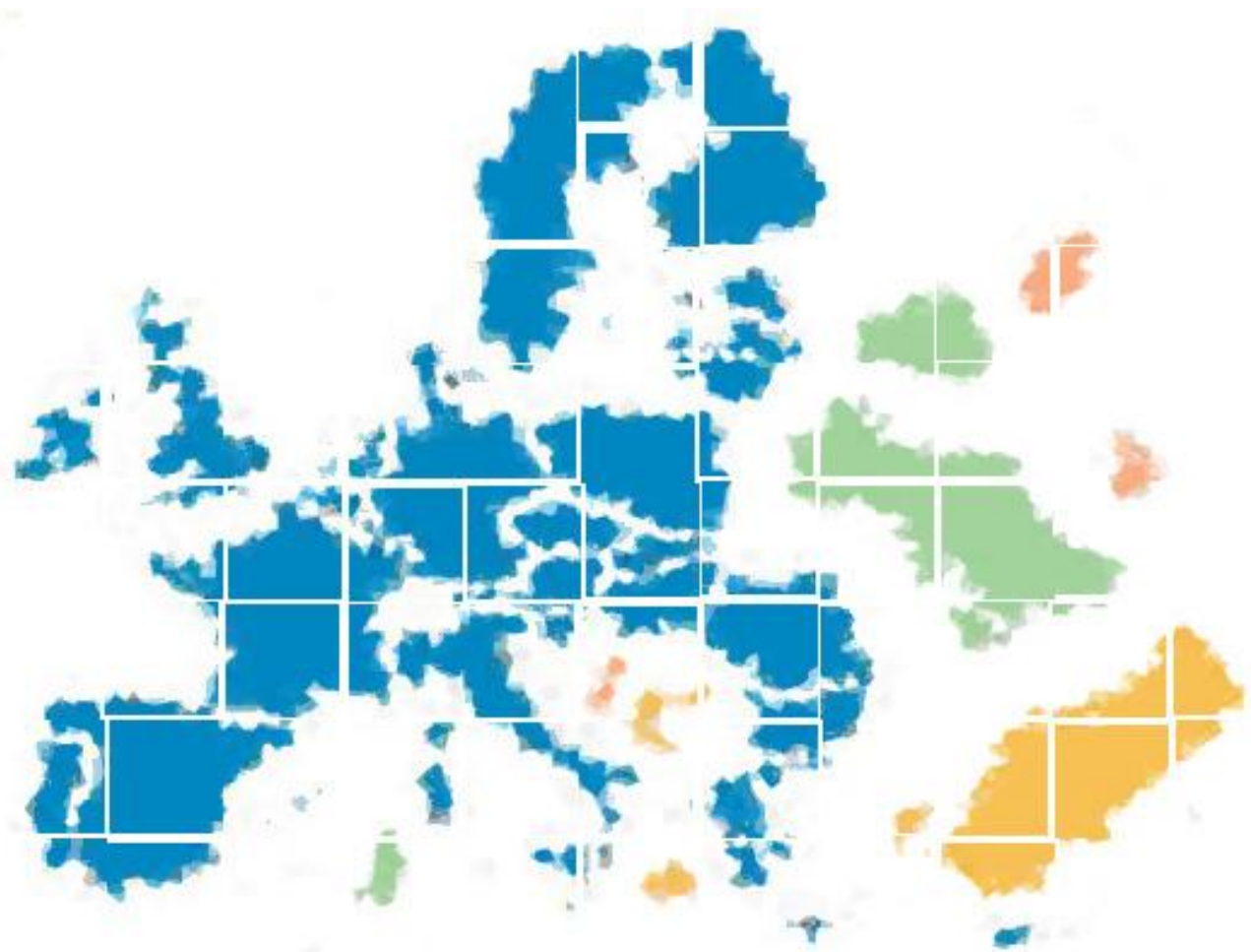


Frontiers of Democracy

Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

Olga Gyárfášová



Center for European Neighborhood Studies

The Center for European Neighborhood Studies (CENS) is an independent research center of the Central European University (CEU) located in Budapest, Hungary. Its main goal is to contribute to an informed international dialogue about the future of the European Union in the world, while capitalizing on its Central European perspective and regional embeddedness.

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Frontiers of Democracy

Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine

Moldova and Ukraine, countries of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program, are undergoing complex processes of democratic transformation, but with weak embeddedness of democratic values and principles drawbacks can occur. It is embeddedness that helps to overcome the challenges of transformation and pushes countries beyond mere frontiers of democracy towards becoming strongly committed democratic communities. The goal of the [“Frontiers of Democracy: Embedding Democratic Values in Moldova and Ukraine”](#) project of the CEU Center for European Neighborhood Studies is to facilitate embedding democratic values in the societal ethos in Moldova and Ukraine by providing a forum for discussion of the difficulties of such a complex process and by drawing on the transition experience of the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).



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The opinions expressed here are those of the author.

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Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

Introduction

The development of post-communist democracies is often described as a rapid fall from euphoria brought on by democratic freedoms to discontent related to the loss of social security and subsequently disappointment in government performance and public administration. Instead of satisfaction the passing years of democracy are characterized by growing disillusionment which often results in political apathy and a lack of interest in public affairs. However, it is desirable to examine satisfaction with democracy in a more sophisticated way. Therefore, it is important to identify factors affecting the level of satisfaction with democracy such as the existing political system and especially its everyday functionality. Furthermore, we put these factors within the context of civic participation and democratic values.

Studying the countries of the Central European Region shows that the path to consolidated and quality democracy is neither linear nor irreversible—regardless of various indicators used for its measurement. Slovakia and its Visegrad neighbors have experienced several “ups” and “downs” in the past decades. Different trajectories of respective democracies are reflected in a different way and at the same time they are shaped by opinions and political behavior of citizens.

The following study analyses public perception of rights in a democracy, satisfaction with how democracy works, factors of civic participation, and external and internal efficacy. The paper conceptualizes the satisfaction with democracy as satisfaction with good governance; additionally, it investigates the main factors that influence satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction with democracy has an impact on democratic participation and the perception and understanding of democratic values. In order to provide not just theoretical concepts but also empirical evidence we rely on empirical findings from Slovakia, above all the ISSP surveys, module Citizenship, conducted in 2005 and 2014.¹ For our purposes Slovakia is understood as an empirical case study that is representative of other Central European countries with similar trajectories of democratic consolidation.

¹ ISSP survey Slovakia 2014 and the work on this study was supported by research grant APVV 0309-11 *Slovak society in international comparative surveys: before and during the crises*.

Satisfaction with democracy as the satisfaction with quality of outputs

There is a general agreement that the implementation of democracy is one thing and the maintenance of a stable democratic regime that is perceived by its citizens as efficient, fair and responsible is another. There is no other political or philosophical category as similarly robust as democracy. Thus, it is not easy to conceptualize it for purposes of empirical research. It is appropriate to start with an explanation of the concept of democracy using standard theories and models. In his studies (1959, 1966), Martin S. Lipset identifies legitimacy and effectiveness as key dimensions of democracy and examines their importance for the stability of a democratic regime. Legitimacy is defined as the “capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society.” (Lipset 1966: 64) It is characteristics of the system based on the belief and values of citizens. Effectiveness in Lipset’s concept is understood as “actual performance, the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government and population.” (c. d.: 77) It is also necessary to distinguish normative legitimacy of the regime, i.e. consent to the rules of the game (expressed in a well-known and popular metaphor “democracy as the only game in town”), from the instrumental one which represents the functionality of the regime, evaluation of its performance.

Combining these two dimensions, we get four theoretical types. Type A is highly stable and type D is highly instable, unless – of course – it is supported by the power of a dictatorial regime.

Scheme 1: Effectiveness and legitimacy

Effectiveness		
Legitimacy	+ /+ (A)	+ /- (B)
	-/+ (C)	-/- (D)

Source: Lipset 1966: 81.

Political scientists Jacques Thomassen and Henk van den Kolk compared effectiveness and political support in old and new democracies on the basis of empirical research. They tested which are more sensitive to variations in system effectiveness. Based on the data, it can be stated that the impact of how economic situations are perceived on satisfaction with democracy is stronger in new democracies; therefore, the support of the political system by citizens is more vulnerable depending on economic situation. The authors claim that, among other things, this result may be explained by the fact that the legitimacy of the political system is not supported by internalized values (Thomassen – Kolk 2009: 346).

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

David Easton’s work is another classical theory of democracy and support of the system. He distinguishes diffuse support, which does not depend on everyday satisfaction with outputs, and specific support, which depends on specific outputs, processes and objects. Diffuse support is a reservoir of favorable opinions or good will that helps members accept or tolerate outputs they disagree with or those they consider threatening to their needs. (Easton 1965: 273) Given types of support differ in their sources and objects of support. This is illustrated in Scheme 2.

Scheme 2: Objects, types, and sources of support

Types of support	Sources of support	Objects of support	
		<i>Regime</i>	<i>Authorities</i>
Diffuse	Norms and values	Legitimacy of regime	Legitimacy of authorities
	Generalized utility	Trust in regime	Trust in authorities
Specific	Short-term utility		Satisfaction with day-to-day output

Source: Thomassen – van den Kolk 2009: 336.

As Thomassen and van den Kolk considered effectiveness to be the dimension more important for political system support and more vulnerable, other authors also believe effectiveness is an important precondition of legitimacy and they point out effectiveness not only in terms of economic results but also in exercising authority: on inputs and outputs as well. This is also related to the fact that, in new democracies, democracy is perceived as the guarantee of social rights and equality – i.e. of what is usually indicated as “outputs” of democracy. Equality, impartiality, and fair-mindedness are understood as qualities of good governance.

The same conceptualization is also suggested by Andrew Roberts (2010) who identifies the following dimensions of democratic quality: 1. quality of processes (focusing mainly on whether elections are free and fair); 2. quality as preconditions, particularly– rule of law and human development; 3. quality as social outputs, especially outputs of policies providing social benefits to people; however, Roberts also claims to be one of the authors who considers democratic accountability (Schmitter) as an additional output influencing quality of democracy ; 4. quality as linkages, and this is related especially to citizen control of politicians. (Roberts 2010: 26-32)

Jonas Linde argues Rothstein and Teorell's theory (2008) and emphasizes the need for impartial inputs – the same approach to the exercise of political

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

rights (universal suffrage, access to political rights – association, forms of participation other than participation in elections and the like) but he also points out the importance of outputs and of quality governance. Rothstein and Teorell stress that the quality of governance – especially for citizens in new democracies – is mainly a phenomenon on the part of outputs. They point out the linkage between inequality of outputs of the political system and political equality of the inputs, i.e. equal opportunities of access to power and universal suffrage in democratic elections (Linde 2012: 37) which even the citizens of new democracies consider to be natural and available. The results of Linde's comparison of five postcommunist countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia; Slovakia wasn't included in the mentioned project) show that legitimacy is positively affected by fair and impartial attitudes from institutions and public administrations towards the exercise of authority and political implementation. Citizens perceive this aspect of democracy as more important compared to the possibility to participate in elections and/or pursue individual interests. In other words: it is a perception of impartiality in public administration that is a strong factor for regime support, and these important factors are often neglected in previous research. (Linde 2012: 57) Of course, it cannot be presumed in simplified terms that improved procedural fairness and equality in how institutions treat citizens will be a magic wand for strengthening legitimacy. However, research repeatedly confirms that this is a highly important factor—especially in new democracies. (Rose et al. 1998)

All conceptualizations mentioned above coincide in their emphasis on quality of governance as the main consideration towards perceiving the quality of democracy and not normative ideas of democracy. Fareed Zakaria also clearly distinguishes democracy from good government claiming that “to have democracy means to have a good government”. (Zakaria 2004: 24) In the literature, various dimensions and signs of good government are mentioned but they have a common intersection containing participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, and focus on consensus, equality, effectiveness, responsible accountability and strategic vision. (Norris 2011: 120)

Satisfaction with the functionality of democracy

How does one assess a term as general and complex term as “satisfaction with democracy or functioning of democracy”? It is one of the most frequently used indicators in surveys focusing on perception of the quality of democracy, however (or maybe because of it) its definitions vary. Conceptualizations also correspond to the specific and diffuse regime support (Klingemann 1999, Thomassen – Kolk 2009), political trust (Dalton 2004), as well as the perception of economic satisfaction.

The path to recognition of dimensions related to satisfaction with democracy and regime support may not always be based on theoretical assumptions, it

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

may also be inductive and based on an analysis of available data. Bellucci and Memoli (2012), for example, accentuate the work of Hans Dieter Klingemann based on data from the World Value Survey. Using factor analysis Klingemann identified three dimensions in the structure of support: citizens are able to distinguish a. support towards political community; b. democracy as an ideal form of governance; c. performance of regime (Bellucci – Memoli 2012: 12), and the third dimension can be understood as the effectiveness or outputs of governance/regime. This dimensional analysis shows that satisfaction with democracy is not only about an ideal but in particular about real performance and results of governance.

The analysis of satisfaction with democracy within the Intune project was based on 13 indicators covering five dimensions identified by Norris (1999) and Dalton (2004). Specifically, they are as follows: 1. support for political community (expressed by national pride and national identity), 2. support for democratic principles (sharing democratic values), 3. trust in institutions, 4. regime performance and 5. engagement in the political system. (Bellucci – Memoli 2012:12-13) The extensive analysis of data from 24 European countries focusing on comparisons of satisfaction with democracy at national and European levels shows a high level of professing democratic principles (regardless of the “age” of democracy), but significant differences in trust towards institutions and satisfaction with the current functionality of democracy. Comparatively lower values are shown in new democracies. Results of their analysis confirm that democratic legitimacy depends directly on concrete results. The conclusion may seem trivial: satisfaction with democracy at national level rises when economic performance is good, level of corruption is low, citizens are politically involved and elected institutions provide fair and wide representation. (Ibidem: 35-36)

But how does the public, the citizens, understand quality of democracy? This question can also be approached through the importance of rights in democracy.

In Slovakia (but similarly in other CE countries), surveys document that the term democracy has a positive connotation, but different content. Basic attributes of the normative concept of democracy are not questioned. There is, however, a certain duality in the public’s perception: “good ideal – bad/insufficient implementation” so the people see a huge gap between what “should be” and what they really live. Another frequently articulated contradiction is between “good democracy” and “bad politicians.” Responses to the open-ended question in the 2004 survey have shown that people see democracy mainly as personal freedom and freedom of choice. Such individualistic interpretations were provided in almost half of the responses. Social and economic interpretations are slightly less common spontaneous interpretations: about a quarter of respondents see democracy as respecting social rights and a fair standard of living. Democracy seen as equality before the law or justice was even less common in that survey (this association was mentioned by 12% of respondents). Active participation in public affairs

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

coming in at just 10% of respondents was the least connected with democracy.

In 2014 ISSP survey respondents had to evaluate nine different rights the democratic system should provide and guarantee. The “right to health care for everyone” and the “right of all citizens to fair standard of living” were by far the most important. Low standard deviation for these first two rights shows the high level of agreement among respondents in terms of these two items. The third most important right – “that state authorities respect democratic rights under any circumstances” can be considered the right to equal treatment and an impartial approach to all citizens under all circumstances. Based on the references mentioned above, all three most important items can be considered as determinant “outputs” of the quality of the system and indicators of good governance. Other items below that we asked about in our questionnaire show a comparably lower level of significance: public participation in public decision-making; right to public disobedience, non-participation in elections, and rights connected with access to the right to vote. Most of these comparably less important rights are related to inputs of the system.

In Slovakia, significant preference to social rights has been longstanding— dating back to the beginning of the 1990s, i.e. shortly after the political regime change. Although the primary desire connected with the regime change was to recover political rights and freedoms, at the moment these goals were achieved there was a sharp disappointment from deficits related to social rights. Focus on social and democratic rights clearly shows that things people miss the most are the most important, i.e. the results prove Inglehart’s hypothesis of scarcity over socialization. (Inglehart 1977) This also confirms conclusions of earlier research evaluating the importance of democratic rights and freedoms and assessing compliance with the same. There is an inverse relationship – citizens attribute the highest value to rights and freedoms they consider to be the least respected (right to work, health care, equality before the law), and vice versa, they accentuate the least the rights and freedoms which they consider to be ensured the most (political rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of religion.)

The research conducted in autumn 2014, on the 25th anniversary of November 1989, repeatedly confirmed that the negative balance of post-November development is related especially to: job opportunities; social security; citizens' security and criminality (almost up to 70% of respondents stated deterioration of situation in each of these areas) and health care, which was also assessed as predominantly negative (55% consider it to be worse compared to the health care provided to similar people before November 1989). On the other hand it has to be said that vast majority appreciate extended possibility to study, work or travel abroad (77%); free access to information (65%); access to education (61%); increased opportunity to express their views (60%) and to freely participate in public life (54%).

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

Let us look closer at the participation right contained in the stimulus “more opportunities to participate in public decision-making and demonstrate public disobedience.” Prominent political sociologist and theorist of democracy, Larry Diamond, considers the participation right of citizens to be one of four core democratic values. The next three are political liberties, equality before the law, and equal rights for women. (Diamond 1999) Civic participation was addressed in more detail in our earlier study. (Bútorová – Gyárfášová 2010) Let us note that while participation takes a top but not the most important position among the selected statements within the normative concept of democracy, in real life, quite the contrary can be seen – the importance of participation decreases.

Declining importance of participation is reflected also in the normative image of a “good citizen.” To respect laws and regulations and to avoid tax payment are much higher in peoples’ ranking than to participate actively in civic and public life or to monitor the government’s activities. A comparison with 2005 ISSP results shows an overall weakening in the importance of participative aspects of the citizenship.

Civic participation – Low, weak, and unequal?

We have to take into consideration that civic participation does not only take place in the sphere of traditionally understood politics, meaning in the sphere of political parties and political institutions, but also in social and economic spheres. The borderline between civic and political participation is blurred and even non-political activities may take a clearly political dimension. That is why we can speak about civic political participation as Russell Dalton did in late 1980s using the term “citizen politics” for “citizens’ political behavior” (Dalton 1988). The most obvious and visible form is voting, participation in an election, and activity that legitimizes other political processes. Further development of civic participation is usually characterized as a process of linear, step-by-step decline of civic engagement where the main argument is the decline in voter turnout. On the other hand, studies based on the empirical comparative studies show that the citizens in post-communist countries differ from those in established democracies by one common feature – lower engagement in public affairs (Vráblíková 2009: 868).

We see that on the one hand after 1989 the space for civic participation has opened up while on the other hand a significant part of the citizenry does not use this space. Attila Ágh points to a “participation paradox”, he argues that the initial large mobilization at the very beginning of systemic change has not generated a “citizen’s culture and participatory democracy as a new tradition in the ECE states.” (Ágh 2010: 76)

We should ask why it is so, why the newly opened space has been left half-empty once the first wave of enthusiasm went down? Internal differences in

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

the surveys do not show any consistent patterns, the explanatory factors are diffused and what the cause of the differences in the level of participation in established and newer democracies (analyses of comparative empirical surveys of political and civic participation see Vrábliková 2009) remains an open question. Among many factors the Austrian political scientists rightly point to ‘over-participation’, that is, the quasi-monopolization of the political scene by the parties has created an alienation from politics and low trust in the new democratic institutions, and it has maintained long standing effects (see Plasser et al.: 1998). Arguing by high level of ‘partocracy’ is quite common, having in mind that the political parties “captured” the public space and are occupying and monopolizing it. We could illustrate this phenomenon with the long-term credibility deficit of the political parties in Slovakia² but the phenomenon has a more general validity in the post-communist world.³

A comprehensive survey about civic participation in Slovakia (Bútorová – Gyárfášová 2010) identified the following factors of (non)participation:

- Civic helplessness (nothing can be done– „nedá sa“) – it is partially inherited from the previous regime but being strengthen by post-communist developments;
- Perceived efficacy of participation is very low and de-motivating. It is related also to the deficit in meaningful choices. And again - absence (decline) of choice has become salient in many political systems. The phenomenon has been studied by Schmitt and Wessels (2005). According to them “[a] meaningful choice set presupposes a plurality of choice option from which to choose. ... Those options need to differ on dimensions that are relevant to the purpose of election – to decide collectively about which political agenda should be persuade [pursued??] and which policies should be enacted, and about who should do it.” The grounds for decline can be summarized in 3 factors:
 1. Traditional cleavages no longer structure the electoral choices
 2. Many advanced societies are becoming more homogenous, the differences between parties have declined
 3. “professionalization“ of political campaigns – tends to downgrade the choice set offered to the electorate (Schmitt – Wessels 2005);
- Respect for authorities and yielding the responsibility to “them” – this inclination is expressed in high agreement with the statement “The best government decides in her own capacity, without any say from the citizens” (Bútorová – Gyárfášová 2010) but also in widespread paternalistic stereotypes and uncritical vertical trust delegating the responsibility to those “above”;
- Low social capital and deficits in interpersonal and horizontal trust.

² In 2013 political parties were trusted just by 17% of adult population what’s even less than the judiciary (trusted by only 24% of respondents) or the police (Bútorová-Gyárfášová 2013).

³ Dozens of studies provide empirical evidences. For example: Mishler - Rose, 2005 .

All these factors have an impact on lower participation.

Nowadays, newer democracies, but again, democracies in general, face a “representation paradox” as the consequence of unequal participation. Lijphart’s influential study about unequal participation as democracy’s unresolved dilemma (1997) is more and more relevant. Uneven participation means unequal influence and that is reproducing social inequality. We should ask – whose voice can be heard in the elected bodies? The famous “spiral of silence” is becoming a feature not only of public discourse but of political representation itself.

Attila Ágh argues that the representation paradox appears in three major forms: “First, the government and politicians elected by the active majority at a given election may not be considered legitimate by the others, since ‘this is not my government’. Second, these unstable governments have to answer to the populations only during election periods, so the accountability mechanism are, they do not include the control of social and territorial actors between two elections. Third, the ECE populations do not feel that their governments represent their interests properly in the EU transnational bodies either. In brief, the representation paradox means that the more the governments concentrate the power in their hands referring to the ‘representative democracy,’ the less representative they are, since they rarely have the sincere support of the majority of the population.” (Ágh 2010, p. 78)

In summary, we see civic participation (not just electoral turnout) as low, or at least lower, compared to earlier years of transition. The factors of these developments are identified, but the recipe on how to change this trend is missing.

Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Alienation

When discussing citizens perception of political reality concepts like frustration, disconnect, discontent, alienation are used. However, these are very general, overstretched, and difficult to conceptualize. Czech sociologist Lukáš Linek (2010) compiled an extensive theoretical and empirical analysis of attitudes of the Czech population towards the political regime and its institutions (2010). Based on the classics of the theory of democracy (especially Lipset, Easton and others) he defines, operationalizes, and empirically analyses four main dimensions of public attitudes toward the political regime: legitimacy of the regime, institutionalized and individual alienation, and political discontentment and its impact on voting behavior. Increased distrust resulted in transfers of voters, declines in party loyalty, declines in issue voting and increases in repeated abstention. (Linek 2010: 41-42)

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

The concept of institutionalized and individual alienation in politics as closely related to political efficacy inspired further analysis of satisfaction with the functionality of democracy in Slovakia. Originally, political efficacy was defined as an awareness, a feeling that “individual political action affects or may affect political processes, in other words – it is worth meeting one’s obligations as a citizen.” (Campbell et al. 1954: 187) Over time, however, its definition has been extended to include internal and external efficacy, and the absence of the former is the source of institutionalized alienation while the absence of the latter is the source of political alienation. Distinguishing between the two dimensions of political efficacy takes us to a study by Robert Lane who claimed, as early as 1959, that this concept includes two dimensions – the conviction that a) the government is responsive, and b) that an individual is able to influence it. (Lane 1959, in Linek 2010: 88) Empirical evidence on the existence of two separate dimensions was offered by Balch (1979, in Linek 2010: 88). The internal dimension refers to the conviction of the individual that they have instruments to influence the government, and the external dimension is the government response to such actions. When political efficacy doesn't work, political alienation occurs. In his key work, Seeman (1959) postulated five different meanings of alienation: 1. Helplessness defined as an assumption of an individual that their behavior may not influence achievement of results or objectives they try to achieve; in this form, it overlaps with low sense of external efficacy, but also cynicism and negativism against political institutions and elites; 2. Meaninglessness which means non-existence of meaning and the sense of incomprehensibility of social affairs and event dynamics which cannot be understood by an individual and moreover, their future and development; in this form, it overlaps with the low sense of internal political efficacy. (Linek 2010: 90) Seeman further talks about normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement that contributed to a more detailed understanding of a previously one-dimensional term and became the basis of several empirical studies; although dimensions such as helplessness and meaninglessness may be considered the cause or consequence of alienation.

Based on the empirical ISSP surveys we could identify the following variables for external and internal efficacy:

A. External efficacy:

1. The voice of people like me has no influence on government action. (5-point scale from “I definitely agree” to “I definitely disagree” + I cannot make up my mind)
2. I don't think that the government is really interested in what people like me think.
3. In most cases it can be believed that people in government do what is right.

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

4. Most politicians started their political careers only for their personal benefit.
5. If you think about public administration in Slovakia, to what extent does it serves its citizens? (1=completely; 2=partially; 3=not very much; 4=not at all + I cannot make up my mind)
6. In your opinion, to what extent is corruption prevalent in public administration in Slovakia? (1=it affects almost nobody; 2= it affects a small number of people; 3=it affects a considerable number of people; 4=it affects a large number of people; 5=it affects almost everyone + I cannot make up my mind)
7. How likely is it that the National Council of the Slovak Republic would deal with your requirements (4-point scale from very likely to completely unlikely + I don't know)

B. Internal efficacy:

1. I think I understand important political problems in the Slovak Republic quite well. (5-point scale from “I definitely agree” to “I definitely disagree” + I cannot make up my mind)
2. I think most citizens in Slovakia are better informed on politics and what the government does than me.
3. To what extent are you personally interested in politics? (1= I am interested very much; 2= I am rather interested; 3= I am not very interested; 4= I am not interested in politics at all + I don't know)
4. Let's imagine that the National Council of the Slovak Republic discusses the adoption of a new law that you consider to be unfair or harmful. How likely is it that you would try to do something about it either on your own or together with other people? (1= very likely; 2= rather likely; 3= not very likely; 4= completely unlikely; 8= I cannot make up my mind + I don't know)

Let us look at the distribution of opinions on those aspects of political system functionality which have been operationalized as an external (how the system works for citizens, its responsiveness towards citizens, public administration performance) and internal efficacy (to what extent citizens can and are ready to participate in political processes, their interest in politics and readiness to be involved in public affairs). If conditions of external and internal efficacy fail to be met, we can talk about alienation in two levels – institutional (institutional alienation and helplessness) and individual (individual alienation, feeling of individual helplessness, absence of meaning). In general, there is evidence that although some indicators were affected by favorable development trends between 2005 and 2014, the functionality of political institutions and politicians on their own is perceived mostly in a negative way: three quarters of respondents think that it is unlikely that the National Council of the Slovak Republic would deal with their requirements;

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

73% think that most politicians started their political career only for their personal benefit; two thirds expressed the opinion that the government is not interested in the opinion of ordinary people; more than half (56%) are convinced that the voice of people like them has no influence on government action and corruption in public administration affects a high number of or almost all people (51%). These statements show a high level of external, institutionalized alienation in terms of political efficacy, and also insufficient level of good governance in terms of effectiveness and democracy outputs. According to a majority of the public principles such as responsiveness, transparency, and responsibility are absent.

In case of individual alienation, the gap between citizens and politics increased significantly compared to 2005 – the feeling that people don't understand is more common (one third in 2014 compared to a fifth in 2005), interest in politics is declining (the share of those with no interest increased from 54% to 62%); the will to “speak up” remains low (65% declare that it is unlikely that they would do something to protect their interests. Using Hirschman's terminology we can talk about prevalence of “exit strategies” over “voice strategies” (Hirschman 1978), which means that declared discontentment and behavioral inactivity prevail. It can be anticipated that negative perceptions of political institutions results in erosion of cognitive understanding and also in declined interest in being informed (in this case, it is difficult to say what is a reason and what is a consequence.) As several studies of civic participation have revealed, civic participation is favorably influenced by “political literacy” (Plichtová 2010) or in other words by an understanding of politics or cognitive understanding (Bútorová – Gyárfášová 2010).

Using stepwise regression analysis (logit model) we identified which indicators of external and internal efficacy influence satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction with democracy recoded to a 5-point evaluation scale was selected as a dependent variable. The higher the positive value of the coefficient, the more satisfied with democracy the respondents in the given category are compared to the respondents in the reference category. The higher the negative value of the coefficient, the less satisfied with democracy the respondents in the given category are compared to the respondents in the reference category.

The stepwise regression analysis showed that the following four variables significantly influence satisfaction with democracy within the external efficacy dimension:

- In most cases it can be believed that people in government do what is right
- Public administration serves citizens
- Level of corruption in public administration
- Most politicians started their political careers only for their personal benefit

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

The variable “it can be believed that people in government do what is right”, i.e. trust in responsibility and competence of decisions made by politicians in the government. Responsiveness of public administration (it serves citizens), corruption and dishonesty of politicians follow.

On the other hand, variables “the voice of people like me has no influence on government action” (which could also be understood as an indicator of responsiveness) and “I don't think that the government is really interested in what people like me think” (it also expresses certain level of responsiveness) do not influence the level of satisfaction with democracy.

The influence of factors summarized under the common dimension of internal efficacy is less ambiguous. Out of four tested variables (I understand important political problem in the Slovak Republic quite well; most of citizens in Slovakia are better informed on politics than me; interest in politics and readiness to do something against unfair decisions of the parliament) only one – understanding political problems – has proved to co-influence the satisfaction with democracy.

Conclusions and discussion

All in all social and economic rights continue to be strongly emphasized in terms of priorities of rights in democracy, while other, especially political rights are seen as comparatively less important by the public. Compared to 2005, the importance of the right to participation declined and this may indicate that people are less interested in it. Similar declines occurred in respective internal efficacy indicators – interest in politics and ability to understand it decreased compared to 2005.

Satisfaction with the functionality of democracy is influenced by the quality of outputs. This is also a challenge to theoretically address the term “quality of democracy.” If this term fails to be addressed through quality of governance, effectiveness and an analyzed concept of external efficacy, real existing problems of democracy will hardly be understood. The public perceives the quality of democracy particularly through its performances and outputs and not via a normative model which, in fact, is not called into question. As for the quality of democracy—the public assesses that the quality of governance and democracy is expected to provide good governance. It is not enough to have democracy and related political rights such as the possibility of involvement and participation in order for the idea of good governance to be fulfilled. Satisfaction with democracy is affected more by factors influencing external efficacy than internal ones. It means that outputs of the governance quality – performance of institutions, their responsiveness, impartiality, non-corrupt behavior and responsibility are more important for satisfaction with democracy than internal efficacy.

Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

Findings that show increasing political alienation also contribute to the view of present day Slovak society. Long-term dissatisfaction with the quality of governance results in increased political alienation, helplessness, and meaninglessness. High levels of non-transparency paralyze civic participation and reduce social capital. Moreover, non-transparency may support previously mentioned conspiratorial stereotypes and this returns back in a vicious circle as a low level of understanding and readiness (will) to understand politics. On the other hand it can be seen that internal efficacy does not influence the level of satisfaction with the functionality of democracy. This indicates not only alienation and resignation but also a certain “discontinuity” and remoteness from the political reality that provides a safe alibi for inactivity. These attitudes are especially a result of behavior of political institutions and elites. It may seem paradoxical that several parameters of external efficacy slightly improved compared to the year 2005 while the evaluation remains critical. Internal efficacy parameters are more negative.

In the perspective of this analysis the dilemma between freedom and social rights is “in the air.” The question raised currently in several societies is: “Who could guarantee equality, social justice, and order and at what price?” A rising spiral of disinterest and disaffection of citizens erodes civic participation and drives the viscous cycle of institutional and individual alienation. How to break it remains an open question. On the other hand, based on anecdotal observation, certain changes directed to improve civic activities and involvement at the local level of public administration can be seen. These however, were out of scope of the analyzed research. This is also the reason why further monitoring of factors related to satisfaction with democracy at various levels of governance continues to be an ongoing assignment.

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Olga Gyárfášová
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Olga Gyárfášová
Satisfaction with Democracy, Participation, and Political Alienation in Slovakia

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