**Patriots or Nationalists? The Ideology and Support of the Slovak National Party**

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**Abstract**

The paper attempts to analyze the case of the Slovak National Party (SNS) in respect to its ideology and electoral results in the country’s primary elections which are elections to the Slovak parliament. We identify the main features of the party’s ideology and its development. The paper covers the time period from the early 90s until presence. The reason for choosing SNS is quite straightforward as it is the only radical right party in Slovakia which succeeded in gaining and keeping relevancy and also repeatedly holding the executive power. When dealing with electoral results we find the patterns of electoral support of SNS and its changes over time. Based on the available data we also identify the characteristics of the voters of SNS and consequently the reason for the described changes.

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The party’s history and ideology

The importance of the far right in current research has increased with the appearance of far-right political parties during the last two decades of the 20th century. Parties like the National Front in Belgium or the Patriotic National Alliance in Finland naturally awoke the interest of authors because they represented a new challenge for more detailed and comprehensive analysis. Perhaps the most important moment reinforcing these trends was the presidential election in France when Jean-Marie Le Pen defeated the socialist candidate and advanced to the second round. The party family of the far right is very heterogeneous, which is also reflected in the character of the research work conducted on it. The same applies to the radical right, as a sub-type of the far right, which is not necessarily anti-democratic. Individual authors approach the radical right in different ways, according to which this ideological current can be studied using a multi-perspective approach (Ignazi 2006, Betz 1993; Betz, Johnson 2004; Art 2011). One of the most comprehensive and applicable definitions is provided by Mudde (2007), who associates this group of parties with nationalism, nativism, and authoritarian tendencies.

In the case of the post-communist states, the radical right displays special characteristics derived from the specific attributes of that region. In comparison to Western Europe there has been long-term impact of immigration from other cultures. Likewise the processes of transformation supported a focus on material values, and the public began to react to the challenges of post-materialism only after a significant lapse of time. Moreover, in a number of countries of Central and Eastern Europe there exist large national minorities, and as developments after 1989 showed, historic tensions re-emerged between individual countries. Altogether this means that the radical right in the post-communist region was shaped by specific conditions that influenced its development and form.

This aspect also applies to the Slovak National Party (SNS). It was formed in 1990, but officially continued from the party of the same name founded in 1871. At that time, when the Hungarian Empire was still in existence, and almost until the beginning of the First World War, it was a party that politically represented the entire Slovak nation. After the

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1 In the case of these countries, many of the elements of research oriented towards Western European countries would not make sense. One example is given by Rydgren (2008), who in analyzing the electorate of the far right in six Western European countries also analyzed whether those voters had immigrants among their friends.
establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 the SNS continued its activities, though in the position of a minority actor. The party focused on defense of Slovak interests in the common state, and it won support especially from the minority Protestant community. After the Munich Accords in 1938 the party was forced to merge with the then-dominant Catholic Hlinka Slovak People’s Party, and during the subsequent period its activities were not renewed (Kopeček 2007: 413-414).

In 1990 the “new” SNS was refounded in a qualitatively different environment, and the first years of its existence might be called a search for identity and position within the party spectrum. From the beginning the party presented itself through nationally-laden themes, which in practice meant staking out a position towards the shared state with the Czechs (Rybář 2006: 157). By the first free elections in 1990 there was a certain heterogeneity on this subject within the SNS, but the demand for full Slovak independence gradually prevailed. Thus the SNS presented a clear goal that was easily communicable to the public. A certain weakness in this tactic was the lesser emphasis given to economic issues, which were logically of cardinal importance after 1989. The new leadership under Ľudovít Černák that took over after 1992 took steps to address this issue by steering the party in the direction of economic liberalism. This course proved unsuccessful, however, and the party itself eventually rejected it. The period of searching for identity came to an end with the breakup of Czechoslovakia and the creation of an independent Republic of Slovakia. The SNS saw its main priority achieved, but at the same this meant finding a new place for itself in Slovak politics. Moreover, after 1993 its socially-conservative, economically-liberal model promoted mainly by Černák ceased to attract voters. At the beginning of 1994 there was a sudden change in the SNS with the election of Ján Slota as chairman. Under his leadership the party definitively took on a radical-right profile (Kopeček 2007: 418-425).

This shift became quite obvious when the SNS became part of the government headed by Vladimír Mečiar in 1994-1998, especially in relation to ethnic minorities (see below). The

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2 Historically Slovaks were predominantly inclined towards Catholicism, while the number of Protestants lagged far behind. This continues to be true at present. In 2011 62 % of the population identified themselves as Catholic, 5.9 % as Protestant (2011 Population Census).

3 With this goal the party abandoned the protest vote and moved itself economically to the right. The Czech SPR-RSC moved in the exact opposite direction, combining nationalism with rhetoric against the ongoing economic transformation (Mareš 2003: 207-210).

4 The SNS displayed some of the indicators of a right-wing profile even before the election of Slota as chairman. For example, in 1990 the party was led by V. Moric whose rhetoric was quite radical. The SNS’s attempt to assume a moderate conservative-liberal character in 1992-1993 showed, however, that the radical character became fully embedded only later.
party’s profile took on even sharper contours after 1998 when it first split into two parties\(^5\), then reunified during the subsequent electoral term. The inclusion of the Hungarian parties in Dzurinda government coalitions led the SNS to even further radicalize its political style. After the 2006 elections the party again became part of the government, this time a coalition led by Robert Fico (Spáč 2012: 233-234). The position of the Nationalists was weakened by a number of corruption scandals, and the following term saw party support decline. In the 2010 elections it just barely managed to clear the 5% mandate threshold, and two years later it failed to get into parliament altogether.\(^6\)

After this brief account of the SNS’s history, we can move on to describing its ideology. As indicated above, SNS was not on the far right for the entire time of its existence. In the early years of 90s it was still searching for its identity\(^7\), and in 1992-1993 actually inclined towards a moderate nationalist profile with pro-market elements. The election of Ján Slota as chairman was the turning point that definitively moved the party towards the radical right.\(^8\) These have been the foundations of the SNS ideology from that time to the present.

Since then the SNS has focused predominantly on the building of the nation and the state, and defending it against what it sees as potential threats (Kopeček 2007: 437-438). After the creation of the independent Slovakia the party had to find new targets, and found them in the form of particular minorities. First among these is the Hungarian ethnic national minority, which makes up around a tenth of the country’s population, and is located in the southern part of Slovakia.

Anti-Hungarian nationalism became a consistent part of the SNS’s politics, and was wielded heavily as a political instrument. The Hungarian minority is seen by the party as disloyal, and was seen as working towards autonomy or even independence. SNS politicians

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\(^5\) In the period after the unsuccessful 1998 elections a personality conflict arose between its two main representatives, Ján Slota and Anna Belousovová. After the election of Belousovová as chairman the group around Slota founded the True SNS, which was ideologically indistinguishable from the SNS. After the 2002 elections, when neither party managed to get into parliament, a unification process occurred, and the two groups reunited under the SNS banner.

\(^6\) In the most recent elections the SNS had to contend not only with the new party Nation and Justic, founded by the expelled Anna Belousovová, but with the radical nationalist People’s Party – Our Slovakia (Bútorová, Gyárfášová, Slosiarik 2012)

\(^7\) This stage of searching for identity is shown by the very different styles of the party chairmen in 1990-1993. The first was the relatively radical V. Moric, whose sharp rhetoric was not acceptable to many of the party’s other leaders, causing him to resign from his function at the end of 1990. He was replaced by the more moderate J. Prokeš, who was replaced in 1992 by I. Černák, who tried to anchor the party in the conservative-liberal part of the spectrum.

\(^8\) Except for the period 1999-2002, Slota was chairman of the SNS until 2012, when the party dropped out of parliament after the elections. In 2013 he was expelled from the party, which was dissatisfied with his handling of the SNS’s finances.
repeatedly accused the Hungarian Slovaks of an anti-Slovak stance and trying to break away the southern part of the country (Mesežníkov 1999; Mesežníkov 2000; Pytlas 2010). The SNS resorted to rhetoric of this type on a number of levels. Besides incorporating this element into regular communication with the voters, the anti-Hungarian theme made good sauce for the election campaign. This was probably best illustrated by the party’s 2006 campaign program, which was a reaction to the participation of the Hungarian parties in the coalition government. The campaign was entitled “We Are Slovaks. Slovak Government to the Slovaks.” (SNS Election Program 2006).

Along with this major theme, the SNS’s anti-Gypsy rhetoric also strengthened as time went by. The party repeatedly labeled the Roma as a parasitic entity feeding off the Slovak social system, and called for a number of radical measures. A prime example came in 2000 when they proposed setting up reservations like those of the Indians in America (Mesežníkov 2000: 117). Over the course of time the SNS also took a negative position towards sexual minorities, with sharp attacks against homosexuals.

The above-described elements represent the party’s main ideological profile and public message. The party’s vocabulary is very aggressive and vulgar towards all the above groups. In particular the tone was set by Ján Slota, who in late 1999 even called for the tanks to roll against Budapest (Kopeček 2007: 429). The SNS justified such attacks on the “foreign” element by claiming to defend the Christian and moral values of Slovakia, which these elements supposedly threatened.

Nothing could be more revealing of these attitudes than the SNS’s attitude towards the Slovak state that existed during the Second World War. Despite its highly problematic nature and its cooperation with the German Nazis, the SNS not only rejected criticism of the regime, show the inclination to praise it as being instrumental in building Slovak statehood. Even the president of the wartime Slovak state Jozef Tiso is regarded mainly in a positive light (Mesežníkov 2009: 55-57). From this perspective as well we see the SNS’s affinity for

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9 In 2002 the SNS compared the behavior of the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), the main Hungarian party in Slovakia at the time, with that of the Sudeten German party before WW II, which assisted the Nazis in breaking up the Czechoslovak state (Mesežníkov 2002: 101).

10 Attacks of this type were not limited to Hungarian politicians in Slovakia but were also directed against Hungarian citizens themselves. A typical example was the presidential election of 2009. Before the second round the SNS declared in its campaign [that it would reject a president elected by “wealthy” Bratislava and the votes of Hungarians. The SNS was referring to the candidate for the [civic right] I. Radičová, who drew her voter support from southern Slovakia (Mesežníkov 2009: 101-103).
authoritarianism, and especially for figures considered important for the Slovak national heritage.\textsuperscript{11}

The foreign policy stance of the SNS was likewise closely associated with the theme of Slovak statehood. The Nationalist party long opposed membership in NATO and advocated neutrality for Slovakia (Kopeček 2007: 439-440).\textsuperscript{12} Although this theme went partially quiet after Slovakia joined the alliance, in the case of the European Union the effect was just the opposite. The SNS had consistently expressed a certain skepticism towards integration into the EU, but it is only in the past few years that it began to criticize the EU more severely. It criticizes the continual deepening of integration, and totally rejects the financial rescue process.

As to economics, the SNS has never developed the issue very deeply. The reason for this was the party’s constant focus on the nationalist subtext. In its programs the SNS preferred to stick to such general formulations as support for a social market economy, but it never formulated a unified economic concept. Among its officials there was often a marked heterogeneity of opinions, but one which because of the low priority of the economy in the party program did not produce any major internal tension. Instead the SNS saw a greater role for the state in the area of security and social programs. One such typical demand, especially in the 1990s but continuing even today, was the reintroduction of the death penalty (Election Program SNS 2010).

All things considered, the SNS qualifies as a radical right-wing party. Although the party itself rejects this label, there is clear unity on this question among academics both domestic and international (Mudde 2007; Kopeček 2007; Petôcz 2009; Spáč 2012).\textsuperscript{13} The core of its message is nationalism, xenophobia, and nativism, while other issues, particularly economic, have an almost secondary importance. According to Betz (1993) parties of this kind often take on a neo-liberal agenda, as with a number of Western European formations of this type; but this did not occur in the case of the SNS. The SNS hails to its historic legacy, and officially describes itself as the oldest Slovak party. This dimension is reinforced by its

\textsuperscript{11} The SNS very actively worked for the passage of a law praising the contribution of controversial Slovak politician of the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century Andrej Hlinka. The SNS demanded that negative statements about Hlinka be made sanctionable.

\textsuperscript{12} The SNS referred to the alliance during NATO’s military operations in the former Yugoslavia as a “criminal pact” (Mesežníkov 2000: 118)

\textsuperscript{13} The ranking of the SNS on the radical right is sufficiently justified by the fact that in 1999 the party’s vice-chairman Belousovová (then Maliková) described Serbia’s actions in Kosovo as the model for ethnic policy (Mesežníkov 1999: 106).
mainly positive view of the wartime Slovak state and its leaders. It is interesting that the party’s profile only became definitive some years after it was founded, which may have interesting consequences for the character of its support.

The character of SNS support

In this section we will examine in detail the SNS’s electoral support beginning with the 1990 elections. We will use aggregate data on the level of districts. Because this is not data on the individual level, it is not possible here to produce a profile of the SNS voters themselves; this will be the subject of the next chapter. The data we will use in this part, however, point out the basic attributes of the SNS’s support and its changes over time. First we will look at the geography of their support, and later we will add the socio-economic indicators.

In determining the geographical distribution of the SNS’s support, we will make use of the concept of the so-called area of stable electoral support (Jehlička - Sýkora 1990). The procedure for determining this is as follows, and is done for each election separately. First we determine what share of the vote the SNS received in each of the territorial units under study (in our case, districts). These units are then gradually ranked according to the vote; that is, first on the list is the district in which the percentage of support for the SNS was the highest. The second step is to work from the most successful district and count the number of votes in each, down to the level of the district in which we have counted a number of votes equal to half of the votes the party gained in the country overall. These districts represent the area of electoral support. Because the analysis takes in a number of elections, the districts of stable support will be mapped over time. The goal is to capture the long-term trends in geographical support for the SNS. The results will be illustrated on the maps, while each district will have a darker color the more times it has been in the group of stable electoral support.

Before looking at the results themselves, one note: until 1996 the territory of Slovakia was divided into 38 districts. In 1997 the country was re-divided into 79 districts, but the individual borders do not correspond with the previous administrative boundaries. Therefore
two maps will be made, one for the era of the old division, one for the current boundaries. During the period when Bratislava had 38 districts, these districts had something of a special status. The city then formed a single district, but the electoral and statistical data is also available for the five districts that became separate districts after (Bratislava I – V). For more greater we will work with these old divisions as independent districts.

Map 1. Area of stable electoral support for SNS in elections 1990 – 1994

There would have been differences between the two maps even without the administrative reforms. As we said in the previous chapter, after it was founded the SNS went through a period of searching for its own identity, which ended with the election of Ján Slota as chairman in 1994. This factor seems to have been have been reflected in the nature of the support for the party, and this is indicated by the existing data (Map 1). The map clearly shows that the support for the SNS during its first years of existence was concentrated in the

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western part of the country. Especially notable given the text that follows was the support it received in the capital Bratislava. This applies mainly to the elections in 1992, when all of the districts in Bratislava and the surrounding areas formed the zone with the best SNS result in the whole country.\textsuperscript{15} This phenomenon can be explained by the more moderate character of the SNS at the time compared to its later profile. Likewise it may reflect the legacy of the historical SNS, which profiled itself as an elite formation with a certain intellectual heft which was valued especially in the main cultural center of the country. However, given the absence of data on individuals during this period, we cannot confirm this for certain.


Note: For the 2002 elections we use the sum of the votes of the two divided parts of the SNS, the original formation and Slota’s PSNS.

\textsuperscript{15} In the 1992 elections the SNS received 17.4 % in Bratislava, while its country-wide result was under 8% (Bureau of Statistics, SR).
The information on map 2 reflects the development of the SNS from the mid-1990s. The radicalization of its profile, the strengthening of nationalism and xenophobia, were accompanied by changes in the character of its geographic support and its movement to the north and east. From the zone of stable support in 1998 the capital city of Bratislava fell out completely, and in the individual areas (now regular voting districts) the party received below-average support at best. On the other hand we can see the very stable core of SNS support in the area of northern and central Slovakia. This group of districts has become the party’s permanent bastion, part of its area of stable support in almost every Slovak election. The dominant district in this zone in terms of number of votes is the district of Žilina, from which Ján Slota hails. On the other hand, in eastern Slovakia the SNS was able to post significant support only sporadically.

The base of support for the nationalist SNS in the northern part of central Slovakia has its own specific dimension. As other studies have shown previously, it was in these zones that the HSĽS drew its best results in the 1920s and 30s; this was the party that ruled in Slovakia during the Fascist wartime state. In the 1990s these ties reemerged and strengthened, and the SNS began to geographically consolidate in the main zone of former support for the HSĽS (Krivý 1999; Krivý 2003).

After outlining the party’s geographic base of support, we can now begin to add the various socio-economic indicators. Here, too, the data is on the level of district, and its values are correlated with the SNS’s election returns for the individual elections. The 1997 change in district boundaries causes no fundamental problem here, and all the results can be presented together. The data used for the calculations was official data provided by the Bureau of Statistics, Slovak Republic.

The list of indicators used is as follows: from the social statistics we operate with the criteria of age, ethnicity, religion, and education. Of the economic factors two were used,

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16 Slota served continuously for 16 years beginning in 1990 as mayor of Žilina.
17 Besides the SNS this was also true for Mečiar’s HZDS, which made heavy use of the nationalist message in the 1990s (Haughton 2001; Kopeček 2007; Mesežníkov 2009). The calculations of geographic support for the HSĽS were cleared of any possible influence of the ethnic make-up, because they were also conducted in territories with minimal presence of ethnic minorities, particularly the Hungarian.
18 For age we measured the proportion of individuals of pre-productive, productive, and post-productive age. For ethnicity we tracked the share of ethnic Slovak and ethnic Hungarian population. For religion we included the most important categories in Slovakia, the number of Catholics, Protestants of the Augsburg confession, and persons without religious affiliation. For education we measured the highest education level attained in four categories – the share of individuals with basic (or no) education, secondary school without graduation, secondary school with graduation, and university.
rate of unemployment and average income. The list is concluded by degree of urbanization as the ratio of inhabitants of the district living in communities officially designated defined as urban areas. It is a minor flaw that data is not always available for the same years elections were held. In these cases the data used was that of the closest date to when the elections were held.¹⁹

In making calculations concerning all variables except for nationality, data was used not from every district, but from a reduced number of them. The reason for this was the behavior of members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, who regardless of socio-economic factors voted predominantly for Hungarian political parties. Taking into account the districts with large shares of these voters would lead to a deformation or complete uselessness of the individual variables. For this reason districts where the population of ethnic Hungarian voters was over 20% were removed. On the other hand, for calculations examining the correlation of SNS the results with the variable of ethnicity, all districts were used because only in this way is it possible to capture the influence of the given variable. This approach working with reduced numbers of districts was used in much of the other relevant research (Krivý 1999; Kyloušek – Pink 2009; Krivý 2012; Madleňák 2012).

¹⁹ As an example we can give indicators of age, education, ethnicity, and religion, which are included in the official and regular census. Censuses were taken in Slovakia in 1991, 2001, and 2011.
Table 1. Correlation of support for SNS and with selected socio-economic factors by district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Economic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Prod</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Elem</td>
<td>H1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-0.205</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>-0.283</td>
<td>0.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.399</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>-0.749**</td>
<td>-0.372*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.611</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.497</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.274*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>0.483</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>0.238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.272*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>-0.247*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.656</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.759</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>0.451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.539**</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
<td>-0.266*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.539**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td>0.537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Significant at 0.05 level. ** Significant at 0.01 level. Cells in bold indicate significant results. Blue color is used for positive correlation and orange color for negative correlation.

Used variables: Age – pre-productive (Prep), productive (Prod), post-productive (PP). Highest acquired education – elementary (Elem), higher without state leaving exam (H1), higher with state leaving exam (H2), university (Uni). Religion – Catholic (Cath), Protestant of Augsburg deity (Prot), undenominational (Und). Nationality – Slovak (SK), Hungarian (HUN). Economic – average payment (Ave), unemployment (Une), Urbanization (Urb).

As with the geographical perspective, the socio-economic factors (Tab. 1) show a marked change in the character of support for the SNS. These statistically significant findings show that in the early 1990s support for the SNS was strongly correlated with areas in which there were a higher proportion of people with higher levels of education, without religious affiliation, in more urbanized communities. This is also shown by the strong support for the party in the capital city of Bratislava, particularly in 1992 and 1994. In the 1990 elections support for the SNS correlated positively on the district level with number of Catholics, but the two subsequent elections this relationship was no longer confirmed.

On the other hand, the elections in 1998 show a shift in the party’s support. The correlation with the individual education levels flipped over completely; now support for the SNS correlated positively with lower secondary education. On the other hand the share of persons with higher secondary and especially university education moved into negative values. A similar shift occurred in the factor of religious affiliation. Even though since 1998 the support for the SNS had only one significant value with amount of people without affiliation, it was a negative relationship. On the other hand we can observe a rooting of support for the party among Catholics. The final element indicating transformation in the character of support for the party is degree of urbanization, where the originally positive values from the early 1990s flipped completely, meaning that the later support for the SNS was now associated with less-urbanized areas.

Several of the factors that were included in the calculations showed no correlation. This was mainly true of age, which except for one return did not measure any significant value. This was also true of numbers of Protestants. On the other hand, the factor of ethnicity had consistently significant indicators with relatively consistent values; unsurprisingly, support for the SNS correlated positively with the presence of ethnic Slovaks, while the presence of ethnic Hungarians in the district showed the exact opposite results. At the same time this fact is not characteristic only for the SNS, as research has shown a positive correlation between ethnic Slovaks, and a negative correlation with the share of ethnic Hungarians, with votes for a number of other Slovak parties (Madleňák 2012: 72-73).

In summary we can say that both the geographic and the economic factors show that since the second half of the 1990s the support for SNS has changed considerably. It must be noted, however, that we are working here with aggregate data, from which it is not possible to determine at what moment in time the profile of the party’s voters changed. It is true,
however, that the changes in SNS support shown by the geographic and socio-economic indicators took place in chronological conjunction with the ideological changes in the party, and its definitive shift towards the radical right.

**Who are the SNS voters?**

The last part of this article will look at the profile of the SNS electorate and its development since the beginning of the 1990s. The text focuses on a description of the groups that represent the SNS’s main source of support, while showing the differences between the composition of the SNS electorate and the composition of the other parts of the voting public, by which we can explain to a certain extent the choice for of the SNS. The reasons for voting for the party are then explored by means of logistical regression.

The information presented in this part relies on analysis of data from research on the individual level. Given the previous description of the party program, the basic motive for voting for this party would seem to be the specific value profile of the voters, which should accent nationalist and “traditionalist” values and Christian religion. From a more concrete perspective this means especially a negative attitude towards the Hungarian and Gypsy minorities and homosexuals. Given the program and positions of the party’s representatives, the chance of voting for SNS would be expected to increase along with higher distrust in international political institutions and support for the introduction of the death penalty.

Factors identified in previous research will also be included in the analysis as explanatory variables. According to one theory, voting in general for a far right-wing party is an expression of protest based on alienation from politics and a feeling of injustice (Koopmans et al. 2005, Norris 2005). The indicators of a protest stance would be feelings of distrust for institutions or dissatisfaction with the government (Norris 2005); feelings of injustice are not constructively conceptualized in the literature, however. Bélanger and Aarts (2006) in their explanation use the degree of alienation from politics, which they construct
using factor analysis, based especially on answers to questions about the role of the individual in politics: his political efficacy.20

According to Lubbers et al. (2002) protest voting is the main reason for voting, and political positions play a limited role only. Bélanger and Aarts (2006) test both theoretical assumptions by studying at the same time the influence of attitudes associated with cynicism attitudes, and political positions. Rydgren (2008) shows the significant role played by xenophobic and anti-immigrant positions. Explaining the vote for far-right parties in 6 Western European countries, he uses variables of approval of the arrival of immigrants, feelings about the idea of an immigrant in the role of boss or partner, and the influence of education and income.

The description of the ideological profile of the party and an overview of studies dealing with the reasons for voting for far-right parties leads us to make use of a certain pool of variables in the analysis. In view of the goal of describing the development of the SNS electorate since 1990, it is necessary to find some kind of source for analysis that will contain these variables, and be trackable throughout the time period in question. The available data sources, however, do not allow us to track developments continually, for example every year or at least every election. In view of the necessity of comparing over time, we were forced because of the absence of national voting studies to use some of the international comparative studies that contain the Slovak case, focus (at least) on the period from 1990 to the present, and contain questions allowing us to find suitable indicators for the broadest possible set of variables identified above. On the basis of this approach the only remaining alternative was the European Value Survey, which was conducted in Slovakia in 1991, 1999, and 2008.

Previous studies of the electorate of far-right parties investigated a whole number of variables, which in order to carry out quantitative studies must be transformed into measurable indicators. The influence of other independent variables should be investigated because of the specific profile of the parties compared to the Western European far-right parties that have been the subject of all the other studies in the overview. These variables should allow us to test the following hypotheses:

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20 The study by Bélanger and Aarts (2006) recorded attitudes towards the following statements: Members of parliament do not care about the opinions of people like me. Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinions. People like me have absolutely no influence on governmental policy. So many people vote in elections that my vote does not matter. Although they know better, politicians promise more than they can deliver. Ministers and state secretaries are primarily concerned about their personal interests. One is more likely to become a member of parliament because of one’s political friends than because of one’s abilities.
The chances of voting for SNS increase with nationalistic and anti-Hungarian attitudes.

The chance of voting for SNS increases with traditionalist attitudes.

The chance of voting for SNS increases with protest voting.

On the basis of operationalization of concepts and the availability of data, these hypotheses will be broken down into working hypotheses, which will then be tested.

The dependent variable in the research is voting for the SNS. This variable does not relate to elections, however, but is based on the questions “which party would you vote for if elections were held tomorrow?” Thus the research does not study the actual voting for the party in elections, but voter willingness to vote for the party; even so, we regard the unit for analysis to be the voter. This variable is constructed in such a way that in one group are the voters for the SNS, and the other group all other respondents, including both potential voters for other parties, as well as non-voters. Therefore the conclusions of the study may be affected by the fact that the difference between voters of the SNS and the rest does not mean just the difference between SNS voters and voters for other parties, but also partly the difference between voters and non-voters; for example this could lead to different conclusions about the influence of education, which might be different if we were to follow only voters (Linek 2013).

Nationalistic attitudes are measured with the help of questions about whether the respondent would be bothered by having neighbors of different ethnic groups or immigrants. The variable is coded so that the value 1 means a negative stance towards these groups. Unfortunately there is no data source that contains questions about the Hungarian minority, nor are there available any variables that would show the attitudes of respondents over time towards the Roma minority. The independent variables following the influence of these factors will therefore be absent from the analysis; nevertheless both influences are at least partially contained in the attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups. To operationalize distrust of the international political system we use questions about trust in NATO and the EU. People who said that they trust these institutions little or not at all were given the value 1. Note that Slovakia did not join NATO and the EU until 2004. The last indicator of nationalistic opinions is declared national pride. People who felt proud and very proud were coded with the value 1.
Traditionalism is expressed by only 2 variables. One is negative attitude towards homosexuals, operationalized in the same way as the questions on immigrants and ethnic groups. Together this trio of variables can be regarded as an indicator of xenophobic attitudes. A second variable is practicing of religion, in which people who attend church services at least once a month are given the value 1.

The available data sources unfortunately do not contain indicators of protest voting for the entire period under analysis. Trust in the government is included only in the final wave of research, interest in politics only in the first and last waves. The only variable is lack of trust in the parliament, in which people who said that they trust little or not at all were given the value of 1.

A number of control variables were also included in the research. First was position on the right-left spectrum, which measures the political stances of voters. Other variables are more socio-economic. We control for the influence of gender, in which value 1 is given to men; as well as the influence of several ordinal variables – education, income, and age.

The only variable having to do with education that is available for all the surveys is highest education level achieved. In view of the relatively stable system of education it is possible, although not without possible inaccuracies, to categorize people who left school at 15 at the latest as people with elementary education at maximum. The second cutoff was set at age 21, when most people have finished their secondary school education, and only a minimum of people of this age have finished university. One complication in this respect might be the introduction of bachelor’s studies. This group is rather heterogeneous, and includes both trade school apprentices as well as people with school-leaving exam (maturita) and without it, and probably some people who have studied higher trade school or bachelor’s level studies at university. The final group encompasses all people who finished their studies at age 22 or later, which will be mostly university-educated. All of the groups, however, may contain “stragglers” who should actually belong in the previous category.

In each of the studies income is divided into various categories. For purposes of better comparison the groups were divided roughly into thirds, with the first third representing persons living in households with the lowest income, and the third people in the wealthiest households.
Age, too, was divided into three categories. The first category consists of persons between 18 and 35 years old. The second group is consists of people 36 to 60 years old. The final group consists of those over 60. Because of the longitudinality of this study, this division does not have the same generational significance for all the elections, and to a lesser degree differ even in the same literal meaning, where role is played by the changing retirement age.

The above-formulated assumptions about electoral support and the operationalization of the variables lead us to the following working hypotheses:

The likelihood of voting for the SNS increases with support for nationalistic positions, which are displayed through negative attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities, distrust in international institutions (NATO and the EU) and feelings of national pride.

The likelihood of voting for the SNS increases with the expression of traditionalistic positions, which are displayed through negative attitudes towards homosexuals and are supported by the practice of the Christian religion.

The likelihood of voting for the SNS increases the lower the trust in domestic institutions (parliament), because these positions are associated with protest voting.

Now we will describe the composition of the SNS electorate and the changes in that composition according to the variables contained in the above hypotheses. As shown by Table 2, the composition of the SNS electorate in regard to various positions and personal characteristics underwent a great deal of change over time. At the beginning of the 1990s the SNS did not differ from the rest of the electorate in the proportion of voters with nationalist and traditionalist opinions. There was no major difference in political positions either; the SNS electorate was only slightly to the right in comparison to other voters. There is no significant difference in distrust for NATO or the EU; nevertheless the SNS electorate did include many who expressed distrust for the domestic parliament. The SNS electorate in 1991 was specific mainly in terms of demographic and social characteristics. SNS voters tended to be men, mostly younger, and people above the lowest income levels but at the same time fewer with university education. The SNS electorate also differed from the rest of the voters on several attitude questions. Among SNS voters there were fewer people with feelings of national pride, which is no paradox considering that the question on which this variable was
constructed went “How proud are you to be a citizen of Czecho-Slovakia?”, while in later years the question addressed attitudes towards the independent Slovakia.21

Between 1991 and 1998 the majority of these differences changed markedly. The only relatively stable indicator was self-placement on the left-right spectrum, where there was only a shift by part of the voters from the category of independent into the category of centrist. In the demographic characteristics the difference disappeared between the SNS electorate and that of other parties in regard to age and religion; on the other hand, differences deepened in regard to gender, education, and income. The party was still chosen more often by men, people with at least trade school education, and unlike the rest of the electorate, people in the highest income category. In terms of the goals of this article the most important changes in the variable composition of the electorate concerned attitudes and values. The SNS electorate became more xenophobic and nationalistic than the rest of the electorate. The differences deepened with the rest of society on the questions of trust in parliament, and a marked distrust of EU and NATO appeared.

In 2008 the composition of the electorate was again different. The SNS electorate did not differ from other voters in its attitudes towards other ethnic groups and immigrants, and it contains fewer voters with negative attitudes towards homosexuals than among the other voters. The composition according to political opinion has also changed. Previously, more of its voters described themselves as right-wing than left-wing, but in 2008 it was the other way around. Also voters who distrust parliament, the EU, and NATO are no longer in the majority. In 2008 there were many more young voters again, and for the first time practicing Catholics are predominant.

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of voting for SNS and individual variables for years 1991, 1999, and 2008

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different ethnic groups</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imigrants</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuals</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left x Right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 The lower “national pride” among SNS voters was, as in 1990, in accordance with the official direction of the party. From its inception the SNS took a reserved attitude towards the federation, and in 1990 openly called for the creation of an independent Slovakia.
The previous paragraphs showed how the SNS electorate differed from the rest of the voters in terms of the individual variables. In view of the method of cross-tabulation used here, however, the importance of the individual variables cannot be interpreted in relation to the other variables, or the clean effect of individual variables cannot be determined, which relatively limits our ability to describe the evolution of the party’s electorate.

Here we present the results of binary logistic regression analysis (Table 3), which tracks the influence of individual variables (while controlling for the influence of the other variables) on the odds of voting for the SNS.

Table 3: Results of binary logistic regression analysis

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does not want as neighbours</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different ethnic groups</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuals</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left x Right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td><strong>2.24</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.05</strong></td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National pride</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td><strong>0.61</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.01</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.47</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion services attendance</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of logistic analysis only reinforce what we learned in the previous section. Among all the included indicators the results reveal only a few variables that influence the chances of voting for the SNS. It must be emphasized that the selected set of variables does not have a very high explanatory power, and some important variables are probably missing from the model. This brings us back to our starting hypotheses in which we assumed a strong influence on the part of negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority. However, we were unable to include these in the analysis. In 1991 the strong influences were education, age, and gender, as well as self-identification on the right and national pride. All of the influences worked in the way described in the previous section. The likelihood of voting for SNS at that time increased along with self-placement on the right, male gender, basic and secondary education levels attained, and lower age. On the other hand, national pride decreased the chances. In 1998 only the influence of national pride remained, but now in the opposite direction, along with gender and distrust of the EU. All of these variables lead to higher chances of voting SNS. During the most recent period the only statistically significant variables are religious faith and age. The chances for voting SNS increase with frequent church attendance and lower age.

When we follow the changes in the correlation of individual variables, we especially notice a change in the role of declared national pride: in 1991 voters who felt proud of Slovakia as part of Czechoslovakia were less likely to vote for the SNS than other voters. The only consistently working influence is that of sex, but in 2008 it was not significant, which may be because of the low numbers of SNS voters in the sample.
Regarding to entire hypothesis, our research does not bring anything substantial to their support. Among indicators of nationalistic position only distrust in the EU and feeling of national pride (moreover only in 1999) seems to be statistically significant in expected way. Similarly, the second hypothesis is partially valid in 2008 when the influence of practicing religion was significant. The third hypothesis is not supported by results at all.

**Conclusion**

The SNS is a political party on the Slovak political scene that has undergone relatively major changes. In the period after its re-founding it focused mainly on issues dealing with the arrangements within the federation with the Czechs. After the creation of an independent Slovakia in 1993 the SNS had to find different program priorities, which in the end led to its anchoring on the far right. The ideological array of the party took on negative and strongly aggressive stances aimed against ethnic and sexual minorities, reservations about or rejection of the country’s Euro-Atlantic integration, and promotion of the concept of traditional values with emphasis on respect for the problematic authority figures in Slovak history.

In accordance with this, the character of the geographic distribution of SNS support also changed. At the beginning of the 1990s the SNS got its votes more from urban and economically more developed areas, and areas with higher numbers of people without religious affiliation and with higher education. As time went by this picture changed to a large degree. As the SNS moved to the far-right, its support moved more to the non-urban environment and to areas with higher representation of Catholics and people with lower education. The only constant for the whole period was the connection between party support for the Slovak ethnicity and a negative stance towards the Hungarians. However, this element cannot be linked to the SNS alone, as it was typical of all the political parties besides those that represented the Hungarian minority.

The individual data also give a similar picture of the character and evolution of support for the SNS. In the early 1990s a majority of SNS voters were men, mostly younger people, people above the lowest income group, and citizens who distrusted the domestic parliament; the SNS voters included fewer people who were proud of their Czechoslovak citizenship. Over the course of the 1990s the differences among voters according to gender,
education, and income deepened. The party was voted for even more by men, persons with at least trade school education, and people at the highest income levels compared to the rest of the electorate. The SNS electorate became more xenophobic and nationalistic. Lack of trust in parliament, EU, and NATO deepened further. At the end of the period under study the SNS electorate has returned to differing little from the rest of the electorate in its opinions about other ethnic groups and immigrants; today voters who trust the parliament, EU, and NATO and practicing Catholics make up the majority. This finding was further clarified by logistic regression analysis, which showed that in 1991 the chance of voting for the SNS corresponded to self-identification on the right, male sex, basic and secondary education, lower age, and lower levels of pride in the country. In 1998 only positive pride in the country, male sex, and distrust of the EU remained. During the most recent period the only statistically significant variables were religious practice and age. Now higher church attendance and the lower age correspond with higher chances of voting SNS.

References


Data
