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## **STIMULATION OF ELECTORAL INTEREST IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC\***

*The modern problems of a democratic society are considered, which create the necessity of finding tools and measures to eliminate the undesirable tendencies of reducing electoral activity in the Slovak Republic and to increase the political participation of the population. Conclusions are made on the necessity of developing democracy by introducing compulsory elections or electronic elections.*

*Keywords:* democracy, political participation, electronic voting, electoral interest, electoral activity.

*Масар Д., Ковачова Н., Янкурова А. Стимулирование избирательного интереса в Словацкой Республике. Рассмотрены современные проблемы демократического общества, которые создают необходимость поиска инструментов и мер для устранения нежелательных тенденций снижения избирательной активности в Словацкой Республике, активизации политического участия населения. Сделаны выводы о необходимости развития демократии путем введения обязательных выборов или электронных выборов.*

*Ключевые слова:* демократия, политическое участие, электронное голосование, избирательный интерес, избирательная активность.

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**Background.** Nowadays, the term democracy crisis, which is very closely related to voter apathy, political mistrust, and citizens' lack of decision-making, is becoming more and more important. It is almost paradoxical that the concept of neo-elitist theory of democracy, in which political decisions stem from the will of a narrow circle of «best-fit», is becoming more intensive in a civil society environment that now has much more prominent status and strong competencies. In order, not to derail the negative trend of falling participation, there is a need for some changes in our political system and the strengthening of civic culture.

The **aim** of this article is to analyse possibilities of stimulation of electoral interest in order to strengthen political participation in Slovak Republic.

**Materials and methods.** The methodological basis of research is the system of methods of scientific cognition as a general scientific (dialectic, formal logical, analysis and synthesis, modeling) and special (historical, legal, functional and legal, etc.), that enables to achieve the goal, creates methodological basis of the article.

**Results.** Empirical studies of democracy have suggested that the nature of democratic governance is currently being modified. Citizens' dissatisfaction with the work of democratic institutions and mistrust in the political system is increasing, which makes declining participation in decision-making processes conditional. The issue of falling political participation raises the issue of the legitimacy of political governance that has been the subject of discussions in the scientific setting. Interpretation of non-citizen's decision-making processes varies, and the main sources contributing to the negative phenomenon depend on the nature of the political system, the dynamics of demographic development, the growing competencies of voters, etc. The literature provides some explanation of why so many voters today do not exercise their right to vote. It is resorting to political abstinence.

The Slovak public does not have a sufficient degree of participation in decision-making processes, which is also evidence of invalidity of referendums and the lowest participation in transnational elections. Therefore, the consideration of different instruments, the mechanisms that the unwanted state leading to the crisis of democracy could eliminate is becoming more popular.

Overcoming the crisis of representative democracy lies in concepts focusing on the participatory principle of governance that emphasizes the participatory model. There is another problem in attendance. The political practice of countries with experience with transformation processes (Slovak Republic too) clearly points to the tendency of decreasing number of voters in different decision-making processes. From the point of view of the popularity of individual types of elections and the degree of civic participation, the elections can be categorized as first-class and so-called secondary. In terms of the SR, the most popular are the elections to the

National Council of the SR, the presidential, the communal, which are of the first type and, on the contrary, less popular are regional elections and elections of a transnational character. In the case of parliamentary and presidential elections in our conditions, the majority always decides. In this context, however, we have the question of whether democracy can be talked about when a minority of eligible voters decides politically, as evidenced, for example, regional and European elections.

In this case, it is possible to see the differentiation of society as a group of passive majorities and vice versa of an active minority. The attitudes of a passive majority can be based on frustration with politics, loss of trust, disagreement with some policy actions, etc. The risk persists that the minority government can easily be modified to the authoritarian regime by using democratic instruments and possible procedures. Otherwise, new, unconventional political parties with strong leaders may find themselves on the political market, which attract part of the passive majority. This statement leads us to the next question of whether the government of the minority can be called democracy. The theoretical aspect cannot be ruled out. The importance lies in the creation of innovative communication and decision-making mechanisms through which minorities can be ruled, but of course with the consent of the majority. Therefore, the participatory principle of governance cannot be identified with direct democracy, but this does not mean that participatory democracy opposes the direct participation of citizens; on the contrary, it requires it directly [1].

The existence of a passive majority, the impact of globalization and pluralism lead to another threat posed by the presence of extremist political groups. Their existence can contribute to the accumulation of unresolved political problems, which are a significant source of support for extreme right-wing subjects. Dissatisfaction with political direction and frustration from politics are also reinforced by the impact of globalization processes, whose dynamics often lead to negative consequences. As a result of the modern phenomenon of globalization, people are moving, and the poorer regions of the world prefer richer regions, while enhancing competitive economic struggle which continues to contribute to the state of danger and discontent of the population. These signals are a breeding ground for the emergence of right-wing political parties. Right-wing extremism is not unusual, especially in the western world, but in the face of a constantly modifying society it may present a real threat to the functioning of the democratic system in the future. The problem is that the extreme phenomenon in society increases the fact that defensive mechanisms liberal-democratic systems against antisystemic manifestations are determined by their own values on which the essence of democracy lies [2].

The primary incentive for participation is an existing social problem or discontent with the condition, which then evokes the need for change. On the other hand, there may be an interest in things public or a particular participation in the election by expressing support and agreeing to the

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current situation, as the potential passivity of citizens could mean a change in a satisfactory and favorable situation. Effective and effective participation results in the achievement of goals that contribute to the greater satisfaction of society. The mission of participation is to eliminate social problems that modern society cannot prevent [3, p. 6].

Interestingly, R. Hardim is not negative about the issue of low electoral participation; on the contrary, he considers it a signal of citizens' satisfaction with the existing status quo. A similar opinion was held by M. Ros, who emphasized that the voter's intensity of the voter's voice increases with low attendance and it leads to the required state [4]. The subject of analyzes by several political scientists, Norris, Lijphart, among other things, has revealed the factors that determine voter turnout. E.g. the sociological point of view besides the «individual aspects of human nature, emphasizes the external factors of the participation of individuals based on which electoral behavior is analyzed. A social correlation can be included in the range of external correlates implying the degree of involvement. In general, people with a lower education or part of the population are integrated into the passive category; on the contrary, with the increase of more qualified, more educated professionals with a higher status, the level of participation in public affairs also increases» [5, p. 56]. Thus, the type of election, voter capability, information, election mechanism, composition of political candidates, the mass media, etc., ultimately influence the degree of voter behavior.

In order to keep up with electoral apathy, we are given the possibility of introducing mandatory electoral participation, similar to that of other countries, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, etc. In the case of a passive attitude to the decision, the citizens of these countries are subject to sanctions. E.g. Belgians who do not come to an election and have no power or have access to a polling station after their closure can get a fine of 27–55 EUR. In case of duplicate non-election, the fine may increase to 137 EUR [6]. The sympathizers of this mechanism call for the strengthening of civic engagement, the deepening of the essence of democracy and, on the other hand, for the elimination of extremist groups which, in the case of low participation, can easily cross the gates of the Parliament [7]. The idea of introducing the obligation to vote is, according to many, controversial, as it contradicts the voluntary nature of participation, since it is an activity based on our own conviction of the individual. It is also contemplated that it is contrary to the values of democracy, which in its essence advocates free voters' choices. In the case of the introduction of this mechanism, the compulsion of all eligible voters to take part in the decision-making process, the question of sanctioning in case of abolition of duty should be resolved. Also, there is a need to lose sight of the certain risk that the policies are far away, respectively politically uninformed citizens whose decisions can shuffle with cards and lead to unwanted results. The free choice to participate in the election is rather a manifestation of citizens who

have a certain information capital of a political nature, and their socio-political situation is not too foreign and indifferent as they are interested in it. As well as the practice, the introduction of the election obligation is very closely related to the maturity of a political culture which, unfortunately, in our conditions cannot be evaluated too positively, and therefore this method of increasing civic participation should remain only hypothetical. In our conditions, electoral apathy can be considered as a signal when something is wrong with the political direction of the country, and non-participation becomes a clear signal of dissatisfaction with the frustrated voter, who in this way has the chance to show his disappointment from the political situation.

The Constitution of the SR defines the right to vote from the age of 18. It is precisely the elimination of the age limit following the pattern of Austria that can be considered as another factor that could contribute to increased electoral participation. Austrians belong to the first European country, which has been in active voting since 16 years, and is thus confident of the younger generation. This would open up opportunities for young voters to be politically active, which would contribute to a larger number of first-time voters. However, the question is whether the young people have sufficient ability to orientate themselves in the political spectrum, whether they can adequately classify information and realize the importance of the electoral act as they lack experience. The problem is also seen in an easier way of manipulating and influencing the younger generation.

In order to popularize decision-making, J. Viskupič from the political party OL'ANO to allow voting in public places such as, libraries, shopping centers, or, cultural houses. These techniques have been adopted by, for example, Swedish political system. The measure would logically predict an increase in electoral interest simply because in the conditions of the election, the elections are Saturday, when most of the public also use the weekend for family purchases as well.

Lately, the idea of rewarding for election is increasingly being used. This proposal favors the political party of the SaS, which proposes that the elections be held on Friday, and that the Day of Labor Day should be a reward for participation (applicable in Canada). On the political scene, this proposal met with criticism of the disruption of the private sphere.

The introduction of Internet voting or online voting can be seen as another positive stimulus for voter participation, thereby making the voting process more comfortable and easier. These techniques have been adopted by, for example, inhabitants of Norway and Estonia. In our terms, the question of the introduction of Internet voting was the subject of the Sulik referendum in 2010, which was void for inadequate participation, but 70 % of the respondents, spoke on the issue. However, this is a complex mechanism that requires a series of revised security measures to prevent hackers from being disturbed, the threat of buying votes, threatening anonymity, etc. [8]. Although this system requires a considerable initial

investment, it would lead to financial costs being scrutinized because the investment would be one-off only. A possible way of voting would be easier to identify with the younger generation, whose technical conveniences are very close.

In order to reverse the existing trend of electoral apathy, it is necessary to think about these techniques and then, at least some of them, after thorough elaboration, to apply to practice.

It should be borne in mind that the public will have a higher degree of political engagement and participation in governance if:

- its interests will be determined by government policy (economic factor);
- has enough information about political affairs and is aware of the impact of the decision (information factor);
- Subject to social pressure to participate in elections (socio-psychological factor).

For the most frequent reasons of electoral nonparticipation in SR we can consider the following arguments to which we offer counterarguments:

*Corruption cases, the loss of trust in the politician* – it is reasonable to assume that corruption will hit the poorest and most vulnerable who are not in the state and who have no resources to prevent corruption. If the voter decides to withdraw from the election, he does not choose those who steal less, he tells all politicians that he does not care whether he steals himself or not in this country. Actually, it gives them green.

*Protesting against all political actors* – not to opt for a disagreement with the entire political scene is a legitimate attitude. The question is, what do you achieve? The refusal to go to vote symbolically expresses resistance to politics and all politicians, but practically their behavior will not change at all. On the contrary, every politician can behave as if he did not consent. The silent majority also helps most extremists, respectively. Any adventure parties that would otherwise have no chance.

*Rejecting the choice of lesser evil* – in other words, reluctance to choose lesser evil mostly pave the way to evil greater. Greater evils are always ready to take advantage of their chances, for example, the chance of passivity and the indifference of voters.

*The rejection of the party leader* – ringing has a relatively small weight in the Slovak electoral system, but for the parties it is a strong indicator of popularity. Voters have the opportunity to move the party in the direction that suits them. If they do not agree with the party chairman, the ringing of his subordinates is the way to print it, but keep the party.

*I do not want to equip the voter's card in the absence of a passport* – getting the electoral card and going away in Slovakia rarely takes more than 45 minutes of time.

As we have already mentioned, ignoring electoral processes is one of the ways in which citizens can be dissatisfied with the functioning of the political system. On the side, the socio-political problems will not be solved

by votive apathy. There are several reasons why every eligible voter should participate in decision-making:

- as a citizen of the SR, every eligible voter has the right to exercise active voting rights after reaching the age of 18;
- electoral law is a basic civil law;
- electoral law is a moral obligation;
- every citizen of SR has the right to decide on his/her future individually;
- the right and the desire to express your opinion;
- every voice can decide.

If, for example, in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic the voter will not participate, will indirectly support the candidates he does not agree with.

**Conclusion.** The advancement of civil society and the dynamics of its development are as though still in the Cologne and early stages of identifying itself. Although trying to fight the phase with undesirable elements in the form of apathy, it is unspeakable because it lacks order, group solidarity, and dominates in it problematic and conflicting situations. Today, for democracy, not only is the formal recognition that the government has emerged from democratic elections and that all power comes from the people, but the important factor is whether democracy is actively used for our own good. Unless political empowerment and the gradual application of innovative tools supporting electoral interest in decision-making processes are achieved, the increase in voter turnout can only be considered as utopia in our society.

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*Масар Д., Ковачова Н., Янкурова А. Стимулювання електорального інтересу в Словацькій Республіці.*

**Постановка проблеми.** Сьогодні дедалі важливішим стає термін «криза демократії», який дуже тісно пов’язаний з байдужістю виборців, політичною недовірою та браком прийняття рішень громадянами. Майже парадоксальним є те, що концепція неоелітарної теорії демократії, в якій політичні рішення випливають із волі вузького кола «найкраїщих», стає все більш інтенсивним у середовищі громадянського суспільства, який зараз має набагато більш помітний статус і сильні компетенції. Щоб не знищувати негативну тенденцію зменшення участі, існує потреба в деяких змінах у нашій політичній системі та зміцненні громадянської культури.

**Метою цієї статті є** аналіз можливостей стимулювання електорального інтересу з метою посилення політичної участі в Словацькій Республіці.

**Матеріали та методи.** Методологічною основою дослідження є система методів наукового пізнання як загальної науки (діалектика, формальна логіка, аналіз та синтез, моделювання) та спеціальна (історична, правова, функціонально-правова тощо), що дозволяє досягти мети, створює методологічну основу статті.

**Результати дослідження.** Демократична криза є небажаним елементом, який знаходиться під впливом низького рівня участі виборців у виборах. Щоб запобігти втрати інтересу громадянами щодо виборів і тим самим посилити участь виборців у процесах прийняття рішень, необхідно вжити певні заходи у вигляді запровадження електронного голосування, примусової участі у виборах, об’єднання окремих видів виборів і т.д. Ці заходи можуть усунути демократичну кризу та забезпечити прогрес суспільства.

**Висновок.** Прогрес громадянського суспільства та динаміка його розвитку, як і раніше в Кельні і на ранніх етапах виявлення себе. Хоча спроба боротьби з фазою з небажаними елементами у формі апатії є невимовною, оскільки вона не має порядку, групової солідарності та домінують в ній проблемні та конфліктні ситуації. Сьогодні для демократії потрібне не лише офіційне визнання того, що уряд виник шляхом демократичних виборів та що вся влада йде від людей, а й важливим фактором є те, чи демократія активно використовується для нашого власного блага. До тих пір, поки не досягнуто політичне розширення можливостей та поступове застосування інноваційних інструментів, які підтримують зацікавленість виборців у процесах прийняття рішень, збільшення явки виборців може розглядатися лише як утопія в нашому суспільстві.

**Ключові слова:** демократія, політична участь, електронне голосування, електоральний інтерес.