



Voices of Central and Eastern Europe

Slovakia Country Report





About this report

The fragility of democracies is an increasing concern amid a period of global instability and insecurity reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, a shared belief in good governance, a reliable and trusted news media and government institutions, and an engaged civil society are now all crucial for democratic societies to get back on their feet, overcome societal and economic challenges of today and the near future.

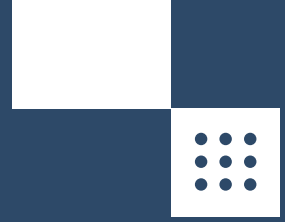
GLOBSEC's new report, [Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Perceptions of democracy & governance in 10 EU countries](#), provides unique insight into public satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and governance in ten Central and Eastern European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Taking note of the links between citizen support for liberal democracy (rather than autocracy), satisfaction with governance and life, and predispositions towards conspiracy theories and misinformation, the report, in its entirety, reveals fragile spots and pinpoints areas for further discussion.

This country report focuses specifically on Slovakia – a nation that experienced a turbulent path to democratisation. Although Slovakia saw a government with autocratic tendencies rule, by and large, during the 1990s, the country now has a record of economic growth behind it and is a fully established member of the European Union and NATO.

This tempestuous past might have, however, taken its toll based on our survey's findings. Support for democracy and commitment to democratic freedoms in the country is far from absolute. And buy-in to conspiracy theories is the highest in the region. Slovaks, moreover, express a heightened sense of threat perception that is directed towards various actors and groups, ranging from the US to migrants and minorities. The population, nonetheless, values its EU membership and does not see its government as overly intruding on media freedoms.





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Key findings



In countries that score higher in democracy quality indexes, respondents express more satisfaction with their governance system.

Compared to the region as a whole, Slovakia is typically ranked in the middle among countries included in our survey (5th in the Freedom House score and 6th in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Score) in the democracy indexes. And Slovaks' Satisfaction with the Governance System Index, is similarly sandwiched in-between countries we surveyed.

Support for liberal democracy is not straightforward in the region. Preference for liberal democracy, as opposed to autocratic rule, is endorsed by over 50% of respondents in only 5 of 10 countries.

In Slovakia, 49% of respondents express a preference for liberal democracy, with 38% instead favouring a strong leader with autocratic tendencies.

Central and Eastern Europeans perceive income inequality to be strongly prevalent in society and hold the view that systemic favouritism benefits individuals with access to elites and those with higher incomes. On average, 70% in the region believe that those with elite political contacts are favoured in society.

In Slovakia, 77% of respondents believe that those with elite political contacts are favoured over others. And 46% of Slovaks, the highest in the region, believe that migrants are favoured.

Trust in the media in the region averages around 44%. At the same time, more than 70% of respondents in Austria, Czechia, Romania, and Slovakia perceive the media as rather or completely free of influence.

This perception that the media is free of influence stands at 79% in Slovakia, notwithstanding the fact that 46% and 24% of Slovaks believe that oligarchs and financial groups and the government, respectively, have a strong degree of influence over the media. Only 46% of respondents in the country, moreover, judge the media to be trustworthy.

Respondents susceptible to believing conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives demonstrate a particular propensity for favouring autocratic leaders over liberal democracy and are more willing to trade away democratic freedoms for other social and financial benefits.

Slovakia has the highest degree of proneness to believe in conspiracy theories in the region. Around 64% of Slovaks, also the highest percentage in the region, express a willingness to trade away freedoms for other benefits.

Only a minority, 28%, of CEE respondents agree, on average, with the narrative that their values are under threat due to the “West”.

But within Slovakia, 50% of respondents feel that the “West” threatens their values and identity and 53% identify the US specifically as a threat.

Slovakia and Bulgaria are the most conspiracy theory- and misinformation-prone countries in the region. Around half of respondents agreed, on average, with statements presented in the survey that incorporated conspiratorial thinking and misinformation.

A total of 60% of Slovaks hold the belief that issues of world affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order. 51% of Slovaks, furthermore, agree with the conspiratorial notion that Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.


Democracy & Governance


The data indicates that support for liberal democracy is not a straightforward matter in Slovakia. Only 49% of respondents prefer a multiparty system with regular elections while 38% would rather have a

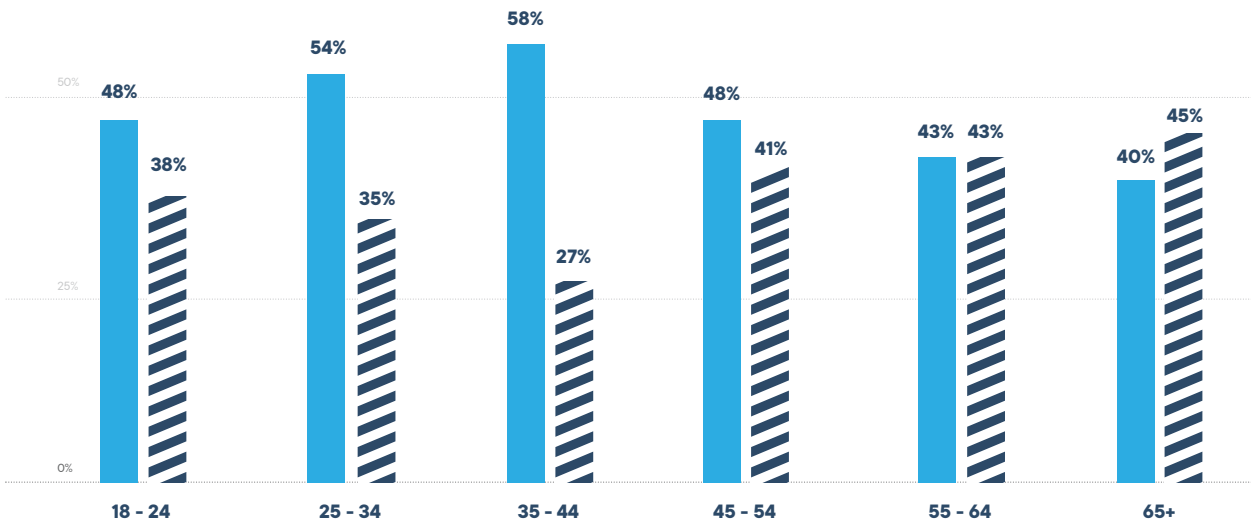
strong authoritative leader. 13% meanwhile, were uncertain. The greatest support, at 58%, for liberal democracy was observed among those aged 35–44. A total of 45% of respondents aged 65 and above, on the

other hand, expressed a preference for a strong autocratic leader. Within the region, this level of openness to an autocratic leader was exceeded only in Latvia and Bulgaria.

Which of the following forms of government is, according to you, better for Slovakia?

 Having liberal democracy with regular elections and a multiparty system.

 Having a strong and decisive leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections.

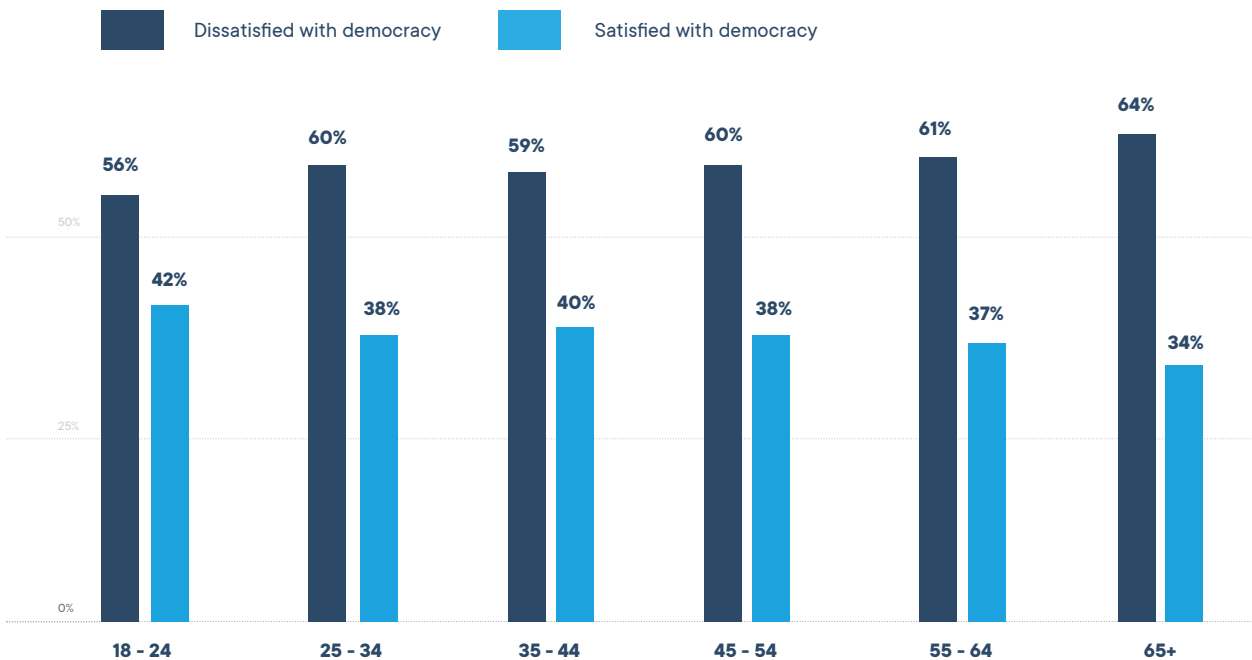


Slovakia's score of -11.5 in our Satisfaction with the System of Governance Index, an indicator of respondents' level of dissatisfaction towards governance in their countries, puts the nation in the middle of 10 surveyed countries. On average, 60% of Slovaks are not satisfied with how democracy works in their country. However, dissatisfaction increases proportionally with age – young people aged 18–24 are the least dissatisfied, at 56%, with how democracy works in Slovakia while elderly respondents aged 65 and over, at 64%, are the most dissatisfied.

Index of Satisfaction with the System of Governance

Austria	82
Estonia	22
Czechia	4
Lithuania	- 1.5
Hungary	- 2
Slovakia	- 11.5
Latvia	- 12
Poland	- 18
Romania	- 32
Bulgaria	- 46

If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied with how democracy works in Slovakia?



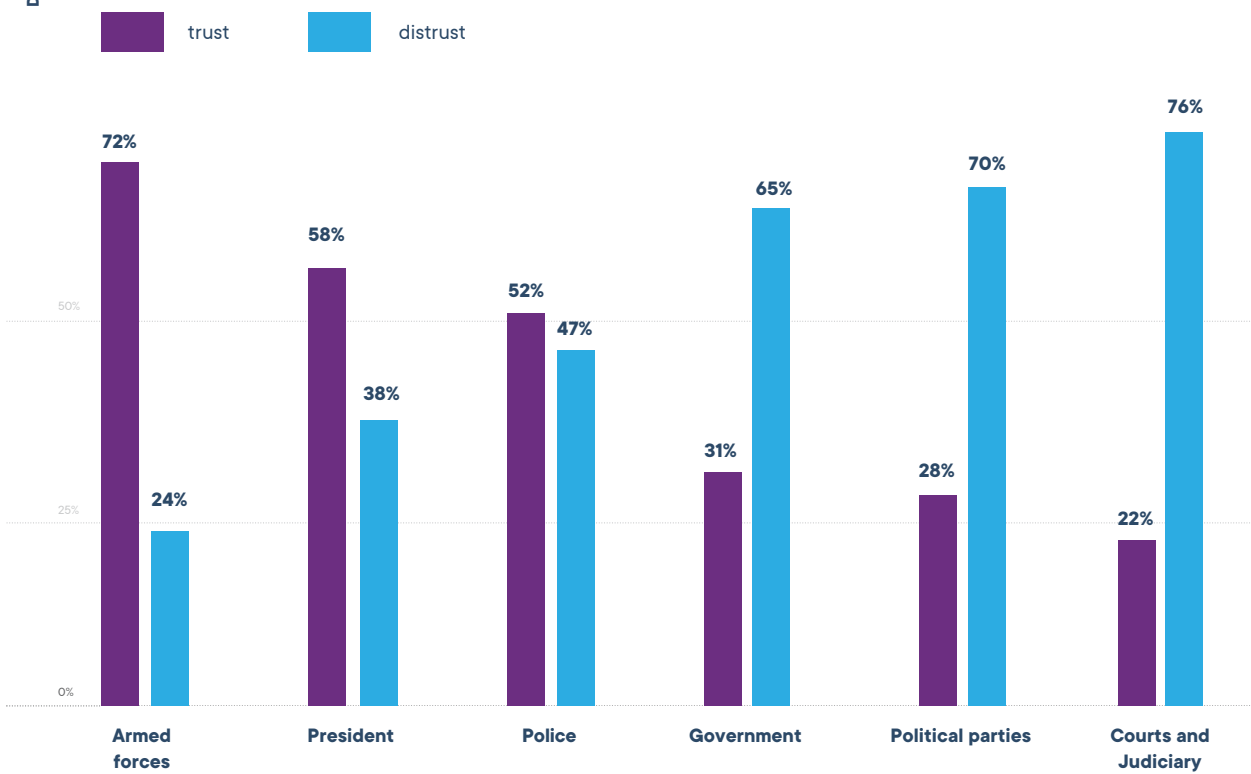
Trust

A closer examination of the level of trust and distrust in public institutions in Slovakia reveals a split, with a trust-gap observed between different institutions. While a majority of Slovaks trust the armed forces, the president, and the police, for example, a majority of Slovaks also distrust government, political parties, and the courts and judiciary. This contrast is underlined by the 72% support garnered for the armed forces, the most trusted institution in Slovakia, and its juxtaposition to a nearly 80% level of distrust in the courts and judiciary.

A total of 70% of respondents distrust political parties: Who is more inclined to express this sentiment?

- Those who agree with the statement that it doesn't matter who governs since nothing will change regardless
- Those who believe that people in Slovakia cannot, in general, be trusted
- Those who are dissatisfied with how democracy works in Slovakia

The number of Slovak respondents that declared that they “personally trust or distrust the following institutions in Slovakia”



This distrust in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government is associated with widespread disillusionment within the Slovak population. The survey finds that 62% of Slovaks think that the needs of people like them are not being taken into account by the political system and 56% agree with the viewpoint that it doesn't matter who governs as nothing will change regardless. This dovetails with findings that 85% of Slovaks, the highest among the 10 countries polled, believe that oligarchs and financial groups have significant control and influence over government. Only 64% of Czechs, by comparison, share this sentiment.

The feeling of alienation and dissatisfaction with political elites and public institutions leads, in general, to distrust in people, a low level of life satisfaction, a feeling that certain groups in society are favoured over others, and a belief that people are not in charge of their own lives. Only 47% of Slovak respondents think that everyone in the country has a chance to succeed in life. This compares to 72% of Poles, 60% of Czechs, and 52% of Hungarians. A majority of respondents in only two of the ten countries, Slovakia and Bulgaria, were pessimistic about life generally and their future. 56% of Slovaks agreed that most people in their country cannot be trusted.

35% of Slovaks believed that the needs of people like them are taken into account by the political system in Slovakia.

41% of Slovaks believed that, in general, most people in Slovakia can be trusted.

47% of Slovaks agreed that in Slovakia everyone has a chance to succeed in life.

56% of Slovaks agreed that it does not matter who holds government power as nothing will change regardless.

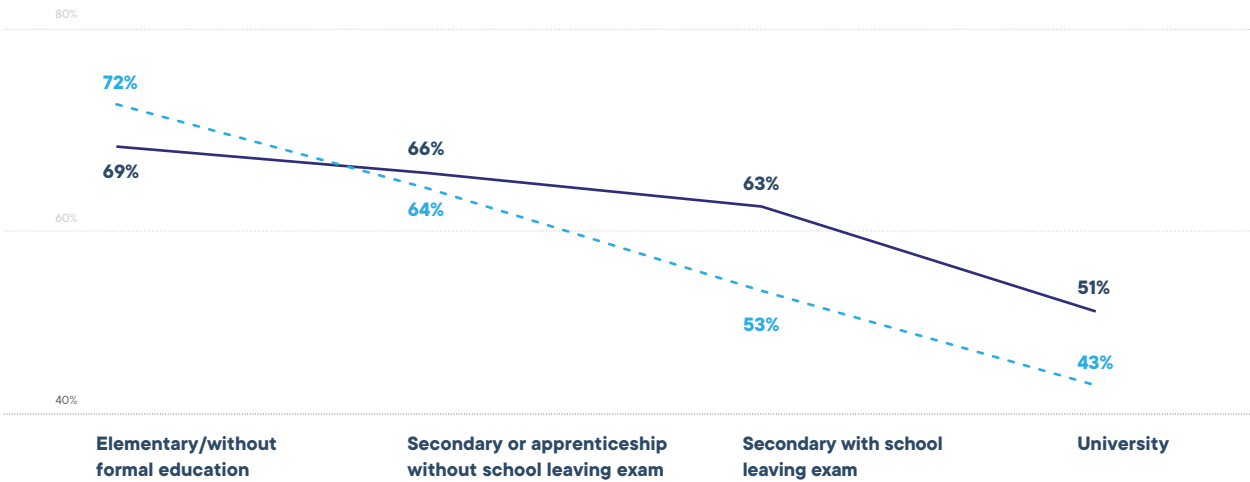
68% of Slovaks agreed that their country has always been oppressed and they were never able to control their own path.

85% of Slovaks agreed that oligarchs and financial groups have a strong control over government in Slovakia.

86% of Slovaks agreed that particular group(s) in their society are favoured over others.

Those who agree with the statement that “it doesn’t matter who holds the power in the government does not matter as nothing will change regardless” and those who do not agree with the statement that “the needs of people like you are taken into account by the political system”

■ Needs are not taken into account
 ■ Does not matter who holds power



The belief that “it does not matter who holds power in Slovakia and that nothing will change regardless” significantly decreases with education level. A negative correlation, furthermore, was observed between level of educational attainment and the perception that the “needs of people like you are not taken into account by the political system”.

86% of Slovaks, on the other hand, think that particular groups in society are favoured over others and 85% believe that oligarchs and financial groups have significant influence over government. This feeling of helplessness and not being in control is further underscored by a perception among respondents, at 68% and the highest in the region, that Slovakia has always been oppressed and never been able to set forth its own path.

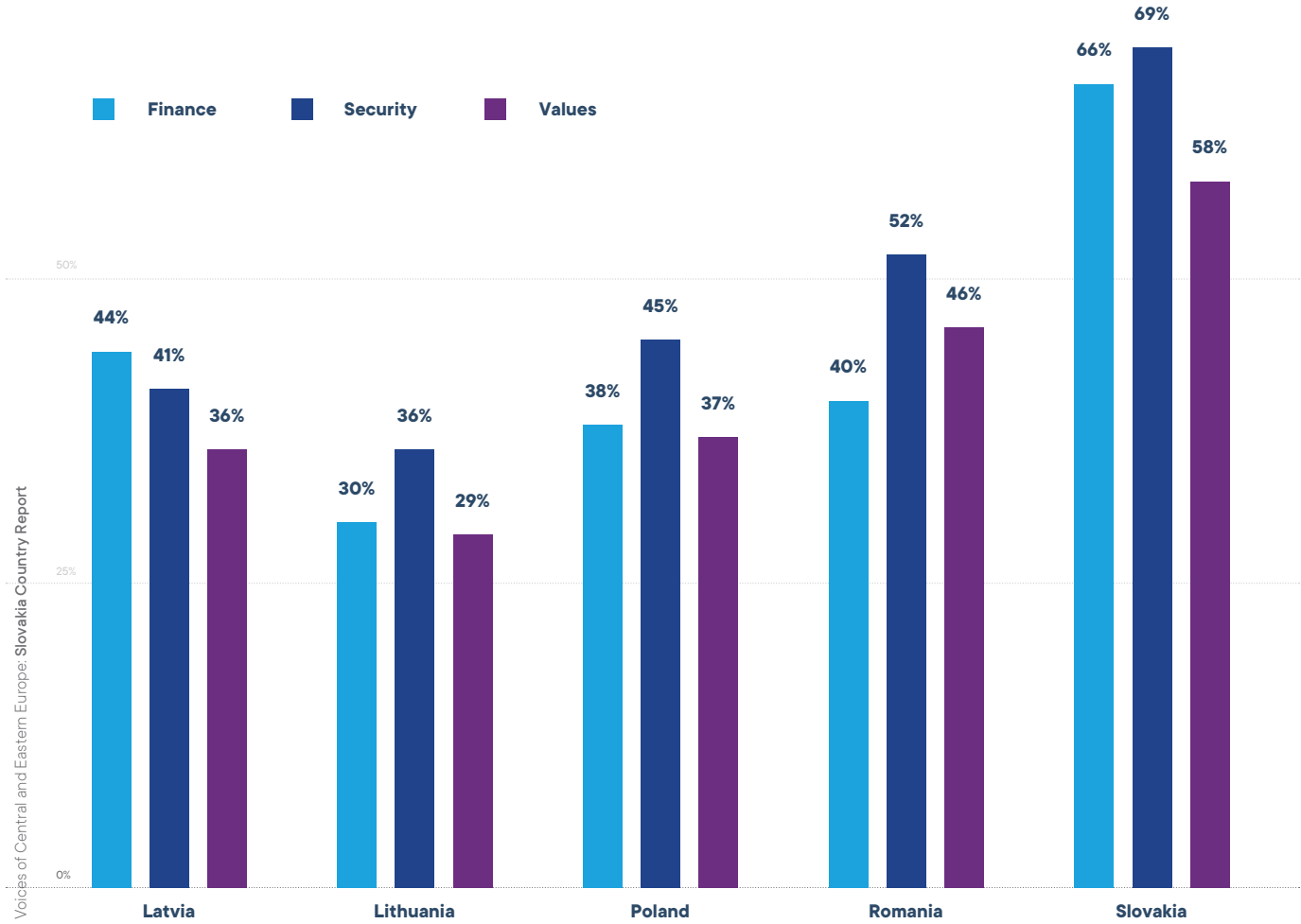
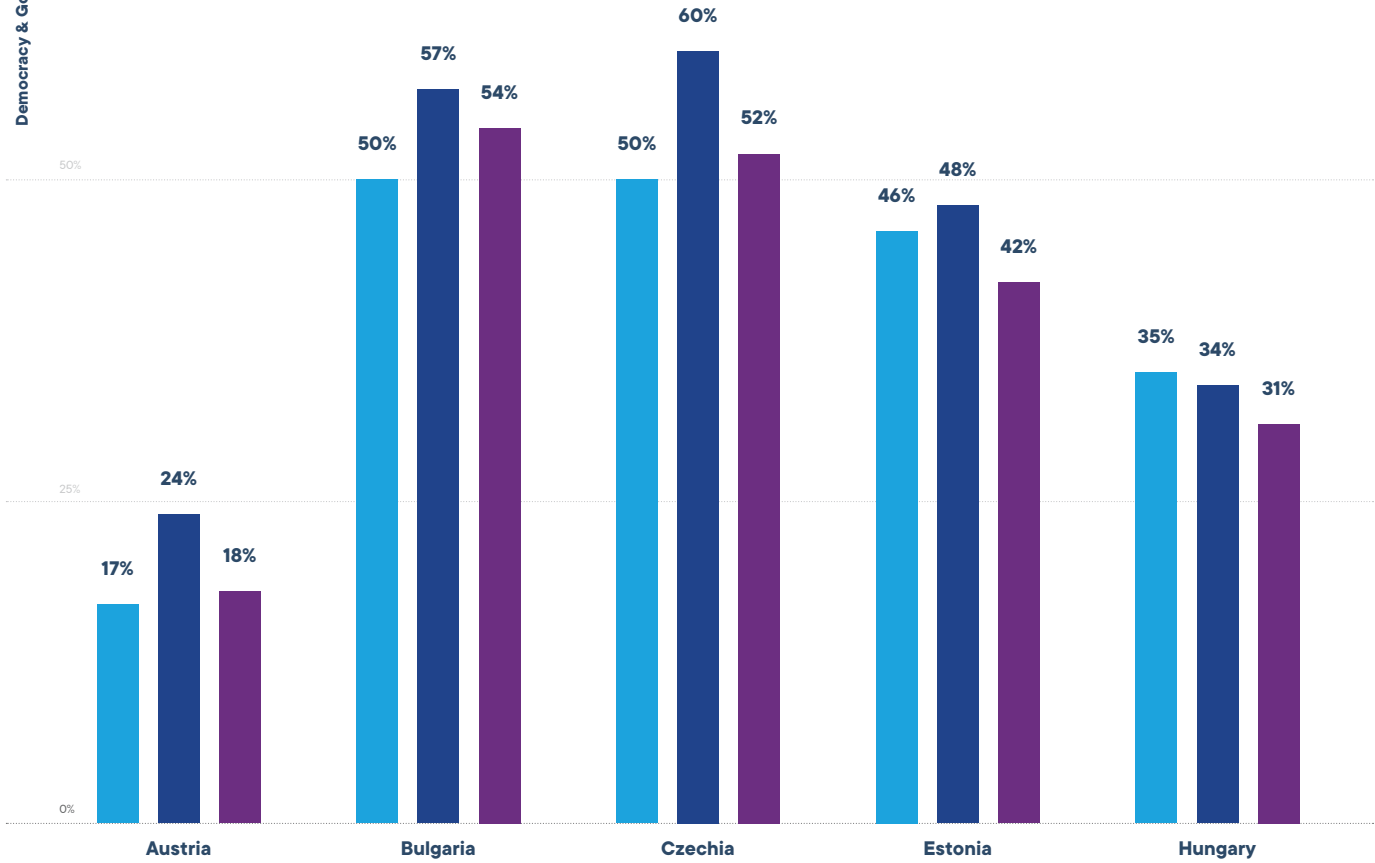
The belief that Slovakia has always been oppressed is interlinked with the believes in conspiracy statements. The majority of those who believe that Slovakia has always been oppressed and that Slovaks were never in control of their path are more inclined to believe in conspiracy theories:

79% think that non-governmental organisations are a secret instrument of foreign powers and interests.

78% believe that protests against the government in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other crucial institutions in the country, were controlled by and paid for by foreign actors.

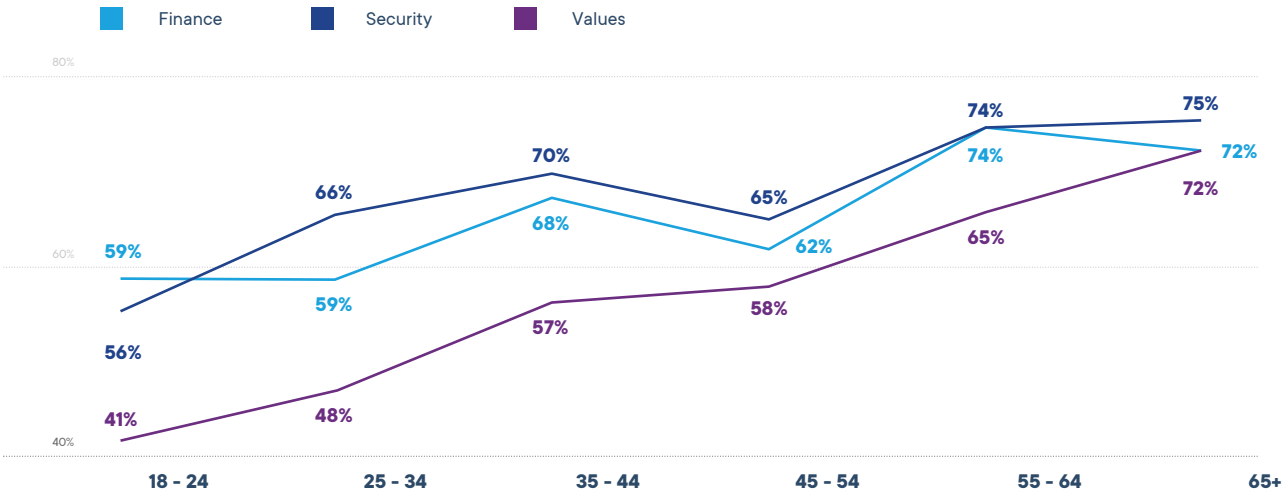
76% believe that issues of world affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.

Willingness to trade freedoms for other benefits



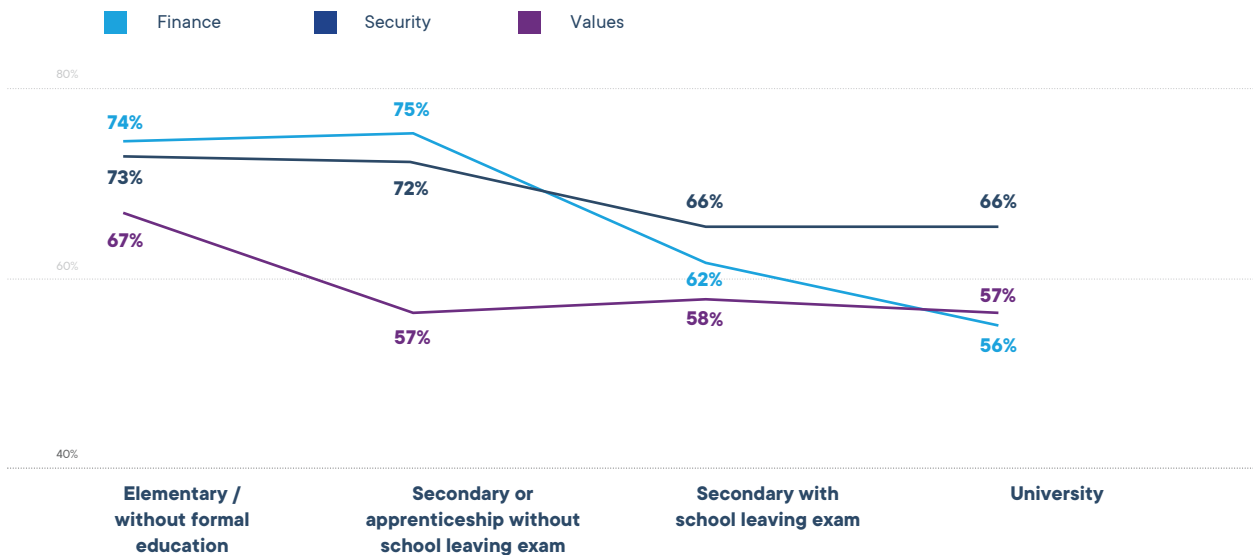
Affirmative answers to three questions:

“Would you trade some of your rights and freedoms - for example freedom to travel, to associate or free speech – 1) for better financial situation of you and your household, 2) for greater security in our country, 3) for the preservation of Slovakia’s traditional values”.



In Slovakia, on average, 64% respondents expressed a willingness to trade freedoms and rights away if it leads to an improved financial situation, increased security, and protection of their country's values. Sizeable differences exist, however, between age groups. There is a positive correlation indicating stronger support with age for

each of the three trade-offs. The greatest difference, a 31% gap, was found between the youngest and oldest age groups on the matter of protection of traditional values. This proved, moreover, to be the only trade-off with less than majority support among young aged 18-34.

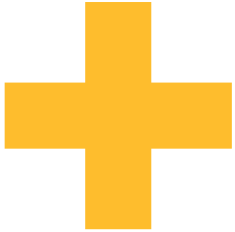


The “willingness to trade” fundamental freedoms and rights for other benefits is also affected by education level. A negative relationship was generally observed between level of educational attainment

and a willingness to trade away rights and freedoms. Increased security, however, has appeal even for university educated respondents.

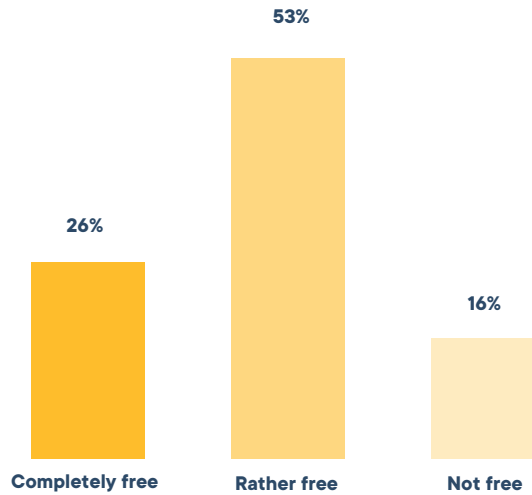


Control Over the Media



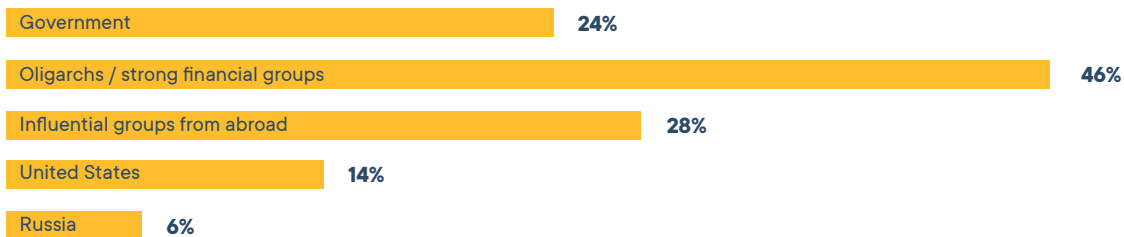
A total of 79% of Slovaks, among the highest in the region, believe the country's media to be rather free or completely free.

Among those who believe the media is rather free or not free, a majority hold the view that the media is influenced by oligarchs or large financial groups.



“Who do you believe has the strongest influence over the media in your country?”

(The question was asked only to those who responded that the media is rather free or unfree in their country but the results were re-tabulated to include the entire sample of respondents.)



Who mostly believes that the media in Slovakia is rather or completely free?

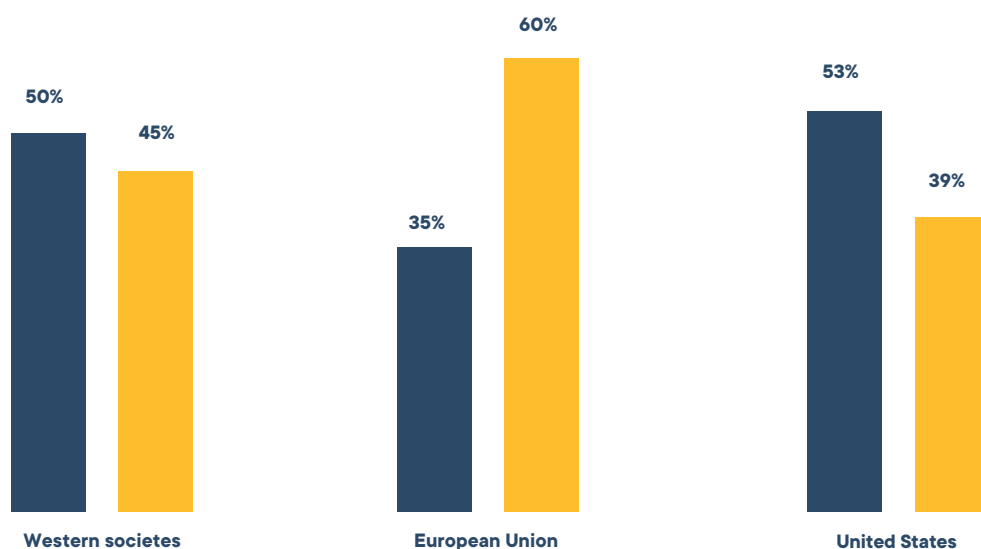
- Those with university education
- Those who believe that people in Slovakia can in general be trusted
- Those who do not believe that Slovakia has always been oppressed
- Those who prefer liberal democracy over having a strong leader
- Those who do not believe in conspiracy theories

Perception of Threats

Some people claim that there are certain groups of people and countries that threaten our own identity and values. Do you personally think any of the following groups or countries threaten your identity and values or not?

- A) Western societies and their way of living
- B) European Union
- C) United States of America

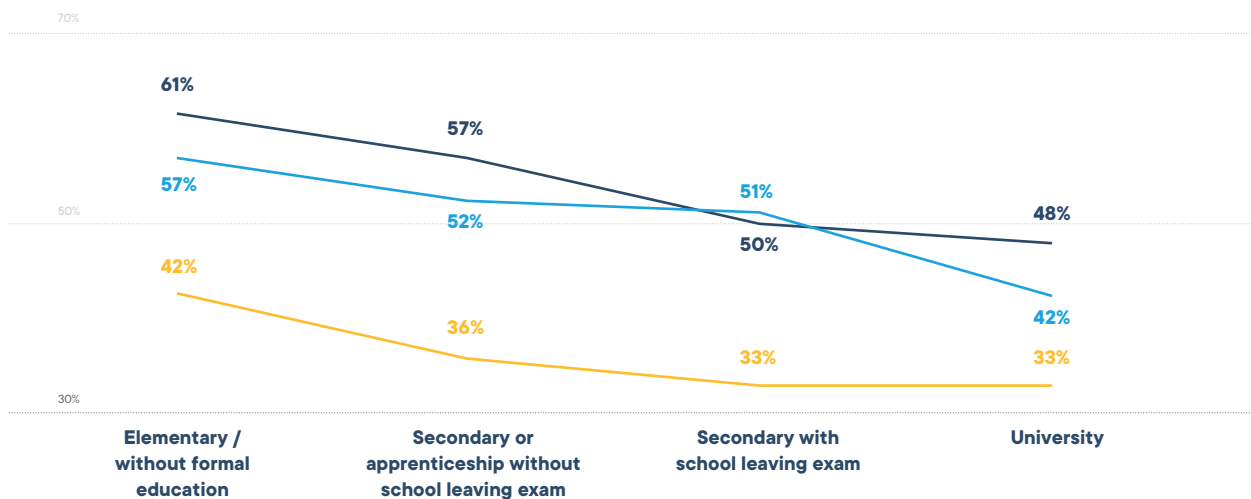
■ Yes, they do ■ No, they do not



The strongest correlation observed was based on level of educational attainment:

Affirmative answers of respondents to three individual questions as above

■ West ■ EU ■ US



Those who tend to see Western societies and their way of living as a threat

- Prefer a strong leader to liberal democracy
- Tend to believe in conspiracy theories
- Live in Eastern Slovakia (on average 60%)

Those who DO NOT feel threatened by the European Union

- Would prefer liberal democracy over strong leader
- Do not think that Slovakia has always been oppressed
- Tend not to believe in conspiracy theories (on average 80%)

Those who feel threatened by the United States

- Tend to agree with conspiracy theories, especially “the protests against the government in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other crucial institutions in the country, were controlled and paid for by sources from abroad.” 68% of those who consider the US a threat to Slovak identity and values also think that the protests against the government were orchestrated by foreign actors.





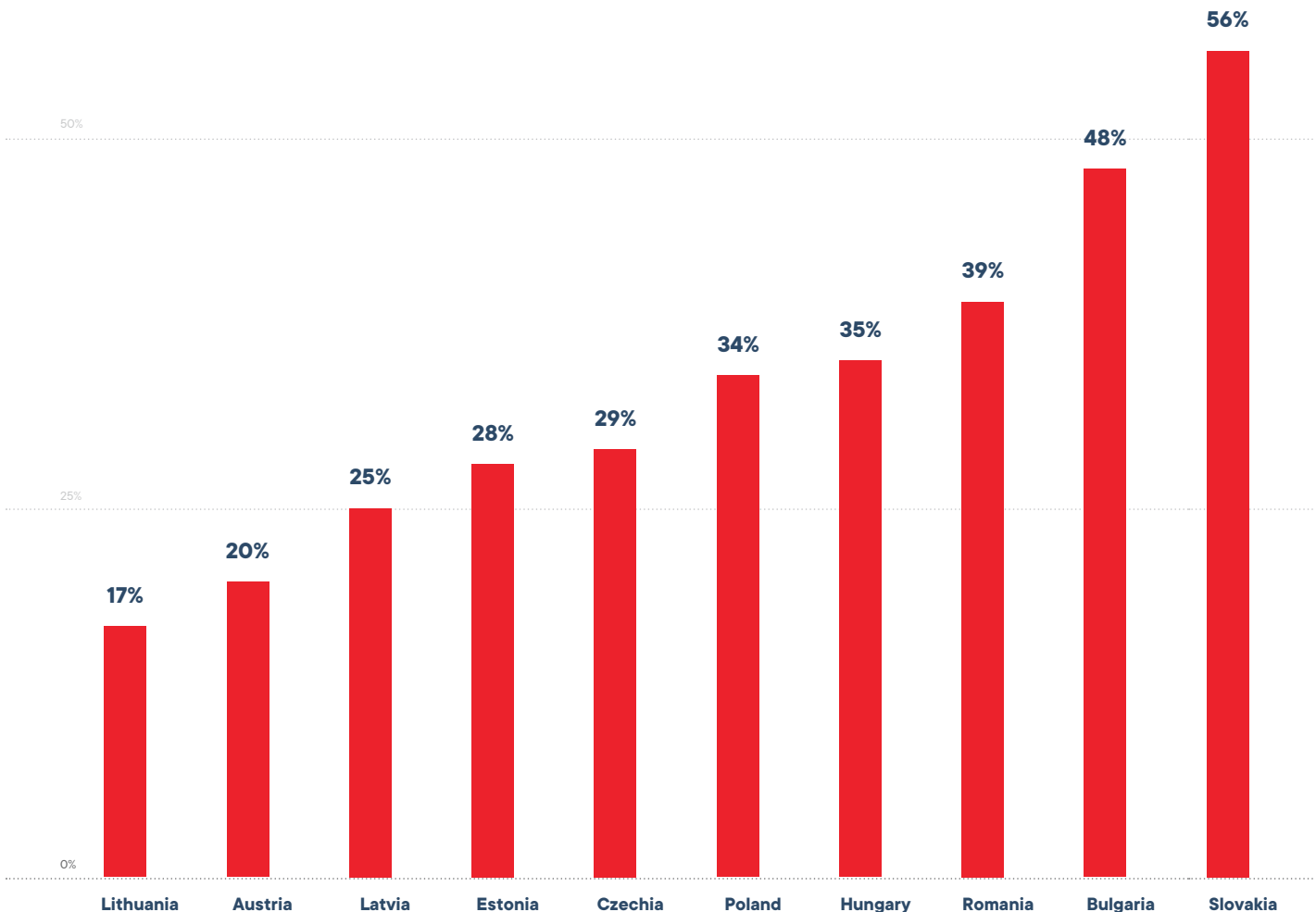
Conspiracy Theories & Misinformation

Who believes in conspiracy theories?

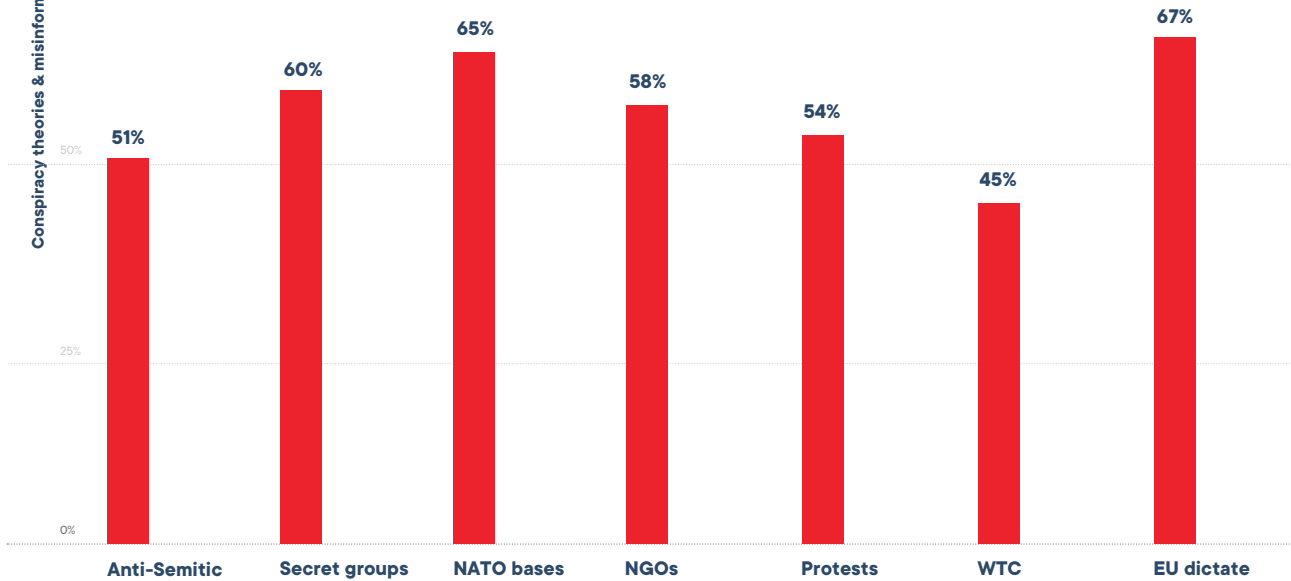
A logistic regression analysis identified five key factors contributing to people's proneness to believe in conspiracy theories and misinformation: willingness to trade away freedoms for other benefits; support for an autocratic leader; belief that the media is not free; dissatisfaction with the system; and dissatisfaction with life. Slovaks cohere with

three of these five factors and are the most conspiracy theory- and misinformation-prone nation in the region with 56% of respondents, on average, susceptible to believing statements that include conspiratorial thinking and misinformation.¹

¹ The percentage scores were calculated based on an average of responses in agreement with 3-4 conspiracy statements. The respondents were asked around 5-6 conspiracy statements, of which three were identical for all countries covered and the rest country-specific and selected by analysts from the respective countries. The statements with the lowest and highest percentage were excluded from the average to remove narratives that might have been strongly influenced by recent political events or by analysts' miscalculation of the predominant narratives.



What conspiracies and misinformation dominate among Slovaks?



Agreement with the following conspiracy theories:

Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.

World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.

NATO bases in Slovakia would mean US occupation.

Non-governmental organisations are a secret voice of foreign powers and interests.

Protests against the government in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other crucial institutions in the country, were controlled and paid from abroad.

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 was planned and conducted by the American government, not Al-Qaeda.

EU and Brussels dictate to Slovakia what to do without Slovakia having a chance to influence it.

Belief in conspiracy and misinformation statements is linked. The majority of respondents who believed one conspiracy also tended to agree with the other statements. Also, on average, of those who agreed with the statements above:

- **71% would choose a strong and decisive leader over liberal democracy.**
- **72% would trade their basic rights and freedoms for a better financial situation**
- **74% would trade their basic rights and freedoms for greater security**
- **65% would trade their basic rights and freedoms for the preservation of their traditional values.**

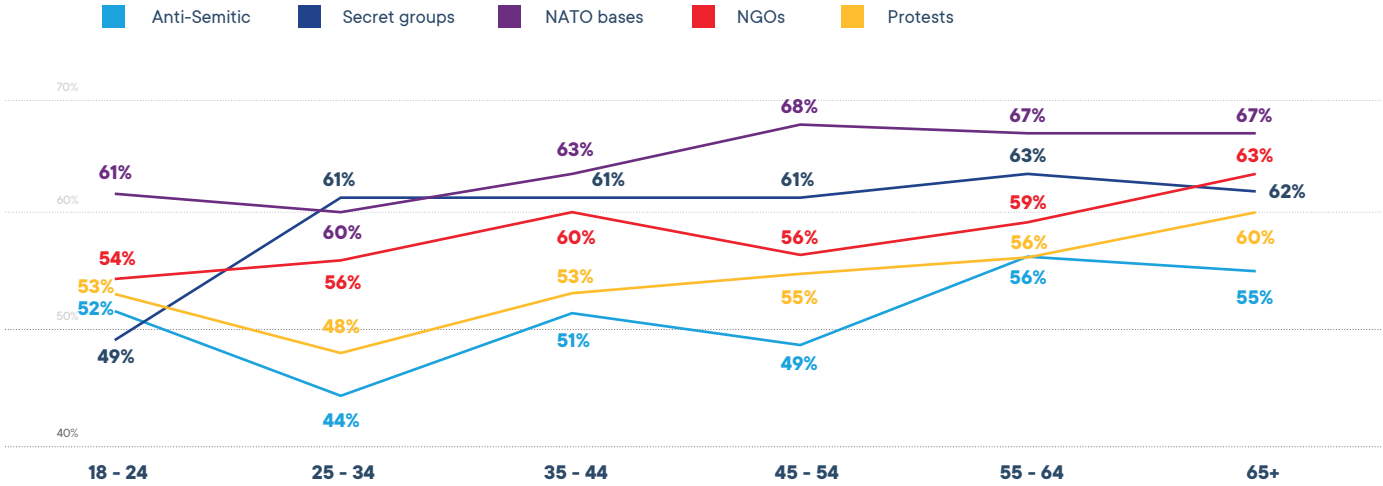


Belief in conspiracy theories according to age

A positive correlation was observed between susceptibility to conspiracy theories and age of respondents. On average, 61% of those aged 65 and above agreed with the conspiracy statements posed to them.

While belief in conspiracy theories is widespread no matter the age, there are sizeable differences in responses to different conspiracy theories within the age groups. There is a 17% difference, for example, between buy-in to the anti-

Semitic conspiracy and the secret societies statement among those aged 25-34. And among 45-54 year olds, there is a 19% difference in agreement between the anti-Semitic conspiracy and the belief that NATO bases in Slovakia would mean US occupation.



The percentage scores represent an average of responses in agreement with 5 conspiracies:

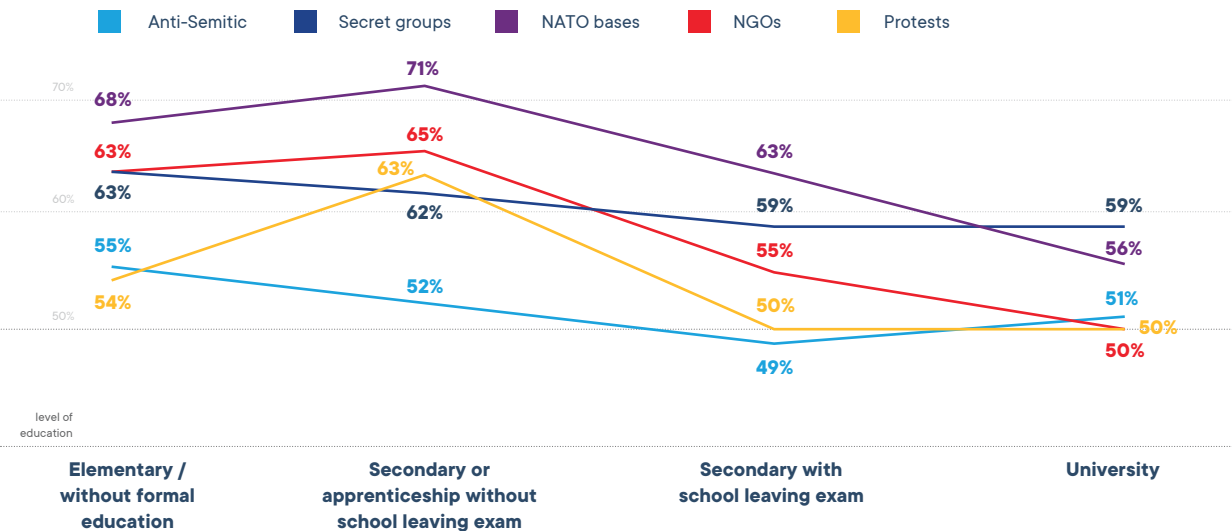
- Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.
- World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.
- NATO bases in Slovakia would mean US occupation.
- Non-governmental organisations are a secret voice of foreign powers and interests.
- Protests against the government in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other crucial institutions in the country, were controlled and paid from abroad.

Education

While a majority of Slovaks believe in conspiracy theories, in general, a negative correlation was observed between conspiracy theory buy-in and level of educational attainment. Around 61% of Slovaks with elementary education believe in conspiracy theories yet "only" 53% of university educated

individuals share this inclination. In the case of NATO bases and the notion that NGOs are foreign agents, there is a 15% difference in responses between those with an apprenticeship and a university degree. The degree of conspiracy-prone thinking has increased considerably among the segment of

the population with a lower level of education compared to our findings in 2018. In that year, "just" 48% of respondents with only elementary education believed that world affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order – now the figure is 61%.



Annex - Tables

Question: "Which of the following forms of government is, according to you, better for Slovakia?"

	Having a strong and decisive leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections.	Having liberal democracy with regular elections and multiparty system.	Do not know
18 - 24 years	38	48	14
25 - 34 years	35	54	11
35 - 44 years	27	58	15
45 - 54 years	41	48	11
55 - 64 years	43	42	15
65 + years	45	40	14
Elementary/ without formal education	49	32	20
Secondary or apprenticeship without school leaving exam	39	42	19
Secondary with school leaving exam	37	52	12
University	32	62	6

Question: "If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied with how democracy works in Slovakia?"

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
18 - 24 years	42	56
25 - 34 years	38	60
35 - 44 years	40	59
45 - 54 years	38	60
55 - 64 years	37	61
65 + years	34	64
Elementary/ without formal education	32	62
Secondary or apprenticeship without school leaving exam	35	64
Secondary with school leaving exam	37	62
University	47	52

Affirmative answers to three questions:

“Would you trade some of your rights and freedoms - for example freedom to travel, to associate or free speech for better financial situation of you and your household?”

“Would you trade some of your rights and freedoms - for example freedom to travel, to associate or free speech for greater security in our country?”

“Would you trade some of your rights and freedoms - for example freedom to travel, to associate or free speech for the preservation of Slovakia’s traditional values?”

	Finances	Security	Values	Average
18 - 24 years	59	56	41	52
25 - 34 years	59	66	48	57
35 - 44 years	68	70	57	65
45 - 54 years	62	65	58	62
55 - 64 years	74	74	65	71
65 + years	71	75	72	73

Affirmative answers to conspiracy statements:

“Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.”

“World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.”

“NATO bases in Slovakia would mean US occupation.”

“Non-governmental organisations are a secret voice of foreign powers and interests.”

“Protests against the government in Slovakia, which resulted in changes in the government and other crucial institutions in the country, were controlled and paid from abroad.”

	Anti-Semitic	Secret groups	NATO	NGOs	Protests	Average
18 - 24 years	52	49	61	55	53	54
25 - 34 years	44	61	60	53	48	53
35 - 44 years	51	61	63	56	53	57
45 - 54 years	49	61	68	60	55	59
55 - 64 years	56	63	67	59	56	60
65 + years	55	62	67	63	60	61
Elementary/ without formal education	55	63	68	63	54	61
Secondary or apprenticeship without school leaving exam	52	62	71	65	63	63
Secondary with school leaving exam	49	59	63	55	50	55
University	51	59	56	50	50	53

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Methodology

The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2020 on a representative sample of the population in ten EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The surveys were conducted on a sample ranging from 1,000 to 1,047 respondents using stratified multistage random sampling in the form of computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) or computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

In all countries, the profiles of the respondents were representative of the country by gender, age, education, place of residence and size of settlement. For the purpose of graphical data visualisation in this report, the results were rounded to full numbers.

To improve the readers' experience, the responses in closed questions with a scale were generalised. For example, a question with options definitely agree/ rather agree/ /rather disagree /definitely disagree, was merged to agree / disagree for the purpose of both data visualisation.

More about the methodology can be found in the comparative report **Voices of Central and Eastern Europe**.

Collection of opinion polls in each country was coordinated by FOCUS, s.r.o.

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