Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy

Slovenia in a Comparative Perspective

Danica Fink-Hafner

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Preface

This book is based on the author's lifelong research into parties, democracy and various models of governing. Among her more recent publications, those relevant to the research in this book are her books on theocracy (co-authored with Boštjan Slatenšek, *Teokracija: talibski režim v Afganistanu 1996–2001.* Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV, 2017); on populism (*Populizem*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV, 2019); on British democracy (*Britanska demokracija: suverenost parlamenta*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV, 2019) and on American democracy (forthcoming). Part of Chapter 4 is based on her article, 'The struggle over authoritarian pressures in Slovenia in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic', *Politički život* 2020 (18): 19–32. Chapters 6 and 7 are partly based on her article, 'Party system change and challenges to democracy in Slovenia', *East European Politics & Societies and Cultures* (in press).

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Ljubljana, Slovenia — Danica Fink-Hafner

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About the Author

Danica Fink-Hafner (Ph.D. in Political Science) is a professor and researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her research interests and publications focus on political parties, interest groups, democracy, populism, post-socialist countries and policy analysis. She is head of the Political Science Research Programme, which is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS). A list of her publications is available at https://bib.cobiss.net/biblioweb/search/si/eng/conor.

Abbreviations

BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
COVID-19	Corona Virus Desease 2019
DEMOS	Democratic Opposition of Slovenia
DESUS	Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FIDESZ	Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance [Fidesz—Magyar Polgári Szövetség]
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
LDS	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North American Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PiS	Law and Justice [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość]
PM	Prime Minister
PYS	Party of the Youth of Slovenia
SDP	Slovenian Democratic Party
The US	The United States
UDBA	State Security Administration of Yugoslavia [Uprava državne varnosti]
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
V-Dem	Varieties in Democracy

WWI.	World War One or First World War
WWII.	World War Two or Second World War

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Studying the Relationship Between Parties and Democracy

Parties and Democracy: Not a Straightforward Relationship

When we talk about parties and democracy, it is usually within the representative democracy framework. However, it has been forgotten that democracy–party linkages were not part of the early philosophical basis of liberal–democratic thought (as we show in Chapter 2). Theoretical adaptations including references to parties evolved later under the pressure of real-life processes. Philosophical linkages with establishing the ideational basis for modern capitalist development had also impacted on the understanding of politics in line with rationalism and a (political) market, where choices are made.

Historically, it had been in British and American philosophical milieus where the distinction had been made between parties and factions. Parties are organizations, which fruitfully debate between belief systems. Factions, on the other hand, are recognized as organizations that primarily promote private interests. For such a definition the size of factions does not matter. Rather, what is important is that factions are organizations that unite citizens based on 'some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community' (Madison 1787). Such distinctions have been too often forgotten both in the political science literature on democracy and in the party literature. So has the

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understanding of the initial evolution of parties as intermediary institutions between society and the state. In real life, representative (indirect) representation via political parties has been dissociated from the accountability of the government to the political community and control over parties/factions (Mair 2005).

More broadly, the literature on democracy has appeared to have evolved without the systematic development of the party politics aspect of democracy, including its dynamics. Rather, democracy has been generally equated with party governing. Post World War Two, the model of liberal democracy with parties at its core had been developed based on empirical studies of democracy in the Western world. This practice had evolved particularly in the United States of America in the frame of a set of literature that had been nicknamed 'empirical liberalism'. Since then, it has been a globally promoted model of democracy. What is particularly important is that the globally exported definition of a polyarchy (democracy for a big share of society) (Dahl 1971) included conditions for liberal democracy with a stress on the minimal conditions for democracy. The minimal conditions had been set as low as to only include continuous political competitions among individuals, parties or both in the frame of regular elections. The original sin of this definition is in creating a basis for satisfaction with the minimalistic, elitist electoral democracy in political practice within a nation state and too often also in political science.

Besides this, at least five trends can be observed in political thought since the 1970s. The first is the reductionism of ideas developed in the frame of classical democratic theory. The key reductionism is replacing the idea of consent with primarily a retrospective control over government and taking interest groups rather than political individuals as fundamental actors in the political system (Goodwin 2001, 283). In the post-electoral democracy, bases for democracy have even multiplied and include 'one person, many interests, many votes, many representatives, both at home and abroad' (Keane 2015, 514–515). Nevertheless, in this framework political parties don't seem to be disappearing. They keep playing various roles in political decision-making directly or indirectly at various levels of governing. However, in practice, models of governing have gone beyond the classical liberal–democratic model.

Second, the liberal philosophy's linking with rationalism and particularly the American understanding of the democratic process in line with the economic process have contributed to the increasing reductionism in studying parties. Competition among parties has often been

seen as a political game while parties have been increasingly detached from society. Political science has proliferated and fragmented into very narrow subfields. Reductionist approaches in studying party politics and democracy have lost sight of the bigger picture.

Third, models of democracy have evolved since the Second World War within and beyond national borders. We present a short overview of them in Chapter 2. What is worth mentioning here is that different models of democracy also include different understandings of the role of parties. Some don't explicitly mention political parties at all.

Fourth, a large amount of literature has developed over the last few decades that is based on the understanding of the steering (of societies, various international and transnational political communities) as governance rather than governing. Networks of various actors, rather than the state and political parties, are brought into focus. In this frame, issues of power seem to have lost their place on the political science radar.

Fifth, ideas of illiberal democracy from the beginning of the twentieth century had started resurfacing again since the 1990s. Real-life undemocratic and anti-democratic trends have been flourishing, particularly during the last decade, both in new and old democracies. They even triggered the development of a thesis on the new global autocratization wave (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Illiberalism and the related changes in political systems have often been closely associated with democratic backsliding led by particular parties and their leaders (Zakaria 1997; Bermeo 2016; Runciman 2019).

To summarize: a long-term simplistic view of the relationship between parties and democracy has been challenged. In times of democratic backsliding, it is particularly important to gain a better understanding of the relationship between parties and democracy. Why and how does this relationship change? Are party and party system characteristics causing democratic backsliding? If so, under what circumstances? Can parties do that in any social circumstances?

Puzzles from the Real World and from the Political Science View

At the empirical level, there are several important issues—direct triggers of our research.

First, in the last several decades, the quality of democracy has not changed in the same direction in all countries at the same time. A decline

in democracy is only one of the trends in the current world, albeit a very important one (Coppedge et al. 2020). Moreover, there is little consensus on when, where and why democratic backsliding occurs (Jee et al. 2022).

Second, democratic backsliding tends to be studied in isolation from other periods/stages of governing models. The longer-term fluidity of democracy seems to be overlooked. So have been the questions on whether/how various periods/stages of changes in democracy may be interconnected. Such isolationist studies of democratic backsliding are in contrast to stagist analysis and the conceptualization of stages in transitions to democracy. Also, this contrasts with findings that sudden changes in democracy are quite rare.

Third, studies of democratic backsliding are often focused on the role of individual politicians with autocratic tendencies in spite of other, rather obvious factors. At least the dependency of individual's role on the support of other actors (who support such a leader for various reasons) can be acknowledged together with existing analysis of relevant social structures (economy, socio-economic characteristics) over time.

Furthermore, there are several grey areas in the party literature that call for more attention.

There are also several puzzles that relate directly to party literature. For example, in the literature on party systems we find the expectation that party system characteristics may impact on democracy (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). This is often presented as a thesis on a very abstract level without substantial elaboration. In research, the relationship between studying party politics and studying democracy has varied, but such research hasn't been substantial or systematic.

In the party literature, a thesis has evolved that party system deinstitutionalization (to some extent also including fractionalization) and polarization are the key factors impacting on democratic decline. However, it is unclear exactly how, in what ways and when this happens.

In the context of a post-socialist party system, party and party system institutionalization has been believed to be linked to the consolidation of democracy. Based on that assumption, it could be hypothesized that party system instability is not compatible with the consolidation of democracy. However, institutionalization of party systems in several post-socialist countries had been linked to the freezing of either democratic transition (as in Montenegro) or democratic consolidation (as in Croatia).

Past research had found that the destabilization of party systems does not endanger democracy in Western countries. On the other hand, more

recent research also points at examples—but not the overall rule—of a potential interconnection between party system instability and decline in democracy in Western countries. More precisely, there are processes of weakening of democratic norms and institutions, which resonate with Bermeo's definition of democratic backsliding as state-led debilitation of the political institutions sustaining an existing democracy (Bermeo 2016). Such processes may happen in very different contexts.

Fragmentation has often been included in studying institutionalization in order to determine the scope of the party system. However, many decades ago, political scientists had revealed that the number of parties in itself does not say much about party system characteristics (Mair 1999). To the best of our knowledge, no research has shown that there is a significant relationship between party fractionalization and the level of democracy. However, there are party sizes and qualities of relationships among parties that really matter.

In the context of studying democratic backsliding it has been polarization that has been exposed as a factor that may harm democracy (McCoy et al. 2018), particularly when linked with populism (Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Orenstein and Bugarič 2020). However, there is also research that has found that a higher level of party polarization can produce behaviour among citizens that contributes to democracy (an increase in party identification, a rise in election turnout due to clearer voters' choices) (C. Wang 2014; Lupu 2015; A. Wang 2019; Dalton 2021).

In addition to the above-mentioned political science challenges, we understand that our research takes place in the context of several contradictory treatments of political parties in relation to democracy. The Western-based political science and global political teaching that parties are critical actors in democracy and that there is no democracy without political parties only presents one stream. There are also political science warnings that political parties have been replacing their connections with demos through other linkages. These shifts make political parties problematic for democracy. Similarly, the role of personalities, their wealth and global power above institutions (including political parties) are becoming a threat to democracy. So too is the role of international networks of actors acting beyond, and hidden from, the state.

What makes studying the relationship between political parties and democracy particularly important is the increasingly frequent international crises, which have been noted as potential factors of democracy.

Democracy's failure has been believed to be caused by economic disasters such as those of the 1930s and the Great Recession of 2007/2008 (Haas 2019), severe economic inequalities (Offe and Schmitter 1996) and also changes in capitalism (Bermeo 2022). However, a complex range of socio-economic and political actors from within and beyond the nation state has not been systematically included in research on factors impacting on democracy.

The Novelty of the Book and the Thesis

This book contains several novelties.

First, we bring together literature and research efforts from three fields: (1) political philosophy and political thought on democracy and political parties; (2) literature on democracy and democratization in relation to parties; and (3) party literature.

Secondly, we systemize party literature related to issues of democracy, which is scattered over several research streams (particularly research into institutionalization, polarization, personalization and populism).

Thirdly, the book reconnects agency, the process approach and the structural approach.

Fourthly, as the time dimension is lacking in studying relationships between parties and democracy, we take it into account both in theoretical chapters and in a case study.

The case study offers a longitudinal comparative analysis of the dynamic changes in parties, democracy and the relationships between parties and democracy in the changing domestic (with the exception of the constitutional and electoral system) and international context. We believe that Slovenia's case study contributes to theoretical developments in understanding party–democracy relationships.

The main thesis of the book is that party and party system characteristics are just one segment of dynamic multiple factors in a dynamic relationship between politics, economy and society converging into particular forms of government at certain points in time. So, there are no particular party and party system characteristics per se, but rather a combination of various factors that may together lead to particular changes in democracy.

The thesis is developed based on a broader theoretical framing, presented in chapters on the theory of democracy and the relationship between parties and democracy.

Research Questions

The goal of the book is to systematically reveal the relationship between parties and democracy in general and party systems and democracy in particular. We shall fulfil this goal by (1) analysing political philosophical and social science literature presented in the previous section and by (2) taking a comparative research approach in the empirical study of a variety of party (party system)-democracy relationships in a dynamic context. There is one post-socialist country where it is possible to conduct such a longitudinal study while having continuously stable institutional variables (constitutional and electoral system): Slovenia.

We seek to explain how the backsliding had been produced in Slovenia and why, in 32 years, it has only happened once and for a very short period. Such a political pattern evolved in spite of dynamic party system changes since the first free multiparty elections in 1990 and polarization varying within the same period of time.

The described complexities in Slovenia of the relationship between party system characteristics and democracy raise the main question: What enables the overlap of party system characteristics with a decline in democracy? More precisely, we deal with several puzzling sub-questions: To what extent do contextual variations matter when studying the relationship between party system characteristics and democracy? Does the party system institutionalization matter? Does the persistence of parties with roots in the previous regime matter? Does the polar structure of the party system matter? Do answers to these questions differ at various points in time?

In relation to the main thesis presented at the beginning of this chapter, we hypothesize that party and party system characteristics are not a sufficient factor for such an erosion of democracy. Rather, there must be a combination of other party system characteristics, particular political processes and contextual factors of democracy. Furthermore, we point out that political parties are not the sole group of agents impacting on democracy, and that a strong civil society (interest groups and social movements) along with international actors can make a critical difference in times of weak party opposition to de-democratization trends. We expect that empirical research will show that it is the combination of various factors (structures and agencies) and their timing that together lead to changes in democracy.

Research Approach

In this book we engage in the current debate on the decline of democracy and party system characteristics. As we recognize the serious limitations of a narrow party system approach, our research is based on a combination of: (1) findings from analysing philosophical and political thought on relations between democracy and political parties; (2) findings from democracy-focused literature, particularly the importance of taking into account other political, social and economic factors co-producing challenges to democracy; (3) findings from the party literature, which in various segments reveals a variety of party and party system characteristics believed to be factors of democracy; and (4) a time factor (dynamics of the studied phenomena in the changing context).

Three chapters are devoted to theoretical analysis of contributions tackling the relations among parties and democracy in three segments of literature: philosophical and political thought, democracy literature and party literature.

In frame of the case study, we search for answers to the research questions. Comparative aspects come to the fore in two ways: first, we look comparatively at a variety of periods in Slovenia's democracy, from transition to democracy, consolidation of democracy to its challenged period and a short democratic backsliding episode by the time of its based on election results; second, comparative inserts into the research include references to other countries. This is particularly done with comparative notes related to Hungary and Poland, which (together with Slovenia) entered the ranks of liberal democracies during the first decade after the transition to democracy during the 1990s.

The multi-method research approach (including data on political and socio-economic variables, social survey data and a review of other relevant research) is presented in more detail in Chapter 5.

Selection of Slovenia as Case Study

In line with Dogan and Pélassy's (Dogan and Pélassy 1990, 107–110) case study methodological strategy, the case of Slovenia is not selected as an illustration but rather as a case study with comparative elements, and in some aspects as a deviant case study that brings about new theoretical insights.

Detailed arguments on the selection of Slovenia as a case study are presented in Chapter 5. Here we only focus on a few that show Slovenia's main differences from Central European post-socialist countries.

First, Slovenia's democracy trajectory is quite unique, even when compared to other Central European countries. Hungary and Poland have moved towards illiberal democracy, while the Czech and Slovak experiences have varied. In 2021 in Slovenia, the quality of democracy was reduced for a short period of time quite sharply and more than in any other country in Eastern Europe and Central Asia after several decades of stable democracy (Freedom House 2022b). Analysis by Repucci and Slipowitz (Freedom House 2022a, 27) summarized changes in Slovenia with these words: '*[the] country suffered a significant decline in civil liberties as Prime Minister Janez Janša's populist government increased its hostility toward civil society groups and the media and continued to undermine independent institutions and the rule of law*'.

Second, unlike many post-socialist countries, the Slovenian institutional framework has been stable for more than three decades. Slovenia's case study is valuable due to the extraordinary stability of the 1991 constitutional system and electoral rules. This includes the parliamentary constitutional system and proportional electoral system. Long-term institutional stability allows for a longitudinal analysis of a changing party system as well as a broader socio-economic and international context.

Third, in comparison with post-socialist Europe (Vachudova 2021), Slovenia's party system (understood as a system of interactions formed by inter-party interactions) has been dynamic since its establishment, while at the same time democracy has persisted continuously for three decades. Slovenia is also interesting as an example of a long-term low party system institutionalization and high democracy, in contrast to Hungary's case of a high party system institutionalization and democratic backsliding (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2021).

At first sight, Slovenia's developments may be explained, at least to some extent, by the party system. However, in order to get as full an insight as possible, it is important to take into account insights from both party system literature and democracy literature, in which the importance of agency and context is stressed.

The Slovenian case speaks against both: (1) the understanding of democracy as an inevitable consequence of modernization, a linear process of democratization; and (2) the notion that democratic backsliding is a linear process from democracy to an authoritarian system (Hanley and

Cianetti 2021). Rather, the Slovenian experience captures a fluid pattern of democracy.

The case study of Slovenia reveals that both dynamic changes in the party system and the consolidation of democracy may also be feasible in the post-socialist context and that there are factors additional to party system instability that may together produce a shift away from democracy. Indeed, it happened in 2021, after several decades of stable democracy, that the quality of democracy in Slovenia was reduced by the weakening of democratic norms and institutions quite sharply and more than in any other country in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Freedom House 2022b). These processes are in line with Bermeo's (2016) definition of democratic backsliding as state-led debilitation of the political institutions sustaining an existing democracy.

Democratic backsliding overlapped with the period of Slovenian Democratic Party government led by Janez Janša (from March 2019 to March 2022). However, the path to it had been paved by changes in parties and the party system since the beginning of the 2000s. Janša's government was not formed based on elections, but due to Šarec (the centre-left government's Prime Minister) stepping down. In the circumstances of taking extraordinary measures to manage the COVID-19 crisis Janša's government paid special attention to implementing the programme of the Second Republic, based on ideas resonating Orbán's authoritarian political views. However, the 2022 national elections brought about the unprecedented victory of a new party, Movement Svoboda, which promised a substantial return to liberal democracy. Svoboda also formed the centre-left government.

Slovenia is among the few post-socialist countries in terms of the organizational strength of old parties as a legacy of the past. While researchers have pointed at the negative impact of a legacy on the consolidation of parties (van Biezen 2003), in Slovenia two parties evolving from political organizations of the old regime had actually been successful with their adaptation by moving toward the centre during the first decade after the transition.

This case study also presents a dynamic view on all three main segments under research: democracy, political parties and the context. It reveals domestic and external factors that together co-create particular outcomes of a fluid democracy, including several meso variables not yet revealed in the literature as relevant. The findings encourage further comparative qualitative and quantitative research into factors not only of democratic

decline, but also of the success of transition and democratic stability in the context of multiple external shocks.

Although Central European post-communist countries in particular share many similar features, there are in fact quite distinct country trajectories. Slovenia in comparison to Poland and Hungary not only illustrates the variety but also offers some insights relevant to other countries outside the Central European region.

For the reasons presented above (and in more detail in Chapter 5), Slovenia serves as a very good case for exploring potential answers to the under-researched issues of political party-democracy relationships in order to contribute to the development of further large-scale comparative research.

It also offers additional empirical insights that may feed back into theoretization of the relationships between party system characteristics and challenges to democracy today. The empirical part in particular focuses predominantly on the research issues in the post-socialist context.

The time scope of the case study covers more than thirty years. In order to answer our research questions, we include in the empirical research the whole period from 1988, when opposition political parties emerged, until the overturn of Janša's third government in 2022 and the establishment of the new government based on the 2022 parliamentary elections. This allows us to analyse the dynamics of parties, the party system, democracy and their relationship.

Democratic backsliding in Slovenia overlapped with the period of managing the COVID-19 crisis under the Slovenian Democratic Party government led by Janez Janša (from March 2019 to March 2022). Janša's party had used the second half of the mandate after the dismissing of the centre-left government due to internal problems (the Prime Minister, Šarec, stepped down). The managing of the health crisis had been amended by measures in line with Janša's party programme of the Second Republic. Ideas in this programme echo Orbán's authoritarian political views. In a very short period of time, the introduced changes had been limited to changes in the dimensions and not an overall regime change. Also, these changes appeared to be at least partly reversible. Democratic backsliding was stopped by the 2022 national elections. Since then, a centre-left government has been comprised of parties promising a full return to liberal democracy.

Outline of the Book

The book proceeds as follows. We start with Chapter 2, where we analyse political thought on democracy in relation to political parties. As relations between democracy and political parties are more directly addressed in literature on democracy developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we dedicate to this literature a separate chapter, Chapter 3. More recently, party literature has been increasingly engaged in research on party and party system characteristics and challenges to democracy. Chapter 4 systematically summarizes endeavours from several party research streams. This chapter also includes a systematic overview of pertinent variables and indicators relevant to empirical research into relations between party system characteristics and characteristics of democracy.

The empirical part of the book, which is dedicated to Slovenia's case study, includes several chapters. Chapter 5 presents both a more detailed argumentation for the case selection and a more thorough methodological framework for the Slovenian case study. Empirical findings on Slovenia's context and evaluation of democracy over time are included in Chapter 6. We proceed with a detailed analysis of changes in party system characteristics since the transition to democracy in Slovenia until the last 2022 parliamentary elections (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 brings together a summary of empirical findings from both empirical chapters. So, we empirically document and analyse how Slovenia's party politics has changed, in what context, in what time frame and with what consequences for democracy. However, the conclusions subsection goes beyond Slovenia's case study. We end with a discussion on the relevance of our findings for further, particularly comparative, research on the relationship between party system change and a change in democracy while recalling the bigger political philosophical picture of parties in relation to democracy.

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CHAPTER 2

Political Thought on Democracy Related to Political Parties

Theories of Democracy

Democracy is a contested term. It is also a historical term. In Held's *Models of Democracy*, there is a whole range of models of democracy, from the classical model of ancient Greek Athens to ideas on the cosmopolitan model of democracy (Held 2009). In addition, many theoretical considerations about democracy have more recently evolved. However, not all models of democracy include political parties.

Within ideas of representative government, within which we now see the important role of political parties, there is no substantial political philosophical basis for the element of political parties in the democratic system of government. In fact, parties first gradually developed in the Western European and North American context into a critical link between society and politics, between the ruled and the rulers. A theoretical justification for political parties, which was heavily based on the same contexts, followed later.

More precisely, it was liberalism that formed the ideational basis for a modern, representative government. In spite of the stress placed on the representative (that is, indirect) form of government, liberalism primarily focused on an individual as a unit of democratic governing.

Indeed, the key characteristics of its development from the Enlightenment are focused on individual rights and the individual morality of English liberalism (John Locke and later John Stuart Mill) and German

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(Immanuel Kant) and American liberalism (Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Thomas Paine).

It is not only that liberal thinkers focused on the individual. They also made a virtue of selfishness (Goodwin 2001, 37). From Hobbes and Locke onwards, the pursuit of self-interest was accepted as man's proper motivation. Locke said that the 'law as of nature' gave man (de facto meaning male) the right 'to preserve his property – that is, his life, liberty and estate, and that the task of government was to help him in so doing'. This economic reasoning was directly exported to politics. The classical economists' understanding that economic man maximizes profits was also translated into politics in the form of a thesis that a political man maximizes the fulfilment of his interests by taking part in a governmental process and making choices (Goodwin 2001, 37).

From Jefferson's (like Rousseau's and Kant's) point of view, each individual (the common man) has common reason and moral sensibility (common sense) within himself. The premise that the individual is the prime source of value rests on the thesis that—unlike a beast—the individual human is rational. His rationality, his knowledge of his own interests, individuality, originality and self-distinction are only compatible with a form of political organization based on a participatory form of government rather than an authoritarian government ('Declaration of Independence: A Transcription' 2023).

The influence of the major European philosophers on the thinking of the American Founding Fathers is well known (Conniff 1980). Even the crafting of America's constitution was based, among others, on the French philosopher Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws and included a hope to create a republic in America that would retain the virtues of the English system without the vices of a monarchy. Locke's influence on America's constitution could not only be traced by natural law philosophical arguments but also justified as constitutive of the 'best form of government'—a representative type of government, assembling institutions similar in structure and function to those of the constitutional democracy described in Locke's Second Treatise.

Furthermore, the *colonial nature* of the British context also found its way into British liberal thought. Locke not only treated the natives in colonized America as irrational and unlearned (Locke 1689, 58) but even conditioned equality on capitalist economic criteria. These criteria were expressed in a particular conception of property. Locke held that property

could not be separated from the labour that went into it (Locke 1690, 28). He did not recognize the pre-modern, unproductive practices of the American Indians as equal to modern productive practices. According to Locke, the right to ownership of land (territories) can only be claimed on the basis of labour and use (Locke 1690, 31). It is of critical importance that for Locke, persons without property cannot be part of civil society as a collective and, therefore, cannot be part of a sovereign people (Locke 1689, 95–98).

Although liberalism—based on the Lockean emphasis on natural rights—had prevailed in America, an additional stream in American political thought had evolved that went beyond a focus on the rights of individuals and, in fact, stressed civic humanism as an ideological counterweight to liberal individualism (Nederman 2023). Civic humanism (recalling the ancient Greek philosophy) proceeds from the premise that human beings are social. From this perspective, natural rights in their abstract form are questionable and need to be substantiated within the community (Davis 1996, 43). The influence of these ideas is seen in the conceptualization of republicanism as a form of government in which citizens take an active part in governing.

Besides the politics of the rights of man, it is the controlled government that underpins the American system. Indeed, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison—like Burke—discussed limited political participation and control in favour of the continuous (favourably enlightened) elite (Testi 2001; Arblaster 2002). The American system of government has remained a rather unique case of marriage between the idea of institutional prevention of the arbitrary exercise of governmental power and the Enlightenment's individual rights.

The anticolonial nature of American political thought was also expressed in American political philosophy. Unlike the French Enlightenment (e.g., Voltaire and Rousseau), American political philosophy was built on an understanding that individual rights and interests needed to be protected against collective ones. It was the protection of the individual from the state (limitations of the government's intervention into the lives of citizens) that was primarily built into the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration relates to 'inalienable' positive rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Meanwhile, negative rights ('freedom from' rather than 'freedom of') prevailed in the Bill of Rights. Later, an extreme form of liberalism—libertarianism—even developed as an

anti-state philosophy (representatives being James M. Buchanana, Robert Nozick, Milton Friedman, F.A. Hayek, Vernon L. Smith) and found its place in US politics as part of the conservative 'radical right'.

All in all, it has been believed that the American ideal of democracy diverged from the British ideal of democracy particularly with the creation of the US constitution. The critical difference has been found between Madisonian pluralist democracy favouring cooperation, deliberation and bargaining as ways of achieving political decisions and the British inclination towards majoritarian decision-making in British parliament (Goodwin 2001, 275). In contrast, in the American context, the danger of 'permanent majorities' very much worried Madison and other Federalists.

Liberal Thought and Parties

For most of the known history of mankind, political parties have been unknown as they are modern formations. Early liberal definitions of democracy do not include political parties. However in spite of the fact that parties did not receive extensive and systematic attention prior to the twentieth-century systematic study, some theoreticians had even before this period touched upon the still current concerns about the compatibility of organized 'partial' interests and factions with democracy (e.g., Rousseau, Hobbes and Maddisson). Nevertheless, ideas on the role of political parties did not find their explicit place in the liberal thought.

Neither in the United States nor in the United Kingdom has a normative model been developed in advance with political parties as intermediary structures between individuals/citizens and government. Nevertheless, in the old liberal–democratic systems, indirect political representation developed spontaneously in practice.

British liberalism includes several key political ideas: modern individualism, the social contract, a strong executive and majority rule. Only to a lesser extent can the political philosophical thought of British liberalism be revered for the legal treatment of individual rights and freedoms in the British model of government.

In British history, several theoretical streams evolved as to what should be the basic unit in a system of government. This basic unit has been redefined over the centuries. Initially, it was defined as a state, later as a particular social group (class), and then as an individual. For Locke, who is considered the 'father of liberalism' (Cram 2010, 472–473), not all

people counted politically. He only recognized individuals who possessed natural rights in the state of nature. Such individuals could contract with each other to form a civil society. In doing so, they form a political body—a body politic. This political community, in turn, empowers a chosen political authority, which then governs in the interests of the governed. Locke was not merely arguing for the right of people to give or withhold their consent. He believed that people have the capacity for moral judgement. This was related to the thesis that abuse of power could be avoided if the monarch (government) was accountable to the political community. Nevertheless, continuous dissatisfaction of the majority may have a decisive impact on the government (Locke 1690).

Whereas Locke argued primarily for the rights of property and less for the rights of the individual in relation to the state, Burke stressed the importance of limiting the monarchical power, yet at the same time, only advocated limited popular representation (Burke 1770; Judge 1993, 37–39). Mill (1861/2001, 84–118) went even further, arguing that a completely equal democracy would bring about risks of some evils and pointed at the need for a person's capacity (like knowledge and intellect) for getting involved in democratic practices.

Contrary to Burke, Paine (who emigrated to America in 1774) recognized rights as primary and government as secondary while also stressing the need to limit the state power while legally guaranteeing human rights ('Thomas Paine: The Rights of Man', n. d.).

In America, more often the negative connotations of factions/parties were noticed in political philosophical discourse. This is especially evident in Madison's definition of a faction as 'a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of a whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interest of the community' (Madison 1787/2003, 118). Due to an aversion to the 'mischief' of factions, Madison analysed the possibilities of dealing with this practically already-existing phenomenon.

One way of achieving this lay in removing its causes and the other in controlling its effects. Since a removal of its causes would have implied either the destruction of liberty or the prescription that every citizen should have the same opinions, the same passions and the same interests, this way of dealing with factions was unacceptable. It would have meant abolishing liberty, which is, according to Madison, 'essential to political life'.

The second way is not feasible since 'the latent causes of faction are sown in the nature of man'. Although Madison found various specific causes of factions, he stressed that the most common and durable source of factions is the various and unequal distribution of property. Property holders and those without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Madison continues at the same point: 'Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views' (Madison 1787/2003, 119). Since the causes of factions cannot be removed, Madison believed that the only acceptable solution was to seek means to control the effects of factions. He believed that regulation of the various interfering interests was the principal task of modern legislation and that a spirit of party and faction was needed in the basic and ordinary operations of government.

Nevertheless, political parties as political institutions playing an important role in the political market as an important element of a modern representative government were initially not even mentioned when the American political system was being shaped. In fact, the American constitution preceded the development of modern political parties. As they developed in the context of historical cleavages, they were only indirectly recognized by the Twelfth Amendment, which separated presidential from vice-presidential voting in the Electoral College and (by this procedural change) acknowledged the role of partisanship in these elections.

Theoretical Adaptations to the Real-Life Phenomena of Political Parties

Regardless, political philosophical foundational thoughts on political parties in representative government found their way into the theorizing of democracy under real-life pressure. The key to the acceptance of political parties was their role in solving political conflicts.

In **British** history, there is at least one theoretical defence of political parties as intermediary institutions in the system of government. Edmund Burke (1770) included a philosophical defence of this emerging political phenomenon in his Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents. The legal acceptance of political parties is based on the fact that political

interests are formed first, and political parties as institutions are formed second—even if they are framed as the common good. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the jurist Capel Lofft, as early as in 1779, defined a political party as an institution formed for the common good and an institution that pursues truth, freedom and virtue, as opposed to factions that represent narrow, self-interested views and interests and are prone to corruption (Evans 1985, 9). In line with this understanding, the prevailing view on political parties after the Second World War was that political parties were the 'life and blood of democracy' (Peele 1990, 138).

Historically, political parties gradually developed, nested in the modernizing British political institution—the House of Commons. While in the early stages of modernization, the political community was conceived of as one body, which was to have one voice vis-à-vis the monarch (Judge 1993, 13–14), factions—embryos of political parties—developed relatively early in practice. The various adaptations of parliament and the extension of the franchise went hand in hand in the process of the development of modern political representation.

Initially, proto political parties grew out of pre-modern splits between Whigs and Tories in the 1770s. Early splits emerged on the issue of the exclusion of James, Duke of York (brother of Charles II; later James II) from legitimate succession to the throne due to his Catholicism, while in the 1770s, modern splits occurred between the defenders of the monarchy (the Tories) and the advocates of increasing the power of Parliament vis-à-vis the monarch (the Whigs). However, at that time, political splits were actually the expression of the different interests of powerful families (Evans 1985, 5). While the status of the monarch was crucial in the constitutional debates of the eighteenth century, including the issue of who shall control the executive (the monarch or the Parliament), the question of the status of political parties as institutions was also opened. Although the King disapproved of parties, the Whigs sought to incorporate parties into the constitution. Burke, a member of the British parliament and political philosopher, took a critical part in a constitutional debate. In his Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents, he offered a justification of a party. He defined the party as '*a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed*' (Burke 1770, 110). Using Edmund Burke's arguments in favour of a party (contrary to a faction as an organization for promoting private interests), the Whigs

opposed the King's opposition to parties and stressed the differences between factions and parties.

In addition, John Stuart Mill (1861/2001), who was not only a political philosopher but also a politician, acknowledged that in representative government, various elements of power must be organized and that the advantage in organization is necessarily with those who are in possession of the government. Nevertheless, he was very much disappointed with the British party system in his time. Still, he did not dismiss the party conflict as part of the representative government (considered to be the best form of government). Rather, he was concerned about the lack of a fruitful political debate between systems of belief.

In the British context, concerns related to (British) democracy, particularly its party centrism, have persisted until today. Indirect (party) representation is built on the fact that while voters choose their representatives in democratic assemblies in general elections, it is political parties that run the candidate selection and campaigning processes. In addition, parliamentary parties demand discipline from their elected candidates. A highly developed system of party whips ensures that members of the House of Commons largely vote along party lines. Effective power is more in the hands of the party than in the choice of individuals. The sovereignty of Parliament remains embedded in the prevailing traditional notion of strong government. For all of these reasons, it can be said that in Britain, Parliament is sovereign and that Parliamentary sovereignty replaces popular sovereignty (Kingdom 1991, 41). This British peculiarity has often been neglected when attempts have been made to transfer features of the Westminster model to other countries (Evans 1985, 1).

In America, the predecessors of the modern parties originated as agents in political conflicts over the nature and operation of the new polity, as the key political cleavages involved both the contest between patriots and loyalists in the context of the struggle for independence from Britain and the contest between the Federalists and the Antifederalists. In spite of the fact that political parties were left out of the constitutional system and were considered to be more or less temporary phenomena in experimenting with the new system of government, they played very important roles as agents of democracy in the making. Furthermore, since the early nineteenth century, American democracy has, in fact, been party democracy.

The experimental nature of the American political system as well as its pragmatism overcame the problem of the missing link between voters

and political office holders. The political parties originally grew out of the rivalry between those politicians gathered around Jefferson and Madison and those gathered around John Adams and Alexander Hamilton and quickly developed into organizational vehicles to recruit and promote candidates for public offices who were broadly sympathetic to the views of the given party. They have also functioned to mobilize voters in support of candidates in the electoral process, to present alternative political views and to aggregate and represent the interests of the mass voters.

Although Madison in his thesis of Timeless Wisdom (the famous 10th Federalist) was very critical of what we now call 'interest groups' or 'special interests' (then called 'factions') for contradicting the common will or interest, he remained a realist in his expectation that the American republic could not be faction free. In thinking about ways to eliminate the effects of factions as much as possible, he concluded that the only acceptable solution was to allow numerous and well-diversified factions, whereby no single one could dominate over all the others. In fact, democracy needs to prevent one minority from suppressing the other minorities.

In America, the fear of a 'political evil' embodied in the factions/parties did not prevent the development of political parties. The expectations of the modern party pre-successors (the Federalists and the Republicans) that they would eliminate conflict through persuasion and the absorption of acceptable members of the other mass-based parties were not fulfilled. Instead, the two-party contest grew into a defining feature of the American political system (Cummings 1996).

In a representative government, this means that every representative in government has to walk between the factions and that the many factions involved will have to accept bargaining and compromises in political decision-making. In addition, the constitutional system was determined in such a way that there is only one national institution—the House of Representatives—that is elected directly by popular vote and could thereby be conceivably colonized by factions. Indeed, the structure of the US institutional system prevented the creation of programmatic parliamentary parties that could create such a platform and fight for it on the federal level and, at the same time, allowed for local variations and political struggles among various social groups with scattered policy outcomes. However, more recently researchers have been pointing out that party politics has become more nationalized during the last two decades and

that national issues tend to dominate state and even local political debates (Hopkins 2018).

Empirical Liberalism and an Operational Definition of Liberal Democracy

As already mentioned, embryos of political parties emerged first while philosophical and social science responses to this phenomena followed later. However, it was the law in the British context that had been pressured for practical political reasons to step in to define a political party. In America, it was not until later in the 1800s that parties were in any way legally regulated. From this extreme, the United States radically shifted to another extreme by introducing extensive legal rules at various levels of the political system (from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards) that determined the organizational and electoral characteristics of parties (McSweeney and Zvesper 1991).

After the Second World War, a conception of liberal democracy increasingly stressed that democracy is a system of competing political organizations, often understood as parties. According to contemporary liberal conception, the party as 'part of the whole' is not controversial and is, in fact, understood as one of the presuppositions of a modern (pluralist) government in which parties compete for electoral support based on democratic rules and win power by democratic means. The model of liberal democracy with parties has been globally promoted (Chan 2002) by wealthy Western countries self-determined as old democracies.

Indeed, political parties have gained the status of a fundamental part of the democratic institutional setting (Key 1959, 12). Even based on this common understanding, from the two main streams of political science theorizing about democracy, two main conceptions emerged.

First, the minimalist conception of democracy understands democracy as a system in which the rulers are selected based on competitive elections (Schumpeter 1942)—contrary to replacing the government by bloodshed (Popper 1962, 124). At the core of the understanding of democracy as electoral democracy is actually the equation of democracy with party rule. In practice, such democracy had more or less become synonymous with party rule (Schattschneider 1964). Together with other institutions and procedures, political parties provided the means for peaceful change in power. It is this that had become the essential element of distinction between totalitarianism and democracy.

Second, a more complex understanding of democracy would then bring about evaluative criteria for a system to be called a democracy (Skinner 1973, 299). However, Skinner also pointed at empirical theorists of democracy as authors who insisted that they are investigating the facts of political life using the scientific approach to empirical studying (Dahl 1956a, 1956b), while at the same time, producing normative implications. However, critics of empirical liberalism not only criticized the supposed ideological neutrality of the system of government that actually functions as a norm of democracy based on empirical studies in Western countries, particularly in the United States, but also the conservatism of empirical theorists. The conservativism of empirical theorizing had been found in the focus of authors such as Almond, Verba, Eckstein, Milbrath and Lipset on stability and efficiency of the system as well as in their attempt to generalize the conditions of stable and democratic rule (Skinner 1973, 291–292). In addition, Dahl (1956b, 151) undermined his alleged neutrality by stating that the American hybrid system is a relatively efficient system and acknowledging that he, in fact, did not restrain from normative analyses and prescription (Dahl 1966, 298). Even more, critics openly pointed not only at conservativism but also at ideological burdens of such a thesis (Walker 1966, 287–288).

Nevertheless, Dahl's eight conditions ensuring 'rule by the people' or 'democracy among a large number of people'—a genuinely democratic political system (Dahl 1971, 1–3)—were not considered a 'must' in its entirety. In fact, he stated the minimal version of polyarchy, which is expected to be devoted to reaching its maximum. The minimal version consists of continuous, political competitions among individuals, parties or both in the frame of maintaining the regular elections. While this is found to be critical for the distinction of democracy from dictatorship, Dahl's critics pointed at his ideological redefinition of democracy as not giving full attention to popular political participation. By doing so, he was also turning from an understanding of democracy as rule by the people towards a more elitist understanding of democracy (Skinner 1973, 295–297). Indeed, Dahl—like Schumpeter, Almond and Verba—accepted the rule of politicians as democracy (Skinner 1973, 302). In spite of that, Dahl's concept of democracy has become canonical (Galston 2018, 25) and it became a globally used standard for the evaluation of democracy.

Somewhat in parallel, another school has evolved based on the tradition of the rationality stream in liberal political thought. It is an economic model of democracy in which the democratic process is understood in line

with economic conceptions, including the rational behaviour of citizens (voters) and parties (acting to maximize their electoral support; Downs 1957). His understanding of democracy was very much under the American influence. Indeed, Downs (1957, 137) defined democracy as: '*a political system that exhibits the following characteristics: a) Two or more parties compete in periodic elections for control of the governing apparatus. b) The party (or coalition of parties) winning a majority of votes gains control of the governing apparatus until the next election. c) Losing parties never attempt to prevent the winners from taking office, nor do winners use the powers of office to vitiate the ability of losers to compete in the next election. d) All sane, law-abiding adults who are governed are citizens, and every citizen has one and only one vote in each electio*n'.

In spite of variations among the empirically based conceptualizations of democracy, Goodwin (2001) points at their common characteristics, which are in contrast with classical democratic theory. Among them, in particular, are idealizing stability and orienting towards the maintenance of the system, replacing the idea of consent with, at most, retrospective control over government and seeing interest groups instead of political individuals as fundamental political actors in the system (Goodwin 2001, 283).

Illiberal vs Liberal Democracy

Illiberal ideas are not new. While they were recognized at the beginning of the twentieth century, they seemed to have moved to the margins after the Second World War but have been returning again since the 1990s.

After the Second World War, liberal democracy had been established as a globally hegemonic understanding as well as the core of the idea of the promotion of democracy from the Western world to other parts of the world (Hobson 2015). It was particularly Dahl's understanding of polyarchy—democracy for the many—that inspired the creation of the European Communities' political criteria that were set for post-socialist candidate states.

Like liberal democracy, illiberalism has remained doctrinally fluid and context based (Vormann and Weinman 2021). Thus, it doesn't come as a surprise that we can find various qualifications of illiberalism in addition to some common characteristics. Nevertheless, illiberalism has been recognized as a concept diametrically opposed to liberalism (Table 2.1)

and, at the same time, a very complex phenomenon that requires interdisciplinary research (Scheiring 2021; Rosenblatt 2021). In spite of some typical ideas linked to illiberalism, it has not been recognized as a comprehensive ideology in line with political philosophical criteria (Sajó and Uitz 2021).

Among the common descriptions of illiberal democracy (see, e.g., Zakaria 1997; Frankenburg 2022; Laruelle 2022) are two major rejections of liberalism and the promotion of selected values, institutional principles and particular public policies. First, it fundamentally rejects liberalism, particularly liberal concepts of equal political freedom and civil liberties, for its alleged hypertrophic individualism and diminishing constitutional boundaries of power. Second, it rejects some political cultural characteristics of liberalism, including tolerance and the protection of minorities and their 'decadent' way of life, while favouring traditional hierarchies, cultural homogeneity and nation centrism. In contrast, illiberalism promotes homogeneity and nation centrism, protectionism at the nation-state level, traditional social hierarchies, cultural homogeneity and nation centrism, majoritarian rules and politicization of cultural issues. Generally, illiberalism has been associated with unfreedom (Sajó and Uitz 2021). It has also been qualified as a reaction to liberalism (e.g., in Hungary; Halmai 2021). Nevertheless, it has been recognized in both young and old democracies (Alviar García and Frankenberg 2021).

Since Fareed Zakaria's (1997) article on illiberal democracies in *Foreign Affairs*, this nickname has been increasingly used by politicians (especially by Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán), thinktanks and mass media. In 2021, even a special academic journal—*The Journal of Illiberalism Studies*—was established. Indeed, the concept of illiberal democracy has been extensively used in spite of criticism for a lack of clarity and its overlap with many other concepts, such as conservativism, populism and the extreme right (see, e.g., Laruelle 2022). Its use has spread to cover several phenomena, such as a path to autocratic regime; a political party programme; and actions that erode liberal democracy (backsliding of democracy, democratic regression). Illiberalism has also been equated with democratic backsliding as a global process and with international/global linkages among right populist actors with illiberal programmes.

However, illiberalism may exist within democracy understood as: (1) procedural democracy; (2) a formalistic democracy, in which there are elections that ensure some elements of democracy (therefore named 'electoralacy'); and (3) illiberal democracies as deficient democracies.

Table 2.1 Illiberalism vs. Liberalism

	Illiberalism	*Liberalism*
Academic status	A field of academic research in a process of establishing; A qualifier used in contemporary political, legal and philosophical scholarship	A political, social and moral philosophy; variety of liberalisms
Ideas	***Political ideology/ programme*** – on the rise since the 1990s – not a comprehensive ideology as understood in political philosophy; – illiberalism associated with unfreedom; – fundamental rejection of liberalism – denigrates liberal concepts of equal political freedom and civil liberties for their alleged hypertrophic individualism; – rejects tolerance, multiculturalism and the protection of minorities and their 'decadent' way of life; – favours traditional social hierarchies, cultural homogeneity and nation centrism, promoting protectionism at the nation-state level; – promotes politicization of cultural issues	***A system of political ideas*** – predominant political ideology in a modern context; – promotes private property, secularism and free enterprise; – individual rights, civil liberties, liberal democracy model of governing, consent of the governed, equality before the law, – polyarchy—democracy for the many – historic delays in recognition of citizenship/rights, particularly for social minorities
Democracy	Illiberal democracy may exist within democracy understood as: – procedural democracy; – electoral democracy; – illiberal abuse of democracy (democratic backsliding); – deficient democracies;	Democracy understood as procedure and liberal content; In practice, gender and racial issues solved with a delay

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

	Illiberalism	*Liberalism*
Institutions	Ignores, decomposes LD institutions; Illiberalism is often purely pragmatic (non-programmatic)	Favours LD political institutions
Constitutionalism	Routinely ignores liberal–democratic institutions (particularly constitutional boundaries of power) and LD rules of the game; – promotes majoritarian rules – uses abusive practices;	Concept of constitutionalism as limited constitutional government
Fundamental institutional preconditions for democracy	Limits participation and representation; – rests on immediate communication with 'the people'; – erodes the public sphere	Supports: – political participation, – public deliberation, – collective decision-making – freedom of the public sphere

LD—liberal democratic
Sources Zakaria (1997), Rosenblatt (2021), Sajó and Uitz (2021), Scheiring (2021), Frankenburg (2022), and Laruelle (2022)

In spite of the fact that illiberal qualifications of democracy have been persistently spreading in literature, public scholars, in general, have pointed at the need for more academic rigorousness and have proposed to replace the qualification 'illiberal' with other qualifications. Landau (2021, 426) stressed that illiberal democracy is, in fact, an unstable regime type with strong authoritarian tendencies. Furthermore, Morlino (2021) reminded us of older regime typologies, particularly of a 'hybrid regime' type, that can be connected to its possibly triple sets of legacies (the deterioration of democracy, the deterioration of authoritarianism or the weakening or transformation of personal rule). More precisely: '*If the hybrid regime comes from previous authoritarianism or traditionalism, then it is progress. If it is the result of democratic deterioration, it is a painful regression*' (Morlino 2021, 150).

As our research interest is in the roles of political parties and party systems, it is interesting to note that illiberalism literature has not yet gone beyond mentioning particular individual illiberal leaders, their parties

and countries or a comparison of such cases. In general, literature on illiberalism seems to cover, first of all, general issues of democracy, constitutional issues (particularly the roles of government in relation to democracy, especially division of power), political institutions and procedures, including elections, and particular public policies (e.g., focusing on mass media, nongovernmental organizations, selected marginal social groups and cultural issues). All in all, issues of the role of political parties in illiberalization processes seem to be primarily covered via an analysis of the executives' roles in such processes and less so in terms of party politics.

A Variety of Other Democratic Ideals in the Frame of a Nation State After the Second World War

In the Western part of the world, some normative ideals of democracy emerged after WWI. They have varied quite a lot.

In the 1970s and 1980s, authors who critically assessed elitist and Western political practice-oriented empirical theorists, such as Dahl, turned to ideas on the development of democratic characteristics that were missing in real-life Western democracies. The ***proliferation of ideas on mending liberal democracy*** included the orientation towards actively involving citizens—as in participatory democracy (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984). Another segment of literature stressed the democratic role of citizen associations in associative democracy (Hirst 1994). Some other authors believed that the missing democratic qualities could be developed through the inclusion of various stakeholders in political deliberations—as conceptualized in discursive or deliberative democracy (see an overview, e.g., in Hansen and Rostbøll 2015).

An entirely different segment of literature developed in peculiar societies where politics evolved based on social segmentation with strong ethnic and/or religious cleavages, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. The model of ***consociational democracy*** had acknowledged the empirically existing social pillars, which are internally integrated based on ethnic and/or religious identities, socio-economic ties and political organization. In such circumstances, the consociational democracy in terms of cooperative behaviour of segmented elites and their favouring of politics of accommodation was believed to be a model for downsizing the

risk of conflict and war (Lijphart 1999). However, with the evolvement of a combination of parties as representatives of citizens (individuals) and parties representing ethnic and/or religious groups (collective), Lijphart also moved his ideas in a direction of stressing constitutional democracy (rights, institutions and rules), supporting the power sharing and naming it consensus democracy. The whole set of literature evolved with a focus on institutional engineering in segmented societies, in which the management of electoral rules have been instrumentalized to control both candidate and party extremism in order to help manage divided societies in a peaceful way (see, in particular, works by Donald L. Horrowitz).

Also based on empirical research, the conflict between two schools evolved—***the pluralist school*** and the ***neo-corporatist school***. Both of these schools recognized interest groups as mediators between citizens and the state. While the first stressed competition between interest groups to gain access to the state, corporatism stressed the cooperation between the interests and the state. Generalizations on a model of governing evolved within both schools, while critics pointed at a lack of grounds for such generalizations (Jordan and Schubert 1992). However, with changing real life in Western countries where the enlarged social state and interest groups interacted with a state in various ways and modes while political parties appeared to be in decline, critics of both schools noted that actual policymaking had been increasingly closer to ideas of networks. Indeed, at the meso level of political decision-making, many types of policy networks had been analysed based on several criteria (Van Waarden 1992), predominantly in contexts of older democracies (Jordan and Schubert 1992). Policy networks were also applied to the EU's context where a network approach helped to better understand governing at the supranational level (Börzel 1997) as well as in a global context (Hajer 2003). Such approaches stressed that networks are horizontal (contrary to traditional hierarchical governing) and result in network governance with missing control and accountability. At the same time, such endeavours pretty much left out the representative forms of governing, including political parties.

Indeed, a whole school on ***governance*** has developed during the last several decades (see, e.g., Ansell and Torfing 2016). It has been focused on the changes in governing in advanced industrialized democracies where the power ceased to be aggregated in the representative government within nation states (Pierre 2000, 1). Governance has become predominantly understood as the processes of governing, which (1) may

be undertaken by government, the market or a network over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory; and (2) executed through laws, norms, power or language (Unu Merit 2012). Researchers have revealed many modes of governing, some still related to the 'government' as well many others outside the traditional understanding of power. They have appeared in changes in the steering of policymaking, amending public policymaking with private modes and combinations of private and public modes of governing. These were named 'governance' to distinguish between the two. Various modes and subtypes of governance have been revealed, such as network governance, democratic network governance, interactive governance, regulatory governance, collaborative governance, private governance, urban and regional governance, multilevel governance, multi-actor governance, supranational governance, transnational economic governance, meta-governance and adaptive governance (Hoogh and Marks 2001; Bache and Flinders 2004; Tömmel and Verdun 2009; Kahler 2009; Torfing et al. 2012; Ansell and Torfing 2016).

As liberal democracy has been found to be in decline, the relationships between various types of governance have come onto the research agenda (see Sørensen 2002; Sørensen and Torfing 2005; Blanco et al. 2011; Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017). In an attempt to solve dilemmas about the relationships between various types of governance, the key questions of democracy and the role of politicians in such post-liberal democracy have been raised. A meta-governance framework has been offered as a potential solution, although it is not very developed (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). All in all, issues related not only to the 'publicness' (Ansell and Torfing 2016) of governance but also issues of accountability, governance's relation to representation and a lack of democratic aspects of many forms of governance have become rather burning issues (Papadopolous 2016).

In parallel, some researchers have been ***critically reflecting on democratic deficits at various levels of government***. Authors have come up with a variety of corrections/amendments in favour of greater accountability to citizens and strengthening their voice in governing. Advocacy democracy has favoured citizens' participation in policymaking processes by using modes of direct democracy. Monitory democracy—or a post-electoral democracy—has been found to be taking place in the real world of democracy since 1945 in the form of multiplying and ever more empowering, scrutinizing mechanisms involving a variety of actors (e.g., organizations, forums, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, etc.;

Keane 2015). Monitory democracy, however, does not exclude representative government and the role of political parties. Rather, '*in the new age of monitory democracy* elections still count, but parties and parliaments now have to compete with thousands of monitory organizations' (Keane 2015, 514) and '*the old meaning of democracy based on the rule of one person, one vote is replaced by democracy guided by a different and more complex rule: one person, many interests, many votes, many representatives, both at home and abroad*' (Keane 2015, 514–515). Liquid democracy was proposed as a combination of direct and highly flexible representative democracy (Blum and Zuber 2016) in which political parties still have a role, though it is somewhat decreased in comparison to the liberal–democratic model (Valsangiacomo 2021). Various searches for democratic innovations more or less evolved without radically changing a system (Guasti and Geissel 2021). The exception appears to be radical democracy, which focuses on the root conditions of governing while demanding rule by the people (Dahlberg 2015). In this stream, authors (as well as activists) expect people's participation in all aspects and levels of active community institutions (neighbourhood, city, state, nation, beyond the nation) in order to deepen the democratic revolution and to link together diverse democratic struggles (e.g., antiracist, antisexist, anticapitalism) and, at least in some cases, also focus on the need for radical change in the capitalist system (Mouffe and Holdengräber 1989; Conway and Singh 2011; Dahlberg 2015).

All in all, in the literature on democracy, the Western tradition and Western lenses prevail. They have been somewhat criticized for their Western European—and American—centrism, but issues of 'non-Western democracy' (e.g., Voskressenski 2017) have not really been debated. To the contrary, Western-centric debates have also evolved on democratic deficits in a transnational, global space, including ideas on (future) regional and global democracy.

Transnational Democracy and the European Union as a Regional Political System

Debates on transnational democracy have often been linked to the example of the European Union. This has been particularly vivid in the process of the deepening of the European integration and the related

evolution of its political institutions. In the debate on democratic qualities of such a transnational phenomenon, the issue of democratic deficit has been particularly interesting.

First of all, there has been no consensus on whether the European Union faces democratic deficit or not—and if yes—how democracy could be developed in the frame of a multilevel polity of the European Communities developing into the European Union since the early 1990s.

Several scholars have denied the EU's democratic deficit with different argumentation. Majone claimed that the European Union is essentially a 'regulatory state' (Majone 1994, 1996) and that at the level of the EU level, it is technical regulation that is needed and not regulation that is redistributive or value allocative. Thus, he didn't expect EU policy outcomes to produce winners and losers but rather to benefit some and make no one worse off. This is why he denied the need for politicization of the EU's decision-making. While Moravcsik (1998, 2002) also didn't believe that the European Union as a transnational political system needs a liberal–democratic model, he did stress that it is the intergovernmental decision-making at the EU level that earns democratic qualification. This is because national governments own legitimacy based on the functioning of national democratic orders.

Contrarily, critics of the democratic deficit believe that the European Union needs politicization of EU decision-making in order to gain democratic legitimacy. Follesdal and Hix (2006, 534–537) summarized the key problems of the democratic deficit in the simultaneous existence of (1) an increase in executive power and a decrease in national parliamentary control in the process of European integration; (2) a too-weak European Parliament (despite an increase in its power); (3) a lack of 'European' elections that would be about the personalities and parties at the European level or the direction of the EU policy agenda; (4) the European Union is institutionally and a psychologically 'too distant' from voters; and (5) 'policy drift' from voters' ideal policy preferences (which is partially a result of the previously mentioned factors) as '*the EU adopts policies that are not supported by a majority of citizens in many or even most Member States*'.

Indeed, the critics of democratic deficit had been very much inspired by the liberal–democratic model when searching for democratic amendments to the EU political system. Follesdal and Hix (2006) stated that democratic polity requires contestation for political leadership and over policy. Mair and Thomassen (2010) directly linked the EU's democratic

deficit with the absence of a system of party government at the European level. More precisely, they indicated the need for parties at the European level to represent the will of the citizens of Europe and that the European parliament needs to gain the capacity to effectively control the governing bodies of the European Union.

In line with the predominant liberal–democratic model in political science, the specific role of parties in democracy has come within the focus of efforts to construct a democratic system in the newly emerging transnational political community. It has been believed that it is the political parties that (alongside civil society) can establish the now-missing political communication. However, normative ideas of a democratized EU political system did not emerge in a context without any party structures at the EU level. In fact, European federations and confederations of ideologically related parties had been developing even before such normative debates. Nevertheless, such European party organizations were estimated to have failed to fulfil their democratic role within the EU system (Attina 1993, 1997; Bardi 1993).

Critics of democratic deficit insisted on their evaluation even after the European Parliament adopted in December 1996, on the basis of the Tsars report, the resolution on the constitutional status of European political parties. The resolution defined a European political party as a 'political association' that expresses opinions on European public policies, is represented in the European Parliament and participates in the processes of expressing the political will at the European level by other comparable means. A European party must be organized in such a way that (a) it is likely (is likely) to express the political will; (b) it is more than an electoral campaign organization (electioneering organization) or an organization that predominantly supports a political group and parliamentary work; (c) it is represented in at least one-third of the member states; and (d) is active at the transnational level (Attina 1997). Since then, European parties and the EU level party system have further evolved (Schakel 2017; Brack and Wolfs 2023).

Applications of deliberative democracy and participatory democracy have also found a way into the debates on diminishing the EU's democratic deficit, particularly in ideas of democracy through strong publics in the European Union (Eriksen and Fossum 2002) and ideas on substantive conception of representation understood as the agents of European governance 'standing' or 'acting' for the European public but without

formal democratic processes of authorization and accountability (Bellamy and Castiglione 2011).

Other conceptualizations of democracy that don't directly expose political parties have not been left out of debates on improving the EU's democracy. Among them have been, for example, federal, deliberative and audit democracy.

Cosmopolitan Democracy

Discussions on cosmopolitan democracy have included a variety of ideas on how to mend present governing. Such ideas range on a continuum from only trying to ensure more democratic accountability for the existing international institutions, particularly international organizations, to ideas on institutionalization of a particular global form of democracy and democratic and/or regional associations based on the normative requirements for democracy.

The EU example has often been seen as a prototype of international democracy on the global scale. As in the case of the EU political system, debates on the global scale could not oversee the real, existing multiple levels of government. While regionalism has been very much linked to the EU's example for other regional integrations, there have been reservations with regard to simply following the EU's model, the regionalization was believed to enable a certain level of cultural diversity around the world (Gould 2012, 117). The issue of regionalism also appeared in a triangle of ideas on confederalism and federalism and polycentrism (Archibugi et al. 2012, 7).

The focus on multilevel governance did not include much elaboration of ideas on the role of political parties in such modelling of global governance. Rather, it seems that even ideas on constitutionalization of public international law and other forms of multilevel regulation were only amended by calls for mechanisms of democratic accountability either directly towards citizens or mediated via their national representatives without specification of the role of political parties (Follesdal 2012, 111).

In the phenomenon of increasing minimalization of democratic criteria, it does not come as a surprise that Koenig-Archibugi (2012, 178) believed that there are many paths that could pass the kind of 'democratic' threshold envisaged by Dahl. He summarized the following paths (Koenig-Archibugi 2012, 177–178): the intergovernmental path (including the idea of a global assembly and 'eventually the popular

election of its members'), essentially replicating the EU; the social movement path by global civil society networks' creating non-state democratic institutions in pressuring primarily intergovernmental institutions to democratize them; the labourist path in which global trade unions 'progressive coalition' would play a role in promoting global democratization as in the past promoted domestic democratization; the capitalist path with transnational business pushing for global governance institutions, which could then serve as a focal point for democratization; the functionalist path resting on increasingly dense governance networks among specialized bureaucrats; and an imperialist path in which a dominant power establishes institutions for global governing and then 'eventually accedes the demands for democratic representation'.

Already at the beginning of the 1990s, Held presented an idea on the transformation of the United Nations into an institution of a global liberal–democratic system (Held 1992). However, such an approach has not found much support. Rather, theoretical elaborations, which have taken into account the governance literature, have pointed at the potential for four distinct types of governance located on the public–private continuum and on the formal–informal continuum: public/formal, public/informal, private/formal and private/informal governance (Bellamy and Jones 2000). While they do at least indirectly refer to the empirical reality, they are not normatively evaluated in terms of suggesting a particular model. Political parties are not in the focus of this attempt at theorizing.

Nevertheless, there are some authors who have linked global democracy and political parties. As a rule, they believe that democratic party contestation is a basis for real democracy, but at the same time, they think this will not be realistic for quite some time (Christiano 2012, 79; Follesdal 2012, 101).

As issues of feasibility have bordered many authors, solutions have also been offered to try to amend the existing conditions by using small-scale democratic experiments through which citizens (or their representatives) have a say in global policymaking (Kuyper 2013) or go to the philosophical level of thinking first, identify the principles of global democracy, the levels at which these principles work and how they fit together. The latter is expected to offer a basis for a fruitful debate on normative political theory and the feasibility of global democracy (Erman and Kuyper 2020).

All in all, it appears that the global reality of cosmopolitan democracy would be a downgraded institutionalization of the normative standards

of democratic accountability in relation to the liberal–democratic model (Hüller 2012). In the current circumstances, Anderson (2015) suggests the mutual support of different forms of democracy (representative and participatory, territorial and non-territorial, national and transnational) while combining bottom-up and top-down approaches to democracy beyond nation-state borders.

In no literature of which I am aware have political parties been recognized as the main actors or institutions of future models of democracy. Nevertheless, they persist in real-life politics and, at least indirectly (e.g., via their positions in governments at various levels of governing), take part in regional and international decision-making milieus.

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CHAPTER 3

Relations Between Democracy and Parties

Varieties of Democracy and Varieties of Parties

As shown in the previous section, only some of the theories of democracy have clearly indicated political parties as elements of democracy. Although they have been more or less abstract, theories on democracy have appeared to be very much interlinked with the real-life social, economic and political developments in particular parts of the world.

There is no one and only conception of democracy—there is also no single conception of a political party. History shows that both democracies and political parties have been changing to an important extent synchronically and diachronically, as have the relationships between the two phenomena.

The twentieth and twenty-first century appear to have followed the thesis that political parties and modern democracy are closely interlinked. However, it must not be forgotten that such a thesis is based on the history of Western Europe and the history of the founding of the United States of America. Early forms of political parties evolved within the institution (called parliament) that was established as a counterpower to the monarch. Nevertheless, this was not a modern democratic parliament,

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and early proto-parties were also not modern democratic political institutions. These parliamentary clubs evolved into parties as they organized electoral committees for parliamentary elections and as these committees evolved into more stable organizational structures needed for electoral competition for political power.

To the contrary, critical views on party government models based on representative, parliamentary and electoral democracy exported from the West to colonial Africa (Randall and Svåsand 2002) contributed to the development of indigenous ideas of no-party democracy. Crook (1999), for example, reported on alternative, 'true democracy' in Ghana, which was based on Ghana's tradition, history and culture, theory of community-level, participatory, no-party democracy that idealized the consensual character of 'traditional' Ghanaian village life. Similarly, a model of an entirely non-partisan form of governance evolving from local communities developed in Uganda, which was based on village assembly, resembling a Greek polis model but including all adults.

It was a particularly Western-centric historical context in which political parties were recognized as a phenomenon closely interwoven with the institutional developments of modern governing. Indeed, parties were first formed in the Western European and North American environment in the nineteenth century. However, in Western Europe, they were developing in a struggle between the monarch and other social elites. In contrast, in North America, they were developing in a combination of struggles against the European colonial metropole and struggles among various ideas in America about the nature of the system of government to be established in America. While in Western Europe, the new system of government in the making was a result of struggles leading to a modern transformation of previous systems of governing, in North America, there was an opportunity to develop a modern system of government 'from scratch' due to a combination of decolonization and the exclusion of native peoples from designing the new political system.

Political parties are also changing phenomena within Western contexts. Historically, party models evolve even within the same country. Even within the United States of America, where it has been believed that parties are first of all coalitions of interests, quite different models of parties have been revealed (McSweeney and Zvesper 1991).

Varieties of democracy have been analytically linked with varieties of party models. Political scientists have analysed party models as they have evolved in particular social contexts. Katz and Mair (1995) presented the correspondence between particular party types and democracy. More precisely, they focused on party representative style (the positioning of the

party in relation to the civil society and the state), typical for a particular social and political context: elite party, mass party, catch-all party, cartel party.

LaPalombara and Weiner (1966a, 3) noted the non-simultaneity of this process in different societies. Hence, in their definition of the term 'party', they explicitly emphasized that party rule is often associated with a growing expectation that individuals should not participate in the exercise of power because of hereditary position (birth) but because of political competences (LaPalombara and Weiner 1966b, 400). This is the reason parties today are also considered to be synonymous with modern society and modern politics.

Western Lenses

Western lenses are not only predominant in defining democracy but also in defining political parties. Indeed, the segment of political science that recognizes political parties has not questioned their existence. Rather, it has focused on their emergence, characteristics and functions. Nevertheless, up until today, no single definition of political parties exists in political science.

It can even be said that definitions are historically and culturally conditioned. The first attempts at defining parties can be traced back to the period when the beginnings of the modern parties evolved. These attempts were the developmental stages of the appropriately vague object of study. Among them, we find the identification of the party with the 'organized opinion' (Disreali, Benjamin Constant, Duverger) or with a group of men who jointly pursue the national interest on the basis of a specific principle on which they agree (Burke). The historical political reality of women's exclusion from politics has also influenced the definition of fundamental political concepts or phenomena. Other authors (Brogan 1965; Duverger 1965) have attributed the party's name to parliamentary clubs and political groups from the pre-party period. In the French revolutionary context, political clubs evolved based on major social groups (estates) as did ideas of the parliament representing various social groups.

In the multitude of definitions of the term political party, there are often specific political–cultural, historical and ideological accents. While Marx defined the Communist Party as an instrument of the political struggle of the working class, the real world also produced variations in this aspect. Weber, for example, defined the party through the author's perspective of the distinction between party leaders and membership. In

the liberal milieu, a party is defined as a 'part of a whole' that struggles for power with other parties in free elections.

In the frame of the socialist system, Kardelj (1977, 50) stated that the League of Communists in socialist Yugoslavia is not a classical party. Rather, he affirmatively defined it as a 'social and political organisation' (ibid., 176), which is and must be a minority (ibid., 179), 'because only as such can it be, in our situation vanguard of social progress' as 'the ideological and political cohesive force of the revolution' and 'the ideological and political vanguard of the working class' and 'a factor of socialist consciousness of the self-managing working masses' (ibid., 177–182). The League of Communists ideologically and politically leads the process of 'emancipation of society as a whole'.

Attempts to trace the early development of parties to the emergence of parliaments and electoral systems could hardly be applied to most of the developing areas (LaPalombara and Weiner 1966a, 12).

Furthermore, the Western liberal understanding of parties starts with an individual (citizen) as a unit of politics, while in reality, parties also evolve in a collective unit, particularly an ethnic group (Dowd and Driessen 2008).

Researchers of governing in the Third World have also shown the Western bias in normative expectations that parties are to be mass-based organizations (Erdmann 2004). Such a conceptualization of parties in studying party politics outside the Western world doesn't even recognize that (1) such parties in Western milieus evolved as working class political organizations in the context of industrialization, urbanization, mass communication and expansion of the political borders of democracy, and (2) parties in Western milieus evolved into predominantly electoral parties. For example, parties in Africa are compared to an ideal that does not exist, even in the West (Osei 2013, 546).

It is not only that a particular notion of a party is nested in a particular systemic context within a particular timeframe (see, e.g., Lawson 2010). For example, parties in the United States have been changing quite a lot over time, including not only the caucus type but also others—for example, party machines and amateur clubs (McSweeney and Zvesper 1991)—while today, American political parties appear to be best viewed as coalitions of intense policy demanders (McCarty and Schickler 2018).

Is it possible to find **a common ground among various definitions?** What are those common characteristics of the parties in the mass of different political systems in different stages of social, political and

economic development? Perhaps Schattschneider's (1942, 35–37) simple answer that parties are primarily an organized attempt to seize power is such a minimal summary of party definitions.

Still, the notion of the political party as an instrument for achieving power and the management of power is very strongly rooted. On top of this minimal definition comes an elaborated functional view of parties as power-oriented organizations that fulfil certain social tasks. Based on the historical processes of formation and (re)formation of Western democracies, von Beyme (1985) systemized them into the following categories: interest articulation and aggregation, goal definition, recruitment of political elites and the formation of governments, mobilization and socialization. Similarly, but in less detail, other major political scientists have defined the tasks of parties, for example, Almond and Powell (1978), Duverger (1965), Hague and Harrop (1991), Sartori (1976), Panebianco (1988) and Pierre (2000).

Nevertheless, in the current world, the only truly discriminatory definition that equates a party with a political organization is competing in the electoral arena, while all other elements in the definitions known today can be challenged with empirical arguments. Panebianco (1988, 5–6) stated that a political party is: '*An organised group, an association, directed towards political goals, which seeks by its activities to maintain or change the existing social, economic and political conditions by means of influencing the exercise of power or by taking power, and is the only type of organisation operating in the electoral arena*'.

In the context of a stable, liberal democracy following the Western European and North American examples, Panebianco's definition seems to be largely valid. Some countries even explicitly provide in their party legislation that parties repeatedly failing to participate in elections can be expelled from the official register (i.e. the register of legally functioning parties).

Taking into account various functions of parties, parties are expected to act as the key link between citizens and the state. On a more abstract level, the functions of parties in democratic societies have been linked to representation. However, in practice, it is more common to talk about governments, which are representative 'if they do what is best for the people and act in the best interests of at least a majority of citizens' (Przeworski 1999, 31). Besides other actors and institutions, parties are also considered to act in the control of administrative power.

During the last decades, however, a rather clear distinction has been made between two key party functions—representative and procedural roles. Even more so, a decline was noticed in the representative role but not in the procedural role (Bartolini and Mair 2001). Indeed, parties have been perceived to be less and less able to fulfil their essential representative functions (van Biezen 2004).

In addition, some parties seek to dismantle the state (a particular political order or polity) and create a new one ('the withering away of the' state, the replacement of one regime by another, the change of the state). Ware (1996, 3) also pointed to borderline cases in which individual political groups, self-styled 'parties', were ridiculing politics and expressing anti-party sentiments.

Yet, Ware draws attention to the particular circumstances in which even the minimalist definition of the party can become questionable. Parties that do not recognize the existing regime or question the legitimacy of a particular election may decide as a matter of protest (a) not to participate in that regime to contest for power and thereby help to maintain the legitimacy of the regime or (b) not to contest for power in the specific elections that they consider to be illegitimate (there is a reasonable suspicion of fraud in the electoral results).

Variety of Relationships Between Political Parties and Democracy

As shown in previous sections, the relationship between political parties and democracy has not been theorized in a homogenous way. Here we summarize a rather rich variety of theses in the literature (Table 3.1).

First, early liberal theory on democracy was focused on the individual and did not explicitly mention parties. At best, in the intermediation between citizens and the state, other political forms were recognized. These included: a contract among citizens (Locke 1690); 'a spirit of party' (Madison 1787/2003, 119); parties as phenomena formed on pre-existing political interests (Burke 1770); a certain kind of political organization in support of those who are in possession of the government (Mill 1861/2001). Nevertheless, these political forms were actually not determined in more detail.

Second, the issue evolved as to ***what comes first—parties or democracy***. Weber called modern forms of parties 'children of democracy', as they are a key factor in modern governance (Mair 1990, 1). For LaPalombara and

Table 3.1 Theses on the relationship between parties and democracy

Theses on the party–democracy relationship	*Examples*
Parties not explicitly mentioned in ideas on democracy	Liberalism (Locke); Cosmopolitan democracy Network democracy
Unclear which is first (parties or democracy)	Parties are precondition for democracy vs. democracy enables parties Difficult to say what comes first in the frame of the dissemination of liberal democracy around the world (e.g., in post-socialist countries, Africa) One needs to be cautious in outlining a direct link between the two (Blondel 1990)
Positive roles of parties in relation to democracy	Parties are creators of democracy (examples are British history, American history; Schattschneider 1942) Parties are indispensable for democracy (Bryce 1921) Parties are key links between citizens and the state in polyarchy (Dahl 1971) Parties are key actors of democratization (Southern Europe, post-socialist countries; transitology literature)
Negative roles of parties in relation to democracy	Parties are not agents of democracy but instruments of dictatorship/ non-democratic regimes (Osei 2013) Parties are problematic for democracy due to acting as egoistic factions, they are 'evil' (e.g., de Tocqueville 1839; Bale and Roberts 2002) Parties erode democracy from the top (Bartels 2023); parties are instruments of elites; parties are problematic for democracy due to the law of oligarchy (Duverger 1965; Ostrogorski 1964; Michels 1915) Parties add to the tendency of presidentialization of politics (Poguntke and Webb 2005) Parties are failing actors due to their declining capacity to fulfil their key roles; they play their electoral roles but decreasingly play their representative roles (Schmitter 2001; van Biezen 2004)

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Theses on the party–democracy relationship	*Examples*
	Parties' ability to keep citizens' trust is declining; parties are discredited
	Parties are agents of conceptualization and implementation of illiberal democracy (illiberalism literature)
Parties' ambiguity	Anti-system parties—agents of democratization or agents of endangering democracy (e.g., Stokes 1999)?
Parties are redundant/democracy without parties	Parties are redundant, transitional phenomena; other actors are taking over (e.g., Daalder 2002)

Weiner (1966a, 3) parties are both; that is, a continuous process and the formation of modern and modernizing political systems. Nevertheless, since the Second World War, the normative formulation for a working democracy has been the sum of democratic institutions, including political parties, the rule of law and free media. However, in building new democracies, particularly in the context of democracy promotion, the question arose as to what comes first: organized parties or democracies. In particular, a chicken-and-egg problem arises in hybrid authoritarian–democratic milieus where parties are expected to enhance and improve democracy but the contextual factors undermine parties' capacities (Dargent and Muñoz 2011; Osei 2013).

Third, there are recognitions of many ***positive roles of parties in relation to democracy***. As shown earlier, in British and American history, it was not the theory of democracy but rather the empirical evolution of democracy that led to recognizing parties as 'creators' of democracy (Schattschneider 1942, 3).

A critical role of parties in a democracy was systematically recognized in Western-centric literature after WWII. The most influential definition of democracy has become Dahl's (1971) definition of democracy for a large share of citizens—polyarchy. Parties have been recognized as the key link between nearly all citizens who participate in elections and government (Dahl 1971). Unlike historical experiences with parties evolving as private organizations, political parties have more recently been to a great deal understood as a 'public utility'—that is, an essential public good for democracy (Katz 1996; van Biezen 2004).

In addition to the positive roles of parties in relation to democracy, many of their ***negative impacts on democracy*** have been recognized. It has particularly been in the left-wing and far-left ideological conceptions that party has always had (also) a negative connotation. At the end of the twentieth century, however, party criticism and anti-party sentiments also became an important component of far-right politics.

Criticism of parties has ranged from moderate criticism to demands for the abolition of parties. Let us list some typical criticisms of parties. Parties are:

a. egoistic, they are organizations of interest rather than organizations of principle (American political thought at the birth of the Republic at the end of the eighteenth century; McSweeney and Zvesper 1991);
b. a factor of negation of democracy, as they limit the activity of citizens to elections only, sacrificing their political principles to increase participation in power (Pulišelić 1971, 31–33);
c. apparatuses that elevate themselves above the citizen, or an apparatus within which the leadership elevates itself above the membership (Duverger 1965; Weber 1946);
d. in the political sense of the word, a 'military organisation' that operates 'the iron law of oligarchy' (Michels [1915] on the basis of a study of the German social democracy);
e. the apparatus of repression of the spontaneity and political energy of the masses (Ostrogorski [1964] on the basis of an analysis of the functioning of the parties in Britain and the United States), and therefore, they must be abolished and direct action introduced in their place (revolutionary syndicalists, anarchists) or direct democracy in the form of workers' trade union committees (anarcho-syndicalists) or in the form of a system of workers' councils (anarcho-communism, guild socialism, movement factory superintendents, council communism; Vranicki 1981);
f. a threat to the 'good society' because their practice is not democratic (Daalder 2002);
g. an alienated form of political organization within society and power over the citizen in capitalist states (Kardelj 1977). According to communist and socialist ideology, communist parties should be parties of a 'new type'—an instrument for the realization of the interests of the working class and the 'common good' at the same

> time. The pursuit of working-class interests should also mean the realization of the ideal of a society that resolves all the key social conflicts in society as a whole.

In spite of tendencies to either look at parties in negative or positive relations with democracy, a thesis on ***parties' ambiguity*** deserves special attention. Indeed, parties appear to have a dual nature. On the one hand, they (can) be the democratic link between citizens and government. On the other hand, they are also an instrument for mobilizing citizens on the basis of democratic or non-democratic platforms (Stokes 1999). Parties can also work effectively in non-democratic regimes without such a direct link. Mainwaring (1989) hints at factors that are believed to impact the role of parties. Here, it is important to note as well that parties' incentives for their commitment to democracy are very relevant. Whose voices parties bring into politics is of critical importance as is how parties manoeuvre between representation and governability (Stokes 1999).

Negative roles of parties in relation to democracy. Parties have also been recognized as problematic for democracy. Such theses evolved rather early based on studying party practice developments in the Western world. A systematic analysis of authors pointing at the problem of internal party democracy, including the iron law of oligarchy as well as the changing character of institutionalizing parties in relation to the environment, can be found in Panebianco (1988).

More recently, the crisis of democracy has been directly linked to problematic party politics. Political parties, particularly their leaders, have been found to erode democracy 'from the top' (Bartels 2023). This view, however, is not the first warning of such a damaging role of political parties. Two decades earlier, researchers had already been critical of inadequate performance of political parties as institutions of representative democracy while the thesis on parties as necessary institutions for representative democracy had been maintained (Schmitter 2001; van Biezen 2004; Mair 2005).

Mair (2005) pointed at this issue based on research showing that democracy in Western democratic countries as well as on the EU level had been steadily stripped of its popular component hand in hand with a stripped understanding of democracy without demos. He held that this change has had much to do with the failings of political parties.

Indeed, 'crisis of parties', 'party decline' (as described since the 1970s in Western Europe) is generally negatively estimated. The phenomenon

not only includes rejection of a particular party but also parties in general (anti-party sentiment) as well as selective rejection of certain party systems (Daalder 2002). More recently, parties have been increasingly recognized as contributors to the fundamental transformation of democracy at the expense of representative qualities of democracy.

Parties are redundant/democracy without parties. Parties are 'redundant', as it is possible to create a relationship between citizens and the state using other—that is direct—channels of political communication. It is particularly outside the West European and American context that alternatives to party democracy can be found. It may be that politicians' incentives to build parties are weakened—as, for example, in the context of the growing informal sector and the spread of mass media technologies in Peru (Levitsky and Cameron 2003). Political parties also may be seen as unnecessary or impractical—for example, in small polities and/or in the context of different traditions (e.g., in Africa; Ware 1987).

Parties and Other Factors of Democratic Transitions and Consolidation of Democracy

Transitologists (e.g., Linz 1990) note that it is the parties that can bring about the transition from authoritarian or totalitarian systems to a democratic system. Although opposition movements or active civil society play an important role in the transition to democracy, parties are the only ones who can peacefully repeal the old legal order, accept a new, democratic constitution, hold free elections, and democratically fill the new institutions of the democratic system by democratic means. The last wave of democratic transitions, including the democratization of post-socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, are believed to have shown two things: (a) that modern governance cannot be established without parties, even if they are still at an early stage of development; and (b) that parties are primarily a 'clientelistic clientele-oriented structure' (Eldersveld 1964, 5).

Indeed, parties have been recognized as supportive mediators in the process of regime change. More specifically, they have been found to be key actors in all—the transition from an authoritarian regime, in introducing a new democratic political order, legitimation of a new constitutional order and in establishing the democratic structure for building the multiparty system (Gebethner 1997). Based on a literature review, Mainwaring (1989) showed that groups and parties with stakes in the

process towards democracy may have nothing to do with democracy. Rather, they seek to fulfil their particular, biased objectives.

However, analysis in the past has also shown that political democracy is not the only possible outcome of transitions from authoritarianism (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). So, what determines the success of transition? Particular circumstances have been revealed in which transitions have been successful. The literature has stressed the role of political factors. It should not be overlooked that theorizing about transitions to democracy has been heavily based on early empirical studies of Latin America. In these studies, the autonomy of political factors—political elites and arrangements, electoral and party systems—appeared to be critical (Mainwaring 1989). In contrast, democracy has been seen less as a result of factors like a level of modernization, a mode of interaction with the international system and a form of social structure. More precisely, the following political factors have been exposed. First of all, successful contractual transitions appeared to be an important factor. More precisely, both the ruling elites and the opposition opted for negotiations in the process towards democracy (O'Donnell et al. 1986; Huntington 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996). However, this had not only been about the goodwill of both sets of party elites but also about their strength. The opposition organizations needed to be very strong to make such arrangements possible (Iakovlev 2022). Such power relations appeared to be possible in countries where a 'liberalisation' phase allowed for the development of opposition (O'Donnell et al. 1986; Colomer 2000).

Generally speaking, the literature on ***democratic transition*** has stressed the role of political processes (including the role of political parties) as relatively autonomous in relation to structural factors (Kitschelt 1992; Schmitter 1995). For successful transitions to democracy, there have been power relations between regime actors and opposition that appeared particularly important (O'Donnell et al. 1986; Swaminathan 1999). Among those who represent the opposition, the presence of certain combinations of *political parties, trade unions* and *the Catholic Church* are expected to be sufficient for the success of negotiations and the subsequent democratization.

Later research developments joined both the political science trend of new institutionalism (March and Olsen 1984) and were also more open to other socio-economic factors. Overall, two trends can be observed in the literature: (1) stressing the role of agency or (2) stressing structural conditions.

Domestic anchoring and external anchoring are the two core subprocesses that should be mentioned (Morlino 2011).

It has been particularly in transitology and in studies of non-Western parts of the world that—beside parties—also expose other underlying factors of democratic development (Table 3.2). Of course, economic factors were recognized as important. Economic crises may contribute to the delegitimation of the old system and transition to democracy, but economic crises may also contribute to the breakdown of democratization (Lipset 1994). The correlation between the level of economic development and democracy has been noted, although not in a simple way (Lipset 1959; Dahl 1971; Bollen 1979; Huntington 1984). Economic problems may impact the disintegration of the old regime (Ramet 1995). Economic problems and poverty may also hurt democratization and the consolidation of a democracy (Cheibub et al. 1996). In contrast, good economic achievements may contribute to the sustaining of the new democratic system (Lewis 1997). After 2000, the attention to international influences on democratization have also grown, especially looking into leverage or governments' vulnerability to Western pressures and linkage (see, e.g., Levitsky and Way 2006).

Besides the economy, other factors have been recognized: (socio-) economic variables (wealth), ethnic structure, cultural variables, religious traditions, various electoral systems, free and lively civil society, characteristics of the transition (especially with regard to the strength of civil society and the relationship between the opposition and the old ruling actors), political parties and institutional choices as well as external factors (bordering with democratic countries, foreign support in favour of democratization; e.g., Lipset 1959; Huntington 1993; Karl and Schmitter 1991; Linz and Stepan 1996; Cheibub et al. 1996; Lewis 1997; Gasiorowski and Power 1998). Last but not least, an analysis of factors impacting the success of transitions to democracy in former Yugoslav countries has revealed that peace is a necessary condition for a successful transition to a democracy, although not per se but in combination with several other factors (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink 2009).

The 1990s brought about more of a research focus on factors ensuring the thriving of democracy in the medium term—***democratic consolidation***. This has been defined as 'the process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down' and involving 'behavioral and institutional

Table 3.2 Segments of political science literature related to the transition, consolidation, decline of democracy and autocratization

Segments of political science literature	*Actors*	*Socio-economic factors*	*External factors*	*War*	*Institutions*	*Previous social political experiences*
Transition to democracy	Part of many factors; Party and non-party actors (civil society); Two main views on parties: Parties as critical public utility vs p. are ambiguous, partial interest-led actors; A learning process at elite and mass level	x	x	x	Particularly related to the liberalization stage and round table negotiations between the old and new political elites	The factor of the liberalization stage within formally still non-democratic regime

Segments of political science literature	*Actors*	*Socio-economic factors*	*External factors*	*War*	*Institutions*	*Previous social political experiences*
Consolidation of democracy	Primarily parties as actors. Particularly as party elites are creators of institutions in institutional engineering; Governments taking care of fulfilling citizens expectations in economy and institutionalization of political system; Institutionalization of parties; desegregation of research into many research subfields	Studies scattered into many fields of research not particularly related to the consolidation of democracy	Studies scattered into many fields of research not particularly related to the consolidation of democracy	Studies scattered into many fields of research not particularly related to the consolidation of democracy	Multiplied research into institutions and their functioning, especially legislative studies	The factor of transition's characteristics (peaceful cooperative vs orientation towards continuous agreement of opposition and incumbent to continue harming each other in post-transition stage)

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Segments of political science literature	*Actors*	*Socio-economic factors*	*External factors*	*War*	*Institutions*	*Previous social political experiences*
Decline of democracy	Primarily parties; Fragmentation of research: -populism -personalism -emergence of new political parties -party system (de)institutionalization Existence of parties ambivalent to democracy; reaction of citizens	Disagreements about unresolved problems	Extraordinary factors, such as international financial and economic crises	Studies scattered into many fields of research not particularly related to the consolidation of democracy	Erosion of democratic political institutions, particularly in favour of the executive's dominance	
Autocratization	Governments; (autocratic/illiberal) leaders and their parties; selected conservative think tanks; in some cases (e.g., in Hungary) individual intellectuals developing theoretical defences of illiberalism	Networks of loyal national capitalists; fusion between economic and political power; accelerating capital accumulation; regions dependent economic model	EU can do little; networks of radical right actors promoting issues related to 'cultural' war	The war in Ukraine; 'cultural' war	Intentional decomposing of democracy in its institutional basis; erosion in protecting of institutions	Antiliberal cultural legacies (such as those inherited from state socialism and other/ previous non-democratic regimes

Source Author based on literature review

changes that normalize democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty' (Diamond 2015, Chapter 5).

In the context of consolidating third-way democracies, research interests have both proliferated and narrowed at the same time. Besides relations among party elites, specialized literature has increasingly focused on elites' institution building, parliaments and separately on specific other political institutions (such as executives and courts) and their functioning. Political parties have also been found to be important in the consolidation of democracies in Africa (Randall and Svåsand 2002).

As the study of the consolidation of party systems was believed to be a factor in the consolidation of democracy during the 1990s, the consolidation of party systems evolved into a separate research subfield. Such research has been particularly vivid in the field of post-socialist countries (see, e.g., Kitschelt et al. 1999; Mainwaring 1998; Lewis 2006; Horowitz and Browne 2008). It can be said that the study of parties and democracy in post-transition countries during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s was more or less confined to two separate clusters. Even when looking into party literature beyond post-transition countries, van Biezen (2004, 1) estimated that '*the literatures on parties* and democratic theory have developed in a remarkable degree of mutual isolation'. The closest subfield to issues of democracy seems to have been learning processes at elite and mass levels towards democratic legitimation.

Nevertheless, political parties have been viewed as actors and institutions with indispensable functions for ensuring democracy. However, they have been found to be rather weak in the process of consolidation of young democracies. So, their role has been evaluated both positively and negatively (see a literature review in Osei 2013). Looking at political factors, characteristics of transition have been found to also matter for consolidation (particularly power relations between former regime actors and opposition actors; Stradiotto and Guo 2010) as well as the (post)transition constitutional and other political institutional choices. Special attention has been paid to civil society as a set of intermediary actors supporting the power of democratic governments, monitoring and subjecting the government to public scrutiny and generating opportunities for citizens' political participation.

An analysis of other factors in the consolidation of democracy have been rare. Remmer (1996) noted that literature on the consolidation of democracy lacked interest in macrosocial prerequisites for political democracy. Gasiorowski and Power (1998) even claimed that perspectives on

democratization have been narrowed by ignoring the rich tradition of structural analysis. Still, several other factors of democratic consolidation can be found in the literature; more precisely, in the literature looking into factors of 'surviving', 'sustaining' or 'maintaining' democracy (democracy keeping free from the threat of backsliding). Among such factors have been economic factors, such as economic growth with moderate inflation, declining income inequality and favourable international climate (Cheibub et al. 1996). However, it has also been recognized that to endure, democracy needs to generate desirable and politically desired objectives that are conditioned by various social, political and economic conditions under which democracy is likely to generate desirable and politically desired objectives (Przeworski 1995). Special emphasis is placed on the interdependence between political and economic reforms. It is argued that the state has an essential role in promoting universal citizenship and in creating conditions for sustained economic growth. What new democracies need above all else to attain legitimacy is efficacy, particularly in the economic arena, but also in the polity (Lipset 1994).

Parties and Other Factors of Democratic Backsliding and Democracy's Failure

While in the 1990s, post-socialist countries democratization appeared as a major issue, Zakaria (1997) warned about the trends opposite to democratic consolidation. This has not only entered the political agenda but also on the agenda of theoretical debates.

Nevertheless, it has only been recently that the issue of democratic backsliding prevailed in academic research. However, it has not only been one term that has been used to entail the trends opposite to democratic consolidation. Among them have been 'a decline of democracy', 'deconsolidation', 'erosion', 'retrogression' and 'recession'. The terminology additionally pluralized with researchers' pointing at a new empirical autocratization wave. Thus, an additional issue evolved—the issue of distinguishing de-democratization/democratic backsliding from autocratization and the idea of illiberal democracy.

It is very difficult to determine an optimal definition of democratic backsliding since there is no clear consensus on a definition of democracy The critical difference is whether it is defined in procedural aspects or (also) in substantive aspects. According to the procedural view, for

an entity to be classified as a 'democracy it is crucial that it has constitution, representative legislature, voting rights, and ballot secrecy, while substantive democracy additionally entails that representatives in legislatures and executives actually hear the demands of the people (including public opinion) and acted upon for their benefit by the passing or modifying of laws, adopting or amending a constitution, and in concrete efforts of executives to implement laws' (Haas 2019, 8–9).

In line with the procedural understanding of democracy, democratic backsliding (erosion, deconsolidation, regression, recession) is 'an incremental process' of substantial erosion of competitive elections, liberal rights to speech and association, and the rule of law and decreasing ability for the opposition to win elections or 'assume office if it wins, established institutions lose the capacity to control the executive, while manifestations of popular protest are repressed by force' (Huq and Ginsburg 2018, 17, 78–169).

In contrast, a decline in democracy in relation to the substantive definition of democracy has been referred to as a loss of democratic quality, changes from liberal democracy to hybrid and to authoritarian regimes (Erdmann 2011). In fact, the term has covered both changes within democracy and in the form of democracy. Based on empirical research involving 88 cases of negative changes in the quality of democracy in 53 countries worldwide in the period between 1974 and 2008, the following main findings were revealed (Erdmann 2011, 34): First, that democratic quality and hybridization outnumber the cases of decline, while breakdowns in democracy have been very rare. Second, young democracies and poorer countries are more prone to decline than older democracies and richer countries, with a few exceptions.

It is important to note that democratic backsliding comes 'from the top'. As Bermeo (2016) puts it, democratic backsliding is a state-led debilitation of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy. However, in practice, it is not a state as such, but there are political parties and political elites that play a major role.

In search of factors impacting the decline of democracy, Scheiring (2021, 602) exposed income inequality as a crucial factor among social requisites for illiberalism. He also pointed at political economy literature showing a growing regional polarization between large towns enjoying positive effects of their participation in global economic networks and deindustrialized rural areas locked out of such fortunes

as well as additional factors of polarization among regions and particular social segments on the axis of losers vs winners of globalization/modernization/deindustrialization (Scheiring 2021, 603).

As in the case of studying democratic consolidation, parties and party systems have been analysed as critical factors in backsliding processes. Based on empirical research on democratization and de-democratization cases in the period between 1960 and 2004, Kapstein and Converse (2008) stressed the role of political institutions in preventing a return to authoritarianism. However, researchers have also pointed at more detailed elaboration of political factors, such as populism, polarization; politicians getting away with violating political norms in the process of norm erosion (Hinterleitner and Sager 2022); elite's use of moral persuasion; citizens' political behaviour, particularly citizens opposing the incumbent regardless of the attractiveness of the challenger (Luo and Przeworski 2020) and elite (mis)use of technological change (Delbert 2019).

Nevertheless, extraordinary factors have become increasingly relevant. Among them have been various international crises—financial and economic, migration and health crises. For example, the V-Dem Institute perceives emergency measures as creating little threat to democracy in just 47 states, but deems 82 states at high (48) or medium (34) risk, with the pandemic response accelerating or emphasizing established trends of democratic decay (Daly 2020). Indeed, patterns of democracy are confirmed to matter in the COVID-19 crisis (Bandelow et al. 2021). Bandelow et al. (2021) stress that not only COVID-19 policy processes differed from everyday policymaking but also governments were forced to establish new institutions and strategies. At the same time, they were bound by their established rules, agencies, actors and history. Institutions matter—they frame what determines which actors and strategies are possible and which particular challenges will be faced.

In the past, it has been recognized that a war (lack of peace) contributes not only to democratic backsliding but also to the freezing of transitions to democracy (e.g., in countries in the territory of former Yugoslavia; Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink 2009). Today, we can recognize far-reaching impacts of the war in Ukraine. However, different kinds of war also seem to be spreading around the globe, which have been very relevant for illiberal tendencies in many countries. In the more recent past, it had been 'the global war on terror' (Crotty 2006; Donohue 2008). Today, it is the 'cultural' war that has been contributing to the development of illiberal political projects with the use of Eurasian civilizationist

narratives in nationalist aspects of illiberalism (Kremmler 2023) as well as policies damaging to particular marginal social groups. The latter has been increasingly linked to illiberalization processes meeting the criteria of autocratization (as shown in the next section).

However, it is of crucial importance to recognize that *democratic backsliding does not inevitably lead to a breakdown of democracy* ending in a hybrid or authoritarian regime. It is particularly valuable to learn when democratic backsliding is successful and what prevents its success. Luo and Przeworski (2020) stress that there are various factors that separately (co)determine the sustainability of democracy, its backsliding and the success of backsliding. For democratic stability (that is, democracy free from the threat of backsliding), it is crucial that opposing politicians are neither very attractive nor very unattractive to citizens. For democratic backsliding, Luo and Przeworski (2020) exposed two critical factors: (1) populism, which attracts citizens by high appeal of the incumbent in knowingly consenting to the erosion of democracy and (2) in circumstances of polarization, when citizens oppose the incumbent regardless of the attractiveness of the challenger (the incumbent can only remain in office by backsliding). Still, not all democratic backsliding cases are successful. Luo and Przeworski (2020) only found successful cases of backsliding where governments didn't need to take unconstitutional or undemocratic steps to achieve the cumulative effect of their secure domination. However, this is only possible if citizens don't react on time and remove the incumbent government by democratic means. It does not come as a surprise that researchers have pointed at the political elite's interest to keep citizens politically uninterested and submissive (Wolin 2017).

While there have been attempts to explain why democracy backslides, the ways in which democracy backslides (the 'how' issue) remain underexplored. Nevertheless, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 143–144) revealed a three-stage model of backsliding: (1) attacking referees; (2) targeting opponents; and (3) changing the rules of the game. Put differently, Riaz and Sohel Rana (2020) found two stages of backsliding. Their model is based on studying Bangladesh, Bolivia, Mali, Turkey, Ukraine and Zambia and includes two main stages: (1) changing the rules of the game (changes in the constitution) and (2) media manipulation. It may be worthwhile to learn about trajectories of democratic backsliding based on more empirical research—as suggested by Wunsch and Blanchard (2023)—and then

develop a more theoretically elaborated systematic analysis of variations in patterns of democratic erosion.

Still, the question remains: Why does democracy fail? In the literature, some factors of democracy's breakdown and hybridization have been noted. Interestingly enough, democracy's inherent characteristic are among them. Indeed, crises of democracy and its self-destructiveness have been pointed out as a factor on its own. Other factors include: (1) multiple but differing forms of democracy's erosion over longer preceding periods; (2) political factors (e.g., democracy's age; constitutional choice—parliamentary vs presidential); (3) unresolved institutional problems, including constitutions promoting gridlock; weak constraints on the executive; (4) proactive anti-democratic alternatives already active prior to breakdown; (5) intense political polarization; (6) core institutions, including the army, infected by polarization; (7) the characteristics and roles of citizens; erosion of democratic political culture, including softened democratic commitment of citizens and political leaders; (8) self-centred pressure groups, political parties led by elites only interested in their re-election; (9) governments that are unable to constrain transnational economic forces; (10) restricting civil and political rights; (11) unaccountable bureaucrats; elected anti-democratic leaders; (12) significant political violence; (13) polarized media offering opposing perspectives to divided public subscribers; (14) losses of legitimacy resulting from economic, security or other crises; (15) economic factors; (16) socio-economic factors (unresolved socioeconomic problems; severe economic inequality); (17) international factors (external non-supporting of pro-democratic actors; colonial heritage); (18) security problems (threat increases the probability of democratic breakdown) (Offe and Schmitter 1996; Sutter 2002; Hagopian 2004; Kapstein and Converse 2008; Chou 2011; Svolik 2019; Masterson 2023; Moss et al. 2023). Indeed, the list of variables expected to explain democracy's breakdown is becoming ever longer as empirical analyses of ever more case studies are revealed. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on exactly which variables make a crucial difference. Rather, the role of context has been increasingly acknowledged as very important.

Illiberal Abuse of Democracy and Autocratization[1]

When linking illiberal abuse of democracy and autocratization, the question arises not only as to how democracy is defined but also how to define autocratization. In analogy with defining democratization, autocratization has recently been defined as a process moving towards its end, which is autocracy. Still, this 'end' needs to be determined.

Several definitions of autocratization can be found in the literature. For example, autocracy has been simply defined as a regime not meeting the criteria for democracy (Svolik 2012, 20) or as rule by other means than democracy (Brooker 2014, 1). More precision can be found in a definition of autocracy as rule in which an executive achieved power through undemocratic means (Geddes et al. 2014, 317). Schattschneider (1942) had already defined *the accumulation of all powers legislative, executive, and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective*, as tyranny. More recently, Wright (2021) summarized three time-varying dimensions of autocracy corresponding with party dominance, military rule and personalism.

Processes leading from democracy in a direction of autocracy have been particularly observed as the decomposing of democracy in its institutional basis. Already in the mid-1990s, Zakaria (1997) had noted the start of a global trend in which democratically elected regimes, often ones that had been re-elected or reaffirmed through referenda, not only routinely ignored constitutional limits on their power and deprived their citizens of basic rights and freedoms but also usurped the power both horizontally (from other branches of the national government) and vertically (from regional and local authorities as well as private businesses and other nongovernmental groups).

In the post-socialist context, Zalan (2016) showed that among the most critical changes in recent tendencies towards autocratization have been: the government's introduction of measures that curb democratic

[1] This part of the text is a substantially developed and amended part of the article Fink-Hafner, Danica. 2020. "The Struggle over Authoritarian Pressures in Slovenia in the Context of the COVID-19 Epidemic." Politički život 18, 20–32. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Danica-Fink-Hafner/publication/346965244_dfh-politicki-zivot-corona/links/5fd4cf6b299bf1408802f211/dfh-politicki-zivot-corona.pdf.

checks and balances; the dismantling of constitutional checks and weakening of other institutions set up to keep an eye on the executive; taking control of the public media and squeezing private media hard; discrediting the opposition and Western critics; creating an enemy or enemies (NGO, immigrants); and rewriting election rules.

These notes show how important it is to not only look at formal but also informal institutions that regulate how political power is assigned and exercised (Eckstein and Gurr 1975). This is the reason we look at autocratization through three main dimensions of political regime variance—political participation, public contestation and executive limitation—developed by Cassani and Tomini (2018, 277). While the authors developed this approach with the main focus on cross-country comparisons, we believe it is also very useful for tracing the dynamics within one country over a studied period of time.

In Table 3.3, we present **dimensions, variables and indicators of regime change towards** autocracy based on Cassani and Tomini (2018) and contributions by several other authors.

There have been some attempts to indicate what transformations may be sufficient to **trigger autocratization**. For example, Waldner and Lust (2018) set a criteria of transformations in at least one and any of the three institutional dimensions presented in Table 3.3 as sufficient to trigger autocratization**.** Still, it is the magnitude of such changes that is critical, not whether these changes will necessarily trigger regime change (Cassani and Tomini 2018, 278). Negative changes in terms of executive constraints, civil and individual liberties, political rights, electoral integrity, competition and participation can vary and may still be considered in the frame of an existing democracy. So, it is not necessary that triggering autocratization automatically leads to the regime change—the actual installation of the new, autocratic regime (the outcome of the processes).

There are still questions that require answers (Lueders and Lust 2018): (1) the question of qualifying when democratic backsliding starts to shape into the autocratization process; (2) the question of measuring the democratic backsliding and autocratization processes; and (3) establishing the threshold in the empirical reality when autocratization actually reaches the final point of regime transformation into autocracy.

Table 3.3 Dimensions, variables and indicators of regime change towards autocracy

Dimensions	*Institutions (formal and informal)*	*Indicators of change towards autocracy*
Political participation	Institutions for leadership selection	Universal suffrage elections for legislative and executive power challenged (including the disrespect of voters' preferences on the ruling coalition-making)
	Institutions regulating political participation	Inclusiveness declining by adopting new regulations
	Protection of institutions	Protection of institutions declining
Public contestation	Institutions regulating public contestation	Free and fair elections challenged; Political rights (freedom of expression, press and organization) declining
	The possibility to publicly oppose and criticize the conduct of government and compete for replacing it	Reducing the enforcement of political rights (freedom of expression, press and organization); Challenged or even declining freedom of the public media
Limitation of the executive	Institutions regulating executive limitations	Weakening of constitutional and other legal limits of executive power by the elected
	Protection of civil and individual liberties and political rights against ruler's abuses	Lack of state institutions' activities protecting civil and individual liberties and political rights against ruler's abuses (such as Ombudsman; Data protection regulator)

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Dimensions	*Institutions (formal and informal)*	*Indicators of change towards autocracy*
	The presence and effectiveness of other executive constraints including horizontal accountability	Real-life executive–legislative institutional balance disturbed; Actual judiciary decisions limiting the executive lacking; Actual constitutional checks—disrespect of constitutional court and decisions of the constitutional court lacking

Sources Author's synthesis based on Dahl (1971), Eckstein and Gurr (1975), Zakaria (1997), Linz and Stepan (1996), O'Donnell (1998), Zalan (2016), Cassani and Tomini (2018); and author's observations

As shown in the previous section, answers to these questions have been partially offered in the literature on democratic backsliding. More recently, it seems that researchers who focus on factors of the autocratic outcome stress the importance of a more complete understanding of agency and also stress the global economic (re)distribution (accelerated accumulation of capital; region-dependant economic model); 'authoritarian' capitalism and national authoritarian legacies (antiliberal cultural legacies such as those inherited from state socialism and other/previous non-democratic regimes) (Scheiring 2021; Sallai and Schnyder 2021).

In terms of agency, it is not only the role of autocratic leaders, their parties and governments that has been acknowledged but also conservative intellectual networks, including selected conservative think tanks and individual intellectuals developing theoretical defences of illiberalism; networks of loyal national capitalists, fused economic and political powers, including electoral clientelism; disinformed citizens and/or citizens 'bribed' by some populist policies. Here also the 'helplessness' of international organizations including the European Union is mentioned (Buzogány and Varga 2018; Mares and Young 2019; Scheiring 2021).

Last but not least, it should be noted that autocratization is not always produced in a gradual process of democratic erosion. Rather, there are

sudden examples taking place in particular circumstances: state emergency. This brings us back to crises and their national management in the interplay between international and national politics. More precisely, extraordinary circumstances make it easier for the authoritarian leaders to declare an emergency and to gain more power over state resources since the nation becomes more susceptible to democratic decline; this reduces the costs for leaders of subverting democratic rule and constraining the freedom of action of the opposition (Lührmann and Rooney 2021). Indeed, a study of sixty democracies from 1974–2016 showed that autocratic episodes are 75% more likely in years with declared states of emergency (Lührmann and Rooney 2021, 630).

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CHAPTER 4

Party System Characteristics and Challenges to Democracy

Introduction

The literature primarily interested in party politics has focused on the relationship between the characteristics of party systems and democracy. In this context, the focus has been especially on party system institutionalization. More recently, party system polarization has been increasingly added to party system characteristics, considered to be factors that impact democracy. Poor party institutionalization and high party system polarization have been found to endanger at least the quality of democracies if not democracy itself. However, it has not always been clear what the relationship between institutionalization and polarization is. Also, it is not clear how other party system characteristics, such as party system stability, freezing, closure and fluidity, are related to either institutionalization or polarization. Furthermore, some party system characteristics have been observed both on the level of the party system and on the level of individual parties. Among these characteristics are institutionalization, polarization (parties' shift to extremism), personalization and populism. The aim of this chapter is to clarify: (1) the relationships among the mentioned characteristics; (2) the relationship between the party system and the party level of these characteristics and (3) the relationship between the studied characteristics and democracy. We start with some introductory theses and then continue by detailing particular party systems and party characteristics and their relationship with democracy.

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The first theses are related to institutionalization. As the history of modern democracy is built on political parties, researchers (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006, 221) expect that institutionalization has important consequences for democratic politics and that democracy may have some deficiencies where parties are less stable mechanisms of representation, accountability and structuring.

Institutionalized parties and party systems have been viewed as necessary conditions for effective democratic governing (Stockton 2001). Institutionalized party systems especially are believed to give rise to democratic qualities of legitimacy and predictability (Lindberg 2007). More precisely, it has been argued that it is the institutionalization of party systems as a whole (and not individual party institutionalization) that matters for democratic survival in Europe, and that achieving a threshold systemic institutionalization ensures avoiding democratic collapse, but over-institutionalization may not be supportive of the survival of democracy (Casal Bértoa 2017).

Based on Western European history, researchers interested in party systems and democracy have stressed the importance of the party system's institutionalization, but recently it has been found that party systems in old democracies may change while democracy remains unchallenged (Casal Bértoa and Weber 2019). Contrary to earlier theses, it has also been found that highly institutionalized party systems may even become problematic for democratic developments when parties become too closely linked to the state and lose touch with developments in a society.

During the last decade, more interest has been focused on party system destabilization as one specific dimension of party system institutionalization. Former simple distinctions between stable Western party systems and unstable party systems in other parts of the world have proved to be wrong as Western party systems have also destabilized during the last decade. Destabilization trends have been emerging in Western Europe as well as across the globe, accompanied by a global trend of declining democracy. Nevertheless, a belief persists that new party systems may be more prone than old party systems to crises.

Research into parties in post-socialist contexts has developed the thesis that post-socialist party systems stabilize while democracy is consolidating (Kitschelt 2009). The research has pointed at many obstacles to party and party system institutionalization (Enyedi 2006). As party system destabilization has recently evolved in parallel with a decline in democracy, the thesis that it is the party system's destabilization in the post-socialist

context that challenges democracy in these countries evolved logically. However, not all post-socialist democracies have joined the trend, and not all democracies backslide at the same time, at the same pace or with the same outcome.

In 2022, for the first time since 2004, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) recorded more autocratic than democratic states, while short- and long-term trends have been negative even when looking solely at more advanced democracies ("Global Report", n.d.). However, not all countries with destabilized party systems have experienced a radical decline in democracy. Furthermore, recent Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data revealed that some older democracies do backslide. It is therefore important to gain a better understanding of whether and under what circumstances party system instability causes democratic backsliding.

Also, it should not be disregarded that party system destabilization and de-democratization trends have evolved in the context of major international crises, particularly international financial and economic crises, migration, environmental and health crises. In the past, comparative research findings have shown that major international economic crises (1929, 1973 and 2008) have not contributed to serious party system destabilization per se, but rather to a restrained change in various party system dimensions (Casal Bértoa and Weber 2019).

The relationship between party system polarization and democracy appears to be less studied. Still, the negative impact of polarization on democracy prevails in literature. More precisely, severe party system polarization is believed to create problems of governance (McCoy et al. 2018). It goes hand in hand with populism (Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Orenstein and Bugarič 2020). In contrast, some studies point to potentially positive impacts of party system polarization. Among these are an increase in party identification, clarification of voters' choices and a rise in election turnout (Lupu 2015; Dalton 2021). In any case, it is important to take into account that polarization has been increasing in the world, including in wealthy nations (Dalton 2021).

To summarize, what appears to be a critical element in discussing the relationship between party system institutionalization and democracy is predictability of the party system's functioning, including both legislative and executive functions in managing societies. When it comes to party system polarization, more concern is devoted to governability and effective steering of a particular society due to sharp political divisions.

A summary of more globally sensitive research findings includes three main theses: (1) the average level of democratization on a particular continent may remain largely unchanged over a long stretch of time; (2) there is significant variation across country cases and (3) the party system is just one of many factors that have an impact on democracy (Arriola et al. 2023).

Besides an overview of currently available findings on the relationship between party system characteristics and democracy, more detailed definitions of party system characteristics and suggestions for their measurement are needed in order to prepare a methodology for the case study research. The next sections are devoted to that goal.

Party System and Party Institutionalization

Party System Institutionalization

A party system is usually understood as 'a system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition' (Sartori 1976, 39). As it is about parties—which may change or even disappear, and new parties may enter the party arena—party systems are also dynamic. The term 'institutionalisation' has been developed to describe the characteristics of one particular party system. However, institutionalization has been associated with both the predictability of a party and the party system functioning.

As a rule, the institutionalization of party systems is believed to be a rather lengthy process in which fluid party systems evolve into a stable party system. However, Stockton (2001) has warned against such a simplistic definition of party and party system institutionalization, stressing that most analyses in this field have been divided by regional investigation. His cross-national comparison has revealed a curvilinear relationship between institutionalization and consolidation. Stockton pointed at Taiwan's path to consolidation, which has been predicated on a pattern very similar to those taken by Latin American cases, and at the case of South Korea, which theoretically should not be as close to consolidation as it was at the time of analysis. There are also cases showing that institutionalization does not necessarily occur over an extended period—as Lindberg (2007) showed in the case of Africa and as can be seen in some post-socialist countries, examples being the Croatian (Čular 2004), Hungarian and Czech party systems (Toole 2000).

Even more relevant for research in this book is that in the past, a thesis also evolved on a critical difference between Western and post-socialist party systems. The difference was believed to be in the level of institutionalization: in late democracies, party systems were characterized as well established, and in third-wave democracies, party systems were viewed as weakly institutionalized (Mainwaring 1988). However, there have been considerable differences among post-socialist countries, too (Casal Bértoa 2014). Also, both Western and post-socialist party systems have become destabilized.

Individual Party Institutionalization

It is logical that a party system cannot be institutionalized unless a sufficient share of relevant parties is institutionalized. But when can a party be considered to be institutionalized? The answer still very much relies on Huntington's (1968) criteria of institutionalization (adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence), which have been applied in empirical examination of the institutionalization of parties (Dix 1992).

The autonomy of parties and, indirectly, of party systems is related to problems of clientelism (and political corruption). At the core of clientelism is the exchange between the party in power and the 'clientele', in which the clientele receives public resources and/or positions in exchange for political support. This phenomenon is sometimes also called patronage.

Authors have used the qualification of a party's 'strength' (e.g. Mainwaring and Scully 1995a) when referring to the characteristics of parties. But what is party strength? Looking into party literature, the core understanding is that it is the organizational strength of a party. In that sense, Panebianco (1988, 58–59) distinguishes between weak and strong parties. However, as a rule, the party strength is not defined; rather, the discourse focuses on party institutionalization (e.g. Mainwaring and Scully 1995a; Stokes 1999).

According to Panebianco's ideal model of organizational evolution, based on the previous work of Michels and Pizzorno, a party goes through three phases: genesis, institutionalization and maturity (Panebianco 1988, 17–20). Furthermore, Panebianco (1988, 58–59) offered the idea of various degrees of party institutionalization based on: (1) the degree of development of the central extra-parliamentary organization; (2) the degree of homogeneity of organizations on the same

hierarchical level; (3) the regularity and number of financial sources; (4) relations with external collateral organizations (party autonomy) and (5) the degree of correspondence between a party's statutory norms and the actual power structure.

In this frame, strong parties are expected to increase the predictability of their behaviour (Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019), and in so doing contribute to party system predictability.

Here, the time factor again comes in. The finding from Latin America (Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019) is especially relevant from the time perspective: the ancestral party origin in previous regimes has been found to have a large impact on organizational strength.

Party and Party System Institutionalization in Relation to Democracy

In spite of the party's organizational strength not guaranteeing the stability of a party system, strong parties are factors of predictability and by that may contribute to democratic processes (Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019). Particularly in new democracies, strong party organizations remain important factors of democracy (Tavits 2012). However, this relationship is not straightforward.

On the one hand, researchers interested in party systems and democracy have stressed the importance of the party system institutionalization present in Western Europe (and presumably lacking in post-socialist contexts). On the other hand, party systems in old democracies have been changing while democracy remains unchallenged (Casal Bértoa and Weber 2019). However, recent V-Dem data revealed that some older democracies do backslide. Furthermore, other studies have shown that: (1) the average level of democratization on a particular continent may remain largely unchanged over a long stretch of time, while (2) there is significant variation across country cases and (3) the party system is just one of many factors impacting democracy (Arriola et al. 2023).

However, Hungary (with a high level of party system institutionalization) and Poland (with a highly fragmented and volatile party system) stand out with illiberal trends. Among other post-socialist countries, Croatia serves as an example of party institutionalization, which clearly has a negative impact on democratization. More precisely, in Croatia, the institutionalized party system during the 1990s went hand in hand with the freezing of democracy.

The institutionalization of parties is also linked to their organizational autonomy. There are several ways in which party autonomy is endangered. At its core, it is a form of corruption—the abuse of power for private gain. When it becomes a substantial political practice, clientelism damages not only parties but also party systems. This is because parties' clientelism always serves to acquire or maintain power in political competition while parties misuse the allocation of public goods and services for this purpose. Political corruption damages government efficiency and trust in the political system (Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston 2017). However, corruption is not only concentrated in developing nations. Kubbe (2017) points to frequent scandals as an illustration that corruption is a serious problem in nearly all European Union states and that it impacts Europe's citizens' concern about politics. A whole other level of the role of money and wealthy individuals in politics can be found in the United States, and probably in some other parts of the world, too.

Party System Stabilization as a Dimension of Institutionalization

Stability in the rules and the nature of inter-party competition in the party system is believed to be the most important property of an institutionalized party system (Mainwaring and Scully 1995b; Meleshevich 2007). However, stability of the party system is a rather complex dimension of party system institutionalization.

When analysing post-WWII Western party system development, scholars have recognized not only processes of stabilization, but also the phenomenon of the freezing of party systems. The thesis on the freezing of party systems was to some extent challenged by the finding that European party systems differed in terms of electoral volatility—i.e. rates of net change in the electorate. While some of the party systems which had traditionally been considered volatile had become less so, others had changed into highly volatile party systems (Pedersen 1979).

East European party politics continues generally to be characterized by instability and unpredictability at all levels (Casal Bértoa 2013). Here, again, big differences exist. For example, Hungary experienced an early freezing of the party system during the 1990s, while Slovenia's party system has been rather dynamic and inclusive of new political parties since the transition to democracy.

However, the openness of the party system to regular entry of ever-new political parties in a short time span reflects a low degree of stability and

a low level of institutionalization. This is especially critical if new political parties are influential political forces with a very short existence (Meleshevich 2007). This phenomenon has opened a window for a whole new subset of party literature focusing on new political parties entering party systems (e.g. Sikk 2005; Tavits 2008; Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015) and on party survival (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2018). The mortality rate among new parties has been very high, especially when they participate in government. This is why Deschouwer (2017) compares new parties to canaries in a coalmine: they are very good indicators of the malaise within democratic governance, but so far not the remedy.

A combination of various indicators of party system stability has been suggested for empirical research. Among them are the total number of parties; the absolute and relative number of new parties at each election; the absolute and relative number of parties voted out; the share of seats of the two largest parties and the share of legislative seat volatility (Lindberg 2007).

The opposite of stability is fluidity of party systems. Party system fluidity is determined by a high number and high turnover of parties, which is accentuated with successive elections (Lindberg 2007). This definition of a fluid party system resonates with Slovenia's party system since the early elections in 2011.

Indeed, time has been exposed as a relevant variable. A study of the first decade after the transition in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic showed that the stabilization of party systems in new democracies may not be a lengthy process as is commonly assumed, and that there are institutional and behavioural factors that impact the party system's stabilization. Among them are the electoral system design and consequent patterns of elite behaviour, and the fact that stabilization not only occurs in spite of ongoing volatility in party-voter alignments, but actually serves to reduce it (Toole 2000).

Another dimension of stability is programmatic stability. The empirical analysis has shown that the combination of party replacement and programmatic instability shapes patterns of party competition (Borbáth 2021). Borbáth determined four ideal types of party system instability based on the interaction between the party replacement and the programmatic instability: empty labels, general instability, ephemeral parties and general stability.

Electoral volatility may also be assumed to be an indicator of party system instability. It is interesting that in Central and Eastern Europe

it was found that electoral volatility follows from, rather than leads to, changes in the supply of parties (Tavits 2008). This points to elites' responsibility for instability in the early stages of party system development and not so much to voters' behaviour.

The instability thesis has gained additional purchase with the phenomenon of a 'hurricane season' (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015) characterized by numerous new political parties emerging in Central and Eastern Europe after the 2008 financial and economic crisis. This phenomenon has not stopped an illiberal trend in either a country with high party system institutionalization (Hungary) or a country with a highly fragmented and volatile party system (Poland). In the context of war during the 1990s, party system institutionalization led to the freezing of democracy (e.g. Croatia). Similarly, the fluidity of party systems may either contribute to democracy (by increasing competitiveness, participation and representation) or prevent institutionalization and the development of strong social roots (Lindberg 2007).

Government Formation and Party System Closure

In order to fully grasp party system institutionalization, characteristics of government formation are added as a special dimension of party system institutionalization. At its core, party system closure is about the stability of relations between parties that leads to government formation (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2021). According to Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2021), characteristics of government formation may be determined by democratic age and birth, party institutionalization, number of parties and fragmentation and polarization. However, other researchers have pointed out that government stability can only be fully understood by taking into account that it is interactively determined by whole constellations of party attributes (Grotz and Weber 2012).

This thesis is particularly relevant in the current context, where in shaken party systems it has become very difficult to form governments. The issue is not only including parties with very different ideologies and political programmes, but also the complicated and lengthy process of government formation, difficulties in government functioning and the related short lives of such government coalitions. All these phenomena may negatively affect the steering of societies.

Government Formation and Democracy

Based on empirical research including almost all democracies that existed between 1946 and 1999, Cheibub et al. (2004) found that minority governments are not less successful legislatively than majority coalitions, and that the coalition status of the government has no impact on the survival of democracy in either system.

However, in the context of party system destabilization and polarization, formation of a coalition government is politically unpredictable. So is such governments' policymaking, which may not only shake trust in individual coalition parties, but also lead to major governance problems and the related challenge to voters' trust in political parties and institutions in general. All these factors may damage democracy per se while creating fertile ground for populism.

Personalization—The Opposite to Institutionalization

Personalization is the opposite phenomenon to institutionalization. It relates to issues of party autonomy and identity. Essentially, institutionalization is 'the process by which an organization incorporates its founders' values and aims' (Panebianco 1988, 53). According to Panebianco, through the institutionalization process, an organization loses its character as a (founders') 'tool' and the organization becomes a value in itself.

Personalization is also related to the phenomenon of charisma. Charisma is 'the authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership' and can be 'exercised by the prophet or—in the field of politics—by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the political party leader' (Weber 1946, 4–5). Devotion to the charismatic leader means that 'the leader is personally recognized …as the leader of men' (Weber 1946, 4–5). So, charismatic leaders are dominant based not on tradition or statute, but rather on followers' belief in such a leader. In contrast, the process of party institutionalization is a process of building control of the personal executive staff and the material implements of administration.

A charismatic party is essentially a vehicle for a charismatic leader, although the charismatic leader does not necessarily create the party in

its early stages. It reflects the primary role of a political leader in a political environment where the party and party politics are dominated by individual politicians' personality and actions (Frantz et al. 2021).

The time factor also matters in party development. Institutionalization can be understood as the second stage of a three-phase ideal model of party development: involving genesis, institutionalization and maturity (Panebianco 1988, 19–20). Institutionalization is actually the party's organizational development, which is expected to ensure the organizational basis for the long-term survival of the party. However, the natural history of a particular party may differ from the model and may even show radical shifts in the direction of change. Nevertheless, Panebianco's model helps understand that a party is at first a social movement type of organization in which the leaders have broad freedom of action. It is a system of solidarity, characterized by a manifest ideology and the goal to achieve a common cause with a strategy of domination of the environment. The process of institutionalization in the model leads to the third phase in which the party as an organization becomes a system of interests, and the main goal becomes the organization's survival and counterbalancing of particular interests. In this process, ideology remains latent while within the organization selective incentives prevail (professional participation) and leaders have restricted freedom of movement.

Contrary to the theoretical expectations in Panebianco's ideal model, political parties have recently been increasingly opting for personalization. This has been evolving in spite of theoretical warnings that political parties 'must institutionalize to a certain in extent in order to survive' (Panebianco 1988, 54–55). In fact, political parties somewhat 'gamble' in search of an optimal relationship between personalization and institutionalization.

Empirical research has recently confirmed the intuitive thesis that democratic politics is growing more personalistic (Frantz et al. 2021). The personalization of parties is expressed in particular forms of the party name and logo. The critical situation comes when voting is 'a mere popularity contest among personalities rather than being about issues that need to be addressed', as Sutter (2002, 28) puts it. It is a situation where competition is not about ideas for solving social problems, which is expected to be inherent in political parties.

With party personalization, issues of individual politicians' characteristics become extraordinarily important. It is not just that all personalities who want to play leading roles in politics need to have necessary qualities

and skills. Lowenthal and Bitar (2015, 15) reveal the need for luck besides skill when politicians make critical decisions. All this has also proved to be valid for successful economic entrepreneurs entering into politics.

With personalization, the question also arises as to what role the party plays in relation to political leaders. Political parties may recruit publicly recognizable personalities (film actors, singers, sports stars, comedians, entrepreneurs) to support their own likeability. However, it is not simply that political parties may use individual personalities in party competition for electoral votes: political parties may also be misused by strong individuals in the process of candidate selection, election of candidates and filling government and parliament offices. Publicly recognizable personalities or (not necessarily previously publicly visible) entrepreneurs may pursue their personal political ambitions by establishing their own personalized political parties.

Personalization has also been linked to the phenomenon of presidentialization (Poguntke and Webb 2005), which include both the increasing role of personalized party leadership and the process of centralization of power within a party. This resonates with Michels' iron law of party oligarchization (Michels 1915, 11) while also tackling the issue of internal party democracy, which has been under-researched for a rather long time.

Personalization, Presidentialization and Democracy

Researchers have warned about three negative sides to the personalization phenomenon. Firstly, personalization in the implementation of the political party supply function 'may cause problems and dangers to both parties themselves as well as the democratic order' (Hofmeister 2022, 34). Secondly, while this phenomenon seemingly helps achieve better electoral presentation of the party, it adds to poor recognizability of party politics and feeds back into anti-party attitudes (Poguntke and Webb 2005). Thirdly, greater personalism is associated with several negative phenomena such as higher levels of populism, a higher probability of democratic erosion and greater political polarization (Frantz et al. 2021).

Personalization brings a greater impact of a particular personality on politics. This is especially critical when a politician has personality traits that may present a danger to democracy. Psychologists have revealed the Big Five trait domains, which are highly stable through the lifecycle and are believed to affect political judgements and how individuals engage with their environments (Gerber et al. 2011). The domains are

extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (sometimes referred to by its opposite, neuroticism) and openness to experience (Gerber et al. 2011). Here a 'dark triad'—Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy—is exposed (Aichholzer and Willman 2020; Tilley 2021). However, it is not only about the politician inserting him/herself into political positions: there is variation in what people want a political leader to look like (Emamzadeh 2020). Also, party supporters' personality characteristics differ among political parties (Limited 2016; 'The 16 Personality Types and Political Preference' 2023).

Personalization and presidentialization have generally been found to be damaging for democracy (Poguntke and Webb 2005). Leaders' creation of their own political parties is a key sign of impending personalization, and the election of such leaders is a red flag for democracy (Frantz et al. 2021).

Party Social Rooting—An Indicator of Party Institutionalization

Modern parties are important institutions of representation, but the question is—who do they represent? In theory, the citizens in modern democracies are represented by parties (Sartori 1976, 24). However, with increasing problems of party representation, parties' social roots have been questioned. A reduction in voter identification with parties, loss of trust and membership and lower turnout have been exposed as indicators of this macro problem, together with the phenomenon of new and anti-establishment parties of various types. Nevertheless, the issue of party financing should also not be disregarded. This brings us also to party models.

Based on Western experiences, several historical party models have been revealed based on the relationship between society and the state, with a historical tendency to move from society to the state (Katz and Mair 1995). These authors exposed the (at that time) new party model, the cartel party, which functions as a set of parties heavily dependent on state resources and acting as agents of the party state while taking care of their own collective survival. This model has been especially critical in Europe, which has favoured state party financing for a rather long time.

As shown in the case of party models, time is a relevant variable in the understanding of party social roots, but it is also relevant for understanding how party organization matters. At least two ways of linking time and party organization can be found in the literature.

Firstly, a party's organization, including its societal linkages, can only be developed over time (Panebianco 1988). Here, the party's status in relation to the executive also matters, since parties in long-term opposition have more time to develop the party organization than parties in the executive (Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019). So, the question is whether the party occupying the executive position is better off due to its easier access to public resources than a party in opposition with more time to develop linkages with society.

Secondly, there are interesting aspects of time in the context of studying transitions to democracy. Here, both kinds of party organization may matter—both the reformed old and new political parties. There are mixed findings about the impact of parties from an authoritarian regime on party system institutionalization. On the one hand, Ribeiro and Locatelli (2019) show that an ancestral party origin in previous regimes has a significant positive impact on the party's organizational strength. On the other hand, parties from a socialist regime have very different success (Bukowski and Racz 1999), and so various impacts on post-authoritarian party systems.

All in all, we can again point to the notion that context matters.

Party Social Roots and Democracy

Mair (2005) goes more into detail showing the link between the changing character of political parties and the changing character of democracy. He reveals the political parties' contribution to the trend of steadily stripping a democracy of its popular components, leading to a notion of democracy without demos. Not only does he find the cause of such negative trends in democracy political parties' failure, but democracy itself is exposed for tending to adapt and change to these party failings. These phenomena have evolved into a vicious circle of parties steadily becoming weaker and democracy becoming even more stripped down in many Western democracies. It appears that a very similar phenomenon has been happening in post-socialist countries, but in a shorter time.

Polarization and Populism

Polarization is 'a process whereby the normal multiplicity of differences in a society increasingly align along a single dimension and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of "Us" versus "Them"' (McCoy et al. 2018). Extreme polarization even brings about the growth of 'Us' versus 'Them', making a sharp distinction between 'friends' and 'enemies' and the related need to protect one's way of life from 'the enemy' (Svolik 2019).

McCoy et al. (2018) stress that severe polarization brings about a particular political dynamic composed of increasing distrust and an inability to search for common solutions in the process of governing. Such a dynamic further causes increasing distrust and problems in communication between the two polarized blocks of parties.

The question is, why do parties move to extreme positions? Based on party manifesto analysis, Wagner (2012) lists the following circumstances: (1) the relatively small size of a party's vote share; (2) taking the extreme position on a particular issue makes the party more distinctive from other parties and (3) other parties fail to emphasize the issue. Although other authors have also looked at other factors, such as income inequality and electoral systems, no linear causal relationships have been found. However, an analysis of a cross-national dataset of party polarization, income inequality and electoral institutions in 24 advanced democracies between 1960 and 2011 revealed that greater income inequality under permissive electoral systems contributes to growing party polarization (Han 2015).

There is a particular psychology of polarization that underlines the process of polarization. In case of severe polarization, the tribal nature of intergroup dynamics enhances group members' loyalty to their group and a strongly biased or prejudiced attitude against the other group, which enables 'mechanisms of dehumanization, depersonalization, and stereotyping [which] all contribute to the emotional loathing, fear, and distrust of the out-partisans' (McCoy et al. 2018, 23). This affective dimension of severe polarization also impacts the perceived legitimacy of political systems and leaders, since they are judged according to moral convictions related to particular issues or leaders when they fail to deliver moralized ends (McCoy et al. 2018, 19, 25).

Psychological mechanisms may be mass- or elite-led and start from the political mobilization of major groups in society based on newly

constructed cleavages to achieve fundamental changes in structures, institutions and power relations (McCoy et al. 2018, 22). A particular discourse is used for deepening social cleavages and/or resentments using both rhetoric and symbols.

Polarization has undoubtedly been favoured by the rise of populist parties of various prevalent ideological tendencies on the left-right continuum. This is because polarization is at the core of populist ideologies. It is based on the alleged antagonism between the people (presented positively as a homogeneous collective—e.g. of underdogs, nation or other kind of common denominator in a particular context) and the elite (presented negatively—e.g. as corrupt, immoral, a group of people's enemies) (Canovan 1984, 15–17; Sartori 1987, 22; Fink-Hafner 2019, 11–13).

In spite of quite profound research findings on polarization, there is no consensus on measures used for party system polarization. While the common ground of the concept of polarization is some kind of ideological dispersion of parties' positions in the frame of electoral competition, many specific measurements have been in use and their combination is recommended (Schmitt and Franzmann 2020).

Polarization, Populism and Democracy

With polarization, politics loses its rationality, pragmatism and tolerance and increasingly focuses on the struggle between 'friends' and 'enemies'. The political elite thus tends to disregard critical social and economic issues in a particular society and further contribute to problems of governability and social cohesion. Populism—which arises from problems in representation by the established political parties—can unleash its destructive effects when political parties do not react in time to the rise of populist parties or leaders and win back the trust of a larger electorate (Hofmeister 2022, 11–13).

Among the negative outcomes for democracy are political gridlocks, which disable governing; discontinuity of policies after a change in government, which damages overall socio-economic development; socio-spatial disintegration of a society and increasing hostility and even violence among social groups, which may even lead to the collapse of democracy (McCoy et al. 2018, 19).

In contrast, Svolik (2019), for example, does not simply believe that the politics and discourse of opposition and the social-psychological intergroup conflict dynamics produced by this alignment are a main source of the risks polarization generates for democracy: rather, he recognizes that this can also produce opportunities for democracy. So, he suggests the following three possible negative outcomes for democracy: gridlock and careening; democratic erosion or collapse under new elites and dominant groups; and democratic erosion or collapse with old elites and dominant groups; and one possible positive outcome, reformed democracy.

However, before violent episodes, political parties may threaten democracy if relevant political parties weaken democratic institutions (Daly and Jones 2020). An even more direct threat to democracy may be the size/relevance of anti-system parties (Sartori 1999, 329, 331, 336).

The Role of Actors

Scholars studying democratization processes have revealed that such processes are not automatic. Actors' activities are required to actually make a change (Linz 1990). Besides constitutional dimensions, behavioural and attitudinal dimensions matter for democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996, 14). It is very relevant for our research that political parties are not the only kind of actors recognized when studying democracy. Among important actors, a free and lively civil society was particularly noted. The term covers self-organizing and relatively autonomous groups, social movements and individuals' attempt to articulate values, to create associations and solidarities and to advance their interests (Linz and Stepan 1996, 17). As a different but complementary set of actors, a relatively autonomous political society has been recognized. This includes political actors competing for the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus. A robust civil society is expected to have the capacity to generate political alternatives and to monitor the government and state. This does not only mean that such actors help democratization: they are critical in the search for an alternative when political parties, as institutions, lose the ability to represent—that is, the ability to deal with crucial social and economic issues. Last but not least, a robust civil society is critical in resisting reversals of democracy.

However, collective actors are not the only category of actors that matter in political processes. Many such processes could not take place without the micro-level actors, particularly citizens/voters and partisans.

So, the question is how political parties and political elites (re)act, and what citizens and partisans' (re)actions are.

Parties, Elites and Partisans

Parties' reactions to political representation problems may include various strategies, such as: (1) developing extremist parties, which exploit citizens feeling alienated from politicians; (2) personalizing party politics and enhancing individual political leaders' roles; (3) enhancing polarization (polarization increases voter turnout); (4) turning to direct communication channels between citizens and the government (instrumentalizing private mass media, social surveys, social media, (mis)-use of new technologies) and (5) shifting from socio-economic issues, national-global cleavages and ideological differences to socio-cultural issues.

In such a context, the elite's commitment to democracy is not automatic. Yet it is precisely political elites' commitment to democracy that can help overcome otherwise adverse conditions in constructing democracy (Lijphart 1977). Without political elites' commitment to democracy, prospects for democracy are poor (Dahl 1971).

However, it should not be forgotten that political parties, even in times of shrinking party membership, rely on their partisans—and they are not homogeneous and simple followers. Rather, they, too, have a role to play, and this is not automatically a pro-democratic role.

Recently, it has become obvious that in certain circumstances partisans tolerate a party leader subverting democratic norms. This may happen in the form of executive aggrandizement, which leads to democratic backsliding. Based on the experiment held in the United States and Canada, Gidengil et al. (2021) showed that partisans in both countries are willing to choose candidates who will empower the executive in relation to other powers. It is interesting that such fundings have proved to be valid regardless of party. According to Gidengil et al. (2021), the reasons for such behaviour by partisans may be multiple. Firstly, there may be strategy—partisans may condone executive aggrandizement in order to advantage their party and disadvantage the opponent in the context of affective polarization. Secondly, there may be ideological reasons—partisans may

be willing to trade democratic norms in pursuit of their ideological agenda.

Nevertheless, a study has shown that gradual erosion frequently culminates in democratic breakdown, but not always (Laebens and Lührmann 2021). Based on in-depth case studies involving substantial democratic erosion where democracy did not break down, the accountability mechanism was found to play a role in halting democratic regression. However, the accountability mechanism (horizontal accountability in the form of parliamentary and judicial oversight; diagonal accountability in the form of pressures from civil society and the media; vertical accountability in the form of electoral competition between and within parties) appeared to be of critical importance. It has been effective in halting the erosion of democracy in very particular circumstances, when institutional constraints (such as presidential term limits or judicial independence) and contextual factors (in particular economic downturns and public outrage about corruption scandals) worked together to create simultaneous pressure on the incumbents from civil society and from vertical or horizontal accountability actors.

Citizens

Citizens' reactions to political representation problems may also include various strategies, such as: (1) abstaining from a vote (many citizens believe it makes no difference who they vote for and therefore do not participate in voting); (2) turning from parties to personalities (supporting parties for their leaders, voting for personalistic parties); (3) supporting newly founded parties and (4) turning to protest politics, social movements and interest group activities.

Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which voters are willing to give priority to partisan interests over democratic principles. Such circumstances may be a combined polarization of both parties (polarization among party elites) and voters (McCoy et al. 2018; Svolik 2019). In fact, polarization reinforces ideological voting (Lachat 2008). Another circumstance in which citizens/voters tolerate non-democratic or even anti-democratic parties and leaders may be found, for example, in Latin America. Citizens in Latin America may be willing to delegate the executive (President) additional authority at the expense of democratic principles (Singer 2018). Based on survey data from Latin America, Singer

(2018) shows that reasons for such citizens' behaviour may be socio-economic. More precisely, the analysis revealed that: citizens' (1) vote for the ruling party in the previous election and (2) perceptions that the economy is strong are linked to citizens' (1) liking democracy, (2) opposing coups and (3) supporting limits on critical actors and opposition parties, as well as (4) being willing to let the President bypass the legislature and court. Singer's (2018) research therefore points to the need for a complex understanding of the breakdown of democracy. The author believes that two kinds of conditions need to be taken into account in analysis: (1) the conditions under which losers of political and economic processes are satisfied with the process which led to their defeat; and (2) conditions under which winners tolerate electoral and institutional challenges and are willing to protect space for public criticism.

To conclude, a distinction must be made between the optimal conditions for democratization and optimal strategies of actors (Bunce 2003). However, it should not be forgotten that there are other relevant actors besides political parties (particularly citizens), and that contextual factors of democracy—socio-economic structures, demographic and geopolitical realities, deep national histories and cultures—matter (Lowenthal and Bitar 2015) for real-life political processes in particular and democracy in general.

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CHAPTER 5

Tracing Changes in Parties, Party Systems, Context and Democracy

Introduction

As we have shown in previous chapters, political parties are only one segment of actors relevant for democracy and party systems are just one segment of political structures that co-determine the fluidity of democracy. On the one hand, democracy literature stresses that parties and party systems may contribute to democratization (more precisely, the transition to democracy and its consolidation). On the other hand, party literature stresses that party system characteristics cause democratic backsliding. In our research, we analyse the role of parties and party systems in determining the characteristics of democracy from a broader perspective, combining analysis of the party factor with analysis of contextual factors of democracy. We start from the finding that real-life processes cannot be understood without tracing the fluidity of democracy and without taking into account factors that affect democracy beyond elections and parties (Cianetti and Hanley 2021).

In this research, democracy is understood as a fluid phenomenon. This means that we expect variations in democracy from democratic transition to consolidation, deconsolidation and backsliding within a particular country. Based on the analysis of Slovenia's development from the transition to democracy (1988–1990) to the establishment of the new government resulting from the 2022 parliamentary elections, we seek to contribute to the literature on the relationship between party system dynamics and democracy's fluidity while taking into account contextual

D. Fink-Hafner, *Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54949-6_5

factors. We believe this is important since some party politics authors have been increasingly stressing the need to take into account the context of party phenomena (see, for example, Randall and Svåsand 2002; Lawson 2010; Dargent and Muñoz 2011; Osei 2013; Arriola et al. 2023).

We take a broader perspective on the context: national as well as beyond the national framework. We pay particular attention to a broader representative role of parties that goes beyond parties as organizations competing at elections and party systems as products of election results. Last but not least, we take into account the time factor, which relates to party dynamics (dynamics of parties and party system), democracy's dynamics and the relationship between the party and democracy's dynamics. By using such an approach, we react to criticisms of narrowly focusing on populism, nationalism, radicalism, elections, party fragmentation, corruption, weak civil society and a weak public sphere in search of understanding threats to democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2021).

Research Goal and Research Questions

The main research goal is to systematically reveal the relationships between parties and democracy in general, and party systems and democracy in particular.

Since Slovenia has rather unexpectedly experienced a radical and short-lived democratic backsliding, the burning research question is: What enables the overlap of party system characteristics with a decline in democracy? However, in line with the overall aim of the book presented in the Introduction, we shall answer a broader range of research sub-questions: To what extent do contextual variations matter when studying the relationship between party system characteristics and democracy? Does the party system institutionalization matter? Does the persistence of parties with roots in the previous regime matter? Does the polar structure of the party system matter? Do answers to these questions differ at various points in time?

In order to answer the research questions thoroughly, we analysed Slovenia in the period since the establishment of the first oppositional parties in the frame of the old regime (1988) until the 2022 parliamentary elections.

Slovenia Case Study

In the case study, we shall analyse the relations between parties and a party system on the one hand, and democracy on the other. In this research, we combine findings from literature on transition to democracy, the consolidation of democracy, democratic backsliding and party politics literature presented in previous chapters. A dynamic research approach is systematically integrated into the research by revealing changes in parties, party systems, democracy and the changing relationships among them in a dynamic context.

Slovenia serves as a very good case for exploring potential answers to under-researched issues in order to contribute to the development of further large-scale comparative research. Beside the main arguments presented in the Introduction, we now point to a more exhaustive argumentation for the relevance of Slovenia's case study.

First, Slovenia is particularly interesting as it has been a successful democracy in comparison to most post-socialist countries, seemingly following a linear movement from transition to democracy to democratic consolidation and consolidated democracy.

Second, Slovenia is a rather exceptional example of a stable institutional context since 1991. Not only that, the stable institutional context of a parliamentary democracy combined with proportional representation has been considered to be supportive of democratic development (Linz 1990; Lijphart 2000). The institutional stability also allows for a more robust longitudinal analysis of a changing party system as well as a broader socio-economic and international context.

Third, the supportive socio-economic starting point of transition and successfully managed socio-economic policies without shock therapy during the first decade in Slovenia provided a good basis for the consolidation of democracy.

Fourth, Slovenia is exceptional not only in terms of transitional political gradualism but also in regard to economic gradualism. Economic gradualism entailed slow privatization processes (which are still not complete) as well as avoidance of shock therapy in the process of early capitalist developments.

Fifth, in comparison to post-socialist Europe (Vachudova 2021), Slovenia's party system (understood as a system of interactions formed by inter-party interactions) has been dynamic since its establishment, while at

the same time quite a high-quality democracy has persisted continuously for three decades.

Sixth, Slovenia is also interesting as an example of a long-term low party system institutionalization and high-quality democracy, in contrast to Hungary's case of a high party system institutionalization and democratic backsliding (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2021).

Seventh, the Slovenian experience captures a fluid pattern of democracy showing that democratic backsliding may not be a linear process from democracy to an authoritarian system. Rather, it may be limited to a short period of time and reversed.

Eighth, Slovenia stands out with the reformed ruling party of the old regime, which has adapted to the democratized milieu without being able to prevail in the political arena. In addition, one of the other former socio-political organizations from the old regime (former regime party youth organization) very successfully evolved into the leading centre-left liberal party, dominating Slovenia's politics over the first decade after the transition.

Ninth, Slovenia has stood out from other post-socialist countries with strong civil society actors, particularly trade unions (which also succeeded in pressuring for the re-establishing of neo-corporatist arrangements) and other civil society organizations (Stanojević 2010, 2012; Fink-Hafner et al. 2015).

Tracing Changes in Democracy

In our research on the flow of democracy, we use data measured by various indexes, particularly V-Dem data. V-Dem data have been found to be particularly valuable (Coppedge et al. 2020), because they are especially sensitive to different degrees of democracy (Vaccaro 2021).

Tracing Contextual Characteristics

As already noted in theoretical chapters, contextual characteristics have been exposed as an important group of factors impacting on democracy.

The context-centred literature is predominantly concerned with structures and other contextual variables. These have included institutional pasts, authoritarian political legacies, the strength of civil society, state capacity, path dependency, critical junctures, international dynamics and structural contexts, which constrain actors' behaviour (Arriola et al. 2023,

9–10). Researchers have not noted that poverty and economic stagnation are not supportive of democratization and the consolidation of democracy in post-socialist countries (Przeworski et al. 1996). Socio-economic, demographic, international and attitudinal factors may also help explain the rise of contentiousness (Arriola et al. 2023, 9–10).

Alongside institutions, in a narrow sense, systems of representation, which impact on the societal (re)distribution of resources and levels of economic equality, also matter (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink 2009; Waldner and Lust 2018). However, it is not clear how and when rising socio-economic inequalities become a critical factor impacting on problems of political representation in general, and party/government-level problems in particular.

External factors matter for democracy. In the literature, they have been recognized as a structural factor and context that may not be the cause of democratization but may play a role in such processes (Schmitter 1996; Whitehead 1996; Burnell 2011). External factors may come in the form of exogenous shocks (such as the 2008 international financial and economic crisis, the international migration crisis, the COVID-19 international health crisis and wars). Indeed, the hypothetical expectation that economic crises exert a critical impact on party systems and hence on democracy appeared quite convincing. However, comparative research findings have shown that major international economic crises (1929, 1973 and 2008) have not contributed to serious party system destabilization per se, but rather to a 'restrained change' in various party system dimensions (Casal Bértoa and Weber 2019).

Nevertheless, some externally evolving crises may indeed open a window of opportunity for a global radical change in the mode of governing. This happened in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic globally by, among other things, reducing some key elements of liberal democracy (Brown et al. 2020).

Indeed, the global rise of leaders with ***autocratic tendencies*** and a trend of gradual erosion of democratic institutions in various parts of the world, including the West—the most influential case being the United States—have evolved into an external factor in itself (Haggard and Kaufman 2021).

V-Dem comparative research into democracy has also highlighted the recent escalation of polarization (reaching toxic levels in 40 countries), which has contributed to the changing nature of autocratization,

including autocratic governments' increasing use of misinformation to shape domestic and international opinion in their favour.

Researchers also point to dramatically ***increased global links*** over the past three decades, which have had a net positive ideational effect on democratization while also providing resources to various actors within particular countries (Arriola et al. 2023, 9–10). However, the promotion of democracy as an external tool of Western countries, including the EU (Lloyd 2010), has only been one side of the coin of external interference. There has also been external support for actors of democratic backsliding due to the prioritization of external actors' other political or security goals.

Even countries integrated into the European Union have learned that the EU does not have the capacity to get directly involved in preventing, or at least stopping, democratic backsliding in spite of its economic, political institutional and legal means (Sitter and Bakke 2019; Theuns 2022; Oleart and Theuns 2023).

While external factors, particularly shocks, may matter, domestic characteristics co-determine the handling of such shocks.

A long list of ***domestic factors*** can be extracted from the comparative literature. Not all of them are relevant for Slovenia (e.g. the complexity of the ethnic structure). There are factors that are generally considered to be relevant, such as socio-economic factors, a free and lively civil society, the liberalization stage before the transition to democracy, the characteristics of constitutional and electoral system choice and international circumstances. When studying the former Yugoslav region, non-involvement in ***a war*** sufficed as an important factor of democracy (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink 2009). Since Slovenia had only been involved in a ten-day war in the process of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the war in Ukraine evolved after the 2022 elections, this factor isn't relevant for Slovenia's case study. The institutional factors are taken as a constant since Slovenia's constitutional choice of the parliamentary system and the proportional electoral system has not been engineered.

In order to capture changes in the ***economy*** over time, we used the following indicators: GDP per capita and unemployment based on data published by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Eurostat, the World Bank and the OECD. For dependence on international loans and privatization waves, we rely on existing research. Specific sources are cited in the text.

For tracing changes in ***social inequalities*** over time, we used internationally recognized indexes related to poverty (Gini coefficient, HDI), the index of social inequality, the proportion of inhabitants at risk of poverty and the World Inequality database. We also rely on existing research. Specific sources are cited in the text.

We paid particular attention to the following ***external factors***: the EU's political (democracy) factor (export of democratic deficit and support for agents struggling against democratic backsliding); external economic shocks related to the international financial and economic crisis; the EU's economic factor (Eurozone management of the international financial and economic crisis); the international migration crisis; the COVID-19 health crisis; international networking and resources empowering agents of democratic backsliding and agents of struggling against democratic backsliding. For the impact of these factors, we rely on the existing research that is cited in the text.

The role of ***non-party agents*** is captured by the following indicators: citizens' election turnout, strikes and demonstrations; dissatisfaction with the economy; citizens' dissatisfaction with politics, citizens' trust in political parties and government, trust in a strong leader/democracy as a system and civil society (interest group) activism. For these indicators we used data published by the National Election Commission, existing data from longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Surveys, the European Values Study and existing research. Specific sources are cited in the text.

Party and Party System Characteristics

Some analyses have particularly stressed the role of leaders and their actions leading to the piecemeal erosion of democratic institutions and civil liberties—the cited examples are Hungary, Poland, Turkey and Venezuela (Huq and Ginsburg 2018; Waldner and Lust 2018). A similar statement applies to the issues of party social rootedness, increased levels of personalism (the related phenomena of party and party system deinstitutionalization) and the association of greater personalism with a variety of negative outcomes such as higher levels of populism, a higher probability of democratic erosion and greater political polarization (Frantz et al. 2021). Based on the finding from Latin America (Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019) that the ancestral party origin in previous regimes has a large impact on party organizational strength, we also include the presence of the reformed old political organizations in the analysed set of variables.

As we study the whole period of transition to democracy, the consolidation of democracy, emerging elements unfavourable to democracy and democracy backsliding, we take into account dynamic changes in parties and party system characteristics over more than three decades (1988–2022). Both kinds of units (parties and party systems) are taken into account. This is due to the fact that Slovenia's party system characteristics cannot be understood without understanding the impact of changing political parties (the emergence of a substantial proportion of new parties with idiosyncratic organizational characteristics) on party system changes over time.

In order to comparatively capture these changes over time, we use several sets of indicators known from the literature as well as several adapted to studying post-socialist party politics.

There are several ways to consider party system characteristics (Bardi and Mair 2008). Although there have been criticisms and attempts to develop ever better insights into party and party system characteristics, a wide range of empirical research based on several 'traditional' characteristics and their indicators have proved that such methodological approaches do help reveal significant variation among countries. In the frame of our case study, we shall seek variations among different party system periods within the same country over time.

For the purpose of our research, we use the national-level parameters that have been traditionally used for determining party system characteristics. To capture the changes in Slovenia's party system between the 1990 elections and the 2022 elections, we use indicators of (1) party system fractionalization, (2) party and party system institutionalization, including governmental closure (presented in more detail in the theoretical section) and (3) polarization of parties (the presence of extremist parties) and party system. In addition, we are also open to additional insights into relevant other party factors based on empirical exploration.

The following paragraphs contain a more detailed overview of party and party system characteristics as well as indicators of these characteristics together with an overview of data sources for empirical research.

Party system fragmentation: number of parties; the size of parties (% of votes and number and % of parliamentary seats immediately after the elections); the share of the two biggest parties immediately after the elections. Sources of data: official election results published by the National Electoral Commission of the Republic of Slovenia. We take

into account election results for the Sociopolitical Chamber of Slovenia's republic assembly (the first free elections in 1990) and for the lower chamber of the parliament established based on the constitution adopted in 1991—The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia (1992–2022).

Party and Party System Institutionalization

Units of the party system: all parliamentary parties immediately after the elections. The reason for the inclusion of all parties is the fact that all the parties in Slovenia's parliament have been relevant due to party system fractionalization demanding coalition governments.

Party system stability: openness of the system for new parties: number and shares of new parties in the parliament immediately after elections; the size of new parties (% of votes, number and share of parliamentary seats); electoral volatility; programmatic stability (shares of parties with clear political-ideological orientation); the share of votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations (shares regardless of ideological orientation); the share of votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations (shares with regard to their positioning on the ideological continuum); the stability of inter-party competition: change in the structure of poles (ideologically similar blocks of parties). Calculations are based on official data; we also rely on previous research. These are cited in the text.

Presence of personalized parties: new parties emerging around individual politicians just before each election (% of votes and parliamentary seats); shares of personalized parties in the party system (% of votes and parliamentary seats); new personalized party of the Prime Minister. Personalization has also been linked to the phenomena of presidentialization (Poguntke and Webb 2005), which include both the increasing role of personalized party leadership and the process of centralization of power within a party. Beside the calculations of relevant official data, previous research on Slovenia's party system will also be taken into account. Specific sources are cited in the text.

Social Rootedness at the Levels of Parties and the Party System

Party membership: number of individual party members, % of party membership (longitudinal data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey; existing research).

Party identification—feeling close to any party (longitudinal data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey).

Trust in political parties: longitudinal data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey; longitudinal survey of data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey and Eurobarometer.

Organizational resources related to the party roots in the socialist regime: the share of valid votes for old parties (successors of transformed socio-political organizations) represented in the parliaments; the share of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations (shares regardless of ideological orientation); the share of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations (shares with regard to their positioning on the ideological continuum) (calculations based on official data and previous research).

Party financing: information on party financing from the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, mass media and existing research.

Specific sources are cited in the text.

Government Formation and Managing

Looking at the party system institutionalization, Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2021) point to the characteristics of government and the related closure of the party system. In order to take into account this aspect of party system institutionalization, the following characteristics have been included: number of coalition partners; stability of relations between parties that lead to government formation; stability of governments; Prime Ministers lacking previous experience in politics; early elections. Sources of data for these indicators: National Election Commission; Archive of Slovenia's government; existing research on government formation and management. Specific sources are cited in the text.

Polarization: Party and Party System Point of View

Polarization at the party level is seen in parties moving to extreme positions—the emergence of new extremist political parties.

Polarization at the level of voters (see McCoy et al. 2018, 20–21) (data available from the longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Survey data and existing research).

Polarization at the party system level (Schmitt and Franzmann 2020) points to many indicators and measures of party system polarization, such as: counting parties' electoral success in relation to their positioning in the left-right dimension; electoral success (or presence) of ideological extreme parties; party system polarization measures. Data: existing international sources of polarization measures (such as V-Dem data); longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Survey data, existing research.

Specific sources are cited in the text.

Structure of Slovenia's Empirical Study

In the following chapter, we first describe the form, extent and timeline of democratic backsliding in Slovenia, including an evaluation of the country's levels of liberal democracy based on V-Dem data (Boese et al. 2022).

In the next chapter, we then empirically document how Slovenia's party system has changed, in what context, in what time frame and with what consequences for democracy. Since the role of non-party actors in this process, particularly in stopping the democratic backsliding, has been closely linked with the outcome of democracy in two critical periods (transition to democracy and recent democratic backsliding), we present their role within the same chapter.

We end the book with a chapter summarizing the findings of Slovenia's case study and a discussion on the relevance of our findings to further, particularly comparative, research on the relationship between party system change and a change in democracy.

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CHAPTER 6

Fluidity of Slovenia's Democracy in a Changing Context

In order to understand the whole context of party system change it is important not only to analyse a narrow political context and the evaluation of democracy in Slovenia over time. Democracy literature also stresses a broader context of changing democracy as a set of factors impacting on democracy. The five main subsets of these highly recognized factors are: economy, social inequalities, institutions, actors (particularly citizens and civil society entities) and external factors.

Political Context and Evaluation of Democracy in Slovenia Over Time

Among the post-socialist countries joining the EU so far, Slovenia has been most consistently evaluated as a liberal democracy since the transition to democracy. Not only had the liberal democracy index risen rather swiftly in the first half of the 1990s (Fig. 6.1), but it had also appeared quite constant. In contrast, a critical decline in democracy has so far only occurred in the period under Janša's third government (2020–2022) in

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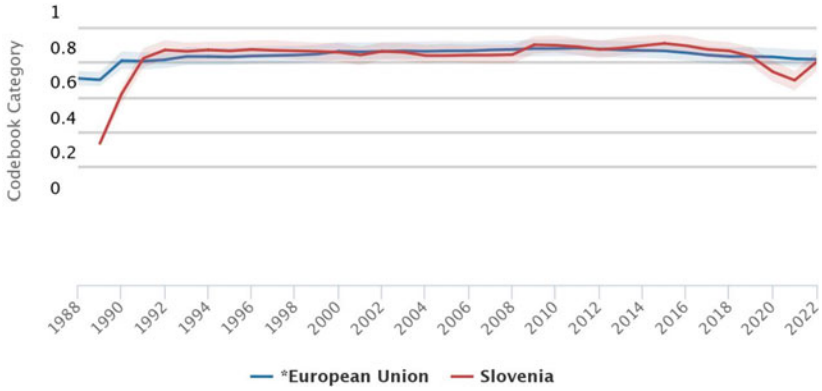

Fig. 6.1 Liberal democracy index—the EU and Slovenia compared (1988–2022) (*Source* 'Variable Graph—V-Dem' [n.d.])

the context of the COVID-19 pandemic when the constitutional system was eroded by the executive's actions.

Although evaluations of democracy have varied slightly over time, it was in the period of transition and in the years between 2019 and 2021 that democracy was evaluated at lower levels, and there are considerable differences between the two periods. The transition period was in fact the start of building democracy based on the deconstruction of the socialist political system, holding the first free elections in 1990 and adopting the 1991 constitution.

Slovenia's transition was a result of the bottom-up pressures of civil society and the emerging oppositional political organizations and top-down activities of the adapting old elite (Linz 1990; Lijphart 2000). This combination and graduality, including the liberalization, has been theoretically recognized as being supportive of democratic developments.

Political gradualism offered the opportunity for political learning of both the adapting old elite and of a newly emerging oppositional party elite. The opposition had enriched the intellectual potential of the newly emerging political elite. This is why the transitional elections brought many intellectuals into political institutions.

However, the old political elite had not only been adapting under the pressure coming from the bottom by Slovenian civil society (both liberal and more nationalist) and newly emerging oppositional political leagues

within, at that time, the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). The pressures on Slovenia's transforming old political elite had also been coming from the Yugoslav political and army elite interested in maintaining the old socialist federal system. In the end, Slovenia's political elite opted to legalize party pluralism and ensure its own legitimization within Slovenia during the second half of the 1980s, as well as among the voters in the first Slovenian Republic's multiparty elections in 1990.

The adaptation of the old political elite also involved following the widely supported (at the national referendum) option to declare an independent Slovenian state, which was initially only favoured by the opposition and later also supported by a majority of citizens at the referendum. The multiple transitions had not only involved political, economic and social changes, but also the creation of an independent state (Fink-Hafner 2006). It had been the Yugoslav context that had contributed to finding the common political grounds of both the old and newly emerging segment of the political elite. Conflicts over transitional reforms had gained less importance than achieving peace in Slovenia in relation to Yugoslavia's war, independence and joining (at the time) the European Community, and to a lesser degree NATO.

Slovenia's adapting old elite had taken special care to ensure that transitional changes and paving the way for an independent state had taken place in a legalistic manner (Grad 1997). Numerous amendments to the socialist constitution were adopted in the period 1988–1990 in Slovenia (at that time still a republic in the frame of former Yugoslavia). The amendments not only legalized political pluralism and the private ownership basis for capitalist development, but they also traced the path for an independent state. The first free elections held in April 1990 were a political act contrary to the Yugoslav constitution and in line with Slovenia's amended old constitution at the time. Only the new constitution (1991) was actually a constitution of an independent Slovenian state.

In Slovenia, neither transition nor consolidation of democracy involved political lustration due to both the power relations between the old and new elite (Pečar 1997) and internal differences on this issue within the new elite. Research has shown the vitality of the reformist old elite, which was already a result of internal differentiation of the old elite taking place during the 1980s as the liberal stream within the Slovenian League of Communists won over hardliners in the mid-1980s. But it had not only been the liberal stream prevailed within the League of Communists of

Slovenia. Opposition within the regime had also evolved since the first half of the 1980s—the transforming socialist youth organization, which later developed into a social-liberal party dominating the governing coalitions for most of the first post-transitional decade. Besides, Slovenia's anti-system opposition had not been fundamentalist.

Quite a lot of the reforming old elite succeeded in keeping their power positions (Kramberger and Vehovar 2000; Kramberger 2002), which makes Slovenia's elite reproduction rate among the highest in East Central Europe. Nevertheless, the openness of the new-elite structure for newcomers was the strongest in politics among all sections of elite sectors, such as economy and culture (Kramberger and Vehovar 2000). However, elite members had highly adapted their social networks during the transition: in 1995, the old elite only kept about a third of their old social ties, so it was old by origin but new by contacts (Iglič and Rus 1996). Such an elite had been effectively having an important say in political managing of economic privatization and other transformative processes. Over time, it has been particularly the new political elite that recognized political gradualism as a way of creating losers and winners. The new segment of political elites appeared to be losers as they has participated less in the newly created economic redistribution.

The animosities within the elite of the mid-1990s had also been additionally fuelled by the heritage of political violence among a fifth of the 1995 elite—personal experience with violence particularly during the Second World War, during the 1966–1975 period and during the 1987–1992 period (Kramberger 2009). According to Kramberger, 25% also experienced parents or grandparents having property or other assets confiscated. The factor of parents' violent experiences in the past, their personal experience of violence during the 1987–1992 period, also became important in Janez Janša's political role in Slovenian politics. However, it was not the only key element of Slovenia's politics.

Soon after the first free elections, the new parties ideologically differentiated and even dismissed DEMOS—a form of collaboration among the parties opposing the old regime. After 1992, the long-term party of the Prime Minister (the successor of the reformed League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, transformed into the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, or LDS) succeeded in managing socio-economic problems and leading the broadly supported process of Slovenia's integration into the European Union and (less enthusiastically) NATO.

As we will show in more detail in the next subsection and in the next chapter, the achievement of the transitional main political goals (independent state and joining European integrations) has not been amended by Slovenia's new developmental goals. Governing has become ever more challenging due to the increasingly turbulent domestic and international context. Increasing problems of party governing through institutions of parliamentary democracy have, among other things, also been expressed in the extensive use of direct democracy (referenda) since 2003 (Fig. 6.2), often on parties' own initiative.

Slovenia's full integration into the EU in 2004 became a critical point in the country's development in general, and in politics in particular. As we will show in the next section and in the following chapter, the paradigm of gradualism, neo-corporatist exceptionalism and policies taking care of maintaining rather low levels of social inequalities has been quite radically challenged. The economy and socio-economic characteristics radically changed in a rather short period of time due to domestic and external factors.

At the same time, a bipolarism has been increasingly determining Slovenia's politics. On the one hand, the success of the transformed

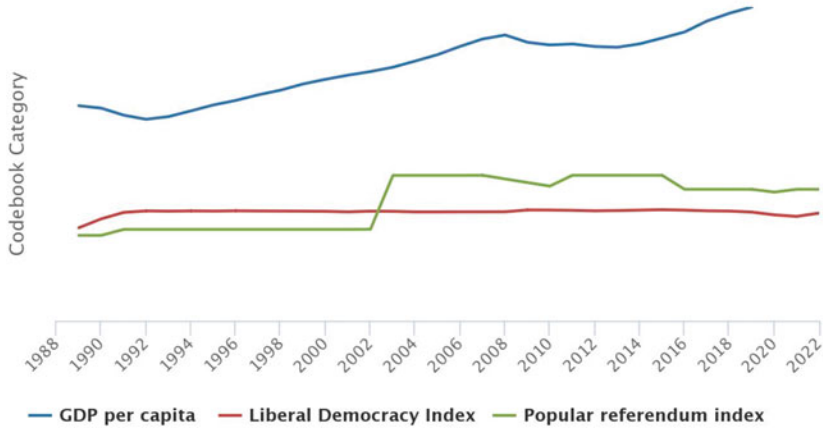

Fig. 6.2 Evaluation of democracy, GDP per capita and popular referendum index in Slovenia (1988–2022) (*Note* As shown in the text, GDP per capita had fallen during the COVID-19 crisis, but later returned to a slight increase. *Source* 'Country graph—V-Dem' [n.d.])

League of Communists of Slovenia in winning the elections and taking over the executive power in a peaceful manner based on the 2008 elections had fulfilled Linz's (1990) indicator of democratic consolidation. On the other hand, this period was already mixing with elements of the emerging challenges to Slovenia's democracy. The year 2009 brought about not only an additional push for polarization, but also a more systematic articulation of the alternative political system—Janša's programmatic idea of the Second Republic (SDS 2009).

Particularly in the context of financial and economic crisis, the critical domestic political actors have been the Slovenian Democratic Party led by Janez Janša and centre-left parties. The centre-left, lacking programmatic responses, have been increasingly taking a populist personalistic stand and the stand of anti-Janša politics (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2019). Since the 2011 early elections, political representatives in the parliament and in government have been radically replaced by 'new faces' lacking political competence and experience (Fink-Hafner et al. 2017).

In this political context, big external shocks hit Slovenia, including the international economic and financial crisis, the international migration crisis and the global COVID-19 crisis. Problems in managing their impacts nationally (as shown in the next subsection and in the following chapter) had been accumulating and led to several early elections. As the centre-left coalition government led by 'a new face', Šarec, was dissolved after the Prime Minister stepped down, an opportunity for Janez Janša's party had opened up. In a very idiosyncratic window of opportunity, Janša's programmatic orientation was intensively implemented after the change in government without holding parliamentary elections. It was only during the period of Janša's government (March 2019–June 2022) that Slovenia's democracy significantly declined (Freedom House, n.d.; 'Variable Graph—V-Dem', n.d.).

Initially, the illiberal alternative had not been formally adopted as a fully developed Slovenian Democratic party platform. Rather it was published as Janez Janša's speech at the 2009 party congress including ten proposals for constitutional changes under the slogan the 'Second Republic' (Druga republika). Nevertheless, among the public it was received as a programme that resonates with ideas of illiberal democracy. However, in September 2013, the SDP published the article on its web page under the title 'Predsednik Janez Janša: "Bo Slovenija druga ali socialistična republika?"' (SDS 2013)—'President Janez Janša: Will Slovenia be the second

or socialist republic?' With such personal exposure, the political orientation developed and practised by Janša was nicknamed *janšizem* (Janshism) and was used in political slogans against Janša's ideology and practice ('no to the politics of janšizem'; 'death to janšism, freedom to the people') (Balen 2020; 'Zaradi napisa "Smrt janšizmu" policija vodi postopek proti osmim osebam', 2020).

However, later Janša's party further developed the practical programme based on the idea that Slovenia 2.0 needed to replace Slovenia 1.0. In December 2012, it had been the Executive Committee of Janša's party that presented a renewed list of proposed constitutional changes to other parliamentary parties together with the proposal for political agreement among parties.

The SDP proposed the following 11 elements of political system reform (SDS 2013): (1) direct elections of MPs based on an absolute majority of votes; (2) inclusion of the possibility of recalling an MP during the mandate based on new elections in an electoral district; (3) inclusion of the possibility of recalling mayors and limiting the mandates to two consecutive mandates or indirect elections of mayors (mayors elected and removed by a local community council); (4) elimination of the parliamentary upper chamber (National Council); (5) inclusion of a trial mandate for all new judges; (6) maintaining a judicial tenure mandate after the trial period. All current judges are to be re-elected. The judiciary council is to be additionally equipped by legal experts from international judiciary institutions and supreme court judges from other EU states; (7) a new specialized course to be established for judging the most difficult economic cases, including bankruptcy and other organized crime. Judges for this court to be named in a special procedure by public voting in the lower parliamentary chamber (National Assembly) on the proposal of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, and to be elected by a majority of two-thirds of the votes; (8) a financial police is to be established with powers comparable to some EU member states; (9) all state and parastate institutions that don't exist in comparable EU member states are to be eliminated (Ukraine); (10) all privileges of elected or named officials are to be removed after the end of the mandate; (11) simpler procedures for calling early elections and government formation.

This list of suggestions had been accompanied by the SDP's suggestions for political agreement among parliamentary parties: (1) ensuring sufficient parliamentary support for the 11 elements of reform; (2) inclusion in the constitution of the golden fiscal rule; (3) changes in the legal

rules for referenda; (4) adoption and implementation of reform and anti-crisis laws; (5) agreement on the freezing during a crisis of all privileges and transfers to individuals (with the exception of social and family transfers) that come, based on various legal bases, indirectly or directly from the state budget in cases where all these payments, together with the basic income, extend beyond the average salary. The money saved in that way shall go towards increased financing of scholarships; (6) the government coalition is to be enlarged or early elections to be held within two months after the acceptance of these proposals (possibly in May or June 2013).

Constitutional changes were not well received by other parliamentary parties. In spite of that, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, Janša's government, formed without holding elections, governed in a way that led to the decline of democracy in Slovenia.

Decline in democracy had been related to types of actions that illiberals in power take in their subversions in liberal democracy (Pirro and Stanley 2022). When compared to the illiberal practices of governing parties Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, Janša's government only partially, and for a rather limited time, succeeded in implementing several of them (Table 6.1). However, a more thorough analysis of the post-2022 election system characteristics remains to be conducted.

The executive's actions under Janša eroded the constitutional system of 1991 in several ways within a very short period of time, but potentially with some longer consequences. While some measures during the COVID-19 crisis were comparable to other countries, many of them were publicly perceived as a misuse of the health crisis for implementing illiberal politics. The critical activities were: the government's attacks on the judiciary; limiting citizens' political rights, including the extraordinary use of physical violence not experienced even in the old system; the political pressures on the police; the political subordination of the national public TV; attacking Slovenia's press agency; taking over the state apparatus (particularly within the police) and positions in economy. There was also criticism that the government favoured the functioning of the economy over protecting the health of workers and creating nursery homes for the elderly as closed places with an extremely high mortality rate.

Unlike Hungary and Poland, a rather swift pushing back of Janša's illiberal politics took place under the pressure of liberal civil socitey. The anti-Janša alternative—the 2022 parliamentary elections bringing the centre-left party majority into the parliament and the formation of the centre-left government—had been demanded and crucially supported by widespread centre-left civil society activities. Without such broad support

Table 6.1 Illiberalism in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia

	Poland PiS	*Hungary Fidesz*	*Slovenia SDP (March 2020–April 2022)*
ILLIBERAL CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES			
Incremental regime change	X	X	Attempts, but time limitation (empowering the executive)
Constitutional illiberal version of the Rule of Law (illiberal legality)	X	X	Limited to political practice
Restricting horizontal accountability in favour of empowering the executive	X	X	Limited to political practice of diminishing the role of the National Assembly, which is the highest lawmaker according to the constitution
Regulations limiting or obstructing opposition	X	X	Limited to political practice
Limitations on the independence of the judiciary	X	X	Attempts; various pressures on judiciary; persistent remains after losing power
Shrinking civil liberties, protecting individuals and groups from the tyranny of the majority	X	X	Restrictions, including protests and the use of unprecedented physical violence at protests, time limitation
State capture, own oligarchic networks	X	X	Persistent remains after losing power
A tendency to rule by governmental decrees (COVID-19 crisis)	X	X	X
RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION			
Supporting biased media in favour of incumbents	X	X	X
Politically motivated regulation of journalism	X	X	Not directly; however, constant attacks on individual journalists; declaring 'war with media'; changing interpretations of rules on state funding of the Slovenian Press Agency
Restricting independent media	X	X	Law on national public TV, political influence via the naming of the TV leading cadre and the selection of the national public TV Council; Persistent remains after losing power

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

	Poland PiS	*Hungary Fidesz*	*Slovenia SDP (March 2020–April 2022)*
Associational autonomy			
Funding/cultivating conservative civil society initiatives, movements and NGOs	X	X	X
Pressure on opposing NGOs	X	X	X

Source Dahl (1989), Bill and Stanley (2020), Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała (2020), Havlík and Hloušek (2020), Splichal (2020), Vachudova (2021), 'Slovenia: "The Government Has Taken Advantage of the Pandemic to Restrict Protest"' (2021), Frankenburg (2022), Fink-Hafner (2023), and Fink-Hafner and Bauman (2023)

for establishing the Freedom Movement as the anti-Janša force, a shift again towards the more centre-left understanding of liberal democracy would not have been possible. As shown in Fig. 6.3, V-Dem noted that democracy changed in a direction of former long-term liberal democracy values.

In the next section we look at a broader context of democracy in Slovenia over time.

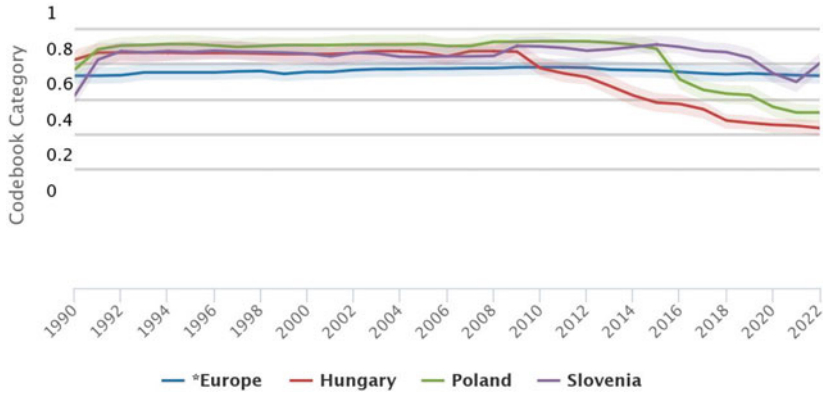

Fig. 6.3 V-Dem liberal democracy indexes of Slovenia, Hungary, Poland and Europe (1990–2022) (*Source* 'Variable graph—V-Dem' [n.d.])

Broader Context of Slovenia's Democracy: Economy, Social Inequalities, Institutions, Actors and External Factors

Transition in Slovenia had been taking place grounded on, comparatively speaking, a very solid financial and economic basis (Mencinger 1997). This enabled Slovenia to reject the externally suggested shock therapy and take a gradual path of capitalist transformation during the first decade after transition. The reaffirmation of neo-corporatist traditions allowed for compromises paving the way for socially inclusive development (Bohle and Greskovits 2007; Stanojević and Krašovec 2011). In spite of multiple complicated transitions, GDP per capita had been growing (Fig. 6.2), and unemployment had been declining.

Privatization of state enterprises had been delayed and gradual. Nevertheless, privatizations had enabled a particular small group of people (mainly managers of privatized companies) to take over former social ownership (Lorenčič, n.d.). The OECD suggests that Slovenia's model for economic growth has suffered from both corporate governance weaknesses and a heavy reliance on state involvement in the economy. Slovenia's degree of state ownership in the economy has been among the highest in the OECD, accounting in 2012 for almost 11% of employment—more than triple the OECD average (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) 2015). Currently there is still a substantial segment of majority or at least partially state-owned companies in Slovenia, mostly in the fields of infrastructure, banking and insurance. Such a privatization and ownership structure has allowed for political interference in the economy. Parties with executive power tend to control publicly owned companies by placing their people in these companies' top leadership positions. As a result, more long-term winners and losers of privatization have proliferated. Party division of the ministries (sometimes also nicknamed 'feudalization') has also allowed parties to prioritize access and financial gain for particular interests, leading to scandals (Fink-Hafner et al. 2002; Novak and Fink-Hafner 2019).

Socio-economic circumstances had been improving, particularly during the 1990s, in spite of some transitional challenges (GDP per capita had been constantly rising during the 1990s and social transfers had allowed for persistently low social inequalities and a constantly increasing Human Development Index (HDI) up to the year 2008) (Hanžek and Gregorčič 2001; United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). At the

same, during the first decade since the transition (1990s), the high levels of social equality had been ensured by social transfers and a delay in the implementation of externally suggested flexibilization of the labour market.

Full membership of Slovenia in the EU (since 2004) and in the Eurozone (since 2007) has had important consequences for Slovenia's economy. Easy access to foreign finance had enabled Slovenia's economic growth until the impact of the international financial and economic crisis. The public debt had risen fast as initially the government decided to use it for social transfers to ease the impact of the crisis while at the same time Slovenian banks, citizens and the non-financial sector (beside the state) relied on loans from abroad (Mencinger 2012, 77). Slovenia lost its position as the least indebted new EU member state and its belonging to the least indebted EU member states in general, while negative investments by banks and the extraordinarily high share of enterprises in credit impacted on economic activity (Mencinger 2012, note 25).

As Slovenia became dependent on international loans it also became subject to pressure from international organizations in favour of neoliberal policies (Fig. 6.4).

Soon after Slovenia joined the EU, the relatively rapid 'flexibilization' of the Slovenian labour market opened a window for the flourishing of 'precarious work'—including an idiosyncratic 'student work'—and a swift increase in the number of self-employed (in the period between 2006 and

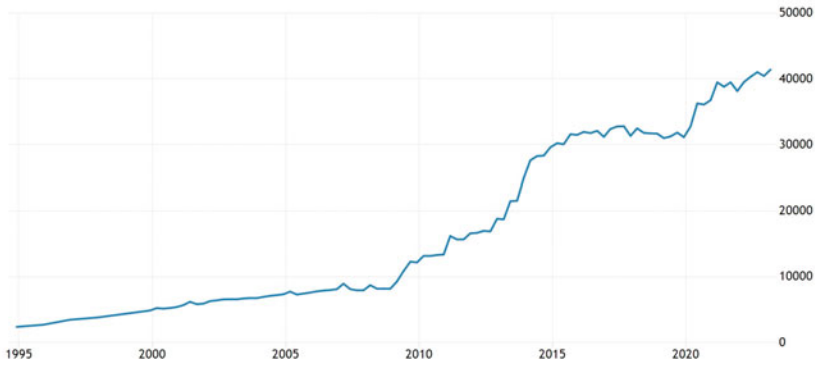

Fig. 6.4 Slovenia's foreign debt (1995–August 2023) (*Source* Trading Economics [n.d.a])

2018, the share of the self-employed increased by nearly 20%, while in the EU it shrank by a few per cent) (Domadenik and Redek 2020, 194).

Slovenia—like other post-socialist countries—positioned itself in more downstream stages of value chains than old EU member states in the 2005–2015 period (Zajc Kejžar et al. 2020). In implementing the EU's policies for managing the impacts of the international financial and economic crisis, many socio-economic circumstances had worsened in Slovenia. GDP per capita had declined during the financial and economic crisis, and again, after some recovery, during the COVID-19 crisis (it declined from USD41,970.4 in 2019 to USD40,782 in 2020 but rose again to USD43,815.9 in 2021) (World Bank, n.d.a; World Bank, n.d.c).

The implementation of EU policies (as elsewhere within the EU) prolonged and deepened the impact of the crisis. Unemployment had reached unprecedented levels in Slovenia (World Bank, n.d.c and Fig. 6.5) while the welfare state had been shrinking. This had led to a decline in equality and an increase in poverty (Lindberg 2019; Intihar 2023; Trading Economics, n.d.b).

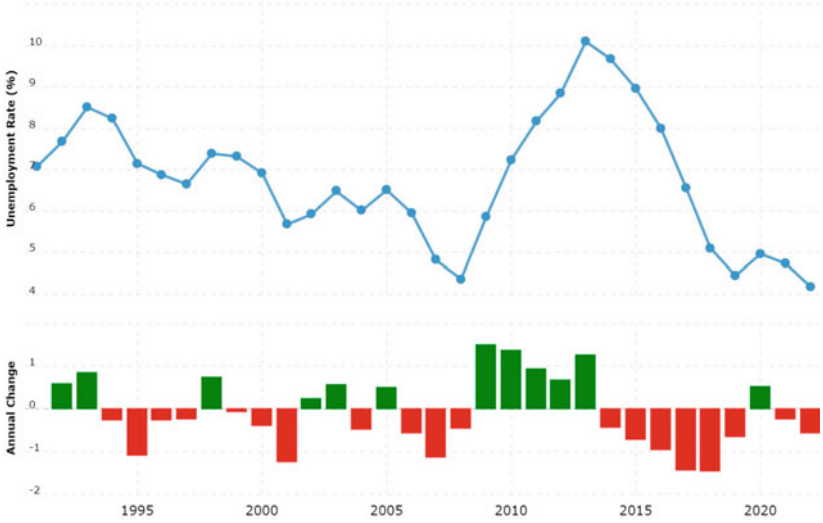

Fig. 6.5 Slovenian unemployment rate (1991–2023) (*Note* Unemployment refers to the share of the labour force that is without work but available for, and seeking, employment. *Source* World Bank [n.d.b])

Despite Slovenia ranking among the OECD countries with the lowest level of inequality, with a Gini coefficient of between 23 and 27 for most of the last three decades, this increased significantly in the context of managing the 2008 crisis (Trading Economics, n.d.a), while the HDI radically declined. In Slovenia, the impacts of the crisis also overlapped with the last big privatization wave, adding to the growing inequalities (Lorenčič, n.d.).

These processes were in sharp contrast to the relatively stable and low levels of inequalities in the period from 1991 to the end of 2008 (placing Slovenia in the late 2000s among the most equal of the OECD countries, with a Gini coefficient of 0.24 [Filipovič Hrast and Ignjatovič 2014]). However, the tradition of equality had been shaken in the process of managing the financial and economic crisis. In the period from 2010 to 2016, poverty and social exclusion had risen (Keuc and Križanič 2019).

A significant increase in poverty was noted in 2008, when the at-risk-of-poverty rate rose from 11.5% to 12.3% (Leskošek and Dragoš 2014). The net personal wealth share of the top 1% has increased sharply since 2009, while the net personal wealth of the bottom 50% has significantly decreased (World Inequality Database, n.d.) (Fig. 6.6).

The sharp breaking of Slovenia's tradition of low-level inequalities had been seen by many people as an injustice. So while Slovenia had still been among the OECD countries with quite low levels of inequality, the share of people believing that the cause of poverty was too much social injustice had risen from 42% in 2007 to 61% in 2010, while the proportion of people believing that the main reasons for poverty were personal (e.g. a person is unlucky or lazy) had halved from 2007 to 2010 (Filipovič Hrast and Ignjatovič 2014, 609–610).

However, the additional pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic in particular brought about additional pressure on the welfare state (as in other countries) (Hrast Filipovič and Dobrotić 2022). Various already mentioned factors, including recently the effects of the war in Ukraine (particularly the rise in energy and food prices), have recently impacted on the rise of inflation and living costs (European Central Bank 2021; 'Zakaj se vse draži? To so vzroki in posledice inflacije' 2021; Viršek 2022) (Fig. 6.7).

Fig. 6.6 Wealth inequality, Slovenia, 1995–2021 (*Source* World Inequality Database [n.d.])

Fig. 6.7 Slovenia's inflation rate (1995–September 2023) (*Source* Trading Economics [n.d.d])

Institutional Factors

The circumstances of quite strong political opposition and adaptive old political elite were not favourable for institutional choices other than the parliamentary constitutional choice with only a ceremonial role for the President of the Republic (1991) and the proportional system. These institutional choices opened the way for citizens' decision on the transfer of oppositional and old elite strength in political institutions based on elections. As they have not changed much up until today, they have produced a stable institutional context for over three decades.

Although these institutions have been believed to ensure the development of a democratic political culture based on seeking consensus rather than authoritarian governing, they have also contributed to a fragmented party system and difficult coalition governing.

One important institutional addition has been neo-corporatism. It has been partly incorporated into the upper chamber (National Council), including indirectly elected representatives of territorial interests (22 out of 40 members) as well as representatives of functional interests, including trade unions, employers' organizations and some professional interests. Even more importantly, neo-corporatism in the form of social partnership (Socio-Economic Council) evolved on the basis of neo-corporatist traditions has impacted on redistribution policies. It has enabled the keeping of social peace for quite some time even in Slovenia's adaptations to European and Eurozone conditions for integration. However, it has been in decline since the early 2000s (as presented in the subsection on actors).

Like neo-corporatism, also other institutions have changed in practice over time. The national executive has been increasingly gaining power in relation to the legislative (the highest lawmaking institution according to Slovenia's constitution) due to the combined effects of (1) the domestic consolidation of democracy in post-communist EU member states, (2) the pressures of international economic liberalization and (3) Europeanization (understood as the adaptations made to the domestic political system in order to manage EU affairs). Even when compared to Central European post-communist countries, Slovenia's executive-legislative relationship has been exceptionally in favour of the executive in setting the agenda of parliament and parliament's policy outputs (Zubek 2011, 173). The national parliament has predominantly shifted to monitoring, representative and legitimizing roles (Rangus 2012, 243). In managing the financial and economic crisis and the COVID-19 crisis, the trend of the

executive's strengthening in relation to the parliament has continued and even allowed more radical changes in these relationships in a relatively short time frame.

Actors

Here we focus on several key groups of actors recognized in a democracy literature (but not parties, which are covered in a special chapter), incorporating civil society entities (interest groups in general and trade unions in particular) and citizens.

Slovenia's civil society has been strong and the country's interest group system has been found to be the closest of the whole of CEE to its Western European peers (Kolarič et al. 2002; van Deth and Maloney 2014; Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015). Its peculiarity in comparison to CEE is also that in Slovenia there has been no significant 'artificial' element dependent on external donors, but it has rather mostly reflected domestic socio-economic and political characteristics (Novak and Fink-Hafner 2019). Nevertheless, interest group-party relationships have been particularly evident in periods of polarization. A particular interest group-party closeness has also become a factor in the professionalization of interest groups based on European funding disseminated by national decision-makers (Maloney et al. 2018).

There are two groups of actors that have played a particularly relevant roles—trade unions (representing the employed) and the Catholic Church (an institution with big stakes in denationalization processes).

Trade unions have succeeded in establishing social partnership due to their extraordinarily high membership in the transition period. In 1989, 69% of the workforce had been unionized, dropping to 58.6% in 1994 and then to 42.8% in 1998 (Stanojević 2000, 39), while the share of the unionized workforce gradually dropped further to 29.7% in 2008. The decline in trade union membership together with other factors led to a decline in neo-corporatism after the first democratic decade (Stanojević 2012). Nevertheless, today trade unions still have big protest mobilization power, which may be used in struggling for the rights of the employed. While during the transition, new and old trade unions had ideologically somewhat diverged and had been closer to different political parties, they later learned to collaborate on common issues. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, they didn't enter into an ideological-political struggle

with particular governments; they also only joined protests related to trade unions' goals (Fink-Hafner and Bauman, 2023).

The constitution determines the division between the Church and the state, however the agreements between the Vatican and the Slovenian government created the basis for the Roman Catholic Church getting back nationalized property. At the same time it has been very generously supported by the Slovenian state in the long term, particularly under centre-right governments ('Bogastvo katoliške cerkve' 2010; Utenkar 2012; Maček 2017). It has also been increasingly involved in capitalist economic and financial activity, including the negative impacts of the international economic crisis of 2008–2010. While it has been inefficient in dealing with paedophile scandals, it has been increasingly campaigning on moral policy issues, particularly in referendum campaigns to repeal the Family Act of 2012 and the Marriage and Family Relations Act of 2015 (Rakar et al. 2011, 19); the 2012 Act legalized the adoption of children by same-sex partners and the 2015 Act, among other provisions, legalized same-sex marriages. The Catholic Church's involvement in politics has traditionally been negatively evaluated by citizens.

Last but not least, citizens have played a very important role, especially in critical times. As we will show, the persisting low tolerance of income inequality (Malnar 1996, 2011) has been one of the key factors in playing that role (Filipovič Hrast and Ignjatović 2014). Since the 2000s, the gap between citizens' expectations and real-life policies has been increasing. Indeed, citizens have been more satisfied with policies favoured by trade unions and social partnership than with policies created by liberal–democratic institutions (Johannsen and Krašovec 2017).

In spite of citizens' dissatisfaction with transitional governing problems, which had been expressed in protest waves during the first half of the 1990s, and in low trust in parties and the parliament, even bigger dissatisfaction emerged after the first post-transitional decade.

Citizens' dissatisfaction with the quality of political representation has been expressed in declining trust in parties and parliament—below the EU average (Kmet Zupančič 2021)—a significant decrease in election turnout and voting for ever-new parties (presented in more detail in the next chapter), leading to substantial replacement of MPs with inexperienced new faces. A vicious circle of party system destabilization evolved—a sequence of citizens' disappointment with each new winning party of a promising party leader outside the national political elite and

new enthusiasm for supporting new parties. The rise of personalist politics, the radical renewal of the party system since the 2011 elections and a generation change in the political elite based on elections have persisted until now (a new party, Movement Freedom, won the last elections in 2022 and created an anti-Janša centre-left government).

After a decline in social partnership since joining the EU, it was particularly in the context of managing the COVID-19 crisis that Slovenians not only experienced Janša's government's disrespect of social partnership, but also perceived a sharp change in their social status. This was expressed in relative deprivation (evaluation of one's own material status as worse than that of other people), feeding into the radically increased protest potential (Hafner-Fink and Uhan 2021) and actual protests.

However, it is of critical importance to note that citizens' attitudes towards democracy as a value significantly changed only in the circumstances of democracy's sharp decline under Janša's third government. In the past, dissatisfaction with democracy had been occasionally combined with an increase in the support for a strong leader. However, this changed after the experiences with Janša's last government. They have contributed to the unique higher support 'for democracy as the best even if democracy sometimes doesn't work' compared to the support for 'the strong leader who would sort things out' (Slovenian Public Opinion 2002–2022, 2003–2023).

Citizens had little trust in political parties and the parliament during the 1990s when parties agreed on party state funding and had been competing over taking advantage of the significant parts of the state-owned economy. However, the overall estimation is that during the 1990s, citizens benefited economically.

In contrast, not only dissatisfaction with the economy but also perceptions of injustice have spread more widely in the context of managing the financial and economic crisis (Filipovič Hrast and Ignjatovič 2014). At the same time, the perception of corruption has risen above the EU average in 2022. According to a special Eurobarometer on corruption (Eurobarometer, n.d.), 87% of the adult population are convinced that corruption is a widespread problem in Slovenia; 67% believe that giving and taking bribes and the abuse of power for personal gain are widespread among politicians at national and local level, while 65% believe the same for political parties and 59% believe that corruption is widespread among officials awarding public tenders.

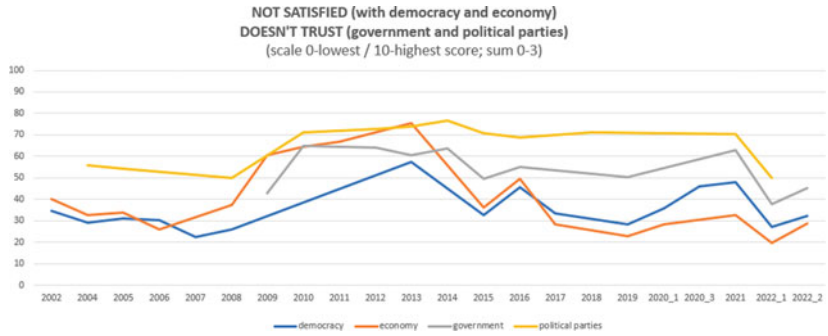

Fig. 6.8 Dissatisfaction with democracy and economy and distrust in government and political parties in Slovenian public opinion (2002–2022) (*Source* Slovenian public opinion 2002–2022 [2003–2023])

Based on the European Values Study of 2008, it has been revealed that Slovenia stood out in terms of the volume of voluntary work in interest organizations and political parties and political (protest) activities in Europe (Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015). It is also obvious that during the last decade the political and socio-economic dissatisfaction has also fed into the radically increased protest potential (Hafner-Fink and Uhan 2021) as well as actual trade union, NGOs' and broader citizens' protests.

The impacts of the financial crisis and political parties' adaptation to externally favoured neoliberal public policies (Johannsen and Krašovec 2017) had not only contributed to the increasing citizens' dissatisfaction with the economy and democracy. They also contributed to an increase in distrust in political parties and the government in particular (Fig. 6.8). Low trust in parties (below the EU average) (Kmet Zupančič 2021) had resulted in a significant decrease in election turnout and voting for ever-new parties (as presented in the following sections), with the exception of the last (2022) national elections.

External Factors

External factors have played various roles in Slovenia's socio-economic and political developments. Multiple crises mattered particularly in the transitional period and in the post-2004 period.

International political events of the 1980s had impacted on Slovenia's old elite behaviour. Its learning from the particularly seriously challenged socialist world fed into the old political elite's calculations. On the one hand, Slovenia's old political elite had particularly kept track of political pluralization and round table negotiations in Poland and Hungary, including the laws adopted for legalization of political parties. On the other hand, the old political elite had also learned a lesson from the suppression of the opposition in China, particularly the impact of the widely spread news of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Additionally, the economic and political crisis in Yugoslavia in the 1980s had not only contributed to the dissolution of the old system, including a war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, but also to creating a common ground for collaboration between the transformed old elite and oppositional parties.

However, Slovenia was not seriously affected by involvement in a war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia or by living close to a war zone in the period between 1991 and 1995, except for dealing with refugees from the war zone during the 1990s. The key reason was a quite swift international recognition and extended economic integration based on a previously signed agreement between Yugoslavia and the EC on special treatment of Yugoslavia compared to other socialist countries at the time.

The important external factors supportive of early democratic developments were quick international recognition of Slovenia as an independent state and expansion of the previously existing integration of Slovenia's economy into the international economy. However, the refugee crisis and temporary worsening of socio-economic problems were already feeding populism during the 1990s.

Slovenia's full EU membership (2004) has not brought about the social-liberal practice citizens and trade unions expected based on the EU institutions' discourse (Canihac and Laruffa 2021). On the contrary, the EU's discourse has evolved more in the direction of favouring the economy over social aspects—which is the opposite of the prevalent values of Slovenians who favour high social equality.

Slovenia slid into the EU economic periphery (together with other post-socialist EU member states) (Podvršič 2023). Neoliberal integration into the EU was enforced at the expense of the European periphery especially in managing the 2008 financial and economic crisis (Hermann 2007; Jäger 2018).

Since 2008, the multiplication of international crises—financial and economic, migration, COVID-19, the rise of energy and food prices with the war in Ukraine has contributed to the democracy's non-friendly socio-economic and political trends.

All in all, Slovenia's exceptionalism from the 1990s has gradually eroded since 2004, allowing for the development of democratic backsliding potential.

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CHAPTER 7

Changes in the Party System (1989–2022)

Introduction

Since the transition to democracy in Slovenia, four party systems can be distinguished: (1) the transitional party system (1988–1991); (2) consolidation of the first party system based on the 1991 constitution (1992–2000 elections); (3) destabilization of the party system (2004–2008 elections); and (4) continuous radical renewal of the party system (2011–2022 elections).

The systems differ among themselves based on various combinations of several main party system characteristics: fragmentation, institutionalization and polarization. In line with the methodology presented in Chapter 5, these characteristics are further decomposed by referring to particular indicators.

First, each party system is described in detail, and at the end of the chapter, a comparative longitudinal view brings together an analytical summary of changes in the party system over time.

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Transitional Party System (1988–1991)

The transitional party system had evolved based on amendments to Slovenia's republic constitution (1988–1990) when it was still part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. The transformed law legalized both the previously existing oppositional proto-parties and the quick formal establishment of other new parties. Just before the first multiparty elections in 1990, around 35 were registered, and in April 1992 there were as many as 91 registered parties in Slovenia (Fink-Hafner 1997, 142). The atomized party system evolved into the party system based on the free elections held in April 1990.

Oppositional political parties had been emerging from various milieus, such as: new social movements (The Greens of Slovenia); social opposition to the old regime such as the Writers' Association, a group of intellectuals around Nova revija (the New Journal) (the Alliance of Intellectuals later renamed the Slovenian Democratic Party); mobilization of various social groups like farmers and craftsmen (Slovenian People's Party, which initially presented itself as a 'class' party, the Slovenian Craftmen's party); political organization of formerly unpolitically organized social groups, e.g. the retired (Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia); political organizations of regions (e.g. the Allianse of Haloze, Party of Slovenian Štajerska, Alliance of Primorska); milieus determined by religion (Christian socialist intellectuals' journal Revija 2000/Journal 2000) or ethnicity (e.g. Alliance for Equal Rights of Citizens, Aliance of Roma—Gipsies, Communita Italiana) (Fink-Hafner 1997, 143).

While the social rootedness of the new parties was somewhat questionable, as they had been parties in the making and more or less electoral committees, the social rootedness of the transforming socio-political organizations had been under stress as they needed to compete with new parties for supporters. Nevertheless, election laws encouraged new parties to develop territorial organizations outside several centres, where they had been initially established. Slovenians' party identity was rather low—in 1991, the average sum of survey answers (being a particular party member or being its sympathizer) amounted to 9.3% (Toš 2021).[1] Party membership of the new political parties started to develop at the same time as

[1] Those surveyed answered the question on membership and sympathy toward a particular party from (old and new) parties listed in the survey questionnaire.

the reformed League of Communists faced a substantial drop from about 125,000 to around 23,000 members (Krašovec 2014).

In spite of the fact that the party system was very fragmented (9 small parties) (Table 7.1) and that each party competed individually, the competition was initially bipolar. The opposition (DEMOS political parties) adopted an anti-communist stand while parties emerging from the old socio-political organizations were considered to be on the opposite side of the communism vs anti-communism cleavage. This cleavage had functioned as a crucial cleavage in spite of old socio-political organizations' transforming and consent on democratic transition under oppositional pressure.

Beside the reformed League of Communists, there were two other parties with roots in socio-political organizations that kept many organizational resources gained in the frame of the old regime (together they received 37.1% of the votes in the 1990 elections). However, not all of them succeeded in adapting efficiently to the democratic framework and keeping their parliamentary status in the following elections, in spite of their pre-existing organizational networks and other organizational resources. The new political parties (which emerged in opposition to the previous regime, together gaining 54.8% of the votes in the 1990 elections) were initially poorly institutionalized (many of them emerged just before the elections and also very soon ended up in the party graveyard), while the DEMOS coalition, due to internal differences, dismissed itself in 1991.

In the fragmented party system a full rainbow of ideological orientations without extremes was presented—reformed socialist and communist, green, Christian democrat, conservative–agrarian, anti-communist social democrat and regional parties as well as parties representing craftsmen (Table 7.2). In spite of the bipolar competition, the largest individual party result at the 1990 elections went to the transformed League of Communists with a programme entitled 'Europe now'. It gained 7.5% of the seats in the Social-Political Chamber, or 10% of all the seats in the—at that time still—three-chamber assembly.

This led to a broad government coalition not only involving DEMOS parties but also allowing for the participation of the reformed League of Communists of Slovenia (Gov.si, n.d.a; Fink-Hafner 1999, 110). A combination of continuity and change was also seen in the selection of the Prime Minister from the new party (Christian Democrats) and the election of Milan Kučan (former president of the reformed League of

Table 7.1 Characteristics of party systems immediately after the national parliamentary elections and election turnout (1990–2022)

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
Number of parties and party lists competing at elections	17	33	18	16	23	17	20	17	25	21
Number of parliamentary parties	9	8	7	8	7	7[a]	7	7	9	5
% of valid votes for old parties (successors of transformed socio-political organizations) represented in the parliament	37.1	37.0	36.0	48.3	33.0	35.66	10.52	5.98	9.93	6.69

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations (regardless of ideological orientation)	54.8	45.3	52.7	47.9	55.3	56.69	81.75	81.32	77.97	69.25
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations in a centre-right cluster of the ideological continuum	45.97	26.45	45.13	34.09	44.99	39.87	46.27	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations in a centre-left cluster of the ideological continuum	8.38	18.85	7.57	13.81	10.31	16.82	35.48	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties emerging just before the elections regardless of ideological orientation	54.8			4.33 (Party of the Youth)		9.37 For Real	36.88 Gregor Virant's Civic List + Positve Slovenia	44.84 The Left + Miro Cerar's Party + Alliance of Alenka Bratušek	12.60 List of Marjan Šarec	34.45 Freedom Movement
% of lost votes (not represented in the parliament)	8.1	17.7	10.6	3.8	11.7	7.65	7.72	12.71	12.11	24.06

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
Number of parties in the ruling coalition immediately after elections	6	4	3	4(+1)[a]	4	4	5	3	5	3
Election turnout (%)	83.5	85.6	73.70	70.14	60.65	63.10	65.60	51.73	52.64	70.97

Source Državna volilna komisija (n.d.), at http://www.dvk.gov.si and own calculations

[a]The Slovenian People's Party and the Party of the Youth of Slovenia competed at elections together, but the PYS did not gain any parliamentary seats. If the PYS was counted as a separate parliamentary party, the number of parliamentary parties would be eight

Table 7.2 Results of parliamentary elections in Slovenia 1992–2022 (no. of parliamentary seats out of 88 filled by party MPs[a])

Election year	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
Political parties									
Democratic Party of Slovenia	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
DeSUS—Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	–	5	4	4	7	6	10	5	–
Gregor Virant's Civic List	–	–	–	–	–	8	–	–	–
The Left and its predecessors	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	9	5
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and its predecessors	22	25	34	23	5	–	–	–	–
New Slovenia—Christian Democratic Party	–	–	8	9	–	4	5	7	8
Positive Slovenia	–	–	–	–	–	28	–	–	–
Slovenian Democratic party and its predecessors	4	16	14	29	28	26	21	25	27
Slovenian People's Party and its predecessors	10	19	9	7	5	6	–	–	–
Slovenian National Party	12	4	4	6	5	–	–	4	–
Slovenian Christian Democrats	15	10	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Social Democrats and their predecessors	14	9	11	10	29	10	6	10	7
Party of the Modern Centre (initially Miro Cerar's Party)	–	–	–	–	–	–	36	10	–
Party of the Youth of Slovenia	–	–	4	–	–	–	–	–	–
For Real—Social Liberals	–	–	–	–	9	–	–	–	–
Party of Alenka Bratušek (former Alliance of Alenka Bratušek)	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	5	–
The Greens of Slovenia	5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
List of Marjan Šarec								13	–
Freedom Movement									41

Source Državna volilna komisija (n.d.), at http://www.dvk.gov.si

[a]…two seats out of 90 are reserved for representatives of the Hungarian and Italian minority elected separately by the two minorities

Communists) as the President of the Presidency of Slovenia's republic in 1990 and then as the President of the Republic of Slovenia (1992).

Polarization had been somewhat constrained by the external threat of intervention by federal Yugoslav institutions, including the Yugoslav army. Nevertheless, several long-term big political issues developed, including the interpretation of World War Two and of the socialist regime (including the postwar killings), political control of the mass media, privatization, denationalization and Church–state relations (including issues concerning the historical role of the Catholic Church in the Slovenian territory, its economic wealth and influencing public policies).

In spite of the centrifugal tendencies within some new parties and in the party system as a whole, parties had been able to collaborate in making several crucial common decisions: the formal decision was made to declare an independent state and adopt a new constitution determining Slovenia's political system as a parliamentary democracy based on liberal democratic principles and a welfare state. The legal basis for the development of a capitalist economy, which had initially been created by adopting amendments to the old constitution by the old political elite (under the pressure of political opposition and the economic elite), was also further ensured by the new constitution adopted in December 1991.

Obviously, in this period political parties and the relations among them could not have been predictable and there is no basis for referring to the party system closure. On the one hand, the governmental arena allowed for alternation in power (DEMOS parties formed the government based on the 1990 elections for the Sociopolitical Chamber of a three-chamber republican assembly). However, due to the inclusive formula of government formation, the government involved not only six small parties but also the former governing party gaining access to the executive (Zajc 2009). Nevertheless, it was not only the numerous coalition partners that had made governing very difficult. The new parties had still been in the process of consolidation, meaning that they had been dealing with internal ideological differences within, as well as among, themselves.

All in all, in spite of the difficulties, the combination of the above-presented characteristics of parties and a party system contributed to a successful transition to democracy.

Consolidation of the First Party System Based on the 1991 Constitution (1992–2000 Elections)

The newly created parties had been busily reforming through splits and integrations. They had tended to quickly change their names, and MPs had been moving from one parliamentary group to another. The two reformed old parties (Liberal Democracy and the successor of the reformed League of Communists) had been integrating some small political groupings and some of the Greens. Nine years after the first democratic elections, the number of active and registered parties had become more moderate. About 30 parties had been officially registered under the new law on political parties of autumn 1994. Only about a third of them succeeded in developing their organizational network over the whole Slovenian territory and ensured they had enough resources for survival. Several key parties had been growing in terms of electoral support (Table 7.2).

In spite of poor early institutionalization, the new political parties had been gaining party membership. For example, the Slovenian Christian Democrats with 35,000 and the Democratic Party of Pensioners with 25,000 had more members than the successor of the transformed League of Communists with 23,000 members (Krašovec 2014). The successor of the reformed League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia had around 6,000 members and the predecessor of Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party had been gaining membership slowly (Krašovec 2014).

Party personalization started to evolve with the anti-communist Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (a predecessor of the Slovenian Democratic Party) after Janez Janša had taken over the party. Also, the Slovenian National Party had been undistinguishable from its leader Zmago Jelinčič.

Social rootedness in terms of citizens' identification with parties had been rather poor. In the period between 1995 and 2000, the percentage of citizens feeling close to any party fluctuated slightly around 20%, with the only sizeable decline being in 1996, which was marked by problems in the formation of government (Toš 2007, 17). The poor new party organizational resources have only allowed a few political parties to survive the transitional period and democratic consolidation. However, the early establishment of party state funding contributed to the stability of the party system core while at the same time producing state-dependent parties (Krašovec and Haughton 2011).

Nevertheless, besides the reformed League of Communists and the reformed League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, some new parties also successfully consolidated themselves (the centre-left Democratic Party of Pensioners, Janša's anti-communist party—at that time named the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia—and to some extent the extreme-right Slovenian National Party). The conservative Slovenian People's Party and the Christan Democratic Party had hurt themselves by trying to position themselves both separately and, for some time, as one merged party during this decade. In the 2000 elections, a new party, the Party of the Youth, entered parliament for the first and last time.

During the first decade of consolidation of democracy, the party system appeared to have been consolidating while it had been losing some ideological diversity (the Greens, parties representing craftsmen) while maintaining the party system's openness and dynamics. The institutional context (proportional election system and parliamentary constitution choice) contributed to the continuous fragmentation of the party system. The centre-left parties opted against the introduction of a system with some or even prevalent majoritarian characteristics (opposing Janša's party favouring the majoritarian system).

It was particularly due to the electoral success of the centre-left Liberal Democracy of Slovenia that the cluster of parties with roots in the former regime rose from around 37% in the period between the 1990 and 1996 elections to 48.3% after the 2000 elections (Table 7.2). The success of the cluster of parties without roots in the former regime had been volatile but reached 47.9% in the 2000 elections. During the 1992–2000 period, the parties without roots in the previous regime empowered the centre-right cluster more than the centre-left cluster in the party system, including even the strengthening of the right ideological extreme with the Slovenian National Party.

In that process, elements of a polarized and moderate party system (according to Sartori's typology) mixed to varying degrees, with a rather high party system fragmentation, polarization on several long-term political issues (as noted in the previous subsection) while collaborating on other major political issues, the existence of a double opposition and ideological fever.

During that period, Janša's party (at that time the anti-communist Social Democratic Party of Slovenia) contributed to elements of polarized pluralism. This included the anti-communist, particularly personalized anti-Milan Kučan stand (even after Kučan's retirement), which has

persisted until today with various stresses (e.g. pointing at the dangerous former secret service, UDBA's, remains in the form of 'udbo-mafia'). Janša believed that Kučan, a leader of the liberalized former Slovenian League of Communists, sacrificed him by having him arrested in 1988 due to publishing sensitive federal Yugoslav documents and then handing him to the Yugoslav army for a trial before the Yugoslav army court in Ljubljana. Besides that, Janša's party had also been challenging the existing political institutions. It had been questioning the legitimacy of elections and demanding the electoral system be changed into a majoritarian electoral system. The party even internationalized conflicts around the change in the electoral system, expressed in differing political interpretations of a referendum on electoral system change (Fink-Hafner and Novak 2022). It had also proactively intruded into conflictual political issues on the party system agenda, making other parties take a more or less reactive stand. The 2000 election campaign also clearly indicated that Janša's party was moving towards the more extreme right by misusing the issues of many marginal social groups.

In the frame of a three-polar party competition, which evolved after the 1992 elections, the centre-left Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) established itself as an integrating actor of the centre-left and centre-right governmental coalition partners. The formation and maintenance of the government had been very difficult due to there being numerous partners (Table 7.3). Nevertheless, for most of the first decade after the transition, the LDS had ensured safe governing majorities with the inclusion of ideologically very diverse parties (Zajc 2009). The LDS even invented a formula to include parties that could not have agreed directly to collaborate within the same government. An example is the LDS's creation of a coalition government including the anti-Communist Social Democratic Party of Slovenia combined with the LDS's special agreement with the successor of the former Communist party. Janez Drnovšek's (LDS's leader) valuable experience at the complex Yugoslav level of politics toward the end of the regime, as well as his international experience, had also proved to be helpful in the national context. Later on, other parties of the Prime Minister also sometimes used the signing of a special agreement or other forms of agreement between the party of the Prime Minister and an individual opposition party on so-called 'project collaboration' in order to ensure a big enough parliamentary majority to adopt the government's projects. There were no early elections in this period.

Rather, individual coalition partners had dropped out (Krašovec and Krpič 2019).

Multi-partner governing coalitions during the 1990s managed to solve many key developmental issues, including the economic and refugee crises linked to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the creation of an independent state and the process of Slovenia's integration into the EU. There was hardly any Euroscepticism. Parliamentary parties signed a pact for collaboration in favour of more efficient fulfilment of the EU's demands related to Slovenia's integration into the EU. The only partial exception was the parliamentary extreme-right Slovenian National Party. And even this party declared itself to be Eurorealist and opted not to act against the integration.

Nevertheless, parties did engage in conflicts over the creation of the rules and conditions for capitalist development, especially the mode of privatization, and political control over the economy and mass media. The power relations (together with favourable socio-economic preconditions) allowed for the implementation of two combined strategies. The first was Slovenia's defending from external pressures for shock therapy and privatization. The second was gradualism in reforms and maintaining relatively low levels of social inequalities.

However, besides many governing accomplishments, parties had also got involved in inter-party conflicts and scandals. This had not been well received by citizens (Fink-Hafner et al. 2002). The Liberal Democracy of Slovenia's increasing involvement in corruption scandals and the expanding political polarization in the party system since the end of the 1990s contributed to the crisis of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia towards the end of the 1990s. In spite of the new Party of the Youth supporting the LDS government after its success at the 2000 elections, the implosion of the liberal centre and the emergence of a two-polar-party competition evolved.

Despite positive measures of democracy in this period, the described problems of governing probably contributed to the decline in trust in political institutions after 2000 (as shown in the previous chapter).

Table 7.3 Characteristics of party systems and government formation immediately after the national parliamentary elections, and election turnout (1990–2022)

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
Number of parties and party lists competing at elections	17	33	18	16	23	17	20	17	25	21
Number of parliamentary parties	9	8	7	8	7	7[a]	7	7	9	5
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations in a centre-right cluster of the ideological continuum	45.97	26.45	45.13	34.09	44.99	39.87	46.27	Unclear[a]	Unclear	Unclear

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
% of valid votes for parliamentary parties without roots in socio-political organizations in a centre-left cluster of the ideological continuum	8.38	18.85	7.57	13.81	10.31	16.82	35.48	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear
% of valid votes and names of parliamentary parties emerging just before the elections regardless of ideological orientation	54.8			4.33 (Party of the Youth of Slovenia-PYS)		9.37 For Real	36.88 Gregor Virant's Civic List + Positive Slovenia	44.84 The Left + Miro sar's Party + Alliance of Alenka Bratušek	12.60 List of Marjan Šarec	34.45 Freedom Movement
% of lost votes (not represented in parliament)	8.1	17.7	10.6	3.8	11.7	7.65	7.72	12.71	12.11	24.06

(continued)

Table 7.3 (continued)

Party system characteristics	*1990*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2008*	*2011*	*2014*	*2018*	*2022*
Number of parties in the ruling coalition immediately after elections	6	4	3	4(+1)[b]	4	4	5	3	5	3
Party of the Prime Minister immediately after elections	Slovenian Christian Democrats	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia	Slovenian Democratic Party	Social Democrats	Slovenian Democratic Party[c]	Miro Cerar's Party	List of Marjan Šarec	Freedom Movement
Election turnout (%)	83.5	85.6	73.70	70.14	60.65	63.10	65.60	51.73	52.64	70.97

Source Državna volilna komisija (n.d.), at http://www.dvk.gov.si; and own calculations

[a]Unclear = ideological orientation not clear

[b]Slovenian People's Party and the Party of the Youth of Slovenia competed in elections together, but the PYS did not gain any parliamentary seats. If the PYS was counted as a separate parliamentary party, the number of parliamentary parties would be eight

[c]After the vote of confidence, Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party's government was replaced by Alenka Bratušek, who had taken over the split part of a new party, Positive Slovenia, first established as the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek, and later renamed the Party of Alenka Bratušek

Destabilization of the Party System (2004–2008 Elections)

Having held a governmental position for a long time, and after multiple corruption scandals, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia radically lost its support (it gained 23 seats in the 2004 elections and only five in the 2008 elections, 11 fewer than in 2000). The social rootedness of parties in terms of party membership had noticeably declined after 2000 with the exception of Janša's Democratic Party (which reported a rise to 27,011 members by 2008) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (with 14,210 members by 2008) (Krašovec 2014). Parties had been continuously dependent on state funding and acting in an environment with low party identity—only around 20% of voters felt close to a particular party (Toš 2007, 17).

All the parties had been more or less adapting to the neoliberal turn within the EU (Krašovec and Cabada 2018). This was in sharp contrast to the predominant values of social equality and support for a welfare state (as shown in the previous chapter). It was only Janša's anti-communist party that very openly marked its ideological turn by shifting its programme more to the right, renaming itself the Slovenian Democratic Party and joining the European People's Party.

In the process of the strengthening of the right's ideological extreme after 2004, elements of a polarized and moderate party system (according to Sartori's typology) mixed to varying degrees, with a rather high party system fragmentation, polarization on several long-term political issues while collaborating on other major political issues, the existence of a double opposition and ideological fever (Fink-Hafner 2023–in print).

The new Party for Real, which tried to revive the liberal centre, won nine seats in the 2008 elections. In the later elections, both the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the Party for Real failed to maintain their parliamentary position. In fact, the 2008 elections demonstrated the level of polarization in an unseen way (Table 7.2). The anti-communist Slovenian Democratic Party (28 seats) and the Social Democrats (the successors of the reformed Communist Party with 29 seats) gained nearly equal support. Other parties gained a much smaller number of seats.

With the crisis of the liberal centre, the percentage of valid votes for parliamentary parties with roots in socio-political organizations shrank from 48.3% after the 2000 elections to 33% in the 2004 elections and 35.7% in the 2008 elections (Table 7.1). By the 2008 elections, the

cluster of parliamentary parties without roots in the socialist regime had contributed more to the centre-right than to the centre-left segment of the party system (Table 7.3).

On the one hand, the Slovenian Democratic Party (led by Janša) in the 2004–2008 period wanted to dismantle these old socio-politico-economic networks and thus announced a radical privatization, as well as adopting an adversarial stance towards its social partners (Guardiancich 2012). On the other hand, the Social Democrats' government headed by Borut Pahor failed to respond in a timely manner to the 2008 international financial and economic crisis and, despite turning to social transfers to keep voters' support, failed to remain in power for the full parliamentary mandate.

Although in 2008 the successor to the former regime party (Social Democrats) succeeded for the first—and so far the only—time in winning the elections and took over the executive power in a peaceful manner, this indicator of democratic consolidation (according to Linz 1990) was mixed with the emerging challenges to Slovenia's democracy. Soon after the Social Democrats became the party of the PM, Janša's party announced the programmatic idea of the Second Republic (SDS 2009).

Moreover, in the context of the 2008 international financial and economic crisis, a new cleavage had also evolved more clearly—the cleavage between the neoliberal understanding of the role of the state and the pro-welfare state orientation.

Continuous Radical Renewal of the Party System (2011–2022 Elections)

Between 2011 and 2022, elections took place in the context of the accumulation of many external pressures, particularly including the impacts of the international economic and financial crisis, the international migration crisis and the global COVID-19 crisis. Domestic factors presented in previous sections as well as external factors contributed to a series of early elections (2011, 2014 and 2018), unstable governments and the emergence of ever-new political parties based on individual political personalities just before the elections and substantial voters' support for such parties (Table 7.3).

After these elections, six new parties entered the parliament. Nearly all of them tried to fill the liberal centre void: Gregor Virant's Civic List; Positive Slovenia (led by Zoran Janković, at that time mayor of Slovenia's

capital, Ljubljana); Miro Cerar's Party (later renamed the Party of the Modern Centre); the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (a splitter from Positive Slovenia, later renamed the Party of Alenka Bratušek); and the List of Marjan Šarec. It was only the Left that declared itself to be red-green. Only two parties of the first democratic decade maintained a continuous presence in the parliament: Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party and the Social Democrats.

Party social rootedness has been under stress. Not only did party membership generally decline after 2010 as in other post-socialist countries, but in Slovenia, it declined more than the average party membership in those other countries (Nikić Čakar and Čular 2023). While Janša's Democratic Party succeeded in preserving party membership at around 30,000 members, other previously existing parties were losing party membership (Krašovec 2014) and the ever-new political parties failed to develop into proper organizations with a substantial membership. According to party funding reports, all parties, with the small exception of the Slovenian Democratic Party, have been fully dependent on state funding in an environment with a rather low party identity (in the period between 2012 and 2020, on average 33.4% of those surveyed responded positively that they felt closer to one particular party than to other parties) (Slovenian Public Opinion 2002–2022, 2003–2023). Nevertheless, parties have taken advantage of governing in circumstances of substantial remains of state ownership in economy.

In November 2023, the investigative committee of the National Assembly focused on Slovenian Democratic Party funding, published an Interim Report on Determining the Political Responsibility of Holders of Public Offices for Alleged Illegal Financing of Political Parties and Party Political Propaganda in the Media Before and During the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly in 2022 with the Financial Resources of State-Owned Enterprises, State Institutions and Foreign Entities (Preiskovalna komisija Državnega zbora Republike Slovenije 2023; see also Trampuš 2023, 24–26, 28; Weiss 2023, 27). It publicly revealed a peculiar 'business model' of party financing. It includes a network of various actors serving as facades for the party financing from domestic (state companies) as well as foreign (particularly Hungarian) sources, often making transactions using cash. These findings resonate with an increase in the V-Dem Clientelism Index in the period between 2019 and 2022 (Fig. 7.1).

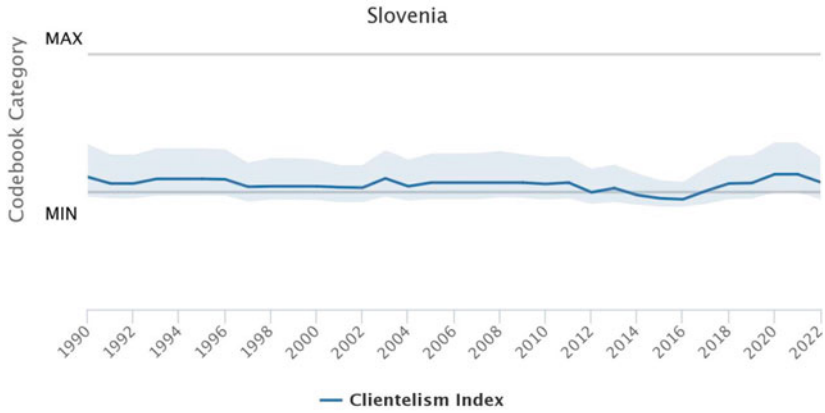

Fig. 7.1 V-dem clientelism index (*Source* V-Dem, Varieties of Democracy, at https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/)

Party system fragmentation changed, particularly the size of units of the party system. Individual parties (particularly several new ones) gained comparatively big shares of parliamentary seats in particular elections. In the 2011 elections, a new party, Positive Slovenia, gained 28 out of 88 seats (two parliamentary seats are reserved for Italian and Hungarian minority representatives) and another new party, Državljanska lista Gregorja Viranta, gained eight seats; in the 2014 elections, a new party, the Party of Miro Cerar, gained 36 seats, an old party, the United Left, gained six seats and another new party, the Party of Alenka Bratušek (a splinter of Positive Slovenia), won four seats; in the 2018 elections, a new party, Lista Marjana Šarca, gained 13 seats; and in the 2022 elections, another new party, the Freedom Movement (led by tycoon Robert Golob, a manager in the energy sector and in the rather distant past also a state secretary in Drnovšek's government), won 41 parliamentary seats—the biggest number since the transition to democracy.

In spite of the many new parties declaring their centrist positioning since 2011, it has become increasingly difficult to identify the ideological-political positions of not only the new parties but also some of the older ones. The Social Democrats failed to further adapt to the changing

society. Janša's party (collaborating ever more closely with Orban's party) additionally shifted towards the extreme right (Haughton and Krašovec 2013). It also intensified international collaboration with extreme-right political parties in Central European countries and beyond.

The party system has increasingly obtained the characteristics of polarized pluralism, especially regarding the erosion of a consensus on the constitutional system and the rise of what Sartori called 'ideological fever'. The bipolar competition of the party system stabilized on the simplified axis of for or against Janša. During 2020 and 2021, the most recognizable blocks of parties on the anti-Janša vs Janša axis re-established themselves on the pro-liberal democracy block vs the de facto pro-Second Republic block axis led by Janša. Coalition partners in Janša's government paid a high price for the enabling of Janša's party. The Democratic Party of Pensioners not only lost the parliamentary position but also faced internal decomposition. The successor of the former Party of Miro Cerar (later renamed the Party of the Modern Centre) further disintegrated into the Konkretno party, which also failed to enter the parliament in the 2022 elections. New Slovenia hardly survived in the parliament and still struggles to distance itself from Janša's party and is re-establishing itself as a clearly ideologically-politically profiled party.

Personalizing party politics and hollowing out programmatic characteristics of ever-new parties have gone hand in hand. Although new parties tended to present themselves as centrist and attempted to fill in the centrist positioning emptied after Liberal Democracy's demise, they were actually 'tabula rasa' until they started making laws when in power. But this has not been the sole method of personalization in Slovenia's politics. Another way has also been linked to Janša's political nourishing of his victimhood (imprisonment in the transition period and imprisonment in 2014 for corruptive behaviour in buying Patria vehicles for Slovenia's army). In the 2011–2022 period, personalistic parties and voters opting for such parties produced a vicious circle of voters' disappointments and ever-new parties without proper resources for governing taking over government coalitions. For about a decade, the electoral competition was to a great extent reduced to the competition among political figures (new parties' leaders) on the anti-Janša side vs Janša.

The context of further increasing the personalization of politics led to the current main political cleavage of Janša vs Golob (leader of the Freedom Movement). Besides the political competition, this also clearly

includes open personal animosities and competition between the two as individuals.

Janša has been additionally building on presenting himself as a continuous political victim. His current victimhood has not been linked so much with his sacrifice by the old elite in Slovenia (leading to Janša's imprisonment and appearing before the Yugoslav army court in Ljubljana). It has become more important that he was imprisoned for a short time in 2014 just before the elections for corruptive behaviour in purchasing Patria vehicles for Slovenia's army, and more recently he received a court sentencing for attacking individual journalists and the leading person in the Slovenian Press Agency. Janša presents these sentences in light of his victimhood. He even invented a nickname for the judiciary: 'krivosodje' ('Slovenian courts of misjustice'). Also, Janša has continuously pointed at the evil 'udbo mafia', 'deep state' and particularly 'strici iz ozadnja'/'uncles from the background', referring indirectly also to the still active informal political role of Milan Kučan. Judiciary is not excluded from this perception of the world as 'the plot' ('svet kot zarota') (Hribar 2011).

In contrast, Golob resents Janša as a person and Janša's followers. This is due to Golob's revelation that Janša's party did not allow him to continue heading the Gen-I company. Since taking over the government, Golob has been passionate about 'cleaning the Janšists' from state apparatus (particularly the police) ('Golob o zaslišanju Tatjane Bobnar: Dogovorila sva se, da policijo očisti janšistov' 2023; Mlakar 2023; 'V SDS-u na nogah zaradi Golobove izjave o "čiščenju janšistov v policiji"' 2023) and the national public radio and TV station ('Golob besedo "janšisti" zamenjal z besedo "janšizem"' 2023). Based on the belief that some of his collaborators, including one MP, 'play for the other team', Golob started a 'cleaning' of the Movement Svoboda party by excluding two individuals from the party and initiating changes in the party leadership ('Iz stranke izključena dva člana, Klakočar Zupančičeva ni več podpredsednica' 2023).

Party institutionalization has not only been eroded by the increasing personalization of parties but also due to many new parties evolving just before the elections as electoral committees led by new faces (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2019), a decline of parties with roots in the old system (from around 37% in the period between the 1990 and 1996 elections to 48.3% after the 2000 elections to between 5.98% and 10.52% in the period between 2011 and 2022) and even the deinstitutionalization of not-so-new parties from the 1990s (particularly Desus) (Table 7.1).

The creation of the Freedom Movement introduced a new party model. First, it brought about the novel practice of taking over a formerly existing but non-active political party (the Party of Green Actions—Stranka zelenih dejanj) based on an agreement with the party leadership and combined with (for Slovenia) quite substantial individual financial contributions. Such a practice has been nicknamed 'the buying of parties' (Vezjak 2022a, b). Particularly in the early stage of establishing the party, Svoboda Golob had embraced direct communication with representatives of the protest movements The Voice of People ('Glas ljudstva' n.d.; 'Golob iniciativi Glas ljudstva zagotovil, da si vlada prizadeva za uresničevanje zavez' 2022; Gov.si 2023). Furthermore, he had also used an unusual technocratic practice from the business milieu in the process of his cadre selection. More precisely, Golob has used Gallup tests for testing his future team members (Lovšin 2023). Golob still appears on the Gallup web page in a video supporting Gallup's ideas on CliftonStrengths (Gallup 2023).

With a radical party system renewal, a difference in opportunities to take care of organizational institutionalization has contributed to a variety of party organizations. As ever, new parties entered government before organizational consolidation; they also lacked time for organizational consolidation, including the development of a party cadre pool. In contrast, older parties (Social Democrats and particularly Janša's Democratic Party of Slovenia) with experiences of governmental and oppositional statuses have had a much longer period of time available for organizational maintenance and development.

Party system closure has been challenged. The government creation process under the leadership of a new party immediately after the elections has become even more difficult. The lack of a new parties' cadre has brought about the rise of politically inexperienced Prime Ministers and ministers, unpredictable government formation and frequent government instability. Political debates on the need for early elections and the actual holding of early elections have become rather regular (held in 2011, 2014 and 2018). Prime Ministers from new parties introduced a new, stepping-down strategy (Krašovec and Krpič 2023). Alenka Bratušek from Positive Slovenia (she took over the prime ministerialship after Janša's government had lost a vote of confidence), Miro Cerar (Miro Cerar's Party/Party of the Modern Centre) and Miran Šarec (Miran Šarec's List) did so when they unsuccessfully managed governments. This happened in circumstances when the governments had become ideologically more

coherent and the political milieu more polarized in comparison to Slovenia's governments and milieus during the 1990s. All of these Prime Ministers lacked political experience, unlike Drnovšek (a long-term Prime Minister during the 1990s with previous experience in Yugoslav politics and internationally).

The described problems have so far opened up opportunities for the second and third Janša's governments. The third Janša's government was enabled by a weak centre-left government (2018–2019) and its Prime Minister, Marjan Šarec' (the List of Marjan Šarec), stepping down. Furthermore, Janša's weak coalition partners (New Slovenia, Desus and the Party of the Modern Centre, which gradually transformed into a new centre-right party, Konkretno) enabled Janša's implementation of some Second Republic programmatic elements in the context of managing the COVID-19 pandemic in exchange for support for a particular party's (party leader's) projects.

In this situation, the door opened for struggles around fundamental issues of democracy. However, it was only the empowerment of the weak centre-left parliamentary opposition by civil society pressures and the mobilization of broad citizen protest against Janša's government that allowed for a change in the distribution of political power. A new party, the Freedom Movement (the Freedom Party in the making), established just before the 2022 elections by a group of people supporting Golob, won the national elections in collaboration with the centre-left civil society and oppositional parliamentary parties as well as with the help of citizens' strategic anti-Janša voting.

A Comparative Longitudinal View

Party System Fragmentation

Party system fragmentation has been a long-term party system characteristic (Table 7.4). As already noted, the law adopted in 1989 not only legalized the previously existing oppositional proto-parties but also opened up a window for the quick formal establishment of numerous parties. However, not many of them have survived. In terms of the number of parties, the party system had been closer to polarized pluralism, for which the threshold is five to six parties. After the first free elections in 1990, nine parties entered the parliament and at that point no party could be considered irrelevant. From 1992 to the 2018 elections,

the average number of parties was eight. The only exception so far was the 2022 elections, based on which only five parties entered the parliament and a single party (Freedom Movement) gained as many as 41 out of 88 (47%) parliamentary seats (Table 7.2).

All in all, party system fragmentation does not tell us much about the qualitative changes in parties and party systems. This is because it had persisted for a long time at high levels when other changes in the party system evolved. When it radically changed with the lowest fractionalization after the 2022 elections, this again doesn't reveal the qualities of the parties, particularly the fragility of the biggest unit (the newly established Freedom Movement). This finding is not novel as authors of early party system classifications had already come to the conclusion that the number of parties per se, even when amending for the size of parties, does not reveal enough about the key party system characteristics (Mair 1990).

Party and Party System Institutionalisation

Party institutionalization has been closely linked to the presence of parties with roots in the old system. Beside the reformed League of Communists (today Social Democrats), there were two other parties with roots in socio-political organizations in the frame of the old regime (they gained 37.1% of the votes in the 1990 elections). However, not all succeeded in adapting efficiently to the democratic framework and maintaining their parliamentary status in the following elections despite their pre-existing organizational networks and other organizational resources. The successors to the reformed League of Communists of Slovenia, and particularly to the reformed League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, initially adapted very successfully to the new system. It was particularly due to the electoral success of the centre-left LDS that the cluster of parties with roots in the former regime rose from around 37% in the period between the 1990 and 1996 elections to 48.3% after the 2000 elections (Table 7.2). However, after a long-term governmental position and multiple corruption scandals, the party radically lost support and disappeared from parliament after 2011. In the period between 2011 and 2022, the Social Democrats (the only party with roots in socio-political organizations) only gained between 5.98% and 10.52% of the vote.

The *new political parties* that emerged in opposition to the previous regime (together gaining 54.8% of the votes in the 1990 elections) were initially poorly institutionalized (many of them emerged just before the

Table 7.4 Party system and democracy in Slovenia—a dynamic view

Changes in democracy	*Transition to democracy*	*Consolidation of democracy*		*Radical decline in democracy*
Party competition	Bipolar structure of competition	Three-polar structure of competition	Bipolar structure of competition	Bipolar structure of competition
Timing (national elections)	1989–1991	1992–2000	2004–2018	2020–2022 Janša's government (not based on elections)
Fragmentation: no. of parliamentary parties	9	7–8	7–9	5 (2022)
Fragmentation: share of the two biggest parliamentary parties (no. of seats/per cent)[a]	26/33%	37/42.0% (1992); 41/47.0% (1996); 48/54.6% (2000)	52/59.1% (2004); 57/64.8% (2008); 54/61.4% (2011); 38/43.2% (2018)	68/77.3% (2022)
Emergence of alternative ideological-political programmes	A combination of bottom-up anti-Communist system pressures and top-down adaptation of the old elite		2009: Janša's programmatic speech on the Second Republic at the 9th SDP Congress 2013: SDP's public reinforcing of the idea of the Second Republic	Implementation of the programme of the Second Republic + Janša's party blocking the establishment of the Freedom government after the 2022 elections

Changes in democracy	*Transition to democracy*	*Consolidation of democracy*						*Radical decline in democracy*
Deinstitutionalization of party system—per cent of valid votes for parliamentary parties established just before the indicated elections	1990 54.8	2000 4.33	2008 9.37	2011 36.88	2014 44.84	2018 12.60		34.45 (41 out of 88 party seats) at the 2022 elections
Electoral volatility	/	Between 22.16 and 27.03	42.71	44.58	31.20			34.91 at the 2022 elections
Early elections			X	X	X			
Governments headed by new parties established just before elections	X		X	X	X			X

(continued)

Table 7.4 (continued)

Changes in democracy	*Transition to democracy*	*Consolidation of democracy*				*Radical decline in democracy*
Personalization of parties (X meaning the establishment of new parties around individual personalities)		Increasing personalization of Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP) predecessors under Janez Janša's leadership; personalized Slovenian National Party (SNP) led by Zmago Jelinčnič	X + SDP	X + SDP	X + SDP + SNP	X + SDP
Social rootedness of parties: party membership (Slovenian Public Opinion Polls)	January 1991 9.1%; December 1991 6.1%	4.5% (1992); 4.9% (2002); 3.5% (2004)	No data on membership; Feeling close to any party: average 35% (2002–2006); 40.5% (2008); 27.9% (2010); average 35% (2012–2018)			3.4% (2022)

Sources Državna volilna komisija (n.d.), at https://www.dvk-rs.si/volitve-in-referendumi/referendumi/; Gov.si (n.d.b), at https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/vlada/o-vladi/pretekle-vlade/; (Fink-Hafner and Novak 2022); Slovenian Public Opinion Polls (n.d.), at https://www.cjm.si/gradiva/; and own calculations based on data presented in Chapter 7

[a]Calculation of the share of the two biggest parliamentary parties for the transition period is based on the size of the Socio-political chamber of Slovenia's Republican Assembly (80 members); other shares are calculated based on the number of seats filled by parties in the National Assembly (established by the 1991 constitution), which is 88 out of 90

elections), and many very soon ended up in the party graveyard. Some new parties also became successfully institutionalized (the centre-left Democratic Party of Pensioners, Janša's anti-communist party—at that time named the Slovenian Social Democratic Party—and the extreme-right Slovenian National Party), while the conservative Slovenian People's Party and the Christian Democratic Party tried to position themselves both separately and, for a time, as a single merged party.

In the 2000 elections, a new party, the Party of the Youth (supporting the LDS government), entered parliament for the first and last time. The new party For Real, which tried to revive the liberal centre after the LDS's decline, won nine seats at the 2008 elections; however, both of these new parties failed to maintain their parliamentary position in the later elections. After the 2011, 2014 and 2018 elections, six new parties entered parliament: Gregor Virant's Civic List, Positive Slovenia, Miro Cerar's Party (later renamed the Party of the Modern Centre), the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (later renamed the Party of Alenka Bratušek), the List of Marjan Šarec and the Left. While all the other new (and old) parties were quite adaptive to the EU's post-financial crisis policies and did not offer a particularly articulated party platform, the Left was the only new party that introduced open criticism of the current capitalism. A radical stream within the Left has openly campaigned for some socialist ideas. The Left is also the only new party that remained in parliament after the 2022 elections. From the parties of the first democratic decade, only two parties maintained a continuous presence in parliament: Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party and the Social Democrats. Parties that have been even more extreme than Janša's party have not succeeded in entering the parliament.

Personalization. The personalization of politics as the antithesis of routine and the institutionalization of political parties (Panebianco 1988, 53) had become an increasing characteristic of Janša's party during the 1990s, but has radically soared over big shares of parties since the 2011 elections. Nevertheless, it is important that in general Slovenia's citizens have not sympathized with Janša. He has been poorly rated in public opinion surveys. In contrast, in longitudinal Slovenian public opinion surveys, Milan Kučan and Janez Drnovšek have been continuously recognized as politicians with a much higher reputation than any other politician. At the maximum, Janša's party has gained 29 seats (33%).

Many new parties evolved just before the elections as electoral committees led by publicly recognizable new faces, and many were even named

after the party leaders (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2019). The personalization of politics has gone as far as the most recent political cleavage formed between two personalities: Janez Janša and Robert Golob. Moreover, it also rests on personal animosities between the two. Golob decided to step into politics after Janša's government had prevented him from gaining another mandate as president of the managing board of Gen-I (a lucrative company in the field of energy, which planned to expand through the solarization of Slovenia) (Černic 2011; 'Golob ni bil vnovič imenovan za direktorja Gen-I-ja, začasno upravo lahko imenuje tudi sodišče' 2021; Mekina 2021; 'Robert Golob: če ne na vrh GEN-I, pa v vrh slovenske politike?' 2021; 'Robert Golob meni, da je državni GEN-I s koncem njegovega mandata obsojen na propad' 2021; 'Vroče vprašanje: gre Robert Golob v politiko?' 2021; Šimac 2022; 'Kako je nastal Gen-I' 2023; Šurla 2023). There are beliefs that Golob did that for revenge as well as that Janša and Golob's personalities are revanchist (Bizilj 2023).

Party social roots. Party social rooting has been a challenge since the transition. This has been expressed in low party membership (Table 7.4), a low percentage of party identity, and distrust of politics, parties and parliament (as shown in the chapter on evaluation of democracy in Slovenia). Early establishment of party state funding contributed to the development of state-dependent parties (Krašovec and Haughton 2011). However, the hyper party system renewal since 2011 has enhanced the lack of parties' social roots. This, along with ever-new voters' disappointment with parties, led to a decline in election turnout and substantial lost votes (not represented in parliament). At the last elections, the proportion of lost votes was as much as a quarter of the votes cast (Table 1) while the turnout was the highest since the 2004 elections (Table 7.3).

Government formation and the related party system closure. Due to the proportional system, governments have often included a large number of parties (Table 7.1). Government formation and the related closure of the party system was already an issue during the 1990s (Table 7.2). But the centre-left LDS managed to form and lead governments, which often included parties from both the left and the right (Zajc 2009). Drnovšek even invented a formula for a separate coalition agreement with two parties, which could not have been otherwise both included into the government due to deep ideological differences among them.

But it has been particularly since the centre-right government led by Janša (2004–2008) that the government formation and stability has

become increasingly unpredictable (Zajc 2015). Unpredictability in the parliamentary party system caused by completely new parties entering the parliament has directly translated into unpredictability of parties of the Prime Minister. Unpredictability has also occurred due to unknown capabilities of Prime Ministers ("new faces") for leading coalition governments and governments' survival throughout the whole four-year mandate.

Governments also became even more unpredictable than at any time in the past. In spite of the fact that in 2011 Positive Slovenia gained 28 out of 88 seats, it was not able to form a government (Zajc 2013). However, after Janša's government's vote of confidence it was Positive Slovenia that provided the Prime Minister (Bratušek). In contrast, when in the 2014 elections the Party of Miro Cerar gained 36 seats it successfully formed the government. When in the 2018 elections, Janša's party gained the biggest share of votes, it was not able to form a government. Also, the Lista Marjana Šarca, which gained 13 seats, had not only had a hard time in forming the government but also in successfully managing it (Zajc 2020). As already noted, Šarec stepped down and Janša's government was formed without holding elections right at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. It appeared that the government formation based on the 2022 elections with the Freedom Movement (led by Robert Golob) wining 41 seats would take place in a quite straightforward manner. However, the government formation brought about the rather surprising inclusion of the former Alenka Bratušek's and Šarec's party including both leaders in spite of the fact that their parties had lost their parliamentary status in the 2022 elections. Voters, in particular, who chose to vote for the Freedom Movement and not for either of the two parties did not see this as a transparent evolution of the Freedom Movement.

Unlike any government in the past, the current centre-left government coalition, with a safe parliamentary majority led by the Freedom Movement, has faced the blocking of its formation. Janša's party-initiated referendum on the law establishing the organization of Freedom's government. So, Golob's government was formed in line with its initially adopted law only in January 2023.

Polarization

In spite of the fact that the party system was very fragmented, and each party competed individually, the competition at first was primarily bipolar (communism vs anti-communism). In the frame of three-polar party competition, which evolved after the 1992 elections, the centre-left LDS (a social-liberal party) established itself as an integrating actor of the centre-left and the centre-right governmental coalition partners. In this period, Slovenia's party system was found to be among the least polarized Central European post-socialist countries (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2011, 134–135).

However, this exceptionalism in Slovenia changed after the first post-transitional decade. While various measures of polarization may differ, it has been polarization expressed in V-Dem measures that has particularly risen and stayed quite high since 2012, almost achieving the maximum value between 2020 and 2022 (Malčič 2023, 31–32). Public opinion surveys have shown that polarization has not been limited to party politics but has also significantly increased among Slovenians (Jou 2011, 36–37; Malčič 2023, 33). The combined party and citizen polarization has created a division of Slovenia's politics into two not only opposing, but also increasingly hostile political camps tolerating and using hate speech (Vehovar et al. 2012; Vezjak 2018; Šulc and Šori 2020; Ratajec 2021). The increasing levels of hate speech have often evolved, especially as a result of Janša's and Janša's party instrumentalization of Twitter and anti-Janša actors reacting to it.

Nevertheless, looking at political life, it should be noted that during the first post-transitional decade, parties did engage in conflicts over the creation of the rules and conditions for capitalist development, especially the mode of privatization, political control over the economy and mass media. This, together with the crisis of the LDS and the expanding political polarization in the party system since the end of the 1990s, contributed to the implosion of the liberal centre and the emergence of two-polar-party competition, particularly expressed in the 2000 elections.

During the 1992–2000 period, Janša's party particularly articulated elements of polarized pluralism, including challenging the existing political institutions (questioning the legitimacy of elections, demanding the introduction of a majoritarian electoral system and hinting at the former regime politicians and institutions as still influential actors beside the scenes) (Hribar 2011). The 2000 election campaign also clearly indicated

that Janša's party was moving towards the more extreme right by misusing the issues of many marginal social groups.

With the strengthening of the right's ideological extreme after 2004, elements of a polarized and moderate party system (according to Sartori's typology) mixed to various degrees (high party system fragmentation, polarization on several long-term political issues while collaborating on the adoption of the euro, the existence of a double opposition and ideological fever) (Fink-Hafner, 2023–in print). The 2008 elections expressed the level of polarization in nearly equal support for the anti-communist Slovenian Democratic Party (28 seats) and the Social Democrats (the successors to the reformed Communist Party with 29 seats). Other parties gained much smaller numbers of seats.

Several elements have enhanced the party system characteristics of polarized pluralism, especially the erosion of a consensus on the constitutional system and the rise of what Sartori named 'ideological fever'. The bipolar competition party system stabilized on the simplified axis of those against or in favour of Janša.

During the last parliamentary mandate (2018–2022), the centre-left was weak not only as a government but also as a parliamentary opposition during the COVID-19 crisis. Since 2021, the most recognizable blocks of parties on the anti-Janša vs Janša axis have re-established themselves on the pro-liberal democracy block vs the de facto pro-Second Republic block axis led by Janša. Parties have struggled de facto around the fundamental issues of democracy.

Ideological characteristics of the party system and party blocks. As already noted, in the fragmented party system, a full rainbow of ideological orientations without extremes had been presented: reformed socialist and communist, green, Christian democrat, conservative–agrarian, anti-communist social democrat and regional parties, as well as parties representing craftsmen. The bipolar structure somewhat softened due to the 1990 election results. As the largest proportion of votes went to the transformed League of Communists with a programme entitled 'Europe Now', the former party of the socialist regime participated in governing. Slovenian parties collaborated beyond their ideological boundaries to solve critical national issues while establishing a national democratic political system and an independent state.

During the 1992–2008 period, parties without roots in the previous regime empowered the centre-right cluster more than that of the centre-left in the party system. While parties had been more or less adapting

to the neoliberal turn within the EU (Krašovec and Cabada 2018), it was Janša's anti-communist party that very clearly marked this turn by shifting its programme to the right, renaming itself the Slovenian Democratic Party and becoming a member of the European People's Party. More recently, Janša's party (collaborating ever more closely with Orbán's party) shifted towards the extreme right (Haughton and Krašovec 2013), so that the extreme-right Slovenian National Party only succeeded in returning to parliament for a very short time. Even more extreme new parties have unsuccessfully competed at elections since 2011.

In spite of many new parties' attempts since 2011 to fill the liberal centre void, it has become increasingly difficult to understand the ideological-political positions not only of new parties (Positive Slovenia, the Party of Miro Cerar, the Party of the Modern Centre and the Freedom Movement) but also some of the older parties without roots in the old socio-political organizations. This was particularly the case with the Democratic Party of Pensioners and the Christian Democratic New Slovenia. The Social Democrats had lost themselves in the 'third way', like many European social democratic parties. So the most obvious opposition to Janša's party has appeared to be the red-green Left, a part of the newly emerging European radical left. Movement Svoboda's position is first and foremost the anti-Janša position. It remains to be seen from its policies and politics what it really stands for.

Key Findings Based on Comparing Changing Party Systems

Party system fragmentation has been a long-term feature of Slovenia's party system and does not seem to function as a political factor of party system change in the frame of a long-enduring proportional electoral system. Rather, it appears that there are institutionalization and polarization, which may matter.

In the period 1993–2021, Slovenia's party system had been among the European countries with the highest parliamentary fragmentation, the highest numbers of new parties, above-average electoral volatility, low electoral disproportionality, about average party system closure and low polarization (Casal Bértoa 2023). While such measures may help in understanding Slovenia's party politics from an international comparative perspective, they don't offer a more refined view, which may be crucial for the understanding of radical changes in democracy.

When looking into institutionalization, of course, it should be noted that Slovenia's party system has never been highly institutionalized. However, there have only been two periods when new parties have taken a big share of the party system: the transitional and post-2011 periods. Slovenia's case also shows that the direction of changing institutionalization matters. While in the transitional stage the overall trend was the institutionalization of both parties and party system, the deinstitutionalization process initially included political parties. However, the increasing share of poorly institutionalized parties has also damaged the institutionalization of the overall party system. Even more, such processes have brought about a large turnout of MPs and government cadre, including also politically inexperienced Prime Ministers. All these together damages party system closure—as has been particularly obvious since the 2011 early elections.

Slovenia's findings also speak against the general thesis that it is not the institutionalization of parties that matters, but rather the institutionalization of a party system. The question is whether there is a particular 'threshold' of individual party deinstitutionalization and a newly emerging party poor institutionalization, which may distinguish between an institutionalized party system, a deinstitutionalized party system and a sufficiently institutionalized party system.

Furthermore, Slovenia's experiences show that with radical deinstitutionalization of parties and a party system, the issue of a political profession may appear on the agenda again several decades after the transition to democracy. New parties in their early stages lack their own political cadre and their leaders tend to lack skills for managing coalitions and the state as well as for efficient securing of their interests beyond the nation state. So, a lack of political knowledge and skills is not a phenomenon that is for ever dealt with in the process of transition and consolidation.

While the bipolar competition has been characteristic of the same two periods, after 2004 bipolarity had been replacing the tripolar competition for most of the 1990s. Furthermore, it was during the first Janša government (2004–2008) that the personalization of party politics had gained new impetus. It was primarily about the anti-Janša stand. However, after the demise of Pahor's (Social Democrats) government (2008–2011), it not only evolved into several parties' general rejection of collaboration with Janša based on a principle (since 2014), but it also actually evolved into the recent cleavage between two political personalities. So, the critical political problem in Slovenia appears to lie in increasing competition

among political personalities instead of among ideas on solving social problems and on Slovenia's overall development.

To conclude, fragmentation, deinstitutionalization (including personalization) and polarization do not appear to be sufficiently strong factors for explaining a long-term party system dynamic. This becomes obvious when we take into account the findings from both this chapter and the chapter on evaluation of democracy in the changing context, which also takes into account citizens' points of view and non-party actors' behaviour.

From this chapter we have learned that simply counting parties and looking at quantifiable characteristics predominantly covered in party literature misses an important party quality, namely the relationship of parties with society and with the state. In Slovenia, parties have been creating an ever-bigger gap between themselves and citizens in several main ways. First, they have actively reduced their representative role in managing the society, including managing the impacts of external pressures. They have betrayed citizens' expectations of a well-functioning economy, low social inequality, and ideologically-politically moderate and honest politics.

Furthermore, we found that party models (particularly linking parties with the state in circumstances with a substantial proportion of state-owned economic entities) matter a lot for the implementation of a representative role of parties as well as for the level of political corruption (which is damaging in itself for democracy). In contrast, in 2022, Slovenia experienced for the first time a wealthy individual organizing a party together with some other individuals contributing their financial shares. This is a phenomenon that is at least to some extent contrary to the predominant party dependency on state financing. Although this practice is very far from the experiences of other parts of the world, it is linked with the emergence of increasing social inequalities in the frame of current capitalist developments (Frank 2023).

When we integrate the findings from this chapter and the chapter on evaluation of democracy and contextual factors, we can empirically substantiate the increasing gap between citizens' expectations and party governing effects. In Slovenia, it has been since 2004 that citizens have been increasingly dissatisfied with party governing leading to economic problems and the decline of social equality, let alone political scandals.

About two decades ago already, Mair (2005) exposed the problematic representative decline in Western democratic countries and on the

EU level. However, over about a quarter of a century since the transition to democracy, Mair's warning has also become a burning issue in Slovenia and probably also in many other post-socialist countries. So have the warnings about the increasing financial secrecy system, which has distorted capitalism and its elites' relationship with taxation and the public realm, so that it conceals kleptocracy, crime and foreign interference as well as exacerbating inequality (Davidson and Judah 2023).

Slovenia's findings also resonate with warnings that politicians' personal qualities and experiences matter for democracy, and that in a partisan political context where a politician might violate their sense of what is morally right, voters are likely much less concerned about morality if the politician is a co-partisan (McCoy et al. 2018; Walter and Redlawsk 2019, 2023).

This is why we call for taking into account a bigger picture when studying party governing. Such a study needs to go beyond only studying party and party system characteristics. In the concluding chapter, we summarize our findings on party and non-party factors of democracy and suggest some ideas for further research.

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CHAPTER 8

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Findings from the Theoretical Chapters

In the theoretical chapters we framed the big picture of party–democracy relationships. Chapters 2–4 showed that the theory today is lagging behind real-life changes in governing (including in various democracies), in general, and in the analysis of the existence, characteristics and roles of political parties, in particular.

Early liberal thought did not clearly define the link between society and the state. Also, political science research into governing in the globalized world has rather forgotten about political parties but instead has fragmented into many subfields with narrower focuses on governing. Increasingly, actors other than political parties have been recognized. The idea of 'governing' has been narrowed to 'governance based on networks of various actors'. The question is how much, if any, space exists today for the 'social contract' within a particular society, in the context of multiple economic, social and political ties beyond the nation state? What is the role of parties in governing? Empirically, parties do not seem to go away.

By contrast, the literature on parties has more or less forgotten about the broader context of party politics. At the same time, it has been very eager to look into the details of particular aspects of party politics, especially manifestos, ideological positioning, elections and governments, mostly in the developed world. In the conditions of northern America and Europe, multiple roles of parties in relation to democracy have been revealed. As a rule, parties and party politics in other parts of the world

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have been analysed in the frame of regional studies, so they have not informed the party literature to any great extent. There is a need for a more holistic and comparative study, of the synchronic and diachronic variety, of governing and political parties.

However, it is important to acknowledge that liberal democracy is not the only model of governing in the current world. From old ideas, illiberalism has also been increasingly renewing itself. The minimalist criteria of democracy based on empirical liberalism additionally complicates the situation in which we study democracy and parties. Last but not least, economic, social and political preconditions for governing have radically changed: as democracy appears to be in crisis, the alternatives seem to have been developing spontaneously rather than on the basis of innovative ideas on democratic governing.

Interestingly, it has been in the non-Western world that the role of parties has more often been understood in a bigger picture (as shown in Chapter 3). The literature on transitions to democracy has taken into account the bigger picture, beyond elections and parties (national contextual factors and external factors). By contrast, the literature on the consolidation of democracy has developed this approach to a somewhat lesser degree, while the literature on the decline of democracy and the rise of autocracy lacks a holistic approach and is scattered into many areas of research. At the same time, it has ignored the fact that even consolidated democracies have been losing their democratic qualities. There therefore remains the question of which preconditions (structure) allow this to happen, what the triggers of such processes are and what the role of agency is in these processes.

Chapter 4 showed that research focusing only on the Western world and using a narrow Eurocentric view of parties and governing misses out a whole spectrum of important variations in phenomena as well as the opportunity for more thorough scientific and fruitful research. Nevertheless, even the inclusion of scattered findings from various parts of the world appears to be helpful in revealing not only the usual measures of party, and party system, characteristics (such as institutionalization, fragmentation, and polarization) but also the relationships between various actors (party elites, party supporters, citizens, interest groups, and social movements). Post-socialist countries appear to be a special research segment. However, as part of the non-western world with today's different global linkages, they may serve as an interesting interconnecting class of cases in comparative research.

All in all, in the theoretical chapters we revealed several layers of theories on parties and democracy: philosophy, the literature on democracy, and the literature on parties. On the basis of the case study we turn back to the bigger picture and offer thoughts for further theoretical and empirical research.

The main thesis of this book is that party, and party system, characteristics are just one segment of the multiple dynamic factors in the dynamic relationships between politics, economy and society that converge into particular forms of government at particular points in time. There are therefore no particular party or party system characteristics per se which influence democracy, but rather a combination of various factors which may together lead to particular changes in democracy.

The case study of Slovenia offers a longitudinal comparative analysis of dynamic changes in parties and democracy and the relationships between parties and democracy in a changing domestic and international context. Throughout the whole period, Slovenia has combined a parliamentary constitutional system and a proportional electoral system.

In the next section we first summarize the findings from Slovenia and then set out what the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the relationships between parties and democracy. We conclude with ideas for further research.

Summary of Findings from the Slovenia Case Study

The goal of this case study was to explain, inductively: (1) how democratic backsliding is produced, (2) how it is stopped, (3) in what circumstances these two phenomena happen, and (4) what the role of the characteristics of parties and party systems is in these processes.

To reveal the complexities in the relationship between the characteristics of a party system and democracy we also asked the following questions: What enables the characteristics of a party system to coincide with a decline in democracy? To what extent do contextual variations matter when studying the relationship between party system characteristics and democracy? Does the institutionalization of the party system matter? Does the persistence of parties with roots in the previous regime matter? Does the polar structure of the party system matter? Do answers to these questions differ at different points in time?

In order to answer these questions, the whole period from the transition to democracy until the end of the democratic backsliding was

studied. This approach proved to be fruitful, as it allowed a sequence of periods with different evaluations of democracy, as well as combinations of various factors, to be described.

When looking at the sequence of periods with respect to democracy, based on the V-Dem evaluations, only three periods are visible: the transition to democracy, the consolidation of democracy and the short-term backsliding in democracy. By contrast, the analysis of contextual changes (particularly economic, socio-economic and macro-political trends) shows that in the frame of the consolidated democracy, several important factors evolved that were damaging for democracy. As a result, we demonstrated that there is an additional sub-period within the period of consolidated democracy. This is the period between 2004 and 2020, within which several fruitful preconditions for democratic backsliding evolved (Table 8.1). However, these did not appear to be sufficient for the actual backsliding detected by the democracy evaluation until the Slovenian Democratic Party took over the government without elections and declared a state of emergency in the context of managing the international health crisis (2020).

These findings are combined with those that reveal periods of change in the party system characteristics. These periods only partially overlap with the periods in the evaluation of democracy.

In this section we first summarize the findings on the sequential changes in democracy and the party system. We then answer the questions that explicitly address parties and party systems as factors of democracy.

Contextual and Party Factors in the Transition to Democracy

The findings from the Slovenia case study on the radical increase in the positive V-Dem evaluation of democracy in this period resonate with findings from the literature on transitions to democracy.

The contextual factors were mostly supportive of the transition to democracy. The economic crisis contributed to the delegitimizing of the old system, but at the same time the socio-economic preconditions for a transition to democracy were comparably favourable. Strong civil and political opposition, and an adaptive old elite, produced a combination of bottom-up and top-down adaptations favourable for a democratic transition. Pressures from the politics at the Yugoslav level and the army contributed to the development of common goals and critical

Table 8.1 Factors in the fluidity of democracy

	Transition	*Consolidation*	*Challenges within consolidated democracy*	*Democratic backsliding*
Economy	Temporary problems, but good socio-economic preconditions	Good	Challenged	Challenged
Social inequality	Low	Low	Increased	Increased
External shocks	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
External support for democracy	Yes	Yes	Yes and no	Yes and no
Political elites responding to citizens' expectations regarding functioning of the economy and low social inequality	Yes	Yes	Declined	Declined
Institutionalization of party system	Low, but increasing	Increasing	Radically declined	Radically declined
Polarization of party system	Clearly present bipolar competition, but transpolar collaboration on major political issues	Three-polar competition with broad governments composed of ideologically different parties; transpolar collaboration on major political issues	Increasing bipolar competition, party personalization, lack of clear ideological-political alternatives	Increasing polarization reduced to personalized political alternatives
Predominance of electoral parties	No	No	Yes	Yes
Alternative of the Slovenia 2.0 programme	No	No	Yes	Yes
International crises with considerable impact on Slovenia	No	No	Yes	Yes

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

	Transition	*Consolidation*	*Challenges within consolidated democracy*	*Democratic backsliding*
Introduction of a state of emergency	No	No	No	Yes
Civil society—an important factor for the empowerment of political opposition	Empowerment of the opposition to the old regime			Empowerment of the anti-backsliding opposition

Source Author, based on Slovenia case study

decisions: the transition to capitalism, the establishment of a liberal democratic system, the creation of an independent state, and a pro-European orientation. In spite of the war in the neighbourhood, peace—a necessary condition for a successful transition to democracy—predominantly prevailed. Also, external factors were favourable for democratization: economic ties with the West, particularly with Germany, which had been there since socialist times, a swift international recognition of Slovenia's independence and the global context of the third wave of democratization were also supportive. In particular, the old elite had learned from the examples of earlier negotiated transitions in Poland and Hungary.

The party and party system characteristics had been mixed in terms of support for democracy. However, the bipolar competition that was clearly present had been smoothed into transpolar collaboration on major political issues through external pressures and the adaptability of the old elite. This led to the establishment of a new independent state and the constitutional basis of the new economic and political system.

Contextual and Party Factors in Consolidation of Democracy (1992–2000)

The economy was strong and social inequalities were maintained. External factors were mainly supportive of economic development and democratic politics. Together with the central European countries, Slovenia was

involved in European accession programmes and evaluations of its democracy. There were not many shocks, either domestic (economic change was gradual and was not dependent on foreign loans) or external, with the partial exception of a refugee crisis related to the war in the former Yugoslavia.

The party and party system characteristics were mixed (as shown in the following sections), but they were, overall, supportive of democratic transition. A three-block dynamic evolved, with a social–liberal party in the centre. The political parties collaborated in the swift preparation for Slovenia joining the EU, and by doing so limited the space for political competition. The institutional party roots and the politically experienced cadre had contributed to some elements of the closed party system since 1992 (the rule under Liberal Democracy of Slovenia). While, at first, two parties with their roots in the former regime formed a big segment of the institutionalized parties, several new parties also gradually succeeded in becoming institutionalized, although the social roots of these parties remained problematic because of citizens' low levels of trust in, and disappointment with, party behaviour.

Contextual and Party Factors in the Period of Increased Challenges to Democracy (2004–2020)

Within this period, the overall evaluation of democracy showed that it was constantly quite high, with no noticeable disturbances. However, the economic, socio-economic and political factors significantly changed in the context of the management of the international financial and economic crisis and in the whole of the period since this crisis.

Slovenia's experiences confirm that economic problems, poverty (Cheibub et al. 1996) and, in particular, economic crises (Lipset 1994) may hurt democratization and the consolidation of a democracy. What should be noted for Slovenia is that it may not be a statistically detectable decline in the level of social inequality per se but, rather, citizens' perception that such a decline is occurring in an unjust way that matters. This produces dissatisfaction with government and the potential for protest.

External factors increasingly became at best unsupportive of the consolidation of democracy, and maybe were even damaging for democracy. Unsupportive and damaging impacts accumulated with increasing frequency over this period. In competition with other parts of the developed world, the EU's policies took a neoliberal turn from 2004 onwards,

bringing about a new cleavage in the bipolar structure of competition between pro-welfare state and against welfare state. A global crisis of capitalism grew into an international financial and economic crisis. The Eurozone turned to austerity measures in the management of the international financial and economic crisis, putting pressure on what had until then been the predominantly pro-welfare state orientation of Slovenia. On the global scale, an increase in social inequality and a trend towards de-democratization evolved, while additional international crises (particularly the international migration crisis and the international health crisis) evolved into external shocks. The trends in the management of the health crisis especially damaged certain elements of democracy and also made such measures more acceptable in Slovenia.

National party elites were not able to meet the challenges of the post-2004 period. They not only failed to produce new national developmental goals after the achievement of the previous ones, but they exhibited poor management of the extensive availability of money after Slovenia joined the Eurozone in 2007. The government was also late in its response to the international financial and economic crisis, while at the same time turning to international loans to reduce the socio-economic impacts on citizens in the short term. However, this made Slovenia much more vulnerable to external neoliberal pressures than ever before.

Rather than focusing on solving developmental problems on the basis of ideological and political debates, the parties turned to simplified bipolar competition. This was established with the succession of the centre-right government led by the Slovenian Democratic Party and the centre-left government led by the successor of the reformed Communist Party. Soon after the Social Democrats won the 2008 elections, the consensus on the constitution diminished. In 2009, the programme of the Second Republic (Slovenia 2.0) was announced as an alternative to 'socialist' Slovenia (Slovenia 1.0). Since then, polarization led to unprecedented polar segmentation and conflicts in public discourse, the mass media and social media, among party and non-party actors.

The parties became alienated from the citizens' expectations and thereby contributed to the crisis of party representation. While the parties did not respond to the citizens' main expectations, particularly in the period after joining the EU, party behaviour and voters' behaviour led to intense destabilization of the party system, and to political polarization (also including increasing political violence in terms of hate speech and

personalized polarization, rather than competition based on policy alternatives for Slovenia's development). These are all factors that have been recognized in the literature as contributing to the decline of democracy.

The party system during this period accumulated several characteristics that together proved to be gradually ever more damaging for democracy: besides the evolution of the Slovenia 2.0 programme, there was also strong polarization (the strengthening of the more extremist party positions and new, more radical, parties, as well as party system polarization), personalization of parties, deinstitutionalization (including the decline of the only persisting old party) and increased problems with the formation and management of governing coalitions.

The parties also changed substantially. On the one hand, a combination of the (mis)use of state resources and the use of non-transparent domestic and international sources evolved into a peculiarly non-transparent business model for party finances. On the other hand, a variety of parties emerged after a series of early elections: a party of the social movement type (the Left), parties of the electoral committee type led by publicly recognized individuals from various milieus (Miro Cerar's Party, Pozitive Slovenia, etc.) and, more recently, an electoral committee led by a wealthy individual who came directly from business to politics that merged with a formally registered but inactive party organization (Movement Svoboda). In fact, the turning of parties into narrowly focused electoral parties damaged their overall representative role. This phenomenon went hand in hand with parties' increased primary focus on the positioning of their 'own' individuals into state institutions and state-owned companies.

Democracy itself also became a challenging factor for democracy. A series of early elections started the radical replacement of members of parliament and of the cadre in the executive with people without political experience. With such a hyper-accountability based on elections, politics and political institutions became radically de-professionalized.

However, these are not all the elements that eroded Slovenia's democracy after 2004. Quite a few other elements of this erosion accumulated without being particularly noted by measurements of democracy. Among them were: the empowerment of the executive arising from Slovenia joining the EU (import of democratic deficit from the EU; weakening of domestic democratic constraints on the executive); the increasing subordination of the parliament to the executive; the decline in social partnership, which put pressure on party elites to govern more in line with citizens' expectations of maintaining good economic results and

low social inequality; the erosion of the democratic political culture, including political leaders with a softened democratic commitment; and illiberal practices, particularly by rightist politicians, including attacks on the judiciary and journalists.

Contextual and Party Factors of the Short Radical Decline in Democracy (2020–2021)

The democratic backsliding was quick and time-limited. However, it was set in train by a complex set of political and non-political factors in the previous period.

The fertile ground for democratic backsliding was based on long-term pre-existing contextual and political trends: the trend towards de-democratization, and a global crisis of capitalism, which had been particularly exposed in the international financial and economic crisis.

The democratic backsliding in Slovenia was caused by an accumulation of economic, socio-economic, domestic, political and international factors, including the management of the COVID-19 crisis and the state of emergency. It was the state of emergency that allowed various aspects of the decline in democracy (presented in more detail in the previous chapters) to occur. It even brought unprecedented political violence into political discourse and unprecedent physical violence against anti-government protesters.

The international situation contributed to the normalization of extraordinary measures that had already been reducing the normal democratic functioning. This phenomenon evolved during the already pre-existing global decline of democracy.

Looking at the relevant agencies, the democratic backsliding was co-produced by the implementation of the alternative political programme of the party of the prime minister, by weak coalition partners, by coalition partners who followed their goals in accordance with their narrow interests and by weak parliamentary opposition.

There were counter-backsliding non-party actors who substantially contributed to the empowerment of opposition parties and the legitimization of a would-be party led by Robert Golob. Democratic backsliding was stopped by the 2022 election results, which were based on an extraordinary election turnout, encouraged by broad civil society activities.

How and in What Circumstances Is Democratic Backsliding Produced?

The democratic backsliding was produced by the accumulation of multiple domestic and external factors and the introduction of the state of emergency.

Based on the Slovenia case study, the standard list can be amended by additional factors which may explain the breakdown in democracy, such as those set out in the section on the contextual and party factors in the period of increased challenges to democracy (2004–2020).

How Is Democratic Backsliding Stopped?

The democratic backsliding was stopped by extensive civil society activities against measures that had been reducing the quality of democracy, by pressure on the parliamentary parties, by the provision of alternative independent sources of information and analysis, and by the mobilization of citizens to participate in the elections. The external factors need additional in-depth analysis. However, based on the available information, there was support by international NGOs for NGOs working against democratic backsliding, and their pressure on the Slovenian government helped domestic actors. Of the EU institutions, the European Parliament's working body, which openly criticized the situation in Slovenia and put pressure on Slovenia's government, was particularly important. The role of external factors in support of the actors for and against democratic backsliding needs to be researched in more detail.

In spite of the fact that the backsliding was disrupted, it needs to be acknowledged that after the 2022 elections many of the circumstances that allowed democratic backsliding are still present in Slovenia. Additional factors have also appeared, such as the wars in Ukraine and Izrael/Gaza, with important consequences for the national economy, social inequality and security. More detailed research is needed into the structural, agency and procedural factors creating further fluidity of democracy. This is a subject for future research.

What Is the Role of the Party and Party System Characteristics in These Processes?

The parties and the party system have evolved away from their primary role of representation. Rather than offering ideological and political ideas

for Slovenia's development, they either lost their parliamentary positions or joined in with the growing polarization, populism and personalization of politics. The empty spaces have been filled by new political parties, which have lacked programmatic clarity. The substantial share of such new parties has led to the deinstitutionalization of the whole party system.

However, this has damaged not only the institutionalization of the party system in a narrow sense, but also the closure of the party system (unstable governments and a series of early elections; poor government management). A whole new phenomenon evolved with the radical de-professionalization of politics, with 'new faces' (people without political experience) coming into politics. This has, in fact, hurt both parliament as an institution and the government as an institution.

Shifts in the circumstances of the state funding for parties and the still significant share of the state-owned economy have led to additional vulnerability of the representative role of parties and democracy. On the one hand, the weak parties have become more vulnerable to special interests. On the other hand, the more experienced parties have been particularly active in using the state-owned economy and other resources for the furthering of narrow party interests and their clientele.

Obviously, the destabilization of parties and the party system, and the polarization and personalization of politics, have become increasingly damaging for democracy. However, it is not possible to say that the democratic backsliding was the result of these factors alone.

What Enables the Characteristics of a Party System to Coincide with a Decline in Democracy?

In Slovenia the extraordinary circumstances of the international health crisis enabled and normalized the state of emergency. This situation allowed limits to be imposed on many citizens' rights, including the right to protest against the government, and in practice it increased the power of the executive in relation to the parliament. Other enablers were weak coalition partners in the government, which was led by a party with an alternative programme, weak parliamentary opposition to the authoritarian turn, and external support for the SDP.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the Slovenia case study alone we cannot say what the necessary and sufficient factors are either for the continuity of consolidated democracy or for democratic backsliding. Further comparative research is needed to answer these questions.

Does the Institutionalization of the Party System Matter for Democracy?

It is true that this institutionalization matters to some extent, but democracy does not follow automatically (as we showed in the previous sections).

Contrary to the thesis that it is the institutionalization of party systems as a whole (and not individual party institutionalization) that matters for democratic survival, our study has shown that a significant growth in the proportion of poorly institutionalized parties in the party system does indeed have an impact on the poor institutionalization of the party system as a whole. Therefore it is the size and not just the level of the institutionalization of individual units (parties or party blocks) that matters.

Another very important finding is that (in the frame of party and party system institutionalization) various kinds of social rootedness of the party's matter. (1) During the transition, new political parties referred back to the historical roots of nineteenth and early twentieth century Slovenian parties. In this way they clearly indicated their positioning within a broad range of ideological families of parties. Besides that, they had their own social roots (by representing particular parts of society). (2) Since 2004, new political parties have predominantly tended to declaratively position themselves on the liberal centre, with the aim either to revive the remains of the Liberal Democracy party of the 1990s or to create a whole new centre-oriented party. Nevertheless, citizens are always in the position of waiting to discover what kind of policies they will actually adopt when in power. These new parties, emerging just before elections, have been election committees without a pre-existing pool of cadre for filling positions in parliament and government. The poor and extremely unstable ideological profiling of new parties and their poor organizational resources, including leaders with underdeveloped political competences, contribute not only to poorly institutionalized parties, but also to the poor institutionalization of the overall party system and government. (3) The only long-term parliamentary parties (Janša's Slovenian Democratic party and the Social Democrats) have evolved into parties of interests.

Another finding that requires further research is that a deinstitutionalized party system and poorly institutionalized parties are increasingly vulnerable to special interests, which have been increasingly noted as more

influential power centres than party institutions. During the 1990s Janez Drnovšek talked about the danger of 'old boys' who agree on certain things outside formal politics (Kaos v Sloveniji 2018). In the past this situation was clearly seen with Miro Cerar (he talked about conflict among the parties and their networks in the process of privatization at that time) (Starič 2015) as well as other leading politicians from various political parties (e.g. Milan Erjavec, Dejan Židan, and Borut Pahor) (Čokl and Mlakar 2023). Video clips from the 1990s of interviews with leading politicians on this theme are still available (Kaos v Sloveniji 2018).

Additionally, we would like to point out here that parties and democracy within one country may change considerably over decades. Of course, it is not only parties, but also the party system, that changes. Democracy also changes because of both changes in the domestic functioning of the constitutionally determined political system and the adaptation of the national party system to the regional political system of the European Union.

In the case study we showed how the relationship changed. The question of why it changed appears to be too complex to be studied within the political framework alone. We cannot say that there were party and party system characteristics that caused short-term democratic backsliding. However, it is obvious that parties can (mis)use the particular circumstances. To do this, a particular programmatic orientation is needed. In Slovenia there has only been one party with such a programme, and at the same time it has already become substantially institutionalized since it initially evolved in the transition.

Does the Persistence of Parties with Roots in the Previous Regime Matter?

The recent decline in democracy has shown that the institutionalization of the party system may benefit from the persistence of parties with roots in the previous regime. However, these parties, too, may face problems with adapting to ever-changing circumstances, and sooner or later may decline. There were two factors that diminished this impact. First, there was a generational change, with experienced politicians either passing away or retiring. Second, these parties faced limitations in their adaptability to the ever-changing circumstances and sooner or later suffered a decline. Today the only old party rooted in the socialist regime, the Social Democrats, functions primarily as a systemic mature party—a system of interests.

It is interesting that the Social Democrats, one of the two most institutionalized political organizations from the old regime (the second being the successor of the former socialist youth organization, which evolved into the Liberal Democracy party), has been the only long-term parliamentary party that has not had a particularly recognized political personality.

Does the Polar Structure of the Party System Matter?

Party system polarization, as shown in Slovenia's case, is not a simple phenomenon. In fact there are several different kinds of polarization. Polarization may be based on the crucial ideological–political positioning of parties, like the bipolarity arising from the communist vs anti-communist cleavage in the transitional period. By contrast, the most recent polarization has primarily arisen from the personalized anti-Janša vs pro-Janša cleavage and, in 2022, even the pro-Golob vs pro-Janša cleavage. Such competition has been found to be damaging for democracy, despite the polarization contributing to the high electoral turnout.

Can Party System Characteristics per se Have an Impact on Democracy?

The findings from the empirical research are that party and party system characteristics are just one segment of the dynamic multiple factors in a dynamic relationship between politics, economy and society that converge into particular forms of government under particular international circumstances at particular points in time.

The Slovenia case study also does not speak in favour of simple and direct causal linkages between (1) low institutionalization of the party system (including a dynamic but persistent fragmentation) and a decline in democracy; (2) the polar structure of the party system and a decline in democracy; or (3) the share of parties with roots in the previous regime (which contribute to the institutionalization of the party system) and a decline in democracy.

Although party system institutionalization and polarization may matter, these two characteristics cannot by themselves explain democratic backsliding. They also cannot explain on their own why transitions to democracy are successful, why democracy is consolidated, or why consolidated democracy may become endangered.

Old and New Findings from the Slovenia Case Study with Some Comparative Aspects

In this section we summarize the findings from the Slovenia case study, put them into a comparative perspective and relate them to the puzzles from the real world presented in Chapter 1.

Our research suggests that it makes sense to study the relevant factors in different periods of a fluid democracy; these are the factors influencing (1) successful consolidation; (2) damage to a consolidated democracy; (3) democratic decline; and (4) the reversal of a democratic decline.

It appears that at the core of the factors in all the four cases may be the economy, social inequality, the setting of social developmental goals, and political efficiency in implementing those goals, as well as external factors. These factors are already known from the literature on transition and, at least to some extent, that on the consolidation of democracy (Lipset 1994; Cheibub et al. 1996). However, not enough research has been conducted on the factors influencing the endurance of democracy, the decline of democracy and the reversal of such decline. These factors are exactly those that are important for knowledge on how to deal with threats to democracy.

This finding is also very relevant for studies of democratic backsliding in post-socialist countries, particularly Poland and Hungary (Bernhard 2021). However, so far too much attention has been paid to political leaders and politics, and not enough to other factors (domestic economic problems, changes in global capitalism and the multiplication of international crises) (Dauderstädt 2022; Stiglitz 2022; Jeriček Klanšček and Furman 2023). Analysing democratic backsliding by looking at individual politicians' politics has proved to be an oversimplification. Contextual and agency factors that contribute to and/or oppose democratic backsliding are important. Our research also leads to the conclusion that focusing just on individual political leaders and particular trends in governing misses the important roles of 'enablers' (party supporters, citizens, and interest groups), and domestic and external contextual factors.

The case findings for Slovenia resonate with the thesis that autocratic episodes are more likely in years when a state of emergency is declared (Lührmann and Rooney 2021, 630). What was peculiar to Slovenia was that the government behaved as if the state of emergency still existed when formally it was no longer in place. However, the government faced fierce opposition from civil society. Unlike in Poland and Hungary, the

preconditions for gradual backsliding were obviously missing. The precise preconditions that need to be fulfilled for gradual democratic backsliding still need to be researched in more detail in the framework of comparative research.

What the Slovenia case study does not show is an impact of institutional choices and institutional engineering. However, the analysis of Poland and Hungary has established that these may matter very much. They matter not only for the takeover of leadership by the executive power, but also for maintaining a constitutional majority for illiberal changes in the constitution and in public policies.

Further comparative research will also need to take into account other factors affecting democracy and the relationship between parties and democracy. Based on previous research, additional domestic and external political factors may also become important, such as adaptation by the former regime party, the strength of the illiberal government, the weakness of democratic government, competition among former opposition parties, the role of the Catholic church and religion in general, rightist civil society networks and mass media, and the institutional characteristics that determine the achievement of the constitutional majority and enable the democratic backsliding party to prolong its position in power (see e.g. Bernhard 2021). Such comparative research may be inspired by research into the factors of democracy in the studied countries in periods of transition and the consolidation of democracy.

Our study resonates with the thesis that international influences on democratization have grown (Levitsky and Way 2006). Beside the international crisis considered in the Slovenia case study, we detected effects from party and non-party actors' international networks and linkages. What we found in the case study and in the literature points to the increased importance of international mutual learning among actors supportive of democracy and among actors working to damage democracy. Moreover, problems with international dark money flows have been increasing, and these have also been recognized as a factor in elections (Fitzgerald and Provost 2019; Scott 2021; Damski 2023; Longman-Rood 2023). Some studies have also revealed that international coalitions among countries going through the process of democratic backsliding may also have an impact on the role of supranational democratic influences, such as the EU (Holesch and Kyriazi 2022). Much more research is needed in this field in the future, while taking into account the bigger

picture of party politics in today's global economic and geopolitical context.

Furthermore, we are able to confirm that the list of variables expected to explain the breakdown of democracy is becoming ever longer as empirical analyses of more and more case studies are provided (Offe and Schmitter 1996; Sutter 2002; Hagopian 2004; Kapstein and Converse 2008; Chou 2011; Svolik 2019; Masterson 2023; Moss et al. 2023; Haughton et al. 2022). The case study of Slovenia has pointed to several additional factors, particularly the characteristics of the parties, the partners in the coalition led by the party favouring radical change in the system, variations in the quality of polarization, and variety in the social rootedness of parties.

There is no consensus on exactly which factors make a crucial difference for actual changes in democracy. Rather, the role of context has increasingly been acknowledged to be very important (Ware 1987; Randall and Svåsand 2002; Levitsky and Cameron 2003; Lawson 2010; Osei 2013; Lupu 2015; Dargent and Muñoz 2011; Vormann and Weinman 2021). Our research echoes this same claim.

What has been a rather surprising finding for Slovenia is that, after several decades of democracy, there was a rather sudden and radical decline in the professionalization of politics. We are not aware of a similar phenomenon in countries like Poland or Hungary. This is not only about the generational change due to the deaths and retirements of the transitional politicians. Since 2011, it has been due to voters' disillusionment with the older parties and their support for completely new parties that do not have pre-existing organizational resources, including pools of sympathizers, members and cadre. After several decades, the level of political knowledge, intellectual capacity and practical political competence therefore radically declined in circumstances where there were many shocks and crises needing efficient political management.

Slovenia's case also points to changes in the quality of parties. Political parties in the party system have not only changed in terms of the renewal of the party system over time. The character of the parties changed over time. In the transition period, new parties emerged from various social groups (intellectuals, farmers, craftsmen, ethnic groups, etc.) and old ones adapted to the changing environment. In the consolidation period, a core of parties that already existed (old and new) consolidated, while increasingly developing the characteristics of cartel parties. Then, particularly after 2004, two trends appeared: a substantial (trans)formation of

parties into parties of interests, and a reduction in party autonomy due to pressures of particular socio-economic interests with a weakening of the traditional party social roots because of the links with particular special interests. How exactly, and to what extent, these trends developed needs further research, but they resonate with the acknowledged party transformations in the west from about two decades ago (as described in the chapters at the beginning of this book). Comparative research among a variety of cases appears to be potentially very valuable.

Furthermore, the relations between parties and the state are very important, for several reasons. First, the interest of parties in taking advantage of state resources to further their factional interests is one of the great challenges to the positive roles of parties in a democracy. The findings for Slovenia resonate with the thesis that factions contribute to the erosion of democracy from the top (Bartels 2023). Second, the question is how strong are parties in relation to interest groups and whether parties linkages to the state may serve as vehicles for interest groups to excessive use of state resources.

All in all, the findings of the case study on Slovenia resonate with previous findings on the impacts—both positive and negative—of parties on democracy. Parties' incentives to commit themselves to democracy are very relevant (Stokes 1999). When this commitment is diminished and parties turn into primarily electoral parties (as is also seen in the recent developments in Slovenia), this damages democracy. Indeed, parties may and do contribute to the fundamental transformation of democracy at the expense of its representative qualities.

Nevertheless, Slovenia's case shows that it is important to embrace a more complete understanding of party and non-party agency in relation to the fluidity of democracy. While studies of transitions to democracy have acknowledged the role of agency, and the whole subfield of research on civil society flourished during the 1990s, this interest seems to have faded away. Knowing that changes in democracy are not predetermined, researchers need to pay more attention to this segment of factors affecting democracy.

Our research points not only to the problem of trust (as noted by Runciman 2019), but also to the most fundamental issue of governing a modern society—the problem of defective political representation. This is seen in the very deep gap between citizens' substantive expectations and (party) governing. These findings point to the need to combine research looking at party politics with research looking at the macro picture of

the dynamics of economic and socio-economic qualities (and particularly social inequalities).

In further comparative research, it would be important to reveal what citizens consider good representation to be. For Slovenia's citizens this includes ensuring a well-functioning economy without shocks, maintaining low levels of social inequality that are at the same time considered to be just, and having a predominant inclination towards moderate politics and politicians. It may be that there are considerable variations among countries with regard to how their citizens understand good political representation in general and party representation in particular.

Conclusions

Ways of steering societies in the context of intensified global economic, social, technological and geopolitical changes have been under stress. There is a need to think about and debate these dilemmas on the philosophical and political theory level as well as on the level of various academic disciplines, and between these two levels. A particular challenge for political scientists is to deal with the open issue of governing that is inclusive for those who are governed.

To a large extent, our research reports on an empirical case study on the fluidity of democracy in one country over several decades. With the help of comparative perspectives, we found that there is no constant general trend in democratic backsliding, and that democratization remains a contentious process. This therefore means that, rather than democratic backsliding, it is the fluidity of democracy that needs to hold our interest.

In a discussion on the fluidity of democracy we can reveal periods with particular characteristics. The question is empirical, and case studies are helpful in establishing the basis for comparative research and summarizing the common findings in theoretical models. However, individual cases may neither fit into ideal models of particular stages, nor follow the sequence of the stages of such ideal models. Furthermore, studying particular stages in the changing democratic qualities of government (in the case of Slovenia: the transition to democracy, the consolidation of democracy, the gradual loss of the qualities of the consolidated democracy, democratic backsliding, and the reversal of democratic backsliding) in isolation probably prevents one from obtaining important insights into the preconditions for the transition from one stage to another in the direction of the sequence or its reversal. For example, democratic

backsliding cannot be fully understood if it is studied in isolation from the governing models that precede the democratic backsliding. As when studying transitions to democracy, it is relevant to analyse whether and how periods and stages of democratic qualities may be interconnected.

Although it may be helpful to use a stage-by-stage approach in revealing the fluidity of democracy, it is of crucial importance to recognize that stages do not evolve automatically. Thus democratic backsliding does not inevitably lead to a breakdown of democracy and ultimately to a hybrid or authoritarian regime. However, the question remains as to whether and how experiences with democratic backsliding (even when they are short-term) may have an impact on the fluidity of future democracy.

There is probably no single answer to questions about when, where and why democratic backsliding occurs. Rather, it appears to be more fruitful to focus one's research on the combinations of factors that together produce democratic backsliding. Our research also points to the need to explain not only the decline, but also the stability and fluidity, of democracy in various contexts.

The time factor has been shown by our research to be very important. It matters in several ways. It is particularly worth taking into account the quality of the dynamics (gradual vs sudden changes) and the accumulation of domestic and external factors within a short window of time that work in favour of a challenge, or damage, to democracy. Sudden changes in the quality of democracy are rare, but they mostly appear at specific times. In the literature the introduction of a state of emergency has been quite widely discussed, but it should not be forgotten that big security threats (such as terrorist attacks) and direct and indirect involvement in war also create windows of opportunity that are supportive of radical changes in government. With the trend for numerous international crises to accumulate and also, most recently, with the direct and indirect impacts of new wars, this factor has gained importance for democracy on the global scale.

More precisely, the question of what happens after democratic backsliding comes to an end on the basis of elections remains open. Many of the circumstances which had allowed democratic backsliding to occur may still be present and may come into play again. What we now know for sure is that backsliding is not predetermined. The actors may make a difference. However, our research has shown that political parties are not the only actors who can critically co-determine the outcome of democratic backsliding. According to our case study findings, it is particularly

important that the role of civil society and the international links of both supporters of democracy and actors in democratic backsliding are fully recognized.

The traditionally complex view of the factors determining the models of governing, which had developed to give an understanding of transitions to democracy, needs to be revived in order to give a better understanding of the fluidity of democracy. This is particularly important in the global context of the changing characteristics of capitalism, radical changes in social inequalities, frequent economic and non-economic international crises (some also being managed by the introduction of states of emergency), and direct and indirect involvement in wars. Developments within particular states cannot be fully understood without recognizing that they are linked with actors and phenomena beyond the national borders.

There needs to be a revival in critical research attention on political parties, as in real life they play very different roles in relation to democracy. A decrease in the fulfilment of parties' representative roles was recognized in Western societies long ago (Bartolini and Mair 2001; van Biezen 2004). The crisis of representation/intermediation through partisan channels, with extreme growth in the role of political parties in the staffing of public positions and in profiting from public policies, known as *partitocrazia* (Schmitter 1997, Note 23) is also becoming ever bigger in the post-socialist contexts. What has been taking place more often in both contexts is the increasing weaknesses of parties, which fail to 'control major areas of policy-making due to trans-national and technocratic forces' (Schmitter 1997, Note 23); the more parties become dependent upon resources provided directly or indirectly by the state, the more they fail to provide this control (Schmitter 1997, Note 23).

Our research warns that political parties are not, per se, a public good. In particular, state funding does not automatically make them a public good. Do parties really steer societies by taking into account broader social interests, or do they function as instruments for the implementation of narrow private interests?

The technological revolution has opened up a whole new aspect for governing (private, public and mixed) and party politics. This is not only about the digitalization of parties and elections and the use and misuse of artificial intelligence for achieving political goals. The basic questions of democracy are being re-opened: what information, and information of what quality, is available to whom, from whom and for what purpose? What impacts does and will this have on the redistribution of

power in governing? How have the characteristics and roles of citizens, interest groups, civil society organizations and political parties changed, and how will they change? Political science needs to catch up with real-life developments and join in solving the newly emerging problems of democracy.

We believe that the findings from our research are relevant not only to central and eastern European countries, but also to social spaces beyond the post-socialist contexts. They should encourage further in-depth case studies and broad comparative research.

Political scientists need to deal more efficiently with methodological nationalism and to take into account more systematically factors beyond the nation state that co-determine governing within the nation state borders, within supranational polities such as that of the EU, and in the global international arena.

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Correction to: Relations Between Democracy and Parties

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The original version of the book was published with an incorrect reference in Chapter 3, which has now been corrected. The book and the chapter have been updated with the change.

The updated version of this chapter can be found at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54949-6_3

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