

CEDMO Special Brief

On the assassination attempt on Robert Fico



Main Disinformation Narratives About the Assassination Attempt on Robert Fico

A false Ukrainian trail

After the assassination attempt on Slovak PM Robert Fico, posts pointing out an alleged Ukrainian trail of the attack appeared not only in Slovak online spaces, but also in other countries, including Poland and Czechia. Shortly after the attempt, a false piece of information [appeared](#), stating the attacker is Ukrainian. As soon as more information about the shooter, including his name and nationality, became public, social media [posts](#) started claiming his [wife](#) is Ukrainian [activist](#). Russian propaganda also [mentioned](#) her alleged ties to the Ukrainian secret service.

Staged assassination speculation

Some people on social media also shared unfounded [speculation](#) that the assassination attempt was staged or that it happened differently than claimed by the media and police. These posts pointed out that the footage of Fico after he was shot showed no blood and that some onlookers behaved “suspiciously”, possibly because they were accomplices. It was also speculated that the shooter used blank ammunition.

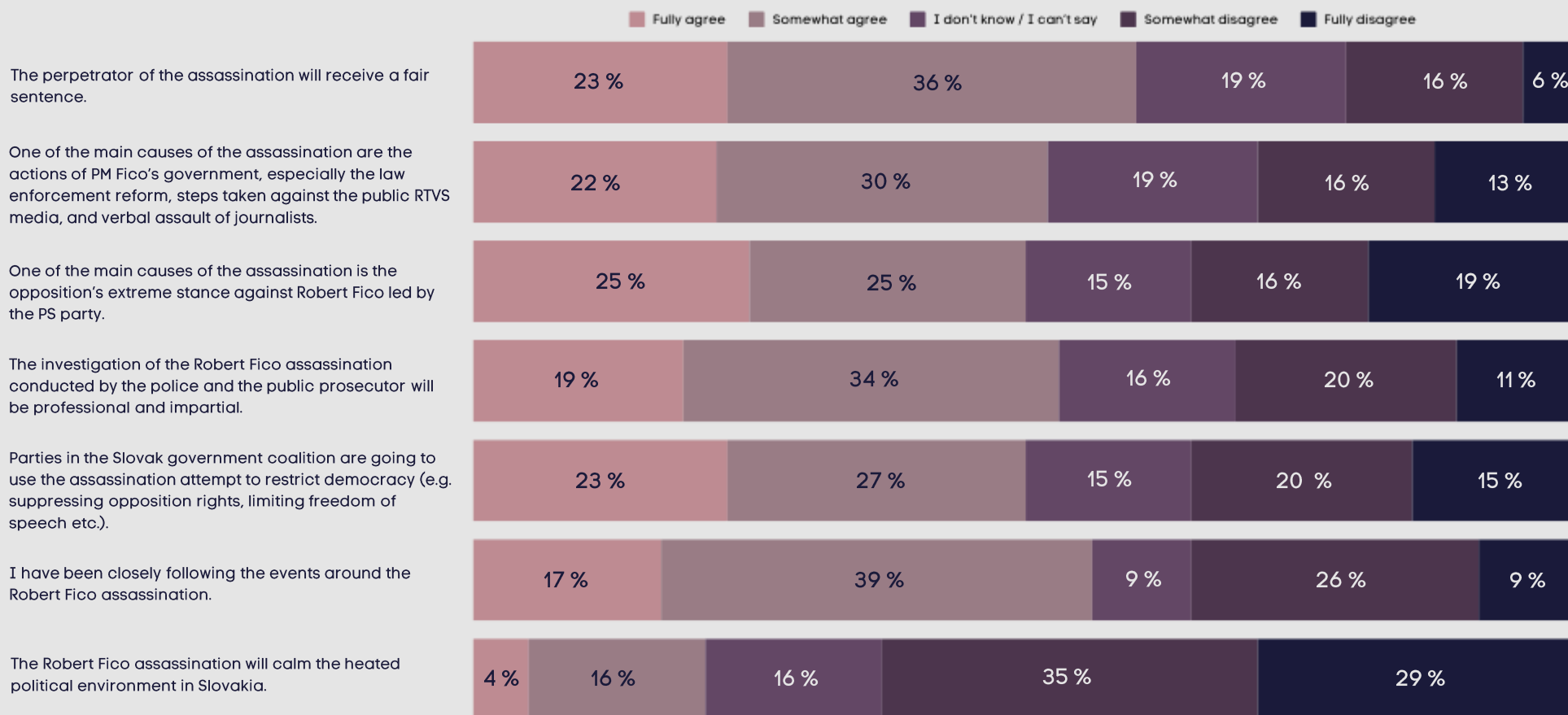
Alleged link between the attack and the opposition

Many posts shared in the hours and days after the assassination attempt focused on either real or fabricated political views and [activities](#) of the shooter and on his supposed links to the Slovak opposition. A widely shared photo showed the attacker with another man, allegedly the journalist Martin Milan Šimečka – the father of the chair of the Progresívne Slovensko (PS; Progressive Slovakia) party. However, it [was](#) somebody else. Another viral photo allegedly showed the attacker with other PS politicians – once again, it was actually a [different](#) person.



Events Surrounding the Assassination Attempt on Robert Fico

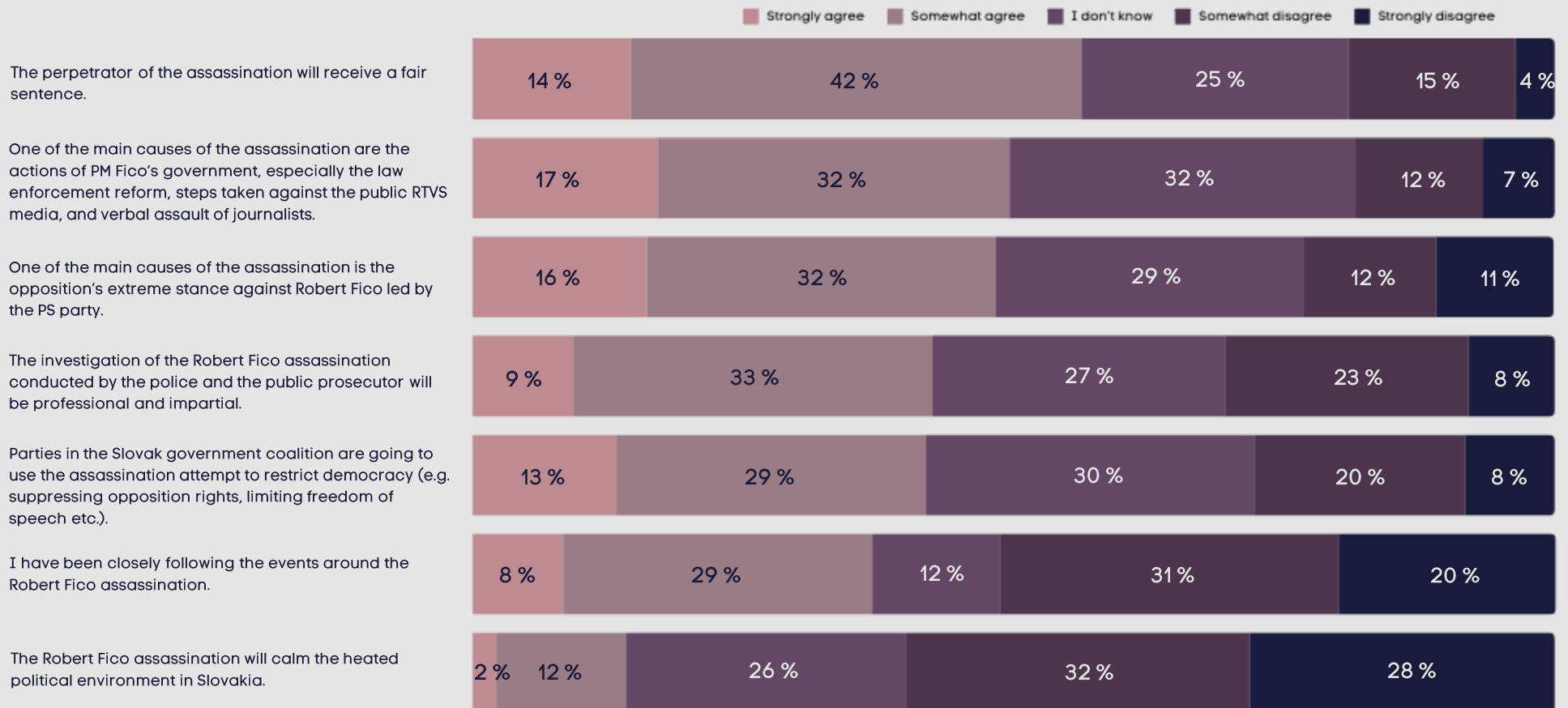
In mid-May, in the town of Handlová in Central Slovakia, the Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot in an assassination attempt. The 71-year-old suspect was charged with premeditated attempted murder. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements related to this event?





Events Surrounding the Assassination Attempt on Robert Fico

In mid-May, in the town of Handlová in Central Slovakia, the Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot in an assassination attempt. The 71-year-old suspect was charged with premeditated attempted murder. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements related to this event?



Events Surrounding the Assassination Attempt on Robert Fico

More than half of Slovak respondents (59 % when considering both “fully agree” and “somewhat agree”) trust the Slovak justice system and believe that the shooter will receive a fair sentence. In terms of voter preferences, voters of SNS (71%), Aliancia + Szövetség (71%), and SMER – SD (68%) agreed with this statement the most. The lowest levels of agreement were reported by voters of the SME RODINA party (41%) and voters of other, non-parliamentary parties (30%).

The statement that one of the main causes of the assassination attempt was the questionable measures taken by Prime Minister Fico, especially the law enforcement reform, steps taken against the public RTVS media, and verbal assault of journalists was the most popular – 52% of respondents agreed with this statement, while younger age groups agreed with it the most often (the highest percentage of agreement was reported by the age group under 24 – 66%. The lowest percentage was in the age group over 55, with an average of 46%). Voters of Progresívne Slovensko were the most likely to agree with the above-mentioned claim (79%) and the least likely to agree with it were voters of SNS, REPUBLIKA, and SMER – SD (32% on average).

It was also very popular to agree with the statement that one of the main causes of the assassination attempt was the opposition’s extreme stance against Robert Fico’s government. Half of respondents agreed with this (50%). The elderly (67% of those in the age group over 65, while only 30% of those under 24) and voters of the SNS (84%), SMER - SD (82%), HLAS - SD (70%), and REPUBLIKA (67%) parties were the most likely to agree with this option.

Only 20% of respondents agree that the attack will calm the heated political environment in Slovakia.

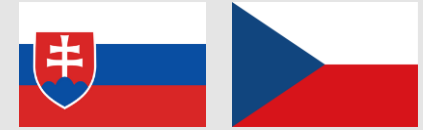


Events Surrounding the Assassination Attempt on Robert Fico

More than half of all Czech respondents (56% when considering both “fully agree” and “somewhat agree”) trust the Slovak justice system and believe that the shooter will receive a fair sentence. This statement has the highest rate of agreement in the survey. People who didn’t vote in the Czech parliamentary elections believe this statement a little less (51%) than those who voted for the parliamentary parties (SPOLU: 62%; ANO 2011: 63%; PirSTAN: 66%; SPD: 58%).

An almost identical share of respondents agree that the attack was mainly caused, among other things, by the questionable measures taken by Fico (49%) and by the opposition’s extreme stance against the PM (48%). Those who voted for the current coalition in Czechia tend to agree that the main cause was Fico’s questionable measures (SPOLU: 72%; PirSTAN: 66%). The same cannot be said for those who voted for the opposition (ANO 2011: 47%; SPD: 28%). They tend to believe one of the main causes is the opposition’s extreme stance against Fico (ANO 2011: 60%; SPD: 61%), which is a statement supported by a minority of the coalition voters (SPOLU: 44%; PirSTAN: 39%).

Only 14% of respondents agree that the attack will calm the heated political environment in Slovakia.



Sources of Information About the Assassination Attempt

Try to think about the source you used to gather the most information on Wednesday, 15 May 2024, the day of the Robert Fico assassination attempt.

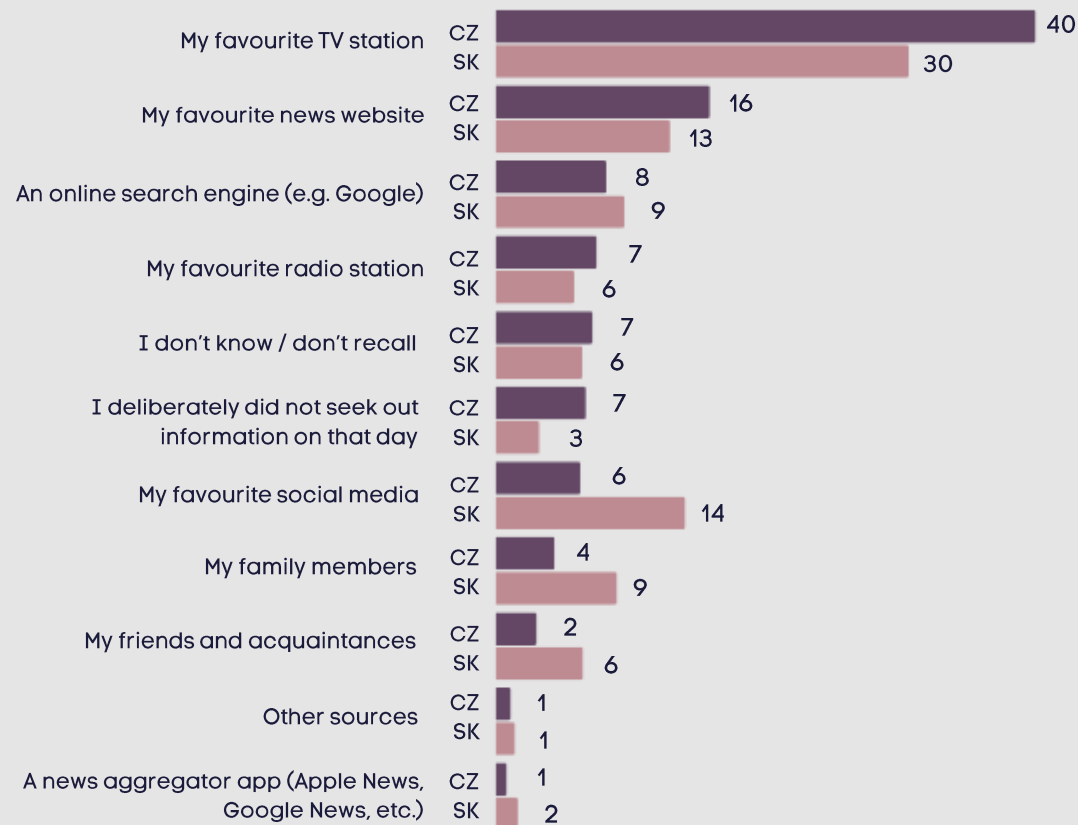
In Slovakia, the most popular source of information on the day of the assassination attempt was the respondents' favourite TV station (30%). Women (33%) relied on it more frequently than men (27%). Men (16%) were more likely than women (9%) to follow their favourite news website.

In Slovakia, the primary source of information for young respondents aged between 16 and 24 was social media (25%). The second most common source was their family members (16%).

In Czechia, the most popular source of information on the day of the assassination attempt was the respondents' favourite TV station (40%). Women (42%) relied on it more frequently than men (37%). Men (23%) were more likely than women (9%) to follow their favourite news website.

In Czechia, 1 out of every 5 respondents aged between 16 and 24 was following the news on social media. It was the second most common source of information for this demographic, right after TV (21%).

In Czechia, young respondents aged 16-34 in the Czech Republic did not intentionally consume firearm information an average of 10% of the time, while those aged 55+ did so an average of only 3% of the time.



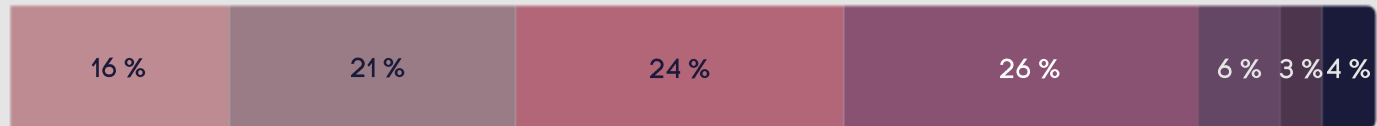


Perception of the Assassination Attempt's Media Coverage in Slovakia

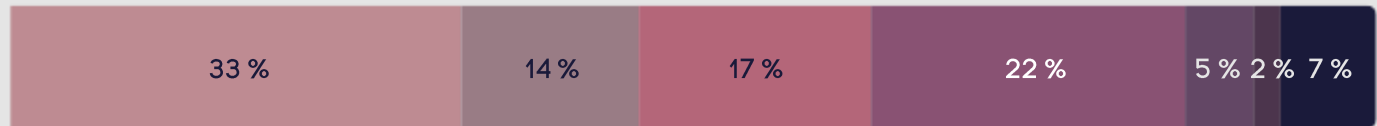
Now we would like to ask about your perception of the way the media covered the assassination attempt on Robert Fico. Regarding this tragic event, to what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements? Please select your answers on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

Strongly agree 2 3 4 5 6 Strongly disagree

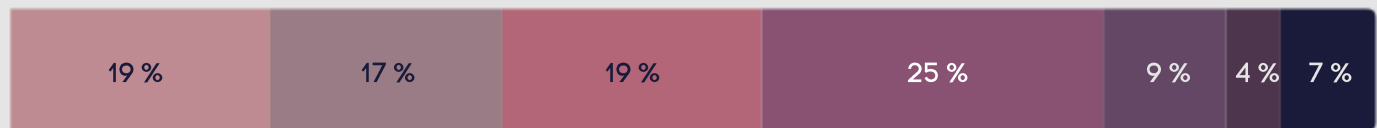
On the day of the shooting, most private news media, esp. their journalists, provided serious, factual reports about the tragedy.



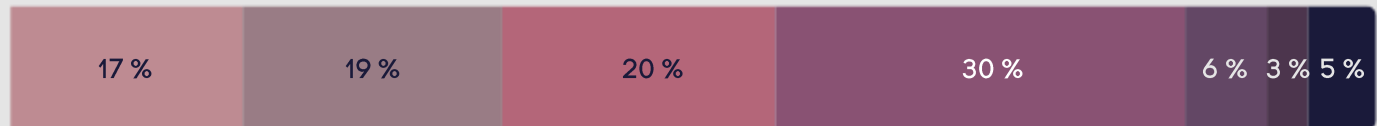
Social media administrators (e.g. Meta) have the full right to delete any hate speech about such events, as well as any posts condoning the shooting.



The Police and the Minister of the Interior provided the public with information about the assassination and its circumstances in a factual and professional manner.



Public service media (RTVS) followed high standards of ethical journalism when covering this tragedy.



On the day it happened, I followed media reports about the assassination of Robert Fico very closely.



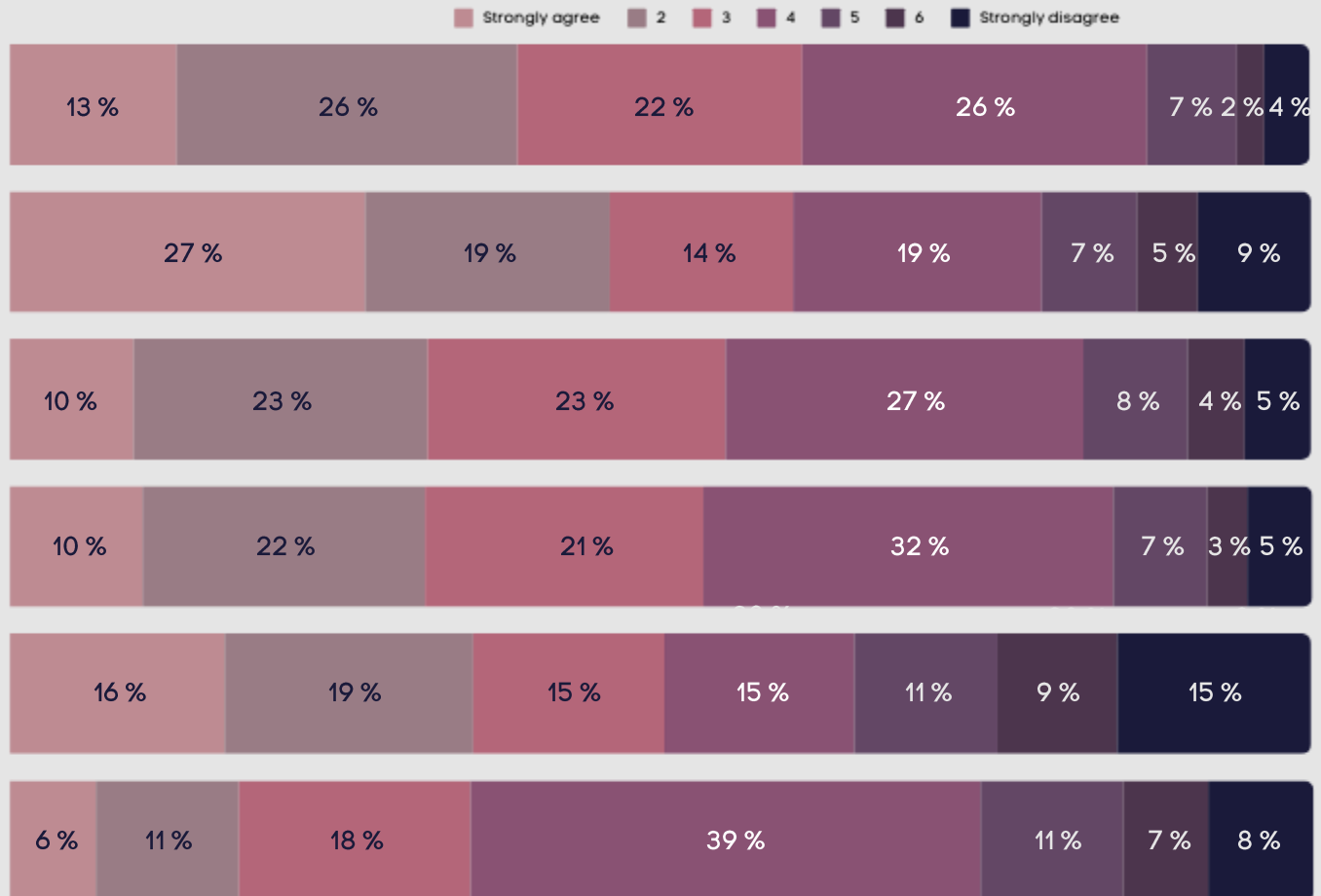
The leaked recording of the testimony the shooter gave in the corridor of the Handlová police station aided government politicians in drawing attention to the assassin's links to the opposition.





Perception of the Assassination Attempt's Media Coverage in Czechia

Now we would like to ask about your perception of the way the media covered the assassination attempt on Robert Fico. Regarding this tragic event, to what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements? Please select your answers on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).





Media Coverage of the Assassination Attempt in Slovakia

Just under two-thirds of respondents (64%) say they followed the assassination very closely in the media. 61% of the respondents agree that a private news media provided serious, factual reporting about the event. 56% of the respondents agree that the public service RTVS managed to maintain high ethical standards of reporting. 55% of all respondents believe that the Slovak Police and the Minister of the Interior provided information to the public in a factual and professional manner.

Over half of the respondents (64% across all degrees of agreement) believe that social media administrators (such as Meta) have the full right to delete any hate speech about such events, as well as any posts condoning the shooting.



Media Coverage of the Assassination Attempt in Czechia

Half of the respondents state they closely followed the media about the assassination. 61% of the respondents agree that a private news media provided serious, factual reporting about the event. 53% of the respondents agree that the public service RTVS managed to maintain high ethical standards of reporting. 56% of all respondents believe that the Slovak Police and the Minister of the Interior provided information to the public in a factual and professional manner.

Over half of the respondents (60% across all degrees of agreement) believe that social media administrators (such as Meta) have the full right to delete any hate speech about such events, as well as any posts condoning the shooting. Those who voted for Petr Pavel (67%) believe this more often than those who voted for Andrej Babiš (52%) in the presidential elections.

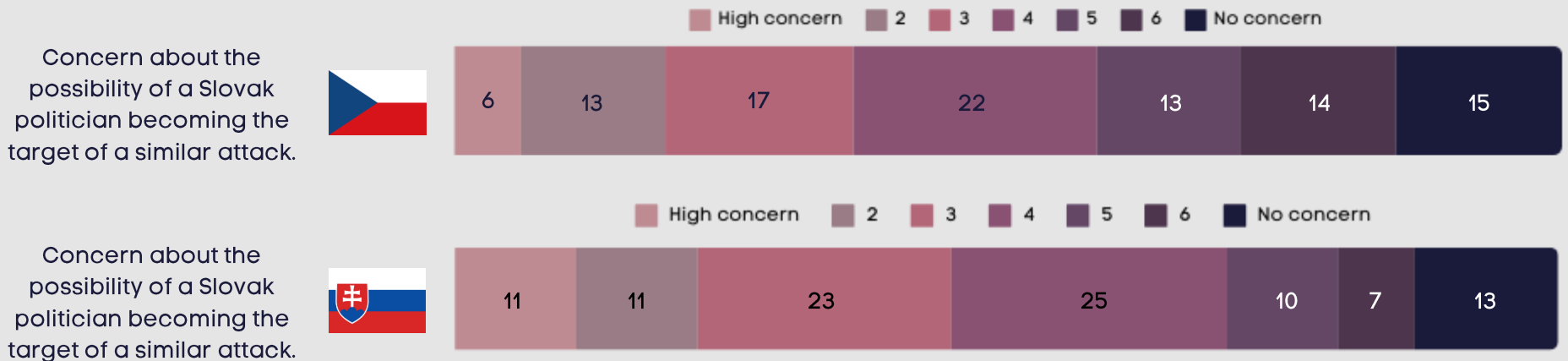


Repetition of the Assassination – Comparison of CZ and SK

Are you or are you not worried about the possibility of a Slovak politician (either government or opposition) becoming the target of a similar attack?

Over a third of Czech respondents are concerned about the potential of a similar assassination in the future (36% after combining the scale’s endpoints 1, 2 and 3). After adding the scale’s endpoints (5, 6 and 7), 44% of men seem to be worried about a second assassination attempt. In comparison, only 40% of women are concerned. Those who voted for Petr Pavel (45%) are also less worried than those who voted for Andrej Babiš (36%) in the presidential elections.

Up to 45% of the Slovak respondents expressed concern about a potential assassination of another politician. Furthermore, 3 out of every 10 respondents are not concerned and a quarter have expressed a neutral stance.



Research Method

Sample size	CZ: 2,729 respondents aged 16 or older / SK: 1,792 respondents aged 16 or older
Survey date	CZ: 14 June – 30 June 2024 / SK: 14 June – 27 June 2024
Survey method	online panel survey (CAWI)
Representativity	<p>quota sampling</p> <p>The survey is representative for the general population of Czechia aged 16 or older based on basic sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, region and size of town), employment status, and past voting behaviour (2021 Chamber of Deputies election, 2nd round of the 2023 presidential election).</p> <p>The survey is representative for the general population of Slovakia aged 16 or older based on basic sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, region and size of town),</p>
Contracted and carried out by	survey conducted by MEDIAN, s.r.o., (SIMAR member) and by Ipsos (SAVA and SIMAR member) exclusively for the Charles University

This publication summarizes the disinformation narratives that appeared in the public space during May and June of 2024 in connection to the attempted assassination of Slovak PM Robert Fico.

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