

Kevin Deegan-Krause: *Elected Affinities: Democracy and Party Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic*

Stanford 2006: Stanford University Press, 329 pp.

The break-up of Czechoslovakia created an enormous opportunity for social scientists as they could observe the divergent development of two countries that had shared nearly 75 years in a common state. Yet, few scholars have taken advantage of this natural experiment to explain why these countries took different paths. And of those who have, most have treated Slovakia in a perfunctory way. Kevin Deegan-Krause's book is a major attempt to make use of this comparison and to treat the countries as equals (notice the ordering of the countries in the title). His focus is the major political difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia which he calls institutional accountability. This refers to the degree to which rulers submit to limits on their power from other state institutions like courts, ombudsmen, constitutional provisions, or opposition parties. The concept was introduced by Guillermo O'Donnell in the late 1990s (he called it horizontal accountability) to describe the situation in countries that held free elections (vertical accountability), but whose leaders seemed to be acting undemocratically by breaking the law and not respecting institutional checks on their power.

Deegan-Krause shows how this concept can be the object of rigorous empirical investigation and how it illuminates the Mečiar era in Slovakia. He begins his book with a detailed portrait of the ways that the Slovak government under Mečiar avoided institutional accountability and tried to weaken checks on its power even while preserving nominally democratic institutions. These violations include attempts to expel deputies from parliament, manipulate police investigations, and control the media. Though he does not spare the Czech Republic criticism on this score, he does

find that Slovakia suffered far more violations of institutional accountability at least in the years 1994 to 1998. What explains this difference? Many would say that this question answers itself. After all, Slovaks were more nationalistic, less modern, and more comfortable with corruption and strong man rule. One of Deegan-Krause's key achievements is showing that this stereotype is false. After looking at poll after poll from the early and mid-1990s, he shows that differences in public opinion between the two countries were small or non-existent. Citizens of the two countries were far more alike than different. To name one particularly important example, they were about equally enamoured of rule by a firm hand. And indeed, after Mečiar was voted out of office in 1998, Slovakia quickly returned to levels of institutional accountability at least as high as in the Czech Republic.

So why did Slovakia have more trouble restraining its leaders at least for a time? For Deegan-Krause, two factors were key. One is the way that opinions are distributed among political parties. Though about the same percentage of Czechs and Slovaks accepted violations of institutional accountability, in the Czech Republic these individuals were dispersed similarly across most political parties. In Slovakia, by contrast, most supporters of strong man rule ended up in Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). But even this was not enough to cause Slovakia's problems. It was also necessary for HZDS to form a governing majority with two other parties – the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS) – who had similar attitudes and more importantly were weak enough to be manipulated by Mečiar. In a sense, Slovakia was hit by a perfect storm – a party that gathered most of the country's opponents of institutional accountability and managed to hold most of the reins of power. As Deegan-Krause points out, take away 12 000 votes from the SNS and the violations of the

Mečiar era may never have happened. Mečiar was very lucky to end up in the position he did.

Deegan-Krause is careful to rule out other explanations for this divergence. Countervailing institutions to the government like the media, civil society, and bureaucracies were not different enough across the two countries to explain the varying levels of institutional accountability. Charismatic and clientelist appeals played a comparable role in the politics of both countries. Even socio-economically, the countries were far more similar than different. In short, there was little in the nature of Slovakia that made these violations happen. They were the product of wilful actors and particular circumstances. What is harder to understand is how the Czech Republic might have ended up with similar violations of institutional accountability. Though the countries do look more similar than different in most respects, I could not shake the feeling that there had to be something more than will and circumstance to explain the different paths. Would the Czech Republic have suffered its own Mečiar era if supporters of firm-hand rule had gathered in the Civic Democratic Party and teamed up with weaker coalition partners? Deegan-Krause correctly suggests that it would not have, but then there is probably something more at play. I do not claim to know what this something is, but Deegan-Krause has certainly ruled out many possibilities and proposed a reasonable and clever answer.

Besides this empirical argument, the theoretical contribution of the book is to show how 'issue divides' develop and affect politics. An issue divide refers to the way that attitudinal differences among citizens are reflected in the party system. The key to explaining events in Slovakia was the emergence of an issue divide over institutional accountability (firm-hand rule) and the linkage of that divide to another issue divide over nationalism. This linkage was not inevitable – it was not present ear-

ly in the transition in Slovakia – and its creation was part of the political 'genius' of Mečiar. He was able to unite nationalists and quasi-authoritarians in one party and oppose them to parties who did not take these positions. The concept of an issue divide should prove useful to a wide array of scholars. It differs from the traditional idea of a cleavage in that it is not based on socio-demographic facts like class or religion. As such, it is more manipulable in both positive and negative directions. It can thus help to explain rapid changes in and out of democracy as it does for Slovakia. The open question is when and where issue divides emerge, and Deegan-Krause has some useful speculation on this point.

The book does have some shortcomings. It is not always clear how exactly the analyses of survey data were conducted. Similarly, some aggregation of these poll results into more general measures and a graphic representation of them would give the reader an easier time. Finally, it would help to discuss the most appropriate methods for analysing institutional accountability and issue divides so that other scholars can follow in his footsteps. Nevertheless, this is easily one of the most rigorous and theoretically rich works dealing with Czech and Slovak politics. Hopefully, others will take up the challenge to investigate institutional accountability in other places and times and pursue his ideas on issue divides and their origins. The book is an especially helpful corrective for those who believe that the abuses of the Mečiar era were a foreordained result of an immature political culture. Deegan-Krause persuasively shows that they were not and that the Slovak experience cannot be easily dismissed or avoided. As the title of his final chapter powerfully puts it, 'Slovakia Is Everywhere'.

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