

DEMOCRATIC CRITIQUE AND DEVELOPMENT: IN SEARCH OF RESPONSIVENESS

Abstract. Democracy in Slovenia is criticised for being unresponsive. A large majority of the electorate has consistently supported core features of the welfare state and democracy but fear retrenchments. In search of greater responsiveness in delivering a consensus on social values, the political system has changed from neo-corporatism through majoritarian pluralism to personalist politics. This article compares and contrasts the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the three models. Having gone through three distinct phases of political development in little more than 25 years, Slovenia is an illustrative and prototypical case that offers insights into the pan-European development of personalist politics.

Keywords: democracy, responsiveness, personalism, pluralism, neo-corporatism

In search of responsiveness and responsibility

At face value, Slovenia's transition to a democracy since the early 1990s has been a tremendous success. Government has changed hands in regular and free elections, and the political authorities steered the country through the economic and political transition to a market economy, to membership of the European Union and is in the midst of overcoming the Great Recession. Yet, Slovenes are increasingly dissatisfied with the way democracy works. Turnout at elections has steadily declined and, driven by the emergence of a new generation of personalist parties, electoral volatility and the success of new political parties reached an all-time high in the 2014 parliamentary elections (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016).

This development may be assumed to have its roots in the economic and social transition but, as we will argue, there is remarkable stability with respect to the core social values. Slovenes have consistently criticised various governments, political parties and politicians for being unresponsive. They appear to suffer from collective anxiety leading to a crisis in the political system which has paved the way, in Pasquino's (2014) analysis of Italy,

* Lars Johannsen, PhD, Associate Professor, Aarhus University, Denmark; Alenka Krašovec, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

for personalist parties. Slovenes are not alone here. Cabada and Tomšič (2016) rightly compare the development of personalist politics in Slovenia and the Czech Republic within the wider framework of Central and Eastern Europe. Populist movements across Europe criticise representative democracy and anti-elitism sentiments run deep (Akkerman et al., 2014). The establishment is considered to be non-responsive suppressing or bypassing the popular will (Werts et al., 2013).

This critique has been one of the drivers of change from neo-corporatism to majoritarian pluralism and then towards personalist politics.

This is not to argue that the course from neo-corporatism to personalist politics in Slovenia has been inevitable but that the weaknesses of each model in conjunction with a decline in political organisation and enormous pressure on the state during the Great Recession fashioned new responses. We argue that neo-corporatism, majoritarian pluralism and personalist politics build on different conceptions of representation and accountability. What appears to be strength in one model may be a weakness in the other two. Each is based on, and presupposes, different degrees of institutionalisation and political compromise.

We highlight these differences through an examination of two decades of political development in Slovenia. The article is organised into three parts. In the first part, we compare and contrast neo-corporatism, majoritarian pluralism and personalism as ideal types stressing their various connotations and links with political and economic consequences. In the second section, we take a longitudinal view of the stability of social values and the constant critique of the way in which the country is managed. Finally, for comparative purposes, we examine three distinct phases of political development and argue that the deinstitutionalisation of political institutions and organisations should be seen as a search for responsiveness from a system in which political parties and leaders produce the normatively desired policies but fail to consider the long-term needs.

Comparing and contrasting models of responsiveness and responsibility

Since 2005, Slovenes have become increasingly dissatisfied with the way in which democracy works. By 2013, nine-of-ten were dissatisfied (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016). However, as we discuss below, Slovenes possess stable social values and have a tendency to believe that they have little influence and that political parties, politicians and governments take little interest in their opinion. This reflects Almond and Verba's (1963) discussion of subject-orientation but at first hand it is primarily a debate about the quality of democracy and especially the claim that Slovenian democracy is unresponsive.

In this debate, representation is considered to constitute a separate dimension of responsiveness (Diamond and Morlino, 2004; Morlino, 2004; 2009). Viewed from a classical perspective, responsiveness in a democracy can be insured through elected representatives and the ability to hold them accountable through elections. However, as Taylor (2016) argues, politics is a multiple and many-layered process with extra-parliamentary opportunities for representation even if these opportunities may not secure equal influence. This is the classical core critique of both pluralism and neo-corporatism that arises from the mechanisms of each model (Table 1).

In pluralism, competing interests seek access to and put pressure on political elites. Although it is argued that these interests underpin liberal democracy (Dahl, 1982), it is also widely accepted that not all interests are equal in their capacity to apply pressure, thus some gain privileged access (Lindblom, 1977; Dahl, 1982; Binderkrantz et al., 2014). However, as Downs (1957: 141) argues, it is not only rational for the government to seek the information provided by the lobbyists but to comply with 'the demands of lobbyists' as these provide critical resources. Lobbying is inherently less transparent than neo-corporatist institutions and the unequal access means that the risk of outright corruption and public perceptions of undue influence have led many countries to seek to regulate lobbying (Holman and Luneburg, 2012). Slovenia also sought to regulate lobbying through the Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act of 2010.

In neo-corporatism, some interests are better represented than others in that the government cooperates with relevant socio-economic interests with the aim of reaching consensus regarding socioeconomic policies (Pryor, 1988: 317; Woldendorp, 1997: 49–50). Furthermore, neo-corporatism has been criticised as conservative – upholding the system – so any new and emerging interest will find it difficult to reach the debating table (Johannsen, 2008) with only already-existing powerful interests recognised as social partners (Siaroff, 1999). In essence, although both pluralism and neo-corporatism provide extra-parliamentary representation, both fail the test of responsiveness in terms of substance – being unable to deliver normatively desired policies (Johannsen, 2002; Morlino and Quaranta, 2014; Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016).

In turn, whereas neo-corporatism and pluralism seek to include other interests, either through co-opting or competing, personalist politics appear to be rooted in the popular will – Rousseau's *Volonté générale* – ensuring responsiveness in direct communication with the political leader who in turn possesses the charisma, the knowledge and the resoluteness to act. Thus, personalist politics share many of the organisational features of populism (Roberts, 2006; Pappas, 2008; Barr, 2009) and are led by charismatic leaders (Brug and Mugdan, 2007; Chiapponi, 2013). But personalist politics

is not necessarily populism in its policies; rather it is technocratic in outlook and the policies it creates are implemented top-down. Moreover, with its technocratic top-down perspective and the direct relationship between the leader and the electorate, parties will often be seen as hindering the general will, and needed only as campaign vehicles (Kostadinova and Lewitt, 2014). In this regard, personalist politics resemble what Poguntke and Webb (2005) have termed 'the presidentialisation of politics'; however, although the two concepts are in agreement in respect to the personalisation of the electoral process, personalist politics is a narrower concept and less ideological coherent and does not necessarily imply an accrue-ment of either institutional nor constitutional resources to serve the political leader.

Table 1: COMPARING GOVERNANCE MODELS: NEO-CORPORATISM, PLURALISM AND PERSONALIST

	Neo-corporatism	Majoritarian-pluralism	Personalist
State-society perspective	Organic and common interest. Partners.	Plural interest in competition. State resources to win.	Volonté générale. Technocratic.
Mechanism	Peak society interest organisations involved in decision-making and implementation.	Competition among interest organisations, to influence decision-making.	Direct reference to leader. Top-down. Implementation.
Political parties	Stable identities.	Cartels, Catch-all.	Campaign vehicles. High degree of personalism.
Political and economic consequences	Consensual democracy. Conservative and equality. Often associated with tri-partism.	Competition and majoritarian democracy. Dynamic and inequality. Often associated with lobbyism.	Unstable political coalitions. High degree of volatility. Often associated with populism.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Pluralism is often associated with majoritarian democracy and typified in Westminster style democracies such as the UK and USA, whereas as neo-corporatist arrangements were found in continental Europe, dominated multiparty systems and typified by Austria. In majoritarian democracy the voter has direct influence on the composition of the government but the disadvantage is that the majorities are often manufactured and

that the development of a two-party system leaves voter preferences short (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Lijphart, 1999).

The debate concerning the quality of democracy also concerns responsibility. Responsibility includes aspects of whether a state is 'effective' (Johannsen, 2003) or 'strong enough to act when action is required' (Fukuyama, 2011: 431). For example, can it adjust to international constraints? Are the representatives able to look beyond narrow and short-term constituent interests towards the common good (Bardi et al., 2014)?

In the triadic exchange of neo-corporatism, political leaders not only gain support but also valuable insight into substance (Johannsen, 2008) and should thus create consensus, stability and by virtue, long-term responsibility through increased capability, insight and accountability. Furthermore, Johannsen and Pedersen (2008) found in a survey of post-communist countries that the inclusion of organised interests in decision-making results in more social equality. However, as the vested interests continuously balance each other out, neo-corporatism can become prone to deadlocks and incrementalism. Hence a classic critique of neo-corporatism is that it is a "fair weather" model (Gobeyn, 1993; Molina and Rhodes, 2002). Pluralism is also able to transfer support and substantive knowledge but is arguably less stable as interests compete for access to decision-making. The competition can reinforce majoritarian politics. With the ability to reach decisions, majoritarian pluralism is therefore more ideally suited to overcoming deadlocks but vulnerable when power changes hands.

Personalist politics are, in turn, not easy to characterise. Kostadinova and Levitt (2014) argue that the policy platforms of personalist parties may be comprehensive or just vague and effective slogans. Some personalist parties will carry an underlying anti-intellectualism in the sense of disregarding the use of the intelligentsia and policy-advice institutions (Shogan, 2007). Thus, personalist politics may simply fail as it is not founded on solid cause-effect evidence and is short-term oriented.

The three models are thus distinct and have different benefits to recommend them. We will now examine how Slovenes have searched for responsiveness, which is one of the drivers that have led to the personalist era.

The search for responsiveness

A majority of Slovenes have been dissatisfied with the way their democracy works since continuous tracking began in 1996. From 2007 onwards, this dissatisfaction began to climb reaching 9 of 10 dissatisfied at the peak of dissatisfaction in 2013 (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016). However, as is evident from Table 2, Slovenes don't favour the abolition of democracy and introduction of strongman rule; nevertheless, a substantial minority, around

20 percent, either supports or does not oppose this option. Three-quarters or more express the view that democracy is good or very good but the belief in technocracy is an indicator of a critique of politicians, government(s) and political parties. The data on trust in political parties conforms to the well-known and recognisable pattern in Central and East European countries. Trust in political parties remains low and substantial segments believe that the parties are not interested in the opinions of ordinary people (Toš ed., 1999; 2004; 2009; 2012).

Table 2: OPINIONS ON DIFFERENT WAYS TO MANAGE THE COUNTRY AND ON TRUST IN PARTIES (1995-2011)

	Democracy	Strong leader	Experts should rule	Trust in parties
1995	80.5	23.6	73.9	4.5
1996	77.6	23.7	67.5	4.4
1998	78.5	19.9	65.9	4.3
1999	82.8	22.9	76.4	6.0
2000	74.8	21.4	61.7	13.6
2005	77.8	18.1	71.2	11.4
2008	82.6	25.1	76.1	8.2
2011	74.1	23.6	74.6	3.4

With regard to the questions on democracy, strong leaders and experts, the percentages were arrived at from the answers 'very good' and 'good'.

From 1995 to 2005, trust in political parties was assessed on a four-item scale with trust being recognised with the scores of 'quite a lot' and 'completely'. In 2008 and 2011 an eleven-item scale was used; from 0 to 10 where 10 indicated complete trust. Values from 7 to 10 were held to be indicators of trust.

Questions: Here is a list of different ways on managing the country. Please tell us how good in your opinion each of them is? ... [Democracy] That we have a democratic political system [Experts should rule] That experts and not government decide what is good for the state [Strong Leader] To have a strong leader who makes decisions without parliament and elections. [Trust in Parties]. To what degree you can trust the following... Source: Toš ed. (1999; 2004; 2009; 2012).

It is not that Slovenes do not know what they want. Table 3 indicates consistent support for the core values of the welfare state and overwhelming support for state involvement in health, pensions and unemployment benefits. Table 3 also shows consistent but more volatile support for the state involvement in lowering differences among poor and rich. Corroborating the image, data from the longitudinal and representative Slovenian Public

Opinion Poll (Toš and skupina, 2013) show that the conception of ‘small social differences’ evoked positive connotations among two thirds in 1994 with an increase, during the Great Recession, to 84 percent in 2013.

The building and maintenance of the welfare state is important. For example, in 2005, close to 90 percent of the population agreed that the preservation of the welfare state was important or very important (Toš ed., 2009). However, Slovenes also regard the welfare state as being at risk of being dismantled. According to surveys, in 2003, about a third thought Slovenia is a welfare state. This increased to 49 percent in 2005 but dropped, following the Great Recession, to 39 percent in 2013 (Toš and skupina, 2013).

Table 3: CORE VALUES OF THE WELFARE STATE (1989–2015)

	Health	Retirement and old age	Unemployment	Lower income differences
1989	94.9	95.2	80.7	72.3
1995	96.1	95.6	84.2	83.3
1996	94.7	94.0	76.6	78.9
1997	96.2	94.6	79.6	78.5
1998	96.2	95.1	77.6	81.5
1999	93.8	90.8	77.8	78.0
2000	96.2	95.4	81.5	88.6
2003	97.0	96.4	85.6	89.2
2005	95.7	95.3	77.4	86.2
2006	97.4	95.8	80.7	89.5
2007	96.3	95.3	86.1	90.8
2009	93.8	93.9	89.1	91.6
2012	98.1	98.2	79.5	n.a.
2015	98.6	98.4	77.9	91.2

Percent expressing the view that the state is ‘Responsible in any case’ or ‘Partially responsible’ in providing ...

Questions: For which things in the future in Slovenia should the state be responsible?... [Health] To assure health help to ill people; [Retirement and old age] To assure retired and old people adequate an living standard; [Unemployment] To assure unemployed an adequate living standard; [Lower income differences] To lower differences among poor and rich. Source: Toš ed. (1999; 2004; 2009; 2012); Toš and skupina (2013).

Considering the stable value system and rather unfulfilled expectations regarding the welfare state, these patterns are evidence of what Pasquino (2014) terms collective anxiety and frustration. Slovenes are in search of responsiveness. They support democracy but have little faith in political parties.

We turn now to our analysis of the transformation of neo-corporatism to personalist politics.

Responsiveness and responsibility: from neo-corporatism to personalist politics

With a professional and impartial civil service, Slovenia initially escaped much of the politicisation of the administration that characterised many of the former Yugoslav states (Ploštajner, 2004; Rabrenovic and Verheijen, 2005). Slovenia experienced fewer implementation difficulties with its policies than the Czech Republic and only slightly more difficulties than Poland and Hungary (Johannsen, 2007). Certainly, Slovenia was seen as a 'good pupil' (Bugarcic and Kuhelj, 2015: 273) – its neo-corporatist arrangement embodied in the Economic and Social Council (ESS – *Ekonomsko-socialni svet*) demonstrated stability and a more social transformation (Johannsen, 2008; Stanojević and Krašovec, 2011; Guardiancich, 2012); it enjoyed favourable socio-economic development in the 1990s (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink, 2009) without major macroeconomic imbalances (Bohle and Greskovits, 2007; Šušteršič, 2009).

52 Corporatism was regarded by many as the natural continuation of Slovenia's political and economic history (Lukšič, 1994; 2003). The transition to the market and the preparations for EU-membership were carried out in the 1990s and early 2000s through a number of social pacts (Crowley and Stanojević, 2011; Stanojević and Krašovec, 2011; Feldmann, 2014).

However, the triadic exchange also contained the seeds of destruction. The government appeared more responsive to the ESS than to the electorate with the famous written apology in 1994 by then Prime Minister Drnovšek for not including the ESS in the budget preparation (Lukšič, 1997). Moreover, the privatisation process appeared to favour managers (Stanojević, 2012) in an elite network across business, politics and administration (Fink-Hafner, 1998) that lead to suspicions of political nepotism (Krašovec et al., 2014). What is more, the arrangement served to maintain vested interests (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016), hindering necessary reforms (Adam and Tomšič, 2012).

The suspicions of foul play undoubtedly fuelled distrust in political parties and electoral turnout continued to fall. With the common anti-party sentiment in Central and Eastern Europe (Fink-Hafner, 2012; Cabada and Tomšič, 2016) and the marked decline by almost one half in the strength of employers' associations and trade-unions (Stanojević and Klarič, 2013), the claim to representation and the exchange model of neo-corporatism appeared flawed. The neo-corporatist superstructure began to crumble.

In addition, at the 2004 election a centrifugal process drew compromise

away from the centre (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016). Although the political space had been dominated by a relative stable left-right divide (Cabada and Tomšič, 2016), the tradition of governing across the divide was replaced when new neoliberal socio-economic reforms were carried through by small majorities (Haughton and Krašovec, 2013). Slovenia did not become a typical majoritarian democracy, neither in its electoral system nor in the distribution of seats in the parliament, but the ideological coherence of Prime Minister Janša's centre-right governing coalition, and its willingness to use a narrow majority, made it resemble a majoritarian democracy with decisive decision-making to overcome the deadlock of neo-corporatism. As such, the government appeared to become more effective.

Janša's reforms ranged from personnel changes, easing restrictions on the labour markets and applying market solutions to provide welfare state services, such as health and education, and a flat-tax rate was also proposed (Prunk, 2012; Stanojević, 2012). Janša's reforms faced strong opposition from pro-welfare groups and from the trade unions and on the streets. Although a new social pact was agreed in 2007, neither the trade unions nor the employers' organisations found governments as cooperative as they used to be (Stanojević and Krašovec, 2011). In addition, the loss of members led them to radicalise leaving less room for bargaining and consensus (Stanojević and Klarič, 2013) and, thus also less attractive to any government as partners. Politics had become more polarised.

The centrifugal process continued as power changed hands following the 2008 election. Prime Minister Pahor had campaigned to reintroduce consensual politics but illustrative of the *quid pro quo* logic he too found it necessary to utilise narrow majorities on critical decisions. The Great Recession hit Slovenia hard and efforts to mitigate the social costs left public debt and the deficit spiralling. The government tried to negotiate a pact through the ESS but negotiations foundered and Pahor launched a package of reforms to increase flexibility in the labour market, and reduce public spending on pensions and health services (Johannsen and Krašovec, 2015). The welfare state retrenchments left the centre-left government squeezed between its natural allies and the opposition. Pahor's opponents used the tactic of initiating referendums to block the reforms. Polarisation, dissatisfaction as well as mobilisation against the traditional political institutions became the norm.

The deinstitutionalisation of political institutions not only affected the labour market partners. Amidst the centrifugal processes, the 'traditional' political parties had begun to disintegrate or deinstitutionalise, most evidently in the case of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) who otherwise had played the leading role during the transition. In contrast to many other Central and Eastern European countries, Slovenia had appeared relatively stable; but with parties largely interwoven with the state and receiving

resources from the state (Krašovec and Haughton, 2011) it had been less attractive to develop the parties as organisations tied to society (Krašovec, 2000). This lack of institutionalisation was furthered by the mediatisation of politics. Easy access to the modern media and the personalisation of politics rather than the feasibility of political programmes had become more decisive for voters (Cabada and Tomšič, 2016).

The deinstitutionalisation of political parties in conjunction with mediatisation gave rise to what Cabada and Tomšič (2016: 41) call 'non-party politics'. It is not surprising that parties who cater to such conceptions should rise in Slovenia when we consider the number that supports technocratic politics in Table 2. These factors cannot, however, stand alone. The lack of responsiveness and the number of scandals and allegations of corruption connected to almost all established political parties, their leaders and prominent members (Krašovec and Haughton, 2012; Krašovec et al., 2014; Krašovec and Haughton, 2014) led to collective anxiety and distrust. The era of personalist politics began.

Cabada and Tomšič (2016) trace the beginning of 'non-party politics' to the election of Zoran Janković, a well-known businessman, as mayor of Ljubljana in 2006. Running on a platform of his personal qualities as a successful business manager, Janković entered the parliament in 2011 with his List of Zoran Janković-Positive Slovenia (LZJ-PS). The list was formed only two months before the election, following encouragement for Janković to run from a group of prominent persons (Krašovec and Haughton, 2012). The 2011 election also saw the election of Virant, an established university law professor, on a party list of his name – the Civic List of Gregor Virant (DLGV) campaigning against corruption. The newcomers represented technocracy – on one hand business skills and on the other anti-corruption. They spoke directly to the electorate and combined accounted for more than one third of the vote. According to the Pedersen index, volatility reached 40 percent and the share of seats for 'new parties' totalled 44 percent (Krašovec and Johannsen, 2016).

However, the Great Recession pushed Slovenia to the brink of a Euro bailout and bickering in the parliament continued. To add to this, Prime Minister Janša from SDS was indicted on corruption charges leaving Alenka Bratušek from Janković's Positive Slovenia to take charge of a shaky coalition. Early elections were called in 2014 which saw yet further new personalist parties campaign.

The Party of Miro Cerar (SMC), founded only six weeks prior to the election, took more than a third of the votes at the 2014 election. Miro Cerar, an established law professor campaigned against corruption and appealed for cooperation and less polarisation. Cerar combined the attraction of technocracy with an appeal to the majority who had lost faith in the political

system (Krašovec and Haughton, 2014). Cerar is not a typical personalist in that he is not considered to be a charismatic leader (Fink-Hafner, 2016). Whether Cerar will have more success than Virant and Jankovič, who both failed to gain seats in 2014 election, is too early to tell. Can he demonstrate responsiveness and lead the restoration of the welfare state? As argued above, Slovenes believe in democracy and also believe that elections can change things. Since 1995, two-thirds of the population has consistently held this belief (Toš ed., 1999; 2004; 2009; 2012). Thus if politicians continuously appear to serve their own or vested interest, rather than the common good, the electorate will continue its search for new faces, new parties and new leaders to believe in.

Conclusion

Slovenia is an illustrative and prototypical case having experienced three distinct phases of political development from neo-corporatism through majoritarian pluralism to personalist politics in little more than 25 years. In the comparison of each model as an ideal type, we noted that a strength of one is a weakness of the other two. The process of deinstitutionalisation of political organisations has made neo-corporatism a less viable model as weak political parties and weak social partners bring less to the table and are less representative. Furthermore, unresolved economic issues and political deadlock has led to suspicions of political cronyism – suspicions that were further fuelled during majoritarian pluralism. In theory, the strength of majoritarian pluralism is political decisiveness; but it also lead to a polarisation of the political system producing new deadlocks illustrating the danger of *quid pro quo*.

Like other post-socialist countries, Slovenia has experienced the process of deinstitutionalisation and the general public is suspicious of cronyism. Beneath the volatility of the party system, large majorities consistently share a core common belief in the welfare state. Slovenes hold the welfare state dear and the failure to deliver has created collective anxiety, distrust and deinstitutionalisation that has given rise to personalist parties. Such parties have not only capitalised on the (assumed) competences of the political leader but, through their novelty, are able to address anxiety and distrust. The question is whether the 'personalist period' will continue, as both neo-corporatism and majoritarian democracy rest on institutionalised and coherent parties and organisations. Thus a turn away from personalist politics will depend on a gradual strengthening, cooperation and responsiveness which will earn the trust of the electorate.

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