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Specificity of the Local Government Elections in the Opolskie Province in 2018

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to analyse the political activity of the local community of the Opolskie Province in the local government elections in 2018 and to identify the characteristic features determining its specificity. The attempt to identify the electoral specificity of the region will consist in presenting a characterization of the region in terms of its size and population as well as its administrative and social aspects. An analysis of the elements inseparably connected with the election process, such as geography, voting turnout, the number of electoral registers and candidates, the types of electoral committees, is equally important. And finally, comments on the election results are significant as well. The local government elections of 2018 were held in a specific atmosphere, largely related to the amendment of the election law. Undoubtedly, the most characteristic aspect for the Opolskie Region is its last position among other provinces with regard to size and population, but it should not be forgotten that it is a borderland region inhabited by a high percentage of the German national minority, which actively shapes the image of not only the local communities at every level, but also the entire Opolskie Region as such.

Keywords: local government elections, local elections, elections in Opolskie Province, 2018 local government elections in Opolskie Province

Introduction

A modern democracy cannot exist without elections; it is citizens' participation in the election of their representatives in governing bodies that legitimizes their authority (Wojtasik 2011). This is particularly important at the local government level, where voters feel that they are able to influence directly local politics, that they are participants in and beneficiaries of government, and they share responsibility for the local community (Tybuchowska-Hartlińska 2012). Local government elections are an excellent opportunity to articulate voters' specific needs and interests (Oliver et al. 2012; Stoker 1991), and subsequently, by winning elections or introducing their representatives to local governing bodies, to pursue them.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the political activity of the local community in the local government elections in 2018 in the Opolskie Province and to identify the characteristics determining its specificity.

The local government elections of 2018 were exceptional, as they were held in a special atmosphere, largely related to the change in the electoral law, which comprised the Electoral Code and the following parliamentary acts: on communal, district, and provincial government, as well as the government system of the capital city of Warsaw, introduced by the act of 11 January 2018 amending certain laws aimed at increasing citizens' participation in the process of election, the functioning and supervision of certain public bodies, which entered into force on 31 January 2018 ([Journal of Laws 2018](#)). This act introduced a number of very important changes to the electoral system at the local government level, including for instance a system in which commune leaders, town mayors and city presidents can hold office for two terms only; an extension of the term of office of commune councils, district councils and provincial assemblies from four to five years; a limitation of single-seat constituencies to communes with a population of up to 20,000 persons; an establishment of two types of precinct election commissions (for conducting the voting process and for establishing voting results); granting the right to appoint one social observer in the precinct, regional, district and territorial election commissions to associations and foundations whose statutory objectives comprise concern for democracy, civil rights and the development of the civil society ([PAP 2018](#)).

Under these new conditions, the Opolskie province and 15 other provinces had to face the election of new local governing bodies. The attempt to identify the electoral specificity of the region will consist in presenting a description of the region in terms of its size and population, as well as its administrative and social aspects. An analysis of the elements inseparably connected with the election process, such as geography, voting turnout, the number of electoral registers and candidates, the types of electoral committees, is equally important. And finally, comments on the election results are significant as well.

Undoubtedly, the most characteristic aspect of the Opole Region is its last position among other provinces with regard to size and population, but it should not be forgotten that it is a borderland region ([Ganowicz 2014](#)), inhabited by a high percentage of the German national minority, which actively shapes the image of not only the local communities at every level, but also the entire Opole Region as such.

Description of the Opolskie province

The Opolskie province is situated in the south of Poland, between the Dolnośląskie and Śląskie provinces. It neighbours the Czech Republic as well as the Łódzkie and Wielkopolskie provinces. Its surface area is 9411.87 km², which makes it the smallest of all provinces in Poland. Similarly, it has the smallest population: 950,464 inhabitants in 2018, which places the province at the very end of the list (Table 1). The province is also among those with a negative rate of natural growth and a progressing outflow of population (GUS 2019).

Table 1. The Opolskie province among the other provinces in Poland

Province	Inhabitants	Voters	Election precincts	Provincial assembly constituencies
Dolnośląskie	2,755,957	2,273,653	1,940	5
Kujawsko-pomorskie	1,978,984	1,610,340	1,651	6
Lubelskie	2,099,846	1,717,638	1,892	5
Lubuskie	974,567	791,991	719	5
Łódzkie	2,390,845	1,976,999	1,732	5
Małopolskie	3,305,730	2,656,449	2,408	6
Mazowieckie	5,199,604	4,186,479	3,468	7
Opolskie	950,463	792,456	880	5
Podkarpackie	2,116,059	1,714,950	1,805	5
Podlaskie	1,153,371	941,772	959	4
Pomorskie	2,208,934	1,759,938	1,392	5
Śląskie	4,310,345	3,548,892	2,745	7
Świętokrzyskie	1,232,926	1,020,502	982	4
Warmińsko-mazurskie	1,387,270	1,126,306	1,111	5
Wielkopolskie	3,369,873	2,710,628	2,179	6
Zachodniopomorskie	1,604,980	1,316,823	1120	5
Summary	37,039,754	30,145,816	26,983	85

Source: PKW (2018).

The fact of being the smallest of the provinces with the lowest number of inhabitants certainly determines also the electoral geography of the region. The numbers of voters, election precincts, and constituencies are the lowest here. As the table below shows, with its 792,456 voters, the Opolskie province was in the 15th place, only slightly ahead of the Lubuskie province (which is slightly larger in terms of surface area) with its 791,991 voters; similarly with respect to the number of precincts (880 in the Opolskie province, 719 in the Lubuskie province).

Its 5 provincial assembly constituencies put the province at the same place as 8 others with the same number. Only the Świętokrzyskie and Podlaskie provinces have fewer constituencies.

Table 2. The Opolskie Province among other provinces with respect to the number of administrative units and the number of elected legislative and executive bodies

Province	Districts	Total	Number of Communes			Number of elected		
			district-based city	above 20,000	below 20,000	Commune Leaders	Mayors	City presidents
Dolnośląskie	26	169	4	26	139	78	83	8
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	19	144	4	9	131	92	47	5
Lubelskie	20	213	4	9	200	165	43	5
Lubuskie	12	82	2	8	72	39	40	3
Łódzkie	21	177	3	14	160	133	33	11
Małopolskie	19	182	3	30	149	120	58	4
Mazowieckie	37	314	5	13	278	227	77	10
Opolskie	11	71	1	10	60	35	34	2
Podkarpackie	21	160	4	18	138	109	45	6
Podlaskie	14	118	3	7	108	78	37	3
Pomorskie	16	123	4	18	101	81	35	7
Śląskie	17	167	19	22	126	96	47	24
Świętokrzyskie	13	102	1	9	92	65	33	4
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	19	116	2	13	101	66	47	3
Wielkopolskie	31	226	4	30	192	113	106	7
Zachodniopomorskie	18	113	3	12	98	67	61	5
Summary	314	2,477	66	248	2,145	1,544	826	107

Source: PKW (2018).

Being the smallest, the Opolskie province has the lowest number of administrative units. There are only 11 districts and one district-based city (Opole as the capital of the province) (*The Opolskie Province in Numbers*), 71 communes, most of which with a population of up to 20,000 persons (60), communes with a population of above 20,000 persons (10). The Opolskie province is characterized by the lowest number of commune leaders in the whole country (35). As far as mayors are concerned (34), the region was ahead of the Łódzkie and Świętokrzyskie provinces,

where 33 mayors were elected respectively. The election of only two city presidents (Opole and Kędzierzyn-Koźle) gives Opole the last place in the ranking (Table 2).

The specificity of the image of Opolskie province is complemented by the fact that it is, to a significantly higher degree than other provinces, a multicultural borderland region (Mazurkiewicz 2015; Ganowicz & Opióła 2017), which should be associated mainly with the existence of a group of the German minority (GM) representatives in Poland, inhabiting, according to the most recent reports (from a decade ago), the most numerous the central and eastern districts of the province: the Strzelecki district (20.62% of residents of the province), the Opolski district (19.82%), the Krapkowicki district (18.38%), the Oleski district (16.82%), the Prudnicki district (14.93%), the Kędzierzynsko-Kozielski district (13.15%), the Kluczborski district (9.75%) and the Opolski city district (2.46%)” (MSWiA 2020). According to the results of the 2002 National Census of Population and Housing, the German minority constitutes 10% of the population (GUS 2002). Since the first local government elections in Poland, the presence of the German minority has been clearly visible, as has been the participation of the group in decision-making processes and in the exercise of power in the authorities of all three levels of the local government system. This political activity of the GM will certainly determine the most strongly the specificity of the elections in the region at each level (in different ways) and at all times, and the local government elections in 2018 were no exception in this respect.

Voter turnout in the Opolskie Province

The aforementioned elections, analysed from a general perspective, compared to the previous ones, in terms of one of the most important factors legitimizing each elected body, i.e. voter turnout, were characterized by a high level of citizens’ activity. According to the National Electoral Commission it was 48.83% (PKW 2018), which was the highest voter turnout (in local government elections) after 1990. In every previous local government elections, the Opolskie province had been among the regions with the lowest voter turnout. As can be seen in the table below, in 2018, with the result slightly above 45% (45.36%), the Opolskie province was ranked third from the bottom behind the Zachodniopomorskie province (45.14%) and Śląskie province (44.47%).

Table 3. Voter turnout in particular provinces in the local government elections in 2018

Province	Number of voters	Voter turnout
Pomorskie	581,223	52.75%
Małopolskie	1,261,294	52.20%
Mazowieckie	1,132,170	51.62%
Lubelskie	633,171	51.62%
Świętokrzyskie	445,092	51.57%
Podkarpackie	441,077	49.56%
Łódzkie	551,242	49.31%
Wielkopolskie	574,921	47.67%
Podlaskie	242,568	47.23%
Dolnośląskie	572,893	46.50%
Warmińsko-mazurskie	513,284	46.40%
Kujawsko-pomorskie	424,907	46.25%
Lubuskie	163,791	45.54%
Opolskie	183,733	45.36%
Zachodniopomorskie	728,252	45.14%
Śląskie	1,073,783	44.47%

Source: PKW (2018).

In the Opolskie province, the highest voter turnout among the 11 districts was in two districts: Namysłowski (53.49%) and Strzelecki (52.09%). The lowest voter turnout was in the Opolski city district (41.93%) and Nyski district (37.77%). These data are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Voter turnout in particular districts in the Opolskie Province in the local government elections in 2018

Districts	Voter turnout
Brzeski	45.18%
Głubczycki	46.62%
Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski	45.69%
Kluczborski	42.71%
Krapkowicki	45.91%
Namysłowski	52.49%
Nyski	37.77%
Oleski	44.81%
Opolski	41.93%
Prudnicki	46.58%
Strzelecki	52.09%

Source: PKW (2018).

This voter turnout specificity of the Opole Region, perceived either externally or internally, turns out not to be so exceptional. The overall result, perhaps in the final registers, is not so much different from that in the Lubuskie province or a few provinces with higher places in the ranking. The situation is similar with respect to districts. Only the Nyski district clearly stands out, with the voter turnout below 40%. One of the districts with a voter turnout higher than 50% (the Strzelecki district) is inhabited by a fairly large GM group, but this is also a characteristic of one of the districts with the lowest turnout, i.e. the Opolski city district. It is therefore difficult to see any clear characteristics here.

Candidates and candidate lists

An analysis of the elections cannot overlook the aspect of exercising the passive voting right. Table 5 shows that 186 commune council candidate lists in communes with a population of more than 20,000 persons, 32 district-based city council candidate lists, 225 district council candidate lists, and 56 provincial assembly candidate lists were registered in the Opolskie province. This is, respectively, 4.24%, 1.61%, 3.5%, and 5.97% of all candidate lists registered in Poland. In total, the rolls in the Opolskie province represent only 3.64% of all rolls registered in Poland.

Table 5. Registered candidate lists in the 2018 local government elections in the Opole Province

	Poland	Opolskie province	%
commune councils in communes with more than 20,000 inhabitants	4386	186	4.24
city councils in district-based cities	1984	32	1.61
district councils	6413	225	3.50
provincial assemblies	937	56	5.97
Total	13720	499	3.64

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

In the local government elections, 5690 candidates were registered, which constitutes 3.08% of all candidates registered in the country (184,745). 178 candidates were registered for the offices of commune leader, mayor, and city president – 75 for the office of commune leader, 93 for the office of mayor and 10 for the position of city president. This is 2.55% of all candidates for one of these offices in the province (6958).

Table 6. The numbers of registered candidates in the 2018 local government elections in the Opolskie Province

	Number of candidates
Number of registered candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants	2143
Number of registered candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants	1362
Number of registered candidates for seats on district-based city councils	245
Number of registered candidates for seats on district councils	1560
Number of registered candidates for seats on the provincial assembly	380
Number of registered candidates for the office of mayor	93
Number of registered candidates for the office of city president	10
Number of registered candidates for the office of commune leader	75
Total	5690

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

The average age of candidates in the Opolskie province in general was 47 years; 45 years for women and 48 years for men (Table 7).

Table 7. The average age of candidates in the 2018 local elections in the Opolskie Province

	Average age
Number of registered candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants	47
Number of registered candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants	49
Number of registered candidates for seats on district-based city councils	48
Number of registered candidates for seats on district councils	50
Number of registered candidates for seats on the provincial assembly	47
Number of registered candidates for the office of mayor	49
Number of registered candidates for the office of city president	50
Number of registered candidates for the office of commune leader	50
Total	47

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Among candidates for seats on councils, the highest number of candidates was recorded in the age range of 40-59 (2700 persons), followed by those aged 60 and more (1297 persons), and those in the age range of 30-39 (1208 persons). In the youngest group aged 18-29, only 479 people decided to run in the elections to local government bodies. The data in the table below show that this number includes 2420 women and 3270 men, which constitutes 42.53% and 57.46% of the total number of candidates respectively.

Table 8. Candidates for councils in the local government elections in the Opolskie Province by gender and age

Age	Number of candidates	Women	Women (%)	Men	Men (%)
18-29	479	204	43%	275	57%
30-39	1208	582	48%	626	52%
40-59	2706	1157	43%	1549	57%
60+	1297	477	37%	820	63%
Total	5690	2420	43%	3270	57%

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Analysing the age of candidates for the offices of mayor, commune leader and city president, one can notice the same characteristics with the predominance of male candidates. In the total number of 178 candidates, there are only 40 women (they constitute 22% of all candidates) and 138 men (78% of candidates). The data are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Candidates for the offices of mayor, commune leader and city president in the local government elections in the Opolskie province in 2018

Age	Number of candidates	Women	Women (%)	Men	Men (%)
18-29	3	0	0%	3	100%
30-39	37	3	8%	34	92%
40-59	107	29	27%	78	73%
60+	31	8	26%	23	74%
Total	178	40	22%	138	78%

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

In these elections, male candidates were dominant, especially in the youngest age group, where there were no female candidates. Over 90% of the candidates aged 30-39 are also men. In the remaining age groups, more than 73% of candidates are men.

The participation of the German Minority in the elections deserves special attention in this electoral geography of the Opole Region. The GM owed its success in the local government elections to its members, who have been known to the voters of this region as “our fellow countrymen” and have always been associated with thrift and “good management”.

In the 2018 elections, the GM had 33 candidate lists for local government bodies (10), which accounts for 6.04% of all candidate lists in the province. There were 5 candidate lists for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants (2 councils), 34 candidate lists for seats on district councils (7 councils), and 4 candidate lists for seats on the provincial assembly (1 council). As it can be seen in Table 10, no candidates were appointed for the district-based city council.

Table 10. The candidate lists registered by the German Minority in the local government elections in 2018

	candidate lists	councils
commune councils in communes with more than 20,000 inhabitants	5	2
city councils in district-based cities	-	-
district councils	24	7
provincial assembly	4	1
Total	33	10

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Such a large number of candidate lists prepared by the German minority indicates its considerable political activation. This is confirmed by an equally impressive number of candidates for local government bodies, as in total the GM appointed 605 candidates in local government elections: 582 candidates for seats on councils (i.e. 10.22% of the candidates in the province) and 23 for the offices of mayor or commune leader (12.92% of the candidates for the executive bodies in the province). In the 2018 election, the German Minority did not put forward any candidates for the office of city president.

For comparison with the leading political forces, 829 candidates were appointed by the Law and Justice party within the region, including 798 candidates for seats on councils and 22 candidates for executive bodies (8 candidates for the office of commune leader, 2 candidates for city president, and 12 candidates for the office of mayor) (PKW 2018). The Platform Modern

Civic Coalition had fewer candidates than the German minority, with a total of 533 candidates: 523 candidates for seats on councils and 10 candidates for the offices of commune leader, mayor, and city president, with 7 candidates for the office of mayor, 1 candidate for the office of city president, and 2 candidates for the office of commune leader (PKW 2018). Thus, the GM appointed a significant number of candidates in the elections, especially for executive bodies, in comparison to the leading national party, although the GM itself is not a party. The discussed data are presented in the table below.

Table 11. A list of the number of candidates of the leading political parties and the GM in the local government elections in the Opole Region in 2018

Election	Candidates		
	PiS	PNKO	GM
Candidates for seats on councils and provincial assembly	798	523	582
Candidates for the office of commune leader	8	2	15
Candidates for the office of mayor	12	7	8
Candidates for the office of city president	2	1	-
Total	829	533	605

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

In the electoral landscape, the GM is, therefore, clearly noticeable and represents an important political force. The analysis of the average age of the German minority candidates indicates that they are usually older than the average candidate in the elections in the province. The data presented in Table 12 show that the average age is 49, while for other candidates it is 47 (Table 7). It is also visible with respect to gender, where the average female candidates' age is 46 and the average male candidates' age is 48, while for the GM it is 47 and 52, respectively.

The most numerous representation of the GM candidates was in the 40-59 age group (281 out of 582 persons), followed by 144 people aged 60 and over, and 120 in the 30-39 age group. There were only 37 persons in the youngest age group. This corresponds to the general trend in the province. With regard to the German Minority, the dominance of the male candidates is a reflection of that in the region in general, and at the same percentage levels (Table 13).

Table 12. The German minority – the average age of candidates in the 2018 local government elections in the Opolskie Province

	Average age	Average age of women	Average age of men
Average age of candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants	49	49	49
Average age of candidates for seats on commune councils in communes with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants	51	47	54
Average age of candidates for seats on district-based city councils	-	-	-
Average age of candidates for seats on district councils	51	48	54
Average age of candidates for seats on the provincial assembly	49	46	52
Average age of candidates for the office of mayor	48	55	45
Average age of candidates for the office of city president	-	-	-
Average age of candidates for the office of commune leader	48	63	46
Total	49	47	52

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Table 13. The German minority – candidates for seats on councils in the local government elections in 2018 by age and gender

Age	Number of candidates	Women	Women (%)	Men	Men (%)
18-29	37	18	49%	19	51%
30-39	120	60	50%	60	50%
40-59	281	119	42%	162	58%
60+	144	52	36%	92	64%
Total	582	249	43%	333	57%

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

In the elections for the offices of the commune leader, mayor and city president, the disparities between the participation of women and men in different age groups are even more pronounced. The data are presented in Table 14.

The analysis shows that men are definitely a majority, with 87% of candidates, while women only with 13% of candidates. In the province, this disproportion was at the level of 22%-78%. In the first two age groups, only men were candidates, while in the 40-59 age group there was only one woman among the 14 candidates. In the oldest age group, only women applied for an office.

Table 14. The German minority – candidates in the local government elections in 2018 for the offices of commune leaders, mayors and city presidents by age and gender

Age	Number of candidates	Women	Women (%)	Men	Men (%)
18-29	1	0	0%	1	100%
30-39	6	0	0%	6	100%
40-59	14	1	7%	13	93%
60+	2	2	100%	0	0%
Total	23	3	13%	20	87%

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Therefore, among the GM candidates for councillors, men constituted a majority. As far as the age of the candidates is concerned, most of them were aged 40-59 or 60 and more. The number of women on the GM candidate lists increases in every local government election, although there are still fewer women than men. Female candidate are the most numerous in the age groups of 30-39 and 18-29. Thus, the majority of the GM candidates are men in the two age groups: 40-59 and over 60. The small number of candidates in the 18-29 age group should be emphasized. This may be evidence of the ageing of local GM leaders and the lack of “generational succession” within its ranks.

The activity of the GM, which is noticeable and distinct on a provincial scale with regard to candidate lists and the number of candidates in terms of their age and gender, is in line with the general trends, where men predominate by far and the smallest number of candidates is in the youngest age group, while the oldest age groups have the largest number of candidates.

The elections to the provincial assembly of the Opolskie Province deserve special attention. They were held in 5 constituencies: the constituency 1 comprising the city of Opole, the Opolski district; the constituency 2 comprising the Kluczborski, Namysłowski and Oleski districts, the constituency 3 comprising the Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski and Strzelecki districts; the constituency 4 comprising the Głubczycki, Krapkowicki and Prudnicki districts; and the constituency 5 comprising the Brzeski and Nyski districts (PKW 2018). In total, 380 candidates from 56 registered candidate lists competed for 30 seats on the provincial assembly (Table 15).

Table 15. The electoral constituencies in the 2018 election to the provincial assembly in the Opolskie province

Constituency	Range (districts)	Number of			
		Seats	Voters	Registered lists	Candidates
1	The city of Opole, Opolski district	8	199,992	12	97
2	Kluczborski, Namysłowski, Oleski	5	140,585	12	74
3	Kędzierzyńsko-kozielski, Strzelecki	5	135,182	11	67
4	Głubczycki, Krapkowicki, Prudnicki	5	133,137	11	69
5	Brzeski, Nyski	7	183,604	10	73
Total		30	792,430	56	380

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

It is clear that the constituencies 1, 3 (especially this one) and 4 are among those, where there are large concentrations of the German minority members, which is likely to affect the overall picture of the elections. The number of candidate lists in the province constitutes less than 6% (5.97%) of that for the whole of Poland (937). The number of candidates in the province is 5.38% of the total number of candidates for the provincial assemblies in Poland (7054) (PKW 2018). These low numbers are obviously a consequence of the province's place in the ranking of population and area.

The candidate lists in the elections to the provincial assembly were prepared by 13 electoral committees. Table 16 presents them by the total number of candidates and the number of candidates in the particular constituencies.

The most active of the five constituencies is the constituency 1 (the city of Opole and the Opolski district). It is characterized by the highest number of candidates (97 out of 380 of all candidates), which constitutes 25.52% of their total number. On average, the electoral committees appointed approximately 29 candidates. The electoral committees of significant political entities, mainly political parties, appointed approximately 40 candidates. The activity of the other entities (with the exception of the Non-Partisan Local Government Activists Electoral Committee and the Green Party Electoral Committee) should be regarded as impressive. Also,

the activity of the German Minority, which in the elections at the highest level of local government appointed 31 candidates – 10 candidates in the constituency 1 and 7 candidates in the constituencies 2-4. In the constituency 5, the GM did not appoint any candidates, which is not surprising, as its influence in the Brzeski and Nyski districts is negligible.

Table 16. Candidates for the provincial assembly according to the election committees in the 2018 local government elections in the Opole Province

Election committee	Candidates in the constituency					Candidates in total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Nonpartisan Local Government Activists	-	7	-	-	-	7
Polish Peasants Party (PSL)	10	7	7	7	9	40
Green Party	8	-	-	-	-	8
Platform Modern Civic Coalition	10	7	7	7	9	40
Democratic Left Alliance - Left Together Coalition	10	7	7	7	9	40
Together Party	5	5	5	5	5	25
National Movement	5	5	5	5	5	25
Kukiz'15	10	7	7	7	9	40
Freedom In Self-Government	8	5	5	7	8	33
Law and Justice (PiS)	10	7	7	7	9	40
The Free And Solidary Election Committee	5	5	5	5	5	25
German Minority	10	7	7	7	-	31
Silesian Regional Party	6	5	5	5	5	26
Total	97	74	67	69	73	380

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

Political activity is quite high at the local government level in the Opolskie province. The small area and scarce population contribute to the accumulation and clearer articulation of interests. Even theoretically weaker entities reach for power more willingly by registering electoral lists and appointing candidates. Traditionally, a larger number of candidates compete for seats on governing bodies, as more of these are available, but efforts to take up executive offices can also be seen. The executive bodies have a more individual dimension and are associated with more power granted to a particular person; the offices are prestigious and representative. Having one's own commune leader or mayor is important for local communities, but in the Opole Region this need has a special dimension, connected with the considerable size of the German minority population and its interests. Hence the special activity of the GM in this direction. It determines the specificity of electoral competition in the region.

The results of the local government elections in the Opole Region in 2018

The results of the electoral competition are as important as the willingness to compete for power, and perhaps even more important. It is worth analysing the results of voting in particular constituencies and for particular committees as well as the overall results of the elections.

The voter turnout in the constituencies was generally below 50%, except for the constituency 1, where it was 50.50%. In the remaining constituencies, it reached the following levels: in the constituency 2 – 49.64%, in the constituency 3 – 44.28%, in the constituency 4 – 49.30%, and in the constituency 5 – 48.54%. Everywhere the percentage of valid votes was over 90% (PKW 2018).

Table 17. The voting results in the provincial assembly of the Opolskie Province in 2018 by election committees

Election committee	Candidate list no.	%
Platform Modern Civic Coalition	4	29.45
Law and Justice (PiS)	10	25.77
German Minority	12	14.64
Polish Peasants Party (PSL)	2	10.72
Kukiz'15	8	6.06
Democratic Left Alliance – Left Together	5	5.94
Freedom In Self-Government	9	1.54
Together Party	6	1.51
Silesian Regional Party	13	1.13
Free And Solidary	11	1.07
National Movement	7	0.95
Nonpartisan Local Government Activists	1	0.78
Green Party	3	0.45

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

The percentage of valid votes in the election committees was as follows: the Coalition Platform Modern Civic Coalition Election Committee (list no. 4) with 29.45% of votes, the Law and Justice Election Committee (list no. 10) with 25.77%, the German Minority Election

Committee (list no. 12) with 14.64%, and the Polish Peasant Party Election Committee (list no. 2) with 10.72%. The other election committees recorded one-digit percentage or even less than 1%. The data are presented in the table 17.

The third place of the GM is worth attention; it was reflected in the distribution of seats. Four electoral committees participated in it: the Platform Modern Civic Coalition Election Committee, the Law and Justice Election Committee, the German Minority Election Committee and the Polish Peasant Party Election Committee (PKW 2018).

The largest number of seats (8) were won by the candidates in the constituency 1, followed by the constituency 5 (7) and 5 seats in the remaining constituencies (Table 18). The election winner was the Platform Modern Civic Coalition Election Committee with 13 seats altogether (seats in each constituency), followed by Law and Justice (10 seats, also seats in each constituency). The GM was third with 5 representatives in the provincial assembly from the constituencies 1, 3 and 4, where it is the most numerously represented. The Polish Peasants Party received only 2 seats, both in the constituency 5. The data are presented in the table below.

Table 18. The provincial assembly election results by constituencies, candidate lists, and number of seats

Constituency	Candidate list number				Total
	2	4	10	12	
1	0	4	2	2	8
2	0	3	2	0	5
3	0	2	1	2	5
4	0	2	2	1	5
5	2	2	3	0	7
Total	2	13	10	5	30

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

The GM, just like in the previous local government elections, managed to introduce its representatives to the provincial assembly of the Opolskie Province. In the 2018 elections, the GM appointed 31 candidates and gained 14.64% of votes, eventually winning 5 seats. The third place in this competition, behind the important political forces, confirms the fact that the GM is still an important political force at the provincial level.

The German minority in the local government elections at the commune and district levels in the Opolskie Province in 2018

An analysis of the GM's position at the remaining levels in the elections seems justified, as the GM determines the specificity of the elections at the highest level of local government in the Opole Region.

As Table 19 shows, in the elections to district councils, the highest number of candidates was appointed by the GM in the Opolski (35), Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski (29) and Strzelecki (27) districts. In the Brzeski, Głubczycki, Namysłowski, and Nyski districts as well as in the city of Opole, no candidate was put forward by the GM in these elections. The GM achieved the best result in the Opolski district, where 12 of its representatives were appointed to the District Council. It also achieved a good result in the Strzelecki district, with 9 seats on the council. 6 councillors were introduced to the Oleski district council, and 5 to the Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski and Prudnicki district councils.

Table 19. The German minority – the results in the local government elections for district councils in 2018

District/district-based city	District/district-based city					
	Number of candidates			Number of seats acquired		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Brzeski	0	0	0	0	0	0
Głubczycki	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski	15	14	29	1	4	5
Kluczborski	2	3	5	0	0	0
Krapkowicki	3	0	3	2	0	2
Namysłowski	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nyski	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oleski	8	10	18	3	3	6
Opolski	16	19	35	2	10	12
Prudnicki	6	7	13	1	4	5
Strzelecki	12	15	27	2	7	9
Opole - district-based city	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	62	68	130	11	28	39

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

The GM was also successful at the commune level, although to varying degrees. In the 2018 elections, the GM confirmed its strong position in communes with a population of up to 20,000 persons, where it appointed altogether 386 candidates and won 203 seats on commune councils. The GM achieved the best result in the Opolski district, where 57 GM councillors

gained seats on the councils. The GM also enjoys considerable support in communes with a population of up to 20,000 persons in the Strzelecki district, where its candidates gained 43 seats, and in the Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski district, where they gained 41 seats. It is worth noting that in all these districts the GM won the elections also at the district level. On the other hand, in the Krapkowicki and Oleski districts, the GM candidates did not receive such support, and introduced, respectively, 2 and 6 councillors to the district councils, while in communes with a population of fewer than 20,000 people, 21 seats (the Krapkowicki district) and 29 seats (the Oleski district). The data are presented in Table 20.

Table 20. The German minority – the results in the local government elections for commune councils in 2018

District/ district-based city	Communes with a population above 20,000 people						Communes with a population of fewer than 20,000 people					
	Number of candidates			Number of seats acquired			Number of candidates			Number of seats acquired		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Brzeski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Głubczycki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kędzierzyńsko- Kozielski	3	5	8	0	0	0	18	37	55	14	27	41
Kluczborski	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	8	15	6	2	8
Krapkowicki	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	20	35	9	12	21
Namysłowski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nyski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oleski	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	39	66	10	19	29
Opolski	1	7	8	0	4	4	38	85	123	17	40	57
Prudnicki	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	9	18	2	2	4
Strzelecki	11	14	25	1	3	4	28	46	74	14	29	43
Opole - district- based city												
Total	15	26	41	1	7	8	142	244	386	72	131	203

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

As it can be seen in this table, the GM's position was much weaker in communes with a population of more than 20,000 people. In the 2018 elections, the GM had only 41 candidates for commune councils. In total, the GM candidates won only 8 seats. Even in the districts where the GM was successful in the elections at the district level and in communes with a population of up to 20,000 people, i.e. the Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski, Opolski and Strzelecki districts, it did not manage to gain many seats. In the Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski district, it did not win any seats, and in the Opolski and Strzelecki districts, it won only 4 seats in each district. In the elections for this

type of communes, the GM did not register any candidate lists in the Brzeski, Głubczycki, Namysławski and Nyski districts.

Thus, in the 2018 district and commune council elections, the GM won 250 seats. The majority of them in the following districts: Opolski, where it introduced 73 councillors to the district and commune councils; Strzelecki, where it gained 56 seats, and Kędzierzyńsko-Kozielski, where it gained 46 seats. Its result was poorer in the Oleski district (35 seats) and the Krapkowicki district (23 seats).

Table 21. The German minority – the results in the local government elections for the offices of commune leader, mayor and city president in 2018

Districts	Communes with a population above 20,000 people						Communes with a population of fewer than 20,000 people						Total					
	Number of candidates for village mayor office			Number of village mayor seats acquired			Number of candidates for village mayor office			Number of village mayor seats acquired			Number of candidates for village mayor office			Number of village mayor seats acquired		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Brzeski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Głubczycki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kędzierzyńsko-kozielski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	3	3
Kluczborski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Krapkowicki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1
Namysławski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nyski	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oleski	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	0	1	1	1	3	4	0	1	1
Opolski	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	6	0	1	1	1	5	6	0	1	1
Prudnicki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Strzelecki	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	5	1	2	3	1	5	6	1	3	4
Total	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	19	22	1	8	9	3	20	23	1	9	10

Source: own work based on PKW (2018).

In the direct elections for commune leaders, mayors and city presidents, the GM appointed in total 23 candidates, i.e. fewer than in the 2014 elections, in which it had appointed its candidates in 28 towns and communes (including, for the first time in history, a candidate for the office of president of Opole). This may indicate a weakening position of the GM leaders. In

10 communes, its candidates won the elections. The GM's stronger position in communes with a population of up to 20,000 people can also be seen on the basis of the results of its candidates for commune leaders. The GM appointed its candidates for these offices in 22 communes of the Opolskie Province: 6 in communes of the Opolski district, 5 in communes of the Strzelecki district, and 4 in communes of the Oleski and Kędzierzynsko-Kozielski districts respectively (Table 21). The GM's best result was achieved in the Strzelecki district, where 3 of its candidates won the direct elections for commune leaders. It was similar in the Kędzierzynsko-Kozielski district. In the Krapkowicki, Oleski and Opolski districts, the GM won the office of commune leader in 1 commune. With regard to the direct elections for mayors and city presidents, the GM appointed its candidate only in 1 commune in the Strzelecki district. The candidate did not win the elections.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the specificity of local government elections in the Opole Region is determined by the activity of the German Minority, which, not being a political party, has become institutionalized and has acted, as if it were a party competing with the actual political parties. The GM is successful in elections at every level (less spectacularly in communes with a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants), and thus can introduce its representatives to governing bodies and pursue its interests.

Based on the data presented in this paper, it can be concluded that the GM participates in elections at all the three levels of the local government, and due to the acquired support, it has the opportunity to co-govern (e.g. at the provincial and district levels), or govern independently (e.g. in communes with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants). The GM's position is the strongest in councils in communes with a population of up to 20,000 people, and in district councils, in particular in the Opolski, Strzelecki, Kędzierzynsko-Kozielski districts. The GM does not participate in the political competition in communes with a population of more than 20,000 people.

The analysis of the data concerning the average age of candidates, for both councillors and the offices of commune leaders, mayors and city presidents shows that the GM leaders are "getting older" and thus becoming less "attractive" to younger voters who were very active in the 2018 elections. Moreover, the small number of candidates in the 18-29 age group may indicate a "generation gap" among the GM leaders, which may have an impact on reducing the intensity of the GM's political activity in local government elections in the future.

In 2018, despite a higher voter turnout than in the 2014 elections, the GM won fewer seats; this decline is particularly visible in communes with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants. This decreasing number of seats won by the GM may also indicate a need to redefine the interests of this national group. In the 1990s, these interests were focused mainly on issues related to identity, culture, or the stopping of the outflow of people of German origin to Germany. At present, due to the accomplishment of most of these objectives, it is necessary for the GM to compete effectively on the local political scene with other actors, and to redefine its objectives.

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**Marketing Communication of Selected
Conservative and Liberal Parties in Slovak Region
Before Elections**

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Abstract:

Through a democratically set system of state functioning, political parties are given space for their establishment and subsequent functioning. Nowadays, registering new parties is not an issue in Slovakia, but another issue arises - most political parties cannot attract voters, and as a result they lose general sympathy and also necessary votes in elections. For a political party to become known to its voters, it needs to address and subsequently implement techniques of political marketing. Reaching and gaining voters is essential for a political party to continue to exist. By using marketing communication in its election campaign, a political party can succeed more than the one that has not used them. Therefore to adequately address its voters, a political party has to know their social, cultural, economic as well as religious background. The political party must also pay attention to the creation of an election program that appeals to voters. However, a political party should choose such proper communication channels through which it will be able to attract its supporters. The presented paper deals with the issue of using / not using marketing communication before the parliamentary elections in 2020 in selected Slovak conservatively and liberally oriented political parties in the Trenčín region. The authors present their findings on the basis of the analysis of marketing communication tools, as well as formulate research questions that helped them meet the research goal, in particular, whether selected political parties used/did not use specific marketing communication tools in their election campaign in 2020.

Keywords: marketing communication, marketing communication tools, political marketing, political parties, voters, Trenčín region

Introduction

During the election campaign, we can observe the significance of political influence on the supporters of individual parties. Political propaganda is generally a well-known term for

influencing people in the election campaign. Nowadays with the gradual development of technology, we also notice a change in the goals of political propaganda towards voters. The means to achieve the most active election campaign are continually changing and also depend on the use of current marketing trends in politics (Hradiská 2010). However, the ideal model for a successful election campaign is not yet known. It is, therefore, up to the political party itself to choose how to reach the voters. Due to the uniqueness of the election campaign, a political party can either gain voters or not.

The pre-election campaign is influenced by various factors, such as country's history, political literacy of voters, current political situation in the country, size and diversity of the political market, political party competition, background of candidates and the image of the political party itself. In Slovakia, the cases of candidates of political parties and the financing of their campaigns are mainly addressed in the pre-election period (Chytílek et al. 2012; Štědroň 2013). Political parties try to compete with each other. Opponents are often discredited in front of the public, especially in the context of preventing candidates from political parties or questioning the financing of the election campaign, especially the transparency of how the financial resources were used. We can conclude that voters usually do not react to the quality of proposed programs of political parties. However, they want to know the background of candidates - their conflicts, extremist attitudes or conflicting views with other political parties.

Despite the various factors that create a burden on a political party, its members need to focus on the importance of using up-to-date information technology towards voters. Today, the Internet and social media are some of the most important means of sharing and transmitting the information. People like to be informed and information is spread very quickly through the mentioned information technologies. The change in the rules used so far in political marketing is caused by on-line space. For those who know how to use on-line and off-line space for the benefit of their political campaign, the media are becoming a handy tool for achieving their goals.

Political marketing

Political marketing is an integral part of the communication of political parties, which concerns not only the pre-election period but also their entire existence. Political marketing started to gain its importance in Slovakia with the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993. The reign of democracy in the country resulted in the general public gradually appreciating the speeches of

politicians, their work with selected groups of sympathizers, etc. (Smolková et al. 2016; Jabłoński & Kopeček 2006). Also crucial were the means and methods of political marketing used by politicians towards their voters. Political behavior had a significant influence on the voters of a particular political party, which was ultimately reflected in the election results. Political parties using political marketing during their campaign were able to rapidly increase the percentage of voters and continue to sustain them.

Similarly to the market mechanism, we encounter the supply and demand also in political marketing. On the supply side, there is a political party with its ideas and program. On the demand side, some voters expect change to come with the elections. Thus, in a democratic society, the product represents the program of a political party, and voters are customers who are interested in it if they sympathize with a particular political party (Ormrod et al. 2013). During election campaigns, we observe an electoral product that each political party has designed differently. The electoral product is characterized by its integrity, which influences the voter. It is not only a program but also the presentation of political parties to the public. The connection between politics and marketing can be found in the promotion of the election product itself (Křeček 2007). The election product is distributed mainly in the pre-election period, using various on-line or off-line media chosen by the political party.

Political marketing is not just a combination of marketing and political science. Political marketing involves several scientific disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, law and other social and human sciences. Political marketing has found its use mainly in election campaigns. Also, political marketing is related to media events, the distribution of PR gifts on the occasion of meetings of politicians with their voters, and the predefined display of the logo in a visible place of the gift (Smolka 2015). This includes other communication procedures that the political party has used so far in the pre-election period. The marketing activities that are related and used to reach the voters are diverse and it is up to the political party of their choice. However, the goal of marketing activities should be primarily to address and open the communication with the voter, which leads to the electoral vote and thus supports the success of the political party in the election. Political party candidates usually hold debates in various media discussing their electoral programs, visions and strategies in order to reach the broadest possible range of the population.

For the public political marketing has become a part of media influence. Today, we can certainly name the tools that politicians use to influence their future voters. It is all about influencing not only in the short-term but also the long-term period (Elder 2016). With the gradual development of the media, but also of the means intended for communication, it was necessary to look for such communication tools that would be able to deliver the message, visions and strategies of the political party to the broadest possible public. Because only by using the broadest possible range of means of communication, is it possible for a political party to reach as many of its voters as possible (Lees-Marshment 2014). Today, political parties are aware of the importance of marketing activities used in politics. Therefore, they are continually looking for ways to link and connect marketing to their political agenda. Also, they put more and more trust in marketers of political or election campaigns, who can help them achieve their goal. The target of political marketing is not just the implementation of campaigns (Štensová & Štarchoň 2009; Kubáček 2012). It is about monitoring the marketing environment, its analysis and how to design marketing strategies. Political marketing is a collection of theory, marketing techniques, methods and tools, and therefore there is an opportunity to run a political campaign at a professional level. Each political campaign is specific and requires the use of other methods and tools during its course compared to the previous one. The current political market requires the use of such techniques which will enable a political party to share its ideology and preferred values of its leaders. This may further follow the creation of an offer, which is requested by the supporters of a political party. However, we often witness an ineffective election campaign, which is well-funded but not primarily marketing-oriented and thought through.

The success of political marketing depends primarily on research, which includes analyzing the environment, current views and preferences of voters. Also, it is necessary to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates of a particular political party (Ivantysyn 2009; Slovák 2016). This identification can support the political party in its further development and steps to achieve the set goal. Changing voter preferences can also bring about a change in the strategy of a political party. It is, therefore, important to use a way that meets the requirements of voters. It should be crucial for a political party to set goals and gradually achieve them. Also, the importance of chosen communication channels and verification of the correctness of the set goals through the implementation of public opinion polls is crucial.

Communication mix of the election campaign

Currently, several tools of marketing communication in the world of politics are used, which influence the decision-making of voters in the pre-election period. The most commonly used include advertising, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing. Perhaps every political party uses advertising on television or radio. With the development of communication media, social media and the Internet have become the leaders. We can increasingly observe the use of social networks to promote political ideologies. Social networks are preferred by political parties closer to young people and families when communicating their election program ([Šaradín 2007](#)). Political advertising in the off-line environment can be perceived by voters in, for example, local or regional newspapers. Most candidates of political parties prefer the distribution of leaflets and catalogues describing their profile and election program. The distribution of leaflets can ultimately be more costly than, for example, advertising on social networks, which can become viral. Likewise, billboards are very popular among politicians in Slovakia, but also financially demanding. In political marketing, the term personal selling means the personal communication of information by candidates towards voters ([Williams 2017](#)). It is a financially and time-consuming form of promotion, but it proves to be the most effective. During the election period, the candidates of political parties must comment publicly on the scandals or unclear circumstances. Positive public relations contribute to the image of a political party.

An election campaign for the National Council of the Slovak Republic took place in Slovakia in February 2020. Political parties could launch their election campaign on November 5, 2019. However, political advertising began to be broadcast on radio and television only on February 8, 2020. Since this date, it was also possible to start with the broadcasting of discussion programs and the promotion of political parties' election programs. According to the law, the election campaign must end 48 hours before the election, because an information moratorium is then in force ([Smolková et al. 2016](#)). The statement of the Broadcasting and Retransmission Council also states that the results of election polls may not be published 14 days before the elections. This prohibition applies until the end of voting in the elections. The Broadcasting and Retransmission Council does not take into account the amendment to the law, which covers the extension of the moratorium on the publication of the results of public opinion polls from 14 to 50 days.

Methodology

In our analysis, we focus on the use/non-use of marketing communication tools of selected Slovak conservative and liberal parties in the Trenčín region. In this case, conservative and liberal parties are understood as Slovak political parties, whose ideology is also focused on conservatism or liberalism. We focus on the Trenčín region due to the use of knowledge gained from the analysis for possible future use in our dissertation thesis. For the analysis, we randomly chose three political parties with an ideology focused also on conservatism and three political parties focused also on liberalism. The condition was that they were Slovak political parties and that they ran for the parliamentary elections in 2020. The analysis took place in January 2020. We analyzed the use/non-use of marketing communication tools in the off-line and on-line environment. For analysis in the off-line environment, we selected the following tools: billboards, leaflets, news, promotion and PR meetings. We have selected the following tools for analysis of the on-line environment: social media, promotion and live stream. We consider the presented selected off-line and on-line tools to be essential in the use of political marketing and, thus, for the overall communication of the political party towards future voters. We analyzed all those as mentioned above off-line and on-line tools through which selected political parties communicated/did not communicate in the pre-election period and we processed the results in Table 1 and Table 2. The results also include four research questions, which we identified before the analysis to find out the use/non-use of marketing communication tools of political parties. Research questions are an essential part of our analysis and their specifics were chosen based on studied election surveys and long-term monitoring of the issues addressed in order to obtain relevant data. The answers to the research questions were provided by our analysis.

Results

Marketing communication of political parties with the conservative ideology

The term conservatism has its origins in the Latin conservare, which means to preserve. The concept of conservatism could have been presented to people as early as the end of the 18th century on the occasion of a response to the changes brought by the French Revolution. Conservatism is based on the rejection of change, adheres to old practices, has moderate behavior and a conventional lifestyle (Fiala & Mikš 2019). The political ideology of conservatism is the belief that radical change cannot be made. Also, this direction taken by political parties considers

the current situation in the country as sufficient enough. This implies that conservatives hold traditional historical values (Coulter 2013; Obšitník 2007). Likewise, proponents of this direction prioritize overarching interests over the interests of individuals. Today, Republican parties and Christian Democratic parties are formed by conservatives. A typical example is the British Conservative Party.

In Slovakia, conservative political parties have been shaping since 1989. In general, the Slovak population is considered to be a conservative voter. This fact may be due to strong religious influence, majority belief in Christian values, and relatively stable national awareness and proudness (Pipes 2018; Ziblatt 2017).

SMER-SD. The Slovak Social Democratic political party - SMER-SD was founded in 1999 by the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. Its chairman has been Róbert Fico from the beginning. Initially, the party has profiled itself as a third option since its inception. Only gradually it started to focus on the left orientation and social democracy (an abbreviation of SD in the name). This became the dominant left-wing political party in Slovakia. The political party appears pro-European; however, within social issues, it is quite conservative (SMER-SD 2020). Representatives of a political party have a negative attitude towards Muslims and migrants from third countries. They also face daily criticism from the liberal public and questions about the decriminalization of marijuana, registered partnerships, and separation from church and state (SMER-SD 2020).

SNS – Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party). The political party – SNS - is one of the oldest in Slovakia. It was founded in 1871, but its modern form was created in 1990 by registration with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. Its chairman is Andrej Danko. It is a political party that is nationally oriented, upholds the ideology of conservatism and claims to adhere to the European-Christian value system (SNS 2020). It has three program pillars: national, Christian and social. SNS promotes the absolute program priority of the sovereign Slovak Republic. It also prioritizes the equality of all the country's inhabitants, regardless of nationality or religion (SNS 2020). The leader Andrej Danko tries to spread the mission of the party and leads its members to peace, nation, honesty, humanity and morality values.

ĽSNS – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko. ĽSNS started its political activity in 2009 and it focuses mainly on three principles, which are similar to the SNS party: nation, socialism and Christianity. The chairman of the political party is Marián Kotleba. The party states that it is the only one that can offer its voters a change in the form of real opposition to a state that is corrupted, in their opinion. Also, the party promotes conservative views held in the past by prominent Slovak historical figures such as Ľudovít Štúr, Andrej Hlinka and Jozef Tiso ([ĽSNS 2020](#)). It is essential for a political party that Slovakia is neutral, politically independent and economically self-sufficient, safe for its inhabitants, socially just, economically prosperous, Christianly and morally preserved, educated and cultural. ĽSNS party is severely criticized by the liberals for the approach that the Holocaust was just fiction.

Table 1. Marketing communication tools –political parties with a conservative orientation

Political parties	off-line marketing tools				on-line marketing tools			
	billboards	leaflets	news	promotion	PR meetings	social media	promotion	live stream
SMER-SD	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SNS	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
ĽSNS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Source: own processing.

Before carrying out the analysis, we identified two research questions regarding the use/non-use of marketing communication tools, which relate to the mentioned conservatively oriented political parties. Below we present the questions as well as the answers.

Research question 1: What marketing communication tools, chosen by us, have been used by the political parties of SMER-SD, SNS and ĽSNS for their promotion in off-line and on-line environments?

Research question 2: What marketing communication tools, chosen again by us, have not been used by the political parties of SMER-SD, SNS and ĽSNS for their promotion in off-line and on-line environments?

Political conservative parties used several marketing communication tools in the parliamentary elections to the Trenčín region. The off-line environment was dominated by billboards, advertisements in local and regional newspapers as well as PR meetings in the cities

of the Trenčín region. Most political parties in Slovakia choose marketing communication through billboards. In previous election campaigns, familiar faces of party candidates appeared on billboards. nowadays this is not a priority anymore. Political parties also decide, for example, on links associated with their election program placed on billboards. In the pre-election period, political parties also sought direct contact with their voter and therefore visited several cities in the Trenčín region to promote themselves. At the meetings, the party's election program and its successes were discussed those were not only formal meetings but also, for example, events connected with the agro-industry, etc. influencing voters also took place in the on-line environment using social networks. Each mentioned party has its Facebook-based fanpage with the communication via short posts or videos to its followers. Likewise, the usual social media venue is the Youtube channel. Each analysed political party has its channel.. Communication with voters takes place through videos in which individual representatives explain the party's election programs or react to the issues that arise on spot. Candidates need to comment on the cases that have arisen, as they may affect their future involvement in politics. The SMER-SD political party had a problem with the copy of an ad. The political party has been accused of imitating the Israeli version of an advertisement by Aaron Shaviv's agency.

Marketing communication of political parties with the liberal ideology

In general, we can characterize liberalism by the word tolerance, which is open to other views and ideologies. Liberalism dates back to the Enlightenment period when a free view of the world was created. The basis for liberalism is the individual whose freedom is the most important (Close & Van Haute 2019). Liberalism can also be expressed as a system of economic, political and social views that strive to achieve the rights of individuals, freedom and often the idea of general social progress (Obšitník 2007). Formerly, tolerance was also promoted in liberalism in connection with religion and morality, the right to private property, and the free market (Selfa 2012; Mill 2005). Liberalism was negatively predisposed to issues of state intervention. However, in the later directions of liberalism, we do not observe these views anymore. It can also be questionable for liberalism, for example, that some liberals are intolerant of other political attitudes. Also, Christian liberals do not promote religious tolerance but Christianity, and in left-wing liberalism, we are more concerned with the promotion of some left-wing principles. The opposite of liberalism is totalitarianism. The liberal direction in Slovakia has been set by political

parties since 1989. Most of them are political parties that have not historically influenced the country's history. Liberal parties are not represented in large numbers in the developed countries of the world. Instead, it is a matter of balancing the parliament with liberal parties ([Hobhouse 2002](#)). However, the influence of liberal parties in Europe is relatively stable.

SaS – Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity). SaS - political party describes itself as right-liberal ([SaS 2020](#)). Its chairman is Richard Sulík. SaS was founded in 2009. The vision of a political party is to make it worthwhile for the individuals to work, do business and live in Slovakia. They prioritize the well-being of the individual because the satisfaction of individuals leads to the satisfaction of the whole society ([SaS 2020](#)). The political party is slightly sceptic about Europe. Following the 2019 elections, it is represented by two members in the European Conservatives and Reformists fraction.

SPOLU – občianska demokracia (TOGETHER – civic democracy). The political party holds pro-European views and was registered in 2018; it focuses on economic liberalism ([SPOLU 2020](#)). Its chairman is Miroslav Beblavý. So far, the party has managed to participate in the municipal elections in 2018. Its candidates succeeded in winning approximately 350 deputies and 19 mayoral posts. The political party continues to run parliamentary elections in coalition with the Progresívne Slovensko party. In its election program SPOLU - občianska demokracia focuses on changes mainly in the area of a strong economy, security and justice in the country as well as on the quality of life in the country ([SPOLU 2020](#)).

Dobrá voľba (Good choice). Dobrá voľba is a political party focused on the ideology of liberalism, founded by its chairman Tomáš Drucker in 2019 ([Dobrá voľba 2020](#)). At the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, party members submitted 30,000 signatures of citizens who were in favor of establishing this party. Dobrá voľba is one of the youngest political parties in Slovakia. Candidates claim to have come up with a policy that is based on values and human and social values are among the most critical ([Dobrá voľba 2020](#)). They claim the importance of belonging, respect, cooperation, honesty and mutual respect. Their vision is to fight for valid values and not to fight against individual parties or their candidates.

Table 2. Marketing communication tools – political parties with a liberal orientation

Political parties	off-line marketing tools				on-line marketing tools			
	billboards	leaflets	news	promotion	PR meetings	social media	promotion	live stream
SaS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
SPOLU	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Dobrá voľba	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Source: own processing.

Also, before carrying out the analysis, we identified two research questions regarding the use/non-use of marketing communication tools related to the mentioned liberal-oriented political parties. Below we state the questions as well as the answers.

Research question 1: What marketing communication tools, chosen by us, have been used by the political parties of SaS, SPOLU and Dobrá voľba for their promotion in off-line and on-line environments?

Research question 2: What marketing communication tools, chosen again by us, have not been used by the political parties of SaS, SPOLU and Dobrá voľba for their promotion in off-line and on-line environments?

Marketing communication of liberally oriented political parties took place in both off-line and on-line environments. Each party used billboards for the election campaign, where it communicated its positions or excerpts from the election program. Voters in the Trenčín region were able to read the election campaign of political parties in local and regional newspapers. They provided the parties with the space to advertise that was accepted by the parties. Perhaps the most striving political party in the context of PR meetings with its voters was SPOLU. Its goal was to visit all municipalities in Slovakia, which is financially straining but also time-consuming. Pre-election discussions of individual party candidates were broadcasted on television, providing the chance to influence a wide range of voters. Each political party used a Facebook page for its promotion, where it most often communicated the election program or tried to raise awareness about the values of the family, belonging, etc. Likewise, political parties tried to share commercials on social networks, urging voters to vote in elections in their favor.

We consider the research questions we set at the beginning of the research to be answered. Also, our goal, concerning the identification of the use/non-use of marketing communication tools of selected political parties in the Trenčín region, has been met. This paper can serve as an

inspiration for further research into the use of marketing communication tools of other political parties, possibly in another region, with subsequent comparison of other findings.

Conclusion

Every election campaign of a political party, whether partly conservative or liberal-oriented, involves the use of marketing communication tools. More and more political parties prefer the services provided by advertising agencies, taking care of the processing of their ideas for the election campaign. However, it is still questionable whether the overall feeling of the campaign will also have a professional effect on potential voters or supporters of the party. The tools of marketing communication are relatively the same in election campaigns of conservative and liberal parties. It is up to the political party which tools it wants to use and what trends the advertising agency will suggest. When choosing the tools of marketing communication, it is necessary to consider the target group to which we would like to communicate the message and, thus, the election program or vision of the political party. Nowadays, political parties use off-line as well as on-line marketing communication tools. Communication is a crucial aspect of the election campaign. Without proper communication, voters would not know about the political party. Although relatively similar marketing communication tools are used in the election campaign, we observe a difference in the communication style of conservative and liberal parties. Conservative parties communicate the interests of society as well as Christian and national values. For liberal parties, communication is focused on the rights and freedoms of individuals, because only then can society as a whole be satisfied. A wide range of marketing communication tools can provide a political party with more influence over voters. However, sometimes more is less, because, during the election period, the influence and pressure on the voter are too strong. The ideal case is when a political party takes care of its potential voters on an ongoing basis, even outside the election period. The members of the party can thus gradually build trust between them and the voters, who, in turn, vote for them in the elections. Perhaps the biggest disappointment to voters are the promises of the political parties they voted for, that are not going to be fulfilled.

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**Regional Policy and Regional Marketing
at the Level of Small and Medium-sized
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Abstract:

The article focuses on the characteristics of regional policy, regional development, regional marketing and regional marketing communication from a theoretical perspective. Subsequently, we characterize research that was realized in 2019 and included V4 countries - Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, along with Serbia. Its aim was to characterize the main reasons of the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises and approach the current challenges of small and medium entrepreneurships, the main question we tried to answer was- How to prevent SMEs from failure? The activities related to the project led to the clarification of different aspects of business activities that can lead to successful and/or unsuccessful entrepreneurial activities. For the purpose of this article, we have selected eight research questions from Slovakia that are currently relevant to the topic of the article. We outline the main obstacles to business success in Slovakia, we characterize external factors that created business difficulties and three questions deal with marketing and marketing communication, because standing in a strong competitive environment requires, among other things, the ability to sell one's business to customers. The aim of the article is to point out the factors that influence business and success in the market of small and medium enterprises in Slovakia.

Keywords: regional policy, regional marketing, marketing communication, small and medium businesses, economy

Introduction

Business entities play a crucial role in regional development, influencing many factors, such as the living standards of the populace, its employment rate, income, social status, buying power, demand and similar. Business entities offer people employment and a wage, individuals with a certain level of income then demonstrate a certain degree of buying power, which in turn influences the management of companies.

Small and medium businesses play a crucial role in the economy of the state and participate to a great degree, in the creation of GDP, employment and tax revenues in a country. SMEs influence the performance of the country's entire economy and have a crucial impact on the regions and their development. It is therefore necessary to pay a sufficiently great deal of attention to supporting entrepreneurship.

Regional policy

The main goal of regional policy is to regulate the flow of public finances into those regions, where the greatest revenue is expected. Regional policy is also an instrument of financial solidarity and a driving means of economic integration. It balances the differences between regions and can regulate ongoing processes, based on goals determined in advance (Foret 2016).

In the Slovak Republic, regional policy is carried out at two levels:

- (1) at a national level, provided by the central government authorities of public administration, and is mainly of a selective nature, with a specification for regions determined in advance;
- (2) at a regional level, which should be provided by the regional administration authorities, and is of a blanket-regional nature, with a focus on intra-regional matters (Marchevská & Gburová 2016).

Financially, regional policy is carried out primarily through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. Financial subsidies of the Cohesion Fund are intended mainly for the less wealthy member states, which show a lower gross domestic product per capita, including Slovakia (Bajanová 2010). Prerequisites for the successful economic growth of regions and the quality of life of their inhabitants include understanding the connections in the functioning of regional economies and the options of influencing the development of these economies through policy (Hudec et al. 2009)

Regional development

The definition of regional development by Minařík et al. (2013) is as follows: „*it is an activity aimed at the better utilisation and the increasing of the potential of a particular territory, which was delineated with the goal of strengthening its socioeconomic level and for the purposes of better utilising existing resources and natural resources.*“ If we look at regional development through the perspective of legislative delineation, we see it is a set of social, economic, cultural and environmental processes and relations, which occur in the region and contribute to the increasing of the region's competitiveness, permanent economic development, social

development, territorial development and the balancing out and equalising of economic and social differences between regions ([Act No. 539/2008](#)) In terms of characterising regional development, is also worth to mention the opinion of Jiří Ježek, who perceives this topic as the result of decisions taken by several participants. He divides them into 3 groups:

- (1) companies;
- (2) individuals;
- (3) the public sector.

Development is a relatively broad concept. It is a set of economic, social, environmental and cultural processes and relations taking place in the region. These bring positive change conditioned by the efficient usage of development resources, the aim of which is to achieve prosperity and well-being of the population. These are derived from economic development and are expressed through the competitiveness of the territory and the economic factors located in it ([Hudec & Bíla 2008](#)).

By analyzing the components of competitiveness, S. Bucher sees a benefit for state administration and local government bodies, which can guide their planned activities in the field of promotion. This selection will serve to facilitate the identification of the country's position, it can identify its strengths and weaknesses, from which the traffic and development of the destination is derived ([Bucher 2015](#)).

Regional marketing

What do we understand under the term marketing of a city or municipality ? „*These are all the instruments, means and methods, with which the city or municipality – their local government authorities – create an idea about their market value. Currently, marketing theory of cities and municipalities is still not understood in a complex manner and is therefore most commonly understood only as promotion, without utilising all the instruments of marketing.*“ claims Horváthová ([2012](#)).

The marketing of a region is a strong strengthening element of the economy, image and identity of a given region. The goal is to create sustainable, competitively advantageous regions by utilising marketing tools. According to Bůšik ([2010](#)), regional marketing is understood as „*a complex and very flexible set of activities. It is also a certain system of thinking, perception and approach to a wide range of information, with the goal of arranging the inner environment (a region) in such a manner, that it would satisfy the needs of customers and simultaneously the*

buying power, financial and material resources, and the production capability of customers to orient it at the given products.“

Regional marketing communication

Regional marketing may have special characteristics with regard to the area, while trying to be competitive in offering its services (Mannschwetus 2013). Every company, institution, local government authority should communicate with all entities within the territory what affects the outside environment as well. The primary goal is reaching public support, a mutual agreement between entities within the given territory and informing the public about the entities activities. In his publication, professor Jaroslav Kita et al. (2010) fittingly characterised the role of communication in marketing: *„marketing communication means, on the one hand, to inform, to familiarise people with products, explain their characteristics, to emphasize their usefulness, quality, value, benefits, use, and on the other hand, to also be willing to listen, accept the proposals and requirements of consumers, and react to them.“*

Marketing communication at a regional level *„is represented by all the instruments, means and methods, with which a town/city, municipality or region - their local government authorities - create a conception of their market value.“* (Horváthová 2012).

Local government must communicate primarily due to the following reasons:

- acquiring public support,
- informing the public,
- increasing the public's interest the development of the area, city, municipality,
- gaining public understanding during problem-solving,
- reaching a mutual agreement between individual subjects,
- pushing through one's own territory on the market.

Support for SME

In the Slovak Republic there are many state and private institutions that cooperate with each other in supporting SMEs.

Enterprise Europe Network

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is the largest network that mainly supports small and medium-sized enterprises with transnational ambitions, and which main role is to support the penetration of innovation into new markets. It helps enterprises to grow faster, to create new partnerships,

and to gain access to financial resources. The project is co-founded through the COSME framework program. It helps to support competitiveness, with the current programming period 2014-2020. Representation of Enterprise Europe Network in the Slovak Republic consists of the following partners – BIC Bratislava, SBA, SOPK and RPIC Prešov. Within the services, the organization provides international business expertise in several areas. One is search for internships – through the access to the largest European business opportunity database, the experts help to build new international partnerships. They also organize quick and effective bilateral meetings for enterprises, research institutions, or universities. As an added value of international conferences and trade fairs it might save time and money of enterprises, which asked for help. Advisory services – consulting services consist of internationalization and business cooperation. Through them they try to identify the best market opportunities and advise on how to expand internationally.

Innovative support – based on the many years of their experience, they can recognize innovation potential, which can be transformed into international business of enterprises. Innovative support includes advice on access to R&D funding, such as Horizon 2020 or SME Instrument. The services such as how to grow and realize innovations are included ([EEN 2020](#)).

Slovak Business Agency

Slovak Business Agency represents the institution in the Slovak Republic which is focused on offering support programs for small and medium-sized enterprises. As a public and private sector platform, it was founded in 1993 by the Initiative of European Union and Slovak Republic. Its main mission is not only to support enterprises in compliance with the Small Business Act, but also to improve their competitiveness. The role of the institution is to publish annually the evaluation of SMEs business activities in the country. “Small business Act” is an EU Initiative which main aim is to support small and medium-sized enterprises, and to provide measures for enterprises how to ensure their competitiveness on the global market. Through ten principles, the initiative wants to remove barriers that hinder enterprises in increasing competitiveness. On the other hand, it is focused on ensuring the conditions for creation of new job opportunities in the SME sector ([SBA 2020](#)).

It is also worth to mention in detail some examples of the support programs and projects of SBA. In the framework of financial support, SBA implements support programs such as:

- Micro-loan program,
- Venture capital funds – National Holding fund.

Micro-loan program - within the program from the Slovak Business Agency, enterprises can apply for a micro-loan under the most advantageous market conditions compared to banks. The aim is to support the development of enterprises, to increase employment in the country's regions and to address the problem of small and "start-up" enterprises' access to financial resources.

Venture capital funds - at present, the National Holding Fund is the intermediary for the Venture capital funds and it manages three funds with separate legal personality (Slovak Development Fund, Slovak Growth Capital Fund and the Innovation and Technology Fund). Individual funds are focused on enterprises that are planning to bring their ideas to the market. However, this is preceded by a risk analysis of all these projects. In the case of success, investments in the form of venture capital are realized in "starting" enterprises, or enterprises in the development phase that are facing financial problems. The mission of the funds is to facilitate success.

In the framework of state programs, Slovak Business Agency provides support to entrepreneurs through following projects:

- Promotion successful business practices,
- Scheme to support the development of the creative industry in Slovakia,
- Program Monitoring and Research in small and medium-sized enterprises,
- Program to support the Internet economy,
- Startup Sharks.

The Operational Program - Research and Innovation

The Operational Program "Research and Innovation" is a joint program document of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic. Its objective is to create a stable environment for innovation, to increase efficiency and performance of R&D, and also to increase competitiveness of enterprises, boost employment and economic growth. The total allocation of financial resources is almost 2.3 billion. More than three quarters of all funds are intended to strengthen research, technological development and innovation. The rest is aimed at supporting competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises. Support from the Operational Program may take the form of grants and financial instruments (loans programs, venture capital funds) ([MINV 2020](#)).

Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic

The most important institutional actor in support of SMEs in term of state support programs and initiatives is Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic. It also has the competence to provide subsidies for the establishment of industrial parks, and provide investment help for regional development. Supporting tools include -Innovative fund, Innovative vouchers, Cluster support, International cooperation in industrial R&D, Innovative solutions for towns.

The purpose of the Innovative fung is to support the activities in the field of science, and development, and thus to accelerate the innovative development in the Slovak Republic. It further provides access to domestic or foreign scientific, economic, technical and financial information, supports the protection of domestic intellectual property, and how-know of the projects. It is a non-investment fund that works on the principle of return funding. Innovative vouchers aim to support enterprises that have the potential to increase their own competitiveness through innovation of their products, services and processes. The total denomination of the voucher is up to € 5.000, where VAT is not included. Cluster support -focuses on emergence and development of industrial clusters, it also improves the links between research, academy and business sector. Support seeks to streamline the co-operation of individual industrial clusters, but also to strengthen their position on international markets. International co-operation in industrial R&D is to support solutions for joint industrial research and experimental projects, to improve access to knowledge, to develop modern technologies, and ultimately to strengthen the competitiveness of the country ([MINH 2020](#)).

The Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency

The Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency is a contributory organization of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, financed from the state budget. The agency created a national project Support of internationalization of small and medium-sized within the Operational Program Research and Innovation SARIO will provide these support types within the National project:

- Trade fairs and exhibitions abroad
- Businesses missions
- Sourcing and cooperation events
- Pre-event advisory meetings
- Export academy
- Development of supply chains (SARIO).

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency was established as a state contributory organization by Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic in 1999. Since 2007, the organization implements the state support for innovation, monitors and evaluates innovative activities in the Slovak Republic, and proposes measures to support them. In the framework of innovation activities, the organization developed several interesting projects:

- SEIA fulfill the role of the Technology Agency in accordance with the document “Knowledge for prosperity – Strategy for Research and Innovation for Intelligent Specialization of the Slovak Republic
- The project www.inovujme.sk aims to raise awareness of the importance of innovation among Slovak enterprises, as well at educational institutions
- The national project “Support for the development of creative industries in the Slovak Republic” aims to help develop innovative processes through the cooperation of small and medium-sized enterprises with creative industries
- International cooperation program – Innovation for Slovakia and Israel
- Competition “Innovative Action of the Year”
- Vysegrad Innovate
- ClusterCOOP International Cluster Cooperation Project ([SIEA 2020](#)).

Research – How to prevent SMEs from failure

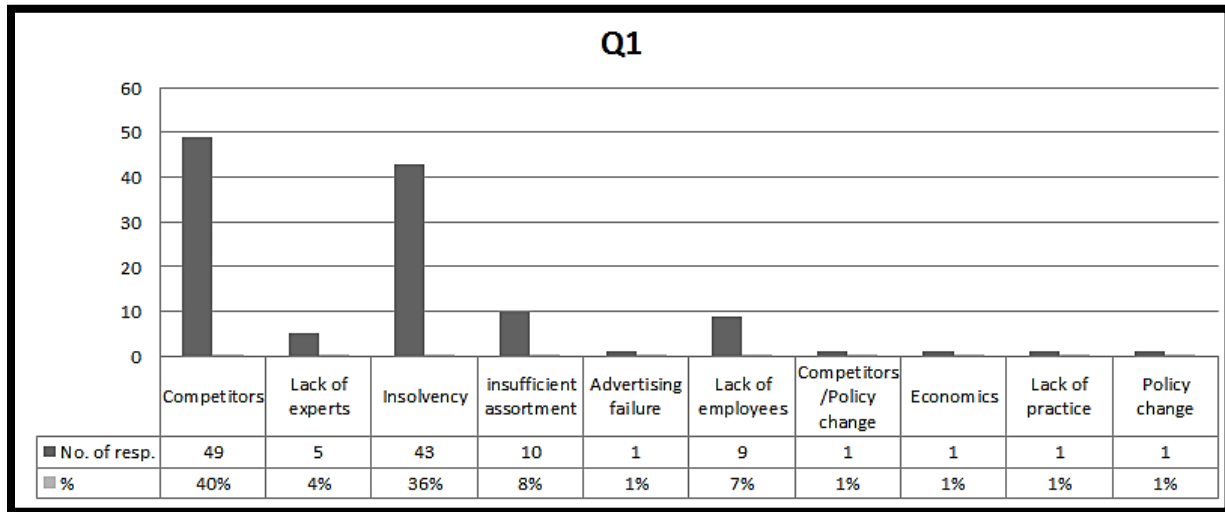
The research, under the auspices of the project How to prevent SMEs from failure, was carried out in 2019 by V4 countries and Serbia. *„This project is focusing to assess the cators influencing the failure of other entrepreneurs, and based on that, to develop the measuring scale, that will helps existing business avoid potential failure. Analysis of the factors influencing SMEs failure and the possibility of their enhanced recovery has not been enough investigated in the region of Serbia. Through this project, we will analyse the reasons for SMEs failure in V4 countries, but also the potential for their recovery.“* (Visegrad Fund Project 2019). Specifically, Slovakia, Czech republic, Hungary, Poland and Serbia. The research was carried out through a questionnaire consisting of 51 questions. It was completed by the owners or management workers of SMEs that have gone through the crisis.

The sample from Slovakia was 121 respondents, in Czech republic 95, in Serbia 134 and in Hungary 100 respondents, Poland unfortunately did not provide any data. Due to the topic of

this paper, we decided to select 8 research questions, those questions reflect situation of SMEs in Slovakia.

Graph 1. The main obstacles to success of your company before the financial distress

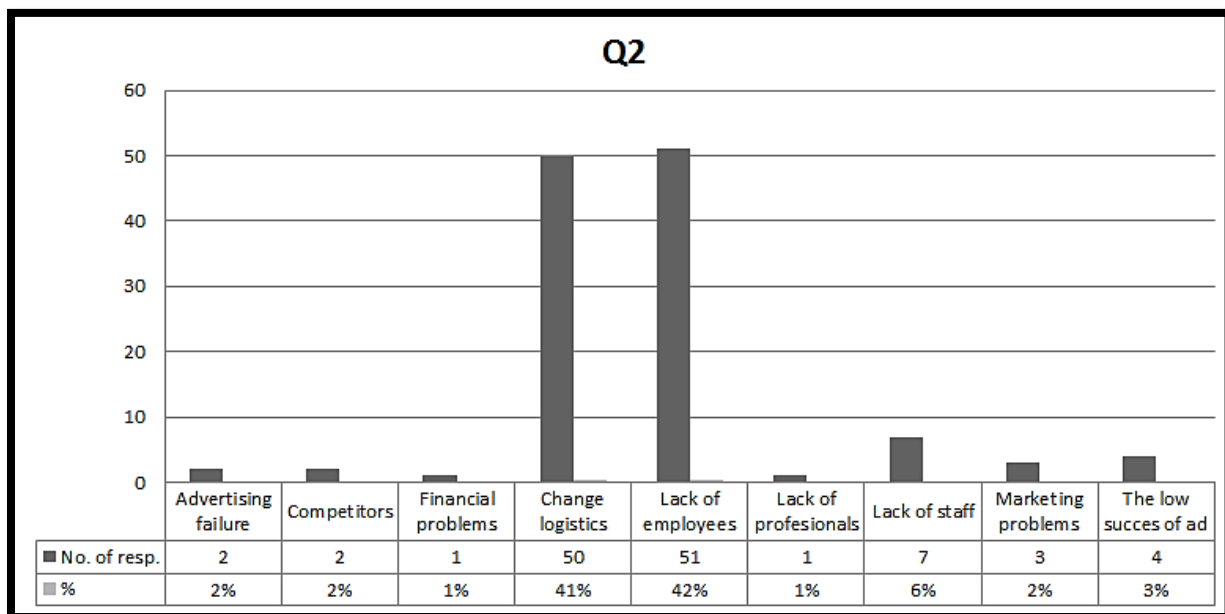
Q1. What were the main obstacles to success of your company before the financial distress?



Source: own research.

Graph 2. The main obstacles to success of your company

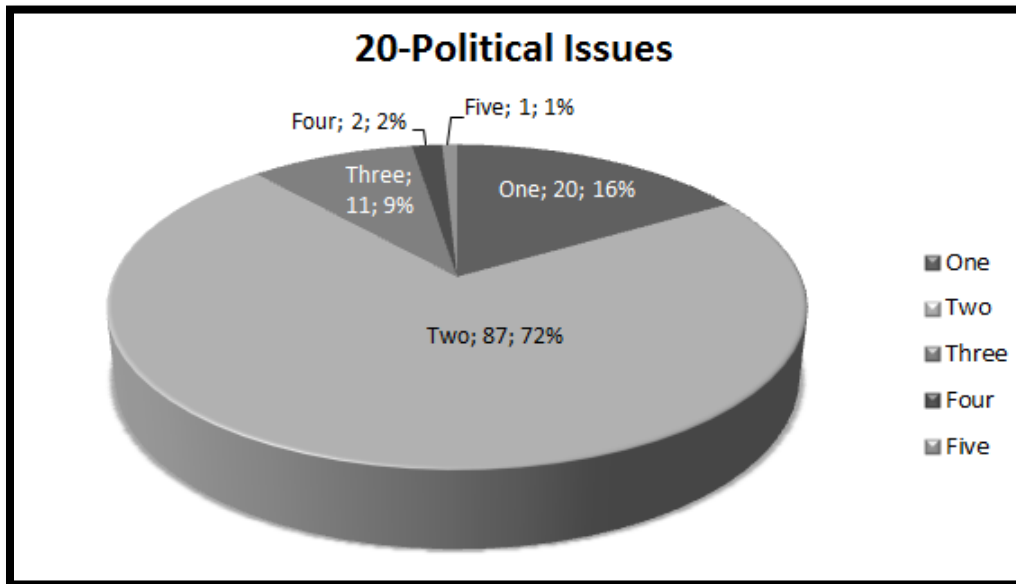
Q2 What would you say are the main obstacles to success of your company, now?



Source: own research.

Graph 3. Created difficulties by political issues

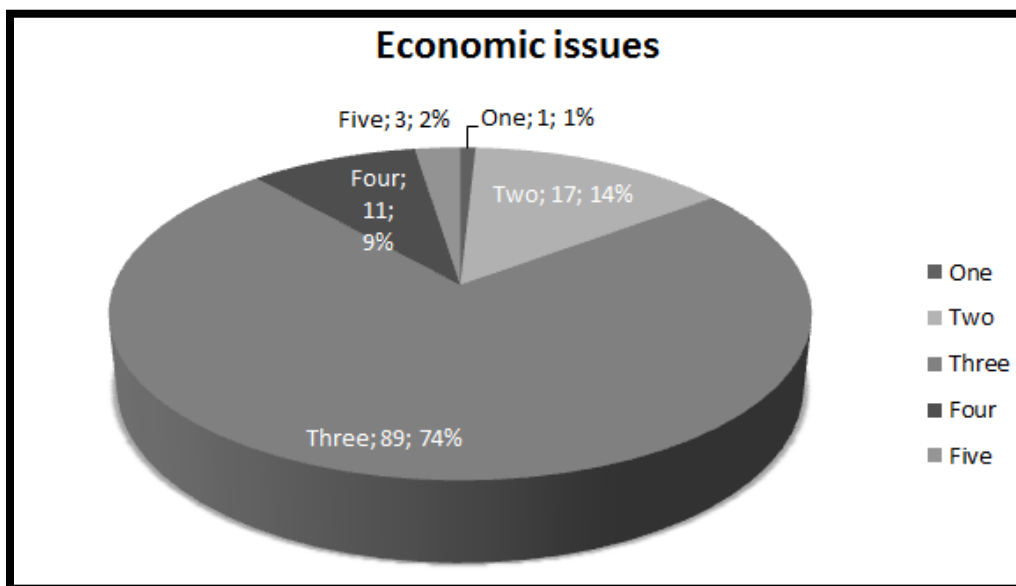
Q3 To what extent the following external factor (political issues) created difficulties to your business that failed? Rate this factor from 1(lowest) to 5 (highest)



Source: own research.

Graph 4. Created difficulties by economic issues

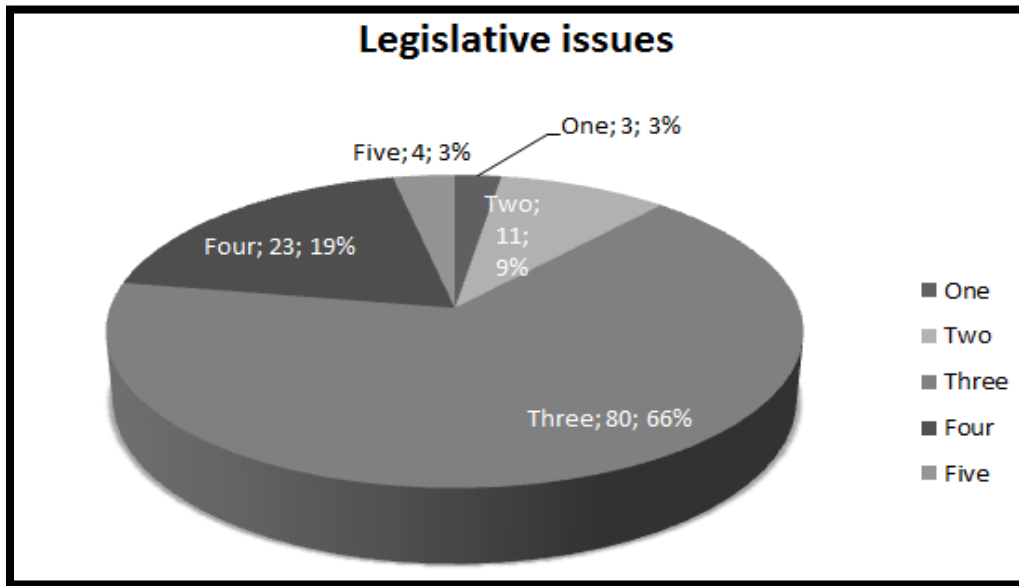
Q4 To what extent the economic issues created difficulties to your business that failed? Rate this factor from 1(lowest) to 5 (highest)



Source: own research.

Graph 5. Created difficulties by legislative issues

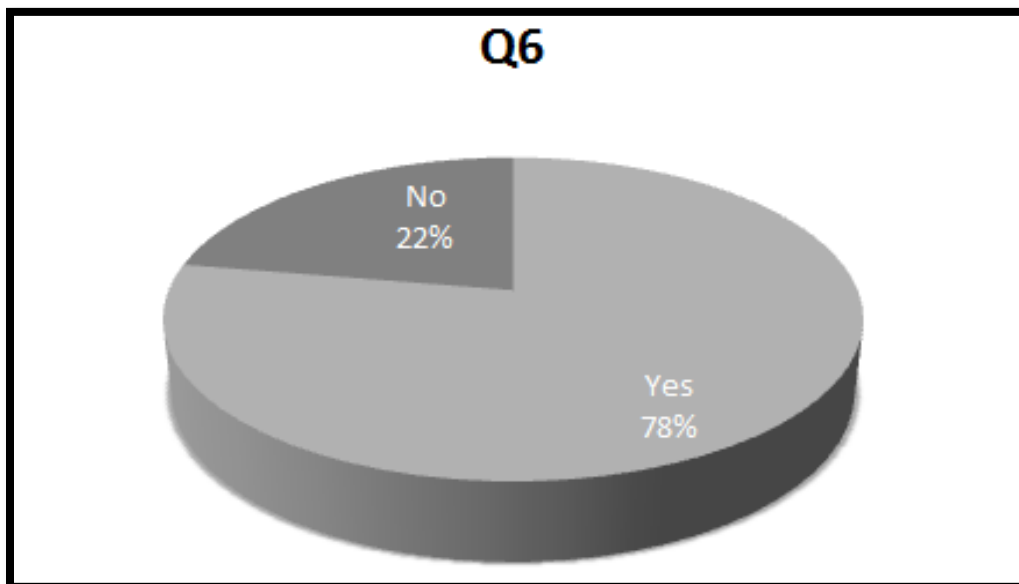
Q5 To what extent the legislative issues created difficulties to your business that failed? Rate each factor from 1(lowest) to 5 (highest).



Source: own research.

Graph 6. Having financial resources just for marketing/marketing communication

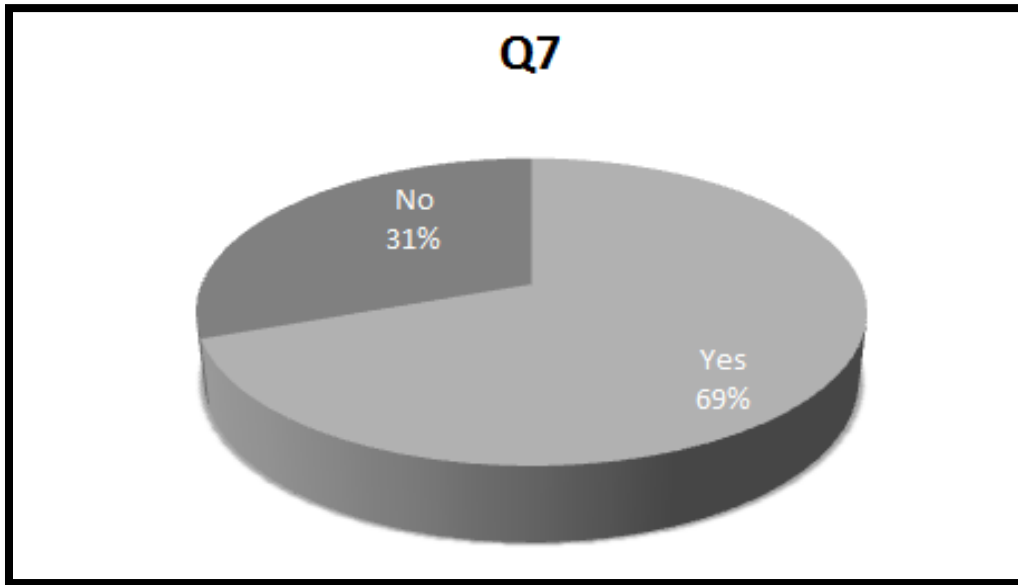
Q6 Does your company have financial resources just for marketing/marketing communication?



Source: own research.

Graph 7. Having communication plan/strategy

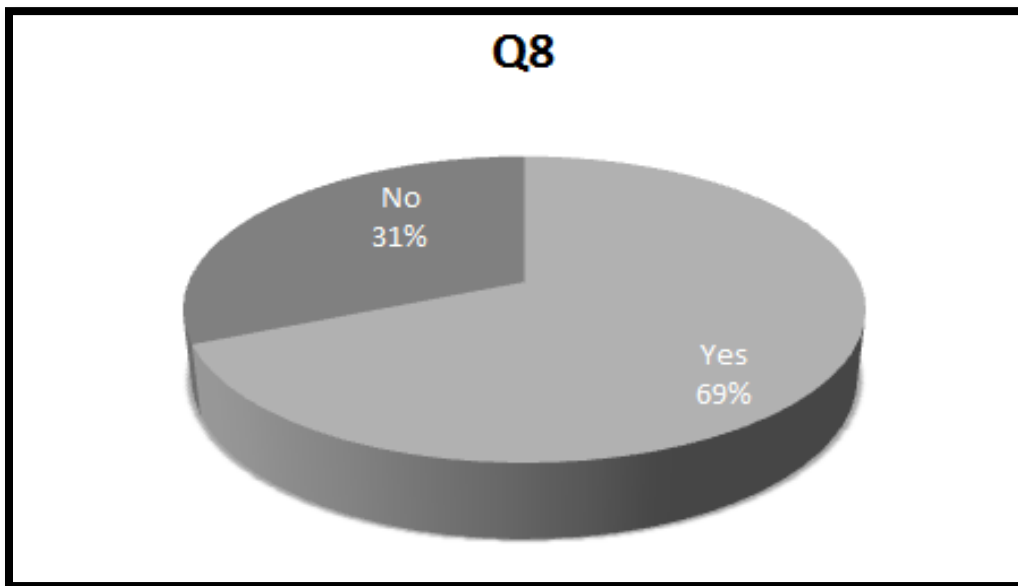
Q7 Does your company have communication plan/strategy?



Source: own research.

Graph 8. Hiring employees who are responsible just for marketing communication of your company

Q8 Do you hire people/employees who are responsible just for marketing communication of your company?



Source: own research.

Conclusion

Every business is different, every company has different needs and each of them must confront various threats. Whether these are competitive threats or economic threats, they are ever-changing and influence the functioning of the business to a great degree. If a business wants to draw attention, succeed, finds its place on the market, and also equally compete with its direct competitors, it is necessary to pay attention to marketing and select an appropriate marketing strategy. Marketing communication helps with shaping the image of an organization, informs customers, and through internal communication attempts to reach the arranged goals. Communication campaigns should contain creative ideas expressed with the right tools, through the right communication channel. Whether marketing communication works well is later reflected in income, the raising of awareness about the business, or the growth of demand. If enterprises want to succeed on the market, they must show excellence, while the market is often characterized by little or no dynamics, sharp competition, both in the domestic and foreign business environment. Company orientation towards the customer and the target market means knowledge of all the characteristics that can help company develop, produce and offer products and services for affordable prices, at the expected location, and under such circumstances that potential consumers can learn about them. They must be also adequately informed. It is precisely their uninformedness, whether in the area of innovations, the options to utilize financial means from the EU funds, or the area of legislation, that also represents a great obstacle for further development of small and medium enterprises. Education, information, and cooperation between institutions could help this development and thus gradually support economic growth in the regions, as well as the creation of special workplaces, whose main role would be communicating with and informing of the business entities. The digitalization of public administration would further trim down the bureaucratic apparatus and remove part of the superfluous paperwork. The bureaucratic burden and opacity of legislation continue to remain a problem for many companies. Business entities are not even sufficiently informed about their financing options or the options for drawing on financial resources from EU funds. The Slovak Republic itself manifests a case of insufficient drawing of EU funds and thus squanders unused development means.

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**Waste Legislation and its Impact on Marketing
Communication of the Circular Economy
in Slovakia**

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Abstract:

The article focuses on the characteristics of circular economy, supporters of the concept of circular economy, legislation and marketing communication in the process of circular economy from theoretical perspective. In the practical part of the paper the results of marketing research are presented. Marketing research is divided into 3 phases and focused on whether the respondents from the sample follow the individual communication tools during the process of shopping for clothes. The aim of the paper is to analyze waste legislation by the means of marketing communication tools in the implementation of the circular economy in Slovakia.

Keywords: politics, legislation, marketing communication, waste management, circular economy, environment

Introduction

Nature and natural resources are an integral part of our being. They are a prerequisite for the functioning of the European and global economy and the basis of the quality of our lives. If current trends will continue, we can expect the world's population to increase by 30% by 2050, representing around 9 billion people.

Over the last decade, we have witnessed the depletion of the resources and supplies that put enormous pressure on our planet. Future generations will no longer be able to use natural resources as much and as we do now. Increasing resource efficiency and securing jobs in Europe will be a response to these changes. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly develop new products and services and look for new ways to reduce inputs, minimize waste, improve resource management, change consumption patterns, optimize production processes and management and

business methods, as well as improve logistics. All of this will help stimulate technological innovation, boost employment in the fast-growing green technology sector and boost trade in the EU, including the creation of new export markets, and benefit consumers through more sustainable products. A more efficient use of resources will help us to achieve our goals, which the EU has also set itself in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Waste management policy

The main objective of waste management policy should be to minimize the negative effects of the waste management on human health and environment. Waste management policy should also aim at reducing the use of natural resources and give priority to the practical application of the waste hierarchy in line with „the polluter pays” principle. Waste prevention should be a top priority for waste management and the reuse and recycling of materials should be prioritized over the waste energy recovery, when it is possible and appropriate from an environmental, technical and economic point of view. Waste disposal should be the last option.

Waste management hierarchy:

- waste prevention,
- preparation for re-use,
- recycling,
- other recovery, e.g. energy,
- disposal.

The legal framework for the waste management in the European Union is laid down by the European Parliament and Council 2008/98/EC. The legal framework for waste management in the Slovak Republic is laid down by the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 79/2015 Coll. on Waste and on amendments to certain acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the Waste Act). The Waste Act defines key terms, sets out basic requirements for waste management and the operators’ obligations of facilities that perform waste management activities.

Support systems

In order to ensure the implementation of circular economy legal documents into production practice, EU Member States need to create an appropriate environment for an economy that uses the circular economy. This calls for a stronger link between the political direction of states,

regulation of production and recycling, which can be achieved by significantly promoting innovation and research in this field.

If we want an answer to the question whether it is possible to realize such an ambitious plan of the EU on the market, to ensure an increased degree of reuse and quality recycling of waste, and simultaneously limit the dependence on primary resources – the answer would be unambiguous. The European Union has a complex system of support in various areas, such as regional and urban development, employment and social inclusion, agriculture, and rural development, maritime and fishing policy, research and innovations or humanitarian aid (Jánošová & Labudová 2019). On the one hand, the European Union puts an effort to effectively using resources, can bring together and coordinate governments, as well as businesses and organisations, as well as it can summon the individual components of the economy to adopt measures that lead to the utilisation of the circular economy concept in the economy. On the other hand, there is the gigantic colossus of the linear economy and the free market, which constantly produces millions upon millions of products and it is precisely this colossus that helps to maintain both the European and global economy. It is unthinkable, that such an established system would give up without resistance, therefore legislative changes are the only means through which one can gradually regulate the amount of waste being created. To overcome the obstacles on the market, which in the present period is based on the linear principle of extract – manufacture – consume, an entire system of measures within the EU is necessary. This entails mainly the issue that all markets are constantly urging to increase manufacturing productivity and these forms of the economy can lead to the endangerment of progress.

One of the most important supporters of the effective resource use and the circular economy are markets, because the material and energies became significant entries among the expenses of all companies. Although it is true that the markets are the driving force of change and growth, they simultaneously represent a whole set of obstacles, that create a barrier for efficient and effective management of resources. The European Commission has also gradually begun to apply specific legislative proposals that are focused on framework directives on waste, directives on landfills and directives focused on packaging and packaging waste, with the goal of transforming the economy in the European Union member states to a circular economy, and thus more effectively reuse waste for further usage on the market. *„The transition to an economy that utilises a circular economic model is the foundation for the policy of effective resource use, as stipulated in the strategy Europe 2020 for securing intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth.”* (Euractiv 2015).

The change of waste into reusable resources is also the basic goal of the „Plan for effective resource use.” This document stresses the necessity of paying more attention to the reuse and recycling of waste. *„This plan strives to create an economy based on complete recycling, which involves the concept of a lifecycle, of better cooperation of all market entities within the value chain, better processes of gathering, an appropriate regulation framework, stimuli for preventing the creation of waste and recycling, as well as public investment into modern facilities for handling waste and high quality recycling.”* (Euractiv 2015).

Since 2013 the European Union has been also gradually headed towards the creation of an economic system that utilises the concept of a circular economy. It actively participates in the utilisation of waste in the national economy of each state and on the solving of specific problems. Significant milestones in the realization of waste as an entry resource into the production process (according to Euractiv.sk 2015) of polyethylene bags in the member states of the European Union:

- **June – September 2013:** a public consultation was held on the revision of the European goals in waste management;
- **July 2013:** the European Commission (EC) presented a revision of the statute on the transport of waste;
- **November 2013:** the EC proposed the amendment of the directive on packaging and packaging waste, with the goal of decreasing the consumption of polyethylene bags in the EU member states;
- **December – January 2013/2014:** the EC published a detailed analysis of the project of revising the goals in the area of waste and waste management;
- **2015:** The Commission reevaluated the measures and goals of the framework directive on waste, and if needed, set goals for further processing of waste;
- **2015:** EU member states developed individual schemes for sorting collected paper, metals, plastics and glass;
- **Until 2020:** The EU has the stated goal of raising the reuse and recycling of waste from households to at least 50%, based on the weight of the waste;
- **Until 2020:** The EU has the stated the goal of raising the reuse, recycling and other conversion of construction waste and demolition waste from to at least 70%, based on the weight of the waste.

Legislation and marketing communication in the process of circular economy

During the years 2018 – 2020, at the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, we were conducting the research task VEGA project No. 1/0078/18 “Aspects of marketing communication in management processes of circular economy”, which results are implemented in the solution of waste legislation and its impact on marketing communication in the circular economy in Slovakia.

The priority of a circular economy is a more economical and more effective utilisation of limited natural resources, raising the effectiveness of product manufacturing with high efficiency and low consumption of resources and a low (or even zero) production of emissions. Multinational corporations must adjust their management practices to adhere to national regulation and local standards (Jánošová & Labudová 2019). Part of it lies in the prevention and decrease of waste production, and with it, the prevention and decrease of polluting substance sources, up to and including recycling, where resources are returned back into the economic cycle, a procedure that has an increasingly urgent practical significance.

Currently, these issues are highly topical not only in Slovakia, but all the developed countries of the world. For several years, various authors have delved into the circular economy as one of the tools for sustaining a healthy natural environment (Sauvé et al. 2016). One part of this field encompasses problem-solving within the context of waste management (Darnadyova 2019). The conversion of waste into reusable resources is also one of the basic goals of the plan for effective use of resources. It is necessary to note, that we need to pay the greatest amount of attention to reuse and recycling in particular.

The circular economy is a strategy of a long-term sustainable development through which one can create functional and healthy relations between the natural environment and people. It is understood as an opponent of the linear system. The basic principles of the circular economy are based on the idea that the product and material flows are once again returned into the production cycle after use, where they'll become resources important for the creation of new products and services. The goal is to prevent the multiplying of waste. Up until now, the solutions were based on the replacement of primary materials with secondary ones. Recycling was to be the way out of this situation. However, we can't consider this solution to be attractive, given that the overall process is considered as very demanding in terms of energy consumption. In general, we talk about the degradation of materials, which leads to an orientation of demand towards primary materials. With a circular economy, we move beyond the boundaries of recycling. Recycling is based on a renewing industrial system that leads to the termination of waste. It is precisely that

the quality of the business environment considered the main factor of long-term economic competitiveness and long-term sustainable development of small and medium enterprises (Jánošová & Labudová 2019). We therefore consider recycling to be the outer layer of a circular economy, even though it requires higher energy consumption than the inner layer of the circular economy. The circular economy should serve for the better use of a product's life cycle, and along with that, also minimize the needed energy consumption.

Part Six of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (SR) delineates the right to the protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage. Article 44 states:

- Everyone has the right to an auspicious environment.
- Everyone is obliged to protect and enhance the environment and the cultural heritage.
- No one must endanger or damage the environment, natural resources, and the cultural heritage beyond the extent established by law.
- The state looks after an economical use of natural resources, ecological balance, and effective environmental care.

Details about the rights and obligations based on sections (1 to 4) are stated by law. The law which specifies the particulars concerning the rights and obligations according to sections 1 to 4, actually represents a series of laws, especially law no. 17/1992 of the Collection of Laws (CoL) on the natural environment, law no. 127/1994 CoL on the assessing of impacts on the natural environment as altered and amended, law no. 309/1991 CoL on air protection from polluting substances /clean air act/ as altered and amended, law no. 76/1998 CoL on the protection of the Earth's ozone layer and its amendment in law no. 455/1991 CoL on trade entrepreneurship /entrepreneurial act/ as altered and amended, law no. 223/2001 CoL on waste and the changes and amendments to certain laws, law no. 184/2002 CoL on waters and the changes and amendments to certain laws /water protection act/, law no. 543/2002 CoL on the protection of nature and the landscape, law no. 15/2005 on the conservation of wildlife species by regulating trade with them and the changes and amendments to certain laws, law no. 245/2003 CoL on integrated prevention and environmental inspection of pollution and the changes and amendments to certain laws, as altered and amended, and the changes and amendments to certain laws, law no. 205/2004 CoL on the gathering, storage and spread of information on the natural environment and the changes and amendments to certain laws, law no. 572/2004 CoL on the trading with emission quotas and the changes and amendments to certain laws, and law no. 491/2005 CoL on the environmental verification and registration of organisations within the

scheme of the European community for environmental management and audit, and the changes and amendments to certain laws (Drgonec 2007).

Article 44 of the Constitution of the SR considers it the norm, which guarantees basic rights in connection with art. 51 sec. 1. All basic rights, which are granted according to no. 44, it is possible to only demand them within the law, as documented in the provisions of art. 44. A situation that forms an exception is one, in which the SR acceded to the exercising of an international agreement with precedence over the laws of the SR according to art. 7 sec. 5 or art. 154c sec. 1 of the Constitution of the SR, or if there exists a legally binding act of the European Community and European Union art. 7 sec. 2.

This connection is particularly special with regards to the topic of environmental protection. In the area of international conventions alone, the Slovak Republic had ratified 20 agreements of an international nature since 2006.

(a) Air quality protection conventions - Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution – Geneva (Switzerland) convention, adopted 13 November 1979 in Geneva. The following protocols were approved as supplements to the aforementioned convention: The protocol added to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution from 1979, the Protocol on the Long-term Financing of the Co-operative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP), was approved in Geneva on the 28 September 1984. It was followed by the Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution in 1979, on the decreasing of sulphur emissions or their transfer between previous state borders, the Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution on the lowering of transboundary transfers by at least 30%, Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution in 1979, on decreasing the emissions of nitrous oxides or their transboundary transfers, Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution in 1979, on further decreasing of sulphur emissions, Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution on heavy metals, Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution on persistent organic compounds, Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution on the limiting of volatile organic compound emissions and their transboundary transfer, and the Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution on the decreasing of acidification, eutrophication and low level ozone.

The Framework Convention of the UN on climate change was adopted in New York on the 9 May 1992. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in addition to the aforementioned convention.

The Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer was signed in Vienna on the 22 March 1985. This convention also includes a range of signed protocols: The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Montreal supplementary protocol to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the London supplementary protocol to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Copenhagen supplementary protocol to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the Peking supplementary protocol to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was signed in Stockholm on the 22 May 2001.

(b) *Water protection conventions* – include the Convention on the Protection and use of Transboundary Watercourses and international lakes, and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.

(c) *Nature conservation conventions* – these include the Convention on Biological Diversity, which itself includes the signing of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals – it also includes the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats, The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and its Protocol of changes and amendments and the European Landscape Convention.

(d) *Cross - sectional conventions* include the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Agreement about assessing the transboundary effects on the natural environment, Agreement on transboundary movement of hazardous waste and their final disposal – which itself includes the signing of the Amendment to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, Convention on Access to information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters – the Aarhus Convention, and the Convention for the establishment of a European Organisation for the Exploitation of. Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT).

It is apparent that the individual regulations in article 44 also state obligations in addition to the rights. The legal subject of the aforementioned article 44 section 2 is everyone. However, in this article, paragraph 3 does not continue to use the word everyone, but adjusts the subject that is subordinate to the legal arrangement in this constitutional norm. The use of the wording of „no one“ is based on language rules, the wording of „no one“ identical in meaning with the word „everyone“, as stated in sections 1 and 2. If we mention the subject, it is necessary to also delineate the subject of protection, i.e. the natural environment, natural resources and cultural monuments.

The protection according to the Constitution of the SR in art. 44 sec. 3 cannot be understood as absolute. It is connected with the endangering and damaging of protected objects, to an extent that is higher than stated by the law.

Sec. 4 of the given article regulates the standing of the state in the areas enumeratively described by the constitution, related to the subject of the wording in article 44. Based on this specific provision, the state pays attention to the considerate utilisation of natural resources, to ecological balance and effective care for the natural environment. It also simultaneously ensures the protection awarded to species of wild flora and protection awarded to wild fauna. The article further states, that these activities do not need to be carried out directly – by national, central or local authorities. For the sake of the wording of this article, the state can transfer the realization of the goals to authorities of administrative areas, or to entities of private law. However, it is necessary to uphold the prescribed quality – to considerately utilise natural resources ([Drgonec 2007](#)).

The following article of the Constitution of the SR also grants the basic rights in connection to art. 51 sec. 1. It is only possible to demand all basic rights, which are granted by art. 45, within those laws, that carry out the provisions of the article.

The right to information, related to the evaluation of the state of the natural environment, is identical with the general right to information, as awarded by article 26, which states that the authorized person is granted the same forms of exercising of this right, i.e. to seek out, accept and expand information on the state of the environment. The Constitution of the SR says, that this right is not limited only to the receiving of information. The given information must be provided in time and to its fullest extent. We consider information pertaining to the environment to be of a timely nature only when there is a possibility to use it in procedures beneficial to the natural environment. This might include information of a negative nature. The subject of this information

can be the state of the environment, the causes behind the state of the environment and the consequences of the state of the environment ([Drgonec 2007](#)).

The goal of marketing communication is to inform, to acquaint the public about the quality, usefulness and uses of a product. Besides this goal, it is also necessary to react to the demands of consumers. The essence of communication activities is to influence the shopping behaviour of consumers, with the help of communication system tools. The traditional tools of marketing communication include: advertising, sales promotion (merchandising), public relations and personal sales.

Marketing communication is significantly influenced by digital media, due to its functioning via a common virtual space. This is despite the fact that we no longer consider the Internet to be a new technology, but instead consider it a form of networked infrastructure, because its accessibility is understood as a right of the people. „Thanks to the trends of the digital age as well, marketing communication has broad options for spreading marketing-communication messages. This is provided by the new opportunities offered by the expansion of mass communication and information technologies, but also the efforts of marketers to draw the public’s attention with new, unconventional forms of presentation and staging original advertising and promotional campaigns. (...) The transfer of information becomes economically more advantageous, more flexible time-wise and the option of receiving feedback allows for a more accurate targeting of the marketing product.“ - as mentioned by [Rajčák](#) in the publication *Marketing communication in the digital age* ([Rajčák 2013](#)).

Marketing research

For the purposes of the research, it is immensely important to organise a good quality collection and processing of data. To supplement the information database, it was helpful to carry out marketing research, which occurred in three phases. As part of the quantitative research, this effort consisted of secondary data collection, through the study of theoretical source materials including materials of various authors, resources of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, or articles in science magazines. It was then followed by the collection of primary data.

I. Research phase

The survey was carried out between the 20 September and 20 October 2018. The survey was carried out in two renditions. The electronic rendition was shared publicly on the Facebook social network. The second rendition was carried out by personal contact with a group of randomly selected respondents. The stated renditions were created based on the broad range of

the target group, the respondents ranging from 18 to 65 years old. The greater number of respondents was recorded on the social network, older respondents were surveyed through a random selection in the shopping centres of the Trnava region. From the point of view of our survey, it was necessary that all of the queried respondents be citizens from within the Trnava region. The size of the selected sample was calculated with the help of a formula. The basic sample consisted of the inhabitants of the Trnava region, with an age range between 18 and 65 years of age. We based our survey on the statistical data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, with the basic sample consisting of 420,867 people.

The level of reliability	Margin of error percentage	The size of the basic sample
95%	5%	420,867
recommended size of the selected sample	385	

II. Research phase

In this phase of the research, the focus was on defining the relationship of the individual materials from selected clothing industry products. The samples for chemical analysis were chosen. With the acquired data, we subsequently ascertained, whether there exists a dependency between the level of recycling and the price of selected textile products. To this end, a correlation and regression analysis in MS Excel software was used.

III. Research phase

This phase was focused on acquiring relevant data from the respondents on the subject of shopping choice, the shopping behaviour of consumers within the conditions of a circular economy. The acquired data was subsequently evaluated based on the evaluation criteria determined in advance, and then charted graphically. The results formed an information base in the creation of recommendations for the improvement of the current status of implementing the principles of a circular economy in Slovakia. The subsequent observance of the given principles will help secure the protection of the natural environment.

Results and discussion

Because the range of products is very wide and the goal was to research the individual production areas in greater detail, the authors have decided to focus their following research on clothing industry products used by sportsmen. This narrow specialisation is intentionally aimed at

products that are used in daily life on a stable basis. In the conclusion, the results of the research will be generalised to all products of the clothing industry.

The target group of the survey was divided into three age categories, specifically, people between 18 to 30 years old constituted 24%, the group between 31 and 50 years of age constituted 39%, and the last group, in the age range of 51 to 65 years was represented by 37%. Thanks to this percentual division as well, it becomes clear that all the categories in the target group were to be addressed with almost the same amount of respondents.

The respondents were asked about the frequency of their shopping for clothes, clothing industry products. Based on the evaluation of replies, it was found out that 45% of the queried shops for clothes at least once (1x) every 3 months. This was followed by a group of 96 respondents, which goes shopping once (1x) a month. 85 of the queried respondents shops at least once (1x) every six months, and the group with the lowest frequency of shopping, only once (1x) in a year, constitutes 8%.

Whether the respondents from the selected sample follow the individual communication tools during the process of shopping for clothes was surveyed. It is interesting that as many as 162 of all queried respondents did not know how to answer the question. 119 respondents replied positively and 104 respondents commented that communication tools play no role in their shopping process.

The attention was directed at ascertaining the knowledge of the queried respondents on the individual principles of the circular economy, on the sample of clothing industry products. The most surprising find for us was that as many as 177 respondents did not know the features of the circular economy in the clothing industry. 123 respondents had a grasp on this area and 85 of the queried respondents had no knowledge at all on the working principle of a circular economy.

Conclusion

Summing up the results of this survey it can be concluded that the policy of the European Union and its individual states is satisfactory. Adopted legislative measures are at a sufficient level, EU countries responding to initiatives and legislative measures issued by the European Union and revising them to national conditions. Also Slovakia, based on the results of the survey is at a sufficient level in this area. The biggest deficiency that we found in the research is insufficient verification of legislative measures issued by Slovakia. As an example, here are a few pictures that point to non-compliance with Slovak legislative measures.

Picture 1. Illegal dump



Source: own work.

Picture 2. Pollution of watercourses



Source: own work.

Finally, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that in the fight against waste management it is absolutely necessary to ensure the enforceability of the law, to implement all political, legislative guidelines into practice. We are aware that this process has a long-term character, but it is up to people to improve the situation.

In the current situation, not only governments, but also the public, including individual companies, are beginning to recognize the need to introduce long-term sustainable approaches to economic development. This results in the fact that even customers demand the guaranteeing of a competitive advantage, they demand non-faulty products, suitable for both their health concerns and for the natural environment. In the present, business owners in Slovakia are also beginning to utilise the tools of a circular economy and green innovations. The two greatest issues that emerge from our surveys are climate change and economic crises. The results hint that the rate of innovation and technological progress is currently at a very low level. Applying the individual models of a circular economy is a long-term process and in Slovakia, currently at a very weak level. The results hint that innovations are the basic element of a cyclical type of economy.

Nature and natural resources, which are increasingly threatened by depletion and pollution with growing world population, are becoming the focus of attention around the world. Based on a large number of theoretical and practical knowledge of experts, we have tried to approach the issue of the circular economy as a key concept towards a sustainable economy.

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Threats to Contemporary Economic Order

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Abstract:

The biggest threats to contemporary economic order were chronologically the bipolarity of the world after 1945, in which one of the poles despised money and the other based its prosperity on money. An attempt to create a unipolar world already dominated by the US dollar, practically was hardly acceptable. The US showed its strength when Japan in 1995 became a pretender to be No. 1 in the global economy. Also in 2008, American banks triggered a global financial crisis by creating bubbles of toxic real estate loans. The 2008 financial crisis also started a crisis of liberal democracy. China was much more powerful than Japan as the next pretender to become No. 1 in the global economy. About it can be seen as the beginning of a global conflict between the United States and China. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic has stopped globalization and is causing a global crisis.

Keywords: bipolar world, unipolar world, crisis of liberal democracy, global conflict, coronavirus pandemic, globalization

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to identify threats to the contemporary economic order in historical terms. It is assumed that the US-China rivalry and the accompanying economic hard to predict COVID-19 are a serious threat to the economic order, outweighing all threats from the last seventy-five years.

The collapse of Biopolar World

After World War II, until 1989, there was a balance of two: the West, headed by the US and the East (socialist) headed by the USSR. From the beginning, the socialist order was based on the contempt for money. However, money has created the modern economy. We call this process of creating the world economy – globalization. Money was created by the West from nothing, both in central banks as an order for the mint and in commercial banks as an entry in the accounts.

The USSR and other socialist countries could only queue for loans, because it was the only way to acquire Western know-how. But when lenders turned on the know-how tap from

West to East and started enforcing the flow of goods from East to West (to pay off the loans), the borrowers fell into a classic debt trap. It was the West that dictated the conditions. In December 1991, the USSR was liquidated. In the post-Soviet area and in the former European countries of people's democracy, the socialist system was broken and market transformations of the economies started. Their peaceful colonization with the use of money took place ([Szafarz 2013: 70](#)).

An attempt to create a unipolar world by the US

It is understandable why countries such as Russia (but also others) do not want to subordinate to another state. In general, the question arises - why does America reinforce such a unipolar world? It is obvious that neither Russia nor China would want a unipolar world under the leadership of one authority on the other side of the Atlantic. Therefore, if the United States do not abandon such goals, Russia and China will be forced to unite. The association of countries in BRICS in 2006 to create a new currency system not based on the dominance of the US dollar is the first manifestation of the unification of countries in the opposition to the US. BRICS - is the term for a group of developing countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa since 2011 ([Mowle & Sacko 2007: 70](#)). In 2019, the GDP of all BRIC states amounted to approximately 46.22 billion international dollars ([GDP of the BRIC 2020](#))

The goals of these countries are:

- Creating new monetary system.
- Increasing the role of developing countries in global monetary institutions.
- Reforming the United Nations.

Economic miracle and fall of Japan

In 1965-1980, Japan had a 12-fold increase in GDP from \$ 91 billion. up to 1.0 trillion dollars. There was talk of economic miracle. In 1995, Japan's GDP was already USD 5.3 trillion. and the US 7.6 trillion dollars, even though Japan had 2.5 times less population than the US. In 1995 GDP per capita in Japan was \$ 42,522 and in the US only \$ 28,782. In 1995, the 10 largest banks in the world belonged to the Japanese. Japan has become the largest creditor and the US has become the largest debtor. In the same year Japan became a contender for position number one in the global economy. The largest banks of the world in 1988 were Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank, Sumitomo Bank, Fuji Bank, Mitsubishi Bank, Sanwa Bank, Industrial Bank of Japan,

Norinchukin Bank, Mitsubishi Trust & Banking Co., Sumitomo Trust & Banking Co. and Tokai Bank.

The USA and the richest countries in the world have required Japan Agreement Plaza - an agreement on the appreciation (increase in purchasing power) of the Japanese yen against the US dollar from a ratio of 250:1 to 149:1. The competitiveness of products exported from Japan has decreased. The US also required Japan to reduce interest rates to 2.5%. Morgan Stanley and Salomon Brothers (investment banking and services for business clients) appeared on the Japanese stock exchange and began selling derivative products, i.e. secondary market securities, to Japanese entrepreneurs. Instead of curing, the Japanese government's treatments based on Keynesianism did harm. Japan has entered a phase of economic stagnation that continues to this day (Bowles & Woods 2000: 85). In 2015, the US GDP amounted to USD 18 trillion, and Japan dropped by 14% compared to 1995 and amounted to USD 4.1 trillion. In 2015, GDP per capita in the USA was USD 56 116, and in Japan only 32 471 USD (GDP 2015).

The financial crisis of 2008 and the crisis of liberal democracy

The first symptoms of the crisis were recorded in January 2007. September 15, 2008 - on Black Monday, American financiers at the New York Federal Reserve headquarters decided to bankrupt the American Lehman Brothers bank. The government decided not to support the 158-year-old American investment bank, one of the oldest and largest in the world. News of the bank's bankruptcy caused a collapse on global stock exchanges. It was American banks that were responsible for creating a bubble of toxic real estate loans. Over 10 million American families lost their homes, and millions more had to pay back loans far beyond the value of their property. In Europe, the crisis has hit not only over-indebted countries like Greece or Italy, but also Ireland and Spain.

The consequences were political turmoil in Southern Europe, an authoritarian turn in Hungary, Russia, Turkey, the strengthening of the PRC, Brexit and Trump's victory in the USA. It was only after German-Chinese consultations in 2012 that Chancellor Merkel decided to leave Greece in the Euro zone. In Hungary, for example, many loans for real estate or cars were sold in Swiss francs or Japanese yen, and monthly installments in forints suddenly increased by 40%. In the fight against world financiers (Dwyer & Tkac 2009), Viktor Orban built his campaign and a later career. In Italy, right-wing populist parties, the Northern League and the Five Stars Movement, etc. have come to the fore, in Poland power was gained by the united right, headed by the PiS party (Law and Justice).

The financial crisis of 2008 caused a crisis of liberal democracy. The essence of the current crisis is that it is not known how and with what result the future world will cope with the new situation. There is a crisis of liberal democracy, a return to national egoisms and the temptation of authoritarian governments, also in Poland. For the world, it is dangerous for the US to return to protectionism, for the European Union Brexit, Polexit and other exits possible in the near future, and finally its disintegration into nation states. This crisis of liberal democracy may take even more severe forms after the defeat of the coronacrisis. Western countries thought that there was no other way than liberal democracy. The West has deprived itself of tools to keep markets under control. Governments have stated that they cannot interfere in economic processes. And China's influence tools have retained. They introduced a combination of market rules and state planning. They did not invent it themselves, Deng Xiaoping ordered to imitate Singapore. Authoritarianism also gives China an advantage over the West. In times of instability and confusion - and in this reality we live today - autocracies have an important advantage: they can react quickly. The example of China showed that the free market gets along well with technocratic authoritarianism ([Castells 2019: 112](#)).

The beginning of the global conflict between the US vs China

The customs war is not about eliminating the trade deficit equal to Poland's annual GDP. It is about exchanging the US consulative attitude for an active one. The US must be active for their corporations to enter the PRC market with investments. Chinese are afraid of this scenario. They are preparing to be not only the strongest economy in the world and set standards for others, but also to increase their advantage. Since the main world currency is the dollar, China has accumulated the world's highest reserves of this currency of 4 trillion. dollars. The second country is Japan, which has currency reserves of 1.1. trillion dollars.

Since 2010, China is the second largest (after the US) and the fastest growing national economy in the world, achieving an average growth rate of 10% per year over the last 30 years. It is also the largest exporter in the world and the second largest importer. Today China is the most populous country in the world with a population exceeding 1.3 billion, which is 19.1% of the world population. In terms of area, it is 3rd in the world, and in terms of the size of the economy, second only to the US (in terms of nominal GDP), and 1st in terms of real GDP ([Coker 2015](#)).

East China's provinces and urban centers play a special role in the economic development of the PRC. Although this area covers only 9.5% of the total area of the country, in recent years more than 90% of China's trade with the world has been realized here, and almost 75% of the

value of foreign direct investment located in China has flowed here. The highest income (gross product) is generated in Guangdong Province (Guangzhou), and it is a scale comparable to Poland's GDP. The indicator characterizing the diversity of individual areas of the PRC is the amount of per capita income. Under this classification, Shanghai is leading, ahead of Beijing, Tianjin, Zhejiang Province, Jiangsu and Guangdong. Income per inhabitant of Shanghai is ten times higher than this indicator in Guizhou Province, which ranks last on the list.

China ranks first in the world in terms of trade value. Most machines and equipment are exported. Behind them are textiles and clothing, footwear, toys, sports equipment and fuel. China exports to countries such as the USA (21.1%), Hong Kong (17.4%), Japan (13.6%), South Korea (4.6%), Germany (4%). However, machinery, electronic equipment, fuel, plastic, iron, steel and chemicals are imported. The partners of Chinese imports are Japan (18%), Taiwan (11.9%), South Korea (10.4%), USA (8.2%), and Germany (5.9%). The Canton Trade Fair plays an important role in the development of foreign trade.

The total number of Chinese soldiers is 2,250,000. The compulsory service in land forces lasts 3 years, and in the navy and aviation 4. The reserve forces number about 12 million soldiers. The Chinese army also oversees the space program. According to the Global Firepower (2014) ranking, Chinese armed forces constitute the third (after the US and Russia) military force in the world with an annual defense budget of USD 126 billion (USD).

China's strength is shown by statistics, facts, trivia:

- The PRC has 48 car brands.
 - They are a world leader in the production of electric cars.
 - The PRC has 31 mobile telephone producers.
 - They are a world leader in the production of supercomputers.
 - The PRC has the largest radio telescope in the world with a diameter of 500m.
 - They have the longest high-speed rail network with the highest operating speed above 350 km/h.
 - The longest metro network is in Shanghai. It's 588km and 364 metro stations.
 - The PRC has 142 thousand km of highways.
 - The longest bridge in the world connects Hong Kong with Macao.
 - A magnetic rail train connecting the airport with the center of Shanghai is speeding at 437 km/h.
 - The PRC is the country with the largest currency reserves.
 - The country has its headquarters 5 largest public companies in the world.
-

- The railway in Tibet is the highest railway in the world (5000 m above sea level).

In the years 2010–2015, foreign direct investment in the amount of USD 250 billion flowed into the Chinese market every year. i.e. as much as to Poland throughout the entire period (Walkowski 2017: 350).

Development prospects for PRC

The economic invasion of China in Africa and the European Union began. In 2020, the PRC's turnover with Africa will exceed USD 440mld. The Chinese are building schools, factories, skyscrapers, railways and highways in Africa. They provide real assistance to Africa in the form of financing. The transfer of knowledge and technology is delayed. At the same time, they flood the African continent with cheap products, destroying local competition. In Adis Ababa they built the headquarters of the African Union, and in Djiboutia a military base, which is consistent with the assumed goal of achieving number one position in the world by 2049 in all areas. In 2010, Chinese from Geely Automobil bought a Ford company from Göteborg for 1.8 billion USD. In France, the YTO Group took over the Mc Cormick tractor factory in Saint Dizier, which gave them access to modern technology. The Chinese took over the port of Piraeus in Greece for 35 years for EUR 35 million. 2/3 of the port is occupied by COSCO, the Chinese giant on the container transport market.

Xi Jinping's team set two goals for the century. The first is to be achieved in 2021 - the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party - and consists in building a "society of moderate prosperity." Translating this into our western categories, it's about powerful middle class strengthening. Xi Jinping wants the driving force of the Chinese economy to be no longer cheap exports to the West, but, as he writes, "a thriving internal market": If he succeeds, the products that were exported will be bought by Chinese citizens. Xi Jinping's second goal is to be achieved by 2049 – the centenary of the proclamation of the People's Republic of China - "the great renaissance of the Chinese people". It is primarily about the peaceful unification of China with Taiwan. Taiwan has a GDP comparable to Poland, so if they merged, then the world's number one economy would be created.

The Chinese have also developed the geopolitical project of the New Silk Road. What is the idea of the New Silk Road? This is to be a convenient connection between China and Europe. By sea and land. This sea route ends in the Greek port of Piraeus, and the land route in Łódź in Poland, from which nine branches are to go in different directions. China is afraid that the new

balance of power in the world will be bipolar: US-China. And they try to do everything to prevent this from happening ([Pechlaner et al. 2020](#)).

In 2060, China is foreseen to have an economy twice as strong as the American one. The US will be pushed to third place in the world by India. Already in 2050, we will observe a double advantage of BRICS economies over the G-7 (i.e. a group of seven countries that are one of the most important in the world in economic terms: France, Japan, Germany, the United States, Great Britain, Italy (G6, from 1975) and Canada (G7, from 1976).

It is not known how many poles will arise. In the puzzle, China, the US, India, maybe Russia are important, and the question is whether the European Union will be the fifth major contender to manage the world. Forecasts for 2035 say that the first economy in the world will be China, the second USA, and the third India. In 2050, the order is to change again: the first China, the second India, and the United States only the third. Russia will not be economically strong, because it is too dependent on China, has become a supplier of raw materials for the Chinese economy. In the clash of giants, which has just begun, great India is unknown ([Staack 2013:125](#)).

Impact of coronavirus-induced political decisions on the world economy

The epidemic shock and government decisions to stop working in many industries have already hit the business. The activity of enterprises in the eurozone collapsed on a scale exceeding even what we saw during the apogee of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. In the world serious economic dislocations can be expected. There is not much known about the results of the coronacrisis yet, although from many comments a more pessimistic picture emerges than from the assessment of 2008-2009. The crisis 2008-2009 began with risky loans granted to consumers for the purchase of real estate, despite the lack of creditworthiness. The crisis of 2020 is the result of the decision of the authorities of many countries to slow down the economy, and actually freeze a large part of socio-economic life, resulting in a lack of income in millions of companies. We have a highly likely bankruptcy for both small and consumer and large companies. We do not know whether the "coronacrisis" will cut off China from the markets in which it has prevailed until now or will make China more dependent on Beijing ([Henzel 2020](#)).

And what effects will the global "coronacrisis" cause in Poland? The National Bank of Poland has started printing paper money for purchased bonds on the secondary market. It is possible to reprint cash to the amount of PLN 90 billion, i.e. by 30%. In addition, the zloty is weakening, as investors are escaping to the dollar and other stronger currencies of the euro, the British pound, the Swiss franc, the yen and even the yuan. This will result in inflation. The NBP

reduced interest rates by 0.5% and the required reserve by 3%. At the same time, the NBP increased the interest rate on the required reserve from 0.5 to 1.0%. This will allow commercial banks to offer very attractive loans. Borrowings for investment and consumption purposes will help the economy as well as successively introduced anti-crisis shields 1.2.3.4. etc. In 2020 and the following year, the Polish economy will probably decline. There will be no funds for repolonizing enterprises and banks. The importance of foreign capital in the Polish economy will increase.

Conclusion

The spark of conflict between the US and China, and nowadays coronavirus crisis is the greatest threat to global economic order. Governments have allocated hundreds of billions of dollars to save the global economy. World leaders faced a terrible choice: to destroy the world economy or lose millions of lives. Coronavirus has accelerated the beginning of the end of the globalization era. It may cause other countries, e.g. Italy, to leave the European Union, as a result of which the community will fall apart. The amount of loss associated with a pandemic will depend primarily on its duration. The prolonged uncertainty caused by it increases the likelihood of the slowdown recorded since 2018 in the global economy, including in the EU, as well as a recession.

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Terrorism and Right-Wing Extremism: History and Comparative Definitions

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Abstract:

Recent narratives on terrorism have focused on the definitions. Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but the problem resides in its definition and who is defining it. Conceptualizing terrorism depends on which framework one utilizes. The use of different lenses to define the term has contributed to the lack of global acceptance of what constitutes terrorism, hence the difficulty of gathering data for analysis. It is also a conundrum when powerful nations legitimize their terrorist activities against weaker ones. This, unfortunately, has led to the subjectiveness of every attempt in the literature to objectively provide a globally acceptable definition. Using meta-analysis as the methodological approach for the study a number of definitions were scrutinised. This article provides a brief examination of the intersection between right-wing terrorism and ethnic nationalism, and how accelerationism escalates ideology into violence. The paper compares two acts of violence, one traditionally viewed as terrorism and the other labelled solely as a mass shooting. It concludes with a comparative analysis of the definitions provided, utilizing a case study to examine how labels of a terrorist or a freedom fighter impact on one's view of a group's motivation. This is pertinent when analysing ideologically motivated violence.

Keywords: terrorism, right-wing terrorism, ethnic nationalism, comparative analysis

Introduction

Since the genesis of recorded history, nations have been subjected to the destruction and violence associated with acts of terrorism. Operating in the name of defense or protecting their colonies and political ideologies, nations have used their militia and military power to engage in well-orchestrated atrocities (terrorism). Terrorism, arguably, has been seen as tactics used by weaker groups against stronger ones. While this argument may be true as established in the literature, this article maintains that terrorism is something that is done by both weak and strong parties ([Antwi-](#)

Boasiako 2010: 104-106). Similarly, terror and terrorism are used interchangeably in this paper as both involve violence and fear (Dekmejian 2007; Holt 2005). Terrorism is seen as a socio-politically constructed term with multiple definitions, which may originate from a variety of sources and directions given how one defines the term (Haahr-Escolano 2005: 70-71; Fine 2010). There are several types of terrorism in the academic literature, which include but are not limited to; civil disorder, political terrorism, non-political terrorism, quasi-terrorism, limited political terrorism, and state sponsored terrorism. This paper concerns itself primarily with political and state terrorism, as it examines the definitions of terrorism, and its contextual relationship within right-wing extremism and ethnic nationalism that seeks to utilize violence for separatist measures.

The paper traces the history of terrorism as an act and a concept. It tries to explicate the various definitions of terrorism and the conundrum of reaching international consensus on defining the term. Two important distinctions the paper will dwell on are the application of traditional terrorism frameworks and freedom fighter labels on certain violent acts. Therefore, the article will conduct a comparative analysis on two separate right-wing terroristic acts, noting similarities and differences based upon these distinct definitions. Ethnic nationalism, under the veneer of broad-based right-wing action, has the natural tendency to advocate for separatism due to desires for ethnic cleansing. While the momentum for right-wing separatists, arguably, is dying out, there exist pockets of individuals and groups that continue to advocate for separation¹. Traditional terroristic definitions regard collective violence as inciting terror to separate, as the group is visible, and its goals are clearly defined compared to other terroristic instances from individuals or small militia groups. However, lone hate crimes, if viewed as terrorism, operate under the self-defined label of a criminal or a freedom fighter, not unlike a militant institution, as its desire in the terroristic act is not to solely incite violence but to symbolically separate from the pluralistic nation-state. Definitions, therefore, can be based upon the self-proclaimed status of the individual easier than through a group.

Tracing Terrorism: The Early Beginnings

The nature of terrorism has evolved since its fledging beginnings. That is, the origin of terrorism could be as old as when humans started employing violence against one another's behaviour. Scholars argue that modern terrorism began with the French Revolution (Erlenbusch 2015;

¹ For example separatist groups in Africa see: Sawe (2017).

[Shughart II 2006](#); [Goldstone 1984](#)) - a period of social and political upheaval from 1789 to 1799- and has been evolving ever since. We argue strongly that terrorism may be traced to the genesis of creation, and its shared causes, intent, or goals have never changed. Some of these common causes may include, but are not limited to land or territorial disputes, cultural differences, ideological differences, religion, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political invasions, and sovereignty.

According to [Fine \(2010\)](#), in 70 AD, Josephus Flavius referred to a sect of Jewish zealots named the *Sicarii* who used assassinations as a tactic in the Jewish rebellion against Rome. [Kaplan \(2011: 104\)](#) maintains this was “the first recorded case of terrorism.” The *Sicarii*, as [Zeitlin \(1965: 302\)](#) noted, were organized by Judas of Galilee who incited people to revolt against “tyranny of the Roman Empire financial enslavement.” However, the *Sicarii* did not limit their aggression to the Roman State but extended their attack on those civilians who willingly submitted to the authority of Rome ([Smith 1971](#)). The *Sicarii* felt their acts against the Judeans were justified because they did not agree with their political aspirations. It was the Jews who first attempted to name the use of terror in a political context though it was the Assyrians who first developed the terminology for the use of political and military “means to inspire terror” ([Fine 2010: 271](#)).

While terrorism might be going on for political reasons and accomplishments in the eyes of victorious political leaders, this is perhaps the first instance where terror was seen as an evil act with negative connotation. However, during the French Revolution, the term “terrorism” had a positive connotation ([Hoffman 2006](#)). The concept of terror employed as a political idea was first utilized by the French Legislature in order to “suppress the aristocratic threat to the revolutionary government” ([Bahan 2009: 336](#)). The leader of the so-called “reign of terror”, Robespierre, “stands apart as the first politician to organize and mobilize the resources of a modern nation to systematically eradicate his opponents” by dehumanizing them ([Fine 2010: 278](#)). Robespierre’s *regime de la terreur* (reign of terror) shares at least two familiar characteristics with what may be described as the modern-day acts of terrorism. First the “reign of terror” (the use of the military) was well organized; second, its goal and justification were the creation of a “new and better” society in place of a fundamentally corrupt system ([Hoffman 2006: 16](#)). Differing from their successors, the leaders of the reign of terror typically shirked intentional military attacks against innocent civilians in order to maintain “political legitimacy” ([Bahan 2009: 336](#)).

The Indigenous and Terrorism

Until the eve of the First World War (WWI), terrorism retained its positive revolutionary connotation. However, by the 1930s, terrorism was commonly used to describe the practice of mass repression in totalitarian states, used by dictatorial leaders against their own citizens. The practice became common in most African countries after gaining political independence from the evils of slavery and colonization (Hoffman 2006). Similarly, outside the continent of Africa, the author noted that Joseph Stalin (1879-1953) unleashed the “Great Terror” upon the then Soviet Union (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics-USSR) and meant to “seize total power by terrorist action” (Hoffman 2006: 25). However, this connotation did not last much past WWII, after which the meaning of terror changed again. One of the biggest gaps in tracing the origin of terrorism and what constitutes terrorism is the focus on authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. But as it is evident in the literature, democratic countries also use their military to terrorise others. For example, Great Britain (treatment of the natives in the colonized; Africa and Australia), the USA (treatment of Native American Indians) (Matthews 2002) and the Portuguese in Brazil or Spain in South American countries (Fausto 1999). In the post-WWII era, those considered terrorists began targeting innocent civilians as means to “inspire media coverage and effect political change in targeted governments” (Bahan 2009: 337). It became the norm for violence to be actively used in nations not directly involved in conflicts in which innocent civilians were attacked for political and ideological reasons.

The concept of terrorism in a revolutionary context expanded in the 1960s and 1970s to include ethnic separatist groups, the disenfranchised, or exiled nationalist minorities. However, these groups often rejected the label “terrorists”, preferring instead to be referred to as “liberators” or “freedom fighters” (Hoffman 2006). In the 1940s-1960s, individuals and groups in colonized African countries that began to fight for their political independence were not only seen as dangerous and terrorists but were also the targets of the colonizers (Anderson 2005; Elkins 2005). By the 1980s, terrorism evolved to new dimensions where, arguably, more frustrated, disfranchised, and marginalized individuals and groups rebelled against powerful authorities. Unfortunately, in what the literature describes as modern terrorism, it is not uncommon for individuals to act alone to cement their agenda through social media, or as a result of extensive global media coverage. While one may not be able to pinpoint the genesis of terrorism, its unfortunate violence and atrocities have escalated as a result of technological advancement in general.

Methodology and Data Collection

According to Gerring (2012), there are several methods incorporating both observational data and quantitative approach, which were used to explain what researchers consider triangulation as this strategy is one of the potential solutions to a problem of conflicting tasks (the definitions of terrorism), and criteria to be identified in a multimethod research. So, what is triangulation? Babbie (2001: 113) defines triangulations as the “use of several different research methods,” which he sees as “valuable research strategy”. The terrorism data gathered from journal publications qualitatively were used to justify the definitions of terrorism through explanation.

Though the study used mixed methods approach not all methods were overly relied on, since there are some expected methodological disadvantages associated with every research method. However, meta-analysis was identified as more appropriate for this particular study. Meta-analysis, usually used in statistical methods for contrasting and combining results from different studies, is utilized in this article by examining the various definitions of terrorism. This article used secondary data by gathering information through publications on terrorism. First, classical definition of terrorism and terror as presented in the literature was examined while critical similarities and differences were discussed based on the literature. Meta-analysis, as a subset of systematic approach to case report, case control study, and cohort study, was used to examine various definitions in the literature. Admittedly, the sample of publications was very small, it was however determined that the definitions used represent or reflect the general definitions and understanding of terrorism, hence we found the definitions in other publications as repetitive and redundant. This determination was based on Internet search, which provided greater ability to generalize the definitions. Additionally, we used word (terrorism, terror, right-wing) Internet search to identify publications directly related to terrorism. We further narrowed the output of the Internet results by limiting our search to only peer reviewed journals, books, and authentic Internet sources.

What is Terrorism? Who Defines it?

Defining terrorism is a complicated task. Globally, there is no distinct internationally accepted definition of what really constitutes terrorism, and the terrorism literature abounds with contradicting and competing definitions and typologies. Additionally, it should be noted “that terrorism is not only the physical act of an attack but also the psychological impact it has on a

society for many years after” (GTI 2019: 6). As Cronin (2005: 341) puts it, “terrorism is notoriously difficult to define, in part because the term has evolved and... it is associated with an activity that is designed to be subjective.” Many studies argue that an “objective and internationally accepted definition of terrorism can never be agreed upon...since one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (Ganor 2002). The struggle in the search for a suitable globally acceptable definition seems impossible “because different bodies, organizations, and government agencies have different definitions to suit their own particular (political) role, purpose, or bias” (Bruce 2013: 26). Hunter (1991: 352) sees terrorism as “a political phenomenon aimed at achieving politically determined goals.” For example, the slave and colonial masters did not see themselves as engaging in acts of terrorism. So, would the nations that engaged in slavery and colonization for centuries consider themselves as sponsors of terrorism? Affirming Bruce’s submission, Carr (2007) argues there are no two agencies within the US government, for example, that have “identical” definitions. In most cases, agencies cannot reconcile on the definition of terrorism.

Terrorism is a complicated phenomenon, which requires a sophisticated strategy in achieving its goals. The League of Nations first attempted to define international terrorism in 1937 as a response to the assassination of the Yugoslavian Head of State, King Alexander I and “the President of the Council of the French Republic, Louis Bathou” (Bahan 2009: 344). Unfortunately, while the convention was adopted, it never came to fruition (Young 2006). Currently, there is a plethora of definitions of terrorism available in the literature, which tend to contradict each other.

The Definition Conundrums

There are several possible working definitions for terrorism. A terrorist is defined as “anyone who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation” (Hoffman 2006: 14). Gupta (2011: 99) defines terrorism as a political act by non-state actors, where participants, in contrast to common criminals, see their acts as a way of achieving public good, such as national independence, social justice, or “the establishment of a theocratic state, thus making them altruist in their own minds.” Those who find this definition limiting may find more satisfaction in Ganor’s (2002: 288) definition of terrorism as “the deliberate use, or threat, of violence against civilians in order to attain political, ideological, and religious aims.”

Those seeking a definition from sanctioned governmental agencies rather than academics might prefer the US Department of State's definition of terrorism contained in Title 22 of the United States Code Section 2656f (d). It defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against other non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), on the other hand, defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objectives" (as cited by [Hoffman 2006: 38](#)). The US Department of Defence (DoD) takes a slightly different stance defining it as "the unlawful use of –or threatened use of- force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives."

The United Nations (UN) has long struggled to settle on a definition of terrorism for global acceptance since its working definitions tend to accuse powerful nations of the very crime they claim to be fighting against. For years the UN avoided using the term "terrorism," even when specifically crafting policy to combat it, in order to avoid any political and ideological disputes surrounding the term ([Saul 2005](#)). In fact, the first time the UN actually used the term "terrorism" was in 1985 in the Security Council Resolution 579, which was crafted in response to "the excessive amount of global terror attacks". Additionally, the first time a direct link was made between terrorism and violations of human rights dates back to the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights ([Symonides 2001](#)). The UN avoided making any declarative statement regarding a definition of terrorism until October 2004, when it adopted the Security Council Resolution 1566, which generally, but not expressively, defines terrorism as:

...criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of person or particular person, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to or to abstain from doing any act which constitute offences within the scope and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism ([Saul 2005: 164](#)).

At the International Convention for the suppression of financing terrorism, the UN once again made an indirect attempt to define terrorism as:

Any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in situation or armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or contest is to intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing an act (Bahan 2009: 346).

However, it could be argued that the UN's best effort to define terrorism occurred at the Draft Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism, which sought to label terrorism as a criminal offense if certain qualifications are met, describing a terrorist as:

Any person who commit an offence within the meaning of the present Convention if that person by any means unlawfully and unintentionally causes (a) Death or the serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, and infrastructure facility or to the environment; or (c) Damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of the present article resulting or likely to result in major economic loss; when the purpose to conduct, by its nature or contest, is to intimidate a population, or to complete a Government or international organization to do or abstain from doing an act (361).

Given the above definitions, they are those that specifically mention targeting civilian populations which are most applicable to the argument concerning the differentiation between terrorists and freedom fighters. Here again, who decides which definition must be used?

Terrorists or Freedom Fighters

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman, Yasser Arafat, including Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Muammar Al Gadhafi of Libya, who resisted foreign oppressive policies, especially, from the West were more often than not seen as terrorists², but Arafat, for example, quibble rejected that label associated to him by Israel and the West claiming that “the difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights”

² Those mentioned above were not the only ones considered or labelled as terrorists or supporting terrorism by the West. For example, even after 27 years of imprisonment and resisting apartheid rule in South Africa, the United States had the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, on its terrorist watch-list (Elliott 2019).

(Hoffman 2006: 26). In fact, many groups that commit acts of terror eschew the pejorative terrorism label and prefer to think of themselves instead as freedom fighters or liberators. Nelson Mandela wanted equality for all in South Africa by rejecting the evils of apartheid in that country, while Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and others wanted total liberation for Africans who were buried in the oppressive rule of European colonial governments.

These views strike many as a massive rationalization. Those who supported the contention of Arafat and his ilk could argue that they were merely freedom fighters; hence the distinction. The same argument could be made for, or against, some African leaders such as Robert Mugabe, Nelson Mandela, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and others who led groups, such as the *Mau Mau*, to fight the evils of the British colonization and occupation for independence and freedom. Ganor (2002: 288) writes:

What is important in these definitions is the differentiation between the goals and the means used to achieve these goals. The aims of terrorism and guerrilla warfare may well be identical; but they are distinguished from each other by the means used- or more precisely, by the targets of their operations. The guerrilla fighter's targets are military ones, while the terrorist deliberately targets civilians. By this definition, a terrorist can no longer claim to be a "freedom fighter" because they are fighting for national liberation or some other worthy goal.

The systematic and continuous targeting of civilians is and should be the principle qualifier in any definition of terrorism. The difference between goals and the means by which the goals are achieved is a distinction that cannot be overstated. Terrorism is a tactic used to accomplish an objective, be it political, ideological, religion, or economical, but it is the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, which separated the modern-day terrorism from the Jacobin revolutionary.

The problem of the definition conundrum is that the terrorism literature is skewed as a result of dependence on data provided mostly by powerful nations (governments) and their agencies. So, if a government decides which criminal activities constitute or fit terrorism then the said government would label it so. It is not uncommon for powerful nations dropping bombs on civilians in the name of preventing the spread of communism or fighting terrorism, but those nations do not consider their actions as acts of terrorism. As Schmid and Jongman (2006: 180) lamented, "The perception of political terrorism as a practical problem requiring urgent solution

has led to poorly defined, ideologically biased, conceptually skewed research.” That is, “policy-oriented research tends to impede sound theoretical work because of urgent social need (real or perceived) to achieve concrete results in the real world.”

Right Wing Terrorism as Ethnic Nationalism

Political terrorism often manifests itself in the targeting of civilians because of personal, identifiable demographics. As noted by the Global Terrorism Index ([GTI 2019: 4](#)), in many parts of the West, there has been considerable growth in right-wing terrorist groups. This assertion is affirmed by the studies of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which states “far-right attacks in the West surge by 320 percent.” Using data from 1970 to 2018, the study further avows “the last five years has seen an increase in far-right terror attacks in western countries” ([GTI 2019](#)). According to Heitmeyer ([2005: 142](#)):

Right-wing terrorism is a product of political interaction and the radicalization of other forms of threat-based right-wing attitudes and behaviour, such as opportunity-dependent violence by (youth) gangs, subcultural violence (such as that of skinhead groups), organized party-political Right extremist violence, and religiously oriented right-wing extremist group violence.

Due to the decentralized nature of these groups, it is often difficult to define one group as right-wing. Often, self-identification descriptors – particularly race or religion – help determine the nature of a political terrorist group. In the West, most right-wing terrorists are self-described Christian, male, and white, and the connection to white nationalism has a low barrier of entry. Common psychological and sociological behaviour varies depending on the size of the group and the specific individual, though there is one common denominator: Right-wing extremist violence or terrorism is mostly carried out by a representative of the ethnic majority population against weaker minorities ([Heitmeyer 2005: 144-145](#)). Power is often exercised to suppress minorities over other demographics. However, regional differences can have a large impact on the political motivations of said group. In Europe, right wing violence has been propagated against foreigners, minorities, and the democratic institutions that pervade much of Western Europe and the developing Eastern Europe. One can contrast this with South America, where many of the right-

wing groups have fought to stabilize current rulers and regimes, as they are in line with the political narrative extremists espouse.

Sprinzak (1995) has attempted a typification to help explain the many deviations within right-wing terrorism. It is historically based and includes a wide range of variants. These range of definitions and applications help to understand terroristic motivations and indicators better. They include revolutionary terrorism, reactive terrorism, vigilante terrorism, racist terrorism, millenarian terrorism, and youth counter-culture terrorism. However, there is room for discussion as to whether all the forms mentioned should be subsumed under the concept of “terror.” For the sake of the previous definitions in this article, it is apt to include these generalized forms as adequate for understanding violence against civilians to induce or incite terror. One of the primary forms of right-wing extremism is reactive in nature, as many xenophobic narratives react to changing demographics and attempt to dissuade this change through overwhelming others with fear and often violence.

Bridging the gap between general right-wing thought and reactionary nationalism can create terrorism that breeds separatist organizations. The primary vehicle for this shift is through escalation. “Escalation depends on the political interaction processes which include three essential elements: the socialization of the perpetrators, the organization of the groups and their ideology, and the opportunity structure” (Heitmeyer 2005: 146). As singular right-wing individuals with fringe political ideas are escalated through nationalistic socialization, groupthink has the potential to overpower individuals and indoctrinate them into ethnic nationalism. When indoctrinated, the group grows and authorizes the potential for future violent tendencies as an ideological feedback loop justifies the “us vs. them” mentality. This leads toward “accelerationism”, a fringe philosophy that promotes mass violence to fuel society’s collapse (Kunzelman 2020). When opportunity presents itself, it becomes as no surprise that a group focused on exerting power takes the chance, often in violent tendencies, irrespective of who it damages. The objective is to fashion a separate society with a worldview similar to their own, and due to the zero-sum nature of radical political ideology, nationalist extremists only have one way to adopt their personal policy. Reinares (2005: 126) writes a potential separate account of escalation from right-wing to nationalist terrorism:

More typically, though, terrorism is adopted by weakened nationalist separatist organizations as a tactical innovation in their repertoire of disruptive collective

action. These political organizations may prove unable to reach influential stances through conventional procedures, see themselves affected by time constraints in order to benefit from changing opportunity structures or have been expelled from relevant public decision-making processes, in this last case, either as a result of state coercion or simply open pluralistic competition, electoral processes for instance.

The comparative analysis following this section examines escalation and opportunity from two perspectives, the Irish Republican Army and a mass shooting motivated by white nationalism, and deconstructs them with the previous definitions of terrorism; put simply, how can these cases be viewed through the lens of a traditional terrorist act or as a non-traditional freedom fighter advancing their liberation narrative?

The Role of Institutions: Irish Republican Army

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) was originally formed in 1919 to halt British rule in Northern Ireland using armed force. It fought for a unified Republic of Ireland through independence. In 1969, there was a resurgence of nationalistic feelings, but the group split into two camps: Officials and Provisionals. Officials sought separation via peace, but the Provisionals waged an increasingly violent campaign against the British Army for nearly 30 years and knew only violence (Cowell-Meyers & Arthur 2010). Overall, an estimated 1,800 people were killed due to the Provisional IRA's actions, and many of these were civilians. White (1993) writes about the escalation process that divided the two camps:

Protestant vigilante violence that met the basically Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s, as well as unexpected repression by the British armed forces and security agencies since the early 1970s, prompted the Provisional IRA to terrorist retaliation and produced a transfer of legitimacy among the affected population.

The Provisional IRA was driven largely by frustration due to Catholic discrimination by a Protestant government and population, opportunity due to civil rights violations, and perceived inability to achieve their goals by the peace seeking Official IRA (The Irish Times 2003). Units of the Provisional IRA were organized to defend Catholic communities and were sustained by support from other units in Ireland. In 1969, the IRA formally divided along these faction lines.

Violence by extremists against the Catholic civil rights demonstrators, unhindered by the mostly Protestant police, set in motion a series of escalating attacks (Cowell-Meyers & Arthur 2010). This manifested itself into an institution with goals for separation – perhaps not solely independence and reunification – that sought to incite terror in a separate ethnicity and religious demographic.

Of all their actions, one of the most notable was the bombing of Belfast, UK on July 21, 1972, known as Bloody Friday. This event was the peak of the most critical and dangerous year of the North Ireland “Troubles”. On Bloody Friday, the IRA exploded 26 bombs across Belfast in the span of eight minutes. Most of them were car bombs designed to target transportation infrastructure. Nine people were killed: five civilians, two British soldiers, a reservist, a political official, and 130 were injured (The Irish Times 2003). This event has traditionally been viewed as a terrorist attack. As the literature has noted, the murder of civilians in an attempt to attain political aims is promptly considered terrorism (Ganor 2002). The IRA’s primary goal was to inflict pain upon a populace they disagreed with ideologically, to the point that violence was the only measure to seek resolution for their political disagreement. Operating under a terroristic definition, violence should not be condoned against civilians. A group that comes in to change the status quo by force is not exercising civil disobedience. As an institution, there is the potential for this insurgency to gain legitimacy, but that does not dissuade their agenda as terroristic (Reinares 2015; Heitmeyer 2015). So long as their actions terrorize non-combatants, they are a terroristic group, irrespective of affiliation and the war they seem to be fighting. Their group status does not legitimize their actions. However, the question arises that the IRA engaged in acts of warfare with combatants. While this perhaps wrestles out of the previous definition, revolutionary terrorism often requires clashing against the military institution. In this case, it is proper to separate operations to inflict damage upon non-combatants from those committed against combatants, as the terrorism definition is different. Thus, the IRA, as many terroristic institutions do, operates under two working definitions.

Juxtaposed with this framework is the IRA’s view of their actions. As a right-wing separatist organization, the civil rights violations per the Protestant police force has prompted violence as a means to enact change (The Irish Times 2003). However, the change they wish requires restructuring of the current status quo: One ethnic, religious group overseeing another. Therefore, anyone who operates inside this system helps propagate it through sheer apathy.

Civilians are not innocent, and if they are unwilling to follow in this liberation, they must be liberated through violence. The members of the IRA considered themselves freedom fighters – thus fighting to free their homeland from the imposed crown in exchange for true freedom. They were revolutionaries, and altruistic in their aspirations. This desire for autonomy to rule superseded traditional human rights considerations, as the system propped up human rights violations through sheer indifference in the populace. Under this framework, they are not terrorists, regardless of the terror they create or how one defines terrorism. Their motivation is to forcefully unshackle the Irish, Catholic ethnicity from an imposed British and Protestant monarchy. If they had been the victor, perhaps a unified – or at least separated – Catholic Ireland would view them as their saviour.

Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorist as a Freedom Fighter for the Ethnic State

Contrasted with traditional views on terrorism, lone wolf terrorism is often perceived based upon the committed act rather than the motivation or emotion incited. Individuals who commit mass murder are labelled as murderers, committing hate crimes and not revolutionaries or terrorists, and this is especially true within right-wing extremist circles. One of the recent incidents that straddles the line between being labelled right-wing terrorism or simply mass murder is the 2019 Walmart shooting at El Paso, Texas. On August 3, 2019, Patrick Crusius, a 21-year-old white man, opened fire at a shopping center in El Paso. He killed 20 people and injured 26 others (Romero et al. 2019). Crusius was arrested and subsequently charged with capital murder. Police believe that a manifesto with white nationalist and anti-immigrant themes, which cited the year's earlier Christchurch mosque shootings and the right-wing "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, was an inspiration for the attack (BBC News 2019). While the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigation saw the shooting as an act of domestic terrorism, previous literature has noted the uncertainty by which legal articles within the FBI define terrorism. Therefore, this mass shooting provides a perfect case by which to compare and contrast two competing definitions: whether this is right-wing terrorism, or, per the Great Replacement motivation, a freedom fighter desiring ethnic liberation.

While it is not far-fetched to consider a mass shooting as terrorism, the next logical step is to claim this shooting as domestic terrorism. However, due to federal legal definitions and the desire to label criminals based upon their crime, not their motivation, there are societal

hesitancies that make it unlikely and very difficult to define an individual as a terrorist (Bouhana et al. 2018). Lone-actor terrorism is not unique to either extremist ideology, yet its emergence in the 20th and 21st centuries is strongly tied to developments in right-wing extremism (Bouhana et al. 2018: 150; Ross & Gurr 2007). As this overwhelming lone-actor terrorism is politically charged, those who subscribe to right-wing political thought, keeping in mind their similar, though not as extreme, politics, do not find it prudent to label one form of violence as different. Yet this concern is overturned by the prevailing definition of terrorism, as a mass shooter often targets civilians to murder and incite fear in the populace. Unless opportunity or necessity presents itself, a mass shooter does not engage in armed forces. Therefore, this case is easier to be labelled under one definition of terrorism rather than the many competing ones noted earlier.

However, interpretation of violent acts is in the eye of the beholder, the definer. Perhaps it is anathema to consider a mass shooter as a freedom fighter, but due to the political motivation of Crusius's attack, there is the potential to consider his shooting as an opportunity to liberate his fellow white nationalists. His appeal to the Great Replacement theory helps frame such a narrative (Romero et al. 2019). The Great Replacement theory is a white nationalist far-right conspiracy theory which argues that, with the complicity or cooperation of "replacist" elites, the white European population is being progressively replaced with non-European peoples (Bowles 2019). This theory is included in a larger white genocide conspiracy theory that has spread in Western far-right movements since the late 20th century. As a freedom fighter, Crusius is fighting to overthrow the liberal elites who wish to replace his ethnicity with other, more diverse, ethnicities. To him, the Latino population in America is invading his country, his land, and his very way of life. With the connection to identity so grounded in his political ideology, the potential for violence increased to the point where removing the problem through means of force was the only solution. Lone wolf far-right extremists are often antisocial, where their need to hurt others manifests itself through a crisis (Bouhana et al. 2018: 154-155). Crusius's crisis, while a self-delusional conspiracy, was based on the very bedrock of his identity. Stripped of his identity, all he had was the potential for freedom, and he capitalized on this opportunity. As demographics continue to shift, possibilities for fractured right-wing cells to emerge will remain persistent. The prevailing question is, if one individual's motivation is far enough left to shift the Overton Window, will their actions be considered per their motivation or the aftermath?

Conclusion

Terrorism has always been a complicated issue and almost impossible to define given its relativity. Since the first cases of documented terrorism committed by the *Sicarii* to the attacks on the US on 9/11 and thereafter, the definition of terrorism has fluctuated with the times, while the violence as a common denominator remains constant. Those are our individualistic or societal perceptions of terror that have proven the most difficult challenge to producing a universally accepted definition of terrorism. Bahan (2009) argues, “in order for international terrorism to be universally defined, the international community must be sensitive to the diverging specific normative values of different states” and actors. However, if we may, as Ganor (2002) suggests, create an objective definition that is based on accepted international law and principles concerning behaviours that are permitted among nations in conventional wars; and then further distinguish the non-state actors that deliberately use violence or the threat of violence to attain political, religious, and ideological objectives, then we may differentiate between “means used to achieve these goals.”

If one furthers the definition that terrorism is the murder of innocent civilians, then the umbrella term is broadened. Even freedom fighters, in their bid to pursue an ideal society, sometimes attack civilians who cling to the status quo and stand in their way, however indirectly. Right-wing extremism, especially when escalated into ethnic nationalism, straddles the line between these two competing definitions. Their desires are inherently political, based on a perceived injustice by the other side, the left-wing political spectrum. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the means to advancing their political belief system utilizes force, often directly and indiscriminately. When a right-wing extremist terrorizes a mall, the problem in defining the action lies in the motivation for the attack, the number of people involved in propagating the violence, and how one labels the criminal. Merely calling the person a criminal, over a terrorist or a freedom fighter, lends credibility to their actions, as a crime is only an act breaking a law instituted by the status quo. It is imperative, when comparing competing definitions of terrorism, that the cause be included in the analysis, not solely the effect. It is here that this delineation has issues, as the case studies have shown, but it is a generalized, workable operational framework.

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