

*Matevž MALČIČ****POLITICAL POLARISATION IN SLOVENIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON LIBERAL DEMOCRACY¹**

Abstract. *Concerns have been raised over the possible link between the growing political polarisation and fears of autocratisation in Slovenia. Faced with a lack of empirical data, we seek to answer two questions. First, how has political polarisation developed in Slovenia? We show that Slovenia has experienced massive increases in both ideological and affective polarisation on the levels of the citizenry and political parties. Second, what has been the effect of political polarisation on liberal democracy in Slovenia? A GLS (generalised least squares) model for the period 1992 to 2022 confirms negative effects only for affective, but not ideological polarisation regarding V-Dem's liberal democracy and judicial constraints on the executive indices.*

Keywords: *Slovenia, affective polarisation, ideological polarisation, autocratisation, SJM*

Introduction

The pernicious effects of political polarisation on democracy have been studied for a long time and were seen as responsible for the interwar autocratisation in Europe (Bermeo, 2003). Although it is only one of the contemporary drivers of autocratisation, alongside anti-democratic parties and low popular support for democratic values (Lührmann, 2021), polarisation also plays a central role within the other two forces. Anti-democratic parties succeed by elevating grievances to the *raison d'être* of their political movement (Ditto and Rodriguez, 2021: 23) and appealing to those identifying with a distinctive group that is hostile to internal dissenters and outside out-groups (Hogg and Götzsche-Astrup, 2021: 211–212). Polarisation

* *Matevž Malčič, PhD, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, matmalcic@gmail.com.*

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is also expected to make voters more willing to accept anti-democratic measures (McCoy and Somer, 2021), making affective polarisation also a danger to democratic norms. The study of polarisation is consequently at the core of any study of autocratisation and seen as a crucial element in the autocratisation of Venezuela (García-Guadilla and Mallen, 2019), Turkey (Somer, 2019), Hungary (Vegetti, 2019) and Poland (Tworzercki, 2019). These developments have not only spurred a new wave of research (Somer and McCoy, 2018; McCoy et al., 2018; Somer and McCoy, 2019; McCoy and Somer, 2019), but also seen the spread of the concept of affective or Manichean polarisation. Contrary to ideological polarisation in the form of left-right placement or different positions on public issues, affective polarisation is of a relational (Us vs. Them) nature (McCoy et al., 2018: 18; Somer and McCoy, 2019: 13-14). Affective polarisation is not simply an individual's preference for their (in-)group or preferred party, but an active dislike for the out-group or opposing political party (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar et al., 2019). The result is that voters attribute more weight to partisan or policy interests than to political candidates' or parties' support for liberal democracy (Svolik, 2019; Graham and Svolik, 2020; McCoy et al., 2020; Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2021).

Slovenia is another country that is considered as having experienced both growing polarisation and possible autocratisation. Attention to these developments has been raised by international watchdogs of political and social development (BTI, 2022; SGI, 2020) and of the state of democracy (Freedom House, 2020; Freedom House, 2021; V-Dem, 2022). It was also clearly expressed in a report by the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. While its October 2021 mission observed that "public institutions overall work well [...] it expressed deep concern over the climate of hostility, distrust and deep polarisation in Slovenia, which eroded trust in and between various public bodies" (European Parliament, 2021: 15). A similar observation of a highly polarised political environment was made before the 2022 parliamentary elections by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR, 2022).

Studies of polarisation and autocratisation in Slovenia must additionally take account of the specific context of post-transition countries. Political polarisation is expected to be negatively impacted by low levels of party development and identification (Lewis, 1996; Olson, 1998) and weak cleavages (Elster et al., 1998; Tóka, 1998). As for autocratisation, younger democracies are not only more likely to experience structural and contextual challenges that heighten the strength of contemporary autocratisation drivers (Lührmann, 2021: 1018-1019), but are also unlikely to have completed the marathon entailed by the transformation of the political, economic and

social power of the *Ancien Régime* required for the roots of liberal democracy to flourish (Berman, 2019; Magyar and Madlovics, 2020: 31–34).

Nevertheless, despite the need to keep these challenges in mind, not only has the study of contemporary autocratisation shifted to generalised worldwide explanations (Lührmann, 2021), our focus in this article is neither the reason *for* the origins and changes in political polarisation in Slovenia, nor *how* any possible autocratisation may have taken place. Instead, we seek to better understand the course of political polarisation in Slovenia and its effects on liberal democracy. Although one study looked at the evolution of political polarisation on Slovenian Twitter (Evkovski et al., 2020), we lack an empirical overview of how ideological and affective polarisation have developed in Slovenia. This dearth of data leads us to formulate our first research question: How has political polarisation developed in Slovenia since the country's independence? We use the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey (Slovensko javno mnenje – SJM) for the period 1992 to 2022 to obtain data concerning ideological polarisation on the population level. For polarisation of the party system, we rely on data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) for 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014 and 2019. Although obtaining population-level data for affective polarisation is hindered by the limited waves covering Slovenia in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), we have access to proxy indicators from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al., 2023a; Pemstein et al., 2023). Given how polarisation has been linked to autocratisation, we also ask: What has been the effect of political polarisation on liberal democracy in Slovenia? Looking at V-Dem's liberal democracy index and some of its major components, we answer this question using a generalised least squares (GLS) model with data from 1992 to 2022 for both ideological and affective polarisation.

The article is structured as follows. The second section outlines the theories behind political and especially affective polarisation, along with its effects on liberal democracy. This is followed by an overview of different methods for measuring polarisation and democracy. The fourth section presents the results of a longitudinal analysis of developments in ideological and affective polarisation in Slovenia. The results of the GLS analysis on the effects of political polarisation on liberal democracy are described in the fifth section. At the end, we summarise the findings and provide a conclusion.

Political polarisation

What are ideological and affective polarisation

Both ideological and affective polarisation are best described with respect to their differences from each other. Affective or Manichean polarisation is different from issue-based attempts to measure polarisation, i.e., the ideological distance between political parties, political elites or citizens/voters (McCoy et al., 2018: 20). Affective polarisation is also not indicated by increasing polarisation of party positions as measured by the CHES (Vachudova, 2019: 90–91). Further, affective polarisation is not a left–right ideological self-placement since there are other dimensions in which citizens may be polarised, nor does it capture the multidimensional nature of political polarisation (Lauka et al., 2018: 109–110). Ultimately, Reiljan (2020) finds that while ideological and affective polarisation are related to each other, they are distinct concepts, with a substantial part of the latter not being explained by the former. Nevertheless, the former can create the basis for the latter (Persily, 2015).

Affective polarisation is more than just a preference for one's own group or political party, but requires an active dislike for the Other. Affective polarisation is thus the spread of the characteristics of exclusion, rigidity and confrontation present in the political struggle to other spaces of social coexistence like families, schools, churches and communities (Lozada, 2014: 4). The defining trait of severe polarisation is its suppression of “within-group” differences and the collapse of otherwise multiple and cross-cutting intergroup differences into negatively charged single differences used to define the “Other” (McCoy et al., 2018: 20; Somer and McCoy, 2019: 13–14).

How polarised societies hollow out liberal democracy

Affective polarisation into two groups is not inherently anti-democratic. If political, economic, and social/cultural grievances are genuine, the mobilisation of support via a simple agenda and a distinct candidate or party, all properly channelled through a “democracy-rebuilding program” (McCoy and Somer, 2021: 8; Stavrakakis, 2018), can indeed lead to positive democratic development. Accordingly, the danger to liberal democracy arises from the nature of polarisation and its bigger political context (Berman and Kundnani, 2021: 32), as well as the “*relation* between political actors and the *political* use of polarisation as a strategy” (McCoy and Somer, 2019: 263, emphasis in the original).

The pernicious effects of affective polarisation include the degradation of democratic norms, particularly mutual toleration and institutional

forbearance. The former “refers to the idea that as long as our rivals play by constitutional rules, we accept that they have an equal right to exist, compete for power, and govern” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018: 102). Institutional forbearance is avoiding action that breaks the spirit of the law even if respecting the letter of the law, thereby refraining from preventing the other side from achieving its objectives or going so far as to make it refuse to play by the rules (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018: 106–107). Political actors’ respect of these two norms is critical for democracy’s survival. Without these norms, elections become not a choice of policy, but of competing political regimes (Enyedi, 2016: 217). The end result is that “[l]ike many civil wars, both actual and metaphorical, the ‘Party Wars’ are not likely to end until one side gives up” (Schleicher, 2015: 438).

The negative effects of polarisation on democratic norms also extends to the citizen body. In a survey experiment conducted in Turkey, Venezuela and the United States, Svoboda (2019: 26–28) discovered two patterns. The first is that ordinary people are willing to trade off democratic principles for partisan party or policy interests. The second pattern is that the fulcrum between democracy and autocracy can be centrists, political moderates willing to punish candidates who do not abide by democratic norms, even if they support their interests. However, data from the United States, which has been leading this type of research, shows that such centrists are few and far between because voters are more likely *not* to punish their “own” candidates (Svoboda, 2020). Further, the stronger one’s attachment to a political party, the more a voter is willing to accept their own party’s democracy-eroding policies, that is, as long as their party is in power (McCoy et al., 2020).

Based on these observations, McCoy and Somer (2021: 9–10) propose the following pathway from polarisation to autocratisation. First, a political entrepreneur starts by exploiting popular grievances or formative rifts² by using an “Us versus Them” rhetoric, blaming alleged enemies and fomenting distrust. They do so by drawing on either existing or invented political identities, which also allows them to draw together otherwise diverse constituencies. One consequence is to divide a population into two opposing political camps, with little or no interaction or reasons to cooperate. Finally, political entrepreneurs can use this demonisation of the out-group to discredit and side-line internal and external opponents, as well as disrupt democratic rules, norms and institutions, all without fearing opposition. The result is a gradual, electorally driven, multiple year or electoral-cycles form

² *Formative rifts are “long-standing and deep-cutting divisions that either emerged or could not be resolved during the formation of nation-states, or, sometimes during fundamental re-formations of states such as during transitions from communism to capitalism, or authoritarian to democratic regimes” (Somer and McCoy, 2019: 15).*

of autocratisation called executive aggrandisement. These are policies that do not cause an abrupt regime change, but are still marked by a weakening or dissolution of checks and balances, horizontal accountability, and rule of law (Bermeo, 2016: 10–11; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019: 1104–1107). Although the mechanism itself has not yet been tested (Lührmann, 2021), the negative impact of affective polarisation on liberal democracy indices was shown by Somer et al. (2021) and Orhan (2022a), each using a different indicator of affective polarisation.

Measurements

Measuring polarisation

The established approach to measuring ideological polarisation is based on Dalton's (2008) Party Polarisation Index (PPI), calculated as follows:

$$\text{Party Polarisation Index} = \sqrt{\left\{ \sum (\text{Party vote share}_i) \times \left(\frac{[\text{Party LR score}_i - \text{Party system average LR score}]^2}{5} \right) \right\}}$$

To calculate the PPI for Slovenia, we use CHES data as it provides the best long-term coverage. The PPI ranges from 0 to 10, with the former indicating no polarisation and all parties placed in the same position, and the latter the highest level of polarisation and all parties at the two extremes.

Expanded to population-level ideological polarisation, Lauka et al. (2018: 116–118) adapt Dalton's formula to calculate the Mass Ideological Polarisation Spread (MIPS) and Mass Ideological Polarisation Extremes (MIPE), both based on a respondent's placement on the left–right political scale. MIPS measures variance and “expresses the spread of the distribution of ideological self-placement of respondents” (Lauka et al., 2018: 116). MIPS is calculated using formula (1) below. P is the individual left–right placement, \bar{P} is the average left–right self-placement for a given year, and n is the number of respondents for that year. MIPS ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger ideological polarisation. MIPE uses formula (2), with Ls standing for the share of individuals in a given year positioning themselves using 0, 1 or 2, and Rs for the share of those responding with 8, 9 or 10. The maximum value of MIPE is 0.25.

$$(1) \text{ MIPS} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{P - \bar{P}}{5} \right)^2}{n}}$$

$$(2) \text{ MIPE} = \frac{Ls * Rs}{0.25}$$

Although SJM has been asking the ideological self-placement question

regularly since 1991, between 1991 and 1994, and in 2017, the scale used in those questionnaires was a 10-point one as opposed to an 11-point one as used by the formulas. This leads us to perform the calculation of MIPS only from 1995 to 2021. In order to provide data since 1992 for MIPE, we use responses 1, 2 and 3 for calculating the left extreme. In case multiple surveys were available in a given year, we chose the one with the highest response rate.

Affective polarisation, however, lacks established measurements, necessitating new approaches (Lauka et al., 2018; Hartevelt, 2021). What they all have in common is that they are based on CSES survey data, creating measures covering bi- and multi-party systems, for both partisans and non-partisans (Lauka et al., 2018; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2020). Since data availability for Slovenia is limited at a maximum to four datapoints from 1996 to 2011 (Table 1), we opted for an alternative measurement as a primary source of affective polarisation.

V-Dem offers two variables that we can effectively use to measure affective polarisation in Slovenia. The first is political polarisation (*v2cacamps_osp*)³, determined by whether “supporters of opposing political camps are reluctant to engage in friendly interactions, for example, in family functions, civic associations, their free time activities and workplaces” (Coppedge et al., 2023b: 227). This definition aligns with that of affective polarisation and we will be using and naming it as such. The indicator ranges from 0 to 4, with 0 signifying that supporters of opposing camps interact in a friendly manner, and 4 that they interact in a hostile one. We have data for Slovenia from 1989 to 2022.

The other variable we use is the polarisation of society (*v2smpolsoc_osp*), which looks at whether “differences in opinions result in major clashes of views and polarisation or, alternatively, whether there is general agreement on the general direction this society should develop” (Coppedge et al., 2023b: 333). This indicator was originally on a scale from 4 to 0, with 4 signifying no polarisation and agreement on the direction of society, and 0 that serious polarisation exists on almost all key issues, resulting in major clashes of views. We recoded the data so as to be consistent with the scale for affective polarisation. Time coverage for this variable ranges from 2000 to 2022.

Measuring democracy

To determine whether polarisation has had a negative effect on liberal democracy in Slovenia, V-Dem’s composite liberal democratic index was used along with four of its most crucial components. Liberal democracy (*v2x_libdem*) is determined not only by electoral democracy, but also by the

³ The name in parentheses indicates the precise name of the variable used in the V-Dem dataset.

limits placed on the exercise of executive power by “constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances” (Coppedge et al., 2023b: 44). In addition to this main index, we use the clean elections index (v2xel_frefair), equality before the law and individual liberties (v2xcl_rol), and judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon). These lie at the core not simply of how Europeans define liberal democracy (Hernández, 2016: 57), but are also the first to be targeted by autocratising actors (Boese et al., 2021). All these indices range from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating the lowest – least democratic – and 1 the highest – most democratic – levels.

Trends of political polarisation in Slovenia

In this section, we answer the first question regarding how political polarisation has developed in Slovenia following its independence. Given its importance and expected negative influence, we initially consider affective polarisation. Using CSES data, Orhan (2022b) calculated the levels of affective polarisation at the four available datapoints. Ranging from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating maximum out-party dislike, we see in Table 1 that Slovenia appears close to the mean of 4.34. Even in a comparative perspective, among 53 countries and 170 electoral surveys Slovenia does not stand out as having either high or low levels of affective polarisation in this period (Orhan, 2022a: 722).

Table 1: CSES MEASURE OF AFFECTIVE POLARISATION

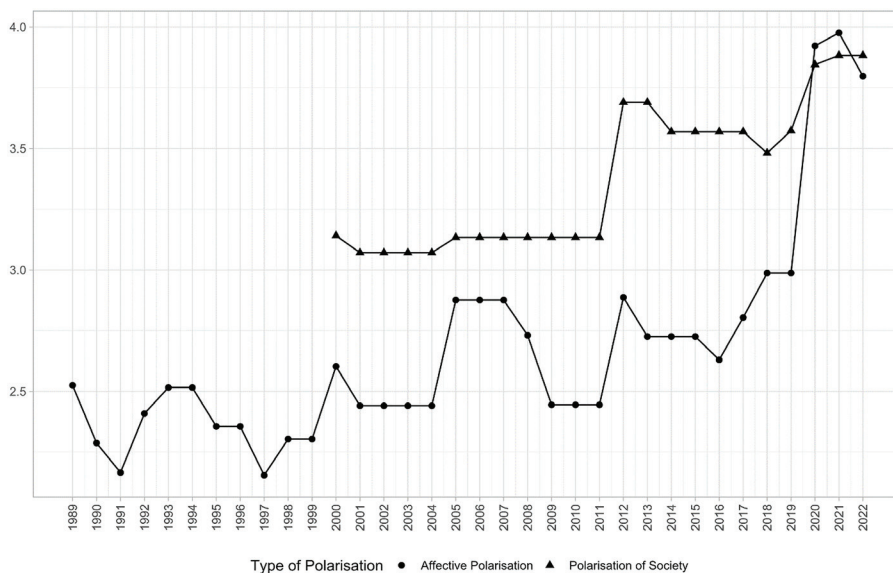
1996	2004	2008	2011
4.704	4.215	5.059	4.684

Source: Orhan (2022b).

Figure 1 shows the two V-Dem measures of polarisation, where it is evident that, except for a spike in affective polarisation between 2005 and 2008, the data reflect the CSES findings in that both affective polarisation and the polarisation of society were at a stable, middle level. Yet, this changes after 2011. Both V-Dem indicators reveal a spike that does not subside like the 2005–2008 one did. As concerns the polarisation of society, it has stayed at a high level since 2012, increasing to almost the maximum value between 2020 and 2022. Even though affective polarisation subsides somewhat bit after 2011, it never returns to the pre-2005 levels. Further, we observe a continuous rise since 2016, reaching almost maximum polarisation in 2020 and 2021, before dropping slightly in 2022. While we cannot confirm the same increase in affective polarisation among the general population, the

similarity between public-opinion and expert data up until 2011 make us more confident when stating that Slovenia has always exhibited heightened levels of affective polarisation, while adding to the validity of the V-Dem data.

Figure 1: V-DEM'S AFFECTIVE POLARISATION AND POLARISATION OF SOCIETY

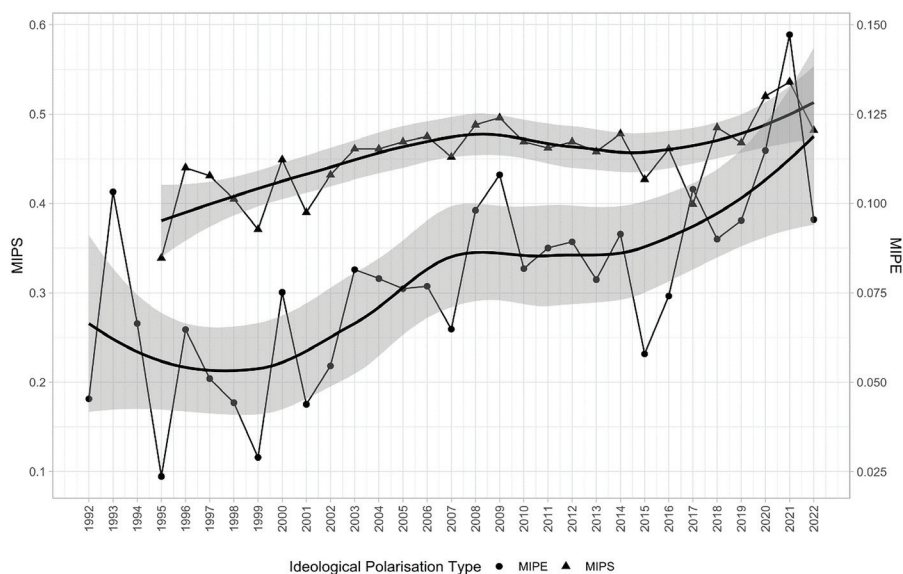


Source: Coppedge et al. (2023a); Pemstein (2023).

Another source confirming the steady growth of polarisation comes from our calculations of ideological polarisation. Figure 2 below shows the development of MIPE and MIPS between 1992 and 1995 to 2022, respectively, with MIPS represented on the left-hand Y-axis, and MIPE on the right.⁴ The MIPS data make it clear that already several years after its independence, Slovenians exhibited a middle level of ideological polarisation, in line with CSES data on affective polarisation. What is more striking is the trend, rising steadily from 1995 to around 2009 before dropping to early 2000s levels in the intervening period to around 2017, when we see the yearly values again rising. The 2020 and 2021 datapoints also surpass the previous high in 2009, reaching a value above 0.5, although in 2022 MIPS drops back to 2018/2019 levels.

⁴ The thinner, point-to-point line, represents the raw data from each year, while the thicker, more fluid line in the middle represents locally estimated scatterplot smoothing (LOESS) used in order to mitigate year-to-year variation.

Figure 2: MASS IDEOLOGICAL POLARISATION SPREAD AND EXTREMES



Sources: Calculations based on Toš and the World Values Study Group (2000); Toš (2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d; 2000e; 2000f; 2000g; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2004); Toš and Malnar (2009); Malnar and Hafner-Fink (2009); Malešič (2010); Kurdija et al. (2010); Malešič et al. (2010); Kurdija et al. (2012); Hafner-Fink et al. (2013); Kurdija et al. (2013); Hafner-Fink et al. (2014); Kurdija and Malnar (2016); Hafner-Fink and Malešič (2016); Kurdija and Malnar (2018); Uhan et al. (2021); Kurdija and Malnar (2021); Hafner-Fink et al. (2021a; 2021b), Hafner-Fink et al. (2022).

This self-sorting towards ideological extremes is further confirmed by the MIPE data. While the earlier start date exhibits strong upward and downward fluctuations in the years prior to 1995, after 1995, when we have data for both MIPS and MIPE, we see that the latter's yearly ups and downs closely following those of the former. An important implication emerges by paying attention to the raw MIPE values. Looking at its lowest and highest points, we see the number of Slovenians positioning themselves on the left-right 0–10 extremes has increased almost six-fold in the last three decades. Even considering the value of around 0.05 in 1992 and the massive drop from 2021 to 2022 to around 2018/2019 values of 0.1, we may still speak of at least a doubling. Both the MIPE and MIPS data also confirm a previous detected trend of growing ideological polarisation among Slovenians (Jou, 2011: 36–37).

Table 2: PARTY POLARISATION INDEX

2002	2006	2010	2014	2019
2.581	3.758	3.319	4.404	5.203

Source: Calculations based on Jolly et al. (2022).

The greater ideological polarisation is also reflected in Slovenian political parties (Table 2). A look at the 2002–2019 period shows that the Slovenian party system became twice as polarised. This may have been the result of either political parties being perceived by CHES country experts as moving away from the centre, or a bigger electoral share going to political parties closer to the ideological poles, or both. We are also unable to say whether political parties follow the voters or the voters follow the political parties, although to the extent we can compare population- and party-level ideological polarisation, we see similar developments. Namely, an increase until around 2009, a drop or stabilisation until around 2013, then a rise from then onwards to the high point of polarisation we see today.

While Slovenia used to have one of the least ideologically polarised party systems in Central Europe (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, 2011: 134–135), which we confirmed with the CHES data,⁵ today, together with Hungary, it appears as one of the most polarised ones. The CHES data thus also confirm previous research showing the growing bipolarity of Slovenia's party system (Fink-Hafner 2006; 2020), with the negative effects of its increasing instability (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec, 2019) and inefficient governance (Johannsen and Krašovec, 2017). However, the party system's increased ideological polarisation is also expected to have a positive effect as voters can more clearly vote for those parties best aligned with their own ideological position (Dalton, 2008). The stronger party system polarisation therefore allows for continued increasing ideological voting among Slovenians (Jou, 2011: 39–41).

The effects of political polarisation on liberal democracy in Slovenia

The above section described how Slovenia and Slovenians not only exhibit higher levels of political polarisation, but also that it has been increasing, especially in the last decade. We are still left with the question of whether this increasing polarisation has had a negative effect on liberal democracy and its subcomponents. To answer this question and given the second-order autocorrelation of our data, we construct generalised least

⁵ Comparative data are available on demand from the author.

squares models (GLS) using the restricted maximum likelihood.⁶ Our model employs the composite V-Dem liberal democracy index and the free and fair elections, equality before the law, and judicial constraints on the executive indices for the dependent variables. The independent variables are V-Dem's affective polarisation index and the MIPE index.⁷ Our time period covers from 1992 to 2022. Despite such an early start, we avoid covering the transition period, which could skew our results given that we are interested in whether the rise in polarisation has had a negative effect on liberal democracy *after* it was established in Slovenia.

The results are shown in Table 3 below. We find a statistically significant negative association between affective polarisation and the composite liberal democracy index, as well as between equality before the law and individual liberties, and the judicial constraints on the executive index. There was no effect on the free and fair elections index. Any substantive interpretation of the results is, however, made more difficult by the fact there is no agreement on how to interpret a change in V-Dem indices in terms of regime change, democratisation or autocratisation (Lührman et al., 2017: 6–8). In the case of Slovenia, the detected effect is quite strong, with a single-point jump in the affective polarisation index causing a 10% change in the value of the liberal democracy index. This drop can also be observed in values of the V-Dem liberal democracy index since the rise of affective polarisation from 3 to 4 between 2019 and 2020/2021 coincides with the drop of the index from 0.74 to 0.6.⁸ Conversely, the drop in polarisation from 2021 to 2022 also coincides with the return of the index to 0.7. The same jump in affective polarisation can also be claimed to be responsible for the 0.015 drop in equality before the law index which, while not as substantial, indicates the wider negative effects brought by growing affective polarisation. We also identify a strong negative effect on the judicial constraints on the executive index, noting that a 1-point increase in affective polarisation results in the index dropping by 0.071, or 7% of the index's entire value. Our results are thus in line with comparative global studies on the effect of affective polarisation (Sommer et al., 2021; Orhan, 2022a) as well as studies of its effect on liberal democracy in Slovenia (Fink-Hafner and Novak, 2021; Fink-Hafner, 2022).

⁶ We confirmed the second-order autocorrelation by examining the residuals of the same model using ordinary least squares as well as the Durbin-Watson test. We also ran additional diagnostics by running the model at different autocorrelation levels and then comparing them using ANOVA.

⁷ We chose the MIPE index to better reflect affective polarisation's division of society into two antagonistic camps. However, since both MIPE and MIPS are highly correlated (Pearson's r of 0.76), we do not expect the results to differ. As a robustness test, we ran the same model with MIPS data and there were no changes in statistical significance.

⁸ It should be noted that 2015 (index value of 0.81) represents the start of the long-term trend of first gradual then faster drops in the evaluation of liberal democracy in Slovenia.

Table 3: GLS ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL POLARISATION ON LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS CORE COMPONENTS

	Liberal Democracy	Free and Fair Elections	Equality before the Law	Judicial Constraints
Affective Polarisation	-0.101*** (0.014)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.071*** (0.012)
Mass Ideological Polarisation Extremes	-0.099 (0.102)	0.016 (0.026)	0.028 (0.026)	-0.073 (0.069)
Constant	1.075*** (0.066)	0.937*** (0.013)	0.989*** (0.010)	1.104*** (0.046)
Observations	31	31	31	31
Log Likelihood	69.692	109.143	98.052	79.151
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-127.384	-206.286	-184.104	-146.302
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-119.391	-198.293	-176.111	-138.309

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.0

Source: Author's work.

Our results also confirm Orhan's (2022a) work that ideological polarisation does not have a statistically significant negative effect on liberal democracy indices. In addition, the coefficients for MIPE are both negative and positive. Despite these findings, we caution against dismissing the rise of ideological polarisation as a possible threat to liberal democracy. In Slovenia, affective and ideological polarisation have shared their ebbs and flows, with ideological polarisation showing a steady and continual increase. Moreover, the increasing positioning of Slovenians at the ideological extremes, whilst not statistically significant, points to long-term changes in the structure of Slovenian political life that can, in the longer run, cause an increase in affective polarisation or the behaviour associated with it.

Having both an observational and statistical link between affective polarisation and changes to the liberal democracy index means we must briefly open the discussion to consider the mechanisms by which affective polarisation negatively impacts a liberal democracy. In the theoretical overview, we presented the argument that growing affective polarisation makes citizens more tolerant or turn a blind eye to policies resulting in autocratisation since it is their own party that is adopting such policies or because it will hurt the "Other". What this fails to consider is that such policies are adopted by political actors, more precisely, party leaders, who are not only fed by it, but also feed it in turn, enabling them to obtain the mobilisation necessary for an absolute or even constitutional majority like in Hungary and Poland, thus allowing them to adopt policies that dismantle the safeguards of liberal democracy. Such parties are known by many names - anti-political-establishment (Camaño and Casal Bértoa, 2020), populist (Ruth-Lovell et al., 2019), anti-pluralist (Lührmann et al., 2021) - but their negative effects have all been

proven. While expounding on the mechanism lies beyond the scope of this article, further in-depth case studies are required to better understand the role polarisation plays in the autocratisation mechanism. This also applies to the case of Slovenia because our results tell us little about how increasing affective polarisation led to a drop in democratic indices. The competence or lack thereof of a certain party or government (Frederiksen, 2022a), the ability of the aforementioned types of political parties to turn systemic failure into the perception of a crisis (Moffit, 2014), and even the increasing age of a democracy (Frederiksen, 2022b) can ensure that autocratising political parties go unopposed, remain in power, and continue their policies.

Conclusion

Our goal was to answer two crucial questions about political polarisation in Slovenia; first, how has political polarisation developed in Slovenia since the country became independent, and second, to ascertain what has been the effect of political polarisation on liberal democracy in Slovenia.

In answer to first question, we observe an increase in both ideological and affective polarisation over the past 30 years. However, our longitudinal overview provided us with a very interesting discovery about the polarisation trend, as something occurred between the 2008 and the 2011/2014 parliamentary elections in Slovenia. The former mark the stabilisation or even reduction of polarisation, while the latter two mark an inflection point, which restarted the trend of rising affective and ideological polarisation. This period hence deserves an in-depth case study. Ideological polarisation, especially the distribution of self-placement at the ideological extremes, has doubled since 1992, with the highs and low exhibiting a six-fold increase. The ideological polarisation of political parties also doubled between 2002 and 2019. As concerns affective polarisation, it rose from middle levels at the outset to the highest possible levels measured by V-Dem in 2020/2021, with only a minor drop in 2022. This indicates a country divided into two opposing, rival political camps that interact in a hostile manner with major clashes of views regarding all key political issues. The middle levels of affective polarisation are also confirmed by CSES post-electoral surveys up to the first pause in growing polarisation in 2011. As such, conducting the current wave of the CSES survey (or its equivalent questions on attitudes to political parties) will be essential for ascertaining whether the rise of affective polarisation in the last decade is also reflected in the general population.

In answer to our second question, our GLS models not only reveal a statistically significant negative effect of affective polarisation on the composite liberal democracy index, but more specifically on equality before the law and individual liberties, and judicial constraints on the executive index. We

do not find such a relationship for the free and fair elections index. This leads us to generally confirm the negative effect ascertained by comparative research on the global level also exists on the national one (Somer et al., 2021; Orhan, 2022a). The fact that in 2022 a drop is observed in levels of affective polarisation concomitant to a rise in the liberal democracy index allows us, at least for one point of the observation, to say that the reverse holds true in the case of Slovenia. Whether this trend will continue has still to be seen. As concerns ideological polarisation, no statistically significant relationship was found, which is also in line with comparable research. There is also a need to further address the mechanism by which affective polarisation leads to autocratisation given that it feeds and is fed by political entrepreneurs and political party leaders. A case study of how this mechanism unfolded in Slovenia would greatly contribute to polarisation research. Finally, with V-Dem offering additional indices and (sub)components, further research would also allow us to more precisely pinpoint the aspects of liberal democracy that find themselves under attack in the conditions of growing polarisation.

Our study also adds to wider research on autocratisation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in particular Hungary and Poland. While work on affective polarisation in the latter two countries benefits from specialised opinion survey data that was able to more clearly determine the proportion and distribution of individuals holding Manichean beliefs within their party systems (Krekó et al., 2018), it also lacks a statistical analysis confirming the effects of the growing affective polarisation. Although Slovenia cannot be directly compared to either country due to differences in the transformation of political institutions, economic liberalisation, nation- and state-building during the transition period (Johannsen and Pederson, 2009), our results give further evidence that affective polarisation is responsible for a negative effect in the CEE region, which calls for similar GLS studies of Hungary and Poland.

To conclude, we contend that providing a better understanding of how affective polarisation has developed and its effects, is the first step to ensuring that academia, politicians and the broader public have a strong framework upon which to inform their comprehension of developments in Slovenia and thereby make sure that polarisation's pernicious consequences are averted in the future.

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