(Im)Perfect Descriptive Representation: Slovenia in the Spotlight

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Abstract: *The failure to ensure descriptive representation is one of the challenges facing democracy. In the literature, it is suggested that, among others, imperfect descriptive representation is connected to insufficient legitimacy as well as low trust in political institutions. This paper analyses the link between descriptive representation and both people's satisfaction with the way democracy is working in practice and trust in political institutions in Slovenia which, despite 30 years of democratic rule, are characterised by persistent low trust and satisfaction levels.*

Considering longitudinal public opinion data and a database on the composition of the Slovenian parliament (eight terms) in terms of gender, age groups and education, we find that also in Slovenia especially women, the young, the elderly and those with a basic education are underrepresented, with this being reflected in trust in the parliament and people's perception of the way in which democracy is working. Still, the fact such underrepresentation has continued for some time (regardless of certain changes) means these findings are only part of the explanation.

Key words: ***representation, parliament, trust, democracy, Slovenia***

Introduction: Mirror thyself

Modern representative democracies must deal with a range of challenges and criticisms (Crouch 2004; Keane 2009; Krause – Merkel 2018), like the decline in participation and trust (Foa – Mounk 2016; Krause – Merkel 2018), low and falling levels of satisfaction with the democracy and the realisation of democracy in practice (Brusis 2016). Around the world, democracies have gone into reverse (Plattner 2015; Bermeo 2016; Lührmann – Lindberg 2019; Diamond

2021). International research indices such as Freedom House, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, and Varieties of Democracy all support this trend. In Central and Eastern Europe, new illiberal forms of representative democracies are emerging – if they can even be described as democracies at all (Greskovits 2015; Ágh 2016; Krastev 2016; Lorenz – Anders eds. 2021).

Departing from the line of research of Newton – Norris (1999), Mishler – Rose (2001) and Eder et al. (2017), several factors are proposed to explain the declines seen in turnout, public trust in political institutions, representative democracy and satisfaction with how democracy is working. Two approaches currently dominate discussion of them. The first approach questions the political system's performance. Economic crisis, inequality (Krieckhaus et al. 2013; Cordero – Simón 2016; Quaranta – Martini 2017) and pervasive corruption (Anderson – Tverdova 2003) have nourished the above trends. However, dissatisfaction with corruption and the economy's performance cannot fully account for the drop observed in participation (Karp – Milazzo 2015). Here, Merkel (2014) even argues that the biggest problem democratic theory faces is not the broader pattern of lower turnout in itself, but the social selectivity of the electoral processes and their outcomes. The second approach looks at the properties and consequences of elections.

It is the latter in which we are considering in this article. While you can vote for a party that wins, does your representative truly represent you? With representation being the dominant form of modern democracies (Keane 2009), the question is whether these challenges and criticism relate to representation itself: are representative democracies representative?

On the individual level, representation describes the relationship between citizens and an elected representative or, on the organisational level, a representative body or institution (Deschouwer et al. 2014). The key principle underlying representation has survived over the centuries: those representing the people should reflect the people's will and do so in the representative institution (Pitkin 1967). Yet, representatives do not always reflect the electorate's composition with respect to sharing characteristics with the electorate, as is expected with descriptive representation. Several scholars (e.g. Philips 1995; Norris – Franklin 1997; Celis – Erzeel 2013) contend the failure to assure descriptive representation is concerned with issues of legitimacy and, as Philips (1995) argues, responsiveness and leadership style (Lawless 2015).

Most will immediately recognise this discussion from decades of research into gendered differences in representation (Lawless 2015), the debate on the underrepresentation of African-Americans' participation in US politics (Spence – McClerking 2010; Casellas – Wallace 2015) and the elected elite's higher education and reproduction of itself (Ilonszki – Edinger 2007; Kountouri 2018). In continuation of Phillips' (1995) argument above and Mansbridge's (1999) observation that descriptive representation develops a bond between representa-

tives and the represented, the general thrust of this debate is that descriptive representation matters for identity, inclusion, trust and political outcomes. Correspondingly, many have suggested and assessed quotas and other affirmative actions as part of reforming recruitment processes and institutions to bring about greater representation in politics and the labour market (Lovenduski – Norris eds. 1993; Krook 2006a; Paxton – Hughes 2015).

The fact that Slovenia is an example of a country featuring low trust in parliament and low satisfaction with the way its democracy is working (see Figure 1) raises the question of whether social selectivity in representation contributes to this outcome. In particular, it is because Slovenians are inclined towards egalitarianism and small social and economic differences (Vehovar 1991; Malnar 2012) and, in contrast with other countries which became democratic during the 1990s, that economic and social inequality remain low, especially when measured by the Gini coefficient.

Therefore, a longitudinal study of the hitherto overlooked case of Slovenia that compares actual descriptive representation in the parliament with public trust and satisfaction adds to the discussion on the state and development of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

The theoretical section below departs from the different forms of representation and turns to descriptive representation to argue for its relationship with trust and satisfaction. We then discuss the longitudinal case study's appropriateness. The analysis contrasts the development of descriptive representation and trust and satisfaction, pointing to the permanence of unequal representation and trust in institutions and satisfaction with the way the democracy is working. The analysis also considers the issues of 'spikes', namely, the impact of sudden changes on descriptive representation. In the conclusion, we stress how descriptive representation matters for trust in the institutions and satisfaction with the democracy and provides avenues for future research.

Theory: In the mirror we trust

In 1967, Pitkin contended, 'that representation is today a significant and widely used concept need hardly be argued' and 'in modern times almost everyone wants to be governed by representatives' (1967: 2). Associated with democracy, liberty and justice, scholars have used 'representation' and 'democracy' interchangeably even though the concept and practice of representation does not always lead to democracy and not all forms of representation are democratic (Pitkin 1967; Deschouwer et al. 2014). This is easily understood if we think of the 'people's representatives' in the former communist regimes or, today, where representatives are elected to rubberstamp the decisions of parliaments in autocracies.

To understand how representation as a concept is linked to democracy, we need to discuss its various forms and connect them to trust and dissatisfaction.

Forms of representation

Conceptually, there are several forms of representation. In a review of the literature, Celis et al. (2008: 100) show that most modern theoretical and empirical studies of representation begin with Pitkin's seminal work *The Concept of Representation* (1967) where she identifies four types of representation: formalistic, substantive, symbolic and descriptive, with especially the last three forms being closely linked.

First, formalistic representation focuses on the institutional arrangements that precede and initiate representation. The key question is the institutional position held by a representative. With respect to formalistic representation, two diametrically opposed views can be found, one dealing with authorisation, the other with accountability. In a nutshell, formalistic representation concerns the procedures from which power is acquired. Second, substantive representation is about the activity of a representative (*acting for*). The question here is whether a representative is acting for someone or according to the (policy) preferences of the individuals represented (Pitkin 1967); that is, if the purpose of representation and power is applied to meeting the goals of the representative's constituency. Third, symbolic representation refers to the symbolic meaning a representative holds for those being represented. The main focus are beliefs and the ways a representative *stand for* the represented. In Pitkin's (1967) typology, descriptive representation also relates to her idea of *standing for* the represented. Yet, here, Pitkin argues (1967: 61), that in political terms descriptive representation is less about what the representative body does and more how it is composed. True representation therefore requires that this body's composition accurately corresponds to the profile of the whole nation, or that it mirrors the nation. Representation depends on a given representative's characteristics, he *is* or is *like*, on being something rather than doing something (Pitkin 1967: 61). On the national level, this likeness is described in terms of similarities between the representatives and the represented concerning socio-economic characteristics or, for example, ethnicity in the population or different social subgroups. With representation being along the lines of '*being something*' rather than '*doing something*', an important question is whether equality and fairness are ensured by inclusion in the representative body (Kissau et al. 2012).

Descriptive representation 'measures' the under(over)representation of social subgroups and, demonstrated below, who these subgroups are has changed over time. The core claim made about descriptive representation is, however, more important for democratic theory. Of the four forms of representation, descriptive representation is the only one to depart from the proposition that social subgroups' representation is unequal and that this inequality matters. Just how the social selectivity of electoral processes and their outcomes matters is discussed in the following.

Imperfect descriptive representation

Early studies of descriptive representation focused on social class (e.g. Norris – Lovenduski 1995; Cowley 2013), only to shift toward gender (e.g. Lovenduski – Norris eds. 1993; Norris ed. 1997; Krook 2006a; Celis – Erzeel 2013) and, particularly in the American context, ethnic and racial minorities (e.g. Mansbridge 1999). Only more recently has age drawn attention (e.g. Kissau et al. 2012; Joshi 2013).

The proposition here is that descriptive representation 'enables' symbolic representation, with both, in turn, being linked to substantive representation. Decades of research in the field show that in certain circumstances ethnicity, gender and social-economic subgroups encompass differences from others regarding what they stand for and the policies they promote (Ilonszki – Edinger 2007; Haider-Markel 2007; Casellas – Wallace 2015; Lawless 2015).

The feminist scholar Phillips' idea (1995) of the 'politics of presence' is that descriptive representation is important for substantive representation. Since then, other scholars have argued (e.g. Philips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Celis – Erzeel 2013) that trust in representative institutions, but also satisfaction with democracy, is connected at least in part with the characteristics of representation, notably the lack or imperfectness of descriptive representation. Mansbridge (1999: 641–650) finds that descriptive representation increases *de facto* legitimacy and stresses that develops bonds of trust between representatives and the represented. Cowley (2014: 573) states that when people see someone 'like them' involved in politics this then leads to higher levels of trust, faith in the political system or engagement and satisfaction with it.

With respect to representation, scholars show that descriptive representation may be used as both a dependent and an independent variable. Although Esaiasson – Holmberg (1996: 6, 19) establish an intrinsic value in mirroring studies, they maintain that representation should serve as an independent variable for further analysis, for example, of the behaviour of elected representatives.

Inequality in descriptive representation starts a chain reaction. What you are is what you stand for, and what you stand for becomes whom you act for. Still, the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation appears so evident that it is often an implicit or explicit assumption that adequate substantive representation requires more proportional descriptive representation (Saalfeld – Bischof 2013: 306). However, a unilinear relationship cannot necessarily be expected (Campbell et al. 2010; Saalfeld – Bischof 2013). In Dahlerup's (1988) discussion, a link between descriptive and substantive representation will only appear once a 'critical mass' has been reached. Dahlerup (1988) states that only when women constitute a 'large minority', usually set at 30% (Childs – Krook 2006), they have a substantial impact on setting the agenda and policymaking.

While Childs – Krook (2006) argue that the relationship between the size of representation and change is not straightforward since small groups of female representatives might work more effectively, we contend that only when the number of female representatives is above a certain threshold you can mirror thyself as it is also more likely that a larger group will represent the diversity of political preferences among women.

Sustained trust on a higher level is, however, questionable. Trust may indeed rise but, if the group in question does not find that its new representatives are responsive and responsible in the delivery of substantive representation, trust and satisfaction may drop to new lows. We propose that this is a 'spike' and more likely given earlier broad changes, i.e. in parties, institutions and descriptive representation, which have led to high, but unresolved, hopes.

Trust in political institutions and satisfaction with the workings of democracy

As noted in the introduction, there are generally two clusters of thought with respect to the decline in public trust in political institutions and the level of satisfaction with how democracy is working. Here we examine whether the likely persistent failure to ensure descriptive representation can account for the differences seen in trust in the parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Although Rosanvallon (2008) finds distrust in institutions to be a permanent feature, the thrust of the literature contends that in such circumstances modern democracies become vulnerable, calling for initiatives to reverse the decline in trust (Mishler – Rose 1997; Kaase 1999; Levi – Stoker 2000; Zmerli et al. 2007). Still, thus far there is no evidence of an increase in trust, as different public opinion surveys (e.g. European Social Survey, Eurobarometer, different national longitudinal polls) all reveal big, even growing negative public sentiment toward the main political representative institutions over the last decade(s).

It is apparent that some scholars believe that the public's trust in the political institutions of representative democracy along with its satisfaction with how the democracy is functioning relate to the characteristics of descriptive representation. Yet, as identified for instance by Nye et al. eds. (1997), Newton – Norris (1999), Mishler – Rose (2001), Eder et al. eds. (2017), there are several other factors affecting trust in political institutions and the level of satisfaction with the functioning of a given democracy. A new vocabulary has emerged about different explanatory clusters, for example: social-psychological, cultural, institutional performance, economic and institutional.

Increasing use of surveys and repeated batteries of questions have led scholars to suggest different forms of trust. These span from generalised interpersonal trust across various institutions to satisfaction with the democracy's function-

ing (e.g. Kaase et al. 1999; Sztompka 1999). However, Linde – Ekman (2003) warn that at least data on satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy is a reflection of how the system is working in practice and not an indicator of support for (the principles of) democracy. In line with this observation, the way forward is primarily to search for ways to make a certain democracy more representative (Alonso et al. eds. 2011).

Researchers in Slovenia have also considered social-psychological, cultural, institutional performance, economic and institutional clusters of factors to empirically explain the level and trends of public trust in political institutions, especially in the parliament, i.e. *Državni zbor*, and citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (e.g. Kaase et al. 1999; Fink-Hafner et al. 2002; Deželan et al. 2007). Some studies detect longitudinal changes in the parliamentary elite (Fink Hafner et al. 2017: 61), but there is a lack of empirical study connecting the level and trends of citizens' trust and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy with the descriptive representation's imperfectness in terms of gender, age and education.

Research strategy and methodology: Linking the longitudinal development of differences

Research into descriptive representation has for instance applied survey data, linking variations in descriptive groups with partisan attitudes to legislators and representation (Casellas – Wallace 2015), multivariate analysis linking groups with policy outcomes (Haider-Markel 2007), datasets tracking size in group variation across the political system (Spence – McClerking 2010) and experiments on distributive decisions (Mendelberg et al. 2014).

Use of these methods (with variations across and within countries) has propelled the debate forward. In this article, we suggest that a longitudinal study of Slovenia tracking developments over time adds to the debate. With a number of contextual factors being constant, a longitudinal study offers insight into a case where the public has experienced several economic and political crises. Moreover, a longitudinal study also considers the generation effects. The effects of Inglehart's lifelong contributions to the study of changing cultural values provide the micro-foundations for modernisation and post-modernisation theory, i.e. the silent revolution, and the persistence of differences in values between generations (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart – Welzel 2010; Norris – Inglehart 2019).

Against this backdrop, we monitor and systematically track variations in descriptive representation in Slovenia with trust in parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy by calculating whether the mean differences are statistically significant. Following the literature, we consider three independent variables gender, age and education.

The data consist of: a) surveys conducted as part of the Slovenian Public Opinion (https://www.cjm.si/gradiva/) and the European Social Survey (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/) – the first available survey after each election,[1] b) national census data from Eurostat, and c) the Centre for Political Science Research's database on Slovenian parliamentary elections (Kustec Lipicer et al. 2019).

We open the analysis by briefly examining the correlation between trust and satisfaction with the democracy in the country. While the two correlate across time, an important variation exists. This strengthens the argument that both are useful for gauging variation in democracy and testing the effect of descriptive variation. The use of both may not only yield important insights about the effect but also amount to a stronger test of the theory.

Analysis: Entrenched differences?

I can't get no satisfaction: The trajectory of trust and satisfaction in Slovenia

Despite Slovenia being a country with continuous low levels of both trust in the parliament and satisfaction with the way the democracy is working (Figure 1), according to the longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Survey the majority of Slovenians believe that democracy is the best form of government (also see Johannsen – Krašovec 2017).

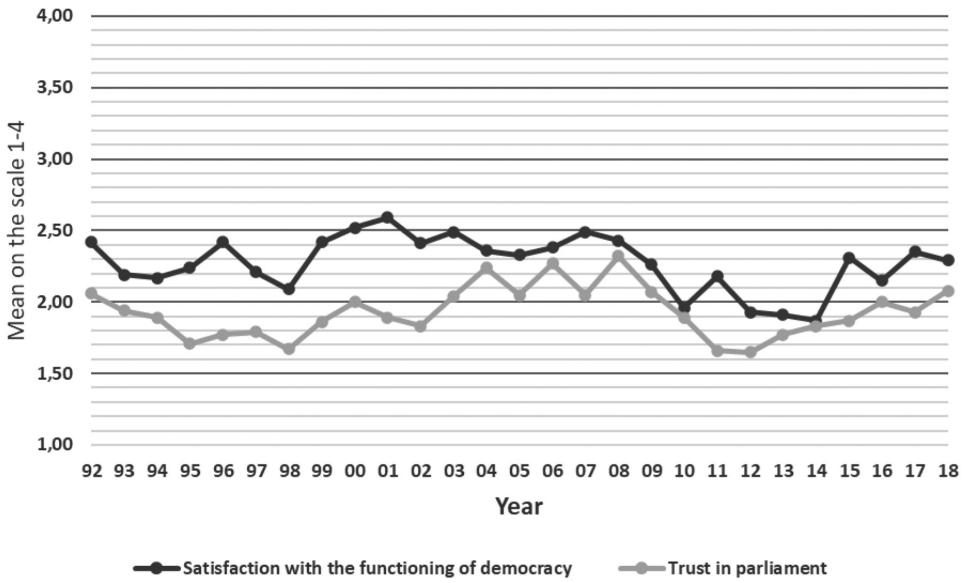
As the longitudinal data in Figure 1 show, the level of satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy has throughout the years been higher than trust in the parliament. The figure also reveals that the values for these two indicators do not necessarily move in the same direction. Although there are long-lasting low levels of trust and satisfaction, one can still identify certain low and high spikes. The question is whether changes in descriptive representation can account not only for the trend but also for the spikes.

Gender: Change and continuity – a critical mass?

Despite insufficient studies on the relationship between descriptive representation in terms of gender, age and education on one hand and trust in the parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy on the other, it is worth mentioning that several research studies in Slovenia have considered female descriptive representation, concentrating on institutional, party, economic and cultural factors which (can) influence it (e.g. Antić Gaber 1998; Fink-Hafner – Krašovec 2000; Krašovec – Fink-Hafner 2004; Antić Gaber ed. 2011).

1 The data concerning both satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and trust in parliament are sometimes reported by the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey on different scales (1–4 vs. 0 – 10). To ensure the comparability of data from different years, we present all results on the 1 – 4 scale using a linear transformation where necessary (e.g. Colman et al. 1997). In addition, for some years the survey omits the question about satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy. We substituted these data with the values regarding a similar question included, namely, satisfaction with the state of democracy.

Figure 1: Trust in the parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy, scale 1–4, means, (1992–2018)



Sources: Slovenian Public Opinion and European Social Survey (1992–2018); authors' own calculations.

Female representation (Table 1) was quite stable between 1992 and 2008, but jumped at the 2011 election only to drop once again in 2018. This spike is probably due to two factors. First, the introduction of a gender quota for candidate lists in 2006. For the 2008 parliamentary elections, this quota was set at 25%, and at 35% for later elections. Paxton – Hughes (2015) find that quotas work and lead to greater equalness over time, yet it seems this conclusion is only partly supported by the Slovenian data. The effect of gender quotas is limited in that parties can list their female candidates in sub-constituencies where the chance of being elected a priori are low while fielding male candidates in the more secure sub-constituencies (Fink-Hafner – Krašovec 2000; Gaber Antić ed. 2011). However, the electoral success of the newly formed parties in 2011 and 2014 also contributed to the change, i.e. the spike, in female representation since both electorally very successful parties (List of Zoran Janković – Positive Slovenia in 2011 and Party of Miro Cerar in 2014) were established only a few months before the elections and had to find their candidates quickly and meet the gender quota, but as Fink-Hafner et al. (2017: 71) show, these new parties were not in a position to determine (based on previous elections) in advance in which sub-constituencies they had better chances of winning seats. Taking these developments into account, the result was that approximately one-third

of the representatives in 2011 and 2014 were women. These spikes, however, did not last long. It appears that not even one-third constitutes, to use Dahlerup's (1988) term, a 'critical mass', i.e. a sufficiently 'large minority' to sustain a path towards.

Table 1: Population and MPs by gender (1992–2018) in %

	Population		Elected MPs		Over/underrepresentation	
Year	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
1992	48.53	51.47	86.67	13.33	1.78	0.26
1996	48.64	51.36	92.39	7.61	1.90	0.15
2000	48.84	51.16	86.81	13.19	1.78	0.26
2004	48.93	51.07	87.91	12.09	1.80	0.24
2008	49.07	50.93	86.81	13.19	1.77	0.26
2011	49.49	50.51	68.13	31.87	1.38	0.63
2014	49.53	50.47	64.44	35.56	1.30	0.70
2018	49.69	50.31	75.56	24.44	1.52	0.49

Note: Over- and underrepresentation calculated as the share (in %) of Elected members of Parliament divided by the share of the population (in %). For example, the overrepresentation of men in 1992 is 86.67/48.53=1.78.

Sources: Eurostat (http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjan&lang=en) Population on 1 January (year); Kustec Lipicer et al. (2019).

Although not statistically significant for all years Table 2 reveals that women continuously show less trust in the parliament than men. Yet, despite the jump in representation after 2011 and 2014, the difference does not narrow. Quite the opposite: women exhibit the highest levels of trust in the very years when they were most underrepresented (in 2004 and 2008). A similar pattern is observed with respect to satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy.

These data suggest that the descriptive representation of women is not (importantly) related to trust in the parliament and satisfaction with how the democracy is working. It is hence possible that some other factors are involved. The first is that it is usually impossible to see the immediate consequence of institutional changes for society's behaviour, but obviously only after some time lag. Second, despite many data showing an egalitarian culture with considerable collective awareness (Jogan 2013) and the gender equality index ranking Slovenia quite high, it is clear that tendency of redomestication after the socialist period has strengthened again (Jogan 2013: 6).

Third, the question is the causal relations between awareness, quotas, mobilisation, descriptive representation and norm change. While quotas might increase

descriptive representation, Vijeyarasa (2020) argues it is necessary for political parties to value and invest in female representation and, moreover, civil society organisations, not simply women's rights organisations, must support the values of equal representation. Chauchard (2014) states that descriptive representation influences norms. Norris – Inglehart (2001) conclude that while egalitarian values in post-industrial societies affect female representation, that it is not a sufficient explanation. Krook (2006b; 2007) adds that changes are partly the result of transnational diffusion. This corresponds with Storer – Rodriguez's (2020) finding that SoMe hashtag# debates increase mobilisation and Halady – Rao's (2010) finding, in relation to the climate debate, that awareness does change behaviour. However, the literature is not conclusive with respect to causal chains.

Table 2: Satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy and trust in the parliament by gender (means comparison, scale 1–4) (1992–2018)

Year	Gender	Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy		Trust in parliament	
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation
1993	Male	2.23	0.68	1.94	0.70
	Female	2.16	0.70	1.95	0.68
1997	Male	2.24	0.84	1.84*	0.73
	Female	2.18	0.79	1.74*	0.70
2000	Male	2.53	0.72	2.04	0.80
	Female	2.51	0.73	1.97	0.75
2004	Male	2.37	0.66	2.30*	0.73
	Female	2.35	0.65	2.18*	0.69
2008	Male	2.47*	0.68	2.38*	0.72
	Female	2.39*	0.64	2.27*	0.69
2012	Male	1.96	0.68	1.70*	0.70
	Female	1.91	0.64	1.61*	0.64
2014	Male	1.91	0.71	1.87	0.76
	Female	1.83	0.62	1.79	0.67
2018	Male	2.32	0.74	2.11	0.71
	Female	2.26	0.71	2.04	0.73

*Note: * $p < .05$. The independent samples t-test was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the mean for men and women on satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and between the mean for men and women on trust in parliament.*

Sources: Slovenian Public Opinion and European Social Survey (1992–2018); authors' own calculations.

Age: The middle-aged in charge

While only a few recent studies have focused on age, particularly the young (e.g. Kissau et al. 2012; Joshi 2013), the questions and even concerns about the low political participation of younger people in institutional politics, especially at elections, are not new (e.g. Blais 2000; Wattenberg 2020).

Still, even more alarming than low participation at elections is the share of young people declaring they would never stand as a candidate, ranging between 40% and 60% in EU countries (Deželan 2015: 27). In the first place, such abstention lowers the representation of the young cohort, and, in the second place, the pool of political talent is reduced as the young become older. Young Slovenians do not differ from other Europeans: They answer in the same way or are even less willing to participate than their counterparts in Europe, and are generally not inclined to participate in parties (Lavrič et al. 2021), which, also in Slovenia, are the main vehicles for entering institutional politics.

Table 3: Population and MPs by age (1992–2018) in %

	Population			Elected MPs			Over/underrepresentation		
Year	**18–30**	**31–55**	**56+**	**18–30**	**31–55**	**56+**	**18–30**	**31–55**	**56+**
1992	25.88	46.44	27.68	6.67	84.44	8.89	0.26	1.82	0.32
1996	25.02	46.26	28.72	0.00	84.7	15.22	0.00	1.83	0.53
2000	24.13	46.32	29.55	4.40	72.53	23.08	0.18	1.57	0.78
2004	23.32	46.51	30.17	2.20	76.92	20.88	0.09	1.65	0.69
2008	21.80	45.79	32.41	3.30	69.23	27.47	0.15	1.51	0.85
2011	20.42	45.32	34.25	2.20	70.33	27.47	0.11	1.55	0.80
2014	18.63	44.90	36.46	5.56	68.89	25.56	0.30	1.53	0.70
2018	17.58	44.61	37.81	4.40	67.80	27.80	0.25	1.52	0.74

Sources: Eurostat (http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjan&lang=en) Population on 1 January (year); Kustec Lipicer et al. (2019).

Not surprisingly then, the data in Table 3 show the 18–30 year cohort is consistently and massively underrepresented, while the middle-aged population is by far and the only group to be overrepresented. This is confirmed by data from Fink-Hafner et al. (2017: 70) showing how Slovenia's parliamentary elite is gradually ageing. In 1992, their average age in years was 43, rising to 50 in 2008 and dropping again slightly to 48 in 2018. This pattern is also observed in other post-socialist countries. Thus, the middle-aged are consistently overrepresented although the extent to which the young and elderly population is

underrepresented has changed over time. Even the electorally successful new political parties did not manage to change the representation of young people in the parliament to the extent that they did field female candidates, with the partial exception of the Party of Youth (*Stranka mladih Slovenije*) in 2000 and the Left (*Levica*), which entered parliament in 2014 and 2018 and succeeded to mobilise younger people to some extent (Fink-Hafner 2020a; Krašovec – Broder 2020), who also participate less at elections. On the other hand, the elderly population has been continually better represented than younger people, probably also because since the mid-1990s the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (*Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije*) has claimed to represent pensioners. This party is usually described as a single-issue party and has been continually present in the parliament since the mid-1990s; even more, it has also participated in almost all governments.

Dalton (in Hooghe 2004: 334) noted that analyses in the 1950s indicated that older people were significantly more distrustful, while in more recent studies this relationship is turned around because younger age cohorts are now clearly more distrustful than older respondents. It seems in Slovenia a different trend can be observed. Even though the young continue to be strongly underrepresented, their trust in the parliament recently rose to become the highest among the three age groups. Still, this is a very low level and the differences seen in trust between age groups are not very large (see Table 4). Figuratively speaking, trust in parliament among the young was U-shaped after 1993, bottoming out at the turn of the millennium to reach its highest level in 2008 – in times of improving or very good economic circumstances. The subsequent massive drop in 2012 may be ascribed to the European sovereign debt crisis that extended the effect of the financial crisis. As stated in the introduction, one train of thought argues that crisis, i.e., here the European sovereign debt crisis and the effect of the financial crisis, do have a causal effect upon trust and satisfaction with the way the democracy is working. Here we find support for this argument in that all three age groups reveal a similar pattern.

Nevertheless, a paradox appears with respect to satisfaction with the way the democracy is functioning. While the young are the most underrepresented group, they are also the most satisfied. The elderly generation is the least satisfied. This slope cannot be explained by descriptive representation. The young orient themselves to issues other than political ones and the elderly, particularly the 56+ generation, who held high hopes in the early 1990s when the democratic transition started and have become disillusioned with politics. As Krašovec – Johannsen (2016) discuss, the Slovenian electorate has consistently held relatively stable values and hopes, but as the state has been unable to fulfil them, they have searched for and formed new political parties. The increasing turnover and entrance of new political parties – also personalistic and populist – are evidence of this.

Table 4: Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and trust in the parliament by age (means comparison, scale 1–4) (1992–2018)

Year	Age	Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy		Trust in parliament	
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation
1993	18–30[a]	2.21	0.64	1.83*[a–c]	0.68
	31–55[b]	2.12*[b–c]	0.70	1.93*[b–c]	0.65
	56+[c]	2.32*[b–c]	0.71	2.12*[a–c, b–c]	0.76
1997	18–30[a]	2.36*[a–b]	0.77	1.71*[a–c]	0.66
	31–55[b]	2.11*[a–b, b–c]	0.79	1.80	0.71
	56+[c]	2.24*[b–c]	0.88	1.85*[a–c]	0.77
2000	18–30[a]	2.51	0.72	1.76*[a–b, a–c]	0.70
	31–55[b]	2.51	0.71	2.02*[a–b, b–c]	0.75
	56+[c]	2.55	0.75	2.18*[a–c, b–c]	0.83
2004	18–30[a]	2.46*[a–b, a–c]	0.63	2.23	0.67
	31–55[b]	2.32*[a–b]	0.67	2.25	0.75
	56+[c]	2.34*[a–c]	0.65	2.23	0.71
2008	18–30[a]	2.44	0.66	2.33	0.69
	31–55[b]	2.41	0.66	2.29	0.66
	56+[c]	2.44	0.66	2.36	0.76
2012	18–30[a]	2.06*[a–c]	0.67	1.64	0.66
	31–55[b]	1.96*[b–c]	0.64	1.59*[b–c]	0.62
	56+[c]	1.85*[a–c, b–c]	0.66	1.72*[b–c]	0.71
2014	18–30[a]	1.89	0.63	1.84	0.65
	31–55[b]	1.88	0.67	1.81	0.73
	56+[c]	1.83	0.67	1.81	0.72
2018	18–30[a]	2.40*[a–c]	0.69	2.18*[a–b]	0.68
	31–55[b]	2.29	0.74	2.02*[a–b]	0.72
	56+[c]	2.20*[a–c]	0.72	2.06	0.72

*Note: * p < .05. Analysis of variance with post hoc tests was used to determine differences between groups labeled [a] (18–30), [b] (31–55), and [c] (56+). For example, *[a–c, b–c] means that statistically significant differences were found between groups [a] and [c] and between groups [b] and [c].*

Sources: Slovenian Public Opinion and European Social Survey (1992–2018); authors' own calculations.

With respect to age groups, descriptive representation collides with theories of political socialisation. On one hand, descriptive representation will, from the point of inequality, argue that it is not surprising that the middle group is overrepresented since it possesses the resources to participate in and win elections (Verba et al. 1995). Yet, theories of political socialisation also argue that values are formed in youth and to a large extent continue as one ages (see Hyman 1959; Abendschön ed. 2013). Hence, those who were aged 25 in 1993 turned 36 in 2004. If we, knowing that this is only a rough gauge, compare the trust of those aged 18–30 in 1993 with that of individuals aged 31–55 in 2004, the level is higher for the latter group, indicating that descriptive representation does matter. If we instead compare with 2014, when our 25-year-olds had turned 45, the means (1.83 and 1.81, respectively) are almost the same, showing that socialisation is important. Thus, the analysis lean support to both arguments in political socialisation.

The present data cannot settle the issue. The dynamic character of age invites competing explanations related to outcome, socialisation and descriptive representation. Here, it is sufficient to note that the young may have learned an important lesson about democracy when several coeval representatives were elected in 2014. This success may help to change patrimonial norms in society and contribute to greater inclusion.

No workers in the previous 'workers' paradise'? The educracy

While talking about representation, hardly anyone can avoid the question of representatives' education. This topic is typically also addressed in a broader issue of elite theory where two authors (Pareto and Mosca) are often connected to it. Having (different kinds of) power and possessing (different kinds of) qualities have, generally speaking, been two major attributes of elites. (Higher) education has also been closely connected to them.

These power inequalities speak to the core of descriptive representation and, accordingly, one may expect the educated to be overrepresented. Many research studies also reveal that higher education is strongly connected to greater engagement in political participation (Verba et al. 1995; Franklin 2004).

Table 5 also reveals the huge overrepresentation of the highly educated in Slovenia. In 2000, representatives with a tertiary education were over seven times overrepresented compared to their share in the general population. Still, this pattern is not unique in post-socialist Europe (see Semenova et al. eds. 2014) or in established democracies (Esaiasson – Holmberg 1996; Best – Cotta eds. 2000). However, the overrepresentation of the highly educated is continually decreasing, mainly due to the general rise in education. This does not imply that the share of representatives with a basic or less of an education is increasing. On the contrary, the traditional working class is not and has never been represented in independent Slovenia. Aside from the puzzle that

Table 5: Population and MPs by education, 15 years of age or older (1992–2016) in %

	Population			Elected MPs			Over/underrepresentation		
Year	Basic or less	Upper secondary	Tertiary	Basic or less	Upper secondary	Tertiary	Basic or less	Upper secondary	Tertiary
1992	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.11	17.78	81.11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1996	37.30	52.11	10.59	0.00	19.57	80.43	0.00	0.38	7.59
2000	32.18	55.36	12.46	0.00	19.78	80.22	0.00	0.36	6.44
2004	27.88	57.13	14.99	0.00	18.68	81.32	0.00	0.33	5.42
2008	24.10	57.68	18.22	0.00	21.98	78.02	0.00	0.38	4.28
2011	21.59	57.61	20.81	0.00	12.09	87.91	0.00	0.21	4.22
2014	19.93	55.89	24.18	0.00	14.44	85.56	0.00	0.26	3.54
2018	17.67	55.10	27.23	0.00	20.00	80.00	0.00	0.36	2.94

Sources: Eurostat (http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_pgaed&lang=en); Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS; available from 1996); Kustec Lipicer et al. (2019).

this could be true in what was previously a socialist country, a broader question is whether the underrepresentation gives or can give rise to populist appeals. Indeed, Slovenia has seen different forms of populism or populist sentiments within different parties for 30 years and some of these parties have managed to cross the parliamentary threshold (Krašovec 2012; Lovec ed. 2019; Fink-Hafner 2020b), yet the differences with respect to trust in the parliament among the three subgroups in terms of education are mainly small (see Table 6).

However, with respect to trust in the parliament those with a tertiary education have since 1997 had greater trust in the parliament than voters with a basic education. Although one education group is highly overrepresented in the parliament, while the differences in trust and satisfaction among the three groups are rather small, it is obvious that the descriptive representation argument cannot offer the only or correct answer, but that the elitist theory might perhaps be more useful here.

Ross (2006) raises the classical question if the democracy is better for the poor, who mostly have only basic education, but find that it is the middleclass that benefits the most from democratic processes. When we find a similar pattern to the above in trust with respect to satisfaction with the way in which democracy function it begs the question if the outcome of democratic processes is more beneficial to the better educated. When those with tertiary education are consistently, except from 1993, more satisfied than those with basic and upper secondary education, a likely proposition in Slovenia, similar to that of Ross, is that democracy benefits the educated.

Table 6: Satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy and trust in the parliament by education (means comparison, scale 1–4) (1992–2018)

Year	Education	Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy		Trust in parliament	
		Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation
1993	Basic or less[a]	2.23	0.74	2.03*[a–b]	0.72
	Upper secondary[b]	2.19	0.67	1.88*[a–b]	0.68
	Tertiary[c]	2.11	0.66	2.01	0.64
1997	Basic or less[a]	2.19	0.85	1.77	0.74
	Upper secondary[b]	2.20	0.79	1.78	0.71
	Tertiary[c]	2.31	0.85	1.89	0.70
2000	Basic or less[a]	2.48	0.76	2.02	0.81
	Upper secondary[b]	2.53	0.71	1.97	0.77
	Tertiary[c]	2.57	0.67	2.10	0.74
2004	Basic or less[a]	2.38	0.68	2.12*[a–c]	0.72
	Upper secondary[b]	2.32*[b–c]	0.65	2.22*[b–c]	0.71
	Tertiary[c]	2.48*[b–c]	0.62	2.51*[a–c, b–c]	0.64
2008	Basic or less[a]	2.46	0.67	2.26*[a–c]	0.73
	Upper secondary[b]	2.39	0.67	2.26*[b–c]	0.68
	Tertiary[c]	2.47	0.59	2.53*[a–c, b–c]	0.66
2012	Basic or less[a]	1.88	0.66	1.67	0.72
	Upper secondary[b]	1.92	0.63	1.61	0.63
	Tertiary[c]	1.99	0.70	1.73	0.67
2014	Basic or less[a]	1.87*[a–c]	0.70	1.78*[a–c]	0.72
	Upper secondary[b]	1.80*[b–c]	0.64	1.75*[b–c]	0.68
	Tertiary[c]	2.02*[a–c, b–c]	0.67	2.06*[a–c, b–c]	0.74
2018	Basic or less[a]	2.28*[a–c]	0.77	1.97*[a–c]	0.76
	Upper secondary[b]	2.21*[b–c]	0.73	2.01*[b–c]	0.71
	Tertiary[c]	2.44*[a–c, b–c]	0.72	2.26*[a–c, b–c]	0.67

*Note: * p < .05. Analysis of variance with post hoc tests was used to determine differences between groups labeled [a] (Basic or less), [b] (Upper secondary), and [c] (Tertiary). For example, *[a–c, b–c] means that statistically significant differences were found between groups [a] and [c] and between groups [b] and [c].*

Sources: Slovenian Public Opinion and European Social Survey (1992–2018); authors' own calculations.

Conclusion: Trajectories of descriptive representation in modern democracies

While modern parliaments have different roles, their representative role is still among the most important ones. Many theoretical discussions on representation assume or argue that representatives reflect the population also with regard to the composition of parliaments, i.e. their composition accurately corresponds to that of the whole nation. As asserted by many researchers, descriptive underrepresentation, in its relative proportion within the population, of social groups in parliament may trigger feelings of alienation, exclusion and an illegitimate political system; namely, a democracy that is lacking in both support and trust.

Data in Slovenia show that, as a group, Slovenian MPs poorly reflect the Slovenian population in relation to gender, age and education. Women, the young, the elderly and those with a basic education are all underrepresented – and across all years of the democratic period in Slovenia, despite their underrepresentation not being frozen on the same level. When this is compared to aggregated surveys on trust in parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy swings are to be expected from one legislative period to another. And certain of these results are visible. This indicates that there is some, but not necessarily a direct and strong, relationship between trust, satisfaction and the descriptive representation of particular social groups. Representation gaps are confirmed as being able to partly explain levels of both trust in parliaments and satisfaction with how democracy is working. Therefore, in comparative perspective, Slovenia is not a deviant case.

These results can help address several questions. One of these is the question of awareness and mobilisation. Awareness of gender issues combined with quotas and other institutional rules has in many countries led to an increasing share of female representatives in the parliament, the boardroom and in the media. Another question is: 'Who is to be blamed?' for the poor descriptive representation of specific social groups – voters and their electoral choices, or political parties, which during the candidate-selection processes (can) strongly influence the supply side at elections. Thinking about a more radical view, someone could even raise a question if the elections is indeed a good (the best) vehicle to achieve descriptive representation.

To reach a better understanding and explanation of trust in parliament and satisfaction with the functioning of the democracy, including the observed spikes, we recommend to employ a matrix of different approaches from electoral studies, theories of representation and political socialisation pinpointed as important in the literature and include cross-comparative and time sensitives cases. The perspective of descriptive representation we have employed improves our understanding, provides information about the (im)perfect descriptive

representation in Slovenia but are not sufficient to clarify the strength of different processes and theories.

Irrespective of this, equality in representation is perhaps a good normative goal, yet a goal that is very difficult to reach, and even when in parliaments the huge over/underrepresentation of various social sub-groups has been diminishing, this has had little immediate impact on trust in the parliament and satisfaction with the democracy among these newly 'empowered' social sub-groups.

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