	59.26	7.41
Žilina	57	21.57	ET	F	17	24	0	0	16	29.82	42.11	0.00	0.00	28.07
Banská Bystrica	49	24.59	UN	SC	3	3	5	25	13	6.12	6.12	10.20	51.02	26.53
Prešov	62	22.13	ET	ET	20	36	0	0	6	32.26	58.06	0.00	0.00	9.68
Košice	57	17.77	ET + EM	F	16	26	4	0	11	28.07	45.61	7.02	0.00	19.30
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>20.11</b>	–	<b>F</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>57</b>	73	27.21	31.62	9.31	13.97	17.89
<b>Difference 2013–2009</b>														
Self-governing region					Absolute numbers					Relative numbers				
	T	SOCH	SOP		R	ET	EM	SC	I	R	ET	EM	SC	I
Bratislava	2.19	R > R+EM	no		8	–12	–1	0	5	18.18	–27.27	–2.27	0.00	11.36
Trnava	–3.00	no	no		–4	1	3	0	0	–10.00	2.50	7.50	0.00	0.00
Trenčín	–3.20	no	no		1	–2	0	0	1	2.22	–4.44	0.00	0.00	2.22
Nitra	–3.90	SC > ET	no		3	1	1	–6	1	5.56	1.85	1.85	–11.11	1.85
Žilina	–2.10	no	no		–1	–4	0	0	5	–2.63	–6.14	0.00	0.00	8.77
Banská Bystrica	–2.50	ET > UN	ET > SC		–4	–27	–2	25	8	–8.16	–55.10	–4.08	51.02	16.33
Prešov	–4.20	no	F > ET		–7	8	–1	0	0	–11.29	12.90	–1.61	0.00	0.00
Košice	–5.20	no	ET > F		6	–4	0	0	–2	10.53	–7.02	0.00	0.00	–3.51
Slovak Republic	–2.79	–	no		2	–39	0	19	18	0.49	–9.56	0.00	4.66	4.41

Abbreviations: D – number of deputies, T – turnout, OCH – political orientation of regional chairman, OP – political orientation of regional parliament, R – right-wing parties, ET – etatis parties, EM – ethnic minority parties, SC – Slovak coalition, I – independent, F – fragmented, UN – ultranationalist, SOCH – political orientation shift of regional chairman, SOP – political orientation shift of regional parliament.

Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.

respective election districts. For this purpose, we notice the results of the first leg of elections particularly, which are crucial towards the occupation of seats in representative bodies of individual self-governing regions. However, we will not only take into account the results of recent elections to the regional self-government (2013) and their spatial peculiarities, but also consider the territorial shifts in support of individual political blocs at regional level comparing election results between 2009 and 2013. We will identify the degree of either stability or volatility concerning the politico-ideological orientation of the given self-governing region not only as a whole but also its partial territories. In practical terms, we will draw attention to the election score gained by candidates of right-wing parties, leftist and national-conservative parties, the political representatives of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia, the so called '*Slovak coalition*', as well as independent candidates, not just for elections held in 2013, but in the context of evaluating their inter-electoral gains and losses in the proportion of votes cast in the last two ballots. In achieving this objective, we will deal with the value of both percentage share and its inter-electoral difference expressed by percentage point change (hereinafter referred to as '*p.p.*'). We will also assess the degree of regional parliament fragmentation in terms of occupancy of seats by the above mentioned blocs of political parties (see Table 1).

Elections to regional self-government as one of the practical consequences emerging from the process concerning the decentralization of public administration in Slovakia have been taking place since 2001, in a four-year periodicity. As a part of our research, we will concentrate on the last two polls, in which twenty-two (2009) and twenty (2013) parties participated. Although the main goal of this paper is to evaluate the inter-electoral spatial and temporal shifts in voter support gained by political blocs (and thus not primarily by the single parties), in this context it is also necessary to outline the mosaic of parties that constitute them from a politico-ideological point of view. For the 2009 election, we grouped the parties as follows:

- **right-wing parties** (of both conservative and liberal orientation) – Democratic Party (DS), Conservative Democrats of Slovakia (KDS), Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), LIGA – Civil Liberal Party (LIGA), Civic Conservative Party (OKS), Civil Candidates (OK), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), Free Forum (SF), Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS), Green Party (SZ) and the Green Party of Slovakia (SZS) – a total of 11 political parties;
- **etatist parties** (of both leftist and national-conservative orientation) – Movement for Democracy (HZD), People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LS-HZDS), New Democracy (ND), Smer – Social Democracy (Smer-SD), Civil Solidarity Party (SOS), Dawn (ÚSVIT) and the Slovak National Party (SNS) – a total of 7 political parties;

- **parties of ethnic minorities** – Bridge-Bridge (Most-Hid), Hungarian Coalition Party – Magyar Koalíció Pártja (SMK-MKP) and the Party of the Roma Coalition (SRK) – 3 parties in total;
- **so-called 'Slovak coalition'** (standing for the seats in Nitra region only) – Smer-SD, SDKÚ-DS, LS-HZDS and KDH.
- **independent candidates.**

The next elections for regional self-government held in 2013 were attended by 20 political parties we grouped as follows:

- **right-wing parties** (of both conservative and liberal orientation) – Democratic Union (DÚ), KDS, KDH, Independent Forum (NF), New Majority (NOVA), OKS, SaS, SDKÚ-DS, SZ and the Change from the Bottom (ZZ) – a total of 10 political parties;
- **etatist parties** (of both leftist and national-conservative orientation) – HZD, LS-HZDS, Smer-SD, ÚSVIT, People's Party – Our Slovakia (LS-NS), Nation and Justice – our party (NaS-ns) and SNS – a total of 7 political parties;
- **parties of ethnic minorities** – Most-Hid and the Party of the Hungarian community – Magyar Közösség Pártja (SMK-MKP) – 2 parties altogether.
- **so-called 'Slovak coalition'** (standing for the seats in the regions of Nitra and Banská Bystrica only) – Smer-SD and KDH;
- **independent candidates.**

Considering political and ideological values, each electoral coalition clearly tended to protect either pro-reform ideas, etatist values, minority rights, nationalism (so-called Slovak Coalition), or candidates were agents of independent politics. Mandates gained by candidates coming from the same politico-ideological block were summed up within the given electoral district as well as entire region and then were converted into the relative number of seats.

Combining leftist and national-conservative parties into a single block, we wanted to emphasize the uniqueness of Slovak political scene: willingness of these two ideologies to cooperate not only regional but also national level. As an evidence the ruling coalition (state government) 2006–2010, when, despite strong criticism from Brussels, leftist Smer-SD formed a government with the LS-HZDS and the nationalist SNS (in government with Smer-SD also today). Cleavage of Slovak party system into the centre-right politics represented by pro-reform, quite liberal oriented parties on the one hand, and those emphasizing values of etatism and egalitarianism on the other are a typical feature of the Slovak party system in effect since the beginning of the 90s.

In this context, it is necessary to stress that we are aware of the interpretative limits resulting from such a grouping of parties selected, as the introduced concept of political blocs is not able to cover adequately all the real existing socio-political cleavages affecting the voting

behaviour of the Slovakian electorate (leftist-rightist and ethnic dimension of the politico-preferential contradiction are regarded but, for example, conservative – liberal not). Division into socio-economic (left-right) and ethnic cleavage respects the result of pre-election consensus between parties running for regional office in 2009 and 2013. The weight of the first mentioned contradiction is calculated as a sum of the electoral score gained by rightist and etatist parties; for the latter we consider votes cast to both ethnic minority parties and the so-called ‘Slovak coalition’. Likewise, we must draw attention to the fact that, in some cases, there was a political agreement on the establishment of an election coalition between parties from quite different sides of the political spectrum that complicates the perception of an ambiguous and clearly recognizable struggle between traditional blocks of political parties (e.g. conservative-liberal cleavage).

#### 4. Results: Politico-ideological orientation

Revealing the territorial patterns in electoral outcomes of individual political (party) blocs measured by seats won is the first of our main objectives. Findings of this kind can be considered the key to understanding the

problems of political power distribution in a spatial context, which means in practical terms familiarity with the nature of the current value and politico-ideological orientation of regional parliaments affecting the performance of government at a sub-national scale. The first of the monitored party blocs is entrenched on the right side of the political spectrum. In the 2013 elections, right-wing parties (either on their own or in coalition) were extremely successful especially in the Bratislava region (see Fig. 2, 3 and 4) where their candidates gained more than 80% of all seats in the parliament (36 of 44 overall). Compared to its nationwide result (27.21%), they enjoyed slightly stronger support in the regions of Prešov (32.26%), Žilina (29.82%) and Košice (28.07%) as well. This confirmed the territorial pattern of both liberal (‘metropolitan environment’) and conservative voter (northern Slovakia as representative of religious values) from the right side of the political spectrum. With only a few remarkable difficulties in contrast, right-wing parties succeeded in attracting the electorate in the regions of Nitra (5.56%) and Banská Bystrica (6.12%), but also in Trnava (17.50%) and Trenčín (20.00%). To some extent it is a consequence related to the establishment of the so-called ‘Slovak coalition’ in the case of the first two mentioned regions embodying the border with Hungary, when right-wing

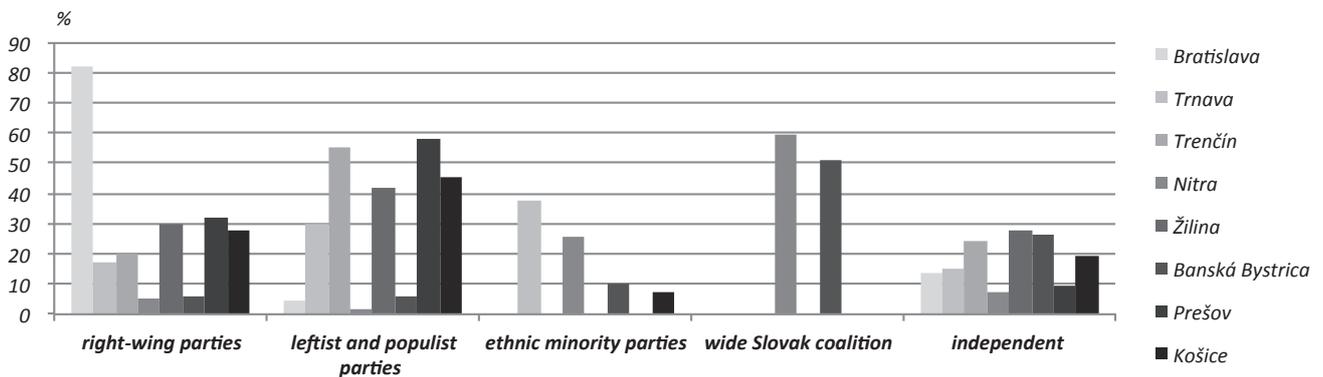


Fig. 2 Seats won by politico-ideological blocs at the 2013 regional elections in self-governing regions of Slovakia (according to blocs). Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author’s calculations and processing.

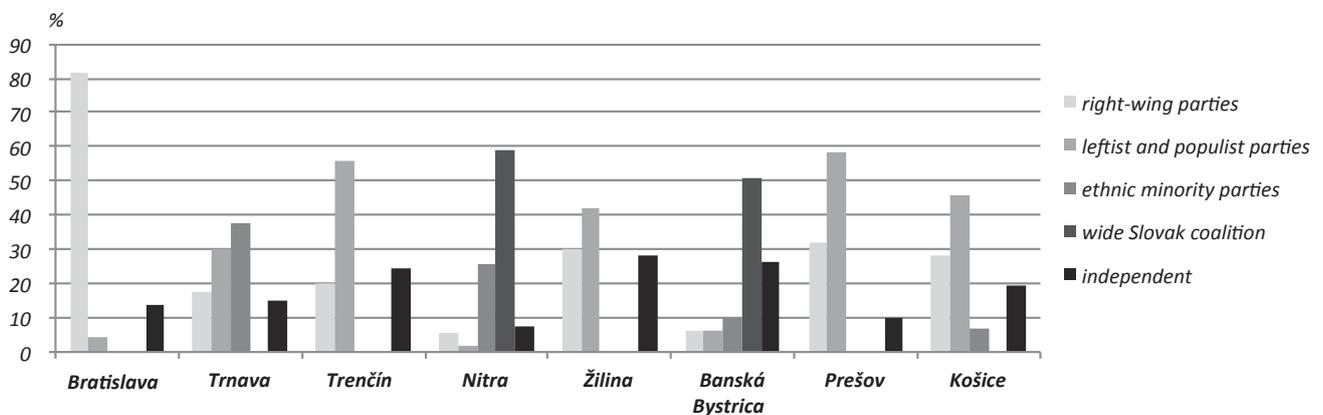
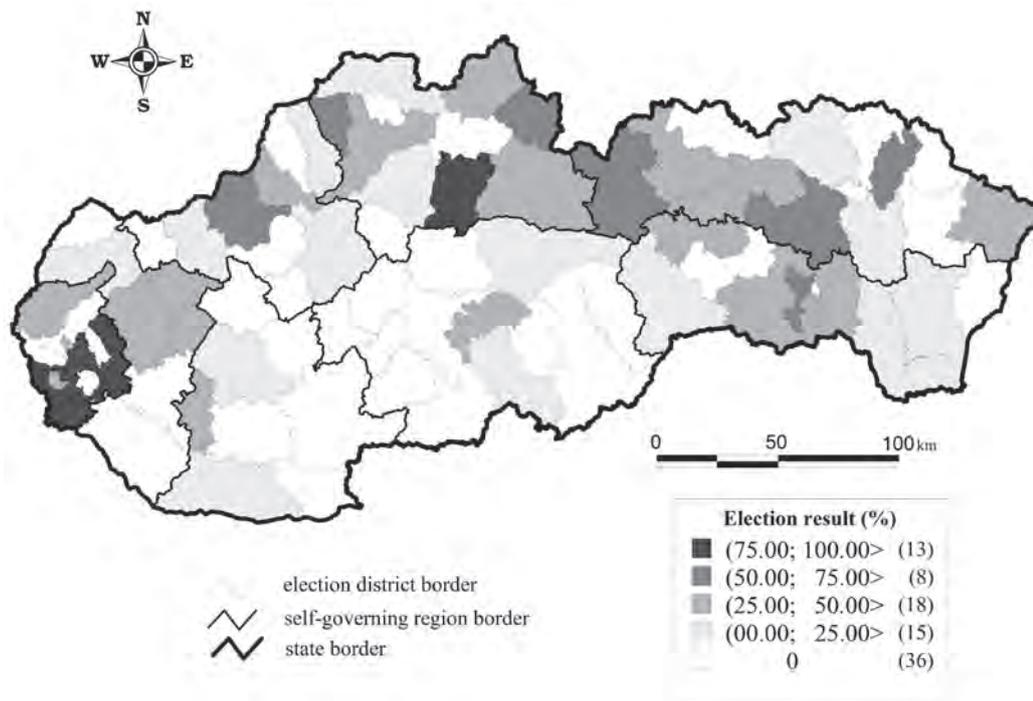


Fig. 3 Seats won by politico-ideological blocs at the 2013 regional elections in self-governing regions of Slovakia (according to regions). Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author’s calculations and processing.



**Fig. 4** Seats won by right-wing parties at the 2013 regional elections in election districts of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.

conservative KDH joined forces with leftist Smer-SD and for these two regions this party does not primarily hold a position advocating classic right-wing politico-ideological values (in terms of socio-economic cleavage), but rather national with the mutual goal of obtaining seats in regional parliament at the expense of the Hungarian minority parties. In Trnava region, ethnic minority parties as well as the leftist and national-conservative ones are traditionally more successful than right-wing forces, promoting the values of egalitarianism and etatism for a long-term perspective. In the Trenčín region as a former stronghold of the LS-HZDS and currently Smer-SD, electoral support for right-wing parties are traditionally at a low level. Thus, typical right-wing parties did not succeed within an environment characterized by wide ethnic cleavage (the regions of Nitra and Banská Bystrica, south of the Trnava region), in some cases, even in those parts of Slovakia which traditionally support either leftist and national-conservative politics (the regions of Trenčín and Prešov region) or independent candidates (the regions of Žilina, Banská Bystrica and Trenčín).

In the following section of the paper we will focus one's attention on the spatial context of the regional voting score by block of etatist parties (leftist and national-conservative), whose voter profile is very similar in Slovakian politics. They establish an electoral coalition very often not only in the case of regional elections, but general ones as well. Recently, ruling Smer-SD as the most popular party in Slovakia for the recent decade has received a significant part of the electorate from national-conservative LS-HZDS gradually, but also the nationalist SNS. Parties of this politico-ideological and value

orientation have confirmed both agenda proximity and the ability to cooperate also at a national level, when after the 2006 general elections they managed to conclude a political agreement and form a common ruling coalition (in this case consisting of Smer-SD, SNS and LS-HZDS).

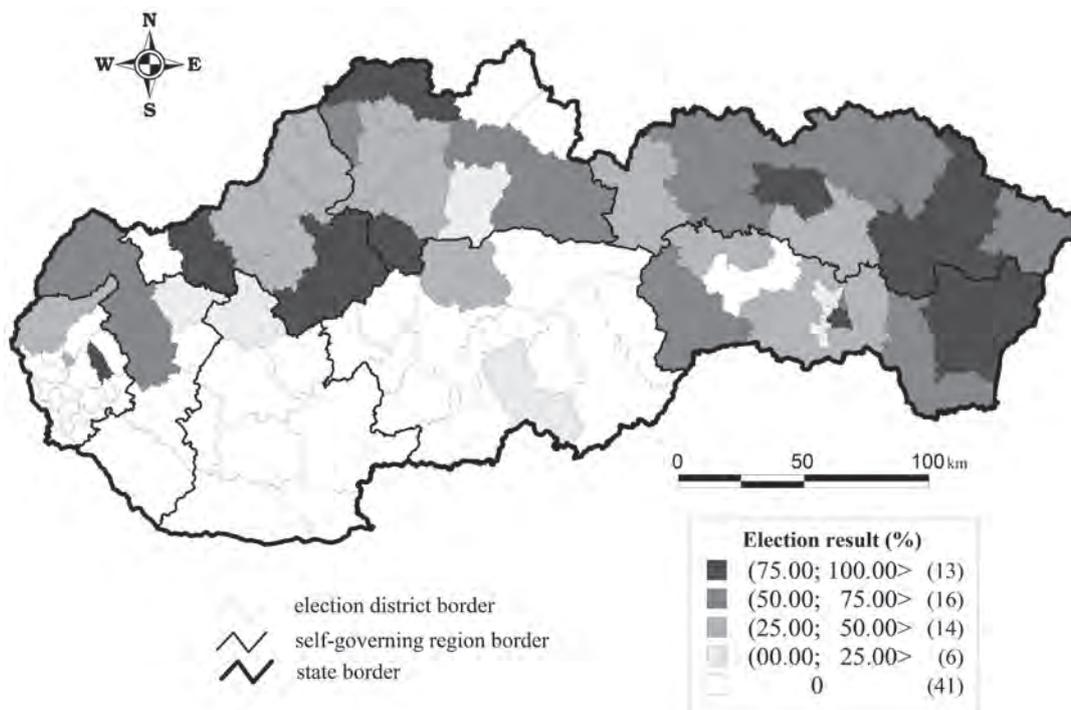
The bloc of leftist and national-conservative parties does not rely on the electoral support coming from one or few centres to such a significant extent, as we can see in the case of right-wing parties controlling regional government in the Bratislava region by more than 4/5ths majority. Therefore, the etatist stream exceeds its most serious politico-ideological and program opponent in seats of the regional parliament in the nationwide sum (129 to 111). More than 50% of positions are occupied by candidates grouped in this block within two regions, namely Prešov (58.06%) and Trenčín (55.56%), which can be considered the traditional strongholds of political groups promoting the values of egalitarianism and etatism. The national average in share of seats (31.62%) is significantly stepped over also in the regions of Košice (45.61%) and Žilina (42.11%). The proportion of mandates for leftist and national-conservative parties is very close to the national mean in the parliament of the Trnava region (30.00%). As mentioned earlier, leftist Smer-SD as the most significant representative of this bloc constituted the so-called '*Slovak coalition*' with the right-wing conservative KDH in the case of both Banská Bystrica region and Nitra region. Therefore, the voting results of the etatist bloc were (statistically) low in these two regions (Banská Bystrica region – 6.12% and Nitra region – 1.85%), influenced by specific political agreements concluded by the above mentioned parties. Following the results

of the 2013 regional elections held in Slovakia, a bloc of left-wing and national-conservative parties has occupied a significantly marginal position only in the Bratislava region, where its candidates took only two out of 44 seats (4.55%). Leaving aside the specific position related to the regions of Nitra and Banská Bystrica, a stream of right-wing parties managed to beat the etatist ones only in the region of the Slovakian capital for the 2013 elections for regional self-government.

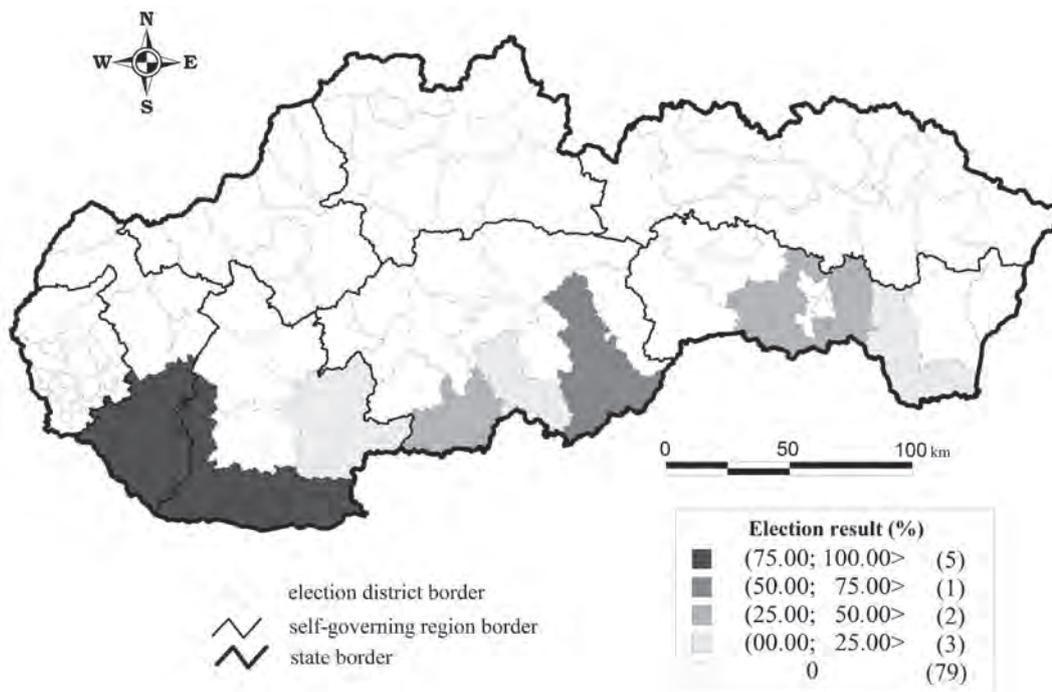
Current leftist and national-conservative political formations won all seats in only six out of 90 electoral districts located mainly in the north-east of the country (see Fig. 5). Conversely, parties of this bloc succeeded in the struggle for parliamentary posts only in a few electoral districts in the regions of Bratislava as well as Nitra and Banská Bystrica (the last two being a result of the regional electoral strategy of Smer-SD, whose candidates competed for an office on a common slate with nominees of KDH, constituting the so-called 'Slovak coalition', that intended to eliminate the number of mandates for parties of the Hungarian minority in this part of Slovakia). The bloc of etatist and egalitarian political forces did not succeed in the strongly religious region of upper Orava (north corner of Slovakia).

However, the left-right dimension of the socio-political contradiction is not the only cleavage present in the voting behaviour of the electorate. In Slovakia, the electoral decision of voters has been traditionally influenced by ethnic contradiction, which is even more intense when you think along the lines related to the delegation of representatives elected to the governments of individual regions. The SMK-MKP and the Most-Hid constitute the

two main parties of ethnic orientation strictly advocating political, civil and cultural rights, and also the general status of ethnic minorities (explicitly the Hungarian one). The latter forms a regional election bloc of right-wing parties along with other representatives of right-wing politics very often, especially in regions inhabited by only a minimal number of Hungarians. In 2009, when the fourth elections to the regional government in order ran, the Party of the Roma Coalition (SRK), also with an election program of an ethnic manifesto took part, but did not succeed. In the 2013 elections for regional self-government, ethnic minority parties gained 38 seats in the regional parliaments throughout the Slovak Republic, mostly in the regions of Trnava (15 out of 40) and Nitra (14 out of 54), but their nominees were elected also in the regions of Banská Bystrica (5) and Košice (4), i.e. territories bordering Hungary characterized by a high geographical concentration of Hungarians. However, their political influence is not restricted only to the aforementioned frontier belt, since as a part of the wide right-wing coalition they scored well in other parts of Slovakia (Most-Hid in particular) as well. However, SMK-MKP compiled neither its own nor a common candidate list in several regions. For the Slovak Republic as a whole, the proportion of seats obtained by candidates nominated by parties of ethnic minorities (9.31%) almost perfectly corresponds to the territorial representation of Hungarians living in Slovakia, which just confirms the importance of ethnic cleavage in the voting decision of the electorate in the southern parts of Slovakia. These parties registered an above average share of seats in the regions of Trnava (37.50%), Nitra (25.93%) and Banská Bystrica (10.20%),



**Fig. 5** Seats won by etatist parties at the 2013 regional elections in election districts of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.



**Fig. 6** Seats won by ethnic minority parties in the 2013 regional elections in election districts of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.

with slightly lagging Košice (7.02%). Candidates nominated by them on their own (not within a wide right-wing coalition) failed in other regions of Slovakia, however.

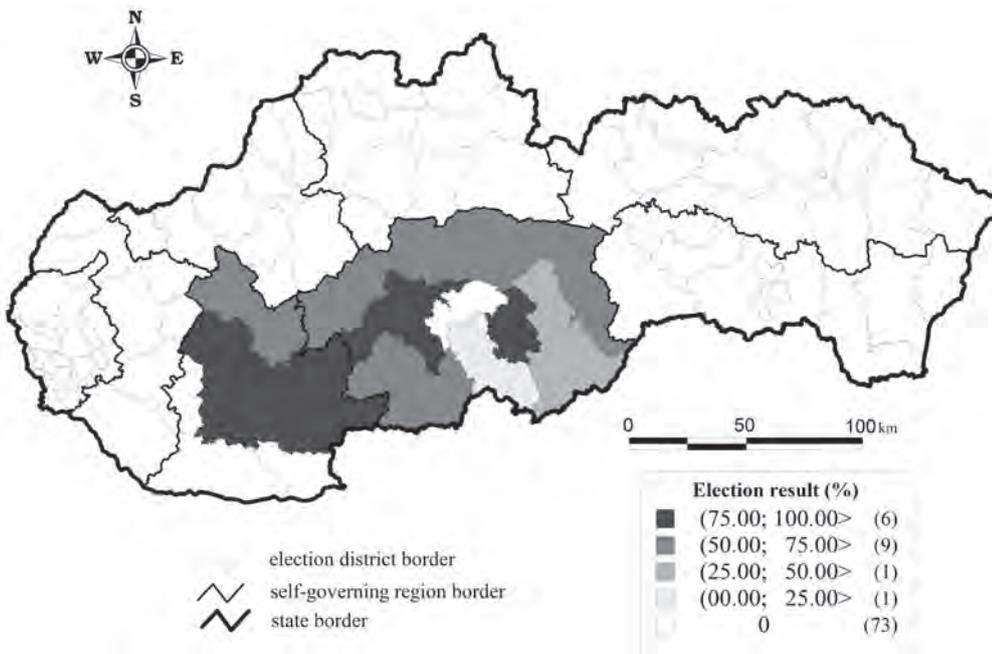
SMK-MKP and Most-Híd were able to cooperate within a broad right-wing coalition in the Bratislava region only. In other parts of Slovakia, they acted as political competitors trying to attract the same electorate, which is related to the former disruption of SMK-MKP, leaving a large part of its members and the subsequent formation of Most-Híd in 2009. All seats for candidates of ethnic minority parties were delegated in three of 90 election districts in total constituted in Slovakia (Dunajská Streda, Galanta and Štúrovo), at least one post in 11 of them (see Fig. 6). In the remaining 79 districts, there was no deputy elected purely with the support of either SMK-MKP or Most-Híd.

In the regions of southern Slovakia, the politico-ideological counterweight to the alternative of ethnically orientated parties in the case of the 2013 regional elections was represented by the electoral coalition of leftist Smer-SD, recently the most popular party, and the right-wing conservative KDH. These two political forces formed a common slate only in two regions, namely Nitra and Banská Bystrica, while they did not stand for office in other regions jointly (see Fig. 7). This coalition acquired a majority position in the regional parliaments in both cases, since it occupied 32 out of 54 seats (59.26%) delegated in the Nitra region and 25 out of 49 (51.02%) elected in the Banská Bystrica region. Overall, the so-called 'Slovak coalition' gained 57 of the 408 mandates (13.97%) designed for regional self-government in the Slovak Republic, which is above the previously mentioned

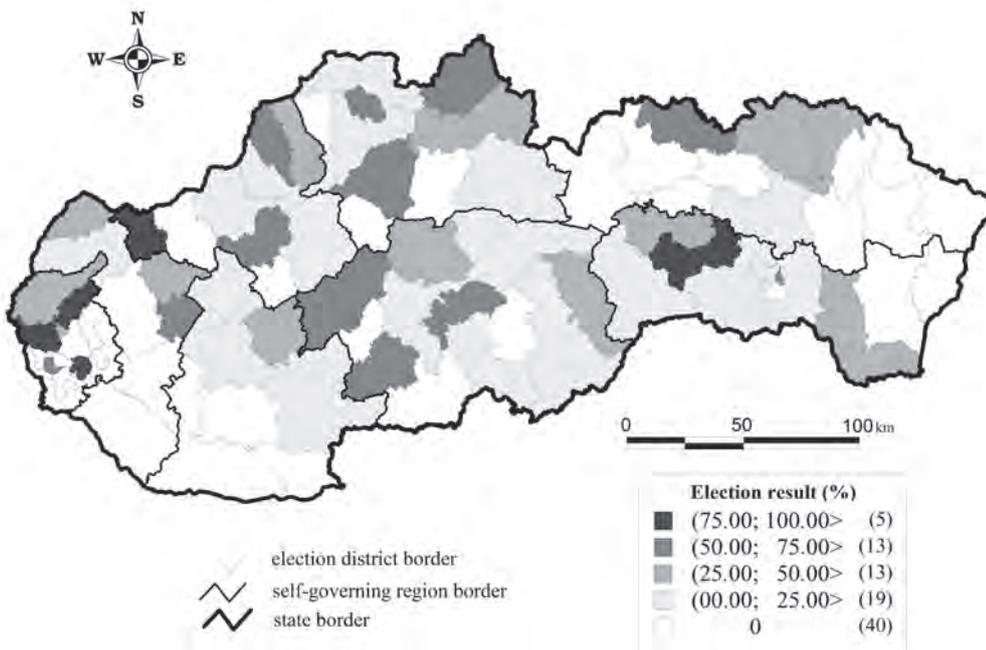
election result of parties profiled on ethnic principle (28 seats / 9.31%).

Formation of the so-called 'Slovak coalition' also for the region of Banská Bystrica was a specific feature of the 2013 elections for regional self-government. Until then, such an initiative had worked only in the Nitra region. On the occasion of the regional elections held in 2009, the so-called 'wide Slovak coalition' running for office in the mentioned region was composed not only of Smer-SD and KDH, but also SDKÚ-DS and LS-HZDS. There was no such political agreement concluded in other regions of Slovakia. Its absence can be considered quite interesting, especially in the case of the Trnava region characterized by a relatively high territorial share of Hungarians, but its long-term chairman had been promoting the policy of cooperation within the regional parliament across the entire spectrum of political parties.

The last group of candidates whose regional election result will be studied in this paper consists of those who were not nominated by any political parties and thus can be considered as civic or independent candidates. Regarding the nationwide sum of seats for all regional parliaments (408 seats altogether), after statist (129) and right-wing parties (111) it is just the third most important political stream, since there were 73 independent candidates at the 2013 regional elections elected. The share of the regional seats for independent candidates is above the national average (17.89%) in the regions of Žilina (28.07%), Banská Bystrica (26.53%) and Trenčín (24.44%) located in the north-western and central area of Slovakia, and partly also in the Košice region (19.30%) in the east, where they constitute from a fifth to a quarter of all



**Fig. 7.** Seats won by 'the Slovak coalition' at the 2013 regional elections in election districts of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.



**Fig. 8** Seats won by the independents at the 2013 regional elections in election districts of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.

seats available delegated via regional elections. Conversely, the lowest support for these candidates is observed in the regions of Nitra (7.41%), Bratislava (13.64%) and Trnava (15.00%), situated in south-western Slovakia, and Prešov region (9.68%) in the north-east of the country, in which they managed to occupy from one fourteenth to one seventh of elected seats only. There is also a second question related to the successfulness of nominees for individual politico-ideological blocs, given the number

of candidates they nominated for election. However, this issue is out of the objectives concerning this contribution.

As mentioned earlier, the independents represent the third largest bloc of regional MPs, since they gained almost one fifth of all seats in regional parliaments distributed via elections held in 2013. The geographical mosaic of their voting results (see Fig. 8) indicates features of spatial randomness in most regions of Slovakia, i.e. it is not formed in the shape of a spatially compact belt

of either higher or lower values (perhaps with the exception of the regions of Trnava, Nitra and Prešov).

Finally, we synthesize the above mentioned findings pertaining to the spatial level of regions as well as election districts, applying a holistic approach for assessing the electoral outcomes of the mentioned politico-ideological blocs for this purpose. Right-wing parties were able to get the most delegated mandates mainly through districts localized in the regions of Bratislava and Košice (especially of their urban areas) as the biggest cities in the country, while they succeeded similarly in another four election districts situated in northern Slovakia only. The rightist bloc dominated in 18 out of 90 election districts. In this respect, the most successful bloc of parties were the left-wing and the national-conservative ones, which won a majority even in 22 districts. Relatively most of them are located in the regions of Prešov (8 of 13) and Košice (4 of 11) in eastern Slovakia, and Trnava (3 of 7) and Trenčín (3 of 9) in the west of the country. Another political bloc under study has been represented by parties of an ethnic character (in this case the Hungarian minority). They decimated other competing political forces in the regions of Trnava and Nitra, located in the south-west of Slovakia. In other parts of the country, parties based on the ethnic principle have not been able to gain a significant part of the electorate (due to the historical, ethnic and political context as well). The so-called '*Slovak coalition*', composed of leftist Smer-SD and right-wing conservative KDH, can be considered as being a counterbalance to the stream of ethnic minority parties in the regions of Nitra and Banská Bystrica. It dominated in eleven election districts situated in the central and northern part of the Nitra region, and in a scattered form within the Banská Bystrica region. The same number of districts were dominated by independent candidates. Most of the seats available were obtained by them in four districts located in the Bratislava region and three districts situated in the Trenčín region. With regard to the political blocs' representation, the highest number of regional governments is characterized by the fragmented structure of their parliament. In practical terms, this means that no politico-ideological stream has a simple majority of seats in the given regional parliament for the 2013–2017 tenure. This is applied for the regions of Trnava, Žilina and Košice, where a political consensus across the spectrum of different political and ideological groups is needed in the prospect of ensuring the smooth operation of regional government in the coming period. For the regions of Trenčín and Prešov, as traditional strongholds of etatist forces, it is not surprising that the regional parliament is dominated by left-wing and national-conservative parties in the coming four years. The so-called '*Slovak coalition*' won a majority in the agency of the Nitra region and the Banská Bystrica as well. Right-wing forces managed to take control over the Bratislava self-governing region again, but this time also thanks to a coalition with the Hungarian minority

parties. If we considered the electoral score of political blocs for all regional parliaments, we would find out that no one has a majority of votes in the Slovak Republic for the 2013–2017 period.

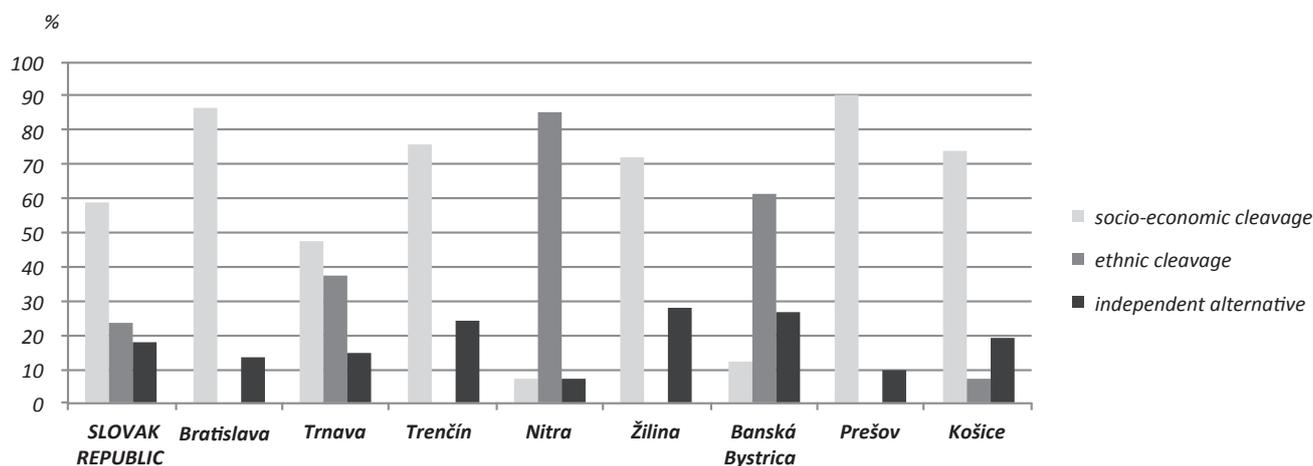
Comparing the politico-ideological inclination of regional parliaments concerning both contemporary and prior tenure, we come to the conclusion that no change occurred in five regions overall. The mentioned territories are located in the west and north-west of Slovakia. The centrally situated region of Banská Bystrica recorded a transformation of political and ideological structure of its representation from etatist to "more Slovak" in order to eliminate the electoral gains of ethnic minority parties. However, this transition is just on paper and can be seen as an accompanying derivative of political agreement concluded by Smer-SD and KDH, and the subsequent establishment of the '*Slovak coalition*' within the above mentioned region (in Nitra region, this concept has traditionally been used). Thus, this part of the country remains mostly etatist-minded. Development of the politico-ideological and value orientation of regional parliaments in eastern Slovakia is also quite interesting. While Prešov region is reporting a change in inclination from fragmented to leftist and national-conservative, Košice as the metropolis of the east has observed the opposite trend since 2009.

## 5. Results: Socio-political cleavages

Based on the results of the 2013 regional elections conducted in Slovakia, the main objective of the paper was to assess the regional context related to dominant socio-political cleavages affecting the electoral behaviour of society at a regional scale. Respecting the political agreements and ideological background of parties' candidates running for the election to the decision-making bodies of self-governing regions, we have considered the effect of two major socio-political cleavages as being socio-economic (rightist-leftist) and ethnic (nationalist) electoral-preferential contradiction. As an alternative to them, a vote for independent candidates has emerged in the case of elections for regional government.

Considering the nationwide outcome of the elections for regional parliaments, we come to the conclusion that more than half of the seats was gained by parties crucially profiled along the left-right cleavage (58.82%), whereas the ethnic contradiction was important for one quarter of mandates (23.28%) and about one fifth of seats (17.89%) was identified with the alternative of independent candidates.

However, a regional context of electoral behaviour can significantly modify the election results in different parts of Slovakia (see Fig. 9). The left-right cleavage of the electorate is most notable for the regions of the largest cities in Slovakia – namely Prešov (90.32%), Bratislava (86.36%) and Košice (73.68%), supplemented by regions



**Fig. 9** Weight of analysed socio-political cleavages in the 2013 regional elections in self-governing regions of Slovakia. Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2014, author's calculations and processing.

located in the north-west, such as Trenčín (75.56%) and Žilina (71.93%), where a significant differentiation of citizens' socio-economic status between centre and its hinterland can be expected. On the contrary, ethnic cleavage affecting electoral decision on representatives of the regional government is most notably profiled in the regions of Nitra (85.19%), Banská Bystrica (61.22%) and Trnava (37.50%), but the marginal position was taken in the region of Košice as the metropolis of the east (7.02%). In the Banská Bystrica region, the share for ethnic cleavage in 2009 is affected by the fact that the political agreement of the parties from different sides of the political and ideological spectrum had not existed there, however this also tells that for the period 2009-2013 public demand stressing the need to address more fundamental ethnic issues had not been formulated in this region (unlike the Nitra region). In 2013, under the context of strengthening the relevance of Roma issue in the Banská Bystrica region (especially by LS-NS) demand to establish a wider agreement across the political spectrum (Smer-SD and KDH) against the flowering of nationalism was legitimate and politically justifiable (relevancy visible particularly in election of regional president). In the light of final election results was showed that the coalition should be even wider (victory of M. Kotleba).

The above mentioned just confirms that the decision of the public to vote their representatives is heavily influenced by ethnic themes in the southern parts of Slovakia characterized by a mixed population of Slovak and Hungarian ethnicity. In other parts of Slovakia, no ethnic contradiction related to voting the deputies of the regional parliament was identified. To some extent, part of the electorate considers the option to elect the independent candidates as attractive in all regions of Slovakia. As mentioned before, the election score of independent candidates moves below the national average in south-western and north-eastern Slovakia. In other parts of the country,

their election outputs are above the national average, mainly in the north-west and the central part.

If we took into account the temporal context of this issue (see Table 1), we would discover that even in the case of individual regions the impact of various socio-political contradictions is not invariable, although it shows a relatively high degree of inter-electoral stability at a regional level. On the national scale, the importance of ethnic socio-political cleavage has increased (+4.66 p.p.), but to a significant extent as a consequence of the so-called 'Slovak coalition' establishment that subsequently led to a decline in the perception of left-right political competition (-9.07 p.p.). However, a slight inter-electoral increase in support of independent candidates (+4.41 p.p.) is indisputable.

If we do not take into consideration a political agreement between the leftist Smer-SD and right-wing conservative KDH concluded to suppress the impact of ethnic parties in the decision-making process in the regional government of Banská Bystrica (-63.27 p.p.), the explanatory power of socio-economic cleavage significantly decreased in the western part of Slovakia inter-electorally, namely in Bratislava (-9.09 p.p.), Žilina (-8.77 p.p.) and Trnava (-7.50 p.p.), while the left-right context of electoral behaviour slightly strengthened in the region of Nitra (+7.41 p.p.) situated in the south-west, and the regions of Košice (+3.51 p.p.) and Prešov (+1.61 p.p.), located in eastern Slovakia.

Ethnic cleavage as the second socio-political contradiction related to politico-preferential attitudes of the public in two recent elections for regional self-government increased its influence especially in the regions of Banská Bystrica (+46.94 p.p. as a response to the establishment of the so-called 'Slovak coalition'), but slightly also in the regions of Trnava (+7.50 p.p.) and Trenčín (+4.66 p.p.), in the west of the country. Ethnic contradiction in deciding on representatives of the regional self-government

weakened in the Nitra region (−9.26 p.p.) of south-western Slovakia, slightly in the neighbouring region of Bratislava (−2.27 p.p.), and in Prešov region (−1.61 p.p.), located in the north-east.

When contemplating the alternative to the left-right and ethnic orientation of voting behaviour expressed by the electorate (i.e. voting for independent candidates) it can be stated that the independents managed to increase their seats most strikingly in the regions of Banská Bystrica (16.33 p.p. as option to ethnic contradiction) as well as in Bratislava and Žilina (+11.36 p.p. / +8.77 p.p. as an alternative to a left-right cleavage of the electorate). Košice region is characterized as the only one with decrease in regional representation of independent candidates (−3.51 p.p.).

## 6. Conclusion

Parties compete usually for political, social and cultural issues explicitly binding to a specific territory, therefore degree of devolution and delegation of administrative functions as well as extent of their politicization at the regional level (Fabre and Martínez Herrera 2009), ideological and value equipment of political parties emphasized by Petrocik (1996), Budge and Farlie (1983), and Klingemann et al. (1994), and the real performance of the ruling ones (Stokes 1963, 1992) are also conditional for the party competition. In this context, we must not forget the variety of socio-political cleavages that affect the final electoral decision of the electorate (Lipset et al. 1967).

Madleňák (2012) defines six socio-political cleavages simultaneously forming the voting behaviour of the Slovak electorate during the history of the independent Slovak Republic (since 1993), whose validity can be very different in a given temporal and space context. In this study we have ignored the centre vs. periphery conflict, which was particularly important in the era of Czechoslovakia, when there was a pronounced bipolarity between Prague (Czech) and Bratislava (Slovak). Today in this context, it refers to the socio-political contradiction between Bratislava and the rest of the country. In our opinion, this cleavage, represented by the urban vs. rural contradiction, are currently just spatial expressions of the most important political-preferential cleavages developed within Slovakian society (formed particularly along the ethnic, socio-economic and conservative-liberal issues). Therefore, we have not dealt with them in this paper as well as *‘mečiarism vs. antimečiarism’ phenomenon*, which was particularly dominant in the second half of the nineties and over time has lost its importance. In this work we have tried to review the affect of the most important socio-political cleavages within contemporary Slovakian society shaped along the ethnic and socio-economic cleavage, ignoring the conservative-liberal contradiction traditionally diminished in the establishment of political agreement concluded by parties prior to the regional election struggle.

The comprehensive objective of this paper was to evaluate the impact of crucial socio-political contradictions affecting the voting outcomes in the 2013 regional elections in Slovakia. For this kind of ballot, the electoral behaviour of citizens is largely determined by a left-right cleavage, which rules nearly 60% of the election results measured by distribution of mandates. Ethnic cleavage in electoral decisions of the public was transformed into one quarter of seats, nearly a fifth of them are covered by the independent candidate alternative. In an inter-electoral comparison, the significance of ethnic cleavage as well as the option to cast an independent candidate increased, whereas the socio-economic dimension of the voting act slightly declined at a national level (due to specific political arrangements concluded by parties).

However, the regional context is capable of modifying the observed relationships significantly, and thus formulates its own conclusions on the electoral behaviour of society. A left-right cleavage of the electorate and its political representation is peculiar to regions of the largest cities in Slovakia (75–90%), while ethnic contradiction is expressed almost exclusively in the southern parts of Slovakia within the mixed territory inhabited by Slovaks and Hungarians (40–85%). The option of independent candidates is increasingly used by the electorate of north-western Slovakia and its central part as well (25–30%).

In the case of elections for regional self-government (as well as elections for the European Parliament), the informative value of the findings is obviously weakened by the low level of the turnout, however. It seems that a quarter a century after the fall of the *‘Iron curtain’*, the Slovakian public is accustomed to participate in the electoral decision-making process on the central political representation, partly gradually learning to decide on local matters related to its own community. Unfortunately, regional and transnational issues equally important for socio-economic development are remote from the civic interest of people in political issues so far.

The global economic crisis with its regional consequences was also being considered an opportunity to change traditional politico-ideological patterns of voting behaviour related to the electorate from Central and Eastern post-socialist Europe and its partial regions. Being aware of the uniqueness in both regional politics and elections deciding on its character, there are also other than traditional cooperation schemes between parties from the same side of the political spectrum only, with a decent chance of succeeding for independent candidates unencumbered by accountability to a political party.

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## RESUMÉ

### Ideologie, konfliktní linie a volební chování v krajských volbách na Slovensku v letech 2009 a 2013

Vycházejí z výsledků regionálních voleb uskutečněných na Slovensku v roce 2013, hlavním cílem předkládaného příspěvku bylo posoudit regionální kontext působících sociálně-politických konfliktních linií ovlivňujících volební rozhodnutí společnosti v regionálním měřítku. Při respektování politických dohod a hodnotově-ideologického vybavení politických subjektů ucházejících se o zvolení jejich kandidátů do rozhodovacích orgánů samosprávných krajů, uvažovali jsme o působení dvou nejvýznamnějších sociopolitických štěpení společnosti, a sice socioekonomickém (pravicově-levicovém) a etnickém (nacionalistickém) volebně-preferenčním konfliktu. Jako alternativa k nim vystupuje v případě voleb do regionálních samospráv možnost volit nezávislé kandidáty. Volební chování elektorátu je ve volbách do regionální samosprávy v největší míře determinováno levo-pravou konfliktní linií, která ovlivňuje téměř 60 % volebních výsledků (získaných mandátů). Etnické štěpení volebních rozhodnutí společnosti je přítomno u jedné čtvrtiny křesel, téměř pětina mandátů se vztahuje k alternativě nezávislých kandidátů. V mezivolebním srovnání rostl na celoslovenské úrovni význam etnické konfliktní linie, stejně tak možnost volby nezávislých kandidátů, přičemž sociálně-ekonomický rozměr hlasování voličů mírně poklesl (vlivem konkrétních politických dohod). Regionální kontext však dokáže sledované vztahy výrazným způsobem modifikovat a vytvářet si tak vlastní závěry o volebním chování obyvatelstva. Levicově-pravicové štěpení elektorátu je příznačné pro regiony největších měst Slovenska (v závislosti na konkrétním kraji 75–90 % křesel), přičemž nacionalistický konflikt se projevuje téměř výhradně v jižních částech Slovenska na smíšeném území obývaném Slováky a Maďary (40–85 % mandátů). Alternativu nezávislých kandidátů dokázali ve zvýšené míře prosadit obyvatelé severozápadního Slovenska a jeho centrální části (25–30 % křesel). Výpovědní hodnota těchto zjištění je však v případě voleb do regionálních samospráv (stejně tak voleb do Evropského parlamentu) oslabená nízkou mírou volební angažovanosti elektorátu.

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