



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Karolína Farská

Title: Eroded resilience of democracy: Attacks on journalists as part of a political agenda in Slovakia

Programme/year: International Security Studies/Summer 2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor): Jonathan Collins

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	38
<i>Total</i>		80	72
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	9
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	18
TOTAL		100	90



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The author sets out to theoretically and empirically map the political attacks against Slovak journalists and its consequences for contemporary society. Carrying out a collection of fascinating and in-depth interviews with these victims, the thesis offers a valuable (and personal) investigation of the strategies and aftereffects these political attacks cause. Not only does the work provide an empirically rich look into the phenomena, but the grounded theory conceptualisation helps extend these findings into a globalized context of far-right effectivity. The following review highlights the qualities of the thesis and offers a few comments for the author to respond to come the defense.

I must commend the author for tackling an extremely timely issue with plenty of empirics and explanation. Events like the proposed banning of the public service broadcaster RTVS not only highlight the pressing need for this research, but also represent the latest stakes within the country. Moreover, the author does an excellent job of sorting through the contemporary literature on the topic, mixing in the findings from a list of different affected countries.

The non-use of some overarching theoretical operationalization makes sense to me; however, I think the author could have done a better job within the text in explaining why a particular or singular conceptualisation of the phenomena was not useful for their case.

The description of the methodology is very well-documented and detailed and leaves no gaps in the imagination on how the study was conducted. As I have seen the initial list of questions that the author was utilizing for their semi-structured interviews, there was a good basis to developing strong empirical and conceptual insights. I might have missed it in the text, but I do not see this list of questions in the appendix or in another file on the SIS. I would instruct the author to bring these preliminary questions to the defense in case the committee is interested in looking them over.

Perhaps unsurprising given my previous statements, but the standout contribution this thesis makes is the fascinating empirical depth, data, and subsequent analysis the author was able to capture and highlight. There is a wealth of information to unpack here (which the author even had to reduce as noted in the methodology). The use of quotations throughout the analysis section offers a personal and strategic look into the attacks on Slovak journalists. Countless stories of intimidation and violent rhetoric against these journalists provide a bitter image of the current climate within the country. The author notes that these are not only personal struggles but represent a deeper more nefarious purpose of (de)revolutionizing press freedom in the country and ensuring that the future generation does not have the same voice/impact. Overall, this section is an excellent read and should be of interest to anyone attracted to the topic.



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Some small discussion questions for the committee if there is time:

The author mentions the potential bias within the limitations paragraph of your work, but I think they could expand on this within the defense. How does their bias (and close positionality) to the subject-matter and selected participants affect the results of their study?

The author could also spend some time during the defense to discuss the larger implications of their conceptual grounding (the different themes outlined) for research on the far-right. Herein, they mention the overlapping potentials between Slovakia and Hungary (a natural choice given the proximity and relationship), but how about other European countries or even more abroad. It would be interesting to hear the author's thoughts on their contribution to the field.

Minor criteria:

The author uses a strong number of sources across the literature review and into the discussion section (especially for a topic that is barely academically covered within the Slovak context). The writing is good for the most part, however some of the sentences run a bit long and I sometimes catch minor colloquialisms or bias (overly emotional) in the language used. Finally, the thesis meets all formal requirements expected from a master's thesis.

Assessment of plagiarism:

I can see no issues of plagiarism within the text, and the Turnitin score sits at 0%.

Overall evaluation:

This is an excellent, well-thought-out piece of research deserving of defense. The author does a great job at providing a strong empirical overview of the current media situation in Slovakia, doing so through a wealth of semi-structured interview data. The results offer a daunting picture of the current climate within the country, which could be representative or a blueprint for future far-right parties coming into power. I have left some questions/items for the author to respond to in this review, however I am thoroughly convinced of its importance as a master's thesis.

Suggested grade: A/B

Signature: