

# **Nationalism in Slovak Politics**

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# Preamble of the Constitution

*„We, the Slovak Nation,  
bearing in mind the political and cultural heritage of our  
predecessors, the experience gained through centuries of  
struggle for our national existence, and statehood...“*

*„...together with members of national minorities and  
ethnic groups living on the territory of the Slovak Republic“*

- Compare with the Preamble in the Czech Constitution

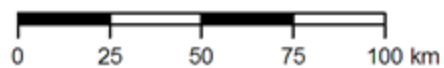
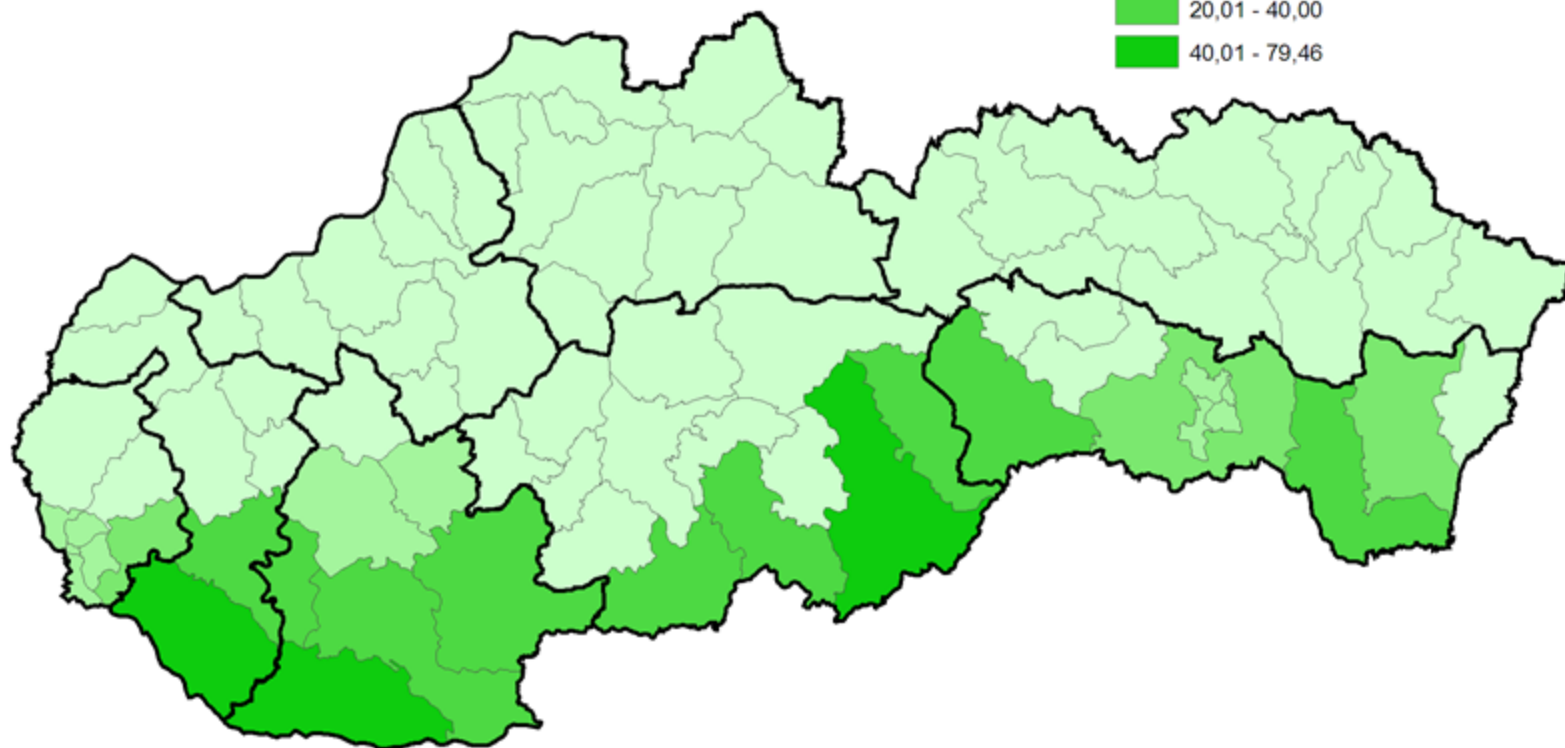
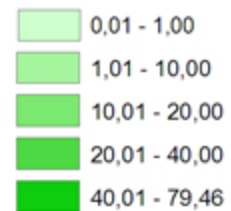
# The Hungarian issue

# The basic facts

- Slovakia:
  - Population of 5,4 mil.
  - Ethnic composition: Slovaks (85,2 %), Hungarians (9,4), Roma (2), Czechs (1), Ruthenians (0,4), Ukrainians (0,2), other (1,6)
- Hungarian minority:
  - Around 500 000 citizens
  - Concentrated in southern part of Slovakia but this land **does not** form a solid region

# HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN SLOVAKIA

Share of ethnic Hungarians (%)



# Hungarian parties in Slovakia

- 1990 – 1998:
  - Three independent and relevant parties
  - Mutual cooperation
- 1998 – 2009:
  - Integration in one subject representing the minority
- 2009 –
  - Split to 2 parties
  - Unsuccessful aims for cooperation yet

# 1990 – 1998

- **Coexistence:**

- „Hawks“
- Miklós Duray



- **Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement:**

- „Moderates“
- Béla Bugár

- **Hungarian Civic Party:**

- „Liberals“
- László Nagy



- Elections 1994 – together as the Hungarian Coalition (MK)

# 1998 - 2009



- 1998 – Mečiar’s electoral reform against coalitions → MK transforms to Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK)
- Participation on executive power in both governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda
- Internal tension after elections 2006
- 2009 – group led by Bugár leaves SMK



# Since 2009

- Existence of two parties:
  - SMK
  - The Bridge (Most-Híd)
- Most-Híd took the earlier position of SMK
- SMK stays out of parliament
- Unsuccessful effort to cooperate
- After 2020 both out of parliament

**MOST HÍD**  
az együttműködés pártja - strana spolupráce



**MK**  
MAGYARKOALÍCIÓ PÁRTJA  
STRANA MAĎARSKEJ KOALÍCIE

# Influencing relations

- **3 models of relations:**
  - International (Hungary – Slovakia)
  - Domestic (Slovakia – Hungarian minority)
  - National (Hungarian minority – Hungary)
- **Primary features:**
  - Reflection of historical issues in present time (Treaty of Trianon, Beneš decrees)
  - Changing intensity of mutual tension

# Trianon

- Occasional topic for the radicals
- Relevance of the topic neutralised with entry of Slovakia and Hungary to the EU
- *„Does anyone understand that since Trianon we do not have our home? Today's Hungary is not a real home even for those who live there, but it is only a „residual“ country“*

Miklós Duray, 2006

# Autonomy

- A topic situated more in the 90s than in the present
- Different understanding of the word „autonomy“ and its content by Hungarian politicians
- Autonomy of culture and schools vs. territorial autonomy
- Approval of Hungarian politicians **not to open** this topic allowed them to participate on government

# Hungarian extraterritorial laws

- *„In a legal sense, in accordance with the Constitution, I want to act as the head of the government of all the citizens of this 10 million strong country, but in spirit and sentiment as the **prime minister of 15 million Hungarians.**”*

József Antall, Hungarian Prime Minister in early 90s

- *„14-15 million Hungarians can do much more than 10 million”*

Viktor Orbán, current Hungarian Prime Minister

# Hungarian extraterritorial laws



- **Foreign IDs (2002):**
  - Available for „minority“ Hungarians except from Austria
  - Financial advantages directly from Hungary
  - Some SMK officials got these IDs
- **Dual citizenship (2010):**
  - Possibility to gain also a Hungarian citizenship
  - Slovakia adopted a counter-law leading to abandoning the Slovak citizenship
  - Until 2012 – about 200 thousand requests (minimum from Slovakia)
- Mobilizing tool for Slovak nationalists and anti-Hungarian sentiments

# The Hungarian issue

## Now from the other side

# Anti-Hungarian nationalism



- Playing with the so called „*Hungarian card*“
- In use mainly in the 90s and later until 2010
- **Various ways of usage:**
  - Electoral campaign
  - Daily politics
  - Reactions on Hungarian political actions
  - Suitable way how to overlay other negative problems



# Slovak National Party



- Created in 1990, claims a link with historical SNS
- Radical right party:
  - Nationalism, xenophobia
  - Topics – Hungarians, Roma, homosexuals, against NATO, reserved towards EU
- Main leaders until 2010:
  - **Ján Slota**
  - Anna Belousovová



# Slovak National Party



- **Development:**

- Early years – searching for identity → radicalization since 1994
- 2001 – split, Slota creates the True SNS (PSNS)
- 2003 – unification after unsuccessful elections

- **Position in the system:**

- Member of governments led by Mečiar (1994-1998) and Fico (2006-2010)
- Out of parliament (2012 – 2016)
- Since 2016 back in government (with Most-Hid)
- 2020 – lost its parliamentary status

# The peak of nationalism

- Mečiar's government in 1994 - 1998
- SNS got ministries of **education and defense**
- Topics:
  - Bilingual school reports
  - Name of towns
  - Names and surnames in registers
  - New administrative division of Slovakia
  - Lowering the funds for minorities' culture

# Electoral Campaign in 2006

- SNS used very offensive anti-Hungarian campaign
- A reaction following 8 years of SMK in government
- „*We are Slovaks. A Slovak government for Slovaks*“
  - Program of SNS for elections 2006
  - Clear reaction to presence of Hungarians in government
- SNS - billboards, slogans etc. with a common message:
  - Hungarians as an enemy
  - Hungarians as a threat



A billboard featuring the Slovak flag on the left and the SNS logo (a white eagle with wings spread, perched on a laurel wreath, above a red circle with a white cross) on the right. The text is in white on a dark background.

Aby sme sa zajtra nečudovali.

VOĽTE ČÍSLO **10**

www.sns.sk



A billboard featuring a close-up of a young child's face with wide, curious eyes. The SNS logo is on the right. The text is in white on a dark background.

Aby naše deti mali istotu.

www.sns.sk



A billboard featuring a portrait of Rudolf Pučík on the left and the SNS logo on the right. The text is in white on a dark background.

Rudolf Pučík

Pozsony? Nie, Bratislava!

VOĽTE ČÍSLO **10**

www.sns.sk



A billboard featuring a golden cross on a hill against a cloudy sky on the left and the SNS logo on the right. The text is in white on a dark background.

Aby naše hranice zostali našimi hranicami.

www.sns.sk



- Faithless (music band) – God is a DJ:
  - *Enemies becoming friends, when bitterness ends*
- SNS – Campaign 2006:
  - *Neighbors becoming enemies*

# Ján Slota

- The most visible representative of Slovak nationalism until 2010
- Very offensive language towards various social groups
- Verbal attacks on:
  - Hungary, its history, symbols and politicians
  - Hungarian minority
  - Roma
  - Homosexuals
  - Slovak politicians including prominent members of SNS
  - Media

# The tank attack on Budapest



- Most „popular“ scandal
- Occurred in 1999 on a meeting of HZDS where he was a guest speaker
- Slota called for a tank attack on Budapest
- *„We will not leave it like this, we will go in tanks and we will flatten Budapest“*



# SNS after 2010



- In 2012 SNS dropped out of parliament
- Change of leadership:
  - Ján Slota excluded from the party
  - New leader – Andrej Danko
- Change of profile:
  - SNS started a renewal process and claimed to differ from its past
  - Many representatives from the 90s however remained in the party
- Decline of anti-Hungarian appeals, increase of populism and conservative values

# Campaign 2016



# Temporary rebirth

- Success in 2016 election:
  - 8,6 per cent and 15 MPs
  - Entered government with SMER-SD and Most-Hid
  - A clear sign of decline of anti-Hungarian sentiments
- Further increase of public support (up to 14 per cent) stopped with issues of the new leader
  - The military rank of captain
  - His doctoral thesis found to be a result of plagiarism
  - Became target of vast mockery in public



*Captain Danko*



**Kapitán  
Slovensko**

# Temporary rebirth

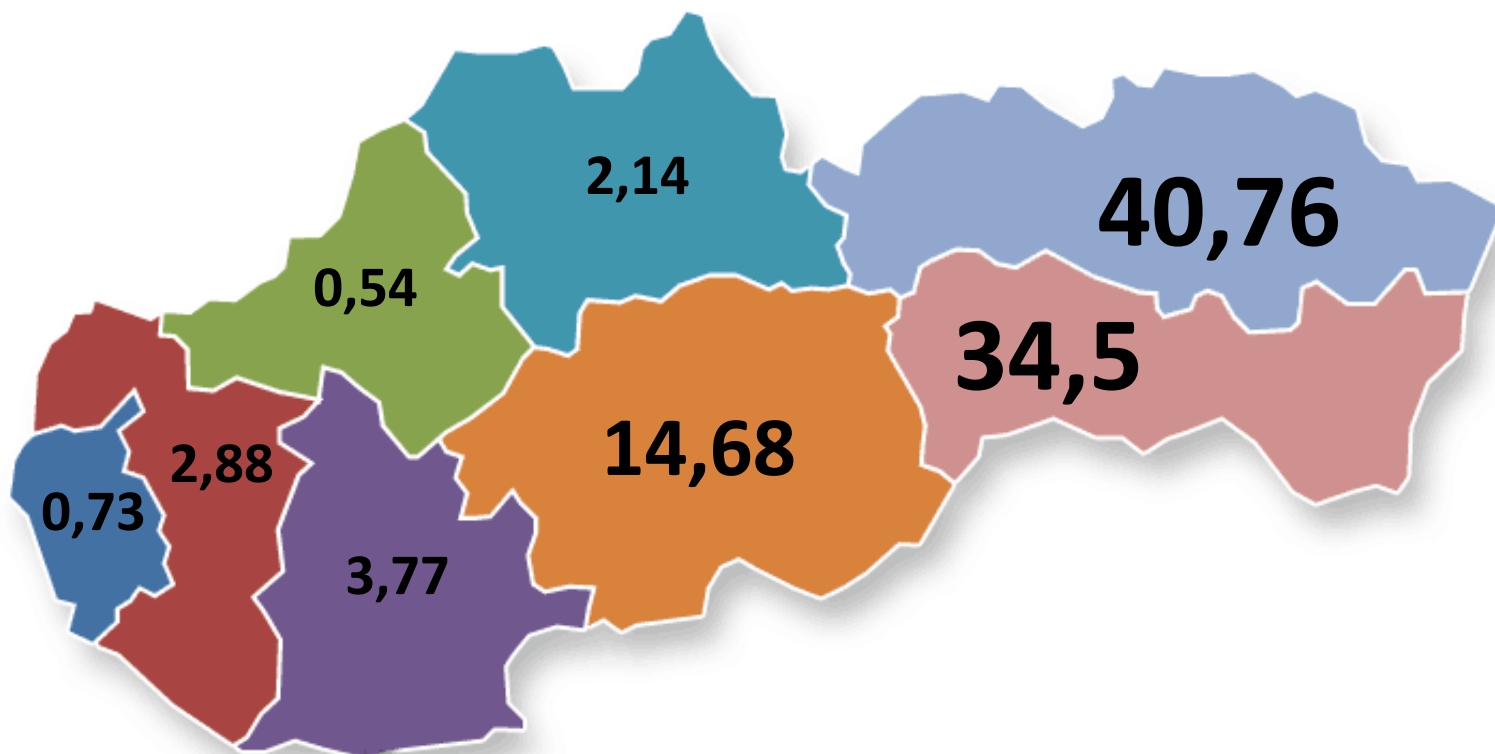
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  - Became target of vast mockery in public
- Continuous decline of public support resulting in 3 per cent in 2020 election

# The Roma issue

# Roma in Slovakia

- Unclear proportion of the population
- Official census:
  - 1991 – 75 802 (1,4 %)
  - 2001 – 89 920 (1,7 %)
  - 2011 - 105 738 (2 %)
- Real estimations around 400 000
- Geographically concentrated in Central and Eastern Slovakia

# 75 per cent of Roma live in Eastern Slovakia





# Roma in Slovakia

- Very bad image from the majority's point of view
- Associated features:
  - Lack of education
  - Unemployment
  - Living conditions and habits
  - Criminality

# Public surveys – „Who would you not accept as your neighbor?“

Category	2006	2008
Drug addict	84,9	88,6
Roma	72,8	82,4
Convicted felon	58,8	71,3
Right-wing extremist	62	66,8
Muslim	49,5	54,7
Homosexual	38,8	51,2
Immigrant	35,2	41,5
Person of a different race	28,8	39,5
Jew	21,5	29
Disabled	6	8,7



# Roma and politics

- No relevant Roma political party
- Attempts to create such subjects end without any success
- Roma parties receive only marginal number of votes
- Lack of organizational skills and absence of unified ethnic identity
- Non disciplined voters (regular attempts to buy their votes)

# Roma as a topic for nationalists

- Mostly stressed by SNS in the past
- Ideas even beyond the principles of democracy or human rights
- Examples:
  - Reservations (as Indians in North America)
  - „*A small yard and a big whip*“

# SNS campaign in 2010



# Rise of extremism

- People`s Party – Our Slovakia (LSNS)
- Leader – Marian Kotleba
- Emerged in 2010
- Previous links with extremist Slovak Brotherhood:
  - Electoral failure in 2006
  - Dissolved in 2008



# Ideology

- Slovak Brotherhood:
  - Various topics
  - Slovak wartime state, Hungarians, Roma, NATO, homosexuals...
- LSNS:
  - Modification of the profile
  - Primary focus on Roma
  - Other topics present, but rather secondary
  - Inclusion of excessive populism after 2012

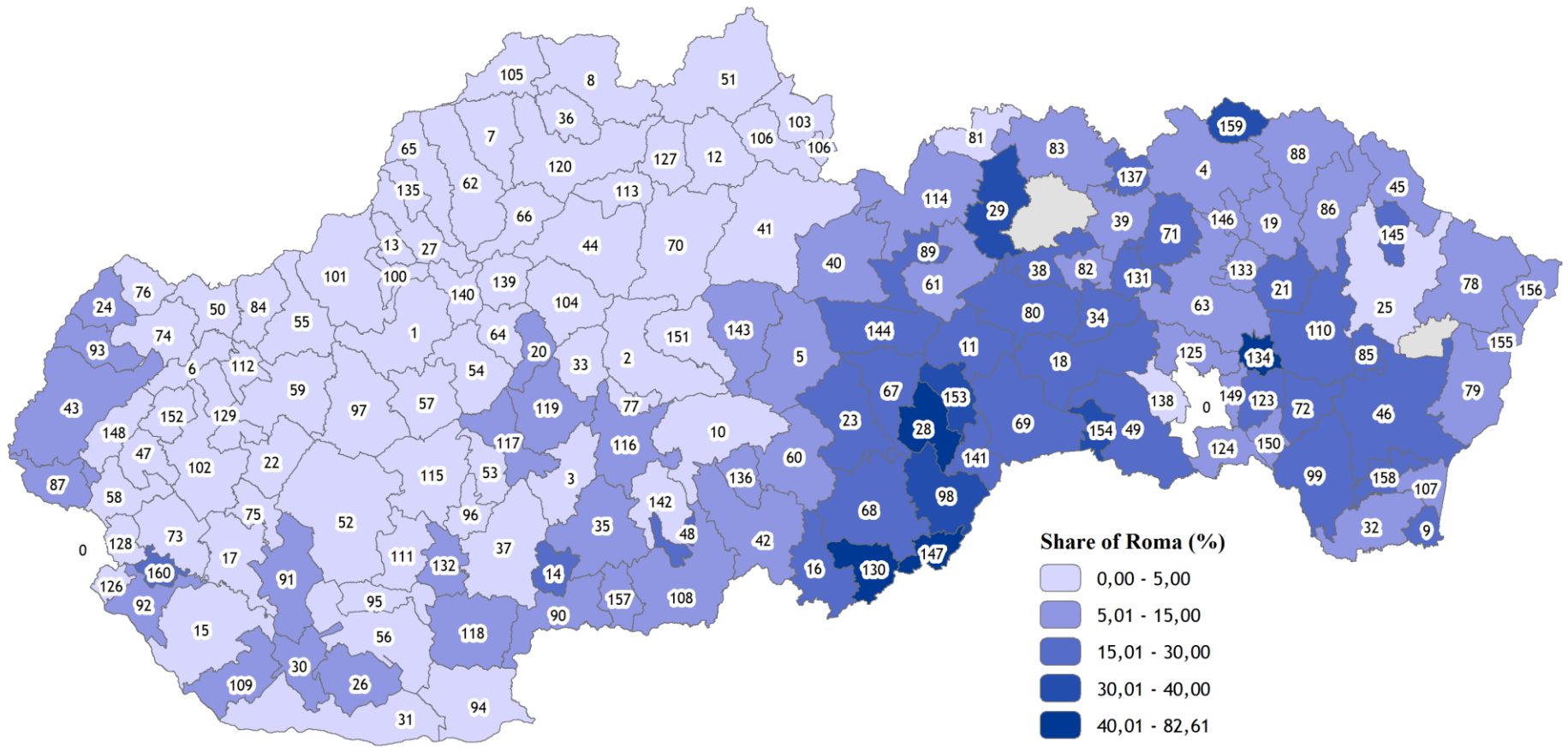


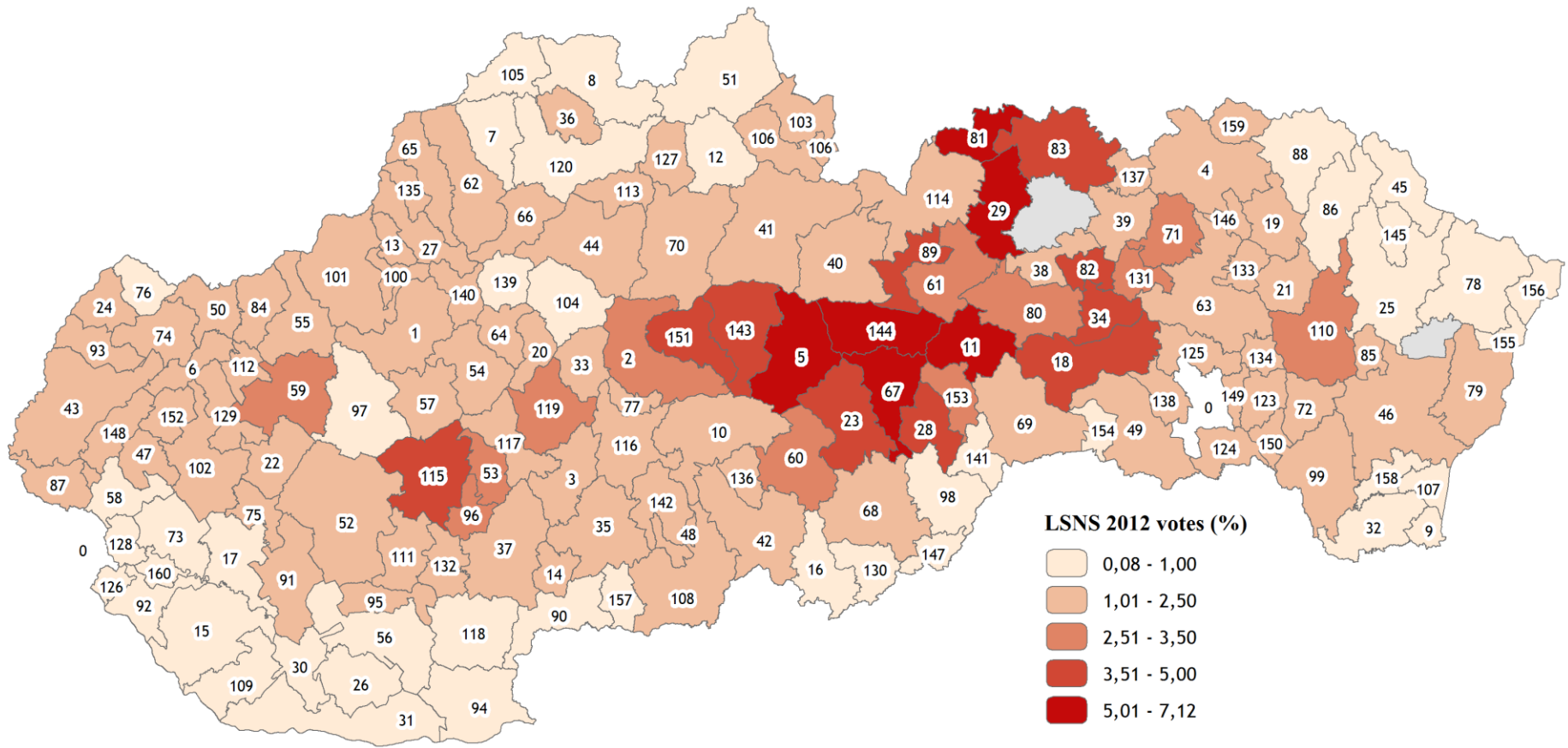
# LSNS and Roma minority

- Party`s framing of the minority:
  - Asocial parasites
  - Gypsy terrorists
- LSNS blames the mainstream parties for being passive and for keeping the majority unprotected
- Trips to towns with Roma settlements
- Kotleba`s purchase of land with an illegal settlement

# Performance in elections

- Originally only minor success in national elections:
  - 2010 – 1,33 %
  - 2012 – 1,58 %
- Kotleba`s unsuccessful attempt to become regional governor in 2010
- Regional election 2013:
  - Kotleba scored second in the first round
  - In runoff Kotleba won over SMER`s incumbent





LSNS 2012 votes (%)

- 0,08 - 1,00
- 1,01 - 2,50
- 2,51 - 3,50
- 3,51 - 5,00
- 5,01 - 7,12

# National elections 2012

- LSNS support grows with rising share of Roma in municipalities
- Maximum votes obtained in areas with 25.1 – 50 per cent Roma
- Slight increase of votes in areas near Roma settlements

# National elections 2016

- LSNS gained 8 per cent (more than 200 000 votes) and entered parliament
- Five times more votes than in 2012 election
- The party won among young people
- Rise of extremism or adoption of protest image?
  - Besides racial hatred, LSNS adopted new topics
  - Immigration, populism, anti-elitism, anti-EU, vaccine hesitancy

# From uniforms to suits



# After 2016



- Train patrols:
  - LSNS started to send patrols to trains into regions with higher share of Roma
- Intensified cooperation with vast network of alternative media to mobilize people
- Proclaimed stress on conservative values and lives of *decent people*
- Despite its anti-elitist stance, the government could rely on LSNS MPs when needed



# Summary

- Strong role of nationalism in Slovak politics
- Increasing extremism in recent decade
- Main representatives (after 1993):
  - SNS – until 2010
  - LSNS – after 2010
- Far-right appeals used also by other parties (SMER-SD, We are Family) when needed