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**Consequences of Electoral reforms in Slovakia:  
Experimental Study**

*Pavol Baboš - Aneta Világi*

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## Consequences of Electoral reforms in Slovakia: Experimental Study

Pavol Baboš<sup>1</sup>, Aneta Világi<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract*

Policy-making in many areas is far from evidence-based. So are the changes of the core of democratic governance: election. In Slovakia, a change of electoral rules for parliamentary elections is suggested and discussed repeatedly in recent decades, without any foreseeable reform. On the other hand, the regional governors' electoral rules were changed rather swiftly, without a proper discussion. Our study contributes to the debate on the effects of electoral reforms on voting behavior and election results. The aim of this study is to investigate possible consequences of two relevant electoral reform proposals in Slovakia. Using experimental design we compare the effects of different electoral rules in parliamentary and regional elections. The findings reveal that people show little signs of increased strategic behavior in case of one-round majoritarian system, when compared to two round majoritarian system. Simulating parliamentary elections, we compared a list-based proportional system with the experimental, limited vote system. Our findings show that the latter decreases the electoral success of parties based on one strong leader, while still preserving relatively high degree of proportionality of the political system. Admittedly, our experiments used student samples and thus the generalization is not without limits, and discussed in the text. Yet, this study provides at least partial evidence on whether intended change of electoral rules in Slovakia can bring the expected results which are used as arguments in favor of the reforms.

*Keywords: electoral reform, strategic voting, experimental research, proportional electoral system, limited vote system, Slovakia*

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<sup>1</sup> Contact: [pavol.babos@uniba.sk](mailto:pavol.babos@uniba.sk), Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Gondova 2, 81499 Bratislava, Slovakia.

<sup>2</sup> Contact: [aneta.vilagi@uniba.sk](mailto:aneta.vilagi@uniba.sk), Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Gondova 2, 81499 Bratislava, Slovakia.

## *Introduction*

Study of electoral institutions and their relation to political behavior preoccupies political scientists for almost over a half of century dating back from Duverger (1951) to most recent works of Dewan and Hortala-Vallve (2017) or Fiva and Folke (2016). The interest in the topic has been constantly fueled by attempts of various political actors to introduce changes in their respective electoral systems and by public debates on the most appropriate one<sup>3</sup>. As the elections are core political action in liberal democracies (Dahl 1995; Schumpeter 2004), the efforts to introduce changes in electoral formula should not be treated lightly. The way in which votes are translated into seats results in some groups participating on policy-making processes while others are marginalized, or even ruled out.

Despite the different contexts in which similar debates have occurred, two main arguments for the change could be detected. The first one points at necessity to increase the democratic principle of representativeness of the political system and thus, it pushes for more proportional electoral systems. The second one puts the political accountability into its core and thus, it prefers majoritarian system with close ties between the representative and his/her electorate.

Since early 1990s, debates on electoral reform had also taken place in Slovakian political discourse with varying intensity of the issue salience and only limited success in introducing real changes. Surprisingly, while there is almost two decades of debating the parliamentary elections reform with no real change in foresight, the regional electoral rules were significantly changed only recently in 2017 without a proper discussion.

In our study, we provide an estimate of what can one expect should the electoral rules be changed in the direction of discussed intentions. Thus we aim to contribute to current knowledge on the impact of institutional changes upon electoral results by investigating strategic voting behavior in an experimental manner.

The following part of our paper reviews the up-to-date knowledge and empirical testing in this area of study. Subsequently we introduce readers to the Slovakian debates on electoral reforms. In the methodological section we describe the experimental design of our two studies. What follows is the analysis of our experiments and discussion of findings.

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<sup>3</sup> For example: 2003 Norwegian municipal electoral reform or 2015 Italian general electoral reform. See also recent Canadian debate over the electoral reform.

## *Electoral systems*

Electoral formulas have significant impact on election results but also on party system and electoral behavior as such. Growing academic literature on the consequences of electoral formula for electoral outcomes helps us to understand, predict and explain certain results or behavior of actors participating in elections. Since Duverger (1951), political scientists distinguish between mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems on election results but also on party system of the given country.

The mechanical effect of the electoral system is activated after the vote itself and refers to the transformation of votes into parliamentary seats. On the other hand, psychological effects occur before or during the vote and they are connected with strategic consideration. While mechanical consequences influence primarily political parties, psychological effects encompass strategic behavior on the part of both the political actors and citizens. (Blais et al. 2011; Cox 1997)

For example, proportional representation system with low threshold provides more favorable conditions for multiparty system because even votes for minor parties could be effectively translated into seats (mechanical effect of proportional system). Thus, there are no psychological incentives to block small parties from participating in elections and no incentives for voters to implement strategic voting in order not to waste their vote. However, increased number of political parties getting the seats also pushes for coalition-building. Coalition government is generally considered to be less accountable due to difficulties with addressing the political responsibility (Fisher & Hobolt 2010; Powell 2000). According to this view, citizens have more difficulties to assess who perform well (which political party) and who should be punished in upcoming elections in case of coalition government. Additionally, as most proportional systems use mechanisms in which voters choose rather concrete political party than a particular candidate, citizens might perceive a limited ability to control their representatives in parliament. Such ability is vested rather in the hands of political parties themselves.

On the other hand, disproportionality between seats and votes in plurality systems (mechanical effect) provides incentive not only for minor political parties not to run in the elections but it also spur the feeling among voters of non-winning party that their vote does not matter, so they are less likely to vote (Karp & Banducci 2008) or would use their vote more strategically. As Duverger (1951) already pointed out, they would abandon their first choice and vote strategically for the candidate they prefer among the top two. Such assumption is valid mainly

for the one round (or simple) majoritarian system. If the system is based on two-round majoritarian election, Duverger implied that voters act strategically only in the second round and cast their sincere preferences in the first ballot. However, Cox (1997) asserts that the difference in psychological effect of one round and two rounds in the majoritarian system is not extensive and people do vote strategically even in the the first round of the two round systems. The assumption was empirically tested and confirmed also by Blais et al. (2007).

Combining the mechanical and psychological effects of plurality systems, the number of political parties gaining parliamentary seats is rather low and as a result the single-party government is formed. This is connected with other significant psychological impact of the majoritarian electoral systems. They promote sense of citizen control over policymakers. (Powell & Whitten 1993) Single-party government increase legibility of politics as they allowed simple assessment of whom to hold responsible for governmental policies. Majoritarian systems also most often use single-member districts. In this system, voters cast a ballot for an individual candidate, which promotes closer personal tie between the voters and elected representative. Plurality systems help promote accountability as popular “voice” has more room for electoral democratic control over the politician behavior.

Generally, elections present sanctioning mechanism through which the accountability is performed in retrospective manner and electoral formulas have indirect impact on the way government is created and how difficult it is to assess who should be hold responsible for possible failures. The core debate concerns whether a country should adopt majoritarian electoral system that produces more governmental stability and better political accountability (Horowitz 2003; Sartori 1997) or rather to opt for proportional electoral system that better mirrors diversity of social representation and provides greater fairness for minor political parties (Lijphard 2004; Powell 2000).

### *Slovakian discussions on electoral system change*

Debates and proposals for a change of electoral rules in the parliamentary elections in Slovakia are regularly popping up and re-emerging by various members of political elite. Currently, representatives to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (national parliament) are elected using a list-based proportional representation system with a 5% national threshold with the whole country constituting a single electoral district (Fitzmaurice 2004).

In 1997 the main coalition party led by Vladimir Meciar suggested a change from the proportional representation with party list system to majority election system from which the HZDS-LS as the political party with dominant position<sup>4</sup> would have clearly benefited (Deegan-Krause 2006). As the then Prime Minister did not received the support for his electoral reform proposal neither from other coalition partners (Slovak National Party and the Slovak Workers' Association), the proportional list system remained valid. However, a few rather substantial changes were passed in 1998 which turned the whole country in one electoral district (from previously four districts) and increased the threshold for coalitions as amendment to election law required that each member of a multiparty coalition reach a 5 percent threshold<sup>5</sup> to gain seats in parliament<sup>6</sup>. Due to electoral changes, the position of parties' broader leadership has increased at the expense of individual representatives and that has decreased the possibility of people to hold politicians accountable.

Support for the electoral system change re-emerged before the 2002 parliamentary elections. The New Citizen Alliance (ANO) listed two points regarding the electoral reform in their electoral manifesto. One of the points suggested introduction of the majority election system. (SME 2002a). Christian democrats (SDKU), the then Prime Minister's party also suggested in their electoral manifesto that the party "will try to improve dignity of the Slovak parliament and authority of the elected representatives of the people. The way to achieve this is the direct election of the MPs. Removal of the party lists and introduction of the direct link between voters and their particular MP will lead to non-anonymous relationships, substantial increase in quality of the legislative assembly..." (SME 2002b) Both SDKU and ANO became members of the 2002-2006 coalition government; however, they did not deliver on the promise to change the electoral system. Since then, the idea of electoral reform resurfaces more or less in regular time intervals. Meciar's HZDS-LS proposed introduction of the majority election system again in 2005 (Majchrak 2005), current Prime Minister Fico suggested the same in 2012 (TASR 2012), a presidential candidate Behyl (in the 2014 presidential election campaign) promoted the idea in 2013 (SITA 2013), and lastly the majority election system was advocated by the then MP Daniel Lipsic in May 2014 (Aktuality 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> The HZDS-LS received 35% of popular votes and gain 61 (out of 150) seats in National Parliament in previous general elections (1994). Thus, the HZDS-LS electoral result was only slightly worse than in 1992 parliamentary elections in which party received 37,2% of votes and gained 74 seats.

<sup>5</sup> In parliamentary elections prior to 1998, the treshold was limited by 5% for an individual parties, 7% for coalitions of two or three parties and 10% for coalitions of four and more parties.

<sup>6</sup> These thresholds were subsequently found to be unconstitutional by the Slovakian Constitutional Court and were consequently struck down in 1999.

In addition to majoritarian electoral system, semi proportional (Prochazka 2012) and mixed (Radicova 2010) electoral systems were also suggested, usually by politicians on the opposition benches at the time in question.

The main argument in favour of the majoritarian or mixed election system has been articulated as bringing representatives closer to the people and making them more accountable<sup>7</sup>. This idea has repeated in most of discussions. However, the PR electoral system was never changed and the whole country is still one electoral district. Conservation of these electoral rules is criticized because of helping large, stable parties with a strong centralized leadership. In relation to the candidate list construction, Rybar writes about “increase of centralization in candidate’s choice after 1998. This is related to the introduction of one country – one district rule, which undermined the basics of regional organizations’ autonomy” (2011: 59). This is a likely reason why parties are not pushing for the change once in government.

Regional governors’ election reform presents an opposite case. While poorly explained and discussed only for short period of time, the law has been amended relatively quickly. Until 2017, the elections of regional governors were based on two-round majoritarian system. In case a candidate won the absolute majority of votes (over half) s/he was declared the winner. If none of the candidates reached the majority, two candidates receiving the most votes continue in the second round and the one with the most of the votes assumed the office. The 2017 reform introduced one-round plurality elections whereby the candidate with the most votes wins. As the law amendment was proposed by MPs, there was no legal requirement to submit a report explaining the proposed changes (as it is the case in law drafts proposed by government). Therefore we can only analyze arguments used by the MPs defending the amendment in media. Decision to cancel the second round and introduce only single round election was based on two arguments. First, the proponents argued that the second round is usually attracting fewer voters than the first one and thus it is not contributing to higher legitimacy. Second, the second round is costly and having just the first round would have saved 2.4 million euros in 2013 election (TASR 2016). Consequently, the conclusion was there would be no harm in legitimacy, while bringing financial benefits to the state budget if the second round is abandoned. The President of the Slovak Republic contested the reasoning and vetoed the law (Office of the President of

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<sup>7</sup> Mikuš & Gurňák (2014) argue that proportional system with one electoral district leads to unbalanced representation in Slovakia. For example, in 2012 elections, proportion of deputies elected from the Bratislava region reached 32,7% of parliament (49 seats) while Bratislava has only approximately 8,8% of the whole population.

the Slovak Republic 2017). President argued that such a change in the electoral year is “political” and “ill-purpose-led” and the reasoning based on low turnout in the second round is not sound as the first round scores similarly low turnout. However, the parliament overrode the president’s veto and passed the law amendment.

Debates on the change of electoral rules regarding the parliamentary elections, and the actual change in regional elections led us to formulation of the following research questions. First, will there be a significant change in election results, if the parliamentary electoral rules allow more personal choice of representatives? Second, will there be different results and more voters’ strategic decision-making in case of regional election change?

To answer the research questions, we have designed two experimental studies. In the first one, we narrowed our attention to national, parliamentary election. In the second one we focused on the regional governors’ election. By definition, a laboratory experiment will never reflect natural circumstances of election including all its details such as campaign dynamics. On the other hand, we designed our experiments in the way to come as close to reality as possible. Detailed description of our studies follows in the next section.

### ***Methodology***

We focus our research on the impact of electoral systems on voting behavior and election results. There might be also impact of such rules on political parties and candidates, who can choose to participate or to not participate in the run or might seek for strategic alliances and so on. However, our research focuses solely on whether voters behave differently under the two, original and reformed electoral systems, given the same set of options.

This research use university students as participants. Students received 3 ECTS credits for participating in our experiments. Use of students is increasingly more debated issue, particularly in regard to generalization of the experimental findings. Especially differences between students and the adult population is the most questionable point.

Using student samples in experimental research in social science is far from being rare. Kam et al. (2007) studied experimental articles in top three American political science journals (American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, and the Journal of Politics) between 1990 and 2006 and found that one quarter of articles based on experimentation



used student samples. Morton and Williams (2010) point out that student samples are even more common in political psychology. During the same timeframe, around 75% of experimental articles in the *Political Psychology and Political Behavior* used students as participants. Danielson and Holm (2007) found out that in the experimental economic research in top American journals only one in 15 articles does not use students as sample.

Several methodological studies show, that even if demographic differences between student samples and non-student samples are obvious, the way they make decisions is not affected (Wang & Jentsch 1998). Other scholars point out that use of student samples is appropriate especially if there is no specific target population, such as voting experiments (Bassi 2006; Cassela et al. 2008).

Based on the reasons above, we believe using student sample is acceptable, given the research design and research questions. Further methodological details of individual experimental studies follow.

### ***Study 1: Parliamentary election***

The aim in the first study was to explore how a change in election rules will affect the voters' decisions, which subsequently affects the composition of the parliament. We recruited 106 university students as participants. First, students voted in simulated online elections according to the electoral rules valid at the time of vote, i.e. proportional representation with closed party lists and the whole country being one district. In a week period students voted in person in simulated elections that were guided by new electoral rules. We chose a semi proportional system which is based on proportional principle but provides for personalized choice and built-in personal accountability, since voters opt for concrete candidates and not for the political party. It shares the most characteristics with *limited vote system*<sup>8</sup> but it also reflects specific Slovakian (historical, cultural) context and the determinants posed by experimental design of its using. For the sake of simplicity and easier understanding, we designed a system in which the whole

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<sup>8</sup> *Limited vote* system presents in some regard an original category within electoral systems. There is only limited number of countries in which it is adopted at national level (f.e. Gibraltar, Spain – upper house of the parliament). This system provides also for proportionality at the district level and at the same time it allows for more personalised vote of representatives. (Farrell 2001, Chytilek et al. 2009) It is a „candidate-centred electoral system used in multi-member districts in which electors have more than one vote, but fewer votes than there are candidates to be elected. The candidates with the highest vote totals win the seats.“ (Reynolds et al. 2008, p. 117).

country constitutes a single electoral district. Voter has fewer votes than there are seats to be filled. Participants were explained that they can choose from 1 to 10 candidates regardless of the political party. Participants had to write names of their choice in order of preference, i.e. stating the most preferred candidate on the first place, second most preferred candidate on the second place, and so on. Participants had a list of over 200 candidates to consult in the electoral booth.

When designing the study we had to make compromises so that the experimental vote is different enough from the current electoral system, but at the same time we needed the experimental conditions to be realistic enough for participants to understand and cooperate. Therefore we preserved a single district as it would have been impossible to simulate several districts and thus not allow participants to vote for their most preferred candidates. Also the list of candidates was based on candidate lists of all relevant political parties running in the 2016 parliamentary election in Slovakia. In reality, we would not know who would be the district party leaders should there be more than one district.

The votes were then counted in the following way. The most preferred candidate on a participant's list (in other words, the top candidate) received ten points, the second most preferred candidate received nine points, the third candidate on a list received eight points, etc. Based on participants' ballots, we constructed the newly elected parliament's party composition, according to the elected representatives and their party affiliations.

### ***Study 2: Regional election***

In the second study our goal was to explore whether people would change their voting strategies after the electoral rules have been changed. The experimental manipulation copied the actual change in the rules of Slovakian regional election. First, all participants voted in a simulated regional election according to the old rules, i.e. two-round majority vote. More than a week later the participants gathered again and were randomly assigned to two groups. Group 1 proceeded with the old rules and voted in the second round of simulated regional elections. However, Group 2 was told that the rules have changed and they have to vote again, according to the first-past-the-vote (FPTP) rules. Participants in the second group were explained the change. Precisely, that there is only one round and that the candidate with most votes will become the regional governor. Total number of participants was 105 and they were university

students. We were not able to present participants with a list of candidate corresponding to their actual region of origin for several reasons. First, taking into account the number of participants and the fact that there are eight self-governing regions in Slovakia, we would risk too low sample size for a meaningful analysis. Second, names of candidates were not known at the time of experiment for most of the regions. As the experiment required real names of real candidates, we selected the region of Banska Bystrica, which is the most monitored region by media and citizens throughout the whole country<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to general instructions, participants in the second group were also shown opinion survey indicating which candidate is leading the race, who has a solid chance to defeat the poll leader and who has no chance according to the polls. By showing this survey, we wanted to indicate that voting for certain candidates in the lower positions of the poll would mean voting for somebody without a real chance of winning. Thus, strategically behaving voter should opt for the candidate from the first ranks to maximize the influence over election outcome.

## ***Findings***

### ***Study 1: Parliamentary election***

The experimental design of Study 1 allowed participants to choose candidates among different political parties in its second vote. The overwhelming majority of participants (more than 90%) used this opportunity and indeed chose candidates across political parties (with a considerable number of participants choosing across the government-opposition line). Acknowledging the limits of generalizability, we argue that this still might indicate that voters in Slovakia would welcome more free choice of their political representation without necessary party bounds.

Results of the simulated parliamentary election are showed in the table 1. We present differences between parties' percentage gains in the two tested electoral systems<sup>10</sup>. What the experimental study is interested in is the difference between what a party scores under two

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<sup>9</sup> The reason is that Marian Kotleba, leader of extreme right party won the election in 2013 and is running for the second term. This attracted much more media attention than in any other region, which makes the rest of candidates running against the incumbent Kotleba rather known to the whole nation.

<sup>9</sup> We see no point in presenting the actual results of students' vote as this is not the main focus of experimental manipulation.

<sup>10</sup> We see no point in presenting the actual results of students' vote as this is not the main focus of experimental manipulation.

various electoral rules. Next to the election results difference is the indicator of statistical significance, the p-value based on one sample t-test.

**Table 1**

*Election Results. Difference between PR and Limited Vote, in %*

Party	Difference	T-test
	Experimental v. Real	p-value
Smer-Social Democracy (Smer-SD)	4.55%	0.020
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)	-2.73%	0.283
Common People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO)	1.82%	0.312
Slovak National Party (SNS)	-8.18%	0.001
Kotleba – Peoples Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – ĽSNS)	-2.12%	0.033
We Are Family (Sme rodina)	-4.85%	0.033
Bridge (Most-Híd)	3.94%	0.007
Christian-democratic Movement (KDH)	-1.82%	0.079
Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK)	-0.91%	0.160
Independent*	14,85%	

Note: In case of independent candidates it is not possible to conduct t-test, as there is no value to compare with, since there are no independent candidates in the PR system.

Source: Authors

The results show three groups of parties. First, there are political parties that significantly increased their electoral gains in the experimental, open election system (close to limited vote system). Social democrats (Smer-SD) and also party bridging Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians (Most-Híd) present such examples. These parties could be described as parties with rather damaged reputation<sup>11</sup> on the one hand, but are represented by many reputable, politically strong personalities. Second, there are political parties that resemble a party owned and

<sup>11</sup> At the time of experiment conduction, the societal discourse had been still preoccupied by various corruption cases connected with the previous government of SMER-SD. Part of this damaged reputation was also transferred to Most-Híd after it became a part of the government coalition (spring 2016).

represented by one man, the party leader, and they also bear the leader's name in the party name (Kollar, Kotleba). These parties lost considerably in the experimental, limited vote system. The possible explanation is that since the party leader is the only well-known representative of the party, limited vote system can only secure a mandate to him and not to other party members, as is the case in the PR system. Third, there are parties that gained approximately the same proportion of votes in both systems, mainly OLaNO-NOVA and SaS. We argue that this low, close to zero difference is possible when there is little discrepancy between the party reputation and amount of strong political personalities within a party. In such cases the party is equipped to do well in both PR and open electoral systems.

In addition to party results, our experiment shows also that the opportunity to vote for independent candidates outside political parties is not a negligible feature of the limited vote system. In our experimental vote, almost 15 per cent of mandates were taken by candidates independent from political parties.

### ***Study 2: Regional election***

As explained in the methodological section, the experimental manipulation copied the March 2017 change in the rules of Slovakian regional election which introduced one round, first-past-the-post rule. In our experiment all participants first voted in a simulated regional election according to the old rules, i.e. two-round majority vote. More than a week later the participants gathered again and were randomly assigned to two groups. Group 1 proceeded with the old rules and voted in the second round of simulated regional elections. However, Group 2 was told that the rules have changed and they have to vote again, according to the first-past-the-vote (FPTP) rules.

The results of the first group's vote are not surprising. Table 2 shows the votes in absolute numbers, with the 1<sup>st</sup> round votes in rows and the 2<sup>nd</sup> round votes in columns. There were also two invalid votes in the second round, shown in the third column, next to Klus' and Lunter's gains. The candidate who won the first round was also able to secure the most votes in the second round. There were 22 participants whose candidate did not succeed to the second round. Their votes were almost equally split between the first two candidates (12:9).

**Table 2:***Regional Election Votes for Group 1*

		2 <sup>nd</sup> round			
		Klus	Lunter	Invalid votes	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> round	Klus	20	0	1	21
	Lunter	0	10	0	10
	Micev	3	4	0	7
	Dubacova	5	2	1	8
	Kotleba	3	3	0	6
	Urbani	1	0	0	1
	Total	32	19	0	53

Source: Authors

Group 2 voted according to the new rules, one round first-past-the-post. Before the act of vote, they were presented with opinion polls indicating the preferences of individual candidates, and thus the chances to win the office. The opinion poll we presented to participants is shown below.

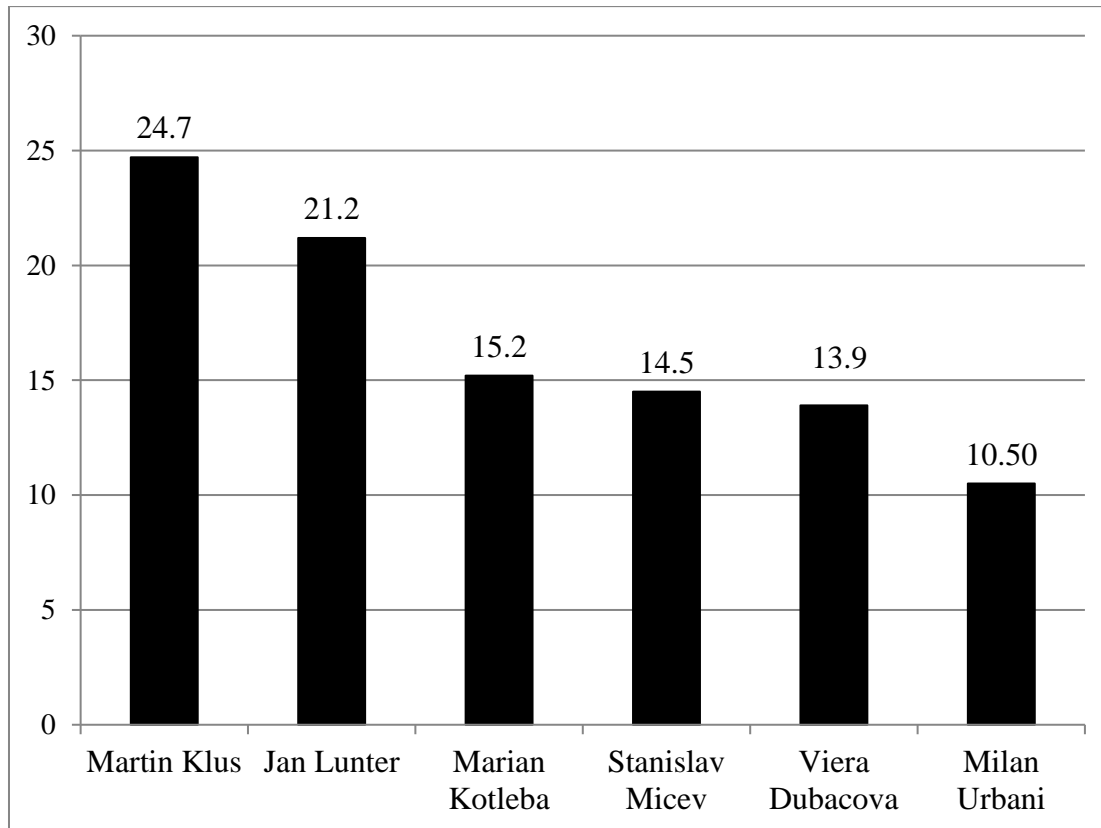
By presenting the polls, our intention was to insinuate that the last four candidates are considerably less likely to win the race. Thus, if there is any strategy to choose, it is to support one of the two leading candidates in according with Duverger's anticipation.

Results of Group 2 show, however, that very few participants voted different from their previously measured preference<sup>12</sup>. In total, 41 of 52 participants in the experimental group voted the same as previously in the first round of the two-round majority vote system. Twelve participants stuck to their preferred candidate, despite the polls indicating they have very little chance of success. Other ten participants changed their mind in the way that they still voted for a candidate with no chance winning according to the polls. Such results are not in line with expectations of a strategic vote, which would push participants into voting for one of the two leading candidates.

<sup>12</sup> We derive the original preference for Group 2 from the first vote under the two round majority vote rules, as there are no assumptions for strategic vote and we assume participants to vote according their honest preferences in the first round

**Figure 1**

*Simulated Opinion Poll for Regional Governor Election*



*Source: Author*

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<sup>13</sup> We derive the original preference for Group 2 from the first vote under the two round majority vote rules, as there are no assumptions for strategic vote and we assume participants to vote according their honest preferences in the first round

**Table 3***Regional Governor Election Results for Group 2*

		FPTP Vote							
		VÚC	Klus	Lunter	Micev	Dubacova	Kotleba	Urbani	Total
Original preference	Klus		<b>18</b>	0	1	1	0	0	20
	Lunter		0	<b>11</b>	0	0	0	0	11
	Micev		0	2	<b>3</b>	1	1	1	8
	Dubacova		0	0	1	<b>6</b>	0	0	7
	Kotleba		0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>	0	2
	Urbani		0	0	0	3	0	<b>1</b>	4
	Total		18	13	5	11	3	2	52

Source: Authors

***Discussion & Conclusion***

Our aim was to study possible effects of two most discussed electoral reforms in Slovakia on the voting behavior and election results. Departing from the latest theoretical and empirical literature, we took into account the domestic discourse on electoral reforms and designed two experiments. The first experiment revealed two important findings. First, the limited vote system, often marked as part of semi-proportional system family, brings about more personalized vote by definition. As a consequence, parties with several politically strong personalities gained more votes than in the PR system, while parties based on one strong leader attracted significantly less votes. Second, the limited vote system also maintained the proportionality of the results, thus ensuring higher degree of representativeness comparing to majoritarian systems. These findings are in line with the theoretical expectations (Chytilek et al. 2009: 175).

Our experiment showed that even relatively small changes in electoral rules might have enormous consequences for many political parties. Assume, for the sake of discussion, that the list-based proportional system maintains the highest representativeness and is the least personalized, while the single seat district majoritarian system is the least representative and the most personalized. Between such two ideal types, our experimental limited vote system presents only a mild shift from the former in direction to the latter in that it is personalized, but



still highly representative and preserving single district for the whole country. Yet, our experiment shows that this small shift can bring about substantial, if not existential threat to several parties (SNS, Kollar - Sme rodina and Kotleba - LSNS in our case). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that any further shift of the electoral rules closer to majoritarian system presents even bigger challenges to parliamentary parties. This is the reason why we believe that it will be extremely difficult to change Slovakian parliamentary electoral rules in the future.

The impact of the more personalized electoral system on overall satisfaction of the electorate with increased political accountability is however long-term effect and thus, it was not possible to measure it via experimental design. Also, it is important to note that in the real world context the limited vote system usually operates within a multi-district setting. The historical legacy of the Slovakian electoral system and the need for parsimony would make multi-district experiment extremely complicated for both participants to comprehend it and for researchers to design.

The second study indicated that people do not necessarily vote in a strategic way. Our participants chose the same candidate in a one-round system as they would have voted for in the first round of a two-round system. This indicates more sincere voting than the strategic one. Our findings are in contradiction with academic literature (Blais et al. 2007; Cox 1997) and there are several possible explanations for this difference.

First, it is possible that the experiment participants did not pay enough attention to the opinion polls we provided. On the one hand, methodological studies reviewed in the theoretical section provide no reason to believe that the political preference formation of students under experimental circumstances is different from political preference formation of adult population (Bassi 2006; Cassella et al. 2008). On the other hand, the participants can always, at least subconsciously, take the experimental activity less seriously than its real-life counterpart, and consequently pay less attention to opinion polls as they would have in reality.

Second, as pointed out by Fiva and Folke (2016) and also Cox (1997), the results may be more prone to be influenced by strategic decisions of the political elites than by those of voters. According to them, strategic decisions of political agents (to participate or not in the elections, to opt for strategic alliances and so on) may significantly influence the way voters decide. The limitation of our approach is that under the experimental design we could not simulate the important incentives posed by strategic behavior on the supply side of the electoral process. For

example in the case of extreme-right candidate Marian Kotleba (LSNS), the effect of massive anti-campaign against him could significantly mobilize pro-democratic voters that would have been otherwise passive. It is also possible that if there was a real threat of an anti-democratic candidate to win the office, candidates of other pro-democratic parties would unite against him. However, our experiment was not designed to test this hypothesis, and thus the supply side effects remain to be tested in the future research.

Third, an important issue is also how voters perceive the importance of what is at stake in the election. The public discourse in Slovakia indicates that the democratic elites, media and civil society consider it crucially important to defeat Kotleba in the 2017 regional elections. However, our participants were shown a simulated opinion poll with Kotleba scoring third, and thus having relatively low chances of winning. In other words, the design of our experiment (departing from the participants previously measured preferences) did not conform perfectly to the public discourse. Therefore our participants might have believed the stakes are low. Also, the regional election are often considered as second-order (Jeffery & Hough 2001, Tronconi & Roux 2009). In Slovakia the lower order of regional elections is also related to their reputation of being unimportant and uninteresting (Rybar & Spac 2017).

Certain limitation of our study is the use of student samples. In the methodological section we argued why we believe it is appropriate in this case, however, we simultaneously admit that the generalization of the findings should be read with some caution. Arguably, the low level of strategic behavior in case of regional election might be close to the bottom bound when taking into account the whole population.

The case of Slovak electoral reforms points on importance of political actors in setting the electoral institutions. It seems that increasing the rate of stakes (parliamentary elections) decreases their willingness to change the status quo. Our experimental studies indicate that concerns of the parliamentary politicians on consequences of new rules for their respective parties might be justified. On the other hand, based on our analysis, we believe that already introduced changes in regional electoral rules will not cause significant shift in political outcomes.

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