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Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani
U N I V E R S I T Y

Contents

Public Perception of Innovation and Technology Investments/Products During Economic Hardships

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study investigates public perceptions of innovation and technology during economic hardships, with a focus on discussions on the social media platform Reddit. Utilizing advanced data mining and natural language processing (NLP) techniques, this research analyzes Reddit posts to uncover sentiment trends, thematic patterns, and levels of public engagement related to technology investments during economic downturns. By methodically gathering and processing user-generated content, the study aims to map out variations in public attitudes towards innovation in response to economic shifts. The analysis employs sophisticated NLP techniques, including sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and semantic analysis, to interpret the rich and diverse discussions occurring on Reddit.

The findings reveal a predominantly positive sentiment towards technology investments, with significant discussions centered around public perception, technological strategies, and environmental impact. The study also identifies key themes that dominate conversations at various stages of economic movement, providing insights into the effectiveness of technological tools and products during challenging times.

This research not only contributes to the academic understanding of public discourse on innovation and technology, but also offers valuable insights for organizations, policymakers, and social media strategists aiming to promote innovation amidst economic adversity. The study's detailed sentiment timeline and thematic analysis provide a comprehensive overview of how public perceptions evolve in response to economic conditions, offering practical implications for fostering technological advancements in difficult economic climates.

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Introduction

Today's technologies are rapidly developing and evolving. How these innovations are received by the public is an aspect that needs to be considered. Examining the ways in which innovations and technologies are received by the public plays an effective role in evaluating technological development, determining the next step of development, and organizing public policies (Moreno&Luján, 1993). The public's perspective on an innovation or technological development may be affected by a variety of reasons, among them gender, economic, political, or environmental concerns.

There is a relationship between public opinion and companies' investment in innovation (Zhang *et al.,* 2018). It has been shown that public reaction to environmental concerns has a positive influence on construction companies' decision-making processes regarding green innovations (Wang *et al.,* 2022). In recent years, it has been observed that encouragement for innovations has increased in both developed and developing economies based on public support (Rosário *et al.,* 2022).

Different analysis methods can be chosen to investigate public opinions. One of these is sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis is a natural language processing method that allows the classification of sentiments based on a written text, sentence, or a certain feature. Natural language processing is a common method used to understand people's ideas in different areas, such as finance, marketing, and advertising. For this method, social media data is frequently preferred, both because of the size of the data and because it provides the most direct access to people's feelings and ideas. In this study, data was collected from the Reddit social media platform.

While prior research has examined public perceptions of innovation and technology through surveys, interviews, and traditional sentiment analysis methods, there is a paucity of studies leveraging large-scale social media data to analyze sentiment during economic hardships. Moreover, the dynamic evolution of public attitudes across different economic cycles remains insufficiently explored, particularly within the context of online discourse. This study aims to address these gaps by utilizing Reddit – a platform that hosts diverse and real-time discussions – to explore public sentiment and identify thematic trends related to technology investments during periods of economic downturn.

The focus of the study is to examine people's perspectives on technology and innovations according to economic change, and examines public perceptions of innovation and technology in the context of economic hardships, with a particular focus on discussions conducted on the social media platform Reddit.

Literature Review

Innovation does not only mean creating a new product or service, but also the need to produce different strategies (Rosário *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, it can be said that innovations are essential for companies to survive. Studies suggest that during economic downturns, it is the innovative businesses that sur-

vive (Uçaktürk *et al.,* 2011). López Fernández *et al.* (2018) conducted a study on this subject and examined the relationship between innovation and business results in several economic cycles. Using the economic-financial data of more than 900 manufacturing companies in the Spanish automotive sector for the period 2002-2014, the study found that innovation had a positive influence on the business results, depending on their size and the economic period.

There are studies that investigate public perception of innovations. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) are the three theoretical approaches most often used to measure technology acceptance, according to the literature (Gijón *et al.*, 2021). Gijón *et al.* (2021) developed a model through surveys to examine the public's perspective on innovations from different perspectives in Spain. One of the results of the study revealed that the perception of innovation is related to the level of education, indicating that people with a higher level of education have a better approach to innovation. Irawan *et al.* (2023) conducted a qualitative data analysis through application comments to measure the public's perspective on the Mobile National Health Insurance (JKN) application used in Indonesia. The analysis concluded that the public's general view of the application was negative.

Since different problems are encountered, such as high expense, risk, and low demand for innovation (Pohulak-Żołędowska, 2016),

public opinion is used so as to ensure the acceptance and legitimacy of innovations. Legitimacy is a principal concept, especially for new technologies, because it is essential for determining the necessary regulators, as well as economic and material resources (Markard *et al.,* 2016). Dehler-Holland *et al.* (2022) conducted a sentiment analysis on publications from four different newspapers between 2009 and 2018, to investigate whether wind energy is still a legitimate energy source in Germany, despite decreasing investments following lawsuits, and increasing backlash. As a result, it was seen that even if wind energy is still a legitimate energy source for Germany, further political regulations are needed for people, animals and the environment. Shen *et al.* (2021) examined the public's views on innovations in different areas related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) via Twitter*. In this study, which examined a four-year period, it was seen that topics such as sustainable agriculture, environmentally friendly materials, and green energy were frequently discussed, and there was generally positive emotional content, whereas it was seen that people expressed "negative" views about agricultural innovations.

With the developing technology, countries have started to invest more in innovations. In order to get the rewards of these investments, it has become important to measure the public's perspective on innovations and to identify innovation barriers. In 2020, De Fuentes *et al.* studied two firms from emerging economies, Mexico and Tur-

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* Note: Twitter officially known as X since 2023.

key, to investigate the factors affecting their perception of innovation barriers. The firm and context characteristics were found to be important factors of the firms' perception of said barriers. By analyzing the overall market sentiment, Dang and Xu (2018) showed that financially constrained firms are more likely to invest in R&D than unconstrained firms. To investigate the impact of technological innovations in a company on the reputation of that company, Caviggioli *et al*. (2020) conducted a study with Twitter data. According to the public's comments from Twitter about five companies that switched to Bitcoin as a payment method, the reputation of the companies increased positively in a short time, and more rapidly still with the innovations made. There are studies where sentiment analysis is used not only to learn the public's opinion about the innovation to be made, but also to obtain innovation ideas. In their study of online user reviews on Amazon, a shopping application, Zhang *et al*. (2021) extracted innovation ideas for products.

Natural language processing is an effective method that enables research on many different topics, among them politics (Al-Razgan *et al.,* 2021), marketing (Wu *et al.,* 2024), sustainability (Cubukcu-Cerasi *et al.,* 2023), health (Park *et al*., 2024), and finance (Todd *et al.,* 2024). The public's response to innovations can be measured using textual data. In this way, the reasons for their opinions can be investigated, and the necessary arrangements can be made to ensure the permanence of innovations.

Methods

This study examines the public discourse and sentiment surrounding innovation and technology investments/products during periods of economic adversity. It employs topic modeling and sentiment analysis methodologies, using natural language processing (NLP) methods. The data was obtained from Reddit, a platform where users often engage in discussions on various subjects, such as technology and economic circumstances. Public chatter was efficiently analyzed using data science methods to classify latent topics and feelings.

Data Collection and Cleaning

Reddit is a popular social media network that has around 57 million active users daily, as of 2023. It provides a vast amount of user-generated content through multiple subreddits that focus on different topics. In this study, we primarily utilized Reddit as our data source because of its large user population and the wide range of viewpoints voiced on the network. We gathered a grand total of 5,329 posts from pertinent subreddits that delve into topics of innovation, technology, and economic circumstances.

The data was obtained through the utilization of Apify, a tool designed for web scraping and data extraction. This platform facilitated the automated capture of Reddit posts and comments. Apify's technologies enabled the extraction of pertinent threads, comments, and related metadata. To adhere to ethical research protocols, all personal data

was anonymised to safeguard user privacy. The data obtained was also streamlined to encompass solely the essential information pertinent to the study's objectives.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in three main steps:

1. **Word Frequency Analysis**: To identify the most commonly discussed topics, we first analyzed the frequency of words and phrases within the collected data. This step helped us understand the public's primary interests related to innovation and technology during economic hardships. A word cloud visualization was generated to present these high-frequency terms intuitively, making critical information easily accessible.

2. **Topic Modeling**: To uncover the latent topics within the Reddit discussions, we employed topic modeling techniques, specifically Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). Topic modeling allowed us to cluster related content, revealing the associations among various subjects. This approach was crucial in exploring the breadth and depth of discussions, providing insights into the multifaceted nature of public discourse.

3. **Sentiment Analysis**: Finally, sentiment analysis was performed to gauge the emotional tendencies conveyed in the text. By classifying sentiments as positive, neutral, or negative, we were able to track emotional shifts in public perception over time. This analysis helped us to identify positive attitudes, concerns, and potential issues related to innovation and technology in the context of economic challenges.

Through this comprehensive approach, we aimed to provide a detailed understanding of how public sentiment and discourse on innovation and technology evolve during periods of economic hardship.

Topic Modeling

All data analyses were conducted using Python (version 3.10). For topic modeling, we explored three well-established techniques to identify and analyze the latent topics within the Reddit posts:

- **Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)**: A widely used probabilistic model that discerns latent topics by assuming that each document is a mixture of a small number of topics, and that each word's presence is attributable to one of these topics.

- **Non-Negative Matrix Factorization (NMF)**: This technique emphasizes the relationship between documents and topics by decomposing the term-document matrix into two lower-dimensional matrices, representing documents and topics. NMF is particularly effective in revealing the underlying structure in the data.

- **Transformer-Based Models**: These models, especially BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers), are renowned for their proficiency in understanding the intricate semantics embedded within textual data. They offer advanced capabilities in capturing contextual relationships, and are highly effective for complex text analysis.

For this study, LDA was selected as the primary method due to its balance between

interpretability and effectiveness in topic extraction from large textual datasets, like those sourced from Reddit. The topics identified through LDA provided a comprehensive overview of the various discussions surrounding innovation and technology in the context of economic hardships.

In this study, we employed a hybrid approach combining VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) and TextBlob for sentiment classification.

- VADER is a rule-based model well-suited for social media text, known for its accuracy in capturing sentiment intensity.
- TextBlob provides a simple API for common natural language processing tasks, and its sentiment analysis tool relies on a combination of rule-based and machine learning approaches.

By integrating the results of VADER and TextBlob, we leveraged their respective strengths to enhance the overall performance of sentiment analysis. This combined approach mitigated the individual biases of each tool and provided a more robust and adaptable sentiment analysis, especially in handling the diverse language styles and expressions present in Reddit posts. This method allowed us to accurately capture the emotional tone of discussions related to innovation and technology during economic downturns.

Results

Word Frequency

In this section, word clouds and frequency graphs provide initial insights into the diverse perspectives of the general public on innovation and technology investments during economic hardships. The analysis includes a total of 5,329 Reddit posts and comments, which were meticulously collected and processed to extract meaningful insights. Figure 1 displays the top 20 most common words from these entries.

As shown in Figure 1, the public's discourse around innovation and technology during economic challenges is multifaceted. Words such as "public," "innovation," and "technology" reflect the central themes of the discussions, indicating a strong focus on the broader implications of technological advancements. The frequent appearance of terms like "economic," "investments," and "hardships" highlights the contextual background of these discussions, emphasizing the economic environment in which these conversations are taking place.

Moreover, the prominence of words such as "perception," "study," and "research" indicates the public's interest in understanding and analyzing the impacts of innovation within this context. The inclusion of words like "collected," "data," and "analyzing" further underscores the data-driven nature of these discussions, suggesting that many contributors are focused on empirical evidence and analytical approaches.
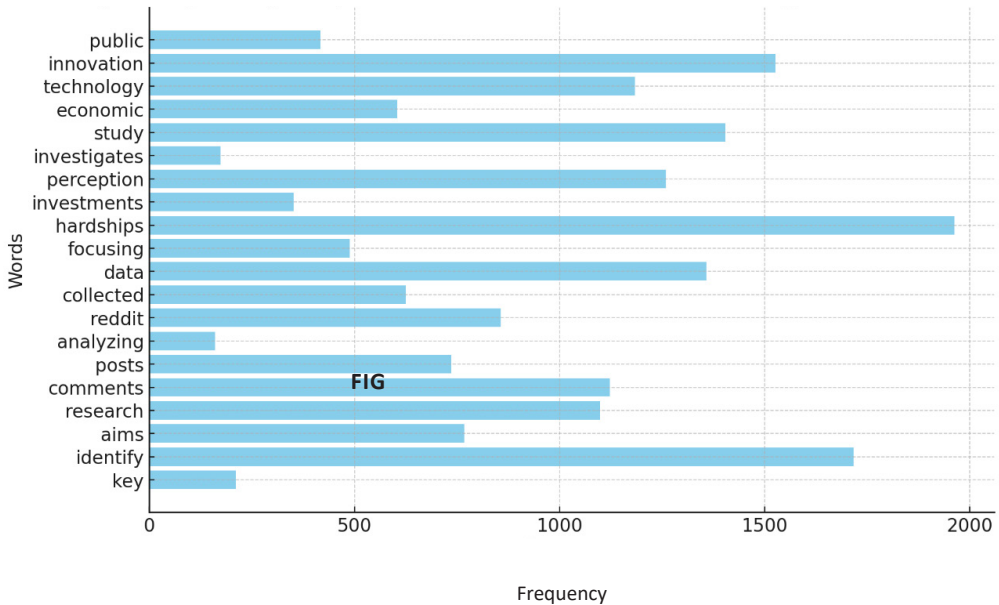
Fig. 1. Top 20 high Frequency Words for innovation and Technology Posts and Comments

Additionally, words like "comments," "posts," and "Reddit" reflect the source and medium of the data, while terms like "identify," "focusing," and "aims" point to the objectives and goals within these discussions. This varied vocabulary illustrates the complexity of public opinion regarding innovation and technology, particularly in challenging economic times.

Topic Modeling

This section presents the emergent topics and themes identified through topic modeling, aiming to address the research question: What are the emerging topics related to innovation and technology investments during economic hardships? The study combines qualitative and quantitative content analysis to uncover and explore latent topics and themes in the public discourse on Reddit. This approach is particularly valuable for research in the field of social media analysis, where understanding public sentiment and discussion trends can provide critical insights.

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was employed as the primary quantitative method for topic classification. LDA is effective in determining the most optimal number of topics by evaluating the perplexity scores, which measure how well the model fits the data. As shown in Figure 2, the perplexity versus the number of topics curve is plotted to guide the selection of the optimal number of topics.

Generally, a lower perplexity score indicates a more accurate model fit. The confusion score achieves its minimum when the number of topics is adjusted to 20 in this investigation. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the lowest perplexity does not consistently signify the optimal model performance. Models that have a large number of subjects may suffer from overfitting, which can result in excessive and non-converging topic counts. Overfitting can lead to excessive duplication, causing topics to lose their distinctiveness and uniqueness. In order to deal with these difficulties, it is often necessary to rely on human judgment to establish the most suitable number of topics. This manual examination follows two specific principles: (1) establishing strong consistency among terms within each topic, and (2) upholding the quality of topics by eliminating repetition, conflict, and providing comprehensive coverage of primary content. This methodical technique aids in discerning the most significant and unique subjects within the data, resulting in a more lucid comprehension of public discussions around innovation and technology during periods of economic decline.

This study examines the categorization of themes and the occurrence of high-frequency words within each subject, with the number of topics set at 8 (Table 1). Nevertheless, the findings reveal certain constraints regarding the consistency and cal-
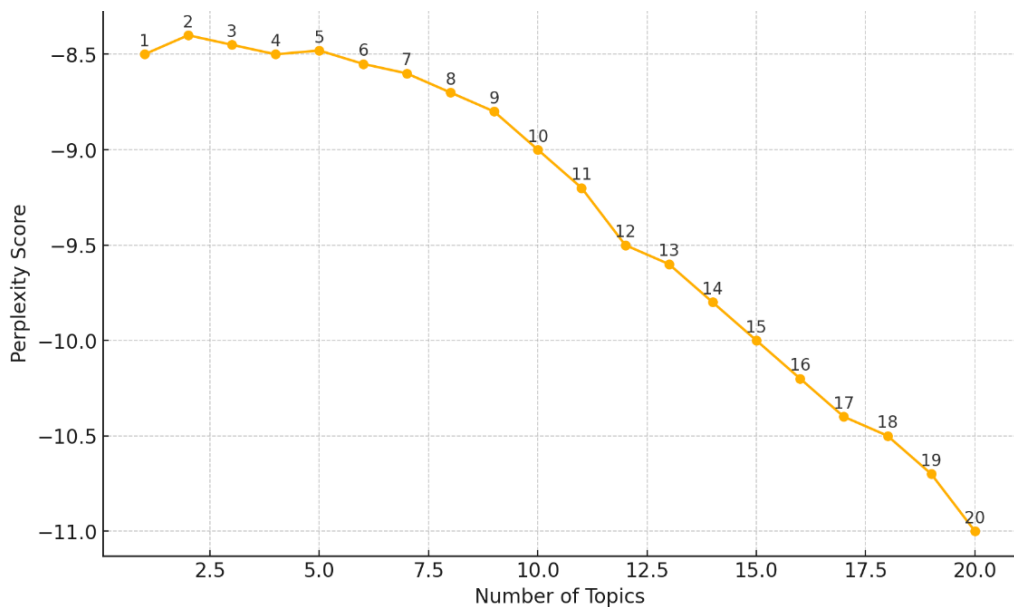

Fig. 2. Perplexity vs. number of topics

Table 1. Top words of eight topics

Topic	Representative words
1	innovation, technology, economic, public, investments, perception, study, hardships, data, analyze
2	sustainability, green, energy, climate, solutions, future, companies, sustainable, resources, environment
3	challenges, barriers, risks, impact, global, economic, uncertainty, crisis, market, adaptation
4	development, growth, opportunities, advancement, research, trends, future, potential, projects, initiatives
5	digital, transformation, strategy, adoption, change, infrastructure, systems, implementation, cloud, tools
6	government, policy, regulation, funding, support, initiatives, incentives, economic, programs, innovation
7	consumer, behavior, trends, preferences, products, services, market, adoption, influence, decisions
8	technology, investments, innovation, economic, public, perception, hardships, challenges, analyze, data

iber of the topics. Throughout the many topics, there is a clear absence of cohesive themes, as the words seem disconnected and less interconnected within each category. The chosen phrases do not consistently provide clear and significant subjects, which could diminish the model's ability to capture the fundamental structure of the data. In order to tackle this issue, the study also examined the quantity of subjects that corresponded to the point where ambiguity significantly decreased. It identified 7 topics that were situated close to the inflection point of the curve, which was deemed to be a more ideal answer. Table 2 displays the distribution of word frequencies within relevant subjects when there are 7 topics. The highest-ranking words in each topic demonstrate enhanced coherence and topic quality, resulting in more distinct and relevant themes.

Table 2 categorizes the top 10 words from each of the 7 topics into three overarching themes: Public Perception, Environmental Impact, and Economic Challenges. The analysis of these seven topics reveals the breadth of discussions on innovation and technology investments during economic hardships within the Reddit community. These discussions encompass key areas, such as public sentiment towards innovation, the impact of sustainability and environmental considerations, and the economic challenges and opportunities associated with technological advancements. The topics reflect the multifaceted nature of public discourse on these issues, highlighting the diverse perspectives and concerns that arise during periods of economic difficulty.

Sentiment Analysis

For the purpose of addressing study question 2, two sentiment analysis models, Vader

Table 2. Top words of seven topics and three themes

Topic	Representative words	Theme
1	innovation, technology, economic, investments, data, analyze, public, perception, challenges, hardships	Public Perception
2	sustainability, green, energy, climate, solutions, companies, sustainable, resources, environment, future	Environmental Impact
3	challenges, barriers, risks, impact, uncertainty, global, economic, crisis, market, adaptation	Economic Challenges
4	development, growth, opportunities, research, advancement, trends, projects, initiatives, potential, future	Economic Opportunities
5	digital, transformation, strategy, adoption, systems, infrastructure, implementation, change, cloud, tools	Technological Strategies
6	government, policy, regulation, funding, support, incentives, programs, initiatives, economic, innovation	Policy and Regulation
7	consumer, behavior, trends, preferences, market, products, services, influence, adoption, decisions	Consumer Behavior
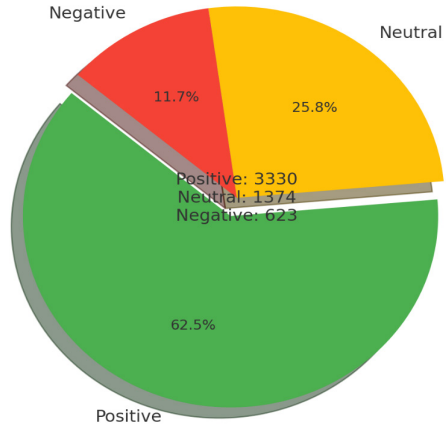
Fig. 3. The weighting of the sentiment pie chart

and TextBlob, were utilized. These models were allocated weights of 0.6 and 0.4, respectively, to classify sentiment. The sentiment analysis classified the emotional tone of the 5,329 Reddit posts into three unique categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Figure 3 illustrates the allocation of weights to these sentiment groups. The data indicates that the majority of Reddit users expressed a positive attitude, with around 62.5% of the postings conveying positive emotional subtleties. Conversely, approximately 11.47% of the posts conveyed negative thoughts, whereas neutral sentiments make up 25.8% of the overall entries. The distribution of opinions suggests that, despite the difficulties related to economic struggles, the Reddit community largely holds a positive view towards investing in innovation and technology.

Conclusion

In the midst of economic challenges, the significance of allocating resources towards innovation and technology has increased, especially in terms of their capacity to influence public opinion and affect political choices. This study investigates the viewpoints of the general public regarding the use and impacts of technology investments, during economic downturns, through the application of topic modeling and sentiment analysis. Unlike traditional survey methods, this study employed an extensive data mining technique, gathering data from Reddit posts and comments. The system employed the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) unsupervised learning model to generate seven topics. The implementation utilized a weighted sentiment analysis technique that combines the VADER and TextBlob algorithms to analyze the sentiment patterns in the postings. The findings uncovered seven subjects of public discussion on innovation and technology investments, which are classified into three overarching themes: public perception, technological strategy, and environmental impact. These findings indicate that the public should thoroughly investigate the potential consequences of investing in technology, as there are prospects for progress in areas such as sustainability, digital transformation, and policymaking. The broad deliberations concerning technology initiatives demonstrate a significant emphasis on how these investments might propel digital transformation and augment operational efficiencies, particularly in the face of economic difficul-

ties. Concurrently, conversations regarding the effects on the environment emphasize the increasing significance of sustainability and environmentally friendly technologies in public discussions.

Sentiment analysis shows that the general public holds a predominantly positive attitude towards technology investments during economic hardships, with approximately 62.5% of posts conveying positive sentiments. Neutral sentiments account for 25.8%, while 11.7% of the posts express negative views. This indicates broad optimism towards the potential of technology to mitigate the challenges posed by economic downturns, although there remain concerns and criticisms, particularly regarding the risks and uncertainties associated with these investments.

For practical implications, this study offers valuable insights into potential strategies for policymakers, business leaders, and technology developers. Companies and developers should prioritize the implementation of user-friendly technological solutions that align with public sentiment. Given the positive outlook towards technology, efforts should be made to leverage this sentiment in promoting further investments, particularly in areas that are perceived as having a significant impact, such as sustainability and digital transformation. Additionally, policymakers should consider the public's concerns regarding environmental and economic impacts when designing policies that encourage technological innovation during economic hardships.

Users must comprehend the impact of technology investments on their lives during economic hardships, and acquire proficiency in properly utilizing the evolving technologies. It is important for the general public to carefully evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of these expenditures, considering their potential long-term effects on both the economy and the environment. Prior study has highlighted concerns regarding the ethical implications of technology, including the possibility of employment displacement, data privacy issues, and the "digital divide." As such, it is imperative for all parties involved to actively participate in open discussions concerning the ethical utilization and regulations of technology, with the aim of fostering openness, responsibility, and impartiality in its implementation.

Although this study has made valuable contributions, it is important to acknowledge its limits. Initially, it is reliant on data sourced exclusively from a single social media network, Reddit, wherein the user demographic may not accurately reflect the overall population. This may restrict the applicability of the results to other social media platforms and wider public perspectives. Subsequent investigations should examine public sentiments on various platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, in order to provide a more thorough understanding of public perspectives. Conducting comparative assessments across several platforms would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different demographic groups perceive technology investments during economic difficulties.

Furthermore, the study is characterized by its descriptive nature, and it is recommended that future research focuses on carrying out causal studies to investigate the effects of technological investments on different sectors of society. One such approach is to use quantitative approaches, such as regression analysis, to evaluate how public sentiment is related to real economic results. In addition, a longitudinal research approach might investigate the evolution of public perception over time, specifically in relation to changes to economic situations and technological improvements. This study fails to pinpoint the exact regions where negative perceptions are most prominent. A more comprehensive qualitative content analysis could investigate unfavorable posts and comments to reveal distinct patterns and underlying anxieties. This would enhance comprehension of the constraints and hazards linked to technological investments, directing further enhancements and more focused interventions. This study adds to the expanding information base on how the public perceives technology investments during economic difficulties, providing significant insights for stakeholders in several sectors. By acknowledging and overcoming the constraints, and broadening the range of future investigations, it is feasible to cultivate a more intricate comprehension of how technology might be utilized to surmount economic obstacles and stimulate sustainable progress.

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Building a Sustainable Financial Future: Exploring Georgia's Path to Green Finance

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Sustainable finance is becoming a central issue and a critical driver of decision-making for the majority of global investors and policymakers. By taking environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into account, and integrating them into the corporate business strategy, financial institutions are ensuring long-term investments in sustainable economics and contributing to meaningful global change.

However, sustainable goals may conflict with other short-term economic objectives of the institution. Many green projects, such as renewable energy infrastructure and eco-friendly buildings, require large upfront investments, while cost of capital in developing countries is often much higher than in advanced economies.

Other challenges, such as regulatory gaps, lack of direct incentives, need for additional competencies and low awareness, also affect the sustainable finance market.

This paper analyses the evolution of sustainable finance over the past decades, and examines the key challenges and prospects associated with sustainable finance in developing countries, particularly in Georgia.

The paper also highlights some recommendations that may help address the current challenges and improve the sustainable financial ecosystem in Georgia.

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Introduction

This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable finance in Georgia, focusing on the structural changes needed in financial systems and regulatory frameworks to support sustainable investments.

Our planet is experiencing the escalating adverse impacts of climate change. The effects of global warming are reflected in the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, among them heat waves, floods, droughts, storms, wildfires and hurricanes.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2023 broke every single climate indicator and went down as the warmest year on record. Global temperatures have risen to 1.45°C, for the first time dangerously close to the 1.5°C lower limit of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The greenhouse gas concentrations reached record high observed levels in 2022, 50% higher than pre-industrial levels. The long lifetime of CO2 means temperatures will continue to rise for many years to come (WMO, 2023).

Despite these alarming developments, the global financial resources allocated for climate mitigation and adaptation remain insufficient in comparison to the scale of the challenge.

Since over half of global GDP has a high or moderately high dependency on nature, investing in nature-based solutions will not only limit global warming, but also result in about US$4 trillion in revenue for businesses and over 100 million new jobs each year by 2030 (UNEP, 2021).

The investments needed to address current sustainability challenges are twofold: they must both "finance the green" (i.e. invest in environmentally friendly solutions) and "green the finance" through reorienting the financial system.

This transition is crucial for the financial industry, as climate change poses risks to both the financial system and the broader economy. A shift towards a low-carbon economy is necessary and inevitable, though it has only just begun (IFC, 2023).

It is clear that without sustainable finance, there will be no sustainable development. Reorienting private capital towards more sustainable investments would require structural changes being made to both the existing financial systems and to the regulatory framework.

Methodology

This study utilizes a quantitative approach, relying on data from secondary sources, such as annual reports, research articles, conference proceedings and industry analyses.

The main sources of data used in the study are official statistical data of the National Bank of Georgia, and data from the annual reports of commercial banks in Georgia.

The Evolution of Sustainable Finance

Sustainability has been defined in a variety of ways over the past decades. The most

frequently cited definition was created by the UN Brundtland Commission in 1987, defining sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The global movement towards sustainable finance took a significant step forward in 1972 with the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which highlighted the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social issues and led to the creation of the UN Environment Programme.

Later, in 1997, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched a Finance Initiative to promote sustainable investments in the financial industry and to help the sector reduce its negative impact on the environment.

UNEP FI supports financial institutions to develop practical approaches to setting and achieving green targets in areas such as greenhouse gas emissions, green finance, sustainable production and consumption, and financial inclusion to address inequality. It was the first global organization to engage the financial sector in sustainability issues and develop the principles of responsible investment.

Today, more than 500 global banks, investors and insurance companies, with assets of over US$ 170 trillion, are implementing UNEP FI's Principles for Responsible Banking, and Principles for Sustainable Insurance, to deliver more sustainable economies worldwide (UNEP Finance Initiative, 2024).

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all people.

The 17 SDGs have been adopted by all United Nations Member States. There are 169 sub-goals and targets to be achieved by 2030 or earlier. The goals and targets are universal, meaning that they apply to all countries. The 17 SDGs highlight the connections between the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development. They are integrated and recognize that actions in one area affects outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The SDG Progress Report published by the UN Economic and Social Council in 2024 demonstrates that the world is unfortunately far behind schedule in achieving its 2030 agenda. Of the 135 targets, only 17% are progressing as expected so as to be implemented by 2030; almost half of the targets (48%) show moderate or severe deviations from the desired trajectory; 18% of the targets have stalled; and 17% have even regressed below the 2015 baseline.

According to the World Economic Forum, the risks related to the environment continue to dominate the risk landscape for the short- and long-term periods. Based on the findings of the Global Risks Report 2024, five environmental-related risks (extreme weather events, critical change to Earth systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, natural resource shortages, and pollution) were included in the top ten risks that are most likely to cause a significant global

crisis over the next 10 years (World Economic Forum, 2024).

In parallel, we see increasing pressure from multiple stakeholders (customers, employees, governments) on financial institutions to take environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into account when implementing business strategies and making financial decisions.

The Global Sustainable Finance Landscape

Sustainable finance encompasses financial activities contributing to sustainable development, which includes environmental, social, governance and economic characteristics.

According to the European Commission, sustainable finance refers to the process of incorporating environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into investment decisions in the financial sector, resulting in long-term investments in sustainable economic activities and projects.

Environmental considerations may include climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as wider environment issues, such as biodiversity conservation, pollution prevention, and the circular economy (European Commission, 2024).

In the context of the EU policy, sustainable finance is understood as finance to support economic growth, while reducing pressures on the environment, so as to reach the climate objectives of the European Green Deal, taking into account social and governance aspects.

According to the United Nations, green finance is "environment-oriented financial products or services, such as mortgages, loans, insurances or bonds, which recognize the value of the environment and its natural capital, and seek to improve human well-being and social equity while reducing environmental risks and improving ecological integrity".

Climate finance, as support provided to developing countries, increased at a compound rate of 5% from 2015 to 2020, reaching US$ 41 billion. While there are a number of estimates and no agreed methodology to account for the US$ 100 billion per year target, this target has not yet been reached (UN Economic and Social Council, 2024).

In 2023, the overall global sustainable finance market reached US$ 5.4 trillion. It is expected to grow at around 22% per annum over the next decade, according to the Sustainable Finance Market Report by Global Market Insights.

Growing awareness of environmental and social issues has become a significant driver in the evolution of sustainable finance markets. Investors are placing greater emphasis on ESG criteria in their decision-making processes. This shift is driven by the understanding that companies with strong ESG practices tend to exhibit better long-term financial performance and greater resilience.

As a result, there has been a notable increase in the demand for ESG-focused investment funds which cater to investors seeking both finance returns and positive societal impact (Global Market Insights, 2024).

Figure 1 below shows the sustainable finance market dynamic from 2021 to 2023.
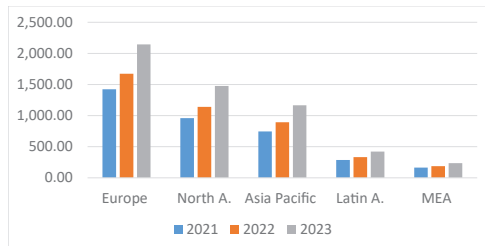
Fig. 1. Global sustainable finance market growth by region, 2021-2023 (USD/billion)
Source: Global Market Insights, 2024.

Although all regions are demonstrating growth dynamics from year to year, the global sustainable finance market is dominated by Europe, with a share of 39%, followed by North America (27%) and Asia Pacific (21%).

As expected, the majority of developing and least developed regions (Latin America, Middle East & Africa) accounted for a critically small market share (13%), illustrating the significant gap between the demand for sustainable finance and the available supply.

According to the study conducted by McKinsey, to get emissions to net zero, US$ 275 trillion would need to be spent on physical assets by 2050. That is about US$ 9.2 trillion per year, or about 30% more than the US$ 5.7 trillion allocated today. These huge funding requirements present financial institutions with a significant investment opportunity in sustainable finance (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

McKinsey estimates that of the trillions of dollars needed to finance the green transition, about one-third (US$ 2.8 trillion) would go towards legacy obligations to support critical high-emission assets that cannot be completely phased out. The remaining two-thirds (US$ 6.4 trillion) would go to new green technologies, low-emission green assets, or assets transitioning to be less carbon-intensive.

Based on McKinsey's findings, significant investments in the near term will be needed in clean energy to power electric vehicles and decarbonize buildings. Approximately US$ 170 trillion is projected to be invested in low-emission assets across three sectors: 1) electric vehicles and infrastructure (US$ 67 trillion); 2) the power sector (US$ 57 trillion); 3) the building sector (US$ 46 trillion).

Characteristics of Sustainable Finance in Georgia

According to the ND-GAIN Country Index, which measures a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges, Georgia ranks 109th in terms of vulnerability, with an overall score of 58.7. However, it is ranked 34th for its readiness to engage in climate finance. While adaptation challenges remain, Georgia is well positioned to adapt (University of Notre Dame, 2022).

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has been working on developing the sustainable finance framework since 2017, when it joined the Sustainable Banking Network (SBN). In 2019, NBG launched the Sustainable Finance Roadmap, the ultimate goal of which is to create a reliable, predictable and stable regulatory framework, and to

prepare the market for the transition to sustainable finance.

In 2022, the NBG adopted the Regulation on Loan Classification and Reporting according to the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy. The new regulation officially defines green, social, and sustainable loans, and sets the reporting requirements for taxonomy-aligned loans for commercial banks. The Taxonomy Regulation came into force on 1 January 2023.

The taxonomy is composed of green and social taxonomies. Green taxonomy provides a list of activities that aim to achieve environmental objectives and contribute to green economy development. Social taxonomy provides a list of categories aimed at achieving social goals for the target population, including: people with disabilities, eco migrants, displaced persons, socially vulnerable individuals, people living below the poverty line, etc. (National Bank of Georgia, 2024).

The total green loan portfolio of Georgian commercial banks by the end of 2023 stood at GEL 1.7 billion, a 21% increase compared to 2022. The share of green loans in the total portfolio of banks was 3.2% in 2023 and 2022, compared to 2.9% in 2021 and 2.2% in 2020. The total volume of green loans issued by banks during the year was around GEL 0.5 billion. As some banks still do not classify green loans according to the green taxonomy, these figures may be underestimated.

Two commercial banks led the green finance market in Georgia as of 2023: TBC, with 47% of total green market share, and Bank of Georgia, with 43% of green market share. BasisBank claims 8% of the market share, followed by Procredit with 1.5%.

Figure 2 below shows the dynamics of green financing in Georgia from 2020 to 2023.
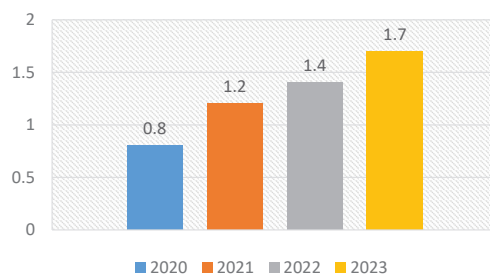
Fig. 2. Green loan portfolio of Georgian commercial banks, 2020-2023 (GEL/billion)
Source: Annual ESG reports of banks, National Bank of Georgia.

According to the NBG's 2023 Sustainable Finance Report, the sectorial breakdown of green financing in Georgia is as follows: the largest portion of green loans, 63%, is directed toward the renewable energy sector (57% specifically targeted towards hydropower projects), while 17% is directed towards sustainable transport, followed by sustainable production and trade (8%) and Waste Management (5%). Sustainable agriculture and green buildings accounted for 3% of total green loans.

Official statistics clearly show that the sustainable finance market in Georgia has experienced steady growth over the past few years, largely driven by increased investment in the renewable energy and sustainable transport sectors. Additionally, this growth in green financing has been supported by government initiatives, subsidized programs from international institutions, and co-funding from donors.

Key Challenges of Sustainable Finance in Georgia

Although the official statistics of recent years point to a positive trajectory of sustainable financing in Georgia, we can observe a number of challenges and obstacles that hinder more dynamic growth of the market. Among such challenges, the following can be highlighted:

- **Limited awareness**. Although there is a positive trend towards increasing general awareness of climate and sustainability issues, it is still at a low level and is characterized by many contradictory perceptions.
- **Regulatory gaps.** There is often a mismatch between the global green standards and local regulations.
- **Mismatches in timeline**. Expectations of short-term profit maximization conflict with the long-term nature of green investments.
- **Large upfront investments.** The cost of capital in developing countries is much higher than it is in advanced economies.
- **Uncertainties**. Large upfront investments, long payback periods and high business risks must be considered alongside the reality that the return on investment is not clear.
- **Conflicted objectives**. Sustainable objectives may conflict with other business goals of banks, such as short-term economic benefits or cost-optimization measures.
- **High cost of "going green"**. Since sustainable finance is a relatively new concept, many banks do not have enough flexibility or the right infrastructure to adapt smoothly and cost-effectively.
- **Risks of "green-washing"**. As more green-washing practices are disclosed, banks are becoming fearful of innovation and of investing in sustainable products, wanting to avoid accusations of green-washing.
- **Limitations of green taxonomy**. Due to the requirements of green taxonomy, some climate-positive and eco-friendly projects cannot be classified as "green" by banks.
- **Lack of direct incentives**. Exceptions are those cases where donors partially subsidize interest rates, or provide targeted Technical Assistance support.
- **Excess bureaucracy**. Additional documents, data, information and competencies are needed to meet the formal requirements of green funders.

Climate change creates both risks and opportunities that can affect the performance of financial institutions, as well as the companies they invest in. Among the potential drivers of sustainable financing, the following can be distinguished in particular:

- **Growing awareness** of environmental and social issues.
- **Increasing pressure** from government and the public towards sustainability.
- **Growing regulations** globally and locally.
- **Rising focus** of businesses towards enhancing their goodwill.
- **Export-oriented sectors** will gradually need to increase green components into their business strategies.
- **Economic effects** in the form of reduced costs due to savings in energy, and increased revenue due to the bet-

ter performance of the new energy efficient equipment.

- **Compliance** with environmental norms and standards; commitment to reducing GHG emissions and promoting green initiatives as an EU candidate country.
- **The new generation** increasingly prioritizes sustainability issues.

Conclusion

The sustainable finance market has demonstrated steady growth over the past few years in Georgia. This was facilitated, in particular, by increased investment in the renewable energy and sustainable transport sectors.

There is increasing pressure from multiple stakeholders (customers, employees, investors, governments) on local banks to take ESG factors into account while implementing their business strategies and making financial decisions.

Climate change presents both risks and opportunities that can enhance the financial performance of banks and the sectors they invest in. Banks have the potential to expand their sustainable portfolios while playing a crucial role in decarbonizing the economy and driving positive change.

Growing awareness about climate issues is pushing banks to expand their green portfolios. By integrating ESG considerations into the business strategy, and by prioritizing sustainability factors, banks can ensure long-term and profitable investments in sustainable economics and promote positive changes within society.

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Communicating Values in Political Campaigns: An Analysis of Polish Candidates' Rhetoric in the 2024 European Parliament Elections

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article is grounded in the hypothesis that political communication is fundamentally shaped by values. Whether acknowledged or not, individuals are consistently situated within a framework of values. The central research questions for this study relate to the purpose, development, and communicative functions of values. To address these, we conduct an analysis of the philosophical and communicative dimensions of values in the pre-election messages for the 2024 European Parliament elections in Poland, focusing on leading representatives (from Lesser Poland) of the major Polish political parties.

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Introduction

All politicians strive for the well-being of their citizens, legitimising themselves with truth and freedom, and seeking to ensure a life for all of peace and prosperity. They promise development, progress and justice, appealing to love and the sacred in doing so. If they do not speak about these values directly, they indirectly refer to them with rhetorical figures in language, or through symbols in their campaign imagery. In contrast, their substantive message tends to hit on injustice, misery, neglect of the good, loss of trust, lies or scams. The closer we get to the election campaign, the richer this messaging becomes.

Due to the complexity of the topic, this study is interdisciplinary. The paper takes a polytolinguistic (Reisigl, 2011) approach, juxtaposed by philosophy and media studies. Specifically, we set the context of communicative analysis in philosophy. We first clarify the concept of values, and further examine whether politicians genuinely uphold the values they reference in their discourse. Then, we analyse the images they present in an attempt to show the political use of the symbols applied as they seek to appeal to the minds of the voters. Finally, we conduct a linguistic analysis of politicians' pre-election statements, aiming to identify the values embedded in the language they use.

What should be emphasized in the political discourse studied here is the fact that politicians today are communicating with their voters in an ever more digital format: "Digital technology has transformed the electoral processes across the world" (Dad&Khan, 2023). The authors express their conviction that communicating political content on social media is an unquestionable response to a very dynamically changing reality, which opens democratic discourse to new possibilities – in the context of election campaigns, giving a chance for smaller, unaffiliated politicians to exist. This article covers only large political groups in Poland, but analysis of their social media accounts has allowed the authors to verify the varying ways they employ to communicate their values. The authors note that social media plays a key role in the political communication of values, offering a unique platform where candidates, parties, and movements can formulate their policies to engage with and mobilize citizens. Unlike traditional media, social media facilitates direct and interactive communication, allowing political actors to establish emotional connections with voters by emphasizing shared beliefs and ideals.

What Are "Values", and Are They Really Present in Politics?

The political struggle for power, and the vote of the electorate in discursive terms, revolves around the ability to present a compelling vision of the world and to persuade others to embrace it. To do so, they use a variety of communication and persuasive tools, ranging from substantive to discrediting their political opponents. The ability to use these in combination with political

marketing fosters popularity. Thus, it is clear that politics, especially in the media age, is not only about the content of the message. This has already been noted by the Sophists. However, it should be remembered that the purpose of the Sophists' practical conclusions was not to establish objective norms, grounded in objective truth (Reale, 2008), the ancient teachers wanted to teach how to hold public office, wield power and convince communities of their views.

However, no matter what type of political message it is, what form it takes, or what its actual purpose is, it always carries a message that refers to some vision of good, be it material, economic, cultural, or social. After all, the political space is the space of human affairs, the space of human encounters. For this reason, it is also the space of an agathological horizon (Tischner, 1998), in which it is always about the cause of the concrete human being and about their quality of life. Thus, it simultaneously functions as a space for hierarchizing reality – a space of values. It must be recognized that political communication, which involves managing and prioritizing the realities of people's lives, is inherently communication based on values (Bednarska, 2020); it is communication in which the cause of the people is at stake, in which politicians compete for a better vision of the world, in which they juggle important and more important issues – in the end, referring to values either willingly or unwillingly. However, the question we wish to address in this article is what these values represent in the political game.

Are they a struggle for truth, goodness and justice, or are they in fact just a sophistic endeavour? The dispute between Socrates, and then Plato, and the Sophists was a dispute not only about truth, but about values in general. This is what wisdom was for Socrates: an awareness of the existence of values, of general, universal, eternal entities, founding the quality of the world. For the Sophists, neither truth nor values had the dimension and status of being absolute, but were thought of as relative. Therefore, the goal of rhetoric, of public debate for Socrates, was truth. For the Sophists, on the other hand, the goal was to convince their opponent(s) of their rationale, no matter the truth or the form it takes.

What are values? Let us not succumb to the illusion that they are norms from which we choose, so that, by our own efforts, we can shape the world. Indeed, this is a fairly common perception today, one which is as popular as it is harmful, leading to a dangerously subjective view of the world. In the essence of values there is a directly opposite logic: it is not people who shape them, but they which shape people. Values guide and refine the world. Simply stating what they are is insufficient, as any descriptions or definitions fall short of capturing the essence of their existence. The most critical issue lies in understanding the context of values, to grasp their metaphysical nature and uncover their true role in the real world. In this case, that world is politics. Thus, the task is to identify values in political communication and assess their actual or postulated status. Are they a discovery of

truth, as per Socrates, or a political tool, as per the Sophists?

By seeing the values in the reality in which we live, we are able to say where the values lay. "Descriptions can be multiplied, they can be made more and more dramatic, more concrete, but one thing will keep repeating: the human world contains something that is good, something that is bad, and something that is better, worse, worst. Our world is, to some unspecified extent, a hierarchically ordered world. Things, objects, people are arranged for us in it according to a more or less permanent hierarchical order. We do not know exactly what is evil and what is good; we cannot draw a precise line between one and the other, but we are nevertheless unable to escape some kind of hierarchy" (Tischner, 2002). As in Plato's cave metaphor, the sun shines; there is a goodness that we all desire and towards which we move. It is a light, an authentic good. In the cave, however, the light of fire burns, an imitation of real light, and it enables the shadows of real being to be (Platon, *trans*. 2018). For Plato, one of the greatest philosophers in history, politics appears as an appealing world, albeit an inaccessible one due to corruption and disorder (Coplestone, 1998). Did Plato himself recognise the impossibility of values in political life?

We are now faced with the need to acknowledge that the world of politics is one of persuasion, posturing, power agitation, tactics and argumentative dexterity. And yet it is a world that is still human and built on people, one which seems to work for the people, and thus it cannot exist as a separate entity from values. What then is the situation of values in the world of politics? Are there any? What are they? As Hans Joas, a sociologist who addresses the topic of values, notes, they now play a large role in political rhetoric, if only to deny a political opponent's moral qualities or to emphasize how trustworthy one's own government is (Joas, 2009). Therefore, it is useful to look at what the political campaign seems to convey about the candidates' personalities and personal values, analyzing which issues have been focused on and which have been overlooked (Soto de la Cruz *et al.*, 2023)

In order to illustrate the imaginary and linguistic way in which politicians use values as a bargaining tool in the European Parliament elections, their social media activity was analysed prior to the European Parliament elections in 2024.

The Imaginarium of Values in Politics

Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, in his *Philosophy of Images*, describes the imaginary realm of politics as follows: "The ethical issue concerning the individual's relationship with themselves is inseparably linked to the political issue, which concerns the mutual relations between people in a broadly understood society. The sphere of social and political life is a particularly instructive example of the place occupied by the imaginary in collective life. (...) Images thus constantly intermingle with normative discourse and influence both common beliefs and actions. (...) Imag-

es contribute to the creation of community bonds, to the formation of the identity of a group united by the rule of law, especially in the form of national identification, as well as to the legitimization of the very figure of power" (Wunenburger, 2011).

Cicero and Epictetus wrote about the use of images in the political game. Rhetoricians mainly focused on the ability of images to build pathos, that is, emotional impact. At that time, language was the most accessible code, and, as a result, the recommendations of rhetoric teachers focused on crafting language that shaped mental images. Moreover, they recommended using images to reconstruct imaginaries as a more effective means of convincing others of one's views. This gave rise to visual narratives that persuaded others of a particular way of seeing the world or the speaker themselves. Values were linked to these narratives as a channel of communication with the audience, as an element of speech utilizing their preferential thinking, based on the implication that "if the speaker/presenter represents my values, then they are worth listening to, and what they say is correct." This mechanism renders values a rhetorical construct, a form of bargaining currency. Their connection to a particular candidate can be assessed by comparing their actions with media representations. However, this assumption requires separate research.

This part of the article summarises visual analyses of the social media profiles of leading party politicians running for the European Parliament: Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość (Confederation Liberty and Independence party), Konrad Berkowicz; Trzecia Droga (Third Way party), Adam Jarubas; Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition party), Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz; Lewica (Left party), Andrzej Szejna; and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice party), Beata Szydło.

The study aims to answer the questions: what values do politicians most often visualize so as to negotiate support, and does the content of individual candidates differ in the values they present?

The research process considered the images created by the politicians that visualise values so as to negotiate support. The image here is understood as a representation composed of all its elements, as a phenomenon. The material basis of the image is a digital representation. The analyses focus on individual images and their comparison both by the criterion of a given politician, and by comparing all. The research material comes from three digital platforms: Facebook, Instagram and X (previous Twitter).

The conclusions are as follows:

1. Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość (Confederation Liberty and Independence party): Konrad Berkowicz

On Konrad Berkowicz's profile, there are images – films and photographs – showing soldiers on the Polish-Belarusian border, which clearly aim to evoke a sense of threat to the homeland. The candidate refers to the values of the homeland and freedom, and seeks to convince the electorate that choosing Berkowicz guarantees the protection of the

country. In this context, images with elements of the Polish flag emphasize patriotism as the main value.

Fig. 1.

Fig.2.

There are also images on the candidate's profile where Berkowicz is trying cream cakes, standing in the market square in Wadowice. This refers to the figure of John Paul II, indicating an appeal to religious values and thus to the electorate who identify with this value.

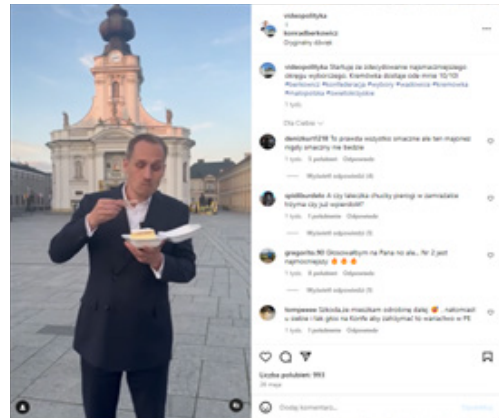**Fig. 3.**

Another image in the set of imaginaries shows the intertwined hands of Berkowicz, his wife and child, referring to the value of family.

Fig. 4.

In most images, Berkowicz appears alone, making gestures of strength and victory; oth-

er figures in the images are usually distant. These are images of struggle, distance, and building the position of a leader.

2. Trzecia Droga (Third Way party): Adam Jarubas

Adam Jarubas creates contrasting images to those built by Berkowicz. The posts mainly contain images of collective heroes, gestures of handshakes, and smiles. These are photographs from meetings where there is usually a large group of people. However, the candidate is photographed from a distance, and thus is rarely shown in the foreground. Jarubas walks in a crowd of miners, expressing the value of tradition and identity; he is at a folk fest promoting the value of locality, small settlements. A series of similar images visualise the values of community, understanding, and family. The framed figures usually stand close to each other, in natural positions. Images show him as an "ordinary person," living and valuing day-to-day affairs, and symbolising the candidate as "one of the crowd," demonstrating the value of working for the community. Interestingly, Jarubas often posts photos on his profiles where the participants of the meetings are in the foreground, and he himself appears in the background.
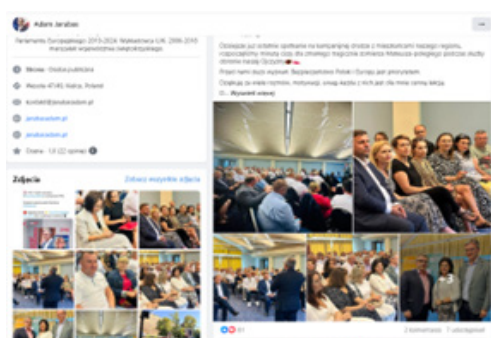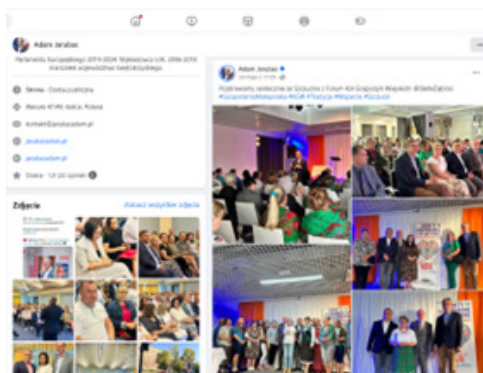

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

Fig. 5.
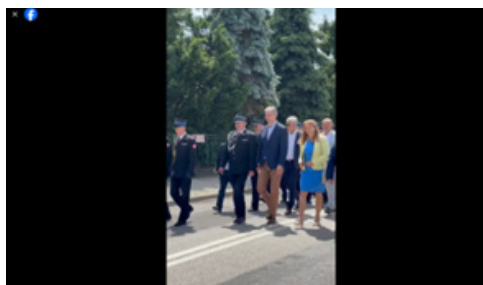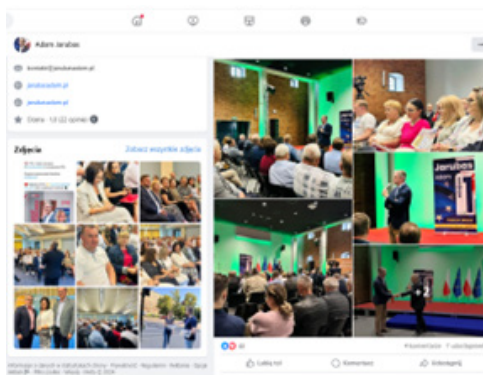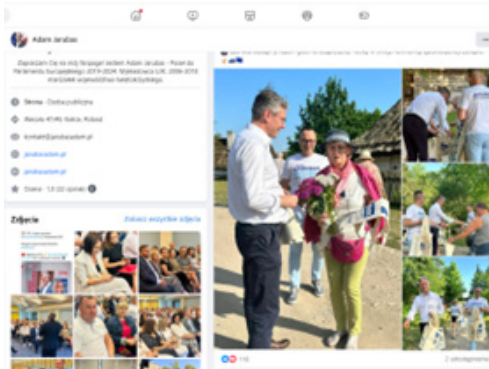
Fig. 9.

3. Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition party): Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz creates his imaginary somewhat differently. Three main images convey the values with which the candidate identifies or, conversely, through which he seeks to convince the audience to support his candidacy. This is an image in a double frame, i.e., two figures – a priest in a cassock and Sienkiewicz, who are slightly turned towards each other. The photo documents a visit to the Diocesan Museum in Sandomierz. This image portrays the value of faith, and appeals to those among the electorate supporting the Catholic Church.

Another image shows the candidate sitting on the steps of the

Meanwhile, an image of a visit to an art gallery emphasizes its value.
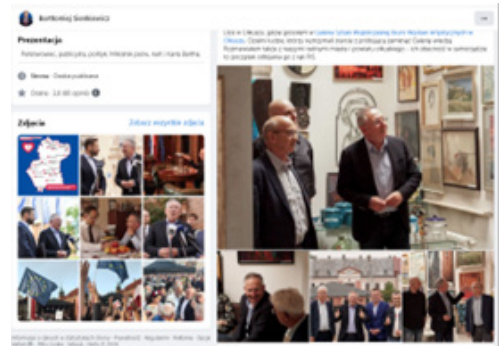
Fig. 11.

4. Lewica (Left party): Andrzej Szejna

Andrzej Szejna often showcases young people, a family with a child, a residential block, a father with a child planting a tree, and, interestingly, like Berkowicz, tasting a cream cake in the market square in Wadowice. The values on which he bases his message are family, concern for young people and their future, care for nature, and safety and tradition.

Fig. 10.
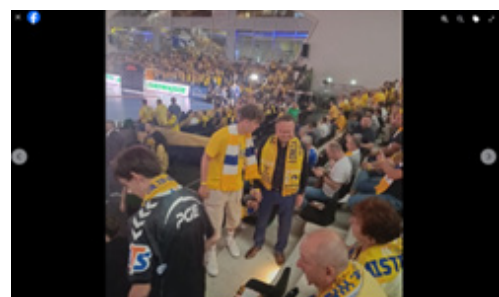
Fig. 12.

Fig. 13.

Fig. 16.

Fig. 14.

Fig. 15.
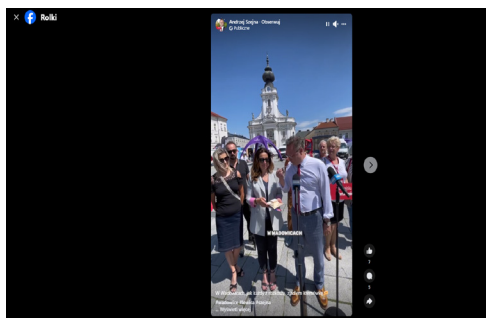
5. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice party): Beata Szydło

In the candidate's imaginaries, the colours white and red appear, referring to patriotic values. Szydło mainly creates images of a collective of women of different ages, with her positioned in the foreground. Other characters in her short films always stand behind her. In such visual representations, the value of women and their voice in political life is visible, alongside images of solidarity, community, and understanding.

Fig. 17.
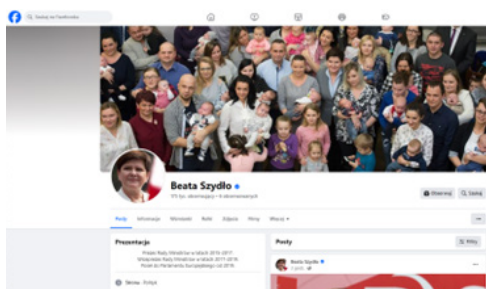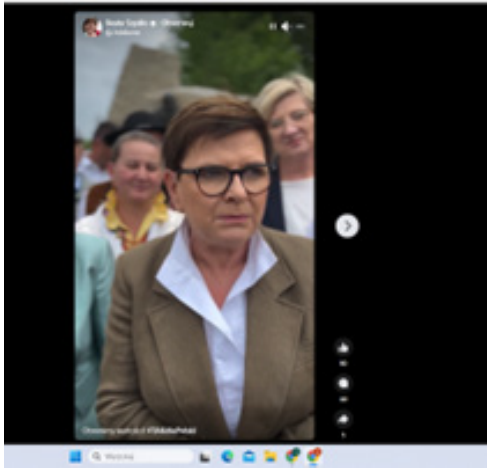
Fig. 18.

Fig. 20.
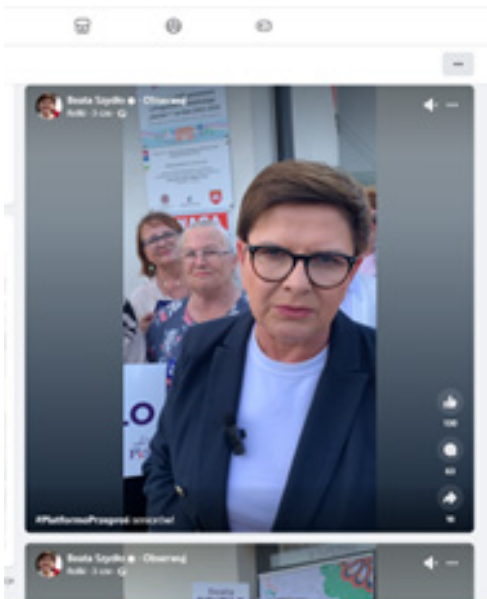
In summary, each of the studied politicians builds their own imaginaries based on their preferred values, or uses these values as a persuasive tool to gain the support of a specific group of voters. In this perspective, values transform into a form of bargaining currency.

The Language of Values and Politicians

Social media facilitates the creation of virtual communities, in which shared values strengthen a sense of belonging. By addressing the concerns of specific groups, from environmentalists to civil rights activists, politicians can tailor their campaigns to the identities of the voters. This strategy not only attracts supporters, but also mobilizes them

Fig. 19

to act in accordance with those values (cf. Castells, 2012).

It is worth emphasizing that the specific language of the Internet also results from its globality and general accessibility. All linguistic signs and symbols are connected to the sender or recipient of the utterance. Through these, it is possible to address various aspects of language use, such as issuing commands, conveying information, or creating an impression. This area of language research is the domain of pragmatics, which analyses the relationships between the implications of speech in extra-linguistic realities, and the very organization and functions of language.

Thinking in the media and politics, from a theoretical standpoint, reflects the evaluation of the world through its interdisciplinarity. This is particularly evident in the expressiveness of language, which resonates with the emotive thinking of modern individuals, expressed through their spontaneity and an increasingly expansive "audience." Politicians have moved their election campaigns to social media for a number of reasons, including the advantages of broad reach and accessibility, direct communication, and engagement and interactions. It seems that the purpose and later the effect of politicians' statements is copyright social division focused axiologically around values presented by a specific political faction. It is thus unsurprising that politicians use it in their official statements from the entire range of linguistic functions. Language is an important aspect, as it is through language that all values can be expressed. Elected politicians frequently declare various types of values, yet it often appears that they either conceal their true beliefs behind these values, or, at times, attempt to showcase them.

Adam Jarubas, a politician from the Third Way party (Trzecia Droga), has an interesting presentation of his election demands, of course in the form of language. In his Facebook posts, he usually refers to events he has previously participated in, meetings that have already taken place, and conversations he has already had. He briefly summarizes what was most important during these events, thus writing about the values that are most important to him. For instance (June 3): "Do you want a safer Poland in a strong Europe, or a lonely Poland in a divided Europe? A very good discussion with the residents. Thank you, City of Kęty, for the meeting!" (https://www.facebook.com/jarubasadam). As we can see, the highlighted value here is safety. In another post (June 1), Jarubas writes: "It promises to be an interesting weekend with a folk twist. We will be in Etnotygiel Kielce, where there will be ethnic and folk music, but also plenty of other attractions for folklore fans and children. Folk culture and our heritage should be passed on from generation to generation" – this time he draws attention to heritage, tradition and the succession of generations as values of inheritance and transmission of important content. What is remarkable about the words that Adam Jarubas communicates on his social media is not that he speaks directly about values, but rather that he seeks to highlight a hidden value – solidarity. His consistent use

of the plural form underscores his alignment with his voters and reinforces the idea that he represents everyone, speaking not solely on his own behalf, but as a collective voice.

Konrad Berkowicz (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość/Confederation Liberty and Independence party), adopted a completely different tactic for presenting his views and postulating his values. Using X (formerly Twitter), his statements tend to be characterized by two qualities: he usually writes not so much on his own behalf, but presenting the views of his party, and most often puts his demands not directly as desiderata, but as responses to the statements of other politicians. For example (June 4): "The Conference proposes something you [responds to Third Way party] do not want to hear, i.e. that Poland's subjectivity in the EU arena, the sovereignty of member states, rejecting the EU's dictates, defending our veto, and withdrawing all harmful directives, especially the Green Deal, are beyond you." (https://x.com/KonradBerkowicz). Berkowicz highlights the value of the country's sovereignty, and emphasizes the essence of the state's subjectivity and the need to maintain its independence. Another time (June 3), he refers to politicians from the Left party, writing: "You have nothing to do with freedom", which draws attention, paradoxically, though denial, that it is freedom that is his postulated value.

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz (Civic Coalition party) wrote on his Facebook profile (May 31), regarding the situation of the media: "I am very proud that on public radio stations and television you can hear voices of criticism towards the government. This is a measure of the independence of the media: that they do not kowtow to the authorities, they are not the government's propaganda mouthpiece which only they can criticize." (http://www.facebook.com/SienkiewiczB/). Siekiewicz wrote this to spotlight the value of independence, especially regarding the media. We can therefore conclude that Sienkiewicz postulates and, in a sense, announces, through social media, that freedom and independence are values that should be cared for and fought for. Sienkiewicz's voters may therefore assume that these are the values that guide this politician.

A relatively linguistically inactive politician on social media platforms is the candidate from the Left party, Andrzej Szejna (https://twitter.com/AndrzejSzejna) who does not publish many posts on X, and whose Facebook profile is private, so his published posts cannot be viewed. What we can see in his statements on X are mainly photos of himself in meetings with various people. In this part of article, we focus on the linguistic side, so we will not comment on non-verbal language.

A very active politician on social media is the candidate from the Law and Justice party, Beata Szydło, who publishes several statements every day both on X and on Facebook, in which she directly or indirectly communicates her values. The way Beata Szydło draws attention to the content that is important to her is interesting. Her statements contain relatively few words, but they are concentrated in clear and short statements. For example: "We should put the *new green deal* right in

the trash!" (May 27); "On June 9, let's choose a good future for Poles!" (May 31); "On June 9, let's vote to defend our values!" (June 2) (https://www.facebook.com/BeataSzydlo). In these three sample messages, we see completely different linguistic forms, and in them, we can discern different values. *A good future* is an assurance of the need to take care of young people and ensure their well-being. The call to *our values* is a postulate in which Beata Szydło does not explicitly state what values she is talking about, but the recipient can assume that they are those shared by the Law and Justice party. However, in a statement regarding the *Green Deal*, the politician shows what she believes in through denial. For Beata Szydło, the *Green Deal* is an anti-value, something bad; a diversion from prosperity.

It must be said that it is very interesting that politicians use social media and linguistic messages in such different ways: writing longer statements, short statements, describing the beliefs of their party or their own, or integrating their demands with social expectations. It turns out that all these methods are good for expressing and promoting elements of life that are important to all voters, such as: freedom, independence, security, tradition, and prosperity. Regardless of what party a politician comes from, and regardless of the communication style he or she chooses, the effect of these statements is similar, as it is a linguistic form of conveying imponderables. Although, as political scientists rightly point out: "the con-

flict between political groups representing various environments society and their often conflicting interests is an important element of everyday life in a democratic country" (Golec, 2002), it turns out that when looking for values in the statements of the most popular politicians in the Małopolska and Świętokrzyskie regions before the European Parliament elections, the language of values they present is not polarized at all.

"A challenge in researching the discourse of politics in media practices comes in trying to answer the question of where the discourse ends and self-creation begins in the textual, communicative and verbal agency of politicians in terms of the typology itself, functionality or range of values" (Soczyński&Urzędowska, 2023). The question we leave open here is whether the values that politicians of different parties postulate, in such a coherent way on social media, are only their political creation, or whether they express (through language) their true beliefs.

Conclusions

The authors conducted a study on the use and significance of values in political communication, with a focus on election campaign statements made by candidates for the 2024 European Parliament elections in Poland. An interdisciplinary approach, combining philosophy, media studies, and linguistics, established that values are a central yet complex element of political discourse. Politicians commonly incorporate values into their communication, either con-

sciously or unconsciously. While some use values as authentic expressions of belief, others use them strategically as rhetorical tools to adapt to voter sentiment. The candidates studied used different approaches in their visual and linguistic communication. For example, Konrad Berkowicz focused on patriotism and sovereignty through images of a military presence and national symbols. Adam Jarubas, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasized community, tradition, and inclusiveness through collective and regional images. Beata Szydło, on the other hand, emphasized patriotism and family values through concise, direct statements. These differences underscore the versatility of values in appealing to different constituencies.

Values are also used to polarize political audiences. While values serve as a universal language across the political spectrum, their interpretation and presentation differ, reflecting party ideologies. This duality illustrates the potential of values to unite or polarize public opinion, depending on the narrative constructed by political actors.

The authors also note the obvious (and effective) shift by politicians to social media platforms, which has significantly shaped the way values are communicated. The immediacy and accessibility of platforms such as Facebook and X enable a targeted communication of values, enhancing both reach and emotional resonance with voters. "The landscape of political discourse has undergone a substantial shift due to the pervasive influence of social media, reshaping interactions and engagement among politicians, governments, and individuals" (Khan *et al.,* 2023).

However, a critical research question posed by the authors remains unanswered: do politicians truly embody the values they promote, or are these merely performative tools in their quest for support? This ambiguity highlights the need for further research on the correspondence between political rhetoric and action.

The results of the analysis confirm that values are not merely abstract ideals, but dynamic elements shaping political discourse and voter engagement. However, their effectiveness and ethical application depend on the authenticity and coherence with which they are integrated into political communication. Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of how values influence electoral outcomes and social cohesion.

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Georgia's European Choice
During the First Democratic Republic (1918-1921)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

For Georgian politicians, the future development of a free country has always been closely linked to the European states. The vision of Georgia's alignment with Europe and its integration into European frameworks dates back to 1918-1921. Considering this fact, Georgia's current aspirations for European integration reflect a desire to return to its natural political and cultural environment.

During the period of 1918-1921, Europeanization was seen as a means of achieving peaceful coexistence, embodying European norms, values, and ideas, while also implementing various structural reforms through cooperation.

The paper aims to analyze, through the study of existing documents, the efforts of Georgia's political leaders to establish security and democratic values in partnership with Europe. This goal was clearly understood, and, for this reason, immediately following the declaration of Georgia's independence on May 26, 1918, the Act of Independence, developed by the National Council of Georgia, became a foundational document. This act outlined the main priorities of the country, rooted in elements of classical European principles, from the form of government to the broad recognition of human rights.

Georgia's Constitution, which followed shortly after, was similarly grounded in European ideals, and clearly demonstrated the country's commitment to democratic development. This constitution is viewed by both foreign and domestic scholars as one of the most progressive of its time.

Despite the varied and often inconsistent trajectories of development in the modern world, Georgia's political and civil approach has remained steadfast and unchanged. Over a century ago, the country sought to preserve and strengthen its political course and direct it towards European political and legal unity. It is an effort that continues to this day.

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Introduction

Georgia's European orientation is a profound historical process that predates even the spread of Christianity in the country, although the advent of Christianity significantly strengthened Georgia's ties with the Christian world of Europe. From that time onward, Georgians chose a clearly pro-Western orientation, and began to distance themselves from the Eastern world. Despite facing numerous challenges, the Georgian nation, with its strong sense of self-conscious, always considered itself a part of Western civilization and sought to forge connections with European states. The orientation toward Europe was most clearly manifested in 1918-1921, during the period of Georgia's state independence.

In the modern context, Georgia's European choice reflects its commitment to ensuring peace, democracy and the well-being of its people. This includes upholding human dignity, equality, the rule of law, the protection of human rights – especially the rights of minorities, pluralism, non-discrimination, and tolerance, as well as respect for national identity. Notably, Georgia's aspiration for relations with Europe is nothing new: During the First Republic, these ideas were evident in all key political moves made by the country.

The First Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), holds significant historical importance, and its experience continues to shape modern Georgia. This period of independence marked a critical step toward aligning with European political and cultural norms. The legacy of this period requires renewed understanding, particularly in the context of Georgia's current foreign policy, which is heavily focused on European integration. By analyzing the past, using the politics of memory, greater clarity can be brought to Georgia's European choice, especially as relations with Russia remain complex, and European integration is a central foreign policy goal.

The paper aims to explore Georgia's strongly expressed European orientation in its foreign policy during 1918-1921. Through a historical examination of official documents, memoirs and scientific works, the paper seeks to highlight how this period laid the foundation for Georgia's ongoing pursuit of European integration.

Georgia's Declaration of State Independence

Since the annexation of Georgia, the aspirations of Georgian patriots for the nation's freedom and independence have always been closely linked to Europe. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Georgian Committee in Paris, and their organization "Georgia" played a crucial role in promoting the idea of a free Georgia. In 1907, the Georgian people made a significant appeal to the Hague Peace Conference, petitioning to have Georgia's legal rights restored.

The declaration of Georgia's state independence in 1918 had deep historical roots, shaped by a variety of factors that influenced its emergence. The declaration was not just a product of local circumstances, but was also heavily impacted by the political dynamics

unfolding in international politics at the time. This was closely tied to the cooperation between Georgian politicians and their European counterparts.

The 1917 October Revolution of the Russian Empire fundamentally changed the political life of Georgia, as well as that of Russia. After the coup, "Ozakom" (the Special Committee of Transcaucasia) was dissolved, and the "Commissariat of Transcaucasia" was established. In Georgia, an inter-party committee was created, which convened the National Congress of Georgia on November 17-22, and elected Noe Jordania as its chairman. On November 22, the National Council was elected, placing the Presidium and the Executive Committee under the chairmanship of Jordania. On May 26, 1918, it was the National Council (influenced by external forces) that declared the state independence of Georgia (Sharadze, 2003).

From 1918 to 1921, Georgia's pursuit of a European way of life and politics was intrinsically linked to a peaceful coexistence. This vision involved not only the adoption of norms, rules and democratic principles, but also the implementation of various structural reforms in cooperation with Europe.

A key factor in shaping these ideals was the European education of Georgian politicians active at the time, among them representatives of the Social Democrats, Socialist Federalists and National Democrats, who had graduated from universities in Germany, France, Switzerland, and Russia, which significantly influenced their political perspectives. This education in turn had a significant impact on the political processes taking place in Georgia, giving the country's leaders the opportunity to put their acquired knowledge and ideals into practice.

These political figures understood the importance of aligning with European values to establish security and democratic principles in Georgia. This is clearly reflected in the Act of Independence developed by the National Council of Georgia immediately after the declaration of independence on May 26, 1918. The document outlined the country's main priorities, such as state sovereignty, democratic governance, permanent neutrality, international peaceful cooperation, good-neighborliness – especially with bordering states, equality of citizens, and respect for human rights and national minorities. These principles mirrored the core tenets of European thought at the time, marking the foundation of Georgia's democratic path.

Modern scholars note that "the Act of Independence shared the advanced European doctrine of the era in the field of basic human rights, to a much greater extent than the European states themselves. This was later reflected in the first constitution, which was particularly innovative in terms of basic rights, and which was even considered "too democratic" for the era" (Gegenava, 2014).

Georgia in The Years of Independence (1918-1921)

Immediately following the declaration of state independence in Georgia, the rul-

ing Social Democrat party found itself facing significant challenges due to the complex domestic and international situation. With scarce resources and no stable economy, they had the heavy responsibility of meeting the needs of the citizens while striving to create a democratic republic based on European values. Despite these difficulties, there was a collective desire among Georgian political leaders to build a state that reflected the ideals of democracy, justice, and cooperation with Europe.

The issue of education has always been central to Georgia's historal development. Indeed, it has been a key focus of analysis for Georgian patriots throughout the centuries, as they understood that the future of the country depended heavily on the education of its people. Based on the wisdom passed down through the ages, including the renowned words of Ilia Chavchavadze that "our country needs European experience, science and education, this should be its gun-weapon" (Chavchavadze, 1985), we can see that the importance of education was deeply ingrained in the national consciousness.

This vision of education was not just theoretical, but was practically applied. Government representatives took great responsibility for the education sector, viewing it as an avenue for sharing European experiences and ensuring that Georgia's educational system aligned with the progressive ideals of the time. One such example is the approach taken in the Social-Democratic Republic of Georgia, where, in 1918, the National Council of Georgia addressed the teaching of religion in

schools with a democratic mindset. This issue was defined by the National Council of Georgia and the Law of the Republic of Georgia on November 26, 1918, before the Constitution was finalized.

According to the law, the teaching of religion was removed from all levels of state and private schools. As established by the law adopted on July 5, 1918, teachers of religion received an allowance following dismissal by the state. If someone expressed a desire to study religion with their own finances, they had the opportunity to do so in the school building, but in such a way that it would not interfere with the regular school curriculum. This democratic approach aligns closely, even more than a century later, with the policies of many modern secular states in Europe, where the state limits its role to regulatory functions, ensuring a peaceful coexistence with religious communities. In such countries, religious education may be allowed in public schools outside of the formal curriculum, typically after school hours.

In addition to these reforms, Georgian educators, cultural leaders, and political figures actively sought creative collaborations with neighboring peoples and other nations. Supported by the government, the Georgian intelligentsia embraced new ideas from abroad, whether in the fields of culture or education (Darchashvili, 2021).

The German-Georgian Cultural Society, founded in July 1918, aimed to foster friendship between the two nations, and promote a mutual cultural exchange and dialogue. These and similar societies played a crucial

role in enhancing the understanding of European influences within Georgia, supporting and solidifying the country's western orientation. It is a fact that from 1918, a short but wonderful era arrived for Georgian culture, seeing Tbilisi become an important and popular center of modernism and avant-garde movements, with flourishing literature, painting, and collaboration efforts between local creatives and foreign famous faces. Mutual recognition and respect reigned (Shvelidze, 2018).

The close cooperation between Georgian and European politicians deserves mention. The visits of influential European politicians to Georgia in 1920 were pivotal for the country's international standing. Karl Kauk, Pierre Renaudel, Emil Vandervelde, Ramsay McDonald, Camille Huysmans made notable statements in Europe praising the principles of the Georgian government – freedom, respect for minority rights, the harmony between urban and rural communities, and more. This served to increase awareness of the Republic of Georgia and played a role in the recognition of Georgia's de jure independence (Javakhishvili, 2003).

The pro-European character of the Georgian state was evident even during the drafting/adoption of the constitution, seeing Georgia announce its choice of democratic development to the entire civilized world. The basic law of the country was a document of European nature, and it is considered one of the most progressive documents of that period, both by contemporary observers and by modern foreign and national experts.

The core principles underpinning the first Constitution of Georgia were the freedom of the nation and the individual. The document, part of the "constitutional wave" seen in international politics (Germany 1919, Austria 1920, Finland 1921, etc.) holds a unique place in the history of world constitutionalism for its adherence to democracy (Matsaberidze, 2021).

The 1921 Constitution of Georgia is a well-rounded and refined legal document that reconciles the experience of world constitutionalism with Georgia's national values. Former Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, noted that the text of the 1921 constitution was "one of the most progressive ones on the European continent." Even then, he recognized such values as freedom, democracy and the rule of law which today's Europe relies on (Demetrashvili, 2005).

In Georgia, the European values of freedom, tolerance and individualism were historically acquired by the population of Georgia. In a democratic state, they were given the opportunity to develop even further. Some Western values were newly introduced to the Georgian reality, and faced initial resistance before gradually taking root. The establishment of a civil society and independent institutions, including unions and associations, marked the growth of democratic norms. The rule of law was effectively implemented (Janelidze, 2018).

Despite numerous difficulties, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was established as a state. It represented "a young democ-

racy, which in its political structure showed a straightforward commitment to democracy and the possibility of common sense" (Matsaberidze, 2008).

Georgia was, in fact, the first European country to have a social-democratic government and a coalition administration, formed by the Social-Democratic Party of Georgia, the Socialist-Federalists, the National-Democratic party, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. The Social Democrats were the dominant force in executive and legislative power, winning more than 80% of the votes in the first general democratic elections in February 1919 (Iremadze, 2021).

This alignment with European values contributed to the recognition of the Democratic Republic of Georgia by leading European nations as a progressive, pro-European state. Unfortunately, the country's European path was abruptly interrupted on February 25, 1921, when the Russian government entered Georgia, ending the republic's pro-European trajectory (Matsaberidze, 2024).

Conclusion

From 1918 to 1921, the Republic of Georgia, in its brief existence, created a valuable experience in democratic development. The country's European aspirations were further strengthened through cooperation with the European social democrats, who recognized the policies of Georgia's social democratic movement – international support that helped increase Georgia's visibility and recognition abroad.

For Georgia, the connection with Europe has always symbolized the rule of law and the establishment of democratic institutions. This relationship promises Georgia a safe, free, and fair environment in which to thrive and prosper. Despite the many obstacles along the way, the fundamental approach remains the same: to maintain and strengthen the political course towards European political-legal unity. This goal has been realized in part through Georgia's current status as a European Union candidate member, a tangible expression of the country's pro-European political heritage.

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The Relationship Between Social Acceptance, Tolerance and Xenophobia in the Tourism Industry

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Social acceptance, tolerance and xenophobia are three distinct but inter-connected processes within the tourism industry. Social acceptance refers to the attitudes and dynamics in social relations, which are determined by various factors, among them tolerance and xenophobia.

This article explores studies and scientific sources on these concepts, analyzing the connections between them, and their origins. It examines how healthy relationships between tourists and locals, as well as local attitudes, impact tourist satisfaction and the development of the tourism industry. The article discusses research on xenophobic social issues in South Africa, identifying the social consequences and the individuals most affected by irrational societal views.

The article also analyzes the factors that contribute to xenophobia, which hinder business relations in tourism and impede the establishment of welcoming environments. Research on social acceptance conducted in the Adjara region is also presented, with the primary methodology being the analysis of sources and surveys carried out through questionnaires.

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Introduction

Xenophobia and tolerance are two important opposing forces that reflect social consciousness, playing a critical role in shaping communication and relationships. These concepts not only influence how information is exchanged, but also have deep-rooted social and psychological bases, leading to negative consequences within the tourism industry. Xenophobia, defined as the "fear of foreigners", is typically rooted in stereotypical thinking, fear, and negative attitudes towards foreigners, mostly tourists. It stems from societal constructs, and not from an objective evaluation of people or social groups. According to the Oxford dictionary, a society with a xenophobic mindset perceives its own (locals), "us," as positive and good, and foreigners as a threat, law breakers, violent people, conquerors, etc. Xenophobia is particularly relevant to the tourism industry because its adverse effects can hinder the sustainable development of tourism and disrupt the healthy functioning of the social institution. Social relations within the tourism and hospitality sector are heavily dependant on the attitudes and perceptions of both parties – locals and tourists – thus making social acceptance and the impact of xenophobia key factors in the industry's success.

This article explores the concept of xenophobia within various social processes, examining its relationship with social acceptance and the regulation of tolerance. Social acceptance refers to positive and healthy attitudes in interpersonal relationships, while xenophobia acts as an enemy to such healthy relations. Tolerance, the highest form of acceptance, involves a community, regardless of geographical or native origins, seeing locals welcoming foreigners and embracing their cultural and other differences. Social acceptance encompasses a range of factors, such as ethnic, racial, cultural, political, religious, sexual, and linguistic considerations.

The aim of the study is to determine the relationship between social acceptance, xenophobia, and tolerance. The research objectives are:

- To examine scientific perspectives on xenophobia, tolerance, and social acceptance;
- To analyse the causes and determinants of xenophobia;
- To evaluate the concept of a tolerant society, including awareness and accompanying social relations;
- To establish mechanisms for fostering social acceptance, thus eliminating xenophobia.

Current Xenophobia and The Tourism Industry

In the tourism industry, the attitudes of the host community, residents towards tourists, have an important role in the process of sustainable development, as both xenophobia and tolerance are involved in the process of social acceptance. A tolerant society promotes tourist destinations, while xenophobia hinders the process of one becoming familiar with a place, leading to that place being associated with negative memories and feelings.

Tourists remember tourist destinations not only for their visual beauty, service quality, or pricing, but also for the warmth and hospitality shown by the host community, as well as the emotional experiences they receive during their stay.

A tolerant society is one that can accept a wide range of differences (Crick, 1971; Ryan& Aicken, 2010). Tolerance is often seen as the ability to accept differing views or practices (Sullivan *et al.,* 1979). In the study of xenophobia and civilized society, xenophobia researchers ask one central question: What are the underlying factors that contribute to xenophobia?

Xenophobic attitudes often manifest between locals and foreigners due to social issues, such as competition in the job market. In South Africa, for example, foreign immigrants seeking employment often take positions that, given the shortage of jobs, reduce the employment opportunities for locals. While immigrants may be drawn by the prospect of earning extra income, their presence can provoke negative reactions within the local community (Comins, 2008). Xenophobia is associated with low self-esteem, ignorance, a lack of understanding, and prejudice. Research into the causes of xenophobic attacks in the 2000s reveals a variety of beliefs held by respondents, which contributed to these negative attitudes (in %):

- Foreigners agree to cheap working conditions / take all employment opportunities – 32%
- Foreigners spread crime, theft, violence – 31%
- Uncontrolled number of foreigners in the country – 18%
- Most foreigners own businesses – 16%
- South Africans are too lazy to work – 11%

The researchers also mention the following factors as contributing to xenophobia:

- Absence of political leadership;
- Weakness of communication between communities;
- Weak legal and police governance mechanisms;
- Institutional xenophobic attitudes, policies and practices that reinforce prohibitions on staff legalization within organizations;
- Long-standing xenophobic attitudes, misinformation and mistrust of foreign Africans;
- Extremely high unemployment rates;
- Corruption in state, regulatory, controlling bodies and services;
- Geopolitical stress in several regions;
- Cultural conflicts, and others.

Xenophobia is a growing issue in many countries around the world. In South Africa, for instance, the rate of xenophobic crimes has risen sharply (The publications of the African Center for Migration and Society address a wide range of challenges related to migration and society). According to the latest data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 154 reported incidents of xenophobic attacks, resulting in 99 deaths, 1,000 displacements, and various injuries. Within one year, this data escalated to 238 cases, including 7,500 deportations.

To address this issue, the UNHCR has launched several programs that seek to reduce the number of xenophobic incidents, including initiatives focused on peace education – the organization of unifying sports activities, social activities, etc. (Misago *et al.,* 2015).

Xenophobia is intertwined with social acceptance, and its elimination in society requires a complex approach involving education, public awareness raising and social interventions. The causes of society's xenophobic behavior are often rooted in collective consciousness, and often stem from weak legislation, inadequate education, lack of cultural awareness, religious influence, ineffective state regulation, and high crime rates.

Xenophobia also has genetic and psychological foundations, which are manifested against those with foreign ethnic origin, skin color, cultural origin, religious beliefs, and nationality. A xenophobic society tends to perceive its national leaders as superior, which can lead to extreme forms of exclusion and violence. Xenophobia is frequently linked to issues such as genocide, segregation, inhumanity, violence, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism. Other factors causing xenophobia include environmental and congenital factors. The latter includes genetic factors, as reflected in the male fighter hypothesis (McDonald et al., 2012) and the theory of genetic similarity (Rushton, 2005).

According to the theory of prejudice and discriminatory intent, men have historically shown higher levels of inhumanity and xenophobia than women, and they are often more likely to show ethnocentric attitudes towards others. The intergroup hierarchy hypothesis suggests that men, as representatives of superior groups, tend to take leadership roles within groups, often showing aggression toward external groups to assert their dominance.

The development of xenophobic fears is also linked to an evolutionary disease-avoidance mechanism (Faulkner *et al*., 2004), according to which the movement of foreigners was historically associated with the spread of viruses and diseases. This led locals to perceive foreigners as a potential threat, fostering feelings of danger (Wagner, 2017).

Social Acceptance and Xenophobia in Georgia

Improving social acceptance and awareness of social relations requires education. It is essential for society to understand the significance of distinguishing between stereotyped and independent perspectives. People need to recognize these differences, which can only be achieved through quality education. Education plays a crucial role in reducing xenophobic and ethnocentric viewpoints (Coenders *et al.,* 2004).

As previously noted, xenophobia can be triggered by various factors, many of which are tied to (lack of) social acceptance. The relationship between the two suggests that the presence of xenophobia simultaneously creates barriers to social acceptance. Without healthy emotional attitudes towards tourists and foreigners, a society cannot fully embrace

social acceptance. Several factors contribute to the aggression and negative attitudes that hinder this process, including:

- The job market and competition;
- Xenophobic threats triggered by the loss of cultural or national values;
- Xenophobic fears caused by the spread of diseases, viruses;
- Xenophobic fears caused by increased market competition and price changes;
- Xenophobic fears caused by the instinct for survival, etc.

Among the factors that shape social acceptance are cultural, ethnic, racist, religious, sexual and political factors, which are closely tied to the intensification of xenophobic fears. This is particularly true for countries that have had or are engaged in political or military confrontations with each other. Carried out from 2019 to 2024, our research on social acceptance in Georgia highlights the role of culture, religion and politics in the dynamics of xenophobia and tolerance. In a study conducted in April 2024, using a questionnaire in the form of interviews with several representatives of travel agencies, it was determined that:

- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary residents, is determined by their nationality;
- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary residents, is determined by their religious beliefs;
- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary res-

idents, is determined by their political position, where the importance of nationality also features.

In a 2019 study in Adjara, hoteliers were characterized by selective attitudes towards tourists based on their origin: if the tourist was an Arab, an Iranian may refuse to serve them; Muslim tourists wearing hijab were also marked as less desirable, inciting a feeling of danger. Such attitudes and xenophobia undermine social acceptance.

Conclusions

Social acceptance plays an important role in tourism relations, impacting tourism businesses, government revenues, the economic growth of the industry, tourist satisfaction and the reputation of tourist destinations.

The trajectory of social acceptance is shaped by the health of its determining factors – social moods and attitudes – including xenophobia and tolerance. These factors are influenced by cultural awareness as well as genetic and natural circumstances.

Overcoming xenophobic fears and biases positively affects tourism relations by enhancing the quality of interactions, strengthening ties, and generating financial and social benefits. It fosters positive attitudes towards local populations, boosts tourist safety and satisfaction, and improves employment indicators, contributing to the multifaceted development of the regions.

To overcome xenophobia between countries that have experienced political disagreements or past conflicts, it is vital to pursue a

policy of reconciliation, which will improve not only relations between the countries, but also reduce the social distance between the populations.

Improving social acceptance requires early-stage education to inform people about its importance. Key points of focus should include: What is social acceptance? What factors influence it? How does it manifest in society? What are the social differences, and how do they impact the tourism industry?

Xenophobia, whether individual or collective, cannot be the responsibility of just one institution. To improve awareness of foreigners and tourists, the following actions are needed:

- **Government and NGO-led Cultural and Social Programs**: These initiatives should promote intensive communication between citizens of different countries, discussion of the problem of xenophobia, in-depth research and presentation of research findings to the public. Providing and explaining information is essential for deepening awareness.

- **Human Rights Protection Programs**: Strengthening social programs that protect the rights of tourists and immigrants. These should highlight the importance of human rights, provide data on discrimination, and present statistics on negative treatment towards these groups.

- **Safety and Security Initiatives**: In order to ensure the safety and security of foreign immigrants through the work of crime fighting agencies and the immigration service, state propaganda should be active, covered through the mass media, in order to better inform the population, so they better understand that the rights of foreign visitors are protected.

- **Educational and Awareness Programs**: Such training programs, in both non-governmental organizations (whose involvement is necessary) and in secondary and higher educational institutions, should be accompanied through informative meetings with students.

- **International Forums and Conferences**: In order to improve intercultural communications, international forums and conferences should be organized, aimed at improving attitudes and ensuring a safe, welcoming environment for immigrants.

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Migration Trends in Slovakia:
An Analysis of Post-EU Enlargement

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ABSTRACT

While migration is not a new phenomenon, it remains a key issue on the global policy agenda due to its economic, social, and cultural implications for both sending and receiving countries. Since 2014, the large influx of migrants and asylum seekers from third countries into the EU has contributed to the migration crisis, which is now closely tied to the broader political crisis within the EU. However, the understanding and application of shared values, particularly solidarity, still vary among EU Member States.

This article examines migration trends in Slovakia following its 2004 accession to the European Union, focusing on key determinants and implications for the country's social-economic landscape. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the research analyzes various types of migration, including labor migration, educational migration, and family reunification.

The research findings reveal significant inflows and outflows of migrants, shaped by economic factors such as wage differences and job availability, alongside social factors like educational opportunities and community ties. While Slovakia benefits from a diverse and dynamic labor force, challenges remain in integration and public attitudes toward migrants. The article concludes with policy recommendations to deeper the understanding of migration in Slovakia, offering insights for policymakers in navigating the complexities of the evolving migration landscape.

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1. Introduction

Slovakia, located in the heart of the Central Europe, has experienced considerable change since becoming a member of the European Union in 2004. This enlargement marked a crucial milestone not only for Slovakia, but also for the EU, as it expanded its borders to include 10 Eastern European countries that had previously been under different political, economic, and social constraints (Kajanek, 2022). EU membership brought Slovakia numerous opportunities, together with challenges, particularly regarding migration pressures. Migration plays a key role in shaping labor markets, economic growth and social dynamics within a country.

This research aims to provide a focused and detailed analysis of migration dynamics in Slovakia, in particular exploring how migration trends have evolved, what the main factors contributing to these trends are, and the challenges faced by migrants and Slovak society as a result. The study highlights the unique aspects of Slovakia's experience, including EU policies, their impact on local migration, and the integration of diverse migrant populations.

To achieve the research objectives, the following research questions will be addressed:

- What are the primary migration trends in Slovakia following EU Accession?
- What economic conditions have influenced migration patterns?
- What challenges do migrants face during the integration process?
- How do societal attitudes shape government policies towards migration?

The research employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to offer a comprehensive analysis of migration trends in Slovakia. By examining both forms of data, the study identifies detailed complexities of migration patterns, their social-economic aspects, and the underlying determinants shaping these trends. The quantitative research involves the analysis of statistical data drawn from national and international databases. Key indicators, such as migration inflows and outflows, demographic changes, and labor market statistics, are examined to identify patterns over the past two decades. The qualitative methods are used to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of migrants in Slovakia. This includes semi-structured interviews with migrants and representatives from NGOs involved in integration efforts.

2. Historical Background

Under the communist regime (1948-1989), emigration was strictly controlled, as it was seen as a threat to state security and ideology. Individuals wishing to leave the country faced significant barriers, including bureaucratic hurdles, surveillance, and severe penalties for attempting to escape the regime (Kurekova, 2016).

The communist government promoted a stable workforce and propagated socialist indoctrination, which led to a controlled internal migration system. Like other communist

countries, the population was allocated to specific industries or regions, limiting personal freedom of movement (Kurekova, 2016).

Following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Czechoslovakia transitioned from communism to democracy, which opened the door to new opportunities. The subsequent split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, resulting in the establishment of Slovakia as an independent nation, led to significant changes not only in migration patterns, but also for the market economy. Slovak citizens began to look for better opportunities abroad, particularly in Western Europe, while the newly formed Slovakia became an attractive destination for nationals looking to capitalize on emerging economic opportunities (Martin&Teitelbaum, 2005).

After gaining independence, Slovakia implemented several reforms, including establishing relations with the EU. The lengthy and difficult process culminated in Slovakia joining the European Union on May 1, 2004, together with nine other states of Eastern and Central Europe. EU membership granted Slovaks the freedom to live and work in other member states, significantly increasing emigration, as many sought higher wages and better living conditions in wealthier EU countries. The United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria became prominent destinations, where Slovaks contributed to various sectors, such as construction, healthcare, and services (Czaika&de Haas, 2014).

Slovakia's EU membership also made the country more attractive to foreign nationals, particularly those from non-EU neighboring countries and beyond. This led to a diversification of Slovakia's demographic profile, as each new wave of migrants brought a variety of skills, cultures, and perspectives.

Despite many opportunities, the post-EU environment also brought challenges. The rapid influx of migrants raised concerns about integration, public services, and societal cohesion (Czaika&de Haas, 2014). It became clear that migration was not just about numbers, but rather that societal change itself demanded sensible policies and inclusive approaches to ensure the successful integration of diverse populations into Slovak life (Castles *et al.,* 2014).

3. Analysis of Recent Migration Patterns

In recent years, Slovakia has experienced remarkable changes in migration trends, driven by both large inflows and outflows of migrants. Some of these trends have been influenced by local labor market demands and opportunities, as well as by wider regional trends within all aspects of European integration.

3.1. Labor Migration

Labor migration has been a dominant factor in Slovakia's demographic landscape. As the Slovak economy has continued to grow, particularly in automotive manufacturing, technology, and services, there has been a substantial demand for both skilled and unskilled labor. Many Slovaks emigrating to western European countries like Germany, Austria, and the United Kingdom, seek better

wages and improved living conditions (Martinkovic&Kral, 2020). This trend has raised concerns about the potential long-term impact of a "brain drain" on the domestic labor market (Boonstra, 2020).

At the same time, Slovakia has attracted foreign labor, particularly from neighboring countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine. Foreign workers often fill labor shortages in critical sectors, contributing to the local economy and addressing gaps in the workforce (Tejchman&Veselsky, 2018). This inflow is supported by the EU's free movement policies, which facilitate the entry of workers from other member states. However, challenges remain in terms of recognition of foreign qualifications and efficient integration into the labor market (OECD, 2020).

3.2. Education-Related Migration

Educational migration also plays a key role in shaping current migration patterns in Slovakia. The country is home to several reputable higher education institutions that attract international students from various regions, including Europe, Asia, and Africa. As an EU member state, Slovakia benefits from partnerships and exchange programs that encourage educational exchanges with other countries. The flow of students not only enhances cultural diversity on university campuses, but also encourages some international students to remain in Slovakia after their studies, looking for long-term employment (Boonstra, 2020). This contributes to cultural exchange within Slovakia and helps to address labor shortages in various fields. However, the transition from student to working professional often involves challenges, among which are bureaucratic work permit processes and managing cultural integration.

3.3. Family Reunification

Family reunification is another critical migration dynamic in Slovakia. Slovaks who migrate abroad often want to take their families with them, contributing to increased migration outflows. While family reunification in other EU member states does not pose particular difficulties, the process has implications for social structures and family dynamics within Slovakia (Bútorová&Gajdoš, 2016).

Similarly, migrants settling in Slovakia also desire to bring their families, as it helps them adapt to the new environment and strengthen community ties. Family reunification policies in Slovakia allow for spouses and dependent children to join migrants, promoting family unity and stability, but the process can be bureaucratically complex, leading to delays and uncertainty (Volkova, 2015).

3.4. Asylum Seekers

Over the years, Slovakia has received asylum seekers, yet it is not typically considered a destination country for migrants heading towards Western Europe. Like other EU member states, Slovakia has participated in various EU initiatives related to the reception and integration of refugees, particularly during crises such as the Syrian refugee crisis (Pavlíny, 2019), and the forced migration from Ukraine.

In 2015, Slovakia, along with the other V4 countries, initially opposed the EU's mandatory relocation quotas for refugees from Greece and Italy, but unlike Hungary and Poland, Slovakia did not pursue legal action against the EU (Kajanek, 2022).

Despite this, Slovakia has implemented measures to provide humanitarian assistance and support for asylum seekers. Many of the challenges asylum seekers face are specifically related to integration into Slovak society, including limited resources for language training, cultural orientation, and employment support. Public attitudes toward refugees can also significantly impact the integration process (Grmelova& Pavalj, 2017).

In recent years, debates about the immigration policy and humanitarian responsibilities have become more prominent within the EU, particularly concerning the pressure on member states to share the responsibility of refugee resettlement (Štefánik, 2019). These dynamics changed dramatically after the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis. Slovakia, along with other V4 countries, received a large number of Ukrainian refugees, demonstrating a very different response than to the 2015 migrant crisis. This highlights the significant difference in public and political response to refugees from Ukraine, compared to those from other regions (Kajanek, 2022).

4. Statistical Overview of Migrant Demographics

When comparing the demographic characteristics of migrants in Slovakia, several important trends emerge based on age, gender, and nationality:

- **Age:** Migrants in Slovakia span a wide age range, with a significant proportion of young adults aged 20 to 35. This group primarily consists of students and young professionals arriving in Slovakia for education or work opportunities. Additionally, there is a remarkable number of older migrants, especially those joining family members or seeking employment (Grmelová&Pavalj, 2017).

- **Gender:** The gender distribution in Slovakia is relatively balanced, but varies depending on migration type. In labor migration, male migrants dominate, especially in the construction and manufacturing sectors. In contrast, family reunification tends to involve more women migrating to join their families. The educational sector shows a more balanced gender representation (Martinkovic&Kral, 2020).

- **Nationality:** The nationalities of migrants in Slovakia reflect both regional and global trends. A significant portion of the migrant population comes from neighboring countries, especially Poland, Ukraine, and Hungary, but there has been an increasing influx of migrants from Asia and Africa. According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, foreign nationals make up about 4% of the total population, highlighting the growing significance of migration to Slovakia's social-economic development (Slovak Statistical Office, 2023).

As noted, Slovakia's current migratory flows are shaped by an intricate combination

of labor migration, educational migration and family reunification. These trends reflect dramatic demographic changes. Understanding these trends is essential for policymakers when developing inclusive strategies to address the challenges and opportunities presented by migration.

5. Determinants of Migration in Slovakia

Migration in Slovakia is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of interrelated determinants. Understanding these factors is important for explaining patterns of migration to and from the country, as well as for developing effective policies to manage these movements. The determinants can be classified as economic, social, and political factors.

Economic Factors refer to the financial and labor market conditions that motivate individuals to move, including wage differentials, job availability, and overall economic stability. Social Factors refers to the role of community and family dynamics that can influence the decision to migrate, including educational opportunities, family connections, and cultural perceptions. Political Factors include governmental policies and geopolitical circumstances, mostly related to immigration laws and asylum policies. Political stability and the perception of safety also play significant roles in influencing an individual's decision to migrate.

5.1. Economic Factors

The most important economic reason for migration is the difference in wage levels be-

tween Slovakia and western European countries (Kahanec&Kurekova, 2016). Many high-skilled Slovaks are driven to cross the borders for better salaries, which means higher living standards. This has resulted in significant outflows of talent from areas like health care, IT and engineering, creating fears of a potential "brain drain".

Job availability is another critical economic factor influencing migration patterns. Slovakia is a rapidly growing economy, particularly in areas like automotive manufacturing and technology, where it faces labor shortages due to the country's ongoing economic expansion. This then creates demand for more labor than is locally available, which in turn presents opportunities for migrant workers, especially those from neighboring countries. The presence of multinational companies in Slovakia further drives the need for a versatile workforce, attracting both local and foreign talent to meet specific skills requirements (Muster& Poledna, 2018).

Broader Economic factors, like economic stability, growth forecasts, and employment rates, can influence an individual's decision to migrate. Slovakia's positive economic situation has motivated many to pursue opportunities within the country; however, regional disparities and slower economic recovery in certain areas have prompted some individuals to seek opportunities elsewhere (Baldwin-Edwards&Kraler, 2015).

5.2. Social Factors

One of the main determinants increasing inflows to Slovakia is opportunities for a

European education and qualifications. This mobility can lead to long-term migration, as graduates from international backgrounds might choose to remain in Slovakia after graduating, thus contributing to the local economy (Jankowski, 2018).

Strong community ties and family members deeply affect migratory decisions. Slovaks living abroad tend to bring along their family members (Lindstrom&Hernández, 2017). Similarly, individuals from foreign countries may migrate to Slovakia to reunite with family members already there. The alignment of these social networks not only provides crucial solidarity but also establishes potential for future integration into existing migration streams by establishing new access points (Záliš, 2017).

How migrants are viewed both culturally and societally is a large factor in determining how these dynamics play out. Public perceptions in Slovakia can be mixed, with portions of society resisting immigration, and others appreciating that foreign labor is needed to support the economy. Unlike the limitations posed by resources, these cultural factors an influence the decision-making process of potential migrants as they weigh the contrast between a different culture and their expectations of a more stable life (Muntean&Schulz, 2020).

5.3. Political Factors

As a member of the European Union, Slovakia is bound by EU regulations regarding migration, including the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which sets out rules and procedures concerning the processing of applications for asylum, as well as the rights of applicants. Slovakia has recently been involved in a number of EU-wide initiatives to harmonize and raise standards for asylum across the bloc. Slovakia's stance on a number of key EU directives, particularly concerning compulsory relocation quotas for asylum seekers, has sometimes posed challenges (Migrationsverket, 2017). For example, during the 2015 migrant crisis, Slovakia opposed EU quotas, exercising its right to control its borders and determine who enters the country. This position reflects political concerns where national sovereignty is prioritized over compliance with EU mandates.

Slovak legislation regarding migration has evolved under both internal and external pressure. The development seeks to streamline EU policies with national regulations concerning immigration, and recognizes specific economic requirements in individual European states. While intentions to create a positive legislative framework for migrants and asylum seekers have also been expressed, bureaucratic obstacles do exist. This can result in a greater processing time for applications, and problems accessing essential services for migrants and refugees (Jankowski, 2020).

Political discourse and contentious media reporting help structure public attitudes toward migration in general, but also in the case of asylum seekers. In Slovakia, opinions are often influenced by political parties with

pro-immigration or anti-immigration attributes (Čavoj, 2015). Politicians there have used migration-related issues to drum up public backing by representing immigration in terms of economic need, or as a threat. This type of framing can contribute to stigmatization and cause communities and society at large to be less willing to tolerate higher numbers of asylum seekers or migrants (IOM, 2021).

Slovakia is another example where the presence of far-right political parties has made it less migrant-friendly. Those parties are typically oriented toward more stringent immigration controls, and take a skeptical view of EU integration, claiming it subverts Slovak sovereignty. The government is unwilling to adopt a more inclusive migration policy, which also influences wider discussions on approaches to integration **(**Rincon&Paniagua, 2019**).** As a result, public discourse can become focused on fears of cultural dilution or economic competition, overshadowing the contributions that migrants make to society.

The migration context of Slovakia is also molded by regional and global geopolitical configurations. Ongoing conflicts in neighboring regions, such as the war in Ukraine, have led to increased numbers of refugees entering Slovakia. The Slovak government's response to these crises can shape both immediate policy changes and long-term migration trends. In recent years, Slovakia has taken steps to accommodate refugees and asylum seekers from conflict zones, reflecting a humanitarian commitment in times of crisis. Yet this can be qualified by the general

public's perception on immigration. Asylum seeker policies are subjected to political debate, as government responses must balance humanitarian obligations with concerns over domestic political stability and public opinion. This balancing act poses significant challenges in developing cohesive and effective migration policies that address immediate needs, while planning for sustainable integration (Rincon&Paniagua, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on theoretical, practical and statistical data analyzed during the research study, the migration in Slovakia is determined by three main factors – economic, social and political. At the same time, the free movement of individuals for labor, education, and family reunification has significantly influenced the demographic landscape, leading to both opportunities and challenges for Slovak society.

According to the findings, Slovakia benefits from cheap foreign labor and a diverse student population and, at the same time, the country struggles with integration challenges and potential labor shortages due to outbound migration.

For policymakers, the mentioned findings underline the need for effective strategies, in particular:

- Developing inclusive integration policies – Slovakia should develop and implement full-fledged integration policies for migrants, including language-acquisition programs or other cultural-orientation opportunities, with access to essential social services.

- Access to the Labor Market – Policies that address recognition of foreign qualifications and skills in order for migrants to be productive contributors to the Slovak economy.
- Promotion of Targeted Recruitment Initiatives – The Slovak government can introduce targeted recruitment campaigns to bring in foreign workers for sectors where skill shortages exist (healthcare, IT and technical fields).
- Family Reunification Policies – Simplifying family reunification will not only provide social protection and security among migrant households, but will also build on successful integration, which broadens local community ties.
- Awareness Raising Campaigns – It is important to conduct public awareness campaigns that promote a more informed understanding of migration, which could help overcome a number of negative perceptions and biases. Campaigns that point to the many contributions of migrants in Slovak society and for its economy can make a real difference.
- Collaboration with the EU – Certain aspects of migration can only be addressed collaboratively. This includes utilizing EU financial resources to implement integration policies and taking a leading role in developing comprehensive, pan-continental migration strategies, rather than relying on fragmented, short-term solutions.

Acknowledgement

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