



Does the freedom of information law increase transparency at the local level? Evidence from a field experiment

Peter Spáč^a, Petr Voda^{b,*}, Jozef Zagrapan^c

^a Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Jostova 10, Brno 602 00, Czech Republic

^b International Institute of Political Science, Jostova 10, Brno 602 00, Czech Republic

^c Sociologický ústav SAV, Slovenská akadémia vied, Klemensova 19, Bratislava 813 64, Slovakia

1. Introduction

Transparency is an important attribute of public administration (cf. Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Heald, 2006; Worthy, John, & Vannoni, 2017). In general, information availability facilitates public accountability (cf. Meijer, 2014; Olsen, 2015). Transparency increases control over government, as it allows society to consider information that is otherwise kept secret. Scholars agree that transparency generally enhances public acceptance of political decisions, reduces corruption and provides more legitimacy to democratic governments (de Fine Licht, 2014; Hood, 2006; Meijer, Hart, & Worthy, 2015). In addition, transparency may stimulate the performance of political representatives, as the disclosure of their mistakes and failures can eventually reduce their support (cf. Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2012; James & Moseley, 2014). On the contrary, Fenster (2015) challenges the simplified understanding of transparency and concludes that for a functional state a balance between transparency and secrecy is necessary.

Furthermore, Fenster (2015: 150) argues that “transparency is best understood as a theory of communication that excessively simplifies and thus is blind to the complexities of the contemporary state, government information, and the public”. From this perspective it is important to study less abstract phenomena related to transparency. This article aims to study one such aspect of the concept of transparency – the compliance of officials to FOI legislation. This legislation provides citizens with the right to ask for information and binds public officials to respond to such demands. However, in the end, the requests are processed by officers. Therefore, how the requests are processed is just as important as the implementation of FOI laws.

The first FOI acts were enacted in Sweden in 1766. However, the mass wave of adoption of such law began in 1966, when the USA adopted their FOIA. According to Hazell and Worthy (2010), by 2010 around ninety countries had adopted this legislation, while another fifty were preparing such measures. In 2017, the number of countries with FOI acts was higher than 115 (Freedominfo, 2017). Hence, over time FOI acts have become a rather regular feature in countries worldwide (cf. Walby & Larsen, 2012; Worthy, 2017).

It is crucial to examine to what extent FOI laws are followed in

practical terms. In other words, for FOI acts to fulfil their role in providing access to information to the public, the compliance of public officials is a necessary condition. In a growing number of countries, research on the effectiveness of such laws has already been conducted (cf. Cherry & McMenemy, 2013; Michener, 2015; Michener & Worthy, 2015). These studies mostly cover either Western democracies or developing countries. One of our aims is to contribute to this state of the art by analyzing Slovakia - a relatively new democracy belonging to a group of post-communist countries in Central Europe. So far, this group's compliance with FOI has not been examined by researchers. A profile of Slovakia provides the opportunity to carry out research of FOI compliance in a new context uncovered by the existing literature. Transparency and its consequences do not work free of context, but they depend on the institutional and political factors of political systems (cf. Cucciniello, Porumbescu, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017). This explains why, under some constellations, transparency reinforces the trust of society in public institutions, while in others such effects do not appear (cf. de Fine Licht, 2011; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). This is yet another reason to conduct studies in new contexts.

Researchers agree that central policies are not always followed by local agencies (cf. Berliner, 2017; Ross & Whittaker, 2009). We thus examine whether FOI laws assist the public in their demand for information at the local level. More precisely, we aim to answer how the FOI act improves the chances of receiving information from municipalities and how this effectiveness is affected by the characteristics of municipalities. In doing so, we divided the municipalities into three groups. The control group received a baseline request, while two experimental groups received the same request with an additional paragraph, either including a moral appeal or a reference to FOI act. We found that FOI requests led to a higher responsiveness from local authorities, while the moral appeal had no effect. This relation is already known in the current literature. What is new is that the effect of the content of the requests is moderated by the capacity of the requested authority. While the FOI requests led to a substantially higher response rate by public authorities in less populated municipalities, in bigger cities, which tend to have more staff, this effect is diminished and the form of the request became less relevant. Finally, we also found a

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: pvoda@apps.fss.muni.cz (P. Voda).

substantial effect of several contextual variables. Language barrier decreases the response rate of local authorities from areas with a predominant ethnic minority, whereas the probability of response is higher in municipalities led by a female or independent mayor compared to municipalities with a male or partisan mayor.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part outlines the theoretical background of FOI as a tool for fostering higher levels of transparency in public administration and discusses various forms of information requests. The second part focuses on contextual factors with potential impact on responsiveness of local authorities. After that, the design of our experiment is presented. The fourth part presents the data and methods. Next, the results of our study are shown and the final part concludes our findings.

2. Legal backing and moral appeals of information requests

In general, FOI laws enhance the public right to demand information. They normally enforce proactive transparency, i.e. they require public authorities to publish information about their procedures and outcomes, and also provide grounds for information requests addressed to such authorities (Worthy et al., 2017). With the spread of FOI acts, the research focus on this field has also increased. In recent years a rising amount of literature has been responding to the demand for a better understanding of FOI regimes and institutional factors affecting their impact on society, press, political institutions and their relations (cf. Cherry & McMenemy, 2013; Meijer et al., 2015; Nam, 2012; Worthy, 2010).

Although the existing research provides important knowledge about the overall performance of FOI legislation, its outcomes are mainly based on studies conducted at the national level and on cross-national comparisons. On the other hand, studies of transparency at the local level are rather underdeveloped (cf. Berliner, 2017). The local level of governance is of vital importance though, as citizens are more closely related to local issues and data. As Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007) found in their analysis of a national survey in the USA, the public is not indifferent to the level of transparency on the local level. Other research on local openness has been primarily devoted to measuring the transparency of local institutions. To capture this, some authors (cf. da Cruz, Tavares, Marques, Jorge, & de Sousa, 2016; Esteller-Moré & Otero, 2012; Jorge, Sá, Pattaro, & Lourenço, 2011; Pina, Torres, & Royo, 2007) mainly use the amount and content of data provided by municipalities via official channels, i.e. websites or annual reports, to propose indices of specific segments of local transparency. Although such tools enable the assessment of the level of openness on the local level and provide conditions for wider comparative research, they all remain focused on proactive transparency. Hence, despite the importance, these indices do not map how local institutions react to FOI requests.

In regards to information requests, the compliance of officials to FOI legislation is the crucial aspect of the concept of transparency. Although the FOI acts are adopted by national parliaments, it is the individual level of analysis where the actual mechanism of requesting information takes place. While FOI legislation may prescribe precise rules for the process of handling information requests, it is always an individual public official who responds to and processes such demands from the public. Hence, from the perspective of those applying for information, the implementation of FOI laws is at least as important as their adoption. In other words, ‘freedom of information laws are useful to the extent that they are followed’ (Cuillier, 2010, 203). Given that the central aims of public policies are not always adopted by all offices and agencies (cf. Berliner, 2017; Peters, 2014), the question is what affects the probability that those seeking information will be successful in their effort.

The compliance of public officials when asked for information may vary substantially. According to the works of Roberts (1998) and Snell (2002), compliance may range from the cooperative disposition of officials towards information requests and the requesters to the non-

compliant behavior that includes deliberate non-recording of information in order to avoid future requests or the removal of information from the requested data files. While failure to comply with FOI laws might be case dependent, existing research does provide some guidance as to why it occurs. According to studies in India, lower compliance with FOI laws is caused by a lack of resources, insufficient training of civil servants or their unawareness of the respective legislation (Raag/NCPRI, 2009, 2014). Similarly, in their study of Brazil, Michener, Moncau, and Velasco (2016) identified bureaucratic, legalistic and technical barriers that lead to a difference between provisions of the FOI act and its actual implementation.

More importantly, however, previous studies agree that the content of requests influences the responsiveness of the receiving party and they mostly discuss requests that include either legal grounds or moral appeals. In respect to the former, the previous research indicates that empowering requests with legal backing supports compliance of the receiving party (cf. Fellner, Sausgruber, & Traxler, 2013; Fiorio, Iacus, & Santoro, 2013). This approach is based on the presumption that the request is handled in a more responsive way if it contains some sort of threat (cf. Cuillier, 2010). In respect to information requests, this role is played by the FOI act itself as it provides a stronger footing for the requester in relation to the public authorities. Requests containing a direct reference to the FOI act also place some pressure on public authorities to supply the requested information, as they underscore that the applicants have some leverage over the bureaucracy (cf. Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010).

Although the literature is rather scarce in this regard, it supports the positive effect requests with legal backing have on the response rate of public authorities. Peisakhin and Pinto (2010) conducted a field experiment on access to ration cards for people living in slums in India. They randomly assigned participants into four groups that used different approaches to obtain a ration card. The groups used approaches which included FOI requests, bribery, and NGO support, while the control group applied for the card in the standard manner. As the results showed, the group using FOI requests had a substantially higher probability of receiving the card than the control group and they almost equaled the effectiveness of the bribery option. Peisakhin (2012) later replicated the experiment, now on voting registration, with very similar results. Similarly, Worthy et al. (2017) analyzed parish councils in England and their responsiveness to information requests. Using e-mail, they sent letters to more than four thousand parishes and asked them to send and publish their organizational chart. One half of the parishes were selected as the treatment group and received an FOI request, while the other half, being the control group, received a less formal ask. The authors found that FOI requests led to a higher level of compliance among parishes, with more than double the response rate when compared to the control group.

Another way to ensure compliance of the receiving party is through moral appeals. This approach does not rely on intimidation but instead on increasing trust on the part of the subject who is asked (cf. Cuillier, 2010). This type of request also aims to persuade the receiving party that their compliance is a rightful act which contributes to some higher good. This motive is shown in a paper by Torgler (2004), who ran a controlled field experiment at the communal level in Switzerland. In cooperation with the local tax administration, the author sent letters containing normative appeals to a randomly selected group of citizens. In particular, the letter stressed the role of taxes in keeping the region attractive for its inhabitants and also referred to the sense of responsibility of Swiss citizens.

In contrast to requests using legal threats, the effect of moral appeals is found to be rather mixed. Experimental studies from the field of economy showed only limited effect of normative appeals (cf. Blumenthal, Christian, Slemrod, & Smith, 2001; Torgler, 2004) although here, public authorities were the party sending the requests and not the ones receiving them. A closely related study was provided by Cuillier (2010). In his experiment, school agencies were requested to

provide superintendent contracts and here three versions of letters were delivered: friendly, threatening and neutral. The friendly letter led to slightly higher helpfulness of the school agencies but without increasing the response rate. On the other hand, the threatening letter had a substantially higher amount of responses.

Altogether, the existing literature shows that the content of requests affects compliance behavior, with legal standing and moral appeals having different effects in this matter. Based on the existing research we formulate the following two hypotheses. In case of the moral appeal, the hypothesis is rather tentative as the results of previous research on this matter are mixed:

H1. FOI requests lead to a higher response rate from public authorities than requests sent without reference to an FOI act.

H2. Requests containing a moral appeal lead to a higher response rate from public authorities than requests sent without such reference.

3. Staff, language and political leadership at the local level as possible predictors of responses

The previous section presented theoretical works dealing with the effect of content of information requests on the responsiveness of public authorities. However, there are other factors which impact the compliance of public bodies besides whether the subjects appeal to legal or moral grounds in their requests. So far, researchers have given less attention to features of the local public authorities and the institutional settings in which they operate. This chapter enlists three such variables, namely ethnic composition and language, political leadership and size of staff.

A number of studies, including cross-national works on public surveys, found that people belonging to ethnic minorities respond at substantially lower rates. Among the reasons for this, language barrier is identified as the primary cause of their non-responses (cf. Feskens, 2009; Harzing, 1997; Sheldon, Graham, Potheary, & Rasul, 2007). Therefore, when asked to participate in a survey in the language of the majority, members of ethnic minorities with less knowledge of the language might find themselves to be unable to respond properly. Darch and Underwood (2005) claim that the FOI act needs general preconditions to be effective – citizens “literate and able to understand the dominant discourse of power, both literally and metaphorically”. From this point of view, a different language does not only lead to problems with simply understanding the request, but also to problems of legitimacy between requested and requesting. Language and ethnic differences might affect the behavior of public authorities as well, although more literature is needed here. In his experimental study, Broockman (2013) found that political representatives from minorities reflect interests concerning their own minority to a higher extent, even if they provide them with no electoral gains. His study was later replicated by Pilet, Reimink, and Schrobiltgen (2015) who tested the responsiveness of candidates in local elections in Brussels, however without confirming Broockman's results. In respect to information requests, the language issue might be relevant if the request is handled by a person with lesser knowledge of the language of a request. This might occur in areas with a predominance of ethnic minorities, as representatives of these minorities are elected to local offices and hired as their staff to a greater extent. Based on the theoretical findings, this scenario should lead to a lower response rate by local authorities.

H3. A higher share of ethnic minorities is negatively associated with the response rate of local governments to information requests.

Previous research points to differences in the level of transparency between municipalities led by mayors of different personalities. Fox and Schuhmann (1999) argue that female mayors promote citizen participation and communication to a greater extent than their male counterparts. However, Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2016) did not

confirm this hypothesis in their study about transparency in Spanish municipalities. There is more agreement on the role of the party ideology of a mayor. Albalade del Sol (2013) confirmed the assumption that left-wing governments are more sensitive to providing transparency than right-wing parties. The same finding was replicated by Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2016). However, these scholars differ in their reasoning for this relationship. According to Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007), both left-wing and right-wing parties are interested in transparency. Moreover, we argue that partisans and independents differ in their performance in local politics. Partisans view local politics as a temporary stage of their careers before being promoted by their parties to regional or central politics. In contrast to this, independents typically lack such a perspective and rather maximize their performance on the local level (cf. Gendźwiń, 2012; Reiser & Holtmann, 2008). The higher motivation of independents for better performance also stems from the character of local rallies. While partisans are backed by their parties and their resources, independents rely only on their performance in office (cf. Nagatomi, 2013). Their election support is also less secure as, unlike voting for parties, it is less customary and heuristic (cf. Madison et al. 2014). Based on the previous findings, local independents are expected to have better performance than partisans and this also includes responsiveness to external challenges such as information requests, as this may also affect their record in their constituency.

H4. Local governments led by a female have a higher response rate to information requests than local governments led by a male.

H5. Local governments led by a leftist mayor have a higher response rate to information requests than local governments led by a right-wing mayor.

H6. Local governments led by an independent have a higher response rate to information requests than local governments led by a partisan.

The final influential variable covers the capacities of public bodies. In the recent period, local governments are facing greater expectations of their overall performance (Raudeliūnienė & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2014). To accomplish this, public bodies need enough resources and staff (cf. Lewis & Wood, 2012). In terms of local governments, more populated towns are given more resources (cf. Styles & Tennyson, 2007) and are able to hire more personnel, which gives them an advantage over less populated municipalities. Existing literature confirms that cities with greater populations do more in terms of proactive transparency and provide more access to information (cf. Bearfield & Bowman, 2017; Pina et al., 2007; Sičáková-Beblavá, Kollárik, & Sloboda, 2016). As handling information requests falls under the overall performance of public bodies, the theoretical expectations lead us to formulate the following hypothesis:

H7. Local governments with more staff will have a higher response rate to information requests.

Unlike the language barrier and non-partisan leadership on the local level, staff size can be expected not only to affect the general compliance of public authorities but also to moderate the effect of various versions of information requests on the response rate of these offices. Under the existing demand for overall performance (Raudeliūnienė & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2014), local bodies with lesser capacities might find themselves with a need to prioritize their activities. Regarding information requests, local governments with limited staff might be more willing to answer requests with legal backing. The reason for this is quite straightforward. Requests under an FOI act provide some legal ground for the requester who, in case of a non-response, may appeal and eventually ask the courts for help (cf. Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010). By not answering these information requests, understaffed public bodies risk facing legal processes that require additional resources, which they already lack. On the other hand, information requests without a proper legal backing, such as those with a

moral appeal, can be ignored more easily, as they do not result in any similar legal processing. This should account mostly for local governments with lesser personnel as bodies with more staff often including specialized legal personnel do not need to concern about consequences to not answering to a request backed by FOI act. Hence, for bigger municipalities, the difference between the response rates to various versions of the information requests should be smaller.

H8. Effect of different versions of information requests on response rate of local authorities will be moderated by capacities of these public bodies.

4. Experimental design and procedure

Following the trends in other Central and Eastern European countries, Slovakia adopted its FOI law in 2000. The law itself is quite extensive as it obliges a wide variety of actors, including state authorities, regions and local governments, to provide information to applicants upon request. Users can apply for information via regular or electronic mail and they have to specify the content of the information and the preferred method of delivery. The FOI law requires applicants to provide their full name, address and phone number with their requests.

To test whether and how local governments respond to FOI requests, we designed a field experiment. Using code in R, we divided our sample – all municipalities in Slovakia – into three groups at random and sent them different types of emails. We requested information about the results for both elected and not elected candidates in local elections held in 2010 and 2014. This was information which we needed for our other ongoing research on ballot order effect in systems using alphabetical ranking of candidates. The information we asked for was publicly available only for the ten largest cities in Slovakia. Only the data for elected candidates was available for all other Slovak municipalities. Before we conducted our study, we contacted the two central bodies which manage elections in Slovakia – the Ministry of Interior and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic – to provide us with this information. Both institutions informed us, however, that only municipalities possessed complete electoral results from both years.

We designed three types of mail. In the first version, which we call *baseline*, we introduced our research team and our focus on local elections. We explained that we came across a problem with the lack of availability of complete results of local elections and we mentioned our earlier communication with the central institutions, which had informed us that only municipalities possessed such data. Then, we asked the municipality to send us the 2010 and 2014 lists of local election candidates, both elected and not elected, and the number of votes these candidates received. We asked for their response to be delivered by electronic mail, and we also provided our address and phone number as required by the FOI law. This letter was sent to the control group. The two remaining versions of our letter were sent to experimental groups. These letters were identical to the baseline version, however each contained a short additional paragraph. Although we are aware that the wording of the first request may appear to be an appeal to professionalism, we decided to call it a “moral appeal” as this is line with previous research studies and similar studies; the “legal” variant is thus labelled because we refer to the exact law according to which the municipalities should act.

To be specific, the *moral appeal* version was intended to create a positive reaction by stressing the value and relevance of their cooperation. Its final paragraph highlighted that sending us the requested information would support our research, research that is intended to increase society’s understanding of the local government and also to enhance the quality of functioning of local government in general. On the other hand, the *legal* version included a final paragraph in which we informed the recipients that our request was based on the FOI law that obliges municipalities to provide information, given that it possesses the respective data. Full versions of all three types of letters can be

found in the appendix.

Previous research has identified several requester characteristics which affect the probability of response. Requesters belonging to vulnerable social groups seem to be at a disadvantage (OSJI, 2006), whereas requests from institutionally aligned persons (Michener et al., 2016) had higher rates of obtaining the requested information than other civilians. Also, the gender of the requester showed some effect, as Michener et al. (2016) found some advantages given to men. On the other hand, an experimental study in Mexico showed no discrimination of requesters with common names compared to seemingly influential requesters (Lagunes and Pocasangre, 2017). From this perspective, the way how the letter is signed can influence the response rate. However, all of our letters are signed in same way.

Our population consisted of all 2928 Slovak municipalities, which enabled us to avoid any potential sampling bias. We downloaded their email addresses from a publicly accessible database (<http://www.e-obce.sk/>), checked and confirmed that every municipality had its own specific email account. On Monday 12.10.2015, after the random division, we sent out the mails manually, without any robots or programs which might have made them look like spam. Even though the law states that institutions should reply to FOI requests within eight working days with the option of doubling this time limit, for the purposes of this study, we report and work with all the answers we received within a month.

Furthermore, in our analysis we include variables on partisanship of mayors, ethnic composition and size of municipality. Slovakia uses a first-past-the-post electoral system to elect mayors; therefore, unlike in a parliamentary election (where a party-list proportional representation system, with one nationwide constituency, is used), voters can vote for individual candidates. Slovakia therefore represents a case in which we can study the mediating effects of partisanship, given that some municipalities are run by partisan mayors (backed by different parties or coalitions) and some by independents. In the latest election in 2014, no party was as successful as independents, who won in almost 38% of municipalities. In addition to this, Slovakia provides an opportunity to study language barriers, given the variation in the ethnic composition of municipalities. The Hungarian minority constitutes around 10% of the Slovak population and is concentrated predominantly in the southern part of the country. Also, since Slovakia is a relatively small country, it enables us to examine all the municipalities in the country. Moreover, there is substantial variance in the size of municipalities, which allows us to also examine the role of size.

One of the most important things to consider when designing an experiment is its ethics (e.g. Morton & Williams, 2010). We consider that our experiment possesses no threat to experimental ethics, since we included all the information required by law in the requests and we used no deception. We also did not ask for information we did not need, but for electoral results we were going to use in our ongoing research, and we would also make it all publicly available once we were finished coding it. We signed the e-mails with our real names and we made it clear that the information received would be used for research purposes. Most importantly, the two institutions expected to have the information we requested – the Ministry of Interior and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic – informed us that we should ask the municipalities to provide it.

5. Data and methods

Our dataset uses the municipalities that gave us some sort of response as well as those that did not. The data as well as replication files are included in the on-line appendix. The dependent variable is the response and it is coded into two categories. Value one is given to municipalities that sent us at least some information. These include both responses containing complete data for both local elections we were interested in as well as partially complete responses that included data for at least one of the two elections. In the event that a

Table 1
Coding scheme of the dependent variable.

Value	Types of responses
1	Reply containing data about at least one of the two local elections Direct link or link with guidelines leading to such data Reply only with publicly available data
0	No reply Reply without any data
NA	Unfunctional e-mail address

municipality sent a link, we accepted this as a response containing some information if the link led directly to the requested data or if it was accompanied with guidelines leading to this result. Since the goal is to study the effectiveness of FOI requests, all other municipalities are given the value of zero on the dependent variable. These are municipalities that did not reply at all or they replied but without sending any data on candidates. 102 municipalities in our dataset had non-functioning e-mail addresses in the database; these generated automatic responses which are also coded as non-response. Table 1 presents the coding scheme of the dependent variable.

A crucial independent variable in our analysis is request type, with three categories associated with the above presented versions. The “control” category is comprised of municipalities who received a baseline letter, the “legal” variant is comprised of municipalities who received the letter with the paragraph referring to FOI law and the third category, the “moral appeal” variant, is comprised of municipalities that received a letter with the moral paragraph. Each category covers one third of municipalities. In the analysis, the “control group” is the reference category and the results of analysis are interpreted as the differences between the legal and moral variants as compared to control group.

Furthermore, our research includes variables to control for the mediating effects of partisanship and gender of mayors and language barrier. Therefore, the variable of political background of mayors and the share of Hungarian national minority are covered in the data. The variable on the partisanship of mayors is categorical. It distinguishes five types of mayors according the party which nominated them – left, right-wing, coalition, independents and others. SMER mayors are categorized as leftists, and the category of right-wing mayors includes those nominated by SaS, SDKÚ-DS, KDH, SNS, SIEĽ and MOST-HÍD. When a mayor is nominated by a coalition of parties including leftist and right-wing parties simultaneously or if there is some other party, we put these mayors in the category “coalition”. Gender is a dichotomous variable, where female mayors are coded as 1 and male as 0. In the case of the Hungarian minority variable, we differentiate between four categories based on the municipal share of Hungarians.

The final variable covers the capacities of public bodies. Given that no data source maps the exact number of staff in each Slovak municipality, we use the size of the local population as a proxy. Recent study has shown that bigger municipalities possess more resources and tend to have a greater number of staff. While the smallest villages in Slovakia have less than five employees, as population rises, staff size increases substantially up to several tens of clerks (cf. [Gecíková & Papcunová, 2013](#)). Population size is measured by number inhabitants according to the 2011 Census ([Statistical Office of Slovak Republic, 2011](#); see [Table 2](#)). We use a logged version of this variable, given that many studies on various political issues ([Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998](#); [Boix, 1999](#); [Buhaug & Lujala, 2005](#); [Gowa & Mansfield, 1993](#); [Hegre & Sambanis, 2006](#); [Reitan, Gustafsson, & Blekesaune, 2015](#); [Remmer, 2004](#)) have shown that population as an explanatory factor has a non-linear effect. [Table 3](#) shows the descriptive statistics for the independent and control variables. In the case of categorical variables, the table indicates the proportion of cases in which the given category occurs in our sample.

However, there is some information we do not have. Although we

Table 2
Number of municipalities according to the population size.

Inhabitants	Number of municipalities
< 199	392
200–499	742
500–999	765
1000–1999	574
2000–4999	283
5000–9999	61
10,000–19,999	34
20,000–49,999	29
50,000–99,999	8
Over 100,000	2

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of independent variables.

	Min	Max	Mean	Median	SD
Type of letter					
Control	0.00	1.00	0.34		
Legal	0.00	1.00	0.33		
Moral appeal	0.00	1.00	0.33		
Party affiliation of mayor					
Left	0.00	1.00	0.29		
Right-wing	0.00	1.00	0.12		
Coalition	0.00	1.00	0.13		
Others	0.00	1.00	0.07		
Independent	0.00	1.00	0.38		
Gender of Mayor					
Female	0.00	1.00	0.22		
Hungarian minority					
0–25%	0.00	1.00	0.84		
25–49%	0.00	1.00	0.04		
50–74%	0.00	1.00	0.06		
Over 75%	0.00	1.00	0.06		
LogPopulation	2.64	12.93	6.56	6.49	1.20

sent requests to all municipalities, we do not know who actually responded to us, or in the case of non-response, who decided not to send the requested information. Even more fundamentally, we do not know whether the non-response was intentional or just accidental. Unfortunately, to gain such information, we would have to approach this question with completely different research, and this would be hardly useful for solving our main question about the effect of using FOI in asking for information.

Binomial logistic regression is employed to analyze the data and evaluate the effect of form of request on the probability of response. This method is chosen because of the nature of the dependent variable and the structure of data. This kind of analysis evaluates the influence of individual characteristics connected to the cases (in this analysis, municipalities) on the chance a certain event will happen or not. The following model is constructed to analyze the relations between the chance of getting a response and a set of independent variables which includes an experimental group and control variables.

6. Results

The first part of the analysis deals with the description of the dependent variable. [Table 4](#) describes the ratio between the type of response and how it correlates with different types of requests. Our requests were thus effectively sent to 2826 municipalities. Out of these, 834 sent us at least some of the information requested about local candidates, or attempted to send us the information by providing us with a link. On the other hand, 2070 municipalities did not reply at all and 25 municipalities sent a response without any data. Thus, a total of 2095 municipalities did not respond with any information. This means that we received answers with some information from almost one third

Table 4
Replies to information requests.

	Total	Absolute N		Relative	
		No info	Some info	No info	Some info
Control	961	750	211	78.04	21.96
Legal	943	529	414	56.1	43.9
Moral appeal	922	713	209	77.33	22.67
Total	2826	2095	834	70.49	29.51

of all municipalities. Among the experimental groups, the highest proportion of responses with some information was received in response to requests containing reference to the FOI act; > 2/5 of municipalities queried sent us the requested data. The control and moral appeal variants received the information requested in only about 1/5 of the cases and there is no significant difference found between the two groups.

The response rate is relatively high compared to other similar studies. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that we ask for information which is generally publicly available. All results of other elections (parliamentary, presidential, regional), including the names of candidates, are published on the webpage of the Slovak Statistical Office. Moreover, our requests mentioned our university affiliation and academic titles, which has previously been found to be an advantage (Lagunes and Pocasangre, 2017; Michener et al., 2016).

There is an interesting trend in responses over time (Fig. 1). We received approximately one third of all answers by the end of the second day after sending the requests and more than half of the replies arrived within three days. Moreover, 610 out of all 834 received answers were sent during the first week. The speed of the replies only slightly differed in relation to the type of requests. Both the baseline and legal versions had the same average response time. On the other hand, responses to the moral variant took one day longer on average.

The results of the binomial logistic regression clearly support the first hypothesis about the effect of FOI requests. E-mail requests referencing FOI law have almost three times greater odds of being processed

than requests without such reference (see Model 1 in Table 5). However, as we do not find any substantive difference in obtaining a response between the control group and e-mails with moral incentives, we cannot confirm the hypotheses that moral appeals lead to a higher response rate from public authorities than requests sent without such reference. The results also show that several of the control variables proved to be significantly influential. Municipal population size is found to be a strong predictor of receiving a response. Requests processed in the largest towns have an approximately ten times greater chance of being answered than the same request in the smallest municipalities. Since the variable “size of municipality” is logged, we illustrate the effect in a more understandable way below (see Fig. 2).

Moreover, size of municipality also affects the influence of the form of request (see Model 2 in Table 5). In small municipalities, the chance of FOI requests being processed is about seven times higher than other forms of requests, but it is still much lower than in more populated municipalities. These differences fade away with growing population size and the probability of responding to a FOI request compared to other versions is only slightly and insignificantly higher among municipalities with > 20,000 people.

Regarding the personalities of mayors, we found a strong and significant effect of gender. The chances of receiving an answer from municipalities governed by a female mayor are one third higher than from municipalities led by a male mayor. This result is in line with our hypothesis H5. Another important variable is the party affiliation of mayors. The odds ratios indicate that requests have a greater chance of being processed in municipalities with independent mayors than in municipalities with partisan mayors. This might indicate that, as expected, independents are more oriented towards maximizing their performance on the local level than their partisan counterparts. However, we do not find any evidence about the differences between municipalities led by leftist and right-wing mayors (see model 2 in Table 5).

These results are opposite to those of Araujo and Tejedo-Romero (2016) on the case of Spain. The missing effect of ideology in our study may be the result of the lack of interest in transparency among both leftist and right-wing parties and by the nature of parties and

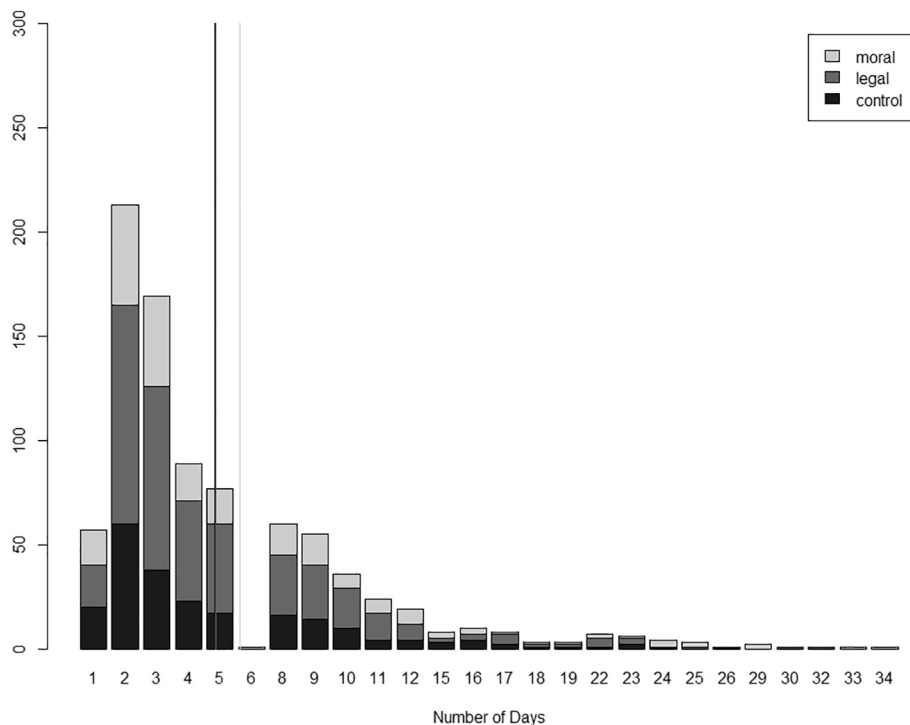


Fig. 1. Received responses on time axis.

Table 5
Odds ratios from binary logistic regression.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Odds ratio	Conf. int.		Odds ratio	Conf. int.		Odds ratio	Conf. int.	
		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%		2.5%	97.5%
Type of letter (control is ref. category)									
Legal	2.82 ^a	2.29	3.47	5.72 ^a	1.70	19.52	5.65 ^a	1.68	19.23
Moral appeal	1.02	0.81	1.27	1.42	0.37	5.42	1.36	0.36	5.17
Party affiliation of mayor									
Reference	left			left			partisans		
Right	1.15	0.84	1.57	1.16	0.85	1.58			
Others	0.96	0.64	1.44	0.97	0.65	1.45			
Coalition	1.25	0.93	1.67	1.25	0.93	1.67			
Independent	1.36 ^b	1.09	1.70	1.36 ^b	1.09	1.70	1.26 ^a	1.05	1.50
Gender (“Male” is ref. category)									
Female	1.33 ^a	1.08	1.64	1.33 ^a	1.08	1.64	1.33 ^a	1.08	1.64
Hungarian minority (“0–25%” is ref. category)									
25–49%	1.23	0.78	1.91	1.24	0.79	1.92	1.24	0.79	1.92
50–74%	1.38 ^c	0.95	1.99	1.39 ^c	0.95	2.00	1.37 ^c	0.96	1.95
Over 75%	0.74	0.50	1.09	0.74	0.50	1.09	0.73 ^c	0.50	1.05
LogPopulation	1.54	1.44	1.67	1.63 ^a	1.42	1.87	1.64 ^a	1.44	1.88
Legal * LogPopulation				0.90	0.75	1.08	0.90	0.75	1.08
Moral * LogPopulation				0.95	0.79	1.16	0.96	0.79	1.16
Intercept	0.01 ^a	0.01	0.03	0.01 ^a	0.01	0.02	0.01 ^a	0.01	0.02

N = 2826.

^a Sig. on level 99%.

^b Sig. on level 95%.

^c Sig. on level 90%.

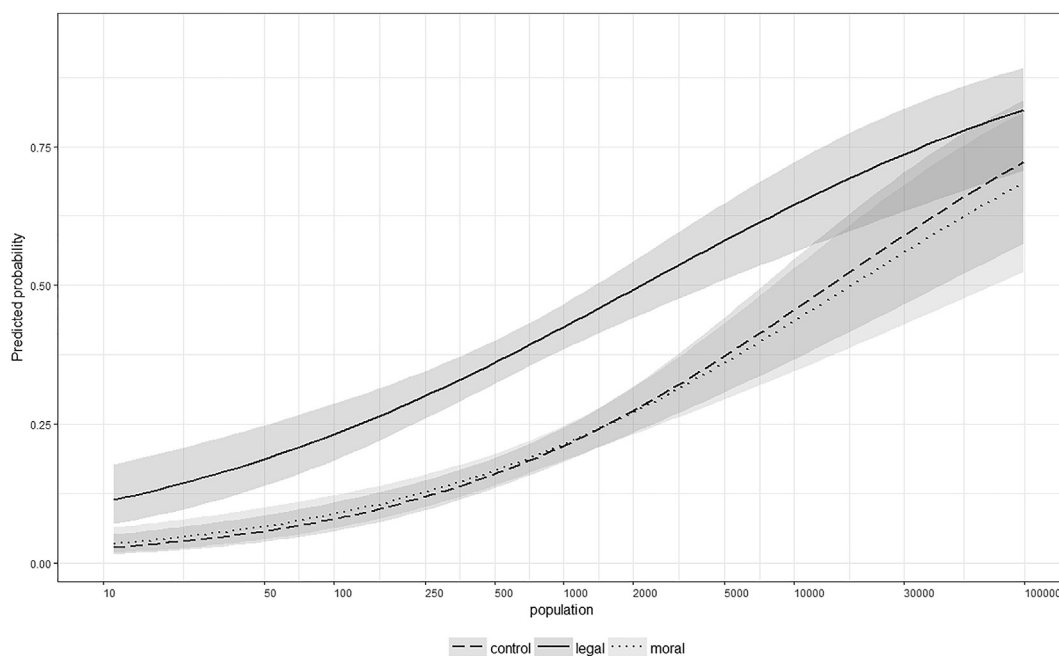


Fig. 2. Probabilities of receiving a response according to size of municipality.

competition on the local level, where parties do not articulate clear ideological stances and where candidates are often supported by a very heterogeneous group of parties, thus making it difficult to identify the ideological position of mayors. On the contrary, the effect of gender may stem from the fact that Slovakia is a younger democracy than Spain. Female politicians in Slovakia (Bitušiková, 2005), and in the Central-East European region generally (Clavero & Galligan, 2005; LaFont, 2001), have to overcome greater barriers than in Spain and therefore they may be more motivated to behave differently than their male counterparts.

In the previous section we presented the odds ratios of the chances of receiving a response. As the substantive meaning of the obtained effect can be misleading when presented in this fashion, the odds ratios are computed to probabilities. Table 6 shows us the predicted probabilities for all combinations of categorical independent variables from model 3 when the size of municipality is average (approximately 700 inhabitants). The effect of population size as the effect of the cardinal variable is illustrated in the chart below. Values of response probability are the highest when an FOI request is sent to municipalities which have both a predominant Slovak population and an independent female

Table 6
Probabilities of receiving a response with some information in different situations.

Type of letter	Minority	Mayor	Gender	Response probability	Confidence interval	
Control	Hungarians < 75%	Independent	Male	0.22	0.19	0.26
			Female	0.27	0.23	0.32
		Other	Male	0.18	0.16	0.21
			Female	0.23	0.19	0.28
	Hungarians > 75%	Independent	Male	0.17	0.12	0.24
			Female	0.21	0.15	0.30
		Other	Male	0.14	0.10	0.20
			Female	0.18	0.12	0.25
Moral appeal	Hungarians < 75%	Independent	Male	0.23	0.19	0.26
			Female	0.28	0.23	0.33
		Other	Male	0.19	0.16	0.22
			Female	0.24	0.19	0.28
	Hungarians > 75%	Independent	Male	0.17	0.12	0.24
			Female	0.22	0.16	0.30
		Other	Male	0.14	0.10	0.20
			Female	0.18	0.13	0.26
Legal	Hungarians < 75%	Independent	Male	0.45	0.40	0.49
			Female	0.52	0.46	0.58
		Other	Male	0.39	0.35	0.43
			Female	0.46	0.41	0.52
	Hungarians > 75%	Independent	Male	0.37	0.28	0.47
			Female	0.44	0.34	0.54
		Other	Male	0.32	0.24	0.41
			Female	0.38	0.29	0.49

Note: Population is set on 700.

mayor. More precisely, in such a case, the probability of receiving an answer containing some information is about 50%. On the contrary, other forms of requests sent to dominantly Hungarian municipalities with male mayors only have a 15% probability of being positively processed. The effect of the presence of a Hungarian minority is similar to findings by [Darch and Underwood \(2005\)](#). They analyzed FOI requests in South Africa and argued that language diversity may be one of reasons for the rather poor performance of FOI legislation.

[Fig. 2](#) illustrates that the evolution of response probability is dependent on the size of municipality and type of request. The upper solid line clearly indicates that FOI requests have a significantly higher chance of being answered than other forms of requests in municipalities with < 10,000 inhabitants (dotted and dashed lines). With rising population, the confidence intervals start to overlap and differences become insignificant. The chart also illustrates the non-linearity of the relation between size of municipality and probability of obtaining a response to a request. In the case of FOI requests, the probability rises from 15 to 40% when population grows from around ten in the smallest municipality to 1000, and a probability of 50% is reached in municipalities with about 2000 inhabitants. When the population rises even further, the probability rises gradually and, due to the low number of cases of large municipalities in our data (see [Table 3](#)), the confidence intervals become wider. With other types of requests, the rise in probability among municipalities with < 1000 inhabitants is less steep as compared to the legal variant, however then the slope becomes steeper and the probabilities in the biggest municipalities reach almost the same level as the legal variant.

7. Conclusion

This research provides insights into how local authorities function and how responsive they are to information requests. Optimally, when asked for identical information, public offices should respond to such requests in the same manner. Our field experiment, encompassing all 2928 municipalities in Slovakia, contradicts this and it shows that the form of information request is influential in this regard.

Our results prove that in respect to achieving a higher response rate, FOI requests are superior to other forms of information requests ([H1](#)). The conducted analysis shows that referring to FOI acts leads to several

times higher odds in receiving the requested information. On the other hand, including a moral appeal in the information request has no effect in this respect and the response rate to such requests was found to be the same as in the control group ([H2a](#)). Hence, we confirm our first hypothesis but we found no support for hypothesis two.

Until this point our findings are consistent with the existing literature (cf. [Cuillier, 2010](#); [Fellner et al., 2013](#); [Worthy et al., 2017](#)). However, our analysis improves the understanding of the effect of FOI requests by including the moderation effect of population. A crucial outcome is that differences between various forms of information requests are related to the size of municipalities. With rising population, the responsiveness for all versions of letters increases. This supports our expectation that bigger municipalities, which hire more staff, are able to deal with requests more effectively ([H7](#)). Considerable differences were found among the three versions of the letters when they were sent to municipalities with smaller populations. Here, the differences are substantial and significant. This leads to the conclusion that smaller localities and their personnel are more likely to be intimidated by information requests that are legally backed by FOI acts ([H8](#)). So, while FOI requests lead to higher responsiveness in municipalities with smaller populations, the form of request becomes less relevant with rising population. This finding is essential, as it shows the public different possibilities for asking for information from local authorities in various local contexts.

Apart from this, we found that the probability of obtaining an answer including at least some information is also affected by the ethnic composition of municipalities and the political affiliation and gender of mayors. In the case of Slovakia, the predominance of a minority from a different language family decreased the success rate of information requests potentially due to language barrier ([H3](#)). Such a finding mainly applies for countries with ethnic compositions similar to that of Slovakia, i.e. countries with relevant ethnic minorities concentrated in specific areas. In regions which have a predominant minority population, requests using the minority language may increase the response rate of the authorities. Finally, we found that towns with independent mayors responded more often ([H6](#)). This finding may be attributed to the higher responsiveness of independents to react to non-partisan initiatives, i.e. from voters, the media, the wider public etc. from below. However, our results do not indicate any important differences between

mayors from parties holding different ideological positions. Finally, contrary to previous research, we found some support for the idea that municipalities with female mayors are more compliant with FOI laws.

This research represents an important contribution to the theoretical debate about the effectiveness of FOI requests and their impact on public accountability. Our field experiment shows that, in a country which has adopted an FOI act, citizens should not consider this as an automatic guarantee that public bodies operate in such a transparent regime. On the contrary, when seeking information, citizens should be encouraged to reference the FOI act in their information requests, at least when local authorities are in play. What is more, inclusion of moral appeals seems to be irrelevant, as they bring no increase in the success rate of information requests and in fact even prolong the response rate. These suggestions are vital, especially in localities with smaller populations, as here the form of information request affects the responsiveness to a greater extent as compared to highly populated centers.

Declaration of interest

No author has any financial and personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence our work.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Czech Science Foundation (GA18-15700S) and by Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV-14-0527).

Appendix A. Appendix

A.1. Baseline variant

Dear Madam/Sir,

We are a research team from [...] and we are focusing on local elections in Slovakia in 2010 and 2014. We however encountered a problem, as both the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic do not have data about results of candidates in these elections. According to these two offices, only municipalities possess such information.

In this regard, we would like to ask you to send us lists of candidates (both elected and not elected) that competed in your town in local elections and the number of votes they received. We need this data for the two most recent local elections, held in 2010 and 2014. In case local elections are held in more constituencies in your town, we kindly ask you to send us data for all these constituencies. We ask these data to be delivered via electronic mail.

Best regards,

A.2. Moral appeal variant

Dear Madam/Sir,

We are a research team from [...] and we are focusing on local elections in Slovakia in 2010 and 2014. We however encountered a problem, as both the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic do not have data about results of candidates in these elections. According to these two offices, only municipalities possess such information.

In this regard, we would like to ask you to send us lists of candidates (both elected and not elected) that competed in your town in local elections and the number of votes they received. We need this data for the two most recent local elections, held in 2010 and 2014. In case local elections are held in more constituencies in your town, we kindly ask you to send us data for all these constituencies. We ask these data to be delivered via electronic mail.

Your cooperation is very important, as our research will lead to

greater understanding of functioning of local government by the society. Our work also aims to increase the quality of governance on the local level.

Best regards,

A.3. Legal variant

Dear Madam/Sir,

We are a research team from [...] and we are focusing on local elections in Slovakia in 2010 and 2014. We however encountered a problem, as both the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic do not have data about results of candidates in these elections. According to these two offices, only municipalities possess such information.

In this regard, we would like to ask you to send us lists of candidates (both elected and not elected) that competed in your town in local elections and the number of votes they received. We need this data for the two most recent local elections, held in 2010 and 2014. In case local elections are held in more constituencies in your town, we kindly ask you to send us data for all these constituencies. We ask these data to be delivered via electronic mail.

We submit our request based on Law No. 211/2000C. of free access to information that in its §2 defines municipalities as mandatory actors and at the same time it obliges them to provide information they possess.

Best regards,

References

- Araujo, J. F. F. E., & Tejedo-Romero, F. (2016). Local government transparency index: Determinants of municipalities' rankings. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 29(4), 327–347.
- Bauhr, M., & Grimes, M. (2014). Indignation or resignation: The implications of transparency for societal accountability. *Governance*, 27(2), 291–320.
- Bearfield, D. A., & Bowman, A. O. M. (2017). Can you find it on the web? An assessment of municipal e-government transparency. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(2), 172–188.
- Berliner, D. (2017). Sunlight or window dressing? Local government compliance with South Africa's promotion of access to information act. *Governance*, 30(4), 641–661.
- Bitušiková, A. (2005). (In)visible women in political life in Slovakia. *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 41(6), 1005–1021.
- Blais, A., & Dobrzynska, A. (1998). Turnout in electoral democracies. *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(2), 239–261.
- Blumenthal, M., Christian, C., Slemrod, J., & Smith, M. G. (2001). Do normative appeals affect tax compliance? Evidence from a controlled experiment in Minnesota. *National Tax Journal*, 54(1), 125–138.
- Boix, C. (1999). Setting the rules of the game: The choice of electoral systems in advanced democracies. *American Political Science Review*, 93(3), 609–624.
- Broockman, D. E. (2013). Black politicians are more intrinsically motivated to advance Blacks' interests: A field experiment manipulating political incentives. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), 521–536.
- Buhaug, H., & Lujala, P. (2005). Accounting for scale: Measuring geography in quantitative studies of civil war. *Political Geography*, 24(4), 399–418.
- Cherry, M., & McMenemy, D. (2013). Freedom of information and 'vexatious' requests—The case of Scottish local government. *Government Information Quarterly*, 30(3), 257–266.
- Clavero, S., & Galligan, Y. (2005). 'A job in politics is not for women': Analysing barriers to Women's political representation in CEE. *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 41(6), 979–1004.
- da Cruz, N. F., Tavares, A. F., Marques, R. C., Jorge, S., & de Sousa, L. (2016). Measuring local government transparency. *Public Management Review*, 18(6), 866–893.
- Cucciniello, M., Porumbescu, G. A., & Grimmelikhuisen, S. (2017). 25 years of transparency research: Evidence and future directions. *Public Administration Review*, 77(1), 32–44.
- Cuillier, D. (2010). Honey v. Vinegar: Testing compliance-gaining theories in the context of freedom of information laws. *Communication Law and Policy*, 15(3), 203–229.
- Darch, C., & Underwood, P. G. (2005). Freedom of information legislation, state compliance and the discourse of knowledge: The south African experience. *The International Information & Library Review*, 37(2), 77–86.
- Esteller-Moré, A., & Otero, J. P. (2012). Fiscal transparency. (why) does your local government respond? *Public Management Review*, 14(8), 1153–1173.
- Fellner, G., Sausgruber, R., & Traxler, C. (2013). Testing enforcement strategies in the field: Threat, moral appeal and social information. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 11(3), 634–660.
- Fenster, M. (2015). Transparency in search of a theory. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 18(2), 150–167.
- Feskens, R. C. (2009). *Difficult groups in survey research and the development of tailor-made*

- approach strategies. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek; Utrecht University.
- de Fine Licht, J. (2011). Do we really want to know? The potentially negative effect of transparency in decision making on perceived legitimacy. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 34(3), 183–201.
- de Fine Licht, J. (2014). Policy area as a potential moderator of transparency effects: An experiment. *Public Administration Review*, 74(3), 361–371.
- Fiorio, C. V., Iacus, S. M., & Santoro, A. (2013). *Taxpaying response of small firms to an increased probability of audit: some evidence from Italy*. Bicocca Department of Economics, Management and statistics; University of Milan.
- Fox, R., & Schuhmann, R. (1999). Gender and local government: A comparison of women and men city managers. *Public Administration Review*, 59(3), 231–242.
- Freedominfo (2017). freedominfo.org: Chronological and Alphabetical lists of countries with FOI regimes. www.freedominfo.org/?p=18223.
- Geciková, I., & Papcunová, V. (2013). The structure of personal facilities local government offices in the Slovak Republic. *International Colloquium on Regional Sciences* (pp. 451–458). Brno: Masaryk University.
- Gendźwił, A. (2012). Independent mayors and local lists in large Polish cities: Towards a non-partisan model of local government? *Local Government Studies*, 38(4), 501–518.
- Gowa, J., & Mansfield, E. D. (1993). Power politics and international trade. *American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 408–420.
- Grimmelikhuijsen, S. G., & Meijer, A. J. (2012). Effects of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of a government organization: Evidence from an online experiment. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 24(1), 137–157.
- Harzing, A. W. (1997). Response rates in international mail surveys: Results of a 22-country study. *International Business Review*, 6(6), 641–665.
- Hazell, R., & Worthy, B. (2010). Assessing the performance of freedom of information. *Government Information Quarterly*, 27(4), 352–359.
- Heald, D. (2006). Varieties of transparency. In C. Hood, & D. Heald (Eds.). *Transparency: The key to better governance* (pp. 25–43). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegre, H., & Sambanis, N. (2006). Sensitivity analysis of empirical results on civil war onset. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(4), 508–535.
- Hood, C. (2006). Transparency in historical perspective. In C. Hood, & D. Heald (Eds.). *Transparency: The key to better governance?* (pp. 3–23). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- James, O., & Moseley, A. (2014). Does performance information about public services affect Citizens' perceptions, satisfaction, and voice behaviour? Field experiments with absolute and relative performance information. *Public Administration*, 92(2), 493–511.
- Jorge, S., Sá, P. M., Pattaro, A. F., & Lourenço, R. P. (2011). Local government financial transparency in Portugal and Italy: A comparative exploratory study on its determinants. *13th biennial CIGAR conference, Bridging public sector and non-profit sector accounting*.
- LaFont, S. (2001). One step forward, two steps back: Women in the post-communist states. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 34(2), 203–220.
- Lagunes, Paul, & Pocasangre, Oscar (2017). *Dynamic transparency: An audit of Mexico's freedom of information act*. Inter-American development bank.
- Lewis, D. E., & Wood, A. K. (2012). *The paradox of agency responsiveness: A federal FOIA experiment*. Working Paper 06–2012. Nashville: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions.
- Madison, T. P., Rold, M., & Honeycutt, J. (2014). How partisans differ from independents: The imaginative functions of self-understanding, rehearsal, and relationship maintenance. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 34(2), 105–116.
- Meijer, A. (2014). Transparency. In M. Bovens, R. E. Goodin, & T. Schillemans (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of public accountability* (pp. 507–524). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meijer, A., Hart, P., & Worthy, B. (2015). Assessing government transparency: An interpretive framework. *Administration & Society*, 50(4), 501–526.
- Michener, G. (2015). Assessing freedom of information in Latin America a decade later: Illuminating a transparency causal mechanism. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(3), 77–99.
- Michener, G., Moncau, L. F., & Velasco, R. B. (2016). *The Brazilian state and transparency: Evaluating compliance with freedom of information*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV.
- Michener, G., & Worthy, B. (2015). The information-gathering matrix: A framework for conceptualizing the use of freedom of information laws. *Administration & Society*, 50(4), 476–500. Advance online publication <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399715590825>.
- Morton, R. B., & Williams, K. C. (2010). *Experimental political science and the study of causality: From nature to the lab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagatomi, K. (2013). *Independent success in mayoral elections in England: A study of factors contributing to the Candidates' success*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Nam, T. (2012). Freedom of information legislation and its impact on press freedom: A cross-national study. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4), 521–531.
- Olsen, J. P. (2015). Democratic order, autonomy, and accountability. *Governance*, 28(4), 425–440.
- OSJI (2006). *Transparency & silence: A survey of access to information laws and practices in 14 countries*. Open Society Institute.
- Peisakhin, L. (2012). Transparency and corruption: Evidence from India. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, 55(1), 129–149.
- Peisakhin, L., & Pinto, P. (2010). Is transparency an effective anti-corruption strategy? Evidence from a field experiment in India. *Regulation & Governance*, 4(3), 261–280.
- Peters, B. G. (2014). Accountability in public administration. In M. Bovens, R. E. Goodin, & T. Schillemans (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of public accountability* (pp. 211–225). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pilet, J. B., Reimink, E., & Schrobiltgen, M. H. (2015). *Vote-seeking vs. intrinsic representation in multimember districts. Results of a field experiment held in Brussels. ECPR General Conference 2015, Montreal*.
- Pina, V., Torres, L., & Royo, S. (2007). Are ICTs improving transparency and accountability in the EU regional and local governments? An empirical study. *Public Administration*, 85(2), 449–472.
- Piotrowski, S. J., & Van Ryzin, G. G. (2007). Citizen attitudes toward transparency in local government. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 37(3), 306–323.
- Raudeliūnienė, J., & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, I. (2014). Analysis of factors motivating human resources in public sector. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 110, 719–726.
- Reiser, M., & Holtmann, E. (Eds.). (2008). *Farewell to the party model?: Independent local lists in east and west European countries*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft.
- Reitan, M., Gustafsson, K., & Blekesaune, A. (2015). Do local government reforms result in higher levels of Trust in Local Politicians? *Local Government Studies*, 41(1), 156–179.
- Remmer, K. L. (2004). Does foreign aid promote the expansion of government? *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(1), 77–92.
- Right to Information Assessment and Analysis Group and Centre for Equity Studies (Raag/CES) (2014). *Peoples Monitoring of the RTI Regime in India 2011–13*. New Delhi: NCPRI.
- Right to Information Assessment and Analysis Group and National Campaign for People's Right to Information (Raag/NCPRI) (2009). *Safeguarding the right to information – Report of the People's RTI assessment 2008*. New Delhi: NCPRI.
- Roberts, A. (1998). *Limited access: Assessing the health of Canada's freedom of information laws*. Working paper/School of Policy Studies, Queen's University.
- Ross, J., & Whittaker, P. (2009). Freedom of information: Is openness too expensive, too difficult or too dangerous? *Journal of Finance and Management in Public Services*, 7(1), 53–70.
- Sheldon, H., Graham, C., Potheary, N., & Rasul, F. (2007). *Increasing response rates amongst black and minority ethnic and seldom heard groups*. Oxford: Picker Institute Europe.
- Sičáková-Beblavá, E., Kollárik, M., & Sloboda, M. (2016). Exploring the determinants of transparency of Slovak municipalities. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 9(2), 121–145.
- Snell, R. (2002). Pol and the delivery of diminishing returns, or how spin-doctors and journalists have mistreated a volatile reform. *An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 2(3), 187–207.
- Sol, D. A. (2013). The institutional, economic and social determinants of local government transparency. *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, 16(1), 90–107.
- Statistical Office of Slovak Republic (2011). *Census 2011*. Bratislava: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic.
- Styles, A. K., & Tennyson, M. (2007). The accessibility of financial reporting of US municipalities on the internet. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 19(1), 56.
- Torgler, B. (2004). Moral suasion: An alternative tax policy strategy? Evidence from a controlled field experiment in Switzerland. *Economics of Governance*, 5(3), 235–253.
- Walby, K., & Larsen, M. (2012). Access to information and freedom of information requests: Neglected means of data production in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(1), 31–42.
- Welch, E. W., Hinnant, C. C., & Moon, M. J. (2005). Linking citizen satisfaction with E-government and Trust in Government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(3), 371–391.
- Worthy, B. (2010). More open but not more trusted? The effect of the freedom of information act 2000 on the United Kingdom central government. *Governance*, 23(4), 561–582.
- Worthy, B. (2017). *The politics of freedom of information. How and why governments pass laws that threaten their power*. Manchester: Manchester University press.
- Worthy, B., John, P., & Vannoni, M. (2017). Transparency at the parish pump: A field experiment to measure the effectiveness of freedom of information requests in England. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 27(3), 485–500.

Peter Spáč is assistant professor at Department of Political Science at Masaryk University. His research interest includes electoral systems, political parties and Slovak politics.

Petr Voda is a postdoctoral associate at the International Institute of Political Science, Masaryk University. His research focuses on local government, electoral behavior and electoral geography.

Jozef Zagrapan is a postdoctoral associate at the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, with current focus mainly on Slovakia in cross-national comparative research.