Czech Political Parties and their Voters*

An Analysis of Voting Patterns in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: This article deals primarily with voting patterns during elections to the Chamber of Representatives. The new trends in voting patterns [Matějů and Vlachová 1997] that emerged during the Senate elections are not considered in the article. Information on voting patterns during the parliamentary elections are supplemented by information gained from surveys carried out in autumn 1996. The article maps out the shifts in votes between the 1992 and 1996 elections and the developing stability of voting behaviour in relation to the developing system of political parties. It analyses certain motives underlying voting behaviour (including sympathy for the political party or the lack of it, potential second choice and negative voting), together with the distribution of voters between parties on the left-right spectrum. It discusses the links between these motives and the more stable alignment of voters with political parties, and the nature of the current governing coalition and of other coalitions which parties indicated were possible. The data used has been taken from various surveys, including two during parliamentary elections in the spring of 1996 and one in autumn 1996.

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There were two elections in the Czech Republic in 1996, the general election to the lower house of parliament, i.e. the Chamber of Representatives, in spring, and to the upper house – the Senate, in autumn. Both elections confirmed suppositions that the Czech political scene is in a process of development which will lead to a change in the party system. Parliamentary politics in the Czech Republic is now seven years old. This is not really long enough to be seen as totally developed and stable, but it is nevertheless clear that the political scene here is moving closer to that common in western democracies. The present system of political parties has more than one feature that is important for the consolidation of the democratic system of government and those features of political development that are not yet fully mature appear positive [Krause 1996: 425]. Out of the welter of political parties in 1991-1992 there have emerged several parties which represent the major political interests and which have a relatively solid core of voters. Following last year's elections the lower house of parliament is largely made up of classical political parties (as opposed to heterogeneous political movements or post-materialist parties), behind which lie specific opinions and ideas and also classical

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political ideologies [Vlachová 1996b][1] and social classes [Matějů and Řeháková 1996]. These political parties cannot now be said to be "hovering" over the political, economic and social reality without being connected with it [Tóka 1997]. The rates at which they are becoming part of the Czech political system differ, contributing to a certain predictability and institutionalisation of the future political competition.

Voting preferences in the Czech Republic are becoming more stable, as is the case in the stable western democracies. They are focusing around six political parties and have also reached a certain degree and limits on the left-right spectrum. Voting is becoming a habit rather than a constantly new decision [Runciman 1971], and the number of people who change their allegiance between elections or in the course of an election campaign is falling.

The Contribution of the Political System

According to the simplest classification in terms of the number of political parties, the Czech Republic has a multi-party political system.[2] This allows for the largest possible number of different political interests and the largest possible number of structural cleavages – democratic political conflicts on questions of economics, social policy, foreign policy, the concept of the regime, religion, minorities, an so on. [Lipset and Rokkan 1967]. As a multi-party system shows in practice, however, not every interest is in fact politically important and not every country has a large number of politically relevant cleavages [Downs 1957].

A political system such as that which now exists in the Czech Republic, in which there is only one important structural cleavage on the economy and social policy (the socio-economic dimension), naturally gives rise to a limited number of large parties – theorists estimate two or three [Downs 1957], and several smaller parties. The major parties – the right-wing ODS during the second parliamentary term and now the left-wing ČSSD as well –represent the major and conflicting interests in the fields of the economy and social policy and are coming to represent the two main streams of politics. A degree of irrationality in the multi-party system allows the existence of smaller parties which can stress minority interests which are not covered by the major socio-economic ones (religious, as with KDU-ČSL, the basic concept of the system as with KSČM and possibly also SPR-RSČ, foreign politics –KSČM and SPR-RSČ, ethnic minorities – SPR-RSČ, etc.). Both the major parliamentary parties and the smaller ones are forced to form alliances within the government and in opposition. This imposes a certain degree of similarity on them, together with a certain similarity of their voters, and forces them into a political system in which they have no hope of gaining an absolute majority.

A democratic political system also makes it possible for very small political parties to exist, representing particular interests. These very small parties lie outside the main

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[1]) The typology of political ideologies is from Janda [1989: 176-178] according to Kingdon [1981].

[2]) The Czech Republic has a system of proportional representation with a threshold of 5% for political parties and 7% for coalitions. This voting system favours the formation of a multi-party political system. In 1991 politicians were already debating what voting system would best suit the then Czechoslovakia [Gabal et al. 1996] and there was considerable support for a majoritarian voting system, but a system of proportional representation was eventually chosen and the Czech Republic took this over after the split of the Federation.

political spectrum (outside parliament) and are a by-product of a political system which allows them to hope that they will become important. Those which do not find their place in the political spectrum (as in Italy in the 1960s, for example, there were no significant regional political parties,[3] although they later became important) are condemned to a meagre existence or to extinction. In the Czech Republic today such parties include the SD-LSNS, LB, SDL, MNS-HSMS, HSMS-MNS, DEU, DŽJ and many others.

Changes in Voting Patterns between the 1992 and 1996 Elections

There has been major development in the Czech parliamentary political spectrum since the 1992 elections to the Lower House (at that time still the Czech National Assembly[4]). Of the parties which won parliamentary seats in 1992 – the ODS-KDS coalition, ODA, KDU-ČSL, ČSSD, LSU, LB (the Left Block – a coalition of the KSČM and SDL), HSD-SMS and the SPR-RSČ (see Appendix 2) – some have been shown to be strong, stable and significant, while others have undergone changes [Kopecký, Hubáček and Plecitý 1996], becoming less important, merging, splitting or disappearing. The HSD-SMS split into the HSD-SMS and the ČMSS. The ČMSS merged with what was left of the LSU to form the ČMUS, the LSNS split off from the LSU almost immediately after the elections and the LB split into the KSČM and the Left Block, while the ODS merged with the KDS. This development was seen at the parliamentary level (in the parliamentary caucuses), at the national level, and at the same time in the behaviour and allegiances of voters, leading to a more consolidated, easily visible and stable parliamentary political scene. As Krause [1996] noted, the fact that unstable parties did not win seats in the 1996 elections was a positive sign of the stabilisation of the political system, since if they did not have a firm organisational base they could not offer lasting political success and really represent their voters.

The outcome of this development was clear from the results of the elections to the Chamber of Representatives of 31st May/1st June 1996. In the period since the 1992 elections the political spectrum had become clearer on the left and in the centre, and the search was on for an acceptable left and at the same time an equal and clear opposition for the relatively strong right,[5] which had managed to consolidate itself earlier than the left, in fact one whole parliamentary term before. According to Novák [1996], it was positive that the ČSSD was growing stronger and that at the same time the ODS was maintaining its strong position. After the 1990 and 1992 elections (see Appendix 2) the strongest opposition party was the KSČM, which was however not acceptable as an alternative government. The fact that those opposition parties in favour of retaining the status quo became more powerful was a factor in the realisation that a reasonable alternative to the then government was emerging.

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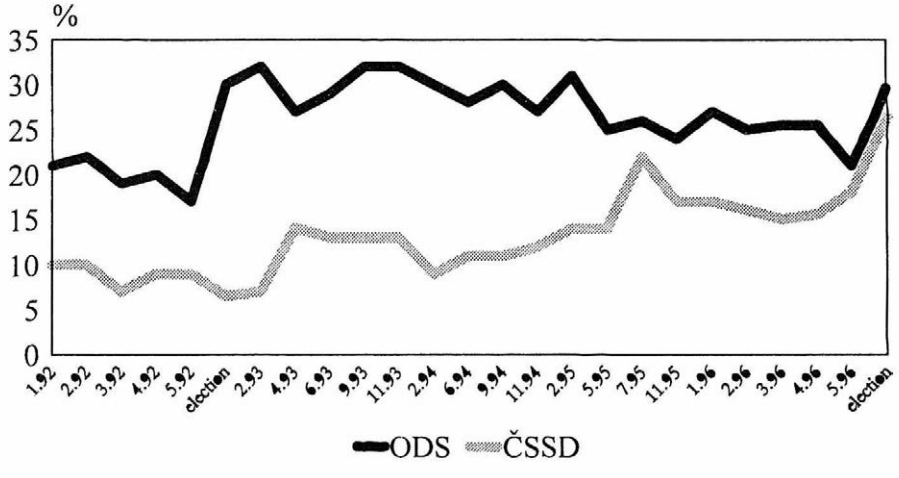
[3]) "In Italy ethnic and regional cleavages are not relevant at the level of national policy making" [Sartori 1966: 142].

[4]) In the period from the foundation of the Czechoslovak Federation until 1992, the Czech National Assembly was of the second rank in the national parliament. The main legislative body of the then Czechoslovak Federation was the bi-cameral Federal Assembly. After the split of the federation at the end of 1993 the Czech National Assembly became the lower house of the Czech Parliament – the Chamber of Representatives.

[5]) Here strong is meant in terms of electoral support, as this decides the strength of the representation in the legislature.

The considerable flow of voters towards the left of centre ČSSD began in the increasingly mature political system between the 1992 and 1996 parliamentary elections and it reached a peak during the 1996 electoral campaign. The ČSSD now seemed acceptable not only for left-wing voters but also for many who had previously voted for right-of-centre parties. It gained many votes that would otherwise have gone to those political parties which had little chance of gaining seats in parliament, but also attracted voters from the larger political parties. The number of ČSSD voters gradually approached that of ODS voters (see Figure 1). This gain helped the ČSSD become the main opposition to the right, which was and is primarily represented by the ODS. On the left it became clear that the support for the former Left Block in the 1992 elections had been largely dependent on the KSČM voters. After the Left Block split into the LB and the KSČM between the elections, the ČSSD became more attractive to those less radically minded voters (Table 1) while others remained faithful to the Communist Party. Two major parties thus took shape on the left of the political spectrum, representing the communist and socialist ideologies.

Figure 1. Developing Voting Preferences for ČSSD and ODS



Source: IVVM

Table 1. Changes in Voting Preferences 1992-1996 (in %)

1992	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	1996 ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ	Others
LB	*67.1*	14.2	0.4	0.5	1.3	3.9	12.6
ČSSD	2.7	*75.3*	1.6	2.5	8.2	1.5	8.2
KDU-ČSL	1.4	10.4	*72.8*	1.1	4.7	3.6	6.1
ODA	3.2	16.0	5.9	*33.5*	31.2	3.2	9.1
ODS-KDS	0.9	15.4	5.2	5.6	*63.3*	2.5	7.1
SPR-RSČ	5.5	22.0	1.7	2.0	2.8	*61.6*	4.4
Others	11.3	29.0	5.2	4.5	23.3	6.6	20.2

Note: Row percentages. Total for each row is 100%, N = 12,222.
Source: Exit poll for Czech Television (IFES/SC&C/ARC).

The law of the "collapse of the centre" was also borne out. The first to fall out of parliamentary politics was the OH (today the SD merged with the LSNS), but it was followed by other political parties which placed themselves on the centre of the spectrum and represented politically undefined positions which are difficult for voters to understand – the LSNS and ČMUS. The centre ground was taken by the KDU-ČSL, described as a centre-right party, which is a flexible combination of elements of Christian conservatism, socialism and populism.

The political right also showed signs of a modest development. Back at the end of the former election campaign the conservative right had merged when a majority of KDS members joined with the ODS, taking a majority of the voters for the ODS-KDS coalition in 1992. The strongest flow towards the ODS was of people who had voted for the ODA, which while very similar is in some ways more liberal (Table 1). This was a natural and rational movement. Supporters of the ODA were aware how difficult the position of this small party is and of the risk involved in voting for it, and many of them chose instead to vote for the very similar but more stable ODS. It can be said that the performance of this party since the election shows that there was no foundation for its supporters' fears just after the election, when for a long time it was not clear whether ODA had in fact reached the 5% threshold for entry into parliament. The liberal ideas which ODA is so close to, particularly in its ideas on economic policy, are not very strong in the Czech Republic. There was also a strong movement of voters towards the ODS from small political parties not represented in parliament, and there has been some shifting of voters between the three parties in the coalition (ODS with KDU-ČSL and ODA with KDU-ČSL).

Table 2. Stability of Voting Preferences (in %)

	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ
1992 elections /1996 elections	61.4	40.5	60.4	35.9	63.5	52.0
May 1996 /December 1996	88.5	82.2	89.9	76.8	91.8	79.5

Note: Coefficient of stability of distribution $S_k = 2n_{kk} / n_k + n_{+k}$ [Řehák and Řeháková 1986: 294], $N_{Exit\ poll} = 12{,}222$, $N_{ISSP} = 729$.
Source: Exit poll for Czech Television (IFES/SC&C/ARC), ISSP 1996 – Role of Government.

The supposition that voters were looking not just for a left wing but also for a viable opposition is borne out by the fact that the opposition parties, the ČSSD, KSČM and SPR-RSČ, had already gained more than 30% of their voters during the period between the two elections (ČSSD 31.7%, KSČM 30.7% and SPR-RSČ 37.0%), while the same period was not overly successful for the coalition parties, particularly ODS and KDU-ČSL. ČSSD and ODA – the two most important and most active political rivals of ODS – won over a considerable proportion of their voters during the electoral campaign. ČSSD ran a very successful campaign, while many voters moved towards ODA at the last minute without being particularly influenced by the campaign. KSČM and ODS ran less successful campaigns than the other parties, restricted by the limits that a one-dimensional political system (left-right) presents for six political parties with different ideological positions to divide and limit the number of voters. These limits did not allow

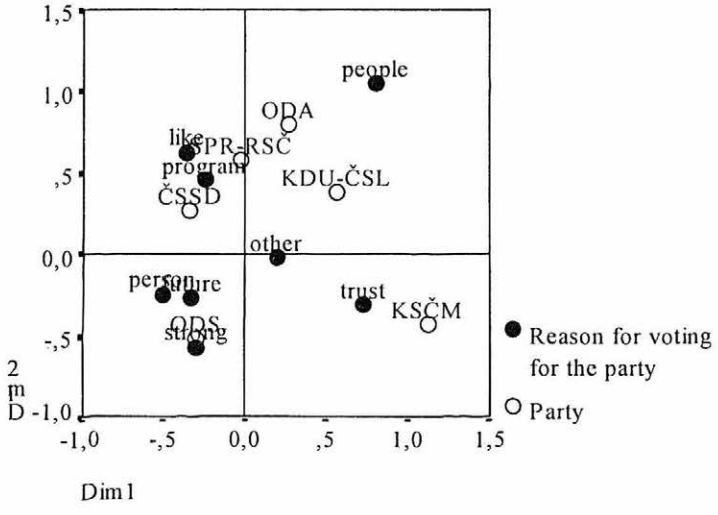
them greater voter support which would increase the core of a long-term stable electorate. KSČM, ODS and KDU-ČSL had the most stable core of faithful voters from the previous elections – KSČM 58.7%, ODS 55.9% and KDU-ČSL 48.8%.[6] These voters had chosen their party during the 1992 elections to the Czech National Assembly and retained it for last year's elections to the Chamber of Representatives.

Table 3. When Voters Decided (in %)

	During the 1992 elections	Between 1992 and 1996	During the electoral campaign
KSČM	58.7	30.7	10.6
ČSSD	25.7	31.7	42.6
KDU-ČSL	48.8	18.7	32.5
ODA	27.0	27.0	46.0
ODS	55.9	25.7	18.4
SPR-RSČ	34.6	37.0	28.4

Note: Row percentages. Total for each row is 100%, N = 892.
Source: Survey "24 Hours before the Elections," SC&C for Czech Television.

Figure 2. Reasons for Voting for Different Parties



r_{Dim1}[7] = 0.25, r_{Dim2} = 0.22, percentage of explained inertia: Dim1 40%, Dim2 32%.
Note: people – led by likable people, like – party I dislike the least, program – good election manifesto, person – strong personalities, future – offers good prospects for the future, strong – strong party, trust – I trust the party, other – other reasons.
Source: Survey "24 Hours before the Elections," SC&C for Czech Television.

[6]) Brokl [1996: 396] gives different figures on voter stability.
[7]) Correlation between row and column scores, singular value.

The ODS, KSČM and KDU-ČSL are the parties with the most stable electorate at the present time (Table 2). They retained 60-64% of their voters between 1992 and 1996, and interim results from the period of marked political instability from May to December 1996 show their voter stability as rising to 88-92% of loyal voters, which is comparable with western democracies [cf. Brynin 1995: 248]. In a political system which is still in the process of formation this means that these parties have become a part of this system and, at the same time, institutions which have gained sufficient legitimacy as representatives of the political interests of citizens. The other political parties as yet have a less stable electorate. They are not as institutionalised as the former three parties and still have considerable development ahead of them.

The institutionalisation of parliamentary parties is also indicated by some of the reasons people gave for voting for a certain party (Figure 2, analysis by ANACOR[8]). Reasons for voting for ODS and KSČM were much clearer and more uniform and reasons for voting for the other parties were much vaguer. Support for ODS was based on the strong party, strong personalities and clear conceptions which voting for this party could bring. Support for ČSSD was based on its election manifesto and on the fact that it was the party people disliked the least. The reasons for voting for KDU-ČSL were less clear and were a combination of its election manifesto, faith in the party, the fact that it was the party people disliked the least, and a mixture of other factors. Reasons for voting ODA included a liking for the people in the party and the fact that it was the party people disliked the least. The fixed star in the political firmament, the KSČM, was chosen for the faith in the party held by those people who were loyal to it. Reasons for voting SPR-RSČ are surprisingly similar to those for voting for ČSSD, i.e. its election manifesto and the fact that it was the party its voters disliked the least. Summarising the motives for voting for the different political parties, it can be said that voters for ODS and KSČM tended to have positive reasons, voting for parties they felt would represent their interests. For these voters, the relationship with other political parties was only secondary. For voters of ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, ODA and SPR-RSČ, on the other hand, negative motives were common – people voted for them because they wanted to vote against another party, rather than because they thought these parties would well represent their interests. This was a case of tactical voting.

Summing up the information on voter stability, on the time at which they decided to vote for a particular party, and on the reasons for doing so, the parliamentary political spectrum has moved further towards the optimal set of parties in the present conditions. ODS has now joined the KSČM as a fixed element of the Czech parliamentary spectrum and KDU-ČSL, ČSSD and SPR-RSČ are becoming parties which people are used to, and without which the Czech parliamentary spectrum would be incomplete. The ODA is still searching for a clear profile, for voters and a stable position in the political system.

Voting, Second Vote, Sympathy and the Lack of It

As in all multi-party systems, elections to the Czech parliament are linked up with preferences and likes and dislikes [Downs 1957] which often spring from non-political motives. Table 4 shows the percentage of cases in which people's vote for a party overlapped with their sympathies. While this was more common for the opposition

[8]) SPSS 6.1.

parties, it played an only slightly lesser role in voting preferences for the parties of the governing coalition. The mixing of sympathies and preferences with political choices is an integral part of multi-party systems, which offer voters several parties that have similar programmes but which they may find more or less likeable. In such a political system, however, voters should think more carefully about who to give their vote to and who will in fact actually profit from this vote. In political systems with a number of different parties elections generally produce coalition governments with all their related problems. Last year's elections showed that Czech voters do in certain circumstances try to overcome their likes and dislikes.

One proof of this behaviour is the drift away from heterogeneous political movements (around 1992) and small unstable parties (around 1996), which meant that in the third free elections since 1989 only six political parties gained seats in parliament, four of which have no political twin there. The only remaining parties which have considerable similarities are ODS and ODA, which are still refining their ideologies and thus their attractions to voters. Despite the signs of a certain electoral rationality, this does not however mean that every political issue, let alone likes and dislikes, is so important that a new political party must be formed.

Table 4. Votes and Sympathies for Parliamentary Parties (in %)

Vote	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ
Sympathy	96.2	91.1	85.2	81.1	83.6	95.1

Note: Diagonal percent, N = 901.
Source: Survey "24 Hours before the Elections," SC&C for Czech Television.

Voters in the Czech Republic expressed the greatest degree of liking for ČSSD and ODS (25.4% of those surveyed for each party), followed by the KSČM. The ranking of political parties according to people's degree of sympathy is close to that of voting preferences for the party (right-hand column in table 5) with the single marked exception of ODA. The ODA is the fourth best-liked party and is the only one in which there is not a significant overlap between sympathy and voting – 35.6% of those who sympathise with ODA voted for ODS, representing 10.4% of ODS's voters, while only 1.2% of ODS sympathisers voted for ODA, making up 4.6% of the total. These figures are not very favourable for ODA, showing the instability of its electoral base, and they imply a worsening outlook for the next elections. It is clear that the gradual settling down of the political scene and the psychological effect of the five percent threshold are leading supporters of small parties to vote for large parties with a similar platform.[9]

The ranking of parties which voters do not like is far more interesting. The first three places are taken up by KSČM, ODS and SPR-RSČ in that order (bottom row in Table 5). The ODS, which is undoubtedly a serious, democratic party which legitimises the present system and which was in power during the greatest part of the post-communist reforms, is here found in the company of the two extremist parties. The fact that ODS is one of the most disliked parties on the Czech political scene can at first

[9]) On the mechanical and psychological effects of the five-percent threshold, see Brokl [1996: 392] and Novák [1996: 411].

glance be easily explained. The ODS has lost popularity[10] because it was in the government between 1992 and 1996 as the strongest party and the strongest member of the coalition. Any political party which is in power, alone or in coalition, becomes worn and commonplace after a certain time and loses popularity. The ODS is not liked by voters of KSČM and SPR-RSČ, which is to be expected from the radicalism of both the politicians and voters of these parties, from their marked dissatisfaction with the government's performance and also from their different ideas about what political system is desirable. While ODS, together with its coalition partners ODA and KDU-ČSL, supports the present system, the KSČM and SPR-RSČ represent an opposition not only to the government but also to the system as such.[11] A detailed analysis of those who expressed a dislike for ODS (Table 5), however, produces an alarming conclusion – that a significant number of ČSSD[12] supporters also dislike ODS.

Table 5. Sympathy for or Dislike of Parliamentary Parties (in %)

			Dislike				Overall
Sympathy	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ	sympathy
KSČM	0.0	0.9	3.7	3.7	78.0	6.4	9.8
ČSSD	18.9	0.0	0.7	3.2	*37.5*	22.5	25.4
KDU-ČSL	40.8	11.8	0.0	1.3	7.9	18.4	7.0
ODA	35.6	9.6	1.0	0.0	7.7	28.8	9.5
ODS	45.9	7.1	0.7	0.4	0.0	29.2	25.4
SPR-RSČ	28.1	1.0	7.3	2.1	44.8	0.0	8.4
Others	28.1	0.0	1.8	3.5	38.6	22.8	-
Overall dislike	29.9	4.0	2.0	1.7	27.5	21.9	

Note: Percentage by row. Difference to 100% made up by voters of other parties, N = 1,174.

Source: Survey "24 Hours before the Elections," SC&C for Czech Television.

[10]) It has been described as arrogant, absolutist, and so forth. Its dominant position during the former parliamentary term was not popular with a part of the population, even though the system was undeniably pluralistic and democratic.

[11]) These are parties which would, if possible, change the system of government. The majority of their voters agree with them on this. The KSČM launched their manifesto in 1996 under slogans such as *We are for the change of the system, for socialism, and Socialism, a chance for the future.* The KSČM typically works within the system and behaves according to its rules. Although it would prefer a different regime, it has accepted the "game" of parliamentary democracy. This is not however the case with the SPR-RSČ, which is far less ready to accept the rules than is the KSČM. Members of the SPR-RSČ have carried out a number of acts which have been judged criminal (although they were politically motivated they were not political crimes but offences such as assault and injury, damage to property, incitement to racism and nationalism, disturbing the peace, and patronage). Such acts demonstrate a lack of respect for the laws of the country.

[12]) ČSSD is considered to be a democratic political party, an opposition which accepts the system as such, an equal rival for the ODS and the main party in a possible alternative government. Even if the fact that voters always react against the opponents of "their party" is taken into account, there remains the question of why the ČSSD supporters' reaction was so marked.

The map of dislikes shown in Table 5 is very similar to that of negative voting (Table 6). Just as a liking for a political party overlaps with voting for it, so a dislike for it clearly overlaps with negative voting. Voters for the parties in the present government coalition would never vote for an extremist party, on either extreme. The KDU-ČSL, ODA and ODS voters are all similar in this. In certain circumstances they would feel able to vote for the other democratic party – ČSSD – although ODS voters saw this as a rather extreme choice. Were ČSSD voters forced to vote for one of the parties in the governing coalition, more than a third of them would not consider ODS under any circumstances. The choices of those voting for extremist parties is limited on two points, on the one hand the ODS, and on the other the party from the other extreme. Voters for the parties in the government coalition show similarities not just in negative voting but also in their second preference. If they had to vote for another party apart from their own, it would be another of the coalition parties. For KDU-ČSL[13] and ODA the most frequent second choice is ODS, while ODS voters would opt for ODA. ČSSD voters feel closest to the KDU-ČSL, and ČSSD is the second choice for voters of the extremist parties.

Table 6. Parties a Person Would Never Vote for by the Party actually Voted for (in %)

	Would never vote for					
Voted for	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ
KSČM	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	71.0	21.0
ČSSD	20.3	1.4	3.6	2.3	*33.3*	35.6
KDU-ČSL	50.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	7.6	33.3
ODA	37.0	3.7	1.9	0.0	7.4	48.1
ODS	57.1	7.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	31.9
SPR-RSČ	28.2	0.0	2.6	5.1	59.0	2.6
Others	33.3	0.0	1.8	0.0	21.1	38.6

Note: Row percent. Total to 100% made up by other parties, N = 750.
Source: Survey ISSP 1996 – Role of Government.

Despite the natural loss of popularity over the period when ODS was the strongest party in parliament and in the government, the high percentage of people who dislike ODS is clearly a result of the battle of its main rival ČSSD and of the political struggles within the coalition (at times during the 1992-1996 term the KDU-ČSL and ODA based their politics on blackmail rather than on co-operation within the coalition). Brokl [1996: 402] comments that these two parties demonstrated "blackmail potential" [Sartori 1976: 123], both exploited their position as parties without real responsibility, and the KDU-ČSL prepared its ground for participation in the peripheral changes in the government in both the centre-right (the present government coalition) and the centre-left (ČSSD and KDU-ČSL [Novák 1996]. Parties with differing platforms such as ČSSD and ODS attract largely differing social and opinion groups of voters, although this does not necessarily mean that they do not compete with each other. They are in the throes of a long political

[13]) These results do not agree with those from the panel survey "24 Hours before the Senate Elections", which SC&C carried out for Czech Television. There twice as many loyal KDU-ČSL voters said they voted for ČSSD, as those who voted for ODS, in the second round when they could not vote for a member of their own party.

battle for floating voters and those not loyal to any one single party. Parties such as ODS and ODA which have similar political programmes are competing for the same voters and so are in close competition. The experience of countries with multi-party systems shows that there can be competition even between members of the same coalition government [Münich and Šorm 1995].

The Czech Republic is no exception in this. During the last parliamentary term political competition in this country took on the guise of continuing, and not just pre-election, confrontation between the ČSSD and ODS and the political stigmatising of the main right-wing parties by social democratically inclined voters using anti-right-wing rhetoric. The ODS was presented by its opponents as a political party which has no natural place on the Czech political scene and which is importing "inhuman" liberal-conservative policies into a country where there is no tradition of these. It described ODS's position as much more extreme. It is well known that voters react more strongly to a more "extreme" rival than to one which is ideologically milder. The presence of a more "extreme" rival therefore draws voters into a closer psychological bond with their party [Bowler, Lanoue and Savoie 1994].

A similar process went on within the government coalition, dominated by ODA in confrontation with ODS. ODA was naturally trying to win over voters from ODS, but this was not achieved and neither ODS nor the coalition as a whole gained any popularity. Anyone who felt disillusioned with ODS policies voted for the opposition rather than for other members of the coalition. Close competition was shown to hold one great risk, that it can cast a stigma and a certain uncertainty on the whole coalition, even though it seems to harm only the major party.

In both types of political competition, which are typical of multi-party systems, ODS was the passive party and carried out a defensive competition primarily aimed at retaining voters [Sani and Sartori 1983]. As a member of the former governing coalition it underestimated factors which should have been taken into account in predicting the behaviour of voters. Both ODS and the other coalition parties underestimated their expectations as to how voters would vote, how the government's performance affects them and what strategies the most important opposition parties, primarily ČSSD, would offer. They did not use the same type of advertising and aggressive confrontation towards ČSSD during the 1992-1996 term as they do now. The formerly little-known ČSSD, through a well-chosen strategy of marking out its ground in relation to the ODS and largely ignoring the other parties, was able to develop into an equally strong rival of the main right-wing party and to win over voters from smaller left-wing parties with similar policies. It could be said to have carried out an expansive contest, primarily aimed at winning voters [Sani and Sartori 1983].

Although there is widespread agreement that ODS, and also KDU-ČSL and ODA, committed certain errors in the way they presented themselves during the electoral campaign,[14] there is still the question of why ČSSD voters and sympathisers have such a

[14]) In illustration; the main slogans which ODS, ODA and KDU-ČSL used during the campaign were not considered successful. In the survey "24 Hours before the Elections" (SC&C for Czech Television) respondents were asked to rank a number of slogans from 1 (I don't like it at all) to 5 (I like it very much). The slogans of the coalition *Dokázali jsme, že to dokážeme* (*We've shown we can do it*) (ODS), *Volte pravou rukou* (*Vote by the right hand*) (ODA) and *Klidná síla* (*Quiet*

negative stance towards the main right-wing party in the present political system, seeing it as almost extremist, and as comparatively antagonistic as towards the real extremist parties. To indicate the difference, voters and sympathisers of the right-wing parties do have an antagonistic stance towards the extremist parties that represent at the very least a disturbing element in political stability and at worst a danger to democracy. The answer is perhaps to be found in the position and opinions of social democratic voters and sympathisers. Although surveys show that voters and sympathisers of the present ČSSD have a greater degree of acceptance of the values of the current system than do KSČM and SPR-RSČ voters, it should not be forgotten that they include people whose social position is different from that of voters for the liberal-conservative parties, who have a personal antipathy for ODS, who frequently came to the ČSSD from extremist parties (a vote for SPR-RSČ prior to that for ČSSD), who vote negatively, and who in general are less ready to accept the democratic system than are those who vote for the coalition parties. The ČSSD has attracted a certain type of voter. There was a hypothesis that the formerly positive stance of ODS voters towards ČSSD could have been because they did not see ČSSD as a serious political rival, but that if they saw the results of the Senate elections as threatening their political interests, they might feel a growing antipathy towards the ČSSD. This was not however borne out by the facts. Even six months after the parliamentary elections ODS supporters had not projected their assessment of the political situation into a dislike for the ČSSD.

Left and Right

The dominant axis of the Czech political system is the classical socio-economic dimension of left-right [Kischelt 1994: 36]. This means that the main political conflicts in society are over the economy, the role of the state in the economy and social inequality, i.e. the conflict between redistribution and the market. According to this dimension, five of the present parliamentary parties can be distributed from left to right as follows: KSČM, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, ODA, ODS and can be labelled according to the traditional terminology of the left-right political dimension[15] communist, social-democratic (socialist), christian democratic and liberal-conservative (although ODA can be seen as more liberal and ODS more conservative). The SPR-RSČ is something of an exception here. Its programme is not dominated by economic issues and it can be seen as similar to the right-wing populist parties that are well known in western democracies.[16] Its existence represents different dimensions such as authoritarian-liberal, anarchy-order, majority-minority, foreign policy versus the internal regime. The SPR-RSČ is close to the extreme ideological right – fascism and it is extreme in its concentration of authoritarian, racist, anti-European and anti-democratic ideas, rather than in terms of its economic programme. The KSČM, on the other hand, is clearly extreme in terms of its economic programme, although its extremism is also clear in its position on foreign

strength) (KDU-ČSL) received average rankings of 2.55, 2.60 and 2.66, i.e. less than the mid-way value of the scale. The least popular slogan was that of the KSČM – *Socialismus, šance pro budoucnost* (*Socialism, a chance for the future*).

[15]) There is a widespread agreement as to where different ideas and ideologies are placed on the spectrum. Starting from the left it goes: communism – socialism – liberalism – conservatism – fascism [Heywood **1992**: 16].

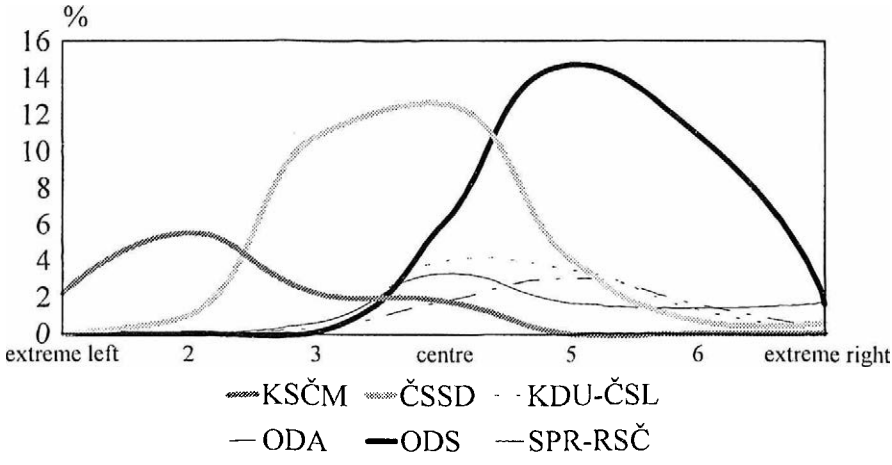
[16]) It can be compared with the French National Front or the Austrian Freedom Party.

policy and its ideas on the form of the political system. The position of the individual parties on the left-right spectrum corresponds to the positions where their voters place them [Šimoník 1996] and also to where their voters place themselves. The exception is the extremist SPR-RSČ, which does not see itself as extreme and which its voters see as centralist [Šimoník 1996]. The average position of its voters is somewhere between ODA and ODS, although the dispersion of their positions on the left-right scale according to their own assessments is wider (table in Figure 3).

The multi-party political system leads to a distribution of voters into several peaks along the spectrum. This creates the possibility for several parties to exist, but the number of these that do in fact have a peak on the spectrum in any one country is not great – usually only two or three. The Czech political spectrum during the 1996 electoral campaign (Figure 3) has three main peaks which represent three political parties: KSČM, ČSSD and ODS, which are also the parties which a large number of voters see as the most attractive. The voting preferences of two of them – ČSSD and ODS – have given them a considerable advance over the others and they now represent the major political conflict in society – the socio-economic conflict, and also that between the two opposing ideologies – socialist and conservative [Matějů and Vlachová 1997]. The political system is close to bi-polar. The other parties – KDU-ČSL, ODA, SPR-RSČ – do not have a peak on the left-right spectrum which is not covered by another stronger party. The political spectrum is not as a rule one-dimensional and the existence of parties without a peak on the left-right scale is made possible by the voting system along with other possible dimensions of the political spectrum, such as liberalism-authoritarianism, anarchy-order, secularism-religiousness, town-country, democracy-totalitarianism, majority-minority, the post-materialist dimension, the dimension of foreign policy, and even the non-political dimension of liking-disliking that is common in western democracies.

Every party on the political spectrum operates politically within the limits that the other parties allow it. All parties have little room to manoeuvre and so they seek any possible way to set themselves apart from the others and maintain their position. Party ideology takes first place among the different ways of achieving this, with the real political questions on which the parties are competing being thrust into second place. Ideology and politics are much more precisely directed in a multi-party system than in a bi-party one. Parties tend to approach or distance themselves from other parties on the political spectrum according to the issue in question. Political ideology is however a stable element of the party and the ideological label which corresponds to the party's clear position is its best definition in the overcrowded political system. Unlike in two-party systems, parties competing with a number of others are less mobile, since if they shift in any direction they enter the territory of other parties, they compete for voters on similar issues and if they are less successful they can drop from being a parliamentary party into the position of a marginal force.

Figure 3. Self-Positioning of Voters on the Left-Right Scale



	KSČM	ČSSD	KDU-ČSL	ODA	ODS	SPR-RSČ
Average	2.30	3.80	4.73	4.89	5.22	5.05
Std	0.94	0.92	0.82	1.04	0.81	1.26
N	105	267	82	65	300	78

Note: The figures on the graph are percentages of the total. Average for the population: 4.37. median: 4.
Source: Survey "24 Hours before the Elections", SC&C for Czech Television.

Conclusion

Parties owe their electoral success both to themselves and to their voters. In last year's elections the ČSSD attracted voters from both the centre and the extremes, for a variety of reasons. The analysis shows that it was the political party which came closest to both the average voter and the median voter [e.g. Downs 1957] (table in Figure 4), and this was an important factor in its success. Although it has set itself the aim of attracting the more faithful voters of the extremist parties, the data on stability, on possible shifts and on the distribution of voters on the left-right spectrum indicate that none of the parties can be sure to win over the voters of other parties, without a shift in the political spectrum and the risk of losing some of their existing supporters. The increasing stability of the electorate has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, a highly stable electorate is an important indicator of the predictability of their behaviour and it undoubtedly contributes to the stabilisation of political parties' positions and of the political system as a whole. On the other hand, however, it can mean that a relatively small number of floating voters can control the political struggle and so make it more difficult for the parties to strengthen their position in the "overflowing" and ideologically structured political sphere.

An interesting fact arising out of the identified range of the second elections and the limited voting preferences is dislike and negative voting (i.e. the party which a person would never vote for). Every voter reacts in a certain way to the range of parties there is to choose from. Among the many factors influencing voting behaviour is the fact that the voter is able to recognise that party in a given political system whose ideology is

unacceptable to him or her, and to vote in such a way as to limit that party's chances of gaining power. The knowledge of the ideologically unacceptable opponent of "their party" can tie voters closer to the latter party [Bowler, Lanoue and Savoie 1994], thus contributing to the ultimate stability of the electorate. The extent and limits of voting behaviour in a multi-party system can also be judged from the possible party coalitions which would be acceptable to voters. Even if it seems that it is better for voters to be able to choose between more than two parties, some authors [Downs 1957] consider that the multi-party system does not really offer most voters a greater choice. The results of elections in political systems with more than one party most often produce coalition governments which suffer all the problems arising out of close political competition. The smaller the number of coalitions which a voter's preferred party is prepared to enter, the easier it is for the voter to predict what a vote for this party will mean in reality. If a voter knows that his or her preferred party will enter a certain coalition, he or she will vote for that party, even if voting for another party would produce the same coalition. Such a voter knows that the more votes a party gains, the stronger it will be within the coalition. If, however, voters do not know what coalitions their party is prepared to enter, then it is not possible to say which party they actually prefer. There may be many resulting coalitions, with many different policies. If voters know who they are supporting along with their favourite parties, there is less need to vote tactically and their voting behaviour becomes more predictable. For this reason it is also important for parties to know which coalitions their voters would accept.

The range of voting preferences indicates that the present coalition is the obvious one for those who voted for the member parties, as their second choice was generally one of the other coalition parties. It is in fact the most natural and most homogeneous of all the theoretically possible coalitions. For voters of KDU-ČSL and ČSSD a coalition between them would have been acceptable but does not seem as natural as the existing one. There are limits for the democratic voters of the extremist parties, which have zero coalition potential, as these parties have distanced themselves from the democratic parties and the latter generally do not consider forming coalitions with them. Voters for extremist parties are prepared to compromise in only one direction [Downs 1957] and would only accept a coalition of their party with the ČSSD, which is also in opposition. They would exclude the ODS, the strongest party and one which supports the status quo, and the party on the opposite extreme. The ODS is also excluded by ČSSD voters.

The extent and limits of voting preferences are in accordance with the signs of possible and unacceptable coalitions which political parties offer their voters. The possible coalitions which parties consider are reasonably homogenous. They are generally groups of parties lying next to each other on the left-right spectrum and do not link parties across the centre from left to right or vice versa. The range of voting preferences generally also includes neighbouring parties. Collaboration between parties is based on ideological similarities and the majority of voters can clearly see what their vote can bring in political terms.

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Appendix 1

Abbreviations Used:

ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party

ČMSS – Bohemian-Moravian Party of the Centre

ČMUS – Bohemian-Moravian Union of the Centre

DEU – Democratic Union

DŽJ – Pensioners for Security

HSD-SMS – Movement for Self-Governing Democracy- Society for Moravia and Silesia

HSMS-MNS, MNS-HSMS – moravian national parties

KDU-ČSL – Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party

KSČM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

LB – Left Block

LSNS – Liberal National Social Party

LSU – Liberal-Social Union

ODS – Civic Democratic Party

ODA – Civic Democratic Alliance

SD-LSNS – Free Democrats-Liberal National Social Party

SDL – Party of the Democratic Left

SPR-RSČ – Association for the Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party

Data

The following surveys were used for the analysis of voting behaviour: Exit poll for Czech Television (IFES/SC&C/ARC), "24 Hours before the Election" (SC&C for Czech Television, 1966) and ISSP 1996 – Role of Government (Institute of Sociology, Academy of Science of the Czech Republic) Respondents who did not vote or did not answer the question as to which party they voted for were excluded from the analysis. Voters for small parties which did not reach the 5% threshold for entry to parliament were included in the category of Others.

The parties included in the analysis were those political parties holding seats in the Chamber of Representatives in Parliament: KSČM – communist party, ČSSD – social

democratic party, KDU-ČSL – christian democratic Party, ODA – liberal-conservative party, ODS – liberal-conservative party, SPR-RSČ – right-wing populist party.

Questions Asked:

1. *Could you tell me which party you like the most?*
2. *And could you tell me which party you like the least?*
3. *Could you try and remember which party you voted for in the 1992 parliamentary elections?*
4. *What party have you decided to vote for? (If you have already voted, what party did you choose?)* (in 1996)
5. *When did you decide to vote for this party?*
6. *Can you tell me why you decided to vote for this party?*
7. *Taking your political opinions as a whole, where would you place yourself on the political scale from left to right?*
8. *If the votes were transferred to two parties, which party would you give your vote too?*
9. *What political party would you never vote for?*

Appendix 2

Parties entering Parliament in 1992 (in the Czech National Assembly later the Chamber of Representatives).

	Percentage of total vote
LB	14.05
ČSSD	6.53
HSD-SMS	5.87
LSU	6.52
KDU-ČSL	6.28
ODA	5.93
ODS-KDS	29.73
SPR-RSČ	5.98

Source: Central Electoral Commission and Czech Statistical Office

Parties entering the Chamber of Representatives in 1996.

	Percentage of total vote
KSČM	10.33
ČSSD	26.44
KDU-ČSL	8.08
ODA	6.36
ODS	29.62
SPR-RSČ	8.01

Source: Central Electoral Commission and Czech Statistical Office