



# Time for Regional Parties to Shine or for National Parties to Lock Horns Again?

## The True Nature of Czech Regional Elections

Adam Folvarčný , Jan Hruška  and Michal Pink  
*Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic*

Establishing representative bodies for the regions was an opportunity for politics to be decentralised. Using a three-dimensional index of congruence of the vote, this text explores the extent to which this opportunity has been taken up in Czech regional elections. Analysing all such ballots since 2000, it compares electoral competition at the national and regional levels; the success of regional parties is also analysed. The results show that Czech regional polls are strongly national in flavour, and their results are similar to those of national elections (only the second-order-election effect is visible); the success of regional parties is very limited, while national parties clearly dominate.

**Keywords:** *regional elections; regionalisation; dissimilarity score; Bohemia; Moravia; three-dimensional index of congruence; second-order elections; regional parties*

### Introduction

Traditionally, electoral research has paid most attention to national elections, even though “regional elections are clearly on the rise.”<sup>1</sup> This “methodological nationalism” in election research has been criticised more than once.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for the limited interest in regional polls is probably their nature as second-order elections. However, Schakel and Jeffery and Romanova<sup>3</sup> have criticised the tendency developed by Reif and Schmitt’s theory<sup>4</sup> automatically to assume that these are second-order elections, as there are a number of factors that influence whether they can be considered second order or not. These include, in particular, the powers of the body that is elected, the involvement of a regional (rather than countrywide) party or parties, and the lack of a direct link with the formation of the national government, if regional elections are held concurrently with national elections. Thus, the specific aspects of any elections analysed should always be examined in detail.

According to Schakel and Romanova, the scholarship on regional elections brings many benefits: “a refinement on the scope conditions of the second-order election model; the introduction of the concept of barometer elections; and the insight that each regional (and national) election is regionalized or nationalized to a certain extent.”<sup>5</sup>

Examining regional elections is also important because of their relationship with the decentralisation of power, which gives political parties and voters opportunities to mobilise and address issues of importance at the local level, possibly leading to a greater interest in democracy.<sup>6</sup> Schakel and Romanova assume that “voters differentiate between national and regional elections based on variations in regional policy autonomy.”<sup>7</sup> Political parties are then motivated to adapt their policies to the regional electoral arena if it is politically beneficial to diverge from the party’s nationwide policy.<sup>8</sup> According to Amat and Léon,<sup>9</sup> decentralisation affects parties themselves as it tends to promote greater independence from their centralist leaderships (e.g., by allowing more independent election strategies). Furthermore, decentralisation changes the environment to benefit regionalist parties, and thus electoral arenas diverge (with lesser spillovers), with, for instance, national parties gaining much less from their participation in regional coalitions or tending to establish more radical profiles alongside the centre-periphery axis.<sup>9</sup>

Voting in regional elections can take on a different form from national elections due to region-specific preferences. Schakel and Romanova argue that specific regional interests can be expected when there are territorial cleavages based on, e.g., history, language, or ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> Bochsler notes the effect of ethnic divisions, which decrease the measure of the nationalisation of the party system.<sup>11</sup> Liñeira stresses the influence of the regional identities of voters on their perception of regional elections.<sup>12</sup>

The degree of regionalisation is reflected in the incongruence of party systems in national and regional elections.<sup>13</sup> Schakel and Dandoy argue that “regionalized regional elections are characterized by similar or higher levels of turnout compared to national elections, minimal second-order election effects, and electorally strong non-state-wide parties with vote shares close to or above 30 percent.”<sup>14</sup> Some studies point to a decrease in the nationalisation of regional elections due to increasing regional authority and strong regional identities.<sup>15</sup> According to the same authors, “regional party systems become increasingly dissimilar from national party systems and the second-order nature of regional elections declines to the extent regional government becomes more powerful and/or regional cleavages are present and politically mobilized.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Caramani argues that, despite strong institutional decentralisation, there is no evidence of the vote being regionalised.<sup>17</sup> This approach emphasises the nationalisation of politics and party systems, including regional elections.<sup>18</sup> According to Golosov, high degrees of political decentralisation exert a strong negative effect on party system nationalisation. Countries with large populations and societies divided along linguistic and/or religious lines also tend to have party systems that are less nationalised. However, different factors may strongly contribute to party system nationalisation, even in federations. The most prominent among these is a high level or quality of democracy.<sup>19</sup>

According to Schakel and Romanova, “nationalized regional elections can be recognized by highly similar regional and national party systems, second-order elections lead to dissimilar regional and national party systems according to the magnitude of second-order election effects.”<sup>20</sup> Also, in nationalised regional elections, regional parties cannot be expected to have much success. As recently shown by Tsirbas and Romanova, some regional elections may thus be simultaneously regionalised and nationalised.<sup>21</sup>

Most studies to date have examined established Western democracies,<sup>22</sup> yet longer experience with democratic institutions and a greater quality of democracy are important factors for regionalisation.<sup>23</sup> Our study therefore examines the regionalisation/nationalisation of regional elections using the case of the Czech Republic with the aim of answering the following questions: Is political competition at the regional level identical to national political competition? How successful are regional parties? And to what extent can regional elections be described as second-order elections?

The Czech case is worth examining for several reasons. Not only is it a case outside the Western democracies that have received most of the attention, but it is also a country with an interesting tradition of decentralisation. While any decentralisation efforts were severely weakened after the collapse of the multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the Czech Republic is made up of three historical macro-regions that used to have their own governance—Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia. The Czech Republic thus offers an opportunity to study the impact of historical decentralisation on contemporary regionalisation. Moreover, the Czech national and regional elections use an almost identical (proportional) electoral system. This removes a significant methodological obstacle for comparing national and regional electoral arenas that has caused problems for research in many other countries.

## **Regional Elections in the Czech Republic**

After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation in late 1992, a new regional division of the country was sought. It was not until 2000 that the Czech Republic was newly divided into 14 regions (technically “higher-level territorial self-government units”). Simultaneously, new, directly-elected regional governments were established, which have become an important part of the Czech constitutional order. The first elections were held in 2000 and have taken place regularly every four years since.

It is important to note that the final form of the regions fails to respect a number of natural administrative and communication routes, and a number of old regions were treated insensitively. The present regions were thus created on an artificial, non-historical basis, failing to respect the old settlement and administrative catchment areas. Dissatisfaction with the regions was retrospectively expressed by a number of politicians across the political spectrum.<sup>24</sup>

Our paper partly builds on the work of Pink<sup>25</sup>; however, unlike him, we examine the regionalisation of regional elections after a period of large recurrent electoral earthquakes.<sup>26</sup> The decline of the major parties that have dominated the political scene since the early 1990s and major changes in the party system could theoretically provide opportunities for regionalisation. Similarly, the longer existence of regions gives more opportunities for regional identities to emerge, which may in turn be reflected in the regionalisation of elections. Compared to the work of Pink, our paper also analyses the congruence of individual parties' results and thus offers deeper understanding. Furthermore, the contribution of our paper is that, in contrast to many other recent studies that focus on a single election,<sup>27</sup> we examine the results of as many as six regional elections and compare them to a corresponding number of national elections.

## Methods and Data

The regionalisation of regional elections can be measured effectively by comparing political competition at the regional and national levels.<sup>28</sup> It is often the electoral outcomes and gains of political parties that reflect the political mindset of voters and their identities, including the extent of political regionalisation. If regions have a strong identity and therefore regionalise politics, this should be reflected in regional electoral competition, where we would expect to see relatively weaker performance of national parties (compared to the national arena) and conversely success for regional parties. If, on the other hand, politics is scarcely regionalised, we expect the regional electoral contest to match the national one, with national parties succeeding. Therefore, this study compares regional electoral competition to national electoral competition using the instrument of the index of congruence of the vote (IoCV). Given the nature of this instrument, the paper also secondarily describes the main trends in the success or failure of political parties in regional elections.

At the same time, we focus on whether regional elections have the nature of second-order elections. Specifically, we compare the electoral performance of the government parties and opposition parties in regional and national elections.<sup>29</sup> Finally, we analyse the performance of regional parties in regional elections. If regional elections are regionalised, significant regional parties are expected in the system. Those are parties that do not operate nationwide and are regularly able to win seats in regional elections, which are their primary arena.

With reference to the different historical experiences with self-governance of the two historical macro-regions of the Czech Republic—Bohemia and Moravia (the small part of Silesia that is part of the Czech Republic is associated with the Moravian region in this research)—we also investigate whether the existence of the historical macro-regions is reflected in contemporary regional politics, i.e., specifically whether the degree of nationalisation of regional elections differs in these two historical macro-regions.

## Hypotheses

Applying the theory to the Czech case, we propose the following four hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Although some authors describe a trend of regionalisation of regional elections, we do not expect this to be the case in Czechia because the constituencies there do not respect traditional boundaries. A correlation between regional and national election results would support this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2:** Following a significant change in the political party system, when traditional parties decline and new parties emerge, we expect to find a greater regionalisation during the regional elections in 2012, 2016, and 2020 than in other years.

**Hypothesis 3:** Given the assumed nationalisation of regional elections, we expect these to be of a second-order character, reflected not just in low voter turnout but also a penalty effect affecting parties in government nationally.

**Hypothesis 4:** Following the assumed low regionalisation of regional elections, we expect there to be very few (if any) regional parties in the system of regional elections.

## Congruence of the Vote

As we already argued, a comparison between regional and national election vote shares is widely used to assess territorial heterogeneity in the vote.<sup>30</sup> Dissimilarity scores are calculated by taking the sum of absolute differences between regional and national vote shares for each party and subsequently dividing the result by two. In this article, we apply an adjusted dissimilarity index which allows us to vary vote shares according to the type of election as well as the level of aggregation (Schakel 2013), whereby  $X_i$  is the vote share won by party  $i$  in election  $j$  or  $l$  (dis)aggregated at the territorial level  $k$  or  $m$ . The type of election as well as the level of aggregation can vary between regional and national levels. The absolute values are summed and divided by two to avoid double counting (one party's gain is another party's loss). Scores may range from complete congruence/similarity (0 percentage points [pp]) to complete incongruence/dissimilarity (100 pp).

$$Dissimilarity\ score = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |X_{ijk} - X_{ilm}|$$

In most published papers, the index takes three forms:

- a. Party system congruence: similarity between the national vote at the national level and the regional vote in the region (NN-RR)
- b. Electorate congruence: similarity between the national vote at the national level and the national vote in the region (NN-NR)
- c. Election congruence: similarity between the national vote at the regional level and the regional vote in the region (NR-RR)

## Data

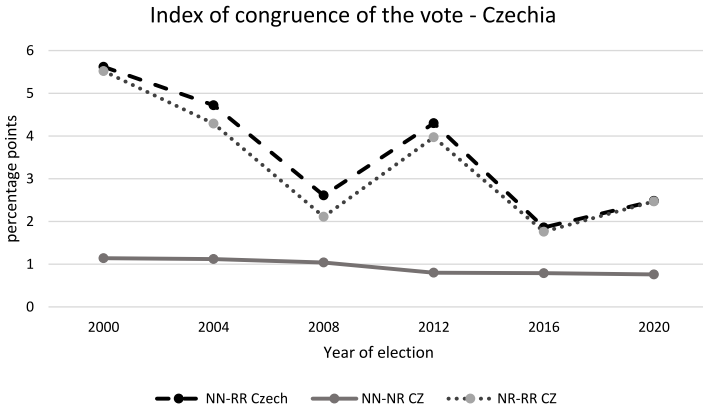
The main source of data is the archive of election results held by the Czech Statistical Office, available at [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz), and a number of publications on this topic as described earlier. We analyse data from six regional elections (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020) and related national elections. The Czech Republic has *de jure* fourteen regions including the capital, Prague. However, the capital city has its own status outside regional government, and the elections in Prague have a number of unique regulations. Most importantly, elections in Prague are held at the time of local elections, which take place two years after regional elections in a completely different social atmosphere. Also, a completely different electoral system is used, allowing a panachage procedure. Compatibility with elections in other regions is thus *de facto* non-existent. For that reason, in what follows, Prague is disregarded entirely, and all the analyses and calculations are based on the results of the elections in the thirteen regions only.

## Territorial Distribution of Electoral Support

The preceding sections described the context of Czech regional elections and what we know about them so far. Now we shall focus on the electoral support for parties and its analysis using the instruments as noted. If we view regional elections as a nationwide contest—but one that uses a different set of rules from that used to elect the Chamber of Deputies, the lower chamber of parliament—the triple IoCV as described can help us to understand them. Electorate congruence (NN-NR) is a measure of the similarity or dissimilarity between the results of the elections to the Chamber nationwide and at the level of regions. The indicator makes it quite clear that the results of the national elections have been very evenly distributed among the various regions, and according to Figure 1, there have been no substantial differences. The support for political parties is more uniformly spread in Bohemia, where the NN-NR index did not reach values above 1 pp. By contrast, in the eastern part of the country, in Moravia, it exceeded 1.5 in 2000, which is still a very low value. What is more, the trend in the two macro-regions is the same—a decreasing index, and hence increasingly even distribution of support for parties over time. Despite the slight difference between Bohemia and Moravia, no significant regionalisation was observed in the Czech party system.

The second indicator of the congruence of the vote (NR-RR) shows how the results of elections to the Chamber and regional elections differ in the same territory, i.e., the thirteen regions, across time. With this indicator, greater differences are apparent, as suggested by the maximums in 2000, 2004, and 2012 in particular. In these elections, which were always held with some time lag after the elections to the Chamber—at about the mid-term of the government—the interregional differences

**Figure 1**  
**Indicates decreasing values of IoCV during the time. Their indices show relatively stable support for the political parties across regions during the time**



Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: The vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

were the greatest. This means that people in the various regions voted relatively differently in elections to the Chamber and regional assemblies. The lowest values were recorded in 2016, followed by 2008 and 2020, when people voted similarly in both elections in regions. The NR-RR index was very similar in the two macro-regions observed.

The third and last indicator (NN-RR), which shows the party system congruence nationally and regionally, exhibits the greatest variance. It shows the difference between the percentages of the vote obtained by parties in national elections to the Chamber and regional elections. These are the averages of the results achieved by parties in the respective years. Since Czech political parties enjoy stable support across regions in elections to the Chamber, as shown by the NN-NR index, the NN-RR and NR-RR indices are very similar. We again observe that, in the elections in 2000, 2004, and 2012, the results of national and regional elections were rather different at the level of the individual regions. By contrast, in 2008, 2016, and 2020, the differences between the party systems nationally and regionally were relatively small, as the two most recent elections were not held during the government's mid-term. With this index, we also observe the greatest differences when comparing the election results in Bohemia and Moravia. In Bohemia, it reached the highest value—above 5 pp—in 2004. In that same year, the index in Moravia was less than four. By contrast, the maximum in Moravia was achieved in 2000, when the value of the index was above 6.5. Considerable growth appeared in both macro-regions in 2012

but was quite brief. In recent years, however, the values of the index have been very similar in the two macro-regions observed.

The overall values of the individual indices do not exceed 6 pp, and they reached this value rather exceptionally during the first regional elections. On the contrary, the index values confirm that, overall, there is a relatively high correlation between national and regional elections. Thus, it is hardly possible to detect any trend towards regionalisation, especially in the last two elections, when the values of the index indicators did not exceed 3 pp. These patterns confirm the assumptions made in Hypothesis 1.

## Main Political Actors

If we want to analyse regional elections in relation to the current Czech party system, it is best to distinguish two clusters of political parties for a full understanding of the restructuring of the party system in Czechia. This also enables a potential effect resulting from changes in the party system to be assessed.

Thus, we distinguish (1) traditional political parties established in the early 1990s that created the foundations of the party system; these were stable political actors until 2020, with variable electoral support. (2) Newly established political parties, the political actors of the last decade; they have been emerging since 2009 and have gained relevance during the reshuffling of the party system after the electoral earthquakes of the past decade, demonstrating a loss of domination by traditional parties.

### *Traditional parties*

- a. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD—Česká strana sociálně demokratická) is the main representative of left-wing values in the Czech party system. In early 1990s, it defined itself in opposition to the liberal-conservative government coalition. It went on to take on the government role in 1998, which it continued to perform after the next elections in 2002. In 2006, however, it went into opposition and, although it won the next elections to the Chamber, it did not form a government coalition.<sup>31</sup> It again became the main party of government in 2014; after the elections in 2017, in which it suffered a significant slump, it was the junior partner of the ruling ANO 2011 party.

In assessing the results, it is apparent that it reached its maximum value in 2008 when it exceeded 35 per cent of the vote. In the same elections, an overall maximum was reached—over 42 per cent—a result to which ČSSD was not even close in other ones. In 2012, they, again as an opposition party, also achieved a high average result, over 23 per cent, and they won in all regions. ČSSD met with the minimum response on the part of the electorate in the most recent election and suffered substantial losses. Moreover, in 2020, it received less than 7 per cent of the vote, and ČSSD failed to cross the 5 per cent threshold in several regions. Their regional elites were weakened.



- b. Christian and Democratic Union–Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU–ČSL–Křesťanská a demokratická unie–Československá strana lidová) is representative of the Christian-democratic political bloc, described sometimes as the centre of the Czech party system. It had to deal with a number of unfavourable circumstances, including a concentration of its electoral support in some regions, decreasing religiosity in Czech society, and a split in the party in 2009. Although the KDU–ČSL has been gradually marginalised within the party system, within the political system, it has been a part of the government majorities most of the time, with a high coalition potential.<sup>32</sup> After a historic failure in 2010, three years later, it managed to cross the 5 per cent threshold and return to the Chamber of Deputies. Given the prevailing balance of power at the time and the party’s political temperament, it went straight into government, where together with ČSSD and ANO 2011, it created government policy after 2013.

Thanks to the regional nature of KDU–ČSL support, its regional election results have been very particular to the party. It has long been able to win strong support and representation in some regions (Zlín, South Moravia, Vysočina, and Pardubice). In the north of the country, by contrast, the party regularly fails and seeks to enter into various alliances and coalitions with local political entities. It is not least due to this aspect of regionally concentrated support that KDU–ČSL has been able to win representation in the leadership of some regions, including governor positions—once regions were established, the party obtained very strong positions there and, with five governors, influenced the foundation of many regions. The minimum and maximum values for this party are also interesting to observe, ranging as they do from the weakest performance equalling zero<sup>33</sup> to the strongest above 30 per cent. It suggests the already-mentioned regional disproportionality in the party’s electoral support, which confirms a number of earlier findings about the party’s electoral base.<sup>34</sup>

- c. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM–Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy) continues to be the main heir to the non-democratic regime before 1989 and, at the lower levels of the system of government, has been moderately successful. The party’s messages and programme (which have become more moderate over the past two decades) are focused on defending left-wing socio-economic values; but in matters of culture, the party mainly advances conservative values. The KSČM has long questioned the Czech Republic’s pro-Western orientation, including its membership of the European Union and especially of NATO. Although represented in the Czech national parliament, unlike local and regional politics, it has long been the subject of a convention to exclude it from national politics, and its coalition potential nationally was for long non-existent. This changed after the 2017 elections, when the party facilitated the formation of a minority ANO and ČSSD government, which relied on its support. KSČM is the most successful of those Communist parties in Central Europe that stayed close to their pre-1989 traditions.

The party’s share of the vote reached a maximum above 28 per cent in 2000 and somewhat lower figures in 2004 and 2012. It is probable that in the first two

elections, it attracted votes because it was the only left-wing party of the opposition (the social democrats were in government at the time). Recently, the results of KSČM in regional elections, shows the party's modest success rate. This decrease is a great loss for a party for which decent polling performance in regional elections had been a way out of isolation.

- d. The liberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS—*Občanská demokratická strana*) was the main successor to the Civic Forum established in 1989 and the representative of the economic and social transformation process following the fall of communism. ODS long served as the main party of the right. It remained the main party of government until 1998 and led the gradual transformation and democratisation of the country.<sup>35</sup>

After the elections in 1998, it concluded a pact with its main rival, ČSSD, that continues to be seen as bizarre by many, as it bound ODS to tolerate a minority ČSSD government. By contrast, after 2002, as the social democrats continued to govern, ODS dominated regional elections, winning most of the governorships and, in Central Bohemia, polled 44.65 per cent of the vote. Contrariwise, two regional elections, in 2008 and 2012, held at the mid-term of the unpopular centre-right governments at the time, were fiascos for ODS. It was in particular the slump following the Nečas government in 2013 that questioned the position of ODS as the pole in the right-wing segment of the political spectrum. In 2020, the party was able to obtain regional governorships for the first time since 2004. However, there has been a gradual transformation in the party overall; it shifted from social-liberal (during the government led by Mirek Topolánek) to social-conservative positions (the government of Petr Nečas and the leadership of Petr Fiala) on issues such as the integration of minorities in society, the role of religious principles in politics and alternative life-styles.<sup>36</sup>

Support for ODS is distributed relatively uniformly across the country. It tends to be somewhat stronger in Bohemia, especially in Central Bohemia and Plzeň. By contrast, its positions have been weaker in Moravia, especially in recent years. The party has long polled about 20 per cent of the vote, but after 2012, this declined to about 10 per cent. Despite this slump it has always (up to 2020) stood on its own in regional elections and has been able to win more than 5 per cent of the vote in all regions.

### *New parties*

- a. Smaller liberal parties – a group of small parties in Czech politics that have won seats in the Chamber, albeit sometimes only for a single term. This is not a homogeneous group of parties, though they are mostly centrist, mostly liberal in orientation and appealing to similar electorates (urban voters, intellectuals and, usually, younger people). Over time this 'quasi-movement' has become a firm part of Czech party politics, although it has been subject to fluctuations and has not been particularly strong in win-

ning vote shares or seats. Its importance is due to its centrist position that has allowed its representatives to serve as junior coalition partners (in the 1990s, with ODS; after 2002, with ČSSD; after 2006, again with ODS).

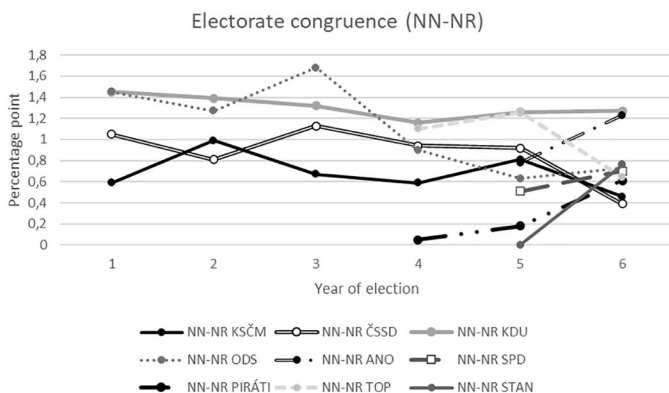
Historically these small parties included US-DEU (1998-2002, latently until 2006) and the Greens (Zelení) (2006-2010). In 2010, the role was taken on by the newly-formed Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), led by Miroslav Kalousek, and its important and close ally, the group of local politicians called Mayors and Independents (STAN—Starostové a nezávislí). Until 2016, TOP 09 and STAN actually constituted a single (electoral) party.<sup>37</sup> However, they contested the 2017 elections to the Chamber separately and both narrowly crossed the election threshold. In 2017 they were joined at the national level by the Pirate Party, which gradually became stronger and hence became the third representative of this liberal-oriented movement around the political centre. In the subsequent regional elections, the Pirates put members into all regional assemblies.<sup>38</sup> The Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana) had long been unable to break into parliament and their gradually improving results at the lower levels of politics facilitated its overall success.<sup>39</sup>

The aggregated support for these liberal parties has been on the increase. However, it needs noting that the structure of these parties has changed over time and that now there are three of them. Though their average aggregated result in 2017 was 9.57 percent and in 2020 16.14 percent, the vote shares won by the individual parties varied widely across the country. The support for these liberal parties is also regionally specific with huge differences. While in the Moravia-Silesia region it has long been very low, in Liberec the combined share of the vote for these parties exceeded 38 percent in 2020. In considering the level of support for these parties we also need to bear in mind that they were in opposition from 2013.<sup>40</sup>

- b. ANO (ANO 2011), led by the businessman Andrej Babiš is a political movement founded in 2012. It took to the Czech political stage with a bang the next year, when following national elections it became the junior coalition partner of the Social Democrats. Following the next elections in 2017 the two parties switched their positions and arguably ANO dominated the Czech political scene until 2021. The party, which describes itself emphatically as a ‘movement’, originally established its profile on the issue of fighting corruption and traditional political parties. It is a party with strong populist tendencies and orientation, vehemently critical of the political establishment. It has also been considered an instance of a business-firm party.<sup>41</sup>

ANO, the party of government, achieved similar scores in both years, although it fared slightly better in the latter elections. The average vote share in 2016 was 20.81 per cent, while in 2020, it was 1 pp higher. Similarly, the minimum share of the vote won by the party increased in the most recent regional elections, while the maximum increased by nearly 5 pp.

**Figure 2**  
**Represents similarity between the national vote at the national level and the national vote in the region was quite stable during two decades for the majority of parties, even the newcomers**



Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: Vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

- c. While ANO can be described as Andrej Babiš’s party, Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚPD—Úsvit přímé demokracie) and its direct successor, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD—Svoboda a přímá demokracie), have both been projects led by Tomio Okamura.<sup>42</sup> In addition to promoting direct democracy and criticising the elite, SPD’s programme has a strong nativist bent. Since the outbreak of the migration crisis, it has been a vocal critic of migration and of Islam. In this respect, it can be described as a populist far-right party, although apparently not an extremist one. SPD is also strongly critical of the European Union and pushes for the Czech Republic to leave this organisation. It cooperates with foreign parties of a similar orientation, including Marine Le Pen’s National Rally.

Tomio Okamura’s parties<sup>43</sup> fared similarly in the two regional elections observed, in 2016 achieving an average<sup>43</sup> result of 5.82 percent of the vote, and in 2020, 6.20 percent. Minimum and maximum vote shares achieved by the party in regions are likewise similar; in 2020, the party did a bit better.

### Analysis of IoCV of Individual Partie

The index of electorate congruence (NN-NR), which only uses the results of the elections to the lower chamber of parliament, has been relatively stable; throughout the two decades, the variance in ČSSD electoral performance has been very low. There is only slightly higher value in Moravia than in Bohemia. This shows that

ČSSD has enjoyed stable support across all Czech regions, especially in Bohemia. The index reached its lowest value after 2017, when ČSSD polled its historically worst result in elections to the Chamber (7.27 per cent).

Similarly, for KDU-ČSL the measure of NN-NR between the various elections is very similar here. Thus, the party's performance across constituencies in the elections to the Chamber does not show substantial fluctuations. There are not even differences between Moravia and Bohemia.

Figure 2 suggests that, in elections to the Chamber, KSČM enjoys very stable support across all regions—this is true for both Bohemia and Moravia. The very slight fluctuations follow the same pattern in both macro-regions. As with ČSSD, the evenness of support increased after 2016 as the party's electoral performance declined.

The support for ODS has lower electorate congruence in the individual constituencies (regions); in elections to the Chamber it is more varied (particularly in Moravian ones). This effect was the greatest in the 2008 elections (reflecting a huge slump compared to its previous parliamentary result), reaching 3 pp, but then decreased steadily, reaching a level similar to that in Bohemia.

Concerning new parties, for TOP 09, NN-NR indicates low values in both macro-regions. It reached under 1.0 pp recently, and there appears no difference from traditional parties' trends. On the contrary, for both STAN and Pirates, NN-NR increased after 2016; for the latter party, as much as three times the previous value.

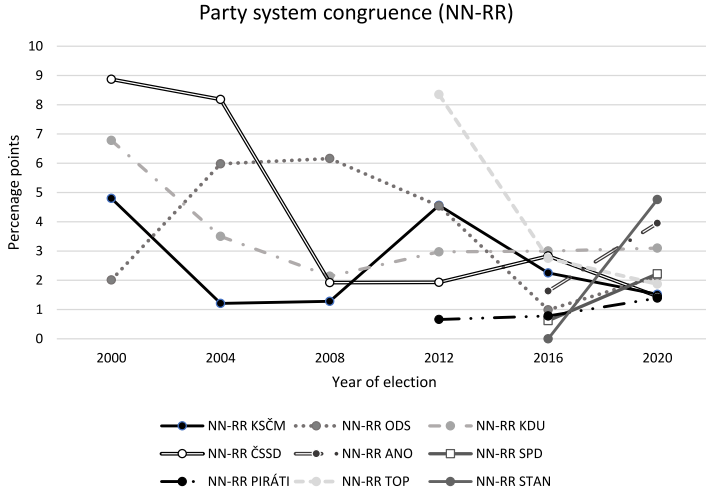
The index of NN-NR shows that support for ANO across the Bohemian and Moravian regions was relatively stable. Obviously, in 2020, the stability of support across regions decreased—in Moravia, the index reached twice the previous value. Despite this, support for ANO across regions during elections to the Chamber cannot be said to have varied significantly. It is also apparent that in the two terms studied, ANO had support spread more evenly than parties already mentioned across regions despite the already noted increase in Moravia. Again, this is not a significant difference.

For SPD, the index of NN-NR achieved very low values in the two elections to the Chamber analysed here. We only observe a slight increase in 2020, greater in Moravia, where the index is just above 1 pp. Evidently, both Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy had very uniform support across the regions of the Czech Republic during elections to the Chamber and, therefore, have not deviated from the overall trend of relatively balanced support for all parties.

The index of party system congruence (NN-RR) and the index of election congruence (congruence in constituencies; NR-RR) are largely the same across the two decades. The indices show that, comparing the elections to the regional assemblies and those to the Chamber of Deputies, ČSSD did not have stable support in the regions. Very high differences in support are observed in the first two regional elections held in 2000 and 2004 (in Moravia somewhat higher than in Bohemia) with values of 8.0–9.0 pp—the elections were held at the midpoint of the government's term. Contrary to 2016, when the increase in the values of both indices was caused

Figure 3

Presents a similarity between the national vote at the national level and the regional vote in the region has varied significantly for individual parties. Relative match between the similarity of the national party system and party system in the particular regions after 2008 was replaced by recent growth



Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: Vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

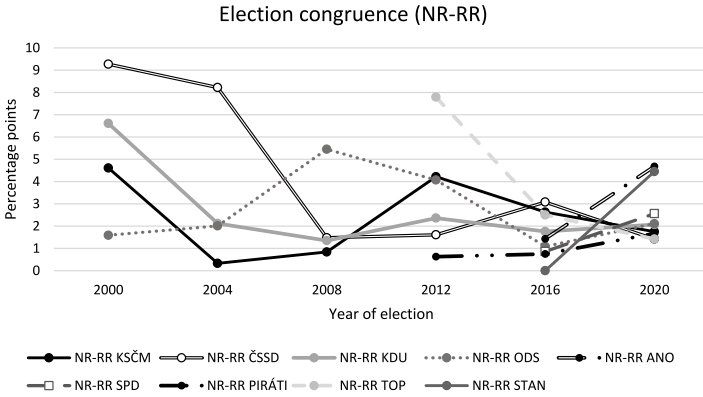
by ČSSD's further slump in regional elections, this was not as pronounced as in the first two regional elections.

Party system congruence of KDU-ČSL was the highest at the beginning when it reached almost 7.0 pp and then decreased particularly between 2004 and 2008. Since then, the values are higher in Moravia—stabilised around 4.5 pp, compared to 2.0 pp in Bohemia. In terms of NR-RR, KDU-ČSL reached its peak during the first regional elections, when this indicator was between 6.0 and 7.0 pp (in both macro-regions). The subsequent trends varied: in Bohemia, this difference decreased to 1 pp in 2008 and later remained at this level and was substantially similar to that achieved in national elections. In Moravia, the indicator increased after 2008, thus the difference increased respective to the national party system and so did the measure of the difference in voters in the two types of election on the same territory, up to 3 pp. The 2020 elections confirmed these divergent developmental trends in the two territorially (and historically) defined parts of the Czech Republic.

Observing trends in the development of support for KSČM in national and regional elections, some fundamental traits become apparent. If we compare the support in regional and national elections using the indices of congruence in

**Figure 4**

**Shows the similarity between the national vote at the regional level and the regional vote in the region that peaked in the first two regional elections. The values mainly decrease since - the electorate behaves more similarly on the same territory in different types of elections - the level of election congruence increased then**



Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: Vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

constituencies, in Figures 3 and 4, we observe greater fluctuations, which are very similar in both macro-regions. In 2000 and 2012, substantially different support in regions was observed during regional elections. This shows that, compared to the preceding elections to the Chamber, KSČM fared much better in the 2012 regional elections, by more than 5 pp on average. It is also evident that when such a phenomenon takes place, the support for KSČM increases somewhat more in Bohemia than in Moravia-Silesia.

Moravia clearly has lower electorate congruence—the support for ODS in the individual constituencies (regions) there in elections to the Chamber is more varied. This effect was greatest in the 2008 elections, reaching 3 pp, but then decreased steadily, reaching a level similar to that in Bohemia. In Bohemia, in 2004, the values of election congruence and party system congruence (similar to overall congruence) reached their maximum, up to 8 pp. The trends of these indices have been very similar, and they gradually decreased until 2016, down to 1 pp. In Moravia, the growth trend of these indicators occurred to a greater extent between 2004 and 2008, when the party system (NR-RR) in Moravian regions differed the most from the national one; this, however, was also followed by a steep decline until 2016, when the two indices came closer again. In 2020, both indices increased slightly both in Bohemia and Moravia, but this was not a major swing.

The indices for TOP 09 started off quite high as suggested by both Figures 3 and 4, around 8.0 pp, both for party system congruence (NN-RR) and election congruence (NR-RR). This followed from the significant difference between the share of the vote received by TOP 09 in elections to the national parliament and regional elections two years later, when the party suffered a significant slump. However, these values decreased over the following elections, reaching 2.0 pp, and the difference between the party's performance in national and regional elections decreased and is comparable to average values, even considering the overall decrease in voter support.

The values of the NN-RR and NR-RR indices for STAN in 2020, when it stood independently for the first time, reached 4 pp. Thus, there was a substantial difference between national and regional elections at the level of the individual regions. Similarly, with the higher values of the indicator of NN-RR, the system at the level of the individual constituencies (regions) differed from the national system, as in some regions, STAN was able to win more than 30 per cent of the vote, while in others, none. A more comprehensive evaluation will only be possible after the next elections.

For the Pirate Party, voters started to differ in national elections after 2016 from voters in earlier elections; this is linked with the party's growing popularity and increase of support. The index of party system congruence doubled between 2016 and 2020 and so did the difference between the party's results in the various constituencies. The growing values of NR-RR suggest that voters in national and regional elections in the same area gradually grew apart, but this is not a sudden hike, overall reaching a maximum of only 2.5 pp (in Moravia). Thus, some developmental trends are discernible regarding the Pirates, and they are linked to some extent with the substantial rise in the support for this party since 2016.

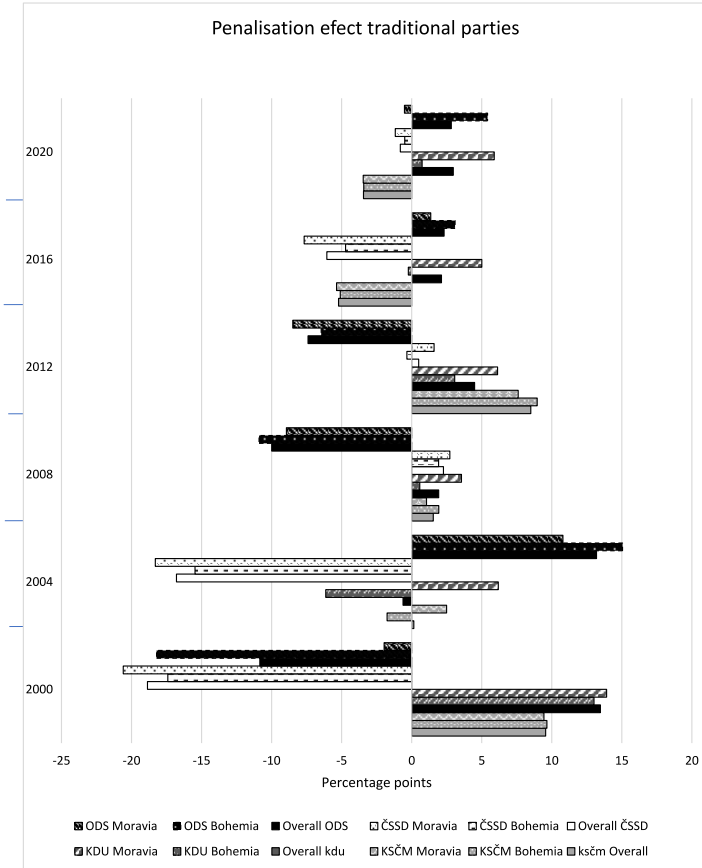
ANO's indices of party system congruence and election congruence are largely the same in the two macro-regions (see Supplemental Appendix). The indices make it clear that in comparing elections to the regional assemblies and to the Chamber of Deputies, ANO enjoyed relatively stable support in 2016, particularly in Bohemia. In Moravia, the values of the two indices in that year were close to 2.0 pp, which is due to the fact that ANO achieved better results in regional elections than national elections, on average by more than 3 pp. However, in the next regional elections, both indices increased markedly, especially in Bohemia (up to 5.0 pp). This is because ANO, as a party of government for several years, was significantly penalised.

Two indices for SPD showing NN-RR and NR-RR are again very similar to each other (particularly true in Bohemia). Their values do differ over time, as evident in Figures 3 and 4. In 2016, Dawn of Direct Democracy in regions during regional elections had very similar support to that recorded during the preceding election to the Chamber of Deputies, especially in Moravia (around 0.5 pp). In 2020, however, the values of the indices of NN-RR and NR-RR increased markedly nationally (and in both macro-regions observed) up to 2.5 pp.



Figure 5

Indicates an enormous penalization effect for traditional parties, particularly in the first elections when they were held in the middle of the government term. Penalization of traditional parties was dependent mostly on their role in the government or opposition



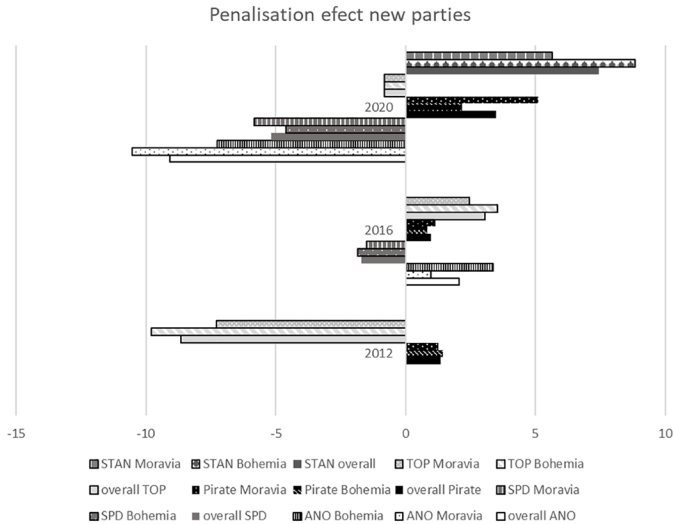
Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: Vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

This growth in indices for new parties is not strong in the context of the trends over the past 20 years; the 2024 regional elections may suggest a change in patterns. Overall, however, the results of the last three regional elections (after changes of the

**Figure 6**

**Suggests a much smaller penalisation effect for new parties. The position of government-opposition is less evident here as the regional elections take place much closer to the national election term**



Source: Own calculations based on [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz).

Note: Vertical axis indicates vote congruence in percentage points.

party system) are not characterised by a greater degree of regionalisation. On the regional level, the positions of traditional parties have been replaced by newly established national parties. The total number of successful regional actors (detailed in the following sections) did not mark a new “dawn” of regionalism, thus not confirming Hypothesis 2.

### Penalisation Effect for Individual Parties

Observing both Figures 5 and 6, it is evident that parties suffered higher electoral losses particularly during the first two regional elections.

For ČSSD, we observe a pronounced penalising effect compared to the previous elections to the Chamber (especially in 2000 and 2004). It is also interesting that ČSSD was always penalised more in Moravia than in Bohemia. During both these elections, ČSSD was the government party nationally. In 2008 and 2012, in opposition, the party did better in these elections than in the previous elections to the Chamber of Deputies (in Moravia particularly). From 2014, ČSSD was a party of government; it did not achieve successes in regional elections and was penalised,

both in Moravia and Bohemia. In 2020, beyond the fact of being a governmental party for six years, ČSSD's result shows a pronounced loss of support, observed in recent years across all electoral contests. It failed to win a seat in several assemblies.

KDU-ČSL's long-term trend is that the party wins a greater share of the vote in the regional second-order elections than in the preceding elections to the Chamber, and the measure of this share varies substantially over time. The party obtained its biggest share during the time of the so-called Opposition Agreement in 2000, when KDU-ČSL was part of the Coalition of Four,<sup>44</sup> with an ambition to serve as something of a third "quasi-pole" in the party system—although this ambition ultimately went unfulfilled. By contrast, the smallest shares of the vote were recorded during periods when KDU-ČSL participated in governments. The party was only weakly penalised overall in 2004 for its government with ČSSD and achieved a very small share of the vote in 2008 when it participated in the ODS-led government. In 2010, it failed to enter the Chamber of Deputies; but in 2012, it was able to exploit the substantial unpopularity of the government parties and held onto its previous positions in the regions. However, the discrepancy between the party's support in Moravia and Bohemia cannot be ignored in the figures. In Moravian regions, the party has long been able to win a greater proportion of the vote (regardless of its national role), and the measure of the extra favour it received from voters there has not been less than 5 pp, while in Bohemia, its support has been weaker overall, and the party lost important positions, e.g., in 2004 as already noted. KDU-ČSL's greater success rate in Moravia can also be seen from its greater ability to win governorships there and to regularly sit in the regional councils. Thus, the regionalisation of the party's support is apparent here, and this has long been linked with the more religious regions, located in Moravia.

Support for KSČM has been relatively stable, and the party was mostly able to obtain greater shares of the vote overall. The party achieved its greatest successes in 2000, 2004, and 2012. Except for 2004, when KSČM won a greater share of the vote in Moravia but suffered losses in Bohemia, it has been the rule that, when the party is weakened, it did more so in the Moravian regions, although the differences have been very small. In 2016, KSČM suffered a downswing across the board by more than 5 pp on average, lacking regional personalities. In the most recent regional elections, the party suffered substantial losses, winning representation in only four regions. Its support for the minority government from 2018 needs to be noted here, as at that time support for the party could hardly be understood as a protest vote. The dropping of the vote share to under 5 per cent reflects the party's gradual decline.

The penalising effect applying to ODS was long dependent on whether the party was in government or in opposition. In 2000, although in opposition, it allowed the emergence and fairly undisturbed functioning of a social-democratic government, and hence was not an unqualified success with the electorate. Although it won the regional elections, compared to the preceding parliamentary elections, it suffered

substantial losses, particularly in Bohemia. Considering the positions of the Communists, ODS was still able to negotiate strong positions for itself in the regional leaderships with other parties, despite its mediocre electoral performance. In 2004, as an unambiguous party of the opposition, ODS successfully presented itself as an alternative to the centre-left government majority and scored a landslide victory across the country. Despite this, the number of ODS governors decreased, and for a long time, these were the party's last. The party's dominant position in the government coalitions led by Prime Ministers Topolánek and Nečas meant substantial losses in its regional positions, as also shown in the penalising effect, which was about 10 pp compared to the preceding parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2010. ODS pretty much "sacrificed" the 2008 elections to the issue of allowing a US missile defence radar system to be installed in Czechia, which resonated particularly strongly at the time, and the regional elections were swept by an "orange wave," symbolising the rise of the Social Democrats. Although ODS was in opposition after 2013, this has had very little effect on the shares of the vote the party obtained in the 2016 and 2020 regional elections. The extra electorate favour for ODS, such as it was, did not reach even 5 pp, and the losses have never been fully recovered. One noticeable aspect is that ODS's gains and losses tend to be very similar in Bohemia and Moravia. It seems that the two macro-regions follow the more general moods, and there is no apparent difference that would, e.g., tend to favour the party in one of the macro-regions irrespective of circumstances.

The penalising of TOP 09 in 2012 and 2016, obvious in Figure 6, was evidently dependent on the position of the party in government or in opposition. During the first regional elections, the party was strongly penalised for participating in government alongside ODS, with the measure of the penalising effect in Bohemia, where the party has long been the stronger, reaching nearly 10 pp. In the following regional elections, when TOP 09 took a stance against the centre-left government, the party earned slightly greater favour from the electorate. The share of the vote was not high overall and was much supported by the success of STAN in some regions, e.g., Liberec. Opposition and vigorous criticism of the government led by ANO did not help TOP 09 to improve its positions in the 2020 regional elections; rather, the party was weakened. It was not even able to put up its own candidate lists in all regions, and in some, it worked with other parties.

STAN by contrast capitalised on its positions and, after splitting from TOP 09 in 2020, became markedly the more popular choice, gaining more than 7.0 pp. In many regions, thanks to substantial favour from the electorate, it won very strong positions, and even several governorships, as well as respectable representation in the regional councils.

The Pirate Party has always been able to increase its share of the vote in regional elections compared to the previous national elections, even after winning seats in the Chamber in 2017, where the party remained in opposition. Figure 6 indicates that, until 2020, the measure of the party's better result in regional elections was nearly

identical in Moravia and Bohemia. In 2020, however, it received much more favour in Moravia, which until then had been considered by some as the Pirates' weak spot.<sup>45</sup> Here, we note that the results do not include Prague, which is notably liberal and favours the Pirates (a member of the party is now the mayor of the capital). Although the Pirates have no regional governors, they have managed to negotiate more positions in the regional councils than some traditional parties (such as KDU-ČSL). What is more, in the Olomouc region, they formed an electoral coalition with STAN, achieving a superb result: 19.51 per cent of the vote. The coalition was then applied nationally for parliamentary elections in 2021 (gained 15.62 per cent in total).

The newcomer, ANO, despite being a party of government for three years, was able to gain support in 2016. However, in 2020, it was significantly penalised by more than 9.0 pp on average overall. This occurred even though ANO in the 2020 regional elections fared slightly better than it did in 2016. However, in 2017, it scored a substantially better result in national elections than previously, and hence, in subsequent regional elections, it had to defend a much higher score. As Figure 6 indicates, ANO failed to do so. This may be because of its long government engagement and the gradually increasing number of scandals in which its politicians had become embroiled and because ANO is a party of a single strong leader and recently has been plagued by a lack of strong personalities in the regions. It was penalised in both macro-regions, more distinctively in Bohemia, where the loss exceeded 10.5 pp. In Moravia, it lost 7.0 pp on average.

SPD suffered a substantial loss of support in the most recent regional elections. It suffered a greater loss on average in Moravia (5.8 pp) than in Bohemia (4.61 pp). The poorer performance of both Tomio Okamura's parties in regional elections can be explained by the fact that these were one-man parties that lacked strong politicians (and structures) regionally. The greater penalisation observed in the 2020 regional elections may also be due to the fact that SPD was a silent supporter of the government coalition. SPD was a silent supporter of the government coalition.

The extent of penalisation for parties, when they are in government, confirms the expectations of the third hypothesis. With the slight exception of ANO in 2016, although a ruling party, as a newcomer, it strengthened and gained its first seats at the regional level. The turnout regularly falls by 20 per cent compared to levels in parliamentary elections.

## Results of Regional Parties

To what extent Czech regional elections are nationalised can be inferred from the results of regional parties in these elections. In a limited number of regions and elections, regional parties have been able to gain limited representation (a few seats) in the regional council (see Supplemental Appendix).

In 2000, we witnessed the relative success of regional parties in the Moravian regions—an echo of Moravian regionalism, more prominent in the 1990s, when it

had representatives in Parliament (terms 1990–1996). At present, regional parties are rarely successful in regional elections.

Any occasional limited success of regional parties is more likely to occur in Bohemia, particularly in smaller regions (especially Karlovy Vary and Liberec), where there are significantly fewer voters, but the number of seats distributed is still high. A relatively small number of votes are thus needed to pass the electoral threshold and win at least one seat. Overall, the very small number of these successful regional actors, often on a one-off basis, is consistent with Hypothesis 4.

An exception to the overall trend are STAN's results in the Liberec region in 2008–2016 when regional elections (exceptionally) served as a vehicle for the party to establish itself at the national level of politics, ensuring, e.g., publicity and funding. Since 2017, STAN can no longer be described as a regional party.<sup>46</sup> It can even be argued that STAN has adapted to the logic of national competition, which has brought it greater success and relevance.

The meagre success of regional parties in regional elections can be explained in another way, which nevertheless confirms the low regionalisation of Czech regional politics. Small regional parties that cannot be sure of crossing the 5 per cent electoral threshold often prefer the tactic of running in coalition with a national party. As a smaller coalition partner, they nominate several of their own representatives on the coalition candidate list. In this way, they are usually able to win at least one or more seats thanks to preferential voting.<sup>47</sup>

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This paper sought to assess the regionalisation of Czech politics by comparing electoral competition in regional and national elections. Using an index of vote congruence, we argued that Czech regional elections are relatively strongly nationalised—the electoral contest in regional elections is fairly similar to the national scene. That confirms Hypothesis 1. It contrasts with the trend of regionalisation observed mainly in established Western democracies.<sup>48</sup>

A possible explanation may be sought in the shorter experience with democratic systems that generally give more room for democratic decentralisation. This explanation, however, goes against the conclusions of Golosov, according to whom high-quality democracies tend to have more nationalised party systems.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, it would be consistent with the findings from some other Eastern European countries that note low levels of regionalisation.<sup>50</sup> Understandably, we cannot describe Eastern European countries with their short democratic experience as having high-quality democracy (compared with Western democracies). However, it is more likely that this is just one of many factors affecting regionalisation.

Czech regional elections are usually dominated by national parties. If a regional party gains a seat in a regional council, it is usually in Bohemia—particularly in

smaller regions where few votes are needed to pass the threshold of 5 per cent. Still, Hypothesis 4 is confirmed by this fact. The very limited success of regional parties is probably linked both with the late introduction of regions and the weakness of regional identities.

Although Schakel and Jeffery, and Romanova<sup>51</sup> too, note that regional elections are not necessarily of a second-order character, Czech elections can clearly be described as such. Beyond the recurring lower voter turnout, their lesser importance is demonstrated by the fact that regional topics are not important in the elections<sup>52</sup> (something we would expect if they were “first order”); rather, national issues dominate. Voting in regional polls often follows national politics, and government parties are punished by voters, in line with the electoral-cycle theory,<sup>53</sup> or they are “barometer elections.”<sup>54</sup>

The results achieved by countrywide parties mostly depend on whether they are in government or opposition nationally, and they are accordingly penalised or favoured in regional elections. In 2016, some deviations from this trend were observed, with the rise of populist movements ANO and SPD; but the 2020 elections confirmed the long-term trend. There is one major exception, KDU-ČSL, which has long enjoyed favour with voters in Moravia irrespective of its position in national politics. The Pirate Party since its inception has done better in the two most recent regional elections than in the preceding national elections.

These exceptions aside, the manner in which voters penalise parties; the importance of the leader for the party’s overall result; the low voter turnout; the national topics that dominate the campaigns (as in 2008, when health care fees were discussed)<sup>55</sup>; and also the timing of regional elections usually in the middle of the government term allow regional contests to be characterised as second-order elections, fully in concord with Hypothesis 3.<sup>56</sup>

Support for the various parties as expressed using the IoCV is relatively uniform across regions for most parties. The only party to exhibit greater regionalisation in the long term has been KDU-ČSL, which has a stronger base in certain regions in Moravia than in Bohemia. More recently, STAN, which was originally founded by local politicians (mayors of municipalities), has exhibited a similar tendency, but this trend has only been apparent in the two most recent elections. Developmental trends observed in our two macro-regions, Bohemia and Moravia, are often very similar; sometimes one macro-region follows the other slightly later. There is a difference with KDU-ČSL, which is favoured in Moravia; by contrast, ČSSD has long suffered from stronger penalisation in the same region. ODS tends to be more successful in Bohemia than in Moravia. However, no pronounced effect of the historical division between Bohemia and Moravia is discernible in the election results.

The historical expulsion of the populations of the so-called Sudetenland after 1945, which resonates to this day, as these are structurally disadvantaged and less developed regions in the north of Bohemia and Moravia, has a much greater effect on electoral behaviour and hence on parties’ electoral performance.<sup>57</sup>

Given the structural changes to the political party system since 2010 (increasing clashes between traditional and marketing-oriented parties), with many parties emerging after running in only two or three elections, some of the trends are more tentative, such as the gradual strengthening of the positions of the Pirate Party in regional elections and the relatively weak position of SPD, which is managed in a strongly centralist fashion and lacks regional structures. These developmental trends (connected with a slight rise in the IoCV of these particular parties) may be confirmed or disproved in future elections, where their positions compared to the national elections may vary. On the other hand, it does not seem that the large turbulences in the party system are associated with a greater regionalisation of Czech regional elections. In this respect, the decline of some traditional parties has not been exploited by regional parties to strengthen their positions in regional elections. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported by the results of this study.

The strong nationalisation of Czech regional elections and the limited success of locally specific or regional parties are in total contrast to Czech local elections. This may confirm the actual position and character of the regions as administrative units providing a certain measure of decentralisation and self-government, while remaining reliant on the centre of political power, which substantially contributes to their legitimacy.<sup>58</sup> Thus Czech regions are not entities *sui generis*—considering also their major differences in area and population size and the fact that they do not overlap with the jurisdictions of the regional courts, for instance. Besides, the tendency to the above-average centralisation has further implications for the functioning of the state, as it reinforces the role of the wealthy capital city while peripheral regions are depopulated (and become unattractive)—people are not bound by any regional identity and are more willing to leave, seeking work or a higher quality of life.

Also, there are no political groups with strong regional profiles (due to a lack of homogeneity and loyalty) that would oppose national politics or push their views through, including those on how the region ought to be managed.<sup>59</sup> If such groups run for election, they tend to garner only marginal support. This is reflected in the results of regional elections, which largely mirror political life and events at the national level. Despite significant nationalisation, the results of regional elections have not caused many political shocks, although they may contribute to shake-ups within the parties, as some regional elites are recruited to the national party leadership. Although regions have not contributed to the regionalisation of elections, they have had an impact on how parties are run, causing some decentralisation of candidate selection and some regionalisation of party elites.<sup>60</sup>

All in all, contrary to Keating, the Czech regions do not represent a new wave of regionalism, well-illustrated also by the minimal use of the power to propose nationwide legislation, as only 12 tiny amendments sponsored by regions have been successful in more than 20 years. Prague on its own pushed through the same number in the same period.<sup>61</sup>



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## ORCID iDs

Adam Folvarčný  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0250-6887>

Jan Hruška  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5667-8430>

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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24. J. LaPlant, M. Baun, J. Lach, and D. Marek, "Decentralization in the Czech Republic: The European Union, Political Parties, and the Creation of Regional Assemblies," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 34 (2004): 35–51; O. Leiner, "Ujišťuji vás, že mlčēt nehodlám. Můj hlas bude lidi stále zajímat, říká Kalousek," *Ihned.cz*, 14 July 2020, <https://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-66790140-nemyslete-si-ze-budumlcet>; N. Villarroel, "Na čtrnáct krajů Česko rozdělila složité hledaná politická shoda. Nyní fungují už dvacet let," *ČT24*, 8 September 2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3179445-na-ctnact-kraju-cesko-rozdelila-slozite-hledana-politicka-shoda-nyni-funguji-uz/>.
25. M. Pink, "Czech Republic: Regional Elections without Regional Politics," in *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe. Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*, ed. A. Schakel, 83–104 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

26. See S. Hanley, “Two cheers for Czech democracy,” *Czech Journal of Political Science* 21 (2014): 161–76.

27. E.g. Romanova, “The 2020 Regional Elections in Ukraine”; Tsirbas, “The 2019 Regional Elections in Greece.”

28. Schakel, “Congruence between Regional and National Elections”; Schakel and Romanova, “Towards a Scholarship on Regional Elections.”

29. As far as turnout is concerned, it is clearly lower than in the parliamentary elections. In regional elections, turnout is consistently between 30 and 40 percent; in parliamentary elections, it is always at least 20.0 pp higher. We thus do not focus more on turnout in this paper.

30. F. Pallares and M. Keating, “Multi-Level Electoral Competition—Regional Elections and Party Systems in Spain,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10 (2003): 239–55; F. Tronconi and C. Roux, “The Political Systems of Italian Regions between State-Wide Logics and Increasing Differentiation,” *Modern Italy* 14 (2009): 151–66; S. Skrinis and E. Teperoglou, “Studying and Comparing Second-Order Elections. Examples from Greece, Portugal and Spain,” in *The Multilevel Electoral System of the EU*, ed. C. Eijk and H. Schmitt, 163–190 (Mannheim, Connex, 2008); A. Floridia, “The Regional Elections of 2010: Much Ado about Nothing? Electoral Observatory of the Region of Tuscany,” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 2 (2010): 137–45.

31. V. Hloušek and L. Kopeček, *Původ, ideologie a transformace politických stran v západní střední Evropě* (Praha: Grada, 2010).

32. Ibid.

33. Candidacy in a coalition or absence of a candidate list in a region.

34. T. Kostecký, R. Mikešová, M. Poláková, D. Čermák, J. Bernad, and M. Šimon, *Koho volí Vaši sousedé? Prostorové vzorce volebního chování na území Česka od roku 1920 do roku 2006, jejich změny a možné příčiny* (Praha: Slon, 2014); M. Šimon, “Measuring Phantom Borders: The Case of Czech/Czechoslovakian Electoral Geography,” *Erdkunde* 69 (2015): 139–50.

35. V. Hloušek and L. Kopeček, *Konfliktní demokracie. Moderní masová politika ve střední Evropě* (Brno: Mezinárodní politologický ústav, 2004).

36. L. Linek, R. Chytilík, and O. Eibl, “Obrana, akvizice, či nesoutěž? Jak se měnila podoba a intenzita soutěže mezi českými stranami v letech 2006–2014?” *Czech Sociological Review* 52 (2016): 647–77.

37. To simplify, the vote shares for TOP 09 and STAN were combined until 2016, even though they mostly ran separately in regional elections.

38. In the Olomouc region, the Pirate candidates stood for election in 2020 on the STAN list and hence their results are counted towards the STAN-led coalition. This is why the Min. figure in Table 7 for 2020 is 0.

39. M. Pink and A. Folvarčný, “The Czech Pirate Party: A New Alternative, Not Only for the Young,” *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 6 (2020): 175–96.

40. Until 2017, the Pirate Party had no seats in the national parliament, though it had some regionally.

41. L. Kopeček, “‘I’m Paying, so I Decide’: Czech ANO as an Extreme Form of a Business-Firm Party,” *East European Politics and Societies* 30 (2016): 725–49.

42. From 2015 to 2019 Okamura’s second party featured his name in the name of the party, Freedom and Direct Democracy—Tomio Okamura. Likewise Dawn of Direct Democracy bore the name of its founder in the first year after it was established.

43. In 2016, it was Dawn of Direct Democracy, in 2020 Freedom and Direct Democracy. The latter is a direct successor to the former and hence they are analysed together here.

44. Opposition to the “government” of the large parties, ČSSD and ODS; KDU-ČSL was the decisive actor in this opposition.

45. P. Maškarinec, “Crossing the Left-Right Party Divide? Understanding the Electoral Success of the Czech Pirate Party in the 2017 Parliamentary Elections,” *Politics* 40 (2020): 510–26.

46. J. Smolík and M. Pink, “Regional Aspects of the Electoral Threshold of Regional Elections in the Czech Republic,” *XIX. Mezinárodní kolokvium o regionálních vědách* (2016): 839–46. doi:10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-8273-2016-108.

47. The voters in the regional elections have four preferential votes that they may cast for particular candidates on the party list (Act No. 129/2000 Coll.)

48. Dandoy and Schakel, *Regional and National Elections in Western Europe*.

49. Golosov, "Factors of Party System Nationalization."

50. G. Dobos and R. Várnagy, "Hungary: Are Neglected Regional Elections Second-Order Elections?" in *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe. Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*, ed. A. Schakel, 105–128 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); M. Rybář and P. Spač, "Slovakia: The Unbearable Lightness of Regionalization," in *Regional and National Elections in Eastern Europe. Territoriality of the Vote in Ten Countries*, ed. A. Schakel, 239–259 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

51. Schakel and Jeffery, "Are Regional Elections Really 'Second-Order' Elections?"; Romanova, "The Principle of Cyclicity of the Second-Order Election Theory for Simultaneous Multi-Level Elections."

52. M. Pink and O. Eibl, "The 2016 Czech Regional Elections: Without Real Regional Parties or Voters' Interest," *Regional and Federal Studies* 28 (2018): 353–65. doi:10.1080/13597566.2018.1450746.

53. E. Tufte, "Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review* 69 (1975): 812–26; C. Jeffery and D. Hough, "The Electoral Cycle and Multi-Level Voting in Germany," *German Politics* 10 (2001): 73–98. doi:10.1080/10.1080/772713264.

54. See Schakel and Romanova, "Towards a Scholarship on Regional Elections."

55. Pink and Eibl, "The 2016 Czech Regional Elections."

56. S. Caletka, "Krajské volby v České republice," *Slovak Journal of Public Policy and Public Administration* 1 (2014): 53–64.

57. J. Bernard, T. Kostelecký, and M. Šimon, "Existují prostorové kontextové vlivy na volební chování i v relativně nacionalizovaném stranickém systému? Příklad Česka," *Geografie* 119 (2014): 240–56.

58. Regional politics also serves as an opportunity for career advancement for politicians. Many MPs have held a position in regional politics in the past, or hold it concurrently with a position at the national level of politics.

59. M. Myant and S. Smith, "Regional Development and Post-Communist Politics in a Czech region," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006): 147–68. doi:10.1080/09668130500481287; S. Balík et al., *Czech Politics: From West to East and Back Again* (Brno: Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2017).

60. S. Balík, V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, J. Holzer, P. Pšejja, and A. L. Roberts *Czech Politics: From West to East and Back Again*; Caletka, "Krajské volby v České republice"; D. Ryšavý, "Regionální politické elity—zrod, charakter a důsledky," *Czech Sociological Journal* 43 (2007): 993–1016.

61. M. Keating, "The Invention of Regions: Political Restructuring and Territorial Government in Western Europe," in *State/Space: A Reader*, ed. N. Brenner, B. Jessop, M. Jones, and G. Macleod (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), 256–277.

**Adam Folvarčný** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. His main interests are Czech and Polish politics, political parties.

**Jan Hruška** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. He is interested in the research of bicameralism, electoral behaviour, and political institutions.

**Michal Pink** is a Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. His main interests are elections, especially the territorial distribution of electoral results and their long-term variability and stability.