Influence of political parties and the media on the formation of public opinion

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Abstract:

Purpose and Originality: This article deals with political parties, mass media and public opinion. It is exploring, how the political parties and mass media influence the decisions made by the public.

Method The research was done by the method of observation. We observed the influence of political parties and the media to shape public opinion. The observation was made in the Slovak Republic.

Results: The aim of this paper work is to analyze and examine how reaction of the public opinion changes by receiving the information from the political parties and media.

Society: The study enables easier orientation in manipulation of public opinion that can improve the social order as well as social responsibility and the environment indirectly.

Limitations / further research: The study is restricted performance enhancers political parties intervene in public opinion. The study is based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the agency FOCUS. Further research could explore influence of interest groups on political parties.

1 Introduction

In the article, we are trying to present influence of political parties and mass media on public opinion formation. The first chapter deals with political parties, when they were found and by their origin. In the second chapter is about the primary division of the parties. Subsequently, in the third chapter I will mainly focus on the public opinion, which is manipulated by the upper echelons, such as mass media, politicians and of course by the parties, which as a whole are connected onto the highest propagandists and information intermediaries. Also I want to mention, or try to describe how the public opinion can be eased, because it is not possible to stop it. So then the main object of this paper work is to analyze the current relation between public opinion and the political parties and analyze information, that are shared via mass media and other structures, which are trying to give these information to the citizens "relevantly".

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 The formation of political parties

Their origin was already established by the group of politicians in antiquity, in antique Greece. It is possible to search beginnings of more substantive parties in England and France revolution; also they might be connected with the creation of the USA. Afterwards the modern political parties were established since the middle of 19th century and brought quarrels between privileged ranks, who wanted to stand for their position; they had not wanted any changes in discriminated ranks, who were trying to radically change their inferior position.

Due that the conservative and social – democratic parties were being created. If there would not be such thing as to spread opinions freely to the public, the creation of political parties alone, will not be effective. In the beginnings, the right to vote was not enhanced to everyone, because of this fact; the liberal parties were created in the middle of 19th century, so they could struggle for the codification of human rights, freedom and surety of the right to vote for everybody. Another kind of the political parties is being founded at the beginning of 20th century; this kind is called the extreme political parties. They separated from the traditional social – democratic and conservative parties. And so the communistic party was founded, in other word the extreme left wing and fascistic parties called the extreme right wing. These parties fought to erase the political pluralism.

The term party is originated in the Latin word pars, which stands for party or it might be better if we say part. In the present, each country has their own term, for example in English it is party, in German it is partei, in France it is parti, however nations which are close for Slovaks, like Czechs or Croatians it is called the exactly same; "strana/stranka". The definition of the word party is harder than it looks. For example in 18th century, E. Burke defined the party as an organization of people, who have united on the concrete principle, which everyone accepts and want to realize for the national interest by their own specific way *(*Scarrow, 2002, p. 35) . Then we can also mention the example of J. Schumpeter, who tried to define the word party as a party of members, who are trying to achieve and organize the power in the competitive fight. We think that it is possible to agree on the statement, that the political party has a lot of definitions, however for today´s definition, it is about the group of people or unit, whose are trying to represent the majority of citizens on the executively – legislatively level in the state and obtaining of power, which will be used for the benefit of the biggest majority possible.

Each political party as a representative subject of people has more of the functions, by which they influence the public opinion. These functions are contributing to stabilization and organization of the society; also some of the functions are changing the society. Under the stabilization of the society we may possibly imagine situation in the state, when parties are cooperating together and they are offering the most primary values and ways of identification in the best possible way for the elector. Simply said they are creating the surrounding suitable for living which contributes to lower the tension at the all levels in the state. In contrast to those stabilizing parties there are parties, which are changing the society, creating much more of the tension, they main motive is to compete with each other . We can definitely say that the political parties are examining the society from the view of values, which creates measure value of the public while facing the reality and evolutionary tendencies, meanwhile the values are being influenced by hierarchy, and by doing that they are informing the public, which values are considered as the deciding ones, unalterable, marginal or in some cases inappropriate ones. Political parties also contribute to socializing of citizens by spreading of the ideas or fantasies about the society. The parties are trying to get the citizens used to democracy or in other words democratic structures of power and political behavior. On the other hand they are bringing the intolerance against other´s political ideas to the conscious of people. Without the activity of the political parties, however political socialization of citizens

could be less efficient and most likely more manipulated; therefore the main subject would become the state. The main duty of the political parties is to persuade citizen to cope with the existing political system, in the case of some problem with his defense as well. Also the political parties includes citizens into the policy, it helps to widen their participation in the adjudging process. By doing this they let them go against each other and limiting their natural perceptiveness of the world, therefore they oblige them to organizational and ideology support of their own party. Besides that, the political parties are creating the space for the legal battle for the political power, they are also the mechanism of organization of elections to the parliament and very important factor, which has the influence on the public opinion, is the elite, which operate the political party as well. A lot of distinguished writers dealt with the elitism, I dare to mention J. Schumpeter. The point, I will be dealing with is his outlook on the relationship between the elector and the elected elite. Elections plebescity are in the sense that they accept or reject a particular team leader (Svennson, 1995, p. 142). Schumpeter insists, that elites, which are elected by the people must have certain freedom at the deciding and maneuvering. It would be very difficult and destabilizing, if elites, which holds the power had to be under constant pressure of the public, in a sense citizens, so they could not be able to carry out any political decisions, therefore there are always people or just the part of the population, which would not agree with the elite. Moreover, it would be much harder to deduce the political consequence against the elites, because they could be forced to some of their decisions by the certain group of people. Therefore it is important to have elected elites with the autonomous deciding, so they would not decide for the certain mass of people for the short period of time, just so they could have relative relax. It is the elite which has to take the responsibility and decide even if it does not appeal to be popular at the first glance, but for the future the best possible choice to be made. Schumpeter in this case says about democratic self-control. At the conclusion of the elites, it is obvious that mostly they and their rhetoric creates the baseline of the page. Although, it is not the rule, because there are parties or just period in some of the traditional parties, when leader´s position is just de jure, however de facto party is pulled from the background by someone else. Exactly parties in the Slovakia in the past as well as now is not the exception, charismatic leaders, who are rhetorically capable. From the past, I am talking about Vladimír Mečiar and currently, it would be impossible not to mention Róbert Fico. They can provide people with exactly what they want through their performance. In the end it reflected in the elections, in the 2010 when party SMER – SD achieved the most of the members in the parliament (62), what was caused by the unstable right wing and middle-to-the-right wing which shattered at the most precious moment and because of that, they let themselves be overtaken by the good rhetorically provided SMER – SD, which appealed to the electors and won the elections. SMER was not able to construct the government; coalitionist government was constructed by the second strongest party SDKU – DS. This government lasted for two years. Downfall was brought by the united voting about uttering faithfulness with EUROVAL from the workshop of SAS, which afterwards did not support their coalition partners and therefore the government fell. In 2012 a premature election occurred, SMER – SD obtained 44, 41% of votes, that ensured 83 mandates in the parliament. SMER – SD constructed the government on its own. (ŠTATISTICKÝ ÚRAD SR, 2012) At the latest elections the dominance of SMER – SD dropped. They were able to gain " just " 28,28 % of votes what makes 49 mandates and therefore they had to find coalitionist

partners whit whom they are going to establish the government. (ŠTATISTICKÝ ÚRAD SR, 2016). A lot of analytics assume that the dropped votes were because of the insufficient marketing communication of the leader with the electors. We can observe what kind of public opinion is in Slovakia and how easily can be manipulated, in the case of Slovak political parties. But it is important to mention the division of political parties, before taking on the description of public opinion versus political parties.

2.2 Division of parties

In these days, it is possible to divide parties according of their establishment and way of organizing into the four main types. Those are elites, masses, catch all parties and cartels. According to M. Duverger and his typology, the main types are elites and masses. Main difference between these two parties consists in their different organizational structure and not in their members, what anyone might think at the first glance. The participation in the elite parties has been different from the participation in mass parties. „Members" of the elite parties are going through strict and informal interviews and their numbers are just limited. The quality of their influence decides. Elite parties corresponds with their surrounding, in which they had been created, where the main role were played by the limited right to vote and limited amount of the electors, property census, and natural interest of well – connected people about political deciding. Mass parties were being established with the widening of the general right to vote. The support for both of the parties reflects different political interests of the voting groups. Elite parties were bourgeoisie parties, representing the interests of the middle class, mass parties were socialistic parties representing lower class. (Rybář, 2011, p.7)

The authors of the phrase "catch all part "is German politic Otto Kirchheimer. It is about the parties which do not have good fundaments at the beginning, but they are trying to talk at the biggest and the widest area around the electors. Parties are trying to reach the maximum width of their potentials electors without looking at their social status. Parties are changing into a big parties, mildly and flexible, dependant on the need from the elector´s side. The bigger straightforwardness of the parties toward the masses, which was supported by the new phenomenal – media, brought new style of policy, that aims at one person only.(Kirchheimer, 1966, p.179) SMER – SD is in these days a example of how does this kind of policy works. The last term of the cartel party is not so important to this work. That is why I think that it is appropriate to mention them just marginally. Richard Katz and Peter Mair came with it. According to them it is about deepening of the relationship between political party and the state and not between political party and the society, as it is mentioned in the upper mentioned parties.

Hypothesis: Political parties influence public opinion thorouhg the mass media in order to achive popularity growth.

3 Method

3. 1 Public opinion

If there is the public, then there is always a public opinion. We might define it, that it is a folder of public expressions of the members of various social groups, about the public assemblies. The research of the public opinion is carried out by the particular component of sociological examination while its aim is finding out the opinion, approaches, or attitudes of the public toward various questions of life in society. Not only one factor is deciding at the opinion – making, but it is the set of crossing – over factors, which then makes the whole public opinion. Very important thing is that under which conditions and in what kind of conditions is the public opinion being formed. Opinion is dependant of the education of person, of the characteristic of his work and his activities, insufficiency of information and knowledge about the subject, which significantly restricts rational core of the opinion, which then can be just shallowly and incorrectly evaluated certain type of phenomenon or event. Opinion itself cannot exist without attitude, because it is originated on the attitude and because the attitudes are complexly creating the opinion. Journalism and mass communication are one of the most important opinion – makers, for certainty. Media must be free, so they could represent public opinion. The freedom of media is fundamental in the creating of public opinion. Expect for freedom, the important factor is that any of the mass – media will not be dependant of any kind of ideology, or will not be formed only one way. This factor is obviously looked at in the common life very simply and naturally. The daily news is simple example of this. It is set so the headline and name of the print can decide the group of readers and form the opinion about the type of group of people or individuals. The influence of the media on the recipients must be constant and persuasive, the number of news, number of viewers or listeners is dependant of the content and as the result of this, creating of the opinion or attitude of reader is dependant as well. In each of the states, the mass – media have their supporters and they are dividing the society according their coverage and orientation, of course it is unwritten. Consequently we can say, media works tactically and in the first place they are trying to catch the attention of the biggest mass of the society. In lot of cases media does not care, or does not put the emphasis whether the information are true and because of this they intentionally manipulate the society. Society is often unintentionally manipulated and not just by the media. Society, which has strong, populism and in lot of cases the charismatic leader, can be often fed by the disinformation, which is called frauds. Leaders, who are giving power and conviction to frauds, are supported by the media as well are creating the fact, intensity of the opinion raise and manipulate the crowd. This public opinion, which was constructed by the leaders' ability, is visible in the example of Hitler and his propaganda against non- Aryan race. Just because he was supported even by the media, it came down to reality, that the tendency of the public opinion became more intensive in a lot of ways and gained the mass character. Frauds are connected with the insufficiency of the information, which are creating misrepresenting explanation, which is gradually changing. They are also creating a isolation of the certain groups of people from the sociological life and they have their share at the creating of the fears in the given society. Medias´ role in the relation toward the frauds is an important task and their reaction toward the frauds can be

different. They might stand for the reaction, which can be reflected as a silence; on the other hand the frauds can be supported and widened.

3.2. The influence of media on the public opinion

As I mention it earlier, the main subject of this work is the relation, public opinion versus political parties. At the basis of the definitions and phrases we are getting to question. How does the party influence the public opinion and how does the public opinion perceives and reacts on a different kind of impulses from the side of the political parties. We will be trying to appoint concrete situations, which we could or still can see in our policy system. We can possibly say, that the parties in Slovakia, mainly the governmental parties are available a couple of ways to influence the public opinion. The main factor without a doubt is media. Media are divided into private media and state media. In the first place the neutrality is supposed to be kept in the media; however in our country it is unfortunately not true. Exactly the private channels are connected to a lot of politicians and parties, which has the power available right now or are currently in the opposition. Countless of common people have own opinion, I mean majority of people; however it is not possible for ordinary people to work out and evaluate the wide spectrum of the messages and proclamations and even analyzing their relevance. Therefore the term "influence of the public opinion". People accept being "fed" by the media, what people at the upper ranks prefer for their "dominance". Independence of the private media is absent and that is why at least the media in the hand of state should be independent. Media are giving the information and by doing that they are giving the stimuli to the public to take a stand toward the public questions. Reader often makes a wrong opinion based on the information provided by the media, whit which he agree, presents and even support. Journalistic information are the subject of daily discussions and way of their output or suppressing orientated in various social groups attention on concrete social phenomenon. The public opinion is created at various events and does not need to be the aimed at the whole state. We must not forget that the media in the first place are subjects, which are trying to approach the biggest possible spectrum of the receivers of the information. One of the reasons why they are trying to get the attention might be their desire to be wealthy, acknowledged and visible, but with that in mind, that each of the mass media have their own leader, who is representative. When taking into consideration the social and cultural changes of the modern society that mass media became important intermediaries of the public and private life. Phrases like a mass media or media are very specific. Mass media represents the wide scale of resources, from where they obtain knowledge, whether they are based on the false, truth, or half – truth. They influence the public in various forms and have big and visible effect. The effects of media influence the behavioral changes or mind change of the individual recipient, or the audience. According the aim of the media impact, we can divide it on the planned or unplanned, but we can also look at the impact from the long - term point of view, how it influences the society. Because of that we can divide the impact into long – term and short – term. Media in the society has the indissolubly place for the existence of the person with the world around him. In a lot of cases the society does not even recognize, how much is being influenced by the mass media. That the person, society is formed through the whole spectrum of mass media is reality, but does the society, individual, even realize it? What kind of power do the media have in this kind of word sense?

3.2 The influence of political parties on the public opinion

Political parties were interfering to creating of the public opinion since a long time ago. Once again we stumble at the problem, which is declared by the one, who currently has the power. The one who occupy the resort of the culture commands the media. This fact creates a significant problem to which no one will ever own up to. However ordinary people once again can do nothing to prevent this manipulation. Some of them do not even realize that in some cases they do not want to realize that. A good example of this is the recent case of gorilla. A lot of political tops states that this case was not even brought on the surface, the reason are so that there will not be conducted responsibility against the competent ones, but because, so the discredit of the interested people right before the election will occur. It is very relevant to evaluate it this way, because after the elections in which a lot of traditional parties noticed a drop and gradually this case is becoming non – actual and unsolved. So we might state, this case served to political goals and principle stayed unnoticed. The best possible way to influence the public opinion is via the media. The news, broadcast, and mainly the internet must be mentioned in this area too. Mainly the internet is currently the biggest place; internet brings the highest risk possible, because a lot of young people are getting in touch with the internet. The internet replaces mass media as daily news, internet is phenomenon of mass media, and it changes public opinion and its medial spot. It is the fundamental player in the breakdown of the time and place barriers in the forwarding of information and messages and in the big ratio assists to global, maybe global public opinion. It is also interfering with the traditional mechanism which serves for controlling and widening of information by the elite. Internet creates nearly unlimited space for the debate of daily and relevant problems of the society, by which it influence and changes even public opinion of the citizens. In the latest elections to the national council of Slovak republic, parties like SAS, LSNS, SME RODINA, OĽANO – NOVA became visible via the internet. These parties gained a lot of sympathy from the people because of their internet campaign. A lot of problems came that way to political party LSNS, which is xenophobic and nationalistic oriented was popular mainly with the youngsters, debutant voters. (FOCUS, 2016) Traditional parties like KDH underestimated this fact and the result was more that disaster. Political party #SIEŤ as well as party KDH underestimated this fact and had an unpleasant surprise after March elections. People have been influenced so much, because of media; meetings and primarily internet were the factors which caused that the pre-elections which were done one month before the real elections were absolutely different from the real ones. Until then the sovereign SMER – SD, suffered in the elections by the significant debilitation, party #SIEŤ which was called as a second strongest party in the examinations, suffered a devastative slump. Party has been struggling to keep at the limit of 5%. On the other hand, extremist party LSNS gained strength; also party SME RODINA, but even party like SAS and OĽANO – NOVA gained strength against pre – election research. (ŠTATISTICKÝ ÚRAD SR, 2016) In these days election researches proves, that the individual political parties are gaining and loses which is caused by a massive communication of the political presenters with people mainly via, already mentioned internet.

As we can see in the table 2, in Novembers' election research the removal of the voters from some of the parties is visible, what might cause the change in the number of mandates in the parliament. We should also mention party KDH, which is esteemed as a traditional party in

Slovakia has strengthen the communication skills with residents what reflected on the election preferences. On the other hand party #SIEŤ, which because of their leader even after the elections continued losing the faithfulness of electors, moreover even the trust of his own members. But we must not forget the fact, this is just a research and we must take these results with a certain outlook, since we know that this examination did not even resemble the real ones.

That is why it is definitely appropriate to say that people should not be manipulated and their approach to information should be in the biggest possible ratio critical. Main problem is the fact, that a part of the population is satisfied with the explanation and by that the need to evaluate something critically is not needed. These people practically put the trust into the media and political parties. Because, when people think about what they see and read they will keep asking the questions. That is the only way to get at least to some kind of the relevance. Journalism today as well as some other professions (e. g. Doctors) suffer because of „ absolute solidarity estates". We speak about the public control from the side of media; it is media, which ensure information and public control practically of every area of public life, but the control of such important part of society, as the media does not exist. Practically there was not a case that the Slovak media would pillory the mistake of another Slovak media, more likely journalist. There are not discussions about ethic questions of journalism and methods of media and there is no consensus in the range of regional journalism *(*Mistríková, Žitný, 2001,p.15.*)* The question still remains how can be the independence of the media guaranteed? The answer is simply very easy, from the change of below. If we, people changed, the guarantee of the independence of media might be reached. The ones who should express their dissatisfaction whit the given statement and force elite to change are the people. However the elites are the ones, who gains from people who are passive toward policy and who do not care about what is happening in the media. That is why we reached the conclusion, we may wonder, that unless people care about the faithfulness of media and politics, this currently dominant phenomenon will not change.

In these days, as well as in the past we may have been observing that public opinion can be also influenced by changing the important current topic, into a topic which invokes the aggression, therefore people forget about the real subject of discussion. Concretely we are talking about the nationalism, nationalistic thoughts and currently the most actual topic of migration policy which was used by some of the parties as a structure of the campaign. In a case of Slovakia it is clearly visible, that as soon as some kind of case came on the surface, the other thing from the past appeared and started to be solved, by following the standard the old cases were orientated on the national character. Those are, for example, the relations between Slovakia and Hungary are as important as presented? We may suggest that anyone of smart people would say no. The importance of this problem is high, and origins reaching the distant past. A lot of grievances, which happened in the past between these two parties, whether we want or do not want, cannot be forgotten, but we think that there is not deep reason to constantly opening them. It is the past which is one of the never ending feuds between these two states and unfortunately the past is brought out whenever the public opinion is averted from what it should obediently observe, to what it should not observe.

Former political represents, who are not situated in the parliament anymore, the former chairman of the Slovak national party and chairmen of the Hungary coalition party are one of the initiators, who were constantly bringing out the thing which happened and cannot be undone. We might mention the one of the most squeamish questions are presidential decrees of Eduard Beneš from the 40s in 20th century. We dare to mention the confiscation of the property, from the Hungarians living in Slovakia. At the decree bases, the tangible and intangible property of people was confiscated; the people were indicated as enemies. The enemies were people who were creating activity against the state sovereignty, integrity, autonomy, protection; they were underestimating or deceiving other people to this activity, supported Hungarian occupants, supported hungarization. As we already mentioned it is the topic which is not suited for public to deal with and listened to it from each party and right before elections.

4 Discussion

Majority of people thinks, that when they are living in a state with democratic elements, is free. Majority do not even recognize that they are doing exactly what they were infected by certain someone. It is the manipulated herd *(*Urbanová, 2011*)*. The truth of this quote is cruel, however according to our opinion is very appositive. We can possibly assume that it appositively reflects the reality. It is really beautiful that we live in a democratic society, but it is the corruption and manipulation, which are present in any area is the reflection of that the principles of democracy are not always kept in the democratic constitution. The biggest possible manipulation is right before the elections. It is the period when each of the parties, which is situated in the political spectrum makes the most of the effort, whether material or any other to manipulate the citizens. The meetings of parties are organized, summits, where the refreshments and souvenirs are given to electors, where rhetorically capable politicians can be presented by their statements, which sometimes do not have meaning. We also must mention that media are significantly active during this period, because they often picks the sentenced out of the context, and by doing that people already do not know what is real and what is fraud. The very good example is pre – election research of the agencies, which are examining the opinions of people toward the political scene. Very refined question can get answers from asked respondents, which were planned at the creating of inquiry. We can create inquiry with a single question and it will be enough; which political party is hurting Slovakia the most and should leave political scene? Regarding to constant influence of the public opinion in disadvantage to certain political party, it is evident that the subconscious will switch on and majority of asked people answer as expected. The result of research is then discussed in media and gets into the heads of those who never gave a thought about such thing or did not even dispose with own opinion. Reality, which is reflected by media is their tactical way, it is understandable for media. It is up to consumer, if he takes the reality offered by media as a real one, will spread it or absolutely cope with it. Identification with the medial reality is very various and is influenced by number of factors. The fundamental thing is also that if the consumer is offered also the medium, which offers opponents version of the reality. The first criterion is also reality, whether the consumer is socialized in big or small society.

The public opinion is easily lost, but hard to obtain. Each of the public opinion is formed in society and is changed, presented and reflected by society.

Despite all of the upper mentioned statements, there is still a question of solving of this unpleasant state. The key question to future is the improvement of morality in policy and media, because if we will not start to care about the fairness now in the current period, it might be too late in the future. Put more pressure on politics and media, tightening the connection and simultaneous enrichment by the every means possible, so we could get the most relevant information than from media, as well as from political parties, that way our public opinion will lead the state, so that the state cannot lead our public opinion.

5 Conclusion

We found clear conclusion in my work. The topic of public opinion and political parties can be understood by different point of views. We emphasize political parties in the first half of the paper work. We describing their foundation, reason of their establishment, and relevance. In the second part we put my brain to their division, characteristic and their opinion to public opinion. In the third part we trying to point out, who is the real intermediary of disinformation and half-truth, which are shared with people and who is the biggest opinion maker in the state. We assume, that we reached that, the politics are manipulating the public opinion by the biggest possible means for their personal success. It is also visible, that not all of the constituents, who are working with the public opinion, are neutral, what applies for the mass media, as well. Of course, when all parts of this folder connects, it does not bring nothing else than just giving of the false information to a common public, which, as we mentioned already, thinks that when we are living in the democratic society, that society must be free. Unfortunately it does not look so, because we are "fed" only by what the upper echelons wants us to be fed.

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Appendix

Table 1. Results of the elections in March 2016 and the number of seats for the winning party. (ŠTATISTICKÝ ÚRAD SR, 2016)

Party name	Share of votes in %	Number of seats
Smer- SD	28,28	49
SaS	12,1	21
OĽaNO- NOVA	11,02	19
SNS	8,64	15
Kotleba- ĽS NS	8,04	14
Sme rodina- Boris Kollár	6,62	11
Most-Híd	6,5	11
#Sieť	5,6	10

Figure 1. Map the results of the dominant parties in individual districts. (aktuality.sk, 2016)
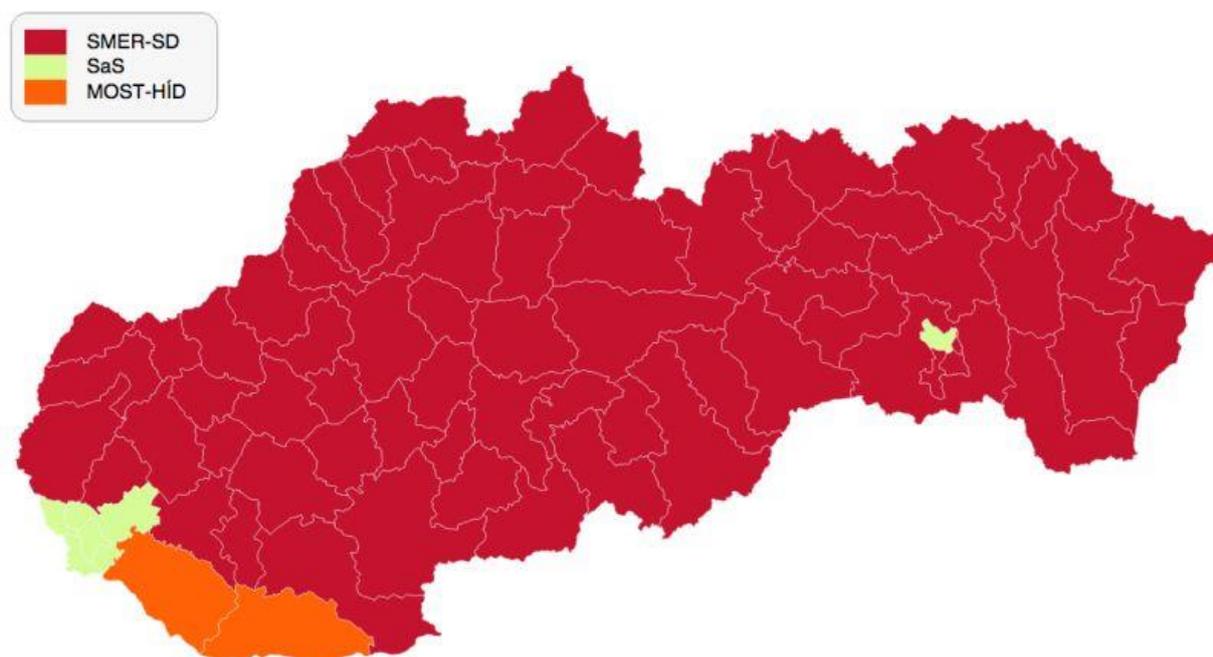
Table 2. Voting preferences November 2016 (FOCUS, 2016)

Party name	Share of votes in %	Number of seats
Smer- SD	26,9	46
SNS	12,8	22
SaS	12,1	20
Kotleba- ĽS NS	8,4	14
OĽaNO- NOVA	8,0	13
Sme rodina- Boris Kollár	7,5	13
Most-Híd	6,7	11
KDH	6,3	11

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