



Trends of [dis]trust 2023

DEKK Institute
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION ●

- The reviewer of the Trends of [dis]trust 2023 is Dr. Marianna Mrva, expert on trust at the Slovak Academy of Sciences and author of the book The Phenomenon of Social Trust in Slovakia (in Slovak: Fenomén spoločenskej dôvery na Slovensku).
- Translation note: In English, survey standards differentiate between Trust and Confidence, trust indicating personal relationships and confidence describing a relationship with an impersonal institution. Slovak language does not differentiate between trust and confidence. English translation thus keeps this difference, despite original survey using only the word trust (“dôvera” in Slovak).
- DEKK Institute would like to thank Ms. Veronika Cigáneková for her help with data analysis.
- The data and text in Trends of [dis]trust 2023 are freely disseminatable, provided the source is acknowledged.
- Unless another source is indicated for the Trends in [dis]trust 2023 data, the data comes from a survey conducted for the DEKK Institute by FOCUS Research Agency. Technical information of the survey:

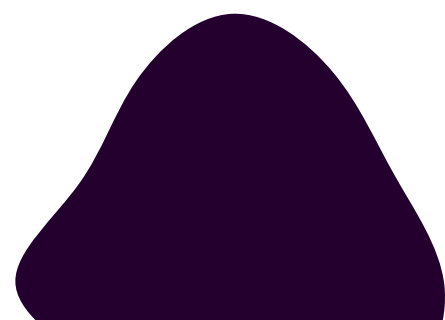
| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Type of Survey | nationally representative quantitative survey |
| Sample selection | quota selection based on official data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic |
| Sample size | 1 009 respondents, 18+ years old |
| Quota controls | sex, age, education, nationality, size of residence, region |
| Interview method | CAPI (Face to face interview recorded in a standardised electronic questionnaire) |
| Field data collection | trained interviewers |
| Collection date | 9th of August – 16th of August 2023 |

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE TRENDS OF [dis]TRUST.

- The authors of the Trends of [dis]trust are members of the DEKK Institute. The long-term vision of the DEKK Institute is to understand the problem of the erosion and regeneration of social cohesion in Slovakia and in Europe. Social cohesion is a term describing the social forces that hold human groups together - and trust is an important condition for the cohesion of any society.
- The aim of the Trends of [dis]trust is to provide relevant data on the state of trust in Slovak society on an annual basis. The collected data will offer a better overview of the current situation and will help to identify areas that require increased attention - both from the citizens and the state.
- The ambition of this document is to bring basic data on the state of trust into the public debate. The document does not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of the state of [dis]trust and its causes, but offers a basic commentary that can guide the reader.
- Trust is not an abstract concept, it affects our everyday life and its quality. Low trust has a negative impact on the economy, and on the contents of our wallet, on safety in the streets, on corruption, and nepotism, on subjective satisfaction with life, on community cohesion and, last but not least, on our ability to respond effectively to crises. For details, see the chapter on 'Social cohesion and [dis]trust'.
- In Slovakia, we regularly collect data on life expectancy, wages and unemployment, but at the level of state management we are not systematically looking at the values, frustrations or beliefs of the population. Slovakia is currently threatened by the disintegration of the fabric of society and we need data on values and identity to diagnose this problem. If we want to better understand the problem of the breakdown of cohesion and trust, we need to build a culture of strategic data collection. This means engaging in international surveys, designing surveys tailored to Slovak society and maintaining them systematically to track social trends. DEKK Institute contributes to tackle this problem by re-engaging Slovakia in the international longitudinal World Values Survey in 2021-2022 and, starting this year, by regularly collecting Trends of [dis]trust.
- As part of our mission to promote research on cohesion-related topics, we make the data from this survey publicly available. Keep an eye on the [DEKK Institute's website](#) or the [Slovak Archive of Social Data](#) at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The survey results themselves are not very pleasant, but we wish you an inspiring read. The first step in solving any problem is knowing the reality. Only then attempting to improve it.

The DEKK Institute Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ●

- General interpersonal trust has been stagnant for a long time - it has been oscillating around 23% since the establishment of the Slovak Republic (1993), regardless of the political or economic situation in the country.
- Two of the three most trusted institutions in Slovakia belong to the non-state sector. These are scientists and scientific institutions such as the Slovak Academy of Sciences (64.6%) and universities and colleges (62.6%). The third place was taken by the municipalities (59.9%), although the third place was almost shared with local Slovak companies and enterprises.
- Political institutions are the least trusted institutions in Slovakia: Parliament (18.8%), political parties (22.5%) and Government (22.6%). In the category of political institutions, the most trusted at the time of measurement was the presidential office (35.9%).
- Long-term trends in trustworthiness over the past 30 years have favoured the private sector in particular, and the trustworthiness of companies and businesses has been rising.
- About half of the Slovak population trusts the state and public sector. Municipal government (59.9%) is the most trusted, while the courts are the least trusted (29.7%).
- Churches and religious organisations have relatively stable trust with a subtle decline that probably follows secularisation. Media credibility has also declined slightly.
- Politics has taken on a “toxic” dimension in terms of trust in recent years. In practice, this means a decline in trust for any institution that starts to be perceived as politicised. At the same time, many explicitly political institutions (government, parliament, political parties) are among the most distrusted institutions in the country.
- When measuring trust in NGOs, we experimentally divided them into organisations primarily focused on helping people directly and organisations focused on changing the attitudes of society. The survey results show that their trustworthiness in the eyes of the respondents varies considerably (50.6% vs. 32.9%).
- The historical reasons for low trust in Slovakia can be traced back to the distant past. Over the last 80 years, it has been the negative impact of the so-called “snitch culture” during Socialism, the transformation in the 1990s, when the weakened state was unable to enforce justice, or the atomization and individualization of society in modern times. General conviction of the population that they cannot rely on the state automatically leads to a decrease in trust in its institutions and representatives.

SOCIAL COHESION AND [DIS]TRUST.

Social cohesion is a term describing the social forces that hold human groups together. It has many facets, such as the tendency to cooperate, the respect for common rules or the willingness to sacrifice for the group. It is based on shared values, interests and a subjective sense of belonging. A shared value framework that generates predictable actions and decisions that are acceptable to the other members of the group thus creates the precondition for mutual trust.

At the same time, however, shared values need to be present not only in interactions at the level between members of a community (horizontal level), but also between individuals and institutions (vertical level).¹ Trust is thus not an abstract concept, but a necessary basis for a stable community and society, which is thus able to respond adequately to the needs of its members and to possible external or internal crises. A society that has these characteristics can be considered cohesive.

However, today many speak of a global crisis of social cohesion. In 2022, erosion of social cohesion appeared in the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report (GRR), where it ranked 4th in the short term (0-2 years), 3rd in the medium term (2-5 years) and 6th in the long term (5-10 years) in a fierce competition of multiple crises. Across Europe, France ranks erosion of social cohesion and polarisation 1st among all acute risks, and Germany and the Netherlands 2nd.² In 2023, the GRR rating has not changed in any significant way.³

In Trends of [dis]trust, we focus on examining one of the cornerstones of social cohesion: the level of trust in Slovak society. Trust operates in two basic dimensions - vertical and horizontal. Horizontal trust is about interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal trust can be seen in two dimensions: as trust towards people we know personally (e.g. family, neighbours) and as trust towards people in general. General trust is the belief that other people can be trusted, even if we do not know them personally.⁴ Vertical trust is about a trust in authority, i.e. about the relationship of individuals to social institutions and elites - and it goes both ways. For practical reasons, we have divided vertical trust into **political institutions**, such as the government, parliament or political parties; **the public sector**, such as civil service, the police, the judiciary or the military; and the **non-state sector and civil society**, which consists of universities, the media, churches, businesses or NGOs.

1 Nowack D., Schoderer S., The Role of Values for Social Cohesion: Theoretical Explication and Empirical Exploration, In: Discussion Paper 6/2020, German Development Institute, 2020, p.3.

2 Global Risk Report 2022, World Economic Forum, p.25. Access: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf.

3 Global Risk Report 2023, World Economic Forum, p.6. Access: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf.

4 Mrva, M., Fenomén spoločenskej dôvery na Slovensku, Sociologický ústav SAV, 2022, p.26.

“ Trust operates on two basic axes - vertical and horizontal. Horizontal trust is about interpersonal relationships; vertical trust is about relationships with institutions and elites.”

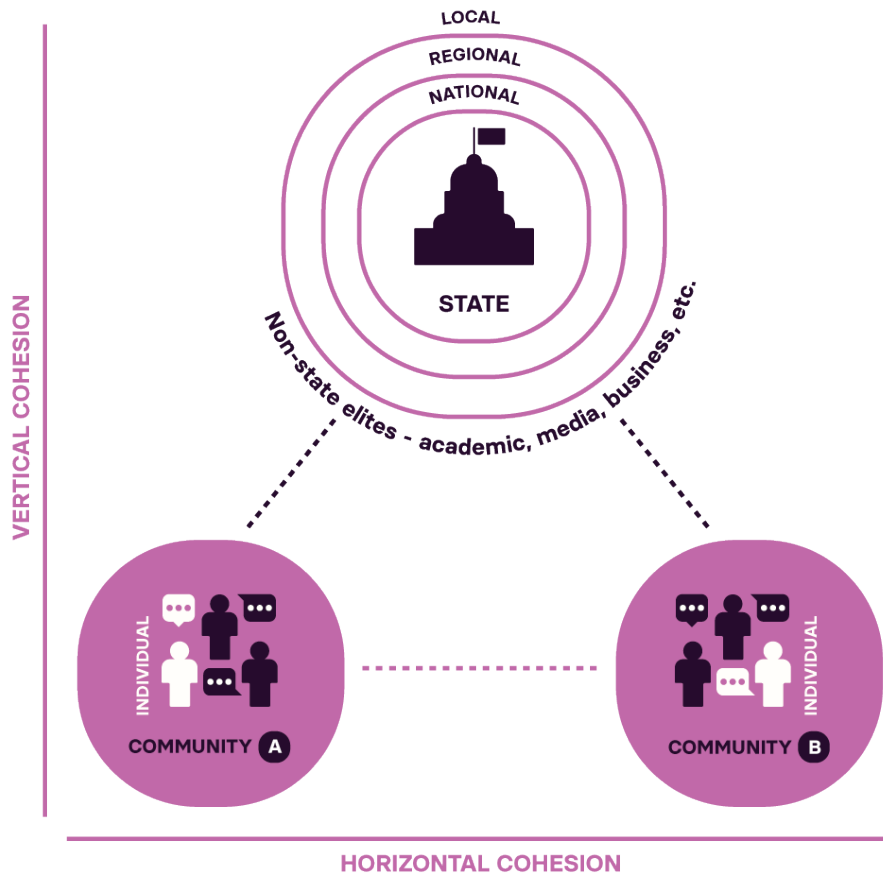


Figure 1: Graphical representation of vertical and horizontal cohesion in society. The state of both dimensions of cohesion depends on the degree of trust between members of society (horizontal level) and trust at the individual-institution level in both directions (vertical level). We divide the state into 3 levels (local, regional, national) and define elites as individuals who have influence in society, including the non-state elites. (Source: DEKK Institute).

Trust is not an abstract concept. It affects subjective sense of happiness, the state of communities in which we live, even the economic growth and social well-being of the country.

Given the complexity of the effects of trust on different areas of society (social, political, economic, etc.), we will briefly focus on its relationship with the economy to illustrate its importance. Nobel Prize winner in economics Kenneth Arrow noted as early as 1972 that virtually every business transaction has an element of trust in it.⁵ The impact of trust on economic life, and hence on the material benefits of members of any society, has been succinctly summarised by Jerry Useem:

“Trust is to capitalism what alcohol is to wedding receptions: a social lubricant. In low-trust societies (Russia, southern Italy), economic growth is constrained. People who don't trust other people think twice before investing in, collaborating with, or hiring someone who isn't a family member (or a member of their criminal gang). ... a study published in 1998 [found] that a 15 percent bump in a nation's belief that “most people can be trusted” adds a full percentage point to economic growth each year. That means that if, for the past 20 years, Americans had trusted one another like Ukrainians did, our annual GDP per capita would be \$11,000 lower; if we had trusted like New Zealanders did, it'd be \$16,000 higher. If trust is sufficiently low ... economic growth is unachievable.”⁶

Low trust of members of Slovak society towards other people and institutions contributes to low social cohesion, which is directly related to:

- the breakdown of collective identity, which means the absence of a common narrative that binds people in a given community together,
- weakening the respect towards local authorities and state institutions,
- growth of the anti-system sentiment,
- deterioration of the ability of society to respond to crises - a shrinking segment of the population responds to crises with cooperation and solidarity, and a growing segment responds to crises with distrust, suspicion and tribalisation,
- higher polarisation of society⁷.

“ Low trust of members of Slovak society towards other people and institutions contributes to low social cohesion.”

5 Arrow, K., “Gifts and Exchanges”, in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1(4), 1972, p. 357.

6 Useem, J., The End of Trust, *The Atlantic*, 21. 11. 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/12/trust-recession-economy/620522>

7 Kosnáč, P., Gloss, H., Trendy (ne)dôvery na Slovensku, In: *Súdržnosť na Slovensku: Čo drží krajinu pokope a na čom sa rozpadá?*, DEKK Inštitút, Bratislava, 2023, p. 13.

Low trust, and therefore cohesion, draws on our money, lowers security and damages our relationships and influences subjective satisfaction with one's own life.

A healthy level of trust is a prerequisite for social cohesion - both horizontal and vertical. For an effectively functioning country with a high level of citizen satisfaction - both levels must work. If only interpersonal trust works in a society, people will gang up against the state and institutions, and either they do not respect the rules and lawlessness arises, or they have their own rules and parallel societies emerge. If there is only trust in institutions/state, there is no natural cooperation at the local level and people rely on the state to sort everything out, local relations are impersonal and what is dealt with by agreement or self-help everywhere else is dealt with through ever larger and more bureaucratic institutions.⁸

“ A healthy degree of social cohesion - both horizontal and vertical - is necessary for an effectively functioning society with a high level of citizen satisfaction. Slovakia has a serious problem with both. ”

Trends of [dis]trust 2023 offer an overview of the current state of trust in Slovak society - both at the horizontal and vertical level. As the results show, Slovakia has a serious problem with both. Nevertheless, there are both state and non-state institutions in our country whose trustworthiness has grown over the last 30 years. If we want to strengthen social cohesion in our country, it is necessary to regularly measure its indicators - which include trust - and to identify the steps that regenerate it in Slovak society at both the horizontal and vertical levels.

⁸ Fukuyama F., Social Capital and Civil Society, In: IMF Working Papers No. 74, International Monetary Fund, 2000.

RESULTS ●

The results below on the state of trust in Slovak society come from a representative survey conducted by the FOCUS Agency in August 2023. Some of the questions were formulated in the same way as the World Values Survey and the European Values Study surveys from 1990, 1998, 2017 and 2022, which allows us to compare them and thus identify trends of [dis]trust in Slovakia in 2023.

HORIZONTAL TRUST IN SLOVAK SOCIETY ●

Interpersonal (horizontal) trust is standardly measured through agreeing with the proposition that “most people can be trusted”. This survey identified the value of interpersonal trust in Slovak society at 22.9%. Compared to 1990, when the value of 23% was measured, we can conclude that there has been no change. In practice, this means that despite thirty years of building a democratic society and objectively measurable material development, interpersonal trust among the Slovak population has not changed at all compared to the period just after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia (1989).

“ Interpersonal trust has remained virtually unchanged since the Revolution and the birth of the Republic - stagnating around ~23%. ”

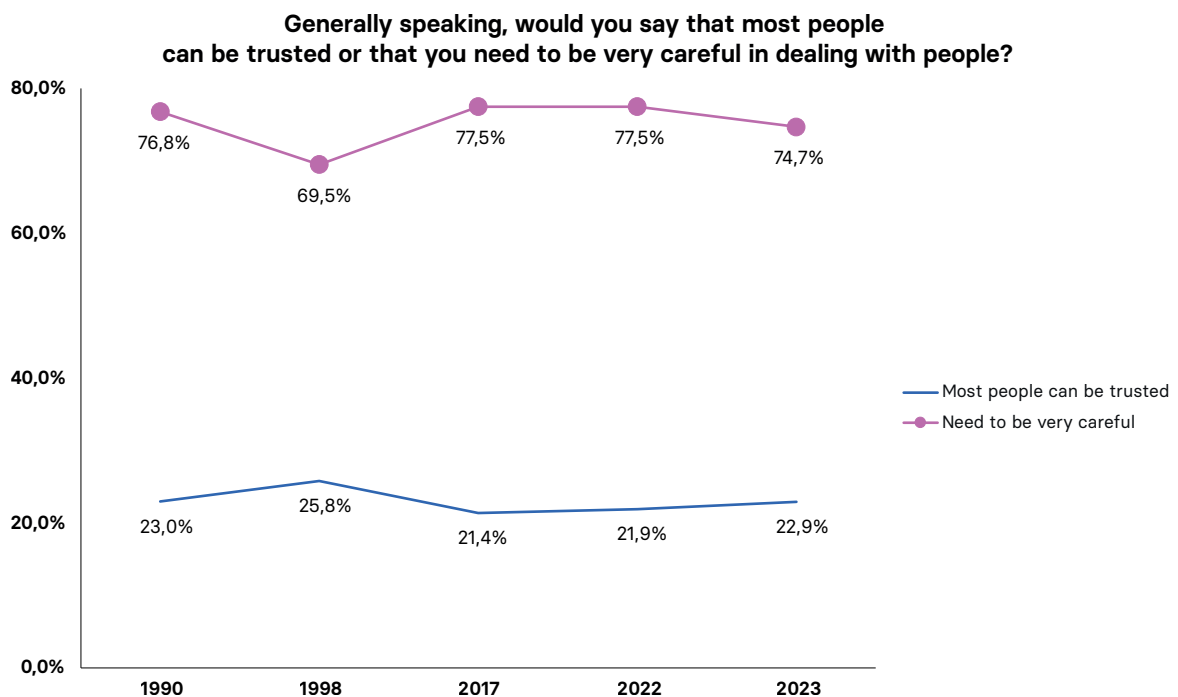


Figure 1: Overview of the development of general interpersonal trust in Slovak society between 1990 and 2023. (Source: WVS 1990, WVS 1998, EVS 2017, WVS 2022, FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

The general interpersonal trust of each member of any society is the result of a number of factors and is the subject of an ongoing research all round the world. Trust towards other people is influenced by the prenatal development where neuroticism levels are formed, our family environment during the growing up, our experiences with other people in adulthood and many other factors. The low and stagnant level of trust in Slovak society is also detrimental to the development of the country. Generations of adults who grew up and came of age before 1989 were strongly marked by the influence of the communist regime, which systematically reinforced mistrust in other people - all Slovaks are familiar with the saying they heard repeatedly from early childhood - “trust but verify”.

Studies have long confirmed the detrimental impact of totalitarian regimes on interpersonal trust, as they encourage a “snitch” mentality - foster informing on even the closest friends and family⁹, and seek to tie individual trust exclusively to state institutions. In the case of Slovakia, being part of Czechoslovakia during the period of 1948-1989, trust was fostered towards the public authorities and the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. However, even after thirty years since the abolition of the State Security (Communist secret police, Stb), known for its vast network of informants, and the enabling civic and political engagement of citizens, the level of dis-trust in Slovak society remains unchanged. People are reluctant to trust other people - and especially in any interaction that requires a greater social investment of time, money or emotions. Unfortunately, these social resources are what social capital is built on. In other words, people instinctively limit their trust towards people they know personally and believe they can rely on - typically family members and neighbours. That unfortunately prevents wider cooperation. The chart below shows the groups with the highest interpersonal trust in Slovakia.

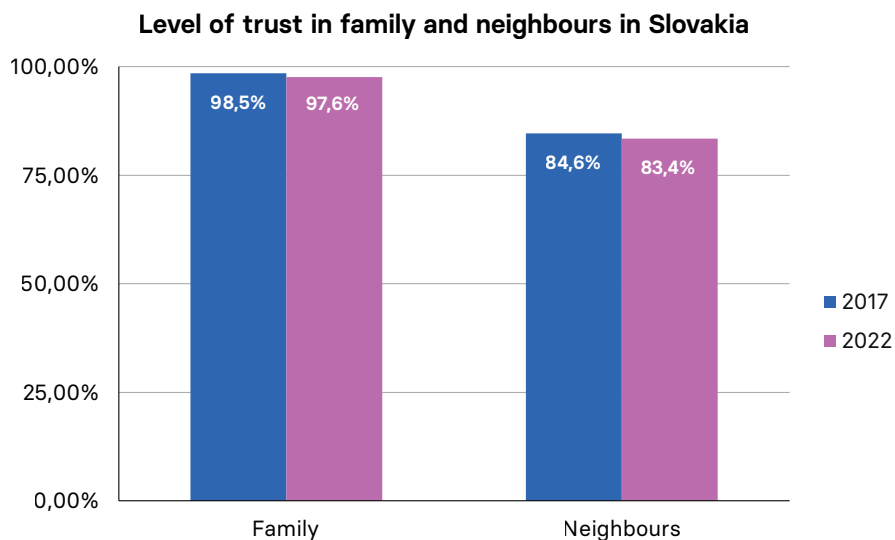


Figure 2: Overview of the most trusted groups in interpersonal trust in Slovak society in 2017 and 2022 (Source: EVS 2017, WVS 2022)


9 Licher, A., Loeffler, M., Siegloch, S., The Long-Term Costs of Government Surveillance: Insights from Stasi Spying in East Germany, Journal of the European Economic Association, Volume 19, Issue 2, April 2021. Access: <https://academic.oup.com/jeea/article/19/2/741/5823502>.

VERTICAL CONFIDENCE IN SLOVAK SOCIETY ●

Confidence in institutions, is more complex and harder to measure compared to interpersonal trust, especially since we live in large societies with millions of members and hundreds of institutions. Trends of [dis]trust measure 25 institutions that DEKK Institute, in consultation with Slovak and foreign scholars, considered to be the most important.

Below we present an overview of the level of confidence in institutions, which we have divided according to whether they are directly linked to the state and the electoral cycle, i.e. **political institutions** (government, parliament, political parties, president); **public authorities** that, although dependent on political developments in the country, have a certain degree of independence in the performance of their tasks, such as the public sector (state and public administration, justice system and courts, police and armed forces); and the **non-state sector and civil society**, consisting of universities, the media, churches, economic actors or NGOs. Confidence in each institution was measured on a scale of: *A great deal - Quite a lot - Not very much - None at all.*

“ **Vertical cohesion, known as confidence in institutions, is more complex and harder to measure compared to interpersonal trust, as we live in a complex society with hundreds of institutions. We measured the 25 most significant ones.** ”



OVERVIEW OF CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

I am going to name a number of organizations.
For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them.

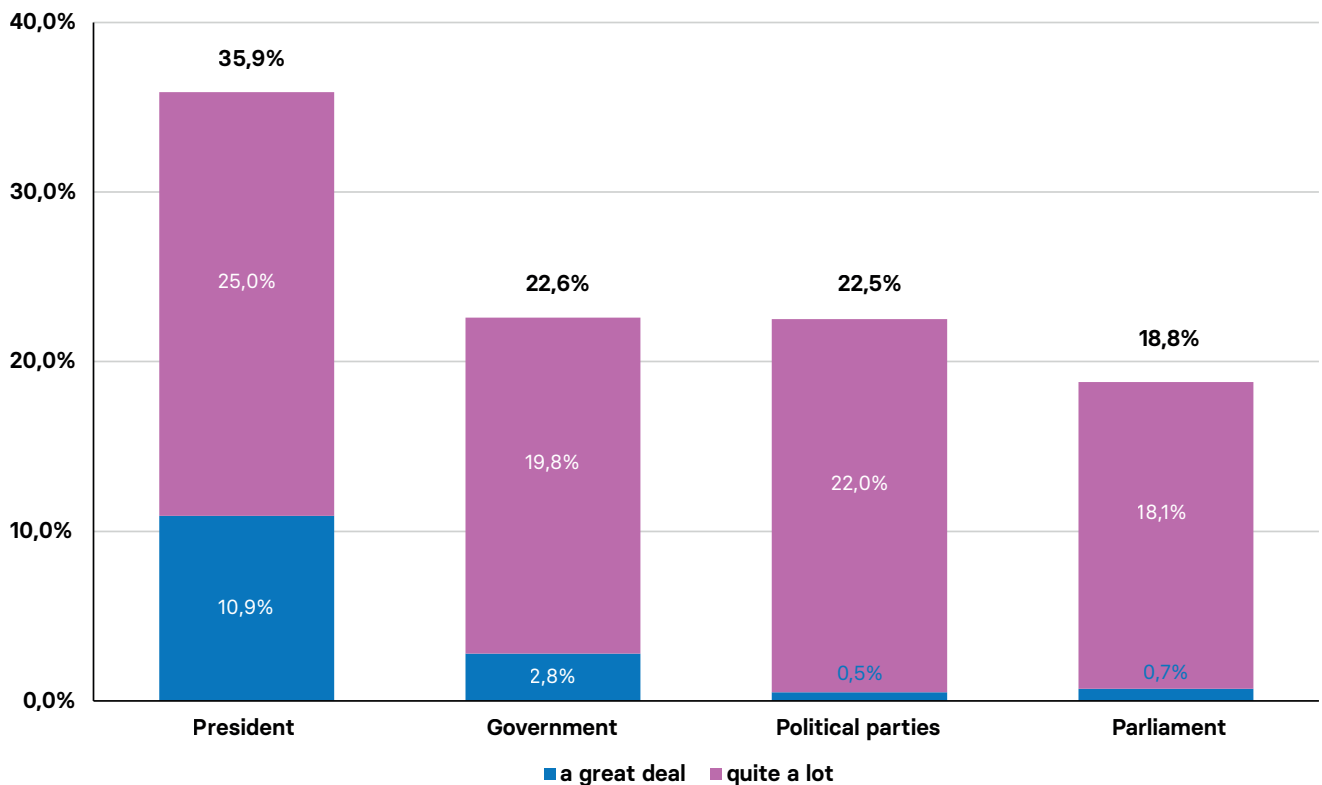


Figure 3: Overview of the confidence in political institutions in the Slovak Republic in August 2023 (Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

In 2023, the historically lowest confidence in the government in the history of Slovakia since 1993 was recorded, i.e. 14% (Standard Eurobarometer 98 - Winter 2022-2023), but confidence indicators have not improved significantly over the previous 30 years - despite the fact that the quality of life indicators in Slovakia have objectively improved compared to 1990 (average standard of living, life expectancy, etc.). Generally speaking, the highest level of confidence after the fall of the Communist regime was recorded towards the first federal government of Vladimír Mečiar at 68% (March 1991, FOCUS Agency), due to the strong optimism and expectations of the incoming civil and political freedom in Czechoslovak society. This optimism, together with the high confidence towards the government, faded after some sobering from the daily reality of the social and economic transformation of the 1990s - see more in the chapter "Historical causes of low trust". During the 30 years of existence of independent Slovakia the level of confidence of citizens in their government has exceeded 50 % only in exceptional cases. But current levels are low even by Slovak standards.¹⁰

¹⁰ Kosnáč, P., Gloss, H. (eds.), Súdržnosť na Slovensku: Čo drží krajinu pohromade a na čom sa rozpadá?, DEKK Inštitút, 2023, p. 17.

OVERVIEW OF CONFIDENCE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ●

I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them.

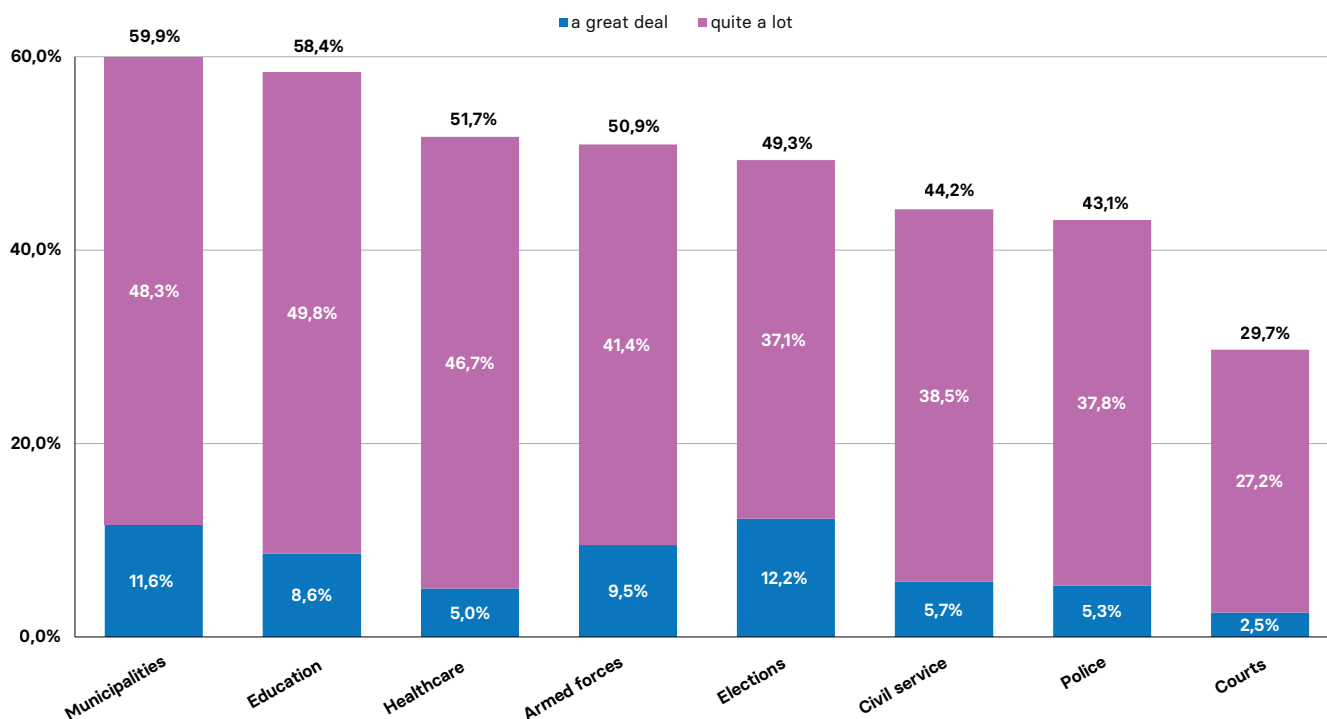


Figure 4: Overview of confidence in public sector institutions in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

Citizens' confidence in the security forces (police and armed forces) and in the authorities at different levels of local and state governance has increased significantly compared to the results of 1990. It can be assumed that the increase in confidence is linked to their professionalisation and a change in the general perception of these institutions on the part of the citizen (they are mostly not viewed as the eyes and arms of a totalitarian apparatus anymore). However, further data are needed for a comprehensive analysis of the factors that have brought about positive changes in perceptions and an increase in confidence in the public sector - these could also serve as a basis for the identification of processes that support the growth of trust on the part of the citizen and could be further developed.

The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and the Police Force of the Slovak Republic are also the only non-political institutions that performed worse in Slovakia in the 2022 measurement than in the previous measurement. One possible reason for this outcome is that this is the result of their involvement in government programmes during the pandemic period and the subsequent clear condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which in the eyes of a part of the population "politicised" the army and police and reduced their credibility. Confidence in the Army was especially damaged - an element of the dip might be caused by general perception of the army as traditionally apolitical in Slovakia and mostly outside of public interest. A strong involvement in two polarising topics (pandemics and the war in Ukraine) put them on the spot, drawing negative attention.

Confidence in the courts and the justice system has not changed over the last 30 years. It can be assumed that this is related to the number of public controversies tied to the judiciary, the absence of judicial reforms, the overall high level of unenforceability and inefficiency of the law and the lack of clarity of the law for the general public.¹¹

OVERVIEW OF CONFIDENCE IN SELECTED INSTITUTIONS 1990 - 2023

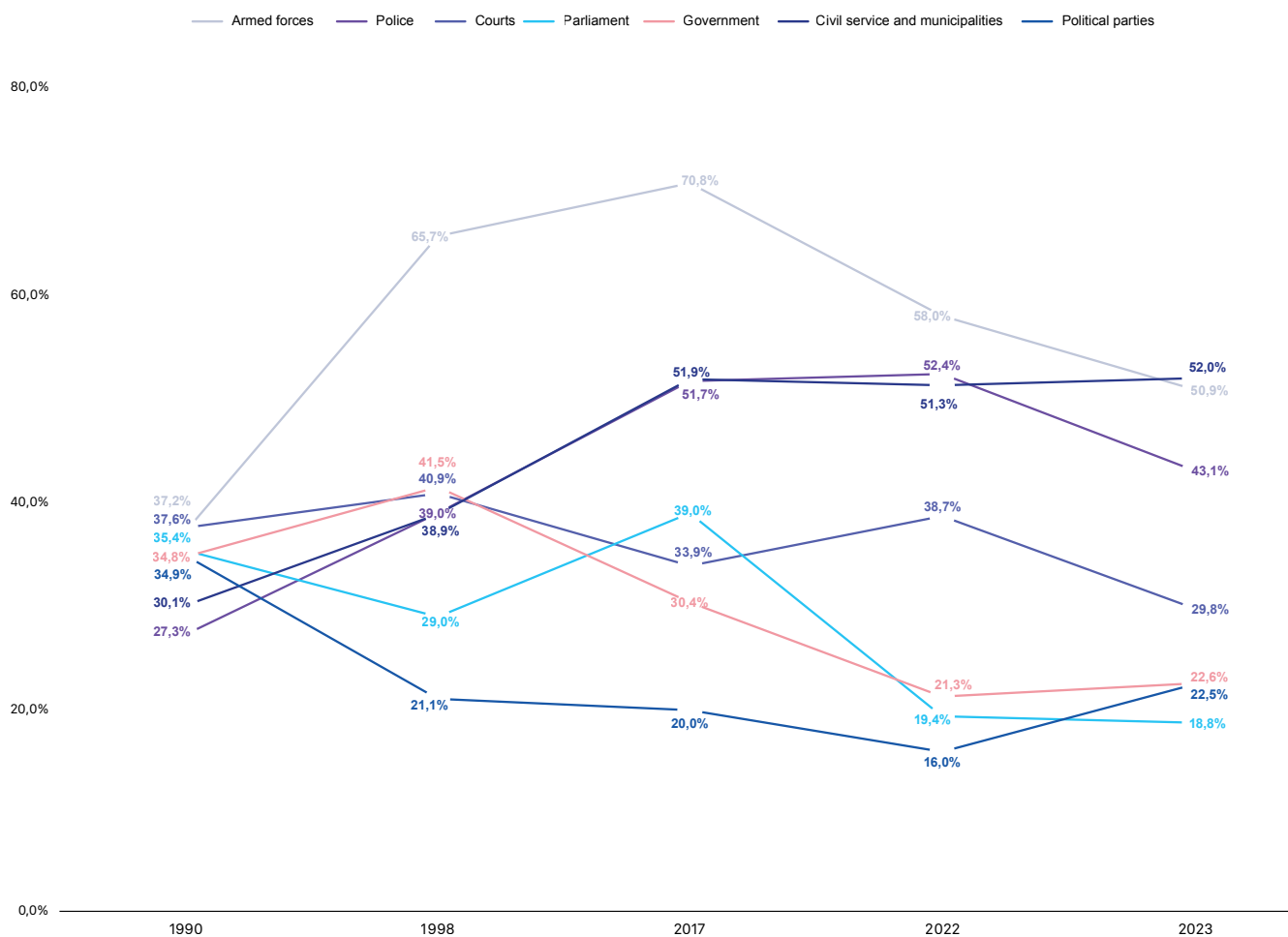


Figure 5: Overview of confidence in selected state institutions of the Slovak Republic between 1990 and 2023 (Source: WVS 1990, WVS 1998, EVS 2017, WVS 2022, FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

¹¹ Rule of law report 2023, European Commission, Accessible at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-mechanism/2023-rule-law-report_en.

OVERVIEW OF CONFIDENCE IN THE NON-STATE SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY ●

The influential social elites in almost any society include the private sector and industry, churches and religious organisations, the media and the NGOs. It is noteworthy that of all the institutions measured, the top three most trusted institutions in Slovakia belong to the non-state sector.

NON-STATE SECTOR ●

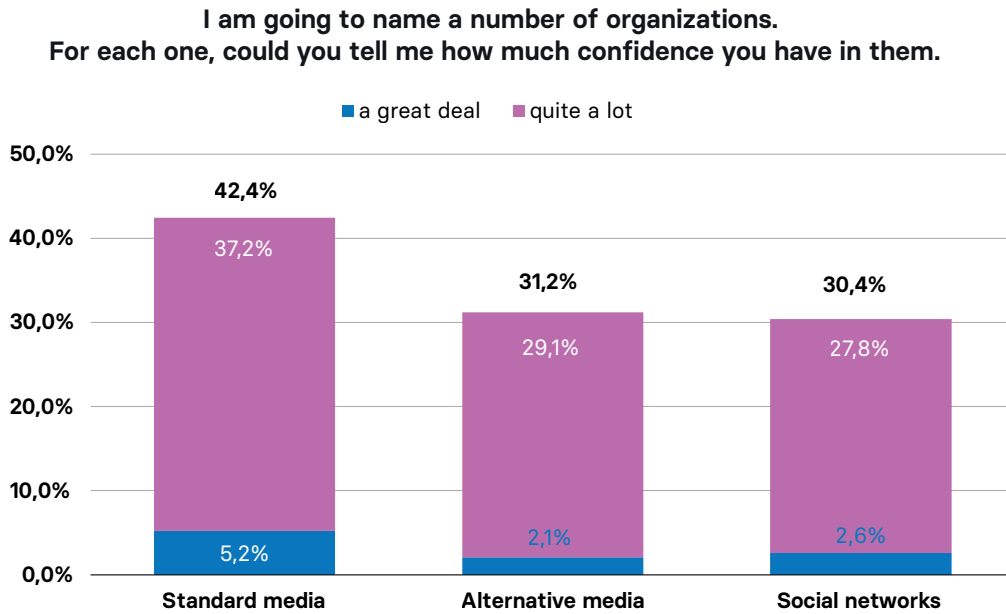
The clear 'winner' of trustworthiness in the list of all institutions measured are scientists and research institutions (64.6%), universities and colleges (62.6%). In fourth place in the overall ranking are Slovak, i.e. domestic, companies and enterprises, which have significantly higher trust than foreign enterprises in Slovakia. The private sector was viewed with suspicion after the fall of the Communist regime and the "wild" 1990s did not help its trustworthiness, but today it is a significant and relatively trustworthy part of Slovak society.

The credibility of churches and religious organisations has been relatively stable, with no significant fluctuations, although historically it has been slightly declining. In Slovakia, this means in practice mainly the Catholic and Lutheran churches, which are the dominant representatives of Christianity in Slovakia in terms of the number of believers as well as historical influence. The level of confidence in churches is among the highest among Slovak institutions. At the same time, the slight decline in confidence compared to the measurements of previous years is probably related to the gradual secularisation of society, and to the fact that many values upheld by churches and religious institutions are part of the so-called culture wars in Slovakia.



Figure 6: Overview of confidence in non-state sector institutions in August 2023.
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

The credibility of the standard media in Slovakia is 42.4%, 11% higher than the credibility of the so-called alternative media (31.2%). Social networks are almost at the same level, with 30.4% trustworthiness.



*Figure 7: Overview of confidence in media in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)*



THE ISSUE WITH THE TERM “NGOS”

In the questionnaire developed for this research, respondents were first asked to answer a question regarding their confidence in NGOs in general, and then they were given the opportunity to express their confidence in NGOs according to their focus.

The purpose of this experimental division was the previous longstanding public debate about the nature of NGOs and their credibility in Slovakia. Some political actors have even suggested limiting the operation or funding of NGOs. In the questionnaire, respondents were first asked about their level of confidence in ‘NGOs’ in general (35.8%), and only then were they given the opportunity to express their level of confidence in ‘charities and humanitarian organisations’ (50.6%), and then in ‘organisations focusing on civic activism’ (32.9%). The experiment showed that in the minds of most people in Slovakia the term “NGOs” is perceived in a very reduced way and that respondents primarily think of NGOs as organisations focused on civic activism.

This perception politicises NGOs in the eyes of the public, and their politicisation can have a negative impact on their credibility. However, these ‘activist’ organisations make up only a small proportion of all NGOs in Slovakia. Most NGOs are primarily concerned with volunteering, sport or cultural activities in nature, and some of the largest existing ones are focused on directly helping people, with thousands of members. An example is the volunteer fire brigades, which have approximately 80,000 members.¹² Thus, efforts of a general restriction of NGOs across the board would have a massive impact on cooperation and civic engagement across the whole of social life in Slovakia.

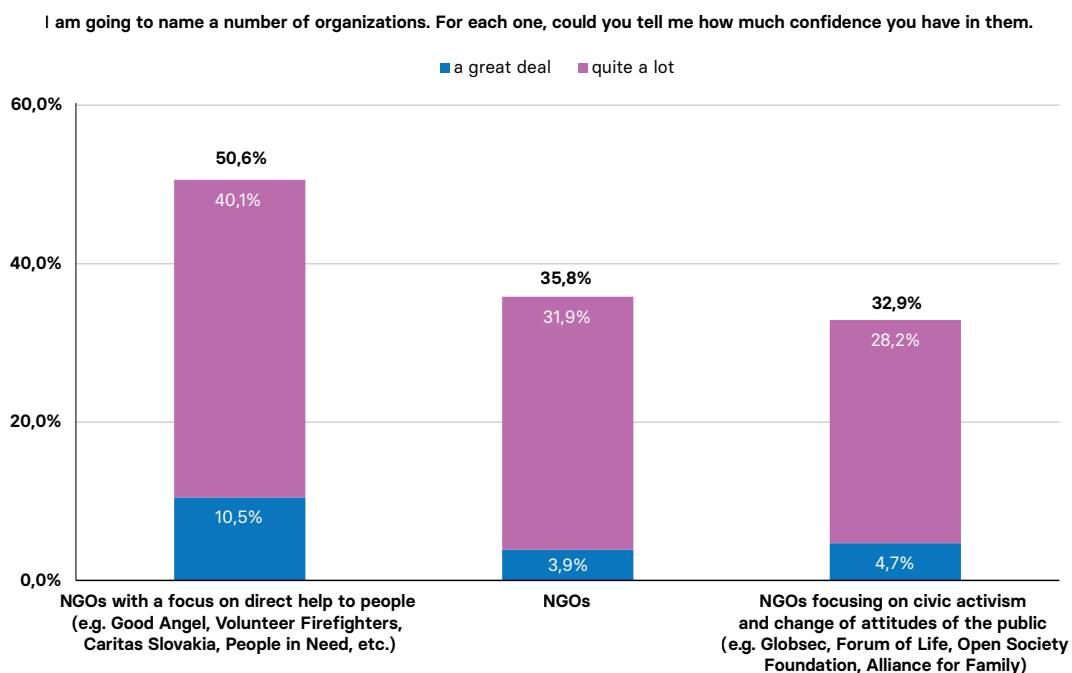


Figure 8: Overview of confidence in NGOs in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

12 Dobrovoľná požiarna ochrana SR, Informácie o DPO SR, <https://www.dposr.sk/index.php/dpo-sr/info-o-dpo-sr>.

OVERVIEW OF CONFIDENCE IN ALL MEASURED INSTITUTIONS ●

| | A great deal | Quite a lot | TOTAL |
|---|--------------|-------------|-------|
| Scientists and research institutions (i.e. SAV) | 15,4% | 49,2% | 64,6% |
| Universities and colleges | 12,3% | 50,3% | 62,6% |
| Municipalities (local government) | 11,6% | 48,3% | 59,9% |
| Local Slovak businesses and companies | 5,9% | 54,0% | 59,9% |
| Education system | 8,6% | 49,8% | 58,4% |
| Healthcare | 5,0% | 46,7% | 51,7% |
| Armed forces | 9,5% | 41,4% | 50,9% |
| NGOs with a focus on direct help to people (e.g. Good Angel, Volunteer Firefighters, Caritas Slovakia, People in Need, etc.) | 10,5% | 40,1% | 50,6% |
| Elections | 12,2% | 37,1% | 49,3% |
| European Union | 7,9% | 39,2% | 47,1% |
| NATO | 8,9% | 35,7% | 44,6% |
| Public offices | 5,7% | 38,5% | 44,2% |
| Churches and religious organisations | 10,3% | 33,7% | 44,0% |
| Police | 5,3% | 37,8% | 43,1% |
| Standard media | 5,2% | 37,2% | 42,4% |
| Foreign and international businesses in Slovakia | 3,3% | 36,9% | 40,2% |
| President | 10,9% | 25,0% | 35,9% |
| NGOs | 3,9% | 31,9% | 35,8% |
| NGOs focusing on civic activism and change of attitudes of the public (e.g. Globsec, Forum of Life, Open Society Foundation, Alliance for Family) | 4,7% | 28,2% | 32,9% |
| Alternative media | 2,1% | 29,1% | 31,2% |
| Social networks | 2,6% | 27,8% | 30,4% |
| Courts | 2,5% | 27,2% | 29,7% |
| Government | 2,8% | 19,8% | 22,6% |
| Political parties | 0,5% | 22,0% | 22,5% |
| Parliament | 0,7% | 18,1% | 18,8% |

Table 1: Overall confidence in all measured institutions in Slovak Republic in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them.

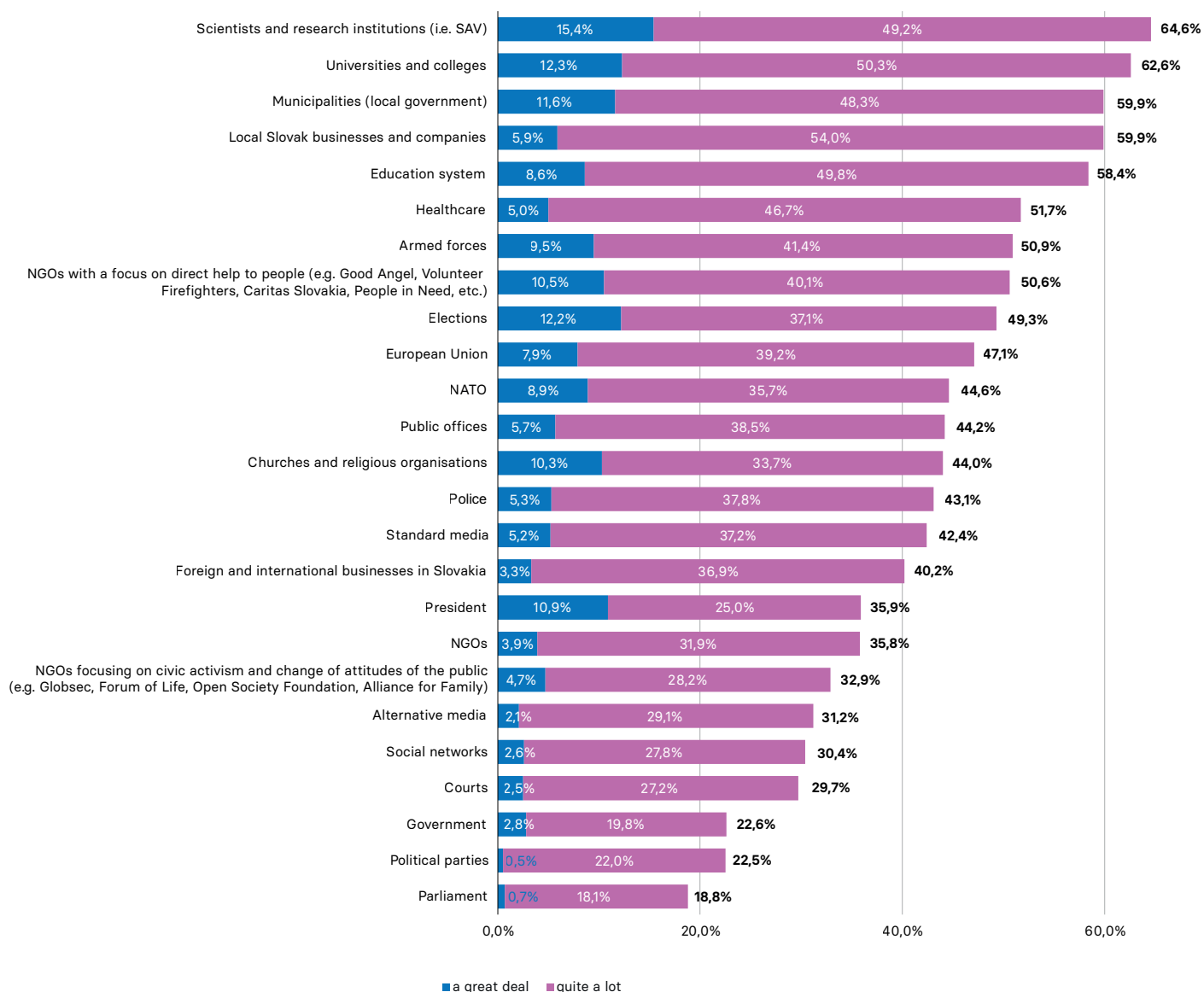


Figure 9: Overall confidence in all measured institutions in Slovak Republic in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

POLL: SLOVAKIA'S MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS ●

Part of the survey conducted for Trends of [dis]trust 2023 was an open question in which respondents were asked about the three largest problems Slovakia is facing today. The texts in brackets are examples of the verbatim answers of the respondents, which formed the basis for the different thematic categories during the process of coding the qualitative data. The intention of the open-ended question was to create a list of the problems from the point of view of the inhabitants of Slovakia. Naturally, the relevance of some topics may fluctuate over time - for example, the topic of migration was mentioned by only 6% of respondents in August 2023, but the figure would likely be higher in mid-September 2023 (month when general public was alarmed by a high influx of migrants from Syria transiting Slovakia on their way to Germany).

However, if we ask the same question about the largest problems of the country at regular intervals, we can identify the problems that resonate in society consistently. It would then be possible to focus a detailed survey on a specific area where the state has the power to improve (e.g. healthcare) and identify the specific reasons for citizens' dissatisfaction, which understandably undermines their trust in the state's competence.¹³ As a next step, these causes of distrust should be addressed by the relevant institutions. Their subsequent improvement in favour of the citizen has the potential to gradually strengthen trust in the country at the vertical level (citizen - state). In other words, by regularly collecting relevant data, we can identify the chronic problems of the country and, by correcting them appropriately, gradually increase the satisfaction of citizens with the state institutions.

¹³ Perceptions of institutional competence have a significant impact on institutional trust. See: Brezzi, M. et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en>.

Now I would like to ask you what are the three largest problems Slovakia is facing today? Try to name the three most serious problems of the country. (Each respondent had a choice of three answers).

| Problems | Answers in % |
|---|---------------------|
| inflation, rising prices (rising prices, constant price increases, high prices of food, energy and services, inflation, constant cost of living growth, high prices of everything, expensive gasoline, ...) | 65,2% |
| healthcare (poorly functioning health services, bankrupt healthcare, expensive medicines, shortage of doctors, long waiting times, ...) | 42,5% |
| standard of living, social security (low income, low pensions, low living standards, poverty, insecurity, social problems, help for families with children, social benefits, ...) | 37,5% |
| state of politics, quality of democracy (incompetent government, incapable government, unstable government, bad politics, disinformation, chaos in society, unstable political situation, threat to democracy, divided politicians, political crisis, we have no government, ...) | 24,7% |
| corruption, clientelism (corruption, the fight against corruption, theft of state property and corruption and little success in punishing the guilty ones, ...) | 13,9% |
| schooling and education (quality of education, level of education, disconnection between education and the labour market, improving the quality of education - keeping young people in the country, ...) | 13,7% |
| economy, state of the economy (economic crisis, high taxes, indebted state, economic decline, interest rates in banks, few subsidies for companies, reduction of the national debt, protection of the domestic market, unspent EU funds , agriculture, food self-sufficiency, ...) | 13,5% |
| war in Ukraine, threat of war (the war in Ukraine, the threat of war, the Ukrainian invasion and exploitation of our state, the war in Ukraine and the threat of it spreading further, support for Ukraine, the military conflict in Ukraine, why we are meddling and sending weapons there, ...) | 11,7% |
| unemployment, labour market (lack of job opportunities, few interesting job offers, difficulty finding a job, long-term unemployment, ...) | 10,3% |
| housing (mortgages, high house prices, young families with nowhere to live, lack of housing, expensive housing, ...) | 7,4% |
| Migrants and refugees (migrants, immigrants, arrival of refugees, ...) | 6,0% |
| divided society, culture wars, conflicts of values (LGBTI, unapproved rights for LGBTI, need to promote equality, culture war, promotion of traditional family, promotion of liberal ideologies, overall bad mood in society, divided society, too much materialism, too much liberalism, "snowflakes" ("slniečkári" in Slovak), ...) | 4,2% |
| judiciary, legislation, rule of law, law enforcement (weak law enforcement, judicial system, lawlessness, dysfunctional courts, breakdown of the rule of law, distrust of the courts, ...) | 4,0% |
| energy crisis (energy crisis, making energy cheaper for citizens, tackling the energy crisis, ...) | 3,7% |

| | |
|--|------|
| parliamentary elections 2023 (upcoming elections, elections - there is no one to vote for, early parliamentary elections, the next elections and the return of Fico and the strengthening of the Republic party, ...) | 3,6% |
| environment (climate, environment, impact on weather, air, climate change, ...) | 3,0% |
| something else (the direction the country is heading, animal cruelty, social networks, rushed times, the decline of the state, there are no experts, the system, the birth rate, border security, the stability of the state, fears for the future of Slovakia, ...) | 3,0% |
| infrastructure, transportation (roads and highways in the east of Slovakia, traffic problems everywhere, bad roads, ...) | 1,9% |
| foreign policy (detachment from nonsensical EU orders, foreign policy uncertainty, Slovakia's lack of sovereignty, Slovakia's dependence on NATO and the EU, the geopolitical situation, Russian propaganda and disinformation, ...) | 1,8% |
| interpersonal relations, morality (hostility, low morality, bad relations, egoism, human hatred, ...) | 1,6% |
| criminality, organised crime | 1,4% |
| ethnic tensions, problems of coexistence (Roma, the Roma question, stop supporting only Roma and those who worked honestly are rewarded with a handout, the maladjusted people supported more than decent people, ...) | 1,0% |
| problems of the elderly (assistance to pensioners, social services, retirement age, insufficient capacity in state nursing homes , ...) | 0,8% |
| regional and local problems, disparities (municipalities and cities do not have money to operate, regional disparities, weak regional support, problems of local governments, ...) | 0,8% |
| brain drain (young people leaving abroad, brain drain, ...) | 0,7% |
| xenophobia, racism, extremism (extremists, not all have equal rights in Slovakia, hatred, Nazis and Russian trolls, ...) | 0,5% |
| police (public safety and police controversies, bad police, struggle in the police for leadership, ...) | 0,5% |
| bureaucracy (endless processing at the relevant offices, bureaucracy) | 0,4% |
| Covid pandemics | 0,4% |
| bears (people's concern for their safety from bears near their homes, the problem of bears near dwellings, ...) | 0,2% |
| illegal drugs and alcohol | 0,1% |

Table 2: Overview of the largest problems in Slovakia in August 2023
(Source: FOCUS Agency for DEKK Institute, 2023)

HISTORICAL CAUSES OF LOW TRUST - A BRIEF OVERVIEW ●

Rebuilding horizontal and vertical trust is a complex and long-term process that must take into account both historical and current factors affecting the state of trust in Slovakia. Dr. Marianna Mrva, expert at the Slovak Academy of Sciences and author of the book *Fenomén spoločenskej dôvery na Slovensku* (The Phenomenon of Social Trust in Slovakia, 2022), states:

We could find several possible sources of mistrust among today's adults, both among cultural factors and among experiences they may have gained recently. The communist regime during which most of today's adults were socialised was known for nurturing mistrust among people and using it to its advantage as a political tool. As a result, parallel worlds were created in this period: small, cohesive communities on the one hand, within which mutual aid, loyalty and trust operated, and on the other hand, a world outside these communities characterised by wariness and mistrust. Caution in dealing with strangers was learned in the process of socialisation, but in many cases it also resulted from direct personal experience.

The post-transition period has brought a great deal of change, but much of it has also been detrimental to social trust. For example, the weakened state was unable to enforce the rules of the game during the privatisation of state assets, which allowed many to get rich through dishonest means. On the other hand, however, the general population felt disillusioned and gave the impression that the new system favoured only speculators. Frustration with the inequalities in society was further exacerbated by the intertwining of politics and the mafia that characterised the period. In addition, ethnic conflicts escalated at this time, which also did not contribute to a good atmosphere in society.

After the "wild" 1990s, although many of these social phenomena were consolidated, the economic reforms introduced brought a sharp rise in unemployment, which began to fall again only after a few years. While the economic and social changes implemented during this period contributed to Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO and to a gradual rise in living standards, the ongoing globalisation also accelerated the atomisation and individualisation of society.

The gradual disintegration of local communities as a result of migration, commuting, overall greater population movement and an increase in the diversity of lifestyles has brought a new type of insecurity into the lives of many. Moreover, the state did not serve as a reliable support in the new situation. On the one hand, it responded to the new challenges in a delayed and inflexible manner; on the other hand, it continued to be tainted by clientelism and corruption. Without the backing of state structures, people may have been left with the impression that they had to rely on themselves and build their own defence mechanisms. And, as under communism, this defence mechanism may have been one of mistrust, in the face of the new forms of insecurity brought about by post-transformation developments.¹⁴

14 Mrva, M., *Fenomén spoločenskej dôvery na Slovensku*, Sociologický ústav SAV, 2022, p. 113 – 116.

We cannot change the factors that have influenced trust in Slovak society in the past. But we need to understand them. At the same time, we need to identify the factors that are contributing to the current weakening of trust. Many Slovaks intuitively understand various causes undermining trust in our society (common petty corruption, the links between the political elite and organised crime, the economic impact of crises or the state of the judiciary), but no one can describe them fully or establish a hierarchy of their importance with any certainty. At the same time, this hierarchy varies across regions and social classes. This is why we need a culture of strategic collection and analysis of relevant data at the state level. By collecting this data on a regular basis, we will have a better understanding of the development of society in Slovakia and it will be possible to identify a hierarchy of factors that influence trust and cohesion in Slovakia. Subsequently, through further - already more focused surveys - we can analyse in more detail the most problematic factors, which relevant actors will be able to address and thus contribute to the restoration of both horizontal and vertical trust in the country.

The DEKK Institute is an independent research organisation that was founded in early 2020 on the initiative of several young scientists, students and humanitarian workers. It was motivated by an interest in the study of society and the shared experience of most of the participants in conflict settings, humanitarian projects and refugee camps in countries in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa, where they came to realise two things the hard way: a well-functioning society requires care and peaceful personal engagement of its members, and despite all areas of legitimate criticism, Slovakia is still doing very well. We want to contribute to keep it that way.

“ The long-term vision of the DEKK Institute is to understand the problem of erosion and regeneration of social cohesion in Europe. ”

The DEKK Institute is the Slovak representative in the World Values Survey Association (WVSA), the largest survey organization studying values in the world, on whose social science data a large part of the decision-making of the UN, OSCE and the World Bank is based, and in the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), the international professional association in the field of collection and design of public opinion polls.

We design our own public opinion polls and analytical tools. Expert partners from all over the world, project guarantors and the Scientific Advisory Board of the DEKK Institute help us uphold the highest quality.

But we don't want to do science for science's sake. We have decided to share our outputs and analytical tools, just as others selflessly shared with us in the past, and thus make life easier for analysts from the civil service, scientists, journalists and the general public, who will be able to use the easily accessible databases that we gradually publish.

We want to contribute to the improvement of the public debate and at the same time draw attention to the issue of cohesion.

Our goal is long-term. We realize that understanding and subsequent intervention in the field of social cohesion is the work that will span for about two generations. Well, we like Slovakia, all the more because we spent several years abroad - in a better, but also significantly worse environment. Therefore, we know what heights we could reach as a society, but also how deep we can fall. We believe that every individual can contribute to the improvement of the country. DEKK and its work is our contribution.

WHY DEKK? ●

Dorrit Dekk (born as Dorothea Karoline Fuhrmann in 1917) was a native of Czechoslovakia (Brno) and during the Second World War of the war collaborated on deciphering the Enigma. The name DEKK Institute is inspired by the idea that Dorrit Dekk worked on a serious problem of her era, which at the time few people knew about and considered important.

Social Cohesion is today the equivalent of what Enigma once was. It is a key problem concerning the whole society, but few people register it in its complexity and even fewer people study it. Dorrit Dekk was thus an ordinary person who contributed to solving an extraordinary challenge, but after the war she returned to a normal life and made a living as a designer.

We, too, are ordinary people who put our energies into solving an extraordinary problem. At the beginning of 2020, when our institute was created, we, inspired by Dorrit Dekk, started working on the study of cohesion in addition to our ordinary jobs and lives - but with the aim of maximum professionalism and joining forces with leading specialists in research and development.

SUPPORT US ●

In case our work makes sense to you, we would be grateful if you would support our further research on the breakdown and regeneration of social cohesion in Slovakia and Europe.

<https://www.dekk.institute/en/support-us/>



DATASETS ●

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