

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**Nationalist-Populism as a Threat to Multi-Ethnic Societies:  
Change of The Institutional Design of Slovakia**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

**Artur Zmeček**

**Bratislava, 2021**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All literature used is attributed and cited in references.

Bratislava, February 15, 2021

Artur Zmeček

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## Abstract

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This work will argue that Slovakia is a multiethnic heterogeneous democracy, but its institutional design is based on the nation-state, which contributes to the growth of nationalist populism in this territory. To mitigate nationalist-populist influences in post-transformation multi-ethnic liberal democracies, institutional design needs to be reconsidered. The first of the necessary changes is a greater amount of autonomy of individual regions of Slovakia. This decentralization of political power is the first step towards suppressing populist influences. The second important point is the increase in the representation of minorities in Slovakia, which makes up almost 20% of the total population. Slovakia, as a heterogeneous state, needs solid protection of minority rights so that they are not pushed out of political life. Last but not least, there is a need for extensive changes in the electoral system in Slovakia, which after the turbulent 90s is adapted to support populism. All areas of change in the institutional design will be explored through similar studies which are focused on rather, post transitional countries such as Slovakia or courtiers countries which in Europe which recently changed their institutional design, as the issue of national populism is increasingly debated. By comparing similar heterogeneous countries such as Slovakia, it is possible to achieve a solution to this problem with an increase in the influence of national populism.

## Abstrakt

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Táto práca sa pokúsi dokázať, že aj napriek tomu že Slovensko je multi-etnickou heterogénnou demokraciou, jeho inštitucionálny dizajn je založený na národnom štáte, ktorý prispieva k rastu nacionalistického populizmu na tomto území. Na zmiernenie nacionalisticko-populistických vplyvov v posttransformačných post transformacyjnych multi-etnických liberálnych demokraciách je potrebné prehodnotiť inštitucionálny dizajn. Prvou z nevyhnutných zmien je väčšia miera autonómie jednotlivých regiónov Slovenska. Takáto decentralizácia politickej moci je prvým krokom k potlačeniu populistických vplyvov. Druhým dôležitým bodom je zvýšenie zastúpenia menšín na Slovensku, ktoré tvorí takmer 20% z celkového počtu obyvateľov. Slovensko ako heterogénny štát potrebuje pevnú ochranu práv menšín, na to aby neboli vytlačené z politického života. V neposlednom rade sú potrebné rozsiahle reformy vo volebnom systéme na, ktorý je po turbulentných 90. rokoch prispôbený na podporu autoritársko-populistických politických strán. Všetky oblasti zmien v inštitucionálnom usporiadaní budú preskúmané prostredníctvom podobných štúdií, ktoré sú zamerané skôr na post-komunistické krajiny, ako je aj Slovensko, alebo krajiny v Európe, ktoré nedávno zmenili svoj inštitucionálny dizajn, nakoľko otázka národného populizmu je čoraz diskutovanejšou témou nie len v Európe, ale aj na celom svete. Porovnaním podobných heterogénnych krajín, ako je Slovensko, je možné dosiahnuť riešenie tohto problému týkajúceho sa zvýšenej popularity populisticko-nacionalistických politických subjektov.

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## **Introduction**

The growth of national populism is becoming an increasing problem in Slovakia. Since the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic, its institutional design has changed to its current form of the nation-state. Slovakia is a multi-ethnic heterogeneous democracy, and such an institutional design contributes to the rise of national populism. The change in the institutional design should take place mainly in several key areas that largely affect the multi-ethnic nature of Slovakia. The decentralization of political power can lead to a more proportionate representation of individual regions in the parliament. The greater autonomy of individual regions is strongly linked to the decline of nationalist populism in Slovakia, what will be proven in this work. Next, the effective representation of individual, most often ethnic, but also religious, minorities should be a key point in any multi-ethnic democracy. As minorities in Slovakia are strongly concentrated in certain areas, the representation of individual regions can also lead to the representation of individual minorities in Slovakia. Another important step is to change the electoral system. The reassessment of the method of choosing individual political parties could result in a positive change in the area of the representation of individual regions and the decentralization of political power. It is through these steps that it would be possible to ensure such a change in the institutional design of the Slovak Republic, which would result in a moderation of the rise of national populism in this region.

Increased autonomy of individual regions leads to the necessary decentralization of Slovakia in order to tackle the rise of national populism. Attempts to decentralize Slovakia have existed since 1989. The decentralization process was to take place in three phases: 1) devolution, 2) fiscal decentralization and 3) territorial consolidation. However, none of the central governments was interested in continuing these efforts (Klimovský, 2015) Decentralization of political power could lead to increased autonomy of individual regions and also to their self-determination. The autonomy of the regions is particularly important in terms of connecting the individual areas to the parliament. It is these links that would ensure the emergence of new, regional political parties or political bases in these regions. These parties would deal with local politics and the problems of the people of the region. The emergence of such

parties would reduce the success of national populists, who are successful mainly due to the nationwide "unification" of Slovak citizens. A good example, in this case, could be the HZDS party, which had great success in the 90s based on the division of people in Slovakia into, "we" Slovaks, and "they" others. (Deegan-Krause, 2012) The emergence of smaller regional communities would result not only in solving local problems but also in a high degree of self-determination. Slovakia, as a multi-ethnic nation, needs a degree of regional self-determination in order to be able to suppress the strong nationalism built up over the last three decades. It is the autonomy of the regions and the higher degree of self-determination for which the decentralization of political power in Slovakia is so important

The fiction about the "pure Slovaks" damages the idea of multi-ethnic democracy in Slovakia. Apart from the war-like Slovak state, the first independent Slovak Republic was not established until 1993 after the so-called Velvet Divorce, the division of Czechoslovakia into two independent republics. The nationalist populist HZDS party led this disintegration process on the Slovak side. With a view to strengthening its power in Slovakia, the party played into the national feeling of the Slovaks, which proved to be a positive step for increasing their preferences (Malá, 1998). Later changes in the division of higher territorial units (VÚC) in turn had the task of dispersing minorities into several regions by "redrawing" the natural map of the regions of Slovakia. All these efforts were aimed at suppressing minorities, which in turn contributed to the national feeling of the Slovaks. Representation of ethnic or religious minorities is a key component in building a multi-ethnic democracy. With the help of changes in institutional design in Slovakia, we would be able to avoid these nationalist-populist attempts. A reassessment of the division of higher territorial units and the autonomy of the regions would be beneficial mainly due to the fact that individual minorities in Slovakia are regionally divided, such as the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. Attempts in the 1990s to create a "pure Slovak" feeling and changes in the division of Slovakia served, for example, to weaken the position of Hungarian political parties in society. Individual minorities are located in certain parts of Slovakia and form a large part of the population of the regions. In order to maintain a multi-ethnic heterogeneous democracy in Slovakia, it is, therefore, necessary to maintain a sufficient representation of minorities, and thus also respective regions, in the Parliament.

The electoral system in Slovakia supports the emergence of populist political parties. Democratic elections and a proportional electoral system have been operating in Slovakia since its inception. Traditionally, this system is very widespread and brings many benefits, such as a high degree of compromise in the election of members of parliament, but also the rights of minorities. (Lijphart, 2012) The paradox in this case is that in Slovakia this system had the opposite effect. Slovakia has only one constituency, which has resulted in a loss of contact with the regions. (Mikuš, 2014) As the party has to address a wider range of people, it needs to address societal issues, which is very challenging in a diversified country like Slovakia. That is why this electoral system gives a lot of space to populist parties that use different ways to secure power, as mentioned above. A possible solution that this work will try to prove is the division of Slovakia into several electoral districts. As a result, individual political parties would have to start addressing regional issues and reaching out to minorities. In such a case, the probability of a party member winning in the elections to the self-governing regions would also increase. This is mainly due to the benefit of connecting the region directly to parliament. These changes in the electoral system in Slovakia could lead to an increase in the autonomy of individual regions and the representation of minorities. Therefore, these changes will cause the decline of national populist parties in Slovakia.

In conclusion, the problem of the rise of nationalist populism in Slovakia has several possible solutions. This work will try to prove that the greater autonomy of the regions is a key point in solving this problem. Regional policy in Slovakia is closely connected with minorities, which are represented in large numbers in a multi-ethnic societies. That is why their representation is important and must be taken into account when changing the institutional design of Slovakia. Last but not least, a key change is in the electoral system, thanks to which it is possible to meet the above-mentioned steps. To mitigate nationalist-populist influences in post-transition multiethnic liberal democracies, such as Slovakia, it is necessary to reconsider institutional design in relation to these three steps.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

The topic of nationalism and populism is becoming more widespread in Europe. Slovakia is no exception, believing in populist leaders and their parties since the 1990s. Given this development, it is not surprising that in 2016, the populist-fascist party ĽSNS and its chairman Marián Kotleba also joined the parliament of the Slovak Republic. Such a development of the 21st century is commented on by scientists around the world, whether sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, etc. Therefore, it is possible to say that many expert articles can be found on this topic from the present, but also from the past, as many scientists have anticipated this situation for a long time. A frequently mentioned topic in society is also the issue of minorities, which are beginning to be increasingly oppressed in many countries. As mentioned in the introduction, the issue of minority representation is crucial in the fight for liberal democracy. Last but not least, the literature dealing with the topic of electoral systems and institutional design, which will be one of the main components of this work. This is due to the fact that the change of institutional design is part of the hypothesis of this work, which tries to prove that only by its change it is possible to mitigate nationalist-populist influences in Slovakia. A few following paragraphs will be describing the branches of literature used and explain why this literature will be used in this work.

### 1.1 Issue of Populism and Nationalism

To understand the whole work, it is necessary to properly understand the issues of populism and nationalism both in the world and in Slovakia. Karen Henderson and Erika Harris in the book *Slovakia since 1989* (2019) in the chapter *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989* traces political developments in Slovakia from its sudden emergence as an independent state, following the breakup of Czechoslovakia, to the present day. Slovakia's slow and difficult transition to democracy in the 1990s has been marked by nationalism and an ambivalent attitude to liberal democracy and relations with the West. This was followed by a period of successful "Europeanization" and accession to the European Union and a relatively quick and successful joining of the Eurozone. In highlighting problematic issues, the

authors suggest that they derive mostly from the absence of statehood tradition, the speed of reforms, and the legacy of communism. The misinterpretation of independence as the “ownership” of the state increases nationalist leanings within society, which then tolerates hostility to other ethnicities and immigrants (Harris & Henderson, 2019) All these points are important for a correct understanding of the issues of nationalism and populism in Slovakia and in heterogeneous democracies in Central Europe. The recent growth of support for populist political parties – mainly on the right but some on the left – plus the emergence of leaders with authoritarian tendencies in many Western societies have attracted much interest. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart in their book *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (2019) present a strong argument apparently sustained by convincing empirical (statistical) evidence. They claim that populism and authoritarian leaders have attracted the most support from those who view recent societal changes negatively. The utilization of their work can bring great benefits, especially in understanding populist leaders and their techniques of manipulating people. (Norris & Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*, 2019) These literary works will serve as a basis for understanding the issues of populism and nationalism both in history and in the present.

## **1.2 Minorities, Regions and Autonomy**

Despite the fact that Slovakia is a relatively small country, it is composed of regions that are very specific from each other. Citizens' voting behavior in different regions is very different and historically very specific. Vladimír Krivý, Viera Feglová, and Daniel Balko in their book *Slovensko a jeho regióny* (1996) mainly deal with the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic after 1989. It examines in detail the individual results of the elections, the causes of the results but also their impact on society. The book also partially deals with the history of Slovakia and especially how Slovak history influenced the electoral behavior of Slovak citizens. Chapter 9 entitled *Regional Differentiation in Slovakia* will be especially important in my work. The chapter deals with the historical marginalization, the "topography" of regional inequalities, evaluates individual regions, and the causes of their success. This source will be utilized because it gives information about individual regions in Slovakia as well as the electoral behavior of people living in these regions. (Krivý, Feglová, & Balko, 1996) Since 1989, the majority of countries formerly under the Soviet Union's

control are now democracies. Many of these countries have mixed ethnic compositions, and a question arises, considering the combination of democracy and ethnic heterogeneity: are ethnic minorities happier in some countries than in others with the way democracy works? And if they are, why? Rubén Ruiz-Ruña answers these questions in his article *Satisfaction with Democracy in Multi-ethnic Countries: The Effect of Representative Political Institutions on Ethnic Minorities* (2012). This work will be utilized because it provides data collected from 1989 to 2001 and uses it to explain the satisfaction with the democracy of ethnic minorities in post-communist countries. (Ruiz-Rufino, 2012) These data are important in determining the degree of representation of individual minorities in Slovakia.

### **1.3 Electoral Systems**

The outcome of this work should be an outline of possible change in the institutional design of Slovakia, which should serve to alleviate the influence of nationalist populism. The right selection and change of the electoral system are an integral part of these changes, which are also addressed by Pippa Norris in her article *Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian, and Mixed Systems* (1997). In the post-war period, the perception of electoral systems and their functioning changed radically. This article discusses in detail the individual electoral systems, proportional, majoritarian and mixed System. The source also goes on to consider the normative criteria underlying debates about reform, and then analyze the consequences of different systems. (Norris-Pippa, 1997) The utilization of this text is crucial in work which is focused on the change of the political and electoral system in Slovakia. For the right choice and change of the electoral system, it is also necessary to know the electoral behavior of the citizen. It is these topics that Dixit K. Avinash and Barry J. Nalebuff address in their book *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life* (1991). This book discusses the issues of strategic behavior and decision making. It also discusses game theories that are a big part of our lives, especially in political life. The authors present basic concepts and terms such as backward induction, auction theory, Nash equilibrium, noncooperative bargaining. However, it is important to say that the individual concepts are illustrated through examples from everyday life, business, politics, etc. It is these examples that help to understand the electoral behavior of people in everyday life. Chapter 10 will be utilized

in this work because it specifically discusses and analyzes voting strategies. Understanding the voting strategies of the citizens of a given state is especially important if the work seeks to analyze the rise of populism today (Dixit & Nalebuff, 1991) The right changes in the electoral system can only occur if we know the electoral behavior of the citizen. That is why this literature in connection with the above-mentioned literature is a key element of this work.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

Nationalist populism is the main focus of many political debates. The literature has been dealing with this issue for several decades, and the results of many researches also bring positive results. However, despite the high number of studies that deal with populism in post-communist Europe, few deals with the issue of a multi-ethnic society that is present in Slovakia. To mitigate nationalist-populist influences in post-transformation multi-ethnic liberal democracies, it is necessary to reconsider the country's institutional design. Greater emphasis on the autonomy of the regions is a fundamental step towards the suppression of populist power. The autonomy of the regions would also have a positive effect on the representation of minorities, which make up a high percentage of the population in Central European countries. Only few researches link these factors together, and it is in this area that this work could find its application.



## Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

The topic of this work falls into several scientific disciplines but mainly it is a work in the field of comparative politics, and therefore it will be relatively complex in terms of research design. The result of this work should be a possible proposal for changes in institutional design in Slovakia so as to mitigate the growing power of nationalist populist influences. The work does not draw directly from a few sources but brings together several studies to create a true picture of the relationships between different areas of research. These are the autonomy of the regions, which have an impact on the representation of minorities in the state, and the electoral system in Slovakia, which is proving to be insufficient.

Increasing the autonomy of regions in Slovakia is an area that has been the subject of many studies in the past. The first step is to examine the history of changes in individual regions, especially with the help of secondary literature such as an article by *Daniel Klimovský, Slovakia as Decentralization Champion: Reality or Myth?* (Klimovský, 2015). This type of literature will be used to create the whole picture of changes in the field of autonomy of regions, which has been lower and lower since the establishment of an independent Slovakia. On the other hand, many primary sources such as collections of laws and legislative proposals can point out in the work the shortcomings in the competencies of higher territorial units. Studies on this topic could serve as a sufficient basis for linking the autonomy of regions with the rest of the work and links it to minorities. It is the minorities that are a good indicator of the immaturity of liberal democracy in Slovakia. It is the minorities that make up a large part of the population, which, however, have almost no representation in society (for example, in parliament). The repression of minorities, which also took place during the time of democratic governments, points out that the history of migration in Central Europe will be important in describing the composition of society in Slovakia. In this area, it is possible to draw on a large amount of literature, whether in the field of history or statistics on the development of the composition of the population living in this area. It will be necessary to use a lot of theoretical literature when presenting changes in the electoral system in Slovakia. On the other hand, there are many studies that look at the

rise of populism in conjunction with mistakes in electoral systems. Statistics on election results as well as minority representation and hypotheses based on existing studies conducted in other countries similar to Slovakia will also form a large part of this area. In work that combines political science, sociology, history, or statistics, it is necessary to take into account the wide range of literature used.

This work primarily deals with changes in institutional design in Slovakia in order to mitigate the effects of nationalist populism. Possible changes in the institutional design could serve as a model for real changes, especially in the area of the electoral system in Slovakia and the autonomy of the regions. The practical part of the work is intended for policymakers, who could draw inspiration from it for political changes in the coming years. The consequences of these changes could have a major impact on the development of liberal democracy in Slovakia and the suppression of national populism. These changes would greatly affect the lives of citizens both in Slovakia and in similar multiethnic societies. The result of the work is applicable to all countries similar to Slovakia, especially in Central Europe. However, the broad issue of populism does not allow for absolute universality, and therefore further studies in this area are needed, which would focus on other, different countries

### **Chapter 3: Decentralization of Political Power**

The first challenge of Slovak political system in relation to the representation of the diversity of interests is its institutional design and the question of the decentralization of political power. Extensive changes in regional division in the 1990s after the partition of Czechoslovakia greatly helped nationalists and populists in expanding their power. With the intention of taking control of the whole country, the political parties at the time decided to limit the power of individual regions in order to gain reach over the entire territory of Slovakia. To properly understand this issue, it is important to clarify the historical development of individual regions and the statistical data on electoral preferences in individual regions. Furthermore, the chapter will show later changes in the division of individual regions as well as the development of their powers from 1993 to the present day. Later, this chapter will try to clarify the impact of the powers of individual regions on the results of parliamentary elections as well as the impact of their limited powers on the rise of populist nationalism in Slovakia. Later, the chapter will deal with the issue of self-determination, which plays a major role in the development of individual regions and will also serve as one of the main pillars of the proposed changes in the distribution of political power in Slovakia. Finally, the author tries to propose possible changes in the institutional design so as to help the decentralization of political power, which will result in the weakening of populist-nationalist influences in Slovakia.

#### **3.1 Regions of Slovakia**

Differences in electoral preferences in individual regions play an important role in the outcome of elections and an increase in their autonomy and the subsequent decentralization of political power could mitigate nationalist-populist influence in Slovakia. Understanding the development of individual regions, as well as the territorial division in Slovakia in general, is necessary for a full understanding of the rise and persistence of populism in this territory. Through statistics from individual regions, such as electoral preferences or the composition of minorities, it is possible to point out the dysfunction of the current territorial division in relation to possibility of modernization of the regions. Since the independence of the Slovak Republic, there have been several changes in territorial division, and many of them, especially in the

1990s, had the task of centralizing political power. Last but not least, the observation of problematics with self-determination in different parts of Slovakia will be also used as a base for proposed changes in territorial division of the country. The analysis of the changes in territorial division can serve as a suitable basis for the creation of new changes that should aim to reduce the impact of populist and nationalist influences in Slovakia.

### **3.2 History of Slovak Regions**

Slovakia has a long tradition of intermediate level of territorial organization of public administration. Despite the fact that this level of government existed permanently with short breaks, especially the last century was characterized by its frequent changes. This was also one of the main counterarguments in the negotiations for their restoration before 1989 (Velvet Revolution). In the early Middle Ages (10th - 13th century), regional institutions and regions were established, which were later united within the creation of the Kingdom of Hungary, there were a total of 16 such territories in Slovakia. These regional institutions served mainly for the privileged part of the population, such as the nobility and landowners, until the end of the 19th century. However, they were firmly tied to a centrist state with a markedly bureaucratic existence. At this level of government, the interwar Czechoslovak Republic could not avoid reorganization. The reorganization took place in 1923 in Slovakia in the form of six counties. However, this system of territorial division did not take hold in the Czech part of the paradise and resulted in the creation of a "land" system, which served to suppress the German minority in this territory (Buček, 2003, s. 144-145).

It was for these reasons that the intermediate level of government in Slovakia disappeared until the Second World War, when it was restored, and Slovakia was again divided into six large districts. Local government institutions were passive at the time, lacking professionals and administration, lacking adequate powers, and being largely occupied by political appointments, resulting in inefficiency. A large number of territorial units caused problems in economic and administrative planning and was therefore changed, and Slovakia was divided into 3 higher territorial units and 33 districts. At the end of the 1960s, minor changes took place in the regional division of Slovakia. Bratislava (Capital City) was given the status of a higher territorial unit (there

were 4 in total) and Slovakia was divided into 38 districts. This division of higher territorial units was valid until 1990.

### **3.3 Issue of The Territorial Administrative Division in Slovakia**

The 1990s had a negative impact on the development of regions in Slovakia. With the advent of democracy in Slovakia came extensive changes in the political functioning of the state and with them the question of the division of the country into higher territorial units. However, the modernization of regions, which was to bring cultural, political and economic development in all parts of Slovakia, had the opposite effect. The "scissors" that have been opening up in the development of the regions since 1989 are mainly the result of their different historically accumulated economic, demographic and socio-cultural potential. They are the result of the different modernization of regions so far, where some regions have been bypassed by the technical side of modernization itself (Kárász & Kárász, 2002) The dissatisfaction of the inhabitants in these "forgotten" regions also has a significant influence on their political feelings and gives room for the rise of nationalist-populist movements. The correlation between development rates and the political feelings of the inhabitants of individual regions can also be seen in the results of the parliamentary elections in 2020. While in less developed districts such as Čadca or Považská Bystrica, the populist and nationalist parties Direction – Social Democracy (Smer -SD) or People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) parties were very successful, in Bratislava and Košice, liberal movements such as the Progressive Slovakia (PS) or the Freedom and Solidarity (SAS) were more successful. However, the correlation can also be seen in the history of political preferences in individual parts of Slovakia. Regions, where in the past (1920s and 1930s) the Slovak People's Party (HĽS) was successful were also the regions where in the parliamentary elections in 1992 people preferred the Slovak National Party (SNS). Later in the 1994 parliamentary elections, the people of these regions preferred the People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimír Mečiar (Krivý, Feglová, & Balko, 1996) The trend of electoral preferences in these regions continues to this day, and the above-mentioned districts of Čadca and Považská Bystrica can be an example.

A partial answer to the issue of "expanding scissors" causing political space for nationalist-populism is the character of the process of decentralization of political power and the reform of Slovakia's institutional design. The frustration of the people who, instead of supporting politicians who deal with regional issues, tend to believe the empty speeches of populists who find them solutions to politicized problems such as the refugee crisis or the Roma issue. It is possible to agree with R. Putnam's words that decentralization will not heal all regions, but will free up hands, especially in developed regions (Putnam, 1993). On the contrary, limiting the naturally fast growth of the more developed areas has an adverse effect on the state as a whole. The knowledge of many post-communist states shows that a strong democratic society not only plays an important role in the democratization of society but is also an important factor in eliminating the accumulated economic problems (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 18) One of the five guarantees of democracy, as Leszek Balcerowicz writes in the book *Freedom and Development*, is:

“an appropriate division of democracy into national and local spheres. A well-functioning local government is an extremely important measure of economy and democracy. It needs to be protected from the ups and downs of national politics. Strong and pragmatic local government is extremely important for areas with a large accumulation of economic problems. Without such self-government, it is not possible to solve them in any way " (Balcerowicz, 2000).

In 1990, the Government of the Slovak Republic launched the process of public administration reform, which consisted of four steps: Decentralization, administrative reform, territorial reform, and control system reform. In the 1990s, the first three previously mentioned preconditions for a successful public administration reform were partially met, but to this date Slovakia does not have an adequate system of control in public administration. The decentralization process was successful until 1996. In this year, the government of the Slovak Republic, led by HZDS - RSS, made changes within the territorial and administrative organization, administrative reform (horizontal integration of local government) and reconcentration of some activities from central government to local state administration. However, no progress has been made in decentralizing competencies from state administration to territorial self-government. The suspended decentralization process has had several impacts on society: 1) low flexibility of local requirements, normative decision-making, delayed responses to problems; 2) does not allow unpopular measures to be addressed effectively (e.g. the

proposal, step, will grow into a national and societal problem, despite the fact that only regional or sectoral disparities, which are the result of inefficient management of recent decades, are often addressed; 4) the excessive concentration of operational activities at central state administration bodies, which causes the persistence of the departmental approach, makes it difficult to effectively coordinate activities and define national priorities, and is a brake on faster transformation (delay statehood) activities that could more effectively provide private, respectively. non - profit organizations. (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 40) The suspension of reforms associated with the process of decentralization of power opened room for the growth of the HZDS party, which later in 1996 took several unpopular decisions concerning the regional division of Slovakia. These reforms offer room for growth for HZDS-like political entities to this day.

### **3.4 Possible Changes to The Territorial Administration**

The paradigm of public administration reform can be decided not only on the basis of a formal-legal structural definition, but also on the basis of an analysis of the ideological principles of the state. The states of the European Union and their ideological structure should be a natural paradigm, which means that the transitional cycles of the post-totalitarian states of Central Europe should also be taken into account. It is necessary to find models corresponding to the requirements of the Slovak Republic. It should not be an attempt to artificially and violently structure the state according to international models (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 52).

The horizontal and vertical separation of power and the autonomy of the legal system over political power is the fundamental characteristic of a pluralistic society. In particular, a broad agreement is clearly needed for decentralization efforts and the emergence of relatively independent sections of the state and the degree of their autonomy. Therefore, the regional level will establish the preconditions for the formation of a system of executive bodies based not simply on the majority principle, but on a proportional basis of the political makeup of the regional parliament. Thus, executive power may become an expression of the co-operation of political parties, or of the apolitical or impartial tendencies of public administration. It is important to respect the features of the government structure when designing a modern public administration.

The Slovak Republic adopted a parliamentary form of government by adopting the Constitution, the determining factor of which is the regulation of parliament-government ties, and its typical aspect is the existence of means of contact and control within government structures. Although this agreement does not have a direct effect on the public administration's starting points, as it is a decisive relationship between the highest state bodies, attempts to formalize self-government as a fourth state pillar of power and the essence of its state status will need to be evaluated in specific relationships and the final starting points will need to be explained. At the central level, the horizontal division of power will influence the essence of the vertical structure of the state (power) and the vertical division of power, which plays a dominant role in the reorganization of public administration (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 54) Regional policy is one of the fundamental preconditions of a democratic state, which enables the disparities between the different parts of the state to be balanced and thus facilitates the cohesion of the state and its stability. Without self-governing regions with their own identity, that is, on the basis of units that have not been formed solely by the administrative division of the state, without the knowledge of regional identity, this mission cannot be fulfilled successfully. The region must be recognized as a territory that is internally unified, relatively self-sufficient economically and culturally, and therefore capable of adequate autonomy. Therefore, the same size of regional territories is not a requirement for regional policy to be implemented. In order to complete the unification of its territories and establish an acceptable degree of homogenization of society, the key function of the regions is to contribute to the highest possible state output in the mobilization of resources.

The process of successful decentralization of political power in Slovakia has to intervene in several spheres of the current state order in order to limit populist-nationalist influence. In the first step, local government reform is needed. Its task is to create conditions at the local level for the transfer of the maximum possible range of competencies to municipalities and ensure their effective performance. One of the possibilities to achieve this goal is to reduce the number of local governments, which can be achieved, for example, by merging municipalities. Similar changes in the competencies of local governments were also proposed in the government's program statement from 2003, but they never fully took place.



The second change focuses on the financial sector and its decentralization. The aim of decentralization of finances is to strengthen the financial autonomy of local governments and strengthen municipal revenues, determine the revenues of local governments of higher territorial units and in connection with these changes the creation and application of a new system of financial compensation (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 178) These changes would lead to effective decentralization, which has two major implications. On the one hand, the strengthening of the state and the strengthening of the position of the central government, which will be achieved by separating political from executive functions in central bodies and shifting roles and responsibilities from the central to the local level. This step will enable the government to become an institution that makes fundamental, strategic decisions, to decide on the exclusive tasks of the state and not to manage and meddle into the details that territorial self-government can provide more effectively for the citizen. Secondly, the strengthening of territorial self-government, which will be reflected in the satisfaction of diverse requirements of the inhabitants of individual municipalities and regions. The transfer of powers to the local level (decentralization process) and support for civil society (political and economic liberalization process) will allow better cooperation between citizens, their elected representatives and local entrepreneurs, allow citizens to directly control the performance of public tasks and the use of public funds (Nižňanský, 2008, p. 186). These changes do not prevent the emergence of local populism or “reverse nationalism”, but to a large extent mitigate populist influences at the national level. This issue will be discussed in depth later in this work. It is these changes in the institutional design of Slovakia that could bring a stronger regional policy that could effectively solve local problems. As mentioned above in this work, it is the directing of the citizen's attention to regional policy that is a fundamental step in limiting the populist-nationalist influence on the territory of Slovakia.

## **Chapter 4: Minorities**

Minorities form a large part of the Slovak population and their insufficient representation contributes to the growth of populist nationalism. Despite the fact that the Slovak Republic is a relatively "young" state, it has a long and rich history, especially in terms of its establishment as an independent state, which was previously part of Austria-Hungary. The development leading to the demise of an independent Slovakia is partly described in the first chapter, but especially in terms of the development of the country as such. To properly understand the importance of minorities in a multi-ethnic democracy such as Slovakia, it is necessary to point out the historical development of Slovakia from the point of view of other nationalities or from the point of view of nationalities that existed in Slovakia before its establishment. It is with the help of the history of development in Slovakia that it is possible to understand the current state of distribution, number and representation of minorities in Slovakia. In the next step, it is necessary to summarize briefly the development of the representation of minorities in the political sphere after 1989. Although the representation of minorities in politics exists in Slovakia, as in the case of the Hungarian minority, it is necessary to point out that this representation is insufficient. With the help of this analysis, it is possible to point out the strong rise of nationalism as a means of populists to gain more political power.

The 2006 elections are also crucial, as the two generations of populist actors began to work together in that year. On one hand, so-called 'hardcore' populists affiliated with the HZDS and the SNS; during the time of reviving the country's integration aspirations (i.e., between 1998 and 2002), the second generation was established and started to flourish shortly before and immediately after Slovakia's accession to the EU, when 'soft' populists (e.g., Smer) became a dominant political power. In 2006, they raised their cooperation to the governmental level. The conditions of the EU accession process have previously limited and even directly hindered the participation of authoritarian populists in power by discouraging other political forces from forming alliances with them. The situation changed in 2004, when the countries

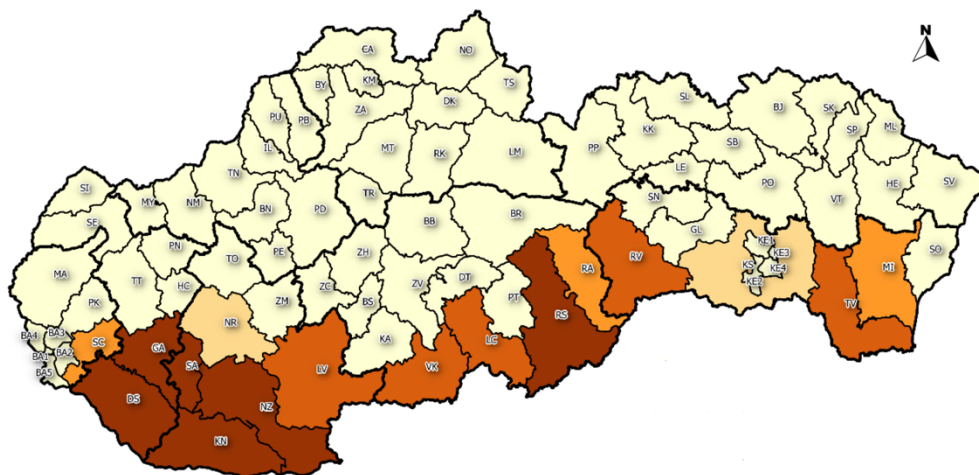
of Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, became full members of the EU and the coalition and power strategies of local political leaders are less dependent on the views of EU leaders. As a direct consequence of this change, Slovak populists ("soft" and "hard") gained a dominant position in the country's party system, formed an alliance and gained influence in shaping and determining public policies in all socially relevant sectors and subsequently managing the country's development (Gyárfášová, 2008) It was this new rhetoric of populist leaders that determined the direction of the development of nationalism as a means to gain more power. These populist-nationalist tendencies can be seen even today in the results of the elections in 2020, when the OĽANO party came to power. This chapter will point out the importance of the representation of minorities in multiethnic democracies, as well as their importance in limiting the growth of populist-nationalist political parties.

#### **4.1 History From a Nationalist Perspective Versus Reality**

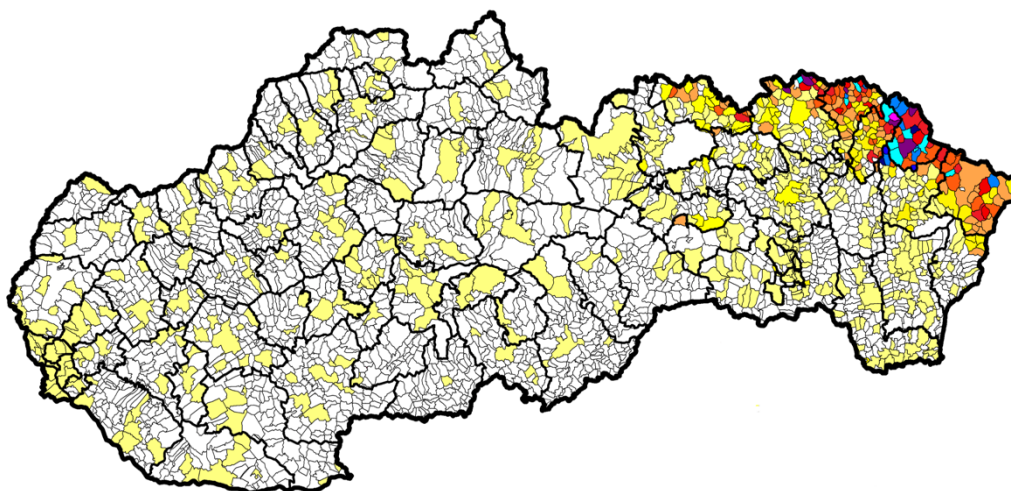
The ethnographic history of Slovakia is often modified and does not point to the natural presence of minorities in individual regions before the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. Despite the fact that Slovakia is a relatively "young country," its history can, according to some authors, go back to the 5th century. Slovakia became a subject of historical research, especially in the 18th century, when the author Matej Bel and his work *Hungarie antiquae et novae prodromus* (1723) tried to describe the history and the development of the Slovak ethnic group. Juraj Papánek and his first systematic description of the history of Slovakia *Historia gentis slavae* (1780) also contributed greatly to the increased interest in the study of the Slovak ethnic group. However, both of these works mythologized history, changed names such as "Great Moravia" to "Great Slovakia" or claimed that Slovaks had ruled in this area since the Middle Ages. The first complete work on the history of Slovakia was created only in 1989 and its content was largely influenced by the times in which it was created (Kováč, 2011). It can also be seen from these examples that the ethnic origin of Slovaks is questionable and discussions on this topic are still going on today. On the other hand, it is possible to point out the fact that Slovak nationalists even today still mythologize history and use "national heroes" such as Juraj Jánošík for the symbols of Slovak history. To achieve his goal, nationalism uses not so much the real, proven and observed history, as its mythical forms. They consider it to be history, the true history of the

nation, but it handles the facts arbitrarily and, if they do not exist, nationalists fabricate them. Mythical history is more colorful, more heroic, without being confined to the rules of the objective scientific research, it can go deeper into the past and, with its focus on the emotional side of the recipient, has a greater impact on the contemporary events (Balážová, 2003) For these reasons, nationalism can be a "contagious" aid to populists in mobilizing their constituents. From a historical point of view, it is possible to prove that numerous groups of people whose ancestors come from neighboring countries and to this day are considered members of another nationality live especially in the peripheral parts of Slovakia.

The Central European region is one of the most dynamic regions in terms of several cultural aspects. This region crosses the border between the Eastern and Western Christianity. Western Christianity represented here not only by the Roman Catholic Church, but also by strong historical Protestant denominations. Central Europe was also influenced by Islam between the 16th and 18th centuries, and there were many Jewish minorities in the region. This region has also been diverse in terms of ethnic origin. Many ethnic groups lived together in the Carpathian Basin. These ethnic groups belonged to different language families. Therefore, the region of Slovakia has always been inhabited mainly by the Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans, and Ruthenians. There were also smaller groups of Croats, Serbs, Jews, Romanians, Roma, Poles and many others (Horňák & Majo). On the other hand, the region of Central Europe has undergone major ethnic changes, especially in the early 20th century. The first big change came after the First World War with the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia. Until then, ethnic minorities were determined mainly by language and not by origin. With the establishment of the new republic came new borders, which were dividing Czechoslovakia and partially assimilated Austria-Hungary region. When looking at ethnographic maps, it is possible to see that individual minorities are often concentrated in certain parts of the country. The largest ethnic minority, the Hungarians, is concentrated in the south of the country, and on the other hand, we can see a large Ruthenian minority in the North-East of Slovakia. This division of minorities in the regions is not accidental and is the result of the history of the formation of the Slovak Republic.



Map 1: Proportion of inhabitants of Hungarian nationality by districts of the SR, 2018



Map 2: Proportion of inhabitants of Ruthenian nationality by districts of the SR, 2001

## 4.2 Representation of The Hungarian and Roma Minority in Slovakia

Hungarians form the largest Slovak minority, which in 2018 represents 8.4% of the citizens of the Slovak Republic, or 450,122 people (Statistics.sk, 2018). The first Hungarian political party to emerge in post-communist Slovakia was an independent Hungarian initiative. An independent Hungarian initiative founded in November 1989 changed its name to the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP) in January 1992. Despite the MPP's efforts to cooperate with other political parties in Slovakia, they did not succeed. This was mainly due to the growing national sentiment. The second political party of the Slovak Hungarian minority was the Coexistence. Coexistence was formed in February 1990 as a liberal-populist party, the most specifically ethnic party in the

Hungarian parties and the only one in the MKP that did not oppose the ethnic-territorial autonomy before the establishment of the MKP. The third party, which was also later a part of the MKP, was the Magyar Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH), which formed in March 1990. It is important to note that the political parties that eventually merged to form the MKP differed in their approaches in areas not related to minority rights. These differences indicate the political heterogeneity of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (Fisher, 1995). Another important political party representing the Hungarian minority is the Most-Híd (Bridge) party, founded by former members of the MKP party. The Most-Híd party became a member of the governing coalition of the former Prime Minister Iveta Radičová in 2010, and subsequently entered the parliament in the following elections in 2012. At present, there is no party representing the Hungarian minority in the Parliament of the Slovak Republic

A large minority living in Slovakia is also the Roma, who no longer have their own political party in the parliament. The first Roma party to form after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 was the Romani Civic Initiative (ROI). ROI participated in the anti-communist coalition together with the Civic Forum in the Czech Republic and with the VPN in Slovakia. After the division of Czechoslovakia, however, no Roma representatives were among the candidates of non-Roma parties, and this resulted in the Roma population having no representation in Slovakia after the 1992 elections. Before the 1994 elections, the Roma parties and associations decided to join forces and go to the parliamentary elections together. However, the main representatives Viliam Zeman and Ladislav Fízík asserted the claim that no Roma party has the opportunity to exceed the 5% election limit and therefore began negotiations with the Democratic Union (DU). Following the negotiations, DU recruited a number of Roma candidates for a position that would allow them to enter the parliament only through a preferential vote. However, after the 1994 elections, it turned out that few Roma understood the principle of such voting, and the Roma minority remained without representation even after the elections (Vašečka). The Roma Intelligence for Coexistence was the second major Roma political party to be founded in Slovakia (RIS). Founded in 1996 as an opposition to HZDS and ROI, RIS entered into negotiations with ROI, the Party for the Protection of Roma Rights (SOPR), in January 1998, representing mainly the Hungarian-speaking Roma and a government official (ethnic Slovak) in charge of the Roma issues. The

organization eventually disintegrated and the only member, Jozsef Ravasz, became the HZDS candidate in 88th place on the ballot. Until the elections in 1998, the Roma did not enter the elections with a united party, and according to the sources available, the Roma population voted mainly for the HZDS and the SDK (Vašečka). Nine RIS-led Roma political parties agreed to form a "Roma coalition" in May 1999, and in July 1999, five smaller Roma political parties signed a coalition agreement. These separate agreements were replaced on 22 October 2000, when representatives of 13 Roma political parties and 25 Roma NGOs signed an agreement on cooperation under the auspices of the ROI which consists of various bodies dealing with a political organization, justice, and international relations (Fil, Romano nevo, 2000). However, disagreements in the Roma Parliament caused the departure of Ladislav Fízik, who later founded the Political Union of Romas of Slovakia (ROMA). ROI and ROMA went to the 2002 elections separately and received less than 0.29% of the vote (Statistics.sk, 2002). On the other hand, the chairman of the RIS party received the 75th place on the HZDS candidate list and was, therefore, more successful than ROI or ROMA (Hviešová-Šilanová, 2002). At present, Roma parties do not come to the forefront of the Slovak political scene, and more successful are Roma candidates in non-Roma political parties, such as Peter Pollák, who became the first Roma in the Slovak Parliament after the 2012 elections on the ballot list of OĽaNO OĽANO.

Most minorities living in Slovakia are represented only on the lists of candidates of other political parties or through civic associations. In the current situation, for example, the Roma community is represented on the OĽaNO OĽANO party's list of candidates, but it cannot be assumed that such representation is sufficient. It is questionable to what extent the OĽANO party wants to represent the interests of the Roma minority, or to what extent it was a populist move to gain more preferences in elections. On the other hand, it can be said that Roma problems are discussed relatively often in the media, and Roma also have political parties cooperating and discussing the issues with non-Roma political parties. This cannot be said in the case of the Ruthenian minority, even though 34,000 people subscribe to the Ruthenian minority in Slovakia. The only deputy who declares himself to be of Ruthenian nationality is Mikuláš Krajčovič from SMER-SD, who, however, does not represent the interests of the Ruthenian minority (Koščová & Medvid', 2020). The "Roundtable of Ruthenians" platform represents Ruthenian professional institutions, civic associations and also

activists who are not in any organization but want to cooperate with the Ruthenians. However, in the case of the Hungarian minority, the situation is very different. There are several Hungarian political parties in Slovakia representing the interests of this minority, and the number of this minority together is higher than the electoral threshold (5%). The problem why none of the parties representing the Hungarian minority got into parliament may be the aforementioned divergence of political views within this large minority. It is for these reasons that the Hungarian political parties go to the polls separately and not together, which causes the distribution of votes of citizens of Hungarian nationality. From these examples it is possible to see the insufficient representation of minorities in Slovak politics, which has an adverse effect on a large part of the population, especially when it comes to multi-ethnic democracy such as Slovakia

### **4.3 Representation of Minorities at The Local and National Level**

Minorities are an important part of individual regions of Slovakia and therefore it is not possible to fulfill needs the given regions without their representation in politics. If the autonomy of individual regions is increased, as outlined in the previous chapter, it will be necessary to fully represent the population in these areas. Parliamentary representation of minorities is crucial to ensuring the successful involvement of these communities in public relations. All significant measures of minority engagement in decision-making at the national or regional level, whether minorities are currently present in legislatures, whether their voices are heard, and whether their priorities are taken into account are important. Such engagement has the potential to help everyone in a group. It can contribute to enhancing democracy, dramatically improving the quality of political life, promoting social integration, and conflict prevention (Protsyk, 2010). One of the ways to achieve increased representation of minorities would be through the Act on National Minorities, Their Financing and Self-Government and on the Amendment of Certain Acts. Such a law ensures that a politician does not run for a political party but for a minority, and that a voter registered in a minority election does not elect political parties, but representatives of his minority in parliament (Okruhly stôl Rusínov Slovenska). This is the case, for example in Hungary, where minorities can have either a member of the parliament or, if they are a small minority, at least have a speaker in parliament who cannot vote but



can enter a debate, interpellated and lobby. The Slovak Republic does not have such a law on national minorities. 30 years after the revolution and 27 years after the establishment of the Slovak Republic, minorities operate only from the position of civic associations. At the same time, minority cultural self-government is a common model that works in Serbia or Hungary (Koščová & Medvid', 2020). The above-mentioned organization Roundtable of Ruthenians also fights for such an adjustment in the laws of the Slovak Republic. This organization has also developed a precise proposal for changes and proposals for the creation of new laws that would greatly help increase the representation of minorities in Slovakia. The intent of these changes can be read from the preamble to this proposal:

The National Council of the Slovak Republic, as the only constitutional and legislative body of a democratic and rule of law, bearing in mind the right of Slovak citizens to freely declare their national and ethnic identity as part of basic human rights guaranteed by the Slovak Constitution, respecting the identity of members of national minorities, manifested in particular by their own culture, traditions or language, taking into account the creation of a multicultural society and striving for the harmonious coexistence of national minorities with the majority population, guaranteeing members of national minorities the right to participate effectively in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, those relating to national minorities, protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in accordance with the international treaties on human rights and fundamental freedoms, by which the Slovak Republic is bound by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, resolved on this law (Okruhly stôl Rusínov Slovenska)

Increased representation of minorities does not have to be conditioned exclusively by changes in the laws of the Slovak Republic but can also be achieved by the natural behavior of political parties. Such behavior could be achieved, for example, by the above-mentioned autonomy of the regions of Slovakia. This would cause increased interest in minorities where they are concentrated and make up a large part of the population of the individual regions.

On the other hand, there is also a more effective change in the institutional design of Slovakia, which would cause increased interest in the representation of minorities - a change in the electoral system. This will be discussed in the next chapter, which will point out the changes already made in the electoral system as well as their impact on society, proposals for changes and their possible impact not only on

minorities, but also on the possibilities of the mitigation of the populist-nationalist influences in Slovakia.

## Chapter 5: Electoral System

The current electoral system used in Slovakia helps populist parties to control power. As elections are the strongest means of democracy, it is necessary to ensure that the majority of the population is represented in the most efficient way possible. Since the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic, the country has been divided into several constituencies. Such a division partially helped political parties, which had their political bases distributed in several constituencies of Slovakia. Extensive changes came in 1998 when the ruling HZDS party, led by Vladimír Mečiar, tried to gain more power. The former prime minister's primary intention was to change the proportional electoral system to a majoritarian electoral system. Although these efforts were not successful, there were still extensive changes to the electoral law in Slovakia. The most fundamental was the change from the original four constituencies to one covering the whole of Slovakia. It had to ensure an increase in preferences for Mečiar, which did not help HZDS in the end, and Mikuláš Dzurinda eventually formed the governing coalition. Since 1998, the electoral system in Slovakia has not undergone any fundamental changes, despite the fact that there have been several debates dealing with such changes. The current government coalition has once again opened the question of changes to the electoral system, and that is why Slovakia is currently at the imaginary crossroads of democracy, and the direction it will take can decide on the further development of the country.

This chapter will discuss the historical development of the electoral system in Slovakia and the reasons why it has changed. It will also discuss why the electoral system has not changed since 1998, although it is proving increasingly inefficient. An important part will also be an explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of individual electoral systems, whether proportional, majoritarian, or mixed electoral systems, applied to Slovakia. The chapter's conclusion will provide the proposed changes in the electoral system, explaining why they are suitable for a multi-ethnic democracy and what impact they will have on the growing popularity of populist parties.

## 5.1 Electoral System After 1989

The electoral system in Slovakia followed the recommendations of Western democratic culture. With the departure of the communist regime, the question arose as to which electoral system would be most suitable for Czechoslovakia. To ensure the most democratic course of the elections, a proportional electoral system was chosen, which was recommended for post-communist states in which the transformation took place, but also had a tradition in the first Czechoslovak Republic. Such an electoral system was expected to bring the most proportional representation of the citizens of Czechoslovakia.

Elections to the unicameral 150-member chamber were, according to Act No. 80/1990 Coll. Of March 16, 1990, an act on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot according to the principle of proportional representation (§1). The condition for active suffrage is 18 years of age and permanent residence in Czechoslovakia. Deputies were elected in four electoral districts corresponding to the then territorial division of the republic: the territory of the capital of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, the West Slovakian Region, the Central Slovakian Region and the East Slovakian Region (§9, §10). The elections were overseen by constituencies made up of delegates from candidate political parties and movements. Candidate lists were sent to regional commissions exclusively by political parties and movements, which attached to the list a statement that the party has at least 10,000 individual members, or attach a petition signed by so many citizens to replace the number of missing individual members up to 10,000 (§17). Although the amount of the election clause for the Czech National Council and for the Federal Assembly was set at 5%, the threshold for the elections to the Slovak National Council (SNR) was set at 3% (Slov-lex). The electoral law from 1990 is much more complex, but for the purposes of this work, this abbreviated description will suffice.

The difference between the Czech Eligibility Threshold of 5% and the Slovak Eligibility Threshold of 3% was due to the alleged "undemocratic" nature of this institute (Praca). 16 relatively unprofiled political entities, including two coalitions, ran for the 1990 elections, and seven of them exceeded the 3% threshold. Successful subjects together received up to 92.3% of valid votes. 7.7% (260,000) of valid votes fell through. Therefore, it can be stated that "although the 3% threshold for the entry into the parliament was selective, it did not in principle undermine the nature of the

proportional representation of political parties in parliament. On the other hand, the number of parliamentary parties in the SNR has been reduced to the level of established democracies with a proportional electoral system (Zemko, 1994). The election period from 1990 to 1992 brought differentiation of the party spectrum, as evidenced by the fact that at the beginning of this election period, nine political parties came into the parliament and at the end there were as many as eleven.

The election period from 1992 to 1994 brought only one fundamental change. The eligibility threshold increased from the original 3% to 5%, as was the case in the Czech Republic. The voting threshold for two- and three-member coalitions was also raised to 7%, and the voting threshold for coalitions of 4 or more political entities was raised to 10%. This regulation in the electoral law is still valid in Slovakia (Act No. 180/2014 Coll.). Both political parties and voters were not used to this change and it brought unfavorable results. Despite the difficult conditions, up to 23 electoral subjects registered for the elections, of which up to four were coalitions. The increased threshold for the election caused as many as 23.8% (733,511) of the votes to fall through. According to the electoral law, these forfeited votes were budgeted among the political entities that entered the parliament, which caused parliamentary representation disproportionate to their electoral result (Krištofik, 2001). "Only" 18 political entities took part in the 1994 elections, indicating that both voters and political parties understood the increased threshold for election. Of the 18 political entities, seven were successful, with a mandate of up to 87%, which led to a significantly better representation of the population of Slovakia. At first glance, seemingly satisfactory data, however, brought the expected problem. In fact, up to 31 political entities took part in the elections, opting for the electoral tactics to form ad hoc coalitions and place their candidates on the lists of stronger entities instead of integrating and merging with program-related entities. "The range of elected parliamentary entities does not confirm the progressive crystallization and political-program concentration of political forces on our (Slovak) political scene. In the National Council of the Slovak Republic, 16 political entities were actually present, of which 9 entered parliament within 3 electoral coalitions, 3 parties placed their candidates on the list of candidates of three other parties (they were a kind of crypto-coalition) and only two parliamentary parties (SNS and ZRS) ran separately" (Zemko, 1994). We can see similar behavior of political

subjects who have no practical chance of getting into parliament today, especially in the case of political parties representing minorities, as outlined in the previous chapter.

## **5.2 Mečiar's Reform of The Electoral System**

The change in the electoral system during the years 1994 to 1998 established an inefficient electoral system, which is still used in Slovakia today. Although the 1994 elections were premature, they did not bring about any fundamental change and were almost identical to the 1992 elections. The first signs of an authoritarian regime by Vladimír Mečiar came after the first and second meetings of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NRSR). In them, Mečiar indicated that he wanted to "streamline" the electoral system in Slovakia. The first change occurred in the right to vote was Act No. 81/1995 Coll. of 7.4.1995 (Slov-lex, 1994). This law allowed political parties to appoint an alternate for a member of the NRSR from their list of candidates, regardless of his placement within the preferences of citizens. This law has greatly increased the reach of the political party leaders to install people "close" to the party in parliament (Krištofik, 2001). Much more drastic proposals to change the electoral system began to emerge in 1995, when the government's opposition was considerably fragmented. Vladimír Mečiar began to suggest that a majority electoral system would be ideal for Slovakia, as it "stabilizes parliament and government" (Mečiar, 1997). Such an attitude on the part of Vladimír Mečiar is not surprising, as his party had the highest number of preferences and these changes would provide Mečiar with even more power. However, the party failed to present a draft amendment to the electoral law in 1996. The reason was changes in the territorial administration of Slovakia (discussed above), which were to be associated with changes in the electoral system. The coalition partners of the HZDS (SNS and the Slovak Workers' Association) did not agree with the changes, and, therefore, Vladimír Mečiar did not have the 50 percent support for approving the new law (Krištofik, 2001). In the event that such a change in the electoral law did not pass, Mečiar also proposed a combined electoral system.

In June 1996, the preferences of the government opposition began to hover around 50%, leading to greater cooperation between the opposition parties. In the autumn of 1996, the KDH (Christian Democratic Movement), DS (Democratic Party) and DÚ (Democratic Union) formed a right-wing centrist coalition with the aim of a joint candidacy in the elections scheduled for 1998. A joint opposition referendum

initiative for the direct election of the president resulted in 1997 until the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). The emergence of a preferentially weaker political entity forced Mečiar to withdraw the bill, as it threatened him to lose even more power.

The changes in the electoral law established for the 1998 elections changed the development of political culture in Slovakia. The "Mečiar Act" and its amendment was very extensive, and therefore this section will focus only on the most important changes brought about by the 1998 elections. Democracy is characterized by the transparency of the electoral process, which is also covered by §4. This law imposed an obligation on municipalities to allow a citizen (at the municipal office) to view the permanent list of voters. At first sight, such a law allows citizens to check the accuracy of their personal data. The problem, however, was the parallel repeal of §6, which granted the obligation to issue a list of voters in every house, where only the inhabitants of these houses appeared. At first sight, these changes did not cause any fundamental change, but from a practical point of view, it was not possible to check, for example, whether a neighbor who is 2 years after death is not on the electoral roll (Krištofik, 2001). The amendment of §48 concerning the appointment of alternates in the National Council of the Slovak Republic further strengthened the influence of the party leadership on the selection of these alternates.

One of the most fundamental changes was §9, in which the electoral regions were abolished and for the 1998 elections, the territory of Slovakia was a single constituency. This law significantly weakened the institution of preferential votes and strengthened the position of the party leadership. As this is a very serious change in electoral law, the work will discuss it later in the section on proposed changes. Another substantial change serving to weaken the candidate coalitions was the new Act §41 regulating the conditions for the allocation of seats:

"The Central Electoral Commission shall further ascertain which political party has received less than five per cent of the total number of valid votes. The political party referred to in paragraph 2 and the votes cast for it shall no longer be taken into account in the further determination of the election results and the allocation of seats. is part of a coalition, looks at other political parties as if they had submitted their list of candidates separately " (Slov-lex, 1998)

This section clearly shows the disadvantage of coalitions, or rather the denial of the meaning of coalitions, as it obliges each party within the coalition to reach a 5%

quorum. This law, adopted just before the 1998 elections, brought about a widespread change in the Slovak political scene. The political parties of the SDK coalition (KDH, DÚ, DS, SDSS and SZS) have decided to deal with this law by creating a separate SDK platform to which the individual parties have appointed their delegates. Due to the plurality of these parties, the programs of the individual parties were not merged, and the individual parties did not even disappear, even though they did not run in the elections. In the second major coalition of the SMK, composed of the parties MKDH, Coexistence and MOS, there was a complete merger of the parties. Despite the expected polarity of political views in the SMK, no platforms were created, and the party went to the polls with a single election program (Krištofik, 2001). “Following the publication of the amendment in the Collection of Laws, a group of deputies asked the Constitutional Court to declare certain provisions of the law unconstitutional. The deputies demanded to declare unconstitutionality as unconstitutional 1) restrictions on the election campaign on STV (Slovak Television) and SRo (Slovak Radio) §23 para. 1), 2) §17 para.2, the discriminatory nature of which prevented political party candidates from running on candidate lists of other political parties or coalitions §16 para. 2, which transferred the obligation to "complete" the electoral district commission from the mayor to the head of the district office. Since the judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic dates to March 18, 1999 - i.e., after the elections, the '98 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic took place according to the valid, albeit questionable, electoral law. In Act No. 66/1999 Coll., The Constitutional Court ruled on the unconstitutionality of the "monopoly" of STV and SRo for the election campaign, and also described (already mentioned several times) §48 para. 1, according to which a candidate enters a vacant mandate according to a political party” (Krištofik, 2001).

Following the filing of the petition, the Constitutional Court assessed some of the new electoral laws as unconstitutional, but many key issues remained unresolved. Act No. 223/1999 Coll. of 24.8.1999 corrected the tightened rules for candidate coalitions so that a 5% mandate of individual parties of the coalition was not required. The law was essentially adapted to its original wording from before the 1998 elections, which means that two- and three-member coalitions needed to get 7% of the vote and four and more member coalitions had to get 10% of the vote (Slov-lex, 1999). However, the "problematic" laws remained intact and influence political events in Slovakia to this



day. One of the fundamental problems remained the §48 law, which enabled the appointment of deputies to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Although these allegations are almost unprovable, even after the 1998 elections, the winning coalition, led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, abused this power and installed people "close" to the party in parliament. However, a much more fundamental problem was one constituency which arose from the original four constituencies. The proportional electoral system with one constituency is still used in Slovakia today. Its most fundamental problem is that citizens do not vote for the representatives of their regions, but for the leaders of political parties. Such a system gives space to populists and, on the other hand, puts the interests of individual regions "on the sidelines". To effectively limit populist-nationalist influences, it is necessary to make changes in the electoral system so as to improve the representation of individual regions of Slovakia. The following subchapter will be elaborated in more detail on this issue, which will outline in more detail the proposed changes and their impact on Slovakia.

### **5.3 Proposed Changes in The Electoral System of Slovakia**

Several important changes need to be made in the electoral system used in Slovakia, but this does not mean that its overall characteristics need to be changed. To begin with, it is necessary to clarify the role of the electoral system in democratic states and why this work seeks to defend its change. The electoral system is undoubtedly the most important constitutional mechanism of a democratic regime, which is understood as a set of laws regulating the division of electoral preferences as votes and the conversion of votes into political representation (L. Horowitz, 1991, s. 163). This is because the electoral system affects whether democracy is majority-oriented or consensual-oriented (Lijphart, *Democratization and constitutional choices in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland*, 1992, s. 208). These are specifically the two types of electoral system that are most widespread in the world. On the one hand, it is an electoral system in which the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. Such a system is called "first-past-the-post" or FPP and supports the majority nature of governance. On the other hand, there is a system whose aim is to translate votes into seats in parliament as proportionally as possible. Such a system is called "proportional representation" or PR systems supporting consensualism (Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 2012, s. 32-33). Majority democracies can cause under-representation or

even the exclusion of these minorities from political power in societies divided according to religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines. For multi-ethnic democracies such as Slovakia, consensual democracy is often much more appropriate, as it promises to represent all major segments of society (Lijphart, *Democratization and constitutional choices in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland*, 1992, s. 208). The proportional electoral system (PR) serves the goal of consensual democracy by relatively accurately reflecting the true political preferences of voters (Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press, s. 32-33).

Given the above specification of electoral systems, it can be argued that if the PR system really serves its purpose and promotes consensual democracy in multi-ethnic states, it is the right choice for Slovakia. On the other hand, there are a number of aspects within the PR system that affect both the democracy of the state as such, but also the proportionality of the representation, which is enshrined in the very name of this system. It is by revising some of these aspects that it is possible to achieve a "more realistic" representation of citizens, which would lead to a mitigation of populist-nationalist influences in Slovakia.

A key change in the electoral system used in Slovakia is an increase in the number of constituencies, which would lead to an increased representation of individual regions. As outlined in the work, the diversity of Slovakia's regions creates the need for an individual approach. The diversity of individual regions concerns not only the minorities living in these territories, but also the differences in the development or financial situation of the regions concerned. Slovakia has undergone various changes since the 1990s and especially in the context of regional development (the theory of expanding scissors mentioned above in the work). For these reasons, it can be argued that the original model of the four constituencies would be insufficient today.

A single constituency system helps parties that are highly centralized, but such a system forgets the regions. (In the chapter *Decentralization of political power*, changes in the regional division of Slovakia were proposed, but such changes would require a deeper analysis and therefore this section of the work will deal with the current number of districts). Electoral systems are a complex matter, and their exact details cannot be understood without adequate education, but they concern all citizens who may not have such education. That is why it is important that the electoral system can

be easily interpreted, and that the citizen be able to vote without "instructions". It is for these reasons that this work proposes the division of Slovakia into 79 constituencies, which is the current number of districts. Such a proposal was also supported by former President Andrej Kiska in 2018 (Kaliňák, 2019). Such a division has several major advantages.

First, the citizen does not have to get used to the new constituencies, as they will be identical to the districts. In the event of a change in the current districts, the constituencies would change along with them. In both cases, however, the citizen knows which constituency he or she falls under. Secondly, such changes would allow political parties to expand their bases and have to put leaders from the regions on the list of candidates. Citizens would thus choose personalities they know from their region and not members of political parties whom they know "only from the media". It is the regional political leaders who are also key to the representation of minorities in the regions of Slovakia, as this work has proved that minorities are usually concentrated in certain parts of the country. This does not mean unconditionally that the deputy for a given region would have to be part of a minority (or declare a nationality other than Slovakia), but would have to work closely with that minority to achieve the required number of preferential votes.

The advantage of strong regional leaders is also the ability to solve local problems, which cannot be solved from the position of strongly centralized political parties. It is the centralized political parties that are centered around the weak leader that do not support the proposal of more constituencies. An example is not only the HZDS from the 90s, but also, for example, the SAS party led by Richard Sulík. Sulík did not agree with the statement of former President Andrej Kiska regarding the division of Slovakia into several constituencies. SAS is a party with a political base in Bratislava and in 2016 it occupied 21 mandates in parliament and of them there were 16 deputies from Bratislava (Kaliňák, 2019). In this example, it is possible to point out the insufficient regional representation by political parties, which would play a key role in the proposed increased autonomy of the regions will happened.

Such changes in the Slovak electoral system need more extensive study. Since the aim of this work is not to provide precise changes in the electoral system, but only to outline the possibilities of change that would be appropriate for the Slovak Republic

in order to limit populist-nationalist influences, an in-depth analysis is needed to outline the exact course of change. However, it can be argued that the correct formulation of changes in the electoral system would increase the representation of individual regions. As part of the representation of the regions, the representation of minorities, which make up a large part of the population in Slovakia, would also be necessary for political parties in order to gain required number of votes. Together with the increased autonomy of regions, it would be possible to effectively limit populist nationalist influences in Slovakia.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that this work pointed to the negative impact of authoritarian reforms in the 90s. Their goal was to support a strongly centralized government and thus ensure a higher share of power for the ruling HZDS party. However, despite the abolition of some of these reforms, there has been no complete return to the original electoral regime. The current electoral system does not provide the necessary representation of minorities in the regions of Slovakia. At the same time, the work argues that it is necessary to ensure increased autonomy of regions, which in the current system are mostly managed by a highly centralized government. All these factors contribute to the rise of populist-nationalist tendencies, which are increasingly the main subject of debate not only in Slovakia but also in the world.

The work argues that the increased autonomy of the regions would have a positive impact on their development and also serves as an effective means of curbing populist tendencies in Slovakia. The unfinished reform process of 2004 caused the differences between individual regions of Slovakia to deepen further. Due to the complexity of the issue of autonomy of regions, the work provided only a basic overview of possible changes that would have a positive impact on regional policy. However, it is necessary to make a more extensive analysis and describe the exact process of changes in the institutional design of Slovakia for successful implementation in practice.

An important part of individual regions in multi-ethnic democracies such as Slovakia are minorities, whose representation has proven to be insufficient. The change in regional division in the 1990s was intended to redistribute minorities between districts in order to weaken their influence. Efforts to increase the representation of minorities have proved insufficient in the work, and therefore the work proposes the adoption of a law on national minorities, which would partially address the representation of minorities in parliament. However, for the full integration of minorities into the political process, changes are also needed in the electoral system in Slovakia.

The current electoral system used in Slovakia supports political parties with a strong leader and a centralized base. The merging of the original four constituencies has helped such parties gain even more popularity, but in a diversified environment such an electoral system does not provide for proportional representation. Therefore, the work proposes the division of Slovakia into 79 constituencies that will be identical to the districts. Such a division would ensure a more proportionate representation of citizens in parliament.

If the autonomy of individual regions could be increased, it would be possible to prevent populism at the national level. However, the introduction of such changes in institutional design also requires a parallel change in the electoral system to ensure genuine regional representation. Both of these steps would lead to the need to involve minorities in the political process, which would result in their increased representation. Although all the proposed changes require further investigation, it can be argued that this work serves as a solid basis for these studies. By changing the institutional design in connection with the autonomy of the regions, changing the electoral system and the resulting increase in the representation of minorities, it is possible to achieve a mitigation of populist-nationalist influences in Slovakia.

## Resumé

Rastúci vplyv populistov a nacionalistov sa stáva čoraz častejšie predmetom ako politických tak aj sociologických debát na celom svete. Región strednej Európy nie je výnimkou, a po páde komunizmu sa štáty bývalého východného bloku museli rozhodnúť akým smerom sa ich republiky budú uberať. História spoločné štátu Čechov a Slovákov netrvala dlho a prvého Januára 1993 sa oba národy vybrali "vlastnou cestou". Už od počiatku vlády Vladimíra Mečiara bolo možné pozorovať jeho autoritárske tendencie a plánované reformy len potvrdili tieto obavy. Zmeny zákonov v 90-tych rokoch postavili Slovensko do zložitej situácie a napomohli vytvoreniu populistických a silno nacionalistických politických subjektov. Aj napriek niekoľkým neskorším reformám sa nepodarilo Slovensku prinavrátiť jeho niekdajšiu, aj keď krátku, demokratickosť a následky 90-tych rokov môžeme cítiť na Slovensku dodnes. Práve z dôvodu narastajúcich preferencií nacionalisticko-populistických politických subjektov si autor zvolil tému ktorá skúma možnosti zamedzenia ich vplyvov. Práca sa snaží poukázať na nedostatky v inštitucionálnom dizajne Slovenska ako aj na možnosti jeho reformácie.

Hlavným zámerom práce je poukázať na historický vývin politickej kultúry na Slovensku, ako aj jej úpadok počas vlády Vladimíra Mečiara. Na tému rastúcich preferencií populistických politických strán je spracovaných množstvo štúdií, avšak len málokteré sa zaoberajú post-komunistickými štátmi strednej Európy. Na správne pochopenie tejto témy sa práca vo veľkej miere venuje skúmaniu histórie a jej vplyvu na súčasnú podobu Slovenska. Ďalej sa autor zameriava na štatistiky súvisiace s demografiou Slovenska, nakoľko menšiny tvoria veľkú časť populácie a poukázanie na ich dôležitosť v jednotlivých regiónoch je pre prácu kľúčové.

Ďalším z hlavných zámerov práce je dokázať že decentralizácia politickej moci je kľúčom ku efektívnemu zamedzeniu rastu populisticko-nacionalistických tendencií. Práve z tohto dôvodu je nutné vykonať zmeny v inštitucionálnom dizajne Slovenska a to najmä vo vzťahu ku autonómii regiónov, reprezentácii menšín a volebnému systému. Práca podrobne rozoberá všetky tieto aspekty ako z historického tak aj zo súčasného pohľadu a pomocou dostupnej teórie sa snaží predostrieť možné návrhy zmien ktoré by zabezpečili efektívnejšiu reprezentáciu občanov Slovenska.

Za prvé sa autor snaží poukázať na dôležitosť autonómie regiónov, ktorých rozdielnosť v spojení s neefektívnym spravovaním spôsobuje efekt "rozvárajúcich sa nožníc", menej rozvinuté regióny čoraz viac upadajú, zatiaľ čo rozvinutejšie regióny ekonomicky aj kultúrne vzrastajú. Takýto efekt spôsobuje u občanov nedôveru v politikov a z tohto dôvodu sa uchýľujú ku voľbe populistických lídrov ktorý poskytujú riešenia na častokrát vymyslené problémy v spoločnosti. Práve zlepšením regionálnej politiky je možné dosiahnuť riešenie skutočných regionálnych problémov ktoré zamedzujú ich rozvoj. Ďalej sa autor snaží poukázať na regionálne členenie Slovenska, ktoré nie je v súlade s historickým vývinom tohto regiónu. Úmyselné "prekreslenie" hraníc regiónov slúžilo na oslabenie vplyvov menšín na týchto územiach. Túto praktiku nazývame "gerrymandering" a aj keď nie je úplne typickou pre proporcionálne volebné systémy Vladimírovi Mečiarovi sa ju podarilo efektívne aplikovať a tým si zabezpečiť zvýšenie volebných preferencií HZDS.

Druhá problematika ktorej sa autor v práci venuje je nedostatočná reprezentácia menšín, ktoré tvoria veľkú časť populácie Slovenska. Multi-etnické demokracie by pri zabezpečovaní čo najproporcionálnejšej reprezentácie svojich občanov mali zameriavať do veľkej miery práve menšinami. Vláda Vladimíra Mečiara sa vďaka svojmu nacionalisticko-autoritárskemu charakteru však pokúšala do veľkej miery obmedziť reprezentáciu týchto menšín za pomoci re distribúcie hlasov občanov medzi jednotlivými volebnými obvodmi. Po zjednotení volebných obvodov sa tento problém eliminoval, ale ku zvýšeniu reprezentácie menšín nedošlo. Po preskúmaní histórie reprezentácie menšín vyšlo najavo, že mnohé menšiny na Slovensku nemajú dostatočnú početnosť na prekonanie päť percentného kvóra, čo v praxi znemožňuje ich akúkoľvek angažovanosť v politickom procese. Preto autor navrhuje prijatie zákona o národnostných menšinách, ktorý by túto problematiku čiastočne riešil.

Tretím subjektom skúmania je volebný systém používaný na Slovensku. Pomocou analýzy výhod jednotlivých systémov sa ukázalo že proporcionálny volebný systém je pre multi-etnické demokracie najvhodnejší nakoľko má najväčší potenciál s relatívnou presnosťou reprezentovať veľkú časť populácie, avšak niektoré z jeho aspektov musia byť pozmenené. Po analýze historického vývoja politického systému z práce vzišlo že vrátenie sa ku pôvodnému členenie na štyri volebné obvody by v dnešnej dobe bolo neefektívne. Z týchto dôvodov autor navrhuje rozdelenie Slovenska na 79 volebných obvodov ktoré by identicky kopírovali hranice súčasných okresov.



Takéto zmeny by mali niekoľko zásadných výhod. Za prvé by boli politické strany nútené angažovať sa regionálnej politike a v každom volebnom obvode nájsť vhodných reprezentantov daného obvodu. Takáto zmena by do veľkej miery pomohla riešeniu regionálnych problémov čo by malo za následok zmiernenie vplyvu populizmu na našom území. Za druhé by takéto zmeny napomohli aj zvýšenej reprezentácii menšín. Ako práca dokázala, menšiny sústredené v určitých regiónoch Slovenska tvoria veľkú časť voličov. Pokiaľ by chcela strana dostať v danom regióne dostatočnú podporu, bola by nútená s menšinami spolupracovať a vyhovieť ich požiadavkám. Práve volebný systém spája ostatné predložené zmeny v inštitucionálnom dizajne a vytvára tak uzatvorený celok ktorého pomocou by bolo možné zmierniť populisticko-nacionalistické vplyvy na Slovensku.

Táto práca slúži ako podklad pre ďalšie potencionálne práce zaoberajúce sa rastúcou popularitou populistov nie len na Slovensku, ale v multi-etnických demokraciách všeobecne. Práca samotná nenavrhuje žiadne konkrétne riešenia, ale popisuje postupy ktoré by po dôkladnejšom preskúmaní a následnej aplikácii mali pozitívny vplyv na vývoj politickej kultúry v štátoch ktoré sa stretávajú s podobnou problematikou ako Slovenská Republika.

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