

Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

In Theory Versus in Practice: The Situation of Human Rights in Slovakia

BACHELOR THESIS

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Bratislava 2025

Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

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BACHELOR THESIS

Study program: Liberal Arts

Study Field: 3. 1. 6. Political Science

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. prof. Dagmar Kusá, PhD.

Degree of qualification: Bachelor of Arts (abbrev, "BA")

Date of submission of the bachelor thesis: March 23, 2025

Date of defense: June 13, 2025

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Bratislava 2025

Declaration of originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All academic and other sources of literature used are referenced and listed in the References. Artificial intelligence, such as Grammarly or ChatGPT, was not used to create this bachelor's thesis. It was not used in the generation of new ideas or the organization of existing ideas, nor was it used to check punctuation or grammatical mistakes. See the Origin Writing Report (Appendix 1).

Bratislava, March 23, 2025

David Adam Sóki

Acknowledgment

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my advisor, Professor Dagmar Kusá, for guiding me throughout the entire process of gathering ideas and writing the thesis. I am grateful to Dr. Lukáš Siegel for supervising me during the course of our Bachelor Thesis Seminar and making the entire process easier and streamlined. I am also grateful to Dr. Sylvia Tiryaki for bringing attention to the topic of human rights in general while also enlightening me about the subject to a degree I could have never achieved myself.

Autor bakalárskej práce: Dávid Adam Sóki

Názov práce: V teórii vs. v praxi: Situácia ľudských práv na Slovensku.

Názov vysokej školy: Bratislavská medzinárodná škola liberálnych štúdií

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Silvia Miháliková

Dátum a miesto: Bratislava, 13. Jún 2025

Rozsah práce: 54018 znakov, 30 strán

Stupeň kvalifikácie: Bakalár (Bc.)

Abstrakt

Ústava Slovenskej republiky, podobne ako viaceré iné ústavy iných štátov, obsahuje paragraf, ktorý zaručuje ochranu ľudských práv všetkým obyvateľom krajiny. Niečo, čo je napísané na papieri, však nemusí byť presne také v skutočnosti. Táto bakalárska práca sa pokúsi presne to preskúmať, konkrétne na prípade Slovenska. Táto práca obsahuje analýzu relevantnej existujúcej literatúry a analýzu aktov slovenskej vlády vo viacerých sférach života na Slovensku, ktoré majú veľmi reálny dopad na životy mnohých ľudí, ktorých príbehy si širšia verejnosť často nevšima. Do úvahy sa budú brať aj skúsenosti špecifických skupín, akými sú ženy a komunita LGBTQ+, ktoré môžu osvetliť realitu ľudských práv v Slovenskej republike, či sú alebo nie sú rešpektované a dodržiavané. Výsledky tohto článku poukážu, že súčasná i predchádzajúca vláda Slovenskej republiky sa pokúšala obmedziť základné ľudské práva niekoľkými rôznymi spôsobmi, ako sú napríklad sloboda prejavu, sloboda združovania a zhromažďovania a sloboda informácií. Upozorňuje tiež na potrebu skúmania rôznych riešení na zlepšenie informovanosti o ľudských právach v Slovenskej republike a upozorňuje na potrebu ďalšieho výskumu tejto témy.

Kľúčové slová: ľudské práva, násilie, obmedzenie, vyšetrowanie, zanedbávanie

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Thesis Title: Thesis Title: In Theory Versus In Practice: The situation of human rights in Slovakia

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Place and Date: Bratislava, June 12, 2025

Page and word count: 30 pages (54018 chars.)

Level of qualification: Bachelor of Arts (BA)

Abstract

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic, like several other constitutions of other states, contains a paragraph that guarantees the protection of human rights to all inhabitants of the country. However, something that is written on paper may not be exactly like that in reality. This paper studies exactly that, specifically in the case of Slovakia. This paper includes an examination of relevant existing literature and analyzes the actions of the Slovak government in multiple spheres of life in Slovakia, which have a very real impact on the lives of many people whose stories oftentimes go unnoticed by the greater public. While human rights protections may be present in certain pieces of legislation, the reality of the situation of human rights is very different. The experiences of specific groups, such as women and the LBGTQ+ community are also taken into account, which may shed light on the reality of human rights in the Slovak Republic, and whether or not they are being respected and upheld. This paper concludes that the government of the Slovak Republic, current and previous, has tried to limit fundamental human rights in several different ways, such as the freedom of expression, the freedom of association and assembly, and the freedom of information. It also calls attention to the need to investigate possible solutions into improving awareness about human rights in the Slovak Republic, and highlights the need for further research into this topic.

Keywords: human rights, violence, limitations, investigation, neglect

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Introduction

Generally speaking, Slovakia is a fairly privileged country. Located in Central/Eastern Europe, it has access to many important natural resources and intersects with important trade routes. Slovakia also enjoys a not insignificant position in the global political theater, being a member of the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union. EU membership, in particular, has allowed Slovakia to prosper even more, using the benefits of EU funding to boost development programs and technological advancements. However, not all is sunshine and roses in this humble European state, and it does not take a lot of digging to find that out. As an example, protests against the government have become a biweekly tradition, and not just in the capital city of Bratislava, but across the whole country (Josipčuk et al., 2025). These protests, dubbed “Slovakia is Europe,” demand from the ruling coalition a political regime more befitting of a European country, let alone a member of the EU. According to the 2024 EIU Democracy Index, Slovakia is categorized as a flawed democracy, losing points mainly in the categories of political culture and the functioning of government. While these indicators do seem relevant and certainly do highlight issues with the democratic framework in Slovakia, one key indicator seems to be absent from this index, and it will be the one that this paper will primarily be focusing on – human rights. International organizations, namely the United Nations and the European Union, stress the importance of protecting human rights. The Slovak constitution also mentions this point, dedicating an entire section of the constitution to the protection of human rights and all the stipulations that come with that. And yet, despite all the safeguards that the

constitution promises, and despite all the norms Slovakia promises to uphold as a member of international organizations, the state of human rights and just how protected they really are is, unfortunately, on a decline. The purpose of this paper is to further examine, in detail, just how much human rights are being infringed upon in Slovakia, and in what specific ways that is happening. The breakdown of the human rights situation in Slovakia can be analyzed using different methods. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the most important are the actual actions or inactions of the Slovak government. This can be examined through the documents that the government produces, namely the laws that govern the country and that the government releases and approves. This does not have to necessarily come from decisions that all parties agree to, as actions of that nature do not often exist in multiparty systems. However, the acts or legislations proposed by single parties or individuals that do get through the legislative process hold great value as well.

There are many human rights that can be considered in this debate, and it is tempting to mention every single one, but that is perhaps beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, select areas will be focused on to elucidate the situation of human rights in Slovakia. More specifically, this paper will focus on the treatment of the media and journalists and on the opinions of the state on the journalistic profession as a whole. The behavior of the police and the growing number of cases of police brutality will be examined, alongside the mistreatment of and growing country-wide hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community. The rights of women must be examined, as there have been significant shortcomings and not-so-subtle ways in which, for example, reproductive rights are being affected. Finally, instances of political repression will be used to elucidate the overall opinions of the state towards this crisis of human rights.

Literature review

Countless authors have already covered the complexity of the topic of human rights. The breadth and depth of this issue, naturally, means that one cannot cover everything human rights entail. That, however, also means that there will be multiple perspectives on one specific subtopic being discussed. To discuss the issue of human rights, or the discourse and view of human rights in a specific region, it is important to first explore a few more general points. For the purposes of this thesis, the relatively recent history of human rights and the basic framework that they adhere to, the universality of the application of human rights, the general view of human rights in Slovak society, and the presence of violence in society seem most pertinent.

A discussion about human rights cannot be had without addressing one of, if not the most, important documents relating to human rights, which is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), or UDHR, is one of the basic documents relating to human rights globally, and is seen as a standard for certain institutions and conventions. It is not, in itself, legally binding, but is used by other conventions which are. The Declaration establishes what rights we have as people from birth. The Declaration states that these rights are inalienable under any circumstance, and apply to every single person regardless of race, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliations, or political opinion, among other factors. The one exception that exists in the Declaration is paragraph 14, the case of seeking political asylum, which may not be given in the case someone is being prosecuted for non-political crimes or “acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations” (United Nations, 1948, para. 26). Important articles in the

Declaration include: everyone is born free and equal, everyone has the right to healthcare, education, recognition, a fair trial, freedom of movement, marry, own property and freedom of thought and expression, and peaceful assembly. The Declaration also highlights that people have a right not to be tortured and unfairly detained or imprisoned, while stating that everyone is equal before the law.

One of the biggest disagreements in the discourse regarding human rights is whether to take a culturally relativistic or universalistic approach. Ignatieff & Gutmann (2001) argue that, unlike the current approach adopted by human rights activists, a more balanced framework should be created. They stress that human rights should not become a form of idolatry and that there are specific criteria that have to be met for a universal idea of human rights to even be considered in the first place. He highlights that this kind of approach would be much more effective, in contrast to the, in his view, much more idealistic standpoint some human rights proponents take, which has been criticized by some countries and cultures in Asia, Africa, and the Arab world.

Another important author contributing to the debate on the relativistic nature was Jack Donnelly (2013), who explores the historical context of the concept of human rights in depth, and emphasizes the fact that, fundamentally, human rights have never been a static concept. It has been in flux ever since its conception, and changes depending on the era and time period. Despite this fact, he concludes that human rights as a global norm can be achieved, specifically while engaging with and utilizing liberalism as a method of transmission, specifying the important of international organizations. He refutes arguments against a global conception of human rights, specifically by stating that, across cultures, some rights have a more universal character than others, and the idea of relativism should not be used to justify cases where human rights were encroached upon (Donnelly). While it is true that perhaps the best chance

of a global human rights is through bodies such as the United Nations, 20 years later the world has not reached Donnelly's ideal state just yet.

To determine whether or not Slovak society is 'ready' for a more specific action plan regarding human rights, one must first examine the status of human rights in the society itself. A suitable starting position might be the way human rights are represented in educational materials. Civic studies have been growing in popularity among Slovak youths, and human rights have also been increasingly implemented in civic studies curricula over the years (Pecníková & Mališová, 2022). However, as the youth make up only part of the population, a broader perspective must also be considered. Perhaps due to the development of not just Slovak society, but the state as a whole (Piscová & Bunčák, 2001), a lot of political discourse is centered around the mythical "other," exemplified by the national disagreements around the treatment of minority groups, such as the Roma community. Case in point, it would appear that one of the most common topics of discussing human rights is the issue of migration and the rights of minorities (Androvičová, 2017), which has dramatically increased ever since the influx of Ukrainian refugees as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The fact is that discussions around the rights of minorities seem to be disconnected from the general consensus that rights of refugees belong under human rights. The concept of human rights is also tightly connected to the idea of democracy, and the attitudes of a society about democracy can point towards trends relating to human rights. While the majority of Slovaks would consider EU integration as a positive and a good road towards democracy, a still significant number responded that they fear interference in their lives due to, for example, immigration (Pondelíková, 2022). A key aspect of this fear appears to be anxiety about a certain loss of the way of life which was present before, which is a common aspect of a more conservative worldview.

Lastly, the general rising trend of violence has to be addressed. According to a United Nations report (n.d.), while grand global conflicts are on a decline, violence and crimes on a smaller scale are becoming more common. Not only that, but the very forms in which these violent acts are committed have changed, due in part to the development of new information and military technologies. At the same time, society as a whole has a much easier access to consume violent content or media that is somehow related to violence. This is perhaps most important in the case of adolescents, where it has been shown that early exposure to internal or external violence can, on one hand, lead to a general desensitization to viewing or hearing about violent events (Mrug et al., 2016), and, on the other hand, even predict future increased violent behaviors (Mrug et al., 2015). This normalization of violence across society by the sheer volume of media coverage surrounding violence can then contribute to the very attitudes society has about violence, and how harsh society's reaction will be to especially egregious violent acts.

1. Media and journalism

The first example of a potential attack on the activities of a free and independent media involved RTVS, the national television and radio broadcaster. It was a state-funded entity that was considered to generally be an objective and credible source of news in the country. This meant that it did not shy away from occasionally criticizing the actions of the ruling party, whoever that might be at the time. The director of RTVS was chosen through a long bureaucratic process. Most importantly, the director had to be approved by a nine-member committee before he could start his tenure (Osvaldová et al., 2024). The current ruling coalition, with SMER at its head, and Martina Šimkovičová, the current minister of culture of the Slovak Republic, had long criticized the broadcaster for a wide variety of actions that they deemed inappropriate.

This culminated in 2024 when Šimkovičová proposed a new piece of legislature regarding RTVS. The document claimed that the broadcaster was “not being objective” when speaking about the government, that its reporting was subpar and that it, ultimately, went against the wishes of the government. In the original form of the law, Šimkovičová proposed that the government should be able to directly appoint people to the head of RTVS, essentially allowing them to hand-pick who gets into that position (Sopóci, 2024). The law also proposed that the broadcaster be renamed, although the reasons why the name change was necessary is not defined that clearly. This proposition instantly sparked a wave of protests across the entire country, not just in Bratislava. Many public gatherings were held, the biggest ones supported by opposition parties, in support of everyone working for the organization. RTVS employees went on strike and

did everything they could to maintain the integrity of the broadcaster, however, this would not come to pass.

In summer of 2024, this law was successfully passed, although some clauses were changed, most importantly regarding the selection process of the director. Instead of giving the government the power to directly choose the director, the law was amended so that the selection committee remained intact, with a few committee members being appointed by the government. RTVS was also renamed to STVR, or Slovak Television and Radio (“Konec RTVS...”, 2024). Despite every claim made by Šimkovičová or Prime Minister Rober Fico, who supported the bill, that this is a move towards higher transparency and fairness of the organization, the reality is the complete opposite. Even if it did not get full control over the leadership of the institution, the government now has a much higher degree of influence on the selection process, giving it the space to potentially appoint loyalists into the most important position, who could then influence what news is shared and what is not. This hypothetical loyalist would then try to diminish the amount of information that is shared which ‘goes against the government,’ allowing it to mitigate the amount of criticism that is shared in the media. Alongside that, it would gain the possibility to perhaps cover some incidents up that make the current administration less favorable in the eyes of the public. The renaming of the institution to specifically include the word “Slovak” is just the populist cherry on top of a barely-veiled move to limit the freedom of the press in the country, a move likely inspired by Viktor Orban’s media takeover in neighboring Hungary.

On a broader level, critics of the actions of the Slovak government during the forming of STVR have speculated that the motion may go against European Union law. Specifically, they put emphasis on the EU Media Freedom Act, which was put in place to protect media plurality and independence (European Commission, 2024). One of the

points in the Act is that the leaderships structure of media organizations should be transparent, as should be their funding. Acts released by the EU apply to all member states without exception, meaning that everyone has to adhere to them. While the Act has not fully come into effect yet, as this is expected to happen in August of 2025, the construction of the framework of the act, and all its resulting committees and organizations, is already in effect. One of the tools introduced by the Act, the Media Pluralism Monitor, rated Slovakia in the medium-risk category in most of the indicators it studied in its 2024 report (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2024). In general, the RTVS incident seems to go against Article 19 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948), which establishes the right to the freedom of expression and opinion, and the utilization of this freedom through any media channels.

The case of RTVS may be an Indicator of a broader trend of hateful sentiment towards journalists and the mainstream media as a whole. After the failed assassination attempt on Rober Fico, taking place in May of 2024, politicians like Ľuboš Blaha immediately took aim at one of the most common targets by the current ruling coalition: liberals and the media (Šuchova, 2024). According to the narrative that was being woven, the liberals, or the media, or perhaps both, were somehow ultimately responsible for the attack on the prime minister, although what form that responsibility takes is not made exactly clear. Another charge that is levied against the liberals and the media is that they spread hatred about the government, and that they should instead focus more on cooperation and making peace and being more factual (Šuchová). There is one fundamental problem with this argument. Because media is supposed to be, in theory and in practice, as factual as possible, it is inevitable that some subjects about whom news is written will not take very kindly to that said reporting. The reporting and retelling of facts, however, cannot be considered a campaign of hatred. No matter how

inflammatory the facts are towards one person or group, if they are indeed factual, they have a place in the media and in the news cycle. To say that the media is leading a 'campaign of hatred' against the government for seemingly no reason is simply a way for the coalition to shift blame away from itself and its own potentially damaging actions. It is not just a blatant attack on journalism and free speech and the freedom of information, but it is also an attempt to restructure reality as a whole. Hannah Arendt (1968) wrote about the conflicting relationship between truth and politics and that, no matter how factual a statement or event might be, opinion will always be higher on the list of a politically active entity or group, as opinion is the source of political power. The claim that liberal media are attacking the Slovak government is simply an opinion by the coalition in power, and yet this opinion is used to justify blatant attacks against an independent media landscape.

Finally, one cannot talk about journalists being targeted without mentioning the 2016 murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner, Martina Kušnírová, an event that is still present in the mind of many Slovaks. Kuciak was an investigative journalist who was specifically working on a story about the shady and potentially illicit business activities being conducted in eastern Slovakia with Italian nationals (Tódová, 2019). These businessmen were already for a long time suspected of being connected to organized crime groups, but no connection could be proven before Kuciak started his investigation. For a time before his eventual assassination, Kuciak became more wary and started suspecting that he was being or was going to be targeted for his journalistic activities. These suspicions would, unfortunately, be proven right, when he and his partner were found deceased in their home, shot at point blank range execution-style. During the course of the subsequent investigation, a businessman named Marián Kočner would surface as the prime suspect for the person ordering the hit on Kuciak,

and he would eventually be convicted and charged on the crime. Kočner was one of the subjects Kuciak was writing about in his article, released after his death. The murder also sparked a wave of protests across the entire country, the biggest ones since the 1989 revolution, against the Fico government (Tódová). While an official connection between Robert Fico and Kočner could not be proven, it is a fact that Kočner has been in the public eye and of law enforcement for a few years before, mainly because of his alleged, large-scale financial crimes. Crimes which, for some unknown reason, the Fico government had refused to even investigate, let alone prosecute, for years. The protests eventually led to Fico and a few members of his cabinet resigning from their posts, including figures like Robert Kaliňák, who also just so happen to be back in power. No matter how one looks at this case, the official ruling of the courts concluded that Kuciak was killed for his journalistic activities which he was free to pursue for the betterment of society. Even if they deny their involvement, Fico and his associates did resign from their posts. It is probably not necessary to explain just how egregious a breach of human rights the murder of a journalist is, and how it completely destroys the concepts of free speech, freedom of expression and information, and protection from violence. What is also important to note, however, is that Kuciak had apparently asked the state for police protection when he started suspecting that someone was onto him. Protection that ultimately could have saved his and his partner's life, was never given (Archleb, 2018).

2. Police brutality

As in any other country, law enforcement is an important part of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. It has also been the subject of several controversies and incidents involving breaches of human rights in some way. Perhaps most notable of which are two recent incidents of police brutality, one happening in 2024, while the other in 2025.

The first incident happened near the city of Košice. A homeless man named Ľubomír had supposedly stolen and taken a drink from a bottle of alcohol from a local Kaufland grocery store. The security detail on-site called the local police station, with officers arriving shortly afterwards. Ľubomír was taken to an off-limits room, and severely beaten, sustaining injuries to his head and face (Bejda, 2024). He was then loaded up into the police cruiser and taken to the police station, where he lost consciousness. The next day, Ľubomír would die from his injuries sustained during the beating. While the investigation into the incident is still ongoing, the police officer responsible for the beating has been taken into custody and faces up to 15 years in prison if found guilty (Bejda). Not only do these actions go against the code of conduct of police officers in Kosice, they also violated Ľubomír's human rights, such as unjust punishment not proportional to the crime committed, not even discussing that he was quite literally beaten to death (United Nations, 1948). It was also found that the offending officer was wearing gloves with special fabric woven into them, which are normally only issued to specialized rapid response units, and likely contributed to the severity of the wounds Ľubomír received during the assault (Bejda).

The second, more recent incident, happening just at the end of February, took place in Bratislava when a homeless Ukrainian man was found bruised and beaten in front of the Nivy shopping center (“V Bratislave dobili...”, 2025). According to TA3, similarly to the case of Ľubomír, the man was caught in the act of stealing from New Yorker, a clothing store in Nivy. On-site security personnel and some police officers then supposedly apprehended the man and started physically assaulting him, after which they left him in front of the shopping center. The first responding paramedic who treated the man had already raised his suspicions about the possibility of security forces having been involved in the incident. This, however, is not the official sequence of events, as according to the investigation being conducted into the incident, multiple conflicting reports are causing several possible timelines and involved people, thus, suspects. To this day, no official conclusion has been reached regarding the attack. It is, however, clear that a severe breach of human rights took place. Whether as a result of a hate crime because the man was Ukrainian, or because he did, indeed, pilfer something from the New Yorker, the level of violence and injury inflicted on the man is beyond anything that could be called reasonable in any context. Much like Ľubomír, the Ukrainian man was not given a chance to defend himself, he was not assumed innocent until proven guilty, and he received grievous bodily harm and violence against his person (United Nations, 1948).

Cases of police brutality are not a new phenomenon in Slovakia. Most incidents in the past are similar to the ones already described, incidents involving minorities or disadvantaged persons which were then escalated by law enforcement personnel. In 2019, two young Roma adults were severely beaten near Kosice after a supposed altercation at a bar. The two suspects were subdued, arrested, and then beaten by responding officers (Rorke, 2021). The situation continued when law enforcement

conducted a raid on the home of the individuals, during which a further two people, relatives of the people involved in the bar dispute, were injured. Originally, after learning of the incident, the mother and aunt of the detainees went to the pub to gain more information. Another dispute broke out between the two women and the owners of the bar, but the women left shortly afterwards. Allegedly, the owners of the bar then called the police one more to the house of the women, who were then arrested, allegedly taken to a bridge and subsequently beaten (“ERRC will ensure...”, 2019).

Perhaps the largest-scale case of police brutality happened in Moldava nad Bodvou. In 2013, in the local Roma settlement in the town, around 30 members of the Roma community were harassed and attacked by law enforcement. The investigation into the incident, which has still not been finalized nearly 11 years after the incident, alleges that the police pulled people out of their homes, beat and kicked them, and even resorted to using electric shocks to inflict damage on the community (Kováč, 2023). The attack is believed to be a retaliation for an incident two days beforehand, when two Roma individuals damaged a police cruiser by throwing stones at it. The initial response of the police was abject denial, and that the residents of the settlement were exaggerating or even making the entire incident up. They would hold this stance for years after the incident transpired. A proper investigation into the attack was never carried out, as any proper inquiries by oversight bodies were, in most cases, dismissed, a cycle that would continue until this very day. However, the European Court of Human Rights would eventually be notified and would rule in favor of the members of the community (Amnesty International, 2023).

This is not the only incident of police brutality investigated by the Court. In an incident in 2009, which shares many similarities with incidents already discussed, six Roma boys were arrested and taken by authorities to the police station on the southern

side of Košice (Poradňa, 2023). According to the testimony of the victims, they were then physically assaulted and forced to act in a humiliating manner in front of law enforcement officers, including stripping naked, kissing each other, and even hitting each other. As this event was taking place, somebody at the scene managed to get a mobile phone recording and publish it onto the internet, substantially boosting the media coverage about the incident. Not only was the conduct of the police officers cruel enough, but another dimension is added onto the already several human rights violations, namely the violation of Article 5 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948), protecting everyone against torture, cruel or inhuman or degrading treatment. The things the victims were forced to act out were highly degrading in nature, and was a clear attack on their personal dignity. However, and unfortunately, these were not the only hardships the Roma boys faced, as the legal proceedings after the ordeal were also fraught with misconduct. A criminal investigation was launched into the offending officers. Despite a large amount of evidence against them, the police officers were acquitted of all charges by the Kosice district court (Poradňa). The prosecution then managed to overturn the decision of the district court in the regional court through an appeal, but, despite this, the district court would further investigate and acquit the officers an additional two times, with the regional court refusing to overturn the judgement the third time around. The third and final judgement happened in 2019, ten years after the initial incident had happened, which is one of the complaints that the Roma children and their legal counsel would eventually bring to the European Court of Human Rights, as an investigation of this caliber should not have taken even close to that long. After the third appeal was rejected by the courts, the victims turned to the Constitutional Court, lodging a complaint that their rights, as established in the Constitution and the European Charter, were violated on several levels. This complaint

was thrown out by the court, twice. Only when they turned to the Court of Human Rights did the victims manage to get some kind of justice as, in 2023, the Court ruled in their favor and awarded the victims financial compensation. The ruling states that the state did not sufficiently protect them from police violence, that there were several deficiencies in how the justice system handled the case, including the disagreements between the district and regional courts and how the district court flat-out refused to acknowledge particularly damning evidence, all of which contributed to the significant prolonging of the legal battle, resulting in contradictions and general confusion, and that, finally, the allegation that the attack had been racially motivated was completely dismissed and little to no attention was given to investigating that aspect of the case. There are many more cases similar to the described ones, and many of them are dismissed or improperly investigated. One can only wonder how many instances are never looked into in the first place.

3. Treatment of the LGBTQ+ community

One cannot talk about the discrimination of minority groups in Slovakia without mentioning the hardships the LGBTQ+ community faces on a constant basis, and on multiple levels. The discrimination begins in the very document that serves as the basis of the legal framework of the entire country: the Constitution (1992). Article 41 of the Constitution defines marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman. While seeming minor in the grand scheme of things, it can still be argued that the dismissal of the very existence of same-sex marriages constitutes a violation of human rights, specifically the protection based on discrimination. Human Rights Watch (n.d.) outlines the importance of marriage as a human right, emphasizing the fact that partners who are married gain access to several legal benefits, such as protection orders, making filing taxes easier and equal rights and responsibilities in regards to child care. HRW also highlights that many countries have either opted to creating legal frameworks on civil unions or domestic partnerships, creating a pathway for queer individuals to enjoy similar or the same benefits that married couples have access to. However, because none of that exists in Slovakia, queer couples are severely limited by the legal privileges they have.

Not only is the constitution already limiting, but some members of the government want to make it even more restrictive. Speaking at a press conference in January of 2025, Robert Fico outlined the plans of SMER-SD to amend the constitution (“PM Fico unveils...”, 2025). This amendment consists of a list of changes: first, the constitution would define gender as the two biological sexes, male and female. Second,

medical transitioning of one's gender would only be allowed in extraordinary cases, although what those cases would be was not specified. Third, adoption would be restricted to married couples. This would not only prevent same-sex couples from adopting, it would also harm heterosexual couples who, for one or more reasons, do not wish to get married, either temporarily or at all. Finally, and perhaps most damning of all, would be a clause that EU law could not override what is in the Slovak constitution. The example that Mr. Fico himself gave related back to marriages, stating that if the constitution defines what marriage is, according to these amendments, EU legislation could not (Lodová, 2025). Alongside the plethora of political and economic effects such an amendment would cause, alongside going against the very fundamental framework of EU law, much of which is outside the scope of this paper, this is a clear attack on the autonomy of select minorities which would, perhaps unintentionally, also end up targeting other citizens.

In October of 2022, a terrorist attack was carried out in front of Tepláreň, a known LGBTQ+-friendly establishment. A lone gunman, inspired by far-right sentiments and his activities on messaging boards which host extremist communities such as 4chan, shot and killed two queer individuals after having posted a manifesto online (Osvaldová & Zdút, 2022). The shooter then fled the scene and allegedly committed suicide, as he was found deceased by law enforcement the following morning. This event shocked the LGBTQ+ community not just in Slovakia, as it was reported by international news agencies all over the world. Widespread condemnation followed, and the event is still remembered to this day as a marked escalation of violence against queer individuals in Slovakia. Now, it would be false to equate the gunman's actions as the actions of the government. What can be criticized, however, is the seeming inaction of the government since the event took place. Multiple countries

and international organizations have been urging Slovakia to address the rise of hateful rhetoric against minorities, and especially the queer community in the wake of Teplaren. In response, the Slovak government has not done much to quell this hatred. Inflammatory and false rhetoric against queer people continues in Slovakia, oftentimes by politicians themselves, and it seems that there is no sign of stopping (Krempaská, 2023).

The Increase In harmful rhetoric and the spread of false narratives against queer people in Slovakia may be highlighted in a case which happened within the Ministry of Exterior in 2024. Ivan Novotny, a diplomat working for the ministry for many years, was suddenly and without much justification fired from the ministry. According to not only himself, but apparently also by his colleagues and superiors, he was a diligent and hard-working diplomat, and contributed greatly to the functioning of the ministry (Kern, 2024). He is also a homosexual and the only openly gay person, married to his husband, within the ministry. In an interview conducted by Denník N (Kern), Mr. Novotny described his activities in the ministry, and that the start of all of his and his husband's problems were when a tabloid newspaper released a slanderous piece about his husband. Mr. Novotny's husband was on track to be stationed at the UN office in New York. However, as a result of the tabloid article, this mission was canceled, and he was relieved of his post at the Ministry. The couple's problems escalated when they applied for benefits from the government because of the birth of their child, a sum of money amounting to 150€, alongside getting more paid vacation days due to the care they need to provide to their child. None of these benefits have even to this day been awarded, even though other heterosexual couples had gotten their benefits swiftly and without much issue (Kern). Mr. Novotny and his husband were also asked to provide a proverbial mountain of documentation about their legal status and their child, none of

which had to be provided by heterosexual couples. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Novotny was also removed from the Ministry, just a few months after his husband suffered the same fate. Ultimately, they suspect that their openly gay marriage was the deciding factor in both of their firings, and that the discrimination against queer couples is nothing new and sadly, does not seem to be getting any better (Kern).

What legislation does exist does not paint a better picture. Looking at the situation of transgender people, medical transitioning is accessible and is not outlawed, even if it does not come cheap, but it must be followed by medically castrating the individual who wishes to transition, completely removing that person's ability to reproduce. Social transitioning is not much better (Krempaská, 2023). If an individual in a legal marriage transitions, they are forced to divorce from their partner. In the case that an individual does manage to transition and wishes to change their gender in legal documentation, their personal identification number present on their ID card changes. A law proposal from the party Sme Rodina wished to completely remove the ability to change the personal identification number (Žureková, 2023). It did move to the second reading in the government, although there have been no updates since that point.

Another entity trying to squash the rights of LGBTQ+ people is the so-called Aliancia pre rodinu, or Alliance for the family, who promotes a traditional view of the nuclear family. It is also important to mention that several current members of the government, such as Andrej Danko, have supported or still do support the marches that the Alliance organizes yearly (“Video+foto: na pochode...”, 2019). While curtailing the rights of queer people, the Alliance also wants medical abortions banned, claiming it to be a violation of God's will and unscientific (Jánošová, 2019). The right to abortion is a fundamental right of anyone capable of giving birth, as it

belongs under body autonomy, and is sometimes necessary if the mother or child's life is in mortal danger because of some kind of medical complication or risk at birth.

While some might argue that there are more important or pressing matters, politically-speaking, to address, the attack on the rights of the LGBTQ+ community is still an alarming fact. Queer people should enjoy the same kinds of rights as every other human on the planet, and there are influential people and groups in Slovakia who are trying to dismantle these rights. All of these are violations of Article 2 of the UDHR ((United Nations, 1948), as these are attacks discriminating entire communities based on gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and even religion, or the lack thereof.

4. The Rights of Women

The rights of women are also being encroached upon in Slovakia, and not just from groups such as the Alliance for the family. Abortion has been a particularly divisive topic in Slovak politics for a considerable amount of time now, especially because of the strong Christian tradition and sentiments that still exist within the country, despite secularization, but it has especially come to the forefront with the catapulting of populism into the political mainstream. Parties like SMER-SD, Sme Rodina, the Slovak National Party, and even opposition parties like KDH or OĽANO, claim to represent, in some way, traditional family values and the traditional views on the roles of men and women. One of these roles for women would be child-rearing, a 'duty' seen as paramount by these parties and their representatives. There can, however, and for an untold number of reasons, develop a situation in which the pregnancy must be terminated. These reasons can be because of a personal choice or some kind of chance in the family situation, such as financial hardship. However, many medical reasons exist as well, such as possible complications with the actual process of birth, which might put the life of the mother or the fetus in danger, or both. As the person whose body is in question, it should be the mother who has ultimate say over whether to terminate the pregnancy or not, especially if it is at the recommendation of a medical specialist. Currently, abortion is legal in Slovakia at request up to 12 weeks after conception, which was first introduced in Czechoslovakia, and later reinforced by a Constitutional Court hearing in 2007 (European Parliament, 2020). Abortions after 12 weeks can be carried out if there is a significant health medical reason, such as a danger

in actually giving birth. There have been, and likely will continue to be, attempts to change these laws.

In 2024, two members of KDH proposed an amendment to the law, shortening the time limit for abortions from 12 weeks to 8 weeks. The justifications used by them are, medically, dubious at best, mainly leaning on moral arguments and invoking the demographic situation in Slovakia (“Poslanci Anna...”, 2024). This, however, does not appear to be the case. According to the statistics, only around 15,000 terminations of pregnancies were reported. Roughly 6,000 of those were artificially induced abortions, while miscarriages or abortions due to medical risks represented the majority of those terminations. Alongside that is also the fact that abortions have been on a decline since the enactment of the law in the first place (European Parliament). To say that roughly 6,000 induced abortions per year in the entire Slovak Republic has a major impact on the birth rate or demographic in general is inaccurate, it does not cause a significant dent on the number of births per year. In fact, in 2023, the total number of abortions decreased to around 10,000, while the number of births was at about 49,000 (“Population Change”, 2024). As of the writing of this paper, this proposal has not been signed into law.

Another proposal that appeared before the parliament came in 2020, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This time put forward by OĽANO, the bill wanted to increase the waiting period of people requesting abortions from two days to four. It also meant to add a further complication to the entire process, in which the applicant would have had to get approval for the abortion from two different doctors (Gehrerová, 2020). When one of the sponsors of the bill was asked further about the bill, she said that the primary goal of legislation of that nature was to lower the rate of

abortions in Slovakia, while strengthening the social help that new mothers would receive (Gehrerová).

While having a concern about the admittedly dwindling birth rates is understandable, these ways of addressing the issue seem short-sighted. Both of the proposals, from KDH and OĽANO, essentially place the blame on women and consider abortions as something negative or even unnatural. It seems that no consideration was given to the right of women to have control over their own bodies, or that unfortunate instances of rape do happen, and that the victim of sexual assault might not want to keep a child conceived in such a way, especially if the perpetrator of the assault does not want to help with the upbringing of the child. Abortions have happened, do happen, and will continue to happen. What can change, however, is the way we approach sex and sexual education in the first place. Increasing funding by the government into sexual education would provide a number of benefits for society as a whole, such as making younger generations be more cautious and more likely to practice safe sex, which would potentially lead to not only a decrease in unwanted pregnancies, but also the lowering of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. An important aspect of making this possible is paying attention specifically to contraceptive methods, for men and for women, and potentially the research and development of newer, safer, and more effective methods of contraception. Focus should also be shifted away from the apparent narrative that women should be punished for carrying out an abortion even in cases of sexual assault, as in those cases, they have already been victimized once, and the prevalence of sexual violence must be addressed.

5. Political Repression

In the second half of 2024, Michal Šimečka, the leader of Progressive Slovakia and of the opposition in the Parliament, was removed from his post as vice-chairman of the parliament. This action was initiated by Robert Fico and his party, SMER, as well as the Slovak National Party, and cited as its main piece of evidence an investigation which was launched against Šimečka. The inquiry alleged that Šimečka has family members in organizations and foundations which get grants from the government (Hajčáková, 2024). These family members then use and misuse the money from those grants for their own personal benefits. The allegation then concludes that Šimečka is acting in such a way that these organizations continue receiving government funding so his family can benefit. This is a serious allegation, and one, if proved truthful, would warrant the removal of an official from their position of power. However, there are several issues with the investigation and how the government utilized it throughout Šimečka's removal.

First of all, the results of the investigation were never relevant in the government's decision, as the removal took place before the investigation concluded. Ultimately, it could not prove that there was a major conflict of interest, or that any family members of Simecka's were misusing any funds, government or other. Had the intention of the inquiry been genuine, this would have dispelled all suspicion placed on Simecka. This, however, was not what transpired. The investigation was utilized as a political tool, more of a way to taint Simecka's character, almost as if the government has already made up its mind about Simecka and just needed a reason that looked legitimate enough

to complete the removal.

Further support is given to this notion by the fact that Simecka was assumed guilty before anything concluded. Simecka was not awarded the due process proper to any legal proceedings. He was not able to counter any points brought up by the government in defense of his name. None of what is outlined in articles 10 and 11 of the UDHR were upheld in this situation. It also sets a precedent of how the current administration could handle individuals they do not agree with in positions of power, which is a key part of the concept of checks and balances. Case in point, with the removal of Simecka, the remaining vice-chairmen of the parliament belong to the parties in power, those being: Tibor Gaspar from SMER-SD, Peter Žiga from HLAS, and Andrej Danko from SNS (NRSR, n.d.). The parties of the opposition did not take part in the vote that removed Simecka, and he has publicly stated that this move was revenge for him carrying out good opposition work.

Last but not least, the Fico government is attempting to curtail yet another human right, in particular the right to peaceful assembly as detailed in Article 20 (United Nations, 1948). Following the assassination attempt on the prime minister, a new bill was proposed titled Lex attentat, which is supposed to improve safety and peace in the country. When looking at the fine print, it puts heavy limitations on the right to assemble. Firstly, it creates a perimeter of 50 meters around politically-important buildings, such as the seat of the president or the government or of the general court (“Dozivotna renta pre...”, 2024). Furthermore, it bans assembling in areas primarily intended for living, with a few exceptions like squares or parks. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it is forbidden to assemble near the building of a person whose profession character is somehow related to the subject of the actual protest, and the organizers of the protest did not agree to a change in location (“Dozivotna renta pre...”).

This law has since gone into effect, and there are multiple ways in which it violates the freedom of peaceful assembly. To begin with, the entire reason why this law was proposed in the first place, the aftermath of the attempted assassination, does not sufficiently relate to the subject matter primarily targeted by the law. Although it is true that Mr. Fico was shot at in front of a crowd of assembled people, it was not a protest, which seems to be the target of this law. Evidence to support this can be found within the law itself, more specifically in the clause which bans assembly near buildings about whom the assembly is about. While the wording is vague enough to perhaps give plausible deniability, it is clear that the government is attempting to silence protests it does not agree with. In recent times, protests which the government has not agreed with have mainly been about the government, drawing a clear correlation between the two facts. What further supports this is the arbitrary perimeter drawn around important government buildings, once again, usually the subject of public protests. It is also interesting to mention that this law was passed within a shortened time interval, which seems to be a trend in the introduction and passing of new legislation. The justification for these shortened intervals is either some kind of emergency, as is the case with *lex attentat*, or, conveniently enough, for the sake of human rights (SNSLP, 2024). It is only the highest irony that human rights are invoked during the introduction of legislation that would ultimately curtail human rights. The problem, then, is a fundamental misuse of the actual term 'human rights.' Some might argue that perhaps it is simply a case of misunderstanding. However, because of the everlasting murkiness of the term when used by certain political actors, without much motivation to actually clarify what is actually being talked about, it is once again a case of creating a suitable and convenient narrative to support a political agenda.

Conclusion

It is clear now that the situation in Slovakia is dire. The active breakdown of human rights in the country is happening on multiple fronts at the same time. Most worryingly of all, it is happening from the very entity that is supposed to protect human rights for the citizenry of the country, namely the government. Through the laws it has proposed or passed, it has actively contributed to the political repression of certain individuals or groups, such as the dismissing of opposition leader Šimečka from his post in the parliament, or the limiting of the rights of free assembly by introducing arbitrary boundaries and stipulations that protests have to adhere to. Also affected are the free media, who are constantly accused of not reporting the news in an objective manner, while criminals, who may or may not be connected to representatives in the government and whom the government had refused to investigate for a significant amount of time, silence those who may be investigating them, as was the case of Jan Kuciak. Women's rights are being limited through the attacks on reproductive rights, specifically the rights to abortions, without taking into account the very nuanced circumstances that people who consider terminating their pregnancy might find themselves in, such as in the case of a medical emergency that could endanger the mother or her child, or in cases of pregnancies that happen because of rape. Permeating also into many aspects of not just Slovak politics, but also culture, is the growing hatred towards members of the LGBTQ+ community, alongside legislation that is designed to limit the terms of

marriage and adoption, and the inaction of the government to address and remedy hateful rhetoric and acts directed at queer individuals, as can be seen in the case of the Tepláreň attack. Lastly, the actions of the police can be seen as an extension of the government, since law enforcement belongs under the Ministry of the Interior. It is, therefore, evident that there exists a substantial discrepancy between the institutional guarantees of human rights, for example the way it is described in the Slovak Constitution, and the reality of the situation as-is. Despite a seemingly pro-European value orientation at the basis of the country, there needs to be seemingly radical change to bring about an actually productive human rights landscape in Slovakia. More and more cases of police brutality are being reported, mainly directed at underprivileged individuals and minorities, and the internal investigations into these instances seem to be wrought with unnecessary bureaucracy, making trials take too long a time and ultimately delaying justice to the victims involved. Underpinning many of these instances is the misuse of the truth by government-affiliated individuals, and the subsequent creation of a seeming alternate reality where opinions take precedent over factual events, and are used to justify the limiting of human rights. The question then becomes if Slovakia is ready to embrace the concept of human rights at all. Although the horizon may look bleak, there is still hope. The presence of the biweekly protests, the actions of activist groups who wish to protect the rights of marginalized people, and even the fact that not all repressive law proposals get passed into effective legislation, are all examples of the willingness to protect human rights in the country. Therefore, it can be argued that the concept of human rights is not entirely absent from Slovakia's political culture. The goal, then, should be to clarify what exactly is meant by human rights on a national level. Clear delineations must be made, not only about what human rights mean, but how protective legislature can be enforced. Otherwise, the concept of

human rights will only continue to be misused for some entity's political agenda. How such a goal can be achieved is a different conundrum in and of itself, and warrants further research. Human rights will never be a simple concept, and perhaps it should not be. However, a simplified framework could perhaps be used for educational purposes to introduce a larger group of the population to at least become aware of this profoundly complicated topic. As is the case with the education system and the increasing demand for quality civic studies, this might be a good starting point. Ultimately, the situation that human rights are faced with is dire, and decisive action must be taken on all levels of society. Otherwise, draconian laws will continue to be passed, and the situation will only continue to deteriorate.

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Resumé

Táto bakalárska práca sa zaoberá stavu ľudských práv na Slovensku, pričom analyzuje rozdiel medzi teoretickými záväzkami štátu a realitou ich dodržiavania v praxi. Hoci je Slovensko členom medzinárodných organizácií, ako sú OSN, NATO a Európska únia, a jeho ústava zaručuje ochranu základných práv, v posledných rokoch dochádza k ich narušovaniu.

Práca sa zameriava na vybrané oblasti, kde sú ľudské práva najvýraznejšie ohrozené. Prvou z nich je sloboda médií a postavenie novinárov, pričom sa analyzuje prípad transformácie RTVS na STVR, ako aj rastúca nenávisťná rétorika voči novinárom po atentáte na premiéra v roku 2024. Druhou oblasťou je policajná brutalita, dokumentovaná na viacerých prípadoch násilného zaobchádzania s marginalizovanými skupinami, vrátane Rómov a bezdomovcov.

Ďalej práca skúma postavenie LGBTQ+ komunity, ktorá čelí legislatívnym návrhom obmedzujúcim ich práva, nenávisťným prejavom a absenciou systémovej ochrany zo strany štátu. Taktiež sa práca venuje aj právam žien, najmä snahám o obmedzenie prístupu k interrupciám. V záverečnej časti sa analyzuje politická represia, vrátane odstránenia lídra opozície Michala Šimečku z funkcie podpredsedu parlamentu a obmedzenia práva na pokojné zhromažďovanie prostredníctvom legislatívy Lex atentát.

Práca poukazuje na nebezpečný trend erózie demokratických hodnôt a odporúča dôsledné monitorovanie situácie, posilnenie občianskeho aktivizmu a väčšiu angažovanosť medzinárodných inštitúcií pri ochrane ľudských práv na Slovensku.

Appendix 1: Writing Report by GPTZero

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