

New Parties and Democracy in Slovenia

MATEVŽ MALČIČ AND ALENKA KRAŠOVEC



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Abstract: *While no stranger to new political parties, Slovenia's party system became much more unstable after 2008 with the constant arrival of electorally very successful parties. Further, while the citizens' satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions has never reached the heights seen in Western Europe, the crisis years saw them drop to historical lows. In these circumstances, one may expect successful new parties to assure greater responsiveness, or a balance between responsible and responsive politics, and to bring improvements to citizens' opinion on their satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions. In addition, new parties are usually more prone to democratic innovations, which can be associated with the popular idea of introducing stronger intra-party democracy in their internal functioning. The analysis shows that in 2014 Slovenia experienced both the nadir of public opinion on democracy and the political system, and the most electorally successful new party. Nevertheless, improvements in satisfaction with democracy and the political system only slowly emerged after 2014, to a considerable extent coinciding with the return to economic prosperity, while even these improvements left enough room for yet another successful new party at the 2018 elections. Concerning innovations in intra-party democracy, we are only able to identify some smaller democratic innovations. Given this, it seems that the new parties themselves have had a relatively limited impact on democracy in Slovenia.*

Keywords: *Slovenia, new parties, intra-party democracy, satisfaction with democracy, trust in politics*

Introduction

The last decade has seen Central European polities confront the dangers of both hollowing, namely, the loss of a connection between citizens and the political system, especially political parties (Greskovits 2015; Cianetti 2018), and backsliding, the actual degradation of democratic institutions and rule of law, seen especially in Hungary and Poland (Bogaards 2018). Although the hollowing and backsliding of democracy are typically associated with questions of the quality of governance and democracy (Brusis 2016; Hanley – Sikk 2016), they are also frequently linked with political destabilisation. In this regard, developments across the region have been strongly associated with the economic and financial crisis starting in 2008. Yet, the quality of democracy does not exist merely in the eyes of experts, but is felt and understood every day by the people who live in it (Krause – Merkel 2018).

Slovenia was also unable to avoid some of the patterns observed in Central European countries. However, the first serious signs of the hollowing or backsliding of democracy, at least in terms of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Slovenia and trust in political institutions, started to appear already in the mid-2000s (European Commission 2019), then deepened with the economic and financial crisis which hit Slovenia badly. The consequences of these developments are not only apparent in public opinion surveys, but also in the electoral landscape's increased volatility, especially in instability of the party system. While before the 2008 elections only one new party in Slovenia had managed to cross the parliamentary threshold at each election (except in 2004 when there were no newcomers), and none had come close to 10% of the vote (Fink-Hafner – Krašovec 2013) – with the Slovenian party system having been regarded, together with the Hungarian and Czech party systems, as the most stable until the late 2000s (Lewis 2001; Enyedi – Casal Bértoa 2011) – this changed radically with the 2008 elections. In the 1992–2008 period, it was precisely small new parliamentary parties that for a long time played an important role in mitigating the population's anti-party sentiments (Fink-Hafner 2012). Many things changed in 2008 with the arrival of the first, somewhat bigger new parliamentary party, a process continuing today with the 2018 elections, with newcomers even receiving the biggest share of votes at the 2011 and 2014 elections. Raising expectations that the latter can stem the tide and restore a balance between responsibility and responsiveness¹, this new party system has so far been characterised by either partial or full turnover since, respectively, some or most new parties are being replaced by

1 Responsibility is defined as the decisions of political parties and leaders that take account of the long-term needs of their people and countries, and the claims of audiences other than the national electoral audience. We can talk about responsiveness when political decisions sympathetically respond to the short-term demands of voters, public opinion, interest groups, and the media (Bardi et al. 2014 b: 237).

newer ones (Haughton – Deegan-Krause 2015), further raising concerns with instability (Cabada – Tomšič 2016: 44).

The question then is whether the arrival of electorally successful new political parties has brought greater responsiveness, or a balance between responsible and responsive politics, and led to improvements in citizens' opinion on their satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions. Moreover, since political parties are believed to have detached themselves from the public at large (Mair 2013) or are seen as being in cahoots with vested interests (Crouch 2004), a second question is whether these new parties have introduced democratic innovations in the way they work. Our goal is to provide insights by analysing the case of Slovenia, especially in light of its poor track record in public opinion surveys and the very successful new political parties since 2008.

We begin with a theoretical section examining the appearance of new political parties generally, and more recently in Central Europe in particular. This is followed by a discussion on new parties, intra-party democracy and why political parties integrate it into their functioning and what the expected benefits are for the wider functioning of democracy, with the last part of that section dealing with questions on satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions. The third section briefly presents the political situation in Slovenia, followed by an introduction to our methodology in the fourth section, with the next two sections analysing the result of both the development of selected public opinion survey indicators, and the presence of intra-party democracy in Slovenian parliamentary parties, and connect them with the emergence of new highly successful parliamentary parties. In the final section we summarise the main findings.

Theoretical section

New political parties

The usual starting point when studying the emergence of new political parties is cleavage theory (Lipset – Rokkan 1967) because party systems respond to changes in their environment with the arrival of newcomers competing with the established parties in representing new social issues (Deschouwer 2017), also termed electoral market failure (Lago – Martínez 2011). The systematic study of new parties gained strength in the mid-1980s (Harmel 1985) when the Green parties (Müller-Rommel 1985) became a special focus along with the rise of post-materialist values (Bürklin 1985). Although Green parties made some democratic innovations in their internal functioning, they soon had to adapt their structures and behaviour to the 'traditional' style of party functioning in their efforts to win elections (Poguntke 2017; Spoon 2007).

In the first decade of the 2000s, a fresh wave of interest swept over new parties. Krouwel and Lucardie (2008) distinguish four ways new parties emerge: transformation, merger, split, or birth, with only the latter formed *ex nihilo*. More important than how new parties as organisations come to be are the forms new parties take on. The first are prolocutors, which represent neglected groups (perceived or otherwise), without referring to a specific ideology, followed by purifying parties or challengers, whose vision of existing parties that have strayed from the 'path' has given them the goal, as the name implies, to restore it to that ideal, and third are the prophetic parties that try to represent new ideologies or cleavages (Lucardie 2000). Sikk (2011) expands this classification by adding „project of newness“ parties that, while occupying the niche of an established party like the purifiers, have a weak ideological motivation like the prolocutors. Newness can be a major boon if properly handled as such parties can convince voters „that they are better than the old ones in some other respects, for instance the capability of integrity of their leaders“ (*ibid.*: 480), which plays right into the conditions of politics of distrust and focus on transparency (Rosanvallon 2008), individualised societies (Lange 2015) and the personalisation of politics (Rahat – Kenig 2018).

Newness has found an expression in Central Europe where many of their supporters believe that new parties can solve problems the existing parties cannot. However, in explaining their success, a greater role is played by distrust or, more precisely, its source – corruption. The politicisation of corruption has become an ever more pressing issue during elections and been successfully used by new and main opposition parties in high-corruption environments (Bågenholm – Charron 2014; Polk et al. 2017) and provides the mould for the form taken on by new parties in more recent democracies in Central Europe. In her analysis of corruption's role in the region's elections, Engler (2016: 294) discovered that: „the historically derived, country-specific corruption level reduces the electoral support for new political parties, whereas an increase in the perceived corruption above the country-specific corruption level leads to a loss of trust in the political elite, therefore raising the electoral support for new competitors“. This has given birth to „anti-establishment reform parties“ (AERPs) „which exhibit – to different extents – three core features: (1) a politics of *mainstream reformism* (2) usually framed in terms of *anti-establishment* appeal to voters and (3) *genuine organizational newness*“ (Hanley – Sikk 2016: 523, italics in original). They emerge during periods of economic distress when the crisis' impact is reinforced by the fact government parties are less responsive to voter demands (Klüver – Spoon 2016), the perceived high and rising levels of corruption, and electoral support for genuine new parties shown in the past (Hanley – Sikk 2016: 525–526).

New political parties may be seen as an indicator of democracies' poor performance and, despite some doubt as to whether they are the remedy (Deschouwer

2017), in trying to either improve matters or simply in the hope of gaining votes such new parties introduce innovations that bring them closer to the citizens (Bardi et al. 2014a) and give what few members political parties still have (Seyd 1999) a greater say in how parties are run in the hope of re-energising them.

Intra-party democracy

Intra-party democracy (IPD) is a very broad term describing a wide range of methods for including party members in intra-party deliberation and decision-making. Some advocates of IPD argue that parties employing internally democratic procedures are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders to ensure they have more responsive policies, while others converge on the premise that parties ‘practice what they preach’ in the sense of using internally democratic procedures for their deliberations and decisions, to strengthen democratic culture generally (Scarrow 2005: 3). Scarrow (2005: 3) also notes the ideal of IPD has gained in attention in recent years due to its apparent potential to promote ‘a virtuous circle’ that links ordinary citizens to government, benefiting the parties that adopt it, and more generally contributing to the stability and legitimacy of the democracies in which these parties compete for power.

More recently, IPD may be defined as rules that maximise „the involvement of party members in the decisions that are central to a party’s political life, including programme writing, and personnel selection (leaders and candidates) and other intra-organizational decision-making (referring to the relative strength of party bodies like congress and executive)” (Poguntke et al. 2016: 670–671). Poguntke et al. (2016) also identify two variants, an assembly-based IPD, which is how we usually view parties’ inner functioning with meetings followed by decision-taking, and a plebiscitary IPD, where only decisions are submitted to a membership-wide vote via ballot (*ibid.*). Some also go further by measuring different dimensions like participation, representation, competition, responsiveness and transparency that are able to capture a party’s inner workings outside of what is written down in the party statute (Rahat – Shapira 2017) and posit that, in addition to the inclusion of party members, we should look at ensuring the guarantee of pluralism and rights of diverse groups, the use of elements of deliberative democracy and the distribution of power between different party layers (Ignazi 2018).

Considerable focus in IPD studies is given to the selection of the leadership and candidate selection for elections, both what it entails and its consequences. Concerning candidate selection, Rahat and Hazan (2001) set the standard by distinguishing four dimensions: candidacy (who can run as candidate), the selectorate (the body that selects the candidates), decentralisation (territorial as to which party layer the selection is made or corporate when it allows for the functional representation of intra-party interest bodies), and voting/appoint-

ment systems (in a pure voting system, candidates cannot be changed after the selection body votes, while with a pure appointment there is no need for further approval by any organ other than the nominating one). Following this distinction, we focus on enlargement of the selectorate and greater decentralisation, which is also recognised by the authors (*ibid.*: 309) as an expression of the democratisation of candidate selection. Enlarging the selectorate has been shown to improve both citizens' trust in political parties and their satisfaction with democracy; yet, parties that decentralised either show supporters with lower trust levels or no change in their level of satisfaction with how democracy works in their country (Shomer et al. 2017; Shomer et al. 2016). However, more democratic or inclusive candidate-selection rules can also be detrimental as they „fundamentally alter the relationships between the parties and the candidates, between the parties and the voters, and between the party representatives and the party leaders“ (Pennings – Hazan 2001: 271), as they produce „*dual sources of legitimacy*“ for candidates – party legitimacy and popular legitimacy“ (Rahat – Hazan 2001: 313, *italics in original*), reinforcing the development of individualisation and personalised politics.

Similar analysis and arguments come into play with the selection of party leaders. Regarding the selectorate, it can range from open primaries on the inclusiveness side to only the parliamentary caucus on the exclusive side (LeDuc 2001), with Kenig (2009) expanding the analysis of the selectorate with candidacy, voting method/majority requirement and de-selection mechanisms. Like candidate-selection democratisation, leadership-selection democratisation is ringing alarm bells due to: “(a) the populist potential inherent in the unmediated leader–follower relation; (b) the demobilization of all the party actors and strata beyond and between members and leaders; and (c) the tighter control on the lower party strata from above“ (Ignazi 2018: 8). Research also shows that an enlarged electorate does not lead to less leadership domination (Schumacher – Giger 2017) and, while leadership coronations are less common, large selectorates tend to produce less competitive contests (Kenig 2008). This concern also feeds into ‘project of newness’ parties and personalised parties that might seek to publicly offset the view of single-person dominance with rules that make their selection appear democratic and thereby improve their party’s image.

We have already noted one reason new parties decide to increase their IPD is because, as novel entities, they are trying something new or feel they have to innovate in the fluid social and political environment (Poguntke et al. 2016). Other reasons include the pressure parties feel to open up that comes with growing distrust in them (Cain et al. 2003), the need to increase the appearance of democratic legitimacy and fairness (Ashiagbor 2008), to better reflect the modern individualised patterns of political participation (Gauja 2015), to ensure a comeback after losing elections or to adapt to changes introduced by others (Cross – Blais 2012), and the need to create new democratic links with

the developments enabled by modern information and communication technologies (Bennett et al. 2018).

Political parties in Central Europe have also introduced IPD in their internal functioning. For example, von dem Berge – Obert (2018: 660) found that before 2011 new parties had displayed „lower levels of IPD as compared to transformed communist or revived precommunist parties“.

Despite the popularity of enhancing IPD in new and old parties and in old and new democracies, Cross and Katz, eds. (2013) more generally problematised the concept of IPD in different ways. Based on many analyses, Mair (1994: 17) also warned that on paper democratisation is often meaningless and/or illusory and may actually coexist with the influence of a powerful elite/leader in practice. On the other hand, Sartori (1965) already had second thoughts concerning IPD, claiming that state-wide democracy need not be the sum of many smaller democracies. Finally, we must not overlook Michels' (1911/1999) famous observation that the very fact of organisation renders democratic internal relationships in parties impossible.

Satisfaction with democracy and political parties

We have already seen the impact IPD can have on satisfaction with democracy and trust in political parties as one of the political institutions, yet our focus on the role of new parties deserves closer examination. First, we must distinguish between old and new democracies as the latter are shown to be more discontented with the way their democracies function. Another apparent difference is that in established democracies it is the quality of governance that determines satisfaction with democracy, while in post-communist ones it is the government's ability to perform its functions and provide public goods (Dahlberg et al. 2015). Linde (2012), however, shows that the quality of governance also plays a major role in post-communist democracies. Regardless of what drives it, (dis)satisfaction with democracy has been revealed to be positioned closer to Easton's definition of specific support, that is, with political outputs, rather than diffuse support, the loyalty to one's political community, meaning that while it increases when „economic performance is strong, when corruption is low, when citizens are politically engaged, and when electoral institutions ensure fair and wide representation“ (Bellucci – Memoli 2012: 36; also see Christmann 2018), its lack thereof does not put democracy as a system of governance into question.

Developments and new parties in Slovenia

While in the 1990s Slovenia was portrayed as a country with relatively stable party system and quite low anti-party sentiments, at the start of the new century

the situation began to change. First, the new century saw the beginnings of the disintegration of the long-term leading governmental party, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (Liberalna demokracija Slovenije; LDS), which was primarily seen as able to assure a balance between responsible and responsive policies. In addition, at the turn of the century clientelism and corruption, especially systemic corruption, were put on the agenda (Krašovec et al. 2014). The economic downturn which had resulted in a severe government crisis finally transformed Slovenia from a country with a relatively stable system into one of the most volatile systems. While not appearing on the agenda before the critical juncture election of 2004 (Krašovec – Johannsen 2016: 315), the presence of „ideologization, incompetence, clientelism, corruption, and other dysfunctional practices“ (Cabada – Tomšič 2016: 43) created a positive feedback loop that merely reinforced the resulting political ‘hurricane’ (Haughton – Deegan-Krause 2015). Further, by doing very little to alter its institutional setup and by copying from the West rather than adapting to its own, changed conditions (Bugaric – Kuhelj 2015), the country’s weak foundations were further undermined by the crisis, fuelling greater „dissatisfaction and anti-political attitudes as well as fatigue and apathy“ (Krašovec – Johannsen 2016: 313). In addition, while like in the rest of Europe since the crisis the political system was chiefly dealing with responsible policies, responsiveness saw a decline, adding fuel to the fire.

The consequence of these developments was an explosion of new successful parties in the Slovenian party arena, with the first big parliamentary success being achieved by Zares, which entered parliament in 2008. This was followed at the 2011 elections by the List of Zoran Janković – Positive Slovenia (Lista Zorana Jankovića – Pozitivna Slovenija; LZJ-PS, PS) and the Civic List of Gregor Virant – Civic List (Državljanska lista Gregorja Viranta, Državljanska lista; DLGV, DL), with the former gaining the most votes in that election. In 2014, this happened with the Party of Miro Cerar – Modern Centre Party (Stranka Mira Cerarja – Stranka modernega centra; SMC), which was also victorious, the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek – Alliance of Social-Liberal Democrats (Zavezništvo Alenke Bratušek – Zavezništvo socialno-liberalnih demokratov, Stranka Alenke Bratušek; ZaAB; SAB) and the United Left coalition (Združena Levica; ZL) (now renamed ‘the Left’). Finally, at the 2018 elections it was the List of Marjan Šarec (Lista Marjana Šarca; LMS) which entered parliament. With the exception of Zares and the (United) Left, all these parties were centred around their party leader, with Cerar representing the high point of the Slovenian electorate’s search for a properly behaving political leader as he claimed to „transcend traditional political and ideological divisions and brought new standards of political culture“ (Cabada – Tomšič 2016: 42).

Table 1: Electoral gains in percent of votes received and MPs² of new political parties since the 2008 elections

	2008		2011		2014		2018	
	%	MPs	%	MPs	%	MPs	%	MPs
Zares	9.37%	9						
PS			28.51%	28				
DL			8.37%	8				
SMC					34.49%	36	9.75%	10
SAB					4.38%	4	5.11%	5
(United) Left					5.97%	6	9.33%	9
LMŠ							12.60%	13

Source: Državna volilna komisija Republike Slovenije (2019)

Given the almost collapse of citizens' trust in political institutions and their dissatisfaction with democracy's functioning on one hand, and the very successful newcomers in the parliamentary arena on the other, Slovenia makes for an interesting case study for analysing the impact of new political parties on both the above-mentioned perceptions of its citizens as well as innovations to the internal organisation and functioning of parties themselves.

Methodology

First, it is necessary to select the parties we will be analysing. When it comes to defining a party as new, Sikk (2005) excludes party mergers and splits as new parties, Engler (2016) and Tavits (2008) exclude from the definition of a new party only merged parties, while we follow Krouwel and Lucardie (2008) and Powell and Tucker (2014) by considering as a new party each party established from scratch or that came into being due to some mergers or splits, or was a successor to certain other party (parties), with our additional criterion that it must have entered parliament. The new parties that meet these criteria were already presented in the previous section. We add to these the 'old' parliamentary parties (including parties in the parliament for years but then later failed to enter parliament, but managed to return (such as New Slovenia (Nova Slovenija – Krščanski demokrati; NSi) and the Slovenian National Party

² The Slovenian National Assembly comprises 90 MPs; 2 of the 90 seats are reserved for representatives of the Italian and Hungarian minorities.

(Slovenska nacionalna stranka; SNS)). This then includes the Democratic Party of Retired People of Slovenia (Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije; DeSUS), New Slovenia, the Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka; SLS), the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka; SDS) and the Social Democrats (Socialni demokrati; SD)³. The time period for our study is from 2008 to date or as far the data allow.

To answer the question of what effect, if any, the arrival of new parties had on citizens' satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions, we shall analyse the responses given in the Slovenian segment of the European Social Survey (ESS). The availability of rounds 4–8 of the ESS, from 2008 to 2016, fits nicely with our chosen timeframe and also took place after the elections, allowing us to more precisely monitor the public's attitude to parties and their functioning for democracy.⁴ In addition, we also look at their trust in parliament, politicians and political parties.⁵ Unfortunately, the latest iteration, round 9, which would have allowed us to analyse the outcomes of another new party's success at the 2018 Slovenian parliamentary elections is not yet available.

To analyse the presence and development of IPD among Slovenian parliamentary parties, we considered party statutes⁶ as available on the respective party websites. Since most parties have amended their statutes several times, we used the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine in order to obtain previous versions of those statutes. We selected statutes in place from the 2008 elections onwards for all parliamentary parties, as well as statutes in force prior to the 2008 elections for old parties for comparison. Following Poguntke et al. (2016), we look at who is eligible to vote during the party congress, who proposes and selects the party president, who proposes and selects candidates for national-level elections (European and Slovenian parliament, president of the republic) and local-level elections, and whether parties were open to a plebiscitary type of IPD, with the entire membership voting or being consulted on a policy/issue. We also rely on Rahat and Hazan's (2001: 304–305) definition of an inclusive selectorate to range from the electorate, through party members, the selected party agency, the non-selected party agency, to the party leader on the exclusive side, and the decentralised selection of candidates to range from local through

3 The Slovenian National Party (SNS) is not included in the analysis due to the unavailability of its old and new statutes.

4 The elections we are interested in occurred on 21. 9. 2008, 4. 12. 2011, 13. 7. 2014 and 3. 6. 2018. ESS data gathering in Slovenia took place at the end of the year, with the 2011 elections being covered by the 2012 round.

5 Answers to our selected survey questions are provided on an 11-point scale which we recoded as follows: values 0–3 as no trust in political institutions/dissatisfied with the way democracy works, 4–6 as somewhat trusting/satisfied, and 7–10 as trust and satisfaction.

6 As Van Biezen (2003) warns, although party statutes are a good starting point for analysing internal organisational party structures and life, they can differ from the *de facto* party organisation.

regional to national as concerns the geographical level of selection, and from sub-sectors/social sub-groups as functionally decentralised through large sectors/social groups to national as a centralised functional selection. This enables us to determine if the new political parties have introduced democratic innovations into their internal functioning which may, as we have seen, shape their impact on the broader political landscape.

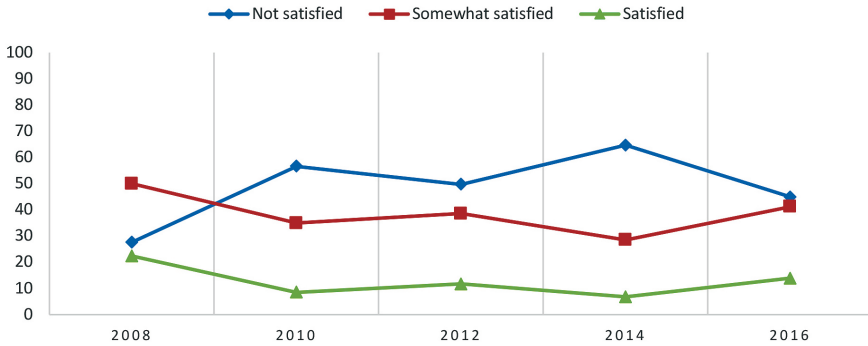
New Parties and Trust in Political Institutions in Slovenia

Even before the crisis, political parties and politicians were not well regarded and, ever since Slovenian independence, those dissatisfied with the functioning of the country's democracy have outnumbered those satisfied (Krašovec – Johannsen 2016: 316), a situation that has only worsened after 2008. Looking at data on satisfaction with democracy and trust in politicians, political parties and parliament reveals the period between 2008 and 2010 was indeed a major critical juncture for the Slovenian political system. While in 2008 just 27.6% of Slovenians were in no way satisfied with the way democracy was working, this share jumped to 56.6% in 2010 and up to 64.7% in 2014, the year the new SMC received the highest number of MPs since the country's independence. This short overview shows the new parties from 2008 and 2011 did not fulfil the expectations (for different reasons) the public had for them, but did provide an extra boost to SMC which was able to play an anti-corruption, rule of law and 'new faces in politics' card in 2014. In 2016, dissatisfaction with democracy dropped to 44.9%, while those fully satisfied remained at around half the level seen in 2008. Based on the 2016 data, it would appear the new parties that appeared in 2014 were better able to give the public what it desired, although this is also a period when the economic situation⁷ improved (in a country heavily dependent on developments in a few of the most developed European countries), but not the perception of corruption.⁸

7 GDP per capita rose from EUR 18,769 in 2008 to EUR 17,540 in 2012, the lowest during the crisis, back to EUR 18,238 in 2014 and EUR 19,547 in 2016 and EUR 20,815 in 2017, both well above the pre-crisis levels (SURS 2019). A huge drop in GDP was recorded in 2009 (-7.9%) and only minimal growth in 2010 and 2011, followed by smaller drops again in 2012 and 2013. GDP growth began again in 2014 (3.1%) and continued in the following years. In 2011, the national debt was 46.6% of GDP, and in 2015 it reached its highest point of 83.1%. After that, it started to decrease. The unemployment rate started to drop after peaking in 2013 (10.1%), reaching 6.6% in 2017.

8 Looking at the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, while its values decreased from its pre-crisis heights (67 out of 100 points in 2008, with higher numbers indicating less corruption), the situation in 2014 (58) was only slightly worse than in 2016 (61) and what it is now (60) (Transparency International 2018). But Slovenia usually recorded much worse results when the question of systemic corruption was exposed (Krašovec et al. 2014).

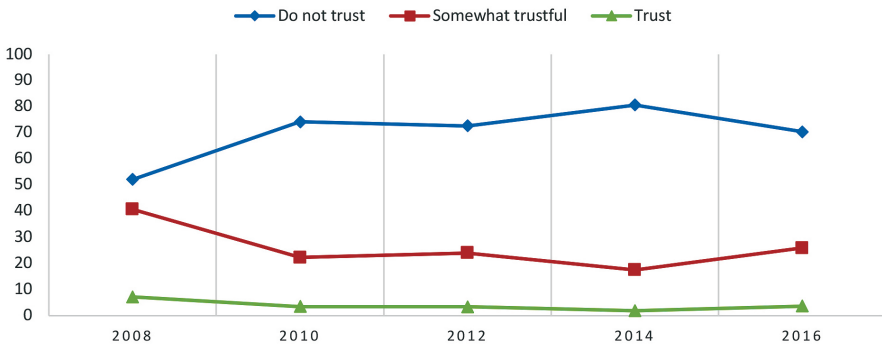
Chart 1: Satisfaction with democracy



Source: ESS Round 4–8 (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016); authors’ own calculations

Now turning to trust in politicians, while following a similar trajectory as satisfaction with democracy, it becomes clear that Slovenians were still more satisfied with how their democracy was working than with their political representatives, as those claiming they trusted politicians reached just 7.2% of the population in 2008 and plummeted to as low as 1.9% in 2014, while those who distrusted them skyrocketed from 52.1% to 80.6%, respectively, at the height of the crisis. This raises the question of how the new parties’ successful appeals for new faces and/or new politics have actually impacted trust in politicians.

Chart 2: Trust in politicians

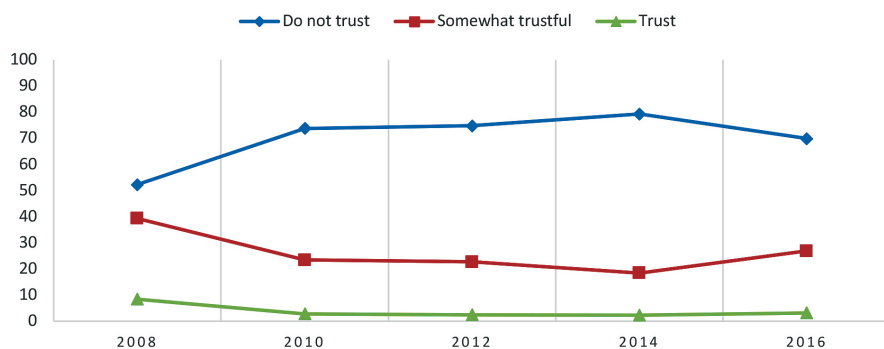


Source: ESS Round 4–8 (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016); authors’ own calculations

Unsurprisingly, political parties seem to share the fate of their politicians, with strikingly similar opinions on both being held by Slovenians. In 2008, 8.4% of citizens trusted them, 39.3% were in the middle, and 52.3% openly distrusted

political parties. In 2014, a mere 2.3% of citizens trusted parties, while in 2016 this share was 3.2%. Those distrustful reached 79.3% at the peak in 2014, returning to just under 70% after the era of new parties achieved its full bloom, according to the data available to us.

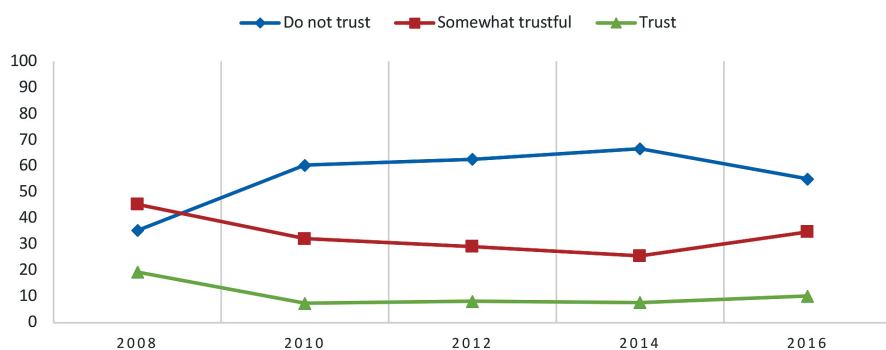
Chart 3: Trust in political parties



Source: ESS Round 4–8 (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016); authors' own calculations

Trust in parliament is locked in with trends in trust in politicians and political parties, but has, however, overall fared better than the individuals and entities represented by it. In 2008, 19.4% of citizens trusted it, and a little over one-third, namely 35.3% were distrustful. The share of citizens trusting parliament fell to 7.8% while the share of citizens distrusting parliament climbed to 66.6% in 2014, before returning to better scores later. However, here it is also difficult to credit the new parties alone for these improvements.

Chart 4: Trust in parliament



Source: ESS Round 4–8 (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016); authors' own calculations

Democratic innovations in Slovenian parties

Turning now to IPD as revealed by the analysis of the statutes of Slovenian political parties, the first general observation refers to the homogeneity of parties concerning how often they amend their statutes to introduce/modify IPD policies. Although they might amend their statutes quite often, with Zares being the outlier among the new parties with a new statute in every year of its existence (6 in total) and SDS among the old parties with 7 (counting the one before the 2008 elections), changes to IPD elements have been rare and even then, with a few exceptions, were only minor modifications rather than wholesale changes or, for the old parties, reactions to the inner workings of their new counterparts.

Looking at the first indicator of IPD, namely, eligibility to vote at the party congress or congress composition, we note the new political parties have generally introduced democratic innovations or improved IPD compared to the old parties. Taking the lead here are Zares, PS and SAB whose congresses are composed of all party members, which is also the case with LMŠ and the Left, while DL and SMC are closer to the old parties by giving voting rights only to national-level representatives such as Council and/or Executive Board members⁹ and delegates from local or regional committees. These democratic innovations made by the new political parties in terms of congress composition did not spread since as no party altered its rules in this regard in the time period under study.

The importance of the congress's composition becomes evident when addressing the question of who has the final say in electing the party's president, which for all of the analysed parties is the Congress. Following LeDuc's (2001, 325) categorisation of party-leadership selectorates, this places Slovenian parties somewhere in the middle as it is more open than a party agency or only its MPs, but more closed than a primary or a caucus. Yet, as mentioned, the composition of a congress differs among parties and a congress allowing all members to vote allows for higher levels of IPD than a congress with a more limited selectorate, especially when at their very beginning new parties might not have many local or regional committees.

Another important topic is who can nominate a candidate for party president. Zares simply mentions it is the Council that puts a candidate list together. DL perhaps has the most direct and open way of nomination as the Executive Board compiles a list of all nominees that received written support from at least 50 members. PS, SAB and LMŠ do not regulate this process in their statutes, while the Left has a complicated procedure whereby its president, named Coordinator of the Council, is a *primus inter pares* of its members that are regional

9 Generally, members of a party's Executive Board are also members of its Council, which is the decision-making body between congresses and is in session only 3 or 4 times a year.

delegates (selected by local delegates) and congress-elected members. On the other hand, it is interesting that nominations are made in old parties by party organs/bodies, territorial and/or functional, making the old parties more decentralised in this regard (notwithstanding the previously mentioned caveat) than the new parties. However, one old party, SDS, radically altered how it regulates the election of its president in its 2018 statute that introduces municipal electoral conferences at which a candidate receiving the highest share of votes is elected. Although via a different way, this old party joins a group of several new parties (congress composition where all party members have a right to vote) regarding the empowering of the party membership in selecting the party president.

In relation to national-level candidate selection and nomination, there is remarkable similarity between the new and old parties, with the former not leading the change to any more inclusive practices. In all of the analysed parties, the final decision on the candidate list lies in the hands of the Executive Board or Council, which can be composed of either only a small number of national-level representatives (the case in all new parties, a partial exception is SAB, and in some the party president proposes certain members to be elected) or with some assured local/functional representation. In a few new parties (PS, SAB and SMC), the President makes the final proposal to be voted on by the Executive Board (Council in the SMC's case). The exception to this rule is the Left with its Council being a highly delegated organ from the local level upwards. The nomination of candidates, however, is considerably more open with all old parties opening up nominations (also) to local/regional committees and interest organisations within the party (e.g. youth, gender etc. organisations) while, among the new parties, DL and the Left allow nomination by any party member. Other new parties do not specifically mention this part of the candidate-selection process. Therefore, the selection of candidates puts Slovenian parties somewhere in the middle of inclusiveness while, once again, we see no democratic innovations in either in the new or old parties.

It is not very surprising that, compared to the practices of many other parties in Europe, the candidate-selection process is more decentralised, but not also much more democratic in the case of local elections, with territorial party organisations holding more power in this regard, despite national party organs in many Slovenian parties also having (at a minimum) the final word. However, a clear division between the new and old parties should be mentioned, with the former tending to record less by way of territorial organisational development (Krašovec 2017).

It is plebiscitary IPD that lies at the forefront of parties' efforts to open up by way of internal democracy. Here, the biggest innovator is the Left that in its 2014 statute permitted for one-third of members to call for an internal referendum, reduced in the 2017 statute to 10% or following a decision of the Council on

topics such as entering a government coalition¹⁰, joining a pre-election coalition, deciding on the electoral manifesto or other decisions within the Council's jurisdiction.¹¹ A more reduced version of plebiscitary IPD would be party-wide consultations, which were an option for the Council of Zares, the Executive Board of DL and, uniquely among old parties following its 2018 statute reform, SDS, whose Executive Board is obliged to conduct a quick, internal vote of its members on political decisions of the highest importance.

An interesting comparison among parties emerges by looking at who has the final vote on the most important policy document of every party, its programme. Here, all Slovenian parliamentary parties, new and old, have the same rule that the party congress adopts the programme. Yet, as mentioned, who makes up the congress determines how open these parties actually are in also allowing their members rather than simply their leadership to shape the development of future policies.

The analysis shows that, although (some) new parties introduced certain democratic innovations (congress composition, internal referendum), Slovenian parties do not generally record a high level of IPD.

Analysis of the party statutes enables us to draw some other interesting observations. It seems that Slovenian parties may be divided in terms of the IPD prescriptions (and in some cases also party statutes in general) into three political family groups. The first group is the social/liberal bloc and contains Zares, PS and SAB (the latter two having been one party at one point). The same can be said for the other two groups, with second containing more social democratic oriented parties, the SD and DeSUS, and the third being a conservative one, with SDS, NSi and SLS, with the latter two having strong similarities since they were merged at one stage. Despite the strong familiar relationship among Slovenian parties, the statutes of four new political parties (DL, SMC, LMŠ and the Left) may be regarded as noteworthy, although as shown, with the exception of the latter, their IPD rules are mostly similar to those of the old parliamentary parties.

The second observation is one of stagnation because not only have the few IPD innovations that were introduced not been copied by other parties but, once introduced, parties have not changed them, sticking with what they know best.¹² The only major shift in this sense is SDS which introduced both some kind of membership ballots for the selection of its president and consultations with its membership as practised by the Left. However, based on previous studies,

10 An internal referendum was held by the Left when deciding whether to support the current minority government; 85% of members casting a vote in favour of supporting the current minority government (L. L. – G. C. 2018).

11 However, only the Council can decide whether to submit these other decisions to an internal referendum.

12 Two decades ago, SD was experimenting with membership ballots in the candidate-selection process, but quickly returned to a more traditional way of selecting its candidates (see Krašovec 2000).

these ‘democratic innovations’ are more likely, in general, to lead to a reduction of power of the middle party elite and to the atomisation of the party members, both of which indeed usually further empower the party leader(ship).

Conclusion

Even though the Slovenian political arena since 1990 has never known a moment of great stability or the political class being held in high esteem by its citizens, the shocks following the 2008 elections led to apparent freefall in terms of trust in political institutions and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and this should be of a particular cause for concern. Exacerbated by the economic crisis, the political crisis seemed set to develop into one of constant turnover and incessant volatility, and the new parties have since started to record very good electoral results. The economic situation has been improving since 2014 and obviously the economic growth and greater prosperity have been slowly accompanied by some improvements in the citizens’ satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and in their trust in politics in general. However, the very good hard economic data (GDP growth, GDP per capita, unemployment rate) and the still low level of inequality (Gini coefficient on inequality) more recently have not led to a return to the pre-crisis levels in relation to citizens’ satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and their trust in the main political agents and representatives. As our analysis shows, the mere emergence of the new, very successful parties can hardly be connected with these improvements in citizens’ opinion. Indeed, a large share of the new parties’ success is due to disappointment with the previously successful new parties. Moreover, the new parties have generally introduced some small democratic innovations yet, all in all, Slovenian parties have so far not shown themselves to be great democratic innovators or do not see these innovations as a requirement for re-gaining the trust of the citizenry.

Future research, which would include many other factors and developments in different fields, is needed to better answer the many questions concerning the role of new political parties in post-communist societies, especially in connecting the citizens with the state. Slovenia proved to be a valuable case study as it finds itself, despite the many democratic weaknesses recorded especially after 2008, in quite a unique position among its Central European peers, having avoided the backsliding of democracy and possibly even reducing the hollowness of its political system.

Abbreviations

- Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije – Democratic Party of Retired People of Slovenia (DeSUS)
- Državljska lista – Civic List (DL)
- Nova Slovenija-Krščanski demokrati – New Slovenia-Christian Democrats (NSi)
- Pozitivna Slovenija – Positive Slovenia (PS)
- Slovenska demokratska stranka – Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)
- Slovenska ljudska stranka – Slovenian People's Party (SLS)
- Slovenska nacionalna stranka – Slovenian National Party (SNS)
- Socialni demokrati – Social Democrats (SD)
- Stranka Alenke Bratušek – Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB)
- Stranka LMŠ (Lista Marjana Šarca) – Party of the List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ)
- Stranka Mira Cerarja/Stranka modernega centra – Party of Miro Cerar/Modern Centre Party (SMC)
- Združena Levica/Levica – United Left/The Left

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Alenka Krašovec is professor of political science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Address: Alenka Krašovec, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Matevž Malčič is a researcher at the Centre for Political Science Research and a PhD student at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is employed as part of the „Young Researchers“ programme (Researcher ID: 50569) and publicly (co)financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.