

EXPLAINING DIVERGING PATHS: DEMOCRATIC
BACKSLIDING IN THE CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIC
INOCULATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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Abstract

Does a polity learn from the past period of democratic backsliding? Democratic backsliding is often understood as a regional trend in current Central and Eastern Europe, but this trend does not apply to the case of Slovakia. This thesis argues that it is because of democratic inoculation - Slovak experience with the hybrid regime of Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s that made Slovak democracy more persistent against democratic backsliding. Theory-building process tracing is equipped to trace this democratic inoculation through three mechanisms, namely, the awareness of the threats to democracy, the creation of specific symbols and parallels, and the popularity of democracy. Quantitative text analysis of journalistic resources and the public opinion polls are used to operationalize these processes. To refine the theory of democratic inoculation, the case of Serbia is analyzed as well. Serbia has also overcome a period of a hybrid regime in the 1990s that was similar to the case of Slovakia. However, unlike Slovakia, Serbia started to backslide significantly after 2012, therefore, the democratic inoculation was not successful in this case. The empirical part of the thesis offers strong evidence for the theorized processes. It is also argued that democratic inoculation did not work in Serbia due to the lack of polarization and the stalled reforms in the post-Milošević era.

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1 Introduction

In the last years, democratic backsliding has become a highly prominent topic in both journalistic discourse and comparative political science. This is partly a result of the developments in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where the liberal democratic consensus seems to have vanished very quickly after the optimistic 1990s and 2000s. The zeitgeist has changed so rapidly that authors speak nowadays about the democratic backsliding as an assumed regional trend applicable to CEE as a whole (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 166; Krastev 2018; Mueller 2014, 15; for the critique of such arguments, see Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018, 243–44).

With an increasing number of published articles and book chapters, the processes of democratic backsliding become better understood. Nevertheless, the literature is still heavily preoccupied with analyzing why countries backslide while neglecting the topic of democratic persistence, which is defined as the ability of democracy to prevent, cope with and survive crises that can lead to the breakdown of democracy (Sisk 2017, 37). Therefore, it is an attribute preventing democratic backsliding and can explain the diverging democratic levels in the region. To understand the democratic persistence in the context of democratic backsliding, we need to go beyond the universe of cases that backslide and include persisting democracies into the analysis. Slovakia, as a country without democratic backsliding and higher levels of democracy than its Visegrad Four neighbors, is chosen as the main case of this thesis.

Since the electoral defeat of the hybrid regime of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar in 1998, Slovakia had six different prime ministers in the office and none aimed to embark on the consolidation of his or her rule through processes of democratic backsliding (for conceptualization, see sub-section 2.3.1). Nevertheless, the electoral outcomes brought opportunities for such backsliding. For example, the 2012 parliamentary elections created a single-party government of the leftist party Direction – Social Democracy (later referred to as Smer-SD) that controlled 55% of the seats in the parliament. This was a higher share than the Polish Law and Justice party had after the 2015

elections (51%), where this majority sufficed to start the backsliding of Polish democracy (Przybylski 2018). Although Prime Minister Robert Fico (2006-2010 and 2012-2018) used his powers to nobble police and judiciary to strengthen the economic interests of oligarchs close to him, he has not tried to undermine democracy as such (Anderson 2018). The backsliding paradigm assumes that all Central European states backslide, so Slovakia should as well. Then – why does it not? This is even more striking considering Slovakia’s V4 neighbors. It is broadly agreed upon that Hungary is backsliding (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018; Herman 2015) and leading this trend (Mueller 2014). Another paradigmatic backslider is Poland (Przybylski 2018). And even the Czech Republic, the most similar case to Slovakia, is considered to be in the early stages of democratic backsliding (Hanley and Vachudova 2018; Klíma 2015; Pehe 2018).

Previous literature has repeatedly noted that Slovakia is an outlier in the quality of democracy and suggested that the theory of *democratic inoculation* can explain this puzzle (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167). Democratic inoculation is a process that emerged in Slovakia as a result of historical legacy. Slovakia underwent a period of democratic backsliding and competitive authoritarianism in the 1990s under the regime of Mečiar. This illiberal experience led to a learning process of the public, which strengthened democratic persistence and thus protected Slovakia from backsliding. Although the literature suggested the existence of democratic inoculation (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167), this theory was never fully developed or analyzed, rather it was speculation intended for further research. This thesis aims to fill in this gap and thus its first research question is: *What are the processes creating democratic inoculation in Slovakia?*

To refine the theory of democratic inoculation, the second case chosen is Serbia. Although a similar case to Slovakia, it shows a very different outcome – democratic backsliding. Serbia shares with Slovakia numerous important characteristics – geographic region, little democratic tradition, a limited history of independent statehood, and similar political culture. Very important is the fact that Serbia had a similar recent history to Slovakia – existing as a hybrid regime under President

Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s and democratizing around 2000. Slovak and Serbian hybrid regimes had numerous similar features (ethnonationalism, populism, anti-Western sentiment). Therefore, looking at the developments of Serbia, it seems to be a very likely candidate for democratic inoculation, in the same way as Slovakia. However, although there was a period of relative democratic stability, Serbia started to backslide after 2012 (Bieber 2018; Pavlović 2020). This is the second key puzzle of this thesis. Serbia seems like a failed most-likely case – democratic inoculation theory (see sub-section 2.2.4) would expect that the democratic inoculation would work and strengthen its democratic persistence, but it did not. Therefore, the second research question of the thesis is: *Why was democratic inoculation ineffective in Serbia?*

The case selection of Slovakia and Serbia is based on both cause and outcome. This is a standard case selection approach for the process-tracing method (Beach and Pedersen 2016, 849) – Slovakia is a typical case for the theory of democratic inoculation, as the theorized causal mechanism seems to be in place. Thus, it can be used for theory-building process-tracing as it is expected that dependent variable, independent variable, and scope conditions are all present (Beach and Pedersen 2016, 852). Serbia is a deviant case as the cause is present, but the outcome is absent. A deeper analysis of this failed most-likely case can help us to identify omitted scope conditions for the democratic inoculation to refine this theory. Together with analysis of the expected case of Slovakia this represents a powerful case study design (Rohlfing 2012, 114).

The thesis continues with a theoretical background of the thesis that builds upon two bodies of literature. The consolidation of democracy literature offers a conceptualization of democratization as a never-ending process, where the survival of democracy is never fully guaranteed. It also discusses a conceptualization of democratic crises and reequilibrations that may have a positive influence on democratic persistence. These similar concepts will make it possible to delimit the conceptual space of democratic inoculation. The second body of literature, the literature on democratic backsliding is discussed to show that it is sometimes trapped into a backsliding

paradigm view that sees all Central European countries as backsliders. Due to its preoccupation with backsliding countries, democratic backsliding literature does not offer a satisfactory account of why Slovakia is a democratic outlier. Nevertheless, this body of literature offers conceptualizations and definitions of the key terms and some fragmented discussions of democratic inoculation theory. The third chapter explains the three theorized processes – awareness of threats to democracy, the creation of parallels, and the popularity of democracy. The operationalizations and the methods (quantitative text analysis and analysis of public polls) are justified and explained in detail. Chapter four gives the results of the empirical analyses of both cases, Slovakia and Serbia. The evidence supports all three theorized processes. The conclusion summarizes the thesis, answers the research questions, discusses limitations, and suggests possible extrapolation of the results on other cases, notably Hungary and Poland.

2 Literature review

This literature review starts with a discussion of two distinct but overlapping bodies of literature – literature on the consolidation of democracy (CoD) and literature on democratic backsliding. Both study similar political phenomena, nevertheless, their scopes and the concepts equipped differ significantly. The chapter aims to synthesize these two bodies of literature and identify conceptual tools relevant for the further research of the thesis. The literature review is also crucial to define the theory of democratic inoculation and find similar ideas to delimit the conceptual space of this concept. The chapter is concluded by discussing case-specific literature on Slovakia and Serbia that is relevant in the context of democratic inoculation.

2.1 Consolidation of democracy

This subchapter explores three partly overarching topics. Firstly, the definition of CoD is given and its limitations as a concept are discussed. Secondly, it is analyzed whether the consolidation has any endpoint and whether consolidation can be ever pronounced as completed. Thirdly and finally, the ideas of crises and reequilibrations are discussed as these are concepts analytically similar to democratic inoculation. The aim is to establish borders that demarcate the concept of democratic inoculation from other similar concepts (Gerring 2012, 127–30).

2.1.1 Definition and limitations

Consolidation of democracy is a very broad term denoting the process of “keeping democracy alive, with preventing its [...] death” (Schedler 1998b, 96). It is a term closely connected with the literature on transitions towards democracy, as CoD is considered to be a subsequent phase of democratic transition (Schedler 2001b, 6). The common denominator of transition and consolidation is uncertainty, which describes the state of doubt of political actors about the survival of the existing regime. Whereas the democratic transition in authoritarian regimes starts with actors’ emerging doubt about the survival of the autocracy, CoD starts with the emergence of democratic regime type and is characterized by *decreasing* uncertainty about the survival of the *democratic* regime (Schedler 2001b, 2). The consolidation of democracy is defined in this thesis as

not necessarily linear and certainly not an inevitable process of avoiding democratic erosion and democratic breakdown. This is a negative notion of the definition (Schedler 1998b, 94–95), as CoD is defined through *avoidance* of democratic breakdown.

Here it is important to acknowledge a partly teleological character of CoD, which is extensively criticized (Carothers 2002; O'Donnell 1996a, 38, 1996b, 163–64). O'Donnell (1996b, 163–64) sees this teleology among some consolidationists who define cases negatively, therefore characterizing them by what they lack in terms of ultimate democratic consolidation. This is problematic as these regimes may not move in the direction towards democracy at all. However, acknowledging the existence of some teleological attributes of the scholarship and believing in some sort of inevitable progress are two different things, as Schedler (1998b, 95) correctly points out. This means that the consolidationist literature can be used regardless of its negative connotations in the scientific community. This is crucial, as the latter definition of democratic inoculation is partly based and delimited by similar concepts from the literature on CoD (see subsection 2.2.4).

2.1.2 Endpoint

Having defined and delimited the beginning of CoD through the concept of uncertainty, it is important to address the question of whether the process of consolidation has an end. Scholars arguing that CoD has an endpoint offered at least three to some extent contradictory accounts of what is this endpoint. Firstly, Schmitter and Santiso (1998, 83–84) suggest that the consolidation finishes with the end of the third term of freely elected parliament (approximately 12 years), as this is the moment by which the most important framework legislation has been decided and ratified. The second account follows Dahl (1980, 315, as cited in Schmitter and Santiso 1998, 83–84), who suggested the threshold of twenty years, after which the breakdowns are extremely rare. Thirdly, Huntington's popular two-turnover test (1991) suggests that democracy is consolidated if the first post-transitional incumbent hands over power peacefully to the second incumbent, and this incumbent hands it over peacefully as well.

This thesis argues that all approaches are deemed to fail, following the argument of Schneider (2011, 13–14). Firstly, whatever threshold is set, this creates an analytical trap as it is simply impossible to find non-consolidated old democracy or consolidated young democracy, which “clashes with common sense and scholarly insights” (Schneider 2011, 13). Secondly, such an approach dichotomizes the operationalization of consolidation – democracy is either fully consolidated or unconsolidated and degrees are impossible to be captured. If CoD is conceptualized through uncertainty as argued before (Schedler 2001b), then the dichotomization is inherently wrong, as uncertainty is continuous. Thirdly, discussing the endpoint explicitly suggests that there is some final stage of democratic consolidation. As it will be argued, there is no such final stage.

Can CoD reach a final point? In the words of Di Palma (1992, 141–42): “when can democrats relax”? Although many competing accounts exist (for an earlier discussion of Linz, Karl, and Schmitter on the topic, see Power and Powers 1988), the most persuasive answer to this question is that there is no “safe haven of regime consolidation” (Schmitter and Santiso 1998, 70). To support this view, three arguments are given – two theoretical and one empirical. Firstly, as Schedler (1998a) extensively argues because the study of democratic consolidation is forward-looking, we need to adopt the language of *probability*. As we always speak about democratic survival in a future time horizon, we need to be aware of the uncertain future causal factors that are probabilistic. Therefore, “the persistence nor the demise of a political regime can ever be a matter of absolute certainty” (Schedler 1998a, 8). Secondly, understanding the consolidation of democracy as a never-ending process has an advantage in avoiding teleology, which is, as was argued before, inherently present in the CoD literature (Schedler 1998b, 95). By understanding CoD as an unachievable ideal type, it is impossible to sustain a teleological view as the *telos* (end goal) is unattainable.

Thirdly, many countries considered in the 2000s as consolidated backslid significantly. There can be three reasons behind this. The first one is that the measures (Schneider and Schmitter 2004, 68) of democratic consolidation and general knowledge about the cases of Poland and Hungary were incorrect and they were considered consolidated, although they were not. This point is implicitly made by Dawson (2018), who suggests that democracies should be measured ethnographically on a basis of day-to-day practices. The argument is that such measures can be significantly more precise compared to the abstract and highly aggregated ones. This is very likely not the case – even with the knowledge about the current backsliding, it is difficult to say what exactly could be changed in the 2000s measures of consolidation to better reflect the incoming backsliding. Even though Dawson (2018) criticized existing measures extensively, his careful ethnographic analysis (fieldwork was done in 2011-2012) was unable to foresee the upcoming backsliding in Serbia after 2012.

The second explanation may be that there was some crucial idiosyncratic event that has turned the tide of history and started the backsliding. Although we can imagine such events in other contexts (for example, civil war or geopolitical change), it is difficult to identify such an event in the case of Poland and Hungary. The third and much more likely explanation of the backsliding and a more general conclusion is that even with relatively high levels of CoD, the absolute democratic persistence is never secured. This also supports a view that there is no final point of CoD and in this sense, democrats cannot ever relax.

2.1.3 Crises and reequilibrations

The CoD literature repeatedly analyzes potentially positive long-term effects of events that are usually understood to be harming democracy. There are two key concepts, namely crises (Schedler 2001a, 73–74, 2001b, 16–17) and reequilibrations (Linz 1978, 87–98).

Schedler (2001a, 73) suggests that crises in democracies have three possible outcomes, two of which are negative. Firstly, a crisis leads to a total breakdown of democracy and the emergence of

the authoritarian or hybrid regime. Secondly, a crisis makes a democracy slip into a debilitating pattern of recurrent crises under which the democracy is increasingly fragile. Thirdly, a crisis leads to paradoxically positive outcomes. Schedler (2001a, 73) speaks about the possibility that “democratic actors manage to weather the crisis successfully and establish a lasting precedent of democratic persistence”. He stresses that such an outcome is infrequent, although it should not be ruled out. Schedler’s analysis of such outcomes is somewhat vague, but he stresses the role of precedents. If the crisis is resolved, it shows the anti-democratic actors that backsliding is costly and condemned to failure through projecting past experience into the future (Schedler 2001a, 74). Schedler (2001a, 74) gives an example of the 1981 coup in Spain, which failed after King Juan Carlos sided with the pro-democratic forces (Valenzuela 1992, 71).

Under the label of reequilibration, Linz (1978, 91–92) speaks about restorations and reinstaurations of democracies. These terms denote “founding a new democracy and consolidating it after a relatively short period of nondemocratic rule” (Linz 1978, 91). Linz (1978, 91) argues that the actors who lived through the period of shocks or crises are likely to have a better understanding of the processes which led to the downfall of democracy, which can lead to a higher degree of democratic consolidation. The theories of Schedler (2001a, 74) and Linz (1978, 91–92) are closely connected to the theory of democratic inoculation and their findings are applied in the thesis. In particular, Schedler’s (2001a, 74) idea of projecting past experience into the future is applied in discussing the first causal process of democratic inoculation (awareness of the threats to democracy). Linz’s (1978, 91–92) underlying logic that reequilibrations happen through the learning of the actors is used later in the thesis to operationalize the causal processes of democratic inoculation. Nevertheless, none of these concepts is suitable to be used instead of the concept of democratic inoculation. This is a point that is extensively argued in sub-section 2.2.4.

This subchapter on the CoD literature identified the analytical core of the concept in terms of uncertainty. The second part argued that there is no endpoint of CoD, therefore, CoD findings

are also applicable to reportedly consolidated regimes in Central Europe. Finally, the subchapter's third part discussed the concepts of crises and reequilibrations that are directly linked to democratic inoculation and these connections are further elaborated in sub-section 2.2.4.

2.2 Democratic backsliding

The following sub-sections discuss the literature on democratic backsliding. It is analyzed why are CoD and democratic backsliding bodies of literature rather distinct and why many current authors try to distance themselves from consolidationism, even if it offers some important insights. The second sub-section of this subchapter defines democratic backsliding. The third sub-section gives criticism on an aspect of democratic backsliding literature called backsliding paradigm. The subchapter is concluded with an extensive discussion of the concept of democratic inoculation.

2.2.1 Abandoning consolidationism?

A recent body of literature on democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018; Hanley and Vachudova 2018; Lindberg 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019) does not stem from the consolidation and transitological studies of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather it is a reaction to a regional trend of backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe and is arguably based on the regional expertise and area studies literature. Although the topics that CoD and democratic backsliding literature study overlap, their conceptual tools and scopes differ substantively.

The key reason for a degree of disregard of democratic consolidation literature by the democratic backsliding literature is that it considered currently backsliding countries as consolidated and did not predict the current wave of backsliding. For example, Schneider and Schmitter (2004) gave both Hungary and Poland democratic consolidation score 11 out of 12 possible as soon as in 1998 – which shows a very high level of democratic consolidation (higher than, for example, Spain in 1998). Linz and Stepan (1996, 292, 316) pronounced Hungary and Poland consolidated and Ekiert and Kubik (1998, 579–80) argued that they “passed by the point of no return”, making a return to authoritarianism unthinkable. Schneider in the late 2000s (2011, 1) argued that “few people believe

that democracy in Central and Eastern Europe will go away in the foreseeable future”. Ten years later, the prospects look much worse.

The measurements could easily lead to a conclusion that the democratic consolidations were fully finished long before the start of democratic backsliding in these countries. Therefore, the democratic backsliding phenomenon can be considered distinct from the question of democratic consolidation. This view was pronounced by Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley (2018, 244), who argued that “there is also widespread agreement that these difficulties [democratic backsliding] go beyond the problems of poor democratic quality usually understood as a side-effects of transition politics.” This is another reason, why it is essential to adopt Schedler’s (1998a) broader probabilistic view of CoD (as discussed in sub-section 2.1.1), which suggests that democratic consolidation is reversible and there is no endpoint of it. This way, democratic backsliding can be analyzed in the context of the CoD scholarship and these two bodies of literature merged.

2.2.2 Definition of democratic backsliding

Bermeo (2016) identified several types of democratic backsliding – classic coup d’état, executive coup (self-coup of the freely elected chief executives), election-day vote fraud, promissory coups (military coup to “protect” democracy), executive aggrandizement, and manipulation of elections strategically. In this sense, democratic backsliding is a process of autocratization of a democratic regime. However, Bermeo (2016) and other authors (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019) acknowledge that some forms of democratic backsliding are very rare in the post-Cold War era. The first three mentioned forms of democratic backsliding were much more common in the Second Wave of Autocratization during the Cold War. Breakdowns in the current Third Wave of Autocratization are more often incremental – quick and dramatic breakdowns happen less often. Therefore, the thesis analyzes democratic backsliding in the forms of executive aggrandizement and strategic manipulation of elections.

Various scholars use Central and Eastern Europe as a source of paradigmatic examples of backsliding. It is suggested that the “liberal-democratic project in these polities has been either stalled, diverted or reversed” (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 166). Ivan Krastev (2018, 51) describes emerging illiberal consensus across Eastern Europe. Apart from Hungary and Poland as the most pronounced examples, backsliding is said to happen also in the Czech Republic (Hanley and Vachudova 2018), Serbia, Slovakia, and Lithuania (Lindberg 2018).

2.2.3 Backsliding paradigm

In the recent period, some academics (Bakke and Sitter 2020; Cianetti and Hanley 2021) started to criticize an aspect of democratic backsliding that sees all CEE countries through the lenses of the most significant backsliders (Hungary and Poland) and thus assumes that all of these countries undergo a process of democratic backsliding. Mirroring Thomas Carothers’ (2002) transition paradigm, Cianetti and Hanley (2021, 70) call this aspect a backsliding paradigm as it tends to consider all CEE countries as backsliding and tries to fit the Hungarian and Polish model to all cases, even in situations when it has little to none analytical use. An illustrative example can be found in the article by Krastev (2018) that speaks about illiberal turn in CEE creating democratic backsliding. He suggests that apart from Hungary and Poland this turn is present in Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Romania. Nevertheless, he does not give any example of illiberal policies in any of these countries, and in the analytical part of his essay repeatedly discusses only Hungary and Poland. Understandably, this does not mean that the other three countries do not backslide, but it shows a fallacy as the concept is assumed to apply to a given case based on the observations from other cases. Whereas Cianetti and Hanley (2021) criticize the backsliding paradigm rather in theoretical and analytical terms, this thesis empirically shows that the paradigm does not apply to the case of Slovakia. To move beyond simple empirical testing of the backsliding paradigm (does it apply to Slovakia, or not?), the thesis also discusses how the cases of Slovakia and Serbia fit into a concept of democratic inoculation and democratic persistence.

2.2.4 Democratic inoculation

Some Central European democracies may be more persistent than others. However, the topic of democratic persistence is not very pronounced in the context of the democratic backsliding scholarship in CEE.

A notable exception is Bustikova and Guasti (2017, 167), who argue that Slovak experience with democratic backsliding in the form of the Vladimír Mečiar's regime in the 1990s inoculated Slovakia from the future illiberal turn. According to them, this is a result of negative economic consequences and the threat of being "left behind" in the integration processes with the West as a result of illiberalism (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167). Bakke and Sitter (2020, 12) also argue that Slovak politics is "inoculated" by the Mečiar experience because parties and voters respond quickly to punish potential backsliders. A similar view was pronounced by Slovak academic Szomolányi (1999, 82–117), only a year after Mečiar's downfall. Finally, Hungarian writer and academic Miklos Haraszti (Terenzani 2019) spoke about the "immunisation of democracy" in the Slovak context: "It is about that first victory over populism. [...] When the people realize and experience that they can win over anti-democratic forces on their own, without help from outside, then it fortifies their immune reactions." Apart from these authors, no literature explicitly discusses democratic inoculation.

There are two important commonalities across the set of these views that is referred to as the theory of democratic inoculation. Firstly, democratic inoculation can be created only by a recent hybrid regime. Therefore, the communist rule in CEE from before the late 1980s do not create democratic. This is because these regimes were created by geopolitical shifts after the Second World War and thus, the emergence of communist rule differs significantly from the democratic backsliding that endangers democracies in the 21st century. Secondly, democratic inoculation is based on public reactions and perceptions, rather than some specific institutional features of the political system (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Szomolányi 1999, 82–117). This has important

ramifications on the question of how democratic inoculation increases democratic persistence (see sub-section 2.3.2) and how it can be traced (see subchapter 3.1).

In this thesis, democratic inoculation is defined as a gradual process of increasing public comprehension that democratic backsliding is a possible outcome of the regular democratic process and that such outcome is generally not desirable. This process may emerge because of a preceding period of a hybrid regime. Many different terms from medicine can be used for the same analytical term (vaccination, immunization, inoculation). This thesis opts for the last one as it was already repeatedly used in the same context in the academic literature (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167). It is also intuitively clear, which fulfills the resonance criterion of conceptualization (Gerring 2012, 117–19). On the other hand, this term may face problems with domain criterion (Gerring 2012, 119–21) as it comes from a different language community (medicine) and may bring with it some unwelcomed connotations. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be available any alternative outside of the area of medicine without inventing ungrounded neologisms and thus the thesis accepts the term inoculation.

Here it is also important to clarify why the term of *democratic inoculation* is used instead of some of the previously discussed terms such as *crises* and *reequilibrations* (for an overview see sub-section 2.1.3). The reason is that these concepts do not fit the analytical core of democratic inoculation. In the case of crises, the positive outcome is considered as an infrequent exception (Schedler 2001a, 74), whereas democratic inoculation is by definition a positive phenomenon for democratic persistence. Additionally, crises are understood to be short-time phenomena, such as coup attempts or threats of violence (Schedler 2001a, 74). Therefore, Schedler's definition of crisis would not encompass the existence of a hybrid regime and consequent re-democratization, which is a defining factor of democratic inoculation.

Speaking about reequilibrations, similarly to democratic inoculation these are understood to be preserving or increasing democratic persistence and include cases of democracies backsliding, after

which the undemocratic regime stays in power for years (Linz 1978, 87). However, the concepts of reequilibration and democratic inoculation differ in two crucial points. The first one is the elite perspective of the argument of Linz (1978, 87–97). He is heavily preoccupied with elites and the party leadership and the argument is based on the expectation that the politicians who lived through the downfall of democracy have more experience in the democratic process and make better parliamentarians (Linz 1978, 91). By contrast, the scholarship on democratic inoculation suggests that the process is driven not by the elites, but by the public and the voters (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167; Szomolányi 1999, 82–112). Secondly, Linz (1978, 91) argued that the reequilibrations are useful to consolidate democracy, not democratic persistence. Linz (1978, 91) understands consolidation in narrow terms, with an end-state. Such understanding goes in contradiction with the definition of consolidation of democracy as not having an end-state, as was argued in sub-section 2.1.2. These two paragraphs prove the unsuitability of alternative concepts, therefore, using a somewhat novel concept of democratic inoculation is considered justified.

Serbia in the 2000s seems like an ideal case for democratic inoculation. Similarly to Slovakia, it was an illiberal, hybrid regime in the 1990s that broke down around 2000. Haraszti (Terenzani 2019) stresses the role of transition from the hybrid regime as a crucial condition for the creation of democratic inoculation as people must experience their victory over an illiberal regime. In this sense, the Serbian transition from the hybrid regime should facilitate the creation of democratic inoculation even better than the Slovak transition. This is because apart from the electoral victory of the democratic opposition, the Serbian transition was accompanied by mass public protests, therefore, the public inclusion into the transition was even more extensive than in the case of Slovakia. Regardless of all these facts, the democratic inoculation was not successful in Serbia, as its regime backslid significantly after 2012 (Pavlović 2020). In this sense, Serbia represents a failed most-likely case, as the empirical outcome differs from theoretical expectations. Such case selection is useful to identify omitted scope conditions and refine the theory (Rohlfing 2012, 100).

2.3 Consolidation of democracy and democratic backsliding – synthesis

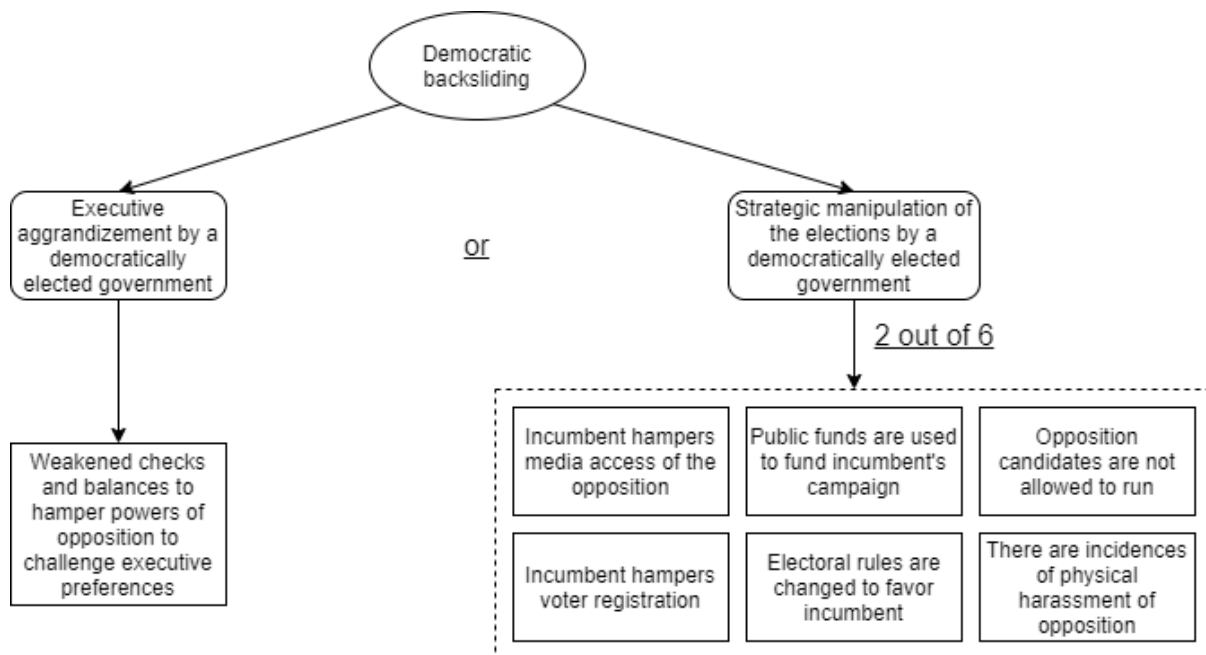
This subchapter aims to synthesize two discussed bodies of literature and introduce the concept of democratic persistence.

2.3.1 Democratic backsliding and the factors preventing it

The first of the diverging points of CoD and democratic backsliding literature is the question of democratic collapse. As Schedler (1998b, 97) argued, we need to be aware that there are different ways of how democracies collapse. In O'Donnell's (1992) abstract terms, these are “rapid deaths” and “slow deaths”. The first includes coups and military occupation, the second term equals to slow decay of democratic institutions. Much of the CoD literature is preoccupied with the first type because of its preoccupation with South America and the specific timeframe. However, as was already argued in the previous subchapter, Bermeo (2016) points out that slow deaths are much more common in the post-Cold War period and these are a key preoccupation of the democratic backsliding literature. Today, only amateurs steal elections on election day. This, to some extent, divergent analytical preoccupation with the forms of democratic breakdown is notable but far from fatal. Democratic consolidation as such prevents both rapid and slow deaths and, thus, there is no reason why CoD literature applicability cannot extend to democratic backsliding in the form of slow deaths.

Figure 1 offers the conceptualization of democratic backsliding used in this thesis (Bermeo 2016). The underlying logic of the conceptualization is that the backsliding as a background concept is a result of two different systematized concepts, namely executive aggrandizement, or manipulation of the elections. Executive aggrandizement is a process of weakening checks and balances to limit opposition powers to challenge executive preferences. Strategic manipulation is a more complex systematized concept, operationalized as a family resemblance concept, where any two out of six indicators are sufficient to constitute strategic manipulation.

Figure 1. Conceptualization of democratic backsliding (partly based on Bermeo 2016).



One of the main reasons to go beyond democratic backsliding literature and use the CoD literature is its extensive preoccupation with factors preserving democracies that is quite absent in the literature on democratic backsliding. In a sense, these two bodies of literature look at the same coin from different sides. Democratic consolidation literature discusses factors preserving democracies, the literature on democratic backsliding discusses mechanisms of how the democracies break down. Przeworski et al. (1996) list six factors consolidating democracy that may be divided on economic (affluence, economic performance, inequality) and political (international climate, institutions, political learning). For this thesis, the effect of political learning is crucial.

Przeworski et al. (1996) discuss the effect of previous democratic experience, it is argued that the experience of a country with democracy in the past has a positive effect on the development of the democratic institutions and thus helps consolidation. Nevertheless, he argues that “political learning [...] cuts both ways” (Przeworski et al. 1996, 43). In the same way as democrats have experience with democracy, anti-democratic forces have experience with a successful overthrow

of democracy, which could endanger democratic consolidation. However, democratic backsliding scholarship (Bakke and Sitter 2020, 12; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167) argues that such an experience can cut three ways. Apart from the two aforementioned effects, there is a third effect – the public has “seen darker days already” (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167) and thus may be better equipped to resist democratic backsliding, if it is emerging. This is a distinct effect from the first one which Przeworski et al. (1996) discuss – it is not about building democratic institutions by the politicians, but rather a broader phenomenon connected to the broader public, who can notice early signs of democratic backsliding and resist it. It needs to be noted that this effect is more probable in the cases of “slow deaths” than in cases of “sudden deaths” when the timespan for recognizing democratic backsliding is much more limited.

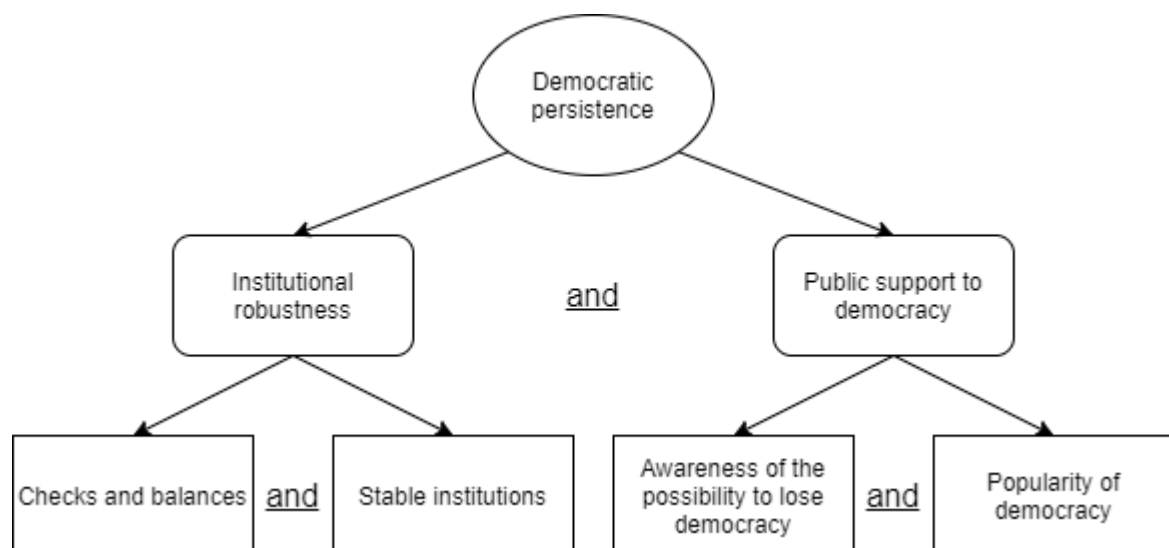
2.3.2 Democratic persistence

On a more general level, any of the attributes leading to increased democratic consolidation and thus decreased chance of democratic backsliding build attributes variously called as “democratic stability, stabilization, survival, guarantee, continuity, maintenance, permanence, or persistence” (Schedler 1998a, 5). This is a cluster of different terms denoting the same analytical concept. More recent scholarship and reports by NGOs (Shattuck, Watson, and McDole 2018; Sisk 2017, 36–67), journalists (Marcus 2018), and scholars (Plattner 2010, 82) prefer the term democratic resilience. Which term to choose? Schneider (2011, 10) argued persuasively that a popular term of stability denotes a static notion of the democratic system. In reality, a democratic system, if expected to persist, must be a dynamic system, ready to change and adapt in the world of changing conditions (Schmitter and Guilhot 2000, 139, as cited in Schneider 2011, 11). This criticism is partly applicable also to the term of democratic resilience. Resilience is considered as a synonym of elasticity and flexibility and is defined as an ability to return to the original shape (Cambridge Dictionary 2021), which does not necessarily happen with the democratic system. Rather, democracy can change its institutional conditions and survive the challenge, *without* a need to return to the original position. This thesis thus adopts the term of democratic persistence. It is defined as the ability of democracy

to prevent, cope with and survive complex challenges and crises that present stress or pressure and can lead to the breakdown of democracy (Sisk 2017, 37).

Figure 2 outlines the conceptualization of democratic persistence used in this thesis. The background concept of democratic persistence consists of two systematized concepts – institutional robustness *and* public support to democracy. Institutional robustness consists of a strong system of checks and balances and stable institutions. Public support for democracy refers to the voters’ opinions about the democratic system and is reflected in the political choices and voters’ behavior. It is operationalized by two indicators – awareness of the possibility to lose democracy and the popularity of democracy. The first one follows the argument of Gill (1998, 167), who argued that “an essential condition of making democracy secure is never to take it for granted”. Democratic persistence is thus partly an outcome of the pro-democratic actors’ vigilance and caution. The popularity of democracy refers to public opinion about the democratic system as such and, indirectly, about the preference of the public for an illiberal, hybrid, or some other form of authoritarian rule.

Figure 2. Conceptualization of democratic persistence.



In this context, democratic inoculation influences only one of the systematized concepts that creates democratic persistence – public support for democracy. This is based on the already

discussed literature on democratic inoculation (see sub-section 2.2.4) that traced democratic inoculation through public action and opinions. Similarly, there was no mention of institutional (or constitutional) changes adopted in states with democratic inoculation. This has important practical implications as the processes of democratic inoculation will be traced only on the level of the systematized concept of the public support for democracy.

2.4 Case-oriented literature

Apart from the topics of democratic backsliding and the consolidation of democracy, it is essential to look at the case-specific literature of Slovakia and Serbia. The working hypothesis of this thesis is that Slovakia underwent the process of democratic inoculation, but this inoculation did not work in the case of Serbia. It is therefore essential to analyze why was this the case. As the process of democratic inoculation is causally linked with the period of the hybrid regime, it is expected that the mode of transition away from the hybrid regimes may have had a causal impact on the democratic inoculation. Based on the desk research, two connected key areas of difference between Slovak and Serbia transitions were identified: polarization and the level of reform.

2.4.1 Polarization

The dominance of PM Mečiar in Slovak politics in the 1990s led to the emergence of political cleavage based on stance towards his political methods and the conflict over the character of the regime itself. Hloušek and Kopeček (2008) call this Mečiarist/anti-Mečiarist cleavage. In the 1990s, Mečiarism was characterized by preferring an illiberal hybrid regime that championed “specific” Slovak way of economic transformation (slow reforms with building domestic oligarchy with ties to the incumbent) and misuse of the state institutions to harass and suppress the opposition. The anti-Mečiarist political spectrum consisted of a very heterogeneous group of anti-communist, right centrist, and post-communist parties, held together primarily by the rejection of Mečiar’s politics (Hloušek and Kopeček 2008, 537).

This cleavage was a highly polarizing factor in the late 1990s to an extent that “any attempt to stand aloof from this principal conflict and reject the associated behavior patterns was a ticket to political obscurity” (Učeň 2004, 46). Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*, HZDS) was victorious in the 1998 elections, but it was forced to stay in the opposition as it could not find coalition partners because of the high polarization. The ruling anti-Mečiarist coalition was very heterogenous with numerous conflicts, but the fear of the HZDS coming back to power was its main “binding agent” enabling it to remain in power until the elections of 2002 (Hloušek and Kopeček 2008, 538).

The Mečiarist cleavage weakened somewhat by then, with the emergence of new parties pursuing “third-way” between Mečiarist and anti-Mečiarist camp (Učeň 2004). Additionally, Mečiar himself adopted a more pro-Western stance, moving away from its previous nationalist ally Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*, SNS). Still, even after the 2002 elections, the victorious HZDS was considered as an unacceptable party by most parties and thus remained in the opposition (Hloušek and Kopeček 2008, 540).

Mečiarist legacy created a strong degree of polarization that paradoxically helped the anti-Mečiar coalition to survive four years of a very heterogenous government and then to remain in power for another four years. These eight years led to the EU and NATO accession, strengthened Slovak institutions, and consolidated Slovak democracy to an extent that the left-nationalist and illiberal coalition of Smer-SD, HZDS, and SNS between 2006 and 2010 did not reverse its democratic path. Mečiarist cleavage was certainly not the only one present in Slovak politics, but other cleavages (economic, urban-rural, international orientation) to a significant extent overlapped with it (Hloušek and Kopeček 2008, 539).

The significant polarization between the old regime and the reformers did not happen in Serbia after Slobodan Milošević. Oppositional parties lacked an alternative political program and many of them supported the aggressive foreign policy of Milošević back in the 1990s (Dolenec 2013,

168). After the downfall of Milošević in 2000, similarly to Slovakia, a very broad anti-Milošević coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*, DOS) consisting of almost two dozen parties formed the government. Vojislav Koštunica, the chairman of the Democratic Party of Serbia (*Demokratska stranka Srbije*, DSS), became the president and Zoran Đinđić, the chairman of the Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*, DS),¹ became the PM. The coalition was soon marred by disagreements and many of them were connected to Milošević's legacy. Đinđić and Koštunica disagreed about the preservation of the legal procedures of the past regimes, the necessity to fully reorganize the security apparatus, and the extradition of Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Hague - ICTY (Dolenec 2013, 179; Kroeger 2001). Some authors argue that Koštunica and his DSS intended to preserve some elements of the Milošević regime (Serbia's Transition: Reforms under siege 2001). In Slovakia, the situation was reverse – the idea of how to deal with the past regime was the most unifying factor in the post-Mečiar coalition.

Bochsler (2010, 103–4) identified four dimensions of party conflicts in post-2000 Serbia - regime conflict, nationalist-authoritarian dimension, foreign policy dimension, and economic conflict. Only the first one is connected to Milošević's legacy. This partly explains why the post-2000 government of the DOS coalition “was marred by rivalries and disputes that hindered Serbia's reform process” (Dolenec 2013, 179). PM Đinđić was assassinated in 2003, which caused the dissolution of the DOS coalition. The assassination broke the resolve in Serbia for fast and far-reaching reform and the new parliamentary elections took place in 2003. Koštunica's DPS created a minority government without the DP, with the tacit support of the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*, SPS), still officially led by Milošević. This clearly shows that the division between pro-Milošević and anti-Milošević parties was already in 2003 only skin deep (Pešić 2007, as cited in Dolenec 2013, 182).

¹ These parties were the two most popular parties within the DOS coalition.

2.4.2 Reforms

The modes of transition from hybrid regimes in Slovakia and Serbia differed significantly. In Slovakia, the post-1998 coalition amended the original constitution, strengthened checks and balances, and introduced a direct election of the president. The extensive adoption of the *acquis communautaire* strengthened prospects of Slovak membership in the EU. Szomolányi (2004, 175) argues that the stabilization of democracy came primarily from the fact that the post-1998 government managed to stay in power for whole four years. This boosted the electoral prospects of Dzurinda's Slovak Democratic Coalition (*Slovenská demokratická koalícia*, SDK), which managed to lead the government also after 2002.

Notably, Slovakia did not face the need to introduce as far-reaching reforms as Serbia, at least in the question of security services. In this area, the most important was the reform of the secret service SIS that was used by Mečiar's government to kidnap the president's son and harass the opposition and media. Only a few days after taking the office, Dzurinda's government replaced the director of the SIS. The new director reportedly replaced all senior employees of the institution (Tódová and Žemlová 2003).

The reforms in Serbia were much more limited. There seem to be a broad scholarly agreement (Bieber 2018; Pavlović 2020) that the reformist government failed to break with the past regime of Milošević, which facilitated the return of competitive authoritarianism in the 2010s. Dolenec (2013, 177) points out that the roots of this failure can be found in Milošević's downfall – protesters co-opted the security services what enabled a peaceful transfer of power, but it compromised further democratic reforms (Subotić 2010). Choosing Koštunica as a president was generally considered a compromise choice that was agreed upon by both the democratic opposition and the old regime. Consequently, Koštunica protected the elements of the old regimes in the security apparatus and obstructed Đinđić's reforms (Dolenec 2013, 177). This led to the preservation of authoritarian enclaves in the security service and elsewhere.

The clearest articulation of the existence of the enclaves and their detrimental impact on democratic consolidation is the assassination of reformist PM Zoran Đinđić in 2003. Dolenec (2013, 189–96) argues that the high number of public officials that were dismissed due to their connection with Đinđić's assassination proves the high embeddedness of the old regime in the state apparatus. As was argued before, the assassination stalled the reform process in Serbia (Dolenec 2013, 181).

The differences in the mode of transition from hybrid regimes in Slovakia and Serbia are significant. Political methods of Mečiar caused an extensive polarization on the political spectrum that stopped Mečiar from returning to power and hold the incoherent democratic coalition together. This allowed to adopt far-reaching reforms and stopped the possible emergence of authoritarian enclaves. Serbian political landscape was divided much more than just by Milošević/anti-Milošević orientation. Numerous other issues created discord among the post-Milošević coalition that was unable to agree upon reforms. Unlike Mečiar, Milošević was removed only after co-optation of the part of the security forces. This stalled the reforms and made president Koštunica cooperative with the old regime. The lack of reforms and objectively much higher embeddedness of Milošević's old regime in the state caused the emergence of authoritarian enclaves. One of them – the untransparent security apparatus and its connection with the criminal underground led to the assassination of PM Đinđić and closed the window of opportunity for far-reaching reforms.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review showed that there are two significant bodies of literature on which this thesis can build. Firstly, it is the literature on consolidation of democracy, notable for its discussion of factors supporting democratic persistence and the effects of crises and reequilibrations on democracies. Secondly, it is literature on democratic backsliding, which discusses causes of

democratic breakdown and provides region-specific knowledge on democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe, and introduces the concept of democratic inoculation.

The literature review aimed to synthesize both bodies of literature, find the contradictions between the two, and identify what the gaps are in the literature. It was discovered that although the democratic backsliding literature avoids the scholarship on democratic consolidation, these two can be still used together after overcoming issues connected to the different timeframes and geographical areas they study. The most significant gap found in the literature was the lack of discussion about democratic inoculation. The CoD scholarship discusses the crises and reequilibrations at some length and acknowledges that they may have also positive effects on democratic persistence. Nevertheless, these concepts cannot be used instead of democratic inoculation due to their different conceptualization and analytical scope. On the other hand, the democratic inoculation theory in the literature on democratic backsliding is undertheorized, with little discussion of the processes driving it. In this sense, this thesis aims to fill in this gap by applying both bodies of literature on the cases of Slovakia and Serbia and better understand the phenomenon of democratic inoculation by theory-building process tracing to find generalizable causal mechanisms.

Finally, the review of case-oriented literature showed that there are several differences between post-Mečiar Slovakia and post-Milošević Serbia. Mečiar's legacy had a higher influence on the Slovak democracy for years to come in the form of polarized politics that enabled far-reaching reforms. On the other hand, Milošević's legacy was soon eclipsed by other party divisions and cleavages. Nevertheless, Milošević's state apparatus survived the transition and retarded further democratization of the country. Taking this into account, it can be expected that the reason why democratic inoculation did not work in Serbia can be found in the transition from Milošević's rule.

3 Data and analysis

To restate, the key concepts of this thesis are:

- democratic backsliding, defined as a gradual process of the deconsolidation of democracy decreasing the chances of its survival,
- democratic persistence, defined as an ability of democracy to prevent, cope with and survive complex challenges and crises that present stress or pressure and can lead to the breakdown of democracy,
- democratic inoculation, defined as a gradual process of increasing public comprehension that democratic backsliding is a possible outcome of the regular democratic process and that such outcome is generally not desirable. This process may emerge because of a preceding period of a hybrid regime.

The hypothesized causal mechanism of democratic inoculation is that the experience with an undemocratic regime leads to learning among the public, which increases the democratic persistence of a polity. The processes of this democratic inoculation are discussed in subchapter 3.1. Without a doubt, democratic inoculation is only one of many factors driving democratic persistence (Przeworski et al. 1996), but the analytical scope of the thesis focuses only on the processes of democratic inoculation that increase democratic persistence.

Following the distinction of different types of process tracing as defined by Beach and Pedersen (2013, 16–18), this thesis uses theory-building process-tracing. Because the literature does not contain a ready theory of democratic inoculation that can be applied, it is not possible to simply test a theory based on the case study (theory-testing process-tracing). Beach and Pedersen (2013, 16) argue that in the theory-building process-tracing, “empirical material is used to build a hypothesized theory, inferring first that what is found reflects the observable implications of an underlying causal mechanism. A second leap is then made by inferring from these observable implications that they reflected an underlying causal mechanism.” Therefore, this approach starts

with empirical evidence, which is then built into a broader hypothesized theory. Importantly, such an approach aims to find a *generalizable* causal mechanism, which works in a broader population of cases. As the second case, Serbia was chosen because it represents a failed most-likely case, as the empirical outcome differs from theoretical expectations (see sub-section 2.2.4). Such case selection is useful to identify omitted scope conditions and through this refine the theory (Rohlfing 2012, 100). This case is also used as a benchmark for comparison of the results of the empirical part with Slovakia.

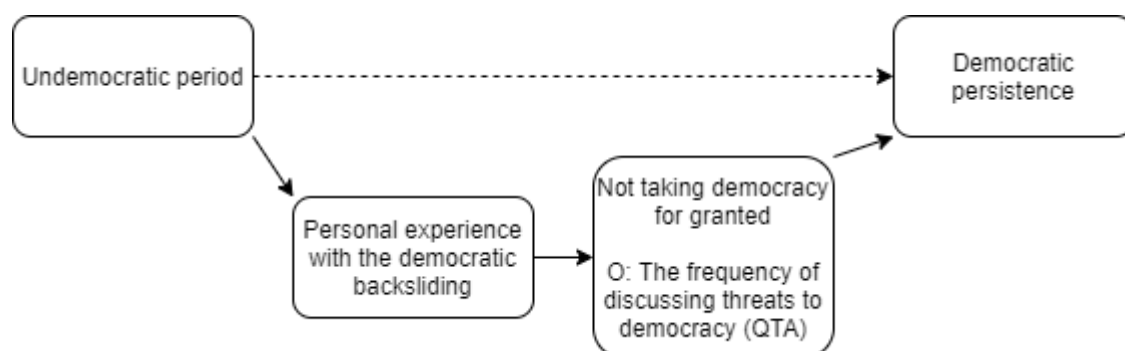
3.1 Process-tracing, data, and operationalization

The following sub-sections outline three processes driving democratic inoculation and discuss the operationalization of individual steps. Each of the processes uses Coleman's (1990) model of causal inference, connecting the macro-level phenomena with a micro-level causal analysis.

3.1.1 Awareness of the threats to democracy

The first process suggests that the personal experience with the democratic backsliding in a country leads the public to not take democracy for granted. The operationalization is based on the frequency of discussing threats to democracy in a given country. As a result, this increased frequency leads to more democratic persistence as it is more likely that the public would identify early signs of democratic backsliding, as it was argued in the sub-section 2.3.2. This logic closely follows Gill (1998, 167), who argued that “an essential condition of making democracy secure is never to take it for granted”. The process is summed in figure 3.

Figure 3. The first process of creating democratic inoculation.



Quantitative text analysis (QTA) is used to quantify the number of occasions in which threats to the democracy of the given country were discussed in the local newspapers. The corpus consists of the news articles of popular dailies in Slovakia and Serbia and is further explained in subchapter 3.2. It can be argued that using the corpus based on newspapers may be problematic as the outcome of democratic persistence is assumed to be driven by the public, not the journalistic elites. Nevertheless, the thesis works with the assumption that the journalistic discourse partly reflects and partly forms public opinion. Therefore, using journalistic discourse is a suitable proxy to study public opinion. This is a standard assumption accepted by most of the previous scholarship studying sentiment analysis of political communication (for an overview, see Haselmayer and Jenny 2017).

It is expected that the discussions of threats to democracy are more common in Slovak than in Serbian periodicals due to the presence of democratic inoculation. If this is the case, it proves that there is a higher level of vigilance among the Slovak public, leading to a higher persistence of democracy.

H1: The threats to domestic democracy were more often discussed in Slovakia than in Serbia.

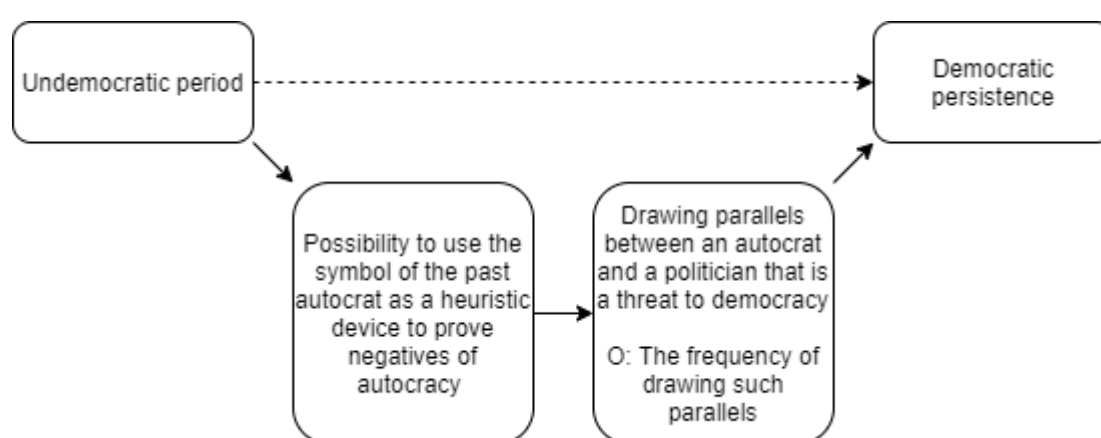
Hypothesis 1 is counterintuitive particularly from the perspective of today, as the newspaper corpus covers the period before 2012 and the Serbian democracy backslid after 2012. It suggests that although Serbian democracy was in greater danger of backsliding (as we can argue *ex post facto*), these threats were not identified by the Serbian journalists. Instead, threats to domestic democracy were more often discussed in Slovak media. This suggests a degree of journalistic alarmism, which can make democracy more persistent.

3.1.2 Symbolism and parallels

Secondly, the process of the creation of symbolism and parallels is traced. For the voters, these represent a sort of heuristic device. Durkheim defined symbols as “carriers and repositories of collective values and meanings, and, such central in motivating, legitimating, and focusing human

action” (Durkheim, 1912/2001, as cited in Olesen 2015, 2). Using the heuristic device of the past experience with a hybrid regime is a powerful tool to name-and-shame an emerging autocrat. Creating a cognitive connection between the past autocrat and emerging autocrat is not just a form of denouncement. It is also a tool to effectively transmit a mental image of the negative implications that may come true, should the democracy backslide *again* through the actions of the emerging autocrat (see figure 4).

Figure 4. The second process of creating democratic inoculation.



To operationalize the frequency of drawing such parallels, the QTA is used to find out how often the figures of Robert Fico and Aleksandar Vučić are compared to Vladimír Mečiar and Slobodan Milošević, respectively. Using the data from the media may be problematic in this context. Drawing parallels between Vučić and Milošević is a much more political statement and a direct critique of Vučić than, for example, discussing threats to democracy. Therefore, it is expected that expressing such views in the media is under the bigger influence of censorship and self-censorship. This is particularly true in Serbia, which currently ranks 93rd in the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2021). Because of this concern, only the period before May 2012 (the beginning of the backsliding after presidential and parliamentary elections, connected with decreasing media freedom) is covered in the corpus.

Fico had a much weaker connection with Mečiar than Vučić had with Milošević during the hybrid regime periods. Fico was a vocal opponent of Mečiar in the 1990s and was an MP of the anti-Mečiar coalition after 1998. After 2006, Mečiar was in Fico's government, but he was only a junior coalition partner and there was no democratic backsliding similar to the 1990s. On the other hand, Vučić was a minister of information in Milošević's government during the period of the hybrid regime in the late 1990s. Empirically speaking, the connections between Vučić and Milošević are stronger than between Fico and Mečiar. Still, it is expected that because of the democratic inoculation, the parallels were drawn much more often between the second pair of politicians.

H2: The parallels were drawn more often between Fico and Mečiar than between Vučić and Milošević.

3.1.3 Popularity of democracy and unpopularity of the autocrat

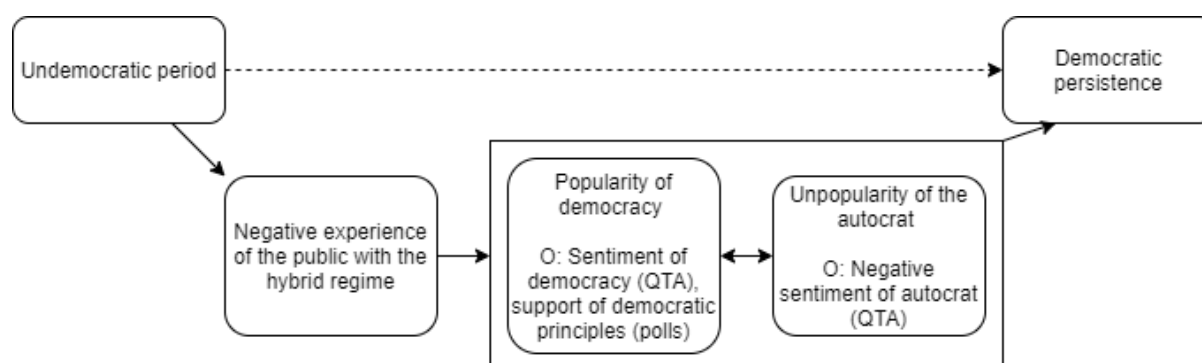
The last process of creating democratic inoculation is driven through a process of negative experience with an undemocratic period, the popularity of democracy, and the unpopularity of the autocrat (the autocrat is understood as a synonym of a leader of a hybrid regime).

The causal chain connects the undemocratic period with the negative experience of the public with this regime. This is a result of numerous inherent problems that the undemocratic period may bring – the economic downturn, organized crime, negative portrayal from abroad, and so on. Both Serbian and Slovak hybrid regimes ended after losing elections with high electoral turnouts, which may serve as evidence of public dissatisfaction with the regime.

The negative experience of the public consequently leads to the popularity of democracy and the unpopularity of the autocrat. These two phenomena are expected to be closely intertwined and create a loop as the unpopularity of the autocrat leads to the popularity of democracy and vice-versa. It is not analytically significant, whether the negative experience of the public leads firstly to one or another. The popularity of democracy and the unpopularity of the autocrat leads to an increase in democratic persistence as the public is more aware of the negatives of the autocracy

from the first-hand experience and the population is thus more likely to disagree with attempts of democratic backsliding. At the same time, the popularity of democracy is one of the indicators of the concept of democratic persistence, as argued in sub-section 2.3.2. The process is summed up in figure 5.

Figure 5. The third process of creating democratic inoculation.



Adopting the same corpus as the analysis of the first mechanism, QTA is used to operationalize and measure the sentiment towards the autocrat and democracy. In addition, comparative public polls are used to study the popularity of democracy.

If the theory of democratic inoculation is correct, the following results are expected:

H3: The popularity of democracy in Slovakia is higher than in Serbia.

H4: Public sentiment towards Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia is more negative than the public sentiment towards Slobodan Milošević in Serbia.

Especially hypothesis 4 is very counterintuitive. Although Mečiar was a negative personality for the democratic development in Slovakia, he did not start any war and was not accused of numerous war crimes, unlike Milošević. Therefore, if hypothesis 4 is confirmed, it will provide very strong evidence for the democratic inoculation theory as the interpretation will suggest that the public vilifies Mečiar because of his low democratic credentials even more than an accused war criminal.

3.2 Corpus

The corpus used for the QTA consists of the newspaper articles scraped from three Slovak and three Serbian dailies. The most important criteria for choosing the newspapers are the political orientation of the newspapers, circulation, and archive availability. In terms of political orientation, the goal is to cover a broad ideological spectrum of newspapers to investigate whether some processes of democratic inoculation are more pronounced based on political orientation. Thus, in both countries, three different types of dailies are covered – one center-left, one center-right, and one tabloid. Although tabloids offer in general little politically relevant content, they were included as this newspaper type is clearly the most popular in both countries (MML - TGI 2008; Rankovic n.d.). In terms of circulation, to cover relevant newspapers with a high impact, popular newspapers with high circulation are preferred.

Based on these criteria, three media outlets from each country were chosen. In the case of Slovakia, the most popular center-left (*Pravda*) center-right (*SME*) dailies from the late 2000s were chosen (MML - TGI 2008; Školkaý n.d.). The situation is more complicated with the tabloid, as the most popular tabloid *Nový čas* does not have an available archive for scrapping. Therefore, the second most popular tabloid *Plus 1 deň* was chosen instead. In the case of Serbia, the most popular center-left and center-right dailies, *Danas* and *Politika* were chosen, respectively.² The circulation of these non-tabloids is lower than in the case of their Slovak counterparts (particularly *Danas*) but sufficient to be relevant (Rankovic n.d.). Regarding the availability, the archives of both are available after 2007.

The most popular Serbian newspaper from the late 2000s *Kurir* was chosen as the tabloid type (Surčulija, Pavlović, and Padejski 2011, 19). The disadvantage is that the archive of *Kurir* covers only a few last months. A similar situation is in all other, less popular Serbian tabloids (*Blic*, *Alo!* or *Srpski telegraf*), therefore, exchanging *Kurir* for another tabloid is not helpful. The corpus uses the

² I am indebted to Miloš Pavković for his help with understanding the media landscape in Serbia.

webpage *vesti.rs*, an automatic news aggregator of all newspaper articles from different media. The articles are without changes published on *Vesti* website (Vesti.rs 2020), including articles of *Kurir* since May 2008. The disadvantage of using this aggregator is the fact that due to copyright, *Vesti* publishes only the beginning of each article. Assuming that the average length of articles did not change since the studied period and comparing the corpus with the current articles³, approximately 60% of *Kurir*'s articles are published on *Vesti*. Although not an ideal outcome, even fragments of the articles can be used for the QTA. Additionally, there is little reason to believe that the parts of the articles available from *Vesti* are biased against the articles as a whole (i.e. beginnings of the articles have different stances towards democracy than the rest). Therefore, the fragments of articles in *Kurir* available on *Vesti* are used, with data adjustment done where necessary (for example, in sub-section 4.1.3).

The choice of the articles chosen for analysis depends on the type of daily. In the case of non-tabloid center-right and center-left dailies, the corpus consists of all the article from the opinion sections. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it is expected that the opinion sections contain more value-judgment statements about the topics of importance than the reporting sections. Also, the opinion section can be understood as a reflection of the political orientation of the daily itself as the choice of the authors already reflects the stances on a range of different topics. The second reason is purely practical, choosing only opinions sections decreases the number of articles in the corpus, which decreases the need for computational power and research resources. Even after making this choice, the number of articles in the corpus exceeds thirty thousand articles.

The choice of the section is less straightforward in the case of tabloids as they do not contain opinion sections. Instead, the reporting sections are analyzed. Serbian *Kurir* (and *Vesti* website) has a political section, so all articles from this section are included. Slovak *Plus 1 deň* does not have a political section, only a much broader section called news. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out the

³ Based on a random selection of twenty articles from the period between February and April 2021.

articles and include in the corpus only the political ones. A keyword approach is used to select these articles. The articles containing stems from the names of the key politicians – chairpersons of all parties accessing the parliament between 2008 and 2012 were added,⁴ together with president Gašparovič. These are all not common names, without publicly known namesakes, therefore, there was little risk that the sample of articles chosen is biased by this. As *Kurír* corpus contains also some foreign policy news, to balance *Plus 1 deň* in the same way, also the stem of the word minister was added to the keywords, which expanded the selection also by some foreign news, but also by some political articles from Slovakia that did not discuss only the top party politics. Generally, this is not a perfect approach, but the results would not be significantly skewed even if some articles are not political, as the corpus contains more than six thousand (after filtering) of articles from *Plus 1 deň*. As different sections are analyzed in the tabloids, the cross-media (tabloids with non-tabloids) comparison is problematic but does not endanger the main goal – cross-country comparison.

An important issue is a period the corpus covers. It has to cover the period after the downfall of the hybrid regime, but before the beginning of the democratic backsliding in Serbia after 2012. This is important as democratic backsliding often causes and is accompanied by the decrease of media freedom. Particularly regarding the second theorized process (drawing parallels), this can lead to journalistic self-censorship. The corpus thus includes only articles from before May 2012, which was the start of significant democratic backsliding as a result of the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS) winning both presidential and parliamentary elections (Bieber 2018; Spasojević 2020). To eliminate the cofounder of different periods, it was aimed to cover the same periods in both countries for one type of newspaper. The covered periods differ based on the type of daily and archive availability. For the center-left and center-right dailies, the 2009-2012 period is covered, as the archive of *Pravda* is not available for earlier years. The tabloid corpus

⁴ In alphabetical order: Bugár, Dzurinda, Fico, Figel', Hrušovský, Matovič, Slotá, and Sulík. Radičová, a PM, who has not been a chairwoman of her party was added as well, due to her key executive function.

covers articles between May 2008 and 2012, as the *Kurir* archive in *Vesti* starts from this month. The total number of articles in the corpus is 30,837. The overview is available in table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the content of the corpus used in the QTA.

Country	Newspapers		Article selection	Number of articles	Time period
	Name	Type			
Slovakia	Pravda	Center-left	Opinions	3278	2009 - 04/2012
	SME	Center-right	Opinions	9353	2009 - 04/2012
	Plus 1 deň	Tabloid	Keywords	6310	05/2008 - 04/2012
Serbia	Danas	Center-left	Opinions	5719	2009 - 04/2012
	Politika	Center-right	Opinions	1174	2009 - 04/2012
	Kurir	Tabloid	Politics	5003	05/2008 - 04/2012

4 Empirical part

The following chapter discusses the results of the empirical analysis. Each subchapter covers one of the traced processes across the three pairs of newspapers. The last subchapter gives a summary and discusses the theorized processes and hypotheses in the light of the empirical findings.

4.1 Awareness of the threats to democracy

The first theorized process suggests that the period of the hybrid regime created a personal experience with the democratic backsliding among the broad public. People realized that the existence of an undemocratic regime is a real possibility also after the fall of socialism in the late 1980s and thus they do not take democracy for granted. Remembering the negatives of undemocratic rule, they are cautious of possible democratic backsliding. Because of this higher vigilance, democratic persistence is increased, as was argued in the sub-section 2.3.2. This is operationalized through the frequency of discussing threats to democracy in the newspapers. It is expected that the threats are discussed significantly more often in Slovakia than in Serbia because of the democratic inoculation. The replication data for this subchapter is available in appendix A.

For the operationalization of this process, the analysis started with choosing articles containing stem form of the word democracy (*demokra*⁵ in both languages). This stem allowed to search for various forms of the word (nouns, adjectives, adverbs). After filtering out other articles, the articles containing the stem were hand-coded to identify articles discussing threats to democracy. The three key coding criteria were geographical, temporal, and substantive. Geographical criterion meant that only articles discussing threats to democracy in a given country were considered. For example, many articles across all newspapers discussed prospects for democracy in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, all of these were excluded. Regarding temporal scope, only articles discussing current threats to democracy were included. Some articles discussed historical threats, for example, in the context of the 1990s. Although this may have some relevance for the topic,

⁵ Apart from the Latin script, Serbian uses the Serbian version of the Cyrillic alphabet that is used by the newspapers *Politika*. When referring to Serbian words Latin is used throughout the text.

these articles were excluded as their influence on democratic persistence today is arguably not significant. Finally, substantive criterion means that apart from threats to democracy, also threats to *democratic consolidation* were considered valid. This is because some Serbian authors (primarily in *Danas*) did not consider Serbia fully democratic, therefore, they discussed threats to the consolidation of democracy that was assumed to be happening in Serbia. Substantially, discussing threats to democratic consolidation is very similar to discussing threats to democracy, the only difference is in reflecting the fact that the author currently considers the regime as a defective democracy. Still, discussing threats to consolidation may boost the democratic persistence of the imperfect democracy as they warn of the possibility of democratic backsliding.

4.1.1 Pravda and Danas

Regarding the center-left newspapers, the threats to democracy were discussed significantly more often in the case of Slovak *Pravda* than in Serbian *Danas*. Almost two percent of all *Pravda* articles from the opinion section discussed threats to democracy, but this was the case only in 0.6% of articles from *Danas*.

To test the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the observed frequencies, Pearson's chi-squared test is used. This test compares the observed frequencies of a contingency table to assess whether the differences in frequencies can be assigned to a chance. In the case of *Pravda* and *Danas*, the difference between frequencies is statistically significant at a p value of .001 (see table 2). The null hypothesis that there is no difference in the frequency distribution of these two newspapers can be therefore rejected with high confidence. At the same time, there seems to be a substantive significance as well. Although 1.9% of opinion articles in *Pravda* that discuss threats to democracy may not look like much, considering the fact that the opinion section discusses various topics, it is a fairly high number and suggests that this is a common discourse of speaking about Slovak democracy. This percentage is three times higher than in the case of *Danas* (0.6%). Notably, in Serbia, the discourse of threats to democracy was not common even straight before the May 2012 elections that started the democratic backsliding.

These findings are in line with the first theorized process that the threats are discussed more often in inoculated Slovakia than in not inoculated Serbia (hypothesis 1).

Table 2. Contingency table and the chi-squared test of the number of articles discussing threats to democracy in *Pravda* and *Danas*.

	Pravda (Slovakia)		Danas (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles not discussing threats to democracy	3215	98.08	5682	99.36	8897	98.89
Articles discussing threats to democracy	63	1.92	37	0.64	100	1.11
All articles	3278	100	5719	100	8997	100

The chi-square statistic is 30.81. The p value is $< .00001$. Significant at $p < .001$.

4.1.2 SME and Politika

In the whole studied period, there was no statistically significant difference in the number of threats discussed in *SME* and *Politika*, although the frequency was higher in the case of *SME*. However, articles in *SME* wrote about threats significantly more often in times when the government of Robert Fico's SMER was in power (until June 2010 and after March 2012). Comparing this frequency with the frequency of *Politika*, the difference is statistically and substantively significant. The frequency of discussing threats to democracy in the whole period is higher in *SME* than in *Politika* by approximately 0.4%. Nevertheless, according to Pearson's chi-squared test, this difference is not statistically significant at the p value of .05 (table 3).

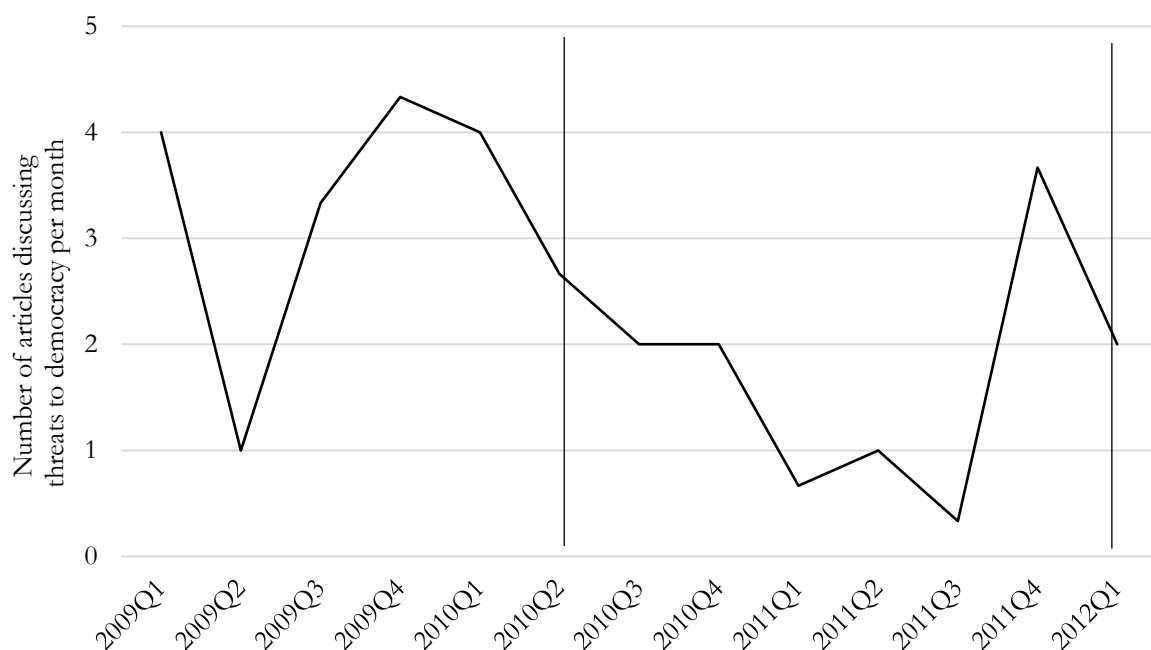
Table 3. Contingency table and the chi-squared test of the number of articles discussing threats to democracy in *SME* and *Politika*.

	SME (Slovakia)		Politika (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles not discussing threats to democracy	9260	99.01	1167	99.40	10427	99.05
Articles discussing threats to democracy	93	0.99	7	0.60	100	0.95
All articles	9353	100%	1174	100%	10527	100

The chi-square statistic is 1.76. The p value is .19. Not significant at $p < .05$.

However, there is a significant temporal variance in the frequency of discussing threats in *SME* (see figure 6). These temporal differences are strongly correlated with the individual governments – there were more threats discussed in the period of the first Fico’s government before Q2 2010 than during center-right Iveta Radičová’s government between Q2 2010 and Q1 2012. One of the interpretations explaining such an outcome can be that this is a result of a media bias. *SME* did not discuss threats to democracy emerging during Radičová’s government as her government was ideologically closer to the newspapers than Fico’s government. However, this does not seem correct. In fact, according to independent observers, the quality of democracy suffered significantly more in Fico’s era than during Radičová’s era (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016, 5, 37). At the same time, *SME* extensively covered also threats to democracy in the latter period, particularly around November 2011, when the wiretapping scandal of the defense minister of Radičová’s government was leaked to the media. This is visible on the spiking line in Q4 2011 of figure 6.

Figure 6. The number of articles per month discussing threats to democracy in individual quarters. Vertical lines represent parliamentary elections.



Taking into account this temporal dimension, it is possible to compare *SME* in the periods of Fico's rule (Q1 2009 – Q2 2010 and Q1 2012) with *Politika* as a whole since there is little temporal difference between individual quarters in the case of *Politika*.

Comparing the whole period of *Politika* to the Fico's government periods of *SME*, the difference in the number of threats discussed is statistically significant at p value $< .05$ (see table 4). Regarding the substantive significance, the theory of democratic inoculation suggests that the frequency of discussing threats is so high in Slovakia that it boosts the democratic persistence of its democracy. At the same time, frequency in Serbia is expected to be substantively lower (hypothesis 1). The frequency in *SME* is twice higher than in *Politika* and the threats to Slovak democracy are in the studied period discussed on average more than three times a month. The opinions section includes also articles discussing irrelevant topics such as foreign policy and culture, in this context the share of more than 1% seems reasonably high and sufficient to speak about the substantive significance.

Table 4. Contingency table and the chi-squared test of the number of articles discussing threats to democracy in *SME* (January 2009 to June 2010 and March to April 2012) and *Politika*.

	SME (Slovakia) (Fico's governments)		Politika (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles not discussing threats to democracy	4698	98.72	1167	99.40	5865	98.85
Articles discussing threats to democracy	61	1.28	7	0.60	68	1.15
All articles	4759	100	1174	100	5933	100

The chi-square statistic is 3.91. The p value is .048. Significant at $p < .05$.

4.1.3 Plus 7 dní and Kurir

In the case of tabloids, the threats to democracy were discussed more often in the case of Slovak *Plus 1 deň*, but only by a small margin that is not significant.

As the full articles of *Kurir* are not available (see chapter 3.2 for explanation), the results were adjusted. During hand-coding *Kurir*, only seven articles discussing threats to democracy were found, but it is expected that some of the threats to democracy could have been discussed in the

bottom parts of the articles that were not available and thus were not included in the corpus. A random sample of twenty recent *Kurir* articles (between February and April 2021) in the news section had an average word count of 372.10 words. It is assumed that the average length of the article has not changed since the studied period. The average length of the articles in the sample is 229.45 words. It is extrapolated that the count of the threats to democracy in whole articles should be higher by a multiplier of 1.62 ($372.10 / 229.45$). The number of threats to democracy in *Kurir* after extrapolation is $7 * 1.62 = 11$ (rounded for the chi-square test).

Although the frequency of threats in the case of *Plus 1 deň* is higher, the difference compared to *Kurir* is not statistically significant at the conventional level of statistical significance and thus it is not possible to speak about the substantive significance (see table 5).

Table 5. Contingency table and the chi-squared test of the number of articles discussing threats to democracy in *Plus 1 deň* and *Kurir*.

	Plus 1 deň (Slovakia)		Kurir (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles not discussing threats to democracy	6310	99.72	4996	99.78	11306	99.74
Articles discussing threats to democracy	18	0.28	11 ¹	0.22	29	0.26
All articles	6328	100	5007 ¹	100	11335	100

The chi-square statistic is 0.46. The p value is .50. Not significant at $p < .05$.

¹ The numbers are adjusted (see explanation in the text above).

The number of threats discussed in the tabloids was significantly lower compared to the previous two kinds of newspapers and is likely caused by the type of articles analyzed. As tabloids do not contain opinions sections, only news about politics was included in the corpus. These contain mostly reporting and not evaluations of the events. Whereas in previous types of newspapers, the statement about threats to democracy came from the article authors, in tabloids these statements came in majority directly from the politicians, who were cited in the articles. Also, the type of tabloid journalism (short articles based primarily on sensational news) stops these newspapers

from offering deeper reflective takes on the events (Johansson 2007b), in which threats to democracy are more likely to be discussed. Nevertheless, this has important ramifications, particularly because tabloids are the most popular newspaper type in both countries. The theorized process may be present only among some strata of the population of Slovakia – better educated and richer social groups that read more complex newspapers (Johansson 2007a, 28–29). This will be discussed further in subchapter 4.4.

4.2 Symbolism and parallels

The second process suggests that democratic inoculation enables the usage of the hybrid regime as a heuristic device to prove the negatives of autocracy. The undemocratic politicians in the inoculated cases are expected to be often compared to an autocrat of the hybrid regime. In the case of Slovakia, such a politician is expected to be Robert Fico, the PM in 2006-2010 and 2012-2018. He did not start democratic backsliding in Slovakia, but his frequent attacks on the free media and numerous corruption scandals made him look like the main “dark knight” of Slovak democracy (Anderson 2018). In the case of Serbia, SNS is the main party creating democratic backsliding after 2012, therefore, its chairman after 2012 Aleksandar Vučić was chosen.⁶ The replication data for this subchapter is available in appendix B.

To operationalize this process, all articles in the corpus were searched for ones that contain both names in the root form (in Slovakia *meciar* and *fic*, in Serbia *milosevic* and *vucic*). At the same time, these roots had to be within fifteen words from each other (the first root, not more than thirteen words, and the second root). As the root forms were used, also nouns, adjectives, and adverbs containing them were taken into account. Articles containing both roots were hand-coded, looking for parallels drawn between the two individuals. The substantive criterion for coding was that the statement directly showed parallels between two politicians that were both explicitly mentioned.

⁶ Arguably, Tomislav Nikolić, pre-2012 chairman of the Serbian Progressive Party and the president of Serbia after 2012, may be considered as another black knight, particularly in the studied period. As a part of the QTA, the parallels between him and Milošević were searched for as well, but the results were identical to the ones of Vučić.

To test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the observed frequencies, Fisher's Exact Test is used. Unlike in the first process, Fisher's Exact Test is used because it is better equipped to test hypotheses with a low number of observations in individual categories (Agresti 2007, 45–46). Nevertheless, the principle is similar to the chi-square test used earlier as the tests compare the expected and observed frequencies of a contingency table.

The null hypotheses that there are no differences in the frequencies of discussing parallels between Slovak and Serbian newspapers can be rejected for both center-left and center-right pairs of newspapers. The p value in the center-left (table 6) newspapers is lower than .001 and in the case of center-right newspapers lower than .05 (table 7).

Table 6. Contingency table and Fisher's exact test of the number of articles discussing parallels in *Pravda* and *Danas*.

	Pravda (Slovakia)		Danas (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles without parallels	3265	99.60	5718	99.98	8983	99.84
Article with parallels	13	0.40	1	0.02	14	0.16
All articles	3278	100	5719	100	8997	100

The Fisher exact test statistic value is 0. The result is significant at $p < .001$.

Table 7. Contingency table and Fisher's exact test of the number of articles discussing parallels in *SME* and *Politika*.

	SME (Slovakia)		Politika (Serbia)		Total	
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage
Articles without parallels	9310	99.54	1174	100.00	10484	99.59
Article with parallels	43	0.46	0	0.00	43	0.41
All articles	9353	100	1174	100	10527	100

The Fisher exact test statistic value is 0.0124. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

The situation is different for tabloid newspapers, where no article mentioning parallels was found in any of the two newspapers. There is no reason to conduct a statistical test in such a situation as there are no frequencies whatsoever.

Apart from the statistical significance, it is important to assess the substantive significance of the results in the pairs of center-left and center-right newspapers. The theorized process suggests that the frequency of discussing parallels is so significant in Slovakia that it strengthens democratic persistence and that the frequency is significantly higher in Slovak newspapers than in Serbian newspapers (hypothesis 2). This seems to be the case. Although the overall percentages are lower than in the case of threats to democracy, this is expected, taking into account the fact that a highly specific discourse is studied as it compares two specific politicians with each other. As the opinion articles discuss a plethora of different topics and events, the fact that the parallels between Fico and Mečiar appear in almost 0.5% of all the opinion articles in both *SME* and *Pravda* is quite persuasive.

Apart from this, parallel drawing is a common discursive strategy also outside of the media. Although it is not possible to give a complex discourse analysis due to the limited space, the 2018 protests can serve as an illustrative example. After the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak in February 2018, the biggest public protests since 1989 took place in Slovak cities. This protest movement was called *For a Decent Slovakia* (*Za slušné Slovensko*), but its first protests were called “We do not want the 90s again!”, as a reference to Mečiar’s era and its similarities with Fico’s government (Vražda 2018). The leaders of the protests consciously used this symbol in their public statements (Veľký protikorupčný pochod 2018; *Za slušné Slovensko* 2018). Also due to these massive protests, Fico was forced to step down as a PM in March 2018.

The most explicit description of the strength of parallels in Slovak context was put forward by the journalist Leško (Hanák 2018, starting from 9:30): “The more details we think about, the resemblance between 1990s and 2018 is becoming more unpleasant. We had a kidnapping in the

past, we have the kidnapping now. We had a murder in the past, we have the murder now. Of course, these are superficial analogies, but a lot of people understand societal situation through exactly such analogies.”⁷ This shows that the parallels are significant and are often drawn between current practices considered to be leading to backsliding and the hybrid regime of the 1990s.

4.3 Popularity of democracy and unpopularity of the autocrat

The third process of the democratic inoculation is that the experience with the hybrid regime in the 1990s led to a more positive stance towards democracy and a more negative stance towards the autocrat in inoculated Slovakia than in non-inoculated Serbia. The QTA is used to map sentiments towards democracy and autocrat. In the second step, public polls from both countries are analyzed to validate the QTA results in the question of the popularity of democracy. The replication data for this subchapter is available in appendix C.

For the QTA, all sentences containing the word democracy, Mečiar (for Slovak newspapers), and Milošević (for Serbian newspapers) were included. All these three words were included in all its noun declension forms. The adjectives and adverbs were excluded. This was done to exclude numerous different forms of the word democracy that do not speak about the political system but are, for example, a part of the name of a political party.

After identifying the sentences containing the keywords, these sentences were translated using Google Translator into English. This is a standard procedure of quantitative text analysis in comparative politics when working with different languages (Lucas et al. 2015, 257–58). Importantly, previous studies proved that Google Translator can be a powerful tool as its translations are close to gold standard translation, particularly when using bag-of-words text models (Vries, Schoonvelde, and Schumacher 2018, 428–29). After the translation, NRC Word-

⁷ The mentions of kidnappings refer to the kidnapping of the president’s son by the secret service in 1995 and of a Vietnamese citizen from Germany in 2017. Evidently, he was abducted by the Vietnamese government and left the Schengen area through the territory of Slovakia using a Slovak government airplane. The mention of murder in 1990s refers to the murder of Robert Remiáš in 1996, allegedly committed by the criminals connected to the government. The second murder was the already mentioned murder of Ján Kuciak.

Emotion Association Lexicon – EmoLex (Mohammad and Turney 2010, 2013) was used to assign sentiment to the words translated to English. EmoLex is a lexicon that assigns words scores 0 or 1 for both negative and positive sentiment. By assigning scores to individual words, we can assign sentiment scores to the whole sentence with the following equation:

$$S_s = N_p - N_n \quad (1.1)$$

S_s refers to the sentiment of the sentence, N_p to the number of positive words, N_n to the number of negative words. The sentiment of the newspapers towards a given word (S_n) is calculated as a sum of sentiment scores of all sentences (based on equation 1.1), divided by the number of sentences (n):

$$S_n = \frac{\sum S_s}{n} \quad (1.2)$$

This is a bag-of-words text model as the position of the words in the sentence does not matter for assigning scores to the sentences. In this thesis, it is assumed that the sentiment of the sentences in which particular objects (democracy, Mečiar, Milošević) appear is a good proxy for the assignment of the sentiment to the objects themselves as objects with positive sentiments would appear in more positive contexts.

4.3.1 Democracy

The sentiment of the newspapers towards democracy was analyzed within the pairs of the same type of newspapers. The unpaired two-tailed t-test was used to test, whether the differences in means of the sentiment scores are statistically significant. The unpaired version of the test was used as the articles compared belong to two independent groups (being sampled from different newspapers). Due to the lack of space, the assumptions that the data need to fulfill to conduct a t-test are not discussed in this and the following sub-section. Nevertheless, the validity of the assumptions (primarily whether the data follow a normal distribution) was checked and confirmed as a part of the data analysis.

The unpaired t-test showed statistical significance when comparing the center-left newspapers of *Pravda* and *Danas*. The mean of the sentiment towards democracy is in *Danas* higher by 0.43 points on the sentiment score. This difference is statistically significant at the p value of .01 (see table 8). This result does *not* follow the expectations that the sentiment towards democracy is better in Slovakia (hypothesis 3). In fact, the opposite is correct.

Table 8. The unpaired t-test of sentiment score of democracy in center-left newspapers.

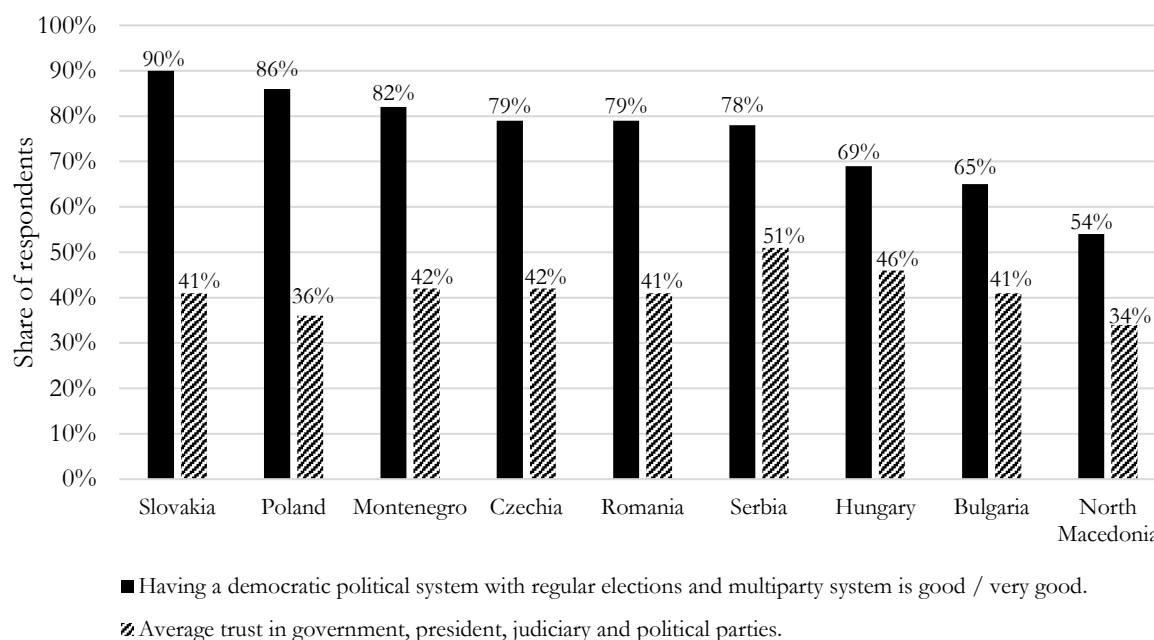
	Pravda (Slovakia)	Danas (Serbia)
Mean	0.47	0.9
Standard deviation	1.70	2.21
Standard Error of the Mean	0.10	0.12
N	316	327

Results of the unpaired t-test: $t = 2.74$, $df = 641$, p value = .0064.

Among the center-right newspapers, the t-test shows no statistical significance in the sentiment towards democracy, with a p value of .72. The difference of means between *SME* (0.55) and *Politika* (0.60) was negligible. Similarly among the tabloids, democracy was reported with a worse sentiment in Slovak *Plus 1 deň* (0.93) than in Serbian *Kurir* (1.29). Nevertheless, the unpaired t-test did not report this difference to be statistically significant at the conventional level of statistical significance with a p value of .26.

Using the comparative surveys from the area gives a contradictory picture. Think-tank GLOBSEC conducted representative comparative surveys on democracy in nine post-communist countries (Sawiris 2021). One of the questions studied respondents' support of the minimalist idea of democracy. Out of the nine countries, this support was the highest in Slovakia (90%), with 78% of respondents supporting minimalist democracy in Serbia. This difference cannot be explained by the trust in the current political establishment (government, president, judiciary, and parties) and consequent "inflation" of the satisfaction with the current government to satisfaction with democracy as such. In fact, Serbia with average support for democracy had the highest levels of trust (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Comparison of support for democracy and political trust in nine post-communist countries (data from Sawiris 2021, 7).



Other data from GLOBSEC confirm this view. There is a significantly higher number of people supporting a strong leader not bothering with elections in Serbia (40%) than in Slovakia (25%). Similarly, out of all countries, the lowest percentage of people (53%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country in Slovakia, compared to 59% in Serbia (Sawiris 2021, 8–13). The difference in support of the conception of democracy as a system based on equality, rule of law, human rights, and freedoms is in both countries within a statistical error (approximately 85%). This suggests that the data from the sentiment QTA of democracy cannot be extrapolated on the population as a whole as the Slovak public is more supportive of democracy even though Slovak media tend to report democracy with less positive sentiment.

4.3.2 Vladimír Mečiar and Slobodan Milošević

The sentiment of the newspapers towards the past autocrat (Mečiar and Milošević) was analyzed within the pairs of the same type of newspapers. The unpaired two-tailed t-test was used to statistically test the difference in means.

In the pair of center-left newspapers, the sentiment towards Mečiar in *Pravda* (mean of 0.31) is more positive than the sentiment towards Milošević in *Danas* (0.17). The difference, however, is not statistically significant with a p value of .41. Among the center-right newspapers, the sentiment towards the autocrat was significantly worse in *Politika* (-0.06) than in *SME* (0.61). This difference is statistically significant at a very low level of the p value $< .001$, which provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis (see table 9). It was expected that due to the democratic inoculation and despite the objectively worse conditions of the population in Milošević's Serbia than Mečiar's Slovakia, the sentiment towards autocrat is worse in Slovak newspapers (hypothesis 4). However, this is not the case.

Table 9. The t-test of sentiment score of Mečiar and Milošević in center-right newspapers.

	SME (Slovakia)	Politika (Serbia)
Mean	0.61	-0.06
Standard deviation	1.84	1.85
Standard Error of the Mean	0.08	0.17
N	528	113

Results of the unpaired t-test: $t = 3.50$, $df = 639$, p value = .0005.

Similarly, in the pair of tabloids, the sentiment towards Milošević in *Kurir* was significantly worse than the sentiment towards Mečiar in *Plus1deň*, by approximately 0.6 points on the sentiment score (see table 10). This difference is statistically significant at the p value of .01, which goes against the expectations voiced in hypothesis 4. Similarly to the center-right newspapers, tabloids also show reversed relationship, compared to what was theorized – Slovak newspapers have better sentiment towards the autocrat than Serbian newspapers.

Table 10. The unpaired t-test of sentiment score of Mečiar and Milošević in tabloid newspapers.

	Plus1deň (Slovakia)	Kurir (Serbia)
Mean	0.95	0.34
Standard deviation	1.55	1.95
Standard Error of the Mean	0.10	0.21
N	265	83

Results of the unpaired t-test: $t = 2.97$, $df = 346$, p value = .0032.

4.4 Analysis

This subchapter discusses the processes suggested in chapter 3 in the context of the empirical data gathered in this chapter and their influence on the theory of democratic inoculation as such. Table 11 below gives an overview of theorized processes and whether the empirical research supported, contradicted (in the case of the statistically significant reverse effect), or did not provide support (no statistically significant result) to the theorized causal processes.

Table 11. The summary of evidence found divided by method and causal processes.

Theorized causal processes	QTA methods			Opinion polls
	Pravda and Danas (center-left)	SME and Politika (center-right)	Plus 1 deň and Kurir (tabloids)	
The first causal process, threats to democracy	Support	Partial support	No support	N/A
The second causal process, parallels and symbolism	Support	Support	No support	N/A
The third causal process, popularity of democracy	Contradictory evidence	No support	No support	Support
The third causal process, unpopularity of the autocrat	No support	Contradictory evidence	Contradictory evidence	N/A

The first process suggested that the experience with the undemocratic period leads the public in democratically inoculated countries to not take democracy for granted. Following the conceptualization of democracy in this thesis (sub-section 2.3.2) and Gill's argument (1998, 167) that "an essential condition of making democracy secure is never to take it for granted", this strengthens democratic persistence. The QTA was used to identify the newspaper articles discussing threats to local democracy. In agreement with the theory, it was found that the Slovak newspapers discuss threats significantly more often. In the case of center-left newspapers, the difference in frequencies was statistically significant at a very low level of the p value (.001). The outcome in center-right newspapers was less straightforward as the chi-square test did not show

statistical significance. However, if considering only the periods of the government of PM Fico, the difference is statistically significant at the .05 level of the p value.

The comparison of tabloids did not show a statistically significant difference between the frequencies. This is very likely a result of the specific type of these newspapers that are more reporting-based, with no articles offering deeper analyses. However, the differences in the other two pairs of newspapers are statistically significant. It is also possible to conclude that this difference is substantively very significant, due to the evidence that “threats to democracy” is a fairly common discursive strategy to speak about Slovak democracy. Strikingly, unconsolidated Serbian minimalist democracy that started to democratically backslide soon after the studied period was not considered as under threat very often. This gives sufficient evidence to support hypothesis 1 and the first causal process.

The second process suggested that the past existence of a hybrid regime enables using the parallels as a heuristic device to transmit the meaning of negatives of undemocratic rule. This process was operationalized through the frequency of drawing parallels between the past autocrat and the current politician, perceived to be a danger to democracy. This is a more specific discursive tactic than the discussion of threats as it requires direct comparison of two specific politicians. Nevertheless, the results of the comparison of center-left and center-right newspapers provided strong evidence for this causal process as the parallels were discussed more often in Slovakia, whereas they were not discussed at all in Serbia. In addition, partial discourse analysis was given to illustrate how the parallels between the current politician and the past autocrat were used to start the biggest protests in Slovakia since 1989, which brought down Fico’s government. It can be therefore concluded that strong evidence was found for both hypothesis 2 and the second causal process.

Nevertheless, there were no parallels whatsoever in any of the two tabloid newspapers. This is outcome similar to the first process – whereas other newspapers supported the theorized process,

this was not the case among tabloids. Here it is important to consider the influence of these outcomes on the argument presented in the thesis. The first interpretation may be that the studied tabloids are less political than the more serious newspapers, due to simplifying important political issues and using emotional appeals (Johansson 2007b; Örnebring and Jönsson 2004). Because of this, they offer few value judgments or deeper analyses. It is therefore no surprise that no evidence of theorized process was found in tabloids, particularly regarding hypotheses 1 and 2. Still, people reading tabloids may understand the negatives of the previous hybrid regime and the parallels between the past and present through different channels – political socialization in schools or different media channels. Therefore, the lack of such discussions in tabloids does not make a difference in terms of democratic inoculation.

The second interpretation is less optimistic. Tabloids are usually read by less-educated and lower-income strata of the population (Johansson 2007a, 28–29). If these tabloids do not contain information that may socialize people to understand the dangers of democratic backsliding and these people do not consume information from elsewhere, it can lead to an outcome that these social groups are less “inoculated”. This thesis understood inoculation as a macro phenomenon on the level of the whole polity, but we can analyze it also on the level of individuals. Some of them may be more or less influenced by the three processes discussed above. This would mean that the social groups reading tabloids are more likely to vote potentially autocratic political forces and not necessarily consider past hybrid regimes negatively. There is no data that can be used to test these two interpretations as a complex survey about individual processes and media consumption would be necessary. Nevertheless, even if we accept the second interpretation, democratic inoculation still works for people consuming media of higher quality than tabloids, as the empirical evidence has shown.

The third process suggested that the negative experience with the hybrid regime of the public leads to the increased popularity of democracy, unpopularity of the autocrat, and consequent

improvement in democratic persistence. Slovakia, as an inoculated country, is expected to have a more positive sentiment towards democracy (hypothesis 3), but a more negative sentiment towards the autocrat (hypothesis 4). Regarding democracy, the QTA did not confirm this expectation. In fact, Serbian newspapers spoke about democracy more favorably than Slovak newspapers, although only in one out of the three cases is the difference statistically significant at a p value of .05. However, the analysis of multiple comparative public surveys showed that the popularity of democracy is higher in Slovakia than in Serbia. Even when compared with the other seven analyzed post-communist countries, popularity of democracy in Slovakia is the highest. This finding strongly supports the theorized process but is in contradiction with the conclusions of the QTA method. The explanation can be that discussing democracy in negative terms may be a sign of some maturity of the public discourse. In such discourse, newspapers are more transparent of the complex and not necessarily positive effects democracy may have. Additionally, Serbia was in the period studied only a minimalist democracy, which could lead newspapers to write about potential future liberal democracy with too much positive normative baggage, which could influence the results.

This way or another, the GLOBSEC surveys (Sawiris 2021) clearly shows that the more positive reporting of democracy is not necessarily correlated with a higher public approval and acceptance of democratic principles. The surveys consisted of several topics pointing in the same direction – support of liberal democracy, support of minimalist democracy, support of autocratic practices, dissatisfaction with democracy in their country. In three out of four of these (apart from the support of liberal democracy, where the difference was within a confidence interval), Slovak democracy scored significantly better than Serbia and also its V4 neighbors. For example, 90% of Slovaks support the minimalist definition of democracy, whereas only 78% of Serbians and Czechs do. Particularly when comparing Slovakia to Czechia, it is difficult to account for such a difference, if not considering the historical legacies of the 1990s.

The second part of the third causal mechanism expected that the sentiment towards Mečiar is more negative in Slovak media than the sentiment towards Milošević in Serbian media (hypothesis 4). The QTA showed that this is a mistaken expectation. The sentiment towards Milošević is less positive than the sentiment towards Mečiar in all three pairs of newspapers and this difference is statistically significant in two of them. Ideally, this QTA result would be compared with the survey results on sentiments towards Mečiar and Milošević, but such a survey is not available. Nevertheless, there is little reason to believe that the survey results would be different. The expected effect of the democratic inoculation was probably overstated, compared to the objective conditions in both regimes and their leaders. Mečiar did not lead Slovakia through several devastating wars and his authoritarian rule was less repressive than Milošević's. In the words of one of the anti-Milošević activists in the 1990s: "Mečiar was Mother Theresa in comparison with Milošević" (Bunce and Wolchik 2010, 51). It is possible that if Mečiar was compared to a less repressive autocrat than Milošević, the effect of democratic inoculation would be visible, but this is only a speculation that needs to be tested in further research.

These mixed results support the existence of the third theorized process. The QTA proved that the sentiment towards Milošević is actually worse than the sentiment towards Mečiar, hypothesis 4 is thus incorrect. Nevertheless, the second causal part of the mechanism that links public negative experience with the hybrid regime and the increased democratic persistence through higher public support of democracy may have an effect regardless of the sentiment towards the autocrat. The GLOBSEC surveys prove that the support of democracy is in Slovakia the highest among the nine studied countries, which supports hypothesis 3. Most likely this is a result of the experience of the Slovak public with the hybrid regime.

5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify and analyze the causal processes that create democratic inoculation in Slovakia and compare them with the case of Serbia as a failed most likely case of the theory of democratic inoculation to find omitted scope conditions of democratic inoculation theory.

The literature review proved that democratic inoculation theory can be linked to the broader scholarship on crises and reequilibrations in democracy. Schedler (2001a, 73) was generally pessimistic about crises but admitted that they may result in positive outcomes for democratic persistence, which is an argument similar to Linz's view (1978, 87–97) on democratic reequilibrations. Although these concepts cannot be used instead of the theory of democratic inoculation due to their largely negative meaning (crises) and elite-centered analysis (reequilibrations), they bring two useful analytical points. Firstly, Schedler's (2001a, 74) idea of projecting past experience into the future as a result of crises was used to elaborate and discuss the second causal process of democratic inoculation (parallels). Secondly, Linz's (1978, 91–92) underlying logic that reequilibrations happen through the learning of the actors was also used in the operationalization of all processes of democratic inoculation, although instead of the elites-centered analysis, the analysis was based on the public opinion.

The recent literature on democratic backsliding (Bakke and Sitter 2020; Bustikova and Guasti 2017, 167) has hypothesized that the higher level of democratic persistence in Slovakia can be explained by the theory of democratic inoculation. Reportedly, the 1990s period of the hybrid regime under Vladimír Mečiar inoculated Slovakia against future backsliding and thus increased its democratic persistence. Nevertheless, they do not develop this theory more, it rather serves as an idea for further research. Similarly, they do not discuss whether this theory applies to other cases as well.

Therefore, this thesis aimed to build a plausible theory of democratic inoculation by suggesting three causal processes through which democratic inoculation boosts democratic persistence using the theory-building process tracing based on the case of Slovakia. The first process was based on

the logic that not taking democracy for granted boosts democratic persistence (Gill 1998, 167). Because of the personal experience with the democratic backsliding, the public in the inoculated country is more aware of the threats to democracy. The second process suggested that in inoculated countries, experience with the hybrid regime can be used as an effective heuristic device to prove the negatives of autocracy and thus boosts democratic persistence. The third process suggested that through a negative experience of the public with the hybrid regime, the inoculated country has a more positive sentiment towards democracy and more negative sentiment towards the autocrat, which strengthens democratic persistence.

Following established case study methodology literature (Rohlfing 2012, 114), the failed most-likely case of Serbia was used as well. Although the theory of democratic inoculation would expect the democratic inoculation to take place in Serbia, this was not the case, as Serbia started to democratically backslide after 2012. The study of such a case is useful to find omitted scope conditions (Rohlfing 2012, 122) of the theory that is necessary for democratic inoculation to function as theorized. At the same time, Serbia is used for comparison with Slovakia in the empirical analysis of the three theorized processes. If the data analysis has shown no significant differences between Slovakia and Serbia, this would mean that the theorized processes of democratic inoculation are not correct.

In the empirical chapter (chapter 4), two data-gathering methods were adopted, primarily an extensive quantitative text analysis (QTA) of three newspapers in both countries, secondary the public opinion polls for a part of the third theorized process. The empirical examination of the first process (awareness of the threats to democracy) proved that the threats to democracy are discussed more often in Slovak newspapers than in Serbian newspapers. This difference was found to be statistically significant among center-left and center-right newspapers. At the same time, the frequency in Slovak center-left and center-right newspapers were sufficiently high to argue that they have a significantly positive effect on the democratic persistence of Slovak democracy. These

findings provide strong evidence for the first causal process. On the other hand, the analysis found that the difference in frequency of threats is not significant in the pair of tabloid newspapers.

The QTA provided strong evidence also for the second theorized process in both center-left and center-right newspapers. This process suggested that the parallels between a current, potentially autocratic politician and the past leader of the hybrid regime are more often drawn in inoculated Slovakia than non-inoculated Serbia. It was proven that parallel drawing is a common discursive strategy in Slovak newspapers, while it is effectively non-existent in Serbia. Similarly to the first process, no evidence supporting the hypothesis 2 was found among the tabloids. Taking into account socio-economic groups of its readership this could suggest that the democratic inoculation has a stronger causal effect in some social groups (richer, better educated) than in others. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make a definite conclusion without further research.

The empirical analysis supported one part of the third suggested causal process (the popularity of democracy). The polls showed that democracy has consistently higher support in Slovakia than in Serbia (Sawiris 2021). However, the second part of the third causal process (unpopularity of the autocrat) was proved to be incorrect – the sentiment towards Slobodan Milošević is significantly worse than the sentiment towards Vladimír Mečiar in the local media. This is most likely a result of the impact their regime had on ordinary people and regimes' level of repression. Still, this finding does not jeopardize the causal chain, as the causal effect boosting democratic persistence is transmitted through public support of democracy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the empirical analysis provided evidence supporting the existence of the third theorized process.

The empirical analysis strongly supported the existence of theorized processes and the influence of the democratic inoculation in Slovakia. The first research question of this thesis is: *What are the processes creating democratic inoculation in Slovakia?* It was argued that these processes are a higher awareness of the threats to democracy, the parallel drawing between the past autocrat and the current, potentially autocratic politician, and the popularity of democracy.

The second research question is why the democratic inoculation did not happen or was not successful in the case of Serbia. Even with an experience of a highly repressive hybrid regime, the new democracy backslid and ejected the politicians of the past hybrid regime to the leading political roles, which is in stark contradiction with the expectation of the democratic inoculation theory. Two key reasons connected with the mode of transition from the hybrid regime were identified in subchapter 2.5.

Firstly, the lack of political polarization was noticeable in the Serbian case. Only three years after the downfall of Milošević, his party SPS supported the government of Koštunica, who was originally one of the leaders of 2000 anti-Milošević protests (Pešić 2007, as cited in Dolenec 2013, 182). This lack of polarization against Milošević made it difficult for the democratic opposition to hold together and reform the country. This was very different in Slovakia, where high party polarization on pro-Mečiar and anti-Mečiar party cleavage helped a very heterogenous reformist government to hold together between 1998 and 2002 (Szomolányi 2004, 175).

Secondly, to overthrow Milošević in 2000, Serbian democratic opposition co-opted the security apparatus, which consequently slowed down reforms and created autocratic enclaves (Dolenec 2013, 177). Therefore, the break with the hybrid regime was not as clear as in the case of Slovakia – the corrupt security apparatus stayed largely untouched, the new government did not agree on whether to make a clear break with the period of Milošević, and the organized crime structures remained powerful (Dolenec 2013, 179). Autocratic enclaves aimed to stall the reforms to stop the ICTY extradition and assassinated reformist PM Zoran Đinđić in 2003, which effectively stopped further reforms. Due to the compromised transition from the hybrid rule and consequent flaws of post-transition democracy, the break between the hybrid regime and the new democratic government was insufficient to create an effective democratic inoculation.

The combination of the lack of polarization and the stalled reforms is an answer to the second research question of the thesis: *Why was democratic inoculation ineffective in Serbia?* At the same time,

this can be generalized as a scope condition of the theory of democratic inoculation. In order for the democratic inoculation to function, the break between the hybrid regime and consequent democratic regime must be significant.

Regarding the limitations of the thesis, it is heavily dependent on the analytical usefulness of the theory of democratic inoculation. The theory offers significant analytical strength in the case of Slovakia, but its usefulness is questionable if it is not generalizable and cannot provide similar analytical strength in other cases. As it was argued, in Serbia, democratic inoculation theory does not work. The scope of the thesis did not allow to extend the case selection and to discuss another positive cases to test whether the processes work as theorized also elsewhere. The case of Peru after the downfall of Alberto Fujimori in 2000 may be a suitable positive case for further research using Most Different Systems Design in comparison with Slovakia and equipping theory-testing process tracing.

This thesis has significant ramifications for the backsliding countries in Central Europe and beyond. Hungary and Poland are paradigmatic examples of democratic backsliding. Their hybrid regimes are currently less democratic than Slovak hybrid regime in the 1990s. Nevertheless, both of these regimes are still electorally competitive – although not offering a level playing field, the democratic opposition may arguably still win in free, although not fair elections. If this will be the case, the lessons learned from the case of Slovakia and Serbia can help us to understand how post-Orbán Hungary and post-Kaczynski Poland would look. With a clear cut break with the previous regime, they can establish “a lasting precedent of democratic persistence” (Schedler 2001a, 73). Such a clear-cut break can be achieved by not co-opting the old regime, not allowing the emergence of authoritarian enclaves, and support a strong party polarization against the incumbent that will last also after its ousting. Regarding the last point, the wide cooperation of Hungarian opposition parties before next year’s elections seems to be such an important first step towards building democratic persistence after Orbán’s downfall.

Appendix A

The replication data for the first theorized process (subchapter 4.1) is available for download on this webpage: <https://bit.ly/2SZUpPv>. The link contains one Excel Spreadsheet that contains a sheet for each newspaper. All sheets contain the full content of the articles (except for *Kurir*, for explanation see subsection 4.1.3), the date of publishing, the title of the article, and coding. All articles are assigned one of the three scores. Score 99 means that the article does not contain any stem of the word democracy. These articles were not hand-coded and were automatically assumed to not contain mentions of threats to democracy. Score 0 means that the article contains the stem of the word democracy and was hand-coded, but it does not mention threats to democracy (as defined in the criteria in subchapter 4.1). Score 1 means that the article contains the stem of the word democracy and the hand-coding found that it contains a discussion of threats to democracy.

Appendix B

The replication data for the second theorized process (subchapter 4.2) is available for download on this webpage: <https://bit.ly/3bzCK7N>. The link contains two files. Appendix B.xlsx contains the content of all the articles for all the newspapers together with their sources, dates of publishing, and titles. The coding in column “Parallels” is a result of hand-coding. All rows containing 1 were coded as articles containing parallels.

The second file Appendix B – list.docx contains numbers for both of the previous two files. These numbers identify row numbers, in which the searching script found keywords at most fifteen words within each other (see subchapter 4.2). There are several false positives for all three Serbian newspapers because the same script was used also to search for parallels between Tomislav Nikolić and Slobodan Milošević (see footnote 6). The script did not recognize the difference between the stems from all three words (Milošević, Vučić, and Nikolić), therefore, it identifies as positive also articles containing Vučić and Nikolić within fifteen words from each other. Nevertheless, because all articles were hand-coded this did not create any bias.

Appendix C

The replication data for the third theorized process (subchapter 4.3) is available for download on this webpage: <https://bit.ly/2S5BTEZ>. The Excel Spreadsheet contains one sheet for each of the objects analyzed (democracy, Mečiar, and Milošević). The sheets contain the translated content of each sentence, which was used for sentiment analysis. Each sentence also contains an assigned score (following equation 1.2), newspaper source, the date of publishing, and the title of the article from which it was chosen.

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