

## DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND ELITE INTEGRATION IN SLOVENIA 1988-1995

### ABSTRACT

*Integrated elite structure is the key for regime stability because 'consensually integrated' elites are more inclusive of different elite circles and opposing elite factions, thus reducing the possibility of democratic breakdowns. Integration of elites in the national arena, and consequently the consolidation of democracy, depends largely on ability of elite actors to form ties with people in different social and policy circles. Elite integration is thus defined as crosscutting elite circles. In the study of ego-networks of elite actors in Slovenia before and after the transition we found systematic changes in elite structure that confirm the general trend toward elite integration. We found that post-transition networks were larger, more inclusive of weak ties and contacts with dissimilar point of view or sectoral affiliation. This trend of opening-up, and reaching-out of post-transition elite actors is consistent with the increasing elite integration. While these findings indicate the trend toward elite integration in Slovenia, the path to consensual unity of elites is still long and uncertain.*

*Key words: Democratic consolidation, elite structure, elite integration, Eastern Europe*

### I. Introduction: The problem of democratic consolidation

Transition to democracy in Eastern Europe was a part of what Huntington called the 'third wave' of global democratic expansion (1991). The third wave which began in Southern Europe in the mid 1970s spread to South America, East, Southeast and South Asia in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and finally reached the Central-European countries in the late 1980s. Since each of the first two waves of democratization (a long wave from 1818 to 1926, and much shorter wave from 1943 to 1964) ended with a reverse

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wave of democratic breakdowns there were only some 40 democracies in the world by the beginning of the third wave. Based on this past experience, the authors have recently began to ask whether the same reversal might happen also to the third wave. Would new democracies survive and reach a level of political stability? Would democratic regimes step on the path of democratic consolidation or would they deteriorate into a no frills electoral democracies? In his most recent book Diamond (1999) shows that while the overall number of democracies in the world is not declining, many prominent third-wave democracies have deteriorated in terms of more demanding measures of democratic performance, and some others are in serious trouble.

In the light of these trends the central issues for the contemporary political sociology are two: political stability and consolidation of democratic regimes. How can nations that went through a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy achieve political stability and avert a breakdown of democracy? And how can they consolidate their newly democratic regimes? The two questions require a distinction between the regime stability and consolidation. Stability of democratic regimes refers to the occurrence of seizures of government executive office, attempted seizures, or widely expected seizures, by force. The concrete manifestations of instability are revolutions, coups d'état, and uprisings aimed at changing the control of government executive offices. Consolidation of democratic regimes, on the other hand, refers to more demanding forms of democratic performance. It includes so called non-electoral dimensions of democracy such as a rule of law, free information, civil liberties, citizen participation, and a distribution of power which produces a horizontal accountability of elites to one another. According to the Freedom House (1998) survey of political freedom which combines political rights and civil liberties in an index of liberal democracy, most of Central European countries rated rather high compared to other third-wave democracies. Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland all achieved the score 1.5 on a scale from 1 ('free' countries) to 7 ('not free' countries). But this recent high score on the index of liberal democracy does not imply that these countries are immune to the danger of destabilization and deconsolidation of democracy.

In Central-Eastern Europe the issues of survival and stability of new democratic regimes seem to have been superseded by the questions of consolidation of democracy. But this change of focus is only very recent. The debate from the early 1990's has dealt almost exclusively with the question of stability of democracy and the threat of reversal from democracy back to the authoritarian rule. The fear was that the old communist elite would use economic destitution of the masses combined with free elections to claw its way back to power and return to the one party system (Przeworski 1991, Stark 1990, Hankiss 1990, Stanicka 1991). This possibility led scholars to focus on the issue of elite reproduction and circulation. The question of old elite and its capacity to maintain itself in elite positions gave rise to the studies which explored how old and new elites fared in the transition. The Treiman and Szelenyi comparative study (1993) planned to go beyond this question but somehow remained confined to the debate of elite reproduction. After the reformed communist parties did return back to power in many of the Central-European countries, it turned out that the elite reproduction thesis was

exaggerated if not completely wrong. The return of old elites did not destabilize democratic regimes. There were many reasons for that. One was, that they benefited from free elections which not only returned them to power but also vested them with legitimacy they never enjoyed before. On the other hand the Western involvement in the Central and Eastern Europe was much too high for a return to autocracy to be a feasible alternative. As it became obvious that the origin of elites does not affect the stability of democratic regimes, the elite reproduction issue faded from the public debate in most of the countries except in Slovenia.<sup>1</sup>

As stability of democratic regimes ceased to be an issue in the Central-European countries, the debate on elite reproduction lost its currency and moved to a more pressing issue of the 'quality' of democracy, i.e. to the issue of democratic consolidation. There are three broad conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for a democratic regime to become consolidated. First, all significant political actors at both, elite and mass level must reach a consensus regarding the basic tenants of democracy and must recognize the democratic regime as the most right and appropriate for their society, superior to any other alternative. Second, the normative commitment has to be built into the routinized patterns of behavior what Rustow calls 'habituation' (1970). Habituation implies that norms, procedures, and expectations of democracy become so internalized that actors routinely conform to written and unwritten rules of the game even when they conflict and compete. Finally, there is a third component of consolidated democratic regime, namely the establishment of the relations of trust, cooperation, tolerance, and moderation among major political actors, or what Dahl terms 'mutual security' (1971). Thus, major political actors – elites - in new democratic regimes must accommodate their norms, preferences, and behaviors, as well as patterns of interactions in order for the regime to become stable and consolidated.

Different theories proposed different factors that play a decisive role in regime stabilization and consolidation. Modernization theory emphasized sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors such as economic development, level of education, level of equality, societal cleavages, civic culture etc. (Lipset, 1959, 1963; Almond and Verba, 1963) With the acceptance of rational choice theory in political science, the focus shifted from 'factors' to 'actors' (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, 1986; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991). The regime change and the prospects for its stability and consolidation was explained in terms of choices, strategies, and coalitions of political elites and decision makers. The problem with the two explanations is that they the first one is too deterministic and the second one is too indeterminate. While it is essential to focus on actors, regime change, stabilization and consolidation can not be reduced on actors' preferences, capabilities and sheer political wit. A fruitful approach to this problem was developed within the elite paradigm (Higley and Gunther, 1992). Regime stability and consolidation is explained by reference to actors - elites - occupying key positions in a society. But their behavior is constrained not by social structures or pure agency but rather by the type of elite integration (Higley and Burton, 1989). Elite integration is critical characteristic of every regime because it is the interaction among the competing factions of the elite that defines the nature of political competition and thus affects

regime stability and consolidation. What is critical for the regime change is that it is accompanied by changes in the elite integration rather than in elite composition. The regime change from autocracy to democracy can achieve stability only if there emerge such patterns of interaction among the competing elites that bring together all the major political actors. Whenever integration of elite does not occur, the regime is likely to become vulnerable to oscillations between autocracy and democracy so often observed in Latin America. The lack of elite integration can propel radical elements outside of the agreed framework of political competition thus jeopardizing the stability of the democratic regime. If such radical elements involve minority factions, their departure from regular politics ends up in terrorist organizations or guerilla groups. If departure from the agreed political framework involves major political interests, the regime can face a military coup or some other method of political overthrow.

Thus, recent research has shown that democratic transitions and breakdowns can best be understood by studying basic continuities and changes in the internal relations of national elites. Integration and fragmentation of elites, and the structure of elite networks of friendship, professional and influence relations have been argued to contribute to the stability or instability of political regimes. Unless regime changes are preceded or accompanied by elite transformation and accommodation, changes in the regime type should be considered only temporary (Burton and Higley, 1987).

The notion of elite integration requires a focus on concrete patterns of interaction between various segments of national elites. In this paper, we focus on social networks of Slovenian elites to determine the degree and the type of their integration. In a fashion that is inspired by Highly and his colleagues we try to determine the volume and the pattern of interactions among various factions of Slovenian national elite. What is radically different is the context. While such studies have been so far conducted in stable Western democracies, our study involves Slovenia, a relatively young democracy in East Central Europe. Furthermore, while other studies were unable to observe the changes in the patterns of integration during the process of transition, we attempt in this article to do just that, i.e. to uncover the dynamics in the elite networks and changes in the overall patterns of interaction. We do this by looking at the changes in the social networks of Slovenian elites before and after the transition to democracy.

## II. Elite integration

In previous section we provided an argument why elite integration is crucial for regime stability and consolidation. Most scholars of democratic transition and consolidation agree that in order for democratic regime to become stabilized the elites need to reach a certain state of integration which they describe as 'consensual unity'. Differences among them arise mainly with regards to how much weight they ascribe to the elite factor with respect to other factors (political culture and organization of civil society, international pressures and economic situation). They understand elites integration as, first, the agreement among all elite circles about the value of democracy

as well as about the basic rules and codes of political conduct amounting to 'restrained partisanship' (Prewitt and Stone, 1973; Di Palma, 1973), and second, the participation of all elite circles in a more or less comprehensively integrated structure of interaction that provides them with relatively stable and effective access to each other and to the central arena of decision-making (Kadushin, 1979; Higley and Moore, 1981). Thus, elite integration has its cultural and structural component. While little empirical work has been done about the political culture, values and the conduct of elites in new democracies, even less or almost nothing is known about the structure of their interactions, or elite networks, although this is becoming one of the central issue.

In this section we focus on the structural aspect of elite integration, i.e. on elite networks. We discuss, first, the types (or shapes) of the elites overall interactional structures, second, the underlying mechanisms of tie formation and integration, and third, the nature of ties that emerge among the elite actors.

Elite integration in stable democracies has been a widely debated topic. The proponents of 'power elite' theory (Mills, 1956) and the 'ruling class' theory (Domhoff, 1967, 1983) argue that elites in democratic industrial societies are well integrated, in cultural and structural sense. Their image of society consists of disorganized masses ruled and dominated by the highly integrated central circle of elites that conspires against the general population in order to pursue their own interests. In contrast, the pluralist perspective (Dahl, 1961) depicts elite as consisting of multiple groups whose competition that results in a degree of public accountability and the balance of power.

The notion of elite integration has recently moved from the cohesive hegemony and pluralism of competing elite circles towards 'consensual unity' (Higley and Burton, 1989). Integration as consensual unity combines the elements of both, 'power elite' and 'pluralist' perspective, the integration and competition. But the emphasis shifted on the mechanisms of inclusion of all important elite groups in the decision-making process, even when they are not on power, and despite the differences among them. The model of elite integration in the form of consensual unity implies a degree of integration and trust under the conditions of dissimilarity and competition. Elite structure that supports such integration requires a relatively dense and comprehensive structure of interaction among multiple and competing elite circles and an inner elite circle which serves as an integrator by virtue of including central persons from various elite circles.

Elite circles can be readily compared to the 'committee structures' described by Sartori in his decision-making theory of democracy (1987). Sartori argues that the key to the functioning of parliamentary democracy are numerous small face-to-face committees which allow for a broad participation of various elite actors in decision-making arena. The work of permanent committees gives elite actors a perspective of continuity of decision-making process. In committees policy issues are not only being voted on but are in large part also being discussed, argued, drafted, and redrafted. Through such continuous interaction the elite actors learn to use the opportunities to influence the decisions in their early stages, to leverage their support for a particular policy, and to negotiate with their supporters and detractors about issues that are of key importance to them. The integrative force of committees comes from the principle of 'deferred

reciprocal compensation' that is key to their functioning. In committees support for an issue needs to be earned through influence trading. This creates interdependence among different elite actors and gives them a perspective on decision-making as a continuous process where none of the parties permanently prevail over others and where they always return to the negotiating table. It is the repeated interaction around different issues and policy problems which allows the committee members to avoid the majority rule, winner-take-all decision-making, and to view the totality of committee decisions as a positive-sum-game (Sartori, 1987).

Sartori's conception of committees as the vehicle for integration of political elite has been extended by Higley and al. (1991) to a larger interaction structure of national elites. Instead of parliamentary committees, national elite structure is composed of elite circles that form around and across issues and problems. Just as in the case of committees, elite circles rest on repeated semi-formal interactions among elite actors who have common policy interests or problems to solve. The empirical analysis of interaction structures in three Western democracies – USA, Germany, and Australia – shows that while elite circles provide partial integration of elite, the circles themselves are integrated on the national level by a large elite central circle, in which political actors are overrepresented. By virtue of multiple elite circle memberships, or 'elite interlocks' there emerges an inner group of elite actors who constitute the 'national single power establishment' (Kadushin, 1979). The elite structure therefore involves a plurality of different heterogeneous elite circles that are tightly integrated through an "overarching elite central circle which links or meshes most other circles" (Higley and al., 1991, p.38).

While the integrated elite structure has been comprehensively discussed above with the reference to stable Western democracies, we still need to make a systematic contrast to the fragmented elite structure. Typical of elite fragmentation is the lack of overarching unity on the national level. Various elite factions are strongly integrated, so much so, that they form isolated cliques that distrust other elite actors that are not members of their circle. While there is strong unity within a given faction there is little willingness to engage in negotiation and power sharing with others. Integration is usually based on strong similarity and familiarity which arises from the common social origins, religion and ideological preferences, and common institutions of secondary socialization. The social ties are strong, close, and personal, while political ties have a nature of patronage rather than influence ties. Fragmentation of elite is a result of the lack of trustful ties between different elite circles or factions. Political actors who derive their power from patronage relationships with their clients and from the loyal support of their close friends and supporters have deep mistrust about the workings of the political system as a whole and the competing elites in particular. Politics appears as a zero-sum game where one's advantage is others' loss. What is missing is an integrative force that would bring various entrenched factions together into a continuous process of negotiation and powersharing. There is also no national central elite circle that would coordinate elite wide activities. There are just different more or less organized centers of power disconnected from one another that lack a dense communication network among them that would facilitate

negotiation, trust, permanent access of different elite factions to the arena of decision-making and their agreement on the basic rules of political competition.

The notion of elite integration in stable democracies as ‘consensual unity’ arising from both a dense interaction structure of diverse elite circles and their agreement on the value of democracy and basic rules of democratic conduct is now widely accepted. But the application of this notion in empirical studies is problematic because the theory does not provide a criterion whereby one could determine the level and the variation in elite integration. How much interaction between different elite circles is needed for the elites to be considered as ‘consensually unified’ without endangering elites differentiation and competition? How dense do the elite circles need to be? And how does the nature of democracy change if elite integration is the result of the lateral interactions among elite circles rather than their vertical integration through the elite central (or inner) circle? These questions are not problematic if the empirical study involves stable Western democracies for which it has been shown in many studies that their elites are well integrated. But as soon as the attention moves to the countries that recently experienced transition to democracy the above questions become pressing because we usually know little in advance about the elites interaction structures, past and present, in those countries. There are also problems related to the evaluation of the trends or changes in the elite structure before and after the transition since we do not know how permanent and representative these changes are.

The partial solution to this problem is to establish an interpretative tool in the form of contrasting ideal types: in our case, integrated and fragmented elite. Ideal types offer a frame for comparison for the cross-national as well as panel studies. With ideal types it becomes possible to compare different empirical cases (or a single case in different time periods) from the point of view whether they show more similarities with one or another ideal case. We present the ideal types of elite structures in Figure 1. The key for the comparison between the two types of elite structures are three elements: the nature of ties that emerge among the elite actors, the mechanisms of tie formation and integration, and the shape of the overall network structure. We will use these ideal types for the interpretation of the empirical evidence of the Slovenian elite structure before and after the democratic transition which we provide in the next chapter.

**Figure 1**  
**Integrated and fragmented elite structure**

	<b>Integrated</b>	<b>Fragmented</b>
<b>Nature of social ties</b>	From strong, personal ties to weak, professional and influence ties	Strong personal, kinship and patronage ties
<b>Mechanisms of elite integration</b>	Interdependence and Cooperation	Similarity and familiarity
<b>The form of elite networks</b>	Membership in multiple, overlapping networks	Membership in closed, clique-like networks

## **Two mechanisms of integration: similarity and interdependence**

There are two social processes that lead to social integration: similarity and interdependence. Similarity is a powerful basis for group formation. Elite can be seen as a group with a given degree of homogeneity and value consensus that determine the level of integration in a group. A group becomes cohesive when there is a high degree of similarity among its members. Thus a high degree of homogeneity in social origins and institutions of secondary socialization is often seen as fostering a unified elite structure, as is consensus on crucial attitudes and values. Alternatively, interdependence is a powerful vehicle for integration of different groups. Elite structure can be seen as social networks connecting people in various social positions that are different but interdependent among themselves. Integration of elite can be achieved when different groups become aware of their interdependence and when they realize that they can fulfill their interests by coordination and cooperation despite their social heterogeneity and political differences. When different elite groups establish cooperative ties among themselves the elite becomes integrated. The key to structural approach to elite integration is its focus on social ties that emerge between different elite groups.

The two approaches to elite integration have very different empirical foci. The first one usually searches for evidence of social similarity among indirect measures of elite integration: data concerning the social and professional homogeneity of elites. Social class background, attendance at exclusive private schools, membership in prestigious clubs, free circulation between different elite sectors, and multiple position holding is assumed to facilitate informal elite integration. Frequent association, combined with intermarriage and secluded 'elitist' leisure is assumed to foster the formation of strong ties among elite members. These indirect measures of integration basically summarize opportunities for the formation of rather than the existence of strong ties. But given the emphasis on similarity, indirect evidence is taken as sufficient proof of elite integration.

With the focus on interdependence, the indirect measures of elite integration become more difficult to obtain. While social similarities are easily conceptualized and measured, interdependence is a complex phenomenon that does not easily render itself to measurement. It is more convenient to employ direct measurement of elite integration. Direct measurement of elite integration requires the mapping of relationships within and among all major elite groups and thus the reproduction of local and global social networks (Higley and al., 1991; Moore, 1979; Laumann and Knoke, 1987; Pappi, 1984; Kadushin, 1979, 1995; Rus 1999). The focus is on interaction itself which makes the data particularly useful for the study of elite structure. Such direct network data help to distinguish elite integration from the 'structural prerequisites of elite integration' (Hoffman-Lange, 1985).

The two mechanisms of elite integration define different elite structures. Fragmented elite structure is based on elite social networks that are the result of similarity based integration. Where social similarity defines the boundaries of association, cooperation, trust and coalition formation, the social cleavages are directly translated into political antagonisms. Deep social inequalities thus become insurmountable differences among

the elites. And since the basis for the formation of ties is social similarity there is virtually no vehicle for establishing effective communication between different elite factions. Thus, similarity based integration results in a fragmented elite structure. In contrast, interdependence builds bridges across the boundaries of different elite circles. Where political ties are formed on the premise that combination of complementary resources of different elite circles can maximize success the integration assumes the nature of consensual unity. Because it pays to work together, the elite actors accept the rules of the game and participate in decision making.

This cooperation is based on the principle of 'deferred reciprocal compensation' whereby elite members who feel less intensely about one issue that they do not particularly like will go along with a decision because they expect to get their way on another issue that is vital to them. This form of cooperation has been discussed at first in the case of committees as small, face-to-face groups of elite members that persists over time. It is the repeated interaction in different issues and policy problems which allows the committee members to avoid the majority rule, winner-take-all decision making, and to view the totality of committee decisions as a positive-sum-game (Sartori, 1987). This view on cooperation among elite members which is based on repeated interactions and concessions or 'side payments' they make to each other has been extended within the elite literature to the larger interaction structure of national elites. Instead of parliamentary committees such national elite structure is composed of elite circles which form around and across issues and problems. Just as in the case of committees, these elite circles do not rest on homogeneity and affect but rather on repeated semi-formal interactions among elite persons who have common policy interests or problems to solve (Higley and al., 1991).

### **Social Ties**

Social ties between elite actors are the building blocks of any elite structure from fragmented to integrated. With the focus on elite structure per se, the studies could not do more than register the existence of ties. What they had to neglect was the quality and the content of ties. The nature of ties is an important dimension of integration because of the correspondence of ties and network structures.

It is important to focus on a wide range of ties because elite integration depends on the kind of ties and relationships that connect elite actors. What matters is to what extent the relationships among the elite actors are personal or impersonal, strong or weak, embedded or strategic. Furthermore, elite structure depends on the extent to which social ties are embedded in the context of generalized trust vs. particularized trust available only in interaction with select groups. And there is also an issue of the relative importance of formal versus informal systems of relationships in the society as a whole.

Fragmented elite structure is built on a culture of strong personal ties. Its similarity based mechanism of integration brings together those elite actors that have many things in common. Elite groups based on old friends, kinship ties, and life-long associates are typical of a fragmented elite structure. Trust is localized, extended only to the strong

ties. Formal relationships are of little consequence if not underscored by informal friendship ties. The system is personalized, because there is little interaction outside the area of personal ties. Elite fragmentation is reinforced by the culture of strong ties because it makes weak, professional, business and influence ties ephemeral to the workings of the elite. With weak ties rare and viewed with distrust, there are few ties that could bring together different elite groups. While each of the elite groups is cohesive and characterized by strong personalized ties, there are few bridging ties that would help extend integration beyond the single elite group.

In contrast, integrated elite structure does not depend on strong affective ties. While strong ties emerge as a consequence of repeated association, it is the weaker strategic ties that play a much more critical role in the integration of modern elites. Among them are business and professional ties that arise among elite position holders in the context of their regular organizational activities. Even more important are influence ties that are endemic to the elite. They emerge among the incumbents of interdependent positions as elite members forge temporal issue based alliances to influence political decisions. These instrumental, semi-formal, strategic ties are taken very seriously by the structural approach to elite integration: 'This means that in industrial societies interpersonal elite contacts based primarily on the formal requirements of an elite position are more important than informal friendship ties based on social and professional homogeneity. In turn, increasing importance of formal relations renders the existence of a closed elite less likely...' (Hoffman-Lange, 1985, p.48). In addition, informal relations among elite members do not presuppose close friendship relations. Informal relations which are used to influence political decision making are mainly based on instrumental considerations, which may include the use of friendships, but also the use of connections and semi-formal relations based on other factors. Thus, relationships among elite members encompass friendships and other personal ties, but it does not rest primarily on affect. Rather, they are based on repeated interactions among the persons who have common policy interests and agendas. These interactions can involve a certain degree of cooperation and trust, not necessarily as high as those found in personal ties of highly homogenous cohesive circles, but sufficient for effective elite integration. The formation of weak ties is encouraged by the phenomenon of generalized trust (Sabel, 1993; Seligman, 1997). It is a trust in the broader context of elite integration that predisposes elite actors to approach and engage in interaction with elite actors from different elite circles. The culture of weak ties in the integrated elite structure fosters the formation of crisscrossing ties that further help to integrate the diverse elite circles.

The 'consensual unity' type of elite structure thus does not rest on close, personal ties and exclusivistic social cliques but rather on social ties of different strength established among similar as well as dissimilar elite actors. The above mentioned empirical study of elite integration in stable democracies shows the communication networks inclusive of all elite sectors and heterogeneous in the social origins, attitudes, and party affiliations of the members of the central circle (Higley and al. 1991)

## **Elite structure**

Elite structure depends on the ties that bind elite members to one another and on the mechanisms of integration that are at the core of integrative process. The quality of ties plays an important part in defining the type of elite structure. There are two types of elite structure that can be distinguished based on discussion above: cohesion and crosscutting elite circles. Fragmented elite structure is, paradoxically, based on cohesion. Cohesion, however, is local pertaining to elite groups but not to the overall structure of national elite. Since integration is built on similarity and strong, personal ties among elite actors the result are homogeneous elite groups that do not interact much with one another. High density of in-group social ties combined with the closure of elite members gives elites a degree of groupness, i.e. a common identity, integration, and clique-like cohesion. In addition, cohesion is based on face-to-face ties which makes indirect influence ties only a distant possibility. On the national level elite cohesion leads to the national elite structure consisting of either one single, dominant 'power elite' group that is unified under the same culture, interests, and identity. Or, if there are different elite groups, it leads to a fragmented elite structure where different elite groups show little trust to each other and maintain little contacts with other elite groups.

Integrated elite structure is based on crosscutting elite circles. In societies that engender multiple competing elites and where similarity, homogeneity and cohesion are not critical, the elites become open, socially and culturally diverse. Weak, instrumental, professional, and strategic ties among heterogeneous elite members lead to the social structure where multiple elite circles readily crosscut and overlap on the issues of national policy. Elite integration emerges as a continuous coming together and going apart of various elite circles. Weaker professional and influence ties allow that elites can talk, negotiate and realign together with the issues that come up for decision making. Constant shifting of coalitions and alliances keeps actors in elite circles open for cooperation and coordination with others. With crosscutting elite circles, elite actors have ample opportunity for interaction with a broad range of elite members from various circles which results in elite integration.

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The systematic comparison of elements of the two ideal types of elite structure is a useful tool in the study of transition democracies. By looking at ties, mechanisms and shape of elite structure, it is possible to determine whether a given society is veering toward elite fragmentation or elite integration with all the consequences for stability of democracy. This question is particularly important in the case of recent transition to democracy in Central East Europe. To last, this transition needs to be followed by a change in elite integration. Regime changes that failed to trigger the change in elite integration, were only temporal (Higley and Burton, 1989).

We know that elite structures are very stable and generally outlast particular regimes. We do not know what was the elite structure under the communist rule but we can safely assume that it was far from consensually unified. If it was unified, it was 'ideocratic unity' (Higley, Pakulski, and Wesolowski, 1998) that had nothing to do with a broadly based consensus. For democratic regime to gain stability there must be a clear change in the integration of new elite compared with the elite in the regime before transition. While the changes can not be drastic the trends toward elite integration or fragmentation should already be evident. Our study aims to look for evidence of changes in elite integration between 1989 and 1994. It takes the ideal typical elite structures as a framework of comparison to determine the direction of change found by the empirical analysis of elements of elite structure.

### **III. Methods and data**

In this article we approach elite integration from a different perspective than has been done so far. While we share with other studies the focus on social networks our emphasis is given on social ties among elite actors. In our study we concentrate mostly on the quality and nature of ties among the elite actors.

There were different approaches to the study of elite structure (for a brief review see Higley and al. 1991). One approach was to study the structure of business elite by means of the analysis of overlapping corporate directorship (Mizruchi 1982; Burt 1983; Mintz and Schwartz 1985; Davis 1991; Mizruchi and Galaskiewicz 1993). This research has persuasively showed a relatively high degree of integration of the business elite. It also demonstrated the particular instances of elite coordination that was due to the existence of interlocking directorates. Its major shortcoming is the neglect of the quality and content of ties that such directorships represent.

A second approach was to study issue-based organizational networks in, for example, health policy domain (Laumann and Knoke, 1987; Fernandez and Gould 1994). This approach recreated the relevant network of interested organizations that emerged over a given issue. It is one of the most suitable ways for the study of influence circles discussed above. The major limitation is that it focuses on a single issue and thus uncovers only a small segment of elite structure.

A third approach is a community organization study where researchers identify all organizations in a given community and map their ties on a specific economic exchange (Galaskiewicz 1985) The advantage of this approach is that one gets a total network structure of key organizations and a clear information on the content of their exchange. However, the focus is on organizational not individual actors. Furthermore, such elite structure is inevitably local, limited to one community rather than national.

A fourth approach was to directly measure a communication structure of national elites. By looking at concrete interactions between elite actors on a number of issues, the researchers obtained a global map of 'generalized relations between elites' (Higley and al., 1991). The advantage of this approach is that it focused on the occupants of all

key decisionmaking positions and thus managed to accurately reproduce the national elite structure. While it managed to control for the content of ties by focusing on communication network it could not account for the quality of ties.

In our study we focused specifically on social ties. We measured ego networks of Slovenian elite in order to obtain detailed information on the ties of the members of the new and old elite. This approach has a serious shortcoming in that it does not measure elite structure at all. However, with its focus on the quality and content of ties, this approach brings a fresh perspective on elite integration. Elite structure is not measured directly but, as argued in the previous section, since the quality of ties to a large extent determines the network structure, this 'indirect' measurement of elite structure is an exciting alternative. It is particularly pertinent for the study of the changes in elite structure. Because elite structures are very stable, the changes are usually small and fine grained. This calls for a measurement instrument that can register very small changes. As we argued above the changes in elite structure should be first seen in the changing quality of ties. We stress that the focus on social ties is an appropriate measurement instrument for the detection of fine grained changes in elite structures.

The data are taken from the survey of national elites in Slovenia in 1995 (Kramberger and Rus, 1995). The survey was comparable to the cross-national comparative study of elite recruitment in post-communist Eastern Europe, conducted in Russia and five Eastern European countries (Treiman and Szelenyi, 1993) The survey involved interviews with several hundred occupants of key decision making positions in major public and private sectors. The interviews gathered data on social backgrounds, political participation, and social and cultural capital of elites. There were 1041 respondents included in our survey with 899 being members of current elites in 1995 and 833 members of the elite in 1988. The total number of respondents was the result of the overlap between the new and old elite. The respondents represent the population of Slovenian national elites. The questionnaire was constructed to elicit responses about current and past experiences. Retrospective part of the questionnaire asked about the 1988.

Sample design began with the identification of key organizations in national arena. The top position holders in each institutional sector were included into the sample: politics, civil service, business, media, voluntary associations, judiciary, academia and culture. The sectors and organizations are described more fully in Appendix A.

Our network data consist of contacts between respondents and the persons they named in answer to six sociometric questions for the 1995 and five for the 1988. The questions are presented in the table below:

**Figure 2**  
**Name generators used in the survey**

Name generators
<b>1988</b>
1. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the politicians at the national level in 1988? Name the one who was your most important contact.
2. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the private proprietors 1988? Name the one who was your most important contact.
3. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the general managers of state owned enterprises in 1988? Name the one who was your most important contact.
4. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the people from media in 1988? Name the one who was your most important contact.
5. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the dissidents in 1988? Name the one who was your most important contact.
6. Was there anybody else whom you considered a significant contact?
<b>1995</b>
7. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the politicians at the national level in 1995? Name the one who was your most important contact.
8. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the private proprietors 1995? Name the one who was your most important contact.
9. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the general managers of state owned enterprises in 1995? Name the one who was your most important contact.
10. Did you have a friend, acquaintance, or relative among the people from media in 1995? Name the one who was your most important contact.
11. Was there anybody else whom you considered a significant contact?

Since the number of citations in each of the name generator was limited to one (i.e. 'Name the one who was your most important contact'), the maximum network size was five for 1995, and six for 1988.

We also asked a number of name interpreter questions such as the sector of activity of each alter, how influential was the alter in public life, and how supportive he or she was for ego in public and private matters. We also measured the strength of ties, and content of ties (relative, business, friend), similarity in political opinions between ego and alters, and socialization in free time.

## **IV. Patterns of elite integration in Slovenia before and after the transition**

Patterns of elite integration in Slovenia before and after the transition In previous sections we argued that the changes in elite structure are reflected in the quality and structure of ties that are formed by elite actors. Any change in elite integration would affect the closeness of ties and emotional intensity of relationships between elite actors,

the level of trust they have in the people that are not their closest friends or family, and the diversity of actors that they cooperate with. It would also affect the what kind of ties elite actors would have, the arenas in which they would meet and form the ties and the degree of instrumental specialization of their contacts. Transition to democracy created a systemic change in the direction of a more open society, larger differentiation of social sectors, and increased autonomy of social actors. It created social and political differentiation and the freedom to express the differences. The challenge of elite integration is to cultivate the newly defined differences and bring them together in the system of fair competition and broad decision making. Elite response can emphasize the differences resulting in elite fragmentation which destabilizes democracy. Alternatively, elites can seek common grounds and pursue their interests through intense negotiation which leads to elite integration and democratic consolidation. It is the choice of elites how to respond to the opportunities and challenges of transition. The choices of elites are reflected in personal networks of elite actors. Prior research found that systemic changes in East Germany were indeed paralleled by such deep changes in personal networks where the change was from cliques based on a handful of strong trustful ties to larger and sparser networks that opened up to weaker ties (Volker, 1995).

The question that we take up in this section is: In the wake of democratic transition in Slovenia, how did the nature of ties change in the networks of elite actors and how did those changes affect the overall integration of elites? The nature and structure of ties that connect individuals in ego-centric elite networks have important consequences for the configuration of the overall elite structure. If the elite actors maintain small dense networks based on strong ties, only occasionally including a highly specialist contact related to their specific task, the overall elite structure will tend toward fragmentation. If the actors are members of larger and diversified networks laced with both, strong and weak ties, that are not strictly linked to the execution of their functions, the overall elite integration will be achieved by plurality of elite circles being tied by bridging ties. Thus by examining the quality of ties we are not only able to describe how systemic changes modified social networks, but also how those changes contributed to the overall integration of the national elites.

First we look at the network size. Table 1 indicates that the average network size increased from 4.58 contacts in 1988 to 4.93 contacts in 1995. What is important is that this increase in the network size was experienced by elite actors in all sectors: culture, economy, and politics. Larger networks indicate the increase in the extent of interaction of elite actors which prerequisite for elite integration. By itself the more extensive networking of elites does not allow conclusions. But the fact that all elites are extending their networks of core contacts is a sign that interaction structure is getting wider if not denser, a key condition for elite integration.

**Table 1**  
**Network size by sector of elite actors**

Sector	1988	1995
All sectors	4.58	4.93
Culture	4.80	5.48
Economy	3.91	4.22
Politics	5.12	5.33

The strength of ties is one of the most important measures of the quality of social ties. There is a debate in sociology regarding the significance of the strength of ties. The ‘strength of strong ties’ argument suggests that strong ties are more important than weak ties for mobilization of resources such as help, cooperation and social support (Krackhardt, 1992; Rus, 1999). The ‘strength of weak ties’ argument maintains that weak ties have an advantage over the strong ties because they can extend farther in the social system and thus help to integrate larger social groups (Granovetter, 1973). The strength of ties in Table 2 was measured on the closeness scale from 5 ‘very close’ to 0 ‘did not know the person’, for all alters named in the networks of 1995 and 1988. The average strength of ties decreased from 3.50 in 1988 to 3.40 in 1995. The strength of ties decreased for both stayers and newcomers in the elite. The only group that experienced the increase in the strength of ties were those who left the elite positions after 1988.

**Table 2**  
**Change in the strength of ties in elites networks from 1988 to 1995**

	Alters in years 1988 and 1995					
	Dropped		Preserved		New	
	1988	1995	1988	1995	1988	1995
Average strength of ties	3.40	3.08	3.60	3.51	3.19	3.38
By mobility of EGO:						
Leavers	3.44	3.00	3.68	3.51	3.52	3.54
Stayers	3.44	3.13	3.58	3.53	3.22	3.44
Newcomers	3.23	2.95	3.49	3.41	2.91	3.18

*Note: The strength of ties was measured on a scale from 0 ‘do not know’ to 5 ‘especially close’.*

The decrease in the overall strength of ties is either a result of the weakening of existing ties or inclusion of new weak ties. We need to determine which are the ties that became weaker. The data in the lower part of the table 2 show that the ties with the contacts that were newly included in the networks were weaker than the preserved ties. However, the ties in the preserved part of networks became weaker too. This is true for both, newcomers and stayers. The only exception were the leavers whose new ties were recruited from the circle of relatively strong ties. The data from the table 2 offer three conclusions. First, the new and old elites preserved their strong ties from 1988. The major changes in the networks occurred among the weak ties. Second, however, all elites experienced the decline in the strength of their strong ties, indicating that even the core of their networks is gradually transforming. Third, while all elite members were adding new contacts from among weak ties, this is even more so for the newcomers. Their new contacts were tied to them through weaker ties than was the case for the old elite.

The story that emerges from this data is the one of general weakening of network ties: preserved ties became weaker and the new ties were weak. Those members who based their networks on very strong ties in 1988 and were recruiting new contacts from among strong ties lost their elite position after 1988. These results should be interpreted in conjunction with the findings on network size. The size of the networks increased from 4.58 in 1988 to 4.93 in 1995. The increase was experienced by both stayers and newcomers. Thus, the networks of 1988 were smaller with stronger ties while the networks of 1995 were larger but based on weaker ties. This means that in 1995, the elites were reaching farther in the social structure and, based on the assumption of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), were connecting diverse parts of the social structure.

The key question is whether the weaker and more expansive networking of the elites in 1995 actually meant the qualitative shift toward more integration. Or, was it merely more of the same, i.e. just a more extensive way of doing business. Bigger networks and weaker ties could well be the result of time budget constraint (Burt, 1992). The more contacts one has the less time one can spend with them. If this is true, we are observing 'more of the same' type of behavior. However, there might be a qualitatively different way of networking. In this case, the elites would be consciously seeking distant contacts in order to reach farther in the social system. They would try to reach beyond the groups of contacts that share similar views and interests and beyond those they need to work with due to their functional interdependencies. If the reaching out argument is true, the elites would end up with bigger and weaker nets because of their conscious efforts to reach diverse segments of the social structure.

To test this hypothesis we need to look at the diversity of alters in ego's network. If the networks just grew in size but did not change in their quality, the network diversity should stay the same over time because ego would be interacting with more people that are essentially the same according to their characteristics. However, if the networks are not only larger but also more diverse, this would support the reaching out hypothesis.

Similarity of the characteristics between ego and alter is called homophily. Homophily can serve as an indicator of how far elites are reaching out. High homophily means that there is a closure of ego in the circle of contacts that are similar to him while low

homophily indicates a broader reach. In the table 3 we look at the ideological homophily of networks, with an assumption that elite members who belong to the same elite circles share their ideological view to a much larger degree than those who belong to different elite circles. In a survey we asked respondents to what degree do they share ideological views with their contacts. We measured it on the scale from 0 'not at all' to 3 'completely'. The results show that the average level of ideological agreement with alters was decreasing from 2.12 in 1988 to 2.06 in 1995. The decrease in ideological homophily was experienced by both stayers and newcomers. It stayed more or less the same for those who left elite positions after 1988 (leavers). These results tell us that larger and weaker networks in 1995 indeed included more diverse alters and thus reach farther in the elite structure than smaller and stronger networks in 1988.

**Table 3**  
**Ideological homophily**

	Ideological homophily
Networks of 1988	2.12
Leavers	2.15
Stayers	2.11
Newcomers	2.11
Networks of 1995	2.06
Leavers	2.12
Stayers	2.05
Newcomers	2.04

*Note: Ideological homophily was measured on a scale from 0 'no agreement at all' to 3 'complete agreement'.*

One of the key issues in elite integration is the tendency of elite actors to form informal ties with a wide circle of people some of whom may not be directly tied to the execution of their immediate tasks. It is important to distinguish whether the growth in the number of weak ties was simply a by-product of the expansion of elite positions that occurred with the formation of Slovenian state, or was it a result of attempts by elite actors to form informal relationships with a broader circle of actors. In the former case, the network expansion would be driven by the growth of business ties because the larger institutional structure would require more coordination and thus more formal, position specific ties. In the latter case, the network expansion would involve informal ties without much regard to their instrumentality. In table 4 we tried to determine the meaning of growth of weak ties. We asked the respondents to identify ties with their alters as kin, business, or informal acquaintance/friendship ties. The majority of ties in elites' networks of 1988 and 1995 were informal acquaintance/friendship ties, followed by business ties. However, the growth in networks in 1995 were due predominantly to the increase in the informal / friendship ties. This is particularly true for stayers who

added informal ties to their preexisting formal, business ties. The newcomers had to acquire new ties in both informal and business arena when they entered the elite arena. Thus, the elites in 1995 were attempting to reach beyond their immediate business interdependencies and were forging the ties with contacts that were placed more broadly in the elite structure. The expansion of informal interaction structure based on weak ties is a sign that Slovenian elite structure was tending toward integration.

**Table 4**  
**Content of ties**

	Kin	Business	Acquaintance Friend
Networks of 1988	.27	1.84	2.59
Leavers	.21	1.97	2.53
Stayers	.28	1.82	2.60
Newcomers	.31	1.36	2.49
Networks of 1995	.24	1.91	2.86
Leavers	.26	1.87	2.65
Stayers	.24	1.87	2.97
Newcomers	.24	2.06	2.97

Taken together, the results presented in these tables suggest that the elites in 1995 maintained qualitatively different network than the elites in 1988. Although the differences between the two time periods were small, they nevertheless indicate that systemic changes which occurred in the early 1990s were paralleled by the transformation of elite networks. In comparison with 1995, ego-centric networks of elite actors in 1988 were smaller, based on stronger and ideologically more homogenous social ties, with fewer non-business weak ties. The elite structure must have changed by 1995 toward more elite integration because the increase of ego networks was based on inclusion of weak ties that were friends or acquaintances from social circles not related to the functional demands of their jobs.

Elite integration that involves multiple elite circles requires many bridging ties that link different elite circles into a unified whole. Our data allow us to look at elite as consisting of three different self-contained sectors: politics, culture, and the economy. The extent to which different sectors are connected between rather than within themselves is determined by the availability of bridging ties that elite actors maintain with people in different sectors from their own. The tables 5 and 6 present results of analysis of inter-sector integration. The numbers in the table are average number of ties an elite actor has with his or her alters. The first row in the table 5, for example, indicate that in 1988 a member of cultural elite had on average 2.51 ties within culture, 1.19 ties within the economy and 1.04 ties among politicians. Diagonal cells in both tables contain highest values, meaning that there is strong tendency of tie formation within the same sector of activity. The numbers in off diagonal cells are the result of bridging ties between

different sectors. The values are hard to interpret by themselves without a theoretical or empirical frame of reference. Since our interest is in the change in the patterns of elite integration our frame of reference is time. We need to compare tables 5 and 6 in order to make conclusions about the changes in elite integration.

**Table 5**  
**Elite integration in 1988**

1988	Sector of alters			All
	Culture	Economy	Politics	
Sector of elite actors				
Culture	2.51	1.19	1.04	4.80
Economy	0.48	2.35	.82	3.91
Politics	1.41	1.68	1.92	5.12

**Table 6**  
**Elite integration in 1995**

1995	Sector of alters			All
	Culture	Economy	Politics	
Sector of elite actors				
Culture	2.49	1.42	1.41	5.48
Economy	0.88	2.31	1.00	4.22
Politics	1.44	1.63	2.12	5.33

The comparison reveals a strong increase in off diagonal cells involving the networks of members of economic and cultural elite circle. The two circles increased the interaction with one another as well as with the politicians. While the increase of interaction was mutual for the two elite circles the increase of interaction with the political elite was asymmetrical. The political elite, while maintaining the same level of interaction with the economic and cultural elite increased its interaction within itself. In 1995 the elite structure resembled the one described in the study of three western democracies (Higley and al. 1991): there were different elite circles with their own identity evidenced by strong interaction within themselves. These elite circles were strongly tied to the central elite circle, a political elite circle, which increased its interaction within itself while maintaining ties to the other two elite circles.

The empirical evidence in this section can be interpreted as a tendency toward elite integration in 1995 in comparison with the 1988. There is a degree of paradox in this result given the usual image of the communist elites as highly integrated in a hierarchical order. Indeed, one would expect elites of 1988 much more integrated across sectorial lines because of political control of promotions in all three elite sectors. An appointment in politics could easily lead to a leadership position in the economy or culture and vice

versa. Thus one would expect a dense unified network that would link the elite without regard to sectorial lines. One would also expect that transition would bring a long suppressed differentiation and necessary specialization of elite sectors. Empirically, one should therefore see a degree of disintegration of a formerly ideologically unified elite. Interpretation of this surprising finding can go in two directions. First, either this order was already broken by the 1988, which is more than a valid assumption, and this contributed to the lower level of elite integration in 1988 compared to 1995. Or, second, the character of integration in the communist regime which was hierarchical and interventionist prevented the creation of spontaneous and informal horizontal integration and cooperation among the elite members. Probably both interpretations are right in explaining the seemingly more atomistic character of Slovenian elites in 1988 compared to 1995.

## V. Conclusion

Consolidation of democracy is a central issue in both political theory and in East European politics. As a political issue the debate focused on elite reproduction. What consequences for democracy has a fact that a large majority of elite actors that held position of power prior to transition managed to reenter the elite ranks in new democracies? The question that was for a good part of the past decade taken seriously in both Brussels and Washington was: Would the old guard ignore democracy, cancel economic reforms and use free elections to install themselves in power? Would they pay lip service to democracy turning it into a hollow electoral system while secretly suppressing political freedom in order to preclude the rise of a genuine opposition? Similar debate sprang up in Slovenia. In a recent public dispute spearheaded by Adam (1999) the issue of a threat of a 'too high' elite reproduction was once again brought up to public attention. The central thesis was that the high reproduction of old elites was suffocating the rise of conservative parties and blocked the formation of effective opposition.

However, the policy implications of these concerns were much worse from the threat they supposedly posed to democracy. To stop high elite reproduction it would require blocking the old elite from participation in the political system. That would not only be a bad start for new democracies. It would also jeopardize its stability and prevent its consolidation. A forced elimination of one elite segment from the political scene creates a void in the system of representation as some interests can not be represented, and makes room for radicalism outside the boundaries of political system. The experience from many South American and Asian countries showed that forced 'circulation' of elites often resulted in very fragile electoral democracies.

In political theory the problem of consolidation of democracy is linked to elite integration and not to elite circulation. The thrust of political analysis is that changes in the elite structure which precede or accompany regime change are more important for the consolidation of democracy than the changes in the elite composition. Namely, elite composition refers to the question of 'who rules the country' and says little or nothing about 'how democracy is run' which is the question closely related to the problem of

elite structure. Integrated elite structure is the key for regime stability because 'consensually integrated' elites are more inclusive of different elite circles and opposing elite factions, thus reducing the possibility for anti-systemic opposition. Integration of elites also contributes to the consolidation of democracy by rising the accountability of executive power to various interests, expressed through informal and semi-formal communication networks. In contrast, fragmented elite structure leaves different elite groups unconnected which can lead to serious confrontations, inability to compromise and the breakdown of democracy. Thus, the key to the stability and consolidation of democracy is not elite composition but elite integration, i.e. whether or not different elite circles can work together within the mutually accepted institutional framework.

In this article we joined the argument that the integration of elites in the national arena, and consequently the consolidation of democracy, depends largely on the ability of the elite to form the ties with other elite members who belong to different social and policy circles. In the study of elite networks in Slovenia before and after the transition we found systematic changes in elite structure. In the analysis of network characteristics we found that there was a general trend toward elite integration. In comparison with the pre-transition elite structure we found that in 1995 the networks were larger and based on more weak ties. We found evidence that the elite actors were reaching out of their immediate circle to include in their networks the people from different sectors who subscribed to different worldviews from their own. They also began to include weak ties, acquaintances, who were not directly related to their specific tasks. The trend revealed by the change in many different network characteristics is consistent with the increasing elite integration. The validity of this conclusion is underscored by the fact that the changes in network characteristics were very similar for both the new and the old elite.

The findings of this study show the beginning of the trend toward elite integration in Slovenia. This, however, is the beginning of a long process rather than completed fact. There is also no guarantee that the process of elite integration would continue in the future. Since elite integration depends on elite actors and their conscious efforts to support the system of fair political competition, the responsibility for consolidation of democracy lies in their hands. The only guarantee for the stability of democracy and its consolidation is therefore the pursuit of agreement among all major elite circles regarding the rules of political competition (e.g. electoral system) and the effort to find compromise solutions to divisive policy issues. Without such disciplined self restraint the elite can drift toward fragmentation which might ultimately destabilize democracy.

## NOTE

1. In recent articles on new and old elites the issue of elite reproduction was clearly positioned as political not academic. None of the two theoretical issues were ever taken up. One theoretical issue that also concerned Pareto was: how can elite retain its elitist character if there is a large inflow of new members into elite circles? (Pareto, 1935; Bottomore, 1964) The second concern with elite reproduction is regime stability: How can a sweeping replacement of

old elite with a new one bring about a stable political regime? (Higley and Burton, 1989) In both cases the problem arises due to circulation of elites and not due to their reproduction. Too much change in the elite poses serious theoretical problems while high elite reproduction rises few academic issues. This is why the authors could not offer much of a guidance regarding the 'acceptable' reproduction rates. Kramberger correctly observed that this question is beyond the academic debate (Kramberger, 1999).

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