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A Right-wing Extremist or People's Protector? Media Coverage of Extreme Right Leader Marian Kotleba in 2013 Regional Elections in Slovakia

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Abstract¹

The paper focuses on the coverage of the extreme right leader Marian Kotleba in the media during the 2013 regional elections in Slovakia. It examines how the media shaped the discourse regarding Kotleba in a six-week period, covering the time before and after the elections. Applying the frame analysis, it identifies ten issue-specific frames that problematize Kotleba in relation to either his general political actions or the regional elections and analyses 359 articles, leading to 1095 claims made by various sources. The findings show that the extreme right politician was mainly framed in terms of extremist threat and the failure of authorities. However, although the prevalent framing in the media may be perceived as negative, the media attention for the leader radically increased after the elections' first round, making Kotleba highly salient in the public debate, while the counter-frames appealing to legitimate side of politician's candidacy can be observed. The paper contributes to the literature on the media representation of the extreme right in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: extreme right, media, discourse, frame analysis, xenophobia.

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Introduction

During the last three decades several extreme right parties have risen and established themselves electorally throughout Europe (Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007). Because of their negative and hostile attitudes towards immigrants, national or ethnic minorities, packed in ethnocentric and xenophobic stances (Betz and Johnson, 2004) and their anti-establishment and anti-elite positions (Rydgren, 2007), scholars have devoted a great deal of research to this group of parties and movements. Various explanations have been put forward for their successes in different countries, focusing mainly on structural and socio-economic factors (e.g. Jackman and Volpert, 1996) and at the level of individual voters (e.g. Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003) in Western Europe. Having neglected the contextual factors, the mass media have in recent years been identified as a variable that affects fortunes of extreme right parties (e.g. Walgrave and De Swert, 2004; Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Ellinas, 2010; Akkerman, 2011).

To explain the public attitudes and beliefs towards the extreme right, and extreme right leaders in particular, media coverage and the exposure to information in news are argued to matter (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Bos and van der Brug, 2010; Bos et al., 2011). The extreme right leaders depend on the media for their public image as they cannot entirely rely on reputation and therefore need the media to provide them with a stage to share their agenda and ideas in order to attract wider electoral support. This is the key especially for small parties such as the People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS), which lacks most forms of mobilization due to the largely non-existent party organization. By focusing on particular issues and by providing public space for extreme right parties, the media intentionally or unintentionally provide an environment, in which electoral support for these parties increases (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007).

The media can help the parties of the extreme right in three different ways: by granting them exposure, by highlighting the issues they emphasize (such as immigration in Western Europe and Roma issues in Central and Eastern Europe) or by framing the parties or their issues in a favourable way. The extreme right can build upon the tendencies of the media to personalize issues within the media and to focus on the scandalous aspects of politics that contribute to anti-establishment (Mudde, 2004) and anti-minorities sentiments. These sentiments both benefit parties like the extreme right that give a (charismatic) party leader a pronounced central role (Eatwell, 2006) and engage in anti-elitist and xenophobic discourse (Kluknavská, 2014). The leader of the ĽSNS Marian Kotleba has attracted the media despite (or thanks to) his radical nature, at first by organising marches through Slovak towns that were seen as neo-Nazi or extremist, and then by pointing to misbehaviour of the government and Roma minority (Kluknavská, 2013). He was also able to build upon the negative public attitudes towards Roma (Kluknavská, 2014) and the inclination of the media to either negatively or stereotypically depict Roma in the country (Dráľ, 2009; Kroon et al. 2014). Although the literature to some extent deals with the media attention for the extreme right and the way how Roma are covered in the media, we know less about the way how the extreme right is framed by the media. Aspiring to succeed electorally,

the framing is especially important since the extreme right leaders need voters to perceive them to be effective and legitimate (Bos et al., 2011).

Given that the research on the extreme right in Central and Eastern Europe is inconsistent and the knowledge about the media coverage on the extreme right in this region is rather scarce, this work is designed to fill this gap. Through the exploratory case study of the 2013 regional elections in Slovakia (the elections to the Bodies of regional governments), the paper analyses how the media shaped the discourse and framed the extreme right leader Marian Kotleba. It does not aim to explain differences in the coverage of particular media outlets, but to explore the overall media discourse in relation to the extreme right politician who transformed from marginalized politician to the governor of the region in a matter of weeks. The paper focuses on the coverage of Kotleba in the media during a six-week period, covering the time both before and after the elections. We expected the media coverage to be of negative tone, with a prevalent frame putting an emphasis on the extremist nature of Kotleba's candidacy. With the discursive examination of the short period spanning the elections, we are able to look at the deeper media narrative concerning this extreme right actor. The paper aims to contribute to the literature on the representation of extreme right actors in the media in Central and Eastern Europe.

The paper is structured into six parts. After the introduction it sets the scene of the case study, outlining the electoral gains of the party, its media presentation and the context surrounding the regional elections. The paper then proceeds with drawing the connection between the extreme right and the media, where it looks at the theoretical assumptions about the role the media play in electoral successes of the extreme right. Then it presents the methodological considerations of the analysis and follows with the results. The paper concludes with summary of the findings and discussion.

The context: the Roma issue and beyond

Marian Kotleba began to make public appearances in 2004 and 2005 as then-leader of the political movement Slovak Togetherness (Slovenská pospolitosť, SP) and the emerging political party Slovak Togetherness – our party (Slovenská pospolitosť – národná strana, SP-NS). As the most visible movement/party representative, he attracted media attention mostly through controversial appeals to the fascist Slovak state and appraisals of its political and religious figures, and to some extent also through anti-Hungarian and anti-Roma stances (Kluknavská 2013). His appearances in the media, such as marches in various towns across Slovakia in the uniforms that resembled the uniforms of the war-time Slovak state, were usually linked to right-wing extremism or neo-Nazism with highly negative connotations (Kluknavská, 2013). For instance, the party condemned “Zionists” and other political adversaries, and advocated “estate-based” society, in which the people would be divided into ten separate groups, out of which one group would be comprised solely of “national minorities” (Slovenská pospolitosť – národná strana, 2006). After the party was dissolved by the Supreme Court in the early 2006 based on violation of civil and human rights and encouraging xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments (Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic, 2006), Marian Kotleba stepped aside as a leader of the

political movement. He came to public attention only after almost three years when he announced his intention to run in the 2009 regional elections as an independent candidate. At that time, several media covered his candidacy, including the public broadcaster in the television debate. Despite his political inactivity in the previous years, he gained 10.03 per cent of the votes (13,629 in total).

The relative success of Kotleba in the 2009 regional elections ended the movement's internal crisis and the new party was formed at the beginning of 2010. Though the party never got into the national parliament, its electoral gains have been on the rise. This can be in part attributed to the thematic and discursive change in their strategy (Kluknavská, 2013). While at first the party tried to gain public support and media attention through glorifying the Slovak state, in recent years it has been mobilizing support on anti-Roma and anti-establishment sentiment by organizing active protests in areas with tense relations between Roma and non-Roma populations.

Beginning already in 2009 during the election campaign, Kotleba had an extensive poster campaign, which stated that "with your support, I can certainly eliminate unfair favouritism of not only Gypsy parasites against decent people"² (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, 2011). After 2010, the LSNS fully engaged in an anti-elitist and xenophobic discourse, emphasizing the perceived threat of the Roma for the society, the corrupted nature of the political elites and their combined blame over the misdeeds of the ordinary people (Kluknavská, 2014). Combining the xenophobia and anti-establishment populism, according to which the extreme right parties mobilise xenophobic attitudes and pose a critique on contemporary democratic systems (Rydgren, 2007), the party has built upon the public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment, the appeal to the common people, and anti-minorities attitudes (Kluknavská, 2014).

In electoral terms, while in the 2006 national elections the party³ gained only 0.16 per cent of the votes (3,815 votes)⁴, in 2010 and 2012 national elections the LSNS received 1.33 per cent (33,724 votes) and 1.58 per cent (40,460 votes) respectively. Moreover, in the 2010 and 2012 elections, the party was the most successful⁵ primarily in those municipalities with a high number of Roma settlements and where the relations between Roma and non-Roma people are perceived problematic, including Banská Bystrica region (Kluknavská, 2013).

² The then Minister of Justice Lucia Žitňanská filed a criminal lawsuit against Marian Kotleba on the grounds that he may have committed the crime of defamation of the nation, race and belief. However, in 2013 the Supreme Court found Kotleba not guilty (Verdict no. 4 Tdo 49/2012).

³ After the dissolution of the SP-NS, its members ran on the list of the extreme right Slovak People's Party (Slovenská ľudová strana).

⁴ The party gained votes in areas where the local leaders concentrated.

⁵ The research looked at the level of municipalities, where the party received more than 5 per cent.

The 2013 regional elections: not surprising surprise?

In the 2013 Slovak regional elections the extreme right leader of the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) Marian Kotleba has, to the surprise of many observers, become the governor of the Banská Bystrica region. The politician won 55.5 per cent of the vote (71,397 votes) in the second round of the elections against then incumbent Vladimír Maňka of the ruling Smer – Social Democracy (Smer – sociálna demokracia, Smer-SD) party. He was placed second in the first round of the elections with 21.3 per cent of the vote (26,251 votes), but qualified for a second round run-off in the governor's race; he had been given little to no chance of winning in both the media and political discourse.

Months before the regional elections 2013, Kotleba built upon the local political potential gained from previous elections and from publicised events such as the burning down of the Krásna Hôrka castle⁶ (which is located in the region of Banská Bystrica) in 2012 during which he positioned himself in the role of the protector of “decent people” that are harmed by “unadaptable” Roma (Kluknavská, 2013) or “gypsy extremists” (Naše Slovensko, 2014). Organising several marches against Roma in the village spanning several months after the incident and receiving rather wide media attention, he described the party's actions as “tidying up” the Roma village (Slovak Spectator, 2012) that was needed in order to protect people after the inactivity of the state and police (Naše Slovensko, 2014).

After the first round of the 2013 regional elections, various reactions from the politicians and the media appeared. The media outlets expressed a dilemma in reporting about Kotleba. Several media stated they would not address Kotleba or report about his campaign. Nevertheless, the SME daily ran an interview with Kotleba the day after the first round, claiming that it is no longer possible to ignore the politician (Slovak Spectator, 2013). The extreme right leader was also featured on live election debate with other candidates (which aired for each region) on news channel TA3, for which the channel earned media and political criticism. In political arena, Vladimír Maňka blamed Kotleba's appearance on TA3 for the results (Slovak Spectator, 2013), while the Prime Minister and chairman of the Smer-SD Robert Fico at first expressed satisfaction with Maňka's strong showing for the party (Slovak Spectator, 2013), but after the second round declared that the right-wing parties along with the media, which he argued did a massive campaign for Kotleba, carry direct responsibility (TASR, 2013). For Marian Kotleba, the results were not surprising because according to him the people realized that the vote for him was not a lost vote (SITA, 2013a).

⁶ The police announced that the fire had been caused by two local Roma boys, while lighting cigarettes. The ĽSNS framed the situation as a consequence of the “unadaptable” way of life of Roma living in the settlement.

The media for the extreme right: enemy and friend

For the extreme right, and especially for the smaller extreme right parties, the media represent one of their main enemies, as they claim the media misinform the public and mistreat the extreme right members (Kluknavská, 2014). They blame the media for the lack of opportunities and the intentional obstruction of their actions (Eatwell, 2006). Having said that, extreme right parties usually depend on the media for their electoral breakthrough even more than the established parties (van der Pas et al., 2011), mainly because they must appear in the media in order to make themselves known to the wider electorate. The media could be related to a party's success in three ways: the party or its politicians receive a great deal of coverage (attention); the issues of the party are overexposed (agenda-setting) and/or the media framing favours the party (framing) (Walgrave and De Swert, 2004). In other words, the media can highlight the parties and leaders within the media content, create a favourable ground by covering the issues, over which they claim issue ownership (Walgrave and De Swert, 2004) or take part in framing the party or their issues in a favourable way.

The media may be either supportive of the extreme right, which can allow extreme right parties to overcome their marginalization and attract more supporters, or denounce and launch campaigns against them, which is more likely to weaken public support (Art, 2006). However, even if the media take negative stances to the extreme right, they can keep them visible in public by granting them exposure (the higher salience of the extreme right) and take part in agenda-setting and framing (Rydgren, 2007; Ellinas, 2010) of the issues, such as immigration in Western Europe, or Roma issues in Central and Eastern Europe.

The media in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 tended to report about nationalist or extreme right organizations in a quite positive manner, but nowadays the mainstream media report negatively on most events, especially when neo-Nazi symbolism is present (Mudde 2005). Nevertheless, some of the coverage of the incidents of the extreme right in relation to ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, tends to be "highly ambiguous" (Mudde 2005: 257) and along with the prevalent coverage on Roma minority may easily favour the extreme right (Kluknavská and Zagibová, 2013). Although the extreme right is usually the most extreme when targeting Roma (Mudde 2007), it is not the only actor sharing negative attitudes towards the minority. In East European countries, specifically in Slovakia, studies examining the media coverage on Roma generally conclude that the minority is presented in a negative and prejudiced way, however, sometimes with offering a positive, though often stereotypical alternative. Roma communities tend to be generalized and silenced in the news coverage and usually referred to in collective terms and in connection to criminality and violence with an emphasis on their ethnicity (Cangár, 2008), presenting Roma as a cause of social unrest or as inherently lazy people (Drál', 2009).

This environment can create favourable discursive opportunity structures, where the radical agenda finds a space to be effective (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004) and legitimate (Bos et al., 2011). This is especially important for the extreme right leaders as in order to be electorally successful, they not only have to be known by the public, but they also need voters to have a positive image about them (Bos et al., 2011). With the purpose to effectively diffuse the message in public, the claims must

have a visibility in the media, a resonance, to which others react to a message and a legitimacy in public (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004). Expecting to build upon negative portrayal of Roma in the media, less is known about how the extreme right leaders in Slovakia are salient and framed in the media discourse.

Methods, data and coding procedure

Frame analysis. To investigate how the extreme right leader is portrayed in the media, we build upon the framing theory (Snow et al., 1986). Framing refers to interpretive processes that render events and occurrences subjectively meaningful (Snow et al., 2007). Media frames are considered as schemes for presenting and comprehending news, which turn meaningless and otherwise unrecognizable happenings into perceptible events (Scheufele, 1999). Entman (1993: 55) defines framing as selecting “some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation.” Central to this definition are ‘core framing tasks’ (Benford and Snow 2000) articulated through diagnoses (problem definitions – what is seen as a problem), prognoses (solution definitions) and motivations (calls for action). In the paper we adapt a diagnostic framing to analyse variations in problem attributions of a specific topic across various media outlets. We build on the qualitative frame analysis, using discursive techniques, analysing underlying structures behind the text and quantifying the frames that were used in the media (salience of selected frames). We also look at the leader’s media salience.

Sample. The data are derived from an analysis of 359 articles on Marian Kotleba that appeared in ten major media outlets in Slovakia in a timespan of six weeks. We searched the media outlets with the straightforward word “Kotleba”. In the analysis we cover the print, electronic and internet-based media: four daily newspapers: tabloids Nový čas (13 articles), Plus 1 Deň (21 articles), and daily newspapers SME (114 articles), Pravda (34 articles); TV stations: private stations TV Markíza (16 programmes), TV JOJ (17 programmes), news channel TA3 (13 programmes), and public broadcaster RTVS (26 programmes); web news portals: Aktuality.sk (45 articles), Topky.sk (60 articles). We focus on a six-week period between 17 October 2013 and 30 November 2013, thus focusing on the three weeks prior to the first round of the elections, two weeks between the first and the second round, and a week after the second round. The first round of the elections took place on 9 November and the second round of the elections on 23 November 2013.

Frames. We identified ten issue-specific frames in the qualitative analysis on the sample of articles and programmes across all media outlets. First, we analysed the sample of articles to identify the main frames, i.e. what is presented as a problem in relation to either Kotleba’s general political actions or the regional elections. After defining the initial set of frames, we then refined those categories and repeat pre-testing on another set of articles. After establishing the final coding scheme we coded the articles in further analysis, which resulted in 1095 claims. A claim is present when one of the sources (who can be either a journalist or any other actor making a

statement) referred to the problematic aspect in relation to Kotleba, in accordance with the predefined frames. We distinguish between the actor-related, emphasizing the politician's characteristics, and the structure-related, emphasizing the electoral circumstances. Within these characteristics, we also distinguish the frames that denote Kotleba either as unacceptable (politician) or legitimate (politician). The following frames were distinguished: 1) Extremist threat, 2) Spurious protector (Actor oriented – unacceptable); 3) Isolated politician, 4) People's protector, 5) Legitimate candidate (Actor oriented – legitimate); 6) Failure of authorities, 7) Election surprise and anomaly (Structure-oriented – unacceptable); 8) Frustrated people, 9) Anti-campaign, 10) Protest (Structure-oriented – legitimate). We elaborate more on the frames in the next part of the paper.

Media framing of the extreme right leader

We present the results of our analyses in two parts. Before proceeding to the analyses of frame variations in the media, we first discuss the results regarding media attention for Marian Kotleba. Our findings regarding total media attention for the extreme right leader are summarized in Figure 1. Strong differences in salience are visible with regard to time period and different media outlets. In the total sample of 359 articles, the extreme right leader was the most visible in the daily newspaper SME (31.8 per cent), which was followed by the two on-line news portals Topky.sk and Aktuality.sk with 16.7 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively. Other media account for less than 10 per cent each.

In time, we can see that the high media attention for Kotleba was triggered immediately after each election round. Before the first round of the elections, the attention was minimal. However, Kotleba did participate in the live election debate on TA3 news channel. The media visibility of the politician radically changed with the first results of the elections. After intensive two-day coverage following the first round of the elections, the media reported about the politician in a steady manner (around 10 articles per day) up until the second round, which triggered another spell of intense coverage, as Kotleba became the governor of the region.

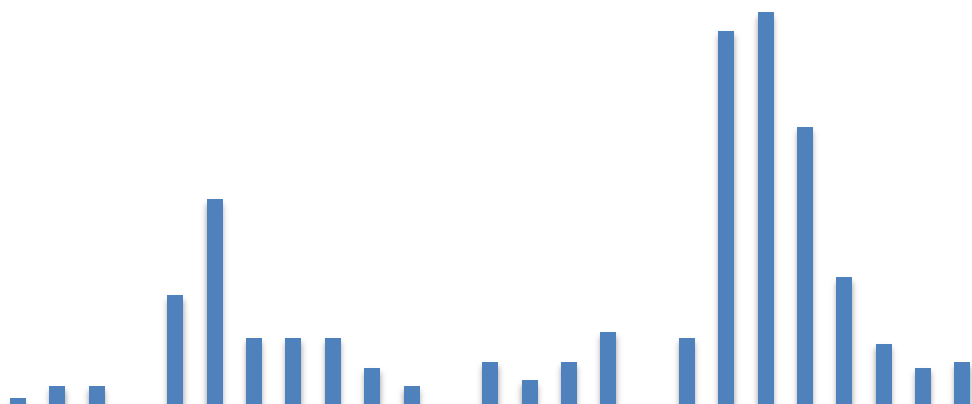


Figure 1. Media attention for Marian Kotleba during 2013 regional elections, 17 October 2013 – 30 November 2013. Source: the author

	Actor-oriented frames					Structure-oriented frames					
	Unacceptable		Legitimate			Unacceptable		Legitimate			
Frame → Source ↓	Extr. threat	Spuri- ous protec- tor	Isolated politician	People's protector	Legit. candi- date	Failure of authorit.	Election surprise	Frustr. people	Pro- test	Anti- campaign	Total (n=1095)
Media	31.2	4.8	5.5	4.4	6.1	12.6	17.1	6.1	4.2	8.0	43.4
Experts	20.0	11.9	0.6	1.9	1.9	21.3	6.9	20.0	13.8	1.9	14.6
Oppo- sition parties	34.1	5.5	3.3	0.0	6.6	33.0	2.2	9.9	1.1	4.4	8.3
Politi- cal actors	23.5	3.7	4.9	2.5	12.3	27.2	9.9	8.6	3.7	3.7	7.4
Kotleba ESNS	0.0	0.0	2.6	44.9	5.1	7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	39.7	7.1
People	11.3	3.8	1.9	43.4	0.0	15.1	1.9	11.3	11.3	0.0	4.8
Smer- SD Maňka	26.9	7.7	1.9	1.9	7.7	19.2	7.7	9.6	11.5	5.8	4.7
Public authori- ties	34.0	12.0	6.0	8.0	12.0	4.0	0.0	6.0	6.0	12.0	4.6
R. Fico	6.7	6.7	0.0	0.0	4.4	68.9	8.9	4.4	0.0	0.0	4.1
Roma	20.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Total	24.8	6.3	3.7	8.1	5.8	18.7	10.1	8.7	5.6	8.0	100

Table 1. Media framing about Marian Kotleba across different sources and frames, 17 October 2013 – 30 November 2013. Source: the author (note: numbers mean percentages of the claims).

Before elaboration on the variation of media frames, we turn to the absolute prominence of framing across different sources and frames in coverage about Marian Kotleba (Table 1). The media or the journalists were the source in most of the claims; they account for 43.4 per cent of the frames, followed by experts (14.6 per cent) and opposition parties (8.3 per cent). Various political actors, including members of non-parliamentary parties and members of local and regional political formations, made claims in 7.4 per cent of all frames, the people in 4.8 per cent and the Roma only in 0.9 per cent. Despite public declarations of Kotleba not gaining access to the media, the leader or ESNS' members made 7.1 per cent of all claims, while the party Smer-SD and Vladimír Maňka only 4.7 per cent. However, as the Prime Minister Robert Fico is also the chairman of the ruling Smer-SD, there are additional to 4.1 per cent. Regarding different frames, the Extremist threat (24.8 per cent) and the Failure of authorities (18.7 per cent) frames are the most prominent, followed by Election surprise (10.1 per cent) and Frustrated people (8.7 per cent) frames. Actor-related frames account for 48.8 per cent of all framings and structure-related frames account for 51.2 per cent of frames. Given the division of the frames as those, which present Kotleba as an unacceptable politician and those that present him as a legitimate political actor are divided in the media discourse in 60 to 40 per cent of the claims.

The Extremist threat appears to be especially salient in the claim-making of opposition parties (34.1 per cent), public authorities (34 per cent), the media (31.2 per

cent), the Smer-SD party and Vladimír Maňka (26.9 per cent), political actors (23.5 per cent) and experts (20 per cent). Within this frame at the unacceptable-level, Kotleba is seen as an extremist or radical politician, known for extreme or racist and xenophobic stances towards various minorities. As shown in Table 2, the adjectives used to name the politician ranged from “radical Marian Kotleba” to “controversial politician” with links to “extremism” (both Topky.sk, 10. 11., 11. 11.). A Roma referred to him as a “fascist” (SME, 11. 11) and a public authority as “a person who presents anti-Semitic and racist ideas” (SME, 13. 11.). The media described him as “the leader of extremists” (SME, 15. 11.). After the second round, the foreign media, reported through the domestic media, described him as a “neo-Nazi” (TV JOJ, 25. 11.).

Date (2013)	Media	Source	Claim
10.11.	Topky	Media	The radical Marian Kotleba advanced to the second round of the election.
11.11.	SME	Roma	We do not need fascists in Slovakia.
11.11.	Topky	Media	Controversial politician , whose political party was in the past dissolved because of the extremism .
11.11.	Aktuality	Media	The extremist who in public acts as a tribune of the people .
13.11.	SME	Public authority	I find it unacceptable that a person who presents anti-Semitic and racist ideas and considers the Roma minority as the only problem in Slovakia would become a governor.
15.11.	SME	Media	The leader of extremists only wants to speak in television live.
15.11.	SME	Expert	Nothing Kotleba ever said about Roma or Roma issues was acceptable.
20.11.	Pravda	Media	The battle between Smer and extremist party of Marian Kotleba . Marian Kotleba is not hiding his extremist opinions towards Roma.
25.11.	TV JOJ	Media	The foreign media warn and denote him as a neo-Nazi .
27.11.	TV Markíza	Media	The most significant increase in votes can be observed in the case of the radical Marian Kotleba .

Table 2. Extremist threat frame. The claims by various sources in different media outlets, 17 October 2013 – 30 November 2013. Source: the author

The second most prominent frame in the media coverage was the Failure of authorities (again at the unacceptable-level), according to which the elections reflect the failure of (political or public) authorities to take action vis-à-vis problems in society and the difficulties that people encounter every day. The frame was salient mainly in the claim-making of the Prime Minister Robert Fico (68.9 per cent), who blamed the opposition parties, first for nominating a wrong candidate and then for not clearly supporting Kotleba's opponent. The frame was also prominent in the discourse of the opposition parties (33 per cent), various political actors (27.2 per cent), experts (21.3 per cent), Vladimír Maňka (19.2 per cent) and the media (12.6 per cent). The experts concluded that “unsolved problems” create “a breeding ground for right-wing extremists” (RTVS, 10. 11.) and the media blamed “the whole political spectrum of so-called standard political parties” (Pravda, 16. 11.). Claims used by various sources are shown in Table 3.

Date (2013)	Media	Source	Claim
10.11.	RTVS	Expert	Because a lot of problems stay unsolved, it creates a breeding ground for right-wing extremists.
10.11.	Topky	Prime minister R. Fico	The problem is caused by the right-wing and its choice in the candidate selection.
11.11.	Plus 1 Deň	Expert	It is a problem of each government, including the current one.
11.11.	Nový Čas	Media	The electoral success of Marian Kotleba is a warning sign for this country and a report card for politicians. Not a single government took a committed action to solve an issue with socially unadaptable people. Instead they close their eyes in hope that the problems will fully develop only after they retire from politics.
12.11.	SME	People (random person)	A lot of people voted for him here. There was no one else, for whom I would vote. Not this government, not the one before or before that had solved or been trying to solve our problems.
16.11.	Pravda	Media	The whole political spectrum of so-called standard political parties is responsible for the outcome of the first round of the election.
24.11.	RTVS	Prime minister R. Fico	If parties such as SDKÚ and SaS were not able to support Mr. Maňka, they carry direct responsibility for this result.
25.11.	Pravda	Opposition party (SDKÚ)	If we are trying to find someone responsible, it is primarily the opponent, vice-chairman of the Smer, and the Smer party itself.
26.11.	SME	Media	The long inactivity in solving the Roma problems was according to experts one of the main reasons for Marian Kotleba's success.
28.11.	SME	Political actor	Marian Kotleba would not win if Vladimír Maňka were better prepared for the election.

Table 3. Failure of authorities frame. The claims by various sources in different media outlets, 17 October 2013 – 30 November 2013. Source: the author

In addition, there is considerable attention for the Election surprise frame, which encompasses claims about the shocking results and electoral anomaly, which should not have been repeated because the politician was not supposed to stand a chance in a political competition. The frame was reproduced mainly by the media, according to which the elections were “undoubtedly the biggest surprise” (TV Markíza, 10. 11.), which came “without warning” (Nový Čas, 11. 11. 2013), when “the extremist Kotleba shockingly advanced to the second round” (Plus 1 Deň, 11. 11.). The second round of the elections triggered the same reactions, when the media reported about “the biggest surprise” (Aktuality.sk; RTVS, 24. 11.) and “the shocking election results” (TV Markíza, 24. 11.). Politicians stated that “Let's face it, it is a kick that none of us expected” (leader of the SDKÚ-DS, Topky.sk, 24. 11.).

The fourth most emphasized frame, *Frustrated people*, claims that the election results mirror anger, discontent, frustration and despair in society, caused by economic and political or moral crisis. Located more at the legitimate-level by giving the impression of genuine political competition, it was mostly emphasized by the experts who claimed that “people feel disgust from politics” (SME, 16. 11.) and the results are “an expression of not solving social and social-economic problems in the region” (RTVS, 24. 11.), when “frustrated voters came and voted for Kotleba” (Plus 1 Deň, 25. 11.). According to the media, “the results are reflected through

dissatisfaction of people with the quality of their life" and "the frustration, scepticism and general disenchantment of people are apparent" (Plus 1 Deň, 25. 11.). The frame also explains the Kotleba's success through "the dissatisfaction of people and their feeling of not solving the problems that directly concern them" (Opposition party, RTVS, 11. 11.).

The Anti-campaign (8 per cent) frame, located at the legitimate-level, claims that either the media or politicians launch actual or reported anti-campaigns against Kotleba. It was mostly emphasized by the extreme right leader himself (39.7 per cent), who repeated the claim about "media pressures from all sides" (Aktuality.sk, 24. 11.). Kotleba stated that "Maňka has compared me to Adolf Hitler, but I will not lower myself to comparing someone to something" (Plus 1 Deň, 11. 11.) or accused the media of bias, when "we have the worst experience with pre-recorded statements – my speech edited to the level I could not recognize myself, pictures of heiling skinheads, fights at football stadiums. We do not need this" (Topky.sk, 18. 11.). The media (8 per cent) claimed that "some parts of the media did not report about this candidate because he is supposed to have racist opinions and attitudes" (RTVS, 11. 11.) or "the right-wing politics took a good and united stance at least in two regions – all for Frešo and all against Kotleba" (SME, 13. 11., 18. 11.).

On the actor-oriented side of frames, two contrasting frames can be observed. At the legitimate-level, the frame claimed that Kotleba is the protector of people (8.1 per cent), at the unacceptable-level, the frame suggested he is a spurious protector of people (6.3 per cent). In the People's protector frame, the politician is presented as a voice and a protector of people, who is following rules and law and order. This frame was mostly emphasized by the people (43.4 per cent) and Kotleba or members of the ĽSNS (44.9 per cent). The people claimed that "I will vote for Kotleba. He wants what five million Slovaks want"; "I like it that he openly identifies problems that I find important" (SME, 11. 11.); or "The result reflects what people think" (TV Markíza, 24. 11.). Kotleba declared that his goal is "to increase the safety of decent people even in the distant parts of the Banská Bystrica region, because the state cannot guarantee it" (SME, 11. 11.). After becoming the governor, Kotleba stated that "the change in the whole society is approaching" (TV JOJ, 24. 11.), when "we are facing very responsible work for all decent people in our region" (Plus 1 Deň, 25. 11.). In some cases, even the media inclined to this frame (4.4 per cent), reporting that "If elected, leader of the People's Party Our Slovakia, a 36-year old IT specialist from Banská Bystrica, would try to improve the social and housing situation of decent families so that they will not leave the region" (Topky.sk, 5. 11.).

The Spurious protector of people frame presents Kotleba's claims and intentions as populist and false, misleadingly easy to attract ordinary people. According to Roma, who were mostly inclined to frame Kotleba this way (40 per cent), the politician claims that he "will take the Roma problem into his own hands and will solve it. And people believed him" (SME, 11. 11.). A public authority (12 per cent) declared that "People once again allowed themselves to be deceived by someone who pretends to be a strong leader" (SME, 26. 11.).

The least emphasized frame on structure-oriented side is the Protest frame. Despite being often presented by experts (13.8 per cent) as one of the main reason standing behind Kotleba's success, this frame was used only in 5.6 per cent of frames.

It claims that the election gains are the result of people voting against the current establishment. An expert saw “a protest vote of disappointed voters” (SME, 16. 11. 2013) and a person (11.3 per cent) confirmed that “I would vote for anyone against Maňka” (SME, 11. 11.). Maňka (and Smer-SD, 11.5 per cent) concluded that the results are “a certain protest of a citizen” (Topky.sk, 24. 11.).

The two least emphasized frames on the actor-oriented side are Legitimate candidate (5.8 per cent) and Isolated politician (3.7 per cent). The former, mostly pursued by various political actors (12.3 per cent) and public authorities (12 per cent), sees Kotleba and his party as legitimate political actors, registered according to the law. Within the frame, multiple sources referred to the principles of democracy. A political actor argued that “Mr. Kotleba was legitimately elected, and we respect it” (Topky.sk, 24. 11.), followed by a public authority stating that “We do not have to like it and we can be disappointed, but this is how democracy works” (TV JOJ, 25. 11.). The latter frame surfaced mainly after the second round. It presents Kotleba as having no political management skills or people around him. Journalists (5.5 per cent) concluded that he probably “will not have the support of any MP, and politicians and the media reject him because of his extremist opinions” (SME, 25. 11.).

As presented in Figure 2, the results showing variations of frames in the course of the elections demonstrate that the Extremist threat was persistently the most salient frame over time. The failure of authorities was mostly emphasized immediately after both the first and second rounds of the elections. A week before the second round, the Anti-campaign frame was highlighted in the overall media discourse. The rest of the frames were used rather steadily during the whole period. In the weeks preceding the first round of the elections, hardly any articles appeared in the media about Kotleba and so no frames appeared either.

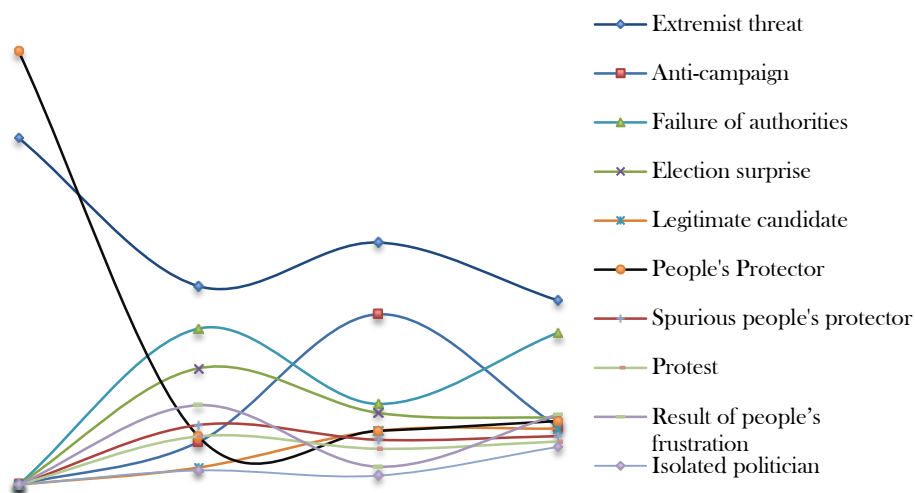


Figure 2. Variations in media frames about Marian Kotleba over time, 17 October 2013 – 30 November 2013. Source: the author

However, while after the first round, the frames were relatively diffused, in the following period the two most salient frames prevailed, leaving other frames clustered

in close percentage proximity. It suggests that while the media continually emphasised the extremist side of Kotleba's candidacy and authorities' responsibility, that are both at the "unacceptable" level of frames, the public debate before the second vote switched to highlighting the possible anti-campaign against Kotleba, and thus to the "legitimate" level of frames.

From the presented data, we can look at the reversed picture and identify the most emphasised frames by respective sources. While the media mostly stressed the extremist nature of Kotleba and his candidacy, the experts equally pointed to the authorities' failure and the frustration of people along with the politician's extremist character. The threat and failure were also prominent in the discourse of various political actors and opposition parties, while public authorities only emphasised the former. Regarding the two main candidates, Marian Kotleba aimed at underlining the notions that he is a protector of people and that an anti-campaign against him had been launched. Vladimír Maňka accentuated mainly the extremist frame and along with the Prime Minister and the chairman of the Smer-SD highlighted the failure of authorities, pointing mainly at the opposition parties. The people saw Kotleba as their protector, while Roma mostly saw him as a spurious protector of people.

Conclusion and discussion: between unacceptability and legitimacy

This study was set out in an attempt to further our understanding about the media coverage of the extreme right leader in 2013 regional elections in Slovakia. It focused on the media attention devoted to the politician and the way in which he was framed in a six-week period during the elections. The findings can be structured in accordance to the media attention and the media framing. First, regarding the media attention, we can see the rapid increase in the media visibility of Marian Kotleba after the first results that persisted over the course of the elections. Second, regarding the media framing, the extreme right leader was equally portrayed with frames on both actor-related and structure-related sides and almost equally covered by frames emphasizing his unacceptability and his legitimacy. At the "unacceptable politician" level, the media discourse mainly stressed the extremist threat and the failure of authorities frames, while at the "legitimate politician" level there was an attempt at counter-framing, pointing to an anti-campaign against Kotleba and his role as a protector of people.

Because the leader of the LSNS in the past attracted the media mostly through controversial appeals and local mobilization, he gained little visibility in the close period preceding the elections. After the elections' first round, Kotleba's media presence significantly increased and the leader attracted a lot of attention in the public debate, as his electoral gains were considered unexpected, which is in line with the media tendency to focus on the scandalous aspects of politics (Mudde, 2004). Noting that the right-wing extremist gained unforeseen public support, the media reproduced the idea of authorities failing to prevent such an outcome. In between the election rounds, a debate about the media anti-campaign arose, claiming it was set to delegitimize Kotleba ahead of the second round of the elections. In fact, it was Kotleba himself, who mostly pointed to the anti-campaign against him. Kotleba's

media salience after the second round was even higher; however, this was to be expected since his victory was received with even greater surprise than the results of the first round.

Despite the fact that we cannot draw conclusions on how the media coverage of Marian Kotleba directly affected the election results, we can identify several processes indicating the final outcome of the elections. Since the prevalent framing in the media may be perceived as negative, this would support the claim that the media report on the extreme right negatively (Mudde, 2005), but would go against Art's (2006) conclusion that negative media evaluations against the extreme right are likely to weaken their public support. However, though the prevalent frame was indeed negative, we can see three clear trends that might have affected the elections, leading to Kotleba's victory. First, the media attention for the politician radically increased after the first round of the elections, making Kotleba highly salient in the public debate. Second, apart from the link between Kotleba and extremism, we can observe counter-frames appealing to the legitimate side of the politician's candidacy. Third, the overall media discourse might have resonated well with the extreme right discourse and public attitudes towards elites and the Roma minority. As the visibility, legitimacy, and resonance are crucial in successful diffusion of the message (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Bos et al., 2011), these three trends might have a profound effect on the Kotleba's victory.

Specifically, as the higher salience in the media is one of the keys for voter support (e.g. Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007), the rapid increase in Kotleba's visibility made him more salient and known to the wider electorate. Though the media attention for Kotleba cannot explain the results of the first round, we may find help in the media framing of the politician. The framing of Kotleba during the elections was not unilaterally negatively-skewed, but the division of frames that underline his unacceptability to those stressing his legitimacy was 60 to 40. The extremist threat and other "unacceptable" frames were counter-framed by the "legitimate" frames that put Kotleba in a position of a genuine politician and a scapegoat that was only trying to help the people. Moreover, the main "unacceptable" frames were mostly emphasised by political and public actors, while "legitimate" frames by Kotleba and the people.

The focus on the frames claiming that while Kotleba tried to protect the people from the Roma menace (People's protector), he was being oppressed by corrupted political and cultural elites (Anti-campaign), created successful counter-frames, which made it possible for Kotleba to fully build upon the anti-establishment and xenophobic discourse. Such discourse was able to resonate with the electorate, as not only the public tend to hold negative attitudes towards Roma, but also the political and media discourses reproduce negative stereotypes and prejudices (e.g. Drál', 2009). As the LSNS and its leader since 2010 fully engaged in the anti-elite and xenophobic discourse, the extreme right strategy appeared to be resonant with the public in regions with perceived problematic relations between the majority and the Roma minority (Kluknavská, 2013). This was also the case in the Banská Bystrica region, which is affected by high unemployment and where numerous Roma settlements are situated.

Therefore, even if the media take negative stances against the politician and may not be sympathetic towards him, they can make a politician salient in the public debate (Ellinas, 2010) and frame him in a favourable way, granting him visibility, legitimacy and resonance (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Bos et al., 2011). As Kotleba and the LSNS in their discourse consider various out-groups as malicious for society and especially target the Roma minority and political elites, blaming them for misdeeds against “decent people” (Kluknavská, 2014), this strategy might have found itself successful during 2013 regional elections. This finding is supported by the poll, conducted by Polis agency between 24 and 28 November 2013, asking whether the respondents consider the victory of Marian Kotleba to be a sign of a growing extremism. Almost half of the respondents did not consider his victory to be a sign of a growing extremism in the country (48.8 per cent), while only 29.9 per cent did consider it as an expansion of the extremism (SITA, 2013b).

In the light of these findings and given the constraints of the exploratory case study, future research could follow with analyses on the media presentation of the extreme right leader building upon the framing theory by adopting and adaptation of presented issue-specific frames, looking at the politicians' or parties' salience and legitimacy in the discourse. Such research could be based on longitudinal analysis, aiming at linking the media content with the electoral results.

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