

Back to Class? Changing Effects of Class on Party Choice in the Czech Republic between 1992 and 2025

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of social class in shaping party choice in the 2025 Czech parliamentary elections and situates these findings within a broader longitudinal comparison covering the period from 1992 to 2025. Using post-election survey data from ten national elections, we analyze the relationship between social class and party choice through multinomial regression models and summary indices of class voting. The study addresses two main research questions. First, it investigates whether class voting declined during the 2010s amid the rise of new political parties and whether it re-emerged in recent elections. Second, it examines the extent to which new parties have absorbed the electorates of traditional parties and reshaped class-based patterns of electoral support. The findings contribute to debates on class dealignment and realignment by assessing whether the transformation of the Czech party system led to a weakening of class-party linkages or to their reconfiguration. Overall, the paper provides the most comprehensive longitudinal account of class voting in the Czech Republic to date and offers new insights into the changing social foundations of party competition in a volatile political context.

Keywords: class voting; party choice; Czech politics; Czech parliamentary elections; populist party support

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the transformation of European party systems has attracted sustained scholarly attention, particularly regarding the changing social bases of political competition. A key debate concerns the extent to which the traditional alignment between social class and party choice, long seen as a cornerstone of West European democracies (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), has weakened, disappeared, or been reconfigured. The decline of European social democratic parties and the parallel rise of national-conservative, economically left-leaning parties have reshaped class-based electoral coalitions in ways that earlier cleavage theory did not anticipate (Rennwald & Evans, 2014; Hartevelde, 2016). At the same time, scholars have documented the growing salience of sociocultural or transnational cleavage, which contrasts cosmopolitan, educated, urban voters with more national-conservative, less educated, peripheral ones. This divide increasingly competes with, and sometimes overrides, the traditional economic left-right dimension (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

These processes of dealignment and realignment are particularly pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe, where party systems are younger and more volatile, and where the sociocultural cleavage has found expression in the rise of populist radical right parties that simultaneously adopt an economically redistributive and culturally conservative platform (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). The Czech Republic represents a particularly informative case within the broader European context. It is among the few post-communist democracies in which class-based voting – broadly comparable to that observed in Western Europe – developed relatively early and reproduced itself in the following elections (Matějů & Řeháková, 1997; Matějů, 2000; Linek & Lyons, 2013; Smith & Matějů, 2011). At the same time, the availability of post-election surveys allows analysis of changes in class-party alignments over more than three decades of competitive elections. Examining whether class voting declined during this period contributes directly to ongoing debates about the persistence of class cleavages and the conditions under which they are weakened or renewed.

The Czech party system underwent significant changes following the 2010 Chamber of Deputies election. At the party level, new parties entered the system, and established parties were losing their support; at the system level, these changes were accompanied by high volatility and fragmentation (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2024; Havlík & Lysek, 2022; Linek et al., 2023). More specifically, most new parties rejected economic issues and refused to position themselves along the left-right dimension. Instead, these parties used anti-establishment and anti-corruption appeals and mobilized on niche topics such as migration and opposition to European integration. These changes were accompanied by the decline of traditional left-wing parties, namely the Czech Social Democratic

Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*, henceforth ČSSD) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM) and the weakening of the dominant right-wing Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS). Based on the analysis of 2010 and 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections, some authors argued in favour of a decline in the importance of social class for party choice (Havlík & Voda, 2018). However, there is no survey-based evidence about level of class-party alignments since 2013 election.

In effect, relatively little is known about the development of class voting in the Czech Republic, as the only longitudinal studies examining this phenomenon were published more than a decade ago (Linek & Lyons, 2013; Smith & Matějů, 2011), thus not including the four most recent general elections. A key question, therefore, is whether (1) the class-party linkages further weakened over time or whether they recovered as research using aggregate-level election statistics shows (Lysek & Macků, 2022; Drašar, 2025), and (2) whether new parties inherited the class structure of the traditional parties they displaced. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to provide an extensive account of the development of class voting in the Czech Republic from the early 1990s through the 2025 Chamber of Deputies election. In total, we analyze ten national elections since 1992 using post-election survey data. Consequently, this study represents the most comprehensive evaluation of class voting in the Czech Republic to date.

The longitudinal evidence presented in this article shows that class-party alignments have undergone a profound transformation. Manual workers underwent the most dramatic shift: as their share of the electorate shrank from 24 to 10 per cent, their traditional ties to ČSSD and KSČM collapsed and were replaced by strong support for the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, SPD) and its predecessor Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*, Dawn). Old-age pensioners, once a stable pillar of the traditional left represented by KSČM, were effectively absorbed by ANO 2011 (literally ‘YES’, henceforth ANO), which by the 2025 election had consolidated its position as the primary party of retired voters. Higher professionals and entrepreneurs, by contrast, have remained a persistent social backbone of the right, primarily ODS and the later SPOLU (literally ‘Together’) coalition, while also increasingly lending support to the Czech Pirate Party (*Česká pirátská strana*, Pirates), and Mayors and Independents (*Starostové a nezávislí*, STAN). At the system level, these processes led to a nonlinear trajectory of class voting. Initially, the role of social class in party choice was increasing, with a peak around the 2006 and 2010 elections, before reaching a minimum in the 2017 elections. Despite this temporary decline in the importance of social class for party choice, the most recent data from the 2021 and 2025 elections indicate a robust increase in its importance, with class-based voting returning to levels nearly as high as their historical peaks around 2010.

2. Politics and class voting in the post-communist Czech Republic

Class voting in post-communist countries has been the subject of research since the early elections following regime change. Early theories expected that an 'era of extraordinary politics' would create winners and losers of transformation. The main idea was that this winner-loser division was based on subjective evaluations of (changes in) personal status before and after the transformation (Gijssberts & Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Matějů, 1993; Matějů, 1996). Thus, individuals from the same social group could differ in their evaluations depending on their feelings of relative deprivation and experiences of social mobility (see also the theory of transitional economic voting; Tucker, 2006). However, as more time has passed since the early years of transformation, the concept of winners and losers of the transformation has become less directly applicable. Many currently enfranchised voters in post-communist countries were born years after the transition, making it difficult to consider them winners or losers of an event that occurred before their birth. This is why an approach based on objective class position (typically Matějů, 2000) gained prominence.

Objective class position became the main analytical tool for the study of class voting, not only because of the growing temporal distance from the regime transition. Over time, indicators of socio-economic status have become consistent (i.e. the positive correlation between education, occupation, and income), and similar to those in advanced democracies. Objective class differences began to generate class-based inequalities as well as distinct economic and redistributive interests. According to Szelenyi and his collaborators (Szelenyi et al., 1996; Szelenyi et al., 1997), politics in post-communist countries shifted from the politics of symbols to the politics of interests. This shift was expected to be accompanied by the growing dominance of left-right divisions and class-based differences in voting behavior (this process in the Czech Republic is analyzed in Matějů, 2000).

The transition from state socialism to market economy in Central and Eastern Europe fundamentally reshaped the class structures of these societies. Researchers in the late 1990s expected that increasing social inequality would create conditions for the emergence of a class cleavage. More specifically, Matějů et al. (1999, p. 235) identified four processes that would contribute to the strengthening of class-based voting behaviour and the crystallization of the 'traditional' left-right political spectrum: (1) the emergence of a class of proprietors and entrepreneurs; (2) the crystallization of working-class consciousness as a result of increasing vulnerability in the labor market; (3) rising inequality in income and wealth following the transition to a market economy; and (4) the increasing importance of materialist values due to growing consumerism and the abundance of capitalist economies. As a result, these scholars expected class voting to emerge gradually and to be observable through the progressive

crystallization of class-based voting across successive elections. However, this process was expected to be uneven, depending critically on historical development patterns and the specific trajectories of change during the 1990s (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Gijsberts & Nieuwbeerta, 2000).

Although research on class voting in post-communist countries became more common in the 1990s, relatively few long-term and comparative studies have been conducted (but see especially Gethin et al., 2021). Only a small number of post-communist countries exhibit strong patterns of class voting (see also Gijsberts & Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Evans, 2006). Moreover, where class voting does occur, the alignment between social classes and political parties sometimes differs from the traditional patterns observed in Western Europe. Knutsen (2013), for example, demonstrates a weak effect of class on party choice in Hungary and provides evidence of a reversed class alignment, with the working class supporting the right-wing Fidesz party and the service class voting for the left-wing Socialist Party. Similarly, Letki (2013) shows that in Poland, the working class and farmers tended to vote for Christian-democratic and agrarian parties, while the service class supported social democratic parties. These differences appear to stem from other factors, most notably ethnic and religious composition, which shape religious and nationalist values as well as party strategies (Tavits & Letki, 2014; Evans & Whitefield, 2000; Kitschelt et al., 1999). More recent research, however, suggests the (re)-emergence of party alignments based on income and education in both Poland and Hungary during the second decade of the twenty-first century (Gethin et al., 2021).

The Czech Republic represents one of the few post-communist countries in which class voting emerged relatively early and in a pattern similar to that observed in Western Europe. Early analyses of class voting in the 1992 and 1996 Chamber of Deputies elections argued that political polarization along the left-right dimension was associated with support for parties with distinct class bases (Matějů & Řeháková, 1997; Matějů et al., 1999). These studies showed that class voting was primarily driven by competition between the Social Democrats (ČSSD), who attracted support from manual workers, and the Civic Democrats (ODS), who drew support from professionals and managers. Occupations requiring intermediate skills, such as routine non-manual workers and lower professionals, exhibited divided partisan and left-right loyalties. Social class has been identified as the primary and symmetrical cleavage, distinguishing left-wing parties (KSČM and ČSSD) from right-wing parties of both liberal and conservative orientations (ODS, ODA [i.e. Civic Democratic Alliance, *Občanská demokratická aliance*], and US [i.e. Freedom Union, *Unie svobody*]). The central issues structuring this cleavage include income and wealth redistribution, state regulation of the economy, and the scope of public social service provision (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2008).

Subsequent analyses based on post-election surveys from the 2006 and 2010 elections identified a similar pattern of class alignment (Vlachová & Řeháková,

2007; Vlachová & Häuberer, 2012). Moreover, studies covering almost two decades of the Czech electoral politics suggested that class effects on voting were either stable over time or slightly increasing (Linek & Lyons, 2013; Smith & Matějů, 2011). The emergence of new parties in 2010 and 2013, however, was only partly associated with class-based support. Support for populist parties such as Public Affairs (*Věci Veřejné*, VV), ANO, and the Dawn was less strongly structured by social class (Havlík & Voda, 2018). Overall, research on class voting in the Czech Republic since 1992 has consistently found evidence of class-based voting and suggests that group-based economic interests have played a consistent role in shaping party choice (Gethin et al., 2021; Linek & Lyons, 2013; Matějů et al., 1999; Smith & Matějů, 2011).

The relationships between social class and voting for individual parties described above are corroborated by studies that use territorially aggregated electoral results together with the social and economic characteristics of these territorial units. An early form of class-based relationships was already identified in a study of the 1992 elections, which showed that a higher proportion of university graduates was associated with greater support for ODS and lower support for ČSSD (Kostecký, 1994). For the period beginning with the 1996 elections, a pattern described by Kouba (2007) and Kostecký (2009) applies: as unemployment increases and the share of entrepreneurs and university graduates declines, support for ČSSD and KSČM increases, while support for ODS and smaller liberal parties decreases (similarly see Voda & Pink, 2015). Later studies focused on whether these patterns continued to hold and whether new parties replicated them.

Maškarinec (2017) confirmed that in both the 2010 and 2013 elections, support for the three main parties with class-conditioned electoral bases (ČSSD, KSČM, and ODS) was related to unemployment levels and the shares of university graduates, entrepreneurs, and pensioners. At the same time, however, he pointed to a decline in the importance of most of these characteristics for the electoral support of ČSSD and ODS in 2013. Among new parties, only support for TOP 09 was clearly linked to class characteristics and, in terms of its social profile, mirrored ODS, whereas support for VV, ANO, and Dawn was much less strongly related to the class characteristics. Support for VV, ANO, and Dawn nevertheless showed a negative correlation with the share of pensioners and, to some extent, university graduates. In models aimed at explaining support for these parties, the effects of class variables were sometimes reversed: a party could receive higher support in regions with higher unemployment and simultaneously higher shares of entrepreneurs, and so on (similarly see Maškarinec & Bláha, 2014). Comparable findings were also presented by Havlík and Voda (2016) who argued that cleavages as a theoretical framework had lost part of their explanatory power.

Subsequent studies, focusing on elections in 2017 and 2021, do not fully confirm declining importance of social class and instead suggest that support

for new parties, such as ANO, far-right SPD, liberal parties STAN and the Pirates, has gradually acquired a class dimension. Lysek and Macků (2022) showed that support for centre-right and right-wing parties (KDU-ČSL [i.e. Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, *Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová*], ODS, TOP 09, STAN) in 2017 as well as for coalitions of these parties (SPOLU and PirStan [i.e. Pirates and Mayors, *Piráti a Starostové*]) in 2021 was associated with lower unemployment and higher shares of university graduates and entrepreneurs. By contrast, support for ANO and SPD in recent years has been linked primarily to lower levels of education and a lower share of entrepreneurs, higher unemployment, and higher shares of individuals facing debt enforcement and pensioners (see also Drašar 2025; Maškarinec & Novotný, 2024; Suchánek & Hasman, 2024).

The dominant interpretative narrative of the development of class voting in the Czech Republic is grounded in the re-stratification thesis proposed by Smith and Matějů (2011). They argue that class voting emerged in the Czech Republic during the 1990s because of the re-stratification of Czech society and subsequently continued to gain in significance. In other words, the formation of occupation-based social classes during the transition to a market economy gave rise to class-based political cleavages. The crystallization of socio-economic status and the growing congruence of education, income, and occupational position during the 1990s reduced obstacles to the formation of class interests. Smith and Matějů (2011) find empirical support for their re-stratification thesis, showing that the effect of social class on party choice increased steadily between 1998 and 2010 (see also Linek & Lyons, 2013, pp. 103–129). Ongoing changes in the stratification of Czech society, such as educational expansion (especially in tertiary education), growth in service-sector employment, and increasing wealth inequality (Večerník, 2025), suggest that social class should continue to play a major role in party choice even after 2010.

The emergence of social classes, however, is not the only condition for the formation and reproduction of class-party alignments. Another crucial factor is party strategy. When political parties emphasize class conflict, class-party linkages are more likely to emerge among voters. Electoral campaigns can thus condition the extent of class voting, depending on the salience of socio-economic conflict. Accordingly, class voting is usually stronger when political parties compete on economic issues such as taxation, redistribution, and welfare benefits, and when polarization of the party system along the economic left-right dimension is high (see the discussion of the role of party supply in Evans & de Graaf, 2013). New parties that have entered the Chamber of Deputies since 2010, however, have mobilized voters less around economic or redistributive issues and more around issues such as corruption, migration, and opposition to European integration. As a result, the electoral support of these parties has been less strongly structured by social class, contributing to an overall decline in class voting (Havlík & Voda, 2018).

Building on the above discussion, this article pursues two research questions. The first concerns the trajectory of class voting since the 2010 election. Specifically, it asks whether class voting declined during the 2010s amid the rise of new political parties and, if so, whether it re-emerged in recent elections, thereby indicating a process of class realignment. Based on the reviewed aggregate-level research, as well as the programmatic appeal and mobilization strategies of new parties, we expect that class voting weakened during the second decade of the 21st century but re-established itself from the 2021 election onwards. This would suggest a transition from an initial phase of class dealignment in the 2010s to a renewed structuring of party competition along class lines in the two most recent elections.

Given that we expect the process of declining class voting to be linked to support for new parties, our second research question examines whether these new parties have absorbed the class-based electorates of traditional parties. Specifically, we focus on the extent to which ANO and SPD have absorbed the electorates of ČSSD and KSČM among pensioners and manual workers. On the other side of the political spectrum, we examine whether new centre-right parties (TOP 09, STAN, and the Pirates) have adopted the class structure of ODS and smaller right-wing parties (ODA and US) from the 1990s, which was dominated by higher professionals and entrepreneurs.

3. Methods

3.1 Data and variables

Class voting is conceptualized as the relationship between a particular social class and party choice in elections (Evans, 2000). Our two research questions related to class voting are analyzed using data from post-election surveys conducted in the Czech Republic since 1992. These surveys provide the necessary information on actual party choice as well as relatively detailed data on respondents' social class (for details on these surveys, see Appendix A).

Social class is measured using an adjusted EGP scheme that also includes old-age pensioners. By incorporating pensioners, our measure approximates the European Socio-economic Groups (ESeG) classification. Although old-age pensioners (retirees) do not constitute a separate class category per se, we include them in the analysis for two reasons. First, our second research question concerns the realignment of pensioners from left-wing parties (ČSSD, KSČM) toward the populist parties, especially ANO. Second, only a limited number of post-election surveys contain information on respondents' occupations prior to their retirement, making it impossible to construct a comparable class measure for retirees across all surveys.

The classification of respondents into class groups followed a two-step procedure. First, we used a question on economic activity that distinguishes among employees, employers, small business owners, old-age pensioners, and other groups outside the labor force (those on parental or maternity leave, students, and disabled respondents). This step allowed us to identify two groups which form two distinct categories within our adjusted EGP scheme: entrepreneurs and old-age pensioners (retirees). Second, employees were assigned to the EGP scheme based on descriptions of their occupations, coded according to ISCO-08. In total, we distinguish seven social class groups: higher professionals, lower professionals, routine non-manual workers, skilled manual workers, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers, entrepreneurs, and pensioners. Residual categories (i.e., respondents outside the labor force, i.e. those on parental or maternity leave, students, and disabled respondents) are excluded from the analyses reported in the article. Appendix B presents detailed information on construction of the social class variable.

Concerning party choice in national elections, we do not restrict the analysis to parliamentary parties only. Accordingly, the detailed analyses of the 2021 and 2025 elections include non-parliamentary left-wing parties, such as ČSSD and KSČM in 2021, as well as Stačilo! (literally ‘Enough!’) in 2025. To enable long-term comparisons of social class support for ideologically similar parties in a volatile political context such as the Czech Republic, we group parties into broader party blocs. Specifically, we collapse support for left-wing parties (ČSSD, KSČM, DŽJ [i.e. Pensioners for Life Security, *Důchodci za životní jistoty*], and SPOZ [i.e. Party of Civic Rights, *Strana práv občanů Zemanovci*]), right-wing parties (ODS, TOP 09, US, ODA, KDU-ČSL, STAN, and Pirates),¹ and far-right and populist parties (SPD, Dawn, VV, and SPR-RSČ [i.e. Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, *Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa*]). We do not assign the ANO to any of these party blocs, as part of our analysis focuses on the substitution of traditional left-wing parties by the ANO over the past decade.² Moreover, ANO gradually moved from centre-right to the centre and then slightly to centre-left over the three most recent Chamber of Deputies elections (as demonstrated in Appendix C, which presents the party positions on the economic left-right scale between 2002 and 2024). Consequently, ANO is treated as a separate ‘party bloc’; all remaining parties are grouped together into the party bloc of other parties.

3.2 Measures

To analyze changes in the level of class voting over time, we employ two main analytical strategies. First, we calculate an overall index to capture the strength of the association between social class and party choice in each election and then

compare its levels across elections. While earlier research relied on the Alford index, measures of association for nominal variables (such as Cramér's V), or model fit statistics from regression models (e.g. Nagelkerke's R^2), the last decade of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of measures based on multinomial logistic regression models applied to social class and party choice in individual elections.

The kappa index was developed for multi-party systems and multi-category classifications of social groups. It is computed as the standard deviation of log odds representing differences in vote choice across social groups in each election (Hout et al., 1995). The index measures the association between social groups and party choice, without accounting for the relative sizes of those groups. It treats all social groups as if they were of the same size. This limitation is addressed by a newer measure, the lambda index, which modifies the kappa index by incorporating the size of social groups. In short, the lambda index is a weighted version of the kappa index in which log odds are weighted by group size (Lachat, 2007, pp. 86–89).

Both the kappa and lambda indices are derived from multinomial regression models. They can be calculated either from logistic coefficients (the relative version of the index) or from predicted probabilities (the absolute version). The advantage of the absolute version is that it can be computed even in cases of quasi-complete separation, where some combinations of social class and party choice have no observations (Albert & Anderson, 1984; Zorn, 2005; Lachat, 2007, p.89). Because it is based on predicted probabilities, the index is calculated as the standard deviation in levels of party support across social groups. In addition, the absolute version offers a relatively straightforward interpretation, as the index ranges from 0 to 0.5. The value 0.5 is a result of a specific case with two parties and two social groups of the same size where each group votes for different party (Goldberg, 2020). Accordingly, we analyze the development of class voting using the absolute version of the lambda index.³

As a second measure of long-term change in class voting, we employ the index of party structuration (Marks et al., 2023). It measures the over- or under-representation of a particular social class within a party relative to its share in the electorate. The index (denoted P) is calculated as the difference between the conditional probability of belonging to a given social class among voters of a particular political party (i.e. the behavioral component) and the overall marginal probability of belonging to that social class (i.e. the structural component). Positive values indicate that a class is overrepresented among voters of a particular party (i.e., the share of votes for a political party coming from that social class is higher than the share of that class in the electorate).

The index of party structuration is both class- and party-specific and assesses the social bases of individual parties. In effect, this measure allows us to answer our second research question about the development of alignments of specific social classes with a particular political party (ANO) or a set of parties (left-wing

parties, right-wing parties). In addition, this measure allows us to distinguish between two sources of change over time: shifts in the size of social groups (structural change) and changes in the strength of the association between social class and party choice (behavioral change). Both processes affect the salience of class, but they operate through distinct mechanisms (Lachat, 2007, p. 68; see also Flanagan, 1984). The lambda index captures both structural and behavioral change simultaneously and therefore cannot disentangle their respective effects.

4. Results

4.1 Class voting in the last two elections

To illustrate how social class structures party choice, we first examine descriptive patterns of electoral support across social class groups in the two most recent Chamber of Deputies elections (see Table 1). In the 2025 election, higher professionals and entrepreneurs emerge as the key class strongholds of the former government coalition. Around one third of members of both classes voted for SPOLU (35% of higher professionals and 32% of the entrepreneurs), roughly one fifth of these classes cast their votes for STAN (21% of higher professionals and 18% of the entrepreneurs), and around one sixth supported the Pirates (17% and 16%, respectively). Both classes strongly rejected the election winner, ANO, with only 14% of higher professionals and 12% of the entrepreneurs voting for ANO, corresponding to negative deviations of 21 and 22 percentage points from ANO's national vote share, respectively. By contrast, SPOLU, STAN, and the Pirates display double-digit or high single-digit overrepresentation within these class groups compared to their respective national electoral results.

Conversely, pensioners (44% of them) and semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers (42% of them) constituted the core electoral base of ANO, exceeding the party's overall vote share by 10 and 8 percentage points, respectively. A particularly pronounced pattern emerges among skilled manual workers, who show the strongest deviation toward SPD (18% supported SPD, corresponding to a 10-percentage-point overrepresentation relative to SPD's national result). This pattern indicates a distinctive affinity for national-populist and culturally conservative appeals. Meanwhile, routine non-manual workers occupy the 'middle' of the electorate, showing the smallest deviations from the national electoral results across most parties. Overall, these findings suggest that in the 2025 election, the traditional class cleavage was most pronounced at the poles of the social class hierarchy.

In the 2021 election, the higher professionals and the entrepreneurs likewise emerged as the primary class strongholds of the electoral coalition SPOLU. Around two fifths of higher professionals (39%) and over two fifths of the entrepreneurs (43%) voted for it. These high-status groups showed substantial

positive inclination toward SPOLU (+11 and +15 percentage points, respectively), while ANO faced significant deficits among these groups, with negative deviations of -12 and -10 percentage points from its national electoral result. In contrast, pensioners constituted the core electoral base of ANO: 42% voted for the party, corresponding to a 15-percentage-point overrepresentation, closely mirroring the pattern observed in 2025. Furthermore, pensioners (25%) and, to a much lesser degree, semi- or unskilled manual workers (12%) provided the most fertile ground for traditional left-wing parties. Pensioners, in particular, showed pronounced overrepresentation for ČSSD and KSČM combined bloc (+16 percentage points), indicating that the left retained a substantial class-based foothold prior to its subsequent decline in 2025. A distinct pattern was already visible among skilled manual workers, among whom one quarter supported SPD, representing the largest deviation toward the SPD (+15 percentage points) and anticipating this group’s later consolidation as a stronghold of national-populist far-right rhetoric. Meanwhile, routine non-manual workers and lower professionals occupied the ‘middle’ of the electorate, displaying relatively small deviations from national electoral results across most parties in 2021.

Table 1:
Party choice by social class (row percentages)

2025 election								
	ANO 2011	SPOLU	STAN	Pirates	SPD	Motorists	Enough!	Other
Entrepreneur	12	32	18	16	6	10	1	5
Higher Professional	14	35	21	17	7	1	1	6
Lower Professional	19	26	21	14	9	4	4	3
Routine non-manual	38	21	8	10	9	4	4	6
Skilled manual	32	16	11	7	18	11	2	5
Semi-skilled or unskilled manual	42	12	12	4	14	9	7	0
Pensioner	44	23	8	5	7	3	8	2
2021 election								
	ANO 2011	SPOLU		Pirates+ STAN	SPD		KSČM+ ČSSD	Other
Entrepreneur	17	43		17	6		0	17
Higher Professional	15	39		19	5		10	11
Lower Professional	24	19		20	13		4	20
Routine non-manual	22	27		18	13		6	14
Skilled manual	19	19		19	25		6	13
Semi-skilled or unskilled manual	18	18		22	15		12	16
Pensioner	42	15		4	7		25	7

Note: Tables present row percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
Source: The authors.

Comparing the two most recent elections, a key development in 2025 is the significant realignment within the pensioner electorate, marked by a partial shift away from traditional left-wing parties toward the right-wing SPOLU coalition. In 2021, pensioners constituted the main electoral stronghold of the left-wing parties (KSČM and ČSSD), with 25% of pensioners voting for them. By 2025, however, these traditional left-wing parties ran in a protest-oriented coalition Stačilo! and attracted only 8% of the pensioner vote. As a result, a substantial share of old-age pensioners' electorate shifted toward other parties, esp. the right-wing coalition SPOLU and STAN. Whereas SPOLU significantly underperformed among pensioners in 2021 (by 13 percentage points), by 2025 it had reached parity with its national electoral result in this group. This pattern suggests that although ANO remains the dominant force among retired voters, SPOLU has successfully repositioned itself as a credible secondary option.

At the same time, notable shifts are evident among the lower strata of the social class hierarchy, pointing to a broader restructuring of class-based electoral alignments. Routine non-manual workers and manual workers (both skilled and unskilled), who were markedly underrepresented among ANO voters in 2021, had become a central pillar of ANO's electorate by 2025. This realignment is particularly pronounced among semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers: whereas only 18% of this group supported ANO in 2021, fully 42% did so in 2025. In addition, manual workers constituted a substantial part of the electorate of the new party Motorists for Themselves (*Motoristé sobě*, Motorists). Together, these changes indicate a strengthening of class-based polarization at the lower end of the class structure.

4.2 Class-party blocs alignments since 1992

Having examined descriptive patterns in the two most recent elections with contingency tables, we now turn to a long-term perspective on class voting. In the following paragraphs, we trace the evolution of class-based differences in party choice across the entire post-communist period. Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities of vote choice derived from multinomial logistic regression models (reported in tables D11. through D20. in Appendix D) that include social class as predictors.⁴ These models are estimated separately for each of the ten Czech general elections held between 1992 and 2025. To enhance comparability and parsimony, conceptually similar and adjacent social class categories were merged into broader classes, resulting in four social class groups: higher professionals and entrepreneurs; lower professionals and routine non-manual workers; manual workers; and pensioners. Similarly, we collapse support for parties into five party groupings: left-wing parties; right-wing parties; far-right and populist parties; ANO; and a residual category of other parties (the latter is not reported in Figure 1).

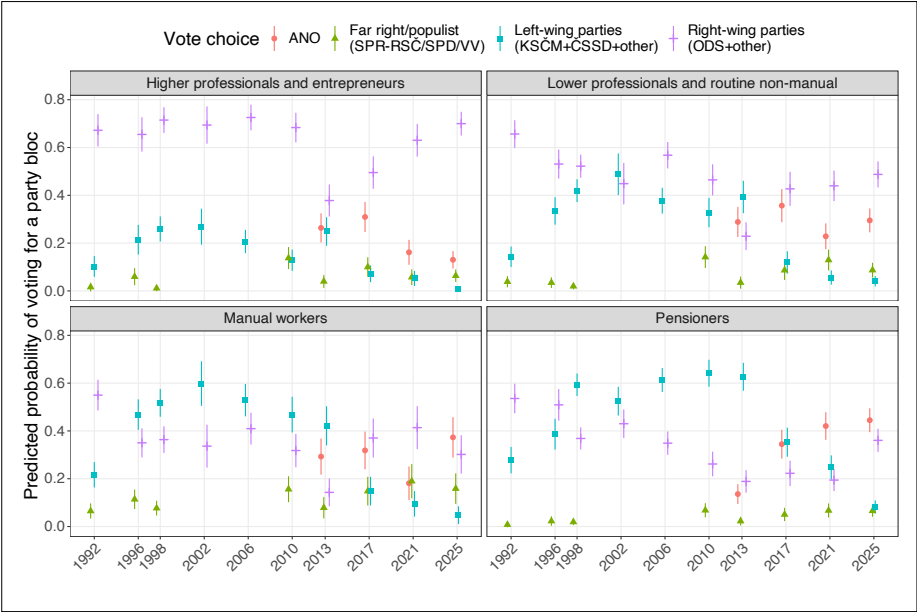
The higher professionals and entrepreneurs (top-left panel) represent the most stable social class group, consistently favoring right-wing parties, with predicted probabilities generally fluctuating between 0.6 and 0.8 throughout the entire period. Although this class experienced a brief decline in support for established right-wing parties around 2013 and 2017, corresponding with a temporary rise in the probability of voting for ANO, which at that time was positioned more towards the right of the political spectrum (see Appendix C), it subsequently reverted to its traditional party-bloc alignment. By 2025, preferences of this high-status class for the right-wing party bloc remained dominant, while predicted probabilities of supporting left-wing or far-right/populist parties remained consistently very low.

Among lower professionals and routine non-manual workers (top-right panel), class voting has been characterized by substantially higher volatility and a marked decline in support for traditional left-wing parties. Initially, this social class was split between the right-wing and left-wing blocs (with the exception of the 1992 election), but after 2013, support for left-wing parties (KSČM and ČSSD) collapsed from a peak of nearly 0.5 to negligible levels by 2025. This vacuum was largely filled by the rise of ANO, whose predicted probability fluctuated between 0.2 and 0.4, alongside a resilient right-wing bloc that recovered significantly in the three most recent election cycles.

Manual workers (bottom-left panel) have experienced a profound realignment, shifting from a predominantly left-wing electorate to a more fragmented class that increasingly supports far-right and populist parties. From the late 1990s through 2010, this group displayed a high probability of supporting left-wing parties (peaking at nearly 0.6 in 2002), but this support collapsed rapidly thereafter. Since 2013, there has been a notable and sustained increase in the probability of manual workers voting for ANO and far-right SPD.

Finally, the pensioners (bottom-right panel) exhibit the most dramatic transformation in Figure 1, shifting from the core electorate of traditional left-wing parties to the ANO's core support base. During the first two decades, pensioners were the most reliable left-wing voters, with predicted probabilities frequently exceeding 0.6. After 2013, however, left-wing support disintegrated, falling toward zero by 2025, while the probability of voting for ANO surged, making it the pensioners' dominant vote choice. Despite this shift, the 2025 data confirm a secondary trend noted above, as the right-wing party bloc saw a recovery among pensioners, surpassing the remnants of the left-wing parties.

Figure 1:
Predicted probabilities of social class voting for party blocs, 1992-2025



Source: The authors.

4.3 The development of aggregate class voting

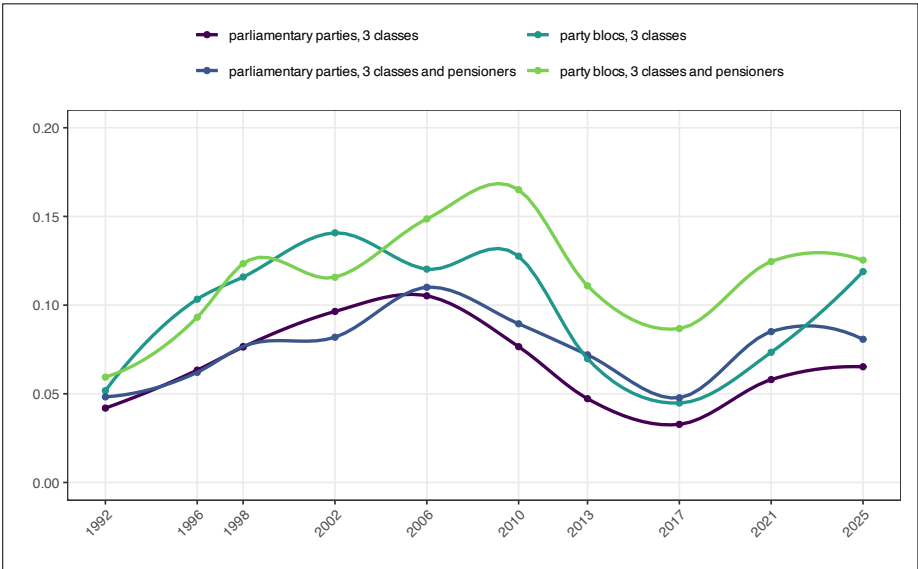
The following subsection provides an overall assessment of the development of class voting in the Czech Republic. In this analysis, we again utilize multinomial regression models, the results of which were presented in the previous section. Based on these models, we calculate summary indices of absolute lambda for each election. The lambda index ranges from 0 (indicating no class-based voting) to 0.5 (indicating complete class-based voting, with two social classes voting for two different parties under perfect deterministic alignment). Figure 2 presents the development of the absolute lambda index from 1992 to 2025 across ten elections.

The figure displays four different versions of the lambda index. These calculations differ in both the dependent variable (party choice) and the independent variable (social class). With respect to party choice, we use: (1) party blocs introduced in the previous section ($N = 5$); and (2) all parties that gained parliamentary representation in a given election. With respect to social class, we use: (1) three broad social classes among the economically active population; and (2) these three classes supplemented by old-age pensioners. There are two main reasons for these different operationalizations. First, the lambda index is sensitive to the number of parties included in the calculation. As the number of parties gaining

parliamentary representation has varied substantially over time, we also employ a more stable operationalization based on party blocs. Second, pensioners do not constitute a social class, but rather an economically inactive social group defined by age. At the same time, however, this group is sizeable and excluding it from the analysis would limit the explanatory power of our findings. In addition, our second research question directly taps into the relationship between pensioners and specific party choice (ČSSD, KSČM, ANO).

The longitudinal analysis of class voting from 1992 to 2025 presented in Figure 2 reveals a nonlinear yet generally increasing trend in the salience of social class in party choice. Starting from a relatively low baseline in 1992, where the absolute lambda index for all four operationalizations was at its minimum (between 0.04 and 0.06), class voting intensified significantly throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. This upward trajectory peaked around 2010, after which class-based voting declined sharply. This decline in aggregate class voting reached a local minimum in 2017. However, the most recent data from 2021 and 2025 indicate a robust class realignment of the Czech electorate; lambda values have returned to levels nearly as high as their historical peaks, suggesting that social class remains a fundamental, albeit evolving, pillar of Czech voting behavior.

Figure 2:
The development of class voting since 1992 (absolute lambda)



Source: The authors.

The analysis also highlights how different operationalizations of the lambda index affect the interpreted strength of class voting across the post-communist period. A key finding is that including pensioners (i.e. an economically inactive, but sizable social group) consistently yields higher levels of class voting than indices limited to the economically active population. This is evidenced by the light green line (denoting party blocs and social classes with the pensioners) consistently sitting above the corresponding dark green line (denoting party blocs and only three economically active social classes). Furthermore, the results demonstrate that class voting is more clearly discernible when analyzing party blocs rather than individual parliamentary parties (as evidenced by the light green line always above the blue line, and the dark green line above the violet line for all ten elections). While individual party indices are more sensitive to shifts in the number of parties gaining representation, bloc-based measures provide a more stable and higher estimate of the underlying social divisions and the process of class realignment between traditional and new parties.

4.4 Party structuration with respect to three classes

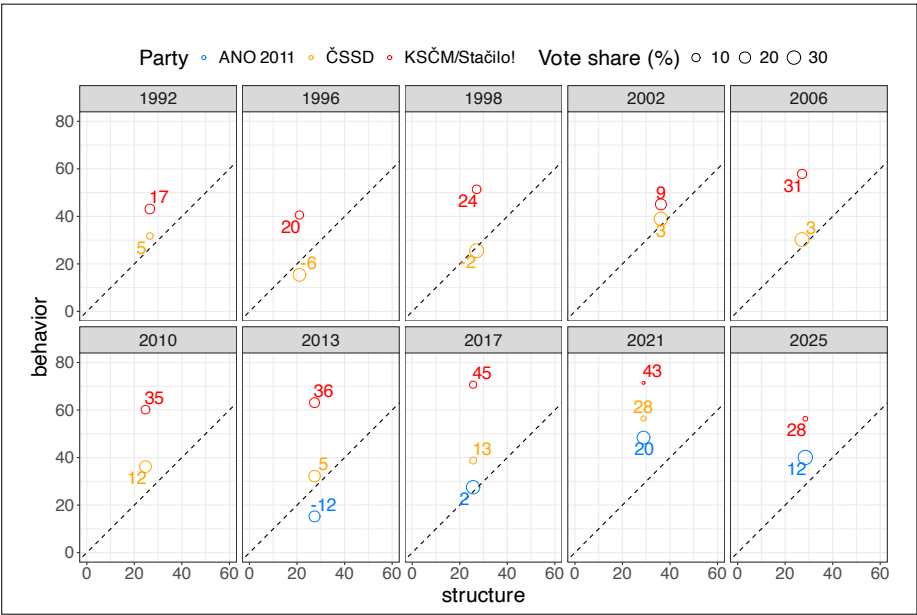
Whereas the previous sections adopted a social class perspective (i.e., for which parties social classes vote), the following section focuses on class voting from the party perspective (i.e., which classes compose a party's electorate). Therefore, this section examines the party structuration of voting among three key social classes that have shaped the post-communist Czech electoral landscape: old-age pensioners; manual workers; and higher professionals, together with the entrepreneurs. To map these dynamics, the next three figures employ a coordinate-based visualization that distinguishes between structural and behavioral drivers of change in class voting. The horizontal axes of these three figures represent the structural component (i.e. the respective social category's share in the electorate), while the vertical axes capture the behavioral component (i.e. the respective social category's share in a corresponding party vote). The index of party structuration (denoted as P by Marks et al., 2023), reported as a numerical label next to each party's circle, quantifies the degree of over- or underrepresentation of a respective social class by measuring the vertical distance from the diagonal line (which denotes statistical independence between class and vote choice). Expressed in percentage points, rounded to whole numbers, positive values of the index indicate that a party is disproportionately anchored in a specific social class.

Figure 3 illustrates a significant shift in the party structuration by Czech pensioners between 1992 and 2025, moving from a landscape dominated by traditional left-wing parties to one centered around ANO. Since the early post-communist period (i.e. before 2000), the KSČM had its primary pillar in the pensioners' vote. The KSČM maintained a remarkably high and relatively stable level of overrepresentation (i.e. the behavioral component), relative to the size of the pensioner social group (the structural component). While the share of pensioners in the

electorate remained relatively constant (roughly between 20% and 30% on the horizontal axis), the vertical distance of the red circles from the diagonal indicates that the KSČM consistently over-performed among this demographic, with the P index peaking at 45 in 2017 (meaning that while pensioners represented only around a quarter of the electorate in 2017, stunning seven out of ten votes received by the Communist party were cast by pensioners, resulting in a P value of 45). The electoral support of the Social Democrats (ČSSD) was more strongly structured by pensioner voters only between 2010 and 2021, peaking at the end of this period with the P of 28.

However, the longitudinal data reported in Figure 3 reveal a dramatic destabilization of these traditional class ties starting around 2017 with the ascent of ANO. The figure shows a clear ‘crowding out’ effect: as ANO’s vote share (represented by the size of the blue circles) grew from 18.7% in 2013 to 34.5% in 2025, the overrepresentation of the KSČM decreased substantially, while ČSSD virtually disappeared from the chart (being subsumed by the small red Stačilo! circle in 2025). By 2025, the pensioner vote had undergone a total realignment. Although the pensioners’ vote for KSČM (Stačilo!) in 2025 remains overrepresented, its overall vote share and overrepresentation have shrunk considerably compared to its 2017 peak. Meanwhile, ANO has consolidated its position as a major representative of this social group, maintaining a P index of 12 in 2025 (meaning 40% of ANO votes came from pensioners who constituted approximately 28% of the electorate in 2025).

Figure 3:
Party composition of pensioners' voting



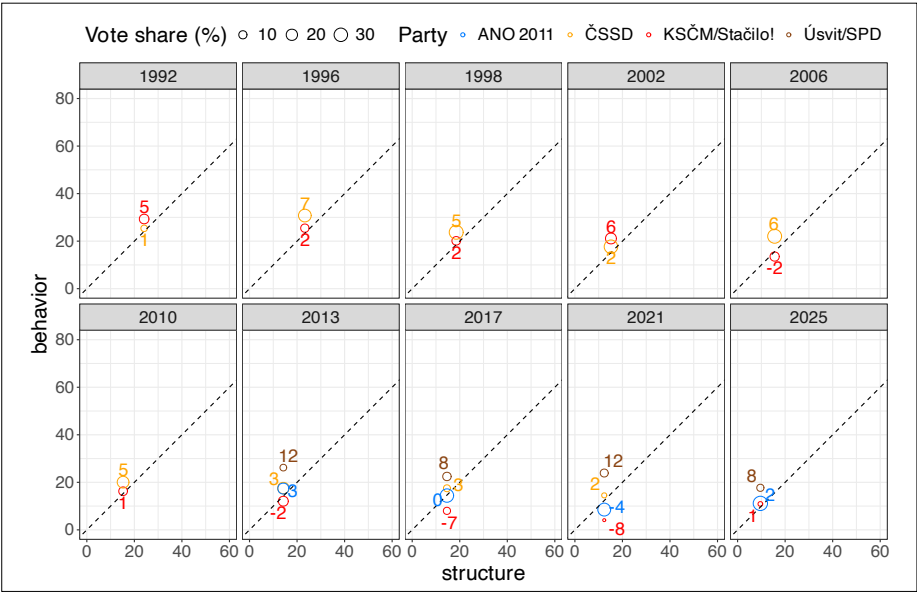
Source: The authors.

Figure 4 illustrates a significant transformation in the party structuration by manual workers in the Czech Republic from 1992 to 2025. A primary driver of this shift is the significant structural change in the electorate: the proportion of manual workers (i.e., skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers) has undergone a gradual and substantial decline among voters, falling from 24% in 1992 to just 10% in 2025 (as indicated on the horizontal axis). Despite this shrinking demographic base, the competition for the ‘worker vote’ has intensified, evolving from a stable reliance of traditional left-wing parties like the ČSSD and KSČM on this social class toward a more fragmented landscape featuring populist and far-right party challengers.

Overall, the party structuration by manual workers in the Czech Republic is relatively weak (especially when compared to that by pensioners presented in Figure 3). Figure 4 captures the near-total collapse of the manual workers’ class-based voting for the ČSSD and KSČM. In the 1990s and early 2000s, manual workers were overrepresented among voters of both parties, but by 2017, the KSČM’s P index turned substantially negative (-7), indicating that manual workers had become underrepresented in the Communist party.

This ‘behavioral’ vacuum was filled mainly by the far-right Dawn/SPD. The emergence of Dawn and its successor, SPD, represents a crucial behavioral shift among manual workers. In 2013, Dawn registered a P index of 12, indicating a strong initial overrepresentation of manual workers in this party’s relatively small overall vote share. By 2021 and 2025, the SPD consolidated this position, maintaining high levels of manual worker overrepresentation with structuration index values of 12 and 8, respectively. The vertical position of this party, significantly above the diagonal line, demonstrates that manual workers remain a core pillar of its electoral base, even as the total number of such workers in the country diminishes.

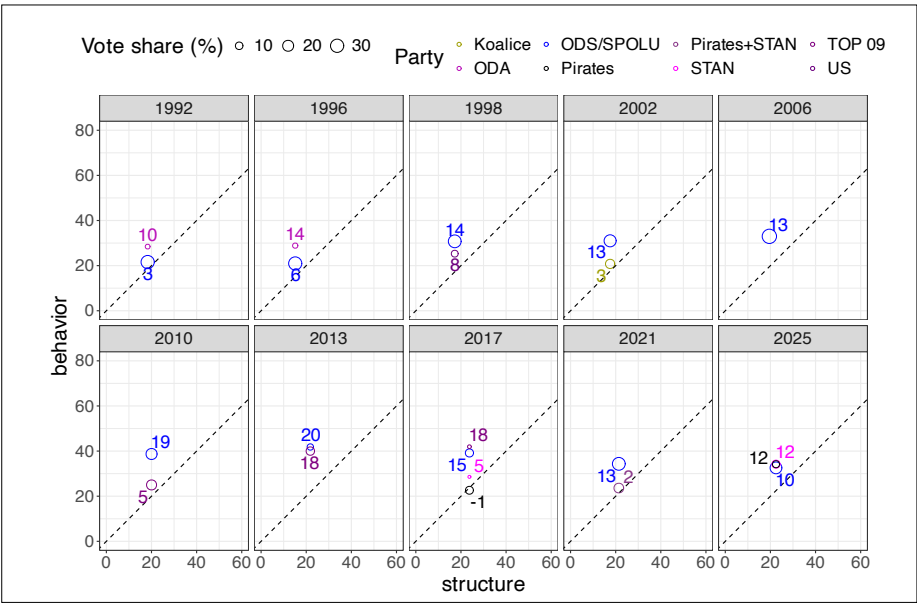
Figure 4:
Party composition of manual workers’ voting



Source: The authors.

Figure 5 illustrates the structuration of right-wing parties by higher professionals and entrepreneurs. This high-status social class has consistently served as the ideological and social backbone of the Czech right-wing parties. The figure highlights a persistent and significant overrepresentation of this class within the ODS (and later the SPOLU electoral coalition), as indicated by their consistently high behavioral component relative to their share in the electorate. The P index for ODS reached its highest point in 2013 at 20, reflecting a period when nearly half of the party's voters were drawn from this high-status social class, while the party recorded its worst electoral result, receiving just 8% of the popular vote. Conversely, the index reached its lowest point in 1992 at just 3, that is, in the electoral period, when vote choice was not significantly structured by social class. Despite these fluctuations, the positive values of the P index throughout the entire 1992–2025 period demonstrate that higher professionals and entrepreneurs remain disproportionately aligned with ODS/SPOLU.

Figure 5:
Party composition of higher professionals and entrepreneurs' voting



Source: The authors.

The Pirates have gradually emerged as a significant secondary party target for higher professionals and entrepreneurs, demonstrating a distinct upward trend in party structuration since its parliamentary breakthrough in 2017 (with P of -1). The Pirates have increasingly anchored themselves in more developed urban regions and among highly educated, IT-focused professionals. By 2021, the

party began making notable inroads into historically right-wing strongholds like Prague and Central Bohemia, regions with high concentrations of professional and entrepreneurial classes. This behavioral shift is reflected in a rising P index, as the party transitioned from a fringe protest movement to a ruling coalition partner. In 2025, the Pirates maintained a stable presence among these high-status social groups, with a third of their votes cast by this social class, resulting in a P of 12. Furthermore, STAN (running in an electoral coalition with the Pirates in 2021) had the same numbers among this high-status social class in the 2025 general election as the Pirates did (i.e., a third of STAN voters were cast by higher professionals and entrepreneurs, with a P of 12).

The overall level of party structuration by professionals and entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic occupies a distinct middle ground between the other two major social classes. It is higher and more stable than the structuration by manual workers (Figure 4), whose ties to traditional left-wing parties like the ČSSD and KSČM have largely collapsed or shifted toward fragmented populist far-right alternatives. However, it remains lower than the intense structuration observed among pensioners (Figure 3), who have exhibited the most dramatic levels of overrepresentation, particularly in their recent consolidation behind ANO and historically behind the KSČM. This positioning suggests that while professional and entrepreneurial status is a strong predictor of voting for right-wing parties, it does not exert the same singular, dominant pressure on party choice as the pensioner class voting has come to represent in the recent Czech party system.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to provide a comprehensive account of the development of class voting in the Czech Republic from the early 1990s to the 2025 parliamentary election. Drawing on post-election survey data and using multinomial regression models and summary indices (e.g. absolute lambda and index of party structuration), we traced the strength of the relationship between social class and party choice over time. The analysis brings novel findings and contributes to a long-standing debate on the persistence, decline, and transformation of class voting in post-communist contexts by offering a systematic longitudinal perspective.

The results indicate that class voting in the Czech Republic weakened notably during the 2010s, coinciding with the rise of new political parties and the erosion of traditional party alignments. In line with expectations derived from the recent literature using aggregate-level data (Drašar, 2025; Lysek & Macků, 2022), the entry of new parties mobilizing voters along non-economic dimensions, such as corruption, migration, and European integration, was associated with a decline in the structuring role of social class. Importantly, the analysis

also points to signs of a partial realignment of party competition in more recent elections. As economic issues regained salience and party competition became more polarized along the left-right dimension, the association between social class and vote choice appears to have strengthened again. This suggests that the decline of class voting in the Czech Republic was contingent on specific political conditions rather than representing a permanent structural shift.

At the same time, our findings suggest that class-based alignments appear to have gone through a process of reconfiguration. In particular, new parties ANO and SPD largely absorbed the electorates of traditional left-wing parties, while other new parties (TOP 09, STAN, and Pirates) partially took over the electorate of right-wing ODS. The fragmentation of parties on the centre-right of the political spectrum suggests, however, that other non-economic issues are also salient to Czech voters. Overall, the study demonstrates that class voting in the Czech Republic has been neither stable nor uniformly declining, but instead characterized by phases of strengthening and weakening, as well as reconfiguration. These findings highlight the importance of considering both party supply and voter demand in understanding changes in electoral behavior (Evans & de Graaf, 2013).

It is important to note, however, that our analysis documents the presence of class-structured voting patterns rather than demonstrating that class interests directly caused individual vote choices. The class realignment we observe with the latest elections could reflect a combination of factors. Party competition in the Czech Republic illustrates how economic and sociocultural issues can become intertwined: for example, debates about positions towards Russia, support for Ukrainian refugees, migration, the Green Deal, or energy transition carried simultaneous economic and identity-based resonances that complicate any clean separation between class-based and culturally driven voting motivations. Therefore, the mechanisms driving the realignment of social classes with new parties may not be purely economic: the pronounced working-class support for ANO and SPD in 2025 likely reflects a combination of redistributive preferences, anti-establishment attitudes, and sociocultural conservatism, and the present analysis cannot fully disentangle these motivations. Disentangling these motivations is beyond the scope of the present study, but it remains an important task for future research.

The Czech trajectory of class-party alignments resonates with broader European patterns, where the weakening of traditional class-party alignments in the 2000s and 2010s was followed by the emergence of new class-based coalitions structured around education, occupation, and cultural values (Gethin et al., 2021; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). The Czech case contributes to this comparative literature by showing that even in a highly volatile, post-communist party system, class-based voting is not simply a relic of early transition politics: it can be disrupted, reconfigured, and reconstituted as parties compete for the social constituencies left behind by the collapse of traditional left-right alignments.

In particular, the ‘crowding out’ of traditional left-wing parties by ANO among pensioners and the capture of the manual worker vote by the far-right SPD mirror dynamics observed in France, Italy, and the Netherlands, where mainstream left-wing parties lost their working-class base to populist challengers (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018; Rennwald & Evans, 2014). These findings thus position the Czech case within a wider European story about the social consequences of party system transformation.

Future research should further explore the mechanisms linking party strategies, issue salience, and social structure, and assess whether similar patterns can be observed in other Central and Eastern European democracies (see Gethin et al., 2021). Moreover, future studies should take heterogeneity among pensioners more seriously (Večerník, 2021), as our study was unable to differentiate among pensioners based on their previous occupation. Future work should also more directly address the relationship between class position and issue preferences, particularly on economic redistribution, migration, and European integration, to better understand whether the class-structured voting patterns documented here reflect class-based interests, sociocultural identities, or some combination of the two.

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Endnotes:

- 1 We acknowledge that labelling all these parties as right-wing is a simplification. However, we adopt this convention for presentation purposes.
- 2 Our classification mirrors the standard classification of populist parties by PopuList project (Rooduijn et al., 2024).
- 3 We are aware of two serious limitations associated with multinomial regression models. First, they often fail to provide reliable estimates for the electorates of small parties. Second, the identification of estimates (one for each alternative) depends on the assumption of Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA), which is unlikely to be satisfied in most multi-party systems. However, these limitations are not easily addressed within our analytical framework unless an alternative strategy, such as the use of stacked data or the use of different dependent variable like probability-to-vote, is employed. To mitigate these limitations, we merge similar parties and social classes in some analyses (see Appendix D for four types of multinomial regression models differing by party and class groupings).
- 4 The regression models estimate the gross effect of social class on party choice. We do not account for variables that may mediate the relationship between class and party choice, such as income, education, or union membership. Since income and education are themselves correlated with social class, controlling for them would risk absorbing part of the very effect we seek to capture. Our analytical approach, therefore, captures the overall association between class position and party choice without decomposing it into the pathways through which class exerts its influence.