

The Political and Economic Context Contributing to the Problem of Political (Dis)Trust in Slovenia

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Abstract: *The article analyses the political and economic context of the growing distrust in politics in Slovenia over the last 15 years. Focus is given to the changes in the power relations, policy changes and roles of different national and international institutions. It is established that the fundamental element of the specific class trade-off which underpinned the broader political legitimacy from the early 1990s up until 2008 – a strong welfare state and low economic inequalities – was partly dissolved after the crisis of 2008. However, no new joint programme emerged to replace it due to the weakening of the trade unions, the EU's stronger role in policymaking processes coupled with the shrinking differences between political parties in their social and economic policies. These changes are not only seen in the high levels of political distrust in public opinion surveys or decreasing voter turnout, but in the instability of the party arena as well.*

Keywords: *political legitimacy, (dis)trust, Slovenia, democracy, capitalism, welfare state, inequalities*

Introduction

This article looks at the political, economic and social processes that have occurred in Slovenia over the last 15 years, focusing on the relationship between structural changes, changes in power relations among social classes and groups, changes in policy frameworks and actual policies on one hand, and the declining political trust in the country on the other. Upon joining the EU in 2004, Slovenia was economically the most developed of the post-socialist countries and the first new member state to adopt the euro, while maintaining a stable and consolidated liberal democracy. It seemed that political stability and trust in political institutions would last. However, since 2008 and the start of the financial and

economic crisis, considerable political changes have been observed in Slovenia, accompanied by a marked decline in trust and satisfaction with how the main political institutions are functioning (Krašovec & Johannsen 2016; Krašovec 2017; Malčič & Krašovec 2019; Novak & Lajh 2023; Fink-Hafner 2024).

The aim of this article is to examine the reasons for the rise in political trust in Slovenia and explain the political and economic processes that have helped lead to the different emanations of the problem of political distrust. Within a neo-Marxist analysis of the contradictions of political democracy and the imperative of capitalist accumulation (Wolfe 1980; Offe 1984; Habermas 1988; Streeck 2011, 2014), we argue that the growing political distrust and dissatisfaction with the way political institutions are working are the outcome of the decoupling of capitalism from the welfare state in Slovenia following the 2008 crisis, accompanied by rising inequalities and the isolation of capitalism from democratic politics. A contribution is thus made to the discussions on the nature and crisis of Slovenian democracy and to the broader debates on the problems around the world of political trust and legitimacy in the 21st century within the framework of the rise and crisis of neoliberal politics.

After the introduction, we outline the theoretical framework based on neo-Marxist scholarship, which has focused on the political contradictions of the democratic capitalist state. In the third section, we explain the political and economic conditions in Slovenia until 2008. The fourth section presents opinion poll data concerning (dis)trust in political institutions and voter turnout, while we also examine qualitative changes in the party landscape since 2008. The fifth section considers three important elements following the 2008 crisis: the transformation of corporatist institutions and the declining strength of trade unions; the role of the EU, and the shrinking differences between political parties; along with the rising economic inequalities and shift from the welfare to the workfare state. In the discussion, we locate our analysis within the broader scholarship regarding ongoing political and economic processes in Slovenia and the world and additionally reflect on recent political and economic changes in Slovenia. In the conclusion, the trends observed in Slovenia are considered within the broader perspective of the decoupling of capitalism from democracy.

Contradictions of liberal democratic capitalist states

The problem of declining political trust as an important element and indicator of the crisis of democracy in the 21st century has been identified by multiple scholars (Dalton 2004; Norris 2011; Hooghe & Marien 2013; van der Meer & Zmerli 2017; Hooghe & Dassonneville 2018; Bertsou 2019; Valgarðsson et al. 2021; Berg 2021; Devine 2024; Dawson & Krakoff 2024). After the Cold War came to an end, liberal democracy and a capitalist market economy became the universal form of political and economic organisation of societies (Fukuyama

1992; Linz & Stepan 1996; Hadenius 1997). The ‘third wave of democratisation’ (Huntington 1991) was to provide citizens with broader opportunities to assert their interests. It was assumed that democracy would lead to the greater responsiveness of political institutions and broader political legitimacy, which is crucial for trust in political institutions (Mishler & Rose 1997; Offe 2000; Uslaner 2018; Newton, Stolle & Zmerli 2018; Hooghe 2018; Warren 1999, 2018). However, political, economic and social development in the last two decades suggests that instead of political stability, improved political responsiveness, and broader political trust and legitimacy, citizens’ mistrust and dissatisfaction with political institutions and the overall political order is on the rise at the same time as populist movements, parties or politicians (typically from the right spectrum, but also from the left) have become more important political actors across the world (Torcal & Montero 2006; Behnke 2009; Parvin 2015; Schäfer 2015; Schäfer & Zürn 2024). This has prompted various scholars to analyse the crisis(es) of democracy (Mounk 2018; Runciman 2018; Merkel & Kneip 2018; Przeworski 2019; Ginsburg & Huq 2020). Nevertheless, the question of political trust and its relevance for political legitimacy already emerged in the 1970s in the face of the particular political and economic developments occurring then.

Universalisation of the liberal democratic political form in the West following the end of the Second World War led to the growing participation of the masses in politics. Faced with strong left political parties, trade unions and the possibility of a revolution, the capitalist class was prepared to make concessions, and the governments – led by left, liberal or right-wing parties – were pushed into the role of mediator between the interests of the capitalist and working classes. A crucial political and economic outcome of the established class compromise was the welfare states in the West and the politics of full employment. Political legitimacy was closely linked to the reduction and limitation of economic and social inequalities, which were a consequence of the capitalist mode of production, and an improvement in the living standards of the working masses (Offe 1984; Streeck 2014).

This structure remained stable as long as profit margins in the West were high and the working class was willing to trade its revolutionary ideals for social security through productivity gains. As it had become clear in the early 1970s that the Fordist mode of production was starting to stagnate, governments could no longer raise enough money via taxation. The globalisation of capitalist production led to the greater mobility of capital, while the pressure remained on governments to continue to provide social benefits and welfare networks – the essential element for political legitimacy (Hirsch 1995; Jessop 2002). This makes it hardly surprising that the issue of political trust became one of the key issues in the 1970s (Cole 1973; Miller 1974; Citrin 1974; Easton 1975).

It was within this framework that neo-Marxist scholars considered the internal structural contradictions of capitalist liberal polities. They noted the irreconcilable contradiction between the promise of political equality in the

political system and the fundamental economic inequalities and exploitation in the capitalist mode of production that underlie liberal-democratic polities. The universalisation of political citizenship and the rise of the welfare state seemed to be the cure for the structural contradictions of class societies and democratic politics, but the crises of the 1970s proved that this equilibrium was far from permanent. The structural crisis of capitalism prevented governments from delivering social and economic policy outcomes like they could in the era of welfare capitalism; welfare provisions were limited while mass expectations rose. The capitalist class was no longer willing to pay through taxes as much as before, while the strength of the working class had started to crumble and the class composition began to change. This led to growing problems for the legitimacy of the politico-economic system.

Wolfe claimed that the curtailment of the welfare state has been a 'two-edged sword for ruling classes, enhancing immediate flexibility at the cost of longer run legitimation problems' (Wolfe 1980: 334). Offe argued that the political contradictions of late capitalism lay in the fact that the welfare state's mediation role had been changing, leading to problems of legitimation and political trust (Offe 1984: 182–194).¹ Habermas observed that due to the economic crisis and the crumbling of the class compromise, another of whose outcomes was the rise of the welfare state, the state had to fulfil the expectations due to the 'pressures of legitimation' while 'mass loyalty' had to be 'secured within the framework of formal democracy' (Habermas 1988: 58).

The subsequent neoliberal revolution – as a specific response to the crisis of welfare capitalism – and the implementation of neoliberal policies since the 1980s have led to a further curtailment of the welfare state and increasing class selectivity of political decisions that were oriented to the interests and needs of the richest (Harvey 2005; Streeck 2014). These shifts had further negative effects on political trust and fuelled even more contradictions within the political and economic systems, especially the declining voter turnout and social selectivity of voting (lower classes are increasingly not voting) (see: Bonica et al. 2013; Schäfer 2010).

The empirically rooted investigation of Wolfgang Merkel, even though he does not work within the neo-Marxist theoretical framework, showed that disembedded capitalism (neoliberal capitalism) has an important influence on democracy and 'poses considerable challenges' to it (Merkel 2014: 126). This is especially because there has been a specific social selectivity of voter turnout ever since the 1980s – i.e. the lower classes do not vote – and due to the rising precarity in the labour market, the declining organisational and ideological strength of left-leaning parties and trade unions, which have played a signifi-

1 Even Dahl claimed that democracy in the form of polyarchy has emerged and been sustained only in capitalist market economies. However, not in completely free market or pure competitive market economies, but specifically in mixed market economies where governments play an important role in correcting the markets and market outcomes (Dahl 1971, 1998).

cant role in the political participation and rise in the working class' political consciousness. Wolfgang Streeck analysed the transformation of the state and the imperatives of the capitalist accumulation within a globalised and neoliberal economy. He claimed that the curtailment of the welfare state due to the second fiscal crisis of the state has been a consequence of the interests and ability of capital to avoid taxes and due to the tax competition among states. Streeck (2014: 4) thus claims that 'legitimation problems therefore arose time and again' after the 1970s, although primarily it was the problem of the capital, which faced accumulation crises, and in order to solve it they put the entire system's democratic legitimation under question. Instead of trying to reinstall democratic legitimacy, governments pursued policies of winning back 'the confidence of "the markets" in the system' by introducing additional liberalisation processes.

In the empirical analysis, we draw on the insights of neo-Marxist scholars and look at the structural contradictions of the capitalist liberal democratic system in Slovenia, which were intensified during the 2008 crisis and, subsequently, when the entire world entered a situation of polycrisis. This led to serious changes in trust in political institutions and also the broader problem of political legitimacy.

The political and economic transition in Slovenia

To understand the changes that have occurred since 2008 in the political and economic processes and policies in Slovenia, it is necessary to explain the Slovenian political and economic transition. On the political level, Slovenia has had a very stable parliamentary constitutional democratic system based on a proportional electoral system. In the political sphere, parties from left to right are present, but the strongest party up until 2004 was the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), which acted as a cornerstone of political stability and created broader coalitions with right-wing and left parties. The country's accession to the EU and long-standing hegemony of the LDS coincided. Yet, from 2004 until 2008 a new right-wing government assumed office led by the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and Janez Janša (Fink-Hafner 2024).

On the economic level, following the breaking up of Yugoslavia, Slovenia managed to avoid a long-lasting war and quickly sought to cooperate with Western markets, which caused a short recession. The export-based growth model and incremental introduction of capitalist markets and relations was based on the conscious decision of the policymakers to sustain Slovenia's export-oriented companies, while the privatisation model was based on an incremental and internal privatisation. The country's accession to the EU and the new right-wing government in 2004 attempted to implement more radical neoliberal policies, but were soon blocked and mitigated by the trade unions (Podvršič 2023; Hočevar 2024a).

Six crucial elements were required for the stable and successful political and economic transitions in Slovenia. First, gradual market economic policy reforms

were introduced, while the mode of privatisation was in fact not neoliberal in its essence, despite the conservative political parties and foreign advisors strongly pushing for a neoliberal transition based on a quick privatisation (Mencinger 2012; Bembič 2017; Podvršič 2023).

The second was the prevailing role of the liberal and left political elite, many of whom had played important roles in the final decade of socialist Yugoslavia. The critical political party up until 2004, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and its leader – as well as the prime minister of Slovenia, Janez Drnovšek – were actually the successors of the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, whereas Drnovšek himself was actually a member of the last collective presidency of Yugoslavia. Moreover, the president of Slovenia up until 2002 was Milan Kučan, the very last president of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Žerdin 2012; Fink-Hafner 2024).

Third, the specific privatisation carried out in Slovenia was in fact based on the primacy of internal ownership – the workers and management of the companies received most of the shares in the companies. Successive governments have not been particularly favourable to either foreign direct investment or the sale of banks and companies to foreign investors. Moreover, since the directors were closely linked to the ruling groups – the government played a decisive role in their appointment – a specific, politically determined accumulation process commenced. This project reached its peak after 2003 when cheap money began to flow into Slovenia (Žerdin 2012; Hočevar 2025).

Fourth, the transition was possible due to the very strong trade unions that were able to mobilise their membership in order to prevent the most radical neoliberal economic and social reforms from being adopted. The high trade union density rate gave the labour movement a strong organisational base, while the clear political goals and scopes had a great sway on the acceptability of specific policies. After the late 1990s, the trade union density rate had begun declining, the unions themselves became more closed and concentrated on the immediate interests of their membership, whereas the strength of the trade unions in the public sector easily exceeded the importance of trade unions in the private sector. Crucially, in 1995 the unions managed to pressure the government to adopt minimum wage legislation, which was a big success for the unions (Stanojević 2014, 2015).

Fifth, as an institutional outcome of the trade unions' strength, the Economic and Social Council (ESC) was established in 1994. The dominant social bloc, consisting of the political bureaucracy and representatives of domestic companies (especially exporters), was pressurised into accepting the position of the trade unions at the policymaking table since they also needed the trade unions' support – the state bureaucracy was to limit inflation while the representatives of capital were to promote the export competitiveness of their companies for their very survival. The trade unions accepted wage moderation along with the specific privatisation model, while the representatives of the capitalist class accepted the introduction of a statutory minimum wage and numerous other

social and labour regulations. This was important for employers as they could either (re)strengthen their position in European markets by way of price competition or barely survive the opening-up of the country's markets. This was, as is usual in a capitalist society, also in the interest of employees since the higher unemployment in the early 1990s greatly destabilised the economy and society and it was also in the interest of workers that these companies could either resume international competition or survive the market pressure as such (Stanojević 2014; Podvršič 2023). In this way, a specific *quid pro quo* relationship was established that mimicked the Western class compromise of the post-war period, albeit in a very different political, economic and social environment.

The ESC served as a typical neo-corporatist tripartite social dialogue institution where representatives of employers, unions and the government negotiate, formulate and adopt crucial economic and social policies. Within the ESC, the unions gained access to political and policymaking processes, while the representatives of capital gained an instrument to soften the resistance of labour through bargaining processes. By the turn of the millennium, the decline in the union density rate had also resulted in a more defensive and narrow focus of the unions, while EU accession led to increased deregulation and liberalisation of the markets in line with the EU rules and convergence policies (Stanojević & Krašovec 2011; Podvršič 2023).

Sixth, a strong welfare state featuring important social and economic rights was created, including universal social rights, paid leave arrangements, child benefit payments, unemployment benefits, social assistance and the universal public provision of healthcare and public schooling system (including a cost-free university) (Kolarič 2012; Filipovič Hrast & Kopač Mrak 2016). Further, the transition to a capitalist market economy did not lead to an explosion of inequalities – the opposite was true. Slovenia has remained one of the most egalitarian countries with respect to income inequality, although certain increases were seen after the mid-1990s, but the overall picture was much better than in other post-socialist countries or when compared to any other country in the world. As concerns wealth inequality, Slovenia was a very equal country, with very stable levels of inequality up until 2008 (Hočevar 2024a; World Inequality Database 2025). These policy outcomes fostered a broader social and political legitimacy within the processes of the consolidation of a liberal democracy.

The political and economic transition in Slovenia was thus a specific case of the organised, institutionally embedded and gradual introduction of a capitalist economy. Political legitimacy and trust were based on the political mediation of market forces and the creation of a universalist welfare state. Governments rarely pursued overtly neoliberal policies, at least not before 2004, which marked an important turning point as the right-wing neoliberal government took office, but its ambitions were quickly curtailed by strong trade unions in 2005, leading to much more nuanced reforms.

Although trust and political legitimacy was stable throughout the period of transition and until 2008, the respective figures were never very high in public opinion surveys. Nevertheless, the share of those who were either satisfied with the government and democracy and who trusted or were neutral in relation to the crucial political institutions was significantly higher than of those who clearly expressed dissatisfaction and distrust (see: Toš 2018, 2021). This changed considerably in the subsequent years while at the same time other quite specific and peculiar new symptoms emerged.

Political ruptures and problems of political legitimacy in Slovenia since 2008

The 2008 crisis led to an important break – the class compromise, already crumbling under the liberalisation pressures set by the EU, began to fall apart, with successive governments implementing strict austerity measures, and the EU advocating strong fiscal consolidation, liberalisation and privatisation. The trade unions, even though the ESC was still functioning, had lost their power in the policymaking processes.

The 15-year period following the start of the economic and financial crisis in 2008 saw important shifts, turns and disruptions within the Slovenian political and party arena. The sharp rise in distrust in political institutions and dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy and the government were accompanied by a steady decline in voter turnout. Moreover, an important permanent qualitative disruption within the party arena has featured the recurring creation of new liberal parties that either win the elections or become the biggest coalition party, only to lose (almost) all of their support by the next election cycle.

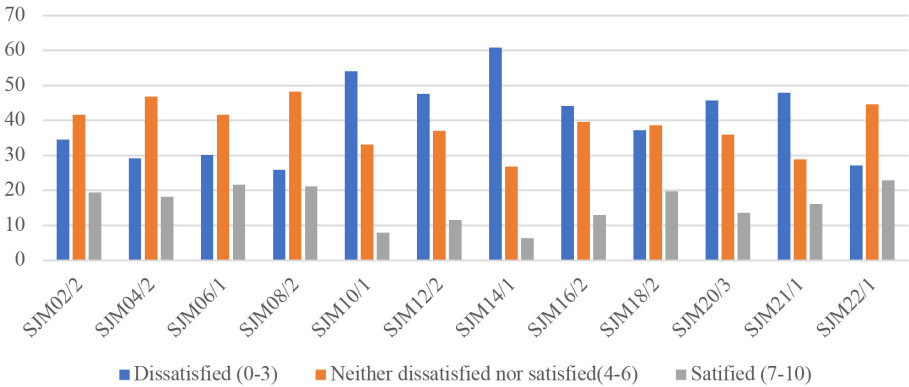
Rising distrust and dissatisfaction with politics?

Even though it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from opinion polls, they remain the best tool for assessing how citizens generally view various important issues. Trust in the key institutions of liberal democracy is essential for determining the quality of democracy. It can provide specific insights regarding how people judge the functioning of key political institutions. The data presented below are all based on various surveys of the Slovenian Public Opinion research programme (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023), which provides the most reliable data. The fact that the surveys are repeated allows changes over time in terms of citizens' attitudes to politics and the main political institutions to be observed.²

² We recoded all the variables since they were all on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating complete distrust/dissatisfaction and 10 complete trust/satisfaction. We organised the variables by aggregating values from 0 to 3 (dissatisfaction/distrust); 4–6 (neither trust nor distrust/neither dissatisfied not

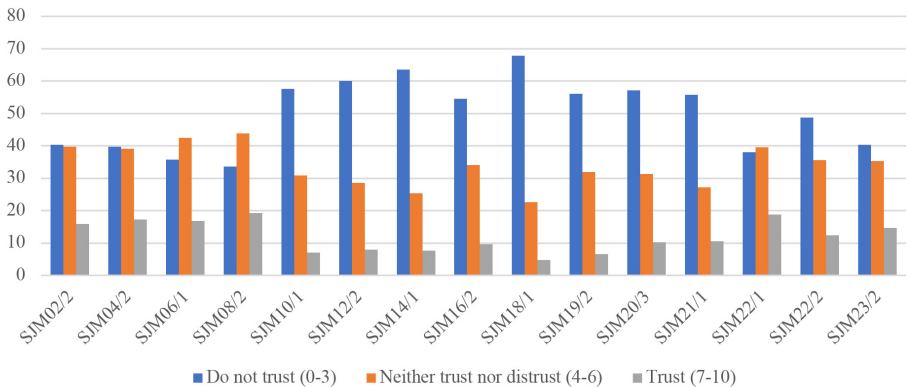
Figure 1 shows satisfaction with how democracy works. It is clear that before 2008 the level of those dissatisfied with democracy was much lower than of those who were indifferent or satisfied. During the crisis years, this trend was changed drastically, with those dissatisfied outnumbering the other two groups. Still, a reversal of this trend has been witnessed since 2016. The number of dissatisfied people fell, only to rise again in the pandemic years. In 2022, the number of people dissatisfied with democracy was on the same level as before the 2008 crisis, while the number of satisfied people also increased sharply to reach its highest level since 2002.

Figure 1: (Dis)satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Slovenia



Source: Author's own compilation based on Slovenian Public Opinion Research programme data (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023)

Figure 2: (Dis)trust in the National Assembly in Slovenia

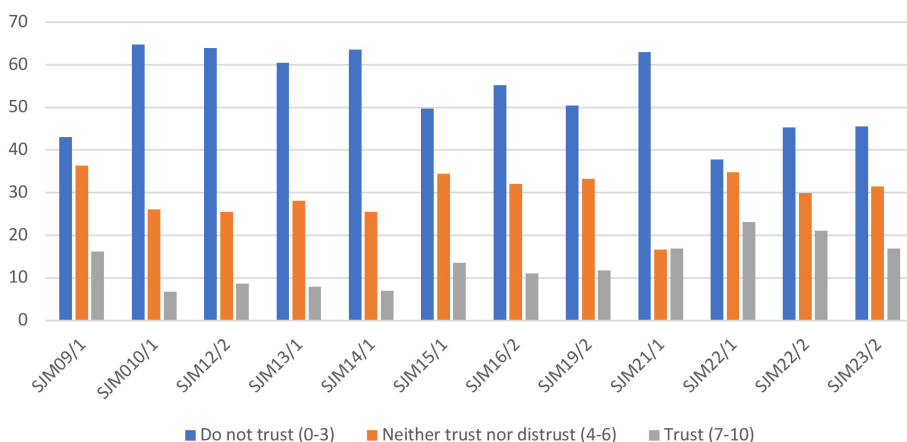


Source: Author's own compilation based on Slovenian Public Opinion Research programme data (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023)

satisfied) and the values from 7 to 10 (trust/satisfied). This was done with all the variables presented here, making the data more comprehensible.

Figure 2 displays data concerning trust in the National Assembly, the most important political institution and the one with the most important legitimising function in the institutional framework of the liberal democracy in Slovenia. The data show that after 2002 the share of those without trust in the National Assembly was quite high at around 40%, but that the other two blocs combined were larger; whereas the share of those who neither had trust nor distrust was at least as high as the share of those expressing distrust. Further, the proportion of those who distrusted the National Assembly dropped to just above 30% shortly before the outbreak of the crisis, while the share of those distrusting the National Assembly remained consistently above 50% between 2010 and 2021, rising to almost 70% in 2018. Consequently, the share of those trusting the National Assembly fell significantly – in 2008, when the new social democratic government assumed office, it increased to almost 20%, only to drop to below 10% by 2021, while the share of those trusting the National Assembly has remained above 10% since 2022.

Figure 3: (Dis)trust in the government in Slovenia

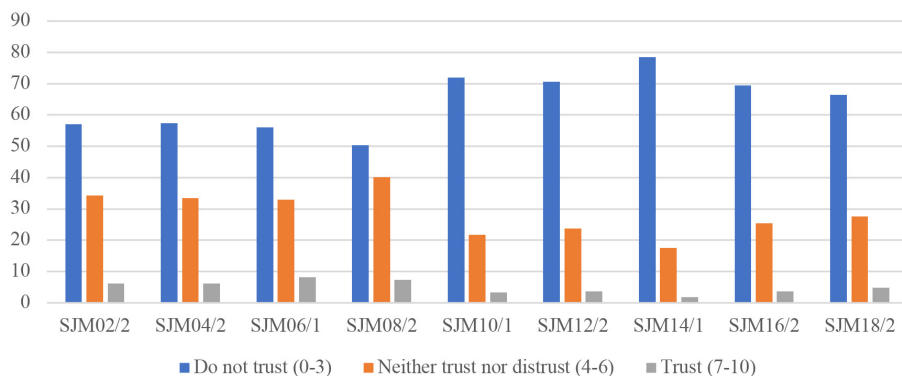


Source: Author's own compilation based on Slovenian Public Opinion Research programme data (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023)

Figure 3 presents data regarding trust in the government in Slovenia. It is evident that from 2010 to 2022 (when the new liberal government took office) the share of those distrusting the government constantly exceeded 50%, and in many years even 60%. This changed in 2022 with the new liberal government assuming office, when the share of those who expressed trust went up to above 20%, while the share of those who distrusted was below 40%, and since 2022 the share of those distrusting the government has increased to around 45%.

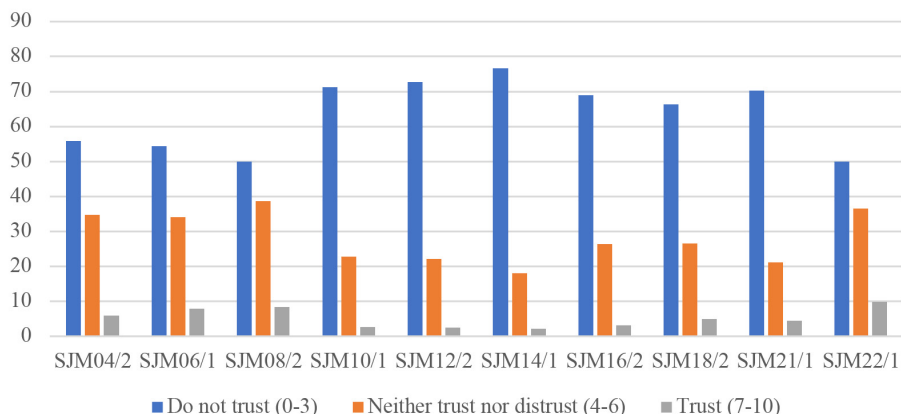
Figures 4 and 5 show data from opinion polls concerning (distrust in) politicians and political parties. Distrust in politicians and political parties

Figure 4: (Dis)trust in politicians in Slovenia



Source: Author's own compilation based on Slovenian Public Opinion Research programme data (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023)

Figure 5: (Dis)trust in political parties in Slovenia



Source: Author's own compilation based on Slovenian Public Opinion Research programme data (Toš 2018, 2021; CRJMMK 2023)

was already very high before the crisis, although the proportion of distrustful people was just over 50%. In these two areas, however, the proportion of those distrusting politicians and political parties increased sharply during and after the 2008 crisis. The data suggest that the share of those who distrusted politicians and political parties exceeded 60% or even 70% between 2010 and 2021, while the share of those distrusting political parties dropped to 50% in 2022.

Distrust in the crucial liberal-democratic institutions in Slovenia is very pronounced, yet distrust in politicians and political parties has been even more apparent. There is an overlap between the period of the 2008 crisis and

the years immediately following and the highest levels of distrust/dissatisfaction with key political institutions and democracy. Moreover, these trends did not change much before the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though some decrease in levels of distrust/dissatisfaction may be observed, they were generally still importantly higher than prior to 2008. More importantly, although since 2013 onwards Slovenia has been doing better economically, it only reached the pre-2008 crisis GDP level in 2017. Some shifts occurred in the period 2020–2022 and after 2022. Initially, the trends changed during the pandemic and due to the particular militaristic way the right-wing populist Janša government was dealing with the pandemic (mistrust in the both government and the National Assembly rose strongly again). After the elections in 2022, levels of political distrust decreased to reach similar levels to those before the 2008 crisis for the first time, while increasing again since 2022.

In addition, there is a clear trend towards declining voter turnout up until the elections to the National Assembly in 2022. At the first democratic elections in 1990, voter turnout was very high at 83.5%, while in 1992 – the first elections since the country’s independence – it rose to 85%. After the 1996 elections, however, there was initially a gradual and then a steep decline: from 73.7% to just 51.73% in 2014 and 52.64% in 2018. In 2022, given the special situation, dissatisfaction with the management of the pandemic and the scandals affecting the third government under Janez Janša, coupled with the strong mobilisation of civil society against the Janša government (ongoing protests against the government lasted over 1 year), voter turnout increased to over 70%, which

Table 1: Voter turnout in Slovenia (in %)

Year	National Assembly Elections	Year	Presidential (first round)	Presidential (second round)
1990	83.5	1992	85.84	
1992	85.6	1997	68.29	
1996	73.7	2002	72.07	65.39
2000	70.14	2007	57.67	58.46
2004	60.65	2012	48.41	42.41
2008	63.1	2017	44.24	42.13
2011	65.6	2022	51.74	53.6
2014	51.73			
2018	52.64			
2022	70.97			

Source: State Election Commission (2025)

was a very important change. A similar situation occurred with the presidential elections. In the 1990s and up to the 2002 elections, voter turnout was quite high, above or around 70%. At the 2007 elections, it dropped to below 60%, while in 2012 and 2017 it was well below 50%. Only the most recent elections saw an increase, with turnout just exceeding 50% in both rounds, which is in line with the repoliticisation of society that was also observed during the 2022 National Assembly elections.

Changes in the party arena: The rise of new liberal parties and their quick demise

Apart from the quantitative changes reflected in opinion polls and derivable from voter turnout, there have been qualitative changes in the functioning of the democracy that call for separate consideration. Since 2007, a new liberal party has emerged before every election to the National Assembly that has either won the elections or became the largest coalition party.

This trend began with the split of the newly founded Zares from the LDS in 2007. Zares was a party led by Gregor Golobič, who for many years was a prominent member of the LDS and a close ally of Janez Drnovšek. In the 2008 elections, the LDS won more than 9% of the vote and became the second biggest coalition party after the SD. Nonetheless, the government collapsed under the pressure of the 2008 crisis, the many internal disputes and problems within the government, and the strong trade unions that were able to block several important austerity measures.

After it became clear that the LDS was unable to reinvent itself politically, and that Zares had also lost its support, a new party was founded just a few weeks before the 2011 elections: Zoran Janković's list – Pozitivna Slovenija (PS). This novel party managed to win the elections despite not having any real party infrastructure and only a very broad and vague party programme. The party won 28.5% of the vote, mainly thanks to the strong support of the liberal intellectual and cultural elite, while its leader, the former CEO of Mercator, the country's largest retail company, has served as the mayor of Ljubljana since 2006. In addition, another important party emerged in the political centre – Gregor Virant, a former minister in the government of Janez Janša in the 2004–2008 term, established his own party and attracted 8.37% of the vote. This was remarkable given that these two completely new parties together received almost 37% of the total vote. Notwithstanding its election victory in 2011, PS did not manage to form a government, but the second-placed SDS was able to form a broad coalition. Yet, this coalition barely lasted one year, and when it fell apart a new government was established under the leadership of PS – but now it was Alenka Bratušek rather than Janković who became the prime minister, which also created intra-party divisions (Fink-Hafner 2020; Hočevar 2020).

The split within the party founded by Zoran Janković already hinted at possible new shifts on the liberal political spectrum. The ‘danger’ of the possibility of a new government led by Janez Janša saw history repeat itself. Immediately before the new elections, another two new important political parties emerged. Following the split in PS, Alenka Bratušek, the then prime minister, set up her own party: Zavezništvo Alenke Bratušek (ZAB). Yet, since it was clear that PS and the newly founded ZAB could not repeat the overwhelming victory of PS in 2011, Miro Cerar, a well-known law professor, established a new party called the Party of Miro Cerar, which was later renamed the Party of the Modern Centre (with both names using the acronym SMC in Slovenian). The party managed to win a large majority under the proportional representation system and attracted 34.5% of the vote. ZAB, in contrast, achieved 4.38% of the vote and only just managed to enter the National Assembly. The government managed to hold on almost until the end of its term, but a few months before the official end the prime minister resigned and opinion polls in spring 2018 revealed a sharp drop in support (Malčič & Krašovec 2019; Fink-Hafner 2020; Krašovec & Broder 2020).

After the opinion polls showed a drastic decrease in support for SMC, the mayor of Kamnik and loser of the 2017 presidential elections – Marjan Šarec – stepped onto the national political stage with his new party Lista Marjana Šarca (LMŠ). Still, LMŠ did not manage to achieve a similar share of the vote as PS in 2011 or SMC in 2014. It received a mere 12.6% of the vote, while the victorious right-wing SDS attracted almost 25%. However, since SMC had not (yet) completely disappeared – it received almost 10% – and SAB just over 5%, the liberal parties managed to form a minority party together with the Social Democrats, which was supported by The Left. Prime Minister Šarec resigned in early 2020, only days before the COVID-19 pandemic began, over the failed healthcare and health insurance reforms that paved the way for the two years of the third Janša government at the time of the pandemic.

In the 2022 elections, when it seemed that no new party would emerge and the Social Democrats could be victorious again on the liberal spectrum, Robert Golob entered the political stage, took over a smaller quasi-green party, and renamed it Gibanje Svoboda, which won 34.5% of the vote and became the biggest coalition party. It should be noted, however, that the three former liberal parties – ZAB/SAB, SMC and LMŠ – did not manage to clear the 4% threshold and did not enter the National Assembly. After the elections, SAB and LMŠ merged with the new Gibanje Svoboda (Fink-Hafner 2024).

This pattern clearly shows that the dynamics and changes in the party-political arena in Slovenia have been rapid and radical: New parties emerge just a few months or weeks before elections, win them or become the largest coalition party, only to quickly lose voter support and disappear. While this trend indicates important distrust in politics, the pattern has continued for over

a decade now, and thus the question arises: What is the cause of this pattern? And why have we seen a dramatic rise in political distrust and dissatisfaction and a significant drop in voter turnout since 2008?

Why the distrust in politics in Slovenia since 2008?

To explain the above-mentioned tendencies with regard to (dis)trust in political institutions, one must focus on the social and economic processes in Slovenia and the growing tensions between social expectations and the policies implemented. Indeed, the social and economic dimensions that were the vital elements of Slovenia's transition to a capitalist economy have been transformed since 2008.

Political and institutional changes influencing the welfare state

In our empirical analysis, we first discuss three institutional changes that clearly signal the crumbling class compromise and the changes in the political goals of the key political actors. The changing balance of power, the shrinking differences between the parties and the special role played by the EU since 2008 have substantially influenced the political decisions and policy options in Slovenia.

The qualitative change to the corporatist institutional framework

Changes in the balance of power within society have contributed significantly to the political developments in Slovenia. Union density has declined since the mid-1990s and today is only around 20%, with considerable differences between public and private sector unions (union density is much lower in the private sector and much higher in the public sector). Critically, unions have become more focused on the institutional arrangements and access to elite political networks, neglecting broader working-class coalitions while concentrating on the narrow interests of their membership. Despite initially blocking the austerity measures during the government of Borut Pahor, after 2011 they accepted the cuts, austerity, privatisation and liberalisation. The social partnership position of the trade unions became ever more counterproductive for their members during the crisis as they negotiated concessions and prioritised the interests of capital, the EU and the financial markets. The social pacts of the 1990s were replaced by fewer concessions for the working class (Stanojević & Krašovec 2011, 2022; Stanojević 2014, 2015).

The institutional framework has remained intact – the Economic and Social Council was not dissolved, and cooperation between trade unions and employers' representatives remains in place. However, the most important political decisions in the period 2008–2011 were generally made outside this framework,

while the 2012 pension reform and 2013 labour market reform were adopted following social dialogue. Since then, all important labour market, employment and social policy measures have been implemented within the neo-corporatist framework after a lengthy consultation phase (Bembič 2018).

While the trade unions maintained their formal social partnership role, their actions shifted to narrow economism. Moreover, the strength and role of the trade unions was altered, while their subsequent involvement of public sector trade unions in the austerity measures since 2012 have eroded the legitimacy of the trade unions, in turn destabilising the entire neo-corporatist system. The declining trade union density and the external pressures during the crisis years (2008–2013) have importantly reduced the unions' capacity to influence the agenda setting of the policymaking processes. The trade unions were those fostering the implementation of strong social-democratic values, as may be seen in the different surveys. The social-democratic policies, based on the coincidence of the interests of the dominant social bloc and the strength of the unions, were in step fostering the relatively high trust, or at least lower levels of distrust in political institutions. Once the strength of the unions started to decline following the changes in the sphere of production, their capacity to actively influence the policymaking decreased which, during the 2008 crisis and the external pressures, led to the curtailment of the welfare state.

Crucially, while since 2017 the Economic Social Council has again started to adopt more social policies, this has not been the result of strong trade unions, but mainly the important position held by the party of The Left (the minimum wage law was passed without interference from the ESC), which initially supported the minority government until 2018–2020 and has been part of the new liberal government since 2022 (Hočevár 2024a, 2024b).

Role of the European Union

The country joining the EU was one of the most important international political goals of successive governments, and its realisation also added to trust and legitimacy. Yet, it also led to a shift away from the neo-corporatist class compromise towards greater liberalisation and deregulation even before the 2008 crisis, although that crisis brought about important new changes. The EU has served as an “engine” of liberalisation’ (Streeck 1998: 430) since its inception, always calling for more market-friendly policies and reduced union strength. Although the EU advocated for institutional tripartite bodies, the primacy of economic and fiscal policy and austerity demands during and after the 2008 crisis never truly allowed organised labour to achieve the policy outcomes typical of the post–Second World War period (Baccaro & Howell 2017).

In the 2008 crisis and thereafter, the EU demanded strict austerity measures and cuts in social benefits so as to stabilise the euro and make countries comply

with the Maastricht criteria (Hočevár 2024a, 2024b). Since 2017, the EU has taken a pro-social stance by adopting numerous directives. In addition, the EU was the key player in securing employment during the pandemic by setting up the SURE mechanism and helping the member states survive the economic shock (Huguenot-Noël & Corti 2024). Nevertheless, the fundamental element of the EU remains the liberalisation and deregulation of markets, while the infamous flexicurity concept, which in reality promoted less employment security in order to strengthen economic competition, still lies at the core of the EU's employment policy (DIGI EMPL 2025).

EU rules and policies provided an external framework for the particular policy choices in Slovenia, although the main political actors also tended to have pro-market policies or had no political programme of their own and adopted technocratic, never-neutral, but mostly pro-market reforms. On the other hand, the so-called liberal and left-wing parties held a decisive role in these processes.

Shrinking differences between parties

The changing balance of power between the trade unions and capital and the EU's political framework have played an important role in the Slovenian political context and in the diminishing differences in social and economic issues and goals among the political parties. At least since 2004, and certainly 2008, the biggest and strongest political parties have had very similar economic and social policies and political goals (Hočevár 2025).

It should not be overlooked that the crucial changes in the social, labour market and employment policies – which initially led to an increase in precarity, unemployment and flexibility – were later eased due to the structural needs of the labour market (not enough workers) and curtailment of the welfare state. However, some important measures have still been in place, like the reduced period of eligibility for unemployment benefits, stricter eligibility conditions for unemployment benefits, conditionality of social assistance for ALMP – all were actually adopted and implemented by different liberal governments (Hočevár 2024a).

Even though it is true that the largest austerity package was adopted by the right-wing government in 2012, it was not until 2018 that these effects were eased, notwithstanding that liberal governments had an opportunity to change the direction of the policy interventions. These decisive fiscal austerity measures were all implemented by governments led by liberal parties or the Social Democrats, and were also supported by the two biggest right-wing parties (SDS, NSi). Accordingly, the content of the political ideas, programmes and proposals did not vary so much, while the tone and extent to which they supported pro-capital policies did (Hočevár 2021; Hočevár 2024a).

One area revealing a big difference between the liberal parties and the right-wing parties is the minimum wage. The right-wing parties strongly resisted the new definition and such large increases, whereas the liberal parties were pressured to accept the increase as they needed support from The Left (Hočevar 2025).

Social and economic outcomes amid the crumbling class compromise since 2008

The three political and institutional changes explained above have triggered very important changes in Slovenia since 2008. The nature of the welfare state began to change rapidly after 2008, while some noteworthy provisions adopted during the crisis remain in force. Critically, the specific policy measures imposed since 2008 have led to a substantial increase in social and economic inequalities, while the number of people living below the poverty line has gone up since 2008.

From the welfare state to the workfare state after 2008

The earliest response to the 2008 crisis was neo-Keynesian – the Social Democrat-led government first introduced a short-time working scheme and lifted the minimum wage, which was seen as a compromise with the trade unions, which were expected to accept other austerity measures and workfare reforms. Yet, in 2010 the government wished to introduce wage cuts in the public sector, but the trade unions were opposed to those measures. This led to the unilateral termination of public sector collective agreements (which, however, was quickly overturned) and the introduction of wage freezes, promotions and lower holiday pay in the public sector (Bembič 2017, 2018).

Simultaneously, the government intended to adopt and implement structural reforms. First, the government introduced important changes to the social security system aimed at introducing activation principles, limiting transfers and tightening eligibility criteria. Most importantly, social benefits were transformed to some kind of credit system, with the state becoming entitled to the beneficiaries' assets after their death: 'According to the new law, people were not allowed to sell, donate or encumber their real estate. As a result of such a policy, fewer and fewer people applied for a welfare allowance and there was a sharp drop in the amount of such funds paid out' (Hočevar 2024a: 178). Second, the left-wing government wanted to introduce a labour market reform with the goal of greater employment flexibility. It sought to implement the 'small work' law following the German example. The third reform was reform of the pension system, which aimed to extend working life. These second and third reforms were blocked by the trade unions, yet the government managed to push through the new social security system.

After the Budget Balancing Act in 2012, Janez Janša's government introduced a strict austerity programme. The new law introduced a series of wage cuts, pension cuts, cuts to parent benefits and other social benefits, as well as a tightening of eligibility requirements for social transfers. In 2013, when the new government led by Alenka Bratušek assumed office it decided on a new linear cut in public sector wages. Further, the changes in labour market regulation and collective bargaining led to greater decentralisation and the liberalisation of employment (Hočevár 2024a, 2024b).

In this period (2008 to 2013), there was a substantial rise in atypical employment (precarious employment) (Kanjuro-Mrčela & Ignjatović 2015) and unemployment as such (notably among young people). The reforms 'in the labour market went in the direction of greater flexibility and the loss of some established rights (less protection for workers with open-ended contracts)' (Filipovič Hrast & Kopač Mrak 2016: 714), although the 2013 reform also introduced greater protection for atypical forms of employment. The country repeatedly fell into recession due to the austerity measures, problems with the export sector (following the crisis in other countries) and low investment and bank lending (Bembič 2018; Hočevár 2025).

Still, since 2016 and especially 2018, certain important changes have been made in the area of the welfare state. First, a new definition of the minimum wage was introduced. In 2019, a new minimum wage regulation was passed, but without it having been discussed in the Economic and Social Affairs Council. The minority government, which was supported by The Left, introduced these changes. During the pandemic, the government spent considerable sums of money on promoting employment (two different employment promotion programmes were introduced). If we focus on the government's various expenditures in the different areas of social care, we can obtain a picture of the financial provisions and expenditures of the state.

If we observe general government expenditure, it becomes clear that the share of GDP accounted for by the various types of expenditure has not increased over the years, but declined. In 2000, government social protection expenditure was 17.8%, while in 2022 it was 17.6% and has never risen above 19.6%. Healthcare spending was consistently below 7% until the pandemic, before increasing for obvious reasons. General government spending on education as a proportion of GDP has fallen to below 6%, while spending on housing has remained at around 0.5%.

However, the data do not reveal all there is about the functioning and performance of the welfare state. Several subsystems have changed dramatically in the last three decades, and notably since the 2008 crisis, where the lack of regulation and proactive government action have caused very serious societal problems. Two areas stand out here: the health system, its privatisation, and the problems with accessibility to health services, medical examinations and

Table 2: General government expenditure by function (as % of GDP) – Slovenia

	Social protection		Healthcare		Education		Housing	
	EUR million	% of GDP	EUR million	% of GDP	EUR million	% of GDP	EUR million	% of GDP
2000	3363.4	17.8	1249.2	6.6	1155.8	6.1	120.7	0.6
2001	3738.0	17.7	1415.5	6.7	1354.1	6.4	135.9	0.6
2002	4170.6	17.7	1582.3	6.7	1512.3	6.4	132.6	0.6
2003	4514.4	17.6	1701.7	6.6	1617.5	6.3	137.5	0.5
2004	4831.5	17.5	1790.3	6.5	1760.1	6.4	150.4	0.5
2005	5149.9	17.7	1872.9	6.4	1895.2	6.5	158.3	0.5
2006	5397.0	17.1	1989.8	6.3	1997.9	6.3	192.6	0.6
2007	5690.0	16.2	2077.5	5.9	2059.9	5.9	206.6	0.6
2008	6251.2	16.5	2340.6	6.2	2290.3	6.0	300.6	0.8
2009	6667.9	18.4	2513.7	6.9	2402.4	6.6	287.9	0.8
2010	6979.1	19.2	2493.3	6.9	2351.7	6.5	251.0	0.7
2011	7247.6	19.6	2587.6	7.0	2368.0	6.4	234.8	0.6
2012	7059.3	19.5	2511.2	6.9	2314.4	6.4	272.1	0.8
2013	7115.5	19.5	2472.8	6.8	2342.9	6.4	267.3	0.7
2014	7055.7	18.7	2440.5	6.5	2246.1	6.0	330.8	0.9
2015	7103.4	18.3	2591.8	6.7	2168.7	5.6	222.2	0.6
2016	7132.3	17.6	2709.5	6.7	2240.2	5.5	161.6	0.4
2017	7326.7	17.0	2821.6	6.6	2338.0	5.4	208.0	0.5
2018	7610.3	16.6	2994.5	6.5	2467.1	5.4	205.8	0.4
2019	7976.3	16.4	3230.9	6.7	2607.1	5.4	201.2	0.4
2020	8763.8	18.6	3763.5	8.0	2641.6	5.6	273.2	0.6
2021	9228.1	17.7	4303.8	8.2	3036.9	5.8	279.7	0.5
2022	10032.1	17.6	4344.4	7.6	3217.8	5.6	272.4	0.5

Source: Eurostat (2025)

interventions; and the provision of public housing, given the complete takeover of the housing market by private investors and the large rise in the price of housing and rent, which is a major problem for young people.

Rising inequalities during and after the 2008 crisis

A look at the Gini coefficient of income inequality shows Slovenia is one of the most egalitarian countries in the world. The coefficient was stable at around 0.23. During the crisis and immediately thereafter, it rose to 0.25, but since 2015 it has fallen back to the pre-crisis level.

Figure 6: Gini coefficient of income inequality in Slovenia

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income after social transfers	0.238	0.237	0.232	0.234	0.227	0.238	0.238	0.237	0.244

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
0.25	0.245	0.244	0.237	0.234	0.239	0.235	0.23	0.213	0.234

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2025a)

Figure 7: Poverty in Slovenia

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
At-risk-of-poverty rate (% of persons)	12.2	11.6	11.5	12.3	11.3	12.7
Number of persons at-risk-of-poverty	238,000	233,000	225,000	241,000	223,000	254,000

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
13.6	13.5	14.5	14.5	14.3	13.9	13.3	13.3
273,000	271,000	291,000	290,000	287,000	280,000	268,000	268,000

2020	2021	2022	2023
12.4	11.7	12.1	12.7
254,000	243,000	251,000	264,000

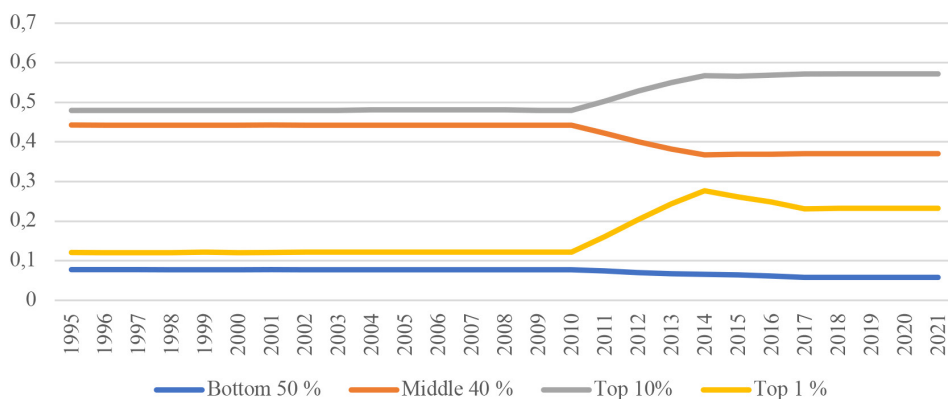
Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2025b)

Still, a longer view reveals a slightly different picture. Between 1980 and 2017, the average real income (after taxes) in Slovenia increased by 12%. This paints quite a bleak picture of just 0.3% per year. Those in the top 1% of the population, i.e. the 1% with the highest income, however, received 128% more in 2017 than in 1980 whereas the bottom 40% of the population received 7% less in 2017 than in 1980. Looking at the period from 2007 to 2017, the picture again differs from the general picture of low income inequality. In this 10-year period, the top 1% received 35% more than in 2007, while the bottom 40% received around 6% less. This shows the winners of the 2008 crisis were those already with the highest incomes (Klanjšek 2020).

The number of people at risk of poverty has risen considerably. In 2005, 238,000 people were at risk of poverty, while in 2023 there were 264,000 such people, with the percentage of people at risk of poverty being stable having increased during the crisis but returning to pre-crisis levels today.

The top 1% of society saw a significant rise in their wealth share during and after the 2008 crisis, and the top 10% of society also saw their wealth share increase. In comparison, the bottom 50% saw a decline in their wealth share and the middle 40% of society a sharp decline in their wealth share, clearly indicating the decline of the middle class and the end of the specific class compromise established in the 1990s.

Figure 8: Wealth inequality in Slovenia



Source: World Inequality Database (2025)

Figure 9: Gini coefficient of wealth inequality in Slovenia



Source: World Inequality Database (2025)

It is thus no surprise that the Gini coefficient of wealth inequality is much higher than that of income inequality. This is the case in all countries around the world. Nonetheless, the trend with wealth inequality is clear – i.e. wealth inequality has increased significantly. The Gini coefficient for wealth inequality rose from 0.66 to 0.74 between 2009 and 2017 and has remained stable ever since.

These processes are in stark contrast to the strong egalitarian values present in Slovenian society. Observing the survey data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Research Programme, the majority of respondents have consistently expressed the feeling that inequalities are too high, that taxes are too low for those on the highest incomes and that they expect the government to take action and reduce income inequality in the population (Toš 2018, 2021).

Political distrust and the problem of political legitimacy in Slovenia

Several authors have already pointed to important changes that have appeared since the 2008 crisis, while trust and satisfaction with the functioning of key political institutions have fallen significantly in public opinion surveys. Arguments such as problems with responsiveness, corruption, crisis, the EU, political representation and populism have all been discussed in the context of the rise of political distrust in Slovenia (Krašovec & Johannsen 2016, 2017; Haček & Brezovšek 2013; Fink-Hafner & Novak 2021). Our analysis sheds light on new elements that explain the rise of distrust in political institutions.

We identify three factors (declining strength of the trade unions, role of the EU and the shrinking inter-party differences) that have contributed to the mentioned political outcomes and changes (changes to the welfare state and the increase in economic inequalities). These processes have been in stark contrast to the class compromise from the 1990s and created the specific framework in which political mistrust and discontent are expressed, leading to the broader problem of political legitimacy.

Beneath these changes in Slovenia have been policies aimed at neoliberalisation of the economy and society (Podvršič 2023; Hočevar 2024a). As we have

demonstrated, the core Slovenian political actors – not out of will – but because of the specific structure of the Slovenian economy and the power resources possessed by organised labour (Crowley & Stanojević 2011; Stanojević & Krašovec 2011) were actually trying to recreate a developmental trend which had come to its end in Western Europe by the 1990s. Yet, since 2004 and especially 2008, as a result of the EU's policy framework, the unions declining strength and the shrinking differences between political parties, which accepted the neoliberal credo in an ever changing political landscape, the prevalence of market logic, non-interference in the regulation of the markets and the fear or self-interest of politicians not to introduce higher taxes for the wealthiest so as to secure more funds necessary for the welfare state's sustainability and to reduce inequalities have led to rising distrust.

In this respect, the crisis of 2008 appears to be a critical breaking point, even though important changes had already begun to appear before (Podvršič 2023). However, it is not the crisis itself that has led to the greater distrust, but the policy choices made within the particular international and national political framework and the political and social power relations that have produced such policy outcomes, which have been detrimental to trust in political institutions. This is a consequence of the 2008 crisis, which has been used in Slovenia to distance the distributional conflict away from popular politics.³

What we can also observe is that even though the public opinion survey figures show a decline in political distrust and dissatisfaction, these numbers are very volatile and vary depending on the respective governing coalition. Other important aspects of political distrust and problems of legitimacy reveal more robust trends – especially the element of the high volatility of liberal political parties. The current liberal government also enjoys a low support among the population, while new (possibly strong and important parties) are already emerging and the biggest coalition party has lost over half of its votes since the last election (CRJMMK 2023; Božič 2025).

In any case, this is not surprising given that the rise of the new liberal parties has also been a consequence of the importance of the political figure and strength of Janez Janša, who has been a constant in the Slovenian political arena since the late 1980s. Janša has sparked considerable controversy with his right-wing populist rhetoric that also served as one of the main means of mobilising voters against him. Due to dissatisfaction with the freshly formed and ruling liberal parties, which pursued policies that added to inequalities and reshaped the welfare state – which also led to the distrust in politics as such and problems with political legitimacy – new political actors sensed an opportunity to take their place without investing in a party structure or coherent political programmes, but mainly playing the card that voting for them would prevent

3 For the general argument, see Streeck 2011, 2014.

Janez Janša's victory. This was most evident in the 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2022 elections, which has caused the hollowing out of the political and ideological orientation of the liberal political parties that were pursuing very similar economic and social policies to Janša, while clearly differing from the right-wing SDS in its minority and identity politics (Hughton, Krašovec & Cutts 2024; Fink-Hafner 2024; Novak & Lajh 2023; Hočevár 2025).

The declining political trust in Slovenia has also paved the path for the rise of populist parties that exploit the dissatisfaction and disappointment with the existing political institutions, especially their social and economic outcomes. This may be seen in the persistently strong voting base of Janez Janša, who has combined strong anti-minority politics, nationalist and traditionalist welfare policies with a view to regaining additional voter support (Benczes 2022, 2024; Šiljak 2024).

While the rise in inequalities and changes to the welfare state have been taken up by political parties or state authorities, the reforms they have introduced are quite limited or do not significantly alter the situation in terms of inequalities. The most recent examples of such reforms, which did not have any great impact on inequalities, were adopted by the current government. The original proposal (which is under public discussion) to implement a new property tax would not tax the richest more – those living in multi-million-dollar homes – on the condition that the owners have also registered their residence there. In contrast, those who own two or more smaller and low-value homes would pay additional tax on those homes where they are not registered as living. The proposal would in fact be used to increase the incomes of the richest through tax cuts for those on the highest incomes (this proposal would give even more to the richest than the tax reform from the third Janša government, which was much more openly neoliberal) (Tarča 2025). A similar situation occurred with the case of the mandatory health insurance contribution introduced in 2024: Supplementary health insurance was transformed to become a mandatory health insurance contribution, but those on the highest incomes actually pay the least because it is deducted from personal income tax (Kordež 2025).

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the structural context and policy outcomes that have caused the rise of political distrust in Slovenia and the multidimensional nature of this problem. The presented analysis shows the importance of the changing economic and welfare context for understanding the problem of political (dis)trust in Slovenia. One of the main pillars of political stability and the democratic transition was the specific class compromise and the construction of a strong welfare state and egalitarian society. These underlying pillars have been dismantled since the country joined the EU and, notably, since the crisis

of 2008 due to the changes made to the political and institutional settings as well as the altered class power relations.

Slovenia is certainly not a unique case given that declining trust in politics has been a common European trend, which has only been exasperated with the poly-crisis structural setting and changes in power relations and political goals. Still, certain unique trends can be observed in Slovenia, especially the trend of the new (victorious) liberal parties having been established before every parliamentary election. Moreover, the changes in the political structures and policy outcomes were serious – the strong welfare state and corporatist institutional arrangements were adapted to new neoliberal and crisis-induced realities, resulting in less pro-social policies while transforming the welfare state more into workfare arrangements. Ever since the crisis, economic inequalities in Slovenia have also grown significantly, which contradicts the egalitarian social and economic values held in society. The class compromise began crumbling after at least 2008 (although the first cracks already started appearing around 2004) and has never been restored and a new developmental and social consensus has not been formed. The decoupling of the welfare state and the rising inequalities within a fairly egalitarian society, the hollowing out primarily of the political parties, along with their ideological similarity, have thus triggered broader problems with political trust and political legitimacy.

Although no attempt was made in the article to find any statistical (causal or correlational) explanation for the declining political trust, this might be a future step in this area as part of broader comparative research. Different elements of welfare state spending, the class position of different persons and their political preferences and attitudes to the main political institutions should be included in future (comparative) research so as to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the topic.

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