



Central European
Digital Media
Observatory



Dilemma: Freedom vs. Security

Coffee Beans

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Hobbes's Leviathan, the novel “1984” by George Orwell, the American Patriot Act or the Chinese Social Credit System - are all results of the application of the dilemma between liberty and security. Its topicality comes to the fore with every terrorist attack; it was strongly present during the COVID-19 pandemic and is also relevant in the fight against disinformation. To what extent can state institutions limit the liberty of their citizens with the argument that they are doing so for their security? The answer must take into account many factors, but one of the most important is the very attitude of citizens - how to choose between two goods - security and liberty?

In the World Values Survey, wave 7, respondents were asked to indicate their preference in the dilemma between security and liberty: *Most people consider both liberty and security to be important, but if you had to choose between them, which one would you consider more important?* Within the V4 region, we have available responses from respondents in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the survey was conducted in 2022.

	CZ	SK
Liberty	35.3%	30.1%
Security	63.4%	69.2%
Does not know / Did not answer	1.3%	0.7%

Table 1: Overview of preferences between liberty and security in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Source: World Values Survey, 7th wave)

In the context of the dilemma, of choosing between security and liberty, the post-socialist countries are specific in that they have older generations who grew up in an atmosphere of Cold War uncertainty and material scarcity, while younger generations no longer have these experiences. When we divide the responses for individual countries into three age cohorts, the results are as follows:

	CZ	SK
Liberty (up to 29 years old)	35.7%	35.9%
Security (up to 29 years old)	63.5%	64.1%
Liberty (30 – 49 years old)	34.6%	30.2%
Security (30 – 49 years old)	64.3%	69.6%
Liberty (50+ years old)	35.7%	27.8%
Security (50+ years old)	62.6%	70.8%

Table 2: Overview of preferences between liberty and security in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The total up to 100% is represented by respondents who did not answer the question or could not answer it. (Source: World Values Survey, 7th wave)

The ratio of responses in Slovakia and the Czech Republic does not differ in the case of the age cohorts "up to 29 years old", but in the case of the cohorts "30-49 years old" and "50+ years old" compared to the Czech Republic, an increase in the preference for security among Slovak respondents can be clearly seen. At the same time, a gradual increase in preference for liberty over security towards younger generations is evident in Slovak society. To compare the attitude of Czech and Slovak society to the dilemma of liberty vs. security, we present the results of the answers from "Western" democracies:

	Germany	Netherlands	USA
Liberty	43.2%	40.7%	69.5%
Security	53.4%	48.2%	28.3%
Do not know / No answer	3.4%	11.1%	2.2%

Table 3: Overview of preferences between liberty and security in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA (Source: World Values Survey, wave 7)

If we also divide the answers in these countries into age cohorts, in the case of the Netherlands and the USA, the opposite trend is evident, as we identified in Slovak society. In other words, younger generations in the United States and the Netherlands prefer security to liberty to a greater extent than older generations.

	Germany	Netherlands	USA
Liberty (up to 29 years old)	48.8%	26.2%	61.9%
Security (up to 29 years old)	48.0%	58.1%	35.5%
Liberty (30 – 49 years old)	42.5%	36.6%	66.6%
Security (30 – 49 years old)	54.8%	46.7%	32.1%
Liberty (50+ years old)	41.9%	45.1%	75.2%
Security (50+ years old)	54.3%	47.5%	22.1%

Table 3: Overview of preferences between liberty and security in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA. The total up to 100% is represented by respondents who did not answer the question or could not answer it. (Source: World Values Survey, 7th wave)

Further research will be required to explain these trends, but the hypothesis within the CEDMO-SVA team is that there is some equalisation of historical experience happening between Western societies and post-communist Europe. While Western countries are experiencing the return of the need to take security into account, whether due to terrorist attacks, the migration crisis or the war in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, in which life was highly securitised under the influence of the Soviet Union and often experienced shortages of even basic commodities (meat, toilet paper, hygiene supplies), etc.), on the contrary, is slowly getting used to a certain level of well-being, and the youngest generation, growing up in an environment of higher liberty, values it even more.

