

## (Original Acknowledgements)

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# Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia

KEVIN DEEGAN-KRAUSE

*Wayne State University*

TIM HAUGHTON

*University of Birmingham*

*Shifting our understanding of populism from a question of core identity to a description of party appeals allows for a neutralization of the term's negative connotations by allowing that all parties may use populist appeals to some extent. It is then possible to address a party's use of populist appeals by measuring its distinctly nonpopulist appeals, which are usually less bound up with normative judgments. Although the preliminary analysis of Slovakia shows a relatively close empirical fit among the theoretical elements in the existing literature, two categories of populist appeals are identified: the outward-looking appeals that vary strongly with a party's relationship to power, and inward-looking appeals that remain more stable over time. Use of these by politicians may offer clues to the origination, attractiveness, and longevity of populist and nonpopulist appeals.*

*Cambiar nuestro entendimiento del populismo desde la cuestión de identidad a una que se enfoca en los llamados partidistas nos permite neutralizar la connotación negativa del término populismo puesto que nos lleva a reconocer que todos los partidos recurren a los llamados populistas en una medida u otra. Es entonces posible establecer el uso de los atractivos del populismo por parte del partido al medir sus atractivos no-populistas, los cuales usualmente están menos vinculados con opiniones normativas. Aunque el análisis preliminar de Eslovaquia demuestra un ajuste empírico perfecto relativamente cerrado entre los elementos teóricos en la literatura existente, dos categorías de las características populistas son identificadas: los atractivos observados en el exterior que varían fuertemente con la relación del partido con el poder y los atractivos observados en el interior que permanecen mucho más estables a través del tiempo. El uso de éstos por los políticos puede ofrecer claves para el origen, atractivo, y longevidad de los atractivos populistas y no-populistas.*

“Populism” seems forever on the verge of losing its meaning, but scholars return again and again to rescue it from itself. Academic efforts during the last decade are particularly impressive, but the job is not done. Strong new definitions of populism seek theoretical clarity in the notion of a political conflict between “them”—the powerful and corrupt—against all the rest of “us” (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007; Canovan 1999; Mudde 2004; Taggart 2000; Weyland 2001). Canovan (1999, 3) defines populism in part as an “appeal to the people, against the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society,” a theme echoed both in Weyland’s (2001, 14) account where a populist leader appeals to the people “to regenerate the nation, combat the privileged groups and transform the ‘corrupt’ established institutions,” and Mudde’s (2004, 543) emphasis on an ideology which divides society into “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.”

Despite this scholarly redefinition, populism has not lost its negative connotation, even among scholars. Indeed, in common political usage, “populist” is a synonym for “bad guy,” and populism often represents no more than the dark side of *popularity*, the “mystery ingredient that explains why a rival political leader has inexplicably large support” (Deegan-Krause 2007, 141). This populism is not only mysterious but also tainted, deriving not from the strengths of “the people” but rather from their weaknesses.

If this normative imprecision persists despite periodic rescue efforts, does the term “populism,” finally deserve the scrapheap? Perhaps not yet if we can find new ways to talk about the concept of populism—and even sometimes measure it—in ways that minimize the term’s imprecision without sacrificing its core meaning.

As Leaman (2004, 325) notes, the limitations of the term “populism” are most obvious when it is used in a substantive sense: “that party or that leader is populist.” Cammack (2000, 155) rightly notes that the term is “better used as an adjective than as a noun—a qualifier of some substantive political project and its related ideology.” Understanding populism as characteristic rather than as an identity allows it to be used in a variety of combinations, a useful shift in light of recent scholarship, which emphasizes that populism can (and perhaps must) ally with other ideological positions (Canovan 1999; Stanley 2008). Adjectival usage also shifts our assessments from binary opposition—a party is populist or not—to a matter of degree—a party has more populist characteristics or fewer. It is possible further to restrict the normative and subjective senses of the term by shifting the adjective away from particular parties or leaders and focusing instead on particular actions and policy proposals. Shifting our understanding of populism from a question of core identity to a description of party appeals rather than parties themselves also allows us to neutralize the term’s negative connotations by allowing that *all* parties may use populist appeals to some extent. It is then possible to address a party’s use of populist appeals by measuring its distinctly *non*populist appeals, which are usually less bound up with normative judgments.

This article explores the advantages of the above framework by applying it to politics in Slovakia between 1990 and 2008. We recognize the perils of making generalizations based on one case, but Slovakia offers a rich case study. Its multiple variations in populist appeals across parties and over time provide a strong basis for developing a framework that applies to many other cases in post-communist Europe and beyond.

### **“There Are Ways of Telling Whether She Is a Witch”: Revised Standards for Evaluating Populist Appeals**

Disassembling populism into clearer, more defined subcategories both reduces the tendency toward normative assessments and improves our understanding of the ways in which populism’s core elements hang together. This task poses certain immediate difficulties, however, including questions about how to separate out the various aspects of populism and how later to reaggregate the results into a meaningful whole.

Recent work by Stanley (2008, 102) offers a straightforward guide. Building directly on existing templates, Stanley breaks populism into four specific elements: (1) “The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’”; and (2) “the antagonistic relationship” between them; (3) “the idea of popular sovereignty”; and (4) “the positive valorisation of ‘the people’ and denigration of ‘the elite’ (the distinction between friend and enemy).” Two of Stanley’s four elements break along further subordinate lines to create six specific populist claims, all of which feature prominently in accepted definitions of populism, and all of which can be assessed separately from one another with some degree of confidence:

- homogeneity of the people;
- homogeneity of the elite;
- glorification of the people;
- denigration of the elite;
- unmediated leadership (as befits the sovereignty of the people); and
- rejection of cooperation or compromise (as befits the friend/enemy dichotomy).

It is useful to begin with this definition and to work backward. A party’s populist appeals, therefore, are those that remain once we have discounted its *nonpopulist* appeals, although this inversion requires us to define in some detail the characteristics of *nonpopulist* appeals.

#### **The Heterogeneity of “the People”**

While few politicians are willing to doubt the wisdom of “the people,” some are willing to doubt that the people are a single unified body. This often occurs implicitly in a party’s support for the goals of particular ethnic, religious groups, or other demographic or socioeconomic subgroups. Certain kinds of

groups, however, form an exception, if they can be successfully characterized as the genuine “people.” This is most likely in the case of ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes, or religious groups that can plausibly be claimed as an overwhelming majority (in Slovakia, e.g., such groups would include Slovaks, working people, and self-declared Catholics). Active recognition and encouragement of cultural pluralism also undermines notions of homogeneity.

### **The Heterogeneity of “the Elite”**

Whereas those using populist appeals may characterize themselves as the only alternative to a monolithic bloc of elites, other leaders and parties argue that political differences among elites are not merely a chimera. Nonpopulist appeals contend that elites are more divided by rival positions than they are united by their common elite status, and that political debates reflect genuine differences on critical issues. Since parties in parliament, and especially those in government, will be most likely to claim the significance of the prevailing political debate, this indicator will be positively related to incumbency. Nevertheless, some parties in power discount their elite status by emphasizing their own underdog struggle on behalf of the people against a different, even *more* elite opponent, ranging from domestic bankers, media, and interest groups to international powers, such as the European Union or American hegemony, or even Freemasons and Zionists.

### **Distance from “the People”**

Parties rarely insult “the people,” but some parties are less likely to celebrate “the common” than are others (Ostiguy 1998). Indeed, the language, habits, and comportment of political leaders offer clues into the degree to which they consciously or unconsciously distance themselves from ordinary citizens.

### **Acceptance of Elite Status**

While parties seldom suggest that those in power somehow “deserve” their status, some parties are far less likely to focus on the faults of the elite than others. Whereas populist appeals tend to focus on the transgressions of the elite, particularly their tendency to reap personal gain from their elite status, nonpopulist appeals can suggest that elites are better equipped to rule because of experience, expertise, competence, and probity.

### **Support for Institution Building and Maintenance**

To the extent that populism seeks the reduction of barriers between individuals and the exercise of power, nonpopulist appeals affirm the purpose of political institutions that stand between popular choice and policy outcomes, sometimes rejecting efforts at direct democracy, particularly in its most plebiscitary forms (Barr 2009). An instructive if indirect measure can be found in a party’s own level of internal institutionalization. Rejection of intermediating political institutions often goes hand in hand with the

concentration of intraparty power in the hands of the party leader, a seemingly paradoxical choice for an anti-elite party, but one that can be justified by emphasizing the leader's unique personal embodiment of popular characteristics. Parties that build strong internal organizations with meaningful internal counterweights tend to fall short of the populist standard to the extent that they mediate the relationship between leaders and their supporters.

### **Acceptance of Cooperation and Compromise**

Populist appeals frequently argue that “democracy is broken,” emphasizing a general state of crisis and the futility (or, worse, counterproductivity) of compromise and cooperation with current elites. Among nonpopulist appeals, therefore, we may look for a more moderate evaluation of the problems facing the country and a stronger willingness to seek compromise. Nonpopulist appeals may note the inability of rival elites to accomplish their goals but will not extend the critique to disqualify them as potential partners.

### **Taking Populism Apart: One Country, Five Elections, Six Appeals, Twelve Parties**

Politics in Slovakia during the 1990s was dominated by questions of the character of the political regime, illiberal democracy, and nationalism (Deegan-Krause 2006). By the middle of the decade, especially during the 1994-98 government led by Vladimír Mečiar, the divisions between the governing parties and those in opposition became acute. Following the 1998 elections and the formation of a broad-based government under Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, Slovakia made significant strides toward EU membership. The 2002 elections led to the formation of a center-right government with a raft of neoliberal reforms at the heart of its agenda. Socioeconomic themes now became of key importance, although national appeals remained significant (Haughton and Rybář 2008). On the basis of opposition to economic reforms, Robert Fico's party Smer won a plurality in the country's 2006 elections. Fico formed a coalition government with Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the xenophobic Slovak National Party.

Many scholars have analyzed these parties and governments in terms of their populist tendencies (Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová 2008; Rupnik 2007), but in order to provide a more systematic analysis, we apply our six categories of nonpopulist appeals to every one of Slovakia's parliamentary parties. Table 1 provides an overview of our assessment. The table itself offers a considerable level of detail, making 342 discrete judgments based on the criteria discussed above. The following sections offer a narrative explanation for these judgments, some of which admit to quantitative analysis, while others do not. In general, the judgments rely on the authors' expertise, and, where possible, on the independent assessments of other observers, notably Mesežnikov (1998, 2002), Rybář (2006), and Kopeček (2007).

**Table 1. Type and Degree of Populist Appeals Used by Political Parties in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006**

General Characteristic	To what extent do parties exhibit:			Acceptance of Elite Status
	Heterogeneity of the People	Heterogeneity of the Elite	Distance from the People	
Specific indicator	Appeals to specific subgroups	Takes sides in existing conflict	Rejects colloquial idiom	Avoids topic of corruption
High score means	Appeals mainly to specific nonmajority subgroup	Favors some current elites over others	Criticizes "colloquial" idiom	Ignores corruption or faces corruption allegations
Low score means	Appeals to broad population or "majority" subgroups	Suggests that all current elites are failing	Operates in "colloquial" idiom	Emphasizes corruption by parties
SDL—Party of the Democratic Left	Low	High	Medium	Medium
	92-94	High	High	Medium
	92-94	Low	High	Low
	94-98	Medium	High	High
SNS—Slovak National Party	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
	90-92	Medium	Medium	High
	92-94	Low	High	High
	94-98	Low	Medium	High
	98-02	Low	Low	Medium
	02-06	Low	Low	Mixed
KDH—Christian Democratic Movement	Medium	High	Medium	Low
	90-92	High	High	Low
	92-94	Medium	Medium	Medium
	94-98	Medium	Medium	Medium
	98-02	High	Medium	Medium
	02-06	High	Medium	Medium
HZDS—Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	Low	Low	Low	Low
	91-92	Medium	Low	Medium
	92-94	Low	High	High
	94-98	Low	Low	Medium
	98-02	Low	Medium	Low
	02-06	Medium	High	Low
MK—Hungarian Coalition	High	Medium	Medium	High
	90-92	Medium	Medium	Medium
	92-94	High	Medium	Low
	94-98	High	Medium	High
	98-02	High	Medium	Medium
	02-06	High	Medium	High
ZRS—Association of Workers of Slovakia	Low	Low	Low	Low
	92-94	High	High	High
DU—Democratic Union	Low	High	Mixed	Mixed
	94-98	Low	Mixed	Low
SDKÚ—Slovak Democratic and Christian Union	Low	High	Medium	Medium
	02-06	High	High	High

See original table below

**Table 1. Continued**

General Characteristic	To what extent do parties exhibit:			Acceptance of Elite Status
	Heterogeneity of the People	Heterogeneity of the Elite	Distance from the People	
SOP—Party of Civic Understanding	94-98 98-02	Low Low	Medium Medium	Low Medium
KSS—Communist Party of Slovakia	98-02 02-06	Low Low	Low Low	Low Low
ANO—Alliance of the New Citizen	98-02 02-06	Medium Medium	Medium Medium	Mixed High
Smer—Direction	98-02 02-06	Low Low	Low Medium	Low Medium
Prevalence of Nonpopulist Appeals (Average of Overall Score for Each Characteristic, High = 1.00, Medium/Mixed = .50, Low = .00)				
To What Extent Do Parties Exhibit:				
General Characteristic	Institution Building and Maintenance		Acceptance of Cooperation and Compromise	
	Heterogeneity of the People	Heterogeneity of the Elite	Distance from the People	Acceptance of Elite Status
Specific indicator	Counterbalance within party leadership	Shades of gray, avoiding manichean search for enemies	Emphasis on “normakty” and absence of crisis	
High score means	Party leader balanced by rival(s) within leadership	Statements depict opposing parties as offering inferior choice	Statements suggest current problems soluble with incremental change	
Low score means	Unrivaled leader within party top structures	Statements depict opposing parties as immoral, dangerous	Statements suggest crisis needing immediate solution	
SDL—Party of the Democratic Left	90-92 92-94 94-98	High High High	High Medium Medium	.62 .54 .46
SNS—Slovak National Party	98-02 90-92 92-94 94-98 98-02 02-06	High High High Medium Medium Low	Medium Medium Medium Low Low Low	.71 .42 .54 .46 .25 .08
KDH—Christian Democratic Movement	90-92 92-94 94-98 98-02 02-06	Medium Medium High High High	Medium Medium Medium Medium Medium	.62 .58 .75 .75

See original table below

See original table below

**Table 1. Continued**

General Characteristic	Institution Building and Maintenance		Acceptance of Cooperation and Compromise		Prevalence of Nonpopulist Appeals (Average of Overall Score for Each Characteristic, High = 1.00, Medium/Mixed = .50, Low = .00)
	To What Extent Do Parties Exhibit:				
HZDS—Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	91-92	Medium	Medium	Medium	.12
	92-94	Low	Medium	Low	.21
	94-98	Low	Low	Medium	.37
MK—Hungarian Coalition	98-02	Low	Medium	Low	.21
	02-06	Low	Low	Medium	.29
	90-92	High	Medium	Medium	.75
	92-94	High	Medium	Low	.58
ZRS—Association of Workers of Slovakia	94-98	High	Medium	Mixed	.50
	98-02	High	Medium	Mixed	.62
	02-06	High	Medium	High	.75
	92-94	Low	Low	Low	.00
DU—Democratic Union	94-98	Low	Low	Low	.37
	92-94	High	Low	High	.54
	94-98	High	Low	Mixed	.42
SDKÚ—Slovak Dem. and Christian Union	98-02	Medium	Low	Medium	.58
	02-06	Low	Low	Medium	.12
SOP—Party of Civic Understanding	94-98	Low	Low	Medium	.37
	98-02	Medium	High	Medium	.17
KSS—Communist Party of Slovakia	98-02	High	High	Low	.17
	02-06	High	High	Low	.37
ANO—Alliance of the New Citizen	98-02	Low	Low	Medium	.50
	02-06	Low	Low	Medium	.08
Smer—Direction	98-02	Low	Low	Low	.21
	02-06	Low	Low	Medium	.21

**Table 1. Type and Degree of Populist Appeals Used by Political Parties in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006 (Original Table)**

General characteristic	To what extent do parties exhibit:										Average numerical score (average of each subcategory (high = 1.00, medium/ mixed= 0.50, low = 0.00))												
	Heterogeneity of the people		Heterogeneity of the elite		Inferiority of "the people"		Superiority of "the elite"		Support for institutional mediation			Support for cooperation and compromise											
	Appeals to/support for specific subgroups	Takes sides in existing conflict	Accepts terms of existing debate	Rejection of colloquial idiom	Avoids topic of corruption	Counterbalance within party leadership	Organizational counterbalance to party leadership	Shades of gray, avoiding manichean search	Emphasis on "normalcy" and absence of crisis	Appeals primarily to specific non-majority subgroup		Suggests that some current elites are better than others	Accepts existing debate and promotes itself according to a particular position on	Criticizes "colloquial" idiom	Fails to discuss corruption and/or faces significant corruption	Party leader balanced in practice by rival(s) within leadership	Party leader balanced in practice by party mid-level organizational	Statements depict opposing parties as offering inferior choice	Statements suggest current problems solvable with incremental				
High score means																							
Low score means																							
SDL	low	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	medium	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	0.38
92-94	low	medium	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	low	high	high	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.46
94-98	low	medium	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	low	high	high	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.54
98-02	medium	medium	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.29
SNS	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.58
90-92	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.46
92-94	low	high	high	high	Low	high	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	Low	Low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.54
94-98	low	low	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.75
98-02	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	0.92
90-92	medium	high	high	high	medium	high	high	high	medium	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.50
92-94	medium	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	0.38
94-98	medium	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.42
98-02	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.25
02-06	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.25
KDH	low	low	low	low	Low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	0.88
91-92	low	medium	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	medium	low	?	?	?	?	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	0.79
92-94	low	medium	high	high	low	high	high	high	low	high	low	low	low	medium	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.63
94-98	low	high	high	high	low	high	high	high	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.79
98-02	low	medium	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	medium	low	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	0.79
02-06	medium	medium	high	high	low	high	high	high	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.71
MK	high	medium	high	high	medium	high	high	high	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.25
90-92	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	medium	medium	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.42
92-94	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	low	low	low	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	0.42
94-98	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	low	low	low	low	0.50
98-02	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	0.38
02-06	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	high	0.25
ZRS	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	1.00
92-94	low	high	high	high	low	high	high	high	low	high	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.63
94-98	low	high	high	high	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	high	0.46
DU	low	high	high	high	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	high	0.46
92-94	low	high	high	high	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	high	0.58
94-98	low	high	high	high	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	mixed	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	mixed	mixed	mixed	high	high	high	high	0.58
SDKU	low	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.58
02-06	medium	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	high	high	high	high	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.42
SOP	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.88
94-98	low	medium	medium	medium	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.42
98-02	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.88
KSS	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.63
98-02	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.63
02-06	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	high	high	high	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.83
ANO	medium	medium	medium	medium	mixed	medium	medium	medium	low	low	high	high	high	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.83
98-02	medium	medium	medium	medium	mixed	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.67
02-06	medium	medium	medium	medium	mixed	medium	medium	medium	high	high	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.50
98-02	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.92
02-06	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	low	medium	medium	medium	medium	0.79

### **Heterogeneity of the People versus Homogeneity of the People**

Since most Slovak parties have appealed to the population as a whole, “low” scores for “heterogeneity of the people” tend to prevail. Similarly, “low” scores apply as well to “group-based” appeals whose groups could plausibly understand themselves as “the people as a whole.” The Slovak National Party (SNS, *Slovenská národná strana*), for instance, directed its appeal at ethnic Slovaks, while the Movement of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS, *Združenie robotníkov Slovenska*) and the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS, *Komunistická strana Slovenska*) appealed to the losers of economic transition, a category which in one way or another included nearly everyone. The one political grouping that pitched more or less consistently for a slice of the electorate was the Hungarian Coalition (MK, *Magyar Koalíció*; this article uses the same acronym, MK, for the subsequent Party of the Hungarian Coalition, *Magyar Koalíció Pártja*), which appealed primarily to ethnic Hungarians. Other parties shifted their positions over time, all in the direction of specific population segments. Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS, *Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*) originally projected itself as a broad-based movement (Haughton 2001), but it increasingly directed its appeal to societal groups, particularly elderly voters and those in rural areas. Similarly, whereas the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH, *Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie*) began by emphasizing Christian values among other issues, its focus on “the Catholic vote” became considerably stronger after 2000.

### **Heterogeneity of the Elite versus Homogeneity of the Elite**

Our measures of elite heterogeneity emphasize the degree to which parties take sides in the dominant conflict and accept the existing terms of the debate. Parties avoid populist appeals to the extent that they seek out alliances with existing elites and take clear positions on dominant issue divides. In Slovak politics, parties clashed regularly and consistently over questions of the nation, levels of authority and economic distribution (Deegan-Krause 2006; Rybář 2006).

Many of Slovakia’s parties can easily be identified as nonpopulist on this measure. The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ, *Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia*), for instance, was formed by key elite figures around the-then prime minister, Dzurinda; its parent the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK, *Slovenská demokratická koalícia*) was formed as an anti-Mečiar coalition. The MK distinguished itself from all other parties in its insistence that ethnic Hungarians enjoy the same linguistic and cultural advantages as ethnic Slovaks.

Other parties were more likely to attack elites as a “class.” The appeal of the far-left Workers’ Association of Slovakia (ZRS) in 1994, for instance, rested largely on the sharp criticism made by its leader, Ján Lupták, of existing political elites across the political spectrum. But with entry into government and

the party's involvement in the murky dealings of the Mečiar-led administration, it lost its distinctive voice and its ability to express anti-elite grievances.

For other parties, circumstances are more complicated. Mečiar's HZDS began by positioning itself as a new force in Slovakia's politics, embracing neither communism nor the post-communist elite. But the party's margin of victory in 1992 set it on the path to elite status in its own right. Nonetheless, following the defection of some key figures in 1994 and the subsequent removal of Mečiar from power thanks to a vote in parliament, HZDS sought with a fair degree of success to depict itself as an outsider in the 1994 elections against the grand coalition of forces that had removed it from power. In 1998, after four years in government, the party found it more difficult to cast itself as the outsider, and it responded to political isolation by rebranding itself as a "normal" party, quite far inside nonpopulist territory.

Smer, the party of Prime Minister Robert Fico, also repositioned itself. At the party's creation in late 1999, Fico began by calling for "new faces" and "a new direction" (Smer means "direction"), transcending the old divisions of Slovak politics (Fico 2000; Orogváni 2006). In the 2002 campaign, the party sought to paint the two main "sides" as equally bad, and it did so on the basis of a new issue dimension—corruption—on which Smer claimed to be distinctive. Smer's 2002 election campaign included the slogan "as they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda" (Haughton 2003, 77). By 2006, however, the party had shifted ground. In the absence of other effective critiques, Smer positioned itself as the main opposition to the Dzurinda government's neoliberal agenda.

### **Distance from the People versus Glorification of the People**

Like nearly all parties everywhere, nearly all of Slovakia's parties regularly extol the merits of ordinary people, but some parties, such as HZDS, ZRS, and SNS, have proven adept at doing so even while in power by contrasting themselves favorably with the Bratislava intellectual elite and using consciously vulgar expressions rarely associated with political speech. A few parties, by contrast, were keen to stress the elite qualities of their personnel, even when out of power. SDKÚ, for example, avoided the "man of the people" approach and instead lauded its leading figures for their expert knowledge.

### **Acceptance of Elite Status versus Denigration of the Elite**

Corruption accusations form the basis of most rejections of elite superiority (or indeed even elite tolerability). Such accusations are quite common in Slovakia's political appeals, coming from across the political spectrum but usually greater among parties in opposition. For most parties in Slovakia, corruption accusations against others vary in direct proportion to chronological distance from a party's own time in government. New parties, such as ZRS, Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO, *Aliancia nového občana*), and the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP, *Strana občianskeho porozumenia*), each

of which entered government soon after being formed, soon moderated their initial attacks on corrupt elites, as it became clear they themselves were not angels. Both the hardline KSS and Smer were highly critical of government corruption, though Smer's entry into government in 2006 forced it to confront corruption scandals of its own (SME 2009). Some parties in power spent considerable effort to shift the burden of eliteness to another level. HZDS between 1994 and 1998 emphasized the unjustified and unfair opinions of international organizations; Smer after 2006 pointed to the influence of the media elite. Both parties also pointed to relationships between these respective elites and rival parties, suggesting that those parties possessed the advantages of an elite position even while in opposition.

### **Institution Building and Maintenance versus Unmediated Leadership**

A good—albeit secondary—measure of institution building is the degree to which party elites permit intraparty institutions that constrain their own behavior. MK and KDH and also the Party of the Democratic Left (SĎL, *Strana demokratickej ľavice*) stand out as parties with strong party institutions and active membership bases. On the other extreme, party leaders in SOP and ANO (and to a lesser extent in SDKÚ and Smer) faced no internal constraints either from rival leaders in the party or from an independent organizational base. HZDS possessed a relatively robust party organization, and a series of potential rivals emerged to challenge the position of party chair Mečiar, but each challenge failed, and departure (or expulsion) of the challengers further strengthened Mečiar's position.

### **Acceptance of Cooperation and Compromise versus Manichean Opposition**

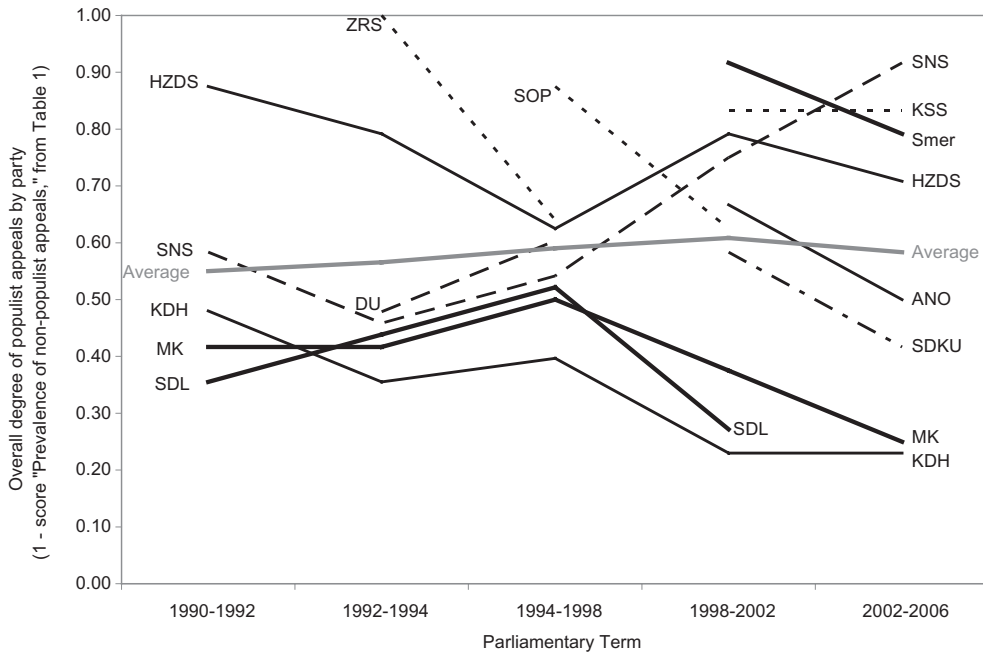
The tendency to paint politics as a battle between *us* and *them* and reject the possibility of cooperating with anyone responsible for the present mess appears most visibly in the hard-line leftist parties, KSS and ZRS and in parties seeking the ethnic vote. SNS, especially after 1994, portrayed the Hungarians as the country's greatest evil. For its part, the MK expressed caution toward cooperation with non-Hungarian parties, but ultimately demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with virtually any party but SNS. Even HZDS moved from its black-against-white appeal in the mid-1990s to a willingness to work with *any* party, and Fico's Smer, by contrast, moved from a 2002 campaign that lambasted *both* the Mečiar and Dzurinda governments to a 2006 campaign that refused to reject any other party (although it reserved its sharpest criticism for Dzurinda's SDKÚ) (Haughton and Rybár 2008).

### **Putting Populism Back Together: Six Appeals, Two Patterns**

The above assessment of populist appeals in Slovakia's politics allows us to illuminate not only Slovakia's political dynamics, but also some of the broader dynamics related to party development in post-communist Europe.

See original graph below

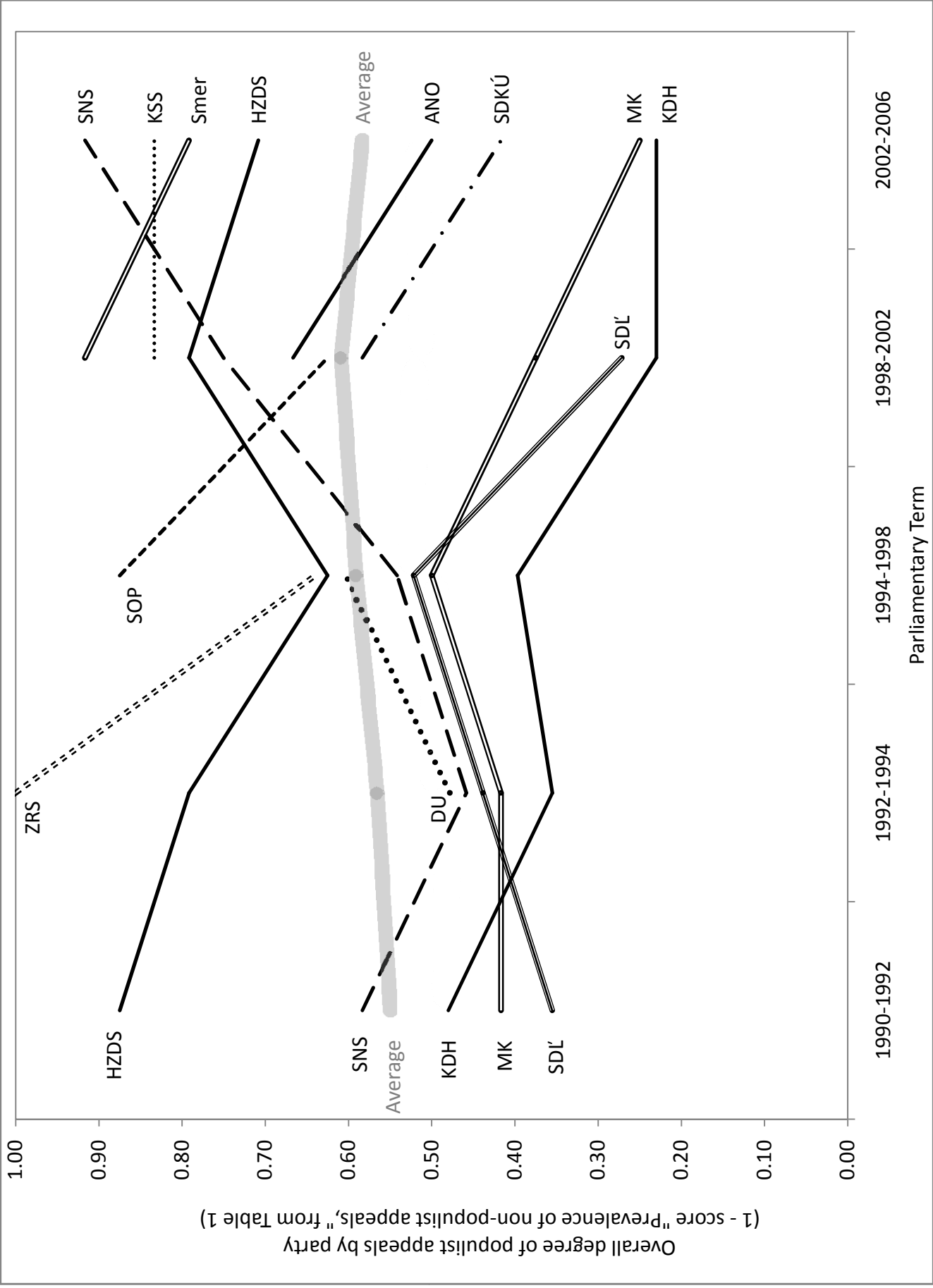
**Figure 1.**  
**Populist Appeal Scores for Parties in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006**



Figures 1 and 2 summarize judgments for twelve parties over five electoral terms for nine questions with three possible answers. Converting the values for “low,” “medium/mixed,” and “high” into corresponding values of .00, .50, and 1.00 allows for a rough quantitative exploration of the relationships between populist appeals, party status, ideology, and a variety of external factors, although this analysis is limited by the small number of cases (n = 38) and relative imprecision of the source data.

Figure 1 demonstrates a striking degree of stability in the overall average of populist appeals with substantial variation within and among parties. Although one of Slovakia’s enduring parties—the SNS—shows an increase in its use of populist appeals, the rest show a steady decline. Figure 2, which disaggregates according to the type of appeal rather than the party, shows steady declines in the emphasis on popular superiority and popularity homogeneity, the latter trend caused by increased party appeals to more specific segments of the electorate. Patterns for other appeals are more erratic: elite inferiority dropped between the first and second parliamentary terms as a new set of parties was exposed to the temptations of incumbency; unmediated leadership spiked upward in the 2002-06 parliamentary term as leader-driven parties came to dominate the electoral landscape, and notions of elite homogeneity exhibited a sharp decline and rebound between 1994 and 1998.

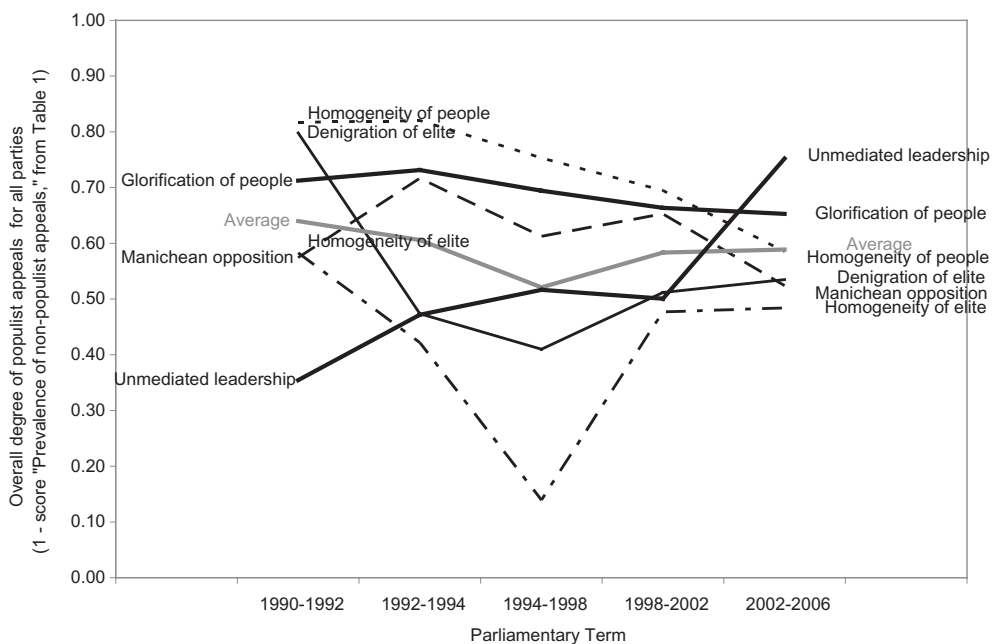
**Figure 1.**  
**Populist Appeal Scores for Parties in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006 (Original Graph)**



See original graph below

Figure 2.

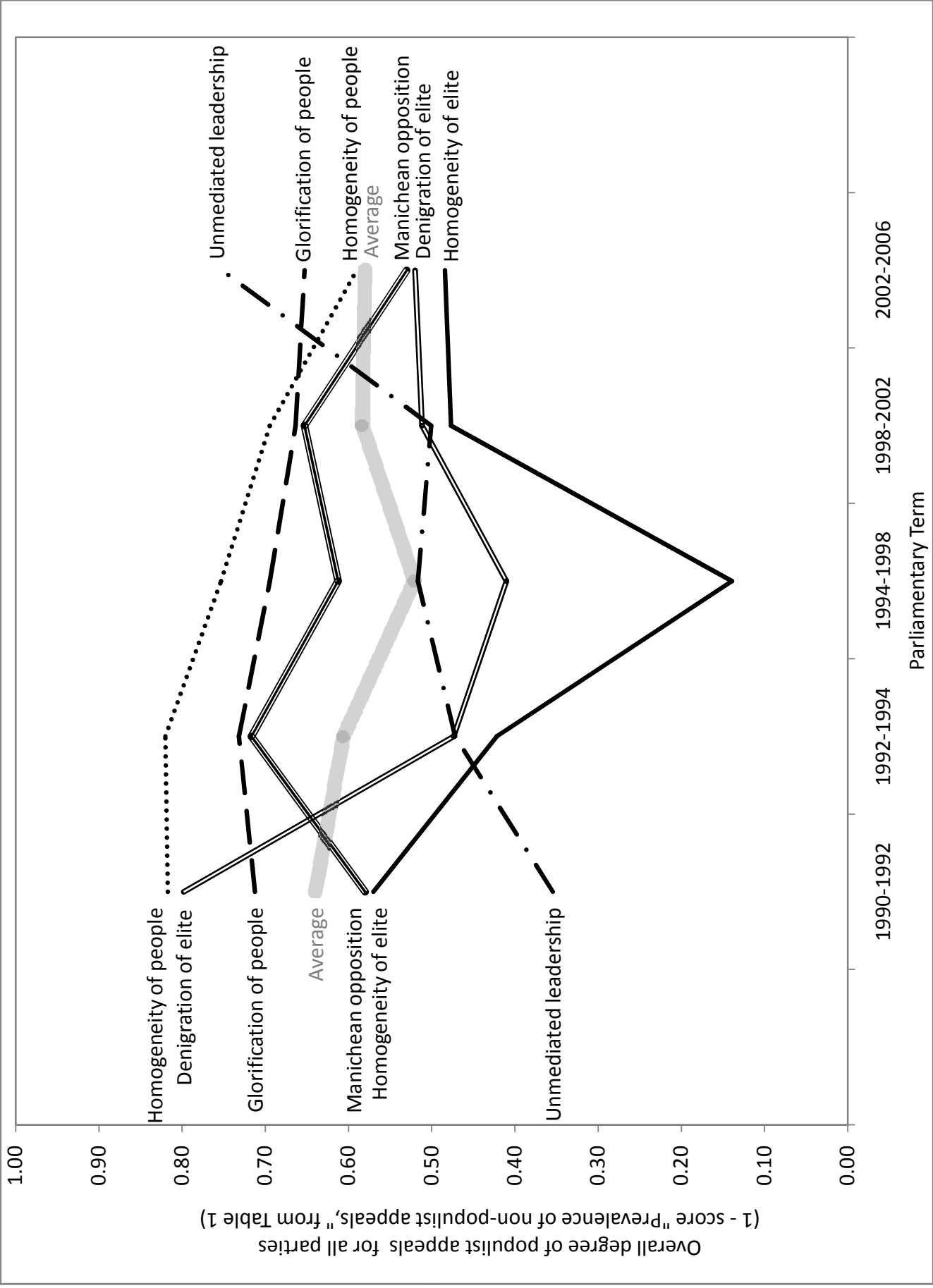
## Populist Appeal Component Scores in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006



Having disaggregated the components of populism, it is possible to ask whether these components hang together in anything that resembles a syndrome. Do the phenomena “run together,” or it is better to regard them as interesting but distinct, occasionally occurring together but not somehow bound together empirically? The data for Slovakia offer grounds for the cautious support of populism as a meaningful concept. As Table 2 shows, all 15 correlations among the six items are positive. Moreover, disaggregating data by time raises the level of correlation. Indeed, with the exception of the period between 1994 and 1998, the average correlation hovered between .42 and .50, with alphas between .77 and .83.

Of course it is not enough simply to exclude the outlying data from the 1994 to 1998 period, but to figure out why it does not fit. The period in question is unusual between 1990 and 2006 because it is the only unbroken term of government by parties with high levels of populist appeals. Not coincidentally, it is also the period of most significant change in party appeals related to elites. Finding themselves in an elite position, parties with anti-elite appeals appear to have found it necessary to reduce or modify those appeals, whereas parties out of power (which had previously exhibited lower levels of populist appeal) began to engage in a stronger anti-elite discourse.

**Figure 2.**  
**Populist Appeal Component Scores in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term, 1990-2006 (Original Graph)**



**Table 2. Correlations among populist appeals used by political parties in Slovakia, 1990-2006**

	Glorification of the People	Homogeneity of the People	Unmediated Leadership	Manichean Opposition	Homogeneity of the Elite	Denigration of the Elite
Glorification the people	—	.463**	.356*	.629**	.362*	.120
Homogeneity of the people	.463**	—	.324*	.373*	.214	.193
Unmediated leadership	.356*	.324*	—	.283	.118	.045
Manichean opposition	.629**	.373*	.283	—	.546**	.217
Homogeneity of the elite	.362*	.214	.118	.546**	—	.461**
Denigration of the elite	.120	.193	.045	.217	.461**	—

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

See original graph below

**Figure 3.**  
**Populist Appeal Component Scores in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term and Coalition, 1992-2002**

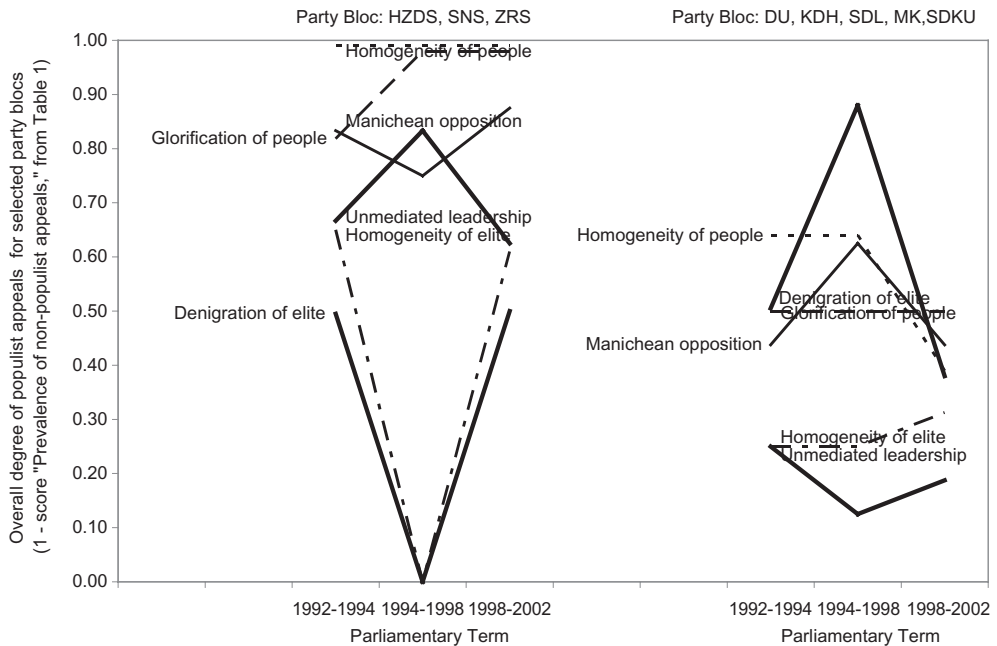
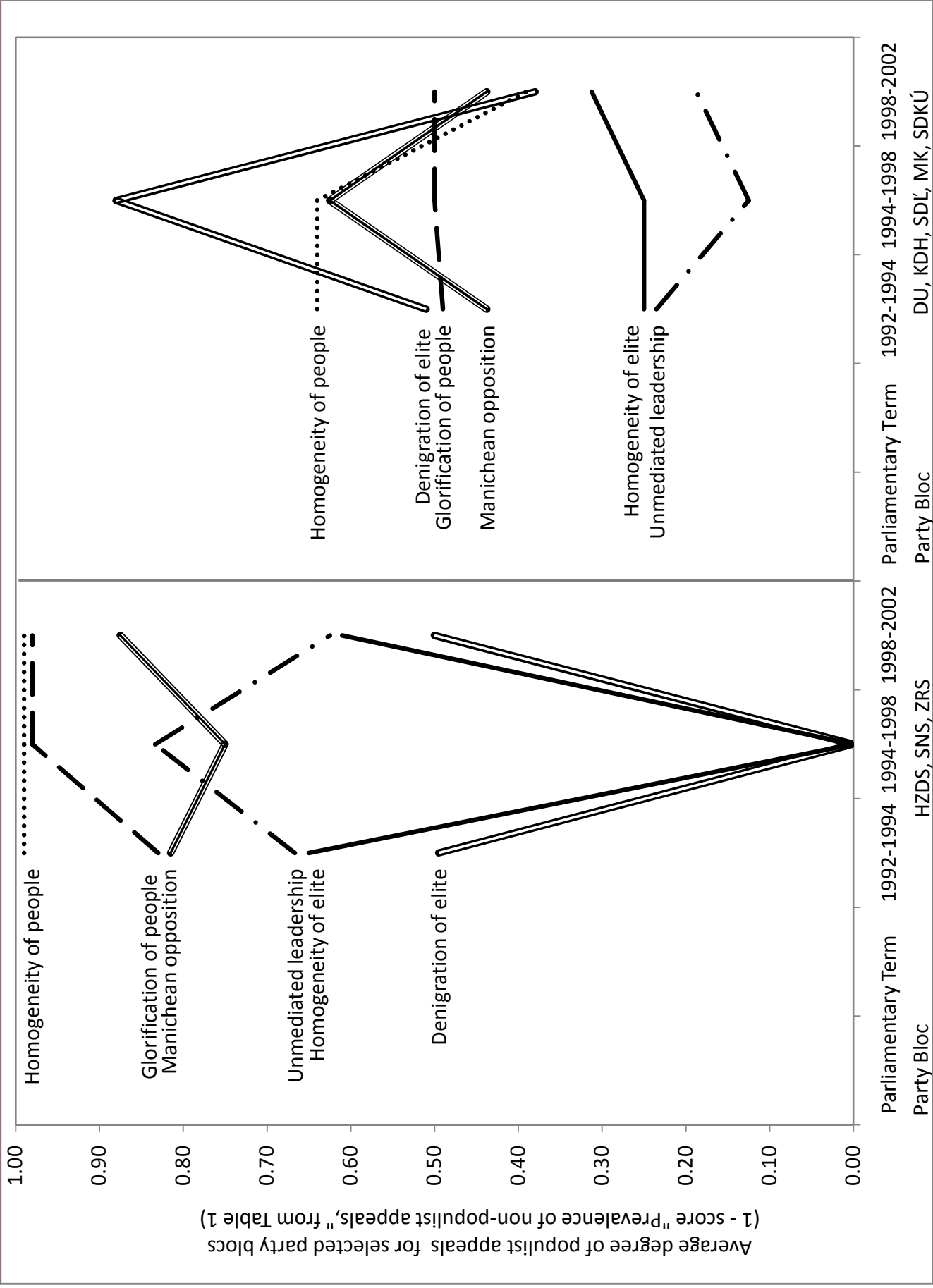


Figure 3 shows the dynamics of the six appeals for the two then-rival political blocs. As the graph shows, the HZDS-led coalition sharply reduced its use of three populist appeals while in government—those related to the unity and inferiority of elites and the Manichean opposition between political rivals—and then resumed their use after leaving office. At the same time, the parties opposed to HZDS shifted *toward* populist appeals on two of these same appeals: elite inferiority and Manichean opposition. On the other populist appeals, change was much less dramatic. Distinguishing between variable outward-focused populist appeals—those addressing other parties and leaders—and more stable inward-focused appeals—those addressing one’s own voters and party structures—helps to explain not just how populist appeals are structured but why they emerge and subside.

**Explaining Why Populist Appeals Come and Go:  
 Age, Government, and Reelection**

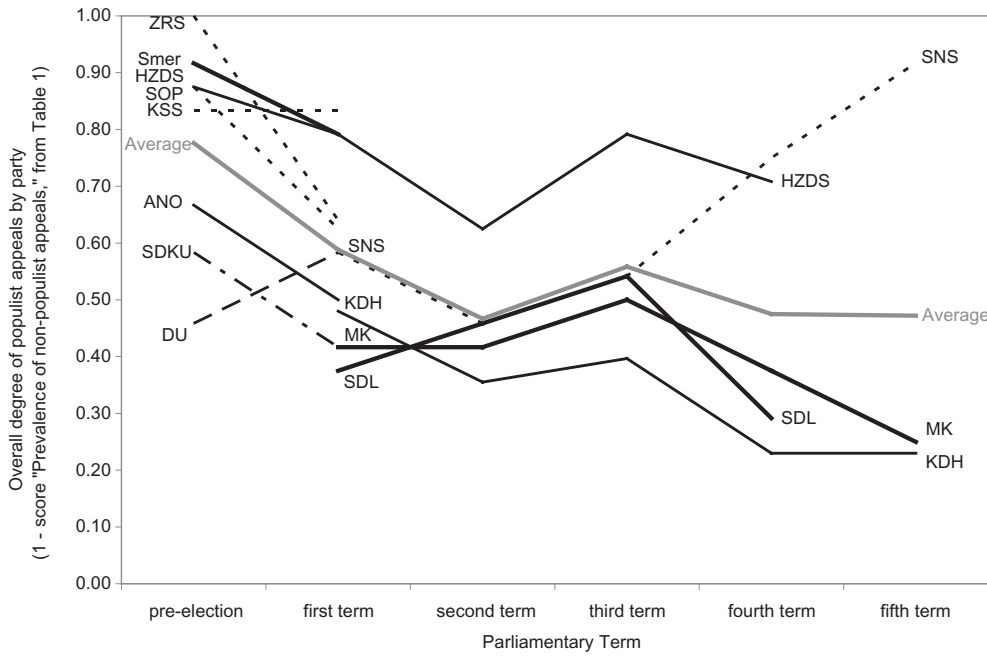
Overall levels of populist appeals did not change much in Slovakia from the beginnings of its democracy, but the types of appeal and the identity of those

**Figure 3.**  
**Populist Appeal Component Scores in Slovakia by Parliamentary Term and Coalition, 1992-2002 (Original Graph)**



See original graph below

**Figure 4.**  
**Populist Appeal Scores for Parties in Slovakia by Party Age, 1990-2006**

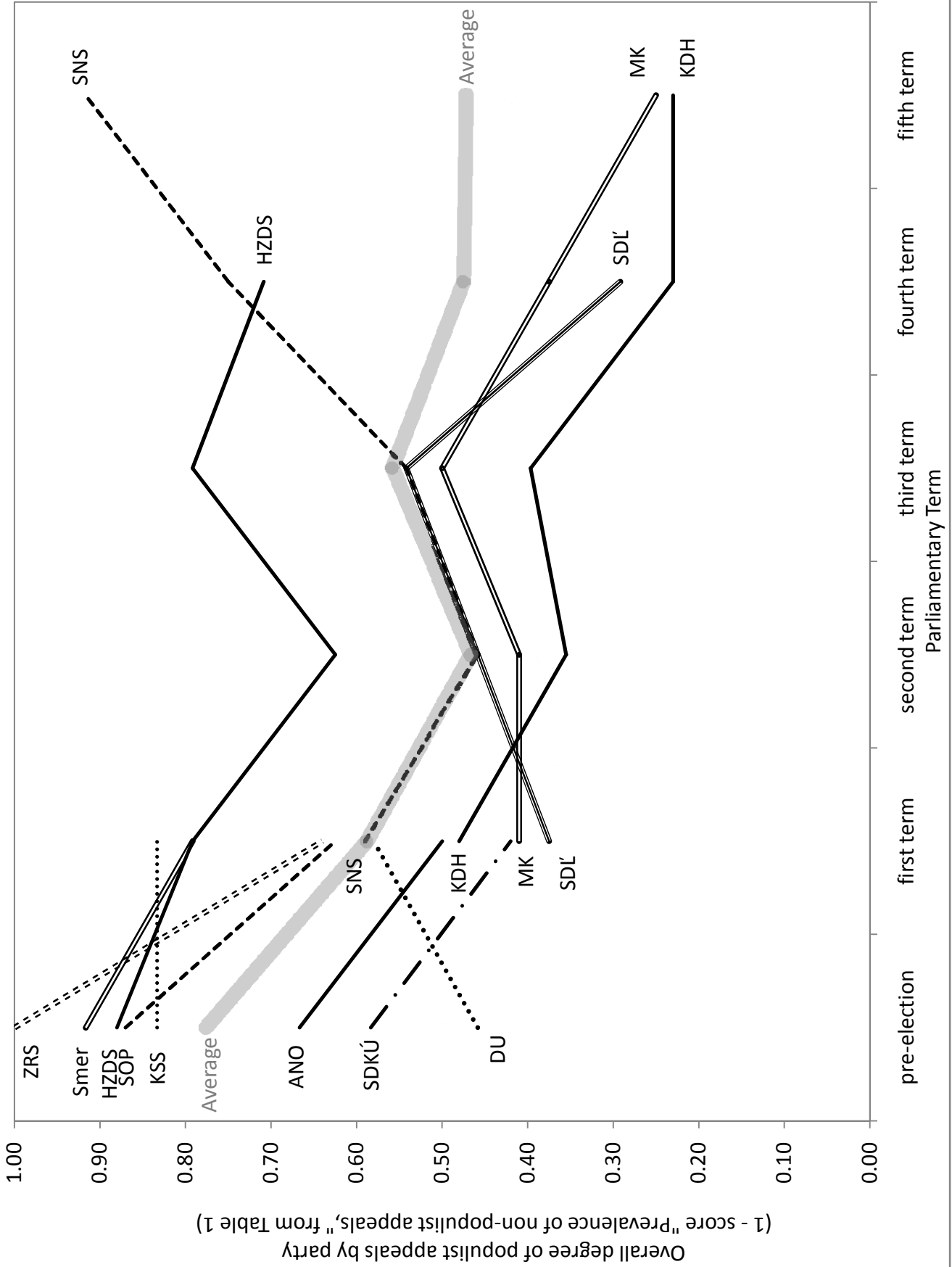


making the appeals changed substantially. Parties' use of populist appeals is negatively related to party age, participation in government, and endurance, though the relationships appear to be bidirectional.

A clear relationship emerges between a party's age and its use of populist appeals. Figure 4 recasts Figure 2 above by lining parties up according to their age rather than chronological period. The average level of populist appeals for parties before their first election was .77. During the first electoral term, this dropped to .60, and then to .47 in the second electoral term, and then rebounding somewhat in the third term before settling back to levels around .50.

But if individual parties' use of populist appeals declines with age: how could overall levels of such appeals remain stable over time? The answer lies in the fluidity of the party landscape in Slovakia. Not only did new parties continue to emerge, but those parties made unusually high use of populist appeals. Of the seven new parties to gain parliamentary representation after 1990, five show levels of populist appeal above the average of all parties for the same period, and for four successive elections between 1992 and 2002, the party with the highest level of populist appeals was new to the political scene. It is also noteworthy that no party remained at the top of the populism charts from one electoral period to the next.

**Figure 4.**  
**Populist Appeal Scores for Parties in Slovakia by Party Age, 1990-2006 (Original Graph)**



This erosion of populist appeals over time is consistent with the characteristics of populism defined above: older parties may find particular demographic niches or become more institutionalized; new parties may have an easier time attacking the elite as a whole. The data for Slovakia tentatively support the hypotheses that age affects parties' use of inward-looking populist appeals: older parties exhibit stronger reliance on particular segments of the electorate and less on the whole people, and it also suggests that older parties are somewhat more likely to possess more engaged internal institutions. These two changes, however, account for only a share of the reduction in populism appeals as parties age. More significant, if also more erratic, changes come in the outward-looking appeals related to other parties and other elites, all of which are closely related to parties' participation in government.

Government participation provides a powerful competing explanation, because with the exception of KSS, every party entering parliament in Slovakia after 1990 also entered government in either its first or second elective term. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2007) note that parties that have used populist appeals to win power have not always abandoned those appeals once in power, but the disaggregated data for Slovakia suggests that the relationship is not uniform for every kind of populist appeal, and that the most erratic shifts in the levels of parties' populist appeals, furthermore, involve outward-looking appeals that are more closely related to a party's position in power than to its age. Furthermore, in the relatively few cases where a party's government-participation did not change from one electoral period to the next, the figures show no clear profile of decline in the overall level of populist appeals or in the six individual categories.

The relationship between populist appeals, age, and government participation, is further muddled by the fact that parties with above-average levels of populist appeals also tended to disappear before having the chance to employ those appeals in a third or fourth election (ZRS, SOP, ANO). Electoral failure, in turn, is inextricably bound up with other factors. In line with the rest of post-communist Europe (Roberts 2008; Williams 2003), voters in Slovakia tended to punish incumbent governments. The gains and losses, however, were not distributed evenly. For parties with strong populist appeals in their pregovernment periods, the loss was more than twice as high as for those without.

Unlike government participation, newness happens to a party only once, and so there are a limited number of cases for disentangling the relationship between participation in government, electoral success, and party age. Although many new parties appeared after 1990, only six managed to win seats in Slovakia's parliament and participate in government. Of these, three—ZRS, SOP, and ANO—saw dramatically worse electoral performance from their first election to their second election, while three other parties—Smer, SDKÚ, and the Democratic Union (DU, *Demokratická únia*)—saw improvements. There is simply not enough data to assess fully the interaction between populist appeals,

newness, and government participation, but it is noteworthy that a triple combination of these characteristics was fatal in three out of three cases (ZRS, SOP, ANO), whereas lesser combinations, such as newness and populist appeals without government (Smer) or newness and government participation without populist appeals (SDKÚ, DU), were not inconsistent with party survival and even with growth in party support.

### **Taking the Next Steps: Comparing Populist Appeals in Post-Communist Europe**

Shining a spotlight on the case of Slovakia illuminates promising avenues of research for political scientists. First, the concept of populism need not be consigned to the conceptual trashcan if used as an adjective rather than as a noun and as a scale rather than a binary choice. The concept's normative baggage can be further lightened by inverting the scales and beginning with *nonpopulist* appeals. The preliminary analysis of Slovakia shows on the one hand a relatively close empirical fit among the theoretical elements explored by Canovan (1999), Mudde (2004), Stanley (2008), and others, and on the other hand, two distinct categories of populist appeals: the outward-looking appeals that vary strongly with a party's relationship to power, and inward-looking appeals that remain more stable over time. Outward, explicitly "anti-elite" appeals are not as able to survive participation in government as easily as a party's inward "pro-people" focus on its own organization and electorate. Further research in Slovakia and elsewhere should help us to understand how and why parties in government retain access to these latter pro-people appeals and clarify the relationship between weakly institutionalized party organizations and catch-all electoral strategies.

Second, while our analysis sheds light on populism's vulnerability to time and power, considerable work remains on the process by which such fragile appeals manage to endure. At the party level, we know that populist appeals have remained prominent in Slovakia because ambitious politicians have regularly formed new parties that promise to dislodge the corrupt and unresponsive elite. We have scant evidence, however, of how the process works in the minds of voters. Preliminary analysis using public opinion data suggests that voters who become disillusioned with one high-populist-appeal party often turn to another in the next election. Preliminary data thus offers support for the hypothesis that Slovakia exhibits a "clean-corrupt" issue divide. This divide cuts across other divisive questions, such as economic redistribution or minority rights, and differs from them in ways that make it hard to recognize: the sides of "clean" and "corrupt" may endure, but the roster of each side changes continually as new "clean" parties come to be perceived as corrupt, and voters who care about corruption seek out a new champion for their cause. Whether this constant cycle of hope and disappointment can endure for more than two or three electoral cycles is an open question, but one that can be explored by closer

attention to public opinion within Slovakia within the other post-communist cases that have seen the emergence of major new parties, particularly the Baltic countries, Poland, and Bulgaria.

Finally, there is the question of anomalies within Slovakia itself. One party in Slovakia—Smer—has deviated from the populist pattern of *live fast, join governments, and die young*. Indeed, in its first three years after entering government in 2006, Smer not only avoided a drop in public support while in office, but actually went on to sustained record highs. A party that can square the circle of populist appeals is worthy of closer observation. It is still not clear whether Smer's continued success is thanks to the party's shift away from populist appeals toward less fragile appeals based on economics and national identity or whether the party has retained its good looks thanks to Slovakia's remarkable economic growth. As the global credit crunch begins to squeeze Slovakia's export-driven economy, it will be useful to study the party's response and the reaction of other parties, including, perhaps, new parties picking up Smer's old populist appeals. In this way, the small case of Slovakia may continue to contribute to big scholarly debates about the meaning and relevance of populism.

### Appendix

*ANO*—Alliance of the New Citizen (*Aliancia nového občana*)

*DU*—Democratic Union (*Demokratická únia*)

*HZDS*—Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*)

*KDH*—Christian Democratic Movement (*Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie*)

*KSS*—Communist Party of Slovakia (*Komunistická strana Slovenska*)

*MK*—Hungarian Coalition (*Magyar Koalíció*)

*SDK*—Slovak Democratic Coalition (*Slovenská demokratická koalícia*)

*SDKÚ*—Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (*Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia*)

*SDEL*—Party of the Democratic Left (*Strana demokratickej ľavice*)

*Smer*—Direction

*SNS*—Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*)

*SOP*—Party of Civic Understanding (*Strana občianskeho porozumenia*)

*ZRS*—Movement of Workers of Slovakia (*Združenie robotníkov Slovenska*)

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