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The Quality of Democracy: Mass-Elite
Linkages in the Czech Republic

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LINKAGES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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**THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY:
MASS-ELITE LINKAGES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

ANDREW T. GREEN and CAROL SKALNIK LEFF

Minimalist definitions of democracy that focus on competitive elections and observance of basic political rights have been the standard for cross-national studies that examine the correlates of democracy, as well as the baseline for many individual and regional studies of democratic transitions. However justified this standard may be in such cases, it is nonetheless of limited utility in the analysis of democratization projects that have completed the initial transition and are--or are not--consolidating. At this stage, it becomes necessary to begin to ask about the quality and dynamics of new democracies, and to extend the definitional field of vision to more complex understandings of how they function. The Czech Republic is a case in point.

The Czech Republic has been widely regarded as one of the major political and economic success stories in the early years of post-communist transition: as the first state to gain OECD membership, with the most creditable economic transformation project, and the lowest unemployment rate, the Czechs have been touted as "bloc champs" in the transition game. The Czech Republic seems, by good fortune and good management, to have been politically unique in several notable respects. The strength and determination of the prime minister, Vaclav Klaus, and the integrity and credibility of the president, Vaclav Havel, are recognized and respected at home and abroad. There have been few of the overt confrontational crises between the two executives that have marked politics in such neighboring states as Poland and Slovakia. In contrast with other post-communist states, the ex-communist left has never achieved the electoral success that would have permitted its exercise of power. Indeed, Czech politics is unique among post-communist states in that the strongest left party is not ex-communist at all; the Social Democrats (CSSD), rather than the rigid communists, now dominate the left, and have yet to share in governance.

Moreover, Czech governments have also been rather stable by regional standards. The first two post-communist governments functioned from election to election without a loss of parliamentary confidence and without significant partisan recomposition, despite the characteristic fluidity of the parties themselves, which generated party schisms and defections in the Czech Republic as elsewhere. Accordingly, while the average cabinet duration in the region as a whole is little more than a year, Czech cabinets have averaged three years in duration, with tenures in office outstripping the West European average. Finally, popular satisfaction with the Klaus government has until recently been strikingly high in comparison to ratings accorded neighboring regimes. This performance record seems to suggest an atypically smooth democratic transition, with popular rewards for the unusually strong economic performance of the post-communist governments.

Despite these positive indicators, though, the 1996 parliamentary and senatoral elections suggest that this exemplary state is also prey to democratic deficiencies. In the parliamentary elections, Klaus's Civic Democratic Party (ODS) once again emerged as the strongest party, but the Klaus government returned to office as a minority government. The senatoral elections were marred by a dramatic drop in voter turnout, the virtual abandonment of ODS by the junior coalition parties, and the election of former Czechoslovak prime minister and Klaus nemesis, Petr Pithart, as Senate Chairman.

Analysis of the surprisingly confused outcomes of the 1996 Czech elections tells a complex story about Czech politics, but more importantly it points to an underlying dynamic with significant implications for the study of democratization. As Schmitter notes, scholars generally posit that "the legitimacy and hence the long-term viability of a given democratic regime depend upon how well . . . external linkages with civil society function."¹ The key to the development and durability of democracy is thus found in the health and vitality of the mass-elite linkage, a linkage that is generally

¹ Phillippe Schmitter, 'The consolidation of Political Parties: Processes, Rhythms, Sequences, and Types,' in Geoffrey Pridham (ed.), Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives From Southern Europe, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth Publishing Co., 1995), p.558.

understood to involve more than infrequent, episodic acts of voting. Since Locke, discussions of the state-society relationship have centered on the policymaking ability of the state and how society can influence and control it; that is, the ability of citizens or groups to participate in, communicate ideas to, and gain influence over policymaking strengthens democracy.

In this analysis, we pursue this focus on the mass-elite linkages that underpin the democratic process, broadly defined to include both electoral participation and engagement in the policymaking process. In the following sections, we will first frame the issue of mass-elite linkage in general terms, before assessing the Czech case in several stages: the pattern of popular attitudes toward government and government policy; the character of the policymaking process in providing or failing to provide organized access and support for the development of associational life; and the reflection of these two variables in the pattern of Czech participation in politics. We argue that this understanding not only sheds light on the narrower conundrum of the Czech election results, but, more broadly, demonstrates the value of directing scholarly analysis of democratization to the endeavor of mapping out characteristic linkage patterns between state and society that transcend the electoral connection as such.

Democracy And The Mass-Elite Linkage

The question frequently posed in journalistic accounts and by attentive international policymakers is “how democratic or undemocratic is a given state?” Indeed, scholars are also concerned with assessing the prospects for the consolidation of democracy, and accordingly themselves attempt such evaluations, implicitly or explicitly. The preponderance of scholarly attention that has been devoted to party systems in the electoral process in post-communist transitions is understandable, given the availability of data and the high salience of electoral contests for minimalist definitions of democracy, but it also offers only a partial snapshot of the political process. It might be more productive to frame the question somewhat differently, particularly in states that meet the standard minimalist requirements for identification as fledgling democracies (competitive and meaningful elections, relatively open information systems). The question then

becomes, not merely how much democracy, but in what form? What is the character of the democratic process? This is particularly true because a political system is not in fact a checklist of democratic indicators, but rather a dynamic process that must be conceptualized and investigated as a whole, and which may exhibit its own distinctive characteristics, regardless of its familial resemblance to the larger class of democratic polities.²

For example, the interwar Czechoslovak parliamentary system--its first twentieth-century experiment in transition from authoritarian (Habsburg) rule--is understood as the only East European democratic experiment to have survived intact up to World War II. Yet we learn little of its evolving dynamics and operational mechanisms from that designation. Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy functioned, in the face of considerable partisan fragmentation, on the basis of a closely coordinated and continually re-negotiated relationship amongst the core non-extremist parliamentary parties. Election outcomes were not decisive: Czechoslovak governments did face and respond to opposition, but without clearcut rotation in office; rather, ruling coalitions shifted at the margins as often as once a year, with continuous delicate adjustments in the ruling core of perpetual cabinet ministers who aged over the course of the Republic without systematic renewal or promotion of a rising generation of politicians. Interwar Czechoslovak democracy was thus a closely held corporation, in which mass-elite electoral linkages were not decisive in promoting clear policy shifts. Moreover, despite an ideologically varied press and the legality of non-system parties such as the Communists, sensitive areas touching on the state's identity and security were regulated through some measure of censorship, police monitoring of public gatherings, and a Law for the Defense of the Republic that restrained the scope of free speech. The complexity of the state's multi-national composition and its regional disparities in economic development, coupled with its parlous international position, created a distinct pattern of conflict control that tended to limit the impact of

² For a critique of the use of amalgamated indices of democracy, see Gerardo Munck, 'Disaggregating Political Regime: Conceptual Issues in the Study of Democratization,' Working Paper #28 (Notre Dame, IN: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 1996), pp.21-24.

popular mobilization and introduced some clear rigidities into the political process, rigidities that ultimately undermined any unified Czech and Slovak response to the German challenge of 1938 and strengthened the post-war Communist electoral position.³

The point here is not to reassign Czechoslovakia from its conventional designation as a democracy, but rather to emphasize that such a designation is only the topic sentence of a paragraph, that fails to capture essential political strengths and pathologies. Nor is it sufficient to focus on the gross anatomy of its institutional structure to categorize it, for example, as a unitary parliamentary system. The way in which a political system structures societal input--a central question in the analysis of democratic dynamics--may vary considerably regardless of commonalities of basic formal institutional design, and this variance may have profound effects on the way key issues are processed, and on the durability and adaptability of the system.

It is this systemic perspective that we bring to bear on the development of the post-communist political process in the Czech Republic. Samuel Huntington has suggested that "as formal democratic institutions are adopted by more and more diverse societies, democracy itself is becoming more differentiated."⁴ David Collier and Steven Levitsky have done valuable work to promote clearer thinking on this question, in a survey of scholarly attempts to develop typologies of democratic functioning: "democracy with adjectives," adjectives that refine the functioning of the political process.⁵ Their review of the democratic subtypes identified by scholars of democratization--"delegative democracy," "consociational democracy," "majoritarian

³ See for example, Carol Skalnik Leff, National Conflict in Czechoslovakia: The Making and Remaking of a State (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). An important scholarly critic of the broad functioning of democracy in the First Czechoslovak Republic is F. Gregory Campbell. See, for example, his 'Empty Pedestals,' *Slavic Review*, Vol.44 (Spring 1985).

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, 'Democracy for the Long Haul,' Journal of Democracy, Vol.7, No.2 (April 1996), p.10.

⁵ David Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy 'with adjectives': Finding Conceptual Order in Recent Comparative Research,' paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1994.

democracy"--highlights the logic of current attempts to define radial types of democracy, all of which share common features, but which function according to some distinctive logics. The current analysis shares the focus of such undertakings.

It may be premature, however, to characterize in broadbrush strokes the kinds of democracies that may emerge in post-communist Eastern and Central Europe. The purpose of our analysis is accordingly more modest. Here, we follow Schmitter in his admonition that "conceptual effort might better be directed towards understanding the interrelationships of specific sets of institutions, toward structuration of a pattern" of linkages,⁶ and attempt to assess the patterning of what he terms the "partial regimes" that link the state with civil society, inclusive of, but not limited to, the electoral connection.

A healthy civil society capable of engaging state institutions is widely asserted, sometimes without elaboration, to be a basic prerequisite of successful democratization. It is generally defined as a voluntary, autonomous "realm of organized social life," encompassing a vast array of organizations mediating between individuals and political institutions.⁷ It is often argued that groups must be pluralist in nature: that is, they may not be maximalist groups seeking to conquer the state, nor corporatist groups with strong ties to the state. Limiting the scope of civil society to bottom-up organizations as the sole channel for interest aggregation and communication is unnecessarily restrictive, however. First, this downplays the reality and potential of corporatist organizations, which are top-down organizations specifically sanctioned by the state for the negotiation of policy issues.⁸ Second, doing so ignores both the potential impact of anti-system groups, and, more

⁶ Schmitter, p. 554.

⁷ See Larry Diamond, 'Toward Democratic Consolidation,' Journal of Democracy, Vol.5, No.3 (July 1994), pp.6ff; and Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), Parts I and III, especially Chapter 3 in Part I.

⁸ The critical issue is not as is often claimed, autonomy from the state, but rather involves questions of intra-organizational democracy and representational monopoly, both of which vary for top-down organizations as well as for bottom-up organizations.

importantly, the possibility that attitudes and strategies of groups supporting democracy may change over time to regime opposition. Here, then, civil society will be understood to encompass all associational activity in pursuit of interests of all kinds. Not all such activity, of course, is directed at influencing policy or constraining state actions, nor are all such groups completely autonomous.

Associations are needed to restrain arbitrary state action as well as to aggregate and express variegated societal interests. In turn, active citizen participation is the catalyst for the organization and functioning of associations. The communication of information and ideas is necessary to encourage participation, stimulate new interests, afford policymaking institutions a clearer grasp of the stakes and impact of existing policies, and guard against abuses of state power. Through access to policymaking institutions, societal norms are promulgated that, in turn, strengthen the legitimacy of the state. We are thus concerned with the dynamics of associational engagement with cabinet governments, bureaucracy and legislative institutions in the nascent Czech democracy. It is through an examination of how the Czech political system structures political participation that we hope to enlarge the scope of inquiry into the development of a stable democratic environment.

Public Opinion and Czech Politics

An understanding of public response to the political system and key political actors cannot in itself define the contours of the political system; the linkage between attitudes and behavior is modulated by other variables, and the character of the political system itself may be only obliquely refracted through the prism of popular consciousness. But public opinion data can serve as a diagnostic exercise in identifying trouble spots in the mass-elite linkage. In this section, therefore, we review trends in the evolution of public opinion regarding the functioning of the political system.

In common with other post-communist experiments, the Czech public showed a decline in popular trust in institutions from an initial peak, as the optimism and euphoria of the initial transition period gave way everywhere in the region to a more sober assessment of regime competence and responsiveness. However, a preliminary comparative comment is in order. In survey after survey, Czech respondents have tended to show a fairly high degree of optimism about the future and a

greater sense of post-communist progress compared to the publics of other post-communist states. Czechs were more likely than others, for example, to feel themselves better off after the collapse of communism than before. Symptoms of Czech disaffection with politics must be understood, therefore, in the context of the general dilemma of achieving democratic legitimacy in transitional regimes. We are clearly not arguing that the Czech case is uniquely problematic; in important and already well-recognized respects, in fact, the Klaus government parlayed its economic performance and control of unemployment levels into a stronger position than most post-communist governments enjoyed.

A more focused analysis of the pattern of Czech popular reactions to post-communist politics, however, does help isolate distinctive weaknesses in the mass-elite linkage that may prove consequential in the longer term. It is true that the public approves of the range of political choice offered in the emerging party system, with some 80 percent feeling that elections do provide genuine alternatives. Since independence in 1992, the majority of the population have been generally satisfied with the functioning of democracy, a proportion that compares favorably with attitudinal patterns in neighboring states.⁹ It is important to note, however, that this response does not signal popular sentiment that the mass-elite connection is a healthy and resonant one. Equally impressive majorities feel, and have felt since at least 1992, that their representatives quickly lost touch with the electorate (86%) and that there is little chance for ordinary citizens to influence government (82%).¹⁰ In a 1995 survey, less than ten percent felt that they could influence governmental decisions, even though more than half would have liked to. Moreover, the means they visualized for influencing policy focused largely on electoral choice and confrontational methods such as strikes and demonstrations; only one

⁹ Eurobarometre Survey (Brussels: Commission of European Communities, 1994), cited in Charles Gati, 'If Not Democracy, What?: Leaders, Laggards and Losers in the Post-communist World,' in Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 1996), p.179.

¹⁰ Data from opinion studies by STEM (Stredisko empirickych vyzkumu), *Trendy 1/1996*: 'Skepticismus obcanu k participaci na politicke moci (demokracie v zajeti obcanske anomie)' and 'Spokojenost s politickum denim.' It should be noted however that older, less educated and left-wing voters tend to be the greatest skeptics, and that supporters of the current right-center government show the strongest feelings of efficacy.

percent of the public contemplated working through parties and associations to negotiate policy outcomes.¹¹ Czech opinion analysts have thus concluded that most Czechs perceive their political influence as “beginning and ending” with the act of voting, and that other forms of participation and engagement in the policy process are ineffectual.¹²

The pattern of public opinion on key political issues is far from formless. As Evans and Whitefield have argued, the initially labile post-communist party systems are increasingly more rooted in social bases, with a concomitant increase of coherence in the alignment of political forces.¹³ In the Czech case, the emergence of a left-right continuum in the party system, accompanied by regular variations of emphasis on key social and economic issues across electoral constituencies, is becoming clearer. While concern for crime and health care issues are not differentiated by class or economic status, other issues are, and show a distinct left-right polarity. What was initially a party system that appeared to lack its historically strong left wing has developed since 1989 into a more intelligible bimodal pattern with basically moderate electoral centers in ODS on the right and CSSD on the left. The optimists--those who approve of the functioning of democracy, and who feel that their own economic situation is improving or gives prospects of improving-- have formed the core constituency of the Klaus government and his ODS in particular since 1992.

If this spectrum is intelligible, however, it is not devoid of troubling elements. A STEM poll in June 1996 captured a popular image of Klaus's ODS as competent and purposeful, but also arrogant and unresponsive to social problems.¹⁴ Moreover, beyond the moderate parties lie

11 Lubomir Brokl, 'Parlament, vlada a prezident ocima obcanu,' Lidove Noviny, 13 October 1995, p.20.

12 People haven't tuned out for this reason: political interest expressed in polls remains relatively high, for better or worse, including among groups most skeptical of government responsiveness, such as older voters. STEM, TRENDY 1/1996: 'Politika pritahuje nektere skupiny lidi silneji.'

13 Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe,' British Journal of Political Science, Vol.23, No.4 (1993).

14 CTK News Summary, 3 July 1996.

anti-democratic extremist parties at both ends of the continuum, whose presence raises particularly pointed questions about any hasty assurance that all is well with state-society linkages. The unrepentant Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) may have proved too rigid to dominate the left as reform communists do in most post-communist states--refusing defiantly even to change its name as all other post-communist parties in the region did--but it retains an electoral following well above the electoral threshold. On the right, Miroslav Sladek's neo-fascist and anti-Semitic Republican Party is vocally skeptical of the existing political system. Adherents of these parties, jointly comprising close to a fifth of the electorate, show an opinion profile that manifests policy disaffection and skepticism about the functioning of Czech democracy. Clearly, a significant proportion of the public feels alienated from the democratic regime.

Also relevant to the shape of public opinion is the pattern of policy preferences and priorities, and the way in which this pattern meshes with perceptions of government efficacy. Here, too, we find some problematic elements that, we will argue, are directly relevant to the larger pattern of limited popular efficacy. Table 1 shows that the problems considered most urgent are precisely those that the government is perceived as handling ineffectively, while Table 2 shows that even non-government parties, including the anti-system Republicans, are viewed as better able to deal with many pressing problems. An important question, therefore, is how capable the political system is of responding to such concerns. It is for that reason that it is important to pay heed to the policymaking process itself, an examination that does not offer encouraging answers.

[TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

Policymaking

Elections are an imperfect indicator of society's linkages to the democratic process, both because elections occur infrequently and episodically, and because they capture societal interests and policy preferences only indirectly. In light of these limitations, it should be clear that any analysis of mass-elite linkages cannot rest solely on investigation of the electoral process. A more useful and complete way to examine the connections between society and the democratic process is to focus on

policymaking, for it is here that societal interests and preferences may be translated into concrete action on an ongoing basis by the state. Indeed, democratization studies generally assign to society an important role in democratization precisely because the inability of groups to participate in, communicate ideas to, and gain influence over policymaking is understood to diminish democracy; this incapacity may produce potentially serious pathologies-- apathy, extremism, and shifts to extra-institutional political expression.

This emphasis on groups, ideas, and access to the policymaking process is paralleled by developments in the public policy literature.¹⁵ As policy scholars turned to the dynamic issue of policy change, the discussion of policymaking moved from simplistic discussions of group competition to a more static picture of exclusionary relationships, and from there to a more dynamic perspective involving such variables as the ability of groups to organize, their activities, the changing content of ideas, and the institutional environment.¹⁶ Any conception of societal engagement in the democratic process must therefore incorporate an understanding of policymaking that frames the interaction of groups, ideas and institutions. This section analyzes the development of associations in the Czech Republic, discusses the flow of information between society, groups and the state, and then examines the role played by groups and information flows in the Czech policymaking process, a role that remains significantly stunted.

¹⁵ Despite this parallel, policymaking is a much-neglected aspect in democratization studies; when it is included, it often utilizes outdated, heavily criticized models of policymaking. See Andrew Green, 'Civil Society, Ideas and Policymaking,' Czech Sociological Review (forthcoming), for a critique of how two typical conceptions of civil society incorporate policymaking.

¹⁶ See Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, Agendas and Instability in American Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), for a discussion of the evolution of policy research.

The Development of Associations in Czech Society

The development of bottom-up associations in the Czech Republic has been slow and hesitant, in no small part due to the legal vacuum in which such associations--particularly non-profit organizations--have existed in all post-communist states. The Law on Association of Citizens of 1990 provided a general framework for legally sanctioned associational activity,¹⁷ by establishing a basic definition of civic associations, including registration, liquidation procedures, and limits to their activities. It quickly became obvious to many, however, that it was inadequate for organizations beyond sports booster clubs, parent-teacher organizations and stamp collectors. In particular, the embryonic non-profit sector wanted to distinguish itself from such groups, in order to justify and promote a Western-style model of tax exemptions, donations, and access to government contracts. At the same time, however, the Czechoslovak government was revamping the tax code, and raised the concern that granting tax advantages to associations without clearly distinguishing between types of associations would exacerbate existing abuse, fraud and loss of tax revenue.¹⁸

This situation was partially remedied in the general overhauling of the Civic Code in November 1991.¹⁹ The section dealing with citizen associations was amended to distinguish between civil associations and foundations, defining the latter as grant-making endowed institutions. This change, too, was inadequate, as most non-profit groups fit neither the definition of civil associations nor foundations, leaving organizations providing free health care, shelters for battered women, drug rehabilitation services, or environmental education in a legal vacuum. Between 1992 and 1995, in a

¹⁷ Zakon 83/1990, o sdruzovani obcanu.

¹⁸ Jiri Kabele and Martin Potucek, The Formation and Implementation of Social Policy in the Czech Republic as a Political Process (Prague: START Foundation, 1995), p.23.

¹⁹ Zakon 509/1991, o obcanskem zakoniku.

reflection of government ambivalence and alternative priorities, the legal treatment of associations in such areas as taxation, inheritance, real estate and fee exemptions was unclear and inconsistent, favorable status and exemptions came and went, and legislation was enacted that incorporated terms without legal definition or that contradicted itself at points. After several years of delay, the Law on Public Benefit Societies, specifically aimed at providing a legal framework for non-profit organizations, passed in September 1995, but was acknowledged by all parties involved to be flawed and imperfect, albeit necessary in any form; proposed amendments are expected in 1997.²⁰

Despite the uncertain legal environment, the growth of civic associations, foundations, and other non-profit groups has been dramatic. Starting in 1989, when no autonomous groups were legal, new associations developed out of existing state organizations related to sports, culture, hobbies, or education, so that more than 32,000 organizations were registered with the state by the end of 1994.²¹ It should be noted that although funding for these organization has increased annually, the majority of this funding is directed to physical education, recreation, education, and sports at all levels, and the distribution of funds is based largely on pre-1989 organizational relationships.²² Moreover, foundations were not eligible for this funding. What is most striking is the overwhelming

²⁰ The Law on National Foundations, passed in spring 1996, provided the institutional and administrative framework for distributing funds set aside from privatization proceedings to projects proposed by organizations meeting the stipulated criteria. There is considerable dispute between the government and other political leaders over how much money has actually accrued, which must be resolved before the agency can be established. In addition, the government still wants to deal with the question of how to spin off many existing state organizations as either budgetary or quasi-budgetary organizations, an issue that held up the Law on Public Benefit Societies, because these organizations would supersede public-benefit societies.

²¹ Almost 4,000 new civil associations were registered with the state in 1990 alone, and in excess of 32,000 civil associations and foundations were registered by the end of 1994. More than 28,000 of these were civil associations, roughly 20,000 of which were concerned with sports, schools or culture. Foundation growth has also been impressive, increasing from 1500 in 1992 to 4200 by the end of 1995. Information taken from Socially-Oriented Non-Profit Organizations in the Czech Republic (Prague: NROS, 1994), pp.13-33; 'Pevny rad dobrocinnosti,' Tyden, No.13 (25 March 1996).

²² Funding from the state for civil associations has increased from approximately Kc 960 million in 1993 to almost Kc 1600 million in 1994; 'The Activity of Foundations and Civil Associations Working in Health and Social Services,' Bulletin ICN, No.1 (1995), pp.6-7; Socially-Oriented Non-Profit Organizations in the Czech Republic, pp.20-33; Rachel Stein, The Not-for-Profit Sector in the Czech Republic 1994 (Prague: ICN, 1995), p.23.

dependence of civil associations, particularly those in social, health, or human rights services, on state funds.

With regard to top-down organizations, one corporatist group has been sanctioned by the state to negotiate certain economic policy issues.²³ In October 1990, the Czechoslovak government set up the Council of Economic and Social Agreement, later called the Council for Dialogue of Social Partners (RDSP),²⁴ composed of representatives of the government, employers, and employees--a classic corporatist configuration in its composition. Employers' interests are represented by the Confederation of Entrepreneurial and Employers' Federations and the Federation of Industries, while employees are represented by the Czech-Moravian Chamber of Union Federations (CMKOS) and the Confederation of Art and Culture.²⁵ Agreements worked out by the RDSP are politically but not legally binding, and thus must be introduced to parliament by the government as proposed legislation. RDSP negotiates such policy issues as wages, collective bargaining, re-training, and workplace safety; the issues of prices and insurance lurk in the background.

Despite recognition accorded labor in the RDSP, though, the Czech government has acted aggressively to inhibit the development of labor organization. The Labor Code of 1990 restricted previous union prerogatives in employee dismissal and access to meetings to senior management, while additional legislation that year abolished the short-lived experiment in the election of plant management; in the face of vocal labor opposition, the labor law was amended in 1994 to place

²³ Martin Potucek, 'Faktory, akteri a problemy socialni reformy,' in Martin Potucek, Miroslav Purkrabek, Petr Hava et al, Analyza udalosti verejne politiky v Ceske republice. I. dil (Prague: Charles University, 1994), pp.22-24. Zdenka Mansfeldova, 'Tripartita jako model prostredkovani zajmu v politickem systemu Ceske republiky,' Working Papers (Prague: Sociologicky ustav, 1996), sections 2-4.1.

²⁴ Rad hospodarske a socialni dohody, later Rad pro dialog socialnich partneru.

²⁵ Konfederaci podnikatelskych a zamestnavatelskych svazu, Svaz prumyslu, Ceskomoravska komora odborovych svazu, Konfederaci umeni a kultury.

further limitations on union prerogatives.²⁶ Labor and Social Affairs Minister Jindrich Vodicka argued in November 1995 that Czech unions should not be as strong as their West European counterparts, lest they impede economic development. He added, with emphasis, that the government was strong enough to block union efforts to play a more prominent role.²⁷ Vodicka's argument for weak unions sparked a sharp retort from labor leaders, of course, but more important here is the fact that his remarks seem characteristic of an active and explicit government concern with the "political demobilization" of unions. We will encounter this pattern again, for it is indicative of a broader government resistance to fostering a dense institutionalized network of mass-elite linkages.

Communication Of Information And Ideas Between State And Society

The second element in this analysis of policymaking sketches the general state of the communication of information and ideas between the state, groups, and society. While this is difficult to define and quantify, some indicators of communication can be examined: perception and attitudes toward civil society, and information flows.

Perceptions and attitudes toward associations, non-profit groups in particular, are generally not very favorable. Premier Klaus's opposition to legislation or state support of any kind is well known from his 1994 debate with President Havel on the concept of civil society, from his statements warning of the danger of groups standing between individuals and the state, and from his focus on election results as the sole means of identifying and validating the interests and ideas of individuals. The leak in 1995 of a State Intelligence Service (BIS) report listing some hitherto-peaceful environmental groups alongside demonstrably violent neo-fascist groups as "extremist," which allowed for BIS surveillance of their activities, is an interesting insight into the

²⁶ For a discussion of early post-communist labor relations, see Ludovit Cziria, 'The Czech and Slovak Republics,' *Labor Relations and Political Change in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp.61-80.

²⁷ CTK News Summary, 30 November 1995.

government's suspicion of civil society. Such suspicion is not universally shared in the premier's party nor in the coalition, however, as Tomas Jezek of ODS and Jan Kalvoda of the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) have been strong supporters of legislation supporting the development of civil society. Despite the division of opinion among coalition party leaders, the general perception among politicians and the public alike is that the non-profit sector in particular is rife with abuse, fraud, and money-laundering, as a result of a lack of regulation and accountability.²⁸ The non-profit sector has become increasingly concerned since 1992 with questions of accountability, ethics, and public relations. The non-profit sector's poor reputation and concerted effort to improve public relations is an indicator of the weak linkages with society--that is, the weak flow of information and ideas to and from such associations and society. Moreover, the deliberately non-political stance of associations, a direct result of the anti-politics attitude developed during the communist regime, effectively constrains the development of direct relations with political parties.

Of larger concern are state attempts to control opinion and the availability and use of information. In November 1993, parliament acted to constrain the exchange of ideas by amending the penal code to provide for imprisonment of up to two years for defamation of high government officials; the law was repealed the following April in the wake of vigorous international protest at its chilling effect.²⁹ The government was once again forced to back away from an amendment proposed in September 1995 to the 1991 Law on the Periodic Press that would have restricted the right of reporters to maintain confidentiality of sources, curtailed their access to state information, and

²⁸ The Tyden article mentioned above was publicized on the cover under the headline, '4253 Foundations in the Czech Republic: An Epidemic of Charity or the Hideout of Swindlers?'; see also Stein, pp.16, 28.

²⁹ Jan Machacek, 'Nehoukejte na prezidenta: Ceske zakony stale jeste omezují svobodu projevu,' Respekt, No.50, 9-15 December 1996, pp.9-11.

provided for a broad and potentially chilling interpretation of the "right of reply."³⁰ Widely viewed as an attack on press freedoms, the amendment also highlighted the lack of a standard procedure for any citizen to obtain information from the state and the lack of a means for enforcing the right to information.³¹ Although the proposed amendment was pulled for further review, Czech journalists later argued that some of the same strictures entered through the back door in conflict-of-interest legislation passed in November 1995: this legislation, which enjoins civil servants to silence about information acquired on the job, prompted journalist Tomas Rychly to complain that the government was using justified limitation on use of official information for personal gain to maintain its more general informational monopoly, and to remind the public of official reluctance to pass enabling laws to back up constitutional guarantees of access to information.³²

Communication between the unions and the government is weak and indirect, coming largely in the form of government response to union demonstrations and strikes rather than the RDSP corporatist arrangement. Prime Minister Klaus disparaged a March 1994 rally against the labor law amendments, and then one month later told delegates to the major trade union congress that unions should concentrate attention on the workplace rather than lobbying the government.³³ A strike called in December 1994 to protest proposed pension legislation was similarly criticized, and demonstrations in early 1995 were reportedly dismissed by Klaus as "absurd." From belittling

³⁰ 'Stanovisko ceskeho helsinskeho vyboru k navrhu tiskoveho zakona,' Zpravodaj ceskeho helsinskeho vyboru, No.4 (1995), pp; 6-11; Prague Post, 21 March 1995, p.11, in FBIS-EEU 95-065 (5 April 1995), pp.8-9.

³¹ The press complains that the general policy appears to be, 'what isn't explicitly allowed, is prohibited,' as opposed to the general Western policy of, 'what isn't explicitly prohibited, is allowed;' see Respekt, p.11.

³² CTK Survey of Czech Press, 20 February 1996.

³³ Jiri Pehe, RFE/RL Daily Digest, 11 April 94.

remarks about planned rallies to a stated preference for weak unions, from questioning union involvement in certain social policy areas to refusing to discuss some issues at all, the government clearly has shown a reluctance to engage unions in the policymaking process. The overall pattern, then, is of government policy that does not tend to nurture the exchange of information, ideas, and opinion between state and society.

The Policymaking Process in the Czech Republic

In this section, we are concerned with access to the policymaking process, broadly construed to encompass the generation of policy initiatives, the legislative process itself, and extra-parliamentary processes such as policy made through corporatist negotiations.³⁴ In the Czech Republic, legislative proposals can originate from the government (including the ministries), representatives, senators, or even from regional units of government.³⁵ Not surprisingly, the most common source of proposals has been the cabinet, in part because members of the coalition parties usually channel proposals through that forum, in part because proposals generated outside the government have less chance of success, and in part because the Senate was not constituted until January 1997 and the regional units have yet to be constituted at all.

The delayed establishment of the Senate and the regional governments are worth consideration in their own right. The constitution of the Czech Republic, passed in December 1992 with little time to spare before independence on 1 January 1993, contained provision for the creation of both a Senate and regional governments. The Klaus government, in defiance of the concerns of its junior coalition partners, consistently proved indifferent to remedying what soon came to be referred

³⁴ Much of the analysis in this section is based on the findings of Andrew Green during his year of research into associational activity and policymaking in the Czech Republic.

³⁵ See Ales Gerloch, Jiri Hrebejk and Vladimir Zoubek, *Ustavni system Ceske republiky* (Prague: 1994), pp.89-107; *Jednaci rad Poslanecke snemovny a souvisejici pravni predpisy* (Prague: Kancelar Poslanecke snemovne); *Parlamentni zpravodaj*, Vol.1, No.4 (1995), pp.182-84.

to as “constitutional debts”--the postponement of authorizing legislation to implement the constitutional mandate for these institutions. Klaus was widely understood to be in no hurry to constitute additional rival power centers beyond the direct control of his government, and indeed, it was 1995--less than a year before the next parliamentary election and almost three years after the legislative ratification of the constitution--before the formula for Senate elections was enacted.³⁶ Regional reform, which Klaus repeatedly and explicitly spurned as a priority of his government, was postponed still further. What is significant for the character of the policymaking process we consider here is that these constitutional debts have had the effect of restricting the number of access points for associational input into political decisionmaking. Thus, parliamentary action is the sole venue of policymaking, one that the government continues, now somewhat tenuously, to dominate.

Legislative proposals begin as broad principles developed by the legislative section of the originating ministry, but there is no formal process; a legislative analyst typically examines the current law, previous ministry positions, the current government position and relevant EU laws. Any consultation with experts or interested parties outside the ministry occurs at the discretion of the legislative analyst and the legislative section head. Only rarely, in fact, do ministries consult with outsiders, and even then on a case-by-case basis; some ministries never consult with outsiders at all.³⁷ Upon receiving declarations of the conditions under which the principles would be acceptable from the Office for Legislative and Public Administration and other relevant ministries,³⁸ the originating

³⁶ The Senate is made up of 81 Senators elected from single-member districts on the basis of majority vote; in the event that no candidate receives a majority of the vote in a given district, the top two candidates advance to the second round of balloting.

³⁷ Consultation is so rare for some ministries that any movement toward consultation is significant. For example, Environment Minister Jiri Skalicky's announcement that he would work with such environmental groups as the Green Circle in formation of legislative proposals was considered newsworthy; 'Ministr Skalicky chce vyslechnout nazory ekologu,' *MF Dnes*, 1 October 1996, p.2.

³⁸ The Office of Legislative and Public Administration has been known in the past to consult with outside experts, but again, this recourse seems to be infrequent and nonstandard.

ministry considers how to incorporate these conditions in the full legislative proposal, which is then forwarded to the government for discussion and evaluation at one of its regular legislative sessions; if approved, the proposal is sent to parliament.

It should be noted that proposals initiated by the government leave very little scope for participation by non-government actors. It is only during the period when general principles are being formulated that non-government actors may become involved, and even then only on an informal and irregular basis. The number of proposals originating with representatives (and eventually with senators) has been increasing, though, which could provide more opportunity for outside experts or interest groups to influence policymaking. Unfortunately, however, these proposals currently tend to be poorly developed, and their chances of success are very low without direct government backing.

The legislative process itself offers little additional access to the policy process. The opportunity for external input, which could occur only at the committee level, is itself uninstitutionalized: involvement by outsiders occurs only by invitation of the committee majority, and is often limited merely to being present; only rarely does an outside actor have the opportunity to answer questions or provide information of any kind.³⁹ In addition, it is only in the second stage of the three-stage legislative process, on the bill's second reading, that the substance of a bill may be amended.

The legislative process is not the only formal arena for policymaking, however. Policymaking on various socio-economic issues is undertaken in extra-parliamentary negotiations by the corporatist RDSP.⁴⁰ General agreements were signed annually between 1991 and 1994, but negotiations broke

³⁹ This conclusion is based on examination of hundreds of parliamentary committee reports from 1990-95; see also Jana Reschova and Jindriska Syllova, 'The Legislature of The Czech Republic,' in David Olson and Philip Norton (eds.), The New Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp.102-3.

⁴⁰ Potucek, pp.22-25; Mansfeldova, sections 4.2-5.

down without resolution in 1995 and 1996. The government's position in these negotiations is quite strong, as the Employers' Associations have no real power and the ability of unions to call or maintain strikes is very questionable.⁴¹ The issues of social and health insurance, price regulation, and wage regulation are major points of conflict. The only action on social and health insurance occurred in 1992, when pressure from the Employers' Associations, supported by the unions, led to adjustments in social insurance. The government refused to discuss price regulation in 1993, in the face of unexpectedly high price increases; it has continued to bar discussion in subsequent years. The issue of wage regulation has internally divided both the Employers' Association and the unions, which leaves the government with a free hand for its preferred policy in the negotiations. The government only moved to end wage regulation in July 1995 in response to threatened strikes; it also raised the salaries for government employees in education and health. This overview suggests that although the RDSP is configured as a corporatist forum, it is unable to act as one.

It should be obvious that the policymaking process in the Czech Republic is currently somewhat closed, providing only limited support for the development of associational activity, and constricting the access of external actors seeking to influence state actions. Martin Potucek, Professor of Social and Public Policy at Charles University, sums up this situation well:

'Many politicians who recently entered the political arena have not sufficiently realized that expertise is important for the objectification of their decisions on affairs of public interest. Many experts are disgusted by their futile attempts to offer their knowledge to those who make decisions...It is possible to say that many representatives (including some ministers) feel a greater and more direct responsibility to the secretariats of their political parties.'⁴²

Even the formally-sanctioned social partnership negotiations have in fact been dominated by the

⁴¹ Kabele and Potucek, p.21.

⁴² Potucek, p.26.

government.⁴³ The development of associations, which play an important role in the aggregation of interests, the generation of initiatives, and the communication of information, ideas, and interests has been stunted by the inadequacy of the legislative framework, by the poor reputation of associations in the eyes of both the government and the general public, and by the highly constrained opportunities for outside access to the process of policy formation and implementation. Policymaking in the Czech Republic is therefore overwhelmingly elite-dominated, the sole province of the government.⁴⁴

Adam Przeworski has warned, in a detailed analysis of the Polish economic transition, that a technocratic approach to the policy agenda of transitional regimes may have deleterious consequences for the legitimation of new political institutions as well as for the efficacy of the policy itself. The Polish government's disregard for the preservation of the safety net and for the psychological shock of unemployment, he argues, worked not only to render the economic transition unduly painful, but to undercut the popular credibility of the nascent political institutions as well.⁴⁵ He sees the two things as interconnected--closed policymaking facilitated the disregard and underestimation of social security issues of central concern to the public. Our analysis here suggests that similar problems plague Czech politics. In Poland, the Przeworski analysis turned out to herald the defeat of the architects of transition at the hands of the ex-communists in the 1993 elections, a

⁴³ Some aspects of the limitations described here are common to other parliamentary systems, notably the constrained external group influence on the formal parliamentary legislative process itself. Even there, however, there is some evidence that interest groups are increasingly active in the West in seeking to influence policymaking at the stage of legislative consideration. In other respects, the Czech case deviates even more markedly from Western parliamentary systems in which interest groups and experts have historically exercised genuine influence in corporatist arrangements, influence within political parties, and participation in policy networks that contribute both to agenda-setting and policy refinement.

⁴⁴ Potucek, pp.25-26.

⁴⁵ Adam Przeworski, Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira and Jose Maria Maravall, Economic Reforms in New Democracies (Cambridge University Press 1993), pp.132-89.

seeming confirmation of the costs of insensitivity to public input. We now turn to the question of the ways in which citizen participation in Czech politics shows similar signs of stress.

Political Participation

Thus far, we have sketched some important features of the shape of public opinion and the character of the policymaking process that raise questions about the effectiveness of mass-elite linkages. In this section, the central question is whether and in what ways these potentially worrisome signs are reflected in political behavior. The focus here is therefore on patterns of political participation, both in electoral politics and in the expression of political demands and preferences between elections.

Czech politics had been notable for its stability in governance since 1990. Despite the fragmentation and fluidity of the party system--a phenomenon widely visible in the post-communist transitions generally--both governments formed in the first two electoral cycles survived the full parliamentary term. The parliamentary elections of June 1996, however, came as a surprise for the Klaus government, whose coalition had been expected to retain its majority. Table 3, summarizing the outcome of the polling, reflects an erosion of the former governing coalition in parliament that proved insufficient to supplant it, but more than sufficient to render it a minority government. Although the ODS gained ground over 1992 in the booming capital and its hinterland, its support levels elsewhere stagnated or declined. Analysts accused the party of mounting a lackluster, complacent and backwardlooking campaign that failed to address the social issues we have emphasized here as popularly salient.⁴⁶

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The showing of the Klaus coalition might have been the subject of envy for other right-center

⁴⁶ In fact, the coalition parties maintained their electoral support in 1996, but faced attrition in parliamentary representation because fewer voters in 1996 cast ballots for parties that failed to meet the electoral threshold. The reallocation of seats among the threshold parties in 1992 had converted a plurality into a majority for the Klaus-led government. In short, defectors from the smaller parties in 1996 systematically changed allegiance to Klaus's opposition, and the government coalition failed to register any net gain from the electoral shifts.

governments in the region, who almost uniformly suffered outright defeat at the hands of ex-communist successor parties and were unable to cling to power even as a minority government.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the existing distribution of seats is problematic for several reasons. The first is of course, greater vulnerability of minority governments and their concomitant limitations in pursuing a coherent policy agenda. But lying behind the existing situation is a related problem; the very existence of a minority government reflects a dispersion of political tendencies significant enough to forestall the forging of a parliamentary majority. The substantial fringe delegations were deemed uncoalitionable by all the moderate parties, and the Social Democrats, necessary to the formation of any majority coalition of moderates, had made pre-election pledges not to enter a coalition with Klaus and ODS. The Klaus government only survived the inaugural vote of confidence thanks to the deliberate absence of the Social Democrats, but in return Klaus agreed not to oppose CSSD leader Milos Zeman in his bid to become Speaker of the House of Deputies. Klaus and his coalition must now govern with the tacit and uncertain support of a party that has been highly critical of government approaches to the core social questions of the economic transition.

We suggest that the profile of attitudes and political processes we have outlined above is central to the interpretation of the unexpected erosion of the Klaus majority. The dramatic fourfold increase of Social Democratic support is notable because the party emphasized precisely the issues on which public opinion showed increasingly disaffection with the government responsiveness, such as housing and health care. STEM polls confirmed the Social Democrat appeal; although some respondents questioned the realism of their promises, it nonetheless receives clear popular credit for safeguarding social benefits.

The Senate elections of November 1996 were also an unpleasant event for the coalition government, but for rather different reasons. Control of the less-powerful Senate is not as consequential as control of the House of Deputies; by a simple majority, the House of Deputies may

⁴⁷ Such governments fell in Poland (1993) and Hungary (1994), for example.

enact any legislation rejected by the Senate. However, it will--as Klaus seems to have expected--provide an alternative forum for consideration of issues and critique of government policy--a forum that the government cannot perhaps dismiss as readily as it does societal groups. The first round of balloting was marred by 35% turnout and indicated a potential landslide for ODS. Three of the four senators elected in the first round of balloting were ODS, and ODS candidates led in 73 out of the remaining 77 single-member districts; in a plurality-vote system, ODS would have gained 76 out of the 81 Senate seats.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the strong showing of ODS was not repeated in the second round of balloting, as leaders and supporters of the other coalition parties openly backed CSSD candidates wherever they competed with ODS. In the end, ODS only won 32 seats.

Although ODS is the largest party in the Senate, the results of the election are not a vindication of Klaus and his party's policies. First, the dramatically lower voter turnout between the parliament and senate elections, 76% versus 30-35%, gives the new legislative body only weak legitimization. The low turnout is blamed on several factors: protest against government policies, a series of scandals afflicting almost all parties, election weariness, and a lack of understanding of the Senate's role. Second, ODS contested the Senate with an election manifesto that placed decided emphasis on social policy, anti-corruption, and other sensitive issues on which the public perceives previous government unresponsiveness; before the election, CSSD leader Zeman had indignantly charged theft of CSSD's election program. Third, ODS' erstwhile coalition partners effectively abandoned the coalition in favor of the leading opposition party, widening a rift in the coalition that has been developing since 1993 and that reflects the same restiveness with Klaus's lack of responsiveness to the views of coalition partners that the public perceives to its concerns. Fourth, the leader of the trade organization CMKOS and implacable foe of Klaus, Richard Falbr, won a Senate seat as an independent, thus providing labor a voice in the legislative process. Fifth, the election of Klaus rival Petr Pithart as Chairman of the Senate, rejecting the ODS candidate and Klaus's

⁴⁸ Data from the Central Election Commission.

well-known characterization of Pithart's period as prime minister of Czechoslovakia from 1990-92 as a "failure." In the final analysis, the Senate election underscores both popular and elite concerns with Klaus's stranglehold on policy content and the policy agenda.

A stunted response to popular malaise with the political system is reflected in the experimentation of the major parties with initiatives designed to signal greater interparty democracy. With some fanfare, the coalition parties introduced primaries for the selection of candidates for the House of Deputies in spring 1996--a novelty in central Europe. The primaries themselves, however, were greeted with considerable journalistic skepticism about the degree of top-level manipulation of the process. Despite the poor showing of several leading ODS members, including deputies and ministers, the leaders of ODS did not adjust the regional party lists, as was widely expected. Subsequently, however, the August 1996 call for more intraparty discussion by Josef Zieleniec, ODS member and Foreign Minister, was effectively squelched by Klaus. In September 1996, the Social Democrats presented an alternative means of telegraphing leadership sensitivity to rank-and-file concerns, by proposing the establishment of an intra-party referendum process. Regardless of the extent to which such initiatives increase internal communications, they do not represent an enhancement of associational linkages between state and society as such. In 1996, Klaus and ODS also twice blocked draft legislation supported by most of the other parliamentary parties, that would have established a parliamentary ombudsman to facilitate response to individual citizen grievances. Leery of an office that would compete with ODS authority, Klaus instead countered in November 1996 by attaching to his own office a volunteer commission with one paid secretary to deal with citizen suggestions and complaints.

Reinforcing the message of the limited leadership responsiveness to rival viewpoints is the pattern of popular protest that has been reflected in strikes and demonstrations in recent years. Street politics, even when the thrust is not a challenge to democratic ideas, is nonetheless a troubling symptom of problems with the linkages between state and society.

Although formally included in the negotiations of the RDSP, labor has persistently felt

rebuffed by the government in its attempts to influence policy. The labor law amendments passed in March 1994 over trade union objections provoked a massive Prague protest rally that drew 20,000.⁴⁹ Months later, the unions organized a demonstration that drew upwards of 60,000 people, the largest demonstration since the Velvet Revolution, in a challenge to government plans to raise the pension age, introduce tuition for universities and cut the budget for child support.⁵⁰ Further threats of strikes in July 1995 forced the government to deal with wage regulation and government salaries. As the confrontational relationship between labor and government has continued, it is clear that the point of contention is not individual policy disagreements, but the status of the unions themselves. The pattern of frustrated protest described here is particularly notable because the unions ostensibly have a voice in the tripartite social partnership mandated to negotiate such issues. As we have seen, however, the domination of the RDSP by the government has meant that there is no effective institutional channel for pressing labor concerns, and the result has been periodic recourse to the streets in the effort to compensate by means of direct popular pressure for what is absent in the regular political process.

The government approach to labor political activism unapologetically extends to other associations, and engenders conflict in those spheres as well. Its protracted battle with the medical profession over pay, working hours, obsolete equipment, etc., arose from frustration at the government's inaction on a wide range of health care issues, resulting in strikes in November 1995 and March 1996. In addition there have been environmental protests against the construction of a nuclear power plant in South Bohemia, the placement of a new highway in Central Bohemia, and the licensing of a gold mine in the ecologically-sensitive Kasperske hory region in South-West Bohemia.

These conflicts seem to reflect a generalized frustration with government resistance to the

⁴⁹ Jiri Pehe, RFE/RL Daily Digest, 24 March 1994.

⁵⁰ Jiri Pehe, RFE/RL Daily Digest, 22 December 1994

development of associations, and with the quality and scope of access to policymaking processes that might serve as a means of negotiating social conflict. Indeed, the public character of these protests themselves reflect the breakdown or weakness of regularized channels of input into the policy process. Of course, the weakness of associational activity in the post-communist setting is not merely a product of government hostility or indifference; formidable organizational obstacles abound in any case and are evident in other countries. What is important is the degree to which the early experience of weakly institutionalized societal input into the policy process may prove a longer term impediment to the flow of information between political elites and mass public, and even to the stability of the political system.

Conclusion

It is, of course, not uncommon for sitting governments to face popular dissatisfaction with its policy priorities and directions -- a circumstance for which regular elections are the intended corrective. What we argue here is that public malaise about certain key issues in the Czech Republic reflects more than just conflicts over policy and priorities; rather, this malaise stems from dissatisfaction with the existing channels of access and influence between mass and elites.

These problems with the constricted mass-elite linkage not only represent part of the underlying message of the 1996 elections, but are also reflected in the surfacing of various confrontations with the government over the course of key policies, policies such as crime, housing, health, corruption, the environment, and living standards; these policy confrontations moved several key segments of society to extremism and political demonstrations, and have a broader political constituency grounded in popular concern with a range of sensitive issues that the government is not addressing.

Does this mean that Czech democracy is in serious trouble? Czech post-communist governments have achieved certain notable successes in maintaining a positive international image and effectively handling certain aspects of the economic transition in a largely technocratic style that has indeed muted dissatisfaction so evident elsewhere, through deft manipulation of the job security

issue. However, this short-term strategy carries the costs of failure to create and nurture routinized channels of input for popular concerns. This stunting of the political process--an unevenness in the evolution of democratic institutions and processes--carries risks for the management of future political controversy. If a rich and variegated associational life, with regularized access to the corridors of power, is an important augmentation of the episodic and imprecise mass-elite linkage provided in the electoral connection, then democratic institutions that lack variegated information channels and access points risk starving themselves of needed corrective input. It is not impossible, of course, that this situation may be remedied over time. Yet the interim costs, in terms of augmenting the alienation expressed by some in opinion polls and solidifying support for extremist parties, are far from negligible.

Here, we have used a single case to argue for the value of attention to the patterns of state-society interaction beyond electoral politics, what Schmitter calls "partial regimes," defined by exchanges between government and civil society.⁵¹ This study suggests that the linkage deficits that are characteristic of the post-communist experience regionally are not merely a legacy of the stunted social landscape of the preceding period and the absence of established autonomous institutions under communism. This legacy exists, and places a special burden on post-communist democratization projects to create institutional contexts and climates of opinion that enhance civic competence to influence policy, since the episodic electoral connection alone cannot bear the weight of democratization. However, it would seem that the weak mass-elite linkages may also reflect a post-communist style of governance that itself discourages regularized citizen and associational input. The fact that the Czech Republic, widely regarded as "bloc champ" in the transformation process, manifests so many deficits in this regard is striking, and suggests that comparative attention to this problem in the post-communist setting would yield rich returns. At a time when street politics have dominated state-society communication in Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, the broader regional

⁵¹ Schmitter, p.558.

implications of the frailty of mass-elite linkages should no longer be of secondary concern, since a punctuated politics of elections and street demonstrations is a politics that substantially removed citizens from the deliberative processes of democracy.

Table 1
Problems Considered "Urgent" by the Public

Issue	Urgency		Govt Response		Action Index
	More	Less	Good	Bad	
Corruption	96	3	6	89	.90
Crime, Security	97	2	11	87	.86
Orgzd Crime/Mafia	92	6	12	78	.80
Health Care	94	4	20	76	.75
Social Security	92	7	23	74	.69
Housing	84	12	15	76	.69
Environment	90	8	24	71	.67
Living Standards	91	8	25	72	.66
Agriculture	82	10	17	69	.65

Source: IVVM, 'Ktere problemy povazuje verejnost za nalehave, jak se o jejich reseni stara vlada,' 17 May 1995.

This is a listing of only the most urgent issues, omitting issues that generated negative or lower positive Action Index ratings. "More" urgency comprises responses of "Very Urgent" and "Urgent", while "less" urgency comprises responses of "Somewhat Urgent" and "Not Urgent"; "good" government response comprises responses of "Very Good" and "Fairly Good", while "bad" government response comprises responses of "Fairly Bad" and "Very Bad". The Action Index is calculated as (More Urgency - Good Govt Response)/100, so that numbers approaching +1.00 reflect an increasingly inadequate government response.

Table 2
The Three Most Important Problems Facing the Czech Republic

	#1	#2	#3	Total	Party Best For Problem?
Crime	19	19	17	55	Republicans, ODS
Social Policy	16	14	12	42	CSSD
Devt of the Economy	20	8	7	35	ODS
Health	6	15	10	31	CSSD, ODS
Living Standards	6	9	8	23	CSSD
Foreign Policy	4	8	7	19	ODS
Nine Other Issues	29	27	39		
	100	100	100		

Source: STEM, Trendy 4/1996, "Nejdulezitejsi problemy CR a schopnost politickych stran je resit."

Respondents indicated the three most important problems and the party that was best able to resolve each of those problems. The "Total" column shows the percentage of respondents that rated a problem in the top three.

Table 3
1996 Election Results

	House of Deputies				Senate 1996
	1992 Elections		1996 Elections		Elections
	% Vote	# Seats	% Vote	# Seats	# Seats
Coalition Parties					
ODS-KDS	30	76	30	68	32
KDU-CSL	6	15	8	18	13
ODA	6	14	6	13	7
	42	105	44	99	52
Pro-System Opposition Parties					
CSSD	7	16	26	61	25
SD-LSNS	7	16	2	--	--
Moravian-Silesian Parties ¹	1	6	14	1	--
Other smaller parties	2	18	--	8	2 ²
	17	56	42	70	27
Anti-System Opposition Parties					
KSCM/LB	14	35	11	22	2
SPR-RSC	6	14	8	18	--
	20	49	19	40	2

Sources: Compiled from Central Election Commission data; Jan Obrman, 'The Czechoslovak Elections,' RFE/RL Research Report 1:26 (26 June 1992), pp. 12-19; OMRI Daily Digest, 3 June 1996.

ODS = Civic Democratic Party, KDS = Christian Democratic Party, KDU-CSL = Christian Democratic Union and People's Party, ODA = Civic Democratic Alliance, CSSD = Czech Social Democratic Party, KSCM = Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, LB = Left Bloc, SPR-RSC = Association for the Republic and Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, SD-LSNS = Free Democrats and Liberal-National Party.

¹ The evolution of Moravian-Silesian regional parties defies explanation in this table.

² This includes one seat for the Democratic Union, which missed the representation cutoff in the 1996 House of Deputies elections, and one seat for Richard Falbr, an independent sponsored by CSSD.