DEPOSIT AND CONSULTATION OF DISSERTATION

One copy of your dissertation will be deposited in ORA (Oxford University Research Archive), where it is intended to be freely available online. In order to facilitate this, you are requested to complete and sign the form below.

Please use block capitals

Surname **Bílik**
First names (in full) **Matej**
Faculty board EDUCATION
Degree name and pathway **MSc Education (Higher Education)**
Title of dissertation **Higher Education and Knowledge in Slovak Political Life** N.B. The title stated here must be precisely the same as that stated on the title page of the thesis submitted. **A candidate wishing to amend the title previously approved by the faculty must apply to the faculty board for permission to do so.**
Supervisor **Professor Simon Marginson**
Subject keywords *Enter your own keywords or phrases to describe your work. This information helps us describe your work in ORA* Higher education Student self-formation Political participation; political representation; politics Slovakia Knowledge Rationality Experts; expertise Educational cleavage Institutional design
Research methods used *This information helps us describe your work on SOLO for future students e.g. quantitative, interviews, vocabulary test, systematic review, etc.* Interviews; Elite interviews Biographical data collection Critical phenomenology Case study Messy approach

Declaration by the candidate as author of the dissertation

1. I understand that I am the owner of this dissertation and that the copyright rests with me unless I specifically transfer it to another person.
2. I understand that the Department requires that I shall deposit one copy of my dissertation in the Oxford University Research Archive ('ORA') where it shall be freely available online for use in accordance with ORA's Terms and Conditions of Use [https://ora.ox.ac.uk/terms_of_use].
3. I understand that this dissertation should not contain material that can be used to personally identify individuals or specific groups of individuals, and that such material should be removed before this dissertation is deposited in ORA.
4. I agree to be bound by the terms of the ORA Grant of Non-exclusive Licence [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ora/deposit-in-ora/deposit-licence] and I warrant that to the best of my knowledge, making my thesis available on the internet will not infringe copyright or any other rights of any other person or party, nor contain defamatory material.
5. I agree that my dissertation shall be available for download in ORA in accordance with paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above.

Signed [an electronic signature is sufficient]: 

Date: August 12, 2022

Higher Education and Knowledge in Slovak Political Life

Dissertation submitted for Master of Science (MSc) in Education (Higher Education)
at the Department of Education, University of Oxford

Written by **Matej Bílik** (Wolfson College)
Supervised by **Professor Simon Marginson** (Linacre College)

August 2022

Word count: 19 997

Abstract

This research focuses on the promise that expanding education and scientific progress will enhance social harmony. It explores this question in elite interviews with Slovak politicians, analysing their answers through the use of critical phenomenology and messy approaches, with an emphasis on active reflexivity. The issues are presented in a broader historical context, accounting for current political and educational challenges, and institutional structures. Participants' experiences from interviews are complemented with educational biographic data of Slovak politicians. The first part of the research focuses on the relationship between education and political life. A compiled database of the educational biographical data of politicians was used to map the Slovak educational cleavage within political representation, confirming the thesis of diploma democracy (Bovens & Wille, 2017). However, participants reject the simplified binary division of people with and without HE. Hence, the research moved to explore the absolute and relative contributions of education to political participation. It uncovered nuanced ways that certain educational experiences in combination with affluent background and the associated predispositions, help individuals to accumulate advantages that place them in proximity to political power. The research introduces the concept of higher education immersion, which shows the impact of educational hierarchies on stratifying access to transformative higher education-related experiences and through that limit space for self-formation. In the second part of the dissertation, the relationship between knowledge and political life is explored, mapping various rationalities used to justify policies. The dissertation identifies the need to rethink the relationship of science to policy and the need to critically reflect on the limits of public reason in the context of confirmation bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect, and social media.

Key words: educational cleavage, higher education, social harmony, rationality, Slovakia

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
MP	Member of the Parliament - National Council of Slovak Republic
NR SR	National Council of Slovak Republic (Slovak Parliament)
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MINEDU	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Republic
OECD	Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation
TASR	News Agency of the Slovak Republic
OĽANO	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (political party)

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Graphs

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking my participants, for finding time in your hectic life and sharing your experiences with me. The year at Oxford would not have been the same without my friends at NOOC, the amazing MSc HE cohort, my library buddies, the teaching staff at the Department of Education and all the supportive staff. To all my friends in Slovakia and around the world, while you might have not been there, I am grateful that you are part of my life. My ideas and thinking were transformed through interactions with all of you and so much credit goes to you.

I would like to thank my parents and family; you supported me from the start and inspired me to think and care about education. And with patience tolerated my writing in the past weeks.

This journey has been so personally formative thanks to the guidance and help of Professor Simon Marginson. You saw my 'messy' ideas and believed there was something in them worth exploring, and for that, I am very grateful.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone that financially supported my studies. You believed in me when I was doubting myself. I am forever grateful for all the support, especially from Samantha, Dagmar, Miška, Janka, Danka, Bálint, Kathleen, Andrej, Matej, Paula, Michal K., Mária D., Dalibor C., Lucia H., Renáta B., Martin V., Jaroslav K., Denisa Z., Eva K., Radoslav P., Jozef D., Miriam S., Juraj S., Rastislav Ž., Ján P., Maroš V., Richard B., Ján M., families: Karasová, Hornáčková, Posluchová, Mruková, and Střelcová.

Introduction

Western liberal democratic thought has been dominated by 'politics of inevitability' (Snyder, 2018) assuming that education will spread reason and scientific knowledge by becoming the source of that reason, will enable society to overcome social inequalities, establish social harmony, and arrive at the 'end of history' (Almond & Verba, 1963; Berlin, 1959; Fukuyama, 1993; Raman, 2014; Rawls, 1999; Sorrel, 1991). But lately, this promise has been under heavy questioning, as along with the expansion of education and progress in science, Western politics has become more polarised and rather disharmonious (W. Brown, 2017; Fukuyama, 2022; Klein, 2020; Millgram, 2015; Reay, 2017; Sandel, 2020). While Slovak politics have never been particularly pleasant, the last few years have been increasingly more frustrating. There is a sense of a society deeply divided and losing its cohesion (Vašečka, 2022b). This has been deeply frustrating for me as a researcher, as a person raised and socialised in spaces which believed in the transformative power of education and knowledge. Why are the advances in sciences and expansion of higher education not leading to greater social harmony?

To start answering this question, the research follows two inquires, exploring the consequences of education and knowledge for political life in Slovakia. The study combines aspects of the case study approach; collecting educational biographical data and interviewing politicians to describe the Slovak educational cleavage. This is complemented in the interview analysis by critical phenomenology and messy approaches that explore through participants' words and experiences the phenomena that emerge concerning HE and working with knowledge. In this dissertation, I take these emerging ideas and let them interact with the literature to affirm existing and propose new understandings, provide suggestions, and critique existing structures.

This research attempts to cover multiple gaps in the current understanding. Firstly, the educational cleavage and its dynamics have been largely described in the context of the major Western democracies (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Gethin et al., 2022; Pew Research Centre, 2016), but there is a lack of research that accounts for the local context in cases like Slovakia. Secondly, the relationship between HE and political participation is extensively researched, using various research approaches and methods, including surveys, administrative data, and interviews (Bömmel & Heineck, 2020; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2015; Persson, 2013b; Verba et al., 1995), these studies account little for the experiences of politicians themselves. Lastly, the literature I came across on the role of knowledges in political life is fragmented across various disciplines, and presented in specific cases of science informing policy or philosophical works

(Christensen, 2021; Millgram, 2015; Sarewitz, 2004). This research is trying to cover those gaps, by mapping various rationalities that are being employed by political actors and what have been identified as limits to public reason.

Chapter 1 gives an account of my methodology and research process, based on principles of 'messy' research and active 'reflexivities of discomfort'. Chapter 2 provides historical context and sets in the research in the current socio-political climate. Chapters 3 and 4 are the main parts of the work, exploring the two inquires, education, and knowledge in political life, combining findings from the literature, interviews, and my other research. Chapter 5 summarises my suggestions as they rose from my engagement with the literature and the phenomena explored through the research.

Chapter 1. Methodology

> *"The qualitative research arena would benefit from more "messy" examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research."*
>
> *(Pillow, 2003, p. 193)*

This methodological chapter will offer personal and "messy" reflections on the process of research. From the start, my thinking was spread out, borrowing from various paradigms, and my research methods and aims were shifting. Only later in the process, encouraged by the examples of other authors, I embraced the messiness of my approach (Clark et al., 2007; Cook, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Folkes, 2022; Mellor, 2001). The phenomena of education and knowledge in political life are similarly "messy" and full of complicated hierarchies of power (Mellor, 2001). While the messy reality of research is broadly shared among academics, it is little reflected and presented in their works (Clark et al., 2007; Cook, 2009). The "messy" approaches are not referring to 'sloppy' research but the research that is honest about the 'swampy lowlands' in which it takes place (Mellor, 2001). Cook thinks of the "messy area" as an important part of achieving clarity and rigour in research, as it is through entering the limbo, in which everything is questioned, and through re-engaging with materials that researchers find new meanings and knowledges (2009). And rather than producing 'clean' writing, which polishes any deficiencies and downplays limitations, the "messy" approach starts with openness to build rigour (Clark et al., 2007; Cook, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 2021).

But the "messy" must be paired with the researcher's reflexivity, "as insight to knowledge production" that is active and ongoing (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). It requires reflexivity towards self, how others might perceive self, and how the self makes sense of the previous two reflexive moves (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020). However, reflexivity should not be a move to find clarity and increase validity, but rather to constantly challenge and keep the researcher in 'reflexivities of discomfort.' It is research that does not claim the success of its attempts, there is no certainty, clarity, or comfort. But researcher persists, because in the recognition of the impossibility to do research, comes also recognition of the pragmatic political necessity to search for meaning and do research (Pillow, 2003).

Research design

This research has evolved quite a lot. At the outset, it was planned as a case study with a qualitative method consisting of semi-structured interviews and the collection of biographical data about participants. Already during interviews, ideas were brought up that pushed me to rethink my methodological approach and theoretical framework. One of the hints that my research design is more phenomenological, came from a short conversation with the assistants of one participant that witnessed the interview. Shortly after finishing the interview, I ran into them. They expressed their surprise with the questions I asked in the interview. There I started explaining that my primary goal was not to find facts but rather to search for meanings, trying to understand how the participants experience and make sense of education and expertise in political life. That was my intuitive answer which probably exposes the underlying research design even though at that point it was not articulated in that way.

This research started and still employs elements of the case study approach, it is bounded to Slovakia, and it includes context description, in-depth focus using mixed methods, interviews and secondary data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Mills et al., 2010). This case has been selected due to relative ease of access to the participants and the ability to navigate the language. But the research is also going further in terms of exploring the participants' experiences.

Through readings on various methodological approaches, I came across phenomenology, and it finally made sense. Phenomenology is concerned with finding meaning, discovering underlying universals, and "the essence of the experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 213), which is not individual but inter-subjective (Lin, 2017). The phenomenological approach was founded by Husserl and further developed by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As there are diverse approaches and understandings of phenomenology, in the next paragraphs, I will explain my understanding of phenomenology, the approach I took and decisions that were made along the way.

The search for essence happens in phenomenological research through a series of turns. Firstly, *epoche* or phenomenological reduction or bracketing is the process of the researcher suspending "personal biases, beliefs, preconceptions and assumptions" (Lin, 2017, p. 471). Interacting with participants and collected data with "freshness and openness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Secondly, eidetic reduction or horizontalization, highlighting significant statements, putting them into themes and clusters of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2016) which allows for the essence, core or the universal to be identified (Lin, 2017). This is in some way very similar to

the way Cook presented the engagement with "messy," repeatedly engaging with the collected material, and then making the "messy turn" to find new meanings and understandings (2009). Thirdly, imaginative variation, a mental experiment, expanding the scope, changing the frame of reference to find the essential elements which could be generalised (Lin, 2017; Turley et al., 2016). The process presented above could be characterized as the classical, modernist approach to phenomenology (Finlay, 2012).

Within the broader tradition of phenomenology, there has been the development of more critical approaches that rethought the turns and overall goals of the inquiry, inspired by the work of Merleau-Ponty and Simon de Beauvoir (Oksala, 2022). The first difference in approach between the more classical and critical approaches is in their overall goal, as critical phenomenology is oriented towards social critique (Depraz, 2022; Oksala, 2022). Secondly, this approach disregards the possibility of complete bracketing, as "persistent social structures influence our capacity to experience the world" (Guenther, 2013, p. 13). The research interactions, researcher and the participants cannot be separated from the historical and political moments (Depraz, 2022; Oksala, 2022). Here the practice of active 'reflexivities of discomfort' is very useful, they constantly engage with problems of positionality and inability to bracket self. These deep reflections and attempts to identify these structures and specific historic moments can lead us to the liberating realisation that these structures are not permanent or natural (Guenther, 2020). Therefore, *epoche* in critical phenomenology provides space to think otherwise, to start separating social, political, and historical structures from the phenomenon. Thirdly, critical phenomenology is very wary of universalising the findings, as they were in past used to legitimise "forms of oppression and marginalization" (Oksala, 2022, p. 5). Rather research should strive for more complex and overlapping essences. Fourthly, the turn of imaginative variation, similar to the first one, relies a lot on the supposed objectivity of the researcher, already discussed above.

My approach adopts mostly critical phenomenology, rejecting the universalism of any finding, as it is aware of the deep consequences of history and political moments on the social world and the inseparability of these structural factors from the phenomenon. The research design includes an attempt to identify these structures and provide a social critique of them. And then explore the phenomena of education and knowledge in political life shared between participants; contemplate their experiences and present findings as 'a' possible way to think about the world (Hussar, 2013).

Research methods

Similarly to the impossibility of the researcher's claim of neutrality, research methods and practices operate in certain socio-political contexts (Martel et al., 2022) and can provide only proximation rather than certainty (Oberauer & Lewandowsky, 2019). My approach includes the principle of methodological eclecticism, using a diversity of techniques from various methods to explore the topic of interest, combining qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods as appropriate. Following my previously stated approach of not universalising, mixed method research allows the researcher to reach diverse conclusions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). Phenomenology primarily uses interviews, to lesser extent observations, while case studies use a wider range of methods to explore the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are the main method of this research. Interviews allow the researcher to explore the topic in depth, to understand not only the sequence of events but importantly how individuals make sense of it (Miller & Glassner, 2016). As they are direct conversations with participants, they provide a chance to build closer rapport, but that also means that interviewer has a greater impact on the data collected (McGrath et al., 2019). The semi-structured format has been selected due to the limited time of the participants. Interviews were partially structured in the introduction and conclusion, to collect key information. The middle section was more open, with broad questions that allowed for unexpected to emerge and to be further investigated. This format is also the most suitable for a less trained interviewer, such as me (May, 2011; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Interviews in this research had a specific set of challenges. First, the involvement of elite participants required extensive preparation and navigating complicated power dynamics (Glas, 2021; Lilleker, 2003; Mikecz, 2012). Second, partially online participation thwarts building rapport (de Villiers et al., 2021).

Biographical secondary data online collection includes data about participants regarding their educational, political, and professional biography to localise their experiences in a broader context. At first data about HE was collected for all individuals in the sample, as it was necessary for recruiting. But this dataset also provided data necessary to quantify the educational cleavage in the Slovak political representation. Biographical information was collected from official institutional websites, all references are in Appendix II. For all interview participants, I did an additional online search for publicly accessible information regarding their educational, political, and professional biography (see Appendix I.). This information was then checked with participants during the interview to confirm its validity.

Research process

In the upcoming subsections, I will be reflecting on my research decisions and my positionality. While the research here is presented in some form of linearity and simplicity, this does not reflect the experience. It was a "process of adding to, shifting and branching off, thinking and sifting" (Cook, 2009, p. 278) with power dynamics being fluid and changing (Folkes, 2022).

Planning

The initial plan of the research is outlined in the CUREC 1a application form (Appendix III.). The first important decision regarding the research was about the anonymity of the participants. As political actors within a democratic system, the information about them is accessible and they could be easily identified if I would write something about their context. Thus, I decided to ask them to speak on the record, similarly to the way they would interact with the media. These individuals chose freely to be in public life, they have extensive agency, and they can expect public scrutiny. Still, I took some steps to protect them, including the option to withdraw and to correct or change what is attributed to them on the record. From the very start, participants were informed that their participation will be on record (a detailed explanation is in CUREC form Section F). In multiple informal conversations with participants, they did not express any problem with participating on record.

The way the plan is presented in the form seems to be quite linear and clear, yet the 'messy' reality of research changed it. The first two 'messy' experiences were piloting and translating. Especially for a less experienced interviewer, it is advisable to pilot the interview, review the guide and address any problems before the main research (Majid et al., 2017; McGrath et al., 2019). I piloted the interview with my former colleague from Slovakia, testing the most extensive version of the interview guide and letting the conversation go freely. Throughout the interview I took notes, she gave me feedback regarding the interview design, and I repeatedly listened to the recording. Following that, I made significant changes to the guide and adjusted the order of questions. Part of the reason why I needed to make extensive changes was also the fact that the original interview guide was developed in English. Translation of the interview guide and other research documents proved to be quite challenging due to extensive English academic vocabulary which does not translate easily into Slovak.

In the planning stage, I mostly reflected on my positionality and potential conflict of interests concerning my professional ties and finances. My studies were funded through governmental scholarship and crowdfunding. This put me in a challenging situation, as the scholarship

included a future commitment to work for the Ministry of Education and possibly interact with my participants later in life. The second aspect of my positionality includes my employer before and during my studies, a public regulatory institution which is in contact with political representation. Lastly, I was publicly involved in the debate and consultation about the HE Act Amendment, which was adopted only a few weeks before the interviews. While these issues were not brought up by the participants and there was no attempt from anyone to influence my research, there are possible unseen consequences of my positionality.

Recruitment

The sample population in the plan included all politically active people (in elected office, political appointees, members of a political party or election candidates) on the European, national, regional, or local levels in Slovakia. The initial definition was quite broad, but actual recruitment only focused on people at the national and European levels. These participants could be defined as elite, due to their direct power enshrined in the law and the more subtle way they can exercise it (Mason-Bish, 2019; Mikecz, 2012). The original plan was to find participants with and without HE experience, excluding those that started but were not finished. This proved to be very difficult and I was able to recruit only one participant without an HE degree, but currently in education.

Recruitment emails were sent to 14 Slovak MEPs and 148 MPs. The 2 MPs were intentionally left out, one due to previous interaction and another due to potential risks. Participants were recruited through email, based on the script in Appendix V., which was personalised and sent to them. In April 2022, recruitment emails were sent in 5 batches to gradually recruit participants. The responses are summarised in Table 1. Out of 162 approached potential participants, 12 participants were interviewed. Two of them were from the European Parliament and the remaining 10 were from the Slovak Parliament.

Table 1. Recruitment overview	
Emails sent	162
No response	126
Failure to deliver	15
Decline	5
Answer then no communication	4
Accept	12

In the recruitment process, it became apparent how strong the position of MPs' assistants is, serving as gate keepers. Based on the responses to my communication, most MPs' email accounts are managed by them, as was often the responsibility of scheduling an interview. Thus, I had an idea to include assistants in my sample, as they fall in the broad category of politically

active individuals. Three assistants were approached through my friend, two ended up doing an interview, bringing the total number of interviews to 14.

I entered this phase with a preconceived idea of the elite and the expectation that I could easily navigate more murky and risky situations (Glas, 2021; Mason-Bish, 2019). I was wrong. Even after the initial positive response, most participants required multiple rounds of emails and the times of interviews were often adjusted last minute. Most participants asked me to switch communication to our phones to figure out the details. Also, they were requesting to change the platform for online interviews (to Zoom and WhatsApp). In both cases I overlooked the university guidelines (CUREC, 2020), exposing myself to risk just to get the interviews, similarly to the experience of Mason-Bish (2019).

In this space, I want to explore my positionality as a student at the University of Oxford. Here I strongly identified with Anuar's experience who also conducted elite interviews in their home country as a student at Oxford (2021). From the participants' reactions in interviews and conversations around, the Oxford brand resonated with them. I expected it, so I made sure to feature it in the subject line of the recruitment email (see Appendix V.). The particular strength of western researchers in the Slovak setting was already reported by Herod, who received a very warm welcome (1999). There are some limitations to the comparison, I am positioned 'only' as a student and I am Slovak, so I could claim to be local, still, I felt the Oxford privilege quite strongly. This could be understood in the framework of Shahjahan whiteness as futurity, where an association with a 'world-class' UK university is a way to boost my position even in White societies (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). It is worth noting that none of the participants studied at a globally prestigious university. This brings me to an uneasy realisation; my recruitment would be hardly as successful without the Oxford name and local networks.

Interviews

The general interview guide was revised after the pilot and the first interview, as there was a larger gap between the first interview and the rest. From the pilot and initial interview, it became apparent that I need to simplify certain questions, as during those they asked me to clarify questions. Expecting that, in later interviews, I would add clarification already to the question. Also, I added two questions that came up in the first interview and that created a guide I used in all other interviews (see Appendix VIII.). Rather than reading out the exact text from the guide, I only followed the main points, which meant the rehearsed speaking only emerged after

a few initial interviews. The guide has evolved during the process, and so has my confidence to talk with elite participants. Still, each interview was unique, bringing new themes and views.

I started the interviews with a brief personal introduction, going over the main points from the participant information sheet and signing the consent form. In the case of online participants, consent has been obtained through email communication. The recording started only following repeated oral confirmation. As noted, the first section of the interview was more structured. Here the guides were personalised for each participant, as I would go over their educational biography (see in Appendix I. – List of participants) and they would sometimes correct my information. Often, they would continue talking about why they chose their study field or institutions, bringing up their HE experiences, often without the need to prompt them. From there the interview took a less structured format and was based on broad questions about the start of their political engagement and what led them to political participation, some background questions about their professional and political career, and reflective questions about social stratification and perceived differences between people with and without HE. In this part, I would try to piece together the timeline of their political engagement and political career, connecting the fragmented pieces of information I found about them. As the last question within the first section of the interview, I would present them with statistics on educational cleavage within Slovak politics (discussed in Chapter 3) and ask for their reaction. The second part of the interview was related to the role of experts and the public in policymaking. These questions would be flexibly moved around, adjusting their order based on something they mention in their answers. Where necessary and possible I asked clarifying questions. In the case of politicians with experience in European, regional, or local politics, I inquire about their experience there. I liked to finish the main part of the interview with a statement from the Slovak president about intellectual superiority in political communication, asking them whether they identify with such a view. The concluding section included background questions about working in education. Asking background questions both at the start and at the end was purposeful, to ease them in and out of the interview, as these questions did not require them to share their views. Sometimes during my preparation for the interview and during collecting the biographical data, I would find out they have a blog, or they said something in the Parliament that is directly connected with the themes covered in the interviews. I would then bring up their past statements during the interview and saw how they think about the issue now. For example, one of the participants had a particularly harsh experience with doctoral studies during which he started publishing a

blog in which he wrote extensively about HE in Slovakia. I asked him during the interview how his views changed since then.

Interviews were recorded on two smartphones disconnected from the internet and recordings were saved to their local storage. The audio files were uploaded directly from the phones to the Nexus 365 OneDrive folder and then removed from the devices. Six interviews were conducted online, four interviews through Microsoft Teams, one using WhatsApp and one Zoom. The remaining 8 interviews were conducted in person within 3 days, which was a quite hectic experience. The average recording time was 34 minutes, the shortest interview took only 13 minutes and the longest 52 minutes, both covering the same questions.

While this technical overview of the research gives some insight, there is a broader context in which these interviews took place. It is impossible to separate socio-political-historical context away from the participant's contributions and their understandings (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Furthermore, interviews "are relational interactions between complex human beings" (Glas, 2021, p. 441), not individual accounts but conversations in which the researcher is co-creating the data (McGrath et al., 2019). In the following paragraphs, I would like to explore contingencies that shaped the interview moment.

The in-person interviews and most online interviews took place during a coalition crisis. Just the night before my first in-person interview, the parties agreed to pause the parliamentary session and try to resolve the crisis (Dlhopolec, 2022). Many plans and meetings were suddenly changing, including my interviews. This happened against the backdrop of low trust in the national government and democracy, polarisation, ranging war in neighbouring Ukraine and incoming refugees, challenges with the pandemic, and criminal charges being raised against the former prime minister (Hajdu et al., 2022; Terenzani, 2022; Vašečka, 2022a, 2022b). Together they created a heightened political moment, which was repeatedly raised during the interviews, and it is explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

I needed my participants to be quite open in their answers and for that to build a rapport with them (McGrath et al., 2019). My first strategy was to demonstrate knowledge of the current political landscape in Slovakia. Throughout the interviews, participants would refer to various events and personalities of the political landscape and history. By showing that I knew, I was able to claim insider status and start building rapport (Finlay, 2012; Louis & Barton, 2002). The second strategy included the personalised interview guides, which showed that I am interested in them as a person and I know things about them (Mikecz, 2012). This included topics to talk

about during informal conversations in the 'waiting field' (Folkes, 2022). Especially successful in building rapport was bringing up their past statements. Due to last-minute changes, I however did not have time to do this extensive research on all participants.

The power dynamics throughout the interviews were quite fluid. While the participants were all broadly speaking part of the elite, it would be wrong to talk about a 'static elite', there were significant differences in power (Glas, 2021). Yet my approach towards them was quite static, I did the polite things that are expected of me when approaching authority, dressing up, using formal language, and when they spoke, "I politely listened" (Mason-Bish, 2019, p. 269). The pinnacle of my passivity came when an assistant took a picture during the interview without prior consent and posted it on social media, which I found later.

While there are some examples of participants being in a more advantageous position, in many instances I was the one with the upper hand. I had extensive knowledge about them. I asked them to speak to me on record with the full awareness that their words could be published. There were instances in which participants paused themselves before answering, some even declined to answer or elaborate on their answers. Even with all the effort to build rapport, there was hesitancy and visible self-censorship. I take their answers as not being the full account, only parts that they think could withstand public scrutiny. Interviewing elites as a student also means negotiating multiple roles as an "enthusiastic rooky who needed them or as a knowledgeable yet unthreatening student" (Mason-Bish, 2019, p. 267). Strategically, I deflected their questions by asking them to share their views first and I left the question which disclosed the extent of my knowledge only towards the end of the interview, so they would be more open in their answers.

All the in-person interviews took place in the offices of the participants. The familiar spaces could have allowed them to be more open. That however meant that I was not always very comfortable. In two instances their assistants stayed in the room, which made interviews more challenging, as they also joined in the conversation. Their statements were not used in the analysis and are not transcribed. Online interviews had their own set of challenges. While all participants were sufficiently technologically competent, still difficulties occurred and it was challenging to build rapport (de Villiers et al., 2021). But two online interviews particularly stand out. My shortest interview was with a participant that kept his video off, so I was missing a lot of visual cues and he was clearly in a space with a lot of noise, which made conversation very difficult. His answers were short, often in single sentences and I had to repeat questions. The second challenging interview involved a participant that was driving during the interview.

He assured me it was fine with him to do it this way, but still, I felt on ethically shaky ground, witnessing rule-breaking, so I rushed through the questions to finish the interview as quickly as possible. Similarly, to Mason-Bish (2019), I bring up these examples to showcase the challenges in elite interviewing and to start thinking about other ways of doing them which would not include risks for researchers and participants.

I conclude this part with a short reflection on my positionality. As Thurnell-Read writes, when you start feeling that you 'fit in' during the research encounters, it is time to start reflecting on your privileges (2016). Firstly, I had financial means, which made it possible for me to take time and travel to conduct in-person interviews. Secondly, I must reaffirm how important the knowledge of social norms, political issues, and the presence of social networks in the local context to both recruit and build rapport is something that would not be accessible to many other researchers. This experience leaves me in an uncomfortable position: reflecting on everything that could influence the interview shows the extent of messy research. But maybe this is how research should feel like, hopelessness in the attempt to conduct objective research yet a pragmatic need to make it anyways (Pillow, 2003).

Sample

In the end, I was able to interview 14 participants, the list along with research relevant characteristics can be found in Appendix I. Participants included 10 MPs, 2 MPs' assistants and 2 MEPs. While the plan was to have the sample divided into participants with and without HE experience, recruiting the latter participants proved to be quite a challenge. Reflecting on those shortcomings in recruitment, the research plan was adjusted to rather contrasting their various exposure to HE, there were participants still in HE, while one was an associate professor. Regarding their credentials, only 1 participant did not have an HE degree yet, 1 had a bachelor's degree, 8 had a master's degree and 4 had doctoral level degrees. It is unclear whether their level of education influenced their willingness to participate, but their level of education roughly follows HE credential distribution within the Slovak political representation.

All MPs and assistants that participated were associated with the ruling coalition, and half of the participants are from OĽANO, the senior coalition party. The other three coalition parties are represented by 3 MPs and 2 assistants. The two MEPs are from parties that are not in the Slovak Parliament. There were no responses from MPs in opposition parties.

A major limitation of the sample is the lack of participation of women. I did not think much about gender initially until I start noticing that I have no responses from women. Even after

repeated attempts to recruit women, I only recruited one, and 'only' an assistant. I suspect that this is a reflection of a broader hostile environment with informal barriers that make it difficult for women to advance in their careers and gain recognition from their male colleagues in Slovakia (Telepčáková, 2020, 2022). As a male researcher, I was blind to this aspect. In the process of getting access and building rapport in elite settings, the performance of gender influences the research encounter, which makes me wonder whether my recruitment would have been successful, had I not been a man (Glas, 2021; Thurnell-Read, 2016). While this research is not addressing the role of gender, the one woman that did participate mentioned that gender is one of the factors why her views and expertise are being sometimes dismissed (Henčeková [11]). Similarly, Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, a current MEP, has faced attacks throughout her career for the lack of HE (Daráková, 2021). This suggests that gender identity might be an important variable to take into consideration. Unfortunately, this study was not able to explore it further.

Educational biographical data

During the preparation for recruitment, I collected biographical data of MPs and MEPs to contact them (name, party affiliation, position, HE credentials and e-mail). While not planned, I realise this contact list could be turned into a database that could help me to quantify the educational cleavage in Slovak politics. I expanded the dataset by additional data collection that included the MPs' assistants, members of the Government, state secretaries and the President of the Slovak Republic. The final dataset includes 504 individuals with information about their political position, party affiliation, and HE credentials.

Additionally, I created a second dataset for historical comparison, based on election records since 2002. The dataset includes a list of all candidates in the past 6 parliamentary elections, along with information on whether they have been elected, their name, party affiliation and HE credentials. One limitation is that historic data only includes MPs as elected. Following the election, part of the elected officials does not take their seat in the Parliament when they become part of the Government and are substituted. This means the actual composition of the Parliament differs from the election results, and during their mandate MPs join the Government or leave it or give up their seat. The changes in time however should not be significant, when I compared the 2020 election data with data collected in May 2022, the number of people with HE credentials remained the same. The list of all sources used in both datasets is in Appendix II.

Analysis

Following the data collection, all the interviews were transcribed using the Microsoft Office Word transcription tool. The initial transcript was then further edited to correct for minor deficiencies, such as repeated words and meaningless sounds to make it more suitable for reading. The transcripts were not translated for analysis. The files were imported into NVivo for analysis.

The phenomenological approach to analysis was not applied intentionally. The bracketing happened partially due to my commitment to try to remain reflective throughout the research. I first tried to find evidence to support my expectations but when those were sparse, I started rereading the material and new ideas started to emerge. Because of the emergence of new topics that I knew little about, I was able to approach the material through a "state of freshness and openness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41) and allow "themes and patterns to emerge naturally from the data" (Hussar, 2013, p. 52). As this chapter shows, I was not able to completely separate myself, I am not neutral or distant (Depraz, 2022; Oksala, 2022).

To make sense of these new ideas, I used open coding, adding new codes along the way, and putting them into groups and broader categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), something that Lin characterizes as eidetic reduction (2017). I would mostly code whole sentences or paragraphs, which is characteristic of the phenomenological method (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To some extent, I also used interpretative phenomenology, not only reading the words but also deeper meaning coming out of context which I could access due to my partial status as an insider (Finlay, 2012; Louis & Barton, 2002). Putting together the quotes and assigned meanings, I was able to start piecing shared experiences of education, knowledge, and political life. I ended up with 73 different codes, grouped into 9 broad categories, as listed in Appendix IX. Not all of them will be reflected in this dissertation.

Participant validation

As was explained earlier, this research involves participants on record. As a way to check my misrepresentation of their statements in public, I offered them an opportunity to edit their statements. This has been done also upon suggestions in literature to let participants validate their answers, as a way to strengthen findings (McGrath et al., 2019; Miller & Glassner, 2016). I shared with the participants excerpts from transcripts in the form of paragraphs with relevant interview questions at end of July 2022. After 2 weeks, I have received 7 responses, with 2 requesting minor changes that did not affect any ideas in this dissertation.

Limitations

The whole notion of elite research has many shortcomings. Firstly, upon critical self-reflection, I must admit that part of my interest in studying the elite population was to gain contacts in this population and earn more visibility for my research. Secondly, I have made a mistake in taking a rather static view of 'elite' (Mason-Bish, 2019), the whole category is rather elusive and requires different conceptualisation. The power dynamics during the research encounter were much more fluid and varied across participants. Thirdly, there is the broader social idea that elites have valuable experience to share and have more agency (Glas, 2021; Mason-Bish, 2019). This is also problematic because there is a lack of research into the less educated population (Kuppens et al., 2018). Preference for elite research perpetuates social inequalities.

The sample in this research has clear limitations, it is an almost exclusively male sample, and all are associated with the current governing coalition, while both are potentially large factors. I think the participation was not discouraged by the on-record publishing. From a few rejections, I suspect that the research was taking place on dates when the possible participants had limited availability. And in general, I suspect the majority of the recruitment emails never made it to a potential participant.

The limitations that arouse most visibly are related to the position of the researcher and specific historical-political moments in which conversations were taking place. This research cannot be reproduced. Due to my privileges I "understood what they meant" (Louis & Barton, 2002) even when they did not express their thoughts very clearly. The interviews comprised of their recent thoughts, political realities, stories, and ideas they were asked to remind themselves about. While the experiences they talked about had already happened, the characterization they offered me was only a representation of that experience, which was constructed in the interview moment (Mason-Bish, 2019).

While this research might not claim the conventionally thought level of scientific rigour in terms of validity and reliability that is not important. This research does deliver on its objectives; to explore the topic and develop social critique. It does not provide certain and concrete answers, but it tries to start building preliminary understandings of the phenomenon studied and it does it by embracing the messy and following an ongoing path of reflexivity. I leave it to the reader to judge the success of my research attempt.

Chapter 2. Context

This chapter aims to provide contextual information to frame the research within larger narratives about politics and HE in Slovakia. Selected events and aspects are outcomes of things mentioned in the interviews and my additions.

The history of HE in Slovakia is closely connected with the projects of national and state building (Harušíncová, 2013). The oldest, still running, HEI is Comenius university in Bratislava which was founded in 1919 following the creation of the 1. Czechoslovak republic (Comenius University, 2022). The institution was created out of political necessity to replace Hungarian institutions, Czech professors came from Prague to educate the new Slovak elite oriented toward democracy (Fogel & Mauch, 1995; Jancura, 2019). Two further universities were founded at the brink of the Second World War during the Slovak state (1939-1945), a clerical fascist state aligned with Germany, which tried to distance itself from Czechia. This period saw many political interventions in HE, the Prime Minister became a rector of Comenius University, at that time known as Slovak University, Czech professors were expelled and there were attempts to prevent women from studying (Škorvanková, 2019; Štulrajterová, 2015).

Following World War II and the February coup in 1948, the communist party gained full political control, manifesting in HE through purges and the introduction of political requirements for staff and students (Švejdová & Halíková, 2015). This process intensified after the Prague Spring in 1969, an unsuccessful attempt to reform the country, which ended with the invasion of Warsaw Pact armies (Payne, 1972). The Communist regime established centralised control over all aspects of HE, including curriculum, staff, resource distribution, management, international cooperation and access, regulating the number of HE students (Fogel & Mauch, 1995; Lubelcová, 2022). Szöllös [04] had experienced this first-hand, as he could not pursue a teaching career due to his religious beliefs. All the control did not stop academia from being one of the grounds of dissent. Especially students were a big part of the Velvet revolution in 1989, leaving the ideologically aligned teaching staff in shock (Kremský [06]). The involvement of students and some academics in the revolution helped HEIs to gain broad autonomy as a way to combat political influence from the state (Hudoba, 2015; Králiková, 2016; Pišút, 1993).

Already during communism, the HE expanded but the push towards massification accelerated after the revolution; access was no longer contingent on political loyalty and new HEIs were created (Lubelcová, 2022). The HE development was however hindered by structural problems,

the formation of a new generation of HE staff and academic leaders was slow due to the low quality of doctoral studies (Urban, 2001). This was not helped by politics, with Mečiar, the strong authoritarian leader who ruled Slovakia for most of the 1990s, showing interest in meddling with academic affairs. His legacy in HE was founding of 3 new universities (Čobejová et al., 2010; Kováčik & Klučiarovský, 2015). He was ousted in the 1998 elections, leaving the country polarised between those favouring a stronger nationalist leader and those striving for a democratic European identity (Madro, 2022; Mathernová & Renčko, 2006). After 1998 the country took a rapid turn towards the EU and 'modernity,' which included Slovakia signing the Bologna declaration and adopting a new HE law in 2002 (Králiková, 2016; Mathernová & Renčko, 2006). HE massified and the sector grew as new public and private HEIs were created (Řádek & et al., 2008).

The recent political developments in Slovakia make 'rational' politics for social harmony particularly difficult. Firstly, since 2013, "culture wars - however inaccurate the term – changed politics" by pushing into public discourse the issue of same-sex marriage and abortions, which resonated in the country, as there is a strong Catholic base and mainstream Christian forces collapsed in politics creating space for more extreme groups (Vargovčíková, 2021, para. 30). Secondly, another dominant figure of Slovak politics, Robert Fico, Prime Minister for 10 years, another polarising figure (Kováčik & Klučiarovský, 2015). He was pushed to step down in 2015 by a protest *For Decent Slovakia* that followed the murder of an investigative journalist and his fiancé. The protesters blamed Fico for corruption in the judiciary and police, which allowed for them to be killed and now evidence is starting to emerge that indeed incriminates him (Associated Press, 2022; German Sirotniková, 2020; Roke, 2019). The opposition towards Fico is reflected in the motivation of many participants to enter politics, Stančík [09] "was angry with the way things are" and Kremský [06] expressed that he wanted to "change this country, turn it around". And new politicians were elected in 2019 and 2020 (German Sirotniková, 2020). While the parties mostly ran on the platform of anti-corruption, their agenda has been also filled with a populist, anti-elite and anti-establishment sentiments, with leaders that were supposed to stay outside of the ideological fight (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019; Engler et al., 2019; Havlík, 2019). The most successful was OĽANO [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities], a party that already in their name sets the fight of "ordinary persons" against "a corrupt professional political class" (Engler et al., 2019, pp. 1323–1324). The party went from 5% in the polls, just 3 months before the 2020 election to getting 25% of the votes, bringing to parliament new people without extensive political experience (Grendel [08]). The new political

elite is incapable to live up to its promise. While they came at a difficult time with the ranging pandemic, they earned their low trust due to their poor reaction to plagiarism scandals, constant fighting among coalition partners and even failing to strip Fico of his MP protection after he was charged (Hrabovská Francelová, 2020; Terenzani, 2022).

Slovakia might be at its worst in terms of social harmony (Vašečka, 2022b). With about 56% of the citizens believing in conspiracy theories (Hajdu et al., 2022), Slovakia is fertile ground for polarisation (Vargovčíková, 2021) especially with social media creating parallel realities (Čaputová, 2022). After huge corruption scandals undermined trust, culture wars divided the country, and the pandemic arrived. It has been one of the great polarising moments, with great opposition towards vaccines, including attacks against scientists and pandemic experts (Madro, 2022; TASR, 2021). Now it seems that every issue divides the population, only a few weeks before the research interviews, in February 2022, parliament was voting to approve a defence treaty with the United States (TASR, 2022a). The opposition parties decided to publish addresses of all MPs that voted in favour (Osvaldová, 2022), leading to MPs, such as Šudík [02] being stalked and called a traitor. Then the war in Ukraine started, creating security concerns (Madro, 2022) and polarising the country around its position on the conflict (Hajdu et al., 2022). About 600 thousand people crossed into Slovakia from Ukraine, with around 85 thousand having now refugee status in Slovakia (UN HCR, 2022) and NATO troops are stationed in Slovakia (TASR, 2022b). Society is divided into camps, with diverging opinions on almost every issue, little middle ground and space for a common future.

The low trust in institutions (Hajdu et al., 2022), creates an interesting paradox in which there is support for experts to be involved in the policy, yet there is a great anti-establishment backlash against the institutions that involve them (Bertsou & Caramani, 2022; Engler et al., 2019). In Slovakia this clash has become very evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vaculčiak [12]), people said “listen more to experts, but when we [government] adopted strict measures, people were saying that they do not want it (Grendel [08]). This backlash is not unique to Slovakia, the anti-expert attitudes have been instrumentalised by Trump and during Brexit, when famously Michael Gove, UK minister said that “people have had enough of experts” (Gove, 2016; Read, 2018). But also in Slovakia, in attacks of the former Prime Minister against the head State Institute for Drug Control for publishing the expert opinion on the safety of the Sputnik V vaccine (Paráková, 2021). These dynamics challenge the role of knowledge in political life. While the public and politicians embrace science as an idea, when it produces knowledge and asks something of them, they reject it and attack it.

In terms of HE, Slovakia reached a peak student population in 2008, followed by a decline and stabilization. Currently, there are around 135 thousand students in 33 HEIs, state, public and private (Lubelcová, 2022; Maňo & Bílik, 2021). Slovakia is experiencing a significant brain drain, with about 19% of students abroad (OECD, 2021b). Those pursuing studies abroad are attracted by its reputation (Hall & Lukáč, 2019) and tend to come from a more affluent background (Martinák & Varsik, 2021). Reputation is something that Slovak HEIs are lacking, as 70% of Slovaks think there are too many HEIs of low quality (Plán obnovy SR, 2021). Šudík [02] lamented in the interview that "universities in Slovakia are not among the top universities, not even among the European average." And according to Žiak [10] "there are many institutions that gave degrees very cheaply and easily" (Žiak [10]). Importantly, politicians themselves might be responsible for the shattered reputation, with "the Speaker of Parliament, who is plagiariser, the Finance Minister, who is plagiariser" (Štefanec [13]) and allegations of plagiarism also raised against the Education Minister (Hrabovská Francelová, 2020).

Institutional design

The extent to which education can help an individual to navigate political spaces and the extent to which knowledge is being reflected in the policy is constrained by structures within which politics takes place. The institutional design here is understood as a set of formal and informal rules, norms, and expected behaviours that organize political organization and are socially constructed through past actions (Goodin, 1996; North, 1990). As Goodin wrote, "the existence of institutions make certain things easier to do and other things harder to do" (Goodin, 1996). This section will contextualise various institutions in Slovak politics and the way they deal with education and knowledge.

The National Council of Slovak Republic (NR SR) or Parliament, is the only legislative body in Slovakia. Its main competencies include approving laws, selecting heads and officials of public and state bodies, approving international treaties, creating ministries and approving the Government (Fajták, 2016). However, in practice, many of the laws are drafted by the Ministries, while the parliament gives it the final form (Grendel [08]). While formally MPs have the right to put forward their proposals and amend laws, their capacity is limited compared to the Ministry with hundreds of employees. The parliament has extensive rules of procedure and unless MPs or their assistant have a law background, they might be limited in their capacity to translate ideas into legislative text in an effective way (Henčeková [11]; Svrček [01]). MPs are also organised into committees with specific agendas, roughly corresponding to the

Ministries. These committees are assigned proposals, which they discuss in more detail, and they prepare a report which is then presented before a vote is taken in the assembly (Fajták, 2016). Over time most MPs become more familiar with the system and start gaining expertise within their committee, but their effectiveness is greatly compromised at the start of their career.

The Government consists of the Prime Minister, several Deputies and Ministers, formally acting on behalf of the Parliament to head the Executive (Government Office of SR, 2022). Ministers have responsibility for specific agenda and their respective ministries. The Government also appoints state secretaries and other leading ministerial officials, that help the Minister to manage the organisations and navigate its expert policy work, in drafting and implementation (Dobeš [03]; Pollák [05]; Svrček [01]). The Government assigns tasks to specific Ministries, this includes drafting laws; which are then approved by the Government and put forward to the Parliament (Grendel [08]). The Minister or state secretaries then argue for it in the Parliament and communicate it to the public (Pollák [05]). There are no formal requirements, but for effective governing, people appointed to the Government should have strong communication skills, preferably a background in the agenda, or at least be able to manage a team of experts.

The European Parliament was described by Štefanec [13], who had experience with both the European and Slovak parliaments. In his view, the European one has less politics and more expertise, partially because there is no set coalition and opposition. MEPs also have more advisors compared to MPs, and there are many more events and consultations with experts, including a parliamentary research centre. This might make it easier for new members to access expert insight, but the complexity of politics on the European level is enormous, including many more institutions and layers of decisions (European Parliament, 2022b).

Local and regional politics is a level of politics in which most responsibility for the quality of the executive, mayor, or head of the region, is placed upon the electorate. Their position requires a broader set of skills (Grendel [08]). While being a local, city, or regional council member does not involve extensive work, the most complicated issue is the budget, and it is more important to know the local context (Dobeš [03]; Šudík [02]). Especially in smaller towns, the barriers to entry are relatively low, but competence can greatly increase personal influence.

The state bureaucracy is the most formally regulated space, as people are required to hold HE credentials to even apply for a position, some even requiring a degree in a specific discipline. The income brackets are based on qualifications (Cmorej [07]; Štefanec [13]; Vaculčiak [12]), so people without HE are lower ranked and paid less.

MPs' assistants tend to be younger people, many of them still students. The only requirement is finished secondary education (Act on Salaries of Officials, 1993). The expectations regarding assistants' competence depend on their work, some assistants help with the administrative work, some are junior party members, and some are experts, often lawyers (Vaculčiak [12]; Henčeková [11]). The access to the position of MP assistant seems to be quite open, but it is not clear how are MPs distributing access to this opportunity.

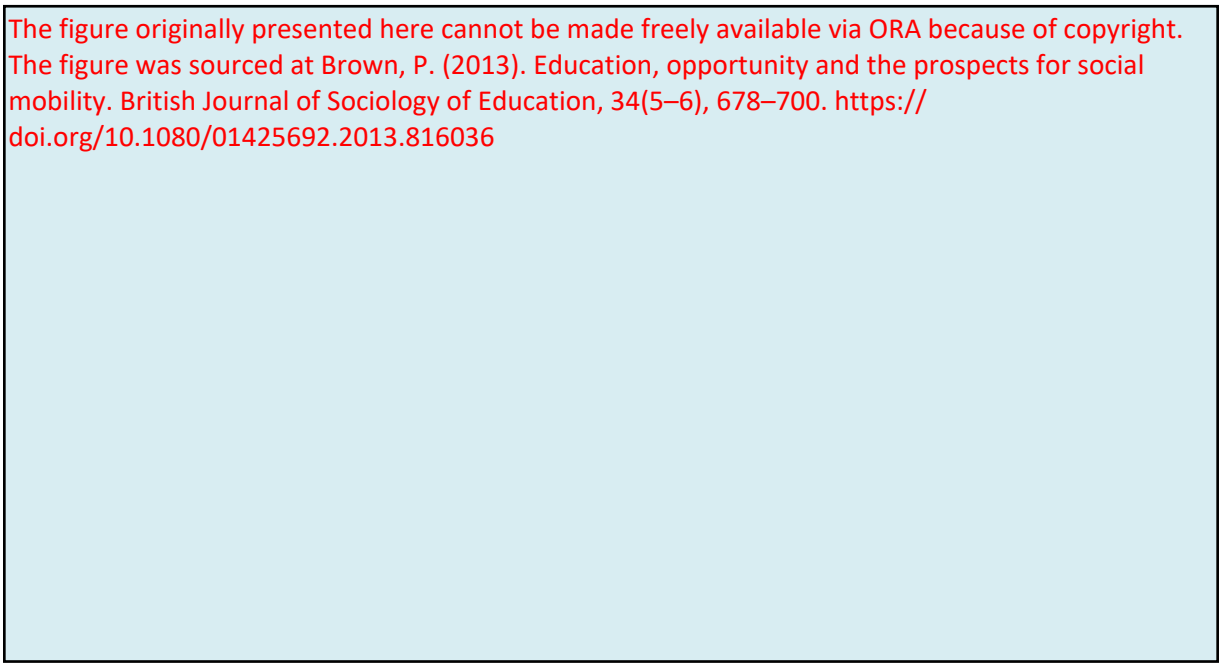
Political parties are institutions with the greatest diversity of design. Their responsibility includes creating a candidacy list for various elections (Act on voting rights, 2014), and deciding who is on the election ballot (Dobeš [03]). Parties have their networks of experts, consisting of party members, and associated and external people that help to guide their policy, draft proposals, and prepare talking points (Vaculčiak [12]; Žiak [10]). However, entering these networks seems to be based on personal connections to party members.

The institutional design of political institutions shapes what education individuals need and what knowledges make it to the policy. This is not only about access, people with limited credentials might make it to politics, but complicated rules of procedures and lack of accessible expert input may make their participation less effective. While many of the historic, political, and structural factors explored in this chapter are specific to Slovakia, some of the barriers are more widespread. The anti-establishment sentiments have country-specific dynamics, yet in different forms, they are a quite common presence in many democratic countries.

Chapter 3. Education and political life

In Michael Young's dystopian novel, the future meritocratic UK achieved supposed social harmony by creating a system with the most qualified and therefore the most meritocratic individuals governing the country (1958). The basis for this thinking is a meritocratic hypothesis that suggests that by allowing more equal educational chances, it might be possible to overcome the inherited stratification of aristocracy or oligarchy, so "social differences are removed to reveal innate character and ability" (P. Brown, 2013, p. 688). Educational attainment as expressed in credentials would then be translated into new social stratification that aligns with abilities and effort (Figure 1). In terms of political participation, it would mean educational attainment causing people to participate in civic affairs and higher quality of political culture (Crittenden & Levine, 2018; Mayer, 2015). But while Young's story ends with revolution and overthrow of the governing elite, meritocracy is now celebrated as the ideal organising principle of societies (Allen, 2011; Bovens & Wille, 2017; Sandel, 2020; Young, 1958).

Figure 1. The hypothesis of increasing merit-selection (P. Brown, 2013, p. 679)



For this research, I have adopted a definition of political participation from Verba et al. (1995) as interpreted by Barrett and Brunton-Smith, as "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing either regional, national, or supranational governance, either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of individuals who make that policy" (2014, p. 6). Direct participation, in this case, refers to a

specific subset of activity in which an individual is directly involved in policymaking or in daily political life, which is the case for participants in this research.

HE was seen by participants as only one of the life experiences that led them towards a career in politics and the level of its reported impact varied among them (Henčeková [11]; Kremský [06]; Štefanec [13]; Wiezik [14]). While I am recognizing that other factors might be also relevant in explaining political participation, during this research, I will suspend those. This chapter will map the educational cleavage in Slovakia and provide an overview of existing explanations of relationships between HE and political participation based on literature and interview. At the end of the chapter, I will outline an idea of HE immersion.

Educational cleavage in Slovak politics

Years of education and higher education are associated with various aspects of political life, including higher interest in politics, reading news, talking about politics, participation in civic activities, voter turnout, running for office and even getting more elected (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Bovens & Wille, 2017; Easterbrook et al., 2016; European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2020b; Persson, 2013b; Stubager, 2010; Verba et al., 1995). While Le & Nguyen (2021) suggest there is little effect of education on ideological affiliation, other studies show certain party affiliations based on education, such as the rise of the so-called 'Brahmin left' observed in Western countries, that attracts a more educated electorate with more liberal views on immigration and care about the environment (Gethin et al., 2022; Stubager, 2010). While the effects of education on political participation and representation are not universal and vary across countries (Dinesen et al., 2016) and political systems (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011), the trend is clear.

The case of Slovakia is only slightly different, the emergence of educational cleavage in politics can be traced back to the 1998 parliamentary elections, with an urban, more educated population supporting integration into the EU, and voting against authoritarian politics (Kyseľ, 2016). Since then it is possible to trace Slovakia's two broad camps of more nationalistic and more Europe-oriented voters, which are also split by education (Madro, 2022). The educational cleavage can be observed concerning views of the EU (European Parliament, 2022a), COVID-19 vaccinations (Hříchová et al., 2021) and attitudes towards immigration (Bahna et al., 2022)[1]. People with HE are evenly distributed along the liberal-conservative axis; those without HE are more conservative-leaning. The current governing coalition is more supported by the population with HE, while there is low support and distrust towards opposition parties (AKO & Focus, 2020; Bahna et al., 2022). The only difference compared to the broader global trend is in the ideological standing of the parties preferred by those with HE, as most could be placed on the centre-right. However, there is an indication of an emerging 'Brahmin Left' in Slovakia with a new party, Progressive Slovakia, a left-leaning party that is supported by the younger, more educated population (AKO & Focus, 2020; Bahna et al., 2022). In terms of political participation, people with HE are more: interested in politics [by 14.7 percentage points], following politics [7.6 p.p.], talk about politics with friends [6.8 p.p.], self-proclaim they understand politics [17.2 p.p.] and they show up to elections [14.4 p.p.] (Bahna et al., 2022).

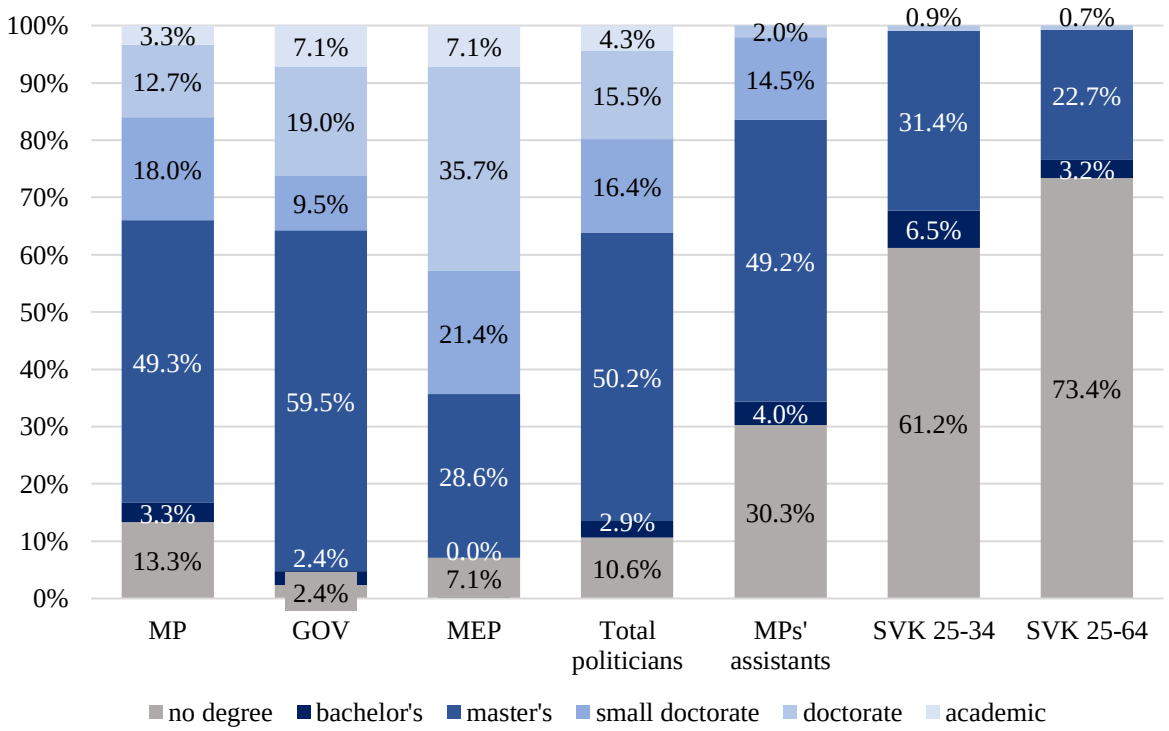
[1] Author's analysis based on data from Bahna et al., 2022.

Political representation

The political cleavage between those with HE and without extends also into political representation, with the most evident gap in the parliaments and governments. People with HE dominate political representation across examined countries and the trend seems to be also historic (Bovens & Wille, 2017). The higher share of officials with HE seems to emerge by voter choice, as countries rarely have any legal restrictions regarding qualification for elected officials (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011).

A similar pattern can be seen within the current Slovak political representation, where 89.4% of political actors and 69.7% of MPs' assistants have HE credentials (Graph 1)[2]. While only 26.6% of the active population has HE (OECD, 2021a). The lack of bachelor's degrees is consistent with the population, but a great divide can be seen in the share of politicians and assistants with master's, so-called 'small doctorate'[3], doctoral and academic credentials[4]. More than a third of politicians are holding above master's qualification, which means extensive experience with HE.

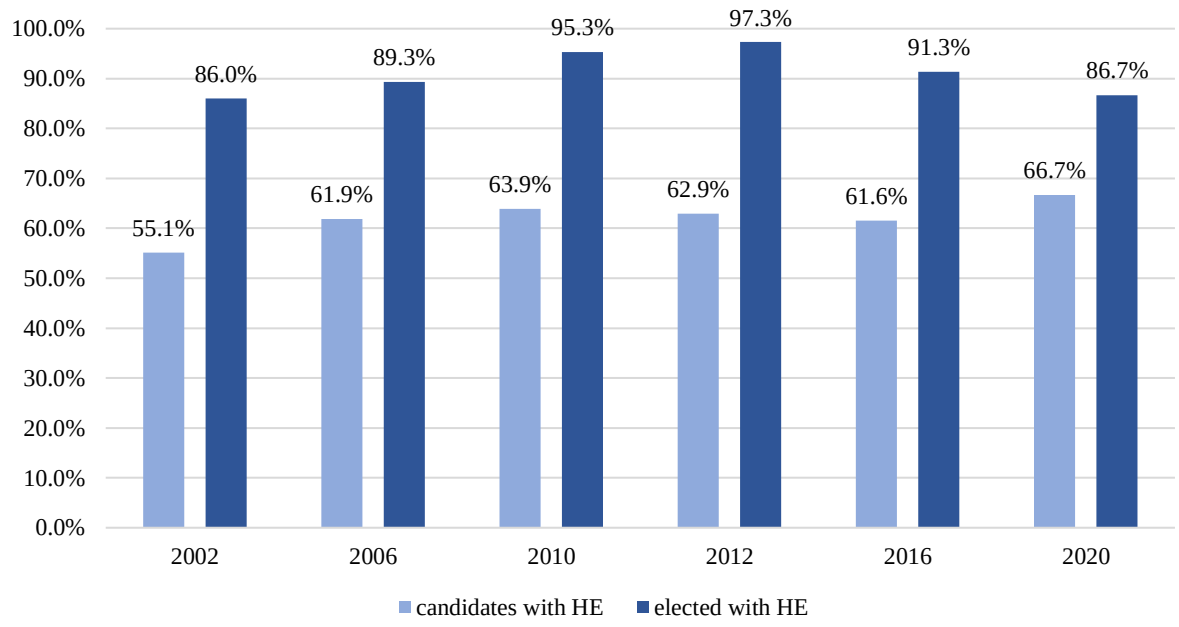
Graph 1. The HE credentials of Slovak political representation vs general population



[2] Dataset compiled by author, all references in Appendix II. Data for general population from OECD (2021)
[3] Postgraduate degree awarded after master's, requires submitting a research work (Gránska, 2015)
[4] Research-pedagogic degree of *docent* (assistant professor) or degree of professor (Gránska, 2015)

Data regarding small doctorate and academic credentials are not available for the general population, but they would be insignificant compared to the politicians and assistants. Only one minister, Ján Budaj, does not have HE, but that is only because of his expulsion from the university for political reasons before 1989 (SME, 2022). Lower education among assistants can be explained by their younger age and possibly still studying (Šudík [02]; Vaculčiak [12]). The domination of political actors with HE credentials is not a recent trend. Election data going back to 2002 even capture a slight decline of elected officials with HE in the last two elections, but the share of candidates with HE keeps rising (Graph 2).

Graph 2. HE credentials in Slovak Parliamentary elections since 2002



There is nothing special about Slovakia, the only conditions to run in elections include not being a criminal and being put on the candidacy list by a registered political party (Act on voting rights, 2014); "the right to be elected is not subject to any qualification or educational level requirement" (Štefanec [13]). Assistants are required to have finished their secondary education (Act on Salaries of Officials, 1993). Participants were surprised by these statistics and they tried to make sense of it, which will be explored in next sections.

This division in direct participation suggests that different educational groups have unequal levels of influence over the formation and support for policies (Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021), seeing significant 'elite capture' by those with higher education (Táíwò, 2022). Kuppens et al. find in their study of Western European countries that this inequality remains largely uncontested, those with HE are even adopting negative toward those less educated (2018). This

polarity between educational groups creates resentment, which "can be mobilised politically" (Marginson, 2018, p. 9) and bring greater social disharmony. The first signs are here, as people without HE have lower levels of political efficacy, feeling that they can affect the political process (OECD, 2020b). In Slovakia, people without HE are feeling significantly more voiceless in national politics (European Parliament, 2022a) and believing that politicians do not care about them (Bahna et al., 2022). This allocation of power is undermining the idea of political equality and threatens social harmony (Arendt, 1961; Dahl, 2006).

Interval

The previous sections worked within a binary, those with and without HE, but my participants challenged my thinking on this. In the context of low HE quality, Grendel [09] suggests that in Slovakia "if someone has a higher education degree, it does not automatically mean that they are more … prepared for political office." The view that formal education and credentials do not translate into being educated was widely shared among participants (Henčeková [11]; Stančík [09]; Vaculčiak [12]; Žiak [10]). While the original plan for the research was to contrast the two groups, the emergence of this sentiment in the interviews shifted my thinking. Mere completion is not a sufficient differentiator, but rather there are various HE experiences that differently contribute to political participation (Perrin & Gillis, 2019).

My participants imagined this more complicated relationship between education and political life through intervals. This term is understood here in a mathematical sense, as a range between two numbers – limits. Wiezik [14] suggests that what education is doing, is putting people into intervals along the axis of political participation and views. Not everyone with HE would go vote every time or have liberal views, but education shifts the distribution along the axis towards certain points. There will be some people that will remain in the extreme positions (Szöllös [04]), so intervals are not meant as absolute limits but more like marks of standard deviation. Compared to binary thinking, this imagining takes into account the fact of overlaps between different educational groups in their politics and life (Šudík [02]), with, probably, a large group in the centre (Čaputová, 2022). In an attempt to make sense of the social world, people create categories and classifications, putting them against each other. But rather than thinking in a clear-cut, binary way, there is space to think more along distributions and intervals. After interviews, I took a more agentic view, in which various life experiences, including HE, situate us within a certain interval, leaving space for manoeuvres.

Higher education and direct political participation

There has been repeatedly shown to be a strong correlation between education and political participation, yet the causal relationship is not as clear (Bömmel & Heineck, 2020; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Mayer, 2015; Nie et al., 1996; Persson, 2013a, 2013a; Sunshine Hillygus, 2005; Verba et al., 1995; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019). The sections that follow combine findings from the literature and experiences of the participants to identify mechanisms through which HE contributes to political participation, following two models. One is the *absolute education model*, in which education contributes by providing individuals with specific skills, knowledge, and experiences that make them more interested in politics and more capable to navigate it, 'HE as cause' (Bömmel & Heineck, 2020; Verba et al., 1995). The *relative education model* recognizes that education's contribution to political participation is not equally distributed, 'HE as proxy' for pre-adult factors, background and personal abilities. Even after graduation, the value of HE depends on the level of education in the environment with the broader struggle to gain social status (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Nie et al., 1996; Persson, 2013a).

HE as cause – absolute education model

Specialised knowledge and skills

While primary and secondary education tends to be more general and cover a broader range of subjects, students in HE are likely to become specialised and gain mostly specific knowledge and skills, creating differentiation (Piketty, 2020). Various fields seem to contribute differently to political participation, Ma-Kellams et al. suggest that various disciplines adopt 'specific socialization processes' which contribute to differences in political attitudes (2014). Previous studies have found that people that studied social sciences and humanities tend to participate more; evidence of less participation for people in natural sciences and technical fields is not clear (Perrin & Gillis, 2019; Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). In the context of my participants, in the parliaments, a significant part of their work takes place within agenda-specific committees. In them, their HE specialisation often becomes their agenda, as is the case for Wiezik [14] in ecology, Kremský [06], Cmorej [07] and Štefanec [13] focusing on economics, and Stančík [09] on international relations (complete list in Appendix I.). But it is impossible to separate the contribution of HE, as the skills and knowledges they use there are also from their professional experience. The contributions are clearer in more politics-related study fields, Svrček [01] mentioned how studying political science has helped him to navigate "parliament and system of political parties." But the clearest contribution is in the case of law, as the parliament's main

responsibility is the legislative process, thus requiring MPs to read, write, and amend laws. The particular benefit of studying law was recognised by participants who studied law (Svrček [01]; Cmorej [07]; Henčeková [11]) and also others (Kremský [06]; Szöllös [04]).

Transferable skills

Under term transferable skills I understand a "useful set of general skills which are necessary in both education and the workplace" (Kemp & Seagraves, 1995, p. 316); in this case, specific skills that might be useful in politics. While Ashwin critiques the concept of transferable skills, as it is not clear whether HE contributes to their development (2020), others suggest that HE can help develop verbal skills and train certain cognitive abilities (Le & Nguyen, 2021; Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). Those are skills that might be useful in politics, but furthermore, MPs need to work how under time pressure and public scrutiny, with information overload and the need to manage their team (Hartley, 2011). In this regard, I take the experiences of the participants as an example where HE seems to have some impact without making a greater claim of this being generally applicable. Similarly, to Le and Nguyen, Kremský [06] mentions how education helps people to "get used to harder intellectual exercises," developing their cognitive abilities. Šudík [02] talked about writing theses as an exercise during which people "learn to work with sources, search for information," others also mentioned critical evaluation of information and sources (Grendel [08]; Štefanec [13]; Szöllös [04]; Wiezik [14]). Furthermore, Kremský [06] attributes HE with learning to prioritise and have more systematic approach work and Šudík [02] developed his time-management. Some of these skills rather than being directly attributable to in-HE experiences, were developed during student years as consequence of specific lifestyle, during those years. Lastly, Dobeš [03] and Szöllös [04] talked about geography giving them a relation-based outlook on the world, which is helpful in thinking about complex policy.

Civic formation

Since Ancient Greece, it was recognised that one of the roles of education was to prepare future adults for their role as engaged citizens (Crittenden & Levine, 2018; Nussbaum, 2016). While civic education on lower levels is more universalised, within HE it depends on the focus of studies, with some evidence that broadly humanities and social sciences tend to be more civic-oriented (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). Yet any HE studies might develop civic skills and provide political knowledge. Kremský [06] mentioned how HE helped him to discuss topics more factually. Findings from literature caution that the effect of education on changing people's

view, liberalising them, might be very limited (Lancee & Sarrasin, 2015) and better explained by generational societal climate (Lindskog & Oskarson, 2022). But it is not only the formal learning but also activities during student years that can help to form citizens, such as participating in student representation, student activism (Holecz et al., 2022) and extracurricular activities (Perrin & Gillis, 2019). Particularly strong was the experience of Szöllös [04] who was finishing university in the last years of the communist regime. As a student of geography and a member of religious organisations, he came into close contact with the key environmental and religious dissidents, contacts that shaped his student years. He participated actively in the activities, spreading censored literature and even airing a radio show through university broadcasting about acute environmental problems that the communist leadership was trying to cover up. While not all of us will be students during the revolution, I know how transformative it is to become part of a social movement and participate in public life as a student.

HE as proxy – relative education model

Background

HE is not nearly as universal and general as primary or secondary education. Formally or informally, a hierarchy emerges of institutions, levels, and fields. This creates HE stratification in which privileged students tend to take better educational opportunities as they are better positioned (Marginson, 2016; Piketty, 2020). Multiple studies have found that when they account for socio-economic background and family effects, the relationship between education and participation weakens or nearly disappears (Burden et al., 2020; Holecz et al., 2022; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Lindgren et al., 2017; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019). Studies in Slovakia confirm this trend. Even with the massification of HE, the importance of socio-economic background, cultural, social, and other forms of capital is influential in educational choices (Lubelcová, 2022; Martinák & Varsik, 2021; Simonová & Soukup, 2022).

The importance of social background on educational opportunities and in turn life chances might be the point with most evidence in this dissertation, yet there was little mention of it in the conversations with the participants. Half of them recalled that their parents followed politics and that they discussed political issues at home (Cmorej [07]; Štefanec [13]; Svrček [01]; Vaculčiak [12]; Žiak [10]). Grendel [08] and Pollák [05] even have a parent who was active in political life. But even after recalling these experiences, they minimally recognised their background as relevant in determining their position in life. Only Stančík [09] directly mentioned background as a possible factor explaining educational attainment. Here I am once

again persuaded by the argument of Sandel, that the merit elite has blindness towards the context of its success (2020). They believe it was their abilities and effort that determined their position in life rather than their family background.

Personal characteristics and abilities

Cmorej [07], when asked what led him to start following politics, mentioned that "[he] feels like he was always interested in it somehow naturally". He was not alone in stating that his interest was an innate part of him. The study by Weinschenk and Dawes with monozygotic twins suggests that the relationship between education and political knowledge is greatly confounded by genetic factors (Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019). Some political movements resist the idea of genetic difference, as they see it would undermine the principle of equality, yet those differences are significant (Harden, 2021). Accepting that, HE would be merely a proxy of certain innate abilities that both would help an individual to succeed in education and participate more in politics, which seem to be congruent with the hypothesis of political meritocracy (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). This argument was prominent among the participants, who saw ambition in life and intelligence as one of the explaining factors behind people with HE being more present in political life (Cmorej [07]; Kremský [06]; Stančík [09]). While it is questionable to what extent ambition is an inherent personality trait, there is the broader problem that study by Sunshine Hillygus found: traits that helped people to succeed in education did not translate into their civic life (2005). On other hand, Rasmussen and Nørgaard have found that "the motivational and cognitive effects of education" are confounded by personal dispositions (2018, p. 39). From this set of evidence, it seems that genes and innate abilities do create differences among people with an impact on their chances in education and politics. But the evidence puts into question the meritocratic belief in a magical universal trait, such as intelligence.

Social positioning

The hierarchy of educational opportunities is translated into life after graduation, the field and level of education predispose who graduates spend time with, in both professional and personal life (Chusseau & Hellier, 2010; Persson, 2013b; Piketty, 2020). In this way HE then reinforces and cements the class origins, permitting only limited mobility and especially punishing those that are not participating (Lubelcová, 2022; Marginson, 2018). HE is not determining a specific destination, rather educational background sets people to pursue certain professional paths and into social bubbles that further shape their political thinking and participation (Wiezik [14]).

Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry are big proponents of this view, proposing that education helps to shape individual social network positions and some find themselves closer to political networks (1996). The benefit of HE is therefore relative, as it depends on which position it places the individual in the wider hierarchy and what resources other actors have (Aars & Christensen, 2020; Persson, 2013a; Rasmussen & Nørgaard, 2018). Interestingly the effect of education on participation increases with age because people with similar educational backgrounds tend to spend time together besides work (Easterbrook et al., 2016). In Slovakia, people with HE self-identify more frequently with higher positions in social stratification, their financial situation is better and there is educational cleavage even in cultural consumption (Bahna et al., 2022; Sopóci et al., 2020, p. 182). Additionally, throughout Europe and in Slovakia, people tend to date within their educational level and then marrying also people with the same level of education (Bahna et al., 2022; Erát, 2021; Katrňák & Manea, 2020). HE, while not completely determining social position, still puts people into certain intervals in terms of people and institutions they interact with in their professional and personal life.

Degree as symbol

There is one additional mechanism through which HE hierarchies are translated into social. Sopóci et al. suggest that Slovakia has a parallel status hierarchy which seems to be separate from socioeconomic and educational factors (Sopóci et al., 2020). It is the obsession with *tituly* [degrees] in the public discourse that makes me think they might be one of the symbols that can affirm that status (Ďuriš Nicholsonová, 2017; Goffman, 1951; Gregorík, 2020). While there is no formal requirement for politicians to have HE credentials, it is socially expected (Dobeš [03]; Grendel [08]; Pollák [05]; Štefanec [13]; Szöllös [04]; Vaculčiak [12]). My proposition here is that indeed *tituly* [degrees] are signifiers of status and they shape political representation. Their symbolic function can be derived from Bourdieu, degrees work as symbolic capital, representing competence and as justification to exert authority (1986). And degrees' symbolic value follows multi-layered hierarchy.

First, there is the formal hierarchisation of HE levels. In Slovakia there are six, beyond the regular Bologna structure of bachelor's, master's, and doctorate, there is a so-called 'small doctorate' placed before doctorate and then a research-pedagogic degree of *docent,* associate professor, and degree of professor. Second, there is a hierarchy within master's and small doctorate levels, as some fields have their degrees and acronyms, while most master's graduates would use Mgr. or Ing., but for example students of medicine use MUDr. (Encyclopaedia Beliana, 1999; Gránska, 2015). The third layers are HE credentials from abroad, some are

difficult to translate into the national context, especially if their acronyms look different (Henčeková [11]; Štefanec [13]). Fourthly, there is differentiation associated with the stratification of HEIs, a kind of 'institutional capital' that assigns value to their relative positionality, which became quite frequent with the emergence of university rankings (Bourdieu, 1988; Teichler, 2008; Tight, 2019; Tomlinson, 2008). Massification of HE did not eradicate elite institutions, they are still existing, providing scarce and therefore valuable credentials (Marginson, 2017; Trow, 1973). The narrative of institutional differentiation was broadly shared among participants, for example: "it very much depends from which institution person has a degree" (Grendel [08]) and they "will judge what HEI did you attend" (Šudík [02]). This is extended also to institutions abroad, which can be seen as also being of various quality (Grendel [08]; Šudík [02]). These factors create significant difference "in the levels of symbolic capital amongst different graduates" (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 59).

And this symbolic hierarchy of degrees influences the creation of political representation. This might be a specific feature of Slovakia, *titul* [degree] is included in the candidacy lists, which are distributed to every household before the elections and degrees are printed on the election ballot (Gránska, 2015; Act on voting rights, 2014). Next to almost every name, there is an acronym, or several, a little reminder of their academic and social status, signalling their competence (Stančík [09]) and "maybe some people are impressed by that" (Henčeková [11]). This is not to suggest that HE credentials are the main factor in voters' decision-making, but HE "is an add-on on top of everything" (Dobeš [03]). The value of HE is however not recognised universally, in some political settings, the degree might hold negative connotations, especially connected with the rise of anti-intellectualism (Pollák [05]). The value of HE is relative, as it is more recognised by people that also have HE (Štefanec [13]), as also people with HE see good education as a greater priority in life (Bahna et al., 2022).

Theorising new understanding

The previous sections explored how findings from the interviews interacted with existing literature. But the conversation I had were much richer and a new idea about the connection between education and political participation emerged. The importance of my personal experience and interpretation is significant in this section. Rather than making any definite claims, the idea I propose here should be understood as an attempt to theorise and create hypotheses that ought to be tested as the relevance of certain factors might be limited to the Slovak context or my experience.

Immersion and self-formation

The previous section already established that there is great diversity among HEIs and levels of HE, so the various degrees awarded are perceived differently. However, seeing HE contribution only through its symbolic value is rather restrictive. So, I propose here a more agentic view, in which actors thanks to their deep HE immersion had broader space for self-formation, which affected their political participation. My original plan for the research was to contrast politicians with and without HE, yet even among participants with similar credentials, I observed a great diversity of views and experiences among them. This started shaping an idea of HE immersion which I understand to mean the level of exposure to various experiences connected with HE.

It was the diverging conceptualisations of expertise and its use in interviews that first gave me an idea of HE immersion. Participants that seemed to have more extensive HE immersion (longer, more intensive, and diverse HE experiences) were more eager to engage with scientific evidence in policymaking and were more aware of the limits of their expertise. Indeed, studies suggest that the scientific ethos contributes to people having lower levels of social dominance orientation and thinking about science shifts certain moral views, possibly making people more liberal (Ma-Kellams et al., 2014; Ma-Kellams & Blascovich, 2013). At first, I was cautious about not overinterpreting this small difference, but during analysis, I started noticing more hints of HE immersion in other aspects. During their student years, participants were not merely gaining skills, knowledges, and various forms of capital, but through an engagement with various HE experiences they worked on themselves (self-formation) which made them into new people (Marginson, 2021).

The key feature of self-formation is understanding that "only the learner does the learning." What HE can do is create institutional conditions under which students discover and use their 'will to learn' to the greatest possible extent (Marginson, 2021). Kremský [06] provided a

compelling summary of this sort of self-formation, "HE giving [him] space to educate self, build self, take responsibility over self, … [and] even think about things that seem senseless," making mistakes and reflecting on them. The concept of HE immersion should indicate how much space a person was given for their self-formation.

The first element of immersion is the capacity to pay attention to studies, "if I will start studying, then I should do it properly!" (Ďuriš Nicholsonová, 2017). Full-time study is a substantial commitment even if the student does not participate in any activities outside classes. Four of my participants were students during their political careers, Stančík [09] opted to suspend his, so he could focus fully on MP's work. The other three are continuing in various part-time arrangements, which allows them more flexibility, but it seems they are not immersed in HE (Šudík [02]; Vaculčiak [12]; Žiak [10]). To be considered immersed, one needs to be present, whether in physical or digital space, but most importantly present mentally. Matovič one of the politicians found to plagiarize admitted being frequently not mentally present during his studies (2020). The way participants represented their experience with part-time studies suggests there can be hardly any talk of any immersion and self-formation (Pollák [05]; Vaculčiak [12]). In the fast-paced era, HE ought to engage students "in deceleration, patience, and immersive attention" (Roberts, 2013) but that requires the learner to commit and structures to create space.

The second element of immersion are interactions that take place across HE experiences. It seems that of particular importance is guidance by academic staff and chances to interact with teachers (Marginson, 2021; Perrin & Gillis, 2019). For Wiezik [14] interactions within academic settings were transforming. Kremský [06] was missing them in Slovak HE but had the opportunity to experience proper class discussion and interactions with teachings staff during his studies abroad. While learning does take place with the agency of an individual, it rarely occurs in isolation but rather in a social setting; sharing with others and peer interactions are found to be enriching (Marginson, 2021; Spero, 2022). Immersive HE ought to include both individual guidance, and the space to interact with staff and peers.

A third element includes moving outside the lecture halls and classrooms, to engage with the world and peers under different conditions, extracurricular activities, student representation and activism. Perrin and Gillis found that participating in community-based projects is one of the high-impact HE experiences with a lasting effect on political participation experiences (2019). Students should be provided with a diversity of cultural, educational and political experiences (Marginson, 2021), HE is supposed to "be an adventure in personal, social, and spiritual formation" (Tubbs, 2019) that students partake in as a process of their self-development This

should include the general orientation of curricular and extracurricular experiences that will enhance student's sense of responsibility to society (Yang, 2021). Šudík's [02] and Szöllös's [04] experiences with student representation and activism seemed to be high-impact. Immersive HE experiences ought to include diverse extracurricular activities, including opportunities in which students could begin their political participation.

A fourth element is an 'immersion in knowledge' (Marginson, 2021), HE creating space for students to specialise and go deep in a topic (Svrček [01]). This often takes place through the undertaking of doctoral studies but could be also experienced in undertaking smaller research projects, including theses and dissertations and continuous engagement with literature. Ashwin et al. show in their study how the understanding of the field changed during an undergraduate degree, which suggests personal formation. But it is also important that there is certain flexibility, so students' research does align with their interests (2014). Here Tubbs stresses the importance of students entering "a universe of previously unheard ideas, of a bewildering variety of people and opinion and characters" (2019), to engage with various knowledges across disciplines. And returning to studies regarding scientific ethos, there seems to be a connection between engaging in the practice of science and working toward social harmony (Ma-Kellams & Blascovich, 2013).

Conceptually I developed the idea of HE immersion in terms of space to discover, develop capacity and act on the '*will to learn,'* as prerequisites for self-formation (Marginson, 2021). The concept of HE immersion also follows the imagining of intervals. Rather than the educational system creating two separate groups, those with and those without HE, the concept of immersion provides nuanced insight that different HE experiences lead to different outcomes. Based on ideas from literature, interviews, and personal experiences I compiled a list of possible factors presented in Table 2 constituting together HE immersion. My conceptualisation of HE immersion to include also academic staff, who in their interactions with students and their participation in knowledge production are also undergoing self-formation. So, the list includes factors that affect HE experiences for both students and academic staff.

Table 2. Possible factors contributing to HE immersion	
Number of: - Interactions (peer, staff, outside), - Friendships, relationships, - Learning/teaching experiences (class, seminar, field work, etc.), - Readings, learning materials, - Research projects, - Group projects and works, research collaborations, - Social/cultural/political/sport activities, - Work and internships, - Study exchanges, - Feedback (written or oral), - Presenting findings or ideas (written or oral),	Intensity of: - Learning/teaching (frequency, class size), - Research (meetings, experiments, field work) - Social network (size and diversity), - Knowledge immersion (diversity of literature, views, approaches, disciplines), - Individual interactions (frequency, length), - Group interactions, peer or staff (frequency, length), - Immersive attention.
Study characteristics: - Length of study (years), - Type of study (full-time, part-time), - Mode (in-person, hybrid, remote) - Size of student body and faculty, - Field or orientation of programme, - Flexibility for personal preference, - Language of the course, - Institutional setting.	Other factors: - Location, facilities, accessibility, - International or domestic mobility, - Living conditions, - Outside responsibilities (work, caring), - Language and cultural setting of the country.

The connection between HE immersion and political participation runs through people growing their network, expanding their knowledge, and building habits beneficial for their personal and political life. Greater immersion should enhance both the absolute and relative contributions of HE. But the transformation happens in self-formation, as greater immersion can expand the space for it to take place. This can motivate people to engage more in politics, but importantly in my understanding, it changes the way they approach politics and how they think about it. They gain a new understanding of knowledge. Therefore, understanding HE immersion is not only a necessary step for political participation but also for political culture and public discourse. And because HE immersion is potentially so transformative for individual and social politics, I need to address where this leaves those in less immersive HE spaces and those that are completely outside of HE (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

HE immersion changes the debate about access, the challenge is not only to extend HE to all that are interested but also to provide them with immersive HE experiences. This will be difficult as historically, "inequality has always protected meaningful education as an elite entitlement" (Tubbs, 2021a, p. 9). High-value experiences are disproportionality pursued by students from affluent families (Marginson, 2016), which can be also expected in the case of immersive HE, leading to elite capture, with few being able to enjoy (Táíwò, 2022).

I expect great disparities in the ability of HEIs to provide immersive experiences, strengthening the existing institutional stratification. As regional and less selective institutions that often serve marginalised communities having the least resources and capacity are forced to rely on less HE immersive forms (Major, 2019; Tight, 2019). In terms of affording attention to studies, people from lower classes tend to work more, as a way to cover their expenses (Martin, 2012). In Slovakia, more than 60% of students work during the term in Slovakia (Hall et al., 2021). And while some limited work hours should not intervene but work too much can obstruct students from dedicating enough time and mental capacity to their studies. Students from less represented groups often face issues with self-affirmation, feeling like they do not belong (Easterbrook et al., 2021). This greatly limits their interactions, as they start doubting whether to seek advice from teachers, and they tend to socialise less and be less involved on campus (Stuber, 2020). While students from more affluent backgrounds do not hesitate and they devote more time to cultural, social and sports activities (Martin, 2012).

All these inequities in HE immersion make it very clear why advocating for equal access to HE immersion and space for self-formation is important. In the time of economic pressures and metrics of employability (Tubbs, 2021a, 2021b), microcredentials and hybrid forms of HE are suggested as ways forward (OECD, 2020a). In the light of these developments, it is crucial to question what impacts those practices will have on political participation and form of the engagement. Conceptualising HE immersion in these details also allows for new metrics to be created that will better reflect the complexity of the HE experiences. For me, the commitment to student self-formation is a better guarantor of life-long learning than small doses of HE sprinkled throughout life. Having a chance to learn later in life, but there first needs to be demand, which will be there if people develop a habit of learning, a 'will to learn.'

Discussion

At the end of this chapter, I would like to conclude with a few remarks that reflect how my thinking about the relationship between education and political life shifted through this process.

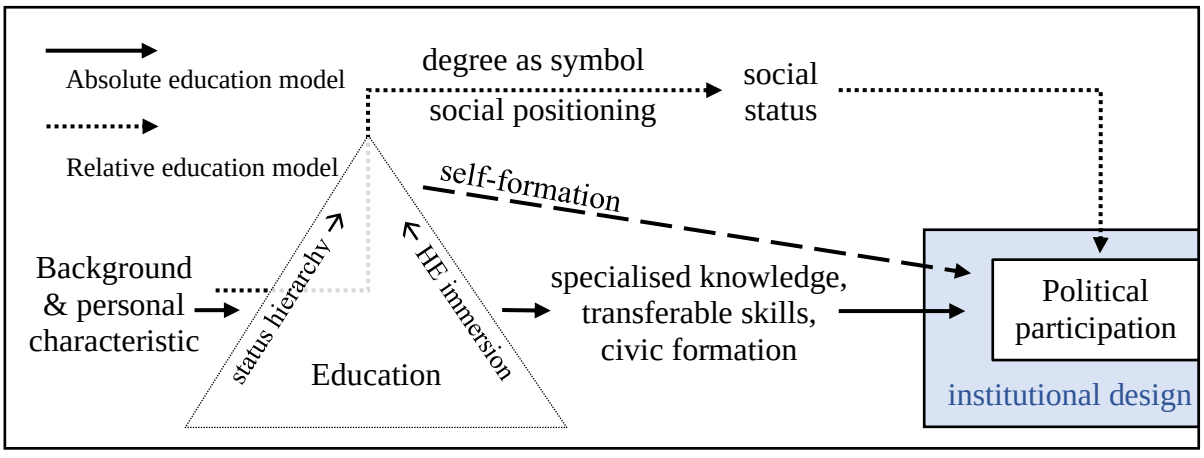
First, it has convinced me to think less in the binary division between those with and without HE, and rather think in terms of intervals and distributions.

Second, within direct political participation, once it becomes an everyday occupation of a person, the absolute effects of education are clearer, as they have space and need to specialise. For the broader population, where politics remains more general, they mostly need to develop their civic habits.

Third, the evidence from literature and interviews convinced me to understand the relationship in more relative terms. The importance of social background and even dispositions can greatly affect success in education. Through education, people gain important symbols, and they socialise into professional and social circles that influence their status and proximity to power. Potentially making them better equipped to navigate the institutional design.

Fourth, I came to understand this process of enquiring about capacity for political participation as a process of accumulating advantages. HE is part of this broader schema (Figure 2.), but some already enter education with great advantages, which are "converted into further advantages in a cumulative manner" (Münch, 2018, p. 42).

Figure 2. Model of relationships between education and political participation[5]



Fifth, I purposefully made the shape of education to be a pyramid to signify its internal hierarchies. On one side hierarchy in terms of providing social status, and on the other side,

[5] inspired by Persson (2013a, p. 15)

access to HE immersion. These hierarchies have a consequence on social stratification and how much space they create for self-formation, which challenges the model of merit-selection from the beginning of this chapter.

Lastly, this chapter outlines many deficiencies in the current stratification models, but it also cautions against adopting a meritocratic utopia of social harmony. I need to think more about meritocratic consequences on political equality (Dahl, 2006; Sandel, 2020; Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021) and the emotional cost this stratification ideal produces (Morton, 2019).

Chapter 4. Knowledge and political life

The political order that arose from the scientific revolution assumed that through the application of positivist science, it would be possible to remove any issue from politics and frame it as a scientific problem (Comte, 1858; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Jasanoff, 1998; Raman, 2014). All problems would be solved by a form of technocratic governance, in Young's imagined UK, it was the civil service, which would be able to finally compensate for the weakness of parliament, alternatively, there are Comte's sociologists or Plato's Guardians (Comte, 1858; Plato, 1992; Young, 1958). Some philosophers even attempted to spread the universal principles into moral order, for example, Kant, Lock, Mill and Comte. Yet that seemed to be too ambitious and for now, it is admitted that certain decisions regarding values should be settled through politics, which lead to the emergence of liberal democracy. This includes elements of the division of power and regular elections, social harmony is achieved through an informed and rationally thinking public (Dewey, 1927; Raman, 2014). At the core of this thinking are two requirements, first, the possibility of science, a supreme source of knowledge to produce objective, universal and certain understandings of the world (Comte, 1858; Sorrel, 1991), and second, the possibility of every individual being and willing to think for themselves (Kant, 1784; Millgram, 2015). This chapter will explore how knowledge, both in terms of rationality in policy making and as a source of public reason interplays with political life.

The Great Endarkenment

The above thinking about the political order has multiple shortcomings. Firstly, the assumption that all people "demand the same unaltering satisfactions of the same unaltering basic needs" (Berlin, 1959, p. 131). Positivist science attempts to create universal understanding without the need to consider the context. This thinking about science is possible because it has been constructed in the context of European colonial domination, so the category of universal included considerations of those in proximity to power (Quijano, 2007). Secondly, universality in sense of overarching understanding of the world is made difficult due to the current 'excess of objectivity:' the problem is not in the lack of scientific knowledge produced, but in its fragmentation and disconnection (Crotty, 1998; Sarewitz, 2004). Thirdly, even the specialised advanced knowledge faces diverging interpretations among experts, making it difficult to be translated into politics (Feyerabend, 1993; Pearce et al., 2014; Sarewitz, 2004). Fourthly, hyperspecialisation and increasing complexity mean that only a narrow set of experts understand any particular piece of advanced knowledge, foreclosing the chance for the broader

public to participate in democratic politics (Millgram, 2015; Stone, 2017). And as Wiezik [14] recalls even among elected officials, it is difficult. He talked about his colleagues that lacked ecological education "so things obvious to me are for them incomprehensible". This returns to the idea of technocratic governance and delegating decisions to experts. But the fifth problem is that "people cannot differentiate who is an expert and who is not," (Štefanec [13]) as even making that decision would require being an expert (Millgram, 2015). Millgram calls this the Great Endarkenment, the foreclosing of the possibility of science-based-policy, as policymaking reassembles the game of telephone; a hyperspecialized piece of knowledge is passed through people with various levels of comprehension and in different contexts until it reaches policymakers, who are by that point making 'informed' decisions based on something that is the equivalent of "reading entrails or casting hexagrams, it is blind, terrified superstition" (2015, p. 37). Quijano argues that "it is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power,… which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity" (2007, p. 177). The next section tries to how various knowledges and rationalities have been instrumentalised in Slovak politics.

Knowledges and rationalities

Before starting to describe the competing means of policy making, I need to address the issue of rationality, based on the assumption that most people are seeking to benefit society and make good decisions. A good decision would be one that can be "justified and it has *ratio"* [lat. reason] (Cmorej [07]), and based on what is sound and rational (Pascarella, 2006). I want however to remain critical of this formulation, following Foucault's view that ascribing rationality is elusive. The question is not if decisions are abstractly rational but rather "which kind of rationality they are using" (1979, p. 226). In the context of the current so-called post-truth era, with fragmented knowledge space and conflicting truth claims (Singer, 2021), it is important to investigate how rationality is used to create justifications, new concepts and ideas (Foucault, 1978; Lemke, 2002). And literature suggests that even highly competent individuals engage in motivated reasoning, their political preferences undermining their supposed objectivity (Hannon, 2022; Kahan et al., 2017; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Something that has been also observed by Kremský [06], is the ad-hoc creation of values to justify the policy, the reason coming "to find justification for the opinion which has been adopted" (Dewey, 1927, p. 50). So rather than evaluating how various knowledges stand against the abstract rationality, in this section I will characterize various kind of rationalities as they emerged from the conversations.

Scientific and expert rationality

Wiezik [14] characterised scientific claims as those closest to being 'objective' as they were "found by objective methods, they are verifiable, refutable, all scientific standards simply apply. And when they are published in peer-reviewed journals, that is the biggest guarantee that someone is not making it up." Science, especially positivistic and quantified, provides an aura of objectivity, certainty, and possibility for comparisons and ranking, which makes it very appealing (Houghton, 2011; Merry, 2016). But little science and expertise can live up to that ideal of certainty and objectivity, most offering less than a fully honest account of the context and methods in which they were found, and the possibility of diverse interpretations (Feyerabend, 1993; Merry, 2016; Standring, 2021). Tetlock collected predictions of established public experts regarding various political events, finding that their accuracy on average equated to anyone that regularly follows politics in news (2005). Science and expertise are a great "tool to support, monitor, and assess" policy decisions, but they are "not a predictive oracle" (Sarewitz, 2004, p. 400). It is important not to equate scientific rationality with the romantic notion of truth (Sorrel, 1991).

Furthermore, as participants reminded me, experts and science are not separate from politics. Political parties often have their networks of experts, and some politicians gain expertise through daily interaction with the issues (Pollák [05]; Štefanec [13]). Knowledge is not acquired in a purely neutral space, with science and the facts suddenly being "ideologically 'polluted' only when crossing the boundary into the zone of politico-administrative procedures" (Strassheim & Kettunen, 2014, p. 260).

Institutional rationality

This brings me back to the idea of institutional design, as institutions are seen as having their interests that guide certain policy decisions. Foucault talks about 'reason of state' as the rationality of governing in which institutions seek to increase the strength of the state (1979). This could include policies for national security or national interests, renewing or creating new governmental institutions, providing them with a budget and appointing their heads. Certain decisions need to be made so the state apparatus keeps going and it develops. Most of these institutions' needs are not as visible from the outside, few participants reflected on how they suddenly saw those institutions in a new light, recognising their needs (Kremský [06]; Szöllös [04]; Vaculčiak [12]). The policy process is not a linear process of an idea being translated

directly to policy, but rather a process of negotiations and consultations that transforms it (Pollák [05]) and this process is bounded by institutions and their rationality.

Bureaucratic rationality

It is closely related to institutional rationality. As was already explained in the section on institutional design, the state bureaucracy plays an important role in drafting and implementing policies. In interviews, this aspect was critiqued, both the existence of their separate identity (Kremský [06]) and the distance they have from the regular people (Pollák [05]). Bureaucratic rationality is oriented toward making policies that can be implemented, even though that sometimes frustrates the politicians (Kremský [06]). Any policy that ought to be implemented needs to look at what is possible within the governance structure and use the different components of that structure to achieve it, basically to follow bureaucratic rationality.

Common sense rationality

Participants when discussing differences between people with and without HE identified a separate source of knowledge, "life wisdom" (Szöllös [04]) and a way of thinking, "common sense" (Šudík [02]). Those, while not acquired in formal institutions, can still form a basis for a rational argument. Such as when personal experience with a specific context is translated into an aura of authority, Pollák [05] claimed his upbringing in and association with the Roma community as a basis to make claims about their needs. This rationality can be adopted both by politicians and the public. It can be manifested in the confrontation of the political insider with the outsider, someone who observes politics from distance (Vaculčiak [12]) and they can bring "something new that experts in their closed box of specialisation could not imagine" (Szöllös [04]).

Public/popular rationality

As elected officials, politicians that want to keep their position, need to justify their decisions to their voters, so they tend to be very attentive to what commonly held views and how they move. Some participants tried to downplay their reliance on public views, Dobeš [03] expressed doubts about public opinion surveys, and few others saw the public as potentially lacking knowledge and understanding to fully comprehend their decisions (Šudík [02]; Szöllös [04]; Wiezik [14]). Yet all participants have affirmed that in some ways, the views of their voters and the broader public are an integral part of their thinking. Due to the diversity of views among the population, it seems reductive to talk about public rationality in a singular term. The

construction of unified public rationality seems to be related to the rise of populism and politicians invoking the abstract general will to justify their steps (Engler et al., 2019; Merkley, 2020; Singer, 2021).

Other rationalities

Participants identified additional sources of rationality. Szöllös [04] talked about the spiritual dimension, as something that can be a source of understanding for people. The rise of some Christian political groups might lead to more rationalisations based on religious teachings (Vargovčíková, 2021). Kremský [06] included value orientation and Grendel [08] talked about character as a basis for decisions. The logic is that if politician proclaims certain values and adheres to certain principles, they should hold them consistently. Lastly, lobbying and activism, while they might borrow from various other rationalities, are guided by their interests: activists rationalise for a cause and lobbyists for certain business or sector advantage (Wiezik [14]).

Political rationality

It was the most widespread narrative among the participants. While they stressed the importance of listening to the experts, the policies are transformed by 'political motif' (Grendel [08], 2022) decided in the 'political context of possible' (Szöllös [04]). Wiezik [14] was probably the most critical of this approach, describing how scientific findings are only instrumentally used, when "it is convenient.". There is an aspect of realism in it, which comes from the desire to protect one's political future or goals. This sometimes means voting for a policy that goes against science because there is political trade. This is made easier for politicians, as they have access to an abundance of evidence and information, which gives have plenty of 'ammunition' to use in making a 'rational' argument for their stance (Hannon, 2022; Kahan et al., 2017).

Limits of public reason

This section tries to draw some further limitations for use of reason within the public discourse. Firstly, the capacity of politicians and the public to reason is limited by the Dunning-Kruger effect. Multiple studies have observed a gap between self-assigned competence and actual competence, with those performing poorly thinking they are doing fine and competent individuals not realizing their competence is not universally shared (Dunning & Kruger, 1999). This has serious consequences for politics, as shown in a recent review of studies by Light et al., who found that the people who disagree most with the scientific consensus (on climate change, COVID-19, evolution, etc.) know less about the relevant issues, but they think they

know more (2022). The crucial aspect of overcoming this bias is better self-assessment (Dunning & Kruger, 1999), which was demonstrated in interviews by Wiezik [14] and Žiak [10] who clearly outlined the limits of their expertise. But politics does not value competence, as anyone that can make claims in a self-assured way has a chance (Žiak [10]). To explain their confidence, Cmorej [07] suspects that "politics is a place with a higher percentage of narcissists" and there is evidence that the Dunning-Kruger effect can be associated with narcissism (Christopher et al., 2021; Dunning, 2011). For people that are self-assured about their high competency and have limited actual competence, educational interventions do little, they can even backfire in case they hold anti-intellectual views (Light et al., 2022; Merkley, 2020). Researchers are also sceptical that feedback could help to correct erroneous views (Dunning & Kruger, 1999; Simons, 2013). Literature suggests that it might be possible to weaken the Dunning-Kruger effect by shifting how people perceive their knowledge (Light et al., 2022) and they should try to explain the topic they claim to know a lot about in detail when they might start noticing gaps in their understanding (Fernbach et al., 2013). Problem is that with political issues, sometimes even people with much knowledge and competence might purposefully overlook certain evidence and even miscalculate if the evidence goes against their views (Hannon, 2022; Kahan et al., 2017; Taber & Lodge, 2006). This limits public reasons by allowing both, confident individuals with limited competence to dominate the discourse, and partisan competent individuals, to partake in public discussion and enter politics.

The second component that limits public reason is social media. The existing cleavages, biases, and impulses are made more visible there, replacing corrective mechanisms with an echo chamber that reinforces them (Anson, 2018; Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021, 2021). Štefanec [13] talks about the transformation of reality which is now characterised by an abundance of information, making it difficult for anyone to evaluate the quality of information (Millgram, 2015). And even if you are trying to communicate carefully, there is so much space for misinterpretation (Čaputová, 2022) and anonymity encourages vulgar attacks (Wiezik [14]). Here I adopt McLuhan's "medium is the message" framework, as platforms and devices through which communication takes place are shaping the message (1967). It almost does not matter what politician posts online, the reaction will always nearly be the same, maybe more or less engagement, but outrage on one side and applause on the other.

Discussion

The idea that people decide based on their rational consideration rather than their emotion and habit is embedded in political and economic philosophy (Dewey, 1927). To start thinking differently, first, it is important to drop the "rationalist conception of rationality" (Lemke, 2002, p. 57). In my thinking, I was inspired by Patočka's concept of radical super-civilization, which he argues is flawed because of the "attempt and aspiration to make rationality the key to answering every question in life" (Dunaj, 2017, p. 471). He proposes to moderate the super-civilization, which still uses scientific rationality but also recognizes the importance of other knowledges for governance (Patočka, 1987). Raman similarly suggests that it is not necessary to choose the main strain of rationality on which to base decisions, but rather make them complement each other (2014).

Science even with all its problems is still a valuable source of knowledge, but it needs to be reformulated so it is more transparent, provides more context, delegates and is accountable to the public (Blue, 2018; Raman, 2014; Sarewitz, 2004; Standring, 2021). In a recent blog, one of the prominent Slovak psychologists suggested that "science cannot be done in a way, that researchers would have to consider before each research how results of their study could affect social order" (Patarák, 2022). On the contrary, I would suggest that it is of vital importance to reflect on the consequences and to think about how knowledge is presented by science communicators and experts (Feyerabend, 1993; Tetlock, 2005).

Social media and the Dunning-Kruger effect show us the mechanism through which knowledge and reasoning become a source of polarisation and disharmony. Because even those with a high level of competence and knowledge seize to apply their capacity consistently when the problem involves political issues (Hannon, 2022; Kahan et al., 2017; Taber & Lodge, 2006). They rather use this capacity to gather evidence that supports their view, confirmation bias (Kappes et al., 2020). Recognising the limits of public reason is of consequence not only to politics but also to individual actions. Wiland suggests taking a 'Humble View; not only meeting the other person in the middle but maybe even going closer to their view (2017). This is finally something that HE can teach, "being able to accept other views and sometimes even change one's views" (Štefanec [13]).

Chapter 5. Suggestions

This brief chapter will outline some of the suggestions, including policy changes, research ideas and questions to think about, that emerged from the writing and thinking about these ideas.

Firstly, I would encourage more researchers to produce methodologically more honest accounts of their research experience and to embrace the 'messy'. As I problematised scientific rationality in chapter 4, it made it even more important for me to be transparent about what research can accomplish and I started thinking about how to act responsibly as a privileged knowledge producer. But here I am short of ideas, perhaps the answer is to continually attempt active reflexivity.

Secondly, the most significant idea that I am personally taking away is the concept of HE immersion and its consequence in creating space for self-formation. In thinking about where to move it further, I have been inspired by an essay *The Power of Patience*, in which Roberts argues for a more cautious way of designing a curriculum. Not only in terms of content, but also "in shaping the temporal experiences of the students" by adjusting "the pace and tempo of the learning" to allow students to "engage in deceleration, patience, and immersive attention" (2013). The idea of HE immersion calls HEIs to apply this not only on the level of courses but to the overall student and staff experiences. This idea also pushes the understanding of educational equality: it means access not only to education but access to learning that is immersive and facilitates self-formation. With policy and economic pressures leading to the disintegration of HE, conceptualising and measuring HE immersion would allow thinking about what HE experiences are being lost or unequally distributed, and what are the consequences for self-formation.

Thirdly, in thinking about institutional design, I would propose to remove the HE credentials from candidacy lists in Slovakia to break their symbolical power. The structures of political life are not permanent; there can be political institutions that allow people of any background to effectively navigate them.

Fourthly, to act on these suggestions, it is important to start building a philosophical critique of political meritocracy and start imagining different, more inclusive logic of social stratification. This means work that aims to uncover the implicit biases of meritocratic thinking and traces how certain ideas of merit were and are constructed. When researching and writing the chapter on context, I realised how much of today's politics could be attributed to decisions made

generations ago. Meritocratic thinking likes to narrow the thinking, so people forget how their current position is shaped by the past and their backgrounds.

Fifth, in the public discourse it is important to take apart the myth of 'rational' policymaking and thoroughly investigate what type of rationality we are using. This calls for science's relationship with politics to be rethought (Sarewitz, 2004). It is important to do it while recognising the limits of the individual and public reason (Wiland, 2017).

Lastly, there is much more research to be done on educational cleavage in political participation and representation. In my original plans, I intended also to collect information on politicians' experience of studying abroad and closely contextualise their political participation in their study field. Those would be my first suggestions for further research.

Conclusion

Before writing my concluding remarks, I would like to reflect on the research process. A substantial portion of this dissertation was spent explaining my methodological thinking and research process. I found that embracing the 'messy' approach liberated my thinking. Constraints, many self-imposed, were gone. This allowed me to explore new-to-me approaches, frameworks and methods, such as critical phenomenology. Combining this approach to analysis with the idea of the 'messy turn,' re-engaging with the research materials through imaginative variation, new understandings have emerged (Cook, 2009; Lin, 2017). The prescribed reflexivities of discomfort helped me to accept my positionality and privilege. Rather than trying to find a way to overcome them, I made those features present in my study (Pillow, 2003). Critical phenomenology helped me to see how in research interactions, I cannot bracket my views, and ideas, and how I cannot escape the historical and political moment (Depraz, 2022; Oksala, 2022), these 'persistent social structures' are so deeply embedded into social reality (Guenther, 2013). And now, after finishing this project, I believe being honest about these aspects makes this research more rigorous as it is communicating its nature and limits.

The chapter on context helped me to identify many underlying structures, historical developments and current challenges that make it difficult for education and scientific knowledge to be translated into social harmony. Here the crucial concept of institutional design helps to explain why the connections are not as straightforward.

There are significant differences between those with HE and without, in their personal views, level of political participation and educational cleavage within elected officials (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Bovens & Wille, 2017; Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021; Stubager, 2010). This research has found the educational cleavage to be also present in the Slovak population and political representation. However, participants in the study rejected this binary thinking. While having or lacking HE might signify some elements of who they are, it is not deterministic, and people as agents might still manoeuvre. Diverse HE experiences push people towards diverging professional and personal life trajectories, placing them within certain intervals. While HE is associated with a change in people's views and political participation, the individual experiences with HE and subsequent professional, personal, and political lives are more nuanced. And the concept of intervals helps to account for overlap between various educational groups.

The research has confirmed multiple findings from the literature. In the context of direct political participation, HE experiences have their absolute contribution to developing specialised knowledge and skills, transferable skills and civically form students (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). However, the effects of various HE experiences differ, for example studying law can go long way in enabling participation in policymaking (Svrček [01]). At the same time, HE is not a neutral redistributor of life chances, rather it often reproduces existing differences in backgrounds, personal characteristics, and abilities by creating educational hierarchizations, which then translate into post-graduation social positioning (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Marginson, 2018; Piketty, 2020; Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019). This has been shown in the section on the symbolic value of degrees, and their use to affirm social status. They translate into the status hierarchy through a multi-layered hierarchisation of HE in study fields, levels, and institutions.

The most significant contribution of this research is in theorising an understanding that tries to overcome the fragmentation of literature in connecting various HE experiences with political participation. The concept of HE immersion is trying to connect various experiences, and understanding them as components that co-create space for student self-formation (Marginson, 2021). The level of HE immersion follows the existing educational hierarchies, allowing those coming from affluent backgrounds to access more transformative HE experiences. Connecting this with the idea of intervals, those with more extensive HE immersion might be more transformed, shifting their views further and encouraging them to participate more.

Regarding the connection between knowledge and political life, the first difficulty is science does not provide a universal, certain, and overarching understanding of the world (Raman, 2014; Sarewitz, 2004; Sorrel, 1991). This is made worse by the process of the ‘Great Endarkenment’, with hyperspecialisation and increasing complexity of human understanding of the world, limiting the possibility for technocracy to work and people to meaningfully participate (Millgram, 2015).

This research has however stumbled into a much more complex model of policymaking. The question in policymaking is not whether something is rational, but what kind of rationality it is using (Foucault, 1979). Participants stressed the importance of scientific and expert knowledge, but when it came to justifying policy, other rationalities manifested themselves: institutional, bureaucratic, common sense, public, and political rationality. They all contribute to creating the outcome and at various points, they are used to ‘rationalise’ the policy.

The translation of science into politics is further obscured by the limits of public reason, the discourse is dominated by those who are confident regardless of their competence (Dunning-Kruger) and the generally competent that see only evidence that supports their views (confirmation bias). All this is happening with the still recent revolution of communication, the blend of virtual and physical relations, and with social media emboldening some of the worst impulses.

To start responding to the problem of scientific progress and increased educational attainment failing to bring about social harmony, it seems that neither education nor science is the magic remedy in the way sometimes discourse presents them (Kam & Palmer, 2008). This should not lead to desperation. Pillow already recognizes the impossibility of all research attempts, but also the presence of "the political need to represent and find meaning" (Pillow, 2003, p. 192). Similarly, we can recognise the impossibility of education and science bringing about a harmonious society, yet the reality can be improved. So, in my own life and career, I will keep going. I will advocate for equality of HE immersion and work on new models of knowledges and rationalities.

Bibliography

Aars, J., & Christensen, D. A. (2020). Education and political participation: The impact of educational environments. *Acta Politica*, *55*(1), 86–102. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-018-0101-5

AKO, & Focus. (2020). *Prieskum volebných preferencií [Election Poll]* (II. vlna [II. round]; Neverejný prieskum pre iniciatívu 50dni.Sk [Non-public poll for 50days.sk initiative]). Focus & AKO.

Allen, A. (2011). Michael Young's The Rise of the Meritocracy: A Philosophical Critique. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *59*(4), 367–382. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41427674

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture*. Princeton University Press. https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691651682/the-civic-culture

Anson, I. G. (2018). Partisanship, Political Knowledge, and the Dunning-Kruger Effect. *Political Psychology*, *39*(5), 1173–1192. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45094456

Anuar, A. M. (2021). Positionality, power and the postcolonial context: Meditations on identity, access and relations in education policy research. In *Intimate Accounts of Education Policy Research* (pp. 47–61). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003123613-4

Arendt, H. (1961). The crisis in education. In *Between past and future: Six exercises in political thought*. Viking Press. https://www.normfriesen.info/files/ArendtCrisisInEdTable.pdf

Ashwin, P. (2020). *Transforming University Education: A Manifesto*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ashwin, P., Abbas, A., & McLean, M. (2014). How do students' accounts of sociology change over the course of their undergraduate degrees? *Higher Education*, *67*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9659-z

Associated Press. (2022, April 20). Slovakia's former prime minister faces criminal charges. *AP News*. https://apnews.com/article/business-europe-slovakia-bratislava-robert-fico-1adee5b0ce3462b5e70c85337080324d

Bahna, M., Klobucký, R., Zeman, M., Zagrapan, J., Sopóci, J., Džambazovič, R., & Gyárfášová, O. (2022). *CSES and ISSP Slovakia 2020* [Data set]. Slovak Archive of Social Data (SASD), Institute for Sociology of SAS. https://doi.org/10.34877/SASD-2020008

Baker, D. P. (2014). Minds, Politics, and Gods in the Schooled Society: Consequences of the Education Revolution. *Comparative Education Review*, *58*(1), 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1086/673973

Barrett, M., & Brunton-Smith, I. (2014). Political and Civic Engagement and Participation: Towards an Integrative Perspective. *Journal of Civil Society*, *10*(1), 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2013.871911

Berinsky, A. J., & Lenz, G. S. (2011). Education and Political Participation: Exploring the Causal Link. *Political Behavior*, *33*(3), 357–373. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9134-9

Berlin, I. (1959, October 31). *Two concepts of liberty.* [Inaugural lecture, as delivered to the Clarendon Press]. https://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/tcl/tcl-e.pdf

Bertsou, E., & Caramani, D. (2022). People Haven't Had Enough of Experts: Technocratic Attitudes among Citizens in Nine European Democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, *66*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12554

Besley, T., & Reynal-Querol, M. (2011). Do Democracies Select More Educated Leaders? *American Political Science Review*, *105*(3), 552–566. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055411000281

Beyer, C. (2020). Edmund Husserl. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/husserl/

Blue, G. (2018). Scientism: A problem at the heart of formal public engagement with climate change. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *17*(2), 544–560. https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1554

Bömmel, N., & Heineck, G. (2020). *Revisiting the Causal Effect of Education on Political Participation and Interest* (No. 13946; Discussion Paper). IZA - Institute of Labor Economics. https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=3751847

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), & R. Nice (Trans.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood. https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm

Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo academicus* (P. Collier, Trans.). Polity.

Bovens, M., & Wille, A. (2017). *Diploma Democracy: The Rise of Political Meritocracy*. Oxford University Press. https://academic.oup.com/book/10083

Brown, P. (2013). Education, opportunity and the prospects for social mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *34*(5–6), 678–700. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.816036

Brown, W. (2017). *Undoing the Demos*. Zone Books. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9781935408543/undoing-the-demos

Burden, B. C., Herd, P., Jones, B. M., & Moynihan, D. P. (2020). Education, early life, and political participation: New evidence from a sibling model. *Research & Politics*, *7*(3), 2053168020958319. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020958319

Buštíková, L., & Guasti, P. (2019). The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism. *East European Politics and Societies*, *33*(2), 302–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418791723

Camus, A. (1991). The Myth of Sisyphus. In J. O'Brien (Trans.), *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Vintage Books.

Čaputová, Z. (2022, March 21). *Láska, pravda, chlieb a soľ [Love, truth, bread, and salt]* (Z. Wienk, Interviewer) [Discussion]. https://www.facebook.com/zastavme.ich.bratia/videos/2439634869505165/

Christensen, J. (2021). Expert knowledge and policymaking: A multi-disciplinary research agenda. *Policy & Politics*, *49*(3), 455–471. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557320X15898190680037

Christopher, K. I., P., P., & Herbert, H. S. (2021). Presence or absence of Dunning-Kruger effect: Differences in narcissism, general self-efficacy and decision-making styles in young adults. *Current Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01461-9

Chusseau, N., & Hellier, J. (2010). Educational Systems, Intergenerational Mobility and Social Segmentation. *European Journal of Comparative Economics*, *8*(2), 255–286. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1607661

Clark, C., Brody, M., Dillon, J., Hart, P., & Heimlich, J. (2007). The Messy Process of Research: Dilemmas, Process, and Critique. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE)*, *12*(1), 110–126. https://cjee.lakeheadu.ca/article/view/625

Čobejová, E., Hanus, M., & Daniška, J. (2010, January 17). Neviňme len súkromné školy [Don't blame only private HEIs]. *týždeň*. https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/6000/nevinme-len-sukromne-skoly/

Comenius University. (2022). *História [History]*. Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave [Comenius University in Bratislava]. https://uniba.sk/o-univerzite/historia/

Comte, A. (1858). *Positive Philosophy* (H. Martineau, Trans.). Calvin Blanchard. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511701467

Cook, T. (2009). The purpose of mess in action research: Building rigour though a messy turn. *Educational Action Research*, *17*(2), 277–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790902914241

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crittenden, J., & Levine, P. (2018). Civic Education. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/civic-education/

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. SAGE. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-foundations-of-social-research/book207972

CUREC. (2020). *Conducting research interviews* [Best Practice Guidance 10]. https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/bpg10conductingresearchinterviewsv10pdf

Daenekindt, S., de Koster, W., & van der Waal, J. (2020). Partner Politics: How Partners Are Relevant to Voting. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *82*(3), 1124–1134. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12619

Dahl, R. A. (2006). *On Political Equality*. Yale University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npjxz

Daráková, K. (2021, April 23). Lucii Ďuriš Nicholsonovej vyčítali vzdelanie, no to ju nezastavilo [Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová was criticized for her education, but that did not stop her]. *Startitup.sk*. https://www.startitup.sk/dredata-politicka-ktora-chce-dekriminalizovat-marihuanu-lucii-duris-nicholsonovej-vycitali-vzdelanie-no-to-ju-nezastavilo/

de Villiers, C., Farooq, M. B., & Molinari, M. (2021). Qualitative research interviews using online video technology – challenges and opportunities. *Meditari Accountancy Research, forthcoming*. https://doi.org/10.1108/MEDAR-03-2021-1252

Depraz, N. (2022). Critical Phenomenology and Micro-Phenomenology. In A. S. Aldea, D. Carr, & S. Heinämaa (Eds.), *Phenomenology as critique: Why method matters* (1st ed., pp. 138–151). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003191483-9

Dewey, J. (1927). *Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry*. H. Holt and Company. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3385067

d'Hombres, B., & Nunziata, L. (2016). Wish you were here? Quasi-experimental evidence on the effect of education on self-reported attitude toward immigrants. *European Economic Review, 90,* 201–224. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2016.02.007

Dinesen, P. T., Dawes, C. T., Johannesson, M., Klemmensen, R., Magnusson, P., Nørgaard, A. S., Petersen, I., & Oskarsson, S. (2016). Estimating the Impact of Education on Political Participation: Evidence from Monozygotic Twins in the United States, Denmark and Sweden. *Political Behavior*, *38*(3), 579–601. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9328-2

Dlhopolec, P. (2022, May 11). News digest: 'People in Slovakia are literally angry'. *The Slovak Spectator*. https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22907866/news-digest-people-in-slovakia-are-literally-angry.html

Dreyfus, H. L., & Rabinow, P. (1983). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2d edition, Ed.). University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/M/bo3638224.html

Dunaj, Ľ. (2017). The inner conflict of modernity, the moderateness of Confucianism and critical theory. *Human Affairs*, *27*(4), 466–484. https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2017-0038

Dunning, D. (2011). Chapter five - The Dunning–Kruger Effect: On Being Ignorant of One's Own Ignorance. In J. M. Olson & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 44, pp. 247–296). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-385522-0.00005-6

Dunning, D., & Kruger, J. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1121–1134. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.77.6.1121

Ďuriš Nicholsonová, L. (2017, September 18). *Nie som hlupaňa, ktorá má obrovské ambície a ego [I am not an idiot with big ambitions and ego]* (L. Tomečková, Interviewer) [Dalito.sk]. https://www.dalito.sk/nicholsonova-nie-som-hlupana-ktora-ma-obrovske-ambicie-ego/

Easterbrook, M. J., Harris, P. R., & Sherman, D. K. (2021). Self-affirmation theory in educational contexts. *Journal of Social Issues*, *77*(3), 683–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12459

Easterbrook, M. J., Kuppens, T., & Manstead, A. S. R. (2016). The Education Effect: Higher Educational Qualifications are Robustly Associated with Beneficial Personal and Socio-political Outcomes. *Social Indicators Research*, *126*(3), 1261–1298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0946-1

Encyclopaedia Beliana. (1999). Akademické tituly [Academic degrees]. In *Encyclopaedia Beliana [online]*. SAV. https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/akademicke-tituly

Engler, S., Pytlas, B., & Deegan-Krause, K. (2019). Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe. *West European Politics*, *42*(6), 1310–1336. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1596696

Erát, D. (2021). Educational assortative mating and the decline of hypergamy in 27 European countries: An examination of trends through cohorts. *Demographic Research*, *44*, 157–188. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27032909

European Commission. (2022). *Future of Europe 2021 (Slovakia)* (Dataset, Volume C, Special Eurobarometer No. 517). European Commission Directorate-General for Communication. https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2554_96_1_517_eng?locale=en

European Parliament. (2022a). *Rallying around the European flag | Democracy as anchor point in times of crisis (Slovakia)* (Dataset, Volume C, EP Spring 2022 Survey; Special Eurobarometer No. EB041EP). European Parliament. https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2792_97_3_eb041ep_eng?locale=en

European Parliament. (2022b). *Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament*. European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RULES-9-2022-07-11-TOC_EN.html

Fajták, Ľ. (Ed.). (2016). *Ako pracuje parlament [How parliament works]*. National Council of Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/zd_ako-pracuje-parlament.pdf

Fernbach, P. M., Rogers, T., Fox, C. R., & Sloman, S. A. (2013). Political Extremism Is Supported by an Illusion of Understanding. *Psychological Science*, *24*(6), 939–946. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612464058

Feyerabend, P. (1993). *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (3rd ed.). Verso. https://mirror.anarhija.net/usa.anarchistlibraries.net/mirror/p/pf/paul-feyerabend-against-method.lt.pdf

Finlay, L. (2012). Debating Phenomenological Methods. In N. Friesen, C. Henriksson, & T. Saevi (Eds.), *Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Education: Method and Practice* (pp. 17–37). SensePublishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-834-6_2

Fitzgerald, H., Stride, A., & Enright, E. (2021). Messy methods: Making sense of participatory research with young people in PE and sport. *European Physical Education Review*, *27*(3), 421–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X20953462

Flanagan, C., & Levine, P. (2010). Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood. *The Future of Children*, *20*(1), 159–179. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27795064

Fogel, D. S., & Mauch, J. E. (1995). Restructuring Higher Education in the Czech and Slovak republics. In J. E. Mauch & P. L. W. Sabloff (Eds.), *Reform and Change in Higher Education: International Perspectives* (1st Edition). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429438943-8/restructuring-higher-education-czech-slovak-republics-daniel-fogel-james-mauch

Folkes, L. (2022). Moving beyond 'shopping list' positionality: Using kitchen table reflexivity and in/visible tools to develop reflexive qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 14687941221098922. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221098922

Foucault, M. (1978). *Governmentality* [Lecture. Published in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, & Peter Miller (eds.), The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 87-104]. https://laelectrodomestica.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/the-foucault-effect-studies-in-governmentality.pdf

Foucault, M. (1979). *Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason* [The Tanner Lectures on Human Values - Stanford University]. https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/f/foucault81.pdf

Fraile, M. (2013). Do information-rich contexts reduce knowledge inequalities? The contextual determinants of political knowledge in Europe. *Acta Politica*, *48*(2), 119–143. https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2012.34

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Ramos, Trans.; 1st ed.). Herder and Herder.

Fukuyama, F. (1993). *The End of History and the Last Man*. Penguin UK.

Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. Profile Books.

German Sirotniková, M. (2020, August 5). Jan Kuciak: A Murder That Changed Slovakia. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/05/jan-kuciak-a-murder-that-changed-slovakia/

Gethin, A., Martínez-Toledano, C., & Piketty, T. (2022). Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies, 1948–2020*. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *137*(1), 1–48. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjab036

Glas, A. (2021). Positionality, Power, and Positions of Power: Reflexivity in Elite Interviewing. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *54*(3), 438–442. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520002048

Goffman, E. (1951). Symbols of Class Status. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *2*(4), 294–304. https://doi.org/10.2307/588083

Goodin, R. E. (1996). Institutions and Their Design. In R. E. Goodin (Ed.), *The Theory of Institutional Design* (pp. 1–53). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558320.002

Gove, M. (2016, June 3). *Britons 'Have Had Enough of Experts'* (F. Islam, Interviewer) [Sky News]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgiGtJk7MA

Government Office of SR. (2022). *Government of the Slovak Republic* [Government website]. Government Office of the Slovak Republic. https://www.vlada.gov.sk/government-of-the-slovak-republic/?csrt=16337166741692928463

Gránska, Z. (2015). Akademické tituly udeľované na Slovensku [Academic degrees awarded in Slovakia]. *Eduworld.sk*. https://eduworld.sk/cd/zuzana-granska/1776/akademicke-tituly-udelovane-na-slovensku

Gregorík, S. (2020, June 25). Skutočne máme príliš veľa vysokých škôl? [Do we really have too many HEIs?] [Newspaper - blog]. *Postoj.sk*. https://blog.postoj.sk/57185/skutocne-mame-prilis-vela-vysokych-skol

Guenther, L. (2013). *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*. University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt4cggj8

Guenther, L. (2020). Critical Phenomenology. In G. Weiss, A. V. Murphy, & G. Salamon (Eds.), *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (pp. 11–16). Northwestern University Press. https://www.academia.edu/40473897/Critical_Phenomenology

Hajdu, D., Klingová, K., Kazaz, J., & Kortiš, M. (2022). *GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Central and Eastern Europe amid the War in Ukraine* (GLOBSEC Trends). GLOBSEC. https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2022-central-and-eastern-europe-amid-the-war-in-ukraine/

Hall, R., & Lukáč, S. (2019). Odchod študentov do zahraničia [Departure of students abroad]. In R. Hall, P. Dráľ, P. Fridrichová, M. Hapalová, S. Lukáč, J. Miškolci, & K. Vančíková, *Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku [Analysis of findings on the*

state of education in Slovakia] (pp. 779–795). To dá rozum [Learning Makes Sense]. MESA10. https://analyza.todarozum.sk/docs/382410002tu0a/

Hall, R., Maňo, P., Lovász, B., & Bílik, M. (2021). *Výsledky prieskumu [Survey results]* (Akademická Štvrťhodinka [Quarter to Quality Education]) [Interactive application]. Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education. https://prieskum.saavs.sk/vysledky/

Hannon, M. (2022). Are knowledgeable voters better voters? *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, *21*(1), 29–54. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1470594X211065080

Harden, K. P. (2021). *The Genetic Lottery: Why DNA Matters for Social Equality*. Princeton University Press.

Hartley, J. (2011). Learning in the whirlwind: Politicians and leadership development. *Public Money & Management*, *31*(5), 331–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2011.598339

Harušíncová, B. (2013). *Vysoké školy v Čechách a na Slovensku—Komparace [HEIs in Czechia and Slovakia—Comparison]* [Master's thesis, Palacký University Olomouc]. https://theses.cz/id/q7zi6e/Diplomov_prca_-_Haruncov_Barbora.pdf

Havlík, V. (2019). Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe. *Problems of Post-Communism*, *66*(6), 369–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1580590

Herod, A. (1999). Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: Praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum*, *30*(4), 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00024-X

Holecz, V., Fernández G. G., E., & Giugni, M. (2022). Broadening political participation: The impact of socialising practices on young people's action repertoires. *Politics*, *42*(1), 58–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957211041448

Houghton, T. (2011). *Does positivism really 'work' in the social sciences?* [Student paper]. https://www.e-ir.info/2011/09/26/does-positivism-really-'work'-in-the-social-sciences/

Hrabovská Francelová, N. (2020, October 9). Support for PM and ruling OĽaNO party plunging amid pandemic and scandals. *The Slovak Spectator*. https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22506235/support-for-pm-and-ruling-olano-party-plunging-amid-pandemic-and-scandals.html

Hříchová, K., Hřích, V., & Ondrejková, D. (2021). *Prieskum verejnej mienky na tému očkovanie a opatrenia proti COVID-19 [Public opinion poll about vaccination and measures against COVID-19]*. AKO. https://ako.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Prieskum_verejnej_mienky_na_temu_ockovanie_a_opatrenia_proti_COVID-19.pdf

Hudoba, I. (2015, March 6). Ponovembrové vysoké školstvo – veľké očakávania za málo peňazí [Post-November HE - big expectations for little money]. *Denník N*. https://dennikn.sk/65394/ponovembrove-vysoke-skolstvo-velke-ocakavania-za-malo-penazi/

Hussar, L. S. (2013). *A Phenomenological Exploration of Academic Entitlement in Graduate Students* [Psy.D., The Chicago School of Professional Psychology]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1526990908/abstract/509949CBB7C485FPQ/1

Hvorecký, J. (2012). The development of the Slovak System of Higher Education: From 1990 to foreseeable future. *2012 IEEE 10th International Conference on Emerging*

ELearning Technologies and Applications (ICETA), 157–162. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICETA.2012.6418603

Jancura, V. (2019, September 30). Slovenské vysoké školstvo v roku nula [Slovak HE in year zero]. *Pravda*. https://zurnal.pravda.sk/neznama-historia/clanok/527571-slovenske-vysoke-skolstvo-v-roku-nula/

Jasanoff, S. (1998). *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisers as Policymakers*. Harvard University Press.

Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., & Slovic, P. (2017). Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *1*(1), 54–86. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2016.2

Kam, C. D., & Palmer, C. L. (2008). Reconsidering the Effects of Education on Political Participation. *The Journal of Politics*, *70*(3), 612–631. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080651

Kant, I. (1784). *What is Enlightenment* (M. C. Smith, Trans.) [Essay]. http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html#note1

Kappes, A., Harvey, A. H., Lohrenz, T., Montague, P. R., & Sharot, T. (2020). Confirmation bias in the utilization of others' opinion strength. *Nature Neuroscience*, *23*(1), 130–137. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41593-019-0549-2

Katrňák, T., & Manea, B. C. (2020). Change in prevalence or preference? Trends in educational homogamy in six European countries in a time of educational expansion. *Social Science Research*, *91*, 102460. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102460

Kemp, I. J., & Seagraves, L. (1995). Transferable skills—Can higher education deliver? *Studies in Higher Education*, *20*(3), 315–328. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079512331381585

Klein, E. (2020). *Why We're Polarized*. Profile Books.

Kováčik, B., & Klučiarovský, M. (2015). The Phenomenon of Strong Political Leadership Embodied in Slovak Prime Ministers—Vladimir Mečiar and Robert Fico. *Political Sciences, Law, Finance, Economics and Tourism*. https://doi.org/10.5593/SGEMSOCIAL2015/B21/S4.052

Králiková, R. (2016). *Transition legacies, rules of appropriateness and 'modernization agenda' translation in higher education governance in Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia* [PhD. thesis, Central European University]. https://elkanacenter.ceu.edu/sites/elkanacenter.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/57/kralikovarenata.pdf

Kuppens, T., Spears, R., Manstead, A. S. R., Spruyt, B., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2018). Educationism and the irony of meritocracy: Negative attitudes of higher educated people towards the less educated. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *76*, 429–447. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.11.001

Kyseľ, T. (2016, February 10). Najviac vysokoškolsky vzdelaných ľudí volí SMER [Most HE graduates votes for SMER]. *Aktuality.sk*. https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/313346/najviac-vysokoskolsky-vzdelanych-ludi-voli-smer/

Lancee, B., & Sarrasin, O. (2015). Educated Preferences or Selection Effects? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Educational Attainment on Attitudes Towards Immigrants. *European Sociological Review*, *31*(4), 490–501. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcv008

Le, K., & Nguyen, M. (2021). Education and political engagement. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *85*, 102441. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102441

Lemke, T. (2002). Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique. *Rethinking Marxism*, *14*(3), 49–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/089356902101242288

Light, N., Fernbach, P. M., Rabb, N., Geana, M. V., & Sloman, S. A. (2022). Knowledge overconfidence is associated with anti-consensus views on controversial scientific issues. *Science Advances*, *8*(29). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo0038

Lilleker, D. G. (2003). Interviewing the Political Elite: Navigating a Potential Minefield. *Politics*, *23*(3), 207. https://www.academia.edu/588783/Interviewing_the_political_elite_Navigating_a_potential_minefield

Lin, C. S. (2017). Revealing the "Essence" of Things: Using Phenomenology in LIS Research. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, *2*(4), 469–478. http://www.qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/123

Lindgren, K.-O., Oskarsson, S., & Dawes, C. T. (2017). Can Political Inequalities Be Educated Away? Evidence from a Large-Scale Reform. *American Journal of Political Science*, *61*(1), 222–236. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12261

Louis, K. S., & Barton, A. C. (2002). Tales from the Science Education Crypt: A Critical Reflection of Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *3*(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-3.3.832

Lubelcová, G. (2022). Vzdelanostná štruktúra mladých ľudí na Slovensku – vývoj a aktuálne trendy [Educational structure of young people in Slovakia—Development and current trends]. In R. Dzambazovic, D. Gerbery, & J. Sopóci (Eds.), *Vzdelanostné nerovnosti v optike sociológie. Teoretické východiská a empirické poznatky. [Educational inequalities from the perspective of sociology. Theoretical starting points and empirical findings.]* (pp. 69–114). STIMUL. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362109526_Vzdelanostne_nerovnosti_v_optike_sociologie_Teoreticke_vychodiska_a_empiricke_poznatky

Madro, P. (2022, April 12). Slovensko žije vo dvoch bublinách [Slovakia lives in two bubbles]. *Pravda.sk*. https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/623259-slovensko-zije-vo-dvoch-bublinach/

Majid, M. A. A., Othman, M., Mohamad, S. F., Lim, S. A. H., & Yusof, A. (2017). Piloting for Interviews in Qualitative Research: Operationalization and Lessons Learnt. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *7*(4), 1073–1080. https://hrmars.com/index.php/IJARBSS/article/view/2916/Piloting-for-Interviews-in-Qualitative-Research-Operationalization-and-Lessons-Learnt

Major, L. E. (2019). *Social mobility and elite universities* (Policy Note No. 20; HEPI Policy Note). Higher Education Policy Institute. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HEPI-Policy-Note-20-Social-Mobility-Challenge-FINAL.pdf

Ma-Kellams, C., & Blascovich, J. (2013). Does "Science" Make You Moral? The Effects of Priming Science on Moral Judgments and Behavior. *PLOS ONE*, *8*(3), e57989. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0057989

Ma-Kellams, C., Ruiz, A. R., Lee, J., & Madu, A. (2014). Not All Education is Equally Liberal: The Effects of Science Education on Political Attitudes. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *2*(1), 143–163. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v2i1.259

Maňo, P., & Bílik, M. (2021). *Kvantitatívne prehľady demografického vývoja v slovenskom vysokom školstve za roky 1989-2020 [Quantitative overview of demographical development in Slovak HE in years 1989-2020]* (Tematická správa [Thematical report]). Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education. https://saavs.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Tematicka-sprava-Kvantitativne-prehlady-demografickeho-vyvoja-v-slovenskom-vysokom-skolstve-za-roky-1989-2020-1.pdf

Marginson, S. (2016). The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: Dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems. *Higher Education*, *72*(4), 413–434. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0016-x

Marginson, S. (2017). Elite, Mass, and High-Participation Higher Education. In J. C. Shin & P. Teixeira (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions* (pp. 1–9). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_50-1

Marginson, S. (2018). High participation systems of higher education. In B. Cantwell, S. Marginson, & A. Smolentseva (Eds.), *High participation systems of higher education*. University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198828877.003.0001

Marginson, S. (2021). Higher education as student self-formation [Unpublished manuscript]. In B. Cantwell, S. Marginson, D. Platonova, & A. Smolentseva (Eds.), *The Contributions of Higher Education [Unpublished manuscript]*.

Martel, R., Shepherd, M., & Goodyear-Smith, F. (2022). He awa whiria—A "Braided River": An Indigenous Māori Approach to Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *16*(1), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689820984028

Martin, N. D. (2012). The Privilege of Ease: Social Class and Campus Life at Highly Selective, Private Universities. *Research in Higher Education*, *53*(4), 426–452. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-011-9234-3

Martinák, D., & Varsik, S. (2021). *Odliv mozgov II: Za siedmim horami [Brain drain II: Beyond 7 mountain ranges]* (Commentary No. 02/2021). Education Policy Institute, MINEDU. https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/21396.pdf

Mason-Bish, H. (2019). The elite delusion: Reflexivity, identity and positionality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *19*(3), 263–276. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794118770078

Mathernová, K., & Renčko, J. (2006). "Reformology": The Case of Slovakia. *Orbis*, *50*(4), 629–640. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2006.07.004

Matovič, I. (2020, July 16). *Priznanie [Confession]* [Post]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/10219938949996585

May, T. (2011). Interviewing: Methods and process. In T. May, *Social Research* (4th ed., pp. 131–160). McGraw-Hill Education. https://www.mheducation.co.uk/social-research-9780335235674-emea-group

Mayer, A. K. (2015). Does Education Increase Political Participation? *The Journal of Politics*, *73*, 633–645. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002238161100034X

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, *41*(9), 1002–1006. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149

McLuhan, M. (1967). *The medium is the message*. Bantam Books.

Mellor, N. (2001). Messy method: The unfolding story. *Educational Action Research*, *9*(3), 465–484. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790100200166

Merkley, E. (2020). Anti-Intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert Consensus. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *84*(1), 24–48. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz053

Merry, S. E. (2016). A World of Quantification. In *The Seductions of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence, and Sex Trafficking* (pp. 1–26). University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226261317.001.0001

Mikecz, R. (2012). Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *18*(6), 482–493. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800412442818

Miller, J., & Glassner, B. (2016). The 'Inside' and the 'Outside': Finding Realities in Interviews. In D. Silverman, *Qualitative Research* (pp. 53–68). SAGE. https://books.google.sk/books/about/Qualitative_Research.html?id=TrwtDAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

Millgram, E. (2015). *The great endarkenment: Philosophy for an age of hyperspecialization*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.sk/books?id=8GEBCAAAQBAJ

Mills, A., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2010). *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397

Morton, J. (2019). Moving Up without Losing Your Way: The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility. In *Moving Up without Losing Your Way*. Princeton University Press. academic.oup.com/princeton-scholarship-online/book/33824

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658

Münch, R. (2018). Elite Formation in the Educational System: Between Meritocracy and Cumulative Advantage. In C. Maxwell, U. Deppe, H.-H. Krüger, & W. Helsper (Eds.), *Elite Education and Internationalisation: From the Early Years to Higher Education* (pp. 41–55). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59966-3_3

Nie, N. H., Junn, J., & Stehlik-Barry, K. (1996). *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/E/bo3683564.html

North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press.

Zákon o platových pomeroch niektorých ústavných činiteľov Slovenskej republiky [Act on Salaries of Certain Constitutional Officials SR], Pub. L. No. 120/1993 Z. z. (1993). https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1993/120/20210801

Zákon o podmienkach výkonu volebného práva [Act on Conditions of Executing Voting Rights], Pub. L. No. 180/2014 Z. z. (2014). https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2014/180/20220531

Nussbaum, M. C. (2016). *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities - Updated Edition*. Princeton University Press. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691173320/not-for-profit

Oberauer, K., & Lewandowsky, S. (2019). Addressing the theory crisis in psychology. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *26*(5), 1596–1618. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-019-01645-2

OECD. (2020a). *Resourcing Higher Education: Challenges, Choices and Consequences*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/735e1f44-en

OECD. (2020b). Indicator A6. How are social outcomes related to education? In *Education at Glance 2020: OECD Indicators* (pp. 120–135). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/82be13a0-en

OECD. (2021a). *Share of population by educational attainment* [Data set]. OECD. https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EAG_NEAC

OECD. (2021b). *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en

Oksala, J. (2022). The method of critical phenomenology: Simone de Beauvoir as a phenomenologist. *European Journal of Philosophy*. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12782

Osvaldová, L. (2022, February 23). Smer vyvesil bilbordy s fotografiami poslancov, ktorí hlasovali za obrannú zmluvu [Smer puts up billboards with pictures of MPs that voted for defence treaty]. *Denník N*. https://dennikn.sk/2733691/smer-vyvesil-bilbordy-s-fotografiami-poslancov-ktori-hlasovali-za-obrannu-zmluvu/

Pascarella, E. T. (2006). How College Affects Students: Ten Directions for Future Research. *Journal of College Student Development*, *47*(5), 508–520. https://www.proquest.com/docview/195177982/abstract/DE955EC972194419PQ/1

Patarák, M. (2022, July 28). Mužský verzus ženský mozog – odlišný hardware a podobný software? [Male vs Female brain—Different hardware and alike software] [Newspaper - blog]. *Denník N*. https://dennikn.sk/blog/2949481/muzsky-verzus-zensky-mozog-odlisny-hardware-a-podobny-software/

Patočka, J. (1987). *Nadcivilizace a její vnitřní konflikt [Supercivilization and its Inner Conflict]*. Jan Patočka - repository. https://archiv.janpatocka.cz/items/show/1062

Payne, P. (1972). Four Years of 'Normalisation': The Academic Purge in Czechoslovakia. *Index on Censorship*, *1*(2), 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/03064227208532170

Pearce, W., Wesselink, A., & Colebatch, H. (2014). Evidence and meaning in policy making. *Evidence & Policy*, *10*(2), 161. https://www.academia.edu/7052963/Evidence_and_meaning_in_policy_making

Perrin, A. J., & Gillis, A. (2019). How College Makes Citizens: Higher Education Experiences and Political Engagement. *Socius*, *5*, 2378023119859708. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023119859708

Persson, M. (2013a). *Does education cause participation in politics?* [Doctoral thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg]. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/17181452.pdf

Persson, M. (2013b). Is the Effect of Education on Voter Turnout Absolute or Relative? A Multi-level Analysis of 37 Countries. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *23*(2), 111–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2012.747530

Pew Research Centre. (2016). *Ideological Gap Widens Between More, Less Educated Adults*. Pew Research Centre. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/04/26/a-wider-ideological-gap-between-more-and-less-educated-adults/

Piketty, T. (2020). *Capital and Ideology a book by Thomas Piketty and Arthur Goldhammer* (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). Belknap Press.

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(2), 175–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000060635

Pišút, J. (1993). Higher Education Reforms in the Slovak Republic. *European Journal of Education*, *28*(4), 421–428. https://doi.org/10.2307/1503409

Plán obnovy SR. (2021, October 28). *70% Slovákov si myslí, že máme príliš veľa VŠ [70% Slovaks think we have too many HEIs]* [Image]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=120194207063226&set=pb.100072179420007.-2207520000..&type=3

Plato. (1992). *The Republic* (G. M. A. Grube & C. D. C. Reeve, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Hackett Pub. Co.

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2–3), 168–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353

Řádek, M., & et al. (2008). *Vysoké školstvo na Slovensku: Realita—Problém—Možné riešenia [HE in Slovakia: Reality—Problem—Possible solutions]*. European Public Policy Partnership. https://docplayer.gr/24128502-Miroslav-radek-a-kolektiv-vysoke-skolstvo-na-slovensku-realita-problem-mozne-riesenia.html

Raman, S. (2014). Science, uncertainty and the normative question of epistemic governance in policymaking. In E. Cloatre, & M. Pickersgill (Eds.), *Knowledge, Technology and Law*. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203797600-3/

Rasmussen, S. H. R., & Nørgaard, A. S. (2018). When and why does education matter? Motivation and resource effects in political efficacy. *European Journal of Political Research*, *57*(1), 24–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12213

Rawls, J. (1999). *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"*. Harvard University Press.

Read, B. (2018). Truth, masculinity and the anti-elitist backlash against the university in the age of Trump. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *23*(5), 593–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1457636

Reay, D. (2017). *Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes*. Policy Press.

Roberts, J. L. (2013, October 15). The Power of Patience. *Harvard Magazine*, *116*(2), 40–43. https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience

Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). Interviews and focus groups. In *Real World Research* (pp. 284–306). Wiley Global Education.

Roke, B. (2019, September 13). This time, it's really time to go Robert Fico! [NGO website]. *European Roma Rights Centre*. http://www.errc.org/news/this-time-its-really-time-to-go-robert-fico

Sandel, M. J. (2020). *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* Penguin UK.

Sarewitz, D. (2004). How science makes environmental controversies worse. *Environmental Science & Policy*, *7*(5), 385–403. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2004.06.001

Schakel, W., & Van der Pas, D. (2021). Degrees of influence: Educational inequality in policy representation. *European Journal of Political Research*, *60*(2), 418–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12405

Shahjahan, R. A., & Edwards, K. T. (2021). Whiteness as futurity and globalization of higher education. *Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00702-x

Simonová, N., & Soukup, P. (2022). Analýza stratifikačních systémů střední a východní Evropy [Analysis of stratification systems in Central and Eastern Europe]. In R. Dzambazovic, D. Gerbery, & J. Sopóci (Eds.), *Vzdelanostné nerovnosti v optike sociológie. Teoretické východiská a empirické poznatky. [Educational inequalities from the perspective of sociology. Theoretical starting points and empirical findings.]* (pp. 37–68). STIMUL. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362109526_Vzdelanostne_nerovnosti_v_optike_sociologie_Teoreticke_vychodiska_a_empiricke_poznatky

Simons, D. J. (2013). Unskilled and optimistic: Overconfident predictions despite calibrated knowledge of relative skill. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *20*(3), 601–607. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-013-0379-2

Singer, B. C. J. (2021). Populism and the separation of power and knowledge. *Thesis Eleven*, *164*(1), 120–143. https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513620983685

Škorvanková, E. (2019). Snahy o obmedzenie vysokoškolského štúdia žien v období Slovenského štátu [Attempts of restricting access of women to HE during Slovak state]. *Historický časopis*, *66*(4), 649–670. https://doi.org/10.31577/histcaso.2018.66.4.4

SME. (2022). *Ján Budaj—O osobnosti [About Personality]* [Biography]. Sme.sk. https://www.sme.sk/os/162778/jan-budaj

Snyder, T. (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Random House.

Soedirgo, J., & Glas, A. (2020). Toward Active Reflexivity: Positionality and Practice in the Production of Knowledge. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *53*(3), 527–531. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519002233

Sopóci, J., Džambazovič, R., Gerbery, D., Bunčák, J., & Hrabovská, A. (2020). *Social Stratification and Social Mobility in Slovakia*. Comenius University in Bratislava.

Sorrel, T. (1991). *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science*. Routledge. https://books.google.com/books/about/Scientism.html?id=5XrOu_1vlzgC

Spero, T. A. (2022). Global citizenship education as bounded self-formation in contemporary higher education internationalisation projects. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *20*(3), 349–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2021.1896999

Standring, A. (2021). Relational expertise and the spatial (re)production of austerity: Challenges and opportunities for progressive politics. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *39*(3), 555–573. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419873674

Stone, D. (2017). Global Governance Depoliticized: Knowledge Networks, Scientization,and Anti-Policy. In P. Fawcett, M. Flinders, C. Hay, & M. Wood (Eds.), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance* (pp. 91–111). Oxford Academic. https://academic.oup.com/book/7167/chapter/151751247

Strassheim, H., & Kettunen, P. (2014). When does evidence-based policy turn into policy-based evidence? Configurations, contexts and mechanisms. *Evidence & Policy*, *10*(2), 259–277. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426514X13990433991320

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. https://resv.hums.ac.ir/uploads/22_288_57_1qualitative.pdf

Stubager, R. (2010). The Development of the Education Cleavage: Denmark as a Critical Case. *West European Politics*, *33*(3), 505–533. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402381003654544

Stuber, J. (2020). The Elusiveness of Inclusion in Elite Higher Education. *Contemporary Sociology*, *49*(1), 10–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306119889961a

Štulrajterová, J. (2015). Vysoké školstvo na Slovensku v období Slovenskej republiky a výchovno-vzdelávací proces na Slovenskej univerzite [HE in Slovakia in period of Slovak republic and educational process at Slovak University]. In B. Kudláčová (Ed.), *Pedagogické myslenie a školstvo na Slovensku v rokoch 1939 – 1945 [Pedagogic thought and education in Slovakia in years 1939-1945]* (pp. 122–140). University of Trnava.

Sunshine Hillygus, D. (2005). The MISSING LINK: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement. *Political Behavior*, *27*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-005-3075-8

Švejdová, J., & Halíková, P. (2015, December 1). *Communist educational policy (1948–1960): Long-term goals, recurring failures and the Reconstruction in 1960*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303445137_Communist_educational_policy_1948-1960_Long-term_goals_reccuring_failures_and_the_Reconstruction_in_1960

Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated Scepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(3), 755–769. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3694247

Táíwò, O. O. (2022). *Elite capture: How the powerful took over identity politics (and everything else)*. Pluto Press.

TASR. (2021, July 18). Iniciatíva Veda pomáha odsúdila protesty proti vedcom aj lekárom [Initiative Science is helping condemned protests against scientists and doctors]. *TERAZ.sk*. https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/iniciativa-veda-pomaha-odsudila-prote/563693-clanok.html

TASR. (2022a, February 9). Poslanci odsúhlasili dohodu o obrannej spolupráci s USA [MPs approved the treaty about defence cooperation with the US]. *TERAZ.sk*. https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/nr-sr-odsuhlasila-dohodu-o-obrannej-spo/610671-clanok.html

TASR. (2022b, March 15). Parlament odsúhlasil prítomnosť vojsk NATO na Slovensku [The Parliament approved the presence of NATO troops in Slovakia]. *TERAZ.sk*. https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/parlament-odsuhlasil-pritomnost-vojsk/619400-clanok.html

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2010). Overview of Contemporary Issues in Mixed Methods Research. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie, *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* (pp. 1–42). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193.n1

Teichler, U. (2008). Diversification? Trends and explanations of the shape and size of higher education. *Higher Education*, *56*(3), 349–379. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9122-8

Telepčáková, A. (2020). *The Position of Women in the Diplomatic Corps* [Bachelor's thesis, BISLA]. https://www.bisla.sk/files/ckeditor/TELEPCAKOVA-BACHELOR-THESIS.pdf

Telepčáková, A. (2022). *The Only Way Is Up: Gender Inequality Experienced by Slovak Women Diplomats* [Master's thesis, University of Amsterdam]. https://scripties.uba.uva.nl/search?id=c6894950

Terenzani, M. (2022, May 9). Matovič-led coalition failed to do what it came for. *The Slovak Spectator*. https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22905526/matovic-led-coalition-failed-to-do-what-it-came-for.html

Terren, L., & Borge-Bravo, R. (2021). Echo Chambers on Social Media: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Review of Communication Research*, *9*, 99–118. https://rcommunicationr.org/index.php/rcr/article/view/94

Tetlock, P. E. (2005). Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know? In *Expert Political Judgment*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400888818

Tetlock, P. E., & Gardner, D. (2015). *Superforecasting: The art and science of prediction* (First edition). Crown Publishers.

Thurnell-Read, T. (2016). Masculinity, Age and Rapport in Qualitative Research. In *Gender Identity and Research Relationships* (Vol. 14, pp. 23–41). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1042-319220160000014014

Tight, M. (2019). Mass Higher Education and Massification. *Higher Education Policy*, *32*(1), 93–108. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-017-0075-3

Tomlinson, M. (2008). 'The degree is not enough': Students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *29*(1), 49–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690701737457

Trow, M. (1973). *Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED091983

Tubbs, N. (2019, November 30). The New Dark Age [Essay]. *Liberal Arts*. https://liberalarts.org.uk/the-new-dark-age/

Tubbs, N. (2021a). *Socrates On Trial*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/socrates-on-trial-9781350053717/

Tubbs, N. (2021b, October 11). Preserving the wonder as we widen access [Comment]. *Wonkhe*. https://wonkhe.com/blogs/preserving-the-wonder-as-we-widen-access/

Turley, E. L., Monro, S., & King, N. (2016). Doing it Differently: Engaging Interview Participants with Imaginative Variation. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *16*(1–2), 153–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2016.1145873

Učník, L. (2017). Neoliberalism and Jan Patočka on supercivilisation and education. *Phainomena, 26*(102–103), 153–175. https://www.dlib.si/stream/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-CLQ0ECFF/b0b577f8-6f25-4470-8899-baf3ee3490e1/PDF

UN HCR. (2022). *Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation*. Operational Data Portal. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.232946142.1377839839.1649860583-887184258.1649860583

Urban, M. (2001). Kvalita vzdelávania a vedy na vysokých školách v SR [Quality of education and science at HEIs in SR]. In M. Beblavý & M. Kubánová (Eds.), *Národná správa o vzdelávacej politike [National report about educational policy]*. Róbert Vico.

Vargovčíková, J. (2021). *Right of Paradise: Dangerous Liaisons in the Slovak Culture Wars | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Prague Office - Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung Prague. https://cz.boell.org/en/2021/12/12/right-paradise-dangerous-liaisons-slovak-culture-wars

Vašečka, M. (2022a, February 12). *Súdržnosť spoločnosti sa úplne rozpadla [The cohesion of society has completely broken down]* (V. Revajová, Interviewer) [Ateliér - interview]. https://www.attelier.sk/dovera-v-spolocnosti/

Vašečka, M. (2022b, July 14). *Skaza je už dokonaná [The destruction is already complete]* (M. Tódová, Interviewer) [Denník N - interview]. https://dennikn.sk/2934815/sociolog-michal-vasecka-skaza-je-uz-dokonana-video/

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pnc1k7

Weinschenk, A. C., & Dawes, C. T. (2019). The Effect of Education on Political Knowledge: Evidence From Monozygotic Twins. *American Politics Research, 47*(3), 530–548. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18788048

Wiland, E. (2017). Peer Disagreement and the Dunning-Kruger Effect. *Episteme, 14*(4), 481–498. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2016.18

Yang, L. (2021). Student formation in higher education: A comparison and combination of Confucian xiushen (self-cultivation) and Bildung. *Higher Education*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00735-2

Young, M. (1958). *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. Thames and Hudson.

Interview references

Cmorej [07], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 07 Peter Cmorej* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Dobeš [03], P. (2022, May 11). *Research interview: 03 Peter Dobeš* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Grendel [08], G. (2022, May 13). *Research interview: 08 Gábor Grendel* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Henčeková [11], S. (2022, May 24). *Research interview: 11 Slavomíra Henčeková* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Kremský [06], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 06 Peter Kremský* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Pollák [05], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 05 Peter Pollák* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Stančík [09], A. (2022, May 18). *Research interview: 09 Andrej Stančík* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Štefanec [13], I. (2022, May 17). *Research interview: 13 Ivan Štefanec* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Šudík [02], T. (2022, May 11). *Research interview: 02 Tomáš Šudík* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Svrček [01], M. (2022, April 20). *Research interview: 01 Miloš Svrček* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Szöllös [04], J. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 04 Ján Szöllös* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Vaculčiak [12], R. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 12 Richard Vacučiak* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

Wiezik [14], M. (2022, May 18). *Research interview: 14 Michal Wiezik* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Žiak [10], M. (2022, May 17). *Research interview: 10 Miroslav Žiak* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].

Appendices

Appendix I. List of participants

Political parties

SME RODINA	(WE ARE FAMILY)
OĽANO	*OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti (OĽANO), NOVA, Kresťanská únia (KÚ), ZMENA ZDOLA* (ORDINARY PEOPLE and Independent Personalities (OĽANO), NOVA, Christian Union (KÚ), CHANGE FROM BOTTOM)
SaS	*Sloboda a Solidarita* (Freedom and Solidarity)
ZA ĽUDÍ	(FOR THE PEOPLE)
KDH	*Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie* (Christian Democratic Movement)
SDKÚ-DS	*Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana* (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – democratic party)
PS	*Progresívne Slovensko* (Progressive Slovakia)

#	**Name**[6]	**HE experiences**	**Politics**	**References**
1	JUDr. Mgr. **Miloš Svrček**, PhD., LL.M.	**Law** – bachelor's, master's, small doctorate (JUDr.), doctorate (PhD.), and LL.M. from abroad **Diplomacy** – no degree, part-time **Political science** – part-time bachelor's and master's (Mgr.) **Tourism - adjunct**	Political party manager (2017-) MP for SME RODINA (2020-), member of: - Constitutional Committee - Committee for Control of Slovak Information Service - Permanent delegation at OSCE Parliamentary Assembly	MINEDU. (2022, June 30). *Miloš Svrček (JUDr., PhD.)* [HE staff register]. Register zamestnancov VŠ. https://www.portalvs.sk/regzam/detail/22209?mode=full NR SR. (2022). *Miloš Svrček* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1060 Svrček [01], M. (2022, April 20). *Research interview: 01 Miloš Svrček* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online]. Wikipedia. (2022). *Miloš Svrček.* In Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Milo%C5%A1_Svr%C4%8Dek&oldid=7323748

[6] There are elaborate conventions regarding writing degrees (Gránska, 2015), I used them in form presented in their official institutional profiles. The bachelor's degree is usually omitted when person receives higher degree.

2	Bc. **Tomáš Šudík**	**Management** – bachelor's (Bc.), studying part-time for master's	City Council Member (2018-) MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - European Affairs Committee - Committee for Agriculture and Environment - Permanent delegation at OSCE Parliamentary Assembly	NR SR. (2022). *Tomáš Šudík* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1067&CisObdobia=8 Šudík [02], T. (2022, May 11). *Research interview: 02 Tomáš Šudík* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person]. Šudík, T. (n.d.). *Niečo o mne…* [Personal website]. Tomáš Šudík. Retrieved 6 May 2022, from https://www.tomassudik.sk/nieco-o-mne/ Wikipedia. (2022). *Tomáš Šudík*. In Wikipédia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tom%C3%A1%C5%A1_%C5%A0ud%C3%ADk&oldid=7332742
3	RNDr. **Peter Dobeš**	**Geography and cartography** – master's, small doctorate (RNDr.) **Hydrology** – postgraduate course	Mayor of Rajecké Teplice (1999-2014) Regional Council Member (2002-) MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - Committee for Public Administration and Regional Development - Committee for Incompatibility of Functions	Dobeš [03], P. (2022, May 11). *Research interview: 03 Peter Dobeš* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person]. NR SR. (2022). *Peter Dobeš* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1004&CisObdobia=8 Žilina region. (2018). *Životopis—Peter Dobeš* [CV]. Žilinský samosprávny kraj [Žilina Region]. https://www.zilinskazupa.sk/sk/samosprava/podpredseda-peter-dobes/zivotopis-2.html
4	RNDr. Mgr. **Ján Szőllős,** CSc.	**Economic and regional geography –** master's, small doctorate (RNDr.), doctorate (CSc.) **Religious education** – master's (Mgr.) **Geography – researcher** (Slovak Academy of Sciences) and **adjunct**	MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - Committee for Agriculture and Environment - Committee for Control of Slovak Information Service	MINEDU. (2022, June 30). *Ján Szöllös (RNDr., Mgr., CSc.)* [HE staff register]. Register zamestnancov VŠ. https://www.portalvs.sk/regzam/detail/12334?mode=full NR SR. (2022). *Ján Szőllős* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1061&CisObdobia=8 SAV. (2011). *Životopis—Ján Szőllős* [CV]. Slovak Academy of Sciences. https://www.sav.sk/?lang=sk&doc=user-org-user&user_no=462&action=cv Szöllös [04], J. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 04 Ján Szöllös* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].
5	Mgr. Peter Pollák	**Social work and health care** – part-time bachelor's **Special pedagogy** – part-time master's (Mgr.)	MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - Committee for Human Rights and National Minorities - Committee for Control of Slovak Security Authority	NR SR. (2022). *Peter Pollák* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1088&CisObdobia=8 Pollák [05], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 05 Peter Pollák* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].

6	Mgr. **Peter Kremský**, MA.	**Journalism** – master's (Mgr.), master's abroad (MA)	MP assistant / OĽANO advisor (2018-2020) City Council Member (2018-) MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - Committee for Economic Affairs - Permanent delegation at OECD	Kremský [06], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 06 Peter Kremský* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person]. NR SR. (2022). *Peter Kremský* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1030&CisObdobia=8
7	Mgr. Ing. **Peter Cmorej**	**Law** – master's (Mgr.) **Economics** – master's (Ing.), not finished PhD.	Local Council Member (2014-) City Council Member (2018-) MP for SaS (2020-), member of: - Committee for Social Affairs - Committee for reviewing decisions of Slovak Security Authority	Cmorej [07], P. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 07 Peter Cmorej* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person]. Cmorej, P. (n.d.). *O mne – PETER CMOREJ* [Personal website]. Peter Cmorej. Retrieved 6 May 2022, from https://www.petercmorej.sk/o-mne/ NR SR. (2022). *Peter Cmorej* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1001&CisObdobia=8
8	Mgr. **Gábor Grendel**	**Journalism** – master's (Mgr.)	City Council Member (2014-) Political party leader - NOVA (2017-2019) MP for OĽANO (2016-), Vice speaker of NR SR (2020-), member of: - Committee for Control of Slovak Information Service - Committee for Defence and Security - Permanent delegation at Inter-Parliamentary Union	Grendel [08], G. (2022, May 13). *Research interview: 08 Gábor Grendel* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person]. NR SR. (2022). *Gábor Grendel* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=910&CisObdobia=8 Wikipedia. (2022). *Gábor Grendel*. In Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=G%C3%A1bor_Grendel&oldid=7417383
9	Mgr. **Andrej Stančík**	**International relations** – abroad bachelor's and master's (Mgr.), doctoral studies suspended	Former president of youth political organisation Občiansko-demokratická mládež (Civic-Democratic Youth) MP for OĽANO (2020-), member of: - Committee for European Affairs - Foreign Affairs Committee - Permanent delegation in Central European Initiative – Parliamentary Division	NR SR. (2022). *Andrej Stančík* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1056&CisObdobia=8 Stančík [09], A. (2022, May 18). *Research interview: 09 Andrej Stančík* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online]. Wikipedia. (2022). *Andrej Stančík*. In Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Andrej_Stan%C4%8D%C3%ADk&oldid=7392186

10	**Slavomíra Henčeková,** PhD., LL.M.	**Law** – bachelor's, master's, abroad doctoral (PhD.), abroad LL.M.	Assistant for MP Ján Benčík, SaS (2020-)	Henčeková [11], S. (2022, May 24). *Research interview: 11 Slavomíra Henčeková* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online]. NR SR. (2022). *Asistenti poslanca—Ján Benčík* [MP details - assistants]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/posl_asistenti&PoslanecID=996&CisObdobia=8
11	Richard Vaculčiak	**Regional development and European studies** – bachelor's part-time student	Candidate for MP, position 141 on ZA ĽUDÍ's candicacy list (2020) PR coordinator for ZA ĽUDÍ Assistant for MP Alexandra Pivková, ZA ĽUDÍ (2020-)	NR SR. (2022). *Asistenti poslanca—Alexandra Pivková* [MP details - assistants]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/posl_asistenti&PoslanecID=1100&CisObdobia=8 SME. (n.d.). *Richard Vaculčiak* [Personality profiles]. Sme.sk. Retrieved 6 May 2022, from https://www.sme.sk/os/168699/richard-vaculciak Vaculčiak [12], R. (2022, May 12). *Research interview: 12 Richard Vacučiak* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [In-person].
12	Ing. **Miroslav Žiak**	**Food security and control** – bachelor's, master's (Ing.) and currently part-time doctoral	Regional Council Member (2017-) City Council Member (2018-) MP for SaS (2020-), member of: - Committee for European Affairs - Permanent delegation in Central European Initiative – Parliamentary Division	NR SR. (2022). *Miroslav Žiak* [MP details]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=poslanci/poslanec&PoslanecID=1098&CisObdobia=8 Wikipedia. (2021). *Miroslav Žiak*. In Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Miroslav_%C5%BDiak Žiak [10], M. (2022, May 17). *Research interview: 10 Miroslav Žiak* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online].
13	Ing. **Ivan Štefanec,** MBA, PhD.	**Economics** – bachelor's, master's (Ing.) and doctoral (PhD.) **Business management** – postgraduate course (MBA)	Gov. plenipotentiary for Euro (2004-2006) MP for SDKÚ-DS (2006-2014) MEP for SDKÚ, now KDH (2014-), member of: - Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection - Delegation for relations with Japan	EP. (2022). *Ivan Štefanec* [MEP details]. MEPs - European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124929/IVAN_STEFANEC/home Štefanec [13], I. (2022, May 17). *Research interview: 13 Ivan Štefanec* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online]. Štefanec, I. (n.d.). *Môj príbeh* [Personal website]. Ivan Štefanec. Retrieved 6 May 2022, from https://ivanstefanec.sk/moj-pribeh/
14	doc. Ing. **Michal Wiezik,** PhD.	**Ecology** – master's (Ing.), doctoral (PhD.) and associate professor (doc.) **Ecology** – researcher, adjunct, associate professor **Vice-dean for research**	MEP for PS (2019-), member of: - Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety - Committee on Petitions	EP. (2022). *Michal Wiezik* [MEP details]. MEPs - European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/197769/MICHAL_WIEZIK/home MINEDU. (2022, June 30). *Michal Wiezik* (doc., Ing., PhD.) [HE staff register]. Register zamestnancov VŠ. https://www.portalvs.sk/regzam/detail/22209?mode=full Wiezik [14], M. (2022, May 18). *Research interview: 14 Michal Wiezik* (Bílik, M., Interviewer & Trans.) [Online]. Wikipedia. (2022). *Michal Wiezik*. In Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Michal_Wiezik

Appendix II. Slovak educational cleavage datasets – sources

These datasets are basis for graphs and findings in Chapter 3., section Educational cleavage in Slovak politics. Data was compiled by the author from various secondary sources and manual search of information on institutional website.

Graph 1. Dataset on HE credentials of political representation

Data about HE credentials were collected from April till May 2022. Originally, this dataset was prepared as part of the recruitment process. Collection included all active political actors in national politics, 150 MPs, 14 MEPs, 16 Members of Government, 26 State Secretaries, the President and 297 MPs' assistants[7]. The dataset used for analysis included their names, positions, party affiliations and HE credential. HE credentials were coded for comparison into 5 categories: bachelor's, master's, small doctorate, doctorate, (associate) professor. Data were gathered across variety of sources, usually from institutional websites, full list below:

Position	Reference
MPs	NR SR. (2022). *Národná rada Slovenskej republiky—VIII. volebné obdobie [National Council of Slovak Republic – VIII. election period]* [Brochure]. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Publikacia/mobile/index.html
MEPs	Statistical Office SR. (2019). *Zoznam kandidátov podľa politických subjektov—Voľby do Európskeho parlamentu 2019 [List of candidates based on political affiliation – Elections to European Parliament 2019]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/ep/ep2019/files/xlsx/EP_2019_SK_tab0b.xlsx
President	Office of the President SR. (2019). *Životopis [CV]*. Prezidentka Slovenskej republiky. https://www.prezident.sk/zivotopis
MPs' assistants	NR SR. (2022, May 4). *Asistenti a poslanecké kancelárie [Assistants and MPs' offices]* [List]. National Council of the Slovak Republic. https://www.nrsr.sk/web/?sid=poslanci/asistenti
Ministers and state secretaries	Finance Ministry of SR. (2022a). *Igor Matovič* [CV]. Minister financií SR. https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/ministerstvo/veduci-predstavitelia-mf-sr/minister-financii-sr/ Finance Ministry of SR. (2022b). *Marcel Klimek* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 1 - Ministerstvo financií. https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/ministerstvo/veduci-predstavitelia-mf-sr/statny-tajomnik-mf-sr/ Finance Ministry of SR. (2022c). *Ľuboš Jančík* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 2 - Ministerstvo financií. https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/ministerstvo/veduci-predstavitelia-mf-sr/statny-tajomnik-mf-sr-2/ Government Office of SR. (2022). *Eduard Heger* [CV]. Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic. https://www.vlada.gov.sk/prime-minister-of-the-slovak-republic/?csrt=10981310645073943325 MINEDU. (2022). *Ministry leadership* [CV]. Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu. https://www.minedu.sk/vedenie-ministerstva-skolstva-vedy-vyskumu-a-sportu-sr/ Ministry of Agriculture SR. (2022a). *Martin Kováč* [CV]. Štátny tajomník - Ministerstvo pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka. https://www.mpsr.sk/?navID=458 Ministry of Agriculture SR. (2022b). *Samuel Vlčan* [CV]. Minister pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka SR. https://www.mpsr.sk/index.php?navID=3 Ministry of Culture SR. (2020a). *Natália Milanová* [CV]. Ministerka kultúry SR. https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/ministerka-kultury/ Ministry of Culture SR. (2020b). *Radoslav Kutaš* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 1 - Ministerstvo kultúry. https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statny-tajomnik-1-mk-sr/ Ministry of Culture SR. (2021). *Viera Leščáková* [CV]. Štátna tajomníčka 2 - Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky. https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/statna-tajomnicka-2-mk-sr/

[7] There were 301 MPs's assistants, 4 were excluded from dataset as they were registered as companies.

	Ministry of Defence SR. (2022a). *Jaroslav Naď* [CV]. Minister obrany SR. https://www.mosr.sk/jaroslav-nad/?zivotopis Ministry of Defence SR. (2022b). *Marian Majer* [CV]. Štátny tajomník - Ministerstvo obrany. https://www.mosr.sk/marian-majer/?zivotopis Ministry of Economy SR. (n.d.). *Richard Sulík* [CV]. Minister hospodárstva. Retrieved 6 August 2022, from https://www.mhsr.sk/ministerstvo/informacie-o-mhsr/vedenie-ministerstva/minister-hospodarstva Ministry of Economy SR. (2022a). *Ján Oravec* [CV]. Štátny tajomník I - Ministerstvo hospodárstva. https://www.mhsr.sk/ministerstvo/informacie-o-mhsr/vedenie-ministerstva/statny-tajomnik-i Ministry of Economy SR. (2022b). *Karol Galek* [CV]. Štátny tajomník II - Ministerstvo Hospodárstva. https://www.mhsr.sk/ministerstvo/informacie-o-mhsr/vedenie-ministerstva/statny-tajomnik-ii Ministry of Environment SR. (2022a). *Ján Budaj* [CV]. Minister životného prostredia. https://www.minzp.sk/minister/ Ministry of Environment SR. (2022b). *Kontakty* [Contact list]. Ministerstvo životného prostredia SR. https://www.minzp.sk/kontakty/ Ministry of Foreign Affairs SR. (2022a). *Ingrid Brocková* [CV]. Štátna tajomníčka 2 - Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí. https://www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/statni-tajomnici/ingrid-brockova Ministry of Foreign Affairs SR. (2022b). *Ivan Korčok* [CV]. Minister zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí. https://www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/minister-zivotopis_ministra Ministry of Foreign Affairs SR. (2022c). *Martin Klus* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 1 - Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí. https://www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/statni-tajomnici/martin-klus Ministry of Health. (2022). *Ministry leadership* [CV]. Ministerstvo zdravotníctva. https://www.health.gov.sk/?vedenie Ministry of Interior SR. (2022a). *Roman Mikulec* [CV]. Minister vnútra. https://www.minv.sk/?roman-mikulec Ministry of Interior SR. (2022b). *Tomáš Oparty* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 1 - Ministerstvo vnútra. https://www.minv.sk/?statny-tajomnik-mv-sr-tomas-oparty Ministry of Interior SR. (2022c). *Vendelín Leitner* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 2 - Ministerstvo vnútra. https://www.minv.sk/?statny-tajomnik-mv-sr-vendelin-leitner Ministry of Investment SR. (2022a). *Ministry leadership* [CV]. Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR. https://www.mirri.gov.sk/ministerstvo/vedenie-ministerstva/ Ministry of Investment SR. (2022b). *Veronika Remišová* [CV]. Ministerka investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR. https://www.mirri.gov.sk/ministerka/ Ministry of Justice SR. (2022a). *Mária Kolíková* [CV]. Ministerka spravodlivosti Slovenskej republiky. https://www.justice.gov.sk/ministerstvo/predstavitelia-mssr/ministerka/ Ministry of Justice SR. (2022b). *Ondrej Dostál* [CV]. Štátny tajomník - Ministerstvo spravodlivosti. https://www.justice.gov.sk/ministerstvo/predstavitelia-mssr/statny-tajomnik-dostal/ Ministry of Labour SR. (n.d.). *Milan Krajniak*. Minister práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny. Retrieved 6 August 2022, from https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/minister/ Ministry of Labour SR. (2022a). *Juraj Káčer* [CV]. Štátny tajomník 1 - Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny. https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/statni-tajomnici/juraj-kacer.html Ministry of Labour SR. (2022b). *Soňa Gaborčáková* [CV]. Štátna tajomníčka 2 - Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny. https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/statni-tajomnici/sona-gaborcakova.html Ministry of Transport SR. (2022). *Ministry leadership* [CV]. Ministerstvo dopravy a výstavby. https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/urad-ministerstva-5163/veduci-predstavitelia-ministerstva-207 Wikipedia. (2021). Štefan Holý. In *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. https://sk.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%C5%A0tefan_Hol%C3%BD&oldid=7297895

Graph 2. Historical data of HE credentials among candidates and elected MPs

Dataset was compiled from election records since 2002, older data did not include information regarding HE credentials. Lists of candidates included candidate's names, party affiliations and HE credential(s). The list of elected MPs included only names and party affiliations; HE credentials were added from the list of candidates. Limitation of this data is that not all elected MPs take their seat in the Parliament. Some elected officials become part of the Government and they suspend theirs mandate. Actual composition of the Parliament is different than election results, as those empty seats are filled by substitutes from party lists. And sometimes even in midst of a mandate, person leaves their position in Government, or they give up their seat entirely, in that case composition changes all the time ever so slightly. The parliament website keeps track of these changes. But in terms of their impact on the results, those differences in the number of HE credentials should not be significant. When I compared the 2020 election results with composition in May 2022, the number of people with HE credentials remained the same.

Year	References for list of candidates and elected MPs
2002	Statistical Office SR. (2002a). *Register kandidátov politických strán—Voľby do NR SR 2002 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2002/webdata/slov/regis/kandid_2002.pdf Statistical Office SR. (2002b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2002 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2002/webdata/slov/tab/tab6.htm
2006	Statistical Office SR. (2006a). *Zoznam kandidátov—Voľby do NR SR 2006 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2006/slov/info/regkand.jsp.htm Statistical Office SR. (2006b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2006 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2006/slov/obvod/results/tab6.jsp.htm
2010	Statistical Office SR. (2010a). *Zoznam kandidátov—Voľby do NR SR 2010 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2010/info/regkand.jsp@lang=sk.htm Statistical Office SR. (2010b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2010 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2010/sr/tab6.jsp@lang=sk.htm
2012	Statistical Office SR. (2012a). *Zoznam kandidátov—Voľby do NR SR 2012 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2012/info/regkand.jsp@lang=sk.htm Statistical Office SR. (2012b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2012 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2012/sr/tab6.jsp@lang=sk.htm
2016	Statistical Office SR. (2016a). *Zoznam kandidátov podľa politických subjektov—Voľby do NR SR 2016 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2016/files/xlsx/Zoznam_kandidatov.xlsx Statistical Office SR. (2016b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2016 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2016/files/xlsx/Zvoleni_poslanci.xlsx
2020	Statistical Office SR. (2020a). *Zoznam kandidátov politických subjektov—Voľby do NR SR 2020 [List of candidates]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2020/files/xlsx/NRSR_2020_SK_tab0b.xlsx Statistical Office SR. (2020b). *Zvolení poslanci NR SR - Voľby do NR SR 2020 [List of elected MPs]* [Table]. https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2020/files/xlsx/NRSR_2020_SK_tab06.xlsx

Appendix III. CUREC 1a application form – selected parts

SECTION C: The research project	
1. Title of the research project	
The positionality of higher education graduates in political life	
2. Anticipated start date of the aspect of the research project involving human participants and/ or personal data (**dd/mm/yy**).	Start when ethics approval is granted
3. Anticipated research end date (**dd/mm/yy**).	31/07/2022
4. Provide a brief lay summary of the aims and objectives of the research. This should cover the questions it will answer and any potential benefits. (max 300 words)	
Political science and sociology are observing developing educational cleavage in political life. In Europe, higher education graduates tend to have more favourable views of the EU, are more active in their communities, have different views on cultural issues and more recently there are indications of differences in attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines and related public health measures (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Eurobarometer, 2021). The social conflict based on educational experience erodes not only social cohesion, but also trust towards science and expertise, and democracy at large. The goal of this research is to understand the role of higher education institutions in creating these differences. The research will primarily review existing literature on the subject, building a theoretical framework through which to understand various ways higher education and surrounding public discourse forms students for their civic and political life after graduation. The project will be enriched by interviews with active political actors in Slovakia and their reflections on their own educational experience, merit, expertise, and recognition of educational credentials. Understanding what drives this conflict, can help higher education institutions to adapt their activities, to build stronger democratic societies.	
5. Please indicate the methods to be used (indicate with an '**X**'):	
Analysis of existing records	☒
Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	☒
Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters (refer to guidance in BPG 01: Researcher safety)	☐
Participant observation	☐
Covert observation	☐
Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	☐
Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	☐
Using social media to recruit or interact with participants (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	☐

Participant performs paper and pencil task	☐
Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	☐
Focus group	☐
Interview (refer to guidance in BPG 10: Conducting research interviews)	☒
Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
Others (please specify below)	☐

6. Provide a brief summary of the research design and methods. What will research participants be asked to do? (max 300 words)
   Please also submit a copy of the questions participants will be asked, if applicable, or some information about the sorts of topics that will be covered.

The dissertation project is primarily focused on building a theoretical framework from existing literature on merit, abilities, abyssal thinking, personal agency, and humility. Part of the research that involves primary data collection is an addition to the whole project. Before developing the theoretical framework first 2-5 interviews will be conducted in early February as part of the pilot phase. Based on the preliminary findings, the interview guide will be further developed, and the literature search reframed.

Approached participants are going to be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews, questions slightly varied based on their educational credentials. Interviews will be conducted in Slovak. In the interview, participants will be asked to share their views on:

- Own educational biography
- Agency building in higher education
- Merit and abilities discourse
- Doing politics, expertise, and education
- Perceptions of people with different educational credentials

Before the interview and after they agree to participate, public biographical information on the participant's education and political career will be gathered. Together with their public statements relevant to key interview topics will be collected from social media accounts (official or personal), blogs, political party and candidate websites, election materials, media appearances, and statements made during the session of parliament, committee, or other official assemblies. During the interview, participants will be asked to confirm or clarify their previous statements and biographical information. A personalised interview script for each participant will be kept together with the transcription. The interviews guide is attached to this form.

Participants will be participating on record. Before the results will be published, they will have an opportunity to review relevant parts of writing, edit any statements attributed to them and suggest changes to their interpretation. If a participant decides to discontinue their participation in the research, none of the responses from the interview will be used, but other publicly available information and statements could still be used.

7. List the location(s) where the research will be conducted, including any other countries.	Bratislava, Slovakia Oxford, UK	
8. Clarify which parts of the research will be conducted in-person and which will take place remotely, e.g. online.	1) If the pandemic permits some of the interviews will be conducted in-person, other online through MS Teams. Research of publicly available statements and participants' biography will be done online. 2) If there is no choice all interviews will take place online.	
3) If your research involves fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? Please indicate with an '**X**'. (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are advised to take out University travel insurance.) Refer to guidance available from your Department, the Safety Office, the Social Sciences Division, and the Humanities Division, and on travel for University business.	Yes	☒
	No	☐
	Not required in this instance	☐
4) In the case of international or collaborative research, explain how you will address any ethical issues specific to the local context. Please provide details of the local review, approval or permission obtained or required. Refer to the BPG 16: Social science research conducted outside the UK. If there will be no local review, explain why not. Please mention any stakeholder or community engagement that has been/ will be undertaken in relation to the research Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in Section G.		
The proposed research project constitutes international research outside the UK, conducted in the home country of the researcher. Considerations brought up in BPG 16 regarding seeking local guidance and considering differences in research ethics were incorporated in the research design. Local context, Slovakia, will be considered through closely following the Slovak National Ethics Codex for Research Integrity. However, this document has been adopted only recently (October 2021) and formal ethical research oversight is quite limited in Slovakia. Nevertheless, to check for possible ethical issues, former academic supervisor (political science) and professional colleagues (educational policy) all based in Slovakia, will be consulted. There are no known risks for the Oxford researcher.		
5) Name of departmental/ peer reviewer (if applicable)	N/A	
6) External organisation funding the research and grant reference (if applicable)	Not specifically the research, but my studies are supported by the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport	

	through Martin Filko scholarship (covering tuition and part of living expenses). Furthermore, my studies were supported through a fundraiser, which raised 10044 € (approx. 8500 £) with contributions from 156 people.
7) Please refer to the CUREC Best Practice Guidance and list any that have been used to develop your research.	BPG 01 Researcher safety BPG 03 Elite and expert interviewing BPG 06 Internet-mediated research BPG 09 Data collection, protection, and management BPG 10 Conducting research interviews BPG 16 Social science research conducted outside the UK

SECTION D: Recruitment of research participants		
1. Number of participants	10-15	
2. How was the number of participants decided?	The research focuses on the development of a theoretical framework that should be only aided by interviews from a specific context. Thus, the essential minimum number is modest. This also takes into account the difficulty of recruiting elite participants. The upper limit takes into consideration the possibility of very successful recruitment and high interest in participating in the research.	
3. Age range of participants	18 and over	
4. Inclusion criteria	Politically active people (in elected office, political appointees, members of a political party or election candidates) on EU, national, regional, or local level in Slovakia. Significant numbers of participants will be with and without higher education credentials. All participants will need to agree to speak on the record.	
5. Exclusion criteria	People that are working for the government, state, or other public body only in professional or expert positions. Politically active but who have some experience with higher education but did not complete it.	
6. Indicate with an '**X**' all intended recruitment methods **Please submit copies of the recruitment material that will be used, e.g. advertisement text, introductory email text.**	Poster advert	☐
	Flyer	☐
	Email circulation	☒
	Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)	☐
	Website	☐

	In-person approach	☐
	Snowball sampling	☒
	Recruitment sites (e.g. Mechanical Turk)	☐
	Existing contacts or volunteer database	☒
	Other (please specify):	☐
7. How will potential participants be identified and approached?	In the pilot phase, Members of the National Council of the Slovak republic will be approached through their public official emails until at least 3 interviews are confirmed. In the subsequent phase, all Members of the European Parliament and Members of the National Council of the Slovak republic will be contacted through their official email. The list of elected officials is publicly accessible together with their contact information. In the third round, mayors of district and region towns, together with regional leaders will be approached. The list of elected officials is accessible but contact information will need to be gathered from individual sites. In the following stages elected members of regional and local governance, party members will be contacted until sufficient interviews are confirmed. Additionally, to the recruitment email, some individuals will be also approached through existing contacts and social network connections. After interviewing, participants will be asked to suggest further people for interviews (snowball). In later stages, the focus of recruiting will be to create a more balanced sample, to have multiple participants with and without higher education credentials, and those that studied abroad. Most public lists of elected officials include their academic titles, which makes it possible to target specific sub-populations.	
8. Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants or their parents/ guardians? If not, please explain why not.	Informed consent will be obtained directly from the participants.	

9. For each activity or group of participants, explain how informed consent will be obtained from the participants themselves and/ or their parents/ guardians, if applicable. How will their consent be recorded? **Please submit copies of all participant-facing materials for review.**	Informed consent will be obtained through email correspondence. All the communication and documents will be in the Slovak language. Attached to this form are:[8] • Recruitment email • Participant information sheet • Email consent form • Interview guide
10. Provide details of any payments and incentives and the rationale for providing these. Further guidance in Best Practice Guidance: 05 Payments and incentives in research.	None
11. Describe how participants • may withdraw from the study • may withdraw any personal information they have provided from the study State any limits to withdrawal, for example once the data has been anonymised or at some other specified stage prior to publication. Make sure participants are aware of any withdrawal limits.	Participants will be able to send an email to matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk asking to be withdrawn from the study latest by 30th of June 2022. If a participant decides to discontinue their participation in the research, none of the responses from the interview will be used, but other publicly available information and statements by or concerning that person could still be used. Before the deadline for withdrawal, all participants will have an opportunity to edit any statements attributed to them and suggest changes to their interpretation.

SECTION E: Research data

All information provided by participants is considered research data for the purpose of this form. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as personal data; any personal data which is sensitive is considered special category data. Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research.

In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the Data Protection Checklist and Data Protection Screening Assessment and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate Data Protection Impact Assessment may also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from Research Data Oxford and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from the Information Compliance team.

[8] Recruitment email in Appendix V., Participant information sheet in Appendix VI., Email consent form in Appendix VII., and Interview guide in Appendix VIII.

For guidance on conducting internet-mediated research, refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance 06: Internet-mediated research.			
1. What data will be collected? (Indicate with an '**X**')			
Screening documents	☐	Task results (e.g. questionnaires, diaries)	☐
Consent records (e.g., written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms)	☒	IP addresses (refer to Best Practice Guidance 09: Data collection, protection and management for guidance)	☐
Contact details for the purpose of this research only	☒	Field notes	☒
Contact details for future use (guidance)	☒	Photographs	☐
Opt-out forms	☒	Information about the health of the participant (including mental health)	☐
Audio recordings	☒	Previously collected (secondary) data	☐
Video recordings	☐	Data already in the public domain. Specify the source of the data: Social media, election materials (text, audio or visual), political party or candidate websites, public CVs, media appearances, statements in parliamentary session or other assemblies.	☒
Transcript of audio/ video recordings	☒	Other, please specify:	☐

2. During the course of the research, where will **each type of** research data be stored?	Research administration - Consent records and opt-out emails will be collected through email exchange using an account by the University of Oxford. Any received communication will be exported into a pdf file with a timestamp and saved on Nexus 365 OneDrive into a password-protected folder. - The spreadsheet with the names, participant numbers, contact information, and the date of the interview will be created directly in Nexus 365 OneDrive through MS Excel, saved to the same password-protected folder. Research data - Audio recordings will be conducted using the Recorder application on a personal smartphone (biometrically protected device). After the interview, the recording will be uploaded to Nexus 365 OneDrive and deleted from the smartphone. - Transcripts of audio recordings are going to be created in MS Word directly in Nexus 365 OneDrive. Relevant parts will be translated by the researcher. - Responses will be analysed directly in MS Excel and NVIVO, both are included in the Nexus 365.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="3">- All gathered data from the public domain (online accessible) are going to be saved through Internet Archive, printed into pdf with a timestamp and saved on Nexus 365 OneDrive in participant folders (named using their participant numbers). If gathered material is in form of video or audio recording, relevant parts will be transcribed with the indication of time frame.
- Field notes are going to be scanned and saved on Nexus 365 OneDrive, only relevant parts will be transcribed.
All documents and files will be regularly backed up to an external hard drive, which will be password protected and encrypted.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. Who will have access to the research data during the project?</td><td colspan="3">Only the student and the supervisor will have access to the full data and research administration documents.

All files and folders will be using only participant numbers and not their actual name.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">4. Please complete this section if your research involves the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data.</td><td>Please indicated with an ‘X’.</td><td>Yes</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>Are data access agreements in place for access to and use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)</td><td>☐</td><td>☒</td></tr>
<tr><td>Did the individuals agree that their data could be used for this purpose?</td><td>☐</td><td>☒</td></tr>
<tr><td>Could anyone (including members of the research team) link the data back to an individual or individuals? If this is a possibility, please explain how the associated ethical issues will be addressed:</td><td rowspan="2">☒</td><td rowspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>On top of primary data gathered through interviews, which will be on the record, publicly available secondary information will be gathered about the participants. Those will include their names and it will be easy to link data. But they already gave consent for their data or statements to be shared in the public domain, though it was not for the specific purpose of this project. Any information or statement that was leaked or obtained without the participant’s consent (article by investigative journalist, leaked video or audio, etc.) in the public domain will not be attributed to the participant, but to the author or institution that created the public record.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="7">5. How do you intend to share the research data at the end of the project?</td><td>Depositing in a specialist data centre or archive</td><td colspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>Submitting to a journal to support a publication</td><td colspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>Depositing in an institutional repository</td><td colspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dissemination via a project or institutional website</td><td colspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>No plans to share the data</td><td colspan="2">☒</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other (please specify):</td><td colspan="2">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Thesis publication</td><td colspan="2">☒</td></tr>
</table>

6. How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the research? (Indicate with an 'X')	Publication in a peer reviewed journal	☒
	Publicly available report	☒
	Conference presentation	☒
	Publication on a website	☒
	Pre-registration	☐
	Report to a research funder	☒
	Providing participants with a lay summary of the results	☒
	Submission for academic assessment	☒
	Other (please specify):	☐
7. Explain what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. This question must be answered for each type of data, including completed consent forms.		
The student will leave university after completing the research. All physical copies of field notes, analysis, transcripts and other documents will be destroyed. Research data and all documentation (consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts, scans of field notes, analysis, data from public domain) saved on Nexus 365 OneDrive will be downloaded into a password-protected compress file and stored for 5 years after final publication in a personal external hard drive and on personal cloud system outside the university. All data and contact information will be archived for 5 years for possible reuse and follow-up study. Participants will be asked to consent for their responses to be used in further studies and be contacted in the future. Those that choose to opt-out from future use or contact could still participate in this research based on the interview data already collected, but their data will be destroyed right after the project final publication. Without further consent, all research documents and data will be destroyed after 5 years.		

SECTION F: Protection of research participants and their personal data

1. How identifiable will the participants be from the **research outputs**? (Indicate with an 'X')	Directly identifiable from the information included	☒
	Pseudonymised/ indirectly identifiable	☐
	Not identifiable – data is anonymous	☐
	Other, please specify:	☐
2. To what extent will the **data** be de-identified? How identifiable will any individuals be from the research data? Describe any measures you will take towards assuring confidentiality, potential risks to confidentiality.	As most of the potential participants are quite visible in public life, in the research it will be very difficult to completely de-identify their responses. Along with the interview, further data will be gathered from their public statements and biographical information, which are directly attributed to them. Anonymising or pseudonymising would require to also alter and mask all other resources, and still, participants could be identified by a simple internet search of statements that are already in the public domain. The project goal is not to generalise the findings to a larger population, as responses will be greatly context-dependent. Withholding information about participants will skew interpretation by the reader. Therefore, it is proposed to conduct this study without the norm of anonymisation, while at the same time protecting participants	

	in other respects (the option to withdraw, the option to correct or to change what is attributed to them on the record, etc). These individuals, all public actors and used to operate on an open basis, will be directly identifiable from the research data. From the very start, participants will be made aware that their participation will be on record. To ensure participants have control over their data, all participants will have a chance to review excerpts containing their statements and the public references to them. In late June, towards the end of writing time, participants will be able to edit parts directly attributed to them and suggest edits to the interpretation. This mode of operating is a normal risk to these participants. The ethical framework within which they operate, politicians within a democratic system of governance, emphasizes transparency and openness. These individuals are voluntary public actors with extensive agency. They are in public life accountable to the public and can expect public scrutiny. Nevertheless, throughout the process of recruitment and interviews, participants will be informed about risks associated with the participation. The researcher recognises that this method has potential risks from the point of view of the research. Perhaps people will be less willing to participate, they will self-censor their responses, and there is of course the limitation of not being able to generalise their responses. But the more open and transparent approach might make the work more relevant to the local public.
3. How will you ensure that third parties (e.g., interpreters and transcribers) are aware of and adhere to the measures described in this form?	Not applicable

SECTION G: Risks and benefits of the research

1. Will the research involve topics that could be considered sensitive? If so:
    a. Please provide more detail or supporting information (such as the interview questions) to show the range of questions;
    b. Explain what steps will be taken to reduce risk of distress;
    c. Consider seeking advice from within your Department or from the ethics committee including whether the application might benefit from additional ethics review (e.g., via a CUREC 2 application).

Questions in the interview guide will be leading participants to discuss their political views and their own experience in politics and education. Potentially they responses might include scandalous statements and if reproduced in the research output, it could allow for news to report on it. While questions are not directly getting into other sensitive topics, their recollection of their educational experience and early political career might bring them out.

Participants will have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the topics that will be covered during the interview from the information sheet that will be shared with them. They will have an option to edit any parts of writing that will be attributed to them and suggest edits to parts that interpret their contribution before publishing. Furthermore, participants in the research are voluntarily participating in public life and they are already under scrutiny from the media and public. Discussing their political views is a part of their accountability towards the public.
2. Describe any additional burden or risks to the participants and the steps you will take to address these.
None
3. Describe any physical or psychological risks to the researcher(s) (including local fieldworkers or research assistants) and the steps you will take to address these.
None
4. Describe any benefits of the research, both to participants and to others.
Participants as political actors are members of a highly contested arena; thus, this research might provide interesting insight into how their opponents and colleagues perceive higher education credentials. At the core of the project lies the challenge of social cohesion, which is being undermined by different positions on political, social, and cultural issues depending on educational credentials. It is in the interests of elected officials to understand the forces that drive those differences. Furthermore, the interview should serve as an opportunity for the individual participants to reflect on their positionality and responsibility as powerful agents to cause social change. The research project should also bring some insight on how to better communicate research outputs and share expert opinions in the political and policy space. But most importantly the research focuses on understanding how higher education institutions help to form their students to become political agents. This role carries a lot of responsibility towards future political representation and social cohesion. Especially how will the graduates make use of acquired agency, knowledge, and privileged position without creating ressentiment of those without higher education credentials.
5. Give details of any other ethical issues or relevant information.
There are practical issues that make it almost impossible to hide their identity, research and participants are in a space with different ethical orientations, which stresses openness and transparency, and lastly, the context of participants is important for the interpretation. To assure control of data by participants, they will have full edit rights for excerpts attributed to them and suggest edits to their interpretation. Furthermore, as some of the statements provided by participants could be potentially contentious or scandalous, there might be pressure from the participants to not include certain interpretations in the research outputs. They might be inclined to influence it to either hurt political opponents or gain political advantage. If any significant change in the interpretation will be made upon review by the participants, this will be communicated in the research output. All additional communication with the participants will be noted, supervisor and other responsible people will be notified if it will involve pressures to alter conclusions or findings.

Appendix IV. CUREC 1a approval confirmation

From: Pinar Kolancali

Date: Friday, 11 February 2022 at 12:22

Subject: Ethics Approval CIA-22-072

Dear YYYYY and XXXXX,

'The positionality of higher education graduates in political life'

The application for the above study has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, based on the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted. I would like to inform you that you will be required to update us on any amendments to your study should you need to change your research methods and may need to complete a data protection impact assessment if you use online platforms to conduct and record interviews. There is an application for this, and it is kept separate from the ethics committee. Please see the link below for more information.

https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/policy/data/checklist

Please continue to follow all current guidance issued by CUREC during the pandemic, notably COVID-19: CUREC guidance on research involving human participants, https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus

If needed, please follow the guidance on online data collection and research methods issued by the University,

(1) https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/covid-19/data#collapse2299911

(2) https://infosec.web.ox.ac.uk/article/guidelines-for-using-zoom

If relevant, please also check the CUREC website for their best practice research guides, https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg

Yours sincerely,

Dr Pinar Kolancali

Postdoctoral Researcher

Departmental Research Ethics Committee Member

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Email: pinar.kolancali@education.ox.ac.uk

Appendix V. Recruitment email script[9]

Subj.: Education and experts in political life – offer your unique perspective to research (University of Oxford)

Dear [position] [last name],

My name is XXXXX XXXX, and I am a student in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. I am conducting a research study that tries to look at the role of education and expertise in political life.

I would like to talk to you about your experience with education and how it shapes your political life. Furthermore, we should talk about the experts and how to use expertise in policymaking. I think your experience will bring a unique perspective to the study.

If you decide to take part in this study, your participation will consist of approximately 30-60 minutes interview, based on your availability. For in-person interviews, I will be available in Slovakia from 11-18th of May. For virtual meetings using MS Teams, I am available any time until end of May. In the dissertation and any other publication will include your name. But before publishing, you will have an opportunity to edit any statements or excerpts attributed to you before and suggest changes to the interpretation.

You can find out more about the research and what would your participation entail in the attached: Participation Information Sheet. **Please reply to this email if you are interested in taking part in this study**. Also feel free to contact me if you need additional information to assist you in deciding on participation.

Thank you in advance for your time,

Sincerely,

Matej Bílik
matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk

MSc student
Department of Education
University of Oxford

[9] This is email script as it was used, it was slightly edited after CUREC approval, email was translated to Slovak.

Appendix VI. Participant information sheet[10]

Positionality of higher education graduates in political life

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: CIA-22-072

1. Why is this research being conducted?

Political science and sociology are observing developing differences in political life based on acquired education. In Europe, higher education graduates tend to have more favourable views of the EU, are more active in their communities, have different views on cultural issues and more recently there are indications of differences in attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines and related public health measures (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Eurobarometer, 2021). The social conflict based on educational experience erodes social cohesion, and trust towards expertise. The goal of this research is to understand the role of higher education institutions in creating these differences. The project will be enriched by interviews with active political actors in Slovakia and their reflections on their own educational experience, expertise, and recognition of educational credentials.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been identified as an eligible participant, because you are a politically active individual (in elected office, political appointees, members of a political party or election candidates) on EU, national, regional, or local levels in Slovakia. The goal is to have 15 interviews with a mix of participants with and without higher education experience, and some that studied abroad. Must be 18 or older.

3. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw yourself from the study, without giving a reason, by sending email latest by 30th of June 2022 to me at matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk. Data gathered from the public domain could still be used.

4. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

Your participation will consist of an interview and an optional review of excerpts attributed to you. Each interview will take 30-60 minutes based on your availability. Interviews will be taking place either in-person (March) or online (February – May). The location for the in-person interview will be in Slovakia, exact location will be subject to further communication and depending on the epidemiological situation in UK and Slovakia. Online interviews will take place through MS Teams.

The interview will involve questions about your:

- educational experience and educational biography (level of education, name of institution, field of study, etc.),
- views on merit and abilities,
- experience with policy making and using expert input,

[10] Document was translated to Slovak.

- views towards individuals with or without higher education credentials,
- view on the role of expertise in politics.

The content of the interview might include discussions of your political views. With your consent, I would like to audio record the interview and take notes during it, so I can have an accurate record of our conversation. You can ask at any time to pause or stop the research activities. Before publication, you will have a chance to review all excerpts that will be attributed to you and their interpretation. This will take place around the end of June. I will email you a text document with all relevant parts of the text and you will be given at least 10 days to respond with edits and suggestions.

5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

The research is trying to understand the causes behind political polarisation. For participants who are at the same time political actors, their statements for the research will be made public in academic papers and blogs, and their identity will be known. Although participants will have the opportunity to correct or change statements that will go into the academic record, the fact of attributable statements on record may constitute a risk, as is the case with all public statements they make.

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The research will provide insight into how various political actors perceive higher education credentials. At the core of the project lies the challenge of social cohesion, which is being undermined by different positions on political, social, and cultural issues depending on educational credentials. It is in the interests of political actors to understand the forces that drive those differences. Taking part in the research will help interviewees to reflect on these important issues.

7. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Firstly, before the interview, it is necessary to collect contact information and consent records. As most participants will have an official public email address, those will be the preferred way of communication, but the participant can also suggest alternative email. All communication and consent records will be archived for the research.

Secondly, data collection will include audio recordings (using a personal smartphone), transcripts of audio recording and its English translation, field notes (written in notebook), and data already in the public domain relevant to educational biography and topics in the interview. These can be gathered from social media accounts, election materials (text, audio or visual), political party or candidate websites, public CVs, media appearances, statements made in parliament or other assemblies.

The audio recordings, transcripts and field notes are necessary to keep an accurate record of the interview. Further data gathered from the public domain should aid preparation for the interview and expand the amount of content from one participant. All data and documents will be stored in an encrypted and password-protected folder on the University of Oxford cloud service (Nexus 365 OneDrive) and backed up to an external hard drive. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the research data.

After the publication of the work of the research, all data and documentation will be stored in a compressed, encrypted and password protected folder stored on cloud service and external hard drive for 5 years. Physical documents will be destroyed after publication. I would like your

permission to use this data in future studies and if relevant, to contact you again. If you decide not to consent for your data to be used for further studies or to be contacted again, you can still participate in this research.

8. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in a master's dissertation and blog on a personal website. The research could be used in academic journal articles and conference presentations. All responses used in the publication will be attributed to you by name. Before publication, excerpts attributed to you will be shared with you for edits.

9. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights.

10. Who is funding the research?

My studies are supported through Martin Filko scholarship administered by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak republic. Furthermore, my studies were supported by a fundraiser. None of these affects the content of the research, but their involvement is acknowledged.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: **CIA-22-072)**.

12. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact Matej Bílik (matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk) or S. Marginson (simon.marginson@education.ox.ac.uk), and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

13. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Matej Bílik, MSc student, matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk
Department of Education, University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford, OX2 6PY
University tel.: +44 (0) 1865 274024
University email: general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk

Appendix VII. Email Consent Script[11]

Subj.: Confirming participation in the study

Dear [*insert position*] [*insert last name*],

You are being asked to confirm your participation in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Have a look at the attached Participant Information Sheet which provides all the necessary details.

Please read the statements below. If you are happy with all the statements, please copy and paste them into an email and send it back to me at matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk. This will be considered to constitute giving your consent to participate in the study.

If you have any questions about the research or the statements below, please do not hesitate to contact me.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study Positionality of HE graduates in political life. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw until 30th of June 2022, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.
3. I understand what will happen to my data.
4. I give the researcher permission to interview me, and audio record me.
5. I give permission for the researcher to quote me directly using my real name.
6. I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me in the future.
7. I give permission for the researcher to use the research data collected in this study to be used in further research studies.
8. I am happy to take part in the research.

You can opt-out from statements 6 and 7, and still, participate in this study. If you don't want to be contacted in the future or for collected data to be used in further studies, leave these two statements out of your reply. Consent to all other points is necessary for you to participate in the study. After you agree to participate, I will be in touch with you shortly to agree on the date and time of our interview.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Matej Bílik, matej.bilik@education.ox.ac.uk
MSc student
Department of Education
University of Oxford

[11] Email consent script was translated, alternative version in Slovak was created for in-person interviews.

Appendix VIII. Interview guide[12]

Opening – introduction and confirming biographical information

Thank you for finding time to meet with me: [*write topics for possible small talk*]

Before we start, I would like to explain how this interview will be done and next steps:

- It will take approximately 30-35 minutes
- 5 core themes
- I will record out conversation, subsequently I will transcribe it and if relevant I will use them to illustrate a point in my dissertation. And your answers will also help me to form my ideas.
- Before, I publish anything, I will send you transcribed quotes that I am planning to use, you can check them and edit them. This should take place towards end of June.
- If you have any questions now or later, feel free to reach out.
- Until 30th of June, you have time to withdraw your consent by sending me an email.

All important information about research can be also found in document I brought with me also I shared it with you, I send it in the email.

Together with it, you also saw consent form, to agree to participate, get recorded and to process your data. If you are not interested in data that I will get from you to be used in the future or to be contacted in the future, you don't have to agree with those points.

Thank you for your consent and I will start recording now.

In this conversation, there are no right answers, I want to find out how you are thinking, because I'm interested in it and I'm looking forward how our thinking will enrich me.

For start, I would like to confirm few details:

- Did you study [*fill in institution, level and field*]

Optional questions

- What led you to pursuing studies in that field?
- How does your education help you in your work as [*position*]?
- Were you thinking about studying abroad? Did you apply somewhere?
- What led you to study so much?
- If I remember correctly, you also studied a certain part abroad. Was the education in any way different from what you received in Slovakia?

Core questions - key topics and possible questions

a. Agency building in higher education

When did you start following politics and social events? What led you to start?

- Did you talk about politics at home with parents?

When did you become politically active? What led you to switch from observing and following, to directly participate?

More questions

- What was the role of education in this? High school or higher education? Teachers?
- Were you part of any societies, student groups or organisations?

[12] This version differs from one submitted for CUREC approval, as it was adjusted after pilot. This version is the basic version, as guides were personalized for each participant.

b. Merit and abilities discourse

Now, I will propose a philosophical debate. Let's imagine a social ladder. On top are people that make decisions and shape public discourse, while on the bottom are people that do not have so much influence over what is happening. According to you, based on what people get position in this social ladder in Slovakia?

More questions:

- How should people achieve their position in life?
- How did you achieve your position in your life?
- What contributed to your current position?

c. Educational cleavage

How do you perceive people with and without HE. Is there a difference between person with HE credentials and without?

In your position as [*insert*] is there a difference whether person in this position has or has not HE?

- Is there difference based on whether person studied abroad or in Slovakia?

How would you define an expert?

More questions:

- Did it ever happen to you that someone invalidate your knowledge? Whether because of your age, lacking education or anything.
- What are differences between experts and intellectuals?
- Who are the experts/authorities you trust?

d. Doing politics, expertise, and education

How strong should be expert's voice in politics/policymaking?

In what thing should politicians listen more to the public than to experts?

Who is helping you to shape your views on issues in politics? You don't need to provide specific names rather what type of people are you seeking.

How are you using knowledge and skills that you gained during HE in your current position?

More questions:

- Is your education (or lack of formal education) helping you to make better political decisions? How? And in what ways?

Closing

In the Slovak active population aged 25-64, less than 30% of people have a HE, but in the parliament, up to 130 MPs have a HE, which means 87% of them. How do you explain this difference?

The President said in a recent discussion that "communication in politics is approached as if with a certain intellectual superiority, as if we (politicians) know what is good for you and you (ordinary people) get used to it" (Čaputová, 2022). Do you also have this feeling?

More questions:

- Can someone with a HE degree represent people without a degree?

Last question, to complete my record about you. Did you ever work at a HEI or in education?

Appendix IX. List of codes and categories from analysis

A. Differences in people with(out) HE
   - Overlap, interval
   - People with HE
   - People without HE

B. HE experiences
   - Abroad
   - Formation
   - Immersion
   - Part-time
   - PhD
   - Research-science

C. Context
   - failed Slovak HE
   - plagiarism
   - Slovak history, politics, state of society

D. Institutional design
   - Local & regional politics
   - European
   - Parliament
   - Political parties
   - State bureaucracy

E. Start of political engagement
   - Activism
   - Community
   - Education
   - Family
   - Frustration, burnout

F. Other codes
   - Dunning-Kruger
   - Knowledge
   - Meritocracy
   - Political knowledge & skills
   - Rationality
   - Social bubble
   - Social media, technology
   - *Titul* [degree]
   - Who is expert?

G. Perception
   - Abyss
   - Expectation not requirement
   - Intellectual superiority
   - Invalidation

H. policy direction by
   - Activists
   - Electorate-voice of the people
   - Experts
   - Lobby
   - Politicians

I. Social stratification
   - Agency
   - Background
   - Connections, relationships
   - Credentials
     - ◊ Signalling
   - Education
   - Experience
   - Expertise
   - Chance
   - Recognition

J. Value of HE
   - Civic values
   - Disciplinary
     - ◊ Law
     - ◊ Political science, economics
     - ◊ Specialised
   - Qualification
   - Symbolic
   - Transferable skills
     - ◊ Communication
     - ◊ Information
     - ◊ Reading, documents
     - ◊ Soft skills
     - ◊ Way of thinking