

# Spatial vote spillovers for Populistic Radical Right Parties due to university educational attainment: The Case of Slovakia

Dana Kuběnková<sup>1</sup>, Štefan Reháč<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Economics in Bratislava, Department of Public Administration and Regional Development, [dana.kubenkova@euba.sk](mailto:dana.kubenkova@euba.sk)

<sup>2</sup>University of Economics in Bratislava, Department of Public Administration and Regional Development, [stefan.rehak@euba.sk](mailto:stefan.rehak@euba.sk)

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to estimate spatial vote spillovers for Populistic Radical Right Parties due to university educational attainment. Motivation for this article lies in unquestionable surge of Populistic Radical Right Parties and their voting support across the countries of European Union. This article aims to fill the literature gap in the field of populist radical right voting by implementing spatial econometric models to estimate spatial vote spillovers for PRRP while considering both contextual and compositional effects of spatial voting patterns – education and neighborhood effect, relying on the presumption that people who talk together, vote together. In general, based on the specification of model our results implies that university educational attainment has statistically significant negative effect on voter support for LSNS.

**Keywords:** university educational attainment, PRRP, spatial vote spillovers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of Populist Radical Right Parties, favoring populism, anti-immigrant rhetoric, xenophobic views, and Euroscepticism, has become recently widespread across the countries of European Union along with their voting support (Hainsworth, 2008; Colantone and Staning, 2019). In this article, we define Populistic Radical Right Parties (PRRP) in accordance with Mudde's definition (2007) as political parties with a core ideology that is a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. While nativism is an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that nonnative elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous group. Authoritarianism refers to the belief in a strictly ordered society. Populism is understood as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately divided into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – the pure people versus, the corrupted elite", arguing that politics should be the *volonté generale* of the people. We consider this phenomenon as undesirable relying on Muller (2017), who point out to the surge of PRRP as potential threat not only to liberal democracy, but even democracy itself. Moreover, Rodríguez-Pose (2018) states, that more populism means less economic stability and inefficient governments and policies. Current voting dynamics in favor of PRRP can be partly manifestation of discontent, which is linked to rising social inequalities and polling booths are powerful tools to pinpoint the voice of discontent (van Leeuwen and Vega, 2021). In case of Brexit in 2016 the results of study provided by Rodríguez- Pose (2018) „Leave votes” were concentrated in industrial declining and disadvantaged areas, after Rodríguez-Pose labelled this phenomenon as „*revenge of the places that don't matter*”. In addition, Becker et al. (2017) found out that vote patterns of leaving votes coincided with geographical patterns of education, income, public services, unemployment, and dependence on the manufacturing sector. In this

respect, authors van Leeuwen and Vega, 2021 identify two effects, that can explain spatial voting patterns – compositional and contextual factors. In our work we will further focus only on two specific components of these effects. Firstly, we decided for education as compositional effect, as it is recognized as one of the most common and used factors in models eliciting support for PRRP. The plausible hypothesis is that lower educated people are more likely to vote for PRRP (Ivarslafte and Stubager, 2013). There are two possible explanations of the link between education and voting support for PRRP in the literature. The former one relates to relationship between education and material position, which implies that PRRP will perform better when economic times are worse and in geographically disadvantaged areas that are comparatively poor (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Potential explanation can also relate to lack of opportunities for less educated individuals, which can result in stronger affection by crises which can worsen regional disparities (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Another view is that educated citizens can create an externality, that may benefit all citizens – they can make more informed choices on election day. Better educated citizens can be more informed voters and they can also process a given amount of information more reasonably due to cognitive skills improvement provided by education (Moretti, 2004). The latter one refers to relationship between education and values, implying that university students are socialized into certain libertarian political principles and norms (Stubager, 2008). Secondly, we chose neighborhood effect as contextual effect offers two mechanisms in relation of voting for PRRP – direct and indirect mechanisms. Direct effect explains that electoral patterns result from spatial variations in the socio-economic condition that individuals share (Pattie and Johnston 1995). Indirect effect is implying that individuals located in areas create networks and discuss politics (Books and Prysby 1991; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).

What we recognized, that has been left out in the literature on populist radical right voting is link between neighborhood effects and those compositional effects, e.g. education, income. We strongly believe that neighborhood effect has to be included in the analysis of populist radical right voting as there is a presumption, which was suggested by Miller (1971): „*people who talk together, vote together*“. Moreover, negligence of spatial dependence may lead to biased and inefficient estimations (Anselin, 1988). For this purpose, we focus our research on municipalities of Slovakia as we think it can present captivating image as case study, as it is one of the few countries where the glory of PRRP had experienced numerous dops and resurrections (Mudde, 2007). Nonetheless, voter support for PRRP appears to have been constant since 2016, with the unexpectedly successful election of *Ludova Strana Nase Slovensko* (LSNS) to the national parliament. In 2020, the LSNS, a neo-Nazi-affiliated party, was re-elected, finishing fourth with 17 parliamentary seats. Another reason for selection of Slovakia, underlies in the absence of literature on the topic of PRRP in CEE region. Given the rise of PRRP as well as democratic backsliding in CEE nations, this gap in the research is startling. Therefore, based on the identification of current literature gap, we would like to answer following research question: *What is the effect of university degree educational attainment of people on spatial vote spillovers of LSNS in Slovak municipalities?*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *If people with university educational attainment live in the observed municipality, then the effect on voting support for LSNS will be negative, not only in the observed but also in neighboring municipalities.*

We identify LSNS as PRRP based on the data of Expert Survey of Chapel Hill 2020, where all the given attributes signify, that LSNS is PRRP. Therefore, we use share of votes for LSNS received in the parliamentary election in 2020 as our dependent variable. Our independent variables will be share of people with higher educational attainment on municipality level, average wage on district level (2016-2020), density of population on municipality level, share of minorities and religious population on municipality level and share of population aged 20-29 years on municipality level as well. We collected this data from Statistical office of Slovak republic and 2021 Population and Housing Census. To test our hypothesis, we decided to use based on specification of LeSage (2014) both - local and global model. That means we used both nested model version of Spatial Durbin Model (SDM) and Spatial Durbin Error Model (SDEM), as it is not clear from this stage if we are dealing with the global or local model.

### 3. RESULTS

**Figure 1:** Regression models (1-6)

	OLS (1)	SLX (2)	SAR (3)	SEM (4)	SDEM (5)	SDM (6)
share of religious population	-0.078*** 0.008	-0.009 0.011	-0.047*** 0.007	-0.028*** 0.009	-0.015 0.010	-0.002 0.010
share of the population belonging to the national minority	-0.119*** 0.003	-0.106*** 0.006	-0.076*** 0.003	-0.111*** 0.004	-0.106*** 0.005	-0.104*** 0.006
share of the population with university education	-0.370*** 0.022	-0.263*** 0.025	-0.268*** 0.020	-0.281*** 0.023	-0.267*** 0.023	-0.242*** 0.023
log.population density	-1.775*** 0.224	-0.933*** 0.277	-1.153*** 0.206	-1.274*** 0.240	-0.984*** 0.245	-0.872*** 0.255
share of population aged 20 – 29 years	0.098** 0.032	0.098** 0.032	0.060* 0.029	0.072*** 0.030	0.096** 0.031	0.083* 0.003
average wage (2016-2020)	-0.004*** 0.007	-0.003 0.002	-0.002 0.000	-0.004*** 0.001	-0.003 0.001	-0.003 0.001
lag.share of religious population		-0.140*** 0.015			-0.112*** 0.017	-0.086*** 0.014
lag.share of the population belonging to the national minority		-0.016* 0.007			-0.015 0.007	0.036*** 0.007
lag.share of the population with university education		-0.249*** 0.039			-0.222*** 0.045	-0.053 0.037
lag.population density		-1.558*** 1.381			-1.348** 0.464	-0.612 0.386
lag.share of population aged 20 – 29 years		0.209** 0.071			0.175** 0.083	0.109 0.066
lag. average average wage (2016-2020)		-0.001 0.002			0.000 0.002	0.002 0.002
R <sup>2</sup>	0.361	0.386				
Rho			0.443***			0.450***
Lambda				0.492***	0.451***	
Log-likelihood			-8309.536	-8320.871	-8283.62	-8280.272

**Source:** author based on the data from SUSR

### 4. CONCLUSION

In general, in most models (1-6), share of religious population, share of the population belonging to the national minority, population density has significant negative effect on voting support for LSNS. The usage of spatial models helps us to precise estimations of OLS model, which now can be divided to direct and indirect effects. Contrary share of population aged 20-29 years has a significant positive level on voting support for LSNS. Average wage (2016 – 2020) seems to be statistically insignificant, except the case of OLS and SEM model. In case of our main explanatory variable – share of the population with university education there is statistical negative effect evidence in every model specification, except the lagged version of SDM model. While comparing the values for the best model fit, it seems that SDM model fits a dataset the best, as it has the highest value. Therefore, just in case of local model (SDEM) we can accept our alternative hypothesis – the share of university-educated people has a significant impact (-) on voter support for LSNS in the observed municipality but also in the neighborhood

area. More precisely, the effect of university educational attainment in terms of spatial spillovers of LSNS voting is -0.249 in observed municipality (direct effect) and -0.235 in neighboring municipalities (indirect effect), while total effect is -0.484. These results might matter for policy making and its further implementation.

## 5. REFERENCES

1. Anselin, L. (1988). *Spatial Econometrics. Methods and Models*. Dordrecht: Kluwer
2. BECKER, S. O., FETZER, T., & NOVY, D. (2017). Who voted for Brexit? A comprehensive district-level analysis. *Economic Policy*, 32(92), 601–650. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epolic/eix012>
3. COLANTONE, I., STANING, P. (2019). The Surge of Economic Nationalism in Western Europe. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33 (4), 128-51
4. HAINSWORTH, P. (2008). *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*. New York: Routledge
5. Huckfeldt, R. Robert, and John Sprague. *Citizens, politics and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
6. INGLEHART, R., NORRIS, P. (2016). *Trump, Brexit and The Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP16-026.
7. LeSage, James P. "What regional scientists need to know about spatial econometrics." Available at SSRN 2420725 (2014).
8. Miller, W. L. 1977. *Electoral Dynamics in Britain since 1918*. London: Macmillan.
9. MUDDE, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
10. Moretti, Enrico. "Human capital externalities in cities." *Handbook of regional and urban economics*. Vol. 4. Elsevier, 2004. 2243-2291.
11. MÜLLER, JAN-WERNER. 2016. *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
12. Pattie, Charles, and Ron Johnston. "‘People who talk together vote together’: An exploration of contextual effects in Great Britain." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90.1 (2000): 41-66.
13. Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2017) The revenge of the places that don’t matter (and what to do about it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 11 (1). pp. 189-209. ISSN 1752- 1378 DOI: 10.1093/cjres/rsx024
14. STUBAGER, R. (2008). Education Effects on Authoritarian– Libertarian Values: A Question of Socialization. *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, 327–350
15. van Leeuwen ES, Vega SH. Voting and the rise of populism: Spatial perspectives and applications across Europe. *Reg Sci Policy Pract.* 2021;13:209–219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12411>