

MEASURING MEDIA POLITICAL BIAS IN SLOVAK TV NEWS PROGRAMMES DURING 2023 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Research purpose. The main objective of this study is to assess the political bias present in the news programmes broadcast by two private TV stations – TV Markíza and TV JOJ – and the public service TV station Jednotka during the campaign period leading up to the 2023 parliamentary election in the Slovak Republic. This research is motivated by the fundamental importance of objectivity in both media practice and media analysis.

Design / Methodology / Approach. A total of 93 broadcasts were examined. We conducted a quantitative content analysis of the main evening news programmes, using a coding framework focused on formal parameters and categorisation of election news items. Each news item was independently coded by two coders. To measure the media visibility and exposure of each electoral subject, the Media Visibility and Media Exposure Index were used to qualify the proportion and frequency of subjects' appearances in the news programme. The Overtone Index was used to assess the tone of coverage. These three indicators were synthesized into the Media Political Bias Index, which allows for synthetic evaluation of the level of political bias in each analysed news item, as well as a comparison of the political bias in each television station's news programmes over time.

Findings. The analysis showed that TV JOJ had the highest share of election news (17.25%), followed by TV Markíza (12.7%) and the lowest share was held by the public broadcaster Jednotka (8.21%). Meanwhile, the public broadcaster showed the highest level of neutrality (MPBI = 0.08), while TV Markíza showed the highest political bias (MPBI = 0.38), with private TV channels being more likely to reflect regional preferences and having a more negative tone towards most of the relevant parties. The exception was Progresívne Slovensko, which was the only political party to achieve a positive overtone index. Parties with low preferences were virtually ignored in the private media. These findings suggest that while the public broadcasters maintained a commitment to neutrality, the private broadcasters tended to reflect the prevailing public sentiments.

Originality / Value / Practical implications. This study provides a contribution by measuring the political bias in Slovak television news programs during a critical electoral period, using a comprehensive media bias index. Its findings highlight the disparity in objectivity between public and private broadcasters, offering valuable insights into how media bias can influence public opinion and electoral outcomes. The research also underscores the importance of media neutrality. These results can inform policymakers, media regulators, and broadcasters on the need to promote balanced reporting standards. Furthermore, the study's methodology could serve as a model for future analyses of media bias in other countries and contexts.

Keywords: media bias; media objectivity; parliamentary elections; political media bias index; television news programs.

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Introduction

In the last decade, we can observe an increase in verbal attacks by politicians on journalists in Slovakia. In 2018, hundreds of Slovak journalists signed a statement condemning the Smer-SD's leader's attacks on the media. In 2019, the parliament began discussing an amendment to the press law that would grant public officials the right to reply if the media wrote about them. More than 300 journalists criticised the amendment on the grounds that it would give politicians undue influence over media content (SITA, 2019; Visnovsky et al., 2023a). At that time, the draft response was criticised by both the media representatives and the opposition. Concurrently, concerns about the independence of the public broadcaster RTVS (now STVR) persisted, as more reporters were dismissed or resigned in 2019, citing political pressure from their superiors as the reason (Freedom House, n.d.a).

The issue highlighted the necessity to examine whether and to what degree political influence is present in the Slovak media sphere, i.e. television, which is still the most influential medium, that reaches the most age-diverse audiences, although nowadays its standing is often overshadowed by online media outlets. More precisely, the aim of this paper is to measure the political bias of news programmes broadcast on two private TV stations (Markíza and JOJ) and one public service station (Jednotka) during the campaign for the parliamentary elections in the Slovak Republic in 2023 by addressing Media Political Bias Index (MPBI).

Through the Media Political Bias Index (MPBI) we are able to assess the political bias in the media, which arises and increases especially in the pre-election period, due to pressure from political actors, economic and ownership interests of the media, as well as increased public interest in political events. As one-sided or manipulative news coverage can fundamentally affect the outcome of elections, it is necessary for the media to maintain political neutrality and thus maintain their status as watchdogs of democracy.

Literature review

Media System in Slovakia

During the period when Slovakia was contemplating the establishment of an autonomous state, the nation was striving to become a part of the more advanced Europe, as it was for more than four decades under socialist repression which allowed the country to consider media freedom and pluralism only within theoretical frameworks (Fekete, 2018). Conversely, it can be argued that the circumstances improved following the formation of the republic and the enactment of the Act on the operation of radio and television broadcasting. Until 1989, Slovakia faced criticism for its lack of freedom and slow progress in establishing a civil society. During Vladimir Mečiar's administration, Freedom House classified Slovakia as "partially free" (Ondrasik, 2010). The advancement of Slovakia acquired a fresh perspective when the opposition took power following the 1998 elections. Following that year, actions were undertaken to create a new era of communication among journalists, media executives, and government officials.

Since 1998, Slovakia has been rated as "free" in media rankings (Ondrasik, 2010), but Visnovsky et al. (2023b) point out that several NGOs, international monitoring and reports assessing transparency and plurality of the media environment have often rated the Slovak media market as risky, especially in terms of transparency of the ownership structure, plurality and concentration of news media, including online platforms. The adoption of a new media law in 2022 brought greater transparency of ownership structures, as confirmed by a Freedom House (n.d.b) report, according to which Slovakia scored 90 out of 100 possible points in 2023, meaning that the situation in the country in terms of press freedom is stable and very good.

The most influential players in the Slovak news media market are government and private actors, but mostly politicians and financial groups (Media & Journalism Research Centre, 2022). After 2020, foreign investors and owners of media outlets were pressured to leave Slovakia and were quickly replaced by Slovak or Czech financiers (Vasuta, 2024), who started to assert their interests. This could be proven by direct ownership of Fun Media Group which belongs to the leader of the Sme Rodina

political party, Boris Kollár. Fun Media Group currently owns and manages 10 radio stations and multiple web portals. Also, it can be proven by indirect, yet politically tied ownership of financial groups such as Penta Investments or J&T, whose owners have close relationships with political parties or politicians, although they claim otherwise (for more, see Visnovsky et al., 2022). These direct or potential ownership issues, although they were enshrined in the newly defined Act of Media Services and Act on Publication, do not prohibit political figures from owning media. Therefore transparency, which the mentioned acts highlight, does not address the problem of influence on media content, and thus the potential sponsorships, external pressures and interests may present a threat. This could lead to the deteriorating objectivity of media, as the media presents the interests of its sponsors, or at least it could lead to the gatekeeping of unflattering information. This in general could possibly weaken the position of a media outlet in the media market. Moreover, this could also open ways to changes in media leadership, who might prefer to hire similarly politically inclined media personnel, but also to let go of media professionals with different worldviews. This is a current issue in TV Markíza, where in 2024, a political programme moderator Michal Kovačič, during a live television broadcast, spoke of the political pressure and an attempt at censorship. It led to the cessation of the most-watched Slovak political talk show *Na telo*. Similarly, before the decision to rebrand Radio and Television of Slovakia to Slovak Television and Radio, the current Minister of Culture Martina Šimkovičová, along with the government, considered changing the leadership of the public service broadcaster, citing the bias as the reason (Pravda, 2024). However, according to the results of Median SK (2024), 22,6% of respondents considered the public broadcaster to be the most objective (STVR, 2024).

The Construction of Reality Through the Media

The media and media content provide a foundation upon which a person can further build their own interpretation of the world. When talking about news and especially their role within civil society, its basis must reflect reality. News is an integral part of media production and should meet specific criteria, i.e. to provide information that is specific, up-to-date, objective, unbiased, balanced in terms of subjected matter and information and verified by at least two sources independent of each other (Botosova & Brník, 2022). In the information age we currently live in, information has a very important position, and it is the news media that is its disseminator. However, the constant technological progress in today's society is also associated with the decline of certain types of media and their importance as a source of information in everyday life.

Today, individuals are inundated with a continuous stream of information, leading them to acknowledge the occurrence of events, but without fully comprehending their nature. They are unable to orient themselves quickly, which is therefore indicative of their information literacy. As McCombs (2009) also notes, the more orientation an individual needs, the more likely they are to listen to the information provided by mass media. Thus, once again, one moves away from information overload to a clear, albeit directive, interpretation of reality. However, it is important to add that the gatekeeper selects news based on various criteria. These depend both on the journalists themselves and on the routine or setting of the particular medium. Different news will be selected by gatekeepers with years of experience from the news selected by those who have only recently come into the position. Likewise, a different news agenda will be offered by media outlets focusing on international politics and economics and those whose attention is focused on showbiz.

From the perspective of political communication theory, the media do not only play the role of a passive mediator or mirror of reality but actively construct it. This process is deeply rooted in power relations and the struggle for influence over public discourse. As Blumler (2015) argues, key theories of political communication – in particular agenda-setting and framing – show that the media, through the selection and interpretation of topics, not only determine what the public thinks about but also how they think about it. In doing so, they set the boundaries of public debate and influence which perspectives and interpretations are legitimate in society and which remain on the sidelines.

The original concept of agenda-setting offered by McCombs and Shaw has undergone considerable evolution in the ensuing decades. With questions such as why the process of topic-setting occurs and why the public adopts the media's agenda, they began to examine the input level of attention of the recipients. The need for orientation is one of the main reasons why a person seeks out the media. For an

individual's need for orientation and their later satisfaction, the topic presented must have a high relevance value and a high degree of uncertainty, i.e., the topic must be important to the individual and should not be sufficiently familiar to them. In the further development of the agenda-setting theory, numerous authors have begun to trace the mechanisms by which topics are set and have produced claims of intermediate agenda-setting.

The concept of framing has undergone significant refinement over the years. Originally understood as a simple selection of certain aspects of perceived reality, framing is now understood as a complex process through which communicators (journalists, politicians or other actors) actively construct meaning by emphasising certain elements and omitting others. This process involves not only the selection of words, images, and metaphors but also contextualizing issues in ways that lead audiences to certain interpretations and emotional responses (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing is now seen as a central tool of political communication that not only determines which topics are discussed, but, most importantly, how these topics are understood and evaluated by the public.

The selection and framing of news are not only determined by journalistic routines and professional experience but are also significantly shaped by the ownership structure of the media and the interests of external actors, such as lobbyists or political elites, as we have already outlined above. Research shows that media owners can directly or indirectly influence editorial decisions, leading to a preferred way of informing the public that often corresponds to their political or economic interests (Sjovaag & Ohlsson, 2019). Theine et al. (2025) also point out that changes in ownership can lead to changes in the volume and emphasis of political coverage, sometimes to the detriment of editorial independence. This dynamic undermines the ideal of media neutrality, as the selection and presentation of information are shaped not only by journalists but also by stakeholder interests.

There is no doubt that in the process of political communication, the media play one of the key roles. They are not only the intermediary that brings information about politics to the public, but they become political factors and journalists, at least hypothetically, political actors. The media are an object of interest for political actors because their success depends on the position of the mass media towards them and their opponents, and they therefore seek to influence media's actions in their favour. Theories from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries speak of a process of "medialisation". The latter is not a mere mediation of events in the political process. Its essential characteristic is that politics is becoming dependent on the mass media. However, it is not determined by it but rather it is shaped by interaction with the media. Political communication through news is also related to the theory of agenda-setting. The aim of political actors is to get their own topics and the attributes of these topics onto the media agenda to be further "presented" to the public.

Research methodology

With the rocky political situation and changes in Slovak society, the question of objectivity was raised. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to measure the political bias of news programmes broadcast on two private TV stations (Markíza and JOJ) and one public service station (Jednotka) during the campaign for the parliamentary elections in the Slovak Republic in 2023. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research, we state two research questions, that will help us to understand the problem holistically: (RQ1) which programme has the lowest media bias; (RQ2) which programme has the highest media bias.

The research focuses on the 3 most watched TV stations in Slovakia – the private ones, TV Markíza (part of the Markíza Group) and TV JOJ (part of the JOJ Group), and the public broadcaster Jednotka (part of the public broadcaster RTVS, currently STVR). This includes *Noviny TV JOJ* (TV JOJ), *Televízne noviny* (TV Markíza) and *Správy RTVS* (Jednotka). The research was conducted one month before the parliamentary elections, i.e. between August 28, 2023, and September 27, 2023 (31 days in total). The elections took place on September 30, 2023. According to the law, 48 hours before the elections, electoral moratory needs to be maintained, during which no media can broadcast political campaigns, publish polls of public opinion, any information regarding the running candidates, or any other political promotion, neither negative nor positive (*Zakon č. 181/2014 Z. z. o volebnej kampani* [Act No. 181/2014 Coll. on Election Campaign], 2014). Therefore, the research started a month before

the electoral moratory and not a month before the elections themselves so we could cover the political bias over a longer period.

A quantitative content analysis methodology was used for the analysis, employing a coding scheme designed to categorize content characteristics. The first part of the coding scheme focused on quantitative formal parameters, such as overall broadcast duration and the percentage of time dedicated to election-related news. The second part specifically categorized news reports directly related to the electoral campaign. A significant methodological challenge involved assessing the overtone of media content. This process balanced the researchers' knowledge, experience, and subjective viewpoints with the need for operationalizing overtone categories precisely to ensure replicability across studies. The overtone assessment considered the main content of each news item, including headlines and expert opinions presented therein. Each news item was independently coded by two coders, and averaged data from both coders were used for further analyses.

We relied on the procedure described by Klepka (2021), which views and shows the results of the media bias in statistics. Initially, we used the Media Visibility Index (V_i): for each news piece related to the parliamentary election campaign and identified the presence of electoral committees or their candidates. Auel (2019) notes that the requirement to measure political bias is to look at all candidates as equals. With this in mind, we aggregated all instances of visibility within the analysed news channel. V_i was subsequently computed for each electoral committee on a scale from 0 to 1. A lower V_i value indicates greater diversity in media attention toward each election participant. The formula for calculating V_i is as follows:

$$V_i = \frac{\text{visibility of a given committee (number of news items)}}{\text{total visibility of all committees (number of news items)}}$$

The second indicator used to study bias is the Media Exposure Index (E_i), which examines the frequency of exposure. This allows us to assess how prominently each electoral committee was featured in news programmes. Moreover, this index measures how often news stories began with the mention of a specific committee, enabling us to compare the data to all news stories where the presence of any committee was coded as the first mentioned. Like the previous indicator, it ranges from 0 to 1. The formula for the index is as follows:

$$E_i = \frac{\text{exposure of a given committee (first in the news)}}{\text{total exposure of all committees (news items)}}$$

The last indicator pertains to overtone (O_i). It can be assumed that each news item presenting a specific electoral committee expresses an overtone towards it, which can be described using one of four states: favourable, unfavourable, ambivalent, or neutral. This indicator takes values from -1 to 1. If all news items about a party were favourable, then the indicator would take the value of 1. Conversely, if all media coverage for a party or candidate was unfavourable, then the indicator would take the value of -1. An indicator value close to zero indicates the highest level of neutrality of the coverage. O_i is calculated for each electoral committee as the difference between the percentage of all news items where the committee was visible and presented favourably, and the percentage of all news items where it was presented unfavourably. The formula for the index is as follows:

$$O_i = \frac{\text{sum of news items with positive overtone for the committee}}{\text{total news items concerning the committee}} - \frac{\text{sum of news items with negative overtone for the committee}}{\text{total news items concerning the committee}}$$

The V_i , E_i , and O_i metrics constitute foundational components utilized in formulating the Media Political Bias Index (MPBI). This tool aims to measure bias by utilizing a set of mentioned indicators, which enhances the accuracy of the assessment compared to evaluating the phenomenon through individual indicators alone. The index provides a synthetic evaluation of the level of political bias in each news item analysed, allowing for a comparison of which TV stations broadcast news programmes with more or less bias. This tool integrates the mentioned indicators through a structured aggregation process governed by established rules and formulas. It is structured around three primary components linked to the electoral committee enjoying the highest media visibility within a specified news program. This design presumes that media bias is most pronounced in the presentation style afforded to the committee most prominently featured in news broadcasts (Klepka, 2021). In cases where multiple committees garner identical V_i scores, priority is given to the committee exhibiting the highest E_i value as the definitive criterion for inclusion in the index. The formulation of the index adheres to the following mathematical expression:

$$MPBI = 0,3 * V_{i_{\max(V_i)}} + 0,1 * E_{i_{\max(V_i)}} + 0,6 * |O_{i_{\max(V_i)}}|$$

The Media Political Bias Index (MPBI) integrates three core components associated with the electoral committee receiving the highest visibility within a specific news program. V_i is assigned a weight of 0.3, while E_i carries a weight of 0.1 in the index calculation. The preeminent role in MPBI is attributed to O_i , weighted at 0.6, reflecting the belief that consistent favouritism or criticism represents the most potent factor in shaping biased political reporting. Unlike V_i and E_i , which operate within predefined ranges, O_i spans from -1 to 1, with its absolute value used in index construction. The primary objective of MPBI is to gauge the intensity rather than the direction of bias, thus disregarding whether media evaluations of parties or candidates are positive or negative. Instead, the index focuses solely on the strength of overtone, as measured by the absolute magnitude of O_i .

Research results

A total of 93 broadcasts were examined, i.e. 31 days for each TV station. A total of 2,005 news items were broadcast during this period, of which 234 focused on the parliamentary election campaign or specific participants in it.

Table 1. Data on the share of the number and time of election news in relation to all news (Source: Created by the authors, 2025)

News bulletin	Number of news items	Number of news items related to elections	Percentage	Broadcast duration (h)	Time devoted to election topics (h)	Percentage
<i>Správy RTVS</i> (Jednotka)	792	65	8.21	24:38:31	01:57:49	7.97
<i>Noviny TV JOJ</i> (TV JOJ)	429	74	17.25	15:18:11	02:32:50	16.65
<i>Televízne noviny</i> (TV Markíza)	784	95	12.70	26:38:23	04:24:53	16.57

Jednotka brought to viewers the highest number of news with the least amount of news regarding the parliamentary election. It was expected, due to Jednotka having a structure that has to cover several areas of social interest. TV Markíza, although it has a similar broadcast time as Jednotka, broadcast less news altogether, but dedicated more broadcast time to the topic of elections. TV JOJ had more news pieces and dedicated more time to elections than Jednotka did, although TV JOJ has only 60% of the

broadcast time compared to Jednotka. From what is visible, almost every fifth news piece on JOJ dealt with an election topic.

Jednotka's daily news regarding the parliamentary elections incorporated a series titled "Election alphabet", where all the letters were covered by specific information about the elections. A similar project was on TV Markíza, but it was about showcasing all the political parties that were going to participate in the elections. The pre-election period was also significant on TV Markíza because of the live broadcasts from different regions of Slovakia, where a reporter asked about the election sentiments of the citizens.

A key aspect of the study was the calculation of visibility, exposure, and overtone indicators for each of the 25 electoral committees participating in the 2023 parliamentary election (see Tables 2 – 4).

Table 2. Indicators of committees calculated for the analysed informational broadcasts on Jednotka (Source: Created by the authors, 2025)

Parties	Indicators		
	V_i	E_i	O_i
Pirátska strana – Slovensko	0	0	-
PRINCÍP	0	0	-
Progresívne Slovensko	0.18	0.03	0.08
Spoločne občania Slovenska	0.02	0.02	0
OEANO a priatelia (Kresťanská únia, Za ľudí)	0.23	0.08	0
Komunistická strana Slovenska	0.03	0	0
Maďarské fórum, ODS, Za regióny, Rómska koalícia, DS	0.05	0.02	0.33
Vlastenecký blok	0	0	-
Modrí, Most-Híd	0.05	0	0
Spravodlivosť	0.02	0	0
Slovenské Hnutie Obrody	0	0	-
Sloboda a Solidarita	0.23	0.02	0
SME RODINA	0.20	0	0
My Slovensko	0	0	-
Slovenská národná strana	0.14	0	0
Smer-SSD	0.20	0.15	0
HLAS-SD	0.22	0	0
SZÖVETSÉG/ALIANCIA – Maďari. Národnosti. Regióny	0.06	0	0
SRDCE – Slovenská národná jednota – strana vlastencov	0	0	-
Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana	0	0	-
Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko	0.06	0	0
Demokrati	0.14	0.03	0
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	0.15	0.02	-0.10
KARMA	0.02	0.02	0
REPUBLIKA	0.14	0.02	0

Table 3. Indicators of committees calculated for the analysed informational broadcasts on TV JOJ (Source: Created by the authors, 2025)

Parties	Indicators		
	V_i	E_i	O_i
Pirátska strana – Slovensko	0	0	-
PRINCÍP	0.03	0.03	0
Progresívne Slovensko	0.27	0.08	0.24
Spoločne občania Slovenska	0.01	0	-
OEANO a priatelia (Kresťanská únia, Za ľudí)	0.32	0.08	-0.16
Komunistická strana Slovenska	0	0	-
Maďarské fórum, ODS, Za regióny, Rómska koalícia, DS	0.01	0	0
Vlastenecký blok	0	0	-
Modrí, Most-Híd	0.09	0.01	0
Spravodlivosť	0	0	-
Slovenské Hnutie Obrody	0	0	-
Sloboda a Solidarita	0.34	0.04	-0.08
SME RODINA	0.23	0.05	-0.22
My Slovensko	0	0	-
Slovenská národná strana	0.20	0.03	-0.20
Smer-SSD	0.36	0.16	-0.21
HLAS-SD	0.27	0.04	-0.11
SZÖVETSEĞ/ALIANCIA – Maďari. Národnosti. Regióny	0.03	0	0
SRDCE – Slovenská národná jednota – strana vlastencov	0	0	-
Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana	0	0	-
Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko	0.04	0.01	-0.67
Demokrati	0.20	0.03	0.67
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	0.24	0.07	-0.12
KARMA	0	0	-
REPUBLIKA	0.22	0.03	-0.38

Table 4. Indicators of committees calculated for the analysed informational broadcasts on TV Markíza (Source: Created by the authors, 2025)

Parties	Indicators		
	V_i	E_i	O_i
Pirátska strana – Slovensko	0.01	0	0
PRINCÍP	0.01	0.02	0
Progresívne Slovensko	0.27	0.06	0.16
Spoločne občania Slovenska	0.01	0	0
OEANO a priatelia (Kresťanská únia, Za ľudí)	0.33	0.13	-0.33
Komunistická strana Slovenska	0.02	0.01	0
Maďarské fórum, ODS, Za regióny, Rómska koalícia, DS	0.03	0	0

Vlastenecký blok	0.01	0	0
Modrí, Most-Híd	0.04	0.02	-0.25
Spravodlivosť	0.01	0	0
Slovenské Hnutie Obrody	0.02	0.01	-0.50
Sloboda a Solidarita	0.20	0.03	0.05
SME RODINA	0.17	0.03	-0.25
My Slovensko	0.02	0.01	0.5
Slovenská národná strana	0.13	0.01	-0.28
Smer-SSD	0.38	0.21	-0.40
HLAS-SD	0.28	0.07	0
SZÖVETSEÉG/ALIANCIA – Maďari. Národnosti. Regióny	0.05	0.02	0
SRDCE – Slovenská národná jednota – strana vlastencov	0.02	0.01	0
Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana	0.02	0.01	-0.50
Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko	0.05	0.02	-0.20
Demokrati	0.14	0.04	-0.08
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	0.11	0.03	-0.10
KARMA	0.03	0.01	0
REPUBLIKA	0.12	0.01	-0.27

The findings regarding visibility indicate that the political parties most frequently cited are also the predominant ones with established credibility among the citizens. Some mentions were loosely based on the “neutrality” of media to showcase that they cover also other political parties, not only the ones that are the most popular. Thanks to this, the media are able to assert that they provide comprehensive coverage of all political parties without preference, despite variations in the amount and duration of coverage. The most mentioned parties were those which had had a long-standing history in the Slovak political sphere, such as SMER-SSD (formerly SMER-SD), OĽANO, SAS, and others. Another significant deal of attention was paid to either new political parties (Demokrati – former prime minister of Slovakia and former member of political party OĽANO; HLAS – former prime minister of Slovakia and former member of political party SMER-SSD) or the political party that had emerged from last parliamentary elections and that even the former president Čaputová used to be part of – Progresívne Slovensko.

What needs to be mentioned is that Jednotka, as a part of the public broadcaster RTVS, was trying to be as neutral as possible, which is proven by the results. The private broadcasters did not mirror this trend and TV Markíza copied the public sentiment of Bratislava region in their broadcast instead. During the pre-election period, according to the polls, it was suggested that it would be a close fight between SMER-SSD and Progresívne Slovensko. Even the last poll before the moratorium showcased that Progresívne Slovensko was getting ahead of SMER-SSD. The poll, however, did not accurately mirror the outcome of the elections. The results from TV Markíza therefore showcase and copy the beliefs of citizens living in Bratislava, and not in the other parts of Slovakia. The fact is not supported by the amount of positive O_i about the parties, but rather by the negative one where only Progresívne Slovensko has a positive overtone, and other relevant parties have a negative overtone. The stance of the media trying to be as neutral as possible is a problematic reality of the current media sphere and political neutrality in Slovakia. Although we mention mostly TV Markíza, this problem was also present in TV JOJ. Neutral O_i in private television stations was attributed to mainly those political parties that were “irrelevant” to the elections, with the stations mentioning them merely once or twice during the analysed period. These parties had such a low percentage of voters, according to pre-election polls, that even the media did not pay attention to them, as their success was not predicted.

The presented indicators allowed for the calculation of the MPBI for each broadcast (see Figure 1). The calculations are presented below.

<i>Správy RTVS</i> max visibility OLANO, $V_i=0.23$ $E_i=0.08$ $O_i=0$	MPBI=0.08
<i>Noviny TV JOJ</i> , max visibility Smer-SSD, $V_i=0.36$ $E_i=0.16$ $O_i=-0.21$	MPBI = 0.25
<i>Televízne noviny</i> , max visibility Smer-SSD, $V_i=0.38$ $E_i=0.21$ $O_i=-0.40$	MPBI=0.38

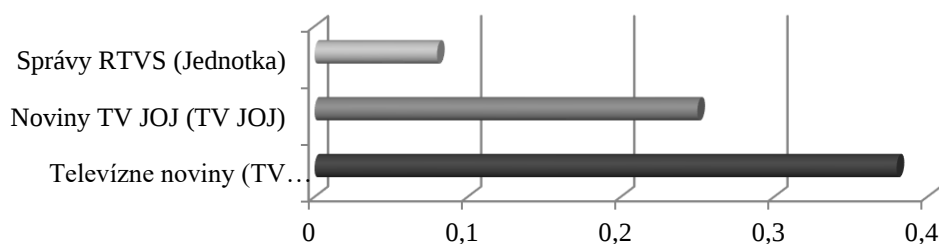


Fig. 1. Results of the Media Political Bias Index for investigated news outlets (Source: Created by the authors, 2025)

Among the analysed news broadcasts, the highest index of political bias was present in TV Markíza's news programme *Televízne noviny*, followed closely by *Noviny TV JOJ*, which achieved a slightly lower score. The lowest level of political bias, therefore the highest neutrality was observed in the Slovak public broadcaster RTVS's Jednotka's programme *Správy RTVS*.

Conclusions

Objectivity is very difficult to achieve, even though many journalists try to do so. Despite objectivity being one of the principles of information society, we still have to consider that it is only a level that everyone is trying to achieve. Regarding the aim of the paper and the first research question, it can be observed that the public service broadcaster showed the lowest level of political bias in media. The Radio and Television of Slovakia, now renamed to Slovak Television and Radio, television station Jednotka showcased 0,08 Media Political Bias Index (MPBI), which was achieved among other neutrally structured "Election alphabet". It was part of a news programme during the pre-parliamentary electoral period and during the broadcast aimed to introduce various election-related areas. Other aspects that need to be mentioned that influenced the political bias in Jednotka's news programme was that, as the public service media, they have to inform about various societal topics and could not broadcast multiple news items on politics as the other examined stations did, therefore there are lesser opportunities for the broadcaster to lean into possible political bias. Aside from this fact, Jednotka attempted to fulfil their principles, which are anchored in the law, by which the broadcaster must broadcast according to ethical and moral principles. The identification of a low level of media bias points to appropriately set values and the efforts of program-makers to broadcast and report the most objective news without any external interference or internal bias.

The second research question focused on the highest political bias in media. The results prove that higher levels of media bias are shown by the private broadcasters TV JOJ and TV Markíza. The latter had the highest level of bias. The results do not explicitly show the cause, but as in the case of Jednotka, we need to consider the commercial character of television stations, where broadcast time dedicated to information on various electoral news pieces is not so strictly specified, therefore are able to broadcast more news items on this topic (see Table 1). Aside from this aspect, it needs to be highlighted that TV Markíza did not necessarily mirror Slovak social sentiment, but rather the one of the Bratislava region. This was mostly evident in the positive bias towards the political party Progresívne Slovensko, which had its supportive roots in this region. The political party was also one of the three parties with positive overtones, interestingly, the other two had 0.05 O_i , while Progresívne Slovensko had 0.16 (see Table 4).

Although we note only the issue of objectivity, it is important to mention that external factors continue to influence the way media and media content are shaped. Even the efforts to make media ownership transparent through law, i.e. to show media ownership by political figures, have not eliminated all influences on the media, which most often have economic undertones. It has long been known that information has become a commodity that generates profit. In fact, people are offered information in quanta, no matter what the content of the information is. What matters is that they feel informed (Kapec, 2023), and therefore often do not perceive how individual contents are delivered. This is exploited by media, which come into play as creators of how individual content is received and how readers, listeners or viewers will think about individual topics. Theories of political communication, such as agenda-setting and framing, highlight that media not only select which topics are presented to the public but also shape the context and interpretation of these topics, thereby influencing public opinion and political attitudes. However, at the time when elections are taking place, whether for regional councils, the National Council or for the presidential post, such media behaviour is all the more dangerous, and the need for objectivity and balanced, neutral reporting is all the more important.

Although the study attempts to showcase the political bias in media, it is difficult to generalize the results of the political bias in examined media as it only examines the specific pre-election period. It is possible that results would showcase different political biases in Jednotka, TV JOJ, and TV Markíza when the examined period is not influenced by the heightened focus on the political sphere due to elections. Therefore, the results do not show the political bias of examined media, but rather the political bias of news programmes of examined media during the pre-electoral period. To be able to comprehensively state the degree of political bias of news programmes in these media, or the political bias of the examined media in general, a longer analysed period would be required for the assessment. Another limitation of the presented study, but rather pivotal for future use of the methodology, is the need for at least 2 independent coders of the examined media programmes. By this, the objectivity of results can be safeguarded, and to ensure there are no possible influences or no significant deviation of coders. Either Cohen's Kappa, Krippendorff's alpha or other inter-rated reliability measures should be included for more complex and long-term measuring, to ensure objectivity when determining how objective the news reporting is and to what degree we can talk about political bias in media.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

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