



universität
wien

MASTER ARBEIT/MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Differences in the Perception of the Left-Right between
students of political science in Austria and Slovakia”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears
on the student record sheet:

A 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium
Politikwissenschaft UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Privatdoz. Mag. Dr. Karin Liebhart

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Introduction

These days, when talking about politics and democracy, we can barely go around the concept of the “left” and “right”. Whether it is the media, political scientists, politicians or just common citizens discussing politics, the division between “left” and “right” seems to be a defining factor in politics. This is also represented by most party systems, where the main competing parties (or blocks) seem to be divided between left-wing social democrats and right-wing conservatives. Even at the EU level, the biggest parties are the European Socialists and Democrats party and the conservative European Peoples Party, with many other parties also being clearly identifiable on the left-right ideological spectrum (European Conservatives and Reformists, European United Left – Nordic Green Left). However, there are concerns whether this situation really reflects the divisions between the European voters, and whether the terms “left” and “right” are really representative of the same concepts across European Countries.

Ever since the dawn of democratic party competition, parties were forming along certain spectrums or divisions in the society. The ambition of a democratic party has always been to appeal voters, and thus, logically, the parties started shaping their political identities and programs along the interests and preferences that their targeted voters expressed.

The terms “left” and “right” have their history in French revolutionary politics. They merely represented where the members sat in the Legislative Assembly – as people with similar positions were grouping themselves at either the left or the right side of the assembly. The term started to have a more coherent political meaning at beginning of the 20th century, spreading from France to other European countries. The “Left” would mostly be used to describe various forms of the socialist (or labor, in the United Kingdom) movement, while the term “Right” would be mostly used for conservative parties.

As far as political science goes, the role of societal conflicts on democracy and party formation has been comprehensively studied by Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan in 1967. They developed a political theory that allows the study of the political system based on *cleavages* – institutionalized, socially embedded and politically effective conflict lines. According to Lipset and Rokkan, four original cleavages have developed: Centrum-Periphery; State- Church; Urban – Rural, and Worker – Owner. (cf. Eith, Mielke 2001). The conflict between left and right, while most closely aligning

with the Worker-Owner cleavage, was able to incorporate most of the cleavages, forming two blocks or dominant parties in most western European countries.

Now, most political scientists would agree that cleavages change and develop over time – some seem to grow weaker such as the State – Church cleavage, while others appear and become stronger, such as an environmental cleavage. Additionally, new democracies arose on in eastern Europe from the former totalitarian Soviet states. However, despite these changes and developments, the Left – Right divide still seems to be most prominent divide in politics.

Personally, I see this as problematic. I've been closely in contact with the Austrian and Slovak political systems, while studying other European political systems as part of my studies. My personal feeling is, that the concepts of left right are being treated differently in different countries, whether by the politicians or by the voters themselves. I have decided research deeper into this possible issue in my master thesis, to see if my beliefs are substantiated. While my resources do not allow for a large cross-country study, I have decided to take a deeper and more focused look. In this study, it is my goal to compare the perception of left and right among Slovak and Austrian voters. More precisely, I want to concentrate on Slovak and Austrian students of political science. The goal of this research is to shed a little light on the question of whether there are differences in the perception of cleavages between countries, and whether the left right division still reflects the politics of contemporary society.

Research Design

The primary goal of this thesis was to study the differences between the political party spectrum in Europe, particularly between the original EU countries and the eastern enlargement countries. I reduced this to the study of differences between the political left and right in these countries, as the left-right axis seems to be the most prominent political cleavage reflected in today's party systems. Because of reasons of scope time and budget, I needed to design a more comprehensive smaller scale study, which would be feasible to accomplish in the relatively small time period of writing a master thesis, while staying focused and not falling for a too broad research design. My decisions on the methods and targets of this thesis were therefore driven by these considerations.

First I decided to limit the scope of the thesis to two countries I can work with the best – Slovakia and Austria. I can see why a large number of cases cross-country study might be a good option in

the respective topic – it is more generalizable, and reflects the reality better, when talking about the European electoral systems in general. However, such a research would be off limits for me because of the scope and expenses. On the other hand, a two country study allows me to go much deeper in the comparison. Where a big study might try too hard to generalize, and has the risk of only concentrating on superficial variables measurable in every country, a two country study can focus more on the underlying correlations and provide a more in-depth analysis. If the study were to conclude that there are significant differences between how the party system works in Austria and Slovakia, this would not be generalizable to all original/enlargement EU countries, but it would still prove, that there are at least two countries between these blocks with significant differences. The choice of Austria and Slovakia makes sense for me for multiple reasons. Foremost, I am a student from Austria studying in Slovakia. Thanks to this, I have had contact with both political systems, both personal and academical, and have a good understanding of how they work. Another advantage is that I have the chance to work with both German, Slovak, and English sources, widening the scope of materials I can use.

The next important decision was to come up with a voter centered approach, rather than a party or institution centered one. The main focus is the perception of the left right by voters. This approach allows me to focus on how voters perceive the cleavages within parties, how they assess themselves on the left-right axis, what issues concern them and how this relates to their party choices. The obvious method to conduct such a research is a survey.

I decided to choose Slovak and Austrian political science students as my target group. This is mostly a decision of scope and access. I also chose this group, because there is the expectation, that political science students should have a clearer knowledge of political cleavages, and should do well at formulating their opinions on the topics of interest. This allows me to place more elaborate in-depth questions in the survey, which the general public might have a problem understanding. Once again, this decision makes the study less generalizable, which needs to be reflected upon when analyzing the results.

As for the layout, the study will be divided into several parts. The first parts will focus on setting clear the goals and design of the study, as well as define the methods used in the study. The second part will focus on the underlying theory, focusing on the cleavage theory of Lipset and Rokkan, and its modern interpretations and uses. The next part, will focus on the development of cleavages

in Europe, and also specifically in the new transition states of eastern Europe. Then it will focus more closely on the introduction and development of the Austrian and Slovak political systems. For this part, I plan to rely as well on two expert interviews with political science experts on the respective countries. These have already been selected and contacted, with interview dates to be set. The next part will consist of the main research itself – it will present the survey results, and analyze them and interpret them. The last part will present the conclusions.

Method

It has proven a somewhat of a challenge, to come up with the methodological framework for my thesis. From my research question it is easily deductible, that it is going to be a comparative approach. I was however less sure on the question whether to use a qualitative or quantitative design. On the one hand, I use an online survey, which will be statistically evaluated, as my main tool, which would point towards a quantitative approach. However, epistemologically, I do not come from a positivist standpoint, I do not aim to create generalizable results. I rather try to research smaller specific groups of people, to study their subjective understanding of the given topic - which strongly points towards a qualitative perspective. To address this dichotomy, I have decided to consider the concepts of mixed-method design, to look for an approach that might be suitable for my research design.

In the following part, I will first analyze two approaches to categorizing and utilizing mixed-method designs in political science, explain some of the principles of the comparative method, and apply these to my design. Then in the next part, I will look more closely on the tools that I plan to use in this survey, explain why I chose them, consider them suitable to answer my research question, and go into detail on how they will be used in the thesis.

Mixed-method designs

After decades of quantitative and qualitative methods being taken as irreconcilably different approaches, mixed-method designs are gaining on popularity, and increasingly becoming a standard approach. Nevertheless, I find that mixed-method studies becoming more common does not excuse the lack of a proper justification of using such an approach. Just as any other approach, using mixed-methods does have its rules and dangers. Moreover, mixed-method designs can be approached from different perspectives, depending on what the outgoing

epistemological/ontological positions are, what specific methods and tools are utilized, and what the reasoning for using different methods is.

Read and Marsh (2002) extensively deal with this topic in their article “Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methods”. They create two classifications on combining qualitative and quantitative methods – one based on the reasons why the combination of methods is used, and the other based on how they are applied.

They identify two main reason why methods are being combined in political science – either to address more aspects of the specified research question; or to increase the validity of research so that one method serves as a check in the other, used as a form triangulation. They build on Denzin’s (1970) division of triangulation within methods, and triangulation between methods. They go even further, dividing the second category into triangulation by combining different quantitative or different qualitative methods, and triangulation by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The triangulation within methods is a very narrow approach – limited to using different tools when measuring a particular variable, and is no more than a variation within the use of a single method. (Marsch, Read 2002: 237). The triangulation using different quantitative or qualitative methods already offers a broader scope. In this approach, a researcher would combine different qualitative methods, such as an unstructured interview and analysis of literature, to cover different variables and explore any inconsistencies within his data sources. (ibid: 238). The third option, which is the most interesting one for this research, is triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim is to address aspects of the research question which cannot be covered by the simple use of either quantitative or qualitative methods. An example of this, would be doing an in-depth interview of a limited number of people to understand how they view politics, and use this to create a questionnaire that would already be used for a representative group of people, to produce generalizable results. Or from the other end, a researcher might use the analysis of a broader survey to observe certain patterns or irregularities, and then try to find possible explanations for these using focus groups. (ibid.: 239)

When talking about the modes of combination of methods, they draw heavily on Creswell’s (1994) classification, which differentiates between three designs: 1. a two-phase design; 2. a dominant/less dominant design; 3. a mixed methodology design. The first model describes a study that has separate qualitative and quantitative phases, which allows to use the appropriate epistemological

paradigm in each phase. (Marsch, Read 2002: 239) This model could be further divided by the temporal sequencing (cf. Pagett 1998: 128-9). Either the qualitative phase comes first, serving as an exploratory study, that serves as a basis for the quantitative study; or the quantitative comes first, providing the starting point for the qualitative study. The second model by Cresswell is the dominant less dominant design. In this type of design, the researcher adopts an approach with a single dominant paradigm, with smaller tools/components of the study taken from the alternative paradigm. This allows the researcher to hold on to a specific paradigm, while allowing for the collection or analysis of a part of the data using methods from the opposite. (Marsch, Read 2002: 240). Similarly, Pagett's division by temporal sequencing can be applied here as well. The third model, the mixed-method design, can be used at any stage of the research process, according to Cresswell. This approach should in theory add to the complexity of the research design, and allows the researcher to take full advantage of each methodology. It also supposedly offers a better use of research practice, as it uses both the inductive and deductive approach. (Marsch Read 2002: 240). However, this last approach also comes with the most difficulties, especially given the different epistemological perspectives of the qualitative and quantitative designs.

This division, as presented by Marsh and Read is a very useful one, but at times it seems to fall short on being too theoretical, focusing on how the mixed-method approaches *could* or *should* be used instead of how they are actually used in praxis. Because of this, I would like to include a different approach to the categorization of mixed-method designs, as presented by Alan Byrman (2006), who used a quantitative study evaluating 232 social science articles, to evaluate the whys and hows mixed-method designs are actually used. According to Byrman, divisions of authors such as Cresswell exist as logically possible types of combination, but are not based on the practical use of them. Based on variables identified from traditional typologies (such as what the function of the integration is, which approach has the priority, whether data is collected simultaneously or successively, and others).

An interesting finding of Byrman was, that two methods were used disproportionately more than the others – 82% of the articles used a quantitative survey instrument, and 71% of the articles used an unstructured/semi structured interview, with 57% of the articles being a combination of a quantitative survey and qualitative interviewing. Also interestingly, in 27% of cases, both the qualitative and quantitative data were gathered by the same instrument. For example, in 20,7 % of

the articles, the qualitative data derived from open ended questions in a structured interview, while in about 6.5% the quantitative data derive from the analysis of an individual qualitative or focus group interview. (Byrman 2006: 102-103)

When looking at the justifications for combining qualitative a quantitative research, there were several key findings. Most importantly, Byrman found out that there is a disproportion between the rationale of how and why the mixed-method approach is going to be used, and how it was actually used in the article. For example, out of 29 articles using triangulation (in a narrower sense) as their rationale, only 19 actually used it this way. Yet if you looked at it from the other way around, 80 articles used triangulation in practice, but only 19 of them used it as their rationale. Similar differences could be found with other categories as well. Overall, the most used in practice were Enhancement (expanding upon data from quantitative or qualitative research by gathering data using the other approach); Triangulation (to validate data); Completeness (to cover a more comprehensive area of the enquiry by using both methodologies); Illustration (using qualitative data to illustrate quantitative findings - this was the category where the difference between the use as rationale (1,7%) and practical use (22,8%) differed the most); and Sampling (using one approach to facilitate the sampling of respondents/cases). (ibid: 105- 109). Also interesting was the finding, that only 10 of the articles clearly indicated, that the qualitative and quantitative approaches were designed to answer specific and different research questions.

Comparative research

Since the comparison of two country specific group is at the core of my research, I find it essential to dwell into the topic of comparative research as well. Comparison is one of the oldest and most familiar methods in politics. Comparative politics have been so prominent, that they also gained status of its own disciplinary sub-field.

When it comes to the comparative method, there are once again multiple approaches it can be undertaken. The most common types of the comparative method differ in what types of cases we compare and how many we compare. Comparison is a traditionally quantitative method, but it can also be used in a quantitative manner.

A typical division of the comparative method based on the selection of cases is the “most similar/most different” system design. In the “most similar system” design, the researcher looks

for cases which have as many similar features as possible, so that most of the variables are held as constant as possible. This should limit the explanatory variables when looking for explaining the difference between these cases. An example would be finding two states with similar constitutional systems, and similar culture, and try to research why they developed different party systems. However, this approach is often seen as very problematic, as it is very difficult to account for all the possible variables. This “is often referred as the “too many variables, too few countries” problem” (Hopkin 2002: 255) The alternative would be the “most different system” design. This concept looks for cases that are very different in most aspects, and seeks to find similarities within them. The idea behind it is, that if the researcher is able to find a theoretical relationship between two or more variables across different settings, they can argue that there is evidence for a connection between the variables. This approach often focuses on the “intrasystemic” level instead of the “intersystemic”, to eliminate system level variation and instead focus on finding generalizable relations valid for different settings. Since this design needs a lot of data, it often focuses on a large number of cases. (Hopkin 2002: 255)

And it is the number of cases, which creates the other very important categorization in comparative politics – Large N and Small N studies. Large N studies are usually using quantitative techniques. It focuses on the study of quantifiable variables, and tries to find links that are universal, or at least applicable to numerous different systems. The context is often disregarded in these types of studies. (ibid: 255). The typical problems of Large N studies are limited cases, limited data and limited data reliability (as there is already a limited number of cases, for many of these cases there is very limited data, and this data can even be misleading or unreliable, depending on how it was collected and how it is used). (ibid: 258-259). The opposite to Large N studies would be Small N studies. These studies are often qualitative, and often focus on “most similar” designs. They try to control for some variables, while exploring potential relationships for others. The disadvantage of this design is that it has a hard time producing universal generalizable statements that large N research does. Some positivist scientists even regard it as less rigorous. (ibid: 261) However, the proponents of this approach argue, that establishing generalizations often is not even the goal of this approach, but rather draw attention to particularities and specifics of individual cases, to emphasize complexity instead of trying to describe a general theory. (ibid: 263)

My choice of method

Based on these analyses of methods I have come to develop a methodological framework for my own thesis. In the first place, I describe my research as a mixed-method design. I use two main tools – a structured survey, and semi-structured expert interviews. The survey itself is the main source of data for my research, the expert interview is used to gain information necessary to give meaning to the results of the survey. Additionally, the structured survey also contains a few open-ended questions, which provide qualitative data that aim to refine and explain the more quantitative data from the questionnaire. This goes in line with the most used mixed-methodology designs as described by Byrman (2006). It should also be said, that my research is not positivist from an epistemological sense. I have neither the ambition nor the data to create some generalizable statements. My research question and research interests are qualitative, as are parts of my data evaluation. I merely borrow a tool from quantitative research to aggregate my data on student perceptions of the left and right. Therefore, in the light of the categories presented by Marsh and Read, I would call my research dominantly qualitative, with certain tools of data collection and evaluation borrowed from the quantitative method.

When it comes to the comparative nature of my research, I would describe it as a “small N” “most similar systems” design. More precisely I am comparing the differences in perceptions of a very limited group of students from two countries. For the research, I chose countries which are both proportional parliamentary systems, both members of the European Union and regionally very close, both offer free higher education. Both were former parts of the Austrian empire (albeit with very different positions in it) and both sided (more or less willingly) with the German side during world war II, while being part of functional democracies in the interwar period. The most prevalent difference is the development after World War II, where one country has been the subject of the Soviet bloc with a communist totalitarian regime and no free elections, while the other developed a functional democracy. This makes them into otherwise very similar representatives of the developed western democracies in case of Austria, and the new eastern post-communist democracies in the case of Slovakia. I also further scaled down my research interest to political science students in both countries. This way I managed not only to limit my sample to a group that I can more easily access, but I also managed to control some variables which might affect my

results in a larger scale study, such as different levels of public education or citizenship education in the countries, different levels of interest in politics among the public in the countries, and similar. Thus, I have limited my cases to a very specific, small number of very similar cases design.

To summarize this, the research design I present here is a mixed method comparative, small N, most similar design, with qualitative research being the most dominant paradigm.

I would also note at this point, that in the earlier plans of this research, the intention was to have stronger quantitative elements, and additionally use focus groups to triangulate the results. However, because of the limits of timeframe, scope and resources for this study, I have not managed to collect enough respondents to produce more robust and representative data nor have I had the time and space to include well prepared and analyzed focus group interviews, instead of which I opted to use open-ended questions within my survey. While I believe that the results of the original plan would be somewhat more comprehensive and rigorous, I am still convinced that even the research the way it was conducted for this thesis is able to provide very interesting insights into the researched topic.

Standardized Survey

The standardized survey is my main tool for data collection in this research. The survey was created on the survey platform www.esurveys.com. It was conducted exclusively online, and spread via mailing lists, social networks, and sharing through other students. The data for the survey was gathered since the 2^h of May until the 28^h of June, for a period of two month. The survey was anonymous, and did not collect any personal data. The system made sure multiple responses from the same IP address were not possible.

The target respondents were students of political science in Slovakia and Austria. Since especially in Slovakia, the political science studies branch out into specific subfields at master level, sometimes even in bachelor, I also accepted responses from similar fields such as International Relations, Public Administration, Security studies, European Studies or International Development. I accepted responses from students studying in the countries in question even if they were not eligible to vote in the parliamentary elections in the country, however, the ineligibility to vote would cause certain questions to not appear.

The original goal was to have 100 respondents from Slovakia and 100 respondents from Austria, however, this has proven hard to achieve despite much effort. Therefore, I had to reduce the minimum number of respondents to a minimum of 50. My final count My biggest problem was a miscalculation due to different semester schedules in Austria and Slovakia. In Austria, the semester runs until the very end of June, while in Slovakia, the exam period begins during may, and the students from Slovakia were less ready to respond to the survey during this period. Another problem was that while in Austria, the majority of potential respondents is aggregated at the Vienna University, with a small part on the University of Innsbruck, in Slovakia they are divided amongst many smaller Universities and slightly different study directions. To demonstrate, the Comenius University only consists of around 120 students in Bachelor and Master together, while the University of Vienna counts their active political science students in over a thousand.

The final number of respondents for the study was 148 – 76 for Austria, 69 for Slovakia.

Questionnaire structure and questions

In the following I will briefly show and explain the layout of the questionnaire. The full questionnaire can be found as annex to the thesis in the back. The survey consists of several parts. The first part consists of basic identification. I ask for the country and field of studies, to be able to control for random answers which would not be made by Slovak or Austrian students, or by students of other fields of science. Further, I ask for gender, age, the eligibility to vote in the respective national parliamentary elections, and whether they voted in the last parliamentary elections. The questions of whether they are eligible to vote, and whether they voted in the last parliamentary elections, condition the appearance of questions considering voter decisions for the respective country.

In the second part, I ask for ideological self-assessment along the left right axis, between Far Left, Left, Center-Left, Center, Center-Right, Right, Far Right. On the same page in the next step, the respondents are asked to write down three things they associate with the left, and three things they associate with the right.

The next part is the largest part of the questionnaire. It asks for the positions on specific policies. The policies are divided into 5 sub-section. The areas covered are following: Economy, Labor

Market, Welfare and Social Issues, Migration, European Union. Within each of these subsections, the respondent is to choose a position between two opposing options on a five-point spectrum.

In the following part, I am going to ask you about specific policy preferences. Please answer what your position is on the given policies issues, and whether your position is more representative of the "left" or of the "right".

ECONOMY

Strong Welfare State	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Minimal Welfare State
High Redistribution	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Low Redistribution
Progressive Taxation	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Flat Taxation
Strong Market Regulation	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Unrestricted Free Markets
State Ownership	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Private Ownership

Figure 1: The Economy sub-section in the policy preferences section

LABOUR MARKET

Strongly Regulated Labour Market	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Deregulated Labour Market
High Minimum Wage	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	No Minimum Wage
Regulate Conditions for Hiring/Firing Employees	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Allow Companies Flexibility in Hiring/Firing Employees
State Regulated Safety Standards	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Company Regulated Safety Standards
Strong Role of Labour Unions	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Minimal Role of Labour Unions
Use Gender/Minority Quotas	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Don't Use Gender/Minority Quotas

Figure 2: Labour Market sub-section in the policy preferences section

WELFARE AND SOCIAL ISSUES

The state should actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The state should not actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups
The state should provide free higher education to everyone	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Higher education should be private
Education policies should be centralised and decided by the state	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The schools should have freedom about deciding their education policies
The state should provide medical insurance	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The state should not provide medical insurance
Same sex marriage should be institutionalised	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Same sex marriage should not be institutionalised
The state should allow abortions	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The state should not allow abortions
Light drugs should be legalised	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Light drugs should remain criminalised

Figure 3: Welfare and Social Issues sub-section in the policy preferences section

MIGRATION

The state should have an open immigration policy	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The state should be protected against migrants
Migrants should add to cultural diversity	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Migrants should accept and assimilate the home culture
Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a good response to the migration crisis	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a bad response to the migration crisis

Figure 4: Migration sub-section in the policy preferences section

EUROPEAN UNION

My country should be a part of the EU	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	My country should not be a part of the EU
The EU should integrate further	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The member states should retain more power
A European fiscal union would be a good thing	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	A European fiscal union would be a bad thing
The EU should have common defense policy	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	Defense policy should remain in the hands of the national state
The EU should have a common migration policy	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The migration policy should remain in the hands of the National state
The EU should have a common Energy policy	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	The Energy policy should remain in the hands of the national state

Figure 5: Migration sub-section in the policy preferences section

After each of the sub-sections, the respondent is asked to assess, whether he considers his answers to the issues in the sub-section leaning more towards the left or the right, as shown here:

Based on your answers above, would you say your opinions lean more to the left or to the right?

☐ Left
 ☐ Center
 ☐ Right
 ☐ Cannot Say

Figure 6: Left-Right identification question after each sub-section

At the end of the policy preferences section, the next significant open-ended question comes forth: “Based on the results from the previous page, where do you see the limitations of the “left-right” division?”. The respondent is instructed to answer in English, Slovak or German, and is also instructed that the question is not mandatory.

In the next part, I ask for the ideological assessment of parties. The respondent is shown a table of Austrian or Slovak parties, depending on his answer to the question on his country of studies. In these tables the respondent is to position the party on the left-right spectrum, using the same values as were used by the ideological self-identification question (Far Left, Left, Center-Left, Center, Center-Right, Right, Far Right). The parties used in both cases are the current parliamentary parties. The Green party is added in Austria (which has fallen out of the parliament in 2017, by

falling just short of the threshold), along with the Communist Party of Austria (KPO) (who have been a historically present party, even though regularly failing to enter the parliament). In Slovakia multiple parties were added: on one hand, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK), who have fallen just short of the threshold in the last parliamentary elections but have otherwise been parliamentary as well government parties. On the other hand, it is the two newly formed parties Progressive Slovakia (PS) and Together, Civic Democracy (Spolu), who represent rapidly growing alternative parties. The party Siet', which disbanded shortly after getting in to the current coalition government, is also included (some former members of Siet' went on to form Spolu, while others remained in support of the government).

After this section, the respondent is again given the option to answer an open question, with the following wording: "Based on the results of the previous page, how well does the "left-right" division reflect the current party system? Please explain your answer shortly." The respondent is again instructed that this question is not mandatory.

The last set of question is the classic voter preference section. I ask the respondents which party they voted for in the last parliamentary elections, and which party they would vote for, should parliamentary elections take place next Sunday. The party selection used is the same as in the question concerning the placement of parties along the left-right spectrum. The only difference being that the party Siet' was taken out of the question of who the respondent would vote for in the next elections, as it was disbanded and no longer remains a significant player in Slovak politics in any way.

Semi-structured expert interviews

To enhance and help explain the results of my survey, I have decided to also include two semi-structured expert interviews in my thesis. One to be held with a renowned Slovak professor of political science, the other one with an Austrian. Both interviewees were to be experts on the topic of democratic development, party system, and cleavages in their own respective countries. The role of the interviews would be threefold: First, the interviews would help point out the specifics of the historical development of cleavages and party systems. Second, the interviewees would be asked for their own definition of left and right, where they see the limits of it, and try to categorize the parties from their respective countries as being either left or right, similarly to how the respondents had to do in the survey, but with more space left for open interpretation. Lastly, the interviewees would reflect on a few early findings of the survey.

For the interview on the Slovak political system, I have spoken with Professor Darina Malová, one of the founding members of the political science faculty at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Malová specializes in political developments in Slovakia and central Europe, processes of European integration, problems of democratization and civil society. She worked together with internationally recognized authors, such as Kevin Deegan-Krause or Tim Haughton. She has published many publications on the topic relevant for this research, some which are utilized in the research. (<http://www.politologiauk.sk/people/malova>)

On Austrian part, I have interviewed professor Anton Pelinka, currently of the Central European University in Budapest. He served as a professor at the University of Innsbruck from 1975 until 2006, where he also served as the dean of the Faculty of political science. He was visiting professor at Harvard University (Schumpeter Fellow), Stanford University (Austrian Chair), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, the University of New Orleans, and the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Institute for European Studies). His central topics are democratic theory, political system and political culture in Austria, comparative party politics, and research on extremism in Austria and beyond. (https://people.ceu.edu/anton_pelinka)

The interview with professor Malová was conducted about a week earlier than the interview with professor Pelinka.

Structure of the interviews

The expert interviews are semi-structured. This means, they have a guided central structure, including the topics that need to be covered in a specific order, a few given questions, but also allows for the conversation to leave the trajectory up to a point, and to pose open unplanned questions. As already discussed in the previous part, the interview has been divided into a few sections, which I would like to demonstrate more into detail in the following part. The interviews themselves were specified for each interviewee according to the specifics of the country in question and the previous work I have read from the interviewee, but they adhere to the same basic structure.

1. Development of cleavages in the country of interest

In the first section, I pose questions considering the development of cleavages in the respective countries. I started by a small introduction of the historical circumstances in which the democracies began, some theories that may be applicable to the given circumstances, and ask how well these theories apply. The goal was not to ask the respondents just for their take on history, but to already confront them with researched notions and ideas, and ask for their positions on them. In the case of Austria I was especially interested in the continuity of parties and cleavages between the Austrian Empire, the inter war First Republic of Austria and the modern day Republic of Austria, in the peaceful pact of the OVP and SPO until the 1980s, and rise of the FPÖ (and other new parties) since 1986. In the case of Slovakia, I was especially interested in the various theories of how cleavages and party systems would develop in the new transitional democracies in eastern Europe (cf. Brendt 2001: 157-159), and how they apply to Slovakia. Also of interest was the role the regime change and the authoritative rule of Vladimir Mečiar in the nineties had on the development of the party system and cleavages. Of special interest was also the contrast of the “politically strong, but societally weak parties (Brendt 2001: 160).

2. The Left and the Right, Left-Right identification of political parties

The second part is somewhat more structured, as to allow a comparison not only with the data from the survey, but also to be able to compare the answers of the experts themselves. I asked the interviewees for their own definition of left and right, and for them to define the parties of their respective political systems. In the interview with Malová, I additionally also ask for

whether she sees a difference in how the terms “left and right” are used in Slovakia to how they are used in western Europe. In the end of the section, I asked both interviewees the same open ended question that was asked from the respondents of the survey: Where do you see the limitations of using the left-right spectrum?

3. Reflections on early results of the survey

In the last part, I confronted the interviewees with the early results of my survey. While during the interview with professor Pelinka I already had more data, the few chosen points from the results were only reinforced since the interview with Malová. These results, and the expert’s opinions on them will be reflected later on in the analytical part of the survey.

The first part thus had a less structured format than the second and third part. Nevertheless, unstructured and spontaneous open question were allowed for and indeed utilized in all three parts of the interview.

Theory

The development of a theoretical approach for my thesis was a longer process. What was certain from the beginning was that I want to compare the differences in left-right identification and perception between Austrian and Slovak political sciences students. However, making an observation is not enough for this study, the real goal is to try to provide reasons for the possible differences (or similarities) between Austrian and Slovak students. And this is exactly where my theoretical approach comes in. The theory serves as a lens through which to regard the results of my survey and through which to interpret them.

In this work, I try to understand the different views on the left right between Slovak and Austrian political science students by using the concept of cleavages, developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), and more precisely its redefinition by Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Mair's student Casal Bertoa (2014). While this cleavage theory offers specific theoretical concepts that I will use in this study, I found that to systematically approach the given issue, I also need a broader theoretical approach. I decided to contrast the differences in the perception of left and right based on the historical development of the Slovak and Austrian cleavage system and, in a reciprocal connection to it, historical development of the Slovak and Austrian party system. Or more generally said, I try to explain the difference between the otherwise similar groups by the historical development of specific institutions in Slovakia and Austria. When put this way, I have decided to apply historical institutionalism and its concept of path dependency, as it best reflects the approach that I have envisioned.

In this part, I will first explain the concept of historical institutionalism the concepts of cleavages, and path dependency and how I plan to use them, and finally I will look a little bit into the concept of "left and right", how I will be using it in this study and why I consciously avoid a more narrow definition of this concept for this study.

Historical Institutionalism

Historical institutionalism is a school of thought in political science, which developed as a specific form of the new institutionalism. It is characterized by using historical context and path dependency to explain political phenomena.

New Institutionalism is a school that developed in the 1980s on some of the notions of the classical institutionalism of the first half of the 20th century. Institutionalism was a political theory based on the idea that institutions play a major role in defining political reality. The original institutionalism had a very narrow definition of institution, almost interchangeable with the term organization. The approach grew out of favor after the 1950s, and by the 1980s was only rarely used. New Institutionalism arrived in the 1980s, as a much broader a varied approach.

New institutionalism brought about a number of important changes to the institutionalist approach, mostly centered on how institutions are defined, and how they are worked with in the analysis. Lowndes (2002) proposes a well-structured analysis of the changes new institutionalism brought forward. Lowndes recognizes 6 significant analytical shifts in new institutionalism: 1. The shift from organizations to rules. While traditional institutionalism really focused on organized institutions, (ministries, organizations, etc.), new institutionalism sees institutions as “sets of rules that guide and constrain the behavior of individual actors” (Lowndes 2002: 98). That does not mean organizations don’t play an important role anymore in institutionalist analysis, its more that various formal and informal rules of conduct are also part of the analysis. 2. Shift towards an informal concept of institutions. In new institutionalism, the definition on institutions is broadened to include informal ones. The argument behind this is that informal rules can be just as important in shaping political reality as the formal ones (the problem being, that informal rules are much harder to research). And the formal and informal institutions also actively interact. A good example of this provided by Lowndes were the rules about the separation of assembly and executive in British local governments. Upon installation, these rules were more effective in cities where a strong tradition of civic leadership was already existent (tradition of civic leadership being the informal institution in this case). (ibid: 98) 3. A shift from a static to a dynamic concept of institutions. Institutions are not things that are given, they are subject to change and instability. Therefore, the stability of institutions is at the core of many institutionalist perspectives. (ibid: 99) 4. The shift from “good government” to a value-critical standpoint. Lowndes describes this a move away from submerged values. While the old institutionalism was set on a finding the “good government”, based on clear preferred values, new institutionalists research the interactions between institutions and sets of values, which are both shaped by the institutions, and can lead to change in institutions. (ibid: 99-

100). 5. A shift from a holistic perspective towards a disaggregated conception of institutions. While traditional institutionalist looked at institutions as “whole” (such as whole systems of government), new institutionalism concentrates on the components of the system (such as electoral systems, decision-making, executive, legislature, party systems etc.) Institutions are considered as never fully complete. (ibid: 100). 6. A shift from independence of institutions to their embeddedness. This shift is particularly significant for the concept of historical institutionalism and this research. Institutions are not existing independently of space at time, there is no vacuum around the institutions. They are embedded in a specific context. This context can be historical, dependent on developments and decisions made in the past, it can be structural, in the way institutions at different levels interact with each other, it can be societal, with institutions embedded in specific sets of norms and values. This context has a significant influence on the creation, function and change of institutions. (ibid: 101)

Since new institutionalism has such a broad approach, it has branched out into many sub-theories. I will not analyze all of them here, but I will define some basics differences between them before I describe historical institutionalism, from the standpoint of which I conduct my research. The most important division within new institutionalism is between normative and rational choice institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism, as the name suggests, is based on the rational-choice theory. According to rational-choice institutionalism, institutions do not influence individual behaviour, norms and preferences, as these are relatively stable, driven by actors’ utility maximization. For rational choice institutionalists, “institutions are purposeful human constructions designed to solve collective action problems.” (ibid: 96) Normative institutionalism on the other hand argues that institutions do shape values, norms and behaviour. The concept of “normative” should be considered not from a “normative theory” standpoint, as in promoting particular norms, but rather with concern with norms and values as explanatory variables. (ibid: 95)

Historical institutionalism is closely aligned with normative institutionalism, even though, according to Lowndes, it can produce both normative and rational choice explanations (ibid: 96). According to Amenta, Historical Institutionalism has its roots in comparative politics. (Amenta 2012:47). According to historical institutionalism, institutions are created through longstanding historical processes, they “engage in historical research to trace the processes behind the

persistence of institutions and their influence on policies and other political outcomes.” (Amenta 2012: 48)

A key concept here is the concept of path dependency. It is based on the “idea that individuals act within institutional arrangements, the present structure and functioning of which are understood only partially when not embedded in a historical perspective. (Kay 2005: 555) Since the institutions are path dependent, it may be difficult to change or reform them once they are institutionalized. Change in institutions in this sense can then hardly be just a product of individual decision making in seeking a higher utility, but rather as changes in the historical path, as outcomes of historical changes. It should be kept in mind here, that the definition of institutions here goes beyond the formal understanding of the word, towards a more open understanding of a formal and informal system of rules that shape political behaviour.

As mentioned earlier, historical institutionalism has its roots in comparative political science. More specifically, they have related to qualitative comparative politics. The historical institutionalist comparative political approach “uses qualitative comparative analysis to emphasize the particularities and specificities of individual cases, rather than to establish generalisations applicable across large numbers of cases.” (Hopkin 2002: 263). Historical institutionalism uses the comparative politics to emphasize complexity and uniqueness of the studied phenomena, instead of providing general theories. (ibid: 263)

This use of historical institutionalism as described by Hopkin is precisely why I consider it a good fit for my research design. I try to find and explain differences between the perception of left and right between Slovak and Austrian political science, or in other words, find the uniqueness of these concepts in the particular countries. And my explaining variable for these possible differences is the different institutional setup of the two countries (institutions such as the political party system), and specifically, the historical development of this institutional system, as affected by different challenges to democratic development in these two countries.

Cleavage Theory

Another concept that is very important for my research is the cleavage theory, the concept of cleavages. To understand what cleavages mean in social science, I always find it very useful to look at the original meaning of the word cleavage, as defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary:

cleavage - “the quality of a crystallized substance or rock of splitting along definite planes; also : the occurrence of such splitting.” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cleavage>). Now before even entering to actual political theory on cleavages, I think this original geological explanation does a great job of outlining the concept of a cleavage, and could serve as a rule of thumb when theorizing on the nature of social cleavages. It defined the quality (of a rock) to split along definite planes, also the occurrence of such splitting. Very similarly, in society, we can talk about cleavages, if there are certain definitive (and definable) “plains”, along which the society splits, and the occurrence of such splitting in the society.

The term cleavage in connection with social sciences existed in the language already before, but it was Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan’s seminal work *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (1967), who first came up with a more rigorous approach to defining and analyzing cleavages and their effects on the political system. It remains one of the very influential works of political science, with adaptations of their approach still being relevant in modern political science. As already the name of the work by Lipset and Rokkan suggests, as well as many others that I am using in my research, such as Bartolini and Mair’s *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability* (1990) or Eith and Mielke’s *Gesellschaftliche Konflikte und Partaisysteme* (German: Societal Conflicts and Party Systems) (2001), the concept of cleavages is mostly used to study voter affinities and party systems, or more broadly conflicts in society.

Lipset and Rokkan describe cleavages as lines of conflict in society, which build on both on structural elements, and as well as on institutionalization through political actors, primarily parties (cf. Eith 2001: 19). Lipset and Rokkan define four classical cleavages that developed over time, which heavily influenced the democratization process of Europe. The centrum vs. periphery cleavage, which developed in the process of state building; the state vs. church cleavage, defined by the conflict between state and church on secularization and cultural hegemony; the city/industry vs. land/agrarian cleavage, developed during the changes brought about by the industrial revolution; and class cleavage, of capital/owners vs. workers. (cf. Eith 2001: 19; Lipset, Rokkan 1967: 47; Lybeck 1985: 106)

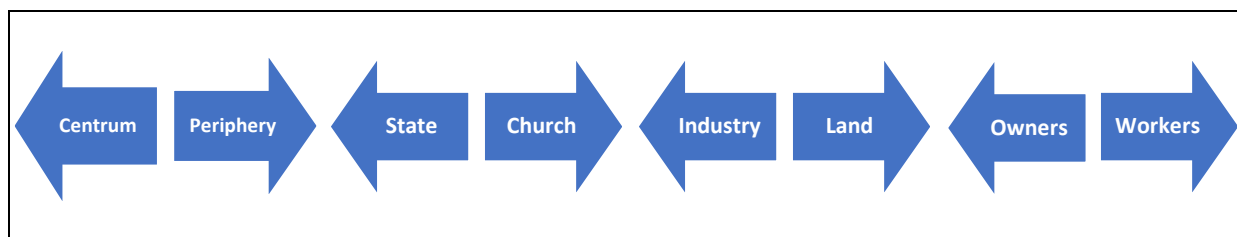


Figure 7: 4 Cleavages of Stein and Rokkan

Of great importance here is the hypothesis on frozen party systems (also known the freezing hypothesis, or the frozen cleavages hypothesis). According to Lipset and Rokkan, the party system remains frozen in the cleavage system of the 1920's:

“We have pushed our attempt at a systematization of the comparative history of partisan oppositions in European politics up to some point in the 1920's, to the freezing of the major party alternatives in the wake of the extension of the suffrage and the mobilization of major sections of the new reservoirs of potential supporters. Why stop there? Why not pursue the exercise of comparative cleavage analysis right up to the 1960's? The reason is deceptively simple: the party systems of the 1960's reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920's. This is a crucial characteristic of Western competitive politics in the age of “high mass consumption”: the party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organizations, are older than the majorities of the national electorates. To most of the citizens of the West the currently active parties have been part of the political landscape since childhood, or at least since they were first faced with the choice between alternative “packages” on election day” (Lipset, Rokkan 1967: 50)

It must be also taken into context, that this was published in 1967, so even if the freezing hypothesis had been true the time of writing of *Party Politics and Voter Alignments*, this does not mean that it still applies 50 years later in 2018. There is much debate on this issue, some of which will be presented in the next chapter of this paper. However, from my theoretical point of interest, the question whether party systems of Europe still represent the cleavages of the 1920's only borders on my research interests. What interests me much more, is whether the possible arrival of new cleavages and institutionalization of new parties may have the same freezing effect, or if a “deforestation” and therefore possibly destabilization of the party system through the possible

arrival of new parties and cleavages takes place, and how this may apply to new European democracies.

Since the very beginning, the freezing hypothesis had its opponents and critics. A base for critique is already laid by the authors themselves, as they admit there are “few but significant exceptions”.(Lipset Rokkan 1967: 50) Lybeck (1985), after many authors have tried to verify or falsify the hypothesis with mixed results, questions whether this hypothesis is testable at all, due to definitional problems. He criticizes authors who tried to test the hypothesis in misinterpreting the claims of Lipset Rokkan, and working with the assumptions that cleavages *created* the party systems. Lybeck counters, that the wording used by Lipset and Rokkan talks about cleavages *reflecting* not *creating* the party systems, and thus there is some space for ambiguity in the relations between parties and cleavages. In this sense, the interactions between cleavages and parties may be both independent and dependent variables at the same time, creating a reciprocate relation. He also points out, that there is confusion on whether these cleavages exist independently of each other or interdependently, and whether some of the cleavages is dominant, with literature being very divided on this issue. (Lybeck 1985: 106-107)

The definitional problems were approached by many other authors. For this study, the clarification and enhancement brought to the concept of cleavages by Bartolini and Mair (1990) is of special relevance. Bartolini and Mair criticize the way some authors try to define cleavages by dividing them into concepts such as “political/cultural”, “structural/non-structural”, “institutionalized/uninstitutionalized” and similar. Bartolini and Mair argue that most cleavages, including the traditional cleavages have attributes of both sides of such a division. For instance if you define the new “cultural” cleavages as sets of beliefs rather than demographic attributes, you would be denying the “normative-ideological – and therefore ‘cultural’ - attributes of traditional cleavages” (Bartolini, Mair 1990: 214)

Bartolini and Mair sees the essential problem of cleavages in them being at an intermediary location between two theoretical approaches. On one side the emphasis on social stratification and its impact on institutions and their behaviour, on the other side the focus on institutions and their impact on the social structure and social change. (ibid: 215). According to Bartolini and Mair, these approaches are often mixed in empirical research, however, their synthesis at the theoretical level is not plausible. (ibid) They try to solve this problem by introducing a more complex definition of

cleavages. In Bartolini and Mair's perspective, cleavages incorporate three elements: 1. An empirical element, which is defined in social-structural terms. This represents a social basis of cleavages. 2. A normative element, which includes beliefs and values, the self-identification of the social groups, 3. an organizational/behavioral element – which is the set of individual interactions institutions and organizations which develop as a part of the cleavage. The authors also stress that these categories do not divide cleavages onto three types, but that the term cleavage should be restricted to a “dividing line in a polity which refers to and combines *all* three aspects.” (ibid: 216)

There are a few more details in the cleavage concept by Bartolini and Mair worth addressing. Bartolini and Mair see cleavages in a historical perspective. By use of this historical perspective, they differentiate between the social base of the cleavage, and the cleavage itself (for example, the difference between a class, and the class cleavage). They describe these as products of different historical processes, but it could also be described as the continuation of a historical process. While class as a social group emerges from processes such as the changing of means of production and the development of capitalism, the class cleavage emerges, when these processes begin coupling with politicization and electoral mobilization. (ibid: 216) While the authors do require that all three elements are present in cleavages, these elements do not necessarily need to be equivalent, meaning, some of the elements may be stronger within a cleavage than the other. For example, the social-structural basis of a cleavage may lose its quantity over time, while the organizational element and normative element may remain strong in a society nevertheless. (ibid: 2017). This notion, combined with the historical difference between the societal base of the cleavage and the cleavage itself, is interesting in regard towards Lipset's freezing hypothesis – from this point a cleavage which in the 1920's came out of a strong social basis and helped form political developments and party organizations, might until 1960's lose some of its societal basis, but still keep its relevance as a cleavage thanks to strong normative and organizational elements – thus remain frozen in Lipset and Rokkan's sense.

Mair and Bartolini also argue that cleavages have an institutional nature. According the authors, *“it can be argued that the institutional nature of the class cleavage, both in terms of social membership and organizational form, is historically and country specific precisely because it does not depend exclusively on the social class.”* (ibid: 218). They demonstrate this by the comparison of the class cleavage in southern European country, which is very heterogenous and divided, and

the class cleavage in the north, which is very homogenous. According to the authors, the only way this can be explained is by looking at the relations that exist among the country specific structural, organizational and ideological aspects of the class cleavage itself, and also between the class cleavage and other cleavages. (ibid: 219).

It is the interactions in-between cleavages which play a strong role in the work of Fernando Casal Bértoa, himself a former student of Peter Mair. In 2011 Casal Bértoa published a study, specifically concerning the cleavage systems in East Central Europe. In this research, he holds closely to the definition of cleavages as presented by Bartolini and Mair. Casal Bértoa studies the influence cleavages have on party system institutionalization through a quantitative approach, testing for different concepts existing in the area of party system research. He tests three most common approaches to explain party system institutionalization through cleavages – cleavage number, cleavage type and cleavage strength (Bértoa 2011: 18) He concludes that none of the three approaches can be verified when used on the eastern central European party systems, as the theoretical expectations these models produce (such as the relationship between cleavage number and party number, that certain types of dominant cleavages lead to a more stable party system than others) do not meet the East Central European reality. Of importance are his findings on the importance on the strength of the class cleavage, which according to findings of Bartolini and Mair, when applied to western Europe, have shown that the stronger the class cleavage is, the lower the level of electoral instability. Not only does this finding not apply to eastern central European party systems, but Casal Bértoa also argues, that his findings support the claim that there is no pure class cleavage in Eastern Central Europe. (Bértoa 2011: 21)

Casal Bértoa then comes up with a different way of determining the relationship between cleavages and party systems in Central Eastern Europe – one that focuses precisely on the interactions in-between cleavages. He works with the concept of cross-cutting and cumulative cleavages. The cross-cutting of cleavages, he argues, lead to weakly institutionalized party systems. There are two theoretical explanations for this assumption: 1. The cross cuttingness of cleavages makes it hard for parties to cooperate, as they may be close to each other based on one cleavage, but incompatible on the other. Because of this it hard to establish structured competition, the parties are prone to change coalitions and do not act in foreseeable patterns 2. The cross cutting of cleavages leads to

low partisan attachment, they are “caught in the middle” and have problems committing to specific ideological group (ibid: 20)

I regard this concept of cross-cutting and cumulative cleavages as being very relevant to my own research. I find Casal Bertoa’s explanation of the relationship between cross cutting cleavages very convincing, and I can see data going in this direction both from Casal Bertoa’s own work, as well as work of other authors (more on that in the next chapter). Apart from that, this argumentation also seems very much in line with my personal experience with Slovak and Austrian politics.

The relation between cleavages and institutions?

A question which automatically arrives after dealing with historical institutionalism in the first part of this chapter, and with the cleavage theory in the next, is up to what way these theories are compatible, and how I plan to utilize them.

The cleavage theory, nor the concept of cleavage itself are not inherently institutional topics, but can be researched from different theoretical backgrounds. Party Systems and Voter Alignments has been written a long time before new institutionalism rose to prominence. Bartolini, Mair and Bertoa’s approaches are strongly quantitative. However, already with certain ideas of Lipset and Rokkan, and much more in the work of Mair or Bertoa, institutions, and their historical context play a strong role. When following development of the original cleavages and the freezing of them in the 1920’s, Lipset and Rokkan base their observation on the study of historical development, on major historic happenings such as the industrial revolution or the general suffrage, to explain how the cleavages came to be, and how they were frozen. This process thus shows to be rather path dependent. Bartolini and Mair bring it even further, when they explain the difference of the social base of the cleavage and the cleavage itself based on country specific historical developments. Moreover, they consider the organizational/institutional element of cleavages as one of the three necessary elements that form a cleavage. The quote by Bartolini and Mair on the institutional nature of the cleavage, which is historically and country specific, used on page 27 of this thesis seems like an open door inviting the topic of cleavages to be studied from the perspective of historical institutionalism.

Cleavages play a very central role in the creation, functioning and change of institutions, mainly the party systems, the electoral systems etc. Even though cleavages are not themselves institutions,

a researcher dealing with party systems from a new institutionalist standpoint would have to come to terms with cleavages in one way or the other. Especially, if we consider the strict definition of cleavages by Bartolini and Mair. Their concept differentiates cleavages from concepts such as social stratification or mere value systems by requiring all three elements of a cleavage, the social, structural element, the normative element and the organizational element. Cleavages in such sense, while informal, show a high degree of effect on political behaviour of individual actors. So they do not only affect political institutions in being organized into parties, they also play a role in forming informal institutions such as rules of conduct. So especially the normative and the organizational elements speak for the possibility to study cleavages from an institutionalist standpoint.

The Left and the Right

It is telling, that for the length of this theory chapter, I haven't touched on the subject which is a part of my research question, and a key concept I am studying in this work – the left and the right. This has been a conscious decision as I do not plan to dwell very deep into defining concept.

My research interest in this work is to try to determine how the left and the right is perceived by the target respondents, both in means of self-identification, and identification of other parties or policies. I am interested in everyone's own definition of the left and right, and everyone's own justification of whether the use of this terminology is justifiable. I try to remain as open towards these individual interpretations as possible. Therefore, I will not try to present a specific or "correct" definition of left and right, that I would compare the answers of my respondents to. This is also out of care of achieving a level of academic distance. The definition I would present would necessarily contain my own preconception on the matter, as a student in Austria, I fall into the same category as many other of the respondents in here.

The Left and Right, Cleavages, Institutions

I will however give few thoughts on the structural nature of the left and right. With respect to my theoretical approaches specified in this chapter, is the left and right a cleavage? Is it an institution? Could it just be a synonym for the class cleavage, or maybe even a term that describes the accumulation of multiple cleavages?

I could imagine a positive answer to all of these questions, and very much depends on the specific definitions one uses for the terms Left and Right on one side, and on the specific context of the

country/system where it is used on the other. Speaking hypothetically, if a country had many cumulative cleavages, which would ten two strong parties or blocks competing for the majority of the voters, it could be very well imaginable that one of these blocks could be considered the “left”, and the other the “right.” However, should a country have many cross-cutting cleavages, preventing coherent party blocks to be formed, the left and the right could be limited to representing just a specific cleavage, such as the class cleavage. This cleavage could potentially be the dominant cleavage, or the cleavage which would play a major role in coalition building effort in this country. It is very well possible, that with the right institutional system, and in a case where cleavages are cumulative, that the left and right dimension could itself check for all three elements of cleavages as presented by Bartolini and Mair. In such a case, the left and right cleavage could become dominant as a form of interaction between multiple cumulative cleavages, while downplaying the importance of the individual cleavages on their own.

These questions show the explorative openness that I hold towards the concept of left and the right. I allow myself this openness by more strictly and precisely defining the concept of cleavages and institutions, and how they relate, in the previous chapters. I do not expect my thesis to find the answers to all of these questions, but maybe at least hints, towards the feasibility of such concepts.

Current State of Research

While I was not able to find literature that would cover my specific topic, as in comparisons on the party/cleavage systems of Austria and Slovakia specifically, or compare student voting behaviour in Slovakia and Austria, there has been a lot of literature on the broader topic of cleavages and the left and right in western and eastern enlargement countries. In this section, I will review and compare some of that literature. I will divide this into several parts. In the first, I will deal with role that cleavages and the left and the right play in contemporary western Europe, how they changed and whether a form of the cleavage theory is still relevant. Next on, I will look at attempts to apply cleavages and cleavage theory on the newly formed eastern central European countries. Finally, I will look at a study that tries to compare the political cleavages and voter behavior in the western and eastern European countries, and see how this finding match my expectations, and the previous literature that was reviewed here.

When trying to come to terms with Stein and Rokkans cleavage theory, and trying to apply it to contemporary politics or to prove it not significant for contemporary politics, there are multiple problems/questions which authors face. The obvious one is, whether cleavages still play a significant role in the society or not. This question is much more complex than it would seem at the first look. It could be interpreted as whether the concept itself still makes sense, whether there still are significant cleavages in the society, or whether they are being replaced by shifting voter attitudes, concepts such as 'value voting' and similar. The answer to a question like this is very theoretical, and depends clearly on the definition of a cleavage. This question becomes easily answerable, when you create a detailed and measurable definition of a cleavage such as the one based on Bartolini and Mair (1980) which I am also taking into account here, and which was detailed in the theory section. The application and analysis of this concept of cleavages, whether in Bartolini and Mair's own work, or in the work of Casal Bertola, seems to demonstrate rather well that cleavages do indeed play a role in voter behavior and party system stability. However, the question of whether cleavages still play a significant role in contemporary politics could also be seen from the perspective of the freezing hypothesis. The question here would be, what role do the original main cleavages that Lipset and Rokkan identified play in current politics? Are they still present in the party systems, and do they still reflect the structure of society? The freezing hypothesis would suggest, that cleavages represented in the party systems reflect cleavages from the 1920s (or more broadly from the past), therefore, they do not necessarily reflect the current structure of society. However, it could be argued that much of these cleavages do still play a role in contemporary society. Or it could be, that the freezing hypothesis does not apply (anymore), as new cleavages are also becoming politically relevant and party forming. This has been a strong point of discussion when it comes to the class cleavage (and in a broader context the left-right dimension) – is it still relevant in modern politics and reflected in both party systems and social structure, or is class no longer relevant in society and only relevant politically due to the freezing of cleavages? (Elff 2007). Or can be taken even further, are the changes in society as significant, that it is time to move "beyond the left and right"? (Giddens, 1994). It is interesting to see how well the definition of a cleavage by Bartolini and Mair cover even this issue, in requiring every cleavage to contain all three aspects (structural, normative, organizational).

The questions above are all very closely connected to the Western European democracy. So another significant area of study has tried to apply the concept of cleavages to new democracies, to

countries outside Western Europe. These studies deal with the questions whether cleavages are relevant also outside of Western Europe, how and why they developed differently, what role do they play in their respective political systems. Eith and Mielke's *Gesellschaftliche Konflikte und Parteiensysteme* (German: Societal Conflicts and Party Systems) (2001), does a great job in collecting a series of articles that deal with cleavages in political systems all around the world. For the purpose of this thesis, the Eastern Central European region is of particular interest. The specific issue for this thesis is the comparison between Western and Eastern Central European democracies, more specifically Austria and Slovakia. While I do miss detailed comparisons of these two countries, Thomassen et. al. (2006), makes an interesting quantitative comparative analysis of cleavages in countries of the EU, with special regard to the comparison of the original EU countries and the enlargement countries.

Class, Cleavages and Parties in contemporary Europe

A great summary and contribution to the debate about relevance of cleavages has been Martin Elff's *Social Structure and Electoral Behavior in Comparative Perspective: The Decline of Social Cleavages in Western Europe Revisited* (2007). Elff, himself questioning the hypothesis of the decline of cleavages, reviews multiple sets of arguments that try to prove the declining importance of (social) cleavages. According to Elff, the claim that social cleavages lose on relevance is an exaggeration:

"If social cleavages really have become irrelevant, one will not be able to find any systematic difference between voters with respect to their support for cleavage based parties or party families, that is, for labor parties (social democratic, socialist, and communist parties) or for Christian (denominational and Christian democratic) and conservative parties. In Western Europe, however, this is clearly not the case" (Elff 2007: 279)

He goes on to demonstrate this with analysis of the connection between church goers and conservative/Christian parties, as well as in the connection between working class and labor parties in seven Western European countries since the 1970s until the end of the 1990s. He sees no decline in the role of the church for the churchgoers (despite the fact that the actual number of churchgoers has declined), and sees some decline in class voting, but not in all countries, and to a lesser degree than was expected.

Elff recognizes two “New Politics” theories that signalize the decline of “classical cleavages”. Dalton’s theory sees the decline of class-based cleavages, rooted in social structures, giving way to new political divisions, value-oriented cleavages. These value oriented cleavages are driven by issue conflicts, and value voting, and while class cleavages are driven by mass voter mobilization. However, Elff considers his results as enough proof against Daltons thesis. While not denying a role of value-based voting, he concludes that these changes have not been so severe as Dalton suggests, and that class cleavages still retain a strong role in influencing the voting behavior. (Elff 2007: 285). Bartolini and Mair go around this conflict by explicitly refusing the division of cleavages between “societal cleavages” “political cleavages” “value-based cleavages” and so on. They point out, that a classical or societal cleavage would also not be value free, just as a value-based cleavage would only be relevant in forming the party-political landscape if it also has a coherent social/structural base within the voters, and the ability to politically organize and mobilize. (Bartolini, Mair 1980: 214)

The other approach, by Inglehart, claims that the decline of cleavages is driven by post-materialism. According to Inglehart, it is value change that drives the decline of social cleavages. According to this theory, the material security in developed Western countries has become wide-spread, which led to a shift from materialist values to non-material values for a large group of (often younger voters). Inglehart describes this group of voters as post-materialists. For the post-materialists, economic concerns, including questions of economy, lose on importance, and consequently, they become less divided on economic interests related to class. (Elff 2007: 286) As Elff argues, this does, even according to Inglehart himself, not necessarily lead to a decline of the class cleavage, and could under some instances even reinforce it. This depends a lot on how the post-materialist issues are coped with by the parties themselves. Inglehart sees two options – either these post-materialist issues are covered by “new left” or “green” parties, or they are integrated into traditional “old left” parties. (ibid: 287) The reason for this is that postmaterialist voters come often come from middle-classes, and tend to vote “left”. If the traditional left wing parties turn to a more post-materialist agenda, which Inglehart calls a “greening-of-the-left”, this can lead to the weakening of the class cleavage, as the traditional left parties attract voters from the post-materialist middle class, while alienating some of the materialist voters from the working class. If new parties with the post-materialist agenda emerge instead, the result is a “split-within-the-middle-classes.” In such a scenario the materialist class-cleavage remains mostly unaffected in relevance. (ibid: 287)

However, Elff, when testing these possible scenarios, comes to the conclusion that neither of them really applies. There are some signs that show there may be some effect of a greening-of-the-left, or a split-within-the-middle, but the variations across countries are too strong. Elff does not argue in his conclusion, that changes in class-cleavage relevance and value-voting, or a rise of post-material voters are taking place, but that they are not as significant, as to replace the traditional cleavages. He demonstrates that the changes are very country specific, and that there is a strong variance between countries. He attributes this to country-specific developments, and to the decisions within individual parties, and therefore questions the predictability of such developments.

The Changes in the European Left

At this point, I think it is useful to dig a little deeper into what some authors call a crisis of the left. While it is a little further away from my main topic of cleavages, it can have something to do with the concepts of left and right, with left-right identification, as well as offer some explanatory potential for certain political developments on Eastern Central Europe, including Slovakia. It has to do with certain phenomena that were already hinted at in the previous section, the (possible) decline of the class cleavage, the rise of post-materialism and the rise of the “new left”. A very significant advocate of this “new left” approach (sometimes also a “third way”). A central figure in this debate is the British sociologist Anthony Giddens. In his books *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) and *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998) Giddens comments on the current state of politics, and advocated a move towards a radical progressive center-left. Effects of modernization, a decline of the significance of the class (cleavage) together with a presumed lack of an alternative to capitalism were among Giddens arguments towards a move away from the traditional politics of left and right. It should be also noted here, that Giddens does not see the class losing its influence completely, but rather changing it:

“Class in the sense of collective action is partly taken out of the picture, but its influence is felt strongly in other political divisions which become the focus of actual and potential social tensions. [...] These have the capacity to tear the social order apart just as threateningly as the old class conflicts ever did, albeit in a quite different fashion.” (Giddens 1994: 188)

These division take place for example in generational divisions or the division of sexes. What is so significant about Giddens concepts is that he managed to influence European politics in a way not many sociologists or political sciences have managed, by shaping to a great extent the face of the

European left in 1990s and beyond. The probably most prominent proponent of a new left (or in this case “new labor”) was long standing British prime minister Tony Blair, as well as many other European left wing prime ministers (Germany’s Schröder, Italy’s Prodi and Renzi, Netherland’s Kok, Austria’s Klima, France’s Valls and Holland, but also to a certain extent USAs Bill Clinton, and current French president Emmanuel Macron). This move is also closely aligns with Inglehart’s take on post-materialism and the decline of the class cleavage as discussed in the previous section.

However, many authors, (De Waele 2016; Meyer/Spiegel 2010; Eskelinen 2016; Segert/Olteanu 2016) see a crisis for social democracy after 2008, and blame precisely the move to the center of the new left, leading to a loss of face, loss of content of the European left. They also see a connection between this center-shift of the new left, and the development of the left, or social democracy, in the emerging post-communist democracies. The transformation of these countries in the 1990s indeed coincides with the rise of the new left (or ‘Third Way’, ‘Neue Mitte’ in German). De Waele questions the social democracy in Eastern Central Europe, often calling it as social democracy in name only (De Waele 2016: 5). He gives blame to the European social democrats, particularly the PES (Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament). According to De Waele, the European social democrats made it very easy for the social democratic parties in the emerging post-communist parties, often merely renamed and partly reformed former communist parties, to become a part of the European social democrats:

[...] the line of the Party of European Socialists (PES) was already devoid of daring propositions, so it was not complicated for these new members to adopt the party line. All they had to do was declare that it is important to reduce inequalities, but without getting specific about how to achieve such a goal, and to claim that peace and democracy are at the heart of the European project: anyone can do that, especially seasoned apparatchiks who tend to be quite good at following the party line without asking questions. (De Waele 2016: 5)

Development of Parties Cleavages in Eastern Central European Democracies

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the newly forming democracies of the former Soviet bloc became a very interesting subject for many Western European sociologists and political scientists. Many have tried to predict the developments in these countries, many saw opportunities in these newly developed democracies. For political scientists, this was an opportunity to study the development of democracies in countries which have endured dictatorship for decades in real time.

According to Bielasiak (1997) four stages of party development could be observed in most of these new democracies. 1. There was the hegemonic party system, with the dominant role of the Communist Party; 2. This changed into a polarized system with the communist party, and an anti-communist party/coalition; 3. After these anti-communist parties/coalitions/blocs have won, they would eventually fall apart, due to differences of opinions within them. 4. Eventually structured pluralist polyarchic systems would develop. (Bielasiak 1997: 30)

A significant trend, as described by Brendt (2011), is the appearance of politically strong, but societally weak parties. The party membership is low despite good electoral outcomes, the parties are voter parties instead of member parties. The exception in some countries are the communist follow up parties, which have taken advantage of the membership structures from the previous regime. There is high voter fluctuation, weak connection between the electorate and the parties. (Brendt 2011: 160)

Brendt also studies how the cleavage theory model by Rokkan and Lipset applies to these new democracies. There were several approaches by political scientists. Two main models were continuity and the discontinuity based approaches. The continuity based approach is based on an idea that is close to Lipset's freezing hypothesis. According to this approach, cleavages which remained "frozen" during the communist era, start to reappear after the installation of democracy. The discontinuity approach on the other hand worked with a "zero hour" hypothesis – the new democracies were seen as clean slates, *tabula rasa*, where the cleavages and parties would be created from scratch, independent from the previous history. In praxis, none of these hypotheses proved to be very successful. The attempts to recreate pre-war parties were mostly failed (with a few exceptions, including the Czech Social Democrats), and even in the cases where these parties were successful, the continuity was often artificial. The Zero Hour hypothesis on the other hand didn't take into account the developments during state socialism and during the regime change, which created country specific developments influencing the development of cleavages. Brendt 2011: 162-163) According to Brendt, this does not necessarily mean that the cleavage theory is not applicable to Eastern Central Europe, it just has to be approached differently, from a perspective that takes in account the specific historical and political development of these new democracies. Historical cleavages, according to Brandt, lost their substance during the communist era. Instead, he argues that the key is to look for new conflicts and cleavages that develop in these post-

communist systems. (ibid: 163-164). He distinguishes three new cleavages that developed in the new Eastern Central European democracies: 1. The transitional cleavage (of post-communism vs. anticommunism); 2. The socio-economic transformation cleavage (which corresponds up to a point with the Western European class cleavage); 3. A cultural cleavage of traditionalism/nationalism against “westernization” (or modernization). (ibid: 165). However, I see it as somewhat questionable whether these “new cleavages” would stand to the test of Bartolini and Mair’s concept of cleavages, as they seem to be somewhat missing in the structural base category. Moreover, both the transitional and the economic transformational cleavage seem to be temporal – only present during the transition/economic transformation itself, but losing on importance as the transition to democracy and capitalist economy has been accomplished. Would this lead to a decline if these cleavages, or a transformation of them?

Interesting is Brendt’s take on the complicated categorization of the parties in the new democracies into the left-right dimension. According to Brendt, left economic positions are often combined with right societal positions. He explains this as being the result of transformation politics, which resulted in left parties being more pro-market, while right-parties ended up using left-wing populism. He demonstrates this on the examples of Poland and Hungary. (ibid: 167). I find this very interesting, as in Slovakia it seems to be the opposite of this seems to be the case, where the governing left wing party Smer, while economically pursuing a very left wing (populist) policy, but would often use anti-migrant and nationalist rhetoric, or protect traditionalist values, more associated with the right in Western Europe.

Fernando Casal Bertoa (2013) offers a somewhat more complex insight in how to deal with the cleavages in Central Eastern European countries, more precisely Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia. The first important difference is that Bertoa, using the cleavage definition by Mair and Bartolini, recognizes different main cleavages for each country (three in Poland and Hungary, two in Slovakia, one in the Czech Republic). (Casal Bertoa 2013: 29) He studies these cleavages based on their number, strength and type, finding significant differences between the four countries, and coming to the conclusion that neither of these factors can sufficiently explain the level of institutionalization of their respective party systems. I do not want to go too much into detail on which cleavages play a role in which country, I will only do that for Slovakia later on in this thesis. Important are however some of his general findings. One is that the cleavage systems

are present, but are different from Western European cleavage systems – therefore, some assumptions and theories which could be applied to Western Europe cannot be applied for Eastern Central Europe. (ibid: 21) The second is that cleavages do indeed play an important role in the stabilization of party systems Eastern Central Europe, but the attribute which seems to be the most relevant in this regard is the level up to which these cleavages cross cut. The argumentation behind this is, that the more the cleavages cross-cut, the more problems arise for parties to find an ideologically suitable lasting coalition partner. In the other hand, the more cumulative (or coinciding) the cleavages are, the parties will side with other parties on their side of the cleavage, unwilling to cross lines. Casal Bertoa confirms these expectations through his findings, adding that “ the degree to which cleavages cross-cut with each other exerts an unquestionable influence on the level to which party systems institutionalize: the lower the cross-cuttingness, the higher the institutionalization.” (ibid: 30)

On the Left-Right Identification and Education

American researcher Kris Dunn (2011) made a research which might also closely relate to my thesis – he researched the influence of higher education in Europe on the left-right identification of students. In his study, he tested three theories on how education would affect left-right identification. The self-interest thesis expects that higher education would shift student’s identification towards the right. It is based on a simplistic consideration of human motivation, and expects that people with higher education will belong to the upper-class, and therefore would vote right-wing based on the class cleavage. The development thesis expects the opposite outcome – that the identification of students with higher education would shift towards the left. This is based on the idea, that higher education leads one to a broader intellectual horizon and greater knowledge and cognitive ability, which leads to a more open and liberal worldview, and less respect towards traditional authority. A third approach is based on socialization theory, and is called the core-values thesis. This thesis expects, that education strengthens the commitments toward core values and institutions of a society. This should not be interpreted as becoming more favorable towards the status quo, but rather that the individual will take the values in question more seriously when forming his individual opinion. (Dunn 2011: 294-295) Since this thesis is oriented towards values, not left-right identification, Dunn slightly modifies the thesis for the purpose of his research:

“education will induce an individual’s liberal-conservative identification to shift either to the left or right based on the core values of that society.” (ibid: 296).

The benefit of the core value thesis is that it can explain the contradictory findings of proponents of the self-interest or the development thesis, as in societies with right-wing values, the self-interest thesis would apply, while for societies with more left-wing values, the development thesis would apply. The problem of the core values thesis is its complexity, as also other factors, such as the strength of the core values, and the openness of the individual towards new messages from the side of the educational institution, play a role in determining the outcomes of education on left-right identification. Nevertheless, testing these theses on data from a large number of European democracies, Dunn comes to the conclusion, that while neither the development or the self-interest thesis fare well in comparison, the modified core-values thesis shows strong explanative potential, while stressing the importance of the individual’s personality for this to apply: “Education’s affect on Left-Right identification is conditional on both the core values of society and on the psychological openness of the individual. Both personality and context matter for Left-Right identification.” (ibid: 309)

Of interest is also the differences Dunn encountered when comparing Western and Eastern European democracies. Dunn finds, that the core-value thesis applies for both Western and Eastern European countries, when analyzed as separate datasets. However, while the figures are similar, they are distinct in their degree – the figures for Eastern Europe look like a tuned down version of the ones for Western Europe. Dunn provides two possible explanations – either it is the result of the fact that the democratic systems of the Eastern European democracies are still developing and stabilizing. Another explanation is based on Inglehart’s theory on post-materialism (which was discussed earlier in this section), claiming that “as society modernizes the Left-Right continuum evolves to encompass cultural issues in addition to the more traditionally associated economic issues.” (ibid: 304)

Do the Eastern Central European Parties and Voters Fit In?

A work of literature, which has influenced my research a lot, and which was actually the motivation that led me to choose this topic for my thesis is Jacques Thomassen et.al. *The Legitimacy of the European Union after Enlargement* (2009). Thomassen studies European electorates and party systems (among other things), to determine the legitimacy of the European Union. His position is,

that if the party systems and electorates across the EU are similar enough, that means, the voters base their decisions on identical sets of values or cleavages, and if the party systems across EU countries offer similar options, then the fact that EU elections take place separately in single countries, instead of having one Europe wide election, does not hurt EU legitimacy. While his conclusions on legitimacy is not important for this thesis, the underlaying research most assuredly is.

Thomassen and Schmidt study party systems across Europe. They argue, that in Western Europe precisely the left-right dimension is superior, as it “not only encompasses the ideological component of the class cleavage but also is a kind of ‘super issue’ encompassing various issue domains. [...] Western democracies can to a large extent be reduced to a single ideological dimension: the left-right dimension” (Thomassen, Schmidt 2009: 24). The authors conclude that this left-right positioning has also been reflected in the party system of the EU. Following, they compare the left-right positioning in the EU party system, with the national party systems of the Eastern Central enlargement countries. Their first test is a rather simple one – they study the extent to which MEPs from the enlargement countries have joined the existing party groups in the European Parliament. They conclude, that while there were a few unaffiliated MEPs, the majority (82%) formally joined a supranational group, and over 60% of them joined one of the two major party groups (EPP or PES). (ibid: 27) Despite the fact, the East tends to vote more right, shifting the balance of power slightly towards EPP, Thomassen and Schmidt conclude that at least on surface, the enlargement has hardly affected the EU party system. (ibid: 28) However, the authors decide to also dwell a little deeper, studying the underling dimensions of conflict in the EU before enlargement, and comparing these to conflict dimensions in Eastern enlargement countries. They work with two main conflict dimensions – the left-right and the integration-independence. Studying multiple data sources, including voter and expert perceptions on the European Parties, come to the conclusion that these two dimensions are still dominant, and the enlargement did not have any significant effects on them. Also, “[t]he party groups at large are still as competitive and cohesive as they were before enlargement.” (ibid: 39)

Even more important for this thesis is Van der Brug et. al.’s contribution to Thomassen book, dealing with the European electorate. (2009) Their argument follows similar premises as the one Thomassen and Schmidt used for parties, only applied on voter – if the cleavages and issue divides

among voters in different European Countries are more or less the same, then the absence of a single European electorate as opposed to many different European electorates does not pose a danger to EU legitimacy. Here the authors study the left-right self-identification of the voters, as well as positions of voters on different left-right issues, and determinants of party choice. Some of the methodology used was similar to the approach I am using, with the difference, that the authors are using a large N comparison thousands of cases, while my approach is more qualitative. (Van der Burg et. al. 2009, 70, 78). They come to the conclusion, that the similarities of the electorates outweigh the differences, and that the inclusion of the post-communist countries in the EU does not fundamentally change its left-right structure of voting behavior. (ibid: 88). Or said differently, the authors confirm that “votes for a socialist party in Poland or Hungary are guided by the same considerations as votes for the socialists in France or Germany.” (ibid: 67) It should be noted, that Van der Burg et.al. do not claim there are no significant differences between how the left and right is perceived in Eastern and Western European countries. They only argue that these are not strong enough to outweigh the similarities, and change the European Party system. (ibid: 88) Some of the most significant differences between the Western and the post-communist states the authors found were: 1. Citizens in the post-communist countries were more egalitarian, and more socially conservative, but less supportive of economic individualism 2. The Eastern Europeans were less likely to agree on the left-right placement of parties and their voting behaviour, which the authors credit to the novelty and volatility of their party systems. 3. Post-materialist and environmentalist are differently attributed to the left-right dimension in the East than in the West, and some other attitude dimensions were not strongly related to the left and right in the Eastern European democracies. (ibid: 87).

I see the results of Thomassen and Schmidt, and of Van der Brug et. al. as very interesting, although I am skeptical towards them, based on multiple reasons. One reason is the overall generalization of the data. The authors worked with huge datasets, that compared all the EU countries doing mostly regression analyses. To do a research like that, they had to simplify and generalize many variables, so that certain possibly relevant country specific differences might have gotten lost in the numbers. Second, especially in the case of Van der Brug, there is the problem of the timeliness of the data. Most of the data for the analyses came from the European Values Study 2000. (Van der Brug 2009: 70) The authors themselves recognize this a drawback, however, they suppose that if changes take place since 2000, they will likely lead to the reducing of differences between the

east and the west (yet they do not provide a good argument for this claim). In 2000, most of these countries were only democracies for 10 years, and political systems were very volatile. Slovakia for example didn't start significant economic reform until the fall of Vladmír Mečiar in 1998. If this was a drawback in 2009 when Thomassen's book came out, it becomes much more of a problem nine years later. Not only is the data not up to date, the development in the Eastern enlargement states since then does not suggest that the party systems would become significantly more institutionalized, or that the behaviour of voters would be more akin to their western counterparts. The European Value Study, after all, took place before the rise of Viktor Orban in Hungary, or the PiS party in Poland. If we take the Slovak example, the problem is even clearer – only a single party that was present in the parliament in 2000 is still in the parliament at this point (the Slovak National Party (SNS), which has itself missed the necessary threshold to enter the parliament on multiple occasions since 2000). Therefore I am skeptical towards the applicability of the findings to current politics, even if we would consider them reliable when they came out in 2009. The conclusions of Thomassen and Schmidt, and of Van der Brug et. al. are also in clear contrast with some of the findings of Casal Bertoa, who identifies different cleavages and divides being prevalent in different Eastern Central countries (as opposed to Thomassen, who sees the left-right dimension as being central in all European countries). The argument that the left parties in Western Europe have the same values, and attract the same types of voters as the left parties in Eastern Europe do, is in contrast with the arguments made by De Waele, Segert, and others mentioned in the paragraphs above.

With this, I do not want to completely dismiss the very rigorous and extensive quantitative work of Thomassen et.al. It is even possible, that his main conclusion, that the arrival of new democracies did not significantly change the EU party system, would stand against more recent data. That is however not my focus here. Instead, I expect that the differences, which Van der Brug et.al. partially examined, are more significant, if looked upon from a closer perspective, and that the concept of left-right is much more country specific and context determined, than the data of Thomassen et. al. would suggest.

The political system and cleavages in Austria

To understand the politics of Austria, to understand how the cleavages in the country developed, and to be able to interpret and compare the differences with Slovakia, I consider it important to discuss the history of Austrian politics.

The Republic of Austria, as we know it today was founded in April 1945. As Anton Pelinka stresses right at the beginning of classical work on Austrian party politics *Vom Glanz und Elend der Parteien* (German: Of the Glory and Misery of Parties) (2005), it was founded *by* the parties, and *for* the parties. As a result of this, Pelinka argues, the parties in Austria gained functions that went beyond the functions of parties in classical parliamentary democracies. (Pelinka 2005: 15) In the first elections, the two main parties, the Peoples Party of Austria (OVP) and Socialist Party of Austria (SPO) managed to secure a combined 94,4% of the vote (OVP 49,8%, SPO 44.6%). The only other party that managed to make it through the threshold of 5% was the Communist Party of Austria (KPO). (The threshold was later reduced to 4%). In the second election in 1949, the party Federation of Independents (Verband der Unabhängigkeiten, VdU), a German nationalist party aiming at former Nazi supporters entered the parliament with 11%, taking around 5% from each large party. (Kritzinger 2013: 15) Over the next 10 years, the KPO lost support and fell under the electoral threshold, while the VdU split which led to the creation of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) as its follow up party, with around 7%. (ibid: 16) This situation remained largely stable until 1986, so for over 40 years since the beginning of the Republic of Austria, the two main parties of the Austrian party system, the OVP and the SPO were able to secure upwards of 40% in every election (with the exception 1949, where the SPO secured “only” 38,7% of the vote).

If you combine these numbers with the fact, that voter turnout in Austria in 1945 was at 94%, and remained over 90% until 1986, as well as the fact that party membership in Austria was very frequent, with both the SPO and OVP counting over 700 000 members, meaning over a quarter of the population were members of one of the large parties (Kritzinger et. al.: 2013), and you will start to get the picture of just how much of a dominant role the two major parties played in Austria.

There were a few more factors that helped institutionalize a lasting pact between the OVP and SPO. First there was the negative historical experience of the first republic, which had a very polarized party system. A grand coalition between the two main parties was to serve as a guarantee of stability, and a check against the possible reappearance of national-socialist tendencies. This was

also one of the reasons why the first government was a coalition of all three parties that made it into the parliament. (Onken 2013: 303) There was also a more pragmatic reason for the creation of grand coalitions – while both parties were very strong in the parliament, neither managed to secure a majority in the parliament and therefore a single party government until the 1966 OVP. The VdU, later the FPÖ, were not considered a viable partner due to their association with the national-socialist past, and thus did not play the role of a pivot party in the creation of government, as would be the case in similar systems. (Kritzinger et. al. 2013: 16) Therefore the only option besides minority government for the major parties was to create grand coalitions.

This explains, why the parties gained such so much presence in the society. According to Onken, the embeddedness of the Parties into the society was so strong, that it could be considered a society-controlling function (Onken 2013: 302). The influence of the parties went beyond dividing functions in the governments, the dual-monopoly of the parties was present across the public sphere – the media, the social partners, the economy. The OVP and FPÖ created something like a power-sharing arrangement: Each party was guaranteed access to power, no matter if it was the “losing” or “winning” party. (Cf. Pelinka 2005: 32-33) Due to this, party affiliation and party membership were important factors for certain careers, and were determining factors for the lives of many citizens: “Party membership allowed access to networks which were important for career developments, schooling, etc. Moreover, a lot of interest groups and even leisure associations were affiliated to the parties” (Kritzinger et.al. 2013: 22) According to Pelinka, this situation stayed largely intact even after 1966, where first the OVP for 4 years, and later the FPÖ for long 16 years managed to form single party governments. Despite the fact the parties felt the loss of power by being outside the government, this loss was moderated by the standing system of guarantees to both parties. During these times, the social partners, which retained their party-loyalties from the grand coalitions, grew on importance. (Pelinka 2005: 33).

Major changes came with 1986. The Greens made it into the parliament for the first time, thus becoming the fourth player among the Austrian parties. Austria’s parliament thus had four parties for the first time since 1959 when the KPO fell out of the parliament. Maybe more importantly, Jörg Haider became the leader of the FPÖ, changing the party’s character drastically. (Kritzinger et.al. 2013: 18) Pelinka, in my interview with him, also recognizes the changes in the FPÖ as being very significant for the development of the party system. According to Pelinka, Haider finalized

the party's turn from German-nationalism to Austrian nationalism. The FPO, which according to Pelinka could be described before 1986 as a party "defined by former Nazis, and existed for former Nazis". However, "as a party of former Nazis, it was always a 5-6-7% party". (Interview with Pelinka 2018) This didn't change in the early 1980's despite the fact that the FPO tried to present itself for a time as a liberal party, which allowed them to enter into coalition with the SPO in 1983 (Kritzinger et.al. 2013:18). According to Kritzinger et al., Haider turned the party into a clear cut "right-wing party focusing on anti-establishment and nationalistic issues and using anti-immigration rhetoric," which led to the cancellation of the government contract by the SPO. (ibid: 18). According to Pelinka, both the Greens and the FPO were the winners, while the major parties were losers of political and cultural changes in the society.

"So, the new Freedom Party under Heider realized that a new generation, and new economic, political and cultural framework, allowed for what would later be described as populism. Not having a stringent and consistent party program, but trying to be everything to everybody, and especially in a position against everything. The old Freedom party was defined by its willingness to adapt, the new Freedom Party was defined by its unwillingness to adapt. And this made well with the new generation which was not willing any longer to vote for a party just because their parents have always voted for this party." (Interview with Pelinka, 2018)

The changes to the Austrian party system were significant. 1983 marked the first time since 1949, that a party not called SPO or OVP was a part of the government. FPÖ thus became a major player in Austrian politics. The FPO reached 16% of the popular vote 1990, and never fell under 10% since, reaching over 20% five times, and being a part of three more coalition governments. The Greens were able to get into the parliament in 1986, and have managed to steadily rise from 4,8% to 12,4% in 2013, before falling out of the parliament for the first time since 1986 after a split in the party shortly before the 2017 elections. Since the 1990's, more parties joined the Austrian parliament. In 1994 and 1995, the Liberal Forum, a split party from the FPO which consisted of a more economically and socially liberal wing of the party managed to enter the parliament. In 2005, after a major split in the FPO, Haider founded the Alliance for the future of Austria (BZO), which replaced the FPO in the government with the OVP, becoming the fifth party in history of the second republic to partake on an Austrian government. The BZO barely managed to enter the parliament the next election, and rose to over 10% in the 2008 election. However, Haider died in a tragic car crash shortly after the elections, and the BZO did not manage to return to the parliament afterwards.

Among the newest parties in the Austrian parliament are the liberal NEOS, who also incorporated the former Liberal Forum, and have managed to get into the parliament in 2013 and 2017. In 2013 a party called Team Stronach, led and named by a Canadian-Austrian business man Frank Stronach, managed to enter the parliament, but was disbanded in 2017. In the 2017 elections, the party called Liste Pilz (the Pilz – list), a splinter group from the Green party led by Peter Pilz, managed to get into the into the parliament at the expense of the Green party.

These societal changes, reflected in the rise of new parties in Austria, had an effect on the hegemony role of the two main Parties. The SPO fell under 40% in the 1994 election, and has not returned since, falling just under 27% in both 2013 and 2017. The OVP currently the strongest party in the parliament with 31,5% has managed to secure over 40% only once since 1990 (42,3% in 2002), and fell under 30% on five occasions. The party membership also went down significantly. According to Onken, the party membership in Austria went down from 23% to 18% in just five years since 1989. Until 2006 it went down further to around 15%. (Onken 2013: 325) According to data from 2008 (Biezen, Mair, Poguntke 2011), Austria has stabilized at around 17%. It should be noted though, that despite this decline Austria still is the country with the biggest percentage party membership among its electorate in Europe, with the average being just 4,7%. (Biezen et. al.: 2011: 28) Pelinka stresses, that unlike voter support the loss of party membership of the two major parties OVP and SPO, was not reflected in a rise in party membership of the Greens or the FPÖ. With the decline of the strength of the two major parties, the attractiveness importance of party membership and of the “Party-State” was falling. (Pelinka 2005: 65)

Cleavages in Austria

When it comes to the development of the cleavages in Austria, as Pelinka stressed in my interview, one has to look back to the times before the fall of the Austrian empire, when the basis of the Austrian party system was created. Pelinka sees two cleavages as being dominant in those times – at one side the religious cleavage, which led to the creation of the Christian-Social Party, which was the basis for the later OVP. Then there was the class cleavage, which led to the creation of the Social Democratic Party in Austria. A reason for why these cleavages became so dominant and formative lies also into the question of Austrian identity after the fall of the Empire. According Pelinka, Austrian identity in the Austrian empire was a loose umbrella, there was no unifying national identity. There were Czechs, Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks Poles, but not Austrians. So

there was no Austrian identity to build on when the first Republic was founded, but there was class identity, there was religious Identity. (Interview with Pelinka 2018) The structural base of these cleavages was very strong. This had also interesting influence on the ethnic cleavage. As said, the Austrian empire was a multilingual and multiethnic empire. There was no concept of an Austrian nation and when the Empire has broken down and the first Republic was founded, the grand majority of the population was German speaking. The ethnic cleavage thus formed into a question of whether the people of Austria are Germans, or not. This led to the creation of a pan-German camp. This camp was later represented in the second Republic by the VdU, and FPO after that. (Interview with Pelinka 2018) These cleavages stayed very stable, and as the previous part shows, were reflected in a very stable party system, so at least up to the 1980' s, Austria could be seen as a good example for Lipset and Rokkan's freezing hypothesis.

Kritzinger et al. also study cleavages in their study on Austrian voters (2013). They also recognize the two main cleavages in Austria used to be class and religion, and to a somewhat lesser extent the regional cleavage. What I consider important, is that according to Kritzinger et.al. all of these cleavages overlap, or in other words coincide. The secular/urban/worker has been represented by the SPO, whereas the rural/religious/farmers and owners were represented by the OVP. (Kritzinger et. al. 2013: 22). Based on this, I consider Austria, at least until the 1980's, a great example for the effect if cumulative cleavages on the stability of the party system.

Kritzinger et. al. also study the changes to this cleavage system based on extensive voter preferences studies in Austria from 1990-2006, and then for the 2008 election, presenting some very interesting findings. The traditional cleavages, class and religion, retained their important status. However, the new parties managed to change the way these cleavages affected voter decisions, by appealing to certain, mostly young, members of society. The religion cleavage for example still differentiates between SPO and OVP voters. However, according to Kritzinger et. al., there has a been a split amongst the older traditional right as presented by the OVP, and the younger, non-religious right-wing voters represented by the FPO. While the religion variable showed a positive correlation between church goers and OVP voters, no significant link between churchgoers and the SPO or Greens, it found a negative correlation between churchgoers and FPO voters (Kritzinger et. al. 2013: 76) Interesting was also the difference between the influence occupation (as a proxy for class) on voter behavior. While occupation remains an important factor

for the two traditional parties OVP and SPO, according to the authors, it has minimal effect on defining the voters of the new parties (ibid: 77). And finally, a factor that has shown a rising significance is education. Higher educated voters used to be a group more associated with the SPO during the 1970s, as they were the party that introduced free higher education in the 1970s (ibid: 22). However, this has changed since 1980s. Young voters in general have shifted towards the newer parties. (ibid: 77). Among the young voters, the education seems to be a “decisive cleavage.” While the young educated voters prefer the Greens, the young uneducated prefer the right-wing radicals. Kritzing et. al. consider these results as very significant, as they say that the “Austrian results concerning the impact of education for younger voters are amongst the strongest ever reported.” (ibid: 77) The factor of education is also brought forward by Pelinka, who also observes that Green Party voters over-proportionally highly educated young people, while the FPÖ is over-proportionally represented by white males. He also notices, that gender also seems to be a factor here – while the Greens were successful in reaching female voters, the FPÖ were more strongly attracting male others. (Pelinka 2005:68) Pelinka also stressed the importance of education in our interview, call it a possible new cleavage. According to Pelinka, education could to a large extent even be behind the pro- /anti- EU stances in Austria, with the higher educated being in favor of the EU, while the lesser educated are more against the EU, as they perceive it as a possible danger to them. (Interview with Pelinka 2018)

The Left Right Identification of the Political Parties in Austria

In the following part, I will look at the left and right stances of the Austrian parties. There were many ways to approach this classification – studying party programs, policy outputs, self-description and so on. Any such classification would however depend on a more rigorous concept of left and right, a so to say *correct* understanding of left and right. Since I wanted to stay away from such conceptions, but still provide a basis on which to compare the results of the students, I decided to use the left- right classification of parties as provided by the experts I interviewed, for their respective countries. I am aware, that a classification like this is very subjective, but it also has its advantages. On one hand, this, after codification and evaluation can create a more thorough understanding of the expert’s views on left and right for a comparison later on. More importantly, this changes the focus of the comparison from a comparison: Instead of comparing students views of left and right, and of the parties with the “correct view of them (if such a thing as a “correct”

view is even definable, which I question) the comparison shifts to how close the students view of the left and right coincides with the experts view of the left and right. Also, since both experts are specialized in the field of their respective countries party systems, their classification still counts as an educated, well argued and reliable source.

When classifying the Austrian parties, Pelinka stresses that he does not see the left and the right as a linear continuum. Pelinka regards social justice and equality as the determinant aspect of the left, ever since the French revolution. He sees a difference in what he calls the traditional understanding of the left, which is limited by borders of the national state (at least in practical terms). But as the world gets more globalized, Pelinka argues that a more international concept of the left is becoming necessary - “[i]f you are interested in social justice, why should it end on the border between Austria and Slovakia? Why should social justice not be thinking about the disadvantaged, about the Roma living in eastern Slovakia? Or thinking about the social rights of Slovak nurses working in Austria?” He sees this difference of a national and cross-national view of social justice as a great dilemma of the left, most visibly demonstrated by the reactions to the migrant crisis by different left parties. When talking about the right, he differences between the *ancienne regime* aristocratic right, the nationalist right and the economic liberal right, with the latter two being the ones still relevant today. According to Pelinka, Austria does not really have the economic liberal right. So the right in Austria is mostly the nationalist right. And here he also sees a breach between the original nationalist right in Austria, which was the German-nationalism, and the new understanding of it, which is Austrian-nationalism.

As a side note – I decided to break the unwritten rule of listing the parties in the order of their parliamentary strength, and put the Greens in the fourth place. This is due to the Greens formative role in Austrian politics since the 1980s, and because it is necessary to first explain the position of the Greens before explaining the newer NEOS and the green splitter Liste Pilz, as they compete for a similar type of voter, and their position is to a large extent formed as a contrast to the Greens.

OVP – The Austrian Peoples Party

The currently strongest party in the Austrian parliament as a **center right party**, not very different from the German CDU or other western European conservatives. They are more pro-market (though not as much as some of their western counterparts) and in favor of agriculture. Rather protectionist than liberal in their economic stance. He also argues that OVP always a nationalist

party in some respects, always an Austrian-nationalist party. To my question, whether the OVP took a more nationalist approach, Pelinka counters: “The Austrian Peoples party defined itself in 1945 as the only true Austrian patriotic party. There is a tradition. The Austrian peoples party had always been interested in being a party of true Austrians.”

SPO – Social Democratic Party of Austria

Pelinka views the SPO as a **traditional, materialistic left party**. It misses the post-materialistic aspects of the left, and it is also rather limited by Austrian national borders in its leftist thinking. Pelinka demonstrates this on the SPO’s reaction to the migrant crisis in Europe, which was very hold back and lukewarm. He sees this as a fear of loss of voters to the Freedom Party. “The SPO is limited in its leftist attitude by this competition for the same voters as the Freedom party.”

FPO – Freedom Party of Austria

The FPO in Pelinka’s understanding is a **right wing party**, especially since he defines the right foremost by nationalism. It transformed in the 1980s from a German-nationalist into an Austrian-nationalist party. He considers them programmatically inconsistent, populist, with an attempt to be a catch-all party, “trying to be everything to everybody, and especially in a position against everything.” However, Pelinka is careful in using the terms *extreme right* or *far right*. It is not extremist as in the meaning of a *nazi party* and not extremist in the meaning *fighting liberal democracy*, not an anti-system party. Or at least, not on the official side, with Pelinka being unwilling to speculate on “would-be” scenarios if the FPO had a single majority in the parliament.

Die Grüne – The Greens

The Greens according to Pelinka are the only “**true**” **leftist party**: social, pro-European, and internationalist. Not limited by the borders of Austria such as the SPO is. He also argues that the Greens have shown the ability to be able to win in direct standoffs with the right, to mobilize an anti-FPO majority, as presented by the green President, or by the Green mayor in Innsbruck.

NEOS – NEW AUSTRIA

The NEOS are described as a liberal party in the direction of German or British liberals. What distinguishes them is their strongly positive stance towards the EU. He sees them as competing for the same type of voter as the Greens, being different from them with a clearly defined pro-market

stance. He describes them as the most clearly **centrist party**, on one hand, their liberal internationalism makes them hard to be called a rightist party, but on the other hand because of the pro-market orientation they cannot be called leftist.

Liste Pilz – List Pilz

Liste Pilz is a group around leader Peter Pilz who split from the Green party shortly before the 2017 elections, gaining 4,4% to barely reach the parliament, while pushing the Greens out of the parliament with a 3,8% result. According to Pelinka, Pilz is more polarizing, an **outspoken leftist-populist**, as opposed to the more programmatic and less polarizing. He sees the survival of the party as based on the popularity of Pilz, and based on the ability of the Greens to regroup after their loss, while giving the Greens better chances of succeeding in the future.

KPO – Communist Party of Austria

The Communist Party is included despite the fact it has not been able to be a relevant player at the national level since the 1960s. It has been included due to their historical relevance as a state-forming party, as well as due to their continuing relevance in the Styria region, especially in its capital Graz where they have been the second strongest party since 2012.

Pelinka argues that the Communist Party of today could barely be called a party at the national level, due its lack of effectivity. He considers it one of the least successful communist parties in western Europe, possibly due to the fact that the Social Democratic party has been one of the most successful in Europe. According to Pelinka the Communist Party today is **not a relevant party**.

The Party system and Cleavages in Slovakia

The history of the party system is very different from that of the Austrian one in multiple aspects. First, the Slovak democratic tradition is much shorter Slovakia has only had its own democratic tradition since 1993. Second, unlike in Austria, the Slovak political system has shown extreme volatility, and many significant changes since its beginning, with multiple parties raising to dominance before being completely disappearing from the political scene. Despite the fact that some of these parties are no longer players in the parliament, it necessary to document their rise and fall, to explain how they affected the party system. After a short summary of the state forms in Slovakia over the past hundred years, I will try to explain the political situation based on three

epochs: 1. The 1993-1998s, with the dominance of HZDS and its leader and prime minister Vladimir Mečiar; 2. 1998-2006, marked by reform governments build out of parties in opposition to HZDS, with the HZDS still remaining the strongest party in the parliament; 3. 2006 – 2018, with the dominance of SMER and its prime minister Robert Fico (who has been the prime minister during all of this time except for 2010-2012, before being replaced after protest in 2018).

Slovakia has been a part of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire before World War I, then a part of the democratic Czecho-Slovak republic from 1918 until 1939. In 1939 Slovakia split from the Czech Republic, to form the authoritarian Slovak Republic, which served as a satellite country to National Socialist Germany. After World War II, Czechoslovakia was reconstituted, fell under the Soviet influence, and soon established a communist totalitarian regime. After the fall of the regime in 1989, Czechoslovakia continued as a democratic republic until the split in 1993. Therefore, the Slovak Republic, founded on the First of January 1993, has been the first independent democratic state in Slovakia, that wasn't under the influence of a different country.

In his book *Elected Affinities. Democracy and Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic*, (2006) Kevin Deegan-Krause explores, among other things, the developments in Slovakia during the era of HZDS, and its leader Vladimir Mečiar, symbolized by its lack of accountability. (Krause 2006: 23). After the breakdown of the anti-communist movement Public Against Violence (*Verejnost' Proti Násiliu*, VPN) many political parties started forming in Slovak politics, already before the breakdown of the Republic. Out of these, the HZDS came as the strongest grouping, with its leader Vladimír Mečiar negotiating the terms of the break-up with the Czech Republic with prime minister Vaclav Klaus. Mečiar served as Slovakia's prime minister since the founding of the Republic in 1993, until 1998. (With the exception of a short interim government led by Mečiar's opponent Moravčík in 1994.) This era was significant by a halted democratic development, encroachment, lack of accountability, all caused by the authoritarian tendencies of Vladimir Mečiar, and his dominant party, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*, HZDS) . (cf. *ibid*: 23-24). While the HZDS never managed to get a majority in the parliament, it managed to form a stable coalition with members of the nationalist Slovak National Party (*Slovenská Národná Strana*, SNS), and the working class oriented Association of Workers (*Združenie Robotníkov Slovenska* ZRS). During the rule of these parties, there have been many encroachments and conflicts, however, I will only point out a few of them, which had impact on

development of the political system. An important set of changes was started right after the entry of Mečiar's second government in 1994. Deegan-Krause calls this *Systematic Legal Encroachment* (ibid:26). The coalition of HZDS, SNS and ZRS used some of the numerous legal loopholes existing in the newly formed democracy, to secure the maximum amount of legislative, executive, and administrative positions, crippling the control functions of the opposition and observatory institutions. (ibid: 27) Significant were also the changes of the media, with the public media being used as a tool for the government. (ibid: 28-29) A further change, which had strong effects on the society and economy of Slovakia, was the privatization undertaken by the Mečiar government. The government first, similarly as in other areas, weakened control instruments that were to oversee the privatization, mostly by placing people close to the ruling parties into the relevant institutions (an example of this the removal of all opposition members from both the FNM – the main oversight institution over privatization, as well as from the oversight body of the FNM itself, during an overnight parliamentary session in November 2004). (ibid: 31) Thus, the way the privatizations were carried out were largely uncontrolled, and mostly benefited people close to the members of the coalition government. (ibid: 34) The politics of the Mečiar governments led a negative report by the European Commission in 1997, which did not recommend to start accession negotiations with Slovakia due to the instability of institutions and insufficiencies in democracy. (Leška 2015: 39)

A major change came in 1998, when the HZDS coalition suffered heavy losses. HZDS still remained the strongest party of the parliament, but fell from 35% to 27%. The ZRS didn't get into the parliament, and the SNS only had 9%, so it was unable to for the coalition to continue its rule. After the developments of the past 6 years, no other parliament party was willing to enter a coalition with the HZDS or the SNS, and therefore, the strongest party had to retreat into opposition. The new government was formed by Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK, a coalition of right and center-right pro-European and anti-HZDS parties), which won just under 27% of the vote. They were joined in a broad coalition by the Slovak Democratic Left (*Slovenská Demokratická Ľavica, SDL*) – the transformed former communist party, the newly formed Party of Civic Understanding (*Strana Občianskeho Porozumenia, SOP*), as well as the ethnic Hungarian party Hungarian Coalition Party (*Strana Maďarskej Koalicie, SMK*). The government, would be possible to create even with only three of the parties, but this way, the parties showed a broad societal consensus against the practices of Mečiar, as well as the willingness of the Slovaks to cooperate with the Hungarian ethnic

minority, which was welcomed by foreign observers (ibid: 58). 2002 brought forth a similar story, with HZDS winning the vote (this time with 19%). The Democratic Coalition split into the newly formed Slovak Democratic Christian Union (*Slovenská Demokraticko-Kresťanská únia, SDKU*), and the traditional Christian Democratic Movement (*Kresťansko-Demokratické Hnutie, KDH*). The SMK also made the parliament, while the SOP and the SDL fell out of the parliament. Three new parties entered the government: The liberal Alliance of the New Citizen (*Aliancia Nového Občana, ANO*), The Communist Party of Slovakia (which did not have continuity with the pre 1989 Communist Party nor the post-communist SDL). The third new party that entered the parliament was SMER (meaning Direction), a party formed by Robert Fico a former popular member of the SDL. The SDL, after its loss support, was itself eventually integrated into the structures of SMER (Malová 2017: 5). The bigger part of the 2002 coalition remained intact though, as SDKU, KDH, SMK and the newcomer ANO were able to form a coalition with a narrow majority. Both the 1998 and 2002 governments were led by Mikuláš Dzurinda. These coalitions have managed to right some of the issues caused by Mečiar, by allowing for more opposition control, including restoration of proportionality in parliament committees. (Krause 2006: 58) Under the two governments of Dzurinda, Slovakia underwent market-liberal economic reform, and the country managed to become a member of the European Union and the NATO in 2004.

In 2006 SMER was able to win the election, securing 29% of the vote, and created a coalition government with HZDS, despite criticism from both the Party of European Socialists and some more liberal left-wing voters. (Malová 2017: 8) Robert Fico has been the prime minister of Slovakia since 2006 until 2018, with the exception of 2010-2012, when HZDS fell out of parliament, SMER and SNS could not form a government, and no other party in the parliament was willing to enter a coalition with SMER. Rather forming a broad anti-SMER coalition that lasted for two years. (A situation closely mirroring the one from 1998). This short termed government included two parties new to the parliament – neoliberal Freedom and Solidarity (*Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS*), and a splitter party from the SMK, Most-Híd (meaning *bridge* in Slovak and Hungarian), which promoted itself as moderate ethnic party and a bridge between Slovaks and Hungarians, formed by the popular former leader of the SMK. The government ended prematurely, as a dispute over the European Financial Stability Facility led to a non-confidence vote by the newcomer SaS.

During the rule of SMER, the basic democratic party competition remained mostly intact on an institutional level. However, especially during the one-party government of SMER, prime ministers Fico's government style has limited checks and balances and excluded non-governmental experts. According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, Fico's government was characterized by lack of transparency, and stagnation of anti-corruption measures. (<https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/SVK/>)

The 2012 elections brought further changes to the party system. In 2012 the party Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajní Ľudia a Nezávislé Osobnosti, OLaNO), entered the parliament. Dolný and Malová (2016) describe OLaNO as an anti-party, which tries to present itself as a "loose group of independent candidates campaigning on a common party list united by criticism of 'partocracy.'" (Dolný, Malová 2016: 4)

The 2016 elections brought some radical changes to the party system. Even more parties entered into the fold, with the parliament becoming even more fractured, as the disillusionment with politics and frustration of voters led to a rise of new populist, even extremist parties. (ibid: 4) SMER suffered heavy losses, falling from 44,5% down to 28%. The SDKU and the KDH fell out of the parliament completely, both for the first time since their founding. KDH ended up just under the 5% threshold (with 4,94%) while SDKU, after a complete breakdown of the party leadership in the previous years, became irrelevant with 0,26%. Three new parties entered the parliament. #SIEŤ (Slovak for #Network) a party formed by an unsuccessful presidential candidate and splitter from KDH, Radoslav Procházka, which included some further former KDH and SDKU members of the younger generation, failed to achieve expectations as a new leader of the center-right bloc (it was the second strongest party with over 10% in opinion polls as late as February 2016) (<http://preferencie.teraz.sk>), and finished with a mere 5,6% due to missteps in the last months before the election. Sme Rodina (meaning "we are family"), a populist party led by controversial businessman Boris Kollár, and right wing extremist Peoples Party – Our Slovakia (*Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko*, LSNS) were also able to enter the parliament. Interestingly, most major opinion polls in Slovakia completely failed to predict the rise of Sme Rodina and LSNS. (<http://preferencie.teraz.sk>)

Out of the complicated situation, a coalition was created between SMER, SNS, Most-Híd and #SIEŤ. This caused a level of uproar from some supporters and even members Most-Híd and

#SIEŤ, who formerly were opposed to the rule of SMER. In #SIEŤ, this caused internal problems, which ultimately led to the stepping down of two party presidents, and eventually the leave of all of its deputies from the party. The government was reformed to only include SMER, SNS and Most-Híd, with the backing of the former #SIEŤ deputies.

In 2018, two years into his third term as prime minister, Fico had to step down as prime minister amid to massive nationwide anti-corruption protests after the murder of government critical journalist Jan Kuciak, who's post mortem released article researched connections of SMER members to people close to the Italian Ndrangheta mafia. He was exchanged by SMER's vice chairman Peter Pellegrini.

Slovakia has been marked by a rather instable, volatile party system. According to Bertoa (2012) the Slovak party system has been characterized by: “by the presence of partial alternations (mainly from 1998), innovative governing formulae and open access (every single cabinet since 1994 has included at least one new party – most of them formed just a couple of months ahead of the elections).” (Bertoa 2012: 26) (2012 was an exception to this, as it was the only time in history a party – SMER – could form a single party government). Moreover, many of these parties have already vanished from the political scene. Only three parties in the history of Slovakia were able to present prime ministers – HZDS, SDKU (as SDK in 1998), and SMER. Out of these parties the first two are not relevant in the parliament anymore. There is not a single party in Slovakia, which would remain in the parliament from 1993 until 2018. (<https://www.vysledkyvolieb.sk/>) Two parties that remain relevant since the founding of Slovakia are the KDH, which failed to gain seats in the parliament for the first time in 2016, but looks to be back on track after last opinion polls (<http://preferencie.teraz.sk/>), and the SNS, which failed to reach the parliament twice (2002, 2012), but always managed to regroup. SMER is currently the longest serving party in the parliament, being a part of it since 2002, followed by two newer parties formed in 2010 – SaS and Most-Híd. Altogether, a number of 18 different parties have managed to enter the parliament since the founding of the Republic (with some more parties entering as part of various pre-election coalitions), out of which 7 are still represented in the parliament, with KDH aiming at reentry into the parliament, two new parties getting close to enter the parliament, and the SMK standing at around 3-4% while remaining a significant player in the southern regions. Out of the 18 parties, 6 were only able to enter government once in their history, 8 of them do not have any relevance to

the party system anymore. Of the 7 parties in the parliament, only two have existed longer than 10 years. (<http://preferencie.teraz.sk/>; <https://www.vysledkyvolieb.sk/>).

A characterization of the Slovak party system that comes in stark contrast with Austria has been party membership. Brendt's (2011:160) description of politically strong, societally weak parties applies wonderfully to Slovakia. Party has been among the lowest in Europe, at 2% of the electorate, while showing a declining tendency. (Biezen et. al. 2011: 28) According to Dolný and Malová, parties in Slovakia are often formed by "the elite, emerging either by fragmentations and divisions of parliamentary parties in parliament, or as projects of political entrepreneurs seeking to gain political influence." (Dolný, Malová 2016: 8) According to the authors, the success of the new parties indicates, that neither a developed and organized structure, nor massive party membership are necessary to succeed in elections in Slovakia. (ibid:8)

A further typical feature of the Slovak party system is described by Malová and Dolný as being "standing on one leg" – "as there has always been a dominant party in one camp (often nationalist or leftist) and a group of fragmented center-right parties in the other." (ibid: 3)

Cleavages in Slovakia

During my interview with professor Malová, I enquired about how the approaches to cleavages named by Brendt (2011) – the continuity approach, that expects cleavages frozen since the pre-war times reappearing; the zero-hour approach, expecting the new democracies to be a clean slate. According to Malová, both of these approaches were correct, up to an extent. According to Malová the first cleavage with developed, the regime cleavage between the proponents and opponents of the old regime, was really a newly developed cleavage. But afterwards, some cleavages really started reappearing, and could be effectively used by parties to gain voters. An example of this is the ethnic cleavage (Slovak and Hungarian nationalist), and the religious cleavage.

An interesting factor, that Malová stresses in the interview, is the historical context of Slovakia, that influenced the development of cleavages is that Slovakia lacked a class structure. The former regime tried to overcome class, private property was abolished, the so-called bourgeois was eliminated, ownership and entrepreneurship were not possibilities in the regime. A whole class ceased to exist. Even the first and second generations of large capital holding enterprises were not entrepreneurs in the general meaning of the word. Their success was built on good relations with

the elites in the state – either through unfair privatization, or through the access to government procurements, not through competition on the free market. Malová describes these groups with the term oligarchs. Therefore, after the revolution, the class cleavage didn't form properly. Economic issues did inevitably become a part of each party's program, but were not cleaving the society based on class difference. So it was that even nationalist/authoritarian parties, such the HZDS, would offer left-wing populist economic solutions. (Interview with Malová 2018)

According to Malová, a specific of cleavages in Slovakia was that they were created from the top the bottom. It wasn't societal movements that created the cleavages, it was the newly forming parties elites who cleaved the society. (Interview with Malová 2018) This aspect interesting in relation to Brendt's (2011) notion of politically strong societally weak parties, and could offer an explanation for the low party membership in Slovakia. It also interesting with regards to the cleavage concept by Bartolini and Mair (1980). If what Malová says is true, it means that the first attribute of a cleavage, the structural base, is very weak. And that the cleavage does not come from the structural base, defined by common values, mobilizing itself to achieve political representation, but rather the other way around – a political force – the party - tries to define the values for their electorates. If this is the case, then the definition by Bartolini and Mair has to be used carefully, with regard to the country specifics of Slovakia.

Baboš and Malová (2012) in their study *Ekologická analýza výsledkov parlamentných volieb v roku 2012 a prezidentských volieb v roku 2014: možnosti a limity štrukturálnych vysvetlení* (2015) (from Slovak: Ecological analysis of election results of the 2012 parliamentary elections and 2014 presidential elections: Opportunities and limits of structural explanations), theorize on this issue, admitting that due to the “openness” of structural and social factors in Slovakia that the cleavages should reflect, they could have often not led to the creation of all three aspects of Bartolini and Mair's definition of cleavage, are therefore not be finalized. (Baboš, Malová 2015: 342-345) However, the authors still come to the conclusion, that structural factors do indeed influence voter behavior, and identify several cleavages significant for the Slovak system. The most significant cleavages they were able to confirm were center-periphery and the ethnic cleavage. (ibid: 357) The center-periphery cleavage, which could also be interpreted as an urban-rural cleavage, have shown that the bloc of liberal-democratic parties has strong support in the urban areas, while in the rural areas, left wing-authoritarian parties gained more support. Especially, the party SMER was able to

gain significant support in towns with a population of less than thousand. (ibid: 347). The ethnic cleavage was demonstrated by the fact, that a presence of ethnic Hungarians in the population in certain areas had significant effect on the results of certain parties (Most-Híd, SMK). (ibid: 357) Interesting is the role of the religious cleavage. Baboš and Malová did not find support for based on confession, but they argue that this does not mean that religion does not play a role, as their analysis did not consider the variable of strength of religious belief. (ibid: 357) They point towards other researches, that concluded religiousness to be a positive factor in favor of the KDH, and a negative factor for SMER and SDKU. (ibid: 347) In their study the socio-economic structure did not prove to be a very relevant factor for other parties than SMER. Parties that define themselves more strongly on economic themes, such as SaS or (former) SDKU, tend to get stronger in more populated cities, and weaker in more rural, less populated areas. (ibid: 356)

A key attribute of the Slovak cleavage system found by Bertoa was its cross-cuttingness. When describing the cleavage system of Slovakia, Bertoa concludes that:

“All in all, when analyzing the process of party system configuration in Slovakia and its chances of developing an institutionalized structure of inter-party competition, it is important to note that the cross-cutting nature of the Slovak cleavages, boosted by the territorial and sociodemographical heterogeneity of the population, fostered the formation and development of a bi-dimensional structure of competition characterized by unstable partisan alliances and unpredictable patterns of government formation” (Bertoa 2012: 27)

As for his research, concentrating on the era around 2006, around Dzurinda’s second cabinet Bertoa recognizes two main cleavages – the center – periphery; and the economic cleavage, with religion also playing a significant role. So, he talks about a bi-, sometimes tri-dimensional cleavage structure. These cleavages cross cut, leading to the creation of at least four different camps (which themselves are not homogenous), with coalitions including members of different camps being necessary to form a government (ibid: 26). It also must be noted, that alliances and positions of the parties have shifted since, since the current parliament only features two parties from the time of Bertoa’s research – SMER and SNS.

An interesting contrast between Bertoa and Baboš & Malová seems to be the view on relevance of the economy cleavage. This could be explained by the slightly different approach the authors chose

in identifying the cleavages. While Baboš and Malová have focus on structural factors, and see the socio-economic cleavage as not very relevant, they are talking about the influence of income/class on voter behavior. (Baboš, Malová 2015: 356) Bertoa seems to focus more on the cleavages between the parties, and defines the economic cleavage in Slovakia as a cleavage between liberal and statist approaches. (Bertoa 2012: 27) He also pays less attention towards the ethnic cleavage, possibly as it was only a regional cleavage, and only affected the SMK. However nowadays there are two significant Hungarian parties being present in Slovak politics (Most-Hid, SMK).

Finally, a point of divide which seemed to be important in Slovak politics, even though it does not appear in the previously mentioned studies, is brought forward by Kopeček and Hloušek (2008). The authors described it as an “pro vs. anti-Mečiarism” cleavage, based on the position towards the government style of HZDS leader Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s. (Hloušek, Kopeček 2008: 536) This division was important, as it divided the political landscape into two rather distinct camps, despite the cross-cuttingness of cleavages, despite different economic, religious views the parties were able to align as an anti-Mečiar coalition. This division did go very much in line with the center-periphery cleavage:

The average supporter of Mečiar’s coalition parties was a less-educated person living in a rural or small town environment. On the other side, voters for the anti-Mečiar parties were more tolerant of minorities, more openminded, more liberally-oriented, and less authoritarian; they were better educated, and the main part of them lived in bigger cities. The cleavage of Mečiarism vs. anti-Mečiarism was thus apparent not only in the political parties, but also in the segmentation of the population. (Hloušek, Kopeček 2008: 539)

Such a deep division in society, that appeared on the party level, but also on the segmentation of society, and on certain dominant values within these segment, really allow for it to be called a *cleavage*. After the arrival of SMER, which was able to stand in-between these two camps, and take voters both from do leftist parties in the anti-Mečiarism block (SDL, SOP) and the HZDS. (ibid: 540).

Malová in an interview agrees, that around 2006 and 2010, maybe 2012, the party system moved towards a more traditional left-right self-identification of the parties, but once again, this did not get institutionalized enough, and did not last (Interview with Malová 2018). The interesting question here is, weather the “pro vs anti-Mečiarism” cleavage, is not being replaced by a “pro vs.

anti-SMER” cleavage. In the 2016 elections, the topic of willingness of cooperation with SMER became a relevant issue. (cf. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/321295/online-zostavovanie-vlady-mimoriadna-debata-vitazov-13-marec-2016/>). After #SIEŤ party agreed upon being in a government with SMER, it led to a split in the party, a radical loss of preferences in the opinion polls, and eventually total disintegration of the party a few months after the start of the government term. (<http://preferencie.teraz.sk/Strana/Sie%C5%A5/1462053600>) However, to see how relevant this division is, whether it is as polarizing and structural as the “Mečiarism” cleavage, would have to be subject to a research of its own.

The left-right identification of parties in Slovakia

Similarly as in the part on the left-right orientation of parties in Austria, this part will lean heavily on the interview of an expert, in this case professor Malová. Once again, I realize that this is not the most objective approach, but still, I opt to use it based on the same line of argumentation as was presented in the Austrian party system case.

Malová unlike Pelinka, sets more focus on the economic factor of the left-right division. When a party is not quite definable, she uses the approach to economy, as a rule of thumb to determine whether the party is left or right. According to Malová, there can be many criteria to distinguish left and right, but the only sensible criterion is whether the party prefers the state or the market. The left and the right in Slovakia are not the same as the traditional European left and right, because of the lack of a clear cut class cleavage.

SMER-SD – Direction Social Democracy

According to Malová, SMER is **a left party**, but not really a social-democratic party, at least not social democratic in a modern European sense – because of its stance towards liberal issues. They are left in the sense that they do redistributive politics. In the economic program of the party, there is a preference of the state. It is also the party with the most former members of the communist party, as it was founded by, and later took over, the members of the post-communist SDL.

Malová goes on to point out that the problem with SMER is, that while it uses a left wing rhetoric to attract its voters, they actually serve large capital. SMER approaches their voters through a “bread and butter” agenda – solving unemployment, minimum wage, social benefits, social

“packages”- in a very non-systemic manner. “But of course, the large capitalist, whom he /Fico/ pleases with his politics, and whose interests he represents – they cannot provide him with votes.”

SaS – Freedom and Solidarity

The strongest opposition party according to Malová is definitely **on the right**. This is due to their clear preference of the free market economy. She adds that in this regard it is in clear opposition to SMER. They are also the first party in Slovak history, to make it a rule not to allow any former members of the communist parties to become a member of the party.

SNS – Slovak National Party

It gets a little harder with the Slovak National Party. They are a conservative party, but their economic policies are harder to be defined, as they like to use a strong role of state in certain issues. However, Malová still argues that SNS would qualify as a **right-wing party** as it somewhat prefers the market to the state economically, and also had many of the “privatizers” in the 90s. “It has always been a very traditionalist party, with its motto “For God and for the nation!” – but the state was always suspicious, only there to serve our interests.”

OlaNO - Ordinary People and Independent Personalities

Malová is critical of even calling OLaNO a party – according to her, it is rather an undertaking of a single person, its leader Matovič, who is one of only four actual members of the group. They act as pure protest party, critical against everything, but without any proposed alternative. Moreover, their leader Matovič, is on hand an entrepreneur, on the other hand critical against the privatization of state property. But judging on their actions in politics, she would place them in the middle, or **slightly right of the middle**.

Most-Híd - Bridge

The only ethnic party in the parliament, Most-Híd, is also a party sitting **right-of-the-center** according to Malová.

LSNS – Peoples Party Our Slovakia

Malová would definitely call the LSNS a **far right, extreme right party**. However, she also understands why some people would call them extreme left, as the totalitarian extremes tend to converge in their anti-system rhetoric.

Sme Rodina – We Are Family

Sme Rodina is defined by Malová as a party of a self-proclaimed businessman, without a clear program. It oscillates **around the middle**, sometimes more to the left, sometimes to the right. It managed to get into the parliament largely on the topic of execution amnesty, which is a leftist topic. Malová doesn't mention, that the other strong topic of Sme Rodina during the campaign was party leader Kollár's anti-migrant rhetoric, but this might be due to the fact, that the anti-migrant sentiment was strong across the political spectrum in Slovakia.

KDH – Christian-Democratic Movement

The Christian democrats are currently outside the parliament, but currently hold a favorable position in opinion polls. According to Malová, the KDH has become more modern and less conservative with their new leader, but still clearly qualify as **right**.

SMK – Party of the Hungarian Coalition

Malová sees them as more left than Most-Híd, but still a **center right** party, due to their conservatism. I personally found this identification interesting, due to the fact that SMK is actually a more nationalist Hungarian party than Most-Híd. But Malová shows again, that her distinction of left and right is understood mostly on economic terms.

Spolu; Progresívne Slovensko (PS) – Together; Progressive Slovakia

I decided to also include the two newly formed parties, which are steadily raising in the polls, and look to enter the parliament at the next elections. Spolu is a party that includes former members of the SDKU, SaS and #SIEŤ, while PS is built around a broader spectrum of personalities without previous political affiliation and different ideological backgrounds, with their leader being a former member of the Social Democratic Youth (an SDL youth organization, before the creation of SMER).

According to Malová, both parties try very hard to present themselves as centrist. Neither of them questions the current economic paradigm, and rather concentrates on specific policy issues.

Spolu's leader Beblavý opposes the terms left and right, seeing them as overcome. Malová sees the party as staying pretty much in the **centre**.

PS is seen as similar (**centre**) but with a more **left-wing** rhetoric. They concern themselves with public policies, with topics where the state plays a significant role – education, healthcare, social services.

Interesting here is also the aligning of the parties in the European Parliament. Malová sees the participation of the parties in larger European party families as a question of gaining legitimacy, rather than that of ideology. She uses the example of SMER, for whom it was important to become a part of the PES, and his membership makes sense to them as well due to the fact that it gives them a bigger representation in the European Parliament. But still, they do not take SMER quite for “one of theirs” – Malová points out Fico's recent lament on a conference of the Czech Social Democratic Party, where he complained that a leader of the Austrian Social Democrats would not meet with him because he didn't consider SMER a social democratic party. Many parties have also changed sides, with Richard Sulík, the party-leader and MEP for SaS, changing from ALDE to the ECR. But Malová considers the membership in the European party families a good thing nevertheless, as it leads to at least some level socialization of the MEPs and national leaders.

Survey Results

The online survey took place between the 2nd of May and 28th of June, for approximately two months. The final number of respondents was 148 – 76 Austrian respondents, 69 Slovak. Out of these respondents, 58 Austrians and 44 Slovaks finished the whole survey, the rest only provided data for a part of the questions.

Left-Right Identification – Acknowledging own bias

After the preparation and analysis of the questionnaire, I realized that my own opinions and biases about the left and right had influence on how I designed and analyzed the survey. Coming from a Slovak environment, and studying in Austria, I have adopted a somewhat dualist understanding of left and right, differentiating between the economic and societal dimension of it (similarly as many

of Austrian respondents in my open questions). I see this duality itself as a limit of the left-right division. Even though I tried to form the questionnaires on issue positions, I did place them in a way that positions I perceive as left were placed on the left, and ones that I perceive as right positions were placed on the right. This decision might have led some respondents to choose a position on the left side because it is “supposed” to be aligned with their left thinking. The self-identification questions after each section were installed as a means to compensate for this, and to make the respondents reflect on whether they believe their positions to be left, right or centrist. Despite this possible bias, I am confident that the setup of the questionnaire allowed for authentic insights on the perception of the left and right by the respondents.

Basic Information

Of the Austrian respondents, 71 studied political science, 1 studied International Relations, and three studied other politics-related directions. On the Slovak side, this was more mixed – 33 students studied Political Science, 33 studied International Relations, and two studied Public Administration, and one studied Public Policy.

52% of the Austrian students were female, while 46,1% were male. One respondent choose “other” as his answer. On the Slovak side, the males were more dominant: 58,8% of the respondents were male, 41,2% were female.

61 out of 76 students in Austria were eligible to vote in the Austrian parliamentary elections, 15 were not. All of the eligible voters took part on the 2017 parliamentary elections. All of the Slovak respondents were eligible to vote in the Slovak parliamentary elections, with 6 students not voting in the last parliamentary elections.

Left-Right Self Identification

The first interesting results already show in the self-identification question, showing clear differences between the Austrians and the Slovaks.

	Far- Left	Left	Center-Left	Center	Centre-Right	Right
Austrians	12,70%	33,33%	34,92%	1,59%	9,52%	7,94%
Slovaks	0,00%	3,77%	11,32%	33,96%	43,40%	7,55%

Table 1 Left-Right Self-Identification

Two things are significant from this data – one the Austrian students are clearly more on the left side, with 80,95% of the students being either Far-Left, Left, or Centre-Left. The Slovaks are more on the right, with 50,95% of students claiming to be right or center-right. Also significantly, the Slovaks are way more centrist. Close to 34% of the Slovak respondents claim to be neither right nor left, but centrist. However, only a single student studying in Austria selected the option “center”. Austrians seem to be generally more radical, with only 46% selecting one of center-right, center, center-left, as compared to 88,6% of the Slovaks. None of the Slovaks chose one any of the far-right/far-left options, while 12,7% of Austrians described themselves as far-left.

Both Malová and Pelinka agree that this has been representative of Slovak and Austrian students for a long time. Pelinka stresses, that students with higher education in Austria often vote the left parties, Greens and SPO. This might be even stronger within political science, which can be seen as an instrument to change politics. According to Malová, the Slovak political science students identified themselves more as rightist since the revolution, and it had a lot to do with the anti-communist sentiment of many of them. Nowadays, Malová says, this anti-communist sentiment has been somewhat replaced by the anti-SMER sentiment.

Left and Right identification – first three mentions of things associated with left/right

The first open question of my interview has proven to be one of the most significant questions of the survey, providing some surprising data. The students were asked to name three things they associate with the right, and three things they associate with the left. The question was not compulsory to finish the questionnaire. This part was answered by 59 Austrian respondents (A total of 177 mentions), and only by 37 Slovak respondents (A total of 111). To be able to use the data in my analysis the answers had to be sorted out and coded. I will first describe the top 5 mentions for each country. Following, I will compare the two different categories that Pelinka and Malová used to differ between left and right – economy and societal aspects. Finally, I will also compare the most relevant unique mentions (as in, mentions that were prominent within one country, but not even mentioned in the other).

The following tables demonstrate the top mentions for the left and for the right respectively for both countries, with percentages counted to the number of respondents who used this as one of their three mentions. Some of the mentions are aggregates of similar meanings (such as –

Egalitarianism will include mentions of equality, equal rights and open society). These aggregate categories were the same for the evaluation of data for Slovakia and Austria.

No.	Austria			Slovakia		
	Mention	Sum	% of respondents	Mention	Sum	% of respondents
1.	Social Justice	22	37,3%	Welfare	18	38,6%
2.	Welfare	17	28,8%	Egalitarianism	10	27%
3.	Egalitarianism	16	27,1%	Big Government	9	24, 3%
4.	Freedom	10	16,9%	Social Justice	8	21 %
5.	Human Rights	7	11,9%	Socialism	7	18.9%

Table 2: Top mentions for Left, Slovakia and Austria

No.	Austria			Slovakia		
	Mention	Sum	% of respondents	Mention	Sum	% of respondents
1.	Conservative	21	35.6%	Economic Liberalism	19	48,7%
2.	Racism	17	28,8%	Conservative	14	35,9%
3.	Nationalism	15	25,4%	Freedom	12	30,7%
4.	Discrimination	15	25,4%	Small State	6	15,4%
5.	Hierarchy, authority	9	15,3%	Hierarchy*	6	15,4%

Table 3 Top Mentions for Right, Slovakia and Austria

* 2 more categories, "Focus on Business/Industry/Enterprises and "Reform (progress)" were also mentioned 6 times

The table concerning the concept associated with the left still shows a level of similarity. Social justice, welfare and egalitarianism show up prominently in both the Austrian and Slovak responses. However, while Austrians also brought forward other societal aspects of the left (Freedom and Human Rights), the Slovaks prominently used two qualities that point towards the character of the state – big government, and socialism. The differences were more significant when comparing concepts connected with the right. Both countries see the term right as conservative with a similar occurrence, and also use terms connected to authority and hierarchy similarly often, but that is where the similarities end. Almost a half of the Slovaks uses the term Economic Liberalism as an association with the right. The categories “small state” and “Focus on business” also strengthen the economic understanding of the right. Austrian respondents on the other strongly focus on negative

societal issues, such as nationalism, racism, discrimination. These do not find their way into the Slovak top mentions, and instead, positive societal issues such as Freedom and Reform/Progress.

This led me to a deeper look at these negative factors of exclusion and discrimination concerning the right among the respondents. And the results are eye-opening. Overall the Austrian respondents use description of extremism nationalism and exclusion (including anti-migrant views, hate exploitation, fear, Nazism, extremism) 68 times, which constitutes almost 40% of the overall count of Austrian responses. In contrast to this, these terms were used by Slovak respondents a total of three times, a mere 2,7%. The only terms in this context were extremism (twice), and Nazism. Neither racism, nationalism, discrimination, all part of the top 5 mentions for Austrians, nor other similar terms were used even once by the Slovak respondents. Interestingly enough, the Slovak respondents used the term “nationalism” twice to describe the left. This finding suggests a rather strong difference in the view of the left and the right between the Austrians and the Slovaks.

To understand these differences better, I tried to use the two approaches the experts in my interviews used to identify left and right, as categories for the responses of the students. Malová differentiated between left and right on terms of economy and the preference between state and market. Pelinka on the other hand used the approach to societal issues, social justice in a broader sense to determine whether a party is left or right. Based on this, I divided the answers into two categories: economic, and social issues. Taken out of this comparison were various concepts which could not be directly linked to economy or society – concepts as conservatism and welfare (which are broader concepts that can be understood in both economic social terms), as well as descriptions of polity forms or larger societal concepts (communism, socialism, marxism, fascism, social democracy...) stance towards the EU, and various terms with neither economic nor societal meaning (such as left being overcome, the right being narrow-minded etc.)

The Austrians defined the left in economic terms a total of 9 times (5% of the overall count), with redistribution being the most common answer with 6. They understood the left in societal terms, a total of 98 times, which constitutes over 55% of the total. They understood the right in economic terms in 27 cases (15,25% of the total), while describing the right in societal terms a total of 81 times (45,7% of the total). Slovakia on the hand, used economic terms to describe the left 27 times (24,3%), while they used 45 terms connected to societal aspects (40,5%). The right on the other hand, is described in economic terms 68 times (61%), and on societal terms a total of 16 times

(14,41 %). This shows two things: First, both among the Austrian and Slovak respondents, the right is described more often using economic terms as the left. Second, Slovak respondents utilize economic terms more often than the Austrians to describe both the left and the right, with especially the approach towards right being totally opposite.

It is also interesting to see the top 3 unique mentions for the left and for the right in the two states, meaning mentions that showed up more times among one group of respondents, but not at all in the other:

No.	Austria			Slovakia		
	Unique Mention	Sum	% of respondents	Unique Mention	Sum	% of respondents
1.	Human Rights	7	11,8%	Socialism	7	18%
2.	Anti-Racism	6	10,2%	Populism	6	15,4%
3.	Feminism, Gender	6	10,2%	State-Ownership	5	12,8%

Table 4 Top 3 Unique Mentions for Left, Austria and Slovakia

No.	Austria			Slovakia		
	Unique Mention	Sum	% of respondents	Unique Mention	Sum	% of respondents
1.	Racism	17	28,8%	Small State	6	15,4%
2.	Discrimination	15	25,4%	Reform (progress)	6	15,4%
3.	Nationalism	15	25,4%	Lower Taxes	3	7,7%

Table 5 Top 3 Unique Mentions for Right, Austria and Slovakia

The differences in the unique mentions for the right were already covered by the previous paragraph, but the table once again demonstrates the differences. The upper table is interesting though. It shows that many concepts associated with the left in Austria, such as human rights, feminism, anti-racism are not present among Slovak responses. This would go further if we included more mentions. The Slovak respondents did not use any of the “protest” meanings of the left, which the Austrians have used in multiple cases – such as anti-fascism, anti-racism, anarchy, critique, protest. On the other hand, the Slovaks associate terms with the left, which have not appeared among the Austrian voters to describe the left, but rather to describe the right. Examples of these are terms such as populism, conservatism, and even nationalism. Interesting is also the take on the EU – while the Austrians describe the left as pro-EU and the right as anti-EU on multiple occasions, the Slovaks do not use the stance towards the EU as a description of either.

Positions on specific policies and issues

In the following part, I will explore and compare the differences in the issue preferences, and how these positions were self-identified on the left right axis. The respondent had to choose a position between two opposing options on a five-point spectrum. The answers on this spectrum are given values, as to allow for better comparison. Depending on the choice along the spectrum, the answer would be given a value of “1” to “5”, with “3” representing the middle ground. The symbol $\emptyset$ represents the arithmetic average; the symbol $\pm$ represents the standard deviation. Percentages used in the analysis and tables were rounded to the first decimal.

A. Economy

The first category of issues I asked about were economic issues. The respondent had to choose a position between two opposing options on a five-point spectrum. The options on the left represent a very state centric view of economics, restrictive of the free markets, while the options on the right represent radical market freedom approaches. This way, the answers were to represent a “common-sense” view of the left and right economics. However, after the section the respondents have the option to decide for themselves, whether they identify their responses between the left and the right.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		$\emptyset$	$\pm$
Strong Welfare State	55,2%	29,3%	8,6%	3,5%	3,5%	Minimal Welfare State	1,71	1,01
High Redistribution	33,3%	35,1%	19,3%	8,77%	3,5%	Low Redistribution	2,14	1,09
Progressive Taxation	37,9%	35,1%	19,3%	6,9%	5,2%	Flat Taxation	2,09	1,14
Strong Market Regulation	22,4%	25,9%	32,8%	15,5%	3,5%	Unrestricted Free Markets	2,52	1,11
State Ownership	22,4%	32,8%	17,2%	22,4%	5,17%	Private Ownership	2,55	1,22

Table 6 Positions on Economy Issues: Austria

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		$\emptyset$	$\pm$
Strong Welfare State	2,3%	20,9%	41,9%	25,6%	9,3%	Minimal Welfare State	3,19	0,96
High Redistribution	0%	25,6%	41,9%	23,3%	9,3%	Low Redistribution	3,16	0,92
Progressive Taxation	2,3%	30,3%	25,6%	30,2%	11,6%	Flat Taxation	3,19	1,07
Strong Market Regulation	0%	9,3%	37,21%	43,9%	18,6%	Unrestricted Free Markets	3,63	0,9
State Ownership	0=	7%	37,21%	32,6%	13,3%	Private Ownership	3,72	0,9

Table 7: Positions on Economy Issues: Slovakia

The results show a clearly more pro-free-market stance on the average for the Slovak respondents in all of the categories. Striking is the result in the first category, where 55,2% percent of the Austrians prefer a strong welfare state, compared to only about 2% of the Slovak respondents. A

similar trend can be seen in the other categories. Upon closer inspection we can see that the largest part of the Slovak respondents actually chose center or the “center-right” positions on the issues at hand. The diagrams below show whether the respondents left or right. While in Austria, the biggest group is clearly on the left, in Slovakia, it is the center, slightly edging right. These self-identifications coincide with the view, that the left is connected with a big state, while the right is represented by free markets.

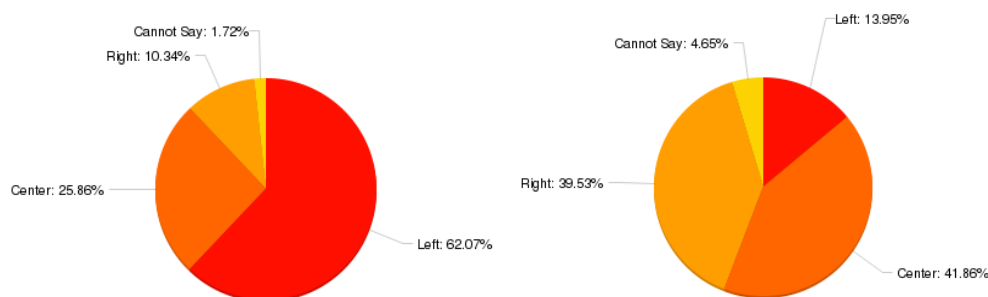


Diagram 1: Left/Right Identification of the Answers in Economy Section, Austria (left), Slovakia (right)

B. Labour Market

The second category concerned with issues of Labour Market Regulation, including one variable concerning the regulation of labour market in general, and the rest a selection of regulation from different areas. Once again, the answers on the left are based on stronger regulation, while the ones on the right based on deregulation, based on the view that the left is more pro-regulation while the right is against it.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		$\emptyset$	$\pm$
Strongly Regulated Labour Market	15,8%	35,1%	36,8%	7%	5,3%	Deregulated Labour Market	2,5	1,02
High Minimum Wage	53,5%	20,5%	15,5%	5,2%	5,2%	No Minimum Wage	1,9	1,17
Regulate Conditions for Hiring/Firing Employees	43,1%	37,9%	6,9%	12,1%	0%	Allow Flexibility in Hiring/Firing Employees	1,9	0,99
State Regulated Safety Standards	62,7%	29,3%	3,5%	5,2%	0%	Company Regulated Safety Standards	1,5	0,80
Strong Role of Labour Unions	44,8%	31%	13,8%	5,2%	5,2%	Minimal Role of Labour Unions	2	1,13
Use Gender/Minority Quotas	37,9%	27,6%	10,3%	8,6%	15,5%	Don't Use Gender/Minority Quotas	2,36	1,46

Table 8 Positions on Labour Market Regulation: Austria

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
Strongly Regulated Labour Market	0%	20,5%	34,1%	34,1%	11,36%	Deregulated Labour Market	3,4	0,94
High Minimum Wage	13,6%	43,18%	20,5%	13,6%	9,1%	No Minimum Wage	2,6	1,17
Regulate Conditions for Hiring/Firing Employees	6,8%	11,4%	29,6%	40,9%	11,4%	Allow Flexibility in Hiring/Firing Employees	3,4	1,06
State Regulated Safety Standards	11,4%	25%	40,9%	15,9%	6,8%	Company Regulated Safety Standards	2,8	1,06
Strong Role of Labour Unions	4,6%	13,6%	47,7%	20,5%	13,6%	Minimal Role of Labour Unions	3,3	1,01
Use Gender/Minority Quotas	4,6%	6,8%	18,18%	25%	45,5%	Don't Use Gender/Minority Quotas	4	1,16

Table 9 Positions on Labour Market Regulation: Slovakia

The differences in views of Labor Market Regulation also show a significantly different set of values for Austrians and Slovaks, with the Slovaks being more opposed to regulation, as shown in tabled 9 and 10. This true for both the general variable of labour market regulation, and for the more specific issues. The Slovak were in favor of less regulation in all cases except for Minimum Wage and Safety Standards, but even in these categories, the Austrians are clearly more in favor of regulation. The Austrians were on average not in favor of deregulation in any of the categories. The most opposed regulation among the Slovaks were gender based quotes. 65% of Austrians see themselves as left in this category. 39,5 Slovaks see their opinions as right, and the same amount sees their opinions as center. These numbers coincide with how the positions on the issues are spread between regulation and suggest, that the views on the left and right in connection with labour market regulation are similar – with deregulation being connected with the right and regulation with the left.

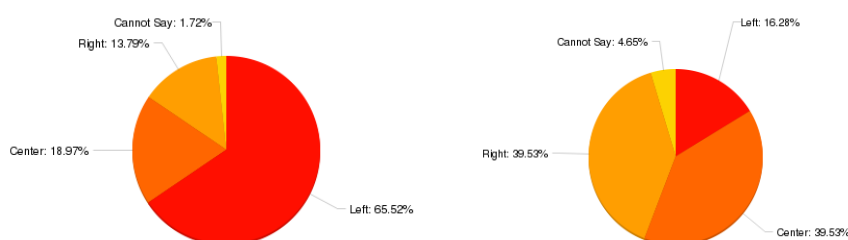


Diagram 2: Left/Right Identification of the Answers in Labour Market Section, Austria (left), Slovakia (right)

C. Welfare and Social Issues

The third category is centered around welfare and social issues, in other words policies concerned with social justice. Here the state/market distinctions break for the first time. While the first four options of this category are still divided along the amount of involvement the state has in certain policies, the last three (same sex marriage, abortions, light drugs) do not fall into this division. Instead they can be attributed to a more liberal/conservative attitude, the first being generally connected with the left and the latter with the right. However, even the first four policy options do not fall in the more economical understanding, considering state involvement in areas such as education, healthcare, minorities. As tables 10 and 11 show, this area brings a significant shift among the Slovak respondents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
The state should actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups	54,4%	28,1%	7%	1,75%	8,77%	The state should not actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups	1,82	1,21
The state should provide free higher education to everyone	79%	10,5%	5,7%	3,5%	1,8%	Higher education should be private	1,39	0,88
Education policies should be centralized and decided by the state	24,6%	28,1%	31,6%	8,8%	7%	The schools should have freedom about deciding their education policies	2,46	1,17
The state should provide medical insurance	93%	1,8%	5,26%	0%	0%	The state should not provide medical insurance	1,12	0,47
Same sex marriage should be institutionalized	82,5%	5,3%	5,3%	0%	7%	Same sex marriage should not be institutionalized	1,44	1,10
The state should allow abortions	84,21%	1,8%	7%	1,8%	5,3%	The state should not allow abortions	1,42	1,07
Light drugs should be legalized	43%	12,5%	16,1%	12,5%	16,1%	Light drugs should remain criminalized	2,46	1,54

Table 10 Positions on Welfare and Social Issues: Austria

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
The state should actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups	34,1%	31,8%	27,3%	4,6%	2,3%	The state should not actively engage in helping minorities/disadvantaged groups	2,09	1,01
The state should provide free higher education to everyone	20,5%	52,3%	18,2%	6,8%	2,3%	Higher education should be private	2,18	0,92
Education policies should be centralized and decided by the state	4,6%	16%	36,4%	25%	18,2%	The schools should have freedom about deciding their education policies	3,36	1,10
The state should provide medical insurance	36,4%	40,1%	15,6%	2,3%	4,6%	The state should not provide medical insurance	1,98	1,02
Same sex marriage should be institutionalized	38,7%	25%	9,1%	18,2%	9,1%	Same sex marriage should not be institutionalized	2,34	1,40
The state should allow abortions	50%	20,5%	9,1%	18,2%	2,3%	The state should not allow abortions	2,02	1,25

Light drugs should be legalized	22,7%	27,3%	22,7%	13,6%	13,6%	Light drugs should remain criminalized	2,68	1,34
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Table 11 Positions on Welfare and Social Issues: Slovakia

While Slovak respondents still voted closer towards the right side than the Austrian ones, the average value of the Slovak choices lies lower than 3 for each policy apart from the central role of the state in deciding education policies. In the other categories, the Slovak respondents are overall inclined towards the role of the state to provide medical insurance, help disadvantaged groups, provide free education, and enable abortions or same sex marriage and legalizing light drugs, with the majority of respondents selecting (1) or (2) on the spectrum of choices. In the Austrian case, the biggest groups of respondents selected (1) in all aspects except for the centralization of education.

75% of Austrians see their views as left, once again showing strong alignment with the initial self-identification. However, this is not the case for Slovakia, 34,1% of the respondents identified their opinions as left, 36,4% as center, and only 13,6% as right. The option “cannot say” raised for this category to 15,9%, which is more than the self-identified right opinions. This is an important finding, considering that in the initial alignment over 50% of Slovak respondents saw themselves as center-right or right, while only 15% as left. This finding suggests, on hand, that Slovaks also consider the fighting of social injustice as a left theme. On the other hand, it shows that despite the students identifying themselves as center-right or right, many of them still opt for left options in the area of welfare and social issues.

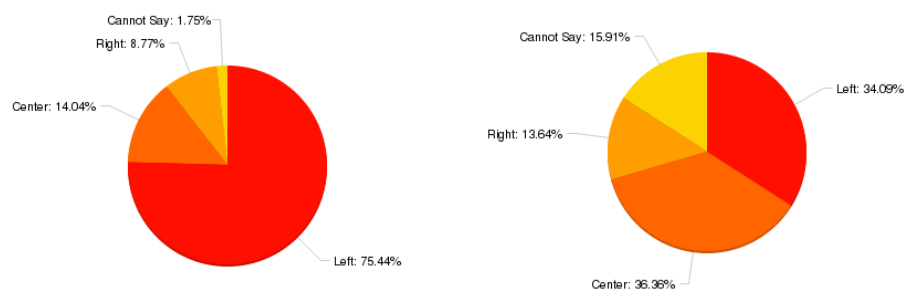


Diagram 3: Left/Right Identification of the Answers in Welfare and Social Issues Section, Austria (left), Slovakia (right)

D. Migration

The fourth category deals with a very recent and actively discussed topic in contemporary European politics as well as in discourses in Austria and Slovakia – Migration. Here the Austrian respondents

show more openness towards migrants, calling for a more open migration policy. They would also allow the migrants to keep their cultural identity and add to diversity, instead of pressuring the assimilation. More than a half consider the redistribution of migrants through a quota system as a good choice. The Slovak respondents are considerably less open towards migrants, although they are not opposed towards them on average, taking a middle stance. However, the answers are very broadly spread. A difference is visible in the approach towards the migrant quota system, towards which the most Slovak respondents are opposed.

It is interesting to look at the self-identifications for this one. On part of the Austrian respondents, the number of respondents who consider their opinions these following policies as left fell to 55,4%, while the center rose to 28,6%. In the case of the Slovak participants, the number of respondents who see themselves as center on this topic was strongest with 40,1%. Moreover, the number of respondents who answered “cannot say” has risen. This suggests that it is hard to align the views on migration along the left and right, especially for the Slovak respondents.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
The state should have an open immigration policy	31,6%	31,6%	19,3%	10,5%	7,1%	The state should be protected against migrants	2,3	1,22
Migrants should add to cultural diversity	30,4%	32,14%	21,43	8,9%	7,1%	Migrants should accept and assimilate the home culture	2,3	1,20
Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a good response to the migration crisis	26,8%	26,8%	26,79	12,5	7,1%	Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a bad response to the migration crisis	2,46	1,22

Table 12 Positions on Migration: Austria

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
The state should have an open immigration policy	6,8%	25%	36,4%	22,7%	9,1%	The state should be protected against migrants	3,01	1,07
Migrants should add to cultural diversity	15,9%	20,45%	27,3%	25%	11,4%	Migrants should accept and assimilate the home culture	2,95	1,26
Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a good response to the migration crisis	4,6%	2,27	29,6%	22,7%	40,91%	Redistribution of migrants using a quota system is a bad response to the migration crisis	3,93	1,11

Table 13 Positions on migration: Slovakia

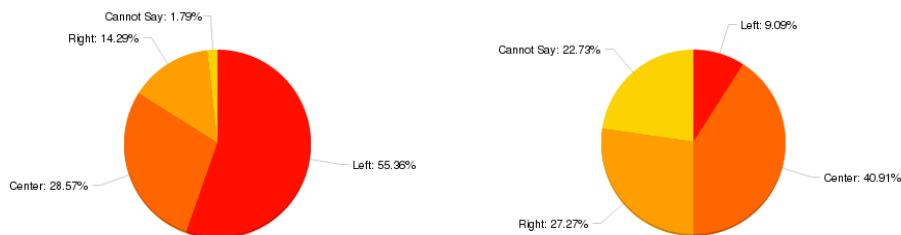


Diagram 4: Left/Right Identification of the Answers in Migration Section, Austria (left), Slovakia (right)

E. European Union

The last category of the issue positions is the European union. On the left side, I placed answered that are more pro-European, while on the right are options that are more Eurosceptical.

In this category, the opinions of Austrians and Slovaks converged the closest, with both the Austrian and Slovak respondents showing strong pro-European tendencies. A slight difference lies in the common migration policy, where the Slovaks are more reserved. However, as the left-right identification shows, it is very hard to differentiate between EU opinions within the left-right terms. A 50% majority of Slovak respondents answered, “cannot say” when asked whether their answers in this section corresponded with the left or right. Center got 22,7%, while the left right each only got 13,6%. In Austria it was a little more clear, with 50% of student seeing their pro-European opinions as left. However, this was the lowest number for left self-identification amongst the sections. 31% saw their opinions as center, while the answer “cannot say” rose to over 10% for the Austrians. This data shows that the opinions on the EU are very close among Slovak and Austrian political science students, but it is harder to align these issue along the concept of left and right.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		$\emptyset$	$\pm$
My country should be a part of the EU	93,1%	3,5%	1,7%	1,7%	0%	My country should not be a part of the EU	1,12	0,5
The EU should integrate further	48,3%	29,3%	15,5%	3,5%	3,5%	The member states should retain more power	1,84	1,04
A European fiscal union would be a good thing	36,8%	8,77%	40,4%	7%	7%	A European fiscal union would be a bad thing	2,39	1,25
The EU should have common defense policy	39,7%	31%	19%	6,9%	3,5%	Defense policy should remain in the hands of the national state	2,03	1,09
The EU should have a common migration policy	67,2%	20,7%	5,2%	0%	6,9%	The migration policy should remain in the hands of the National state	1,59	1,09
The EU should have a common Energy policy	63,8%	17,2%	12%	1,7%	5,2%	The Energy policy should remain in the hands of the national state	1,67	1,1

Table 14 Positions on EU: Austria

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		Ø	±
My country should be a part of the EU	81,8%	15,9%	2,3%	0%	0%	My country should not be a part of the EU	1,2	0,46
The EU should integrate further	36,4%	31,8%	18,2%	6,8%	6,8%	The member states should retain more power	2,16	1,20
A European fiscal union would be a good thing	25%	38,6%	20,5%	11,4%	4,6%	A European fiscal union would be a bad thing	2,32	1,12
The EU should have common defense policy	36,4%	34,1%	18,2%	9,1%	2,3%	Defense policy should remain in the hands of the national state	2,07	1,07
The EU should have a common migration policy	15,9%	20,5%	20,5%	25%	18,2%	The migration policy should remain in the hands of the national state	3,09	1,36
The EU should have a common Energy policy	36,4%	36,4%	22,7%	4,6%	0%	The Energy policy should remain in the hands of the national state	1,95	0,89

Table 15 Positions on EU: Slovakia



Diagram 5: Left/Right Identification of the Answers in EU Section, Austria (left), Slovakia (right)

Results from the open question: “Based on the results from the previous page (positions on specific policies and issues), where do you see the limitations of the "left-right" division?”

Both the Austrian and the Slovak students actually see the left-right division as problematic – however, the reasons for this are different between the two sets of respondents. The answers were analyzed in a multiple-step process. First, through repeated reading, common themes and frames of the answers for each set of respondents were determined. Based on this, these most common themes were coded, and all the answers were analyzed by this coding. Finally, the results of the two sets were compared to each other.

The main point of critique towards the left/right division from the Austrian respondents, was that the left-right division can be understood either economically or societally, with both these having different meanings, with the possibility of a party being left in a societal sense, and right in an economic sense, or the other way around. More than a half of the respondents voiced a similar

position. Positions towards the European Union have been mentioned to be problematic to categorize between the left and right, as both could be pro or anti EU. Many respondents explained, that the current society is too complex to use the left and right divisions, instead suggesting various other spectrums for how to classify parties and policies (however, there was no unison on the use of these spectrums). These answers are especially interesting, since the Austrian students generally were able to categorize their answers on specific issues as left or right, using the “cannot say” option more than 2% of times only for the EU category (10,34% “cannot say”). Therefore, the open-ended question revealed, that despite the ability to categorize between left and right upon request, many Austrian students reflect upon this categorization as unprecise/limited.

The Slovak students were also critical towards the use of the left and right division in their answers. The most common objections fell under themes of relevance and flexibility of the division. Respondents argued, that the division is too inflexible to be used for modern politics, that it has limited explanatory potential for modern political science. Other students framed their positions more in the direction, that the concept of left and right is losing on relevance/importance, with the dividing line between the left and right becoming less and less clear. The “center” position, according to Slovak respondents, has the benefit of more flexibility and allows for concentration on pragmatic politics, as opposed to stringent ideological divisions of the left and right. These explanations are similar to Inglehart’s explanations of the decline of cleavages due to post-materialist approaches to policy, as presented by Elff (2007: 286). The distinction between a societal and economic understanding of left and right does not appear in the open answers of Slovak respondents, but several respondents answered that the left-right division only makes sense in economic terms. Proposals to use other spectrums also appeared, but less common than with the Austrian respondents. Other interesting positions mentioned were the cross-cuttingness of the listed issues – one could have different positions on the issues and policies in the previous sections, accounting for instability and diversity in the political parties. One respondent also suggested, that the left and right division is not applicable for Slovakia, or Eastern Europe in general.

When comparing the Austrian and Slovak answers, the most interesting difference is, that unlike the Austrian respondents, the Slovak respondents do not specifically mention the different economic and societal understanding of the left and right, even going as far as saying the left and right only makes sense in an economic sense. Some intersection between the two sets of

respondents could be found in the question of complexity of society, where both sides agreed that society is getting too complex for a left-right understanding of politics, that left and right distinctions is too limiting. Other approaches to categorizing politics have been proposed by some respondents both on the Austrian and Slovak side, but unison within or between the respondent groups in how/what other categorizations should be used were not present.

Left/Right Identification of Party Systems

Party:	Malová	Survey Respondents							
		Far Left	Left	Center-Left	Center	Center Right	Right	Far Right	Cannot Say
SMER	Left	2.3%	58.1%	30.2%	0.0%	4.7%	2.3%	0.0%	2.4%
SaS	Right	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	2.4%	26.2%	64.3%	2.4%	0.0%
SNS	Right	0.0%	23.3%	11.6%	9.3%	14.0%	25.6%	0.0%	16.6%
OLaNO	Center Right	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	7.0%	37.2%	25.6%	0.0%	23.3%
LSNS	Far Right	4.7%	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	86.1%	0.0%
Sme Rodina	Center	0.0%	4.7%	7.0%	4.7%	14.0%	27.9%	11.6%	30.2%
Most-Híd	Center Right	0.0%	7.1%	11.9%	26.2%	40.5%	9.5%	0.0%	4.7%
KDH	Right	0.0%	2.3%	11.9%	9.5%	19.1%	54.8%	0.0%	2.3%
SMK	Right	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	19.1%	14.3%	4.8%	39.5%
PS	Center Left	4.8%	14.3%	57.1%	9.5%	2.4%	2.4%	0.0%	9.52%
Spolu	Center	0.0%	0.0%	9.5%	16.7%	54.8%	4.8%	0.0%	14.3%

Table 15 Left/Right Identification of Parties in Slovakia

Party:	Pelinka	Survey Respondents							
		Far Left	Left	Center-Left	Center	Center Right	Right	Far Right	Cannot Say
OVP	Center-Right	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	50.0%	8.3%	0.0%
SPO	Left	0.0%	26.7%	56.7%	13.3%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
FPO	Right	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.3%	21.8%	73.3%	0.0%
Liste Pilz	Left	10.0%	35.0%	31.7%	3.3%	1.7%	0.0%	1.67%	16.7%
NEOS	Center	1.7%	1.7%	15.0%	38.3%	26.7%	5.0%	1.7%	10.0%
The Greens	Left	15.3%	59.3%	20.3%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
KPO	Not Relevant	81.7%	11.7%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 15 Left/Right Identification of Parties in Austria

Tables 14 and 15 show the identification of national political parties on the left right spectrum. The identification drawn from interviews with Malová and Pelinka were included in the table as the first column. The Austrian identification table shows that the identification of parties was rather clear. For the SPO, OVP, FPO, Greens and the KPO, at least 50% of voters were able to agree on the placement of the party. Overall the parties were clearly left or right, receiving over 80% in center-right/right or center-left/left combined. The only slightly problematic parties were the new party Liste Pilz, which was described as center-left to far left by 76% of voters, but had the highest percentage of voters who couldn't say where the party was positioned; and the NEOS, who had the most spread votes, concentrated around the center – with 38,3% respondents seeing them as pure center, 26,7% as center-right, and 15% as center-left (a total of 80% of respondents). The

identification of parties also largely corresponds to Pelinka's identification of the parties. In comparison to Pelinka's view, there is a slight push towards right in the perception of the parties – the majority of respondents saw the OVP as right (center-right for Pelinka), the SPO as center-left (traditionalist left for Pelinka), and the FPO was seen as far right (right wing for Pelinka).

The situation is rather different in Slovakia. A unison of at least 50% of respondent votes was found only for six of the eleven parties considered - SMER (58,1% left), SaS (64,3% right), LSNS (86,1% far right), KDH (54,8% right) and the new parties SPOLU (54,8% center-right), PS (57,1% center-left). These views correspond also with the views of Malová. It becomes more problematic with the other parties. For 5 parties at least 14% of voters could not say how they identify the party. For ethnic-Hungarian SMK (39,5% cannot say) and new party Sme Rodina (30,2% cannot say), "cannot say" was the most common answer. The nationalist SNS received a combined 34,9% percent of votes on the left side of the spectrum, 39,6% of voted on the right side of the spectrum. LSNS, KDH, Most-Híd, Sme Rodina are other parties that received over 10% from each side of the spectrum.

The open question "Based on the results of the previous page, how well does the "left-right" division reflect the current party system? Please explain your answer shortly," can provide more information. The Austrian respondents generally see the Austrian parties as well identifiable between the left and right, except for the NEOS. Around a half of the Austrian respondents listed the NEOS as a difficulty in an otherwise clearly definable system, making it the most common theme. The problem with NEOS is that they are both economically and socially liberal, making it difficult to align for many respondents. Another theme prominent amongst the respondents was a pull to the right of the whole system – multiple respondents had the opinion that the whole system moved right, with left parties moving to the center, and center-right OVP moving towards the right. For the Slovaks, the respondents to the open questions were discussing whether the left right division makes sense for Slovak politics at all. Many considered the party system to be too complex, and the left-right division too limited. One respondent discussed why he considers the extremist LSNS as left wing, claiming that its authoritarian state centered politics are more aligned with the left. So unlike the Austrian respondents, the Slovak respondents admitted having problems with the alignment of the parties between left and right, and this as mentioned not only for parties such as Sme Rodina or SNS which had the most dividing percentages, but also parties like SMER

and SaS. Some even voiced the opinion, that the left/right division is not relevant for Slovak politics, as the parties so not really aim to speak to their voters in terms of left and right. These explanations are similar to Ing

Left-Right Perception: Analysis of Expert Interviews

Finally, I decided to do a more in-depth analysis of the expert interviews, concerning how the experts themselves understood the left and the right. To do this analysis, I used two main explanatory factors of the left and of the right – economic explanations and societal explanations. I looked for these two explanations in the interviews themselves. For each of these two variables, I differentiated between direct explanations (where the experts directly explained their views of the left and right) and indirect ones (where they use the left-right identification to describe a party, voters or a specific policy). The indirect explanations are interesting, because they do show how the experts in question use the terms “left” and “right” in practice, which may, but also may not reflect their declared explanation of left and right. So the interviews were analyzed to find direct and indirect explanations of how the experts utilize the terms “left” and right” in economic and societal terms. An extra category was included to add other categorizations or explanations of left and right not directly connected to economic or societal factors.

Pelinka uses societal factors to differentiate between the left and right twice directly. He defines the left through the idea of social justice, equality, improving the conditions of the less privileged. However, when explaining right, he uses two possible explanations of the right: an economic understanding of the right described by economic liberalism and free markets; and a societal explanation of the right, understood as a nationalist right. He adds that he considers the societal understanding of a nationalistic right to be the most common, especially in Austria, where he says the economic liberal understanding of the right does not have a tradition. Pelinka stresses that he does not understand the left and right as a continuum, they do not necessarily represent opposite concepts, but rather different concepts. When classifying the parties, Pelinka usually uses the societal explanation indirectly, he does so 7 times during the interview. He only uses indirect economic explanations twice – he describes the OVP as “pro-market, but not a 100%” when explaining why considers it center-right, and he uses it to describe the NEOS as centrist, when he compares their pro-market economic views, with liberal internationalist societal views.

Malová uses the economic understanding of left and right as a direct explanation three times. She explicitly says, that “the only sensible criterion that there is” to differentiate between right and left is “whether the party prefers the state or the market.” She uses this direct explanation twice. She adds, that this distinction is prevalent, because it has been reinforced by the anti-Mečiar coalition, especially former finance minister Mikloš, as well most of the relevant Slovak NGOs and think tanks. Indirectly, she uses the economic explanation of left and right to categorize parties 9 different times. She never uses the societal explanation of left and right directly, but she does so on three instances indirectly, associating the right with conservative thinking, she uses this when describing the KDH, SMK, and once again when she describes the SNS – in that cases she also uses the term traditionalist. However, she never quite understands what she understands under the term “conservative”, as this could also be potentially understood in an economic way. So even with these three cases it is not sure whether the distinction is societal. At one point, when describing the SNS, she notes that it would be easier to classify them if the classification was conservative-liberal instead of left-right, which implies that she sees the distinction between conservative and liberal as not directly corresponding the left and right division. Malová also stresses on multiple occasions that it is difficult to use the left and right concept for Slovakia, one that Slovak political science has to find a way to deal with. She does not negate these terms, but she says they have a different meaning in Slovakia then they have in other countries.

The comparison of these approaches demonstrates that even at the level of expert political scientists, the findings of the survey seem to apply. Namely, that one of the key distinctions between how the left and the right are understood lies in whether the terms are understood economically or societally. Malová leans heavily on the economic understanding, using it both directly and indirectly, while not using the societal understanding at all. Pelinka uses exclusively the societal understanding to describe the left, and differentiates between the economic and the societal understanding of the right, seeing these two understandings as different concepts, not different aspects of the same category, with the societal understanding of a nationalist right being more prominent.

Discussion of Key Findings

In the previous parts, I have described and analyzed the results of my survey and of my qualitative interviews. In the following part, I will summarize my most relevant results concerning the

differences in the perception of cleavages between Slovak and Austrian students of political science. Following, I will try to provide possible explanations for these differences using the different historical developments of the political systems and differences in the cleavages in the respective countries.

The first significant result comes from the self-identification of students. The results have shown, that while an 80,95% majority of the Austrian respondents described themselves as left (center-left, left, or far left); a smaller 50,95% majority of Slovak respondents described themselves as right (right or center right). 88,68 percent of the Slovak respondents described themselves as one of center/center-right/center-left. So in comparison to Austria the students in Slovakia are comparably more right-wing, with a majority of them being situated around the center. Both Malová and Pelinka confirm in their interviews, that this has indeed been a trend in their respective countries – the Austrian students were generally more left leaning, which Pelinka demonstrates at the results of student elections, adding that this trend has been even stronger in political science; and the Slovak students were more right-leaning and reserved against the left, which Malová argues has been the case since the beginnings of political science in post-communist Slovakia. In Slovakia, this can be well explained by historical context. With the fall of the authoritarian regime, communism was considered a defeated ideology. The only democratic left in early Slovakia was the post-communist SDL, and as demonstrated in the part on the political history of Slovakia, the anti-communist sentiment played an important role in the forming years. This anti-communist sentiment was later exchanged by the anti-Mečiar sentiment, creating a broad coalition against the governing HZDS at the end of the 1990s. The SDL was a part of this opposition, but after they became part of the new government, they were in-line with the free market reforms pursued by the Dzurinda governments. These free market reforms became the source of the understanding of the term “right” in Slovakia. The rise of SMER brought a new big left party to the political system, supported mostly in rural areas, and overtaking much of the former HZDS electorate. SMER became the strongest party in the system, but it has gained a broad political opposition from different ideological backgrounds, creating a constellation similar to the pro-/anti- Mečiar sentiment at end of the 1990s. In fact, there only were three experiences of the Slovak voters with left concepts – the communists, the post-communist SDL, and divisive SMER party with many allegations of corruption, the most former communist members out of the current parties, and based mainly on rural voters. Therefore, a skeptical view towards the left, combined with allegations of

nationalism and populism, as the survey showed, is not very surprising. Malová also sees a shift from what used to be an anti-communist sentiment towards an anti-SMER sentiment. In Austria, as the findings by Kritzinger et.al. cited in the part on the history of Austria demonstrate, it has been especially the SPO (especially since the 1970s, when the SPO government eliminated fees for universities), and the Greens since the 1980s (by targeting higher-educated young people with their program) were better at attracting university students. These context dependent interpretations of why Slovak political students are more center-right, while the Austrians lean clearly to the left, is also in line with Dunn's modified core values thesis on how higher education affects left-right self-identification, claiming that higher education tends to strengthen the core-values dominant in the society. (Dunn 2011: 296)

The second, even more important finding, is the different understandings of the terms left and right, gathered mainly from the open questions of the questionnaire. The surveys have shown, that the Slovak political students recognize the left and the right mainly in economic terms, as a distinction between free market and state-centered approaches to economy. The societal dimension seems to be almost completely missing. Strong direct and indirect evidence for this view has also been found in the interview with Malová. Malová herself agrees, that this economic view of the left and right have been strengthened by the market-oriented reforms and privatizations of the center-right Dzurinda governments. Since the concepts of class has been missing after the revolution in Slovakia, a broader class cleavage, understood also in terms of discrimination, exclusion, was missing. Nationalism was a topic which has not been exclusive for the right, and has even been identified as a left concept in the survey. Austria on the other hand, did not have a history of market liberal thinking, both the SPO and the OVP have largely supported a strong role of the state and of the parties in the economy. The right was more connected with religion, conservatism, traditionalism, while the left has traditionally been understood as secular, and favoring the disadvantaged. Even the topic of nationalism, while being present in the OVP from the start if the second republic, has really become a larger scale issue only since the raise of the national-populist FPÖ under Haider in 1986, also strongly influencing the understanding of "right-wing" politics in Austria. So even here, the historical context dependence, created by the different structural background of the societies, and by the different performances and topics presented by the parties describing themselves as left or right, offers itself as a very good explanation for the different understandings of the left and right between Austrian and Slovakian respondents.

Finally, a finding that is very related to the second finding, is that the Slovak respondents were much more divided when choosing specific policy preferences, identifying these policies as left or right, and identifying the parties in their respective political systems as left or right. While the Austrian respondents did see a conflict in differentiating between an economic and a societal view of the right, they still chose rather consistently among policy options according to their left-right self-identification and were also rather consistent in their left/right identification of these positions. They were also consistent with the left/right identification of Austrian parties, with only the NEOS (and partially the newest Liste Pilz) posing some difficulties. The Slovak students on the other hand, changed their left-right positions more often in different areas of policies. They very often chose the “center” option, and chose the “cannot say” option to describe the left-right identification of their policy preferences or parties significantly more often than the Austrian students. In the open answers, they would describe the left and right to be too limiting, with the center offering more flexibility for policy choices. This difference between Austrian and Slovakian respondents is very well explainable by the concept of cross-cutting and coinciding cleavages. As Bertoa demonstrated in his work that I have been citing here (Bertoa 2012), the Slovak cleavage system shows a high degree of cross-cutting, explaining the turbulence and change in the Slovak party system. Parties with different ideological backgrounds were creating various coalition and opposition constellations. This is in stark contrast with the Austrian system, which had very neatly coinciding cleavages between 1945 and 1985, leading to a stable two-party system. There has been more cross-cutting since the 1986 with the raise of the FPÖ and the Greens, but these parties were still easily aligned along the existing left-right spectrum. So the cross-cutting between cleavages in Slovakia might be the cause, why many respondents prefer a more flexible center position, while seeing the left right division as very limiting, and are sometimes not able to identify certain policies or parties to one or the other.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have tried to look at the differences in the perception of left and right between Austrian and Slovak students of political science. I have tried to approach this from a historical institutionalist theoretical standpoint, combined with a cleavage-theory approach. Methodically, I approached the topic with a qualitative main paradigm, while utilizing a mixed-method design

consisting mostly of comparisons based on a structured online survey with several open-ended questions and two expert interviews.

I have identified three key findings – 1. A significant majority of the Austrian students of political science identified themselves as left, while the majority of Slovak students of political science identified themselves as center or center right. 2. The understanding of the terms left and right among students of political science seems to be different in the two countries in question: In Slovakia, it is limited to a rather narrow economic understanding of the terms, while in Austria the terms have both a societal and economic understanding, which are not necessarily connected. The societal understanding seems to be prevalent among Austrian students of political science. 3. The Austrian students of political science have a much more aligned view on policies, can clearly identify them as left or right in most cases, and can clearly define most Austrian parties as leftist or rightist. The Slovak students of political science tend to have different alignments for different policy areas, often position their positions as “center”, and often don’t know how to identify certain policies or parties to the left or right. I have provided extensive summaries on the development of party systems and cleavages for both countries, and have tried to use these historically specific contexts to explain the differences discovered in the online survey.

A problem for the thesis is its amount of representability - for the findings to be really relevant, the work would have to be replicated on a larger scale. Both a higher, more representative number of students, and possibly multiple expert interviews for each country would be necessary to add statistical relevance to the thesis. However, thanks to the clearly defined method and design, I believe the study would be replicable. If the study was to be undertaken on a larger scale, focus group interviews could be considered instead of open questions in the survey, providing more in-depth explanations for the students’ decisions in the survey. Also, further research could be used to confirm the proposed explanations presented in the discussion of the results in this thesis.

Even if replicated on a larger scale, one should be careful with the implications of these results. The limiting of the target group to political science students does on one hand allow for a more educated examination of the understanding of the left and right. On the other hand, when extended to the whole Austrian and Slovak population, the differences could become significantly less clear. Because of the concentration on context dependence and historical specifics of each country, this

work could also not be generalizable to, for example, Central Eastern European countries and Western European Countries in general.

Despite of all this, I believe there is strong relevance to this work. The left and right are concepts which are commonly used in both political discourse, media and political science, often without a clear definition of how they are meant in the specific usage. This thesis confirms, that these terms can really have very different meanings, depending on specific contexts where they are used. Therefore, just commonly using them, for example in European party politics, could lead to unintended conflicts, and even legitimacy biases. The differences that the results of my survey has shown are significant enough, to inspire future in-depth research on the topic, and motivate political scientists and others not to use these terms as given, but to reflect on its meaning and clearly define it if they are to use it.

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European Commission: Special Eurobarometer 461. <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2173> (date of access 29.06.2018)

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Anton Pelinka Profile on the Web Page of the Central European University: https://people.ceu.edu/anton_pelinka (date of access 29.06.2018)

Darina Malová Profile on the Web Page of the Comenius University: <http://www.politologiauk.sk/people/malova> (date of access 29.06.2018)

Anhang 1: Abstract – English

This Master Thesis deals with the different understanding, perception and identification of the left and the right in politics. More specifically it compares the perceptions of the left and right among political science students in Slovakia, a post-communist EU country and Austria, a traditional western EU country. The countries are close geographically, but with very different recent political histories. I compare the perception of left and right in these two countries, from the perspective of historical institutionalism and the cleavage theory. The basis for my data was an online survey of political science students in the respective countries, as well as semi-structured interviews with political scientists who are experts in the area of national politics in the respective countries. The results show, that there is indeed a very different understanding of the left and right in the two countries, with the Slovak respondents understanding the concept almost exclusively in economic terms, while the Austrians focus more on the social justice element, and recognize both a social and an economic level to the left and right division. I offer possible explanations of this by the different historical developments and different levels of cross-cutting between cleavages in the two countries. While the results are not generalizable, they seem significant enough to pursue further studies to confirm the findings.

Anhang 2: Abstract – Deutsch

Diese Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich mit den Unterschieden im Verständnis, Perzeption und Identifikation von Links und Rechts in der Politik. Konkret geht es um einen Vergleich der Perzeptionen von Links und Rechts zwischen Politikwissenschaft Studenten aus Österreich, einem traditionellen westlichen EU Staat, und der Slowakei einem post-kommunistischen EU Staat. Die Länder sind sich geographisch nah, haben aber sehr unterschiedliche politische Geschichte über das letzte Jahrhundert. Ich vergleiche die Perzeption von Links und Rechts in diesen Ländern aus einem Blickwinkel des Historischen Institutionalismus und der Cleavage Theory. Die Basis meiner Daten war eine online Umfrage von Politikwissenschaft Studenten von den jeweiligen Staaten, wie auch semi-strukturierte Interviews mit Politikwissenschaftlern die Experte im Feld der nationalen Politik in ihrem Land sind. Die Resultate zeigen, dass es tatsächlich signifikante Unterschiede in dem Verständnis von Links und Rechts zwischen den beiden Staaten, wo Slowakische Befragte den Konzept sehr stark in ökonomischen Rahmen verstehen, wobei die Österreichischen Befragten eher auf die Soziale Gerechtigkeit fokussierten und die Gesellschaftliche wie auch die Ökonomische Ebene der Links und Rechts anerkannten. Ich versuche diese Resultate durch unterschiedliche geschichtliche Entwicklung und unterschiedliche Menge an Überschneiden von politischen Spaltungen. Die Resultate sind zwar nicht generalisierbar, aber ich halte sie für signifikant genug für die Weiterführung von Forschung um die Resultate zu bestätigen.