

# INVERSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN WESTERN SLOVAKIA

Marián BUŠŠA<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ss. Trenčín University of Alexander Dubček in Trenčín, Department of Political Science, Študentská 2, 974 01, Trenčín, Slovak Republic.*

\* Corresponding author E-mail address: marian.bussa@tnuni.sk

## Abstract

This paper argues that in the three regions in Western Slovakia, there is an inverse relationship between level of social capital and level of electoral participation. We first show our data on levels of social capital in three regions with centers in Trenčín, Trnava and Nitra and discuss how we can also get data for individual districts. Subsequently we compare these data with levels of electoral participation in the parliamentary election of 2012 and 2016. We find that at the level of five natural regional units the inverse relationship is quite significant. At the level of 30 districts the inverse relationship is significant only if we do not include the three atypical districts of regional capitals. These have high levels of both social capital and electoral participation. We suggest that the inverse relationship is a consequence of different patterns of political culture in the natural regions.

**Key words:** social capital, electoral participation, civic associations, natural regions, Western Slovakia

## 1 Introduction

In the classic understanding of social capital, there is no reason for electoral participation to behave inversely to other civic activism indicators. Where people tend to participate more in public space activities, they can be expected to also vote more actively. But when we were looking into data on social capital, which we have been collecting for the natural regions of Western Slovakia (Bušša 2017), we noticed, that this does not seem to be the case there. Quite the opposite. In the regions with the lowest levels of social capital, such as the Hornonitiransky region, the electoral participation was generally very high and vice versa. Therefore, we decided to compare this relationship more closely.

## 2 Social Capital Values for Western Slovakia

In our previous research (Bušša 2017) we measured social capital in three official regional units of Western Slovakia with centers in Trenčín, Nitra and Trnava. These form together the NUTS 2 region Western Slovakia. We tried to get data for smaller territorial units, since the official regional units are too big and too heterogeneous. Therefore we evaluated the levels for five so-called natural regions, which respect geographical divisions better and also for individual districts of Western Slovakia.

Our measurement was twofold:

1. complex measuring of social capital using secondary data analysis,
2. alternative measuring by density of the network of civic society organizations.

Both values were then compared. Since both were trying to measure the same thing using alternative methods, we expected, that if the measurement would be correct, the results should be similar.

## 3 Complex Measuring of Social Capital Using Secondary Data Analysis

The much more thorough method of the two we used was secondary analysis of the data collected in ISSP Slovensko 2014 social research. The data available gave us access to very wide spectrum of behavioral indicators as well as attitudes towards various aspects of civic life and associated values of inhabitants. Social capital values were counted for each of the three regional units (VUC). However it did not provide data for smaller parts of the territory.

The model of social capital took into consideration various indicators of:

- interpersonal trust,
- trust towards the government,
- various measurements of civic activism,
- degree of associating,
- values of citizens.

There were over a hundred respondents from each of the three regions. Together their answers gave us a complex weighted result for social capital levels of the three regions. The highest social capital was in the Trnava region, then in Nitra region and the lowest was in the Trenčín region.

#### 4 Measuring by Density of the Network of CSOs

A separate measuring using density of the network of civic society organizations (CSOs) was also conducted. We included all four types of CSOs in Slovakia: civic associations, foundations, nonprofit organizations and non-investment funds. Civic associations represented waste majority of all CSOs, being the most common and least regulated type of civic society organizations.

This data had the advantage of being available for much smaller units – individual districts in Western Slovakia. There was thirty districts within the studied territory, distributed relatively evenly between the three regions. The data showed similar results. The highest level was in the Trnava region, followed by the Nitra region and Trenčín region had the lowest level of CSO density. When we looked at the lower level of five natural regions, we could see, that the lowest level was in the Hornonitriansky region (with 0,0055 CSO/inhabitant), followed by both Trenčiansky and Komárňanský regions at 0,0071 CSO/inhabitant and highest levels were in Trnavský region (with 0,0078) and Nitriansko-tekovský at 0,0080 CSO/inhabitant. The average for Western Slovakia was just above the level of Trenčiansky and Komárňanský regions at 0,0072.

**Table 1** Density of the network of civic associations, nonprofit organizations, non-investment funds, foundations and civic society organizations by districts and natural regions

District, region	No. of CA	No. of NO	No. of F	No. of NF	Total no. of CSO	Inhabitants	CSO/1 inhab.
Považská Bystrica	396	16	3	2	417	63 263	0,0066
Púchov	236	6	2	3	247	44 596	0,0055
Ilava	340	9	2	7	358	60 428	0,0059
Trenčín	975	46	7	13	1041	113 662	0,0092
Nové Mesto nad Váhom	403	10	2	2	417	62 468	0,0067
Myjava	169	7	0	0	176	27 229	0,0065
<b>Trenčiansky region total</b>	<b>2519</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2656</b>	<b>371 646</b>	<b>0,0071</b>
Prievidza	790	31	6	3	830	137 050	0,0061
Partizánske	220	9	0	10	239	46 735	0,0051
Bánovce nad Bebravou	168	8	1	5	182	36 963	0,0049
Topoľčany	354	9	3	4	370	71 847	0,0051
<b>Hornonitriansky region</b>	<b>1532</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1621</b>	<b>292 595</b>	<b>0,0055</b>
Skalica	305	10	0	3	318	46 887	0,0068
Senica	387	16	1	0	404	60 686	0,0067
Trnava	1107	38	10	18	1173	129 705	0,009
Galanta	616	19	7	2	644	93 623	0,0069
Hlohovec	288	5	2	0	295	45 682	0,0065
Piešťany	566	16	2	4	588	63 141	0,0093
<b>Trnavský region total</b>	<b>3269</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3422</b>	<b>439 724</b>	<b>0,0078</b>
Nitra	1411	48	14	6	1479	160 040	0,0092
Zlaté Moravce	283	7	1	9	300	41 251	0,0073
Levice	695	29	3	2	729	113 913	0,0064
<b>Nitriansko-tekovský region total</b>	<b>2389</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2508</b>	<b>315 204</b>	<b>0,008</b>
Komárno	737	55	8	26	826	103 709	0,008
Dunajská Streda	915	23	9	9	956	117 884	0,0081
Nové Zámky	818	29	5	14	866	142 964	0,0061
Šaľa	320	5	3	2	330	52 938	0,0062
<b>Komárňanský region</b>	<b>2790</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>2978</b>	<b>417 495</b>	<b>0,0071</b>
<b>WESTERN SLOVAKIA</b>	<b>12499</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>13185</b>	<b>1 836 664</b>	<b>0,0072</b>

*Source* Register OZ, NO, NF, F Ministerstva vnútra SR, 2017; Krivý, V. a kol. ISSP Slovensko 2014; calculations of the author

#### 4.1 Comparison of the Results

We compared the results from both researches and found that relative data for the three official regional units are almost identical with very high correlation of 0.999. That supports validity of their respective results. Both methods seem to lead to the same relative levels of social capital in the three official regions.

**Table 2** The correlation between the density of the network of civic society organizations and the amount of social capital in the regions

Region (VUC)	Density of civic society organizations	Value of social capital
Trenčiansky	6,2	3,98
Trnavský	7,5	5,95
Nitriansky	6,7	4,66

*Source* Register OZ, NO, NF, F Ministerstva vnútra SR, 2017; Krivý, V. a kol. ISSP Slovensko 2014; calculations of the author

#### 5 Inverse Relationship Between Levels of Social Capital and Electoral Participation

The social capital theory suggests that electoral participation in general election should rise along with the level of social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993). Electoral participation is one of the behavioral indicators of participation and activism and therefore of social capital. Which is why it was interesting to found that social capital levels and electoral participation levels seem to have inverse relationship in Western Slovakia when comparing the data for the five natural regions.

**Table 3** Correlation between the density of networks of civic associations, non-profit organizations, foundations, non-investment funds and electoral participation by natural regions

Natural region	Social capital	El. participation 2012-2016 (average)	Correlation
Komárňanský region	0,0071	55,5	
Trnavský region	0,0078	59,15	
Nitriansko-tekovský region	0,008	60,91	
Trenčiansky region	0,0071	62,3	
Hornonitriansky region	0,0055	62,36	
			-0,3163

*Source* Register OZ, NO, NF, F Ministerstva vnútra SR, 2017; Krivý, V. a kol. ISSP Slovensko 2014; SO SR, calculations of the author

When we make a comparison at the level of 30 districts, the correlation is much weaker, because the three capital cities of official regions (Trenčín, Nitra and Trnava) have both the highest levels of social capital and high levels of electoral participation. Without the three capital cities, however, the correlation is -0,27643, which is again quite significant. We consider this an interesting finding and suggest that this relationship is subject of further research.

#### 6 Conclusion

The assumption, given by the theory of social capital, that higher social capital means, among other things, higher electoral participation of citizens, has not been confirmed here. The measured values of electoral participation were entirely different. Generally they went against previously measured values of social capital rather than confirming them.

This is related to how these two results - the highest civic activity and participation and very low political participation - can be reconciled. In relation to the data we analyzed, we suggest the interpretation that there are two specific patterns of political culture. The pattern of paternalism, particularly pronounced in Hornonitriansky and less so in the Trenčiansky region, links low to average values of social capital with high electoral participation and high support for paternalistic political parties. The inhabitants of these regions seem to attribute a relatively large protective and regulatory role to the state and a relatively passive role to the citizen, who can enter the public space, organize and realize his own vision, but for the good functioning of society it is far from perceived as

necessary. This is linked to the greater responsibility of the citizens of these regions for their participation in elections, which is taken as their main input into the political system. This also seems to be related to the regional preference of parties that perceive the role of the state in society as relatively significant.

On the contrary, regions with higher to medium levels of social capital in the central horizontal strip of Western Slovakia and in the southern districts of Dunajská Streda and Komárno have a relatively lower preference of paternalist parties and a higher preference of citizens' parties, and we could talk about more pronounced citizenship pattern here. This is surprisingly linked to the low and continuing declining electoral participation in parliamentary elections. It may be argued that this is to a certain extent related to the greater orientation of citizens on organizing and self-help in these areas and the less perceived importance of electoral participation as a way to improve their situation and the overall situation in society. It points to a certain skepticism of the political system and what can be expected of it in these regions. In this respect, this reduces total regional social capital, since such an approach does not increase the chances of responsive and efficient public administration.

### References:

- [1] M. Bušša: Social Capital in Western Slovakia: Levels of Social Capital in Natural Regions of Western Slovakia. First edition. Tribun EU, Brno, 2017.
- [2] V. Krivý, et al.: ISSP Slovensko 2014, SASD 2014001. Krivý, Vladimír (vedúci riešiteľského tímu) Sopóci, Ján Chorvát, Ivan Gyárfášová, Oľga. [online] Available: <[http://sasd.sav.sk/sk/data\\_katalog\\_abs.php?id=sasd\\_2014001](http://sasd.sav.sk/sk/data_katalog_abs.php?id=sasd_2014001)> [cit. 2017-05-16].
- [3] Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky, sekcia verejnej správy: Register nadácií. [online] 2017. Available: <<http://www.ives.sk/registre/startrnd.do>> [cit. 2017-05-17].
- [4] Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky, sekcia verejnej správy: Evidencia občianskych združení. [online] 2017. Available: < <http://www.ives.sk/registre/startoz.do> > [cit. 2017-05-19].
- [5] Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky, sekcia verejnej správy: Register neinvestičných fondov. [online] 2017. Available: < <http://www.ives.sk/registre/starttrnf.do> > [cit. 2017-05-17].
- [6] Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky, sekcia verejnej správy: Register neziskových organizácií. [online] 2017. Available: < <http://www.ives.sk/registre/starttrno.do> > [cit. 2017-05-17].
- [7] R. D. Putnam, R. Leonardi, R. Y. Nanetti: Making Democracy Work. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.
- [8] M. Skovajsa: Politická kultura. Prístupy, kritiky, uplatnení ve zkoumání politiky. Karolinum, Praha, 2006.
- [9] D. Sloboda, O. Dostál: Župný variant. Návrh na zmenu územného členenia SR [online]. Bratislava: KI, 2005. Available: <[http://www.konzervativizmus.sk/upload/Zupny\\_variant\\_2005/KI\\_Zupny\\_variant\\_2005\\_text.pdf](http://www.konzervativizmus.sk/upload/Zupny_variant_2005/KI_Zupny_variant_2005_text.pdf)> [cit. 2017-05-21].