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# ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AS A TRAFFIC LIGHT OF THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN THE REGIONS OF SLOVAKIA – WHERE SHOULD WE FOCUS OUR ATTENTION?

**Abstract**: The article deals with the issue of the relationship between the economic situation and support for the far-right in elections using the example of Slovakia since 2020, assessing the risk of its further growth at a spatially disaggregated level. The input variables are the unemployment rate based on data from the 2021 census and the election results of far-right parties in the parliamentary elections in 2020 and 2023. We monitor the relationship at three spatially hierarchical levels – regional, district and local. We classify regions into four categories, municipalities and districts into seven categories, considering the potential for growth in support for the far-right, in the context of current support and the recent economic situation. In individual regions, we identified groups of municipalities with the highest risk of growth in support for far-right parties. In order to assess this risk at the level of districts in Slovakia, an FRG coefficient was created, with seven levels of assessment of its severity. While the western part of the country is doing well, the risk of growing support for the far-right is particularly high in central and eastern Slovakia. Special attention should be paid to the Horné Považie and Kysuce regions, the south of central Slovakia and several districts in the north-east of the country. This information can be valuable for political and civic actors at the central, regional and local levels, when trying to implement spatially targeted policies in the field of prevention and education, in order to address the issue of political radicalization at the sub-state level.

**Key words**: Far-right support, unemployment, FRG coefficient, regions, districts, municipalities

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between economic conditions, social situation, and the electoral success of far-right parties is a multifaceted subject extensively examined in political and social sciences. Several recently published articles collectively offer a comprehensive understanding of how economic and

social factors influence the rise and success of far-right parties in elections. They underscore the importance of addressing economic insecurity and cultural anxieties to mitigate the appeal of such parties.

Study by D. Bolet (2020) highlights that in economically deprived areas, particularly those with high unemployment, competition between native and immigrant workers intensifies. Such conditions have been shown to significantly boost support for radical-right parties like the National Rally (FN) in France. S.H. Dehdari (2021) analyzing Swedish electoral data, finds a strong link between economic distress – measured by layoff notices – and increased votes for the Sweden Democrats (SD). Notably, the effect is more pronounced among low-skilled workers, underscoring the importance of economic insecurity in shaping far-right support. A. Brännlund (2021) focusing on Sweden, suggests that rising unemployment in less affluent areas tends to increase support for left-wing parties, while in wealthier districts, the opposite effect is observed. This nuanced understanding of economic conditions and voting behavior provides insights into the complex interplay between economic factors and political preferences.

In the Central and Eastern European region, more and more attention has recently been paid to the issues of radicalism, extremism and support for far-right parties (Mareš 2009; Kluknavská 2012; Mikuš, Gurňák 2012; Gyárfášová, Mesežnikov 2015; Mareš, Havlík 2016; Mikuš, Gurňák 2016; Kovarek et al. 2017; Vasiľková, Androvičová 2019; Bankov et al. 2021; Kevický 2021; Kovalcsik, Bódi 2023; Plešivčák 2023; Kevický 2024; Mihai, Ungureanu 2024). Increase in social problems such as unemployment and poverty lead to greater support for radicalism and extremism. Economic recession affects the voting behavior of the population and its inclination towards the extreme right, especially in the most economically affected regions in Slovakia (Marešová et al. 1999; Kluknavská 2013; Kluknavská, Smolík 2016).

The general objective of the paper is to examine the relationship between the economic situation and the vote for the far-right in the regions of Slovakia. An important objective of the paper is to offer a specific methodology for assessing the relationship between the economic level and support for the far-right at the regional, local and district levels. Within this objective, we want to categorize regions, identify municipalities with the highest and lowest risk of growth in support for the far-right for individual regions of Slovakia and categorize districts based on the created FRG coefficient[1] measuring the potential (risk) of growth in support for the far-right in the future, given the economic situation. The aim is also to bring current findings about this relationship, which can be valuable information for the political and decision-making sphere, across the entire hierarchical system of political power in the state, e.g. in the field of prevention and education, with the aim of limiting the growth of support for far-right ideologies in society. Politicians and other actors at central, regional and local levels should be aware of the geographical differences in the severity of this issue and, with this awareness, implement appropriate, spatially differentiated and territorially targeted measures that are tailored to individual regions and other territorial units within them.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Long-term research on far-right-wing parties in Western Europe (Betz 1994; Zimmermann 2003; Csanyi 2020) has shown that socio-economic conditions have a significant impact on their electoral support. These parties are expected to receive the most votes from people who are socio-economically marginalized, because of changes associated with globalization and deindustrialization. A similar

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[1] The abbreviation "FRG coefficient" is also used in physics, but with a different meaning (Functional Renormalization Group).

phenomenon is also observed in periods of socio-economic decline, such as rising unemployment or declining real wages. Another factor that influences support for extreme right-wing parties is income inequality.

Another area that is discussed in the literature in the context of support for far-right parties is the relationship between social situation and identity politics. J. Essletzbichler et al. (2018) examined the relationship between neoliberal globalisation and support for populist and radical political actors. Their findings suggest that the populist radical right is successful in regions with low but growing migrant populations, in old industrial areas, and in locations where the economic crisis has hit the labour market hard, and the recovery process has been slow. They also show that in regions with higher unemployment, voters of populist and radical parties criticize the social impacts of processes such as deindustrialization and the free global market, as well as the cultural aspects of globalization, including the acceptance of multicultural lifestyles, migrants, and the LGBT community. A.C. Weeks and P. Allen (2022) explore how the rise of far-right parties has led mainstream parties to shift their focus from non-economic identity groups to the working class. It suggests that the far-right's emphasis on issues like immigration and national identity has reshaped party platforms across the political spectrum. P. Ortiz Barquero et al. (2022) utilizing data from the European Election Study 2019, they argue that support for radical-right parties is primarily driven by policy considerations rather than economic grievances or protest voting. It highlights the role of ideological alignment in shaping voter preferences for parties like the Sweden Democrats, Lega, and Rassemblement National. Comparative analysis by T. Brils et al. (2022) examines how economic deprivation and cultural anxieties contribute to far-right support in both Western and Eastern Europe. It discusses theories like ethnic competition and welfare chauvinism, which link perceptions of resource scarcity to anti-immigrant sentiments and support for far-right parties. Z.P. Grant (2020) posits that economic downturns, when coupled with ideological convergence among mainstream parties, amplify support for anti-system parties. It suggests that voters, disillusioned by the lack of ideological distinction among traditional parties, may turn to far-right alternatives during periods of economic crisis.

The degree of education and tolerance for different ethnic groups, or social minorities, are significant factors that impact the electoral behaviour of the citizens in addition to socioeconomic class. In recent decades, the problem of far-right party selection in relation to educational attainment has gained some attention (Betz 1993; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2007; Ivarsflaten, Stubager 2013).

Similarly, the age or religious structure of the population appear to be important explanatory factors for support for the far-right (Minkenberg 2002; Ivarsflaten 2008; Wodak 2015; Rooduijn 2018; Mudde 2019; Norris, Inglehart 2019). Older individuals are generally more inclined to support far-right parties. This is often due to their preference for traditional values, nostalgia for past social orders, and a sense of cultural displacement due to modernization and globalization. Higher levels of religiosity, particularly adherence to Christian conservative values, are strongly linked to support for far-right parties. These parties often emphasize religion as a cornerstone of national identity and social order. Religious voters are more likely to be attracted to parties that promise to preserve traditional social norms, often framed as being under threat from secularization and immigration.

Slovak studies suggest that the economic and social situation, especially unemployment and the deterioration of working conditions, can influence political decision-making and support for the far-right. These factors can lead to an increase in protest voting and support for parties that present themselves as an alternative to established political forces. In the Slovak scientific community, there are several studies that analyze the relationship between the social situation, economic conditions and support for the far-right in elections. These studies focus on various aspects such as unemployment, quality of life, political engagement and regional differences. According to a study funded by the European Commission within the framework of the SIREN project (2003), the deterioration of working conditions, job insecurity and fears of losing their jobs are associated with an increase in support for the far-right and populist political parties in Europe, including Slovakia. In this period, O. Gyárfášová

et al. (2003) provided an analytical perspective on the 2002 parliamentary elections. The authors analyze the election results and their cultural-historical, regional, urban-rural, socio-demographic, and ethnic contexts. These factors may influence voting behavior and support for various political parties, including the far-right. An analysis by M. Rybář et al. (2014) points to unemployment as a key problem in Slovakia, which was reflected by political parties in their election programs. For example, the Smer-SD party considered increased unemployment a "cruel result of the global economic crisis" and proposed measures to support employment and reduce the administrative burden on the business sector. A study by D. Kevický (2020) examines the relationship between the size of a municipality, ethnic composition, and voter turnout in parliamentary elections in Slovakia between 2012 and 2020. It was found that in municipalities with a higher share of the Hungarian minority, voter turnout was lower, which may indicate lower political engagement in these regions. This factor may affect support for the far-right, which often emphasizes national and ethnic issues. Another work by D. Kevický (2021) analyzes geographical factors influencing support for the populist radical right in the Czechia and Slovakia. The results show that in the Slovak Republic, support for these parties is stronger in districts with lower voter turnout and a higher proportion of Slovaks. This research suggests that social factors such as ethnic composition and political mobilization can influence the choice of the far-right. These studies suggest that economic and social factors such as unemployment, ethnic composition, and political engagement can influence support for the far-right in elections in Slovakia. Understanding these factors is crucial for analyzing political trends and the development of the political spectrum in the country.

## DATA AND METHODS

The research part itself consisted of several phases. In the initial phase, it was necessary to obtain data on the electoral support of far-right parties in the parliamentary elections in 2020 and 2023. This data was monitored at three spatial-hierarchical levels (national, regional and municipal). When classifying parties as far-right, we based our analysis on their electoral programs of the parties for the given parliamentary elections. To compare them with the economic indicator (unemployment rate), we subsequently worked with the average of the support received in both elections.

We calculated the unemployment rate for individual territorial units of different hierarchies (state, regions and municipalities) from data from the 2021 census of population, houses and apartments. It is calculated as the share of unemployed people in the total number of productive population. This is made up of the categories of workers (excluding pensioners), working pensioners, people on maternity leave and unemployed. At the local level, there are very few completely available indicators of an economic nature, and for this reason, thanks to census data, the unemployment rate is a very suitable indicator representing the economic situation in the territory at a given spatial-hierarchical level.

Subsequently, we compared these two indicators (the average support for the far-right 2020–2023 and the unemployment rate from the 2021 census). We recalculated the values of these two indicators for individual territorial units with respect to the median value of the set (share it constitutes of the value of the median territorial unit). We identified these median values for both the regional and local levels. Then, we created four types, or c a t e g o r i e s   o f   r e g i o n s :

1$^{st}$ category – $x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– regions with below-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is minimal)

2$^{nd}$ category – $x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– regions with below-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rates (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is low)

3rd category – $x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– regions with above-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rates (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is medium)
4th category – $x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– regions with above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rates (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is high)

  x = value of the given region
  $\overline{x}$ = median value of all regions
  frs = far-right support
  ur = unemployment rate

At the local level, we worked with the following assumptions. At the local level, we worked with the following assumptions. These assumptions are based on a contextual approach and try to take into account the reference (average) value for the given region and its position in the national assessment (four categories of regions defined above):

- If the municipalities are located in a region that falls into 1st category, then within it we can delimit the risk of supporting the growth of the far-right in the following way (taking into account the level of support for the far-right and the unemployment rate compared to the value of the median municipality in the region):
$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is minimal)
$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is very low)
$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is low)
$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is medium)

- If the municipalities are located in a region that falls into 2nd category, then within it we can delimit the risk of supporting the growth of the far-right in the following way (taking into account the level of support for the far-right and the unemployment rate compared to the value of the median municipality in the region):
$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is very low)
$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is low)
$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is medium)
$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$
– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is high)

- If the municipalities are located in a region that falls into 3rd category, then within it we can delimit the risk of supporting the growth of the far-right in the following way (taking into account the level of support for the far-right and the unemployment

rate compared to the value of the median municipality in the region):

$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is low)

$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is medium)

$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is high)

$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is very high)

- If the municipalities are located in a region that falls into 4th category, then within it we can delimit the risk of supporting the growth of the far-right in the following way (taking into account the level of support for the far-right and the unemployment rate compared to the value of the median municipality in the region):

$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is medium)

$x_{frs} < \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with below-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is high)

$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} < \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and below-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is very high)

$x_{frs} > \overline{x}_{frs}$ and $x_{ur} > \overline{x}_{ur}$

– municipalities with above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment rate (the risk of growth in support for the far-right is maximal)

  x = value of the given municipality

  $\overline{x}$ = median value of all municipalities in the region

  frs = far-right support

  ur = unemployment rate

In this way, we tried to eliminate significant regional differences between individual parts of Slovakia, whether in terms of support for the far-right or the socio-economic situation, and thus work with the existing differentiation within the regions themselves.

Subsequently, we created the seven aforementioned categories of municipalities within the territory of Slovakia, given the existing risk of growth in support for the far-right: minimal, very low, low, medium, high, very high and maximal.

In the text part of the work describing the local context of the relationship between support for the far-right and the economic situation (with regard to the regional standard), we will consider those cases worthy of increased attention in which the sum of the value of support for the far-right and the unemployment rate exceeds the threshold of 300% (with regard to the median value within the given indicator and region), or in regions with a larger number of municipalities and more significant intra-regional differences, this threshold is adjusted to the value of 400% (Košice region), or 500% (Banská Bystrica and Prešov regions).

At the end of the article, we evaluate statistical data regarding the group of municipalities in individual regions of Slovakia that show above-average unemployment compared to the regional

median. From these municipalities, we subsequently identified those that also show above-average support for far-right parties.

In the last phase of the research, we proceeded to calculate the risk coefficient of growth in support for the far-right at the district level, based on the representation of municipalities in the individual above-mentioned categories of risk of growth in support for the far-right (far-right growth – FRG coefficent):

$$\text{FRG coefficient} = \frac{1}{n}x_1 + \frac{2}{n}x_2 + \ldots + \frac{n}{n}x_n$$

$$\frac{1}{n} \leq \text{FRG} \leq \frac{n}{n}$$

$x_i$ = relative number of municipality in given category (share of all municipalities in given district)
$n$ = number of categories

## RESULTS

### Level of self-governing regions

The relationship between support for the far-right in elections and the economic situation measured by the unemployment rate was first assessed at the regional level (Fig. 1). Based on this relationship, the territory of Slovakia is divided into two groups of regions. The first of these consists of regions located in the western and northwestern parts of Slovakia. These are characterized by a much more favourable economic situation than the remaining three regions of Slovakia – the Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice regions. The regions that achieve below-average unemployment rates and at the same time support the far-right to a lower extent are in the southwest of Slovakia. These are the Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra regions. The region of the capital of Slovakia reaches approximately 71% of the median unemployment rate and only 62% of the median value in the case of the indicator regarding support for the far-right. In this case, we can speak of a minimal risk of growth in support for the far-right. The second category of regions (low risk of growth in support for far-right parties), with a below-average unemployment rate, but with above-average support for the far-right, includes only one region, namely the Trenčín region. The same statement applies to the representation of the third category, to which only the Košice region belongs, with a significantly above-average unemployment rate, but with slightly below-average support for far-right parties. While in the case of the region of the second largest city in Slovakia, the unemployment rate reaches almost 190% of the median value, in the case of the indicator of electoral preferences for far-right parties we are talking about a value of 96% of the median. In its case, we identified a medium risk of growth in support for the far-right, also due to the almost twice as high unemployment rate compared to the median value for the regions of Slovakia. The last, fourth category is made up of the Žilina, Prešov and Banská Bystrica regions. This group is characterized by above-average support for the far-right and above-average unemployment. While in the case of the Žilina region the unemployment rate is only slightly above the median value, in the Prešov and Banská Bystrica regions it is at a comparable level to the Košice region (180–190%). Along with the Trenčín region, the far-right has above-average support in these three regions. However, the differences are not as striking as in the assessment of the economic situation, since the highest support for the far-right is registered in the Banská Bystrica region, at 115% of the median. While in the case of the Žilina region it is more a consequence of the long-term entrenchment of conservative and nationalist values of the population living in this part of the country (similar to the Trenčín region), in the case of the two economically least developed regions of Slovakia (Banská

Bystrica and Prešov regions) we can speak of the consequence of frustration from the unfavourable social and economic situation and the inability of standard political parties to solve the accumulated problems resulting from. Less advantageous geographical location, insufficient physical and social infrastructure, poverty, low attractiveness for foreign investments, low salaries of a significant part of the population, lack of jobs with higher added value, outflow of the young cohort of the productive population, the issue of marginalized Roma communities are crucial problems that these regions have been struggling with for a long time. Insufficient progress in solving these development challenges by standard political entities leads to the choice of alternative, often populist, radically oriented parties. Therefore, in the case of this category of regions, we can continue to speak of a high risk of growth in support for far-right parties in the future.
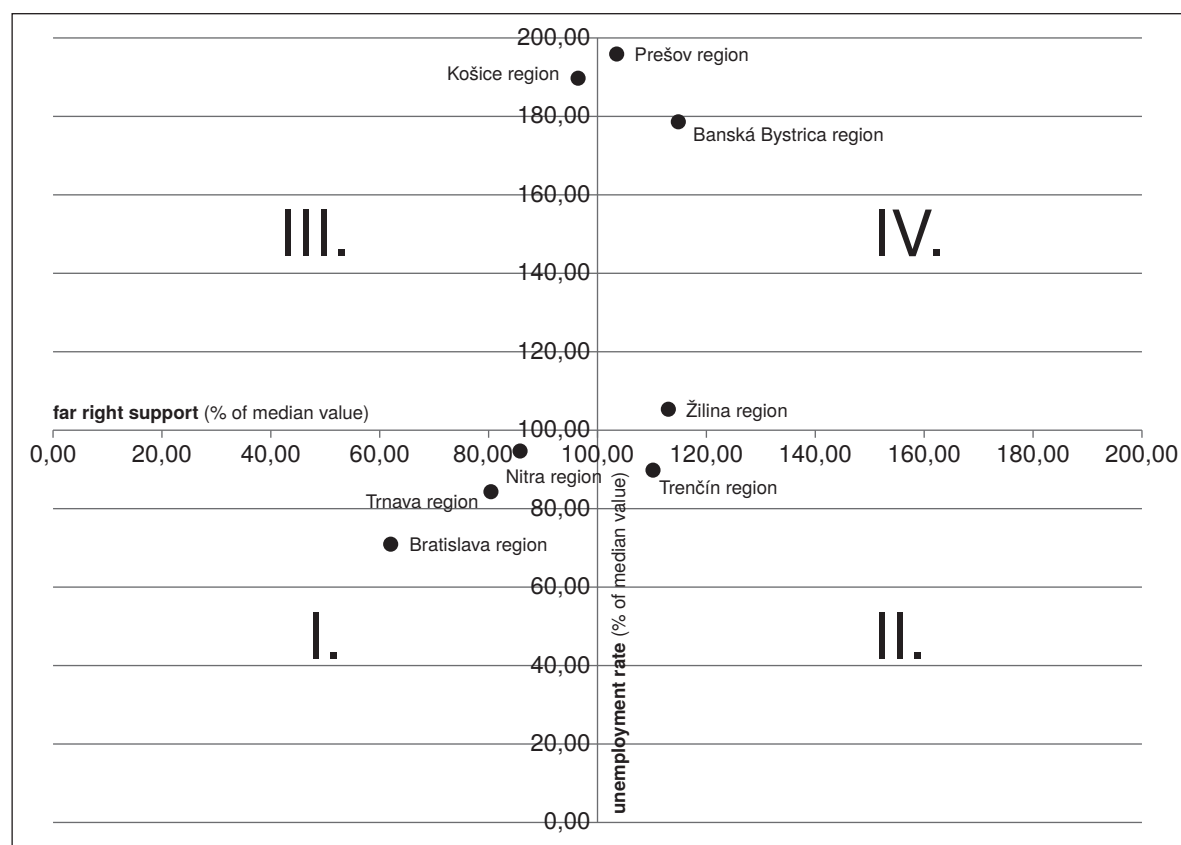


\* 100% = value of the median region

**Fig**. **1**. The relationship between support for the far-right in the 2020 and 2023 general elections and unemployment rate (The 2021 Census) at the regional level of Slovakia
Source: own elaboration.

### Local level

At the intra-regional, local level, if we assume that the potential for growth of far-right support exists where it is already relatively well established (the level of support above the regional median, i.e. standard) and at the same time this territory lags behind in economic level (compared to the regional median value), then we can divide the municipalities of individual regions into four groups, with a risk of growth of far-right support, depending on the regional value of both key indicators.

As Fig. 2 shows, the lowest potential for growth of far-right support was identified in the western part of the country and in the second largest city of Slovakia, Košice, and its hinterland. In the case of the Trenčín region, we can notice a difference between the western and eastern parts – while municipalities located in its western part show in principle a very low or low risk of growth of far-right support, municipalities in its eastern part (Horná Nitra region) have a medium or high risk. This is a consequence of the already relatively high level of inclination towards far-right parties in combination with a higher unemployment rate and an overall less favourable economic situation. However, certain differences can also be seen within south-western Slovakia, with a generally low risk of growth in support for the far-right. For example, within the Bratislava region, the Malacky district and the north-eastern part of the Pezinok district are typical of a medium risk of growth in support for far-right parties, while Bratislava, the south-west of the Pezinok district and the Senec district have minimal potential for growth in support for such oriented political entities. Certain differences can also be seen between individual parts of the Trnava and Nitra regions. In the case of the first mentioned region, a medium risk of growth in support for far-right parties was identified in the Senica district, while in the Nitra region, a medium potential is registered mainly in several municipalities in the Levice district. The regional cities of Trnava and Nitra, together with their hinterland, show a minimal risk of support for the far-right, which is related to the favourable educational structure of the population and the good economic situation in this area. The districts of Dunajská Streda and Komárno with a high proportion of citizens of Hungarian nationality show a low risk of support for the far-right, which is not a surprising finding. On the contrary, the most problematic areas within the territory of Slovakia appear to be Horné Považie and Kysuce located in the northwest of Slovakia, the southeast of the Banská Bystrica region and a significant part of the Prešov region. In this case, we can speak of a very high to maximal risk of growth in support for the far-right. While in the case of Horné Považie and Kysuce it is mainly a factor of the long-term inclination of the population towards national and conservative values, the south and east of the Banská Bystrica region, as well as the Prešov region as such, are the most socio-economically disadvantaged parts of Slovakia. In addition to the unfavourable socio-economic situation (or due to it), populist parties of both national-conservative and social-democratic orientation, have long shown increased electoral support here. It is precisely on these parts of Slovakia that the state's policy in the field of education and prevention should be focused, with the view of eliminating the risk of growing support for ideologies and movements suppressing basic civil liberties and human rights. However, this must go hand in hand with a practical solution to the accumulated socio-economic problems, especially the stagnation of the citizens' living standards, poverty and the solution to the Roma issue.

If we take a closer look at the individual regions of Slovakia, we will find out which specific municipalities show the highest risk of growth in support for the far-right in a given regional context. In the case of the Bratislava region, four categories of municipalities were identified, namely with minimal, very low, low and medium risk. 33% of the region's municipalities fall into the category with medium potential for growth in support for the far-right. The results of our analysis show that the greatest attention should be paid to this topic in the municipalities of Suchohrad (Malacky district), Nový Svet (Senec district), Záhorie, Gajary (both Malacky districts), Jablonec (Pezinok district) and Pernek (Malacky district). For example, in the municipality of Suchohrad, the far-right enjoys support of up to 146% compared to the regional median, while the unemployment rate is up to 225% compared to the regional median. The highest support for the far-right was identified in the municipality of Nový Svet, where it reached 241% of the regional median value.

In the Trnava region, we can also talk about municipalities with minimal, very low, low and medium risk of support for the far-right. The group of municipalities with medium risk of growth in support for this type of party is made up of 22% of the municipalities in the region. The highest growth potential was identified in the municipalities of Čáry, Štefanov, Kuklov (all Senica district), Hubina (Piešťany district), Jalšové, Tekolďany (both Hlohovec district), Dojč (Senica district), Me-

rašice (Hlohovec district), Osuské (Senica district), Zlaté Klasy (Dunajská Streda district), Borský Mikuláš and Šaštín-Stráže (both Senica district). The highest unemployment rate from this group of municipalities was identified in the case of the municipality of Zlaté Klasy, up to 295% compared to the median value of the municipality in the region. Regarding support for the far-right, the highest value (219% of the regional median value) was reported by the municipality of Jalšové.

The neighbouring Nitra region has the same classification of municipalities, i.e. with minimal, very low, low and medium risk of growth of support for the far-right. A fifth (20%) of municipalities belongs to the last category, i.e. with medium potential. From this group, the risk is highest in the case of the municipalities of Dolné Semerovce (Levice district), Dulovce (Komárno district), Turá (Levice district), Mudroňovo (Komárno district), Slatina, Plavé Vozokaky, Šarovce, Iňa (all Levice districts), Telince (Nitra district), Čechy (Nové Zámky district), Malé Vozokaky (Zlaté Moravce district), Vozokaky (Topoľčany district), Hontianske Trsťany (Levice district), Dedinka (Nové Zámky district), Ondrejovce, Bajka, Vyškovce nad Ipľom, Hontianska Vrbica (all Levice districts), Semerovo (Nové Zámky district), Sikenica (Levice district), Šrobárová (Komárno district), Úľany nad Žitavou (Nové Zámky district), Jedľové Kostoľany (Zlaté Moravce district), Lok and Veľký Ďur (both Levice districts). In the municipality of Dolné Semerovce, the unemployment rate is as high as 345% of the regional median. The far-right parties have the highest support in the municipality of Mudroňovo (211% compared to the regional median).

In the case of the Trenčín region, we are already talking about a slightly modified structure of the categories of municipalities, namely with very low, low, medium and high risk, given that, unlike the above-mentioned regions (Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra), the region as a whole already achieves above-average support for the far-right, while at the same time having a below-average unemployment rate (i.e. a favourable economic situation). In the three above-mentioned regions, in addition to the below-average unemployment rate, support for the far-right was also below-average. 32% of the municipalities in the region fall into the category with a high potential for growth in support for the far-right. The results of our analysis recommend that the greatest attention should be paid to this topic in the municipalities of Klieština (Považská Bystrica district), Horná Ves (Prievidza district), Vrchteplá, Kostolec (both Považská Bystrica district), Dlžín (Prievidza district), Brvnište, Čelkova Lehota, Papradno (all Považská Bystrica district), Očkov (Nové Mesto nad Váhom district), Čavoj, Podhradie (both Prievidza district), Záskalie and Malé Lednice (both Považská Bystrica district). In the municipality of Dlžín, the unemployment rate is up to 219% of the regional median, while the far-right enjoys support of up to 131% compared to the regional median. The highest support for the far-right was identified in the case of the municipality of Klieština, where it reached up to 223% of the regional median.

The Žilina region, located in the northwest of Slovakia, falls into the fourth category, with an above-average unemployment rate and above-average support for the far-right. For this reason, we register municipalities in the region with a medium, high, very high and maximal risk of growth in support for the far-right. 29% of the region's municipalities fall into the latter category. Attention in the field of prevention, education, but also support in solving socio-economic problems should be specially paid to the municipalities of Malé Borové, Bobrovník, Važec (all in the Liptovský Mikuláš district), Rakša, Sklené, Abramová (all in the Turčianske Teplice district), Liptovská Porúbka (Liptov-ský Mikuláš district), Brieštie (Turčianske Teplice district), Dlhá nad Kysucou (Čadca district), Horná Štubňa (Turčianske Teplice district), Suchá Hora (Tvrdošín district), Lodno (Kysucké Nové Mesto district), Čremošné, Borcová, Ivančiná (all in the Turčianske Teplice district), Liptovské Revúce and Liptovský Michal (both in the Ružomberok district). The highest unemployment rate was recorded in the municipality of Malé Borové, namely up to 329% of the median value in the region. In the municipality of Rakša, support for the far-right reached 214% compared to the regional median.

In the Banská Bystrica region, we can also talk about municipalities with a medium, high, very high and maximal risk of support for the far-right. The group of municipalities with a maximal risk

of growth in support for this type of party is made up of exactly a quarter (25%) of the municipalities in the region. The highest growth potential was identified in the municipalities of Sútor (Rimavská Sobota district), Hrlica (Revúca district), Dulovo, Lipovec (both Rimavská Sobota district), Sása (Revúca district), Kesovce, Slizské, Janice (all Rimavská Sobota district), Šuľa (Veľký Krtíš district), Barca, Radnovce (both Rimavská Sobota district), Rákoš (Revúca district), Cakov, Neporadza, Figa (all Rimavská Sobota district), Pravica (Veľký Krtíš district), Krokava and Hostišovce (both Rimavská Sobota district). The highest unemployment rate from this group of municipalities was identified in the case of the municipality of Dulovo, even reaching an extreme level of 636% of the median value in the region. Regarding support for the far-right, the highest value (427% of the regional median value) was reported by the municipality of Hrlica.

The Prešov region, located in the northeast of Slovakia, has the same classification of municipalities, i.e. with medium, high, very high and maximal risk of growth of support for the far-right. A quarter (26%) of the municipalities belongs to the last category, i.e. with maximal potential. Of this, already extremely endangered group, the risk is highest in the case of the municipalities of Cigeľka (Bardejov district), Chminianske Jakubovany (Prešov district), Doľany (Levoča district), Petrová (Bardejov district), Parihuzovce (Snina district), Jarovnice (Sabinov district), Dlhoňa, Krajná Bystrá (both Svidník district), Výborná, Rakúsy (both Kežmarok district), Lenartov (Bardejov district), Malý Slivník (Prešov district), Stráne pod Tatrami (Kežmarok district), Nižný Komárnik (Svidník district), Jurské (Kežmarok district), Ostrovany (Sabinov district), Roztoky (Svidník district), Lesíček (Prešov district) and Hrabské (Bardejov district). In the municipality of Jarovnice, the unemployment rate is at an extreme level of 560% of the regional median value. The far-right shows the greatest support in the municipality of Parihuzovce (312% compared to the regional median).

In the case of the last evaluated Košice region, we are already talking about a slightly modified structure regarding the categories of municipalities, namely with low, medium, high and very high risk, given that, unlike the above-mentioned regions (Banská Bystrica and Prešov regions), the region as a whole achieves below-average support for the far-right, while at the same time having an above-average unemployment rate (i.e. an unfavourable economic situation). In the case of the two above-mentioned regions, in addition to the above-average unemployment rate, support for the far-right was also above-average. 23% of the municipalities in the region fall into the category with a very high potential for growth in support for the far-right. The results of our analysis recommend that the greatest attention should be paid to this issue in the municipalities of Richnava (Gelnica district), Žehra (Spišská Nová Ves district), Bôrka, Slavoška, Hanková (all Rožňava district), Bystrany (Spišská Nová Ves district), Petrovo, Roštár (both Rožňava district), Vrbnica, Markovce, Zemplínske Kopčany and Drahňov (all Michalovce district). In the municipality of Bôrka, the unemployment rate is up to 469% compared to the regional median value. The highest support for the far-right was identified in the case of the municipality of Petrovo, where it reached up to 318% of the regional median value.

Subsequently, we decided to take a closer look at the group of municipalities in individual regions that show above-average unemployment compared to the regional median. And from these municipalities, we subsequently identified those that also show above-average support for far-right parties. From the analysis for individual regions (Table 1), we found that the Bratislava region has the most such cases, up to 66%. Higher figures are also shown by the Trenčín (64%) and Žilina regions (59%). This means that within these regions, the economic level has a certain influence on support for the far-right. However, in the Bratislava region, support for the far-right is de facto negligible and the economic situation (as well as educational structure) is favourable overall. In the Trenčín and Žilina regions, which are also doing well economically, this is more of a manifestation of a traditional inclination towards nationalist and conservative values, especially in rural areas, which are also characterized by a higher unemployment rate and lower educational level (compared to urban areas). On the contrary, the lowest values of this indicator are in the Nitra (41%), Trnava (44%) and Košice regions (45%). In the case of the first two regions, this is a consequence of the influence
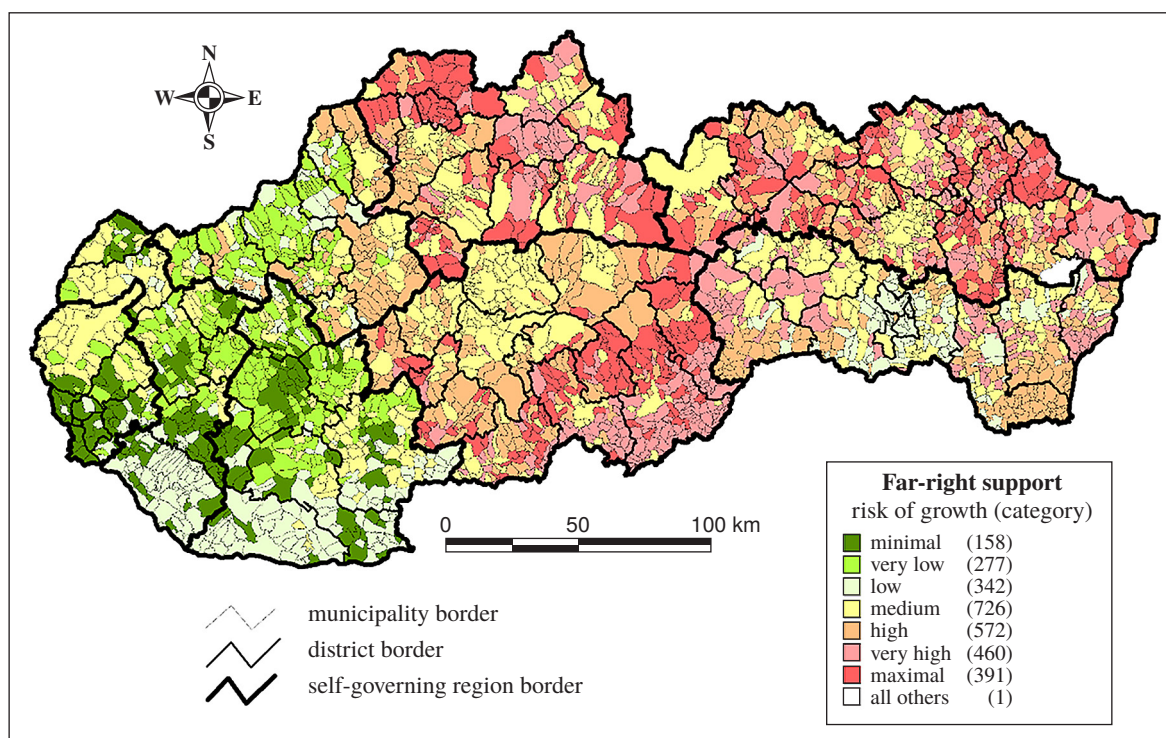
**Fig**. **2**. Risk of growth of far-right support at local level in Slovakia
Source: own elaboration.

regarding another factor, namely the ethnic structure of the population, since in their southern parts the population of Hungarian nationality predominates, rejecting the support of the Slovak far-right. In the case of the Košice region, we can assume the interplay of two influences in this context – the presence of the second largest city of Slovakia, Košice, and a relatively high proportion of residents of Roma, but also Hungarian nationality, rejecting such a type of policy that directly threatens their civil and other rights and freedoms. The remaining two regions, the most economically lagging, reach a value close to 50% in this indicator (Banská Bystrica region 49% and Prešov region 52%). This means that in their case there is a wide range of factors influencing support for the far-right, starting with an unfavourable regional economic structure, then a lack of (suitable) job opportunities, poverty, the ethnic structure of the population (the issue of marginalized Roma communities), the educational level, emigration of the younger generation, differences in living conditions and opportunities between urban and rural environment, etc.

In the final phase of the research, we took a closer look at the issue of the potential for growth of support for the far-right at the level of districts in Slovakia (Table 2), based on FRG coefficient. From Fig. 3 it is clear that the largest group of districts is made up of those with minimal risk of growth. There are twenty of them and they are all concentrated in the western part of Slovakia. Based on the value of the coefficient representing the risk of growth of support for the far-right, their order is as follows (ordered by the coefficient with the lowest value): Districts Bratislava 1–5, Šaľa, Nitra, Galanta, Senec, Trnava, Trenčín, Hlohovec, Nové Zámky, Zlaté Moravce, Skalica, Piešťany, Topoľčany, Dunajská Streda, Ilava and Pezinok. These reach values in the range of 0.143–0.387 (up to 0.400). On the contrary, a total of 18 districts, located in the northwest, south of central Slovakia and the northeast of the country, belong to the categories with a very high and maximal risk of growth of support for the far-right. The first group of districts with very high risk includes the districts of Banská Štaivnica, Tvrdošín, Svidník, Bytča, Lučenec, Stropkov, Dolný Kubín, Snina, Ružomberok, Kežmarok, Vranov

**Table 1**. Above-average unemployment and above-average far-right support compared to the median at regional level of Slovakia

| Region | Number of municipalities with value above regional median – Unemployment rate | Number of municipalities with value above regional median – Unemployment rate *and with value above regional median – Support of far-right parties* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Bratislava** | 44 | 29 | **65,91** |
| *Trnava* | *125* | *55* | *44,00* |
| **Trenčín** | 138 | 89 | **64,49** |
| *Nitra* | *177* | *72* | 40,68 |
| **Žilina** | 157 | 92 | **58,60** |
| Banská Bystrica | 258 | 127 | 49,22 |
| Prešov | 332 | 172 | 51,81 |
| *Košice* | *230* | *103* | *44,78* |
| **SLOVAKIA** | **1461** | **739** | **50,58** |

Source: own elaboration based on The 2021 Census (2021) and General Elections (2020, 2023).

nad Topľou, Turčianske Teplice, Rimavská Sobota (0.800–0.874) and the second group, with maximal risk, includes the five districts of Poltár, Revúca, Medzilaborce, Čadca and Kysucké Nové Mesto (in the range of 0.909–0.969).
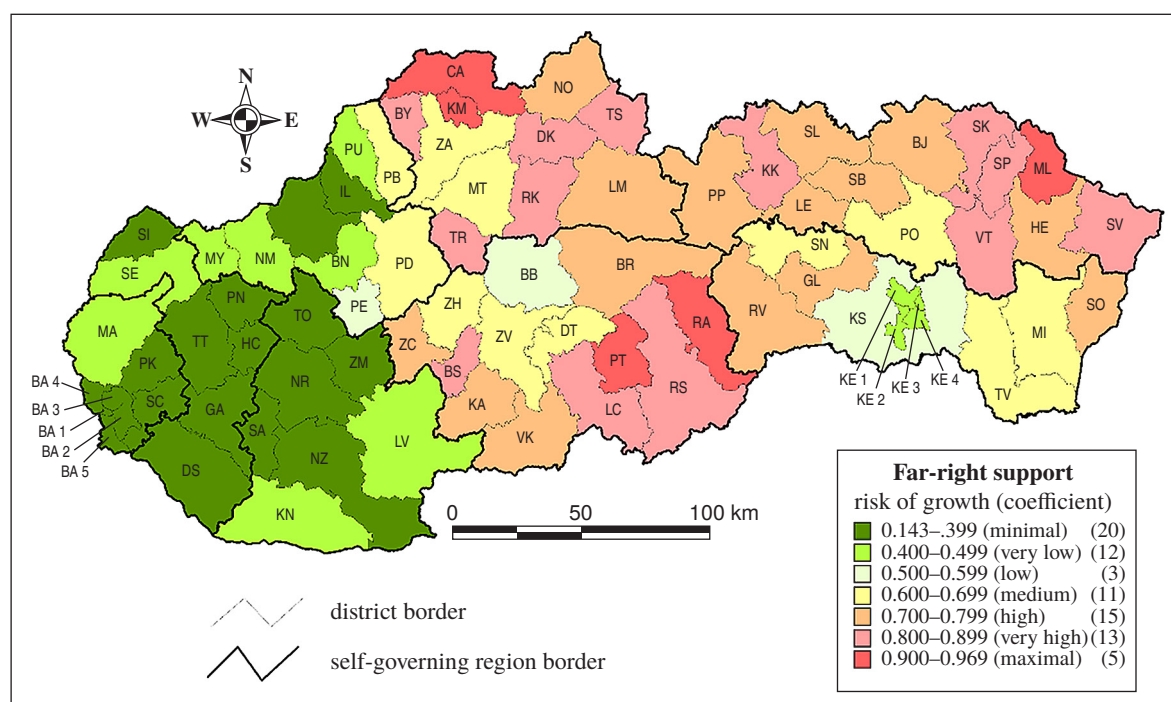


**Fig**. 3. Risk of growth of far-right support at district level in Slovakia
Source: own elaboration.

**Table 2**. Districts of Slovakia and their abbreviations

| Bratislava region | | Trnava region | | Trenčín region | | Nitra region | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. |
| Bratislava | BA | Dunajská Streda | DS | Bánovce nad Bebravou | BN | Komárno | KN |
| Malacky | MA | Galanta | GA | Ilava | IL | Levice | LV |
| Pezinok | PK | Hlohovec | HC | Myjava | MY | Nitra | NR |
| Senec | SC | Piešťany | PE | Nové Mesto nad Váhom | NM | Nové Zámky | NZ |
| | | Senica | SE | Partizánske | PE | Šaľa | SA |
| | | Skalica | SI | Považská Bystrica | PB | Topoľčany | TO |
| | | Trnava | TT | Prievidza | PD | Zlaté Moravce | ZM |
| | | | | Púchov | PU | | |
| | | | | Trenčín | TN | | |

| Žilina region | | Banská Bystrica region | | Prešov region | | Košice region | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. | District | Abbr. |
| Bytča | BY | Banská Bystrica | BB | Bardejov | BJ | Gelnica | GL |
| Čadca | CA | Banská Štiavnica | BS | Humenné | HE | Košice | KE |
| Dolný Kubín | DK | Brezno | BR | Kežmarok | KK | Košice – okolie | KS |
| Kysucké Nové Mesto | KM | Detva | DT | Levoča | LE | Michalovce | MI |
| Liptovský Mikuláš | LM | Krupina | KA | Medzilaborce | ML | Rožňava | RV |
| Martin | MT | Lučenec | LC | Poprad | PP | Sobrance | SO |
| Námestovo | NO | Poltár | PT | Prešov | PO | Spišská Nová Ves | SN |
| Ružomberok | RK | Revúca | RA | Sabinov | SB | Trebišov | TV |
| Turčianske Teplice | TR | Rimavská Sobota | RS | Snina | SV | | |
| Tvrdošín | TS | Veľký Krtíš | VK | Stará Ľubovňa | SL | | |
| Žilina | ZA | Zvolen | ZV | Stropkov | SP | | |
| | | Žarnovica | ZC | Svidník | SK | | |
| | | Žiar nad Hronom | ZH | Vranov nad Topľou | VT | | |

Source: own elaboration based on https://lstn.juls.savba.sk/minfo/skratky-okresy (accessed: 10.10.2025).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We are currently living in turbulent times, defined by the shortening of the interval between economically favorable periods and those of economic, social and political crises, whether at the global or national level. In less than two decades, we have witnessed the global economic and financial crisis of 2008–2013, the migration crisis of 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2022, and the energy, security and refugee crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine in its open phase since 2022. All these events have tested standard political entities in Europe and the rest of the Western world and their ability to solve accumulated social, economic and political problems. However, a large part of the electorate is not convinced of the success of these policies, they do not see sufficient results in their everyday lives, their standard of living is stagnating or falling and therefore are increasingly resorting to choosing radical parties, recently especially the far-right. However, economic well-being

is only one of the attributes that influences their willingness to support extreme or radical parties. Education, along with social class, is another important factor influencing the voting behaviour of the population. It also plays a role in the degree of tolerance towards different ethnic groups and social minorities. In recent decades, the topic of choosing extreme right-wing parties in relation to educational level has become quite common (Betz 1993; Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Kitschelt 2007; Ivarsflaten, Stubager 2013). Research suggests that most extreme right-wing voters are people with lower education (e.g. Lubbers et al. 2002; Kessler, Freeman 2005; Ford, Goodwin 2010; Ivarsflaten, Stubager 2013; Savelkoul, Scheepers 2017). Some studies, however, dispute these findings (Norris 2005; Arzheimer, Carter 2006). Nevertheless, most research agrees that as an individual's education level increases, the likelihood of choosing an extreme right-wing party declines (Ivarsflaten, Stubager 2013; Van Gent et al. 2014).

As many studies previously confirmed (e.g. Fukuyama 1995; Uslaner 2002; Mudde 2007; Andersen, Fetner 2008), the weakening of social trust between different groups, partly caused by the growing income gap, leads to a reduced tolerance towards other groups in society. This phenomenon is also reflected in the respect for the principles of equality, minority rights and the rights of other social or ethnic groups. It also concerns relations that are based solely on income inequality. As a result, the popularity of extreme right-wing parties is increasing.

The article brought information that the risk of supporting the far-right is highest in central and eastern Slovakia, given the given economic conditions. However, conservative oriented Horné Považie and Kysuce in the north-west of Slovakia, and the socio-economically lagging south of the Banská Bystrica region and the districts in the north-east deserve special attention. The deepening of social and economic disparities within society, as well as between territorial units (as a frequent consequence of socio-economic crises), provides fertile ground for the growth of support for the far-right, and ultimately creates a chance for emerging undemocratic, authoritarian regimes.

However, the rise of the far-right is not only related to the economic level but also have a lot to do with a choice long-term rooted in the subconscious of the entire region and its cultural and value-ideological identity, the educational level of the electorare or ethnic structure of individual parts of Slovakia. When considering ethnicity, the presence of the Roma ethnic group has a fundamental impact on the geographical distribution of support for extreme right-wing parties, such as the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS). This is confirmed by several studies, e.g. R. Mikuš and D. Gurňák (2012), J. Mikuš and D. Gurňák (2016) and J. Buček and M. Plešivčák (2017). Likewise, the far-right is not doing well in areas where the population of Hungarian nationality predominates. On the contrary, in those parts of Slovakia that have long tended towards national and conservative values, it is possible to assume that support for this type of parties will strengthen.

Of course, the size structure of municipalities and the difference between rural and urban environments are also important. The results of this study indicate that the municipalities in which the far-right gains the most in elections are predominantly those with smaller populations. However, if the feeling persists that the challenges facing society are not adequately addressed by standard political parties, then there is a real risk of an increasing seepage of far-right ideology into medium-sized municipalities or smaller (and medium-sized) towns, where the values of liberal democracy are still not fully anchored.

The findings of this work may be helpful to accountable actors (state institutions, regional and local governments, civil society, NGOs) in managing and implementing policies aimed at reducing the risk of the growth of political radicalism, which, however, is not far from practical, with specific manifestations of aggression, violence or suppression of the rights and freedoms of other individuals or social groups. Actors at various spatial levels should adopt preventive measures that are set precisely to the given conditions in a certain regional and local context. This territorial variability, differences in the intensity of the problem, or possibilities and tools for solving it, should be aware of, e.g. in connection with setting and calibrating appropriate educational programs and activities,

whether from the position of the state or regional and local governments. Likewise, there is no modern, long-term campaign by state and territorial self-government institutions aimed at minimizing the risk of the growth of support for the far-right in society visible in the public space. It would be ideal if it considered the differences resulting from the territorial variability of this topic and its differentiated significance across individual parts of Slovakia.

## Acknowledgements

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