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Democratization and political participation in Slovakia

Sharon L. Wolchik

In November 1989, citizens of Slovakia joined those in the Czech Lands in mass demonstrations that brought about the rapid end of one of Central and Eastern Europe's most oppressive communist regimes. With the end of the Communist Party's monopoly of political power, political life in Slovakia changed radically. The proliferation of groups and voluntary associations that followed was paralleled by the rapid repluralization of the party system in Slovakia as in the Czech Lands.

By the June 1992 elections, it was clear to most observers that the Czechoslovak federation would not last. In January 1993, the federation was replaced by independent Slovak and Czech states. In the Czech Lands, developments in both the political and economic realms continued to progress smoothly. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Václav Klaus, Czech political leaders continued their rapid reintroduction of a market economy. Czech political institutions also appeared to be more stable than those in most other post-communist states.

In Slovakia, where political life differed in many important respects from trends in the Czech Republic prior to the break-up of the federation and where the shift to the market caused far greater economic hardship, political life after independence was more tumultuous. In contrast to the situation in the Czech Lands, where public support for Václav Klaus and the move to the market remained high, Slovak politics continued to be characterized by high levels of conflict among political leaders. Evident in the acrimonious relationship between Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar and President Michal Kováč, as well as between the members of the ruling coalition and within Mečiar's political movement itself, these conflicts resulted in the ousting of the prime minister as the result of a parliamentary vote of no confidence in March 1994. The grand coalition government formed at that time included Political forces that spanned the left-right spectrum, but nonetheless demonstrated a good deal of consensus in dealing with pressing public issues such as privatization and minority relations. However, this coalition proved unable to cooperate in the September-October 1994 elections, and Vladimír Mečiar once again became

prime minister in December 1994 in coalition with the Slovak National Party and the newly formed Association of Slovak Workers. Despite the high level of elite conflict, alternation of governments has taken place peacefully to date. There are also encouraging signs in terms of the development of other elements of civil society, including non-governmental organizations.

As this brief recital illustrates, the effort to create stable democratic political institutions has faced a number of challenges in Slovakia since the end of communist rule. The pages to follow examine an important aspect of this process, the development of the party system and other mechanisms for citizen participation in politics. As the experiences of other countries in transition from authoritarian rule in other contexts indicate, the development of such mechanisms, which both link citizens to the political system and provide feedback to political leaders, is an essential part of creating and maintaining democratic institutions. The development of what has often been called "civic society," that is, non-governmental, voluntary associations, as well as of attitudes that support democracy, are also critical aspects of this process.¹

The chapter to follow examines the extent to which democracy has been consolidated in Slovakia. After examining the factors that have influenced the formation of political groups and parties, it turns to the development of voluntary associations and interest groups, political parties and the party system, and popular perceptions of political leaders, institutions, and the political system. It concludes with an evaluation of the impact of the party system and other mechanisms for citizen participation on the way in which policies are made, citizen support for the political system, and the consolidation of democracy in Slovakia.

Factors influencing the formation of political groups and parties

The formation of political parties and groups in Slovakia has been influenced by many of the same factors that have influenced the formation of such groups in other post-communist states.² These include the impact of the communist era on the political attitudes and values of citizens and leaders, and the impact of rapid and large-scale economic change on citizens' perceptions of politics and political entities. The formation of such groups as well as broader trends in political life have also been influenced by a number of factors that are specific to Slovakia. These include its pre-communist history and political traditions; the interrelationship between Slovak and Hungarian as well as Czech culture; the delayed industrialization of the

region; and the country's multiethnic composition. They also include the impact of the break-up of the joint state with the Czechs and the tasks Slovak leaders have faced in state-building in the post-communist era. To a larger extent than in many other countries, Slovak politics and the development of

the party system have also been influenced in important ways by the characteristics, personality, and beliefs of a single dominant political leader, Vladimír Mečiar.³

The pre-communist legacy

In Slovakia as in other post-communist countries, the development of political groups and parties has been shaped in important ways by the pre-communist legacy of its people. Slovaks' sense of national identity developed in reaction to Hungarian and Czech culture. Living in a multi-ethnic region that was part of Hungary for nearly 1,000 years, Slovaks had very little opportunity for the development of a national movement until the interwar period. In contrast to the situation in the Czech Lands, where Austrian rule allowed the formation of citizens' groups that developed into a mass based national movement, Slovaks experienced strong pressures from their Magyar rulers to assimilate and to give up their national identity. These pressures became particularly strong in the second half of the nineteenth century. Very few Slovaks (6 percent) were able to vote, and Slovak representation in the Hungarian parliament's lower house (7 of 413 in 1906 and 3 of 413 in 1911) was very low.⁴ Levels of illiteracy were high into the early twentieth century, and educational levels among Slovaks were low. Slovaks also had few opportunities to be educated in their own language. Again in contrast to the situation in the Czech Lands, which were among the more industrialized areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slovakia remained predominantly agrarian.⁵

These factors had an important impact on political life in Slovakia after the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Brought together with the Czechs, as well as sizeable Hungarian and German minorities, for the first time in a common state, Slovaks entered the new state with political experiences, levels of economic development and urbanization, educational levels, and cultural orientations that were very different from those of the Czechs.⁶ These differences soon led to resentment and fed the growth of Slovak nationalism, as many Slovaks felt that Hungarian rule had merely been exchanged for rule from Prague. Although Slovaks were able to and did participate in multiparty elections, many Slovaks became increasingly alienated from the political system.

The growth in national identity and the politicization of ethnicity in interwar Slovakia reflected a variety of factors that influenced the ability of ethnic Slovak leaders to mobilize the population around ethnic issues. Efforts to promote the industrialization of Slovakia largely failed during this period, in part as the result of the Great Depression. Economic hardship, which fueled large-scale emigration from Slovakia, coupled with the perception that economic and political decisions made in Prague did not really take Slovakia's

interests into account, led to widespread disaffection with the government and to growing support for political actors, such as the leaders of the People's Party, who would articulate national grievances. At the same time, although Slovakia's economy virtually stagnated,⁷ the marked increases in educational levels that occurred during the interwar period provided new resources for Slovak leaders to use to mobilize the population. Voluntary associations developed, and Slovaks also organized a variety of political parties.⁸

Given the low levels of urbanization and education of Slovak society, Catholic priests emerged as important political as well as spiritual leaders. As the interwar period progressed, Slovak resentment grew and fueled support for extreme nationalist movements. Thus, Slovaks as well as Czechs lived in a political system that was democratic for much of the interwar period. However, because most Slovaks saw the interwar government as an instrument of Czech hegemony, this experience did not provide the same grounding for the effort to recreate democratic political life in Slovakia as it did in the Czech Lands.⁹

The extent to which Czechs and Slovaks viewed the interwar government differently was evident in the results of public opinion polls conducted in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. Czechs surveyed in October 1968, for example, were most likely to identify the interwar republic as the most glorious period of their history (39 percent), followed by the age of Jan Hus (36 percent) and the reign of King Charles IV (31 percent). Slovaks, on the other hand, were most likely to identify the time of L'udovít Štúr, the 1840s (36 percent), the period after January 1968 (36 percent), and the Slovak National Uprising, which occurred in 1944 (26 percent). Among Slovaks, the interwar republic was perceived as the most glorious period by only 17 percent of respondents;¹⁰ 13 percent of Slovaks ranked the Slovak state as the most glorious period." As Brown notes in a discussion of these results, far more Slovaks regarded the Slovak state as the least glorious or most unfortunate period for their nation (44 percent).¹² A 1992 survey found that most Slovaks also identified figures important to the development of Slovak national identity, such as Štúr, M.R. Štefánik, or Alexander Dubček as the most important personalities in Slovak history. However, 11 percent identified Father Andrej Hlinka (founder of the People's Party that came to dominate Slovak politics in the interwar period) and 5 percent Jozef Tiso (president of the Slovak state established in 1939 under Hitler's aegis) as the most important figures. As in 1968, 11 percent of respondents identified the period of the Slovak state as the most famous period in Slovaks' history.¹³

Although their numbers are not large, then, for certain Slovaks, the Slovak state created in 1939 was a more relevant symbol than the interwar republic.

Given the nature of this state and the actions of its leaders, efforts to link the post-communist government of Slovakia to it have been extremely controversial. Nominally independent, the Slovak state created on March 14, 1939 followed Nazi Germany's lead in almost all areas and in fact was largely a puppet of Hitler. During its reign, anti-Jewish legislation increasingly restricted the rights of the country's Jewish inhabitants. Beginning in the early 1940s, 70,000 Slovakian Jews were deported to death camps, where they perished.¹⁴ Although the country retained the form of a democratic government, Slovakia's political life was dominated by the People's Party which ruled in an increasingly authoritarian way. Some political groups, such as the Communist, Social Democrat and Jewish parties, were banned in 1938. Others, with the exception of the National Party, which disbanded voluntarily, were forced to merge with the People's Party, which became a means for mobilizing the population to carry out the leadership's orders. As in other states under Nazi influence, freedom of the press and other democratic liberties were suspended. Leaders of the Slovak state also adopted laws that abridged the rights of the Hungarians and other minorities.¹⁵

Discussions of the place of Jozef Tiso and Andrej Hlinka, as well as of the Slovak state itself, in Slovak history have been heated. Apologists and critics alike note that the creation of the Slovak state fulfilled the aspirations of many Slovaks for their own state, despite the way in which it was created and its nature.¹⁶ The experience of having a state of their own, however limited its actual powers, also influenced Slovak views of the government after World War II when a joint state with the Czechs was recreated.

It has been primarily the nationalist Slovak National Party's leaders who have tried to resurrect Tiso and the Slovak state as honorable parts of Slovakia's history. Certain other nationalist groups active in the interwar period have also been resurrected. These include Matica Slovenska, a patriotic association founded in 1863 that existed for much of the Communist period, but operated under many of the same restrictions as other organizations. After 1989, this organization once again came to be active in pressing Slovak national claims, including the demand for Slovak sovereignty.

The legacy of the interwar nationalist movement has also been evident in patterns of support for political parties in the post-communist period. Support for the Slovak National Party and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, the most nationalist parties in Slovakia for example, has not varied consistently by level of economic hardship. Rather it has been highest in those districts in which support for the Slovak People's Party was highest in the interwar period.¹⁷

The legacy of the interwar period has also led to problems in creating what has been termed a "usable past," that is, a past compatible with democratic

values and forms of politics.¹⁸ Since most Slovaks do not see the leaders and experiences connected with the interwar republic as positive, it has been difficult for Slovaks who support democracy to find figures to use to help create a democratic identity. The fact that most of the historical figures seen most positively by Slovaks are associated with the Slovak national movement at various points in history also creates problems for the effort to foster a sense of identity that is inclusive of members of other ethnic groups. This problem is compounded by the fact that Hungarians in Slovakia also identify individuals associated with the development of Hungarian history as the most important figures in their history.¹⁹

The pattern of relations between Slovaks and Hungarians during the interwar period was also an important element of the pre-communist legacy. The Hungarians who found themselves in Czechoslovakia after 1918 suffered from an abrupt loss of status; the citizenship status of many was also unclear for some time. The constitution guaranteed those who could claim citizenship the right to use their own language in schools and in court under certain conditions.²⁰ However, many Hungarians felt themselves to be disadvantaged and welcomed the reincorporation of the southern part of Slovakia into Hungary brought about by the first Vienna Award of 1938, which also allowed Hungary to annex southern Ruthenia, also previously part of Czechoslovakia. Those Hungarians who remained in Slovakia, along with other minorities, were subjugated to heavy pressure to become Slovak.²¹ These events and the exchange of Hungarian and Slovak populations after World War II complicated ethnic relations during the communist period and continue to be reflected in the attitudes of Hungarians and Slovaks toward each other in the post-communist period.²²

The communist legacy

The communist period left several important legacies in Slovakia. Many of these, including the impact of a command economy on economic performance and the structure of the economy, the widespread alienation of the population from the political system, distrust of political leaders, lack of interest in joining political organizations, and the erosion of morality in the public and private spheres that Václav Havel has described so eloquently, were similar in Slovakia and the Czech Lands. Others, however, were peculiar to Slovakia and reflected the many ways in which the two regions differed from each other at the outset of the communist period.

Several of these were particularly important. These include the impact of a unitary political system on Slovak national aspirations and identity; the pattern of industrialization that occurred in Slovakia during the communist era; the impact of the Communist Party's monopoly of power and control of the

.media on ethnic relations within Slovakia; and the different patterns the political reforms of 1968 took in Slovakia and the Czech Lands and the resulting differences in the political climate after their suppression.

The Kosice Government program which formed the basis of the Czechoslovak state re-created in 1945 included guarantees of Slovak autonomy. However, these provisions were largely ignored after the communists came to power in February 1948. As the Stalinist system was consolidated in Czechoslovakia, Slovak national bodies such as the Slovak National Council lost much of their authority and Slovak leaders, including Vladimír Clementis and Gustav Husák, were accused of being bourgeois nationalists and executed or forced to leave political life during the purges. Promises of autonomy were forgotten, and decision-making once again was centered in Prague. Due to the party's monopoly of power and control of the media, Slovak leaders lost the ability to raise ethnic issues. Several of the parties that had championed Slovak national causes during the interwar period, including the People's Party, were banned after World War II. Others, such as the Democratic Party which had been active in the period between 1945 and 1948, were abolished after 1948.

It was only in the context of the process of theoretical renewal that preceded the reform period of 1968 that Slovak leaders and intellectuals were once again able to voice Slovak national claims openly. As the process of rethinking the nature of socialist society that took place at the elite level spread, Slovaks began to question the unitary organization of the state and call for greater attention to Slovak issues and needs. It was during this period that Slovak national organizations, such as Matica Slovenská, were once again allowed to act as advocates of Slovak national interests. In the context of the reform, Slovak leaders were also able to bring about the federation of the country.²³

Many of the powers granted to the republic governments as the result of federalization, which was one of the few elements of the reform agenda to survive the August 1968 Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and subsequent "normalization" and which entered into effect in January 1969, were subsequently rescinded. The reduction in the powers of the republic governments, especially in the economic area, in turn was reflected in the growing dissatisfaction among Slovaks with the federation that became evident after November 1989. The change in the structure of the state had an important impact on political developments in the late communist and early Post-communist period. The lack of power of the republic governments was one of the factors that fueled Slovak dissatisfaction with the notion of a federation and provided a rallying point for Slovak leaders who wanted to see either a radical change in the state's structure or independence for Slovakia.

As numerous analysts have noted, most Slovaks as well as most Czechs opposed the break-up of the Czechoslovak federation, and the dissolution of

the state was ultimately accomplished at the elite level.²⁴ But while political leaders, particularly Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar, negotiated the break-up without consulting the broader populations directly, large numbers of citizens in Slovakia wanted to see some change in the structure of the state. It is telling, for example, that only 8 percent of respondents in Slovakia surveyed in 1991 by the Institute for Public Opinion Research were satisfied with the federation.²⁵ Most Slovaks wanted to see a "confederation;" however, few were clear about what such an arrangement would involve. Many of those who wanted to see a confederation also supported Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia in the June 1992 elections.²⁶

The concentration of decision-making power in Prague during the late communist period allowed Slovak leaders to blame the Czechs for the ills the system created. The continuation of the existing federal structure after the November 1989 revolution also allowed them to blame the Czechs for the negative results of the introduction of the market in Slovakia. At the same time, the fact that political life had been organized in a federal system for some time made it easier for political leaders to agree to divide the country and to do so peacefully.

The timing of Slovakia's industrialization also had an important influence on political developments in the post-communist period. Because most of Slovakia's industrialization took place during the communist era, its economy was particularly vulnerable to the disruptions caused by the transition to the market. The closing or downsizing of many of the large, inefficient enterprises in the arms and other heavy industries contributed to rates of unemployment that were much higher in Slovakia than in the Czech Lands prior to the break-up of the state. The proportion of families living in poverty was also much greater in Slovakia than in Bohemia and Moravia. This situation fed resentment against the federal government and the Czechs and increased support for parties that called for a change in the strategy of economic change to better suit Slovakia's economic conditions.

The impact of the leadership's approach to Slovakia's sizeable Hungarian minority during the communist era was another important part of the communist legacy in Slovakia. Citizenship and other restrictions on Hungarians after the end of World War II were lifted during the communist era. Hungarians living in Slovakia also had an officially established cultural organization. However, like other mass organizations under communist rule, this organization existed to mobilize the population to do the bidding of the Communist Party rather than to articulate or promote the interests of the Hungarian minority. There were also a number of schools, particularly at the elementary level, that taught in Hungarian. Control of public debate by the Communist Party and the inability of citizens to form independent groups

meant that only a few activists gave voice to the grievances of the Hungarian minority during the communist period. However, Hungarian resentment over what many considered to be their second class status in Slovakia and lack of opportunity for education in Hungarian, particularly at the secondary and higher levels, continued to grow. When the communist system fell, then, the ground was prepared for Hungarian activists to mobilize Hungarians living in Slovakia around Hungarian ethnic claims.

Finally, the formation of interest groups and parties in the post-communist period was influenced by the impact of the reform period of 1968 and its aftermath in Slovakia. The 1968 reforms and their suppression had a profound impact on political and economic life in Czechoslovakia. Due to the Husák leadership's fear that any discussion of economic or other significant reform would have political repercussions, it was virtually impossible to speak of reform in any area for much of the rest of the communist period. The replacement of Husák by Miloš Jakeš in 1987 and the impact of Gorbachev's policies in the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia led to some change in this respect. The Communist Party adopted a new approach to economic issues in January 1987 that highlighted the need for significant economic reforms, for example. Change in the composition of top party bodies was accompanied by an increased willingness on the part of the population to challenge the regime by participation in activities organized by dissidents, particularly in the Czech Lands. Dissent also spread to groups previously not involved, such as young people and people in the official world.²⁷

In Slovakia, the end of the reforms of the Prague Spring reflected the nature of the reform process itself. Although certain Slovaks supported the effort to create a more democratic system, many were more concerned with national issues in 1968. The purge of supporters of democratization, therefore, was not as deep in Slovakia as in the Czech Lands.²⁸ Intellectual life also was not as tightly controlled after 1968 as in the Czech lands. As a result, many Slovaks who had they lived in the Czech Lands would have been classified as dissidents by the regime were able to keep their jobs in the official world while at the same time engaging in what Martin Butora, one of the founders of Public Against Violence, has called "constructive deviance." In the late 1980s, activist intellectuals were able to use officially approved organizations, such as the Guardians of Nature, to organize and engage in activities to support the environment and other non-conformist actions. The numbers of people who participated in these activities was not large; like their counterparts in the Czech Lands they were for the most part intellectuals and developed few links to broader groups within the population. Several of the leaders of this group became leaders in Public Against Violence in 1989, and the informal networks created at this time continued to have an influence on politics after 1989. At

the same time, because they operated within the framework of official organizations, leaders of these groups did not gain the experience that Polish and Hungarian dissidents did in mobilizing large groups of people or openly engaging in politics, or the support of large groups of citizens. Nor did their actions earn them the same moral authority as that of many of the Czech dissidents. The primary exception to this pattern occurred in the case of a few writers and philosophers, such as Milan Šimečka and Miroslav Kusý, and the growing numbers of religious activists, such as Jan Čarnogurský who became more active in the late 1980s in challenging restrictions on the freedom of religion. The actions of the latter included pilgrimages to shrines, which grew from approximately 100,000 people in the early 1980s to an estimated 800,000 people in 1988.²⁹ A 1988 candlelight demonstration in Bratislava was a particularly important step in the development of religious activism.

The impact of the communist period on levels of development in the Czech Lands and Slovakia also affected ethnic relations and the development of the political system after 1989. Investment in Slovakia succeeded in reducing many of the disparities between the Czech Lands and Slovakia during the communist period. As I have demonstrated more fully elsewhere, these results were evident on almost all indicators of development, including occupational structure; educational levels; urbanization patterns; and living standards.³⁰ In 1948, for example, 59.8 percent of the labor force was employed in agriculture in Slovakia, compared to 33.1 percent in the Czech Lands. The difference between the two regions had decreased substantially by 1970 (23.6 percent in Slovakia, 14.6 percent in the Czech Lands), and continued to decrease throughout the rest of the communist period. By 1989, 12.6 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture in Slovakia, compared to 8.4 percent in the Czech Lands.³¹ Access to education in the two regions also became more equal. In 1949, the ratio of students in higher education per 1,000 population between 20 and 29 years of age was 0.70. This ratio was 0.93 in 1955 and, in the 1960s and 1970s, 1.13 to 1.41. The ratio decreased somewhat to 0.91 by 1985 and 0.87 by 1987, but educational access in Slovakia was still closer to that in the Czech Lands by the end of the communist period than at its inception.³²

A similar picture emerges if one considers average monthly wages in the socialized sector of the economy (excluding agricultural cooperatives), which were slightly lower in Slovakia at the outset of the communist period, but had reached 0.98 percent of those in the Czech Lands by the mid-1960s.³³ Because a somewhat larger proportion of the population was employed in agricultural cooperatives in Slovakia than in the Czech Lands, and average wages of cooperative members were somewhat lower than those in the rest of the socialized economy, average incomes were still slightly lower in Slovakia than

in the Czech Lands in the 1980s. However, these differences did not lead to great differences in standards of living in the two regions. Information about the equipment of homes with consumer goods and automobile ownership, for example, indicates that differences in the two regions had all but disappeared by 1980.³⁴ However, the near-equalization of conditions in the two regions did not lead to a decrease in ethnic identity among Slovaks or ethnic tensions in Czechoslovakia.

Table 6.1 Demographic trends in Slovakia since the 1950s

	1950s	1970s	1980s
Percentage of labor force in:	(1950)*	(1969-73)*	(1980)*
Agriculture	53.5	21.6	15.5
Industry & construction	25.2	42.0	45.1
Average annual rates of population growth	n.a.	(1970-74) [†]	(1980-90)
		0.6†	0.6 [‡]
Age Distribution (%)	(1961) [§]	(1970)*	(1990) [¶]
15-24	15	19	15
25-49	32	32	35
50-59	11	9	9
Over 60	11	14	15
Levels of education‡ (%)	(1950)*	(1970)*	(1991)
Primary	77.6	55.9	38.6
Secondary	4.3	13.4	50.9
Post-secondary	0.7	3.3	9.5
Apprentice programs	8.7	20.2	
Trade school	6.6	5.9	

Notes: †Population growth rates for 1970-74 are for Czechoslovakia. ‡Among persons 15 and over. Indicates attainment of completed or partial education at each level.

Sources: *Sharon L. Wolchik, "Regional Inequalities in Czechoslovakia"; ^bUnited Nations Statistical Yearbook 1975 (New York: United Nations, 1976), p. 71; ^cUS Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstracts of the United States; ^dStatistická Ročenka Československé Socialistické Republiky 1963 (Praha: Ústřední Komise Lidové Kontrolы A Statistky, 1963), p. 109; ^eIbid., 1971, p. 86; ^fIbid., 1992, p. 104; ^gSharon L. Wolchik, *Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), p. 164.

The numbers of people who participated in these activities was not large.

After 1989, political conditions allowed Slovak leaders to use the resources modernization created to mobilize the population around ethnic issues.

The impact of the transition: the repluralization of politics

The sudden end of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, coupled with the tight political control exercised by the regime until the end of the system, meant that Slovaks as well as Czechs were faced with the need to respond rapidly to the unexpected after November 1989. As in the Czech Lands, Slovaks could not rely on existing institutions or groups, such as Solidarity in Poland, to take the lead in bringing about the end of the communist system and reorganizing of the polity and economy. Rather, they faced had to create a new organization to deal with the rapidly changing demands of the situation. In the Czech Lands, Václav Havel and other dissidents centered around Charter 77 moved quickly to create Civic Forum and were the obvious choice to negotiate with the government and coordinate the mass demonstrations that spread after the November 17 beating of peaceful student demonstrators. In Slovakia, it was a loose coalition of the non-conformist intellectuals discussed above, cultural figures, and people who had been involved in the old regime but quickly came to support the call for its end who established Public Against Violence. As in the case of Civic Forum in the Czech Lands, this umbrella organization included individuals with what would prove to be very different ideas about how to deal with the tasks of the immediate post-communist period.

The involvement of large numbers of ordinary citizens in the mass demonstrations that brought about the end of communism was a positive resource for the new leaders in the Czech Lands and Slovakia. However, this public support soon faded, to be replaced by skepticism about political movements and parties and, in many cases, about political institutions and leaders. Because the old regime fell so quickly, citizens in Slovakia had a limited opportunity to participate openly in politics prior to the effort to recreate democratic political life. The transition therefore did little to contribute to the legitimacy of the new government or create new symbols or myths that democratic leaders in Slovakia could use to develop a political culture supportive of democracy. Because the "Velvet Revolution" began in Prague and there was initially a high level of cooperation between Czech and Slovak leaders, many of the Slovak intellectuals who led the movement to end communist rule were vulnerable to being depicted as insufficiently dedicated to pursuing Slovak national interests. The short period of the transition meant that citizens had little opportunity to become familiar with those who would emerge as leaders in 1989. It also meant that there were few leaders in Slovakia apart from those associated with the Communist system who had any experience in negotiating with the Communist leadership, or in leading a mass based political party or movement.³⁵

The end of communist rule in Slovakia, as in the Czech Lands, was followed

by a rapid effort to re-create democratic political life. Most of this effort focused in the immediate post-communist period on removing those leaders compromised by their roles in the old system and reorienting the style of work of existing institutions. Changes were made in the composition of the Federal Assembly in December 1989 and early 1990 by coopting new people to replace those communist deputies who resigned. Competitive elections, held in June 1990 and 1992 for Federal and Republic legislatures and in September/October 1994 for the Slovak National Council as well as in November 1990, November 1992 and November 1994 for local offices were the primary means of selecting new leaders.³⁶ The rapid repluralization of politics that occurred after the end of Communist rule provided citizens with the opportunity to articulate their views and join or form voluntary organizations to defend their interests, advocate policies and pressure political leaders.³⁷

Electoral legislation and the timing of elections in Slovakia were influenced by the desire of Czechoslovakia's new leaders to move quickly to legitimate the ad hoc personnel changes and changes in government that occurred immediately after the end of the communist system; the need to take the multiethnic nature of the country and its tradition of proportional representation into account; and the desire to prevent an extreme degree of fragmentation of political forces in parliament. Thus, a system of proportional representation with thresholds of 5 percent for the Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council, and 3 percent for the Slovak National Council, was adopted. In 1992, the threshold for the Slovak National Council was increased to 5 percent. Political considerations including the situation of the Hungarian minority have influenced recent discussions of electoral districts.

In the June 1990 elections, Civic Forum and Public Against Violence emerged as the clear winners in their regions. Public Against Violence gained 32.5 percent of the vote and 19 of the 51 Slovak seats in the House of the People and 37.3 percent of the vote, or 33 of the 75 Slovak seats in the House of Nations in the Federal Assembly. The movement also won 29.3 percent of the vote to the Slovak National Council, which gave it 48 of the 150 seats in that body. The Christian Democratic Movement was the second most popular party, with approximately 19 percent of the vote to the House of the People and 16.7 percent to the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly and 19 percent of the vote to the Slovak National Council. The Communist Party of Slovakia won 13.8 percent of the vote for the House of the People and 13.4 to the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly; the party won 13.3 percent of votes for the Slovak National Council. The Slovak National Party won approximately 11 percent of the vote to the two houses of the Federal Assembly and 14 percent to the Slovak National Council. A coalition of two

Hungarian parties, Coexistence and the Hungarian Christian Democratic Party, gained about 8.5 percent of votes to all three bodies. In addition to these parties, which passed the 5 percent threshold required to seat deputies in the Federal Assembly, the Democratic Party, with 4.4 percent of the vote and Green Party with 3.5 percent passed the three percent threshold required to seat deputies in the Slovak National Council (see table 6.2).

Table 6.2. *Parliamentary elections in Slovakia, 1990*

Political Parties	House of the People			House of Nations			National Council		
	No. votes	% vote	No. seats	No. votes	% vote	No. seats	No. votes	% vote	No. seats
PAV	1,104,125	32.54	19	1,262,278	37.28	33	991,285	29.34	48
KDH	644,008	18.98	11	564,172	16.66	14	648,782	19.20	31
SNS	372,025	10.96	6	387,387	11.44	9	470,984	13.94	22
KSS	468,411	13.81	8	454,740	13.43	12	450,855	13.34	22
ESWMK	291,287	8.58	5	287,426	8.49	7	292,636	8.66	14
DS	149,310	4.4	-	124,561	3.68	-	148,567	4.39	7
SZ	108,542	3.20	-	87,366	2.58	-	117,871	3.48	6
SD	64,175	1.89	-	51,233	1.51	-	61,401	1.81	-
SSL	49,012	1.44	-	42,111	1.24	-	60,041	1.77	-
SZV	87,604	2.58	-	71,204	2.10	-	85,060	2.51	-
CSS	2,086	.06	-	2,073	.06	-	1,166	.03	-
SB	6,145	.18	-	5,643	.17	-	3,326	.09	-
VDS							6,753	.20	-
CSDP	562	.20	-	499	.01	-	338	.01	-
HCSPP	13,947	.41	-	16,943	.50	-	13,417	.39	-
DURS	22,670	.67	-	20,445	.60	-	24,797	.73	-
VDSPPR	8,577	.25	-	7,169	.21	-	7,023	.21	-
HOS	580	.02	-	914	.03	-			

Notes: Voter turnout: 95.39% of eligible voters; Acronyms: ČSDF - Czechoslovak Democratic Forum; ČSS - Czechoslovak Socialist Party; DS - Democratic Party; DURS - Romanes; ESWMK - Coexistence-Hungarian Christian Democratic Party; HCSPP - Movement of Czechoslovak Understanding; HOS - Movement for Civic Liberty; KDH - Christian Democratic Movement; KSS - Communist Party of Slovakia; PAV - Public Against Violence; SB - Free Bloc; SD - Social Democratic Party; SNS - Slovak National Party; SSL - Freedom Party; SZ - Green Party; SZV - The Alliance of Farmers & the Countryside; VDS - All-People's Democratic Party; VDSPPR - People's Democratic Party-Rally for the Republic
Sources: Sharon L. Wolchik, *Czechoslovakia: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1991), pp. 72, 75; Oskar Krejčí, *History of Elections in Bohemia and Moravia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 341-52, FBIS-EEU, Slovakia, June 11, 1990, pp. 31-34 and June 15, 1990, p. 18.

As in 1990, no party won a majority of the vote in the 1992 elections in Slovakia. Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia gained the largest share of the vote (33.5 percent to the House of the People and 33.9 percent to the House of Nations of the National Assembly and 37.3 percent to the Slovak National Council). The Party of the Democratic Left, the successor

to the Communist Party of Slovakia, came in second with approximately 14 percent of the vote for all three bodies, followed by the Christian Democratic Movement with approximately 9 percent. The Slovak National Party won 9.4 percent of the vote for both houses of the Federal Assembly and 7.9 percent for the Slovak National Council. In addition, coalitions of Hungarian parties gained approximately 7 percent of the vote and seated deputies in both the federal and Slovak bodies. The Social Democratic Party, with 6 percent of the vote, also passed the threshold to seat deputies in the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly. The Civic Democratic Union, however, the center right successor of Public Against Violence, with 4.0 percent of the vote for all three bodies, did not pass the threshold required to seat deputies at either the federal or republic level (see table 6.3).

Since independence, Slovakia has experienced early parliamentary elections brought about by the parliamentary ouster of Vladimír Mečiar as prime minister in March 1994. In these elections, which were held in September-October 1994, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia won the largest share of the vote (34.96 percent). Common Choice, a coalition of the Party of the Democratic Left, the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, the Green Party of Slovakia and the Farmers Movement of the Slovak Republic, was second with 10.41 percent; and the Hungarian Coalition was third with 10.18 percent. Unable to convince leaders of the Party of the Democratic Left to enter into a coalition with him, Mečiar formed a coalition with the Slovak National Party which won 5.40 percent of the vote, and the Association of Slovak Workers which won 7.43 percent. Together, the coalition holds 83 of the 150 seats, eight more than a majority in parliament (see table 6.4).

The break-up of the Czechoslovak Federation

The development of the party system and other forms of citizen participation in politics in Slovakia was also influenced by the break-up of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1993. As I have argued in greater detail in an earlier discussion of this issue, the end of the Czechoslovak state was the reflection of a variety of historical, cultural, economic, and political/institutional factors.³⁸ Cooperation between Czech and Slovak leaders after November 1989 soon gave way to conflict over the division of labor between the federal and republic governments as well as to the increasingly open expression of different views on the speed and extent of economic reform.

Table 6.3. *Parliamentary elections in Slovakia, 1992*

Political Parties	House of the People			House of Nations			National Council		
	No. votes	No. seats	% vote seats	No. votes	No. seats	% vote seats	No. votes	No. seats	% vote seats
HZDS	1,036,459	24	47.0	1,045,395	33	44.0	1,148,625	74	49.3
SDL	446,230	10	19.6	433,750	13	17.3	453,203	39	26.0
SNS	290,249	6	11.7	288,864	9	12.0	244,527	15	10.0
KDH	27,061	6	11.7	272,100	8	10.7	273,945	18	12.0
MKDH	-	-	-	-	-	-	228,885	14	9.3
MKDH/MSL	227,925	5	9.8	228,219	7	9.3	-	-	-
SDSS	-	-	-	188,223	5	6.6	123,426	4	-
ODU	122,359	4	-	124,649	4	-	123,426	4	-
MOS	72,877	2.3	-	71,122	2.4	-	70,689	2.3	-
DS/ODS	122,266	3.7	-	113,176	3.4	-	102,058	2.3	-

Notes: Voter turnout: 83% of eligible voters; Acronyms: DS/ODS - Democratic Party/Civic Democratic Party; HZDS - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia; KDH - Christian Democratic Movement; MKDH - Coexistence-Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement; MKDH/MSL - MKDH/Hungarian People's Party; MOS - Hungarian Civic Party; ODU - Civic Democratic Union; SDL - Party of the Democratic Left; SDSS - Social Democratic Party; SNS - Slovak National Party

Sources: Jiri Pehe, "Czechoslovakia's Political Balance Sheet, 1990-1992," *RFE/RL Research Reports*, June 19, 1992; "Volby 1992," *Respekt*, June 8-14, 1992; Sharon L. Wolchik, "The Repluralization of Politics in Post-Communist Czechoslovakia," *Journal of Post-Communist Studies*, no. 1 (1994), 419; Oskar Krejci, *History of Elections in Bohemia and Moravia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 341-52; and *FBIS-EEU*, Slovakia, June 8, 1992, pp. 15-17 and June 11, 1992, p. 9.

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Table 6.4 *Parliamentary elections in Slovakia, 1994*

Political Parties	No. votes	% vote	No. seats	% seats
Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)/Peasant Party of Slovakia (RSS)	1,005,488	34.96	61	40.7
Common Choice ^a (SU)	299,496	10.41	18	12.0
Hungarian Coalition ^b (MK)	292,936	10.18	17	11.3
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	289,987	10.08	17	11.3
Democratic Union (DU)	246,444	8.57	15	10.0
Workers' Assoc. of Slovakia (ZRS)	211,321	7.34	13	8.7
Slovak National Party (SNS)	155,359	5.40	9	6.0
Democratic Party ^c (DS)	98,555	3.42	-	-
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	78,419	2.72	-	-
Christian-Social Union (KSU)	59,217	2.05	-	-
New Slovakia (NS)	38,369	1.33	-	-
Party against Corruption (SPK)	37,929	1.31	-	-
Movement for a Prosperous Czechia and Slovakia (HZPC+S)	30,292	1.05	-	-
Romany Civic Initiative (ROI)	19,542	.67	-	-
Social Democracy (SD)	7,121	.24	-	-
Realistic Social-Democratic Party (RSDSS)	3,573	.12	-	-
Assoc. for the Republic-Republicans (ZPR)	1,410	.04	-	-

Notes: Voter turnout: 75.65% of registered voters ^aCoalition of Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), Social-Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS), Movement of Farmers of the Slovak Republic, and the Green Party of Slovakia (SZS). ^bCoalition of Coexistence, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH), and Hungarian Civic Party (MOS). ^cIncluding Party of Businessmen and Self-Employed.

Sources: *FBIS-EEU*, Slovakia, October 5, 1994, p. 11; "1994 Elections," by EUnet (Internet source), October 2, 1994; *Slovakia: Parliamentary Elections 1994*, ed. Soňa Szomolányi and Gregorij Mesežnikov (Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovak Political Science Foundation, 1995); *1994 Parliamentary Elections in the Slovak Republic*, TA SR, Slovakia News Agency, September 27, 1994.

The inability of leaders to come to an agreement on the power-sharing issue and the much harsher impact of the shift to the market in Slovakia, given the differences in the timing and nature of industrialization discussed earlier, resulted in growing dissatisfaction with the federation in Slovakia. As the results of the 1992 elections illustrate, this dissatisfaction, coupled with psychological and historical factors, as well as with the differences in opinion among Czechs and Slovaks concerning many of the most important issues of the day, led to the victory of a center-right coalition led by Václav Klaus in the Czech Lands and a coalition of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the Slovak National Party led by Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia.

The actual process by which the common state ended was initiated by political elites and confined to the elite level. The public, which continued to oppose the break-up in both the Czech Lands and Slovakia even as their leaders negotiated it, was not consulted by means of a referendum. The Federal Parliament eventually approved a plan for dividing the state, but it is clear that neither the federal nor the republic legislatures played a significant role in the process.³⁹ At the same time, the different perspectives of Czechs and Slovaks on issues such as the nature of the state and the pace and extent of economic reform provided the background for these actions. Thus, among those Slovaks who wanted to see a common state continue, most favored a "confederation"; however, the nature of this arrangement was not clearly understood or specified.⁴⁰ Similarly, Vladimír Mečiar's promise to find a road to the market that would take Slovakia's specific features into account resonated with the desire of many Slovaks to see the state continue to play a larger role than most Czechs wanted as well as with the lower levels of support among Slovaks for privatization of large state enterprises. Differences in the perspectives of Czechs and Slovaks, then, allowed political leaders, particularly in Slovakia, to mobilize citizens around these issues.

In contrast to the situation in the former Yugoslav federation, the break-up of Czechoslovakia occurred peacefully. The peaceful nature of the end of the Czechoslovak state reflected the fact that the Czech leadership was willing to agree to Slovakia's independence after the June 1992 elections. It also reflected the fact that Czechs and Slovaks had never slaughtered each other in mass numbers and the absence of a history of violence between the two peoples. The concentration of settlement in the two regions was also an important factor. In contrast to the situation in former Yugoslavia, the numbers of Czechs living in Slovakia and Slovaks living in the Czech Lands was not large.⁴¹

From the perspective of the development of the party system and other avenues of citizen participation in politics in Slovakia, the break-up of the federation was significant in a number of ways. Questions about the nature and

future of the state played a dominant role in public life in the first two and a half years of the post-communist era. Particularly as economic hardship due to the shift to the market increased in Slovakia, those political leaders and political parties who supported both reform and the continuation of the federation were doubly disadvantaged in their efforts to gain electoral support. After the elections of June 1992 they were marginalized from politics.

The fact that the split occurred peacefully was also important for the further development of the party system as well as of other political organizations and institutions in Slovakia. In contrast to the situation in former Yugoslavia, the leaders and citizens of Slovakia were able to continue to engage in political life without the threat or presence of war after independence.

Social and ethnic cleavages in post-communist society

Ethnicity, which was one of the most important cleavages in Czechoslovakia during the interwar and communist periods, continues to be the most politically salient cleavage in independent Slovakia. Slovaks comprise 85.7 percent of the population. There are approximately 567,000 Hungarians concentrated in the southern part of Slovakia; 17,200 Ruthenians; and 13,300 Ukrainians.⁴² There are also smaller Polish and Czech communities and a sizeable Romany, or gypsy community, unofficially estimated to be between 100,000 to 250,000.⁴³ During the communist era, members of the Hungarian minority as well the Ukrainians/Ruthenians concentrated in Eastern Slovakia were more likely than Slovaks to work in agriculture.⁴⁴ However, most members of both groups were workers or employees. The educational levels of Ukrainians/Ruthenians were substantially lower than those of other citizens of Slovakia.⁴⁵

Political life after independence, just as it was before, is organized along ethnic lines. Hungarian voters in particular vote for Hungarian parties. As a later section of the paper will discuss, there are also important differences in the political perspectives of young and old voters. Political values and attitudes also differ by educational levels, as well as by gender.

As I have argued in greater detail elsewhere,⁴⁶ there are important differences in the status of men and women in Slovak society. As the result of policies adopted during the communist era, women's educational levels have increased and now equal or exceed those of men, particularly in the younger age groups. Most women are also employed outside the home. However, substantial inequalities still remain in the workplace. Women are less likely to hold leading positions and also have lower incomes. In the post-communist period, women's share of the unemployed has generally been larger than their representation in the labor force. Women have also faced increasingly open discrimination in the workplace and in society at large. The exclusion of

women from positions of political power has continued in the post-communist period.⁴⁷ Slovak society is also becoming more stratified along economic lines as a result of the reintroduction of the market.

The shift to the market

At the end of the communist period, Slovakia's development level was nearly on a par with that of the Czech Lands. However, because it took place largely during the communist era, the nature of Slovakia's industrialization differed. Much of Czechoslovakia's arms industry was concentrated in Slovakia, and more of Slovakia's industries were of the very large, inefficient type typical of centrally planned economies. There were also large numbers of towns that were in effect one-industry towns and thus extremely vulnerable once market conditions were introduced.⁴⁸

Slovak leaders agreed to the plan for the rapid reintroduction of the market, adopted by the federal and republic governments in September 1990. However, given the timing and nature of industrialization, the Slovak economy was more susceptible to disruptions caused by the shift to the market. Unemployment rates soon reached 12 to 13 percent, rates several times higher than those in the Czech Lands. Part of the source of Vladimír Mečiar's electoral victory in the 1992 elections was his promise to adjust economic strategy to better reflect the specific needs and conditions in Slovakia.

As in other post-communist societies, the impact of the economic transition has been differentiated. Those who are young, better educated, and live in urban areas have benefited most from the opportunity to establish or work for private businesses, increase their skills through contact with foreign experts and travel abroad, or work for international corporations. They and a larger group have also benefited from the ability to practice their professions or work in their occupations without political or ideological interference.

For many Slovaks, however, the shift to the market has created a good deal of hardship. Unskilled workers, older workers, and women have borne the brunt of the transition. Vulnerable groups in the population, such as the elderly and single mothers⁴⁹ have been particularly hard hit. Workers in the many one-industry towns and cities in Slovakia in which the main enterprises are not competitive in the new conditions have also suffered high levels of unemployment and economic hardship.⁵⁰ Different groups in society have had different experiences with privatization. Many Slovaks benefited from their participation in the first wave of coupon privatization, which took place before the break-up of the federation. Since that time, critics of the Mečiar regime have charged that privatization has benefited largely those who support Mečiar and members of the old apparatus.⁵¹ Hungarian activists in particular have claimed that members of the Hungarian minority are being systematically

excluded from participation in privatization.⁵² Economic Performance began to improve in 1995, when the Slovak economy grew at the rate of 6.6 percent. However, as in a number of other post-communist countries, progress at the macroeconomic level has yet to be reflected in the living standard of many sectors of the population (see table 6.5).

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Table 6.5 Indicators of economic trends in Slovakia since 1989

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995 ^a
GDP	1.4 ^b	-0.4 ^b	-14.5	-6.4	-4.1	4.5	6.6
Industrial output	-0.7	-3.6	-17.5	-14.4	-10.2	6.4	8.4
Rate of inflation	2.3 ^b	10.8 ^b	61.2	10.1	23.2	13.5	9.9
% Labor force unemployed	0	1.5	11.8	10.3	14.4	14.8	13.1
GNP per capita	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6,660	n.a.	n.a.
% Workforce in private activity	1.0	5.0	12.8	18.4	22.2	31.9	n.a.
% GDP from private sector	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	22.0	24.6	43.8	n.a.

Notes: GDP – % change over previous year; industrial output – % change over previous year; rate of inflation – % change in end-year retail/consumer prices; rate of unemployment as of end of year; GNP per capita – in US dollars at PPP exchange rates. ^aEstimate. ^bYears 1989, 1990 are for the Czechoslovak Federation; beginning with 1991 data are for Slovakia only.

Sources: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report 1995: Economic Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London: EBRD, 1995); European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report Update, April 1996: Assessing Progress in Economies in Transition* (London: EBRD, 1996).

Large-scale privatization virtually stopped after Vladimír Mečiar became prime minister in 1992. The coalition government of Jozef Moravčík adopted plans to reinstitute coupon privatization in 1994, and the first sales were made prior to the September-October 1994 elections. The Mečiar government formed in December 1994 as the result of the September-October 1994 elections invalidated these sales, including several that had involved foreign investors. Under pressure from the IMF, the government announced a new plan in June of 1995 to privatize large scale economic enterprises later that year. However, this plan would provide citizens with bonds redeemable only in

five years. In addition, many enterprises were sold by means of direct sales.⁵³ In July 1995, the parliament ended coupon privatization.⁵⁴ A December 1995 poll by FOCUS found that 40 percent of respondents in a nationwide survey were critical of the government's privatization strategy. Over 66 percent felt that privatization was not proceeding in the proper direction in Slovakia.⁵⁵

Despite the reluctance of the government to continue the privatization of state enterprises, the private sector has continued to grow in Slovakia. By 1992, private enterprises accounted for 32.4 percent of GDP. This figure had increased to 58.2 percent by 1994 and 62 percent in the first half of 1995.⁵⁶ Approximately 40.5 percent of the labor force was estimated to be engaged in the private sector by 1994.⁵⁷

The political evolution of society

Political parties and movements are the dominant political actors in Slovakia. As the section to follow on political parties and the party system details, many new political parties were formed after the end of communist rule. The Communist Party and other small parties permitted to exist during the communist period also continued to exist and took steps to reform themselves in order to compete electorally.

Other associations and organizations, including business groups, professional and voluntary associations, and trade unions, also took advantage of the new political conditions to organize and attract members. The NGO sector grew particularly quickly after the end of restrictions on forming new organizations. There were an estimated 9,800 NGO's in Slovakia in late 1995. This represents a sizeable increase since 1993 when there were approximately 6,000 NGOs registered with the government.⁵⁸ These figures compare to the approximately 16,000 associations that Mannova notes existed in Slovakia in the interwar period.⁵⁹

Information on all of the NGOs registered with the government is not available. However, analysis of data gathered by SAIA-SCTS (Slovak Academic Information Agency-Service Center for the Third Sector) on 1,571 NGOs provides some insight into their fields of activity and focus. In 1995, the largest category of NGOs registered with SAIA-SCTS worked in the area of education and training (59 percent); 58 percent worked with youth, 46 percent with children; 35 percent with charity and social welfare; and 33 percent with disabled people. In addition, 25 percent focused on issues related to the environment and 20 percent on issues related to business development. These organizations encompassed approximately 380,400 volunteers in 1995.⁶⁰ Originally concentrated in Bratislava, NGOs have increasingly spread to other parts of the country.⁶¹

In March 1994, a Council, or Gremium, of the Third Sector was formed by

sixteen people who represented different areas of the NGO sector. In 1995, this group was expanded to include seventeen individuals representing five areas of NGO activity. This body meets monthly and attempts to influence legislation that affects the NGO sector.⁶²

A study of volunteerism conducted in Slovakia in April 1994 as part of an international study of volunteering provides some information about the number and kinds of citizens who take part in the work of voluntary organizations. In 1994, 11 percent of the 1,015 individuals surveyed indicated that they had participated in some kind of unpaid work for a voluntary organization in the previous year, and 12 indicated that they had done specific types of such work.⁶³ Of these over half (56 percent) did so at least once a month; 41 percent of those who regularly volunteer spent 10 hours a month doing so. Fialova notes that these proportions, as those in other formerly communist European countries, were considerably lower than those in countries such as Belgium (where 30 percent of respondents volunteered), Denmark (28 Percent), the Netherlands (34 percent) and Sweden (32 percent). Volunteers in Central and Eastern Europe are more likely than those in the rest of Europe to become volunteers through their work; they are also more likely to volunteer to provide services. Levels of satisfaction with volunteering are also lower.⁶⁴

Equal proportions of men and women were regular volunteers; individuals with university education, as well as those who are older than 35, were most likely to volunteer.⁶⁵ These figures correspond to the results Zora Butorova, Jan Haiti, and I found in our December 1994 survey which found that women were more likely to be active in non-partisan organizations than in Political parties.⁶⁶ Men are more likely to volunteer for sports and recreation related organizations; women are more frequently found as volunteers in groups that deal with health and social service issues.⁶⁷ In addition to groups that focus on providing services and recreational groups, a wide variety of other nongovernmental organizations developed that focus on issues ranging from the environment to feminism. Religious denominations also expanded the groups they organized for youth, women, and other groups of the population, as did political parties.

The introduction of the market and privatization have been accompanied by the formation of numerous groups and associations by business people and managers. To a large extent, these groups focus primarily on professional development and business related issues. However, a small party, the Party of Businessmen and Tradesmen, was formed in 1990. This party, which favors the rapid reintroduction of the market and creation of a positive environment for small and medium-sized businesses, ran as part of the Democratic Union's electoral slate in the 1994 elections. The Party also cooperates with business

organizations abroad, including those in the Czech Republic and Hungary. On August 1, 1994, the party began a regular column in the daily *Sme* to provide advice for business people and information on issues that affect them.⁶⁸ Disagreement among the leaders of the party led to a split in February 1995; a new party, the Union of Tradesmen, Businessmen, and Farmers of the Slovak Republic, was formed.⁶⁹ In October 1995, the Party of Businessmen and Entrepreneurs agreed to cooperate with Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia.⁷⁰

In addition to these groups, there are also numerous business groups and associations that are affiliated with international bodies. The Slovak Association of Employers Unions and Associations represents employers groups in the Tripartite Commission, a body that brings together the trade unions, employers and the government to negotiate wage and other agreements.⁷¹

Privatization and the introduction of the market have also sparked efforts to organize on the part of agricultural workers. As in the case of business groups, most groups have focused on issues related to their members' occupations, such as agricultural production techniques. Agricultural workers and farmers have divided their votes among a variety of different political parties. These include the small Peasant Party that ran in the 1994 elections in coalition with the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia; the Christian Democratic Movement; and the Party of the Democratic Left.⁷² The farmers movement, which formed part of the Common Choice coalition in 1994, also represents agricultural interests. The end of communism has allowed trade unions to be more active protecting the interests of their members. However, the action of the trade unions has been limited by their participation in the deliberations of the tripartite commission. First established under the federation, the tripartite commission that brings unions, employers and the government together was continued after Slovakia became independent. Union representatives signed a General Agreement for 1994 designed to promote social peace in August 1994.⁷³ There have been few strikes in Slovakia since independence.

However, individual trade unions such as KOVO, the union of workers in mining, geology, and the oil industry, staged protests against the government's social policies in 1995.⁷⁴ Dissatisfaction with the government's effort to revamp social policies led representatives of the confederation to walk out of the tripartite agreement discussions in September 1995.⁷⁵ There have also been demonstrations such as that of 20,000 people in Bratislava organized by the Confederation of Trade Unions to protest government policies.⁷⁶ Leaders of the Confederation have also accused the Mečiar government of trying to break up the unions.⁷⁷

The military, which was rapidly downsized, has played virtually no role in the

selection of government leaders in Slovakia during the period between 1989 and 1993 or since Slovakia's independence.⁷⁸ During the communist era, the army was unpopular as the result of its politicization and subordination to the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ However, as in the former Soviet Union, the military was subordinated to Czechoslovakia's political authorities and did not play an independent role in politics. In the course of the reforms of 1968, steps were taken to reduce political influence in the military as well as to increase the number of Slovak officers and reduce discrimination against Slovaks in advancement.⁸⁰ The purge of reformist officers who supported the political reforms of 1968, which involved almost all of the junior officers, resulted in the dominance of officers who supported the repressive policies of the Hissak regime, particularly after Soviet support for Husák became clear. For the remainder of the communist period, the army suffered from funding problems and demoralization.⁸¹ The low educational levels of officers and evident subordination of the military to the Soviet command were additional factors that led to low public trust in the military and to the low prestige associated with military careers.⁸²

The army's role in the events that brought about the end of communism in Czechoslovakia is disputed. As Barany notes, there is evidence that elements within the military as well as in the political leadership contemplated the use of force against the growing number of demonstrators in November 1989, but the resignation of the Communist Party's leadership prevented a decision about this issue from being reached.⁸³ In October 1990, then Defense Minister Miroslav Vacek was replaced when an investigation revealed that he had been a central figure in a November 1989 plan to control radio and television broadcasting.⁸⁴

As in other post-communist states, the military underwent important changes in its size, staffing, doctrine, and international links after the end of communist rule. Steps were taken to increase the military's professionalism. A significant number (23.6 percent) of officers and other professional soldiers left the military either because they did not pass competence testing or at their own request.⁸⁵ Slightly over one-half of all generals and 23.6 percent of all professional soldiers did not sign the new loyalty oath. Most of those who worked as political officers also left military service.⁸⁶ The Czechoslovak government also established greater civilian control over the military and took steps to eliminate the influence of foreign intelligence in the military.⁸⁷

The Slovak army which came under the control of the new Slovak Republic in 1993 is uninvolved in political life. When the Czechoslovak federation broke up, Czech and Slovak leaders agreed to split the army's assets and equipment on a two to one ratio. The division of the army was facilitated by the redeployment of army troops from the Czech Republic's western borders,

where they had been concentrated during the communist period, to a more uniform distribution throughout the county. Czech officers serving in Slovakia and Slovak officers serving in the Czech Republic were given the option of remaining or returning to their own country when the federal state broke up. Most of the Slovaks who returned to Slovakia were younger and less experienced than those who remained in the Czech Lands. This factor complicated the task of creating a national Slovak army. As was the case for numerous other institutions such as the foreign service, for example, Slovaks had to build new institutions while Czechs could use federal institutions as a framework for the creation of Czech institutions. The weakness of the military as an institution and the fact that it has been largely preoccupied with its own internal affairs in Slovakia since independence, are additional factors, then, that have limited the military's political influence.

The direct political role of the political or secret police also appears to have been minimal. However, in Slovakia certain political leaders have allegedly influenced the decisions of their opponents as to whether or not to seek office or to continue in office by using information provided by the intelligence service or from police files. In these cases, the intelligence services provided information used by political leaders rather than initiating action or playing a role as independent political actors.

To date, violence has played a similarly limited role in the selection of political leaders in Slovakia. There have been several changes of government that have occurred peacefully in Slovakia. However, there are indicators that violence or the threat of violence may play an increasing role. The beating of Frantisek Miklosko, Deputy Chair of the Christian Democratic Movement, in September of 1995, is widely thought to have been politically motivated. The August 1995 kidnapping of President Kováč's son, who was forced to drink large quantities of alcohol and taken across the border into Austria, is another example of a politically motivated violent act.⁸⁸ President Kováč has accused Ivan Lexa, the head of the Slovak Information Service, Slovakia's secret service, of directing the kidnapping of his son.⁸⁹ Other opposition leaders, including Jan Čarnogurský, head of the Christian Democratic Party, have also charged that the SIS was involved in the abduction.⁹⁰ Two police investigators on the case who had alleged that the secret service was involved were removed from the case. The Director of the SIS filed criminal charges against the investigators as well as a lawsuit against President Kováč.⁹¹

At present, the process of selecting political leaders by democratic means is threatened more by political factors than by the use of violence. Hungarian activists charge that the government coalition's plans for redrawing the borders of Slovakia's districts threaten the ability of Slovakia's Hungarians to elect Hungarian leaders, for example. Originally approved by the government on

March 22, 1996 and reapproved on July 3 after President Kováč's veto, the administrative reform recreated eight regions in Slovakia. It reduced the numbers of districts from 83 to 79.⁹² The Deputy Chair of Coexistence, one of the members of the Hungarian Coalition, notes that the government plan incorporates the districts of two of the main centers of Hungarian settlement, Komarno and Dunajska Streda, into three different regions. Other districts and sub-districts with large Hungarian populations have also been separated and have become parts of different regions.⁹³

The efforts of the Slovak National Party and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia to revoke the mandates of Democratic Union deputies in March 1995 and the effort of the Mečiar government to force President Kováč to resign are examples of the attempted use of non-electoral, but legal means to influence the composition of the country's leadership. In January 1996, the Chair of the Mandate and Immunity Commission of the National Council announced that the conclusions reached by the earlier temporary mandate committee that the mandates of the Democratic Union deputies elected in 1994 were invalid was legally irrelevant because of procedural abnormalities in the temporary committee's handling of the issue. This judgement relied on the Constitutional Court's ruling to that effect in March 1995.⁹⁴ As the failure of both of those attempts illustrates, the ability of leaders to use such measures has been limited to date by the powers of other institutions, such as the Constitutional Court, despite the fact that the current government coalition holds a majority of legislative seats. International pressure also appears to have served as a restraint.

As in other post-communist countries, rumor abounds concerning the influence of organized crime in Slovakia. International criminal organizations, including "mafias" from Ukraine and Russia, have moved into Slovakia in addition to Slovak criminal groups and networks. For obvious reasons, there is little systematic data about such groups and their activities.⁹⁵ Public opinion surveys indicate that Slovaks rank crime of all types second in importance after health concerns as a public problem.⁹⁶ Public officials have enacted new laws designed to deal with organized crime.⁹⁷ They have also begun to cooperate with agencies of other governments, including the FBI, to combat organized crime. However, in contrast to the situation in several post-communist countries, where such groups appear to have infiltrated governmental bodies as well as economic institutions and many new private businesses, the direct political influence of such groups on politics appears to be small.

The greater threat to the persistence of democracy appears to come from antidemocratic actions on the part of certain elements of the legitimate political elite, including remnants of the old apparatus.⁹⁸ It is this influence rather than the influence of organized crime *per se* that appears to have most impact on

citizens' perceptions of political life and institutions. As the section to follow illustrates, many citizens in Slovakia continue to be suspicious of the motives and actions of people in positions of political leadership. They are also reluctant to get involved in politics themselves, in part because of their belief that most people in politics are active in political life primarily to enrich themselves rather than to promote the common good."

Since the end of communist rule, the media have developed into an independent source of information and opinion in Slovakia. Several political parties have newspapers that are either affiliated with them or favorable to their point of view. Efforts by the government to control newspapers have occurred frequently and led in some cases to the formation of new, more independent, dailies. After their 1994 electoral victory, Mečiar and his coalition partners attempted to change what they perceived to be the hostile press and other media by a number of means, including the replacement of the members of the board of governors of Slovak television and pressure on editors and journalists. These changes were followed by more extensive personnel changes in the media. A Council for Mass Media was also established in February 1995 to make sure that the media respect the constitution.¹⁰⁰ Political influence has been particularly noticeable in the broadcast media. Although there are several regional television stations and . private radio stations, these stations cannot compete effectively with state owned channels, which remain more popular with viewers and listeners. A survey conducted by the State Television Board in May 1995 found that coalition parties and figures received markedly more coverage than the opposition or the president.¹⁰¹

The print media have not been as susceptible to measures to control them as the broadcast media. However, the government has taken a number of steps to attempt to correct what its members see as an anti-governmental bias in the journalism world. In February 1995, a law was discussed in a parliamentary committee that would have imposed a very high VAT on all dailies that were partly owned by outside investors. This measure provoked a common protest by thirteen dailies against what they described as undue economic pressure designed to muzzle a free press, and the government measure was shelved.¹⁰² Opposition activists also see the removal of the license of the majority shareholder of the publisher of *Sme* and the purchase of another independent journal, *Pravda*, by the Harvard Investment Fund, which is closely connected to Ivan Lexa, head of the SIS, as efforts to limit the independence of the press.¹⁰³ The law on the protection of the republic which Parliament passed in December 1996 after President Kováč vetoed an earlier version of the law, calls for sanctions against those who spread false news that endangers the security of Slovaks or damages its interests, including those that are potential threats, and gives the government an additional tool to silence its critics in the

media and other areas.¹⁰⁴

Public support for democratization

Survey research conducted since the end of communist rule demonstrates that most Slovak citizens support democratization in general terms.¹⁰⁵ However, there have been important changes over time in the levels of this support, and there are significant differences in the degree of such support among different social groups. In general, younger, better educated, urban males tend to be more supportive of both the move to the market and the effort to recreate a democratic political system.¹⁰⁶

As the survey results discussed below illustrate, a sizeable number of citizens in Slovakia continue to be unconvinced that it was necessary to change the pre-1989 system. Prior to the break-up of the Czechoslovak federation in 1993, Slovaks tended to be less favorable than Czechs toward a rapid move to the market. They also were less willing to accept greater unemployment and more fearful of a decline in the standard of living. Respondents in Slovakia were also less favorable toward the privatization of large enterprises and more likely than those in the Czech Lands to want the state to continue to play a major role in providing social welfare and security for citizens.¹⁰⁷ In a November-December 1994 survey on which I collaborated with colleagues in Bratislava and Prague, 41 percent of respondents in Slovakia (compared to 68 percent of those in the Czech Lands) believed that extensive changes were necessary in the economy.¹⁰⁸ The less positive attitudes of Slovaks toward economic reform and the introduction of the market can be traced in part to the high levels of unemployment in Slovakia since the end of communist rule and in part to the persisting legacy of certain values and expectations dating from the communist era.

Respondents in Slovakia also were less favorable toward the political changes that occurred after 1989. The proportion of those who felt that the current system had more disadvantages than advantages increased from approximately 20 percent in May 1991 to 55 in October 1993. In December 1994, approximately 42 percent of respondents in Slovakia, compared to 20 percent in the Czech Republic, felt that the present political regime had more disadvantages than the pre-1989 system. Most citizens in Slovakia as well as in the Czech Lands, however, felt that the current system gave their children advantages the previous system could not offer.¹⁰⁹

Citizen evaluations of political leaders and institutions have generally not been as favorable in Slovakia as those toward the overall idea of democratization. A majority of respondents surveyed in the Slovak Republic in November-December 1994, for example, disagreed with the statement that most politicians act in an unselfish and moral way (approximately 76 percent).

Approximately 91 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the powers that be do not care about the opinion of common people.¹¹⁰

Trust in political institutions fluctuated in Slovakia after independence.¹¹¹ In early 1991, for example, 57 percent of the population trusted the president of the federation; 48 percent the Federal Assembly; 67 percent the Slovak National Council; and 77 percent the Slovak government.¹¹² In October 1993, 73 percent of those surveyed trusted the president of Slovakia; 43 percent the Slovak National Council; and 41 percent the government of Slovakia. Levels of trust in the National Council increased slightly during the period of the coalition government in Slovakia (May 1994), while those in the government increased substantially (to 55 percent).¹¹³ In late 1994, trust in the president had increased to 80 percent; and in the government to 61 percent. Trust in parliament remained substantially lower at just under 40 percent.¹¹⁴ As is the case for general attitudes toward the transition, trust in political institutions, as well as in individual leaders, varies considerably by the political orientations of respondents. In 1994 and 1995, those affiliated with the opposition parties put more trust in the president, who has often opposed the policies of Prime Minister Mečiar; those who voted for the ruling coalition were more likely to trust the government and National Council.¹¹⁵

Attitudes concerning political parties have tended to be negative in Slovakia as well as in the Czech Republic. Thus, many citizens think that a strong leader is more important for democracy than strong political parties.¹¹⁶ Slovak respondents were also less likely than those in the Czech Lands (15 percent compared to 27 percent) to be members of interest groups and civil associations, but nearly equally likely (32 percent and 34 percent) to be members of trade unions.¹¹⁷ Respondents in Slovakia and the Czech Lands were equally unlikely to view at least two strong political parties which compete in elections as the most essential feature of a democracy.¹¹⁸

Many citizens in Slovakia feel that they do not understand politics. The majority of those surveyed in 1994 also felt that they had little ability to influence government decisions that adversely affect their interests at either the national (74 percent) or local level (50 percent). A majority (55 percent) did not feel that parliamentary elections allow citizens to influence decision-making; only a slightly higher proportion (58 percent) saw local elections as a way of influencing local decisions.¹¹⁹

As in the case of general evaluations of the process of democratization and the move to the market, opinions on these issues vary considerably by social category and, particularly, partisan political affiliation or sympathy. Supporters of parties that are in the government that was formed in late 1994 tend to be less supportive of a liberal conception of democracy and less favorable toward the market. However, partisan affiliation does not differentiate among citizens

with different potentials for participation. Younger and better educated people, as well as students, entrepreneurs, and professionals are more likely to indicate that they are willing to participate in political activities than workers or retired people. Men were more likely to participate than women.¹²⁰

Differences in attitudes and inclinations to take part in political action are particularly noticeable between men and women. Women are less likely than men to feel that they understand politics and far less likely to feel that they can influence political decisions at either the national or local level. They are less often members of political parties and less often indicate that they are likely to take part in the activities of political parties.¹²¹

As the discussion above indicates, the economic transition has had a major impact on citizens' attitudes toward the transition and their roles in it. In general, those who have benefited from the shift to the market or have the ability to benefit from it in the future are more likely to have a liberal concept of democracy. They are also more likely to indicate that they are active or are likely to be active in a variety of forms of political action in addition to voting.

Political parties and the party system

Slovakia's party system shares certain features with those of other post-communist European countries. Chief among these is the fact that there is still a good deal of fluctuation in both political parties and popular affiliation with particular parties. These features are evident in the changing roster of parties that have competed in each of the parliamentary elections held since 1989 and the number of new parties that continue to be formed; they are also evident in survey research that indicates that a significant number of citizens are not firmly anchored to a single political party but rather float among different parties in their electoral support and choices.¹²² Two of the seven parties that won enough votes to seat deputies in the 1994 parliamentary elections, for example, had been created after the last elections.¹²³ Another, Common Choice, was a newly formed coalition of left of center parties including the Party of the Democratic Left, the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Social Union, and the Farmers' Movement among others. Vladimir Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia also entered into coalition with the small Peasant Party. (See tables 6.2-6.4 for the results of the post-communist parliamentary elections.) There have also been a number of changes in political parties since the 1994 elections, including a split in the Social Democratic Party.

Most parties continue to have small memberships. This tendency, which parallels the decline in party membership in certain West European democracies, is compounded by low levels of party identification among voters. As noted above, many citizens in Slovakia have rather low opinions of political parties and are not convinced that they are essential to democracy. In

reaction to the communist period when party membership was required to advance in one's career or influence politics, most citizens do not want to join any political party. Most of the respondents in our 1994 November-December survey did not participate in the work of party organizations. Thus, 8 percent of those surveyed in Slovakia, compared to 12 percent in the Czech Lands, were members of political parties in late 1994. Men were more likely than women to be party members in both countries. Both men and women were more likely to be involved in the work of nonpartisan voluntary organizations.

As in other post-communist systems, many of the umbrella organizations and groups that united people with a wide variety of political perspectives have fragmented in Slovakia. The split in Public Against Violence in April 1991 that was followed by the formation of Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the eventual formation and electoral demise of the Civic Democratic Union was paralleled by the splits that occurred within the Christian Democratic Movement, the Slovak National Party, and other political groupings.

However, the fragmentation of non-traditional movements has not been followed, as it has in the Czech Republic, by the domination of political life by political parties that can be easily placed on the left-right spectrum similar to those that exist in more established political democracies. Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, for example, has supported economic and social policies often associated with leftist parties; however, its symbols and appeal to national sentiments are more typical of radical right-wing parties.¹²⁴

There are some indications that party divisions are beginning to crystalize in Slovakia. This tendency has been particularly evident among the Hungarian political parties, which saw the least shift in their supporters in the 1994 elections. The Christian Democratic Movement has been the most stable of the right of center parties.¹²⁵ However, there has been considerable fluctuation in both the levels of support and individuals supporting most other political parties and movements.

The electoral laws adopted after the fall of the communist system have influenced the structure and durability of political parties in Slovakia in important ways. Based largely on the electoral law used for the 1946 elections, the electoral law adopted to govern the June 1990 elections, which relied on a system of proportional representation with a threshold, was instrumental in both ensuring that the various cleavages in Slovak society would be reflected in parliament and in limiting the number of political parties that would be represented in parliament. Coupled with the retention of the federated system of government, the electoral system, which required a party to achieve a threshold in only one republic in order for deputies to be seated in one of the

houses of the Federal Assembly, also reinforced the division of political life and party formation by republic.

The threshold requirement succeeded in limiting the number of competing political parties that would be active in parliament to a manageable number. However, it also meant that there were a large number of "lost" votes for parties that did not gain the percentage of the vote required to seat deputies in the legislature. The increase in the threshold from 3 percent to 5 percent for single parties in the Slovak National Council and the introduction of a 7 percent threshold for a coalition of two or three parties and a 10 percent threshold for coalitions with more than three parties further increased the number of parties that did not pass the required threshold.¹²⁶ However, it did succeed in reducing the number of lost votes from 23.8 percent in the June 1992 elections to 13.02 percent in the 1994 elections.¹²⁷

As Zemko notes, despite the impetus toward consolidation that thresholds might be expected to create, most small parties did not unite with others but rather joined or formed electoral coalitions of larger parties to ensure that some of their candidates would be elected to parliament in the 1994 elections. As a result, of the approximately sixty political parties that existed in Slovakia in the spring of 1994, eighteen parties and coalitions participated in the elections. However, these included a total of thirty-one parties, organized into coalitions of one sort or another.¹²⁸

As noted earlier, the structure of the state, as well as ethnic cleavages, had a major impact on the organization of parties during the period in which Slovakia remained part of the Czechoslovak federation after 1989. However, the existence of a unitary system within Slovakia after independence has not decreased the salience of the ethnic division as a focus for political organizing. This fact suggests that the form of the state has been less important in Slovakia than underlying ethnic cleavages in influencing party formation. Analysts of other societies in transition differ concerning the impact of parliamentary and presidential systems on political stability.¹²⁹ The president in Slovakia is elected by parliament and has relatively limited formal powers. However, as the role President Kováč's speech to parliament played in bringing about the ouster of the Mečiar government in March 1994 illustrates, the occupant of the office can play an important political role in certain circumstances. The close relations between the president and the parties that participated in the broad coalition government in 1994 that became the opposition after the September-October 1994 elections, however, did little to bolster the drawing power of those parties in the 1994 elections.

The latter point illustrates a further factor that has been very important in influencing the development of the party system in Slovakia as in other post-communist states: the role of personalities and personal rivalries. The pivotal

role of Vladimír Mečiar in Slovak politics since 1989 is the clearest example of this factor. Several new parties have formed directly as the result of their leaders' conflict with Mečiar. Personal rivalry has been at least as if not more important than policy or programmatic differences in the splits that have occurred and led to the formation of other new parties in other political groupings. As noted earlier, Mečiar's dominant role and the conflicts that have occurred between him and his former supporters, as well as between him and the opposition have contributed to the polarization of political life in Slovakia.¹³⁰

Research conducted in Slovakia indicates that supporters of parties in the government and in the opposition differ from each other in their commitment to pluralistic values, as well as in their levels of belief in egalitarianism and nationalism. Differences in value orientations and attitudes toward the institutions and principles of parliamentary democracy in turn are among the factors that make compromise between the two groups unlikely.¹³¹ Thus, supporters of the Democratic Union, the Christian Democratic Movement, the Party of the Democratic Left, the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, the National Democratic Party, the Green Party of Slovakia, the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement and the Hungarian Civic Party have followers who tend to be supportive of democratic procedures and the development of a more differentiated civil society. The commitment of leaders and supporters of the three parties in the government coalition to democratic principles is not as clear. None of these parties openly espouses the use of violence, although the leader of the Slovak National Party has argued that all Hungarian political organizations in Slovakia are working against the state and should therefore be banned. None is linked with paramilitary forces or with forces outside the state that openly advocate the overthrow of democratic institutions.

Leaders of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the Slovak National Party left office peacefully in March 1994 when their government received a vote of no-confidence in parliament. However, many of the supporters of these parties and the Association of Workers of Slovakia, do not support many of the principles of democratic political life, such as tolerance, compromise, negotiation, and the need to respect the rights of opponents and minorities.¹³² The Slovak National Party draws on many of the traditions of the Slovak interwar clerical movement. Survey research indicates that its supporters, as well as those of the other members of the ruling coalition, include sizeable numbers of individuals who do not have a strong faith in democratic principles. SNS supporters also score very low on measures of ethnic tolerance. They differ from supporters of their coalition partners in their strong pro-market orientation.¹³³

Leaders of these parties have engaged in efforts to limit the rights of

expression of their political opponents and tried to use legal means including their majority in parliament to change the rules of the political game in a way that would ensure their continuation in power. As discussed earlier, in October 1994, Mečiar and his coalition partners attempted to remove fifteen deputies of the Democratic Union, a party formed in March 1994 by Josef Moravcik and several other deputies who were originally elected to parliament as members of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, from Parliament. The coalition's supporters also have tried repeatedly to force President Kováč from office. In addition to investigations into Kováč's role in Mečiar's ouster by parliament in March of 1994, the parliament passed a nonbinding vote of no-confidence in the president in May of 1995. The budget of the president's office has been severely cut, necessitating drastic staff reductions and limiting the activities in which he can engage.¹³⁴ As noted earlier, in addition to these actions which violate the spirit of democratic political life but are not strictly illegal, political institutions and actors controlled by or affiliated to the government have been associated with politically motivated violence in a number of cases since the 1994 elections.

The need to compete in competitive elections has clearly had an influence on the successor to the Communist Party of Slovakia, the Party of the Democratic Left. Leaders of the party, which has consistently earned more of the votes than its social democratic competition, have worked hard to reorient the image and policies of their party. The party defines itself as a social-democratic party, and its leaders participated in the broad coalition in power between March and December 1994 which included the Christian Democrats and other center-right parties. Public opinion data gathered in late 1994 indicate that supporters of the coalition Common Choice which the Party joined in the last elections see the parties affiliated with the coalition as the most leftist of the parliamentary parties. However, in their opinions on economic issues, most supporters fall closer to the center of the political spectrum. Coalition supporters tended in November and December 1994 to have views on economic and foreign policy issues closer to those of Vladimír Mečiar and the other parties that joined his governing coalition in December 1994. However, their views on democracy and other political principles, as well as on the Hungarian minority, were more similar to those members of the political parties that were in opposition to Mečiar.¹³⁵ Most supporters of Common Choice have higher educations and support social-democratic positions.¹³⁶

The formation of the left-wing Association of Slovak Workers by a former deputy of the Party of the Democratic Left who broke away from the Party is another indication of how far the Party of the Democratic Left has moved from hard-line leftist positions. In addition to the Association of Slovak Workers, there is also a very small hard-line Communist Party of Slovakia

which is not represented in parliament. This party opposes privatization and most of the changes that have been made since 1989. It is not a threat to democratic political life in Slovakia because it is so small.

There is a strong ethnic dimension to Slovakia's party system. Two of the three Hungarian political parties, the Hungarian Civic Party and the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, are differentiated primarily by their lay or religious character. Both are center-right parties whose leaders and followers support the move to the market and democratic principles. Coexistence, the third Hungarian party, which also includes Ruthenian/Ukrainian as well as Roma supporters, is less well-defined. It is the primary example of a political movement that crosses ethnic lines, although it is part of the Hungarian Coalition in Parliament and is generally viewed as a Hungarian movement. Most Hungarians support Hungarian parties. In May 1994, for example, Coexistence was the most popular party among Hungarian respondents surveyed (31 percent) followed by the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (28 percent). The Party of the Democratic Left and the Hungarian Civic Party had approximately equal degrees of support (9 and 8 percent respectively).¹³⁷ There is also a Romany Civic Initiative which draws support from the Roma.

In addition to the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, the Christian Democratic Movement and Christian-Social Union are religiously based parties. The strongest of these is the Christian Democratic Movement. Supporters of the CDM, which defines itself as a center-right party, support liberal economic principles and adhere to democratic political values. Almost all are religious.¹³⁸

Conclusion: the impact of the party system on governmental efficiency and the consolidation of democracy in Slovakia

The party system in Slovakia has not facilitated the formation of a government able to carry out coherent public policies to date. In the period between 1990 and 1992, Slovak politics, as well as that of the federation as a whole, was dominated by the issue of constitutional reform and the future of the joint state. These issues complicated the process of economic reform and increased citizen dissatisfaction with political institutions and leaders. In Slovakia, the June 1992 elections saw the marginalization of the liberal leaders of the former Public Against Violence and the victory of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, which endorsed economic policies at odds with those adopted by the previous coalition and also attracted supporters dissatisfied with Slovakia's position in the federation.

After Slovakia became independent, the divisions within the country that had been evident regarding the issue of independence continued to color

political life. Vladimír Mečiar's informal coalition with the Slovak National Party was unstable; defections from his own party eventually made his government a minority government. Coupled with Mečiar's conflict with the president, these problems led to his ouster by parliament in March 1994.

The broad coalition government formed at that time made a good deal of progress in dealing with Slovakia's problems and restarting economic reform. However, its leaders proved unable to form an electoral coalition and Mečiar, as leader of the party with the largest share of the votes, was once again able to form a coalition, despite the fact that his party did not gain a majority of the vote in the September-October, 1994 parliamentary elections.

Political life also continues to be highly polarized in Slovakia. In late 1995-early 1996, representatives of the Party of the Democratic Left flirted with cooperating with the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia. However, party representatives indicated that one of the conditions of such cooperation would be the removal of the Slovak National Party from the coalition. The prime minister's coalition, which brings together the right of center National Party and the left of center Association of Slovak Workers, has only a slim majority of votes. Disagreements within the coalition or defections from the coalition parties could easily upset the balance that prevailed through 1995 and early 1996. Significantly, the primary example of cooperation between the opposition parties and the government in 1995 occurred in the passage of the language law, a measure which threatens the interests of the Hungarian minority.

These factors call into question the extent to which democracy has been consolidated in Slovakia. In formal terms, Slovakia has a democratic government. The Mečiar government formed in December 1994 reflected the results of free, open, and contested elections. To date, the actions of the leaders of the coalition have remained within the framework of the law. However, as noted earlier, leaders of the coalition have attempted to use their parliamentary majority to remove vocal opponents of their policies from their positions and restrict the influence of the opposition. The government has also used legal means to consolidate its power in the bureaucracy at the district and local as well as central level and in the police forces. It has attempted to use legal means to control the media and has taken actions to make the future of non-governmental organizations more difficult. The sporadic violent attacks on and harassment of prominent members of the opposition as well as of the president's son are widely attributed to the government. The law on the protection of the republic which the government approved in December 1996, in effect subjects anyone who makes a critical remark about the country or publishes information that is critical to possible prosecution.

On the side of the opposition, the unity of the period of the coalition

government in 1994 appears to have been short lived, as the parties that participated chose not to form an electoral coalition. There also appears to be little willingness among the lay center-right parties to put aside personal and other differences to form a strong center-right party. Nor have these parties been able to recruit or develop a leader who could match Vladimír Mečiar's ability to appeal to the populace or challenge his position as the dominant personality in Slovak politics. The inability of the governing coalition and the opposition to compromise or establish a system to institutionalize and mediate the conflicts that separate them are further signs democracy has yet to be consolidated in Slovakia.

The situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia is also problematic from the perspective of the consolidation of democracy, if consolidation is also understood to include the requirement that all significant groups in society have a chance of having their interests heard. Efforts by the Mečiar government in 1995 to assert greater central control over the selection of principals in local schools and introduce so-called "alternative education," that is, education in Slovak in Hungarian language schools, if parents request it further increased the distrust members of this group felt toward the government. Parliament's failure to ratify the state treaty with Hungary signed in March 1995 in a timely way due to opposition from the Slovak National Party, and the passage of a law making Slovak the official language and requiring its use in a wide variety of official, cultural, and other contexts also increased tensions between the two groups.¹³⁹ In early 1995, Hungarian activists gathered 45,000 signatures to protest the introduction of "alternative education," that is, classes in Slovak in Hungarian schools. Hungarian representatives have expressed the fear that the law will lead to the restriction of the use of Hungarian in official contacts, a right which is guaranteed to members of national minorities by the constitution.¹⁴¹ The difficulty of resolving this situation is illustrated by the fact that most opposition deputies (apart from those of the Christian Democratic Movement) supported the language law.

To date, most Hungarians appear to accept the boundaries of the state, as well as the need to work within the framework of democratic institutions.¹⁴² However, the policies discussed above may in time lead to the perception among Slovakia's Hungarians that they are being systematically marginalized and that there is little hope that they can achieve their aims or defend their interests by using established institutions. Evidence of this possibility is found in the fact that Coexistence, whose leaders have occasionally advocated more direct forms of protest and whose supporters have demonstrated less support for democratic norms and values than those of leaders of other Hungarian parties, has consistently gained the largest share of the Hungarian vote.

The progress of democratic consolidation in Slovakia will be influenced by many factors in addition to the development of the party system. Despite efforts to restrict their influence, opposition activists and intellectuals continue to have the possibility to publish, travel abroad, and organize with others to criticize or question government actions. Citizens also are able to engage in active protests, as occurred in the November 1994 and March 1995 demonstrations for democracy and free speech.¹⁴³

The growth of the non-governmental sector in Slovakia is also positive. Many of these organizations are dependent on foreign funding; most are small; and many consist largely of those who staff them in Bratislava or other large cities. However, such organizations provide a ground for the development and fostering of attitudes supportive of democracy among citizens. They also allow citizens to organize independently of the existing political parties to protest government policies and attempt to mobilize public opinion to bring new issues to the political agenda. The fact that young people tend to be more supportive of democratic values than older people is also an encouraging sign for the future.¹⁴⁴

The fate of Slovak democracy and the likelihood that democracy will be consolidated will also be influenced by economic factors. The economic hardship many Slovaks experienced as a result of the shift to the market in the early post-communist period was one of the factors, together with national grievances, that fueled support for the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia. The growth in the Slovak economy in 1994 and 1995 surprised many analysts. Despite the effective end of large-scale privatization of state enterprises after the Mečiar government returned to power, the private sector continues to grow in Slovakia. The improvement in economic performance has yet to be reflected in a decline in the rate of unemployment or a widespread increase in the standard of living. However, should it continue,¹¹ may increase the number of individuals who feel they have a stake in a market economy and a democratic political system. The political impact of a decline in economic performance is perhaps easier to anticipate. As in the early 1990s, increased economic hardship would in all likelihood increase support for parties, such as those in the ruling coalition, that promise to buffer the population from the hardships of the market.

International factors will also have an important impact on the outcome of political developments in Slovakia. The desire of Slovakia's leaders to be a part of the European club, to join the EU and become a member of NATO, is one of the factors that puts certain limits on the extent to which the government will infringe upon the rights of the opposition and of minorities. Demarches by the United States and several EU ambassadors in October 1995 expressed concern about unsettling political developments in Slovakia including the

campaign to remove President Kovač from office and called for greater attention to toleration of different views and for full respect for constitutional rights.¹⁴⁵ The passage of the law on language and the protection of the republic, despite the protests of the Hungarian government and the concern expressed by European institutions as well as by representatives of individual governments indicates the limits of such influence. However, as the signing of the treaty with Hungary in 1994 and the dropping of overt attempts to force President Kovač from office illustrate, the actions of outside groups and the desire to be a respected member of Central Europe can have a positive influence.¹⁴⁶

Outside support is also crucial for the development of the non-governmental sector. Although such support makes NGOs vulnerable, there are few alternative sources of support for such organizations at present. Those groups that support activities to foster the development of civic values and values supportive of democracy are particularly dependent on outside support. Until the private sector develops in such a way as to generate more philanthropists within Slovakia, such support will be a critical factor in determining the outcome of the transition from communist rule in Slovakia.

As the pages above illustrate, the party system has contributed to the polarization of political opinion that has occurred in Slovakia, as well to the bitter conflict among political elites in the coalition and opposition that prevents compromise. But the instability of political coalitions and volatility of political life in Slovakia since 1989 cannot be traced to the party system alone. Rather, both the functioning of political parties and the conflictual nature of politics reflect deeper social and attitudinal cleavages as well as the impact of the transition within the electorate, and the lack of consensus on political values and the rules of the game among the members of the political elite.

NOTES

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