POPULISM AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES: HOW POLITICIANS IN SLOVAKIA ABUSED POVERTY DURING ELECTION

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Abstract. Based on a 2019 study carried out by the Government Commissioner for the Roma community, the Roma community in Slovakia makes up approximately 8% of population. Marginalized groups are often targets of exploitation by fraudsters and usurers from their own community not only in Slovakia. At the institutional level, majorities face prejudice based on their ethnicity. People in these excluded communities often live in conditions reminiscent of the past century, facing restricted access to basic hygiene and education. The Roma population in Slovakia constitutes a great potential and can be a driving force for economic growth and the survival of companies, especially in the least developed regions – Prešov, Košice, Banská Bystrica. Their participation is important not only in the labour market, but also in public life. In 2023, elections took place, during which the former Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic took advantage of the situation in these communities, promising a reward of 500 EUR to anyone participating in the elections. The aim of our work is to investigate how this promise influenced electoral preferences in the given community and the impacts of such unethical political practices on poorest and one of the most vulnerable communities in the country.

Keywords: Slovakia, OĽANO, marginalized Roma communities, voting rewards, populism.

JEL Classification: E0.

1. Introduction

Free and fair elections are considered a significant accomplishment of the 20th century and have become an integral part of Western societies. While elections also occur in non-democratic or autocratic societies, their regularity is often scrutinized by independent organizations and observers. The Democracy Index published annually by The Economist, serves as a tool to assess the quality of democracy worldwide.

The most democratic countries, primarily in North America (USA and Canada) and Western Europe, where approximately one-tenth of the population resides, lead the rankings. Following them are "Flawed democracies," encompassing 40% of the global population, while the remaining half resides in either hybrid regimes or authoritarian regimes. Slovakia has been a democratic country since 1993, and although the country has gone through various stages of development, it has remained democratic. Especially in the first years of their existence, they encountered challenges and the question of which circle of civilization their inhabitants want to belong to. After the 1998 elections, gradual reforms were adopted to gradually decentralize power and it moved to a stage. In 2022, Slovakia was in the 43rd position in this ranking, of course the western neighbors Czech Republic (25th) and Austria (20th) were better off, closely followed by Poland (46th), Hungary (56th) and the war-torn country Ukraine (87th), which is considered a hybrid mode.

This paper focuses on other elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the activity of the government party OĽANO, which led to increased

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interest in the elections to the National Council, especially among excluded communities.

Igor Matovič was the prime minister after the elections to the National Council in 2020, and mainly thanks to his eccentric ideas and insults, he caused the fall of his government, the subsequent reconstruction, when he was replaced by the Minister of Finance Eduard Heger, and subsequently the fall of this government and the early parliamentary elections that took place in October 2023. The goal of the campaign was mobilization against the mafia and a very feasible promise to voters that everyone who comes to vote will receive 500 EUR. However, this promise was the condition on the participation of the OĽANO party in the future government coalition. Many people, particularly from low-income marginalized groups, perceived this information as already approved, when in reality, this idea lacked support from any of the relevant parties that entered the parliament. At the very least, it amounted to deception and exploitation of the poorest segments of the population in the country.

2. Literature review

This chapter contains an overview of the situation in the examined country and to introduce relevant studies and concepts related to the concept of rewarding voters for their participation in elections.

Martin (2003) claimed that scholars have had limited success in empirically demonstrating the importance of political participation. In this study, the author focuses on the relationship between participation in elections and employment. This idea is not new, but until now it was not possible to find a country that would really implement something similar, nor a politician who would promise a financial reward for participating in the elections.

2.1. Political background

Igor Matovič became the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic after the elections on February 29, 2020. A relatively controversial figure, he gained prominence primarily through his agenda focused on combating corruption and organized crime. The defeat of the dominant party SMER-SD marked a culmination of activity in the Slovak political scene, triggered by the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová.

The early twenty-first century was characterized by constant technological progress. The economic growth in the second decade was challenged by a new threat in the form of the onset of a global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The disease called COVID-19 brought about turbulence in the world market, which affected all market actors. As well as Matovič's office faced the COVID-19 situation (Kalamen et al., 2023). The pandemic significantly impacted societal life not only in Slovakia but globally, affecting nearly every aspect of life, the economy, state administration, and local governance (Solej, 2023b). COVID-19 targeted also labor market in

Slovakia, especially young people and least skilled (Solej & Vojtasová, 2024). Similar situation was present also in different European countries (Vojtasová & Solej, 2024).

His government lasted for over a year and was marked by conflicts and disputes. The main instigator of conflicts was the party leader, Igor Matovič, who proposed ideas such as widespread testing for COVID-19, which garnered attention even in reputable scientific journals (Holt, 2021). In his article, Holt (2020) also presented a perspective on testing in Roma settlements, where entire communities faced lockdowns (Hidas et al., 2022).

The first government fell due to the controversy surrounding the purchase of the Sputnik vaccine, which caused outrage among coalition partners and led to a government reconstruction. Igor Matovič was replaced as the Prime Minister by his party colleague and Minister of Finance, Eduard Heger. Igor Matovič then assumed the position of Minister of Finance for the Slovak Republic and remained the leader of his party, OĽANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities).

This government fell again after over a year, triggered by an ultimatum from the coalition partner "Sloboda a Solidarita" (Freedom and Solidarity), which demanded the departure of Finance Minister Igor Matovič from the government. This ultimatum expired at the end of August, and while the government lost the majority, it did not lose a vote of confidence. The government continued to govern until December when it ultimately lost a vote of confidence. The entire situation culminated in a bizarre incident when Igor Matovič had to withdraw his resignation at the last moment.

After the fall of the government, President Zuzana Čaputová tasked Eduard Heger with leading the country to early elections, which took place in October 2024. A faction of the OĽANO party, led by its leader and ministers, established a new party called DEMOKRATI (Democrats).

Igor Matovič, now a member of the opposition, entered the elections with the same theme of fighting organized crime and appealed for increased voter participation. He pledged that if his OĽANO movement became part of the future government coalition, a key condition would be a reward of 500 EUR for each participant in the elections.

2.2. Roma population in Slovakia

Data on the Roma population in Slovakia vary. According to Matlovičová et al. (2012), this issue is associated with several problems. One of the main reasons was the belief after the fall of communism that any identification of race, language, or social origin leads to discrimination. Vaňo (2001) attributed it to the consistent application of the basic constitutional rights of citizens of the Slovak Republic.

Based on Solej (2023a) research, majority of majors saw he presence of a marginalized Roma community in a neighboring municipality as obstacle to consolidation reform of Slovak municipalities.

According to Kozmová (2004), there are approximately 12 million Roma worldwide, with around 8 million residing in Europe. The highest number of Roma is estimated in Romania. In 1991, 75,802 people (1.4% of the population) identified as Roma, while in the 2001 population census, it was 89,920 people. However, estimates suggested 300–350 thousand people. Liégeois (1997) estimated in the early 90s that there were 480,000 – 520,000 Roma inhabitants.

Kozmová (2004) attributed this to factors such as insufficiently developed Roma ethnic awareness, inadequate preparedness, and ideological inconsistency of Roma political and cultural entities. Contributing to this

Table 1. Total number of Roma population in Slovakia (source: Korec et. al., 2022)

Year	Total number	Share of population	Source / Methodology
18th century	20 000	1.05%	Hungarian census – unofficial
1893	36 237	1.40%	Hungarian census – unofficial
1921	8 035	0.25%	census 1921
1927	62 192	2.12%	records by municipalities
1930	31 188	0.90%	census 1930
1938	60 000	2.05%	police records
1947	84 438	2.48%	records by municipalities
1955	114 000	3.58%	hygiene field research
1966	165 606	3.74%	records by municipalities
1967	164 526	3.67%	survey of the statistical office
1970	159 275	3.52%	census 1970
1980	199 853	4.01%	census 1980
1989	253 943	4.81%	records of national committees
1990	263 337	4.97%	estimate of the Statistical Office
1991	75 803	1.44%	census 1991
2000	365 000	6.76%	estimate (Vaňo, 2002)
2001	89 920	1.67%	census 2001
2004	281 379	5.23%	census for the atlas of Roma communities 2004
2005	295 000	5.48%	estimate (Kalibová, 1991)
2010	352 924	6.49%	census for the atlas of Roma communities 2013
2011	105 738	1.67%	census 2011
2013	402 840	7.44%	census for the atlas of Roma communities 2013
2019	417 535	7.65%	census for the atlas of Roma communities 2019
2019	450 000	8.24%	census for the atlas of Roma communities 2019
2020	515 000	9.43%	estimate (Vaňo, 2002)
2021	156 164	2.86%	census 2021
2025	520 000	10.00%	estimate of the Statistical Office

were the attitudes of the majority towards the Roma, where up to 80% of the majority maintained social distance towards Roma, and 30% of adults, or 34% of young populations, characterized their attitude as hostile.

The recent developments in estimating the Roma population were summarized by Korec et al. (2022), who compiled data spanning the last three centuries from the periods of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, and the independent Slovak Republic.

The article highlights a nationwide difference between the number of Roma people reported in the 2021 population census and the count of individuals identifying with Roma ethnicity in the latest Atlas of Roma Communities from 2019, which is nearly threefold (Ravasz et al., 2020).

While the 2019 atlas indicates that there are at least 417,535 residents of Roma ethnicity in Slovakia, the 2021 census shows that only 156,164 individuals identified themselves as Roma by nationality, considering both the first and second nationalities. Comparing these two figures reveals that approximately only 37.40% of the Roma ethnic population identified with Roma nationality (both first and second nationalities combined) in 2021.

According to the authors of the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, the estimated number of residents of Roma ethnicity in Slovakia in 2019 was higher, reaching 450,000, based on the methodology used (Ravasz et al., 2020).

All data for Roma population in Slovakia are presented in Table 1. It is estimated that Roma population will be over half million citizens which represents almost 10 percent of total population of Slovakia.

3. Data and methodology

This chapter delineates the specifics of the pertinent data collection process and provides a description of our sample. The primary aim of this article was to assess how populism and election rewards can influence voter turnout among the lowest-income marginalized groups.

In our analysis, we utilized data collected by the statistical office, which encompasses detailed results of individual political parties, including the OĽANO party, from the elections to the National Council in all 2927 municipalities in Slovakia, encompassing 17 city districts in Bratislava and 22 city districts in Košice. The data were also amenable to analysis at the regional and district levels. For the analysis of the Roma population, the official source document chosen was the Atlas of Roma Communities compiled by Ravasz et al. (2020).

3.1. Atlas of Roma communities

The Atlas of Roma Communities comprises a series of comprehensive publications delineating the geographical distribution, dimensions, and infrastructure of Roma communities within the borders of the Slovak Republic. Its inaugural edition emerged in 2004 (Radičová et al., 2004), succeeded by a subsequent version in 2013 (Mušinka et al., 2014). Methodology is

explained in Mušinka et al. (2019). The database supporting the third iteration of the Atlas resulted from a collaborative effort between the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Úrad splnomocnenca vlády Slovenskej Republiky pre Rómske komunity, 2004) and the Institute for Labour and Family Research, financed through European funds as an integral part of the Operational Programme Human Resources. Initial data collection involved the administration of questionnaires to municipalities, with subsequent verification conducted by field collaborators. Both the database and its associated publication (Ravasz et al., 2020) are publicly accessible online.

The fundamental analytical element of the 2019 Atlas is concentration. Concentrations are defined as "territorial areas where a considerable number of individuals or families from Roma communities reside in close proximity. These include locations outside municipalities, on the outskirts of municipalities, within municipalities (i.e., settlements, Roma streets, Roma apartment buildings), and municipalities with a Roma majority" (Ravasz et al., 2018, p. 7). The Atlas 2019 incorporates municipalities with concentrations, comprising at least 30 residents from the Roma community, as well as municipalities with at least 30% Roma population within the total population of that municipality. Overall, the database encompasses 1,102 concentrations in 825 municipalities (Smatanová & Šeligová, 2021).

3.2. Statistical office

Other data used in this study origins from the databases of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic available online. These are data related mainly to the election results for the years 2016, 2020 and 2023. The data for 2012, when OĽANO was in the first independent elections, were in a bad structure and for that reason we did not include them in the analysis. The variables we used were the total number of eligible voters, the number of participating voters, the number of valid votes, we calculated the voter turnout and the election result based on valid votes for the coalition of parties OĽANO and friends.

3.3. Methods and econometric model

This study uses basic statistical and quantitative methods. The purpose is to answer the question of how the size of the Roma community, which was promised money for participating in the elections, increased the result of OĽANO for these communities compared to the majority and at the same time their electoral participation. Whether there is a relationship between the outcome and the population size

With the help of boxplots, we will look at the regional breakdown. There are 8 NUTS2 regions known as "regions" in the Slovak Republic. These regions include 3 main regions where the majority of the Roma population lives – Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov.

By using a sample of 2927 municipalities by pairing them with data from the Atlas of Roma communities using the created our own SQL database, we can analyze their impact. We also focused on municipalities where the result was more than 90%.

When investigating the impacts, we used a correlation matrix where we tested the relationship between the variables.

Based on these variables, an econometric OLS model was also constructed, which is expressed by the following equation:

$$Results\_OĽANO\_2023 = a0 + a1.ROMA + a2.\ Results\_OĽANO\_2020 + a3.\ Results\_OĽANO\_2016 + ε. \qquad (1)$$

Results_OĽANO_2023 – share of votes received by OĽANO in parliament elections 2023
ROMA – share of Roma population as % of total population.
Results_OĽANO_2020 – share of votes received by OĽANO in parliament elections 2020
Results_OĽANO_2016 – share of votes received by OĽANO in parliament elections 2023.

4. Results

The *"OĽANO and friends"* coalition experienced a decline in the election outcomes. Following the triumph in 2020, where the movement secured 25.02% of the vote, the early elections to the National Council in 2023 concluded with a reduced outcome of 8.89% OĽANO after 3 years of their government lost almost 70% of their voters.

This marked the second-worst performance for the movement since its establishment in 2011. In 2023 they run in election as a coalition of three parties together with "Za ľudí" (For people) and "Kresťanská únia" (Christian Union). Consequently, the threshold for parliamentary participation was raised to 7%, an increase from the original 5% set for the individual party. To meet this threshold, OĽANO's leader emphasized a pledge of EUR 500 for those participating in the elections.

In the evaluation of regional performance as ca be observed in Figure 1, the Prešov region stands out as a noteworthy bastion for the OĽANO party, delivering a robust electoral outcome of 14.78%. This stellar performance propelled OĽANO to secure a commendable third-place finish within the regional context. In the Košice region, OĽANO cemented its electoral standing, clinching the fourth position with a substantial vote share of 13.46%. This signifies a commendable achievement, solidifying the party's electoral presence in the eastern reaches of Slovakia. An additional laudable feat unfolded in the Trnava region, recognized as the hometown of OĽANO's leader, Igor Matovič. Here, Oľano managed to clinch the fourth position with an electoral share of 9.40%, further consolidating its regional influence. This result not only underscores the party's resonance within the leader's hometown but also reflects the broad appeal
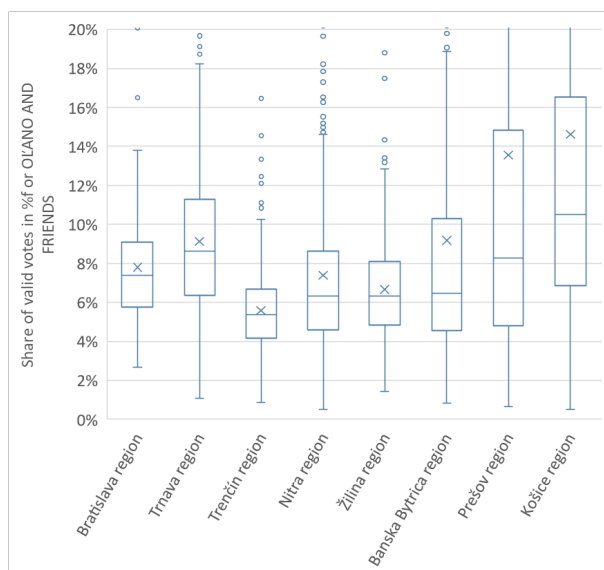
Figure 1. Results of OLANO and friends in 2023 parliament election by region (source: own calculations)

that OĽANO commands across diverse regional landscapes. Crucially, Oľano demonstrated its electoral viability by surpassing the crucial 7% electability threshold in two additional regions. In the Nitra region, the party garnered significant support, yielding a commendable 7.47% result. Likewise, in the Banská Bystrica region, OĽANO secured a notable electoral outcome of 7.41%. These achievements not only affirm OĽANO's regional appeal but also underscore its capacity to resonate with diverse voter demographics.

In sum, OĽANO's performance in various regions attests to the party's ability to garner substantial electoral support across geographically diverse areas. This underscores the nuanced nature of regional voting patterns and

the multifaceted appeal that the party maintains in different parts of Slovakia. Table 2 provides an elucidation of the average electoral outcomes across municipalities, particularly within the demographic framework of the Roma population, with a specific focus on the Prešov and Košice regions – regions predominantly inhabited by the Roma community in Slovakia. The electoral share of the OĽANO party exhibits a discernible increase contingent upon the numerical augmentation of the Roma population. A comparatively attenuated correlation is discerned within the Banska Bystrica region.

In instances where there is a complete absence of Roma population (approximately 0%), the political representation of OĽANO would secure parliamentary seats solely in the Trnava region, accruing a noteworthy 8.95% result. Subsequently, the Košice region and the Prešov region would follow suit with 8.31% and 7.21%, respectively. In other regions, the party's electoral support ranged between 5.61% and 6.69%, with a national average of 6.67%.

Expanding the analytical scope to municipalities harboring Roma populations of up to 10%, the cumulative result for OĽANO ascends to 7.01%. Notably, OĽANO surpasses the parliamentary entry threshold in the Nitra region (7.11%) under these conditions. Progressively broadening the radius to include municipalities with Roma populations up to 20%, the electoral outcome inches closer to the parliamentary entry threshold, culminating at 7.30%. At 30%, the result further rises to 7.58%. Beyond the 40% mark, it reaches 7.78%, with noteworthy outcomes exceeding 10% observed in two regions – Košice (10.58%) and Prešov (10.50%).

Extending the analysis to municipalities with up to 50% Roma population, the nationwide average achieves 7.97%. The inclusion of regions with up to 60%

Table 2. Election results of Olano in 2016–2023 election by region and percentage of Roma pop-ulation

Share of Roma population	Banská Bystrica region			Košice region			Prešov region			Total		
	2016	2020	2023	2016	2020	2023	2016	2020	2023	2016	2020	2023
0%	9.3%	21.8%	6.0%	11.2%	24.4%	8.3%	10.3%	23.5%	7.2%	**10.8%**	**24.3%**	**6.7%**
1%–10%	10.9%	22.4%	5.4%	13.2%	26.8%	8.7%	13.4%	25.5%	9.0%	**12.0%**	**25.8%**	**7.4%**
11%–20%	8.8%	23.4%	8.3%	9.0%	25.9%	12.3%	12.4%	25.1%	13.1%	**9.8%**	**25.0%**	**11.0%**
21%–30%	6.1%	17.9%	10.8%	8.2%	24.9%	15.0%	12.5%	27.0%	18.2%	**9.4%**	**24.7%**	**15.7%**
31%–40%	5.8%	19.0%	11.6%	8.2%	26.5%	20.1%	8.6%	25.2%	24.5%	**7.7%**	**24.2%**	**18.4%**
41%–50%	5.8%	18.9%	19.0%	9.8%	28.5%	27.4%	9.2%	27.2%	34.5%	**8.5%**	**25.1%**	**28.4%**
51%–60%	5.2%	18.2%	26.1%	8.0%	27.3%	39.3%	10.5%	33.4%	44.6%	**8.7%**	**28.9%**	**40.3%**
61%–70%	10.9%	16.3%	30.4%	6.8%	31.3%	35.4%	11.0%	37.1%	54.2%	**9.4%**	**29.6%**	**41.9%**
71%–80%	2.4%	16.6%	14.8%	11.7%	44.1%	55.8%	16.3%	36.1%	66.6%	**12.0%**	**35.4%**	**56.3%**
81%–90%	3.4%	19.3%	39.2%	20.2%	51.5%	68.3%	24.1%	53.2%	76.1%	**19.2%**	**42.7%**	**69.3%**
91%–100%	18.5%	15.4%	16.2%	7.7%	62.2%	80.8%	8.1%	46.7%	85.4%	**11.5%**	**43.3%**	**69.3%**
Grand Total	**9.5%**	**21.8%**	**7.4%**	**11.0%**	**26.3%**	**13.5%**	**12.1%**	**25.7%**	**14.8%**	**11.0%**	**25.1%**	**8.9%**

Roma population underscores a marginal exclusion of OĽANO from parliamentary representation in the Banská Bystrica region (6.9961%), while the national average stands at 8.23%. Subsequent considerations incorporating municipalities with up to 70%, 80%, and 90% Roma population yield results of 8.40%, 8.62%, and 8.78%, respectively. Incorporating the entire population, the official result attains a figure of 8.90%.

Oľano has taken part in four parliamentary elections and has consistently secured seats in the parliament. By utilizing data from the statistical office, we've obtained information for three other elections, which we can efficiently process and analyze. In 2016, there was no apparent connection with the Roma population, as evidenced in both Table 2 and the correlation matrix in Table 3. Table 2 demonstrates that the outcome remains relatively unchanged despite population growth, indicating a lack of a discernible linear relationship. While there's a minor trend in the Prešov region, it doesn't reach statistical significance.

In the remarkable victory of 2020 parliament election, the correlation between the Roma population percentage was indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of merely 0.14, representing a notably weak positive correlation. Interestingly, in the Banská Bystrica region, the trend leaned slightly towards the negative. In Košice, the range spanned from 24.4% to 62.2%, which denotes a relatively broad spectrum. Similarly, in the Prešov region, the range extended from 23.5% to a maximum of 53.2%. These figures lack a distinct trend compared to subsequent elections, where OĽANO witnessed a rapid decline in municipalities with Roma populations of up to 40%. Conversely, there was a notable increase in municipalities with 50% Roma population compared to preceding elections, as depicted in Figure 2.

In the parliamentary elections of 2023, no other political party demonstrated a similarly significant relationship between the proportion of the Roma population and the election outcome.

The Princíp party, a Roma party, was a potential contender in this regard, achieving a positive correlation coefficient of 0.17. The Pirates also exhibited a positive correlation of 0.40.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of % of Roma population and previous OĽANO results in previous elections (source: Own calculation)

Variables	% of Roma population	OLANO 2023	OLANO 2020	OLANO 2016
% of Roma population	1.00	0.77	0.14	0.00
OLANO 2023	0.77	1.00	0.44	0.18
OLANO 2020	0.14	0.44	1.00	0.60
OLANO 2016	0.00	0.18	0.60	100

However, both parties garnered comparatively low levels of support, with the Princíp party securing only 1817 votes (0.06%) and the Pirates receiving 9358 votes (0.33%).

When considering the larger (see Table 4) parties that attained a threshold of 5% in the elections, there were only seven such parties: SMER-SD (22.94%), Progressive Slovakia (PS) with a vote share of 17.96%, HLAS-SD with
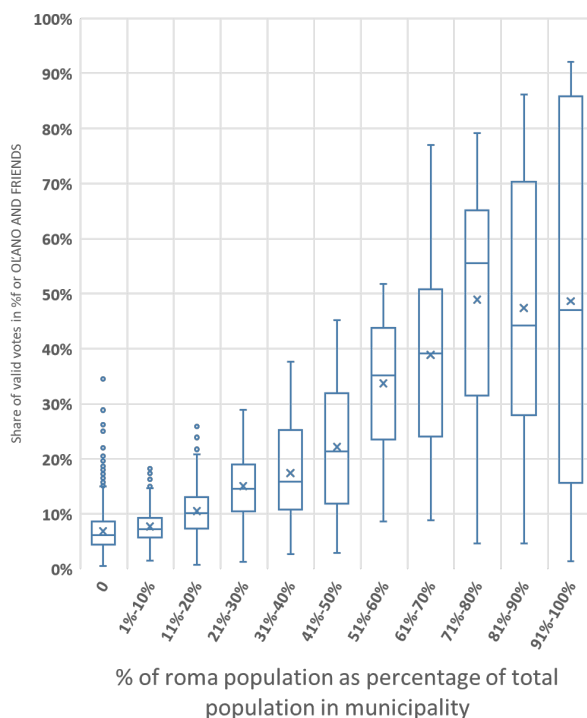

Figure 2. Results of OĽANO and friends in 2023 parliament election by % of Roma population (source: own calculations)

Table 4. Correlation matrix of % of Roma population and previous OĽANO results in previous elections (source: own calculations)

Piráti	PRINCÍP	PS	SOS	OĽANO
0.40	0.17	−0.33	0.11	0.77
KSS	MF, ODS, ZR, RK, DS	VB	MM	SPRAVODLI-VOSŤ
−0.02	0.13	0.13	0.03	0.14
SHO	SaS	SME RODINA	MySlovensko	SNS
0.01	−0.20	0.06	0.02	−0.27
SMER-SD	HLAS-SD	SZÖVETSÉG-ALIANCIA	SRDCE-SNJ	SDKÚ-DS
−0.30	−0.20	0.00	0.01	0.12
ĽSNS	Demokrati	KDH	KARMA	REPUBLIKA
−0.05	−0.21	−0.14	0.13	−0.18

14.70%, OĽANO with 8.89%, KDH with 6.82%, SaS with 6.32%, and SNS with 5.62%. Notably, all these parties, except OĽANO, exhibited negative correlations with the Roma population percentage. Progressive Slovakia registered a highest negative correlation of –0.33, SMER-SD recorded –0.30, SNS (–0.27), HLAS-SD (–0.20), SaS (–0.20), and KDH (–0.14).

In this study, we constructed a basic econometric Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model to analyze the election outcomes of OĽANO party by considering data from various municipalities. We utilized 2871 observations covering nearly all municipalities in Slovakia.

The model incorporates the percentage of the Roma community in each municipality, sourced from the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, alongside data from the 2020 elections and the 2016 election results.

The initial unrestricted model (see Table 5) incorporates all variables, revealing that up to 70% of the variance can be accounted for by including these variables. Moreover, all variables demonstrate statistical significance.

Analysis of the data indicates a positive correlation between the percentage of the Roma population and the electoral performance of OĽANO in 2023.

Table 5. OLS unrestricted model (source: own calculations)

Dependent variable: OĽANO 2023	Unrestricted Model		
	Coefficient (p-value)		
const	–2.26	***	(<0,0001)
% Roma population	0.40	***	(<0,0001)
OĽANO 2020	0.42	***	(<0,0001)
OĽANO 2016	–0.07	***	(0,0069)
Observations	2871		
Adjusted R square	0,7054		
F-Statistic	2291,4970		
P-value (F)	0,00000		

Table 6. OLS restricted model (source: own calculations)

Dependent variable: OĽANO 2023	Restricted model 1			Restricted model 2		
	Coefficient (p-value)			Coefficient (p-value)		
const	6.30	***	(<0,0001)	–1.67	***	(0,0006)
% Roma population	0.43	***	(<0,0001)			
OĽANO 2020				0.53	***	(<0,0001)
OĽANO 2016						
Observations	2871			2871		
Adjusted R square	0,6005			0,1897		
F-Statistic	4321,8520			671,7755		
P-value (F)	0,00000			$2,9\ e^{-133}$		

Specifically, for each percentage point increase in the Roma population, OĽANO's result saw an average rise of 0.42 percentage points. Similarly, the previous election's outcome for OĽANO also positively influenced its 2023 performance, with each percentage point gained in the previous election corresponding to a 0.42 percentage point increase in the 2023 result.

If we were to consider individual variables exclusively, it becomes evident that the percentage of the Roma population holds greater significance. (see Table 6) This is evidenced by the model's ability to explain 60% of the total variance in the dependent variable, compared to only 19% when considering solely the 2020 election results. Notably, the sign and coefficient remained consistent, with only slight adjustments observed.

5. Discussion

The findings outlined in the Results section indicate a significant positive correlation between the presence of marginalized communities and the electoral success of the OĽANO party. Notably, the party made a highly misleading pledge during the campaign, promising 500 euros to each participant for their involvement in the elections.

Regrettably, this promise remains unfulfilled to date, impacting numerous individuals within these communities who believed it would be automatically given after election.

Additionally, the findings suggest that OĽANO's presence in parliament relied heavily on the inclusion of marginalized communities. Without these communities, their electoral support would have fallen below the 7% threshold required for parliamentary representation. The table 7 above presents summary statistics, including median and quartile indicators, which reveal that for municipalities considered national, the median support for OĽANO was up to 20.2%.

Furthermore, analysis of model results highlights notable differences. Notably, certain villages, such as Lomnička, saw significant increases in OĽANO's electoral support, with a more than twofold rise compared to 2016. Similar patterns of increase were observed in other villages with marginalized Roma populations, often doubling the 2020 results. For instance, in Podhorany

Table 7. Summary statistics of OĽANO results in parliament elections 2023 (source: own calculations)

	mean	min	Q1	median	Q3	max	Sample
All municipalities	10.1	0.5	4.9	7.1	10.9	92.1	2871
Excluded of Atlas	6.9	0.5	4.4	6.2	8.7	34.5	2052
Included in Atlas	18.3	0.8	7.6	12.5	22.9	92.1	819
Less than 20%	7.2	0.5	4.6	6.5	9.1	34.5	2400
More than 20%	25.2	1.3	12.5	20.2	32.0	92.1	471

village, the support for OĽANO increased up to five times compared to previous elections. Similarly, Zemplínske Kopčany, where OĽANO received no votes in 2016, witnessed a substantial increase, garnering almost two-thirds of all votes in the 2020 elections.

Moreover, Table 8 shows percentage of 27 municipalities with best results for OĽANO. The total number of municipalities where OĽANO and friends achieved an election result higher than 20% was 252 municipalities. Of these, only 5% of the municipalities were those where the share of the Roma population was 0%. Half of these municipalities had more than 60% Roma population.

Figure 3 displays a scatter plot representing OĽANO election results across various Slovak municipalities, accompanied by a trend line highlighted in red. This visualization effectively demonstrates the organization and unity exhibited by the Roma community, underscoring their potential for collaboration.
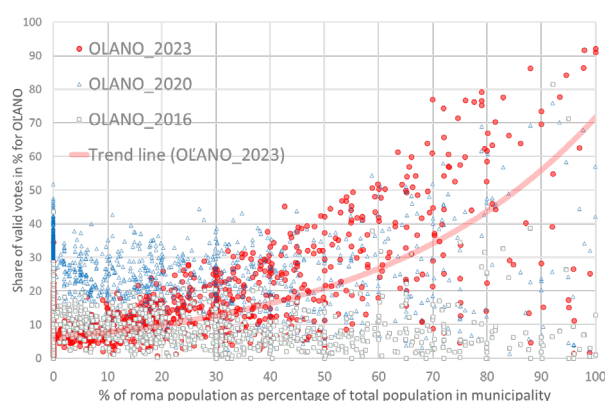

Figure 3. Results of OLANO in parliament elections 2016, 2020, 2023 by municipality (source: own calculations)

Table 8. Results of OĽANO & Friends by municipality listed from highest to lowest including percentage of Roma population (source: own calculations)

Name of municipality	Share of Roma population	Results of parliament election – OĽANO		
		2023	2020	2016
Lomnička	100%	92.05	42.13	1.00
Jurské	98%	91.66	34.14	6.89
Košice – Luník IX	100%	91.02	57.07	12.90
Kecerovce	98%	86.36	67.86	6.94
Jarovnice	88%	86.22	69.24	38.67
Stráne pod Tatrami	95%	84.21	58.42	26.38
Červenica	79%	79.20	68.96	27.10
Vtáčkovce	93%	77.72	70.11	8.04
Rankovce	83%	77.63	56.81	32.58
Krížová Ves	70%	76.98	51.88	11.48
Rakúsy	76%	76.67	43.52	3.88
Cigeľka	79%	76.56	36.49	10.16
Podhorany	78%	76.32	13.82	10.62
Vrbnica	79%	75.25	61.60	5.40
Malý Slivník	72%	74.32	57.87	10.00
Chminianske Jakubovany	90%	73.52	20.35	6.28
Ihľany	75%	71.47	35.94	15.85
Žehra	81%	70.36	45.27	8.27
Kaloša	90%	69.66	23.68	1.90
Bystrany	80%	66.94	60.86	45.00
Ostrovany	84%	66.27	48.99	24.00
Zemplínske Kopčany	72%	65.78	39.70	0.00
Výborná	86%	63.96	25.55	4.16
Licince	69%	63.89	25.00	9.75
Richnava	81%	63.32	47.60	6.10
Petrová	97%	62.54	44.51	2.67
Varhaňovce	80%	62.36	42.65	31.49

Nevertheless, it is imperative to engage in ethical practices and refrain from unethical tactics to secure votes.

The Roma population in Slovakia constitutes a significant demographic group with untapped potential to enhance demography and bolster public finances sustainably. However, it is essential to prioritize efforts aimed at increasing electoral participation and literacy to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

6. Conclusions

The issue of the Roma community extends beyond Slovakia, affecting neighboring countries as well. Cultural and linguistic disparities exacerbate the persistent problem of poverty within this community. Throughout history, Roma have endured ostracism, prejudice, and the ramifications of economic hardship.

It is imperative for governments to address the exclusion of these marginalized communities and strive to integrate them into mainstream society, ensuring their prosperity and access to education, including education in their native language.

Regrettably, Roma community frequently become target of hostility, not only from ordinary citizens but also from politicians who exploit these marginalized groups to sow hatred. In 2020, the victorious OĽANO party proudly proclaimed support from the Roma community and ushered several Roma representatives into parliament. However, it is confounding and disheartening to witness how this trust was betrayed, as indicated by this study's findings. The research reveals a clear linear relationship between the Roma population size and the electoral success of the OĽANO party. No other party, in this or previous elections, has displayed such a pronounced correlation, not even OĽANO itself in prior elections.

Funding

Disclosure statement

The authors currently declare no conflict of interest.

Contributions

Conceptualization, R.S. and K.K.; methodology, R.S.; software, R.S.; validation, R.S.; formal analysis, K.K.; investigation, K.K. and M.V.; resources, K.K. and V.H.; data curation, V.H. and M.V; writing—original draft preparation, R.S. and K.K.; writing—review and editing, M.V. and R.S.; visualization, R.S.; supervision, K.K.; project administration, V.H.; funding acquisition, R.S. and M.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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