

## POLITICS - IN TERMS OF PUBLIC CREDIBILITY (2013- 2018)

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### Abstract:

*This work aims to describe and analyze aspects of politicians credibility in the Slovak Republic. I will perform the given description and analysis through the following terms: political culture, ethics, morality, virtue.*

*In this work, I will focus on the analysis of negative manifestations of selected politicians. For the plurality of opinions and ideas, I chose one politician from the governing coalition and the other from the opposition. From the government coalition, I chose the chairman of the strongest government political party, Igor Matovič, and from the opposition, I chose the chairman of the Smer-SD party, Robert Fico. In the case of Robert Fico, I will discuss his populism, statements, relationship with journalists and the degree of self-reflection.*

## 1 Introduction

Many political theorists think about politics in a different sense than the general public. They are aware that politics is not just about lawmaking and legislation, but also about phenomena in the relationship between citizens and political leaders. In a utopian world, the selection of political leaders would work in such a system that people would choose their representatives based on certain aspects such as virtue, courage, knowledge of political culture, honesty or pragmatic behaviour. However, in the real world, it usually works in such a way that people do not have the choice of political leaders who meet these attributes and are therefore they are forced to choose politicians based on emotions and current situations. Because politicians are just people like everyone else, their lives are also accompanied by negative qualities. In our work, We focus on the negative manifestations of politicians and their impact on the credibility of politicians.

## 2 Theoretical background

In this section, we will define some of the selected aspects of credibility, including Political Culture, Ethics, Morality, and Virtue. As early as ancient times, Aristotle and Plato, two of the most important ancient philosophers, discussed values, attitudes and knowledge. They talked about the great influence of political culture on the formation of political systems. „*Political culture is a certain system of values (citizen, political system, regime) and the way of their reflection (application) in practical political activity. (For example, political values, moral personalities, etc.)*“ (Korim, 2012:33) Political culture is thus a certain system of values and unwritten ethical rules that the public demands to be respected by politicians or political parties. „*Political culture, these are the attitudes that citizens take towards politics.*“ (Skovajsa,2014:123) The level of political culture depends on the extent to which politicians manage to adhere to these unwritten ethical rules or values. „*The media more often point to the vulgarities of politicians than to violations of political culture.*“ (Lincényi, 2013:94)

We will focus on one of the three important sciences of ancient Greek philosophy, ethics. Ethics examines people's behaviour in the context of good and evil. „*The Greek word ethos denoted morality, moral character, behaviour, feature, inner essence, law, transcription.*“ (Janotová, 2005:13) Ethics, in general, is a science that deals with natural law as well as the science of morals. This science includes a set of universal knowledge that is methodically developed, and there is no room for error, as its relevance is documented by generally applicable principles. It is a discipline that deals with the values of human deeds. Based on the highest intellectual rules, it can also be the science of administering human deeds to the ultimate goal. Ethics organizes human deeds mainly from the aspect of moral values, it deals with the consequences, causes and goals of man. „*Historically, ethics, along with economics and politics, has been an integral part of practical philosophy.*“ (Korim, 2012:26) Ethical behavior of politicians is important. If a politician behaves virtuous, his political credibility can be enhanced.

This phenomenon, in which politicians do not derive their political responsibility in the event of a mistake, is a sign of low political culture. Ethics in politics demands, in particular, the creation of beneficial laws for society and well-functioning institutions. „*The meaning of institutions can be understood as political rationality, and the moral quality of politics also depends on the use of the system of institutions.*“ (Bočáková - Tomášiková, 2014:69) This is important because it demonstrates the absence of morality. Many times we encounter the immoral behaviour of politicians, and society often condemns this immoral behaviour. If these institutions are to fulfil their potential, both politicians and citizens must comply with certain principles for the common good in matters of morality.

Politics is an art of possible, but it is not a simple discipline. Sometimes this can be reflected in the emotional state of politician. When a politician acquires moderation, he can control his passions and always makes decisions judiciously and rationally. As Cicero said, "Fury is the enemy of balance." That is why politicians need to maintain balance and moderation because good decisions are a step forward for society. If a politician acquires all the virtues, then society will reward him with trust, and that is the most important thing for politicians. If a politician is virtuous and cares about society, public confidence is his indicator of whether he is doing his job well or bad. A politician needs to remain virtuous throughout all his political life. „*The greatness of a politician is not measured by how he entered the policy, but how he left it.*“ (Banáš, 2015:133)

### 3 Metodology

In this work, we will focus on the analysis of negative manifestations of selected politicians. For the plurality of opinions and ideas, We chose one politician from the governing coalition and the other from the opposition. From the government coalition, We chose the chairman of the strongest government political party, Igor Matovič, and from the opposition, We chose the chairman of the Smer-SD party, Robert Fico. In the case of Robert Fico, We will discuss his populism, statements, relationship with journalists and the degree of self-reflection. Subsequently, we will describe the development of his political credibility. In the case of Igor Matovič, We will analyze his populist, statements, the absence of ethics in politics and his lies in politics. Subsequently, as with Robert Fico, We will describe the development of his political credibility. The analysis aims to find out whether, due to the negative manifestations of selected politicians, is their political

credibility significantly reduced. In this work, We assume that despite the negative manifestations of selected politicians, their political credibility is not fundamentally reduced. The table of results of surveys of the credibility of individual politicians from the Focus agency will provide me data to confirm or dismiss this claim. In this work, We further assume that the number of negative manifestations of selected politicians has increased. As a primary method for proving hypotheses, We used the method of analysis as well as the method of description. The secondary goal of our analysis is to find out what are the main negative manifestations of selected politicians. Another partial goal of the analysis is to examine the development of political credibility among selected politicians.

### 4 Research result

### Statements of Robert Fico

Robert Fico has often polarised society with his statements. In 2013, for example, he commented on unemployment in Slovakia by outraging the Roma minority. „We have incredibly distorted our unemployment figures by the huge number of Roma we have in Slovakia. We know very well that these are people for whom it is difficult to find work, who are difficult to retrain, whose work habits and work discipline are very low. If we didn't have this problem, our unemployment is at maybe 8 or 9 percent.“ (SITA, 2013) The issue of Roma people in Slovakia has been resonating for many years. Part of the public agreed with this statement, while part of the experts warned of a possible rise in extremism because of this Robert Fico's statements. On reactions Robert Fico, The Gypsies, on the other hand, demanded an end to labelling in society because not everyone from the Roma minority in Slovakia is not working.

### Statements of Igor Matovič

Another verbal attack was addressed to MEP Monika Beňová. „I don't like such whores who show off for other people's money and make a fool of themselves. Any honest working woman who lives off her honestly earned money is a thousand times more human to me than such filthy thieving plastic ogres.“ (FB Igor Matovič, 2017) She had previously described him as a "vindictive, bitter wretch". Even though Monika Beňová made an unpleasant remark about him, such a statement is not worthy of a decent person. A politician should be careful in his statements and should not insult the opposite sex as Igor Matovič did. This statement was condemned by many people. They admitted that they do not like Monika Beňová, but this is already over the line.

### Relationship with journalists of Robert Fico

„Mass media always play an essential role in influencing public opinion.“ (Laczko, Lincényi 2020) It is characteristic of Robert Fico that he has specific relations with journalists. In 1998, when he was a member of the Slovak National Assembly for the SDE, he preached the independence of the media. He was a supporter of independent news coverage by the Markiza television station. „We understand freedom of expression not only as spreading

positive and beautiful information. Freedom of expression is also the dissemination of critical, sometimes shocking information. And that is what it takes for Markiza to fully realise such freedom of expression, as it is understood throughout Europe.“ (Mikušovič, 2016) His relationship with the media has evolved and escalated to hatred of certain media. In 2008, he even named media outlets that Robert Fico has long considered to be anti-government. "I want to ask Pravda, Sme and TA3 to stop behaving like prostitutes.“ (Čorej, 2008)

### Absence of ethics in politics

The fact that Igor Matovič and some rules and principles do not go together can be examined in relation to the change of the Rules of Procedure in the plenary of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic. From the beginning, he was reluctant to submit to the changes that the Rules of Procedure represented. A politician should not only act within the framework of the Code of Conduct, but he should also act and present himself in public. The fact that politicians should dress like politicians have been respected by probably all members of the Slovak Parliament in the history of the independent Slovak Republic. They used to go to work in suits until the arrival of Igor Matovič to the Parliament. Matovič wears a suit to parliament one day and a T-shirt with the inscription "Fico protects thieves" on the other. This not only violates the etiquette of dressing up but also belittles the dignity of politicians. This defamatory writing on a T-shirt is an attack on one of the three highest constitutional officials that should not be represented in a modern democracy and certainly should not be taken to be okay.

### Development of political credibility Robert Fico

To help understand the evolution of political credibility, We use the results of surveys conducted by Focus, an agency that has been studying the credibility of politicians since 1993. The results of the Focus research can be found in the appendix of this book. Since 2000, Robert Fico has almost continuously, with minor interruptions, been at the top of the credibility rankings. In 2002 and 2016 he was in second place, then in 2017, he was in the

first place together with the President of the Slovak Republic. Paradoxically, a rather large part of the population takes him as the opposite of a trustworthy politician, because the dissatisfaction of citizens is reflected in the form of constantly organised protests against Robert Fico and his policies. In 2013, when Smer-SD formed the government on its own, up to 45% of the public, i.e. almost half, distrusted politics and political representatives. Trust in that year was low because this period was associated with the period of "mečiarism" when only one person decided everything and had almost all the power. Despite this, Robert Fico was named the most trusted politician this year. At the end of January 2018, Robert Fico was the second most trusted politician, surpassed by the President of the Slovak Republic, Andrej Kiska. Based on the data collected, it can be said that negative manifestations in the form of statements or actions in politics do not fundamentally affect his credibility.

### **Igor Matovič**

To assess the development of Igor Matovič's political credibility, We will again use the results of Focus polls. In 2011, 3% of people trusted Igor Matovič. A year later, the trust had climbed to 9%. In this year, parliamentary elections were held, so Igor Matovič was able to raise his profile and so a wider circle of people was able to get to know his vision for the functioning of the country. In 2013, his political credibility dropped to 7%, and the following year it dropped by another one percent. In 2015, Matovič began pointing out various scandals of the then government and started wearing a T-shirt to parliament with the title "Fico protects thieves". That year, his credibility rose to 8%. In 2016, parliamentary elections were held, and Igor Matovič's strategy was to defeat Fico and rid the country of the oligarchs. Igor Matovič and opposition political representatives wanted to fold the government. The government was eventually formed by Smer - SD, but Igor Matovič secured the highest level of credibility he has ever had, up to 13%. In 2017, the same percentage of respondents trusted him. In January 2018, 10.1% of those polled trusted him. From these available data, it can be concluded that the credibility of Igor Matovič was slightly increasing. AltBANÁŠ, J. 2015. Dementi. 1. Vyd. Bratislava : Ikar, 2015. 252 s. ISBN 978-80-551-4547-1

though there was a little drop of less than 3% in January 2018.

## **5 Conclusion**

At the beginning of the paper, I assumed that despite the negative speeches of the selected politicians, their political credibility is not fundamentally diminished. Based on the results provided by Focus, the hypothesis was confirmed. Robert Fico has always been the most trusted politician since 2000 - 2018. Except for two years when he was in second place. Igor Matovic's credibility had a growing tendency, later it stabilised and his political credibility is around 10%. It can be concluded that despite the negative speeches by selected politicians, their political credibility is not decreasing. The second hypothesis was the increased incidence of negative talk among the politicians in question. The hypothesis can be considered confirmed as the number of negative speeches increased for these politicians from 2013 to 2018. This may be caused by the relationship between Robert Fico and Igor Matovič because many negative speeches have arisen from the conflict between them.

Describing and analysing negative manifestations in politics and also discussing aspects of credibility on a professional level is not very sufficient. There are many scholarly articles or books on certain aspects of credibility such as ethics or political culture. However, the tabloids in Slovakia are the most devoted to this topic, pointing out either negative manifestations or the established rules of behaviour of politicians in politics. There is a lot of unanswered questions on this topic and a lot of room for further analysis and research on this issue. A possible comparison of Slovak politicians with politicians from abroad could be made in this area. In this way, a more effective measure of political culture in Slovakia could be ascertained. Also, we have not discussed all aspects of credibility in this research. There is room for other aspects such as politician's beliefs, psyche, intelligence, emotions, values and so on in other works.

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