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POLICY TRUSTS IN PUBLIC POLICY IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC*

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Abstract. The research study offers an analysis of public opinion of citizens of the Slovak Republic focused on trust in politics and politicians, while the authors try to look for possibilities of increasing the political participation of Slovaks. Among other things, the analysis of public opinion showed that citizens of the Slovak Republic are not active in political participation. Most of the polled Slovaks do not try to influence politics other than by participating in elections, with only a third of those polled actively participating in the elections. Demanded citizens are not satisfied with the current state of the political scene in Slovakia, as well as with the current investigation of political cases. Research has also shown that Slovaks would be willing to participate in elections on a regular basis in cases where ordinary people care about politicians or if politicians are honest and reliable people who deliver on promises, (such as no-policy politics).

Keywords: Slovak Republic; politics; public opinion; political culture; active participation; trust

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1. Introduction

According to Jaroslav Čársky (2018), public confidence in political leaders is an indicator of the distinction between moral and responsible politicians from populists. As Bulanda (2017, p. 31) states, political power has always been expressed through the embodiment of political self and its presentation through laws. "The construction of a political personality is based on a historical context, expressing its own characteristic features of political subjectivity and political representation" (Bulanda, 2017, p. 31).

Public opinion polls on the credibility and non-credibility towards politicians are very popular among the public (Lincényi, Fabuš, 2018). Since the beginning of public opinion polls, the term public opinion has generally been used to refer to survey results (Chandler, Munday, 2011, p. 344).

Politicians are aware of the importance of mass media surveys, as the media have a significant share in the creation of the political scene, as they raise the media, political and public agenda. (Lincényi, 2015, p. 488) As stated by P. Juza (2019), public opinion and public theory of democracy tend to assume that today's large-scale democracy can retain all the benefits of itself and still have the advantages and opportunities of democracy to a small extent. So it is a differentiation between responsibility and populism, which is actually the godfather of political irresponsibility. "A thorough look at democratic ideals and practice is bound to reveal a large number of problems that probably have no definitive solution. One of the consequences of changing the dimension of democracy is praising the once so utopian democratic ideals. (Juza, 2019).

However, several experts point out that opinion polls are increasingly using as a tool for public opinion manipulation. Tibor Môcik is of the opinion that the degree of influence of polls depends on various criteria, like the influence of the mass media, on the social status of a particular person or his / her education. "In addition to general education, it is necessary to take into account the possibility of education that specifically targets media literacy of media recipients and the improvement of their ability to detect media manipulation."

2. Methodology and methods

The main aim of the submitted research was to analyze the current public opinion of Slovak citizens with a focus on trust in politics and politicians. The secondary research goal was to look for possibilities for increasing active participation of Slovaks in politics.

In the case of further planning and design of research, we preferred the concept of research questions to the identification of research problems. We identified the following research questions (VO):

VO1: What is the active participation of Slovak citizens in political life?

Explanation VO1: We think that the Slovaks are most active in parliamentary and presidential elections and vice versa least in European and regional elections. We rely on the results of statistics of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for the last period. The answer to this research question will be determined through questions 1 to 5 of our questionnaire.

VO2: What is the current credibility or non-credibility of politicians among Slovak citizens?

Explanation VO2: We assume that the most trusted politicians will be former President Andrej Kiska, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini and Chairman of OĽANO party Igor Matovič. On the other hand, the most untrustworthy politicians should be former triple Prime Minister Robert Fico, Chairman Marian Kotleba of the LSNS party and chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Andrej Danko. These results were brought by the agency AKO in the same period when the questionnaire was collected. We will find out the answer to the research question through the questions 6, 7, 8 and 10 of our questionnaire.

VO3: What are the main options to help citizens be more willing to participate in politics?

Explanation VO3: We believe that citizens will be more interested in politics when politics is not associated with corruption cases, and when large cases such as the Gorilla case or the Kuciak case are properly investigated and accountable to the guilty parties. The answer to the above we will investigate through questions number 9, 11, 12 and 13 of our questionnaire.

The questionnaire was used as the main research method for data collection. The questionnaire was administered by 50 trained experienced interviewers personally in the field. The questionnaire consisted of 13 quantitative questions.

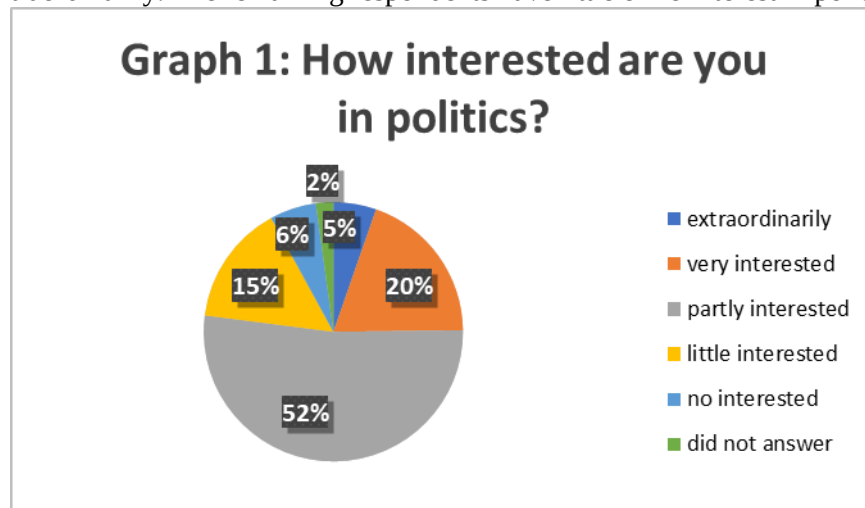
The survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2019 on a research sample of 879 respondents. The research sample consisted of 397 men and 480 women, with 2 respondents not giving their gender.

Looking at the research sample by age, 288 respondents were 18-25 years old, 215 were 26-35 years old, 148 were 36-45 years old, 90 were 46-55 years old, 66 were 56-65, 62 aged 65 and over, with ten respondents not responding.

Respondents from the research group came from Bratislava region (47), Trnava region (65), Nitra region (44), Trenčín region (456), Žilina region (91), Banská Bystrica region (70), Košice region (82), Prešov region (22), with two respondents not mentioning the region of origin.

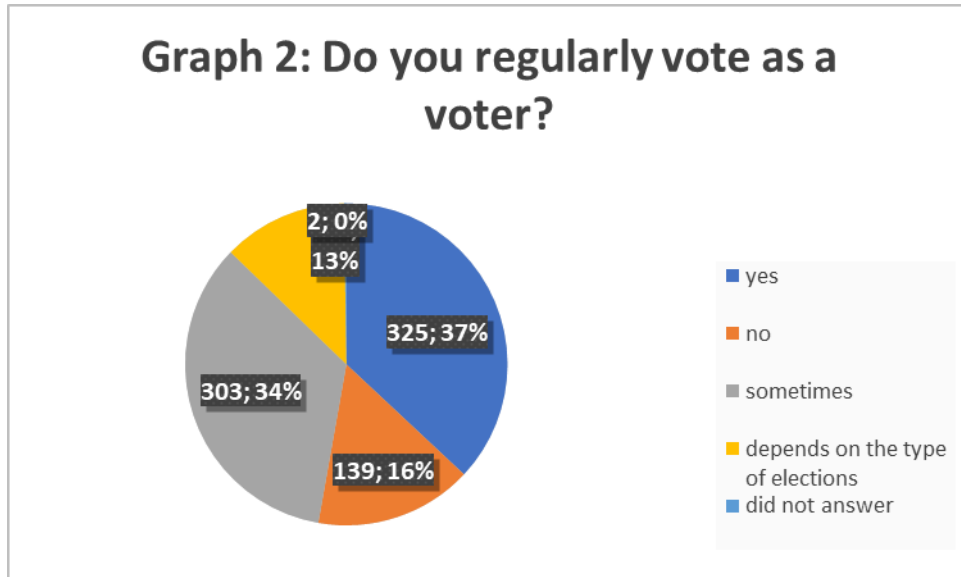
3. Analysis of results

Research has shown that for most addressed Slovaks, politics is not a priority in their lives. More than half of respondents are partly interested in politics (52%), while a quarter of respondents are very interested in (20%) and 5% are interested extraordinarily. The remaining respondents have little or no interest in politics. (More: Graph 1)

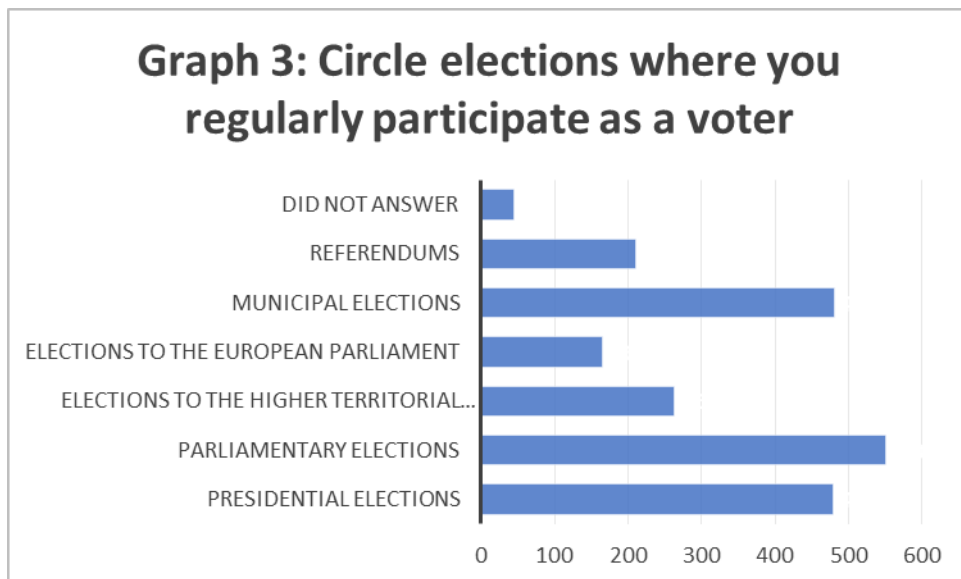


Source: Based on own research results

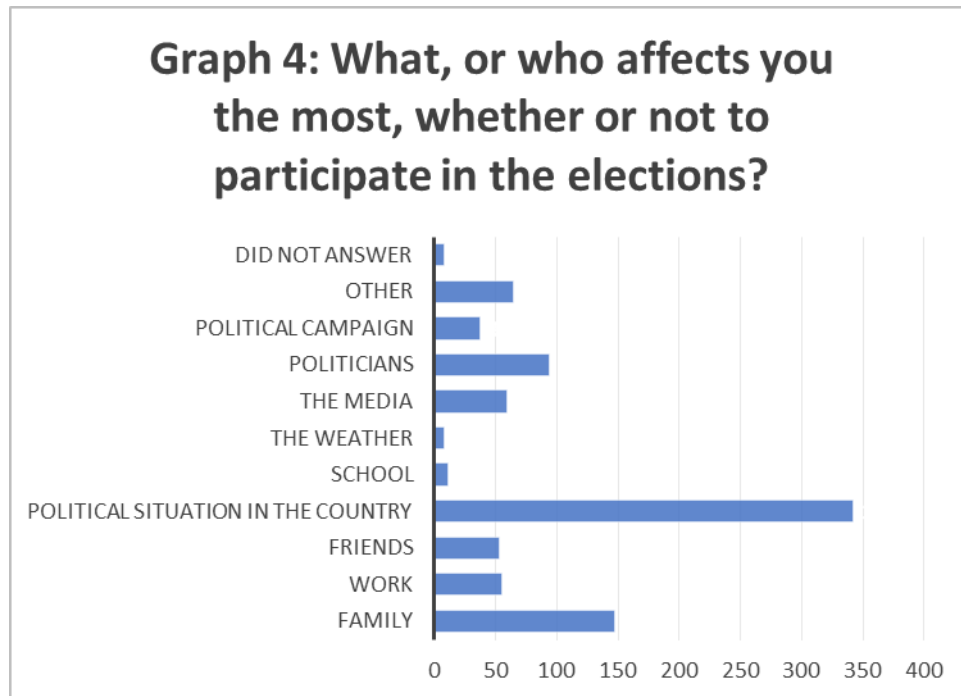
Slovaks have a slightly higher interest in politics in the case of elections. One third of respondents regularly participate in elections as a voters (37%), another third of respondents sometimes participate in elections (34%), part of respondents (13%) participate in elections according to a particular type of election. The remaining 16% of respondents said they did not vote regularly. More in Graph 2.



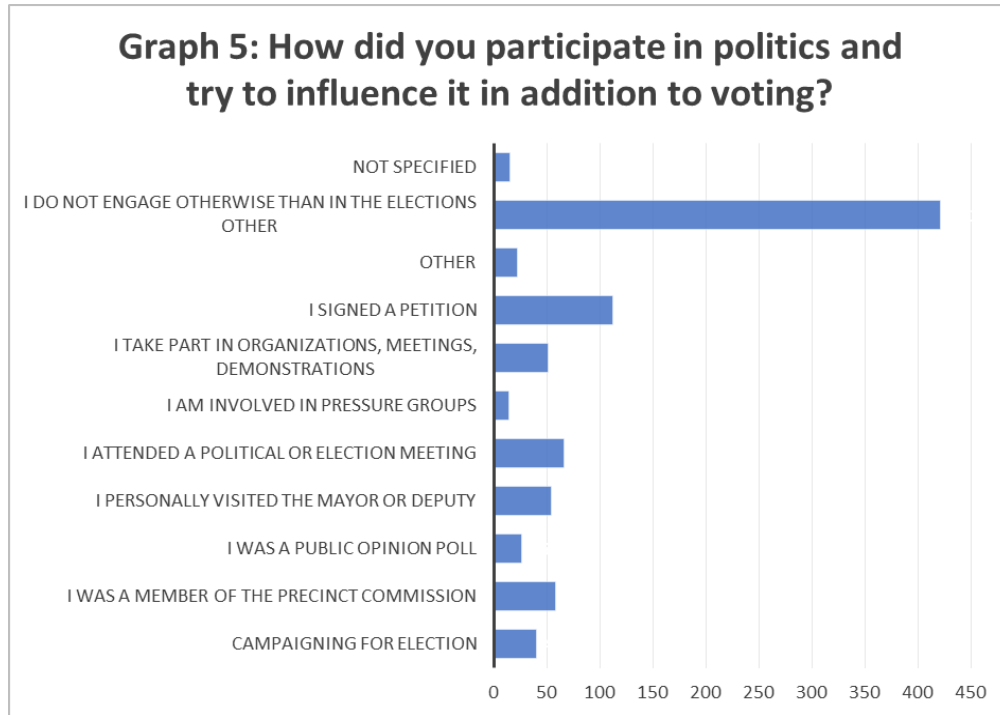
In the following question, we found out which elections they regularly participate in as voters, and it was possible to pick several elections on this issue. The research showed that Slovaks participate most in parliamentary elections (550 respondents), municipal elections (480) and presidential elections (479 respondents). On the contrary, the least interest is in the elections to the European Parliament (166 respondents), in referendums (211) and also in the elections to the Higher Territorial Units (263 respondents). 45 respondents did not answer. More Graph 3.



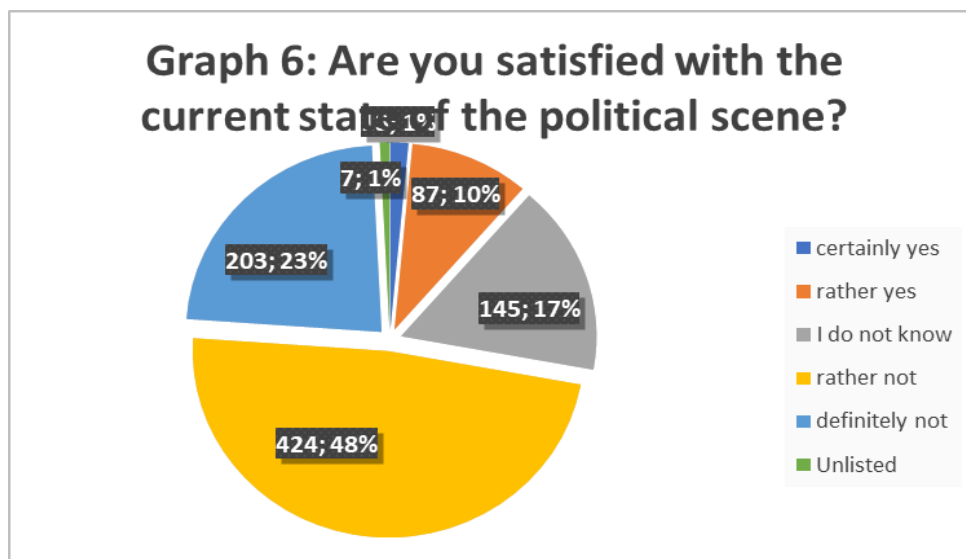
Furthermore, we asked what the respondents are most influenced to take part in or not to vote for. The research clearly showed that the Slovaks (342 respondents) decide whether or not to vote, based on the political situation in the country. The respondents are also influenced by the family (147 respondents) or politicians (94 respondents). According to the interviewees, the weather (8 respondents), school (11) or political campaign (37 respondents) have the greatest influence on their participation in elections. More in Graph 4.



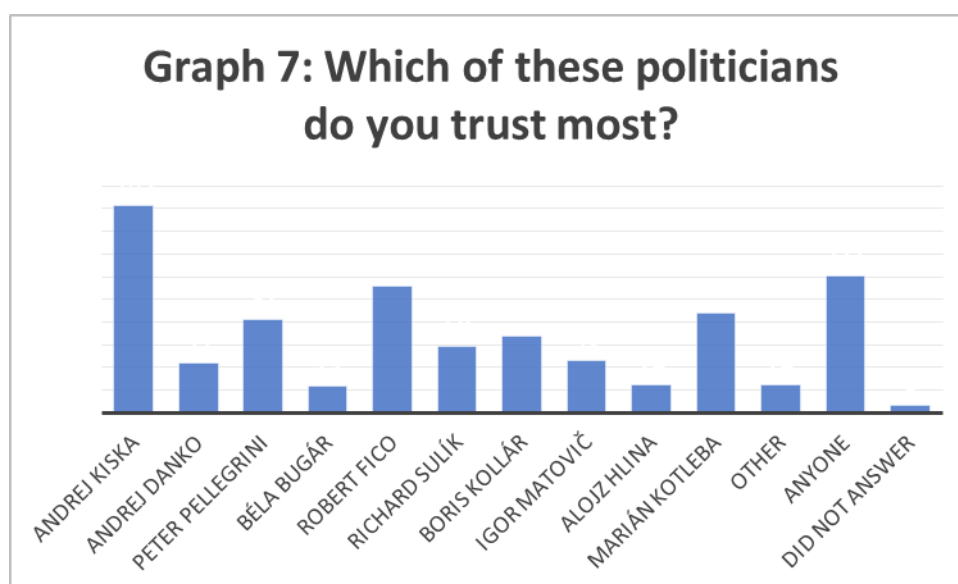
In the fifth question, we surveyed the interviewees how they participated in politics and tried to influence it in addition to voting. Research has shown that the majority of respondents do not engage otherwise than in the elections (421 respondents). Other respondents actively participated in politics by signing a petition (112), attending a political or election meeting (66), or being a member of a precinct election commission (58 respondents). The lowest active participation in politics was seen in engagement with pressure groups (14) or in opinion polls (26 respondents). More in Graph 5.



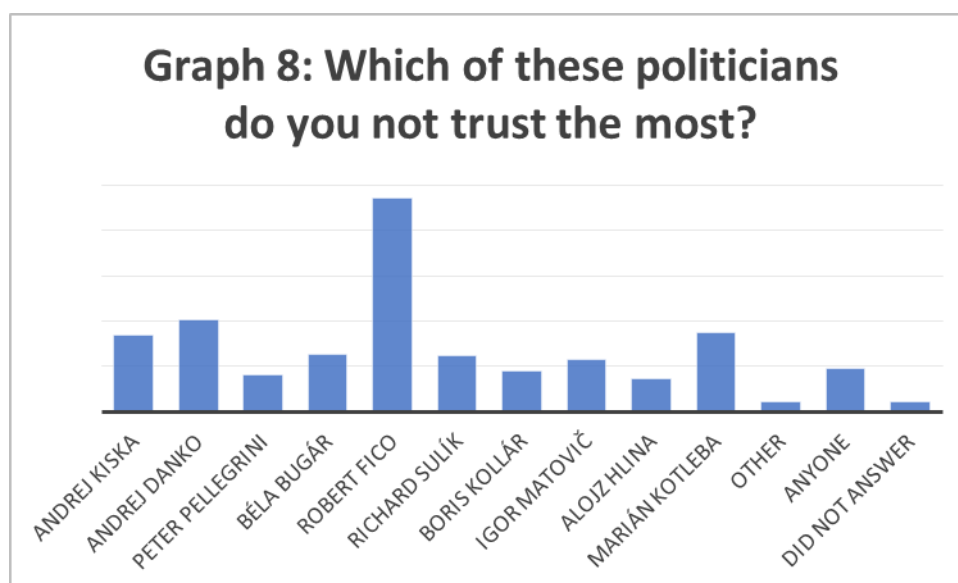
Research has shown that most respondents are certainly not, or rather, not satisfied with, the current state of the political scene. The opposite opinion was 11% (10% - earlier yes, 1% - definitely yes). A significant number of respondents could not comment on the question (17%) (See Graph 6).



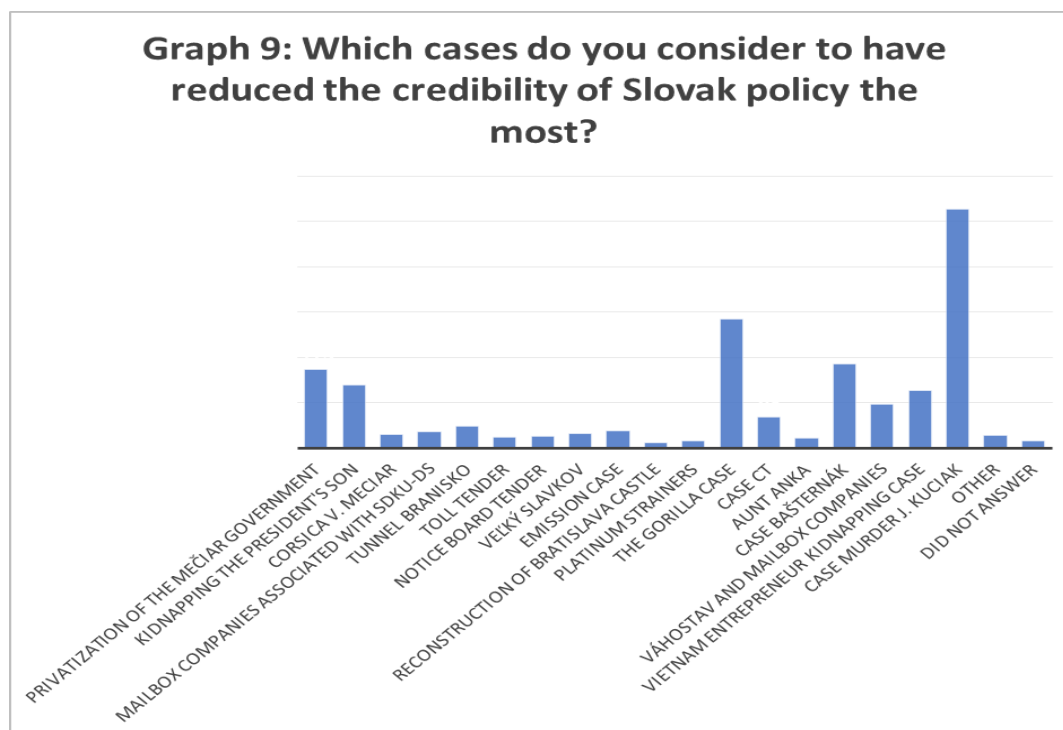
In the next question we found out which of the selected politicians the Slovaks trust most. The survey showed that the interviewees most trust the former President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska (183 respondents), and subsequently nobody (121), while the former triple Prime Minister Robert Fico (112) came third. On the other hand, the interviewees have the least confidence in Bela Bugár (23), Alojz Hlina (24) and other politicians (24). Only one answer could be ticked on this question (See Graph 7).



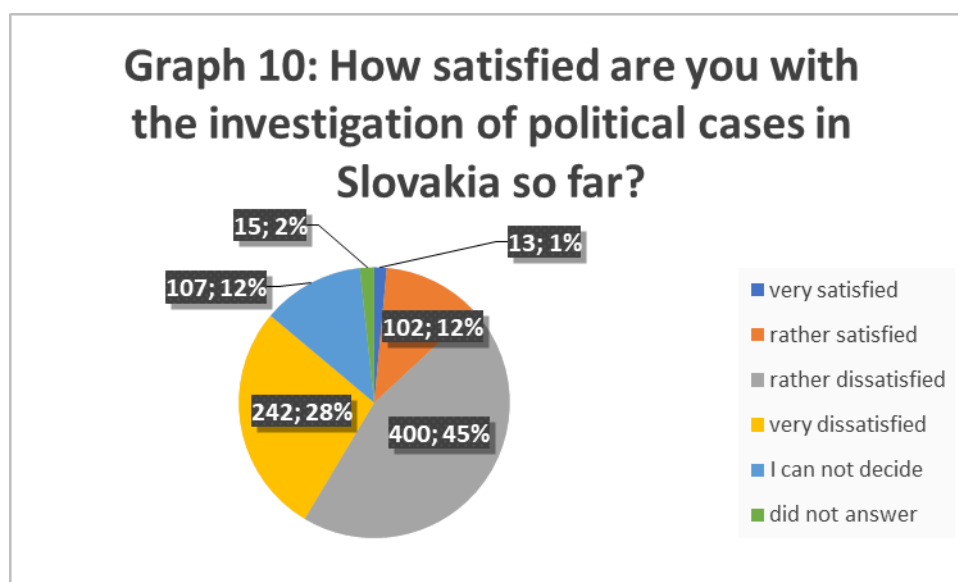
In the following question, on the contrary, we asked which of the selected politicians the Slovaks do not trust the most. Only one answer could be ticked on this question. The research showed that the interviewees do not trust the former three-time Prime Minister Robert Fico (235 respondents), the National Council chairman Andrej Danko (101 responses) and the chairman of ĽSNS Marián Kotleba (87 respondents) (See Graph 8).



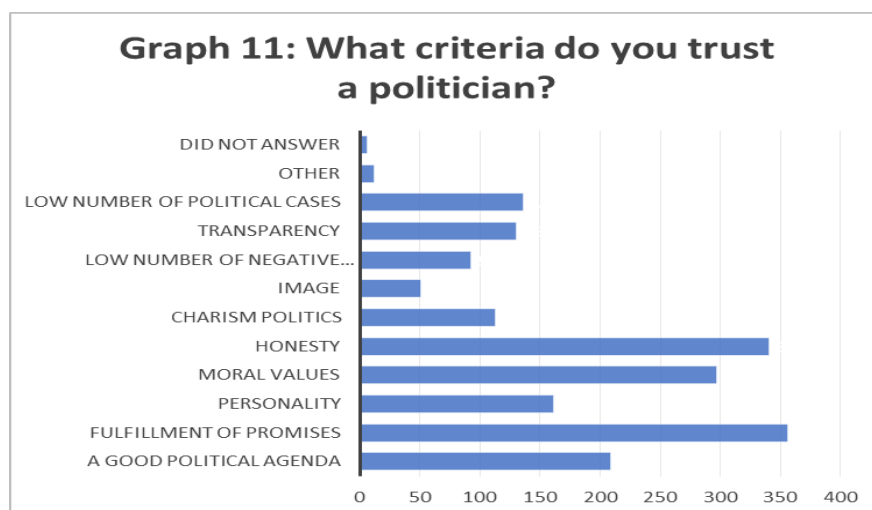
In the research we also found out which cases according to the interviewees most significantly reduced the credibility of Slovak policy. 3 cases could be ticked on this issue. Research has shown that the case that most harmed the credibility of politics in Slovakia was the case of the murder of J. Kuciak. Respondents ranked Gorilla (285 respondents) in second place and Bašternák (185 responses) in third place (See Graph 9).



Most of the addressed Slovaks (73%) are rather dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the previous investigation of political cases in the Slovak Republic. 13% of respondents are of the opposite opinion who are very satisfied or satisfied with the current case investigation. The remaining respondents could not answer or did not want to comment (See Graph 10).

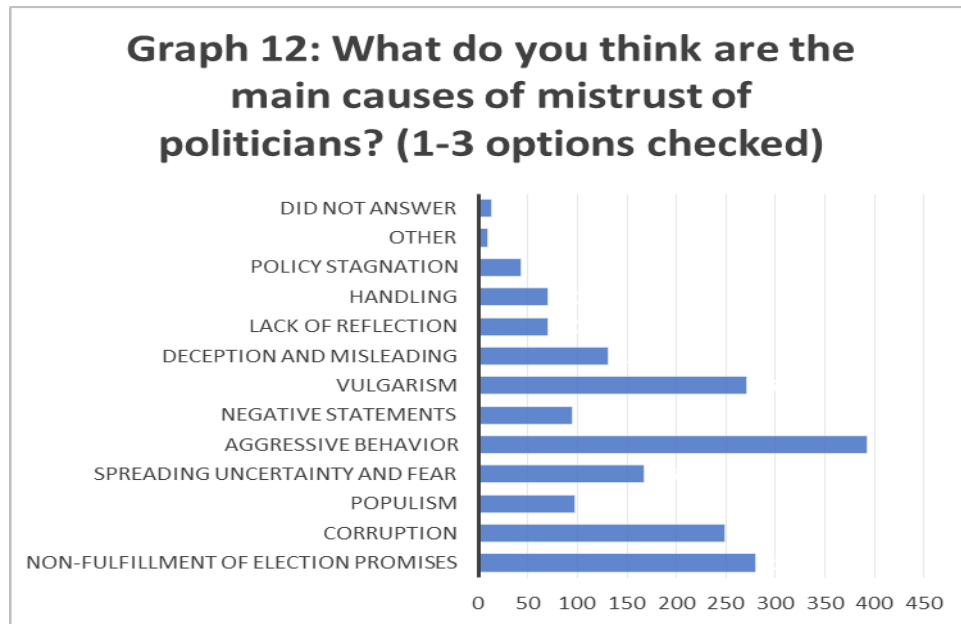


In the eleventh question we found out according to which criteria the Slovaks trust politicians. The research showed that the people trust Slovak politicians according to the criteria of fulfillment of promises (356 respondents), honesty (341 answers) and moral values (297 answers). On the contrary, the least important criteria for trusting politicians are different (12 responses), image (51 responses), low number of negative speeches (92 responses). Respondents could choose 1-3 answers. (See Graph 11)

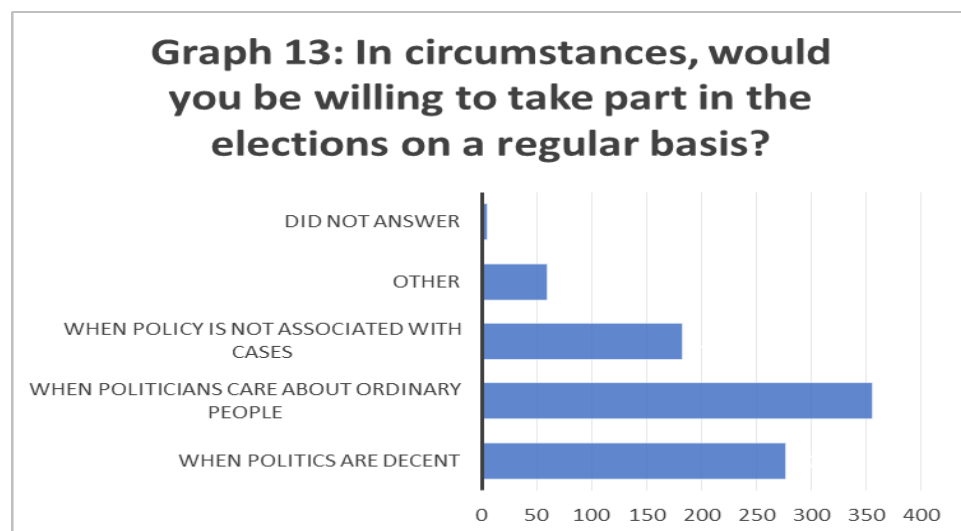


We also asked what the main causes of mistrust of politicians are. The research showed that according to the addressed Slovaks, the biggest causes of mistrust of politicians are aggressive behavior (393 respondents), non-

fulfillment of election promises (280 answers) and vulgarism (271 answers). On the other hand, according to the asked people, at least the distrust of politicians is due to other causes (9 respondents), manipulation (70 responses) and lack of reflection (70 responses). Respondents could choose 1-3 answers. (See Graph 12)



In the last thirteenth question, we found out under what circumstances Slovaks would be willing to participate in the elections on a regular basis. Most respondents would be willing to participate in the elections if politicians care about ordinary people (355 respondents). (See Chart 13).



Discussion

In the first research question, we thought that the Slovaks actively participate most in the parliamentary and presidential elections and vice versa in the elections to the European Parliament or the elections to the HTU. This statement was confirmed to us in part, as research has shown that Slovaks are most involved in parliamentary elections, municipal elections and presidential elections, with the least interest in elections to the European Parliament or in regional elections. It should be noted, however, that in the case of municipal and presidential elections, almost the same turnout was recorded, with a minimal difference between the participation in referendums and in the elections of the HTUs. For most of the addressed Slovaks, politics is not a priority in their lives, as only 20% of those surveyed are very interested in politics, the remaining respondents are partly, not at all, or almost not at all interested in politics. One third of Slovaks regularly vote as an elector, while another third of respondents sometimes vote. The research clearly showed that most Slovaks decide whether to vote on the basis of the political situation in the country. On the other hand, most respondents did not try to influence politics other than by participating in elections.

In the second research question, we thought that the most trusted politicians would be former President Andrej Kiska, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini and Chairman Oľano Igor Matovič. On the other hand, the most untrustworthy politicians should be former triple Prime Minister Robert Fico, Chairman Marian Kotleba and chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Andrej Danko. This statement has also been partially confirmed to us. The demanded Slovaks have the greatest confidence in the former President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska, but subsequently in nobody, and the third place was taken by former Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. On the other hand, we confirmed that the Slovaks do not trust the former triple prime minister of the Slovak Republic Robert Fico, the chairman of the National Council Andrej Danko and the chairman of ĽSNS Marián Kotleba. The research also showed that most of the respondents are certainly not, or rather not, satisfied with the current state of the political scene. We also found out from the research that most of the addressed Slovaks are rather dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the previous investigation of political cases in the Slovak Republic.

In the third research question, we argued that citizens would be more willing to participate in politics when politics was not linked to cases, and when large cases such as the Gorilla case or the Kuciak case were properly investigated and accountable to the culprits. This statement has not been confirmed to us, as citizens expect more honest politicians to deliver on promises than politics without a case. The demanded Slovaks consider the murder case of J. Kuciak, the case of Gorilla and the case of Baštrnák to be the biggest three cases that have reduced the credibility of Slovak politics. On the other hand, respondents would be willing to take part in the elections on a regular basis if ordinary people care about politicians or if there are decent people in politics. The main three causes of mistrust of politicians are aggressive behavior, non-fulfillment of electoral promises and vulgarism. The three most intensive criteria by which the citizens trust the politicians are the fulfillment of promises, honesty and moral values.

Conclusion

The sociological research of the public opinion of the citizens of the Slovak Republic shows the following points and conclusions:

Citizens of the Slovak Republic are not active in political participation. Most of the interviewed Slovaks did not try to influence politics other than by participating in elections, with only a third of those polled regularly participating in elections as voters. Most Slovaks opt for voting on the basis of the political situation in the country, most often taking part in parliamentary, municipal and presidential elections.

The research also showed that most of the Slovaks who were interviewed are not satisfied with the current state of the political scene in Slovakia, as well as with the current investigation of political cases. Addressed respondents most trust the former President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska and, conversely, the least trust the former triple Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Based on the carried out research, we can say that respondents would be willing to participate in the elections on a regular basis if ordinary people care about politicians or if there are decent people in politics. Demanded citizens expect more honest politicians to deliver on promises than politicians without a case.

This study does not claim a comprehensive view of the analysis of public opinion of Slovaks on the issue of credibility of politicians in public opinion in the Slovak Republic.

This topic offers several additional processing options. First of all, it will be very interesting to analyze the public opinion of Slovaks on the issue of the credibility of politicians the year after this study, or in the longer term. It would also be interesting to compare the results of opinion polls in individual EU Member States.

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